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# Wolfgang Tillmans

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## Artist Wolfgang Tillmans: 'This game can never be mastered'

Wolfgang Tillmans hobbles towards me, his left leg strapped into a fearsome contraption designed to allow his broken bones and ligaments to heal.

He is mobile, but only just, reliant on crutches to move around his studio, and a wheelchair to cover longer distances. Tillmans, it turns out, is recovering from a serious car crash. For now, this most light-footed of artists — a prominent anti-Brexit campaigner whose works have explored themes such as dance, flight and space — finds his freedom of movement sharply constrained.

I have arranged to pick up Tillmans from his studio in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg, where he rents the first floor of a 1930s department store with a notable Bohemian pedigree. Tillmans and his 20-odd assistants occupy a succession of white, airy rooms. The largest contains a vast model of the exhibition space at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which is preparing a retrospective of his work; it seems destined to confirm Tillmans as one of the most celebrated artists living today.

Tobias Buck

«Artist Wolfgang Tillmans: "This game can never be mastered»

Financial Times, 7 Juin 2019

<https://www.ft.com/content/18398928-86c2-11e9-a028-86cea8523dc2>

The 50-year-old German is in shorts and a purple T-shirt that proclaims in bright pink letters: *Votiamo insieme. Votiamo per l'europa* ("Let's vote together. Let's vote for Europe"). The slogan is part of his pro-European political campaign work, an increasingly important part of his life in recent years. As we head for the nearby restaurant, Tillmans is talkative and scrupulously polite, equipped with a disarming, slightly mischievous grin that lights up his still-boyish face.

Our lunch venue is not without controversy. Orania is an ambitious restaurant, known for its subtle blend of German and Asian flavours, in a luxury hotel on the leafy square that abuts Tillmans' studio. This is the formerly rough heart of countercultural Kreuzberg, just up the road from SO36, the most storied punk club in Berlin. Like much of the rest of the capital, the neighbourhood is gentrifying rapidly, sparking angry — and occasionally violent — opposition. Orania is a highly charged symbol in that battle. Several windows are shattered by stones, other parts of the façade are marked by paintbomb splashes.



Amsterdam artist Vincent van der Waal, left, and streetwear shop owner Guillaume Schmidt in T-shirts designed for Wolfgang Tillmans' 'Between Bridges' project © Dana Lixenberg

Tobias Buck

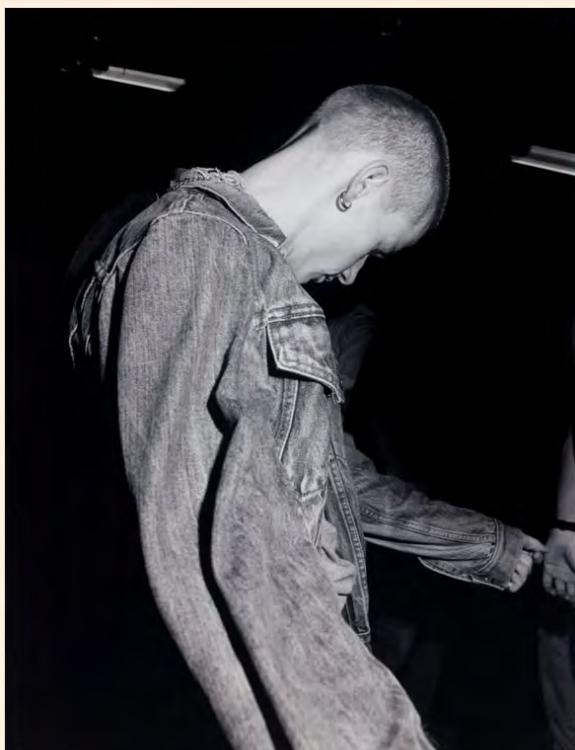
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Tillmans seems keen not to pick sides in this urban conflict. He says he chose the restaurant because his broken leg makes it hard to move farther afield, and because it is quiet enough to allow for a conversation. "Also, the people here are really nice," he says.

The waitress arrives with a clutch of menus. Tillmans finds what he wants in seconds. We are in the midst of *Spargelzeit*, white asparagus season, which exerts a near-mystical pull on Germans. Tillmans and I are no exception, and we each order a plate of the delicate vegetable, which is harvested in Beelitz just outside Berlin, accompanied by boiled potatoes, ham and Hollandaise sauce. As a starter, he picks Orania's quirky take on a tomato and mozzarella salad. I opt for grilled octopus with gin-infused tomatoes.



'dancer, Opera House' (1989) © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Maureen Paley



'Smoker (Chemistry)' (1992) © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Maureen Paley

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As we wait for our first course, I ask about Tillmans' turn towards political activism, which started with Brexit and has since grown into something of a full-blown campaign organisation that produces slogans, posters and T-shirts for a variety of events, including the May 26 European election.

"What changed is that I suddenly saw my whole world and my entire way of life under threat," he responds. "Friendship between the peoples of Europe is of absolutely central importance to me. It is the basis of the freedom and prosperity that we enjoy, and I wanted to do whatever I could to preserve that."

It is easy to see why Brexit matters so deeply to Tillmans. Born and raised in the small town of Remscheid in West Germany, he moved to England in his early twenties and lived there for more than a quarter of a century. Today he spends most of his time in Berlin but keeps a smaller studio in London. "I didn't leave Germany because I felt I had to leave something behind. I left because I saw something positive in England . . . I found something in England that touched me, but I also never wanted to leave behind my Germanness."

He emerged on the scene in the early 1990s, publishing photos of young ravers as well as strangely subversive fashion shoots in magazines such as i-D. In the years since, Tillmans has built up a body of work that is instantly recognisable yet fiendishly hard to summarise or define. Hours into our lunch, he offers an attempt of his own, saying he wants to "make pictures that talk about what it feels like to be alive today". The phrase captures the scale of his ambition, but also the difficulty faced by anyone looking for a simple key to his work.

Tillmans' decision to venture into the political arena may be new, but his art has been political from the start, he says. "The acid house and house music revolution in the late 1980s and early 1990s seemed highly political to me. People were trying out a new utopian form of living together, between women and men, a new approach to sexuality . . . That is something I wanted to amplify. Photography was an amplifier and it still is today."

In Tillmans' mind, the political lurks everywhere, even — or perhaps especially — in the superficially beautiful. "Beauty is what society deems to be worthwhile or desirable. Ugly is what society deems to be non-desirable. If you take the example of two men kissing, that is a picture I can find beautiful even if someone else is disgusted by it."

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'Lacanau (self)' (1986) © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Maureen Paley

The irony, of course, is that the recent surge in rightwing and nationalist sentiment across Europe is at least in part a backlash against the cultural and social shifts that Tillmans was documenting at the time. "This has to do with men and it has to do with sexuality," he says of the current political tides. "We are living in a moment when, at least in some parts of the world, equality between men and women and attitudes towards different sexual identities have reached a level that some regard with abhorrence. And there is an authoritarian part of society — mostly men, of course — who have seen society move in this direction for decades and who hate it."

We have made swift work of our starters — both delicious — and are halfway through our plates of asparagus when the conversation shifts back from Tillmans' politics to his art, which is far broader in scope than many of his casual admirers realise. In some of his best-known photographs, Tillmans tries to draw meaning and beauty from the seemingly mundane: apples and potatoes on a window sill, a folded piece of paper, the wing of an aeroplane, a fly sitting atop a pile of crab shells. He has also devoted long stretches of his career to abstraction, using chemicals, light and photographic paper to produce works of pure colour and movement.

In 2000, he became the first photographer and the first non-Briton to win the Turner Prize. Yet Tillmans insists that he is no photographer. Indeed, some of his earliest work was produced with nothing more than a photocopier. He has returned to this humble machine time and again since, including in the works that make up part of Tillmans' current solo show at Maureen Paley in London.

I ask him about the now-famous picture that apparently marked his beginning as an artist: taken during a beach holiday in Lacanau, France, it resulted from Tillmans pointing the camera downwards into the sand, creating an almost abstract image that includes bits of his leg, a swath of pink fabric and black Adidas shorts. He was 18 at the time. It could have stayed an experimental holiday snap, except — as Tillmans realised when he put together one of his first major exhibitions a decade later — it was not.

“What made it special was that it was an immediate moment of self-perception. It was a moment of doing something and reflecting it at the same time. It was also a moment of doing something irrational, and doing it so consciously,” he tells me. The picture, Tillmans decided, belonged in the exhibition. Today, it forms part of the MoMA collection in New York.

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'Forever Fortresses' (1997) © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Maureen Paley



'17 years' supply' (2014) © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Maureen Paley

"That is one definition of art: to do something that shouldn't be done, to do something that others shouldn't see you do. But when you do all this on purpose, it no longer works. Then it becomes artificial," he adds. Tillmans has wrestled with these questions for more than 30 years but insists there can never be a formula. "This is a game that – unfortunately, thankfully – can never be mastered," he concludes.

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Tillmans has decided against wine, leaving me to drink a glass of crisp Riesling on my own. I am tempted to order another but decide a clear head is preferable. Even in a state of sobriety, I find Tillmans' thoughts are not always easy to follow. He speaks slowly and carefully, stopping frequently along the way to offer a clarification or correction, though occasionally he soars to levels of abstraction that leave me slightly bewildered. There is also, I realise, an inherent contradiction between my desire to nail down precisely the meaning of Tillmans' work, and his determination to leave room for uncertainty, interpretation and association. As he remarks at one point, "don't kill it by naming it".

One thing that comes across clearly, however, is Tillmans' fascination with questions that have become increasingly acute in today's world of total image saturation: What makes a picture? When does a picture become possible? And how can a mechanically produced picture — that has never even been touched by the hand of the artist — still be charged with meaning and emotion?

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**Restaurant Orania**

**Oranienplatz 17, 10999**

**Berlin**

Tomato and mozzarella salad  
€10

Pulpo salad €9

White asparagus €18

White asparagus and ham €24

Marinated strawberries €14

Sparkling water €6

Glass of Riesling (NikWeis, St  
Urbans-Hof, 2017) €7

Double espresso €3

Espresso macchiato €2.50

**Total (excl tip)** €93.50

For Tillmans, one response has been to look at the ephemeral, and to “extract great impact from very fragile things”. At other times, his answer has been autobiographical. Indeed, among the many highly charged pictures that Tillmans has made over the years, two stand out for their painful personal connotation. “Forever Fortress” dates from 1997 and shows two hands clasped on a hospital bed. One looks healthy and belongs to Tillmans himself. The other — pale and thin, the thumb attached to a pulse oximeter — belongs to Jochen Klein, a German artist and Tillmans’ partner at the time. The picture was taken just hours before Klein’s death, of Aids-related pneumonia.

“It is not normal to take a picture like this — on the hospital bed, on the day Jochen died. But it seems I had to do it,” Tillmans recalls. “It shows a moment of devastation in my life but it is a quiet picture, a moment of sadness that is absolutely truthful. If you know how to read it you cannot avoid feeling a lump in your throat, even if you don’t know exactly what it shows. It is clear that something serious is happening.”

The second picture I want to ask Tillmans about was taken long after “Forever Fortress” but is closely related. It is called “17 years’ supply” and shows a large cardboard box filled with empty pharmaceutical packages. The drugs they once contained were taken by Tillmans as part of his own HIV treatment and to prevent the outbreak of the disease that robbed him of his partner 17 years earlier.

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Once again, he sees an unmistakable political connection. "This picture also marks the arrival of HIV in the group of treatable diseases. The fear of death, that was so pervasive for people in the 1980s, is no longer there — as long as these medicines exist and are taken regularly. But if those medicines are no longer made and paid for, then my life is over. So this is a very existential question for me."

We have been speaking for almost three hours. Tillmans' appetite — for conversation, for ideas and for food — has turned out to be prodigious. Our desserts (a luscious combination of marinated strawberries and cream) have come and gone, our coffee cups are drained. We have covered vast and varied ground: from the role that Bronski Beat's music in the early 1980s played in his coming out, to the awkwardness of photographing seafood on a park bench in Tasmania. He has tried to explain the order behind his seemingly disorderly manner of hanging pictures, and the difference between a loud but small image and a quiet but large one. I think with regret of all the questions that are still on my list, but Tillmans is already running late for an appointment with his physiotherapist.

I pay the bill. Tillmans settles into his wheelchair, and I push my guest back across Oranienplatz, drenched in mild late afternoon sun. We have almost reached his studio when Tillmans asks me to stop and wheel him back a few metres. He has seen something that is of interest: a patch of recently laid pavement, still dusted with fresh sand.

The spot, Tillmans tells me, was occupied until recently by a *Litfaßsäule*, one of the Berlin advertising columns that were once ubiquitous across the city but which are now gradually being dismantled. Armed with that knowledge, the unremarkable scene before our eyes suddenly takes on a different character: we are looking at a former hub of information that has now fallen silent.

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He gets out his mobile phone and takes a few pictures. “*Das muss man dokumentieren*,” he says matter-of-factly. That has to be documented.

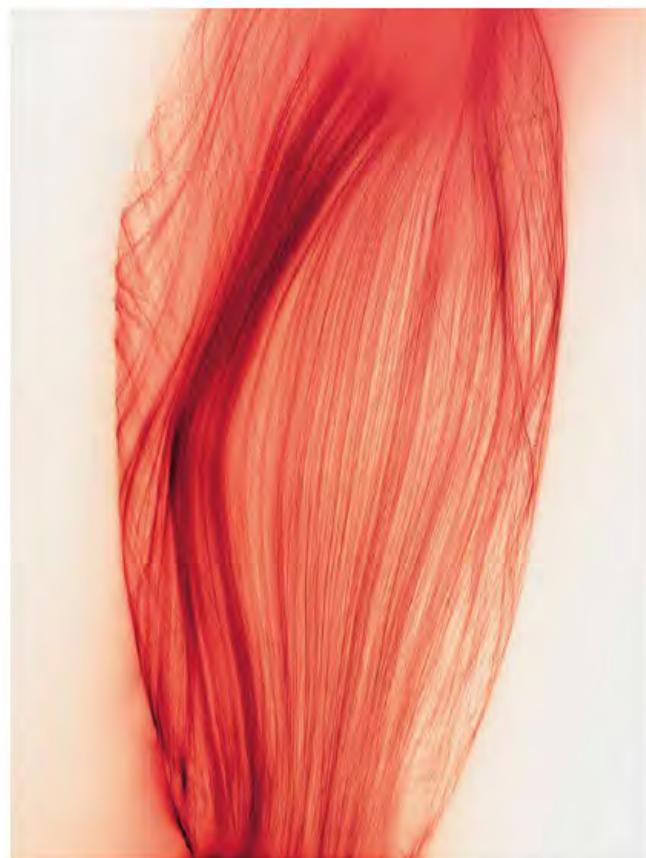
A few minutes later Tillmans is back in his studio, and I am left to ponder an unexpected question: Did I just witness the making of an enduring work of art? Or will the pavement picture be swiftly filed away, never to reappear? I suspect it is the latter, but with Tillmans you can never be sure. If there is one lesson that can be drawn from his art, it is that pictures — beautiful, meaningful, unforgettable pictures — can emerge when we least expect them, and in the most unlikely of places.

*Tobias Buck is the FT's Berlin correspondent*

# Mousse Magazine

MOUSSE 66  
TALKING ABOUT

## QUEER ABSTRACTION (OR HOW TO BE A PERVERT WITH NO BODY)



## SOME NOTES TOWARD A PROBABILITY

1 - Wolfgang Tillmans, *Muskel*, 2001. © Wolfgang Tillmans. Courtesy: Maureen Paley, London

BY TRAVIS JEPPESEN

"I don't think there is such a thing as queer art unless it deals bleakly with sexuality, and then I would call it sexual art or erotic art. I don't think that just because a person is gay and creates art, that *queer art* has been created."

—Bruce Benderson

### QUEER ABSTRACTION (OR HOW TO BE A PERVERT WITH NO BODY) T. JEPPESEN

Among all the nonsites I've visited in my peregrinations across the mindways, there's one I keep getting stuck inside of, a place that resists nominal assignations and normative grammar, an outside of the outside where I enjoy getting lost and losing what little sense of self I still possess in the multiple contradistinctions of being. A splattered form of being...

Being open to the world, I suppose, increases your chances of getting lost in it.

This has to do with the body, with representation. With work, with projections of the self (selves) that fall outside of the figurative. And with feeling: how it feels to *arrive* without actually physically *being there*.

For there is indeed, in spite of our vociferous objections, a near-universal consensus that such a thing as *queer art* does exist. And that assignation is nearly universally relegated to those works wherein a body manifests itself. Is represented, pictorially or in space. Oftentimes, in performance—one of the favored modes of work deemed *queer*—an actual physical body. And so my thinking around this issue began with a very simple, even naive question: why does queer = body? Which leads, of course, to much more complicated questions, such as what it is that actually constitutes a body. And, for someone like myself, whose primary medium is words, language: what might a writing, a language (be it visual or otherwise) *of* the body *look* like when that physical body is no longer (re)present(ed)? In what ways, through what possibilities, does queerness articulate itself in the allegedly "pure" cerebral realm of abstraction? (Put another way: In what ways is mind a body?) Because queer people do make abstract work—very often, as it turns out.

This isn't a *theory*; it's not cohesive enough; I have no interest in assuming a position or defending it; rather, place this collection of thought-splatterings in the realm of poetics—the delineation of a certain sensibility that is not bound to any one particular time but whose resonances can perhaps be charted throughout the whole history of art, starting with that proto-Modernist moment when Wilhelm Worringer first articulated abstraction, not as a style but as a mode of intentionality in artistic creation.

1.

*Something like a body:* Okay, so I should at least begin with what I mean by *queer*. Meaning, definitionality, in its consensual constitution, has to be challenged and interrogated constantly—this, in a word, is the writer's duty. Like Benderson, I'm not a believer in the notion that something called *queer art* ontologically exists—even work “that deals bleakly with sexuality.” There is such a thing as “issues art,” which might stem from the artist's intentions or might be branded thus by an external viewer or critic after the fact. What is commonly referred to as “queer” relates, of course, to issues of nonheterosexual and nonnormative sexual identity and practices. Of course, “queerness” has come to encapsulate non-gender-conforming modes of being, as well. I would widen the perimeters a bit more. When we speak of things *queer*, be they human or art objects or whatever, let's speak of all those things whose inherent being is contingent upon a resistance to codification—whether that code be legal, signifying, or otherwise. By abstract, I mean non-representational.

2.

*Abstraction* and *figuration (representation)*, as categories in art, are traditionally related to the Cartesian split between mind and body, respectively. A queer abstraction, on the other hand, refuses to honor this distinction. (This, among other attributes, is what makes it so *queer*, in the other meaning of the term: strange, bizarre, off-kilter.) Mind and body can never truly be separated; the one feeds the other; nor is there any real unity between mind and body; many minds, many bodies: many body-mind vehicles.

Queer abstraction posits that traditional figuration, as *representation* of the body, is less vital than a possible/probable *writing of* the body: a shooting-off-into-space of the body-mind vehicle's inner substance.

3.

"The primal artistic impulse," writes Wilhelm Worringer in his 1908 classic *Abstraction and Empathy*, "has nothing to do with nature." Nature, of course, doesn't really exist, it is a construct in itself (here, I'll follow Timothy Morton in capitalizing Nature to make it seem all the more unnatural). Just as we are now denaturalizing Nature, we are also living through a period in history where sexuality and gender identification are being increasingly denaturalized.

"[U]nnaturalness... the hallmark of all artistic creation determined by the urge to abstraction..."

—Wilhelm Worringer

Queer abstraction can thus be considered as a manifestation of Unnaturalism.

4.

"When I was starting to form a path with my work, the male torso was accepted as synonymous with gay male identity or desire, and later, with the beginnings of an articulation of queer identity. I wanted to work away from this somehow, beyond the pictorial, which is why I focused on specific physical locations, spatial zones, and their power distributions, as a way of complicating that discourse."

—Tom Burr

Let placelessness be the place. A journey, too, relies upon a frame.

5.

Perhaps the crowning moment, art historically, for queer abstraction was the moment that lovers Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, put off by the machismo and not-so-latent homophobia of the reigning Abstract Expressionists, decided to stop showing up at the Cedar Tavern. The work that they produced during their six-year-long relationship would alter the course of the canon, as it is traditionally conceived, paving the way for the evolution of Pop in the 1960s—though their own work remained by and large rooted in abstraction.

6.

The frame is unbearable. The only option is to try to destroy it, implode it from within. This is not a mere disordering. It is an attempt at rectification, based on volition (the artist's own).

7.

That abstract work is consistently gendered by its critical appraisal is evidenced by, for instance, the derogatory use of the adjective “decorative” (or, more usually, “merely decorative”). Decoration, ornament: these have been traditionally relegated to the domestic, which is the domain of the feminine under patriarchal systems. Queer artists working in abstraction occasionally work to subvert these structures; this can be alluded to in titles, such as Julie Mehretu's series *Sapphic Strophes*.

8.

Central to the notion of a possible queer abstraction, a queer abstraction of the past and a queer abstraction to come, is the notion of gesture. But gesture, in its seeming spontaneity of execution, framed by our consideration, is never about the mere motion itself; rather, its elegance is found in the details of the stain, the mark. To understand this, it helps to take an extreme example, one of the three “dicks from Dixie” (along with Johns and Rauschenberg) whose work fomented a queer abstraction: Cy Twombly. An artist much of whose work seems to be comprised of pure gesture. Whose work seems to stage a very vivid and violent struggle against the frame. For within the densely layered markings and scribbles that typically fill one of his canvases, Twombly gives us a pertinent definition of queer abstraction we might hold to be universal: a *writing of the body*.

9.

The decorative must be recovered from the derogatory and rehabilitated as a positive attribute. Anyway, in historic terms, it is inaccurate, since there were and are many cultural and historical contexts (for example, wall painting in ancient Rome) in which there was no real distinction between what we tend to categorize as either an instance of “fine art” or certain elements of “design.”

10.

Bodies everywhere: especially in those spaces where there are no bodies. Working in a medium, sculpture, in which the body has historically been the central motif, Helen Marten spares no sorrowful glances backward as she writes her way into space with her messy hyperdetailed and conglomerated objects that oftentimes resemble half-animate bodies, perhaps belonging to some as yet undiscovered extraterrestrial species. Something like a body, indeed.

11.

"[T]he urge to abstraction is the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world; in a religious respect it corresponds to a strongly transcendental tinge to all notions. We might describe this state as an immense spiritual dread of space... this same sensation of fear may also be assumed as the root of artistic creation."

— Wilhelm Worringer

Zones, places re-infested with agency. Certain of John Monteith's drawings on drafting film elicit a near Jasper Johnsian seriality of expression. The titles guide you toward what they are: architectural elucidations of actual spaces, neighborhoods, buildings, occasionally just a detail. Re-created, re-elicted in shapes of color—Monteith is, among other things, a great colorist—the spaces throb, pulsate, exude subterranean liveliness, even when, as in the drawing titled *XX* (2017), their frenzied geometry serves to assert negation.

12.

In the work of Agnes Martin, we find confirmation of Worringer's assertion that "the simple line and its development in purely geometric regularity was bound to offer the greatest possibility of happiness to the man disquieted by the obscurity and entanglement of phenomena." Lines. The calming strokes that posit a sort of endlessness. A promise of transcendence that we seldom find reflected in lives structured by a heteronormative matrix.

13.

At the same time, we can't completely write Abstract Expressionism off here. There's something deeply faggoty about all this harping on the heroic prowess of the masculine gesture, sublimated lust in the battle with the canvas. And even the female protagonists, like Joan Mitchell, had to play along, out-butching all of the dudes both in life and in art. Something, certainly, queer in the way

"the Abstract Expressionists paraded themselves as painters without a country, stripped of the exigencies of culture—those particularities of time, place and audience that make manipulated pigment meaningful. They thought of themselves as totally autonomous individuals, as anti-cultural cultural workers"

—Jonathan Katz

Hence, a sort of anarchic individualism is at play here—one that is not at variance with assertions of queer selfhood. Not at all.

14.

To lose oneself in substance. In the assemblages of Magali Reus, we discover a multidimensional world that seems to elucidate the hylozoic revivalism that has been occurring in philosophy of late (object-oriented ontology, hyperobjects, speculative realism... one of Timothy Morton's lesser known texts is an essay on queer ecology). Common household or hardware-store objects are transformed into strange inexplicables; constructed objects are disguised as mundanities. Space is outer, inner, splintered. Space is anguished. Space *is* anguish.

15.

"In the urge to abstraction the intensity of the self-alienative impulse is incomparably greater and more consistent."

— Wilhelm Worringer

The motif of loneliness is, of course, a central tenet of the queer canon. Alienation from society, sure. But alienation *from* the self, too (not mere *self-imposed* alienation, though that happens, of course, and often as well). Often happens through *multiplication*, *dilution* of the self into separate selves. Context becomes its own parade: the what I am here, the what I become over there. Identity drag, not just a means of survival but a way of inserting the joy back into detachment.

16.

Surfaces, surfacing. Canvas, like skin, a porous object. The body has its own logic, one all the more profound because it speaks a language that cannot be transcribed “properly,” only inferred; an endless work in progress. Instances of which are made to surround us.

17.

“For us, art is no more and no less than ‘objectified self-enjoyment.’”

— Wilhelm Worringer

That is, an enjoyment of the self as reflected in objects. The splattering of the self, semen-like, into those things that surround you, that might give you back that pleasure with which you inseminated them.

18.

“Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality.”

— José Esteban Muñoz

19.

Longing for the ineffable. For that moment to come.

20.

To return to Benderson's objection, the articulation of a queer abstraction must not be mistaken for a desexualization of this kind of art; rather, it is an infusionary reminder that abstraction, in itself, is necessarily perverse, sexual, affirmative of the corporeal. Fucking is also abstraction. All forms of non-Catholic fucking, fucking without a purely procreative intent. Fucking is praxis (creation). There's the old cliché that to fuck is to lose yourself in the other. This needs to be revised. To fuck is rather to mix one's selves (for one is always a multiple) with the other's selves, to put all those selves into a blender and make a chunky cocktail that, when diluted, yields a consistency that elicits a postradial primordial mud: here comes a future where there's no such thing as names.

21.

All abstraction is fundamentally queer, because queerness is an abstract state of being.

# Le réel en fragments de Wolfgang Tillmans au Carré d'art de Nîmes

## PHOTOGRAPHIE

Après deux expositions en 2017 à la Tate Modern de Londres et à la Fondation Beyeler, le musée d'art contemporain de Nîmes célèbre à son tour le mythique photographe allemand dans une exposition jusqu'au 16 septembre.



"Am Rhein", Wolfgang Tillmans, 2014, Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris - Galerie Buchholz, Berlin-Cologne.

Eric Toncy

« Le réel en fragments de Wolfgang Tillmans au Carré d'art de Nîmes »

Numéro, August 21, 2018

<https://www.numero.com/fr/photographie/wolfgang-tillmans-exposition-carre-art-nimes>

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Premier étranger à recevoir le très british prix Turner en l'an 2000, Wolfgang Tillmans est, depuis la fin des années 80, le témoin incontournable d'une génération. Son œuvre photographique exprime, mieux que n'importe quel texte, le chemin parcouru. De son Allemagne natale à celle de la chute du mur de Berlin, jusqu'à la scène techno, il aura traversé la mode, les rave parties, l'amour, le sexe, le sida, la politique et l'art. Et après avoir côtoyé la mort, celle de son compagnon, Tillmans quitte le domaine du portrait pour aborder celui de l'abstraction, comme pour prendre de la distance. Un recul que l'on retrouve dans ses vues panoramiques prises d'avion. Photographe du quotidien, ses natures mortes composées de bananes ou de saucisses font désormais partie des images iconiques de notre temps. L'artiste aime mélanger les thèmes et les formats pour présenter, comme il le dit, "des constellations d'images dans lesquelles j'essaie d'approcher ma vision du monde, pas d'une façon linéaire, mais à partir de multitude d'expériences parallèles".

**"Je choisis scrupuleusement les sujets et il serait hâtif de penser que mon travail est documentaire." Wolfgang Tillmans**

On l'a parfois pris pour un photographe générationnel. Mais Wolfgang Tillmans est moins porté par le souci de dépeindre son époque que par un amour profond des images. Sa relation sensible à l'esthétique permet à ce jeune génie de capturer l'essentiel et de transcender sans complexe une émotion fragile en beauté universelle. On le croit flâneur débonnaire, photographiant à la sauvette... erreur. C'est un calculateur au sens le plus noble du terme. Né en 1968, il a su imposer dans les années 90, l'air de rien, une façon apparemment décomplexée de faire de la photographie. S'il a ébranlé bien des académismes dans cette discipline, jusque dans ses stratégies de présentation – punaisant ou collant des pages de magazines sur le mur ou les cimaises des galeries–, c'est pour mieux déclarer sa passion aux images et réfléchir à leur extraordinaire pouvoir de séduction. Séduction mêlée d'érotisme, s'il le faut, comme un élément naturel du dialogue. Il fréquentait les clubs et y faisait des images : on le déclara photographe de la "Génération X". Mais est-ce bien le monde contemporain qui lui tient lieu de sujet, comme on a coutume de le croire?

**"Je choisis scrupuleusement les sujets, confie-t-il, et il serait hâtif de penser que mon travail est documentaire. S'il l'était, il inclurait aussi bien des choses négatives. C'est un monde parfaitement utopique, un fragment de la réalité. Je choisis des situations et des personnes de mon environnement et j'essaie de les transformer en quelque chose d'autre, une image, qui ait un caractère plus universel. En aucun cas mon objectif est d'immortaliser des instants de ma vie, il ne s'agit pas de cela du tout."**

Wolfgang Tillmans, jusqu'au 16 septembre, Carré d'art de Nîmes.



"Paper Drop", Oranienplatz, Wolfgang Tillmans, 2017, Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris - Galerie Buchholz, Berlin-Cologne.

Eric Toncy

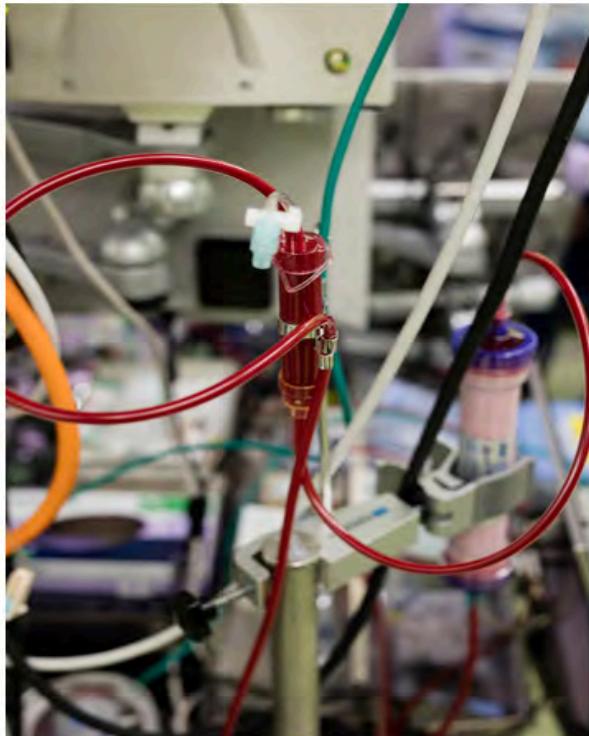
« Le réel en fragments de Wolfgang Tillmans au Carré d'art de Nîmes »

Numéro, August 21, 2018

<https://www.numero.com/fr/photographie/wolfgang-tillmans-exposition-carre-art-nimes>



"Nee l'Yaow eow eow II", Wolfgang Tillmans, 2017, Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris - Galerie Buchholz, Berlin-Cologne.



"Open Heart Bypass", Wolfgang Tillmans, 2015, Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris - Galerie Buchholz, Berlin-Cologne.



"Morning rain", Wolfgang Tillmans, 2014, Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris - Galerie Buchholz, Berlin-Cologne

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"Vapeur", Wolfgang Tillmans, 2017, Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris - Galerie Buchholz, Berlin-Cologne



"Springer", Wolfgang Tillmans, 1987, Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris - Galerie Buchholz, Berlin-Cologne



"Victoria Park", Wolfgang Tillmans, 2007, Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris - Galerie Buchholz, Berlin-Cologne

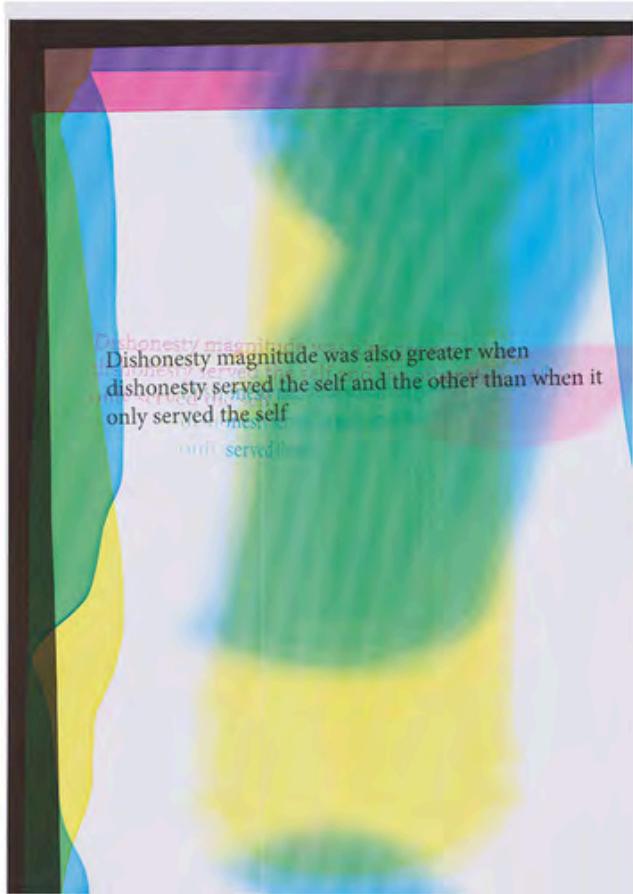
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"CLC 004", Wolfgang Tillmans, 2017, Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris - Galerie Buchholz, Berlin-Cologne



"Yulan Grant", Wolfgang Tillmans, 2016, Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris - Galerie Buchholz, Berlin-Cologne

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## Wolfgang Tillmans, nature morte au citron

Par [Julie Ackermann](#) • le 2 août 2018



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Morning Rain*, 2014

**Nous sommes en 2018.** À tout casser, cela fait donc 400 ans que les artistes peignent des natures mortes en tant que telles ; plus d'un siècle qu'ils en photographient et un demi-siècle que nous sommes proprement assaillis d'images dans nos sociétés du spectacle. Malgré tout, Wolfgang Tillmans, 49 ans, s'obstine encore à faire des natures mortes (pas que évidemment) et parvient à apporter sa pierre à l'immense édifice que constitue ce genre un brin vieillot.

**Ce sont donc, tout simplement, trois citrons** pas encore mûrs et humides de quelques gouttes de pluie claire, qui accueillent le visiteur dans l'exposition que consacre le Carré d'art de Nîmes à ce photographe allemand établi. Et quels citrons ! Des citrons d'une sensualité folle, comme des seins transpirants émergeant d'une touffe de feuilles vertes, comme des ballons gonflés de sève, de vie, comme la promesse foisonnante et balbutiante d'un renouveau.

**Démesurés et en si haute résolution** qu'on n'en perçoit pas les pixels, ces citrons-bijoux si frais incarnent en fait à merveille l'approche de ce virtuose de la photo, attelé à conserver coûte que coûte la fraîcheur de son regard sur les éléments les plus triviaux. Une entreprise en photo somme toute banale, elle aussi : beaucoup de photographes s'y aventurent, la plupart échoue, Wolfgang Tillmans y excelle. Car enfin, qui peut se targuer aujourd'hui de photographier comme lui un entrejambe, des coquillages, des pêches ou des vêtements simplement déposés sur un lit ? Une chose est sûre, après avoir vu cette photo, on ne regarde plus le citron de la même façon.

→ [Wolfgang Tillmans](#)

Du 4 mai 2018 au 16 septembre 2018

Carré d'Art-Musée d'art contemporain • Place de la Maison Carrée • 30000 Nîmes  
[www.carreartmusee.com](http://www.carreartmusee.com)

Julie Ackermann  
« Wolfgang Tillmans, nature morte au citron »  
Beaux Arts, August 2, 2018  
<https://www.beauxarts.com/vu/wolfgang-tillmans-nature-morte-au-citron/>

Marcelis, Bernard. « Wolfgang Tillmans, le monde en arrêt sur image à Nîmes », *Art Newspaper Daily*,  
Numéro 91, Monday, July 16, 2018, pp.4-5.

THE ART NEWSPAPER DAILY



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# WOLFGANG TILLMANS, LE MONDE EN ARRÊT SUR IMAGE À NÎMES

Après la Tate Modern à Londres et la Fondation Beyeler à Riehen l'an dernier, le Carré d'Art à Nîmes invite Wolfgang Tillmans. « Qu'est-ce qui est différent ? » est non seulement le titre de l'exposition, mais aussi celui d'un livre atypique, essentiel pour comprendre les prises de position de l'artiste et son rapport engagé au monde.

Par **Bernard Marcelis**



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Paper drop Oranienplatz*, vers 2017. Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris ; Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne. © Wolfgang Tillmans.

« Maintenant [en 2018, ndlr], la sortie de l'album blanc des Beatles remonte à autant d'années que la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en 1968 », autrement dit un demi-siècle. Cette phrase, extraite du livre qui amplifie l'exposition de Wolfgang Tillmans au Carré d'Art à Nîmes, sans en constituer à proprement parler le catalogue, manifeste les enjeux de la démarche du photographe allemand. Son œuvre est formée de régulières mises en perspectives, tant à l'intérieur de son travail que dans le monde qu'il a pour habitude d'arpenter. Il s'agit pour lui de rendre aussi bien compte des changements qui s'y

**CHAQUE EXPOSITION DE TILLMANS EST CONÇUE COMME UNE VÉRITABLE INSTALLATION**

sont produits depuis trente ans, soit ses débuts, que de constamment renouveler son expérience d'humain à la rencontre de ses semblables.

Les traces de ces rencontres sont de tous ordres, la photographie bien sûr, mise à tous les formats, à toutes les expérimentations techniques, à toutes les altérations, encadrée ou non. L'ensemble est ponctué de films, de vidéos, d'archives – essentielles dans son travail – et d'une installation sonore. À l'apparente cacophonie visuelle répond ainsi un semblant de cacophonie sonore, même si l'on se rend compte très rapidement que tout est parfaitement maîtrisé, au point d'en faire un style largement copié depuis par toute une génération de photographes.

Chaque exposition de Tillmans est conçue comme une véritable installation – comme s'il s'agissait de mettre les murs en pages – et celle de Nîmes ne déroge pas à cette règle constitutive à part entière de son travail. Toute hiérarchie y est bannie, tant dans les supports utilisés que dans l'absence de chronologie. Seules quelques inflexions thématiques peuvent donner l'une ou l'autre clés de lecture au visiteur, qui se focalisera sans doute sur l'engagement citoyen du photographe. On le rencontre ainsi opposé au Brexit, dénonçant les brutalités de la police américaine face aux Noirs ou les exactions de Boko Haram au Nigeria. Si Tillmans n'est pas le seul artiste à

Marcelis, Bernard. « Wolfgang Tillmans, le monde en arrêt sur image à Nîmes », *Art Newspaper Daily*, Numero 91, Monday, July 16, 2018, pp.4-5.

## THE ART NEWSPAPER DAILY

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Wolfgang Tillmans, *Am Rhein*, Basel, 2014.  
Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris ;  
Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne.  
© Wolfgang Tillmans.



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Yulan Grant*, 2016.  
Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris ;  
Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne.  
© Wolfgang Tillmans.



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Vapeur*, 2017. Courtesy  
Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris ; Galerie  
Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne. © Wolfgang  
Tillmans.

laisser le monde contemporain faire irruption dans son œuvre, il le fait en le prenant à bras-le-corps en y injectant une bonne dose d'images autobiographiques dont de nombreux autoportraits, parfois des plus intimes. Avec lui, sphères privées, sociales, publiques et politiques cohabitent constamment.

Face à ce kaléidoscope de photographies, néanmoins disposées au cordeau sur et à l'assaut des murs, le visiteur est amené à naviguer à vue pour établir ses propres repères. À lui d'agencer les connexions et correspondances dans ce réseau d'images où portraits, textes, natures mortes, paysages et abstractions colorées sont mis sur le même pied, mais pas dans le même format. D'où un délicat exercice de positionnement, en réalité en perpétuel mouvement, du regardeur selon qu'il veuille s'attarder sur telle ou telle photographie. Le questionnement de la représentation du corps chez Tillmans implique donc aussi en quelque sorte celui du visiteur.

L'exposition est complétée au rez-de-chaussée du musée par un bel ensemble d'une douzaine de photographies de Candida Höfer, dont on regrettera l'espace confiné qui lui est attribué. C'est là toute la différence entre un accrochage et une exposition.

« Wolfgang Tillmans, Qu'est-ce qui est différent ? », « Candida Höfer, Portraits d'espaces », jusqu'au 16 septembre 2018, Carré d'Art-Musée d'art contemporain, Place de la Maison Carrée, 30000 Nîmes, [www.carreartmusee.com](http://www.carreartmusee.com)

À lire : Wolfgang Tillmans, *Qu'est-ce qui est différent ?*, Sternberg Press  
Carré d'Art, 2018, 228 p., 25 euros.



**Jonas Lund  
Celia Hempton  
Nick Mauss**

**Laurent Jeanpierre  
Berdaguer & Péjus  
Supports / Surfaces**

**Wolfgang Tillmans  
Craft is back**

# Wolfgang Tillmans

## Qu'est-ce qui est différent ? / “What Is Different?”

par / by Patrice Joly

Carré d'art, Nîmes (F),  
04.05 – 16.09.2018

Galerie  
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L'exposition de Wolfgang Tillmans au Carré d'art de Nîmes s'inscrit dans une série de monographies au sein d'institutions de renom comme la Tate Gallery et la Fondation Beyeler. «Qu'est-ce qui est différent?» ne déroge pas aux préoccupations récurrentes de l'artiste qui mêlent des interrogations purement liées au médium à des considérations d'ordre sociopolitique. Forme et contenu: le traitement de l'image via les dernières avancées technologiques accompagne une extrême attention portée aux problématiques qui irriguent le débat sociétal et politique du moment. Chez le Berlinois, l'innovation formelle qui lui a valu une reconnaissance précoce — en 2002 une grande exposition monographique au Palais de Tokyo (*Vue d'en haut*) faisait découvrir au public parisien ses impressions numériques décadrées et simplement fixées aux cimaises par de petites pinces — est toujours au service de la recherche d'un réel qu'il semble traquer dans les moindres recoins: l'utilisation d'imprimantes de plus en plus performantes affirme toujours la même exigence, seul le format semble avoir varié, ainsi que la densité des pixels. En même temps, ses positionnements politiques où s'expriment la prégnance d'une culture empreinte de post-utopie et de clubbing ne faiblissent pas... Les images qu'il distille à Nîmes dans ce qu'il appelle le «cabinet» affichent crûment ses préférences sexuelles sans pour autant tomber dans la provocation gratuite; Tillmans expose et s'expose sans complexes et sans angoisses dans le giron d'une société européenne ouverte et débarrassée de ses carcans religieux et autres interdits comportementaux mais cependant menacée par le retour en force des réactionnaires. Dans la publication qui accompagne l'exposition et dont il est le rédacteur en chef invité — le *Jahresring* de Sternberg Press, désormais une véritable institution — le photographe tente de mettre en lumière ce qui a permis la réémergence des énergies négatives au sein d'une Allemagne à la santé économique insolente, et au-delà de la seule Allemagne, ce qui menace l'un des piliers de la cohésion européenne, l'acceptation des comportements «non normés». Il se paie le luxe de faire le tour des ministres de la coalition gouvernementale sortante et d'interroger, après Sigmar Gabriel, un Wolfgang Schäuble qui, on le devine aisément, ne partage pas les mêmes orientations politiques mais se révèle étonnamment lucide quand il s'agit de déterminer les causes de cette disparition des tabous qui réussissaient jusqu'à maintenant à juguler le retour de l'antisémitisme et du populisme.

Une autre des grandes préoccupations de l'artiste est le phénomène de l'effet rebond qui consiste non seulement à adopter des points de vue que les faits contredisent mais

The Wolfgang Tillmans exhibition at the Carré d'art in Nîmes is part of a series of solo shows being held in famous institutions like the Tate Gallery and the Beyeler Foundation. “What Is Different?” is not a departure from the artist's recurrent concerns which mix questions connected solely with the medium with socio-political matters. Style and content: the treatment of the image by way of the latest technological breakthroughs goes hand-in-hand with an extreme attention paid to issues informing the societal and political debate of the moment. The formal innovation which earned the Berlin artist early recognition—in 2002 a large solo show at the Palais de Tokyo (*Vue d'en haut*) enabled the Paris public to discover his unframed digital prints which were simply affixed to the walls using small clips—is still a tool in his quest for a reality which he seems to hunt down in the smallest of nooks and crannies: the use of ever more efficient printers always asserts the same demand, only the format seems to have varied, as well as the pixel density. At the same time, his political positions, in which are expressed the significance of a culture imbued with post-utopia and clubbing, do not falter... The images he distills in Nîmes, in what he calls the “cabinet”, crudely display his sexual preferences, but without toppling over into gratuitous provocation; Tillmans exhibits and exhibits himself with neither complexes nor anxieties in the bosom of an open European society freed of its religious straitjackets and other behavioural prohibitions, but a society that is nevertheless threatened by the comeback of reactionaries, in force. In the publication accompanying the exhibition, for which he is the guest editor-in-chief—Sternberg Press’ *Jahresring*, which is nothing less than an institution now—the photographer tries to shed light on what has enabled the re-emergence of negative energies in a Germany whose economic health is brazen, and, beyond just Germany, on what is threatening one of the pillars of European cohesion, the acceptance of “non-standardized” forms of behaviour. He offers himself the luxury of doing a tour of the ministers in the outgoing government coalition, and questioning, after Sigmar Gabriel, a figure like Wolfgang Schäuble who, as we easily guess, does not share the same political ideas but shows himself to be surprisingly lucid when it comes to determining the causes behind this disappearance of the taboos which have hitherto managed to curb the comeback of anti-Semitism and populism.

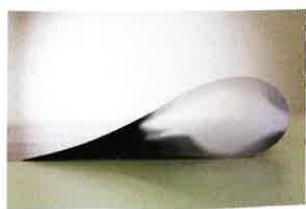
Another of the artist's major preoccupations is the phenomenon of the backfire effect which consists not only in adopting viewpoints contradicted by the facts, but, in addition, involves defending them tooth and nail against all manner

en plus à les défendre bec et ongles à l'encontre de toute rationalité: prospérant sur le terreau d'un désintérêt grandissant pour une information argumentée et d'une désinformation massive entretenue par les lobbies, le *backfire effect* a de beaux jours devant lui. Les fameuses *fake news* qui ont enregistré, au moment de la campagne de Trump, un véritable tournant, sont le corrélat de ce principe psychologique retors, mais elles ne font après tout que s'inscrire dans une longue tradition de manipulation des esprits, entre l'invention des «armes de destruction massive» par l'administration Bush et l'escamotage des dossiers secrets sur le Vietnam par Nixon. On comprend aisément que ces sujets interpellent grandement un artiste qui ne peut rester indifférent à tout ce qui touche à la production de l'image contemporaine; la présence très marquée des unes au début de la déambulation trahit un intérêt jamais démenti pour la presse et tout particulièrement les journaux. De quoi est faite l'image photographique sinon de multiples manipulations et autres interventions sur sa matière première, le réel? Une photo n'est jamais vraiment pure et participe toujours d'un discours, d'un désir d'interprétation, voire d'une idéologie.

Dans la première salle de l'exposition, un ensemble de vitrines jumelles se font face, l'une exposant des objets anodins (pierres, patates, cailloux) quand l'autre exhibe son double photographique: désarmantes de simplicité et d'efficacité, ces œuvres renvoient au gouffre qui sépare le réel de sa représentation. Les autoportraits de l'artiste sont également très présents et demeurent l'un des axes majeurs de son travail: l'un des tout premiers, datant du début des années 1980 est également présenté, fait suffisamment rare pour être rapporté. Le parcours savamment organisé fait découvrir l'organicité d'une pratique qui prend en compte la totalité du spectre de la photographie contemporaine. Le moment central de la manifestation est certainement la grande salle où se côtoient d'innombrables portraits de toutes les couleurs et de tous les formats, mêlés à des natures mortes bien vivantes de plantes, d'arbres et d'objets divers dans une tentative sans cesse renouvelée d'approcher la complexité du monde mais aussi d'y affirmer d'évidents principes affinitaires. Les grandes compositions / collages extraites de la dernière série de l'artiste et d'où surnagent slogans et sentences parfois énigmatiques, témoignent de la difficulté de représenter un monde qui se dérobe à la seule «objectivité» de l'appareil. La dernière salle de l'exposition vient clore une profonde réflexion sur le médium avec une série intitulée *paper drop* qui constitue comme un retour à l'objet, à la chose, nous éloignant d'un réalisme photographique auquel nous étions plus habitués jusqu'alors.

of rationality: thriving in the loam of a growing disinterest in reasoned information, and of wholesale disinformation upheld by lobbies, the backfire factor has a bright future ahead of it. The famous fake news which, during the Trump campaign, chalked up nothing less than a turning-point, is the correlate of this crafty psychological principle, but, when all is said and done, it is merely part and parcel of a lengthy tradition of mind manipulation, somewhere between the invention of “weapons of mass destruction” by the Bush administration and the spiriting away of secret files about the Vietnam war by Nixon. It is easy to see that these subjects considerably exercise an artist who is unable to remain indifferent to anything that involves the production of contemporary imagery; the very distinctive presence of headlines at the beginning of the stroll betrays a never denied interest in the press, and in newspapers in particular. What is the photographic image made of if not many different manipulations and other interventions on its raw material, which is reality? A photo is never really pure and is always part of a discourse, a desire for interpretation, or even an ideology.

