



New World / Life is astronomical

Wolfgang Tillmans in conversation
with Beatrix Ruf

BR You call this book and the new series *Neue Welt* [New World]. The title brings to mind the 1928 photography book *Die Welt ist schön* [The World is Beautiful] by Albert Renger-Patzsch, in which he used 100 photographs to depict the state of the world in motifs like those of plants, people, landscapes, architecture, machinery, and industrial products. It also reminds me of the 2002 publication *Sichtbare Welt* [Visible World] by Peter Fischli & David Weiss, in which they revisited every sight seen hundreds of times already, every longed-for mythologized location, and made touristy, postcard images from them again.

What was your project? How can one grasp the world today?

WT Recently, a friend referred to my studio as a laboratory for the contemporary. What is the current situation? From the start, I was concerned with trying to answer this question as a whole. In the process, I was constantly aware of only being able to do this based on selected motifs and significant fragments taken from the world. For example, carefully studying a single edition of a daily newspaper tells you an amazing amount about the world. It poses the question of how information is actually processed. Information density nowadays is incredibly high. For that reason, only fragments can actually be processed. We might possess more absolute knowledge than ever before, but everything is fragmented—the same way hard drives save “fragmented” files. There is no longer a view of the totality, of the whole.

Until now, I had always found this whole in facets of the private and the public, and I usually remained close to my own living environment at the same time. Foreign and exotic exceptions to the rule have always existed. Of course, my work was primarily an involvement with people and things in some way close to me, or with art-immanent questions concerning the picture, the material, and the installation. Basically, to study a wrinkle in a piece of cloth or a dent in an unbroken surface is already enough to locate a picture of the whole. It's all a matter of the gaze, of an open, anxiety-free gaze.

BR So you have dealt extensively with questions of medium, abstraction, and representation.

WT For the last ten years I've been dealing rather introspectively with abstract, medium-reflexive images like those in

Neue Welt / Leben ist astronomisch

Wolfgang Tillmans im Gespräch
mit Beatrix Ruf

BR Du nennst dieses Buch und die neue Werkgruppe *Neue Welt*. Der Titel ruft den 1928 erschienenen Bildband *Die Welt ist schön* von Albert Renger-Patzsch in Erinnerung, in dem er mit 100 Fotografien den Zustand der Welt in Motiven wie Pflanzen, Menschen, Landschaft, Architektur, Maschinen und Industrieprodukten darstellte. Auch die 2002 veröffentlichte Arbeit *Sichtbare Welt* von Peter Fischli & David Weiss kommt mir in den Sinn, in der die beiden jede schon hundertfach gesehene Sehenswürdigkeit und jeden mythologisierten Sehensort noch einmal aufgesucht und das touristische Postkartenbild davon noch mal gemacht haben.

Was war dein Projekt? Wie kann man heute die Welt erfassen?

WT Ein Freund bezeichnete letztes mein Atelier als Forschungsstätte für das Zeitgenössische. Was ist der Stand der Dinge? Von Anfang an ging es mir um den Versuch, diese Frage als Ganzes zu beantworten. Mir war dabei stets bewusst, dass ich dies immer nur anhand von ausgewählten Motiven und signifikanten Ausschnitten aus der Welt machen kann. Zum Beispiel kann einem das genaue Studium einer Tageszeitung eines einzigen Tages unglaublich viel über die Welt sagen. Das wirft die Frage auf, wie Information eigentlich verarbeitet wird. Die Informationsdichte ist ja heutzutage sehr hoch. Deshalb können eigentlich nur noch Fragmente verarbeitet werden. Wir wissen vielleicht absolut mehr als jemals zuvor, aber alles ist fragmentiert – so wie auch Festplatten Daten „fragmentiert“ abspeichern. Man hat kaum noch einen Blick für die Totalität, für ein Ganzes.

Dieses Ganze hatte ich bislang stets in Facetten des Privaten und Öffentlichen gefunden und war dabei meistens nah an meiner eigenen Lebenswelt geblieben. Ausnahmen des Fremden und Exotischen hat es immer gegeben, aber meine Arbeit war vor allem eine Beschäftigung mit Menschen und Dingen, die mir in irgendeiner Weise nahestanden, oder aber mit kunstimmanenten Fragen des Bildes, des Materials, der Installation. Im Grunde reicht ja bereits das Studium einer Falte im Stoff oder eines Knicks in einer unversehrten Oberfläche, um ein Bild des Ganzen zu finden. Es ist alles eine Frage des Blickes, des offenen, angstfreien Blickes.

BR Du hast dich dann viel mit Fragen des Mediums, der Abstraktion und Repräsentation beschäftigt.

Nouveau Monde / La vie est astronomique

Wolfgang Tillmans en entretien
avec Beatrix Ruf

BR Ce livre et la nouvelle série d'œuvres, tu les appelles *Neue Welt* [Nouveau monde]. Ce titre rappelle le livre de photographies publié en 1928 par Albert Renger-Patzsch, *Die Welt ist schön* [Le monde est beau], dans lequel l'état du monde était représenté à travers 100 photographies classées par motifs – plantes, hommes, paysage, architecture, machines et produits industriels. Il me fait aussi songer à l'ouvrage de Peter Fischli et David Weiss publié en 2002, *Sichtbare Welt* [Monde visible] dans lequel les deux artistes ont revisité toutes les attractions touristiques et tous les lieux mythiques fantasmés déjà vus cent fois pour en refaire la carte postale.

Quel a été ton propre projet? Comment peut-on faire un état des lieux du monde actuel?

WT Récemment, un de mes amis a décrit mon atelier comme un centre d'études de la contemporanéité. Quel est l'état des choses? Dès le début, mon propos a été de tenter de répondre à cette question dans sa totalité. J'ai toujours été conscient que je n'y parviendrais qu'à l'appui de motifs choisis et de fragments significatifs du monde. L'étude détaillée d'un journal à une date particulière nous apprend par exemple un nombre de choses incroyable sur le monde, ce qui appelle la question de savoir comment l'information est traitée. La densité de l'information est aujourd'hui très élevée. Du coup, seuls des fragments peuvent être traités. Dans l'absolu, nous savons peut-être plus de choses que jamais auparavant, mais tout cela est fragmenté – comme en informatique, les disques durs sauvegardent les données de manière « fragmentée ».

Nous n'avons pratiquement plus de vue d'ensemble, de regard pour le tout. Jusqu'ici, j'avais toujours trouvé ce tout dans certaines facettes du privé et du public, et j'étais donc resté proche de mon propre monde, de mon propre vécu. Il y a toujours eu des exceptions étrangères et exotiques, mais mon travail portait avant tout sur des hommes et des objets qui d'une manière ou d'une autre étaient proches de moi, ou encore sur des questions immanentes à l'art – l'image, le matériau, l'installation. Au fond, l'étude d'un pli de tissu ou d'une irrégularité dans une surface intacte suffit pour trouver une image du tout. Tout est question de regard, d'un regard ouvert, sans peur.

BR Après, tu t'es beaucoup intéressé aux questions touchant au médium, à l'abstraction et à la représentation.

Blushes, paper drop, and Lighter. During that time, I also continued to photograph with the camera. But only now, after years of studio practice, has a really new, artistic interest in the outside world developed. The abstract works, too, were a reaction to things in the world, but they confronted paper and abstract compositions for the most part. This is why, at the end of the last decade, I arrived at the question of how the world actually appears when seen at a distance from my usual beaten path. In this sense, I was gripped by a restlessness and curiosity. I asked myself why I shouldn’t travel to places where I was nothing but a traveler. I wanted to know: How does the world appear twenty years after I’ve begun to form a picture of it? Can there be a “new” view of it? And “new” also in the sense of greatly expanded technical possibilities. The tremendous political and economic shifts of recent years, and technical advancements, have considerably altered the world’s appearance.

BR You could have also said: The world is so greatly altered that this even shows itself in my immediate vicinity. We definitely see “old friends,” too, among the portraits in *Neue Welt*.

WT That’s why I photographed simultaneously in London, New York, and Berlin, also “old friends” whose world has likewise moved on, but also found as uncomplicated and, actually, as utterly wondrous as things like cell phones and flat-screen monitors.

BR You repeatedly talk about the micro- and macrocosm connection that you reinvent in particular in the digital resolution of a high-resolution pictorial world. After these abstract worlds in the introspective space of the studio, did the new digital technology first inspire you to travel to take photographs?

WT There was no direct connection. The wish to expand the field of vision was there first. I bought this digital camera before taking the first trip. That was in 2009, on the occasion of the total solar eclipse in Shanghai. I had always deprived myself of the China trend. But the total solar eclipse was different. That was my China moment. On my way back, I traveled through different Asian countries. During this trip, I took both analog and digital photographs. By the way, the photographs in this book are also, in part, analog prints.

Digital photography is not better than analog photography. It’s just different. What mattered to me was looking at the “new world” through a contemporary

WT Ich habe mich ca. zehn Jahre eher introspektiv mit abstrakten, medium-reflexiven Bildern wie *Blushes, paper drop* oder *Lighter* beschäftigt. In der Zeit habe ich zwar auch mit der Kamera weiter fotografiert, aber erst jetzt, nach Jahren der Studiopraxis, ergab sich ein wirkliches neues, künstlerisches Interesse an der Außenwelt. Die abstrakten Arbeiten waren zwar auch eine Reaktion auf die Dinge in der Welt, aber sie setzen sich doch vor allem mit Papier und abstrakten Kompositionen auseinander. Deshalb kam ich Ende des letzten Jahrzehnts zu der Frage, wie eigentlich die Welt jenseits meiner gewohnten Pfade aussieht. Insofern hat mich eine gewisse Unruhe und Neugier gepackt. Warum, fragte ich mich, sollte ich nicht an Orte fahren, an denen ich nichts als ein Reisender bin. Ich wollte wissen: Wie sieht die Welt aus, 20 Jahre nachdem ich angefangen habe, mir von ihr ein Bild zu machen? Kann es einen „neuen“ Blick auf sie geben? Neu auch im Sinne erweiterter technischer Möglichkeiten. Sowohl die großen politischen und ökonomischen Verschiebungen der letzten Jahre als auch die technischen Neuentwicklungen haben das Aussehen der Welt doch ziemlich verändert.

BR Du hättest auch sagen können: Die Welt verändert sich so massiv, das zeigt sich auch in meinem direkten Umfeld? Wir sehen ja auch durchaus „alte Freunde“ in den Porträts, die in der *Neuen Welt* auftauchen.

WT Deshalb habe ich simultan auch in London, New York und Berlin fotografiert, auch „alte Freunde“, deren Welt ebenfalls weitergegangen ist, aber auch als simpel empfundene, aber eigentlich höchst wundersame Dinge wie Handys oder Flachbildschirme.

BR Du sprichst immer wieder von der Verbindung zwischen Mikro- und Makrokosmos, die du insbesondere in der digitalen Auflösung einer hochauflösenden Bildwelt wiederfindest. Nach diesen abstrakten Welten im introspektiven Raum des Studios hat dich erst die neue digitale Technologie dazu gebracht, auf Reisen zu gehen, um Fotos zu machen?

WT Es gab keine direkte Verbindung. Der Wunsch, das Blickfeld zu erweitern, war zuerst da. Ich habe mir diese neue Digitalkamera gekauft, bevor ich die erste Reise angetreten habe. Das war 2009 zur totalen Sonnenfinsternis in Schanghai. Ich hatte mich immer dieser China-Mode entzogen. Aber die totale Sonnenfinsternis war dann mein China-Moment. Auf der Rückreise bin ich durch verschiedene Länder Asiens gereist. Auf dieser Reise habe ich parallel analog

WT Pendant à peu près dix ans, j’ai travaillé de manière plutôt introspective sur des images abstraites interrogeant le médium, comme dans les séries *Blushes, paper drop* ou *Lighter*. À l’époque, il est vrai que je continuais à photographier avec un appareil, mais c’est seulement aujourd’hui, après des années de travail en studio, qu’est né un intérêt artistique vraiment nouveau pour le monde extérieur. Les œuvres abstraites étaient elles aussi une réaction aux choses du monde extérieur, mais elles portaient essentiellement sur le papier et la composition abstraite. À la fin de la dernière décennie, j’en suis donc venu à me demander à quoi ressemblait le monde hors de mes sentiers battus. On peut donc dire que j’ai été pris par une sorte d’inquiétude et de curiosité. Pourquoi, me suis-je demandé, ne pas aller dans des endroits où je ne suis qu’un simple voyageur ? Je voulais savoir à quoi ressemblait le monde vingt ans après que j’ai commencé à m’en faire une image. Peut-il y avoir un « nouveau » regard sur ce monde ? « Nouveau » aussi au sens des possibilités élargies offertes par la technique. Les grandes évolutions politiques et économiques des dernières années et les progrès techniques récents ont quand même fortement changé l’aspect du monde.

BR Tu aurais aussi pu dire: le monde change tellement que cela se voit même dans mon environnement immédiat ? Dans les portraits de *Neue Welt* apparaissent aussi de « vieux amis ».

WT C’est pourquoi j’ai photographié à la fois à Londres, à New York et à Berlin, dont les « vieux amis », pour qui le monde a également continué d’évoluer, mais aussi des objets apparemment banals, mais en fait absolument merveilleux comme les portables ou les écrans plats.

BR Tu parles encore et encore du lien microcosme/macrocosme que tu retrouves en particulier dans la résolution numérique d’un monde visuel en haute définition. Après les univers abstraits explorés dans l’espace introspectif du studio, est-ce la nouvelle technologie numérique qui t’a incité à partir en voyage pour faire des photos ?

WT Il n’y a pas eu de lien direct. Il y a d’abord eu le désir d’élargir mon champ de vision. Je me suis acheté cet appareil numérique avant d’avoir entrepris mon premier voyage. C’était en 2009, pour l’éclipse solaire totale de Shanghai. Je m’étais toujours tenu à l’écart de cet engouement pour la Chine. Mais l’éclipse totale m’a attiré en Chine. Au retour, j’ai voyagé à travers plusieurs pays d’Asie. Pendant ce voyage, j’ai travaillé en

medium that corresponds with the simplicity of a good reflex camera. The camera I chose for this cost 2,000 and not 15,000 euros. It’s important to me that my medium delivers high-quality results without it settling into a world of “special effects.” I always find technologies interesting when they arrive at the point of general use, because this is also when they have the potential to reach people with a generally accepted vocabulary.

BR The attention to detail in digital pictures no longer corresponds to our everyday seeing experience, unless one consciously changes to extreme focusing. In your new photographs, one continually encounters this extreme perceptual density, for example, in the picture of the waterfall (*Iguazu*, 2010), where even the smallest spray of water surprises with its staggering resolution, or when microstructures become large-format images.

WT This question deeply preoccupies me, now more than ever since I switched to the digital camera. It enables pictures to be taken with an almost endless information density, which only reveals all its details when enlarged to two meters. Even then, one doesn’t see pixels! I had to learn from scratch how to take pictures. Thirty-five millimeter film is actually enough for me, since it corresponds to what my eye actually sees. Large-format images are, of course, impressive, but they don’t usually move me because of their inhuman sharpness. Now I find myself in the situation of using a camera capable of achieving large-format sharpness. But now, too, the increased sharpness strikes me as being consistent, because everything in the world is “high definition” in the meantime. The increased sharpness corresponds to what feels like a new perception, and since I otherwise use the new camera like I did the other—without a tripod, et cetera—the former view remains the same. I find it extremely challenging to generate photographs in an already overdepicted world using precisely these new technologies. Just the same, I often had my doubts and thought: What sort of randomness and complete worthlessness is this?

BR The digitalized world archive is still physically and mentally impossible to grasp, as well as a disturbing model of an archive. Has digital photography changed your approach to taking pictures?

WT I needed a year to ignore all feedback on the small display on the back

und digital fotografiert. Die Fotos in diesem Buch sind übrigens auch teilweise analog. Digitale Fotografie ist ja nicht besser als analoge. Sie ist anders. Es ging mir eben darum, die „neue Welt“ mit einem zeitgenössischen Medium anzuschauen, das der Einfachheit einer sehr guten Spiegelreflexkamera entspricht. Die Kamera, die ich dafür gewählt hatte, kostete daher 2.000 und nicht 15.000 Euro. Es ist mir wichtig, dass mein Medium zwar hochwertige Resultate liefert, aber nicht in einer Welt der „Special Effects“ angesiedelt ist. Technologien finde ich immer dann interessant, wenn sie im allgemeinen Gebrauch angekommen sind, weil sie dann auch das Potenzial haben, die Menschen mit einem allgemeingültigen Vokabular zu erreichen.

BR Die Detailgenauigkeit digitaler Bilder entspricht schon nicht mehr unserer alltäglichen Seherfahrung, außer man wechselt bewusst zum extremen Fokussieren. In deinen neuen Fotos trifft man immer wieder auf diese extreme Wahrnehmungsdichte, zum Beispiel in dem Bild von dem Wasserfall (*Iguazu*, 2010), wo selbst das kleinste Gischtelement noch mit einer gigantischen Auflösung überrascht oder auch Mikrostrukturen, die zum Großbild werden.

WT Diese Frage beschäftigt mich sehr, erst recht seit ich auf die Digitalkamera umgestiegen bin. Sie ermöglicht Bilder mit einer fast unendlichen Informationsdichte, die erst bei zwei Metern Vergrößerung alle ihre Details zeigt, und dann kann man immer noch keine Pixel sehen. Ich musste komplett neu lernen, Bilder zu machen. Eigentlich reicht mir Kleinbildfilm, weil das dem entspricht, was mein Auge tatsächlich sieht. Großformatbilder beeindrucken zwar, aber aufgrund ihrer menschlichen Schärfe berühren sie mich normalerweise nicht. Jetzt finde ich mich in der Situation wieder, eine Kamera zu benutzen, die in ihrer Schärfe ans Großformat heranreicht. Diese höhere Schärfe erscheint mir aber jetzt als schlüssig, weil mittlerweile alles in der Welt „High Definition“ ist. Die höhere Schärfe entspricht einer neuen gefühlten Wahrnehmung, und weil ich die neue Kamera ansonsten wie immer verwende, also ohne Stativ usw., bleibt der bisherige Blick erhalten. Ich sehe es als eine extreme Herausforderung, gerade mit dieser neuen Technologie aus einer bereits überabgebildeten Welt Fotografien zu generieren. Ich habe auch immer wieder gezweifelt und gedacht: Was ist das für eine Beliebigkeit und totale Wertlosigkeit?

BR Das digitale Weltarchiv ist doch immer noch ein physisch und gedanklich

argentique aussi bien qu’en numérique. Un certain nombre de photos du livre ont d’ailleurs été prises en argentique. En fait, la photographie numérique n’est pas meilleure que la photographie argentique. Elle est différente. Ce qui m’importait, c’était justement de regarder le « nouveau monde » avec un médium actuel qui ait la simplicité d’un bon reflex. L’appareil que j’ai choisi a donc coûté 2 000 euros, pas 15 000. Il est important pour moi qu’un médium fournisse des résultats de grande qualité, mais il ne doit pas se situer dans un monde d’« effets spéciaux ». À mon sens, les nouvelles technologies deviennent intéressantes une fois entrées dans l’usage courant, parce qu’elles ont alors aussi le pouvoir d’atteindre les gens par un langage universellement valide.

BR Aujourd’hui, la précision de l’image numérique ne correspond déjà plus à notre expérience visuelle quotidienne, sauf quand on est dans le domaine de l’agrandissement extrême. Dans tes nouvelles photos, on trouve régulièrement cette densité de la perception, comme dans la photographie des chutes d’eau (*Iguazu*, 2010), où la plus infime partie de l’écume surprend encore par son incroyable précision, ou dans des microstructures transposées en grands formats.

WT Cet aspect me préoccupe beaucoup, a fortiori depuis que je suis passé au numérique. La photographie numérique permet de réaliser des images contenant une quantité d’information presque illimitée dont tous les détails ne se révèlent que dans l’agrandissement à des formats de deux mètres, et l’on ne voit toujours pas les pixels. J’ai dû repartir à zéro pour faire des images. En fait, le 35 mm argentique me suffit parce qu’il correspond à ce que mon œil voit réellement. Les images en grand format sont bien sûr très impressionnantes, mais leur précision inhumaine fait que, généralement, elles ne me touchent pas. Aujourd’hui, je me retrouve dans la situation d’utiliser un appareil qui se rapproche du grand format. Cela dit, cette plus haute précision me semble aujourd’hui cohérente parce qu’entretemps, presque tout dans le monde est devenu *high definition*. La précision accrue correspond à une nouvelle perception sentie, et comme la manière dont j’utilise l’appareil reste la même pour tout le reste – c’est-à-dire sans pied, etc. –, le regard d’avant est préservé. Je trouve que c’est un défi extrême d’utiliser ces nouvelles technologies pour générer des photographies d’un monde déjà surreprésenté. Régulièrement, j’ai aussi douté et je me suis dit: qu’est-ce que c’est que toute cette gratuité et cette absence totale de valeurs ?

of the camera, detailing what’s being photographed at the moment. For me, photography is a dialogue between the photographed and the one photographing—a projection, a hope, and a presumption, regardless of what emerges from it. With analog photography, this first becomes visible a few days later. In the viewfinder, you can see what you photograph, but the translation process constituting the magic and psychology of photography is not just optomechanical. Photographs are also spiritually charged objects. In the past, this idea had a space of its own. Today, however, you already see the image in the display a half second after taking the shot. For me, a customary approach encountered a great disturbance in this way. I had to learn to ignore this. Taping over the display is not the solution, because it also gives me access to important controls. Evaluating the deeper quality of the picture is done later on the computer. That’s one of the reasons why, on principle, I never retouch or alter anything afterwards. I believe in the magic of the picture’s creation process at the moment the photograph is taken. One should be able to trust my pictures. Despite the vast photo-editing possibilities, as a matter of principle, I never remove, enhance, or smooth out any details. On those rare occasions when I did change something, the intervention was clearly recognizable, and it was usually meant tongue-in-cheek.

BR Then you would say: You still make your decisions for the picture in the same manner?

WT Exactly. It happens afterwards, weeks or months later. I don’t take advantage of the possibilities of immediate processing. I always feel images somehow need time to mature. Of course, that’s not true, since they don’t really do that. But the more distance you have from the moment the image is photographed, the more you can separate yourself from your wishes and hopes.

BR Like in your earlier work, similar to Renger-Patzsch, large thematic groups move through *Neue Welt* as well: people, social constellations, natural formations, plants, points of transit like airports, shopping malls, animals, means of transportation, technology, and science. How do you view these thematic groups, and what do you see happening when pictures are juxtaposed?

WT I’m not concerned with completeness or a conceptual principle. Popular locations and landmarks can be followed the next day by a totally unfamiliar or banal

nicht fassbares und auch beunruhigendes Modell von Archiv. Hat sich dein Vorgehen durch das digitale Fotografieren verändert?

WT Es hat ein Jahr gedauert, bis ich die Rückkoppelung mit dem, was ich gerade fotografierte, auf dem kleinen Bildschirm hinten auf der Kamera ignorieren konnte. Für mich ist Fotografie ein Dialog zwischen dem Fotografierten und dem Fotografierenden, eine Projektion, eine Hoffnung und eine Vermutung, was dabei herauskommen mag. Bei der analogen Fotografie wird das erst ein paar Tage später sichtbar. Du siehst zwar im Sucher, was du fotografierst, aber der Übersetzungsprozess, der das Magische und Psychologische an der Fotografie ausmacht, ist eben nicht nur optomechanisch. Fotos sind auch geistig aufgeladene Dinge. Dies hatte früher seinen ganz eigenen Raum. Jetzt siehst du eine halbe Sekunde nach der Aufnahme das Bild auf dem Display. Für mich wurde dadurch ein gewohntes Vorgehen mit einer massiven Störung konfrontiert. Also musste ich lernen, das zu ignorieren. Das Display zu verkleben ist ja auch keine Lösung, denn es hat auch wichtige Kontrollfunktionen. Die Beurteilung des Bildes in seiner tieferen Qualität erfolgt dann später auf dem Computer.

Das ist auch einer der Gründe, warum ich grundsätzlich nichts nachträglich bearbeite oder retuschiere. Ich glaube an die Magie des Bildentstehungsprozesses im Zeitpunkt des Fotografierens. Man soll meinen Bildern vertrauen können. Trotz der immensen Möglichkeiten der Bildbearbeitung nehme ich grundsätzlich nichts nachträglich weg, verschönere nichts und ebne nichts ein. In den ganz wenigen Fällen, in denen ich mal etwas verändert habe, ist der Eingriff offensichtlich erkennbar und hat zumeist eine humorvolle Note.

BR Du würdest also sagen: Die Entscheidung fürs Bild triffst du immer noch auf dieselbe Art und Weise?

WT Genau. Die findet hinterher, Wochen oder Monate später statt. Die Möglichkeiten der sofortigen Verarbeitung nutze ich nicht. Ich habe immer das Gefühl, dass Bilder irgendwie reifen müssen. Obwohl das natürlich nicht stimmt, denn sie tun es nicht wirklich. Aber je weiter du von dem Aufnahmezeitpunkt entfernt bist, desto stärker kannst du dich von deinen Wünschen und Hoffnungen trennen.

BR Wie in deinen bisherigen Arbeiten ziehen sich ähnlich wie bei Renger-Patzsch auch durch die *Neue Welt* große Themenkomplexe: Menschen, soziale Konstellationen, Naturformationen,

BR L’archive numérique mondiale reste un modèle d’archive insaisissable, physiquement et intellectuellement, mais aussi inquiétant. Ta démarche a-t-elle été changée par la photographie numérique ?

WT Il m’a fallu un an pour pouvoir ignorer le retour de ce que j’étais en train de photographier sur l’écran de contrôle de l’appareil. Pour moi, la photographie est un dialogue entre le sujet photographié et celui qui photographie, une projection, un espoir et une conjecture sur ce qui peut en résulter. Dans la photographie argentine, ce résultat n’apparaît qu’après quelques jours. Ce que tu vois, tu le vois dans le viseur, mais le processus de transposition qui fait l’aspect magique et psychologique de la photographie n’est pas seulement de nature optomécanique – les photographies contiennent aussi une charge spirituelle. Avant, cet aspect avait son espace propre. Aujourd’hui, l’image apparaît à l’écran une demi-seconde après la prise de vue. Du coup, ma démarche habituelle a été confrontée à une perturbation massive. Il m’a donc fallu apprendre à l’ignorer. Coller un cache sur l’écran n’est pas une solution parce que l’écran affiche aussi des fonctions de contrôle importantes. L’évaluation de l’image quant à ses qualités plus profondes a lieu plus tard, devant l’ordinateur.

C’est aussi une des raisons pour lesquelles en principe, je ne retravaille ou ne retouche jamais rien après-coup. Je crois en la magie du processus de création de l’image au moment où l’on photographie. Je veux qu’on puisse faire confiance à mes images. Malgré les immenses possibilités offertes par le traitement de l’image, je n’ôte par principe rien après-coup, je n’embellis rien, je n’égalise rien. Dans les cas très rares où il m’est arrivé de changer quelque chose, l’intervention est clairement reconnaissable et comporte généralement une note humoristique.

BR Donc, concernant la manière dont tu choisis telle ou telle photo, tu dirais que rien n’a changé ?

WT Tout à fait. Le choix a lieu après-coup, après des semaines ou des mois. Je n’exploite pas les possibilités du traitement immédiat. J’ai toujours l’impression que d’une manière ou d’une autre, les images doivent avoir un temps de maturation. Bien sûr, ce n’est pas vrai concrètement. Mais plus on s’éloigne du moment de la prise de vue, plus on peut se défaire de ses souhaits et de ses espoirs.

BR Comme dans ton travail antérieur et un peu comme chez Renger-Patzsch, de grands complexes thématiques parcourent aussi *Neue Welt*: hommes, situations sociales, formations naturelles, plantes,

place, perhaps some small town I hung around in because a friend of my parents lived there and I could stay a couple days. There is less of a system to my traveling. It has more to do with searching for possible flight routes: What lies over there? What could be connected to that? That’s how I landed in unheard-of spots like Darwin in North Australia. And I’m not scared off by unusually popular locations like Iguazu Falls either, since I trust that many places are unusually popular simply because they are, in fact, special. For example, the Sydney Opera House is such a famous landmark that it shouldn’t be necessary to see it in life. But it looked totally different from the well-known photographs of it, and felt totally different from the way I had imagined it.

BR While searching out these well-known places again, you have neither a guiding concept nor any ethnological or investigative intentions. Also, you say that you don’t stay very long in each of these locations.

WT That’s right. A short period of full immersion is enough for me. More isn’t possible than simply being physically present, moving around as much as possible, gathering impressions, making contacts, and opening a few doors. It comes down to physically taking a good look at various things on location and confronting them as best you can. This was no touristy round-trip that forces the so-called foreign into familiar interpretive patterns, but rather the attempt to have a genuinely new experience.

The short stay can attain a special lucidity in the process. We’re all like this: The first day of a trip feels like three days, the second day like two days, and the third like one. After that, the time passes like it does every day. In the case of such a short stay, the surface of a place stands out most. The surfaces and even superficiality itself have always interested me, because we basically have to read the truth of things from the world’s surface. There is a well-known quote by Bertolt Brecht about the exterior of a factory never depicting the work conditions inside it. Of course the photograph of a factory reflects only to a limited extent what happens inside, but its exterior is a reality, too, the way it stands there. And the double-page spread with both photographs of the foreign workers’ dismal quarters in Dubai is to be understood this way (*workers’ accommodation*, 2009).

BR What also suggests itself here is the critical discourse on the exotic and the reception of the exotic. How do you deal

Pflanzen, Orte des Transits wie Flughäfen, Shopping-Malls, Tiere, Transportmittel, Technologie und Wissenschaft. Wie siehst du diese Themenkomplexe, und was geschieht für dich in der Gegenüberstellung der Bilder?

WT Es geht mir nicht um eine Vollständigkeit oder um ein konzeptuelles Prinzip. Nach bekannten Orten und Wahrzeichen folgt am nächsten Tag vielleicht ein völlig ungewöhnlicher oder banaler Ort, irgendeine Provinzstadt, in die es mich verschlägt, weil da ein Freund der Eltern wohnt und ich dort zwei Tage sein kann. Ich bin weniger mit Systematik gereist, sondern eher mit der Suche nach Flugrountenmöglichkeiten: Was liegt denn da? Was könnte sich daran anschließen? So bin ich dann auch an Unorten wie Darwin in Nordaustralien gelandet. Auch vor besonders populären Orten, wie den Iguazu-Wasserfällen, bin ich nicht zurückgeschreckt, denn ich vertraue darauf, dass viele Dinge besonders populär sind, weil sie eben besonders sind. Zum Beispiel ist das Sydney Opera House ein dermaßen bekanntes Wahrzeichen, dass es eigentlich unnötig sein müsste, es noch in natura zu sehen. Aber es sah völlig anders aus als auf den weltweit bekannten Bildern und fühlte sich völlig anders an, als ich es mir vorgestellt hatte.

BR Du gehst also weder konzeptuell in Hinblick auf das Wiederaufsuchen bekannter Orte vor noch ethnologisch oder investigativ. Du sagtest, dass du dich nicht lange an den jeweiligen Orten aufgehalten hast.

WT Stimmt. Mir genügt ein kurzzeitiges Volleintauchen. Mehr ist nicht möglich, als sich physisch an diesem Ort aufzuhalten, sich dort möglichst viel zu bewegen, Eindrücke zu erhalten, Kontakte zu machen, Türen zu öffnen, sich Situationen so weit wie möglich auszusetzen. Das war ja keine touristische Rundreise, die das sogenannte Fremde in vertraute Deutungsmuster einpasst, sondern der Versuch, eine wirklich neue Erfahrung zu machen.

Das Kurzzeitige kann dabei eine besondere Luzidität haben. Es geht uns allen ja so: Der erste Tag auf einer Reise fühlt sich an wie drei Tage, der zweite Tag wie zwei Tage und der dritte Tag wie ein Tag. Danach verfließt die Zeit wieder wie im Alltag. Bei einem solchen Kurzaufenthalt zeigt sich vor allem die Oberfläche des Ortes. Die Oberfläche, auch die Oberflächlichkeit, hat mich schon immer interessiert, weil wir die Wahrheit der Dinge im Grunde anhand der Oberfläche der Welt ablesen müssen. Es gibt dieses bekannte Zitat von Bertolt Brecht, nach dem das Äußere

espaces de transit comme les aéroports, centres commerciaux, animaux, moyens de transport, technologie, science. Comment considères-tu ces thématiques et que se passe-t-il pour toi dans la confrontation des images ?

WT Je ne recherche pas l’exhaustivité ni un principe conceptuel. Après les lieux célèbres et les emblèmes, demain, je vais peut-être photographier dans un endroit totalement inhabituel ou banal, une ville de province où je me retrouve parce qu’un ami de mes parents y habite et que j’ai deux jours à y passer. Je n’ai pas vraiment voyagé dans une perspective systématique, plutôt en fonction des routes aériennes possibles : que trouve-t-on là-bas ? qu’est-ce qui pourrait suivre ? Du coup, je me suis parfois retrouvé dans des endroits aussi improbables que Darwin, au nord de l’Australie. Je n’ai pas non plus reculé devant des sites particulièrement populaires comme les chutes d’Iguazu, car je me fie volontiers au fait que bien de choses sont populaires justement parce qu’elles sont spéciales. L’opéra de Sydney, par exemple, est un emblème tellement connu qu’il devrait en fait être inutile de le voir de ses propres yeux. Mais il a un tout autre aspect que ce que montrent les images diffusées dans le monde entier, et l’impression qui s’en dégage a été complètement différente de tout ce que j’avais imaginé.

BR Donc, ta démarche, quand tu te rends à nouveau sur des sites célèbres, n’est ni conceptuelle, ni ethnologique, ni investigative. Tu as dit que tu n’étais pas resté longtemps au même endroit.

WT C’est vrai. Une courte immersion totale me suffit. On ne peut faire plus que séjourner physiquement à un endroit, y bouger autant que possible et chercher à en tirer des impressions, établir des contacts, pousser des portes, c’est-à-dire simplement s’exposer le plus possible à des situations. Car ce n’était pas un circuit touristique destiné à faire entrer l’« étranger » dans des schémas d’interprétation familiairs, mais la tentative de faire une expérience réellement nouvelle.

À cet égard, la brièveté peut produire une lucidité particulière. C’est la même chose pour tout le monde : le premier jour d’un voyage est vécu comme trois jours, le deuxième comme deux jours, et le troisième comme un jour. Après, le temps s’écoule à nouveau comme dans notre vie quotidienne. Lors d’un court séjour de ce genre, ce qui apparaît, c’est surtout la surface du lieu. La surface – et aussi la superficialité – m’a toujours intéressé parce qu’au fond,

with this difficult question? What does it mean today to travel and to grasp the world?

WT The more interesting question is: “What is normal?” Who decides what is aestheticizing, what is research, what is familiar, what is exotic? Pictures are always the transcription of an experiencing of the world. Ideally, they pose the question of there possibly being another way to experience the world. It’s not the world contained in the picture; the picture is a translation. A representational picture does no more and no less than form reality before our eyes. Even if this is fundamentally a platitude, it should always be kept in mind. Of course, I’m aware of the problem addressed here. It was even a key point for me, as a privileged individual traveling to places less connected to the West and suffering economically. Just the same, these places exist and people live here without seeing their existence purely as hardship. What mattered to me was not losing sight of the respective social presence—without being, of course, able to penetrate it too deeply in such a short amount of time, but while, most of all, devoting myself to the question of what constitutes life on earth today, how one assesses and captures it, and perhaps, too, how a sense of the whole could be revealed. In connection with this, three or four years ago I came across the sentence “Life is astronomical.” I see the earth and, most importantly, all living things as merely the formation of a particular astronomical condition, which specifically exists on this planet. The human assumption that we all heed, that life on earth is in and of itself separate: “We live on the earth,” “We populate the earth,” and “Save the planet!” just isn’t so, because *we* are the planet; all of us are the formation of these conditions and, for that reason, only the expression of an astrogeological concoction. The same is inherent in the juxtaposition of people, plants, constructions, and technologies: Everything is matter continually renewing itself and transforming from one aggregate state into another. I even find that somewhat comforting. Naturally, we should make each other’s life as pleasant as possible, and that’s why I believe philosophy, politics, and the rest make sense. All this isn’t just entropy and chaos—that we desire a sense of order and, for example, seek love, right?

BR That sounds like a higher wisdom that ignores social conditions and relationships.

WT The thought that “Life is astronomical” is not meant deterministically,

einer Fabrik niemals die Arbeitszustände in der Fabrik darstellen kann. Natürlich sagt ein Foto einer Fabrik nur bedingt etwas darüber aus, was im Inneren vorgeht, aber auch das Äußere ist eben eine Realität, so wie sie dasteht. So ist auch die Doppelseite mit den beiden Fotos von den tristen Quartieren der Fremdarbeiter in Dubai zu verstehen (*workers’ accommodation*, 2009).

BR Es drängt sich auch der kritische Diskurs über das Exotische und die Rezeption des Exotischen auf. Wie bist du mit dieser schwierigen Frage umgegangen? Was heißt es, heute zu reisen und die Welt zu erfassen?

WT Die interessantere Frage ist: „Was ist normal?“ Wer entscheidet darüber, was Ästhetisierung und was Forschung ist, was vertraut und was exotisch? Bilder sind immer die Umsetzung einer Welterfahrung und stellen im Idealfall die Frage nach einer anderen möglichen Welterfahrung. Es ist nicht die Welt, die in dem Bild enthalten ist, das Bild ist eine Übersetzung. Ein gegenständliches Bild formt die Wirklichkeit vor unseren Augen, nicht mehr und nicht weniger. Auch wenn das im Grunde ein Allgemeinplatz ist, sollte man es sich immer wieder klarmachen. Natürlich bin ich mir über die Problematik bewusst, es war sogar ein zentraler Punkt, als privilegierter Mensch an weniger westlich verbundene und wirtschaftlich ärmere Orte zu fahren. Aber auch dort leben natürlich Menschen ihr Leben, ohne dieses immer nur als pure Härte zu empfinden.

Mir ging es darum, das jeweilige Soziale zwar im Auge zu behalten, ohne in der kurzen Zeit natürlich tiefer eindringen zu können, aber mich vor allem der Frage zu widmen, was das Leben auf der Erde heutzutage ausmacht, wie man es einschätzen, festhalten und wie sich vielleicht ein Sinn für das Ganze ergeben kann. Im Zusammenhang damit ist mir vor drei, vier Jahren der Satz „Leben ist astronomisch“ in den Sinn gekommen. Ich sehe die Erde und alles Leben vor allem als Ausformung eines bestimmten astronomischen Zustandes, der speziell auf diesem Planeten gegeben ist. Die menschliche Annahme, der wir eigentlich alle folgen, dass das Leben von der Erde an sich getrennt ist: „Wir leben auf der Erde“, „Wir bevölkern die Erde“ und „Save the Planet“ stimmt so eben nicht, denn *wir* sind der Planet, wir alle sind die Ausformung dieser Gegebenheiten und damit eigentlich nur Ausdruck eines astrogeologischen Gebräus. Das steckt auch in der Gegenüberstellung von Menschen, Pflanzen, Bauwerken oder Technologie drin: Alles ist Materie, die sich dauernd erneuert und verwandelt, von einem Aggregatzustand in den nächsten. Ich finde,

la vérité des choses doit être lue à partir de la surface du monde. Il y a cette célèbre citation de Bertolt Brecht qui dit que l’aspect extérieur d’une usine ne peut jamais rien dire sur les conditions de travail dans cette usine. Bien sûr, la photo d’une usine n’illustre que très relativement ce qui se passe à l’intérieur, mais l’extérieur aussi est une réalité brute. C’est aussi comme ça qu’il faut comprendre la double page montrant les sinistres logements de travailleurs immigrés à Dubai (*workers’ accommodation*, 2009).

BR L’on songe forcément au discours critique sur l’exotisme et la perception de l’exotisme. Comment as-tu abordé cette question difficile? Que signifie aujourd’hui voyager et recenser le monde?

WT La vraie question est plutôt: « Qu’est-ce qui est normal? » Qui décide où commence l’esthétisation et où commence l’étude, ce qui est familier et ce qui est exotique? Les images sont toujours la transposition d’une expérience du monde, et idéalement, elles posent la question d’une autre expérience possible du monde. Ce qui est contenu dans l’image n’est pas le monde, l’image est une traduction. Un tableau figuratif formule la réalité devant nos yeux, ni plus ni moins. Même si c’est un lieu commun, il est bon de le rappeler de temps en temps.

Je suis bien sûr conscient de cette problématique, cela a même été un aspect central de pouvoir me rendre en privilégié dans des endroits moins reliés à l’Occident et économiquement plus pauvres. Mais ces endroits existent, des gens y vivent leur vie sans forcément la percevoir comme une pure dureté. Pour moi, il était certes important de garder à l’esprit les différents aspects sociaux – sans pouvoir bien sûr y entrer plus profondément dans un laps de temps aussi court –, mais surtout de me consacrer à ce qui fait la spécificité de la vie sur Terre aujourd’hui: comment peut-on l’évaluer, la fixer, et comment peut-il éventuellement en découler un sens pour le tout? C’est dans ce contexte qu’il y a trois ou quatre ans m’est venue la phrase: « La vie est astronomique. » Je vois la Terre et toute vie en premier lieu comme la formulation d’un état astronomique particulier donné précisément sur notre planète. Le postulat de l’Homme, qu’au fond nous suivons tous, selon lequel la vie est un fait séparé de la Terre en tant que telle – « Nous vivons sur Terre », « nous peuplons la Terre », et « save the planet » – n’est pas vraiment juste, car nous *sommes* la planète, nous sommes tous une manifestation de ces conditions et donc en définitive seulement l’expression d’une décoction astro-géologique. C’est aussi inhérent à la mise en

implying that everything follows its “higher” path and no one can change the course of things and so forth. It’s rather the question of: What can one know at all; what can and cannot be changed? In what position does one find oneself as an observer? In my experience, occurrence advances in its simultaneity and always remains ungraspable in its wholeness. Nevertheless, I was driven by the question of whether it might be possible to achieve the awareness and experience relevant to wholeness via a short-term visibility of things. In order to engage in such an “experiencing of the world,” one has to physically move oneself to the most diverse places on earth. My relationship to reality is always, above all, more ethical than technical, or purely aesthetic. I see and photograph the world in the same way that I otherwise react towards it. Essentially, this is about humanitarianism. I’m aware that one can easily succumb to ethnological temptations and glorify the exotic as such. But these photographs are also reactions to my own experiences, which are not always pleasant and familiar. In that respect, “Life is astronomical” deserves emphasis in larger brackets.

BR What does photographing strangers mean for you at all? That’s not exactly a problem-free activity. And you don’t always ask for their permission beforehand.

WT In my opinion, observing people and sometimes photographing them without their knowledge is acceptable when done with the kind of empathetic gaze just mentioned. Of course, each person has to decide this for himself. It could also be considered questionable, how people use posed profile pictures on Facebook in order to be appealing. I think the unobserved photographing of people in their everyday life can also contribute, in general, to a more empathetic understanding of the world. This should never be about capturing photographic “spoils.” I realize I’m walking a thin line here, but I always try to remain aware of this. The moment I sense a lack of consent or catch people at a bad moment, I immediately delete the picture. That’s good about the camera display. But this photography in a state of flux, which dives into life with the camera, risks embarrassment, and has no safety zone whatsoever, continually brings forth something truthful, something genuine. I’m sure of that. It’s also the joy of experiencing the unpredictability and derangedness of life, the preposterous situations that arise, how bodies act among themselves,

das hat auch etwas Beruhigendes. Natürlich sollten wir unser Leben gegenseitig so angenehm wie möglich machen, und deshalb, glaube ich, macht Philosophie und Politik und alles Sinn. Das ist nicht alles nur Entropie und Chaos. Dass wir eine Ordnung wollen und beispielsweise Liebe suchen, oder?

BR Das klingt wie eine höhere Weisheit, die soziale Zustände und Zusammenhänge ignoriert.

WT Der Gedanke „Leben ist astronomisch“ ist ja nicht deterministisch gemeint, dass alles seinen „höheren“ Gang geht und man sowieso nichts ändern kann und so weiter. Die Frage ist doch vielmehr, was kann man überhaupt wissen, was kann man verändern und was nicht? In welcher Beobachterposition befindet man sich? Meine Erfahrung ist es, dass das Geschehen in seiner Simultaneität voranschreitet und in seiner Ganzheit immer uneinholbar ist. Dennoch trieb mich die Frage an, ob eine das Ganze betreffende Erkenntnis und Erfahrung auch über eine kurzfristige Sichtbarkeit der Dinge möglich ist. Und um eine solche „Welterfahrung“ zu machen, muss man sich eben physisch an die verschiedensten Orte der Erde hinbewegen. Meine Beziehung zur Wirklichkeit ist immer in erster Linie eher ethisch als technisch oder rein ästhetisch. So wie ich die Welt sehe und fotografiere, so verhalte ich mich ihr gegenüber auch ansonsten. Es geht im Grunde um Menschenfreundlichkeit. Mir ist klar, dass man dabei schnell der ethnologischen Versuchung erliegen kann, das Exotische als solches zu verklären. Die Bilder sind aber auch Reaktionen auf die eigenen Erfahrungen, die ja auch nicht immer angenehm und vertraut sind. „Leben ist astronomisch“ dient insofern einer größeren Klammer.

BR Was bedeutet es für dich überhaupt, fremde Menschen zu fotografieren? Das ist ja auch nicht ganz unproblematisch. Du wirst sie ja vorher nicht immer gefragt haben.

WT Ich denke, die Leute zu beobachten, sie zu fotografieren, teilweise ohne dass sie davon wissen, ist dann in Ordnung, wenn es mit dem eben beschriebenen empathischen Blick geschieht. Das muss natürlich jeder für sich selbst entscheiden. Man könnte es auch als höchst fragwürdig empfinden, wie sich Leute für ihre Facebook-Profilbilder verstellen, um zu gefallen. Ich denke, dass auch das unbeobachtete Fotografieren von Menschen in ihrem Lebensalltag im Allgemeinen zu einem empathischeren Weltverständnis beitragen kann. Es darf eben niemals

regard d’hommes, de plantes, d’édifices ou de technologies: tout est matière qui se renouvelle et se transforme continuellement, d’un état au suivant. Je trouve qu’il y a aussi quelque chose de rassurant en cela. Bien sûr, nous devrions nous faciliter la vie les uns aux autres dans toute la mesure du possible, et c’est pourquoi je crois que la philosophie et la politique ont un sens. Tout n’est pas qu’entropie et chaos. Le fait que nous voulons un ordre et que nous recherchons par exemple l’amour, n’est-ce pas?

BR Cela sonne comme une sagesse supérieure qui ignore les conditions et les rapports sociaux.

WT Cette idée, « la vie est astronomique », n’a pas pour moi un sens déterministe selon lequel toutes choses suivraient leur cours « supérieur » et que de toutes façons, on ne peut rien changer etc. La question est plutôt, très généralement: que pouvons-nous savoir, que pouvons-nous changer ou non? Quelle est notre position d’observateur? Mon expérience est que les choses avancent dans leur simultanéité et qu’il est impossible de les rattraper en leur totalité. J’ai néanmoins été motivé par la question de savoir si une connaissance et expérience touchant la totalité était aussi possible par le truchement d’une approche brève. Et pour faire ce genre d’« expérience du monde », il faut bien se rendre physiquement dans les différents endroits de la terre. Mon rapport à la réalité est toujours plus d’ordre éthique que technique ou purement esthétique. La manière dont je regarde et photographie le monde est aussi celle dont je me comporte à son égard. Au fond, tout est question d’humanité. J’ai conscience qu’on peut très vite succomber à la tentation ethnologique de transfigurer l’exotique en tant que tel. Mais les images sont aussi une réaction à mes propres expériences qui, elles non plus, ne sont pas toujours agréables et familières. Dans cette mesure, « la vie est astronomique » sert en fait à ouvrir une parenthèse assez vaste.

BR Très généralement, que signifie pour toi photographier des inconnus? Cela ne va pas non plus sans poser des problèmes. Je suppose que tu ne leur as pas toujours demandé leur avis.

WT Je pense qu’observer les gens, les photographier sans qu’ils en soient conscients, même un peu, est acceptable quand on le fait avec le regard empathique que je viens de décrire. Chacun doit bien sûr se positionner individuellement sur ce point. On peut aussi trouver fortement suspecte la manière dont les gens manipulent la photo de leur profil sur Facebook

and how they dress, establish nearness, or keep their distance. All this is infinitely fascinating. I find such contact with everyday life around the world endlessly inspiring.

BR In the series and here, too, in the book, pictures of stellar constellations and night skies frequently appear. You have as strong an interest in astronomy, the universe, scientific research focused on perceiving the universe, and viewing the world we live in as scientifically ascertained and ecologically endangered, as you do in basic questions concerning human existence in light of knowledge and non-knowledge.

WT The question of knowledge and non-knowledge, of everything non-scientific applied to the scientific and the reverse, naturally leads to an ironic way of dealing with knowledge and/or non-knowledge. This is the topic of my work *truth study center*. It opposes those people who accept nothing outside of their own truths and religions; it opposes an ideological understanding of knowledge and truth.

Astronomy is my childhood obsession. I even believe it was my visual initiation into seeing: hours spent trying to distinguish between the finest of details, moving along the boundaries of the visible. Did I just see something or was that only a flicker in my eye? Since then, the question of perceptibility, of the ability to distinguish between nothing and something, has been a central interest of mine. When do developments become visible? What were they prior to being recognizable? This is as interesting politically as it is scientifically. In the series of night sky shots, I could specifically capture this borderline topic in pictures with the new camera. For these pictures, I adjusted the camera’s sensor to such a high speed that it could record hundreds of stars in only one or two seconds. But at the same time, this extreme adjustment makes it hard to tell if what one sees is a star or nothing at all. When sensors see nothing, they create noise, and in these pictures the noise’s pixels seamlessly merge with the real stars. At the European Southern Observatory, one could see that astronomers push their research to precisely this limit. What they see by night are not sparkling stars, but rather weak and pale-hued monitor images in which the noise is barely distinguishable from the stars. Not until several exposures are layered together does it stand out what is artifact and what is truly reality.

That today, twenty-five years later, I rediscovered a deep interest in astronomy also has to do with astronomy currently

darum gehen, fotografische „Beute“ zu machen. Das ist ein schmaler Grat, ich weiß, ich versuche mir immer darüber bewusst zu sein. Sobald ich ein Nichteinverständnis spüre oder Leute in schlechten Momenten getroffen sind, lösche ich das Bild sofort. Das ist das Gute an dem Kamera-Display. Aber diese Fotografie im Fluss, voll und ganz ohne Sicherheitszone, mit der Kamera ins Leben eintauchen, Peinlichkeit wagen, fördert dauerhaft etwas Wahres/Echtes hervor, da bin ich mir sicher.

Es ist auch eine Freude an der Unvorhersehbarkeit und Debilität des Lebens, daran, was für absurde Situationen sich ergeben können, wie Körper sich zueinander verhalten, kleiden, Nähe oder Distanz halten, überhaupt die Beobachtung sozialer Interaktion. Das ist ja alles unendlich faszinierend. Diesen Umgang mit dem Alltag überall auf der Welt finde ich endlos inspirierend.

BR In der Serie und auch hier im Buch gibt es auch immer wieder Bilder von Sternenkstellungen und Nachthimmeln. Du hast generell ein großes Interesse an Astronomie und an wissenschaftlichen Forschungen, die an unsere Vorstellungen vom Universum, an die Welt als wissenschaftlich Erfasste und ökologisch Gefährdete ebenso rühren wie an Fragen der menschlichen Existenz angesichts von Wissen und Nichtwissen.

WT Die Frage von Wissen und Nichtwissen, das ganz Unwissenschaftliche angewandt auf das Wissenschaftliche und umgekehrt, führt natürlich auch zu einem ironischen Umgang mit Wissen/Nichtwissen. Man kann vieles wissen, aber eben nicht alles. Dies ist das Thema meiner Arbeit *truth study center*. Es richtet sich gegen Leute, die nichts außer ihrer eigenen Wahrheit oder ihrer Religion gelten lassen, gegen dieses ideologische Verständnis von Wissen und Wahrheit. Astronomie ist meine Kindheitsobsession, ich glaube, sie war sogar meine visuelle Initiation zum Sehen: stundenlang zu versuchen, feinste Details zu unterscheiden, mich an der Grenze des Sichtbaren zu bewegen. Ist da noch was, oder ist das nur ein Flimmern im Auge? Diese Frage der Wahrnehmbarkeit, der Trennschärfe zwischen nichts und etwas, ist seitdem ein zentrales Interesse von mir. Wann werden Entwicklungen sichtbar? Was waren sie, bevor sie erkennbar wurden? Das ist politisch wie wissenschaftlich gleich interessant. Dieses Grenzthema konnte ich mit der neuen Kamera in der Reihe von Sternenhimmel-aufnahmen noch mal ganz konkret in Bildern fassen. Für diese Bilder habe ich den Sensor der Kamera so hochempfindlich

en vue de plaire. Je pense qu’en général, photographier des gens pendant leur vie quotidienne sans qu’ils le sachent peut contribuer à une compréhension plus empathique du monde, à condition de ne jamais chercher à faire du « butin » photographique. La marge est étroite, je sais, je tâche d’en être conscient à tout moment. Dès que je sens un refus, ou si les gens sont touchés à un mauvais moment, j’efface immédiatement l’image. C’est ce qu’il y a de bien avec l’écran de contrôle. Mais cette photographie au gré du moment, s’immerger entièrement dans la vie avec l’appareil, sans zone de sécurité, oser l’embarras, fait émerger durablement quelque chose de vrai, ça j’en suis sûr. C’est aussi la jouissance de l’aspect imprévisible et débile de la vie, la jouissance des situations absurdes qui peuvent apparaître, la manière dont les corps se comportent les uns par rapport aux autres, s’habillent, entretiennent une proximité ou une distance. Tout cela est formidablement passionnant. Ce rapport au quotidien partout dans le monde est pour moi infiniment inspirant.

BR Dans la série comme dans le livre, on trouve régulièrement des photos de constellations et de ciels nocturnes. Tu t’intéresses beaucoup à l’astronomie, au cosmos et aux recherches scientifiques qui touchent à notre conception de l’Univers, du monde tel qu’il est abordé par la science et menacé écologiquement, aussi bien qu’aux problèmes de l’existence humaine au regard de ce qu’on sait et de ce qu’on ignore.

WT La question du savoir et de l’ignorance, le fait totalement non scientifique appliqué au fait scientifique et vice versa, cela conduit évidemment à une approche ironique du savoir et de l’ignorance. On peut savoir bien des choses, mais pas tout. C’est le thème de mon œuvre *truth study center*, qui s’oppose aux gens qui n’admettent rien d’autre que leur propre vérité ou celle de leur religion, à cette compréhension idéologique de la connaissance et de la vérité.

L’astronomie est mon obsession d’enfance, je crois même qu’elle a été mon initiation visuelle : passer des heures à tenter de distinguer les moindres détails, me situer aux confins du discernable. Est-ce que je vois encore quelque chose là, ou n’est-ce qu’un papillotement dans l’œil ? Depuis lors, cette question de la perceptibilité, de la distinction aiguë entre rien et quelque chose, revêt pour moi un intérêt central. À quel moment les évolutions deviennent-elles visibles ? Qu’étaient-elles avant de devenir décelables ? C’est là un sujet tout aussi intéressant du point de vue politique que du point de vue scientifique. Avec mon nouvel appareil, j’ai pu aborder très

being at a point where it’s paradigmatically changing the world again – as it last did in the times of Copernicus and Galileo. In this respect, I’m fascinated by exoplanet research. That now one can say, with relative certainty, that millions of earth-like planets exist in the universe, has actually changed the fundamental parameters for assessing human life. Until recently, only the guesswork of astronomers told us there were probably other planets with earth-like atmospheres, but this couldn’t be proven. Today, one has proof—with almost absolute certainty—that among the countless planets in the universe, the specific conditions for an earth-like surface character are repeated elsewhere.

This year, when I was able to visit the European Southern Observatory in Chile, an astronomer confirmed this for me. He said that, twenty-five years ago, when as a young physicist, he chose to become an astronomer, it was still a seemingly inert field of research, and it was unforeseeable that one would handle such fundamental questions today. Naturally, this challenges religions and their leaders, who see human beings as the center of divine concerns. Something is fundamentally changing today. Without delving any further into this topic, let me briefly mention that I deliberately left religion out of *Neue Welt*. There are more relevant things.

BR This seems to be just the beginning. In CERN, in Geneva, discussions in the area of the microcosm are opening up similar fundamental boundaries of our knowledge of the world.

WT Yes, on a neighbouring mountain beside the one that is home to the largest ESO telescope to date, consisting of four mirrors, each one eight meters across, the E-ELT is going to be built and completed by 2022, with the telling name “Extremely Large Telescope.” It will have the incredible reflector diameter of 40 meters. For a period of 40 years, the five-meter reflecting telescope at Mount Palomar was considered astonishingly big. During the last fifteen years came the eight-meter reflectors, and today, thanks to further advancements, even 40 meters are possible. My guide at ESO spoke of being on the brink of a Galilean moment.

BR This thought is directly realized in your new pictures: The conditions for creating the earth’s surface and its extremes basically correspond with the conditions for creating images. The presence and absence of composition is definitely similar. The world is incessantly recorded microscopically as well as macroscopically, for example, on the pages of *Google Earth*.

eingestellt, dass er in nur ein, zwei Sekunden Hunderte von Sternen erfassen, aber zugleich durch diese Überreizung nicht mehr genau sagen kann, ob da tatsächlich ein Stern ist oder nichts. Wenn Sensoren nichts sehen, kreieren sie Rauschen, und in diesen Bildern gehen die Bildpunkte des Rauschens nahtlos in tatsächliche Sterne über. Auf der Europäischen Südsternwarte konnte man sehen, dass die Astronomen an genau dieser Grenze ihre Forschung betreiben. Was die nachts sehen, sind keine funkelnden Sterne, sondern laue, fahle Bildschirmbilder, auf denen Rauschen kaum von Sternen zu unterscheiden ist. Erst durch das Überlagern mehrerer Aufnahmen lässt sich erkennen, was Artefakt ist und was echte Realität. Dass ich mich 25 Jahre später wieder sehr stark für Astronomie interessiere, hat auch damit zu tun, dass sie heute an einem Punkt angelangt ist, an dem sie die Welt noch mal paradigmatisch verändert, so wie dies zuletzt unter Kopernikus und Galileo der Fall gewesen ist. Insofern interessiert mich die Forschung nach Exoplaneten.

Da man jetzt mit ziemlicher Sicherheit sagen kann, dass es Millionen von erdähnlichen Planeten im Universum gibt, haben sich eigentlich alle Grundparameter für die Beurteilung des menschlichen Lebens verändert. Bis vor kurzem gab es nur die Vermutung von Astronomen, dass es wahrscheinlich auch andere Planeten mit erdähnlicher Atmosphäre gibt, man konnte es aber nicht beweisen. Jetzt hat man Beweise dafür, dass es so viele andere Planeten im All gibt, dass sich die spezifischen Bedingungen zu einer erdähnlichen Oberflächenbeschaffenheit mit an Sicherheit grenzender Wahrscheinlichkeit woanders wiederholen. Als ich dieses Jahr auf der Europäischen Südsternwarte in Chile zu Besuch sein konnte, wurde mir das von einem Astronom bestätigt. Er meinte, als er vor 25 Jahren als junger Physiker den Weg zur Astronomie eingeschlagen hatte, war sie ein schläfriges Forschungsfeld, und es war nicht abzusehen, dass man es da heute mit so fundamentalen Fragen zu tun haben würde.

Das stellt natürlich Religionen und deren Führer in Frage, die den Menschen als Zentrum des göttlichen Interesses ansehen. Da wird gerade fundamental etwas verändert. Ohne das Thema jetzt weiter aufzumachen, will ich kurz sagen, dass ich Religion bewusst aus der *Neuen Welt* rausgelassen habe. Es gibt tatsächlich relevantere Dinge.

BR Es scheint gerade erst der Anfang zu sein. Im CERN in Genf werden im Bereich des Mikrokosmos ähnlich fundamentale Grenzen der Erkenntnis über die Welt aufgestoßen.

concrètement le thème des limites de la perception dans des images comme celles de la série des ciels étoilés. Pour ces images, j’ai augmenté la sensibilité du capteur au point qu’il pouvait capter des centaines d’étoiles en une ou deux secondes, mais du fait de cette hypersensibilité, personne ne peut dire si ce qu’il voit est une étoile ou non. Quand les capteurs ne voient rien, ils génèrent du bruit, et dans ces images, on passe insensiblement des points de bruit aux étoiles. À l’Observatoire européen austral, on peut voir que les recherches se situent très exactement dans cette frange limite. Ce que les astronomes voient la nuit, ce n’est pas le scintillement des étoiles, mais des images d’écrans blafardes et diaphanes dans lesquelles on ne peut guère distinguer le bruit et les étoiles. Seule la superposition de plusieurs clichés permet d’identifier ce qui est accidentel et ce qui est vraiment la réalité.

Le fait que je m’intéresse à nouveau très fortement à l’astronomie vingt-cinq ans plus tard est aussi lié au fait qu’elle est aujourd’hui arrivée à un point où elle est à nouveau en train de changer le monde du point de vue du paradigme, comme cela a été le cas la dernière fois avec Copernic et Galilée. C’est ce qui m’intéresse dans les recherches sur les exoplanètes. Comme on peut dire aujourd’hui avec une quasi-certitude qu’il existe dans l’Univers des millions de planètes semblables à la Terre, tous les paramètres fondamentaux de l’appréciation de la vie humaine ont changé. Récemment, on n’avait encore que les conjectures des astronomes selon lesquelles il existe d’autres planètes enveloppées d’une atmosphère semblable à celle de la Terre, mais on ne pouvait pas le prouver. Aujourd’hui, on a des preuves du fait qu’il existe dans l’Univers un si grand nombre d’autres planètes que la probabilité d’avoir des conditions superficielles analogues à celles de la Terre confine à la certitude.

Cette année, quand j’ai pu visiter l’Observatoire européen austral au Chili, un astronome me l’a confirmé. Jeune physicien, quand il s’est lancé dans l’astronomie il y a vingt-cinq ans, cette science était un champ de recherches ensommeillé, et l’on ne pouvait encore prévoir que l’on serait confronté aujourd’hui à des questions aussi fondamentales.

Cela remet évidemment en cause les religions et leurs chefs, qui placent l’homme au centre de l’intérêt divin. Sur ce point, quelque chose est en train de changer fondamentalement. Sans vouloir développer ce sujet, je dirai seulement que dans *Neue Welt*, j’ai délibérément laissé de côté la religion. Il y a des choses plus importantes.

BR Il semble que ce ne soit que le début. Au CERN à Genève, des limites tout aussi fondamentales concernant le microcosme

Technology is everywhere nowadays. What exactly does it mean to produce pictures in this overdepicted and over-represented world, and to make physical and mental journeys? Couldn’t you also make these pictures and journeys on the Internet?

WT Not really. I still believe it’s possible to show something new and say or find something inexpressible in pictures. There I have faith in the picture. In fact, I think a value is created when I “put myself in situations” and subject myself to unpredictable reactions. Taking a step on the Internet always means following the respective “command.” Maybe you never know what follows on the next page, but you basically see only whatever you have asked about. Everything is predefined on the Internet. On the other hand, in the real world the possibility of a surprise is always immanent.

BR The Swedish poet and artist Karl Holmqvist said that, provided the collectivization of a given world is advanced, the individual will become collectively meaningful again. Precisely because the overlapping, the collective authorship, like on the Internet, is so omnipotent regarding the simultaneity of all the “voices,” the individual voice becomes relevant again in order to establish a connection to the collective as a dialogue factor. Today, the Internet is no longer the technical “other” or counterpart we imagined it to be ten years ago. Now it’s a fully integrated aspect of reality—and for that reason has a completely different connection to the individual...

WT ...and perhaps even demands this. In any case, at the end of the 1990s, I sensed less of a need to photograph my contemporaries. I felt the parameters had changed. In the early 1990s, that was still the exception and it wanted to be visualized. Ten years later, however, to photograph a young European-American person meant something else, and we were only then on the road to the over-photographed state, which was nowhere near as far along as it is today. As a kind of counter-reaction, I slowed down my picture production and directed my attention more towards nonre-presentational, abstract photography. Now it strikes me as necessary to become active in such excessive background noise. And so I asked myself: Would it be possible not to filter out individual pictures, but rather to place them inside it, as individual pictures that “ring out” from the general noise?

BR During your travels, you had to “resist” using your new digital camera’s photo-editing possibilities. So which pictures surprised you most?

WT Ja, auf einem Nachbarberg zum bis jetzt noch größten ESO-Teleskop, das aus vier Spiegeln mit je acht Metern Durchmesser besteht, wird bis 2022 das E-ELT gebaut, mit dem bezeichnenden Namen „Extremely Large Telescope.“ Es wird den unglaublichen Spiegeldurchmesser von 40 Metern haben. 40 Jahre lang war das Fünf-Meter-Spiegelteleskop von Mount Palomar einzigartig groß, dann kamen in den letzten fünfzehn Jahren die Acht-Meter-Spiegel, und dank dem Fortschritt sind heute diese 40 Meter möglich. Mein Betreuer bei ESO sprach davon, dass ein galileischer Moment bevorstehe.

BR In deinen neuen Bildern findet eine direkte Realisierung dieses Gedankens statt: Die Bedingungen der Entstehung der Erdoberfläche und ihrer Auswüchse entsprechen im Grunde den Bedingungen der Entstehung der Bilder. Die An- und Abwesenheit von Komposition ist durchaus vergleichbar. Mikro- wie auch makroskopisch wird die Welt permanent aufgezeichnet, zum Beispiel bei *Google Earth*. Technologie ist überall. Was bedeutet es, in dieser überaufgezeichneten und auch überrepräsentierten Welt Bilder zu produzieren, physische und mentale Reisen zu machen? Könntest du diese Bilder und Reisen auch im Internet machen?

WT Nicht wirklich. Ich glaube nach wie vor, dass man etwas Neues zeigen oder etwas Unaussprechbares in einem Bild sagen oder finden kann. Ich habe da Vertrauen ins Bild. Ich denke, es entsteht insofern ein Mehrwert, als dass ich mich „in Situationen bringe“ und nicht planbaren Reaktionen aussetze. Wenn man im Internet einen Schritt macht, folgt man stets dem jeweiligen „Befehl.“ Man weiß zwar nicht, was auf der nächsten Seite folgt, aber man sieht im Grunde immer nur das, wonach man gefragt hat. Im Internet ist alles schon vorgegeben. In der realen Welt ist dagegen die Möglichkeit einer Überraschung stets unmittelbar gegeben.

BR Der schwedische Dichter und Künstler Karl Holmqvist meint, dass in einer Welt, in der die Kollektivierung so weit fortgeschritten ist, eigentlich das Individuelle wieder kollektiv bedeutungsvoll wird. Gerade weil die Überlagerung, die kollektive Autorenschaft wie im Internet in der Gleichzeitigkeit aller „Stimmen“ so omnipräsent ist, sei die individuelle Stimme wieder relevant, um als Dialogisches einen Bezug zum Kollektiven herzustellen. Das Internet ist heute ja nicht mehr das technische „Andere“ oder „Gegenüber“, wie wir es noch vor zehn Jahren wahrgenommen haben, es ist

sont aujourd’hui battues en brèche par notre connaissance du monde.

WT Oui, sur une montagne voisine de ce qui va rester pour quelque temps le plus grand télescope ESO du monde quatre miroirs de huit mètres de diamètre – va être construit d’ici 2022 l’E-ELT, avec son nom très significatif: « Extremely Large Telescope ». Son miroir aura un diamètre incroyable de 40 mètres. Pendant 40 ans, le télescope du mont Palomar, avec son miroir de cinq mètres de diamètre, a été le seul de cette taille. Puis, ces quinze dernières années, sont arrivés les miroirs de huit mètres, et les progrès actuels permettent d’avoir ces 40 mètres. Mon guide à l’ESO a parlé d’un moment galiléen imminent.

BR Ton nouveau travail est une concrétisation directe de cette idée : les conditions de l’apparition des surfaces et des excroissances terrestres correspondent en fait aux conditions de la genèse des images. La présence/absence de composition est tout à fait comparable. Aujourd’hui, le monde est continuellement recensé, sur les plans microscopique aussi bien que macroscopique, par exemple par *Google Earth*. La technologie est partout. Dans ce monde sur-recensé et sur-représenté, que signifie pour toi produire des images, entreprendre des voyages physiques et mentaux ? Pourrais-tu réaliser ces images et ces voyages sur Internet ?

WT Pas vraiment. Je continue de croire qu’on peut montrer quelque chose de nouveau ou dire ou découvrir quelque chose d’inexprimable dans une image. Sur ce point, j’ai confiance en l’image. Je pense qu’il y a une valeur ajoutée dans le fait que je me « mets en situation » et que je m’expose à des réactions non planifiables. Quand on fait un pas sur Internet, on suit toujours la « commande » proposée. Bien sûr, on ne sait pas ce qui va apparaître sur la page suivante, mais en définitive, on ne voit jamais que ce qu’on a demandé. Sur Internet, tout est toujours fixé d’avance. Dans le monde réel en revanche, la possibilité d’une surprise est sans cesse donnée immédiatement.

BR Le poète et artiste suédois Karl Holmqvist pense que dans un monde dans lequel le collectif a atteint un tel degré de développement, le facteur individuel redevient en fait collectivement significatif. C’est précisément parce que la superposition, l’atorat collectif – comme sur Internet –, sont tellement omniprésents dans la simultanéité de toutes les « voix » que la voix individuelle redevient significative pour établir un rapport de dialogue avec le collectif. Techniquement, Internet n’est plus aujourd’hui un « autre » monde ou un vis-à-vis, comme il était encore

WT Actually, everything continued to function the way it always does: When something interests me, or when I’ve thought about it long enough, I always find the right moment to photograph it, without having to force it in order to make the pictures. In the process, I find especially interesting the observations that set me in motion without having to search for them. For example, over the last ten years, I have followed how car headlights have increasingly become highly technical and transformed to complex light sculptures, and have a more aggressive look about them now. They’ve been “overbred” far beyond the necessary technical requirements. I found the “right moment” in an underground garage in Hobart in Tasmania. The ambient lighting and absence of security guards let me give my full attention to the headlights. In this small detail, I saw a picture for a fundamental state of mind, for the technological fantasies of the entire world. It’s interesting how, on this restless search for individuality and distinction, one falls for such cyber-light objects. I see an immediate connection between this aggressive design and the increasingly tougher competition rhetoric in the world. While twenty years ago, most car headlights were round or rectangular, with a friendly look, today, nearly all of them are shark-eye headlights. There really is something detectable on the surface here. Cars have always interested me, these strange capsules always present in the street scene. Mankind’s fundamental wish for individual and independent mobility is understandable, but the consequences of this are also so monstrous ...

BR You could have also photographed these headlights in an underground garage in Berlin.

WT Yes, but somehow it needed ...

BR ...Tasmania.

WT There are many pictures in the series I could have made in London, a city I know better than any other, but nevertheless an endless, unfathomably deep, and intricate place that functions like a mirror reflecting the whole world, of course reinforced by the Commonwealth that practically was the whole world once. In reality, it’s not at all clear which place produced which pictures. Oddly enough, I rarely hear: “Where was that taken?” I often heard this with my earlier pictures, when the W-questions: Who? Where? Why? What? functioned as reflexive actions meant to give viewers access to the images.

ein voll integrierter Realitätsaspekt – und damit hat es ganz andere Bezüge zum Individuum ...

