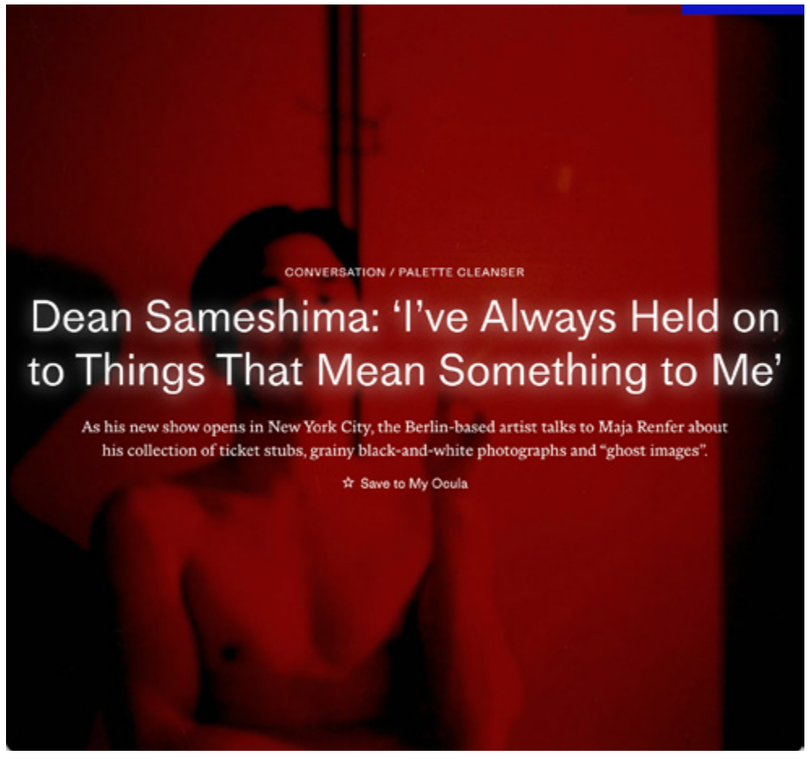
Dean Sameshima,
Press

Ocula, 2026



By Maja Renfer – 15 November 2026, New York City

Dean Sameshima’s work is informed by “a fear of losing something I value”. Over the past three decades, the California-born, Berlin-based artist has documented sites of queer activity, from the unassuming façades of Silver Lake’s sex clubs to his own creased, recently vacated mattress to glory holes, the latter in a series titled *Erdbeermund* (2023)—German for “strawberry mouth”—after the now-shuttered porn theatre in which they were photographed.

Three other porn theatres, the final ones surviving in Berlin, were the subject of *being alone* (2022), in which Sameshima centred his camera on the backs of anonymous theatre-goers, silhouetted against overexposed screens, as the establishments they sat in were failing under the pressures of digitalisation and gentrification. Sameshima wanted to make sure he had “some kind of piece of it”, as he has put it, “Before it all goes away.”

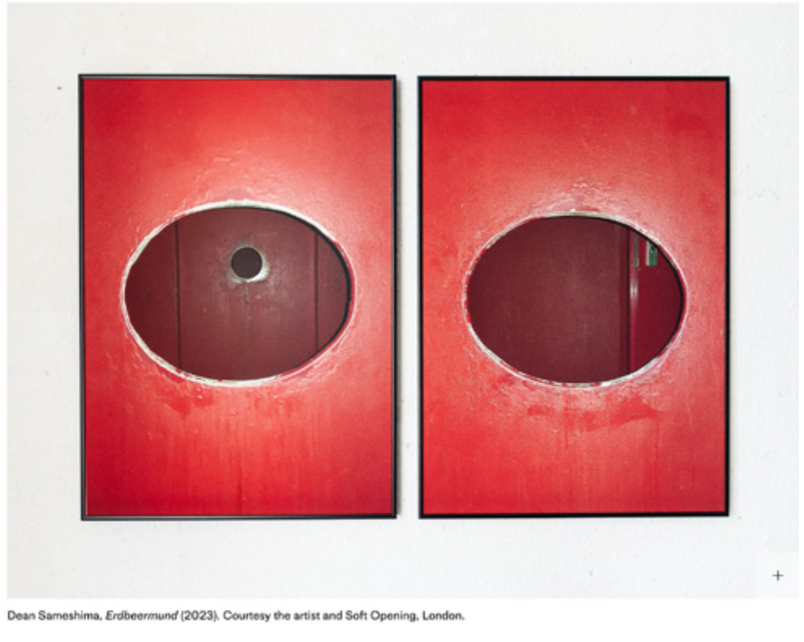
Indeed, Sameshima made sure to take several pieces with him, holding on to the tickets from his frequent visits to these theatres—ephemera reproduced in his solo show *The Intervals* at PAGE (NYC) and Dracula’s Revenge as a series of silkscreen prints, arranged and abstracted in a grid-like structure, overlaid with “ghost images” of previous prints. Sameshima’s work, more broadly, pursues ghosts—whether of people, places or practices.

