

Wolfgang Tillmans *Fold Me*

September 7–October 14, 2023
525 and 533 West 19th Street, New York

Press preview: Thursday, September 7, 4 PM
Opening reception: Thursday, September 14, 6–8 PM



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Watering, a*, 2022. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/Hong Kong; Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne; and Maureen Paley, London

David Zwirner is pleased to present *Fold Me*, Wolfgang Tillmans's fourth solo exhibition with the gallery, on view across 525 and 533 West 19th Street in New York. The exhibition attests to the singularity of Tillmans's expansive vision and meditates on the simultaneity of life. *Fold Me* will feature an entirely new body of work by the artist, and follows Tillmans's major retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in the fall of 2022. Titled *Wolfgang Tillmans: To look without fear*, the survey is currently on view at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, through October 1, 2023, and will later travel to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (November 11, 2023 to March 3, 2024).

A fold is an encounter of the inside and the out, a change of direction leaving a physical impression. In his work, Tillmans invites an interplay of chance and control, of consideration and coincidence, of process and time. He folds the world back onto paper. At a time when image-making technology is accelerating into an unknown new, Tillmans's pictures in *Fold Me* calmly rely on the photographic translation/recording of the act of seeing: from eye to paper via the analog use of the digital camera.

The fold has been a recurring visual trope in Tillmans's work since the 1990s, when he made his first *Faltenwurf (Drapery)* images. He developed the theme further in his *paper drop* and *Lighter* works, formalizing the fold as a concept that articulates the materiality of photography. Tillmans has long been interested in Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's monad, which sees folds and foldings as "not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside."¹ For the artist, the fold collapses linear delineations and boundaries of separation, for instance between image and its carrier, and opens up the potential for reimagining the curvature of space.

Provo, Utah and the Wasatch Range of the Rocky Mountains (2023) and *Lunar Landscape* (2022) take the folds of Earth's surface as their subject. The stark contrast between a flat urban landscape that encounters a mountain range and the effect of the full moon reflecting on the innumerable curves of the Atlantic's surface results in almost diametrically opposite interpretations of landscapes, presented here as fragments of a larger whole that escapes containment.

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1986), pp. 96–97.

Tillmans's examination of water in its different states punctuates the exhibition. *Watering, a* (2022) is a carefully composed still life that Tillmans made in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. The image depicts bottle caps that appear to hover in midair, resting on the top segment of transparent plastic bottles alongside a water sachet—the most widely available form of safe drinking water in West Africa. In *Power Station (Low Clouds)* (2023) a plume of water vapor from a power station silently traverses a layer of low clouds, casting a shadow. The elegance of vapor on top of vapor can only disguise the messiness of our hunger for energy so much.

A sense of intentionality and intimacy are revealed by the still lifes in the exhibition: from the overgrown plants and flowers in *Inner City Poppy Pods* (2022), deliberately grown by Tillmans from experiments with seedlings, to *Lagos still life II* (2022), a monumental still life of slightly bruised mangos and plantains that lay on a bed alongside local plastic bags, herbs, and an ornament. In another large-scale still life, *Rain Splashed Painted Life* (2022), what at first reads as a play of scale, suggesting a romantic landscape of a horizon at dusk, reveals itself to be a close-up view of a mud-splattered wall. The wall itself, painted olive green, reveals in the upper part of the frame a white painted edge, creating the effect of the work's border bleeding into the image.

New York from New Jersey (2022) articulates the artist's ongoing fascination with the city of New York as well as its surrounding landscape and the infrastructure that supports the city's constant ebb and flow. Among the most photographed subjects on earth, New York occupies a special place in the history of photography. In Tillmans's picture, we see the city itself as a slim line of spikes, a distant body connected to traffic arteries in a vast landscape devoted to transport and the distribution of goods.

Also included in the exhibition is *Seeing the Scintillation of Sirius Through a Defocused Telescope* (2023), a video projection depicting Sirius, the brightest star flickering in the night sky. Intrigued by the question whether it would be possible to record the twinkling of a star in real time, Tillmans succeeded by slightly defocusing his telescope to make the star appear as a small blurry disk on his camera's sensor. The cold white ray of light from Sirius is refracted and bounced around as it passes through the Earth's atmosphere. Air currents and air cells of different densities result in an ever-changing flicker, blur, and display of spectral colors and shapes. The movement of the star across the projection screen is owed to Earth's rotation. A study of "seeing"—the technical term in astronomy that describes the degree of degradation of an image through turbulence in the Earth's atmosphere—this work reverses a negative into a visual pleasure available to most of mankind during the winter months, when Sirius is visible twinkling in the evening sky.

The exhibition's focus on inanimate subjects is juxtaposed with the inclusion of new portraits, among them two Iranian artists, a queer activist in Lagos, a Crimean Tatar refugee working in Toronto, and a New York-based film producer. These portraits attest to Tillmans's ongoing investigation of what it means to depict a person. His portraits are at times long planned and at other times the result of unexpected interactions or in-the-moment encounters. Each of these portraits speaks of a distinct moment in history, and the relationship that each of these subjects maintains with their present.

Interspersed in the exhibition alongside the artist's figurative pictures are new *Lighters*, a body of work that Tillmans began in 2005. Explicitly not windows to something else, these non-referential photographic paper sculptures are folded in the darkroom before exposure or, at times, after processing. The colors and shapes are the result of Tillmans drawing with light sources on differently folded

light-sensitive papers. As such, Tillmans's *Lighters* have a three-dimensional physicality that carries an image of its own genesis.

