

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Silent Blooms

Liz Jobey



SILENT BLOOMS

The American artist *Taryn Simon* began a series of works in 2013 based on the ceremonies that accompany the signing of international political treaties and agreements. Classifying and sourcing the official bouquets that served as 'witnesses' to these occasions, her finished work, *Paperwork and the Will of Capital*, reflects the history of these agreements and exposes their fragility and often temporary nature. Simon, who is the 2017 Master of Photography at Photo London this weekend, was in email conversation with *Liz Jobey*

Liz Jobey You began this project some years before Trump, though now it might be seen as a prescient commentary on his attempts to reverse political treaties and agreements. What was the original motivation behind this body of work? What was the initial impetus?
Taryn Simon I was thinking about the performance of power and how it is recorded and distributed. I stumbled upon a photograph of Hitler, Mussolini and Chamberlain sitting around a table at the Munich conference in 1938 to discuss their geographic and economic designs. There is a large bouquet of flowers at the centre of this image, and in most images of major political decision-making. In reading these ceremonial equations throughout history, nature is consistently positioned as a silent observer

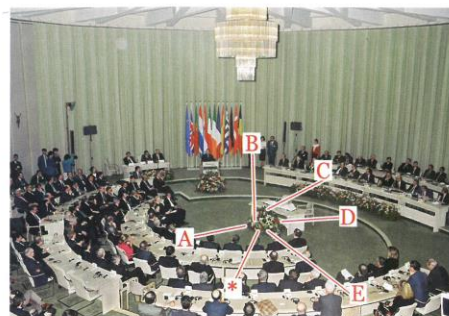
Continued on p26 ▶

Treaty on European Union (Maastricht Treaty) Maastricht, the Netherlands, February 7, 1992

Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom signed a treaty to establish the European Union and outlined the details for a shared common currency, the euro.

The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 formally established the European Union. A historic project of economic union, the treaty proposed the creation of a shared common currency, the euro, by the end of the decade. The final currency framework provided for voluntary rather than compulsory participation in the euro, largely in response to the UK's repeated refusal to participate in a shared currency or submit to the control of a central bank. The agreement outlined the economic requirements for countries seeking to adopt the euro, including thresholds for deficits, GDP and inflation rates. By 1999, the commission established to review the economic viability of potential member states had qualified nearly all members for monetary union under the euro. Greece failed to meet the "convergence criteria"; Italy and Belgium were qualified despite having public debt that exceeded 120 per cent of GDP; and Denmark, Sweden and the UK chose not to apply. The euro was introduced to the general public on January 1 2002.

- A. *Solidago* hybrid, Solidago, Kenya
- B. Iris x *hollandica*, Dutch Iris, Netherlands
- C. *Dianthus caryophyllus*, Carnation, Colombia
- D. Aster "Pretty Wendy", Aster Pretty Wendy, Zimbabwe
- E. *Lilium Asiatic* hybrid, Asiatic Lily, Netherlands
- * *Chrysanthemum*, Chrysanthemum (prohibited)









**Thirty-year natural gas contract
between Gazprom and China
National Petroleum Corporation
Shanghai, China, May 21, 2014**

Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller and chairman of the China National Petroleum Corporation Zhou Jiping signed a 30-year natural gas contract, in the presence of Russian president Vladimir Putin and Chinese president Xi Jinping.

The 30-year gas deal between Russia's Gazprom and China's National Petroleum Corporation was the biggest natural gas contract Russia had secured since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The deal strengthened the relationship between two major powers that have drawn closer in recent years in order to counter the geopolitical dominance of the US and Europe. Russia made an urgent push to complete the deal – already over a decade in the making – after it was bombarded with US and European Union sanctions in response to its military intervention in Ukraine. With the Russian economy severely constrained, President Vladimir Putin looked to China as an alternative energy client. Europe, which had been the main consumer of Russian fuel, had new market options, in part due to the rapid rise of US shale gas. Negotiations between China and Russia stalled over the price China would pay for the natural gas. China had previously secured economically favourable gas contracts in Central Asia and could therefore hold out for Russia to compromise. The final deal guaranteed the sale of more than one trillion cubic metres of natural gas over 30 years, a deal with an estimated market value of \$400bn. But the final negotiated price remains unknown. Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller referred to the financial details as a "commercial secret".

