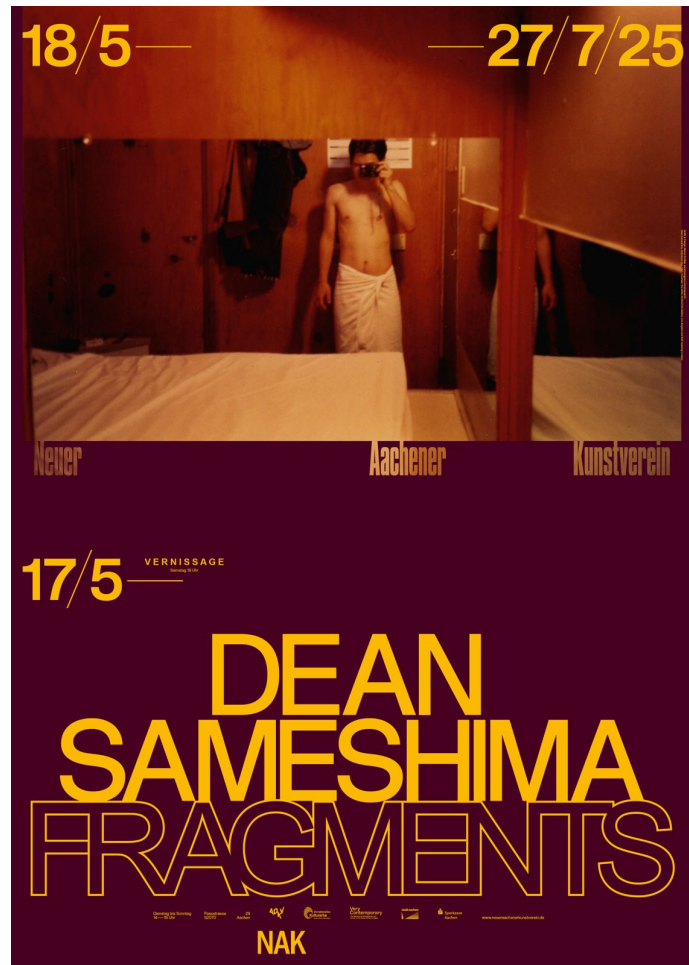


Dean Sameshima – Fragments

Press date: May 15, 2025, 12 p.m.
Opening: May 17, 2025, 7 p.m.
Duration: May 18 until July 27, 2025



NAK Neuer Aachener Kunstverein is delighted to present *Fragments*, the first institutional solo exhibition of American artist Dean Sameshima.

In his artistic practice, the multidisciplinary artist deals with topics such as visibility and desire, traces subculture and queer identity and explores the relationship between art and the viewer.

NAK is exhibiting the multi-part photo series *being alone*, which already attracted a great deal of attention in the exhibition *Foreigners Everywhere* at the 60th Venice Biennale. In contrast to the presentation there, the complete series of 25 works will be exhibited at the Kunstverein.

For the series, Sameshima photographed people unnoticed in front of the projection screen in sex cinemas, who are thus outlined in dark contours in front of a bright, luminous but equally empty surface. Lonely together? Alone together. Before. After. But in-between? It is a clear abstraction of a longing desire that multiplies in Sameshima's photo series from the individual, anonymous projection of desire into the supra-personal and timeless, including the doubling and tripling of the gaze.

With *being alone*, Dean Sameshima not only captures shadowy, unidentifiable people as silhouettes, whose anonymity the artist not only preserves but deliberately brings about, but also documents the interior of the porn cinema, a place of vanishing. But a place that is vanishing itself as well, a relic of days gone by, the end of an era, post-Internet. And yet:

the white screen as desire, hope, redemption, the light. At least for the visitors to the theater.

For the viewers in the exhibition, on the other hand, the white screen becomes a blank space to be filled, a place of potential, of possibilities: the projection onto the projection. Nevertheless, the knowledge of the location is always in mind, imagining associatively the most likely pornographic content of the explicit film. It is a projection onto the different, individual nothingness. The movie is missing. Neither the film nor the people are recognizable. And yet you know exactly what seems to be going on. In addition, one's own gaze in the exhibition space duplicates the situation in the cinema, a looking, searching, observing, the gaze supposedly straight ahead, but nevertheless tense.

