



TARYN SIMON

Dossier réalisé par Nassim Daghighian



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_00_Umbrage_2003_couverture.jpg



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_01_Larry Youngblood_2002_c-print_76x101c...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_02_Ronald Jones_2002_c-print_76x101cm ou...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_03_Troy Webb_2002_c-print_76x101cm ou 12...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_04_Charles Irvin Fain_2002_c-print_76x101c...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_05_Calvin Washington_2002_c-print_78.7x10...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_06_William Gregory_2002_c-print_76x101cm ...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_07_Frederick Daye_2002_c-print_76x101cm o...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_08_Larry Mayes_2002_c-print_76x101cm ou 1...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_09_Tim Durham_2002_c-print_76x101cm ou ...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_10_Hector Gonzalez_2002_c-print_76x101cm ...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_11_Roy Criner_2002_c-print_76x101cm ou 12...



The Innocents: Headshots

photographs & interviews by Simon Taryn

November 10, 2004 - January 30, 2005

The Innocents: Headshots
photographs & interviews by Simon Taryn
is presented by
The Midwestern Innocence Project at the UMKC School of Law
UMKC Center for Creative Studies
UMKC Department of Art & Art History



UMKC Gallery of Art
300 and Lockhill Road, First Floor Building

Simon Taryn_The Innocents_40_Headshots_all portraits_electronic pigme...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_40_Headshots_Ron Williamson_electronic pl...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_41_Headshots_Larry Mayes_electronic pigme...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_42_Headshots_Eric Sarsfield_electronic plg...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_43_Headshots_Paula Gray_electronic pigmen...



Simon Taryn_The Innocents_44_Headshots_A.B. Butler_electronic pigmen...



Simon Taryn_Tsunami_2005_01.jpg



Simon Taryn_Tsunami_2005_02_temporary housing.jpg



Simon Taryn_Tsunami_2005_03_MAISARA.jpg



Simon Taryn_Tsunami_2005_04_ROMI.jpg



Simon Taryn_Tsunami_2005_05_HAIKAL.jpg



Simon Taryn_Tsunami_2005_06_JALOE.jpg



Simon Taryn_Tsunami_2005_07_SRI.jpg



Simon Taryn_Tsunami_2005_08_FARIDAH.jpg



Simon Taryn_Tsunami_2005_09_more than 50000 bodies.jpg



Simon Taryn_Tsunami_2005_10_selsmograph.jpg



Simon Taryn_Tsunami_2005_11_aerial view.jpg



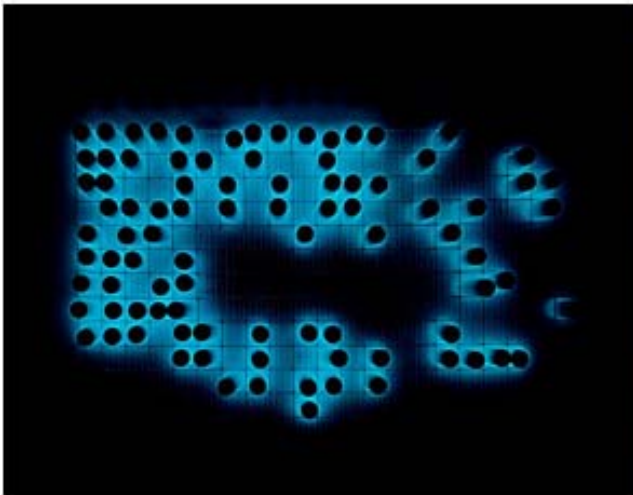
Simon Taryn_Tsunami_2005_12_boat.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_00_couverture_Stefid.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_01_cryonics.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_02_nuclearwaste.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_03_whitetiger.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_04_playboy.jpg



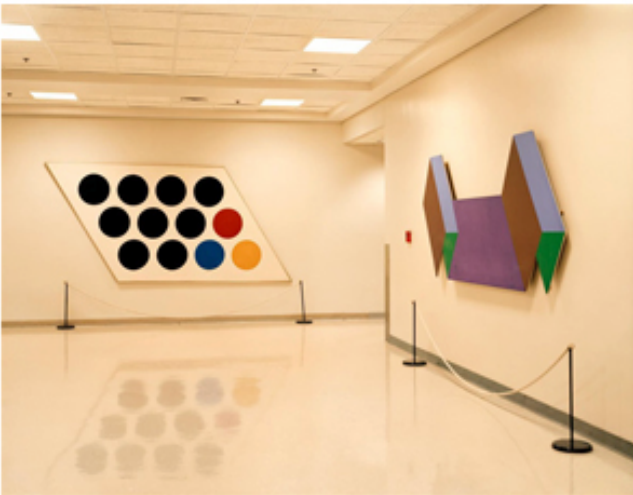
Simon Taryn_An American Index_05_avian.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_06_customs.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_07_cannabis.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_08_cia.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_09_forensic.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_10_Live HIV.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_11_Death-row.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_12_Transatlantic.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_13_Avalanche.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_14_Weather.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_15_Fireworks.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_16_Alhurra TV.jpg



Simon Taryn_An American Index_17_hymenoplasty.jpg

Légende des images

Taryn Simon, *The Innocents*, 2002, c-print, 76.2x101.6 cm ou 122x152 cm (livre paru en 2003)

01.

LARRY YOUNGBLOOD

Alibi location, Tucson, Arizona

With Alice Laitner, Youngblood's Girlfriend and alibi witness at trial

Served 8 years of a 10.5-year sentence for Sexual Assault, Kidnapping and Child Molestation, 2002

2002

02.

RONALD JONES

Scene of arrest, South Side, Chicago, Illinois

Served 8 years of a Death sentence, 2002

2002

03.

TROY WEBB

Scene of the crime, The Pines, Virginia Beach, Virginia

Served 7 years of a 47-year sentence for Rape, Kidnapping and Robbery

2002

04.

CHARLES IRVIN FAIN

Scene of the crime, the Snake River, Melba, Idaho

Served 18 years of a death sentence

2002

05.

CALVIN WASHINGTON

C&E Motel, Room No. 24, Waco, Texas

Where an informant claimed to have heard Washington confess

Served 13 years of a Life sentence for capital murder

2002

06.

WILLIAM GREGORY

Wick's Parlor, Louisville, Kentucky

With fiancée Vicki Kidwell, whom he dated prior to conviction

Gregory was pool champion in prison

Served 7 years of a 70 year sentence for Rape and Burglary, 2002

2002

07.

FREDERICK DAYE

Alibi location, American Legion Post 310, San Diego, California

Where 13 witnesses placed Daye at the time of the crime

Served 10 years of a life sentence for Rape, Kidnapping and Vehicle Theft, 2002

2002

08.

LARRY MAYES

Scene of arrest, The Royal Inn, Gary, Indiana

Police found Mayes hiding beneath a mattress in this room

Served 18.5 years of an 80-year sentence for Rape, Robbery and Unlawful Deviate Conduct, 2002

09.

TIM DURHAM

Skeet shooting, Tulsa, Oklahoma

11 alibi witnesses placed Durham at a skeet-shooting competition at the time of the crime.

Served 3.5 years of a 3,220-year sentence for Rape and Robbery, 2002

10.

HECTOR GONZALEZ

At home, Brooklyn, New York The week of his homecoming

Served 6.5 years of a 15-to-life sentence for Murder, 2002

11.

ROY CRINER

Alibi location, Houston, Texas.

Served 10 years of a 99-year sentence for Aggravated Sexual Assault, 2002

Taryn Simon, *The Innocents*, 2002, electronic pigment print, 61x51 cm

Headshots

40
Ron Williamson

41
Larry Mayes

42
Eric Sarsfield

43
Paula Gray

44
A.B. Butler



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51st and Rockhill Road, Fine Arts Building

Légende des images

Taryn Simon, *Tsunami, 2005*, reportage pour le New York Times, 23.11.05

01.

Remains of the day, nearly a year later: Rubble and decay where homes once stood in Banda Aceh. In the distance, barracks built by charitable organizations.

02.

Temporary housing and new construction in Banda Aceh, one of the areas hardest hit by the tsunami. It will be years, though, before the decay and destruction surrender the landscape.

03.

MAISARA - Just outside Banda Aceh. She had led a comfortable life with her husband and three daughters. She was rescued by a Javanese policeman.

04.

ROMI - He was carried nearly a mile by one of the waves and beached on a pile of debris. Now karaoke in a neighbor's tent helps pass the time.

05.

HAIKAL - A radio station in Banda Aceh. Haikal was back at work within a few days, having survived on top of a floating roof.

06.

JALOE - In the Aceh River. He survived by turning his boat into the waves, as his grandfather taught him to do many years before.

07.

SRI - In an operating room at the general hospital. She survived because of a change in scheduling and was then besieged by patients.

08.

FARIDAH - Her home once stood on this spot. She was taken in by an elderly stranger and then continued to look for her missing loved ones.

09.

More than 50,000 bodies were buried in a mass grave along the road to the airport.

10.

SEISMOGRAPH - Badan Meteorology and Geophysics Agency. It was built in 1977.

11.

Aerial photograph taken from a U.N.-sponsored helicopter, flying over destroyed homes in Banda Aceh on Sept. 20, 2005.

12.

A boat atop a home in Lampulo, Banda Aceh.

Source au 08 03 18: http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2005/11/23/magazine/20051127_TSUNAMI_SLIDESHOW_1.html

Voir aussi reportage sur les Palestiniens, The New York Times, multimedia, 13.03.2005 :

http://www.nytimes.com/packages/khtml/2005/03/13/magazine/20050313_PALESTINIANS_AUDIOSS.html?scp=1&sq=taryn+simon&st=m

Légende des images

Taryn Simon, *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*, 2007, tirages c-print, 95x113 cm

01.

Cryopreservation Unit, Cryonics Institute, Clinton Township, Michigan

This cryopreservation unit holds the bodies of Rhea and Elaine Ettinger, the mother and first wife of cryonics pioneer, Robert Ettinger. Robert, author of "The Prospect of Immortality" and "Man into Superman" is still alive.

The Cryonics Institute offers cryostasis (freezing) services for individuals and pets upon death. Cryostasis is practiced with the hope that lives will ultimately be extended through future developments in science, technology, and medicine. When, and if, these developments occur, Institute members hope to awake to an extended life in good health, free from disease or the aging process. Cryostasis must begin immediately upon legal death. A person or pet is infused with ice-preventive substances and quickly cooled to a temperature where physical decay virtually stops. The Cryonics Institute charges \$28,000 for cryostasis if it is planned well in advance of legal death and \$35,000 on shorter notice.

02.

Nuclear Waste Encapsulation and Storage Facility Cherenkov Radiation

Hanford Site, U.S. Department of Energy

Southeastern Washington State

Submerged in a pool of water at Hanford Site are 1,936 stainless-steel nuclear-waste capsules containing cesium and strontium. Combined, they contain over 120 million curies of radioactivity. It is estimated to be the most curies under one roof in the United States. The blue glow is created by the Cherenkov Effect which describes the electromagnetic radiation emitted when a charged particle, giving off energy, moves faster than light through a transparent medium. The temperatures of the capsules are as high as 330 degrees Fahrenheit. The pool of water serves as a shield against radiation; a human standing one foot from an unshielded capsule would receive a lethal dose of radiation in less than 10 seconds. Hanford is among the most contaminated sites in the United States.

03.

White Tiger (Kenny), Selective Inbreeding

Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge and Foundation

Eureka Springs, Arkansas

In the United States, all living white tigers are the result of selective inbreeding to artificially create the genetic conditions that lead to white fur, ice-blue eyes and a pink nose. Kenny was born to a breeder in Bentonville, Arkansas on February 3, 1999. As a result of inbreeding, Kenny is mentally retarded and has significant physical limitations. Due to his deep-set nose, he has difficulty breathing and closing his jaw, his teeth are severely malformed and he limps from abnormal bone structure in his forearms. The three other tigers in Kenny's litter are not considered to be quality white tigers as they are yellow coated, cross-eyed, and knock-kneed.

04.

Playboy, Braille Edition

Playboy Enterprises, Inc.

New York, New York

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), a division of the U.S. Library of Congress, provides a free national library program of Braille and recorded materials for blind and physically handicapped persons. Magazines included in the NLS's programs are selected on the basis of demonstrated reader interest. This includes the publishing and distribution of a Braille edition of Playboy. Approximately 10 million American adults read Playboy every month, with 3 million obtaining it through paid circulation. It has included articles by writers such as Norman Mailer, Vladimir Nabokov, Philip Roth, Joyce Carol Oates, and Kurt Vonnegut and conducted interviews with Salvador Dali, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Malcolm X.

05.

Avian Quarantine Facility

The New York Animal Import Center

Newburgh, New York

European Finches seized upon illegal importation into the U.S. and African Gray Parrots in quarantine.

All imported birds that are not of U.S. or Canadian origin must undergo a 30 day quarantine in a U.S. Department of Agriculture animal import quarantine facility. The quarantine is mandatory and at the owner's expense. Birds are immediately placed in incubators called isolettes that control the spread of disease and prevent cross-contamination by strategically placed High Efficiency Particulate Air Filters. Before each quarantined bird is cleared for release, it is tested for Avian Influenza and Exotic Newcastle Disease.

06.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Contraband Room

John F. Kennedy International Airport

Queens, New York

African cane rats infested with maggots, African yams (dioscorea), Andean potatoes, Bangladeshi cucurbit plants, bush meat, cherimoya fruit, curry leaves (murraya), dried orange peels, fresh eggs, giant African snail, impala skull cap, jackfruit seeds, June plum, kola nuts, mango, okra, passion fruit, pig nose, pig mouths, pork, raw poultry (chicken), South American pig head, South American tree tomatoes, South Asian lime infected with citrus canker, sugar cane (poaceae), uncooked meats, unidentified sub tropical plant in soil.

All items in the photograph were seized from the baggage of passengers arriving in the U.S. at JFK Terminal 4 from abroad over a 48-hour period. All seized items are identified, dissected, and then either ground up or incinerated. JFK processes more international passengers than any other airport in the United States.

07.

Research Marijuana Crop Grow Room
National Center for Natural Products Research
Oxford, Mississippi

The National Center for Natural Products Research (NCNPR) is the only facility in the United States which is federally licensed to cultivate cannabis for scientific research. In addition to cultivating cannabis, NCNPR is responsible for analyzing seized marijuana for potency trends, herbicide residuals (paraquat) and fingerprint identification. NCNPR is licensed by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and also researches and develops chemicals derived from plants, marine organisms, and other natural products.

While 11 states have legalized the medical use of marijuana, a 2005 U.S. Supreme Court decision allows for the arrest of any individual caught using it for this purpose. Nearly half of the annual arrests for drug violations involve marijuana possession or trafficking.

08.

The Central Intelligence Agency, Art
CIA Original Headquarters Building
Langley, Virginia

The Fine Arts Commission of the CIA is responsible for acquiring art to display in the Agency's buildings. Among the Commission's curated art are two pieces (pictured) by Thomas Downing, on long-term loan from the Vincent Melzac collection. Downing was a member of the Washington Color School, a group of post World War II painters whose influence helped to establish the city as a center for arts and culture. Vincent Melzac was a private collector of abstract art and the Administrative Director of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.'s premiere art museum.

Since the founding of the CIA in 1947, the Agency has participated in both covert and public cultural diplomacy efforts throughout the world. It is speculated that some of the CIA's involvement in the arts was designed to counter Soviet Communism by helping to popularize what it considered pro-American thought and aesthetic sensibilities. Such involvement has raised historical questions about certain art forms or styles that may have elicited the interest of the Agency, including abstract expressionism.

09.

Forensic Anthropology Research Facility, Decomposing Corpse

The world's primary research center for the study of corpse decomposition in Knoxville, Tennessee, is nicknamed "the body farm" and hosts up to 75 cadavers in various stages of decay. The skeletal analysis of human remains helps solve murder cases.

Simon said she was granted full access to shoot as she pleased, which, given the setting, was a bit disconcerting: "They gave me gloves, let me roam around and do whatever I wanted to do. I had a strange reaction to being there with bodies lying all around," Simon said. "I was thinking a lot about how we handle and interpret and respect our dead."

10.

Live HIV, HIV Research Laboratory

This flask contains live human immunodeficiency virus, used to study the neutralizing potential of antibodies against the virus at the Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts.

"With all of the photographs, I was trying to get at a white noise that was disorienting, and yet there's a reserve," Simon said. "There's something apocalyptic and yet something optimistic in it."

11.

Death-Row Outdoor Recreational Facility, "The Cage"

At the Mansfield Correctional Institution in Ohio, death-row inmates are allowed one hour of outdoor recreation per day. There is only a chin-up bar inside the segregated cages, and inmates are not allowed to bring anything in with them.

"It's a topic I was interested in personally, and it's an area that you come away from with so many vulnerabilities about the content," Simon said. "And the anxieties only grow when you make these discoveries."

12.

Transatlantic Sub-marine Cables Reaching Land
VSNL International
Avon, New Jersey.

These VSNL sub-marine telecommunications cables extend 8,037.4 miles across the Atlantic Ocean. Capable of transmitting over 60 million simultaneous voice conversations, these underwater fiber-optic cables stretch from Saunton Sands in the United Kingdom to the coast of New Jersey. The cables run below ground and emerge directly into the VSNL International headquarters, where signals are amplified and split into distinctive wavelengths enabling transatlantic phone calls and internet transmissions.

13.

Avalanche Control, Hand-thrown Explosive Charge
Spaulding Bowl
Copper Mountain, Colorado

14.

Weather Modification, Cloud Seeding
Weather Modification, Inc.
Watford City, North Dakota

15.
Fireworks by Grucci, Northern Test Site
Corporate Headquarters
Brookhaven, New York

16.
Alhurra TV
Broadcast Studio
Springfield, Virginia
Anchor Mona Atari at the Alhurra news desk.

Alhurra is a U.S. Government sponsored, Arabic language television network devoted primarily to news and information. Established in February 2004, the network broadcasts 24 hour, commercial free satellite programming to an audience of 21 million weekly viewers in 22 Arab countries. In April 2004, a second, Iraq-focused channel, Alhurra Iraq, was launched. Section 501 of the U.S. Information and Education Exchange Act, passed by Congress in 1948, authorizes the U.S. Government to disseminate information abroad about the U.S. and its policies. Section 501 also prohibits domestic dissemination of that same information. It is therefore illegal to broadcast Alhurra domestically. Alhurra is Arabic for 'the free one.'

17.
Hymenoplasty
Cosmetic Surgery, P.A.
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

The patient in this photograph is a 21-year-old woman of Palestinian descent, living in the United States. In order to adhere to cultural and familial expectations regarding her virginity and marriage, she underwent hymenoplasty. Without it she feared she would be rejected by her future husband and bring shame upon her family. She flew in secret to Florida where operation was performed by Dr. Bernard Stern, a plastic surgeon she located on the internet.