- A. *Aspidistra elatior*, Cast-Iron Plant, US
- B. *Xerophyllum tenax*, Beargrass, US
- C. *Cymbidium* hybrid, Cymbidium, Netherlands
- D. *Eustoma exaltatum* subsp. *russellianum*, Lisianthus, Netherlands
- E. *Eustoma exaltatum* subsp. *russellianum*, Lisianthus, Netherlands



**Nuclear co-operation agreement
Baghdad, Iraq, December 2, 1974**

French prime minister Jacques Chirac and Iraqi vice-president Saddam Hussein signed a framework agreement for nuclear co-operation.

After Iraq and France formalised an agreement for nuclear co-operation, Iraq requested the purchase of a 500MW uranium-fuelled power reactor. The French declined the request, as the unit far exceeded the needs of a peaceful civilian nuclear power programme, and instead negotiated the export of a lower-power "Osiris" reactor and smaller "Isis" research reactor. The final deal, estimated at \$300m, was well above market value but Iraq's nuclear options were limited, and Iraqi vice-president Saddam Hussein paid the sum. Two years later, Iraq acquired three hot cells from Italy, which US intelligence agencies asserted could process enough plutonium to produce one bomb per year. Amid growing fears that Iraq had successfully established a clandestine nuclear weapons programme, on June 7 1981, Israel initiated the world's first pre-emptive attack on a nuclear facility. Dubbed "Operation Babylon", the Israeli air strike completely destroyed the main Iraqi Osiris reactor, but the Isis reactor, its critical assembly unit, and the hot cells escaped damage.

A. *Rosa × hybrida*, Hybrid Tea Rose, Netherlands





Agreement to form a Palestinian national unity government, Mecca, Saudi Arabia, February 8, 2007

Hamas leader Khaled Meshal and Fatah leader and Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas signed an agreement to form a national unity government.

The Hamas-Fatah unity government was created in part to end the ongoing violence between the two Palestinian factions, and to reverse an international aid embargo imposed on Palestine after Hamas won a majority of seats in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections. Immediately following these elections, the US, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations indicated that assistance to Palestine would continue only if the Hamas-led government publicly acknowledged Israel's right to exist, and upheld all previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements. US president George W Bush signed into law the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006, which prohibited accessing banking services and loans from global financial institutions concerned about violating international embargoes and US anti-terrorism laws. International public investment ceased, and private investment fell nearly 15 per cent in just the first year. Despite the US ban, the American government funnelled nearly \$700m through non-governmental organisations and aid groups in an effort to forestall a humanitarian crisis. The Hamas-Fatah unity government was seen as a necessary attempt to stabilise the economy, but the power-sharing deal only lasted four months. On June 14 2007, Hamas forcibly took control of the Gaza Strip and the unity government was dissolved.

- A. *Chamaedorea elegans*, Parlor Palm, Costa Rica
- B. *Rosa x hybrida*, Hybrid Tea Rose, Kenya
- C. *Lilium* Asiatic hybrid, Asiatic Lily, Netherlands
- D. *Cymbidium* hybrid, Cymbidium, Netherlands
- E. *Dendrobium* hybrid, Dendrobium, Thailand

'The recreation of the bouquets and the colour-fields they sit upon play with the visuals of flags, bombast, nationalism, the stagecraft of power'

◀ and accessory to man's belief in his abilities to control and steer the course of the world.

LJ Ever since your first major piece, *The Innocents*, which drew attention to the failings of the US justice system by making portraits of people who had been falsely convicted at the scene of their supposed crimes, your works have involved exposing the systems that control our lives - in many cases drawing attention to their fallibility. Does this recent body of work fit that definition?