My work is informed and sustained by acknowledging and enduring the extremely low probability of making a good picture. That does not mean that everything is coincidence, or that my work is the result of amassing and selecting images. It is an experimental arrangement of sensitivities that I have built over a long time, with different modes of observation and a continuous fine-tuning that lead to the images that make up my work. —Wolfgang Tillmans

Born in 1968 in Remscheid, Germany, Wolfgang Tillmans studied at Bournemouth and Poole College of Art and Design in Bournemouth, England, from 1990 to 1992.

Few artists have shaped the scope of contemporary art and influenced younger generations more than Tillmans. In a career spanning almost four decades, he has consistently redefined the medium of photography through a seamless integration of genres, subjects, techniques, and exhibition strategies. His inventive practice pairs intimacy and playfulness with a commitment to social awareness and a persistent questioning of existing values and hierarchies. Guided by a profound sense of curiosity and care towards his subjects, Tillmans seeks to expand the poetic possibilities of the medium while addressing the fundamental question of what it means to create pictures in an increasingly image-saturated world. As the artist states, "The underpinning of my work has always been the use of my medium and everything it offers in order to make a new picture."²

In 2000, Tillmans was the first photographer and first non-British artist to receive the Turner Prize, an award given annually by Tate in London. From 2003 to 2009, Tillmans served as a professor at the Städelschule in Frankfurt. In 2009, he was selected to serve as an artist trustee on the board of Tate. He has been a member of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, since 2012 and was appointed a member of the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in 2013. Tillmans was the recipient of the 2015 Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography and in January 2018, he was awarded the Kaiserring (Emperor's Ring) prize from the city of Goslar in Germany. Tillmans was named one of the TIME100 Most Influential People of 2023.

Since the early 1990s, Tillmans's work has been the subject of prominent solo exhibitions at international institutions, including Tate Britain (2003); P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York (2006); Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2006), which traveled to Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2006–2007), Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC (2007), and Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (2008); Serpentine Gallery, London (2010), which traveled to venues in South America including Museo de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, Museo de Arte del Banco de la República, Bogotá, Colombia, Museo de Arte de Lima, Peru, and Museo de Artes Visuales, Santiago, Chile; Kunsthalle Zürich (2012), which traveled to Les Rencontres d'Arles, France (2013); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2013); and The National Museum of Art, Osaka (2015). Also in 2015, *Book for Architects*, a two-channel video installation, was on view at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. In 2016, a solo show of the artist's work was hosted by Museu Serralves, Porto, Portugal.

In 2017, the Tate Modern, London, held a major survey of Tillmans's work. The artist also presented a new immersive installation featuring his work in music and video in the South Tank at the museum. Later

²Tillmans, "Interview with Julia Peyton-Jones and Hans Ulrich Obrist," in Sophie O'Brien and Melissa Larner, *Wolfgang Tillmans*. Exh. cat. (London: Serpentine Gallery, 2010), p. 23.

that year, solo shows of Tillmans's work were on view at the Fondation Beyeler in Basel, marking the institution's first comprehensive examination of photography as a medium, as well as at the Kunstverein in Hamburg.

Fragile, a major solo exhibition of the artist's work, opened in 2018 at the Musée d'Art Contemporain et Multimédias in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, organized by Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, Stuttgart, Germany, and traveled throughout Africa, with its last stop at Art Twenty One and Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, Nigeria. *Qu'est-ce qui est différent?* was presented at Carré d'Art - Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes, France, in 2018. *Rebuilding the Future* was on view at Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, in 2018–2019. The exhibition *Today Is The First Day* was presented at WIELS, Brussels, in 2020. *Sound is Liquid* was on view at the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna, in 2022.

A major traveling exhibition of Tillmans's work, *To look without fear*, opened at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in September 2022, and subsequently traveled to the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, in April 2023. The presentation will go on view at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in November 2023.

The artist has operated the nonprofit exhibition space Between Bridges since 2006. Located in London until 2011, Between Bridges has exhibited a range of work by artists, including David Wojnarowicz, Ull Hohn, Charlotte Posenenske, and Charles Henri Ford. In January 2014, it reopened in Berlin with a solo show of work by Patrick Caulfield.

Tillmans considers the printed page to be an important venue for his work. He is deeply involved in the publication of artist books and monographs, and regularly contributes to magazines. Publications that have been designed and edited by the artist include *manual* (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007); *Lighter* (Hatje Cantz, 2008); *Abstract Pictures* (Hatje Cantz, 2011); *FESPA Digital / FRUIT LOGISTICA* (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2012); *Neue Welt* (Taschen, 2012); *The Cars* (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2015); *What Is Different?* (Sternberg Press, 2018); and *four books* (Taschen, 2020); amongst others. In 2019, the artist guest edited *Aperture's* "Spirituality" issue.

In recent years, Tillmans has been more directly involved in political activism. In tandem with his ongoing *Truth Study Center* project (begun in 2005), he has created posters for the anti-Brexit campaign in Britain and in response to right-wing populism in Germany.

Work by the artist is held in museum collections worldwide. The artist joined David Zwirner in 2014 and had his inaugural exhibition with the gallery in New York the following year. In 2018, his work was the subject of two solo exhibitions at the gallery's Hong Kong and New York locations. Tillmans lives and works in Berlin and London.

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