

Dean Sameshima,
Press

Flash Art, 2023

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

May 13, 2023



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

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.

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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 x 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.

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Where I Find Ourselves

A reaction to: "Tom of Finland: Highway Patrol, Greasy Rider, and Other Selected Works," at David Kordansky Gallery (January 13–February 25, 2023); Felix Gonzalez-Torres, at David Zwirner (January 12–February 25, 2023); Dean Sameshima: Being Alone, at Queer Thoughts (February 1–March 18, 2023).

by Paul Moreno

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

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

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



Tom of Finland, *Untitled (from "Setting Sail")*, 1974. Graphite on paper, (framed) 17 5/8 x 14 x 1 1/2 inches. Photo: David Kordansky Gallery, NYC.

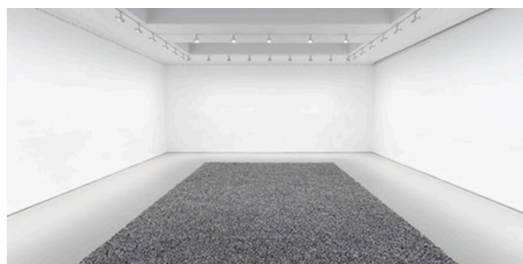
The drawings of Tom of Finland not only address the fear one may have of queers but also addresses the fear a queer may have of the non-queer, in particular the man in uniform. The cop, the soldier, the sailor, etc., symbolize the most extreme version of an existence in the world that gets called manly: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



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

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

The liminal space where public rubs up against private is an exciting place for art to occur. **Felix Gonzalez-Torres** was an artist who deftly exposed the potential of this space. The most immediate way we witness this is in observing the ephemeral nature of his work, and the frequent resistance to there being an original object. For example, in the show at David Zwirner there was an example of his candy spill pieces, "*Untitled (Public Opinion)*", 1991. In one gallery a large rectangular carpet of the black licorice filled the center of the room. In a sitting area outside the gallery, a small mound of the candies was nestled into a corner. The sculpture was in two places at once but remains a single work. Viewers are invited to take from the piles of black candy, some were sucking away on their candies, and some slid the candies into their pockets. Some delicately



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took one; some would take a handful, disrupting the clean edge of the rectangle. Once the gallery was closed, the rectangle was corrected, and more candy might be added. Ideally the piece consists of 700 pounds of the black missile-shaped treats. This installation, which belongs to the collection of the Guggenheim, resists ownership, relying on its owner to execute it regularly according to its instructions, and allow, if not encourage, it be continuously dismantled by its audience.



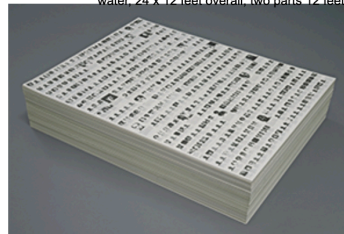
Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (*Public Opinion*), 1991. Black rod licorice candies in clear wrappers, endless supply. Overall dimensions vary with installation; ideal weight 700 lbs. Photo: David Zwirner Gallery.

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

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



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



Felix Gonzalez-Torres (Left), "Untitled" (*Perfect Lovers*), 1991. Two identical clocks hanging on the wall, set in synchronized manner at the same start time, operating with identical batteries. The clocks touch while showing the time which is running out. Inevitably, at some point they will stop; one of them will stop ahead of the other. MoMA. Photo: tripimprover.com. (Right) "Untitled" (*Death by Gun*), 1990. Print on paper, endless copies. Stack: 9 inches ideal height x 44 15/16 x 32 15/16. Photo: moma.org.

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

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

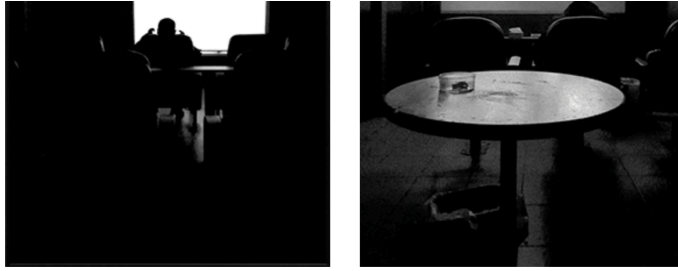


(Below) Felix Gonzalez-Torres (Installation view), "Untitled," 1994–1995. Mixed media, dimensions vary with installation. Photo: David Zwirner Gallery.

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



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Dean Sameshima (Left), *Being Alone (No. 9)*, 2022. (Right) *Being Alone (No. 8)*, 2022. Archival inkjet prints, 23.4 x 16.5 inches. Photos: Queer Thoughts Gallery.

Or perhaps that screen is filled with an image from Tom of Finland's *Take vol. 22—"Highway Patrol,"* 1980. In this series of twenty-one drawings, two highway patrol officers, concealed in some shrubbery, spy a leatherman passing by on his motorcycle. *Take*, the name of Tom of Finland's frequent protagonist, is written across a roadside billboard. The officers take the biker behind the billboard where they have their way with him—the biker is more than willing to oblige. Once they are all satisfied that the law has been laid, we have a final drawing in which the spent biker smiles and waves at the departing cops. A truck passes by with the name "Tom" in large letters on its trailer. I can imagine the disconcerting racket it makes as our trio make their farewells.

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

Paul Moreno is an artist, designer and writer working in Brooklyn, New York. He is a founder and organizer of the New York Queer Zine Fair. His work can be found on Instagram @bathedinafterthought. He is the New York City editor of the *New Art Examiner*.