WT ...und fordert diese vielleicht auch. Ende der 1990er-Jahre jedenfalls habe ich eine geringere Notwendigkeit verspürt, meine Zeitgenossen zu fotografieren. Ich hatte das Gefühl, dass sich die Parameter verändert hatten. Anfang der 1990er war das noch die Ausnahme, die nach einer Bebilderung verlangte. Zehn Jahre später bedeutete das Fotografieren eines jungen europäisch-amerikanischen Menschen etwas ganz anderes, und wir waren erst auf dem Weg zum überfotografierten Zustand, das war lange noch nicht so weit fortgeschritten wie heute. Als eine Art Gegenreaktion habe ich die Bilderproduktion verlangsamt und den Fokus mehr auf die verhaltenslose, abstrakte Fotografie gerichtet. Jetzt scheint es mir notwendig, in diesem extremen Grundrauschen aktiv zu werden. Ich habe mich gefragt: Ist es möglich, Einzelbilder nicht herauszufiltern, sondern eben Einzelbilder da hineinzustellen, Bilder, die aus dem allgemeinen Rauschen „herausklingen“?

BR Du musstest auf den Reisen ja immer auch der Bildüberprüfungsmöglichkeit deiner neuen Digitalkamera „widerstehen“. Welche Bilder haben dich dann am meisten überrascht?

WT Eigentlich, dass es weiterhin so funktioniert, wie es immer funktioniert hat: Dass ich für das, was mich interessiert oder worüber ich lange genug nachdenke, den richtigen Moment finde, ohne ihn zu forcieren, um daraus Bilder zu machen. Ich finde dabei vor allem Beobachtungen interessant, die mich in Bewegung versetzen, ohne dass ich sie gesucht habe. Zum Beispiel habe ich über die letzten zehn Jahre verfolgt, wie Autoscheinwerfer immer hochtechnisierter, zu komplexen Lichtskulpturen und auch aggressiver in ihrem Ausdruck geworden sind. Sie sind weit über das nötige technische Maß hinaus „überzüchtet“. In einer Tiefgarage in Hobart in Tasmanien habe ich dann den richtigen Moment gefunden. Die Lichtstimmung und Absenz von Wächtern erlaubten es, dass ich mich voll den Scheinwerfern widmen konnte. In diesem kleinen Detail habe ich ein Bild für eine grundsätzliche Befindlichkeit, für die Technologiefantasien der ganzen Welt gesehen. Es ist doch interessant, wie man sich auf dieser rastlosen Suche nach Individualität und Unterscheidung solche Cyberlichtobjekte andrehen lässt. Zwischen diesem aggressiven Design und einer immer härteren Wettbewerbsrhetorik in der Welt sehe ich durchaus

perçu il y a dix ans, mais un aspect pleinement intégré de la réalité – et de ce fait, il entretient aujourd’hui des rapports très différents à l’individu ...

WT ...et les favorise peut-être. Cela dit, à la fin des années 1990, j’ai moins fortement éprouvé le besoin de photographier mes contemporains. Mon sentiment était que les paramètres avaient changé. Au début des années 1990, c’était encore l’exception qui invitait à une mise en images. Dix ans plus tard, photographier un jeune Américano-Européen signifiait tout autre chose, et nous n’étions encore qu’en route vers « le » sur-photographié, tout cela était encore très loin d’être aussi développé qu’aujourd’hui. C’est par une sorte de réaction contraire que j’ai ralenti ma production d’images et orienté sensiblement mon attention vers la photographie non-figurative et abstraite. Aujourd’hui, il me semble nécessaire de redevenir actif dans ce bourdonnement extrême. La question que je me suis posée est celle-ci : est-il possible non pas d’en distiller des images particulières, mais précisément d’y instiller des images particulières qui « résonnent » hors du bourdonnement général ?

BR Pendant tes voyages, il t’a toujours fallu « résister » à la possibilité de visionner les photos sur ton nouvel appareil numérique. Plus tard, quelles sont celles qui t’ont le plus surpris ?

WT En fait, ce qui m’a le plus surpris, c’est que tout continue de fonctionner comme cela a toujours fonctionné : le fait que je trouve le bon moment pour faire ce qui m’intéresse et à quoi je réfléchis depuis suffisamment longtemps, sans me forcer la main pour en faire des images. Dans ce processus, les observations qui m’intéressent le plus sont celles qui me font bouger sans que je les aie recherchées. Ces dix dernières années par exemple, j’ai suivi la manière dont les phares de voitures sont devenus des sculptures lumineuses de plus en plus complexes du point de vue technique, mais aussi plus agressives dans leur expression. Ils tournent largement en « surrégime », bien au-delà de toute mesure techniquement nécessaire. C’est dans un parking souterrain à Hobart, en Tasmanie, que j’ai trouvé le bon moment. L’ambiance lumineuse et l’absence de gardiens m’ont permis de me consacrer entièrement aux phares. Dans ce petit détail, j’ai vu l’image d’un état d’esprit fondamental, des fantasmes technologiques du monde entier. Je trouve intéressant de voir que malgré la quête permanente d’individualité et de différenciation, on se fait fourguer ce genre de cyberobjets. Pour moi, il y a un rapport direct entre ce design agressif et la rhétorique toujours

BR Let’s go back to the photographs of the car headlights and the association with shark eyes it triggers in the viewer. The relationship of technology and nature, or the association made to this relationship, frequently appears in your work, for example, in the photographs of new technologies for food processing and packaging, but also with the copy and printing machines and high-tech settings. You often show transportation vehicles and technical facilities ...

WT It’s amazing how high technology visually overpowers and spreads around the world. In the past, a smaller number of people participated in the use of high technology. Technical advancements were best recognized in connection with icons of sought-after achievements like space travel, the moon landing, and the Concorde. Today, billions of people communicate with the same cell phones. Even in poor countries, like Ethiopia, no one uses a cell phone from ten years ago.

I observed something similar in connection with sportswear, although sportswear doesn’t immediately depict a sense of technology, but rather tries awakening the suggestion of technological advancement directly on the body. Wherever I went, people wore the same styles and materials—like a global uniform. This gave the impression that certain things are virally present. Of course, this corresponds with the intentions of corporations. But there’s more to this simultaneous spreading of particular styles and technologies.

It’s fascinating to observe how the world’s surface is changing: For example, the color of light is drifting away from light-bulb yellow and towards the pallid, cold glow of the energy-saving lamp. At first, I wondered how someone could accept this lighting of a much lesser quality. Now it has become apparent that energy-saving lamps are just an intermediate phase, and that in the future all light will come from LED sources, which offer a broader spectrum of colors. In China, entire houses are decked with LEDs already. The cities there look totally unlike anything I’ve ever seen before. And the flatness fetish related to monitor screens is a similar global phenomenon. In Ushuaia, the world’s southernmost city, I photographed a shanty town, where the heat insulation was made entirely of Styrofoam packaging from technical appliances (*Ushuaia Favela*, 2010).

BR Surfaces, disguises, and architectural cladding constantly turn up in these pictures as well: designs evolving from folds, but also architectural facings like the Arabic architectural elements used as

einen unmittelbaren Zusammenhang. Vor 20 Jahren waren Scheinwerfer zumeist rund oder viereckig, mit einer freundlichen Ausstrahlung, heute gibt es fast nur noch Haifischaugen. Hier ist an der Oberfläche tatsächlich etwas abzulesen. Autos haben mich immer schon interessiert, diese im Straßenbild allgegenwärtigen seltsamen Kapseln. Der fundamentale Wunsch des Menschen nach individueller und unabhängiger Mobilität ist verständlich, aber in seiner Tragweite auch so was von monströs ...

BR Diese Scheinwerfer hättest du auch in einer Tiefgarage in Berlin fotografieren können.

WT Ja, aber irgendwie brauchte es ...

BR ...Tasmanien.

WT Es gibt viele Bilder in der Serie, die ich in London hätte machen können, einer Stadt, die ich so gut wie keine andere kenne, die aber trotzdem unendlich und uneinholbar tief verschachtelt ist und als Spiegel der gesamten Welt funktioniert, verstärkt natürlich durch das Commonwealth, das mal fast die ganze Welt war. Eigentlich ist es überhaupt nicht eindeutig, welcher Ort welche Bilder hervorgebracht hat. Die Frage „Wo ist das?“ wird interessanterweise gar nicht so oft gestellt, wie ich das früher bei meinen Bildern erlebt habe, als diese W-Fragen: „Wer? – Wo? – Wie? – Was?“ als reflexartige Zugangsfunktionen des Betrachters ins Spiel kamen.

BR Lass uns zurückgehen zu den Fotografien von den Autoscheinwerfern und der beim Betrachter ausgelösten Assoziation zu Haifischaugen. Das Verhältnis Technologie und Natur oder die entsprechenden Assoziationen tauchen häufig in deinem Werk auf, zum Beispiel auch in den Fotografien von neuen Technologien der Nahrungsmittelverarbeitung und Verpackung, aber auch bei den Fotokopierern, Druckmaschinen und Hightech-Umgebungen. Häufig zeigst du Transportvehikel und technische Anlagen ...

WT Es ist erstaunlich, wie sich Hochtechnologie visuell niederschlägt und um die ganze Welt verteilt ist. Früher hatte ein weit geringerer Teil der Menschen Teilhabe an Hightech. Technischer Fortschritt wurde eher über Sehnsuchtsikonen wie Raumfahrt, Mondlandung oder die Concorde wahrgenommen. Heute telefonieren Milliarden von Menschen mit denselben Handys. Selbst in armen Ländern wie Äthiopien werden keine Handys von vor zehn Jahren benutzt. Etwas Ähnliches habe ich in Bezug auf Sportswear beobachtet, obwohl

plus dure de la compétition mondiale. Ici, la surface permet effectivement de lire quelque chose.

Les voitures m’ont toujours intéressé, ces étranges capsules omniprésentes dans le paysage urbain. L’aspiration fondamentale de l’homme à une mobilité individuelle et autonome est bien compréhensible, mais aussi tellement monstrueuse dans ses implications ...

BR Ces phares, tu aurais aussi bien pu les photographier dans un parking souterrain de Berlin.

WT Oui, mais pour une raison ou pour une autre, il fallait ...

BR ... la Tasmanie.

WT Dans cette série, il y a bien des photos que j’aurais pu faire à Londres, une ville que je connais mieux qu’aucune autre, et qui néanmoins est insaisissable, d’une complexité infinie, et qui fonctionne comme un miroir du monde entier, notamment de par le Commonwealth, qui était autrefois presque le monde entier. En fait, on ne peut pas vraiment dire quel lieu a produit telle ou telle image. Fait intéressant, on me pose aujourd’hui moins souvent la question « c’est où ? » qu’autrefois avec mes photos, quand les questions « qui ? – où ? – comment ? – quoi ? » servaient de clés d’accès réflexes au spectateur.

BR Revenons aux photographies des phares de voitures et à l’association avec des yeux de requin déclenchée chez le spectateur. Le rapport entre technologie et nature, ou la référence à ce rapport, est souvent présent dans ton travail, notamment dans les photographies des nouvelles technologies de production et d’emballage alimentaires, mais aussi de photocopieurs, de presses d’imprimerie et d’environnements high-tech. Tu montres souvent des véhicules de transport et des dispositifs techniques...

WT C’est étonnant de voir comment la haute technologie exerce une influence visuelle et comment elle se diffuse dans le monde entier. Autrefois, seule une partie des gens bénéficiaient du high-tech. Les progrès techniques étaient plutôt perçus au travers d’icônes fantasmées comme la conquête spatiale, les alunissages ou le Concorde. Aujourd’hui, des milliards de gens téléphonent avec les mêmes portables. Même dans des pays pauvres comme l’Éthiopie, on n’utilise pas les portables d’il y a dix ans. J’ai observé un phénomène similaire dans le sportswear, qui n’est pourtant pas strictement représentatif de la technologie, mais qui entend plutôt susciter l’image du progrès

decorations in one of your photographs (*cladding*, 2009), taken in a new structure built of concrete; the radiant surfaces of the new hotel and merchandise temple, but also the forms and encasements of the world’s surface in urban structures, shown from a bird’s-eye view; or the Masai’s hair sculpted into an artistic shape with mud (*Young Masai*, 2012).

WT Cladding is not just a construction type, enormously popular and almost considered normal. It also grants expression to a specific attitude. Other similarly questionable attitudes are, in the Anglo-Saxon realm, exposed brickwork and the factory-building aesthetic in Berlin, both interesting at first, but later became the cliché of stifled forms. I always travel around the world with half an eye open only to architecture. What interests me is when something is pure facade and when something is “genuine,” meaning when something is either false or honest. In my opinion, architecture often handles the expectations of its users very carelessly. In this respect, I consider deception, when it presents itself as such, much less problematic. But when everything is just curtain-walled slabs, my first reaction is that I don’t feel taken seriously as a user. In the Anglo-Saxon realm, everything is completed with cladding or curtain walling. The Centre Pompidou-like approach is more to my taste, everything left open, or else everything permanently plastered. Of course, the “cladders” could say that they are being honest in their illusion, that it never lasts longer than five years anyway, and being fake is used in the same way to neatly plaster or cover with bricks.

This tension between constructions promising eternity and endurance and the pragmatism and practical constraints of money, the vagabonding use of it, is something I find mind-boggling. A strong motivation for traveling and taking trips to cities evolves from observing this in all its forms around the world. Built space always confronts viewers with the results of a multitude of creative decisions made by the most disparate people and their different approaches. A kind of visual polyphony reigns. Most people don’t notice this at all, because it qualifies as the norm. But I constantly see and read the world in this way. Other interesting “constructions” are blossoms. On the one hand, they envelop and adorn the real issue: the fertility pistil. On the other, blossoms are wondrously decorative deception devices for bees. But they never poison bees. This is less clear in many malls in the world of consumers. I am not, per se, against consumerism. I’m concerned with intensifying that point where the harmless

Sportswear nicht im unmittelbaren Sinne Technologie darstellt, vielmehr den Anschein technologischen Fortschritts am Körper erwecken will. Überall, wo ich war, trug man dieselben Stile und Stoffe – wie eine globale Uniform. Man bekommt den Eindruck, dass gewisse Dinge viral präsent sind. Das entspricht natürlich der Absicht der Konzerne. In dieser Gleichzeitigkeit der Ausbreitung bestimmter Stile und Technologien steckt aber noch mehr. Es ist faszinierend zu sehen, wie sich die Oberfläche der Welt verändert, zum Beispiel die Lichtfarbe, weg vom glühbirnen-gelb hin zum fahlen kalten Licht der Energiesparlampe. Ich hatte mich zunächst gewundert, wie man ein so viel schlechteres Licht in Kauf nehmen kann. Jetzt wird deutlich, dass die Energiesparlampe nur eine kurze Zwischenphase ist und in Zukunft jegliches Licht von LEDs kommen wird, die farblich ein weit größeres Spektrum bieten. In China sind bereits ganze Häuser in LEDs verkleidet. Die Städte dort sehen ganz anders aus, als ich es je gekannt hatte. Auch der Flachheitsfetisch in Bezug auf die Bildschirme ist ein ähnliches globales Phänomen. In Ushuaia, der südlichsten Stadt der Welt, habe ich eine informelle Siedlung fotografiert, in der die Wärmedämmung aus Styroporverpackungen von Technikgeräten bestand (*Ushuaia Favela*, 2010).

BR Oberflächen, Verkleidungen, Verschaltungen kommen in den Bildern ebenfalls immer wieder vor: Faltenwürfe, aber auch Architekturverkleidungen, wie zum Beispiel die arabischen Architekturelemente, die in einem deiner Bilder in ein neues Betongebäude als Dekoration gesetzt sind (*cladding*, 2009), die glänzenden Oberflächen der neuen Hotel- und Warentempel, aber auch die Strukturen und Umhüllungen der Weltoberfläche in Stadtstrukturen, die man aus der Vogelperspektive sieht oder die mit Lehm in eine künstliche Form gebrachten Haare eines Massai (*Young Masai*, 2012).

WT Verschalung ist eben nicht nur eine Bauart, die enorm weit verbreitet ist und fast als normal empfunden wird, darin kommt auch eine Haltung zum Ausdruck. Andere ähnlich bedenkliche Haltungen sind das *exposed brickwork* im angelsächsischen Raum oder die Fabrikhallenästhetik in Berlin, beides anfänglich interessante, aber jetzt zum Klischee erstarrte Formen. Ich laufe ständig mit einem halben Auge nur für die Architektur durch die Welt. Mich interessiert, wann etwas reine Fassade und wann etwas „echt“, das heißt, wann etwas unehrlich oder ehrlich ist. Architektur geht, wie ich finde, häufig sehr fahrlässig mit den Erwartungen der Benutzer um. Insofern halte ich Unehrlisches, das sich als solches

technologique à l’appui du corps. Partout où j’ai séjourné, on porte les mêmes styles et les mêmes tissus – comme un uniforme global. On a l’impression que certaines choses sont là de façon virale. Cela correspond évidemment aux intentions des grands groupes industriels. Mais cette simultanéité de la diffusion de certains styles et de certaines technologies recèle encore davantage.

Il est ainsi fascinant de voir comment la surface du monde change, par exemple avec la couleur de la lumière : nous quittons le jaune de l’ampoule à filament pour la lumière blafarde et froide de l’ampoule à basse consommation. J’avais d’abord été étonné que les gens acceptent une lumière tellement moins bonne qualitativement. Aujourd’hui, il semble évident que l’ampoule à basse consommation n’est qu’une courte phase transitoire et qu’à l’avenir, tous les éclairages vont être à base de LED, qui offrent un spectre chromatique beaucoup plus étendu. En Chine, des immeubles entiers sont déjà équipés de LED. Les villes là-bas ont un tout autre aspect que tout ce que j’ai jamais connu. Un autre phénomène global similaire est le fétiche du « plat » dans le domaine des écrans. À Ushuaia, la ville la plus méridionale du monde, j’ai photographié des bidonvilles dans lesquelles l’isolation thermique était faite en plaques de polystyrène expansé venant d’emballages d’appareils électroménagers (*Ushuaia Favela*, 2010).

BR Dans ton travail apparaissent aussi régulièrement des surfaces, des masquages, des coffrages : des draperies, mais aussi des revêtements utilisés en architecture, par exemple les éléments de l’architecture arabe qui servent de décoration pour un nouvel immeuble en béton dans une de tes photographies (*cladding*, 2009), les surfaces rutilantes des nouveaux temples de l’hôtellerie et du commerce, mais aussi les structures et les revêtements de la surface du monde avec les structures urbaines photographiées en vue aérienne, ou encore la mise en forme artificielle des cheveux d’un Massaï avec de la glaise (*Young Masai*, 2012).

WT Le coffrage n’est pas seulement un mode de construction immensément répandu et presque perçu comme un fait normal, il exprime aussi une attitude. D’autres attitudes tout aussi suspectes sont l’*exposed brickwork* dans le monde anglo-saxon ou l’esthétique « halle d’usine » à Berlin. Ces deux formes intéressantes à l’origine se sont aujourd’hui figées jusqu’au cliché. Je me promène sans cesse dans le monde avec un œil sur l’architecture. Cela m’intéresse de voir quand quelque chose est pure façade et quand c’est « authentique »,

enjoyment of packaging, advertising, and types of decoration shifts to exploitation and simulating false data. It always revolves around the same question: What is genuine?

BR Alongside cosmological, technological, and organizational constellations you frequently express an interest in social constellations, groups of people entangled in everyday situations. Here, I’m thinking about the marketplace scene in Ethiopia (*Market I*, 2012). What I find especially interesting about this picture is that it makes an immense picture archive available as the basis of our perception: We encounter such a huge number of images. Unlike nineteenth-century ethnologists, we no longer bring home with us from our travels pictures that appear foreign in nature. A great deal of this comes across in the marketplace picture. On the one hand, this is your own “authentic” picture. But it also shows everything we know about composed imagery. One witnesses the interplay of everything possible: expressions of so-called “authentic” life or the not composed, art history, and a visual range spanning from our collective projections to the collapse of this acquired way of seeing. Like you mentioned earlier, the same scene, with people wearing different clothes and with other goods, could have taken place in a park in London, right? What role does the migration and globalization of pictures and merchandise play for you in this context?

WT Markets and merchandise define people and cultures. People come together where trading takes place. Markets are economically vital for their participants, but also places of communication and places to ward off boredom with. People are never alone at markets, and they can hope to personally benefit from some part of the general activity.

BR How and why do the photographs become specific?

WT That’s another important aspect. This has nothing to do with making a stereotypical image of the world, but rather with making something in the general realm of things visible. I don’t think of this as a “balancing act.” It’s actually inherent in all things. For example, a hotel room is, first of all, nothing out of the ordinary and simply a standard. At the same time, however, it’s this specific hotel room that prompted a reaction in me (*Jurys Inn*, 2010). So it’s not just the idea “Ah yes, there are millions of hotel rooms like this one,” but also the specific combination of red carpeting, offensive lamp stand, and this particular abstract painting on the wall.

zeigt, für nicht so problematisch. Wenn aber alles nur vorgehangene Platten sind, fühle ich mich als Benutzer erstmal nicht ernst genommen. Im angelsächsischen Raum ist alles verschalt oder verhangen. Mir liegt eher das Centre-Pompidou-mäßige, alles offen zu lassen oder aber das dauerhaft Verputzte. Die „Verschaler“ können natürlich sagen, dass sie ehrlich in ihrer Illusion sind und, da sowieso nichts länger als fünf Jahre hält oder in derselben Weise genutzt wird, es *fake* wäre, ordentlich zu verputzen oder zu mauern.

Dieses Spannungsverhältnis zwischen einem ewigkeits- und dauerhaftigkeits-versprechenden Bauen und dem Pragmatismus und Sachzwang des Geldes, der vagabundierenden Nutzung, finde ich irre. Eine starke Motivation für das Reisen und die Fahrten durch Städte rührte daher, sich das in den verschiedensten Spielarten überall auf der Welt anzusehen. Im bebauten Raum ist man ja stets mit den Resultaten einer Vielzahl von gestalterischen Entscheidungen unterschiedlichster Menschen und ihrer verschiedenen Ansätze konfrontiert. Es herrscht eine Art visueller Polyphonie. Das wird ja von den meisten Leuten gar nicht wahrgenommen, weil es eben der Normalfall ist. Ich aber sehe und lese die Welt ständig so. Andere interessante „Konstruktionen“ sind Blüten. Sie verhüllen und verzieren das, worum es eigentlich geht: den Fruchtstempel. Blüten sind ein wunderbares Zier- und Blendwerk für Bienen, aber sie vergiften die Bienen nicht. Manche Konsumwelt-Mall ist da nicht so eindeutig. Ich bin ja nicht konsumfeindlich per se. Mir geht es darum, den Blick dafür zu schärfen, wo der harmlose Genuss von Verpackung, Werbung und Zierrat umschlägt in eine Ausnutzung, eine Vortäuschung falscher Tatsachen. Immer wieder dreht es sich um die Frage: Was ist echt?

BR Neben kosmologischen, technologischen oder organischen Konstellationen interessieren dich immer wieder soziale Konstellationen, Gruppen von Menschen, die in Alltagshandlungen verstrickt sind. Ich denke da an die Marktszene in Äthiopien (*Market I*, 2012). Ich finde dieses Bild besonders interessant, da wir inzwischen als Grundlage für unsere Wahrnehmung über ein immenses Bilder-Archiv verfügen: Wir kennen so enorm viele Bilder. Anders als noch die Ethnologen des 19. Jahrhunderts bringen wir von Reisen keine fremdartigen Bilder mehr mit. An diesem Marktbild zeigt sich davon sehr viel. Einerseits ist es ja dein „authentisches“ Bild, es zeigt aber auch alles, was wir von komponierten Bildern gelernt haben. Man kann im Grunde alles daran

en d’autres termes, quand quelque chose est honnête ou malhonnête. À mon sens, l’architecture traite souvent les attentes de l’utilisateur par-dessous la jambe. C’est pourquoi la malhonnêteté qui s’affirme comme telle ne me semble pas tellement problématique. Mais quand tout n’est que plaques de revêtement, ce que je ressens, c’est qu’on ne me respecte absolument pas en tant qu’utilisateur. Dans le monde anglo-saxon, tout est bardé de revêtements et de murs rideaux. Je préfère le genre Centre Pompidou, où tout est ouvert, ou encore un bon vieux crépi durable. Bien sûr, les « revêteurs » peuvent dire qu’ils sont honnêtes dans leur illusion et que comme rien ne tient plus de cinq ans et n’est utilisé de la même manière, ce serait *fake* de faire un crépi ou de monter un mur dans les règles de l’art.

Cette tension entre un mode de construction qui promet l’éternité ou la durabilité d’une part, et d’autre part le pragmatisme et les contraintes de l’argent, de l’utilitarisme errant, je trouve ça fou. Une forte motivation pour mes voyages et mes promenades urbaines a été d’en voir les différentes déclinaisons dans le monde entier. Dans l’espace construit, on est toujours confronté aux résultantes de toute une série de décisions formelles prises par toutes sortes de gens avec leurs différentes approches. Il règne une sorte de polyphonie visuelle. La plupart des gens ne s’en rendent pas compte parce que c’est la normalité. Mais moi, c’est le regard que je porte continuellement sur le monde et la lecture que j’en ai. D’autres « constructions » intéressantes sont les fleurs. D’un côté, elles servent de voile et de parure au sujet crucial : le pistil. Les fleurs sont un prodigieux ouvrage ornemental et trompe-l’œil pour abeilles, mais elles n’empoisonnent pas les abeilles. Certains centres commerciaux mondiaux ne sont pas aussi clairs à cet égard. Je ne suis pas fondamentalement hostile à la consommation. Ce qui m’importe, c’est d’aiguiser le regard là où le plaisir bénin de l’emballage, de la publicité et de l’enjolivre tourne au traquenard, au simulacre et au mensonge. On en revient toujours à la même question : qu’est-ce qui est authentique?

BR À côté des constellations cosmologiques, technologiques ou organiques, tu t’intéresses régulièrement aux constellations sociales, à des groupes de gens impliqués dans des actes quotidiens. Je songe à la scène de marché en Éthiopie (*Market I*, 2012). Ce que je trouve particulièrement intéressant dans ce livre, c’est qu’il crée une immense banque d’images qui serait la base de notre perception. Nous sommes confrontés à tant d’images... Contrairement aux ethnologues du XIX^e siècle, nous ne revenons plus de nos

BR The Internet, perhaps the last twenty years of images and image transfer, has played a major role in establishing access to a different dimension of the subjective and the individual in order to enable other assertions again. In media theories, this is discussed in terms of new maneuvering space for the subjective. I can imagine that there must be more advanced theories of the subjective, theories we haven’t actually read yet and therefore can’t discuss.

WT It is probably becoming increasingly difficult as an individual to make an individually valid depiction of the “world” because people are overrun, like never before, by an incredible number of preconceived opinions and pictures of an unknown magnitude, and these are constantly colliding and ending up beside and on top of one another within a sustained noise. What interested me was not only to passively submit to all this, but to consciously let things bump against each other and stand side by side, even when—or precisely because—their references are so obvious. In this book, for example, there is a double-page spread showing what appears to be one sheep, until its shadow reveals it to be two sheep. Beside this image is the picture of a beach cottage in Papua New Guinea, which is the epitome of the island paradise cliché, but, in reality, shows a family residence. Then there is also the photograph of a DeBeers jewelry store with a limousine driving by, taken on Fifth Avenue in New York City. Here, the contrasts are really too obvious. What excites me, however, is enduring this because it’s somehow the full range: How far does it go? What can one endure? I can resist the judging-and-condemning impulse these contrasts provoke in me. Now I can leave everything the way it is.

BR This is really about an altered reality and, therefore, having different experiences with this simultaneity.

WT The simultaneity and availability of all things constitute our reality today. That hint of the didactic is gone: There are the poor and there the rich, and so forth ...

BR ...and the genuine and the perhaps no longer genuine. What does it mean when you refer to all three of these pictures without immediately activating the clichés of your existing or, to some extent, learned and educated criteria? The first time I saw these works, I had the impression they were about an emptying process—not of pictures, but rather an emptying of the clichés and

durchspielen: Begriffe des sogenannten „authentischen“ Lebens, also das Nichtkomponierte, die Kunstgeschichte, unsere kollektiven Projektionen bis hin zu einem Kollaps dieser erlernten Sichtweisen. Wie du schon sagtest, die Szene könnte auch in anderer Kleidung und mit anderen Gütern in einem Park in London stattgefunden haben, oder? Welche Rolle spielt für dich Migration und Globalisierung von Bildern und Waren in diesem Zusammenhang?

WT Märkte und Waren definieren Menschen und Kulturen. Wo gehandelt wird, da kommen Leute zusammen. Märkte sind für ihre Teilnehmer wirtschaftlich lebensnotwendig, aber sie sind auch Orte der Kommunikation und Orte gegen Langeweile. Auf Märkten ist man nie allein und kann außerdem darauf hoffen, dass etwas von der allgemeinen Aktivität für einen selber abfällt.

BR Wie und warum werden die Fotografien spezifisch?

WT Das ist ein weiterer wichtiger Aspekt. Es geht nicht darum, ein stereotypes Weltbild zu erzeugen, sondern etwas Allgemeines sichtbar zu machen, das trotzdem hochspezifisch ist. Ich glaube, das ist kein „Spagat“, es ist eigentlich inhärent in allen Dingen vorhanden. Ein Hotelzimmer zum Beispiel ist ja erst mal nichts Außergewöhnliches, ein Standard eben. Zugleich ist es aber genau dieses spezifische Hotelzimmer, das in mir eine Reaktion hervorgerufen hat (*Jurys Inn*, 2010). Es ist dabei nicht nur die Idee „ah ja, solche Hotelzimmer gibt es millionenfach“, sondern auch genau die spezielle Kombination aus dem roten Teppichboden, dem fiesen Lampenhalter und diesem kitschigen abstrakten Bild an der Wand.

BR Das Internet, vielleicht die letzten zwanzig Jahre von Bildern und Transport von Bildern, hat eine große Rolle dabei gespielt, Zugang zu einer anderen Dimension des Subjektiven oder Individuellen zu finden, um wieder andere Behauptungen machen zu können. In Medientheorien wird das etwa diskutiert als neue Handlungsspielräume für das Subjektive. Ich könnte mir vorstellen, dass es noch weitergehende Theorien des Subjektiven geben müsste, die wir noch nicht wirklich lesen und deshalb diskutieren können.

BR Ces vingt dernières années environ, l’internet a joué un rôle important pour conquérir une autre dimension du subjectif ou de l’individuel et pouvoir avancer de nouvelles affirmations. Dans les théories des médias, cet aspect est débattu dans le cadre des nouveaux espaces d’action ouverts au subjectif. J’imagine assez bien qu’il existera encore des théories du subjectif plus développées que nous ne pouvons encore vraiment lire et donc discuter.

WT Es wird wahrscheinlich zunehmend schwieriger, sich als Individuum ein individuell gültiges Abbild von „der Welt“ zu machen, weil man in bislang nicht gekanntem Ausmaß von einer ungläublichen Vielfalt vorgestanzter Meinungen und Bildern umlagert ist, die in einem

voyages avec des images inconnues. Dans la photo du marché en question, cet aspect est très présent. D’un côté, c’est ta photo « authentique », d’un autre côté, on y trouve tout ce que nous avons appris des images composées. Au fond, tous les aspects sont là : les notions de la vie « authentique », c’est-à-dire l’aspect non composé, l’histoire de l’art, nos projections collectives jusqu’à l’effondrement des regards appris. Comme tu le disais, cette scène pourrait aussi bien s’être déroulée dans d’autres habits et avec d’autres produits dans un parc de Londres, n’est-ce pas ? Quel rôle jouent pour toi la migration et la globalisation des images et des produits dans ce contexte ?

WT Les marchés et les produits définissent les hommes et les cultures. Là où l’on marchande, les gens se rassemblent. Pour leurs acteurs, les marchés sont une nécessité économique vitale, mais les marchés sont aussi des lieux de communication et des espaces contre l’ennui. Sur un marché, on n’est jamais seul ; de plus, l’individu peut espérer récupérer une part de l’activité générale.

BR Qu’est-ce qui fait qu’une photographie devient spécifique ?

WT C’est l’autre aspect important. La question n’est pas de produire une image stéréotypée du monde, mais de rendre visible un fait général qui soit malgré tout hautement spécifique. À mon sens, il n’y a pas là de « grand écart » ; en fait, cela existe en toute chose. Dans un premier temps par exemple, une chambre d’hôtel n’a rien d’inhabituel, c’est un standard. En même temps, c’est justement cette chambre d’hôtel particulière qui a suscité en moi une réaction (*Jurys Inn*, 2010). Il ne s’agit pas seulement de l’idée « ah oui, ce genre de chambre d’hôtel, il en existe des millions », mais aussi de la combinaison très particulière entre la moquette rouge, l’infâme abat-jour et cette peinture abstraite kitsch accrochée au mur.

BR Ces vingt dernières années environ, l’internet a joué un rôle important pour conquérir une autre dimension du subjectif ou de l’individuel et pouvoir avancer de nouvelles affirmations. Dans les théories des médias, cet aspect est débattu dans le cadre des nouveaux espaces d’action ouverts au subjectif. J’imagine assez bien qu’il existera encore des théories du subjectif plus développées que nous ne pouvons encore vraiment lire et donc discuter.

WT Il va probablement être de plus en plus difficile de se faire une image « du monde » individuellement valide parce que nous sommes assaillis comme jamais auparavant par une incroyable diversité

stereotypes we are familiar with and readily approach.

WT Essentially, artworks are only endowed with a soul and uniqueness when a specific set of criteria exists in the artist. I found it to be an enormous challenge, verging on frightening, to unlearn how to photograph, to ignore the criteria I felt secure with, and to expand my focus to the extreme: to the whole world, to the entire pixel and/or information density, and to the complete range of subject matter, while pulling out the rug of my own social environment from under my feet in the process. Added to that comes the hugely increased number of pictures, around three times as many as I normally used when I photographed with film ...

BR That means you must have had many more pictures to choose from ...

WT Exactly. Where image consumption is concerned, I believe there’s a limit. Books with thousands of pages don’t interest me. “A lot” has never really interested me. Even though I’ve always been very productive, I only fully utilize thirty to forty camera pictures a year as art works. As a viewer, you can’t really process more than that.

BR With your abstract works, the studio works, from the *Freischwimmer* series to the *Silver* works, there is a development linked to a material-induced composition. You didn’t want the *Freischwimmer* series brought in connection with the “travel” pictures, but with the latest *Silver* works you did ...

WT ... because the *Freischwimmer* series connects intention and wish to the uncontrollable with far more intensity. Ultimately, it deals with traces and compositions I actively bring into the picture manually. With the *Silver* works, my hands are involved only insofar as I expose some of the sheets to colored, homogeneous light. The imaging process is subjected to the inherent logic of the material purely mechanically. The undeveloped photo paper—sometimes exposed, sometimes unexposed—passes through a photo-developing machine, which I intuitively, or depending on my intention, leave dirty or clean to varying degrees. Because of the remnants of chemicals in the empty machine, filled with only water, the photo paper continues to develop, but only partially. On the other hand, dirt and silver particles from the traces of chemicals settle on the paper’s surface, and this often produces interesting scratches. The result is basically no less a piece of reality than the photograph of

ständigen Rauschen aufeinanderprallen, nebeneinander und übereinander liegen. Dabei hat mich interessiert, das nicht einfach nur passiv hinzunehmen, sondern die Dinge bewusst mal einfach so aufeinanderstoßen und nebeneinanderstehen zu lassen, auch wenn oder gerade weil ihr Bezug so offensichtlich ist. In diesem Buch gibt es zum Beispiel eine Doppelseite, auf der etwas zunächst wie ein Schaf aussieht, sich dann aber über den Schatten als zwei Schafe entpuppt. Daneben gibt es das Bild einer Hütte am Strand in Papua-Neuguinea, das dem Klischee des Inselparadieses perfekt entsprechen könnte, aber in Wirklichkeit der Wohnort einer Familie ist, und dann ein Foto von einem DeBeers-Laden mit einer Limousine davor, das an der 5th Avenue in New York entstanden ist. Die Gegensätze sind hier eigentlich zu offensichtlich. Aber mich reizt es, das ertragen zu können, denn irgendwie ist das die Spannbreite: Wie weit geht es? Was kann man ertragen? Ich kann dem be- und verurteilenden Impuls widerstehen, den diese Gegensätze bei mir herausgefordert haben, ich kann es jetzt stehen lassen.

BR Es geht ja eigentlich um eine veränderte Realität, und darum, mit dieser Gleichzeitigkeit andere Erfahrungen zu machen.

WT Die Gleichzeitigkeit und Verfügbarkeit von allen Dingen macht unsere heutige Lebensrealität aus. Es fällt der didaktische Fingerzeig weg: Es gibt hier Arme und Reiche und so...

BR ... und Authentisches oder vielleicht nicht mehr Authentisches. Was heißt es, wenn du dich gleichzeitig auf diese drei Bilder beziehst, ohne die Klischees deiner vorhandenen wie auch immer gelernten und gebildeten Kriterien sofort zu aktivieren? Als ich die Arbeiten zum ersten Mal gesehen habe, hatte ich eben auch den Eindruck, dass es um eine Entleerung geht – nicht um eine Entleerung der Bilder, sondern eine Entleerung der Klischees und Stereotypen, mit denen wir gewohnt sind, uns dem anzunähern.

WT Grundsätzlich sind Kunstwerke ja nur beseelt und besonders, wenn dafür ein spezifisches Set von Kriterien im Künstler vorhanden ist. Ich habe es als extreme Herausforderung empfunden, bis hin zur Angst, das Fotografieren zu verlernen, auf die bewährten Kriterien bewusst zu verzichten und meinen Fokus extrem auszuweiten: auf die ganze Welt, auf die gesamte Pixel- oder Informations-tiefe, auf die gesamte Sujet-Bandbreite, und mir dabei gleichzeitig den Teppich

d’opinions et d’images préfabriquées qui s’entrechoquent, se juxtaposent et superposent dans un bourdonnement incessant. Ce qui m’a intéressé dans ce contexte, c’est de ne pas seulement accepter ce fait de manière simplement passive, mais de laisser délibérément les choses s’entrechoquer entre elles, de les laisser à leur place les unes à côté des autres, même si ou précisément parce que leur rapport est tellement évident. Dans mon livre, il y a par exemple une double page où l’on aperçoit quelque chose qui ressemble d’abord à un mouton avant que l’ombre portée de ce quelque chose montre qu’il s’agit en réalité de deux moutons. À côté, il y a l’image d’une hutte sur une plage de Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée, cliché type de l’île paradisiaque, mais qui est en réalité le logement d’une famille, et puis la photo d’une bijouterie DeBeers, avec une limousine devant, qui a été prise dans la Cinquième Avenue à New York. En fait, ces oppositions sont bien trop éclatantes. Mais cela m’intéresse de pouvoir le supporter, car d’une certaine manière, c’est bien là l’étendue du spectre: jusqu’où va-t-on aller ? que peut-on supporter ? Je peux résister à l’impulsion de juger et de condamner ce que ces oppositions suscitent en moi ; aujourd’hui, je peux laisser les choses à leur place.

BR En fait, il s’agit d’une réalité modifiée et aussi que la simultanéité permet de faire d’autres expériences.

WT Aujourd’hui, notre réalité vécue est définie par la simultanéité et la disponibilité de toutes choses. La didactique de l’index pointé disparaît: il y a là des pauvres et des riches et donc ...

BR ... et de même l’authentique et ce qui ne l’est peut-être plus. Qu’est-ce que cela signifie quand tu te réfères simultanément à ces trois images sans activer tout de suite les clichés de tes critères appris ou constitués d’une manière ou d’une autre ? En voyant pour la première fois ces œuvres, j’ai eu le net sentiment qu’il s’agissait aussi d’une évacuation – pas d’une évacuation des images, mais des clichés et des stéréotypes auxquels nous avons l’habitude de faire appel pour aborder tous ces aspects.

WT Fondamentalement, les œuvres d’art n’ont une âme et ne sont spéciales que quand un ensemble de critères spécifique existe en l’artiste. J’ai resenti comme un défi extrême, et ce jusqu’à l’angoisse, de désapprendre la photographie, de renoncer consciemment aux critères éprouvés et d’élargir mon approche à l’extrême: au monde entier, à toute la profondeur des pixels et de l’information, à toute la palette des sujets, tout en me privant des ressources de

a tree, but one for which I also didn’t create the depicted object.

BR A self-depiction of the process?

WT This is fundamentally something mineral, a piece of nature, genuine matter, a changing environment. Residues of every kind—dirt, remains, and scratches—are unavoidable, basic and intermediate states in nature. Even in the photo emulsion, I view color in exactly the same way—as a natural phenomenon. Placed in connection with the subject, this “natural autonomy” development of the *Silver* pictures’ material perhaps transforms thinking and perceiving in the sense of a new subjectivity. Actually, here in the book, one always confronts a representational picture as though the main concern is likewise a kind of reflecting on reality. At the same time, one could view the *Silver* works as a farewell to the organic-chemical nature of photography.

BR In books, you have recently begun to layer photographs onto the pages.

WT The first time I did that was last year, in the catalog of the exhibition in the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw. One naturally lessens the “preciousness” of the individual picture and uses it as pure image material. But we should also have confidence in the picture as simply an excerpt in a new relationship to other pictures, as able to be something entirely new. On the one hand, this might create an image from the simultaneity of pictures I sense. But, most of all, I believe this addresses an interest in new developments, in the question: “How does one arrive at new pictures?” In some cases, I see these compositions and pages created from layering as new, individual works.

BR For example, you have three technological pictures, headlights, and technical spaces overlap on the back cover. It looks as if cutting took place, but the pictures are no longer the classical, cut-out fragments of a collage technique, but rather layered images and visual simultaneities. Then double-pages like these appear in the book: the photograph of an extremely intricate concrete mixer truck beside the page showing the interior of the driver’s cabin of a bus, where images in the reinforced rearview mirror, television images above it, and the view outside layer the composition; or the image of the young man on the telephone, with the layered photograph of a copying machine behind it, and which you juxtapose with a hotel

meines sozialen Umfeldes weggezogen. Dazu kommt eine stark erhöhte Zahl an Bildern, die ungefähr dreimal so hoch wie das ist, was ich sonst mit Film fotografiert hätte ...

BR Das heißt, du musstest auch aus viel mehr Bildern auswählen ...

WT Genau. Ich glaube, dass es im Bilderkonsum sowieso eine Grenze gibt. Bücher mit tausend Seiten interessieren mich nicht. „Viel“ hat mich eigentlich nie interessiert. Obwohl ich immer sehr produktiv war, habe ich pro Jahr eigentlich nur dreißig bis vierzig Kamerabilder wirklich als Werke herausgegeben, als Betrachter kann man auch gar nicht viel mehr verdauen.

BR Bei deinen abstrakten Arbeiten, den Studioarbeiten, gibt es eine Entwicklung von den *Freischwimmer*- hin zu den *Silver*-Arbeiten, die mit einer materialbedingten Komposition zu tun haben. Die *Freischwimmer* wolltest du nicht mit den „Reise“-Bildern zusammenbringen, die neueren *Silver*-Arbeiten aber schon ...

WT ... weil die *Freischwimmer* viel stärker Absicht und Wunsch mit Unkontrollierbarem verbinden. Letzten Endes handelt es sich hier um Spuren und Kompositionen, die ich manuell aktiv ins Bild bringe. Bei den *Silver*-Arbeiten sind dagegen meine Hände nur noch insofern im Spiel, als ich manche Blätter mit farbigem homogenem Licht belichte. Das Bildgebungsverfahren ist aber rein mechanisch der Eigenlogik des Materials unterworfen. Das unentwickelte Fotopapier, manchmal belichtet, manchmal unbelichtet, wird durch eine Entwicklungsmaschine geschickt, die ich je nach Intuition und Absicht in verschiedenen Stadien der Verschmutzung oder Reinigung belassen habe. Aufgrund der Restchemikalien, die sich in der leeren, nur mit Wasser gefüllten Maschine befinden, entwickelt sich das Fotopapier partiell noch weiter, andererseits lagern sich auf dessen Oberfläche die in den Restchemikalien enthaltenen Schmutz- und Silberpartikel ab. Auf diese Weise entstehen auch oft interessante Kratzer. Das Resultat ist im Grunde genauso ein Stück Realität wie das Foto von einem Baum, bei dem ich auch nicht den zentralen Bildgegenstand geschaffen habe.

BR Eine Selbstabbildung des Prozesses?

WT Es ist im Grunde etwas Mineralisches, ein Stück Natur, reale materielle, sich verändernde Umwelt. Ablagerungen aller Art, Schmutz, Reste, Kratzer, sind ja unvermeidliche Grund- und

mon environnement social. À cela s’ajoute un nombre de photos accru qui représente un volume à peu près trois fois plus important que ce que j’aurais photographié avec un appareil argentique.

BR C’est-à-dire qu’il t’a aussi fallu choisir entre un plus grand nombre de photographies ...

WT Tout à fait. De toute façon, je crois que la consommation d’images a ses limites. Les livres de mille pages ne m’intéressent pas. En fait, « beaucoup » ne m’a jamais intéressé. Même si j’ai toujours été très productif, je n’exploite pleinement que trente, quarante photographies en tant qu’œuvres d’art par an – en tant que spectateur, on ne peut d’ailleurs en digérer beaucoup plus.

BR Dans tes œuvres abstraites, les œuvres d’atelier, il existe aussi une évolution qui va des séries *Freischwimmer* aux *Silver*, qui concernent une composition liée au matériau. La série *Freischwimmer*, tu n’as pas voulu la rapprocher des photos « de voyage », alors que *Silver*, plus récente, oui ...

WT ... parce que dans *Freischwimmer*, l’intention et le souhait sont beaucoup plus fortement liés à l’incontrôlable. En définitive, il s’agit de traces et de compositions que je fais entrer dans l’image manuellement et de manière active. Dans les œuvres de la série *Silver* en revanche, mon intervention manuelle se borne à exposer certaines feuilles à une lumière homogène, le procédé de fabrication de l’image étant soumis de façon purement mécanique à la logique propre du matériau. Le papier photographique non développé, parfois exposé, parfois non, est envoyé dans une développeuse que j’ai laissée dans différents états de salissure ou de nettoyage au gré de l’intuition. Du fait des produits chimiques résiduels présents dans la développeuse vide seulement remplie d’eau, le papier photographique continue de se développer partiellement, cependant que des particules de saleté ou argentiques contenues dans les produits chimiques résiduels se déposent à sa surface. Souvent, il en résulte aussi des rayures intéressantes. Au fond, le résultat est tout autant un morceau de réalité que la photo d’un arbre, pour laquelle je n’ai pas non plus créé le sujet central.

BR Une autoreprésentation du processus?

WT Au fond, il y a là quelque chose de minéral, un morceau de nature, d’environnement réel, matériel, qui se modifie. Les dépôts de toutes sortes – saleté, résidus, rayures – sont en effet des

window's view of a city—but superimposed on the view is the reflection on the window's inside surface ... Can you say more about these layered images and overlaps? They not only seem to demonstrate your special perception, but also a transition of this simultaneity to a picture.

WT These layered images, the impure, the contaminated, and that which isn't compatible but which functions just the same, were present in my work from the start. This not only happens in the pictures, but has always been a central aspect of my installations. Books, too, if you turn the pages rapidly, have this simultaneity. As a result, a new formation of something that was there all along is currently in my work. Now my perception of the world has found this form.

Zwischenzustände in der Natur. Genauso sehe ich Farbe, auch in der Fotoemulsion, als ein Naturphänomen an. Setzt man das in einen Bezug zum Subjekt, transformiert diese „natürliche“, „autonome“ Entwicklung des Materials der *Silver*-Bilder vielleicht das Denken und die Wahrnehmung im Sinne einer neuen Idee von Subjektivität.

Hier im Buch stehen sie eigentlich immer einem gegenständlichen Bild gegenüber, so als handelte es sich ebenfalls um eine Art Realitätsbetrachtung. Zugleich kann man die *Silver*-Arbeiten auch als Abgesang auf die organisch-chemische Natur der Fotografie ansehen.

BR Vor kurzem hast du begonnen, in Büchern Fotografien auf den Seiten zu überlagern.

WT Das habe ich das erste Mal letztes Jahr im Katalog zur Ausstellung in der Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warschau gemacht. Man setzt so natürlich die „Kostbarkeit“ des Einzelbildes aus, benutzt es als reines Bild-Material. Man muss darauf vertrauen, dass es als bloßer Ausschnitt im Verhältnis zu anderen Bildern vielleicht etwas Neues sein kann. Einerseits entsteht so vielleicht ein Bild von dieser Gleichzeitigkeit der Bilder, die ich empfinde, aber es ist, glaube ich, vor allem auch ein Interesse an Neuentwicklungen, an der Frage: Wie kommt man zu neuen Bildern? Die aus den Überlagerungen entstehenden Kompositionen und Seiten werden von mir teilweise schon als neue Einzelwerke gesehen.

BR Zum Beispiel überlagerst du auf der Coverrückseite drei technologische Bilder, Scheinwerfer und Technikräume. Das sieht so aus, als ob da Schnitte stattgefunden hätten, obwohl diese Bilder gerade nicht mehr wie in der klassischen Collagetechnik ausgeschnittene Fragmente sind, sondern Überlagerungen und Gleichzeitigkeiten von Bildern. Dann gibt es im Buch Doppelseiten wie diese: Dem Foto eines unendlich kompliziert verschachtelten Betonmischlastwagens steht die Innenansicht einer Fahrerkabine in einem Bus gegenüber, in der sich Bilder im Rückspiegel mit Blenden, Fernsehbildern und der Außenansicht verschachteln; oder aber der junge Mann am Telefon, dessen Bild ein Foto von einem Kopierer überlagert und das du einem Blick aus dem Hotelzimmer auf die Stadt gegenüberstellst – der Blick auf die Stadt ist aber mit der Reflexion auf der Innenseite des Fensters überlagert ... Kannst du mehr über dieses Überlagern und Verschachteln sagen? Darin scheint sich nicht nur deine sehr spezielle

états fondamentaux et intermédiaires inévitables dans la nature. C'est exactement la manière dont je vois la couleur, même dans l'émulsion photographique : un phénomène naturel. Quand on met cela en relation avec le sujet, cette évolution « naturelle », « autonome » du matériau des œuvres de la série *Silver* transforme peut-être la pensée et la perception au sens d'une nouvelle idée de la subjectivité. Dans le livre, elles sont en fait toujours mises en regard d'une photographie figurative, comme s'il s'agissait également d'une sorte de regard porté sur la réalité. En même temps, on peut considérer les œuvres de la série *Silver* comme un chant du cygne à la nature organico-chimique de la photographie.

BR Récemment, dans des livres, tu as commencé à superposer des photographies à l'intérieur d'une même page.

WT J'ai fait ça la première fois l'année dernière pour le catalogue de l'exposition à la Zachęta National Gallery of Art à Varsovie. L'on se défait ainsi du caractère « précieux » de l'image unique, qui est utilisée comme un pur matériau visuel. Il faut avoir confiance dans le fait qu'en tant que simple fragment, dans un nouveau rapport avec d'autres images, elle peut devenir quelque chose de nouveau. Il en résulte peut-être une image de la simultanéité des images, telle que je la ressens, mais je crois que c'est aussi et surtout un intérêt pour de nouvelles évolutions, pour la question : « Comment parvient-on à des images nouvelles ? » Les compositions et les pages qui résultent de superpositions, je les considère en partie déjà comme des œuvres à part entière.

BR En quatrième de couverture par exemple, tu superposes trois images technologiques, des phares et des espaces techniques. Tout se passe comme s'il y avait eu des découpages, bien que ces images ne soient justement plus des fragments découpés comme dans la technique classique du collage, mais des superpositions et des simultanésités d'images. Et dans le livre, il y a des doubles pages comme celle où la photo de la bétonnière extraordinairement complexe est placée en regard de la vue intérieure d'une cabine de conducteur de bus, dans laquelle l'image reflétée dans le rétroviseur s'imbrique avec un pare-soleil, des images télévisées et la vue extérieure, ou encore le jeune homme au téléphone dont l'image se superpose à la photo d'un photocopieur, et que tu mets en regard de la vue sur la ville d'une chambre d'hôtel – mais à la vue de la ville se superpose le reflet de la face intérieure de la fenêtre ... Peux-tu en dire un peu plus sur cette superposition et cette imbrication. Il ne semble

Wahrnehmung zu zeigen, sondern eben auch eine Umsetzung dieser Gleichzeitigkeit ins Bild.

WT Diese Überlagerungen, das Unpure, das Kontaminierte, das, was nicht zusammenpasst, aber trotzdem funktioniert, war in meiner Arbeit von Anfang an enthalten. Das findet nicht nur in den Bildern statt, sondern ist immer schon zentraler Aspekt meiner Installationen. Auch Bücher, wenn man schnell blättert, haben diese Gleichzeitigkeit. Von daher ist das in meinem Werk jetzt eine neue Ausformung von etwas, das eigentlich schon immer da war. Meine Weltwahrnehmung hat jetzt diese Form gefunden.

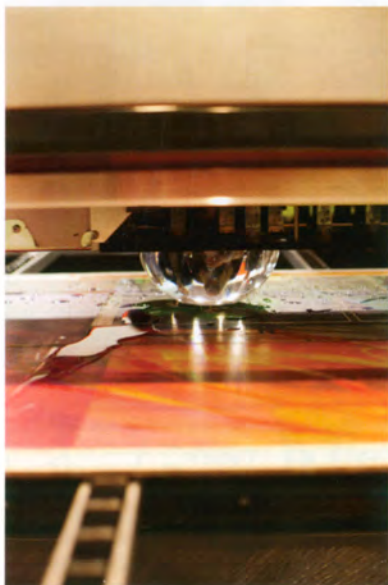
pas seulement s'y montrer ta perception très particulière, mais aussi, précisément, une traduction de cette simultanéité dans l'image.

WT Ces superpositions, l'impur, le contaminé, ce qui n'est pas fait pour aller ensemble, mais qui fonctionne quand même, a été présent depuis toujours dans mon travail. Cela ne se passe pas seulement dans les photographies, mais est déjà un aspect central de toutes mes installations. Les livres aussi, quand on les feuillette rapidement, ont cette simultanéité. Dans mon travail, il s'agit donc d'une nouvelle déclinaison formelle de quelque chose qui a en fait toujours été là. Ma perception du monde a désormais trouvé cette forme.



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
(Walther König, 2012).





Wolfgang Tillmans, *Headlight (a)*,
2012, ink-jet print on paper,
10' 6" x 7' 6"; digital C print,
16 x 12"; digital C print,
24 x 20"; digital C print in
artist frame, 83 1/8 x 57"

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, *Freischwimmer 151*, 2010, ink-jet print on paper, 12' 5" x 16' 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 proportion 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: How 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, *Lutz & Alex sitting in the trees*, 1992, ink-jet print on paper, 63 x 47 1/4".
Installation view, Maureen Paley/Interim Art stand at Unfair, Cologne.





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

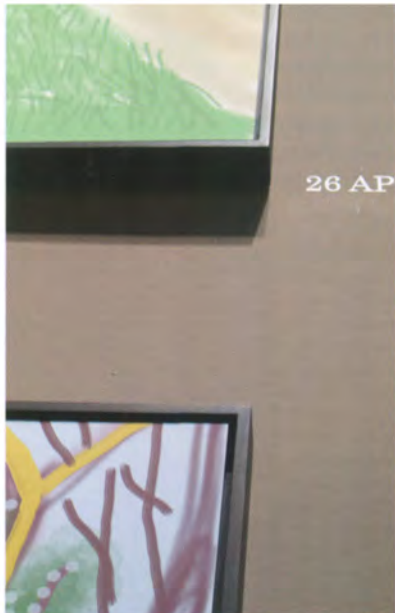
and a certificate, instructing the owner how to reprint the picture when the first copy faded. While this was a practical solution, it also afforded viewers the opportunity to break down certain barriers of materiality—attaining a paradoxical permanence even as attachment to the "original" print was 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



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Onion*, 2010.
ink-jet print on paper, 81 1/4 x 54 1/4".



Details of various contemporary artworks made using ink-jet printing. Photos: Wolfgang Tillmans.



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 editioning, 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 *media* 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 those 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 HD information density. But random noise still happens in digital photography, in which a photo 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 or an ad agency or a graphic designer—as subject 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 also 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 democracy 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 everything 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—of the picture on the screen. But this portends a homogenization of vision even as it suggests new possibilities for imaging.

WT: It's mind-boggling. Digital has created 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 way of seeing, of working. In the past I had always said that 35-mm film was exactly right for my photography because I want 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.

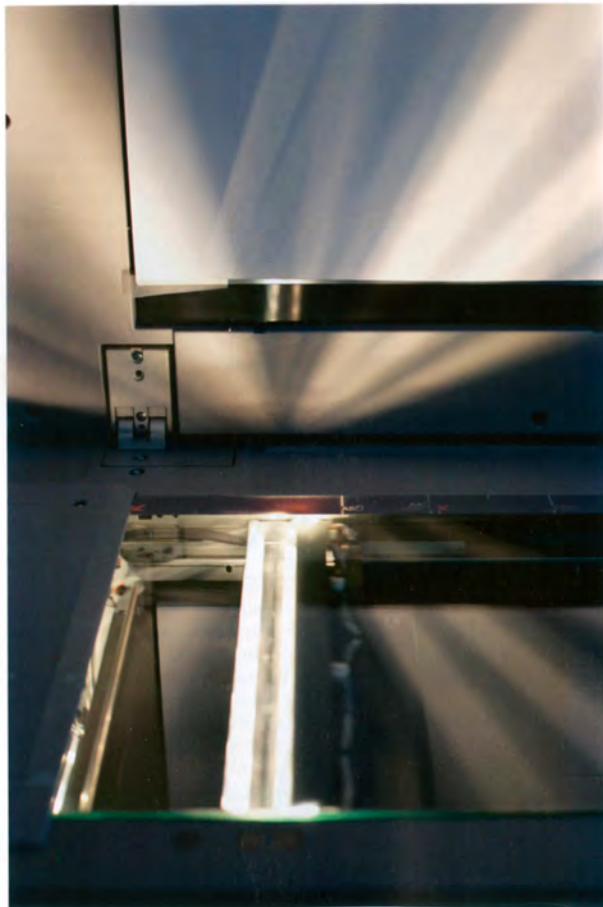
Now I have suddenly found myself with a small SLR [single-lens reflex] camera that has the sharpness



Wolfgang Tillmans.
Tukan, 2010, ink-
jet print on paper,
81 1/4 x 54 1/2";
digital C-print,
16 x 12"; C-print,
24 x 20"; digital
C-print in artist
frame, 83 1/4 x 57".

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.

Wolfgang Tillmans, *Kopierer* (e), 2010, ink-jet print on paper, 81 1/4 x 54 3/4"; digital C-print, 16 x 12"; digital C-print, 24 x 20"; digital C-print in artist frame, 83 1/4 x 57".



Wolfgang Tillmans, *in flight astro* (ii), 2010, ink-jet print on paper, 81 1/4 x 54 3/4"; ink-jet print on paper, 19 x 13"; digital C-print in artist frame, 83 1/4 x 57".

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 supersharper 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

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.

MK: 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.

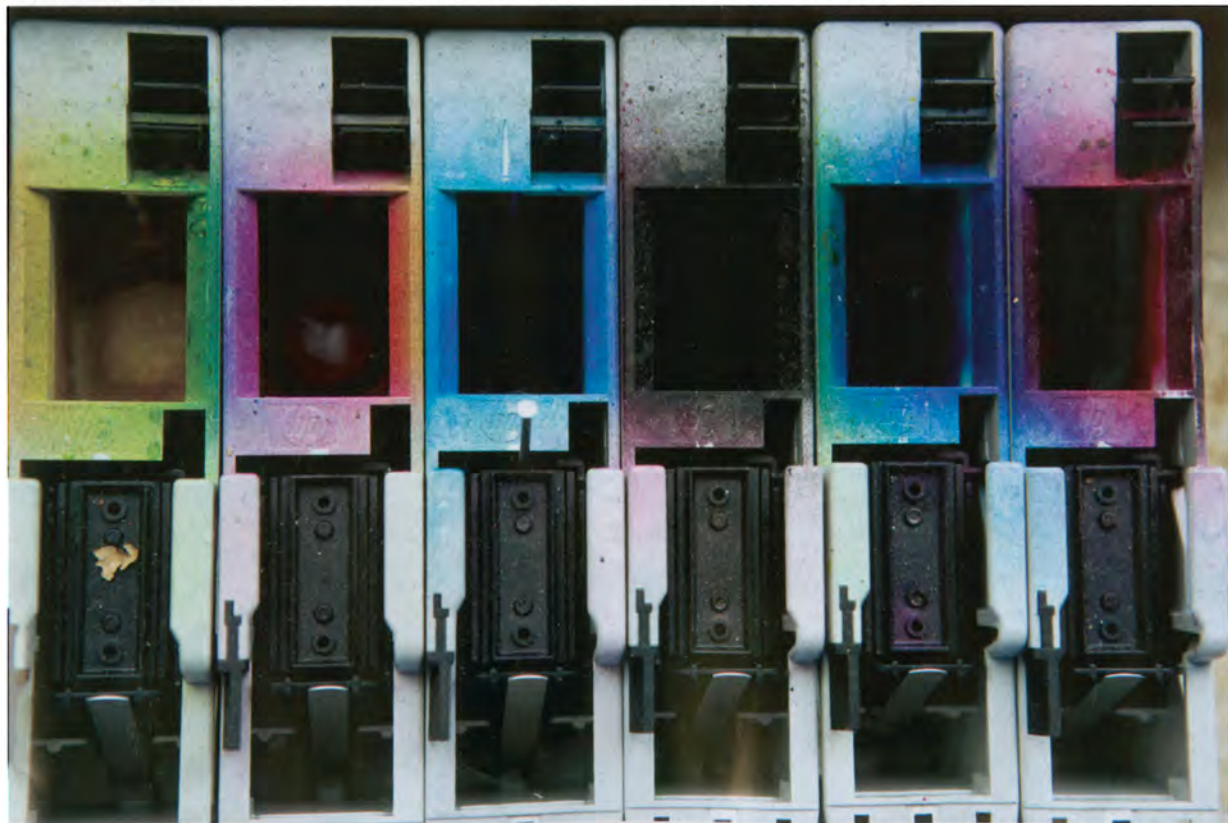
It seems that, on the one hand, the “pictures” you speak of deal very much with this territory—the realm of desire, psychology, consumption (those lurid images at the digital-printing trade fair!). But on the other hand, the universe of pictures you are talking

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 Ink*, 2008, ink-jet print on paper, 54 x 81 1/4"; digital C-print, 12 x 16"; digital C-print, 20 x 24"; digital C-print in artist frame, 57 x 83 1/4".



This PDF is part of the catalogue of the exhibition *Wolfgang Tillmans*.
Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 06.10.2012 – 20.01.2013
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 02.03.2013 – 07.07.2013

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The Unforeseen.

On the Production of the New, and Other Movements in the Work of Wolfgang Tillmans

Prelude: How a visitor may be led

Warsaw, January 2012. Ascending the majestic staircase of the classicist art palace built between 1890 and 1900 for the Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych, the then Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts, and now home to the Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, Poland's National Gallery, I make my way up to Wolfgang Tillmans' exhibition *Zachęta. Ermutigung (Zachęta. Encouragement)*. En route I see large paper-drop pictures hanging in niches that must originally have been intended for paintings. These close-ups of sheets of curling, curving photographic paper with shimmering and gleaming polychrome surfaces are unframed, held in position by the foldback clips that Tillmans uses to present his works on paper. With the three-dimensionality of the images and the three-dimensionality of the physical objects, the paper-drop pictures perform a dance of gravity, materials, reflections and shadows. They show what they are, even if not completely. For the difference between the materiality of the photographic paper 'in' the pictures and the archival sheets exhibited here (207 × 138 centimetres) that have absorbed the ink-jet prints, prevents any over-hasty identification.

The brilliant white of the walls of this grand stairwell, the stage for real and imaginary art societies, forms a backdrop against which the white backgrounds of the paper-drop scenarios stand out discretely yet distinctly. Thus the opaque white of a classicist art ideal turned white cube contrasts with the white of an artistic project that is not beholden to any notion of an ideal white but that does nevertheless engage with an endless number of photographically producible white tones, with the grey tinges and marginal hues of a white that is never pure, that is always mixed, mingled, mashed.

On the landing I turn to the right to continue my tour of the exhibition. I enter the first room, an airy gallery with a glass ceiling that indirectly allows daylight into the space. The pale parquet floor is empty – as opposed to the walls, which are loosely covered with works in all sorts of formats, some crowded together, some spaced far apart. That this part of the exhibition alone contains fifty-three pictures only dawns on me later on. For the abundance of exhibits is not overwhelming – if anything it evaporates, evanesces, ephemeralises into the lightsome heights of the gallery, albeit not without forming hotspots, concentrated items and arrangements that require our concentration – combinations, groups, where gazes, gestures, lines, planes interact, where rhythms and chords arise and where the distinction between form and content is consistently rendered inoperative.

I look straight ahead and see, on the wall facing me, two large, blue-black ink-jet prints from the *Freischwimmer* series, placed symmetrically side by side, at exactly the same height. Since it is impossible to miss this diptych from the entrance to the room, it sets the tone, establishing a benchmark for this display. The movements within the image in the left-hand *Freischwimmer* (187, 2011) run vertically; the dark, fibrous threads or cloud formations plunge downwards, or maybe stand up, whereas the right-hand picture (176, 2011) appears overall lighter and undulating, with dark hair tentacles flowing horizontally.

The two *Freischwimmer* pictures are flanked on the same wall, at a respectable distance, by two smaller-format C-prints. On the far left is *Genom* (2002) and on the far right *Nonkosi* (2008): enlarged black-and-white photographs (printed on colour photo paper) of a still life with socks scattered on the wooden floor of a corridor in a domestic interior, and a half-length portrait of a woman against a black background; leaning on her arms with her head turned towards the camera, she is wearing a red T-shirt with a logo that reads 'HIV POSITIVE'.

Together with the *Freischwimmer* images these two pictures connect in their difference. The title – *Genom* – takes the pattern of socks (whose shapes resemble the scientific symbols for chromosomes used in images of genomes) and turns it into a still life of molecular-biological data – or into a message, written in a reified foreign language that is to be deciphered in some other way. Meanwhile the portrait of Nonkosi Khumalo, Chairperson of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa, reflects Tillmans' commitment to education on AIDS and the development of treatment methods. This is also seen in his photographs for a publication documenting a meeting of AIDS activists in Cape Town in 2006; the publication was produced jointly by Tillmans, TAC and HIV i-Base. He also took up the thread of activism around issues of medical and sexual politics in other parts of the Warsaw exhibition, such as in a series of display tables in the adjacent room, where he focused on issues surrounding homophobia, transgenderism and sexual politics, as a critical challenge to the reactionary sexual morals of Polish officialdom and as a gesture of solidarity with the country's sexual opposition.

Parallelism – Subjectivism – Objectivism

This all means that the decorative unity of wall and image, which the hanging of the *Freischwimmer* initially promises, is not only thwarted by the shift in dimensions, the infringement of symmetrical order and the (supposed) discontinuity of abstraction and figuration, and by the fact that the different types of image and their configuration on this wall require the viewer to move around in the space and to continually readjust his or her gaze, bearing in mind that in the corner of one's eye or following a slight turn of the body more pictures are constantly looming into view, mostly unframed, very small (postcard-sized), very large, hung very low down, but also very high up, portraits and still lifes, gestural abstractions, a close-up of a vagina, a picture of a modern *Boy with Thorn*, street scenes, an air-conditioning system. It also means that the pictures communicate with each other in a way that is not bound to the pattern of a closed narrative or any particular line of argument. Instead they create a form of aesthetic and thematic interaction that Tillmans sees as 'a language of personal associations and "thought-maps"',¹ as '... a pattern of parallelism as opposed to one linear stream of thought',² and which the critic Jan Verwoert has aptly described as a 'performative experiment with the viewer.'³

With all their variability and flexibility – underpinned by an invisible rectilinear grid yet fundamentally open in their interconnections – these installations serve Tillmans as reflections of his own way of perceiving the world, as externalizations of his thinking and feeling, and as a chance to fashion a utopian world according to his own ideas and fantasies.⁴ However, this Romantic subjectivism of self-expression or externalization has to be seen in light of a radical objectivism (Tillmans attaches great importance to this) that specifically draws attention not only to the expressive potential arising from the ageing process, from evidence of wear and other precariousnesses in the materials of photography (paper, camera techniques, chemicals, developing equipment etc.) but also to the remarkable resistance and persistence of these same materials.

1 'Peter Halley in Conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans', in Jan Verwoert, Peter Halley and Midori Matsui, *Wolfgang Tillmans* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 8–33 at 29.

2 Steve Slocombe, 'Wolfgang Tillmans – The All-Seeing Eye', in *Flash Art*, vol. 32, no. 209, November–December 1999, 92–95 at 95.

3 Jan Verwoert, 'Survey: Picture Possible Lives: The Work of Wolfgang Tillmans', in Verwoert et. al., *Wolfgang Tillmans*, 36–89 at 72.

4 See Slocombe, 'Wolfgang Tillmans – The All-Seeing Eye' (see note 2), 95.

Amongst the phenomena that inform this objectivism there are those instances of loss of control that can arise during the mechanical production processes of analogue photography or from coding errors, glitches, in digital images. Temporality, finity, brevity come into play here – a certain melancholy that activates rather than paralyses.

Over the years Tillmans has constantly found new ways to explore, to interpret and to stage this dialectic of intention and contingency. His repertoire and means of aesthetic production have multiplied. And this expansion has not been without consequences for the presentation of his work. Tillmans himself feels that the character of his installations has changed since 2006/07, in other words, when different versions of a solo exhibition of his work toured to three museums in the United States. It was during this exhibition tour that Tillmans started to see the benefit of placing greater weight on individual groups of works in the various rooms of larger exhibitions. In so doing he gave visitors the chance to engage in a different kind of concentration, without the pressure of constantly having to deal with the ‘full spectrum’ (Tillmans) of his oeuvre.⁵

The *Freischwimmer*, which Tillmans started to produce in the early 2000s, form a group or family of images that are not made using a camera lens. As the results of gestural and chemical operations in the dark room, these originals on medium-sized photo paper, which are subsequently scanned and enlarged both as ink-jet prints and as light-jet prints on photo paper, are unrepeatable one-offs. It has been said that these images, which include ensembles such as *Peaches*, *Blushes* and *Urgency*, call to mind microscopically detailed images of biological processes, hirsute epidermises, highly erogenous zones, and that their aura fills the whole space – above all when they are presented in such large formats as in Warsaw or yet larger still, as in the case of the two monumental *Ostgut Freischwimmer* (2004) that used to grace the walls of the Panorama Bar at Berghain in Berlin. The *Freischwimmer* and their kin can be read as diagrams of sexualised atmospheres in private or semi-public spaces, in boudoirs or clubs, as highly non-representational images that both suspend and supplement conventional depictions of sex.