In the first exhibition room, a set of twinned display stands are placed opposite one another, one showing insignificant objects—stones, potatoes, and pebbles—while the other exhibits its photographic double: these works, which are disarming in their simplicity and effectiveness, refer to the chasm which separates reality from its representation. The artist's self-portraits are also very present and remain one of the major themes of his work: one of the very earliest, dating from the 1980s, is also on view, a fact that is sufficiently rare to be worth mentioning. The shrewdly organized circuit lets visitors discover the organic nature of a praxis which encompasses the entire spectrum of contemporary photography. The central moment of the show is undoubtedly the large room where countless portraits of every colour and format rub shoulders, mingled with very alive still lifes of plants, trees and various objects in an ever renewed attempt to broach the complexity of the world but also to assert obvious peer principles. The large compositions/collages from the artist's latest series, displaying enigmatic slogans and sentences, attest to the difficulty of representing a world which slips away from the camera's sole “objectivity”. The last room in the exhibition winds up a far-reaching line of thinking about the medium with a series titled *paper drop*, which represents something akin to a return to the object and the thing, removing us from a photographic realism which we had hitherto become accustomed to.



dans le sens des aiguilles d'une montre /  
clockwise from left:  
Kammerspiele, 2016  
Bronzino, 2015  
paper drop Oranienplatz, a-d, 2017  
Springer II, 1987  
Springer III, 1987

Wolfgang Tillmans. Qu'est-ce qui est différent ? / 'What Is Different?' », ZERO DEUX, 86, Eté / Summer 2018, pp.2-11.

« Wolfgang Tillmans. Qu'est-ce qui est différent ? / ‘What Is Different?’ », ZERO DEUX, 86, Eté / Summer 2018, pp.2-11.

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« Wolfgang Tillmans. Qu'est-ce qui est différent ? / 'What Is Different?' », ZERO DEUX, 86, Eté / Summer 2018, pp.2-11.

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Steffen, Chains, 1993



morning rain, 2014

« Wolfgang Tillmans. Qu'est-ce qui est différent ? / ‘What Is Different?’ », *ZERO DEUX*, 86, Eté / Summer 2018, pp.2-11.

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



CLC 008, 2017

Participants' starting dishonesty was greater when dishonesty was self-serving than when it was self-harming

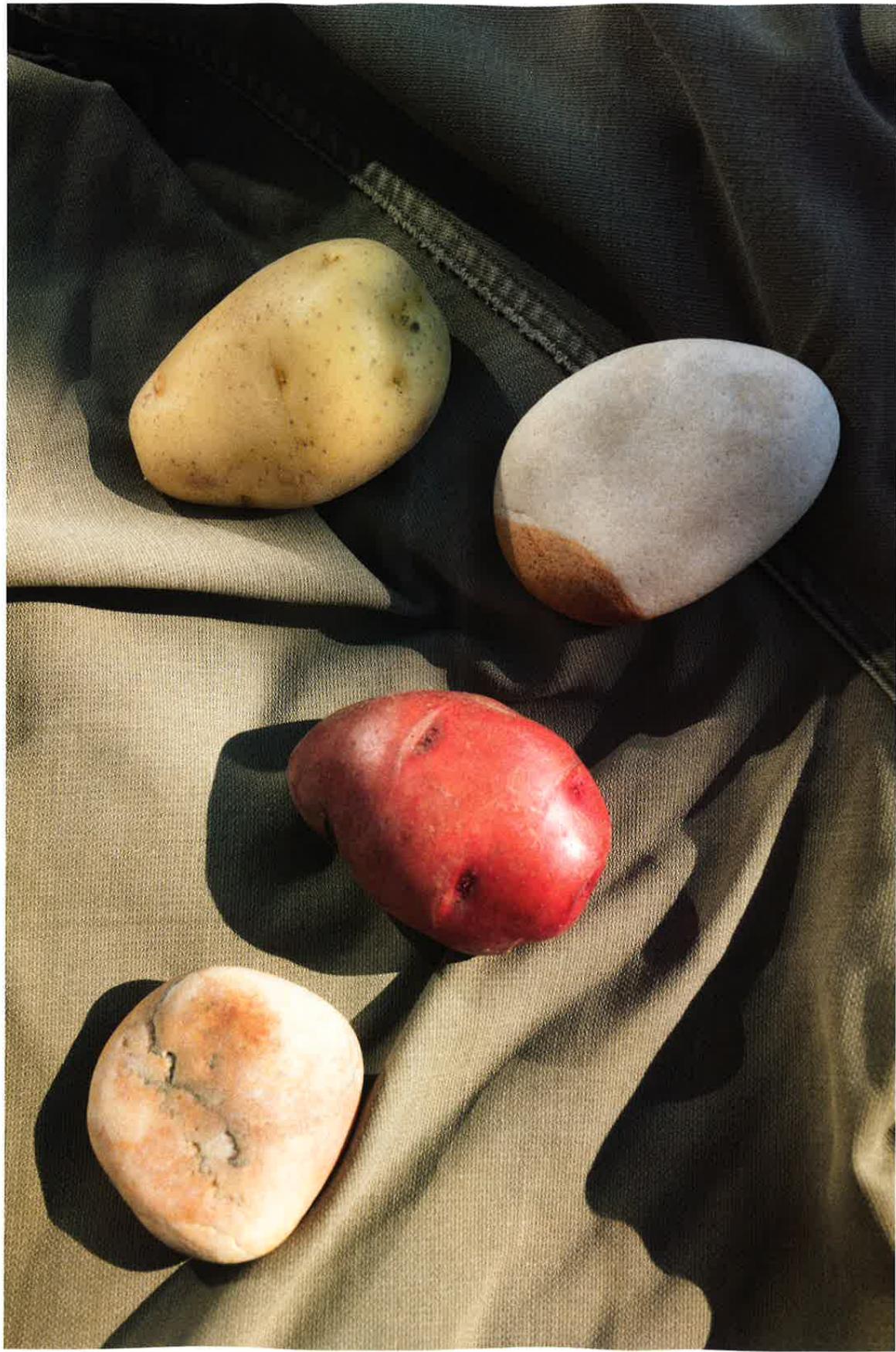
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Far away inside (Echo Beach), 2017

« Wolfgang Tillmans. Qu'est-ce qui est différent ? / 'What Is Different?' », ZERO DEUX, 86, Eté / Summer 2018, pp.2-11.

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Sunken Forest, 2017 Central Park, 2010

« QUELQUE CHOSE D’ORGANIQUE. QUI VIENT DE L’INTÉRIEUR, QUI SORT DE LA TÊTE. »  
Isa Genzken en conversation avec Wolfgang Tillmans

20

## Wolfgang Tillmans

C'est à Chicago qu'il y a eu les premiers gratte-ciel ?

**Isa Genzken** Oui, c'est là qu'ils sont nés. Un grand incendie avait détruit toutes les maisons — d'un coup d'un seul — et ils ont dû reconstruire. C'est comme ça que les premiers gratte-ciel sont apparus. Avant New York.

**W.T.** Et ils ont aussi inventé l'ascenseur ?

**I.G.** Oui.

**W.T.** C'est ce que j'ai lu. C'est la société Otis qui les a probablement inventés et c'est pour ça qu'il n'y avait pas de gratte-ciel avant. Mais les gratte-ciel t'ont toujours intéressée...

**I.G.** J'avais 21 ans quand je suis allée à New York pour la première fois. J'étais si fascinée par l'architecture, si heureuse que quelque chose comme ça existe et que je puisse en faire l'expérience visuelle, que je me suis dit : c'est là que je veux vivre. Je pense que pour moi, New York était lié à la sculpture. Même si à 21 ans je n'étais pas encore une sculptrice, que je commençais à peine mes études et que je ne savais même pas ce que je voulais faire. New York est une ville incroyable de stabilité et de robustesse. La hauteur des immeubles m'impressionnait, et aussi le fait que les gens dans la rue aient l'air un peu plus heureux que les Allemands. Quand je suis revenue en Allemagne, mon environnement visuel ne me paraissait pas très plaisant, c'était franchement ennuyeux. Le modernisme est très peu présent en Allemagne. D'accord, il y a eu le Bauhaus et puis telle ou telle chose, mais l'architecture moderniste est pratiquement absente. En revanche à New York, il y a eu l'Empire State Building dans les années 1930, puis les Twin Towers... Je veux dire, les tours étaient extrêmement modernes... Ce qui est affreux avec l'architecture, ici, c'est que presque tout est construit dans le style le plus bas de gamme, vraiment.

Ils ne s'assurent pas de la qualité des matériaux, ils prennent juste le moins cher. Regarde Potsdamer Platz, on dirait un décor ! Tout cela est fait à moindre coût, ça pourrait être à Cologne ou à Tenerife... On n'autoriseraient jamais une chose pareille à New York, ils ont une conscience insensée de la qualité.

**W.T.** Peut-être parce que les Américains n'ont pas peur de la richesse... Ça ne les dérange pas de produire des choses très chères, tu ne crois pas ?

**I.G.** Ah non, c'est sûr. À l'inverse, ici, j'ai toujours dû me battre avec des matériaux bon marché... parce que je vis ici et que je ne peux pas faire comme si j'étais à New York. Ça me rappelle que Josef Strau a récemment réalisé une sculpture d'extérieur pour moi, et beaucoup de jeunes artistes étaient vraiment enthousiastes le jour du vernissage. Je ne m'y attendais pas du tout, parce que je m'étais juste dit que ce serait bien de faire quelque chose de simple pour changer. Et c'est précisément ce qui leur a plu : qu'une chose puisse être relativement généreuse, mais bon marché. De ce point de vue, les Américains sont complètement différents. Ils adorent que ce soit cher et que ça se voie. J'ai eu de la chance avec mon exposition *Fuck the Bauhaus*<sup>1</sup> à New York en 2000, parce qu'il y avait quelques sculptures dans des matériaux bas de gamme et ça a quand même été un succès. C'est peut-être que les Américains savent baisser la garde quand ils voient quelque chose de simple, qui change. Tu vois ? Quelque chose à quoi on ne s'attend pas en Amérique.

**W.T.** Mais ton travail avec Josef Strau est par ailleurs très sympa. Comment l'idée t'est-elle venue ?

**I.G.** D'abord je voulais mettre des stores sur le bâtiment. Mais quand je refais quelque chose que j'ai déjà fait, parfois j'ai un sentiment d'insécurité. Même si je suis sûre que ça marche. De toutes façons, c'était trop cher. J'avais remarqué des bambous tout neufs, d'un vert éclatant,

1. *Fuck the Bauhaus (New buildings for New York)*, AC Project Room, New York, 7 octobre – 18 novembre 2000.

« ‘Quelque chose d’organique, qui vient de l’intérieur, qui sort de la tête.’ Isa Genzken en conversation avec Wolfgang Tillmans »,  
*Initiatives*, NO. 11, May 2018, pp.20-23.

au KaDeWe. Je m’étais dit que ce serait bien d’en faire quelque chose. De retour chez moi, j’étais assise à dessiner sur la photo quand je me suis rappelée ce beau bambou vert vif, et puis aussi qu’il y a un bâtiment fasciste, ou en partie fasciste, juste à côté du KaDeWe, un théâtre, un truc très moche. Alors j’ai pensé : le bambou est politiquement correct, voilà, c’est ça. Mais évidemment, c’est aussi beau à voir. Simple. L’œuvre s’appelle *Haare wachsen, wie sie wollen* (« Les cheveux poussent comme ils veulent »), et elle va très bien avec le petit pavillon.

W.T. Et les bambous, c’est ceux du KaDeWe ?

I.G. Non. Mais ils sont gris à présent, c’est très bien aussi. Le bambou est normalement jaune, et il a quelque chose de cheap, un truc très « touriste » — jaune canisse. Mais maintenant, il est devenu gris à cause des intempéries, il est passé de vert à gris. C’est la première fois que je vois ce genre de changement de couleur. Elle s’adapte à ce qui est autour, c’est bien.

W.T. Tu as peint sur une photo pour ce projet ?

I.G. Oui.

W.T. Tes idées commencent souvent avec des photos ?

I.G. Oui, pour les sculptures d’extérieur.

W.T. Toujours ?

I.G. Presque toujours. Tu prends une photo et tu regardes ce qui manque.

W.T. C’est important que ce soient tes propres photos ? Que ce soit ta propre perception de la situation sur laquelle tu vas travailler ? Ou bien les gens peuvent t’envoyer des photos, aussi ?

I.G. C’est mieux si je vois la situation et que je prends la photo.

W.T. Je suis toujours étonné quand je vois à quel point on ne voit rien dans les photos professionnelles de musée. Même si tu connais les lieux, ces photos d’intérieurs ne te disent rien. Elles sont pourtant en général parfaitement réalisées. Je préfère travailler avec un cliché que j’ai pris moi-même, juste comme ça. Tu as souvent ton appareil photo avec toi ?

I.G. Quand je suis invitée à faire quelque chose. Je le prends avec moi.

W.T. Et sinon, le reste du temps ? À l’atelier, tu en as un ?

I.G. Très rarement. Il faut vraiment que je me force pour prendre des images de mes nouvelles sculptures.

W.T. En guise de notes ?

I.G. Oui, parce que c’est important, aussi.

W.T. Pour voir où tu en es ?

I.G. Oui, récemment je suis retombée sur des photos de mes sculptures en verre. On voit l’idée d’où c’est parti, c’est intéressant.

W.T. Tu as toujours pris des photos ?

I.G. Qu’est-ce que tu veux dire ?

W.T. Je sais que tu prenais déjà des photos dans les années 1970. Est-ce que ce médium jouait un rôle particulier pour toi ? Ou plus exactement, est-ce qu’il y a eu un moment où tu t’es dit que tu pourrais te l’approprier ?

I.G. Si on a l’idée de photographier une oreille, ou un équipement Hi-Fi... C’est très différent des photos que je prends maintenant quand je travaille sur un projet.

W.T. Je comprends. Mais je voudrais savoir ce que la photo signifie réellement pour toi...

I.G. Je crois que la photographie a beaucoup à voir avec la sculpture, parce qu’elle est spatiale et qu’elle représente la réalité. Par exemple, ça a toujours été plus facile pour moi de me rapporter à une photo plutôt qu’à une peinture. Quand je photographiais les pubs Hi-Fi, je me disais : tout le monde a une de ces tours chez soi. C’est le dernier cri, le truc le plus moderne disponible. Donc une sculpture doit être au moins aussi moderne et durable. Puis j’ai accroché mes photos au mur et j’ai mis une *Ellipsoïde* au sol et je me suis dit : l’*Ellipsoïde* doit être au moins aussi bonne que cette pub. Au moins aussi bonne. Une sculpture moderne doit être à ce niveau. Tu comprends ? Il y avait ce dialogue...

W.T. Donc en fait, le monde réel est toujours ton point de départ...

I.G. Oui, et j’ai toujours dit qu’on devait pouvoir dire toute sculpture, même si ce n’était pas un ready-made, qu’elle pourrait en être un. C’est à ça qu’une sculpture doit ressembler. Elle doit avoir un certain rapport au réel. C’est-à-dire pas quelque chose de hors sol ou de fabriqué, mais de distant et poli.

W.T. Donc ce n’est pas ta seule volonté qui te fait juxtaposer des formes à la réalité. L’Empire State Building, par exemple, fonctionne comme une sorte de repère, de règle.

I.G. Exactement. Et je ne vois pas cet aspect chez beaucoup d’artistes. Souvent, j’ai l’impression qu’ils veulent déterminer ce que l’art devrait être. Ce n’est pas du tout mon but. Au contraire, une sculpture est vraiment comme une photo : elle peut être folle, mais elle doit toujours posséder quelque chose en commun avec la réalité.

W.T. C’est ce que j’aime aussi dans le médium photographique. Qu’il offre une certaine économie. Qu’il soit discret et sans prétention. On peut poser une paire de jeans sur un dessus de porte et mettre le tout en espace dans une pièce. Mais je trouve plus facile de le prendre en photo. En tant que geste, c’est moins grandiloquent. Parce que la photo crée une sorte d’universalité ou d’accessibilité.

I.G. Une chose qui me dérange avec certains de mes étudiants c'est que leur travaux ne sont pas chaleureux envers le regardeur. Je leur dis toujours : vous devez aussi imaginer comment on le voit. Vous devez faire preuve d'empathie avec le spectateur quand vous faites quelque chose. C'est important pour moi. Sinon, c'est trop froid ou trop arrogant.

W.T. Au sens de «je peux faire quelque chose que tu ne peux pas» ?

I.G. Exactement.

W.T. En ce sens, une photo permet de communiquer quelque chose qui existe et t'intéresse avec une certaine économie de moyens ?

I.G. Oui. En gros, je peux lire ta photo et voir ce qui t'émeut. Ce qui t'émeut vraiment, pas une émotion simulée. Je ne crois pas que ce soit bon quand c'est comme ça en art. Malheureusement ça l'est souvent. C'est pourquoi j'aime Bruce Nauman, par exemple, comme sculpteur. Devant son travail, je me suis souvent dit : c'est juste très beau.

W.T. Parce que c'est quelqu'un qui utilise toujours autant que possible des moyens qui sont déjà là ? Parce que ses œuvres ne sont pas faites de formes imaginaires inventées...

I.G. Surtout, c'est assez difficile de décrire quelque chose qui te remue profondément. Mais au bout du compte, c'est ce que doit être l'art et c'est aussi ce qui attire les gens, quand un artiste y arrive.

W.T. Et quand la volonté de «faire art» n'est pas ce qu'on voit d'abord, mais plutôt...

I.G. Oui, exactement.

W.T. ... mais plutôt quelqu'un qui se soucie vraiment de quelque chose. C'est bien plus excitant quand quelqu'un s'intéresse à quelque chose plutôt qu'à la volonté de faire quelque chose. Et en gros, on peut diviser l'art entre ces deux groupes. L'un consiste dans la volonté de montrer : je fais quelque chose. Et l'autre procède d'un intérêt immédiat pour le monde et les choses.

I.G. Je ne sais pas comment dire ça... ce n'est pas facile à exprimer... c'est pourquoi je n'aime pas donner d'interview non plus...

W.T. Ce que je viens de dire, par exemple, est extrêmement simplificateur si on se demande, bon sang, est-ce que je peux dire ça ? Mais quand je regarde l'art, c'est en gros la façon dont il fonctionne pour moi. Y a-t-il une idée ou non ? Est-ce inventé ou non ? En vrai, cela te mène dans des zones taboues... Parce qu'on ne devrait pas vraiment dire ça...

I.G. Je pense qu'on se ressemble un peu de ce point de vue...

W.T. Est-ce que tes photos ont une structure formelle ?

I.G. Les premières photos que j'ai prises, c'étaient les chaînes Hi-Fi. Elles sont évidemment en rapport avec le son et la musique, et elles ont leur propre forme, très présente. Ensuite j'ai photographié les oreilles. Quelque chose d'organique. Qui vient de l'intérieur, qui sort de la tête. J'ai fait cette série d'oreilles à New York et j'ai demandé aux gens, des femmes, dans la rue, si je pouvais prendre leur oreille. Il n'y en a pas eu une pour refuser. Parce que je ne leur demandais pas leur visage, mais quelque chose de beaucoup plus anonyme.

W.T. C'était quel genre de femmes ?

I.G. Des femmes dans la rue, c'est tout.

W.T. Donc des femmes que tu connaissais à peine et dont tu photographiais les oreilles comme ça, sur le coup ?

I.G. Oui.

W.T. Je vois. Mais vraiment, dans la rue ? Ou tu fixais des rendez-vous ?

I.G. Non, dans la rue. Ça prenait un instant. Les femmes répondaient toujours «Quoi mon oreille ? Bien sûr». Mais je n'ai jamais froissé personne en les regardant de près avant. Juste l'oreille. Et tout le monde trouvait ça super. C'était une très belle expérience. Pour moi aussi comme photographe. Évidemment, j'ai un peu travaillé la lumière et les reflets du soleil dans les cheveux... J'ai essayé de rendre le contexte avantageux pour l'oreille.

W.T. Quel rôle joue l'autoportrait ?

I.G. J'ai fait les *X-Rays* après la Hi-Fi et les oreilles. C'est de ça que tu parles ?

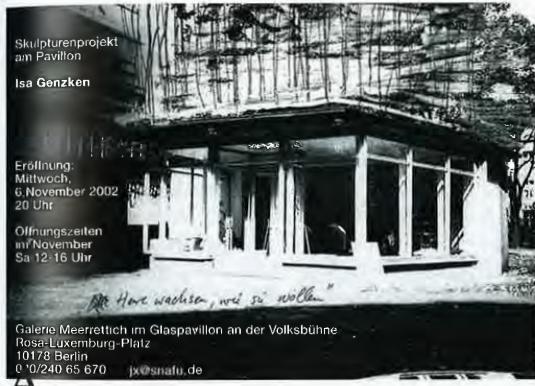
W.T. Ce sont tes premiers autoportraits ? Parce qu'il y a aussi tes photos de la clinique, en noir et blanc.

I.G. Ah ça ? Je venais de subir une opération, je m'enuyais profondément et donc je me suis prise en photo. Par ennui. Ce n'est qu'après que je me suis rendu compte que ce travail-là était spécial. Prendre des photos à la clinique et les publier dans un catalogue... ça prenait soudain un air sérieux. Tout le monde a peur des cliniques et personne ne veut voir à quoi ça ressemble de l'intérieur. Enfin, vraiment voir. Et tout le monde a un peu peur de s'y retrouver soi-même. Moi j'y étais, j'étais là à ne rien faire. Alors j'ai utilisé la clinique comme un studio et j'ai commencé à prendre des photos. Et j'ai commencé à me sentir mieux. Juste parce que ça me permettait d'avoir une occupation. Quant aux *X-Rays*, je voulais juste savoir à quoi ressemblait l'intérieur de ma tête, et ça me plaisait qu'elle puisse être éclairée de l'intérieur, comme un globe terrestre. Puis j'ai photographié les façades de New York.

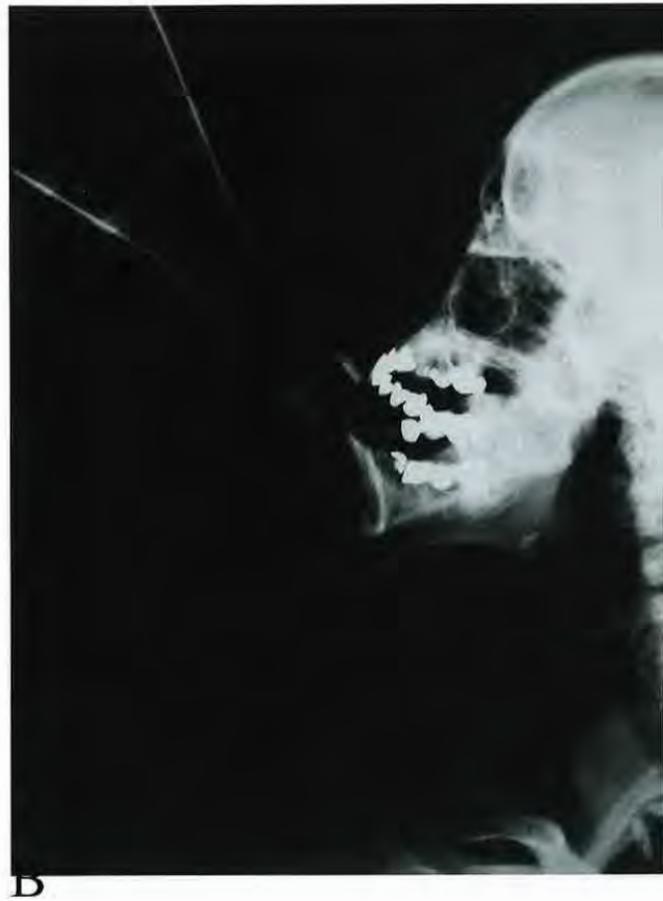
W.T. C'était à la fin des années 1990 ?

I.G. Oui. J'ai fait les livres à la fin des années 1990 et les façades peu après.

A. Isa Genzken, carton d’invitation pour «Isa Genzken. Haare wachsen, wie sie wollen», 2002, Galerie Meerrettich au Glaspavillon de la Volksbühne, Berlin. B. Isa Genzken, *X-Ray*, 1991, photographie couleur, 108×81,4 cm, 1991.



A



B

W.T. Et tu as aussi fait les photos en rapport avec les livres, par économie de moyens?

I.G. Oui.

W.T. C’était comme à la clinique, tu n’avais pas de studio, juste l’appareil photo...

I.G. C'est ça. Parce que je suis quelqu'un qui doit toujours s'occuper. Si je ne fais rien, je vais très mal. Mais en fait, je travaille toujours sur quelque chose. Et j'ai toujours le désir de travailler.

W.T. C'est peut-être une autre chose que nous avons en commun : une forme d'obsession ?

I.G. Oui, sûrement...

W.T. Mais c'est peut-être le lot de tous les artistes...

I.G. C'est-à-dire que tous les artistes que je connais très bien, ils sont si... Tu t'exposes à un gros blocage si tu te dis, bon, maintenant, je dois faire de l'art. C'est très important d'apprendre que ce n'est pas la chose la plus importante.

W.T. *Hier und jetzt zufrieden sein* (« Être content ici et maintenant »), c'est ce que je dois me répéter en permanence. L'art finira par arriver tout seul.

I.G. Oui, après, ça vient.

Traduit de l’anglais par Éric Loret  
Initialement publié sous le titre «*Isa Genzken. Ein Gespräch mit Wolfgang Tillmans/Isa Genzken. A conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans*», Camera Austria 81, Vienne, 2003, p. 7–18.

2. En référence à AC: *Isa Genzken, Wolfgang Tillmans, Science Fiction/Hier und jetzt zufrieden sein*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 1<sup>er</sup> novembre 2001–17 février 2002.

Luquet-Gad, Ingrid. « Entretien exclusif avec le photographe Wolfgang Tillmans : “Je veux rendre l’activisme attractif” »,  
*Les Inrockuptibles*, May 13, 2018.

<https://www.lesinrocks.com/2018/05/13/arts/entretien-exclusif-avec-le-photographe-wolfgang-tillmans-je-veux-rendre-lactivisme-attractif-111081929/>

**lhrockuptibles**



Wolfgang Tillmans, "Victoria Park, 2007", Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris ; Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne. © Wolfgang Tillmans

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

## **Entretien exclusif avec le photographe Wolfgang Tillmans : “Je veux rendre l’activisme attractif”**

Dans un entretien exclusif, le photographe Wolfgang Tillmans se livre sur son récent engagement politique en faveur de l’Europe, intimement lié à l’utopie des raves des années 1990.

Les pupilles extasiées des raves des 90s, les néo-vanités d'un tas d'habits gisant au sol, de fruits se recroquevillant sous la lumière du petit matin, ou encore les grandes abstractions pixellisées. Wolfgang Tillmans a réussi là où la plupart des photographes échouent : non seulement son vocabulaire est immédiatement reconnaissable, mais il a réconcilié également la sensualité intime de son médium et les ambitions conceptuelles de l'art contemporain, souvent réticent à accepter entre ses rangs les photographes - c'est particulièrement le cas en France. Cette plasticité tient beaucoup à sa manière de combiner les différentes images entre elles. Dans les constellations qu'il dessine au mur en associant différentes tailles d'images et types d'encadrement, mais aussi dans les planches de recherche se lit une pensée en train de se faire, attachée à relier plutôt qu'à isoler.

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**lhrockuptibles**

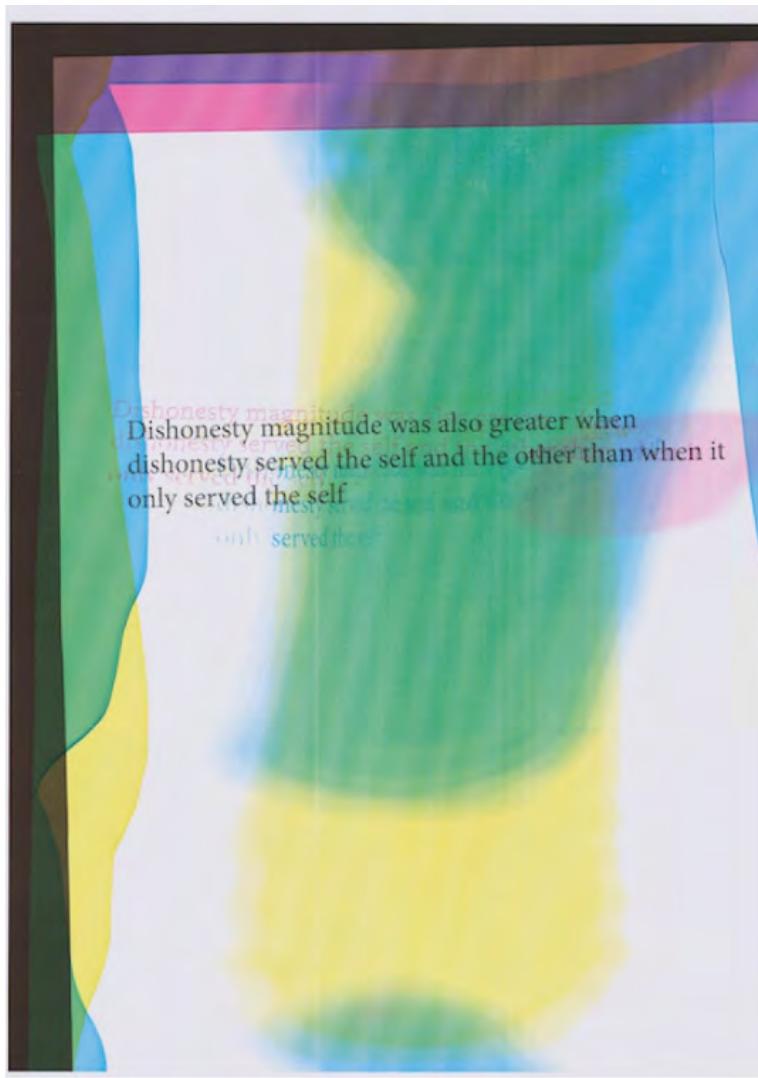
Après deux grandes expositions monographiques à la Tate Modern à Londres et à la Fondation Beyeler à Bâle, le Carré d'Art à Nîmes lui confie l'intégralité de ses espaces. Comme point de départ à l'exposition, il y a d'abord une nouvelle série entreprise il y a deux ans autour du phénomène du "*backfire effect*" ("effet rebond"), mécanisme psychologique expliquant que l'on puisse être persuadé d'avoir raison alors que toutes les évidences prouvent le contraire. Que l'on en soit arrivé à ne plus croire aux faits, c'est ce que démontrent la prolifération des fake-news. A partir d'un scanner en fin de vie trouvé dans la rue en bas de son atelier berlinois, l'artiste dissout dans des nappes de couleur RMB des fragments de textes, diagnostics psychologiques, interrogations laconiques et divers documents relatifs au phénomène en question. Mêlées à ses prises de vues habituelles, les images viennent réorienter la lecture de toute son œuvre. Et résonnent avec des œuvres de jeunesse pas montrées jusqu'alors, des scans de photos noir et blanc qu'il réalise dans les années 1987-88 alors qu'il a vingt ans.

A quelques mois de son cinquantième anniversaire, Wolfgang Tillmans mène plusieurs activités de front : un *project-space* à Berlin (Between Bridges), une activité de musicien et de DJ (il vient de sortir un nouvel EP remixé par Roman Flügel) ainsi qu'un engagement politique s'exprimant notamment à travers des affiches, des textes dans les journaux allemands et des billets d'humeur sur Instagram. Une constellation donc, comme celle que tissent ses images, où le détail résonne avec l'infini, où l'intime est déjà intensément politique et la fête se confond avec la création d'espaces libertaires.

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**Inrockuptibles**



Wolfgang Tillmans, "CLC 004", 2017. Courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris ; Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne. © Wolfgang Tillmans.

**En mai 2016, alors que plane la menace du Brexit, tu te lances dans la campagne avec une série de posters pour défendre l’Union Européenne. Dans la presse, tu déclarais être à ce moment devenu "*ouvertement politisé*". As-tu ressenti qu’être artiste ne suffisait plus, ou voulais-tu contraire mettre à profit la visibilité dont tu bénéficiais en tant qu’artiste ?**

**Wolfgang Tillmans** – Je ne suis pas devenu un artiste politique en 2016. J’ai toujours eu l’impression de l’être ; et mon travail a toujours servi de caisse de résonnance à des idées, des esthétiques et des positions politiques. En revanche, je ne m’en étais jamais servi pour faire campagne. Tout au long des années 1990, j’ai regretté que les jeunes soient moins politisés qu’au cours des années 1980 dans lesquelles j’ai grandi. Pour moi, il n’y a aucune contradiction entre le clubbing et l’engagement politique. Mais j’ai aussi conscience que personne n’aurait eu envie que je vienne leur faire la morale. J’ai donc surtout voulu rendre l’activisme attractif. D’ailleurs, l’activisme doit surtout se prolonger par l’engagement politique de la majorité de la population. Ce n’est pas une poignée d’activistes très actifs qui nous sauveront, mais que chacun se sente concerné et exprime ses opinions politiques. Le centre, les vues modérées, on les entend trop peu.

Luquet-Gad, Ingrid. « Entretien exclusif avec le photographe Wolfgang Tillmans : “Je veux rendre l’activisme attractif” »,  
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## Inrockuptibles

### **Ce qui serait une manière de répondre à la question concernant ton propre engagement, qui est d'abord celui du citoyen...**

Oui, c'est le cas. Je ne recherche en aucun cas le romantisme des extrêmes. La pop-culture a toujours été fascinée par les positions politiques extrêmes. Ce n'est pas ce qui fait tourner le monde. Nous devons parvenir à inverser le mouvement centripète qui place les extrêmes au centre du débat et de la visibilité publiques. Tout ne peut pas être extraordinaire. S'engager au sein d'un parti politique classique est sans doute assez fastidieux, ça n'a rien de sexy au premier abord. Mais si tu ne le fais pas, d'autres le feront à ta place. Désormais, nous sommes face à une situation où la nouvelle droite est tellement guidée par une mission suprême que si nous ne faisons rien, elle progressera inéluctablement. Si c'est le cas, notre liberté à tous qui en pâtira.

**Cette idée de normalité revient souvent dans ton travail. Dans les années 1990, lorsque tu photographies ton cercle proche, tu ne cherches pas à parler de toi mais à montrer comment les gens normaux s'habillent, se prélassent et font la fête. A l'époque, montrer la majorité invisible, magnifier le quotidien, c'était nouveau...**

En art et en musique, les extrêmes m'intéressent énormément. Mais effectivement, j'ai toujours été attentif à ne pas sous-estimer la valeur du banal. La raison est simple : le banal est réaliste.

**Il est souvent dit que face à la nouvelle droite (*l'Alt-Right*), la gauche traditionnelle a perdu la faculté d'imaginer les récits fédérateurs de demain. Est-ce pour cela tu as choisi d'intégrer également des images à tes posters, pour qu'ils ne parlent pas uniquement à la raison mais aussi aux sens ?**

Au début, j'avais l'intention de n'utiliser que du texte, car je désirais garder mon travail visuel séparé. Mais la combinaison du texte et de l'image est une formule éprouvée et redoutablement efficace. De nombreuses personnes m'ont également fait remarquer que plus personne aujourd'hui ne faisait des posters. Or pour moi, cela ne fait aucun sens puisque n'importe quel smartphone affiche une image avec du texte : c'est un poster ! J'ai donc choisi d'adapter les posters en quatre formats : une version Instagram, une version PDF à imprimer soi-même, le format A1 classique que nous avons imprimés à l'atelier, puis nous avons pris conscience du poids des t-shirts – le corps de la personne qui le porte devient un poster pour des réseaux sociaux. Le côté affectif joue effectivement un grand rôle. J'ai réalisé que personne ne parlait de manière positive de l'Union Européenne ; et que si je ne le faisais pas, peut-être que personne ne le ferait. Pour moi, j'associe d'abord l'UE à plein de moments heureux passés à l'étranger ou avec des ressortissants des autres pays. Peut-être est-ce une expérience plus présente dans le monde de l'art ou de la musique. Il n'en reste pas moins que nous avons vécu dans les années les plus pacifiques de l'histoire de l'Europe.

Luquet-Gad, Ingrid. « Entretien exclusif avec le photographe Wolfgang Tillmans : “Je veux rendre l’activisme attractif” »,  
*Les Inrockuptibles*, May 13, 2018.

<https://www.lesinrocks.com/2018/05/13/arts/entretien-exclusif-avec-le-photographe-wolfgang-tillmans-je-veux-rendre-lactivisme-attractif-111081929/>

## Inrockuptibles

**Tu insistes beaucoup sur le fait que lorsque tu as grandi, la mode et la musique exprimaient des positionnements sociaux – des formes de vies fédératrices, sans forcément parler d’engagement politique. Perçois-tu aujourd’hui des phénomènes de pop-culture qui jouent le même rôle ?**

Il y a toujours des voix très puissantes aux Etats-Unis. Des artistes à grand succès comme Beyoncé n'hésitent pas à faire entendre leur voix, mais ce phénomène concerne essentiellement la communauté noire. En revanche, la scène club est étonnamment peu politisée alors que c'est elle qui a le plus à perdre. Par exemple en Allemagne, l'AfD (le parti eurosceptique d'extrême droite) vient de déposer une motion au parlement pour faire fermer le Berghain, le mythique club berlinois. Pour l'extrême droite, la liberté du dancefloor est perçue comme une provocation. S'ils arrivent au pouvoir, la première chose qu'ils feront serait de brimer la vue nocturne. C'est leur hobby préféré, ainsi que celui du néolibéralisme en général. Voilà la liberté que je défends, celle du dancefloor qui rejoint celle de l'art. En ce moment, on me demande très souvent si je pense que l'art devrait être plus engagé : je réponds à la fois oui et non. Ce qui dérange l'extrême droite avec les clubs est la perte de temps, l'inutilité de ces moments de communion. La beauté de l'art est également d'être inutile. Et d'un autre côté, les artistes ont oublié le pouvoir dont ils disposent. Lorsqu'ils s'expriment, ils sont écoutés. Or justement, trop d'artistes ont peur ou honte de faire entendre leur voix dans les débats politiques ou sociaux.

**Tu publies régulièrement des textes engagés dans les journaux allemands, tandis sur ton Instagram, chaque image est un prétexte à poster un long texte d'actualité dans la légende – souvent sans rapport avec la photo. L'écriture, c'est récent chez toi ?**

Pas entièrement. En 1994, j'avais publié un long texte dans la revue Purple qui s'appelait *Les Anneés Dix? The Nineties Haven't Happened yet!* Mais pour répondre plus directement à la question, c'est bel et bien récent que l'écriture prenne cette ampleur. Je me rends surtout compte que je peux le faire, que je sais parler et écrire et que j'ai envie de m'en servir plus. La confiance est venue avec l'âge, auparavant je me sentais gêné de m'exprimer. Surmonter cette gêne est primordial.

**Récemment, le New York Times publiait une longue enquête sur le futur "post-texte" où il était question du passage d'un internet de l'écrit à un internet de l'image et de la vidéo. Lorsque tu détournes l'usage d'un média de comme Instagram pour y poster des textes, est-ce une manière de résister à la facilité de la consommation fast-food des images ?**

Oui, c'est une stratégie délibérée de ma part. Ne pas atteindre la totalité de son auditoire potentiel n'est pas très grave. Si 90% ne lisent pas le texte, cela veut quand même dire que 10% le liront. C'est déjà important. Lorsque les gens ne vont pas voter, c'est l'attitude inverse qui les conditionne : ils se disent que leur vote n'aura de toute manière pas d'importance ; ou ne veulent pas tenter de changer les choses s'ils ne peuvent pas avoir exactement ce qu'ils veulent. Pour en revenir à Instagram, je n'ai jamais été inscrit sur un autre réseau social, et je ne pense pas qu'un médium détermine forcément ses usages. Ici aussi, le choix nous appartient ; y compris celui de continuer à vouloir lire et écrire.

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## Inrockuptibles

**Sur Instagram, tu postes des vues de détail à deux doigts de basculer dans l'abstraction, tandis que pour ta dernière série autour du "Backfire Effect", tu te sers d'un scanner en fin de vie pour reproduire des bribes de texte. Pas de visages ; peu de corps, ou fragmentés . Ton travail est-il en train de prendre un tournant plus conceptuel ?**

Pour moi, toutes les images figuratives, c'est à dire toutes celles faites avec un appareil photo, l'ont toujours été. Chaque photo est confrontée à un dilemme conceptuel : pourquoi aurait-elle la moindre importance ? Quelle est la possibilité que l'on s'en souvienne plus tard ? Au vu des millions de photos prises tous les jours, la possibilité est infime – il y a vingt ans, c'était la même chose. Parler de ma vie ne m'a jamais intéressé. Je parle à travers mon vécu parce que c'est la seule matière que j'aie à ma disposition. Lorsque je photographie une pile d'habits, je ne cherche pas à montrer mes habits mais ce que j'y perçois. – le potentiel social ; la qualité sculpturale, sensuelle ou sexuelle. Dans les années 1990, je me suis demandé pourquoi j'avais tant envie de faire des portraits ; si tout en prenant des photos alternatives de personnes pouvant être considérées telle, je n'étais pas en train de reproduire un processus normatif. Est-ce que je légitimais l'industrie de l'image en faisant contre ma volonté l'apologie de certains standards de beauté ? Et en même temps, le plaisir de prendre des photos a toujours été là. J'aime toujours faire des photos de natures mortes. Et je n'en ai toujours pas marre de faire des photos. Elles changent tout en restant remarquablement identiques. L'exposition à Nîmes le montre bien : mes toutes premières œuvres, les photocopies de la fin des années 1980 que je faisais lorsque j'avais 20 ans rejoignent la dernière série sur le "Backfire Effect".

**Si la photographie reste pour toi un plaisir, est-ce que tu l'aurais aussi choisie comme moyen d'expression si tu avais eu 20 ans en 2018 ?**

Il y a quelques jours, je parlais avec des étudiants en photo qui me disaient se sentir menacés par Instagram. Lorsque j'ai commencé dans les années 1980, j'aurais pu avoir le même sentiment vis-à-vis de photographes plus âgés. Au contraire, j'ai assez vite ressenti que c'était une liberté de ne plus avoir à prendre les photos qu'ils avaient déjà faites. Personne ne nous oblige à continuer à reproduire ce que d'autre ont déjà fait mieux que nous. J'ai le sentiment que nous vivons à une époque de transition aussi riche que problématique ; il y a tant de textures et d'affects avec lesquels travailler. Bien sûr, les années 1990 sont une pierre d'achoppement pour la jeune génération, car elles ne semblent ne jamais vouloir prendre fin. Personnellement, je me retrouve toujours dans beaucoup de valeurs de cette décennie.

**Comment tu expliques ce revival des années 1990 ?**

Parce que nous n'en sommes jamais sortis ! Et nous n'en sommes jamais sortis parce qu'elles ont été le symbole d'une valorisation de l'instant présent. Cette immédiateté, nous ne pouvons l'expérimenter par procuration. Pour moi, les valeurs des années 1990, ou du moins certaines d'entre elles, sont authentiquement inadaptées au système capitaliste. Certes, les tentatives de vendre l'esthétique et l'esprit des années 1990 n'ont pas manqué. J'ai moi-même dû défendre mon langage photographique à la fin de la décennie lorsque cette esthétique a commencé à être reprise par la pub et la mode mainstream. Reste que nous avons toujours autant faim d'expériences immédiates et du sentiment d'appartenir à une communauté.

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**Inrockuptibles**

**Dans le sillage du mouvement des places, on a récemment beaucoup évoqué la vulnérabilité de corps rassemblés malgré tout, malgré les différences ; sans que préexiste un but ou une fin prédéfinie....**

Je retrouve cette idée dans le clubbing ; la sensation de communion à travers l'atomisation du dancefloor, le sentiment d'être rassemblé tout en dansant seul. L'unique chose que je regretterai serait peut-être la disparition des paroles dans la dance music des années 1990, qui questionnerait peut-être la portée de l'identification que peut produire un track sans paroles. Mais en fait je pense que ce n'est pas le cœur du problème. Le clubbing reste un acte de résistance contre le capitalisme, dont la liberté sexuelle et l'improductivité ne pourra jamais être commercialisée.

- ***Wolfgang Tillmans, jusqu'au 16 septembre au Carré d'Art à Nîmes***

## Portfolio

Si l'artiste allemand **WOLFGANG TILLMANS** tisse une œuvre sensible depuis le début des années 1990, il n'en est pas moins engagé. Après s'être attaqué au Brexit, il compose aujourd'hui une série inspirée par le phénomène des fake news et le trouble qu'elles induisent sur notre rapport à la réalité.

**TEXTE** Ingrid Luquet-Gad

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

# L'HEURE POST-VÉRITÉ

**POUR CERTAINS, CE SERA LES PHOTOS DE RAVE 90'S.**  
**POUR D'AUTRES, LES NATURES MORTES** où la simplicité tutoie le sublime. Il y a encore les photos abstraites, celles qui figurent la dissolution du réel dans une mer de pixels. Qu'on les ait aperçues sur les cimaises des plus grands musées, au détour d'un magazine de mode ou dans la touffe du Berghain à Berlin, les photographies de Wolfgang Tillmans sont cultes.

A bientôt 50 ans, l'Allemand n'a jamais été aussi engagé. A Berlin, son espace autogéré Between Bridges accueille débats et expositions autour de l'avenir de l'Europe ou de la crise migratoire ; tandis que ses virulentes campagnes d'affichage,

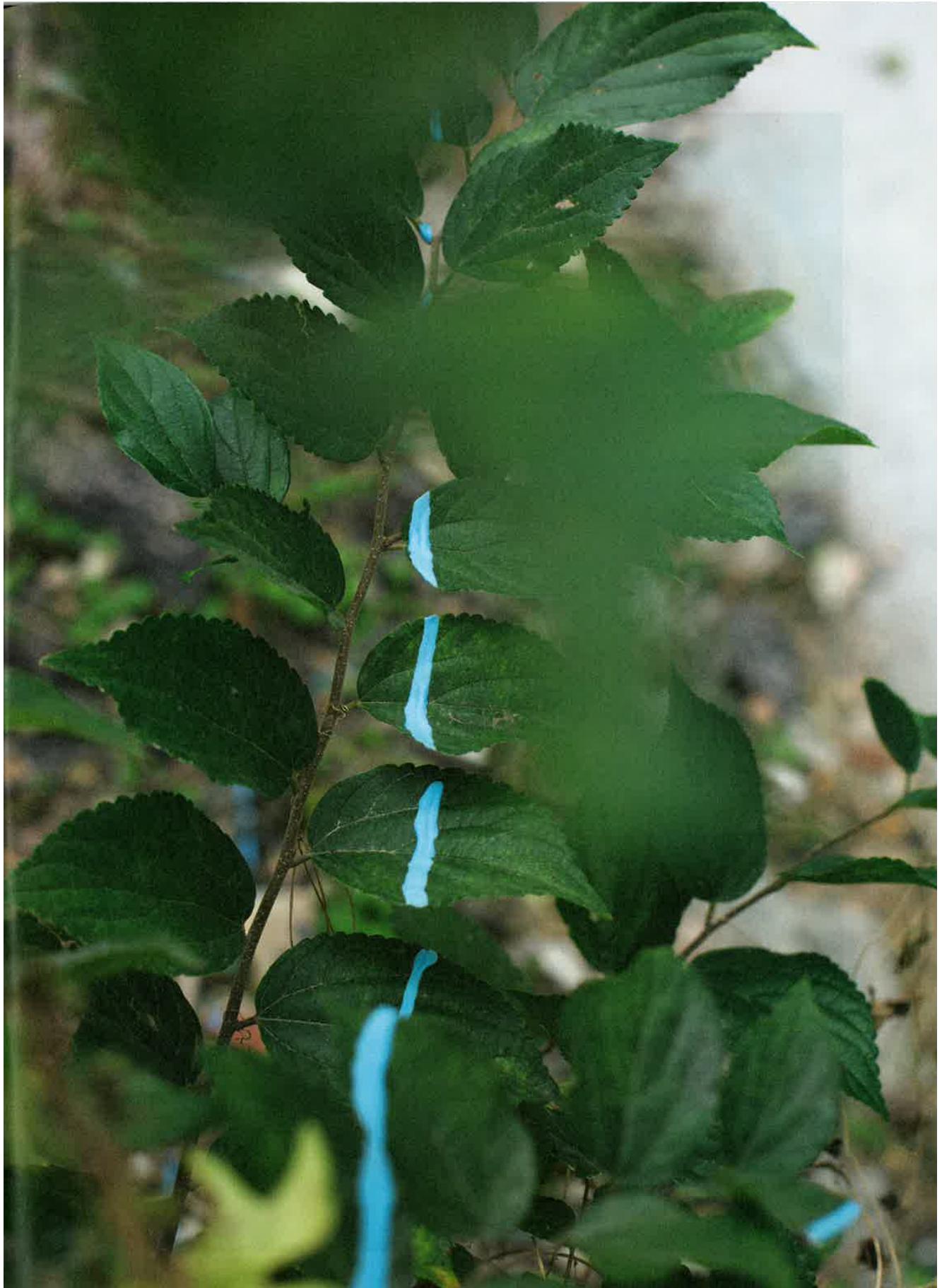
notamment contre le Brexit, n'épargnent ni la rue, ni Instagram. Le portfolio que l'artiste a composé pour *Les Inrocks* témoigne de cet engagement. Issues d'une nouvelle recherche initiée en septembre 2017, ses images à la lisière du visible explorent le phénomène paranoïaque de l'"effet rebond" ("backfire effect"), où la conviction d'avoir raison l'emporte sur les faits rationnels. ●

**Expo** Du 4 mai au 16 septembre, Carré d'Art-Musée d'art contemporain de Nîmes (30)

**Musique** Source de Wolfgang Tillmans, disponible le 4 mai en vinyle et en streaming. La version originale est une pièce vocale de 16 min., remixée par le DJ et producteur allemand Roman Flügel

**les  
Inrockuptibles**

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



# les Inrockuptibles

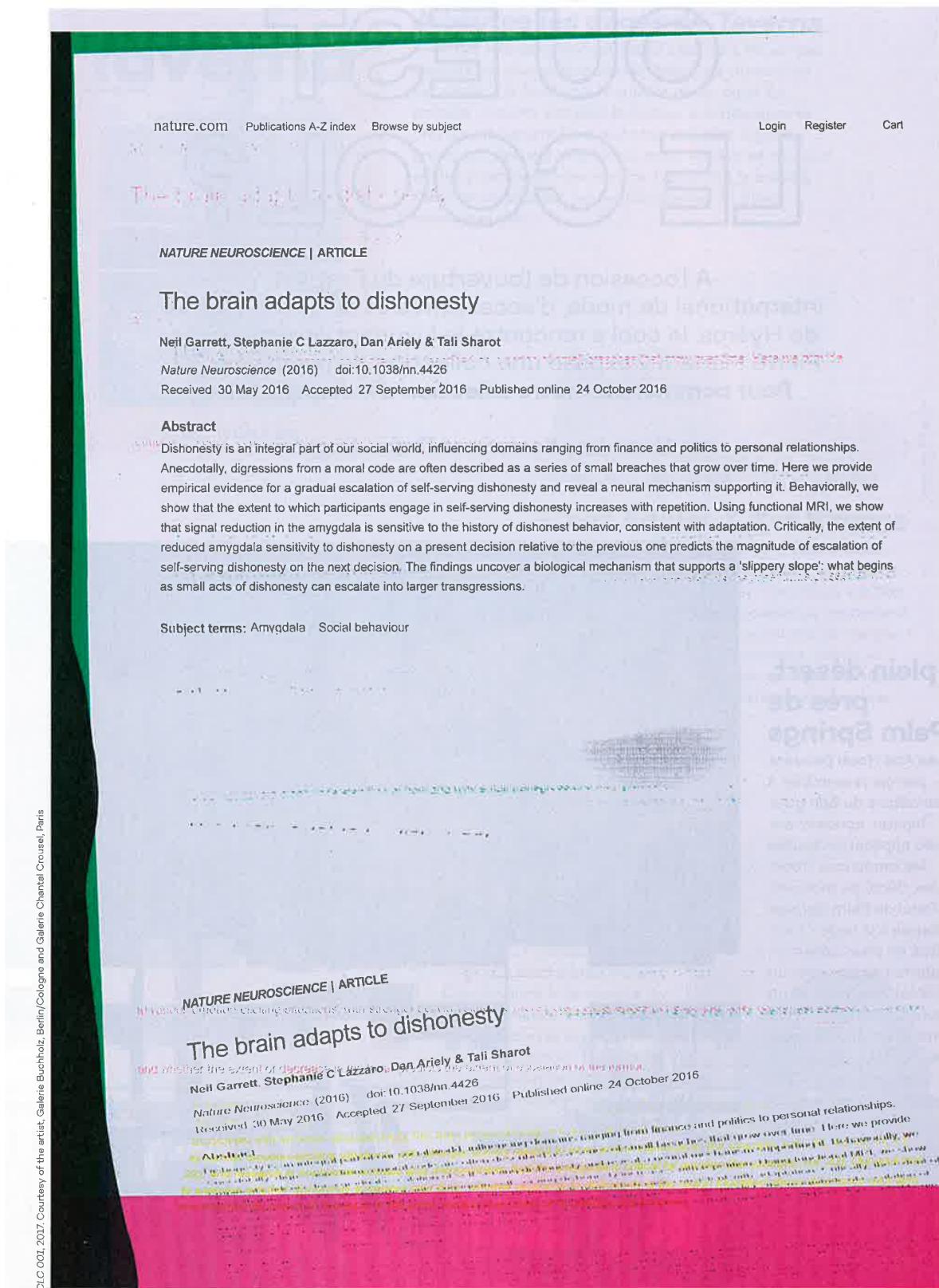
Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

Quelle est la probabilité que je sois le seul à avoir raison à ce sujet ? 2017. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

Quelle est la probabilité que je sois  
le seul à avoir raison à ce sujet ?

