

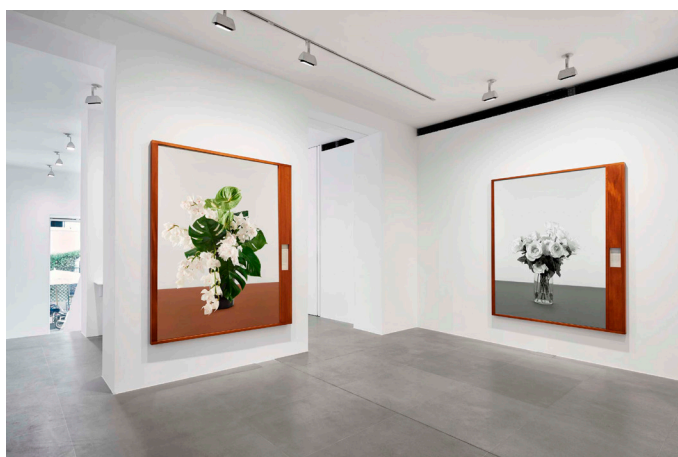
GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Numéro

Taryn Simon's political flowers at Rome's Gagosian Gallery

One of the most talented conceptual artists of her generation, the 41-year old American is showing a new series of photographs at the Gagosian Gallery featuring bouquets with unexpectedly political undertones...

Thibaut Wychowanok



*Exhibition view. Photo by Matteo D'Eletto, M3 Studio.
Courtesy Gagosian Gallery and the artist.*

If the “conceptual” label given to Taryn Simon’s work was to put anyone off, it would be a mistake. Sure, ideas are at the heart of her work. She fuses her photography like protons in a particle accelerator. But they aren’t any the less figurative for that and are even understood with great clarity. In her series *The Innocents* of 2002, the artist became interested in people mistakenly condemned for crimes they hadn’t committed and who’d been finally released thanks to DNA testing. The artist photographed them, sometimes at a staging of the very crime scene that accredited their guilt.

This work questioned the limits of justice (with its tendency to condemn the impoverished and minorities) as much as those of her chosen medium (isn’t photography itself a forcibly bias representation of the real or fake?) Starting out from abstract ideas she deploys them according to a pretty simple protocol, repeats them in series, and then firmly anchors them in reality.

Entitled *Paperwork and the Will of Capital*, her latest series is breath taking. After having been unveiled in New York and then exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 2015, it’s now on show at the Gagosian Gallery in Rome. This oeuvre is composed of 12 sculptures and 36 impressive photographs representing as many amazing bouquets of flowers. Each one is the perfect

reproduction of the floral composition made to celebrate the signing of important international treaties. They decorate the tables around which the signatories are assembled. Commenting on this series when the exhibition had opened at the Gagosian Gallery in New York, Taryn Simon confided to us, *“I find these photographs hilarious. These flowers are the silent witnesses to the decisions made by men. The flower often embodies femininity, and here we see it... reduced to a single decorative function.”* So women are nothing more than pots of flowers in world governance? Taryn Simon’s beautiful images reflect on this irony. The great charade of these geopolitical masses where the bouquet, as much as its composition and colours, is the object of subtle negotiation between the signing countries is highlighted by the artist on almost two meters by two meters.

With Taryn Simon, the work reveals the hidden logic behind representations and official speeches. She invites the public to pursue their own investigations. By whatever end we perceive her photographs, it’s all about enquiry, opening new perspectives and lines of questioning. These floral clichés convoke horticulture, the history of painting, geopolitics, world economics... *“Still lifes of flowers were developed in the Netherlands in the 17th century. Through the luxury of a bouquet, the upper classes could display their power and social status. ‘Impossible’ bouquets appeared in paintings featuring flowers that couldn’t possibly be put together because they didn’t grow at the same time of the year or on the same latitudes. Now today these bouquets are possible. The world economy can bring these flowers to the same place at the same time.”* To create this new series, Taryn Simon imported 4,000 specimens from the Netherlands, the heart of the flower market where 20 million flowers are exchanged every day. *“The capitalist system knows no limits. Even nature is forced to bend to its will. It makes every fantasy possible. And that leads to further questions: what can we possibly dream about if all our fantasies are possible? What will be the next fantasy made real by a capitalism that has no limits?”*

Beyond these pretty bunches of flowers, Taryn Simon’s focus of attack is of course capitalism. Treaties on nuclear arms, immigration or the selling of diamonds... *“The men that sign them think they can control the evolution of the world with an accord, i.e. words on a scrap of paper, relegating nature to mere decoration”*, she explains. An ambitious presumption that she firmly puts back in its place: as nothing more than a vain piece of theatre having fun pretending it can control the world and a nature that will exist long after its demise.

Paperwork and the will of capital,
On until July 24th 2016,
Gagosian Gallery (Rome).