Maja Renfer: ***The Intervals* (2026) is the result of a meticulous process of collecting and archiving that recurs throughout your practice. What draws you to this way of working?**

Dean Sameshima: I’ve always held on to things that mean something to me. Over time, some of these collections have been thrown out, sold or given away, but a few have been with me for decades. Sometimes, I didn’t realise how important they were until much later.

These [ticket] cards have personal meaning, and form a record of a decade, showing how the business has changed over time. The number of locations presented on the cards have decreased between 2015 and 2025, while the prices have increased. Each card is individually signed by the employees selling the tickets and these signatures, too, have changed over time.

All of this shows shifts in the economy, and a loss of interest in spaces that once thrived. In the fall of 2017, PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) was made available in Berlin; then in March 2020, Berlin had its first Covid-19 lockdown, which affected these types of social spaces. These collections don’t only have value to me; I believe they present ideas that can be translated into something beautiful and useful beyond their intended use.



Dean Sameshima, *Erdbeermund* (2023). Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London.

MR: What’s your most valued collection?

DS: My collection of vintage concert flyers, T-shirts and ticket stubs.

MR: *The Intervals* is a clear nod to Warhol’s *VIP Ticket—Studio 54* (1976–1978), a reproduction of a ticket to the famed New York nightclub. Can you expand on this connection to Warhol?

DS: I love what his VIP drinking ticket paintings reference and signify. It’s a portrait of sexual liberation and decadence—and a portrait of a time right before AIDS, just before the party ended. Now that we’re in a period some will call “post-AIDS”, because PrEP has been made available to the public, my tickets represent a newer kind of decadence and sexual liberation.

> “These collections don’t only have value to me; I believe they present ideas that can be translated into something beautiful and useful beyond their intended use”

MR: Like much of your practice, this series is both retrospective and introspective, with the tickets printed over images of your previous works. Why?

DS: In silk-screening there is the term "ghost image", which happens when the screen is permanently stained by the previous images it's printed. Most of the time these aren't harmful for the continued use of the screen. Other times, the screens are underexposed and the emulsion won't wash out, which ruins it. It has to be thrown out or re-stretched, which is oftentimes more expensive than buying a new screen.

I like the idea of repurposing the screens and having my past haunt the current works. It makes me think of the past haunting me—something that won't go away, good or bad. That history has informed me and brought me to today.



Dean Sameshima, *being alone* (No. 22) (2022). Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photo: Lewis Ronald.



Dean Sameshima, *being alone* (No. 10) (2022). Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photo: Lewis Ronald.

MR: Your earlier series, *being alone,* has a similarly tactile element. The photographs are grainy, yet they were taken on your phone camera: digital images of disappearing physical spaces. Am I reading too much into this?

DS: You are not reading too much into this. That's what I hope my work can deliver: readings that extend outside my initial intentions.

I wanted the works to look like prints made from 35mm black-and-white film with a high ISO, which gives night photography—or low-light photography—its contrast and grain. So there is deception with the process. I am not a fan of digital pixellation. My eyes are used to seeing grain in a photograph.

Dean Sameshima, *The Intervals* (until 19 December) at PAGE (NYC) and Dracula's Revenge, New York City

Main image: Dean Sameshima at Club 1350 (1997)



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 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

At 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.

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.



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.

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

ArtReview, 2024

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.



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 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?*

DS My phone. But I studied photography as an undergrad, so I'm pretty well versed. Photography was my gateway drug into art. I used to photograph concerts in the 80s a lot. In *being alone*, I try to make the images look analogue. I play with the grain and contrast, so when you see them in person you can't tell they're not.



