

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



On View | The Fancy Flock of James Bond Films

Gay Gassmann



Courtesy of the artist. Clockwise from top left: details of the “Ionian Sea,” “Victoria Harbour,” “North Africa” and “Switzerland” photographs in Taryn Simon’s “Birds of the West Indies,” 2014.

Central to the work of the New York-based artist Taryn Simon are the practices of substitution and replacement, and the resurfacing of seemingly “lost” or secretive material. Where one may find it vaguely interesting that the inimitable character of James Bond was named after a real-life American ornithologist who published a book called “Birds of the West Indies” in 1936 — the author of the popular spy novels, Ian Fleming, was an avid bird-watcher — Simon sees an opportunity. In a two-part exhibition also titled “Birds of the West Indies,” Simon examines the surprising and thought-provoking relationship between the two men.

The first installation of the photographic series, a visual inventory of the women, weapons and vehicles featured in the past 50 years of Bond films, was shown at the Carnegie International last year. Today, it is on view again at the Gagosian Gallery in Los Angeles, where Part 2 will be exhibited for the first time. For this newer set of images, Simon again obsessively cataloged characters in the Bond films — but only the feathered ones.

Through careful inventory of the 24 movies, she identified and photographed the 340 birds that appeared onscreen, often incidentally flying through scenes. “I had to find them in the margins and the background of the background — a place that is often ignored and rarely given a stage,” Simon says. She identifies each bird by its timing, the location in which it appears in the film and the year in which it flew. The photos also serve as tiny time capsules that trace technological advances over the past 50 years. “The differences in film’s evolution through the years from 35 millimeter to high-resolution digital output can be seen in the grain and quality of each static bird’s image,” she explains. “Black-and-white was used to flatten time in the films and simultaneously resembles the photographic processes used in the years when James Bond, the ornithologist, would have been photographing.” To hit home the connection of Bond-the-ornithologist to the show, there are also relics of his life — correspondence, awards, etc. — on display.

“Birds of the West Indies” is on view through April 12 at Gagosian Gallery, 456 North Camden Drive, Beverly Hills, Calif.; gagosian.com.