

Xaviera Simmons, *Open*



For her new exhibition, Xaviera Simmons splits her practice, roughly, between two physical and intellectual states. Periods of fevered bursts of cultural mining—excavating small truths resident in objects and images found throughout the global landscape—are immediately followed by periods of rest. Specific to the layout at David Castillo’s Wynwood space, Simmon’s *Open* abandons her comfort zone in terms of curatorial choices and orientation. As every work hangs on the wall, the space morphs into a traditional portrait hall. Large-scale photographs of vaguely human torsos are hung at eye level. “Index Six, Composition One” (2013) is a blueprint for these corporeal pseudo-structures: a tangled mess of postcards, rosaries, crushed photographs and jewelry scraps are then funneled into a series of filled-out blue jeans and printed leggings and photographed.

This conglomeration is, literally, the heart of each form. Oddly, the lifelike trunks covered in denim or nylon appear more like the lower extremities of a mannequin versus an organic being. Where one composition is rendered in full color, the next two are cast in black-and-white, then back to color. These circulate almost entirely throughout the space, until the far right wall is reached where four massive, black wooden panels complete the circle. Spreading across each dark surface are streams of hand-painted white letters. Less a form of communication, these untitled works trigger the senses in correspondence with a natural landscape: “lunar dust salt opulent jasmine”, “wood above sea with hints of black leather.” They sound like pompous ads for a luxury perfume but are, in fact, treacherous to the entire codex of commodity culture. Her words become reminders that they are, in and of themselves, expensive, seductive, addictive and dangerous.

Simmons works very much like Bruce Lee. In his films, Lee would employ a form of martial artistry called the burst-pause or pause-burst-pause pattern. A powerful rush of activity would be followed by a period of equally intense stillness. The burst (the fully realized work) begins as a calculated series of drawings, factored into sculptural experiments. Once each photograph is hung neatly beside the next, Simmons recoils and waits. The pause happens in the deep spaces behind those photographs and her hand-painted poetic texts; they inhabit the negative space of the photographs and the whitewashed gallery walls. Her work pulsates with life even in the absence of an image. Ever receptive to the ebbs and flows

of the process, she makes no secret of the fact that there are periods of overwhelming stasis. Recurring motifs of trash behaving like treasure, gems and jewels acting as mere fillers, the body as a vessel and memory as the tangible object: these are the results of cascades of hyper-productivity for Simmons. Immediately following these intense exercises are periods of rest. Every conceivable term relating to the show's title: *Open*. The cavernous gallery space, a continuous visual dialogue, an invitation, these are all emergent.