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

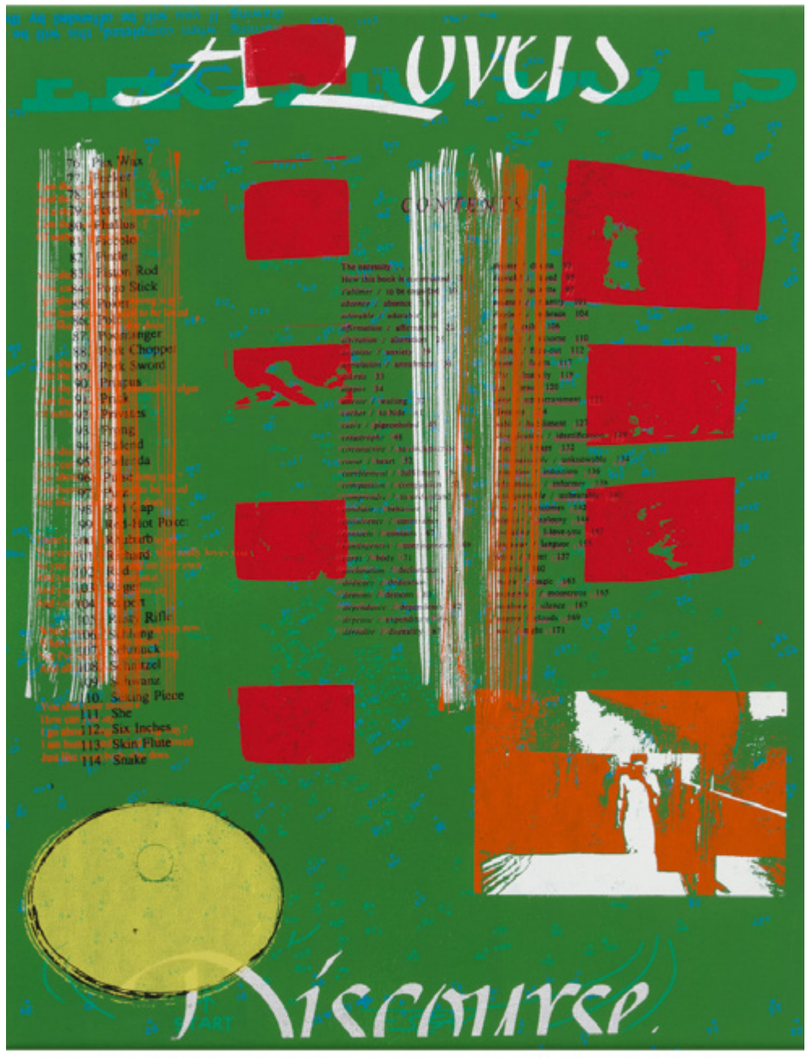
AR *You remove what's on the porn theatre screen. Why?*

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.

Also, these spaces are dying out because of new technology. Younger generations are not finding these spaces as useful as they used to. Especially in Berlin. In the US, a lot of them closed long ago. This project is also about this moment before porn theatres disappear. A community that might not exist for much longer. Before it all goes away, I wanted to make sure I had some kind of piece of it.



figures (no. 22), 2024. Photo: Eva Herzog. 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 bed that was covered in sweat. I was trying to take portraits of these people without them in the image. Some of the beds were messed up, others were left pristine. It was a portrait of the people, the bathhouse and the time – a time when Felix Gonzalez-Torres had his bed billboards [*Untitled*, 1991] displayed throughout Los Angeles. But a lot of people were reading a sweetness into that work, the idea of monogamy and coupledom, because it was two pillows in this beautiful bed. This was a time when, as gay men, we were supposed to be making 'responsible' work. My photos were a reaction against that, about promiscuity, and multiple partners, and not this heterosexual ideal.

AR *The Gonzalez-Torres images were a tribute to loss due to AIDS?*

DS Yes, I think he had lost his partner at this point.

AR *This idea of ephemerality reminds me of Prem Sahib's work, specifically what he calls his "sweat panels", in which aluminium sheets with resin droplets on them, sometimes with the trace of a handprint, evoke the sweat, steam and bodies in a bathhouse. It comes back to what we were talking about earlier: how do we commemorate or grasp onto this experience that was so fleeting?*

DS Trying to catch that fleeting moment, that short period of time you had with a stranger. And so you try to make it happen again with someone else.

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 *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?*

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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.

