PRESS COVERAGE

Taryn Simon: The Innocents

August 2 — October 1, 2005

1. Chicago Reader, 9. 2. 2005
2. Chicago Reader, 9. 16. 2005
3. Chicago Tribune, 8. 25. 2005
4. Time Out Chicago, 8. 4. 2005
5. Time Out Chicago, 8. 18. 2005
6. Time Out Chicago, 8. 25. 2005
MoCP
Museum of Contemporary Photography

events + exhibitions

August 2 - October 2, 2005
Taryn Simon:
The Innocents

CLOSING RECEPTION
Thursday, September 29
5-7pm
Museum of Contemporary Photography

FILM SCREENING
Murder on a Sunday Morning (111 minutes)
Wednesday, September 14, 6pm
Museum of Contemporary Photography
600 S. Michigan Ave. 1st floor

FILM SCREENING AND DISCUSSION
WITH DIRECTOR LAURI FELDMAN
The Innocent (71 minutes)
Monday, September 26, 2005, 6pm
Room 921, 9th Floor, 600 S. Michigan Ave.

PANEL DISCUSSION
Mistaken Identities:
Stories of the Wrongfully Convicted
Thursday, September 22, 2005, 6pm
Museum of Contemporary Photography
600 S. Michigan Ave. 1st floor

August 2 - October 2, 2005
Erik Johnson:
Borderlands

CLOSING RECEPTION
AND BOOK SIGNING
Thursday, September 29, 5-7pm
Museum of Contemporary Photography

LECTURE:
JOEL-PETER WITKIN
Thursday, September 8, 2005, 6pm
1104 S. Wabash, 8th Floor

MEMBERS EVENT
Photographic Excursion
Saturday, September 24, 1-4pm
reservation required
Museum of Contemporary Photography
600 S Michigan Ave
Chicago, IL 60605
312.663.5554
mocp@colum.edu
mocp.org

Free and open to the public
Monday through Friday
from 10 am to 5 pm
Thursday until 8 pm
Saturday from noon to 5 pm

Columbia College Chicago
The Wrong Men

Taryn Simon's exhibit of large-format photographs has its roots in an assignment from the New York Times Magazine in 2000. The magazine asked her to photograph a handful of wrongly convicted men who'd been on death row. Simon found that while some were angry and others were forgiving, all had been devastated. "They would tell me about the process by which they were convicted," she says, and it often involved a victim responding to a photograph presented by law enforcement, and then having to deal with her personal memory of the experience. The process was frequently flawed—sometimes the police would show the victim two sets of photos in which one picture repeated.

The daughter of an amateur photographer, Simon says she grew up with lots of weekend slide shows. "My parents relate to the past through photographs, and I've always been interested in the way photographs replace memories." After the assignment was done, she began researching wrongful convictions and the role photography plays in the legal system. "Reminded of the importance of context in photography, she included captions with this set of portraits. Her book, The Innocents, includes even more explanatory text.

Funded by a Guggenheim grant and the Innocence Project in New York, with assistance from organizations like the Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern University Law School, Simon crisscrossed the country for six months, photographing about 60 subjects. While a few former inmates didn't want to be involved, most were eager. Simon knew before she talked to them that even the most solicited eyewitness testimony could be wrong, but she was surprised at how often the process was corrupt. One of her subjects, Troy Webb, was sentenced to 47 years (he served 7) because the victim told the investigators, "It looks like him, but he's a little too old. So the police showed her a picture taken four years before the crime."

Simon says that the first few photos she took didn't represent the power of the stories she was hearing, so she changed the locales. "I went back and retouched at sites that had particular significance. The most powerful place to photograph was the scene of the crime—most of the time they've read about it but have never been there. If you're innocent, you don't want to have any familiarity with that place before your trial." Other sites are somehow related to the case: Simon photographed Calvin Washington, who did 13 years, through the window of a motel room, the place where a witness claimed Washington had confessed. But others didn't want to visit the crime scene even though their innocence had been proved, fearing the visit could be used against them.

