

Taryn Simon
A Polite Fiction

01/12

Underneath layers of cement and drywall in the Fondation Louis Vuitton is a message in green permanent marker on concrete: “Oubliez la terre. Elle ne vaut pas le coup ... à moins que vous soyez là pour me sauver” (Skip earth. Not worth it ... unless you’re coming to save me).

In A Polite Fiction (2014), Taryn Simon maps, excavates, and records the gestures that became entombed beneath – and within – the building’s surfaces during its five-year construction.

Designed by Frank Gehry, the Fondation was built to house the art collection of Bernard Arnault, one of the world’s wealthiest individuals and owner of the largest luxury conglomerate in the world.

Simon collects this buried history and examines the latent social, political, and economic forces pushing against power and privilege.

In the part of the project featured in this issue of e-flux journal, Simon investigates the removal or disappearance of objects from the construction site of the Fondation Louis Vuitton, designed by Frank Gehry. Simon entered an invisible marketplace, tracking, purchasing, and photographing objects taken from the site. Items include copper and aluminum cables sold to scrap dealers; cement used by a father to build the walls of his daughter’s bedroom; and an oak sapling that a worker took to Poland, planted, and named after his boss. The custody and movement of these objects transform their value, as they pass from employer to worker and, ultimately, to artist.

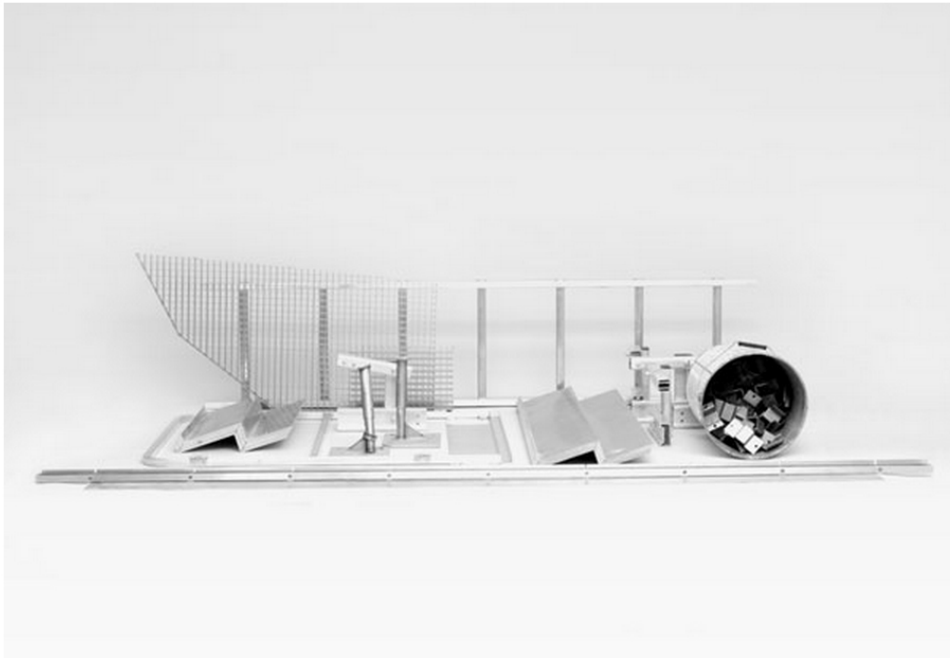
Some geographic details and all of the names in A Polite Fiction have been redacted.

e-flux journal #66 — #66—october 2015 [Taryn Simon](#)
A Polite Fiction



Eye bolt (19cm)—Donated. *Souvenir*

From: Poissy, France
Resides: Achères, France



Aluminum (62kg) and steel (60kg)—Purchased for €182 (aluminum: 1€/kg; steel: 2€/kg). [redacted] and [redacted] took approximately 400kg of steel and 400kg of aluminum from the construction site to sell to scrap dealers. They do this at every construction site they work on and call it a "cadeau de Noël" (Christmas present).

From: France Resides: France



Heart cut from concrete panel (30cm x 30cm) — Donated.

■■■■■■■■■■ made the heart for his wife, Jenny, who was battling ovarian cancer. She kept it on top of their television at home in Germany.

From: Magdeburg, Germany
Resides: Kleinleitzkau, Germany



Eye bolt (34cm) — Donated. ■■■■■■■■■■ kept the eye bolt in his car to use as a weapon for self-defense.

