

# David Zwirner

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## Wolfgang Tillmans *The Point Is Matter*

March 25–May 11, 2024  
5–6/F, H Queen's,  
80 Queen's Road Central,  
Hong Kong



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Filled with Light, a*, 2011. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/Hong Kong; Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne; and Maureen Paley, London

David Zwirner is pleased to present *The Point Is Matter*, a solo exhibition of new and recent work by Wolfgang Tillmans at the gallery's location in Hong Kong. The exhibition's title stems from Tillmans's long-term understanding of his work sitting between the physical reality and presence of the world he works and lives in and the conceptual, sociopolitical, sensual, and spiritual concerns that underpin his practice. Presented across both floors of the gallery, the works on view include depictions of changing forms of atmosphere and elusive natural phenomena; pictures that explore notions of time and temporality; and images that engage with the artist's expansive conceptions of the still life and the portrait. Tillmans punctuates the exhibition with works made in Addis Ababa, Berlin, Lagos, and Mongolia, along with those taken in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, sensitively invoking resonant associations between the local and the world at large, while advocating for an experience of connectedness that is rooted in the process of looking.

In each of the gallery spaces, distinct subject matter emerges. Among them is a room that focuses on images that picture the cycle of water as it transitions from a liquid to a solid (ice) to a gas (water vapor). In *Lunar Landscape* (2022), the Atlantic Ocean glows at great luminosity, the image colliding the celestial plane with the surface of the Earth. *Sirius Through a Defocused Telescope, a–f* (each 2023) show Sirius, the brightest star visible to the human eye, at distinct moments as the star "twinkles." The works depict air currents and air cells of different densities that result in an ever-changing flicker, blur, and display of spectral colors and shapes. Astronomy represents the artist's earliest passion, having trained his eye through the observation of the physical universe, the sky, and celestial phenomena.

Tillmans further indicates the subtle geological movements and natural states of matter in a world undergoing historic and rapid changes. In *Ulaanbaatar Still Life* (2023), arranged in Mongolia, silk flowers rest on a heating unit in front of a window that overlooks a snowy landscape and a *ger*, a portable tent that can withstand fierce winter winds, used in the region as a nomadic, adaptable home. *Summer Storm Rain Drops Freeze Frame* (2023) captures rain droplets outside the artist's studio in Berlin in an otherwise imperceptible moment of transition.

Other works in the show delicately evince a sense of temporality. These pictures evoke the cumulative passage of time in the distinct moments they depict. *Filled with Light, a* (2011) exposes in large scale the luminous shifts that Tillmans observed in his studio, rays of light casting the shadows of window frames onto the bare floor, walls, and ceiling. In *Window Left Open* (2023), another work Tillmans made in his studio, we see a layered interplay between light and shadow, interior and exterior architecture, and domesticized vegetation. In other works on view, Tillmans reflects further on transformative processes. In *Office Paper For Food Wrapping Recycling, Addis Ababa* (2019), discarded business papers are repurposed as packing material. In *Temporary Shoe Shop* (2022), a car hood and windscreen are covered in trainers—the surfaces effectively converted into a retail outlet in Lagos.

Tillmans's expanded approach to still life and the portrait are emphasized throughout the exhibition. In a large still life, citrus fruit and a smoked cigarette in an ashtray are laid atop a copy of the *Los Angeles Times* from 2001. In *Badehose, photocopy II* (1996), the sculptural qualities of swimming trunks are translated into two-dimensionality, their folds abstracted further by the photocopying process. Though recognizable, the otherwise distorted, crumpled form is suggestive of the way in which figuration and abstraction coexist within Tillmans's oeuvre, as well as the relationship of photography to surface and three-dimensionality.

Tillmans's portraits are at times long-planned, at other times the result of unexpected interactions or in-the-moment encounters. The portraits shown in this exhibition range from *Anders Stretching On the Carpet* (2022), of his oft-photographed long-term friend, the Danish artist Anders Clausen, to *Zaur Abduraimov* (2023), a Crimean Tatar refugee whom Tillmans shot in Toronto, where Abduraimov works; from Jodie Foster, an actor long admired by the artist, photographed in his kitchen, to the women of *Maraljingo, Sambuunyam & Norimaa in their ger* (2023), which shows multiple generations of a Mongolian family in their home. Tillmans's portraits have served as an ongoing investigation: what does it mean to depict a person?

A new video work on view, *Build from Here (Video Room)* (2024), extends Tillmans's fascination with the interplay between his video and music-making languages and showcases his interest in sound and movement. The video features tracks from the artist's forthcoming album, *Build From Here*, to be released on April 26; Tillmans will be working on the video right through the installation period, in response to the exhibition. The video consists of footage recorded by Tillmans at different times and locations. In the opening and closing sequences we see Tillmans's body at moonrise, silhouetted as the full moon illuminates the ocean; he performs gestures with a large stick-like form that exaggerates the body's improvised movements as he effectively draws in space. Another sequence shows telescopic imagery of the surface of the moon: shot in real time, it reveals the rotation of the earth as the moon gradually moves across the screen. Punctuating the footage is close-up imagery of an industrial offset printer in action, in which ink rollers covered in paint show the different stages of the analogue printing process.

Tillmans has visited and returned to Hong Kong and Shenzhen on numerous occasions in his extensive travels and across his body of work. *HKG Airport Interior* (2023) shows a largely dysfunctional informational display wall, with a pixelated screen frozen in a moment of technological rupture. In *HK drive* (2018), an image of an outreached hand on the back of a Hong Kong bus merges with the porticoed stairwell on the street—the public built environment seamlessly flowing into the visual excesses of advertising. Portraits such as those of a young woman, Yixue, seated in a banquet hall, and a scene of packages toppling onto a Shenzhen street connect the presentation to the surrounding metropolis and region.

This exhibition follows his 2023 solo exhibition *Fold Me* at David Zwirner New York and his major 2022–2023 traveling retrospective *To look without fear* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. This will be the artist's fifth solo exhibition with the gallery and his second at David Zwirner Hong Kong.

Wolfgang Tillmans was born in 1968 in Remscheid, Germany, and 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."<sup>1</sup>

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 Museu 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, 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 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Tillmans, "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.

*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 the Spring of 2023; and to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in November 2023– March 2024.

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. Tillmans lives and works in Berlin and London.

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