

Dean Sameshima,  
*Press*



GALLERY

## DEAN SAMESHIMA

by JOSH LUSTIG

Perhaps you could read something into the baby-blue facade, or the shock of pink from the building next door. The neon OPEN 24 HOURS sign is turned off, the posters are hard to discern. The building is clearly something, disguised as nothing.

In Dean Sameshima's work, concealment and anonymity play important roles. For more than 30 years, the Californian artist has documented the physical and psychological characteristics of queer spaces. Spaces that often had to hide themselves, to remain in some way blank, for

their own protection. From his grainy black-and-white portraits of the backs of people's heads in Berlin porn theatres that make up the series *being alone* (2022), through to the "glory holes" in public bathrooms photographed for his series *Erdbeermund* (2023), Sameshima's practice is rooted in depicting something hidden.

Here we see Melrose Baths. "It opened in 1996 and closed in 2017," Sameshima says. "Their lease wasn't renewed. They survived Aids... But not greedy landlords." It is one of seven images from the

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FT WEEKEND MAGAZINE

series *Wonderland*, now on show in London. Sparse, unassuming topographic photographs of sex clubs and bath houses in Los Angeles, made between 1995 and 1997, it was Sameshima's first mature body of work. "All the clubs I photographed in Silverlake were forced to close," he says. "Many had years and years of battles with police, neighbours, government officials, etc. Most could not afford to keep up with the barrage of allegations."

The photographs exist now as memorials to physical spaces that offered community and

safety. Their blankness was important. "I hope my use of anonymity becomes a tool of seduction, a lure," Sameshima tells me. For some viewers, the image appears neutral, free of what Sameshima describes as a "demographic stamp". But for the initiated, it means something else, something more. "There was no need for advertisements because we knew, or we knew people who knew, and word of mouth is how we discovered all these spaces." But their closure leaves a sadness. "The advancement of technology is a double-

edged sword," Sameshima says. "Marginalised communities have been able to develop, organise and find each other because of social media... On the other hand, it can hurt businesses. Gay bars and bathhouses served as important spaces for community development, but today, they can't seem to survive financially because fewer people are using those physical spaces." **FT**

*"Wonderland" is at Soft Opening, London, until May 23, softopening.london*

## Review

### Dean Sameshima review - did the neighbours really not know? The extreme LA sex clubs hidden in plain sight



📷 'The door is left mysteriously open' ... Dean Sameshima, Untitled (12 stalls, 1 leather bunk bed, outdoor garden, 1 water fountain, 1 barber's chair, glory-hole platform, Chinese décor, 1995), 1995-97. Photograph: Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

## Soft Opening, London

Deadpan 90s photographs of seemingly ordinary buildings only hint at the queer bacchanalia within - and stand as a record of lost and beloved safe spaces

Charlotte Jansen

Mon 30 Mar 2026 13.55 BST

**A**t first, they look like ordinary buildings, photographed in an ordinary manner. Each is shot formally from across the street, framed by thick black utility cables and poles, barbed wire fences, graffiti and flyposters carving horizontal and vertical planes, with glimpses of cerulean California sky and Arcadian palms beyond. It's the city, but there are no people in sight, and the streets are clean of debris and dirt, except for a few oil stains left behind in a parking lot. The pictures are strangely silent.

None of these buildings have windows - if they do, they are boarded up, shuttered, blacked out. In only one photograph, the door is left mysteriously open - inside, I can just make out a security door, latticed iron bars, and beyond it a neon arrow sign directing the way in. These are photographs to tease your deepest voyeuristic desires. Only the titles direct you to what's going on inside these locations - "12 stalls, 1 leather bunk bed, outdoor garden, 1 water fountain, 1 barber's chair, glory-hole platform, Chinese decor" reads one.

# The Guardian, 2026

American artist Dean Sameshima took these photographs, part of a series titled *Wonderland*, between 1995 and 1997. They depict Silver Lake's queer sex clubs and bathhouses, illegal safe spaces hidden in plain sight, where the community could meet and hook up. Sameshima was in his early 20s at the time he took the pictures, and the Aids pandemic had already devastated Silver Lake's queer community. His images seem shaped by a sharpened sense of precarity and wistfulness, a foreboding that these buildings will be effaced, disappearing like the bodies that once occupied them. The titles tell us that at least three of these clubs closed in 1995. He photographs them to mitigate grief and loss.



📍 Grief and loss ... Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Closed 1995)*, 1995-97. Photograph: Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

In the daylight, these places of illicit nocturnal activities - warehouses, industrial spaces and stores - are pretty unremarkable and perfunctory. A sign for a bakery rises behind one; the club formerly at 1800 Hyperion sits nestled beside residential homes. Did the neighbours know? One is painted sludgy grey, with no sign or markings at all. You could easily walk past them, the same way you pass someone on the street - unless you were there, like Sameshima himself, a devoted observer-participant. These pictures are devotional documents, anchored to a specific time and place, but they also resist the prying eyes of outsiders, the shaming gaze of heteronormative society. These places have also been subjected to surveillance and police raids - a reminder that sometimes visibility is dangerous, that being anonymous can be a strategy for survival.

There are seven sex club pictures on show. They are hung at intervals, with long pauses between them along the white walls - a pacing that is akin to the feeling of getting in and out of a car and driving to the next spot in a sprawling city like [Los Angeles](#) - the prints (all 1990s originals) too stretch horizontally, giving a wide, panning vista, the impression of looking from a car window. They cut a series of blank spaces, parentheses in the urban landscape, a part of the city's architecture and history concealed and sequestered by necessity.

# The Guardian, 2026



📍 Safe or unsafe space? ... Dean Sameshima, Untitled (Griffith Park), 1995-7. Photograph: Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

Hidden around the corner is a suite of photographs documenting famous spots for cruising after dark in two public parks (Griffith Park and Harbor City Recreational Park). They take an unsensational, prosaic approach distinct to Kohei Yoshiyuki's famous up-close flash pictures of sexual encounters in Tokyo's public parks, taken at night in the 1970s. Sameshima is about as sensationalist as a damp teabag. Shot again in the warm daylight sunshine, there are no people in his park pictures. Rather than sylvan sex, it's the quiet, natural solace of these small open spaces, shrouded by shrubbery and the dappled light falling through the trees, that you notice. They might even make for a good picnic spot, and you'd be none the wiser. But they also bristle with tension, between being seen and being safe, being caught out and being concealed, between living publicly and private passion. By taking the sex out of cruising, these sites simply exist, embedded in the everyday. And then on the ground in one picture, among the stones, I can just make out a tiny detail - a discarded blue condom wrapper.

# The Guardian, 2026

Wonderland gives a deeper sense of Sameshima's slow, unshowy approach to documentation and representation of communities, centring the importance of communal spaces as islands of freedom and autonomy. His approach is especially striking compared with Catherine Opie - who started documenting California's queer community at the same time, currently showing at the National Portrait Gallery. Opie's portraits are brash, loud and proud, unapologetic and often unflattering - Sameshima deals in subtleties and shadows, finds power in the unseen, and sad poetry in a condom wrapper. It's a more nuanced, open-ended picture of queerness, presence and belonging, a celebration of the fleeting, radical nature of pleasure. Even when it takes place in the bushes.

[Dean Sameshima: Wonderland, is at Soft Opening, London, until 23 May](#)



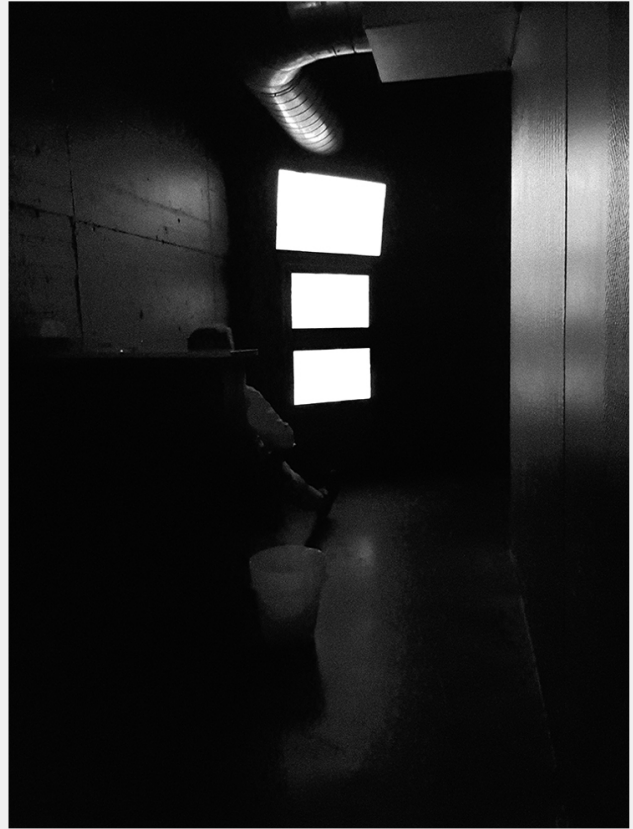
## Dean Sameshima – being alone

February 8, 2025 / by Kris Kozlowski Moore

*“Evans’s subway photographs of 1938-41 are a bundle of contradictions. They describe people as individuals, and in that fundamental sense the pictures are portraits. But each person is presented as a single unit in a potentially infinite series, and the environment could hardly be more impersonal. Unlike most photographic portraits, these exclude any possibility of exchange between sitter and photographer (and thus between sitter and viewer). On the contrary, the intimacy of the pictures depends on their subjects’ utter lack of awareness of the photographer. That intimacy is in itself contradictory. Evans’s subway portraits address the deepest of inner secrets, only to assert that they are incommunicable.”*

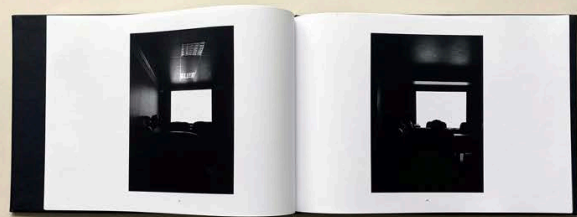
Peter Galassi wrote this in 2000 about Walker Evans’s *Many are Called*, but he could have been writing about Dean Sameshima’s *being alone*, published this year by Soft Opening. Granted, the two are about something very different. Evans, people lost in thought on the subway. Sameshima, people watching porn in Berlin. That aside, the two feel close. First, there is Galassi’s definition of what makes a picture a portrait: a portrait describes someone. Sameshima’s pictures are portraits in this rudimentary way – they are *of* people. Maybe more so because they’re watching porn, and porn is porn because it’s watched *by someone*. So you can say that the person on page *fifteen* watches porn in the same way you might say that someone likes football. A description of sorts. But then for the same reasons Galassi speaks of, Sameshima’s pictures fall short of being portraits. There’s no looking towards (no ‘possibility of exchange’), only the back of a head or the line of a shoulder. Yes, a shoulder that belongs to someone, but a shoulder that could belong to anyone. Portraits, but not.

# C4 Journal, 2025



***being alone* is full of contradictions. Portraits, but not. Telling, but not. Personal, but not. Alone, but not.**

Then there are the cinemas. Impersonal the way most cinemas are but personal because of how domestic *these* cinemas are. Like living rooms with the litter of time spent in comfort – ashtrays and empty bottles. And then there is the porn, which takes something personal and flattens it into what Galassi calls a 'potentially infinite series'. It's impersonal in that vapid way, but then I catch myself: is porn impersonal or just not intimate? In hindsight, I think the latter. Which leads to another contradiction: while *being alone* feels less intimate because of porn, it's intimate because, like in *Many are Called*, the people in Sameshima's pictures don't know Sameshima is looking at them looking at porn. Intimacy through unknowing. There is another reason for the book's intimacy, which Evans speaks to when he says that in the subway, "The guard is down and the mask is off, even more than when lone in bedrooms". I think it's the same for cinemas, you just have to be looking from the front. But probably the most obvious contradiction of all is the title that promises solitude while Sameshima is always there with the person in the photograph, as we are here with Sameshima.



# C4 Journal, 2025

Like Evans's subway pictures then, *being alone* is full of contradictions. Portraits, but not. Telling, but not. Personal, but not. Alone, but not. Most people think contradictions are bad. At best, uncertain. At worst, hypocritical. But here they are good. It gives what are simple pictures a richness, makes them layered and slippery in a gently challenging way. They are also, I think, a way for Sameshima to veto the judgement others will jump to, and instead leave the book delicately open.

As an object, there isn't much to say. It's simple, beautiful, modest. A black cover, spacious pages and the occasional elegant French fold. But *being* a book is more than enough if not perfect, because books are often read in the same in-betweenness as the people watching porn. Alone, but not. Just as I finish reading this latest draft sat up in bed, with the neighbour's gospel music pouring through the wall behind my head. Alone, but not.

## The Interview: Dean Sameshima

Amelia Abraham Features 08 October 2024 artreview.com



Dean Sameshima, *Anonymous Desire*, 2024. Photo: Lewis Ronald. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

**“We make these things to communicate with others when we can't with our mouths or our minds”**

The artist Dean Sameshima has spent more than three decades cataloguing queer venues and collecting queer ephemera, almost to the point of compulsion. Where he has felt excluded from spaces and archives as a gay Asian man, he has used his art practice and formal interventions to insert himself into the narrative, albeit as an outsider, as if at once to say ‘I was here’ and ‘I was not here’. Absence, for Sameshima, also contains within it the preemptive fear of what might be lost. Whether cataloguing or collecting, the urge behind his work is conservational.

He began his practice documenting aspects of subculture like the LA punk scene he grew up in. Later works document the porn theatres or public bathrooms he’s visited over the years, such as *Erdbeermund* (2023), in which photos of glory holes become abstracted portals in the context of his frame. The series *being alone* (2022), meanwhile, which Sameshima exhibited in a solo show at London gallery Soft Opening [earlier this year](#), comprises grainy, erotically charged photographs taken in Berlin’s porn theatres, in the city Sameshima now calls home. While his mediums include painting and sculpture, as well as a penchant for screenprinting that stems from his days frequenting punk shows, it’s of little surprise that Sameshima gravitates towards photography as a quickfire and stealthy means through which to lament the transitory and ephemeral minutiae of the present – while preserving it for the future.

# ArtReview, 2024



Photo: Thomas Dozol

**ArtReview** *Your paintings emblazoned with the words ‘Anonymous Faggots’ and ‘Anonymous Homosexual’ really jumped out at this year’s [Venice Biennale](#). Both because it was the first time I had seen that series and because it contained the word ‘faggot’ on a canvas. Maybe that’s just me. Although I saw a lot of people posting photographs online.*

**Dean Sameshima** I had no idea people were going to connect with the work like that, and it was an amazing surprise. People would tag me on social media. I’d thank them and they’d thank me. That’s all I’ve wanted – to connect with people, because socially it’s been difficult for me to connect. For a lot of artists, right? We make these things to communicate with others when we can’t with our mouths or our minds.

**AR** *The play of the word ‘Anonymous’ repeated across this series creates a paradox: an anonymous figure is placed in various scenarios, conjuring the anonymous act of cruising, but there is an irony in the visibility the work itself has received. What have some of the responses to it been?*

**DS** I think people *felt* visible. That was meaningful because I’ve always had issues with representation. As an East Asian person in general but as an East Asian male, we are still subjected to the stereotype of the feminine, the comedy relief, the nerd and therefore nonsexual and undesirable. I always felt invisible while at times also feeling like a target for peoples’ racist aggressions. In art, but also film, pornography and fashion, people like me don’t exist. When queer people make works about community, I rarely see people like myself. For the same reason, I try to make work that doesn’t for the most part put a demographic stamp on my ideas.

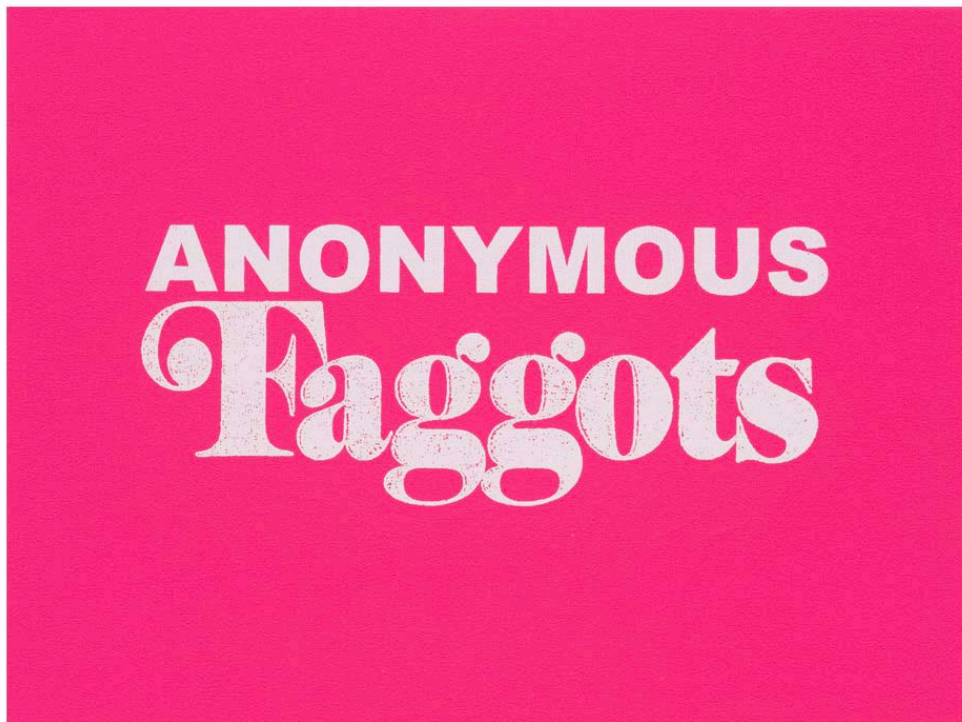


*Anonymous Pictures*, 2024. Photo: Lewis Ronald. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

**AR** I want to ask you about the repetition of ‘anonymous’ across a bigger series. What is your connection with the word?

**DS** It came from a dedication in the first pages of [the 1977 book] *The Sexual Outlaw* by John Rechy. It says: ‘For all the anonymous outlaws... and my mother.’ Reading that really connected with me when I first read it in the 90s because – especially at that time, when AIDS was still new – activists were shaming people in the artworld because they weren’t making the kinds of ‘responsible’ work they thought they should. Being someone who enjoyed public sex was also looked down upon. So I thought Rechy was speaking to *me*. That’s what I want the paintings to do.

There’s also a connection to sobriety. The font of a few of the anonymous series paintings is taken from the ‘Big Book’, the AA blue book. I’m not on the programme anymore but I’m still sober, and that book was always lying around my apartment, which is also my studio. Since the initial inspiration for these paintings was a book, I pursued that by tweaking typography and colour combinations from texts in my archive library, mostly queer texts. I also wanted to choose from my library due to the laws in the US, particularly Florida and other conservative states, that are banning books. I wonder what would have happened to me in the 80s and 90s if I didn’t have books to connect with gay figures, and how much more at a loss I would have been.



*Anonymous Faggots, 2024. Photo: Lewis Ronald. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London*

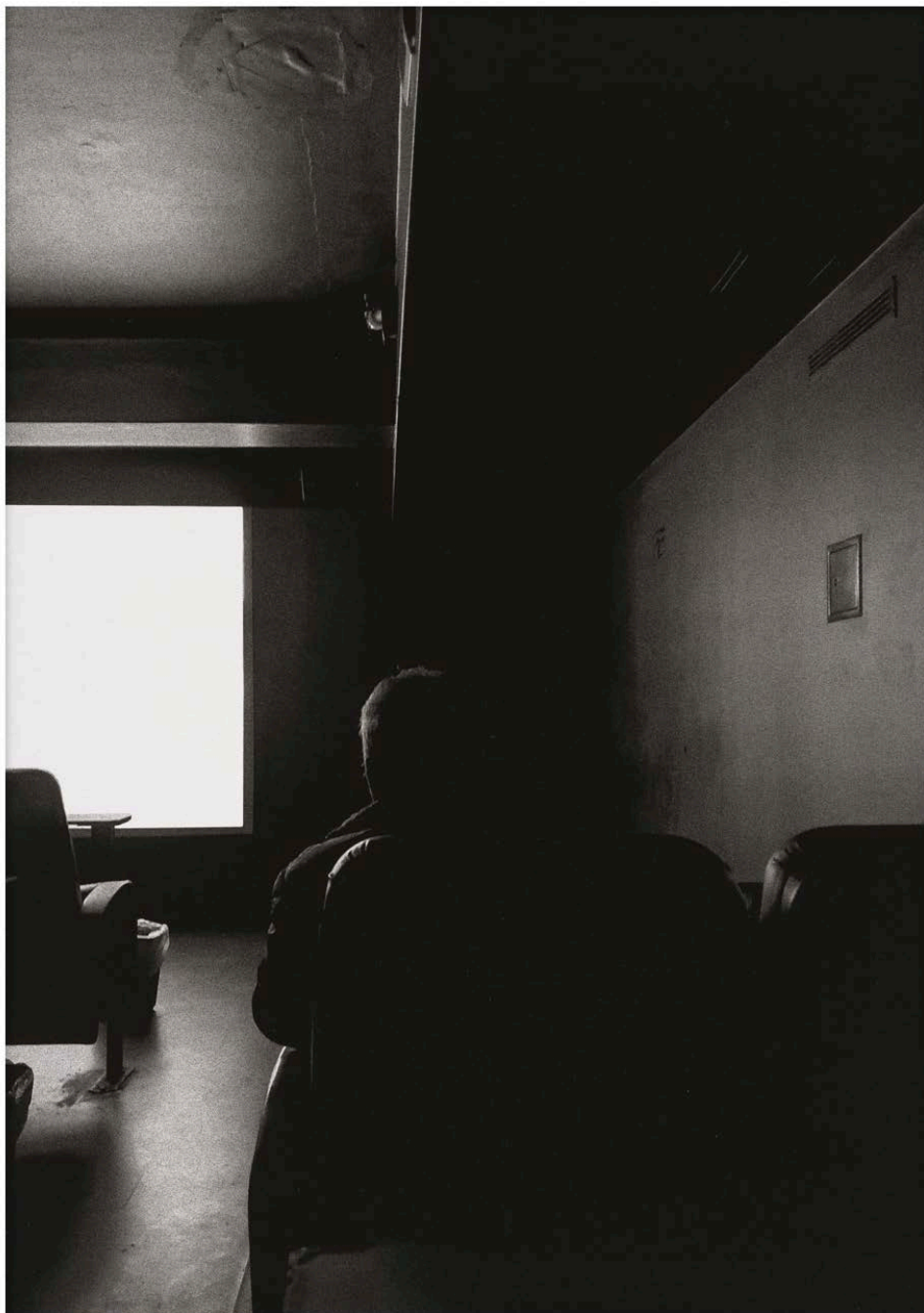
**AR** *Did you notice a shift in your work when you moved from LA to Berlin? Say, the being alone series – they could be taken in LA, or Berlin, or almost anywhere...*

**DS** When I came to Berlin in 2007, I stopped making work. My focus was on getting drunk and high as soon as I woke up every morning until I passed out. Then when I got sober, I couldn't make work because the wine, cocaine and pills had helped me to feel less self-conscious. So I had to learn how to do it again. In 2020, during the pandemic, something clicked. One of the early series I made was of these boxes of things people left out on the streets in the summertime to give away [*Zu Verschenken, 2020–ongoing*]. It was my portrait of Berlin. Then I started making portraits of trash cans in the porn theatres. Again, pointing my camera down.

I clean apartments for a living, and was inspired while cleaning clients' homes and emptying their trash. Actually, part of the reason I had so much time in 2020 was because I lost a lot of those cleaning jobs and was forced to be at home. I started to look at all the photos on my phone, hundreds and hundreds of them. I call them 'notes'. I noticed these photos of people from porn theatres. That's when *being alone* came about. The images of the backs of heads felt more interesting than those from the side. I wanted everything to remain anonymous.

**AR** *What do you shoot on?*

# ArtReview, 2024



*being alone (No. 3)*, 2022, archival inkjet print, 59.5 × 42 cm. Photo: Lewis Ronald. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

**AR** *You remove what's on the porn theatre screen. Why?*

**DS** A lot of us have experienced going to the movies alone, no matter what it is, identifying with what we're seeing on screen; romance, horror, comedy. We're immersed. I wanted to keep the sex out of it so you could project your own fantasy or story or feeling.

**AR** *It becomes more about your gaze on the audience, which is sexier, or at least more complicated. We've spent a lot of time collectively thinking about the gaze when we watch pornography, but watching people watching it is something else.*

**DS** The spaces I go to are not gay-specific. A lot of the guys don't identify as gay or bi, or are married or have a heterosexual relationship outside of this space. Women go there too. In these spaces most people are aware, if not hyperaware, of their surroundings. Ninety percent of the people go there to cruise and have sex. Even when people are watching the films they are aware of others. I like that tension.

# ArtReview, 2024



*being alone (No. 9)*, 2022, archival inkjet print, 59.5 × 42 cm. Photo: Lewis Ronald. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

**AR** *You could watch online at home; you could go on Grindr. Right? But I wanted to pick up on your impulse to catalogue these things almost obsessively – like the street boxes in Zu Verschenken. Have you always been like that?*

**DS** Since I was a little kid. Stamps. Baseball cards. Coins. Then it became comicbooks and Japanese toys. I’ve always been a collector of things. In the 80s I collected punk flyers and records. When I took my camera to shows – smaller goth and punk shows – I documented as much as possible. Or in the sex clubs if they had matchboxes, I’d always be taking something like that to hold onto. It was just *in case* this disappears or goes away.

**AR** *Your series of photographs In Between Days Without You, of beds in gay bathhouses, feels similar.*

**DS** That series started in 1997. I was fooling around with a guy one night at a bathhouse in California. After he left, I thought, ‘this guy looks so familiar’. I realised he was in my high school. I wanted to remember so I took a photo of the



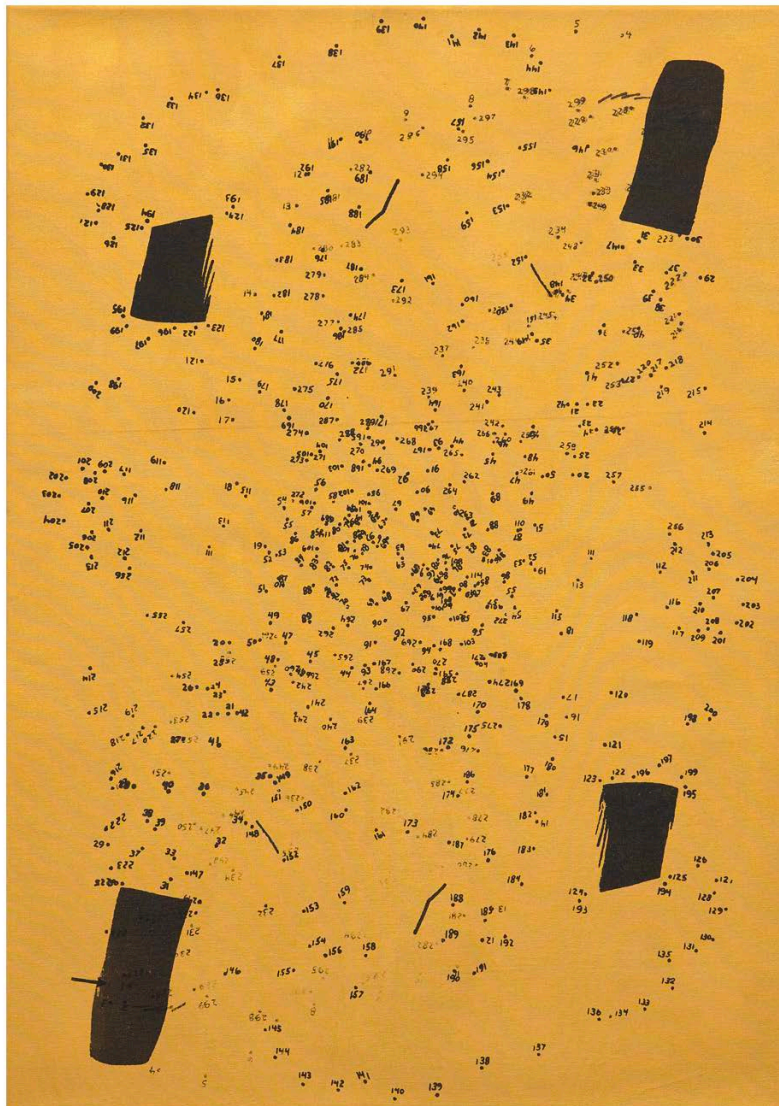
# ArtReview, 2024

**AR** I was reading an exhibition text for a show you did with Peres Projects and McNamara Art Projects in 2017. It read: 'A nostalgia for a prelapsarian decadence for sexual adventure'. Do you feel that applies?