From: Assomada, Cape Verde
Resides: Gournay-sur-Marne, France



2 smoke detector cables; 9 spotlight cables; 5 power supply cables; LED lighting cable; RJ45 network cable—
Donated. ██████████ and two of his colleagues claimed they sold approximately €15,000 worth of copper and aluminum
cables to a scrap dealer. ██████████ called it a "petit bonus" (small bonus).

From: France
Resides: France



22 9mm casings—Donated. ██████████ kept the casings from an acoustical test in the auditorium during which
guns were fired.

From: Niamey, Niger
Resides: Brou-sur-Chantereine, France



Plaster model of penis (30cm x 7cm)—Purchased for €50.
 ██████ found the penis on his office chair. He put it on his desk, but it made people uncomfortable so he moved it into the closet.

From: Paris, France
 Resides: Levallois-Perret, France



Aluminum attachment bracket (30cm x 2.5cm)—Donated.
 ██████ used the bracket as a stress-relief object. He explained that this is why it is so crooked.

From: Paris, France
 Resides: Boulogne-Billancourt, France



Universal key—Donated. ████████ took a universal key for the trapdoors on the construction site.

From: France
Resides: Paris, France



Limestone letter U – Donated. ████████ took the letter from the word “Vuitton” in a limestone prototype of the museum's signage.

From: Nouméa, Nouvelle-Calédonie, France
Resides: Neuilly-sur-Seine, France



Limestone tile (50cm x 45cm)—Purchased for €40.
 [REDACTED] used eight limestone tiles to support an umbrella in his garden.

From: Lomme, France
 Resides: Avesnes-le-Sac, France



Basalt tile (15cm x 13cm)—Donated.
 [REDACTED] took 30 tiles from stock reportedly rejected by Frank Gehry. She used them to build a barbecue pit at her home.

From: Cassano d'Adda, Italy
 Resides: Arcueil, France



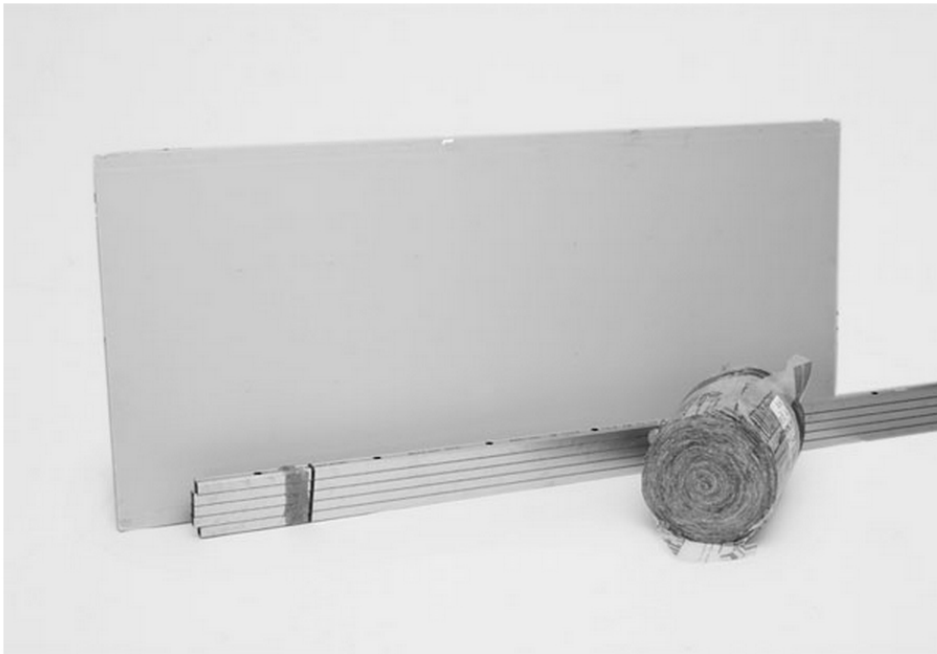
Plaster model of a vagina (13cm x 13cm)—Donated.
■■■■■■■■■■ kept a plaster vagina that his colleague made for him.

From: Sarcelles, France
Resides: Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, France



2 nuts welded together—Donated.
Souvenir

From: Les Molières, France
Resides: Les Molières, France



2 drywall panels (2.5m x 1.2m); roll of mineral wool insulation (16m x 60cm); 5 aluminum rails (4m x 3.5cm)—
Purchased for €50.

