



# Taryn Simon: An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar

*Ronald Dworkin, Christina Kukielski, Salman Rushdie*

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First published in 2008, and now commanding high prices second-hand, Taryn Simon's *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* reveals objects, sites and spaces that are integral to America's foundation, mythology or daily functioning, but which remain inaccessible or unknown to a public audience. To make the more than 60 large-format photographs often required protracted negotiations before Simon was granted access to the sites. When circumstances permitted, she photographed with a large-format camera and careful lighting, emphatically *not* following the tradition of the journalistic snapshot. The photographs include radioactive containers in a storage facility for nuclear waste; the recreational facility of a high-security prison; the headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan with its Wizards, Night Hawks and Kleagles; a Scientology seminar room; MOUT, a facade city in Kentucky built as a training ground for urban warfare; the sealed-off halls of the CIA headquarters; a high-security research institute studying animal epidemics; and an operating room in which a Palestinian woman had her hymen (and thus her virginity) restored. Each image is accompanied by a brief text written by the artist, that precisely explains what is seen and why it is hidden or off-limits. Although *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* forces us to confront the darker side of democratic society, it also conveys the fascination that attends the exploration of forbidden territories.

**Taryn Simon** was born in New York in 1975. She has produced several books of photography and writing, including *Contraband*, *The Innocents* and *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters*. Other subjects documented by Simon include feuding families in Brazil, victims of genocide in Bosnia and the body double of Saddam Hussein's son Uday.

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