**DS** It is happening now – the photos in *being alone* were taken over the last few years. But my work is often dismissed and placed in this category of gay sex or cruising. I'm trying to let it breathe bigger breaths, and hopefully not make it just about that. I am inspired by spaces of desire, whether it be a magazine, a book page, a porn theatre, the streets. At this point in time I want my work to be about technology, architecture, community.

**AR** In Jeremy Atherton Lin's book *Gay Bar* [2021], he laments how things are becoming sanitised. This is specific to gay spaces, and the fact we often now call them 'queer spaces' as part of a push for inclusivity. But is also about claims on public space and policing, while the book banning you mentioned above speaks to an antisex sentiment.

**DS** What I love about these porn theatres not being gay-specific is their sense of community. I have been denied entrance to gay clubs, bars and sex clubs and bathhouses in the past. I have often had to deal with aggression by white gay men, both verbal and physical. The gay 'community' has had a long history of racism dominated by white men and white supremacist ideals of beauty. Society in general has this problem. It may be better now in gay spaces. I don't know; I haven't been to a gay bar or club in ten years.



*S&MTHREWAY*, 2011. Photo: Tom Carter. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

# ArtReview, 2024

**AR** *Something about your inclination toward screenprinting does feel nostalgic for a time gone by...*

**DS** Yes. This series of paintings, *Figures* – some from 2011 and others from this year – are numbered. They stem from my *Connected Dots* series I did in 2006. Now I've started including photographs in my silkscreens. They have photos I've taken from the 80s to now, spaces in LA and Berlin; there's text and my notes. These are inspired by 80s punk flyers – getting a lot of information into a certain amount of space – and Vivienne Westwood shirts, and cut and paste.

It's an important part of my history, a time when I was discovering music and a community of people in that music, but also coming out to myself. Confusing but also very hot. Punk shows were the hottest thing, a gay boy's dream. A bunch of shirtless dudes sweating in the mosh pits. Guys beating each other up, hitting each other, this aggression, this homoerotic energy.

**AR** *It's an experience from your youth that speaks to the being alone series: there's a spectatorship and a distance.*

**DS** A fear of joining but enjoying what I'm seeing. An observational position.

*Amelia Abraham is a writer living in London and the author of Queer Intentions: A (Personal) Journey Through LGBTQ+ Culture (2019)*

**Amelia Abraham** Features 08 October 2024 [artreview.com](https://artreview.com)



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# THE TOE RAG

Summer Issue

ISSUE 03

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

JUNE-SEPT 2024

being alone and horny:  
Will Ferreira Dyke on  
*Dean Sameshima*

*Louis Blue Newby & Laila Majid*  
inner heat

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CAMEL TOE with  
Monique Fei



*Bertie Brandes & Ben Ditto*  
talk indie publishing

*Robert Wilson*  
Mary Said  
What She Said

24 hours with  
*Miles Greenberg & Douglas Gordon*

# DREAM WORK

Ella Slater on *speculative cartographies* \* *The dream of a Vietnamese* by Georgina Quach  
*An Introduction to Dreaming* by Sebastián Sánchez-Schilling \* Alfred Yatlong Yeung's *Delirious London*  
*Libraries as Dream Work* with Oisín Roberts & Lu Rose Cunningham  
*Which BBC Proms?* by Vee Matsumari \* *Paris Syndrome*, a play by Nour Ben Saïd  
*Rally Festival special* \* *summer knitting pattern* by Ilana Blumberg  
*Horoscopes* by Isabella Greenwood \* *cartoons* by Athen Kardashian  
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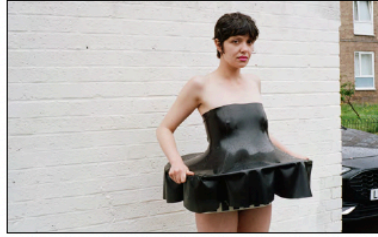
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*Cartoon*

Athen Kardashian is a visual artist and doodler.

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Camel Toe with Monique Fei, photographed by Isabel MacCarthy, styled by Jip Boxstart.

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IMAGE 04  
Photography by Isabel MacCarthy

IMAGE 05  
Théâtre de la Ville-Paris, *Mary Said What She Said*, credit Lucie Janoch, Barbican Theatre 10-12th May 2024.



SHOWS AND EXHIBITIONS

*Interview: Robert Wilson on Mary Said What She Said*

Robert Wilson is an American experimental theatre stage director, and founder of The Watermill Centre, a laboratory of inspiration and performance. Bart Price is a LARP (live action role-play) designer and experimental filmmaker based in London.

*Review: Coumba Samba 'Capital' at Cell Project Space*

Rosa Sittig-Bell is an arts writer based in London.

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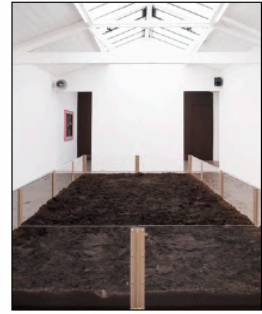


IMAGE 06  
Exhibition view, *Coumba Samba Capital*, 2024, Cell Project Space. Images courtesy Cell Project Space. Photography: Jonas Balsevicius.

IMAGE 07  
Dean Sameshima, *being alone*, 26 April-8 June, 2024. Installation view at Soft Opening, London. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography Lewis Ronald.

*Review: Jerwood Survey & Material Girls and their Muses, group show at VITRINE*

Aram Masharqa is a Palestinian writer based in South London.

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*Review: With Urgency at Ilenia*

Adam Stamp is an artist who lives and works between Los Angeles, London and Rome.

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*Review: Dean Sameshima, being alone at Soft Opening*

Will Ferreira Dyke is an art historian and communications assistant at Whitechapel Gallery.

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IMAGE 08  
Daria Blum, *Guendalina Cerruti and Mary Stephenson, With Urgency*, 2024. Installation view at Ilenia, London. Image courtesy the artists and Ilenia.



You can tell me to my face

BACK PAGES

IMAGE 09  
MV Brown, *All Saints, 2022* (film still). Originally commissioned for *Jerwood Survey III* (2024-25) led by Southwark Park Galleries and supported by Jerwood Arts. Courtesy and © the artist.

*Horoscopes*

Isabella Greenwood is a London-based priestess, sorceress, spellcaster, healer and folklorist.

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*Sports Column*

As a teenager, Max Peston showed tremendous potential on the basketball court. He became a writer in his twenties (deciding not to play in the NBA). Bea Ysolda is a mixed media London based illustrator/ animator.

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*Knitting Pattern*

Ilana Blumberg is a knitwear designer based in London.

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*Puzzles & Games*

Surrealist games by Irina Costin and a cryptic crossword by Jay Temperance.

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*Agony Aunt*

Phyllis Stein is the quirky and unpredictable doyenne of the advice column world.

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## Reviews

### *being alone and horny with Dean Sameshima*

by  
Will Ferreira Dyke

'Do you understand? As Auden says, we want not only to be loved, but to be loved alone,' declared Sutherland, the generously flamboyant and gorgeously warm protagonist of Andrew Holleran's 1978 novel *Dancer from the Dance*.



rofessed with nonchalance and flippant grandeur, this quote always captures my attention. Underscored in HB, it is etched into my subconscious. Visiting Dean Sameshima's solo exhibition *being alone* at Soft Opening, I was reminded of that annotated page. Sameshima's twenty-five black and white photographs depict a series of anonymous visitors to Berlin's porn cinemas. Ten images from this series are also currently exhibited at the Venice Biennale, alongside the work of artist Miguel Angel Rojas. Whilst Holleran's character espouses this opening statement eyeing up a suitor on Fire Island, a popular cruising spot off the coast of New York City, the figures in Sameshima's photographs cruise German cinemas. Littered with boxes of tissues, transfixed male figures, and the smell of sex which lingers through inky pigments, these images gesture towards a queer community, hiding within plain sight, in a public space that paradoxically unveils private desires.

Cruising is the act of seeking anonymous, casual sex with strangers, often in outdoor or public locations. The social and spatial politics of cruising have been explored by scholars including Jonathan Weinberg and Alex Espinoza, and depicted by artists including Paul Cadmus, Leonard Fink, Peter Hujar and De LaGrace Volcano. In 1970, American sociologist Laud Humphreys argued in *Tearoom Trade*, his ethnographic study of cruising, that participants developed a stronger sentimental attachment to the buildings *in which they met* rather than to the persons *with whom they met*. Although Humphrey's account has been criticised since its publication, this observation still rings true for Sameshima's cinematic environments,

which do not merely house these encounters but are active participants.

Obscuring the cinematic screens with glaring white light, Sameshima shifts his attention towards the architectural space of the cinema itself. 'I didn't want the main focus to be sex, but our relationships to the 'silver screen'. I always loved going to the movies alone', stated Sameshima, in our interview over email. He continued: 'I made sure there was no evidence of porn on the screens because I wanted to open up the work to more people'. The cinemas themselves, as an *embodied* location, are imbued with a bodily corporeality. Complete with phallic water bottles and Freudian cigarette butts, the space of the cinema itself seems to participate in this public pleasure. The reflective shine of the mopped tiled floors mimics the sweatiness of high cardio coitus; the musculature of the armrests and the *bodily* curves of the seats suggest they too are there to fuck and get fucked. Beyond subject matter, the materiality of the images adds to the anthropomorphised cinema. The granularity of the prints and their inky softness lay a supple, warm epidermis over the image, evoking the texture of follicles on skin. This tactility is suggestive of sensorial arousal: the cinemas are alive, and they are horny. Many of these images depict a lone individual, and while some may interact with other men, they all are cruising the cinema itself.

There is a tentative yet subtly voyeuristic quality to Sameshima's lens. His images capture the statue-like backs of cinema-goers, some with their feet up and others with their hands behind their head. Their slackened poses obscure all personal details. Hiding the explicit pleasures on the cinema screen, Sameshima's photographs allude to the communal promiscuities that exist beyond the confines of the frame. Those who engage with sexual happenings in this room probably know no more about each other than the viewer of the photograph: we know no



names, no numbers, no family history, just physical dimensions and sexual preferences.

'I always wanted to make sure I had evidence of something existing in case it disappears', revealed Sameshima. The artist began *being alone* in 2015 and shot in five theatres, two of which are now closed. Sameshima notes that porn theatres are 'an old-fashioned site of cruising' and believes that younger people are now 'not so interested' in these spaces, as they have 'access and successes' within cruising spaces elsewhere, both 'physical and virtual'. The artist emphasised that the work is about preserving lost and vanishing archives as much as it is about 'the older people who will also soon disappear'. These themes of hauntology, loss and melancholia echo throughout the series.

In mourning the loss of such cruising spaces, Sameshima becomes part of a lineage of artists and scholars evoking ghosts, memory and longing to position public sex in queer histories and archives since the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Jacques Derrida's theory of hauntology uses the ghost as a

conceptual tool to address the effects of how lost futures haunt the present.

This idea has been expanded further by scholars such as Jose Esteban Muñoz, who writes on depathologising melancholy within the context of HIV/AIDS, and Douglas Crimp, who comparatively theorises the urgency, antagonism and politicisation of mourning for queer people. Sameshima's images, though not overtly antagonistic nor militant, carry this queer resistive quality through their silence. The haunting cinemas, soundless and quiet, sing loud in their testimony of queer presence. Sameshima's images capture silence, a silence which shouts back.

Despite their title, the works in *being alone* present a falsified solitude, for the subject is never alone. Visitors to the show occupy a dual role, as both observers and participants in the act of voyeurism. The viewer watches someone else watch pornographic films, and in turn, realises that they are also an object of scopophilic desire. This realisation introduces a layer of longing, not just for the contents of the films, which are blurred and obscured, but for the recognition of one's own desires and existence.

The initial rhetoric posed in Holleran's text references W.H Auden's poem 'September 1, 1939'. Like these photographs, the poem is rife with contradictions. Writing that we crave 'to be loved alone', Auden later professes that 'no one exists alone [... we] must love one another or die', serving as a reminder that 'being' is a relational act. Much like Auden, Sameshima's series suggests 'being alone' to be a pretence. The very production of these images — an intimate negotiation between photographer, subject and viewer — negates this suggestion. It is in this contradiction that the beauty of the series lies. Whilst picturing the backs of individual men, caught in a singular moment, Sameshima's photographs testify to the existence of queer lives, desires and kinships existing beyond the length of any film, far longer than any hurried hook up. ➔

IMAGE 25-26  
Dean Sameshima, *being alone* (No. 4), 2022. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography by Lewis Ronald.

Dean Sameshima, *being alone* (No. 23), 2022. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography by Lewis Ronald.



IMAGE 27  
Dean Sameshima, *being alone*, 2024. Installation view at Soft Opening, London. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography by Lewis Ronald.

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Venice Biennale 2024

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Interview

## Police busts, porn cinemas and glory holes: the wild art of sexual outlaw Dean Sameshima

30/05/2024, 15:41

Police busts, porn cinemas and glory holes: the wild art of sexual outlaw Dean Sameshima | Venice Biennale 2024 | The Guardian

Mon 29 Apr 2024 11.10 BST



**V**eer to your left in the [main exhibition of the Venice Biennale](#) and you'll come across a painting bearing the words: "Anonymous Homosexual." Round the corner, there's a row of black-and-white pictures showing transfixed male viewers, seen from the back, watching a screen. Ah, the magic of cinema, you might think - except for all the boxes of tissues, indicating that this is a particular kind of cinema.

This is part of *Being Alone*, a body of work by the artist [Dean Sameshima](#), an expanded version of which is also on show at [Soft Opening in London](#). Sitting in an outdoor cafe in the Giardini, the Biennale's main space, Sameshima says he visited five gay porn cinemas in Berlin, his adopted home, over a number of years, and decided to commemorate a culture that is disappearing due to hook-up apps. His pictures are enigmatic, melancholy and yet somehow seductive, the loitering silhouettes and shining screen expressing loneliness, escapism and perhaps a kind of defiance against the expectations of society.

**■ I became a morning drinker. I would do tequila shots to wake myself up**

Though some people may regard going to porn cinemas as tragic and sleazy, Sameshima doesn't see it that way. Since his teens in California, he's cruised bookshops, cinemas and public toilets, finding them much more congenial than the mainstream gay world. On Grindr, he says, no one is interested in meeting a 53-year-old man of Asian heritage. "If you ask other queer Asians, especially of my generation, the gay community has been horrible," he says. "Horrible to our self-esteem, to everything."

# The Guardian, 2024



Loitering silhouettes ... a photograph from the series Being Alone. Photograph: Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

Sameshima grew up in southern California. He didn't enjoy school, but his imagination was fired by music (on Instagram, he often posts old tickets he has kept from gigs he loved, on the anniversary of the date he saw them). His first concert was David Bowie, the Go-Gos and Madness in 1983, but his main passion was for British punk bands like Crass and GBH, though he dabbled in goth too. Music and clothes ("I had pointy skull boots") allowed Sameshima to express his feelings of being different without drawing attention to his sexuality. He was particularly inhibited because, he says, "Aids had started to happen. As soon as you came home from school, it was the first thing on every news channel."

Once Sameshima was 17, he got a car and was able to explore farther afield. In his late teens, inspired by the magazine [Details](#), he became fascinated by high fashion. "I was like, 'Margiela, what is this?' That was like punk and goth to me." This led him into the worlds of art and photography. Another route was via a famous LA bookstore. "Someone told me, 'If you want to meet people like yourself, go to Circus of Books.' I thought, 'Maybe there are meetings for people like me?' But it turned out to be cruising."

As a [recent Netflix documentary](#) confirmed, the gay clientele of Circus of Books used to make eye contact while perusing the shelves, then go to a nearby car park known as Vaseline Alley. Nonetheless, Sameshima spent enough time actually reading to realise that there were entire books of homoerotic photography by people like [Herb Ritts](#), [Bruce Weber](#), and his favourite [Joel-Peter Witkin](#). He realised there could be a space for him to express himself through his camera - he was already taking photographs at the gigs he was attending. Another inspiration was [The Sexual Outlaw](#), a gay rights polemic by the writer John Rechy written in 1977. "On the first page it says, 'For all the anonymous outlaws.' And I remember thinking, 'He's talking to me.'"

Sameshima got a job in the bookshop at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in LA, the ideal place for him to continue delving into his artistic and literary obsessions. In 1992 he was busted by the LAPD while cruising for sex in a public toilet, six years before the same fate befell George Michael. In 2016, Sameshima

# The Guardian, 2024

made enormous paintings out of his police documents and exhibited them in a gallery. When his parents came to the opening, it was the first time they'd realised he'd been arrested. He had been so scared of their reaction that he dealt with the whole thing alone.



Dean Sameshima's glory hole tattoo. Photograph: Dean Sameshima

Given the way gay cruisers were often publicly shamed, this may have been a wise strategy. “In 2012, on Tumblr,” Sameshima says, “there was an article about a bust in Manhattan Beach [in California] at one of the popular bathrooms, and they posted the full names and portraits of all the men. I just thought, ‘If that had happened to me ...’ This is why people kill themselves, because they can’t be out. And so that’s what triggered me to want to do these monumental paintings of my record of getting busted, to pay homage to those people, and to anyone else who had to go through that, and to hold it with pride.”

In fact, Sameshima is now so at ease with his cruising self that he has a tattoo of a glory hole - openings punched in the walls of toilet cubicles, allowing the men on either side to have sex with each other. (He also did a series of photographs of them, called *Erdbeermund*.) The artist is more ambivalent about another tattoo that reads “How Soon is Now” in homage to the Smiths, given *Morrissey’s recent politics*. “Johnny Marr is still OK,” he says. “And he co-wrote How Soon Is Now. Well, that’s how I justify it.”

# The Guardian, 2024

Sameshima did his artistic training at [CalArts](#), and by the turn of the century was being noticed for work that drew on his immersion in fashion and gay subculture; re-photographed images from Prada ads “like landscapes”, or a series in which he went to Britpop clubs in LA and photographed handsome young men going wild on the dancefloor. (Sameshima was a huge Britpop fan: “Jarvis Cocker was my ideal man. I was obsessed!”) He was represented by the hip gallery [Peres Projects](#), but his work never came anywhere near the mainstream. “I’ve always felt overlooked,” he says. “Even by the power gays in the art world.”

Around 2007, Sameshima seemed to stop working. Why? “Drugs and alcohol,” he says without hesitation. “I’ve always had a problem with addiction, but in 2006 I got blackout drunk, and got a DUI charge” - driving under the influence. Given his dangerous propensity to get behind the wheel while severely intoxicated, his gallerist Javier Peres persuaded him to move to Berlin, where a car was far less essential. Once there, however, his self-destructive tendencies ramped up, and he spent much of the time drinking alone in his flat. “I became a morning drinker,” Sameshima says. “I would do tequila shots to wake myself up.”

He finally got sober in 2010, and this week celebrated 14 years of being alcohol and drug-free. Returning to art was “like learning how to walk again”, as drinking “really eased my mind ... it shut up the self-criticalness”. Before Sameshima felt ready to make work again, he started a successful Tumblr account on which he posted “stuff from my archive, things I’ve held on to - flyers, sex club membership cards”.



Another Being Alone shot. Photograph: Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

# The Guardian, 2024

study of gay sex in public toilets by the sociologist (and priest) Laud Humphreys. Sameshima would sell the T-shirts on Etsy, and they gathered a cult following, until producing and posting them became too much hassle: “It was detracting from my studio practice.”

Nevertheless, the work *Anonymous Faggots*, Sameshima’s showstopping painting in the Venice Arsenale, reveals a through-line between his various projects: he used to produce a T-shirt printed with the word *Faggots*, and the distinctive typeface on both T-shirt and artwork is taken from the cover of a 1978 book by [Larry Kramer](#), a satire on New York’s hedonistic gay in-crowd. (The “Anonymous”, meanwhile, comes from *Alcoholics Anonymous*.)

The people in Sameshima’s porn cinema pictures are not the in-crowd, and neither is the man photographing them. “I don’t mind being alone,” he says. “I love doing stuff alone. I’m a loner, owning it.” Yet the pictures also have a certain sense of camaraderie, not least because in Venice they are hung alongside other photographs taken in gay porn cinemas in the 70s, by the Colombian artist [Miguel Ángel Rojas](#), speaking to a kind of tradition and commonality, across time and in different countries, even in the most furtive and marginal places.

Both artists commemorate those who feel at home in the shadowy, sticky spaces of a sex cinema, perhaps the only places they can be themselves. “It’s about celebrating and acknowledging that we still exist,” Sameshima says. “People who don’t identify with a gay community, people who don’t even identify as queer. In-between people.”

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[Dean Sameshima: Being Alone is at Soft Opening, London, until 8 June](#)

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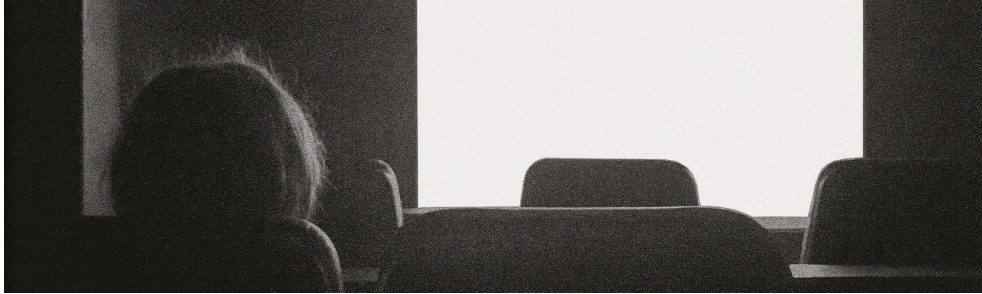
# Frieze, 2024

## Dean Sameshima Shoots in the Dark

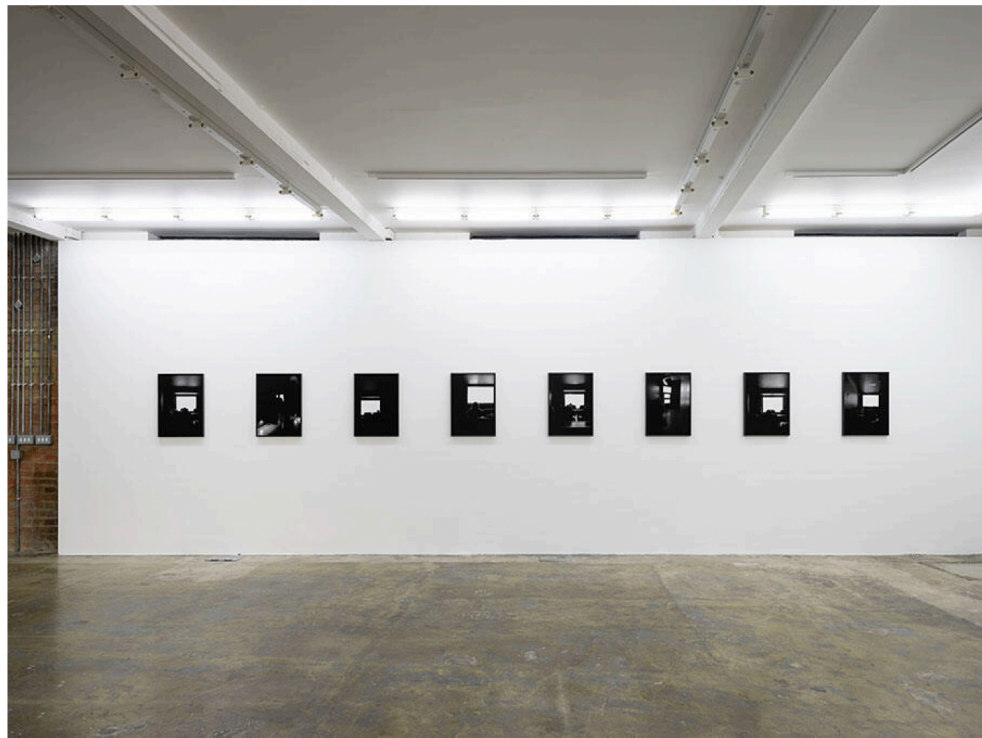
A series of monochrome photos at Soft Opening, London, allows viewers to peek into Berlin porn cinemas, offering only slight hints of the people inside



BY EMILY STEER IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 24 MAY 24



What does it mean to be alone? In Dean Sameshima's recent body of work – 25 monochrome photographs of queer men in Berlin porn theatres with sumptuous black negative spaces and blinding white cinema screens – 'alone' is a complicated term. Each intimately scaled work in the series 'being alone' (2022) invites the viewer to step closer and peer into the rooms photographed, offering only small clues about the spaces and people they are observing.



Dean Sameshima, 'being alone', 2024, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Soft Opening, London; photograph: Lewis Ronald

Velvety matte black occupies large swathes of these pictures. Sometimes, light serves as an interior detail, illuminating drab rooms with fissured tiles, messy plaster repairs, ventilation pipes snaking across the ceiling and rows of seats bolted to the floor. Sameshima redirects the viewer's attention from the on-screen pornography – the most urgently visible thing as far as his subjects are concerned – to silhouettes of the individuals that populate these tawdry spaces.

Of the people inside the cinemas, we see little more than the backs of their heads. Sameshima's figures are nearly always solo, surrounded by empty seats. Occasionally, the bright lights of the cinema screen shine through the thinning hairs on the top of someone's head (*No. 11*) or illuminate the edges of metal-rimmed glasses (*No.5*). These men make themselves at home, with their feet slung casually over the chair in front, or a can of beer propped on the plastic armrest next to them, showing these spaces as places of comfort as well as pleasure. While the personal details of the images are limited, the protagonists have visible physical quirks, such as how a man might lift his hands to his face or lean against a wall.

# Frieze, 2024



Dean Sameshima, 'being alone', 2024, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Soft Opening, London; photograph: Lewis Ronald

We, too, take on the role of voyeur as we observe these figures from behind, as though we have become another cinemagoer. The experience makes for uneasy viewing. Are we infringing on these people's privacy, or would they feel excited to know we're there? Perhaps our presence creates a sense of safety for them, reassuring them that they are not truly alone. There might be a chance for physical connection in this public/private erotic space, as viewer and subject both gaze upon this blank screen rich with erotic possibility. In *being alone (No. 14)*, a man stands with much of his head and torso covering the display. It takes a while to work out whether he has been photographed from behind or whether he's walking towards the artist. The long shadow he casts, and the potential for him to see someone looking, evoke a moment of excitement and fear.



Dean Sameshima, *being alone (No. 11)*, 2022, archival inkjet print, 60 × 42 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Soft Opening, London; photograph: Lewis Ronald

# Frieze, 2024

Of course, everything the viewer can see in these images is the result of the photographer's own placement within the spaces: it is he who brings these private moments into the public realm. While this is a common aspect of documentary photography, there is a palpable vulnerability to these subjects, given the potential ramifications for them of identification. The exhibition text speaks of the 'anonymous being together' promised by these spaces. The men are witnessed in their most private moments, but Sameshima goes to great lengths to preserve their anonymity. Even the locations depicted become far removed from their real-life appearance, with negative spaces, both black and white, blurring identifiable details. While this provides protection for the cinemagoers, it also offers an open invitation for the viewer to project onto the subjects their own sexual fantasies. As with Sameshima's brilliantly clean cinema screens, our minds fill in the blanks.

*Dean Sameshima's 'being alone' is on view at Soft Opening, London until 8 June*

## An Introductory Guide to the Seductive Queer Art of Dean Sameshima

Art & Photography / AnOther Guide



Dean Sameshima, Secret Historian (no. 1), 2010. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

As his new exhibition opens at Soft Opening in London, we give you a five-point guide to the erotically charged, subculture-obsessed work of American artist Dean Sameshima

April 30, 2024

Text Sam Moore

The art of **Dean Sameshima** defies classification. Working across a variety of forms including photography, collage and found images, the American-born artist has created a body of work that plumbs the depths of subcultures and queer identity, exploring ideas of eroticism, history, and the relationship between art and its viewer.