Value Theory, Value Praxis

The Warsaw *Freischwimmer* diptych also invites analogies, a biomorphising and anthropomorphising gaze, where the atmosphere of the ‘museum’ context of course has its own agenda and suggests different points of interest, raises different expectations, prompts different modes of behaviour to those that would apply in a club or private apartment. The tendency to receive works in terms of their figurative rather than their defiguring qualities can be explained in terms of cognition theory and the psychology of perception; it can be attributed to the activities of the ‘brain-association tool’ that Tillmans himself holds responsible for our perceptive faculties’ urge to identify forms.⁶ For the picture-object itself does not provide any evidence for these interpretations. In the exhibit we see a more or less random conglomeration and distribution of colour particles in and on the fibres of a chemically reactive sheet of paper that was fixed with clips and nails, unframed, to the wall of an exhibition space in Warsaw in late 2011. But, by definition, for the culturally and aesthetically predisposed visitors to a museum, it is impossible to exclusively concentrate on this empirical reality. No-one is so naïve – least of all Wolfgang Tillmans – to imagine that political-economic conditions and symbolic contexts

5 See Julia Peyton-Jones and Hans Ulrich Obrist, ‘Interview with Wolfgang Tillmans’, in *Wolfgang Tillmans* (London: Serpentine Gallery/Koenig Books, 2010), 21–27 at 24.

6 See Pirkko Vekki, ‘Wolfgang Tillmans, sukupolvensa silmä’, in *Gloria Syyskuu*, 2006, 64–67 (quoted by Dominic Eichler, ‘Thinking Pictures’, in *Wolfgang Tillmans Abstract Pictures* [Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011], 7–12 at 9).

are not constitutive to the perception and the generation of meaning in works of art. Both the institutional backdrop of art and each individual art institution in which Tillmans' works are exhibited contribute to the institutionalisation of the artist and to the construction of specific modes of perception.

The visitor to an exhibition of the work of Wolfgang Tillmans in the year 2012, in this case the author of these lines, arrives in expectation of a particular, clearly defined type of art and image experience. A sense (however fragmentary) of the artist's past exhibitions and publications is always present in any encounter with his work. And this includes the need to see the 'abstract pictures' in the context of an oeuvre where realistic and abstract elements have never intentionally been separated from each other. On the contrary, abstraction is always co-present with figurative and representational elements. There is no contradiction between forms and matter free of meaning – that is to say, visual moments that on the face of it neither represent nor illustrate anything – and Tillmans' photographs of people, animals, objects and landscapes; in fact there is an unbroken connection, a continuum. This applies both to individual images as much as to the internal, dynamic relationalism of his oeuvre as a whole. And it also applies to each individual, concrete manifestation of multiplicity, as in the case of the installation in the first room of the exhibition in Warsaw.

Both aesthetic theory and the institution of art itself provide decisive grounds for discussing photography and visual art in such a way that images are not solely considered in terms of documentary functions or ornamental aspects nor are they reduced to the question as to whether their contents are stage-managed or authentic, but that attention is paid instead to the material nature of the pictures and objects in the space, to their sculptural qualities. Having decided early on against a career as a commercial photographer and in favour of a life in art, there was no need for Tillmans to seek to justify the interest he had already felt in his youth in a non-hierarchical, queer approach to various forms and genres in the visual arts. For the young Wolfgang Tillmans the cover artwork for a New Order LP, a portrait of Barbara Klemm (in-house photographer at the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*), or a screenprint collage of Robert Rauschenberg in Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen were all 'equally important' images.⁷ The mobilisation and reversal of value and meaning are central strategies in his praxis. He questions the 'language of importance'⁸ in photography and alters valencies of the visual by, for instance – in a 'transformation of value'⁹ – producing C-prints from the supposedly impoverished or inadequate visuality of old black-and-white copies or wrongly developed images and thus raising them to the status of museum art. However much he may set store by refinement and precision, he avoids conventional forms of presentation, that is to say, 'the signifiers that give immediate value to something, such as the picture frame'.¹⁰

In November 2000 the London fashion and lifestyle magazine *i-D*, for which Tillmans himself regularly worked from 1992 to 1995, published a long feature on Tillmans by Kodwo Eshun. Looking back at the early and mid-1990s, Eshun wrote that 'to see a Tillmans image then was to experience the immediate thrill of short-circuited hierarchies, of worlds

7 Wolfgang Tillmans, email of 12 May 2012.

8 Julie Ault, 'Das Thema lautet Ausstellen (2008) Installations as Possibility in the Practice of Wolfgang Tillmans', in *Wolfgang Tillmans. Lighter* (Stuttgart/Berlin: Hatje Cantz/SMB), Nationalgalerie Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2008, 27.

9 See Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Wolfgang Tillmans* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007 = *The Conversation Series*, 6), 41.

10 Gil Blank, 'The Portraiture of Wolfgang Tillmans', in *Influence*, 2, autumn 2004, 110–21 at 117.

connected, of moments, desires, moods that had never been elevated and valued before.¹¹ That this form of photographic seeing – with the intention of doing away with existing cultural classifications – was bound to meet with resistance was already known to others before Tillmans. The bureaucratic discipline that separates the domains of different modes of expression and perception in order to maintain a social order, in which access to aesthetic experiences is just as rigorously controlled as mobility within the given class system, has repeatedly provoked contraventions of its rules. After all, the history of Modernism and Postmodernism in art is above all shaped by the progressive opening-up and expansion of audio-visual vocabularies and the ongoing integration into art of allegedly non-artistic forms of expression and perception.

But these tendencies towards greater openness and integration are far from random in terms of either history or geography; their importance and their impact arise from the discursive and aesthetic conditions in a particular place at a particular time. The cultural situation in London or Cologne around 1992 was very different to artistic life in Berlin or New York in 2012. Historic events such as the German reunification, the wars in former Yugoslavia and Iraq, September 11th 2001, the financial crisis and Fukushima have led to this difference, as have the paradigm shifts in aesthetic praxis and theory (documentary turn, educational turn, ethical turn etc.), the deterritorialisation of the field of contemporary art in the wake of globalisation, and the ever-deepening divide between art-market art, biennial art and alternative-dissident practices without institutional ties. And then there is the ubiquitous and no doubt irreversible digitalisation of photographic techniques, from camera technology to online distribution and presentation methods, which has fundamentally changed the basic conditions of photographic discourse and has obliged practitioners to seek out new concepts and strategies.

Tillmans' own 'value transfers' are thus not idiosyncratic whims. On the contrary, they are responses to the transformation of visual culture in both local and translocal contexts, to conservative and progressive tendencies, to technical innovations and the obsolescence of media – within but above all outside the system of the visual arts. Driven by subjective interests and passions, his work is marked out by the increasingly complex typology of his groups and series, and by the dynamic, recombinable repertoire of his presentation methods and technical procedures. And, as such, it addresses not only the status of the photographic image but also the limits of art itself.

Conditions: Subject – Work – Mediation

If we take the line proposed by the philosopher Jacques Rancière, then the 'aesthetic regime' of the modern era, which – following the introduction of a modern concept of art and aesthetics – abandoned the regulatory aesthetic canon of the classical age in the nineteenth century, is distinguished by the fact that under its auspices the traditional hierarchies separating the high from the popular branches of narration and visualisation were problematised and reconfigured in such a way that a new politics of aesthetics and a 'distribution of the sensible' in the name of art ensued. Rancière has recently proposed the term 'aisthesis' for the way in which very different things have been registered as 'art' for the last two hundred years or so. As he points out, this is not about the 'reception' of works of art, but about the sensory experiential backdrop against and within which they come about. 'These are completely material conditions – places of performance or exhibition, forms of circulation and reproduction – but also modes of perception and the regimes of emotion, the categories that identify them and the patterns of

11 Kodwo Eshun, 'Under the Flightpath', in *i-D*, no. 203, November 2000, 104–16 at 107.

thought that classify and interpret them.¹²

In order to understand why the work of Wolfgang Tillmans – so seemingly casual, so heterogeneous and so wide-ranging – is not only extremely successful, but has, for over twenty years, been intelligible and influential both within and outside the field of art, with the result that by now his praxis seems like a universal, subtly normative style of perception and image-making, it is essential to consider the ‘conditions’ alluded to by Rancière. For these are fundamental to the specific visibility and speakability of this œuvre and to its legitimacy as art.

In view of the task implied by Rancière’s concept of ‘conditions’, it is advisable to reflect not only on the artist and the relationalities of his work but also on one’s own position and relation as critic, art analyst, mediator, interlocutor, theorist and observer of this work. For how does one establish what might be called a relationship to artistic work – and how can this relationship be formed and changed? The most obvious way, in the context of a publication being produced to accompany a major overview exhibition, is to work one’s way through the categories associated with the work. The institutional configurations and infrastructures that connect the artist, the critic, the museum, the marketplace and the format ‘survey exhibition’ determine questions as to the unity or heterogeneity of an artist’s production, for in this web of interconnections every exhibition, every publication, every text reproduces and reconstitutes the work.

That I am writing, as the author of this essay, on the work of Wolfgang Tillmans, is the outcome of a whole series of material and epistemological circumstances. By that I am referring less to the anecdotal level of acquaintanceship and a partly shared history¹³ than to the constantly startling (although, or maybe because, it is so natural) and disturbing fact that any encounter with an artist’s ‘work’ is also experienced (and is lived out) as an encounter with another person. The economy of the art market – with its dependence on originality, authorship and uniqueness – is structurally at the mercy of the signature of the individual artist. That this very singular market is so personalised goes back to all sorts of aesthetic, art historical and sociological manifestations of artistry, creativity and the artistic genius, all of which can be traced back to the early modern era; these were then taken to full effectivity by the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie and, in our own time, culminated in the cult of the creative persona and his or her never-ending performances. The ongoing desire for a monographic view of a visual artist goes back to these precepts; at the same time it also pre-forms recipients’ attitudes and critics’ perspectives.

The Production of the New

Wolfgang Tillmans deals with this traditional mediation of the work and subject in a carefully considered, highly strategic manner. He knows that this mediation owes its existence to the historical development of the role of the author and as such is fundamentally open to criticism and to review; and he exploits the malleability of this principle by deliberately seeking out experiment and, hence, taking a calculated risk that the relationship of ‘indeterminacy’ and ‘determinacy’ is not always that of the ‘moment’ to the ‘whole’, in the way that Theodor W. Adorno, for instance, still insists in his aesthetic theory.¹⁴ The ‘unforeseen’ is one of Tillmans’ guiding principles. As long as a thing cannot be planned and cannot be subsumed in discourse,

12 Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis. Scènes du régime esthétique de l’art* (Paris: Galilée, 2011), 10.

13 In the late 1990s, for instance Wolfgang Tillmans and I, along with Jutta Koether and Diedrich Diederichsen were all actively involved in the publication of the German music and pop-culture magazine *Spex*, based in Cologne.

14 See Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie (Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 7)*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 63f.

there is a chance of art, in other words, art may ensue ‘when the cognitive process cannot fully catch up with what you’re looking at.’¹⁵ Or to put it in terms of another terminology – drawn from system theory and chaos research but long since transdisciplinary in its application – Tillmans’ artistic praxis provokes *emergence*, that is to say, changes and events that cannot fully be explained in terms of cause and effect or on the basis of the properties of the relevant components and elementary particles. However much the previously mentioned ‘conditions’ have to be taken into account, the objects and processes of this production are irreducible to their context, which ultimately also means irreducible to the artist as author-actor.

Emergence is thus the aim of the investigations that Tillmans undertakes in his exhibitions and publications – although this aim is never ‘achieved’, because by definition it resists prior definition. The gallery becomes an experimental set-up, a composition with chains of reaction so that the public behaviour of the pictures may be observed. In a correspondence with Julie Ault there is talk of an ‘ongoing ever-changing laboratory situation’,¹⁶ and as he contemplated a model of the exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in 2010 Tillmans again saw it as the image of ‘a laboratory for studying the world in many of its facets and visual manifestations.’¹⁷ The search, or research, that is his praxis seems to be sustained by a fundamental belief in the world and its potential for change. Every picture, every exhibition, every publication is required to create a situation whereby – in the contact between the pictorial objects and the public, from the individual viewer to the great mass of those with an interest in art – those present sense the possibility of change, of a new becoming.

Tillmans thus also makes his contribution to an answer to the question posed by the philosopher John Rajchman (in response to Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault and their deliberations on the production of the new and on the creative act in present-day, control-obsessed societies). Rajchman asked how, in and with the arts and their institutions, spaces for open searches and researches could be devised, in which learning and unlearning, resonance and interference, a new affective solidarity and real experimentation might be possible *before* the onset of all sorts of methods, all forms of governance, all kinds of discipline and *doxa*.¹⁸

This form of experimentation does not lead to benchmark research results; nothing is ever proved or illustrated, regardless of what is in the images or what they may purport to show. Ever engaging in experiment Tillmans roams through the reality of materials, forms, affects and gives us tangible access to these unportrayable, unreferential realities. Tillmans engages his emotions when he is working, also and specifically when he is photographing people, or plants, machines and cities. Individual emotions separate off from the representation of living beings and objects and form nodes of emotion in the viewer’s mind. ‘Artists are presenters of affects, the inventors and creators of affects’, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari put it in *What is Philosophy?*, ‘they draw us into the compound.’¹⁹ And indeed Tillmans’ laboratories are places where emotion and affect are generated and presented, rhythmically resonating between pictures, from wall to wall, from room to room, from side to side. The dog asleep on the stones, its breathing body warmed by the sun (in the video *Cuma*, 2011),

15 Quoted in Nathan Kernan, ‘What They Are: A Conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans’, in *Wolfgang Tillmans. View from above*, ed. Zdenik Felix, conceived by Wolfgang Tillmans (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 11.

16 Ault, ‘The Subject Is Exhibition’ (see note 8), 27.

17 Peyton-Jones and Obrist, ‘Interview with Wolfgang Tillmans’ (see note 5), 23.

18 John Rajchman, ‘A Portrait of Deleuze-Foucault for Contemporary Art’, in Simon O’Sullivan and Stephen Zepke (ed.), *Deleuze, Guattari and the Production of the New* (London: Continuum, 2008), 80–90 at 89.

19 See Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 175

Susanne's lowered gaze (in *Susanne, No Bra*, 2006), with the line of her hair encircling her head like an incomplete figure of eight, but also the disturbed, interrupted, lurking monochromatism of the *Lighter* and *Silver* works – they all open up the longer you look at them, the longer you *are* with them, to a perceiving in terms of forces and affects. They alert us to the fact that all images are fabricated.

In Defence of One's Own Interests

Wolfgang Tillmans does a great deal to communicate important tenets of his own aesthetic theory. Aesthetic *theory*? It would surely be more appropriate to talk of theory-praxis or praxis-theory, for the systems and methods he uses are the result of his own empirical-experimental investigations into the material potential of photography, investigations that also concern his interest in an artistic language of surprise, of spontaneous occurrences, of emergence. On another level of discourse, above all in the medium of the artist's interview, Tillmans has repeatedly pointed out how important it is to him that his distinctive, sometimes distinctly Romantic preferences and convictions, his way of perceiving the world, directly impact on his artistic decisions and on the forms his works take. And as he says, the exhibitions, the installations of individual pictures reflect the way that he sees the world he lives in; at the same time, as he explains, they are also models of a world that he would like to live in.²⁰

However, in order to realise this demiurgic project of a subjective agency, without stumbling into the trap of an ideology of creativity, it is necessary to reflect on the 'conditions' cited by Rancière. In interviews and in his occasional texts Tillmans himself has repeatedly returned to certain aspects of the conditionality of his own praxis. Amongst these, not surprisingly, he primarily lists his own interests and concerns, in so far as it is possible to verbalise these. At a young age the child with the unusual hobby of astronomy developed a fascination for life's great questions. Tillmans talks of 'this very fundamental interest in light and what I can do and how I can shape it'; later on he also took a keen interest in social matters, in subcultural communities, interpersonal interaction, in 'the very real, the very being-in-this-worldness with others, and the desire to be intensely connected to other people.'²¹ Certain comments in early interviews underline this humanist yet also anthropological interest that goes with merging fantasies of an idiosyncratic social utopia. All this can at least partly be attributed to Tillmans' experiences (still very important to him) of spirituality and collectivity in peace-loving church youth groups and, not long afterwards, of the queer glamour of bohemian Pop around figures such as Boy George in London in the 1980s. Despite that, in the early days of his career Tillmans had to fight against constantly being referred to as a lifestyle photographer and chronicler of youth culture. As he pointed out in 1996, 'I didn't set out to talk about youth culture, but to report on humankind.'²² He had acquired this unwanted reputation above all through his work for magazines such as *i-D* and *Spex*, but also through the response to his earliest exhibitions – such as the much acclaimed stand presented by Interim Art/Maureen Paley at the *Unfair* in Cologne in 1992 (with a large print on fabric of *Lutz & Alex sitting in the trees*, 1992, from the 'Sex' issue of *i-D* that same year) or his first major solo exhibition, in 1993, at Daniel Buchholz, with an installation that combined – in a highly unusual way for a gallery presentation in those days – magazine pages, photocopies, individual prints tacked straight onto the wall and sequences of images from magazines laid out in display cases. But

20 See Slocombe, 'Wolfgang Tillmans – The All-Seeing Eye' (see note 2), 95.

21 Quoted in Kernan, 'What They Are: A Conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans' (see note 15), 11.

22 Christian Göttner and Alexander Haase, 'Wolfgang Tillmans: Fotografie als Selbsterfahrung', in *Subway*, November 1996, 8–11 at 10.

little real attention was paid at the time to the particular degree of independence that Tillmans had attained in the magazine world. Or else people simply tended to ignore the semantic and semiotic effects of the 'art gallery' context.

The (entirely contradictory) construction of Tillmans' early image ultimately culminated in the reception of his first book, published in Cologne in 1995 by Taschen, who produce high print runs that are distributed worldwide. This book contained a gallery of by now iconic portraits of friends, chance acquaintances, strangers and scenes of youthful life in various cultural and social-sexual parallel universes. In the accompanying essay Simon Watney talked of 'a dense tapestry of sumptuous images which go some way to restore our sense of the dignity and integrity of a generation which is so frequently represented only in banal clichés and stereotypes'.²³ And although this remark is certainly not inappropriate, above all in that it refers to the avoidance of clichés in the depiction and presentation of the individuals in question, it nevertheless casts Tillman in the role of portrait artist for his own generation, which he never set out to be and never in fact was, in part because, in view of the highly differentiated youth subculture of the 1980s and 1990s, the concept of 'generations' was harder to justify than ever before.

Tillmans therefore always energetically resists labels of that kind, the same labels that first made his name. They are entirely at odds with his determination constantly to surprise himself and others. In that sense it is also wrong to suggest that he is exclusively interested in 'ordinary, everyday' things, since, as he himself says, he is at least as interested in 'extraordinary' things.²⁴ Annoyingly, as he says, above all the critics working for the mainstream media are hardly willing to recognise 'parallelism and polyphony', whereas the public at his exhibitions and those who buy his books are perfectly able to cope with an 'interconnected web of delight in the absurd and humility towards life'.²⁵

Over the years he has attached increasing importance to matters such as the relationship of the general and the particular, of contingency and control, of materiality and cognition. 'Above all I am interested in textures, in surfaces and smells. I am attracted by the kinds of perceptions that form in a single moment or in a single glance . . . so that the essence of a thing presents itself to me with the greatest clarity.'²⁶ Tillmans, as he himself says, sometimes tries to puzzle out the paradox of how 'universality' can be achieved by recognising 'specificity'.²⁷

Lane Relyea has suggested that the contradictory aspirations of modern art caught between experimental particularity and symbolic unity are acted out by Tillmans in his wide-ranging work, with a division of labour between the general and the particular. Thus, as he proposes, the abstract pictures may help to divert attention from the 'parliamentary tussle' of the people and objects in the representational photographs, with their very specific gazes and perspectives, to the phenomenon of the medium of photography in general.²⁸ On the other hand, one might equally well suggest that the 'multi-vectored[ness]' of the installations that

23 Simon Watney [introduction], in *Wolfgang Tillmans*, ed. Burkhard Riemschneider (Cologne: Taschen), 1995, n.p.

24 Florian Illies, 'Ohne Zweifel kann ich mehr nach vorne gehen', in *Monopol*, February 2007, 56–70 at 68.

25 Ibid.

26 Quoted in Heinz-Norbert Jocks, 'Von der Zerbrechlichkeit der Nacktheit und der unerschrockenen Suche nach Glück', in *Kunstforum International* 154, April/May 2001, 314–27 at 316.

27 Blank, 'The Portraiture of Wolfgang Tillmans' (see note 10), 120.

28 Lane Relyea, 'Photography's Everyday Life and the Ends of Abstraction', in *Wolfgang Tillmans*, exh. cat. Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (New Haven/London: Yale University Press 2006), 89–105 at 97.

Tillmans prefers to talk of,²⁹ need not be restricted to the camera-based pictures, but may equally well include the photographs that owe their existence solely to gestural acts and chemical processes.

Assimilating Photography into the Paradox

By virtue of the portability and variability of his works, with every print, with every exhibition, with every publication Tillmans can modify and modulate anew the relations between picture and picture support, representation and presentation, motif and materiality. In the two decades that have elapsed since his entry into the art business his praxis has continuously expanded. From the outset photography was his springboard for both integrative and eccentric acts. And even though this oeuvre may create the impression that the medium of photography knows no limits, photography – as discourse, as technique, as history, as convention – has remained the constant point of reference for all of Tillmans' complex operations. It could also be said that he is immensely faithful to his chosen medium, although – or precisely because – that medium is not always recognisable as such. To quote an older essay on photography and painting by Richard Hamilton (whom Tillmans once photographed), his work is about 'assimilating photography into the domain of paradox, incorporating it into the philosophical contradictions of art. . .'.³⁰ Since Tillmans' experiments with a laser copier in the 1980s, he has produced hundreds of images that may be beholden to the etymology of photography (light drawing) but that also constantly undermine or overuse the social and epistemological functions of photography as a means to depict reality, as proof, as an aide mémoire, as documentation or as a form of aesthetic expression. The discourse on photography, with all its 'post-photographic' exaggerations, the debate on the status of the photographic image – none of these have been concluded; on the contrary, Tillmans is continuously advancing them on his own terms. His praxis forms the backdrop for experimentation and adventures in perception that are closely intertwined with the past and the present of photography and theories of photography; yet the specific logic of this oeuvre creates a realm of its own in which archive and presentation interlock in such a way that photography still plays an important part as historic and discursive formation, but the problems and paradoxes of fine art have now taken over the key functions.

The contagious impact of the epistemological problems of art has opened up new options for the medium of photography, new contexts of reception. And in this connection it is apparent, as Julie Ault has put it, that 'Tillmans enacts his right to complex mediation'.³¹ In other words, photography provides a means for him to engage with a whole range of interactions with the viewer. In his eyes and hands photography becomes a realm of potential, where a never-ending series of constellations and juxtapositions of materialities, dimensions and motifs of the 'unforeseen' can come about. Photography thus regains a dimension of experimentation, an openness that is not constrained by aesthetic formats and technical formatting but that does arise from a precise knowledge and understanding of the history of the medium.

Layers and Groups

Tillmans' work has consistently expanded both horizontally and vertically, that is to say, it has developed not only in terms of its breadth, variation and selection of motifs and processes but

29 See 'Peter Halley in Conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans', in Jan Verwoert, Peter Halley and Midori Matsui, *Wolfgang Tillmans* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 8–33 at 33.

30 Richard Hamilton, 'Photography and Painting', in *Studio International*, vol. 177, no. 909, March 1969, 120–25 at 125.

31 Ault, 'The Subject Is Exhibition' (see note 8), 15.

also with regard to the acuity, actuality and decisiveness of its statements and forms. His oeuvre consists of layers and groups, to which new ones are periodically added. The layers are questions, interests, passions. The groups (or families) comprise materials, motifs, methods. The boundaries between layers and groups are neither rigid nor random. Every layer can expand and deepen, every group can accommodate new members or participants. Layers extend into groups, groups mingle with layers. What this looks like and what effect it has is demonstrated by Tillmans in every exhibition, in every single room in an exhibition, on every single wall, in every single picture.

Any attempt to follow the artist's progress through these developments involves tracing his horizontal and vertical movements, making dynamic maps of internal and external vectors and connections. It should be borne in mind that Tillmans himself also actively adds to these maps and diagrams. His exhibitions and publications are to a large extent endeavours to *discover through the act of construction* an order, a sense of orientation, a taxonomy in the multitude of individual pictures – without demonstratively drawing attention to this order, which itself cannot simply be equated with the intention that underpins the movements in the work. This order is neither methodological nor heuristic; it neither instigates nor directs production, for it arises during the course of the artistic process and is only, if at all, visible or legible with hindsight – as an offer to the viewer, or a challenge.

Thus, in order to embark on an analysis of Tillmans' oeuvre, we have to make maps from maps, diagrams from diagrams, constellations from constellations. In the moment when that happens, that is to say, when someone starts reading (in contrast to viewing the works, which is not about coming up with fixed statements and descriptions) a collaboration also gets under way between the author of the work, who in this case bears the name 'Wolfgang Tillmans' and the author who is attempting to decipher a logic or an intellectually affective structure that can contribute to our understanding and experience of that work. In the case of an artist such as Tillmans a collaboration of this kind automatically leads to comparisons, possibly even to rivalry between different systems of order. Cognitive interests may converge in the process, they may even be identical for long stretches. But any reading, however concentrated, ultimately deviates from the explanations and manuals that the author himself has provided for his works and their reception.

This difference creates a specific hermeneutic tension, of the kind that occurs in confrontations with many instances of basically discursive contemporary art. And this tension is hard to dispel, since the discursiveness and referentiality of the work does not manifest itself in contestable statements or contributions to the discussion, but rather in installations, in arrangements of pictures and pictorial objects, whose generation of meaning is, and has to remain, ambivalent and atmospheric. The experience of authenticity, spontaneity and incidentalism should not be mistaken for a lack of codification, nor affective engagement in these pictorial spaces for a presuppositionless accessibility.³²

Although Wolfgang Tillmans concerns himself with the quality of each individual picture, although he conceives and produces his works as self-contained, rounded compositions in their own right and exhibits them in a manner that does justice to their singularity and autonomy (in that sense the installations serve to test the power of iconic persuasion inherent in individual works), reference is repeatedly made to the 'interdependence' of his pictures and to the fact that Tillmans' works are generally seen in the company of and surrounded by other pictures. The relationship of individual pictures to the context that they collectively create

32 See Ilka Becker, *Fotografische Atmosphären. Rhetoriken des Unbestimmten in der zeitgenössischen Kunst* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2010), 151.

is not simply that of parts to a whole. Each side of this relationship exists despite the other. Pictures form sentences and statements without having any clearly identifiable semantic or narrative meaning, but rather as couplings of emotions, impressions and moods. However, the latter are entirely open to discussion, for the artist only provides a minimum of guidance. Besides clichés, he probably dreads nothing as much as didacticism.

Continuity for Discontinuity

Only on the rarest of occasions, such as in the period following the AIDS-related death of his partner Jochen Klein in 1997, have Tillmans' energy and determination flagged for any length of time. Since 1993 he has produced picture after picture, exhibition after exhibition, book after book. In this year alone, in 2012, there are six major solo exhibitions for the public to attend – in Warsaw, São Paulo, Glasgow, Zurich, Stockholm and Bogotá; in addition to this there are the books *Wolfgang Tillmans: Zachea. Ermutigung*, *Wolfgang Tillmans: FESPA Digital/FRUIT LOGISTICA*, *Wolfgang Tillmans: Neue Welt*, and the publication accompanying the survey exhibition at Moderna Museet and Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, which contains this text.

This level of output bespeaks ability, skill, professionalism, aptitude; it seems like a singular manifestation of ableness. We search in vain for signs of failure, which is all the more astonishing considering the aesthetic importance to Tillmans of moments of hesitation, of precariousness, uncertainty, waiting, transience. A possible explanation: the artist's professionalism is the prerequisite for emergence, for mistakes, for questioning and problematising, in other words, the productive weakness that paves the way for both crises and success. Tillmans' elaborate productions rely on efficient collaboration with institutions and publishing houses and on help from his own team of assistants and from his galleries. He is personally involved in and oversees each phase of the production process. A smooth-running, carefully controlled operation provides the necessary backdrop for the experimental openness, the surprises and spontaneity, the elegance and lightness that make his work what it is.

In the programmatic afterword to his book *Manual*, published in 2007, Tillmans poses a series of questions which constitute the point of departure for his life's work, but which also seem to underpin his art and to propel his artistic activities forwards: 'When do developments become noticeable? When is a process recognizable? Which one achieves critical mass? When does something become something? What can pictures make visible?'³³ Each of these questions is about marginal values, fault lines, turning points and flashes of intuition. Evidently it is not only individual exhibitions and individual books that serve Tillmans as his laboratory. The ongoing production of his oeuvre as a whole is like a test series or a series of stress tests. Careful note is taken of whether anything happens or something changes, and under which circumstances. In these tests Tillmans uses tools that he himself has designed. Each individual picture fulfils a dual role – as both the means and object of observation and exploration.

Discovering a Picture

Wolfgang Tillmans and I are standing in one of the high-ceilinged, white-painted rooms of his studio, which occupies over six hundred square meters of one floor of an office building in Berlin-Kreuzberg that was planned and built as an apartment store in the late 1920s by Felix Hoffmann and Max Taut. It is one of his places of production. Here he and his team work on upcoming exhibitions, testing out ideas with cardboard models and trying out hangings on the walls; here, too, is the archive with the artist's proofs – the operation centre for Tillmans'

33 Wolfgang Tillmans, *Manual* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007), n.p.

exhibitions, which mainly consist of the artist's own prints, rather than those held in private or institutional collections; in his Berlin premises he also has a dark room with enlarging and colour processing equipment.

It is mid-June 2012. We are talking about regularities and patterns in Wolfgang's work. On the wall there is a large-format, ink-jet print of a street scene at night in Shanghai, evidently photographed in summer and bathed in the yellowish glow of the street lights, crowned by branches that – being in sharper focus than anything else in the scene and cut off by the picture edge – reach into the picture from the upper left and right.

For a long time Wolfgang did not have particularly high hopes for *Shanghai night*, a, 2009. Despite this, he has included it in his upcoming book *Neue Welt*, which is currently in preparation and will be published in time for the exhibition of the same name at Kunsthalle Zürich in September 2012. And now, enlarged to 207 × 138 cm, this print displays a previously unsuspected crystalline strength of precision – like many of the images Tillmans has taken with his extremely high-resolution, digital single-lens reflex camera, which he has only been using regularly for the last few years. While people are seen dosing on light loungers in the blurry background, in the foreground three men are playing a board game; two are down on their haunches, the third has drawn up a folding chair and is sitting with his bare, whitish back to the photographer. It is an image of absorption, of waiting, of passing time, of the passing of time. Something seems not to be right here, as though there were change in the air. Or is it an image of perfect peace? The photographer seems to have gone unnoticed as he pressed the shutter. But what influence did he nevertheless have on the composition of the picture? And why does he like it much better now, hanging on the wall? We talk about the need to enter into the social situations that one is photographing. Not to behave as though there were somewhere outside the scene and the frame. About the importance of being involved. The difficulty of overcoming one's reluctance to step out of the shadows. The sense of shame at one's own voyeurism.

I say to Wolfgang that the rear-view figure is a striking constant in his pictures of people; almost a counterpart to the frontal portraits where the subjects gaze straight at the viewer. (I am thinking here of certain pictures in the *Alex & Lutz* series and the *Bournemouth* series, both 1992, I am thinking of *Paul*, New York [1994], *Valentine* [1998], and of *Paula with typewriter* [1994], *After Warriors* [1996], *Arkadia III* [1996], and of certain images in *Soldiers – The Nineties* [1999], of *Gedser* [2004], *haircut* [2007], of *Nacken (a)* [2007] and *Nacken (b)*, [2009]). Wolfgang puts me right. In the first place, as he tells me, for years he has consciously used shots of people as substitute self-portraits and heads seen from behind as extensions of himself. And in the second place, he always tries to avoid conspicuous or too-methodical-looking regularities. Even as he points the camera, he is thinking of the predictability of a motif or a composition and, if necessary, taking steps to minimise that. One often senses in his work a determination to circumvent any form of repetition that exudes the odour of the tried and tested rather than the taste of an uncomfortable new beginning.

Nights and Markets

For his *Neue Welt* book, his fourth artist's book published by Taschen, Tillmans has predominantly selected photographs from the last two to three years, during which time he has travelled widely, venturing to places that were entirely new to him. In Haiti at night, a year after the earthquake catastrophe, he took pictures from a moving car of tented camps along the sides of the road. Or of someone jumping out of a bus carrying a heavy sack. These pictures convey, in a very concentrated manner, something of the essence of that post-catastrophe situation, a sense of the ongoing crisis in Haiti, of the exhaustion of the people, of the need

to be constantly alert here. In contrast to such dreamlike-desolate night scenes, *Neue Welt* also contains memorable sunlit tableaux. A double spread of an epic market scene in Ethiopia looks like a perfectly arranged stage set or a realist painting from the nineteenth century, as though you could never in fact chance on such a balanced, multi-layered scene in real life. This picture of traders on dusty ground, this image with its complex web of gestures, poses, gazes, colours (above all in the garments and clothing) and the plunging diagonals around which the players are all grouped, looks like the vanishing point (forwards or backwards) of the many images of rooms and buildings of the globalised economy, the gleaming chrome-finished and granite-clad shopping malls, of speculative architecture, of shopping streets with huge billboards or of people in shops stuffed with merchandise that we see in *Neue Welt*. In this volume the photographs also reflect a heightened interest in materiality, in the sleekness and edginess of commercial architecture and in urban scenarios in the non-places of globalised society. It is a catalogue of textures – metallic paints, fake façades, glass and synthetics. Time and again, pictures of car headlights, faceted and polished like insects' eyes or primeval druzes and geodes. Dangerous-looking, futurist-archaic forms found in some underground car park in Tasmania, where Tillmans experienced something of an epiphany at the sight of recent car design in all its grotesqueness. Or this unsettling still life: a mercilessly grasping claw at a rubbish tip; a heap of jetsam that one is as keen to avoid cutting oneself on as on the sharp shells of crustaceans lying on a table that seem to point to a hastily consumed meal. A parade of disparate, heterogeneous materialities and textures, alternating with portraits of men in work outfits and leisure clothing, of Wolfgang Tillmans' partner Anders Clausen, of the aged Gustav Metzger, who – like Nonkosi Khumalo – was seen in the first room of the Warsaw exhibition. Tillmans presents glimpses of highly technologised workplaces, of an operating theatre and an observatory. He photographs the night sky above Kilimanjaro, but draws attention to the digital noise of the shot and thus foils any expectations viewers might have had of a *National Geographic* aesthetic.

And he homes in on upper arms, napes of necks and folds in clothes. These are familiar visual gestures, there are some quite astonishing continuities that initially may not seem entirely in keeping with a book title promising a new world, until it becomes clear that the movements in this body of work occur less in connection with motifs than in the sometimes imperceptible changes in photography with regard to its technical and historical possibilities and in the changes in the relationship that the artist has with his own medium.

Latent Pictures

In *Neue Welt* Tillmans' photographic practice becomes even more differentiated than before. It is not merely a document of his handling of digital technology, of his new-found delight in the crassness and harshness of global junkspaces that can be represented and refined in high-definition mode very differently to what was possible using analogue equipment. Significantly, above all in the first half of the book, he has interspersed the camera shots with images from the *Silver* series, possibly his most difficult, least accessible group of works. For these works are not only bereft of easily recognisable and explicable figurative elements, they also lack the gestural aspect of the *Freischwimmer* and the three-dimensional corporeality of the creased and folded *Lichter* images. Tillmans uses the stock colours from various colour photo paper manufacturers, manipulates the chemical processes in the dark room by working with used or impure developing fluids and uses the correspondingly dirtied rollers in the developing equipment, so that debris and other mechanical traces are left on the surface of the paper. As a result these images often appear strangely dry and dull, despite the fact that they are endlessly nuanced in their morphology and give a vivid account of the phenomenon (and the process)

of becoming a photographic image. Does the dark blue of many *Silver* pictures not perfectly record the struggle of the exhausted developer that is no longer capable of generating black? Do the patches, scores, rips and other irregular marks not attest to form-giving defects and deliberate operating errors?

Tillmans started to collect these maladjusted, apparently faulty, abnormal images early on in his career and first published them in 1998 in an edition for the journal *Parkett*. With these precursors of the *Silver* series he already revealed his interest in resilient materials, in the processes, in the sub-linguistic dimensions, in short, in the *noise* of photographic messages. The mechanical, chemical, physical conditions systematically suppressed in the regime of photographic representation and documentation now take centre stage, with all their modest yet intransigent *illegibility*. As Tillmans himself has said, 'Because they are so much a part of the material, for me they are also somehow a piece of nature, something mineral. The picture here develops both traditionally in the emulsion and on the surface of the image in the form of deposits of salts, silver derivatives and chalk and algae.'³⁴ These nature-like pictures often lead a life of their own, some originals (30 × 40 cm or 51 × 61 cm) change with the passage of time, because they have deliberately not been correctly fixed; they are instable, ephemeral, incalculable. They do not so much represent an event as they embody it. These are essentially latent pictorial objects, for waiting within them are countless more, other pictures.

In his feeling for the productive wilfulness of his photographic materials, Tillmans demonstrates an affinity with the early days of photography. Most notably, in his first book, *The Pencil of Nature* (1844) William Henry Fox Talbot, the inventor of 'photogenic drawing' attached great importance to the fact that photographs were 'formed or depicted by optical and chemical means alone', with no assistance from a human hand; the 'pencil of nature' could now replace the 'artist's hand'.³⁵ Talbot's calotype process, his use of paper treated with silver nitrate and potassium iodide, which produced a weak, pale image after exposure, made it possible – through the subsequent application of silver nitrate with gallic and acetic acid – to create a clearly visible (albeit still negative) image. It was only this photochemical development process that brought the hitherto 'latent' image to light. The surface of the photo paper becomes a retina of sorts, in which images of reality are caught and can be stored until they are needed; thus the paper takes on the independent reality of a chemical-physical process.³⁶

This reality, which is also embodied in the *Silver* picture objects, is now juxtaposed by Tillmans in *Neue Welt* with digital images of a present that is profoundly shaped by digitalised design processes. Radically different pictorial concepts and pictorial realities rub shoulders. In view of the inescapability, the (economic and epistemological) power but also the potential of digitalisation of photographic images that has long since overtaken and transformed his own praxis, Tillmans will not let go of a blunt, obstinate sense of materiality and the beauty of the 'organic-chemical nature of photography'.³⁷ In his search for new pictures, which he regards as his most important duty in his artistic production,³⁸ the latest technologies are a source of inspiration and a trigger, but not a solution, at least not the only solution for the production

34 Wolfgang Tillmans, email of 8 June 2012.

35 See William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* [1844] (New York: Da Capo, 1969), n.p.

36 See Bernd Busch, *Belichtete Welt. Eine Wahrnehmungsgeschichte der Fotografie* (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 1989), 188ff. and Vered Maimon, 'On the Singularity of Early Photography: William Henry Fox Talbot's Botanical Images', in *Art History*, vol. 34, no. 5, November 2011, 958–77.

37 Wolfgang Tillmans, email of 8 June 2012.

38 'That's the only thing I feel responsible for: my sense of duty is that I want to make new pictures', Peyton-Jones and Obrist, 'Interview with Wolfgang Tillmans' (see note 5), 22.

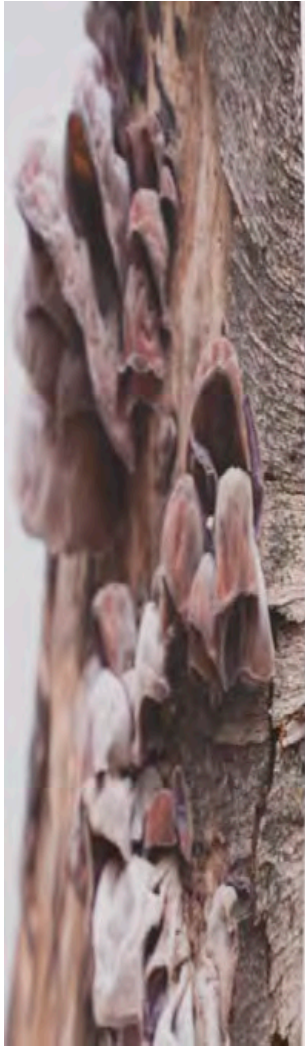
of visual events that allow us to see the 'unforeseen'. The digital conquest of nature is countered by the unpredictable latency of photo paper. But this does not bring with it a retreat from the power of digital images in favour of a return to the supposedly metaphysical authenticity of a self-activating natural image. On the contrary, it seems that in the future Wolfgang Tillmans will concentrate all the more – through his engagement with the physical presence of pictures – on exploring the latency and emergence of the digital.

Installation views

Room 1

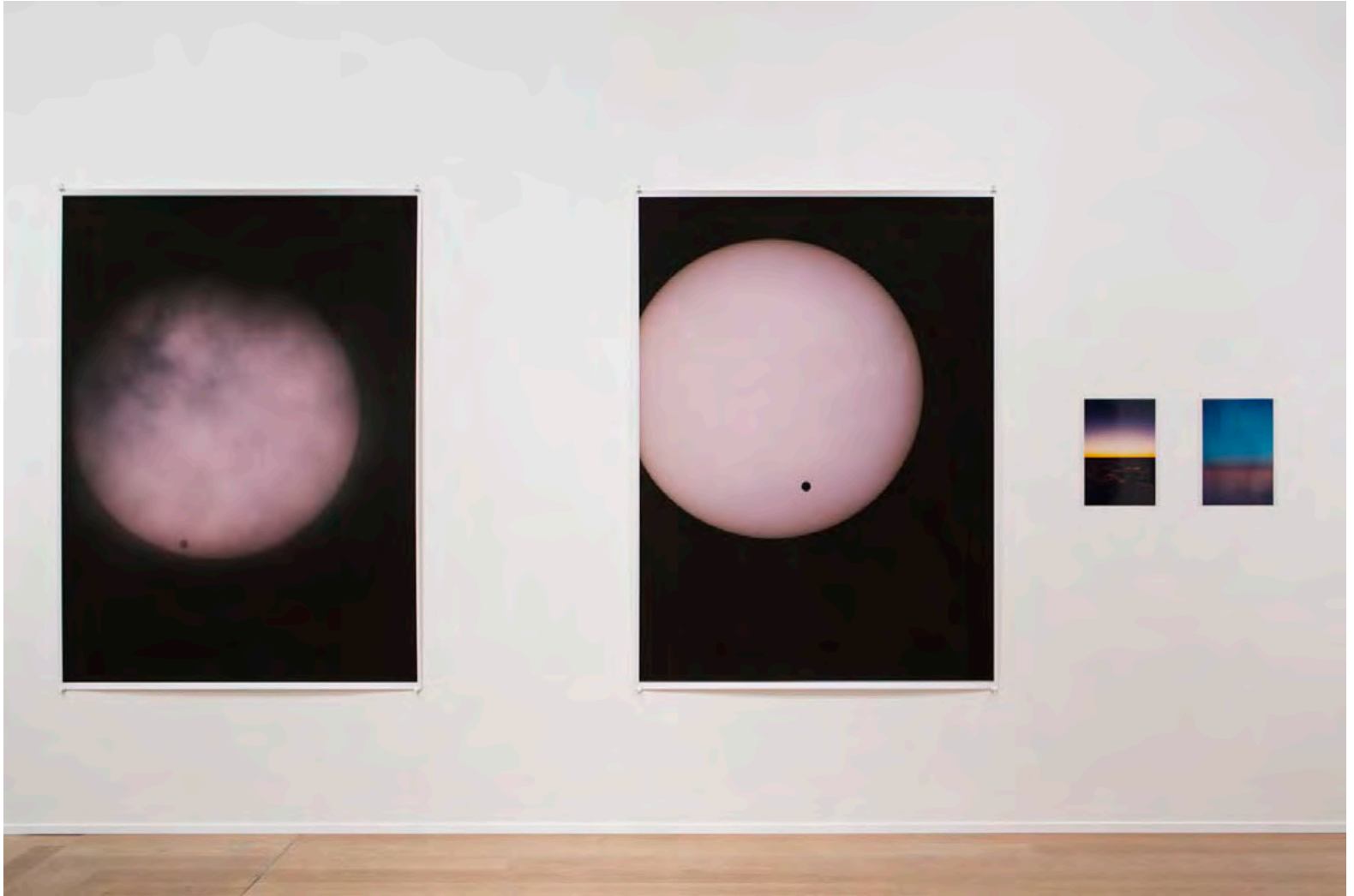






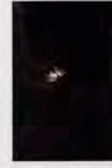
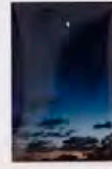
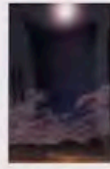
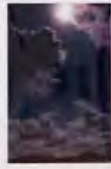
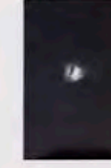
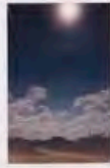










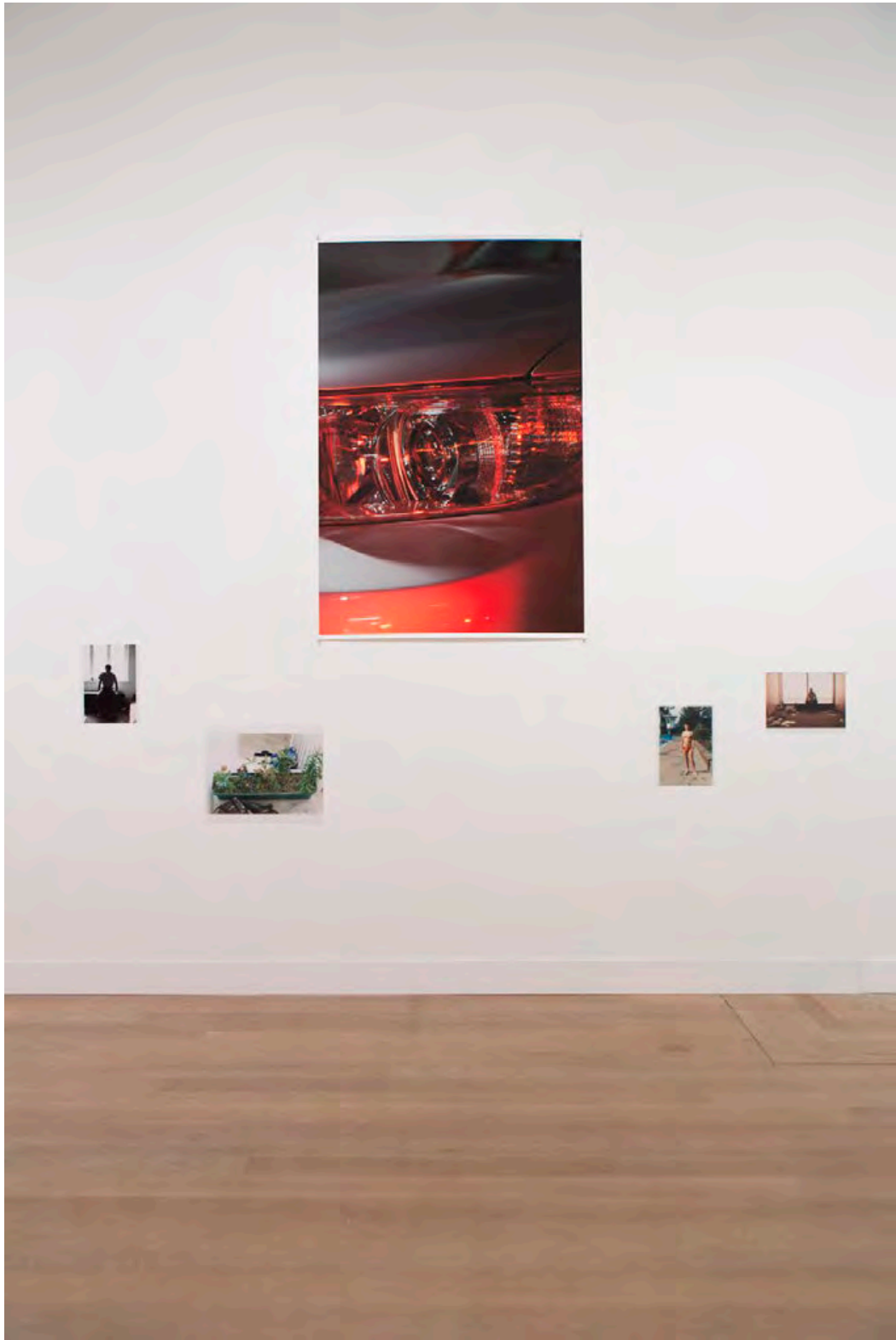


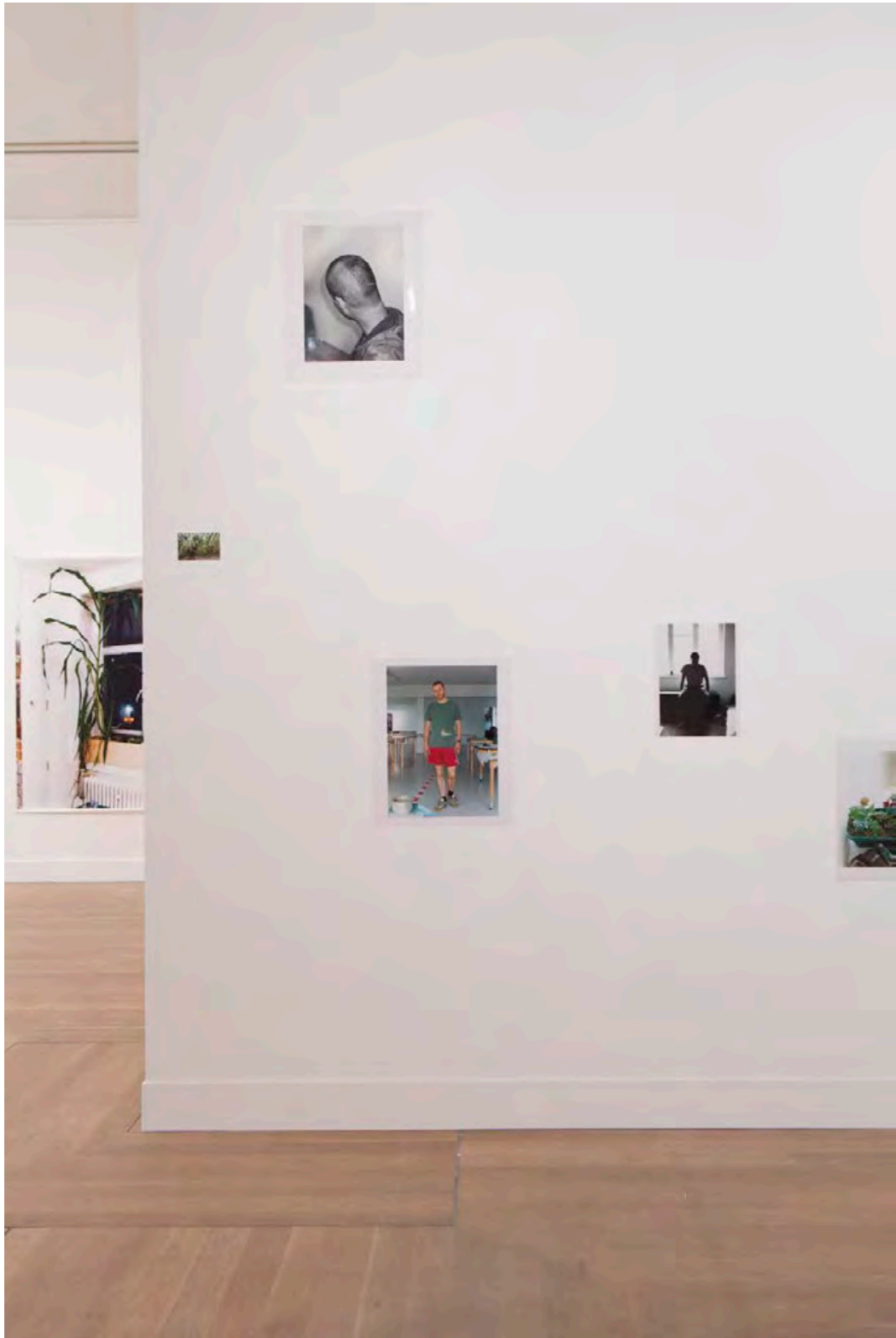


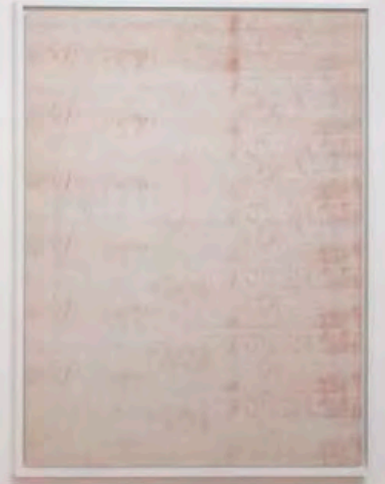
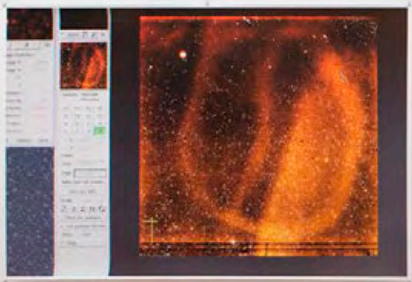
Room 2











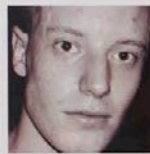
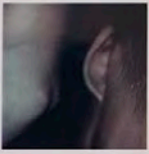




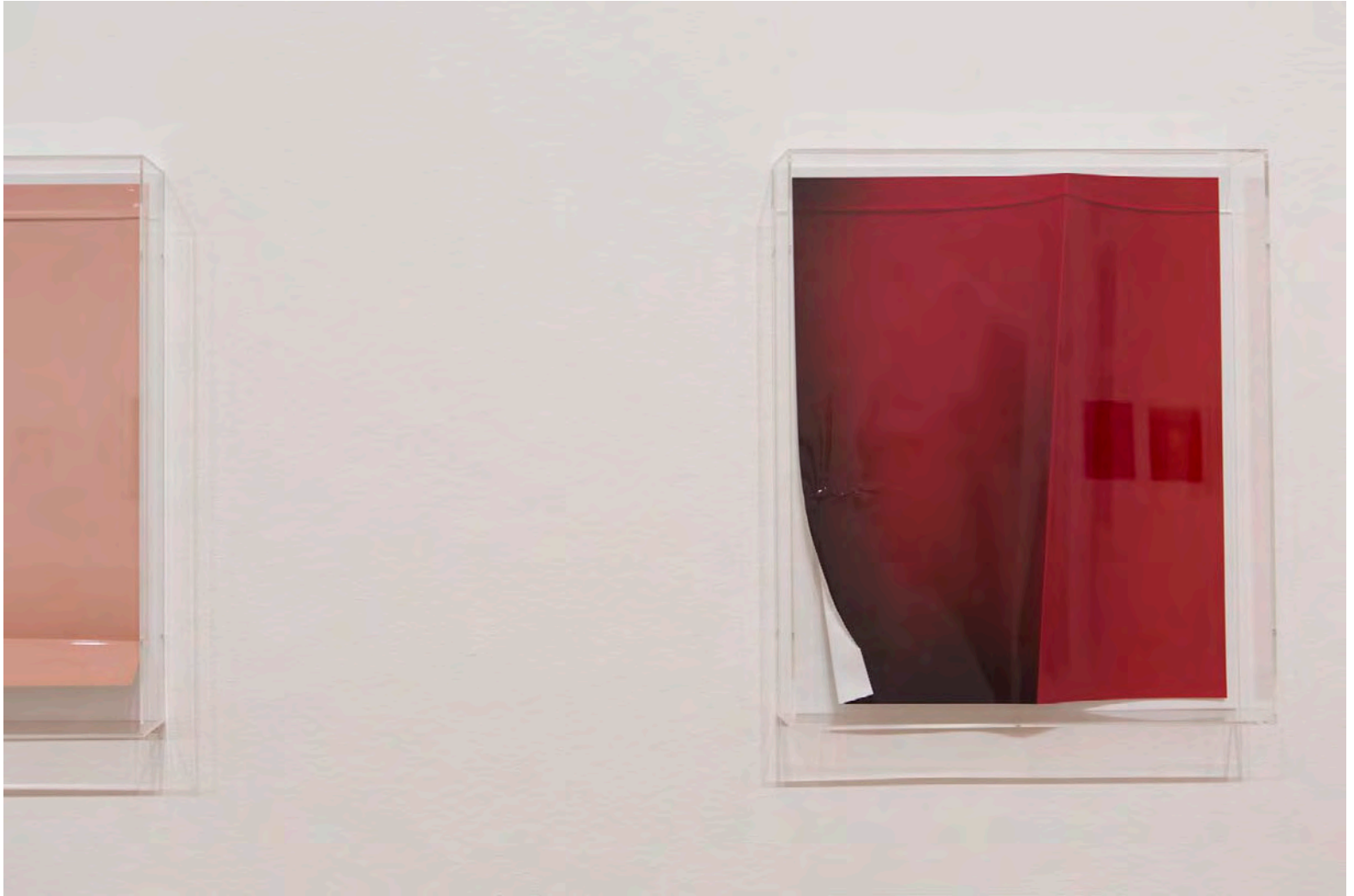
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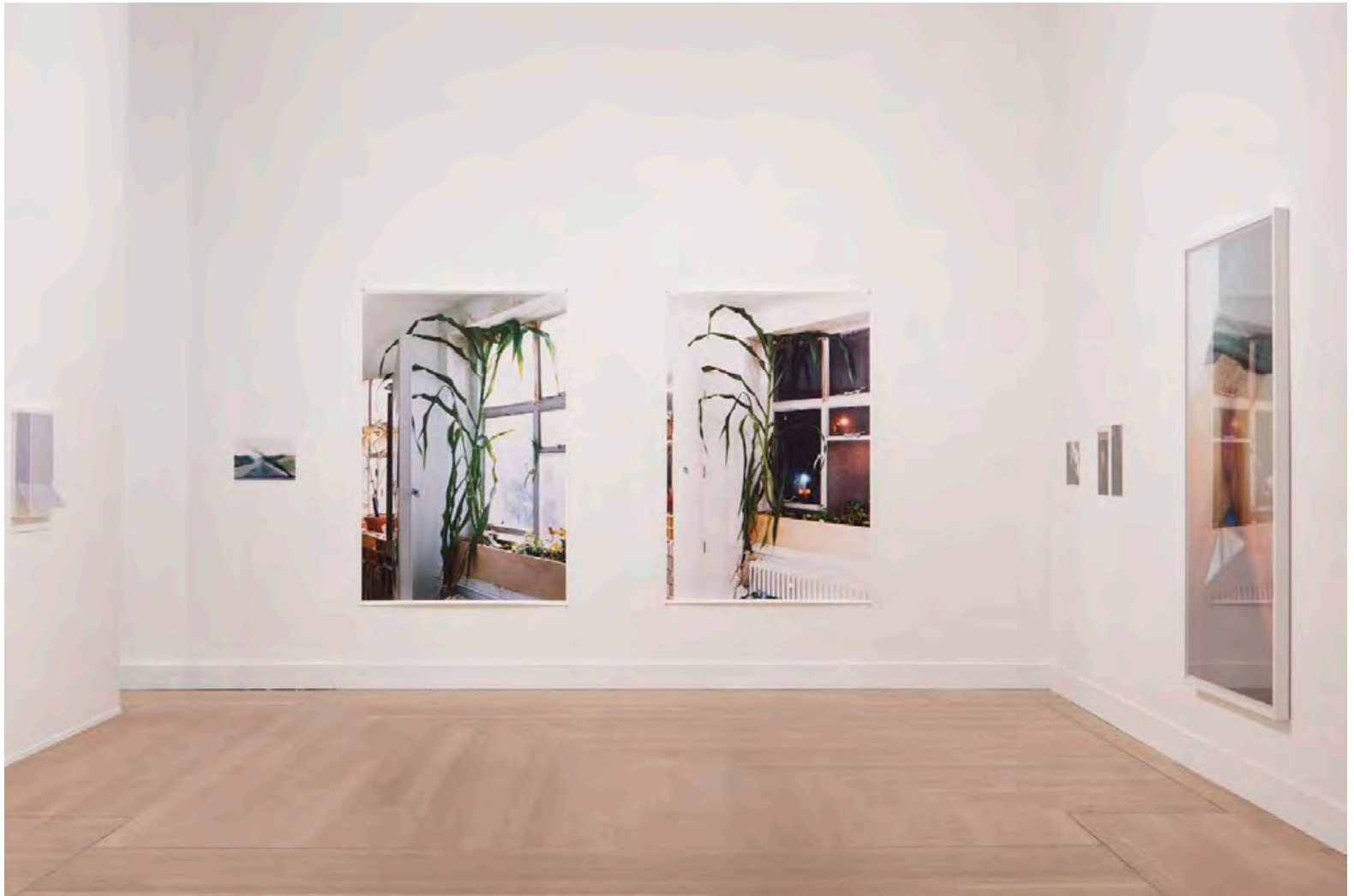




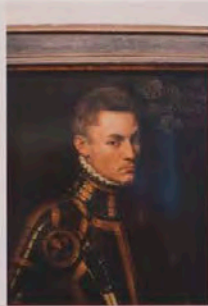












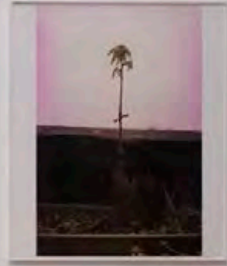


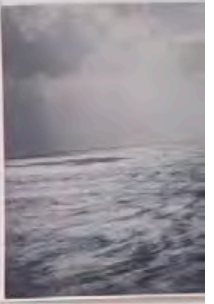
Room 4



















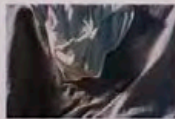
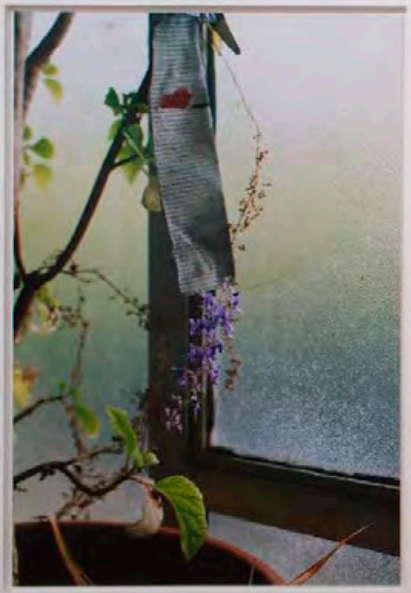


