

Wolfgang Tillmans

Glade / Clairière

September 5 — October 10, 2026



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Glade / Clairière*, exhibition view, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris (2026).
Photo: Jayun Deng—Galerie Chantal Crousel.

Exactly one year after the closing of his exhibition at the Centre Pompidou and following a year at the Beaux-Arts as visiting professor, Wolfgang Tillmans returns to Galerie Chantal Crousel, extending a seamless continuous conversation with Paris.

Since the 1980s, Wolfgang Tillmans has developed a practice grounded in observation and in questioning the realities he encounters. His images are composed as fragments of lived experience while demonstrating that the reality we perceive is also one we actively construct. Portraits, everyday objects, landscapes, fragments of nature, and architecture are all approached with the same degree of attention, without hierarchy – a sustained attentiveness to detail and to the conditions of perception that runs throughout the exhibition.

At the core of the exhibition lies an examination of the line, which in various ways and functions, has played a major role in the artist's practice throughout the years. Tillmans's engagement with the line follows two opposite impulses that nonetheless converge in the finished image. Some lines are drawn – deliberately set, composed, controlled in their placement and colour, – while others emerge as the result of a relationship to the world built on a sense of trust, in which the world itself becomes a partner in the making of the image rather than a subject simply recorded. What looks, in language, like a contradiction – the consciously constructed set against the subconsciously arising – dissolves in the picture itself.

Tillmans's works are the result of meticulous compositions, in which every shift in scale and every condition of light contributes to the organization of the image. Situated at the threshold between the analogue and digital eras, his work addresses questions of collective perception and discernment. While it is impossible to represent the world in its entirety, his practice proposes a way of reading it through detail: a body, a garment, a piece of fruit, a leg. The exhibition title, *Glade / Clairière*, speaks for itself: a word that defines a place where light passes through, serving as a subtle reference both to photography and to the tradition of landscape in art.

In one of the gallery's spaces, Tillmans presents a sculptural installation: large industrial rope loops directly on the floor. Originally designed for towing ships and withstanding extreme loads, they are here detached from their intended function. Their scale, weight, and structure introduce ideas of tension and resilience, while their circular forms suggest lines, with no beginning or end. These forms possess both material and symbolic presence, evoking dynamics of cohesion as well as systems of connection and infrastructures that are simultaneously robust and yet not destructible. They embody a certain sculptural boldness which, although not unprecedented in the artist's exhibitions, reasserts the physical presence of things as a counterweight to the image and to representation itself.

His work engages both with the technical properties of photography and with the production of images of the world that are not directly accessible to the naked eye. In *Lighter* (2005-ongoing), he continues his exploration of photography as a material support. Created from folded sheets of photosensitive paper exposed to coloured light, these works are also a result of Tillmans utilising lines in the process of making. Here, they appear as folded or unfolded lines, separating and organising fields of colour. Situated at the intersection of image and object, they endow the photographic surface with an autonomous presence, heightened by their plexiglas frames, which reinforce their sculptural dimension. The passage from volume to flat surface forms a central axis of his practice: what appears visually self-evident is almost always constructed, while what seems documentary frequently results from carefully anticipated staging.

This is the case with *Intervention, a* (2026), a constellation of droplets refracting the sky and the beach. At first glance, the image may evoke waves breaking into spray. In fact, the photograph originates from water thrown by the artist, who captures the droplets in motion. The apparent motif is therefore the result of both play and a controlled action. This ambiguity of truth, poised between chance and construction, is of particular interest to Tillmans: how do we associate forms, colours, and dynamics within an image in order to draw conclusions about what it depicts?

Forty years after *Lacanau (self)* (1986), a pivotal work in his career, the artist returns to the same location to produce *Lacanau (self)* (2026). The work occupies a space between self-portraiture and the exploration of abstraction, a tension that would become a constant throughout his practice.

Similarly, in a work that oscillates between portraiture, abstraction and a nightlife scene, entitled *After Juan Pablo's Performance Provincetown* (2016), a soft cone of light falls gently on two people in a nightclub, illuminating the back of one figure and another's hand and arm – a moment of tenderness revealed by a single beam of light. In *Nîmes still life* (2018), a bundle of fresh asparagus is held together by a thin red rubber band, which lies over the still life like a protective line.