Ahead of the opening of *being alone*, a solo show of photographs that zero in on a solitary viewer in a Berlin porn theatre, at Soft Opening in London, and an exhibition of his work at the 2024 Venice Biennale, Sameshima's work – and the ways in which it deftly cruises through both historical archives and contemporary technologies – is as gripping and seductive as its ever been.

Below, we give you a five-point guide to the erotically charged work of Dean Sameshima.

# AnOther, 2024

## 1. Sameshima has a thing for erotic locations

At the heart of Sameshima's new solo show, *being alone*, is a Berlin pornographic film theatre. The stark, high contrast of his photographs renders the screen almost blindingly bright, as the onlooker projects their fantasies onto it. It's through images like this that Sameshima explores not only the aesthetics of erotic spaces, but the meanings we give them; *being alone* creates not only a space for fantasy, but one of safety.

In his series *Erdbeermund* (2023), photos of glory holes turn from erotic sites to a kind of hypnotic looking glass, with Sameshima offering a glimpse into fading, secret worlds. Sameshima says that his aim here is to explore "scenes that were often overlooked in everyday life [...] presenting spaces that are highly charged, but without being explicit."



Dean Sameshima, *being alone* (No. 17), 2022. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

## 2. He's an archivist of queer and lost subcultures

Sameshima is, however, explicit in the relationship that his practice has with queer spaces and subcultures, saying "I've always had an impulse to document and save, or archive, out of fear of these things disappearing." This impulse can be felt in a new series of work, titled *Traces* – on display as part of the group exhibition *Scratching at the Moon* at the ICA in LA – which includes photographs of places from the 1990s up until today, capturing how places change with time, creating what Sameshima calls "a tension regarding time and history."

In a series about the queer outlaws of the past, Sameshima's *City Men* (2015) makes a direct reference to experimental/pornographic filmmaker Fred Halsted, who Sameshima says is still a figure existing on the fringes, hoping that work like *City Men* can "make sure those names aren't forgotten."

# AnOther, 2024

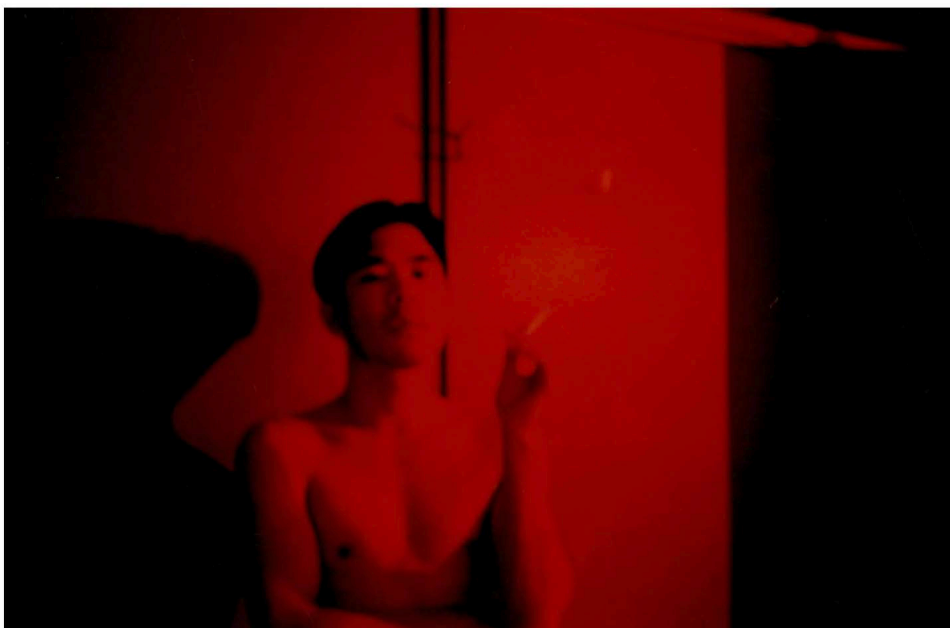


Dean Sameshima, *Traces* (No.7), 1990/2023 Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

### 3. He takes pornography seriously

As his reference to Halsted makes clear, Sameshima is an artist with a deep interest in the form and history of pornography. His collage series *If there's a heaven above (Rooster Fish Bathroom)* from 2001-16, presents wild fragments of male bodies in eroticised, sexually explicit positions and poses. The deeply analogue vibe of these images – like stills ripped from a magazine – echoes Sameshima's statement that his "interest in erotica and desire and porn go hand in hand with the evolution of technology."

The artist makes reference to a series of images from 2000, inspired by the dawn of gay online dating. This series, *Figures of Lust Furtively Encountered in the Nights*, taken from these websites, captures how queer bodies began to exist in cyberspace, even as their relationship to flesh and blood places has changed with time. As Sameshima says, "part of *being alone* is acknowledging the decline of porn theatres around the world, which is a product of current technological advances."



Dean Sameshima, *Traces* (No.4), 1990/2023 Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

# AnOther, 2024

## 4. He's interested in the relationship between image and spectator

The photographs in *being alone* have a tension to them; an uncertainty of what exactly it is we're supposed to be looking at. Is it the anonymous figure, feet up, staring at a vast screen, or is it the screen itself? The blankness of the movie theatre screen invites a viewer to project their own fantasies there, just as much as Sameshima's subject might be doing. The same is true of *Erdbeermund*, in which a glory hole becomes a kind of perverse looking glass, the viewer looking both at and through the image simultaneously.

With a practice that explores eroticism in such depth, this dynamic seems to invite viewers to consider what it is about these spaces we imbue with meaning, and the relationship they might have to our own fantasy lives. As the artist himself says: "I hope all my work is seductive and informative."



Dean Sameshima, Still Life (No. 14), 2023 Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

## 5. His art is always evolving

One of the things that makes Sameshima's work so compelling is his refusal to fall into a single formal box. The photographs of *being alone* are so formally different from his "documentary paintings" in his *647(a)* series, and yet they share a common ground; a desire to understand not just in capturing the things that we remember, but also capturing things we might forget. Sameshima admits to struggling with "artistic monogamy" early in his career, although now he's more than willing to admit that "not every idea can be expressed through photography."

The evolution of Sameshima's work is rooted in the importance of preserving history and knowledge. He's forthright about this, saying that coming of age in the 80s was "an important time and a very scary time for a young gay man." While his work celebrates what couldn't be celebrated during his youth, it also serves to acknowledge what he calls the "fear and repression [that] still exists for many people around the world."

[being alone](#) by Dean Sameshima is on show at Soft Opening in London until 8 June 2024.

### Dean Sameshima's Pornographic Nothing

Mark Rappolt | Reviews | 29 May 2024 | ArtReview



Dean Sameshima, *being alone (No. 5)* (detail), 2022, archival inkjet print, 60 × 42 cm. Photo: Lewis Ronald. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

#### ***being alone* at Soft Opening, London enforces something lewd about the gallery-viewing experience**

I was when I went into the gallery on a sunny Saturday afternoon. And it's hard to imagine seeing Dean Sameshima's *being alone* in anything like a group or a crowd. It would feel rude. In a way, unfaithful to what's on show. The exhibition features 25 inkjet prints featuring individuals (in the main) who are seated (for the most part) in various small, shabby cinemas, with their backs to us, facing luminous, but blank, screens. Some of the spaces are more like domestic rooms; others fit more closely with what you'd imagine a cinema to be. None of the individuals present are identifiable, which makes you look at them all the more closely, in case something slipped. The screen in each image that is overexposed (both in the photographic sense, and in terms of the investment that it is given) is the centre of their attention in any case. As a viewer you can't help but be aware that you're projecting onto a space of projection. Which, judging by the number of tissue boxes in the shots, is what those who are seated are doing too.

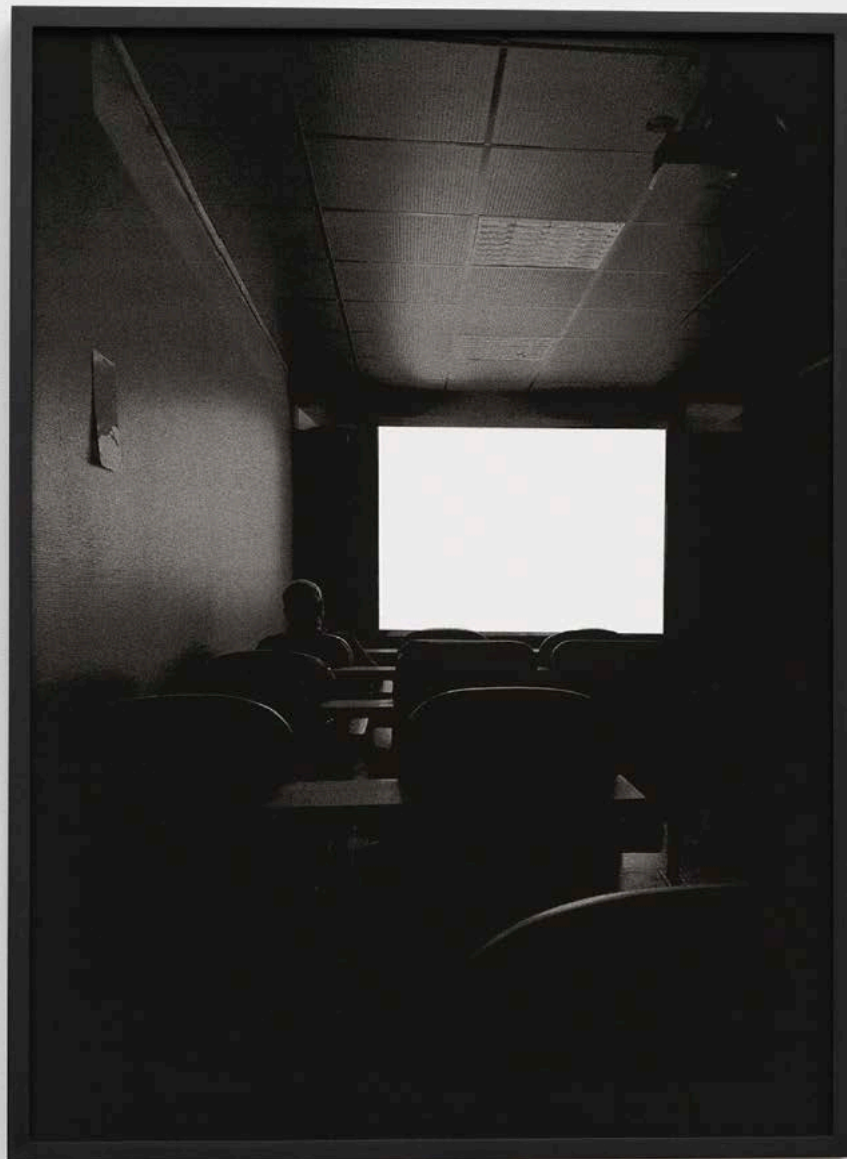
Each of the photographs is titled *being alone* and numbered (1–25), although they are not sequenced in numerical order as they flow, in linear fashion, around the walls of the gallery. As a group, the images look as though they're the product of an obsession or compulsion: each one is generally the same as those neighbouring it, just different in the details. Similarly, as a viewer, you start to obsess a little over these differences (an abandoned drink can, fancier seating, chairs bolted to the floor, someone standing up) that distinguish one photo from the next. It's not long before you think that 'an excess' would be the true collective noun for this show.

# Bomb, 2024

## Dean Sameshima by Matthew Lax

Photographing community through anonymity.

MAY 29, 2024



([https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/\\_hiresolution/being-alone-No-1-Dean-Sameshima1.jpg](https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/being-alone-No-1-Dean-Sameshima1.jpg))

Dean Sameshima, *being alone (No. 1)*, 2022, archival inkjet print, 23.5 x 16.5 inches. Photo by Lewis Ronald. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.

# Bomb, 2024

Dean Sameshima has long documented so-called “outlaw” spaces and the ephemera of subculture. His black-and-white photo series *being alone* (2022) portrays a porous border between temporarily cohabiting individuals. Shot in the darkened interiors of Berlin porn theaters, the shadows of these anonymous, solitary strangers are backlit by overexposed projection screens. The sense of being alone is a diaristic record of chance, and these furtive exposures taken from within the audience accumulate into a seemingly endless night of cruising.

## **Matthew Lax**

When I first encountered *being alone*, I wanted to know all of the details. The more time I spend with it, the less important that information feels. You’re known for a documentarian approach to art-making. Can you speak to the opacity that you bring to an archival practice?

## **Dean Sameshima**

I think there are some similarities between this and one of my first projects, *Wonderland* (1995–97), in which I documented the facades of sex clubs in Los Angeles. With *being alone*, I’ve been focusing on the porn theaters of Berlin, where I’ve lived since 2007. Maybe since 2015, I started taking a lot of photos, or what I call notes, just over and over. I’ve always wanted to do a project where I could document a community without representing ethnicity or gender. I’ve always had problems with queer artists who document their “communities.” I never see people that look like me in these communities. I’ve had a problem with representation, even before I was in contemporary art. When I came out in the 1980s, there were no Asians in popular culture. And if there were, it was a very specific, negative representation.

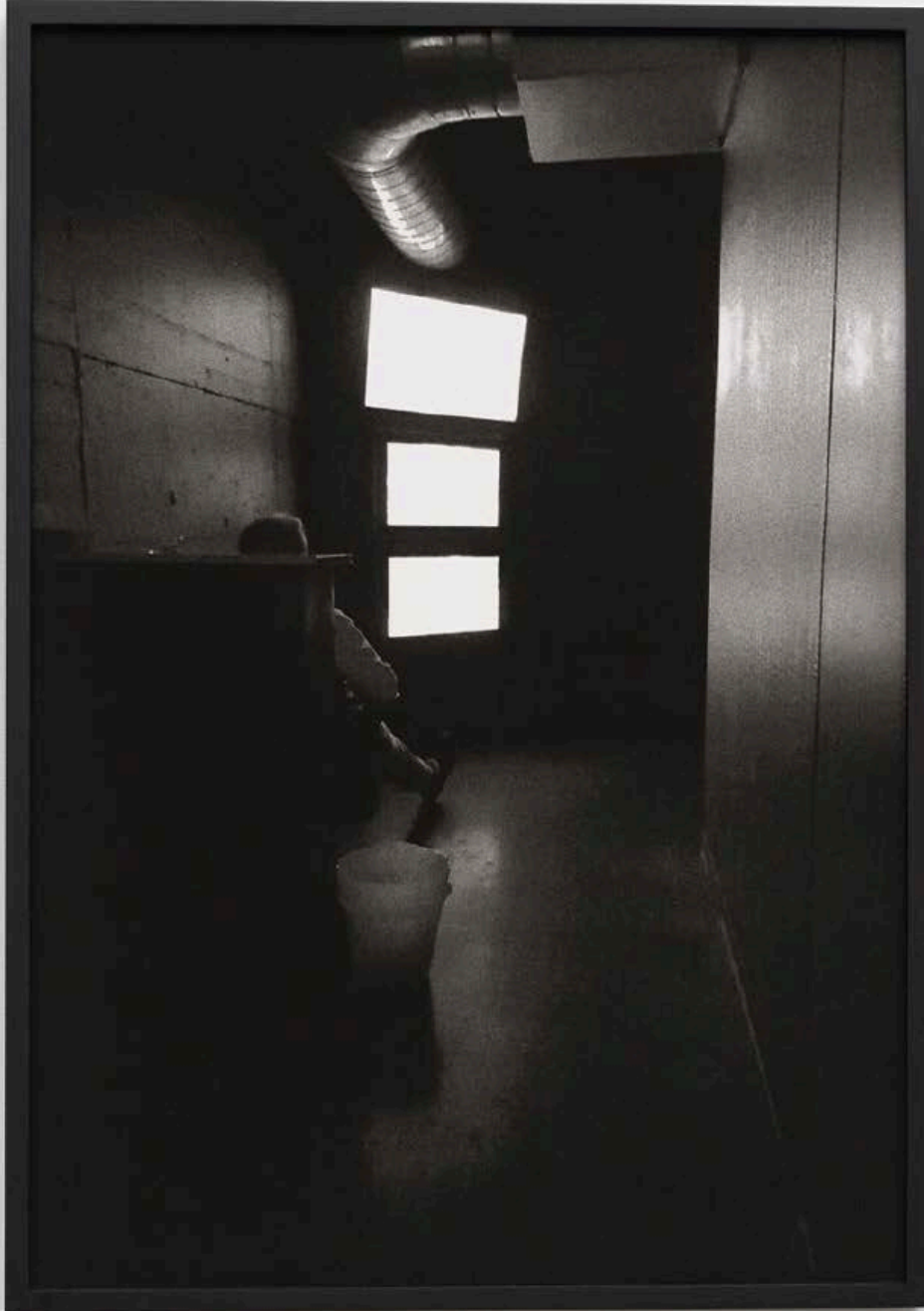
## **ML**

I’m fascinated by this idea of taking a photo of a community but removing any sort of specificity as to who is a member. You’re talking about an issue of representation, but your images don’t provide signifiers.

## **DS**

And my reaction is not, Oh, let’s photograph all the Asian people I can. I’m not trying to bust anyone either; this is about anonymity. I don’t want anyone to be identifiable. I wanted to make some sort of anonymous portrait of a community of people. I’ve always loved Walker Evans’s *Subway Portraits*. I was thinking about the frontality of Evans’s images and how I could reverse that with portraits of the backs of the heads.

# Bomb, 2024



([https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/\\_hiresolution/being-alone-No-6-Dean-Sameshima2.jpg](https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/being-alone-No-6-Dean-Sameshima2.jpg))

Dean Sameshima, *being alone (No. 6)*, 2022, archival inkjet print, 23.5 x 16.5 inches. Photo by Lewis Ronald. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.

# Bomb, 2024

I'm reminded of Sophie Calle's *Suite Vénitienne*. In it, she follows a guy around and projects a narrative on the back of his head. You're also shooting from behind, but your strangers stay strange. You're also implicated as mid-cruise yourself. Is that ever a conflict for you, being both a documentarian and participant?

**DS**

I think Robert Mapplethorpe said he'd rather be part of the party than photograph it. But I could do both at the same time. There's so much downtime in these spaces. Part of the notetaking is relieving that boredom. It's like snapping photos all the time. I don't want to name the spaces, or locations, or time because I want to keep these spaces private. It also adds a timelessness to it in the sense that these images could be almost any theater in the world. Even though my work tends to get linked with sex and cruising, I wanted to open up this project. That's also why there's no images of sex.

**ML**

You're using the literal overexposure of sex on the screen to reveal or expose, just barely, the sitter. Why remove the sex?

**DS**

While I was printing these and conceptualizing this body of work, I was thinking about Stephen Barker's *Night Swimming* series from the '90s. They're beautiful, blurry, ghostly images of men having sex in porn theaters. That was at the height of AIDS. In the beginning of the epidemic, Christian Walker photographed men in Boston porn theaters. Stuart Comer introduced me to Miguel Ángel Rojas, who photographed men in porn theaters in the '70s. So, I had to think about this historically. How can I add to this dialogue that these gentlemen started three generations ago?

**"I think the queerness comes when someone notices, like, a tissue box. That's the queerness that I love."**

— Dean Sameshima

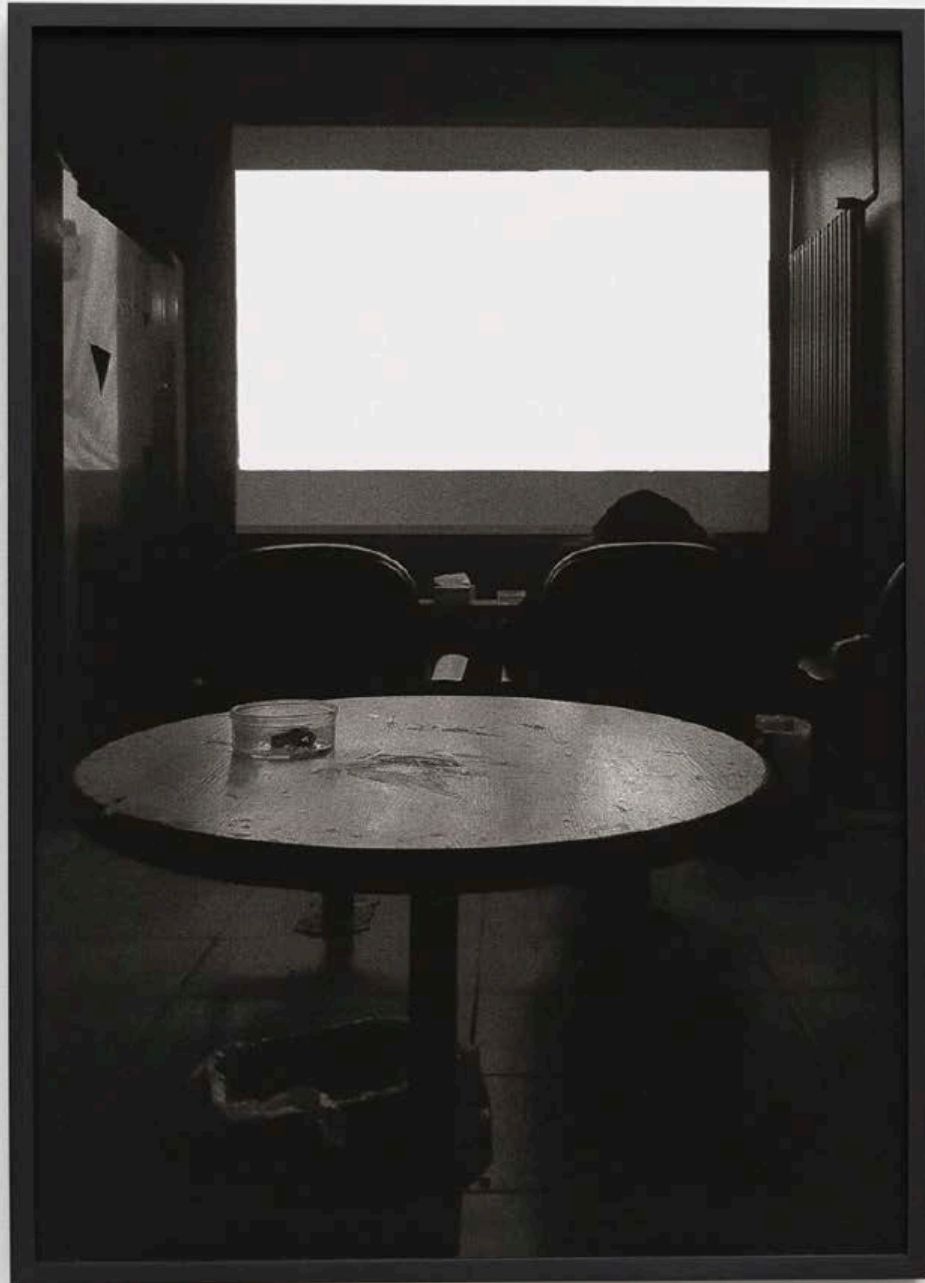
**ML**

You mentioned timelessness earlier. What about nostalgia?

**DS**

I never thought about that. I love these porn theaters so much. They're so exciting. They're also disappearing. Part of my notetaking and photographing from the very beginning, even when I was younger and photographing bands, was about trying to capture something before it disappeared. To say, This existed. With apps, face-to-face cruising has disappeared. It's been around forever because of circumstances, but these spaces, hopefully not while I'm alive, might disappear. The men will disappear.

# Bomb, 2024



([https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/\\_hiresolution/being-alone-No-8-Dean-Sameshima3.jpg](https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/being-alone-No-8-Dean-Sameshima3.jpg))

Dean Sameshima, *being alone (No. 8)*, 2022, archival inkjet print, 23.5 x 16.5 inches. Photo by Lewis Ronald. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.

# Bomb, 2024

I was just looking at documentation from your 2004 *Outlaw* show at Peres Projects, and I realized that I'm looking at a photo of the Gauntlet bar, which I know as the Eagle twenty years later. But the bar is the same, as is the pool table, the spider web, the pride flag, all markers of time and culture changing over the decades but also retaining some of the same things.

**DS**

It's not bear or leather only anymore, right? Didn't the Rooster Fish reopen too?

**ML**

Yeah. The Rooster Fish isn't a gay bar anymore. The bathroom ceiling is still there, though. We've talked about disappearance and removal, but what about absence? They're very different, but *being alone* and *In Between Days (Without You)* (1997–98) both imply an absence, where the removal of the body becomes a premonition.

**DS**

Well, *In Between Days (Without You)* is about the emptiness of losing a partner. But it's also *become* a document of a space that also closed, which had been around since the '70s. I think it's a fear of absence that maybe spurs the impulse to document. Initially, I wanted to photograph the person I was having sex with, but I didn't want to get into the uncomfortableness of that social interaction. So, I waited until they left. The bed is a portrait of them, their sweat, their mess on the bed. I think a lot of my work is about figuring out different ways to get at portraiture without putting a demographic mark on anyone or any location.

**ML**

I have to say, Félix González-Torres.

**DS**

He was definitely someone I had to think about because his beds were up as billboards throughout Los Angeles at the time. I love his work, obviously, but also the way people were reading the bed work was with a sense of the safeness, monogamy, and partnership because there are often two pillows with two indentations. It made me uncomfortable. It's too sweet. I get it: it's beautiful; it's romantic. And that's also his brilliance because he also removed the people, right? Maybe when I remove the people more people enter the work. My decision to photograph in color was a reaction against what I thought people were reading into his work.

**ML**

I love *In Between Days (Without You)* because you see the emotionality in the mess. In *Still Lives* (2023), too, the garbage becomes portraits of people by way of their detritus. I'm curious about this poignant image being co-opted or becoming part of a larger narrative of sexuality.

**DS**

I don't know if Ross [Laycock] was still alive when Felix presented these in LA. But it was a mark of a certain time. The empty beds feel more powerful than ever. Mine was just at a time when we weren't supposed to be promiscuous. We were supposed to be more responsible. Activists were telling gay artists they should make work a certain way. The depictions of sex weren't supposed to be explicit. I wanted to make mine a little bit more messy.

# Bomb, 2024



([https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/\\_hiresolution/being-alone-Dean-Sameshima4.jpg](https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/being-alone-Dean-Sameshima4.jpg))

Installation view of *Dean Sameshima: being alone*, 2024. Soft Opening, London. Photo by Lewis Ronald. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening.

## ML

What about the title, *being alone*?

## DL

During the pandemic I started going through hundreds of these theater images. I did not mind lockdown. I like being alone. I thought a lot about the people who go cruising; trans women and DL men are the two groups I see mostly in these spaces, and they all come alone. It is a community that gathers within these spaces of desire. People congregate in other ways besides sex; we're there to find a partner, a friend, a fuck-buddy. But we arrive and leave alone.

*Dean Sameshima: being alone* (<https://www.softopening.london/exhibitions/being-alone>) is on view at *Soft Opening* in London until June 8; *being alone* can also be seen in the group exhibition *Scratching at the Moon* (<https://www.theicala.org/en/exhibitions/133-scratching-at-the-moon>) at the *Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles*, in Los Angeles until July 28, and in *Venice Biennale 2024: Stranieri Ovunque—Foreigners Everywhere* (<https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2024>) in Venice until November 24.

# Where I Find Ourselves

by Paul Moreno

**A**t the end of winter in New York City this year, three exhibitions by three queer men, working in different times and places, all took place at once. In viewing all these shows within days of each other, I found myself asking how these works all connected, and taken together, what picture they make. They formed a monochromatic landscape: the black and white drawings of Tom of Finland; the black candy, the monotone photos, and water on gray concrete of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and the high contrast black and white photographs of Dean Sameshima. I also asked some friends (and myself) how they felt these works related to their own lives as gay men.

