

Wolfgang Tillmans

How likely is it that only I am right
in this matter?

519, 525 & 533 West 19th Street, New York

September 13–October 20, 2018



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(c), 2018 Inkjet on paper

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of new and recent work by Wolfgang Tillmans across the gallery's three locations on West 19th Street in New York. Choosing a markedly different approach to his inaugural show at David Zwirner in 2015, Tillmans here eschews his signature style of floor-to-ceiling installations in favor of a more minimal, linear presentation concise in subject matter as well as scope. Featuring photographs, video and sound, and a spoken-word piece, the show revisits themes explored by the artist throughout his thirty-year career, but also initiates a subtle reevaluation of how to portray a world consistently in flux.

Since the early 1990s, Tillmans's works have epitomized a new kind of subjectivity in photography, pairing intimacy and playfulness with social critique and the persistent questioning of existing values and hierarchies. Through his seamless integration of genres, subjects, techniques, and exhibition strategies, he has expanded conventional ways of approaching the medium, and his practice continues to address the fundamental question of what it means to create pictures in an increasingly image-saturated world.

In a continuation of his recent spatial interventions to exhibition spaces at the Museu Serralves, Porto in 2016 and at the Kunstverein Hamburg in 2017, Tillmans has made small changes to the gallery's architecture and lighting, which subtly draw attention to some of the conditions that guide perception. Each room in the show constitutes a self-contained environment that reverberates in the others, setting up unexpected dialogues across the three galleries at the same time as creating a continuous viewing experience.

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The photographs on view were alternately created with a photocopy machine, in the darkroom, and with a camera. A common denominator is a focus on materiality and the surface of the physical world: closeup depictions of sand and foam find counterpoints in aerial views of deserts and rivers, but ultimately conflate notions of macro and micro; textile folds suggest presence and absence at once; and collages with eggs, insects, and intertwining body parts reveal layers of life and decay, sex and fragmentation. For these works, Tillmans composes the image on a book printing press, exposing different pictures to the plates while he processes them. As such, they represent his latest subversion of the still photograph, with the actual act of arranging the plates akin to performance. Other works were created directly on a photocopier by manually moving paper edges while scanning in four colors. The resulting ink-on-paper compositions challenge the medium specificity of a photograph while also emphasizing its inherent alchemical qualities.

The exhibition also presents a large selection of new *Silvers*, which form part of an ongoing group of abstract works begun in 1998. Made by manually feeding paper through a darkroom processor filled with exhausted photo chemicals, they reveal deceptively nuanced “chemical realities” with equal degrees of cause-and-effect and coincidence as a representational photograph. For Tillmans, the rhythmic pattern created by the paper’s gradual movement—during which it endures different pressure points and varying amounts of residue—is comparable to notation and the visualization of sound in sonograms. In *Silver 198* (2017), a mishap in the darkroom whereby two pieces of photographic paper stuck together face to face, preventing the developing liquid to reach the entire surface, resulted in a strong juxtaposition of light and dark. Their direct contact creates a subtle analogy to images of bodies clinging to each other elsewhere in the show.

Video is another means by which Tillmans explores a style of narration that at once diverges from and resembles the still photograph. In *Rebar* (2018), part of an installation comprising three works, the artist causes movements and unexpected musicality of steel rods at a construction site. A video showing the Gherkin building under construction in London—where an otherwise seemingly still image is constantly moving due to hot air turbulence from the artist’s open studio window and passing birds—features a percussion soundtrack by Tillmans created on a triangle and by manipulating a digital audio recorder (*Swiss RE / Triangle*, 2002/2017). Music by Tillmans also accompanies *Completely Changed* (2017), which depicts the gentle motions of the telescope at the Roque de los Muchachos Observatory in La Palma, Spain.

Playing within a near-empty, darkened room, *I want to make a film* (2018) is a new sound piece in which a male voice discusses plans for a film about the computing power of smartphones. Disarming and quixotic in its bewilderment, it maintains a daring and

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powerful insistence on the act of questioning, which ultimately reverts back to the question posed in the exhibition's title: How likely is it that only I am right in this matter?

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. In 2000, he was the first photographer and first non-British artist to receive the Turner Prize, an award given annually by Tate in London. In 2009, he received the Kulturpreis der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Photographie and 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 (or "Emperor's Ring") prize from the city of Goslar in Germany.

Since the early 1990s, Tillmans's work has been the subject of prominent solo shows at international institutions. Recent venues include Tate Modern, London; Fondation Beyeler, Basel; and Kunstverein Hamburg, all in 2017. The artist's first solo exhibition in Africa, *Wolfgang Tillmans: Fragile*, was on view earlier this year at the Musée d'Art Contemporain et Multimédias in Kinshasa. The show has traveled to the Circle Art Gallery and The GoDown Arts Centre in Nairobi and is currently presented at the Johannesburg Art Gallery (through September 30, 2018). On view through September 16, 2018 is *Wolfgang Tillmans: What Is different?* at Carré d'Art – Musée d'art contemporain in Nîmes, France. This fall, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, will present a solo exhibition of the artist's work.

Since 2006, the artist has operated the non-profit exhibition space Between Bridges, which has just become a foundation with the dual aim of supporting the arts and protecting democracy, with a special focus on antiracism and LGBTIQ rights internationally. 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. From 2003 to 2009, Tillmans served as a professor at the Städelschule in Frankfurt.

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. Recent publications that have been designed and edited by the artist include *Wolfgang Tillmans: manual* (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007); *Wolfgang Tillmans: Lighter* (Hatje Cantz, 2008); *Wolfgang Tillmans: Abstract Pictures* (Hatje Cantz, 2011); *Wolfgang Tillmans: FESPA Digital / FRUIT LOGISTICA* (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2012); *Neue Welt: Wolfgang Tillmans* (Taschen, 2012); and *Wolfgang Tillmans: The Cars* (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2015).

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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. For the 2018 edition of Sternberg Press's Jahresring, the artist guest-edited and designed *What Is Different?*, a publication including interviews with scientists, politicians, journalists, and social workers on the issues of societal consensus, fake news, and psychological findings such as the backfire effect.

Work by the artist is held in museum collections worldwide, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The National Museum of Art, Osaka; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate, London; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Tillmans lives and works in Berlin and London.

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