

Young-jun Tak

Doubt

Rooted in his South Korean background and queer identity, the filmic and sculptural works of Berlin-based Young-jun Tak (b. 1989) address a world-wide rise in religious and politically led polarization of society. In the current post-truth era, this is leading to, amongst other things, a tangible increase in homophobia. Looking at our communal spaces—from those of clubbing to holy worship—Tak’s practice explores how populist patriotism drives forward new behavioral restrictions, not least for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Changing O—Overgaden’s architecture into a church-like structure of symmetrical chambers, Tak’s first large-scale institutional solo show to date, in and of itself, constitutes a ritualistic space. In its several compartments, the visitor is taken through a sequence of new and existing works.

The entrance to Tak’s shrine is embellished with two gargoyle-like casts of a human figure. Titled *Knocked* (2023) and *...and Knocked* (2023) the works are modeled entirely on the artist’s own body. Architecturally, the gargoyle is a grotesque human or phantasmagorical figure that takes the practical function of a drainpipe, leading rain from a trough cut in its back through its open mouth. Typically sitting on the facades of Gothic churches, these odd bodies—perpetually penetrated mythic deep throats—push against the rigid Christian symbolism with a distinctly *queer* image. At O—Overgaden, Tak takes the casts of his own body as a point of departure for the grayish white glazed ceramic components of face, torso, hands, and limbs that are tied onto the dark gray aluminum pipe—gagging, touching, torn, and parting. Installed at the very threshold to the exhibition, these works create a personal archway, as if we were entering into the symbolic innards of the artist.

In the exhibition’s first chamber Tak’s recent film *Wish You a Lovely Sunday* (2021), mustering a star-clad production team and cast, is on show. In this work, the rituals and constraints laid down in the spatial etiquette and hierarchy of the church and queer club are investigated. Two queer male pairs, each consisting of a dancer and a choreographer, softly move within and touch these communal spaces while caught in slow, color-drenched rushes following two different four-handed (duet) Bach piano. The two duos—among them the renowned Danish Principal Dancer of the Royal Swedish Ballet, Daniel Norgren-Jensen—each spent days creating and rehearsing new choreography in the Berlin church Kirche am Südsterne and queer club SchwuZ, respectively. Yet, just before performing their new pieces on camera, Tak swapped the designated venues, to the surprise of the performers. By way of this change, a central query in the film becomes

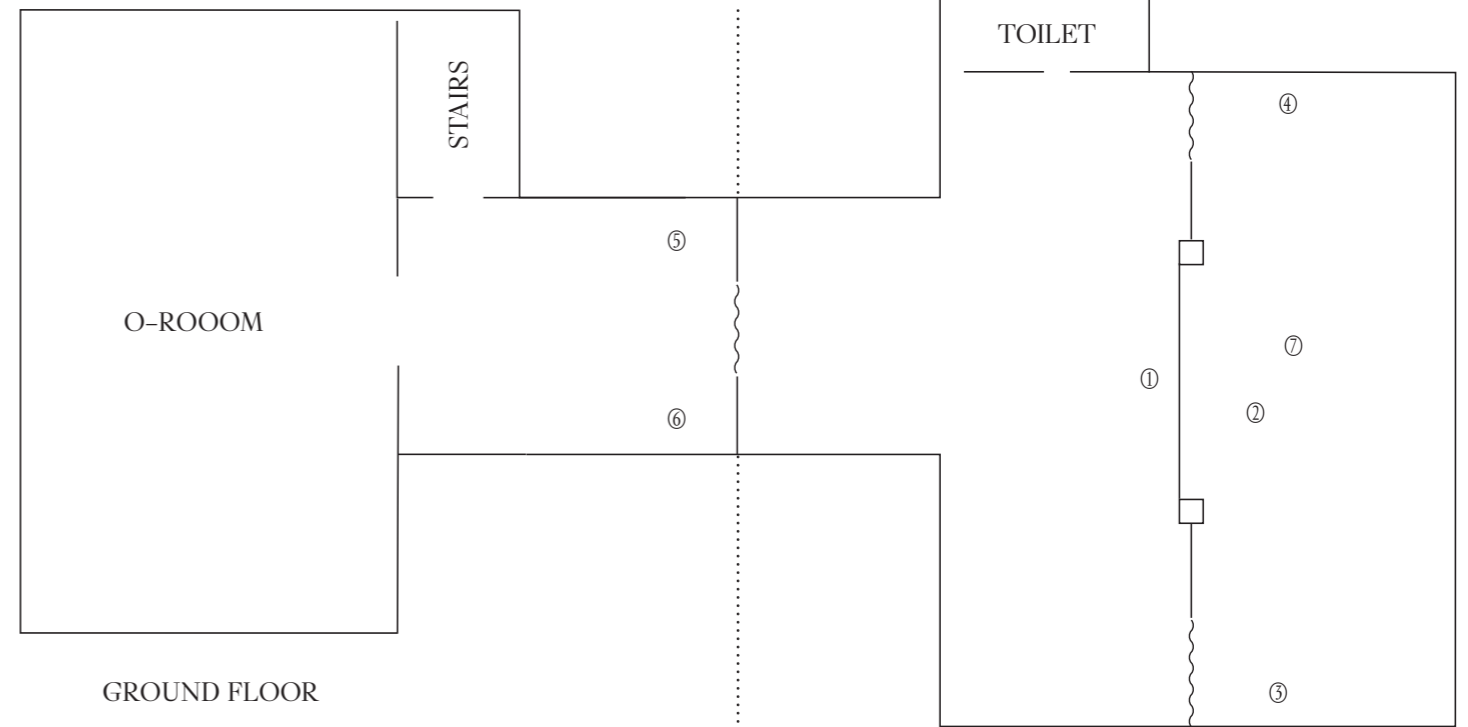
how each of the adjusted choreographies suggests an unlikely merging of the ample, sunlit church space with the narrow, dark cruising rooms of the queer club and vice versa.