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

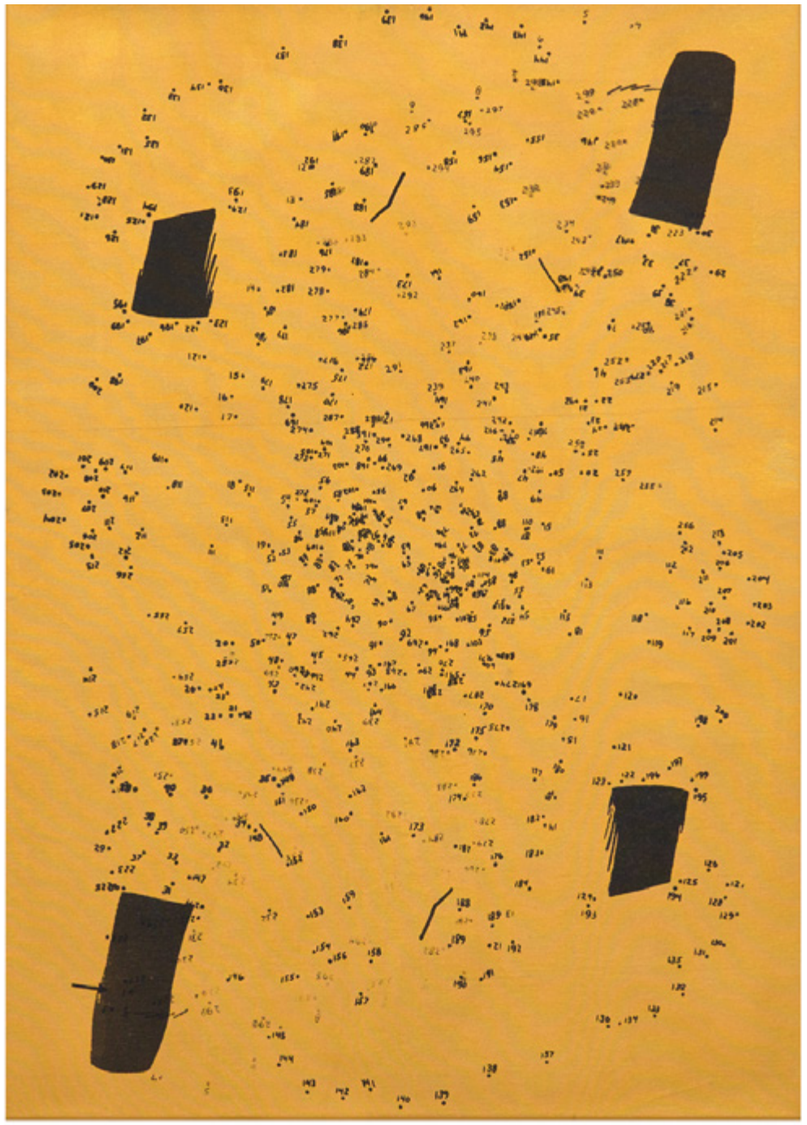
DS Yes. This series of paintings, *Figures* – some from 2011 and others from this year – are numbered. They stem from my *Connected Dots* series I did in 2006. Now I've started including photographs in my silkscreens. They have photos I've taken from the 80s to now, spaces in LA and Berlin; there's text 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)*



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

The Toe Rag, 2024

FRONT

Editor's Letter p.6

Cartoon
Athen Kardashian is a visual artist and doodler.
p.2



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Camel Toe with Monique Fei, photographed by Isabel MacCarthy, styled by Jip Boxstart.
p.7

IMAGE 04
Photography by Isabel MacCarthy

IMAGE 05
Théâtre de la Ville-Paris, Mary Said What She Said, credit Lucie Jansch. 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 Balsevičius.



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.

p.11



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



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 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.

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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.
p.47

Review

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*.





Professed 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 muscularity 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. ➽

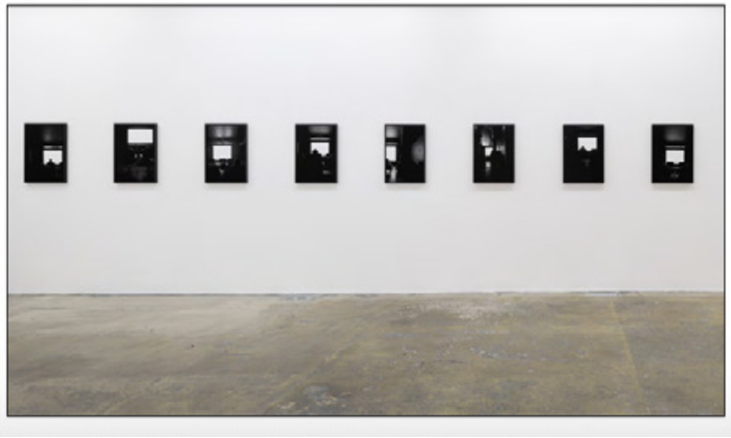


IMAGE 25-26
Dean Sameshima, being alone (No. 4), 2022. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography by Lewis Ronald.

Dean Sameshima, being alone (No. 25), 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.

ArtReview, 2024

Dean Sameshima's Pornographic Nothing

Mark Rappolt Reviews 29 May 2024 ArtReview



***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.

The leaflet that accompanies the exhibition states that each of the cinemas 'offer the kind of encounter that has been described as an "anonymous being-together", a space wherein an individual can project not only his own desire and sexual fantasy… but disidentify with the external world'. It brings to mind a tortoise in its carapace. A hunchback in a cathedral. A Ukrainian or Palestinian hiding in a bunker. But although the synapses fire and these types of associations flash past, what's on show is a little more perverse than that. And not just because we can imagine what kind of porn the people depicted might be watching. Or how they might be showing their appreciation of it.