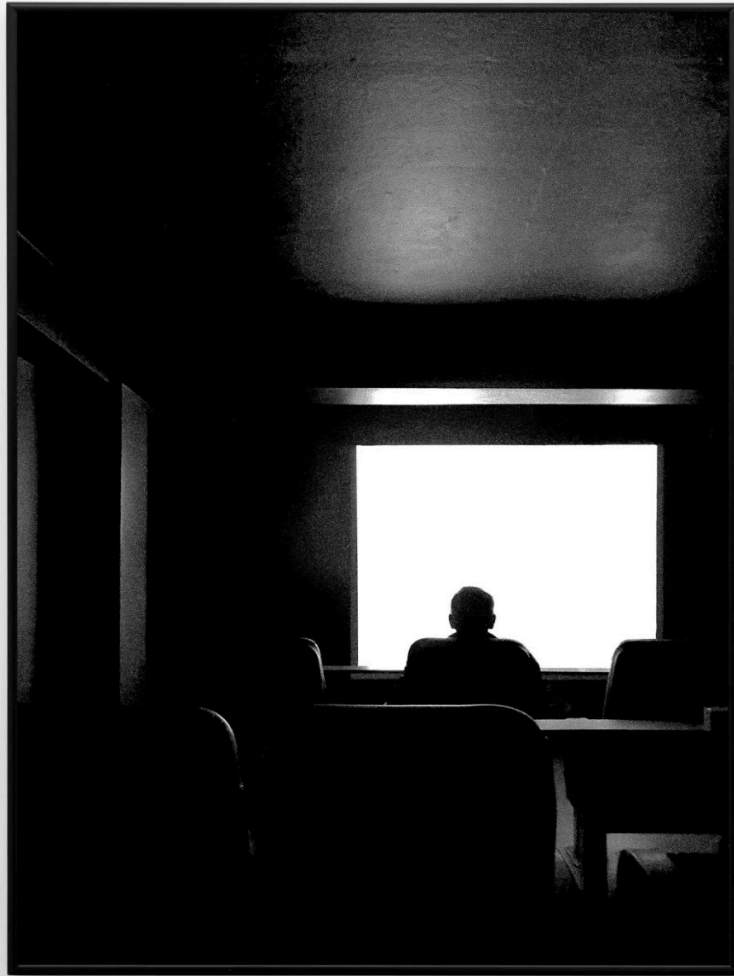


(Top) Tom of Finland, *Untitled*, 1979. graphite on paper, 21 7/8 x 17 1/8 x 1 1/2 inches (framed). Photo: Jeff McLane, courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery. (Bottom) *Take vol. 22—"Highway Patrol,"* 1980. Pen and ink on paper, one of 20 parts, each: 18 3/8 x 14 7/8 x 1 1/2 inches (framed). Photo: David Kordansky Gallery.

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

Posted on February 28, 2023 by EMILY COLUCCI



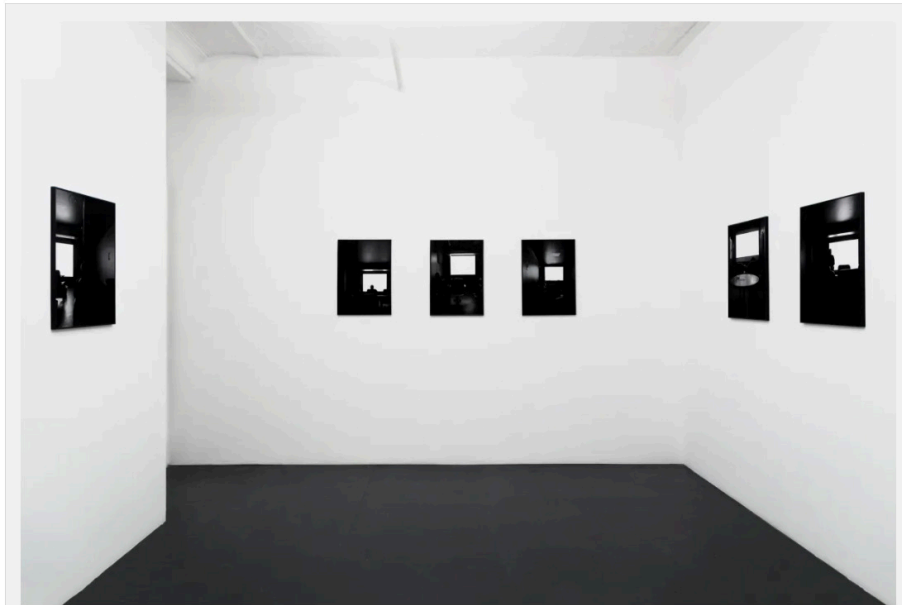
Dean Sameshima, *Being Alone* (2022), Archival inkjet print (Courtesy the artist and Queer Thoughts, New York)

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

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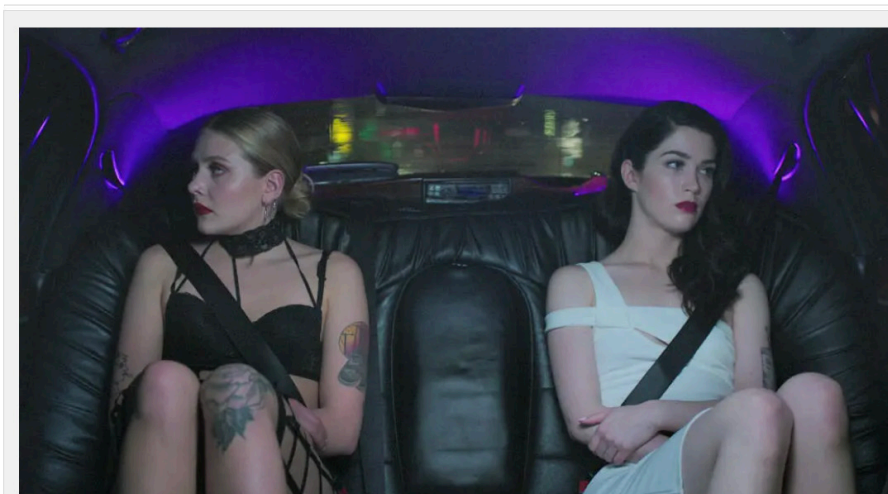
negative critique, but it isn't. Though anyone visiting the gallery expecting neon-lit sordid glamour akin to Bette Gordon's 1983 film *Variety* will be woefully disappointed, Sameshima's unwavering dedication to rigidly framing and producing each photograph with an exacting sameness allows him to portray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