While attending Brown University, Simon took classes at the Rhode Island School of Design and discovered large-format photography. "I liked the complexity of it combined with the beauty. The resolution is amazing." For magazine assignments, she shot her subjects—Chechen fighters and members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, normally shown in fear-laden moments—with a four-by-five camera, carefully lighting and composing her portraits. In this series, too, she tried to honor the serious subject matter. "These are people who have only been presented photographically in very degraded terms, in old photos poorly reproduced or through their mug shots." When "The Innocents" opened in New York in 2000, the Life After Exoneration Project flew her subjects in. Most still live in fear or are haunted by their convictions. Some lost their families while they were in prison, many are unemployed, and others are working at jobs far below their capabilities. "When you go for a job interview, you have to say you've been in prison."

Simon says, "so they're going with newspaper clippings to show their innocence." After the book came out, they had additional proof—Fred Camper

Calvin Washington
C&F Motel, Room No. 24, Waco, Texas
Where an informant claimed to have heard Washington confess
Served 13 years of a Life sentence for capital murder

Larry Moore
Scene of arrest, The Royal Inn, Gary, Indiana
Police found Moore hiding beneath a mattress in this room
Served 18.5 years of an 80-year sentence for Rape, Robbery and Unlawful Deviate Conduct
Photos of exonerated memorable

By Alan G. Artner
Tribune art critic

Taryn Simon spent 3001 photographing people who had been accused, convicted and incarcerated for crimes they did not commit. The trust of this was not just on her, for often people had been misidentified from photographs, and to say something about the injustice, there she was photographing them again.

The results were collected in a book, "The Innocents," (Umbravus, 2001), and an exhibition, which has come to the Museum of Contemporary Photography. Both prove difficult to forget.

Simon shot each of her exonerated subjects at a site central to their cases. In most instances, this meant the scene of the crime, though some photos were taken at the scene of the misidentification or trial. Once there, she posed them and photographed in color. The exhibition prints are large and accompanied by labels giving the subject's name, time served, length of sentence and crimes for which they were convicted.

Apart from a palette that emphasizes golds and browns, Simon's picture-making vision does not stand out. The poses of her subjects are ordinary. Her images convey next to nothing about the subjects' character or psychology.

The strength of the work comes from us seeing people in landscapes and interiors the labels tell us had life-altering effect. We can easily imagine why they would want to reengage so directly a part of the past that brought them ruin. But the fact that all of them did suggests the wrong may have been the largest thing they've had in life, and what we imagine they feel about it overwhelms us regardless of how much feeling the pictures actually show.

Simon's book complemented the photographs with brief interviews of her subjects. In the exhibition, they speak on video, adding tones of defeat too terrible to be borne.

A second exhibition, of color landscape photographs by Erik Johnson, offers a kind of palliative. Johnson is interested in what happens at sites that are between places of habitation and desolation. In his travels he found that things accrue, and he makes often unexpectedly beautiful photographs showing them. Some of his pictures are of secluded wooded areas through which few people pass. Others are of the margins of suburban housing developments where large numbers of people live. In both are objects the hand of man has left behind. Usually the objects are pieces of junk a traveler has dropped or the wind has blown.

Above: "Untitled (Tires)" from 2003 is part of "Erik Johnson: Borderlands." Left: Taryn Simon's "Calvin Washington C&E Motel, Room No. 24, Waco, Texas." (2002). The photo caption says: "Where an informant claimed to have heard Washington confess "Served 13 years of a Life sentence for Murder.""
ART & DESIGN

Museum of Contemporary Art
220 E Chicago Ave at Miss van der Rohe Way (212) 230-3660, www.mcachicago.org, Th-Sa 10am-5pm, Su noon-5pm.

Flaws in the system
Taryn Simon, Ronald Jones. Scene of arrest, South Side, Chicago, Illinois. Served eight years of a Death sentence for Murder and Rape, 2002. From “The Innocents,” Simon’s photographs of the 44 men and one woman who were wrongfully convicted and later released through DNA evidence is on exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Photography through Oct 1. See Museums & institutions.