The true perversity actually lies in Sameshima's decision to show us something, again and again, that shows us nothing: neither details of the bodies that occupy the cinema, nor the bodies that they are, presumably, looking at onscreen. On the one hand, it's like a line from Bret Easton Ellis's 1987 satire, *The Rules of Attraction*: 'No one will ever know anyone. We just have to deal with each other.' On the other, you can't help but be conscious that 'we', the viewers in the gallery, are reenacting what 'they', the viewers in the photographs, are doing. And then the mind drifts to wonder whether 'they' are enjoying their experience, while 'we' are worrying about what it all means.

being alone *at Soft Opening, London, through 8 June*

Mark Rappolt Reviews 29 May 2024 ArtReview

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)

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

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.

ML
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.

ML
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 th 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 th 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 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 t be explicit. I wanted to make mine a little bit more messy.


(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.*

AnOther, 2024

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.



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

1. Sameshima has a thing for erotic locations

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, Traces (No.7), 1990/2023 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."

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

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.*

Flash Art, 2023

REVIEWS

13 May 2023, 9:00 am CET

Dean Sameshima “being alone” and Mark Verabioff “VERBIAGE;” *O-Town House / Los Angeles*

by Gracie Hadland



1 2 3 4 5

Dean Sameshima, *being alone*, 2022. Archival inkjet print on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag paper. 59,5 × 41,9 cm. Courtesy the artist and O-Town House, Los

In Dean Sameshima's photographs on view at O-Town House, taken covertly in adult movie theaters in Berlin, there is rarely more than one figure in the frame. Silhouettes of theatergoers' heads are in the foreground; the screen is washed out; no projected image is visible. In images there's a wastebasket, boxes of tissues, ashtrays, but one's eye is drawn to the white screen, the glowing void. The long-exposure, high-contrast black-and-white photos show different angles from the back of the theater looking toward the screen, sometimes peeking around the corner, part of the view obstructed by a wall or another body. The show is called “being alone,” but the loneliness is false: the photographer is present even if the person in the audience doesn't know it. What is it to be alone among others? What does it mean to be alone in public?

Unlike the photographer and audience members who are comforted by the presence of an image, we, the viewers, have nothing to jerk off to. The viewer becomes as alone as the photographer and the moviegoer; we're all looking at the same screen, but each at a different level of remove.

As a meditation on the precarity of a quasi-social space that is slowly disappearing or being rendered obsolete, this elegant, quiet work has a melancholic tone. The tactility of the photographic prints is emphasized by their being framed without glazing. Exposure to the light coming through the window of the gallery will change them; the prints will become documents of the time spent on exhibit in this place. The graininess of the long exposures makes the blacks look almost like graphite, with an inky opacity. Like the spaces they depict, the photographs themselves are endangered. With exposure to light, like the activities carried out in a porn theater, the photographs will change.



1 2 3 4 5

Mark Verabioff, *CCCP (CUM CURSE CASTIGATOR PECKER)*, 2023. Page tears, inkjet prints, spray paint, rubberized undercoating, artist tape, hardware, gum, and acrylic on canvas with silicone. 154,9 × 436,9 cm. Photography by Brica Wilcox Courtesy the artist and O-Town House, Los Angeles.

If Sameshima's work sounds like quiet whispers or shuffling in a movie theater, Verabioff's sounds like nonsense shouted in a bar with music bumping. The works deliver what is teased in the exhibition's title: verbiage. The canvasses, despite being highly saturated with text and image, begin trains of thought that lead to nowhere. He provides a smattering of seemingly unrelated references, leaving you to construct meaning yourself: Michael Snow's biography; chewed gum that resembles lesions; self-portraits of the artist; hot guys on Instagram; a letter from the 1980s with the artist's New York address. Cheeky deceptions literally jump out from the paintings: rubber wires extend from surfaces like booby traps, as if to literally trip up the viewer. One wire coming from *CCCP (CUM CURSE CASTIGATOR PECKER)* (2023) is taut enough to ensure a quick, clean trip, whereas a length of limp tubing further on might create more of an inelegant slow stumble, ensnaring the viewer in tangle of rubber on the gallery floor.

Upon entering the gallery, one is confronted with a pole a bit taller than the average viewer. The obstruction, like a traffic signal, confirms the artist's eagerness to draw you in, to make you pay attention.