The purpose of hymenoplasty is to reconstruct a ruptured hymen, the membrane which partially covers the opening of the vagina. It is an outpatient procedure which takes approximately 30 minutes and can be done under local or intravenous anesthesia. Dr. Stern charges \$3,500 for hymenoplasty. He also performs labiaplasty and vaginal rejuvenation.

Sources au 08 03 18 :

<http://www.tarynsimon.com/>

<http://www.galeriealminerech.com/>

http://www.mensvogue.com/arts/slideshows/2007/08/taryn_simon?slide=2#showNav

http://www.mensvogue.com/arts/slideshows/2007/08/taryn_simon?slide=6#showNav


Foam, n°12

Taryn Simon (1975, New York City, USA ; vit à NYC, USA)
Site de l'artiste : www.tarynsimon.com

Taryn Simon was born in New York in 1975. She is a graduate of Brown University and a Guggenheim Fellow. An exhibition of her most recent series of photographs, *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art in March 2007. The exhibition will travel to the Museum für Modern Kunst, Frankfurt in September 2007. For this project, Simon assumes the dual role of shrewd informant and collector of curiosities, compiling an inventory of what lies hidden and out-of-view within the borders of the United States. She examines a culture through careful documentation of diverse subjects from across the realms of science, government, medicine, entertainment, nature, security, and religion. Transforming the unknown into a seductive and intelligible form, Simon confronts the divide between those with and without the privilege of access. Her sometimes ethereal, sometimes foreboding compositions, shot with a large-format view camera whenever conditions allowed, vary as much as her subject matter, which ranges from radioactive capsules at a nuclear waste storage facility to a black bear in hibernation. Offering visions of the unseen, the photographs of *An American Index* capture the strange magic at the foundation of a national identity. Simon's previous endeavors have been received with high acclaim. Her most influential work, *The Innocents*, documents cases of wrongful conviction in the United States and investigates photography's role in that process. Simon's photographs have been exhibited nationally and internationally, including: High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York; Haus Der Kunst, Munich; Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati; and Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin. Permanent collections include: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Her photography and writing have been featured in numerous publications and broadcasts including The New York Times Magazine, The New Yorker, CNN, BBC, Frontline, and NPR.

Source au 08 03 18 : <http://www.gagosian.com/artists/taryn-simon/>

 Rencontre avec l'artiste, exposition Elles@centrepompidou, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2009 : <http://www.ina.fr/video/CPD10001384/portraits-de-femmes-artistes-taryn-simon.fr.html>

 Présentation par Taryn Simon, juillet 2009, Oxford, GB, 17'20 : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKl0tb3VmfQ>

Taryn Simon. The innocents


The Innocents documents the stories of individuals who served time in prison for violent crimes they did not commit. At issue is the question of photography's function as a credible eyewitness and arbiter of justice. The primary cause of wrongful conviction is mistaken identification. A victim or eyewitness identifies a suspected perpetrator through law enforcement's use of photographs and lineups. This procedure relies on the assumption of precise visual memory. But, through exposure to composite sketches, mugshots, Polaroids, and lineups, eyewitness memory can change. In the history of these cases, photography offered the criminal justice system a tool that transformed innocent citizens into criminals. Photographs assisted officers in obtaining eyewitness identifications and aided prosecutors in securing convictions. Simon photographed these men at sites that had particular significance to their illegitimate conviction: the scene of misidentification, the scene of arrest, the scene of the crime or the scene of the alibi. All of these locations hold contradictory meanings for the subjects. The scene of arrest marks the starting point of a reality based in fiction. The scene of the crime is at once arbitrary and crucial: this place, to which they have never been, changed their lives forever. In these photographs Simon confronts photography's ability to blur truth and fiction-an ambiguity that can have severe, even lethal consequences.

Taryn Simon lives and works in New York. The Innocents has been exhibited in 2003 at PS1 Contemporary Art Center, New York and at Kunstwerke, Berlin. Simon was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in Photography. The Innocents, Simon's first book, was published in the spring of 2003 by Umbrage Editions. Her photography and writing has been featured in numerous publications and broadcasts, including The New York Times Magazine, Vanity Fair, The New Yorker, Frontline, CNN and BBC.

Source au 08 03 18 : <http://www.gagosian.com/exhibitions/beverly-hills-2004-06-taryn-simon/>

Voir aussi dossier pédagogique : www.mocp.org/uploads/MoCP_Simon-PacketA.pdf

www.mocp.org/uploads/MoCP_Simon_PacketB.pdf www.mocp.org/uploads/MoCP_Simon_PacketC.pdf

 : *Interviews With the Exonerated*, January 2003, directed by Taryn Simon in collaboration with the Innocence Project : http://www.nytimes.com/videopages/2003/01/26/magazine/20030126_EXONERATED_VIDEO.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=taryn+simon&st=m&oref=slogin

The Innocents

Taryn Simon

"I was asked to come down and look at the photo array of different men. I picked Ron's photo because in my mind it most closely resembled the man who attacked me. But really what happened was that, because I had made a composite sketch, he actually most closely resembled my sketch as opposed to the actual attacker. By the time we went to do a physical lineup, they asked if I could physically identify the person. I picked out Ronald because, subconsciously, in my mind, he resembled the photo, which resembled the composite, which resembled the attacker. All the images became enmeshed to one image that became Ron, and Ron became my attacker." Jennifer Thompson, on the process to identify the man who raped her.

During the summer of 2000, I worked for the *New York Times Magazine* photographing men and women who were wrongfully convicted, imprisoned, and subsequently freed from death row. After this assignment, I began to investigate photography's role in the criminal justice system.

I traveled across the United States photographing and interviewing men and women convicted of crimes they did not commit. In these cases, photography offered the criminal justice system a tool that transformed innocent citizens into criminals, assisted officers in obtaining erroneous eyewitness identifications, and aided prosecutors in securing convictions. The criminal justice system had failed to recognize the limitations of relying on photographic images.

For the men and women in these photographs, the primary cause of wrongful conviction was mistaken identification. A victim or eyewitness identifies a suspected perpetrator through law enforcement's use of photographs and lineups. These identifications rely on the assumption of precise visual memory. But through exposure to composite sketches, mugshots, Polaroids, and lineups, eyewitness memory can change. Police officers and prosecutors influence memory, both unintentionally and intentionally, through the ways in which they conduct the identification process. They can shape, and even generate, what comes to be known as eyewitness testimony.

The high stakes of the criminal justice system underscore the importance of a photographic image's history and context.

The high stakes of the criminal justice system underscore the importance of a photographic image's history and context. The photographs rely upon supporting materials, captions, case profiles and interviews, in an effort to construct a more adequate account of these cases. This project stresses the cost of ignoring the limitations of photography and minimizing the context in which photographic images are presented. Nowhere are the material effects of ignoring a photograph's context as profound as in the misidentification that leads to the imprisonment or execution of an innocent person.

I photographed each innocent person at a site that came to assume particular significance following his wrongful conviction: the scene of misidentification, the scene of arrest, the alibi location, or the scene of the crime. In the history of these legal cases, these locations have been assigned contradictory meanings. The scene of arrest marks the starting point of a reality that is based in fiction. The scene of the crime, for the wrongfully convicted, is at once arbitrary and crucial; a place that changed their lives forever, but to which they had never been. Photographing the wrongfully convicted in these environments brings to the surface the attenuated relationship between truth and fiction, and efficiency and injustice.

The wrongfully convicted in these photographs were exonerated through the use of DNA evidence. Only in recent years have eyewitness identification and testimony been forced to meet the test of DNA corroboration. Because of its accuracy, DNA allows a level of comfort that other forms of evidence do not offer. In the exoneration process, DNA evidence pressures the justice system and the public to concede that a convicted person is indeed innocent. In our reliance upon these new technologies, we marginalize the majority of the wrongfully convicted, for whom there is no DNA evidence, or those for whom the cost of DNA testing is prohibitive. Even in cases in which it was collected, DNA evidence must be handled and stored and is therefore prey to human error and corruption. Evidence does not exist in a closed system. Like photography, it cannot exist apart from its context, or outside of the modes by which it circulates.

Photography's ability to blur truth and fiction is one of its most compelling qualities. But when misused as part of a prosecutor's arsenal, this ambiguity can have severe, even lethal consequences. Photographs in the criminal justice system, and elsewhere, can turn fiction into fact. As I got to know the men and women that I photographed, I saw that photography's ambiguity, beautiful in one context, can be devastating in another.

The Innocents : Headshots. Photographs and Video by Taryn Simon

Case Profiles by Peter Neufeld, Barry Scheck, and Huy Dao

Juanita Kreps Gallery, Durham, North Carolina, USA, April 7–May 31, 2004

In *The Innocents* photographer Taryn Simon presents photographs of individuals who served time in prison for violent crimes they did not commit. The photographs are accompanied by the Innocence Project's case profiles and Simon's interviews, collected during her cross-country journey. While mugshots and photo arrays are used to condemn and imprison innocent people, Simon has turned the camera around to document the victims of misidentification and perverted justice. At issue is the question of photography's function as a credible eyewitness and arbiter of justice.

The primary cause of wrongful conviction in the United States is mistaken identification. A victim or eyewitness identifies a suspected perpetrator through law enforcements use of photographs and lineups. This procedure assumes that visual memory is precise. But, through exposure to composite sketches, mugshots, Polaroids, and lineups, eyewitness memory can change. Jennifer Thompson's account of the process by which she misidentified the man who raped her illustrates the malleability of memory:

"I was asked to come down and look at the photo array of different men. I picked Ron's photo because in my mind it most closely resembled the man who attacked me. But really what happened was that, because I had made a composite sketch, he actually most closely resembled my sketch as opposed to the actual attacker. By the time we went to do a physical lineup, they asked if I could physically identify the person. I picked out Ronald because, subconsciously, in my mind, he resembled the photo, which resembled the composite, which resembled the attacker. All the images became enmeshed to one image that became Ron, and Ron became my attacker."

A domino effect ensues in which victims do remember a face, but not necessarily the face they saw during the commission of the crime. For the men in these portraits (one woman is also included), photography was often instrumental in their misidentification and subsequent imprisonment.

In the case of Troy Webb, convicted of rape, kidnapping, and robbery, the victim was shown a photo array of potential rapists. She tentatively identified Webb's photo, but said that he looked too old. The police then presented another photo of Webb taken four years before the crime occurred. He was positively identified. Troy Webb served seven years of a forty-seven-year sentence.

The mugshot—the emblem of photography in the criminal justice system—signifies the transition from innocent citizen to potential criminal. Whether it is recorded on film or in digital format, the mugshot is seen as raw and cheap: a small image, traditionally in black and white, that shows minimal detail of the subject. Simon confronts the mugshot form in these larger than life, high resolution color portraits that reveal more than the human eye can see on its own.

This exhibition of headshots and the book, *The Innocents* (Umbrage, 2003), recognize the ten-year anniversary of the Innocence Project. Founded by leading civil rights attorneys Peter Neufeld and Barry Scheck, the Innocence Project is responsible for most of the post-conviction DNA exonerations in the United States today. The project strives to transform criminal justice into a more equitable and reliable system, working in cooperation with district attorneys and police departments to design and test pilot programs to reform eyewitness identification and to implement other measures that will limit the number of wrongful arrests and convictions. The failings of the criminal justice system and the use of the death penalty in this country are currently under close scrutiny and an important topic of public debate. The images and voices of *The Innocents* mark this historic turning point in justice in America.

Source au 08 08 13 : <http://cda.aas.duke.edu/exhibits/innocentspast.html>

Taryn Simon. An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar

☞ Interview Taryn Simon, 3'40 : http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_TWKpeWIEc

Voir aussi (8'45) : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBuY1lsUXkc> (5'31): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSnwVupYojE>

Paroles de l'artiste, film de Christiaan Tonnis, 2009, 1'46 : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YONH7tnwbZE>

Taryn Simon. Shedding Light on America's Dark Recesses

Bridget L. Goodbody, *The New York Times*, Art Review, April 6, 2007

There's something quintessentially American about the way Taryn Simon's photography exhibition "An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar" examines the culture's irreconcilable differences. Ms. Simon couches the show in the intellectual, power-to-the-people oratory of leftist politics. Yet she clearly delights in exposing, in a quasi-tabloid fashion, America's underbelly.

Ms. Simon comes naturally to documenting places average citizens can't access. For the State Department her father photographed Soviet cities during the cold war, restricted sites in Southeast Asia during the war in Vietnam and out-of-the way locations in Afghanistan, Israel and Iran in the 1970s.

Though she has also worked in war-torn areas (the Gaza Strip, Lebanon and Syria), Ms. Simon is best known for "The Innocents," a series of portraits of men and women who were wrongly convicted of crimes but later, in some cases after decades in prison, were cleared by DNA test results.

Ms. Simon can work as long as a year to gain permission to photograph high-security zones like the government-regulated quarantine sites, nuclear waste storage facilities, prison death rows and C.I.A. offices on view in the show. There are also pictures with lighter themes, taken at sites with presumably fewer restrictions: the sandpit where the Grucci family tests fireworks, ski slopes being dynamited for avalanche control and the second Death Star, from "Return of the Jedi," at George Lucas's Skywalker Ranch.

What's amazing is how many closed doors open for Ms. Simon. Interestingly, Disney did refuse her request, saying it wanted to protect the fantasies of theme park visitors. (A copy of its reply is in the catalog.)

Aware that realistic images can mislead, Ms. Simon goes to great lengths to explain the content of her photographs with label texts. She writes them herself in an objective journalistic tone, wanting the viewer to share her understanding of the images.

At times her texts can obfuscate, rather than reveal. The label with her photograph of Thomas Downing's 1960s post-painterly abstractions in the halls of the C.I.A.'s former headquarters is one example. It reads like an excerpt from a conspiracy theory document as it alludes to the agency's earlier use of Abstract Expressionist art to promote its cold-war agenda.

Ms. Simon is at her artistic best when her delight in the strangeness of American culture shines. She turns America's melting pot into a global compost heap in her image of the contraband room at Kennedy Airport: a cornucopia of once fresh, now rotting organic materials — African cane rats, Bangladeshi cucurbit plants, a South American pig's head — confiscated from the many different people who arrive daily.

She caught Kenny, a genetically modified white tiger born mentally retarded, in a pose that makes him look stuffed. Her picture of the flat, white interior of a jury simulation room, where lawyers stage mock trials, recalls Thomas Demand's photographs of the airport security zones he created from cardboard.

Other images suggest how complicated it can be when a member of one culture tries not to judge the traditions of another. "Hymenoplasty," the label says, portrays an anonymous Palestinian woman, who has traveled to Atlanta, in a plastic surgeon's gynecological chair, moments before she is to have her hymen reconstructed. When she writes that the woman is undergoing the surgery "to adhere to cultural and familial expectations regarding her virginity and marriage," you perceive that despite Ms. Simon's bland language, she is outraged by the woman's circumstances.

Yet Ms. Simon can suggest hope in her images too. Her portrait of Don James, an Oregon cancer patient and advocate for the state's law permitting physician-assisted suicide, captures him as he has filled his prescription for a lethal dose of pentobarbital. (He died shortly afterward, before using it.)

Ms. Simon illuminated Mr. James, in a wheelchair and looking tired, with an eerie light from above, suggesting that the right to choose one's time of death is sanctified. America may not be as free as Ms. Simon would like, but she marvels at its bravery.

Taryn Simon's "American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar" continues through June at the Whitney Museum of American Art, 945 Madison Avenue, at 75th Street; (212) 570-3676.

Source au 08 03 18 :

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/06/arts/design/06simo.html?ex=1333512000&en=16b7debac32538fa&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

Photographer Captures America's Best-Kept Secrets

Jenna Wortham, *Wired*, January 14, 2008 [11 images de *An American Index* commentées par l'artistes]

Taryn Simon photographs some of the most top-secret, highly restricted areas in the world. Her latest book, *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*, took four years to assemble as the photographer gained access to research facilities and government offices hidden from the public. "I felt like I was discovering a new landscape in America, a new terrain, morally and politically," she said. The book dives under the surface of society with images of decomposing bodies and radioactive waste, deadly viruses and an outdoor recreation area for death-row inmates. The result is an all-access pass into America's best-kept secrets.

Avian Quarantine Facility

The New York Animal Import Center in Newburgh, New York, detains all imported birds for a mandatory 30-day quarantine before testing them for bird flu and other diseases. "I decided to photograph this facility because as a citizen, I was concerned about (avian flu), and what things were being done to protect our country," said Simon. Simon scheduled her visit to the Avian Quarantine Facility between trips to other limited-access research facilities to avoid cross-contamination.

Cherenkov Radiation, Nuclear Waste Storage Facility

Submerged in a pool of water, these stainless-steel nuclear-waste capsules contain radioactive material. The water serves as a shield against the radiation emitted. Nearly 2,000 capsules reside at the Hanford Site in southeastern Washington State, which is considered among the most contaminated waste sites in the United States. "Radiation is a light source I've never worked with, so there was no visual reference to shoot (the images) from -- it was a leap of faith," Simon said. "I found this one section that resembled the U.S. That was a great find." The blue glow comes from an effect called Cherenkov radiation.

Forensic Anthropology Research Facility, Decomposing Corpse

The world's primary research center for the study of corpse decomposition in Knoxville, Tennessee, is nicknamed "the body farm" and hosts up to 75 cadavers in various stages of decay. The skeletal analysis of human remains helps solve murder cases. Simon said she was granted full access to shoot as she pleased, which, given the setting, was a bit disconcerting: "They gave me gloves, let me roam around and do whatever I wanted to do. I had a strange reaction to being there with bodies lying all around," Simon said. "I was thinking a lot about how we handle and interpret and respect our dead."

White Tiger (Kenny), Selective Inbreeding

Simon photographed Kenny, an extremely rare white tiger at the Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge and Foundation in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. Kenny suffers from mental retardation, as well as walking and breathing problems. In the United States, white tigers are the result of inbreeding during captivity that leads to their white fur and blue eyes. The other tigers in Kenny's litter are knock-kneed and cross-eyed, with yellow coats.

"The white tiger is a huge part of American entertainment and commerce and from a distance you look at it as a familiar image," Simon said. "With Kenny, you gaze and begin to realize there's something not quite right. You get the idea that something is off, but not immediately."

Playboy, Braille Edition

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, a division of the Library of Congress, maintains a free national library of braille materials. *Playboy* was selected on the basis of demonstrated reader interest: Congress funds free distribution of the braille edition.

"The approach is informed by the content," Simon said. "I think about the formality, the art and seductive quality and then consider the content to shoot the image."

Cryopreservation Unit

The Cryonics Institute in Clinton Township, Michigan, currently preserves 74 legally dead human patients and 44 dead pets, charging the same price it has charged since its establishment in 1976: \$28,000 with advance reservation.