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

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

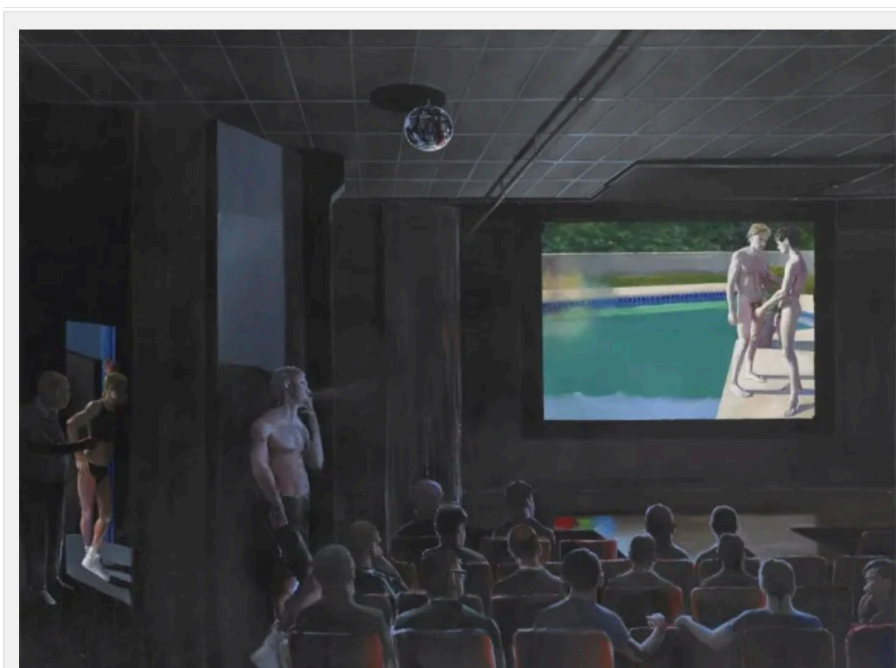
In this, the photographs remind me of Ninja Thyberg's 2021 film *Pleasure*. Though filmed realistically using almost entirely current and former porn workers with the exception of the protagonist, aspiring blonde bombshell Bella Cherry (Sofia Kappel), *Pleasure* is a fictional representation of the LA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



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

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



Patrick Angus, *Hanky Panky*, 1990,

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

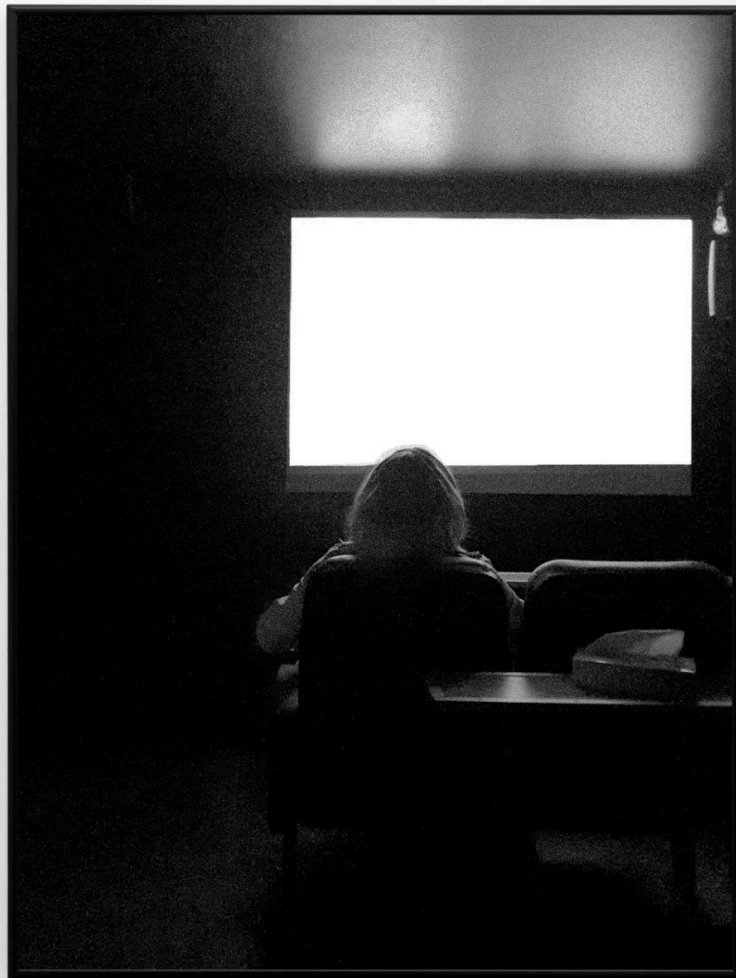
Yet, if we go by the action within the photographs of *Being Alone* only, these men sit silently, staring rapt at the screen. Though appearing on the surface separate and alienated, Sameshima forges a connection with the men who are still attached to this disappearing sexual destination. As the artist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

We can't, however. With the erasure of the erotic action on screen and the relegation of the figures to near shadows, we, as viewers, are left to gaze at the utilitarian austerity of the screening room architecture. The drop ceilings, pipes, fuse boxes, possibly a radiator, and banks of hideous and uncomfortable-looking chairs that recall waiting room décor à la [Joseph Liatela](#)'s bondage rope-encircled chairs, *Formative Systems*, in his past exhibition [Nothing Under Heaven](#). In certain photographs, random elements that break this pattern pop: a soda or beer can, a bottle, a garbage can. But, what granted me entry into and further appreciation for the series was the most

filthy dreams, 2023

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.