# les Inrockuptibles

Portfolio Wolfgang Tillmans



« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.



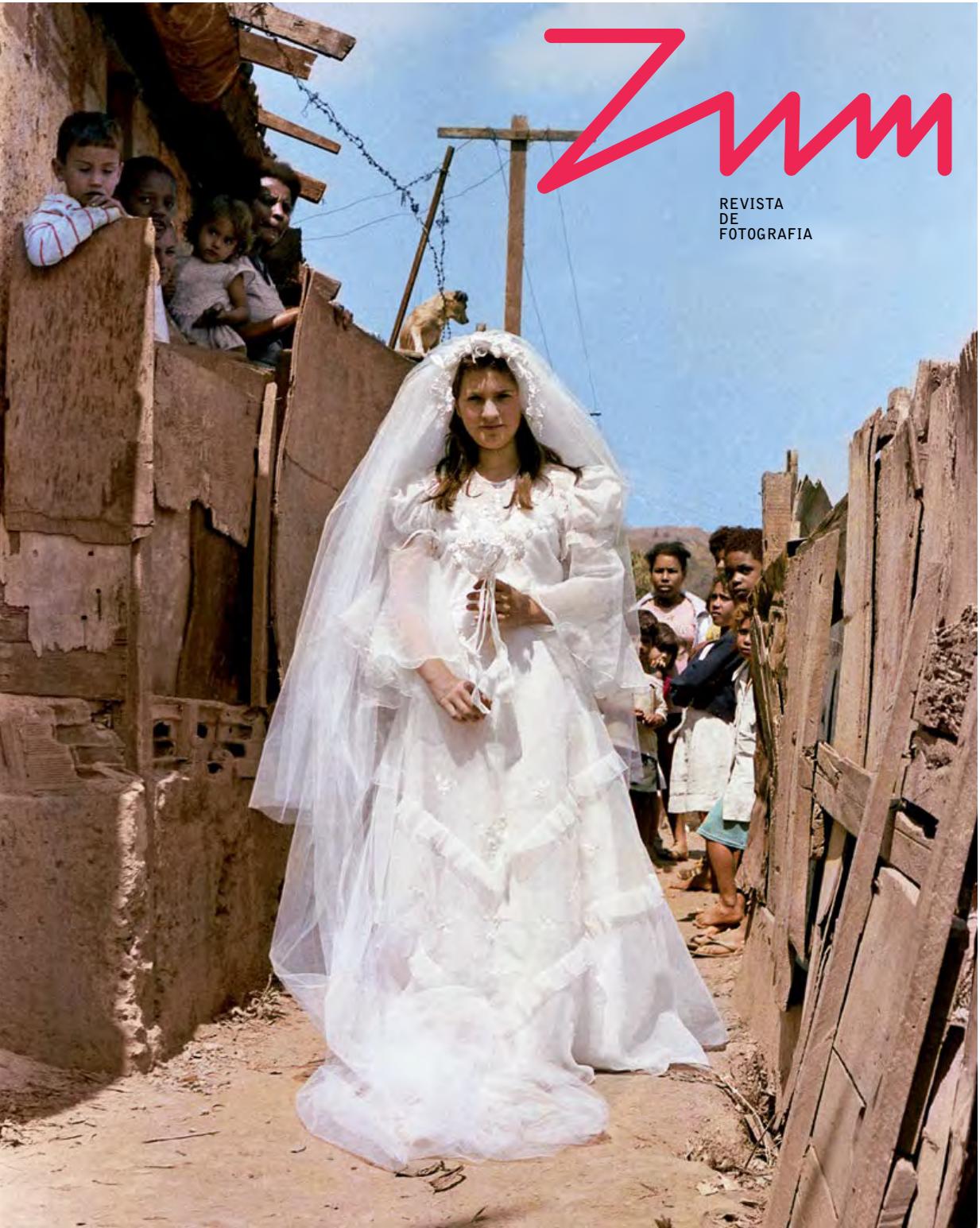
14

ANNA BELLA GEIGER / DANA LIXENBERG / WOLFGANG TILLMANS / MASAHISA FUKASE / YANN GROSS / DAVID CLAERBOUT / ALEKSANDR RÖDTCHENKO / AFONSO PIMENTA / MARTIN GUSINDE / MEMES

2018



Galerie  
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REVISTA  
DE  
FOTOGRAFIA



## THE FORM OF FREEDOM

By WOLFGANG TILLMANS

Looking back at his artistic development, the German photographer WOLFGANG TILLMANS reflects on his interest for youth and urban culture and his fascination for Astronomy and Painting.

After having experimented with a number of media, from singing in a band to making dresses, to painting, and drawing, I came across a photocopier, the first digital photocopier, in 1986, in a copy shop in my hometown, and realized its great potential of reproducing halftone images with an enlargement of up to 400%. After having worked with different expressive modes, I was totally taken by this potential of a mechanically produced image that didn't really get touched by me, but was still made by the touch of a button. And yet, out of this industrially produced sheet of A3 paper, a transformation happened into an object that I held with great esteem and great appreciation. That interest in the texture, in the surface of the photographic print, has stayed with me ever since. I've been ever since also open to digital printing, at the time when that was not, of course, widely used. But I have, until a couple of years ago, never believed in digital image taking. When I made my first little exhibitions in Hamburg, in 1988-89, I realized I needed my own camera to make more pictures that I could then photocopy. And that's how I really ended up at photography.

At the same time, "acid house" happened and I was, for the first time, part of a youth culture, a movement. And I greatly embraced this liberating music and club life, which was in such stark contrast to the posy-dressy 1980s. That particular late 1980s, early 1990s music scene was so powerful because it was non-hierarchical, all-inclusive, and of course a bit mind-expanding as well.

Very early on, I recognized the potential of photography speaking about three-dimensional issues. The relationship between photography and sculpture is to me very strong.

*Grey jeans over a stair post* (1991), deals with personal subject matter, not really in a "diaryistic" way, but in a general way. I was not talking about somebody's specific jeans, I was trying to speak about the meaning of clothes, the essential aspects of these membranes that are between our bodies and the world. *Still life Talbot Rd* is also from 1991. Both types of pictures – the one of the art historical genre of drapery, and the still life –, are parts of an ongoing interest. They're not series; I don't really ever work in a serial mode. I don't make them in an art historical reference, they're not meant to be primarily read through art history. Instead, I see that the still lives on window ledges from 400 years ago are there because also those artists have been drawn to the particular situation between inside and outside, or that fold of fabric is of a deeper interest and potentially of greater meaning, even though it is so inconsequential and insubstantial. Without referencing art history, I feel that these different genres have come into my work, and that they are there co-existing ever since.

I have also been greatly inspired by magazines and by the immediacy that a magazine can have on the viewer. You can find it anywhere, it can travel much easier than an exhibition. So, the potential of the printed page, just like the potential of the photocopy as a venue for art, has been with me from the start. I approached the *i-D* magazine, which at the time was an alternative non-commercial journal, documenting urban youth culture, and started to take photographs for them. I realized that the fashion pages in these magazines are really the only pages where you can publish pictures that have no particular agenda. From the mid 1990s onwards, fashion magazines have become completely and utterly linked to the advertisers. But in these days I did actually style these photographs, I chose the clothes and made my observations or comments on, for example, the depiction of genders in the media. For example, that toplessness in women is not equal toplessness in men (*Lutz & Alex holding cock*, 1992); to get an equality it should really have a bottomless in men. Simultaneously, I carried on exhibiting these pictures and have been very at ease about them existing in magazines, as well as on gallery walls. That has not been an easy position to take and, for a long time, my practice was being read in a hierarchical way, as if no artist could deliberately choose to publish in magazines. I was always seen as a magazine photographer who moved into art. I find it interesting that it is continuously the case: applied arts seemingly preclude the fine arts practice.

Those 1990s were... those 90s!... I mean, I was very enthusiastic and excited about exploring what one would cover under the um-

brella of the term *identity*, and how it is a fractured one; how it is not one single entity, but it is composed out of different aspects, of different layers. For example, the use of military clothes (*Lutz, Alex, Suzanne & Christoph on beach (orange)*, 1993), which have been altered in their meanings. All of this also loosely circling around the politics of the body, and trying to show pictures of people not afraid of their bodies; a free and playful use of their bodies and sexuality, not in an exploitative, but in an equal and participatory way.

I recreated of one of my first exhibitions, which I also consider my first show after the photocopy works of the late 1980s. This was in 1993, at Daniel Buchholz gallery, in Cologne. To show the equivalents between a hand-printed fine photographic print that I made with my own hands, and a magazine page which has been printed for 30000 copies, but which had been laid out and designed by me, I showed these side by side: the prints carefully taped, so one can remove the tape, and the magazine pages pinned, because the tape would tear the different paper. All of this has been about the purity of the objects. To not frame them has been really about showing it in the way it would lie in my hands in front of me. This way of installing doesn't speak the language of importance of framing one piece and presenting it on a big white wall.

The portrait is also something that stays with me and that I would find difficult or problematic if I got tired of it, because it is an exercise in alertness where no recipe can help. If you go into the situation with a sense of security, then the photograph will look exactly like that. And that is an axiom that I found generally to be true. Photography always lies about what's in front of the camera, but it never lies about what is behind, it always clearly reveals the intentions that are behind. So, if you are in a portrait situation and you're not open, you're just putting the person into a pre-set idea. Then, photography will only speak about that pre-set idea. Allowing and being as prepared as possible for what might happen, while staying open for what chance may come into play, is my way of working. That is hard to maintain because the moment you think you know how it works, the parameters have already changed. This openness is an ongoing challenge, which doesn't get easier the longer one works. *Deer Hirsch* (1995), for example, is a good illustration of this correlation of chance and control. What looks like a heavily staged photograph has actually been a chance encounter on a beach in Long Island, where there happen to be wild deer. We were feeding our food to the greedy deer and, then, when nothing was left, Jochen was gesturing that there's nothing left in his hands. I saw that and just said:



hold it! I just rewound the situation by one second, and took this photograph of an attempted communication between animal and human.

People occasionally say that I look at everything, that I'm all-consuming eye, and I beg to differ. I think I do not photograph everything, not everything all the time. When I have arrived at a picture of something that holds the essence of what that experience, that object or that subject might be, I don't embark on an entire series, I just rest with that. For example, for some people, my photograph *Hallenbad Detail* (1995) might contain the smell and remind them of their own experience in a place like that, and that point of connection interests me. I still try to photograph every sunset that moves me, however hard that is. Is it possible to take another photograph of this? Is it possible to make something new in the face of potentially completely exhausted subject matter? That challenge continues to excite me: the transformative power of photography, the way you look at things, and the way they will look back.

From 2000 – really from 1998, but more visibly from 2000 –, I included work that was not made with a camera, that was non-figurative and pretty much abstract in nature. There was a sense of surprise which I could never quite share, because I felt that abstraction has been within my work from the start, from the early black and white photocopies. The work called *Concorde*, from 1997, which first was a book of 64 photographs and, shortly after, a grid of 56 photographs of the supersonic airliner which had intrigued me for years because, at the time, it was the last and only thing left from the space age that was fully functioning in the way it was originally designed. Other things from the 1960s that were made from this belief of a better future through technology had been defunct, had been abandoned, or had to be repaired three times over. But Concorde was this icon, this image of overcoming time and space through technology. That straight forward belief was of course no longer available for my generation, and so this really is a work functioning on many levels. It may also be a love story, the work of two nations, and also an abstract piece of 56 colour gradations.

It took me years to finally act on this little seedling of an idea that popped-up occasionally in my head, and that is what I want to address the students present tonight about. I found that it is crucial to take these ideas seriously, ideas that are seemingly unimportant or inconsequential, that don't feel big. But if they knock on your conscious three times, then it's usually a good moment to take them seriously and to act on them. Because those things that come up from the subconscious or

semi-conscious, and mix with the conscious, those are the things that are truly yours and are not ideas that have been invented, that have been made up. I guess when one talks about art and making art it is by nature language driven. But visual art is not primarily driven by language and there is a dichotomy in that when one is, on the one hand, constantly forced to talk about it, and language seems to favor ideas, and, on the other hand, one also shouldn't blindly follow any idea that comes to mind. It's a difficult equilibrium. That's why I usually find the serial work that is just an idea, and then played out forever and ever again, less interesting, unless it is for a particular reason.

Here's an example of the *Blushes*, which is a 24 × 20 inches C-print a color photograph (*Blushes #3*), which I began making in 2000. I never felt a particular allegiance to the camera as such. I love the camera and photography because it can speak so easily, it can communicate so freely, and can be expressive without the weight of expressive gestures that, for example, comes with painting. I found that lack of expressiveness on the surface very liberating, and this allowed me to make pictures that wouldn't probably be possible for me to make when painted, even though they are painterly in some way. It is really important that they are photographs. The brain instantly connects to them on a realistic level, trying to connect them to reality and removes this sense that each mark has been made by the artist's hand. Another type of semi-abstract figurative work also emerged in 2000. This one called *I don't want to get over you* (2000) was the centre piece of my Turner Prize presentation in 2000, and, from the year after, the photograph called *New Family* give good examples of the co-existence of abstraction and figuration, and abstract elements in figurative pictures.

Somewhat my visual initiation was as a child through Astronomy, I can't quite explain... There was a little book I found in my parents bookshelf, an introduction to Astronomy, and it completely got me hooked until I was 14. That experience of intense observation, of looking at dots of light for hours, I believe has had an important influence on me. And I stayed fondly connected to the subject. When I was 10-11 years old I knew that when I'd be 36 years old there would be a transit of Venus happening, which is an extremely rare astronomical phenomenon taking place every 128 years and then 8 years after once more and then not for another 128 years. And what happens is that the planet Venus, the Earth, and the Sun are perfectly aligned – just as it happens in a total solar eclipse where Moon, Earth and Sun are perfectly aligned. And then you see the little disk of Venus move over the duration of six hours over the disk of the Sun. So

what you here see is: the pink circle is the Sun, the spot is Venus (*Venus transit*, 2004). This was of particular importance in Science History, which led actually to the discovery of New Zealand and Australia by Captain Cook, who went out on a mission to time the entry of Venus and the exit of Venus into the disk of the Sun, compared to the same timing taking place in London, and from the two time keepings one hoped to determine the parallax, and determine the distance of Earth to the Sun. So it was really the only way at the time to locate ourselves in the universe, where we are in relation to what surrounds us. For me that was an extremely moving experience to see, like the mechanics of the solar system right in front of your eye.

For years I admired in museums the *Spinario* subject matter for antique sculptures, usually a young person pulling a splinter from their foot. Because again it is such an universal experience of how everything is of relative importance and if you have a splinter in your foot the entire world around you could collapse, you only want to get that splinter out of your foot. One day I walked into the living room and my boyfriend Anders was completely absorbed trying to remove a splinter from his foot, and this picture (*Anders pulling splinter from his foot*, 2004) was completely not set up or made in any way in reference to the historical forefathers, but of course stays in direct lineage to it.

The interest in paper – in the three-dimensional presence of paper – is something that struck me in 2000/2001, when I realized that really absolutely everything I do is on paper. And I began photographing photographic paper. This was the first, in 2001, which I called *paper drop*, it was a sheet hanging curling on a wall. Five years later, I came back to the subject, then folded paper over onto itself and photographed it with a very shallow depth of field, so there is only the very rim/edge in focus, and everything, in front and behind, it is out of focus and, then, this strange two-dimensional/three-dimensional looking drop shape works emerged.

Ten years ago, when I last held a talk at the Royal Academy, then in connection with the *Apocalypse* show, the pictures were shown as analogue slides, and showed of course so much more detail than the digital projector, which is a kind of a nemesis of any artist's work. It is just interesting how we freely accept lesser quality through technology. We're all watching YouTube, we're all watching the films in the worst possible resolution and think this is an advance. But anyway these are really actually quite beautiful in real life and they are called *Silver*, a family begun in 1998 and continuing. They are the opposite of the abstract pictures that I make with lights on pa-



per in the dark room, where I use different light sources, manipulate them over light sensitive paper in darkness, and then process the paper normally through the conventional process. These *Silver* works are actually chemo-grams, made with wasted chemicals, picking up the dirt from the rollers of machines. They are mechanical pictures. And all I do is set up the parameter surrounding their making, they don't have my hand involved, and they are usually enlarged to 1,80m x 2,40m.

In 2005, I also made a transition into actually three-dimensional photographs that have been folded or creased either before exposure or after exposure, after processing different modes that lead to different results, again still fully, and 100% photographs, but now again a photograph with no subject, more with an object inserted into them. They become photographs that reject the natural role of depiction because they are things themselves, which is of course the case for all photographs; I've seen them always as extremely flat cubes. Here, in the photographs called *Lighter*, in reference to cigarette lighters that play a role in their making, their emancipation of the role of depiction becomes more fully apparent. After ten years of primarily exploring the relation of abstraction and figuration, I've felt from 2009 a renewed interest in looking at the world. How does the world look like twenty years after I began my career? I have travelled extensively and photographed a great deal with a camera; and also a new type of camera, a new technology has finally allowed the digital camera to be better than film camera. For years I've been asked "do you photograph digital?", and I said "what's the point? A 100 ASA film has 14 megapixels and your camera has 6, so why should I use digital?". I mean, it's all about resolution. Now the threshold has been crossed and new full format chip cameras allow an exact optical performance like a 35mm camera. They act exactly as my 35mm film camera, but they have a higher resolution, so now that has become for me natural to of course use that, because it is a true advantage that however co-exists with film. This interest in technology it is not only in my own medium but also in the world, looking at things that simply have not been there before.

In 2008, in the preparation for the Venice Biennale where I had a major installation, I travelled to different borders, and I went to Tunisia to the place where the boats of refugees left for the Italian island of Lampedusa, and I travelled to Lampedusa, where those boats landed. They of course all arrive in these hardly sea worthy boats that are basically one-way journeys. The Italian authorities don't send the boats back; they take them out of the water and destroy them on a gigantic ship-graveyard (*Lampedusa*, 2008).

At the Walker Art Gallery, in Liverpool, in 2010, I had an exhibition where I was invited to integrate twelve works that the Art Council Collection had acquired, plus three that I added to the group. I was given carte blanche to move, remove, insert, and combine them with my own work. There was a Flemish tapestry of the same size and I replaced it by *Freischwimmer 155*, an inkjet print. There were interesting and unexpected relations happening in the room between the presences of the huge steel blue colour and the most of the skies in the old Baroque paintings.

In 2006, in Los Angeles, the Truth Study Center Installation, which has a title a little tongue in cheek, is a response to the polyphony that surrounds us. I also use my work as an amplifier, using the medium to promote causes. I found myself powerless in the light of what happened in the last decade, and often found the newspapers articles commentary much more to the point. So I included them and placed them around. It's all about different levels of perception and clarity of seeing.

Very occasionally I have a moment of seeing a person in a painting, and then feeling compelled to portray, re-portray this person. It's not really an act of art appropriation, but re-framing the person in the first degree. This photograph (*The Cock (kiss)*, 2002) of two guys kissing got slashed by a visitor at the Hirshhorn Museum, in Washington. I'm always aware that one should never take things for granted, never take liberties for granted. For hundreds and hundreds of years this was not normal, not acceptable, and this term of acceptable is really what I connect beauty to. So, sometimes I'm said to be turning everyday subject matter into beautiful things, and I find that a bit uncritical, unless it is connected to that beauty that is of course always political, as in it describes what is acceptable or desirable in society. That is never fixed, and always needs reaffirming and defending. ///

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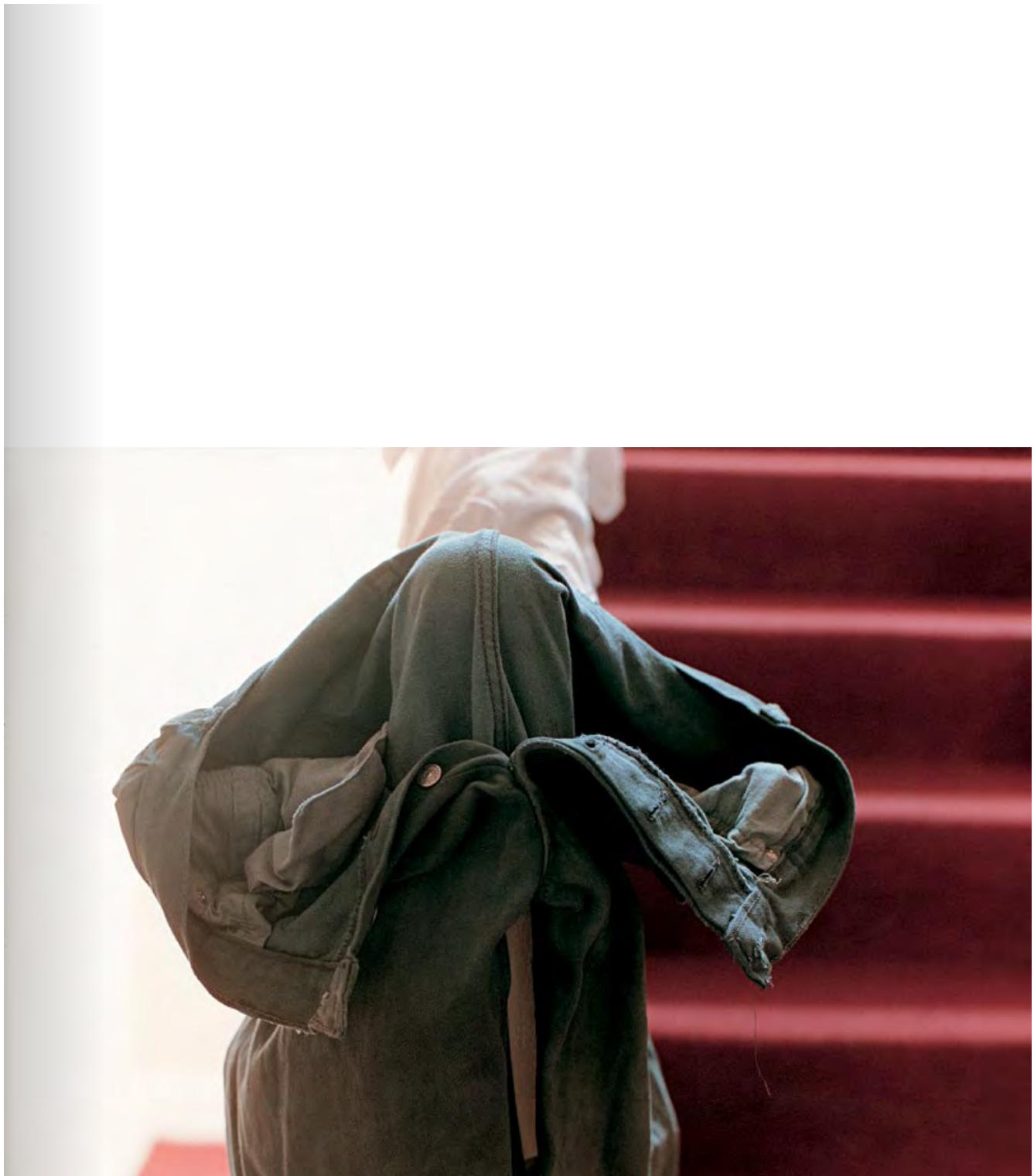
CAPTIONS p. 47: *The Cock (kiss)*, 2002 p. 49: *Grey jeans over a stair post*, 1991 p. 51: *Still life Talbot Rd*, 1991 p. 52: *Lutz & Alex holding cock*, 1992 p. 53: *Lutz, Alex, Suzanne & Christoph on beach (orange)*, 1993 p. 55: *Deer Hirsch*, 1995 p. 57: *Hallenbad Swimming Pool, detail*, 1995 pp. 58-59: *Concorde grid*, 1997 p. 60: *Blushes #3*, 2000 p. 61: *I don't want to get over you*, 2000 p. 63: *Anders pulling splinter from his foot*, 2004 p. 64: *Venus transit*, 2004 p. 65: *paper drop*, 2001 p. 67: *Silver 50*, 2008 p. 68: *Lighter, Red II*, 2008 p. 69: p. 73: *Lampedusa*, 2008.



« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.



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*Jeans cinza sobre corrimão, 1991*

« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.

ZUM



Natureza-morta, estrada Talbot, 1991

« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.

Zum

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Lutz & Alex  
segurando pau,  
1992

« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.

ZUM

Lutz, Alex,  
Suzanne &  
Christoph na  
praia (laranja),  
1993





Veado, 1995

« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.

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Piscina coberta,  
detalhe, 1995



« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.



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« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.



*Concorde (grid)*, 1997

« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.



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Borrões 3, 2000

« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.

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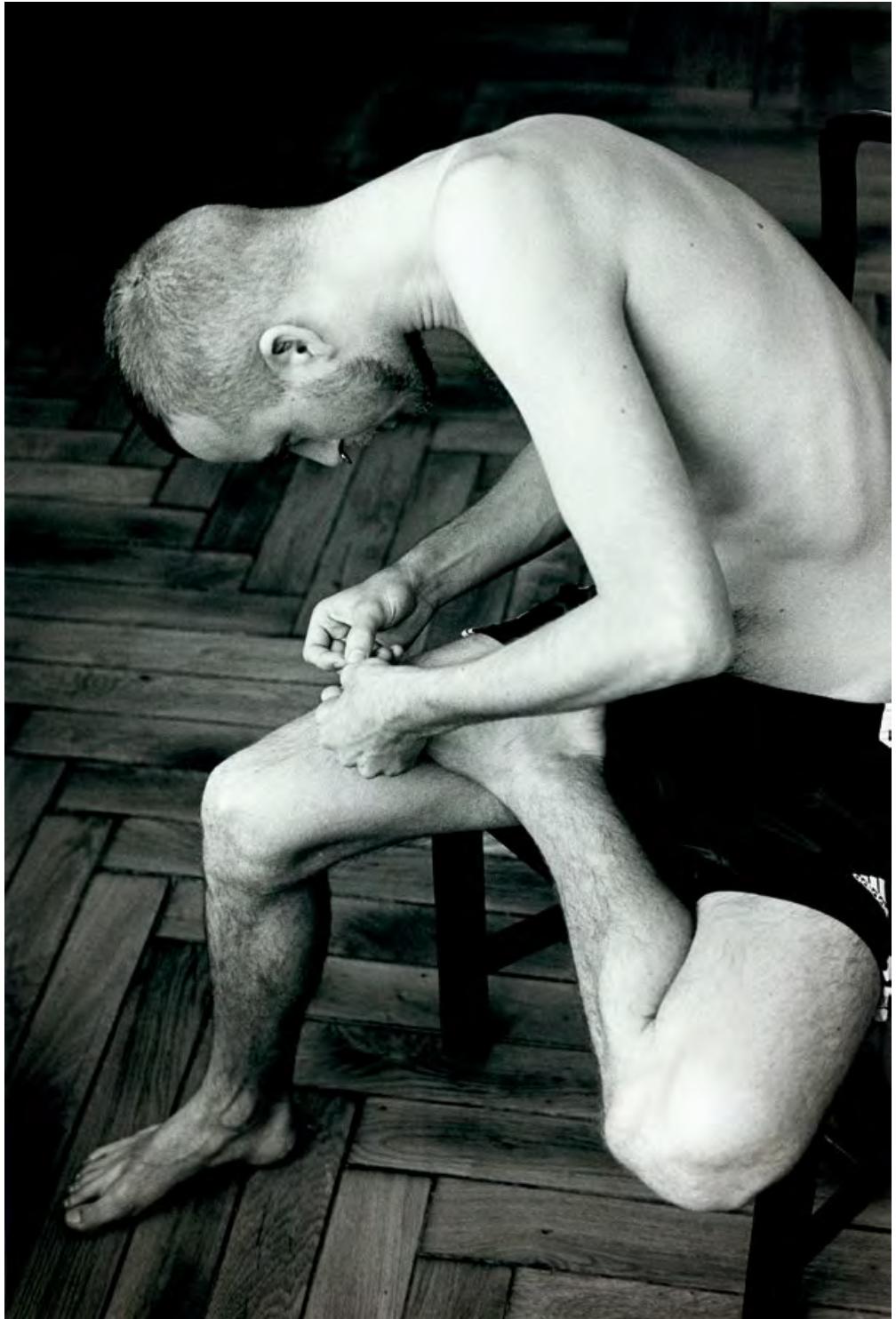
*Eu não quero esquecer você*, 2000

« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.

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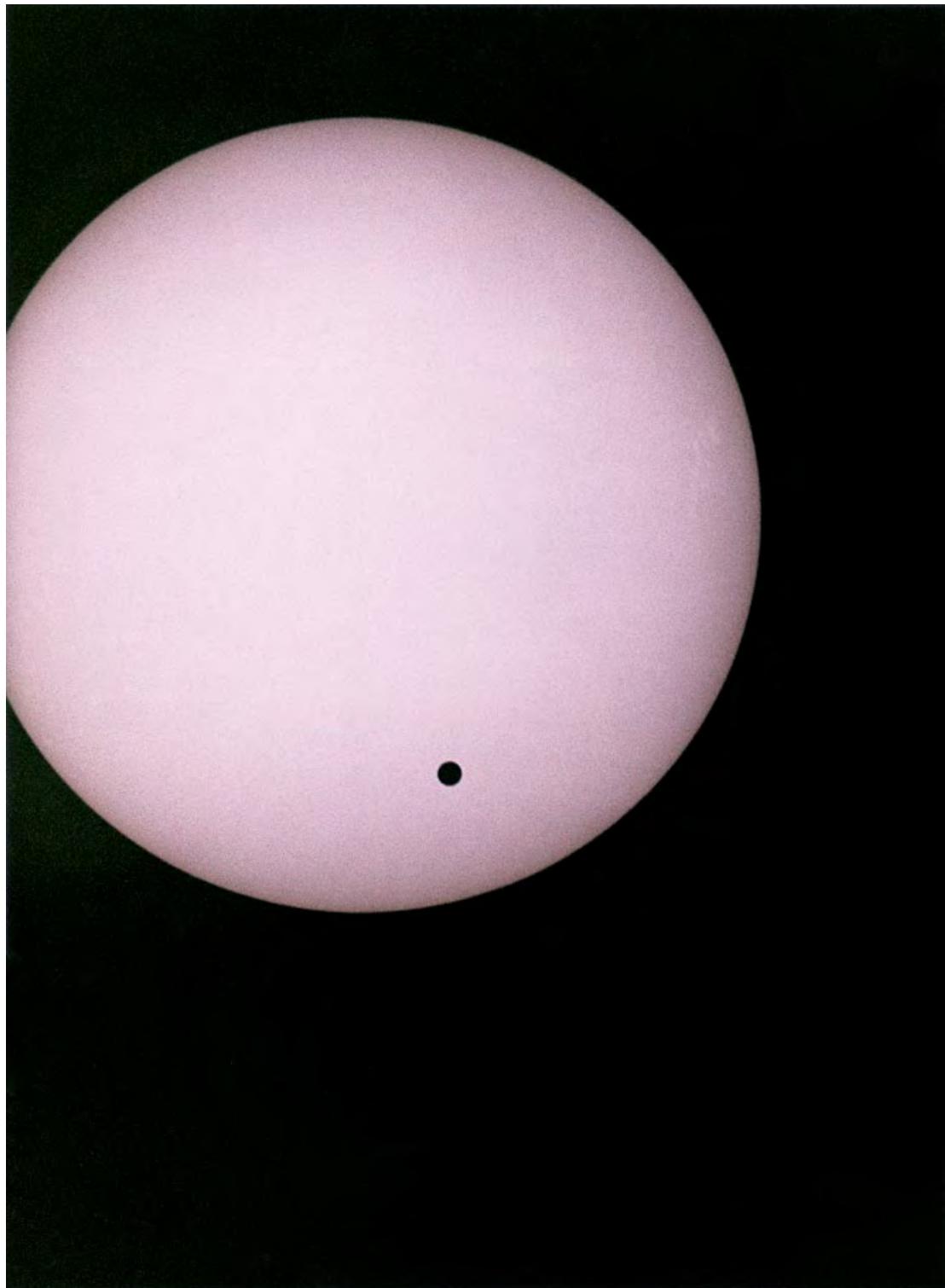
*Anders tirando  
farpa do pé*, 2004



« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.

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Trânsito de  
Vénus, 2004

« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.

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Papel pendurado, 2001



« A forma da liberdade», ZUM , May, 2018.



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Prata 50,  
2006



Lin, Aimee. « Wolfgang Tillmans, What's on during Art Basel Hong Kong Shanzhai special », *ArtReview Asia*, 2018.

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**Wolfgang Tillmans**  
**What's on during Art Basel Hong Kong**  
**Shanzhai special**

## Wolfgang Tillmans

### On the limits of seeing in a high-definition world

**ARTREVIEW ASIA** Do you feel that your work is received differently in Asia than it is in Europe?

**WOLFGANG TILLMANS** During interviews with Japanese critics in the early to mid-1990s, I noticed that they picked out different and deeper meanings in my work. While Western writers were more interested in the social narrative of clubbing or youth culture, the Japanese accessed my work on a more spiritual level. They were concerned with different states of being and the interplay, or the suspense, between chance and control in my work. That we are all 'in-between' is at the heart of what I do. The subject matter is only a means of talking about those overarching philosophical concerns.

**ARA** Your work quickly gained a reputation in Japan, but it took much longer for a show to happen in China.

**WT** I'm a latecomer to Hong Kong and China, because I've only shown there once before, as part of a group show at Leo Xu in Shanghai [in 2012]. I've only been to China twice.

I'm fascinated by how China is, of course, connected via land to Europe: Japan is an island, but you can take the train to China. I've always been interested in borders and limits, and the question of when you notice a change. Taking the superficial view, you would think that Europeans and Chinese are very different. But when you look at that shift gradually – you go from Europe to Iran, then to Afghanistan, and you're neighbouring China – you see that everything is transitional. It's not clean-cut.

We are not as different as we are often taught to think we are. That is what I realised again and again in my relationship with Asia. That Europe and Asia are much closer than we think. Because I am a photographer primarily, there's the assumption that this needs to show in the work or in the subject matter, but I'm not sure that the photographs I take in Asia are really *about* Asia.

**ARA** In the catalogue for your Hong Kong exhibition you have reproduced an email conversation with a printing company you contacted in response to a spam email. How did that dialogue start?

**WT** It was just by chance. The email caught my eye because it was so unsophisticated and

innocent. I thought that, rather than malicious phishers, these might be real people. So I wrote back, and their response was quite touching. They explained they were young and sending out random emails to find customers for their printing business. We think of it as spam, but it is no different than a leaflet through the letterbox. They really were trying to find clients, but I naturally assumed that it was some terrible virus or phishing scam.

**ARA** Why did you want to include this in the catalogue? It's a very beautiful story, very funny, even flirty.

**WT** I see this catalogue as an artist's book. I like to explore different materialities in books, different ways of thinking. It's not just a representation of images, it's a book of poetry. When I was laying out the book, I thought of it as writing. I can't tell you the story in words, but I feel it in the sequence of pictures. The book is about language, but not necessarily a verbal or literary language. Text is included in my recent pictures, including the works exhibited in this show.

And I considered this exchange with [the printer] Klaus as a kind of concrete poetry.

**ARA** The conversation reminded me of Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* [1976]. It's about two inmates, a political prisoner and a thief, and in each chapter one of the guys tells the story of a film they've seen.

**WT** I never understood myself as speaking only through photography. I feel like I can say almost everything I want to with photography, and I still haven't got tired of it, but on the other hand it is only one medium. More and more, I realise that language is something I care about and have developed more as a medium in the shape of interviews and lectures. The lectures are like 80-minute performances, with language, pictures and silence. This performative element moved into video and finally back into music. Music is a lot about words being spoken and sung.

**ARA** The exhibition at David Zwirner's Hong Kong space will include images of Shenzhen, Macau and Hong Kong, all of which are political and geographical borders inside China. I'm curious about why you chose to photograph those places.

**WT** The Macau picture is from 1993, which is the first time I was in Macau and the last time I was in Hong Kong, so there's been 25 years between my two visits. Back then I wanted to see the border with China. I'm interested in understanding the difference across a border when the earth – the ground, the matter – is the same. I never took borders for granted, and I don't necessarily want to tear them down, but I do want to understand them in their material reality. To feel them.

Clothes also interest me, this thin layer of fabric that conceals plain human bodies that are pretty much the same. The putting on of clothes changes so much. A uniform creates authority and distance, which is in a way ridiculous, because it's just a piece of fabric, it's nothing. A pair of ripped jeans is seen by a parent as something that should be thrown away, and by a teenager as the most beloved piece of clothing.

**ARA** Clothes are an artificial border against your natural body.

**WT** Yes. I acknowledge that there are borders between people, language and races. But I think that by looking at them, touching them, smelling them, feeling them, you can also see them for what they are. Strangely, that's the visible medium of photography. It's not a scientific way of looking deeper, but it does put me into situations where I can explore those limits, whether that's being at a border or looking through an extremely large telescope. I spent a weekend in Chile at an observatory, looking at the border of the visible.

**ARA** The far end of the universe.

**WT** Astronomy is located at the limit. Can I see something there? Is that a detail or is it just noise in the camera sensor? By going to the limits, to the borders, I find comfort in being in-between. I always felt held in-between the infinite smallness of subatomic space and the infinite largeness of the cosmos. It gives me comfort to feel infinity.

**ARA** How does that experience, that feeling, relate to your high-resolution digital photographs, which are printed at a very large scale? Those images are so massive, contain so much detailed visual information, that they are overwhelming.

WT I wasn't originally interested in super-sharp, large format film, because I wanted my photographs to describe how it feels to look through my eyes. For that, 100 ASA 35mm film is close enough to how I feel things look. But since 1995 I have also shown very large photographs, the largest of which is called *Wake* [2001], recently shown at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin [the inkjet print is 545 × 807 cm]. Those pictures were made with 35mm negatives, but in 2009 I started to work with a high-resolution digital camera. Suddenly I found myself with an instrument in my hand that was as powerful as a large-format camera. It took me three years to learn how to speak with this new language. By 2012, the whole world had become high-definition. Being able to zoom in on a huge print, and still see detail after detail, is how the world feels now, through my eyes. I'm grateful that I was able to make that development from film to high-resolution digital, because it opened up a new language in the history of art.

One of the pictures, included in the Hong Kong exhibition, showing the texture of wood and an onion [*Sections*, 2017], is of such shocking clarity that you find yourself facing an idea of infinity. These pictures contain more information than you can ever remember. Only these large-format prints are able to display the full range of detail, colour and scale, and so digital has actually made the objects almost *more* unique. The object can only be experienced in the full depth of its presence and its material reality in that room at that time.

ARA This material reality is only accessible through the picture. The eyes can't process so much information in one go.

WT I find that miraculous. There's something deeply philosophical in having to learn to let go of information. It's an analogy for the information age, and the challenge of valuing things at the same time as being prepared to let them go. To understand everything as the same, and yet to decide that some things are more valuable than others. I choose to value certain things, and at the same time to understand that everything is materially equal, if we accept that things are infinite. That's a strange opposite.

ARA Much of your new work, specifically the *Neue Welt* series [2009–13], is made while travelling. You've said that you're very conscious of your status as an outsider when taking these pictures, so how do you make them relevant to your own world and your own practice?

WT It's a huge challenge, and much of what we've talked about is relevant to the *Neue Welt* series: learning a new language, learning a new subject.

ARA What is the connection between yourself and the scene you've captured?

WT The main thing is to understand desire. The desire to possess, the desire to own or to control, the desire to interpret: they all make for bad art. Only when I look without this possessive desire is there an understanding or a connection between myself and the subject. The camera is something that I put between myself and the subject; it is not a tool for possession or acquisition, but a recorder of what my mind sees.

Desire for beauty or for a person or for longing can, in itself, be a beautiful thing. The moment your art makes a claim to control, or claims sovereignty of interpretation, then it's just ugly. But if you are genuinely interested in something, it is difficult to go wrong. Your art is only as interesting as your thoughts about the world. If you have a boring mind, if you're not interested in the world, then you can't see anything interesting in it. Your pictures would only talk about the desire to see something, without actually seeing it. I find science and news photography inspiring because the takers are really *interested* in what they're looking at. They're not interested in being seen to look at something, but they are interested in looking at something. That's the danger of our time: that people are only interested in being seen as being interested. People taking pictures because they want to be seen taking pictures.

ARA Your most celebrated portraits are of people that you are familiar with, with whom you have a relationship. But *Neue Welt* includes photos of strangers, and I'm curious about how that feels. You're not a photojournalist, and so I wonder if that brings its own pressures.

WT I can't answer this straightforwardly because it really is very difficult to overcome or go beyond the circumstances I described: this possessive desire to capture, to own, to grab. A photograph, like other artworks, speaks very clearly about the intentions behind its making. When the intention is just to capture an exotic person, it's not interesting; when there are two strangers looking at each other without trust, affection or interest, then that is all you get in the picture. I'm not interested in a picture of misunderstanding. In the exhibition in Hong Kong, there are three portraits of strangers. Two took place in the few minutes after the total eclipse in Illinois, and there was maybe this shared experience that connected people.

ARA How did you approach the subjects?

WT For the portrait of a young woman in Kinshasa, Congo [*Patricia*, 2018], I came twice to her shop. It took some courage to ask if I could take her portrait. I needed to know that I wasn't intruding, that she was willing to give me her picture. You have to be given a picture. I don't take a portrait, I receive a portrait. It's only what

people are prepared to give you that you can capture. This cannot happen five times a day. Maybe five times a year; for me it's a very rare thing. I am respectful of this. If you want more, it *looks* like you want more. It's the same with a still life: it is only when I'm really interested in the objects that a good still life happens.

In a way, art is so easy. All you have to do is be honest and see what you're really interested in. As a young artist you think that your desire to express yourself is special, but among artists it is of course not special. The art is to *hide* your desire to express yourself. That is the single least interesting thing about yourself. We all want to look good, we all want to express ourselves, we all want to be unique, but what are you actually interested in other than yourself?

ARA Why did you decide to bring the 25-year-old images that you took on your last visit to Hong Kong back to life for this exhibition? And what did those images mean to you?

WT They were alive already. The photographs were first published in a book by Taschen [*Wolfgang Tillmans, 1995*], which included three pictures from Hong Kong. They were a kind of symbol, a placeholder for something I didn't understand. *Hong Kong TV Reporter* (1993) was a placeholder for the many situations that seemed to me staged and absurd, narratives I could never understand. My work up to that point had described communities that I felt close to. So these situations that are so intense and super-specific – the TV reporter in the meat market or the Filipino housemaids [*Hong Kong, Filipinas on street*, 1993] – were very strange. All I could do was show them as a fascination; as something that I had no power to interpret. I had nothing to say.

ARA But these things drew your attention. Why did you take the photo of the same subject 25 years later?

WT I'm very happy about the new picture [*Playing Cards, Hong Kong*, 2018]. Even though it's this very specific situation in Hong Kong, it really speaks about playing cards: this all-ages activity. The gestures of the hands and the depiction of details – the distribution of colours and fabrics – are almost mannerist. Artists have always understood the moment of play as a metaphor for human activity. A portrait is given but a scene from life has to be taken. And at some point you need the courage to take a picture, you know? Life plays by itself, and you have to recognise that as an artist. When you observe that moment, you have to do something with it. It's as simple as that. But that moment cannot be forced. ara

An exhibition of work by Wolfgang Tillmans can be seen at David Zwirner Hong Kong from 26 March through 12 May

Lin, Aimee. « Wolfgang Tillmans, What's on during Art Basel Hong Kong Shanzhai special », *ArtReview Asia*, 2018.