One of these friends, in the spirit of Lent, had given up posting nude selfies on the internet. He dealt with his urges to lay himself bare on the web by taking the pictures, (it is not the taking of the pictures that is the issue) and sending them to me privately, forsaking the excitement, the danger, and the subsequent likes and lurid comments from the many approbating eyes that come upon the pictures my friend posts on-line. At the same time that I was the recipient of his exhibitionism, I was presented with the challenge of explaining, to readers and my editors, how the drawings of Tom of Finland are not simply pornography. I do think they are pornographic in the sense that they are depictions of sex and sometimes quite explicit, but because they are so much more, I do not think they are pornography. I asked my aforementioned friend, what he thought of Tom of Finland. He admitted that he didn't know much about the context in which the drawings were made but that they were sexy and, in a way, cute, that they were nostalgic and felt commercial (I'm paraphrasing).

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This was already enough to explain how the Tom of Finland images are not so purely prurient. His drawings, specifically the ones in the recent exhibition at David Kordansky Gallery in New York, were part of illustrative narratives about man-on-man intimacy and were intended to be viewed as such within the context of publications. Presenting these images in a gallery context makes the steamiest of the drawings less steamy, as they are viewed alongside the sweeter ones. For example, the first drawing in the show, *Untitled (from "Setting Sail")*, 1974, depicts two figures: the first, a light-haired and shirtless man aggressively smiles as he rests languorously in a double ender, his legs overboard, his billowing flared pants tilting in the breeze. The other figure is almost identical to the first, but with darker hair. He is nude—very nude—and appears to be pushing the dinghy with all his might. The image is sexy—one could imagine it being used to advertise a party at a gay bar. But the humor of this scenario takes the image to a place of cuteness in the sense that there is no threat of harm from these muscle men. No embarrassment or shame clouds their endeavor; no one in this image has tasted forbidden fruit, for the fruit was never forbidden here. But cuteness can also prick the darkest parts of us, inspiring a sense of abjection or violence for the guileless joy we are witnessing. Tom of Finland provokes a discomfort in a viewer who does not enjoy a man using his muscles in the romantic service of another man and if that man uses those muscles openly and with a smile, the discomfort can become a rage. These images are powerful not because of the oversized penises but because of the blatant smiles. I do not think a smile can be pornography.

The drawings of Tom of Finland not only address the fear one may have of queers but also addresses the fear a queer may have of the non-queer, in particular the man in uniform. The cop, the soldier, the sailor, etc., symbolize the most extreme version of an existence in the world that gets called manly: the guy who gets jobs done and does not make a fuss and does not think too deeply about it. These men are banal. But the drag of their uniforms announces them fabulously. Many queers have harbored a fear of a man in uniform, but fear can be an aphrodisiac, and Tom of Finland shows us that. His fetishization for masculine drag that plays out through the characters in his drawings emerges from collages he made. These tidy and organized groupings of found and personal photographs, sometimes amended in pencil or ink, are group images of police, soldiers, bikers, cowboys, all glued down to pages of drawing paper. One such collage from the exhibition, *Untitled*, c. 1966-1990, is a gathering of men mostly cut from newspapers. He augments the images, adding boots, enhancing the thighs to jodhpur proportions, eliminating distracting background details. We see his mind at work, taking quotidian images and creating a personal *mise en scène*—literally moving the banal to a world of fetishization.

One day, my aforementioned friend sent me a handful of images of himself. We were a week and change into Lent at this point. He had sent me any number of pictures in the past, but somehow these were suddenly subtly different. They were less “look at me” and more “look at this.” They were

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more aware of composition or light or detail. They depicted fantasies being enacted. These images spurred in me a further realization of how Tom of Finland drawings transcend their sexual content. His drawings are not so much about wide open exploits of sexual abandon. Rather, they are the most private, intimate, vulnerable fantasies of an artist whose own experiences were restricted by the mores, laws, and plagues of his lifetime. He reacts to compulsory secret-keeping by making public gesture of aggressive pleasure. When we look at Tom of Finland's collages and the subsequent sketches and final drawings, the images only feel salacious when their consumption is clandestine. When they are on the wall of a major U.S. gallery, when they are in the collection of MoMA and LACMA, they don't lose their erotic power, but they open up and demand to be seen as the materials of an artist working in solitude to bring the world of his private life to the world of honest, open, public expression.



Tom of Finland, *Untitled*, c. 1966–1990. Graphite, marker, guache and mixed media on paper, (framed 16 3/8 x 13 7/8 x 1 1/2 inches. Photo: David Kordansky )Gallery, NYC.

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The liminal space where public rubs up against private is an exciting place for art to occur. Felix Gonzalez-Torres was an artist who deftly exposed the potential of this space. The most immediate way we witness this is in observing the ephemeral nature of his work, and the frequent resistance to there being an original object. For example, in the show at David Zwirner there was an example of his candy spill pieces, *“Untitled” (Public Opinion)*, 1991. In one gallery a large rectangular carpet of the black licorice filled the center of the room. In a sitting area outside the gallery, a small mound of the candies was nestled into a corner. The sculpture was in two places at once but remains a single work. Viewers are invited to take from the piles of black candy, some were sucking away on their candies, and some slid the candies into their pockets. Some delicately took one; some would take a handful, disrupting the clean edge of the rectangle. Once the gallery was closed, the rectangle was corrected, and more candy might be added. Ideally the piece consists of 700 pounds of the black missile-shaped treats. This installation, which belongs to the collection of the Guggenheim, resists ownership, relying on its owner to execute it regularly according to its instructions, and allow, if not encourage, it be continuously dismantled by its audience.

The title *“Untitled” (Public Opinion)* already evokes something about one’s relationship to the community. Its “endless supply” of components are evocative of the many voices one hears in social media, the news cycle, word on the street, etc. Just like in our participation in those realities where we hear what we need or want to hear, here we pick the ones, the candy we want to consume. A slightly different read evokes something more ominous that was in the air during the artist’s life and is looming once again: the government being a pill that is poisoning the queer community through legislation and the judicial system. We are asked to swallow this, or we can ignore it, despite its undeniable determining force in our private lives.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *“Untitled” (Public Opinion)*, 1991. Black rod licorice candies in clear wrappers, endless supply. Overall dimensions vary with installation; ideal weight 700 lbs. Photo: David Zwirner Gallery.

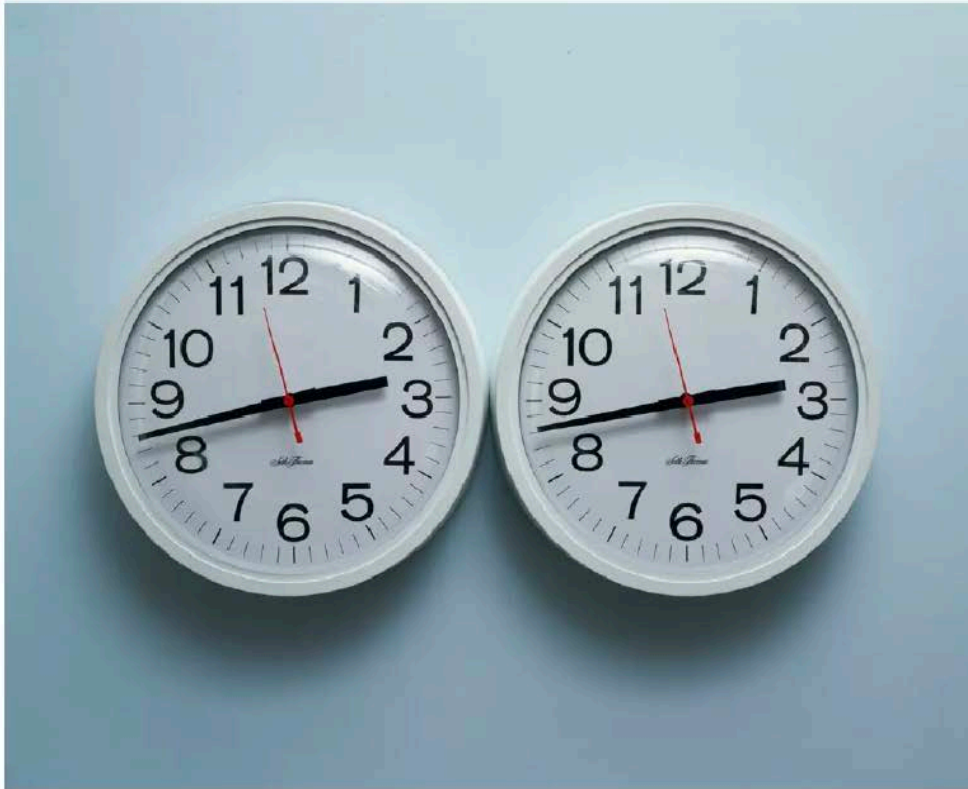
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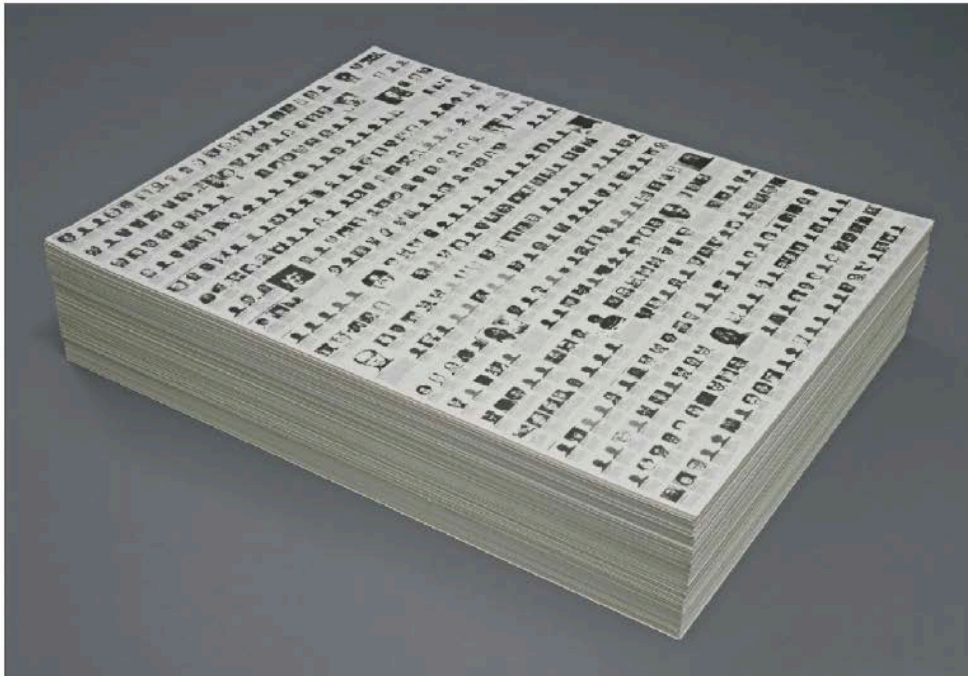
Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (Public Opinion), 1991. Black rod licorice candies in clear wrappers, endless supply. Overall dimensions vary with installation; ideal weight 700 lbs. Photo: David Zwirner Gallery.

The installation of "Untitled" (*Sagitario*), 1994-1995 is a work that the artist planned in the 90s but was being presented for the first time in the US at this exhibition. Two shallow circular pools of water are embedded in the floor; they are almost, but not quite, touching. The title, *Sagitario*, references a centaur, a creature that is half this and half that—two halves reliant on each other to make a whole. The double circle is a leitmotif throughout Gonzalez-Torres's work. In two iterations of a sculpture called "Untitled" (*Perfect Lovers*), 1987-1990, and 1990, two clocks are placed side by side on the wall and started at the same moment and allowed to run until their times are no longer identical and perhaps even stop. In "Untitled" (*March 5th*) #1, 1991, two 12-inch mirrors are embedded into the wall at head height, forming an ever-changing split portrait. In "Untitled" (*Double Portrait*) a stack of posters printed with two gold rings, just touching, printed on a white field, is depleted, and replenished as viewers are asked to take a poster from the stack.

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Felix Gonzalez-Torres "Untitled" (Perfect Lovers), 1991. Two identical clocks hanging on the wall, set in synchronized manner at the same start time, operating with identical batteries. The clocks touch while showing the time which is running out. Inevitably, at some point they will stop; one of them will stop ahead of the other. MoMA. Photo: [tripimprover.com](http://tripimprover.com).



"Untitled" (Death by Gun), 1990. Print on paper, endless copies.  
Stack: 9 inches ideal height x 44 15/16 x 32 15/16. Photo: [moma.org](http://moma.org).

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*“Untitled” (Sagitario)* also operates as mirror, we see the reflection of others walking around it. As the water is “imperceptibly” exchanged between one pool and the other, we understand the metaphor about relationships between lovers, but it occurred to me for the first time when seeing this show, that Felix Gonzalez-Torres has established a relationship with me. But not only me. I have been making pilgrimages to see his work since I first encountered it in the 1995 Public Information exhibition at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art where I picked up a poster from *“Untitled” (Death by Gun)*, 1990. I have a collection of Felix Gonzalez-Torres posters rolled up in a tube somewhere. I have a small basket filled with candies from various candy spills. I have lingered in galleries waiting for the go-go dancer to show up to activate *“Untitled” (Go-Go Dancing Platform)*, 1991. I visited *“Untitled” (Sagitario)*, with a friend, another fan of the work of FGT, as we affectionally call him. He activated the work by splashing water from one pool to another. I thought that was a bit silly and almost sacrilegious, but what I realized is that he, like me, desires our relationship with Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Those of us who really love his work have a relationship with him that is profound. It is almost as though his work is made for us, and we are part of it, it is almost eucharistic, if that is not too overstated. But if God is a circle, as they say, it is the circle drawn by Felix in which we see ourselves.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *“Untitled” (Sagitario)*, 1994–1995.  
Medium varies with installation, water, 24 x 12 feet overall; two parts 12 feet in diameter each. Photo David Zwirner Gallery.

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*“Untitled”*, 1994-1995, a second piece in this exhibition that was unrealized while the artist was alive, was also being presented for the first time. Filling a large dimly lit gallery, two freestanding billboard structures were situated side by side but facing in opposite directions, so that one could see the front of one and the back of the other. Janus-like, these are two faces looking in opposite directions, keeping sentinel, or just observing the crowd of on-lookers. The act of bringing a billboard inside echoes the way in which one internalizes public opinion. Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s work is periodically exhibited outdoors on actual roadside billboards and this act of bringing them inside also felt like the artist was pulling you aside to tell you something directly. Each billboard depicts one of Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s iconic images of a bird in flight against a cloudy sky. This wistful vision stirs feelings of lovers lost. Periodically, the viewing of these billboards was interrupted by a disconcerting racket—staticky, reverberating, hard to define. This noise was in fact a recording of the audience’s applause at a Carnegie Hall concert given by Kathleen Battle and Jessye Norman. This crowd sound shocks us out of their viewing relationship with this image of the sky. Once it ends, we reconnect to the image, or quietly exit alone.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres (installation view), *“Untitled,”* 1994–1995. Mixed media; dimensions vary with installation. Photo: David Zwirner Gallery.

The images of the birds in flight formed a connection for me to the images in Dean Sameshima’s *“Being Alone.”* In this show Sameshima shares a selection of fourteen pictures from a twenty-five-image series, *Being Alone*. Sameshima started these in 2015 and shot them until the onset of the Covid-19 Pandemic. They are strikingly high contrast. Each is a cave of deep blacks, and each has a bright white rectangle where the illuminated screen would be in an otherwise small, dark, porn theater. Shot from the rear of the theaters, the screen backlights the seats, the occasional box of tissues, the trash cans here and there, maybe a soda can or an ashtray, and, in each one, a solitary viewer that we see in silhouette as he gazes at the screen. The lone figures are like the silhouetted birds against Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s sky.

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The solitude of the men in these photos resonates with the work of Tom of Finland and Felix Gonzalez-Torres. In *Being Alone (No. 13)*, 2022, a man is slouched deep into his seat, we see the white of the sneakers he wears, elevated, ankles crossed, resting on some structure in front of him. He is relaxed, restfully watching the show. He has escaped the public sphere and retreated here where he is maybe not even in the depths of an erotic throe, but just alone, in his thoughts or perhaps with no thoughts at all. *Being Alone (No. 14)*, 2022, is shot from a shallow passage, at the end of which we see a figure leaning against the wall, he has not quite entered the space but is viewing it. He is at the edge of this space that simultaneously possesses the premise of anonymity and/or connection and/or continued solitude, or to put it another way, a venue where the potential of his private self may be realized in public.

Dean Sameshima and I were born the same year, about 500 miles apart in the western US. His work evokes many of the same fascinations I had as a teen and younger man. The coded queerness of icons such as British musician Morrissey or the French theorist Roland Barthes. Sameshima fetishizes vintage porn and public sex as objects and ideas beyond their intended goal of immediate gratification. He and I came of age at a moment when the party of 1970s queer liberation had ended, and suddenly sex could kill you. I felt as though the wild life that I had been waiting to live was canceled and was replaced with waiting two weeks for the results of your anonymous testing. Sameshima's work speaks to this. There is the fantasy of public sex being the outlet for private desire. There is the desolation that one might find once one has arrived at the public sex space. There is the realization that the public lives of the queers who came before us were not all hunky-dory. Not every gay man was at the orgies but there is always the hope that one will meet the perfect lover. Even if only fleetingly. Or maybe you don't. There is no shame in being alone.

The picture, *Being Alone (No. 9)*, 2022, is one of the strangest pictures in the bunch. The seated figure we see from behind is basically dead center. On either side of his head a sort of "air-quotes" shape rises over the chair. One assumes they are hands, but whose hands are they and what are they doing, what are they about to touch, or what are they carefully not touching? Is this figure being alone? There is the photographer. There is we the viewer. We are watching this private moment play out in public. At this exhibition we are actually in the midst of a crowd of fourteen figures, all facing the other way, all publicly lounging in their private lives. How we interpret this action, whatever scenario we provide ourselves, that is what we individually project into the white box before the guy in each picture. It may only be a bird in flight against a cloudy sky.

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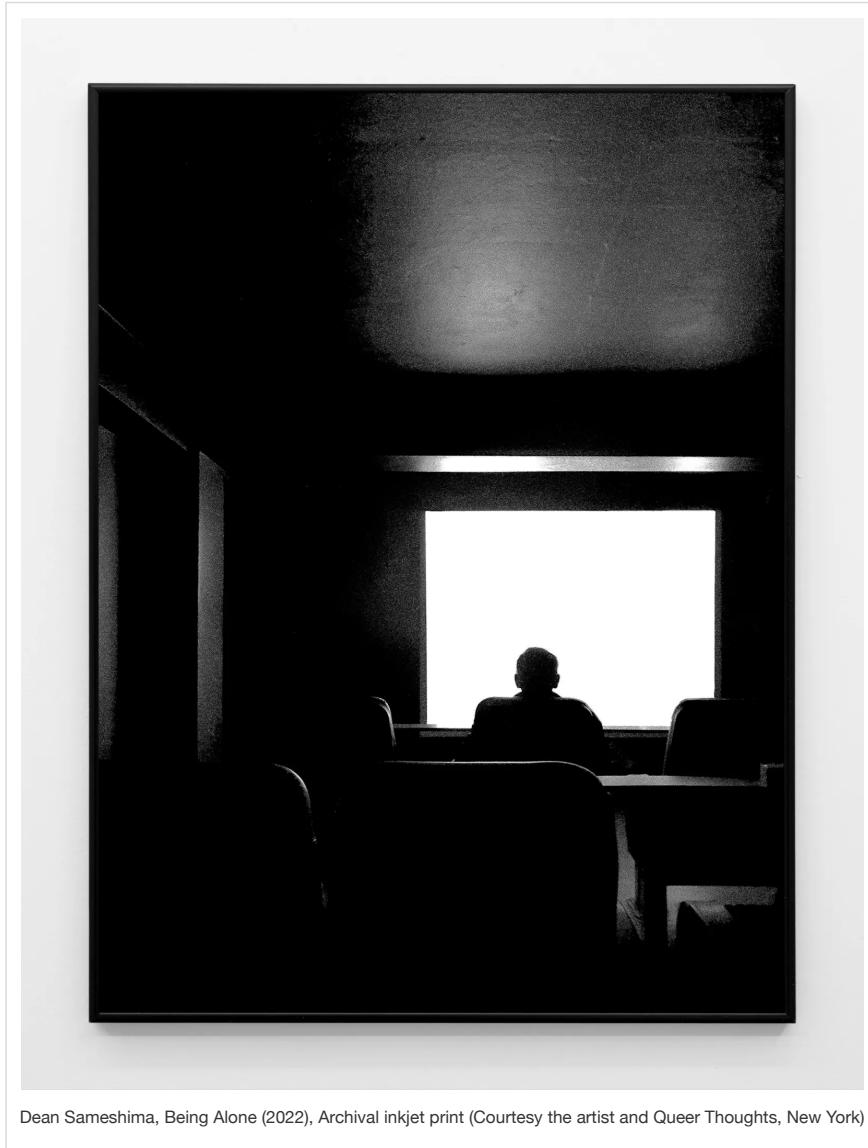
Dean Sameshima, *Being Alone (No. 9)*, 2022.

It is clearly not only gay men who struggle with an aporia between their private lives and public selves, between the inner workings of their psyche and the persons they portray at the office. Queers however have had to force that divide especially profoundly. It is one thing if a straight white male discusses his peccadilloes at the office water cooler, because he is afforded the dignity of choosing privacy. A queer man during Tom of Finland's era did not dare disclose his encounters for fear of censure, brutality, or even death. In a video on the website for the Tom of Finland Foundation, Touko Valio Laaksonen, Tom of Finland's actual name, explains that he had always said he only intended his drawing for the audience that enjoyed them, but that he realized that was not true, that he wanted "so-called straight people" to see them, to understand that gay men had the right to enjoy sex and enjoy each other. Here he makes a strange distinction between a private public (his fans) and a public public (those who would be offended by his work). This private public is not dissimilar to the porn theaters in Dean Sameshima's photographs. This public public is not dissimilar to a roadside billboard of a bird in flight against a cloudy sky, a billboard that anyone can see but only those who know the code will understand. In the time span from Tom of Finland's first drawing to Felix Gonzalez-Torres's dying of AIDS at age 38, with work unrealized, to Dean Sameshima's theater-goers, queer people are still grappling with the public/private dichotomy. We attempt to conjure anonymity—simply being left to one's devices, while at the same time evoking visibility, the resistance to having to operate behind closed doors. We do this by making art that leaves little to the imagination but that also leaves everything to the imagination.

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## A Session of Porn Therapy in Dean Sameshima's "Being Alone" at Queer Thoughts

Posted on February 28, 2023 by EMILY COLUCCI

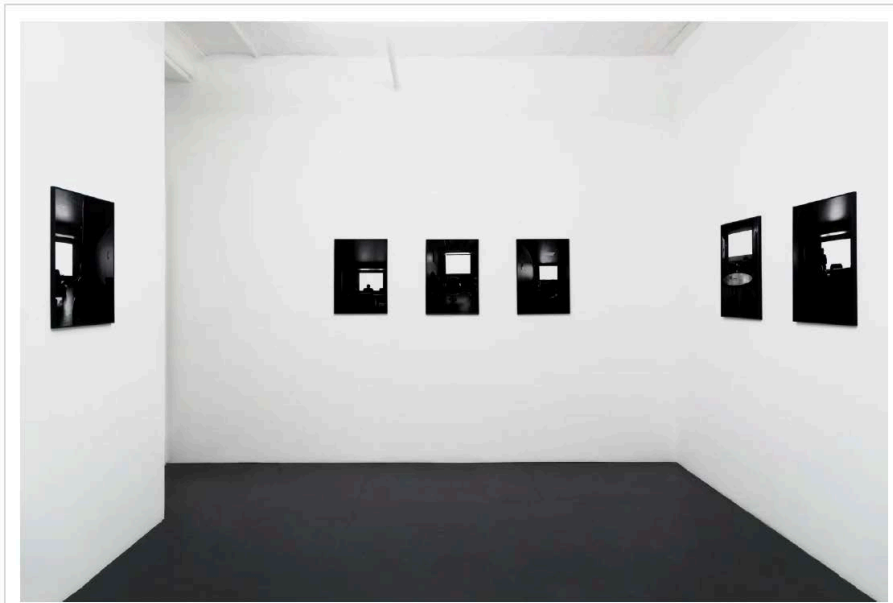


Can you write an essay about porn theaters that doesn't cite Samuel R. Delany's *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*? Similarly, can you look at photographs of queer spaces and not immediately start flipping through Jose Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* to find a relevant quote? These two texts have done a number on criticism and critical theory in recent years, even though they are both quite old (over a decade for *Cruising Utopia* and two for *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*). Yet, they remain at the forefront of queer thought—not to mention on the shelves of every institutional exhibition's reading room (\*cough\* The Brooklyn Museum's [Jimmy DeSana: Submission](#)). While I won't dismiss their importance as formative texts, at what point does using the same goddamn references narrow interpretation, leading to almost everything being viewed the same way through the same lens? Even when it doesn't warrant it. For instance, can we see a porn theater as something other than an idyllic site of sexual freedom, community, and even political possibility? Can it, instead, just look kind of blank and lonely?

Because blank and lonely were the feelings I gathered from Dean Sameshima's series of photographs, *Being Alone*, on view in [his current exhibition](#) of the same title at [Queer Thoughts](#). Rather than the bright marquees and cum-caked movie house architecture of the heyday of Times Square sleaze, Sameshima presents a punishingly monotonous series of inky black-and-white prints of small porn screening rooms in Berlin. This sounds like a

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negative critique, but it isn't. Though anyone visiting the gallery expecting neon-lit sordid glamour akin to Bette Gordon's 1983 film *Variety* will be woefully disappointed, Sameshima's unwavering dedication to rigidly framing and producing each photograph with an exacting sameness allows him to portray something *different* about the spaces of porn theaters and the people who momentarily inhabit them than those same old past queer utopias.



Installation view of Dean Sameshima's *Being Alone* at Queer Thoughts (Courtesy the artist and Queer Thoughts, New York)

For example, instead of cruisers making googly eyes at each other from across the room, each photograph is empty except for one solo man, typically only seen from the back of his head rising above the seats. There's no sex captured here—not in the theater itself nor on screen. Sameshima has dialed up the contrast to such an extreme extent that the filthy cinematic imagery shown has been transformed into a blinding white light that works to illuminate the photographs. No penetration. No money shots. Not even some softcore heavy petting. Sameshima has managed to make some of the least erotic photographs I've ever seen of a supposed erotic space.

In this, the photographs remind me of Ninja Thyberg's 2021 film *Pleasure*. Though filmed realistically using almost entirely current and former porn workers with the exception of the protagonist, aspiring blonde bombshell Bella Cherry (Sofia Kappel), *Pleasure* is a fictional representation of the LA porn industry. The most lasting part of *Pleasure* for me wasn't the bureaucratic navigation of consent (including numerous forms) or the aggravatingly conventional plot of a high-achieving girl that abandons her friends for a competitive shot at fame. Instead, I was struck by just how *tedious* shooting porn seemed—a job just like any other, even with close-ups of genitalia. In one scene, after Bella Cherry sells out her goofy and endearing D-list roommates in order to get into porn mogul Mark Spiegler's circle, she sits isolated in the VIP section of a party, roped off from all the peons, appearing downright miserable amongst the sordid glitz.



Bella Cherry (Sofia Kappel) and Ava Rhoades (Evelyn Claire) have a great time in *Pleasure*

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*Pleasure's* smutty boredom is filtered through the same candy-colored cinematography that seemingly every feminist film has to use after 2020's *Promising Young Woman*. Though diametrically opposed aesthetically, Sameshima's photographs showcase a similar mundanity from the consumer side of the industry. Only Sameshima doesn't stereotype consumers of porn as being almost entirely malformed nerds wandering amongst the beauties like the attendees of the porn convention in *Pleasure*. Instead, they are solitary silhouetted figures with little to no discernable features, just a glimpse of grey hair, a balding hairline, a raised hood, a pair of sneakers caught by the light of the screen. Though captured with a sense of empathy and care, neither the kind of hot stud heroism nor aberrant compulsive masturbator that mark the two poles of public and/or anonymous sex representations, these porn viewers are unquestionably participants—hold-outs or leftovers, even—of a fading era of sexual culture. This is not the sold-out audience watching, what looks to be, *Boys in the Sand* or some other Wakefield Poole film in Patrick Angus's painting *Hanky Panky*.