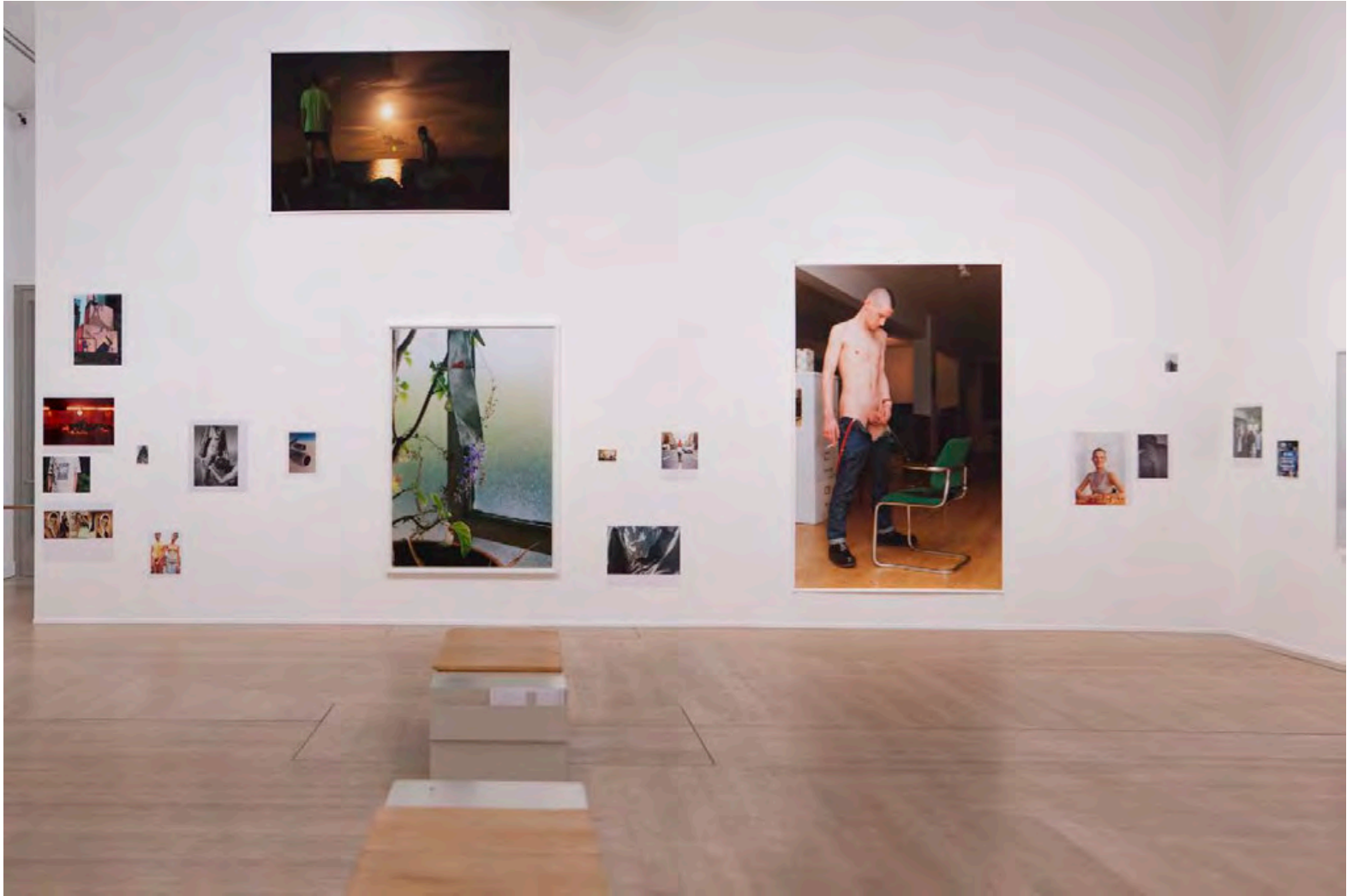
Room 5







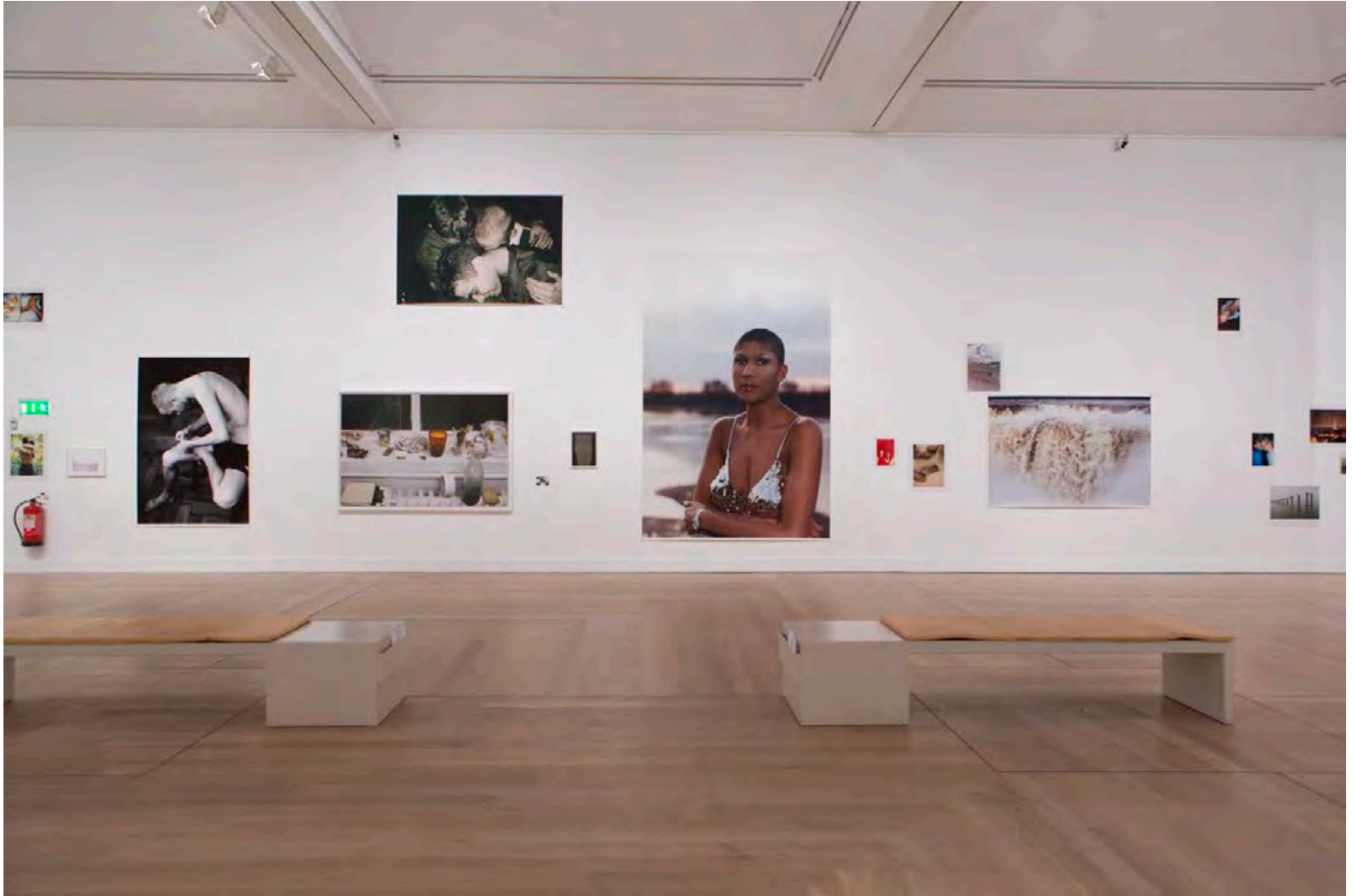


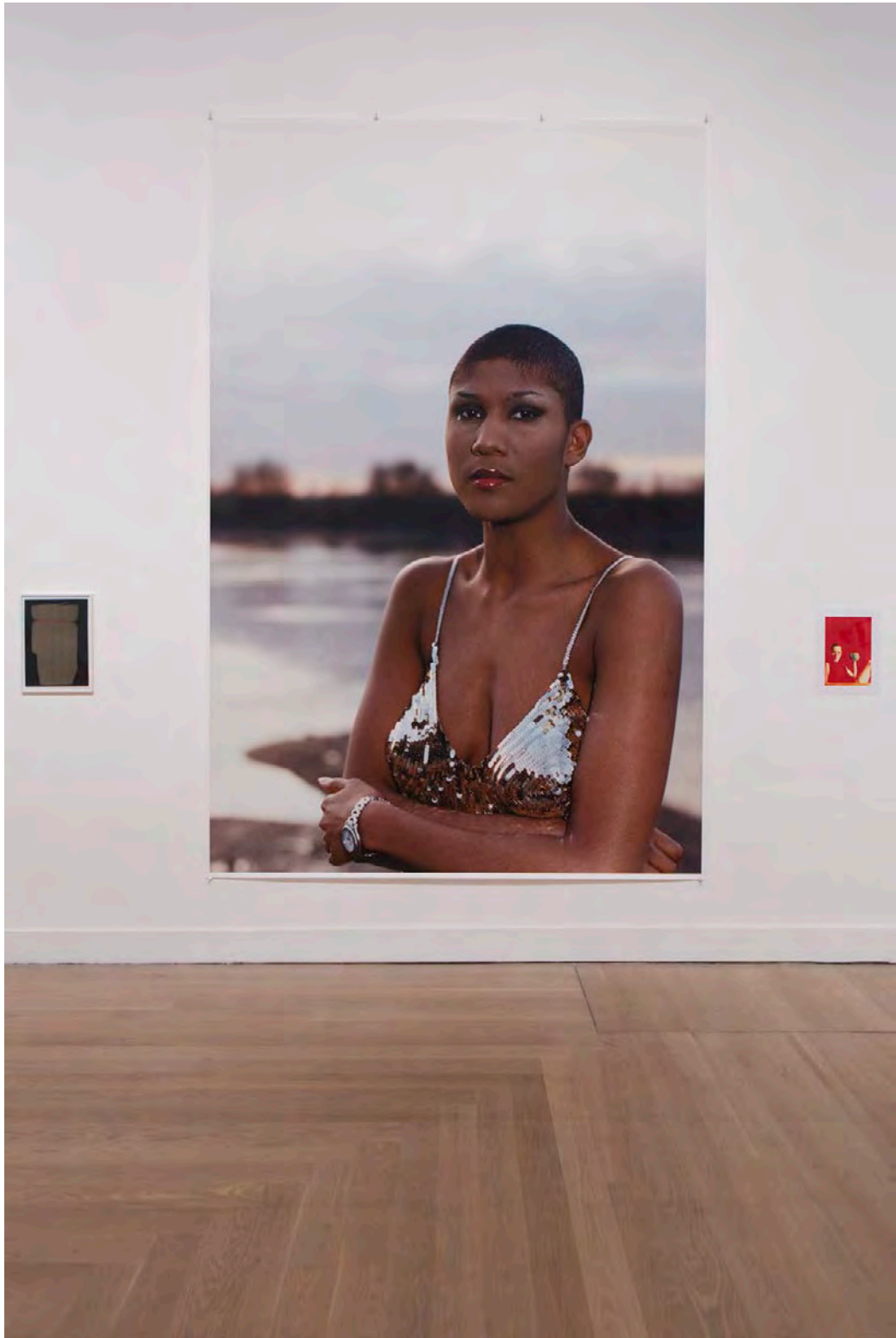




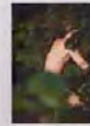




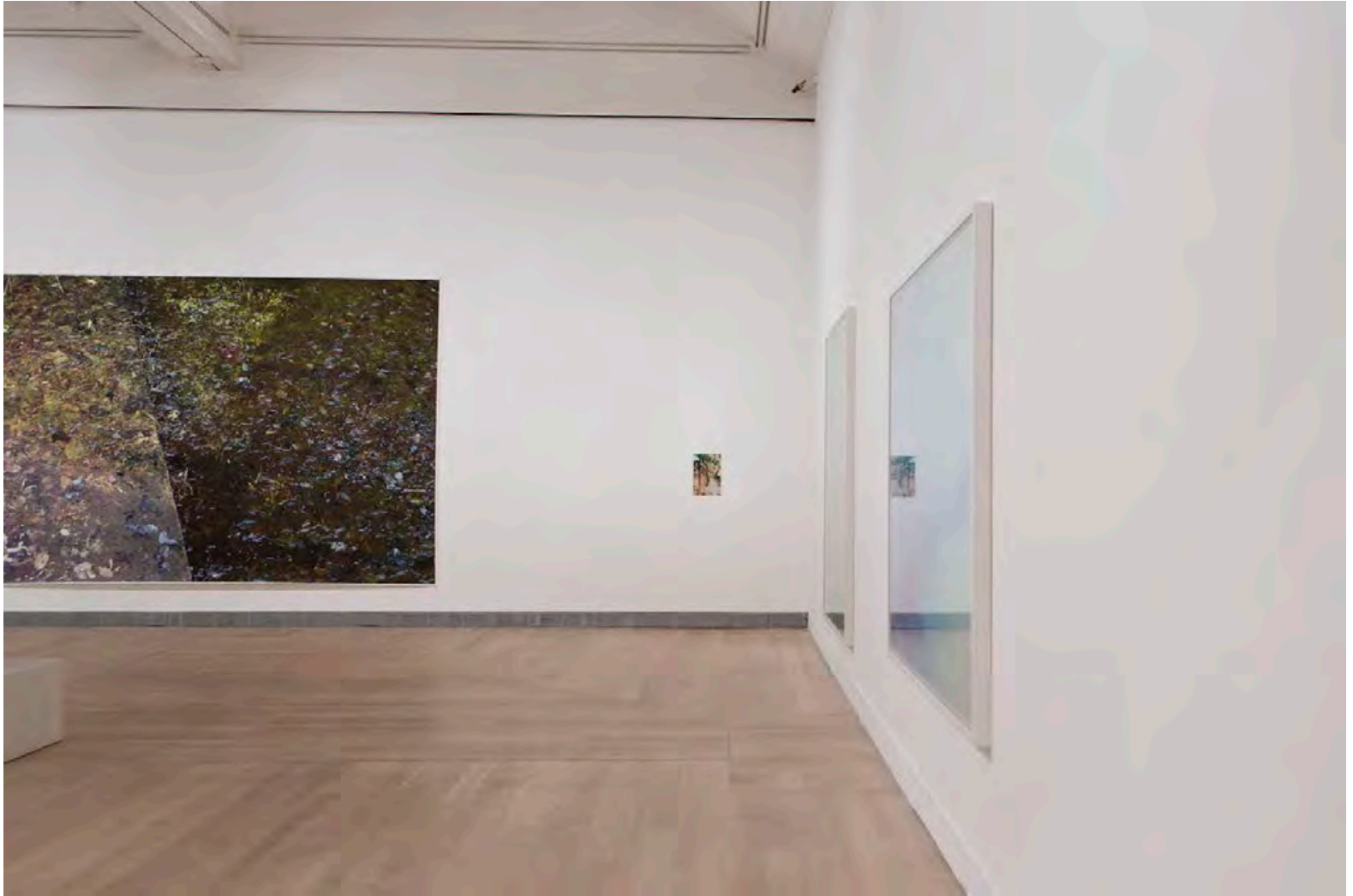






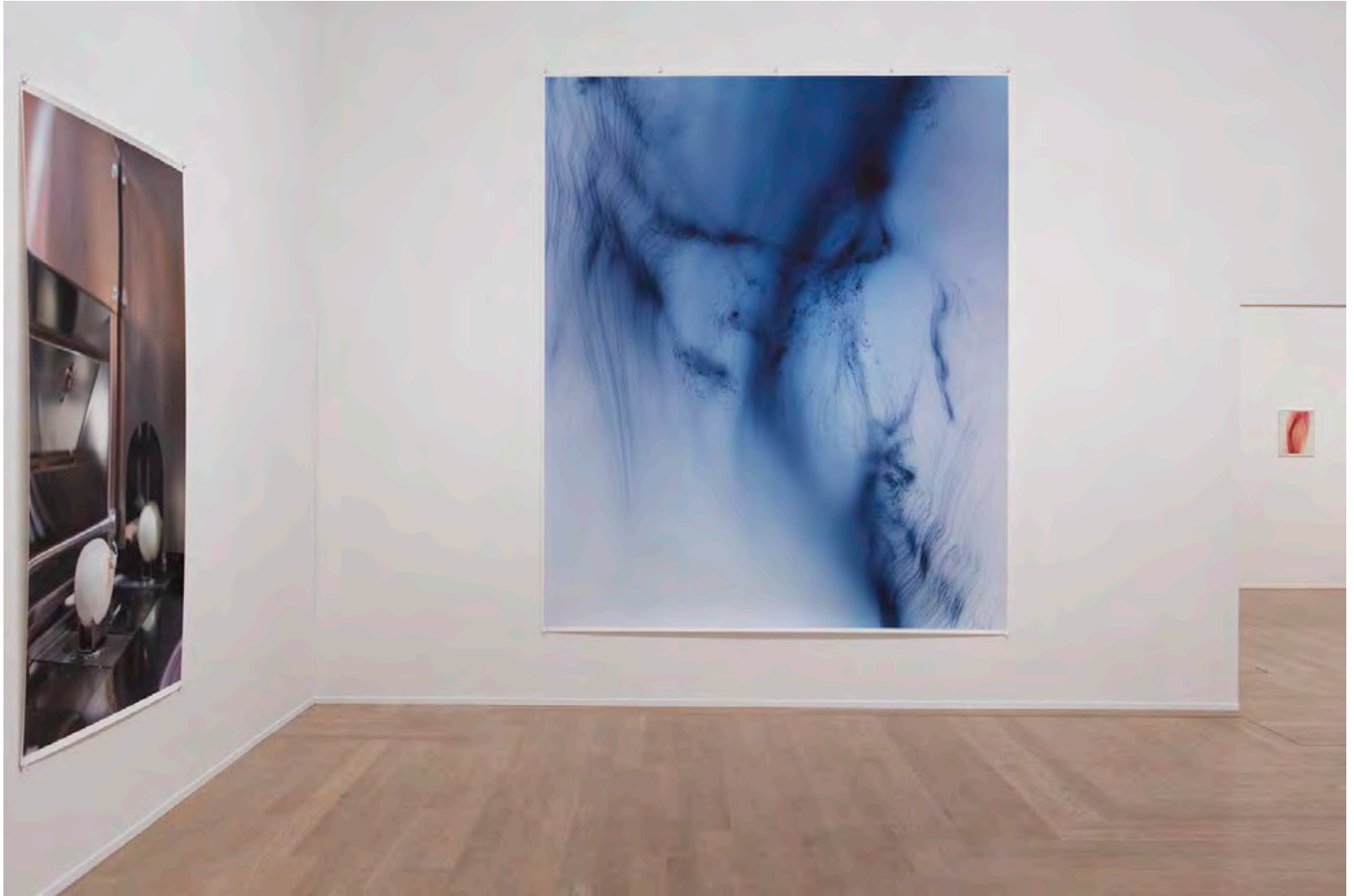


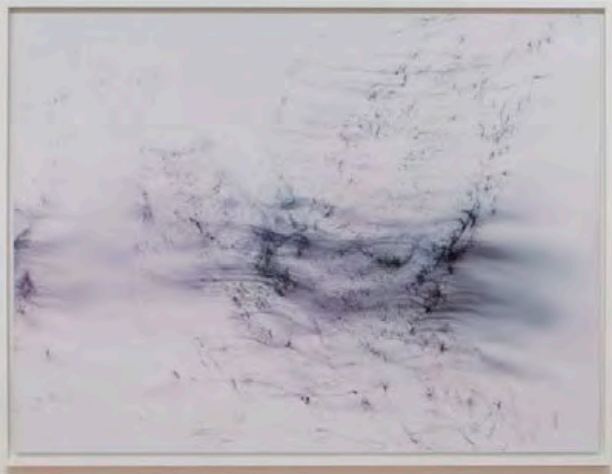
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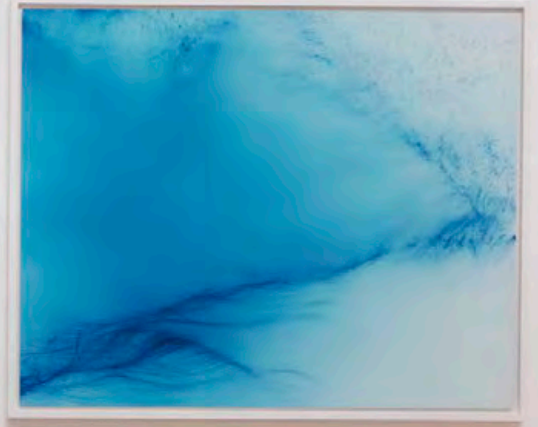


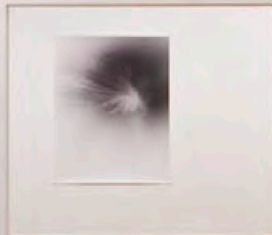
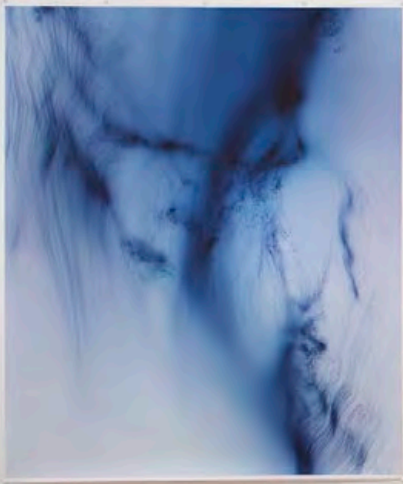




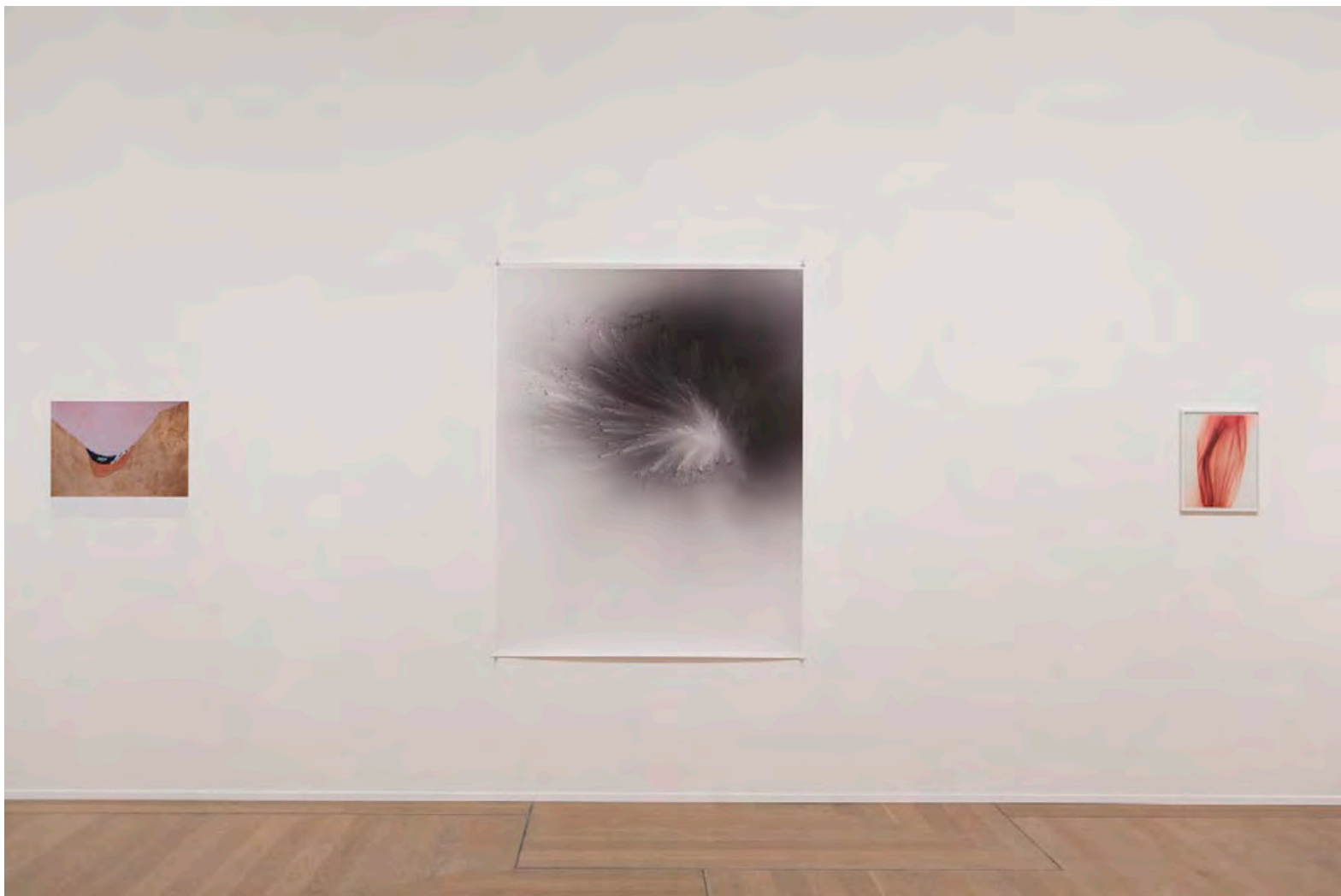






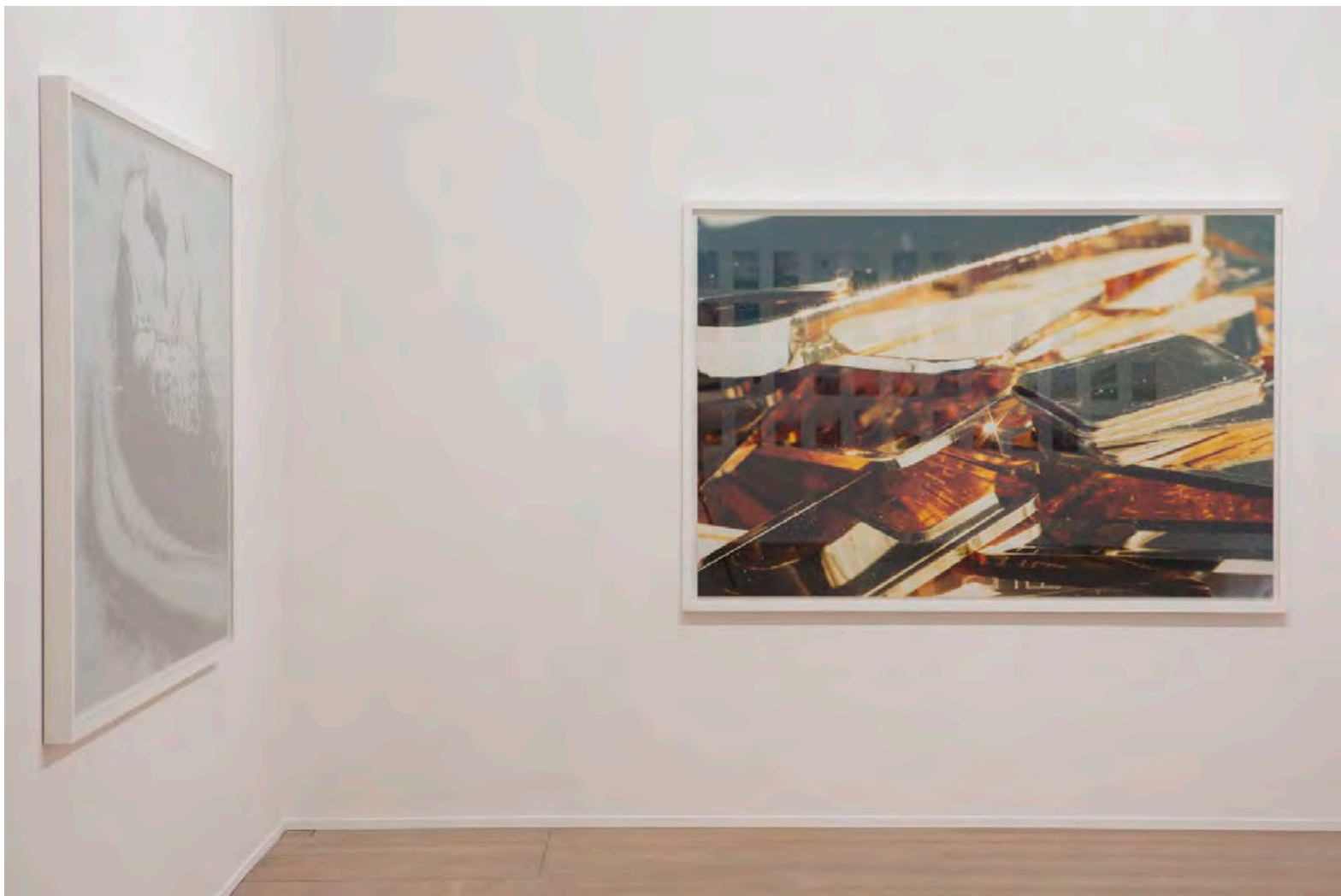


Room 7

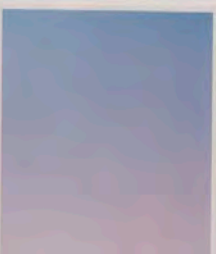
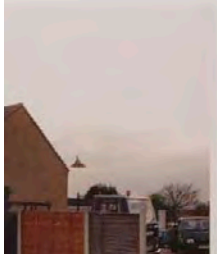
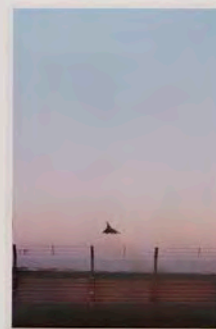
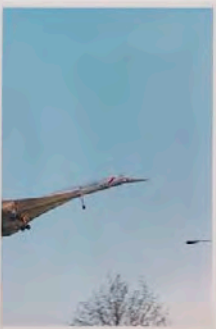
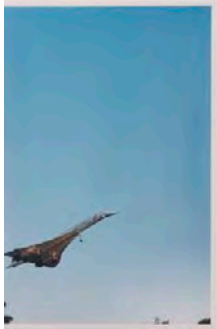
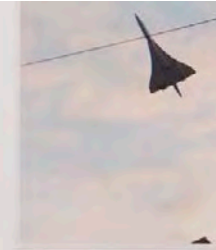
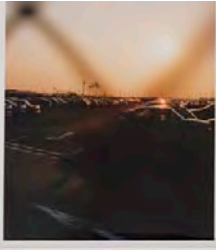


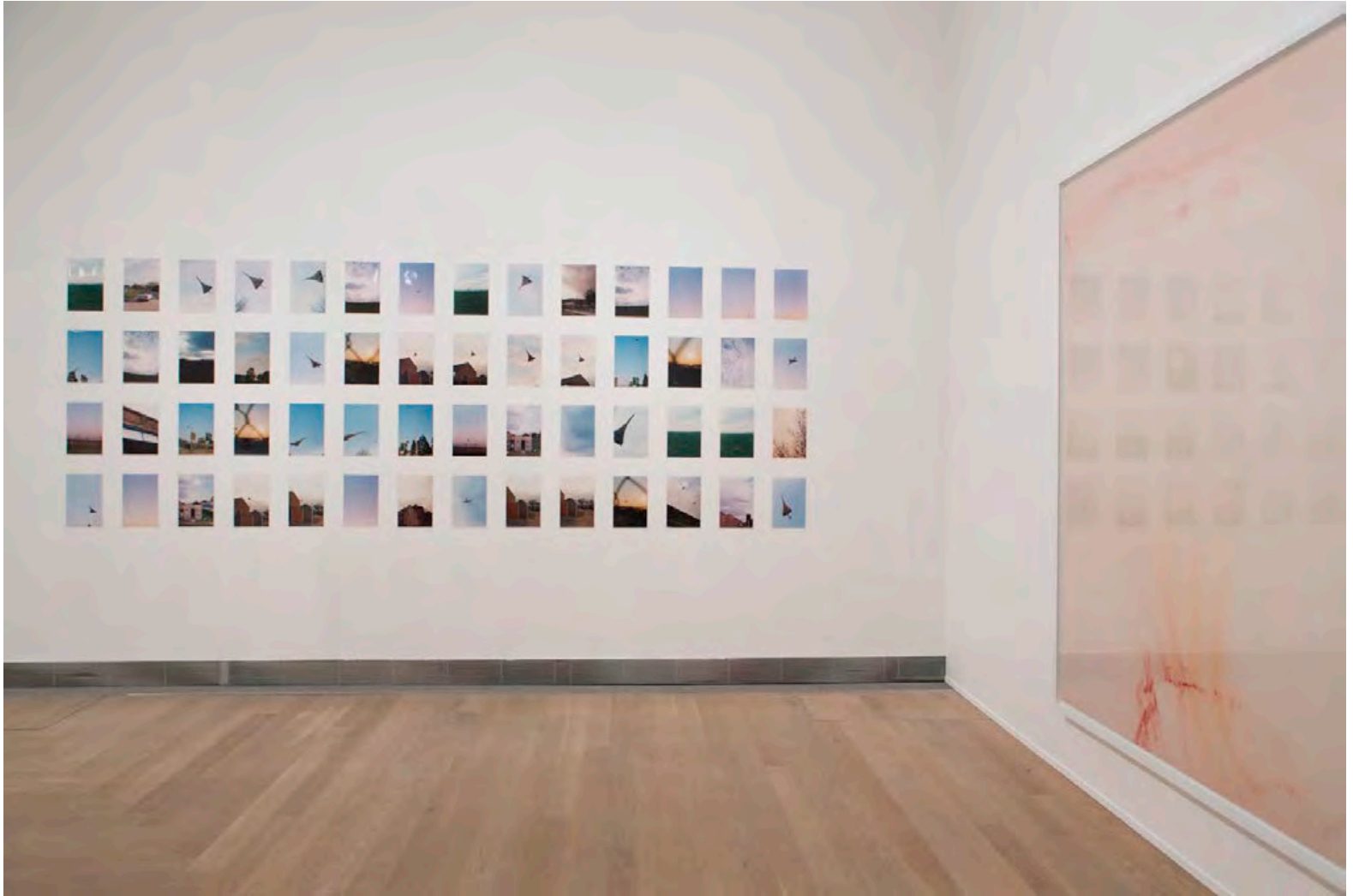


Room 7









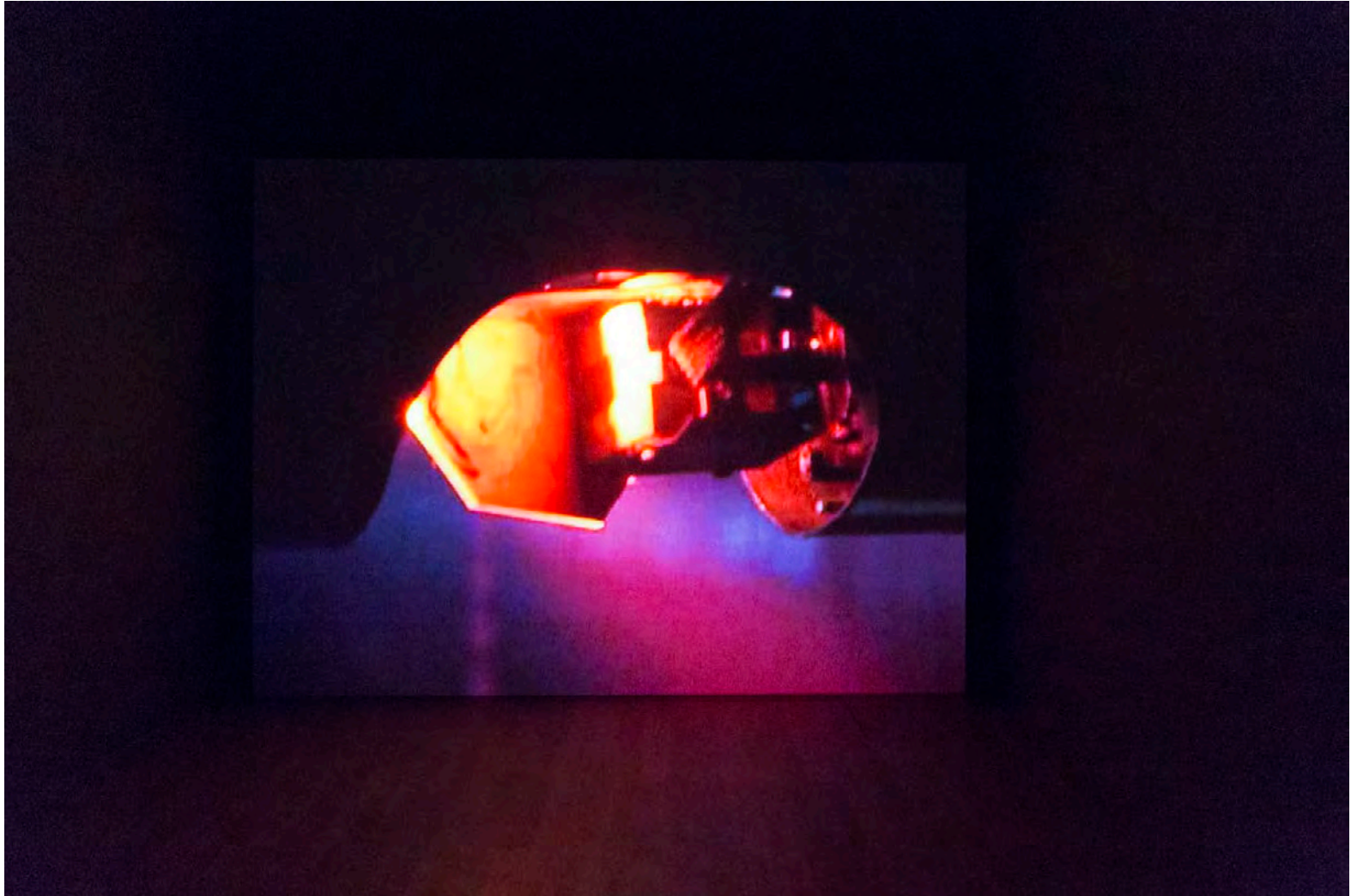


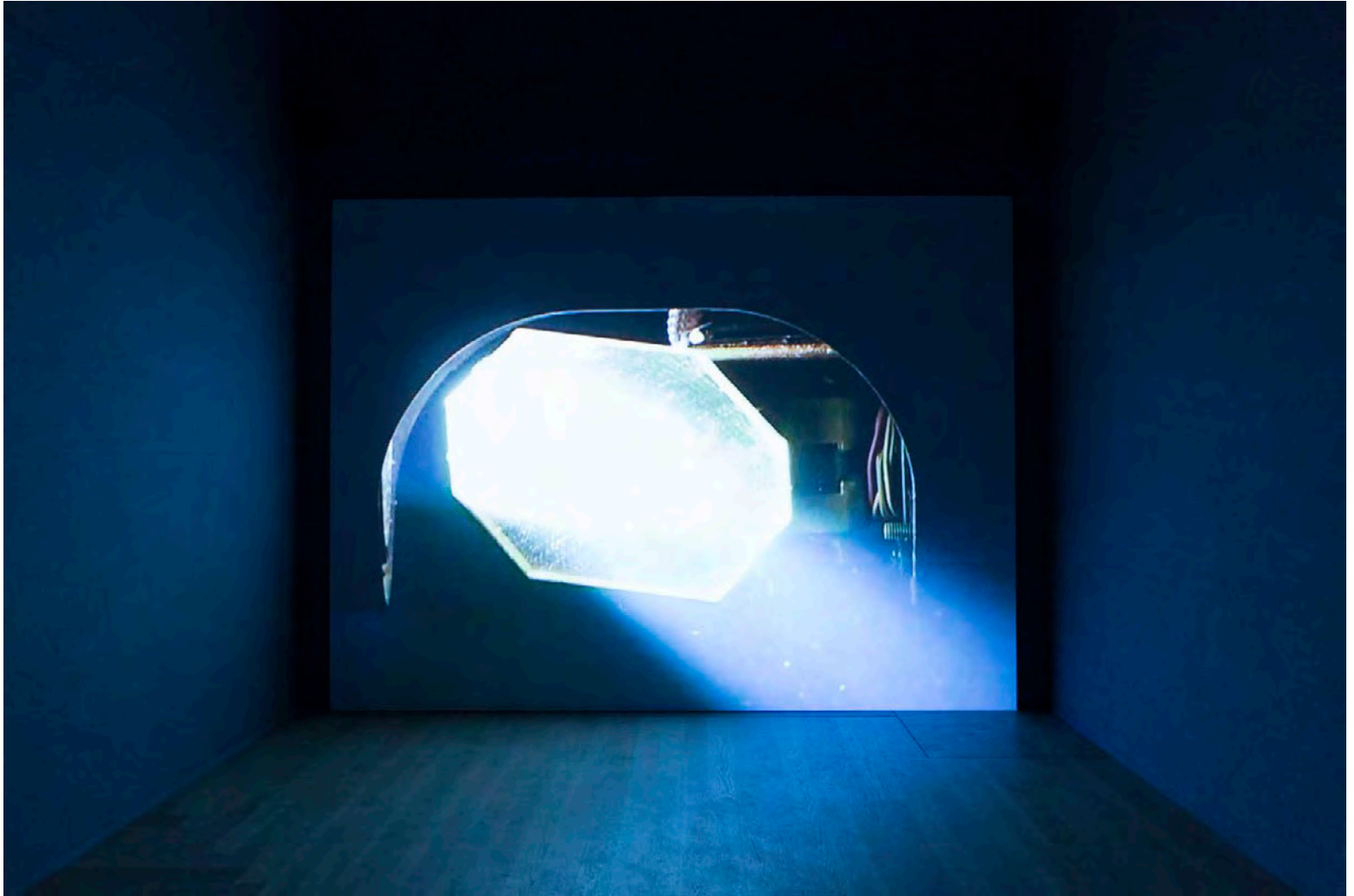


Room 8





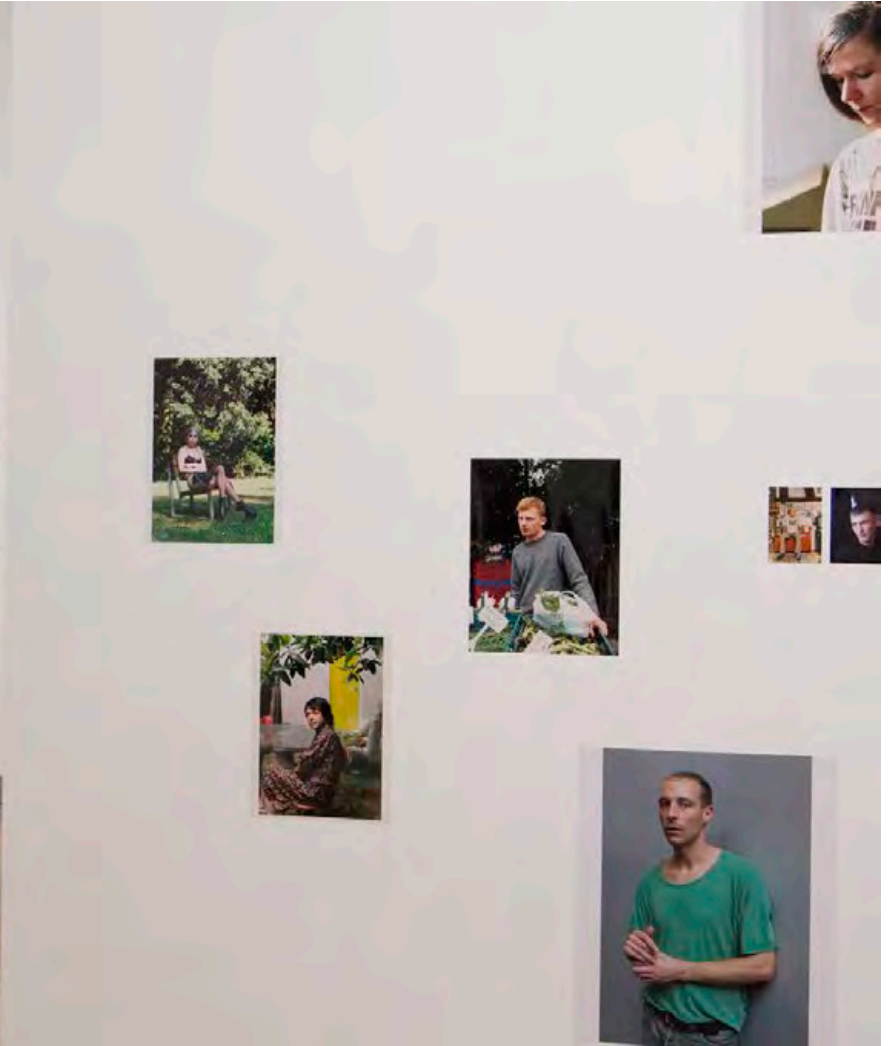
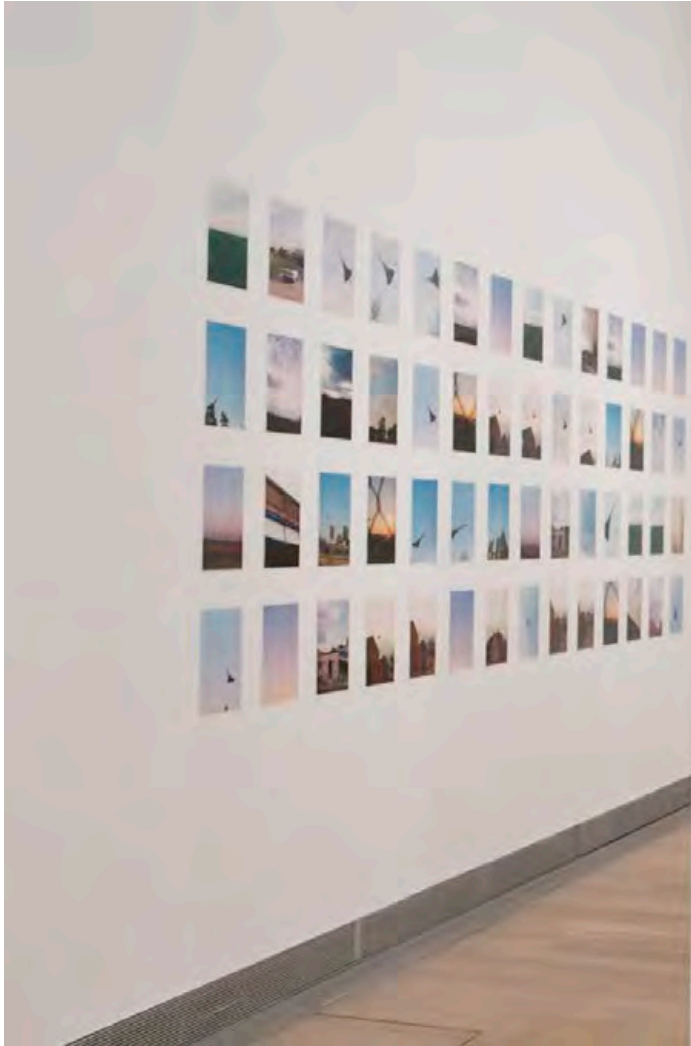




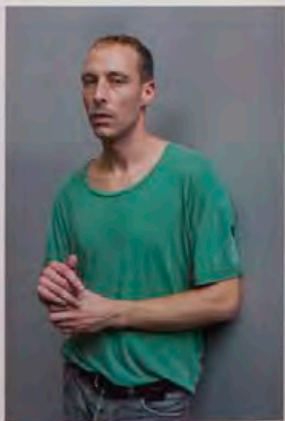
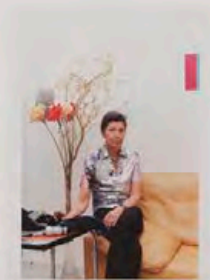
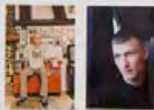
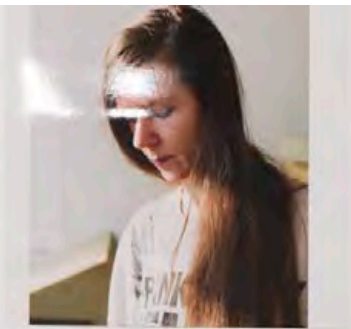
Room 9



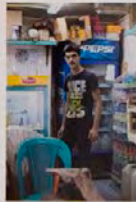


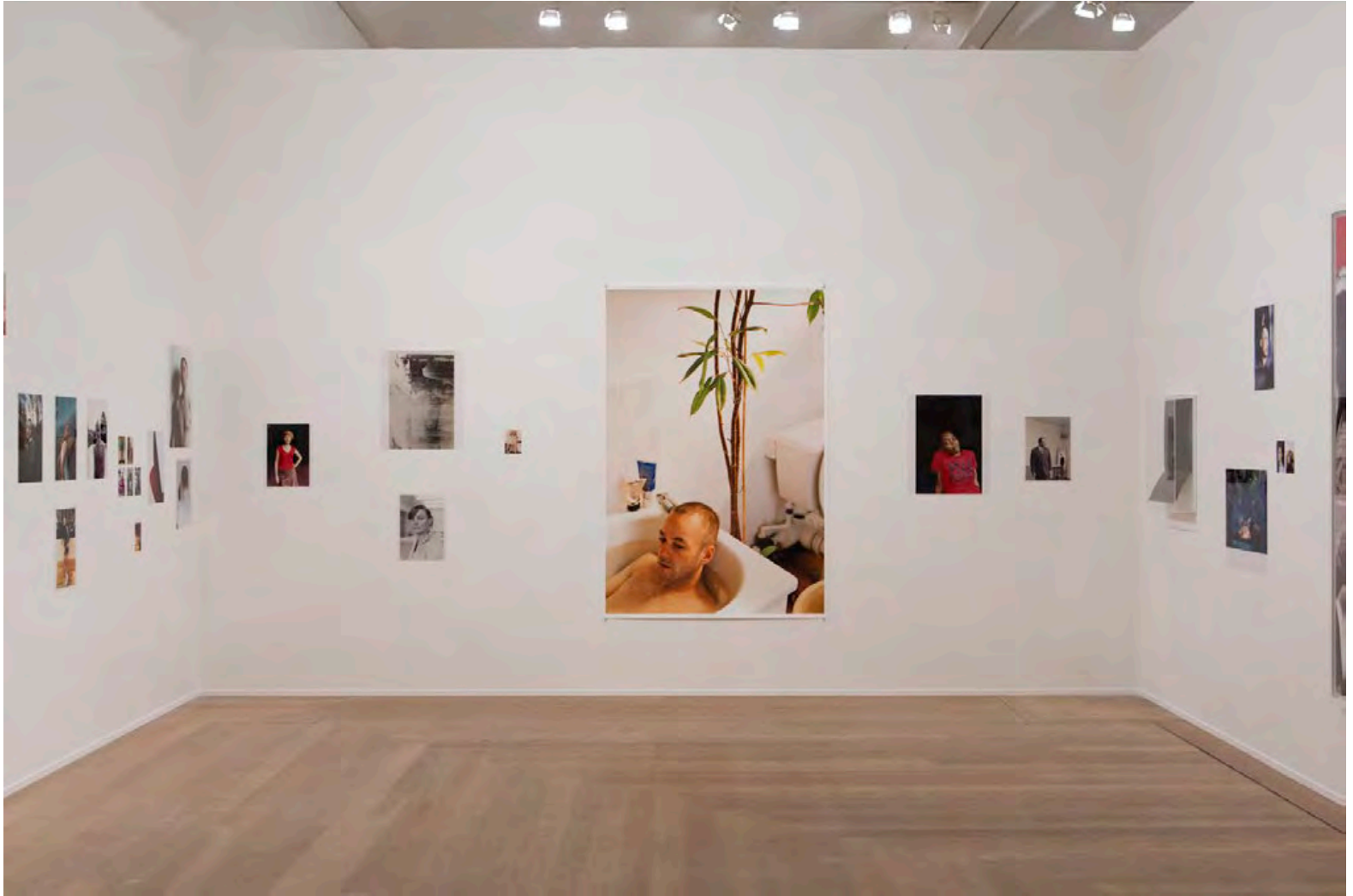










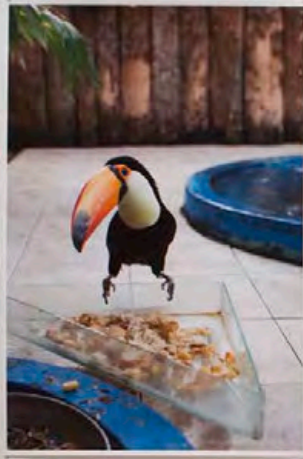


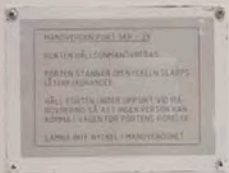




Room 10





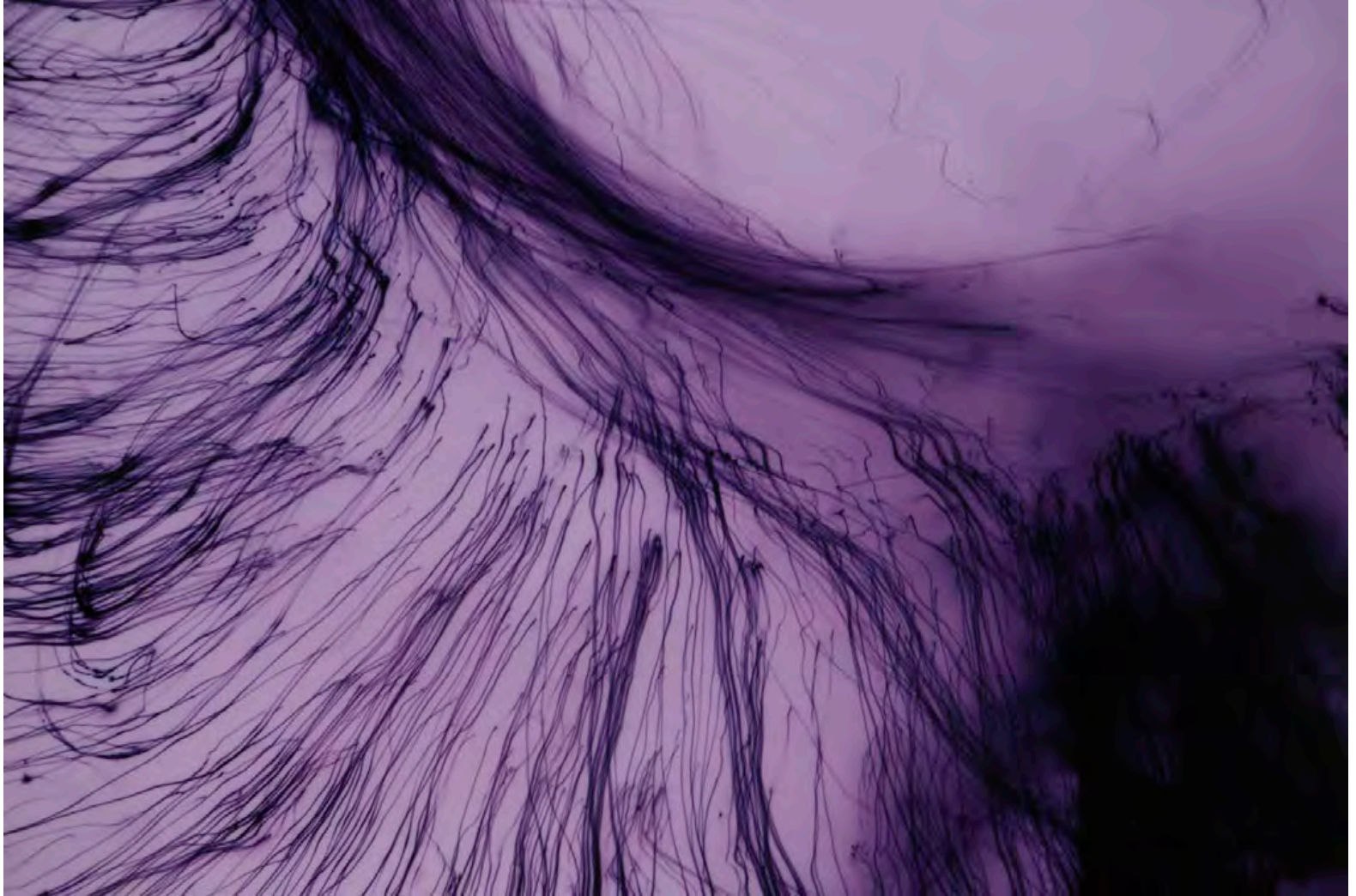














Room 11









Room 12







List of works Moderna Museet
(work in progress)

Room 1

Shanghai night, a, 2009, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
paper drop (light), 2006, c-print, 30.5 × 40.6 cm
untitled, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
in flight astro (ii), 2010, inkjet print on paper, clips, 208 × 138 cm
Venus transit, second contact, 2004, inkjet print on paper, clips, 190 × 138 cm
spores, 2012, inkjet print on paper, clips, 242 × 161 cm
sunset reflected, 2005, c-print, 15 × 10 cm
Kilimanjaro, 2012, c-print, 30.5 × 40.6 cm
Rest of World, 2009, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm
Rohbau, 2009, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm

Vista Telescope, ESO, 2012, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
lovers, 2009, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Eierstapel, 2009, c-print, 15 × 10 cm
Venus transit, drop, 2004, inkjet print on paper, clips, 190 × 138 cm
Munuwata sky, 2011, inkjet print on paper, clips, 242 × 161 cm
Venus transit, clouds, 2004, inkjet print on paper, clips, 190 × 138 cm
Venus transit, 2004, inkjet print on paper, clips, 190 × 138 cm
Fire Island, 1995, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Tag/Nacht, 2009, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
dusty vehicle, 2012, c-print, 30.5 × 40.6 cm
red eclipse, 2000, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm

Nightfall (b), 2010, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
paper drop (space), 2006, c-print, 30.5 × 40.6 cm
Eclipse, China (a), 2009, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Venus transit, edge, 2004, inkjet print on paper, clips, 190 × 138 cm
Paranal ESO, sky & ocean, 2012, inkjet print on paper, clips, 292 × 194 cm

Silver 1, 1998, c-print, Forex, glass, wood, 237 × 181 × 6 cm
Total Solar Eclipse Grid, 1998, 21 c-prints, 106 × 197 cm

New Year table, 2009, c-prints, wood, glass
Kepler Venice tables, 2009, mixed media, wood, glass

Room 2

Silver 85, 2011, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood, 181 × 238 × 6 cm

Plant life, 2005, c-print, 10 × 15 cm
After Warriors, 1996, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm
August self portrait, 2005, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm

Kieler Straße (self), 1988, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
windowbox, 2000, c-print, 50.8 × 61 cm
Headlight (a), 2012, inkjet print on paper, clips, 208 × 138 cm
Selbstportrait, 1988, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
o.M., 1997, c-print, 30.5 × 40.6 cm
Silver 69, 2000, c-print, Forex, glass, wood, 181 × 237 × 6 cm

sensor flaws & dead pixels, ESO, 2012, inkjet print on paper, clips, 138 × 208 cm
Silver 91, 2011, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm

Room 3

Lighter, white concave, a, 2012, c-print, plexi glass, 64 × 54 × 10 cm
Lighter 76, 2008, c-print, plexi glass, 64 × 54 × 10 cm
Lighter, blue II, 2006, c-print, plexi glass, 64 × 54 × 10 cm

An der Isar, I, 2008, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood, 260 × 181 × 6 cm
Sommer, 2004, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm

Chemistry squares, 1992, 15 c-prints, 14.2 × 426 cm
Venice, 2007, c-print, Forex, glass, wood, 181 × 265 × 6 cm
Lighter, blue concave II, 2010, c-print, plexi glass, 64 × 54 × 10 cm
Lighter, unprocessed supra I, 2010, c-print, plexi glass, 64 × 54 × 10 cm
Lighter, jam, 2011, c-print, plexi glass, 64 × 54 × 10 cm
Lighter 92, 2012, c-print, plexi glass, 64 × 54 × 10 cm

New Family, 2001, c-print, 30.5 × 40.6 cm
Mexican non-GM corn plant (day), 2009, inkjet print on paper, clips, 208 × 138 cm
Blushes # 59, 2000, inkjet print on paper, clips, 208 × 138 cm

Oberhaut, 2009, c-print, 30.5 × 40.6 cm
William of Orange, 2007, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
blacks, 2011, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Wilhelm Leibl painting, 2002, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
nackt, 2003, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood, 211 × 145 × 6 cm

Room 4

paper drop (green), 2008, c-print
Movin Cool, 2010, inkjet print on paper, clips
rat, disappearing, 1995, c-print
Darwin, NT, 2012, c-print
pixel bullet holes I (b/w), 2002, inkjet print on paper, clips
killing machine, 1995, c-print
Italian border guard, 2008, inkjet print on paper, clips
Guardia di Finanza (Lampedusa), 2008, inkjet print on paper, clips

dark side of gold, 2006, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood
rain, 2006, inkjet print on paper, clips
What is a liquid?, 2011, c-print

police helicopter, 1995, c-print
Faltenwurf (twisted), 2000, c-print
suit, 1997, c-print
Empire (The problem with holes), 2005, c-print
Swiss Police, 1994, c-print
Eichen, 1999, c-print

Strümpfe, 2002, c-print
Soldat I, 1996, c-print
Soldat II, 1996, c-print
catch great, 2008, c-print
Horseman, 1994, c-print
Army, 2008, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood
Lutz, Alex, Susanne & Christoph on beach (orange), 1993, c-print
U-Bahn Sitz, 1995, c-print
Shay, 2002, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood
Shay IV, 2002, c-print

Room 5

Times Square LED, 2010, c-print
Silvio (U-Bahn), 1992, c-print
Fuck Men, 1992, c-print
Carina, 1992, c-print
Genom, 2002, c-print
Lutz & Alex holding cock, 1992, c-print
Lutz & Alex looking at crotch, 1991, c-print
JAL, 1997, c-print
moonrise, Puerto Rico, 1995, inkjet print on paper, clips
Zimmerlinde (Michel), 2006, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood
TAC Khayelitsha activists, 2006, c-print
Faltenwurf (grey), 2009, c-print
Corinne on Gloucester Place, 1993, c-print
man pissing on chair, 1997, inkjet print on paper, clips
Kate McQueen, 1996, c-print
Faltenwurf (off Soho), 1996, c-print
Elephant Man, 2002, c-print

Thirty & Forty Party, 2008, c-print
NICE HERE. but ever been to KYRGYZSTAN? Free Gender-Expression WORLDWIDE, 2006,
c-print
paper drop (Roma), 2007, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood
Alex, 1997, inkjet print on paper, clips

Faltenwurf (submerged) II, 2000, c-print
Silver 89, 2011, c-print
Suzanne & Lutz, white dress, army skirt, 1993, inkjet print on paper, clips, c-print
paper drop (window), 2006, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood, c-print
Paul, New York, 1994, c-print
Garten, 2008, c-print
Alex & Lutz, back, 1992, inkjet print on paper, clips, c-print
window/Caravaggio, 1997, c-print
on the verge of visibility, 1997, c-print
we summer, left, 2004, c-print
we summer, right, 2004, c-print
paper drop, 2001, c-print
end of winter (a), 2005, c-print
paper drop (white) c, 2004, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood

grey jeans over stair post, 1991, c-print
Piloten, 1993, inkjet print on paper, clips
Faltenwurf Bourne Estate, 2002, c-print
Faltenwurf (skylight), 2009, c-print
Deer Hirsch, 1995, inkjet print on paper, clips
Milkspritz, 1992, c-print
Market I, 2012, inkjet print on paper, clips
Lutz & Alex sitting in the trees, 1992, inkjet print on paper, clips
Dan, 2008, c-print
Anders, behind leaves, 2010, c-print

socks on radiator, 1998, c-print
friends, 1998, c-print
waste power station, 2011, c-print
AA Breakfast, 1995, c-print
Alex & Lutz holding each other, 1994, c-print
like praying (faded fax), 2005, photocopy
Anders pulling splinter from his foot, 2004, inkjet print on paper, clips
Nachtstilleben, 2011, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood
Arkadia I, 1996, inkjet print on paper, clips
shiny shorts, 2002, c-print
Economy, 2006, photocopy
Smokin' Jo, 1995, inkjet print on paper, clips
Kate with broccoli, 1996, c-print
four boots, 1992, c-print
untitled (La Gomera), 1997, c-print
Iguazu, 2010, inkjet print on paper, clips
Dunst I, 2004, c-print
The Cock (kiss), 2002, c-print
Macau Bridge, 1993, c-print

Room 6

Layers, 2000, c-print, 50.8 × 61 cm

Freischwimmer 93, 2004, c-print, Forex, glass, wood, 181 × 261 × 6 cm

Onion, 2010, inkjet print on paper, clips, 208 × 138 cm

Freischwimmer 199, 2012, inkjet print on paper, clips, 380 × 253 cm

Thirty & Forty Party (Pia), 2008, inkjet print on paper, clips, 138 × 208 cm

Ursuppe, b, 2010, inkjet print on paper, clips, 298 × 448 cm

Quarry II, 2001, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm

Freischwimmer 180, 2011, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood, 265 × 181 × 6 cm

Freischwimmer 177, 2011, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood, 181 × 261 × 6 cm

Gedser, 2004, c-print 40.6 × 30.5 cm

Room 7

Die Schwärze, 2007, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood, 145 × 211 × 6 cm

Gold (e), 2002, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood, 145 × 211 × 6 cm

Lacanau (self), 1986, c-print, 50.8 × 61 cm

Muskel, 2001, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm

Concorde grid, 1997, 56 c-prints, 159.8 × 442 cm

Urgency XXI, 2006, c-print, Forex, glass, wood, 242 × 172 × 6 cm

Room 8

Lights (Body), 2002, single channel video, 5 min. Looped

Room 9

Gaga sitting in park, 2010, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm

Peter Saville, 2002, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm

Cameron, 2007, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm

Philip Wiegard, 2011, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm

Susanne, No Bra, 2006, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm

Richie Hawtin, home, sitting, 1994, c-print, 15 × 10 cm

Karl, 2011, c-print, 15 × 10 cm

Morrissey, 2003, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm

Gustav Metzger, 2009, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm

Isa Mona Lisa, 1999, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Isa Genzken, 1993, c-print, 15 × 10 cm
Isa vor Sound Factory, 1995, inkjet print on paper, clips, 208 × 138 cm
Andy on Baker Street, 1993, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
John Waters sitting, 1996, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Princess Julia Berlin, 2010, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm
Morwenna Banks, mirror, 1995, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Volker, lying, 2002, c-print, 30.4 × 40.6 cm
Anders, 2004, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Anders before storm (a), 2004, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Cliff, 2000, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Anders, Lucca, 2008, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Christos, 1992, c-print, 15 × 10 cm
young man, Jeddah, a, 2012, c-print, 15 × 10 cm
Adam, 1991, c-print, 15 × 10 cm
Robert, 2011, c-print, 15 × 10 cm
young man, Jeddah, b, 2012, c-print, 15 × 10 cm
Eka, 2009, c-print, 15 × 10 cm
paper drop (London) II, 2011, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Mark, studio, 2009, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm
haircut, 2007, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm

Irm Hermann, 2000, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
photocopy (Barnaby), 1994, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm
Kylee, 2009, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Julia, 1991, c-print, 15 × 10 cm
Jochen taking a bath, 1997, inkjet print on paper, clips, 208 × 138 cm
Nonkosi, 2008, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm
Gilbert & George, 1997, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm

Lighter, black V, 2008, c-print, plexi glass, 64 × 54 × 10 cm
OP, 2011, c-print, 50.8 × 61 cm
Anders on train, 2011, c-print, 40.6 × 30.5 cm
Simon, 2009, c-print, 15 × 10 cm
Richard Hamilton, 2005, c-print, 15 × 10 cm
Everlast II, 2009, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood, 211 × 145 × 6 cm

Richard James, 2001, c-print, 15 × 10 cm
Conor IV, 2006, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood, 211 × 145 × 6 cm

Kuh, 2008, laser photocopy, 29.7 × 21 cm
after party (c), 2002, inkjet print on paper, clips, 138 × 208 cm

Room 10

growth, 2006, inkjet print on paper, clips, 208 × 138 cm

it's only love give it away, 2005, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood, 237 × 181 × 6 cm

Addis Abeba afternoon, 2012, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm

Abney Park, 2008, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood, 181 × 260 × 6 cm

Roy, 2009, c-print, 15 × 10 cm

Jurys Inn, 2010, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm

Tukan, 2010, inkjet print on paper, clips, 208 × 138 cm

Ushuaia Lupine (a), 2010, inkjet print on paper, clips, 208 × 138 cm

Old Street, 2010, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm

TGV, 2010, c-print, 61 × 50.8 cm

Springer, 1987, photocopy, 42 × 29,7 cm

Wald (Tierra del Fuego) II, 2010, laser print on paper, 42 × 29,7 cm

Les Calanques, 1987, photocopy, 42 × 29,7 cm

Room 11

Science Fiction/hier und jetzt zufrieden, 2011, inkjet print, mirrors, wood

Room 12

Atelier, 1993, 12 c-prints

In the hallway

still life, New York, 2001, c-print, c-print, Dibond, glass, wood, 145 × 211 × 6 cm

Wolfgang Tillmans

Biography

1968	Born in Remscheid, Germany
1987–1990	Lives and works in Hamburg
1990–1992	Studies at Bournemouth & Poole College of Art and Design, Bournemouth
1992–1994	Lives and works in London
1994–1995	Lives and works in New York
1995	Ars Viva Prize, Germany Kunstpreis der Böttcherstraße, Bremen
1996–2007	Lives and works in London
1998–1999	Visiting professorship at the Hochschule für bildende Künste, Hamburg
2000	Turner Prize, Tate Britain, London
2001	Honorary Fellowship, The Arts Institute at Bournemouth
2003–2010	Professorship of interdisciplinary art at Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main
Since 2006	Runs exhibition space “Between Bridges”, London
2007–2011	Lives and works in London and Berlin
2009	Kulturpreis of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Fotografie
Since 2009	Artist Trustee on Tate Board, London
Since 2011	Lives and works in Berlin and London

Solo Exhibitions (selection)

Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, K21 Ständehaus, Düsseldorf (2013)
Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2012)
Neue Welt, Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich (2012)
MAM Museu de Arte Modernas de São Paulo (2012)
Works from the Arts Council Collection, ‘*Onion*’ and ‘*Headlights*’, The Common Guild, Glasgow (2012)
together with Franz West, Galería Juana de Aizpuru, Madrid (2011)
Zachęta Ermutigung, an exhibition of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen at Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, Warsaw (2011)
Serpentine Gallery, London (2010)
Lighter, Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2008)
Bali, Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover (2007)
Freedom from the Known, PS1, New York (2006)
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, touring to Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C. (2006)
if one thing matters, everything matters, Tate Britain, London (2003)
Veduta dall’alto, Castello di Rivoli, Museo d’arte contemporanea, Rivoli, Turin (2002)
Vue d’en haut, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2002)
Aufsicht, Deichtorhallen Hamburg (2001)
Wer Liebe wagt lebt morgen, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (1996)
Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich (1995)
Portikus, Frankfurt am Main (1995)

Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York (1994)
Daniel Buchholz – Buchholz & Buchholz, Cologne (1993)
Interim Art, London (1993)
Approaches, Café Gnosa, Hamburg (1988)

Publications (selection)

Neue Welt, Taschen, Cologne (2012)
FESPA Digital / FRUIT LOGISTICA, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne (2012)
Zachęta. Ermutigung, cat. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2011)
Abstract Pictures, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit (2011)
Wolfgang Tillmans, cat. Serpentine Gallery, London (2010)
Lighter, cat. Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart Berlin, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit (2008)
Wako Book 4, Wako Works of Art, Tokyo (2008)
Manual, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne (2007)
Freedom from the Known, cat. Contemporary Art Center/P.S.1, Steidl, New York, Göttingen (2006)
truth study center, Taschen, Cologne (2005)
if one thing matters, everything matters, cat. Tate Britain, London, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit (2003)
Wolfgang Tillmans, J. Verwoert/P. Halley/M. Matsui (Ed.), Phaidon, London, New York, (2002)
Aufsicht/View from Above, cat. Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit (2001)
Wako Book 1999, Wako Work of Art, Tokio (1999)
Total Solar Eclipse / Totale Sonnenfinsternis, Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne (1999)
Wer Liebe wagt lebt morgen, cat. Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit (1996)
Wolfgang Tillmans, Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich (1995, reissued by Ringier 2008)
Wolfgang Tillmans, Taschen, Cologne (1995, reissued 2002)

For a complete biography and bibliography go to tillmans.co.uk

Wolfgang Tillmans

Moderna Museet, Stockholm

06.10.2012 – 20.01.2013

Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, K21 Ständehaus

02.03.2013 – 07.07.2013

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Translators: Fiona Elliott

Editors: Bettina Schultz

Book edited and designed by Wolfgang Tillmans

Design and Editing Assistants: Carmen Brunner, Karl Kolbitz

Installation Views: Carmen Brunner

Exhibition Production Studio Assistants: Maria Bierwirth, Karl Kolbitz, Simon Menges, Frauke Nelißen, Tara Khan, Romello Yu

Lithography: Hausstaetter Herstellung, Berlin

Print: Elanders Fälth & Hässler, 2012

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Moderna Museet Exhibition Catalogue no. 374

ISBN 978-86243-46-3

www.modernamuseet.se

Exhibition Catalogue no. 203031-215

ISBN 978-3-941773-20-2

www.kunstsammlung.de

The exhibition at Moderna Museet is supported by



The exhibition at Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen is supported by



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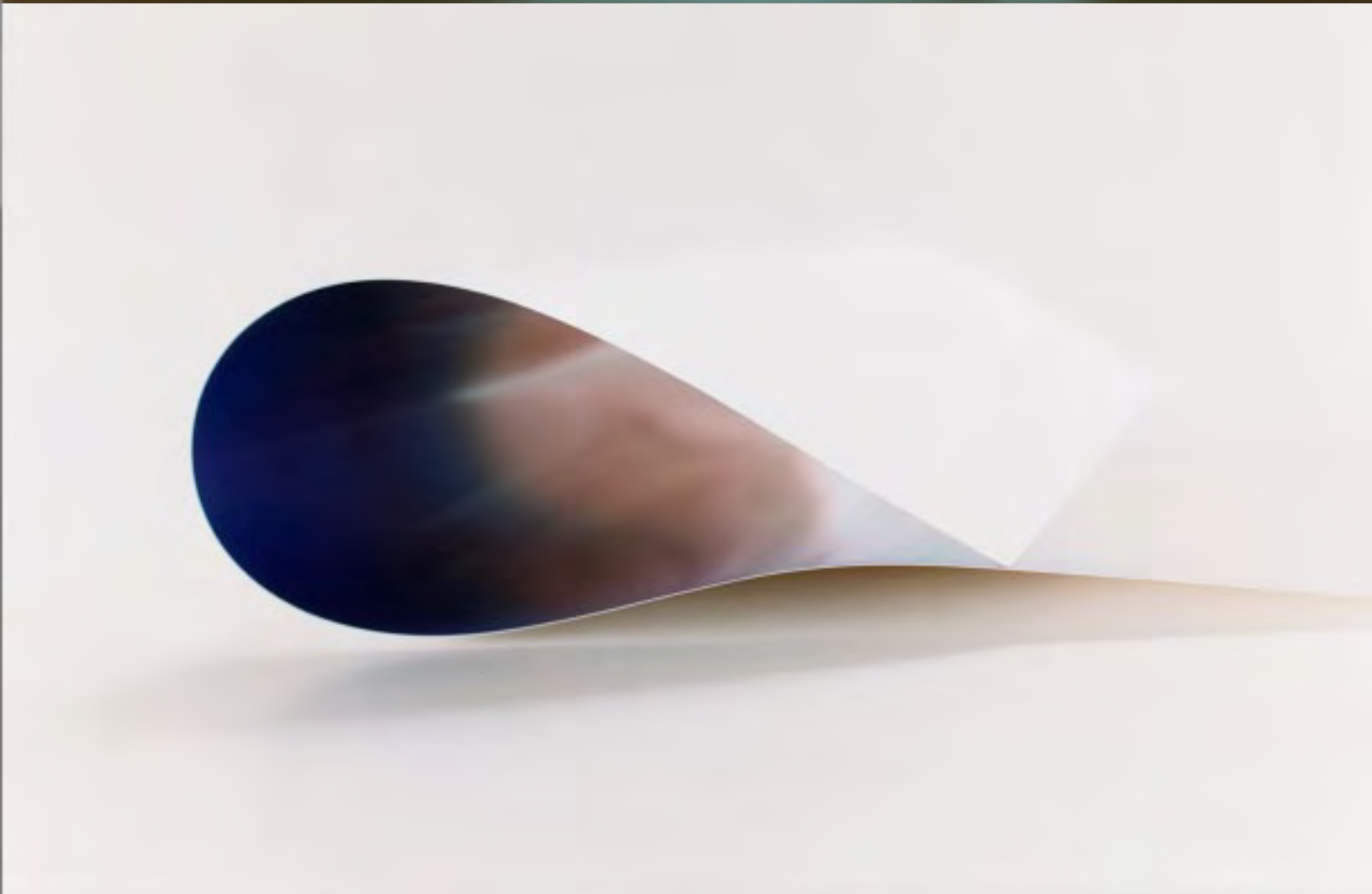


Interview



WOLFGANG TILLMANS
THE GERMAN PHOTOGRAPHER DOESN'T NEED TO TAKE
PICTURES OF YOUNG REVELERS UP TO NO GOOD TO CREATE
PROVOCATIVE WORK. IN FACT, SOMETIMES HE DOESN'T
EVEN NEED A SUBJECT OR A CAMERA

By BOB NICKAS *Photography* SØLVESUNDSBØ *Styling* NANCY ROHDE





“BIG IDEAS DON’T MAKE
THEMSELVES KNOWN AS
BIG. THEY BEGIN WITH THE
LITTLE RIDICULOUS IDEAS
THAT MOST PEOPLE WOULD
DISCARD OR REJECT.”

*THIS PAGE: PAPER DROP (LIGHT), 2006.
OPPOSITE (FROM TOP TO BOTTOM): PAPER
DROP (WINDOW), 2006; PAPER DROP (ROMA),
2007. THE FOLLOWING SPREAD (FROM LEFT
TO RIGHT): MUSKEL, 2001; KASKADE, 2001.*





Among photographers today, Wolfgang Tillmans occupies a unique position. In the '80s and '90s, German photography came to be associated with a sensibility that was cool and measured—with highly conceptual and pictorially minded artists such as Andreas Gursky and Thomas Ruff. Simultaneously, an American style of diaristic photography emerged that was kinetic and emotional—from Nan Goldin all the way to Ryan McGinley.

Over the past 20 years, the Remscheid-born Tillmans has been more peripatetic in his pursuit of ways to constantly re-engage his activity with the camera, as well as moving between London, Berlin, New York, and Frankfurt, among other places. His picture-making addresses his own life, the world around him, his social and political concerns, and it also directly engages the history of the medium. In the mid-'90s, he became well-known for portraits and images of youth culture—whether capturing a radiant Kate Moss or ecstatic bodies on the dance floor—that seemed to effortlessly translate the spirit of the times. They were exhibited in galleries and museums around the world, reproduced in the pages of *i-D*, *Purple*, and *The Face*, and brought the artist an immediate international audience. It was as his editor at New York's *index* magazine that he and I first worked together in the '90s, and he shot memorable covers and assignments for the publication, including images of John Waters, Gilbert & George, and Udo Kier.

With the unparalleled explosion of photos in recent years, the now 43-year-old Tillmans turned increasingly to abstract pictures produced directly in the darkroom, most often without any camera whatsoever, and his work asked us: What else can a photograph be? If he insists on anything, it's that there should be new ways of questioning what it is that we see. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Abstract Pictures* (Hatje Cantz), a new book that brings together more than two decades of his experiments and projects beyond traditional representation. Alternately rigorous, sensuous, beautiful, and beguiling, these pictures further animate a body of work that continues to unfold in unexpected and ever-challenging ways. I recently caught up with Tillmans, who was at his studio in Berlin.

BOB NICKAS: You're in Berlin now?

WOLFGANG TILLMANS: Yes, I'm in the process of setting up shop here, with a huge move of all the contents of my London studio. I had an empty space here for three years as a kind of experimentation ground, and now I've switched it around. I'll keep the London studio as an empty space, and move the center of activity to Berlin.

NICKAS: You were in London for a long time.

TILLMANS: For 21 years—with a couple of years in New York.

NICKAS: I just got your new book, and it's wonderful.

You're very good with books, but you know that.

TILLMANS: [laughs] Thank you.

“THERE WAS SUCH AN ACCELERATION OF IMAGES IN THE WORLD...SO I FELT THE NEED TO SLOW DOWN HOW ONE CONSUMES PHOTOGRAPHS.”