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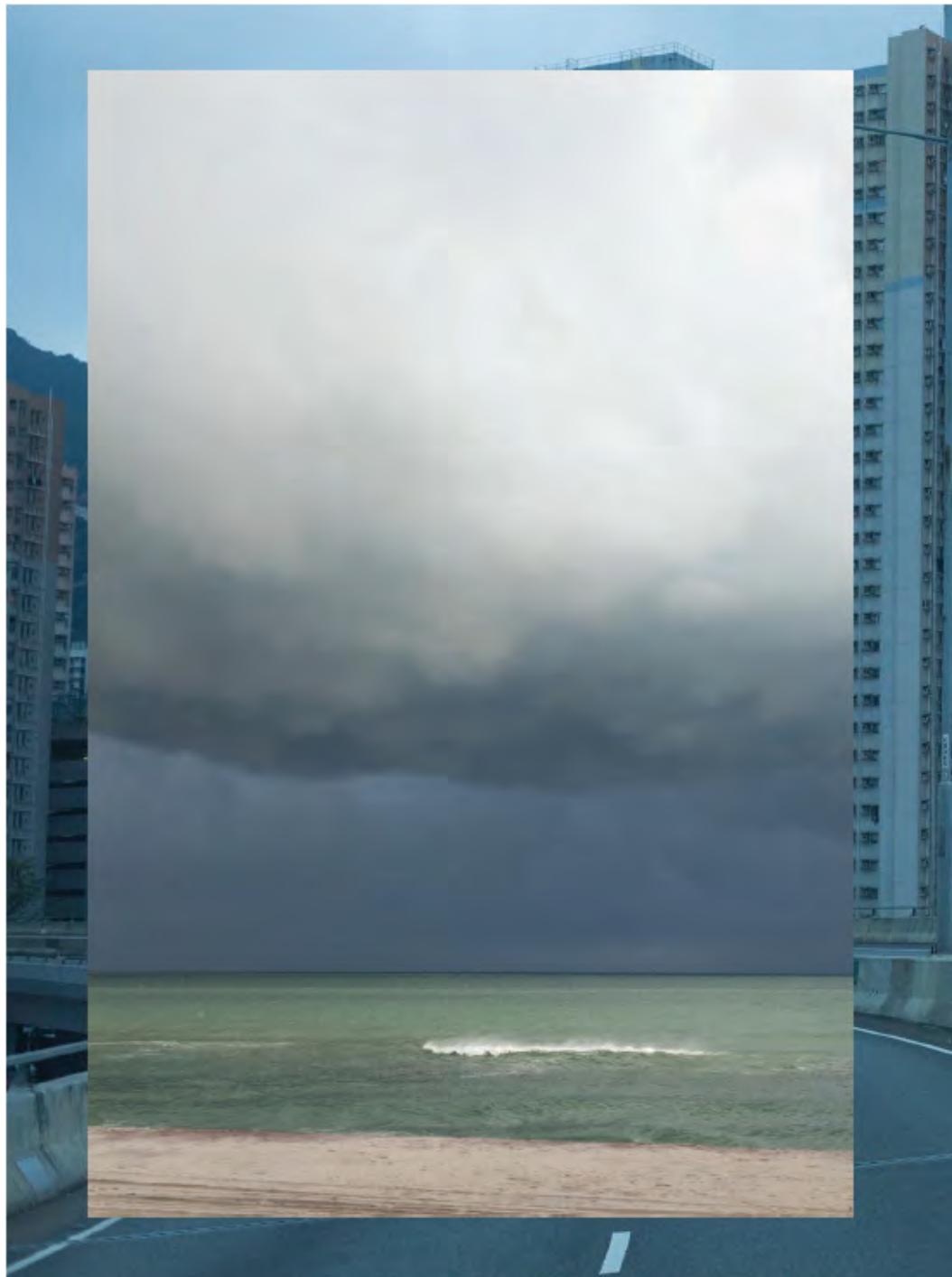
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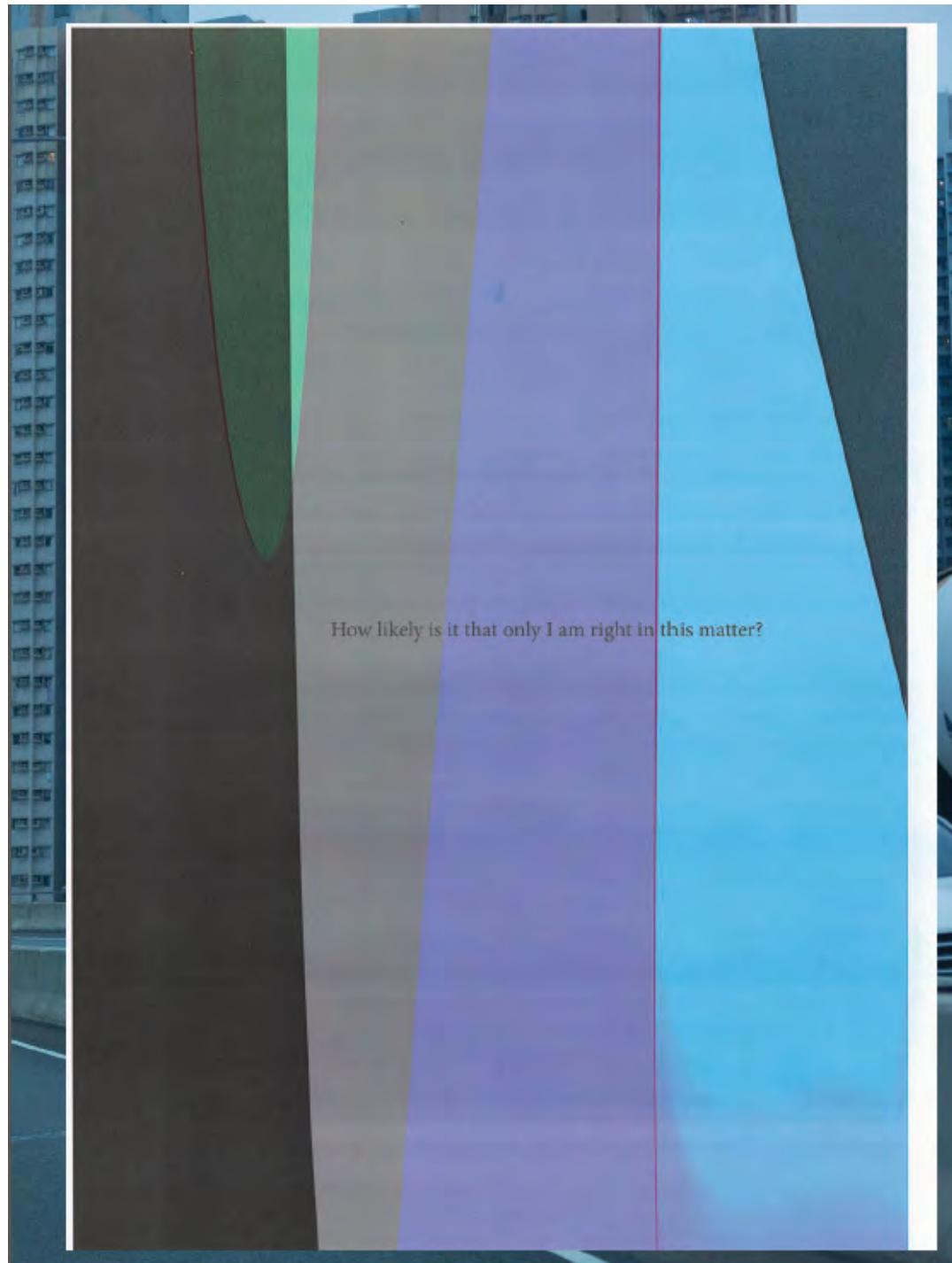


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# ARTFORUM



## WOLFGANG TILLMANS

WOLFGANG TILLMANS IS AN ARTIST BASED IN BERLIN AND LONDON. IN 2017, HE HAD SURVEY EXHIBITIONS AT FONDATION BEYELER, BASEL, AND TATE MODERN, LONDON. FORTHCOMING SOLO EXHIBITIONS INCLUDE A TRAVELING SURVEY THAT WILL OPEN IN JANUARY 2018 AT MUSÉE NATIONAL D'ART CONTEMPORAIN ET MULTIMÉDIAS, KINSHASA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO, AND TOUR SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA.

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**1**  
**HÉLIO OTICICA (WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, NEW YORK; CURATED BY LYNN ZELEVANSKY, ELISABETH SUSSMAN, JAMES RONDEAU, AND DONNA DE SALVO WITH ANNA KATHERINE BRODBECK)** Before seeing the Whitney's retrospective I had thought that I knew a lot about Hélio Oiticica. However, this exhibition's vibrancy took me by surprise. The galleries were brimming with the energy of a multigenerational audience taking in the different facets of the artist's work, sensitively displayed and ranging from Concrete to Conceptual to participatory art to Happenings.

Co-organized with the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, and the Art Institute of Chicago.

**2**  
**KERRY JAMES MARSHALL (MET BREUER, NEW YORK; CURATED BY IAN ALTEVEER, HELEN MOLESWORTH, AND DIETER ROELSTRAEDE)** Kerry James Marshall's application of paint—layered on, and at times encroaching on the beings in his paintings—is a perfect example of form following function. The anatomical complexity of the depiction of the deer in *The Land That Time Forgot*, 1992, is astounding. The painter's translation of the physical weight of the slain animal into psychological weight is heart-wrenching.

Co-organized with the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.



**3**  
**ALBERTO GIACOMETTI (TATE MODERN, LONDON; CURATED BY FRANCES MORRIS AND CATHERINE GRENIER WITH LEONA FRITSCH, ASSISTED BY MATHILDE LECUYER)** This retrospective reignited my enthusiasm for Giacometti's work. The show was super-impressive in its depth, ambition, and comprehensiveness. The deliberate narrowing-down of an artist's palette of forms and shapes has rarely allowed for more eloquence than in Giacometti's case.

Co-organized with the Fondation Alberto et Annette Giacometti, Paris.



**1**, Hélio Oiticica, *Tropicália*, 1966-67, plants, sand, birds, poems by Roberta Camila Saigado on bricks, tiles, vinyl. Installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2017. Photo: Wolfgang Tillmans. **2**, Kerry James Marshall, *The Land That Time Forgot* (detail), 1992, acrylic and collage on canvas, 97 x 75". Photo: Wolfgang Tillmans. **3**, Alberto Giacometti, *The Dog*, 1951, bronze, 18 x 39 x 6 1/4". Photo: Wolfgang Tillmans. **4**, Alexandra Bircken, *Storm*, 2013, motorcycle suit, cotton and felt stuffing, 51 1/4 x 20 1/2 x 20 1/4". Photo: Wolfgang Tillmans. **5**, View of "Viron Erol Vert: Born in the Purple," 2017, Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien, Berlin. Photo: Eric Tschernew.



**4**  
**ALEXANDRA BIRCKEN (KUNSTVEREIN HANNOVER; CURATED BY KATHLEEN RAHN)** Birken creates an intersection between two-dimensional picture/fabric objects and uncomfortably real bodily sculptures, leaving the viewer disarmed in the best possible sense.

Co-organized with Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany, and the Centre d'art contemporain d'Ivry, France, where it is on view through December 17.

**5**  
**VIRON EROL VERT (KUNSTRAUM KREUZBERG/BETHANIEN, BERLIN)** Künstlerhaus Bethanien (now Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien) has for decades been a venue known for the wide-ranging scope of its program. This summer, Viron Erol Vert created an ambitious exhibition of installations and individual works that was a proud continuation of this tradition. Drawing from a personal multicultural history, the Berlin- and Istanbul-based artist explores linguistic and cultural gestures, traditions, and differences, with a focus on the cosmopolitan capital on the Bosphorus.

# ARTFORUM

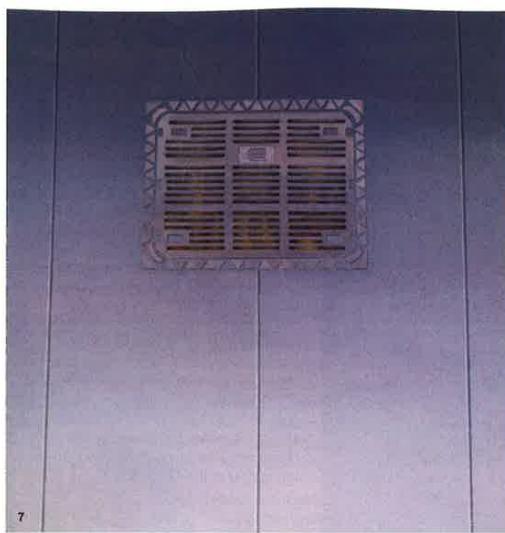
Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

6

**"THE WHITE SHADOW" (PELES EMPIRE, BERLIN)** Peles Empire is a nonprofit exhibition venue in London, Los Angeles, and, more recently, Berlin centered around artists Katharina Stoever and Barbara Wolff. Not shy about forging a space for their curatorial practice in the booming property markets of the aforementioned cities, Stoever and Wolff have managed to keep the spirit of a Transylvanian Eastern European gallery and faux palace alive. In this three-person exhibition, sculptural offerings were discomfitingly juxtaposed. Benedicte Gyldenstierne Sehested's slumped figures joined Mariechen Danz's pseudosphere in confronting two fantastical "beings" from the mind of Mark Barker. Together, these works, a group of objects made in uncertain times, created an atmosphere of unease.



6



7

**THOMAS EGGERER (PETZEL, NEW YORK)** For his sixth solo show in New York, Eggerer shifted his focus to a mainstay of the visual experience of urban life: the manhole. Cast-iron covers, the central motif of each of the paintings in this exhibition, are the entrances to an endless, rhizomatic underground system of tunnels and pipes. Viewers were witness to a number of fictional social encounters, presumably taking place during the summer, on the city's pavements. Known previously for virtually two-dimensional renderings of the human body, Eggerer departed here to a nearly naturalist painting style.



8

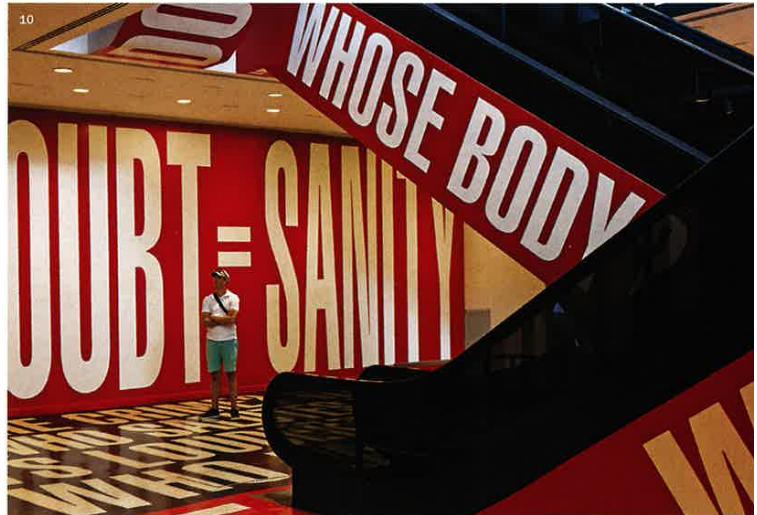
**JAMIE HAWKESWORTH (HUIS MARSEILLE, MUSEUM VOOR FOTOGRAFIE, AMSTERDAM; CURATED BY NANDA VAN DEN BERG)** In this major solo exhibition we see an eloquent documentarian's voice emerge. The warmth of Hawkesworth's C-prints speaks of the generosity the photographer brings to his subject matter. Far from the occasionally finger-pointing idiom of his countryman Martin Parr, and bypassing the detached gaze of some contemporary American and German photographers, Hawkesworth's pictures feel genuinely refreshing.  
*On view through December 3.*

**"KITCHEN MIDDEN" (GRIFFIN ART PROJECTS, VANCOUVER; CURATED BY ANNE LOW AND GARETH MOORE)** Group shows featuring more than fifty artists are often hard going—fun, yes, but difficult to make sense of. Located in a venue on the outskirts of Vancouver, Low and Moore's exhibition was a stimulating overload of sculptural and pictorial objects, all dealing with the kitchen, or the idea of it. The artists were local, and the variety of voices was a reminder of the simultaneity of artistic production. It gave me a sense of how we are connected not only in time but also through our concerns.



9

**BARBARA KRUGER (HIRSHHORN MUSEUM AND SCULPTURE GARDEN, WASHINGTON, DC; CURATED BY MELISSA HO)** Of the many artists who emerged in the 1980s, Barbara Kruger has a particular relevance to me, largely because of her architectural text/image installations. Positioned right on the National Mall, her words are beautiful examples of her political poetry as well as a sign of the independence of the Smithsonian, which is giving a stage to voices of doubt in a time when caution and skepticism, in many parts of the world, are denounced as treason. □



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## Wolfgang Tillmans

FONDATION BEYELER, BASEL  
Maja Naef

FOR A PREVIOUS EXHIBITION at the Fondation Beyeler in 2014, Wolfgang Tillmans was invited to pair his own pictures with works from the museum's collection. The artist showed two large, seemingly abstract landscape-format pieces—*Ostgut Freischwimmer*, left, and *Ostgut Freischwimmer*, right, both 2004—alongside works by Picasso, Matisse, and Max Ernst. That installation was, in a sense, a precursor to Tillmans's vast new survey at the same institution: Both asked how and why his practice might respond to an architectonic and institutional setting built on modernist claims for the autonomy of the work of art. If the earlier exhibition allowed him to challenge the individuality of the artwork—and the medium specificity of photography and painting—by setting his pictures in dialogue with those of acclaimed modern masters, the

more recent show, by contrast, seeks to address the same challenge through a retrospective of his own work. That its opening coincided with the last day of the Beyeler's Monet exhibition only underscored how "casual" his presentation is, if at first sight considerably less experimental than his installations at Galerie Buchholz in Berlin in 2016 or Tate Modern in London earlier this year.

The foyer contains three works from different groups and periods, which together function as an introduction to the programmatic ambitions of the exhibition as a whole. In the large photograph *unscharfer Rückenakt* (Out-of-Focus Nude Back), 1994, the slightly blurred contours of the naked male body possess a painterly quality reminiscent of Gerhard Richter's works; it is only at second glance that a vulnerability evoking life at the margins of conventional society becomes evident in this image of a kneeling man with dirty feet, who is seen from above and contained in a narrow pictorial space. The small photograph *Night Jam*, 2013, is a study in color contrast, depicting gently creased strips of variously hued photographic paper arranged on top of a paper guillotine, bringing to mind series such as "Lighter," 2005—, for which Tillmans turns flat pictures into three-dimensional objects by bending, folding, or creasing photographic prints and exhibiting them in Plexiglas boxes; or the famous "paper drops," 2001–, for which he takes pictures of photographic paper gently furled into drop-like forms. The third work in this opening ensemble, *ceremony*, 2007, shows a performance space, presumably a theater. The photograph, a blown-up scan of a black-and-white photocopy of a color photograph, is permeated by a ghostly white. Instead of replicating an image, the process of copying here bleaches out the world. Together, these three pictures create an allegory of photography and how it opens onto the practices of painting, sculpture, and performance.

These attempts to reach beyond photography as such laid the groundwork for Tillmans's compelling engagement with the exhibition space in what followed. Across twelve rooms, some two hundred photographic images from 1986 to the present are brought together, grouped either by series or loosely by theme. The first rooms speak directly to the museological setting, featuring various genres of European art: portraits, still lifes, landscapes, and drapery studies of articles of clothing casually thrown on top of one another. Tillmans's portraits in particular stand out; they are direct and intimate, more gifts of friendship than documentary images or records of their subjects. If the artist has become well known for these snapshots of friends, passersby, and acquaintances, here their familiarity and utter singularity are amplified, in stark contrast to, say, Conceptual photography's use of typology, seriality, and repetition. Tillmans's is an art of the specific, never the generic. At the same time, however, traditional artistic genres evidently remain viable categories for articulating how individuals, social interactions, spatial settings, and objects offer different perspectives on a singular yet multifaceted world.

In other words, Tillmans's images are never simply *bis*: They are historically and formally mediated. Let's look again at one of his portraits, albeit an atypical one: *Wilhelm Leibl painting*, 2002, is a black-and-white shot of a nineteenth-century oil painting by the eponymous artist, in which a boy sits on a chair looking somewhat anxious, as if he were about to slide off it. Tillmans's cropped photograph is decentered and includes part of the original picture's frame, undoing its traditional stabilizing function. Indeed, Tillmans's own pictures are often bordered by white strips above or below the image, or (sometimes) down just one side. These white bars articulate the transitions between picture and wall, allowing

Opposite page: Wolfgang Tillmans, *Ostgut Freischwimmer*, left, 2004, ink-jet print, 7' 11 1/4" × 20' 2 1/4". This page, below: View of "Wolfgang Tillmans," 2017, Fondation Beyeler, Basel. Photo: Mark Niedermann. Right, top and bottom: Two stills from Powell's 2017 video *Freezer*, directed by Wolfgang Tillmans. Right, center: Wolfgang Tillmans, *Non-toxic Foam*, 2017, two-channel HD video, color, sound, 3 minutes 54 seconds.



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the photographs to stand on their own while at the same time relating them to their architectural support. White is, however, not only a framing or fixing element: It also repeatedly appears as a sign of overexposure, as in the aforementioned *ceremony* or the early studio photograph *o.M.*, from 1997. Many of the objects Tillmans photographs are also white, and can—like the crumpled T-shirt in *Sportflecken* (*Sport Stains*), 1996—be said to refer to the gallery's white walls.

But Tillmans also uses the wall as a screen for bringing together political images from various times and places inside the contemporary space of the exhibition. With subjects ranging from an LGBT protest in Berlin in 2006 to the US antiracism movement of the past few years, these works include several examples of the political activism for which Tillmans has become widely known since his anti-Brexit poster campaign of 2016. Here, however, the context of

## Tillmans's is an art of the specific, never the generic.

the exhibition space again changes their emphasis. Take the picture of the palm of a raised hand titled *Black Lives Matter Protest, Union Square, b*, 2014, for example. When a detail of this image was reproduced on the cover of *Artforum* in March of this year, it was clearly a signal of resistance, but on the walls of the Beyeler, it above all tells the viewer to keep his distance, to pause for a moment.

To these pictures, Tillmans has added a small image of a pile of old newspapers (*Zeitungsstapel* [Pile of Newspapers], 1999). The simultaneity of nonsimultaneous images directs the gaze toward specific historical events, but then draws it away, to the mode of display itself—creating a palpable tension between the pathos of the depicted events

and the purity of the white cube. In *Silvio (U-Bahn)*, 1992, a clock at the center of the picture illuminates the scene like a pale moon floating above a landscape from the distant past; the photograph, seemingly bathed in red light, shows the temporary memorial built in a Berlin subway station in 1992 for the victim of a neo-Nazi murder. Tillmans includes this picture twice in the arrangement of images here—in two formats, one larger and one smaller—positioning it so that the strip lights in the underground passageway form a kind of horizon line, thereby changing the relationship of the entire installation to the museum wall.

In 1989, the critic Jean-François Chevrier remarked that the most important issue in regard to photography's status as art was not to raise the medium to the rank of painting but rather to find a form that can “reactivate a thinking based on fragments, openness, and contradiction, not the utopia of comprehensiveness or systematic order.” This would mean a more intense experience for the viewer, produced by the aesthetic distance between her and the photographic image (which allows a one-on-one relationship very different from flicking through pictures in books or magazines). Along such lines, Tillmans's exhibition insists on a particular kind of gaze that the artist has described as “open and fearless.” But while demanding the viewer trace a startling multiplicity of patterns and relationships, this dynamic way of looking is riven by sudden interruptions, moments when Tillmans's works use the gallery setting itself to confront the viewer as individual images that insist on being considered on their own terms.

Take, for example, *Chaos cup*, 1997, an unassuming picture of a white cup filled with tea. Here, it is hung between two doorways, one of them connecting two galleries, the other a photographic close-up of an entrance in *Schlüssel* (Keys), 2002, in which a cluster of keys hangs

from a magnet stuck to the lock of an old white door. From a distance, the dark liquid in *Chaos cup* appears as a black sphere against a white background. On closer inspection, however, the image reveals itself to be dense with meaning: a metaphor for contingency. The tea has apparently been left standing for some time, and a thin membrane has formed on its surface that looks at first like a cracked and fissured section of the earth's crust photographed from space. Perhaps, though, we can also see a tree reflected in this skin covering the tea, maybe even a face? Or gazing into the vessel might bring to mind the dark cup of coffee in Jean-Luc Godard's 1967 film *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, where the action of stirring sugar into the liquid accompanies the circular course of the dialogue itself, determining its length and cohering into an emblem of the mind dissolving into the world of things. But the porous and reflective surface of the tea also recalls the film, in various senses, through which the photographed world is rendered, which in Tillmans's work often turns opaque, either completely black or completely white—or even gray, orange, or turquoise, as with the monochrome drips of chemical residue in the “Silver” series, 1998–2015. What these pictures show is something quite different from a “comprehensive order.” They offer instead—as Chevrier puts it—a fragmentary, open-ended worldview given structure through movement and transformation but also by singularity: the unrepeatable power of each picture as a moment of difference. □

“Wolfgang Tillmans” is on view through October 1.

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Translated from German by Nathaniel McBride.

Visit our archive at [artforum.com/print](http://artforum.com/print) for Wolfgang Tillmans's cover feature (March 2017), an interview with Michelle Kuo (September 2012), and other articles about the artist's work.



From left: Wolfgang Tillmans, *unscharfer Rückenakt* (Out-of-Focus Nude Back), 1994, ink-jet print, clips, 72 ½ × 54 ¾". Wolfgang Tillmans, *Night Jam*, 2013, ink-jet print mounted on aluminum, artist's frame, 25 ¾ × 29 ½". Wolfgang Tillmans, *Chaos cup*, 1997, framed C-print, 15 ¼ × 11 ¾".



# expos

## l'objectif d'un regard

Dans une lumineuse rétrospective, la Fondation Beyeler dévoile la grande diversité de l'univers visuel du photographe **Wolfgang Tillmans** et son souci de conjuguer distance et proximité.

**S**ur la pochette de son dernier album, *Blonde*, Frank Ocean, les cheveux teints en vert, dissimule son visage avec sa main d'un mouvement furtif. Très belle dans l'intensité de sa simplicité même, l'image illustre l'art du portrait que déploie le photographe allemand Wolfgang Tillmans, depuis le début des années 1990. Jamais spectaculaires ou guidés par un souci de mise en scène appuyé, ses portraits traduisent sa volonté de « décrire la sensation d'être en vie », plus que celle de sublimer le monde.

L'artiste, né en 1968, a construit sa notoriété – consacrée en 2000 par un Turner Prize – sur cette façon de saisir pleinement, sans artifice apparent, une présence humaine dépouillée de toute autre réalité que celle de sa propre nécessité. En errant dans les lumineuses salles de la Fondation Beyeler à Bâle qui lui consacre une magistrale rétrospective, succédant à celle de la Tate Modern de Londres, cet art du portrait revient aux yeux des visiteurs encore habités par les souvenirs de ses images parues, dans les années 1990, dans le magazine *I-D*.

Mieux que personne, le photographe allemand – vivant aujourd'hui entre Londres et Berlin – a concentré l'esprit d'une époque et d'une jeunesse alternative liée à la scène de la house music. Ses images captaien l'énergie de ses moments partagés avec des clubbeurs, amis ou personnalités (Tilda Swinton, Kate Moss, Isa Genzken, Richard Hamilton...), comme des traces de liens affectifs.

A la fois généreux, dans la manière de commenter son œuvre, et discret dans la façon d'en préserver les mystères de fabrication, le photographe tient à rappeler que ses images ne procèdent jamais d'une stratégie cadenassée. Prises sur le vif, au gré de ses complicités

et de ses humeurs, ses photos ne surgissent pas non plus du hasard ; « tout est réfléchi », reconnaît-il, en laissant entendre que la réflexion s'ancre forcément dans l'expérience, dans un « mélange de hasard et de contrôle, de jeu et de mise en scène ».

Pour autant, rien n'est si simple avec Tillmans, comme en témoigne l'exposition qui dévoile ses autres formes d'intervention : natures mortes, paysages, images abstraites, politiques... Comme le souligne la commissaire de l'exposition, Theodora Vischer, « le spectre de la production photographique de Tillmans est extrêmement large, à la fois sur le plan du contenu et sur le plan technique et formel. La stupéfiante diversité de cet univers visuel échappe à toute identification univoque au sein de la tradition photographique, a fortiori de la tradition picturale, faisant surgir au premier plan tantôt un aspect de son œuvre, tantôt un autre ».

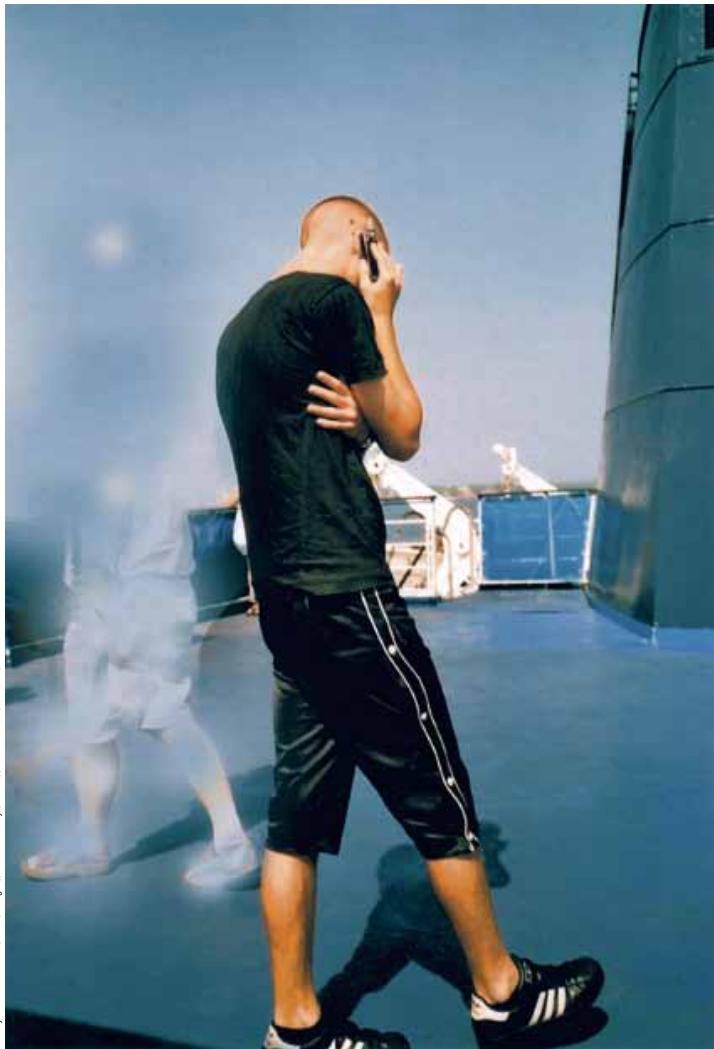
N'importe quel visiteur étranger à son travail sera ainsi surpris par la variation des images de Wolfgang Tillmans, rétif à toute possibilité de réduire un système



courtesy Galerie Buchholz (Berlin/Cologne), Maureen Paley (London), David Zwirner (New York)



courtesy Galerie Buchholz Berlin/Cologne, Maureen Paley (London), David Zwirner (New York)



**Sportflecken,  
1996**  
(à gauche)  
et **Gedser,  
2014**  
de Wolfgang  
Tillmans

esthétique à quelques traits homogènes. Fascinante par l'électisme révélé des images, autant que par la délicatesse d'un accrochage inspiré – ajusté à l'architecture douce et imposante du lieu –, l'exposition joue de cette multiplicité propre à ces deux cents images pleines de corps de jeunes garçons nus autant que de vagins, de fruits ensoleillés que de coques de noix brisées, de mégots de cigarettes que d'épluchures d'orange, d'un kiwi coupé en deux que de peaux à vif, de T-shirts tachés que de nuques de garçons, de drapés suspendus que d'arbres solides, de nuages que de vagues, de bords de mer que d'avions en perdition, de soldats que de manifestants...

Intimes, politiques, abstraites, conceptuelles, figuratives, les images de Tillmans ne sont au fond qu'une traduction élastique du monde visible, d'un réel à la fois frontalement abordé et subtilement déserté. Contempler le monde, c'est autant s'approcher au plus près de la main sèche d'un militant de Black Lives Matter

que de jouer avec les couleurs de figures abstraites. Entre réalité nue d'un corps et projection visuelle d'un rêve.

Eparpillées sur les murs sans organisation logique apparente, en grand format ou minuscules, imprimées sur photocopieuse ou tirées en format argentique, les images de Tillmans se font face dans un chaos maîtrisé. A la première impression d'un vertige plastique indexé à l'impossible appréhension d'une cohérence stylistique, succède vite celle de l'évidence d'un dialogue permanent entre toutes ces images disséminées.

Ce fil, qui relie la plupart d'entre elles à la mesure des rayures qui traversent

quelques images énigmatiques, procède d'un regard que Tillmans qualifie lui-même "d'ouvert et sans peur", ajusté aux situations multiples de la vie. Theodora Vischer parle de "la proximité de celui qui fait partie de ce monde et la distance du regard détaché qui scrute, observe, enregistre, en accordant aux détails secondaires la même attention qu'à ce qui saute aux yeux. C'est précisément cette dualité de proximité et de distance qui constitue la marque spécifique du regard de Tillmans", ajoute-t-elle. Jamais voyeur, jamais complaisant : attentif, ouvert, plein d'amour et de curiosité."

Cet amour et cette curiosité se déploient dans l'intensité calme de ses images où, l'air de rien, vibre la présence des êtres, des objets, des idées, des luttes et des rêves. "Jusqu'aux hommes" : le nom même de Tillmans porte la promesse d'un regard posé sur cette part d'humanité qui résiste à tout ce qui tend à l'effacer. **Jean-Marie Durand**

**"jamais voyeur, jamais complaisant : attentif, ouvert, plein d'amour et de curiosité"**

Theodora Vischer, commissaire de l'exposition

**Wolfgang Tillmans** jusqu'au 1<sup>er</sup> octobre, Fondation Beyeler (Bâle)

## INTERVIEW

*Artist*

Tillmans has installed his own work at the Beyeler



# 'It's the great album tracks that didn't become singles'

The Fondation Beyeler picked a versatile artist for its first major photography exhibition. German-born Wolfgang Tillmans has tested the medium over his career since the 1990s, applying photography to art-historical genres such as still-lives, landscapes and abstraction. He has experimented with techniques, from using photocopiers to forging the camera entirely and creating chemical reactions directly on paper. He has also always been directly involved in the installation of his work for exhibitions, hanging different images together to draw connections and comparisons. "The photographs do not all hang at the same height next to one another, but seem to be installed in a loose configuration on a wall: large and small, figurative and abstract, unframed and framed," says Theodora Vischer, the show's curator. It is probably because of this building of relationships that Tillmans refers to his various photographic series as "families". And at the Beyeler (until 1 October), we get to join the reunion.

**Wolfgang Tillmans reveals the ideas behind his Beyeler show—the Basel museum's first photography exhibition.**

By Helen Stoilas

THE ART NEWSPAPER: You have a very distinct way of presenting your photographs: not chronologically, but by grouping things and drawing connections between them.

WOLFGANG TILLMANS: Yes, it's not all without direction. There are connections and recurring themes and modi operandi. I just didn't approach it 25 years ago [with the aim] to spell everything out in one series after another. It's becoming more and more clear over the years.

There isn't a room only of still-lives. Normally, still-lives have a tendency to cancel each other out—I don't like it in Old Master museums, when in a side room there's nothing but still-lives. At the same time, it is valid to want to look at them and maybe compare them. But I'm actually proud of two [in the Beyeler show]: in the first room, there is a long wall, which has two equal-sized big still-lives on it. They are two of my favourites and they are so within their own sphere that they sit comfortably and strongly together. One is called *Nite Queen* [2013], and the other is called *Osaka Still Life* [2015].

What was it like going back and looking at some of that earlier work for the show?

It was a great pleasure to really look at work that I haven't shown much in the last decade. The Tate Modern show [closed 11 June] is deliberately not a retrospective; it looks at the last ten years or so. But here at the Beyeler, there are works from the 1990s and the early 2000s that I might have shown a lot at the time. For example, the still-life called *Still Home* from 1996 [of discarded pomegranate, orange peel and pistachio shells], in the light of *Astro Crusto* (2012), the lobster shell still-life, suddenly somehow becomes its unknown predecessor. And I literally haven't shown that work since 1998.

So there'll be a lot of surprises. And it's a retrospective that makes do without a lot of the greatest hits, so I think it will be a surprising exhibition for people who know my work well.

So if it's not the greatest hits, is it the B-sides? Maybe that is an analogy too far. It's the great

Continued on p18

TELLMANS: KARIN OERLICH/COURTESY OF MAMMENSEITE

### A SOLID RELATIONSHIP

Wolfgang Tillmans's *Nite Queen* (2013, right) and his *Osaka Still life* (2015) "sit comfortably and strongly together" at the Beyeler show, according to the artist



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF GALLERIE CHANTAL CROUSEL, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND BEYELER FOUNDATION BY DAVID LOMBARDO

# INTERVIEW

## Artist



*[There] is a very new film of sea foam—it's non-toxic, it's natural*

Wolfgang Tillmans:  
In his own words



As well as installing the exhibition, Tillmans has collaborated with the show's curator Theodora Vischer to create a unique book that pairs reproductions of works from throughout his career with his writing and texts from talks and interviews. "I love making books, but I don't want to make redundant museum publications," the artist told us.

After realising a few years ago that if his collection of "untranscribed tapes and cassettes, faxes and emails, unedited texts and interviews" was not catalogued, it could be lost, he hired a researcher to sort through the material. Vischer then selected and edited the texts to create the catalogue "because I have reader's block", Tillman says, although he adds: "Words play an important role in my work. The interviews and the lectures I do, I feel they are actually part of my output and they are a valid medium in my work as an artist. It's just that I can't quite fathom computing all of that, so I'm glad I found ways to let that filter."

But make no mistake—this is not a catalogue raisonné. "It's not complete in any way. There are families and types of work missing," Tillmans says. "But it looks at a good portion of the work that I make and delves in deep and doesn't shy away from making them comparable." H.S.

Continued from p17

album tracks that didn't become singles. When you have a good album, you can only ever have three singles, but what do you do when there are six good songs?

And even though this exhibition has 100% different work from the Tate's, it still excludes so many other great works that I wish I could show. It's a huge exhibition and it's still vastly incomplete.

**Well, you've got to leave something for down the line.**

Yeah, it's really been a great process to look at 30 years of work and to make decisions. It creates connections and ways of looking at other work that would not have been the same without this particular set of decisions.

One thing I was really reminded of was how important it was that I didn't do more of things that worked well; that I never followed the "let's make another one" instinct.

For example, the male nude; you would think that there are more, but actually they are extremely rare, and there's one called *Unscharfer*

From left: Tillmans's *Eleanor-Lutz* (2016), *Leaf for Architects* (2013) and *Crease shiny* (2001)

Rückenakt [1994], an out-of-focus nude of a back, and that is singular and it's tight. And if I had somehow done more, it would have [made it] less special.

Even [with] Concorde, I incubated the project for four years, then I finally did it and then I never touched it again. And that was the right decision. I feel now that there are a lot of unique pictures even though they are part of larger families. For example, the keys on the door with the magnet, that is a unique picture and you immediately remember it when I mention those three words to you.

**And you're showing a video installation in one of the downstairs galleries?**

The downstairs is an exciting part of the exhibition. There is a never-shown-before, 50- or 70-metre-long row of seven Concorde pictures from 1997, so it's marking the 20th anniversary of the book [on the series]. The last seven pages of the book turned purple from the exhausted



chemicals that I used [in printing] and, instead of going full black, it became purple. So this bleak suburb of London became this purple dreamscape in the very last pictures. But because these were unique prints – they were not editions, they were only in the book – the ones that are exhibited are seven enlargements from the unique print and I'm showing [them] here for the first time.

In the adjacent room, there is a 20-minute video and sound programme focusing on a few vocal pieces. And there are two [previously] unseen videos, one of which is for Oscar Powell, who is somebody I'm working with on music. I made a video for a track of his, which is the only piece of music in this programme that isn't mine. And a very new film of sea foam—it's non-toxic, it's natural, just white foam that sometimes happens when algae are being whipped up in the water. And they shake like creatures in the wind.

You know, making a picture or a film of something very general and simple like the sea is very difficult—and over-prescribed and obvious—and to do it anyway is of course the greatest challenge. There is something—excuse the pun—very deep about the sea.

## Mousse Magazine

### CONVERSATIONS

# Wolfgang Tillmans at Fondation Beyeler, Basel

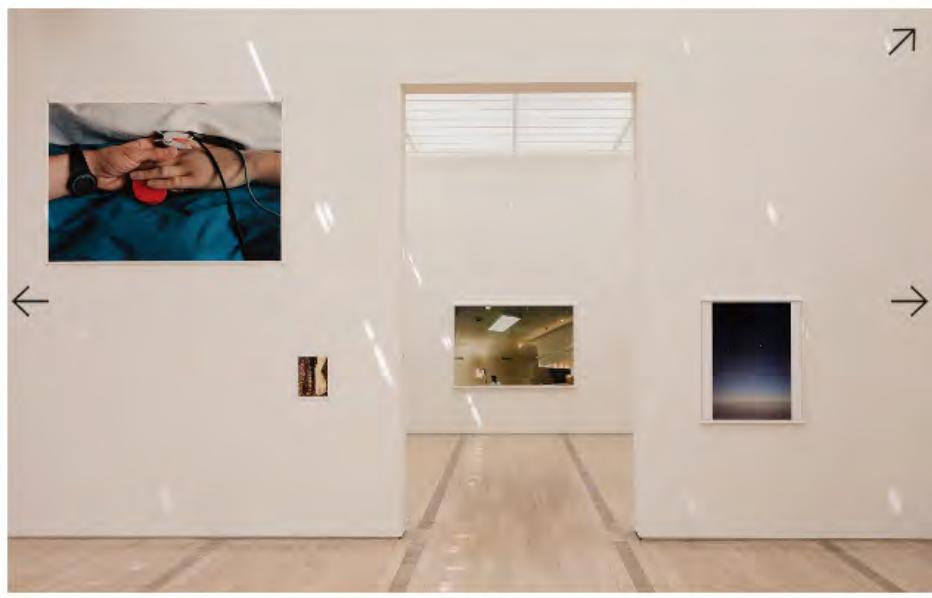
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Wolfgang Tillmans in conversation with Riccardo Conti

Wolfgang Tillmans has become one of the most important artists of his generation. He had a recent solo exhibition at Tate Modern in London until 11 June and now, as well, the Fondation Beyeler in Basel has dedicated its summer show to him, focusing for the first time on the medium of photography. This major solo exhibition, curated by Theodora Vischer, features around two hundred artworks. In these photos Tillmans reveals moments of beauty, nature, friendship, and desire, and documents scenes of activism and social and political life. This and the Tate installation perfectly embodies Tillmans's intense oeuvre, and his utopian idea of a non-hierarchical society.

Riccardo Conti: In the Tate and the Fondation Beyeler exhibition, some of your works are attached to the wall with small clips, while others are exhibited in frames. How do you decide how to present each photo?

Wolfgang Tillmans: It comes from my understanding that photographs are "objects." The sheet of paper is inseparable from the image it carries, not just a vessel of information. Thus, instead of hiding the body of the photograph I choose to show it as



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Wolfgang Tillmans at Fondation Beyeler, Basel, 2017

Courtesy: Galerie Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin / New York; Maureen Paley, London; David Zwirner, New York / London

## Mousse Magazine

an object. This is why I place some pictures naked on the walls, letting the viewer perceive them for what they are.

RC: Can you explain further how you arrived at this open form of presentation?

WT: Yes, it was minimalist—the purest approach, in a way. Yet after ten years of having exhibited only unframed photographs I felt that it had become expected. And so I thought it would be interesting to add frames because they remind the eye of these different statuses. I didn't just add *random* frames. They are the result of precise research for a model that can lend purity to the object one is working on over time.

RC: Did your relationship with reality change between your early analog works and the advent of the digital era?

WT: I think photography just offers realistic depictions of reality. I see myself using photography in the way any artist looks at the world with the means of his or her own time.

RC: What are your thoughts about the reproducibility of the medium, and its implications in the market?

WT: The market and its demands have never been compelled me to do more. I have always believed that the intention behind the making of an artwork is encapsulated in the artwork. For example, the first airplane wings were a one-to-one direct negotiation of thousands and thousands of pictures I took years and years before the first time I exhibited that photo. But when I realize the perfect image of a subject, there is no need to have that experience again, because there is no remaining innocence in repeating it.

RC: So when you achieve a result, it's time to move on to something different?



Wolfgang Tillmans at Fondation Beyeler, Basel, 2017

Courtesy: Galerie Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin / New York; Maureen Paley, London; David Zwirner, New York / London

## Mousse Magazine

RC: So when you achieve a result, it's time to move on to something different?

WT: Sure. But if you put that way, it sounds like an active decision. It wasn't necessarily that "conscious" for me. You have to make yourself open to things. You have to be prepared for chances.

RC: It's hard to circumscribe the range of your subjects to a single theme, but if I had to name it, I should say "freedom." What does freedom mean to you?

WT: Actually freedom has a precise meaning to me. First, it comes from the awareness that the freedom we enjoy is something that others fought for. If we can live freely, it's because other people in history did serious, radical, challenging things. And I'm not just talking here about the LGBT community; I'm thinking about even more basic rights that today we take for granted. The big question of our time and for the younger people is to protect those achievements.

RC: Would it be safe to say that one of your art books, *Soldiers: The Nineties* (1999), conveys a certain desire toward bodies in uniform?

WT: Perhaps, but it's a contradictory attraction, a double feeling, that could be affirmative or subversive. Uniforms are designed to look a certain way, to display masculinity, in ways that are never actively discussed. If you look at those bodies wrapped inside the uniforms with a sexualized glance, you immediately remove the power and the authority they represent.

RC: At the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the exhibition *Eternal Youth* includes some of your photographs. Do you think that part of your work is misleadingly connected to or entrapped in some cult of "eternal youth"?



## Mousse Magazine

WT: In the first place, I do not speak about youth. When I was twenty-four, my main thing was to speak to being alive, being human, and to do that I spoke through the people who were close and accessible to me, and they happened to be young. When my first book came out in 1995 it got a lot of attention and people started to describe it as "a portrait of a generation," but that was never my aim, because when you are young you are not really aware of this condition. It's a matter of perspective. I realized I wasn't young anymore when I was thirty-one years old. And I certainly don't consider "being young" a particular value, because it is a moment of great vulnerability, crisis, and confusion.

RC: Do you think you contributed to some change in the ideals of beauty with your work for magazines such *i-D*?

WT: Maybe. But what goes on in 99 percent of fashion publications is not influenced by that. A real alternative of bodies and beauty is not fulfilled because there is always a sense of perfection there. I'm not so optimistic in that sense. I think that we are just carrying forward a small detail of what people did in far more radical ways in the 1960s and 1970s. And our tolerance for different bodies is definitely lower than it was twenty-five years ago.

RC: An ethical question persists in photography: How to operate in a world of heavily consumed visual imagery? Why should a photographer want to take another picture in a photo-saturated world?

WT: Exactly. It's the reason I slowed down my photography in the late 1990s, when I turned more to abstract pictures made without the camera in the darkroom. If you think about a balance, a justice regarding what lives are worth representing, I wonder why we should have 10 percent of the world be portrayed every minute and other people from the same Earth not at all.

RC: Is that why you usually take photos of people you personally know, and not just bodies without any story or context...

WT: I was always critical about it, and aware of the complications that come with depicting people. I had problems with how young people were depicted in the late 1980s; they were always presented as not serious, making funny faces or funny gestures, like they had to excuse themselves for being young, and I never felt that that generation should be taken anything other than seriously. The people I knew were quite deep, not superficial. I personally felt very serious at eighteen, or twenty-one, with sincere interests in fine arts and music as well as pop culture, magazines, and fashion.

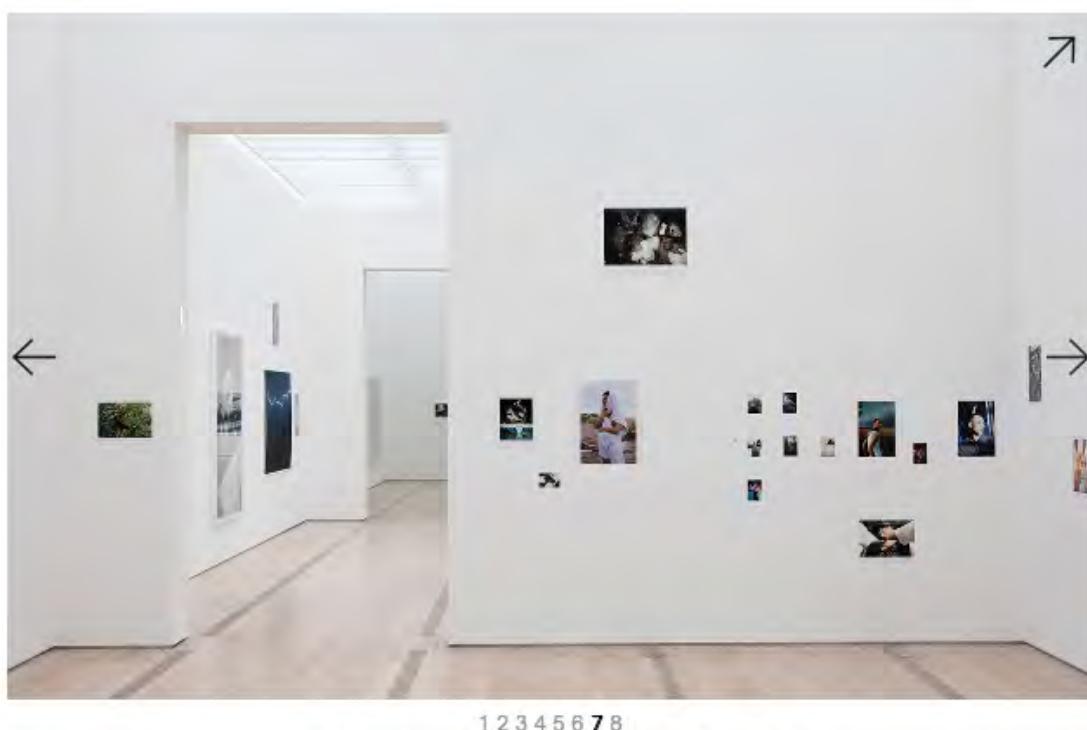
RC: Now that your artworks belong to some of the world's most important art institutions, what kind of relationship do you have with the Old Masters?

WT: I have never regarded the Old Masters as completely out of my reach or my real experience. When you talk about Gustave Courbet, first of all I think of him as a human being. That's because of my fundamental belief is that all people are born equal. There are variations in how we use a tool to represent a wave—for instance with painting or photography—but we are still looking at the same subject in different moments in history.

## Mousse Magazine



Wolfgang Tillmans at Fondation Beyeler, Basel, 2017  
Courtesy: Galerie Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin / New York; Maureen Paley, London; David Zwirner, New York / London



Wolfgang Tillmans at Fondation Beyeler, Basel, 2017  
Courtesy: Galerie Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin / New York; Maureen Paley, London; David Zwirner, New York / London



5

CARTE BLANCHE À  
**Wolfgang Tillmans.**

LE PHOTOGRAPHE ALLEMAND, FIGURE DE L'ART CONTEMPORAIN,  
EXPRIME SA LIBERTÉ DE TON AVEC DES IMAGES QUI MÉLENT  
ABSTRACTION ET RÉALISME DOCUMENTAIRE. UN UNIVERS  
INTIME ET ENGAGÉ QU'IL PRÉSENTE JUSQU'À L'ÉTÉ.



Vue de l'installation, Fondation Beyeler, 2017.

Patty, Félix. « how did wolfgang tillmans become one of the defining photographers of his generation? », *i-D*, June 5, 2017.  
[https://i-d.vice.com/en\\_gb/article/how-did-wolfgang-tillmans-become-one-of-the-defining-photographers-of-his-generation](https://i-d.vice.com/en_gb/article/how-did-wolfgang-tillmans-become-one-of-the-defining-photographers-of-his-generation)



PHOTOGRAPHY | Félix Patty | 5 June 2017

## how did wolfgang tillmans become one of the defining photographers of his generation?

As his second Tate retrospective draws to a close this weekend, award-winning artist, photographer and musician Wolfgang Tillmans reflects on the politics, photography, and musical endeavours that have defined the last fifteen years of his career.

f t p t g+ e



Headlight (d), 2012.

