

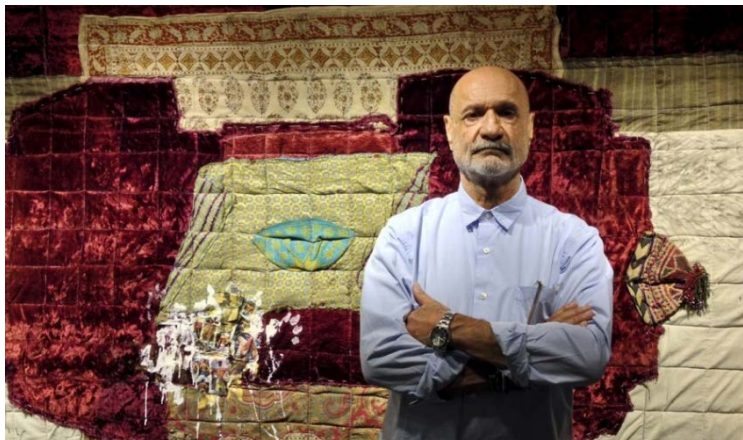
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Three must-see Hong Kong art exhibitions by international artists in Hong Kong this summer

Photography, white porcelain sculptures and quilts with a message by international artists Taryn Simon, Rachel Kneebone and Fereydoun Ave are featured in their first solo shows at Gagosian, White Cube and Ross & Rossi galleries

Enid Tsui



Iranian artist Fereydoun Ave poses with 'Lahaf 17', made with a traditional Persian blanket and a patchwork of fabrics including a velvet seat covering from his late grandmother's house. Photo: Enid Tsui

Hong Kong's commercial galleries have gone into hyperactivity, with one opening after another to catch visitors before the summer exodus begins. Don't know where to start? Here are three must-see shows by major international artists who have never had solo exhibitions in this city before.

Taryn Simon: Portraits and Surrogates Gagosian Gallery

American Taryn Simon catalogues situations where the individual gets caught up in the power of the state, war, religion, capitalism and other overarching systems they have little control over, which means anyone, anywhere, can be her subject.

Indeed, the mini retrospective at the Gagosian Gallery covers a bewildering range: from the most mundane – a record of confiscated items at Kennedy International Airport – to the shocking – a project about albinos in Tanzania killed for their body parts because witch doctors insist they bring luck.



Part of the 'Portraits and Surrogates' exhibition by Taryn Simon.

The latter is part of the series called *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I – XVIII*. Simon spent four years from 2008-2011 travelling around the world researching and recording families who have lost members to cruel superstition, to civil war, or in the case of feral rabbits in Australia, to biological warfare designed to wipe them out. Each panel has a photographic family tree with gaps representing the dead and the missing. The unsmiling faces of the three generations she photographed are as blank as the uniform, beige background. Textual explanations on the other side provide the context.



'A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I-XVIII', by Taryn Simon.

This clinical presentation is provocative. By parodying the photographic records of, say, Victorian eugenicists and taxonomists, she insists on presenting her findings in an unsentimental way.

She adopts the same dispassionate gaze for *Contraband* (2010), a police line-up of more than a thousand items seized at the New York airport.



'Handbags, Hermès (counterfeit) (detail)', 2010, by Taryn Simon.

It was an exercise similar to Dutch artist Christien Meindertsma's *Checked Baggage* (2003) but there is one major difference. Whereas Meindertsma found a relatively straightforward way to

purchase the confiscated objects from Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport, Simon patiently negotiated with bureaucrats to gain access to the customs and border protection federal inspection site and the international mail facility at New York airport. Then, during five basically sleepless days she documented the 24/7 operation.

Her modus operandi reveals a hidden passion beneath the cold erasure of emotion from the photographs. Simon said at the opening of her Hong Kong exhibition that getting access for her projects was often a test of endurance, and her battles with red tape should be thought of as performance art and an important component of her work.



'Agreement for cooperation on China's Beidou Navigation Satellite System in Pakistan. Aiwan-e-Sadr, Islamabad, Pakistan, May 22, 2013' from 'Paperwork and the Will of Capital', by Taryn Simon, 2015.

Her *Paperwork and the Will of Capital* (2016) series required research rather than battles with bureaucracy. She studied photographs of major international treaties being signed, and reproduced the floral centrepieces that are always a kind of silent witness to the proceedings.

The exercise is reminiscent of Kapwani Kiwanga's *Flowers for Africa* (2014), a project recreating the floral arrangements at the declarations of independence for African countries, except Simon's focus on the flowers is a commentary on capitalism and an anti-authority gesture.

You may not be convinced by the intellectual contortions but her work certainly raises interesting questions about the role of the artist.

Taryn Simon: Portraits and Surrogates, Gagosian Gallery, 7/F Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Tue-Sat 11am-7pm. Until Aug 5.