Patrick Angus, *Hanky Panky*, 1990,

Because let's face it, porn theaters like the ones in *Being Alone* are not much needed today with the endless supply of Internet porn, OnlyFans, and hookup apps. Of course, each of these brings its own form of isolation as we endlessly stare into the abyss of our phones for any number of forms of gratification. While the absurdity of flirting with a black screen has inspired a number of artists such as [Colin J. Radcliffe](#), [Salman Toor](#), and [Justin Liam O'Brien](#), Sameshima, in contrast, focuses on diminishing and quickly disappearing porn theaters, which exist as a type of anachronism—a throwback to a more analog age. Granted, this is an ironic description given the center of a porn theater is still a screen. However, the promise of a porn theater isn't only getting off through the visuals, but with the others at that same screening. Not that this possibility is completely absent if Sameshima's concurrent 2022 series of [still lifes](#)—trashcans filled to the brim with fluid-coated spent tissues and used condoms—is any indication.

Yet, if we go by the action within the photographs of *Being Alone* only, these men sit silently, staring rapt at the screen. Though appearing on the surface separate and alienated, Sameshima forges a connection with the men who are still attached to this disappearing sexual destination. As the artist explains in [Kaleidoscope Magazine](#). "I was contemplating where I fit in, feeling in limbo in the communities I thought I was a part of...I never felt comfortable within any mainstream group but balanced between the few that I felt I had some connections to (art, gay, Asian). I started to identify more and more with these 'marginal men' I was interacting with and less with any other group previously I thought I was a part of." Because my continual description of these men as solitary isn't quite true, is it? Neither is Sameshima's series and exhibition title that trades in the same façade. These men aren't being alone. Sameshima and his camera are right there behind them—the resulting photograph a kind of physical manifestation of his lens-mediated Warholian voyeurism. Voyeurism, of course, is another fun part of the porn theater experience. For those who don't want to participate, they can always watch.

We can't, however. With the erasure of the erotic action on screen and the relegation of the figures to near shadows, we, as viewers, are left to gaze at the utilitarian austerity of the screening room architecture. The drop ceilings, pipes, fuse boxes, possibly a radiator, and banks of hideous and uncomfortable-looking chairs that recall waiting room décor à la [Joseph Liatela's](#) bondage rope-encircled chairs, *Formative Systems*, in his past exhibition [Nothing Under Heaven](#). In certain photographs, random elements that break this pattern pop: a soda or beer can, a bottle, a garbage can. But, what granted me entry into and further appreciation for the series was the most consistent object: a Kleenex box. In almost every photograph, there is a tissue box placed on a table or the shelf on the back of a bank of chairs. Its white tissue is easy to spot against the darkness enveloping the room. Helpful for an emergency clean-up!

# filthy dreams, 2023

Admittedly, what amused me about these Kleenex boxes is pretty niche and probably not something anybody else is going to think. But, for me, I had never before considered the similarities between the design accessories in Berlin porn theaters and psychotherapy rooms (also funeral homes and [the September 11 Memorial Museum](#), therapy practice). There, in every office, most flat surfaces also have a Kleenex box, a feature of the therapy environment so normalized that you barely even notice it, unless you need it to wipe away tears or a wayward sneeze (hopefully, not for the result of a vigorous public jacking). Though its function is different, the Kleenex box is a necessary item for both locales.



Dean Sameshima, *Being Alone* (2022), Archival inkjet print (Courtesy the artist and Queer Thoughts, New York)

What does this odd correlation mean? Maybe nothing! But, at least I take something from it. One of the healing parts of therapy is the ability to be with—to sit across from a therapist and build a kind of intimacy that is unique to that relationship. In the porn theater, as represented by Sameshima, the screen also sits opposite the viewer. Perhaps this, too, is a unique type of intimacy, not intimacy as in the communal and, at this point, nostalgic potential of anonymous sexual encounters in porn theaters as described in *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*. But the exchange of people sitting solo (or sort of solo) in that space staring up at the screen. Though normally projecting its own imagery, here the screen is a blank slate, filling the room with light, while also being filled up, projected on, by the multitude of desires directed at it by those who are there, being alone.

# Kaleidoscope, 2022



# Kaleidoscope, 2022

SEASON K41 FW22

DEAN SAMESHIMA • MARGINAL MEN

For over two decades, artist Dean Sameshima has been exploring the fragile liminal spaces of queer desire, marginalized sexual practices, and homoerotic fantasy. Born in Torrance, California, in 1971, he's never limited the sites of his artistic practice: from pop culture to public space, clubs, porn magazines, galleries, cities, and minds. His work often involves manipulating presence and absence through imagery (a great example being his series of paintings titled "Numbers" (2007–) which invites the viewer to connect the numbered dots to reveal the image). "Being Alone" (2022), his latest exhibition at Queer Thoughts gallery in New York, continues his strive to capture "spaces of escape, spaces of fantasy, spaces to get lost in. In the past these included sex clubs, fashion magazines, Britpop clubs, and books." In "Being Alone," high-contrast silhouettes of men are captured against a glowing screen—so bright that it appears to be blank. The series was shot in Berlin, where Sameshima is now based. The small, almost entirely deserted screening rooms of the city's porn theaters evoke a fragile sense of intimacy.

Sameshima admits that he is currently primarily interested in "exploring where an older, Asian-American, gay man fits in this world." He started photographing men in screening rooms as he was turning 50. "I was contemplating where I fit in, feeling in limbo in the communities I thought I was a part of," he remembers. "I never felt comfortable within any mainstream group but balanced myself between the few that I felt I had some connections to (art, gay, Asian). I started to identify more and more with these 'marginal men' I was interacting with and less with any other group I previously thought I was a part of."

The porn theaters Sameshima captured are rapidly becoming obsolete in Berlin, his subjects cemented in the contrasted monochrome as they find refuge through being alone and "leaving one reality to enter a safer one."

WORDS BY ANASTASIIA FEDOROVA

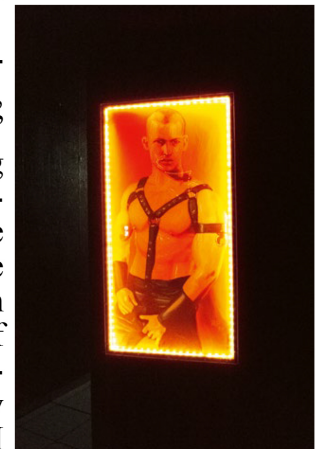


Image courtesy of the artist, Queer Thoughts, New York, and O-Town House, Los Angeles.

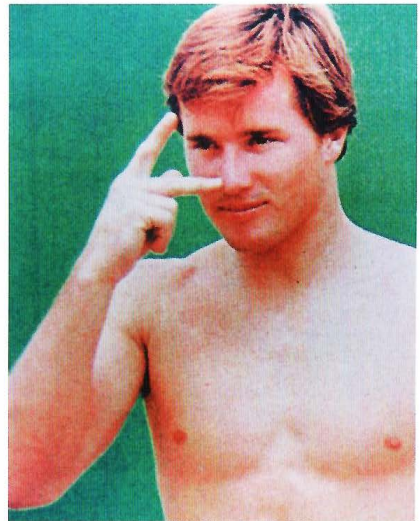
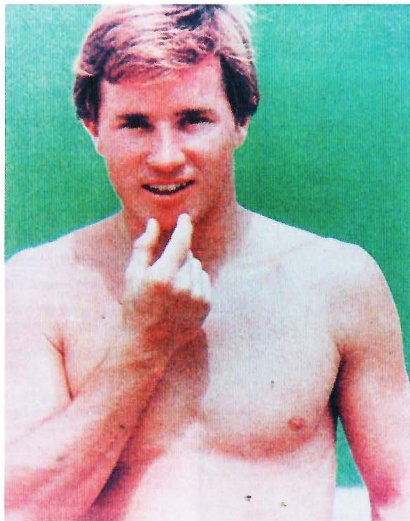
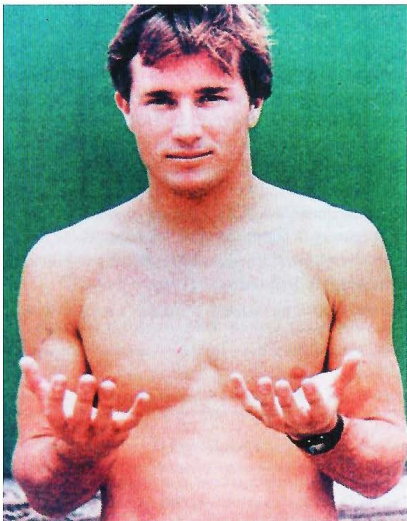
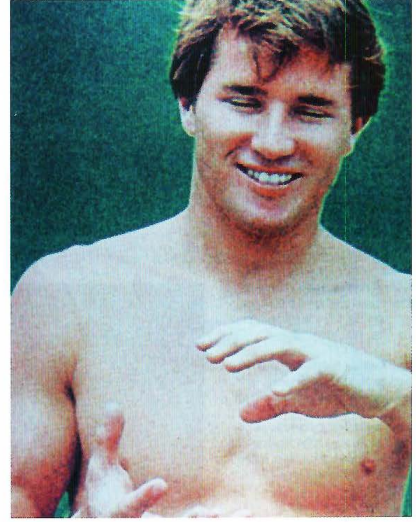
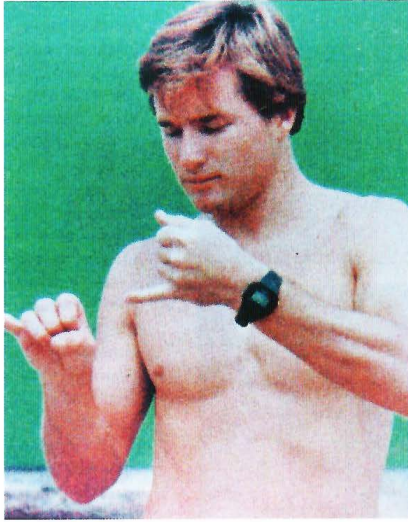
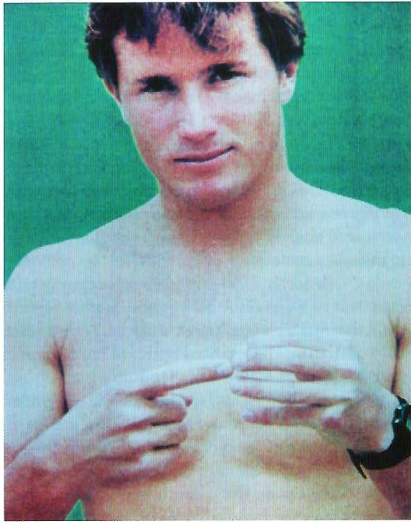
Berlin-based artist Dean Sameshima's next solo show, "Being Alone," is set to open in 2023 at Queer Thoughts in New York. His photographs frequently feature a nostalgic view of the disappearing world of elements of gay culture, such as sex clubs, theaters, and specialized magazines and books.

CLOSE-UP

# INDIFFERENCE AND REPETITION

DAVID RIMANELLI ON DEAN SAMESHIMA'S "OUTLAW," 2003

Clockwise, from top left: Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Blowjob)*, 2003, C-print, 12 1/4 x 9 3/4". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Screwing)*, 2003, C-print, 12 1/4 x 9 3/4". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Group Sex)*, 2003, C-print, 12 1/4 x 9 3/4". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Penis)*, 2003, C-print, 12 1/4 x 9 3/4". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Gay)*, 2003, C-print, 12 1/4 x 9 3/4". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Testicles)*, 2003, C-print, 12 1/4 x 9 3/4". All from the series "Outlaw," 2003.



## The upshot wasn't so much Deleuze and Guattari as it was naked men, over and over and over again.

**GIVEN THE RATHER MARKEDLY** heterosexual lineups that are taken as the wellsprings of both Minimalism and Conceptual art, one wouldn't immediately assume that these movements—tendencies or inclinations might be better words—would prove fertile for art with a pronounced gay or queer agenda. Yes, the Gay Agenda—perhaps you've heard of it? But a number of queer contemporary artists have indeed proceeded from Donald Judd and Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt and John Baldessari. I'm thinking of Tom Burr's reinventions of Minimalist and Land art precepts as filtered through gay cruising and the public restrooms that might have facilitated it, or of Henrik Olesen's user-unfriendly collages—works that typically eschew the representational concerns of much gay-inflected art in favor of strategies derived from Conceptualism's *idées fixes* about documentation, enumeration, and typology. These are relatively recent attempts to “queer” the canon of 1960s vanguardism, but in many ways they follow that other relentlessly used and abused avatar of that decade in art, Andy Warhol—yeah, him—who was exploiting these resolutely “dumb” procedures at the very same time as those artists listed in the catalogue for “When Attitudes Become Form,” Harald Szeemann's magnum opus of the '60s. Seriality is the Warholian preoccupation par excellence from virtually the outset of the artist's “professional” fine-arts phase. The replication of the grieving Jackie Kennedy in various formats. Elvis split into three overlapping images. The Campbell's Soup cans. We might also consider Warhol's preoccupation with endurance and real time (à la Bruce Nauman, Michael Snow, Vito Acconci, et al.), and his penchant for a certain kind of anesthetic or anti-aesthetic photography (pace Jeff Wall's 1995 essay “Marks of Indifference”).

The Los Angeles-based artist Dean Sameshima partakes of both Minimalist and Conceptual art legacies, as well as, indubitably, the Warholian one. A certain kind of documentary photography is often at work, as are serial procedures. There is a foregrounding of typology, a procedure genealogically linked to Hilla and Bernd Becher, though I wonder what they'd have made of it. Perhaps the work by Sameshima that's most familiar is his series “Outlaw,” 2003, a group of seventeen photos of a cute, presumably gay guy demonstrating the American Sign Language gestures for, oh, let's see: *mutual masturbation, climax, gay, blow job, erection, ejaculation, well-hung, group sex, testicles*, etc. Sameshima had discovered these images in an early '90s issue of the gay-porn magazine *InTouch*; he then rephotographed the pictures and displayed them in either a grid or as a sequential row. If the result points toward precursors of the '60s and '70s, it also mines

the less cerebral terrain of quasi-medical brochures and pornographic “sex manuals.” In such images, the aesthetic patina is seemingly accidental, the by-product of various agendas and unknown hands (or if they are known, it's not to the art history department, but to human resources).

“Outlaw” is stand-alone, but, like Père Warhol, Sameshima has worked in many different media. He's done zines. He's made T-shirts. Gay magazines, skater magazines, *i-D*, and *The Face*: Those are as much his background as the requisite *October* subscription and vintage *Avalanche*. He made a painting of the Winter 1989 issue of *October* recently. He must have known about John Boskovich's painting of *October*'s AIDS issue: *Signifiers for Being Smart #1: Disco October, 1999*.

A hyperawareness of art-historical precedent is something inculcated in certain young artists by a fine-arts education. Sameshima got his MFA from Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, in 2001. Especially in that decade, a degree from this school was regarded as a reliable predictor of future critical and institutional success (the very near future, one hoped, given the expense); monetary rewards would occur as a mere side effect of one's interventions in consciousness. I met Sameshima at the end of his tour of MFA duty. We chatted, I looked at his work—as I recall, photographs of the same epicene young man in varying states of color correction, a disquisition in the making on the intersection of homoerotic fixation and photomechanical processes. There was desire and repetition, but the upshot wasn't so much Deleuze and Guattari as it was naked men, over and over and over again.

Naked men: It's a good subject; even I like it. Sameshima frequently makes projects from his collections of archival gay-interest imagery, from naturist nudism to physique pictorials, pre-iPhone nude selfies, teen fanzine pics of the young Argentine fashion model Iván de Pineda, and other ephemera with an avowedly fetishistic character (young men in gas masks: sultry). Once more, we canvas an archivist's terrain, like that adumbrated in the “vintage” Conceptualism of the Bechers, Dan Graham, and Douglas Huebler. The picture, presented in toto, sidesteps the banal if understandable homilies of *Lift Up the Queer Race*, instead giving up a sort of highly personal yet objectively sourced image of what it meant to be a male person of “inverted” sexuality.

I wish a good arts publishing house would collaborate with Sameshima to bring us a Big Book of Bad (Very Good) Homosexuality. That would be a true public service. □

DAVID RIMANELLI IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.

## Know your history: Dean Sameshima

INTERVIEW! American artist and self-designated preserver of queer culture Dean Sameshima on why his show 647(a) serves both as nostalgia and a cautionary tale. It opens Mar 10 at Peres Projects.

Photo by Matthias Kolb

**Artist and self-designated preserver of queer culture Dean Sameshima on why his show 647(a) serves both as nostalgia and a cautionary tale.**

It's a familiar story: LA artist Dean Sameshima came to Berlin for a month in 2007 and never left. Ten years later and seven years sober, he works part-time for cleaning company Book a Tiger, and has been making art again after a long creative dry spell. Drawing from an extensive archive of zines, porn, and ephemera collected from years on the LA gay scene, Sameshima's detailed large-scale paintings depict bathhouse membership cards, receipts from cruising venues and book covers from gay and lesbian exhibitions. We spoke to the artist about what these notes from the underground have to say in 2017.

**You're known primarily for rephotographing found images. Why start painting?**

I had been struggling to make art again. I'd been working with silkscreen and photography to document things in my archive, but photography started to bore me because I thought there was nothing left to document. Then I started painting. I was thinking about how Warhol went from hand-painting images that looked like silkscreens to more mechanical reproduction, and how I wanted to go back to the handmade.

**What are you trying to achieve?**

These are items that are disposable or meant to be hidden. They're in some way shameful – you use them for a little bit and then dispose of them, hide them. My approach was all about saving, collecting, representing and preserving those forgotten histories. My first big love was documentary photography, and to me that's what these paintings function as: a window into what I'm interested in and what I'm obsessed about. Bringing them to a gallery gives them an exposure that wasn't there before, or has been there but has been forgotten, neglected, pushed under the rug and denied visibility.

**What does 647(a) refer to?**

Lewd conduct! A lot of what I've participated in is considered lewd conduct. One of the main pieces in my last show was five pages of an arrest record when I got arrested for public sex. The first time my parents knew about it was at the exhibition! [Laughs] I was ashamed, but these days it's completely outdated. Like, I cruise here all the time in Berlin. No one cares. There are bigger issues. But if nothing else, this stupid election in the States has given me new energy to make the work. I think a lot of young gay people take things for granted. This is what happens when everyone's so comfortable. That's when this right-wing stuff happens.

# Exberliner, 2017

## **What do you want your work to say to them?**

Pay attention. Do your research. Know your history. Because Trump is happening! The younger generation of gays has been complacent, and conservatism in the gay community has been growing for decades. There's been this wave of wanting to get away from things like cruising, public sex, tea rooms, bathhouses, things that made the gay community interesting and special to me. It's been distanced like "those are the perverts, but we're not the perverts". There's this kind of heterosexual ideal that has taken over.

## **Do you see that changing?**

When I went to school, people were still doing activist work. ACT UP and Queer Nation were around. There were reasons for queer people to make work. I think once that died down, there were a lot fewer queer artists because I think the urgency wasn't there to take out their frustrations, to make political work against the government. I don't know, but maybe it's going to go back to that. Maybe there's going to be more identity art coming out because now there's real urgency again.

**Dean Sameshima: 647(a), Mar 10-Apr 24 | Peres Projects, Friedrichshain**

# SEDUCTIVE DARKNESS: AN INTERVIEW WITH DEAN SAMESHIMA

THOMAS MOORE

28.04.14



California born, Berlin based artist [Dean Sameshima](#) makes work that is simultaneously ghostly and living. Drawing on moments that he fears may be lost if not captured and thereby instilling them with new breath and a critical re-appropriation that is sharp and yet loving. I was surprised when he said that he doesn't consider himself to be an optimistic person, because I find a raw hopefulness in his work, which on reflection may be due to his perceived lack of optimism. Either way, his work is beautiful, it draws in moments from queer history, punk aesthetics, an investigation of space (cruising areas, empty beds), and a seductive darkness that's hypnotic and intoxicating.

**FZ: When I look at your work there are certain words and themes that begin to feel apparent. There's something happening to do with the past, about understanding things, trying to make sense of things that are gone; in a way maybe you're trying to make sure that certain things aren't lost. When I was making notes, I wrote down the word nostalgia. To me, that word these days has a very loaded feel to it, and I don't think it would do your work justice ... However there is a strong trace of the past in your work and I wondered if you could discuss that a little bit? It feels like some of it is celebratory of forgotten or perhaps overlooked aspects of queer history, but then there's always something else going on, a really interesting re-appropriation or something. I guess I'm asking about the role of specific references to the past in your work.**

Yes I have always had an interest in parts of gay history that seem overlooked, as well as on the verge of forgotten and especially that which was ignored. One of my first bodies of work, Wonderland series, was such an important body of work for me. It was a breakthrough series for me as an artist. I was putting something deemed shameful out there and giving it some dignity. Bringing something from the darkness to light. Bath houses, public cruising and sex clubs aren't as popular today as they were pre-internet and especially pre-AIDS. I felt the need/urge to document this stuff, and this was before I knew what kind of impact computers would have, before it all started to disappear. I don't mind the word nostalgia and I am not sure why people think it is such a bad thing in art work. I no longer care much what others think. My work is very steeped in nostalgia. To me, the past was just so much more interesting.

# Fanzine, 2014

Appropriation is something I started to do in undergraduate school as well and it worked well for me because I was (and still am) a super shy person and I wanted to start to bring actual people into my work, actual bodies. Because in the beginning, my work was empty of people. I never wanted to put a demographic stamp on the sites I was photographing. The only real traces were from the tea-room drawings and texts I rephotographed from the walls of public toilets. I thought maybe it was time I start showing people what I was expecting to find in these spaces. Also, at the time I was really into fashion magazines and models, so I guess I was trying to combine these two areas of interest for me and trying to make them fit, trying to make sense of the two and how they shaped my desires.

**FZ: I like what you say about looking back on things and wanting to give them dignity – that celebration is really prevalent in your work. It's like shining sunlight on something that some people had previously forced into the darkness. Things can be forgotten easily, and it feels like your work fights against that. But of course part of that looking back is unavoidably sad, because things are gone, things become lost. Often one of the most haunting things in your work are the things that aren't there – photographs of places that may have been used as cruising but that now seem deserted, photographs of empty beds (like in your *In Between Days (Without You)* series), closed down sex places in daylight – the people and events that are evoked from these images are conspicuous by their absence. It feels like some of your work attempts to use sadness and turn it inside out – mine difficult times and experiences and force some kind of beauty out of them. I might not be making sense, but it feels like an overriding sensibility of your work is hopefulness. Can you talk a little about that? Are you naturally optimistic? What things make you feel happy?**

I don't think I ever thought much about sadness as a theme or something that propelled me... maybe more fear than sadness. Maybe they are linked? Like the sex clubs. I photographed them while they were still opened for business, they just happened to close down few years after my series was complete. but I feared this might happen and what would happen once they closed? What safe place would we have then? Back to the streets? The parks? Tea rooms? All these uncontrolled and potentially violent spaces. So the fear of losing something (I found lots of value in), was perhaps a strong emotion for me. i am not a naturally optimistic person at all.

**FZ: I'm interested to hear about your teenage years. Your work is sympathetic and loyal to several different subcultures – punks, queers, goths. What pieces of art (in whatever medium, music, sculpture, books, anything) were formative for you as a teenager? What else shaped you around that time?**

In my teen years I didn't know anything about art. As a teenager all I cared about was hanging out with the cool kids and dressing cool and listening to cool music. My "cool" wasn't a popular cool. I tried very hard to stand out and away from the norm... and I did. I was very concerned about image as a teenager and didn't care at all for art. But what did make some sort of impression on me were punk magazines like *Flipside* and *Maximum Rock n Roll* and the fanzines I would collect from that time period as well. The rawness and DIY aesthetic of these publications made an impression on me for sure. And as a teenager I was always collecting things, I was a huge collector of stuff. Japanese robot toys, punk flyers, stamps, clothes, records, fanzines, vintage gay publications.... I always wanted to amass a cool archive of stuff. These days not so much, other than images from my decades of shooting/photographing. And a small archive, a sort of "best of" from my past interests into one big mixed collection.

**FZ: Moving on from looking at what movements and cultures you feel a direct lineage too from the past, I ended up wondering about what art or artists you feel a kinship with in the present?**

Today I feel a bit lost as far as feeling a part of anything. The last thing I got really excited about was reading the books: *The Secret Historian*, *Just Kids*, and *Dirty Poole*. See again, these are books about the past. I don't really feel such a strong kinship with any one movement or artist in the present.

# Fanzine, 2014

**FZ: I'm not sure how to ask this question really... Just thinking about queer art, and loss, and sex, I dunno, my relationship to the subject of AIDS is probably quite different to yours because I think there's twelve years between us. I was wondering how AIDS influenced your work?**

12 years between us? I am going to be 43 at the end of May and right when I was about to start my sexual exploration AIDS hit. Every single day the first thing on the television news was the topic of AIDS. It was super scary and confusing and depressing. Can't say that AIDS has influenced my work directly BUT the art that came out of the 80's and 90's, the political art, "body art", "identity art", gay art all inspired me greatly. Most of it was criticized but it totally worked for me and got me excited. When AIDS came about, I believe there was an urgency for people to make work... sometimes angry and aggressive work. And a lot of it came from gay men obviously. There seemed to be a larger presence of gay male artists back then and as the decades go by, that sense of urgency fades.

**FZ: One of the artists who you've paid tribute to in your series of unique T-Shirts that you've created is Felix Gonzales-Torres. I can definitely feel a kinship between some of his work and some of yours. What is it that made you create the tribute to him?**

Good question. I absolutely love and despise his work at the same time... or more so, I despise that he became THE chosen gay artist. His work is super seductive and safe and at times I am super jealous and other times just think about how good he was at figuring out a niche in the market. And despite all of this I still admire his work. I made work in response to his bed billboards because I thought what he was representing, was a conservative view of homosexual life, or an idea of homosexual life, one that mimicked a heterosexual ideal. I also worked at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles when he had his retrospective back in 1994, which was such a privilege to be able to see and "experience" his work throughout the duration of the exhibition...namely the candy spills and poster works and their depletion over time.

The edition and shirt I made was simply two things I have been wanting to make for a while. I have had that press release since 1995 and it has even traveled the world with me. I only make things that I want to live with and I make shirts that I want to wear, so I thought it was time to make a piece using this deteriorating Felix Gonzalez-Torres press release I have had for almost 2 decades.

**FZ: You have some work in the Tony Greene exhibition at Iceberg in Chicago. It's a show that features his work and also the work of artists who he has influenced or has a bond with. How did you become involved in that and what is your relationship to his work?**

I think Elijah Berger recommended me for that exhibition. I got an email from the curator, John Neff and he suggested two things of mine to be included in the exhibition. First time I saw Tony Greene's work in person was at the home of Richard Hawkins back in 1994. One of the main links between his and my work is the use of found vintage imagery, especially the use of physique imagery.

**FZ: Carrying on that theme of artists who may or may not have had an influence on your work: I was looking at a photograph of your *Master Rich # 3 (Crucifixion)* piece on your website, and it brought to mind the work of Gengoroh Tagame – almost like an attempt to bring to life some of the fantasies in his work. Whether he's an influence or not could you tell me a bit more about that piece?**

Well I only got to know the work of Tagame in the past few years and though he wasn't a direct influence, I do admire his work greatly!

The piece was just inspired by hanging out at this leather bar in L.A. called Gauntlet II. I used to go there all the time with friends and alone and I would watch this guy do his leather performances in the middle of the bar. I would just stand there and watch him bind, tie and sometimes hang his subjects. It was all so beautiful and elegant and quite performative. One night I got the courage to approach the guy, Master Rich, and asked him if I could photograph his creations. He is a relative of a famous American photographer and liked the idea, so I photographed a few of his creations, Cocoon being the first.

# Fanzine, 2014

**FZ: It sounds very ritualistic. Which made apparent a certain attraction to a type of ritualism in your work, be it cruising, or immortalizing certain things, the places associated with rituals etc (because I always feel that the spaces connected to where things happen are as important), I was wondering if you have any rituals when it comes to how you create your work. Are you an artist who works in a set way or order or someone to who works different with each piece, depending on how or where an idea arrives. I suppose I'm asking you tell me how you start working on a piece.**

I have no rituals for art making, which lately I have realized, is a not such a good thing for me. I have no discipline whatsoever and therefore make very little these days. Sometimes I find something worth expanding upon while digging through old magazines. But these days, something, some idea, really has to stop me in my tracks in order to pay attention to it. Otherwise I just go on about my day doing anything but "art" and lately I have given myself permission to do this and be okay with it. There is nothing that urgent these days about art or artists. We are not curing cancer.