NICKAS: It's a retrospective survey. When we use that term, we're usually talking about a show, but a book is just as important to you. It has a longer life.

TILLMANS: Books have this function that help me to understand the work I've done, to wrap it up. Once it's done, fortunately, it doesn't mean there's closure. Change in my work happens not in revolutions—it's more evolutionary.

NICKAS: Critics often ask, “What does the photographer bring to the picture? What personal history, what politics, biases, or obsessions?” The abstract photos raise another question entirely, although I think it's true of all your work. We ask: “What do we, the viewers, bring to the picture?”

TILLMANS: That is a challenge I've always taken. I want the pictures to be working in both directions. I accept that they speak about me, and yet at the same time, I want and expect them to function in terms of the viewer and their experience. With these abstract pictures, although the eye recognizes them as photographic rather than painted, the eye also tries to connect them to reality. There's always this association machine working in the brain, and that is why it is important to me that they are actually photographic and not painted.

NICKAS: I see you as someone who is always thinking in the abstract. Whether it's a person in front of you or chemicals in a darkroom, you're looking at color, form, pattern, and visual coincidences. This is important to the way that you put a picture together—whatever the subject of that picture is.

TILLMANS: That's very true. There is this looking at the world as shapes and patterns and colors that have meaning, and you can't deny the superficial because the superficial is what meets the eye. The content can never be disconnected from the surface, and this active interest in surface can never be disregarded from the good art that we admire.

NICKAS: It involves a heightened visual sense, looking intimately at what we already recognize. Zooming in, as it were. I'm thinking of how you enlarge a picture and isolate part of it, which you did when you made Xeroxes in the mid-'80s—what you call your Approach pictures [1987-1988], moving closer and closer to your subject.

TILLMANS: Yes, that was really my first work before I even owned a camera. I was enlarging photocopies or photographs in three stages. But in my actual practice, I never zoom. I always have a single focal-length lens,

which forces me to change position. I see my practice as picture-making. Whatever is available, I use. In the beginning, it was the photocopier. Then the camera seemed to be the best way to make pictures that talk about what is needed.

NICKAS: I have the sense that you felt from early on, I can do anything. Working with a copy machine stems from punk and 'zine culture, the idea of appropriation, taking images, manipulating them, and reusing them not in the way they were intended.

TILLMANS: I think it's about an early understanding that values are really relative and are very much to be questioned and can be flipped upside down. Lots of people have that experience and have followed it through the last decades, this constant struggle of youth culture having to defend its validity against accusations of it not being serious.

NICKAS: Against high art.

TILLMANS: But I somehow felt I could embrace both, not even seeing them as contradictory. It's really only for very narrow-minded people to set up this divide. Because how can one start a debate about high and low in 1990 when there are absolutely incredible Kurt Schwitters collages in 1920 that use snippets of newspaper and magazine cutouts?

NICKAS: With the copier, you dealt with images that were already in the world—the way artists use the scanner today. It's incredibly direct and very seductive to have an image right away and be able to manipulate it.

TILLMANS: A photocopier is a camera in its own right. I was fortunate to grow up in the time and culture that I did. I was allowed to develop an awareness that the art that really moves me is actually based on an original image. The straight photography that really touched me growing up was printed in magazines and in newspapers. In particular, the early issues of *i-D*, for example, that had their own texture. But I guess it really comes down to this interest in recognizing that any picture can have the potential to move me, to say something, and it can be a canvas by Morris Louis or it can be a picture in a newspaper.

NICKAS: *i-D* was one of the early publishers of your pictures. Once you began to exhibit, people started associating your work with your milieu—the people and sensibilities around you. Your concerns, your private world, and what was happening at the time, entered the public sphere.

TILLMANS: Growing up in the '80s, questions of style and music and youth culture all seemed inherently political—like gay rights issues, dressing up, wearing makeup, arms protests. A lot of attitude and opinions were expressed through clothes, and they all were meaningful. So in that way, I was so excited about the connection between our private lives and politics—who I kiss, how I like to dance. If you went to a nightclub where you couldn't wear sneakers, you were rejected at the door. But then in the late '80s, with acid house, everybody was just wearing sweaty T-shirts and



suddenly there was no dress code. But I didn't aim to publish these pictures simply because they were of my social scene. I truly believed that there was something new happening, that there was a new language in music and a nonhierarchical socializing that seemed radically new. How much that really changed the world, that's another story. But this coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall and Europe coming closer together, and nightlife and techno and ecstasy culture seemed like a very powerful pan-European movement.

NICKAS: When artists find themselves in a cultural moment where there are great changes—and even small changes—they, and photographers especially, can't help but document that, because it's your own life and it's what's happening around you. Lots of people would say, "Wolfgang is not a documentary photographer." And yet you are reporting on the world around you, and as these events come into view, you're part of it. You can't help but want to participate in a world from which you had been excluded.

TILLMANS: At the same time, when, for example, you now look at pictures from 1968, they are hugely misleading in terms of standing in as an absolute image of the time. Because maybe two percent of the people looked the way that we now associate with that time. I was also aware that what I was aiming for is an idealized, utopian version of how people could be together. I found photography to be a very powerful tool because as long as it looks real, it is perceived as real. That was the foundation for the style that I developed. I made extraordinary things look not particularly staged or extraordinary. Two people sitting naked in a tree is hardly a documentary picture [*Lutz and Alex sitting in the trees*, 1992], but it was somehow instantly seen as a picture of the zeitgeist, of the reality. That was why I think this whole project worked so well, that some of my pictures were taken on the street and in nightclubs, and others were staged.

NICKAS: It is documentation, because it documents the fantasy.

TILLMANS: Yes.

NICKAS: You once told me that when people look at your photographs they tend to identify a picture that was staged as something you had actually encountered, and conversely, they identify a picture you simply took in passing as the staged situation. The kind of blurring of what you did and what you didn't do—that's one achievement of your work. The other thing is that people often purposely stage themselves in the first place. Luckily for photographers, those who dress up want to be photographed.

TILLMANS: But they also appear as themselves, as humans in general.

NICKAS: What attracts you to a person? What happens when, walking in the street, you think, I have to photograph this person.

TILLMANS: I heard this wonderful quote the other day, "Only the brave show what they love." It's so embarrassing to approach somebody and say you want to

"PHOTOGRAPHING SOME FRIENDS PARTYING AND PUBLISHING THE PICTURES MEANT SOMETHING ELSE IN '92 THAN IT DOES IN 2011"

look at them. But without that risk-taking, nothing can happen, so I have to make myself vulnerable. What I think is the unifying aspect in people that I like is that they have a sense of their own vulnerability, and I respond to that.

NICKAS: There's a recent documentary about Candy Darling, and at one point she says something remarkable: "You must always be yourself, no matter what the price. It is the highest form of morality." This idea of being brave about showing oneself in the world is true for both the photographer and the person being photographed.

TILLMANS: Yes. How people are depicted and how life around me is depicted, and this whole idea of how value is attributed, what is beautiful and what is acceptable . . . these are all questions of style, and style means content.

NICKAS: You've spoken about how important it is for you that what's considered to be beautiful is opened up somehow. Because magazines and movies have a common idea of what it is—a very dominant image that you want to counter in your own way.

TILLMANS: It's really about representation, and who is represented, and these questions don't stay the same. They constantly change. Because whatever pictures are put into the world, the balance needs to be readdressed, it needs to be observed. That's why I am also really questioning what a lot of photography has done since I began. I am not saying because of me, but I mean, photographing some friends partying and publishing the pictures meant something else in '92 than it does in 2011. And I find the younger generation is not questioning this at all today. Back then, there were almost no pictures available of normal people—how normal people dress and how normal people party . . .

NICKAS: And especially considering who we're referring to as a "normal person" through the lens of an ad or in a fashion magazine.

TILLMANS: Well, that happened maybe for one season, in '93. That was also only really a fantasy. Now there is such a closed loop between realness and commercialism that one has to question why do more and more and more of those pictures. It's almost like everybody deserves a book about themselves, and everybody deserves a whole issue of *Vice* magazine devoted to them. I don't know if it's the right way to put this, but I think it is maybe a good place to say that if I were 20 years younger, I would try and pick up on this, to do something different. I find it so incredibly boring . . . There still is no new photography and no

new concerns.

NICKAS: Anything radical or different becomes continually adapted and overtaken, and what was new in '92 has been in place for a very long time.

TILLMANS: Yes. I mean, one has to ask how many column inches does this Western, innercity lifestyle actually need? Is it really negative to say this?

NICKAS: In *Interview* magazine? Maybe it's the best place. Maybe someone will take notice.

TILLMANS: I mean, it's all about people, and I love people, and photographing people is something I hope I never get tired of.

NICKAS: You're going back to shooting people after many years of making all these abstract pictures, taking this direction in such a strong way in your work.

TILLMANS: Yes. They happily sit side by side. It's not that one ends and the other begins. I think if I haven't done something for a while, there's also then a need, and not just to continue what I have been doing. I'm 42 now, and it's dangerous at this stage to be driven by just continuing, by trying to keep it all going.

NICKAS: It could have been a real disaster for you at an earlier age, with editors trying to turn you into a celebrity photographer. And you didn't let that happen. Of course, it makes me wonder if there's someone famous who you always wanted to photograph.

TILLMANS: For years and years I said that the person I would like most to photograph is Michael Jackson. But that never became a reality. In the year before he died, I actually did reach out, and it never got anywhere.

NICKAS: What about people who were important for you growing up?

TILLMANS: There's Boy George, who, of course, was my idol as a teenager. I haven't photographed him, even though I know him now. He wants the pictures to be retouched, and I don't want that.

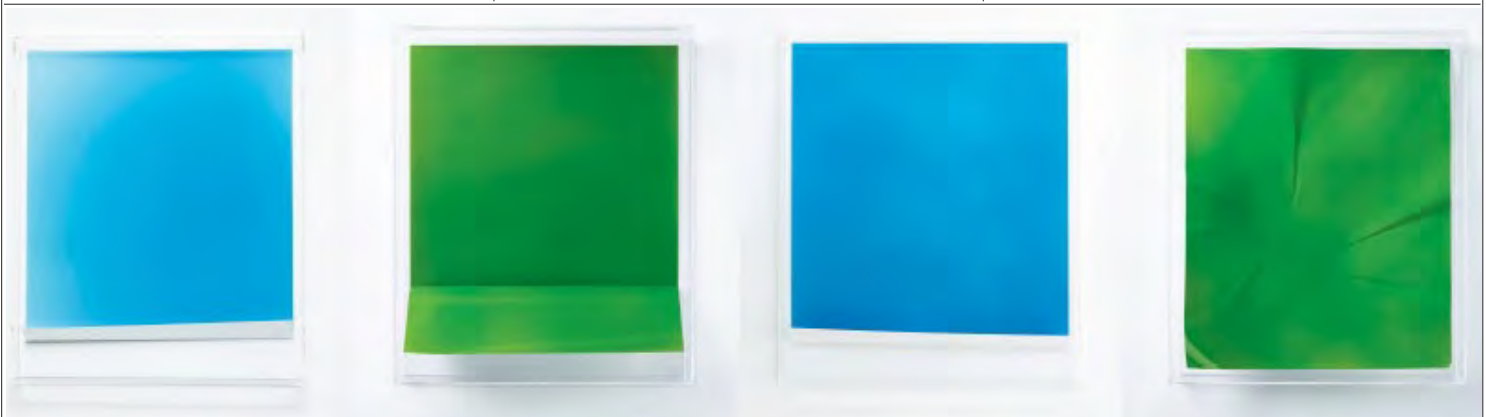
NICKAS: Who interests you now?

TILLMANS: Last year I organized a shoot with Lady Gaga, and that worked out. That waws just for myself, but this year I did publish a few pictures in *i-D* and in the German music magazine *Spex*. That was very exciting. She, by her standards, dressed down for me and kept it quite real, which was very nice, and I appreciated it a great deal.

NICKAS: Still, I doubt she wanted you to see her when she woke up first thing in the morning.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 271)

BOB NICKAS IS A NEW YORK BASED CRITIC AND CURATOR, AND ONE OF THE AUTHORS OF THE FORTHCOMING BOOK *DEFINING CONTEMPORARY ART: 25 YEARS IN 200 PIVOTAL ARTWORKS* (PHAIDON). THIS PAGE (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT): *LIGHTER, BLUE UP V*, 2009; *LIGHTER, GREEN V*, 2010; *LIGHTER, BLUE UP II*, 2008; *LIGHTER, GREEN CONCAVE IV*, 2010. OPPOSITE (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT): *LIGHTER, AC3*, 2009; *LIGHTER, ORANGE II*, 2010; *LIGHTER, ORANGE I*, 2008; *LIGHTER II*, 2006. GROOMING: TRACIE CANT USING CHANEL PREMIER HAIR AND MAKEUP. PRINTING: PASCAL DANGIN/BOX. >See more of WOLFGANG TILLMANS on interviewmagazine.com



TILLMANS: She's very pretty without makeup.

NICKAS: Is there one picture that you simply had to do, and really went after?

TILLMANS: The picture of the guy pissing on the chair [man pissing on chair, 1997].

NICKAS: Which was in Honcho [magazine].

TILLMANS: Yes. I had the idea of this absurd act of pissing on a chair rather than in a toilet or on the ground, and this minimal act being so transgressive, even though no major harm is done.

NICKAS: That chair in that environment represents corporate culture, the business world. It's really saying, "Piss off" to all that. Plus, the way he looks, with his sort of mohawk hair . . .

TILLMANS: Yes [laughs].

NICKAS: Even without pissing on it, he's defiant.

TILLMANS: True. I mean, this act, which can be considered sexual by some, a pleasurable experience, is at the same time total disrespect. I had once asked a friend to do this picture and he totally refused. So I carried the idea around with me for years. When I was invited to do a Honcho shoot, I approached Phillip, who was the barman at The London Apprentice, and fortunately he knew who I was. He had a copy of my first book, and that broke the ice. At the end of the shoot with him, I realized I could ask him to do this picture. I had waited four years to do it. Sometimes it takes a long time for a picture to incubate. The same with the Concorde photos [of the supersonic airliner in the sky over London, 1996–1997, 2001]. I had been thinking about it for years, but to actually make the commitment and travel out to Heathrow several times a week and aimlessly stare at the sky...

NICKAS: These kinds of pictures take you outside of your regular routine.

TILLMANS: Yes, and every time I do that, the rewards are so much bigger than what I would have gotten if I had only done the same as I always do. So each time I make an effort and I get out of a lazy routine, it's amazing how big the reward can be. It's listening to those little ideas knocking on the door in your mind. That's the important thing, to listen and recognize them. Because big ideas don't make themselves known as big. They begin with the little, ridiculous ideas that most people would discard or reject. Every successful picture I've done has really been based on taking a very flimsy, fleeting little idea, grab bing hold of it, and taking it seriously.

NICKAS: There's a thread through all your work, which is a very basic question: "What else can a photograph be?" We see it with the Lighter series [ongoing series, which began in 2005]. The pictures are folded and creased, whether by accident or intentionally—they are about the physicality of a sheet of photographic paper. This goes back to your early decision to simply tape prints to the wall. The photo might be a carrier of great emotion, but it's still a piece of paper. You insist on that reality.

TILLMANS: And that it has a sculptural presence. This was a surprise when I first showed the Lighter works. Even a taped photograph, which may only be a twentyfourth of an inch thick, always became an object that extended into space from the wall. And when there was a group of fifty pictures taped to the wall, they had a very spatial presence.

NICKAS: Your installations are so choreographed that walking into the gallery, we feel as if we've entered into a giant collage, an activated space. Your photos are pictures of things, but they are also objects.

TILLMANS: They are really color fields—color playing on a purely visual level. That's why it's interesting to do these installations where the actual narrative content is taken away and each picture only represents color. The Lighters, in particular, simply refuse to represent. Nor mally every photograph has the duty to

represent. They just say, You're looking at me.

NICKAS: You've spoken about the dance floor as a place where we alternately lose ourselves and see our selves in relation to other bodies in space. So there's a poetics of being transported and attracted. Among the first pictures of yours that I recall was a series titled Chemistry, from '92, smallformat black-and-white photos taken at Chemistry Club in London. There's one which is a closeup called armpit. It's very abstract and, at the same time, very sexy. I hadn't thought about it for a while, and then I saw an abstract picture in your book that reminded me of it instantly: elbow [2001].

TILLMANS: [laughs] Yes.

NICKAS: Someone should show these pictures together. They offer such a clear example of how, in close proxim ity to a person, whether on the dance floor or in bed—the body allows us to see in the abstract. Artists have done that forever, it's nothing so new, but you gave a contemporary image to that, and an abstract image.

TILLMANS: Of course, each generation has to give images to that. The mobility of the eye is such a fundamental treasure that we have, and that coexists with sen sation. On the dance floor, you are totally in reality, while also experiencing this dream imagery of changing col ors and wet surfaces of skin. Sometimes it's the shadow outline in the strobe light, and in another moment it's the closeup of an armpit that you're looking into. I'm not photographing all the time, but it's something that I actually see all the time, and not just on the dance floor. It's this ongoing coexistence which makes life sensa tional. The eyes have this ability to flip around what they see from one second to another, to see something as an object, and then as a design. That's really liberating, and I try to convey that in my work, that your eyes are free and you are free to use them. The original interest in mak ing pictures that don't directly depict came around '97 or '98, when I felt there was such an acceleration of images in the world, and that was before Flickr and so on. So I felt a need to slow down how one consumes photographs. With the abstract pictures, I was engaged in trying to find new images, but in practice, it was a bit like throwing a wrench in the spokes. The omnipresence of photogra phy is at a level that it has never been in the history of the world. I feel really curious to now reengage and see what the camera can do for me.

NICKAS: Your show in L.A. at Regen Projects this past spring included a photo of stacks of eggs in a vil lage store in the Philippines, a photo that you took in Times Square of an enormous fashion advertisement, as well as photos you took last year in Haiti. That's quite a range of images placed side by side.

TILLMANS: Which is a risky position to take. It's very hard to keep a sense of direction and purpose within chaos and disorder—that's what I really tried to draw from bringing these pictures together.

NICKAS: Chaos and disorder not only describe the sit uation in Haiti, but Times Square as well.

TILLMANS: Assuming that viewers today have been trained or numbed to an unprecedented degree by this level of image exposure that we see now. I always think that we know so much more than one would have ever known before. But I don't know if that's really true.

WOLFGANG TILLMANS



WOLFGANG TILLMANS

AT THE WALKER ART GALLERY LIVERPOOL

It is with great pleasure that we present this important group of works by Wolfgang Tillmans at the Walker Art Gallery. Nine of the works were acquired by the Arts Council Collection in 2009 and this is the first time they have been shown, and in addition the artist has included three other works that come directly from the studio. This exhibition is all the more extraordinary for being a unique collaboration between the artist and curators here at the Walker, who have enabled a fascinating dialogue between Tillmans and some of the treasures of this great Liverpool collection.

Although his subject matter parallels traditional genres, with an emphasis on portraiture, landscape, interiors, still life and, more recently, gestural abstraction and the monochrome, Tillmans always makes the viewer aware of the physical quality of photographs.

“I love the piece of paper itself, this lush, crisp thing. A piece of photographic paper has its own elegance, how it bows when you have it hanging in one hand or in two and manipulate it, expose it to light – I guess it is quite a gestural thing.”

Since 2000, Wolfgang Tillmans has become increasingly interested in the chemical foundations of the photographic medium. Abstract works, created without a camera, now appear next to the figurative photographs. This step from ‘picture’ to ‘object’ is perhaps best demonstrated in the works from the “Lighter” series. These colourful photo-paper works are folded, creased or otherwise manipulated and contained under Plexiglas lids, enabling a subtle play with the material surface and the resulting illusion of lines and contrast.



Gedser 2004

Cover: *Faltenwurf (Morgen) II* 2009

The work entitled *Faltenwurf (Morgen) II* 2009 provides a bridge between the more figurative and the purely abstract. Part monochrome, part still life, and almost a portrait, the photograph focuses on discarded clothes slung over the back and seat of a chair. Tillmans has always photographed clothes, fetishising their surfaces, colours and the signs of wear. Here at the Walker, the artist has chosen to hang the work so as to emphasise its relationship to the depiction of sumptuous drapery in the adjacent paintings by Reynolds and his contemporaries. Through this juxtaposition we are suddenly aware of the sensuality in what might appear rather formal 18th century portraits.

The still life in this group, *Beerenstilleben* 2007, is characteristically located on a windowsill and features the vernacular debris of 21st century life: plastic food containers alongside a solitary, leftover almond and the more symbolic burned down candle that might have appeared in the Dutch still lifes of the 17th century as a reminder of mortality. Tillmans repeatedly speaks of his awareness of the fragility of human life, and of his desire to celebrate it. In his still lifes as in his portraiture, one understands his intense, emotional relationship to the subjects of his work.

In his portraiture, Tillmans works with his subjects to choreograph what one might suppose are quite spontaneous shots. The work titled *Dan* 2008 in this group, presents a nude man. The photograph is taken from a characteristic angle, above the subject; Tillmans has very often used this technique and considers the “view from above” what he calls “the unprivileged view”. It is the viewpoint that anyone can have who bothers to climb a cliff, a tower or a ladder. In this instance, the perspective has the effect of abstracting the subject’s body into a series of dynamic axes. In *Gedser* 2004 and to an even greater extent in *Empire (Punk)* 2005 the emphasis is on clothing, associated with identifiable urban ‘tribes’, and on the seemingly unselfconscious moment. *Empire (Punk)* in particular recalls Tillmans’ earliest works, and the subject matter draws our attention to how the material/physical aspect of the image and the subject are interwoven. *Empire (Punk)* is a pixelated image of a punk boy wearing army clothes and boots which has clearly been fed through a fax, and the beautifully grainy streaks and machine-made patterns and swirls bring immediately to mind the disjointed, anarchic spirit of punk music and the visual ‘noise’ of vintage punk flyers.

The way Tillmans installs his work has always been a precisely considered exercise. He has referred to groups of works as “mind maps”, and the disposition of works in relation to each other, as much as the actual hanging method, is central to the creation of meaning across each group. First known for hanging photographs from white binder clips and map pins, the installations had a feeling of temporariness that suited the fleeting, fragile quality of the social situations pictured, as well as serving to emphasize the physicality of the photographic object. In recent years Tillmans has framed works, as part of an ongoing exploration of the materiality of photography. Rather than being separate voices, the figurative and abstract elements of Tillmans’ work relate closely to each other, referencing each other and adding layers of meaning; in this exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery the ‘dialogue’ has been opened up to include voices from other centuries with such respect, wit and subtlety that the result is an exciting new perspective on both the contemporary and the historic.



Our heartfelt thanks go first and foremost to Wolfgang Tillmans and to Reyahn King, Director of Art Galleries, National Museums Liverpool, for accepting the proposition of this ambitious collaboration with such energy and realising it with such style. The artist’s commentary on the exhibition in the pages that follow is a wonderful insight into his thinking, and draws us closely into the processes that lead him to individual works in the Walker’s collections. We are grateful to Maureen Paley and her team in London for their support, and indebted to Ann Bukantas, Head of Fine Art at the Walker Art Gallery and to Ann Jones, Curator for the Arts Council Collection, for their tremendous contribution in delivering the exhibition. Finally our warm thanks go to Wolfgang’s assistant Karl Kolbitz, our own Victoria Avery and Andy Craig and Richard Roberts from National Museums Liverpool for their meticulous work and attention to detail on the project.

Caroline Douglas

Head of Arts Council Collection

Room 1 (Medieval and Renaissance)
Joachim Beuckelaer, courtesy Schorr Collection
Dan 2008



Commentary by Wolfgang Tillmans

Silver 57 is part of a series dating back to the 1990s. It began as paper fed through the machine to clean it, so there are some traces on it relating to this physical process, and then it was enlarged to this size. It is completely analogue, interacting with material and light, controlled and intuitive at the same time. This room is exclusively for early religious art, all of which uses a lot of gold, making the gold-covered parts of the works very two-dimensional – the gold sits on the surface. Similarly in *Silver 57*, the picture is very flat, abstract, and very unlike *Freischwimmer 151*, which has visual depth. The emptiness of *Silver 57* is seemingly like a blind mirror which throws you back on yourself.



Room 1 (Medieval and Renaissance)
Silver 57 2006



Dan is a picture of a man in what at first seems to be an improbable act of balancing. Upon closer inspection one realises that the photograph is taken from above and *Dan* is standing firmly on the ground on his concealed left leg. When photographing people I often look for a coexistence of vulnerability and strength, which is how I would define beauty. I'm touched by Medieval and Renaissance representations of the human body. There is a sense of fragility, almost helplessness, that shows an awareness for the precarious state we all share. From one point in room 1 you can see both *Dan* and *Silver 57*, and see the similar skin-like colour.

Room 1 (Medieval and Renaissance)
Dan 2008

On visiting the Walker in preparation, I responded not only to the paintings, but also to the spaces, and in this room [2] I was drawn to a huge Flemish tapestry, *The Triumph of Fortitude* c.1525, and I thought it was interesting what it did in this space; that in all the galleries there are oil paintings in wooden, often gilded frames, and that here there was one object which was completely unframed and suspended from the top, very much like my large-scale inkjet prints. It was a formal connection that drew me to it. *Freischwimmer* 151 is 4 x 5 metres - sized exactly to replace the tapestry.

The tapestry is extremely narrative, it came from a time when pictures were often the only way to tell stories and retain memories. My work, which has replaced it, is completely abstract and hints at the unconscious or otherworldly. It wasn't taken with a camera but was done by photographic processes. It has drifts, in the mainly grey shades; some are completely soft and then pinpoint-sharp shapes arise. It also activates all the skies in this room's paintings with the same steely blue colour.

In these Medieval and Renaissance galleries there is often very dramatic subject matter. The religious subject matter is taken out in my work; these are not about certainty, but the unknown, about opening up the reading and testing your eyes and allowing free association, which is really what I think is important in all art reading.



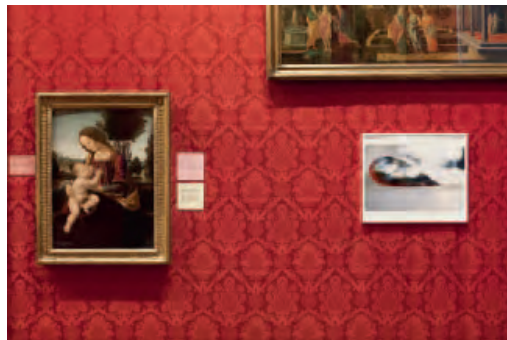
Room 2 (Medieval and Renaissance)
Freischwimmer 151 2010
paper drop (London) 2008

I have always been interested in Old Masters. I have learnt to see them as contemporary in their times and recognise that they were dealing with questions of art and life through what one might consider the straightjacket of the religious subject matter. When you look past that you'll see them as commentary on their point in history.

There is a theme running through a lot of this work which connects questions of the picture object and the question of the surface and the sculptural. This isn't of course something initially associated with photographs, but I found for myself that photography is the perfect medium indeed to work about these issues.



Paper is the material basis of almost all my work. In 2000 I began making it the subject of my work and, soon after, I started making pictures of glossy photographic paper itself, which I had exposed to specific coloured light before processing it. In this piece, *paper drop (London)*, the red and blue tones inside the 'tunnel' of paper, created by flipping over the edge of the sheet of paper onto itself, mix with reflections of light falling in from the back. I found that the light behind *Virgin Suckling the Christ Child* by a follower of Lorenzo di Credi had an interesting semblance to the mood in my *paper drop*.



Room 2 (Medieval and Renaissance)
paper drop (London) 2008



Room 5 (18th century)
Faltenwurf (Morgen) II 2009

This was one of the first ideas I had at the Walker, as I am always amazed at the way that these eighteenth-century portraits almost seem like a pretext for painting drapery. The face is a tiny proportion of the surface of these paintings and in some cases more than half of the painting is covered with a depiction of fabric. *Faltenwurf (Morgen) II* refers to this art historical theme but exercises it on very everyday things, like t-shirts and jeans. These are very simple objects but I have given them the same attention to detail as these painters did in their works. There is this disparity in class between my picture and these society portraits, if one can call them that.

One of the first works I made as a student in Bournemouth was a picture of a pair of jeans hanging to dry over a banister and I am really attracted to how this very flat fabric has the body imprinted into it - again it is this link between photography and sculpture, the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional, the fabric being super-flat but being used to cover a three-dimensional object. There is of course also a sensuality in it that I am drawn to.

I have a strong interest in clothes as a way of communicating with the world - they are how we present ourselves to the world, like a membrane between the body and the outside world; the thing which is physically closest to us. They are hugging our skin and in the process of that they carry an imprint of the body. Even though they are actually very flat and thin they are sculptural objects. This is an aspect which runs through the whole group of works that the Arts Council Collection has acquired.

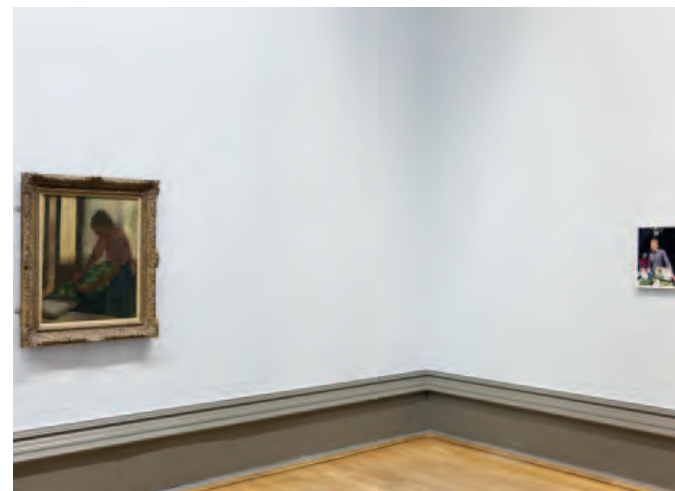


In this installation the entire wall is an active part of my work. I asked for two high-up paintings to be removed, leaving exposed the shadow that is left after years of light bleaching away at the surrounding wall fabric.

The interesting connection here is that Turner has this fascinating abstraction, or what we see as abstraction today, as it is not quite clear if he saw it as that. There is a modernity in him that is interesting and it is all about light - light is the first thing that comes to mind in both Turner's and Daguerre's paintings. Daguerre is a far less well-known painter, but is hugely well-known in photography as one of its co-inventors. Next to these are two of my latest works, called *Lighter*. They are three-dimensional picture objects where the photograph has been folded and bent into a three-dimensional shape. In one case it is just a black photograph, which means that it has been saturated with light and that makes it black when you process it, but the shiny surface reflects light very strongly, so that you've got this black photograph with all sorts of light bouncing off it. The light reflects from it differently as you move. The other one is a dark red, burgundy piece which has been folded in the darkroom in darkness and then exposed to light so that the image which appears is a reflection of the three-dimensionality of the picture. They are a strange fusion of sculpture and picture. They are encased in perspex boxes, which makes them like specimens, they become these quasi-scientific objects. I placed the *Lighter* works on top of the shadow of a second Turner painting that had to be removed for this project. All four works on this wall, plus the shadows of the removed ones, are connected through different manifestations of light.

Room 7 (Romanticism & early 19th century)
Lighter, red II 2008; *Lighter, AC 3* 2009
 Right: *Lighter, AC 3* 2009





Opposit page: Room 10 (Impressionism & after) *Empire (Punk)* 2005, William Hamo Thornycroft *The Mower* c1882-94
Left: Cameron 2007

For this installation I moved Thornycroft's *The Mower* into the room of nineteenth-century Impressionist and naturalist paintings. The room was cleared apart from a few works which I left exactly where they were. I only left works that could be described as having a rural or manual labour feel – a shepherdess by George Clausen, a woman ironing by Degas, a seascape by Courbet and a landscape by Charles Conder. I added *Empire (Punk)* – a very large piece made by enlarging a fax of an early photograph of mine – with its graphic interaction between analogue and digital and chance and control. Also, two smaller photographs, the photograph of a market vendor, *Cameron*, and the photograph of a painting by Wilhelm Leibl, a German naturalistic painter of the same era as Courbet. I positioned *The Mower* to face in the direction of the punk, with the farm boy from the

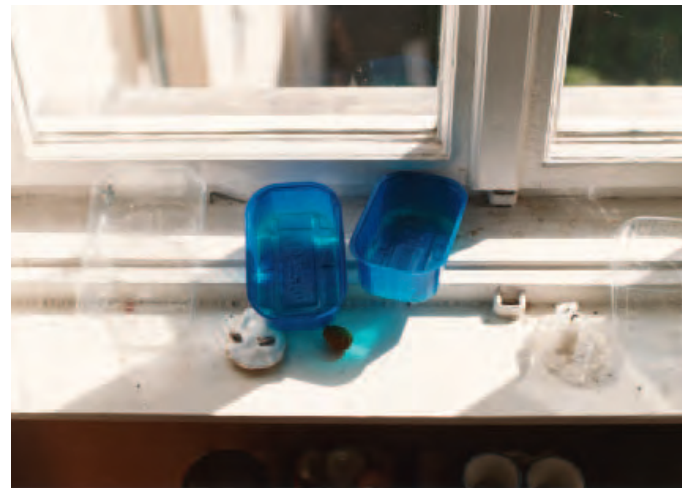
Leibl painting looking in from the side. The punk, as a member of our post-agrarian, post-industrial society, looks with a slight smile into this world of different priorities and occupations. *The Mower* in return becomes detached from his role as a farm worker and is reconsidered as the subject of admiration for his perfect beauty and body.



I've been an admirer of Patrick Caulfield for a long time and I was excited to find this still life alongside a 'still life' relief of a glass of water by Michael Craig-Martin on the adjacent wall. It seemed a great opportunity for me to see two of my works alongside two by British artists I admire. All of the other works were removed from the room except these two, which remained exactly in their place, leaving odd gaps of wall space – a strategy I also used in the nineteenth-century room. Immediately a whole range of connections opened up between the shades of blue in all four works, the play of transparency and translucency at work in our still lifes but also in the picture of the man with a mobile phone. Caulfield's and Craig-Martin's works are from a pre-digital age but both pre-empt the use of layers and image manipulation, now so common in a lot of imagery surrounding us. *Gedser* is one of my only works that employs any kind of digital manipulation. Instead of hiding this and making it look perfect, I deliberately made an awkward job that still looks believable on a composition level, but totally 'unacceptable' in terms of photo-professional skill.



Room 13 (1950 to now)
Beerenstilleben 2007 and *Gedser* 2004
 Patrick Caulfield *Still Life – Autumn Fashion* 1978
 © The Estate of Patrick Caulfield.
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Michael Craig-Martin *A Glass of Water*
 1984 © the artist
Beerenstilleben 2007



Lighter, red II 2008

Biography

Wolfgang Tillmans was born in Remscheid, Germany in 1968. He moved to the UK in 1990 to study at Bournemouth and Poole College of Art and Design. For almost two decades he has exhibited internationally, at venues including Tate Britain, London (2003), PS1, New York (2006), Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2006), Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2008), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2008) and most recently at the Serpentine Gallery, London (2010). In 2000 he became the first photographer to win the Turner Prize and in 2009 he was awarded the Kulturpreis der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Photographie. He divides his time between London and Berlin.

List of works by Wolfgang Tillmans

Unless stated otherwise, all works are owned by the Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London. Purchased in 2009 with the assistance of the Art Fund. Partial gift of the artist and Maureen Paley, London.

Unless stated otherwise, all other works shown in the installation images are from the collection of or on loan to the Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool.

Wilhelm Leibl painting 2002

C-print in artist's frame, 61 x 52.8 cm
Courtesy Maureen Paley, London

Gedser 2004

C-print in artist's frame, 63 x 52.8 cm

Empire (Punk) 2005

C-print in artist's frame, 243 x 181 cm

Silver 57 2006

C-print in artist's frame, 228 x 181.2 cm

Cameron 2007

C-print in artist's frame, 42.6 x 32.5 cm
Courtesy Maureen Paley, London

Beerenstilleben 2007

(Berry still life)
C-type print in artist's frame, 145.2 x 212.8 cm

Dan 2008

C-print in artist's frame, 43.9 x 33.9 cm

paper drop (London) 2008

C-print in artist's frame, 54.3 x 64.3 cm

Lighter, red II 2008

Folded c-print in plexi hood, 64.5 x 54.2 x 3.9 cm

Lighter, AC 3 2009

Folded c-print in plexi hood, 64.5 x 54.2 x 12.5 cm

Faltenwurf (Morgen) II 2009

(Drapery (Morning) II)
C-print in artist's frame, 210.2 x 145.2 cm

Freischwimmer 151 2010

Inkjet print, 378.5 x 508 cm
Courtesy Maureen Paley, London

The Arts Council Collection supports artists in the UK through the purchase and display of their work. Since it was founded in 1946, the Collection's acquisitions policy has always been characterised by a spirit of risk taking combined with an informed appraisal of current practice. As a consequence, the Arts Council Collection is now the largest national loan collection of modern and contemporary British art in the world. For more information about the Arts Council Collection, please visit our website at

www.artscouncilcollection.org.uk

Installation at the Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool 18 September – 12 December 2010 during Liverpool Biennial 2010

Exhibition organised by Ann Bukantas and Ann Jones with Victoria Avery and Andy Craig

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ISBN 978-1-85332-292-1

ART

Developing

Twenty years ago, Wolfgang Tillmans reimagined what a photo could be. Now he's doing it again.

BY JERRY SALTZ

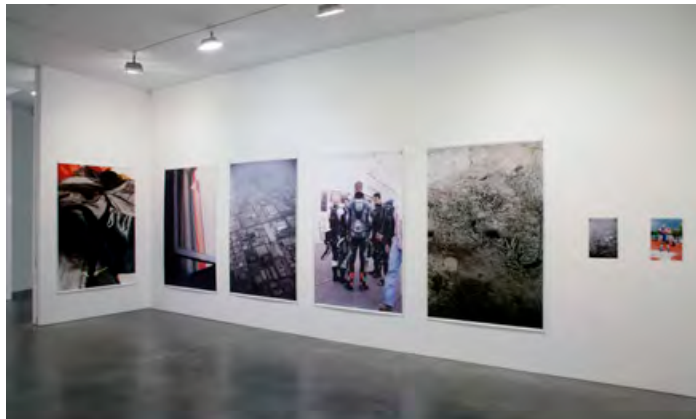
Billions of photos are shot every year, and about the toughest thing a photographer can do is invent an original, deeply personal, instantly recognizable visual style. In the early nineties, Wolfgang Tillmans did just that, transforming himself into a new kind of artist-photographer of modern life. He's now so widely imitated and all-purpose that—like Pollock's tangles or Warhol's colors—Tillmans's style is everywhere. It's part of the culture.

What that style is is hard to encapsulate. For two decades he's moved among genres, making images large and small, color-saturated and bleached-out; photographing cast-off clothes, cityscapes, still lifes, studio tools, youth culture, and portraits. He's all over the subject-matter map. One year he'll be making pictures of the Concorde; the next, of soldiers. But they do have things in common. A Tillmans has slackerlike beauty and nonchalance; a color sense that is more like that of a monochrome painter who works in large or otherwise unbroken fields; an accidental and uncontrived appearance; an attraction to the abstract and fragmented; and a sense of the photograph as an object that (usually unframed) occupies wall space more like a sheet than like a piece of art.

Tillmans's self-assured, majestic new show at Andrea Rosen especially embraces that last idea. Much of the gallery is hung with scores of unframed pictures of varying scale reaching almost to the ceiling and the floor, some clustered, some isolated. Visiting is like being suspended in a photographic aquarium. Although at first you might think he was just traveling around, snapping the shutter willy-nilly, you soon see that he's trying, with each picture, to make something powerful and personal out of impossibly clichéd subjects.

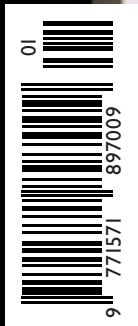
In one shot, a man is in the Ganges, but he's presented from such an odd angle that Tillmans avoids both the hopelessly generic and easy exploitation. A modern Islamic building doesn't look bombed-out or exotic; instead, it tells us that in this part of the world, people build until they run out of money and then live in their unfinished homes until they can afford to build again. An overhead picture of Dubai forgoes the mirage of the fever-dream oasis, showing us instead the ugly strip city it really is. He gives us boat people, athletes, and Asian markets as if we'd never seen them before. Tillmans is expanding his old aesthetic, producing images even more street, even less effete, and asking with every photo, "How can I make a picture nobody else has?"

Wolfgang Tillmans
Andrea Rosen
Gallery
Through March 13.



FANTASTIC MAN

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Mr. WOLFGANG TILLMANS
The artist and the gentleman

Furthermore in this eleventh issue of THE GENTLEMAN'S STYLE JOURNAL for Spring and Summer 2010... The esteemed New York journalist Mr. BOB COLACELLO, the HOT CHIP singer Mr. ALEXIS TAYLOR, the world-famous icon of masculinity FABIO, plus so much more to enjoy while travelling or at home in the garden.

Mr. WOLFGANG TILLMANS

(born in Remscheid, Germany, on August 16, 1968,
lives and works in London and Berlin)

The particularities of the
artist who makes the or-
dinary extraordinary.



Text Paul Flynn
Photography Alasdair McLellan

For nearly 20 years now, Mr. WOLFGANG TILLMANS has brought new meaning to photography, and to the way images are displayed and understood. Born in Germany and based mainly in London, WOLFGANG creates a community around him with his graciousness and his curiosity, characteristics that both play a vital role in his work. The first photographer to win the TURNER PRIZE, WOLFGANG never questions the veracity of the medium but uses it to find truth in art itself. On the eve of a major TILLMANS exhibition in London, FANTASTIC MAN's reporter travels with the artist between London, Berlin and New York, to see just how much of the man it takes to make the picture.

LONDON

Mr. WOLFGANG TILLMANS sits in his workspace in east London. It is Saturday evening, and he has already spent several days contemplating a scale model of an exhibition of his work that is to open in New York in three weeks' time. It will be his first US show in a year and a half. At some point during the two hours we spend together in the studio, he casually asserts that I will be granted access to anything and everything I'd like to see him do in the run-up to the show, whether in London, Berlin or New York.

The scale model of the exhibition fits onto half a trestle table and stands some 30cm high. Small versions of the pictures are delicately taped to the thick, white cardboard walls. The real pictures are taped around his studio, a 300-square-metre industrial unit in a rare pocket of east London that has yet to show any surface signs of gentrification.

The studio looks like it could be one of his pictures. "Aha," he says, "that is funny. What you see is a still life; what I see is a bunch of flowers for the studio."

WOLFGANG is tall, with sympathetic eyes and a huge smile. His German accent is heavy, despite 20 years living in London, and his vocabulary is immaculate. When he smiles, his face works in almost comic slow motion, his whole head rising with his lips. He is a committed pacifist with a fetish for army-wear, the irony of which he is all too aware. He is a gentle man.

Profile

Fantastic Man
The Gentleman's Style Journal
Est. MMV
Spring and Summer 2010
Issue N° 11

WOLFGANG had intended to take 2009 off, but his plans not to exhibit for at least a year were interrupted by a request to show at the Venice BIENNALE. He nevertheless managed to fit in some travelling with his boyfriend, the artist Mr. ANDERS CLAUSEN. They travelled to the Far East for the first time, to China and Thailand, with an unintentional stop-off in Dubai on the way back. "Have you been there?" he asks. "Awful."

Throughout the period that was meant to be a holiday he could not ignore his artistic impulse. Hanging on the wall is a picture of the mirrored ceiling at a nightclub in Venice, taken at an unusual angle. "Awful," he says again, of the club, not the picture. "But I have to be careful that the work does not descend into kitsch or condescension." He mentions the photographs of Mr. MARTIN PARR—"I don't want to be mean to him; what he does he does very well"—as a negative benchmark by which artistic levels of kitsch can be gauged.

The new exhibition is a deliberate U-turn for WOLFGANG. It will feature none of the abstraction that he had introduced to his work in 1998, and will continue his earlier practice of hanging the work, unframed, with tape, nails and bulldog clips. The most significant move forward with the coming exhibition will be its international feel, away from the artist's familiar territories of east London and Berlin. The scale model includes a picture of a man bathing in the Ganges (WOLFGANG has deliberated long and hard whether to

include it), and a shot of a Shanghai skyscraper, alongside several more homespun and immediately recognisable still lifes with textiles, mostly his own clothing.

WOLFGANG is now 41. Throughout all his work, from his first international solo show in 1993 to winning the TURNER PRIZE in 2000, and beyond, there is the sense of a single underlying question: what makes a picture? That question is still noticeably present in the work to be shown in the New York exhibition. One picture is of a sheet of glass being transported in a factory. Another features glossy gossip magazines on a shelf. There is a still life of a rain drop on an orchid that WOLFGANG took in Thailand. "I mean, this could almost be the cover of a menu in a restaurant," he says, pointing to it. With tricky subject matter, there is always a delicacy and often an idiosyncrasy to WOLFGANG's eye that belongs only to him. With every picture he takes, he asks himself: what is it that I am attracted to here?

WOLFGANG is contemplating which picture visitors to the gallery should see first. At the moment, taped to the cardboard wall in the entrance foyer of the scale model is a large picture of a baby in the car seat of a very suburban car. It is titled ROY. "It is so not what you would expect of me," he says, staring intently at the image. I slowly begin to carousel with WOLFGANG's manner. He is certainly one of the most thoughtful men I have ever spent long periods of time with, though he can also punctuate the patience of his purpose with quick, sprightly decisions. I find him almost mystically serene.

In the picture of the baby, a reversed tax disc sticker is visible on the window of the car. Because of the font used, when reversed, the year 2009 printed on the sticker appears to spell out the word "poof". He responds immediately and kindly to any observation of his work and laughs gently at this one. "But this is the reality of how many people live their lives," he says, pointing at the picture without judgement.

WOLFGANG's studio is just a few footsteps away from the gallery of his London dealer, Ms. MAUREEN PALEY. It used to be an umbrella factory, and when bidding for the lease of the building just before his TURNER PRIZE win, he was competing with a group of local African churches who wanted to turn the space into a place of weekly worship. He says that his Indian landlord shows no sign of being impressed by what he does. "He has never commented on any of the photos, for example." WOLFGANG's artwork is everywhere in the studio. "He only cares about whether the rent is paid on time." It always is.

For the past few years, WOLFGANG has also used the studio for his own summer parties which have become the stuff of local legend. These parties are a direct reflection of WOLFGANG's world. The mythical boundaries between the sometimes very separate worlds of art, fashion, music and nightlife collapse within the confines of his studio. Because he is an inclusive person, his parties are, too. They are cool in a liberal usage of the word, as in the opposite of uptight.

These parties cut deeper, too. They are part of his ongoing, egalitarian interaction with the world. "It's fun to give something that you also get so much back from. It's very interesting to occupy my mind with something outside of myself. Even though I deal with the outside world with my camera, it is still dealing with my own stuff, day in, day out. I find the parties a very refreshing thing to do for my mental agility."

WOLFGANG does not throw his summer parties as a launch, or to coincide with an exhibition, but simply for the sake of having a party. "It's good to think about something that isn't just furthering my own direct interests, and I put a lot of time and effort into them. They are not truly altruistic. They are altruistic because they can be. I am aware that a lot of people don't have the space or the money to do that. As someone who is fortunate enough not to have to just survive, it's good to utilise my resources. I don't have any particular lifestyle needs."

In a week, WOLFGANG will visit Berlin, where he will replace some art he has hanging in the PANORAMABAR, part of BERGHAIN, probably the most influential club in the world right now. "There is a lot of bad art involved in clubbing. I don't think that art necessarily lends itself to many applications. The moment it serves a function, it is not purposeless, yet I think purposelessness is quite crucial to art. Otherwise it is an illustration. In the PANORAMABAR they have just the right understanding. They are making a mad place, but they are also very realistic about it. It is a reasonable undertaking to have a great techno club with a sex club attached to it, architecturally. Then sometimes the whole place becomes a sex club and the closed-off area has theme parties. It's so caring for the human mind and the different receptors of what people might want, to offer this playground paired with an aesthetic sense that has never been trashy."

BERLIN

WOLFGANG's studio in Berlin is in a building that was designed by Mr. MAX TAUT, the less famous brother of Bauhaus architect Mr. BRUNO TAUT. Mr. WIM WENDERS once

"It is so not what you would expect of me."

occupied the top floor and Ms. NINA HAGEN's manager operated out of a studio here when WOLFGANG first moved in. The stairwell was prominently featured in a film by the avant-garde filmmaker Ms. ULRIKE OTTINGER. At 680 square metres, the studio is twice the size of his London space.

WOLFGANG is very precise about certain aspects of his working conditions. For example, he is most specific about the weight of lead in the pencils that he uses to sign his art. His pencil of preference is by the Austrian brand CRETACOLOUR. He uses their 7B graphite. Its marks, he notes, are heavier than those of 8B pencil leads from other brands, yet the CRETACOLOUR 7B pencil has the satisfying performance aspect of leaving no indenture on photographic paper, a carelessness that other pencil factories may wish to correct.

All this could lead the reader to believe, incorrectly, that WOLFGANG is a fussy man. There is no doubting that he is incredibly particular. But his particularities are ones that are easy to warm to, and that are mostly deployed in the service of his work. Some aren't. He never smokes a cigarette before 6pm, for example. Whenever I am with him, at some point between 6.05 and 6.25pm a rogue, unopened packet of Marlboro Lights will appear close by. While there is a satisfying certainty about entering and re-entering his world, one can never be certain of where the day, or more specifically the night, will end.

While roaming around the studio I notice a recent family portrait showing WOLFGANG with his sister, Ms. BARBARA FORKEL, 44, and brother, Mr. CHRISTIAN TILLMANS, 46, all smiling in the family kitchen. He thinks it must have been taken by his father, Mr. KARL A. TILLMANS, now 79. His mother, Ms. ELISABETH TILLMANS, is 72.

WOLFGANG was born in the small town of Remscheid, Germany, in 1968. He moved first to Hamburg at the end of the '80s and then, for a few weeks during the crazy acid-house summer of 1989, to Berlin. From 1990, after having read in an interview that the fashion photographer Mr. NICK KNIGHT had attended the Bournemouth School of Art and Design, WOLFGANG spent two years studying photography in the incongruously-sleepy British seaside town of Bournemouth. He loved it. "People always laugh, but I had a great longing for the English seaside. Rainy, sad, autumnal...falling in love and spending time on the pier. I was happy to be in a provincial place and I relished the local gay disco, THE TRIANGLE. The other foreign students couldn't wait to go to London for the weekend. But I moved to

Britain because I had an affection for English culture." Since 1992, WOLFGANG has lived mostly in London, with a gap of two years in the mid '90s, when he lived in New York.

It is lunchtime, and there is another scale model of the upcoming New York exhibition at the far end of the studio. WOLFGANG's German assistant, Ms. CARMEN BRUNNER, presents him with a series of postcards of his own work, from which he must choose an image to send to the building's caretaker. "What is the celebration? Christmas? New Year? Maybe just 'Thanks for your help'," he says, before spending a full 20 minutes deciding on a tone that is appropriate for a man whose first name he does not know and whom he refers to only as NEUENDORF. He says that it is not unusual in Germany to call another man by his surname, nor is it considered impolite or overly formal. WOLFGANG says that as a professor of interdisciplinary art at the Städelschule in Frankfurt, he is sometimes referred to as PROFESSOR TILLMANS.

In the late afternoon, we stroll in the sub-zero temperature between distinct aspects of WOLFGANG TILLMANS' Berlin. He spends 15 minutes at his framers' shop in serious discussion about a particular type of rivet. Afterwards we catch a cab to the PANORAMABAR to oversee the lighting and hanging of his art. His feelings towards the nightclub are affectionate and sincere. He was last in the PANORAMABAR for New Year's Eve, where he observed and participated in a 36-hour party and noticed a man napping, mid afternoon, on a banquette with the music, lights and detritus of the nightlife pulsing around him.

The PANORAMABAR and BERGHAIN were founded five years ago, metamorphosing from the lawless club OSTGUT. For the opening, WOLFGANG installed in the PANORAMABAR two abstract images and a portrait of a vagina. The new pictures are two enormous abstract paintings with light and a visceral but oddly poetic portrait of the backside of a man bent over, revealing his open anus. "It is the last taboo," he says.

In 1998, WOLFGANG began experimenting in the darkroom with exposure and light, moving away from photography into something less certain. He showed his first set of abstracts in 1998, a series of 60 prints titled PARKETT EDITION, dated 1992-1998. It was a radical and significant shift in his art, away from his signature ability to find the extraordinary in the ordinary through his camera. The abstractions moved his art into a whole new realm of visual language. He began his ongoing series of "paper drop studies" in 2001. "The name came from the hanging and falling





Left, WOLFGANG stands in the doorway of his ex-council flat in Clerkenwell, London. Its location on the top floor allows him to make use of the strong light to grow a selection of plants on his balcony. On this page is a view of WOLFGANG's studio, where he displays the placard under which he marched at the anti-Iraq War demonstration in London on February 15, 2003.

“I fear nothing more than losing a sense of doubt.”

shape of the first ones,” he says. “Only in 2005 did I start the horizontal type where the paper actually resembles a drop shape. So the title became a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

When he presented the three new art works to be hung in the PANORAMABAR, its owners, Mr. NORBERT THORMANN and Mr. MICHAEL TEUFELE, unfettered libertines, responded with the words “The arsehole is perfect!”

While we are still in the nightclub, just after 6pm, WOLFGANG smokes a cigarette. We dine that night at a corner restaurant called the OPENHEIMER CAFE and we talk almost immediately about being from a generation of gay men that grew up in the '80s under the morbid suspicion that one's sexuality might also result in one's death, and what a curiously unsettling perspective that afforded youths. For extended periods of time during his teen years, WOLFGANG would sit in his bedroom just being angry, listening only to JOY DIVISION. Some of his pictures of cloth and worn clothes have mistakenly been associated with the idea of loss and emptiness, and as a comment on AIDS. In fact, the opposite is true. WOLFGANG likes the association with bodies, the intimacy of clothing just shed.

Over dinner he says, “My ultimate, ultimate truth is that ultimately I don't know. People pretend that they do. My fundamental understanding is that I might always be wrong. I may be assured or confident, but I could always be wrong. I think that's probably one of my biggest strengths, that I don't fear failing. Or that I know that the fear of failing is a huge inhibitor. So many people don't achieve what they want to achieve because they are too precious about losing face in the short term. And so, for example, with photography as a medium, you have to be embarrassed sometimes. When you ask someone to sit for you, that moment always includes the potential for rejection. If you can't handle rejection or you just want to avoid rejection at all costs, you are not taking the risks that make good pictures.”

He recounts two stories about early personal failures and humiliations. In the first he is 13 years old, volunteering to give a talk at a local fair about his first obsession: astronomy. WOLFGANG had just learnt about stars and believed himself to be equipped to talk on the subject. When it came time to give his talk, his projector failed and he couldn't speak; he left the stage acutely embarrassed. The second took place at college in Bournemouth. In an attempt to nourish one of his early ambitions of becoming a rock star—“more of a MARC ALMOND-type synth star, actually”—he offered to be the singer in a band at the graduation ball for the class ahead of his, only to

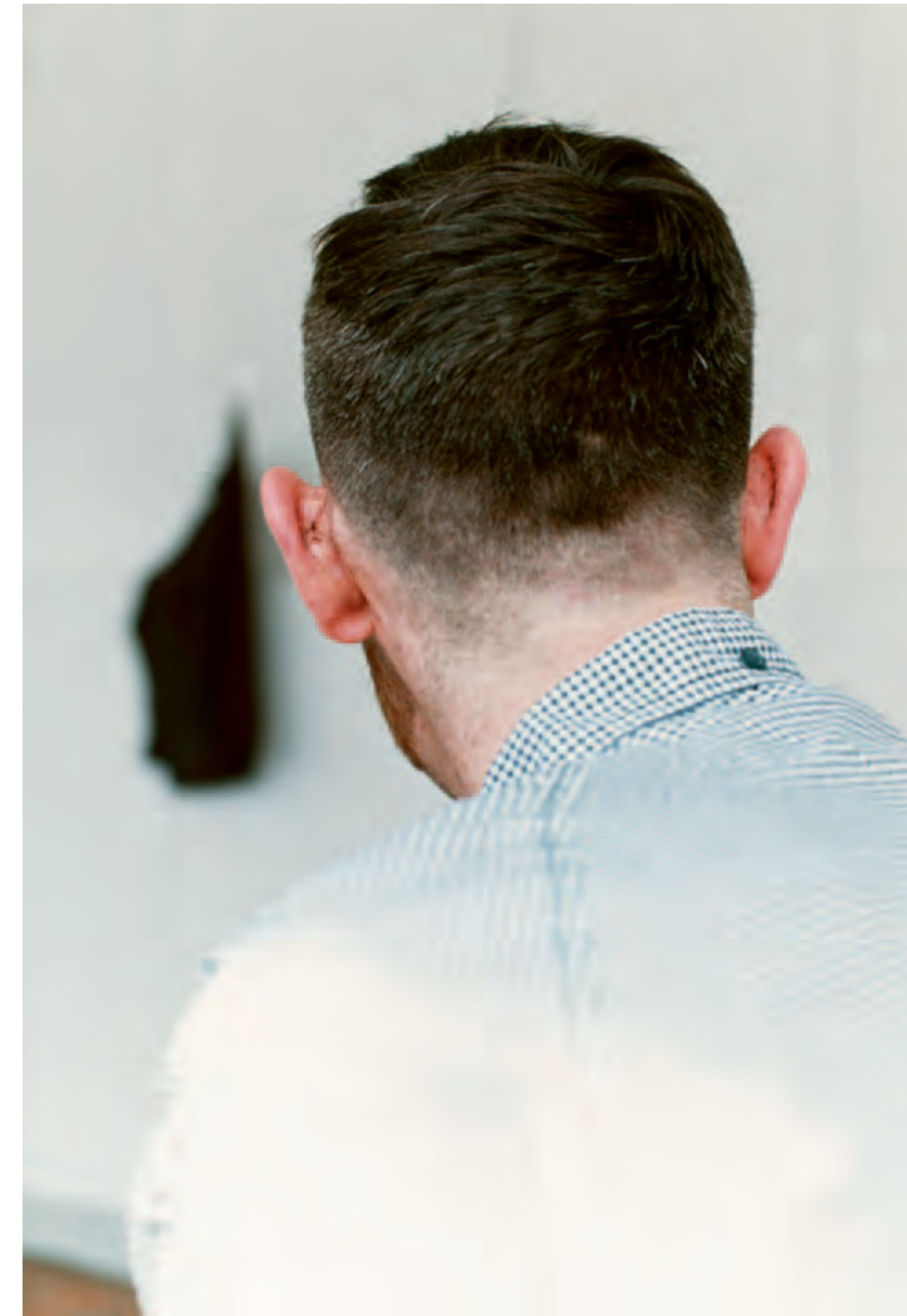
find out on the night that he could not sing in time or in tune. “These incidents vaccinated me against failure. As a 19-year-old, having just done my A levels, I moved to a big city, Hamburg, and within a few months I approached a respectable artists' cafe, the GNOSA, about showing my work there. To make these photocopies and to really believe this is art was wonderful... It could've been equally embarrassing if they had been bad. It probably seemed a little mad to people that I had this drive and this belief that the work was good and that it mattered. And that somehow if this mattered to me, there might be some relevance in it to the outside world.”

After dinner we return to the studio. WOLFGANG studies the scale model of the New York exhibition for another three-quarters of an hour. He is still somehow perturbed by ROY, the picture of the baby in the car seat. “What is it now? Have I only just discovered babies? Parenting?” He blanches at the idea. “There is always a disconnect for me with straight men. I never feel the same. I think there is a fundamental difference. It's almost like there are men and women and then there are gays. I don't believe so much in just a gradual ‘Oh, we're all just different shades of grey.’ I think there is something that I have felt from very early on that is very different from the straight world that I grew up in.”

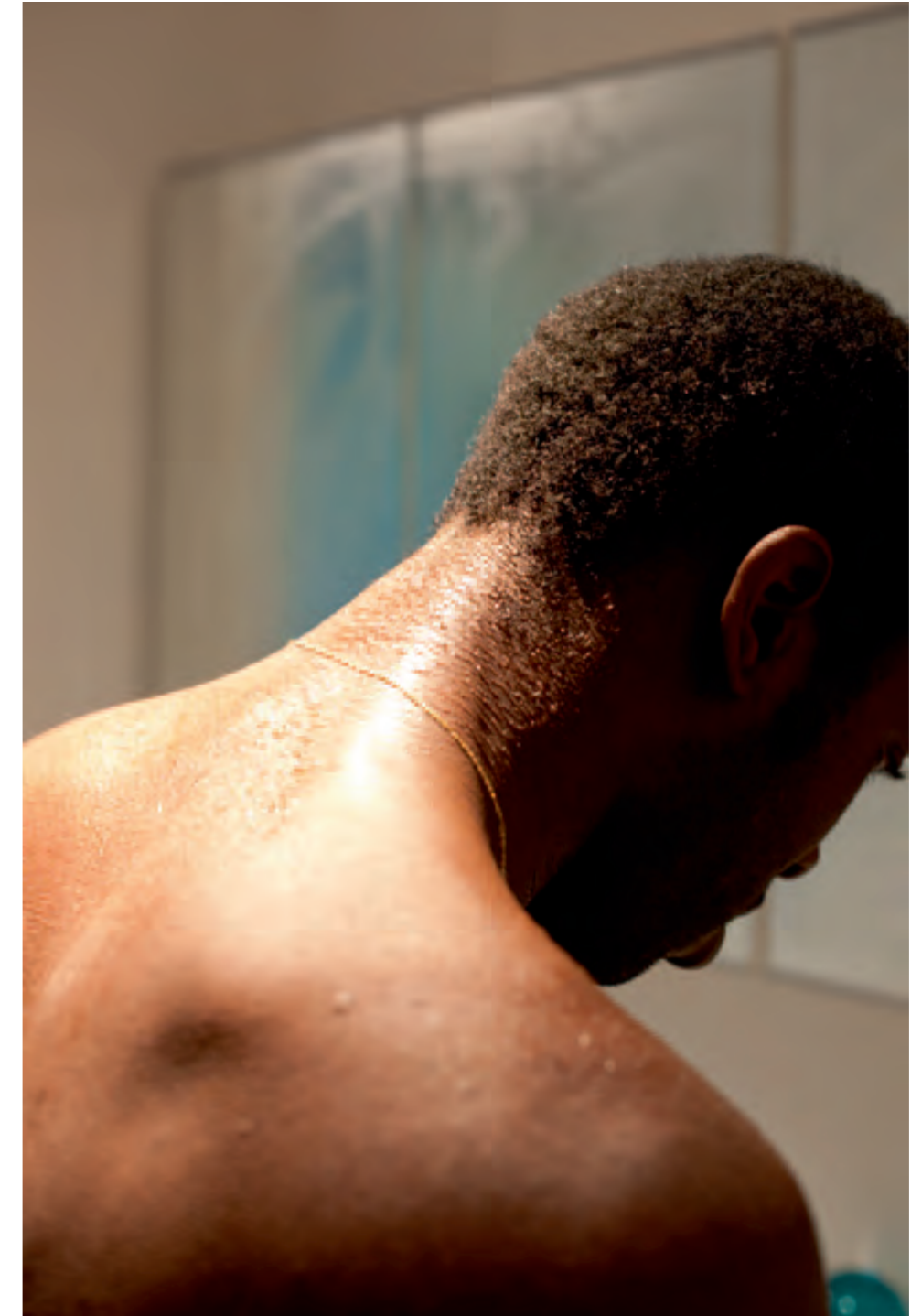
He replaces the baby picture with a shot of a group of motorcyclists standing on a Berlin street, in full, garish and slightly ghastly techno leathers. He turns to me after he has made the switch. “You liked the baby,” he says. I say nothing. It is past midnight.

LONDON

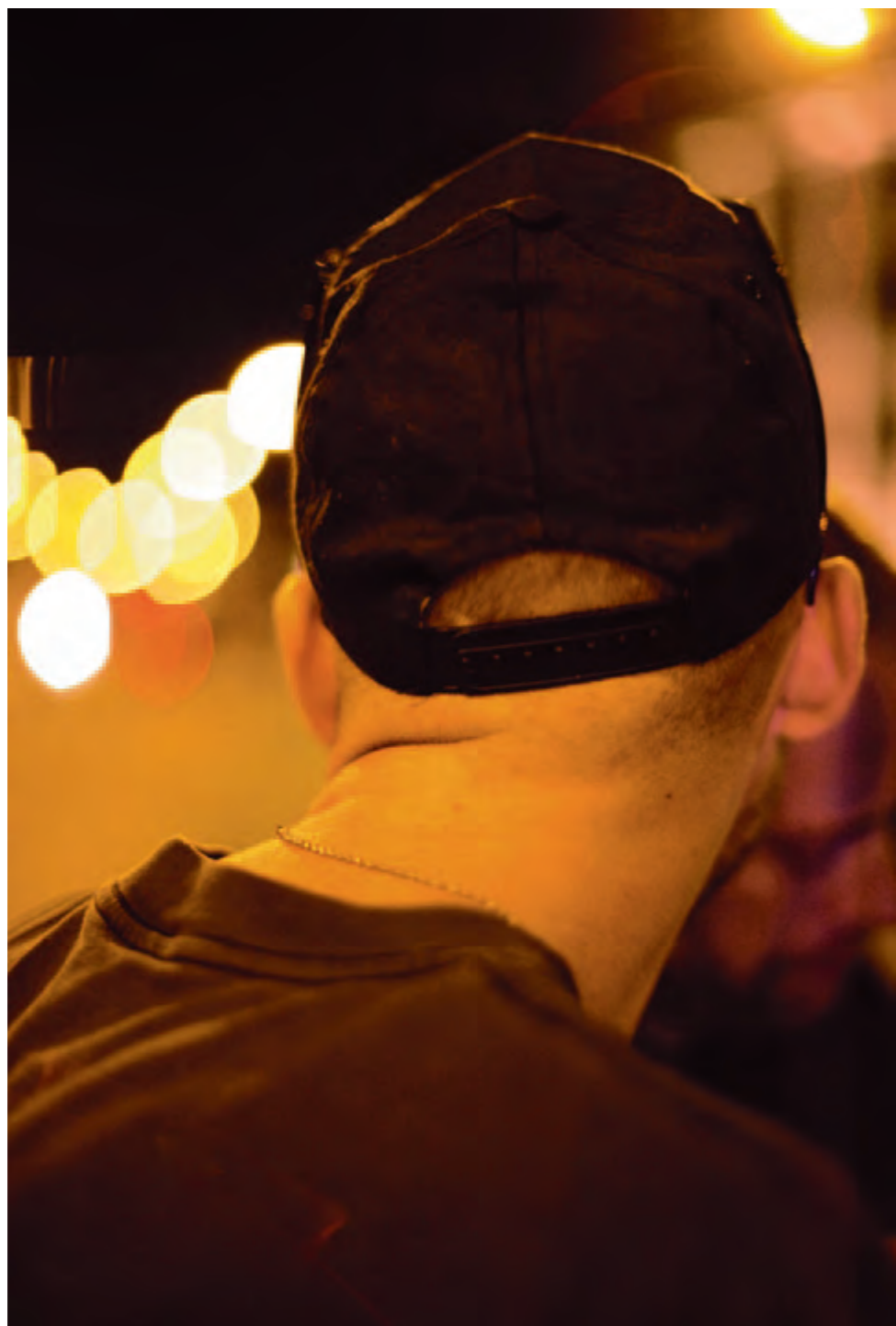
Back in his London studio, Professor WOLFGANG TILLMANS offers an academic-sounding theory of success: “I hadn't necessarily predicted my success, but it has never surprised me and it always seems to come at the right time. I have always felt a sense of purpose, that I had something to say and that I wanted to say it. That if in a certain phase I believed in something very deeply, then there might be 50 per cent of the population that might possibly relate to that. And if only five per cent actually do relate to that, well, that is a lot. One usually thinks of success or fame in a 100 per cent kind of way but that is not at all right. It's quite amazing if you even manage to speak to one per cent. Speaking to five per cent does not seem like hubris. You must always remember that “Being Boring” was only ever number 20 in the charts and that “Blue Monday” was only number eight in the charts; there were seven songs that were deemed more successful at



Necks
by Wolfgang Tillmans







the time. If you can really touch a small number of people, I think that that is a more meaningful success than being one of the three or four artists that are in the press all the time. In the last ten years or so I have dropped out of that, because it's so uninteresting. I have become less and less interested in the idea of mainstream success. It comes at a cost: you also have to compromise on the art side. What is talked about in the *EVENING STANDARD* is maybe not what is considered really important in other places. That kind of success requires upkeep and maintenance. Winning the *TURNER PRIZE* is one of the few experiences where an artist gets close to feeling famous in a real-world sense, rather than an art-world sense. In the days after I won the *TURNER PRIZE* it was slightly unreal how people would discuss my work."

The day after *WOLFGANG* won the prize in October 2000, the *DAILY TELEGRAPH* headline ran: "Gay Porn Photographer Snaps up Turner Prize", predating by a full four years the *DAILY EXPRESS* headline: "Booker Won By Gay Sex", in reference to *ALAN HOLLINGHURST*'s victory for his novel *THE LINE OF BEAUTY*.

WOLFGANG remembers that the public reaction to his win was more sensitive. "The day after I won the prize, I stepped out of the house and a cyclist drove past shouting, 'Congratulations'. Then the newspaper agent knew me and suddenly I was literally recognisable in the street. People would stop me and say they had seen me on TV last night. Within seven days it had diminished to a quarter of the number of people saying it and within a month it had gone back to the five per cent. I realised that in order to be famous you probably have to be in the media three times a week on a continuous basis. There was no reason to continue that. There was nothing driving it. That whole experience happened once, I never asked for it again and it somehow drifted away."

This summer, *WOLFGANG* has a major exhibition at the *SERPENTINE GALLERY* in London. He last showed in his adoptive hometown at *MAUREEN PALEY* in 2008. "After the last show I had with *MAUREEN*, there was a piece in a newspaper saying that I was making a comeback. In the previous eight years I had had ten major museum shows around the world. So the hours that I put into the show in New York or into whatever I do are always for the very small audience that I imagine. I almost have a handful of people in mind that I am doing this show for."

It is important to *WOLFGANG* that his confidence in his success not be mistaken for certainty—about anything. "My work is about doubt," he

repeats. "I think that's really where it is at. The people that I feel touched by or care about or who interest me usually have an inherent sense of doubt and uncertainty about who they are and what the world is. They have retained a kind of flexibility in their head, not shutting down but being open about their fears and uncertainties. Even though of course I might come across as self-assured, I fear nothing more than losing a sense of uncertainty and doubt about myself. I am really most mindful of that. The moments where I recognise that I have lost track of that are moments of real tragedy for me."

NEW YORK

It is Friday, the day before the exhibition opens, and *WOLFGANG* arrives at the gallery of his New York dealer, *ANDREA ROSEN*, at 11am. Tuesday he had been at the gallery till 4am, Wednesday until 5am, and yesterday until 1am, giving himself a break to attend one of the regular parties held by the photographer *MR. RYAN MCGINLEY* in Chinatown. He is a little hungover; nothing that a power-nap at 7pm won't solve.

He is clearly loved by the gallery staff, not just for his art, but for who he is. "It's the exhibition that you always look forward to," says *ROSEN*'s right-hand woman, *BRONWEN*. *WOLFGANG* says that he always assumes people are on the same side, a surprisingly rare attitude in artists from any medium. The tenderness of his art, even when the subject matter is profane, comes directly out of the behaviour of the artist.