Navy Pier
220 E Battery Pier, 600 Grand Ave (www.pierwalk.com), Bus: 29, 65, 66 (24 hrs), 124, Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri-Sat 10am-12am. • New Yorker art critic Peter Schjeldahl is back. For the second time he’s curating “Navy Pier Walk,” an annual contemporary sculpture exhibition. This year’s artists are Jim Benedict, Corin Loban, Zenzer Mosley, Ralph Provost, Tamara Ringler, Kay Rosen, Ulrich Ruckriem and Franz West.

Racine Art Museum
441 Main St, Racine (262) 638-8300, www.racinet.org, Tu-Sat 10am-5pm, Sun noon-5pm. • Gifted!!! Luster and Luxe in RAM’s Collection.” Features ceramics, fiber, glass, metal, wood and works on paper from RAM’s permanent collection that demonstrate luxury and use of precious materials. Through Sept 11.

Smart Museum of Art
University of Chicago, 5550 S Greenwood Ave at 55th St (773-702-0200), www.smartmuseum.uchicago.edu, Bus: 44 (24 hrs), Th, Wed, Fri 10am-4pm, Thu 10am-5pm, Sun noon-5pm. • Centers and Edges: Modern Ceramic Design and Sculpture, 1880-1980.” Covering 100 years of American and European pottery, this exhibition investigates the ways clay has been used, from utilitarian Scandinavian designs to Rudolph Duckworth’s contemporary artworks. Through Sep 18. “Quiet Revolutions: Modernizing Traditional Art in East Asia.” The political transformations of the 20th century in East Asia reshaped artistic conventions that had been in place for hundreds, and sometimes even thousands, of years. This exhibition portrays the tensions between time-honored traditions and modernity. Through Nov 6.

Galleries
River North
El Brown, Purple (rush hrs) to Chicago, Bus: 29, 67 (24 hrs), 156.

Flavio Flavin: A Retrospective.” More than 50 pieces are on display by this minimalist artist who worked solely with light. This may well be the only meditative space filled with fluorescent light you’ll ever encounter. Through Oct 30. “Circle of Influence: Letters by Dan Flavin and Artists’ Books by his Peers.” This collection of writings by Flavin’s peers from the MLA archives includes works by Robert Smithson, Sol LeWitt, James Turrell and others. Through Oct 9. “Aerom Titik: Refraction.” Dutch video installation artist Aerom Titik stages fictional scenes rooted in reality by combining filmmaking and sculptures to create surreal scenarios. Milka’s video “Refractie” depicts the modern aerom traffic accident. Through Sep 25. “12X12: New Artists/ New Work.” Deb Sokolow’s detailed drawings are often cryptic observations on the connections between various people and places in her apartment complex, neighborhood and of fire. Through Aug 28.

Museum of Contemporary Photography
441 Main St, Racine, WI (262) 638-8300, www.racinet.org, Tu-Sat 10am-5pm, Sun noon-5pm. • Taryn Simon: The Innocents.” Working for The New York Times Magazine in 2000, Simon photographed people freed from death row on the account of a wrongful conviction. Her interest in the use of photography as a tool led to her decision to be part of the project here. These images are of countless people at the scene of their arrests or alleged crimes. Through Oct 1. “Erik Johnson: Borderlands.” Photographic series of rivers and streams lined with de- dents or faint pathways marks the no man’s land between new residential areas and the wild. Through Oct 1.

Millennium Park
220 E Chicago Ave at Miss van der Rohe Way (212) 360-3660, www.mcachicago.org, Th-Sa 10am-5pm, Su noon-5pm. • CUT/Film as Found Object.” This exhibition features the work of eight video artists, including Christian Marclay, Douglas Gordon, and Jennifer and Kevin McCoy. It’s a great hit’s collection of video art by artists who work with the same materi al—found footage—in intriguing different ways. Through Sep 11.

The Arts & Crafts Movement in Europe and America, 1880-1920: Design for the Modern World.” This traveling exhibition organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art features furniture and decorative objects made by international designers and utopian art colonies. Through Sep 11.