**FZ: And also, are you still interested in leather bars and that kind of scene and if so how do you find the scene to be in Berlin? And also while we're talking about Berlin, how do you find it there in general, do you see yourself staying there for the foreseeable future?**

I don't go out much to bars unless I have visitors. I don't go out to the gay clubs here in general because they are usually horrendous. The leather scene doesn't interest me that much. I am interested more in the idea of fetishes in general and I'm curious about the idea of domination and submission but not really the leather scene specifically.

In general I find Berlin fantastic, I am still in love with it! I have been here for 7 years already and see myself here for a while more, for sure.

**FZ: I want to ask you to talk about your use of the internet. We follow each other on Instagram, and you've got some really cool stuff on your Etsy page, but specifically I was thinking about your Tumblr page. How do you view it? Scrapbook? Some kind of art curatorial thing? Or just online fun? Personally I've found tons of inspiration from looking through Tumblrs. Just a ton of interesting and beautiful things posted together, you know? I also find it interesting finding new Tumblrs and working out how someone is trying to represent themselves through the images they choose to post.**

I view it a few important ways. It started out as all original posts mainly of my inspirations outside of the "art world" and my inspirations for my own work, but not putting in my own work. Then I started to add more Art specific images and texts and songs etc and seeing myself as more of a curator but also starting to add my own art work here and there to put things into perspective and see how I fit into other works...then I realized it was important to re-blog others as mine was re-blogged, as I felt that was in important part of the Tumblr experience, community and dialog. I have met some really cool people from Tumblr and have actually met a few in person. What I LOVE is the connections I have developed with a few of the people there.

# Fanzine, 2014

**FZ: In my eyes, the T Shirts on your Etsy site are very much pieces of art in their own right. I've seen you post various pictures of T Shirts online as well ... is there something that draws you specifically to the T Shirt?**

Thanks! They are meant to be artworks for sure. I think my love of t-shirts started with concert t-shirts. Concert shirts were a way for me to communicate my tastes during Jr. High and High school. I also did my best to stand out in school, visually, and band shirts helped. Concert shirts or any shirt with a message on it, is a quiet way for us to communicate to others. It's a way of letting you know a little something I am into. If I see someone wearing a shirt of a band I love, then I feel a sense of identification, which is nice. I also found that the bootlegs sold right outside of the venues where usually better than the official merch being sold inside, and usually much cheaper!

The shirts I make and sell are all shirts I wanted to wear for a long time, but could never find them for sale out there. So I decided to just make them myself and found Etsy to be an amazing platform to sell them to others. It's as if these are the bootleg tour shirts for some of my favorites in literature, film and contemporary art...as if they were on tour like a band.



Dean Sameshima, *YMAP (Sun #2)* (detail), 2005, framed light jet print, 30 x 21 1/4".

honor of Harvey Milk and in peaceful protest of the light sentencing of his assassin, Twinkie-eater Dan White. I usually retch whenever I see a rainbow anything, but Dean Sameshima's use of rainbow pride here triggered glee: Tearing at the seams of Baker's handmade prototype, Sameshima allows the sign of craft to remain only in the rainbow tinting of his images scanned from underground 1950s and '60s physical-culture-turned-sugary-porn chapbooks like *Butch* that, picturing "young men at play" as nude or pouch-clad cowboys, gymnasts, wrestlers, footballers, and artists, sexed the postal system.

Sameshima's usually monochromatic tinting isn't capricious: His sources' simple color separation and newspaper-like stock kept most of the "adults only" material affordable to both budget queens and horny, questioning teens. In the blue-toned diptych *YMAP (Art)*, 2005, a well-hung and well-leied brunet shows off both his front and rear assets, relaxing on a ready bed while a second figure uses a makeshift Warhol-meets-Kienholz "camera" (made, in part, of a "Toymato Soup" can and jerry-built tin flash) to "take" pictures. This device could only shoot phantasmatically, while the mostly anonymous photographers were left striving to realize with actual cameras and willing beefcake equivalents in the world. Sameshima asks if it is at all possible in an age of anything goes to risk something similarly eccentric and intense for the sake of desire.

With this exuberant boyfest, Sameshima acknowledges that, ever since Mike Kelley put two stuffed animals on a dinky afghan with a boom box droning theory in his 1991 "Dialogue" series, theory has often looked down-home and craft has become a sign of self-consciousness. By unfurling rainbows as sheer signification of the personal (re: craft) and by Viagravating the often too-latent sexual energy of rephotography, Sameshima skirts the potential impasse of theory to struggle with the personal. The young men at play become a study not in nostalgia (how could they, when from Abercrombie & Fitch to *Friday Night Lights* [2004] "jock" is the dominant aesthetic of all masculinity?) but rather in mourning for an identity now (?) kaput.

In *Boys In My Bedroom*, 1995-, the man-crazy second part of the show, Sameshima inverted (and perverted?) his negotiation of gay history by sorting out his private desires from the world's vast bombardment of cute "types." *His* dream is slim-hipped, Euro, Hedi Slimane-for-Diorish, but obsession extends it messily to include Luke Wilson, certain surfers,

teens with baby fat, a young Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and supermodel Ivan de Pineda, black-and-white photocopies of whom Sameshima has taped into delicate wall-paper-like "screens." This fierce archiving echoes, fractures, and diverges from the rainbow rhapsody. Relentless, its cruising is endless, all-consuming, and beyond normative relationality.

The apotheosis occurs with *Boys In My Bedroom*, #2, 2005, a dizzying, two-hour compilation of every glimpse of televised hotness that's caught Sameshima's eye, edited down to the guys alone. No one and nothing else matters, not Oprah, not narrative, perhaps not even "Dean." From spicy arrestees on *COPS* to Tom Cruise, the low-tech binge of singled-out talking heads and show-offs overwhelms, producing simultaneous exhilaration and unease. Love isn't the only drug anyone should be thinking of while ogling this sublime. Nearby, *Self Portrait*, 2005, comprised of nine Polaroid stills grabbed from Fassbinder's *Fox and His Friends* (1975), ends with ends with a bottle of Valium and a dead Fox.

—Bruce Hanley

y 2000, clumps of weeds and grasses. Two trees at the top of the piece send cascades of roots into side-by-side maps of the city. The one on the left charts the meandering path of Mission Creek, a stream that ran freely through the sparsely populated terrain of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The oak tree's roots flow seamlessly into this stream, suggesting an undisturbed natural cycle. By contrast, in the map on the right, the eucalyptus's roots become part of a grid of streets. A ghostlike version of the creek is repeated behind this grid, like penitenti on maps of the ancient world that reveal the sites of once-thriving but long-vanished empires.

While replete with deftly rendered decorative detail, *Mission Creek* sags a little under the weight of all the different ways it seeks to convey the single message that nature has been Irreparably Altered. *San Francisco Bay 1800/San Francisco Bay 2000* essentially tells the same story, but does so in a way that feels subtler and more open-ended, allowing viewers to reach their own conclusions.

—Maria Porges

## LOS ANGELES

### DEAN SAMESHIMA PERES PROJECTS

Fagdom's Betsy Ross, Gilbert Baker, a "self-described 'flaming queen' by age three," designed the rainbow flag in 1978, but due to technical problems (an initial eight-color design could not be commercially fabricated because hot pink was at that time unavailable for mass production) it wasn't unfurled until a year later, in

the but the re rep-fauna. lission tus, knife-raws s to isco, ghly wild untain bull rts such nts ave led

# Attitude, 2005



## DEAN SAMESHIMA

I chose Dean Sameshima partly because along with myself he's represented by the gallerist Javier Peres of Peres Projects LA and Berlin, and partly because he's a solid artist. Dean has an academic background – including an MFA from the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena – but we won't hold that against him. (I have an MFA too, so there). He has exhibited in a variety of galleries from Tijuana to Tokyo. One thing I like about Dean's work is that everything old school is new again. Here his humpy found photos from old chapbooks are updated with monochromatic, rainbow flag overlays, a genteel mockery of both pre-Stonewall coyness and post-Stonewall political idealism.  
*On left, YMAP (Rainbow), 2005; Diptych*



## RYAN FOERSTER

Ryan tracked me down in Toronto several years back and asked if he could show me his photographs. I magnanimously agreed, and the rest is history in progress. I thought he was gay at first (he looked up me, after all), but when I found out he wasn't, it didn't matter. His photos are gayer than gay, in a good way. I introduced him to some people at *Vice* and he immediately started publishing photos for them; next thing you know I'm writing him a letter of recommendation for the exclusive International School of Photography in New York. He starts in two weeks. It would be easy to pass him off as the Ryan McGinley of Canada, but that would be reductive: Ryan F has a style all his own.  
*On left, Jump, 2005; on right, Brennan Roof, 2003*



## TOM DURA

Forget what I said about being gay, young, and involved in pornography: Tom Dura is all three and he's hot as hell – the exception that proves the rule. I first became aware of Tom when he e-mailed me about appearing in one of my movies. Born in rural Switzerland in 1984, he's now attending art school in Zurich after winning a national prize for his photography. But Tom has many other interests, including escorting and appearing in porn. He recently completed a movie for Jean-Daniel Cadinot, under the name Tom Schwarz. Aside from his supersexy self-portraits, you can see more of this up and comer at the great escort site *Escupido.com*. Rent him today! (He ain't cheap.)  
*On left, Self Portrait, 2005*



## say hi to photographer dean sameshima, he's hot

Dean Sameshima is struggling to describe his work. "Perhaps emotional conceptualism is a good term," he concedes. It's a good description. Sameshima's work mixes art theory with the autobiographically personal to produce a body of work that is both knowing and wistful, work that skates lightly between fashion and the legacy of queer/race theory taught in American visual culture courses. "My work comes from a very personal starting point, it's very autobiographical, but I'm also interested in conceptualism. Ultimately, I think I try to explore my own various structures of desire." This started off with the Wonderland series, where Sameshima photographed the façades of various sex clubs in Los Angeles, but during the daytime so they were deserted. The locked doors promised eroticism but also had that curiously empty feeling that all clubs have in the harsh light of day, and especially the morning after. These images were mixed with empty spaces in Griffith Park - sites where Sameshima remembers as places where he once had sex. "I didn't feel safe to explore my own personal desires in men, so for a long time my work never had people in them," he explains. "I was, actually I still am, terrified to approach men for shoots." One way round this was simply not to ask. In one series of photographs Sameshima would follow whoever he thought was "the cutest guy of the night" around clubs, taking photographs until they either noticed or left. Permission or not, his art career is taking off big time. He featured in a one-person presentation at the artworld's most prestigious art fair, Basel, bagged himself a swanky New York gallerist and has also been signed up by London's asprey jacques, where he has an opening exhibition in March. "I'm working on a series with a guy that I met called Master Rich. He's a 'rope top' and has studied various forms of rope bondage. He hangs people from the ceiling, in very beautiful forms that I am photographing." Exquisite emotional bondage - now that really is worth waiting for. NIRU RATNAM

Dean Sameshima's debut show *Outlaw II (Silverlake)* opens at asprey jacques on March 24. Check out [www.aspreyjacques.com/](http://www.aspreyjacques.com/) [www.peres-projects.com](http://www.peres-projects.com)

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICOLE PATTERSON

# iD, 2004



013 DAVID ARONOFF, filmmaker  
photographed by Lynn Labov



014 DEAN KAWASHIMA, writer  
photographed by Todd Cole



015 BRENDAN BABBITT, singer/songwriter  
photographed by Lisa Remander



016 DONALD CUMMINS, writer  
photographed by Richard Kern

# DEAN SAMESHIMA

ディーン・サメシマ



「Untitled (older men, 1995)」1995年

「ボーイズ」たちのユートピア、の昼間の素顔。

text / Kyoko Wada

©Dean Sameshima courtesy of Taka Ishii Gallery



SIAM



「Untitled (15 rooms, 1 locker room, 3 bathtubs, 2 leather slings, 1995)」1995年

□ サンジェルス郊外、旅行者なら気づかずに通り過ぎるだろう何の変哲もない建物。旅行ガイドの写真にしては、活気やその営みがまったく見えてこないこれらの建物の正体は、いわゆるゲイクラブで、夜な夜なゲイたちが集いパートナーとともに過ごす場だ。ディーン・サ

メシマはドアも窓も閉めきった館の外観を、営業時間外の真っ昼間に撮影する。そこに個人的な思い入れも、人の気配もまったく存在しない。たぶんナン・ゴールドフィンや荒木経惟が同じ光景を撮影したら、ウェットで情感たっぷりの写真に仕上げるのだろう。しかし厳格に水平を保った

隙を許さない構図や、建物を白日の下に照らし出したサメシマの写真には、感傷を禁じる視線すら感じる。写真には建物のベッドルームの数やシャワーの有無といった、いわゆる施設概要だけが添えられ、このあまりにも即物的な表現が、かえってニヒリズムを浮き彫りにしている。

ディーン・サメシマ

●1971年、ロサンジェルス生まれ。新しい世代の写真家として注目される若手作家。学生時代には教師たちに「君の作品はベッキヤ夫妻がクラブに行って撮影したみたいな写真だな」と言われていた。その言葉どおり、彼は保守的な近代写真と同時に、Webサイトに投稿されたようなアマチュア写真にもインスパイアされているという。

甲斐裕司 = 写真  
photographs by Hiroshi Kai  
フジヤ奈穂 = スタイルリング  
styling by Naho Fujiya  
special thanks to Taka Ishii Gallery

「ねえ、私たち解消しない？」  
こんなシンプルな一言で、6年間  
つきあった彼女との関係はいとも簡  
単に放棄された。まるで飲み終わっ  
たコーヒの缶をゴミ箱に放るよう  
に。僕は、トランクひとつで彼女と  
の家を出た。二人で買ったラプチェ  
アもエスプレッソマシンも50インチ  
の大型テレビも、なにもかもみんな  
置いて――。  
隅田川沿いの倉庫街。かつては織  
物倉庫だったという大きなビルを改  
装した一部屋が、僕の新居だ。周囲  
は生活感のない茫漠とした風景が続  
くが、最近いくつかのコンテンポラ  
リーギャラリーが引っ越して気にな  
っていたエリアだ。  
居住スペースを探す途中、ふらりと  
立ち寄ったギャラリーで気になる  
写真を見つけた。僕の心を捉えたの  
は、デイン・サメシマというアー  
ティストの写真の連作だった。海辺  
に佇む男の後ろ姿は、彼の別れたホ  
イフレンドだ。21枚の同一イメー  
ジは、枚数を追うことに残像のよう  
に淡く霞んで最後には白く消えてし

一台のバイオが叶えてくれた画像と音の贅沢。

最高に欲張りな究極のミニマルライフ。



まう。作家の心象風景はいまの僕には笑ってしまうほどストレート過ぎるが、アートへの思い入れというのはこんな風に個人的に始まるものなのかもしれない。

殺風景なSOHOの空間には、コルビュジエの一人掛けのアンティークLC2とライトスタンドがひとつだけ。彼女と暮らした部屋にはモノが溢れていたが、シングルライフは徹底的にミニマルに暮らそうと決めた。その代わり、好きなものには最大限の贅沢を惜しまない。だからコングリート打ちっ放しの大きな壁には、思いきって一目惚れした写真を買った。

テレビもDVDデッキもODプレイヤーも何もない部屋。ぼつんと置かれたバイオWだけが静かに光を放っている。いまの僕を支えてくれるわずかなツールは、このバイオと携帯電話だけだ。

リモコンを取り出して音楽をかける。彼女とは趣味の合わなかったテックノも、ここには思いきり響かせることができる。明日目覚めたら、まずテレビをつけるだろう。歯磨きをしている5分間に好きな音楽をMDに落として、そのまま持ち出す。週末にはお気に入りのリキールを買って、DVDを見るのもいい。これさえあれば、テレビだってMDだってCDだってDVDだってなんだって堪能できる。楽しみを詰め込んだ僕のプライベートサーバーなんだから、彼女は僕を捨てた。僕は必要のないすべてのものを捨てた。そしてこの思いきりミニマルで贅沢な暮らしから、もうひとつの朝が始まる。③

写真作品とトランクひとつで始めた新生活。

殺風景な一人暮らしの空間で目指すのは、

徹底したシンプルさだ。

でも、そこにバイオ Wがあれば、

ビジュアル& オーディオライフは心配ない。



#### パーソナルコンピューター「バイオW」

オープン価格。ベーシックなPCV-W120(カラーはムーンホワイトのみ)とNet MD対応のMDデッキを搭載したPCV-W120(コスモブルーとムーンホワイト)の2機種。ともに音楽・テレビ・DVD用リモコン付属の15.3型ワイド液晶ディスプレイモデル。キーボードが折り畳める厚さ約1.9cmの薄型で、音楽やテレビの視聴、録音(画)、再生が可能。インターネットのIEPG番組情報サイトからの番組録画も簡単だ。

ディーン・サメシマはロス在住のアーティスト。写真を使ったコンセプチュアルな作品は「I-D」などでも紹介され、評価が高い。作品集に「hysteric 7」(ヒステリックグラマー)がある。

p152 "In Darkness, There is Light"  
(Sean, La Jolla, CA, 1996) 1999  
©Dean Sameshima  
Courtesy of Taka Ishii Gallery

#### information contact

VAIO カタログセンター tel.03-5454-0700 <http://www.vaio.Sony.co.jp/w>

## "Inframince" at Cabinet, London By Catherine Wood

According to Susan Sontag, Georges Bataille's transgressive fantasy *The Story of the Eye* (1928) "charts the stages of the gratification of an erotic obsession which haunts a number of commonplace objects." At the beginning of Bataille's story, protagonist Simone lowers her "burning buttocks" into a saucer of milk that has been set out, she says, "for the pussy." Bataille's electrifying description of her "pink and dark flesh cooling in the white milk" pinpoints an infinitesimal point of contact: an image so subtly precise that it is simultaneously a merger of like with like (the inside/outside flesh of the female body with the symbolic liquid) and a highly charged difference.

"Inframince" takes Duchamp's enigmatic category of measurement (translated as "infra-thin") as a starting point to figure a group show. Duchamp defined his term by example only. The exhibition is curated in a similar spirit, its title lending a perceptual key to the works without yoking them to an overbearing theme. Curator David Bussel cites some of Duchamp's notes on the "inframince": "when the smoke of tobacco smells also of the mouth from which it comes"; "Velvet trousers—their whistling sound (in walking) by brushing of 2 legs," as well as "opalescence" and "wet silk." Bataille's observation might serve as an additional exemplar: the milk's surface tinged with

erotic opalescence is a fitting approximation to the charged current connecting works in Bussel's show.

Cerith Wyn Evans's *Untitled (Monochrome)* (1989) is made of phosphorescent paint which absorbs and stores light energy so that in darkness it glows. By day, its transformation remains latent as (denied) possibility. The literally charged surface of Wyn Evans's work is juxtaposed with Andy Warhol's *Oxidation Painting* (1978), produced by urinating on and so transmuting a copper-painted canvas. Permeating the space, Rodney Graham's *Verwandlungsmusik (Transformation Music)* (1990) makes audible a Wagnerian passage intended to impart in(aud/vis)ibility to sounds that belie the mechanics of theatrical illusion during the pause between operatic acts.

Liam Gillick's black-glitter-and-vodka floor piece, *Smooth Spaces* (2002), magic-dusts the gallery floor, infusing the usually functional surface with an intimation of spent glamour. On the adjacent wall, *Cherry (June 15, 2001)* (2001), a suite of photographs by Dean Sameshima, depicts a young man in a Los Angeles night club. Sameshima snaps his camera amongst the disorientating lights until his desired subject becomes aware of his admirer's presence or disappears into the

crowd. The only contact that takes place is between the photographic flash and the man's skin. Knut Asdam's photograph, *Psychasthenia 10 (image 23)* (2000), sits least comfortably within the exhibition. His night-time picture sucks the utopian social structures of modernist housing into a shadowy black light, but the aluminum-mounted photograph's confident slickness ultimately deflects the subtlety its subject might otherwise have evinced. Placed centrally in the exhibition, Fischli and Weiss's DVD *Busi (Kitty)* (2001) is a six-minute loop portraying a stray kitten lapping up a saucer of milk.

The operative momentum of Bussel's exhibition propels a complex engagement with each of its individual works but also suggests infinite possibilities for expanding its curatorial selection. "Inframince" makes no claims about contemporary trends and posits no thesis. Instead, in attending to the minute structures of difference within a small number of works, Bussel succeeds, as he says, in "[elucidating] the work, of the work." Quantum curating?

The exhibition ran from May 24 to June 29, 2002. (Right) Liam Gillick, *Smooth Spaces* (detail), 2002, black glitter, Belvedere vodka, dim. var. Courtesy Cabinet, London.



## DEAN SAMESHIMA

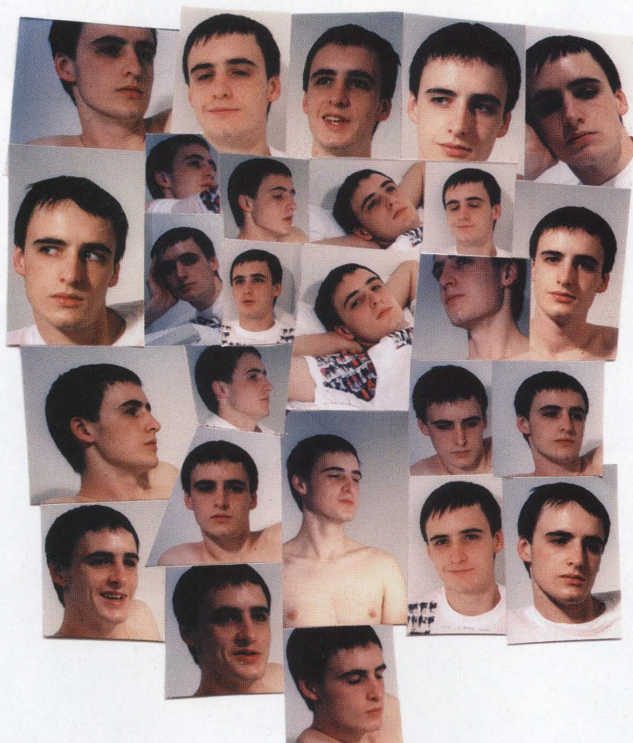
In 1995, Dean Sameshima began documenting the anonymous architectural façades of various gay sex clubs scattered throughout Los Angeles. This project is conducted during closing hours, when the activities conducted within are either a memory or a fantasy reserved for a subsequent evening. The photographs are presented in a horizontal format that reflects the elusive, drive-by experience of both LA and the kind of anonymous, public sex chronicled there in John Rechy's *City Of Night*. The cheap modern semi-industrial buildings present an unmarked bluntness in the urban landscape matched by the matter-of-fact nature of Sameshima's photographs. If space is a practised place, then the artist has practised this milieu and the means with which to document it. More recently, he has directed his camera away from empty landscapes of clandestine desire and has focused instead on his own constellation of 'personal celebrities'.

His apartment in Los Angeles is packed with an archive of ephemera from a parallel universe of art, supermodels, fashion designers, Britpop stars and homoeroticism that have all impacted his unique field of vision. Sameshima has absorbed these public figures into a private mythology of longing which contributes to a distinct erotic of slim young men with dandyish tendencies. In *Modern Boys* he plays paparazzi and descends on LA's mod and Britpop club to cruise and chronicle his objects of desire. Relying on the same systematic approach that he deploys in the sex club series, the moment he locates a boy who can reaffirm his own cultural biases, he shoots frame after frame of his subject until his gaze is returned. These brief narratives of arousal are displayed from first frame to last, and the final acknowledgement of the subjects tests the fragility of Sameshima's yearning with the shock of the real. STUART COMER

*Dean Sameshima shows at Kunstverein Hamburg in April and with Low Gallery, Los Angeles in Statements at Art Basel in June.*

*Too Young To Reason, Too Grown Up To Dream* (2001) by Dean Sameshima.  
Courtesy of Low Gallery, Los Angeles.





## DEAN SAMESHIMA

L.A. artist Dean Sameshima considers himself a photographic masochist because his mix of photography, collage and installation explores the space between desire and fulfillment. Coolly detached yet imbued with a tension more often associated with photographers like Larry Clark or Nan Goldin, Sameshima's portraits of sex club exteriors, dance club interiors and male models are a historically charged catalogue of memory, place

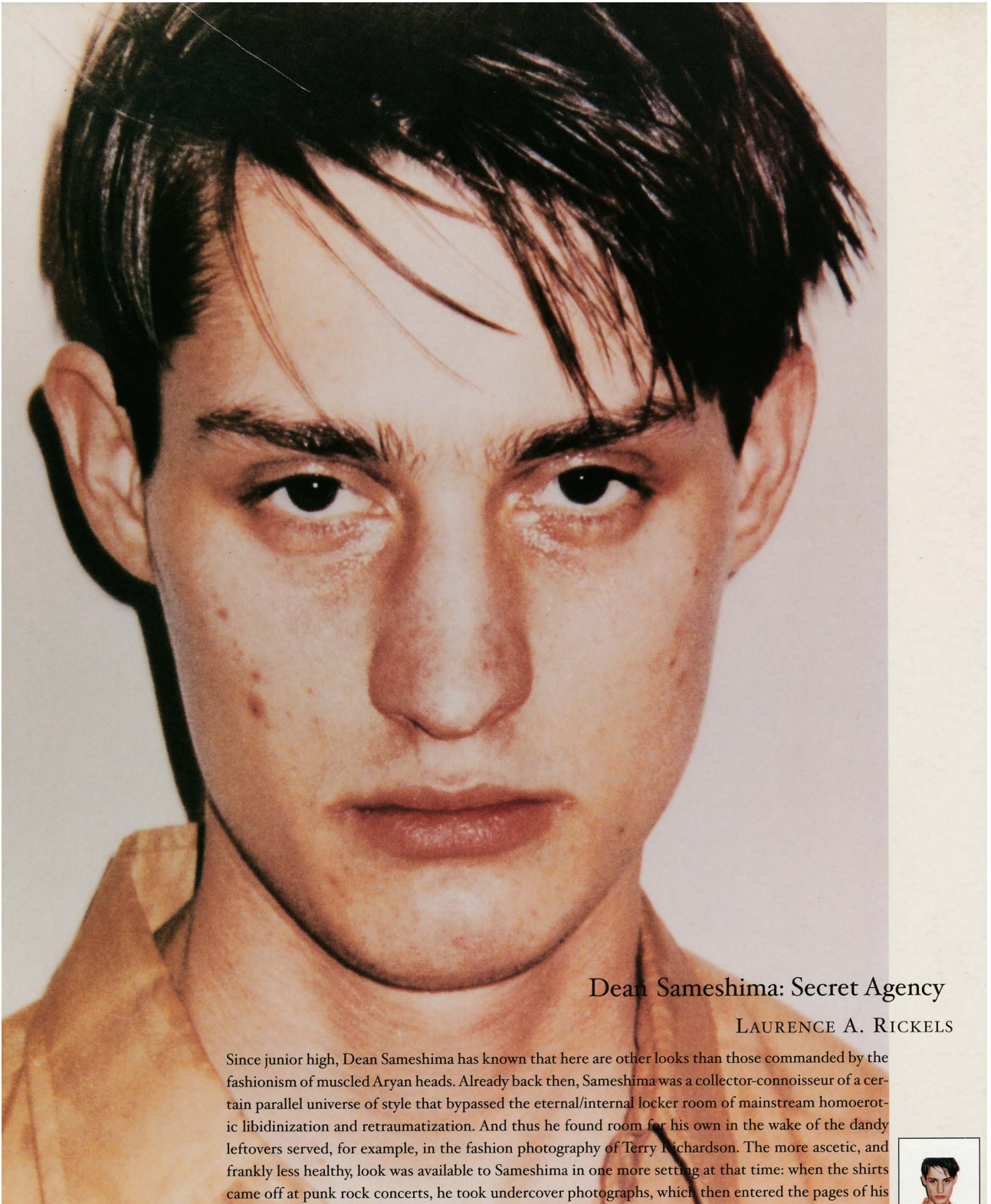
but Sameshima offers us more than just a clever mix of pop and commercialism. In photographic series that unfold like a visual diary, the California native examines fashion and advertising's influence in shaping desire (both his and ours), and it ain't always pretty. His juxtapositions of original portraits alongside clichéd images of the idealized male (white, blond and buff) show how the industry can create unrealistic expectations. It's a critique

"IN PHOTOGRAPHIC SERIES THAT UNFOLD LIKE A VISUAL DIARY, THE CALIFORNIA NATIVE EXAMINES FASHION AND ADVERTISING'S INFLUENCE IN SHAPING DESIRE (BOTH HIS AND OURS), AND IT AIN'T ALWAYS PRETTY."

and identity. But it's his visual appropriations—re-photographed images from the pages of fashion magazines like *Vogue*—that are earning him the attention of the *Artforum* crowd.

