

GAGOSIAN

ARTFORUM

Taryn Simon: Gagosian Gallery

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Taryn Simon, Animal Corpses (Prohibited), Animal Parts (Prohibited), Animal Skeletons (Prohibited), Animal Specimens (Prohibited), Butterflies (Prohibited), Snails (Prohibited) (detail), 2010, 15 archival ink-jet prints in Plexiglas boxes, dimensions variable.

An uncomfortable portrait ushers viewers into American artist Taryn Simon's first exhibition in Hong Kong: The single-channel video *Cutaways*, 2012 shows footage of the artist making prolonged eye contact with newscasters for Russian prime time. Simon was asked to stare in silence for several minutes after an interview on the network, so that the footage—which she obtained from the program's producers—could be used in the editing process. The work sets the tone for several of Simon's other projects on view, which use photography to illustrate controlling systems or authorities: At the center of the show, the piece *Paperwork and the Will of Capital*, 2015, dissects the symbols of power present at the signing of international accords. Simon carefully re-creates and photographs bouquets beside which powerful men stand during significant diplomatic deals. (The flowers are both markers of femininity and reminiscent of "impossible bouquets," a seventeenth-century Dutch painting trope of flowers whose existence would be inconceivable in the seasons and climates of their settings.) She houses the images in large, wooden museum-cabinet frames with textual details of their circumstances inscribed into the panels. Other series examine, through photographs and meticulous research, the bloodlines of albino families in Tanzania targeted for their supposed magical powers, or the family members of a South Korean man believed to have been kidnapped by the government of the North. In the

final room of the gallery, *Contraband*, 2010, comprises hundreds of photographs of items confiscated during Simon's five-day stint with customs at JFK airport in New York. Among the objects are beans, weapons, sausages, pirate videos, sexual-enhancement drugs, and one dead bird; the work is a motley archive of desire, violence, and restraint.