ALMINE RECH

Taryn Simon
Kleroterion

Oct 6 — Nov 11, 2024 | Storm King Art Center, New Windsor, NY, US

Artist Taryn Simon (American, b. 1975) has imagined an election machine based on surviving archaeological fragments of the kleroterion, an ancient device from the beginnings of democracy in Athens.

To prevent corruption, all male citizens of Athens were given the opportunity to hold public office or sit on a jury through the unpredictable workings of a kleroterion. This instrument implemented a lottery system that ensured randomized selection of a winner. The integrity of a transparent election process was preserved by placing the kleroterion in public areas, where everyone could observe the proceedings.

At Storm King, Simon's interactive sculpture maintains this alliance between open space and good governance. Her mirror-polished monolith, made from cast resin, functions like a game. Visitors are invited to come together in a group of five and determine what power the winner will be granted. To activate the machine and its randomizing capabilities, participants select a colored chip and insert it into an empty slot, positioning themselves as a potential victor. A hand crank is turned to release four balls that funnel through the kleroterion's interior, knocking out all the chips except for the one belonging to a single winning individual.

Simon's sculpture demonstrates how randomized outcomes can counteract authoritarian forces in a nation, a small group, or a family unit. What if questions such as "Who decides what's for dinner?" and "Who decides if we go to war?" were determined by chance and the pull of a lever?
Kleroterion—the presentation of which coincides with the presidential election season in the United States—asks what might be lost or gained through this process of randomized resolution and invites everyone to participate. The sculpture spotlights the ways that decisions are made and the dynamics of both a family and our political system.