Art's intersection with fashion has been a major point of contention for critics who see it as the worst that Warholism and Reaganomics had to offer. As a result, photography informed by fashion gets dismissed as the fast-food equivalent of art. Sometimes that is an accurate assessment (after all, Bruce Webber's work may look good, but quit calling it brilliant),

that continues with re-photographed images from fashion ads to which the artist makes specific changes, cropping the image and shifting the focus to the model's skin, for example, rather than the Prada shirt covering the skin. The simple change from shirt to skin completely re-informs the work and sets Sameshima's art apart from Steven Meisel wannabes. *Dean Sameshima*, published by Hysteria Glamour, is out this month, and the artist's second solo exhibition, *Failures 1977 (Michael 2002) 2002*, also opens this month at Basel Art Statements. **Madelynn Amalfitano**



Dean Sameshima: Secret Agency

LAURENCE A. RICKELS

Since junior high, Dean Sameshima has known that there are other looks than those commanded by the fashionism of muscled Aryan heads. Already back then, Sameshima was a collector-connoisseur of a certain parallel universe of style that bypassed the eternal/internal locker room of mainstream homoerotic libidinization and retraumatization. And thus he found room for his own in the wake of the dandy leftovers served, for example, in the fashion photography of Terry Richardson. The more ascetic, and frankly less healthy, look was available to Sameshima in one more setting at that time: when the shirts came off at punk rock concerts, he took undercover photographs, which then entered the pages of his

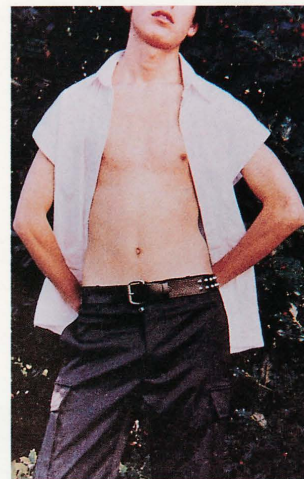


DEAN SAMESHIMA, (OPPOSITE) *Brian*, 1999, Fuji Flex print, 35.5 x 28 cm./ framed 50 x 40 cm. (BELOW) *Bang*, 2000, Fuji Flex print, set of 5, 4 x 6 in. on 11 x 14 in. Courtesy Low, Los Angeles.



That photography does not necessarily serve as the limit concept of this overlap was underscored in the 2000 series, *Untitled (Portraits 1999)*. In these printouts on photographic paper, clicked-open windows are empty but for the menu frame and the occasional cover note or come-on message and Web name. But the attached image that's the next step in Web courtship remains just a click away—now and forever, way away. These ready frames of access to a look that appears always in excess of being there and Sameshima's 1998 series, *In Between Days (Without You)*, go together like before and after. In the latter photos of empty bathhouse bedrooms, the afterglow that the anonymous partner split upon consummation is caught—point, shoot, no flash—by *bomo alone*. But the photographer does not take the pictures because he is alone, but is alone so he can carry out his undercover assignment. The relationship to absence in these works is that of the frame—the techno frame—as the constitutive possibility of access, of every object and subject's ready positioning for access, and of the opening up or clearing that at the same time denies access.

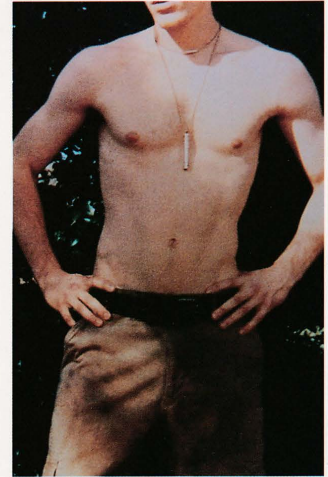
The downtime Sameshima does with absence comes up in his undercover excursions into the recent past. His first body of work, the 1995-99 documentary series *Wonderland*, is an archaeological dig and, since final resting places of representation and repression tend to be disturbed in the process, also a seance with the specters of a certain subculture that's now history. The writing and drawing on the walls of "tea rooms" and the exterior shots of bathhouses and sex clubs become, somewhere between wonder and wound, the Pompeii-like relics of catastrophic loss. The 2000 serial piece *Miles Away* in turn explores the empty illusionistic setting on Santa Monica Boulevard that once upon a time was crowded into the background by countless hustlers who can now only be found missing. In the 1999 set of photographs, *Once full, now empty (Baja Reef, Palace Verdes, California)*, Sameshima explores a libidinal and aesthetic setting from his own childhood, an aquarium which was the first to permit visitors to swim in the tanks with the fish. Of course his parents, fearing their son could contract a disease, didn't let him dive in. When Sameshima heard in 1997 that the old Marineland was being cleared away for the construction of new condos—sorry, I mean condos—he promptly broke into the condemned and already largely demolished site. He was able to rediscover and commemorate one of the stations of his submarine desire, the Baja Reef where way back when, pressed against Plexi windows, he had watched the torsos of boys swimming inside the tanks.



DEAN SAMESHIMA, (ABOVE) *Modern Boys*, 1998-99, Fuji Flex prints, set of 5, 11 x 14 in.

When Sameshima re-photographs images from the fashion mag collection, he crops the images, thus getting closer, in a sense, to the point or punctum that moved him to make each page a keepsake in the first place. In the 1999 series *Something to believe in ... or at least get lost in (Landscapes)*, Sameshima re-photographs, crops, and enlarges images from a Prada ad campaign, playing up the juxtaposition between photographs of what little of model Freddie's skin, hair, and hands was left uncovered by the Prada packaging and the landscapes that take center stage once the models have been edited out. He emptied these romantic settings to keep them open to fleshed-out Freddie's entrance, conjured, as it were, by metonymy and absence. In *Brian* (1999-2000), the re-photograph lingers all over the face, the face-to-face relationship, which Sameshima reclaims from the star distractions of the original Richardson ad. The camera, as they say, makes love, but to an image—or rather, generates virtual lover's memories out of the disconnection (which is just another kind of connection) between Sameshima's self-collection and the never-not-missing beloved.

His 1999 *In Darkness there is light (Sean, La Jolla, 1996)* serializes and etiolates an earlier photograph-souvenir of the X-marking-the-spot Sameshima was in back then, an image which had in the meantime survived his annihilation of all reminders of a love of his life that had reached the breakup point. From the first recognizable photograph to the final version of the same image, a 0.5-second exposure, the body that once fit the romantic cliffhanger setting keeps its growing distance. The subject's back is turned to the photographer in a duo dynamic marked by the one-way line of sight that extends through both parties and which, even while they share it, can never turn around on itself and be returned, gaze to gaze. This was Sameshima's first work to bear a live subject's name, and to bear it with the redoubled force of afterthought. Sameshima renamed the original subtitle (*Farewell Reel*) and filled in the farewell blank with the real name. Benjamin described this sort of long-distance love affair, in his 1931 essay on Karl Kraus, as "the way in which the beloved becomes distant and blinking, and all his smallness and gleam is drawn into the name."



(BELOW LEFT) *In Between Days (Without You)*, 1998, C-print, 1 of set of 15, 3.5 x 5.25 in. on 8 x 10 in. (BELOW RIGHT) *Café Bleu*, 2000, Fuji Flex print, 1 of set of 7, 4 x 6 in. on 11 x 14 in. Courtesy Low, Los Angeles.



In his 1998-99 series *Modern Boys*, the re-photographs of the mag boys meet the candid point shots—but halfway. The middle ground introduces a change in protocol that, by turning up the contrast, underscores, even in its semi-exclusion, the governing “I Spy” principle of Sameshima’s live photography. At clubs and bars, Sameshima asks boys if he can photograph them in his studio. Against a blue-sky, white-cloud backdrop, the boys stand there, shirts off, at an attention that is not fixated, not satisfied, not hungry. There is still, even in the studio setting, a hidden quality about the photographer’s gaze, like that of the spy who cannot be caught looking. For his Spring 2001 show at L.A.’s Low, entitled “Too young to reason, too grown up to dream,” Sameshima has been snapping away at any incarnation of his ideal glimpsed on the dance floor until the subject’s awareness of the shoot ends each series of photographs. This awareness that sets the limit to Sameshima’s intervention resonates with the difference self-consciousness makes in the subject whose beauty was in your eyes until his awareness of it wipes it off his face.

Espionage is about obtaining intelligence of the other through undercover means for purposes of aiming long-distance projections targeting this other. But even in the technically projective setting of real warfare, as Clausewitz once remarked, the targeted subject in whom you take a controlling interest is only your own question, a question about yourself that’s wandering about in the guise of the other.

LAURENCE A. RICKELS is currently concluding a study of Ulrike Ottinger’s films entitled *The Autobiography of Art Cinema*.

REVIEWS LOS ANGELES

## Dean Sameshima

Low

By Bruce Hainley ☞

Dean Sameshima eyes skinny boys with wan complexions and an air of Anglophilia. Such boys are everywhere, but Sameshima studies them in their native environment, LA clubs and bars like Bang, Cafe Bleu, and Akbar. Prefatory study for such outings would be a crash course in British fashion magazines (*i-D*, *The Face*, *Dazed and Confused*) and certain designers (Raf Simons in particular, but also Jean Colona and Hedi Slimane), whose talents are attuned to the slim-hipped protopunk and -goth. Through the lens of fashion, Sameshima proffers a trenchant commentary on photography and its documentary claims, appropriation, the readymade, and homosexual desire. His economical photos demonstrate the real's production of unrealities as outpacing any moody staging.

Sameshima takes surreptitious pictures of club boys until they either notice him or disappear from view. In the five-photo work *Bang (July 3, 2000)*, 2000, a guy dances in the foreground of a small crowd. The blue tank he sports is sweat-stained; his rainbow pride belt allows his jeans to ride his thin hips. In the background is a guy in a red shirt, with a chewier physique; you get the sense that he wouldn't be caught dead in a pride belt. In the first three frames Redshirt dances behind Blueshirt; in the fourth frame, the only vertical shot in the sequence, he has advanced and taken over the frame—leather studded bracelet on his wrist, his face intense, and his pose (hand at crotch as if about to grab himself) weirdly repeated by some tattooed guy behind him in a Def Leppard tee. In the final shot Redshirt has dipped back into the dancing crowd and Blueshirt is nowhere to be seen.

Not unlike Kleist's marionette theater in Paul de Man's disturbing *Rhetoric of Romanticism* analysis, this is the realm of the mechanical and its inhuman grace—the animate and human superseded by the inanimate and typological. The aesthetic's machinations (bracelets, haircuts, dance moves) cool the guys' being to a presence signified only by the not-there, long-gone looks in their eyes. In part, Sameshima's project is a meditation and commentary on Richard Prince's early rephotographs, like *Untitled (Three Men Looking in the Same Direction)*, 1978. In that image, looking the same way is both an action and an ontological condition. For Sameshima, it is the existence of these gorgeous guys that both makes them unreal (they are the embodiment of desire) and tests his own reality in proximity to them (they are devastating). Paradoxically, the photographs, each digitally dated in red, become a way to trace their reality. But if Sameshima has allowed desire to animate the stillness of the photograph, other works destabilize this reading. Installed next to *Bang, Cafe Bleu (April 6, 2000)*, 2000, focused on a

# Artforum, 2001

different blue shirt and red shut, drawing the eye to color as a device structuring this project—how color operates within the frame and how it is connected to desire, as on a peacock's tail. In another series, it is green (pants) and white (tie) that recur. In these photographs, color *means* as much as (if not more than) masculinity.

One part of the exhibition was hung on an edition of vivid green wallpaper, *If there's a heaven above (ceiling of men's room, Rooster Fish, Venice., CA, 2000)*, 2001, printed from photos of the cut-and-paste collages that line the bathroom in one of Venice's few gay bars: dippings from porn and exercise magazines, the somatotypical antitheses of the skinny boys in Sameshima's framed photographs. A few of the cutouts have fallen off and the semenlike stain of the glue ghosts the shape of a body: These men are figments of the imagination but also the vestiges of the muscular frames that blossomed in '50s physical-culture magazines (a kind of protoporn) and returned with a steroid-fueled vengeance in the '80s, sublimation of the wasting body of AIDS. Hung on this "wallpaper" were other kinds of documents: views of a desolate aquarium, more boys—both rephotographs (a sinewy Asian, a nameless hottie, a fashion model named Brian, whose greasy hair and sad eyes make him a muse for the artist) and photographs (Marcus, shirtless and happy odalisque). Formally, all Sameshima's images are studies in the physicality of the gaze (particularly, of the gays)—but by juxtaposing and equating photograph and rephotograph, stranger and friend, he demonstrates the medium's ability to make any body a readymade.

—Bruce Hainley

Dean Sameshima

"The thing about being an artist in L.A.," says the 29-year-old native Angeleno, "is that it's completely, absolutely comfortable." Funny, then, that his work so often hinges on imparting *dis*comfort. Perhaps best known for his series of photographs chronicling the conjugal cots of underground gay clubs, Sameshima routinely straddles a fence that many won't go near. "My photographs seem to exist in the space between desire and gratification." That space, so often dark in his work, lightens a bit when he discusses his hometown and its tight-knit art world. "There used to be a sort of weird competition here," he says, "but we've moved beyond that. There can be a bit of social competition, but we see one another so much that there's not much point in it."

Cotton shirt, Comme des Garçons Homme Plus by Rei Kawakubo, \$410. Cotton pants by Kenzo Homme, \$170. Sunglasses by Diesel. His own sneakers by YMC.



# Dean Sameshima

Martin Prinzhorn

## CONCEPTUALISM WITH A SPLASH OF CRANBERRY

### VOLL UND LEER, ÖFFENTLICH UND PRIVAT

Als ich Dean Sameshima vor einigen Jahren kennen lernen konnte hatte er gerade einen Zyklus von Fotografien fertiggestellt, auf denen verschiedene Schwarmtrübs in Los Angeles zu sehen waren. Diese halblegalen, über die Stadt verstreuten Plätze sind durch nichts bezeichnet, existieren nur als Punkte einer Landkarte im Gedächtnis ihrer Besucher. Sameshima war während des Tages dorthin zurückgekehrt, als diese verlassen, nur mehr verschlossene Türen und leere Räume waren. Auch ohne Erklärung sind diese Arbeiten aber mehr als bloße postkonzeptuelle Fotografie, nicht einfach nur ein schlauer Kunstgriff, eine Fragmentierung der Welt, die einfach von der Strategie des Bruchs und des Abschneidens lebt. Genauso wenig drücken sie in einem psychologischen Sinn eine schlichte Sehnsucht nach etwas Vergangenen oder Unbefüllten aus, das Nichtvorhandensein hat hier etwas Selbstverständliches, fast Affirmatives, das keinen Platz für irgendeinen Mythos freilässt. Anderswo ist eine Leere oft beladen, da sie eigentlich etwas Fehlendes meint und so eine Sehnsucht in einem bloß romantischen Sinn symbolisiert. Bei Sameshimas Arbeiten ist zwar auch eine Sehnsucht vorhanden, aber keine, die durch ein einfaches Auffüllen befriedigt werden kann. In diesem über Emotionen definierten Zusammenhang ist es interessant zu fragen, ob die Personen in den hier abgebildeten neueren Arbeiten tatsächlich vorhanden und repräsentiert sind und so einfach in ein System von Erzeugung und Erfüllung von Sehnsucht einzubauen sind und somit den üblichen Bedingungen des Abbildens von Körpern, Gesichtern und den damit verbundenen Narrativen entsprechen.

Speziell in der amerikanischen Fotografie der letzten zehn bis fünfzehn Jahre gibt es so etwas wie eine Faszination der Abbildung menschlicher Gestalten und Porträts, die aber gleichzeitig als Unterminierung des Genres verstanden wird. Wo vor einiger Zeit noch die hegemoniale Stellung des Tafelbildes und der Malerei im Allgemeinen stattgefunden hat, geht es heute darum, den repressiven Mächtigkeitscharakter speziell des fotografischen Porträts zu thematisieren und zu untersuchen. Genau in dem Moment, als die Malerei größtenteils aufgehört hat, sich dieser Thematik zu widmen, wurde sie von der Fotografie übernommen. Die Erkenntnis, dass das Genre in einem tatsächlich kreisenden Sinn die Rezeption von Körperlichkeit beeinflusst und steuert, ist dabei zentral. Gerade eine vorgelebte Realität oder Authentizität wird in vielen Arbeiten hinterfragt und mit so unterschiedlichen Mitteln wie Maskerade, gefälschter historischer Bezug oder Darstellung »subkultureller« Körper bearbeitet. Das Feld ist insofern ein problematisches, weil es in vielen Fällen nicht klar ist, ob die intendierte Kritik und Subversion nicht sofort auf der Bühne des bürgerlichen Spektakels als Akteur eingesetzt wird und so einfach eine Rolle im derzeitigen Erfolgsmächtigkeits»Sensations« spielt. Wenn sich Fotografie in dem Bereich von markierten und als deviant empfundenen Inhalten bewegt, induziert sie oft ein voyeuristisches Moment und gibt lediglich vor, Einblicke in eine andere Welt zu gewähren, was dann letztendlich wiederum auf eine Manifestierung der kritisch untersuchten Verhältnisse hinausläuft, nur unter umgekehrten Vorzeichen. Das einfache Konzept »Randposition« wird hier immer zu kurz greifen, da dann keine Ränder in die Mitte geraten, sondern die Mitte höchstens die vom außen kommende Ästhetik aufnimmt und für sich einsetzt. Die Geschwindigkeit und Reibungslosigkeit, mit der etwa die Arbeiten von Larry Clark oder Nan Goldin in der Magazin- und Fotografeie Eingang finden, indem sie dort simuliert werden, sind hier ein gutes Beispiel. Nicht dass ich dies prinzipiell kritisieren möchte, ich denke nur, man muss diese Möglichkeit beachten und darf sie in der

## CONCEPTUALISM WITH A SPLASH OF CRANBERRY

### FULL AND EMPTY, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

When I first met Dean Sameshima a few years ago, he had just finished a cycle of photos depicting various gay meets in Los Angeles. These semi-legal spots, scattered around the city, are not indicated in any way, and only exist as points on a map in visitors' memories. Sameshima had gone back there during the day when they were deserted, just locked doors and empty rooms. Even without any description, these works are more than just post-conceptual photography, not just a clever trick, a fragmentation of the world that is merely based on a strategy of breaking and cutting off. But nor do they express a simple yearning for something past or unfulfilled in the psychological sense, there is something perfectly natu-



DEAN SAMESHIMA, *Untitled (closed)*, 1985, 1995, C print



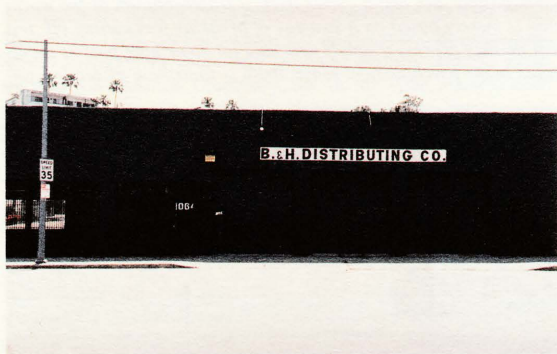
DEAN SAMESHIMA, *Untitled (open)*, *Astronaut*, *A shadow*, *A television*, *A tank*, 1985, 1991/96, C print

ral, almost affirmative, about non-existence in this case, something that yields no space for any legend. Elsewhere, emptiness is often bravely hidden, because what it really implies is something that is missing, thus symbolizing a yearning in the purely romantic sense. Although there is a yearning in Sameshima's works, it is not of the kind that can be satisfied by mere filling up. In this context defined via emotions, it is interesting to ask whether the people portrayed in the more recent works shown here are actually present and represented and thus whether they can be easily incorporated into a system of creating and fulfilling yearning, hence conforming to the usual conditions of portraying bodies, faces and the related narratives.

In American photography of the past ten to fifteen years in particular, there has been a kind of fascination with representing human figures and portraits which is, however, also seen as undermining the genre. Where some time ago the hegemonic status of the panel painting and painting in general took place, today it is a matter of focusing on and exploring the repressive power (specifically) of the

# Camera Austria International, 2000

künstlerischen Praxis nicht als Negativum sehen. Und es ist auch klar, dass die Fantasie der Trennbarkeit eher auf der Seite der BetrachterInnen und nicht so sehr bei den KünstlerInnen vorhanden ist. Auf der anderen Seite und aus durchaus ähnlichen Gründen ist es genauso falsch, die Mainstream-Fotografie in den Modemagazinen in dieser Situation einfach zum Feindbild zu erklären. Nicht nur, dass man damit einer hoffnungslos kulturpessimistischen Meinung aufsitzt, die in vielen Fällen über ein Beklagen einer Bilderflut hinausgeht und bei einem Jammern über ein Diktat der Sexualität als öffentlich definiertes Instrument endet und dieses einfach mit den ökonomischen Konditionen der kapitalistischen Gesellschaftsordnung gleichsetzt, akzeptiert man damit genau jene Grenzziehung zwischen öffentlicher Repräsentation und privaten Bedürfnissen, die das Funktionieren von Machtverhältnissen erst sicherstellt. Genauso wie es falsch ist, im Bereich der künstlerischen Fotografie eine Form von Wahrheit oder Identitätstreue einfach vorauszusetzen, wäre es falsch, diese Kriterien einer außer-künstlerischen kommerziellen Fotografie abzusprechen.



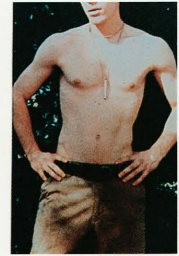
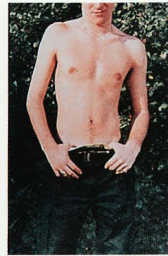
DEAN SAMESHIMA, *Untitled* (15 rooms, 1 locker room, 3 bathtubs, 2 leather slings, 1995), 1995/96. C-print.

Dean Sameshimas Porträtarbeiten entziehen sich unmittelbar solchen definitiven Einteilungen, gerade weil sie diese ansprechen und instrumentalisieren. Sie sind ein explizites Nebeneinander und ein Mix aus öffentlicher Privatheit und privater Öffentlichkeit. Obwohl es ja eigentlich eine banale Weisheit ist, dass das Private ein öffentliches Konzept ist und in der Öffentlichkeit inszeniert werden muss, verschleiert Porträtkunst oft genau diese Relation. In einigen Arbeiten fotografiert Sameshima seine Lieblingsmodelle aus Modejournalen ab und kreiert so eine Privatheit um sie, die aber letztendlich immer in einem ästhetischen Spannungsverhältnis zur Quelle steht. In anderen Arbeiten bildet er seine Models vor einem immer gleichbleibenden Hintergrundhimmel ab, die Studiosituation hat nichts Persönliches an sich und auch nicht der Blick, so dass man zunächst glauben könnte, die Personen hätten sich in eine traumhafte Situation verirrt, so etwas wie Polizeifotografie im Himmel. Gleichzeitig tragen sie um den Hals blecherne Anhänger, auf denen die Namen der Britpopbands *Pulp* und *Suede* zu lesen sind, Bands also, die in ihren Texten und ihrer Musik persönliche und private Motive und Projektionen in eine gleichzeitig öffentliche, aber dort doch wieder gemeinschaftsbildende Metaphorik umwandeln. Lyrik, die in ihren Übertreibungen Gefühle so kanonisieren kann, dass sie keinem Bereich mehr zugeordnet werden müssen und es nicht einmal mehr notwendig ist, zu wissen, was Ironie ist und was nicht. Hardcore einmal authentisch mit seinem Rockbezug und einmal als Fake alternder New-Wave-Männer. Schließlich noch das Foto des Exfreundes am Meer, das in Serie gestellt, langsam verbleicht. Die Präsentation als Serie ist für alle Arbeiten wichtig: Sie ist in der Gleichförmigkeit, die sie erzeugt für Sameshima ein weiteres Mittel, eine Illusion einer getrennten und abgeschirmten inneren Welt gar nicht erst aufkommen zu lassen. Gleichzeitig ist diese Strategie einer Repetition auch ein Kommentar zum Medium Fotografie selbst: Die Reproduzierbarkeit kann nie allein eine Frage der Technik sein, sondern ist immer auch eine

photographic portrait. At exactly the same time painting largely stopped devoting itself to this issue, it was adopted by photography. The realisation that the genre influences and controls the reception of corporeality in what is actually a creating sense is of key importance in this context. Many works particularly challenge some purported reality or authenticity, dealing with these issues with a wide range of instruments such as masquerade, falsified historical reference or representation of »subcultural« bodies. The field is problematic in that in many instances it is unclear whether the intended criticism and subversion are not immediately deployed as an actor on the stage of the middle-class spectacle, thus merely playing a role in the current successful piece called »Sensations«. If photography enters the realm of marked contents and contents felt to be deviant, it often induces a voyeuristic moment, merely pretending to grant insights into another world, which ultimately boils down to a manifestation of the critically analysed conditions, just under different circumstances. The simple concept of a »peripheral position« will always fall short of the mark in this context as no peripheries come into the centre but rather, at best, the centre absorbs the aesthetics coming from outside, using it for its own purposes. The speed and smoothness with which the works of Larry Clark or Nan Goldin, for example, find their way into magazine photography, by being simulated, is a case in point. Not that I want to criticise this per se, I just think that we have to keep this possibility in mind and that we must not see it as something negative in artistic practice. And it is equally clear that the fantasy of separability is rather with the viewer, and not so much with the artists. On the other hand, and for quite similar reasons, it is just as wrong simply to demonize mainstream photography in fashion magazines in this situation. It is not just that by doing so we fall foul of a hopelessly pessimistic opinion which, in many cases, goes beyond bemoaning a flood of images and ends up griping about the dictates of sexuality as a publicly defined instrument, simply equating it with the economic conditions of the capitalist societal order, we also accept the very delimitation between public representation and private needs that permits power conditions to work in the first place. Just as it is wrong in the field of artistic photography simply to presuppose a form of truth or faithfulness to identity, it would be wrong to deny that these criteria are applied in commercial photography outside the realm of art.