Contraband Room, United States Customs and Border Protection

The foodstuffs in this image were seized over a 48-hour period from passengers arriving at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport in Queens, New York, from abroad. Among the pictured items are African yams, uncooked meats, fresh eggs, okra and a South Asian lime infected with citrus canker. "This room is one of my favorite shots. I spent hours arranging the contraband to get it to look like a still life," Simon said.

Live HIV, HIV Research Laboratory

This flask contains live human immunodeficiency virus, used to study the neutralizing potential of antibodies against the virus at the Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts. "With all of the photographs, I was trying to get at a white noise that was disorienting, and yet there's a reserve," Simon said. "There's something apocalyptic and yet something optimistic in it."

Death-Row Outdoor Recreational Facility, "The Cage"

At the Mansfield Correctional Institution in Ohio, death-row inmates are allowed one hour of outdoor recreation per day. There is only a chin-up bar inside the segregated cages, and inmates are not allowed to bring anything in with them.

"It's a topic I was interested in personally, and it's an area that you come away from with so many vulnerabilities about the content," Simon said. "And the anxieties only grow when you make these discoveries."

Transatlantic Submarine Cables Reaching Land

These submarine telecommunication cables extend thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean before reaching this endpoint in Avon, New Jersey. They transmit as many as 60 million simultaneous conversations. "There's a humor because the cables are so important, yet they look so unguarded and unimportant," Simon said.

The CIA, Art

In this unexpected juxtaposition, Simon captures an image of fine art on display at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Included in the art collection are a bronze bust of George H.W. Bush and these two pieces by post-World War II painter Thomas Downing.

Source au 08 03 18 : http://www.wired.com/culture/art/multimedia/2008/01/gallery_simon

Les inquiétantes photos de Taryn Simon

Lucie, Fluctua, 04.03.08

Le visage sombre et décidé de cette jeune artiste américaine renferme un mystère que son exposition nommée *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* dévoile, sans pourtant en livrer le secret. Cette jeune trentenaire s'attache ici à montrer l'autre côté du miroir de l'Amérique, miroir brisé... Au fur et à mesure du visionnage, l'inquiétante étrangeté qui se dégage des clichés de Taryn Simon nous amène presque à appréhender l'arrivée du suivant. Est-ce que ce sont ces luminosités sombres qui effraient, comme un voile trouble que l'on jette sur la réalité ? Est-ce l'aspect sordide de ces teintes usées qui dérange ? Ou le contraste des couleurs, qui opère un glissement vers le surnaturel et donne le vertige ? Est-ce le discours qui accompagne chaque photo ? Comme autant d'auscultations froides et détachées qui resituent la photographie dans une perspective sociopolitique affligeante. La photographe livre des situations qui semblent si calmement documentées, un contexte si clairement énoncé, est-ce alors cette rigueur qui égare ? Il est clair que les thématiques choisis par Taryn Simon nous fragilisent. Son travail semble se situer à l'endroit des dérives obscènes des sociétés. L'endroit où celles-ci dégénèrent. Ce tigre blanc magnifique est issu d'un croisement. L'animal paie alors sa beauté du prix d'une consanguinité qui la rendu retardé et de fines déformations physiques qui l'empêchent entre autre de respirer normalement. Cette jeune palestinienne dont on ne voit que les jambes vient se racheter un hymen pour un prix monstrueux dans un contexte sordide, tout ça pour ne pas risquer un rejet de sa famille. Et cet endroit où l'on congèle les corps des hommes ou des animaux dans l'espoir qu'un jour on pourra les ramener à la vie. La photographe, qui expose maintenant ses clichés dans le monde entier, réalise des reportages très fouillés sur des sujets dérangeants. Sa précédente série de photographies *The innocent* rassemblait des portraits de personnes condamnées pour meurtre puis innocentées. Taryn Simon réfléchissait par ce biais au rôle que joue la photographie dans le dispositif judiciaire américain. Objet nécessaire au procédé d'identification et de condamnation, capable alors de transformer l'innocent en criminel. La jeune femme s'est également intéressée à la C.I.A comme à Disney, et traque tout ce qui peut se cacher derrière chaque (apparemment) belle vitrine. Inquiétant ? On ne sait pas pour qui finalement...

L'exposition *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* est à la galerie Almine Rech (<http://www.galeriealminerech.com/>), Paris-3^{ème}, du 16 février au 15 mars.

An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar est publié chez Steidl et comporte un avant-propos signé par Salman Rushdie, une introduction rédigée par Elizabeth Sussman et Tina Kukielki, ainsi que des commentaires par Ronald Dworkin

Source au 08 03 18 : <http://arts.fluctuat.net/blog/29288-les-inquietantes-photos-de-taryn-simon.html>

Convention Steppenwolf : Taryn Simon, d'un index des choses cachées ou inhabituelles

François Bon, 19 avril 2007

Ça ne s'appelle d'ailleurs pas *convention Steppenwolf*, je prends ce nom à cause de Herman Hesse et quand même il s'agit de très proche, né de son *Glassperlenspiel*, et du prix qui y est associé. Nous sommes huit, deux sont renouvelés chaque année, nommés pour une durée de cinq ans, pour moi c'est ma deuxième année, et il n'y a jamais — sur les huit — deux qui soient du même pays. Les fonds privés qui sont à l'origine de ce que je continuerai ici *convention Steppenwolf* tiennent à cette discrétion, et nous rassemble donc pendant une semaine, hébergement dans le même hôtel et conférence chaque matin dans un lieu à la suggestion de qui la prononce, aujourd'hui c'est la salle de conférence du Whitney museum qui nous était réservée. La règle du jeu est qu'on dispose d'une chaise et d'un micro, et qu'on travaille sans notes.

Le thème de la conférence est le même cette année pour tout le monde, juste le mot *réalité*, on dispose d'1 heure 50, lieu à notre convenance. Ma propre intervention est dans 5 jours, ce matin on ouvrait la série avec Taryn Simon, photographe.

Comment constituer, dans le réel, ce qui l'établit dans sa complexité perceptible ?

En tout cas, c'est ce qui est la question posée pour l'ensemble des huit conférences. Taryn Simon a d'abord proposé une image très simple : format carré couleur, et quatre câbles rouges et jaunes surgissant du sol pour monter sur une paroi carrelée, l'arrivée du câble transatlantique de fibres optiques dans le New Jersey. L'autre extrémité du câble est en Angleterre vers Brighton, ces fibres optiques peuvent convoyer 60 millions de voix simultanées et pas mal d'Internet. Que montre la photographie, qui puisse signifier l'importance technique ou sociale de l'objet dans sa simplicité en jaune et rouge sur carrelage vulgaire, à part ces deux trous minces dans le sol ?

Elle a ensuite montré, deuxième image carrée, même format, l'édition Playboy en braille (qui d'entre nous sept, et les quelques observateurs autorisés, aurait pu concevoir l'idée qu'une édition braille de Playboy *existe*). Puis des perroquets gris d'Afrique en cage : sauf qu'il s'agit de la salle de quarantaine pour les personnes qui importent aux USA des animaux vivants, et des lois qui réglementent cette importation, puis des conditions de la quarantaine (filtrage de l'air garantissant comment et où ça se passe, puisqu'aux frais de la personne qui importe l'animal. Puis : laboratoire de production de marijuana de la Food and Drugs Administration. Puis : hall d'entrée du siège de la CIA, et deux tableaux, sur un mur, de l'exposition annuelle de travaux d'art contemporain dans ce hall. Puis des essais d'explosifs des services de fourniture et conventionnement de l'armée. Puis une photographie qui s'intitulait *Death with dignity*: ce monsieur, Don James, en 2001, alors qu'un cancer de la prostate avait hypostasié dans les os, s'est rendu en Oregon où l'assistance à la mort librement choisie est légalement autorisée. Il vient de subir une injection de penthotal, il est photographié avec son consentement de face sur son fauteuil, les articulations gonflées, et regarde l'objectif avec fierté. Je suis hanté ce soir par ce visage et ce regard. Cet homme vit, et dans ce qui déforme le visage il y a la totalité de ce qui nous est expliqué par le texte associé, et ne serait pas présent dans notre réception de l'image sans cette information particulière.

Ensuite, Taryn Simon présente un déclenchement d'avalanche, un tigre blanc obtenu par croisement génétique dans un zoo : ce tigre est effectivement blanc avec des yeux bleu glacier. Mais la suite des manipulation génétiques lui a créé une infirmité respiratoire permanente, une déformation considérable des proportions du museau et de la face, et des problèmes de mobilité aux articulations des pattes avant. Le tigre blanc, qu'on a cherché à reconstituer d'après une espèce peut-être disparue, s'avère en captivité un monstre pathétique. Et non pas invraisemblable, puisque dûment photographié. Ensuite, une église intitulée *World Church of God* utilisée dans le principal centre d'entraînement à la guérilla urbaine de leur pays. Taryn Simon précise qu'on l'a dotée l'an dernier d'un mur identique à celui qui entoure en Irak la plupart des mosquées.

Puis : la salle où sont stockées à l'aéroport John Fitzgerald Kennedy les fruits et légumes ou tout autres variétés organiques que des voyageurs en provenance de tout pays s'imaginaient faire franchir la frontière. Ces fruits et légumes sont évacués pour incinération une fois tous les quatre jours : on dirait un étrange marché exotique, déjà pourrissant. Puis : une salle de simulation des débats d'un jury que louent (on donne le prix) les cabinets d'avocat pour élaborer leur stratégie. Dans ces simulations, on rétribue des personnes en réelle condition de devenir jurés du procès concerné, et la salle est dotée d'un miroir sans tain avec réplique symétrique de la même table et des mêmes chaises pour les avocats. Puis : la salle d'opération d'un chirurgien de Floride dont la spécialité est de reconstruire l'hymen de jeunes femmes qui le souhaitent, sur le fauteuil d'opération, mais le visage recouvert d'un voile, une jeune Palestinienne, coût 3500 dollars et la liste fournie des autres opérations possibles. Puis : les services de cryogénie d'une entreprise spécialisée pour ceux qui souhaitent tenter l'aventure d'une préparation de leur corps à la survie (tout cela existe, à preuve que c'est photographié). Puis : les capsules de césium et strontium, durée de vie 120 millions d'années, dans la piscine anti radio activité où elles sont stockées après récupération dans les centrales nucléaires.

Taryn Simon est née en 1975, dans le livre publié par Steidl sous le titre *American index of the hidden and the unfamiliar* il y a d'autres clichés. On a évoqué la théorie de l'empreinte photographique telle que développée par Barthes dans *La Chambre claire* et j'ai eu la surprise de constater que les travaux d'André Rouillé sur la critique de cette notion étaient connus ici.

Dans la dernière heure de la matinée, elle nous a incité chacun à constituer, pour notre propre espace ou territoire, ce qui seraient les pistes d'un index équivalent. Elle suggérait, plutôt que de travailler sur ce que nous aurions envie de connaître d'un réel de toute façon inaccessible avant même que le traverser, de la méthodologie à mettre en place, par l'enquête, par le terrain, par l'imaginaire et son arpentage raisonné (je traduis à peu près la formule anglaise qu'elle a employé), nous pouvions rendre possible d'être mis en présence de l'objet imprévu – le câble en fibres optiques émergeant du sol, les tableaux contemporains proposés aux fonctionnaires de la CIA, l'installation de cryogénie pour humains en mal d'éternité.

J'ai constitué ma propre liste (mais ne peux l'insérer ici).

A Conversation with Taryn Simon

David Schonauer, *Pop Photo*, April 19, 2007

Simon's new book and exhibition methodically uncovers America's hidden and unfamiliar.

Photographer Taryn Simon admits that the similarities between her two most recent art projects are not readily apparent. But they certainly do exist. Each, in its own way, is a story about America.

Simon's breakthrough 2003 book *The Innocents* was a collection of portraits of former prison convicts who had been exonerated through DNA testing. The elaborately lit and staged portraits (in some cases, the former prisoners posed with the very people they had been accused of victimizing) were filled with blank and bitter gazes. In accompanying interviews, the former prisoners often questioned notions of justice and the merits of freedom.

In her latest book, titled *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* (Steidl/D.A.P., \$75), Simon turns her attention to particular American places and spaces -- rooms and landscapes that "lie deep within the borders of the United States at the foundation of a national culture." In one way or another these are all essential places: essential to the functioning of government and science, and essential to the way we think of ourselves as Americans. They also happen to be inaccessible or hidden from the general public. (There is also an exhibition of the work up at the Whitney Museum of American Art through June 24.)

Simon's pictures document everything from a nuclear waste storage facility in Washington to a room at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York where seized contraband is kept. There is the Avian Quarantine Facility of the New York Animal Import Center in Newburgh, New York, and the Marijuana Research Grow Room at the National Center for Natural Products Research in Oxford, Mississippi; the Church of Scientology film screening room in Hollywood and a great white shark in a tank in an aquarium in Monterey, California.

"Shooting pictures without people in them was something I hadn't done for awhile," says Simon, who spent a little more than four years on the project. "When I was doing *The Innocents* I'd been concentrating on portraiture. So that's one of the reasons I wanted to do this new project."

But what links the two bodies of work? In each case Simon gazes at corners of America that normally remain out of view -- spotlighting prisoners whose lives might have otherwise gone unnoticed, documenting rooms that are literally hidden from most of us. There is an underlying sense of haves and have-nots: those with the power of freedom to move about and witness, and those without that power. In both there is also the sense of exploration and cataloging, as if Simon were a naturalist examining and collecting the flora and fauna of an exotic, perplexing, and sometimes dangerous land.

Recently, Simon spoke with *American Photo* about her new project and discoveries she made on her journey through hidden America.

AP: How did the *American Index* idea come about?

TS: When I completed *The Innocents* I went back to my older work to find what I had done previously that I thought was successful or not. And the photograph that I kept coming back to was a shot I'd made of the Palace of the Revolution in Cuba.

AP: What brought you back to it?

TS: I was attracted to its geometry and formal lighting and the absence of a figure in the photograph. But what I also liked about the shot was that its impact was bound to the fact that it showed an inaccessible space. The combination of the aesthetics and the hidden dimension of the place is such an important part of photography.

AP: There is something purely photographic about using the camera to show a place that is hidden from view...

TS: Yes, and then I wanted to find photographs that had that combination of qualities within America's own borders -- places that were unseen and could reveal something about the foundation of America and its mythology and how it works.

AP: How did you research and find these places?

TS: The Internet played a huge part in that process. I worked with three producers on the project. I began with a wish list of the places that I had imagined would be what I was looking for. Then through my research process I would arrive at places far different from what I imagined when I started. Some places came from our own original ideas. Sometimes we'd be looking for one place and that would lead us to another place.

AP: That sense of surprise is part of what is interesting. The viewer can't imagine where you'll take them next.

TS: A large part of this project is its entropy -- its disorder in the way it jumps from one subject to another, from entertainment to security to religion to nature. There were certain categories within those themes that I wanted to fill. I worked in such a calculated way. For instance, I knew I wanted to photograph in an avian quarantine facility. I had no idea what an avian quarantine facility looks like, nor do most people. But I knew I wanted to address the subject of avian influenza in some way, because I think Americans somehow expect there to be some place that is protecting them from this kind of epidemic. Then I had to find an avian quarantine facility, and then I had to arrive at this place and had to respond to it with a large-format camera and a lighting setup.

AP: The subjects you photographed are so different, and yet in the end you need to come away with images that hang together visually. How do you do that?

TS: As I said, I generally am extremely calculated. I like things to be very ironed out when I go into a photographic situation. But I also had to be somewhat spontaneous within that framework. That was a contradiction for me. The lighting setups changed from subject to subject. But in general I wanted to create a kind of strange, eerie beauty in each setting. I shot with a large-format camera most of the time, though there are some cases when I was unable to use that. I shot a Native American sun dance in Texas and had to use a smaller camera that was more discreet because photography was not allowed there. For a shot of an exploding warhead I made at Elgin Air Force Base in Florida, I couldn't use a photographic camera, so I used an IMAX 70mm film camera and pulled a frame from that.

AP: How do you see this body of work fitting in with what you did in *The Innocents*?

TS: From a visual standpoint, the connection is how both projects set up a seductive stage to show subject matter that typically wouldn't receive that sort of treatment. A huge part of what I do is to simply finding subjects that aren't being given attention or thought and then applying this seductive aesthetic that draws in a larger audience.

AP: Did you do much post-production work on the images?

TS: The only thing I use Photoshop for is preparing files for my lab to make Lambda prints. I tweak the images so they'll look right on the conventional paper that the printer uses.

AP: I want to ask about the book's design. It was a perfect marriage of design and photography.

TS: I know. It was done by a designer named Joseph Logan. He has his own company and does a lot of art books. We both wanted to make the cover look like an old index -- sort of like those 19th century books that documented plants and animals and exploration. This project does have that element of exploration in it.

AP: Can we come away from your pictures with any conclusions about America or our culture?

TS: To each his own, really. But certainly for me I would say the process of doing this work revealed something to me. I photographed a lot of government sites, and I was struck that so many of them looked like they hadn't really evolved since the 1960s or the 1970s. They felt locked in time. That felt surprising to me. You just rely on these places to be modern or powerful in some way; you take for granted that you are being kept safe by the work done in them. To see the reality can be a little frightening, or dream crushing.

Source au 08 03 18 : <http://www.popphoto.com/photographynewswire/4073/a-conversation-with-taryn-simon.html>

Taryn Simon. *An American Index of the Hidden and the Unfamiliar*

" I am always immensely grateful to people who do impossible things on my behalf and bring back the picture. It means I don't have to do it, but at least I know what it looks like. So one's first feeling on looking at many of these extraordinary images is gratitude (followed quickly by a momentary pang of envy: the sedentary writer's salute to the woman of action). "

Salman Rushdie on Taryn Simon

Our image of America is changing. *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* is the title of a new series of works by Taryn Simon (b. 1975), which is being exhibited in full for the first time at the MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst. For this project, the New York-based artist, whose works often bridge art and politics, has documented places that are essential to the United States, its myth, and its everyday functioning but remain closed to the public. More than sixty large-format photographs taken over the past four years often required protracted negotiations before Simon was granted access to the otherwise inaccessible. When circumstances permitted, she photographed with a large-format camera and careful lighting, quite explicitly not following the tradition of the journalistic snapshot. Simon explores a society by carefully documenting various subjects from the fields of science, politics, medicine, nature, and religion that remain inaccessible to us for natural,

social, or political reasons. Her motifs include radioactive containers in a storage facility for nuclear waste, the recreational facility of a high-security prison, and the headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan with its Wizards, Night Hawks, and Kleagles. Her enormous powers of persuasion enabled her to gain access to a Scientology seminar room and to visit MOUT, a facade city in Kentucky built as a training ground for urban warfare. She was in the sealed-off halls of the CIA headquarters, in a highly protected research institute studying animal epidemics, and in an operating room in which a woman had her hymen and thus her virginity restored.

