

Jaanus Samma

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[Ida Panicelli](#)

In “Outhouse by the Church,” [Jaanus Samma](#) examines the public urinal as a site of past and present gay cruising. *Flaminio Station 1–4*, 2016–18, based on archival research and a map of Roman public baths, focuses on one such facility near Piazza del Popolo, which has not yet been rendered anachronistic by dating apps and remains a cruising site. In this series, four panels of yellow ceramic tiles evoke public bathrooms; graffiti with offers and requests for sexual services and the inevitable tones of trash talk contribute to the work’s extroverted and rambunctiously Pop-y nature.

In contrast, *Outhouse by the Church*, 2018—for which Samma reconstructed the remnants of an old wooden outhouse from outside Saint Michael’s Church in Kodavere, eastern Estonia—is coarse, dry, and silent. Here, he displays the same passion for investigation and anthropological curiosity as he did at the 2015 Venice Biennale’s Estonian pavilion, in which he exhibited a case study in how male homosexuality was treated with ostracism and cruelty under the repressive Soviet regime of the 1960s. Scatological innuendos are carved into wood, some dating back to the 1920s, and sexual norms exploding next door to the church create a pointed proximity between the sacred and profane.

The sober presentation of this archeology-like piece contrasts with *Study of a Toilet*, 2016–18, a series of fourteen ink drawings with an exhilarating mix of ornate details and utterly irreverent subjects: urinals, squat toilets, pulls, drains, toilet paper. But if, in this instance, Samma softens his philological and rigorous approach with a tone of mordant irony, his reflection on queer subjects favors the direct gaze and terse truth of history.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.