■■■■■■■■■■ used 100 drywall panels, 81m of aluminum railing, and 1000 screws to build walls in his home. He also took a toilet frame and 4m of porcelain tiling for his bathroom.

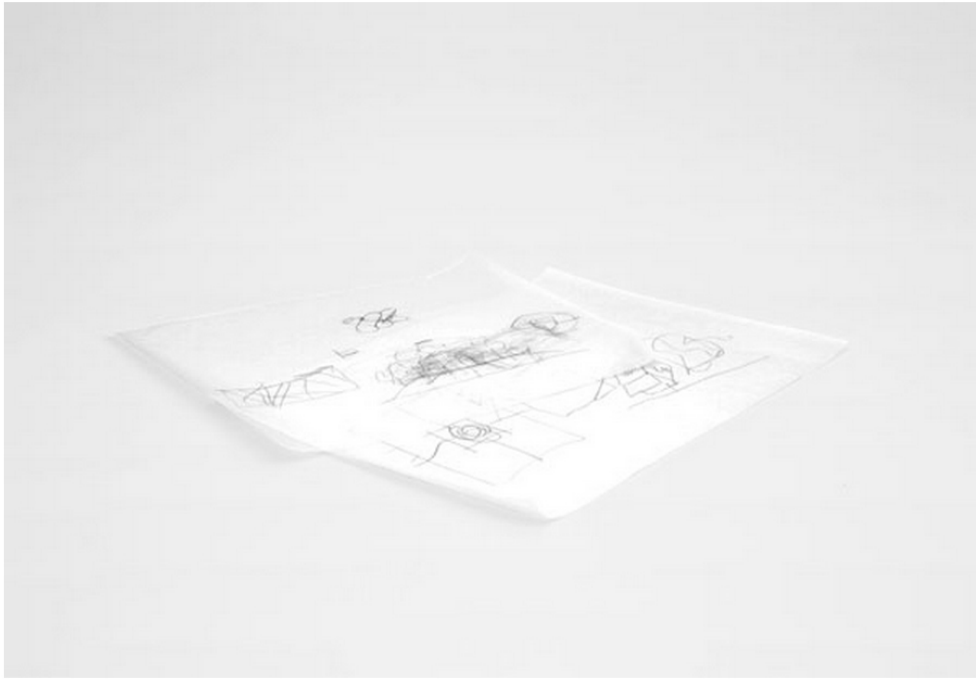
From: France
Resides: France



Construction helmet—Purchased for €50.

■■■■■■■■■■ intends to donate the €50 she received for selling the helmet to aid in the fight against the whaling industry.

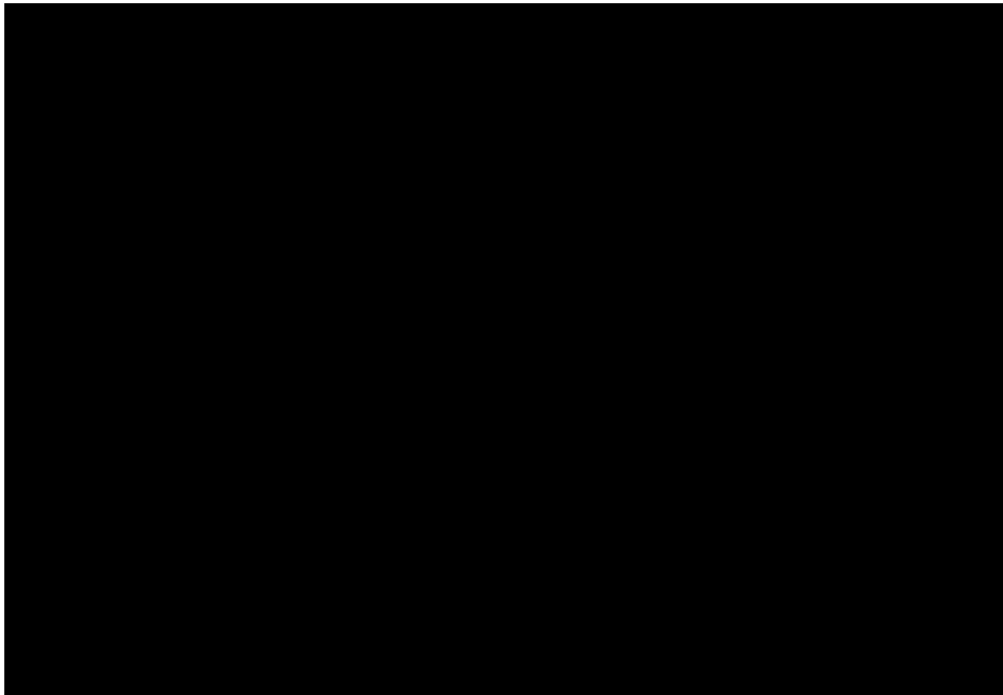
From: Poissy, France
Resides: Montesson, France