Taryn Simon gives a visible and clear form to places that are otherwise taboo or removed from our gazes. In doing so she clarifies the discrepancy between the privileged access of a few and the limited access of the public. Making the hidden visible is linked to the task of conveying knowledge. Consequently, each image is accompanied by a text by the artist that precisely explains what is seen and the reasons it is hidden. One aspect of Simon's understanding of aesthetics is expanding the limits of what we are permitted to see and know, to approach those obscure marginal areas in which physical, intellectual, and moral dangers lurk. Although *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* forces us to think and confront some of the excesses that a democratic society can produce, these images also convey the fascination that goes along with discovering unexplored territories. Simon captures the strange magic of what is closed off beneath the surface, which rests on the base of the American national consciousness.

Source au 08 03 18 : http://www.mmk-frankfurt.de/mmk_e/03_ausstellungen00_ix.html

In Plain Sight. Taryn Simon uncovers the buried oddball treasures of American life.

Tasha Green, *Men's Vogue*, August, 2007

It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it," Aristotle once observed. In *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* (Steidl, \$75), photographer Taryn Simon entertains a slew of unsettling thoughts—and even more disturbing characters, from the serpent handler at the Edwina Church of God in Jesus Christ's Name in Newport, Tennessee, to the World Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Sharpsburg, Maryland. These shots are premeditated, meticulously lit, and arranged in locations that are painstakingly researched and pursued. Simon doesn't rely on a click of chance. But her arresting images—reproduced one to a page with accompanying text—are the result of daredevil action: jumping into a cave of hibernating black bears, entering a radioactive-waste storage facility. As evidence of clandestine worlds we may not have known existed (there's a Braille edition of *Playboy*?), Simon's eerie compositions transform the raw nerve of her subject matter into the still beauty of portraiture.

Men's Vogue: Why have you chosen photography as the medium for your creative and critical expression, particularly since your photographs are often accompanied by text?

Taryn Simon: It was never a conscious decision. I've been photographing from a very early age.

MV: Please explain the convergence of the visual with language, and what it represents for your work?

TS: As I'm often dealing with highly politicized subject matter, the text is a way for me to manage its engagement with the broader public. Some may see that as a crutch. I see it as a necessity—for my work and my interests—which are not solely aesthetics.

MV: Isn't this typically the meeting place of film or documentary? Will you ever pursue these mediums?

TS: I made a documentary that was part of the exhibition of my first body of work, *The Innocents*, which documented cases of wrongful conviction throughout America. And, I've done some additional short film work. I would love to make a film someday.

MV: Please discuss the transition from portraiture in your previous book, *The Innocents*, to mostly shooting still life or landscape in *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*. Do you prefer one to another, or will your future work continue to include both?

TS: When I finish a body of work—it's truly closed. The jump to a more ethereal, abstract approach in *An American Index* was a natural leaning toward something new and it functioned best with my conceptual interests in the new body of work.

MV: Does the impact of your photographs rely on their contextual explanation or are you simultaneously pursuing something purely aesthetic?

TS: Both are equally important. I work tirelessly to create seductive works independent of their context.

MV: If the snapshot immortalizes a fleeting moment that would otherwise have been lost—and for many photographers that is a powerful motivation—why do you, on the other hand, choose to painstakingly set up the shoot with a large frame camera and lighting, etcetera?

TS: It's another school. I'm not interested in capturing moments. I construct a very calculated frame. That said, I'm continually bringing a camera and lighting set-up into situations with very rigid margins—time constraints, restrictions—that forces a certain spontaneity (as much as I try to avoid it). The conflict between my approach and the subject matters I choose—which would likely be more suited to hand-held, traditional documentary equipment—is where something comes alive.

MV: This requires tremendous premeditation, and yet aren't you still ultimately after the same aim—capturing an image that otherwise would have been lost to the world? Will you discuss the dichotomy here?

TS: I'm not just collecting what's there. I see my images as more of a building process. There is a lot of intervention within the frame.

MV: What is your reason for continually coming back to subject matter that is kept hidden or inaccessible to the average person?

TS: I think it's an effort to confront my personal boundaries and the collective's boundaries. It's a testing of controls and a desire for control.

MV: And if you don't take snapshots, please explain how you get these rare moments—whether of detainees on the U.S./Mexican border or hibernating black bears—without using stealth, luck, or speed?

TS: All three are part of it. I fail a lot.

MV: While preparing to photograph a site, do you have a team of researchers? Or is it just you digging for clues and asking for permission?

TS: I work with a team. They are an enormous part of my process. For the last four years, I always had one person helping me research and produce at all times. There is so much work leading up to a single image. Site selection in *An American Index* required a more liberated approach. But accessing the sites involved an unbelievable amount of letter writing, phone calling, getting permissions. I had to be approved by the department of homeland security, the army etc...In the end, I also collaborate with editors on writing and developing these texts—which are supposed to feel unauthored, very much like an encyclopedia. They too require a lot of research, compiling, fact checking, interviewing.

MV: I have to ask what it was that you requested from Disney Publishing Worldwide that they refused to provide?

TS: Their underground facilities where there is a holding cell, all of their maintenance operations and where characters can take breaks without their head costumes. I was never all that interested in it—and thought it may be an edit from the get-go. That said, the fax they sent me denying access, which is the final page in the book, was far better than any photograph.

MV: Will you continue to pursue editorial work, or do you prefer working on these longer projects that culminate into a book and/or museum exhibition?

TS: I prefer working on my own projects as I can control the context in which they are presented.

MV: Can you tell us about any upcoming projects?

TS: I wish I could. Lots of bad ideas right now. I'd only bore you.

MV: Somehow, I find that hard to believe.

Source au 08 03 18: http://www.mensvogue.com/arts/articles/2007/08/taryn_simon

Taryn Simon. Kaleidoscope of entropy

Kai von Rabenau, *Mono.Kultur*, n°15, déc. 2007-janv.2008, p.1-3 [introduction avant l'interview de l'artiste]

A nuclear waste storage facility with its containers, glowing a dark blue, suspended deep into water tanks; a cryopreservation unit preserving humans in a frozen state for a future promising new medical possibilities; the blank stares of young members of the Ku Klux Klan — in her new book *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*, photographer Taryn Simon unveils sights and locations one often would not even suspect existed; and, in some cases, one even might have preferred to remain in the dark. Taking us on a rollercoaster ride into the underworld of the United States, from military sites to Hollywood to religious phenomena to sociological curiosities, one cannot help but wonder at the complexity but also the strangeness of the foundations of our civilization. Revealing the bones of the power structures and mythologies at the core of the American dream, with an unwavering relentlessness bordering on obsession, Taryn Simon uses photography as a means of exploration, as a tool that allows you to see what is not meant to be seen. With its literally incredible subject matter and the assured production, *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* is easily one of the most significant and exciting works of art to be shown and published this year, earning Taryn Simon solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum in New York, The Photographers' Gallery in London and the MMK in Frankfurt.

At only 32, Taryn Simon has not only perfected a surprisingly strong and focused visual identity; she has also produced an astonishing body of work. She studied Environmental Sciences at Brown University before opting for photography as a career, and is now living and working in her birthplace, New York City. Rapidly gaining a reputation in editorial work for some high-profile publications such as *Vanity Fair*, *i-D* and *The New Yorker*, it was a commission by *The New York Times Magazine* that put her on the right track: Asked to portray some wrongfully convicted and imprisoned men and women, she was intrigued by the role of photography in the misidentification in these cases and decided to take the project further. Supported by a Guggenheim fellowship, she photographed dozens of victims over several years, finally published and exhibited as *The Innocents*, introducing a highly sensitive political issue into gallery spaces.

Stylistically, Taryn Simon continues to work on the borderline between fine art and documentary photography. Frequently relying on text to avoid any ambiguities in content, she applies methods of advertising photography to journalism, creating carefully staged and manipulated tableaux that gain their force from the friction between their visual perfection and the unsettling subject matter. Taryn Simon has perfected this duality with *An American Index*, a project she pursued over four years and which marks a shift from portraiture to spaces and still lifes. In their aesthetic beauty and eerie stillness, but also in the often shockingly banal reality of places of high power and significance, the images exude simultaneously a sense of depth and of shallowness that are not only visually fascinating but uncomfortably disturbing in all their unexpected nakedness.

Source au 08 03 18: <http://mono-kultur.com/issues/15>

Photography is a Prostitute.

Geoffrey Batchen Interviews Taryn Simon ; with an introductory essay by Nell Clister, in *MUSEO*, contemporary art magazine, volume 8, 2007?

Looking at artwork online tends to feel cheap, like cheating: Whatever aura a work might possess is usually dissipated by pixilation, miniaturization, and the cold context of a screen among millions, a webpage among billions. Looking at Taryn Simon's work online is no exception, though it's not exactly the aura of her work that's lost in the translation to cyberspace. Indeed, her photographs, though sumptuous and striking, do not claim that special combination of self-sufficiency, uniqueness, and mystery traditionally denied to a reproduced work of art, be it mechanical or digital. In fact, her work might seem to lend itself perfectly to reproduction on the web where images can be matched with such a wealth and range of information about who, what, where, when, and why that they genuinely flicker into documentary blips, which is on one level the highest incarnation of Simon's images. But it is the fickle, often mendacious nature of the web that stands in starkest contradiction to Simon's aim, which is, even more than composing and printing images themselves, truth-telling.

Simon's celebrated 2000-1 body of work "The Innocents" began as a *New York Times Magazine* project; the lush Umbrage Editions book includes a commentary by lawyers Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld, founders of the Innocence Project, which has brought more than 100 post-conviction exonerations based on DNA evidence. Obviously "The Innocents" belongs less to the rarefied art world than to the journalistic tradition of uncovering personal stories in order to illuminate societal ills and inequalities. Yet the recitation of the case in the text accompanying the images, which often show the wrongly convicted man (and one woman) at the scene of the crime, suggests the fallibility of such ideological documentary evidence: images generated to identify a perpetrator—sketches, mugshots—are often used to manipulate the truth, whether or not there is malice aforethought. In one case, Simon focuses on the fact that a police sketch was given so much authority that the victim forgot the actual appearance of the attacker and instead focused on identifying the person who looked most like the sketch.

The role of Simon's own images could be seen as righting a wrong, except that they also slyly mislead, weaving a false narrative whose veracity is traditionally promised by the nature of the medium. We see not what the witness saw, but what the witness *thought* he or she saw. We see a person who "fit the description," but was the wrong person. We see a person at a crime scene where he had years ago been "placed," but in some cases, had never visited since the crime—never been there at all. We see a carefully constructed image geared to give the wrong impression.

Such implications bump us out of the purely documentary realm where images are presented as truth. The presence of the explanatory text further exposes the photograph as limited or fragmentary rather than authoritative. Simon's project falls under the rubric of what Allan Sekula has labeled "anti-photojournalism," photography that aims not to capture a defining image or pretend to truth, but rather which calls to be treated simply as a language. Sekula's works update the social realism inherited from photographers like Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, who brought the presence and the humanity of the socially invisible to public attention. Sekula wields his camera in a modified documentary style that consciously avoids overstatement, complementing his visuals with a narrative that likewise eschews the dramatic. Simon's photographs are likewise anything but "defining," though they are carefully composed and printed, aesthetically conscious to the extreme, and work to isolate the subject, to suspend it for a moment—to celebrate it, no matter how perversely. They are also clearly undoctored, which both amplifies the effect of the real-world information that accompanies it and emphasizes the inherent artifice of the image.

Despite their high degree of finish, the photographs display a decided lack of excitement that is an important feature of Simon's work. She has a knack for creating a kind of image that would look utterly empty on its own: not only indifferent, but forlorn. Her most recent series, "An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar," includes a shot from a window of a modified airplane wing, a view into a news show set, and a glimpse of a projected forest on a wall. But as with her earlier work, the paragraph or two that Simon writes to accompany each image could be said to furnish each subject even more than the image itself does. We can read that the airplane belongs to a company called Weather Modification, Inc. and that the device on its wing generates silver iodide crystals that cause rain—an up-and-coming and controversial national security strategy. The television studio, it turns out, is partly a U.S.-run satellite channel that broadcasts translated American content and commentary on American policy in Arabic countries. The third image was

taken at Microsoft Home, a site of intensive research and prototype development of concepts for a futuristic, fully mechanized domestic space activated by voice and gesture recognition, integrated displays, and automated mood lighting. The Home is closed to the public.

Viewing one of these works involves looking briefly at the image, then looking away to read the text, and then looking anew at the image, lingering on it, drinking it in fully once it is loaded with meaning. By that point, it is practically a hybrid of text and photograph: it is charged. Simon's brand of social realism is thus also, perhaps primarily, a form of critical practice that calls into question its own medium. In this sequential process of viewing, the movement of the two inadequate media finding their complement becomes explicit. More to the point, the role of knowledge in viewing an image makes itself felt. In light of the information given, the image changes dramatically and irrevocably: it is, quite literally, no longer unassuming. This lesson obviously has far-reaching implications. The text's description becomes definitive. Once one has read, for example, about the CIA's alleged support of Abstract Expressionism as a pro-American strategy during the Cold War, it is no longer possible to see the image of two large shaped canvases by Thomas Downing hanging in the CIA headquarters as in any way innocent. The unpeopled hallway fairly reeks with ideology.

The image/text combination does not become authoritative. On the contrary, their relation calls to mind Martha Rosler's landmark 1974-75 project "The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems," which with a combination of image and text proposes the failure of either "system" to approach truth, be it representational or social. Both Rosler and Simon seek to comment on some unpleasant and neglected aspects of life in America: homelessness and poverty on the Bowery; racial and class injustice on Death Row; and in "American Index," the gamut from religious and political absurdity and cruelty in the name of science to pathological narcissism, governmental paranoia, and so on. Both Rosler and Simon suspend the authority of both word and image, and in Simon's case, there is yet a further suspension: the explicit narrative of untruth, secrecy, hiddenness, and invisibility throws the subjects themselves into question, aside from their representation. Who sees these sites? Who hides them? And what do they hide?

In the secrecy and subtext of her subjects lies Simon's subversive updating of the genre of Walker Evans-style social realism in photography. If Rosler questions the representation of a subject like The Bowery, challenging both photography and language as purveyors of social truth behind the ostensible subject, Simon chooses subjects whose hiddenness reveals much and whose mute plainness speaks volumes. Simon's subject is not only the limitations of the visual or linguistic media, but more to the point, the contingency of truth, its ideological dimension, and especially that of its veiling.

In preventing us from settling into these images, from accepting their authority, Simon does us a great service. These "unseen" sites call out for recognition for what they are. Here on view, on the record, they demand to be *fully known*, something that an image by itself cannot confer. The image itself does not beg to be evocative: it is what it is, and we are told what it is. But the truth is that photography *can't* show us everything. We are reminded that we have to find out a lot of things for ourselves.

Interview with Geoffrey Batchen

Geoffrey Batchen: Taryn, I wonder how you'd place your own photographic practice within a history of such practices? It seems to borrow equally from documentary, conceptual art, and photojournalism. Is "conceptual documentary" a term you'd be comfortable with?

Taryn Simon: I prefer to have people continually re-define what [photography] is and may be. Identifying genres in photographic practice often involves a commitment to traditional thinking. Current generations are no longer working in such clear forms [in any domain]. Everything is very quickly becoming interdisciplinary. People are continually trying to place the work in a comfortable envelope and are often confounded by what envelope that may be. It bridges a number of long-established definitions: documentary, political, and conceptual. I prefer that it float between and in and out of everything.

GB: Your photographs are often studiously frontal and undemonstrative. Could you say something about your aesthetic choices as a photographer when confronted with a particular subject? Why the deadpan approach? Why color photography and not black and white?

TS: The frontal, deadpan that you observe represents a certain reserve. In confronting loaded subject matter, I often choose to avoid any editorialized, spoon-fed emotion or angle. By doing so, my personal distance from the subject is built into the audience's experience of engaging with the

photograph. I'm avoiding a stance of "understanding" or of having knowledge that others don't have. It says: "Here it is, and I don't really know." In my own work, I avoid that which claims to have a closeness with its subject. It alienates the viewer, relieves tension, and cheapens the impact. This is often something people use to critique the work. It can be seen without emotion. For me, the reserve, the distance is what the emotion inhabits.

As for color, it was never a question. I always try to avoid nostalgia, although it becomes harder with the advent of digital processes. There is a very specific palette in the work, which is programmed to seduce.

GB: How do you feel about the use of fiction in contemporary documentary photography (as in the work of Walid Raad) or abstraction or manipulation (as in the work of Andreas Gursky)? What is the function of "truth" in your own work?

TS: Documentary photography is becoming more illustrative as people become more familiar with photography's limitations and vulnerabilities. Reality has always been interpreted through layers of manipulation, abstraction, and intervention. But now, it is very much on the surface. I like this honesty about its dishonesty.

Every photograph has many truths and none. Photographs are ambiguous, no matter how seemingly scientific they appear to be. They are always subject to an uncontrollable context. This is a tired statement, but worth repeating. My reliance on text is where I try to reign in the ambiguity. It is in this relationship that I can control and [use to] steer interpretation in my intended direction. Again, the text is reserved, like the photograph, and for the same reasons. That said, the photograph can dream and slip away into abstraction and form while the text sits fixed to the floor anchoring.

GB: Your first book, *The Innocents* (2003), comprised interviews with and photographs of Americans convicted of serious crimes who had subsequently been freed on the basis of DNA evidence (some of them 18 years after being incarcerated). It's a powerful condemnation of the American justice system, but it's also a critical commentary on the power of the photograph to distort the memories of eyewitnesses and facilitate mistaken identity. Your own photographs for this project sometimes show your subjects posing self-consciously at the scene of a crime that they didn't commit. Could you explain your approach to this project?

TS: Photographing the wrongfully convicted at the scene of the crime where they never were (as they didn't commit the crime) highlights the complicated and dangerous relationship between truth and fiction in their lives and in photography. This was integral to the project's position. Some, it's worth noting, would not return to the scene of the crime as they didn't want to have any familiarity with a site of which they had always claimed to have no knowledge—that by going there and gaining familiarity, it would make them appear guilty. This fear exposes the power and danger of imaging.

I set up very strict parameters for myself when taking these photographs. Often, many of them fail visually in honor of the conceptual framework. My photographic choices and background selections were limited and directed by content. I wasn't free to respond visually and aesthetically in all instances.

