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Taryn Simon's Participatory New Sculpture Makes a Game of Politics

Inspired by Ancient Athenian polling device, Simon's monolithic work operates as an interactive game for visitors.



Taryn Simon with *Kleroterion* (2024) at Storm King Art Center, New York. Photo: Eli Baden-Lasar.

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A trip to New York's [Storm King Art Center](https://stormking.org/) (<https://stormking.org/>), this autumn will include an installation quite unlike the monumental sculptures and sweeping land art that is most closely associated with the venue. American artist [Taryn Simon](https://news.artnet.com/art-world/taryn-simon-park-avenue-armory-647360) (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/taryn-simon-park-avenue-armory-647360>) has created a machine, *Kleroterion* (2024) (<https://collections.stormking.org/Detail/occurrences/210>), now situated a short walk down a path from the central museum building.

The outer shell of the work is made of cast resin, as are the variously colored rectangular tiles, or “chips,” that protrude from its front—five stacked vertically and five horizontally just beneath. Upon closer inspection, a small window at the top of the square monolith reveals a row of four small balls.

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And if the quality of the machine's finish and colors seem familiar, it's because they likely are. The colors of the slotted chips are based on those of billiard balls used in a game of pool, matched exactly, with the main body of the *Kleroterion* drawn from the cue ball. A short, polished pathway leading to the piece is black, like the eight-ball. With all of these elements taken together, and standing against the natural landscape of Storm King, the *Kleroterion* manages to appear both retro and futuristic at the same time.



Installation view of Taryn Simon, *Kleroterion* (detail) (2024) at Storm King Art Center. Photo: Eli Baden-Lasar. Courtesy of the artist, Gagosian, and Almine Rech.

One of the inspirational starting points for the piece was seen by Simon on a trip to Greece, where artifacts of Ancient Athenian kleroterion were on exhibit. These devices were randomizers, employed to select citizens to local or state councils, offices, or other public positions equitably by chance. No complete kleroterion is currently known, though there are advanced theories on how it might have worked from an operative standpoint. Studying fragments of the ancient tool as well as written accounts, Taryn created a version fit for the 21st century.

Despite the slick visual aesthetics of the work, at its heart, *Kleroterion* is participatory, a work meant to be played like a game. Similarly to its Ancient antecedent, visitors in groups of five each select one of the colored chips from the lower line and insert it into any open slot along the upper vertical line. At this point, it is up to the group to decide what to vote on: who is on the hook for doing the driving back down to the city? Where should we go to lunch? How much time should we spend here? Once decided, a hand crank on the side is turned, releasing the four small balls that trail down the machine's interior and randomly knock out four of the five chips, with the remaining chip indicating the winner.

Speaking of the execution of the project and its reception, Storm King Art Center Artistic Director and Chief Curator Nora Lawrence said, "I have long admired Taryn's practice and am thrilled to collaborate with her to realize *Kleroterion* at Storm King. The work is poignant and playful, a reflection on the role of transparency in democracy and the value of open space. It's been exciting to see visitors come together to use the machine's game-like elements, to shape the outcome through their own unique questions, and to experience its power-granting abilities."



Installation view of Taryn Simon, *Kleroterion* (detail) (2024) at Storm King Art Center. Photo: Eli Baden-Lasar. Courtesy of the artist, Gagosian, and Almine Rech.

While its inspiration by an Athenian democratic tool invites broader considerations around voting, elections, and contemporary democratic processes, as Lawrence notes *Kleroterion* simultaneously doesn't resist but rather embraces its associations with games, and more specifically games of chance—a stark and poignant juxtaposition. The chips, here literally, fall where they may, bringing questions around the allocation of power and the extent of power to the fore.

Though not visible, further evoking the effect of a classic coin-op game is what's just beneath the surface. Inside the *Kleroterion*, there are no circuit boards or digital anything. Instead, there is an intricate core of machinery, entirely designed by Simon herself. Full of gears, levers, and an Archimedean screw (a helicoid that transports the four balls within).

"I've wanted to make a game for a long time," said Simon via email. "And there's no bigger game than politics. I grew up in my grandfather's and father's arcades. They both invented, manufactured, and distributed air hockey, pool tables, old school arcade games. Games were like oxygen—always there."

With its artificial colorway and polished finish against views of Storm King's South Fields and now-changing fall foliage, the kleroterion conveys a certain degree of uncanniness, one that tempts and repels at once. An apt physical metaphor for the allures and uncertainties of power, both micro and macro.



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