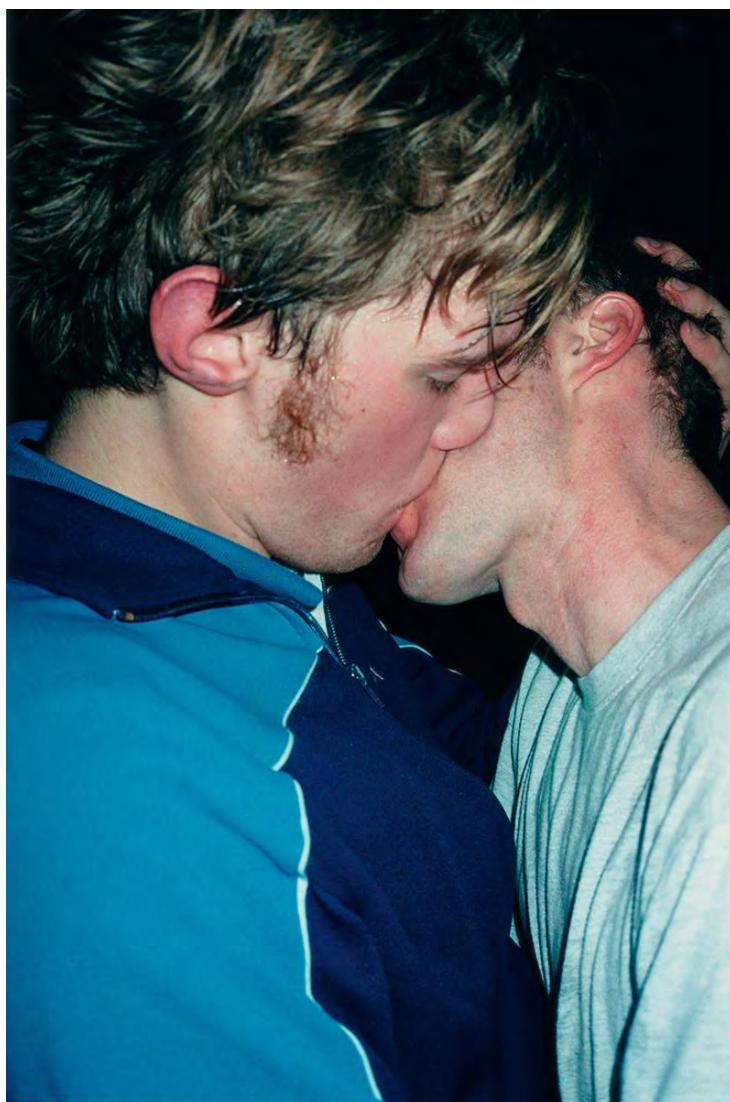
**i-D**

*This article originally appeared i-D's *The Family Values Issue*, no. 347, 2017.*

Wolfgang Tillmans is standing in front of a giant photograph, detailing in high-definition an arse and a pair of balls, and laughing. When pressed for an interpretation of the image, he says, with another laugh, "It's just the facts of life." One of his assistants is listening to the theme music from *Indiana Jones* in the background, the sounds of triumphant violins drifting in from another room, lending a surreal air to our discussion. It's just over a week until Wolfgang's second Tate retrospective opens, and in the galleries he's busy putting the finishing touches to the show. There are assistants methodically working away on boxes of prints. There are pictures resting against the walls. Plans for arranging small prints plastered around the space. One room is still full of building materials.

The image we're discussing is *nackt, 2 (nude, 2)* from 2014. Upon a deep blue carpet rest a pair of testicles, legs splayed slightly open, a semi-circle of arse cheek covers the top half of the image. It's shot with the crystal sharpness and intense clarity that's defined the artist's recent work. Every hair is visible. Wolfgang states it's not on display as a provocation, it's simply "what we are. It's free of charge and it doesn't hurt anybody. To look at a bum and a pair of balls from this angle is not harmful, yet it seems completely scandalous. It's very difficult to photograph nudity in a new way, but it warrants its place in the exhibition, or so it seems."

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



*The Cock (Kiss), 2002.*

i-D



JAL, 1997.

It may surprise you that Wolfgang, for all his unflinching representations of everyday life, sex, dancing, love, and politics, is a photographer who gets easily embarrassed and has to overcome shyness to take even a clothed portrait, but especially to take a picture such as this. "It's very embarrassing! Very!" he states. "That's why there aren't many nudes here. In the 2003 Tate Britain retrospective there were two penises in an exhibition of 350 photographs. Three reviews in the newspapers described the show as being 'littered with genitalia', but I very rarely take sexual pictures, or nudes, because I get so embarrassed." So does his self-consciousness ever hold him back? "No, embarrassment is a good thing," he states. "It's a threshold you have to cross if you want to take a picture. Photography has to be painful almost. I have to want to make that picture so much that I have to overcome my embarrassment."

Wolfgang's second Tate show, simply titled *2017*, is not a strict retrospective as such, more a survey of the work he's created since his first Tate Britain retrospective, *If one thing matters, everything matters* in 2003. So there are no images of Alex and Lutz, no Concorde, no *Deer Hirsch* and none of those ground-breaking early images from i-D that made his name either, just 14 years of work by maybe the best artist-photographer in the world; densely beautiful abstractions, blown up black and white photocopies that revel in grain and noise, delicate and humanistic portraits and luxuriously detailed still lives. Wolfgang is, of course, rightly heralded and lauded for his work. In 2000 he became one of the youngest ever winners of the Turner Prize, as well as being the first non-Brit, and the first photographer to win too. He's almost 50 now, yet still full of boyish charm and enthusiasm, his work still propelled forward by a genuine engagement in the world around him. *2017* feels an apt title for the exhibition. *If one things matters, everything matters* might be a mantra for those of us trying to find ways into the beauty of Wolfgang's work, defined by its lack of visual hierarchy and openness. *2017*, then, is more about Wolfgang "looking for a sense of now" and "uncovering the state we're in." It's the work of an artist uncovering the world around him.

Patty, Félix. « how did wolfgang tillmans become one of the defining photographers of his generation? », *i-D*, June 5, 2017.  
[https://i-d.vice.com/en\\_gb/article/how-did-wolfgang-tillmans-become-one-of-the-defining-photographers-of-his-generation](https://i-d.vice.com/en_gb/article/how-did-wolfgang-tillmans-become-one-of-the-defining-photographers-of-his-generation)



The state we're in, Wolfgang suggests, began in 2003, with the Iraq War and the massive global demonstrations against it. In particular the "wilful ignorance of the evidence," that propelled us towards war, and "the disconnect between people and politicians," when the protest proved unsuccessful in preventing it. It was an event that ended Labour's post-Thatcher honeymoon years and proved a political millstone around the neck of a generation. "You know the whole 'post truth' thing that we're supposedly living in now?" Wolfgang asks. "Back then that was something that drove me and concerned me very much, and that's how the *Truth Study Centre* projects came about."

The *Truth Study Centre* is a series of works arranged on mazes of overlapping narrow tables. It presents a constellation of fragments; newspaper clippings, emails, images, quotes and pieces of text curated from 2005 to the present day. *Truth Study Centre* is of course a tongue-in-cheek title, but the series isn't about finding meaning in a confusing world. Instead, the alternative-facts and fake-news era we're currently crashing through has put these works into stark relief. In response, Wolfgang has created a new *Truth Study Centre* work for the retrospective that explores "the backfire effect" which is "the psychological effect observed in people who hold a belief that might not be supported by facts, and when they are faced with the facts about it, it will not change their view, but reinforce it."

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



Faltenwurf (skylight), 2009.

i-D



Nackt, 2 (nude, 2), 2014.

Politics is never far from Wolfgang's work; something evident last year when he took an active and very public role in campaigning for Britain to stay in the EU. 2016 also saw him actively take a stand against Trump's presidential campaign; utilising his public platform to try and prevent the slide towards racism and nationalism we're experiencing right now. But in the last two years Wolfgang has also immersed himself in his work as a musician. He was in a band in Germany in the mid 80s before he even picked up a camera, and recently returned to it, fronting a 'traditional' band, called Fragile, and also embarking on an electronic project under his own name; one of his songs appearing as the coda to Frank Ocean's *Endless* visual album. "I didn't embark on all these projects last year because there was a stagnation or a vacuum in my art practice," he begins. "The music just wanted to find a way out." But even now, back "concentrating on the main thing I do" as he puts it. Politics and music are always inescapable for Wolfgang. In the exhibition itself, music finds form as a listening room dedicated to work of the 80s avant-garde pop group Colourbox. Part of his mission to get people to take pop music seriously as an art form, something he's been pushing at his Between Bridges project space in Berlin. But music is there in many of his photographic works, 2017 features portraits of musical idols old and new, from Morrissey to the aforementioned Frank Ocean, through to images of clubbers lost in passion.

"In some ways I see myself as an amplifier," Wolfgang explains. "It's not the only role I have, but photography lends itself to amplifying things because it is a medium of mechanical multiplication. I felt from early on in my career that I could give physical space to ideas through my work. That was what my early work in magazines was about, in particular *i-D*. I wanted to use photography to give that space over to something I liked, like the peace movement. Or, for example, we're sitting in front of this portrait of Patti Smith, a very unusual portrait because she's being portrayed on a 15 metre digital screen at Glastonbury. To place that here is giving her space, giving Glastonbury space, giving what Glastonbury means to people that space. Or the picture next to it, which I think will move by the time the exhibition opens, of six or seven people in intense conversation in a bar in St Petersburg. It's giving space to the very human act of talking to each other, instead of the act of buying designer handbags."



For all this talk of politics, music and space, it's easy to lose yourself in the beautiful imagery Wolfgang creates - even if he insists, "beauty is only a concept, a definition, something different to different people." Specifically the large scale, super detailed photographic works he's been creating recently. Wolfgang started using a digital camera in 2009, and stopped shooting analogue in 2012. One image that stands out from this recent period is a simple shot of a bright green weed sprouting out of concrete, captured in hypnotic high resolution. The detail these images capture gives them an almost 3D quality in the way they squash together depth and flatness. Another image, almost entirely white, called *In A Cloud*, was taken through a plane window as he flew through a cloud. "Every photograph is an experiment," Wolfgang continues, whether it's of a person, an object, wildlife, or the whiteness inside a cloud. "It was an experiment to see whether I could take a picture of it. People are afraid of using the most common subject matter - and that's what I get accused of doing by some critics - but it's really about seeing whether I can take a picture that captures the nature of something, but also the very specific feelings of that moment, in this time, in this place." It's this that lends such simple subject matter such resonant emotion, such depth, beauty and visual complexity.

It's hard to describe what gives Wolfgang's portraiture its essence, its *Wolfganginess*. You can recognise his work a mile off, somehow. There's a humanity and simplicity to the way he captures people. There's no trickery, no showy concepts, just an image that captures the soul. One photograph, of an artist called Philip, is particularly memorable, especially amongst the more famous names on the walls. And we could discuss all the famous names he's shot over the years, but this image seems more *him*, in its humbleness, openness, heart and soul. Dressed casually in a green baggy T-shirt and jeans, Philip is staring right into the camera, fiddling with his hands.



Philip Wiegard, 2011.

**i-D**

"It's so fascinating about photography, isn't it? That you can tell from a mile off who a picture is by," Wolfgang laughs. Not that there's a formula to the way he works, each portrait "has to be felt new each time." And this portrait of Philip, for all its apparent simplicity, took years to shoot. "I had been observing and noticing him, and wanting to take a portrait of him for some years, so in my mind it matured. But because I was embarrassed, I could never ask him if he would sit for me. Then this picture was taken backstage at a Meadham Kirchhoff show at London Fashion Week, the most unlikely setting for such a personal portrait. It took me literally five minutes, but years as well. That's the amazing thing about photography, it can condense years of thinking into a moment."

Wolfgang is not one of those photographers taking pictures all the time. "I'm not walking around all day, every day, with a camera," he says, standing in front of a portrait of an anonymous young man, dressed in purple robes, in front of a purple car in the Saudi Arabian city of Jeddah. There's something sphinx-like and intriguing in the man's expression and circumstance. "I have a strong sense of embarrassment, which means that only occasionally is there a clarity that overrides it, that means I can take the picture. In this moment, in the old town of Jeddah, when there was a lucidity. I was seeing everything with such clarity. I just felt I had to take these photographs."



Young man, Jeddah, (a), 2012.

"I thought Saudi Arabia would be the worst place to ever go to as a gay person," he continues. "Then, when you are there, you realise there are five million people living in Jeddah, and the people I met were, of course, nice human beings. Wherever I go that's been my experience. People are people, as the Depeche Mode song goes. This whole demonisation of the other doesn't work when you are up close and face to face." Which maybe stands as a nice closing mantra for the exhibition, for Wolfgang's work and his approach to photography. It's all about finding the humanity and universal emotional centre of us all, collapsing us and them together.

As I leave Wolfgang to his boxes of prints, wall plans and hard-working assistants, he seems remarkably calm, but then he's done this all before of course. Few people get two Tate retrospectives. Less get them whilst they're still alive. So if he doesn't seem particularly nervous, maybe it's because he's rightly confident in the power of his work, it's there for all to see. Before leaving he points to a large, beautiful, abstract print. "A lot of people want to know what these works mean," he says. "They want a manual to read it correctly, but it's just about accepting and bearing what is in front of us. The irrationality and absurdity of life is so powerful that sometimes you have to embrace it."

**Read:** From one icon to another, Arca is shot and interviewed by Wolfgang Tillmans.

Credits

Text Félix Petty  
Photography Wolfgang Tillmans

## Les Echos

# Wolfgang Tillmans, superstar de l'art contemporain

Judith Benhamou-huet / Journaliste | Le 01/06 à 06:00, mis à jour à 10:23



« Nite Queen », 2013. Dans ses photos, Wolfgang Tillmans aborde les grands comme les petits sujets, joue avec les cadrages, les effets de matière, de lumière ou de taille Galerie Buchholz

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

Le génie de certains artistes consiste à vous obliger à vraiment regarder ce qu'ils ont à montrer. C'est le cas de l'Allemand installé à Londres Wolfgang Tillmans (né en 1968), lauréat en 2000 du Turner Prize. S'il reste encore peu connu en France, il est devenu, à juste titre, une des superstars de l'art contemporain international. Il est en ce moment l'objet d'une exposition à la Tate Modern de Londres et d'une autre qui vient d'être inaugurée, importante aussi en qualité comme en quantité (200 œuvres), à la Fondation Beyeler de Bâle. Il est aussi présent dans le pavillon international de la Biennale de Venise et une salle entière lui est consacrée à Paris, au Grand Palais, dans l'exposition de Laurent Le Bon sur le sujet des jardins (jusqu'au 24 juillet).

Selon Tillmans, l'exposition anglaise montre l'état du monde aujourd'hui depuis la guerre en Irak, il y a quatorze ans. L'expo bâloise consiste davantage en une exploration intime qui commence avec un autoportrait dessiné de 1986 jusqu'à ses

dernières photos. « La production de Wolfgang incarne parfaitement les images de notre époque. Il y a une unanimité des critiques au sujet de son importance pour le XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle », affirme Samuel Keller, le patron de la Fondation Beyeler, qui consacre pour la première fois l'intégralité de ses espaces à un photographe. Wolfgang Tillmans a d'abord marqué en peuplant ses photographies de scènes d'une jeunesse trash - la sienne. Mais, rapidement, il s'est révélé, en élargissant son style et son répertoire.

## ABSTRACTION ET FIGURATION

Son travail peut être qualifié de contemplatif, car il contient beaucoup de vide, de silence et de ce qu'on appelle le dérisoire. Son genre consiste à mélanger abstraction et figuration, petits et grands formats, photos encadrées et photos scotchées au mur ou épinglees. Une photo riche et une photo pauvre. Il aborde les grands et les petits sujets : un essuie-glace en action sous la pluie et un marché en Afrique qui ressemble à une peinture orientaliste ; un grain de peau sur la partie intime d'un corps et un jeune homme en train d'uriner sur un fauteuil... Il joue avec les effets de matière, de lumière ou de taille, avec les cadrages, appliqués ou pas. Tillmans surprend, Tillmans, dérange, Tillmans attendrit. A la Fondation Beyeler, cet accrochage flottant, qui fait passer comme un zapping géant d'une intimité à l'autre, oblige le spectateur à s'appliquer à regarder.

### WOLFGANG TILLMANS

Londres, Tate Modern jusqu'au 11 juin.

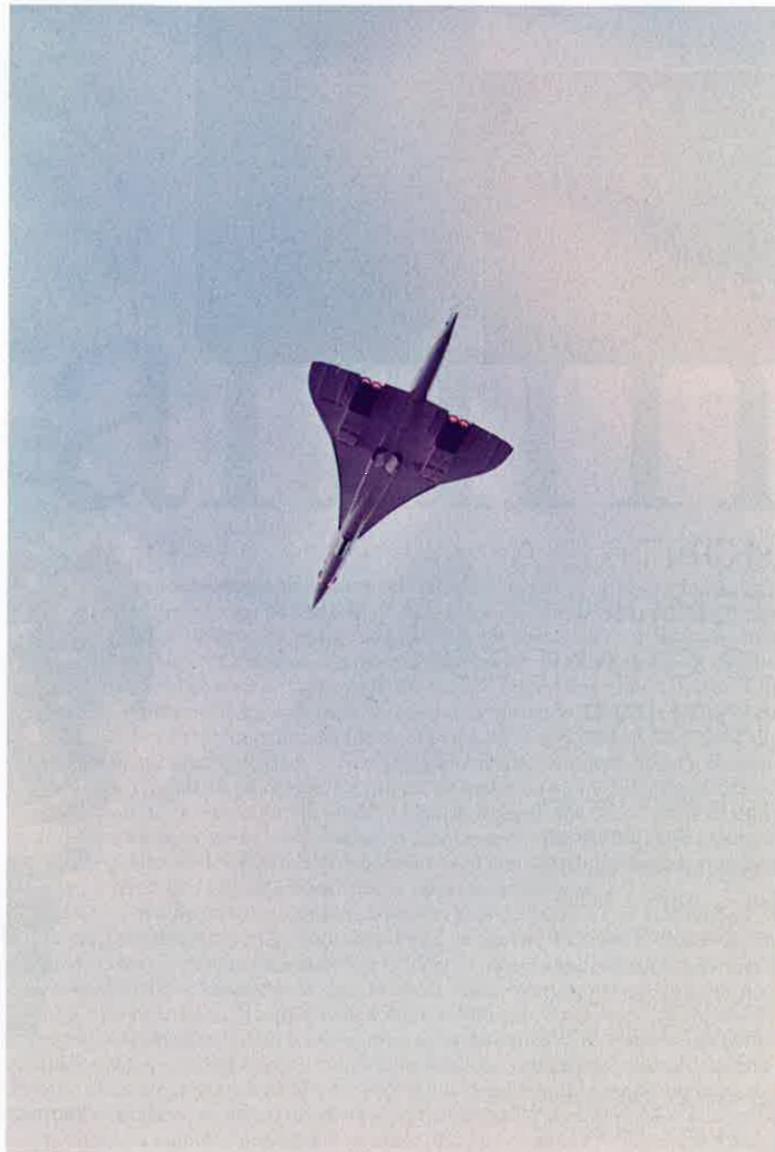
Bâle, Fondation Beyeler,  
jusqu'au 24 octobre.



CARTE BLANCHE À  
**Wolfgang Tillmans.**

LE PHOTOGRAPHE ALLEMAND, FIGURE DE L'ART CONTEMPORAIN,  
EXPRIME SA LIBERTÉ DE TON AVEC DES IMAGES QUI MÈLENT  
ABSTRACTION ET RÉALISME DOCUMENTAIRE. UN UNIVERS  
INTIME ET ENGAGÉ QU'IL PRÉSENTE JUSQU'À L'ÉTÉ.

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



Il y a vingt ans, Wolfgang Tillmans a réalisé son projet *Concorde*.  
Un livre poétique qui traite du résultat magnifique de l'esprit d'équipe  
et de la coopération dont ont fait preuve les partenaires européens.

*Concorde L449-19, 1997.*

Making of

18



2



3



4

Wolfgang Tillmans (1) explore deux registres différents : la forme documentaire et l'abstraction.  
*Faltenwurf Bourne Estate, 2002* (2);  
*Armpit, 1992* (3);  
*Lutz & Alex; holding cock, 1992* (4);  
*Paper drop, Oranienstrasse, 0, 2017* (5);  
*Peaches V, 2001* (6).



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## Wolfgang Tillmans, l'irrévérencieux.

DEPUIS SES DÉBUTS DANS LES ANNÉES 1990, LE PHOTOGRAPHE ALLEMAND BOUSCULE LE BON GOÛT AVEC DES IMAGES QUI REVENDIQUENT UN MODE DE VIE DÉGAGÉ DES CONVENTIONS. PARALLÈLEMENT, IL CRÉE DES COMPOSITIONS ABSTRAITES ET POÉTIQUES. "M" LUI CONFIE JUSQU'À L'ÉTÉ SA "CARTE BLANCHE".

PAR CLÉMENT GHYS

Dans les années 1990, le milieu de l'art européen voit débarquer un jeune Allemand, né en 1968, Wolfgang Tillmans. En quelques expositions, le jeune homme aux cheveux ras et à l'allure décontractée (veste de surplus militaire, short en Lycra) dépoussiète le monde de la photographie. Il punaise ses images à même les murs des galeries, les photocopie sur du papier lambda, ajoute des coupures de journaux. Les tenants du bon goût de l'époque sont choqués par cette audace, comme par les images elles-mêmes : des instantanés des amis de Tillmans, parfois nus, en pleine forêt, accrochés à des arbres comme le Baron perché d'Italo Calvino. Ou encore de jeunes hommes s'embrassant goulûment, urinant sur une chaise de bureau ou regardant l'objectif avec un œil moqueur.

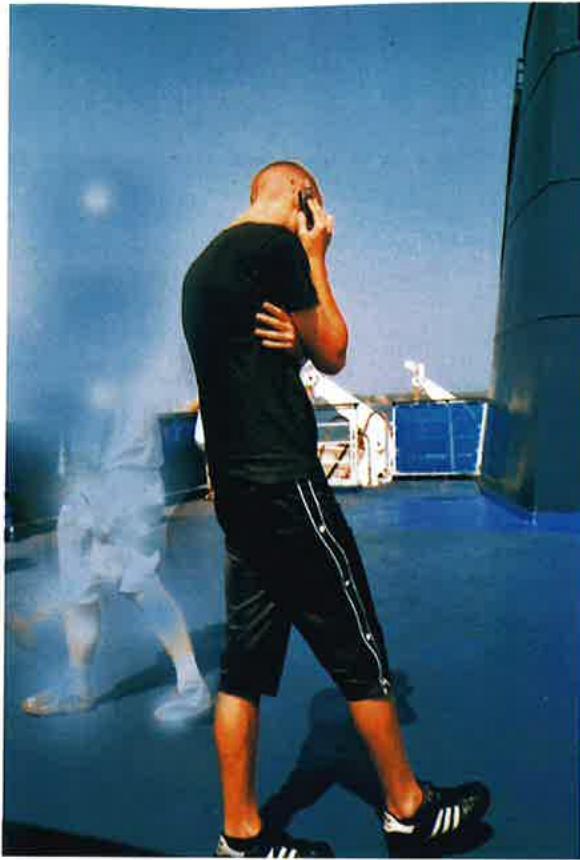
En Allemagne, au Royaume-Uni ou aux Pays-Bas, le photographe collabore avec des revues indépendantes, qui croisent l'art, le graphisme et la mode : *The Face*, *i-D*, *Butt*... Son travail porte en germe toute la désillusion et la radicalité des années 1990. Mais Wolfgang Tillmans est de ces artistes qui savent s'adapter à l'époque, étendre sans cesse leur spectre. Ainsi, si son travail a un aspect documentaire et défend fièrement un mode de vie supposément marginal, il lorgne aussi vers l'abstraction. Il photographie la mer et les vagues comme une fresque, le ciel comme un monochrome, passe des heures à saisir une goutte d'eau sur du papier ou à attirer une mouche sur des fruits de mer. « *Les natures mortes sont un mélange de hasard et de contrôle, de jeu et de mise en scène* », commente-t-il. Ces deux facettes, documentaire et abstrait, ne s'opposent pas. Elles se complètent et forment une œuvre qui, le succès et les récompenses venus (notamment le prestigieux Turner Prize en 2000), a influencé la photographie contemporaine par sa liberté de ton.

Wolfgang Tillmans, 48 ans, vit entre Londres et Berlin. À partir du 28 mai, une exposition lui est consacrée à la Fondation Beyeler, à Bâle. Et jusqu'au 11 juin, il fait l'objet d'une rétrospective à la Tate Modern, à Londres. Quelques mois avant son ouverture, le Royaume-Uni était en pleine campagne sur le Brexit, et l'artiste signait des affiches pour appeler les électeurs à voter pour l'Union européenne. Sur des images d'aubes ou de crépuscules, selon les interprétations, il imprimait des slogans comme « We are the European family » (Nous sommes la famille européenne). Un énième pas de côté pour celui qui a fait sa carrière en les accumulant. En août 2016, le rappeur américain Frank Ocean, dont le coming out avait fait parler en 2012, tant le geste est rare dans le milieu du hip-hop, sortait un album, *Blonde*. Tillmans en signait la pochette. Un portrait de Frank Ocean, les cheveux teints en vert fluo. Une manière de sortir l'art des musées et des galeries, et de prouver que la politique se niche aussi dans la pop culture. 

Wolfgang Tillmans, Fondation Beyeler à Bâle, du 28 mai au 1er octobre ; et à la Tate Modern à Londres, jusqu'au 11 juin.

# ARTFORUM

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



BASEL

## WOLFGANG TILLMANS

Fondation Beyeler  
May 28–October 1  
*Curated by Theodora Vischer*

Few artists working today illuminate the politics of everyday life with the subtle insight and devastating versatility of photographer Wolfgang Tillmans. He turns seemingly casual observations of simple subjects, like friends or flowers, into potent symbols of youth, community, mortality, and hope. The implicit social engagement of Tillmans's work pervades the vast but carefully chosen survey now at Tate Modern. But a second exhibition, opening this month at the Fondation Beyeler, offers a more introspective view. This show, focusing on the artist's studio-based work, will include portraits, still lifes, and staged shots, plus films and music. Look for Tillmans—an ingenious installation artist and quiet provocateur—to activate the complicated meanings in his own work, slyly tweaking the foundation's patriarchal canon of blue-chip modernist masters.

—Brian Wallis

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N°477 | DU 14 AU 27 AVRIL 2017

Le Journal des Arts

## EXPOSITIONS

# DANS LA PEAU DE WOLFGANG TILLMANS

*Le photographe allemand est un activiste. La Tate Modern le rappelle à l'occasion de ce palpitant électrocardiogramme de l'homme et de son œuvre*

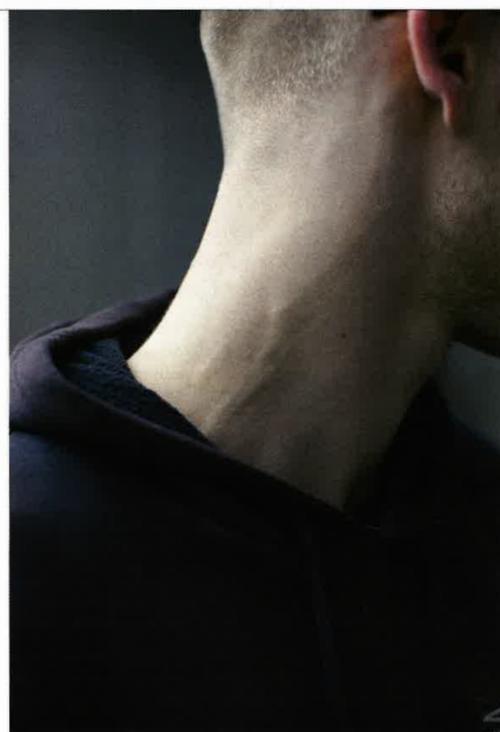
### PHOTOGRAPHIE

**Londres.** Un électrocardiogramme précise toujours la date de sa réalisation. Celui de Wolfgang Tillmans, pratiqué par la prestigieuse institution londonienne à la veille des presque 50 ans de l'artiste allemand, n'y échappe pas. La mention « 2017 » en titre de l'exposition à la suite de son nom n'est pas anodine, à l'heure où la Grande Bretagne s'apprête à sortir de l'Union européenne, tandis que les déclarations de Donald Trump, Vladimir Poutine et Marine le Pen forment une inquiétante caisse de résonance. Les pays vacillent sous la montée des nationalismes, les effets du drame migratoire en Méditerranée et les fake news. Wolfgang Tillmans s'en fait ici le dénonciateur en apposant sa manière de voir le monde dans un « habiter poétique et pensant », pour reprendre Martin Heidegger. La Tate développe au fil des salles cette

approche en se faisant l'écho autant de la photographie, des installations, de la vidéo, la performance que de la musique, l'édition ou encore de son intérêt manifeste pour l'architecture.

#### Amateur de musique

Si l'on retrouve la plupart des grandes séries de l'artiste (« Silver », « Headlight », « Greifbar »...), ses expérimentations et libertés en matière de prise de vue, d'impression et d'accrochage, la Tate Modern convoque avant tout ce qui fait battre le cœur du photographe. Une première dans l'approche de sa création visuelle. En ce sens, donner une large place aux *truth study centers* (centres d'étude de la vérité regroupant articles, photographies ou courbes statistiques sur tel ou tel sujet étudié) et entamé par l'artiste depuis 2005) ou réservier une salle à ses goûts musicaux, élargit les points de vue. À mi-parcours, une « Playback Room » est en effet réservée à la sélection personnelle de Tillmans, grand



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Collum*, 2011. © Wolfgang Tillmans.

amateur de musique, de boîtes de nuit et musicien lui-même. À l'automne 2016 est sorti *Fragile-Visual*, son premier album, qu'il a entièrement composé.

Dans cette salle, l'évocation de la programmation artistique de Between Bridges – espace d'exposition qu'il a ouvert en 2006 à Londres

avant de le transférer à Berlin, où il vit désormais – ouvre à une autre focale. À l'instar de la vaste salle réservée à ses différents articles, affiches et ouvrages que l'on peut consulter. Visiblement curieux de tout, l'artiste a trouvé dans la création et l'art les meilleurs alliés pour conjurer les régressions et les visions

ségrégationnistes, homophobes et/ou racistes. Wolfgang Tillmans n'a jamais mâché ses mots ni caché ses sentiments. En témoignent les slogans de la campagne d'affichage anti-Brexit qu'il a réalisée lors du référendum au Royaume-Uni. L'intérêt qu'il porte aux autres cultures et aux fonctionnements sociaux répond aux chaos et errements du monde.

Les portraits de ceux qu'il rencontre au cours de ses différents voyages ou qui forment sa constellation d'êtres aimés ou de références, disent beaucoup sur ses questionnements et attachements. Deux portraits d'Oscar Niemeyer pris à peu

*La Tate Modern convoque ce qui fait battre le cœur du photographe. Une première dans l'approche de sa création visuelle*

d'années d'intervalle font ainsi écho à sa passion pour l'architecture. Une salle du rez-de-chaussée de la Tate a d'ailleurs été réservée à l'installation de *Book for Architects*, projection sur quatre écrans de 450 photographies d'édifices, d'artères ou espaces urbains prises entre 2004 et 2014 dans 37 pays et cinq continents. On a désormais hâte de découvrir fin mai l'autre grande retrospective Wolfgang Tillmans concoctée par la Fondation Beyeler, à Riehen en Suisse.

●CHRISTINE COSTE, ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE

**WOLFGANG TILLMANS : 2017**, jusqu'au 11 juin, Tate Modern, Bankside, Londres.

# Aesthetica

Wolfgang Tillmans: Societal Discourse



Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

As far as timely exhibitions go, Wolfgang Tillmans' (b. 1968) current exhibition at Tate Modern, London, is charged with the heartbeat of today's news and societal hot topics. 2017 features work from Tillmans' portfolio since 2003. If not a retrospective, the prominent subjects his work explored from over a decade ago are still the issues of discourse and the media today.

Matters of war, gender politics and gay rights, immigration and the refugee crisis are embedded throughout his photographs and in the mixed materials of the vitrines filled with the artist's own images and media clippings. Specific themes are not followed, and the visual and supplementary stimuli on show is like scrolling through news-driven social media feeds. The presentation is not all serious, more sprightly challenging, and emphasises the biased perspectives on what is seen as truth – which is now the ubiquitous "fake news" raising controversy at present. The work is evocative in an enticingly captivated form and it has an underlying sense of urgency that encourages its audiences to pay attention to what is happening in the world around them.

Whilst politics are a part of Tillmans' career and personal life, his main focus is making art. The variety of images on display is vast, as is the way that they are presented. Mostly unframed, clipped or taped to the walls, some are high, some are low, some are in the corners of the galleries. The photographs are small and large-scale, and of portraits, landscapes, film abstractions, cities, deserts, TV static, car headlights, bedrooms, drains, plates of food, tropical birds, airport customs – all are individual vignettes of deeper stories or commonplace scenes carefully cropped.

# Aesthetica

Each individual piece channels a reflection of our world, and together represents its chaos, contents, and beauty. These snapshots resonate beyond their surfaces on many levels. His work is given further accreditation from the aforementioned political references to art historical associations, such as the photo of a meal of lobsters alluding to Dutch still life paintings. Its pink, yellow, orange, white and red palette is offset by a black fly, a symbol with negative connotations. There is no doubt in the talent Tillmans holds in producing striking imagery.

The show follows its own energised beat, including a room where audiences can listen to the recorded music by the band Colourbox. This space was curated by the German-born photographer, with his reasoning that studio recorded music does not receive the same acknowledgement as live music. It is unexpected, as is discovering a video of Tillmans dancing in his underwear. Although, nowadays in our constant flux of change, it is the dynamism that keeps it interesting. And, if there is also the playfulness and beauty as in the works produced through the lens, now could be the time to take advantage of the moment.

Ashton Chandler Guyatt

*Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017* runs until 11 June at Tate Modern, London. For more information:  
[www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)

Follow us @AestheticaMag on Instagram and Twitter for the latest in contemporary arts and culture.

**Credits:**

1. Wolfgang Tillmans *La Palma* (2014) © Wolfgang Tillmans.

Posted on 3 April 2017

Mercier, Clémentine. « Wolfgang Tillmans «A la fin, la seule chose qui reste d'une civilisation est l'art» »,  
*Libération*, March 17, 2017.

[http://next.libération.fr/arts/2017/03/17/wolfgang-tillmans-a-la-fin-la-seule-chose-qui-reste-d-une-civilisation-est-l-art\\_1556465](http://next.libération.fr/arts/2017/03/17/wolfgang-tillmans-a-la-fin-la-seule-chose-qui-reste-d-une-civilisation-est-l-art_1556465)



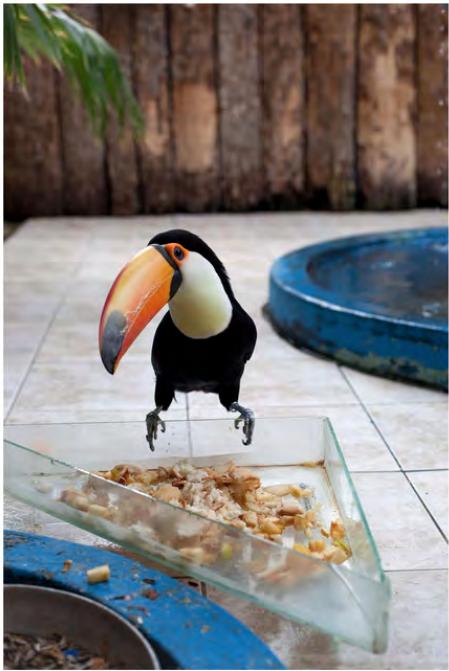
INTERVIEW

## **WOLFGANG TILLMANS «A LA FIN, LA SEULE CHOSE QUI RESTE D'UNE CIVILISATION EST L'ART»**

Par Clémentine Mercier  
— 17 mars 2017 à 17:56

Wolfgang Tillmans explique son rapport à la photographie, son implication politique et l'évolution de son travail sur trois décennies.

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



Tukan (2010). Photo Wolfgang Tillmans

▲ f □



On le célèbre ici comme un enfant du pays. Premier artiste non britannique à avoir reçu le Turner Prize en 2000, Wolfgang Tillmans (photo Anders Clausen) a vécu près de vingt ans à Londres, et en a adopté le mode de vie. Né en 1968 à Remscheid, en Allemagne, l'artiste habite désormais Berlin. Ce printemps, il occupe près de 14 salles à la Tate Modern, à l'aise comme un poisson dans la Tamise. Rencontré la veille de l'ouverture, Wolfgang Tillmans, presque 50 ans, décontracté et généreux, s'allonge sur un banc au centre de l'expo, large sourire aux lèvres, et prend le temps d'expliquer sa vision du monde et de la photographie, qu'il veut poétique, expérimentale et engagée. Difficile de résister au charme doux du photographe, pleinement concerné et à la nonchalance déconcertante.

Pendant PhotoLondon 2016, vous vous êtes engagé contre le Brexit...

C'est une campagne que j'avais commencée seul au début de l'année. C'est la première fois que je suis devenu activiste politique. J'ai toujours été politisé dans ma vie, et mon travail l'a toujours été dans un sens, mais pour la toute première fois, je suis devenu militant. Je me suis rendu compte que personne en Grande-Bretagne ne défendait avec chaleur l'Europe. On parlait surtout des dangers qu'il pouvait y avoir à la quitter, mais il n'y avait personne pour rappeler que, peut-être, l'Europe était une bonne idée. Pour moi, cela a été une chose tellement forte de vivre ma vie comme un Européen, de voyager en France, d'apprendre les langues, d'étudier puis de déménager en Grande-Bretagne... J'ai toujours eu conscience qu'il y a soixante-dix ans, l'Europe n'avait pas ce visage.

Mercier, Clémentine. « Wolfgang Tillmans « A la fin, la seule chose qui reste d'une civilisation est l'art » »,  
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**Vous avez pensé cette exposition au moment où vous êtes devenu un activiste, est-ce que cela a changé votre manière de la concevoir ?**

Cette campagne d'affichage était tournée vers le résultat de l'élection, qui était important pour moi. Cela n'avait rien à voir avec l'art. L'exposition de la Tate parle d'art et pas de Brexit, pas de Trump non plus. Elle raconte la façon dont je regarde le monde. Dans ce regard, je transmets différentes sensibilités. J'espère que je présente les choses de façon non sexiste, non raciste, non xénophobe, avec un point de vue opposé à l'extrême droite. Certaines photos ont une charge plus politique que d'autres. L'urgence continue et j'aimerais montrer mes posters contre le Brexit dans d'autres pays européens [*ce qu'il fait d'ailleurs ces jours-ci aux Pays-Bas, ndlr*]. La mauvaise ambiance est partout maintenant.

**Militez-vous dans un parti ?**

Non. Mais j'ai l'impression de faire plus de choses en n'étant pas affilié à un parti en particulier. Pour résumer, nous devrions tous nous impliquer davantage dans les endroits qui comptent. C'est bien différent que de poster des trucs sur Facebook ou d'émettre une opinion dans un bar. On pense toujours que l'art est marginal et qu'il n'a aucune influence. Or, ce n'est pas vrai. Les cultures sont définies par l'art et par leur production culturelle. Et, à la fin, la seule chose qui reste d'une civilisation est l'art... Il compte donc. Et comptent aussi les problématiques sur lesquelles il se focalise. C'est pour cela que j'ai commencé *Between Bridges*, un espace d'exposition non-commercial dans un local à Londres en 2006...

**Vous en montrez les cartons d'invitation dans l'expo. Que représente ce lieu ?**

A l'époque, je réfléchissais à l'art des jeunes artistes à Londres et tout me paraissait si formel... alors que le monde est plein de sujets intéressants pour lesquels on pouvait se passionner. En 2006, déjà, ce n'était pas un monde parfait qui autorisait à être apolitique : on avait la guerre en Irak, le fondamentalisme. J'ai été obligé de montrer dans ce lieu alternatif des artistes qui étaient d'une façon ou d'une autre assez politiques.

**Vous avez commencé par montrer David Wojnarowicz (artiste et militant homosexuel dans les années 80 à New York)...**

Il m'a paru être le choix parfait. C'était un artiste excellent qui ne mâchait pas ses mots. Il parlait avec beaucoup de colère. Je l'ai exposé comme un exemple et comme un rappel pour tous - et surtout pour moi-même d'ailleurs - sur le courage que l'on peut avoir en tant qu'artiste. On a aussi montré Charlotte Posenenske, dont les sculptures en carton et en aluminium, éditable à l'infini, ont un positionnement politique sur la valeur des choses... Par ailleurs, mon projet *Playback Room*, la salle de musique, donne de la valeur à la musique enregistrée...

**Vous vendez un disque dans la boutique du musée. Vous êtes devenu musicien ?**

Oui, c'est bien ma musique. C'est quelque chose que j'ai commencé à l'âge de 17 ans, puis je me suis arrêté pendant vingt-huit ans et, il y a deux ans, mon côté performatif est revenu. On peut voir dans l'expo la première vidéo où je me mets en scène. Et je me suis mis à refaire de la musique. J'ai utilisé des paroles écrites il y a trente ans... C'était fascinant.

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**Vous avez une grande confiance pour vous lancer ainsi dans la musique...**

Oh non ! Pas du tout. Je me sens encore très peu sûr de moi avec ça...

**Quand avez-vous vécu en Grande-Bretagne ?**

Je m'y suis installé dans les années 90, cela fait donc vingt-six ans. Puis je suis retourné à Berlin il y a dix ans et j'y ai déménagé mon studio il y a quatre ans. Mon boyfriend y vit, et c'était la meilleure solution pour nous. Londres est si intense. Mais la vie y a changé et tout y est devenu commercial. Il n'y a plus rien de gratuit à part les collections permanentes de certains musées.

**Pouvez-vous expliquer votre succès en Angleterre alors même que vous avez refusé de vendre des photos au publicitaire Charles Saatchi ?**

Cette histoire est tout à fait mineure. Je n'aimais pas ses campagnes. Je n'avais juste pas envie de faire partie de cela. Mais bien sûr, la Grande Bretagne représente beaucoup plus de choses que Charles Saatchi. On a toujours l'impression de l'extérieur qu'il occupe le terrain, mais c'était il y a vingt ans. Je n'ai pas l'impression que mon succès ici soit plus grand qu'à New York ou en Allemagne. J'ai toujours été étonné par le fait que mon travail puisse se traduire dans différents pays, comme au Japon par exemple. Il y a quatre ans, j'ai même exposé et fait un grand tour en Amérique du Sud. J'ai compris que j'avais beaucoup de fans là-bas.

**Vous avez commencé à travailler avec le magazine I-D...**

Pour revenir aux années 80, il y avait peu de médias qui montraient une scène alternative et une culture jeune non commerciale. J'ai commencé en 1989 pour eux, et j'ai été un contributeur régulier à partir de 1991. En 1995, le magazine a beaucoup changé pour devenir plus mode, ce qui est encore le cas aujourd'hui. Mais jusqu'à cette date, c'était très underground. Malgré cela, *I-D* reste un magazine intéressant. Ils sont conscients de cet héritage, de cette voix de la rue, de la culture jeune dans toutes ses couleurs et sous toutes ses facettes. Quand j'étais impliqué, c'était de petites publications de 96 pages et c'était pré-Internet. On regardait ces pages comme la seule source et la seule nourriture visuelle possible. J'ai reçu de là un grand sens de l'énergie, de la culture dance, de l'acid house...

**L'utopie de la club culture ?**

Pour moi, cela a été une vision politique, et même si j'étais intéressé par les beaux-arts, j'ai toujours aimé l'énergie qui venait de la musique pop, des night-clubs, de tout ce qui s'y passait...

**Allez-vous toujours en club à Berlin ?**

Bien sûr. Une bonne chose à Berlin, c'est que l'âge importe peu et il n'y a pas de fermeture aux plus âgés... Les gens de plus de 30 ans qui sortent encore, c'est possible, ce n'est pas un truc bizarre et c'est normal là-bas.

Mercier, Clémentine. « Wolfgang Tillmans « A la fin, la seule chose qui reste d'une civilisation est l'art » »,  
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**Vous avez affirmé être «heureux de ne pas connaître l'histoire de la photographie»...**

Je ne connaissais pas si bien l'histoire de la photo au moment où j'ai élaboré mon propre style. C'était une réponse aux critiques de certains photographes. Bien sûr, je n'étais pas totalement sans culture, mais je ne fais partie d'aucune école. Je n'appartiens pas à l'école de Düsseldorf, Eggleston n'a pas non plus eu un impact très fort sur moi. Il est formidable, il n'y a pas de doute là-dessus, mais ce n'est pas ma religion.

**C'est pour cela que vous photographiez plein de choses différentes comme cet écran, ce monumental cul masculin ou le blanc absolu, comme sur ce tirage immaculé ?**

La photographie toute blanche ? C'est un nuage, j'ai photographié l'intérieur d'un nuage ! Cela m'a pris trente ans pour faire cette photographie. La chose intéressante à propos de l'art, c'est qu'avec la maturité, on ne fait pas la même chose qu'à 25 ans. Je suis heureux de travailler dans le champ des arts visuels, car c'est un espace où l'on peut grandir. Avec la musique pop, vous êtes *out* quand vous avez 35 ans. Vous avez sans doute vu déjà ça, une photo prise depuis un hublot d'avion où l'on ne voit rien du tout. Au moment particulier où j'ai pris cette photo, c'est ce que j'ai vu. C'est vraiment ce que l'on voit à l'intérieur d'un nuage ! Etais-je capable de prendre cette photo ? C'est toujours la question qui précède chacune de mes images. Parce que c'est hautement improbable finalement que l'on puisse prendre une photo de cela. Dans un monde de milliards et de milliards d'images, pourquoi ma photo pourrait-elle ou serait-elle importante finalement ? C'est toujours un défi que je me lance.

**Qu'est-ce qui motive encore votre désir de faire des images ?**

Je ne travaille pas toujours avec le même modus operandi. Par exemple, la photo de cette main tendue à New York pendant une manifestation du Black Lives Matter : là, je suis motivé par l'idée d'amplification, j'aime l'idée d'être un porte-voix. Je peux prendre la photo et la mettre sur le mur : des milliers de personnes vont la voir pendant les quatre mois de l'exposition. Pour d'autres images, c'est un jeu pur. J'adore jouer dans la chambre noire avec les lumières et le papier photosensible. Enfin, cette photographie statique d'écran est politique et poétique en même temps. Normalement, on ne peut pas photographier un écran car il y a toujours des barres noires qui apparaissent - j'avais déjà essayé sans réussir il y a trente ans. Mais j'étais à Saint-Pétersbourg et j'ai vu un vieil écran plat dans ma chambre d'hôtel. Là, j'ai enfin trouvé la façon de photographier correctement un écran sans barres noires. Chaque image est une expérience. C'est à chaque fois un nouveau challenge.

**Et la photo de ce cul monumental ? A qui est-il ?**

Je ne sais pas. Enfin si, je sais très bien, mais je ne peux pas vous le dire. C'est un cul qui doit rester secret. ➞

Clémentine Mercier

Sooke, Alastair. « Never mind the politics, feel the lobsters - Wolfgang Tillmans 2017, Tate Modern, review »,  
*The Telegraph*, February 14, 2017.  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/what-to-see/politics-lobsters-wolfgang-tillmans-2017-tate-modern-review/>

## The Telegraph

# Never mind the politics, feel the lobsters - Wolfgang Tillmans 2017, Tate Modern, review

★★★★



Wolfgang Tillmans's Juan Pablo & Karl, Chingaza 2012, on display at Tate Modern CREDIT: © WOLFGANG TILLMANS/TATE MODERN

By **Alastair Sooke, ART CRITIC**

14 FEBRUARY 2017 • 9:30AM

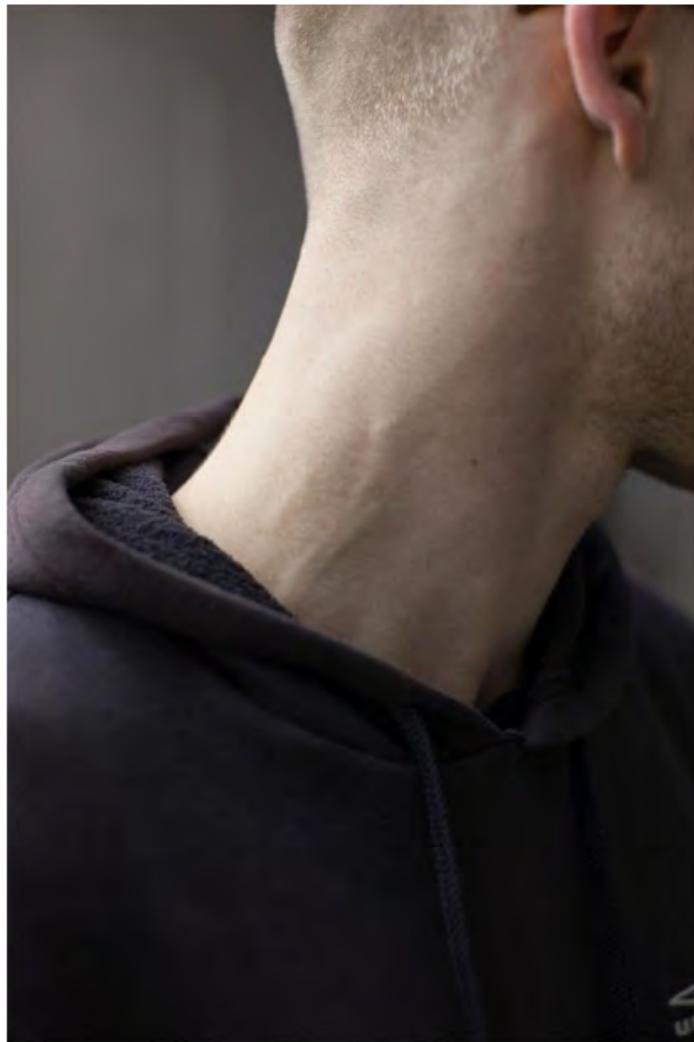
**I**t is almost two decades since Wolfgang Tillmans became the first photographer, and non-British artist, to win the Turner Prize, back in 2000. The German, then, is hardly a new name. Indeed, now 48, he is very much in middle age.

Don't get the wrong impression, though: there's no cocoa-and-slippers cosiness about his fresh and invigorating new exhibition, arranged across 14 rooms at Tate Modern. Walking through it is like putting your fingers on the beating pulse of now.

Call it a retrospective at your peril: everything about the show, which presents Tillmans's output using a high-resolution digital camera since 2003, when he had a solo exhibition at Tate Britain, broadcasts his questing, restless desire to innovate and do things differently.

Sooke, Alastair. « Never mind the politics, feel the lobsters - Wolfgang Tillmans 2017, Tate Modern, review »,  
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## The Telegraph



Wolfgang Tillmans's Collum, 2011 CREDIT: © WOLFGANG TILLMANS/TATE MODERN

So, with one or two exceptions (towards the end, for instance, we find a gallery of portraits), there are no themed rooms. Instead, in the spirit of his artistic hero Robert Rauschenberg (currently the subject, coincidentally, of another retrospective at Tate Modern), Tillmans delights in thumbing his nose at hierarchies and smashing apart conventions.