It is only when faced with the reality of the gallery that I understand the significance of the scale models and the hours spent in preparation for the show. *WOLFGANG* has spent three days and nights taping to the wall the exact final cut of the exhibition, and now two technical staff at the gallery are helping him with the precise measurements for taping the pictures to the wall.

I watch *WOLFGANG*'s body contort into unusual shapes as he unravels pictures from a step-ladder. He almost becomes one with them, copying the paper's curve with his spine as the image is slowly revealed. He instructs the men in the studio to hold the photos only by the corners, between their forefingers and thumbs. The tape he uses to hang his pictures is made by *TESA*, a Swiss brand he imports especially. These are the only tape dispensers without serrated blades; they create a clean, finite cut.

When he started exhibiting, there were two major misconceptions about *WOLFGANG*'s work. "People thought it was a grungy gesture to tape them up," he says, adding categorically: "It

"Oh, super!"

“You know I see myself as gentle.”

was not.” The other was that because there was an intense air of reality to them, they were simple snapshots. In fact, his work has always been a mix of the staged and the unstaged.

When he notices diagonal lines across two adjacent pictures, he questions their positions next to one another. Ms. ANDREA ROSEN is with him. “I don’t think that people looking at your work think you make these formal decisions,” she says. As small but intricate changes happen to the structure of the show during the day, ANDREA is displaying some half-comic concern about a still life of faeces in grass, called SCHEISSE, hung at knee level.

ANDREA has been WOLFGANG’s East Coast US dealer since 1993, when she and two other prominent New York interests courted the artist. She was first alerted to his work after receiving an invitation to his second solo show in Cologne. The picture on the invite was one of WOLFGANG’s most immediately eye-catching and iconic gifts to the contemporary art culture: ALEX IN THE TREES. It was enough for ANDREA to board a plane to Germany and then follow the artist to his home in London, eventually winning his trust.

Now, in the foyer of her gallery, the baby in the car seat is back as the first picture of the show. On a right-hand wall of the foyer is the only framed piece in the exhibition, showing the decadent nighttime at OSTGUT, intertwined with pictures from churches. It is called OSTGUT DECEMBER EDIT. “They were made in a very intense and passionate time of my life,” he says.

Early in his career, WOLFGANG had distinguished himself from the then vogue-ish Brit Art conglomerate by choosing specific mediums other than art galleries to display his art. Because some of his work appeared in style magazines, most particularly in i-D, he was mistaken by the British art media as a jobbing portrait and club photographer. The major art territories of Paris, Cologne and New York had no problem with his work appearing in magazines, as it occasionally still does.

Some of WOLFGANG’s New York collectors insist on seeing the new show before the public opening the next day. There is mention of Mr. MARIO TESTINO popping by before he leaves the city. A gentle conga line of interested parties interrupts the afternoon’s hanging, and WOLFGANG talks each one through the show. With each interested party he is patient, attentive and affects a pleasantly passive position. There is a fascinating intimacy to this exchange between artist and collector. Everything up to the point of sale is foreplay, on both sides, prior to the satisfying

union of passing a piece of art from the creator to its new home.

At one point the traffic in the gallery heats up as an art consultant arrives with her client and a small child, perhaps five years old. But suddenly the client has to leave, as her husband is trapped in the restroom of his favourite restaurant. “Have they called the fire department, even?” she asks when he calls her on the phone. Another collector is an impressive man with a booming voice, a side-parting in his hair and heavy-framed spectacles, who is sitting in ANDREA’s office at the back of the gallery and telling WOLFGANG enthusiastically what he likes about the latter’s work. “You see the whole world,” he says, his voice amplifying with every statement. “Vice, technology, sex, nature. It’s about everything spinning in front of your eyes. The thing is, in this world, everything is spinning out of control. There is a madness to the whole world. You are capturing the madness of this world.”

At 4.45pm, the singer Mr. MICHAEL STIPE arrives with his boyfriend, the photographer Mr. THOMAS DOZOL, and STIPE kneels involuntarily prostrate in front of the picture of the techno bikers, which is now positioned in the second room. DOZOL takes his portrait from behind. STIPE wows openly at the exhibition. “It is deep. It is moving, which people need right now.” A pause. “By the way, ANDREA told me not to tell you that she told me to tell you to lose the poop.” The first sale is made at 5.14pm to the man who was trapped in the toilet.

When sleeving some of his work in the suite of offices at the rear of the gallery, CRETACOLOR 7B pencil in hand, WOLFGANG notes that no one who has seen the exhibition seems to have found any of it funny yet. “Look, WOLFIE,” says TAMSEN, one of ANDREA’s staff, “I am not going to stand in front of one of your pictures and start laughing, and then find out that it is the one you consider to be the most meaningful in the exhibition.” The staff at the gallery adore him. All the women call him WOLFIE. As an aside, WOLFGANG notices the distinction between the male and female members of staff at ANDREA ROSEN. All the men, bar one, are engaged in manual labour and technical activities; the women are all at desks.

When I ask him later about his relationship with his own masculinity, he says, “It of course depends on what one sees in the word masculine.” And then: “I don’t want the work to be hard. I can play with hardness and I like to play with images of hardness and masculinity and dress, but I never want to be hard. You know I see myself as gentle, which isn’t in contradiction with masculinity.”

There is a light interchange between the artist and some of the staff as they prepare to leave. When WOLFGANG asks ANDREA, “Are you going to wear your brown leather catsuit tomorrow?” his mouth and head upturn into one of his great smiles. She flips back, “I promise you I’ll fit into it by the SERPENTINE,” referring to his forthcoming London show. WOLFGANG will not leave the gallery until 4am.

It is 1pm on Saturday, five hours before the opening of his show, and I meet WOLFGANG in the lobby of his hotel. He is wearing an EVERLAST tracksuit top, jeans and trainers, and has clipped his own hair. He asks if the line around his head is even. It is. “Oh, super.” “Oh, super” seems to be something of a catchphrase for the artist. In the time we’ve spent together, I’ve often heard this casual affirmation.

We wander around art galleries, starting at GAVIN BROWN’S ENTERPRISE in Greenwich Village, where the artist SILKE OTTO KNAPP, whom WOLFGANG knows, has a new collection of watercolours on display. Walking into an art gallery with an important artist presents its own peculiar dynamic. In every space we enter there is a sly little confirming nod from the receptionist. Someone always wants to speak to him. Because his disposition is kind and interested and he sets up the tone of his conversation in this way, he almost forces the people he happens upon to respect the pleasantries. In company, WOLFGANG possesses the quite incredible natural duality of having the impeccably good manners of a shy person while not being remotely shy.

At REENA SPAULDING’S FINE ART in the East Village, a woman cannot believe that he could be so casual as to stroll around galleries on the afternoon of his opening, as if perhaps he should be sat in the empty gallery, fretting. “I am unusual among artists,” he tells me, “in that I like other people’s art. I am interested in it.”

At his own opening, what WOLFGANG calls his “grin muscles” are lively and active. He is a diligent if unassuming host. He takes a glass of champagne with the gallery staff at 5.45pm and by 6.15 the trickle of excitable patrons has turned into a full gallery of admirers despite it being the coldest night of a biting New York winter. The attendees of a WOLFGANG TILLMANS gallery opening in New York are an interesting mix of downtown and up. WOLFGANG refers to the opening as like being caught in the frame of a WOODY ALLEN movie. A succession of erudite New Yorkers offer their verbal applause.

If an opening is the direct reflection of the artist it celebrates, he should be thrilled with his.

Additional Matters



Seen above is the foyer of ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY in New York with the picture ROY hanging pride of place, as detailed in this article. This exhibition is now closed, but upcoming is WOLFGANG’s show at the SERPENTINE GALLERY in London, opening on 26 June and running till 29 August, coinciding with both the SERPENTINE’s fashionable summer party and the appearance of this year’s temporary pavilion outside the gallery. The latter is a hotly anticipated architectural project drawing mass-media attention. All the more important is that the SERPENTINE is situated right in the middle of one of London’s largest park spaces, where HYDE PARK and KENSINGTON GARDENS meet. It makes the park full of visitors who flock to the SERPENTINE before finding a patch for a picnic or a sunbath, making it the gallery’s busiest time of the year.

Boys in anoraks and outsized boots, wearing an air of concerted deliberation and occasional restlessness, rub shoulders with prominent art-world powerbrokers from MOMA. The age, race and gender mix is impossible to pinpoint. At one point Mr. JOHN WATERS turns up and blends seamlessly into the evening’s demographic.

The opening is followed by a dinner at INDO-CHINE, a restaurant with particular significance for both WOLFGANG and ANDREA. When WOLFGANG used to come over to see ANDREA in the early days of his international career, she would take him to dine at the Astor Place Restaurant, which was an old WARHOL favourite just prior to his death. As well as marking WOLFGANG’s opening, the meal is also to celebrate the 20th anniversary of ANDREA’s gallery.

The dinner progresses from the civilised to the raucous the more the wine flows. I sit between two of WOLFGANG’s collectors, one who owns two popes by FRANCIS BACON, and another who has just bought 25,000 square metres of real estate upstate, where he intends to set up an art foundation. WOLFGANG begins the night seated at our table. The collectors are amicable men, passionate about modern art, a lawyer and an MD, simultaneously able to crumble and affirm the fabulosity of the New York art set.

Between them, WOLFGANG and ANDREA manage an effortless waltz amongst the diners. At certain moments you can see them beaming at one another, her with her immaculate New York finesse, him with his inviting Northern European bluntness.

I ask the collector seated directly opposite me whether he liked WOLFGANG’s new show.

“Yes, there is important work there,” he responds.

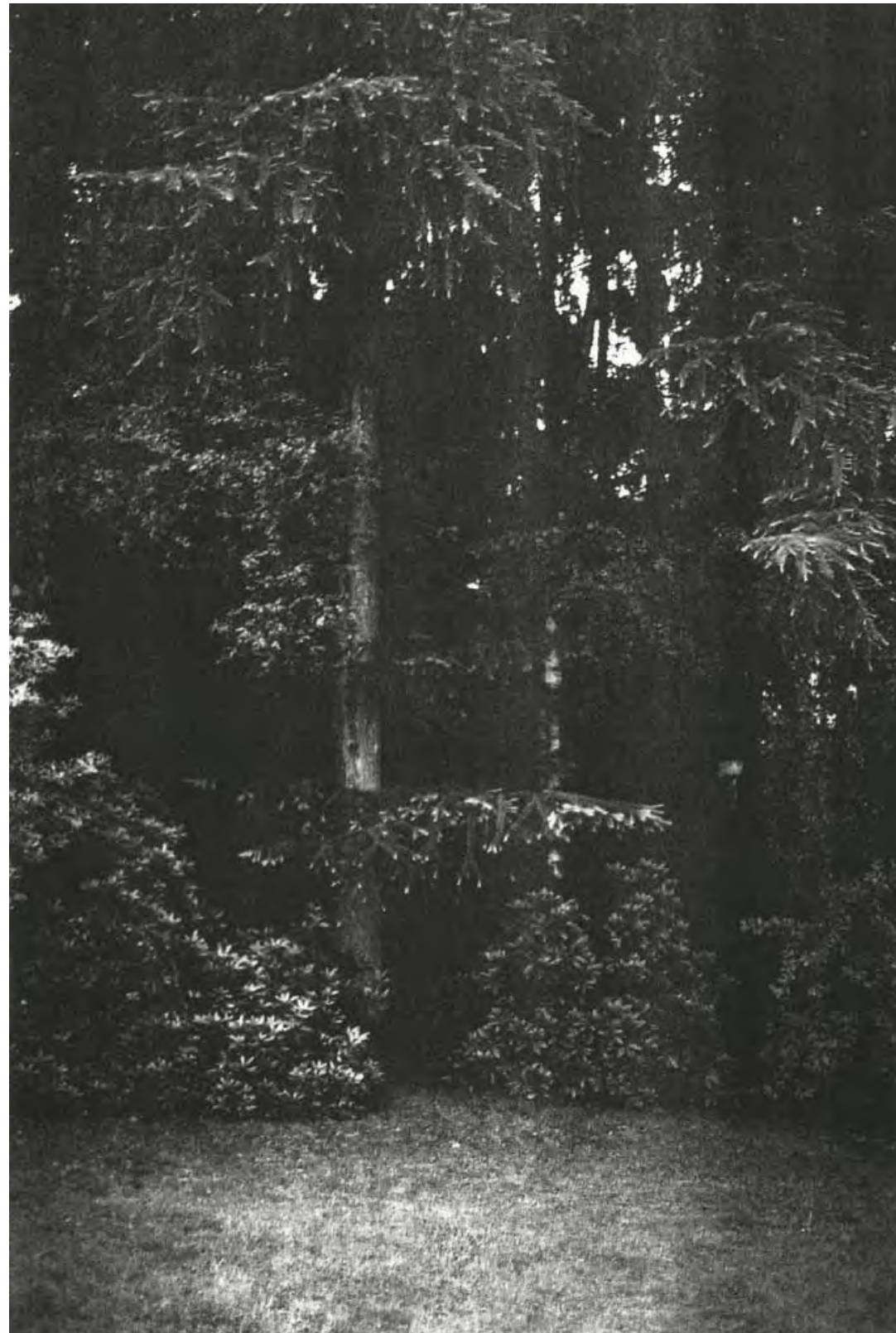
Were there any pictures that he considered particularly important?

“Yes. The baby in the car seat when you just walk in.”

I find WOLFGANG TILLMANS at 1am, sitting on someone’s knee, drunk and laughing. He will go on to THE BOILER ROOM, an East Village gay bar, and only leave there at 3am.

“Not a very late night,” he later says.

(Ends)



**Everywhere, all the time
and at once: the art
of Wolfgang Tillmans**

Michael Bracewell

I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.

Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*, 1939

There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening.

Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage: An inventory of effects*, 1967

The tall trees before us are dense and mysterious. Their foliage hangs majestically, in languor, as though sombre and dazed by clinging tropical heat, yet somehow alert and sinister. But we are faced, in fact, across a modest width of lawn, with the dark entrance to a temperate northern forest. Exuberant shrubberies give a garden-like air to the beginnings of this seemingly wild space. As the smooth trunks of the tallest trees soar straight and vertical, the gathering mass of leaves and branches creates a dark portal, like the entrance to an enchanted path. Higher up, patches of light can be glimpsed, glinting through the deeper canopy. The scene appears quite still. And yet, as you look at these trees, you might start to question the nature of this apparent stillness. Is the atmosphere on this lawn peaceful with birdsong and distant cheerful voices? Or is it silent, expectant and laden with portent? Perhaps it is simply neutral.

This black and white photograph by Wolfgang Tillmans (*Wald (Reinshagen)*, 2008) enfolds the viewer in such a succession of distinct yet overlapping emotional and psychological sensations. But throughout these responses, the image brings one back to its own unique location, its confluence of calm and mysteriousness, and the unwavering tension between its pictorial and atmospheric qualities.

With its visceral sense of place, this photograph transports the viewer to an immediate experience of landscape and nature; at the same time, our precise identification with this simple scene – a towering screen of placid trees, rising from Edenic shrubberies – is meticulously destabilised upon the axis of its empathetic capacities. For all its apparent serenity and calm, there is a semiotic undercurrent running deep within the image, as profound as a sub-sonic pulse: an animating tautness that derives from the precise balance – within the emotional weighting of the image, of the known and the unknown – of that which we can see and that which we intuit, reading, as it were, through the surface of the image and beyond its materiality.

A further image by Tillmans of the interior of a forest, *Wald (Briol I)*, 2008, depicts the play of bright light through the crowded trees. Scattering ingots of white brilliance create the illusion of a stroboscopic or Op-art effect, playing games with the scale and perspective of the image, and creating a dream-like or submarine other-worldliness that makes the viewer think of moonlit woodland. This image appears as filled with motion and clamour as *Wald (Reinshagen)* seems heavy with stillness and silence.

But photography is in many ways only the beginning of Tillmans' art. Indeed, over the last decade, he has made an important body of abstract works that are 'not made with camera' (the artist's phrase), yet are still directly related in process to photography. In both a practical and a philosophical sense, therefore, Tillmans engages and works with the photographic image on every conceivable level: as a consumer and reader of images, a producer of images, an editor of images, as their printer, replicator, publisher, arranger, curator, installer, and also as their mechanic, anatomist, politician, sculptor, technician, connoisseur and philosopher-scientist. He is thus the creator and director of an encyclopaedic lexicon of images, examining and exploring every aspect of their form, in terms both of medium and object. (Small

wonder a major publication on Tillmans' work is titled *Manual*, proposing an instructional handbook of the mechanics of the image). For Tillmans, photography has as many sculptural possibilities as it has representational, aesthetic or political capacities. It is the bearer of information as much as of 'beauty' (this latter quality being a charged and conditional term when applied to his work), a form that interrogates the viewer, individually and sociologically, as much as it is itself an object of scrutiny, appraisal or reflection.

The art of Tillmans is multi-allusive, in both the extent of his subject matter and his treatment of photography as a medium. From astronomy to portraiture, to luxuriant yet minutely poised studies of light on photographic paper, he creates a cosmology of images, tirelessly refining – as artist, editor, installer and curator – the semiotic chemistry of their interrelationship to one another. In this, Tillmans locates the visual equivalent of Proust's 'mot juste', identifying not simply the most eloquent images, in terms of colour, composition, mood, texture, light and emotional pulse, but those that appear to possess their own sentient meaning. For Tillmans, one feels, the potentiality of the photographic image is intimately related, at a profound level of empathetic understanding and philosophical awareness, to the messy but complicated business of being alive. In his art, spirituality and semiotics are held in balance, revealing moments of quotidian transubstantiation in which the subject is suddenly seen in a newly coherent and heightened form – as both its 'natural' self and as an image. Collectively, the images made by Tillmans seem to comprise a seamless keychain code of visual DNA, becoming – as 'pictures' and as objects – both meditative and filled with restless self-enquiry. Generationally, Tillmans was simultaneously informed by traditional art education and, perhaps more importantly, by the sub-cultural creativity and European clubbing scene of the late 1980s and 1990s. In its turn, this position was derived in great part from the

explosion in the earlier 1980s (and post-punk years of the late 1970s) of a creativity and artistic network that was derived from sub-cultural lifestyles as much as from arts institutions. Youth sub-cultures transform the personal space of adolescents and young adults (the teenager's bedroom in the family home, for example) into intensely private spaces, which are at once shrines to lifestyle choice and laboratories of image-making; they become both dressing room and theatre, their poster- and image-hung walls acting like altars dedicated to the icons of pop and fashion. (We might think of John Ashton's portrait of the British Pop artist Pauline Boty, for example, in which the artist poses triumphantly before a bed-sit wall collaged with found images.) There is an echo of such *dedication* to images in Tillmans' approach to hanging his individual work (with pins, tape or clips) and to its overall installation: the effect is chapel-like, at once secular and sacred in feel, balancing informality with reverence or meditative stillness: the personal becomes the political; the domestic, in its own quiet way, becomes touched by the devotional.

Throughout the 1980s, and extending into the 1990s, the subcultural worlds of music, clubs, fashion, new magazines and pop and fashion video provided both a subject and a venue for many young artists, writers, designers and image-makers. Indeed, in London, in the years prior to Young British Art, there was a sense for some artists that the 'underground' network of sub-cultural lifestyles, underpinned by pop music, clubs and fashion, were of more relevance, culturally and creatively, than the activities taking place within the institutional world of contemporary art. 'Style culture' magazines of the 1980s such as *i-D* (in which Tillmans would publish photographs) and *Blitz* and *The Face*, proposed a culture that was at once stylistically exuberant, elitist, aggressively trend-conscious yet politically aware and left-wing in attitude – a stance echoed by the development of dance music out of post-punk electronica.

(Bronski Beat's 'Small Town Boy', for example, no less than Heaven 17's 'We Don't Need That Fascist Groove Thang', were founding examples of politicised British pop music in the 1980s, proposing a sensibility – at once vibrant and actively political – that Tillmans would later inherit.)

The art of Tillmans – in all its variety as an edited and installed form – might thus be said to have engaged directly with the subcultural zeitgeist. (Marshall McLuhan's phrase from his classic analysis of mass media, *The Medium is the Massage*, 'When information brushes against information' seems an apt description of this engagement.) Tillmans' early use of photocopiers, for example, or even of faxes, encodes his work with the urban and Warholian imprint of mass mediation, which also had its place in the sci-fi futurism of the post-punk aesthetic. And yet Tillmans is always most concerned with the constitution of the image itself, to free it from anything but its own form, and allow it to declare itself in what might be termed a state of 'not knowingness'. Every image and configuration of images created by Tillmans has at its heart a tension of opposites: the precise balance of enigma and certainty. As such, Tillmans' art can also be seen to descend from classic Romanticism (the simultaneous activation of 'reason' and 'the senses' proposed by Friedrich Schiller, for example); this lineage is further affirmed by the political and spiritual concerns within his work.

The figurative and 'representational' photographs by Tillmans relate social narrative to still life, nature and landscape photography; and yet there is a holistic unity to their vision and temper. The common denominator of this unity appears to be their visceral description of emotional and psychological texture: they reveal their subjects at peace – in humanistic repose – yet alert with life. They both assert the democracy of universal human experience, and describe the indifference of nature to the passage of human events – a philosophical position that transposes to the

contemporary urban world the Pantheistic belief in the higher power of nature, as it frames individual and social destiny.

In *Roy*, 2009, we see an infant sleeping in a carrying chair, secured backwards in the front passenger seat of a car to face out towards the viewer. In the rear-view mirror, we see the upper half of a woman's face, the edge of the reflected image cutting horizontally across her features, so that her dark eyes – concentrating on the road ahead – are only half visible. Her eyebrows, forehead and centrally parted hair give the viewer a good indication of her age and appearance. Pale but bright sunlight is coming into the car, highlighting the collected dust and dried raindrops on the windscreen, and the dragged arc of smeared water left behind by the perishing rubber of the windscreen wipers. In the bottom-right foreground, the infant's sleeping face is framed by the dark blue-black of his woollen pullover and knitted hat.

In one sense, this picture appears to take its place within the historical imagery of mother and child. One cannot be sure that the woman driving the car is the child's mother – it could be aunt, nanny, or a friend of family. And yet one intuits a relationship between the fragment of the female figure visible in the rear-view mirror and the intensely felt presence of the sleeping baby. In its undeniable modernity and sense of daily event, the image brings to mind Richard Hamilton's painting *Mother and Child*, 1984–85, in which a smiling infant, dressed in white woollens, attempts awkward early steps towards the viewer, its hand held by the smiling mother. In this image, too, we can only see a fragment of the mother's face, since it is cut across by the upper edge of the canvas. Her relationship with the child is defined by what we see of her jaw and smiling mouth, framed by her long brown hair hanging loosely to one side as she bends down to guide the stumbling child. The light within the scene – as in *Roy* – appears to be that of pale, bright early spring sunshine, suggesting new life.

Another image by Tillmans, *Heptathlon*, 2009, shows a female athlete at a track event. Behind her, two other female athletes can be seen, unheeding of the attention being paid to the principal figure, who is being filmed by a cameraman just visible at the left-hand side of the photograph. Again, the figure appears both tensed and in repose; the half-clenching of her hands might suggest nervousness or impatience, while her expression towards the camera is at once impassive and slightly confrontational. Knowing nothing more about the circumstantial context of the image, the viewer is nonetheless made fully aware of the emotional and physical challenges with which an athlete is faced. There is a quality of ruthlessness in her gaze towards the barely seen cameraman's raised lens: the expression of competition.

Heptathlon is an image filled with declamatory colour and complex geometry. The picture is divided horizontally, roughly, across its centre by the upper rim of the trackside advertising. In the upper half, beyond the insular world of the track event – fenced off – we can see the tops of trees and a suburban-looking rooftop. The lower half of the image is dominated by the bright orange surface of the track itself, and the busy criss-crossing of white markings, the bare legs of the athletes, speaker cables and numbered cones. In this lower half, we see how figuration begins to collapse and transform into abstraction, how that which is naturalistic begins to shed its narratives, and how the stuff of everyday life on Earth – its raw materials, technology and residues – can begin to acquire a form and appearance that rejects linear meaning.

This point of transformation within an image, when a subject in one state dismantles the container or borderline of its meanings and enters a new visual identity, is vital to Tillmans' art and has become increasingly so. This is doubly significant in the case of an artist

for whom the precision of reading – his minute scrutiny of print media, journalism and found imagery, for example, in his *truth study centre* tables – is equally important. To reveal yet preserve the 'tipping point' of an image, at which its representational qualities become first abstract and then sculptural, might be seen as a further example of the founding system of maintained tensions in his work. At this point, where the borders between our perceptions of an image become first broken and then dissolved, the photographic image achieves a form of closed aesthetic circuitry, in which subject and object cease to be determining values. Such, perhaps, is the artistic journey taken by Tillmans to date.

We can see the development of this process by first considering examples of Tillmans' camera-made images, the subjects of which are hard to ascertain, but whose colour, composition and textural power are richly beguiling. In *Economy*, 2006, *CLC1100*, 2007 and *glass factory*, 2008, for example, we see images of industrial and technological materials and equipment. All three are figurative, representational images, yet all examine their subject in a way that seems to highlight the visual tactility of the image itself: the satisfying, lozenge-like oblong of vivid purple glass resting against the vertical black bars of its industrial holding frame in *glass factory*; the bite of an elastic band into dense, carbon-coloured sponge in *Economy*; or the magnesium-like flare of white light off the opened photocopier in *CLC1100*. In all of these images, representational coherence is brought to the edge of collapse, to the point at which texture becomes marginally more dominant, in our reading of the image, than narrative or legibility.

The progress of Tillmans' exploration of the image (which might be likened to a study of sound), from representational camera-made works to non-camera-made pure sculptural abstraction, might also be seen to embrace his earliest photocopier works: the images from 1987, for example,

depicting incoming surf (*Wellen Lacanau*, 1998), or three seemingly random, UFO-like clusters of white dots against a graphite black background (*Genova*, 1998). The play of light and dark in photocopied images, and the interruption of their image surface by ghostly bars, shimmers and mottling of shadow, creates the impersonal, mass-media effect of classic American Pop art (specifically Warhol and Rauschenberg); and yet for Tillmans the medium appears once again to hold qualities in tension: intimacy and enigma, figuration and abstraction, knowing and not knowing.

A glacier seen from the air, an opened window, the shattered hulk of a bright blue wooden boat: as subjects of Tillmans' photographs these each explore texture and legibility, and the transformation of a tangible subject into abstraction. In one sense, such works run parallel to Tillmans' major non-camera-made and sculptural works. In the latter, however, he allows the image – its 'stuff' or raw material – to be completely liberated from 'meaning'; rather, process becomes image, in that the manipulation of light and photographic paper (by which the abstract works are made) both creates the subject of the image and transforms it into a sculptural object.

Tillmans' *Ostgut Freischwimmer, right*, 2004 is a vast, near billboard sized work (231.1 x 607.8 cm) in which particles of blackness appear to have been combed into diffusion across the horizontal breadth of the image. The seeming 'whiteness' of the image's background turns out to be as complex and subtle as the submarine-like play of diffused blackness that it contains. It is as though, from the top left-hand corner of the image, the white of cloud or dense fog has become gradually 'stained' by the evaporation or dilution of the particles of blackness, which appear to be losing their solidity – like a substance in chemical suspension that has gradually broken down. Thus the viewer might have the experience of being 'allowed' to witness some dramatic ritual from micro-biology, chemistry or the natural sciences; the image proposes its own

unnameable narrative, recounting the transformation of light from one form into another.

Ostgut Freischwimmer, right is an epic example of Tillmans' enabling process to become image; and there is a quality to the amorphous and diaphanous fluidity and merger, within the image, of light and dark, solid and dissolve, that is utterly disconnected to work in any other medium. The picture becomes a floatation tank of light, at once scientific and fantastical in its aura, as though it were some kind of sentient scientific 'performance' or spectacle. (It hung for five years in the Panorama bar in Berlin.) Another such work, *not knowing*, 2009 is as densely vibrant with vivid colour as *Ostgut Freischwimmer, right* appears subtly monochrome. One might think of the 'cosmic' imagery often associated with progressive and psychedelic rock music: the oil-and-water light projections shown during long improvised sets by Soft Machine or Pink Floyd, for example. The use of colour, form, light and scale is visually overwhelming, allowing the image to work foremost as a masterclass in spectacle.

It is as though Tillmans, in his epic exploration of the capacities of the image – one might say the 'physics' of the image – is charting the deepest primal recesses of his subject. What happens when the image is handed over to the effects of pure colour? As contemporary readers of the image, how might we respond to sheer aesthetic spectacle, to which no signage of 'meaning' is attached? Where might this image stand on the registers of taste and kitsch? Or do these concerns of cultural status have no relevance to such a work? Tillmans answers with the discursive void of the work, which proposes only its own abstraction, and its own vivacious, seemingly weightless suffusions of colour – somehow ominously pitted with black cavities.

In its study of diffusion, *Ostgut Freischwimmer, right* might be seen as the descendant image of *Urgency XIV*, 2006, in which the uniform, somewhat industrial

magnolia of the image's surface is speckled and stained with dissolving and sedimentary ribbons of bright blood red – a substance that is in fact nothing more (nor less) than light itself. In the bottom-right corner of the image, a pinkish scarlet hue appears to be diffusing – as though droplets of a scarlet substance were breaking up within the processes of dilution. Both works (like those configured in the multi-panelled *Silver Installation VI* and *Silver Installation VII*, 2009) dismantle the artistic borders between different media: they are painterly, photographic, sculptural installations – unfettered image-making that takes its place on the far end of a scale of continuum between figuration and abstraction.

In his *paper drop* and *Lighter* works, too, Tillmans creates a fusion between the coolly industrial or mechanistic and a luxuriance of form and texture. The *Lighter* works, framed in Perspex boxes, resemble metallic panels – some folded, others dented – that have been industrially spray-painted in high-gloss colours. Made from photographic paper, these works appear to collapse the medium of photography itself, while taking the form of beguilingly coloured abstract sculptures: sky blue, swimming-pool blue, a green-to-yellow fade crossed horizontally by a blue bar, ripe-corn yellow divided at a low angle by black fading to spruce green and glinting jet black. There is a coolness to these works that brings to mind the US colour-field paintings of Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland and Barnett Newman. At the same time, the metallic look of their dented or folded surfaces distracts the painterly references and re-connects the works to a somewhat science-fictional industrial strangeness, untethered to the formal arguments of fine art.

Bikers, the Moon, a snowy suburb seen from the air, a homeless person, a television in a coach, a national border, metal machine parts, a block of flats, a garden, the sky, newspaper articles, advertisements, plastic boxes on a window sill, a portrait of William of Orange, male necks, exhausted party-goers, colours: in Tillmans' art, image

is infinite – everywhere, all the time and at once. The metal frame of a seatless and backless office chair, the fold of sunlight, the tessellating blocks of text and image in magazines and newspapers: all are agents and bearers of meaning – as though 'meaning' might take a malleable and elastic form, reflexive to our perceptions and understanding.

The Medium is the Massage is subtitled *an inventory of effects*. This would serve well to describe Tillmans' work, since it takes the form of a ceaselessly cross-referencing visual encyclopaedia of the image. In his meticulous selection of images, his treatment and installation of them, Tillmans creates an epic directory and handbook of visual effects that is at once novelistic, journalistic, ethnographic, meditational, political and poetic.

For McLuhan, writing in 1967: 'Environments are not passive wrappings, but are, rather, active processes that are invisible. The ground rules, pervasive structure, and overall patterns of environments elude easy perception. Anti-environments or counter-situations made by artists provide means of direct attention and enable us to see and understand more clearly.'¹ Tillmans is precisely such an artist, born precisely into the image-saturated culture that McLuhan surveyed. In his art, Tillmans renders visible those patterns, rules and structures – aesthetic, sociological, cultural, political – under which an age of accelerated and saturation media strives to maintain lucidity. At its core, of course, there is a necessary fallibility to this endeavour: as W.H. Auden once remarked of the attainment of religious faith, there is a quality of *not knowing* that underwrites its sincerity. Tillmans is likewise aware of the necessity of doubt, and, arguably, it is from this sense of doubt that his art achieves its monumental humanism.

1 Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: an inventory of effects*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1967, p.68.





Alongside the abstract plane,
dots and bangs of latent
evidences and true relativity
exposed

Josef Strau

In the early 2000s, I was invited to co-curate an exhibition at Kunst-Werke, Berlin, called *Now and Ten Years Ago*, which referred to an exhibition of the same name held in New York a decade earlier. The exhibition was based on a by now well-established theory that assumes that if a cultural product reappears ten years later it will have lost its attraction, or at least might look pale in comparison to its first successful entrance onto the scene, but that after ten more years it might reappear as an interesting revival. This assumption was fashionable in some alternative art circles at the time, used as a tool to unmask the fickleness of the culture industry and its influence on even the most independently produced art objects. But being somewhat tired of theories whose sole aim was the denouncement of the quite obvious (but in some ways exciting, albeit rather destructive) mechanisms of cultural fashions, I wanted to find works that would exemplify the opposite qualities – works that might have even more meaning than they did ten years before. The strongest disproof I could find for the theory was the work of Wolfgang Tillmans. Looking back on his photographs of the early 1990s, and considering the political and art situation of that time, I realised that these images would have an even more radical effect on viewers of the early 2000s than on those of the decade before.

In *Now and Ten Years Ago*, Tillmans presented a large version of *Silvio (U-Bahn)*, 1992, a photograph of flowers in a Berlin subway station – the unofficial monument to a man who had been killed there by neo-Nazis. It became, for myself and others, the central piece in the show. The work had this strong effect because of Tillmans' ability to capture something that people are not yet willing to recognise as a phenomenon: *Silvio (U-Bahn)* was made at a time when many were reluctant to accept that there was a resurgence of right-wing violence in Germany, believing that the country had overcome these ghosts. It was a truth that had been left unnamed for too long. When shown for

the second time in this large version, the photo was exposed to a now transformed public, whose awareness of this frightening phenomenon had shifted from latency to consciousness. Tillmans' particular choice of display, with the work extending down to the gallery floor, bringing the image of the candles, the flowers, the handwritten letters and words of mourning from another place and another time into the space, made the tragic monument more present than ever before, and gave the exhibition a glimmer of gloomy subversive radicality.

And now, some years later, many of Tillmans' works have become more explicit in their emphasis on the photographic potential of latency. They display the fundamental photographic procedure of carrying a certain moment of the past into the future, but more than that, they freeze and transform latency into obvious visual evidence. These works are usually labelled as abstract, but they are quite often ambivalent to general definition and this practice of ambivalence is perhaps the most impressive achievement of his works. It is not the ambivalence of an in-between or of a double negation; it is the expression of a very contemporary political philosophy, exemplified in his almost literary or cinematic combination of radically diverse meanings and narratives in photographic images, or a combined pattern of diverse statements, as in the table-top works, *truth study center*, begun in 2006. This concept of ambivalent involvement doubled by subversive engagement is most obvious in works dealing with astronomy and religion. His interest in these fields is not of the pretentious sort, stemming from a fear of missing out on some fashion; quite to the contrary, they are interests, at least for the moment, avoided by the majority of artists.

Having started to work with texts and writing some years ago, I have often wished that I could create the same kind of perfectly contemporary novels that Tillmans makes with his camera. This literary quality comes from diving into various social and personal narratives, but also

from suddenly coming down, as in *Silver 1*, 1998 or *paper drop*, 2001, to revelations of the abstract, the concealed and the pure matter of photography, or even of light itself. It could also be called a fictional quality. As an observer standing in one of his exhibitions, I often feel that there is a moment when, almost automatically, my brain will start perceiving a narrative pattern in his work. Perhaps the best way to describe this pattern is as a new, completely reinvented science fiction – the result of Tillmans' idea of dealing with the contemporary situation through a permanent attack of extremely diverse imagery. This definition of his work as a reconsideration and transformation of science fiction is put forward in the context of the development of contemporary definitions of fiction writing, where fiction is not a completely invented structure, but more a transformation of real or daily events, recombined or sometimes appearing in a transgressive perspective.

Tillmans' combination of different formulas of image production might appear at first as a strategy to avoid the pitfalls of stagnancy and dead-ends often inherent in successful art productions. But with his strong theoretical awareness of social and productive systems, he seeks to influence his own creation of a system with these diverse patterns and waves of information. For example, if one looks at the display tables contained in the *truth study center* project, one repeatedly finds texts and information dealing critically with the most powerful institutions that administrate 'absolute truths', particularly religious institutions. Alongside this one can find a newspaper text about the recent findings of astronomical research. This is not an attempt to play the old game of religion versus science. During further exploration of his work, one finds a differentiated world exposed from different angles, sometimes even incorporated as modes of perception in his own personal methods of observation. Often, the objects observed by him are in some way representations of the photographer himself, although they are

not simply self portraits. This indirect involvement of the artist in the image as a model for the exploration of reality pushes the concept of ambivalence further towards contemporary ideas of science.

Photos of the night sky full of stars always make demands on the visual perception of the observer: they are just a bunch of dots on paper. They are abstract-looking images of the real in the most extreme form. Tillmans sometimes plays with achieving almost impossible photographic feats, like photographing the stars from the window of a plane with a non-specialist camera and still making them recognisable to the viewer, or capturing images of the planet Venus passing through the field of the sun. When he makes reference in his work to the discovery of exoplanets (the planets orbiting far-away suns) he touches on a very exciting step in contemporary astronomical developments – for many, one of the most exciting in astronomic history, although in fact it is just the conclusion gleaned from other observed data, like the diminishing light of stars when orbiting exoplanets cross their field. It is a similar operation to that in Tillmans' *Venus transit* photographs, but without the direct use of photography. The information proving the existence of these planets functions like a mirror of science itself, reflecting the long journey that it has had to undertake through the ages – the self-imposed limits that scientific knowledge and even the idea of enlightenment had to break through, even in the last few decades, to finally arrive at the proof of planets far away from our own solar system.

Tillmans seems obsessed with astronomy and physics, and with the changing nature and relativity of science and enlightenment itself. Not only has evidence of astronomical data progressed dramatically during the last years, but the relation between theory and evidence has made unpredictable changes in consequence. Whoever follows the now very accessible scientific texts and images in astronomy-related websites will experience a

dramatic shift in the language of science, and even in the culture of its communication. Many of the ideas and language of what some decades ago was only science fiction has recently become 'official' institutional expression, like the recent debate on parallel universes. For me, the verification of the existence of exoplanets made during the last years is so exciting because during my school years in the 1960s and 1970s, any suggestion of their existence was refuted with a whole list of impossibilities. Planet Earth was perceived to be the result of a singular incidence. Since then, almost every year, one of these 'impossible truths' has been proved possible, and former heresies have now become authoritative realities. The image of the universe presented by the defenders of scientific institutions during the 1960s or 1970s now looks like a weird human-projected abyss, a dark hole that now suddenly shines with infinite possibilities and endless varieties of other life forms and forms of intelligence. As Tillmans perhaps proposes, even in enlightenment there is relativity and it has to change its imaginative capabilities just as an artist has to change his comparably small mechanisms in order constantly to rethink, sometimes even dramatically, the theories for which his work is a tool.

As stated above, the appearance of scientific material and logic in the works of Tillmans is often a result of his reflections on the ambivalences inherent in them. One might speculate even further and propose that the same sensibility seems to be at work in his reflections on the religious authority of absolute truth. The subversive power of religious heresies in earlier centuries was in their refusal to obey the authority of dogma and institution, but even more, in their embrace of the personal qualities of religious practice – for instance, life as a power-free zone, religion as social awareness, religious celebrations as redemptive means for the transformation and relief of pain and suffering, placing a messianic emphasis on the poetic beauty of original texts and the hope for an era

without repression and injustice. It might sound incongruous to enumerate such old-time qualities in a contemporary art context, but seeing the texts and images that Tillmans has used in different parts of *truth study center* about the repression, injustice and the strangling of life caused by the authorities of religion, I feel the urgency of raising these arguments again. The radicality (at least in the context of contemporary art) of Tillmans' subversive practice of ambivalence does not diminish his critical statement; the opposite is even the case. The religious or quasi-religious qualities above seem latently to reappear in the way he portrays objects in his everyday still lifes or landscapes, although he does not represent faith in any traditional way. Their pictorial intensity appears to be touched by some transcendent latent light.

The famous Israeli documentary film *Trembling before G-d* by Sandi Simcha DuBowski about gay and lesbian people living in the Jewish orthodox communities documents their struggle for acceptance in societies where homosexuality is strongly rejected. Their vivid statements and stories of excommunication become all the more intense when they insist on continuing to celebrate religious holidays, to dress traditionally, to carry on singing their old and beloved prayers and songs. This reaches its high point at the end of the film when one of the men, who has expressed his suffering on the long road of self-determination to live both a gay and a Hassidic life, stands alone on the East River. In a lonely performance of one of the Jewish New Year rites, he casts the sins of the old year into the water, garbed in beautiful traditional dress, singing the old songs, alone, with the whole of Manhattan behind him. This poignant scene recalls Tillmans' process of combining seemingly opposite signs, and in that way giving a stronger subversive power to his critique of the institutions of absolute truth.

WOLFGANG TILLMANS

TEXT SARAH FAKRAY



where I really found my expression – I didn't own a camera until I was 20, after I had already done my first exhibition in Hamburg.

I came to London for the first time in 1983 on a language trip and saw Culture Club play. I think that was a lucky moment to grow up as a latently gay boy, in a time where the whole of pop music was about sexual ambiguity. It wasn't called 'gay', it was just stylish. It was all about making clothes and putting on make-up – I wore a hat made from perspex melted in my mother's oven.



I have known Lutz and Alex¹, my best friends from school, since we were about 13, and they are still my best friends. We were never going out with each other – Lutz was gay and Alex was straight, and there was never any drama. After school we moved to Hamburg, because if you didn't want to do the 15 months of national service with the army you had to serve 20 months in community service.

Hamburg had the most sophisticated club scene in Germany. I was, on the one hand, working on very reduced photocopy work, and on the other hand feeling I wanted to record what went on in these clubs. I was photographed by *i-D* at their party in Amsterdam for making an eco fashion statement by wearing a hat made from living moss. When they came to Hamburg, I took my first club pictures for them because I wanted to show them how happening the city was. I was right in the middle of the whole club explosion and that seemed to be the most exciting thing, the ecstasy feeling. It was so empowering and so meaningful in a truly political way. Lutz and I thought, 'Everyone should experience this.'

I went from club pictures to taking full page spreads for magazines, but I never actually wanted to do that, so I quit a successful career and left to study photography in Bournemouth. I really just wanted the innocence of a student. Plus I always had a soft spot for the English men!

ON HIS FIRST TIME, ECSTASY EMPOWERMENT, AND THE JOURNEY TO ABSTRACTION

"I grew up in Remscheid, an industrial town that is the centre of tool-making in Germany. My father spent about nine years in South

America on sales trips throughout his life, and my mum worked as an accountant and was also a local politician. My brother, sister and I enjoyed a lot of freedom because the parents were not always around.

At the age of 10, I became obsessed with astronomy to the degree I could not think about anything else. That is what I have kept with me since then: the importance of exact observation and factualness. When I was 13, I went to summer camp with a group from church, and that was another life-changing experience. It was all about disarmament, demonstrations and pacifism.

In high school I discovered the first Canon laser copier in a coffee shop, which could photocopy photographs in a much clearer quality than before. I made a little fanzine using it, a collage of images combined with my own lyrics and a lot of teenage angst. The grey shades of early digital photocopies were



"I realised, no, I actually don't want to be an American. I was longing for something a bit darker"



The first love of my life was the keyboard player of Bronski Beat. I guess I was some kind of groupie. We had a night of romance in Cologne when I was 16, when I was under the age of consent, which was 18.

Alex, Lutz and I moved to London in 1990, when gay rights was still a big issue. I went on the demonstrations that mattered to me, like the Criminal Justice Bill or the Anti-Nazi League. It felt as if hedonism and activism were not exclusive – that was my strong personal belief. I didn't see my own vision represented in the photography that I saw; that was my motivation. A lot of photography was either stylised or overly artistic – I photographed what I saw with little artifice. What got a lot of people mad about my work was how un-artificial it looked, and that is exactly what I worked hard to control. They were anything but snapshots.

I moved to New York with the opening of my first solo show there in 1994. I met Jochen Klein², my then boyfriend, and I had great opportunity to develop my work in a different direction: still lifes and pictures of folds and fabrics and landscapes. Being with Jochen, who was a painter and conceptual artist, opened my eyes to old art and to understanding Caravaggio and the like as potential friends – as young men who were dealing with issues of their time in their way. I could learn from Jochen about Lacan and Žižek, and I would tell him about The Hacienda and New Order.

I had started a green card process, but the next year I realised, no, I actually don't want to be an American. I was longing for something a bit darker, without this constant 'upness'. I moved back to London with Jochen, and he was totally healthy at that point. The great tragedy of his death³ is that we had no idea that he was ill until five weeks before he died; there must have been a faulty

test. He suddenly fell so ill with pneumonia that he wasn't able to take the combination therapy that had been invented the year before. It was only really in 2000 that I came out of that totally overshadowed period.

I had my time of greatest happiness in 1997 with Jochen, when I embarked on the *Concorde* series⁴, which is as abstract as it is figurative. Abstraction has always been inherently there in my work, but in 1998, I exhibited pictures made without a camera⁵, the most important development in my work. It was me questioning what a picture is. People interpret the pictures as something underwater, something with pigment... that's why they are so powerful. If I had painted them, you would not engage with them the same way.

I wasn't surprised that I got nominated for the Turner Prize, because at that point I had shown extensively internationally, but I was a bit insecure about the press – 2000 was the first year that foreigners were nominated. It was nice the way that Britain dealt with a foreigner that they liked, embracing me and calling me German-born, London-based, rather than German. In 2004, I got a place in Berlin and met Anders Clausen, the Danish artist. When artists are partners they talk about everything a lot, so the influence on one another is quite intense. He plays an incredibly important role in detecting weaknesses. A bullshit detector! I don't get upset about it. Maybe a little, but not really.

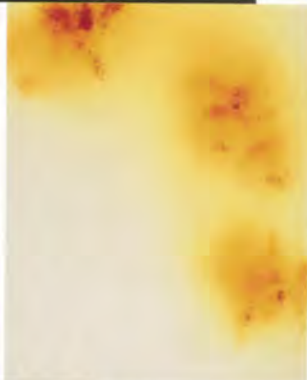
The US got on board with my work in 2006 and in my North American museum tour I included Memorial for the Victims of Organised Religions⁶. That time was fuelled by outrage over 9/11 and also the Iraq War, the warping of truth and the election of George Bush. I always find myself in disbelief about being subjected to men telling you that they know what God wants.

The same year, I realised the entrance of my studio could be used as a gallery⁷, and I felt that there were certain kinds of art not represented in London. Since I had always liked political art, I wanted to show artists that are engaged in social processes. I see my practice as political, even though it's not campaigning in its majority.

Last year I took a sabbatical, and rediscovered the camera. I found myself travelling a lot but also photographing London and Berlin as well as South America and Asia. I've got a great hunger to see what has changed in the world after me looking at it for 20, 25 years. My new pictures, some of which will be at the Serpentine exhibition, are informed by the non-figurative work of the last ten years, so this is an interesting new period in my photography. I'm really excited about taking pictures now."

Clockwise from top left:

August self portrait, 2005; o.T. München, 1997; Lutz & Alex holding cock, 1992; *Blushes* #105, 2001; rain, 2006; NICE HERE. but ever been to KYRGYZSTAN? Free Gender-Expression WORLDWIDE, 2006; *Concorde* L449-11, 1997; paper drop (Roma), 2007; *Faltenwurf* (submerged), 2000; Dennis, 1995
Tillmans's exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery runs from June 26 to August 30



FOOTNOTES ON WOLFGANG TILLMANS

1. Lutz and Alex feature in much of Tillmans's early documentary work, often together and naked. He first shot them in April 1973.
2. Painter and conceptual artist Jochen Klein was part of New York artist group Group Material (see page 58 for the recent book on the collective, published by Four Corners Books).
3. He died from Aids, in 1997.
4. 62 colour photographs of the plane while in the air, landing or taking off.
5. Using light-controlling tools based on torches, Tillmans projects on to paper in the darkroom, which is processed using a normal processing machine. The abstracts are created using movement with hands and light, and no liquid at all.
6. Abstract work of f8 black, or almost-black, pieces of paper.
7. Between Bridges is located at 223 Cambridge Heath Road, London.



1 *Paper Drop (star)*, 2006.

2 *Lighter, green/red III*, 2009.

Images © Wolfgang Tillmans,
courtesy of Maureen Paley, London.

EVERYTHING IS ILLUMINATED

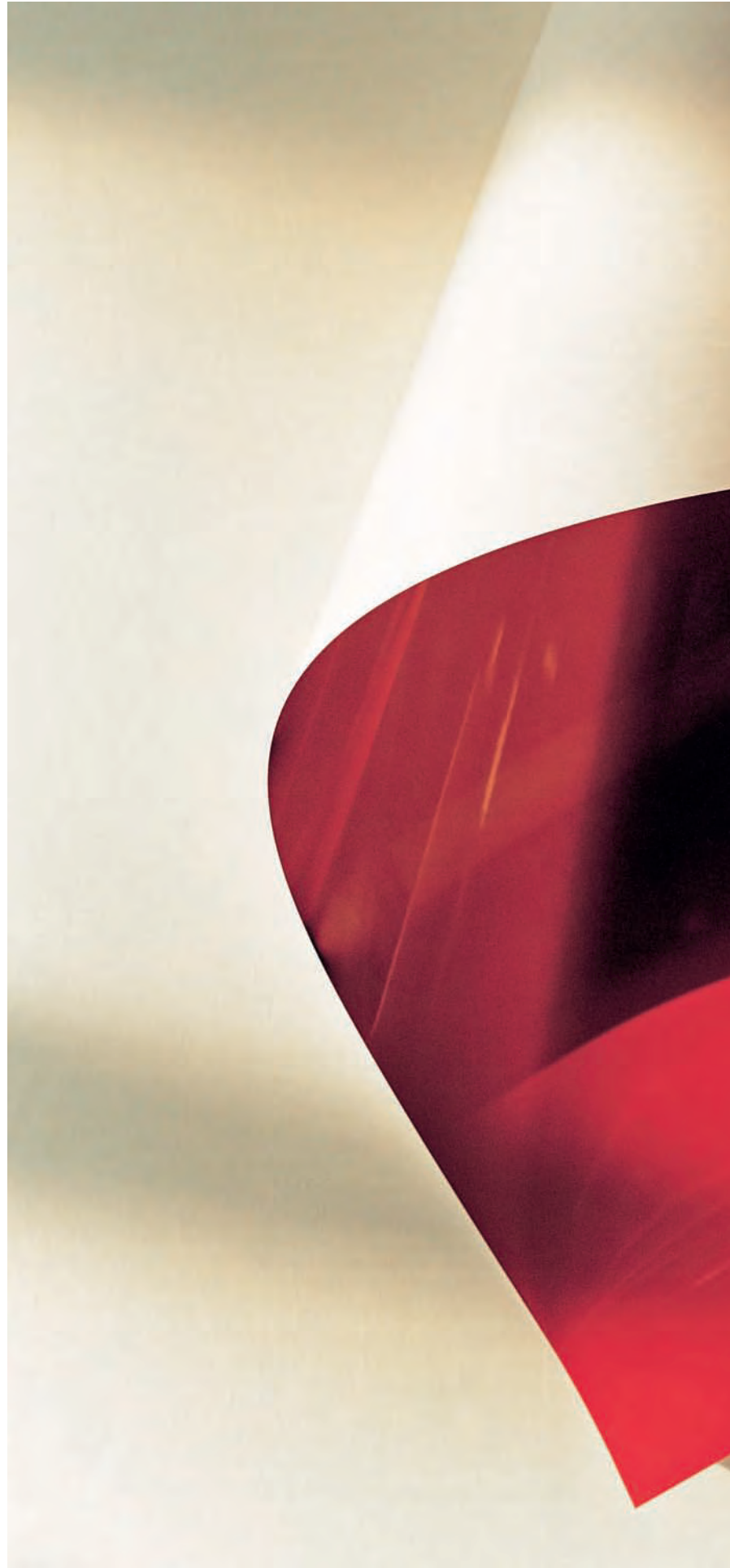
In the work of **Wolfgang Tillmans**, any small detail, a gesture or even a humble apple, can be photographed as something beautiful. But his approach is anything but casual, finds **Diane Smyth**, when she visits the Turner Prize winning artist at his east London studio

On first sight, Wolfgang Tillmans' east London studio has a relaxed feel, verging on the messy. But look closer and you notice the meticulously organised files cataloguing invoices, alongside boxes of letters and out-of-date films. The objects around this studio are often the subject of his photographs, and in many respects it helps explain his work.

With their informal style and seemingly loose approach to subject matter, Tillmans' photographs have

been mistaken for casual snapshots. Don't be fooled. He has deliberately abandoned "the language of importance", but his images are carefully thought out and are often partly staged. "I guess there is a tendency for any artist in any field to want their work to be noticed," he laughs. "But the artists who are a little bit more interesting go beyond that and realise that of course it's much cooler to make it all look effortless."

Despite the apparent ease of



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style, Tillmans' work is instantly recognisable, and he's become one of the most celebrated artists of his generation. A decade ago he was the youngest person to ever collect the Turner Prize, as well as the first and only photographer, and he has the rare distinction (for a photographer) of being given a solo at Tate Britain in 2003 and at the Venice Biennale in 2009.

Tillmans didn't get into photography until he was 20. Born in 1968 in Remscheid, a small town close to Cologne where the work of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (new objectivity) photographers such as August Sander and Bernd and Hilla Becher was "in the water", as he puts it, his first exhibition was a collection of images photocopied on a Canon laser printer.

"It probably seemed a little mad to people that I had this drive and this belief that the work was good and that it mattered," he told *Fantastic Man* magazine recently. "And that somehow if this mattered to me, there might be some relevance in it to the outside world... I have always felt a sense of purpose, that I had something to say and that I wanted to say it."

He showed the work in various venues in Hamburg, where he lived for three years after finishing school, then moved to Berlin during the tumultuous months of 1989, when the city's wall divide was spectacularly torn down and the party began. Yet just a few months after arriving, he moved again, this time to a seaside town on the south coast of England best known for elderly sunseekers. He'd read that Nick Knight, who'd made his name blurring the boundaries between fashion and documentary with shots of skinheads and youth culture, had studied photography at Bournemouth School of Art and Design, and applied to go there himself.

His sheer drive marked him out early on, say his former tutors. "I was interested, and knew what I was interested in," he says. "Or not even that - I was passionate."

Unaffected gaze

Primarily influenced by artists who worked with photographic images, such as Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke and Robert Rauschenberg, Tillmans had every confidence in photography as an art

form. But he found his signature style when he stripped away the accoutrements of art, shooting apparently unglamorous subjects with simple flashlight bounced off the walls.

"I saw all the students, including myself, try out interesting lighting techniques, and it was the heyday of cross-processing and lith-toning and wide-angle lenses," he says. "It dawned on me, 'Why are these images not really looking like what I see, what I feel with my eye?' So I embarked on looking for ways to approximate what my eye sees and came up with these portraits that I then became known for, including this realistic palette and normal light and normal lenses, but also this unaffected gaze. A lot of people in the early days found that almost hostile or rejecting because, I guess, a lot of pictures when I was growing up were of young people smiling or being funny or acting as if they excused themselves for that phase they were in. Whereas I saw myself and my contemporaries as serious, complex human beings, and that was enough."

These resulting images, such as *Julia* (1991), showed casually posed



3 [Opposite] Lutz & Alex sitting in the trees, 1992.

4 Dan, 2008.

5 Inflight Astro (ii), 2010.



4

friends and associates, often in homely domestic spaces, though many of these acquaintances were involved in the 1990s techno scene. Tillmans also documented London's Chemistry Club and shot stories for *i-D* (one of his best-known images, *Lutz and Alex, sitting in the trees* [3] was shot for the style magazine), which rather confused some when he was nominated for the Turner Prize. The critic Matthew Collings, for example, told *The Observer* he had "no idea why Tillmans is supposed to be an artist. If he wins the message will be the Tate... wants to get down and boogie in an embarrassing way with the youthful airheads who read *The Face*".

Collings' comments were inaccurate – Tillmans has never shot for *The Face* – and the photographer still finds the subculture tag slightly frustrating. He's stated he "never set out to be a photographer of the 1990s, the techno generation", he just shot the people he had access to. But he's also said he shot the ecstasy generation because he felt closest to them, and that the portraits he most values are of the people he loves. This, combined with his still lifes of



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everyday objects such as fruit and half-empty milk bottles, have led some to further confuse his work as primarily diaristic.

It's another misinterpretation, he says, although he admits that after 25 years in photography he can see some of his own history

in his work. "I have a very varied subject matter, but it is actually not everything," he says. "It's not every plate I've eaten off – it's a particular plate maybe once a year. It's not like I've photographed every seat I've sat in, every bed I've slept in... There are different reasons for portraits.

There are those of the friends I'm close to, others I've made because I think that person is important, or does something important that I want to amplify. Others I see almost literally as an exercise in flexibility. There are two or three magazines that can approach me about

6 [Opposite] *I don't want to get over you*, 2000.

portraiture, because I generally like what they do, and then it's a random thing. A person suddenly gets proposed and you have to deal with them, sometimes in 20 minutes in a hotel room. They don't have any idea of who I am or the status I might have in my world, so I just have to function on this one-to-one human level. There's no safety net."

In fact, he says the possibility of failure is at the heart of any good portrait. If you go into a situation with a preconceived idea, he argues, you'll get a picture with that idea; if you go into it with an arrogant or dismissive attitude, you'll get bad results. He's fond of saying that although photography always lies about what's in front of the camera, it never lies about what's behind it, and he adds that photography is "an incredibly true medium in regards to the intentions that are behind the camera".

"You could say these are just pictures of clubs, but you know thousands of people take pictures of clubs and none of them look just exactly like mine," he says. "That's a proof. I don't mean it as a proof of how brilliant I am, it's a proof of how specific photography is, how truly psychological."

Subversive eye

Tillmans' still lifes reveal another aspect of this democratic approach. He's described the eyes as subversive because "they are free when used freely" – that is, they ascribe value to what's seen in front of them, no matter how expensive or banal the subject. But although many of his still lifes show ostensibly everyday scenes, in fact many are staged, and if they're not, they've acquired meaning for him over a long time before shooting.

The title of his 2003 Tate Britain

show, *If one thing matters everything matters*, has been misinterpreted as meaning that everything is equally important, he says. He didn't mean that every milk bottle is of equal value to him, nor is he taking a straight inventory of the objects around him. He meant that any object has the potential to be a worthy subject, nothing is per se excluded from consideration.

"I don't think, 'Oh this normal apple is actually quite beautiful', that wouldn't cross my mind," he says. "There isn't a programme saying, 'Hey let's make something normal look good'. I genuinely think it's good. And that doesn't exclude a precious object either. I might take pictures of very inexpensive things, but I'm also interested in the special [he's shot gold bars, for example]. It's almost that I transfer the special in the everyday and the everyday into the special."

His constant question to himself, he adds, is "Can I make a picture out of this?" The titles of his images sometimes function in the same way – sometimes he'll pick out a seemingly incidental aspect of the image, in an attempt to sharpen the viewers' senses. "It's again in keeping with my approach, you know – don't be so sure about what you think you see, be open, look twice," he says.

This emphasis on the image runs through Tillmans' abstract experimentations too. Although he's always shot abstracts, after the 1990s he started working on process-driven pieces too, for example the *Blushes*, *Peaches*, *Starstruck*, and *Freischwimmer* series. These images are often talked about as fragments of hair or skin, which Tillmans puts down to the sheer fact they're photographic – if they were paintings, he argues,

viewers wouldn't try to read them in terms of reality. These images draw attention to the materiality of photography, he says, and the fact that images don't simply depict reality, "something that is not really well understood by the general public". Beyond that, he says, they're not so different to his other work. He's a picture-maker, and "anything goes".

"Photography is matter, or it was matter before digital, and they [photographs] are objects," he explains. "They are an embodied image, which is a picture, and the abstract works pronounce that more, even though the concern for me is the same if I take a picture of a stained t-shirt and put it on the wall."

Common experience

He always shows his abstract images alongside figurative work in the pin-up, installation-style exhibitions for which he's become known. Selecting a large number of pictures, in some installations even including photographs culled from newspapers as well as his own, he prints them out as inkjets, then tacks them to the walls, or (as in the *Truth Study Center* project) lays them flat on crude, wooden tables.

Abandoning glass mounts and frames is another bid to reject "the language of importance" and "the reek of mimicking painting", but it also leaves the images free to "battle it out". He doesn't want to promote one image above another, he says, just as he doesn't want to prejudge his subjects because "the world is so full of interesting things". What matters is being open-minded enough to really look, and what's special about photography is that it can point towards what you actually see, he argues. "I chose the medium because I can say what I want to say

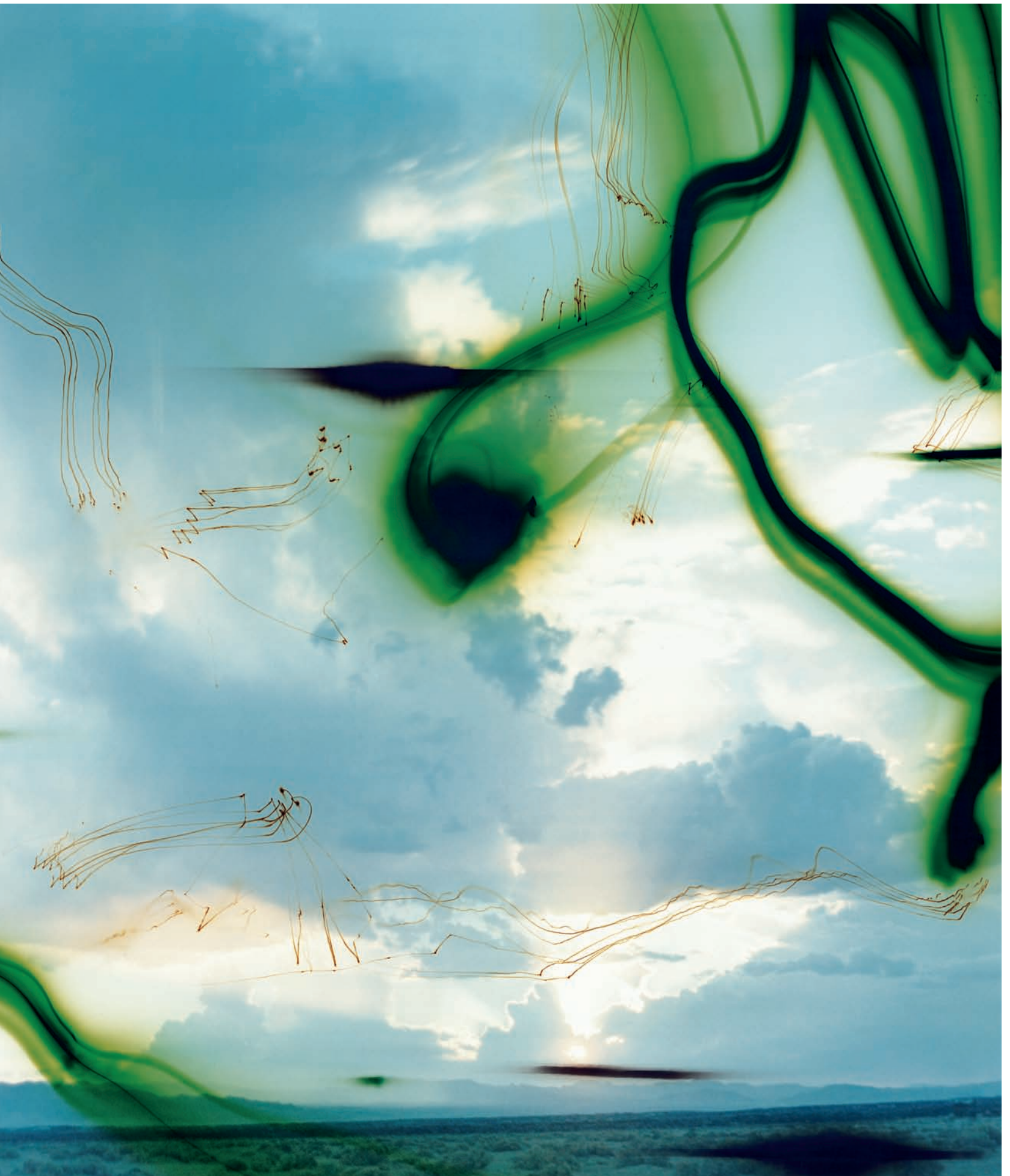
with it," he states. "Photography allows me to make very expressive things but keep them still related to and grounded in reality."

Connected universality

That reality, of course, is shared with other people, and Tillmans told *Influence* magazine in 2004 that he liked the fact that photographs join him to the world and connect him with others. "I can get in touch with somebody when they recognise the feeling, 'Oh, I felt like that before, I remember jeans hanging on the banister, even though I've never seen that exact pair,'" he said. "It's this universality that interests me, how this individual's experience relates to a shared universal experience," he adds, a position not a million miles away from Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, which argues that each individual, subjective response is universally shared by all. But, typically, Tillmans has another, more common sense of universality – the loss of ego implicit in clubbing, and in losing the self to a mass of people and music. It's this sense of fellow feeling and communication that makes it all worthwhile, he says, not his spectacular success in the art world.

"Regularly, people tell me how they see the world differently because of my pictures, that they somehow see things in their own life that they take a picture of in their mind's eye," he says. "I find that super, such a reaction is really rewarding. That is real success – not the price that my pictures go for, but that actually affecting a fellow human to see something with open eyes." *BJP*

Wolfgang Tillmans is on show at the Serpentine Gallery until 19 September. www.serpentinegallery.org www.tillmans.co.uk



Ward, Ossian, *Exhibition of the week: Wolfgang Tillmans*,
Time Out, 5 August 2010, p.43.

Exhibition of the week

Wolfgang Tillmans



Installation view (top); 'Roy', 2009; 'Heptathlon', 2009; 'Eierstapel', 2009

★★★★★

Serpentine Gallery Major spaces

A photocopier machine flashes, a baby sleeps, a jacket lies crumpled in a heap and a plane skirts low over industrial land – in that order. So begins this trail around a decade's worth of images by Wolfgang Tillmans, marking the period since he became the only photographer yet to win the Turner Prize, in 2000. It's clear that he's not been resting on his laurels or flogging the subcultural vein that first brought him prominence in the pages of *The Face* and *I-D* magazines (there's only a couple of post-party scenes and an amusing up-skirt shot of full-on male genitalia that hark back to more hedonistic days). This rave-tinted view once lumped him in with a Nan Goldin-lite documentary practice and made his art 'easy'. That's not true any more, given an increasingly freeform accumulation of subjects, styles and possibilities.

And so it goes on: a raindrop pools in a leaf, a sprinter anticipates the gun, eggs lie in boxes for shipment and a house awaits demolition. There are, of course, patterns to Tillmans and they're often visual – in this case a bright-red point punctuates most of the colour photos in the room – but they can be thematic too. A sense of expectation hovers over each frame, whether it's the knowledge that the drop of water will fall, or that the runner will explode away from the blocks. Tillmans captures in-between moments when the deed is not done nor yet quite begun.

The very best of these also inhabit a form on the threshold: one that's neither photographic nor sculptural – a folded or scrunched print pulls away from the wall – and neither accidental nor quite controlled – light effects dance off the surface like streaks of liquid striating across the developing paper. Tillmans edits ruthlessly for pace, flip-flopping between pure

abstraction and gritty figuration, before changing into reverse gear when least expected. This is why rooms of giant abstractions are bridged by an occasional portrait in the doorway, say of a man with a fresh haircut or one engrossed in a DJ set.

Although pictures are taped to the walls and tables arranged with seemingly random detritus, he's anything but slapdash. Everything is highly orchestrated and speaks of laboratory levels of organisation, down to the seemingly forgotten and faded fax hidden in the corner. That makes Wolfgang sound like a dull boy nowadays, it's only partially true. He does pause as often as he takes forward steps, but at least he's not churning out zeitgeisty characters like he used to. Tillmans is still a drifter and a first-class sifter, though, collecting the fragments of time that normally fall through the cracks and preserving those things we forget to look at.

Ossian Ward

The Telegraph

Wolfgang Tillmans at Serpentine Gallery, Seven magazine review

This ethereal photographer hints at the magnificent beyond the mundane . Rating * * * *

By Andrew Graham-Dixon

Published 29 July 2010

Wolfgang Tillmans is one of the most eclectic and intriguing of modern photographers. Surveying the heterogeneous images gathered together in his new show at the Serpentine, it seems that almost anything could furnish him with material for a picture: empty plastic fruit punnets clustered on a windowsill; the disc of Venus crossing the orb of the sun; a boy in leisurewear standing on the deck of a ship, talking on his mobile phone; a sad-faced William of Orange looking out from a fragment of 17th-century portrait, light flaring on the canvas; two dismantled office chairs, seatless and backless, in a stark white room.

Tillmans's images jump erratically from the macrocosmic to the microcosmic, from the sublime to the mundane, from the urban to the pastoral, with disconcerting rapidity. To enhance the unsettling effect of the whole installation, the pictures themselves are printed in widely varying sizes, from monumental scale to the size of a postage stamp.

These scatterfire images are displayed in a consideredly offhand way, simply pinned or stuck to the wall in multiple configurations. Some of the hangs look as if they might have been inspired by the jumbled shapes in a kaleidoscope.

The images themselves often look overexposed or underexposed and frequently exhibit the imperfections to which the photographic process itself is prone: scratches, traces of grit on or in the lens, speckles or fading.

This is an exhibition liable to raise the hackles of photographic purists. But a kind of preciousness is implied, none the less, by this apparent absence of preciousness. Imperfections and all, these images aggressively declare that the photographer's own eye and mind are all that counts.

The show is presented as a sensorium rather than an exhibition – the flow of a life – in which the photographs are to be seen more like shards of consciousness than consciously framed pictures.

But what kind of consciousness do they reflect? Tillmans is commonly regarded as a photographer working at the borderline with conceptual art – a preconception bolstered by the fact that he won the Turner Prize in 2000 – and there are one or two groups of works in the present show that might seem to support that view of him.

There are a number of apparently abstract works on display, sheets of photographic paper that have been saturated in a single colour – flashing orange, deep blue, glossy black – as well as images that seem to have been formed by printing unexposed negatives on which grains of dust or sand have been allowed to settle.



'Anders pulling splinter from his foot' (2004)

Such dumbly resistant objects might seem like arid exercises in postmodern self-reference – photographs about photography, as it were – but Tillmans is so openly emotional in so much of his other work as to make that seem unlikely.

If there is a single thread to the breadth and diversity of his work, it is his keenly romantic sense of the world. He was originally raised as a Lutheran in the small town of Remscheid, not far from Cologne, and although his work could hardly be described as religious, it feels strongly and constantly touched by displaced forms of piety, morbidity and spiritual yearning.

Like the German and northern European Romantics of the 19th century, he is fascinated to the point of obsession both by the depths of the forest and by the height of the sky: some of his largest pictures aim to plunge the viewer into dense tracteries of branches, while some of his smallest and most light-filled pictures are all but blank images of the dawn air snapped through the window of an aeroplane.

Many of his most apparently experimental pictures have a strong emotional or elegiac core. A series of monumental photographs of red fluid dispersing in water, in streams or livid blurs, may be intended to lament friends or lovers lost to the Aids epidemic. Even his mutest abstracts, those pure blocks and slices of fixed photographic emulsion, call to mind the colour experiments once conducted by Goethe.

Tillmans comes across as a man constantly on the lookout for signs and symbols, for some higher reality, above and beyond the ordinariness of the ordinary world. He uses his lens to preserve urban detritus, but he does so with the solemnity of a designer of reliquaries.