Both shows exude a kind of nostalgia, but not a cheap retro one. Both artists are gay men of a certain age who lived through the AIDS crisis, and their works reflect on a kind of gay cultural history that has transitioned from the extant to the archival. While some spaces are truly lost, others are merely outdated. As homosexuality is integrated into the mainstream and digital platforms take over, cultural spaces like bars and adult movie theaters, once a haven for transgression, are no longer in demand. They begin to enter a liminal zone of sentimentality. Both artists, who collaborated on a zine for the exhibition, push back against this idea; they refuse to fade into obscurity. As Verabioff, quoted in the press release, asserts: “Attention children: don't think Gramps is one of those lame-ass-neo-sniffies-libs-bitter-basic-cis-twit male painters!” Gramps certainly is not.

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

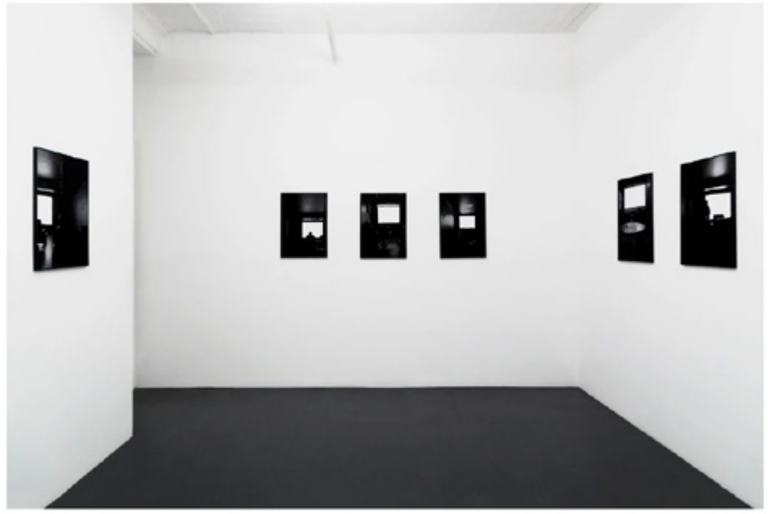
Posted on February 28, 2023 *by* EMILY COLUCCI



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

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 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

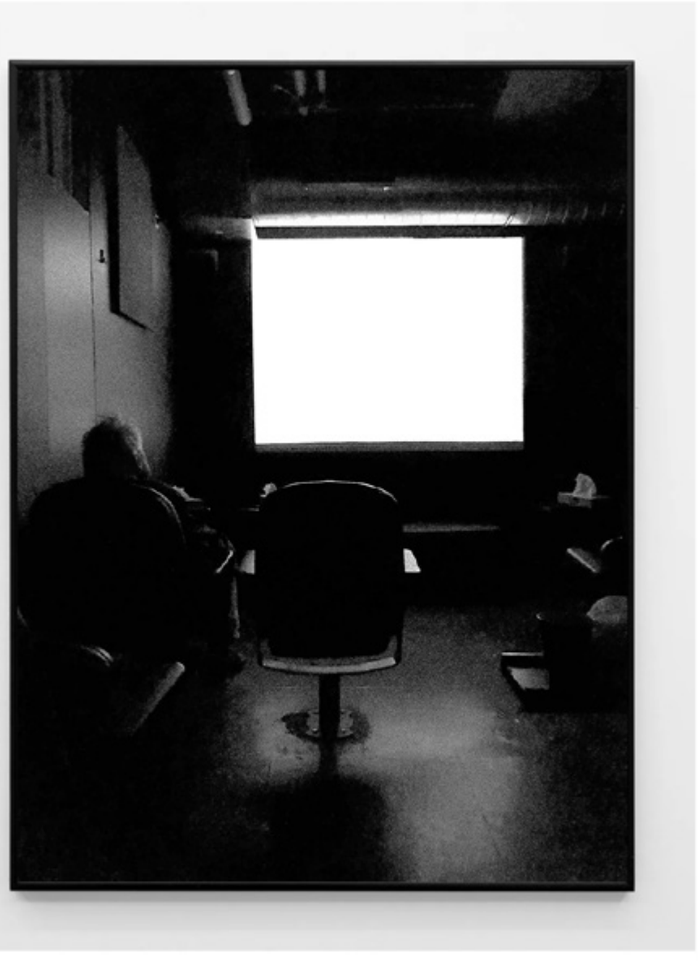
Pleasure's smutty boredom is filtered through the same candy-colored cinematography that seemingly every feminist film has to use after 2020's *Promising Young Woman*. Though diametrically opposed aesthetically, Sameshima's photographs showcase a similar mundanity from the consumer side of the industry. 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.



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

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!

