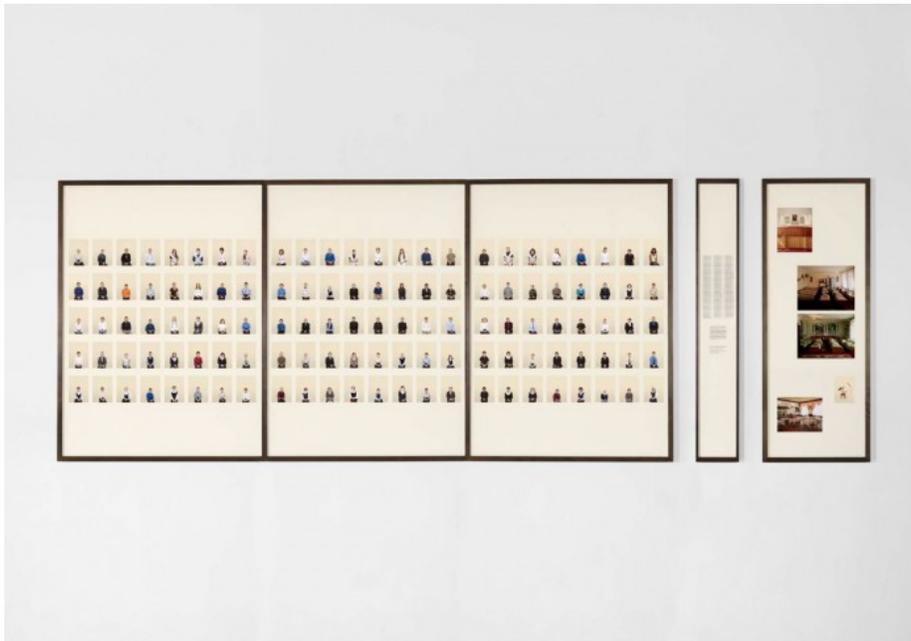


Taryn Simon: ‘A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I- XVIII’

By Richard Lacayo



Chapter XVII, *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I–XVIII*

If Taryn Simon hadn't become a photographer, she could have made a fortune in sales, because she has persuasive powers that the rest of us can only dream of. For her 2007 exhibition and book *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*, she got herself admitted to dozens of places where outsiders with cameras aren't usually allowed, including a nuclear-waste storage facility and a reconstructed crime scene at a forensic research center, complete with a rotting corpse. For another project, *Contraband*, she persuaded the wary authorities at John F. Kennedy International Airport to let her photograph every item seized by customs over a five-

day period, from counterfeit Viagra to cow-dung toothpaste. Despite a personal manner that's the last word in low-key, she has a way of getting what she wants. "If somebody closes the door," she says, "I have to find another way to get in."

Simon, 37, had to find a lot of ways in for her new show, *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters*, which is on view through Sept. 3 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City before moving to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. The organizing principle for this project is what she calls bloodlines: all the living descendants, plus any living forebears, of a single man or woman who sets a story in motion. Traveling to 25 countries, Simon tracked down hundreds of family members bound together by not just genealogy but often some curious or painful fate.