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

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

Kaleidoscope, 2022



Kaleidoscope, 2022

SEASON K41 FW22

DEAN SAMESHIMA • MARGINAL MEN

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

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

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

WORDS BY ANASTASIIA FEDOROVA



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

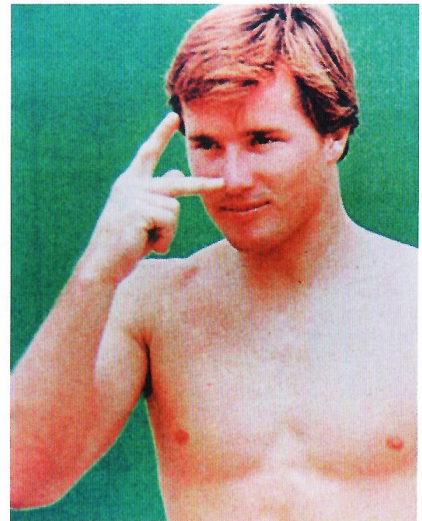
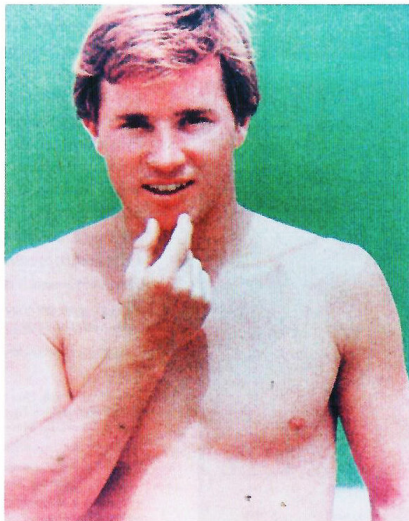
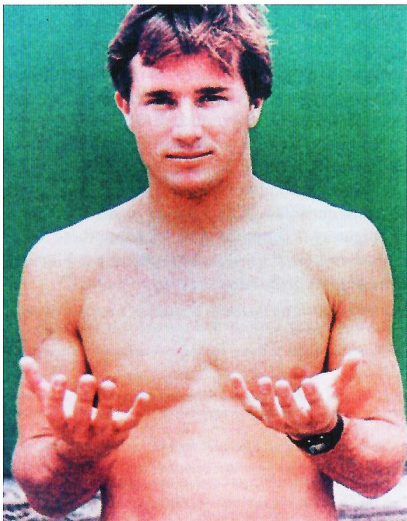
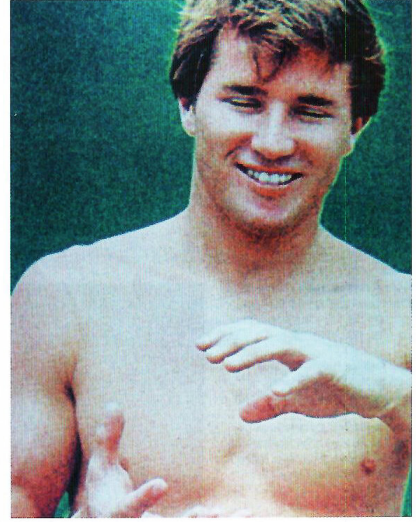
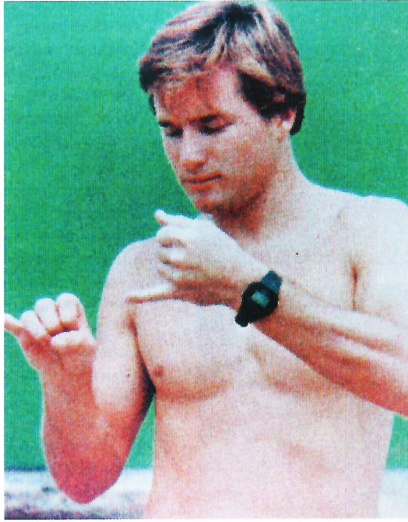
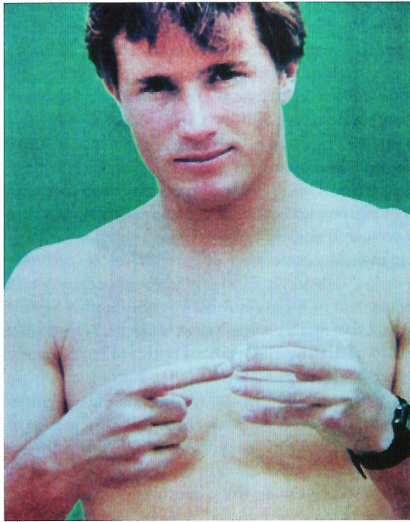
Berlin-based artist Dean Sameshima's next solo show, "Being Alone," is set to open in 2023 at Queer Thoughts in New York. His photographs frequently feature a nostalgic view of the disappearing world of elements of gay culture, such as sex clubs, theaters, and specialized magazines and books.

