

Art in America

Xaviera Simmons at The Kitchen



Through July 29, 512 West 19th Street

In Xaviera Simmons's exhibition "CODED," the human figure and the landscape are presented as complex territories that both invite and resist mapping. Her photographs and videos pair alluring bodies with desolate expanses of land or sea. A video cuts between shots of the ocean and men dancing in a go-go bar. In a photo diptych, an unseen figure in a desert holds creased and wrinkled images, one of a nude woman, the other of a nude man.

The photograph *Red (Number One)*, 2016, depicts a woman standing in a parched mountainous landscape. She holds a board adorned with pictures of scantily clad dancing bodies, apparently drawn from Simmons's collection of imagery from Jamaican dance halls. The neatly collaged photographs on the board comprise a kind of image atlas, recalling Aby Warburg's efforts to trace cultural shifts over time by comparing depictions of figures in motion. ("CODED" is set to culminate in a forthcoming performance, which could underscore the emphasis on movement and transformation in many of Simmons's images.) In a monumental painting that spans one wall of the gallery, white text on a black background explains

the different codes that cartographers employ to represent various features of the land and sea, thus highlighting the process of mapping as a symbolic act.

—*William S. Smith*

Pictured: Xaviera Simmons: *Red (Number One)*, 2016, color photograph. Courtesy David Castillo, Miami Beach.