TS Many of my works look at the ways in which time, space, individuals and even our emotions are governed - the mathematics by which we organise ourselves and give an appearance of order to the indeterminate components of life. The aesthetics of the works - the technical ways in which I piece them together - in some ways mimic or reflect these systems.

Paperwork and the Will of Capital in different ways alludes to the precarious nature of survival - the survival of historic records, language, promises, nature. The accords and agreements that are the subject of each piece often represent broken promises - for example, Russia, the US and the UK affirming their obligation to protect Ukraine and its territorial integrity against any aggression in exchange for its nuclear arsenal in 1994, or Ronald Reagan's collaboration with the Afghan mujahideen in 1981, providing material support to them through the CIA in Pakistan.

LJ Why did you decide on this form of presentation - bouquets, dried flowers? Why go to such trouble to recreate something that is so elaborate and so fragile?

TS I distilled archival images of political signings of accords down to their aesthetic components - the background colour of the wall, the colour of the desk or table upon which the documents were signed and the flowers themselves. The recreation of the bouquets and the large colour-fields they sit upon in the works play with the visuals of flags, bombast, nationalism, the stagecraft of power - the line between presentation and what's actually happening. The frames were designed with the aesthetics of power and diplomacy in mind - the mahogany of boardroom furniture and sites like the United Nations.

I've preserved specimens of the flowers I photographed in concrete sculptures, whose form is loosely based on plant presses. Over time, each mutates - much like the accords themselves. We know flower specimens have survived in Egyptian tombs for thousands of years. Who knows how long man's records of history through the English language and photographic documentation will survive?

LJ You have described each arrangement as an “impossible bouquet”. Could you explain that phrase and how it applies here?

TS Each work presents a bouquet of flowers that could never bloom naturally in the same geographic location and season, and could therefore never exist in the same bouquet. The impossible bouquet was a concept that emerged in Dutch still-life painting in the 17th century, during the Dutch Golden Age – an economic boom credited as the birthplace of modern capitalism. Impossible bouquet paintings represented a fantasy – a luxury and surrealism that visualised access to a larger, global arena that was not achievable in reality. What was once possible only in painting is now possible at local supermarkets as global consumerism demands a transcendence of nature’s limitations.

I sourced the flowers in each recreated bouquet from Aalsmeer – the world’s largest flower auction, which happens also to be in the Netherlands. Flowers are shipped daily from growers in countries such as Kenya and Israel to this Dutch collection point, from which they are redistributed to vendors throughout the world.


LJ All your installations involve a large degree of preparation and research, and the result is a strictly controlled assemblage of facts, in which the photographs are just one visual tool. Some visitors to your shows find this hard to recognise as art. How – or why – did you come to work in this way?

TS My grandfather and father both used moving and still images and data collection in their art. My father worked for the state department and photographed in areas including Afghanistan, the Soviet Union, Iran, Thailand, Cambodia and Pakistan. I learnt about the world through his Kodachrome slideshows, films and stories. My grandfather ground glass to make special lenses for his telescopes. He obsessively collected images and data about the things our eyes miss or can’t see – in the skies and in nature: minerals and plants. I’m sure some of that leaked into my ways of visually organising material. But all these methods and constellations are ultimately arbitrary, yet give the appearance of being comprehensive or understood.

