



# HYPERALLERGIC

GALLERIES

## Nowhere to Go in a Desert of Images

Seph Rodney | July 22, 2016



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Xaviera Simmons, "Red (Number One)" (2016), color photograph (all images courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery unless otherwise noted)

In [Xaviera Simmon's CODED](#) exhibition, now on view at The Kitchen, there are a lot of intersections between the human, sexualized (and colored) body, and wide, visually monotonous land- and seascapes. It's just not clear to me whether sex and sexuality are meant to guide the artist's insertions of the body into these places, or these insertions

are to render the barrenness of these spaces in greater relief, or that Simmons means to show that bodies are always markers for territories we know, or something else. There are maps and there are bodies and there is the overarching buzzword “mapping” that would seem to almost bridge the gap between the two major conceits of the work. But the way the notion of mapping is articulated doesn’t quite get me all the way across.

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Xaviera Simmons, “Landscape (2 Women)” (2007) color photograph



Installation view, Xaviera Simmons, *CODED*, (2016) (All installation photos by Jason Mandella, courtesy of The Kitchen)

In a video monitor near the gallery entrance there are shifting still images of participants simulating sex on the dance floor — images, from what I can tell, mined from the subculture of Jamaican dancehall. There are photo collages of deserts dotted with cacti, and then other images of a woman within the same desert landscapes holding a chart of images — some repeated from the video presented at the gallery's front, some aerial photography and some maps, and African masks. There is a photograph of two half naked women seemingly caught in pull each other's dresses off over the other's head in unison. There is a video on another monitor that alternates views of a male go-go dancer shaking his moneymaker with a swimmer in the middle distance slicing through the sea. There is also a large wall installation of script describing the various uses and potentials of maps. Each individual piece reads to me like it ends with a trail of ellipses. They are not bound to each other except by proximity and, in certain cases, a repetition of imagery, and a sexuality that for all the time I spent with it, remained opaque in its meaning.



Installation view of monitor at the gallery entrance, Xaviera Simmons, *CODED*, (2016)

I've read that Simmons wants to inject sex and sexuality, including queer sexuality in the highly aestheticized and over-starched environments of galleries and museums to reactivate the idea of visual pleasure. This might be a worthy goal, but in a world that features vast stores of sex discussion, performance and exploration in online environments, meetups and other social networks, then the presence of sex in a contemporary art setting has to do more than tantalize. *CODED* almost conveys ideas or an experience that I can't find elsewhere, but mostly I felt I was left in those desert landscapes, alone and thirsty for meaning.

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Second Installation view, Xaviera Simmons, *CODED*, (2016)

*Xaviera Simmon's [CODED exhibition](#) continues at The Kitchen (512 W 19th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) until July 29*

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