

# Li Tavor

## *IN THE CLOSET*

### May 9–June 28, 2025

Central to the exhibition *In the Closet* is the interplay between visibility and invisibility, protection and vulnerability—embodied in the closet as symbol, space, and object. The metaphor of the “closet,” which has no equivalent expression in the German language, is rooted in the queer histories of the twentieth century but also refers to older cultural notions of secrecy, shame, and private space. It stands for hiding and making oneself invisible, but also for a space that ultimately must be “left behind”—since “coming out” remains the goal and guiding narrative of queer life, at least in a Western cultural framework.

This division between inside and outside, between “closeted” and “out,” holds significance in queer cultural and linguistic repertoires, but it is not without contradiction. The supposedly clear boundary between the inside and outside of the closet is unstable and blurred: most queer people navigate it repeatedly—throughout everyday life and across their lifetimes—shifting between positions, often involuntarily. In this sense, the closet is not only a place of silence and concealment but also a space of retreat from precarious legal, social, and political conditions and from the expectations of a (hetero)normative society.

In the scenographic staging of a walk-in (wardrobe) closet, Li Tavor combines objects, photographs, and video and audio works into a spatially expansive installation. Furniture elements such as doors, mirrors, clothing racks, and hangers are exaggerated in scale and take on sculptural qualities. Curtains made of pigmented latex shield the rooms from outside view and create an intimate atmosphere. Epoxy-soaked assemblages of garments allude to queer codes; filmic moments and voices in the video installation, as well as photographs of bodily fragments, point to human presence inside the closet.

Walking through the exhibition leads from the initial flickering impressions of the entrance toward moments in which forms sharpen and the world regains its contour. Visitors move through an inner world whose boundaries remain indistinct: between memory and the present, desire and projection, formation and dissolution of identity.

The entry room is bathed in muted rose. Colored latex curtains—in saturated pink and blue, with cloudy blurs and streaks of shine—frame the window theatrically. The room smells of latex. Above the window, the glowing sign “Dyke at Heart” invites a queer reading of the image on the windowpane: a reproduction of an amateur painting printed on acrylic glass. Depicted are two figures, read as female, walking arm in arm through a sunlit landscape—a scene reminiscent of a classical motif from bourgeois pictorial tradition, but which appears here like the projection of a youthful fantasy that obscures a view of the real world outside. The combination of romanticized intimacy, kitschy sunlight, and the unambiguous self-designation above the window evokes a dream-like space: queer, soft, utopian.

This self-projecting relation begins to shift in the photograph *Mirror*: a figure stands in front of a mirror, hips wrapped in a towel, smartphone in hand. Smoke drifts through the frame, the flash erases detail. The colors are inverted, dominated by shades of blue, like a medical scan. At the same time, the photograph is a collection of signs and resembles a faded memory. Reflected in the mirror: a Nan Goldin poster, a child’s portrait, dried flowers, a note: “Dear Mother, I’m a Homosexual.”

In the doorway, two oversized closet doors stand open, their silhouette reminiscent of Art Nouveau forms. Their exaggerated scale renders them less furniture than walk-in models. Black latex sheets block the view into the next space. The ironic red text on them—“Caution! Entering can make you very gay!”—quotes, with satirical exaggeration, the homophobic notion that queerness might be contagious. The warning evokes not only fear fantasies about “the other,” but also anxieties about one’s own permeability.

## Room 2

Heavy, translucent latex curtains, draped across the windows like membranous veils, cast the second room in semi-darkness. Their surfaces are irregular, almost scarred—marked by bubbles, streaks, fingerprints—and allow an uneven light to pass through, projecting images of cosmic landscapes across the folds. The drapery recalls the opulence of bourgeois interiors, but here it appears sooty, stained, improvised—an implausible décor.

Within this dim space unfolds a three-channel video installation, *Untitled* (Li Tavor & René Steffen): a montage of unused material from the

film *Äned am Bär (Yonderland)* (2025), along with discarded audio recordings from earlier compositions by Tavor. Two figures in pajamas move silently, waiting and seemingly idle through the abandoned architecture of a house in the Swiss Alps, overlaid with other images, voices, and lights. Their movements and dialogues are fragile, eluding time and narration, as if following an inner, intangible logic. At the end of each loop, a rendition of the traditional Guggisberg song is heard—a song about longing and distance that responds like an echo to the figures' searching movements. In contrast to the idealized romantic pair in the window image of Room 1, no perfect relationship is portrayed here. Rather, what unfolds is the experience of a tentative being-with—fragile, interwoven with imagination and memory. Connection appears as a state that is neither fully achieved nor entirely lost – rather, as an attempt to recognize an other through gesture, voice, and gaze.

The recurring motif of fire runs throughout the video overlays. On one level, it evokes bourgeois domestic intimacy—fireplaces, coziness—but it also references ritual and sacred meanings: a site of gathering, warmth, exchange, and transition. In this context, it gestures toward the spiritual emptiness experienced by many queer people through institutional exclusion, and the necessity of creating one's own forms of transcendence, intimacy, and care.

The installation conjures an interior world between sleep, memory, and lived reality—ghostly in its layering, fragile in its construction, yet sustained by the ongoing search for connection.

### Room 3

In the final room, the view opens up: muted daylight enters through pale, warm-toned latex curtains. The flickering impressions from the previous room begin to take shape here—fragmented, elusive images and sensations condense into material forms: at times rigid like frozen movement, at times abstracted into sculpture.

Monumental furniture-like structures with smooth black surfaces reprise the door motif from Room 1. They appear as relics from another time. Their exaggerated presence recalls the blurred reflection in the *Mirror* photograph—as if a hazy memory, a dissociative flashback, or psychedelic vision has taken sculptural form.

On the walls hang shiny assemblages made from garments preserved in epoxy resin. These textile fossils, no longer wearable, gesture toward queer

codings of the past. Also on the walls: reproductions of smartphone photos. Close-ups of body fragments—hair, scars, breast tissue. The camera's proximity and graphic manipulation pull the images out of context and highlight their indeterminacy. What remains is a trace—material, intimate, unresolved.

Text: Li Tavor, Renée Steffen & Eva-Maria Knüsel

Li Tavor extends heartfelt thanks to Verena Dietze, Karin Steffen, and Renée Steffen

### EVENTS

#### *Reflect your Closet*

Mediation project by Nina Baumann,  
MA Art Education, Bern University of the Arts  
Saturday, June 10, 2025, 12–4 pm

#### *Guided Tour in Sign Language*

with Janet Fiebelkorn and Eva-Maria Knüsel  
Thursday, June 12, 2025, 6 pm

#### *Untitled (Promote Homosexuality)*

Film program, curated by Renée Steffen & Li Tavor  
(Special Affects Collective)  
Saturday, June 28, 2025, 11 am–7 pm

### STADTGALERIE TEAM

Director/Curator: Eva-Maria Knüsel  
Administration: Andrea Bracher  
Exhibition Technology/Carpentry: Verena Dietze  
Audio and Video Support: Thalles Piaget,  
Christoph Studer  
Exhibition Attendants: Christoph Studer, Ursle  
von Mathilde  
Graphic Design: Amanda Haas  
Photography: Julie Folly

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