

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Wallpaper*

Flower power: Taryn Simon explores politics and global wealth at the Gagosian

Olivia Martin



An arrangement of carnations symbolise the 1968 Bratislava Declaration, where representatives from the Bulgarian Communist Party, Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Polish United Workers' Party, Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia reaffirmed their commitment to Marxism-Leninism. The piece is in black and white to reflect the black and white nature of the source material. Pictured: Bratislava Declaration, Bratislava, Slovakia, August 3, 1968. All images © Taryn Simon, courtesy of Taryn Simon and Gagosian Gallery

When artist Taryn Simon came across a photo of Adolf Hitler signing an agreement surrounded by dignitaries, she was struck by a seemingly incongruous floral centerpiece in the middle of the scene. Later, she noticed another flower arrangement in a photo of the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference – a conference held in the United States that established the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Over and over, Simon came across these generic images of men signing world-changing agreements with a floral arrangement nearby.

Combining this motif with a 19th century horticulture book, Simon crafted her latest exhibition, 'Paperwork and the Will of Capital'. For it, she recreated 36 flower arrangements used in signings that involve the countries present at Bretton Woods. She worked with a botanist

to identify the flowers and imported over 4,000 plants from the world's largest flower auction in Aalsmeer, The Netherlands. Each of the arrangements is also an 'impossible bouquet', a concept that emerged from 17th-century Dutch still-lives, in which flowers that could not exist together in real life due to seasonality or distance are painted together as a show of status and wealth.

'Taryn has the instincts and energies of an investigative reporter,' says Gagosian gallery director Louise Neri. 'Her work is the point of departure where the instability of facts and history are revealed.'

The arrangements are presented as 215-cm-by-186-cm prints, with the original table and background distilled into one-third foreground and two-third background blocks of color. Displayed in mahogany frames to emulate boardroom furniture and accompanied by an inset description of the treaty signing, these are Simon's largest single images to date.

Additionally, the artist created her first sculptures by crafting 12 concrete flower presses for each arrangement that house dried and pressed versions of the flowers used for the photographs and sewn on archival herbarium paper.

They also include 12 additional photographs of the arrangements Simon took to land upon the ones she selected for the large photographs, and descriptions of the treaties and their contexts. Her intentions here refer to the fact that we ultimately don't know which versions of these agreements will actually last – the physical flowers, the photographs, the treaties or even the English language itself.