Their self-consciousness is never posed. Subjects were very rarely directed. There is often a discomfort between them and the camera. They are standing before the very thing that initiated their traumatic history, which was founded on lies and misinterpretation. By this, I'm referring to the fact that the majority of the wrongful convictions in the book were the result of an eyewitness or victim being manipulated or mistaken in their engagement with photographs of the perpetrator. I wanted that discomfort and unfathomable conflation of reality and fiction to be evident within the photograph. The uneasy reserve should tremble ever so slightly beneath the surface.

GB: Your most recent project, "An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar" (2007), is the end result of a personal quest to document some of America's most secret places, sites that aren't typically seen by outsiders and to which photographers don't usually get access. The fifty-seven subjects don't seem related at first glance. Could you describe how you came to embark on this project and how you chose your sites?

TS: After completing *The Innocents*, I looked back through photographs I had taken and responded to through the years. I kept returning to a photograph I had taken at The Palace of the Revolution in Cuba. I was lured by its formal qualities: the geometry, lighting, and absence of the figure. It bordered on abstraction and had a disorienting structure. This was all sharpened by the fact that it was largely un-photographed, had no popularly distributed visual anchor, and remained

inaccessible to the broader public. After September 11th, I decided to look for these sites: that which is foundational to America's daily functioning and mythology yet remains out-of-view, overlooked, or inaccessible to the American public. This was a time in which the American government and media were seeking secret sites beyond its borders. I wanted to look inward.

The subjects are purposefully unrelated in a traditional form. There is a very intentional entropy in [choosing what] is photographed for this work. The use of the word "index" in the title is a play on the word, as it is glaringly not comprehensive and often chaotic. Viewers are meant to engage with subjects that have escaped their compartments. You jump from security to entertainment to science to government in a disarming and almost irresponsible fashion. By this, [the series] confronts accepted and traditional forms of ordering information, confronting the separation of the public and the experts. It reflects new orders of distribution like the internet, which challenge control.

Site selection is personal, often reflecting my anxieties. I worked very hard to maintain a lack of order or any discernable formula, which is its own order, I know. I had chapter headings (government, science, religion...) and made many lists. I was always aware of one getting too heavy and crushing the chaos. Initially the choices were conceptual ones. I was looking for very specific complications, something with a quaking presence, a white noise. Then I had to consider the visual. That said, as many of these had no visual references, I had to either take a blind risk or proceed with imaginations from oral descriptions.

Incidentally, the resulting images are never pure documentations of the space I encounter. There are admitted interventions in every image to make them more seductive and aesthetically successful.

GB: You insist that each of your photographs is exhibited or published with an extensive accompanying text. Why is this so necessary? Is photography incapable of functioning as an effective political tool without such an accompaniment?

TS: It can be the most powerful political tool without text. History has demonstrated that again and again. Photography is a prostitute—used to promote so many agendas, both inadvertently and purposefully. The use of text is an effort to avoid other contexts, to avoid being used. It acknowledges photography's limitations (which are often its beauty) through an effort to own its framework.

GB: You also do work for news magazines. Isn't this a more effective vehicle for the kind of work that you do? Why show in art galleries?

TS: No. The work's impact stems from the fact that one individual is accomplishing and producing this on her own, completely independent of anybody's choices, ideas, texts, fears, politics, agendas. Built into its reception is the impossibility of it all — that one person crossed all these lines. Working for the *New York Times* allows me to access that which I could never access on my own: Abu Mazen, Assad, Tsipi Livni, etc... I rarely accept assignments for anything I could accomplish on my own.

Showing in museums is currently the most democratic and pure form in which to engage with the public. That's not to pretend that one isn't always going to be subject to certain constraints, contexts and agendas. It also allows the viewer to see the photograph in its most complete form. I shoot with a large format camera, which deserves and wants more than newsprint.

GB: When you do show in gallery spaces, you go to a lot of effort to control the way that we encounter your work. For your recent exhibition at the Whitney Museum, for example, the walls were repainted Super White rather than their usual cream, and the lighting was turned up, at your insistence, to seven times its normal level. Each of your photographs was printed to a large scale and was hung equidistant from the next. Why go to all this trouble? What kind of experience are you looking for in your exhibitions?

TS: More and more layers of control. Like I said before, so often photography is just passed off and used. Its author lets it slip into unintended and unexpected zones. I try to own the entire experience to whatever degree I can.

GB: I'm wondering where we should look for the content of your work? At the photographs as individual pictures? At the combination of text and image in each case? Or should we be concentrating on the overall conceptual structure that underpins the work?

TS: In "An American Index," it's in all three. You arrive at the work visually and digest it as an aesthetic object, often not knowing what you're looking at. You then discover the text, which centers your focus and allows you to rediscover the image. The two play back and forth in this manner until you move on to the next. Their finest form is in a series, in which you jump very abruptly from one to the next. This awkward movement and disorienting structure mirrors a confused moment in American history and considers the distribution and reception of accurate information.

Access All Areas

Christy Lange, *Frieze*, rubrique Focus, Issue 115, May 2008

Taryn Simon's photographs of restricted locations reveal an unsettling side to the American Dream

'It's 3am and something is happening in the world [...] There's a phone in the White House, and it's ringing.' So began the narration of a recent television advertisement for Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, unleashing a flurry of discussion about the White House telephone and the candidate best suited to answer it in case of a global emergency. The folklore of the White House 'red phone' was, in fact, first exploited during the 1984 presidential campaign, when it represented the tenuous hotline between Washington and Moscow. It's telling that the Clinton campaign was so eager to revive this anachronistic symbol: though Barack Obama accused Clinton of exploiting 'the politics of fear', Clinton had in fact tapped into a deep-seated American fantasy about the backstage operations of the United States government and its national security apparatus, at a time when that backstage is probably more expansive and dimly lit than ever. Americans, apparently, are still intrigued by the 'red phone' as a potent symbol of national secrets and the intricate bureaucracy hidden behind them. The country operates not only on freedom and transparency, but also on things that are unseen and unknown to most of us. Perhaps that's what makes Taryn Simon's 2007 publication of her photographic series 'An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar' so timely and appealing.

Leaving behind the representational modes that used to characterize the country – the inherent optimism of *Life* magazine editorials or the meandering road trips of Walker Evans or Stephen Shore – Simon's 64 images and accompanying captions penetrate places in the USA few have seen but many suspect must exist, and some places so obscure we've never even dreamed of them: like the Missile Control Center on the nuclear submarine *USS Nevada* – a claustrophobic, 1970s'-era control room dominated by a panel of large buttons, knobs and antiquated monitors. From Simon's detailed caption we learn that the officer seated at the control panel can pull the trigger only after 'opening a series of locked boxes', the keys for which are kept in multiple safes, for which the combinations must be 'called in': 'When the Fire Control Panel indicates "FIRE", he pulls the trigger which ignites the gas generator and ejects the missile from its tube.' This is the kind of Cold War-era intrigue that Salman Rushdie, in his foreword to Simon's publication, calls 'occult glamour'; and it is this occult glamour that Simon seizes in her meticulously composed photographs taken with a 4x5 camera, heightening their conspiratorial intrigue with encyclopaedic, matter-of-fact captions. In addition, Simon cultivates her own brand of glamour: an element Rushdie identifies as her 'powers of persuasion', which must play a part in the arduous, unfathomable process by which she gained access to all these places.

As a young woman of 33, Simon cuts an unlikely figure for someone who has stepped over the boundaries of Plum Island Animal Disease Center in Long Island and photographed exploding warheads on Florida's Eglin Air Force Base with her camera's shutter hooked up to the trigger. I remember reading that Joan Didion, as a young journalist, would sit by the phone in her hotel room when researching her stories, trying to muster the courage to call her sources; but Simon doesn't seem crippled by any of the same fears of making contact. Working with a rotating team of producers, she spent four years researching the sites for her project on the Internet and fitting them into pre-determined categories: 'religion', 'nature', 'science', 'government', 'security' and 'entertainment'. She wrote countless emails and made endless follow-up phone calls to obtain permission to take her photographic equipment inside notoriously restricted spaces such as the Church of Scientology Celebrity Centre in Hollywood and the CIA Original Headquarters Building in Langley, Virginia. She didn't crawl under fences: doors were opened for her. (She attributes some of her success to the initial permission of Army and Homeland Security, which helped her gain access to certain government sites. She is also the first to admit that her status as a young woman made her seem to be a less threatening breach of security.) In interviews, Simon makes her process sound bureaucratic and banal, admitting that it's 'extremely calculated'. Yet the long paper trail that leads to the realization of the photographs, raising the issue of how Simon managed to access those locations, casts its own seductive spell.

The density of information in the captions that accompany Simon's photographs opens each work up again, like unlocking a Pandora's box.

Though she battles with some of the same restrictions as a photojournalist, Simon describes her project as the 'aesthetic antithesis of photojournalism'. She claims she's not interested in 'stolen' images, but considers each work to be a 'collaboration'. Her aim is not only to expose her subjects but also to seduce her viewer: 'Set design', she admits, 'is a big part of my project [...] I look for

something that is going to be seductive'; even if this means rearranging a pig's head and maggot-infested fruit in the contraband foods area of New York's JFK airport to make it look more like a Dutch still life, or revisiting the Imperial Office of the World Knights of the Ku Klux Klan after she wasn't satisfied with her first shoot.

While her photographs are so frank and tightly composed that there is little room for abstraction or interpretation, the density of information in the texts that accompany them opens each one up again, like unlocking a Pandora's box. An image of a handgun frame being poured from molten metal allows for a caption concerning handgun statistics in the USA, while the caption beside an image of four apprehended Mexicans at the US/Mexican border provides data about the number of times each of the four men had attempted to cross illegally. But Simon skirts a definitive position or agenda. The texts maintain a consistently objective voice, like that of an instruction manual, offering details almost *ad absurdum*. Her command of arcane statistics and terminology such as 'Exotic Newcastle Disease' or 'Cryostasis' adds to the intrigue of an image rather than explaining it away. She hasn't just photographed these sites, she has become an expert on each one, and we trust her expertise implicitly: what we see and what we read make for a complete, authoritative package. Without the captions, we wouldn't know the difference between a controlled avalanche blast and the blast of nuclear weapons testing.

According to Simon, the text and image format for 'An American Index...' was inspired by the logs and journals of early explorers of the New World, who hand-drew pictures and labelled them with a cold recording of data. Her body of work attempts to forge a new valuation of the American landscape, but I wonder whether some of the borders Simon crosses would be better left intact, just as those lands 'found' by explorers might have been better left 'undiscovered'. Images such as one depicting a woman awaiting an operation to repair her hymen, whose straddled legs on a surgical table are shielded only by a white sheet, verge on the pornographic; I feel uncomfortable that such an intimate, personal procedure is being exposed in the same context as the disposal of medical waste. The caption is even more revealing: the patient is receiving the procedure from 'a plastic surgeon she located on the Internet' who 'charges \$3,500 for a hymenoplasty [and] also performs labiaplasty and vaginal rejuvenation'. Simon also photographed Don James, who suffered from terminal cancer, sitting in his pyjamas in a wheelchair after he had filled his prescription for a lethal dose of Nembutal.

Even with permission, Simon often puts herself in danger to get her shot. We can picture her asking a room full of KKK members to pose, or hovering with her camera over a hibernating black bear and her cubs. If the danger is not obvious from the photo, the captions remind us of the procedures she has had to follow to enter places such as 'a biosafety level 2 plus lab which requires, among other things, controlled access, decontamination of all waste, decontamination of lab clothing before laundering and that air must be exhausted, not recirculated'. Or a Nuclear Waste Encapsulation and Storage Facility, where 'a human standing one foot from an unshielded capsule would receive a lethal dose of radiation in less than ten seconds'. As tempting as it may be to read the photographs as an implicit leftist comment on the enhanced security measures implemented since 9/11, their captions make it apparent that access to such places is restricted not to service paranoia, but to shield us from danger.

Simon's photographs expose a terrifying and sometimes revolting side of the USA and its wrong-turns on its unfettered bearing toward progress. One of the most disturbing images is of a white tiger named Kenny, confined inside a wire cage. At first glance Kenny resembles a fierce and exotic cat from a Las Vegas spectacle, but closer up his face looks strangely like that of a harmless rabbit or a small teddy bear. He confronts the camera looking unexpectedly vulnerable and deformed. We learn from the caption that his 'mental retardation and significant physical limitations' are due to the inbreeding necessary to create white tigers. This is perhaps the most literal translation of the tenets of progress gone wrong – not only the questionable activities that take place behind America's closed doors, but the retardation and permutations of those activities – the new situations and hidden disasters that our so-called advances have spawned.

One discomfiting effect of 'An American Index...' is the sense that it renders all these sites – both hidden and unfamiliar – as equivalent, and therefore implies that there may be something sinister about all of them. While some indeed might be frightening, there are plenty of others that fulfil a nerdy curiosity, rather than a morbid one. George Lucas' model of Death Star II, photographed at his workplace, Skywalker Ranch, in its 'true orientation' (as opposed to the mirror image of it that was shown in the film *Return of the Jedi*, 1983), for instance, or the Hoh Rain Forest, the wettest spot in the continental US, where ingredients for cancer treatments occur naturally. By casting an aura of mystery over all of them, does Simon misrepresent them? Can the simulation of a 'Prisoner of War

Interrogation Resistance Program' be compared to the simulated exam that helps medical students identify physical abuse? This uncomfortable friction between images is especially apparent in the artist's portraits of religious practitioners, which, through their inclusion here, run the risk of being implicated in something secretive or sinister. Can members of the Lakota tribe performing a sacred ritual be compared to anti-Zionist rabbis or serpent handlers? Doesn't this give them all a cult-like aura?

Simon's work forms an inventory of the fading patriotic fantasies of the USA, of places that look so locked in time that they are dream crushing.

It's common to think that the darkest secrets are those that are hidden from view or can never be seen or represented, but that is not necessarily always true, and some of Simon's photographs may be trying too hard to seduce us into believing it. According to the artist: 'The work is not meant to be didactic at all; if anything, it should lead to more confusion.' But in some instances, her objectives seem so easily encapsulated in one photograph and her grip on the background information so tight, that we have little chance to think otherwise. We can't know if she's telling the truth, but we trust the privileged access she's been given. This might be why the pictures seem to sit so uncomfortably on the walls of a museum, or even on the pages of a contemporary art magazine. They aren't obvious fictions, nor do they fit the mould of photojournalism. Taken together, they create the impression that everything has been thoroughly, even overly, prepared for her viewers. However, Simon is so well-versed in the history of photography – effortlessly gathering references from Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Joel Sternfeld and the Center for Land Use Interpretation without mimicking or imitating any of them – that she even sidesteps the potential pitfalls of her project in the eyes of an art audience.

For all the unwelcome surprises 'An American Index...' reveals about the USA, as an American I can't help feeling a twinge of patriotism looking at it; after all, these are some of the places where the American Dream is made – places that represent, or once represented, our country's ethnic diversity, freedom of religion, and scientific advances, like the 'cloud-seeding' aircraft that can actually change the weather or the telescope at the Kitt Peak National Observatory which can photograph the 'Pac-Man' Nebula 9,500 light years away. Simon's subjects also play into the tradition of movies from my childhood (and presumably hers too) such as *War Games* (1983), *Top Gun* (1986) or *The Hunt for Red October* (1990) – finger-on-the-trigger thrillers born in and left over from the Cold War. An image of the members of The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation can elicit the same breathless feeling I get when I see Jack Bauer interrogating a suspected traitor on *24* (2001–ongoing). Simon keeps an inventory of our fading patriotic fantasies, places that she admits looked so 'locked in time' they were 'dream crushing': the NASA Beach House – built in 1962 to accommodate the families of astronauts quarantined before launch – which we never got to glimpse when we watched the shuttle taking off on television in school; the underground basketball court in the thermonuclear bunker at the Cheyenne Mountain Directorate, which has something in common with the absurd banality of the red phone. These places do hold secrets, but Simon's photographs humanize them. Freedom's opposite may be lurking behind closed doors, but this also where the fiction of the American Dream is being constantly resuscitated.

The red phone will have to remain the stuff of folklore, however, as the White House was one of the few places that patently refused to grant Simon any access. But a little of my own research unearthed a question-and-answer session on the White House official website that asserts: 'There is no red phone in the Oval Office'. It doesn't mention whether there might be one hidden somewhere else.

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'Prostitutes' and 'Heavy Anchors': the photographic work of Taryn Simon

Rachele Ceccarelli, Ph : The Postgraduate Photography Research Network, September 8, 2010

This paper was written for the conference *Displaying Word and Image* (University of Ulster, Belfast, 4-6 June 2010) and presented in the panel "Con-text: Displaying Photographs".

When entering the space dedicated to Taryn Simon's work at the Photographer's Gallery in London, part of the 2009 Deutsche Bank prize exhibition, what I found most striking was the unusual behaviour of the audience. The spectators were particularly still and concentrated – but often they weren't focusing their attention to the large scale images chosen as a selection of Simon's shortlisted work, 'An American Index of the Hidden and the Unfamiliar'; instead, they were intently reading the long and detailed captions that accompanied each photograph. Text represents an essential component of Simon's project, an inventory of some of the most secret and unexplored sites in the U.S., that investigates the foundations of American identity, mythology, and politics. The fifty-seven pictures that constitute the body of work are all complemented with extensive and well researched captions, which introduce the viewer to a large variety of scenarios that range from an avian quarantine facility, nuclear waste encapsulation, hymenoplasty cosmetic surgery, cryopreservation, a marijuana research centre, to Microsoft house and the Playboy Mansion – to give just a few examples. Although the presence of text is not uncommon in museums, the written word is usually overlooked by the impatient and distracted art consumer; neglected as a tedious supplement to the actual piece, or sometimes deliberately ignored as constraining and overtly didactic. The pronounced interest of the audience in Simon's factual and plainly stated captions was, then, quite remarkable – especially considering the alluring beauty of her photographs; a compelling presence that competes for the viewer's attention.

It is exactly this compelling presence that, in Salman Rushdie's opinion, constitutes the revealing force of the work, elevating the image to a position of authority, as the main source for the establishment of meaning. In his foreword to Simon's monograph, *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*, he acknowledges the integral role played by the text, but concludes: 'When a photographer comes up with an image as potently expressive as that, even a dedicated word-person such as myself is bound to concede that such a picture is worth at least a thousand words.' This image described by Rushdie is the first photograph shown in the book, and is usually one of the images selected for smaller exhibitions of the work. It is undoubtedly enticing in its stark chromatism and geometrical abstraction, but is this image really worth a thousand words? Is any image worth a thousand words? Taryn Simon does not need a thousand words, but only 206, to undermine this commonplace. In fact, the long caption that accompanies the photograph, providing detailed information about its subject, origin, and location, completely changes the viewer's perception and understanding of the image. We read that the photograph was taken at the nuclear waste encapsulation and storage facility at Hanford Site, part of the US Department of Energy; and that the blue glow depicted is created by the Cherenkov Effect; 'the electromagnetic radiation emitted when a charged particle, giving off energy, moves faster than light through a transparent medium.' We are also told that the plutonium formerly produced in this complex was used in the Nagasaki atomic bomb, and that it is one of the most contaminated sites in the US.