Dean Sameshima's portrait works elude such definitive classifications precisely because they address and instrumentalize them. They are an explicit coexistence and mix of public privacy and private publicness. Although it is a trite piece of wisdom that the private sphere is a public concept and must perforce be enacted in the public sphere, portrait art often veils exactly this relation. In several works, Sameshima photographs his favourite models from fashion magazines, thus creating a privacy around them which is, however, always in a relationship of aesthetic tension with the source. In other works, he depicts his models in front of a uniform background sky, there is nothing personal about the situation in the studio, nor in the view, with the effect that you could think that the portraitees have strayed into some dream-like situation, something like police photography in heaven. At the same time they are wearing metal tags around their necks bearing the names of the Brit-pop bands *Pulp* and *Suede*, bands that transform personal and private motifs and projections in their lyrics and music into what is at once public and yet community-forming imagery. Poetry that, in its overstatements, can canonise emotions in such a way that they no longer need to be allocated to a particular area and that it is not even necessary to know what is irony and what is not. Hardcore authentic with its links to rock and, on the other hand, as a fake of ageing New Wave men. And finally the photo of the ex-boyfriend by the sea, in a series, slowly fading. Presentation in the form of a series is an important aspect for all works: thanks to the uniformity that it generates, for Sameshima it is another means of nipping the illusion of a separate, isolated inner world in the bud. At the same time this strategy of repetition is also a statement on the medium of photography itself: reproducibility can never be a matter of technique alone, but rather is always equally a question of content. His work

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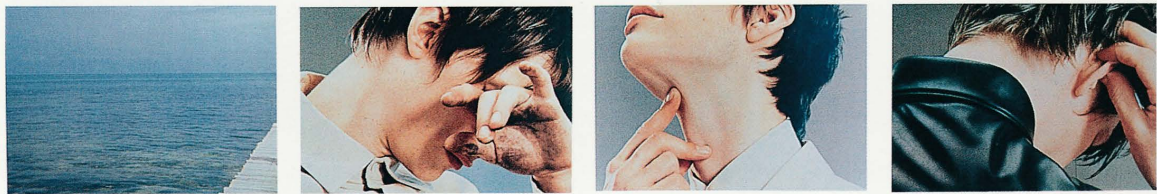
*DEAN SAMESHIMA, aus der Serie / from the series: Modern Boys, 1998/99. Fuji Flex-prints, je / each 35, 5 cm x 28 cm.*

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DEAN SAMESHIMA, aus / from: *Something to believe in...or at least get lost in (landscapes)*, 1999. C-prints, je / each 28 cm x 35, 5 cm.

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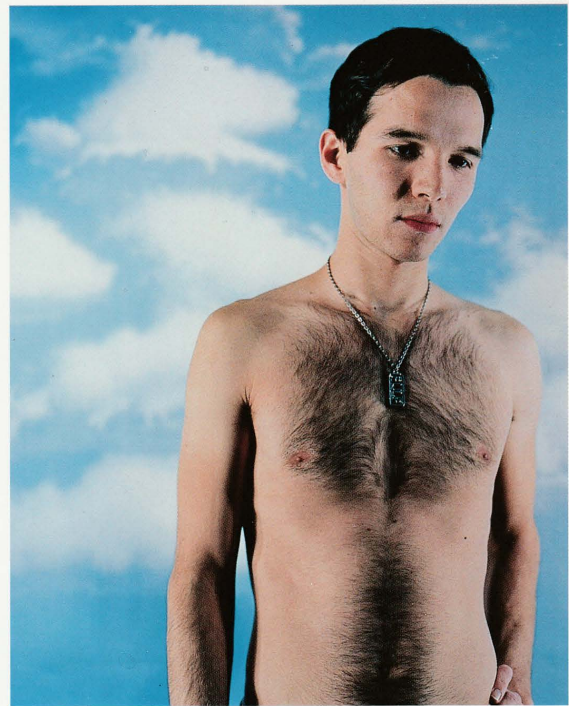
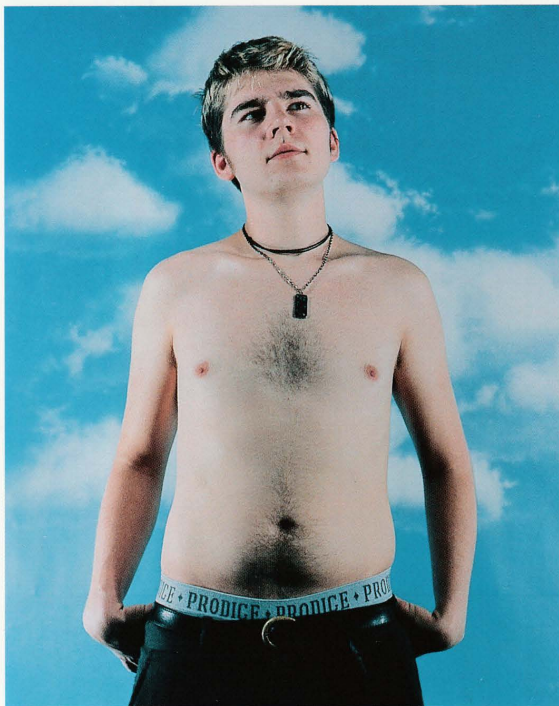
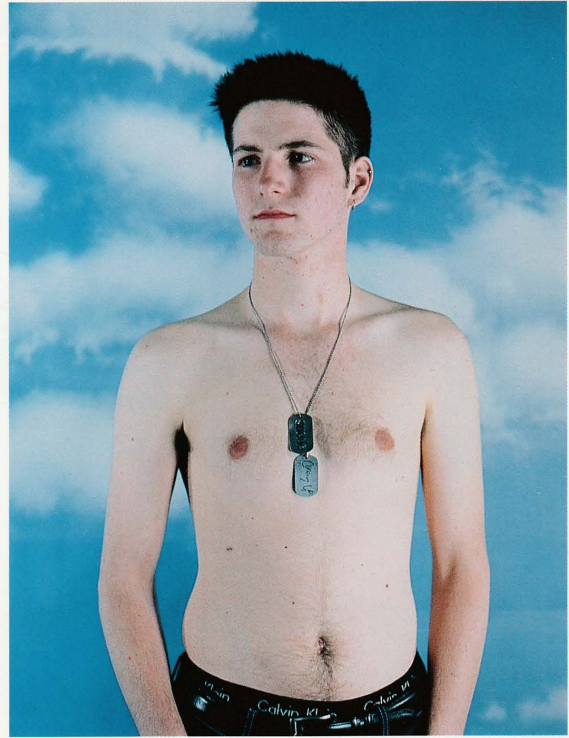
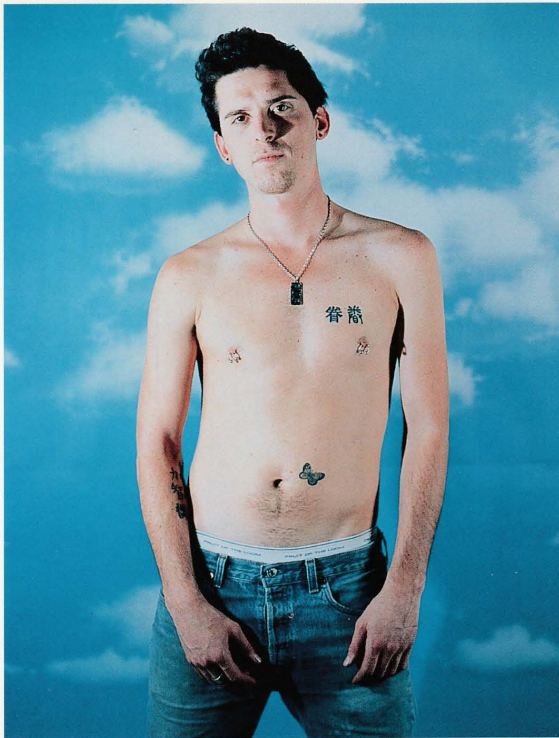
DEAN SAMESHIMA, aus / from: *Something to believe in...or at least get lost in (landscapes)*, 1999. C-prints, je / each 28 cm x 35,5 cm.

# Camera Austria International, 2000



DEAN SAMESHIMA, aus der Serie I from the series: Modern Boys (Mark, Akbar, 1999), 2000. Fuji Flex-print, 35, 5 cm x 28 cm.

# Camera Austria International, 2000



DEAN SAMESHIMA, aus der Serie | from the series: Modern Boys, 2000, Fuji Flex-print, je / each 5, 5 cm x 28 cm:

Sebastian, Akbar, 1999  
Michael, Art Center, 2000

Ryan, Café Bleu, 1999  
Ferraby, Café Bleu, 1999

# Camera Austria International, 2000



DEAN SAMESHIMA, Brian, 1999. Fuji Flex-print, 35, 5 cm x 28 cm, gerahmt / framed 50 cm x 40 cm.

# Camera Austria International, 2000



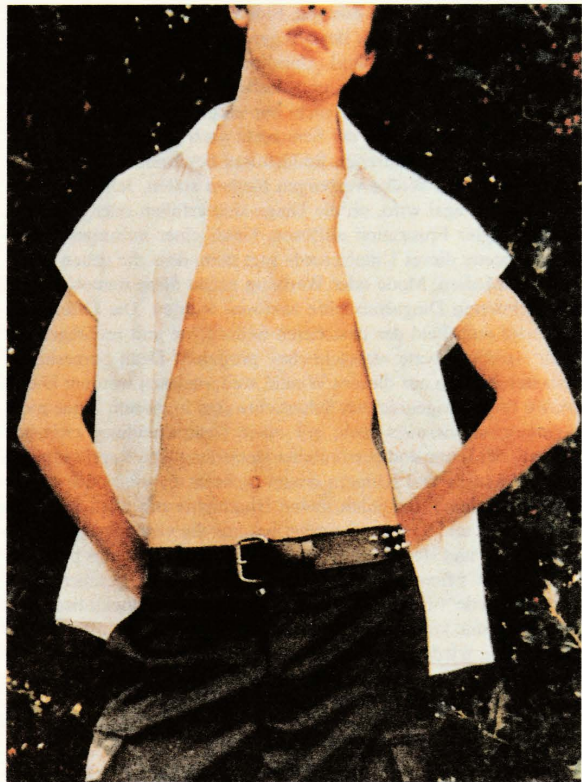
DEAN SAMESHIMA, aus der Serie / from the series: *In Darkness There is Light* (Sean, La Jolla, 1996), 1999. Fuji Flex-prints, je / each 35,5 cm x 28 cm.

des Inhalts. Seine Arbeit sagt auch, dass die Wahrnehmung des Inneren nur über ein Außen möglich ist. Was in den früheren Arbeiten von den Orten des verlassenen Geschehens noch indirekt gesagt wird, dass das Innere immer in der Öffentlichkeit als etwas präsentiert wird, das dem Blick von Außen entzogen wird, ein Punkt, den Mark Wigley in Zusammenhang mit Architektur gemacht hat<sup>1</sup>, wird in den neuen Arbeiten präziser ausgedrückt, indem sich das Auge der Kamera direkt auf die Personen richtet, ohne sie direkt anblicken zu wollen. Nicht durch Maskeraden, nicht durch Surrogate wird der Blick bearbeitet, sondern indem der Kollaps von Öffentlichkeit, Privatheit und der diese umgebenden Haut inszeniert wird. Es entsteht eine Welt von Oberfläche, in der das Starmodell, der Freund oder ein Typ aus dem Club nebenan sich in einer Ununterschiedlichkeit repräsentieren lassen, die die Lust an Schönheit oder an Körperlichkeit mit einer Fantasie in Zusammenhang bringt, die sich nicht mehr einer hierarchischen Weltordnung des Glamourösen und des Startums unterwirft. Es gibt auch keine hierarchische Beziehung zwischen einer künstlerischen und einer außerkünstlerischen, massenmedialen Ästhetik oder Repräsentation mehr, statt etwas mit dem Etikett Kunst zu entwickeln und dieses so einer eventuellen außerkünstlerischen Aneignung zur Verfügung zu stellen, geht Sameshima einen umgekehrten Weg und bedient sich ganz direkt bei der Modefotografie. Dass es keine hierarchische Beziehung zwischen Kunst und Mode mehr gibt, heißt aber nicht, dass sie bei Sameshima einfach als Kontinuum gesehen werden und so grundsätzlich ununterscheidbar ist. Seine Arbeiten widersprechen nur Typisierungen, die auf der einen Seite »Oberflächlichkeit« und »Kommerzialisierung« sehen, während sie auf der anderen Seite ein diffuses, »ernsthafte« analytisches Potenzial lokalisieren. Kunst ist in diesem Sinne also nicht rigider als Mode und diese kein offenes Feld, auf dem man sich einfach und folgenlos bedienen kann. Es ist dem Künstler sehr bewusst, dass etwas passiert, wenn er die Modefotos in seine Arbeit hineinnimmt.

## SEHNSUCHT

Obwohl ich meine, dass Dean Sameshimas Fotoporträts sowohl den üblichen Rahmen der Abbildung der menschlichen Gestalt sprengen und sich auch völlig anderer Mittel einer Subversion der damit verbundenen Strukturen als in der Mehrzahl der gegenwärtigen künstlerischen Darstellungen dieses Themas bedienen, bleibt doch die Frage nach der Abbildung psychologischer Zustände und Relationen in seinen Arbeiten bestehen. Eine übliche Analyse, die mit Begriffen wie »gaze« oder »identity« arbeitet, scheint mir aus den vorher beschriebenen Gründen unbefriedigend, da sie ja die grundsätzlichen Brüche und Aneignungen seines Werks nicht wirklich beachten könnte. Es ist aber auch nicht so, dass die Arbeit auf einer emotionalen Ebene einfach neutralisierend oder auslöschend wäre.

Ich möchte diesen Aspekt von Sameshimas Werk anhand des Konzepts von Sehnsucht betrachten, wobei ich mich dabei auf Unterscheidungen verschiedener Formen von Sehnsucht im Zusammenhang mit Emotionen stütze.<sup>2</sup> Wenn von der künstlerischen Repräsentation von Gesichtern und Körpern die Rede ist, ist schnell auch von Sehnsucht die Rede, allerdings bleibt ihr Objekt oft im Dunkeln oder verschwommen. Gerade die Distanz, die jede künstlerische Repräsentation mit sich bringt, verklärt dieses Objekt. Es ist klar, dass jede Sehnsucht ihre soziale und individuelle Geschichte hat und Bedingungen unterliegt, die mit ihr verbunden sind, was aber die Dinge sind die ersehnt werden, lässt sich meistens nur ungefähr beschreiben. Manche sind der Ansicht, dass es genau diese Unspezifität ist, die das Wesen der Sehnsucht ausmacht: Es muss etwas in Erfüllung gehen, genau was, ist egal – vielleicht wollen wir das gar nicht wissen. Wir können unsere Sehnsüchte oberflächlich aber zumindest in solche unterteilen, die sich auf Handlungen oder Zustände beziehen und solche, die sich auf Dinge richten. Über solche, die sich auf Dinge richten, sagt man, sie seien nicht notwendig und seien außerdem nur die Folge unreflektierter Versuche, mit der Welt fertig zu werden, was wiederum zu Verwechslungen von Ursachen und Folgen führt. Nach dem Motto: Wenn du dieses eine Ding willst, sehnst du dich eigent-



DEAN SAMESHIMA, aus der Serie / from the series: *Modern Boys*, 1998/99. Fuji Flex-print, 35, 5 cm x 28 cm (Ausschnitt / detail).

also tells us that perception of the inside is only possible via an outside. What earlier works said indirectly about places of past events, i.e. that the inner is always presented in the public sphere as something that is denied to the view from the outside, a point that Mark Wigley made in connection with architecture, is expressed with greater precision in more recent works when the eye of the camera is directly aimed at the individuals without wanting to look at them directly. Not by means of masquerades, not by means of surrogates is the view processed, but rather by enacting the collapse of the public sphere, the private sphere and the skin that surrounds it. What evolves is a world of surface in which the star model, the friend or someone from the club next door are represented in an indistinguishability that marries pleasure in beauty or corporeality with a fantasy that no longer subdues to a hierarchical world order of glamour and stardom. And there is no longer a hierarchical relation between an artistic and a non-artistic, mass media aesthetics or representation; instead of developing something with the label of art, thus making it available to possible appropriation by the world outside art, Sameshima takes the reverse approach and avails himself directly of fashion photography. The fact that there is no longer a hierarchical relation between art and fashion, however, does not mean that Sameshima sees them as a mere continuum and, as such, essentially indistinguishable. His works simply contradict typifications that, on the one hand, see »superficiality« and »commerciality«, while, on the other, localising a diffuse, »serious« analytical potential. Thus, in this sense art is no more rigid than fashion, and fashion is not an open field from which we may help ourselves simply and without consequences. The artist is well aware that something happens when he integrates fashion photos into his work.

## YEARNING

Although I think that Dean Sameshima's photo portraits go beyond the usual scope of representing the human figure and employ completely different means of subverting the related structures than the

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DEAN SAMESHIMA, *Modern Boys - A Bittersweet Symphony*, 2000. *Installationsansichten Large Gallery at the Graduate Studios, Art Center/ installation views at the Large Gallery at the Graduate Studios, Art Center.*

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lich nach jenem anderen Zustand. Eine reflektierte Sehnsucht wäre dann umgekehrt eine, bei der ich genau weiß, wie ihre Erfüllung aussieht. Mittelbarkeit und Unmittelbarkeit. Die Unterteilung bricht also unter Analyse und Reflexion scheinbar wiederum zusammen. Trotzdem ist sie nicht nur im psychoanalytischen Sinn eine wichtige, da wir mit der Sehnsucht nach Dingen auch im Alltäglichen jene romantischen Bedürfnisse beschreiben können, die hinter einer rosa Wolke verborgen bleiben sollen. Jene Zustände, wo es schon egal wird, ob die Dinge sich erfüllen oder in sich in unbefriedigter Frustration auflösen. Unter einer kulturpessimistischen Facette dieses Unterschieds sagt man, dass die neuen »Dinge« wie Medien, Mode oder Werbung genau diese unmotivierten, unreflektierten Dingsehnsüchte auslösen würden. Die Öffentlichkeit wird zum Feld der unsicheren Sehnsüchte und im Gegensatz dazu werden private »tatsächliche« projiziert. Dean Sameshimas Arbeiten können aus diesem Winkel weitergelesen werden: Die in seinen Fotos ausgedrückten Sehnsüchte sind in diesem Sinne nicht geordnet, er insistiert nicht auf einer Unterscheidung zwischen öffentlicher Ikone und persönlicher Beziehung. Die Repräsentation von Gesichtern und Körpern deutet nicht in die eine oder andere Richtung; einmal um mich meine Biographie mit allen persönlichen Hochs und Tiefs und einmal um uns die von allen erzeugten Sehnsüchte und Bedürfnisse. Der übliche Weg ist es, das persönliche Sehnen öffentlich zu machen und historisch gesehen muss natürlich jede öffentliche Sehnsucht zumindest anekdotisch aus dem Privaten kommen. Sameshima holt sich diese öffentlichen Sehnsüchte wieder zurück, sie gewinnen dann wieder etwas Persönliches, aber ihre Geschichte und damit auch ihre vormalige Öffentlichkeit bleibt in ihnen doch weiter ablesbar.

1 Mark Wigley: »Evolution-By-Prosthesis«, in: Andreas Lechner & Petra Maier (Hrsg.) *Stadtmotiv*. Wien 1999. 158-193.

2 Insbesondere auf Richard Wollheims *On the Emotions*. New Haven 1999.

majority of contemporary artistic representations of this subject, the question remains as to the portrayal of psychological conditions and relations in his works. A conventional analysis that operates with concepts such as »gaze« or »identity« would seem to be unsatisfactory for the aforementioned reasons as it could not really take into account the fundamental breaks and appropriations of his work. But neither is his work merely neutralising nor effacing at the emotional level.

I would like to look at this aspect of Sameshima's work with the aid of the concept of yearning, basing my observations on distinctions between various forms of yearning in connection with emotions. If we talk about the representation of faces and bodies in art, we soon find ourselves talking about yearning, too, although its object often remains concealed or obscured. It is precisely the distance that inheres in all artistic representation that transfigures this object. It is clear that every yearning has its social and individual history and is amenable to conditions connected with it; generally, however, we can only roughly describe the things that we yearn for. Some people think that it is precisely this unspecificity that constitutes yearning: something must be fulfilled, what exactly does not matter – perhaps we do not even want to know. But we can divide our yearning at least superficially into yearnings that refer to actions or conditions and yearnings that focus on objects. Yearnings focused on objects are said to be unnecessary, indeed merely the consequence of unreflected attempts to come to terms with the world, which in turn leads to confusion of causes and consequences. According to the motto: if you want this one thing, you are in fact yearning for the other condition. Inversely, a reflected yearning would be such that I know exactly what its fulfilment is like. Mediacy and immediacy. So, in turn, the distinction would seem to collapse upon analysis and reflection. Nevertheless, it is not only important in the psychoanalytical sense as we can also use yearning for objects in everyday life to describe the romantic needs that are supposed to remain hidden behind a rose-coloured cloud. The conditions in which it becomes irrelevant whether things are fulfilled or break up in unsatisfied frustration. From a pessimistic perspective of this distinction, the new »things« such as media, fashion or advertising are said to trigger precisely these unmotivated, unreflected yearnings for objects. The public sphere becomes a field of insecure yearnings and, by contrast, private »actual« yearnings are projected. Dean Sameshima's works can be read in greater depth from this angle: the yearnings expressed in his photos are not ordered in this respect, he does not insist on distinguishing between public icons and personal relations. The representation of faces and bodies does not point in one direction or the other; on the one hand there is my own biography, with all the personal highs and lows, and, on the other, the yearnings and needs created by everyone. The usual way is to make personal yearning public and, from a historical standpoint, every public yearning must, at least anecdotally, stem from the private sphere. Sameshima recaptures these public yearnings, whereby they regain something personal, but their history and thus their former publicness remains visible in them.

1 Mark Wigley: »Evolution-By-Prosthesis«, in: Andreas Lechner & Petra Maier (Eds.) *Stadtmotiv*. Vienna 1999. 158-193.

1 Particularly on Richard Wollheim's *On the Emotions*. New Haven 1999.

## HONCHO FEATURED ARTISTS

DEAN SAMESHIMA, GLENN LIGON,  
ADRIANO PEDROSA, MATTS LEIDERSTAM

by Bill Arning

**B**efore modernity hit artists had useful jobs: they made monuments of one type or other. One sculptor might celebrate a ruler's virtue and ruthlessness while another painter preserved some colonial magnate's spurious piety. This history literally goes back to the pyramids. While the society which supported such art has long since disappeared, the urge to record significant events for posterity still exists and floats freely in the ether, waiting for the right situation to resurface.

The conditions today are right. Much attention in the visual arts is paid to sexuality in the nineties. With the hard fought battle many of us have faced to actually feel proud of the totally out sexuality (not just socially sanctioned meaningful relationships), it is hardly surprising that public parks, baths and other cruising sites have been seen as unusually deserving of recognition. They have been around for ages, an invisible institution, and have survived more hard battles than General Patton ever faced. Legions of armed enforcers of the law have tried to obliterate these sites, but like cunning freedom fighters they go briefly underground and return. That is heroic and deserves a monument.

While most encounters in these spaces are as forgettable as a morning wank, all of us have some that we will recall at 80. I was in Amsterdam late one summer for the opening of a retrospective of the Russian queer artist Timur Novikov at the Stedelijk Museum. I was happy to discover that the hotel room the museum had booked for me was right next to sexy Vondelpark. Novikov, while a wonderful artist, proved to be a lousy giver of directions and sent me to a section of the park with only children and Frisbee playing dogs. Left to my own



Matts Leiderstam, *The Rambles*, 1997



Dean Sameshima, *Slide # 12*



Dean Sameshima, *Slide #5*

devices I wandered, my boots getting increasingly muddy until finally I saw someone who looked like they might be cruising duck between two bushes. I followed, found a clearing with about twenty guys, dicks out, but none I fancied. I only had two hours to go until the museum opening and was seriously despairing that this trip would be remembered as anything other than a business trip.

Then out of some other unseen entrance "he" came, Eastern European looks, tall, built. Visualize a butcher, studlier Illya Kuryakan from "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." I thought I didn't have a chance, but he scanned the crowd, smiled at me, walked over and stuck his tongue down my throat. We went at it, tugging off each other's clothes,

letting them fall to the muddy ground and letting everyone around watch us. It was quick simple sex, kissing and stroking, like park sex so often is, but I wouldn't have changed a thing. Five minutes later, still panting, he muttered a thickly accented, "Thank You" (Polish, I think) and left. I yelled after him, "No, thank you, the pleasure was mine," becoming strangely decorous from the afterglow. I looked around at the panel of judges: most had cum during our show and I thought to myself, *How strange. I just experienced one of those meaningful quickies that only park sex offers, I just hooked up with the best-looking guy I had ever touched. I will remember this all my life, and the only public record of this will be in the J.O. replay of these strangers, I should come back here and put up a plaque, build a monument, make offerings to the great gods of the libido.*

Many artists have been doing just that. Four that come to mind are from all around the world: **Dean Sameshima** in Los Angeles, **Glenn Ligon** in New York, **Adriano Pedrosa** in São Paulo and **Matts Leiderstam** in Stockholm.

# Honcho, 1998

**Matts Leiderstam** is an artist best known for making bud vases with puckered assholes on top. He once locked the door to a gallery in Stockholm during his show and instead of making a traditional exhibition he painted footprints on the sidewalk leading away from the gallery. Those of his frustrated audience who followed the path found themselves at the subtly indicated door of a popular sex club down the block.

He has recently been repainting minor landscape paintings from master artists such as Poussin. I have noticed that in the course of my travels, when I happen upon a public park I can't help but briefly ponder whether or not this is the currently active local hunting ground, even if I have no time or inclination to return at dusk for a look-see. Leiderstam treats the landscape in museums the same way, peering into them to look for hints of action. He repaints them, darkening them to indicate that it is prime cruising time. They generally appear unoccupied, as cruising parks do, leaving our horniness to turn every shadow into a lover.

Recently he had begun depositing his paintings in cruising parks, including New York's Rambles and London's Hampstead Heath, in the crannies he can find. He photographs them there on easels as if the painter had been working hard *en plein aire* before finding love in the bushes. What becomes of them he never knows—some post-orgasmic guy may have stumbled upon them and decided that, with his lust taken care of, it was time to worry about his art collection.

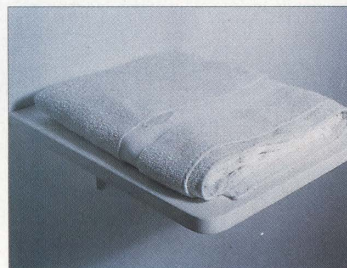
**Dean Sameshima** is more the documentarian. His photographs of parks and buildings resemble what is known as the Dusseldorf school, the students of the great conceptual photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher who produce scores of catalog-like photographs of some category of objects or buildings. Straight viewers would likely walk in and out of his exhibition without knowing what they were seeing. The industrial building he depicts is not recorded for its unique architecture but, as is recognizable to almost anyone who has been homosexual in Los Angeles, for its prominence as a well-known sex



Dean Sameshima, Slide #10

club. And the park studies are of the tiny cruising paths that used to sprawl all over Griffith park, and still exist in ever-smaller pockets, devoid of bodies but full of potential.

**Adriano Pedrosa** made a number of works comparing sex in his home city of São Paulo to Los Angeles where he went to graduate school. In a poetically simple piece he showed two towels neatly folded on shelves—one pilfered from LA's Melrose baths and one from Termas for Friends in São Paulo. They are of course almost identical, and the message might be thought of as a fag "It's a small world." Wherever you go men find ways to get naked, get sweaty and get off, and afterwards body fluids are mopped up and a shower is always taken. Or interpretation becomes more complex when we note that Brazilian men are an already eroticised other in North America. These two nearly identical



Adriano Pedrosa, Melrose Baths, 1992



Adriano Pedrosa, Termas for Friends, 1992

pieces when shown in the states may be very different in their effects on an Anglo viewer. The Melrose towel would be more likely to evoke memories of wasted nights and fending off the advances of less desirable men if only because of familiarity, while the Brazilian towel bespeaks erotic adventure. As a North American I can only hope the effect is reciprocal, that the Brazilian viewer finds the LA towel exotic—but somehow I doubt it.

In a different take on our theme **Glenn Ligon** has memorialized something sweet if not quite as juicy: unsuccessful flirtation. At an art residency program in San Antonio, Texas he noted, in touching and wistful language, eye contact or other failed attempts to communicate made on the street and the reasons why he and the desirable strangers failed to connect. He made his text into bronze markers and placed them illegally at the sites where the non-incident occurred. Hybridizing the standard historical markers that proliferate in that city (the Alamo was blocks away) with those personal ads (often listed under the headline "Sightings"), which usually say something like "You were handsome and with friends, I was alone, now I wished we had talked." Not to devalue cruising that leads to sex, but unsuccessful cruising can have certain perfection to it. You never have to deal with the guy's bad breath or little heroin problem. In the passing eye contact you both get a little adrenal, hormonal high and someday that is just what you need.

Watching all the pictures on the news of a certain Beverly Hills t-room and its most celebrated patron, I can't stop thinking that if such institutions are going to be recorded for posterity with the affection and honor they deserve, we have to do it. These four artists have made a start. ■

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