

Taryn Simon

Rear Views, A Star-forming Nebula, and the Office of Foreign Propaganda

Feb 24 — May 17, 2015 | Jeu de Paume, Paris

The exhibition at the Jeu de Paume presents a collection of Simon's works produced since 2000. Her earliest series, *The Innocents*, documents cases of wrongful conviction throughout the United States, calling into question photography's function as a credible witness and arbiter of justice. She underscores photography's ability to blur truth and fiction – an ambiguity that can have severe, even lethal, consequences.

In *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*, Simon compiles an inventory of what lies hidden and out-of-view within the borders of the United States. She examines a culture through documentation of subjects from domains including: science, government, medicine, entertainment, nature, security, and religion. In her own words, this work “confronts the divide between the privileged access of the few and the limited access of the public.” The objects, sites, and spaces assembled by the artist are integral to America's foundation, mythology and daily functioning, but nonetheless inaccessible or unknown.

Contraband presents an inventory of items seized by American customs officials at John F. Kennedy International Airport, New York. Simon remained on site over a period of five days and four nights, continuously photographing and collecting data on 1,075 objects that were refused entry to the U.S. These images are classified in a manner reminiscent of an entomological collection: placed within Plexiglas cases, they represent an archive of global desires and perceived threats.

A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters was produced over a four-year period (2008-2011) during which Simon travelled around the world researching and recording bloodlines and their related stories. In each of the eighteen “chapters” comprising the work, legacies of territory, power, religion and circumstance collide with psychological and physical inheritance. The subjects documented by Simon include victims of genocide in Bosnia, test rabbits infected with a lethal disease in Australia, the first woman to hijack an aircraft, and the living dead in India. Her collection is at once cohesive and arbitrary, mapping relations of chance, blood, and other components of fate.

The Picture Collection (2013) takes as its subject the New York Public Library's picture archive, which contains 1.2 million prints, postcards, posters, and printed images. It is the largest circulating picture library in the world, organised according to a complex cataloguing system of over 12,000 subject headings. Since its inception in 1915, it has been an important resource for writers, historians, artists, filmmakers, fashion designers, and advertising agencies. Simon highlights the impulse to archive and organize visual information, and points to the invisible hands behind seemingly neutral systems of image gathering. Simon sees this extensive archive of images as a precursor to Internet search engines.

Curator: Ami Barak, exhibition curator and art critic.

Partners: An exhibition produced by the Jeu de Paume

© Jeu de Paume, Paris