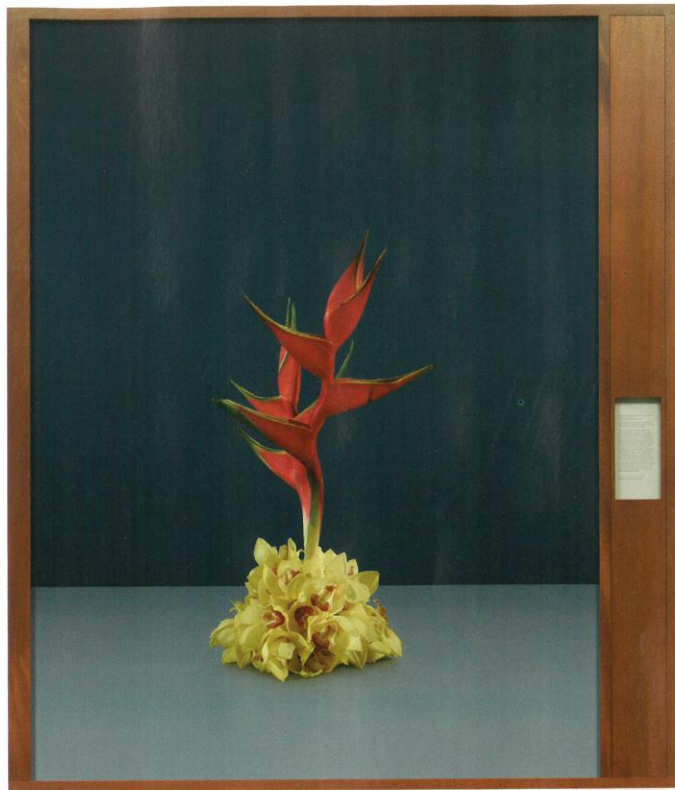
LJ The original bouquets were witnesses to significant moments in history. But we recognise that such agreements rarely last, so the bouquets come to represent failures and betrayals. Is that your view of the political process?

TS I’d like to think it’s more optimistic than that. But even the most productive or beneficial result from co-operative negotiation is by definition compromised, and at best relevant for a short period of time. In the work there is an expectation of expiration for both negotiated compromise and nature itself. Decomposition is the outcome for all earthly things – and in a way, the hope for any other outcome is irrational.

LJ Is your work primarily an art of provocation?

TS Not at all. It’s often me trying to organise and map out abstractions that are beyond language and image – the unknowns that keep me awake at night. 

© EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES/SOURCE: EC – AUDIOVISUAL SERVICE/PHOTO: CHRISTIAN LAMBIOTTE, AFP/GETTY IMAGES; PARIS MATCH/GETTY IMAGES



**Decision of general principle to ban third-party ownership of players’ economic rights
Zurich, Switzerland, September 26, 2014**

The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (Fifa) executive committee made a decision of general principle to ban third-party ownership of players’ economic rights.

Following an internal Fifa study that reportedly linked third-party ownership (TPO) of players’ economic rights to a “vicious cycle of debt and dependence” for football players and their clubs, Fifa’s executive committee voted to ban the practice. The practice has been described as “trading in human beings”. TPO is most prevalent among cash-strapped football clubs, which sell a percentage of their players’ economic rights to outside investors, often to settle outstanding debts or simply pay the club’s operating costs. TPO investors are guaranteed a percentage of any future transfer fees, which can yield a considerable profit on their initial investment, sometimes millions of dollars per transfer contract. While TPO investors lack any formal power to force transfers, they can pressure teams to transfer players by threatening to deny future financing. International TPO firms primarily invest in Latin American and South American players. It has been reported that 90 per cent of first-division players in Brazil are subject to these contracts. The 20 first-division Brazilian clubs they play for collectively owe nearly \$2bn and face frequent strikes because they cannot pay player salaries. Questions remain about the enforceability of the ban, as investors could instead buy small clubs outright, sign promising players for cheap, and collect fees when the players are transferred.

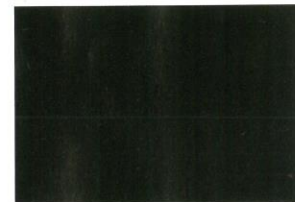


image access denied by Fifa

- A. *Cymbidium* hybrid, *Cymbidium*, Netherlands
- B. *Heliconia* *bihai*, *Lobster Claw*, Netherlands

.....
All texts for the works by Taryn Simon. All artworks courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery. Works by Taryn Simon are on view at the Gagosian Gallery, Britannia Street, London WC1; her book “Paperwork and the Will of Capital” is published by Hatje Cantz. Works from her earlier project, “An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar”, are on Level 2 of the Boiler House at Tate Modern; tate.org.uk