Moving into the exhibition’s innermost chamber, the centerpiece is Tak’s large sculptural installation *Chained* (2020) which is created from ten ready-made Christ-figures that the artist has chained arm-in-arm and clad in anti-LGBTQIA+ slogans. Figuratively the work is based on when Christian fanatics tried to block the annual Pride Parade in Seoul by interlocking their arms while lying on ground, hence creating a human barricade. The entire surface of the crucifixes are collaged with propaganda flyers (of such hate groups) offering so-called “conversion therapy.” As an apparently disturbing light source for this configuration, equally resembling a halo and a warning signal, the new light work *Doubt* (2023)—also carrying the title of the exhibition—flickers its own title D·O·U·B·T in morse code over the tied-up bodies.

Further, two smaller sculptures are placed on either side of the rear space. *One More Please* (2022) consists of a wooden milking stool that carries realistic silicone casts of the artist’s nipples which are sized as the typical votive candles to light in prayer. Countering patriarchal focus on the female body, Tak is here forwarding the (mostly neglected) male nipples, and cheekily interlinking mammal lactation with the artist’s self-portraiture of erogenous intimacy and pious spiritism. This is not unlike *Your Anticipation* (2022), a work installed on the opposite wall. In this piece made of limewood and brass, two small-scale white asparagus, each depicting a tiny male face based on Saint John the Baptist, are arranged as if served in a fancy German restaurant (Germans tend to worship this asparagus as an almost holy food). Traditionally German farmers finish the harvest of this beloved vegetable on 24 June, the feast day of Saint John. The phallic diptych with its ambiguous facial expressions (agony and ecstasy) combines a holy longing with a libidinal or gastronomically inferior craving. In this, the piece humorously doubts any division between what are often seen as opposites by suggesting a mishmash of bodily and religious desire.



Exhibition supported by:



① *Wish You a Lovely Sunday*, 2021
Single channel HD video,
5-channel sound
18:38 min.
Courtesy of the artist
Supported by Arts Council Korea;
Berlin Masters Foundation; Burger
Collection, Hong Kong; and Center
Stage, Moscow, New York

② *Chained*, 2020
Resin, fiberglass, paper, glue
400cm in diameter
Courtesy of the artist
Commissioned and coproduced
by the 11th Berlin Biennale for
Contemporary Art Supported
by Arts Council Korea

③ *One More Please*, 2022
Wooden milking stool, votive candles,
silicon, paint, aluminum, glue
39 × 35 × 35 cm
Courtesy of the artist

④ *Your Anticipation*, 2022
Lime wood, brass, beeswax
25.5 × 10.5 × 10.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Efremidis,
Berlin

⑤ *Knocked*, 2023
Ceramic, aluminum, drain pipes,
rope, metal, glue
257 × 33 × 129 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
NEUSTARTplus-Stipendium der
Stiftung Kunstfonds / NEUSTART
KULTUR der BKM.

⑥ *...and Knocked*, 2023
Ceramic, aluminum, drain pipes,
rope, metal, glue
257 × 33 × 129 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
NEUSTARTplus-Stipendium der
Stiftung Kunstfonds / NEUSTART
KULTUR der BKM

⑦ *Doubt*, 2023
LED, aluminum, controller, driver,
cable
230 cm in diameter
Courtesy of the artist

Young-jun Tak (b. Seoul, 1989) is a self-taught artist living and working in Berlin. He has BAs both in English literature and cross-cultural studies from Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, South Korea. Tak has participated in major international exhibitions such as the Lyon Biennale (2022), the Berlin Biennale (2020), and Istanbul Biennale (2017). He received the TOY Berlin Masters Award (2021). *Doubt* is Tak’s first institutional solo exhibition.

The exhibition is generously supported by the Danish Arts Foundation, the Goethe-Institut Dänemark, and NEUSTARTplus-Stipendium der Stiftung Kunstfonds / NEUSTART KULTUR der BKM.

STIFTUNG KUNSTFONDS



O—OVERGADEN