The movement from photograph to text, then from text back to photograph, charges this beautiful image with the specificity of contextual meaning. 'Her images hold their own', states Rushdie, implying a rivalry between text and image finally won by the autonomy and evocativeness of the second. But it is exactly this hierarchical opposition between text and image that Simon's work challenges, creating a compelling hybrid of text and photography where the visual and the written are not held in competition or unbridgeable distance, but co-exist and complement each other in a productive dialogue. This strategic interdependence of image and text suspends the authority of both, disrupting an understanding of the photographic image as self-sufficient and evidential, that has been for a long time at the foundation of traditional documentary practices. Taryn Simon is strongly aware that (as decades of theoretical criticism have highlighted) the supposed transparency of photographs, the sheer nakedness of images, can increase exponentially their affective power, making them efficient agents for disseminating ideas and influencing judgement. The obtuse muteness of photographs makes them the perfect dummies for ventriloquist acts.

One of Simon's first major projects, 'The Innocents', produced for the New York Times in 2002, explored the role of photography in the criminal justice system, portraying Americans wrongfully convicted to death row, who had subsequently been freed on the basis on DNA evidence. In all of the cases, photography played an important role in the mistaken identification of the perpetrators and in the distortion of eyewitnesses' memories. Commenting on her own work, Simon writes: 'This

project stresses the cost of ignoring the limitations of photography and minimising the context in which photographic images are presented. Nowhere are the material effects of ignoring a photograph's context as profound as in the misidentification that leads to the imprisonment of an innocent person.' Rather than an indisputable vehicle of truth, photography turns into an unreliable witness, partial, malleable and deceptive. Simon undermines the claimed reliability of images as transparent depictions of the real, destabilising accepted conventions and ideological responses. Her self-reflective artistic strategy exposes the intrinsic ambiguity of the photographic medium and investigates the notion of evidentiary proof as an influential means for processing, systematising and interpreting reality.

'Evidence', Simon claims, 'does not exist in a closed system. Like photography, it cannot exit apart from its context, or outside of the modes by which it circulates.' The meaning of the term 'evidence' shifts here from its usual positive connotations of testimony, document and indubitable proof, to the opposing idea of a naturalised product of specific regimes of knowledge and truth. Michel Foucault defined evidence not as an instrument of enlightenment, but as a means of manipulation and constraint, as a deceptive sedative that makes acceptable imposed ways of seeing and strategies of power, by disguising the submissive passivity of our gaze as habit, social convention, necessity, nature. Following Foucault, John Tagg has recently argued, in *The Disciplinary Frame*, that the status of photography as an instrument of knowledge and evidence was not technologically defined, but was institutionally produced and negotiated within a disciplinary apparatus of capture, based on practices of surveillance, identification, control and archival recording. Drawing on his earlier work, *The Burden of Representation*, Tagg reasserts that photographic claims to veracity and transparency must be circumscribed within particular regimes of power; and that the inexhaustible openness of photographic images is always captured and framed as truth by the discursive apparatus that surrounds and circulates them. In a description of what he defines as 'the violence of meaning', Tagg writes: '...every photograph, like the sign, refers to every other, positively or negatively, by sympathy or exclusion, opens not to the guarantee of totality but on the undecidability of a network of cross-reference in which [...] there are only differences and no positive terms, only differences and the kind of violence that insists they can be held in place.' Aware that the photograph's ambiguity stimulates a demand for narrative framing, and that meaning is always violently determined by contextual discourses and institutional modes of circulation, Taryn Simon added extensive supporting material to the portraits in 'Innocents', including captions, case profiles, and interviews, in an attempt to give a more adequate account of the cases.

'An American Index of the Hidden and the Unfamiliar' similarly combines seductively aligid images with long and detailed captions, in a strategic attempt to gain control over her photographs and their interpretation. She stated in a recent interview: 'Every photograph has many truths and none. Photographs are ambiguous, no matter how seemingly scientific they appear to be. They are always subject to an uncontrollable context.[...] My reliance on text is where I try to reign in the ambiguity. It is in this relationship that I can control and steer interpretation in my intended direction [...] The photograph can dream and slip away into abstraction and form while the text sits fixed to the floor anchoring.' This statement makes overt reference to Barthes' concept of anchorage, or the use of text to define the meaning of images, to 'fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way to counter the terror of uncertain signs.' Simons adds: '[Photography] can be the most powerful political tool without text. History has demonstrated that again and again. Photography is a prostitute—used to promote so many agendas, both inadvertently and purposefully. The use of text is an effort to avoid other contexts, to avoid being used. It acknowledges photography's limitations (which are often its beauty) through an effort to own its framework.' Simon's heavy reliance on text represents the means through which she aims to recuperate some form of authority over the distribution and reception of her work; re-appropriating the contextual framework of the images in a manner that reflects upon the authority and function of both photographic and written documentation. She carefully stages the encounter of viewer with image, providing strict instructions as to how the exhibition space should be set up: the walls of the gallery have to be repainted Super White, the lighting turned up to seven times its normal level, the photos printed in a fixed format and hung equidistant from one another.

This strategic and attentively planned interdependence of image, text and display within the gallery space situates Simon's work within a body of conceptual and critical documentary practices that can be traced back to the work of artists such as Bernd and Hilla Becher, Allan Sekula, or Martha Rosler. Yet, she refuses to be explicitly linked to this post-modern genealogy, or to categorise her photographic work, leaving it to float between, and play with, the genres of photojournalism, documentary realism, and conceptual art. Her photographs skillfully combine a

frontal and undemonstrative impassivity with a seductive and sumptuous aesthetic sophistication. Carefully composed and lit and exhibited as large format prints, Simon's images are never a 'pure' document of the scenarios she encounters; for she intervenes, shaping the subject and lighting the space to add to the visual allure of her photographs. She admits spending hours arranging the rotten fruits and vegetables confiscated from passengers by the US Customs and Border Protection and amassed in the Contraband Room of the JFK Airport in New York, so that they would pictorially resemble a still life.

This tension between veracity and artifice does not only inform Simon's photographs on a formal and stylistic level, but through the sorts of subject she chooses to photograph. Examples of artificiality, camouflage, and simulation are frequently photographed: from the computer generated virtual simulations of military operations on urban terrain, to the mock trials and juries monitored and analysed by DOAR Litigation Consulting, to the professional actors and actresses trained to imitate real patients in the UCLA Medical Centre. Even when representing the natural world, she captures scenarios that are often totally constructed: the white tiger Kenny is the result of a selective inbreeding programme that causes mental retardation and physical malformations, the Great White Shark is held in captivity, the avalanche is induced using dynamite and military artillery. The artificiality of her images, then, reproduces and mirrors a 'real' world that is already fabricated and doctored. 'Reality', says Simon, 'has always been interpreted through layers of manipulation, abstraction, and intervention. But now, it is very much on the surface. I like this honesty about its dishonesty.' Her play with the polar notions of reality and artifice, documentary and fiction, moves back and forth, from the physical sites she visited to the images that depict them, from the signified to the signifier, from content to form.

As Geoffrey Batchen has observed, Simon's work reflects upon and underscores the intrinsic ambivalence of photography, considered both as neutral revelation and discursive sign, constantly divided between the polar traditions of documentary realism and conceptual inter-textuality. In this context, the written captions clearly highlight the limitations of the image, disrupting any claim to transparency or autonomy. The captivating beauty of her pictures is combined with an uneventful reticence: without the complementary presence of the text, it would be impossible to contextualize these images, or grasp the complexity of the issues examined in Simon's work. Yet, the factual and objective explanations provided by the captions—even if detailed and well researched—are not sufficient to fully satisfy our desire to know more. In combination with the images, they do not furnish an answer, but instead stimulate curiosity and generate additional questions. The artist has claimed that 'I'm avoiding a stance of 'understanding' or of having knowledge that others don't have. It says: 'Here it is, and I don't really know.' In my own work, I avoid that which claims to have closeness with its subject.' Suspending the authority of both photographs and text, she encourages and points out the complicit gesture of the viewer in the process of signification.

Simon's attentively planned interdependence of image, text and display in the gallery space does not provide a definitive and comprehensive account of the secret and unexplored sites in the US, as one could be deceived into believing. On the contrary, Simon's flirtation with the concepts of documentary realism, accuracy of text and the archival authority of the museum highlights their limits and fallacies. The employment of the term 'index' in the title of her project thus becomes an ironic reference, both to the claimed indexicality of the photographic medium, and to the supposed neutrality of taxonomic forms of archival knowledge. Her pictures are not objective and immediate shots of the sites she visited, and her selection of places and people is arbitrary, at times even disconcerting. As she explains: 'The subjects are purposefully unrelated in a traditional form. There is a very intentional entropy in [choosing what] is photographed for this work. The use of the word "index" in the title is a play on the word, as it is glaringly not comprehensive and often chaotic. Viewers are meant to engage with subjects that have escaped their compartments. You jump from security to entertainment to science to government in a disarming and almost irresponsible fashion. By this, [the series] confronts accepted and traditional forms of ordering information, confronting the separation of the public and the experts.'

Simon's work offers a critique not just of the political, scientific and institutional apparatuses of control revealed in the images, but also of photography, taxonomic knowledge, journalism and artistic display as quiet instruments of 'the violence of meaning', described by Tagg. Her project invokes the absent information, bodies, and stories, proving that photography cannot show everything, the text cannot tell the full story and the museum cannot provide the complete information. It is, first and foremost, an investigation of the politics of showing and looking, of the institutional framing and circulation of meaning, of privileged accessibility and instrumental closure.

Reaction of Sarah James, September 20, 2010

Before I begin, I have to confess that I wrote the catalogue text on Taryn Simon for the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize 2009 that Rachele is exploring here. In the process of so doing, I was lucky enough to talk to Simon at length about her work. My thoughts on Simon's project might – or might well not – be more clearly articulated in that text than in this short response...

I think Rachele's paper on Simon is entirely right in asserting the centrality of the relationship between text and image in this project, and offers several really constructive and thought-provoking meditations on this complex issue.

I would possibly query Rachele's early reading of the status of Simon's texts, and her initial definition of these texts as captions. As the rest of the piece makes clear, Simon does not see the texts in *An American Index* as short supplementary captions, but as thoroughly researched texts, meant (in their supposedly neutral and objective tone) to mimic encyclopaedia entries. Consequently, as Rachele stresses subsequently, they form a central element of the project, and are integral to its conceptual framework. Rachele's reading of their status is perhaps further complicated as she goes on to say: 'Although the presence of text is not uncommon in museums, the written word is usually overlooked by the impatient and distracted art consumer.' This seems to both neglect the centrality of text/textuality in conceptualism (extremely popular, against its own original intentions, with the art museum), and post-conceptualism, but also risks reducing Simon's texts to the level of museum-written information labels, a reading which contradicts our knowledge of their conceptual function. This leads Rachele to conclude that 'the pronounced interest of the audience in Simon's factual and plainly stated captions was, then, quite remarkable – especially considering the alluring beauty of her photographs; a compelling presence that competes for the viewer's attention.' Whilst I entirely agree that this tension between aesthetic allure and factual textuality is key to Simon's work, I would suggest that the audience's interest in the text is less surprising when one considers that the majority of the images depict subjects and scenes that are initially inexplicable. We cannot always work them out from the pictures alone, and demand or seek some kind of clarification. This – the access and desire the public have to gain access to such geographic spaces AND to the knowledge about them – is clearly one of the project's central areas of interest.

I think that the assertion that the artificiality of Simon's images mirrors the fabrication and falsification of the 'real' word is well-put, as is the argument that 'Simon's flirtation with the concepts of documentary realism, accuracy of text and the archival authority' 'highlight their limits and fallacies.' Further, I think Rachele is spot on in her discussion of the 'hierarchical opposition between text and image that Simon's work challenges', and the 'compelling hybrid of text and photography where the visual and the written are not held in competition or unbridgeable distance, but co-exist and complement each other in a productive dialogue.' I think that her concluding remarks on 'this strategic interdependence of image and text' that 'suspends the authority of both' are eloquently stated. I would only add that the physical acts of movement from photograph to text, then from text back to photograph, is something that Simon is interested in; the performance and physicality of seeing and reading. She wants her audience to work at this. This is an important aspect of the work, one which relates to the labour she herself reinvests in the photographic image through both her technique and the enormous lengths she goes to to take each picture.

Rachele is right to talk about Simon's bid for control over images' reception. Here, something Rachele misses is the importance of the size of the texts themselves, which are deliberately printed in tiny font, so that the viewer has to strain to read them, to stoop, to go up close. Again, this is because Simon hopes to demand some effort in reading, so as to activate her audience, and then, once they have been newly informed, to allow them to re-see the picture in a new light.

The paper suggests that 'this strategic and attentively planned interdependence of image, text and display within the gallery space situates Simon's work within a body of conceptual and critical documentary practices that can be traced back to the work of artists such as Bernd and Hilla Becher, Allan Sekula, or Martha Rosler.' I'm not sure that the Bechers sit so naturally in this group. I would argue that they don't use much text at all; at least not in a conceptual way. Nor in a way that engages with the documentary debates surrounding the politicality of the caption. Their project is much more about the aesthetics and abstraction of language. Photography forms a kind of visual parallel to language, looking at patterns of similarity, difference, and typicality. This might well be what Rachele means, but perhaps it just needs to be stated more explicitly. I'd also worry about grouping the Bechers, Sekula and Rosler as 'post-modern', when they represent such different 'postmodern' projects. Notably, Rosler has been very critical about the postmodern world

of late capitalism, the commodification of the art world and the mechanisms of the art markets, especially in relation to documentary work and its changing nature from the 70s to the 90s. In relation to this artistic lineage, Rachele suggests that Simon 'refuses to be explicitly linked to this post-modern genealogy, or to categorise her photographic work, leaving it to float between, and play with, the genres of photojournalism, documentary realism, and conceptual art.' While I think that Simon likes not to be too neatly categorised, I'm not sure we can claim this work as 'photojournalism'. This project is clearly art (and I doubt that the Gagosian are unsure of its status as art, either).

The piece concludes by asserting that Simon's practice is 'first and foremost, an investigation of the politics of showing and looking, of the institutional framing and circulation of meaning, of privileged accessibility and instrumental closure.' I entirely agree with this reading, but would add that it possibly overstates the centrality of institutional framing – of the politics of display. For although Simon's project is an artistic one it is also sociological, and one with a social content and complexities that stretch beyond 'institutional framing' in the museum-sense. (Perhaps her book publication for the project is important here, as is the history and hermeneutics of the photo-book in this context). As Simon herself states, her project confronts 'the separation of the public and the experts'. What this means in terms of its position within the museum is an interesting issue. But more broadly her work is about knowledge and power, and, consequently, I'd say that the work is not only limited to interrogating 'the politics of showing and looking', but is about the politics of looking and knowing, of how vision and knowledge are politically related.

Sarah James.

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It's not like I was trying to 'superhero' my way through the red tape ~ Taryn Simon *talking about An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*

interview by Eric Miles ~ photographs by Dana Lixenberg

Like the most sharp-eyed observers of our national culture, Taryn Simon aims to uncover contradictions that lay at the heart of the institutions that comprise it. In her most recent body of work, *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*, she explores the most basic of these contradictions – known versus unknown, public versus private, overt versus covert. An exhibition of these works opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art in March of this year and will travel to the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt in September. Her acclaimed 2003 book, *The Innocents*, which she produced with the help of a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, pictured men and women who had served time in prison for crimes of which they were later exonerated, at times setting them in locations pertinent to those crimes.

Can you describe the genesis of the American Index project? What was the progression from your earlier work on *The Innocents*?

After completing *The Innocents*, I looked back over past work I had produced. One photograph I kept returning to pictured the interior of Castro's Palace of the Revolution in Cuba, a site that the public can't typically access. I responded to it formally: the absence of a figure appealed to me after *The Innocents*, which was so invested in documenting human subjects. The light was softer and had more of a religious and ethereal feel. There was an abstraction alive in it that became somewhat disorienting. I knew I wanted to achieve this feel aesthetically. But it was a huge departure. That said, its formal success was inextricably bound to the fact that it was a site reserved for 'the few'. It had no popularly distributed visual anchor. It confronted the boundaries between the public and the expert. I wanted to find more images

like that. Initially I imagined them throughout the world. But that quickly transformed into a very focused effort to find that which is unseen within American borders. It was a critical moment in American history, in which America's identity was being redefined. It was a time in which the American government was invested in finding secret sites beyond its borders. As they looked outward, I looked inward.

Was this before or after September 11?

After. Just after. I took the photograph of the Palace of the Revolution before 9/11. Its conceptual makeup and relevance was alive before that event, but after 9/11 it became very clear to me that this study needed to focus within American borders.

The subject matter and the institutions in *American Index* – NASA, U.S. Customs and Border control, radioactive waste, death row, girl scouts, for example – are decidedly recognizable and familiar. But since the sites you've chosen to picture reveal 'hidden and unfamiliar' recesses, the book is incredibly accessible, riveting even, to a fairly wide audience. How would you guide viewers to an understanding of the complex issues it raises? There is a peculiar logic to the selection of sites in *An American Index*; they are not easily categorized.

The subjects are familiar, but the visuals are not. I'm not sure it requires any guidance. It's intentionally chaotic. The viewer should feel its entropy. Its initial influence was the method and form used in early discovery books exposing and recording explorer's finds (fauna and plant life) within the New World. They always include a small encyclopedic description beneath a rendering of the subject. The project was very much in line with that model.

In characterizing the project as 'indexical' and 'encyclopedic', how would you describe that taxonomic, organizational scheme that you employed in selecting sites to be photographed and described?

It's a bit of a play on the word index, because it's certainly not comprehensive and never could be. It gracelessly jumps from one thought to the next. You've got Hollywood, science, security, government, and so on bouncing off one another. It's almost irresponsible.



And that was the point. It reflects how people are receiving information, on the Internet, or even in an encyclopedia or newspaper. Yet it is one individual as the editor and manager of the project.

As for the site selection process, it employed so many different approaches. I began with a very clear list of topics and sites that I had imagined and wanted to include in the work. These, upon further research would mutate, transform and lead me to something completely unexpected or to nothing at all. I was constantly aware of chapter headings – medicine, nature, government etc – by that I mean categories that needed to be filled to achieve the disorder I was talking about.