He is known, for instance, for his unusual approach to showing work, and here he does not disappoint. Photographs are presented every which way: large, small, high up, low down, above doorframes and windows, squeezed into corners, stuck next to fire escape signs. A few are framed, but most are not. Typically, they're attached to bulldog clips hanging from tacks. Some are even taped directly to the wall.

The presentation is crucial, because it broadcasts an important message: Tillmans's art is anything but stuffy or pompous. Rather, it's all informality and casual flair. At times, he flirts with visual anarchy. But he also subtly corrals the exhibition so that it flows with enviable rhythm.

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Wolfgang Tillmans's Iguazu, 2010 CREDIT: © WOLFGANG TILLMANS/TATE MODERN

He is no stranger to art history, either. Walking around, I totted up references to, among other things, Courbet's *Origin of the World* (later, there is a corresponding and provocatively blown-up close-up of a naked man's buttocks and testicles), and the *Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, a notorious, gender-bending ancient marble statue that Tillmans co-opts as an emblem of his own queer politics.

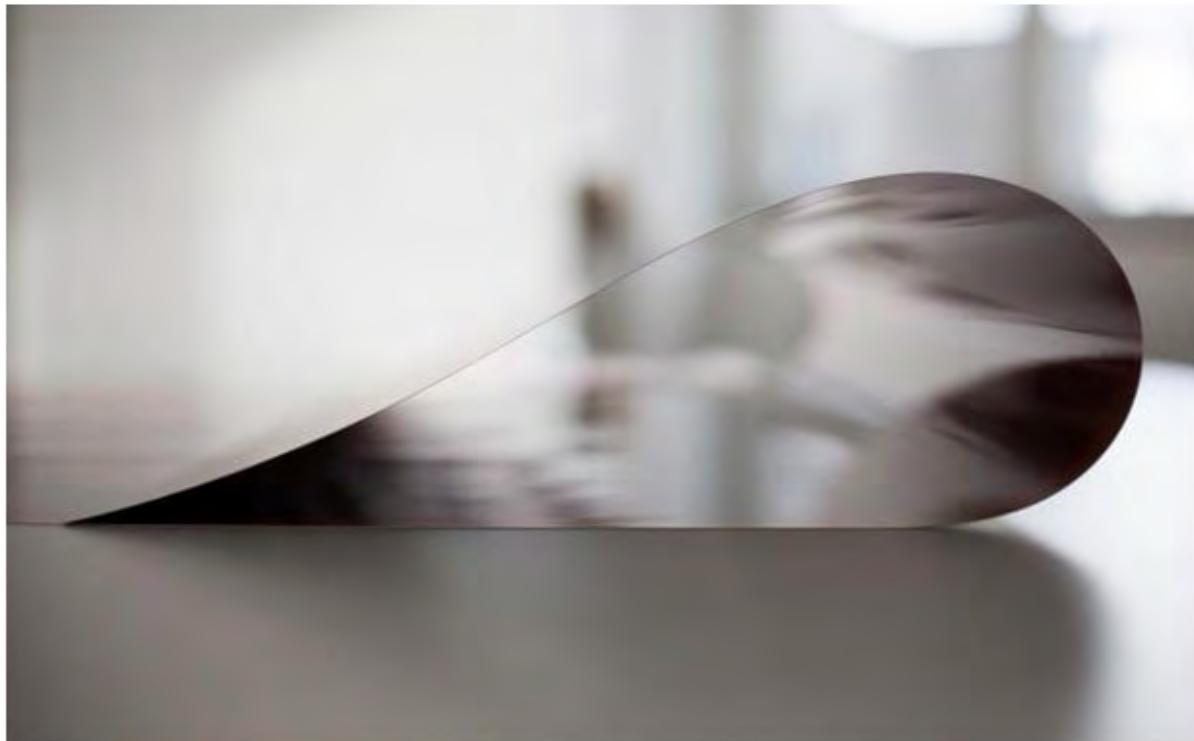
A vast black-and-white print of a semi-naked male youth, wearing only Adidas shorts, pulling a splinter from his foot restages another famous statue from antiquity, known as the "Spinario", or Boy with Thorn.

I doubt that many people will get the reference, and fewer still will care – but such allusions suggest that beneath Tillmans's modishness and freewheeling invention, a solid bedrock underpins his art.

What, then, of the work? Above all, Tillmans is a gorgeous colourist. As befits an artist who made his name in fashion photography during the Nineties, he has a sensuous eye, and can make even the most unremarkable subject, such as the folds of a jacket above a pair of jeans, compelling.

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Wolfgang Tillmans's Paper Drop Prinzessinnenstrasse, 2014 CREDIT: © WOLFGANG TILLMANS/TATE MODERN

Indeed, his instinctive knack for creating memorably ravishing images is a sort of ocular superpower – the essence of his talent, akin to, say, David Hockney’s exquisite draughtsmanship.

This is evident after the preamble of the exhibition’s opening two rooms (the second of which, focusing on Tillmans’s studio, functions as a composite, introductory self-portrait). The third gallery – hung with seven substantial prints – stops you in your tracks.

Here is a close-up of a glittering car headlight, surrounded by an expanse of glossy red bonnet: automobile bodywork has never looked so sexy. There are the cracked remains of a lavish meal of lobsters: the panoply of oranges, reds, yellows, pinks, creams, and whites provides a succulent visual feast, reflecting the one consumed.

Lest we surfeit, though, a plump black fly – a classic symbol of mortality – strikes a troubling note. There’s that engagement with art history again.

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## The Telegraph



Wolfgang Tillmans's Astro Crusto, 2012 CREDIT: © WOLFGANG TILLMANS/TATE MODERN

Throughout the exhibition, there are countless instances of similarly lush and sumptuous images. The graceful young man from Jeddah wearing a loose pink robe, leaning against a garish pink car. The brilliant, insouciant toucan, with a curving orange beak. The majestic weed thrusting through the cracks of Tillmans's London patio with puffed-chest vigour, presented on an epic scale, like a portrait of Napoleon.

Then there are the stunning Blushes – a series of sublime abstract images on which Tillmans has been working since 2000. (Abstraction is an important strand of his artistic DNA.) With startling originality, Tillmans produces their quasi-painterly marks without a camera, by manipulating light directly onto photographic paper.

Elsewhere, he is great on texture, as well as colour. In Dusty Vehicle (2012), desert sand covers a Mercedes like a thick and tactile pelt. In La Palma (2014), foaming waves have the consistency of double cream. Spherical specks of spray levitate in mid-air like a juggler's balls.

I could go on. But there is another side to Tillmans – and one, I sense, which he encourages deliberately, to temper the facility of his innate gift for image-making, lest people accuse him of producing superficial pictures that appeal only to the eye. And that is his tendency to talk politics.

Sooke, Alastair. « Never mind the politics, feel the lobsters - Wolfgang Tillmans 2017, Tate Modern, review »,  
*The Telegraph*, February 14, 2017.  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/what-to-see/politics-lobsters-wolfgang-tillmans-2017-tate-modern-review/>

## The Telegraph



Wolfgang Tillmans's Shit Buildings Going Up Left, Right and Centre, 2014 CREDIT: © WOLFGANG TILLMANS/TATE MODERN

There are many photos here about war, gender politics and gay rights, the refugee crisis. A smashed-up boat lies wrecked on a beach on Lampedusa. An aerial shot documents the catastrophic effects on Port-au-Prince of the earthquake of 2010.

All this is fine: Tillmans is free, of course, to express his concerns and beliefs. For many people, his crusading political sincerity will only add urgency to work that already feels remarkably contemporary.

Sometimes, though, his political work feels like an exercise in virtue-signalling. Moreover, even his most ardent fans would surely concede the weakness of his “truth study center” installations, featuring itsy-bitsy photographs, clippings from newspapers and magazines, and print-outs of online articles, all presented beneath glass on wooden tables.

Sure, they remind us that the world is horribly violent, divided, and fragile. They also skewer our era of “fake news”. But they have the subtlety of thought of a sixth-form debate, and none of the arresting visual aplomb which won Tillmans acclaim.

Sooke, Alastair. « Never mind the politics, feel the lobsters - Wolfgang Tillmans 2017, Tate Modern, review »,  
*The Telegraph*, February 14, 2017.  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/what-to-see/politics-lobsters-wolfgang-tillmans-2017-tate-modern-review/>

## The Telegraph



Wolfgang Tillmans in 2013 CREDIT: ANDERS CLAUSEN

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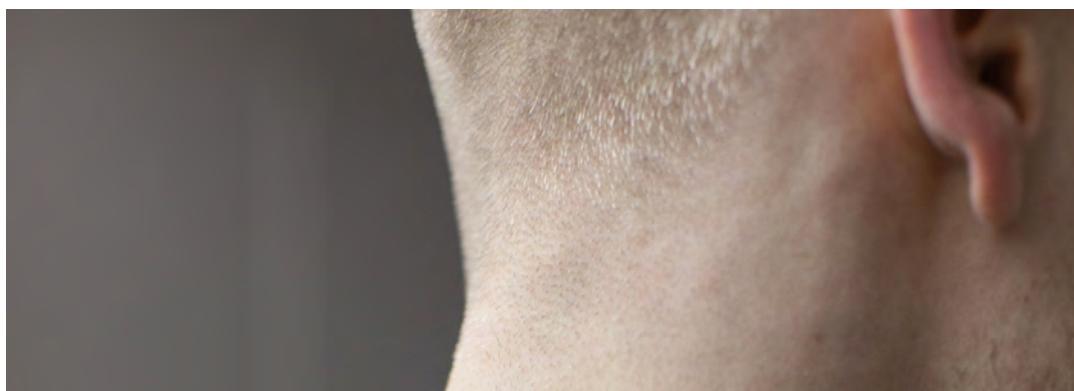
By the end, I was also tired of Tillmans's disruptive aversion to the conventions of retrospectives. He deliberately disregards chronology, by jumbling up different bodies of work, but this means that there is little sense of artistic development.

Consequently, although Tillmans is a sophisticated and supple designer of exhibitions, the final room, for instance, feels similar, in terms of overall tone and effect, to the preceding ones. An exhibition two thirds the size would, arguably, have had more impact.

These, though, are quibbles. Few artists navigate the complexities of the world today with such honesty as well as style, presenting both the dazzle and the muddle of our overloaded modern lives. Tillmans may not be a new name, but he remains a very special talent.

**From Feb 15 until June 11; information: 020 7887 8888**

FRIEZE.COM



REVIEW - 14 FEB 2017

# Wolfgang Tillmans

Opening tomorrow, Wolfgang Tillmans's major retrospective at Tate Modern shows an artist coming full circle

BY LAURIE TAYLOR

'[Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017](#)', which opens tomorrow, is the artist's first solo exhibition at Tate Modern and is part of the institution's push to expand their contemporary photography collection beyond the canonical 'black and white fine print' tradition. Born in Remscheid, West Germany in 1968, [Tillmans](#) first gained attention in the early 1990s for his photographs, which documented the gay scene and club culture in London for magazines such as *i-D* and *Spex*. He went on to win the Turner Prize in 2000 – the first photographer and non-British artist to do so – and has since continued to work along an increasingly conceptual axis. The exhibition begins in 2003, a year that marked a fundamental change for [Tillmans](#). The second Iraq war, the fall out of which is still being felt today, and its peripheral issues of religious fundamentalism, capitalism, migration and anti-globalism had a profound effect upon the artist, markedly influencing his artistic practice.

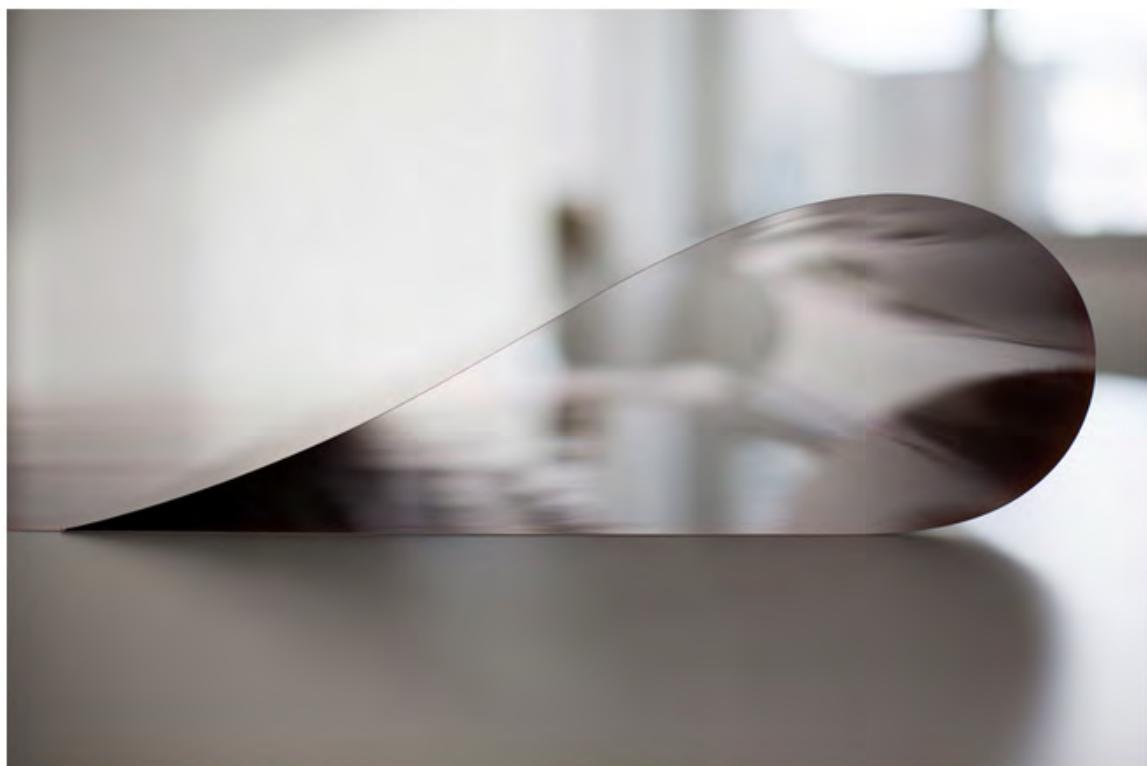


Wolfgang Tillmans, *Juan Pablo & Karl, Chingaza*, 2012. Courtesy: © Wolfgang Tillmans

## FRIEZE.COM

His is a practice that can be difficult to categorize as Tillmans's work often fails to fit into traditional boxes. First and foremost a photographer, his early interest in the medium's documentary capabilities have given way to a more inward-looking approach, whereby he makes photographs, causing the images to happen, rather than taking them from what is already there. In his abstract series, such as 'Paper Drop' (2001–08), 'Greifbar' (2014–15) and 'Silver' (1998–ongoing), Tillmans explores the serendipitous effects that occur when light, chemicals, dust and photographic paper are combined in unconventional ways. These works, which range in size from A5 portfolio prints to 2m wall-size prints, are evidence of Tillmans's fascination with photography's unique materials and processes, but they also represent a different form of photographic record, created but nonetheless true. As if to highlight their central significance to Tillmans's practice, these abstract works are scattered throughout the exhibition, appearing in different rooms, sometimes framed, sometimes hung with bulldog clips, alongside other seemingly unrelated works.

In a departure from purely photographic work, Tillmans also uses newspaper and magazine clippings, postcards and pamphlets alongside his own photographs, presenting them not on the wall, but rather in custom-made table displays. The 'Truth Study Centre' (2005), in addition to being more multi-media than previous work, was also Tillman's first overtly political work. The project, which features in the exhibition, functions as a critical engagement with propaganda and the assumed veracity of visual and printed materials. Produced just two years after the invasion of Iraq, 'Truth Study Centre' was motivated by Tillmans's own desire to do more than watch from the side-lines; this pull towards activism was one he hoped would translate to viewers, inspiring further active engagement.



Wolfgang Tillmans, *paper drop Prinzessinnenstrasse*, 2014. Courtesy: © Wolfgang Tillmans

## FRIEZE.COM

These days, Tillmans is discovering new creative vehicles through which to express his political and social interests. He runs an exhibition space, 'Between Bridges', which opened in London in 2006 as a showcase for young artists with a notably political edge to their work. Tillmans relocated the space to Berlin in 2014, where it continues to feature installations, talks and performances, concentrating most recently on addressing the refugee crisis in the EU. In his latest venture, Tillmans is reinvented as a songwriter and vocalist. In 2016, with help from a revolving line-up of studio musicians, he put out two techno-influenced EPs. *Device Control 2016/1986* was released in September and was quickly followed in December by *That's Desire/Here We Are*. The latter features a synth-pop/post-punk musical style straight out of 1983, but Tillmans lyrics, particularly the Brexit and Donald Trump-inspired 'Naive Me' are all too current. The EP has also been released as a 'visual album' in which Tillmans and a cast of guest performers sing and dance (and hula-hoop) to each track. In making the albums, Tillmans wanted to remind us that amidst the need for activism and awareness, we must also leave room for living life and seeking out happiness wherever we can.

Tillmans's musical endeavours form part of his latest exhibition, as Tate Modern turns its underground chamber, 'The Tanks', into a makeshift listening room. For ten days, beginning on 3 March, Tillmans will take over the south tank for a series of music and video events designed to provide an immersive and contemplative environment for the appreciation of music and sound – not unlike the spaces created by museums and galleries for visual art.



Wolfgang  
Tillmans, *astro crusto*,  
2012. Courtesy: ©  
Wolfgang Tillmans

## FRIEZE.COM

With this latest foray into music, there is a feeling of Tillmans coming full circle. It was club culture, after all, that first sparked his rise to international fame. But in those early photographs of ravers, Tillmans existed as observer, looking outward and bearing witness to the world around him. In his more recent works, however, he seems to be playing an increasingly active role. Is this just the natural evolution of contemporary artistic practice, where the artist slowly becomes the art or rather did the events of the early 2000s initiate this participatory turn in Tillmans? By starting in 2003, the Tate Modern show suggests the latter. Perhaps it was only when the world around him began to change that the artist was able to do the same.

- ['Look, again' – Wolfgang Tillmans talks to Dominic Eichler about observation, perception and translation](#)
- [Listen: Wolfgang Tillmans talks to Julia Peyton-Jones, Adrian Searle, and Jane & Louise Wilson about London in the '90s](#)
- ['EU Campaign' – Saim Dermican on Tillmans's pro-EU poster campaign](#)
- [Listen: Wolfgang Tillmans discusses two decades of his practice](#)

['Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017'](#) is on view at Tate Modern, London, 15 February–11

June. Main image: Wolfgang Tillmans, Collum, 2011. Courtesy: © Wolfgang Tillmans

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LAURIE TAYLOR

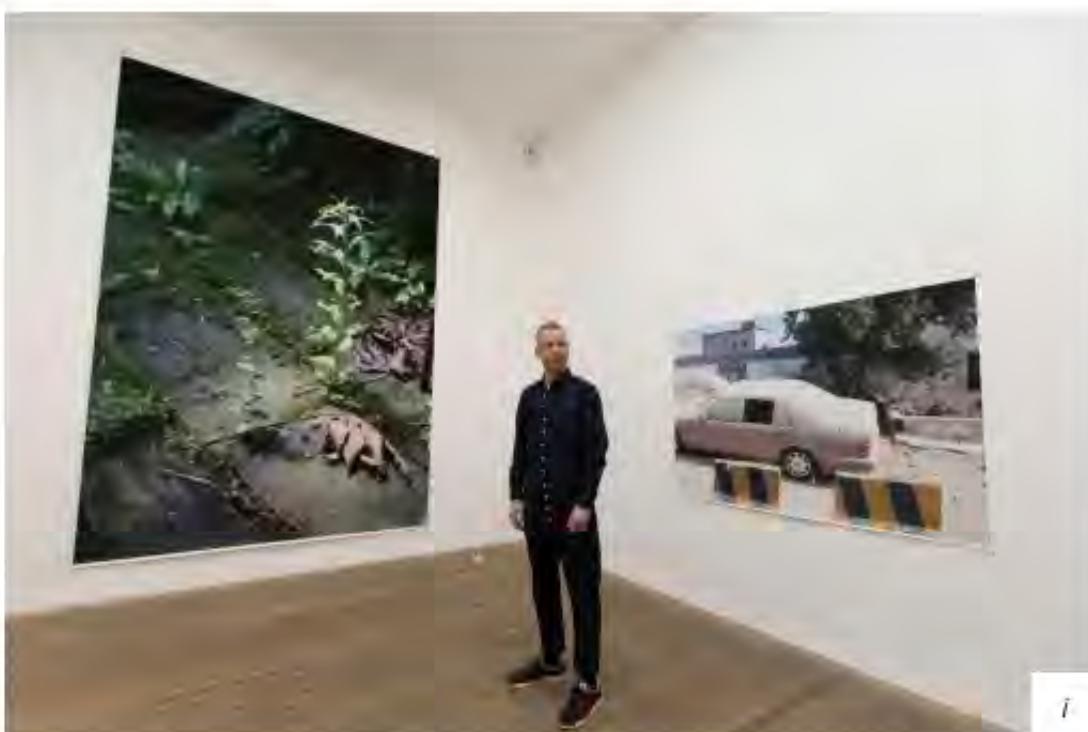
Laurie Taylor is a writer and editor based in London, UK.

# Brexit et testicules : Tillmans expose à la Tate Modern de Londres

AFP

Publié le 14/02/2017 à 17:42 | AFP

Galerie  
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"Fake news", Brexit et testicules : le photographe et plasticien allemand Wolfgang Tillmans expose à partir de mercredi à la Tate Modern de Londres une oeuvre éclectique mêlant poésie et politique.

"Cette exposition n'est pas seulement politique", a toutefois souligné l'artiste lors de la présentation de l'exposition, mardi. "Il y est tout autant question de poésie et d'art".

Pour autant, le politique est omniprésent dans son oeuvre, qui associe photos, vidéos et sons : Il est au coeur de ses posters pro-Europe réalisés lors de la campagne du référendum sur la sortie du Royaume-Uni de l'Union européenne, l'an dernier, et de ses photos de frontières et de murs.

# Le Point

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Il est aussi au centre de ses "truth study centers" ("centres d'étude de la vérité"), sur lesquelles il travaille depuis 2005, et qui prennent une résonance toute particulière dans une période où "post-vérité" et "fake news" - les fausses informations créées pour duper le public - sont au cœur des débats.

Ces "centres", compilations de photographies, dessins et coupures de presse, visent à démontrer comment une information peut être traitée différemment selon la source la diffusant.

Wolfgang Tillmans est un "homme de la Renaissance vivant au XXIe siècle", estime Chris Dercon, commissaire principal de l'exposition, qui se tient jusqu'au 11 juin. "Il apporte quelque chose à ce monde. Il veut que nous soyons les complices de l'image. Il ne prend pas des photos, il fait des photos".

Le commissaire souligne la capacité de l'artiste allemand à s'inspirer d'oeuvres anciennes, comme les natures mortes, en leur donnant une dimension moderne.

Symbolique de cette capacité de synthèse, une de ses œuvres ne manquera pas d'attirer les regards : un cliché de testicules intitulé "Nackt, 2" et faisant écho au célèbre tableau de Gustave Courbet, "L'origine du monde", représentant un sexe de femme.

14/02/2017 17:41:29 - Londres (AFP) - © 2017 AFP



## Wolfgang Tillmans review - a rollercoaster ride around the world



Tate Modern, London

Cities from the sky, cigarette still lifes and sunset drives ... the German's swirling show has got the lot - even a room to dance in



Wolfgang Tillmans with his work *Sendeschluss/End of Broadcast V*, 2014 at Tate Modern. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

Room after room, turn after turn, Wolfgang Tillmans' Tate Modern exhibition teems with images large and small. Images alone and arrays of larger and smaller photographs, framed and unframed and attached to the wall with bulldog clips, hung high over doorways and shuffled on a table.

A young man's neck, a knee, a hand stuffed down a pair of shorts. A glimpse of flesh as someone turns. A boy looking at his phone at a London roundabout, a young man in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, all in fuchsia next to his shiny purple car, mobile phone in his hand. A pair of balls and anus, close-up, huge on the wall. A city seen from the sky from an aeroplane window; another city, veiled in pollution. You can get very close or not nearly close enough. Or even too close.

These shifts in distance and proximity, scale and presentation let Tillmans' photographs, in all their variety, breathe. Such stratagems are familiar from earlier exhibitions of the German artist's work, but are more than just a way of amassing his material. They take account of our mobility and insatiable hunger for the next thing, in order to slow us down and pay attention.

Searle, Adrian. « Wolfgang Tillmans review – a rollercoaster ride around the world », *The Guardian*, February 14, 2017.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/feb/14/wolfgang-tillmans-review-photographer-tate-modern>

the guardian



Headlight, 2012, left, and Munuwata sky, 2011 by Wolfgang Tillmans. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock



There is music. There is dancing. Bewilderment is part of the pleasure, as we move between images and photographic abstractions. [Tillmans' asks us to make connections](#) of all kinds - formal, thematic, spatial, political. He asks what the limits of photography are. There are questions here about time, place, belonging, voyeurism, affection, sex. After a while it all starts to tumble through me.

Here is a laser print of a faded fax, itself a print of a photograph of a young man crouching, in a position like praying. Through all its technical reproduction, the image assumes a new quality, both degraded and as delicate as a pen and wash drawing, the faded memory of something seen or encountered, bought back to mind.

Then we are swept away on a drive down Sunset Boulevard, rear lights flaring in the night, then trudging down the grey-carpeted slope of an airport corridor, heading towards Immigration, beyond the sign that reads “Rest of World”. OK. Where next? To the studio, with its messy desk, a still life of monitors, laptops and cables, beer bottles, cigarette packs and ashtrays. Some images give you only blankness, pure colour pocked and marked by a dirty printer, a corrupted purity.

the guardian

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Sunset night drive, 2014. Photograph: © Wolfgang Tillmans



When Tillmans won the [Turner prize in 2000](#), he used some of his winnings to buy an expensive colour printer. In 2011, he dismantled the by now defunct machine, screw by screw. A thing of silvery panels and grey shadows, the parts clutter his studio floor, surrounding the printer's disembowelled carcass. What that thing has seen, how much use and abuse it has suffered. Then he took its photograph, as if he were looking for some secret there, some image lost inside. A little later we come to a gutted lobster shell, a fly working at a scrap of uneaten flesh in the upturned carapace on the table.

[Tillmans' work](#) is all a kind of evidence - a sifting through material to find meaning. Now the camera is staring into a big cardboard box, half-filled with pharmacist's tubs and packages, 17 years' supply of antiretroviral and other medications to treat HIV/Aids. I imagine the sound that box would make if you shook it, what that sound might say about a human life, its vulnerability and value.

## the guardian

A whole world is here. A filthy drainpipe in Buenos Aires, a Delhi morning, Shanghai nights, Port-au-Prince and Lima seen from the air. Anders, half naked, bent over and pulling a splinter from his foot, a timeless moment of attentive self-care. Everything collides in this warren of 14 spaces. Tillmans' 2017 is not a retrospective so much as a realignment of images and preoccupations. Reconfiguring his work, introducing pauses and interruptions, is a way of telling the story new each time.



Market I, 2012, on show at Tate Modern. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images



Making a show is as much a part of Tillmans' work as taking pictures, making a video or an installation. Or, one might add, creating exhibition spaces in London then Berlin, championing other artists, and making the best case for remaining in Europe, as Tillmans did in a series of posters he created, and which could be downloaded and distributed for free, last year.

An arrangement of home-made tables fills one room. Begun in 2005 his truth study center is an ongoing project that collates all kinds of visual and written material as a kind of tabletop scrapbook of archived articles and images. It functions as a litmus test of the present moment. There are studies in brain research, and how hard it is to change people's political opinions; global warming evidence and why it riled doubters; the cognitive process, and why it is that that people don't care that Donald Trump lies. Here's a pamphlet on anal play for men and women. There is too much to take in, in these background rumbles of the personal, the public and the private.



Lampedusa, 2008. Photograph: © Wolfgang Tillmans



Reading jail (taken for his participation in the [Artangel](#) project there last year).

And here is artist Gustav Metzger, who first arrived in Britain as a refugee on the *Kindertransport*, almost a lifetime ago. The colourful wreckage of boats beached on Lampedusa marks a more recent transit of fleeing refugees. In a further image the spotlight of an Italian coastguard helicopter is cast on a dark sea in a rescue mission off the coast.

Someone stands beneath the Gaza wall, as if they were waiting for something. White paint is hurled over the screen of a Spanish ATM in a gesture of rage and obliteration. We are coming to the end. The last room in the show is dominated by an empty ocean, heaving with contrary currents and undertows. The image is called *The State We're In*. In a corner hang four modest pictures of a small apple tree, growing outside Tillmans' old London studio, the fruit ripening. Around, the world roars on.

Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017 is at Tate Modern, London, 15 February-11 June

the guardian

Later, music leaks into the gallery, and we are led into a blue room with acoustic baffles mounted on the walls and ceiling. A serious sound system blasts the music of 1980s British band *Colourbox* into the space. This is a kind of release. *Colourbox* was a studio band that never performed live, and the speakers reproduce their music as close to the quality of the original master recording as possible. Tillmans' *Playback Room* was first set up in Three Bridges, the studio/gallery space he set up in Bethnal Green, then again when he moved to Berlin. The room is cluttered with rows of old GDR school chairs. Ignoring them, I danced alone by the window, looking out at the grey river light on a winter day.

In another room, wearing only his underpants, Tillmans dances too, to the beat of his bare feet as he moves left and right before a mark on a wall, in the video *Instrument*. Maybe the black mark is a glory hole. On an adjacent screen we see his shadow cast on a different wall, making the same moves, slipping in and out of sync with his other self. Dancing for himself, dissolving in the rhythm, he is both instrument and player, catching up with himself, lagging behind. This second room, we learn, is in Tehran. What a strange and compelling work this is.

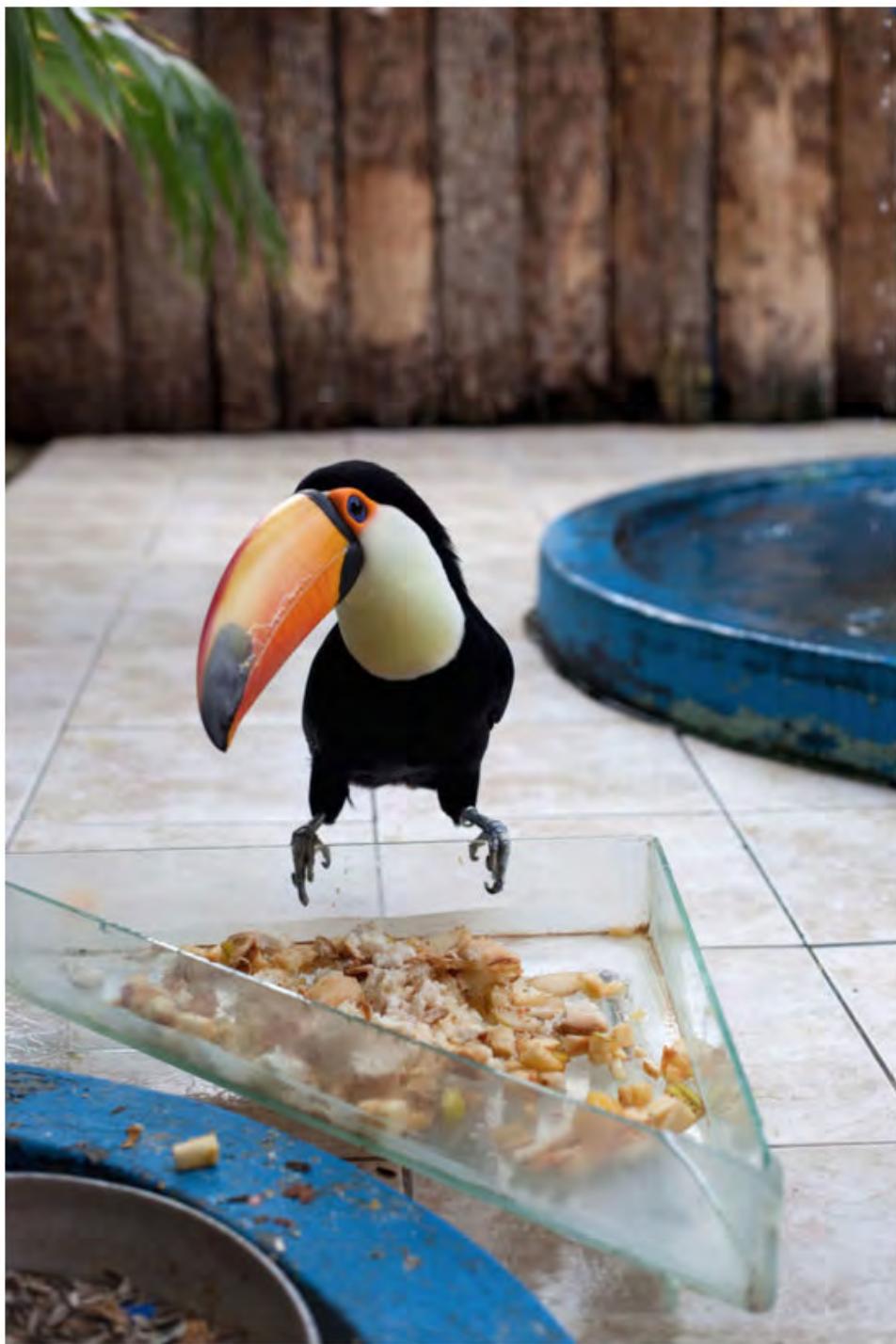
Among a number of portraits - including artist Richard Hamilton, singer Frank Ocean and ex-British Museum director Neil McGregor - we find Tillmans' own reflection, fractured in a scarred, dented and distorting metal mirror in

## **British Journal of Photography**

*Published on 14 February 2017*

# **Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017 opens at London's Tate Modern**

written by Diane Smyth

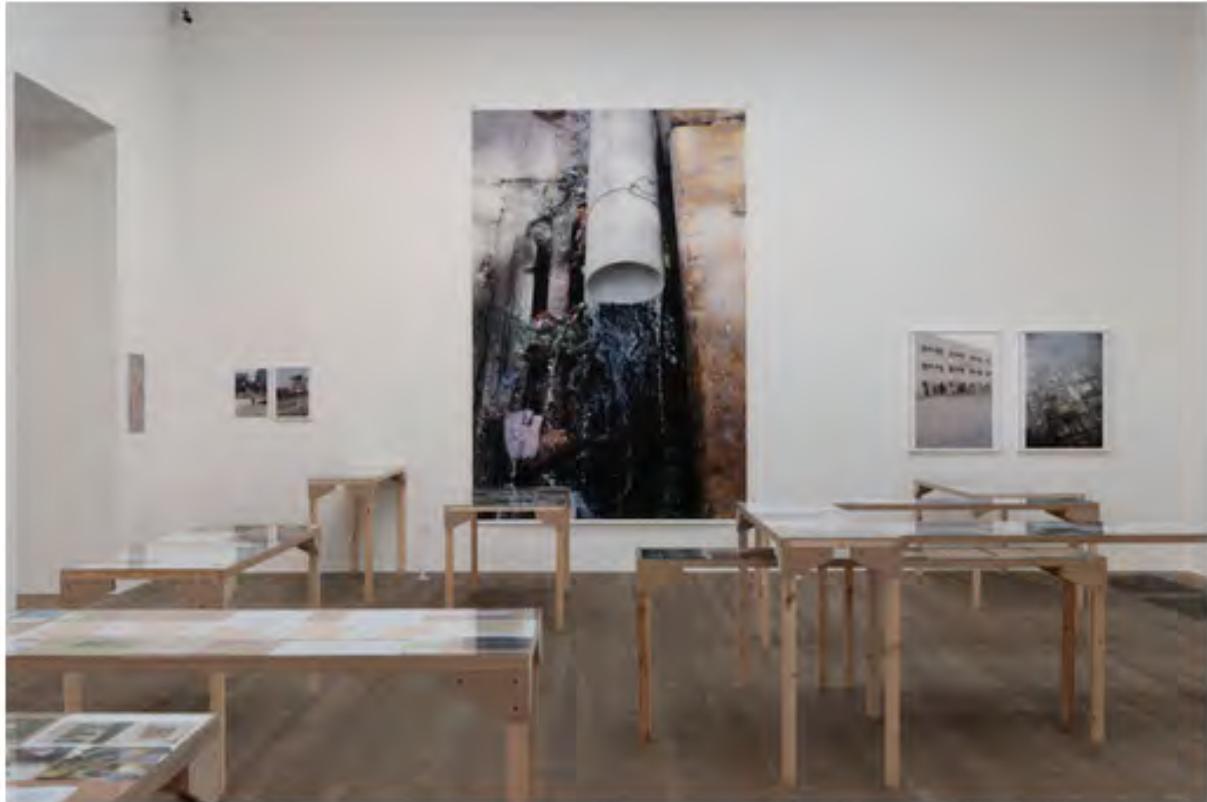


## British Journal of Photography

A huge 14-room exhibition, which also includes installations and live events in Tate Modern's south Tank, shows an artist with a singular take on the world

"He's not a prophet, but he sees where things might go because he has an eye for the world," said Chris Dercon, director of the Volksbühne Berlin and co-curator of Tate Modern's *Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017* show at its press view this morning. A huge 14-room exhibition it bears out Dercon's words with installations such as the ironically titled *truth study centre*, a collection of newspaper and magazine clippings, objects, drawings and images, that reflect on media representation of facts and our propensity to believe what we want despite them; also on show are Tillmans' pro-Remain posters from the recent British referendum on EU membership.

A close-up shot of a car headlight shot in 2012 is accompanied by the thought (in the exhibition booklet) that headlights are more angular now, "giving them a predatory appearance that might reflect a more competitive climate"; shots taken in nightclubs are interpreted in terms of the freedom might experience in such places. Other images show apples, celebrities, static interference; a specially-designed room, The Playback Room, is devoted to sharing recorded music on state-of-the-art equipment. The subject matter varies but it adds up to a singular, and maybe prophetic, vision.



Installation shot of room 4, which includes the latest iteration of the *truth study centre* project. Image © Tate Modern showing *Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017* at Tate Modern 15 February – 11 June

Smythe, Diane. « Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017 opens at London's Tate Modern », *British Journal of Photography*, February 14, 2017.  
<http://www.bjp-online.com/2017/02/wolfgang-tillmans-2017-opens-at-londons-tate-modern/>

## British Journal of Photography



*Installation shot of room 13, which focuses in on Tillmans' portraiture. Image © Tate Modern showing Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017 at Tate Modern 15 February – 11 June*

In March Tillmans will take over Tate Modern's south Tank for ten days, with a series of live music events including an afternoon devoted to "The 48 tracks that make up *It's A Sin* by Pet Shop Boys". The exhibition includes a series of Playback Room Sessions, in which artists such as Jeremy Deller and Adam Buxton have been invited to share and discuss music that's inspired them.

*Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017 is on show at Tate Modern from 15 February – 11 June; entry costs £12.50. [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)*



*Shit buildings going up left, right and centre 2014 © Wolfgang Tillmans. On show at Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017 at Tate Modern 15 February – 11 June*

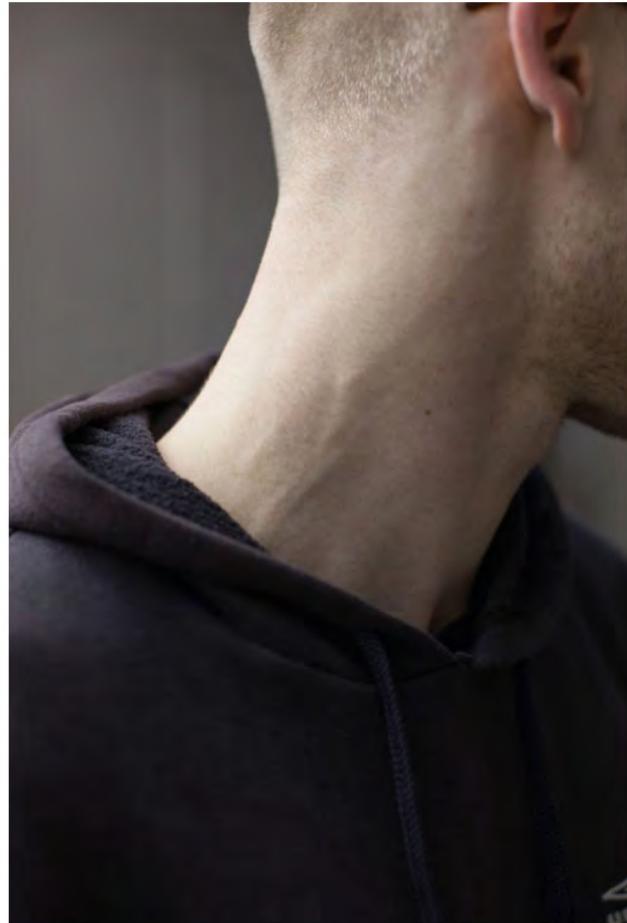
Smythe, Diane. « Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017 opens at London's Tate Modern », *British Journal of Photography*, February 14, 2017.  
<http://www.bjp-online.com/2017/02/wolfgang-tillmans-2017-opens-at-londons-tate-modern/>

## British Journal of Photography

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*astro crusto*, a 2012 © Wolfgang Tillmans. On show at Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017 at Tate Modern 15 February – 11 June



*Collum* 2011 © Wolfgang Tillmans. On show at Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017 at Tate Modern 15 February – 11 June



*Juan Pablo & Karl, Chingaza* 2012 © Wolfgang Tillmans. On show at Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017 at Tate Modern 15 February – 11 June

Smythe, Diane. « Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017 opens at London's Tate Modern », *British Journal of Photography*, February 14, 2017.  
<http://www.bjp-online.com/2017/02/wolfgang-tillmans-2017-opens-at-londons-tate-modern/>

## **British Journal of Photography**



*Iguazu 2010 © Wolfgang Tillmans. On show at Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017 at Tate Modern 15 February – 11 June*



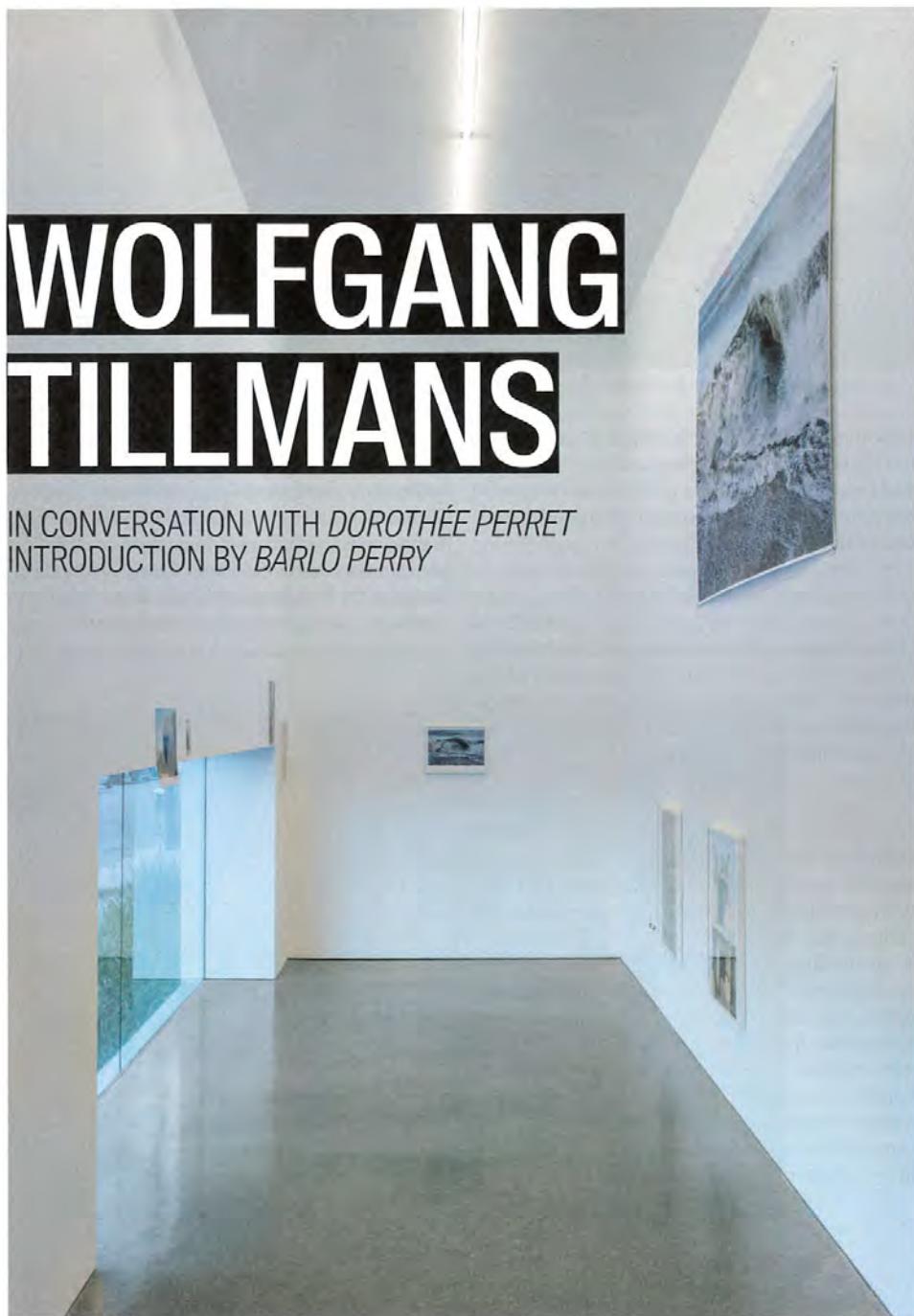
*paper drop Prinzessinnenstrasse 2014 © Wolfgang Tillmans. On show at Wolfgang Tillmans: 2017 at Tate Modern 15 February – 11 June*

**PARISLA**

# **SOUND AND VISION**

## **WOLFGANG TILLMANS**

IN CONVERSATION WITH *DOROTHÉE PERRET*  
INTRODUCTION BY *BARLO PERRY*



Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

# PARISLA



The new Wolfgang Tillmans show at Regen Projects in Los Angeles opened three days before election night 2016, a jolting aftershock to the pro-Brexit vote the previous June. Maintaining their “special relationship” by mimicking one another’s worst instincts, the United States and Great Britain have both taken a “populist,” nationalist leap from a cliff, exit Right.

In many ways this feels like terra incognita. But it also feels familiar. Certainly Wolfgang Tillmans—creator of anti-Brexit posters and a recent *Artforum* ad for his Regen Projects show which he repurposed as an anti-Trump message—has been somewhere like this before. At a London anti-Iraq war demo over a decade ago, he carried a large sign with the words: *the axis of evil goes right thru George W.’s juicy manhole*.

Born in Remscheid, Germany in 1968, Wolfgang moved to Hamburg in his late teens—where he had his first show, at Cafe Gnosa, an artists’ café—and left for England in his early twenties, where he attended the Bournemouth College of Art and Design. London has been a chief base of operations since 1992, and he won Britain’s Turner Prize—the first photographer and first non-U.K. citizen to do so—in 2000. In Berlin he is identified with a rich work-and-play relationship with the Ostgut and Berghain techno clubs. In 2016, Wolfgang returned to music making with the 2016/1986 and *Device Control* EPs, both on Fragile. The former includes remixes of three songs he recorded in 1986, and the cut “Device Control” also appeared on Frank Ocean’s *Endless* album.

A thoughtful, intelligent confidence has guided his long, successful journey, but Wolfgang has claimed that he would be lost without the strong sense of doubt that defines his photography, from the representational documents of his community to his abstractions. He is highly engaged in the international discourse around politics and power. Yet, as he told writer Paul Flynn in 2009, “purposelessness is quite crucial to art.” These contradictions are the connections that inform Wolfgang’s body of work, most recently in the half-hour visual album *That’s Desire/Here We Are* by his band project Fragile, shot in Los Angeles in autumn 2016. Featuring improvisations by actors Bashir Daviid Naim and Hari Nef, joyous hula-hooping by Karis Wilde, and Wolfgang’s lyrics and deep-voiced *Sprechgesang*, it’s a bittersweet celebration and affirmation of individuality, cosmopolitanism, and desire.

# PARISLA

## DOROTHÉE PERRET

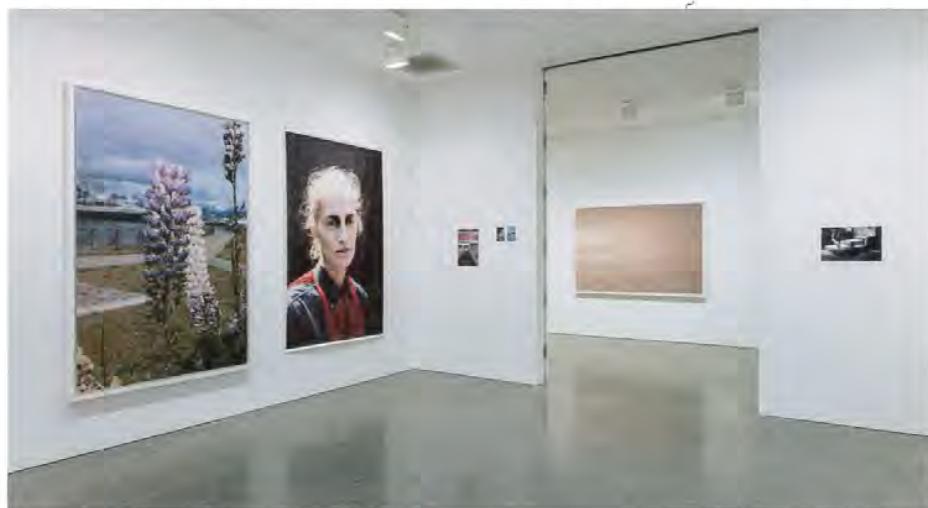
I first encountered your work through magazines like *i-D* and *Purple*. That was the culture at that time, that's how I got information in my youth. You somehow managed to start from magazines, and kind of bridged, crossed over. And you did it, like, twenty-five years ago.

## WOLFGANG TILLMANS

But that's really a very long-lasting misconception.