He sees his friends, or people on the street, as if they might almost be gods, or mythological creatures: a group of bikers, clustered together in a pedestrian precinct, are observed as if they are some strange archaic tribe; Anders pulling splinter from his foot might be a 21st-century Philoctetes on the Isle of Lemnos, tormented by a fatal wound.

Such mythic and spiritual overtones are only half-serious, suggested shruggingly as if with a deeper sense of their absurdity. But still they hover in the air, like the sphere of Venus that so preoccupies his imagination, hovering before the great shield of the sun. Is it a miracle?

The mind says no, just a side effect of the physical organisation of the universe, but the heart wonders; and the photographer's eye remains fascinated by the image, rapt by the cosmic majesty of it.

Tillmans is a late, late romantic, a lapsed mystic, but one who cannot quite accept the idea of living in an entirely disenchanted world.

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL ● REVIEW

EXHIBITION REVIEWS

June/July 2010



View of Wolfgang Tillmans's exhibition, 2010, inkjet and chromogenic prints; at Andrea Rosen.

WOLFGANG TILLMANS

ANDREA ROSEN

For the past 20 years, the German artist Wolfgang Tillmans has captured in snapshotlike photographs random glimpses of people, places and things ranging from Dubai guest-worker housing shot from an airplane window to a man bathing in the Ganges, women athletes waiting to compete in a German heptathlon, wrinkled clothing, the inside of a photocopy machine and shoreline debris on the Italian island of Lampedusa. The photographs in his latest New York show—more than 65 in all, most from 2008 or '09—hint at well-trodden themes of globalization and the voluntary nomadism of individuals having the freedom and means to pass from developed to developing worlds and back again. But an open, noncommittal tone prevails, in part because Tillmans doesn't picture abject poverty, violence or the ultra-rich. Rather, his unsensational photographs offer no coherent narrative, just a series of partial views.

The works included large, poster-style inkjet prints and small- or medium-sized chromogenic prints that, in Tillmans's

signature style, were taped or clipped directly to the walls in seemingly arbitrary groupings throughout the space. The installation had the random feel of social media, paralleling the experience of encountering groups of images on a stranger's Facebook page, though Tillmans employed this hanging style well before the rise of such networking sites. As a whole (and it would make little sense to view Tillmans's photographs individually), the installation constituted a kind of placeless image world in which people and events are disconnected from history and politics, even as they are connected through the eye of the photographer and, perhaps, the beholder.

Tillmans's fracturing of the contemporary context can seem to exemplify 21st-century vision and experience, yet his snapshot esthetic, seemingly neutral eye and reliance on strong, saturated colors to create formally balanced compositions are familiar gambits redeployed here to vastly different ends. Photographer and MoMA curator John Szarkowski contended in his essay for the 1964 catalogue *The Photographer's Eye* that photographs are incapable of communicating a coherent

narrative, and can offer only a series of "scattered and suggestive clues." Through the photographer's isolation of details, the effective photograph could "give the sense of a scene, while withholding its narrative meaning." Like William Eggleston's classic photographic fragments (an open freezer, a tricycle on the sidewalk), Tillmans's brief and arbitrary glimpses draw attention to all we are *not* seeing in order to address the complicated world outside the frame.

—Kirsten Swenson

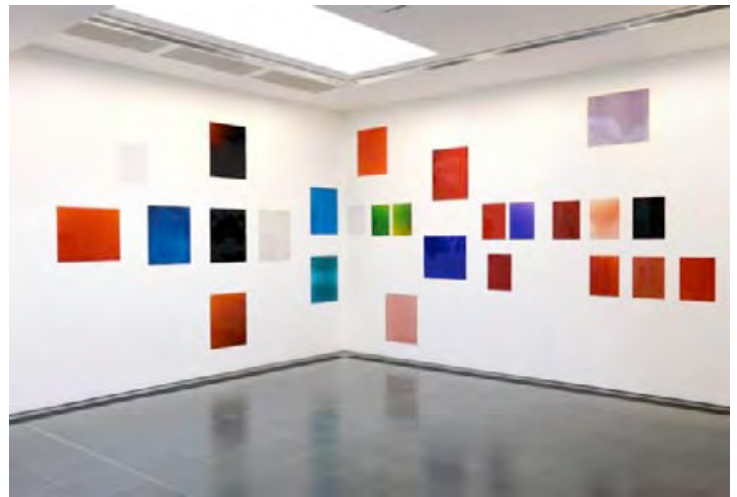
Wolfgang Tillmans, Serpentine Gallery, London

Tillmans' masterclass in botany, the history of art and (a bonus!) ways of seeing
Reviewed by Charles Darwent

Sunday, 27 June 2010

Side by side in the Serpentine Gallery's rotunda hang two shots of what might loosely be called botanical subjects by the German-born photographer Wolfgang Tillmans. Plants apart, the two works could hardly be less alike; plants included, in fact, since one is of a brooding Rhineland forest and the other of a crop of dead ivy growing up the wall of a London council block.

The first, *Wald (Reinshagen)*, is a huge photograph – a landscape in portrait format measuring nearly three metres by two, its titular forest shown soft-grained and creepy by Tillmans' use of black-and-white C-print. The second image, *growth*, is very much smaller – 40 centimetres by 30 – and is also a chromogenic print, although in colour this time, its palette a bleak confection of red brick and dead leaves. If memory serves (it may not), *growth* is attached to the wall by Tillmans' trademark two bits of sticky tape; *Wald (Reinshagen)*, by contrast, is conventionally glazed and framed. Seen in isolation, the treatment of the two subjects seems dictated by hierarchy. Forests are serious things, the stuff of Teutonic myth, Caspar David Friedrich and Richard Wagner. They deserve the High Art treatment, big, brooding Expressionism, frames. Dead ivy on British council estates, on the other hand ...



WOLFGANG TILLMANS

Modern and ancient: Silver Installation VII was hung by the artist, like the entire show

So why have these two images been shown on one wall? A thing to bear in mind as you walk around the Serpentine's 20-year retrospective is that the works in it weren't just made by Tillmans but hung by him. They can certainly be seen in isolation, but they can – must – also be read together. The Turner Prize-winner divides his time between London and Berlin. *Wald (Reinshagen)* and *growth*, the one German-titled and epic, the other grungily English and lower-case, suggest two historical ways of seeing. In the context of the show, their differences feel autobiographical, a bi-national stand-off between order and humanity.

Which is to say that the vast array of genres and hangings and hierarchies of image in this show isn't just there to show what a clever boy Wolfgang Tillmans is. Each grouping of photographs makes the point that images do not exist in isolation. We see what we see historically, art-historically, politically, in several ways at once. Tillmans' work makes constant reference to genres of art other than photography. Anders pulling splinter from his foot is a deeply tender and perhaps loving photograph, but it is also a conscious echo of the *Spinario*, one of the best known pieces of Hellenistic sculpture. Another portrait of Anders shows him as a pebbled Arcimboldo, while William of Orange cuts out the middleman of mere allusion by reproducing wholesale a chunk of Antonis Mor's Kassel portrait of the Dutch king. Three suites of work – *Lighter*, and *Silver Installation VI* and *VII* – are painterly in quite a different way, being assemblages of what look like Minimalist monochromes.

The aim, though, is not to imitate or compete but to trouble. At the heart of all Tillmans' work is a kind of moral doubt – a question mark about what photography is and what it does. The most obvious answer is that it reproduces, by repute exactly and objectively. Lighter 83 is a reproduction in more senses than one. It could be, say, a Donald Judd, and it goes the whole Minimalist nine yards in being framed in a Plexiglas hood. But Lighter 83 is a deeply complex image, its surface being both actually and illusionistically bent, the yellow line that crosses its lower field noticeably ambiguous. Has Tillmans simply made it by exposing his paper to light, or is that yellow line a photograph of something? Is it neutral, or does it have some meaning – some content – of its own?

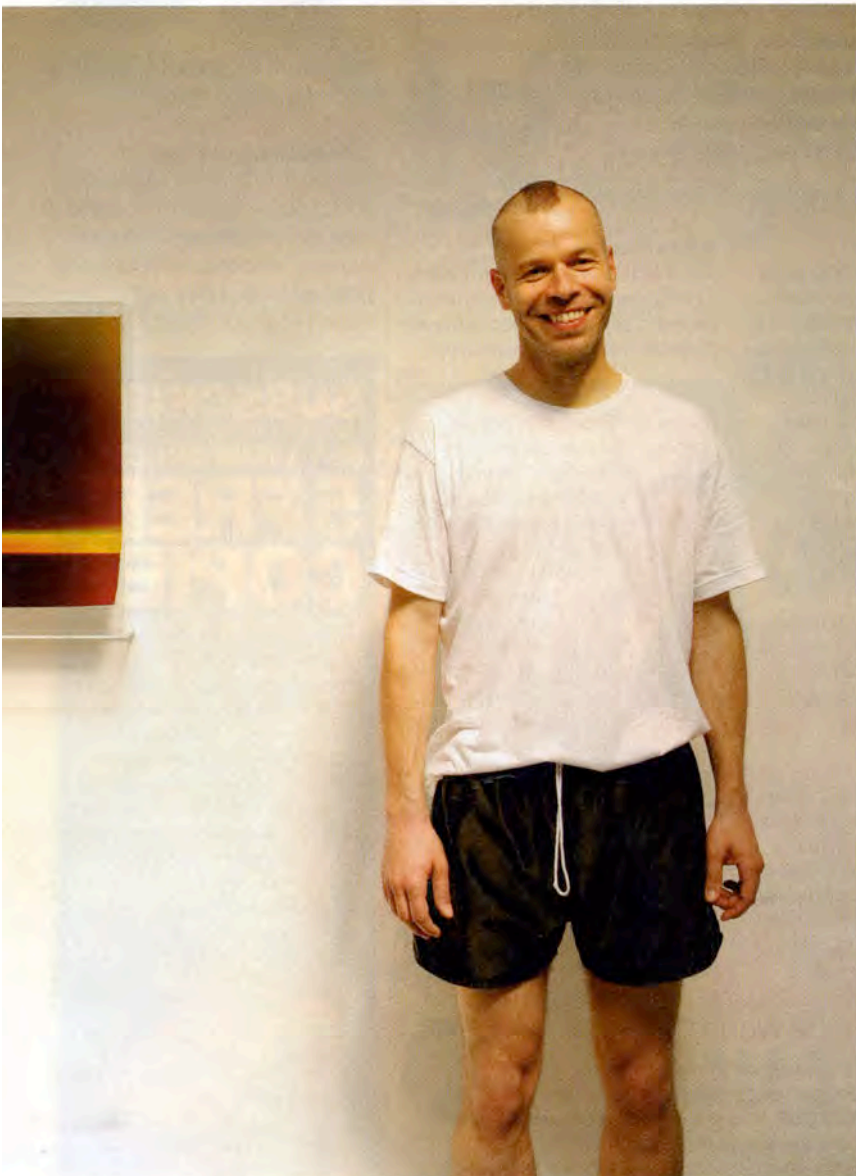
The real subject of the Serpentine's exhibition isn't Wolfgang Tillmans but the way we see, the way that photography asks us to see. It is an excellent show, one of the best this summer. Go.

To 19 Sep (020-7402 6075), free

Tillmans, Wolfgang, *Wolfgang Tillmans: My London*,
Time Out, 24 June 2010, pp.6-8 & 10.

WOLFGANG TILLMANS: MY LONDON

As a major exhibition of his work opens at the Serpentine Gallery, the Turner Prize-winner gives *Time Out* a glimpse into his unique experience of the capital. Words and pictures **Wolfgang Tillmans**. (Portrait below shot in Tillmans's London studio by **Rob Greig** for *Time Out*)



▲ 'Concorde L449-11', 1997

'For more than 25 years Concorde was a flying landmark in the skies over London. For years, I took delight in seeing it, before embarking on a project to meet it with my camera at different places under its flight path across south London. This was taken in Hatton Cross on the rare occasion of it taking off in an easterly direction.'



▲ 'Sex', 2003

'One day, aimlessly staring at the seat across from me on the Central Line, I realised that one can read the word "sex" in the seat fabric. The "s" and "e" are in the red squares, the "x" is in the blue square. Ever since I made that discovery I always read "sex" written all over the seats when travelling on the Central Line. Maybe *Time Out* can find out if this was a subliminal joke on the part of the textile designer.'

Tillmans, Wolfgang, *Wolfgang Tillmans: My London, Time Out*, 24 June 2010, pp.6-8 & 10.

Wolfgang Tillmans's London



▲ 'Growth', 2006

'I walked past this housing estate in Bethnal Green a lot on the way to lunch at the vegetarian restaurant Wild Cherry, which is now sadly closed. For a while I had noticed the cut-off ivy, which was left to die and rot. The way it's dry and brown but full with leaves makes for this contrast of organic versus man-made shapes, while both have the same colour. I sometimes notice something but don't instantly take a photograph of it. When I saw this scene again on another day, I took out my camera to finally take a picture of it and, in that moment, a little boy walked out of the house, completing the picture in a way I could never have planned. Like this little human creature in an alien world.'



▲ 'Baraclough', 2008

'Little Richard, one of the unsung heroes of underground art and night culture, hosted a one-off evening of performance art called "Maggot" in the store room of my studio. This picture shows the anarcho-noise trio Baraclough performing.'



▲ 'Jubilee Line', 2000

'Rush hour on the tube is obviously a challenging ordeal, but seen with different eyes, it's also an interesting visual journey through a macro-cosmos of other people's ears, hair and armpits, and allows for close-up studies of fabric and stitching patterns.'

Tillmans, Wolfgang, *Wolfgang Tillmans: My London*,
Time Out, 24 June 2010, pp.6-8 & 10.

Wolfgang Tillmans's London



▲ 'After storm', 2002

'The wind of a gale-force autumn storm had blown fallen leaves against the fence of the public tennis court across the road from my studio with such force that the leaves, as well as two blue carrier bags, got stuck permanently like an imprint of the forces of nature.'



▲ 'Cabvision', 2009

'Even though I deeply love London, I never get over how greed and outsmarting others for one's own profit are fully acceptable here. A financial services ad like this on a cab would be considered to be incredibly bad taste and bad karma in continental Europe. The transformation of English society in this direction has not been stopped by 12 years of Labour government. Now we're in for the next round.'



▲ 'I HAD YOUR NAN', 2005

'The white van is a very London thing, I find. In particular their angry, reckless drivers scaring the hell out of cyclists. The best thing about them are finger graffitis written in dirt, like this one which was apparently written by four different people: "If only my wife was this dirty"; "My girlfriend is though"; "They are, I've had em both"; "I had your nan. She's well good". If this isn't poetry, then what is?'

Tillmans, Wolfgang, *Wolfgang Tillmans: My London*,
Time Out, 24 June 2010, pp.6-8 & 10.

Wolfgang Tillmans's London



▲ 'The Bell', 2002

'Only when I showed this picture at Tate Britain in 2003 did I realise that the female half of the population didn't know what the subject matter of this picture was: a steel urinal with odour cakes. The title is a tribute to the legendary '80s Bell pub in King's Cross, which was converted into an annoying fun pub around 2000 and is where the photo was taken.'

▼ 'Lars on tube', 1993

'This was from a portrait/fashion series of Germans in London for a German magazine. For this, we took the Jubilee Line to the very last stations where the train was almost empty. I knew I had to stop shooting when the expression on Lars's face turned from pleasure to pain.'



◀ 'Chemistry, view', 1992

'The Soundshaft behind Heaven was a location of many legendary clubs. I caught it when I first moved to London in 1992 when the club night Chemistry was held there. I asked *i-D* if I could take pictures there for its club pages. I only took a compact camera and two rolls of film but added two Es to the mix. I was so "one" with the crowd that no one even noticed my photographing and I took some of my best club pictures that night. The red I added later in my darkroom when printing it.'

*Wolfgang Tillmans is showing
at the Serpentine Gallery
Sat June 26-Sept 19. See Art.*

Wolfgang Tillmans: Everything and nothing

Botched haircuts, still lifes, the planet Venus – artist Wolfgang Tillmans shoots the world and beyond. But does it all hang together? Adrian Searle finds out at a major new retrospective

Adrian Searle

guardian.co.uk, Wednesday 23 June 2010 21.30 BST



Rhythm, pace and surprise ... a detail from Wolfgang Tillmans's *Morning* (2009)

Wolfgang Tillmans's new show is a world of differences: bodies and buildings, trays of eggs and vernacular Tunisian houses, pictures of the world and pictures of nothing. There are on-the-hoof shots and darkroom experiments; large photographs and small; intimacies and distances. There is a photograph of a young man's ear, caught by the clippers while having his hair cut; there is a shot of a forest in Tierra del Fuego, the trees blitzed by light and shade.

All this might be bewildering: the jumps in scale, the sheer variety of Tillmans's subject matter, his different means of presentation (huge sheets of photographic paper hung from bulldog clips, other things taped directly on to the wall, work sitting in Perspex boxes). But it is all orchestrated with a sense of rhythm, pace and surprise.

For Tillmans, photography can be a record, something observed or something never seen before. It can also be painting by other means: pinkish fields with sudden judderings that recall skin seen close up; strange abstractions generated by the random dirt on the silver drum of Tillmans's printer (and which recall the squeegeed abstractions of Gerhard Richter, whose art is also much concerned with the relationship between painting and photography, intention and meaninglessness). Some of his photographs are near-monochromes, recalling thin shadows crossing the walls in a pale room, or the acid lighting on a highway at night. Sometimes it is hard not to think of paintings by Ellsworth Kelly or Raoul de Keyser.

Here is a still life, an accumulation of little objects on a window sill: a conker, an acorn, a key, some lenses, a number of stainless steel sex toys for stretching your balls. (At least that's what I thought they were. When I asked him, Tillmans called me a pervert. He was right.) Elsewhere, there is a small image of a naked man on his knees. He might be praying.

Weirdly, it looks more like a pallid ink drawing or a water-colour than a photograph. In fact, it is a faded fax, a degenerated thermal image of a photograph now fixed for ever on the verge of disappearance.

Somehow everything makes a kind of sense. The cumulative effect of Tillmans's art may be puzzling, but it isn't a puzzle. Its logic lies in process rather than in the production of telling images. The differences in his work are themselves the point: from his coloured rectangles dancing on the Serpentine gallery's white walls (they make your eyes dance, too) to the wonky, knocked-together tables that stand in the middle of one room, laden with cargoes of text, newspaper pages, printed ephemera. Here is an article on religion by Polly Toynbee, commissioned by Tillmans for an edition of *Die Zeit* he guest-edited; there is a piteous image of two young men – little more than boys – about to be hanged in public for the crime of homosexuality in Iran; here is an article by Tillmans himself, a keen amateur astronomer, on the 2004 transit of Venus. What is the carpet tile doing among all this stuff, on one of the tables, a blank square of pixellated industrial flooring?

If art can talk about the world, the big question is where to stop. What do you include and what do you exclude? Sometimes, and especially in photography shows, you can end up going from one damn thing to another, driven by the hope of finding something salacious, erotic or just plain peculiar. Tillmans does his best to call a halt to such aimless gawping by constantly giving us things that need to be approached and looked at in different ways – as images, as constellations of pictures, as objects.

For some artists, doing one thing well is enough. But photography – perhaps more so than painting – allows for many different kinds of incidents and singularities. The great pleasure of this exhibition is its orchestration of different registers and voices. The last big Tillmans show I saw, in Berlin in 2008, was called *Lighter*. Walking through it, I felt heavier and heavier: it was so full of stuff, it was hard to hold the logic of it all in one's head. Retrospectives often fall into this trap. The smallness of the Serpentine gallery demands much tighter editing; the space edits the work as much as the artist.

Tillmans's show was hung and finished two days ago, but late on Tuesday night the artist decided to rearrange part of the hang. Things aren't right until they're right, and rightness seems to be a big issue for the artist. The big problem, of course, is what happens when the crowds pour in. You lose all those perfect sightlines.

The extreme variety of Tillmans's work, with its different printing techniques and technologies, makes for a fascinating show on many levels. There are luscious photographs and dirty faxes, photocopies that accentuate the dismal Edinburgh light and glossy prints that bring out the unpleasant glamour of Shanghai by night; there is a vivid cyan blue invented in the darkroom and too artificial to be the sky. It is all here. These could, of course, all be exercises in style: I can do this, and this, and this; you can have it this way or that. You want abstract? I can do abstract. You want gritty, or sexy? Well, here they are. But there is more to Tillmans's work than formal intelligence. He wants it all, and why not?

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/jun/23/wolfgang-tillmans-serpentine-gallery>

THE NEW YORKER

March 1, 2010

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN art listings for February 24-March 2, 2010

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

WOLFGANG TILLMANS

As if to remind us that he did it first, this influential photographer mounts a terrific installation of huge and small, mostly unframed color prints scattered about the gallery in what would seem to be an utterly random order. Typically, his subjects also appear to be random and tangential, as if snapped on the run: a street scene in India, a magazine rack in the U.K., aerial views of Dubai and London; stacks of egg crates, sliced watermelon, the Washington Monument, a turd in the grass. This casual, encyclopedic view of the world has become the default mode for countless young photographers, but none of them can match Tillmans when it comes to elegance, intelligence, or emotional impact. Through March 13. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

New York

Wolfgang Tillmans

ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

525 West 24th Street
January 30–March 13

Recent solo projects and group-show contributions by Wolfgang Tillmans have seen the artist foreground various aspects of the photographic process, manufacturing focused abstractions that exploit the properties of the materials and machinery involved. In this exhibition, however, he returns to the snapshot—some might also say scattershot—aesthetic with which he made his name. The checklist identifies some sixty-five separate works, and the gallery also provides a handy map to make sure we don't miss a single one of them. The prints, which come in pocket size, poster size, and banner size, are hung by a variety of means and dispersed scrapbooklike across every available wall.

What continues to impress about Tillmans's work is his capacity to combine some fairly conventional ideas about what makes a good picture (he remains fascinated by striking combinations of color and pattern, for example, and by the visual exoticisms offered up by international travel) with a consistently open-ended approach to their ordering and presentation. But there is also, despite the initial impression of wild eclecticism or even arbitrariness that a show such as this conveys, a coherent vision at work therein. Tillmans takes on both the personal and the political with such a light touch that they dovetail with an engaging naturalness. There are some exquisite single images here, too, none more so than Yunxiu Nunnery, 2009, wherein a globular raindrop is poised on a leaf.

— *Michael Wilson*



Wolfgang Tillmans, Yunxiu Nunnery, 2009,

Wolfgang Tillmans *Lighter*

Hamburger Bahnhof—(Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin)

TOP PICK IN BOTH ARTFORUM AND FRIEZE “BEST OF 2008”

As seen in Frieze, January 2009

Giorgio Del Vecchio

Wolfgang Tillmans solo show at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin was great. A long sequence of emotions and a great number of works of unflinching intensity, this was the total vision of a total artist - the last of the Romantics. The show confirmed almost definitively who it is, today, that uses and understands images in all their possible nuances, citing poetry, reality, imagination, knowledge and background. Tillmans is not just a photographer: he is a complete artist. ‘Lighter’ proved this, creating a unique and excellently constructed itinerary, confirming his status not only as a major artist but a cultural beacon. Other shows: Tris Vonna-Michell at Kunsthalle Zurich; Alexander Rodchenko at Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin; R. Buckminster Fuller at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Marc Camille Chaimowicz (in collaboration with Alexis Vaillant) at de Appel, Amsterdam; Rivane Neuenschwander at the South London Gallery.



Lizzie Carey-Thomas

The year opened magnificently with Frances Stark at greengrassi, London. Wolfgang Tillmans’ retrospective ‘Lighter’ at Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, reminded me why he has many imitators but no one else comes close. Also, Richard Wilson’s mini survey at The Grey Gallery, Edinburgh, along with his spinning architectural intervention for the Liverpool Biennial International 08 Turning the Place Over (2007).

Beatrix Ruf

Wolfgang Tillmans’ solo show, which made use of the Riek Hallen of Berlin’s Hamburger Bahnhof, was an absolute highlight of 2008, as was the accompanying catalogue, which, like most of Tillmans’ books, was designed by the artist himself. Tillmans is known for his outstanding ability to use space, and he managed to energize this endless sequence of rooms with a survey of works spanning his entire career, from wall pieces comprised of groups of multi-sized images to large-scale abstracts, from archives in vitrines to politically and sociologically activated sets of images.

**Wolfgang Tillmans’
‘Lighter’ at Hamburger
Bahnhof was the total
vision of a total artist -
the last of the
Romantics.
*Giorgio Del Vecchio***

As seen in Artforum, December 2008

Matthew Higgs

6 “Wolfgang Tillmans: Lighter” (Hamburger Bahnhof-Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin) This sprawling solo exhibition was an exhaustive and exhilarating journey through more than two decades of Tillmans’s images. Having worked in as well as combined virtually every idiom of photography, including documentary, fashion, editorial, and fine art, Tillmans evidently has not lost his curiosity and genuine empathy for the world around him. Even the show’s epic scale both mirrored and amplified the persistent inclusiveness of this most generous and self-consciously mercurial artist.



Bob Nickas

3 “Wolfgang Tillmans: Lighter” (Hamburger Bahnhof-Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin) I was unlucky to arrive in Berlin a week before the opening of this show, but lucky to run into Tillmans as he finalized its installation. He’s very much his own curator; his powers of visual thinking extend from the pictures to the rooms in which they’re shown. When you’ve known an artist’s work for a long time, you’re bound to ask—especially in a major retrospective—if the artist is done; if you are; if you’ve seen enough. But with all Tillmans’s openness to the beauty of life, and to human and political engagement, his show was a reminder that our interactions with one another continue not only to unfold but to surprise.

at left:
Wolfgang Tillmans
Peas
2003

Video with ambient sound
Duration: 2 minutes 42 seconds

above:
Wolfgang Tillmans
Lighter 44
2008

color photograph in Plexiglas box
24 3/16 x 21 1/4 x 5 1/8 “

“At that point . . .”

Daniel Birnbaum

Three parameters influence visibility in the night sky: the angle the planets make with the sun, the onset of dusk or dawn, and the disappearance of the planet beyond the horizon. Together, these factors result in a window of visibility.¹

—Wolfgang Tillmans

Window of visibility seems to me a relevant concept when trying to grasp the production of Wolfgang Tillmans, a maker of pictures who usually is regarded as a photographer but whose practice clearly transcends all attempts to explicate art in terms of discipline and medium specificity. In some of his works the very nature of *visibility* seems to be the theme, in others the *window* itself, and then there are those pictures in which someone appears in the open and steals all the attention: a person, a group of friends, or a crowd of people involved in something larger than the individual point of view. In an attempt to define his most characteristic fields of interest, Tillmans points to two radically different centers of attention: on the one hand an exploration of the chemical fundamentals of photography as a pure *writing of light* (i.e., as a kind “alchemy”) without any necessary rapport to a world beyond itself; and on the other hand the social interaction between humans, himself included. The first tendency has given rise to a large body of nonrepresentational works, sometimes referred to as abstract and metaphysical in nature, dealing with the exposure process and with the nature of color, light, and photosensitive materials. The second tendency, the interest in human interaction, is abundantly evident in all those pictures of people and social situations that consistently seem to emphasize the possibility of lifestyles that dodge repressive and reductive stereotypes and instead suggest an alternative, perhaps even a “utopian,” social order. These pictures from rallies, clubs, and parties are what made Tillmans known in the mid-nineties, but the other aspect, the attraction to pure or abstract forms of visibility, has in fact been present all along, embedded in the works, slumbering as possibilities not yet fully developed. And then, some years ago, these abstract works became more visible and were given a more prominent place, which in turn made aspects of earlier works discernible in a new way retroactively. “At that point,” says Tillmans about his 2006 exhibition *Freedom From The Known*, “I had drifted

furthest from the visible human world, the social world.” Dominating the show, he says, were “abstract works, largely metaphysical in nature.”

“At that point . . .” So what are these explorations of pyrotechnic color, these monochromatic images, barely touched sheet of paper, and virtually blank windows of visibility doing in the exhibitions of the photographer who took the decisive portraits of his generation and made our new forms of living and being together visible in the first place? “I just see these things simultaneously,” says Tillmans.² And now that the “abstractions” are there, prominently displayed in books and exhibitions, we can see hints and glimpses of that “zone” all over the place: in the reflections of the disco ball, in the empty skies behind the Concorde, in the strange light from the solar eclipse, perhaps even in the shiny ice cubes in a glass of whiskey. And then there are all these vacant surfaces lacking reference to anything beyond themselves and thus verging on abstraction: paper, textiles, skin. Something has been forced into the foreground and the void itself becomes visible and seems to gain new significance. “At that point,” says Tillmans, “I had drifted furthest from the visible human world . . .” Into emptiness, vacuity, a zone freed of any social significance? To get a first grasp of this zone and of its role in the pictorial universe of Tillmans is my modest ambition here.

A clear-cut line between representational and abstract imagery is not as easy to draw as is sometimes believed. This, it seems to me, is of particular relevance for a critical assessment of Tillmans’s recent work, and in fact it is a point the artist often makes in relationship to the works that appear to represent nothing outside themselves and their concrete process of coming about: “Reality is central to these pictures . . . In this sense, their reality, their context, and the time during which they were created are all crucial components of their meaning, for me at any rate.” It seems that *abstraction* here, if that really is the right term (I doubt it, for reasons that will become clear), is not a permanent state fixed once and for all, not a distinct condition with an essence that can be defined and fully exhausted, but rather a feature that can *emerge* in pictures as well as in the situations they depict. And perhaps this *emergent* quality has an appeal to him because it’s not a final and stable condition but rather a phase in a transformative process that can be quite explosive and which is present—perhaps in less purified form—also in photographs that do depict things in the world. It is photography in pure form: “I’m always aware that it’s a miracle, a photo-chemical miracle. To me it seems like a gift to have this technology at my disposal.” The possibility of creating a visually appealing and significant object out of an industrially manufactured sheet of paper must be seen as a gift, says Tillmans: “I won’t lose that feeling, and that’s what I meant by metaphysical.”

Photographs can represent things in the world, but photography can also become self-reflexive and explore its own possibilities as a medium, i.e., the technical and material conditions involved in the making of images through light and chemistry. The abstract works that explore the effect of light on photosensitive materials could perhaps be seen as a kind of painting practice with photographic means, even if it's not clear if the concept of "painting" helps us understand them better (after a few early attempts Tillmans has in fact actively avoided the world of stretchers and canvas as well as forms of display too closely related to the history of painterly abstraction). More interesting, in my view, is the question what role these sometimes strict and seemingly purist but often surprisingly visceral works play in the oeuvre, and what the turning back upon itself of the photographic medium implies for an artist so often seen as the key portraitist of his generation. And what, in general, is the nature of the realm opened up by such a folding back of the medium upon itself?

"I never thought of a picture as being bodiless, but rather as existing within a process of transformation from three dimensions to two," explains Tillmans, and this seems true even of images such as *Blushes*, *Peaches*, and *Freischwimmer*, in which the viewer tends to see hair, skin, and muscle fibers although they are produced without a lens and depict nothing. Indeed, they are more overwhelmingly visceral than any image showing a real body. They are bodily in the profound sense of the lived *flesh* explored by phenomenology and described in terms of a *living present* that always implies the embodied nature of the perceiving subject. Every form of perception—even of the most distant, abstract or theoretical kind—presupposes a perceiving subject that lives in a body and relates to the world (and to other embodied subjects) through the perceptual and kinesthetic capacities this lived body renders possible. Incarnation—the fact that we are bodily beings—is a fundamental point of departure. In his search for the most original and authentic mode of access to the world, Edmund Husserl tried to reduce experience to a level of immediacy and bodily givenness. Maurice Merleau-Ponty developed this path and discovered the "flesh of the world" as the ultimate origin of all experience.³

His original fascination was not with photography, says Tillmans, but with the things around him, with "objects and thinking about the world at large."⁴ He emphasizes immediacy and the fact that photographs are themselves objects, which means that they are things produced by the photographer, not just some kind of pure representations floating in a mysterious abstract realm. Color photographs, for instance, don't simply come from the lab, they are actively produced and the process is full of decisions. Even before he started to use the camera, Tillmans experimented with the photocopier and his fascination with the possibilities of

intervening with the mechanical process to produce beautiful and artistically significant objects has remained to this day. He uses the copier as a kind of stationary camera that replicates what is on top of it rather than what is in front of it, that can secure, multiply, enlarge, and frame all kinds of textual material and imagery, and that, although without any status as an artistic medium, is capable of freezing the most riveting pictures. The machine adds what seem to be arbitrary digital patterns and lines, and out of a subtle blend of control and randomness entirely unpretentious objects of great splendor and obvious technical sophistication can emerge, free of the cultural weight and intellectual expectations associated with the technical supports of established disciplines and yet capable of creating links to the grandest of traditions and to issues that nobody expected from such a “low” artifact. A photocopy of an old fax, grayish and illegible, is normally hardly perceived as an auratic object. Regardless of technology, it’s the physicality of the picture as a crafted object just as much as its ability to convey a true view on the world that appeals to him—true to his point of view, to his feelings, and to his intentions when producing the image. And the tension between control and chance, intention and liberating accidents is, I think, a constant theme in Tillmans’s work, and in the photo-chemical experiments the chance element seems to be affirmed and given a positive role reminiscent of August Strindberg’s speculations in the late nineteenth century and his occult “celestographs,” produced through the exposure of photographic plates to the starry sky.⁵

Tillmans often emphasizes his attraction to paper not only as a support or medium for imagery but as an appealing body with its own artistic qualities. In fact he makes wrinkled, folded, and doubled photo paper a subject for art in a way that renders it sculpturally rich and fascinating. In the *paper drop* series the seemingly dry subject matter of folded paper is transformed into highly charged territory, and a white two-dimensional world gives rise to enigmatic topologies where an outside is twisted into an inside and an inside into an outside, and where the eye gets lost in a night that gradually gives rise to a day and the white tundra slowly passes all shades of grey and falls into the most impenetrable of blacks. Although utterly formalistic, the *paper drops* turn “abstract” photography into an exploration of psychological and erogenous zones. The *Silver* series, ongoing since the nineties, may seem less spectacular, but closer scrutiny displays a world of weird colors that seem to fit into no established spectrum and sometimes there is a silver quality that reminds the viewer of the metallic base of the photographic medium. The recent book *manual* opens with a series of these images, and we are invited to travel from a grayish pink and a pinkish gray via more recognizable hues back to a dirty crimson world. Everywhere there are marks, lines,

scratches, and stains that indicate a physical process, but these are not the traces of another “reality” beyond the process of creating the pictures. The smear doesn’t refer to anything beyond itself and its own making. This goes for *Lighter* as well, a series of works consisting of folded paper in riveting colors shown in Plexiglas boxes that emphasize the three-dimensional nature of the works. This is a subtle game of wrinkled surfaces, sharp folds, and demarcation lines that sometimes generate the illusion of fault lines that in reality are nothing but visual effects produced by the confrontation of colors. In what sense are these modestly sculpted papers pictures, and in what sense are they really photographs?

Tillmans’s works are always those of an embodied subject, even when the phenomena depicted are seemingly artificial, technical, or remote. There is something irreducibly concrete even in the experience of the most abstract things and something bodily even in the observation of a cosmic occurrence. The early fascination with astronomy that has remained with him until this day has resulted in unusual images of heavenly phenomena that, although light years away, are rendered as part of a world of concrete, tangible, and material things perceived by someone with an individual perspective. In a Tillmans exhibition a photograph of a Venus transit or a photocopied sun appears next to pictures of the most ordinary of things, next to newspaper clippings and to portraits as well as to images that display nothing beyond their own materiality. A distant star, a close friend, an empty sheet of paper—there seems to be no fundamental difference between how these things are approached, and the pictures themselves are given due respect as objects in their own right, carefully produced, selected, and displayed by the artist.

“I follow an aesthetics of mathematics,” says Tillmans in a discussion about astronomical diagrams, but immediately makes clear that it’s the concrete appearance rather than the abstract language that appeals to him: “I’ve always hated mathematics, but I’m interested in visibility diagrams, in the question of when something becomes visible.” Even the most abstract of things become tangible the moment it becomes visible to someone, because this concrete someone is located in time and space and at home in a body. That’s why the atmosphere in the nonrepresentational pictures is not different from the ones that depict the most ordinary things. They are also displayed as physical object, radically *concrete* rather than abstract. Indeed, the two kinds of pictures have more in common than what differentiates them, perhaps one could even claim that the concrete works makes something in Tillmans’s deeply personal approach to the issues of what it is to make a picture visible in a way that is difficult in an image that depicts something outside of itself. In that sense they don’t represent a radical break or alternative to the world of depiction, they simply make visible what the

photographic medium is capable of in the hands of Wolfgang Tillmans and what silently and in a less distilled way has been going on in his work for two decades.

((Notes))

1 If not otherwise indicated citations are from Wolfgang Tillmans and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *The Conversions Series*, Vol. 6 (Cologne, 2007).

2 Personal correspondence with Tillmans, December 2007.

3 In his late texts—especially *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964)—Merleau-Ponty, whose trust in art was far greater than his trust in abstract thought, developed a philosophy with a set of new concepts: the visible, the flesh, the chiasm, and vertical Being. All these concepts have in common the attempt to transcend traditional dichotomies and reach a more originary level of givenness where the received dualisms (concept and intuition, mind and body, subject and object) have not yet been separated, but are united in a “positive ambiguity.” The flesh is neither subject nor object, neither perceiving nor perceived. The opposites are united according to a logic that breaks down the distinction between activity and passivity. In order to attain this level, philosophy must “install itself where reflection and intuition have not yet been separated, in experiences not yet ‘moulded,’ offering us everything at once, ‘pell-mell,’ both ‘subject’ and ‘object,’ existence and essence, thereby making it possible for philosophy to define these concepts anew.”

4 Personal correspondence with Tillmans, December 2007.

5 August Strindberg, *New Directions in Art: Or the Role of Chance in Artistic Creation* (1894), reprinted in *Strindberg* (Valencia, 1994), pp. 188–94.

ART



JOSHUA WHITE REGEN PROJECTS

QUOTIDIAN: A Video of peas boiling is included in Wolfgang Tillmans' solo show. Other videos show a man's armpit and a rotating Mercedes emblem atop a German high-rise.

AROUND THE GALLERIES

The banal parts make up a deeper whole

HOLLY MYERS

Wolfgang Tillmans is not an artist who operates from project to project, in distinct, consecutive series, but who proceeds, rather, along multiple interweaving paths at once -- some personal in nature, some sociological, some political, some highly formal. Though grounded in photography, his work assumes myriad forms and explores a near schizophrenic array of genres: snapshot, documentary, portrait, landscape, still life, even abstraction.

Given the casual air his work often assumes, such breadth might easily be mistaken for a dilettantish lack of focus. He seizes on the unexceptional: the side of an apartment building, an airline billboard, a pair of dogs asleep on the ground. Though more capable than most of making a beautiful picture, he increasingly downplays the photogenic.

All of which makes him rather awkwardly suited to the conditions of a commercial gallery exhibition, which tend to privilege discrete projects and themes compact enough to be comfortably contained in the few paragraphs of a news release.

"half page," his fifth solo show at Regen Projects, is a substantial but nonetheless partial and rather scattered selection of recent work, and as such, may not win him any converts. Indeed, for those not already sympathetic to his project, it would be easy to interpret the show in line with many of his perennial critics: as so many random bits and pieces.

This reading, however, misses the point. Central to Tillmans' career has been an extended flirtation with banality, pursued not merely for its own sake, in a spirit of slacker irony, but with the deep, philosophical conviction that no aspect of the social, physical or political world is devoid of meaning or unworthy of investigation. If individual images occa-

ART

sionally fall flat out of context -- and I confess there are several in this show whose inclusion I find perplexing -- it needn't detract from virtue of the pursuit and the value of such a holistic perspective.

More important, however, the "bits and pieces" reading belies Tillmans' exceptional rigor as an artist. However banal many of his subjects, for instance, his methods of selection and organization are highly conscientious and complex.

This show, like much of his recent work, has a strong, if oblique, political undercurrent relating to issues of violence, war, globalism and consumerism, articulated most distinctly in the several collages composed across the surface of specially constructed tabletops. They function as visual essays, combining his own photographs with news clippings, advertisements, signs, stamps and other bits of ephemera. (One contains a sheet of paper that reads simply: "What's wrong with redistribution?")

Even more striking in recent years -- and in this show in particular -- is the complexity of his formal language. From his many experiments with scale and installation strategies to his investigation of related technologies like photocopying and video to his recent forays into darkroom-borne abstraction, few photographers in recent memory, or even in history, have undertaken such a far-ranging exploration of the photograph as an object.

There are three videos in this show, all depicting characteristically quotidian subjects: peas boiling in a pot of water; a rotating Mercedes emblem at the top of a high rise in West Berlin; and a man's armpit. Though lacking the distinctive sharpness and sensuality of his photographs, the works point in an intriguing direction with an air of tentative curiosity.

It is the abstraction that dominates, however: glossy sheets of vivid color -- blue, black, orange, green -- printed small and large, some crumpled or folded and encased like sculpture in clean Plexiglas boxes. They're dazzlingly seductive objects that seem to boil the entire discipline of photography down to its most poetic essence.

Regen Projects, 633 N. Almont Drive, Los Angeles, (310) 276-5424, through Dec. 6. Closed Sunday and Monday.



Ornate: Wolfgang Tillmans' show also contains photographs, including "Muqarnas" a framed C-print

frieze

Contemporary Art and Culture

Issue 118 October 2008

An interview with Wolfgang Tillmans

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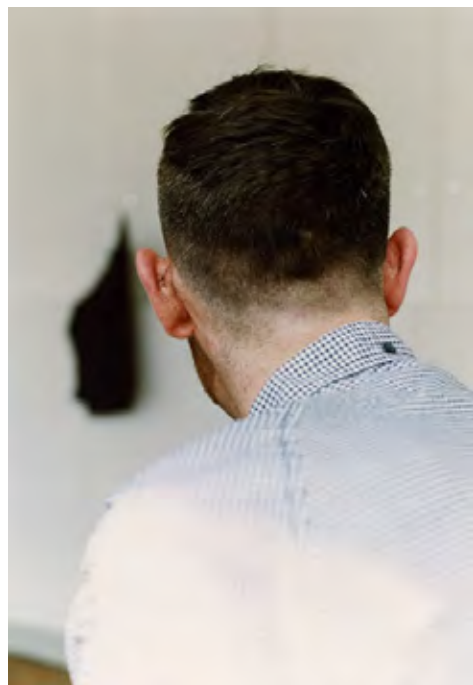
Look, again

For 20 years **Wolfgang Tillmans'** photography has been a sustained meditation on observation, perception and translation. His most recent major exhibition, 'Lighter', was held at the Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, in Berlin. He talked to Dominic Eichler about intimacy, objects, community and politics, abstraction and representation



Above:
Lightner 59
2008
C-type print
61 x 51 cm

Below:
Haircut
2007
Photograph
Dimensions variable



DOMINIC EICHLER Looking back over the last 20 years of your art-making, it is striking how you have circled and constantly returned to a diverse range of genres, modes of reproduction and printing techniques while exploring both figurative and abstract images, and that all of these approaches still find their place in your recent exhibitions and publications, such as *Manual* (2007). Do you think there is a particular kind of quality that makes for a ‘Tillmans’?

WOLFGANG TILLMANS In terms of one repeated style, no, but there is an underlying approach that I hope gives everything I make a cohesion. I trust that, if I study something carefully enough, a greater essence or truth might be revealed without having a prescribed meaning. I’ve trusted in this approach from the start, and I have to find that trust again and again when I make pictures. Really looking and observing is hard, and you can’t do it by following a formula. What connects all my work is finding the right balance between intention and chance, doing as much as I can and knowing when to let go, allowing fluidity and avoiding anything being forced.

DE Years ago I was in a friend’s apartment where there was nothing on the white walls except a photograph of an autumn tree torn out of a magazine. I kept looking at it; it had a kind of aura about it, and in the end I couldn’t contain my curiosity any more and so I asked him who the picture was by. It was one of your images. And that’s the thing about many of your photographs – their subjects might be something seemingly really everyday, like a tree, friends or leftovers from a party, but there’s something singular about them, and it’s hard to say what it is exactly.

WT I just think all images should be significant. They should be able to stand alone and say something about their particular subject matter. If they don’t do that, then why make them? The picture you mentioned is titled

Calendar Leaves because it is so golden it could be in a calendar; I took it in upstate New York during the Indian summer of 1994. Trees have been photographed so many times. It’s always a question of: ‘Is this possible? Can I take a picture of this?’

DE So making images is partly about some kind of impossibility?

WT Well, I wanted to capture my experience of this tree in the first degree. I wanted to photograph it knowing that it was really hard to do, but on the other hand I didn’t feel that I shouldn’t take a picture of, say, a sunset or the wing of an aeroplane or autumn foliage. I am knowing, but I try not to be cynical. At least some aspect of the picture has to be genuinely new; it can’t be a ‘me too’ picture. I feel things like these have been photographed or painted so often because they move people and I’m also moved in that moment, and in this I see myself in a long continuum of people making pictures of these larger subjects of life. Trees have interested artists for a long time. I guess they’re one of the most consistent things in life and on earth.

DE Are you thinking about the translation of the experience into an image or work?

WT Considering that translation or, metaphorically speaking, the process of transformation, is the central aspect of my work. The experience of something in real life doesn’t automatically make for a good work. I can only really photograph things that I understand in some way or another. It’s about whether you can look at something for 60 seconds; it’s very much about being able to bear reality.

DE The golden melancholy of the autumn tree makes me think of the Douglas Sirk film *Imitation of Life* (1959). But I get the same mood from some of your abstract colour images, such as the streaky and stained, fleshy and azure ‘Silver’ pictures (mostly from 2006) or, for that matter, your photocopy-based works like photocopy (*Barnaby*) (1994), which involve so much longing for what is only partly there.

WT *Imitation of Life* is a beautiful title but it’s not what I aim for because art is always different from life. You can try to get close to the feeling of what it’s like to be alive now, but the result of that is an art work, and that has its own reality. When I work on the non-figurative pictures in the darkroom or use photocopiers, it is a direct engagement with physical realities: the colour and intensity of my light sources or the electrostatic charge on the copier drums. I use them and play with them to make pictures possible. For instance, under the burden of all the clichés it’s not really possible to photograph Venice, but I still wanted to, so I made the photocopier-enlarged image *Venice* (2007), in which the details that indicate ‘Venice’ are reduced heavily. That makes them feel almost appropriated, but in fact all the photocopy pictures are based on photographs, which I took for this type of enlargement.

DE The abstract colour works such as the 'Silver' group of pictures (1994–2008) and impossible colour V (2001) also involve signs of their making and process.

WT impossible colour V is a large pink octagon placed on a larger white picture base. It's actually a rectangle with the same proportions as 35 mm film that has been turned ever so slightly against a frame with the same proportions. Unlike my other abstract work, the 'Silver' images are mechanical pictures made by feeding them through a processing machine while it's being cleaned, so they pick up traces of dirt and silver residue from the chemicals. Because they are only half fixed and the chemicals aren't fresh, they slowly change hue over a few days. Sometimes I use this instability to create different shades and lines on them, before scanning and enlarging them to their final size.

DE Then there are your three-dimensional pieces 'Lighter' (2005–8), which are physically creased and folded photographs.

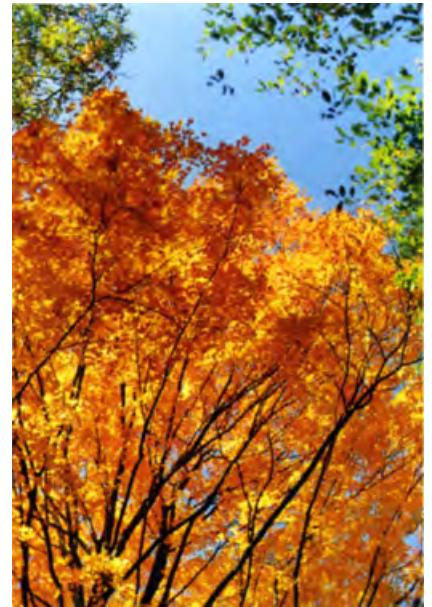
WT Some of them I expose to different coloured light sources in the darkroom after first folding them in the dark, and some are made in reverse order. Some are not folded at all – they only suggest the possibility of a fold – but they are all highly intricate. We are still blind to what it exactly is that makes a photograph so particular, so deeply psychological, even though it's supposedly a mechanical medium. The 'Lighter' works are a continuation of the three-dimensional approach of the 'paper drop' pictures (2001–8) of hanging and flipped-over pieces of photographic paper.

DE What would you say to people who interpret your later abstract work as a retreat into some kind of formalism?

WT Look again. It's not a retreat. If colour is a retreat, then I checked into that retreat early on. The video of the moving disco lights *Lights (Body)* (2002) or the astronomical pictures like *Sternenhimmel (Starry Sky, 1995)*, are all about light and colour. I never separate that experience from a social one. David Wojnarowicz, one of the most socially engaged artists of recent history, repeatedly says in his video *ITSOFOMO* (1990): 'Smell the flowers while you can.' How can that be a retreat? You have to be pretty senseless not to allow artists the freedom to deal with the whole width of their experiences and explore their medium to the extreme. The abstracted picture of that golden tree you mentioned earlier on is from 1994, when I was in the midst of making the so-called realist work that I was first known for. I was then, as I am now, involved in seeing and transforming that into pictures.

DE How much system or discipline and control is involved in getting what you want?

WT It sounds a bit square, but I've found that the chances of getting a good result are just so much higher when you spend at least eight hours a day on your work. That work is, of course, all play [Laughing]. Seriously, the biggest challenge is not always to do the right thing but at times to do wrong things, to act irresponsibly in the light of constant demands. When artists start out, they



Above:
Calendar Leaves
1994
Photograph
Dimensions variable

Below:
Memorial for the Victims of Organized Religions
(detail)
C-type prints
Installation View





Alex and Lutz, Back
1992
Photograph
Dimensions variable

‘I think people don’t observe enough. I’m a great believer in observation. My first passion in life was astronomy.’

all have some sort of alternative vision in mind, and then career and success, or equally the lack of it, grind most of them down to become bored and boring. It’s really the biggest challenge not to believe your own system, so the discipline is, strangely, to be undisciplined.

DE You’ve mentioned before the fact that in learning about the world you also inherit certain kinds of images, and that every image you make is going to have a relationship to the image banks that you’ve inherited from your culture. That makes me think of your shots of men’s bum cracks. [Laughs]

WT There is always something unsettling about fearless looking as opposed to coy allusion or shockingly flashing. To look without fear is a good subversive tool, undermining taboos. Study the soldier or riot policeman, make him an object of formal considerations, see him as wearing drag. Look at things the way they are.

DE With your cultural baggage alongside?

wt Yes, even though I feel that after 150 years or so, the subject matter of a woman’s exposed crotch isn’t owned by Gustave Courbet. I attribute these overlaps to certain pictures being in your

milk from a young age, so to speak. But still, once a picture is in the world as an object, it’s impossible not to think about your relationship to it. Is it too ironic? Is it too referential? Not everything is strategy because, despite these considerations, what is uppermost in that moment is to be an awake, attentive being.

DE People often think that there are too many images in the world and that we have become numb to them, but from what you’ve been saying it’s almost as though your practice is trying to prove the opposite – that we’re still alert, and that we’re still intelligent about images, and that there can be necessary pictures, ones which aren’t redundant from the start.

WT Absolutely. There are people who have no joy in viewing – who have no joy in life, perhaps. I think people don’t observe enough. I’m a great believer in observation. My first passion in life was astronomy.

DE I remember reading that, and also that you didn’t take photographs as a teenager. I suppose your photographs from 2004 of the planet Venus passing in front of the sun – like a blank face with a beauty spot – suggest that the idea of looking at something unattainable and distant, but which still can be experienced and understood, has stayed with you.

WT The experience of relative perception is something that keeps turning me on. The photocopy works I made in the late 1980s, before I found my first direct photographic subject matter in nightclubs, were really about this dissolving of details, of zooming into pictures and information breaking down. What makes me happy is when people pick up on the nuances, when you don’t need ten years to realize that there is a composition behind the picture, or that not every elongated object is a phallus, or that questions of authenticity and the identity issues of the 1990s are embedded in the work as deliberate contradictions.

DE I think that one of the great achievements of your work is the way you have navigated those contradictions. You have never shied away from presenting compelling pictures of the world at odds with the mainstream or from addressing major socio-political issues like privatization and AIDS education, to name recent examples. And you have done this with a radical subjective gaze and with a consciousness of the difficulties and limitations of that position and what you can achieve as an artist. I’m also curious about your Memorial for the Victims of Organized Religions (2006). It recalls a serial Minimalist grid: are you suggesting that there is a correlation between religious belief and belief in art?

WT I showed this piece for the first time in Chicago, as part of a three-city US museum tour. It reflects the helplessness I felt at trying to tackle a subject of such magnitude in a country so held in the grip of the more unappealing sides of religion, but at the same time I wanted to explore faith as a subject. The absoluteness of the grid is disrupted



by using creased and scratched photographs, but in a way that is only noticeable after a while, and at the intersection point between the pictures the eye creates a black dot, which is not actually there. A third element undermining the rigour of the grid is the inclusion of some not quite black but dark blue photographs interspersed in the piece. Being installed in the corner the grid is reflected in the shiny surfaces of the prints in a totally warped and distorted way. The piece doesn't depict religion in the same way that a picture of, say, a mosque would, but it still tackles the idea that all religions have a claim to the absolute.

DE In the 1990s you often talked about your interest in communal activities and club culture and the possibility of alternative forms of collectivity and togetherness. Do you still believe in these kind of Utopian moments as a viable alternative to ideological, economic or faith-based social constructions?

WT Absolutely. However, it's dodgy territory because so many ideologies were built on forcing people into a pit of togetherness, so it seems odd to go looking for that in subcultures. Still, I was always interested in the free, or at least non-branded, activities that functioned outside control and marketing. Those pockets of self-organization – free partying, free sex, free leisure time – are on the retreat. A less commercial spirit of togetherness is worth defending against the market realities, which are the result of the implementation of an atomized, privatized model of society, of 'free workers and consumers'. At least it's worth asking what choices you have if you don't want to belong to the mainstream types of belonging in the privatized model of society – nation, sport, family values or religion.

DE In your installation Truth Study Centre (2007) all of this takes a major battering from you through your own and collected images and newspaper clippings. It is at times totally harrowing to peer into all of those trestle-table vitrines full of conflict and extremism on the one hand and human tenderness on the other. In a way, some of your pictures from the 1990s, which rightly or wrongly were seen as fashionable or lifestyle-oriented by some, are more con-

frontational now than they were back then.

WT Yes, a couple of friends and I went to see my show 'Lighter' at the Hamburger Bahnhof a day after the opening in May, and it was really interesting to observe how teenagers were looking at the depictions of bodies in, for example, the Turner Prize Room (2000). The sort of physicality I show in my photographs, which was always so important to me, hasn't dissolved into harmlessness. It seems to have gone the other way, almost as if somehow it's become more provocative.

DE It strikes me that in all your images everyone looks as though they want to be loved. Even the guy doing what the title of one of your photographs says he's doing in man pissing on chair (1997).

WT What connects them, I think, is that, even though they are confident, one gets a sense of their awareness of their own vulnerability. The depiction of other people is terribly fascinating, and even more so if it's a psychological undertaking or a lifelong focus on single people, like a few friends of mine who I have photographed for many years now.

DE So intimacy is crucial too?

WT Yes, because it connects us to the physical world, and there is, of course, a deep loneliness in us all. I find people interesting when they have a sense of their own fragility and loneliness, and that's something that I feel alive in a lot of people, but many of them have problems embracing this or accepting it.

DE Which is fair enough, don't you think?

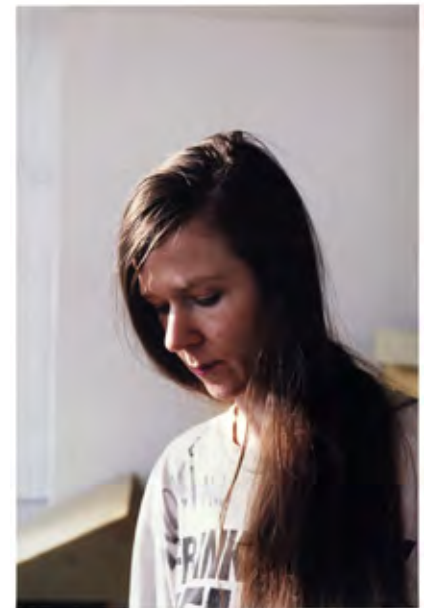
WT Sure! The title of one of my first books is *For When I'm Weak, I'm Strong* (1996), and it's not that I can always abide by that, or that I'm always living that.

DE Your abstract works also reflect this fragility too.

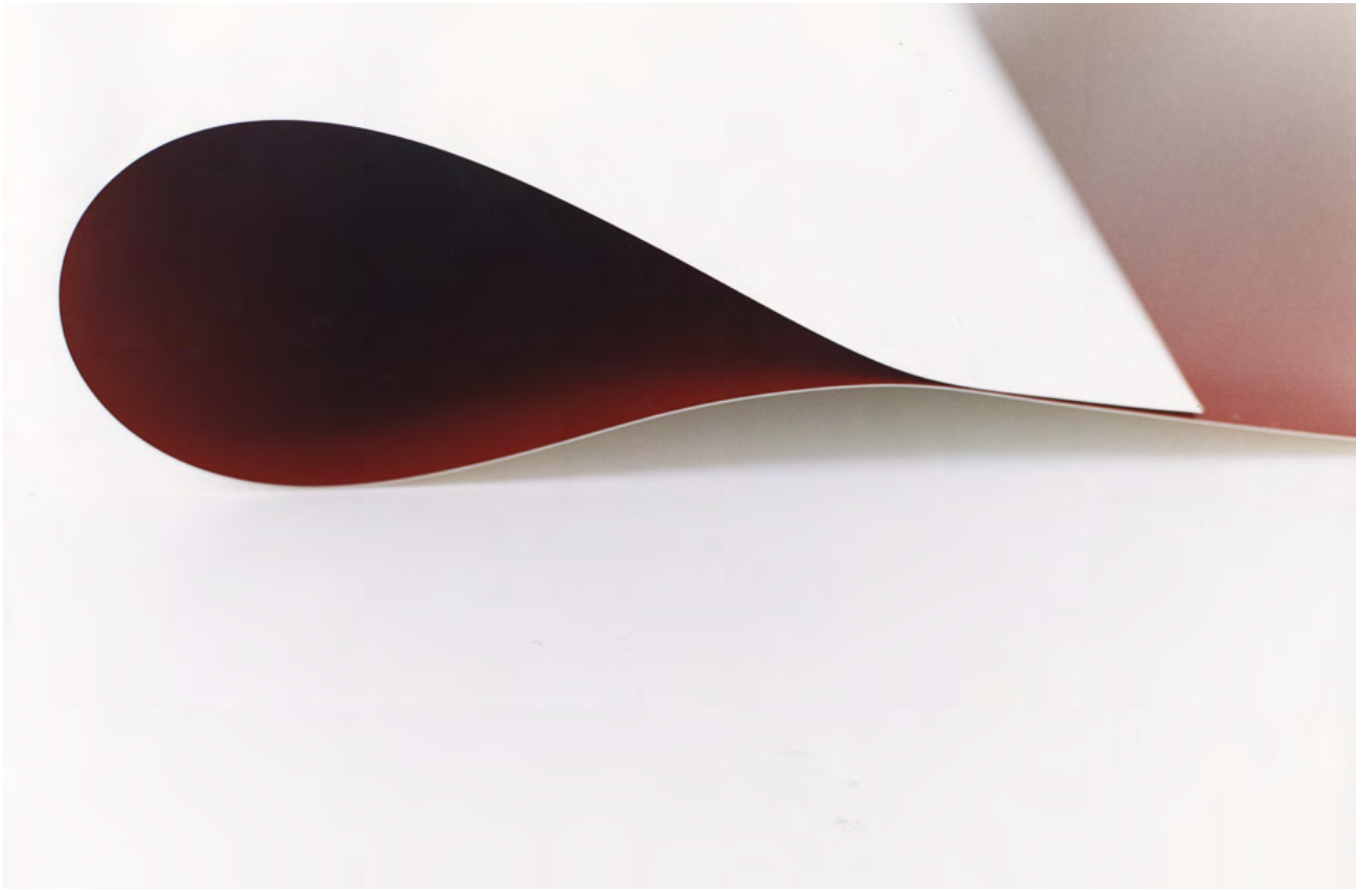
WT But, it's a resilient fragility, I hope. Of course, a sheet of paper can be both an image of a person and a metaphor for a person. I truly appreciate the modest contemplation that completely gives in to the circumstances as they are. I don't see anger as the only driving force for change – concentration can be an equally powerful state of being.

Truth Study Centre (Table 19)

2007
C-type print, offset
print, photocopy, wood, glass
77x198x78



Susanne, No Bra
2006
Photograph
Dimensions variable



Paper Drop (Red)
2006
Photograph
Dimensions variable

DE How has your own view of yourself as an artist, and your practice, changed over the past 20 years? You have said that you're an ambitious person. Do you ever get into any kind of conflict about your current status in, or have ethical issues with, the contemporary art world? Do you feel a different sense of responsibility to your audience, and other artists? I know, for instance, that you teach and have your own gallery space in London, *Between Bridges*.

WT Even though I don't think there's free choice for everybody, there's a lot of choices available for successful artists. You don't have to disappear into your own super-high value systems, as some high-profile artists do. I try to use my voice as an amplifier for what I care about and stay out of gratuitous projects. *Between Bridges* is a way for me to engage in a different kind of communication, showing artists who I feel for some reason or other have been under-represented in London. It's also a learning opportunity for myself. The next show is work by Wilhelm Leibl, a German realist painter from the 19th century who I came across and paid homage to in a photograph I made in 2002, and who I've wanted to find out more about ever since.

DE How did you feel about your exhibition 'Lighter' being held in the Friedrich Christian Flick Collection wing of the Hamburger Bahnhof? I ask this considering that his family's fortune was partially made through arms manufacturing during World War II, and given the public criticism he attracted for not having paid into compensation funds for forced labourers. He was also seen to be potentially enriching himself because initially he only loaned his collection to the city.

WT I really didn't understand why and had no sym-

pathy for the fact that Flick didn't want to pay the compensation at the time and instead used a similar amount of money to set up a foundation to fight xenophobia among youths in East Germany. He could have easily afforded to do both. At the same time I felt the witch hunt was unfair, because he never personally employed forced labour: it was his grandfather, and the lines drawn between clean and unclean money were drawn much too symbolically. I find it equally unsettling to think of collectors who actively in our lifetime earn their money with politically incorrect or destructive activities. But Flick did pay up eventually, and he's also gifted 160 major works from his collection to the Hamburger Bahnhof, instead of building another private collector museum. Interestingly, these facts were hardly reported or acknowledged by his critics.

DE There is an inherent contradiction in the fact that art is structurally implicated in money and power but at the same time ought to function like a cultural conscience. One interesting part of the debate around the Flick Collection is thinking about the extent to which an artist can or should control the distribution of their work.

WT Yes, and I noticed that the least popular position to take on this is to acknowledge one's own implication in it. It's very attractive to be totally against the market, and it's OK to not say anything at all and just get on with one's work. I try to be as ethically involved in the distribution of my work as possible, but at the same time I acknowledge my inability to control everything.

DE 'Lighter' was an overwhelming round-up of your work past and present. In particular it showed how the various types of abstract works and those that have to do with the basic condition of the image fit and relate to

the more 'traditional' photographs.

WT The exhibition was a new type of show for me. After ten museum survey exhibitions in the past seven years, this one was never meant to be a retrospective. In the first room there are six photocopy pictures from 1988, and in the last room there are another three, and in between is primarily work from the last five years. The Turner Prize Room from 2000 also featured but was a kind of show within a show. I made the exhibition completely irrespective of any retrospective duty.

DE So the only duty was introspective?

WT [Laughs] It was introspective, yes. No, not introspective, it was now-spective. It was what was going on.

DE Even though a good quarter of the show was taken up by the mostly political and science-hugging Truth Study Centre installation from 2007, it seems that many of your concerns have become more abstract.

WT I think it took shows such as 'Freedom from the Known' at PS1 in New York (2006) or 'Lighter' to bring this to the fore. I exhibited my first abstract and damaged, too dark and fucked-up pictures as a Parkett edition in 1998. From that time onwards I think that the abstract nature of earlier works like the drapery close-ups of clothing or the 'Concorde' pictures (1997) became more clear; an abstraction grounded in the real world.

DE In some of the photogram abstract work I can't help but make associations between body, fluid and cellular structures. There's a kind of direct relationship with the body in the image. They're abstract, but there are areas of physical and emotional stuff flowing around inside. Titles like it's only love give it away (2005) or the big and bloody-looking Urgency III (2006) also suggest this to me.

WT The human eye has a great desire to recognize things when it looks at a photographic print. I made use of this phenomenon and found I could speak



about physicality in new pictures while the camera-based pictures could be seen in a new light as well. So they kind of inform each other, rather than being pitted against each other.

DEIs the key in the mix or the constellations; how one image sits next to another and how they influence each other?

WT When I was working on the book *Lighter* earlier this year, which comprises some 200 installation views, I realized that this is actually the first book that shows what my work really looks like. You get an idea of how, in the constellations of pictures, I try to approximate the way I see the world, not in a linear order but as a multitude of parallel experiences – like now I look at you, seeing a portrait, now out of the window there is a landscape, here on the table the cups standing around, there my feet. It's multiple singularities, simultaneously accessible as they share the same space or room.

Dominic Eichler is a musician, writer, artist and contributing editor of frieze.

HMD1
2007
C-type print
Dimensions variable



NEW YORK

Wolfgang Tillmans

ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

Individual photographs: a sweeping view of a Venetian lagoon; members of the World Adult Kickball Association gathered on the mall in Washington, DC; a sheet of paper, curled into a teardrop shape and glinting against a reflective surface; a profile of a man's face encrusted with an assortment of mottled stones. All were encountered in the main room of Andrea Rosen Gallery as part of Wolfgang Tillmans's eighth solo outing there, "Atair," where the photographer's characteristic



range of genre and format spurred an initial feeling described once by Thomas Pynchon as "antiparanoia," "where nothing is connected to anything." But if the sense at the other end of Pynchon's continuum "everything is connected" never obtains for a Tillmans exhibition, subtle rapports between works nevertheless eventually emerge. A photograph of a newspaper article about the deleterious effects of gold mining presaged *Gong*, 2007, a burnished disk hanging in the next room, while an image of a thigh and knee in part of a medieval tapestry reverberated in the muscular legs of the young man pictured in *Gedser*, 2004, a few paces away.

Well timed for New York audiences unable to make it to Tillmans's still touring retrospective in Washington, D.C., Chicago, L.A., or Mexico City, "Atair" was a sprawling show featuring nearly fifty works from the past three years in one of the artist's typically anarchic installations, in which a catholicity of subject matter is underscored by the irregularity of the hang. He frames some works and affixes others to the wall with Scotch tape, presses hallways and niches into service as exhibition space, and positions pictures at varying heights, clustered closely together or spaced several feet apart. Here,

his colorful darkroom abstractions (made by exposing photographic paper to sundry chemicals and light sources) were interleaved with shots of interiors of cathedrals and mosques, and a few exquisite images of bowed or looping paper commingled with black-and-white still lifes of single blooms. Four tabletop assemblages, titled *Paradise, War, Religion, and Work (TSC New York)*, 2007, comprised photos, newspaper photocopies, and ephemera under glass. (The *Work* section included, among other objects, a copy of an International Herald Tribune dispatch on voter fraud and a snapshot of an IKEA billboard.) These setups, microcosms of Tillmans's discursivity, distill an operative mechanism of his practice whereby meaning, even truth, is negotiated via juxtaposition and collision.

This was a strong show, but not a surprising one, and one wonders if Tillmans's eclectic subjects and unconventional installations have begun to hazard a certain stylization now that he has reached midcareer. Some themes seem to be running their course; the beer-drinkers in *HMD (01-15)*, 2007, are older and paunchier than the club-goers of fifteen years ago, and don't look like they're having nearly as much fun. Still, a few heartening new directions surfaced. The effects of enlarging black-and-white photocopies in a triplet of massive framed photographs—*Venice, Garden, and Victoria Park* (2007) are mesmerizing enough to short-circuit any (surely less interesting) chestnuts about reproduction or flatness their making might inspire. In addition, *Gong* and the folding and crumpling of photo paper in *Lighter 30*, 2007, and *Lighter 31*, 2007, signal a long-in-the-making move into the third dimension.

The video *Farbwerk (Color Work)*, 2006, provided a braking coda to the acceleration of images as one neared the small back room where it was shown. A little less than a minute long, it's a slow, hypnotic zoom in on the spinning red ink rollers of a printing press. The subject is obliquely self-reflexive, evoking Tillmans's publishing endeavors and work in color printing. Yet the video might also be thought a graceful figure for his practice, in which the mundane thing, caught unawares, rouses equally unexpected reserves of scrutiny and attention.

-Lisa Turvey

Wolfgang Tillmans at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

By Walead Beshty, published in *Texte zur Kunst* issue no. 64

The recent history of photography presents some intractable quandaries. While the emergent non-photographic practices of the nineties were dominated by a renewed genre-bending interest in bricolage, social networking, and rough-hewn or vernacular aesthetics—a set of concerns that photography’s cultural prevalence seemed particularly adept at addressing—the photographic programs developing at the time were engaged with a diametrically opposed array of concerns. As nineties art audiences became increasingly accustomed to a plurality of approaches aimed at democratizing, or at least livening up the cold austerity of the institution, the contemporary photographic practices most often confronted were Plexiglas testaments to objecthood, anxiously committed to the antiquated genre forms of premodern Beaux-Arts pictorialism framed in monolithic ersatz-minimalist coffins. The ubiquity of architectural tropes underscored this phenomenon; in a compulsive imaging of depopulated modernist topographies that offered a reaffirmation of the stark geometries of the white cube for which they were intended. With increasing regularity, the photographic frame was deployed as a proscenium arch for heightened artifice, vacant expanses, and cinematic fantasy, an anxious distancing from the snapshot’s quotidian depictions, dazzling and dwarfing viewers with its spectacular accretions, as though allaying photography’s historical marginalization, and ideological promiscuity by the force of their imposing grandeur.

Within this milieu, Wolfgang Tillmans work is something of an anomaly. His photographs appear to renounce their autonomy from the outset, confronting viewers with images whose edges seem blurry, uncontained, as if ready to bleed into one another, and offer neither the emotionally charged *mise en scènes* of American street photography, nor the quality of epic disaffection or serial authority characteristic of the new topographic/Düsseldorf school. To put it another way, Tillmans’ photographs are distinctly non-theatrical constructions: his formal predilections tending toward pictorial flatness, and a seemingly offhanded compositional arrangement that sits tenuously within the photograph’s flat field. This causes Tillmans’ photographs to exude a sensation of incompleteness, which is often mistaken for the ill-considered, or unintentional indeterminacy of the snapshot. Yet, Tillmans’ treatment of the medium varies too widely to fit comfortably within this categorization. In his exhibitions, the faces of the anonymous butt up against those of the famous, a conflation of private memory and the public sphere that renders the membrane between these seemingly opposed mnemonic repositories more porous than our sense of interminable individuality usually allows; lush abstractions hover along side chance observations of the mundane, a similar negotiation with photographic fortuity having brought both of them into existence. It is fitting that Tillmans’ earliest photographs found their home in the pages of picture magazines, varied in subject matter and genre, they easily adapted to the editorial strictures that had come to represent the very incompleteness that the neo-pictorialists were hard at work to correct. Tillmans’ editorial experience might also explain the seemingly idiosyncratic form of his installations, which favor densely clustered thematic groupings in an exhibition logic that is somewhere between the taped up mementos of a teenager’s

bedroom, and the salon style configurations of a magazine page bereft of text; perhaps a nod to photography's most common contexts. This particular reflexivity is called forward in his repeated comparisons between the relation of forms within the photograph, and the relations of objects within an exhibition, as in *Silver Installation Detail*, from 2005, showing a series of Tillmans' monochromatic works taped onto a wall, that by analogy, calls attention to the internal logic of the image as a parallel to that of the exhibition.