I often picked the brains of experts at the sites. For example, NASA. I knew I wanted to do something with space travel and America's history in its evolution. I spent a ton of time researching NASA and talking to them on the phone. They were giving me access to pretty great things for any other photographer. But they were flat, deeply inaccessible, but flat, with no white noise to them. I then kept researching and unearthed the beach house where astronauts spend their last moments with their families in quarantine before going off into space. *That* had something in it that I wanted. It had the emotional quality and conceptual nugget that I needed – the history, the foreboding, an awkward incongruity. And then I had to work really hard to explain to them that this was something they would want out there representing them. They were much more interested in showing their technological prowess.

The last plate in the book is an 'absent' image accompanied by a quote from a Disney P.R. person to the effect that the 'magical spell' of Disney needs to be protected [see above for quote]. What were some of the other sites to which you were not granted access?

The White House. Initially I asked to visit Camp David. They declined. I then tried for something more benign: the place where they keep past presidents' furniture. Current presidents, when they assume their presidency, can go in and select what furniture they want to have in their version of the White House. A pretty safe image, but still declined. These are all under the umbrella of the White House. They were not interested in working with me. Not surprising.

Actually, I feel great luck that Disney denied me access. I was never convinced that it would ultimately fit in the book. It was too obvious. But I followed it through in case something surprising was revealed. We were requesting access to the underground tunnel system, where characters become human again and all the inner, ugly workings of a theme park are kept from the public. They even have a holding

'After giving your request serious consideration, even though it is against company policy to consider such a request, it is with regret that I inform you that we are not willing to grant the permission you seek... As you are aware, our Disney characters, parks and other valuable properties have become beloved by young and old alike, and with this comes a tremendous responsibility to protect their use and the protection we currently enjoy. Should we laps in our vigilance, we run the risk of losing this protection and the Disney characters as we know and love them. Especially during these violent times, I personally believe that the magical spell cast on guests who visit our theme parks is particularly important to protect and helps to provide them with an important fantasy they can escape to.'

Quote from a faxed response from Disney Publishing Worldwide, July 7, 2005 reproduced in An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar, Steidl, 2006

cell. I actually flew to Florida for another photograph in the book and was scheduled to go to Disney upon its completion. At the last minute they said I couldn't come and sent me that brilliant fax. It gave me the ideal postscript and summed up all the contradictions and complications at the foundation of this work. There is something dream crushing about this work...something that creates an anxiety; there is an 'ageing' in doing something like this. They articulated that process. I also liked the idea that some individual within this colossal corporate structure had such a defined voice; that they 'leaked out'.

Many of the people and sites you picture – Ku Klux Klan members, quarantine facilities, C.I.A. headquarters, military bases, to name a few – raise obvious and, to most viewers, very intriguing questions about accessibility. How would you characterize the role of negotiation with authority figures and others in the project as a whole?

It is an enormous part of the project. At one point I even considered making an addendum to the book that included all of the letters that went back and forth between myself and the sites. I ended up including only the Disney note. I worried that too much of the process would shadow the work. It is extremely interesting how you go about getting in; how you have to package yourself, sell yourself to authority figures. It is really site-specific. There isn't any formula that consistently works. It took me four years to do this project. I worked with different producers along the way. It starts with a phone call; you just have to hear the voice on the other end and determine what is the best method. It's always more difficult in the beginning as you have nothing to show them as examples of other people who have joined in.

I think in many cases I slipped through the cracks. Mine was sort of the antithesis of a standard journalistic approach. I was calling and it felt like a small art project. There was nothing particularly threatening in what I was doing.

How would you describe the 'second order of meaning' that joins together the images that comprise American Index as a whole? Are you after a specifically American 'mythology,' in the sense that Roland Barthes uses that term?

America is changing. It is changing in its approach to the world and in its approach to its inner politics, so there is a sense of discovery at this moment. It feels as though we are in a different landscape, ethically, morally, religiously, and politically. And so I am indexing and discovering that moment. >



~

If the photographs are like helium balloons, the text is like my lead weight

~

What sort of reception has *American Index* received outside of this country?

We'll see. It hasn't gone there yet. I'm aware of the implications of taking this work outside of American borders. That is why I'm also so careful about the context in which it is presented. The work is not inherently critical and I don't want it be misused as such. That's where the reliance on text comes into play in a very obvious way; it is a way of protecting the intention of the work because it could so easily be translated into other forms. I want to be very vigilant about making my intentions clear.

Is this also the reason for your lack of desire to do assignment work for magazines? Ways in which the work circulates?

Exactly, you're just a pawn in somebody else's editorial decisions. Photographers are used.

To what extent is your work in *American Index* and *The Innocents* a critique of *verité* style documentary or of the 'decisive moment'?

I am not interested in the 'decisive moment'; everything I do is extremely calculated. I don't catch moments; they're very constructed. This is linked to the way I photograph, the equipment I use, as much as with my understanding of what photography is. *American Index* does appear to have a journalistic intention, but then when you look at something like the JFK contraband room, you can see very clear actions of intervention. I don't try and act as though I am documenting what is there; I created the arrangement. It refers to earlier still life paintings in a contemporary form. I like to have that intervention be very evident when you are looking at the photograph.

Your use of a detached, clinical prose in the accompanying descriptions contrasts rather sharply with the artifice you're describing.

The text very much links back to *The Innocents* project and to an understanding of photography's inherent ambiguities and the problems that stem from that. It can be artful in one context, and then it can actually lead to someone's death in another. This is why I did *The Innocents*: this idea that through a process of misidentification, at the root of which is someone's response to a photograph – which is itself replacing a memory – someone could actually lose their life on death

row. Within that is the absence of a caption, some sort of a 'correct' narrative connected to the photograph.

If the photographs are like helium balloons, the text is like my lead weight. The space in between those two is where something happens. It's not what's on the wall or the page; it is the space between those two. And the way people interact with those two. People will approach the image aesthetically, they come in closer and read the text and back up and re-examine the image with this new information.

In *The Innocents* project, there is a clear ethical commitment, very much related to the traditional roots of documentary in social justice. In what ways does this sort of ethical commitment figure into *American Index*?

I don't even know what 'documentary' means; it seems to be trying to assert that it is getting at something honest, without intervention. My approach to documentary subject matter is to not pretend that, to not pretend that I have any connection to the truth of my subjects. In everything I do, I show this distance, which some people find cold or antiseptic because there is no conventional emotional 'tangle' in the image. I am not pretending to understand, to access, or know something completely. I'm constantly showing that I don't know what I'm seeing.

In *The Innocents* [the ethical commitment] would sometimes shadow what led me to that body of work. What I was most interested in from the onset of that project was *photography*, and photography's role in that process. It was a focused site to investigate photography's complexity and power. But you have this thing, which is so huge, and so wrong built into that exploration. And that naturally became bigger... and it was always an effort to keep the photographic focus alive within that. I did that through the interviews and the sites at which I photographed. By taking the men and women in these pictures back to the scene of the crime (where they had never been), I was able to visually produce the conflict between truth and fiction in their lives within the photograph.

But *American Index* was produced at a time when citizens felt they lost access to the core of anything; as individuals, we live in a society with an increasingly secretive power structure. It's not like I was trying to 'superhero' my way through the red tape; I got in, but I don't think I ever really came to know anything. Mine was just another perch. >



Does the juxtaposition of text and image mitigate aesthetic qualities as well as the 'irrefutable thereness' of the images themselves?

Regarding language, there are two schools in photography: there are many who will look at my work and say that its reliance on text is a crutch, that a great photograph exists and survives outside of any connection to its caption/context. I don't disagree, rather I'm not interested or compelled to make that kind of work. It feels disposable. For me the work is more than a photograph and more than aesthetics. It's not just about taking a perfectly seductive image. Many aren't. For me it's the entire package. I am very committed to what is alive aesthetically in a photograph, I work tirelessly at it – but it is always inextricably and perpetually linked to its context. I can't separate the two. I don't think I'll ever want to. Its relevance or success will always be linked to *what it is*.

Can you play historian and try and predict how American Index will age. What do you think it will say to future viewers about our immediate post 9/11 epoch?

I always wonder how it will age. The larger contradictions it exposes will always be alive. There is a black and a white, opposing forces, in each of the subjects, in each individual image. And this does define the period. But what appears to be inaccessible and unknown right now, down the line will likely grow more familiar and potentially more photographed, studied and written about. Right now they don't have any real distributed history or popular visual representation. But that's right now.

Since we live in such an image-saturated culture, the problem then becomes to find things that are not photographed, which would seem to be impossible.

In this work there were a few subjects that slipped into popular consciousness while I was working on it. When I visited Colorado City, the center of polygamist practice in America, it was under the radar. And then suddenly there was an HBO series [*Big Love*] and the capture of Warren Jeffs [fugitive leader and self-declared prophet of a fundamentalist Mormon sect on the Utah-Arizona border that practices polygamy] and it became a widely discussed issue, a part of the zeitgeist. I was trying to find things outside of that. But ultimately, I decided to include it, as there is something in that process worth looking at; how things slip in and out of the zeitgeist and of a national identity's consciousness.

Which raises the question of a sequel. Won't there always be a 'zeitgeist' against which to position oneself?

Then I wouldn't have to torture myself about what I'm going to do next. I could just embrace the sequel; The Innocents part two and American Index part two. +

Eric Miles is a writer and bookseller specializing in photographic literature. He is based in New York and Santa Fe, N.M., where he is the in-house rare book specialist for photo-eye Books & Prints (see www.photoeye.com/auctions).

Dana Lixenberg (Netherlands, 1964) studied photography at the London College of Printing and at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. She received widespread acclaim for her series of portraits of residents of the Imperial Courts Housing Project in Los Angeles, resulting in commissions from a wide variety of magazines. Her editorial clients include *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *Newsweek*, *Vibe*, *Fortune*, *GQ*, *Life*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazine*, *Sunday Telegraph Magazine*, *Time*, *Vrij Nederland* and *Wallpaper*. Dana Lixenberg published several books, including *United States* (2001) and *Jeffersonville, Indiana* (2005, both by Artimo). Her work was exhibited at the Frans Hals Museum/De Hallen, Haarlem; Museum of Photography, The Hague; Percy Miller Gallery, London and Kunsthal, Rotterdam, among others. She lives and works in New York.

Taryn Simon

An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar



U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Contraband Room
John F. Kennedy International Airport
Queens, New York

African cane rats infested with maggots, African yams (dioscorea), Andean potatoes, Bangladeshi cucurbit plants, bush meat, cherimoya fruit, curry leaves (murraya), dried orange peels, fresh eggs, giant African snail, impala skull cap, jackfruit seeds, June plum, kola nuts, mango, okra, passion fruit, pig nose, pig mouths, pork, raw poultry (chicken), South American pig head, South American tree tomatoes, South Asian lime infected with citrus canker, sugar cane (poaceae), uncooked meats, unidentified sub tropical plant in soil.

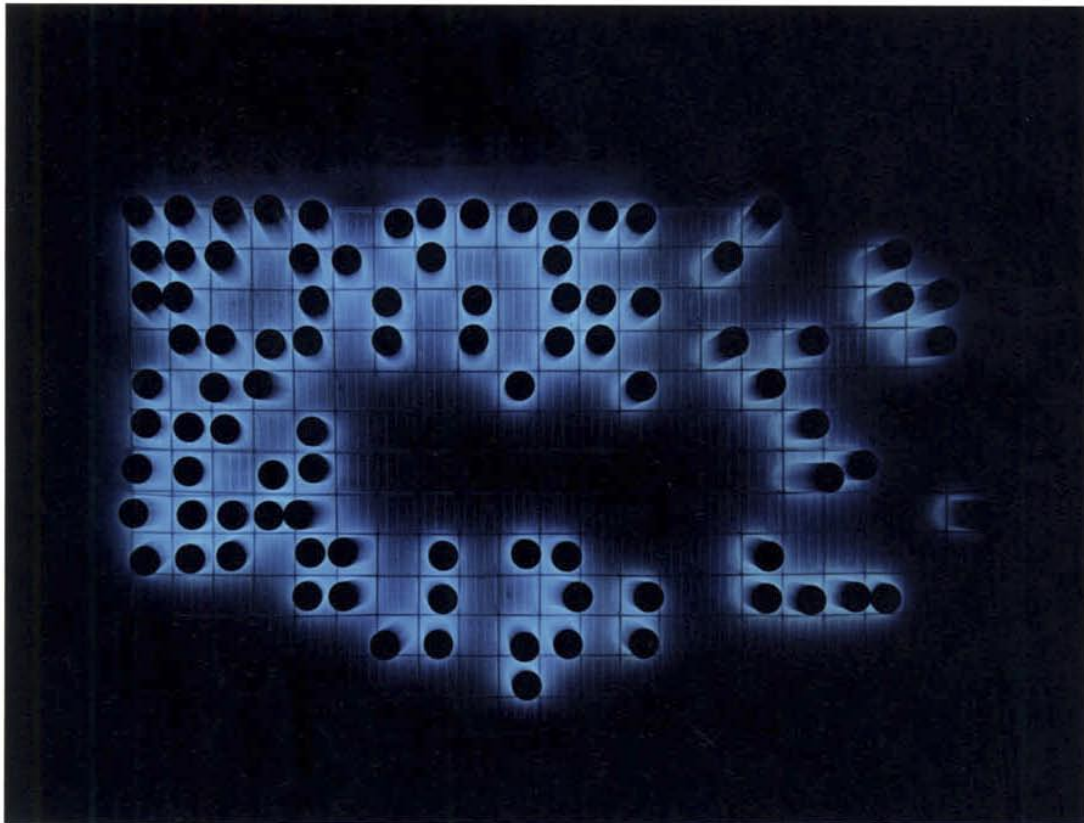
All items in the photograph were seized from the baggage of passengers arriving in the U.S. at JFK Terminal 4 from abroad over a 48-hour period. All seized items are identified, dissected, and then either ground up or incinerated. JFK processes more international passengers than any other airport in the United States.



Hymenoplasty
Cosmetic Surgery, P.A.
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

The patient in this photograph is a 21-year-old woman of Palestinian descent, living in the United States. In order to adhere to cultural and familial expectations regarding her virginity and marriage, she underwent hymenoplasty. Without it she feared she would be rejected by her future husband and bring shame upon her family. She flew in secret to Florida where the operation was performed by Dr. Bernard Stern, a plastic surgeon she located on the internet.

The purpose of hymenoplasty is to reconstruct a ruptured hymen, the membrane which partially covers the opening of the vagina. It is an outpatient procedure which takes approximately 30 minutes and can be done under local or intravenous anesthesia. Dr. Stern charges \$3,500 for hymenoplasty. He also performs labiaplasty and vaginal rejuvenation.



Nuclear Waste Encapsulation and Storage Facility, Cherenkov Radiation
Hanford Site, U.S. Department of Energy
Southeastern Washington State

Submerged in a pool of water at Hanford Site are 1,936 stainless-steel nuclear-waste capsules containing cesium and strontium. Combined, they contain over 120 million curies of radioactivity. It is estimated to be the most curies under one roof in the United States. The blue glow is created by the Cherenkov Effect which describes the electromagnetic radiation emitted when a charged particle, giving off energy, moves faster than light through a transparent medium. The temperatures of the capsules are as high as 330 degrees Fahrenheit. The pool of water serves as a shield against radiation; a human standing one foot from an unshielded capsule would receive a lethal dose of radiation in less than ten seconds. Hanford is among the most contaminated sites in the United States



Cryopreservation Unit
Cryonics Institute
Clinton Township, Michigan

This cryopreservation unit holds the bodies of Rhea and Elaine Ettinger, the mother and first wife of cryonics pioneer, Robert Ettinger. Robert, author of The Prospect of Immortality and Man into Superman is still alive.

The Cryonics Institute offers cryostasis (freezing) services for individuals and pets upon death. Cryostasis is practiced with the hope that lives will ultimately be extended through future developments in science, technology, and medicine. When, and if, these developments occur, Institute members hope to awake to an extended life in good health, free from disease or the aging process. Cryostasis must begin immediately upon legal death. A person or pet is infused with ice-preventive substances and quickly cooled to a temperature where physical decay virtually stops. The Cryonics Institute charges \$28,000 for cryostasis if it is planned well in advance of legal death and \$35,000 on shorter notice.



'World Church of God' Simulation
Military Operations on Urban Terrain (MOUT)
Fort Campbell, Kentucky

The Cassidy Military Operations on Urban Terrain (MOUT) training site is a 90,000 square kilometer training facility built for tactical simulations of urban combat. Cassidy MOUT contains representations of government buildings, a hospital, a bank, a school, suburban homes, apartment buildings, narrow and wide streets, a park, and detailed elements such as street signs, sewer covers, utility cables, and streetlamps.

The World Church of God represents a generic religious structure where city residents meet for collective worship. Recently, Cassidy MOUT constructed a wall around the church to mimic the set-up of many mosques in both Iraq and Afghanistan.



Military Operations on Urban Terrain, Virtual Simulation
MetaVR
Brookline, Massachusetts

This computer-generated model of Fort Campbells Military Operations on Urban Terrain (MOUT) site in Kentucky depicts the cement wall recently built around the World Church of God to simulate a mosque in Afghanistan or Iraq.

MetaVR, a software company that creates 3D, real-time, PC-based visual systems combining geo-specific simulations with game quality graphics, built a computer generated replica of Fort Campbells MOUT site. Virtual simulations like these are used for the training of soldiers and the development of future combat systems and strategies. They enable soldiers to operate a computer as an individual combatant from the perspective of a first person shooter, commonly seen in popular computer games. The U.S. Army uses MOUT sites, site simulations and 3D virtual MOUT site interactions to prepare soldiers for urban warfare, which is considered the future of enemy combat.



The Central Intelligence Agency, Art
CIA Original Headquarters Building
Langley, Virginia

The Fine Arts Commission of the CIA is responsible for acquiring art to display in the Agency's buildings. Among the Commissions curated art are two pieces (pictured) by Thomas Downing, on long-term loan from the Vincent Melzac collection. Downing was a member of the Washington Color School, a group of post World War II painters whose influence helped to establish the city as a center for arts and culture. Vincent Melzac was a private collector of abstract art and the Administrative Director of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.'s premiere art museum.

Since the founding of the CIA in 1947, the Agency has participated in both covert and public cultural diplomacy efforts throughout the world. It is speculated that some of the CIA's involvement in the arts was designed to counter Soviet Communism by helping to popularize what it considered pro-American thought and aesthetic sensibilities. Such involvement has raised historical questions about certain art forms or styles that may have elicited the interest of the Agency, including abstract expressionism.



White Tiger (Kenny), Selective Inbreeding
Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge and Foundation
Eureka Springs, Arkansas

In the United States, all living white tigers are the result of selective inbreeding to artificially create the genetic conditions that lead to white fur, ice-blue eyes, and a pink nose. Kenny was born to a breeder in Bentonville, Arkansas on February 3, 1999. As a result of inbreeding, Kenny is mentally retarded and has significant physical limitations. Due to his deep-set nose, he has difficulty breathing and closing his jaw, his teeth are severely malformed, and he limps from abnormal bone structure in his forearms. The three other tigers in Kenny's litter are not considered to be quality white tigers as they are yellow coated, cross-eyed, and knock-kneed.



