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Wallpaper*

Taryn Simon to bring her seminal installation on mourning rites to London

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Marisol Rosalía Fernández and Ana Fernández, Venezuela, performing An Occupation of Loss, 2016, by Taryn Simon, a co-commission by Artangel and Park Avenue Armory. Photography: Taryn Simon

London-based arts organisation ArtAngel announced today that multidisciplinary artist Taryn Simon will bring her 2016 work *An Occupation of Loss* to London this April.

Originally staged at New York's Park Avenue Armory, the project saw Simon bring professional mourners from some 30 countries to enact their native rites of grief and lamentation, many of which date back to pre-Christian and pre-Islamic eras. Every night for a week, the mourners would perform within a series of 11 concrete towers, created in collaboration with OMA. In typically meticulous fashion, Simon also documented the process of research, arranging appropriate visas for the performers to enter the United States, and rehearsal in a monograph, published by Hatje Cantz the following year.

The specifics of the London iteration remain shrouded in mystery. The venue has been announced as 'a cavernous undiscovered space beneath Islington Green', with the artist declining to release exact details or architectural photography ahead of time, so as to preserve an element of surprise for the first visitors. In lieu of the OMA towers, Simon is designing a series of sculptures to house the mourners, who hail from 11 countries including Azerbaijan, China, Russia and Venezuela.

Promised recitations include Albanian laments that excavate 'uncried words'; Venezuelan rituals to safeguard the passage of the soul to the Milky Way Greek laments that weave together stories of life and afterlife and Yezidi performances that recount experiences of exile and displacement.

‘Loss yields an emotional space and a vulnerability in which individuals seem to operate without artifice,’ says the artist and erstwhile Wallpaper* Guest Editor (W*163).

‘I want to look at the potential of this space, and the mechanics of it – even the ways it can be programmed or performed.’ She adds that the project is about ‘how we mourn individually, nationally, globally – how organised religion, government or civic leadership guides and shapes mourning and how citizens are mobilised in those moments of loss.’

The London performance is a homecoming of sorts, seeing as the project began as a conversation between Simon and ArtAngel co-director Michael Morris in the British capital six years ago. ‘The enactment of mourning in this ambitious new work for London sees Simon turn a found site into a sonic instrument for the performance of grief, measuring losses beyond language,’ says Morris. In a country currently beset by social fracture and political uncertainty, the anxiety and catharsis of *An Occupation of Loss* will no doubt resonate.



Behind the scenes at Simon's New York performance at Park Avenue Armory. Courtesy of the artist



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