In the second exhibition room of the Kunstverein, Sameshima presents new paintings from the *figures* and *fragments* series. Here, too, the focus is on the absent. With the *figures* series, begun last year, Sameshima skillfully references his own oeuvre. In 2007, he began producing works under the title *numbers*, whose colors and titles refer to the so-called Hanky Code, a signal system using an inserted handkerchief to communicate preferences for certain types of sex and positions within the gay scene.

In the 1970s, the US American *Drummer* magazine published *Erotic Dots*, a tongue-in-cheek puzzle game in which a line drawn between a series of numbered dots revealed the outline of a sexually explicit scene. Encouraged by the accompanying instructions, true to the maxim "*Create your own erotic artwork*", Sameshima recreated these to-be-completed drawings first for *numbers* and now for *figures* in color fields. For *figures*, Sameshima combines the dot drawings with material from his own photographic work or appropriates images by other authors in order to find new figures and protagonists. Text fragments and notes also find their way into the works, which are screen-printed onto the canvas. In doing so, Sameshima consciously refers to artistic role models such as Robert Rauschenberg, who also incorporated his own photographic works into screen prints. The inner complexity of the *figures* also increases in comparison to the *numbers*, for example through a broader color palette.

Here, for example, the index of the book *The Joy of Gay Sex* by Charles Silverstein and Edmund White meets the photographs of glory holes from Sameshima's *Erdbeermund* diptychs or a self-portrait of the artist meets the typographic adaptation of Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* - a book whose subtitle lends its title to Sameshima's exhibition at the Kunstverein.

Complemented by patterns of boxes of tissue that were collected by the artist in a porn cinema over the course of a decade, a "*No Cruising*" sign from Griffith Park Boulevard in Silverlake, Los Angeles, notes from telephone sex advertisements from the early 2000s, interior and exterior views of sex clubs and cinemas, they all bear witness to an explicitly gay world and history in which Sameshima both participates and observes, collects its references, documents its disappearance and at the same time archives it artistically. Moreover, in each individual work of *figures*, the colliding subjects condense into a condensed retrospective.

Whereas Sameshima's *numbers* refer to the literal numbers in the pictures as well as to the word Numbers, which is also commonly used in English-speaking countries for sexual services by male prostitutes (made famous in this connotation by John Rechy in his semi-autobiographical novel *numbers* from 1967, which Sameshima quotes here), the new title *figures* marks both a closeness and a distance between the new works and the earlier series. Above all, the particularly dense and varied layering of different templates

and information leaves plenty of room for possible projections of content and for finding the figures in the *figures*. Sameshima thus simultaneously creates a universally valid but at the same time extremely private archive of queer space, access, signaling and language.

Exploring this idea further, the artist began work on the *fragments* series right afterwards. Leaving the idea of connecting the dots behind, this recent series of works is less abstract. The *fragments* include screen-printed photographs from Sameshima's archive, explicitly never repeating an image, except for the base images of the floor, and sometimes including chapter titles from Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse*. All of *fragments* start with two different base images of the floor of a porn theater, usually splattered with cum and the presence of the artist's own shoes, hence inscribing himself in every work. Mostly from his own archive, as in photographs or polaroids, but from altered image sources such as screenshots of amateur porn as well, thus forming patterns, Sameshima layers multiple images on top of each other, once more creating a dense collage of mostly pictorial information, that true to their title remain *fragments* nonetheless.

The presentation at NAK will be completed with works from the series *traces* from 2024/2025, which address Dean Sameshima's examination of his own photographic archive and how it informs his current works. The series also revisits the idea of the disappearance of (queer) history: many of the places shown in the photos no longer exist today, but have left traces behind. In the Kunstverein's stairwell, Sameshima has created a new arrangement of the *traces*, which loosely relates the artworks on the lower and upper floors to one another. All of them, *Fragments* of an open narrative.

Dean Sameshima (1971, Torrance, CA) studied at the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA and subsequently at the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA. Sameshima's works are in the permanent collections of the Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, Cantor Arts Center of Stanford University, Stanford and the Museo de Arte São Paulo, São Paulo. He was honored with the Artist Acquisition Club Award in 2022. The artist lives and works in Berlin.