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, both of which seem a bit too grim to bring in here in any depth). Part of this strange conflation is due to the context of my visit to Queer Thoughts, immediately after my weekly meeting for my writing consulting gig at a 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.

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.



DEAN SAMESHIMA • MARGINAL MEN

WORDS BY ANASTASIIA FEDOROVA

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."

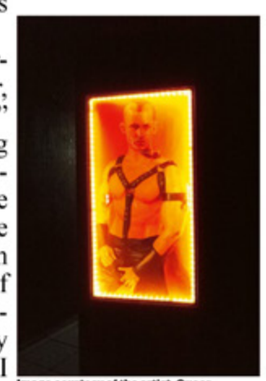


Image courtesy of the artist, Queer Thoughts, New York, and O-Town House, Los Angeles.

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, 12¾ × 9¾". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Screwing)*, 2003, C-print, 12¾ × 9¾". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Group Sex)*, 2003, C-print, 12¾ × 9¾". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Penis)*, 2003, C-print, 12¾ × 9¾". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Ass)*, 2003, C-print, 12¾ × 9¾". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Testicles)*, 2003, C-print, 12¾ × 9¾". 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

"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 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*.

Exberliner, 2017

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.

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 think 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.

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 our 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.

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.

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.

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 21¼".

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 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 semes of Baker's handmade prototype, 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 wallpaper-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 Hainley*

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

Brutus, 2004

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

iD, 2004



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/ www.peres-projects.com

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICOLE PATTERSON

Esquire, 2003

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

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。



「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ー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。二人で買ったラブ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空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、ディーン・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、彼の別れたポーイフレンドだ。21枚の同一イメージは、枚数を追うごとに残像のように淡く霞んで最後には白く消えてし

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。だからコンク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CDプレーヤーも何もない部屋。ぽ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クノも、ここで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ュールを買って、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。❻

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19cmの薄型で、音楽やテレビの視聴、録音（両）、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

artext, 2002

"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.



iD, 2002

DEAN SAMESHIMA

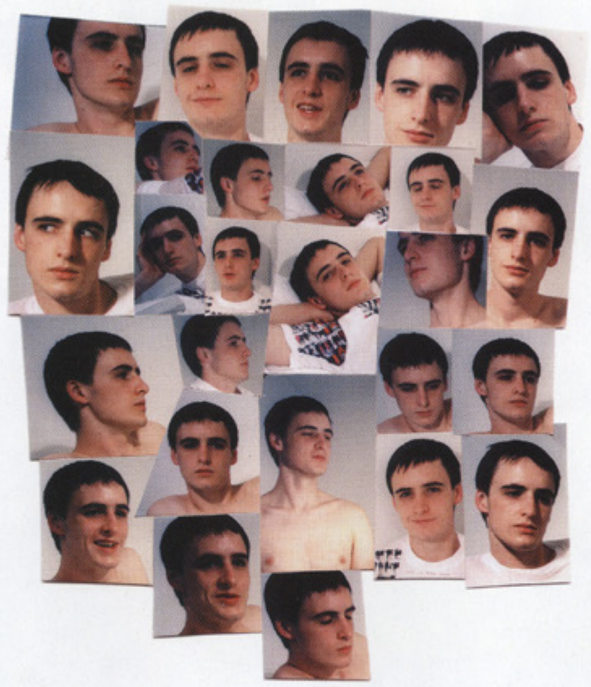
In 1995, Dean Sameshima began documenting the anonymous architectur façades of various gay sex clubs scattered throughout Los Angeles. This project is conducted during closing hours, when the activities conducted within are either a memory or a fantasy reserved for a subsequent evening The photographs 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 thi 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 homoerotica 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.



