

# this is tomorrow

Contemporary Art Magazine

David Castillo Gallery, 2234 NW 2nd Ave, Miami, FL 33127, United States, 7 Jan 2014

## **Xaviera Simmons: Open**



**Artist :** Xaviera Simmons

**Title :** Index Six, Composition One

**Date(s) :** 2013

**Material :** Colour photograph

**Website :** <http://www.davidcastillogallery.com/>

**Credit :** Courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery, Miami

**Xaviera Simmons: Open**  
**David Castillo Gallery, Miami**  
**2 December 2013–31 January 2014**  
**Review by Shana Beth Mason**

Systems of visual and performative integration are prodded, inverted and fully exposed to a public audience in Xaviera Simmons' solo exhibition, 'Open', with David Castillo in Miami. Simmons (born, raised and still working in New York) has a strong performative backbone. She embodied the stresses of walking parts of the transatlantic slave trade route (accompanied by a group of Buddhist monks) over the course of two years, and tuned the body-as-instrument at a two-year acting conservatory with the Maggie Flanagan Studio. Her installations, photographs, multimedia works and performances have been featured at venues such as MoMA PS1, the Studio Museum in Harlem and The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston.

For her solo project with Castillo, Simmons incorporates text-based and sculptural objects laid out with near-typological precision. The spacious warehouse in Miami's Wynwood Arts District holds Simmons' photographic documentation of oddly constructed bodies and large, dark panels written over with free, poetic verse in white paint.

In the photographs, what appear to be torsos are in fact amalgamations of various amulets, postcards, papers and other ephemera, while their trunks are familiar forms set into pairs of jeans or leggings. These figures border on a common human paradigm, but they are imaginatively translated into memories, artefacts and evidence materialised through the course of a life lived extraordinarily. Trace elements of journeys abroad, letters sent towards home and trinkets serving as calendars are joined together to *be* the body itself; flesh and blood is pushed into the realm of metaphor as presence is defined by what is taken away versus what simply is.

The heavy-looking black panels are densely scripted memorials of observations in and of nature, with phrases such as 'electric blue silk on amber woods', 'black leather musk and oak charcoal', and 'mink fur and grains on a wild parcel of terrain on a hunt the hidden gold.' To read these strictly as chronicles is futile: when associated, unfettered, with luxury objects, grandiose expeditions or placidly quasi-developed landscapes, however, these works firmly reinforce the mind's selective visual absorption set against the memory's overarching powers of pure sensory imprinting.

At the centre of Simmons' various humanoid sculptures, the arrays of crumpled papers and tangled beads could quickly be tagged as refuse. What is left behind is, eventually, phased out by the desire for smooth, shiny new things. Simmons reaches deeper into the relationships between the objectionable and the desirable with these formations: what is 'new' or 'fresh' as man-made paraphernalia is destined for an extended death, one that stretches out parallel to the timeline of its fabricators and, then, its possessor(s). She seems to apply this dynamic to a basic process of textual memorisation both rote and remote, as well. Words are expensive, expansive and destructive, their effects reach beyond multimedia communication; they manifest themselves into bloody battles and pining pilgrimages, they jump-start lives and can end them just as swiftly. 'Open' is a word with plural implications: to stretch out, to engulf a living being, to leave unfinished or unanswered, or perhaps it is simply a signal to allow movement in any direction.

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