2 sketches by Frank Gehry on drafting paper—Donated.

■■■■ found two unsigned sketches by Frank Gehry in a conference room following a lunch meeting between Gehry and Bernard Arnault at the construction site.

From: Nouméa, Nouvelle-Calédonie, France
Resides: Neuilly-sur-Seine, France



10 steel tubes (1.2m x 1.5cm).

■■■■ used the tubes to create a tool to smash potatoes for his chickens.

From: Geel, Belgium
Resides: Meerhout, Belgium

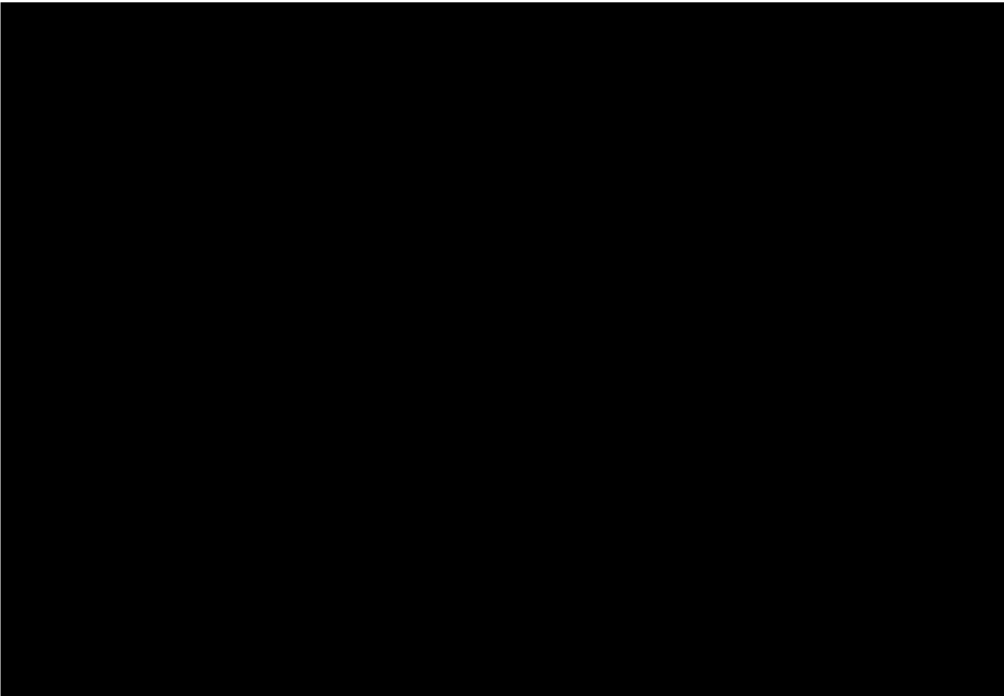


Firewood.

■■■■■■■■■■ took wood home from the construction site every day to use in his fireplace.

From: Antakya, Turkey

Resides: Garges-lès-Gonesse, France



7 plaster boards (1.2m x 80cm); 3 bags of plaster (25kg each); roll of oakum.

■■■■■■■■■■ used the materials for undeclared work repairing a bathroom ceiling. He earned €500 for the job.

From: France

Resides: France

Taryn Simon is a multidisciplinary artist who has worked in photography, text, sculpture and performance. Her practice involves extensive research, guided by an interest in systems of categorization and classification. Simon's works have been the subject of monographic exhibitions at Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2013); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012); Tate Modern, London (2011); Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2011); and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2007). Permanent collections include Metropolitan Museum of Art, Tate Modern, the Guggenheim Museum, Centre Georges Pompidou, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Her work is included in the 56th Venice Biennale (2015). She is a graduate of Brown University and a Guggenheim Fellow. Simon lives and works in New York.

12/12

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