CLOSE-UP

INDIFFERENCE AND REPETITION

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

Clockwise, from top left: Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Blowjob)*, 2003, C-print, 12 1/4 x 9 3/8". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Screwing)*, 2003, C-print, 12 1/4 x 9 3/8". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Group Sex)*, 2003, C-print, 12 1/4 x 9 3/8". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Penis)*, 2003, C-print, 12 1/4 x 9 3/8". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Gay)*, 2003, C-print, 12 1/4 x 9 3/8". Dean Sameshima, *Untitled (Testicles)*, 2003, C-print, 12 1/4 x 9 3/8". All from the series "Outlaw," 2003.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DAVID RIMANELLI IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.

Know your history: Dean Sameshima

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

Photo by Matthias Kolb

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

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

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

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

What are you trying to achieve?

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

What does 647(a) refer to?

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

Exberliner, 2017

What do you want your work to say to them?

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

Do you see that changing?

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

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

SEDUCTIVE DARKNESS: AN INTERVIEW WITH DEAN SAMESHIMA

THOMAS MOORE

28.04.14



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

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

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

Fanzine, 2014

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 out of them. I might not be making sense, but it feels like an overriding sensibility of your work is hopefulness. Can you talk a little about that? Are you naturally optimistic? What things make you feel happy?

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

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

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

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

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

Fanzine, 2014

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fanzine, 2014

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

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

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

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

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

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

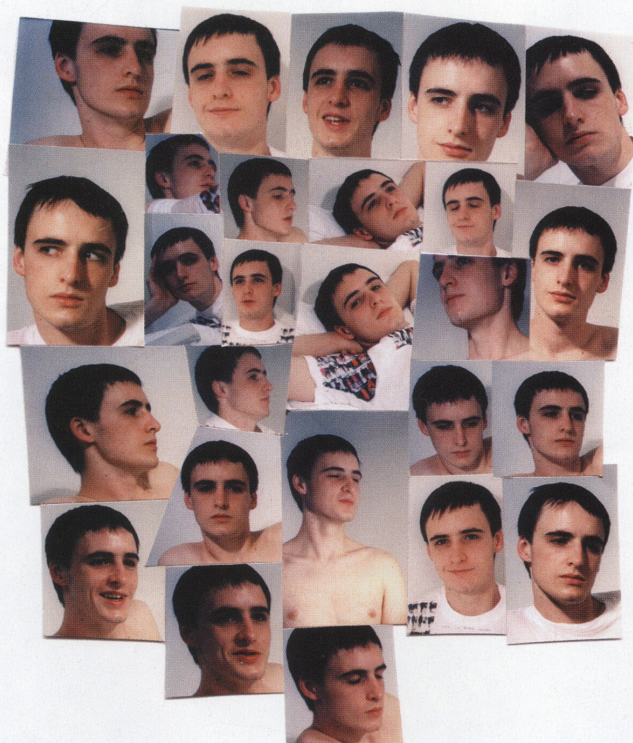
I view it a few important ways. It started out as all original posts mainly of my inspirations outside of the "art world" and my inspirations for my own work, but not putting in my own work. Then I started to add more Art specific images and texts and songs etc and seeing myself as more of a curator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

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!

Fanzine, 2014

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

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

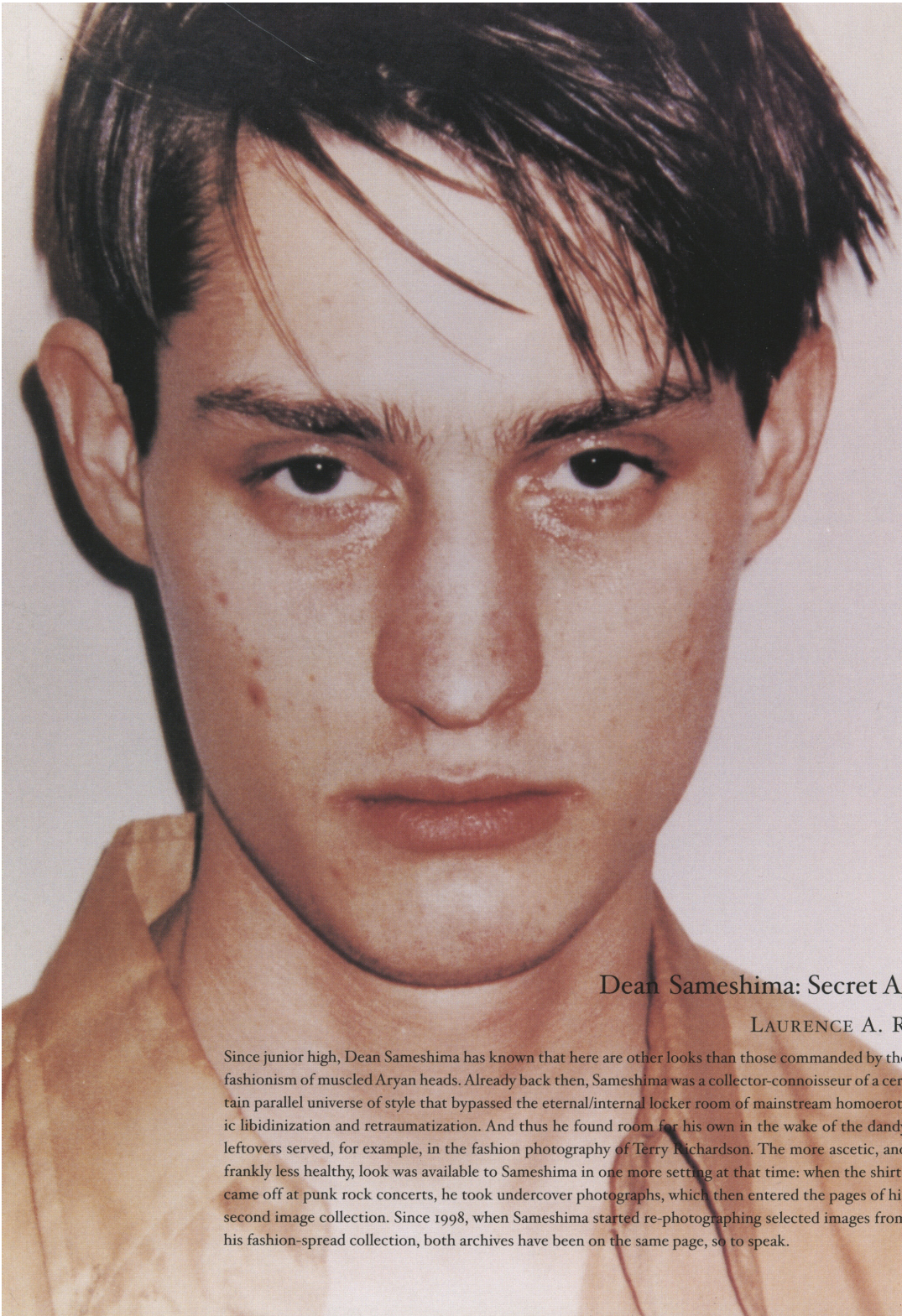
but Sameshima offers us more than just a clever mix of pop and commercialism. In photographic series that unfold like a visual diary, the California native examines fashion and advertising's influence in shaping desire (both his and ours), and it ain't always pretty. His juxtapositions of original portraits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

