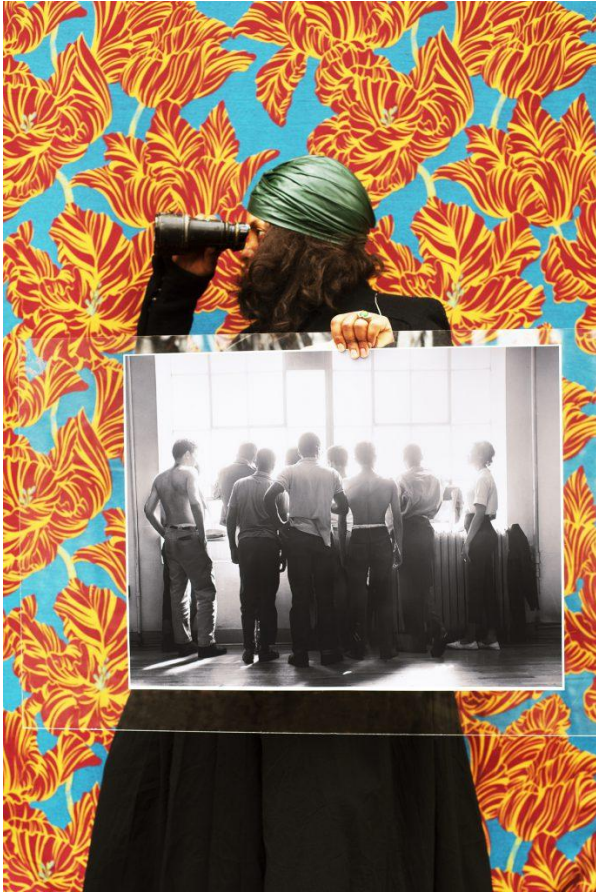


ARTFORUM



Xaviera Simmons, *Sundown (Number Fifty)*, 2022, chromogenic color print, 60 x 40".

PARIS

Xaviera Simmons

KADIST - PARIS

19 bis - 21 rue des Trois Freres

May 6–July 24, 2022

In Xaviera Simmons's debut solo exhibition in France, the New York-based artist has created a fresh inventory of images based on ancestral ones. Each photograph by Simmons contains, and features, a historical photograph selected from the *AFRO American Newspapers'* astonishing 130-year-old archive. This massive cache preserves the legacy of a publication that documented news of and for the Black community in the Baltimore region since the late nineteenth century (it continues today, still run by the same family). Providing a robust counterpoint to exclusionary white media, the *AFRO's* annals encompass millions of vintage photographs. Savannah Wood, who oversees this rich trove in her role as executive director of Afro Charities, hopes to galvanize and widen

its audience, asking: "How do you abandon the limits of the archive and move towards other modes of knowing?"

Simmons responds to this query. Her ongoing "Sundown" series presently spans some 200 color prints, although only fourteen are shown here (as well as two videos) in an exhibition titled "Nectar." Each black-and-white source image, of food distribution centers and political rallies, for example, is set against colorful patterned backdrops and the artist's own silhouette, creating a hybrid between historical artifact and contemporary studio performance. The frontal view of the archival image contrasts with Simmons's evasive gaze: shielded by sunglasses, obstructed by vintage cameras, looking beyond the frame in profile, or hiding behind masks. (Simmons previously trained as an actor and worked as a fashion photographer, skills evident in her *mise-en-scènes*.) She grips each photograph, holding it against her own body, in a visible reckoning with history. Here, racism and white supremacy don't just lurk in insidious, systemic ways that elude representation: Simmons bears evidence of such within the frame, and, through the act of reappropriation, brings the past and the present into intimate contiguity.

— Sarah Moroz