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*Approved of Architecture & Design, Government Consulting, 2004

TIME OUT CHICAGO | AUGUST 4-11, 2005 60
The age of ‘Innocents’

Two jarringly beautiful exhibits at the MCP explore truth in imagery

By Ruth Lopez


Simon traveled around the country documenting the men and one woman who had been wrongfuly imprisoned, and managed to persuade many of them to pose in the spots where they had been plucked without warning and dropped into as many as 18 years in hell.

That project prompted Simon to investigate the criminal justice system’s flawed use of photography. A quote by a crime victim, printed in the exhibit’s brochure, eloquently explains how her participation in identifying her attacker through photos and creating the composite drawing led to a false arrest: “I picked out Ronald because, subconsciously, in my mind, he resembled the photo, which resembled the composite, which resembled the attacker. All the images became enmeshed in one image....”

These poignant photographs can be admired for aesthetic reasons, but they can’t be divorced from their contexts and so, in this way, “The Innocents” becomes political art. As images, they present strong arguments for reform.

The subjects of these environmental portraits, shot in ordinary places where their otherwise ordinary lives were disrupted, are living testaments to a failed system.

We see Frederick Daye posing with a bottle of beer in the American Legion Post where he was arrested. It’s hard to imagine what it must have been like for Daye, who served ten years in prison, and the others to return to these locations. This is photojournalism touched by a fine artist’s sensibility of composition, color and light.

In the bird’s-eye view of Tim Durham (who served three and a half years), taken in an Oklahoma skeet shooting field, Durham appears to be floating with his rifle above the hundreds of clay disks that at first glance look like a huge patch of red flowers. There is an education room with a video of interviews of the subjects; newspaper clippings, including the excellent Chicago Tribune series on the death penalty; and books, including a catalog of Simon’s complete project. In that book there is an image of James O’Donnell, who is shown holding a police sketch of the perpetrator, who might look more like some of us reading this than it does him.

Simon has stipulated that the captions for each photograph run in full when they are reproduced, and so, in image after image, the number of years lost begins to jump out. It’s a monstrousivery and begs the question: If our criminal justice system can get it so wrong, what business does it have enacting something like the Patriot Act?

For visual disturbances of another kind, the museum also presents the work of Eirik Johnson in “Borderlands,” a collection of jarringly beautiful, untitled landscape photographs of trashed environments.

Because of their formal elegance, these appear to be soothing images. But upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that they’re not shots of Eden. The seemingly empty stream under a canopy of tree branches in one image reveals itself to be a long scrap of discarded carpet. Johnson is fond of the places where worn tires accumulate and underground spaces.

This is photojournalism touched by a fine artist’s sensibility of composition, color and light.

ART & DESIGN

“Dual Vision”

Wendy Cooper Gallery, through Sat 20 (see West Loop).

A nything is fodder for painting these days, and in this exhibition, six young artists make that a good thing. Curator John McKinnon matched each painter with another so their work is hung in pairs throughout the show—hence the title “Dual Vision.” In each of these couples, the painters’ wild, irreverent styles take everything as subject matter—from historical art genres to heel balm and yarn—making for duos so awkward, they visually resonate like nails on the chalkboard.

Within these jarring juxtapositions the painting is sumptuous and the awkwardness compelling, starting with Rita Rubas and Aaron Steffes. Rubas’s swipes of paint glaze the canvas in a shocking array of macabre colors and gunky textures. They are gruesome, resembling dead animals punctured by bright flecks that look like festering eyes. Or, possibly, Rubas’s abstractions resemble gory scenes because they are paired with Steffes’s still lifes: surrealistic-inspired mazes of mazes, horse heads, ointment and spider webs casually placed on the canvas like Cézanne’s bowls of fruit.

Dipping into the digital domain, paintings by Josh Podoll and William Staples are strewn with hard angles and CAD-like hexagons. While staples’s muddled geometric tableaux appear to be horror scenarios and apocalyptic explosions, next to Podoll’s work they are scenes and characters from computer games. Still, these paintings do what any good work of art does—they don’t let you look away.

—Madeline Vasser

ART & DESIGN

Master mixologist

Galeries

56

56
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**Sigur Rós: Takk... Listening Event**

MoCP debuts the new Sigur Rós album 5 days before the official release.

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_Courtesy of the artist_