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

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

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

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



Dean Sameshima: Secret Agency

LAURENCE A. RICKELS

Since junior high, Dean Sameshima has known that there are other looks than those commanded by the fashionism of muscled Aryan heads. Already back then, Sameshima was a collector-connoisseur of a certain parallel universe of style that bypassed the eternal/internal locker room of mainstream homoerotic libidization 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.

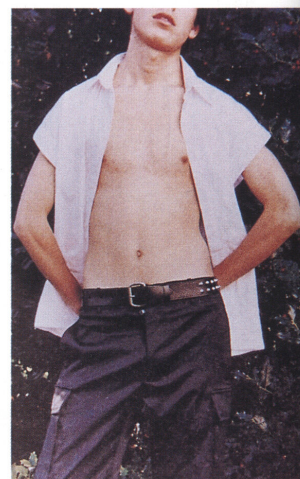


DEAN SAMESHIMA, (OPPOSITE) *Brian*, 1999, Fuji Flex print, 35.5 x 28 cm./ framed 50 x 40 cm. (BELOW) *Bang*, 2000, Fuji Flex print, set of 5, 4 x 6 in. on 11 x 14 in. Courtesy Low, Los Angeles.



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 *bomo alone*. But the photographer does not take the pictures because he is alone, but is alone so he can carry out his undercover assignment. The relationship to absence in these works is that of the frame—the techno frame—as the constitutive possibility of access, of every object and subject's ready positioning for access, and of the opening up or clearing that at the same time denies access.

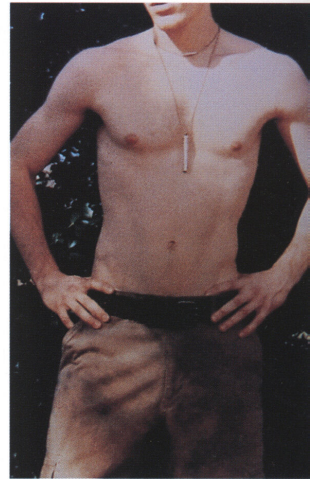
The downtime Sameshima does with absence comes up in his undercover excursions into the recent past. His first body of work, the 1995-99 documentary series *Wonderland*, is an archaeological dig and, since final resting places of representation and repression tend to be disturbed in the process, also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



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

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

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



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



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

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

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

REVIEWS LOS ANGELES

Dean Sameshima

LOW

By Bruce Hainley ☞

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

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

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

Artforum, 2001

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

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

—Bruce Hainley

Dean Sameshima

Martin Prinzhorn

CONCEPTUALISM WITH A SPLASH OF CRANBERRY

VOLL UND LEER, ÖFFENTLICH UND PRIVAT

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

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

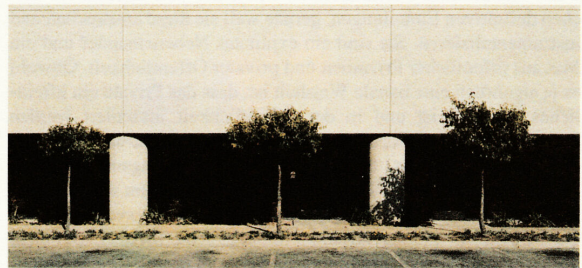
CONCEPTUALISM WITH A SPLASH OF CRANBERRY

FULL AND EMPTY, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

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



DEAN SAMESHIMA, *Untitled (closed, 1995)*, 1995, C-print.



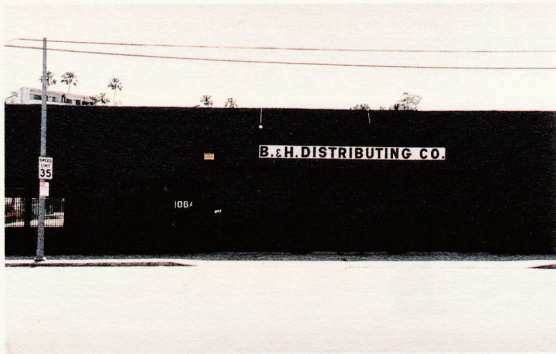
DEAN SAMESHIMA, *Untitled (5 rooms, 1 livingroom, 1 shower, 2 televisions, 1 van, 1995)*, 1995/96, C-print.