Playboy, Braille Edition
Playboy Enterprises, Inc.
New York, New York

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), a division of the U.S. Library of Congress, provides a free national library program of Braille and recorded materials for blind and physically handicapped persons. Magazines included in the NLS's programs are selected on the basis of demonstrated reader interest. This includes the publishing and distribution of a Braille edition of *Playboy*.

Approximately 10 million American adults read *Playboy* every month, with 3 million obtaining it through paid circulation. It has included articles by writers such as Norman Mailer, Vladimir Nabokov, Philip Roth, Joyce Carol Oates, and Kurt Vonnegut and conducted interviews with Salvador Dali, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Malcolm X.



No more secrets

The American photographer **Taryn Simon** will step into a room full of glowing nuclear waste if that's the of the *Hidden and Unfamiliar*, a new collection of photographs in which she throws light into some of the

Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things,' the poet Robert Browning wrote in *Bishop Blougram's Apology* (1855). It is a line that has inspired writers from Graham Greene, who said in his 1971 memoir *A Sort of Life* that it could serve as an epigraph to all his novels, to Orhan Pamuk, who sets it at the beginning of his novel *Snow*. It could equally well serve as an introduction to the photography of a woman whose aesthetic is one of stretching the limits of what we are allowed to see and know, of going to the ambiguous boundaries where dangers – physical, intellectual, even moral – may await. Taryn Simon doesn't think twice about entering a room filled with nuclear waste capsules glowing blue with radiation that, were you not shielded against it, would kill you in seconds. I am always immensely grateful to people who do impossible things on my behalf and bring back the picture. It means I don't have to do it, but at least I know what it looks like. So one's first feeling on looking at many of these extraordinary images is gratitude (followed quickly by a momentary pang of envy: the sedentary writer's salute to the woman of action). I once knew a sports photographer who bribed a course attendant at Aintree racecourse to allow him to sit wedged in at the foot of Becher's Brook so that he could bring back 'impossible' photographs of the mighty racehorses jumping over his head. If one of them had fallen on him, of course, he would almost certainly have been killed, but he knew, as Simon knows, that one of the arts of great photography is to get yourself into the place – the radioactive room, the animal disease centre, the racecourse fence – in which the photograph is about to occur, and seize it when it does.

'Most of what matters in our lives takes place in our absence,' the narrator of my novel *Midnight's Children* reflects. If Saleem Sinai had seen Simon's photographs he would have realised that he was more right than he knew. Look at the innocent orange and yellow cables coming up through the floor in an almost empty room in New Jersey, protected only by the simplest metal cage: they have travelled 4,029.6 miles (Simon likes to be precise) across the ocean floor from Saunton Sands in north Devon to bring America news from elsewhere – 60,211,200 simultaneous voice conversations, Simon says. The point about these cables is that you might have guessed that such things probably existed but you almost certainly had no notion of where they were, or how many, or how thick, or what colour, until you saw this picture. You could not have imagined your voice into this banal yet magical room, but it has been here, transformed into little digital parcels of energy. Every day we pass through secret worlds like the worlds inside these cables, never suspecting what is happening to us. Which, then, is the phantom world and which the 'real': ours, or theirs? Are we no more than the ghosts in these machines?

Ours is an age of secrets. Above, beneath and beside what Fernand Braudel called the 'structures of everyday life' are structures anything but everyday, lives about which we may have heard something but have almost certainly seen nothing – and other lives about which we have never heard and yet others in whose existence it is hard to believe even when we are shown the pictorial evidence.

How do you get into the world's most secret places, and get out with the picture? The great journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski said he survived the world's most dangerous war zones by making himself seem small and unimportant, not worthy of the warlord's bullet. But Simon doesn't deal in stolen images; these are formal, highly realised, often carefully posed pictures, needing full co-operation.

When so many make such great efforts to conceal the truth from the mass of people, an artist such as Simon is an invaluable counter-force. (*Turn to p55*)

US Customs and Border Protection, Contraband Room

John F Kennedy International Airport, New York

All these items (including African cane rats infected with maggots, Andean potatoes, bush meat, giant African snail, pig nose and raw poultry) were seized from passengers arriving in the US at JFK Terminal 4 over 48 hours.

Prohibited agricultural items can harbour foreign animal and plant pests and diseases that could damage US crops, livestock, pets and the environment. All items seized are identified, dissected and then either ground up or incinerated



only way to catch the image she wants. **Salman Rushdie** introduces *An American Index*
world's most hidden places



© TARYN SIMON/STEDL/GAGOSIAN

**Transatlantic
Sub-marine Cables
Reaching Land
VSNL International,
Avon, New Jersey**

These VSNL sub-marine telecommunications cables extend thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean. Capable of transmitting more than 60 million simultaneous voice conversations, these underwater fibre-optic cables stretch from Saunton Sands in north Devon to the coast of New Jersey. The cables run below ground and emerge directly into the VSNL International headquarters, where signals are amplified and split into distinctive wavelengths enabling transatlantic phone calls and internet transmissions



**Playboy, Braille
Edition**

**Playboy Enterprises
Inc, New York**

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, a division of the US Library of Congress, provides a free national library of Braille and recorded materials for the blind and physically handicapped. Magazines are selected on the basis of demonstrated reader interest. They include a Braille edition of *Playboy*. Approximately 10 million American adults read *Playboy* every month. It has included articles by writers such as Norman Mailer, Vladimir Nabokov, Philip Roth, Kurt Vonnegut and Malcolm X





Avian Quarantine Facility
The New York Animal Import Centre,
New York

The picture shows European finches seized upon illegal importation into the US and African grey parrots in quarantine. All imported birds not of US or Canadian origin must undergo a 30-day quarantine in a US Department of Agriculture animal import quarantine facility. Birds are placed in incubators called isolettes that control the spread of disease. Each year the New York Animal Import Centre processes upwards of 4,000 horses, 400 swine, 40 llamas and 1,100 species of bird



Cryopreservation Unit
Cryonics Institute
Clinton Township,
Michigan

This cryopreservation unit holds the bodies of Rhea and Elaine Ettinger, the mother and first wife of cryonics pioneer Robert Ettinger.

The Institute offers cryostasis (freezing) services for individuals and pets upon death. Cryostasis is practised with the hope that lives will ultimately be extended through future developments in science, technology and medicine. A person is infused with ice-preventive substances and quickly cooled to a temperature where physical decay virtually stops. The Institute charges a one-off fee of up to \$35,000 for cryostasis



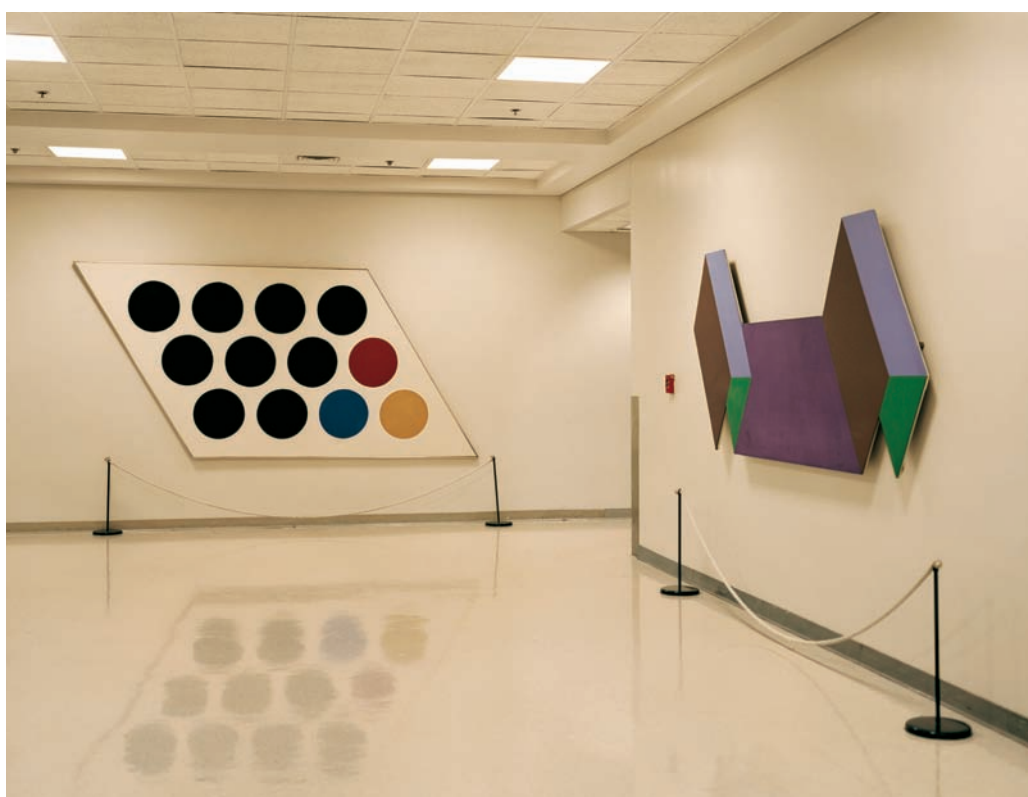
© TARYN SIMON/STEIDL/GAGOSIAN

**Research Marijuana Crop Grow Room
National Centre for Natural Products
Research, Oxford, Mississippi**

The National Centre for Natural Products Research (NCNPR) is the only facility in the US licensed to cultivate cannabis for scientific research. It is also responsible for analysing seized marijuana for potency trends, herbicide residuals such as paraquat, and fingerprint identification. While 11 states have legalised the medical use of marijuana, a 2005 Supreme Court decision allows for the arrest of any individual caught using it for this purpose

**The Central Intelligence Agency, Art
CIA Original HQ, Langley, Virginia**

The Fine Arts Commission of the CIA is responsible for acquiring art to display in the Agency's buildings. These pieces are by Thomas Downing, a member of the Washington Colour School. Since its founding in 1947, the CIA has participated in both covert and public cultural diplomacy throughout the world. It is speculated that some CIA involvement in the arts was designed to counter Soviet Communism by helping to popularise what it considered pro-American thought and aesthetic sensibilities



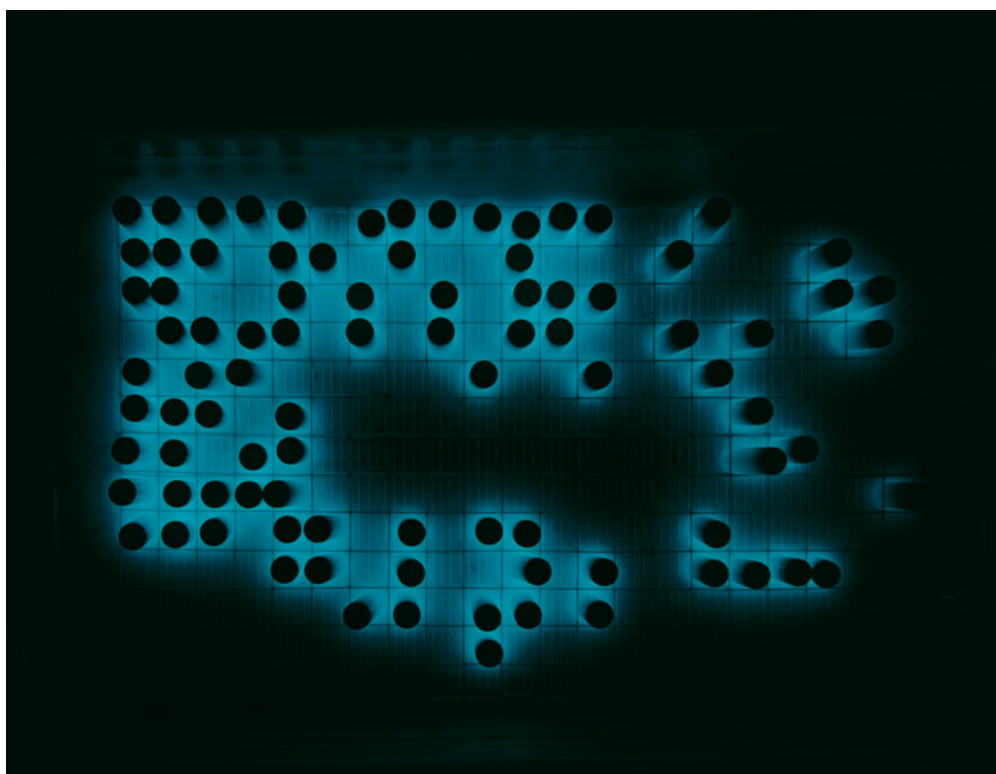
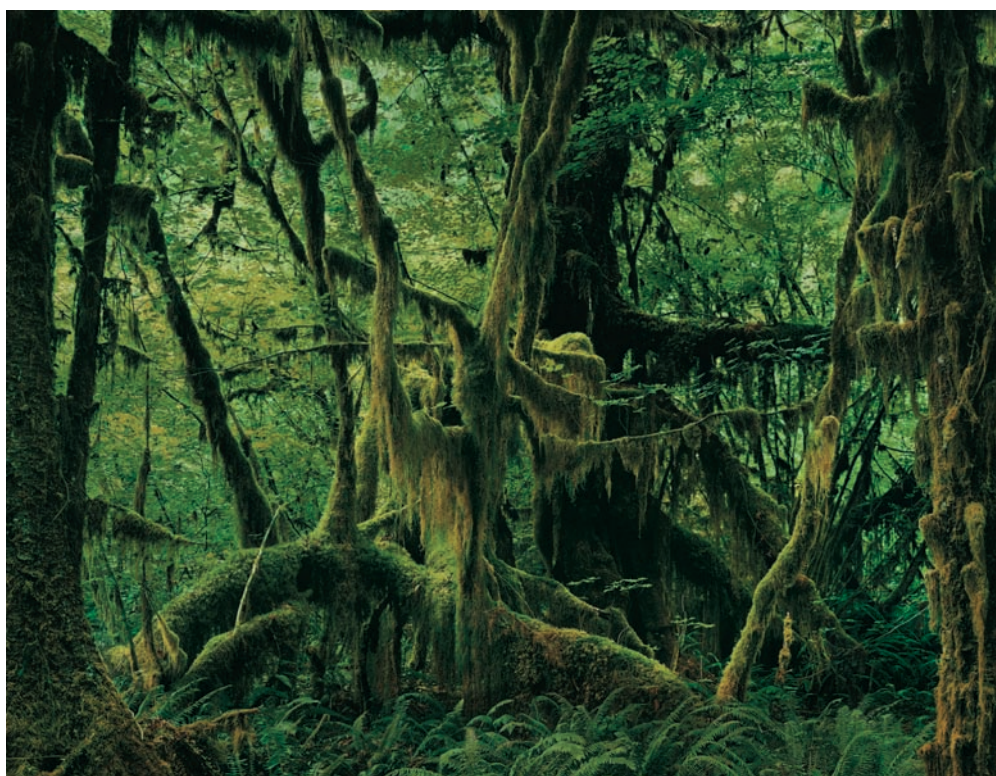
Democracy needs visibility, light. It is in the unseen darkness that unsavoury things huddle and grow. Somehow, Simon has persuaded a good few denizens of hidden worlds not to scurry for shelter when the light is switched on, as cockroaches do, and vampires, but to pose proudly for her invading lens.

Not for her the shaky hand-held camera, the grainy monochrome film stock of the 'real'. Her subjects – parrots in quarantine cages, marijuana plants grown for research in William Faulkner's home town of Oxford, Mississippi – are suffused with light, captured with a bright, hyper-realist, high-definition clarity that gives a kind of star status to these hidden worlds, whose occupants might be thought to be the opposites of stars. In her vision, they are dark stars brought into the light. What is not known, rarely seen, possesses a form of occult glamour, and it is that black beauty which she so brightly, and brilliantly, reveals.

Simon uses text as few photographers do, as an integral part of the work. There are images that do not reveal their meaning until the text is read. There are (rare) instances when the text is more bizarrely interesting than the image. Cataloguing the confiscated contents of the US Customs and Border Protection Contraband Room at John F Kennedy Airport, Simon offers up a kind of surrealist fugue, an ode to forbidden fruit (and meat) that outdoes even her cornucopia of an image.

For the most part, however, her images easily hold their own. The smoky, white-on-white portrait of the degree-zero cryogenic preservation pod in which the bodies of the mother and wife of the cryonics pioneer Robert Ettinger are frozen is beyond spooky, speaking so eloquently of our fear of death and our dreams of immortality that few words are necessary. And in at least one instance there's a remarkable piece of 'found' art. Who could have predicted that those 90 stainless-steel capsules containing radioactive cesium and strontium submerged in a pool of water and giving off that blue radiation would so closely resemble, when photographed from above, the map of the United States of America? When a photographer comes up with an image as potently expressive as that, even a dedicated word-person such as myself is bound to concede that such a picture is worth at least a thousand words.

Taryn Simon: 'An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar' (Steidl), is available for £40 plus £1.25 p&p (expect at least 30 days for delivery). To order, call Telegraph Books on 0870-428 4112. The exhibition is on at the Whitney Museum of Modern American Art, New York, until June 24



© TARYN SIMON/STEIDL/GAGSIAN

The Hoh Rainforest Understory and Forest Structure Olympic National Park, Washington (top)

This is the largest preserved coastal temperate rainforest in the world. It is considered to be the wettest spot in the continental US, receiving 140-167 inches of rain per year. Located within Olympic National Park, the Hoh is fully protected from commercial exploitation. Rainforest beyond the park's borders has been logged heavily over the past century. Pacific Yew, specific to the region and once considered insignificant, was recently discovered to harbour Taxol, a natural compound now being used to treat cancers

Nuclear Waste Encapsulation and Storage Facility

Cherenkov Radiation Hanford Site, US Department of Energy, Southeastern Washington State

Submerged in a pool of water at Hanford Site are 1,936 stainless-steel nuclear-waste capsules containing cesium and strontium. Combined, they contain more than 120 million curies of radioactivity, estimated to be the most curies under one roof in the US. The blue glow is created by the Cherenkov Effect which describes the electromagnetic radiation emitted when a charged particle moves faster than light through a transparent medium. The temperature of the capsules is as high as 330F. The water shields against radiation; standing a foot from an unshielded capsule, you would receive a lethal dose in under 10 seconds



Taryn Simon, *Death with Dignity Act - Don James*, tiré de *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*, 2007, c-print, 95x113 cm [Don James who was diagnosed with terminal prostate cancer, was a citizen of Oregon where in 1994 the Oregon Death with Dignity Act was established. As of 2006, 292 people have taken their lives under Oregon's Death with Dignity Act.]