

CHRISTOPHER K. HO: HAPPY BIRTHDAY

WINKLEMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

10 JANUARY - 9 FEBRUARY

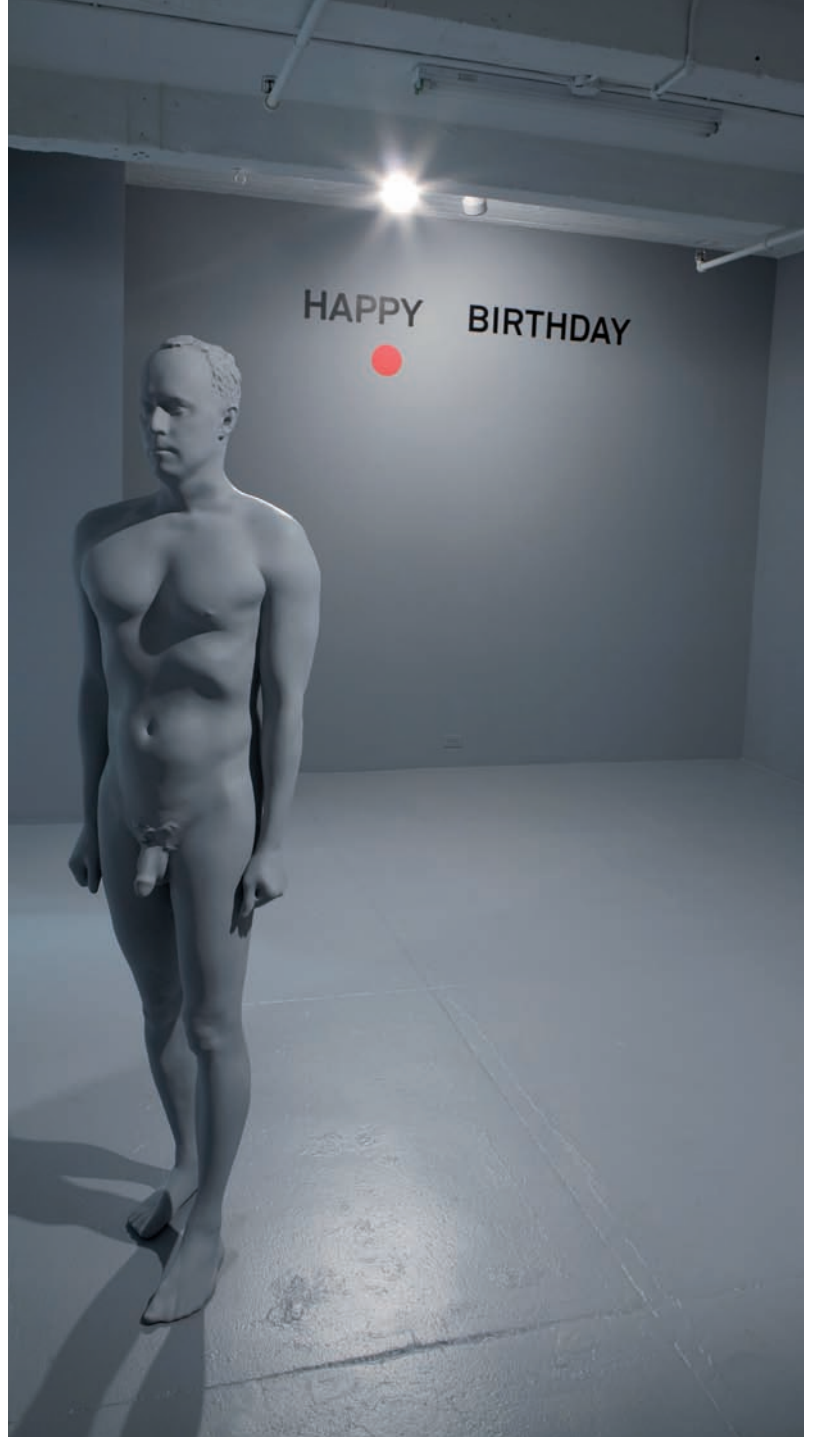
'Collaboration' is the idea that animates most all of Christopher Ho's artistic enterprise, but it is collaboration conceived differently than most artists do in the wake of relational aesthetics, or by those who espouse 'community' or have banded together into one kind of art collective or another. For Ho, collaboration implies or even necessitates a certain antagonism. His favoured analogy is to the tennis match, where two players not only compete against one another but also collaborate in the creation of the match itself, which somehow exceeds the inevitable outcomes of victory or loss. Here, 'working together' is stripped of its hackneyed utopian veneer and set up as a constant and never frictionless negotiation.

For *Happy Birthday*, Ho's first solo show, the artist's (or really any artist's) standard artworld relationships – between artist and dealer, artist and collector, artist and critic, artist and public – are staged as so many different collaborations. So for example, *Happy Birthday from Nuit* (all works 2008) takes the form of a critical essay in the accompanying catalogue, itself the site of another of the artist's works, *Happy Birthday to Ed*, which retroactively prices and redates Ho's previous body of work for Edward Winkleman, the artist's new dealer, who is also offered the promise of future sales splits. *Happy Birthday from Nuit* also serves to record a (fictional) transaction between Ho and Winkleman, in which Winkleman Gallery was bought by Ho on the date of the exhibition's opening and was then gifted back to the dealer after a supposed \$30,000 increase in value, presumably due the interval of Ho's show.

Some may attempt to dismiss Ho's various *Happy Birthday* gestures as so many manifestations of the political economy of potlatch (insert Mauss here), but to do so overlooks the one piece in the show around which all of the others necessarily revolve, and that is *Happy Birthday from Ed*, a painted polyurethane statue of Winkleman himself, naked and standing in the pose of a classical kouros (the piece is indeed a perfect replica of the dealer, who the artist flew to California for a full-body 3D scan that was then fed to a CNC machine for milling).

So exposed, Ho draws his dealer into a double sacrifice, the first of which, of course, is economic: *Happy Birthday from Ed* is the only 'object' in the show and so stands as the sole enticement to potential collectors. The second sacrifice, and the more important one, is Winkleman's sacrifice of himself – quite literally, his naked body – to his artist and public. Here the conceptual gesture never quite matches up with, or exhausts, one's own rather visceral confrontation with the work, which is not to suggest that *Happy Birthday from Ed* somehow rejuvenates the category of aesthetic experience proper, but rather to recognise how fundamentally discomfiting this kind of doubling, this bearing witness to a kind of loss of control, can be.

Jonathan T.D. Neil



Happy Birthday from Ed, 2008, milled, sanded and painted polyurethane statue, 185 cm (height). Courtesy the artist and Winkleman Gallery, New York