Quarry belongs to the *Intervention Pictures* (2000–ongoing), in which Tillmans draws directly with light onto photographic paper during exposure in the darkroom, adding coloured lines to the image. Its sibling, *Quarry II* (2001), was exhibited only once, at the Palais de Tokyo in 2002 and depicts a limestone quarry crossed by tree roots. The work establishes a connection between the represented subject and the very composition of its support, whose mineral components allow the inks to adhere to the paper surface. These interventions can be read as deliberate insertions, pointing to the fact that our gaze is constantly subjected to visual overlays. In obscuring what lies behind them, they compel the eye to settle on the closest layer of the visual field. Given that these photographs depict three-dimensional space, the insertions instead assert the flatness of the surface itself, collapsing the illusion of depth back onto the picture plane. These interventions and the resulting dynamics are emblematic of his practice, unfolding in the space between accident and control, representation and materiality.

Paysages à Grande Vitesse brings together landscape photographs taken from high-speed trains in China and France in 2006, in Germany, the US, Japan, Iran, and Portugal over the years, as well as from the artist's InterRail travels in his youth. This sequence of photographs stems from an experimental protocol gradually refined and developed over time, deliberately placing the act of looking in a position of relative loss of control. The selection includes subgroups organised around modes of velocity and different camera technologies, producing different kinds of images and interventions on the pictorial plane. Aside from analogue and digital photographs, Tillmans has also included iPhone pictures from 2008, when the phone's camera sensor would create the image by scanning it line by line, resulting in a slight time difference between the top and bottom line of the image. In these pictures, the temporal shifts unfold as motion blurs of moving objects and as diagonal, distorted lines. The camera records what escapes clear perception with the naked eye, producing images that have emerged through a long process of selection. All of these photographs combine a strong sense of generality with highly structured compositions, at times recalling older modes of landscape representation. They also point to the fact that the landscapes unfolding along high-speed rail lines are themselves the result of centuries of cultivation and human intervention, while again emphasising the line: here appearing as tracks on earth, moving the artist from place to place. The traveling train thus becomes an active part of the image-making process, combining the speed of travel and the camera's shutter speed to create pictures that talk about velocity and proximity in different ways.

Produced at the Cité internationale des arts, the video work *Cité Shadows / Seine Turbulences* unfolds in two consecutive sequences. *Cité Shadows* – recorded over the course of his nine month residency at Cité – presents the artist's silhouette projected onto the studio wall. His shadow moves fluidly through an intimate, and almost ceremonial choreography with the camera, stretching towards the wall's edges, as body and architecture gradually merge. Various audio sources can be heard playing in the studio during filming – a large part of it coming from Lucie Antunes' latest album 'Silence' to which Tillmans contributed his own voice as a collaborator on two of its songs. The work continues Tillmans's sustained engagement with the moving image since the 1980s. The apparent simplicity and playfulness of the filmic apparatus is counterbalanced by its archival dimension, producing an abstract and fleeting form of self-representation that manifests the heart of the creative process taking place in the studio.

The quiet shadow play acts as a silent interval preceding the upbeat, hypnotic dive of the video's second part. *Seine Turbulences* extends this moment of suspension through a broader meditation on the Seine and its opposing currents. Filmed in a single take, the video features the scenic neighbouring river as its protagonist, its waves and eddies naturally syncing with the remixed composition by Juan Pablo Echeverri and Wolfgang Tillmans, *Warm Star* (originally produced in 2016, then remixed and released in 2026) – the track that gives the video part of its title. The water's untamed movement echoes the fluidity, relentlessness and turmoil that have long underlined the social and political contexts of Tillmans's photographic work. It also offers a metaphor for resonance: sound and body vibrating in sync, their sympathetic vibrations thus amplified. Bringing together shadow, water, movement, and sound, Tillmans teases the tamed energy held within our bodies, drawing us into a state of deeply embodied listening, and offering, in turn, a reflection on perception as physical, unstable, and continuously in flux.