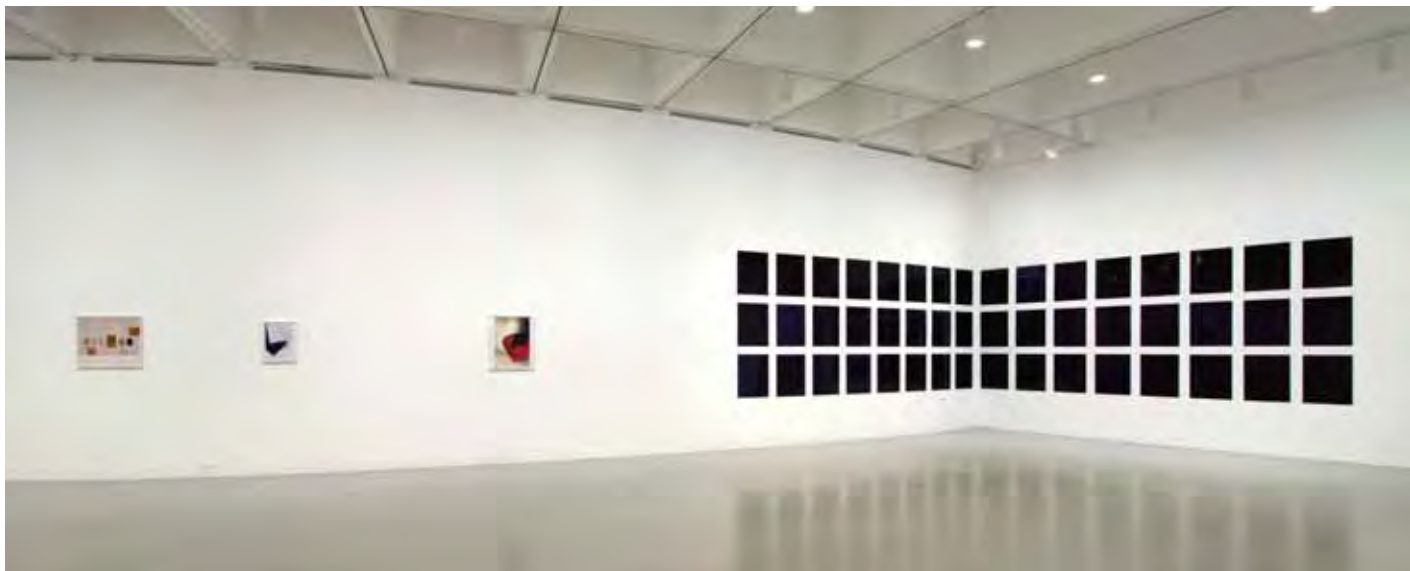
These signature strengths of Tillmans' practice are perhaps no better expressed than in his first museum survey in North America, a traveling mid-career retrospective originating at the MCA in Chicago, and currently on view at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles (co-organized by Russell Fergusson and Dominic Molon). Although in this case, both the terms "traveling" and "retrospective" are perhaps misnomers, as only a minority of the work appeared at both venues in identical form, and no strict chronological or categorical logic is overtly proposed. Instead, Tillmans employs his signature approach to the gallery, which is something between that of "installation" and exhibition. Carefully avoiding the isolation of any work, Tillmans proposes each photograph as a momentary stopping point in a larger movement through the show, situating the viewer in a precarious position between distraction and contemplation, forcing them to undertake an interpretive selection process similar to what one would imagine he engaged in while making the images. Tillmans has always used the exhibition context to interweave old and new work, each iteration of his practice acting as a reshuffling of the familiar and the unfamiliar, an operation also at work in his treatment of individual images. His recent *Empire (Punk)*, is one such example, in which one of his more iconic early photographs appears as a blown up fax transmission, the clear-eyed lens description of the original sacrificed to the digital artifacts of the fax machine. These momentary echoes of previous moments of reception employ individual photographs as component parts of a system that constantly performs a reexamination and retelling of its own procedures. His constellations of disparate recollections evoke the hybridized cinematic practices of late twentieth century experimental film. The works of Hollis Frampton, Morgan Fisher, Chris Marker, and Yvonne Rainer, each displayed an equally promiscuous notion of their medium, weaving together found images, quasi-autobiographical narration, and abstraction, into a materially based subjectivity that rejected the genre-based purism of their contemporaries, and opted instead for the subtle negotiation with the medium's specific confines.

It was this reflexive quality that Craig Owens associated with photography's operation *en abyme*, specifically its ability to not only exemplify its own reduplication, but depict it simultaneously. Owens saw this as the void from which the photograph could not escape, an endlessly reduplicated failure of meaning

which left only “an overwhelming feeling of absence¹” as its foregone conclusion. But Tillmans’ repetitions eschew this seemingly inescapable reiteration of nihilistic failure through a rejection of photographic transparency (as he said in a recent interview, “the camera always lies about what is in front of it”), and instead emphasizes the epistemic conditions of display that draw the images together (continuing, “and never lies about what is behind it”²). Distanced from totalized spectacle, and pantomimed objectivity, Tillmans performs a recovery of documentary photography, materialist abstraction, and appropriation from their strict delineation by self-anointed purists. Tillmans appears acutely aware that the taxonomic separation and categorization of subjects is the most pervasive form of cultural violence enacted on the marginalized, and that further more, this is a process within which photography is uniquely culpable. As the political geography of the United States appears as polarized as ever, purist regimes of righteous indignation and codified cynicism are all too easy to find, even in the art world, where the discussion of politics and form, personal autonomy and public consciousness, are often treated as mutually exclusive. Tillmans cheats these dialectics, producing an exhibition that is rigorous without being rigid, and passionately politicized without being didactic. It is this sensibility that Tillmans’ perfectly timed exhibition draws to the fore, an insight that aesthetic and social divisions are often one and the same.

¹ Craig Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press) 1992, p. 26.

² From an interview between Wolfgang Tillmans and Mark Wigley, at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, September 17th, 2006.



Tillmans's Touch

Artist Deftly Controls His Seemingly Unruly Works

By *Blake Gopnik*

Washington Post Staff Writer

Wolfgang Tillmans, one of today's most influential contemporary artists, takes snapshot-style pictures of his slackest techno-party pals, but he also shoots impressive images of piles of gold bullion.

He takes almost-abstract photographs of blank sheets of photo paper as they curl back onto themselves on his studio floor. He also presents pared-down abstract sculptures made from sheets of photographic paper, colored and folded. He enlarges pictures found in newspapers until they fill a wall, and reduces his own most famous photographs until they're postcard size. And then he assembles all these absurdly varied kinds of pictures and objects -- some framed as precious works of art and others stuck up with pins or Scotch tape -- into an installation that crawls up and down and all across the gallery walls.

At the Hirshhorn Museum, where a touring show that is Tillmans's first U.S. retrospective opened Thursday, the result is stunning. And it's compelling just because it's so perplexing.

Tillmans's individual pictures are often notable. But what's most impressive is the way they come together into a larger, more substantial whole. It's hard to put your finger on what makes Tillmans's totality so strong. But equally hard, I think, to resist its pull.

Being hard to pin down is part of what gives Tillmans's art so much traction. Most works of art present us with self-contained little worlds that seem sufficient to themselves. The 400 or so images Tillmans gives us at the Hirshhorn seem to open out to a wider world, capturing some of that sense that the lives we live are more open-ended than art is.

That's something that artists have always struggled to capture. And every time they succeed, they also fail. Every time that art seems to evoke life "just as it is" (such a tempting goal, because art can come so frustrat-

ingly close to life), it also sets itself up as merely the latest flashy artistic move.

Tillmans has worked harder than most to make his art feel as if it's plucked straight from reality, maybe because he's more concerned than most with how quickly such effects become just more artistic fluff.

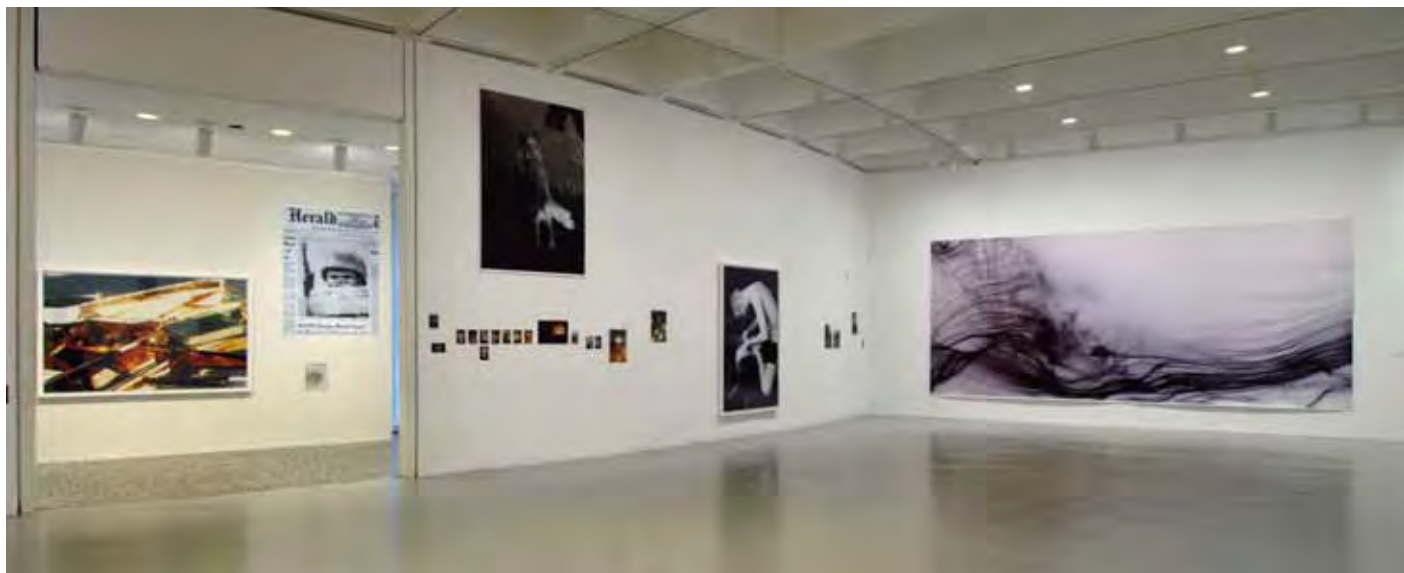
Tillmans's first stab at making art that seemed authentic to the feel of life came early on, with his straight-ahead images of the folk he partied with and loved. He didn't want his art to be about art; he wanted it to be about people. So he used a technique that mimicked a point-and-shoot effect, where who's in the shot seems to matter more than how it's taken. But Tillmans is too good for his own good. Whether he wants to or not, he creates piles of striking pictures that viewers can't resist.

"Adam, Red Eye," near the beginning of this show, finds an echo of its subject's flash-induced red pupils in the bright red lockers behind him. That makes its "casual" moment seem as decisive as anything by Henri Cartier-Bresson, whose famous photos tried to catch the instants in the passing flux when accidents cohere into arresting images.

Ditto for Tillmans's shot of his late partner, Jochen Klein, taking a bath in 1997: The apparent accidents of its composition, with a houseplant dead center and its subject and his bathtub barely in the shot, become a perfect, and perfectly compelling, image of what accidents look like. "Empire (Punk)," a hugely enlarged photo of a lousy snapshot sent by fax, captures all the random artifacts of its transmission. This ought to make it about as casual as anything can be -- but instead it seems like an artistic distillation of casualness itself.

Or maybe Tillmans was simply the victim of his own success, like all those dedicated realists before him. An approach that seemed either not concerned at all with beauty, or even opposed to it, came to be one of the dominant aesthetics of our time. It was copied in fashion shoots and advertising throughout the 1990s.

Ever since the Tillmans mode became a fashionable photographic style, his career has seemed to be about finding constantly new ways to achieve his earlier effects -- to somehow be a guy just doing stuff, rather than an artiste striving to engender Art. The seemingly chaotic sprawl of his im-



ages across the gallery wall, and the apparent accidents of how he frames and hangs them, all speak to that ambition. They all signal that Tillmans doesn't have a settled goal in what he does; he just goes with the flow. In an installation called the "Truth Study Center," Tillmans fills a gallery with 23 knocked-together wooden tables. He then covers their tops with masses of news clippings and assorted photographs, some by him and others found, some clearly meant to look good and others resolutely not. The accumulated imagery seems to come straight from Tillmans's stream of consciousness, as he contemplates all the objects and issues that have impinged on him. (One unusually spare table in the Hirshhorn version of this installation hosts nothing more than the pages of an article published barely three weeks ago by Naomi Wolf, titled "Fascist America, in 10 Easy Steps.")

Another striking piece at the Hirshhorn, with a somewhat similar dynamic, is called the "Concorde Grid." It consists of 56 photos of that historic supersonic jet, barely glimpsed as it takes off and lands above the scrappy landscapes that surround your average airport. The unruly feel of its images seems to capture the "lifelike" encounter between an insignificant onlooker and an iconic object as they meet by accident within the haphazard flow of time.

But every time Tillmans seems to be doing one thing -- becoming, that is, an artist with a trademark strategy for making art -- he veers off in another direction.

He seems like somebody who avoids allegory and classic symbolizing, right? And then he makes a piece called "Memorial for the Victims of Organized Religions," which consists of 48 sheets of photo paper, in elegiac shades of black and midnight blue, arranged in a grid on a wall. They're like photographs of what it is to shut your eyes, or to focus on a starless night, in mourning for the evil deeds religion has inspired. So a work that seems at first glance to be art at its most formal and abstract -- like the Ellsworth Kelly color patches at the National Gallery, but without the color -- turns out to have the closest ties to issues the artist cares deeply about.

Maybe Tillmans's steadfast contrariness, his determined indeterminacy -- like the sheer, meaning-defeating quantity of information he provides

are all part of his attempt to make an artwork that evokes life. That is, taken as a single work, the Hirshhorn's Tillmans exhibition provides a living, mutating, dynamic portrait of the man who made it, in the act of making it. Its shifts, twists, refusals and perplexities provide a faithful record of the shifts and twists and refusals and perplexities that any life is built around, but that most any art will have a tendency to iron out, just because of almost any art's inherent order.

That includes the art of Wolfgang Tillmans.

Even disorder can become an ordering principle; it takes effort and ambition to achieve randomness. Look at the wooden tables in Tillmans's "Truth Study Center": Their inconsequential look is achieved through very careful carpentry. The lifelike energy in Tillmans's agglomerations of images is achieved through very deliberate labor; the dimensions and components of each museum installation are recorded with a tape measure before a show comes down, so it can be re-created in any part of it that is bought.

The Hirshhorn installation is much closer to a carefully considered magazine layout meant to capture a chaotic, energetic feel -- Tillmans was famous early on for his design of magazine spreads of his own art -- than to an actual tipped-out box of old photos.

The true surprise of the Hirshhorn exhibition isn't its disorder; it's how fine it looks. That's not how I felt the first time I saw a similar Tillmans installation. I was sure that it was about a compelling exploration of ugliness and the truly haphazard. But now Tillmans has taught me better.

He's taught me that, all along, his work has simply had the trademark look of the latest captivating art -- or of what captivating art has come to look like, since he came on the scene.

Wolfgang Tillmans is at the Hirshhorn Museum, on the south side of the Mall at 7th Street SW, through Aug. 12. Call 202-633-1000 or visit <http://www.hirshhorn.si.edu>.



Wolfgang Tillmans

HAMMER MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES

17 SEPTEMBER 2006 - 7 JANUARY 2007

'You can see everything in the world here in isolated examples at least, peculiar characters or people who are for the moment you see them peculiar. And everybody is quite peculiar now and then. Not to mention how peculiar anyone can be at home.' Edwin Denby's sharp observations of mid-twentieth-century New York provide a rich context for Wolfgang Tillmans's photographs - or better yet, his selective (re)programming of them in exhibitions - that can help us keep our eye on what always seems to be the prize (rather than the lesson) of

his work: absolutely nothing is normal all the time, and any claims to the contrary are not to be believed. That Denby expanded his discussion of the diversity of 'people in the streets' to include that found in both dancers and buildings reinforces a connection to Tillmans's ideology, aesthetics and, most importantly, material in all senses of the term. Tillmans shows us that even the most minimal and even tautological photograph of a curled sheet of white photo paper - paper drop (white), b (2004) is the one example included in this show - can have all the peculiarity and substance of the most ordinary person (whether anonymous, celebrity, best friend or even oneself) or the far-from-distinctive building. In *himmelblau* (2005), for example, a view up a nondescript airshaft at a cropped rectangle of pristine sky is upended and transformed into something much more than formal bliss.

With that said, and moving too quickly past some of the other examples of 'abstraction' in Tillmans's output - especially all of the absolutely gorgeous large-scale photographs of colourfully streaking light effects, and his one DVD projection, *Lights (Body)* (2000-2), which to me is a masterpiece - it was in the very first room in this particular installation of the exhibition that Tillmans has raised his game. (It opened in Chicago, where according to reliable sources it was much more spare and grand; and significantly, it will travel to Washington, D.C., where one can at least dream that it will speak some truth to power.) Tillmans clearly understood that

the Hammers galleries call for a sense of intimacy, and any thought I had going in that maybe I'd already seen everything he could do (whether in his high-energy presentation at the Palais de Tokyo, the comprehensive rigour of his survey at Tate Britain or the calm contemplation of the almost otherworldly Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery) was immediately erased by walking into a selection of 13 photographs from his 'Soldiers' installation at Tate Britain that were juxtaposed with a new work, *For the Victims of Organized Religions* (2006). Comprising a grid of 42 'blank' photographs that moved in colour and emotion from black to blue, this new work changed the way I looked at everything else, which, given the fact that I'd seen a lot of the photographs many times before, goes to show the deepest benefits of never taking anything for granted in Tillmans's work, and by extension, the rest of the world. **Terry R. Myers**

ART

AFTER ARBUS

Wolfgang Tillmans, Seeing and thinking

BY HOLLY MYERS



Susanne and Lutz, white dress, army skirt, 1993

In thinking about Diane Arbus, as one does from time to time, I came to a distressing realization: that I couldn't name a single photographer subsequent to Arbus (and Frank and Winogrand and Friedlander and Eggleston and the other greats of her generation) who ranked on anywhere near the same level, which is to say, who thrilled me near as broadly, deeply or consistently. Looking back from Arbus, one sees Stieglitz, Weston and Evans; Cartier-Bresson and Atget; Fenton, Cameron and Nadar — a long lineage of soul-satisfying luminaries, whose images aren't likely to ever get boring.

But looking forward? There are many who produce admirable pictures, but none who don't feel, in some way, partial, like one chapter in a fine collection of essays rather than a volume unto themselves: Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall, Nan Goldin, Lewis Baltz, Catherine Opie, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth — all important artists who do what they do really well but who, for the most part, do only that. None approaches the poetic scale of Arbus' vision, or the sheer intensity of humanness she manages to encapsulate in a single picture.

Wolfgang Tillmans would not seem an obvious candidate for heir to the Arbus legacy. In fact, his work has virtually nothing in common with hers, either formally or conceptually. With the exception of the occasional celebrity, he photographs humble things: friends, fruit, piles of rumpled clothing. He prints his images in a variety of sizes, rarely doing them the honor of a frame, and puts such emphasis on the interchangeability of both subject and scale that he is commonly (and mistakenly) criticized for a casual approach to the medium. His current retrospective at the UCLA Hammer Museum, however — his first in the U.S., surprisingly — suggests a reason to be hopeful about the state of photography as a discipline. It's not so much a matter

of his being a better or worse photographer than others of his generation (the medium has changed so much in the past three decades that a qualitative hierarchy would be virtually meaningless), but rather that he restores to the enterprise something that was lost back in the '70s somewhere: a certain holistic heroism of vision.

The distinction is more romantic than intellectual, I'll admit — and therein lies the problem. Photography obviously didn't disappear after 1971 (the year of Arbus' death), but, like art generally, went the way of the intellect, exalting concept over impression, thinking over looking. The romantic ideal of the photographer as pure eye gave way to the photographer as typologist, trickster and theorist. With Ruscha's "Every Building on the Sunset Strip," photography became a tool rather than a mode of being, and rarely achieved — or cared to achieve, or even necessarily trusted — the sheer visceral (that is, visual/emotional/psychological) impact that previous generations strove for. It was not the goal of these works to thrill, exactly, but to dissect, analyze, stimulate and provoke. At best, the shift can be said to have rejuvenated a medium that had grown stale and repetitive, bringing it in line with the concerns of the wider art world. At worst, it shuttered the scope. Even the least conceptual of photographic projects today cling to themes, devices and statements; few brave anything nearly so broad and messy as the City, Nature or the Human Condition.

If there's anyone poised to bridge these two divergent currents, it's Tillmans. Born in Remscheid, Germany, in 1968, he emerged in the early 1990s sparkling with voice-of-his-generation promise. If you know his work only casually, these early pictures are probably the ones that you know: tender, snapshotlike portraits of sexually liberated, effortlessly gorgeous (in that loose, organic, European way), techno-era hipsters. Tillmans presented the work, as he has all work since then, in cluttered, frameless exhibitions, printing the photos in multiple sizes and taping them in freeform clusters directly to the walls, as well as in elaborate layouts on the pages of British and American fashion magazines.

The Hammer show, the installation of which Tillmans designed and oversaw (as he does most of his shows), affirms the best aspects of this early promise without indulging the hip factor or trapping the artist in its mystique. A seductive 1992 series called "Chemistry

Squares” — 15 small, square, black-and-white images of sweat-glistening, Ecstasy-glowing club kids, taken on a dance floor somewhere in London — is the show’s primary token of this cultural moment and, hung as it is next to a large photo of a sculpture of the Trinity, epitomizes the spiritual aspect that Tillmans clearly ascribes to that moment’s communal idealism. His view of humanity is



Anders pulling splinter from toe, 2006

fundamentally optimistic and generous, which makes his portraits particularly engaging. The dozen or two assembled here, both early and recent, of musicians, artists and personal friends, primarily, are among his best and should leave no doubt of his pre-eminence in the genre. Few have such a talent for drawing vulnerability, kindness and complexity out of such a range of faces, classically picturesque or not.

The portraits, however, are only a fraction of what the show contains. There are also still lifes, landscapes, documentary works, abstractions, a video and a room-size installation of glass-topped tables containing a collaged assortment of found images, newspaper clippings and other ephemera. There are conceptual threads to the show, sociological threads, formalist threads and political threads, all equally rigorous.

There are moments when the work feels cool and cerebral and moments of extravagant visual indulgence; moments of dinginess and moments of elegance; moments of humor and pathos and joy and grief. The essays in the show’s catalog go to great rhetorical lengths to isolate and justify several of these aspects individually — Daniel Birnbaum writes on the imagery, Dominic Molon on the conceptual framework, Russell Ferguson on the portraiture, Lane Relyea on the abstraction and Julie Ault on the installation — but what’s striking, ultimately, is the perfect ease with which these aspects coexist in the work itself. What might easily have come off as aimless, schizophrenic or showy feels instead naturally and appropriately holistic. He titled his 2003 exhibition at Tate Britain “If One Thing Matters, Everything Matters,” and that pretty much says it. His subject is nothing short of existence itself, in all its grandeur and banality.

Tillmans has resisted the strict designation of “photographer,” which is understandable given the breadth of his practice and the general unpleasantness of being pinned into any one category, but he has nonetheless become one of the medium’s most important visionaries. The show suggests an artist entering into an impressive maturity, moving beyond his stylish beginnings to become a voice of not only his generation

but of the medium as a whole, redefining the terms of production and exhibition to propose an approach defined by neither the romantic ideologies of seeing nor the conceptual ideologies of thinking, but by a graceful and often profound interweaving of the two. The camera, for Tillmans, is both a tool and a mode of being, which makes following along the paths he uses it to blaze a deeply rewarding experience.

THE NEW YORKER

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK ABSTRACT THINKING

Wolfgang Tillmans, the German-born, London-based photographer, has never tied himself down to the literal image. Although he made his reputation in the early nineties for sly insider's views of youth culture, Tillmans has also turned out landscapes, portraits, and a series of charged still-lives that seem to be only loosely anchored in the material world.

Recently he has experimented with pure abstraction, and massive nonrepresentational photos are at the core of "Freedom from the Known," his sprawling new show at P.S. 1. Putting his camera aside, Tillmans manipulates light and chemicals applied directly to photographic paper.

His bruised monochromes, agitated color fields, and scratched-up swaths of foam recall psychedelic light-show effects, but they're more mysterious. Juxtaposing these almost empty images with photographs of a vase of peonies, pyramids, open windows, a crouching soldier, and a man's scrotum, Tillmans invites us to see all these things as potential abstractions—buoyant, atomized, melting into air.

—*Vince Aletti*



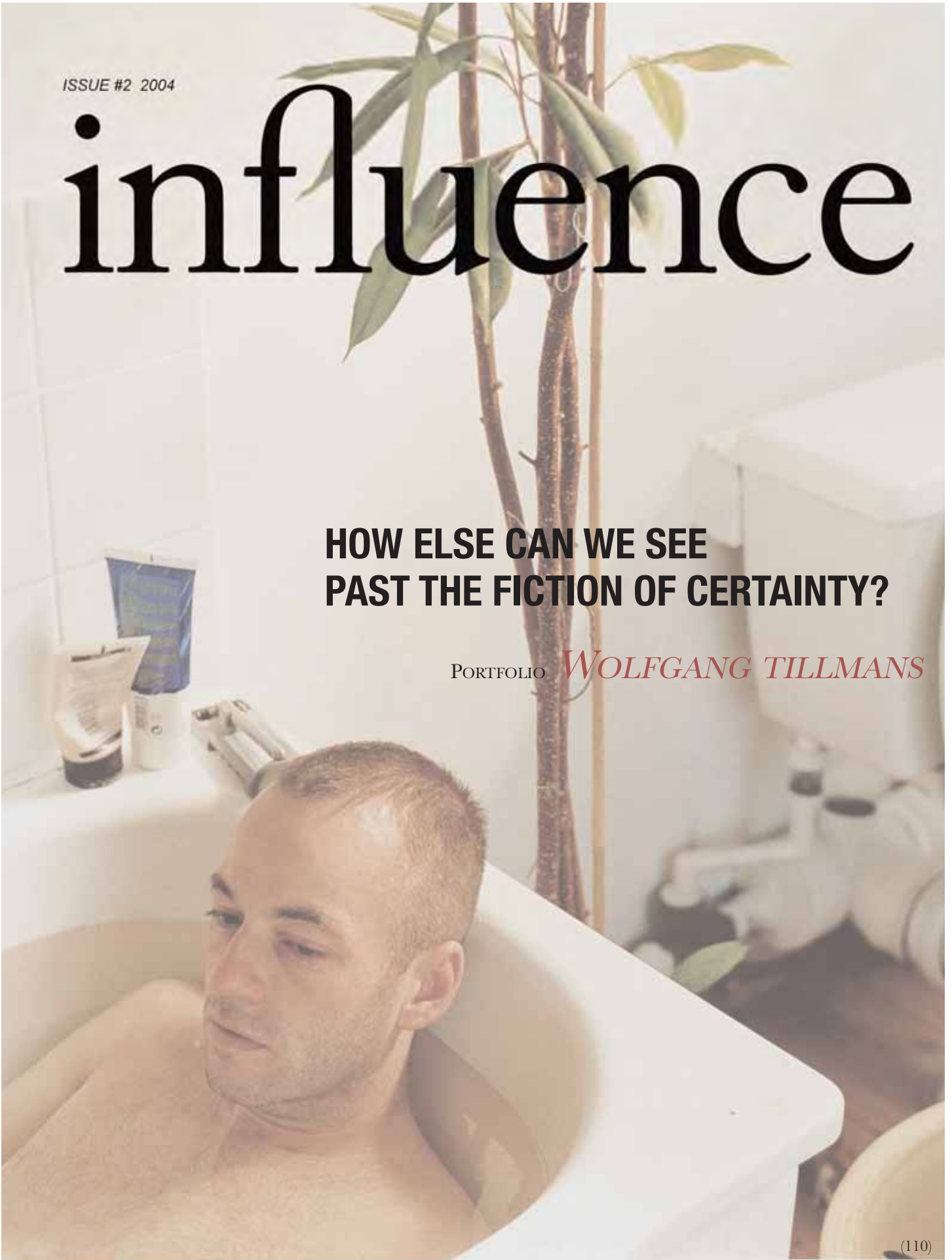
WOLFGANG TILLMANS, "IT'S ONLY LOVE GIVE IT AWAY" (2005)

ISSUE #2 2004

influence

**HOW ELSE CAN WE SEE
PAST THE FICTION OF CERTAINTY?**

PORTFOLIO *WOLFGANG TILLMANS*



(p. 110) TILLMANS, Wolfgang
Jochen taking a bath, 1997. © Wolfgang
Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery,
New York.

(p. 111 left) TILLMANS, Wolfgang
Mauricio, profile, 2000. © Wolfgang
Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery,
New York.

(p. 111 top-right) TILLMANS, Wolfgang
Zietungsstapel, 1999. © Wolfgang
Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery,
New York.

(p. 111 bottom-right) TILLMANS, Wolfgang
Blushes #89, 2000. © Wolfgang
Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery,
New York.

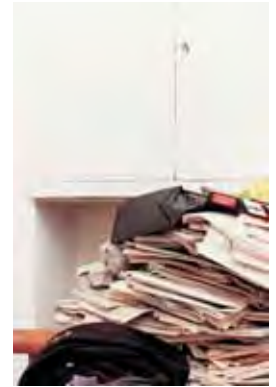


FOR MUCH OF ITS HISTORY, PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITURE HAS SOMEWHAT PATHETICALLY ECHOED ITS PRECEDENTS

in painting, continuing to reflect the compromising relationship between patron and artist. Portraitists often go to confectionary extremes to pad a sitter's chosen mythology, most awkwardly demonstrated by the work of Julia Margaret Cameron, Edward Steichen, and Annie Liebovitz. Likewise, photographic dissent rarely extends beyond hijacking the presumed objectivity of the process to artificially (and negatively) hyperstimulate our perception of the subject, as demonstrated by Diane Arbus, Richard Avedon, and most photojournalists. Both methods depend on and promote the fallacy of the clarifying gesture, the singular image that captures essences and reveals mystic truths. In fact, what photography has more consistently shown, despite its practitioners, is the opposite: the infinite ambiguity of the human experience, a flood of implication that by its elusive nature denies explicit understanding. Genuine portraiture reflects that continuum, rather than attempts to act as an isolated document superior to it.

The artist Gerhard Richter, who creates work of supreme rigor, has said that the amateur's family snapshot, as an unself-conscious and direct recording of information, is a more reliable method of depiction than the cleverly composed art photograph. In his formulation, both of those attempts at understanding human experience are doomed to frustration anyway, but the snapshot at least is uncontaminated by ridiculous delusions of grandeur. It is, in his words, "pure picture." Maybe it's a bit cynical to contend that any single snapshot, as an embodiment of careless resort, is more profound than a purposeful but vain attempt at

establishing meaning. But there is great originality in the thought that a lifetime of such images, a compendium of them, the result of an ongoing, fractured, subconscious but active routine of searching, comprises a more viable kind of compound "portrait" than any single image that teeters dangerously on the verge of propaganda. It's not merely a matter of volume: Nan Goldin has an ample cache of solipsisms, but their sum never reaches a critical mass that can lift them above the weight of individual anecdotes. They become a foreseeable routine. What might instead render the quotidian as sublime is an approach from oblique angles, from the indirect and always limited information we more realistically know life to afford, so that the attempt at depiction itself reflects our finite capabilities and knowledge of experience. A new and viable portraiture then might serve not so much as a terminus or distillation, a "decisive moment," but as a catalyst for reconsideration, a point of departure rather than one of absurd, convenient, and obviously false finality. Wolfgang Tillmans' work is an open-ended example of this kind of new portraiture. If the most common criticism is that it lacks focus and





resolve, that same sense of loss and existential capitulation grants his portraiture an anticlimactic fragility that's unexpectedly strong, convincingly intimate, and never once surrenders to patronizing homilies. No single Tillmans portrait fully coalesces or completes itself. No single portrait is ever a portrait. Rather, each gels by the same process as memory, through the unending accretion of multiple and imperfectly formed instances, a synthesis of glances, always incomplete and peripheral, constantly realigning our knowledge, as snow accumulating over a landscape dynamically and randomly defines the thing observed. There's no question that Tillmans' anarchic, threadbare style can be troubling to eyes more conditioned to photography in a mode of perfected majesty. It's no help sinking to the contemporary indulgence of calling it "real", but the work is honest, and gratifyingly upfront in its copious shortcomings. It makes no assumptions and, in a way that is exceedingly rare, never attempts to inform. The totality of Tillmans' oeuvre, consisting of thousands of pictures of maddening variety, serves as a single, plainspoken document that paradoxically diffuses our knowledge and expectations. It contradicts all of the demands of historic portraiture, and so is uniquely photographic.

GIL BLANK What's the basic motivation for your photographic portraiture? Is it at all distinct from the remarkably wide variety of other subjects you seek out? **WOLFGANG TILLMANS** When I began to define my portraiture, in 1990 to 1991, I wanted to communicate both the feelings I had for my contemporaries as well as the sense I often had of a single person. I wanted to communicate the complexity of that person in its entirety, that lack of a singular reading. I wanted to channel the multilayered character of a personality and its contradictions, the way it's revealed in clothes, in styles, in attitudes, and the way a person lives. It's the fractured reality of identity that fascinates me. I didn't feel myself well represented in the late-eighties media as I was growing up. Perhaps I did in some magazines like i-D, but everything else depicted people making odd gestures, or acting crazily, or smiling. They were always apologizing for being the way they were, always giving a single reading of their mood, of what they were about. It took me a while to get my own photography of people in line with the way I saw people. That happened around 1991, when I realized that I needed to strip all the pictorial devices away, so that the subjects wouldn't have to apologize for who they were, and the picture wouldn't have to justify its observation. It wouldn't hint at being more of an artifice than necessary. I got rid of everything that's artistic in portraiture: interesting lighting, recognizably "special" techniques, and all the different styles that divide us from the subject and are usually considered to be enhancements of the subject or the picture. I found a way of indirect lighting that looks like the absence of artificial light. That's often been misunderstood as a lack of formality, and dismissed as the dreaded "snapshot aesthetic." I know what people are referring to when they say that the immediacy they feel from my pictures-but what's mistaken about the term is the lack of composition and consideration that it implies. **GB** But why should that be considered a pejorative term, except in the shallowest reading? Obviously, the "snapshot" label is for some a lazy way of critiquing the aesthetic or formal value of the work, but I'm not so sure that the lack of consideration that it also implies is necessarily a bad thing. It goes directly to Richter's idea of "pure picture," of a direct, unmediated pictorial experience that doesn't suffer from all kinds of overbearing artistic effect. **WT** It does release me from having to meditate on the picture. I take a picture to perceive the world, not to overthink what's in front of me. Pictures are an incredibly efficient and



CAMERON, Julia Margaret

After she was given a camera at the age of 48, Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-79) became an ardent and accomplished amateur photographer, creating portraits of friends, family members, and Victorian celebrities, as well as allegorical images with costumed models. Her work was rediscovered and embraced by Alfred Stieglitz in the twentieth century, and there were similarities between her photographs and the atmospheric, soft-focus work of the Pictorialists.

STEICHEN, Edward

Born in Luxembourg, the photographer, painter, and curator Edward Steichen (1879-1973) spent much of his life promoting photography and modernist art in New York. In his photography he moved from soft-focus Pictorialism to New Realism; as a curator at The Museum of Modern Art for fifteen years, he is best remembered for organizing the tremendously popular exhibition "The Family of Man." In 1905, with Alfred Stieglitz, he founded the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, at 291 Fifth Avenue, and in 1923 he became the chief photographer for Conde Nast Publications. In addition to fashion and advertising photography, Steichen also shot portraits, landscapes, cityscapes, still lifes, and images of sculpture.

LIEBOVITZ, Annie

The commercial photographer Annie Liebovitz (born in 1948) is best known for her splashy, flatteringly elegant celebrity portraits. She got her start in the early seventies, when she became a photographer for Rolling Stone, after acquiring her first camera while studying painting at the San Francisco Art Institute. In 1983 she became a contributing photographer to Vanity Fair. Liebovitz has also shot advertising campaigns for the Gap and American Express.

(p. 112 top-left) TILLMANS, Wolfgang *Central Line*, 2000. © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

(p. 112 top right) TILLMANS, Wolfgang *Still Life, Talbot Road*, 1991. © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

(p. 112 bottom-left) TILLMANS, Wolfgang *Conor Sun Burst*, 2002. © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.





economical way of visually absorbing the world. If I have an immediate feeling, then it's actually a very good language for me to translate that into a picture. I agree with almost everything that is said about the positive side of the snapshot, but not with the conclusion that one could draw from that, that every snapshot is the same. **GB** Despite its apparent ease and immediacy in the short term, your working method requires a certain degree of counterintuitive thinking to be effectively turned into a meaningful life pursuit. It's a complete abandonment of the patterns of identification that are most familiar to a photographer. For many photographers it's easier to settle for the clichés of portraiture—the exquisite technique, the overly constituted moment, the conventional signs of an archetypal personality—then it is to forego that, to vacate one's familiarity and create something that shows few overt signs of consideration. At this point, so much in your work revolves around the seemingly tangential moments, the synthesis of unexpected or apparently unimportant elements, that I wonder if it's become a conscious part of your process to specifically avoid photographing subjects that are too ideally photographic. There are a few aspirationally iconic pieces like *Deer Hirsch* and *Untitled (La Gomera)*—but is this kind of endowed single image something that you resist? **WT** A lot of them are just given to you when you make yourself open and vulnerable to the human exchange that takes place in the photographic situation. That's how I try to negotiate a portrait. The desire to control the result, to come away with an interesting image, is simultaneous with the admission that I'm not in fact completely in control of it. Ultimately I have to be as weak as the subject, or as strong. If I go into the situation with a preconceived idea, then I'll limit the human experience that I might be able to have. The outcome of such a situation is unknowable, and that's something very hard to bear; people prefer to know that what they do will have a good result. I've possibly developed the faith or strength of letting myself fall each time. I risk not knowing what might come out and I also risk making an important work. That's what I like about the magazine portraiture that I've been doing now for fifteen years. It always sends me back to the zero-point of human interaction, the point of not knowing. I know that I'm likely to make a printable picture, but I'm not forced to make an artwork. And I quite like that, that I have no responsibility to the sitter or anything beyond the act itself. That's also why I never take commissions from private parties or collectors, **GB** That would make no sense at all, diverting the centrality of the interpersonal experience. **WT** The essential fragility of the outcome would

(p. 116 top) TILLMANS, Wolfgang *Circle Line*, 2000. © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

(p. 116 bottom-left) TILLMANS, Wolfgang *grey jeans over stair post*, 1991. © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

(p. 116 bottom-right) TILLMANS, Wolfgang *Sternenhimmel*, 1995. © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

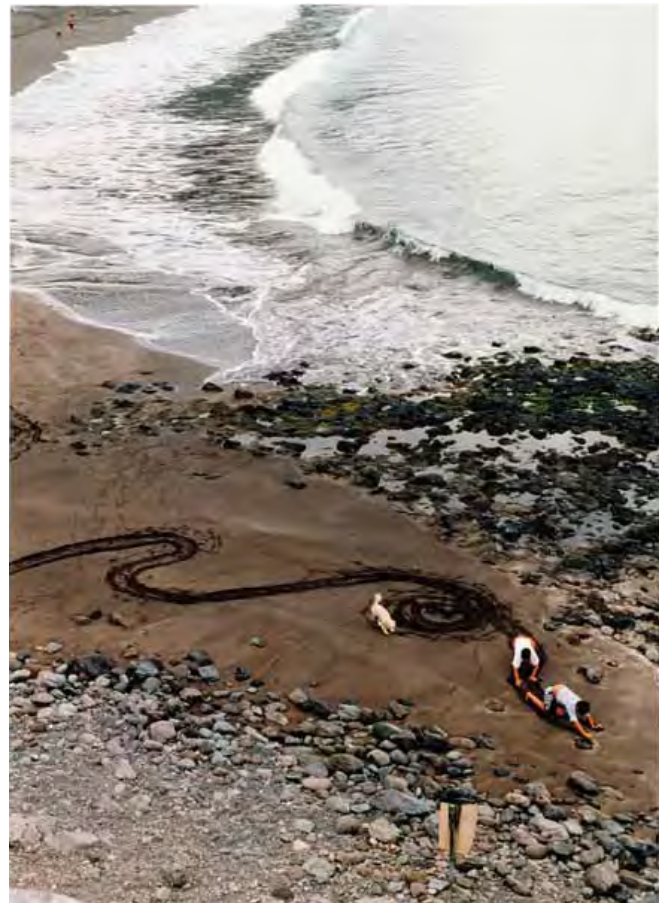
(p. 117 top) TILLMANS, Wolfgang *Untitled (La Gomera)*, 1997. © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

(p. 117 center) TILLMANS, Wolfgang *Arkadia I*, 1996. © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

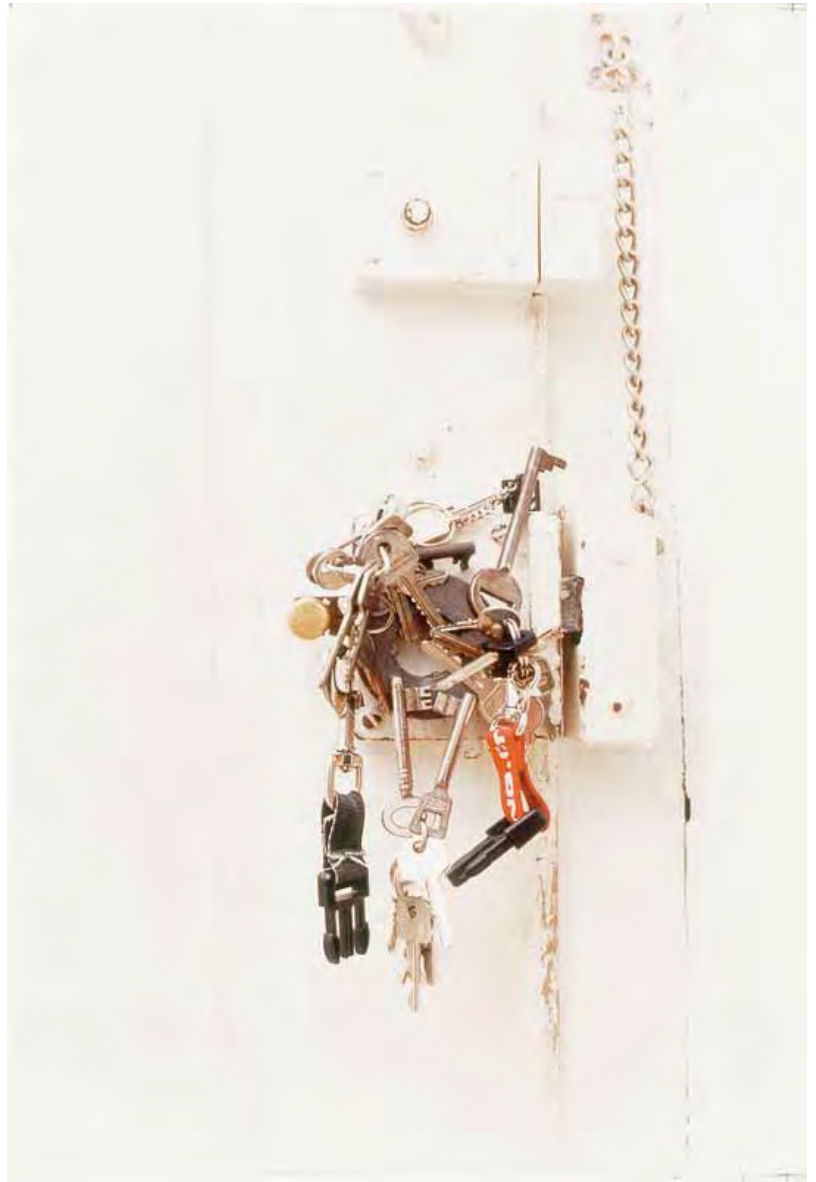
(p. 117 bottom) TILLMANS, Wolfgang *Richard James*, 2001 © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.



only a truly powerful outcome would be possible. There would be only that useless certainty. **GB** One of the fundamental impulses for any portraitist, especially apparent in your work, is to approach experience, to make sense of what we experience and the people in our lives. Photography, because it's so accurate in its registration, always contains the implicit hope that we can somehow obtain a vestige of proof, of knowledge: this is how things are, this is what exists, what I know. We live in hope, but it's an absurd hope, because as soon as you move toward that or try to build on it in pictures, you automatically begin to assert a control over the situation that prevents it from ever being anything beyond your own preconceived ideas. And so for you, it's vital to maintain that position of vulnerability. **WT** Yes. And of course with friends, I'm like that much more naturally. In the end the pictures that matter to me most are of people that are close to me. **GB** And when you consider the sketch you made for your retrospective at the Tate, which functions like a diagram or flow chart of your working method, you put the "People" category at the very top. It's quite disorienting, and I imagine purposely so, because you do break things down into large categories, but obscure that with the insertion of smaller and smaller notes, and cross-referencing paths and connections, so that there is no real separation. Everything is cross-contaminated. **WT** But you can separate, for instance, "Crowds/ Strangers" from "Friends Sitting." Then again, that can be extended into "Nightlife," which gives you a big family of extended friends you don't immediately know. The whole chart was made in the full knowledge of its own absurdity. Likewise, the catalog for the exhibition, *If One Thing Matters, Everything Matters*, which is an encyclopedic catalog of over two thousand images from the present back to when I began making pictures, is all about the audacity implicit in the attempt to make a map of my world, something that can never be drawn or defined. The thing that makes working this way both harder and much more interesting is that it's also how I experience my life: there never are sharply circumscribed experiences or fields. I admire other artists that work in very strict patterns, but it's interesting to note how that strictness or seriality is often associated with seriousness in our culture, with more thought and more depth. I find it more challenging to try to reconcile all those different fields that constitute experience as I live it day to day. **GB** And that's what can be so difficult to accept about your work. For years, it was a constant source of aggravation for me. It requires a renunciation of the assumptions we have about photographic forms. A beloved motivation for photographers is the isolation of perfect meanings, singular visions. You're adamantly seeking the same kind of reconciliation with experience that photographers have always attempted, but you're doing so by abandoning the status of photographs as exceptional objects, and that naturally disturbs people who are conditioned to placing a high degree of value and faith in them. **WT** Or let's say the language of them. Because truthfully I'm also after refinement and precision; I'm only abandoning the preferred language of that, the signifiers that give immediate value to something, such as the picture frame. First of all, I see an unframed photograph as an object of great beauty, in its purity as a thin sheet of paper, but I'm also resisting the statement that one image or object is more important than others. I want it to battle it out for itself. That doesn't mean that I don't believe in singular, great pictures, though. Some images function in different ways, some more or less loudly, but in terms of quality, I would never throw something in that I don't believe has the potential, on its own, to be really good. The totality will always reflect more of what I think than any single picture can, but the single picture functions as the definitive version of the subject for me here and now. **GB** What? You really mean that? **WT** Yes! That feeling might change in a year's time, when I have a different angle on the same subject matter. But take the *Ecstasy* and *nightlife* experience of early-nineties techno as an example.



After '92, I made very few pictures in nightclubs. Those shots are that feeling for me, that Ecstasy feeling. I wanted to have that and I got it; I'm satisfied that they're a true reflection of what I felt and thought. I never have the desire to do more of them. Similarly, with the still life images, even though the genre is repeated over the course of thirteen years, I somehow always try to divine what the situation is for me now, in the best possible way, and not necessarily allow twenty variations of that. **GB** How, then, do you determine the overall arc of your picture-taking? If we are to take the pictures as a compendium, an articulated personal history, how, then, do you prioritize the meaningful events in your life? **WT** I quite like the term "quantification." By observing the number of times I use a certain picture, by seeing how much it shows up in the installations, which ones become a postcard, which ones become featured in books. I know what's significant in my actual life. Thinking backward I know what felt significant, and though perhaps in the here and now you can never fully face that, I don't think there's any need for it either. **GB** At first sight, your work can seem scattershot, and randomized. With more time and attention, connections and coincidences can emerge, with one photograph "activating" others, as you've put it. How much of that is planned and controlled, and how much is left open-ended, for the pictures themselves to spontaneously create a unique system of meaning? **WT** I do leave it pretty open to the pictures. I know everyone of them; I do have thoughts about them and that was another reason why I did *If One Thing Matters, Everything Matters*. But the reassessing of pictures isn't a process that goes on indefinitely. I wanted to wrap up all the pictures that meant something to me. Ultimately, though, they all stay free, and in an installation I never say how they should be read. There's no narrative that



(p. 118 bottom-left) TILLMANS, Wolfgang
Adam, 1991. © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy
Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

(p. 118 bottom-right) TILLMANS, Wolfgang
Concorde, 1996. © Wolfgang Tillmans, cour-
tesy Andrea Aasen Gallery, New York.

(p.119 top) TILLMANS, Wolfgang
Kiefer StraBe (self), 1988. © Wolfgang Till-
mans, courtesy Andrea Aasen Gallery, New
York.

(p. 119 middle) TILLMANS, Wolfgang
Isa with pool of water, 1995. © Wolfgang Till-
mans, courtesy Andrea Aasen Gallery, New
York.

p. 119 bottom)TILLMANS, Wolfgang
Young Woman (Chemistry), 1995. © Wolfgang
Tillmans, courtesy Andrea Aasen Gallery, New
York.



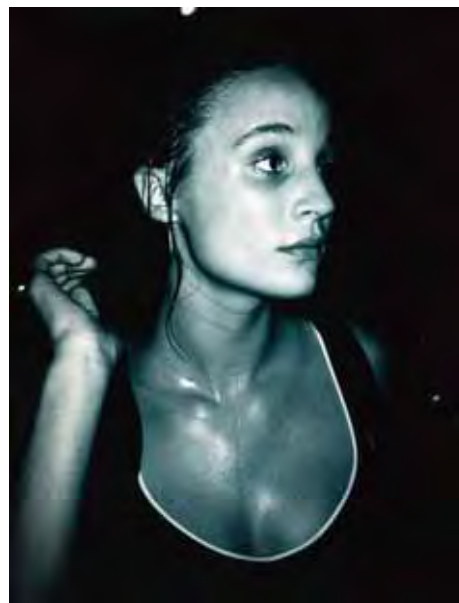
a way of helping us understand or access personal experience? Is there any hope, or help, or any need for either? **WT** I like the idea of the photograph as something that joins me to the world, that connects me to others, that I can share. I can get in touch with somebody when they recognize a feeling:

"Oh, I felt like that before. I remember jeans hanging on the banister, even though I've never seen that exact pair. I've seen my oranges on a windowsill." It's the sense that "I'm not alone." That's the driving force behind sharing these things—that I want to find connections in people. I believe that every thought and idea has to be somehow rendered through personal experience, and then generalized. **GB** Can that kind of approach ever be completed? Or might it not actually doom itself, a restless desire to move and to know and to see that because of the foregone conclusion of our own deaths - implies its own impossibility? **WT** Yes, but it is all impossible! Like the Eva Hesse quote I love: "Life doesn't last, art doesn't last, it doesn't matter!" **GB** [laughter] **WT** [laughter] **WT** I mean that of course you have to give as much love as possible into your life and your art, not only despite the fact that none of it matters but precisely because of it. I don't feel a restless desire at the core of my work. I feel it's about stillness, about calmly looking at the here and now. These are real issues, the biggest ones, and particularly in regard to portraiture: Why take pictures of others? It's not the same as taking pictures of non-portrait subject matter. When you show a person to another person, why do you do that? Do you show a role model, do you show an ideal of beauty, or power? Why should somebody else regard someone they don't know? Why is it necessary for me to circulate pictures of people in books and magazines and exhibitions? Isn't that part of the omnipresent terror that we're faced with merely by being alive and part of this non-stop normative process? **GB** Then is that the central affirmation of the work? It won't rely on the pathetically heroic devices of traditional portraiture, so you force your subjects into a proxy war in which their portrait images "battle it out." as you say, to somehow identify themselves within a tide of beauty and banality. **WT** I certainly feel a responsibility when using my power to utilize media of any sort, such as an exhibition. I've always felt very strongly that whatever I do involves using a position of privilege and power, because I'm the one

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binds them sequentially in the books, even though I know why I placed them as they are. **GB** In your installations, everything is incorporated into a heterogeneous mix: genres, sizes, wall placements, even print formats. But in that book, for the first time, every image was treated the same way: you made them all identical, placed them one after the other in a relentless stream. **WT** There's a rigorous system of only a few sizes underlying the intended sense of heterogeneity. I'm certainly not embracing everything. Even though there are so many subjects in the work, there are also so many things that aren't. I tried to show that in the flow chart. It is something specific that I'm looking at, and not everything. It's not about trying to control the whole world through pictures, or to get the process of seeing and experiencing out of my system. It's more that I'm trying to bear life, to bear the multiplicity of things, and that's what people find very hard. They find it hard to bear the lack of answers, so they strive for simple solutions and concepts, for simple ideas. Letting things stand on their own is about giving up control over them, it's the attempt to bear them. It's finding the pleasure in that experience, but also giving witness to the fact that there are no simple answers. I do think the work is optimistic, but perhaps in the harder way that an existentialist might come around to that realization of freedom. **GB** Let me then come right out and ask the fundamental questions: What kind of faith do you place in photographs, and portraits in particular, as

that's talking. But I've also thought that my point of view deserved to be heard, because I always felt that neither I nor the way that I look at the world was adequately represented. That of course changes, and we're now living in a completely different image world than we were ten years ago. **GB** One in which there's tremendous-and perhaps dubious value placed on perceptions of authenticity and the authentically lived life, particularly in the representations that we fashion of each other. How do you react in your work to that dangerously hypocritical impulse? **WT** First of all, I never denounce it publicly, because we're all part of the argument. You can't possibly have an uncompromised relationship to authenticity. As soon as you represent something, it's always a mediated, invented situation. What is genuine, though, is the desire for authenticity. So, absurdly enough, that's something that actually is authentic about this moment. Personally speaking, I feel somewhat post-authentic. What's authentic to me is whatever looks authentic. **GB** Perverse. **WT** Well, that's the gift of late birth! Certain ideas are just worn to death. All the sorts have been played out. Images had been so outspokenly formulated by the time I started to speak with them that I didn't feel a need to add to that. I don't have to be part of anyone school. The authenticity label is tricky, because I immediately want to denounce it, to say it's not true, that everything in the work is consciously constructed, but that's also untrue. I do respond quite immediately to situations, and I think the pictures should come across on an intuitive level. You shouldn't have to get caught up in the artifice; you should try to be hit by an authentic experience. At the most basic level, all I do every day is work with pieces of paper. I shape colors and dyes on paper, and those objects aren't the reality they represent. I understood that early on, and it was the beginning of all my work. How does meaning take hold of a piece of paper? Why does this paper carry a charge? It's the brain, it's our humanity that brings life to it. What matters is how we shape the things on the paper, somehow forcing it to become a representation of life, or experience. People always think that a photograph is bodiless, that it's not an object unto itself but merely a conduit, a carrier of some other value. **GB** And that's the reasoning behind your darkroom abstraction pieces, to short-circuit photography's representational value by foregoing lens-based images and simply exposing photographic paper to light by hand. **WT** Yes. I'm trying to challenge people's assumptions that every photograph is reality by presenting abstract forms that somehow look figurative. People inevitably use all sorts of words and allu-



sions to describe them, saying they look like skin, hairs or wires or sunbursts, but they only bring those associations along because the images are on photographic paper. If they were on canvas, they wouldn't say the same thing. **GB** But I think that kind of challenge to photography's formalist character is a well-established concept. More relevant to the work at hand is whether the abstractions are a conscious subversion of the rest of the oeuvre's totality. Because the uniqueness and aesthetic value of the other images as a totality is so inherently photographic. The abstractions feel like a deliriously utopian attempt to bring things



back to that hypothetical zero-point, the state of surrendering photographic knowledge. **WT** But I always have a good excuse for them because they are purely photographic. They're as true as my other photographs, because they do exactly what photographs are designed to do. **GB** Which is what? I'm challenging you to spell that out. **WT** They collect light and translate it into dyes. I expose and manipulate light on paper and I let it do exactly what it's supposed to do. I'm not doctoring the process. **GB** But that's ridiculous. It's like saying the only point of language is to produce sounds. Both language and photography only have value in so far as they're human systems, and that they produce human meanings. Kangaroos have no use for photographs, only we do. And just because I open my mouth and make noise doesn't mean I've said anything. So here's the trap we're in: photographs are permanently bound to experience, to the recounting of events with a precision that's exceptional but incapable of ever completely explaining those events to us. If your abstractions provide none of that explicit signification, however ambiguous, if in fact they are made as negations of meaning, are they really photographs? Perhaps simply by virtue of their process, but I don't think at all by what you state as their human value as objects. **WT** But they are photographic in pleasure. **GB** What?! **WT** They're great pleasures for me. They're a fascinating phenomenon that I take great pleasure in. **GB** That can't be all there is. **WT** But it is! **GB** All of this can't be that insubstantial. **WT** But it's part of that research into how meaning gets onto paper. Part of that's hard work, but it's also being open to the pleasure of being and playing. Without sounding too corny, I think play is very important, very serious. I'm exploring what happens when thinking and being become matter, because photographs don't just come into existence on their own. **GB** I think I Don't Want To Get Over You is the key example of that, because it shows within a single image the kind of cross-contamination we see in your work at large, with the abstracting light trails that break open the underlying straight representational image. It has a duality, the connection to experience mated to the desire and the attempt to break free of that condition. Then there's also the transposition of the image formed automatically by a lens, by a machine, and the trails left by your own hand as the author. **WT** It has that inherent quality of being man-made. **GB** Not just manmade, but Wolfgang-made. It yearns for universality but is tied to your own everyday, like all the other images that are distinctly of their time, of their author. **WT** Because they can't be achieved any other way. I've never been afraid of being of my time, and I often find it problematic when people try to avoid that in order to achieve timelessness. They cut themselves short in the process. All great art is strongly linked to its time. The paradox is how to achieve that universality while acknowledging specificity. It's quite hard to handle, this open-endedness. The lack of clear answers, handling the contradictions, not thinking, and yet not giving up either. Not going the easier route of pretending that there are simple answers .•



What They Are

A Conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans

by Nathan Kernan

*Photographer Wolfgang Tillmans was born in 1968, in Remscheid, Germany, a small town not far from Dusseldorf. He moved to Hamburg after high school to do community service in lieu of being drafted into the army, and there he continued to make the Xerox art that he had begun to produce during his last year in school. He had his first show of this work at Cafe Gnosa in Hamburg in 1988. Needing pictures to use in the Xeroxes, he bought a camera and soon became more interested in his original photographs than in their "degradation" as photocopies. Tillmans first made a name for himself taking pictures of club kids, which he published in i-D and other magazines, but after deciding he was "too young to be a professional photographer" he moved to England and enrolled in a two-year photography program at the Brighton and Poole College of Art. Since 1992 he has lived mostly in London. In such books as *For When I'm Weak I'm Strong* (1996) and *Burg* (1998), and in gallery and Museum installations, he combines still-lives, portraits, landscapes, scenes of communal celebration, and, recently, abstractions, with a seeming casualness that is anything but casual. Tillmans was the winner of the 2000 Turner Prize and a large retrospective of his work will open at Hamburg's Deichtorhallen this fall, later traveling to the Castello di Rivoli in Turin. At the time of our conversation there was a show of his new work at Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York.*

NK

Nathan Kernan In your current show you include a lot of cameraless abstraction, in addition to, or sometimes as interventions upon, “straight” photographs. Can you tell me about how you started to make these abstractions?

Wolfgang Tillmans Ever since I started printing in 1990, I've been collecting things that went wrong in the darkroom. I've always taken great pleasure in interesting accidents, and as I saw them happening I would then use that as a chance to experiment, shaping the accidental. But I never showed any until

I was asked by Parkett in '98 to do an edition, and I gave them 60 of those darkroom accidents. I don't really like gratuitous editioning—all my work is editioned already—so usually when I do editions I try to play with the actual concept of multiples and uniqueness. So for Parkett, everybody got a completely unique picture.

But, in a way, abstraction is something that I have always done. I don't know if I mentioned those black-and-white photocopies to you, which I was doing from '87 till '89, using found photographs, newspaper photographs, or my own holiday photography. I was enlarging them on a digital photo--

pictures look like they are pictures of something. And that's important to me, that they are not necessarily just another exercise in abstraction, but also somehow in dialogue with photography and the illusion, or the assumption, that a photograph must be of something. And of course, every single one is an imprint and a trace of light that has happened to the paper.

NK How do you make those Blush marks, those wire-thin lines and tiny particles?

WT They are all done with different light sources, like flashlights, and the Super Colliders with a laser, and it's quite an involved process which I don't really want to go into because, again, I want them to be what they are, and not just how they're made. The initial question everybody asks when confronted with a photograph is who is it, when was it made, how is it made, and when you're confronted with a painting you don't ask that. I mean, why can't it be enough to look at the object in front of you?

NK Yet to me the Blushes are very close to gestural abstract painting, which is not about the object only, but also about the gesture and the act of making it. Do you feel that plays a part in your work too?

“This exploration of the image surface, of the very nature of what constitutes an image has always been of great fascination to me.”

copier by Canon, which had this huge enlargement facility of 400 percent, and I would zoom into the image, and then enlarge that enlargement 400 percent, then that one, and so even after the first step the picture would be very grainy-pixelated—and after three steps what was left was just a pure graphic design. And so this exploration of the image surface, of the very nature of what constitutes an image, has always been of great fascination to me how in a way it's all just a likeness and never the real thing, but also how something you mark on paper is transformed into something that you look at and see something else in. It's the same today with the Blushes in the current show, for example, which are almost on the border between something and nothing; and when does “something” become “something ... else”? So in a way I started being interested in photography through deconstructing or destroying photography.

NK The new pictures of riders in the London Underground are also very abstract, very unspecific and formal.

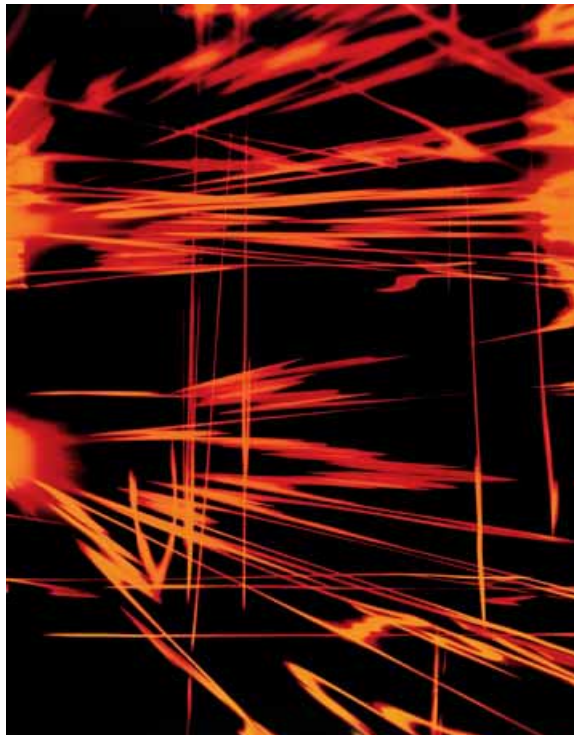
WT And that's the interesting role that the abstract pictures play: they activate shapes in the other pictures. So the fact that they are abstract isn't really that important. Because all the different abstract

WT It is an act, I mean it is a time-based process which I have to get into. I don't want to over-romanticize it, either, but it is kind of an intuitive process, and I need to kind of bond with the material that I'm using, and then over time I develop a sense of, for example, how to filter to get the color I want, or time the exposure exactly, or make a movement quick enough so that the paper doesn't get too dark—and all that is, of course, very much like what a painter does. So it is a very physical thing; and I love this sheet of paper itself, this lush, crisp thing. A piece of photographic paper has its own elegance, how it bows when you have it hanging in one hand or in two, and manipulate it, expose it to light—I guess it is quite a gestural thing. And now I have set up a new darkroom where I can be more involved with that.

NK “Painting with light.”

WT Well, you know, it's an obvious term that comes to mind, but, on the other hand, I think it's been used in the past in an apologetic way, in the past decades, trying to sort of bring photography to some level of perceived higher-well, to painting's status. But I don't want to mimic painting, and I think it's actually crucial that they are photographs. In a way, they are not doing anything that photog-

(Right)
Wolfgang Tillmans,
Super Collider #3,
color photograph
(medium, edition size, and
dimensions vary), 2001



(Far right)
Wolfgang Tillmans
*Lutz & Alex looking at
crotch*, color photograph
(medium, edition size, and
dimensions vary), 1991



raphy doesn't do anyway, because they are recording light. They're inherently photographic, and they are not like painting. I mean they are not abusing the photographic process to do something else and so in that way they are as truthful as any photo can be. I think that it goes back to just letting them be what they are in front of you. Another thing that is important about them and which ties them into all the rest of my work is the simplicity of how they are done. And even though I don't want to explain the exact technical process, the fact is that they are made very simply, and, as with all my other pictures, I am interested in how I can transform something simple, or even something complicated, into something else.

NK After you started taking pictures in clubs, you took pictures with your friends that were not spontaneous, but were collaborations with the subjects.

WT Yes, in '89, or shortly after, I started to use people as actors of ideas, or actors of their own ideas, like a kind of collaboration, or a way for me to see what I would like to see. I soon realized that photography is a good way to see situations with your own eyes that you would like to see, like scenes of togetherness, for example, and you can't -it's kind of strange to ask people, "Could you hold each other because I want to see what it looks like?" But with a camera everybody instantly agrees, they understand that that is a good enough reason. And this is actually one thing that I really enjoy

about photography and have used ever since I noticed it is possible: a camera gives a good reason to be allowed to look at things.

NK Were the Lutz & Alex photographs structured as fashion in some way? They were done for *i-D* weren't they?

WT They were in *i-D*, yes. I realized that the fashion pages were actually the 'only pages in a magazine where you could think about these things and publish pictures without having to tell a story or be documentary or report something. It's the only space in a magazine where you can just show pictures for what they are. And they were using a magazine as a reason to enact something I wanted to see. I really wanted to bring my ideas of sexuality into this context of *i-D*, to represent a man and a woman as partners, rather than the woman as the sexploited one and the man in control. The man is, in a way, as exposed as the woman, since toplessness isn't equal in the genders, it's only equal when [as in these pictures] it's topless for the woman and bottomless for the man. So there were a lot of ideas which I had gathered over the years which in this weekend all crystallized. And so the pretext was, yes, it is a fashion story for *i-D*, but what was going on there were things that I wanted to do and the clothes idea I had, and so it's just been my work. Saying it's fashion but meaning that it's not my work is wrong; that it said what it did in a fashion context was totally intentional.

(right)
Wolfgang Tillmans,
Faltenwurf (twisted)
c-print 2000

following page:
Cliff, c-print, 2000



NK I loved it when you said once that you don't believe in snapshots, because it made me wonder whether maybe we're all too visually aware to even be able to take a snapshot anymore.

WT The big misunderstanding of the '90s was people thinking it's all about "anything goes," people snapping snapshots. The notion that you can take anything has been around a long time; in terms of art it's not a very interesting idea. But, on the other hand, I am always interested in how I can make photography do for me what I want it to by any means possible, including car-

-rying a small camera around with me at times. So there are moments when I just try and see, well, can I take a picture of this at two o'clock in the morning somewhere? It is possible that a great picture can come from that.

NK AA Breakfast.

WT Yes, for example. Exactly-in that moment it was the appropriate camera. No other camera would have given me that picture. In a way, that is a good example of when a very of-the-moment, in-the-moment readiness of the camera is the only

way for the camera to be. But that's not my dogma. That it does happen now, here, this second, doesn't make it any better or any more authentic. I think that's what I've wanted to say. I don't want people to assume that my pictures are any more or less real than anyone else's—they are all real because they all happened in front of the camera. But then at the same time they are all constructions, they are not real, they are photographs, and they are my way of making the camera do what I want it to do, or trying to. And it's always more like an attempt. And it's a lifelong process to get better at it.

NK Some of your new works, such as the ink-jet prints of the Conquistador series, are editioned rephotographs from one-of-a-kind originals. Is that how you edition your non-abstract work as well?

WT No. Normally I have a negative and I print from that. But conceptually the uniqueness of the abstract ones is not important to me, and so I only keep them unique when it's technically necessary, that is, when they can't be re-photographed in a good enough quality.

NK Would that apply to the Blushes?

WT Yes. To be exact, they stay unique because the shifts in color are so faint that I can't really photograph that again. But in general, whenever I can, I edition them because I do believe in that image, and I want to use it at least a few times, rather than it just being done once and then gone. But because I either do all the prints myself, or they are done in my studio, I can only do a small number, and that is why my editions are always small, either one or three or ten.

NK What about the ink-jet prints? I remember you referred to them as "manifestations" of the image, and that if one deteriorated out in the world ten years from now that you would replace it, is that right? You seemed to acknowledge their inherent Impermanence.

WT Yes, with those it is actually part of the work. I know that they will deteriorate, but there is nothing I can do about it, and the qualities that I get from the ink jet are definitely worth it for me since they offer something that no other technique can offer. And, to be honest, I think they are probably the most archival conceptually, because



you can just store the original master print that was used to print the ink jet from, in whatever safe, dark, cool

conditions you need to, and then you can reprint the picture as many times as is necessary—as long as you destroy the previous one—and also given that ink-jet printing will always become better, it's actually a very safe medium. In a way this fragility of the ink jet is kind of an image of paradox—this sort of fragile and perishable quality which is also its beauty. I guess I could have an easier life if I didn't care so much about all those different manifestations of an image, you know, didn't care about making the prints myself or in my studio, but somehow that is my work also, and the time spent dealing with a print is also time spent with the work. And I do understand my work better through that. I can judge it better, because if I

have spent many hours making it I do have a closer eye on it than if it just arrived from the lab at the gallery ready-mounted, ready-framed.

NK You mentioned that you would be going back to—not that you ever left-taking more portraits of people again, like the portrait Cliff in this show.

WT Yes, the whole last year I've been taking more portraits again and it's something I guess I won't ever really tire of—sometimes I don't feel I have anything to add to that, and then suddenly after a year or two I find there's a renewed, a refreshed interest in people, because in a way being tired of people as a whole would be a dangerous thing to happen, for me. The act of taking a portrait is just such a fundamental human act—it's a fundamental artistic act—and the process of it is a very direct human exchange, and that is what I find interesting about it. The dynamics of it never change, no matter how successful you are or how successful the sitter is or how famous anybody involved is, the actual dynamics of vulnerability and exposure and embarrassment and honesty do not change, ever. And so I found that portraiture is a good leveling instrument for me. It always just sends me back to square one. I'm not saying it's something you can't get better at of course, it develops. But it requires me as a person to be sort of intact and fluid. +++