## WOLFGANG

But I also wanted to speak with clothes. I was always working with a sense of purpose. Maybe "mission" is too much, but actually, yes, it was [a] mission. Like the Alex and Lutz story, for example. That was in 1992, and when you look at the magazine, the opening page is a T-shirt that I made with a flyer that I collected in Los Angeles in 1990. And it says, "Fuck Men! Fuck Male Domination! They don't destroy their selves... they aim to destroy me and you. The freedom



tion, a misunderstanding. I always saw myself as an artist, but I was equally drawn to youth subcultures, their music and street styles. I saw no reason, other than hierarchical "high-art/low-art" narrow-mindedness, to not engage in *The Meaning of Style*, as the subtitle of Dick Hebdige's book from 1979 goes. From the start, I equally showed in galleries and magazines, and I still do so today. For me nothing changed from that.

"we seek, to live, to love, to do," will explode us. We want the freedom to love, to live.

## DOROTHÉE

That was already there.

## WOLFGANG

It's always been there. I'm only in media because, on the one hand, I have felt a great energy from it myself, growing up with feeling the power of record covers, the power of a magazine. And I wanted to be there because I wanted to represent my ideas, my *ideals*, of what I felt was missing.

## WOLFGANG

They were all for *i-D* in the early '90s. I was given exceptional freedom in a short time window, maybe a couple of years.

## DOROTHÉE

Did you collaborate with magazines because you missed the representation of the people in your community?

## DOROTHÉE

I remember the Alex and Lutz series burned in my mind as a symbol for gender equality. You were exposing through one image all sorts of different forms of sexual exploration. It was definitely not fashion [per se].

## WOLFGANG

First of all, everything worked out great. [LAUGHTER] I'm very happy. But I did go a more difficult route. I did a lot of things that were not necessarily considered high art in the broader art world, and from the beginning my audience

# PARISLA

was not limited to the art world. I started making exhibitions in 1988, when I was not even twenty. And they were black and white, grainy photocopies.

DOROTHÉE

So in fact you started as a "purely disciplined" artist.

managed to tune in to many ways of looking at the world. And you've opened the spectrum for us. I wanted to talk about music because I know it's been one of your big passions for a long time. How does music interact with photography? Is it one big thing? Is it separate?

WOLFGANG

I mean, definitely, the making of music is a new thing because, for twenty-eight years, I haven't done music. I just hope we're okay.



WOLFGANG

Yes. It was studying the abstraction of a photograph. It was, like, gray surfaces. I was studying the nuances of these toners on paper. Why was a photocopy, to me, suddenly more valuable than my paintings? I stopped drawing and painting. I stopped making music. I moved into these photocopies.

DOROTHÉE

Did magazines invite you to shoot fashion, and you refused?

WOLFGANG

No, I wanted to. In 1990 I did a story for a Hamburg *Time Out*-type magazine called *Prinz*, and it was about styling it. So all the relevant fashion things that I did I styled myself. It came from the clothes.

DOROTHÉE

The culture around the queer scene in the '90s in Berlin, with techno and house parties, was your lifestyle. And your images, your photos, in all formats, that document that era, do what music does when it opens senses. Because of your purely disciplinary way of working, you've

This summer [2016] you performed on Fire Island and in Brooklyn. Can you share the experience? Did you enjoy the performative aspect of it?

WOLFGANG

In Fire Island I spent the summer writing songs with musician friends under the name of Fragile, my teenage nom d'artiste, which has kept a curious currency in today's world. We performed on the beach at the BOFFO Performance Festival, and later at Union Pool in Brooklyn. In the beginning I was very afraid to take it live, but thanks to band members Juan Pablo Echeverri, Jay Pluck, Kyle Combs, Tom Roach, and Daniel Pearce—who all have live experience—I soon overcame my stage fright, and we did a surprisingly confident set. The feedback was genuinely positive.

DOROTHÉE

Did you receive a musical education, or did you do your own research?

WOLFGANG

Music is something that I was never trained in.

# PARISLA

I was never good, *supposedly* good, at it. I never had confidence. But I grew up with music. Classical music with my parents, and the Neil Young and Beatles records of my brother and sister, before I discovered Italo Disco, haha. My passions were astronomy and then music.

DOROTHÉE

You [first] composed music twenty years or...

WOLFGANG

I mean, I see the life *politic*, the life that we live all together as people, is the sum of what people throw into their world. And, ultimately, culture is hugely important. There's commerce, there's food, there's housing, there's, for some, religion. But culture is a huge thing, and it is often treated as an extra, as a marginal thing. But, ultimately, it's the clay of culture that holds our life together and nurtures it, and then moves it this way or that way. And, ultimately, I care about the



Thirty years, like '85, '86. And then exactly two years ago I started to think about this again. I wanted it not to be something that is amateurish. I want musicians to think this is okay, this is serious. Even though my recognition as an artist is obviously indivisible from what I do as a musician, I don't want to rely on that. I have to live with it, of course, and use it. It is there. It gets me more attention, but it also gets me a more critical attention, and it's, of course, *that* [attention] that interests me. That it's not just written off as, "He should stay with his primary talent."

WOLFGANG

life that we live and that we are allowed to live, and how free we are allowed to live our lives. Because the story of mankind, at least of, say, Christian history that I can maybe refer to, has not always been a free world, a free life.

DOROTHÉE

To me, you're a true contemporary aesthete. You take the time to look at the world, and you point us in directions with your photography and video work. I remember the video with the little peas that felt intense, and quite dramatic, yet it was only a video of little beans boiling in a pot.

DOROTHÉE

Yeah, and I wanted to talk with you about something that's always constant in your work: the political involvement, and the care that's been there from the very beginning. You always had that conscience that is carried through the work. And today, you open a show, and it feels that politics is still a huge concern for you. It's still omnipresent. And, to me, it's maybe what finally links the music, fashion, photography, and fine art. Finally, your whole œuvre is political in that sense.

WOLFGANG

*Peas* (2003) is also about people, like a crowd being agitated, and then calming down when the fire is taken off. I don't work in symbolism. I like the work to speak, but not speak symbolically. So, on the one hand, the waves and clouds and horizons in recent pictures are political in their poetry, but on the other hand, they are not symbols. Even, of course, in the form of the invitation poster and the *Artforum* ad, with that slogan. ["Only the Americans have the power to stop Trump."]

# PARISLA

## DOROTHÉE

Do you feel a political sense in every aspect of life?

## WOLFGANG

Yes. I mean, I don't feel guilt, but we are always in a society with everybody else. One has to question what it means, what we do. What does this constant self-expression mean? Is that maybe a terror of self-expression? It's a lot about taking space—this sort of Western creative scene is taking a lot of space. For example, I questioned in the early 2000s, why should there be so many pages devoted to a young, Western lifestyle? How many more pictures of people standing in their Converse and jeans does it need? I know we give air, but we are also possibly sucking [up air]. And we're occupying a lot of space on the server farms of Instagram, etc. And it's not enough to just be a little politically aware. Everyone has to really think: What does it really mean? A big lifestyle does use up a lot of natural resources. It uses up a lot of labor in developing countries, and maybe it's a good thing that it creates jobs. But you have to think, like, there are more repercussions to how we live [with] these bottles of Fiji water floating around L.A. everywhere. And in L.A. and in America you often hear, in general, "Ah, it's crazy," or "It's a circus." But everybody still runs around with Fiji water bottles that are shipped halfway around the globe.

## DOROTHÉE

To me, the bottom line is education. To educate oneself, and others on the way—and you've shown us a lot about that. It's a complicated world now because there is all this flux of information, and it's hard to know what's true from what's fake. That's what the [American] election has shown, and what Brexit was. Western societies have made some progress, but it's complicated right now.

## WOLFGANG

Yeah, we have to be very clear [that] whatever social progress we are enjoying has been fought for by the generations before us.

## DOROTHÉE

Can you talk about the spontaneous energy around the making of Fragile's visual album, and the collaboration with Ash B., Hari Nef, and the other performers?

## WOLFGANG

I try to make music that is, on the one hand, poetic, and should be listenable and, sometimes, danceable. I like that it can have content. One thing I regret a little bit about the whole techno-electronic thing is that it basically didn't have lyrics. I always liked lyrics, and the house music that really changed my life from 1986 to '89 was all with lyrics—you know, Inner City's "Good Life." They all had lyrics. Even when it was only one line—as in Bam Bam's "Where's Your Child?" They said something. And then the last twenty years or more it's like, no words. I also love non-vocal hardcore techno music like Underground Resistance. I love protest songs, but I also love nonsensical lyrics. On the *Fragile* EP I wanted to work in a number of musical styles, and the lyrics stem from a wide variety: my own, and those of a 95-year-old Swiss liberation theologian, and the young New Jersey rapper Ash B. [*PARIS, LA*'s cover star for this issue]. She is an extraordinary talent! I met her for a portrait sitting, which was scheduled to take place at the recording studio in Greenpoint where we worked on this summer's material. We had just finished a spontaneous session around a bassline that Tom, the bass player, presented to us. Whilst we were listening back to it in the control room, Ashley came in, and she felt inspired to jump into the booth and record a one-take response to the song we just did. "That's Desire" is basically the result of a recording session that took no more than 30 minutes in total.

Image credits: *Fragile* live at Union Pool, Brooklyn, September 2016. Photograph by Luis Nieto Dickens (p.51). Installation view of Wolfgang Tillmans at Regen Projects, Los Angeles, November 5 – December 23, 2016. Photographs by Brian Forrest (p.48 – 52).  
Ash B., 2016 © Wolfgang Tillmans (cover). All images courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles.

Songwriter-vocalist-rapper Ash B. is originally from Newark, New Jersey. Her debut EP *Infinity & Beyond* was released in early 2016, and she's at work on her upcoming project *Memoirs of an A.G.* Her single "Are You Serious?"—"a dedication to all those who doubted me"—is out now, and she's featured in *That's Desire/Here We Are*, Wolfgang Tillmans' 2016 visual album with *Fragile*. Ash B. also collaborates with the Qween Beat crew. <https://soundcloud.com/kandy-crush> <https://soundcloud.com/qweenbeat>.

# frieze

1998



Wolfgang Tillmans  
*friends*

'Each photograph Wolfgang Tillmans takes and prints is part of a collective,' wrote Julie Ault. Tillmans himself has said: 'I do want each picture to be understood as its own self-sufficient entity.' *friends* embodies both of these positions. Three male heads on an orange-red pillow: two of the men (one with a prominent safety-pin earring) are cuddling, while the third faces the opposite direction. Although he is partially cropped out of the scene, his hair softly touches the shorn skull of one of his friends and he seems very much part of a moment of union and warmth. The constellation feels personal, but it's also an iconic representation of three people challenging both monogamous norms and the assumption that males are supposed to bond without getting too intimate. Taken in the year Northern Ireland entered the Good Friday agreement, the Kosovo War commenced, and the year after Tillmans lost his partner, Jochen Klein, to AIDS, this picture, and the people in it, are a self-sufficient entity *and* part of a collective.

— Jörg Heiser

“Wolfgang Tillmans takes over the Tate”. *Phaidon*, April 20, 2016.

<http://fr.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2016/april/20/wolfgang-tillmans-takes-over-the-tate/>

PHAIDON

# Wolfgang Tillmans takes over the Tate

He'll get a solo show at Tate Modern in 2017 and will also take over the South Tank. So what can we expect?

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



Self-portrait (Christian) for Phaidon monograph, 2013, colour photograph, by Wolfgang Tillmans

What sort of photographer would one of the world's largest fine-art institutions turn to when drawing up not only its new visual arts calendar, but also its performance and installations programme? A photographer like Wolfgang Tillmans is the answer.

The Tate has just announced that the German Turner Prize winner and Phaidon Contemporary Artist Series subject, will receive a mid-career retrospective at the Tate Modern from 15 February – 11 June 2017. The show will focus on the photographer's output since his exhibition at Tate Britain in 2003. In addition to this show, the Tate has also invited the artist to take control of the Tate's South Tank for ten days, staging “an installation featuring live events.” What should we expect? Let's turn to our recent Tillmans monograph for some potential clues.

“Wolfgang Tillmans takes over the Tate”. *Phaidon*, April 20, 2016.

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# PHAI DON

Galerie  
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A spread from i-D magazine featuring early photography by Wolfgang Tillmans. As reproduced in our monograph

Magazines “Over the years Tillmans has been trying out varying platforms for the circulation of his images, from magazines to installations, from books to inserts in newspapers,” explains the critic Jan Verwoert in our book. Tillmans began his career as a photographer for i-D magazine, and placed a series of vintage magazines on display at his gallery back in 2015. Visitors were allowed to leaf through these old publications; perhaps he will include a few in this new show.

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# PHAIDON



Love (Hands in Air) (1989) by Wolfgang Tillmans

Music In our book Tillmans tells the artist Peter Halley that, he first grew to appreciate photography via the pictures on record sleeves. Wolfgang Tillmans installed a listening room, or gallery space fitted out with a high-quality hi-fi and a selection of CDs, at his Berlin gallery Between Bridges in 2014. The listening room enabled visitors to listen to the work of a single band - Tillmans chose the work of the 1980s indie group Colourbox for his first installation – elevating pop music to the same status as fine art. The BBC reports his forthcoming Tate show will also include music, so keep your ears open.

“Wolfgang Tillmans takes over the Tate”. *Phaidon*, April 20, 2016.

<http://fr.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2016/april/20/wolfgang-tillmans-takes-over-the-tate/>

# PHAIDON

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Silver Installation VII (2009) by Wolfgang Tillmans

Idiosyncratic picture hanging Wolfgang doesn't present a succession of single, framed works for visitors to behold. Instead, he covers gallery walls with images in a range of sizes, often unframed, in a style of hanging he describes as "Multi-vectored" "This way of hanging allows for each of these different vectors to have a voice," he explains to Halley in our monograph. "It's an inclusive practice, which allows me to have a little joke in one corner and some sort of personal wink to somebody else in another corner. And also say something very deliberate in terms of formal considerations related to, say, portraiture or landscape."

“Wolfgang Tillmans takes over the Tate”. *Phaidon*, April 20, 2016.

<http://fr.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2016/april/20/wolfgang-tillmans-takes-over-the-tate/>

# PHAIDON

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Silver Installation VII, 2009, 26 colour photographs, 306 x 843 cm, installation view at the Venice Biennale, 2009, featuring Tillmans' Venus pictures

A little bit of astronomy Tillmans shot the transit of Venus across the sun in 2004, using a telescope he has owned ever since he was teenager. While Tillmans admits that these images have no scientific value, he says in our monograph that “it was a moving experience to see the actual mechanics of the sky work in front of my eyes,» and now considers these pictures to be among his best.

“Wolfgang Tillmans takes over the Tate”. *Phaidon*, April 20, 2016.

<http://fr.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2016/april/20/wolfgang-tillmans-takes-over-the-tate/>

# PHAIDON



Astro Crusto, A (2012) by Wolfgang Tillmans

Maybe another famous artist or two Tillmans made his first professional sale as a fine-art photographer to fellow German artist Isa Genzken. The two have remained friends ever since. He has collaborated with Genzken, and shown her work as well as other artists such as Jenny Holzer, at his Berlin gallery. Perhaps he will call on one of them.

For greater insight into this important contemporary artist buy a copy of our newly updated Wolfgang Tillmans monograph here.

PORTO, PORTUGAL

## “WOLFGANG TILLMANS: ON THE VERGE OF VISIBILITY”

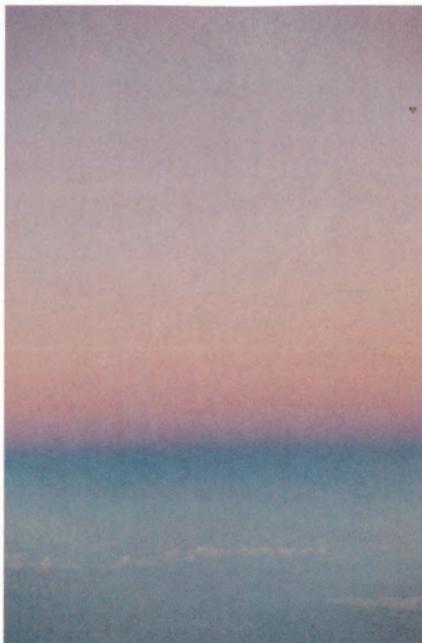
Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves

January 29–April 25

*Curated by Suzanne Cotter*

Long before he completed his stunning two-channel video *Book for Architects*, 2014, Wolfgang Tillmans had established himself as an artist with an exceptional sensitivity to constructed space, not only as a subject to document but as a medium to explore and inhabit. Since the early 1990s, he has experimented with the installation of his work to produce exhibitions of extraordinary spatial complexity, even when he begins with the generic—and ubiquitous—white cube that still dominates contemporary exhibition space. Tillmans’s upcoming show at Álvaro Siza Vieira’s Serralves Museum, then, will be a welcome pairing. Featuring more than 120 of his works from the past decade, including his “Vertical Landscapes” and his recent “New World” series, all installed in the Portuguese master’s subtly sculptural galleries, the exhibition will present Tillmans encountering a spatial sensibility as sophisticated as his own.

—*Julian Rose*



From left: Wolfgang Tillmans, *Tag/Nacht II (Day/Night II)*, 2010, ink jet print, 81 1/2 x 54 1/2".

## REALIST ESTATES

### Julian Rose on Wolfgang Tillmans's *Book for Architects*

ALTHOUGH WOLFGANG TILLMANS'S *Book for Architects*, 2014, offers an encyclopedic survey of the contemporary built environment, those to whom its title is addressed are likely to recognize surprisingly little of their own handiwork. Architects have never lacked ego, and we live in an age in which their trade has taken on an outsize importance and unprecedented popularity as a premium product of the international culture industry—charged with all manner of place making and identity branding. But this has led to a myopic understanding of architecture as little more than a series of individual buildings as prestige projects, isolated urban interventions that remain largely discrete from the broader contexts they seek to transform. Tillmans's work, which debuted at the Venice Architecture Biennale last year and is currently on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, offers a far more inclusive view. The artist has a long-standing interest in architecture as both a photographic subject and a frame for experience, and *Book for Architects* is an extension of this fascination, taking the form of a kind of photo-diary of his day-to-day encounters with architecture over more than a decade. Tillmans lives and works in two global capitals, London and Berlin, and travels widely; the piece combines more than 450 still images (shot in and around dozens of cities across thirty-seven countries) into a two-channel video installation of some forty minutes. The result is an equally radical rejoinder to both the glossy coffee-table volumes and the vapid Tumblr-style blogs that play such a major role in defining architecture's cultural status today; it presents architecture not as it is conceived by its practitioners, or as it is pictured in the popular imagination, but as it actually exists in the world.

At first glance, things look grim. As the installation's dual digital projectors silently cycle through the images at an unremitting pace, the initial impression is of an oppressive sameness. Take the numerous aerial views of cities—bleak, gray, gridded, relentless. A similar uniformity is visible in many interiors, particularly spaces of transit (airports, hotels) and consumption (shopping malls, storefronts). The former tend toward the starkly generic, illuminated by the same dull fluorescent glare, occupied by the same crowds of harried travelers who are directed by the same uniformed staff. The latter are characterized by garish confusion: dazzling lights, loud colors, reflective glass, shiny metal.

This repetitiveness is not rooted in the individual photographs themselves, which have the spontaneity typical of Tillmans's work and are often stunning in the sheer visual complexity and variety with which they map architecture's dense, tangled textures across myriad scales of construction, ranging from individual rooms to entire municipalities. Rather, the consistency seems to emerge

inexorably from Tillmans's subject matter itself, almost in spite of the endlessly varied perspectives he presents (a variation reinforced by the format of the slides, where images are often paired or even layered on top of each other). In this sense, his project is a distinct departure from the long tradition of typological architectural analysis carried out by artists and architects such as Bernd and Hilla Becher, Dan Graham, Ed Ruscha, or Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, who used a standard format to emphasize uniformity in their subjects. Moreover, their projects tended to focus on a literally superficial similarity, with each structure typically presented in a frontal facade view, while Tillmans emphasizes a more fundamental similarity in the experience of space, suggesting that the physical symptoms of globalization are the same, no matter where or how you look.

Inevitably, *Book for Architects* also includes famous buildings by well-known designers. But part of the brilliance of Tillmans's photographs lies in the way they undercut the mythology of the iconic structure, reminding us that, as actually experienced in the city, even the most ostensibly arresting landmarks frequently offer a relatively quotidian experience. Consider a pointed image: Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall (2003) in Los Angeles, glimpsed through a windshield (surely the most common view of the building in a notoriously

car-centric city), its signature swooping panels barely recognizable through layers of reflection and glare, and partially obscured by the rearview mirror. Lest we miss the point, Tillmans pairs this with an image of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's 2014 "Freedom Tower" in New York, captured from a (literally and metaphorically) pedestrian viewpoint a block or two from its base, its hallmark spire cropped out of the top of the frame, the sheen of its mirrored facade echoing that of another glass tower in the foreground.

Even more subversive are the photographs whose subjects are almost, but not quite, identifiable as famous buildings. A swath of fussy patterned curtain wall, an aggressively faceted corner, the hint of a dramatic curve—these moments suggest that the highly individualized styles of today's top architects may be more a matter of marketing than reality, ultimately reducible to a remarkably similar set of material palettes, structural systems, and formal strategies. Tellingly, too, these images collapse the distinction between individual and corporate authorship upon which so many assumptions about the cultural value of architecture are founded. Zaha Hadid? Kohn Pedersen Fox? Without a full picture, it's hard to say.

In the process of breaking down icons into fragments, Tillmans undermines not just the buildings themselves but the conventions of architectural photography. The

Tillmans sees photography as a means not of transforming architecture into images but of understanding the occupation of space.



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Book for Architects*, 2014, two-channel digital video, color, silent, approx. 40 minutes.  
Installation view, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2015.



Two stills from Wolfgang Tillmans's *Book for Architects*, 2014, two-channel digital video, color, silent, approx. 40 minutes.

medium has long colluded in flattening the specificity and complexity of spatial constructions into easily consumed images, aiding in architecture's reduction to branding and speeding its transformation into commodity. Tillmans makes this point bluntly in several images of the billboards often erected at construction sites, where garish, photo-realistic renderings trumpet idealized visions of the developments to come.

Despite all this, *Book for Architects* is not a pessimistic project; it is an ambitious recalibration of the relationship between architecture and image. Tillmans describes his fundamental goal as using his photographs to capture the physical experience of architecture, giving a vivid, sensory quality that he poetically describes as a "how-does-it-feel-ness." He sees photography, in other words, as a means not of transforming architecture into images but of understanding the occupation of space. He has achieved this effect in part through straightforward technical means, by eschewing the tilt-lenses and wide angles typical of architectural photography, and instead shooting all the project's images with a fixed-focal-length lens that he feels most faithfully represents the perspective of the human eye. And indeed, many of the images he presents have the undeniable familiarity of architecture seen in passing—incidental glances out of windows, across streets, from planes—views indicative of both the Benjaminian state of distraction in which we typically experience architecture and the degree to which it has become the background Muzak of contemporary urban life.

But many of the photographs are far more deliberate and detailed, particularly the close-ups, which suggest an intimate bodily connection to architecture, indexing the artist's inhabitation of the spaces he depicts: We sense him leaning into a corner to see how two materials meet, or crouching down on the sidewalk to study the way a drainpipe emerges from a building's foundation,

To emphasize the physicality of architecture, Tillmans seems to argue, is also to engage in photography as a physical act. This physicality is echoed in the layout of the installation, where the two video channels are projected onto perpendicular walls, presenting the images in an immersive environment. *Book for Architects* extends Tillmans's interest—present since his first major gallery show in 1993—in the spatial mechanics of exhibition design, his insistence that viewers consider not only the world he presents in his images but the way in which his photographs exist in the world.

The results of Tillmans's scrutiny are sometimes hilarious. Again and again, we see the endless contingencies through which buildings escape architects' oversight, the numerous ways in which even the most carefully considered designs are no match for the messy business of daily use, of changing needs and passing time: A mass of hoses is jammed through a wall to enable the ad hoc installation of an air conditioner; a tangle of cables running across a ceiling disrupts the carefully articulated union of a beam and a column; gobs of expanded foam insulation ooze out of the gap around a retrofitted pipe and dribble down toward the floor. These are the kinds of things that drive most architects crazy.

But at other times, the results of the artist's examination are simply heartbreaking. This is particularly true of the images of a multipart cardboard shelter constructed against the polished granite base of what appears to be an office high-rise; an example not just of the ways in which buildings and urban spaces inevitably seem to be adapted far beyond their designers' intentions, but also a reminder that often architects are so focused on aesthetic control that they lose their ability to address the broader social and economic realities in which their designs are embedded. Indeed, Tillmans's most damning statement about architects' misguided obsession with control comes from images of various "antihomeless"

devices—physical barriers meant to fill or obstruct spaces that might otherwise become occupied by itinerants. One photograph, in particular, shows a man lying on the ground just inches beyond a field of pyramidal bumps that is clearly meant to discourage sleeping next to the adjacent wall. It's a distressing reminder that so long as buildings are understood as static materializations of an a priori design intent, exigencies of inhabitation will always trump the assertion of control.

These images draw added poignancy from the fact that Tillmans also includes several slides of the most expensive home in the world, the skyscraper built as the private residence of the Indian business tycoon Mukesh Ambani, by Perkins+Will in Mumbai, at a reported cost of more than one billion dollars. In fact, housing in its many forms—from refugee tents huddled along borders to suburban family homes to the anonymous apartment blocks that proliferate on the outskirts of cities around the globe—is a recurring theme of *Book for Architects*, and these juxtapositions offer a powerful reminder that today, economic and political difference is often expressed most directly in architectural terms. And yet, more than any other field of contemporary cultural production, architecture also approaches a universal condition. It remains grounded in certain fundamental problems and entangled with the same basic social and cultural conditions the world over, even if cultural (and economic) specificity continues to emerge in the responses posed by architects and inhabitants. Indeed, given an ever more urbanized population and continuously accelerating growth, architecture increasingly *is* our world; not just a backdrop but the scaffolding that sets the stage for social interactions and dictates the conditions of life itself. But architecture in this expanded sense will remain out of architects' grasp until they recognize that they must flexibly intervene in and adapt to the social, economic, and environmental systems that shape it, rather than merely declaring authority in the face of the chaos these factors seem to introduce. It is presumably to provoke this recognition that Tillmans has created his book for architects. □

*Book for Architects* is on view through July 5 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

JULIAN ROSE IS A SENIOR EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.

DAMN°50 magazine /WOLFGANG TILLMANS



# Between the Blur and the Flicker

## *Tillmans on TV*

Wolfgang Tillmans was initially known for his seemingly casual, sometimes snapshot-like portraits of friends, famous and otherwise. His photographic practice has since developed to encompass a wide array of genres. Portraits, still lifes, sky photographs, astrophotography, aerial shots, and landscapes have all been motivated equally by aesthetic and political interests, in formulations of reality and truth claims. As Tillmans puts it: "I take pictures in order to see the world." His most recent project deals with the timely coexistence of analogue and digital photographic processes, the essence of which he has succinctly captured in the works currently on show in Paris, where DAMN° caught up with him.

ANNA SANSOM

Wolfgang Tillmans has often spoken about the importance of the unforeseen in his work. His exhibition, *Lignine Duress* at Galerie Chantal Crousel in Paris, continues this investigation. On show are two groups of pictures of fuzzy television screens, with an image of a ruptured tree trunk in another space. The link between these may not be immediately apparent but they allude to something having happened – the TV connection becoming lost or the programme being over, and the tree trunk snapping – that has a strong visual effect. "The connection that I find interesting between the two is that something very random has produced a very distinct result", says the German artist when we meet on the day of the opening.



How the photographs of the TV screens came about is fortuitous. Tillmans was staying at a hotel in St Petersburg last February while preparing for Manifesta 10, and 'discovered' a badly tuned, first generation flat-screen television in his room that was still receiving analogue signals. Finding it to be a rich subject for picture making, he requested the same room on two subsequent trips. Using a high-resolution digital camera, Tillmans was able to capture the fast-changing images on the screen at a speed that would not have been possible in the past, when diagonal dark bands or blurriness would have shown across them. So although they are reminiscent of the days when the TV in your parents' living room conked out, they

Ligne Dure; exhibition view,  
Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, 2016  
© Florian Kleinfeld

DAMN'50 magazine /WOLFGANG TILLMANS

could only have been made today. It is this particular coexistence between analogue and digital technology rendering the pictures feasible that strongly appealed to the artist. "So it's a strange overlap of old and new technology together", he says, excitedly. "It was a fascinating discovery to be able to play and take these pictures just before the analogue signal disappears from the world, because in most western cities you don't have the analogue signal anymore anyway."

#### OTHERWORLDLY

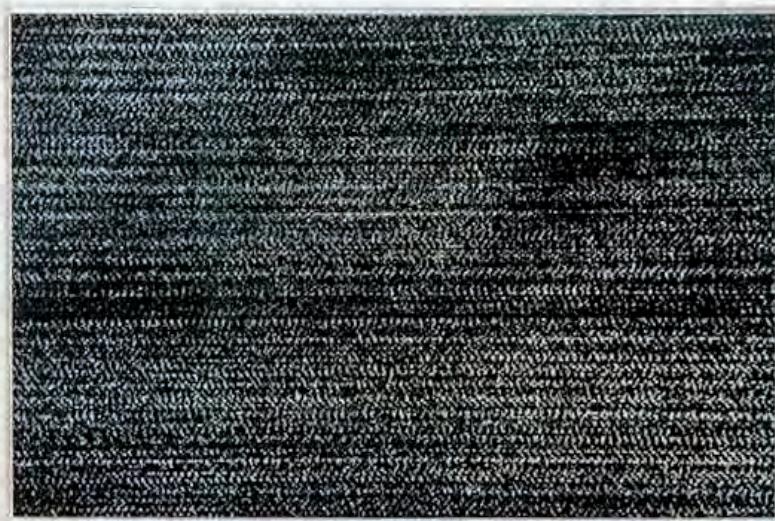
The darker images, Weak Signal, carry recognisable yet indistinct flickering patterns of information that the television is trying to relay. The lighter ones, Sendedchluss/End of Broadcast, capture instants after a broadcast when there is no information being transmitted and the fuzz is pattern-less. Although from a distance they appear black and white, closer inspection reveals pixelations of vivid colour – red, blue, green, and yellow – in the Weak Signal ones, and a more complex range of colours in the others, where some parts seem pink, yellow, or pale blue. Staring at them is an eye-popping, dizzying experience, your mind overwhelmed with trying to decipher any sense

from the mass of lines of tiny squares. "The patterns are even like a kind of language when you study the lines – it could be Arabic or Hebrew or a musical code – and that of course happens all the time without us actively noticing that we're seeing stuff we don't understand", says Tillmans, 46, about the Weak Signal images. "So it's just background noise. What is specific about these images is: where does this meaninglessness gather meaning? There is a reason, and perhaps we will never necessarily understand. But I want to study why things end up the way they are in social, political, and personal contexts."

Indeed, he sees the series as a metaphor of the problems in the world today. "Lack of communication, misunderstanding, not hearing – that is the nature of politics", asserts Tillmans, who won the Turner Prize in 2000. "Something about the larger political situation we are in, made me perceptive to these pictures – of how, when there's too much pressure, something breaks. I'm not connecting this to any particular event, and the reason why these photographs are here is that they work as pictures. They are sensations to the eye, but they also speak about something in the outside world."

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

Weak Signal III, 2014  
Unframed inkjet print on paper, c-type  
161 x 242 cm  
Edition 1/1 + 1 AP  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris  
© Florian Kleinefenn





*End of Broadcast V, 2014*  
Inkjet print mounted on D bond  
171 x 262 x 6 cm (framed)

*Lignin Diptych, 2014*  
Unframed inkjet print on paper, clips  
208 x 138 cm

Both images:  
Edition 1/1 + 1 AP  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie  
Chantal Crousel, Paris  
© Florian Kleinfeld

#### TEMPORALITY

Visually, the *Sendeschluss/End of Broadcast* works remind Tillmans of Dan Flavin's *Monument to V. Tatlin*, a staggered arrangement of white fluorescent tubes in homage to Russian artist Vladimir Tatlin's proposed design for the *Monument to the Third International*, a revolving spiral that would have been taller than the Eiffel Tower. (According to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Flavin made 39 such variations from 1964-1990). "Dan Flavin dedicated these light sculptures as memorials, and I like the idea of physically giving space to an idea", he says. Following on from Tillmans' abstract work, such as his camera-less series *Freischwimmer* and *Greifbar*, both created in a darkroom, the new images are also connected to *Memorial for the Victims of Organized Religion* (2006), an installation of black and very dark-blue photographs. "That was about illustrating the flawedness of absolute ideology by making the distinction between black and dark-blue impossible", explains Tillmans. "It's the same with these *Sendeschluss/End of Broadcast* works. At first you think you have black-and-white pictures, but when you go close up you see the colour, though you cannot really point at it."

The title of the exhibition, however, refers to the photograph of a tree trunk that has split in half after a storm in Essen, the exposed fibres of wood recalling fragile tendons severed from a bone. The exposure reminded Tillmans of how paper is composed of varying amounts of cellulose and lignin, the highest quality and longest lasting paper being lignin free. Longevity versus impermanence in paper and in photographic printing is something that has obsessed the artist has throughout his career. In his early exhibitions, images of clubbers, London tube passengers, friends, lovers,



Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

DAMN50 magazine / © WOLFGANG TILLMANS



**Encounter**, 2014  
Inkjet print, framed  
30.60 x 40.60 cm  
34 x 44.60 cm (framed)  
Edition 1/10  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie  
Chantal Crousel, Paris  
© Florian Kleinerfass

Portrait of Wolfgang Tillmans  
by Carmen Brunner

and still-lives would be stuck to the wall using bits of tape or pins, breaking down the hierarchy between framed and unframed pictures.

In his new show, Tillmans has chosen to juxtapose framed and unframed Weak Signal pictures. The different form of presentation is intended to make visitors more consciously aware of how the photographs are actual objects in themselves. It also brings into question notions of value and protection. The unframed inkjet prints are physically vulnerable, yet the owner can reprint the work with a set of data provided at the moment of purchase. By contrast, the framed and glazed photographs are physically protected but the owner has no right to reprint them.

The fact that the Weak Signal and Sendeschluss/End of Broadcast photographs are pictures of an image-carrier – the television – intrigues Tillmans. "With the TV, we are talking about an elusive image of an embodied picture that you cannot touch", he says. "I made concrete pictures of the most elusive picture, but they are also photographs of a picture body – a grid of LCDs on a TV screen. Presenting them on two other picture bodies – the unframed inkjet print and the framed, mounted inkjet print – further activates this question of what are we looking at."

Certainly, the perplexing complexity of image-making is what makes Tillman's questing mind tick :

Lignine Dunes is at Galerie Chantal Crousel Paris, until 23 May 2015.  
[crousel.com](http://crousel.com)

## PARIS

### Wolfgang Tillmans

Galerie Chantal Crousel / 18 avril - 23 mai 2015

La troisième exposition de Wolfgang Tillmans à la Galerie Chantal Crousel paraîtra étrangement sage au visiteur habitué au simultanéisme de ses constellations d'images proliférantes aux sujets, formats et supports hétérogènes. Tout au plus, l'artiste y alterne-t-il entre tirages encadrés et tirages libres qui correspondent à deux modes contradictoires d'existence et d'appréhension des images qu'il a toujours mis en tension. Cette retenue traduit peut-être la volonté de Tillmans de ne pas s'enfermer dans un mode opératoire qui pourrait se rigidifier en protocole et se banaliser en signature. Elle dit sans doute aussi le désir d'en réaffirmer, par le déséquilibre, la puissance déstabilisatrice qui force le regard. La série qui donne son titre à l'exposition *Lignine Duress* (la lignine est une composante du bois absente du papier sur lequel Tillmans tire ses images) n'est ainsi représentée que par une photographie, qui plus est placée dans un espace secondaire. Cette image d'arbre fendu par la tempête est pourtant décisive.

Figurative et descriptive, elle invite à ne pas se laisser séduire par l'opticalité et la pictorialité des grandes abstractions qui occupent seules l'espace principale de la galerie. Car ces *all over* aléatoires de carrés apparemment noirs et blancs mais en fait subtilement colorés de rouge, bleu et vert, ne sont pas une actualisation numérique des recherches abstraites développées depuis 15 ans par Tillmans dans le laboratoire. Ce sont des photographies prises en 2014, avec un appareil extrêmement rapide, dans une chambre d'hôtel de Saint-Pétersbourg, de l'écran d'une télévision numérique de la fin des années 1990 recevant un signal analogique. Entre mauvais réglage et incompatibilité, absence de signal ou présence de parasites, les séries *Sendeschluss/End of Broadcast* et *Weak Signal* offrent une image de l'incommunicabilité instaurée par une communication surabondante.

Commentaire, réalisé avec une technologie de pointe, sur l'obsolescence technique et le passage au numérique, ces deux séries confirment que Tillmans, excellent observateur de son temps, fait du progrès technique, à la fois constaté et intégré dans son processus de création, un étalon de notre contemporanéité. Mais sans fétiçisme ni naïveté, car ce progrès a ses limites et cet étalon est critique. À cet égard, *Sendeschluss/End of Broadcast* et *Weak Signals* s'inscrivent dans la continuité de *Neue Welt*



(2012), projet majeur dont l'ambition était de définir les images du « monde nouveau » que l'artiste voyait se dessiner sous ses yeux. Passionné par l'astronomie, il avait notamment rapporté, de ses séjours à travers le globe, des ciels étoilés, des télescopes et, significativement, dans ce haut lieu technologique qu'est l'Observatoire européen austral (ESO), la photographie d'un écran de contrôle intitulée *sensor flaws & dead pixels* (capteur défectueux et pixels morts). Auto-déstruction de la technique qui n'est pas sans rappeler celle de la nature.

Étienne Hatt

Wolfgang Tillmans' third exhibition at Galerie Chantal Crousel will seem strangely moderate to visitors used to the simultaneism of his constellations of proliferating images and heterogeneous subjects, formats and supports. Here there is simply an alternation between framed and unframed prints, corresponding to two contradictory modes of existence for images and two different ways of seeing them, modes whose opposition has always informed his work. This restraint may reflect Tillmans' desire not to be limited to a *modus operandi* that could hypostasize into a protocol or become a banal signature. No doubt, too, it expresses a desire to reaffirm the destabilizing power of the image, which forces the gaze, by means of disequilibrium. The series after which the exhibition is named, *Lignine Duress* (lignin is a part of wood that is absent from the paper on which Tillmans prints his images) is represented by only one

Ci-dessus/above:  
«Lignine Duress», 2015  
Vue de l'exposition/Exhibition view  
Ci-dessous/below: «Lignine duress (b)»,  
2014. Impression jet d'encre sur papier,  
non encadrée, pinces 208 x 138 cm  
(Court. de l'artiste © Florian Kleinfenn).  
*Unframed inkjet print on paper, clips*

**photograph—showing a tree split by a storm—and what's more, this is placed in a secondary space. But the image is decisive.**  
Figurative and descriptive, it encourages us not to be seduced by the opticality and pictoriality of the big abstract pieces that are the sole occupants of the main space. For these random all-over works with squares that seem to be black and white but are in fact subtly colored in red, blue and green, are not a



**digital actualization of the abstract experiments made by Tillmans in the laboratory these last fifteen years, but photographs of a digital TV screen from the late 1990s taken in 2014 with an extremely fast camera in a hotel room in Saint Petersburg. The TV was getting an analogue signal. Showing a badly adjusted set afflicted by technological incompatibility, the absence of signals and the presence of interference, these two series, *Sendeschluss/End of Broadcast* and *# Weak Signal*, offer an image of incommunicability caused by overabundant communication.**

A commentary on technical obsolescence and the transition to the digital, made with cutting-edge technology, these two series confirm that Tillmans, who is an excellent observer of his times, takes technological progress, as something that his work both observes and assimilates, as a marker of our contemporaneity. But there is nothing fetishistic or naïve about this. In this regard, *Sendeschluss/End of Broadcast* and *Weak Signal* continued on from *Neue Welt* (2012), a major project that set out to define the images of the "new world" that the artist saw taking shape before us. Fascinated by astronomy, in his travels around the world he has photographed starry skies, telescopes and, significantly in that great technological center that is the European Southern Observatory, a control screen, with the title *sensor flaws & dead pixels*. This self-destruction by technology echoes that of nature.

Translation, C. Penwarden

ENTRETIEN

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06

LE QUOTIDIEN DE L'ART | JEUDI 30 AVR. 2015 NUMÉRO 825

Propos recueillis par  
Emmanuelle Lequeux

WOLFGANG TILLMANS, ARTISTE  
**« Faire la paix  
avec cette inquiétante  
étrangeté du monde »**

Wolfgang Tillmans présente à la Galerie Chantal Crousel, à Paris, une série de photographies commencée en 2014 devant un écran de télévision mal réglée dans une chambre d'hôtel à Saint-Pétersbourg. L'artiste nous explique le fondement de ce travail.



Galerie  
Chantal Crousel

Wolfgang Tillmans,  
*Weak Signal II*, 2014,  
impression jet d'encre  
sur papier,  
non encadrée, pinces,  
273 x 410 cm.  
Edition 1/1 + 1 AP.  
Courtesy of the artist  
and Galerie Chantal  
Crousel, Paris.  
© Florian Kleinfenn.

**Emmanuelle Lequeux** Pour cette exposition à la galerie Chantal Crousel, vous avez photographié, quasi exclusivement, la neige qui apparaît sur de vieux téléviseurs : motifs a priori abstraits, entièrement noir et blanc... Ces images peuvent surprendre, tant elles diffèrent de vos précédents travaux. Qu'est-ce qui vous a fasciné dans ce motif ?

**Wolfgang Tillmans** Ne pensez pas qu'il s'agisse de photographies noir et blanc ! Approchez-vous de l'image, et regardez combien elle est riche en couleurs ! Le noir et blanc ne revient que si l'on regarde à nouveau l'image de loin. Le glissement est imperceptible. C'est un jeu incroyable entre ce que l'on voit et ce que l'on croit voir. J'ai souvent pensé que les choses ne sont pas ce qu'elles semblent être. Voilà ce qui lie ces images à celles du passé : j'ai toujours cherché à rendre perceptible la notion même de développement. Que cela concerne les mouvements sociaux, les phénomènes naturels ou le développement chimique d'une photographie.

Vous mixez souvent les différents registres d'images, mêlant de purs flux de lumières et couleurs à des instants vécus proches du snapshot. Ici, il n'y a aucune échappatoire.

Mon instinct naturel est effectivement d'offrir des alternatives au regard. Mais ces images, qui exigent beaucoup du visiteur, méritaient d'être seules, pour encourager à plonger en elles.

Quitte à ce que ces images plus expérimentales semblent plus dures, plus sèches ?

Certes, ce que je ressens dans l'espace de cette galerie appelle une

J'AI TOUJOURS  
CHERCHÉ  
À RENDRE  
PERCEPTIBLE  
LA NOTION  
MÊME DE  
DÉVELOPPEMENT

...

ENTRETIEN

WOLFGANG  
TILLMANS, ARTISTE

PAGE  
07

LE QUOTIDIEN DE L'ART | JEUDI 30 AVRIL 2015 NUMÉRO 825

**SUITE DE LA PAGE 06** rhétorique plus ardue, et je ne ferais sans doute pas cette exposition à Chelsea [New York]. Mais elle n'est pas plus expérimentale qu'une autre : toute exposition est un laboratoire.

La question de la réflexivité de l'image, de son processus technique, semble cependant avoir pris plus d'importance dans votre travail.

Sans doute, mais c'est le même cerveau qui opère : ces pensées étaient là à mes débuts il y a 25 ans. J'abordais déjà la question du regard d'un point de vue scientifique et philosophique. À quoi s'ajoute cet intérêt de toujours pour l'ici et maintenant : la musique, le sexe, la vie... En 1992, on a pris mes gros plans sur les peaux de danseurs comme des images tendance et *fashion* de jeunes gens. Mais elles portaient déjà sur ces questions : comment retrancrire cette émotion collective, l'alchimie d'un dancefloor... Ce qui m'importe est que le sujet, dans son esprit, soit actif jusque dans la matière de l'image.

Bien qu'abstraites en apparence, ces images relèvent donc d'une même quête de l'ici et du maintenant ?

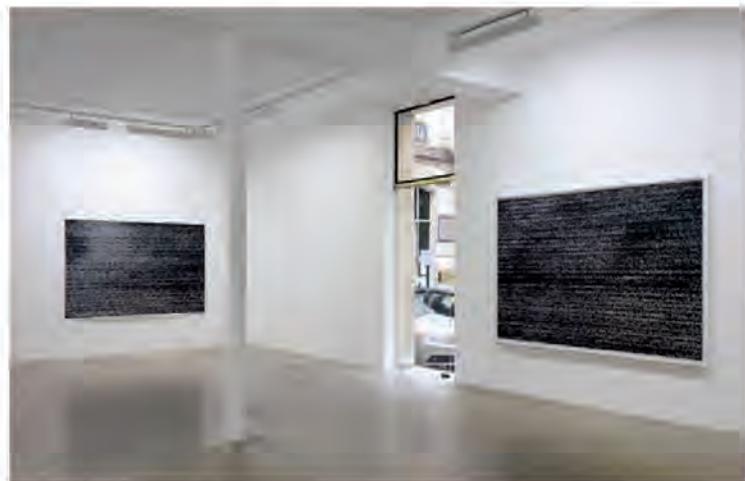
Car elles n'ont rien d'abstrait : elles ont pour origine la réalité, et ont été saisies par un appareil photo à partir d'un producteur d'images, à savoir un téléviseur. Le signal électromagnétique de l'écran engendre deux types de motifs très

différents. Les uns sont un pur chaos, où n'apparaît aucun signal, et dont l'œil ne peut dégager aucune forme. Les autres sont structurées, avec des formes fantômes qui surgissent, sous-jacentes : il y a bel et bien un signal, mais il n'est pas assez fort pour lutter contre la neige. C'est comme une partition musicale, ou une calligraphie, cela n'a rien d'un symbole vide : ce sont des dessins très stimulants, à décrypter. En même temps, je les vois comme une métaphore de notre condition, de l'absence de dialogue entre nous, qui vivons pourtant si près les uns des autres.

Vous avez pris ces images l'an passé à Saint-Pétersbourg, au début du conflit ukrainien. Ce contexte leur confère-t-il un sens particulier ?

Au début du processus, bien sûr. On peut voir ces images comme une censure possible, dans un monde où les télécommunications auraient été coupées. Mais elles se sont aujourd'hui détachées de leur contexte d'origine. Avec le temps, le projet est devenu plus riche et plus complexe. Une manière pour moi d'aborder cette question qui me hante : je ne sais pas toujours ce qui se passe, je ne parviens pas à donner un sens à tout, mais je dois faire la paix avec cela, avec cette inquiétante étrangeté du monde.

ON PEUT VOIR CES IMAGES COMME UNE CENSURE POSSIBLE, DANS UN MONDE OÙ LES TÉLÉCOMMUNICATIONS AURAIENT ÉTÉ COUPÉES



Wolfgang Tillmans,  
«Lignine Duress»,  
vue de l'exposition  
à la Galerie Chantal  
Crousel, Paris.  
Courtesy of the artist  
and Galerie Chantal  
Crousel, Paris.  
© Florian Kleinfenn.

WOLFGANG TILLMANS. *LIGNINE DURESS*, jusqu'au 23 mai, Galerie Chantal Crousel, 10, rue Charlot, 75003 Paris, tél. 01 42 77 38 87, [www.crousel.com](http://www.crousel.com)



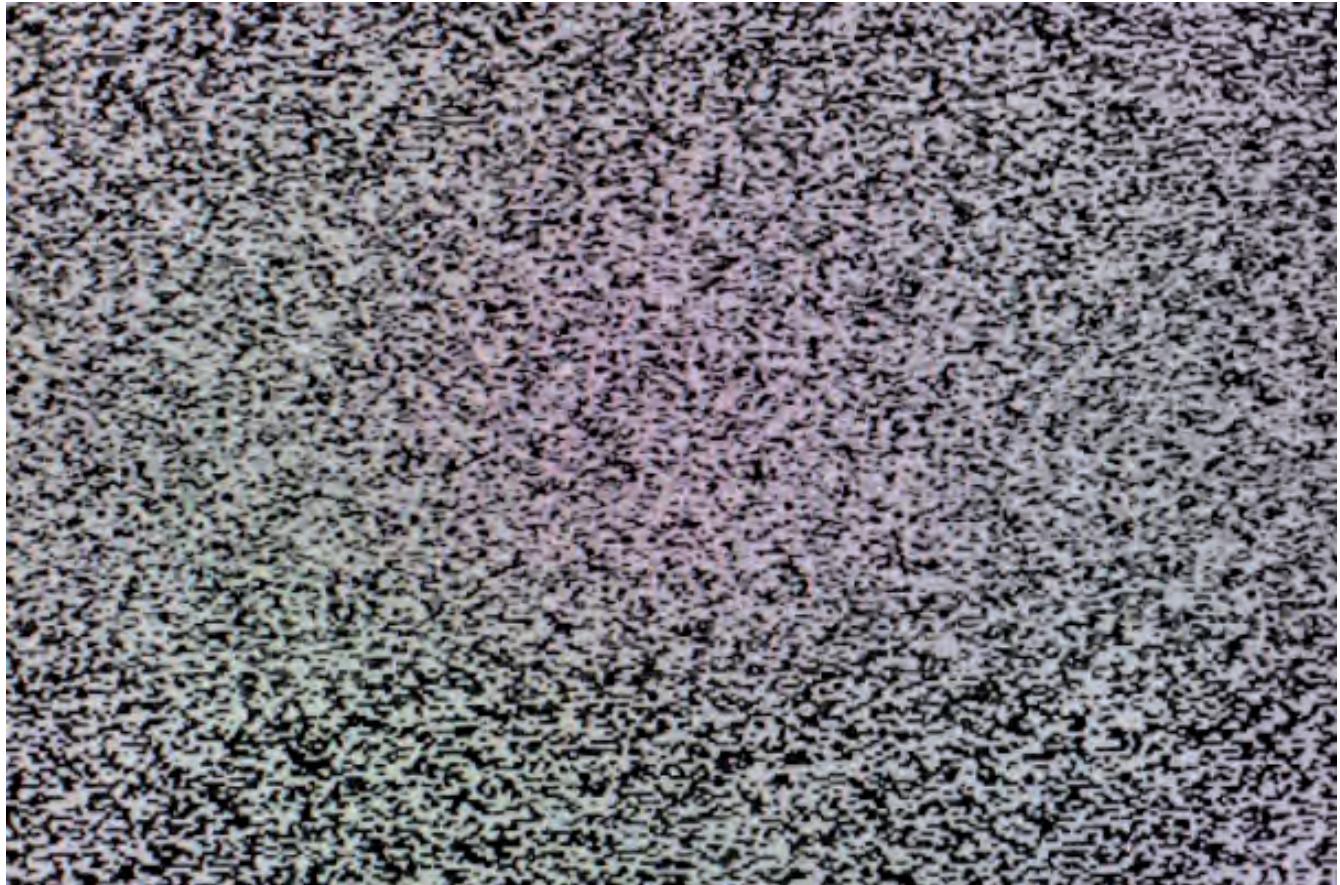
Claire Moulène. «Le top 5 des expos de la semaine», *Les Inrocks*, April 17, 2015.