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

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

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



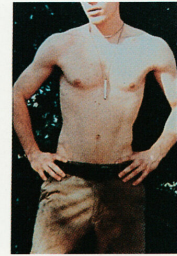
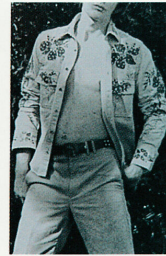
DEAN SAMESHIMA, *Untitled* (15 rooms, 1 locker room, 3 bathtubs, 2 leather slings, 1995), 1995/96. C-print.

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

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

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

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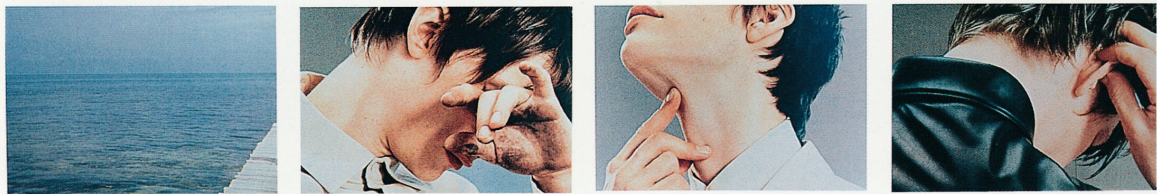
DEAN SAMESHIMA, aus der Serie / from the series: *Modern Boys*, 1998/99. Fuji Flex-prints, je / each 35,5 cm x 28 cm.

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

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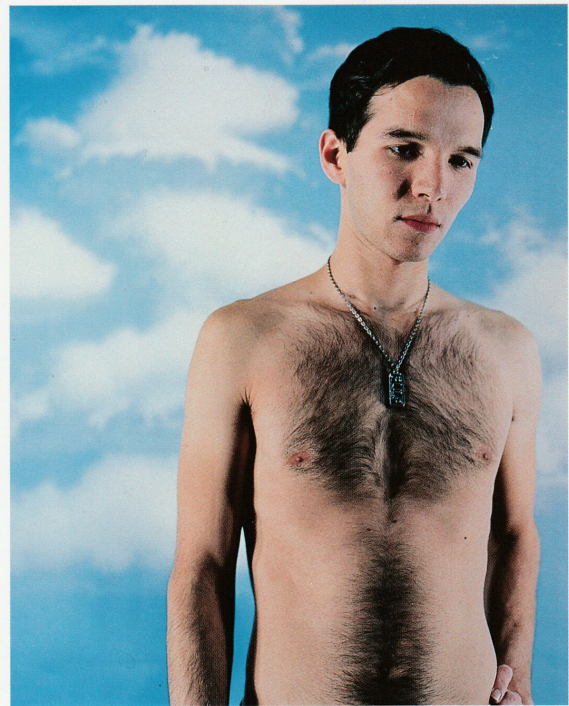
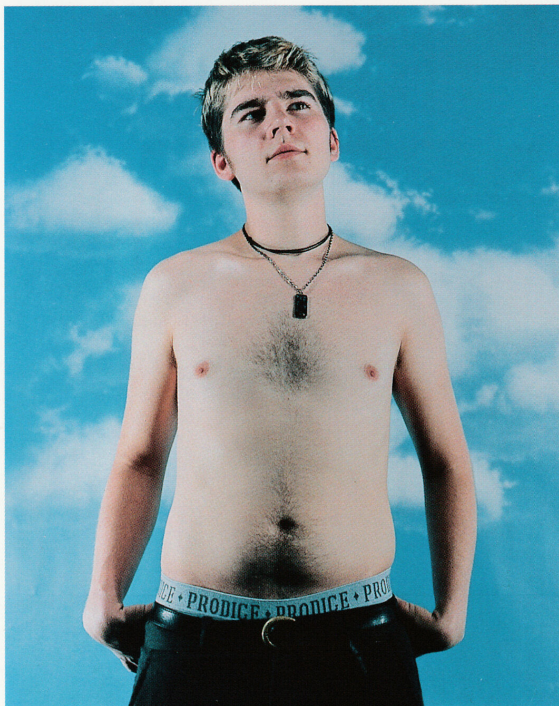
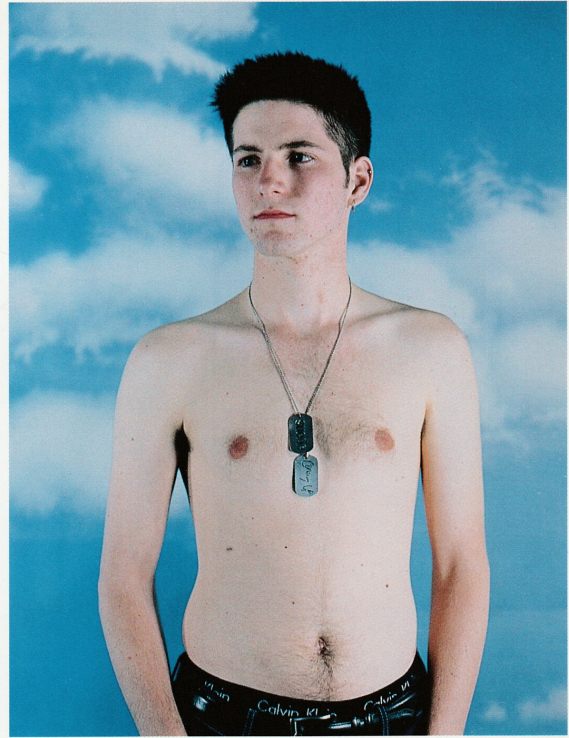
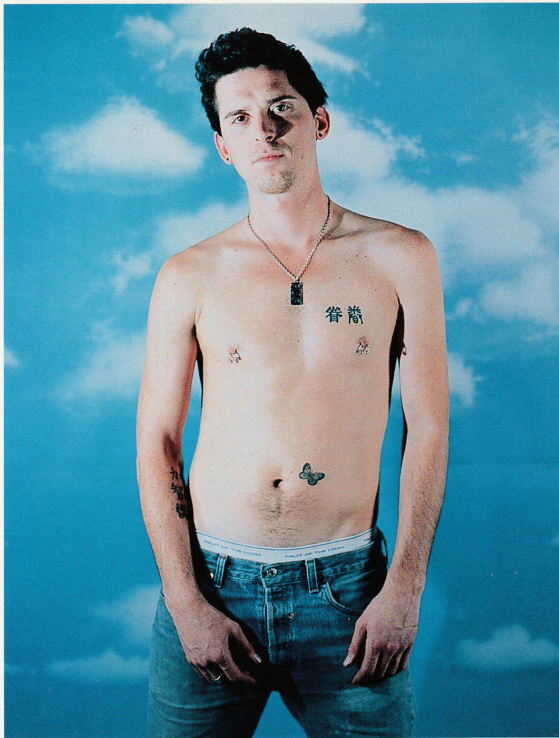
DEAN SAMESHIMA, aus / from: *Something to believe in...or at least get lost in (landscapes)*, 1999. C-prints, je / each 28 cm x 35,5 cm.