Across the exhibition, this tension recurs as one of its central concerns: the interplay between what is consciously made and what is allowed to emerge. Tillmans neither surrenders entirely to accident nor insists on total authorship – he works in the space where giving something away to the world and shaping it are no longer distinguishable acts. In this sense, the exhibition traces a sustained study of the line in its broadest, most conceptual form: not only as mark or trace, but as the very boundary – always shifting – between intention and the world's own unpredictability.

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Born in 1968 in Remscheid, Germany.
Lives and works in Berlin, Germany and London, United Kingdom.

Throughout his career Wolfgang Tillmans has challenged the potentiality of making pictures and has brought a new kind of subjectivity to photography. He explores traditional genres such as portraiture, still life, or landscape with a constant interest in the limits of visibility by pairing intimacy and playfulness with social critique, thus questioning the existing values and hierarchies. Through the integration of genres, subjects, techniques, and exhibition strategies, Tillmans expands conventional ways of approaching photography and addresses the fundamental question of what it means to create pictures in an increasingly image-saturated world.

In 2000, he was the first photographer and first non-British artist to receive the Turner Prize, from Tate, London. From 2003 to 2009, Tillmans served as a professor at the Städelschule in Frankfurt. Tillmans was the recipient of the 2015 Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography and in January 2018, he was awarded the Kaiserring prize from the city of Goslar in Germany.

The Centre Pompidou hosted a major solo exhibition in June 2025, transforming 6,000 m² of space into a curatorial experiment, establishing a dialogue between his work and the library he is inhabiting for the occasion. This exhibition marks his first institutional monograph in Paris since his ambitious installation at the Palais de Tokyo in 2002.

In recent years, Wolfgang Tillmans has been the subject of major retrospectives at prominent institutions, including the Tate Modern in London in 2017 and the MoMA in New York in 2022. He also curated a significant traveling exhibition across Africa titled *Fragile* (2018 – 2022 in Kinshasa, Nairobi, Johannesburg, Addis Ababa, Yaoundé, Accra, Abidjan, Lagos).

The work of Wolfgang Tillmans has notably been the subject of solo exhibitions at Centre Pompidou, Paris (2025); Albertinum, Dresden (2025); AGO, Toronto (2023); SFMOMA, San Francisco (2023); MoMA, Museum of Modern Art, New-York (2022); mumok, Wien (2021); Wiels Brussels (2020); Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2019); Carré d'art, Nîmes (2018); Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel (2017); Tate Modern, London (2017); Fundação de Serralves, Porto (2016); The National Museum of Modern Art, Osaka (2015); Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia (2014); Museo de Arte de Lima, Lima (2013); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2012); Sao Paulo Museum of Modern Art, Sao Paulo (2012); Serpentine Gallery, London (2010); Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2008); Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington (2007); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2006); Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporanea, Mexico (2006); Castello di Rivoli, Rivoli (2002); Museum Ludwig, Köln (2001) ; Museo Nacional Reina Sofia, Madrid (1998) among others.

Wolfgang Tillmans was also featured in several international group shows and Biennales such as: 36th Biennale of São Paulo, São Paulo (2025) ; Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (2023); Bourse de Commerce, Fondation Pinault, Paris (2022); Centre Pompidou Metz (2021); Fondation Beyeler, Riehen (2021); The Kitchen, New York (2020); Barbican Centre, London (2020); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2019); MOCA Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2019); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2019); MMK, Frankfurt (2018); Villa Medici, Rome (2018); Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich (2018); Aishti Foundation, Liban (2017); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2017); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2017); Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2016); CAPC, Bordeaux (2016); Museo Jumex, Mexico City (2015); The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (2015); MANIFESTA 10, St Petersburg (2014); 14th International Architecture, Central Pavilion, Venice Biennale, Venice (2014); Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2014); New Museum, New York (2013); Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover (2013); Tate Britain, London (2012); Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2011); Les Rencontres d'Arles, Arles (2010); Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai (2010); Turin Triennial, Turin (2008); Museum Ludwig, Köln (2007); Kunstmuseum, Basel (2005).

His works have joined the collections of the Fondation Beyeler, Basel; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines; Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel; Kyoto National Museum of Art, Kyoto; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; CAPC, Bordeaux; Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean (MUDAM), Luxembourg; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo (MAXXI), Rome; Museum Ludwig, Köln; MOCA Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Royal Academy of Arts, London; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate Britain, London; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.