<http://www.lesinrocks.com/2015/04/17/arts-scenes/arts/le-top-5-des-expos-de-la-semaine-13-11742390/>



## Le top 5 des expos de la semaine

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



Wolfgang Tillmans, «Sendeschluss / End of Broadcast VIII», 2014

Chaque semaine, le meilleur des expositions art contemporain, à Paris et en province.

Wolfgang Tillmans

Il s'est fait un nom dans les années 1990 en photographiant la scène rave berlinoise naissante pour le magazine i-D. Et d'ailleurs, depuis quelques semaines, les habitués du Berghain à Berlin auront pu constater le renouvellement des trois grandes photos qui en ornent habituellement les murs. Ces tirages, ceux de Wolfgang Tillmans, ont ainsi été remplacés par trois autres de sa nouvelle série : de gigantesques photographies abstraites montrant un motif pixellisé. C'est cette série, datant de 2014, que l'on retrouvera à la galerie Chantal Crousel à Paris. Elle y voisinerà avec une autre, qui donne son titre à l'expo : Lignine Duress, où il dresse le portrait d'arbres sinistrés lors de la tempête de 2014 en Allemagne, représentés comme des humains brisés en plein élan. Dans les deux cas, tout est à recomposer par le spectateur : chacun interprète les photographies de manière différente – soit que la trame pixellisée de la reproduction grignote le réel, soit que le réalisme “deadpan” du cliché numérique semble nous présenter la scène elle même, sans cadrage ni composition. Parmi les plus novatrices actuellement, la pratique photographique de Wolfgang Tillmans ne cesse de s'interroger sur la manière dont le réel se donne à nous – et pas seulement dans les darkrooms d'un club berlinois.

Stéphane Corréard. «Wolfgang Tillmans en ligne de mire», *Liberation Next*, April 20, 2015.  
[http://next.liberation.fr/arts/2015/04/20/wolfgang-tillmans-en-lignine-de-mire\\_1231624](http://next.liberation.fr/arts/2015/04/20/wolfgang-tillmans-en-lignine-de-mire_1231624)

## Wolfgang Tillmans en ligne de mire

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



«Lignin Duress» (b) 2014, de Wolfgang Tillmans. Impression jet d'encre sur papier, non encadrée. (Courtesy of Wolfgang Tillmans and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris)

Premier non-Britannique lauréat du Turner Prize en 2000, le très éclectique photographe allemand livre une nouvelle exposition parisienne aux notes boisées, alliant souplesse et dureté.

Il y a les photographes et il y a Wolfgang Tillmans. Cru sans être vulgaire, conceptuel sans même effleurer l'ennui, hyper-actuel mais jamais journalistique, son art embrasse et déborde toutes les catégories. D'ailleurs, portraits de stars ou d'anonymes, nus, natures mortes, paysages, instantanés de raves, abstractions sophistiquées, Tillmans, 46 ans, dégaine tous azimuts.

Cette variété se retrouve dans le format de ses expositions où se côtoient tirages numériques monumetaux, banales photocopies, tirages léchés et cartes postales. Sans oublier ses fameux livres d'artiste. Pourtant, quel que soit son sujet ou son matériau, une image de Tillmans se reconnaît toujours entre mille.

Son secret? Il repart constamment de l'origine épiphanique de la photographie. Comme Maurice Denis déclarant qu'un tableau sera toujours «essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées», Tillmans martèle: «Je ne pense pas en termes de catégories spécifiques à un médium. Je me dis avant tout : une plage de couleurs est une plage de couleurs.»

Chez lui, l'élégance extrême va de pair avec une certaine sécheresse, forme de pudeur. Il place cette nouvelle exposition personnelle à Paris (la première depuis 2011) sous le signe de la lignine, cet élément qui donne au bois sa rigidité, son imperméabilité et sa résistance à la décomposition. Autant de qualités substantiellement photographiques, aurait remarqué Roland Barthes.

«Wolfgang Tillmans : Lignine Duress», du 18 avril au 23 mai, à la galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris 3e.  
([www.crousel.com](http://www.crousel.com))

Martin Herbert. "Wolfgang Tillmans, The world through my lens" *Art Review*, Issue 67, April 2013

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel



Martin Herbert. "Wolfgang Tillmans, The world through my lens" *Art Review*, Issue 67, April 2013

Galerie  
Chantal Crousel





When *ArtReview* visited Wolfgang Tillmans recently in his labyrinthine studio in Kreuzberg, Berlin, we found an artist toggling between looking forward and looking back. On the one hand, Tillmans – first photographic artist to win the Turner Prize, nonpareil expander of his medium's horizons and reach in recent years, etc – was fresh from the triumph of *Neue Welt*. This years-in-the-making project (showcased both in a 2012 exhibition at the Kunsthalle Zurich and a lavish Taschen book) serves as a surgical inquiry into how, in diverse ways, the world has changed, 20 years after Tillmans began photographing it: cue, for him, a global itinerary of lightning trips, toting a newly adopted digital camera, to everywhere from basement garages in Tasmania

to bustling Indian streets, silvery Far Eastern malls to titanic rubbish dumps. On the other hand, he was preparing – alongside a museum exhibition in Lima – his current large show for K21 in Düsseldorf. In an office filled with a big model of that space, its size necessary for the artist to perfect the intricate scalar shifts of his installs, Tillmans talked about his recent past and a more distant one – starting with his plans to include, at K21, some illuminating work from his teenage years...

#### MARTIN HERBERT

*When did you first get a camera of your own?*

#### WOLFGANG TILLMANS

Not until I was twenty. I come from a family of avid amateur photographers – my father, my grandparents – and so that medium felt completely precluded for me. Maybe that's why I didn't initially put my photographs directly on the wall and only explored found photos, mechanical pictures. Look at these [points out *Edinburgh Builders a, b and c* (1987) on worktable]. With my mother's little Rangefinder camera, I photographed a builder working on the opposite house – so the queer gaze is subtly already there [laughs] – and progressively enlarged it across several photocopies so it becomes just a distribution of surface pattern. It's a kind of noise, but it comes across as super-specific. I still don't know what this random-or-not information means, but it's always been of great interest to me. The lucky thing was that I discovered these photocopies as 'originals'. They had the aura of finished work, yet I didn't have to paint or draw it. Maybe that was in keeping with me liking electronic music, too – the idea that you can do something expressive without an expressive hand, I was fortunate to have that at an early age. A photocopy is just a sheet of paper, but something happens and it becomes of value, of aesthetic charge.

*This issue of transformation has never gone away in your work, has it?*

WT: I'm always interested in the question of when something becomes something, or not, and how do we know? I observe it all the time. One person becomes a dear friend, the other not; this pair of old jeans your mother thinks is rubbish and wants to throw away, and to you it's your favourite piece of clothing. There's different attributions of value at different times and stages in one's life, different people have different vantage points – and this is what *Truth Study Center* [his ongoing installation project, first shown at Maureen Paley, London, in 2005, intermingling astral photography, newspaper clippings emphasising various types of intolerance, and much more] was concerned with. All of these people claiming to know 'what it is', and almost, one could say, an immodesty in assessing value – in not asking 'where did my evaluation come from, and when did I start

this page from top: Silver 92,  
2012; Silver 94, 2012; Silver 97,  
2012

facing page: *Freischwimmer 230*,  
2012



thinking about that? And I would also like to know what things are, but I also want always to acknowledge that even though I want clear answers, they always evolve over time.

*And so now you've just looked back over 20 years, comparing then and now, for Neue Welt. How did this start?*

WT: Part of what determined the locations was an interest in borders. At the end of 2008 I went to [the Sicilian island of] Lampedusa and a month later to Israel and travelled all over the borders of Israel, and then on the same trip – though not directly, of course, to Tunisia, to go to the other side of Lampedusa. As so often happens, though, when you backtrack, the seeds of the work lie further back. There's one photograph in *Neue Welt* called *Growth* and that's from 2004. I had an interest in going against the aesthetic that I've become known for, and at first – for a show at Andrea Rosen in 2007 – I thought of making deliberately ugly pictures, but that isn't an interesting pursuit in itself. Only two years after I started *Neue Welt* did it become clear that

this was the biggest thing I've been working on since the *Abstract Pictures*.

*When you gathered those together in a book, you also included works like Edinburgh Builders: again, the starting point was earlier – your work doesn't divide neatly into sections. But from 1998 you did spend a decade focusing on abstraction*

*– the galaxial scanned-and-enlarged darkroom luminograms Freischwimmer and Blushes; the lysergic lumino- and photogram Mental Pictures; bent and crumpled Lighter photo-objects; the series of photographs of curling photographic paper; Paper Drop, to name but a few.*

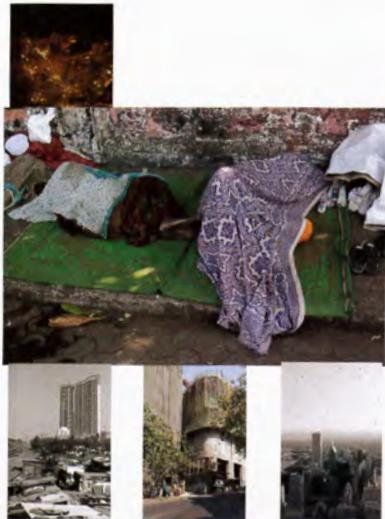
WT: Dealing with materiality was a way of dealing with changed contexts in the photographic world. At the end of the 1990s what I felt was needed was this slowdown of picture consumption – which of course seems funny to think about back then, because now there's an insane speed of picture consumption. But I already felt people were getting careless with it. I wanted to go against that and mess with expectations of what one would see and how one would read this piece of photographic paper. Since 1998, this talking about the photograph as an object has been such a strong focus for me. I'm doing what I do for myself, but of course I'm always doing it in the context of the world it exists in, so if I feel there isn't enough of something, then that, in a way, constitutes the reason for me to do something about it.

IF I FEEL  
THERE ISN'T ENOUGH OF  
SOMETHING,  
THEN THAT, IN A WAY,  
CONSTITUTES THE REASON  
FOR ME TO DO  
SOMETHING ABOUT IT

Martin Herbert. "Wolfgang Tillmans, The world through my lens" *Art Review*, Issue 67, April 2013

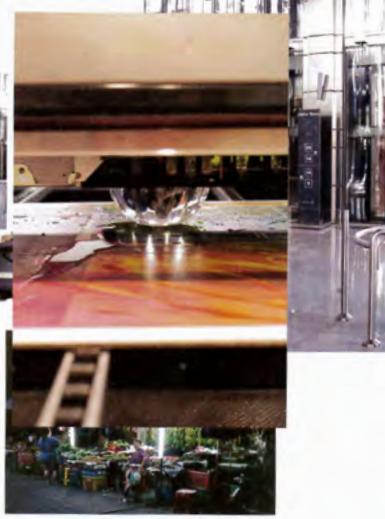
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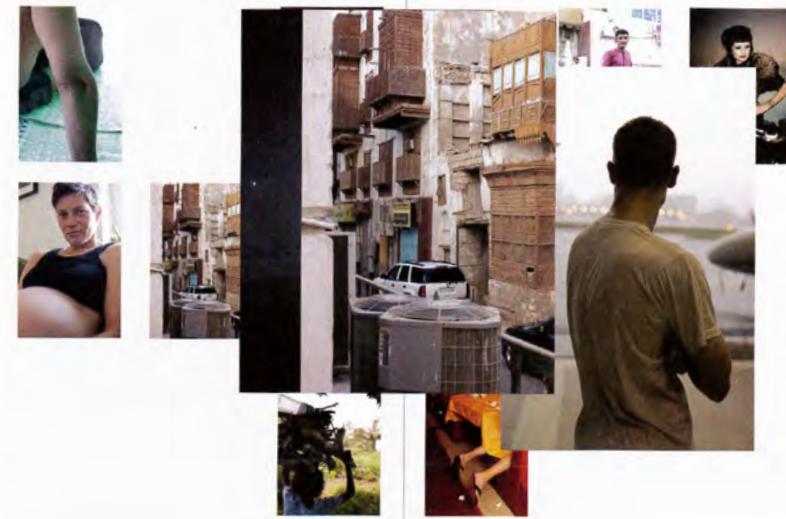
For *Neue Welt* you began using a digital camera for the first time, and set out on deliberately short trips around the world, to these border zones. It's a project full of rocketing contrasts: in one section of the book, we zoom between car headlights – that you've identified as having a new cruelly sharklike design template – to a creamy abstraction, to a boy running down a shantytown street, to a pin-sharp night sky. In a conversation with Beatrix Ruf published in the book, you said, 'Essentially this is about humanism.' What did you mean?

WT: It's a big word, but I guess what I meant with it is that I don't want to create a distance between myself and the world that I depict and the viewer. With this triangle one can so easily put up distance and gaps and steps between the three; I find a low threshold of approachability between them more interesting than to build in distance or difference. At the same time, and this



#### MY PHOTOGRAPHY BEGAN THROUGH USING THE FIRST DIGITAL PHOTOCOPIER

is crucial, I'm fully aware that there is difference, that there are huge differences in access, wealth... The difficulty with *Neue Welt* – which in itself I couldn't write down as the agenda – was to be open-ended but at the same time come up with specific results that speak about specificity in the most nonprescribed, unplanned way, because if you go somewhere with an idea in mind, you will only find that idea. And if you make drifting the subject, then you also maybe end up with just that, without focus. So there are specific interests



this page from top: spreads from  
*Neue Welt*, 2012, Taschen

facing page from left: *Headlight*  
(l), 2012; *Spores*, 2012



[in it]. I'm always reading and following what goes on, and there are certain markers that I find are significant and telling points.

*Car headlights...*

WT: Yes, or all sorts of things to do with markets and marketing and the transfer of goods.

*And you feel like a lot of this is available on the surface? Because it seems this project is tied to surfaces: you're deliberately skimming the surface of a place, and leaving when it becomes familiar, and what you're picking up are articulate surfaces.*

WT: Yes. Content inscribes itself into surfaces so eloquently, because a surface that is not purely made by nature is usually the result of layers of many people's interactions with it. With architecture, cityscapes, I'm always fascinated by the layering of different architects, generations of what they thought is right; and with shop displays, what that shop assistant thought in

conjunction with the display that was made by that design office – all those wishes and desires to design.

*How does a project like this relate, then, to, say, ethnography?*

WT: I guess an ethnographer identifies a subject to study, and they want internal coherence and it's led by an external demonstration of difference. And I wasn't led by pure expectation of difference, but nor was I led by a romantic longing for what all this human family shares. I guess that was the biggest personal human growth I got from this: learning to accept the similarity and, at the same time, total differentness of people and places. On the one

hand we're extremely the same, and at the same time we are insurmountably different.

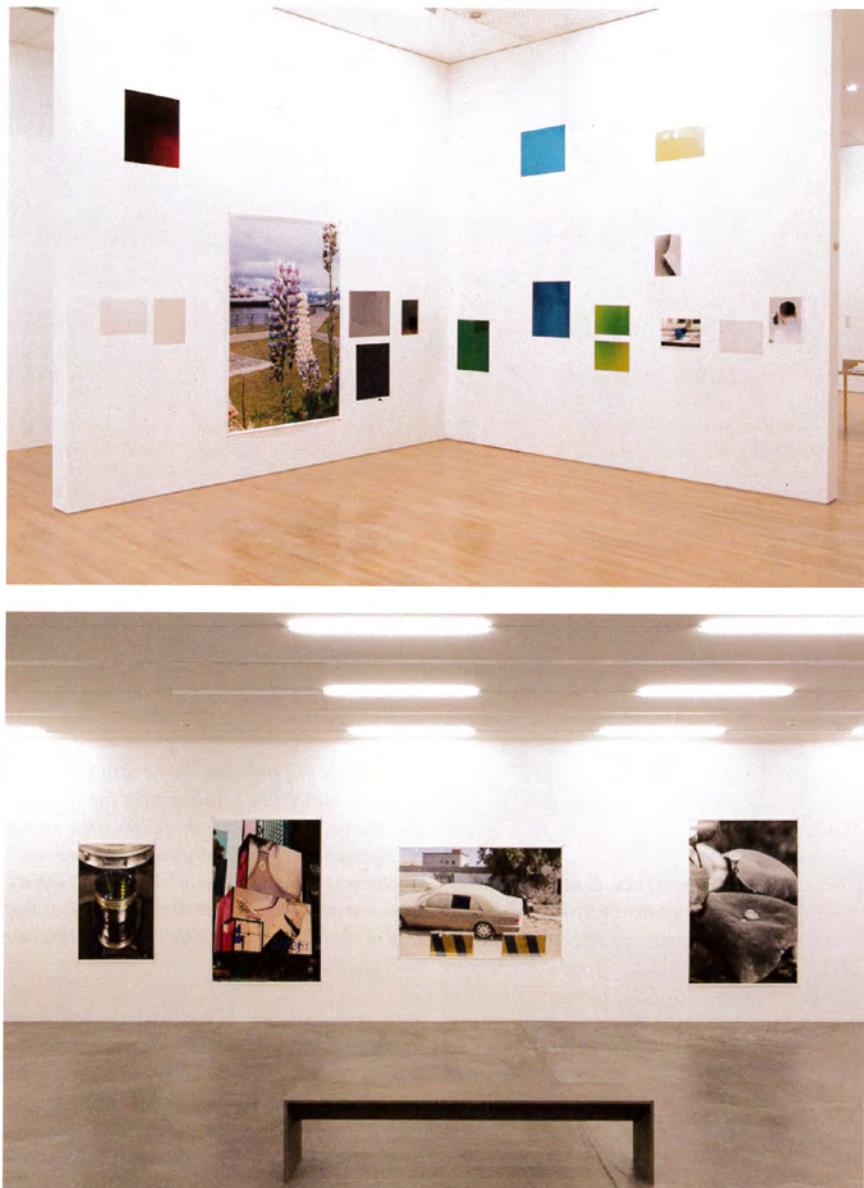
*You said in one previous conversation, 'This is actually really like a laboratory for studying the world in many of its facets and visual manifestations.' I'm slightly uncertain how much emphasis to put on the idea of 'the world as subject' in your work. Neue Welt would suggest there's that kind of whole-grasping ambition at work. Is that the scale you think on?*

WT: Undeniably yes, but with a huge disclaimer attached: that it's an impossible task, and if taken too seriously it could be laden with hubris. But it would also be coy if I said, oh, I'm not dealing with it. I am, because how could I not – because that would mean my fascination would drop off at a point, and my fascination is kind of limitless. It's not greedy, it's not trying to piss on every territory, but I mean – economics and economic activity, for example: how important is that to what goes on in almost every aspect of human life?

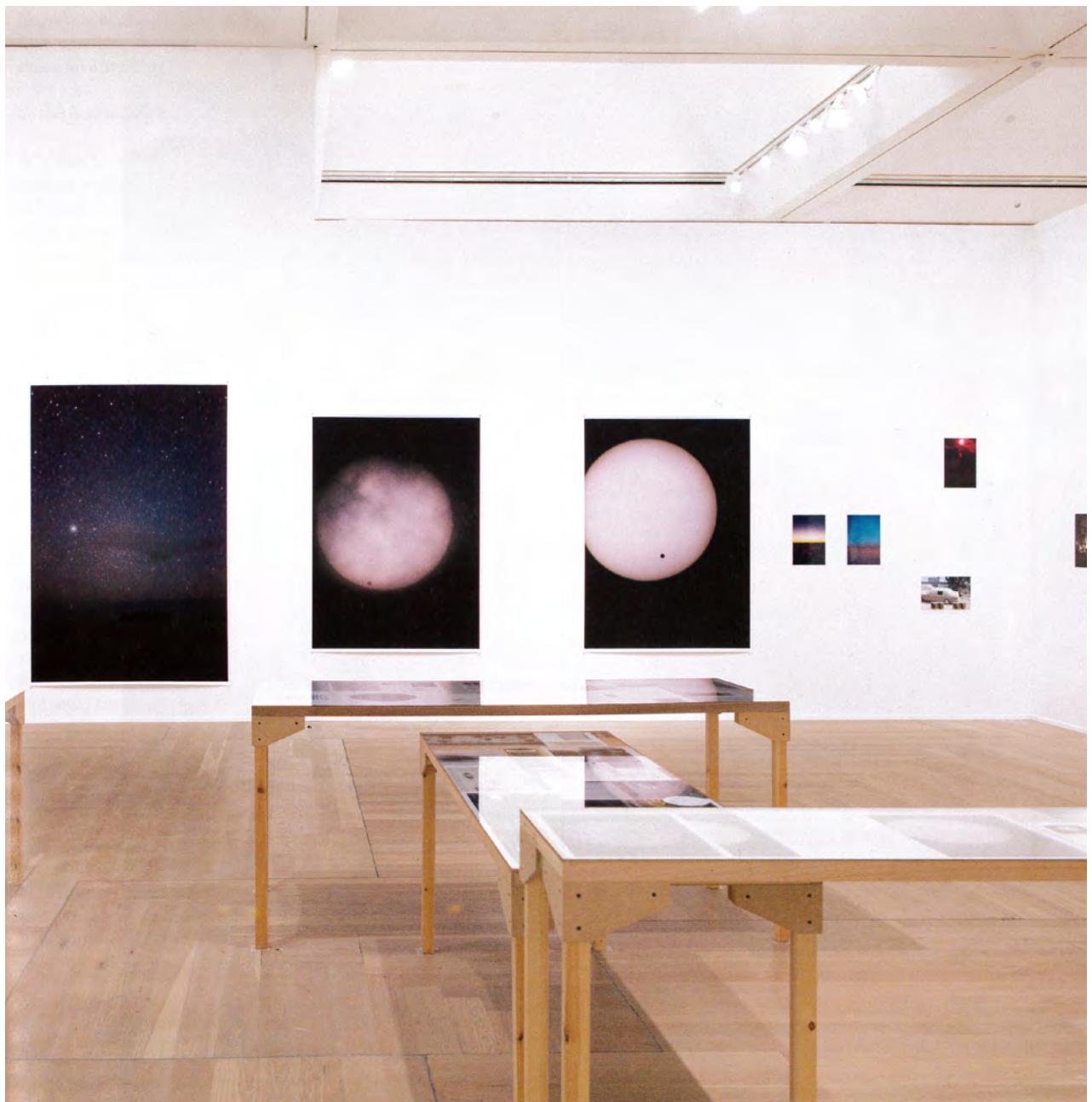


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these pages, from top:  
installation views of Wolfgang  
Tillmans exhibitions at Moderna  
Museet, Stockholm, 2012, Museo  
de Arte del Banco de la  
República, Bogotá, 2012, and  
Kunsthalle Zurich, 2012



MY APPROACH TO  
PHOTOGRAPHY AS  
A MEDIUM HAS ALWAYS  
BEEN THAT I WANTED  
TO APPROXIMATE  
WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO  
LOOK THROUGH MY EYES



*As you've made this marker of 20 years of work, do you feel your vision – your actual ability to look – has changed in that time?*

WT: Maybe what I would call the ability to name and discern what my vision records, that has possibly improved. I hope so. Because there is what we *choose* to see and what we are *able* to see, and then there's a lot of things that people don't choose not to see, but simply aren't able to see. I hope I've stayed attentive. This term, attentive, is the most crucial in my life, in a way. The way we look, that is how we decide to act in this world, and that is then also how society as a whole acts, if you see societies always as an addition, an accumulation of individuals.

*How much of a difference has working digitally made to you?*

WT: My photography began through using the first digital photocopier, which you saw in those Xeroxes. I happened to come across that in 1986, and understood the possibilities it allowed for making pictures. And then I bought, obviously, an analogue camera and then in 1992 used a large-format Canon copier to make the large-format inkjet prints. So I stayed purely analogue, technically, until 2009 in regard to how the image generation is made, where the image dots come from. That's always been onto film, and in a way I'm still analogue now because I use the [digital camera's] sensor really as a film,



and I never move pixels around. And I think that's important because people nowadays just expect that something has been altered in pictures. I find that a bit disturbing.

*So this is about truth...*

WT: Yes. In my work various ways of transfer, meaning printing, are possible, because this is how an idea becomes form, in a way. But the world as it passes through the lens and is projected onto film or sensor - I find that shouldn't be tampered with. Because the world already allows for so much absurdity, so many wild conjunctions of events and objects, it would be crazy to think that's not enough. By not doing retouching additions in my work, I insist that what you see somehow was in front of the lens. I want people to trust this as a basic given. That makes it somehow more powerful than all the pixels I can move around.

*Then the attraction of digital is on the level of resolution?*

WT: Yes. I had found my photographic truth in the grain and information level of 100 ASA fine-grain film. Which I read somewhere carries as much information as a 14-megapixel sensor. So until there were digital portable light cameras that could have 14 megapixels, I thought the idea of going digital was stupid anyway. My approach to photography as a medium has always been that I wanted to approximate what it feels like to look through my eyes, and that seemed very much achieved with 35mm. What was attractive to me about digital cameras of this full-format generation is the extreme variety in speed: that you can set it from 100 ASA to, now, 25,000 ASA. And it really makes certain pictures possible that were impossible before.

*For example?*

WT: The starry skies. They seem not of a particular time, but if you are in the know, you know this picture is very improbable. Ten years ago you wouldn't have been able to take this picture, without manipulation. Because after five, seven, eight seconds, stars show up as a line, because of the earth's rotation. So you'd have to put the camera on a countermovement, but then the ground would be blurry. For me to take a picture of the northern sky, an astro-photograph, from a flying aircraft, with no movement, that's such a crazy idea. So I'm glad I went to digital of my own free will, because then a year later Fuji discontinued the fine-grain film that I used.

*It seems you're also more interested in issues of scale now. In the sense that you have these really large enlargements that are pin-sharp as well...*

WT: The scale-shift issue has been going on since my first show at Daniel Buchholz, 20 years ago, but what has changed, and really been a challenge for me, is that you can look as close at the large pictures as you want and there's no dissolution. And that I find is of huge significance - in cultural history, possibly. I don't want to sound immodest because it's also something that was given to me by the camera maker, but some of these new pictures - or all of them, in a way - contain more information than the mind can possibly remember. So any super-fine paintings from 1500 with fur that looks super-real, they are still not as fine as these pictures, which are at the same time photographed from the vantage point of my eye, which is always interested in the nonhierarchical point of view. So whereas in the past a 10 x 8 photograph always somehow had to be taken from a privileged point of view, there is somehow a coming together of, on the one hand, this very human perspective and glance, with this precision. It's something I find personally still perplexing, like: what is going on here? It's a bit scary. And interestingly, now I've gone digital, there's no digital medium that can show these pictures in their full quality.

*So it's still analogue in the end: you still have to go to the one-off, the print...*

WT: There's no screen that has the depth of information. And so it becomes very much about standing in front of this print, and having the spatial relation and movement around it. So I kind of have great faith in the picture: it hasn't gone away. Fortunately. :

*Work by Wolfgang Tillmans is on show at K21, Düsseldorf, until 7 July and at Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI) until 16 June. Neue Welt is available in a limited portfolio edition (signed and numbered) from Taschen*

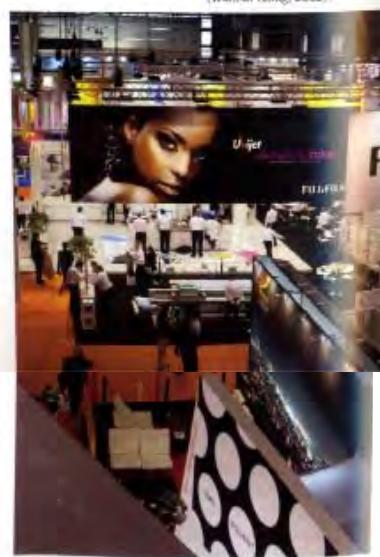
Michelle Kuo. "Step into Liquid. Michelle Kuo talks with Wolfgang Tillmans about the ascendancy of ink-jet printing" *Artforum*, 50th anniversary issue, September 2012, p. 420-429.

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# Step into Liquid

MICHELLE KUO TALKS WITH WOLFGANG TILLMANS ABOUT  
THE ASCENDANCY OF INK-JET PRINTING

Pages from Wolfgang Tillmans's  
FESPA Digital/Fruit Logistica  
(Walter König, 2012).



Michelle Kuo. "Step into Liquid. Michelle Kuo talks with Wolfgang Tillmans about the ascendancy of ink-jet printing" *Artforum*, 50th anniversary issue, September 2012, p. 420-429.



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We have arrived at a point where a large proportion of "painting" is actually ink-jet printing. This is an amazing fact. But it is never really talked about.



Wolfgang Tillmans. *Felschwimmer 152*, 2010, inkjet print on paper, 12' 5" x 18' 8". Installation view, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

**MICHELLE KUO:** I was struck by your reaction to the David Hockney exhibition in London this past spring ["A Bigger Picture," Royal Academy of Arts]. Beyond any sheer aesthetic pleasure, you seemed especially taken by the show's structure, in which traditionally painted canvases were shown alongside digitally produced paintings as well as arrays of video monitors that functioned as display "canvases."

**WOLFGANG TILLMANS:** Hockney's exhibition is a fascinating example of the veil we put around medium. This is a subject I've been dealing with in my work from the beginning, so I was intrigued to see this set of issues appear in another artist's practice—and excited by the exuberance of the show. Not only by his relentless dwelling on the subject matter of nature but also by his iPad paintings, which were actually ink-jet prints on paper mounted on Dibond. I was curious to see how these digital images were presented as material paintings in drop-shadow frames. And they resonated with the multipanel video screens showing moving images made with nine cameras. Ultimately, though—even if the work celebrates new media and technology, just as Hockney has done in the past—it almost seemed as if the iPad and video pieces were there as foils, to

underline, by contrast, the masterly position and unsurpassable value of actual oil on canvas.

Last month I was in Cologne to take a portrait of Hockney, and he talked about how amazing the quality of ink-jet printers is today, how they can produce colors beyond those of any other medium. But then he added, "The images have to be drawn. You have to draw them. It can't come from photographs." I found this so telling, this notion that something hand-drawn will print differently from something that is photographed, and that the printing technology itself could be used, ultimately, to uphold this hierarchy. The ink-jet printer itself obviously doesn't care where the input, the color values, come from; whether something drawn, scanned, or photographed; the printer merely prints the color space it can technically cover.

In fact, the show demonstrated there is an unprecedented equality among different media today. But it also made clear that there is a deep psychological attachment to traditional hierarchies of medium. And I have been observing this leveling—and the attachment to hierarchy in the face of it—for many years. For example, the same medium exists in completely different museum departments. If one looks

at the traditional divisions of modern art (the same category of mechanically produced work exists across the print department, the photography department, the painting and sculpture department, plus obviously architecture and design),

**MK:** And just as the boundaries between those traditional mediums themselves have become increasingly murky, markets and institutions have seemingly reinforced those divisions all the more.

**WT:** We have arrived at a point where a large portion of "painting" is actually ink-jet printing. This is an amazing fact. But, almost as astonishingly, it is never really talked about. A photographic ink-jet print on paper, an iPad drawing printed on ink-jet paper, and an original design printed on ink-jet paper are all technically exactly the same. Perhaps it's time to rethink the remarkably persistent categorization of artworks. In my view, we are all making pictures.

**MK:** I low is this condition of "pictures" reflected in your work, and how did you come to work with digital photography and ink-jet printing yourself?

**WT:** I always saw myself as a picture maker, using whatever means were available to make a new picture. I started working with digital printing in 1986. I used the first black-and-white laser photocopier by Canon in a copy shop to print a one-off zine. When

Wolfgang Tillmans. *Lata 5 (also sitting on the grass)*, 1992, c-print print on paper, 63 x 42 5/8". Installation view, Museum für Moderne Kunst am Turm, Frankfurt am Main, 2000.



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Wolfgang Tillmans, *InterRail*, 1987; black-and-white laser photocopy, 11 1/4 x 16 1/4".

I started experimenting with this new machine, I realized how much more meaningful those photocopies were in texture and in presence than the drawings and paintings I was making at the time—that this mechanically produced object had a richer texture because of the rather rough dot screen and the surface lines generated by the technology of the moment. It was digital, which meant it should be perfect, but in fact it wasn't; the process always created some degree of interference and unevenness, which I liked. Then in 1992, in order to make larger pictures, instead of tiling many A3 photocopies together I found a brand-new Canon Color Bubble Jet Copier A1, which was really a photocopier unit

with an ink-jet printer inside it that printed on twenty-four-inch rolls of paper.

I realized that I could make large-scale, lightweight pictures by photocopying my smaller, hand-printed photographs from the darkroom and enlarging them to four feet by five feet. I hung each picture as a sheet of paper on the wall, unframed, so that there was nothing between the viewer and the ink-saturated matte surface. Because these early ink-jet prints were executed with unstable dyes, I realized that if I wanted to have the advantage of this fragility and more immediate spatial relationship, it was essential to find a way for people to perceive them as permanent, and so I accompanied the works with the original photograph

and a certificate, instructing the owner how to reprint the picture when the first copy faded. While this was a practical solution, it also afforded viewers the opportunity to break down certain barriers of materiality—attaining a paradoxical permanence even as attachment to the "original" print was obviated.

**MK:** And that transitioned away from the heavy vehicle or container—like the thick wood and Plexiglas frame or the light box—that was standard practice for large photographs and also associated with a certain strain of conceptual photography.

**WT:** Yes. I wanted to avoid the heavy language of large-scale photographs. The unframed ink-jet print was definitely an exception to that language, and it

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was seen as a dramatic, rebellious gesture at the time, although it has since become a common practice. But for me, it was not so much an objection to the frame. It was about the love of this immaculate object as it comes out of the printer or processing machine. It was about acknowledging the objectness and the specificity of materiality. I was asking: How can I present this object, which has always been just that—an *object*, a print, for me, and not just a conduit of information? And how can I bring it to the wall?

For my small-scale C-type prints, I found a way of taping the photograph that wouldn't harm the surface and was detachable from the back, in order to foreground this attention to materiality. After some years, though, I became known for this way of installing my work; it felt important to reinvigorate the dialogue about the photograph as an object and not let it drift into the background as merely the expected way of encountering my work. So I introduced frames and showed them next to the unframed work. This juxtaposition held open the possibility of a reversal of meaning, or a questioning of expectations.

**MK:** The frame, or the border, gets pressured differently within newer media. In several photographs that

you took for this piece, which are close-ups of ink-jet works by different artists, you focused on the edges and corners.

**WT:** Because that's really where the picture begins and ends, where it meets the real world around it. It is a crucial point—where the reality or the body of the work, so to speak, manifests itself. It is also, importantly, a juncture where you can often see the paint or ink or pigment meet the material support underneath. So I've always been interested in the ways in which artists deal with the corners and edges, how they are managed and handled. Whether viewing a Velázquez or a Jeff Wall, after taking in a picture as a whole I take a look at its side. I like to observe the shadows that stretchers cast—as in a room of Rothkos on view recently at MOMA, which could be viewed afresh by blocking everything else out and only concentrating on the shadows cast by the bottom corners of the paintings.

**MK:** Modern ink-jet technology also produces something you've referred to as "smooth color." the experience of pure, solid color.

**WT:** The experience of pure color has been heightened to a new level: That is where I think there has been a

In its most extreme state, a contemporary ink-jet painting on stretchers inside a museum is technically the same as an advertising banner stretched on the museum's facade. For some that may be hard to stomach.

seismic change in technology, what Hockney referred to as colors that have not been possible before, colors with a deep richness—not a lurid richness. The quality of ink and ink-jet printing has become even more amazing in recent years, and manufacturers are now using pigmented ink, which lasts much longer than traditional C-type color photographs.

We have come to a point where the ink-jet printer actually has a bigger color space than C-type photography. But I have also noticed that there remains a faith in the optical C-print because it is connected to a unique negative and not to a set of codes. There is a tendency to want to hold on to the analog for some sort of authenticity.

**MK:** And yet images generated by a set of codes are dominant, across vastly different types of imagery—from the commercial pictures at the digital print fair you visited in Barcelona, for example, to a late Polke on vinyl.

**WT:** In its most extreme state, a contemporary ink-jet painting on stretchers inside a museum is technically the same as an advertising banner stretched on the aluminum framework on the museum's facade. For some that may be a little hard to stomach.

**MK:** One could cynically surmise that's why various artists have tried to bring the symbol for the artist's hand or the gesture into their art, by adding an "original" painterly touch with washes of paint or color on top of the ink-jet-printed image, just as late Warhols were individualized in that way.

**WT:** Yes, that seems a bit anachronistic. Interestingly, I think that for a younger generation of artists, expressive gestures are more naturally performed on digital recording surfaces, like trackpads, stylus tablets, or iPads. And these pictures' first state of being is immaterial. They are just as immaterial as a digital photograph on a computer screen or a FreeHand illustration. They are all categorically the same, but there still seems to be a hierarchization of this material, which is a near-ethical dilemma that I find fascinating.

In order to transfer such imagery into an exhibition space, it has to be mediated back onto a physical substrate, unless it will be shown on monitors. Probably one sad day, exhibition spaces may be covered floor to ceiling in digital screens as thin as wall-

paper. But today the challenge is this: Everyone who makes digital images uses the same machines made by a handful of manufacturers that produce state-of-the-art ink-jet printers. From Gerhard Richter in Cologne to a photographer in Tokyo to a fine art printmaker in Los Angeles, they all use the same set of machines.

**MK:** On the one hand, that introduces a bottleneck, because so many of those parameters are completely predetermined—but they then have endless permutations. You can introduce a boundless series of layers of different visual registers—scans, vector graphics, photographed imagery—into what is outputted.

**WT:** And now you can print onto anything—canvas, wood, glass, metal, Mylar, you name it. The choices going into making a specific pictorial object are all important here: What is a good way for this image to exist in the real world? Of course there is also the question of how one can assure that monetary value is attributed to the image. It's hard to ignore the fact that we still value the notion of an image on canvas more highly than if it were on wood, and therefore a sculpture, or on paper, and therefore a photograph.

**MK:** Nevertheless, the principle at the moment is always the same: ink pigment sprayed onto something. Which raises questions of reproducibility, of editing, of uniqueness. None of this is new, of course—from early hand-wringing about photography to the industrially produced objects of Minimalism. Yet what seems new is the pervasiveness of one type of *medium* across so many supposedly different *mediums*.

You also point to something interesting, which is that despite the sophistication of our programs or printers or technical apparatuses, it is still extremely difficult to achieve the same results. That even though we think that things are infinitely reproducible, in fact reproduction itself is still always slightly contingent on—

**WT:** On the touch and the craft and the knowledge of the operator of the printer. The reproducibility of art has to some extent always been an ideal, because the moment the data meets the physical world, you are dealing with the idiosyncratic consistency of the pigment powder that has been mixed into the ink liquid in Japan by a specific company.

For instance, the static charge that creates a slight blip in the flow of data or ink, the inconsistencies in paper or other base materials, and printing profiles and program updates mix with variables like humidity and temperature in the print workshop—anybody who has experience in fine printing knows how frustratingly difficult it is to achieve a perfect result; just as my work addresses its relation to medium, it also directly addresses our relationship to perfection and accident.

**MK:** It recalls Warhol's paintings: the randomization of texture and the introduction of noise into the screenprinted surfaces—versus now, when nothing falls through the grid of the screen.

**WT:** Because today's best ink-jet prints have become a closed surface, with no screen or dot visible to the naked eye. The surface is 300 dpi or more, with 100 information density. But random noise still happens in digital photography, in which a photon sensor translates what it sees or doesn't see into zeros and ones. In extreme low light, cameras generate random information. I used this effect in photographs of the night sky, where at great enlargement a star is no longer distinguishable from a pixel that just displays a random charge.

**MK:** Do you see the users—whether you're an ad agency or a graphic designer—as subjects to the technology, waiting for the next advance, looking forward to the opportunity to play around with whatever new tools are designed? Or is it the other way around: The producers are looking at what their users desire in terms of each next-generation development?

**WT:** I don't think that the artists are the ones who are actively pushing the development, and I don't think the developers are looking to artists, necessarily. But there is no denying the incredible democratization of this medium and in these extremely powerful tools. The technology is on the desktops of millions of people using all kinds of applications, making *virtually* anything from home video to political signs. One has to see this as an opportunity. What does it mean, then, for the art object?

**MK:** Now the ink-jet print is a kind of material picture that parallels the register—in resolution, in color—the picture on the screen. But this prevents a homogenization of vision even as it suggests new possibilities for imaging.

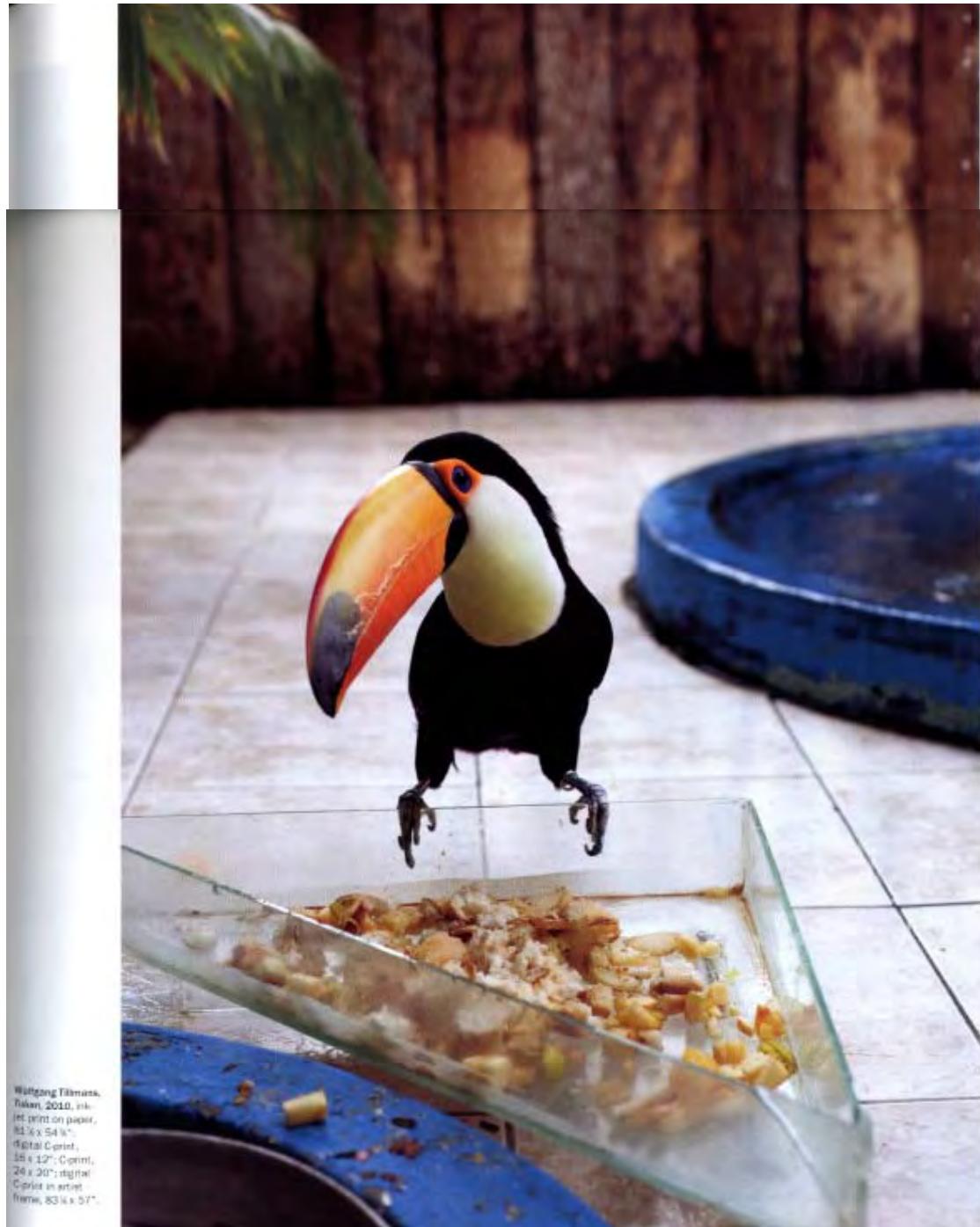
**WT:** It's mind-boggling. Digital has allowed an advance in quality at the same time as it has created an incredible degradation of standards and of expectations. Just think of how we only watch films in fuzzy YouTube quality.

Buying a digital camera three years ago was, for me, a total revolution. I needed to learn my language for the second time; I suddenly had to deal with high definition, that every picture now sees more than my eye can see. This was about a whole new world of seeing, of working. In the past I had always said that 35-mm film was exactly right for my photography because I wanted my photographs to look like what my eye sees. And photographs recorded on large-format film always left me cold; they are impressive, but they have nothing to do with my experience of the world.

Now I have suddenly found myself with a small SLR [single-lens reflex] camera that has the *strength*

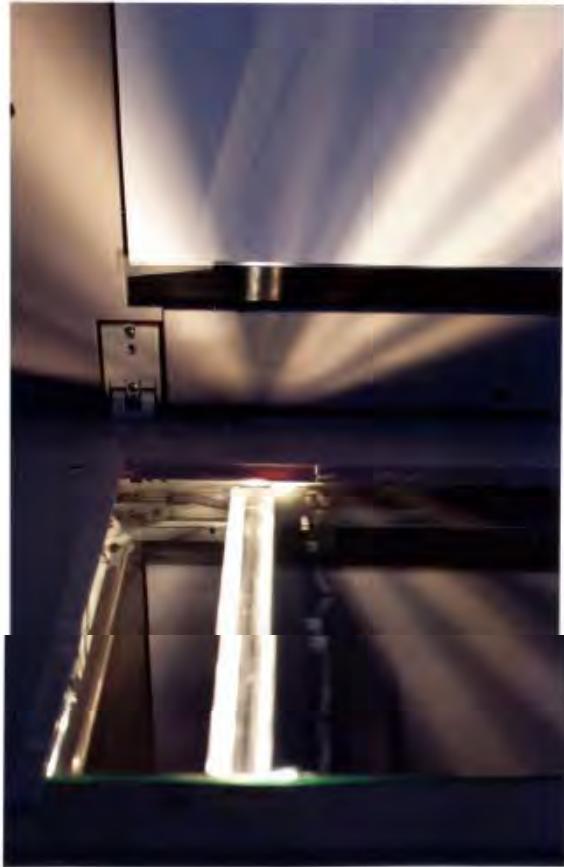
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Paradoxically, today, when almost all of our images involve mechanical reproduction, we are hardly aware of the social functions that the new technology might fulfill.



of large-format film. So I have really had to learn to adapt to a different process—because there is no point in artificially adding grain to these pictures. That would be so wrong. And about four years ago there was a new generation of digital cameras with sensors exactly the size of 35-mm film, and so optically the lenses perform exactly the same as those in my 35 SLR. Before, I could always recognize digital photographs. Now they don't have the same quality of flatness that they once did. Because of the portability of these supersharp cameras, I can carry on in the way that I move around the world and keep the same angles and perspectives as my previous work.

The transition was tough. I didn't want my medium to look nostalgic, but could I still make pictures of the same emotional charge and intensity? This is all coming together, in a way, as I prepare for my exhibition "*Neue Welt*" [New World] at Kunsthalle Zürich in September. As I've worked on this show, a whole new layer has entered my work, which can only be seen in person in front of the actual prints. The depth of detail is so great that a picture can never be memorized in its entirety. It's as if in

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each one there is a sense of the infinite complexity of matter—a kind of *trompe l'oeil* effect that is neither clinical nor cold but surreal.

WT: This seems like part of a shift to a different visual order, one in which a surfeit, an exponentially greater magnitude, of information is simultaneously readily available—both within the camera's viewfinder and in print—and totally beyond our perceptual capacity. WT: I had experienced this act of learning a new visual language once before, when starting to work with cameraless, nonfigurative pictures in the darkroom. These shifts, some chosen, some forced on us by technological development, shouldn't be seen as a threat. They are profoundly exciting.

MK: If *Pictures* was famously coined by Douglas Crimp as a way of talking about the class of images being made in the 1970s that did not seem self-

reflexively preoccupied with their own medium specificity but instead addressed new types of representation—film, photography, television, advertising—Crimp articulated the ways in which such "pictures" were still committed to modernism, to its radical aspirations and to its investigations into signification and representation, along the lines of Surrealism and Pop. To his mind, these artists in the '70s had merely turned from modernism's internal, formalist questions of medium to questions of the psychology of the image and its relation to (consumer) desire.

It seems that, on the one hand, the "pictures" you speak of deal very much with this territory—the realm of desire, psychology, consumption (those lurid images at the digital-printing trade fair!). But on the other hand, the universe of pictures you are talking

about also appears to break with modernist radicality, with older critiques of representation. The landscape has changed, even if we are leaving many of its possibilities unexplored.

WT: Well, the Pop silk screen was at the center of this tension between the radical and the commercial in the postwar period. And decades before that, Walter Benjamin spoke of mechanical reproduction as, in a way, freeing the artwork from its cult status, its role in ritual, and allowing it to enter the realm of the political. But paradoxically, today, when almost all of our images involve mechanical reproduction, we are hardly aware of the social functions that the new technology might fulfill; instead we persist in tethering it to the realm of cult and ritual, which is the fetishization of images stretched on canvas. □

WOLFGANG TILLMANS IS AN ARTIST BASED IN BERLIN AND LONDON.

Wolfgang Tillmans, Waste III, 2008, ink-jet print on paper, 54 1/8 x 81 3/8"; digital C-print, 12 x 16"; digital C-print, 20 x 34"; digital C-print in artist frame, 57 x 83 3/8".