Soma, 2002



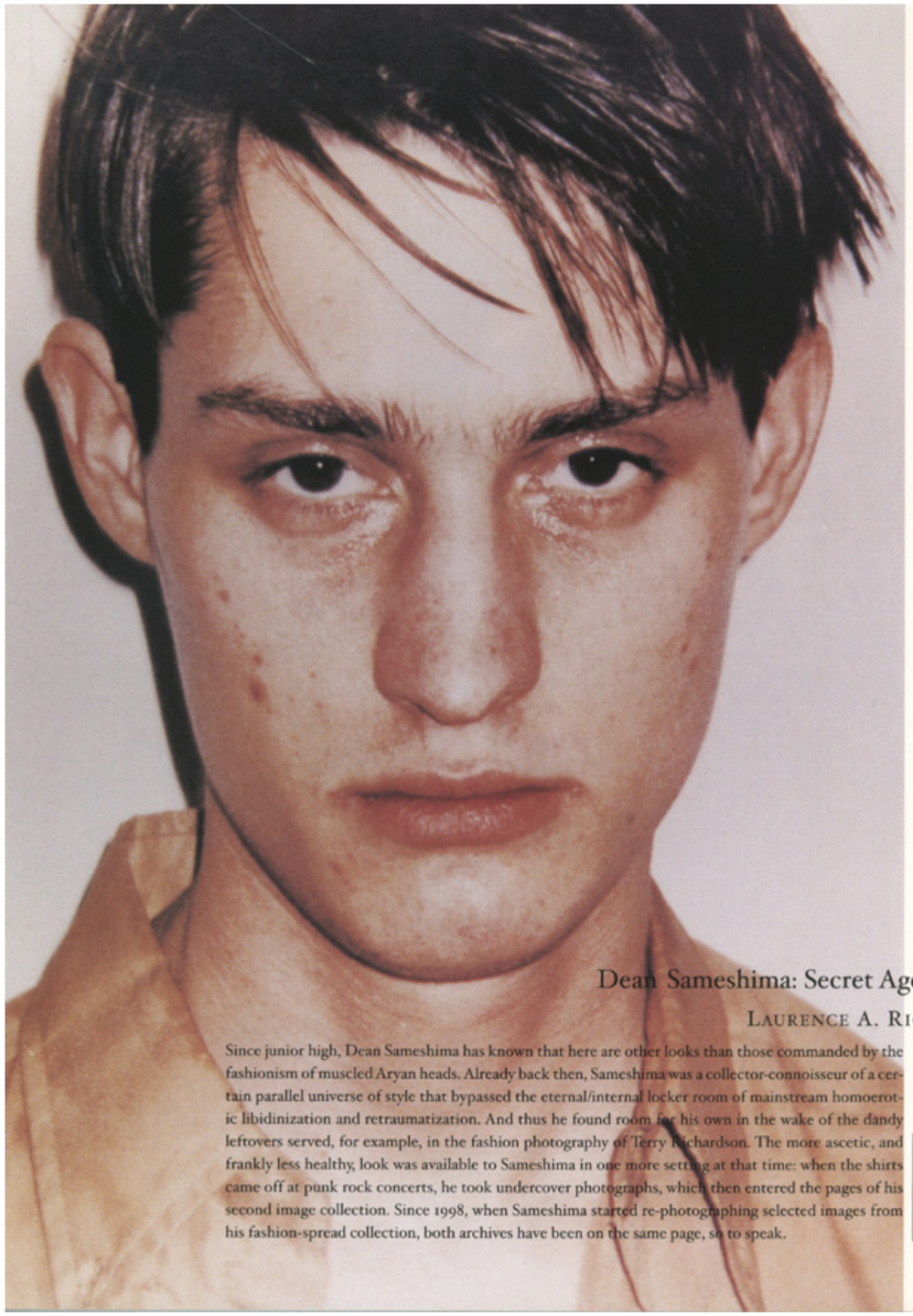
DEAN SAMESHIMA

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. Cooly 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 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), 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 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 Hysteric 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***

"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."

artext, 2001



Dean Sameshima: Secret Agency

LAURENCE A. RICKELS

Since junior high, Dean Sameshima has known that here 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 second image collection. Since 1998, when Sameshima started re-photographing selected images from his fashion-spread collection, both archives have been on the same page, so to speak.



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 *homo 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 condoms—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.







(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) *Cafe Bleu*, 2000, Fuji Flex print, 1 of set of 7, 4 x 6 in. on 11 x 14 in. Courtesy Low, Los Angeles.



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."



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*.

Artforum, 2001

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 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

GQ, 2001


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.
STOR-ALL

Honcho, 1998

HONCHO FEATURED ARTISTS

DEAN SAMESHIMA, GLENN LIGON, ADRIANO PEDROSA, MATTS LEIDERSTAM

by Bill Arning

Before 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.



Matts Leiderstam, *The Rambles, 1997*



Dean Sameshima, *Slide # 12*



Dean Sameshima, *Slide #5*

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 Stedeliijk 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 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.

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 cruisiest 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 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.

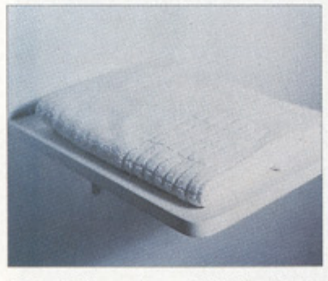


Dean Sameshima, *Slide #10*

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 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.



Adriano Pedrosa, *Melrose Baths, 1992*



Adriano Pedrosa, *Termas for Friends, 1992*

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 somedays 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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