Camera Austria International, 2000



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

Camera Austria International, 2000



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

Sebastian, Akbar, 1999
Michael, Art Center, 2000

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

Camera Austria International, 2000



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

Camera Austria International, 2000



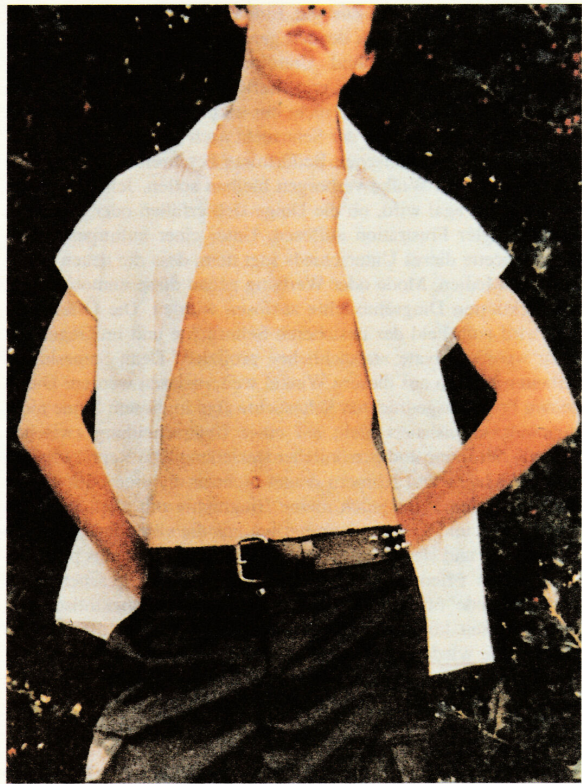
DEAN SAMESHIMA, aus der Serie / from the series: *In Darkness There is Light* (Sean, La Jolla, 1996), 1999. Fuji Flex-prints, je / each 35,5 cm x 28 cm.

des Inhalts. Seine Arbeit sagt auch, dass die Wahrnehmung des Inneren nur über ein Außen möglich ist. Was in den früheren Arbeiten von den Orten des verlassenen Geschehens noch indirekt gesagt wird, dass das Innere immer in der Öffentlichkeit als etwas präsentiert wird, das dem Blick von Außen entzogen wird, ein Punkt, den Mark Wigley in Zusammenhang mit Architektur gemacht hat¹, wird in den neuen Arbeiten präziser ausgedrückt, indem sich das Auge der Kamera direkt auf die Personen richtet, ohne sie direkt anblicken zu wollen. Nicht durch Maskeraden, nicht durch Surrogate wird der Blick bearbeitet, sondern indem der Kollaps von Öffentlichkeit, Privatheit und der diese umgebenden Haut inszeniert wird. Es entsteht eine Welt von Oberfläche, in der das Starmodell, der Freund oder ein Typ aus dem Club nebenan sich in einer Ununterschiedlichkeit repräsentieren lassen, die die Lust an Schönheit oder an Körperlichkeit mit einer Fantasie in Zusammenhang bringt, die sich nicht mehr einer hierarchischen Weltordnung des Glamourösen und des Startums unterwirft. Es gibt auch keine hierarchische Beziehung zwischen einer künstlerischen und einer außerkünstlerischen, massenmedialen Ästhetik oder Repräsentation mehr, statt etwas mit dem Etikett Kunst zu entwickeln und dieses so einer eventuellen außerkünstlerischen Aneignung zur Verfügung zu stellen, geht Sameshima einen umgekehrten Weg und bedient sich ganz direkt bei der Modefotografie. Dass es keine hierarchische Beziehung zwischen Kunst und Mode mehr gibt, heißt aber nicht, dass sie bei Sameshima einfach als Kontinuum gesehen werden und so grundsätzlich ununterscheidbar ist. Seine Arbeiten widersprechen nur Typisierungen, die auf der einen Seite »Oberflächlichkeit« und »Kommerzialisierung« sehen, während sie auf der anderen Seite ein diffuses, »ernsthafte« analytisches Potenzial lokalisieren. Kunst ist in diesem Sinne also nicht rigider als Mode und diese kein offenes Feld, auf dem man sich einfach und folgenlos bedienen kann. Es ist dem Künstler sehr bewusst, dass etwas passiert, wenn er die Modefotos in seine Arbeit hineinnimmt.

SEHNSUCHT

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

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



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

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

YEARNING

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

Camera Austria International, 2000



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

Camera Austria International, 2000

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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