



<b>Exhibition</b>	<b>Wolfgang Tillmans. View from above</b>
<b>Curator</b>	Giorgio Verzotti
<b>Catalogue</b>	Charta, Milan
<b>Press Office</b>	Massimo Melotti, Responsible Alessandra Santerini, Consultant Manuela Vasco, ph. 011 9565209 Silvano Bertalot, ph. 011 9565211 fax 011 9565231 e-mail: <a href="mailto:press@castellodirivoli.org">press@castellodirivoli.org</a>
<b>Press preview</b>	Monday, February 18, 2002, 11:30 a.m.
<b>Opening</b>	Tuesday, February 19, 2002, 7:00 p.m.
<b>Dates</b>	February 20 – May 5, 2002
<b>Hours</b>	Tuesday – Friday, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, 10:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. 1 <sup>st</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sat. of the month, 10 a.m. – 7 p.m.
<b>Entrance</b>	€ 6.20 (Itl. 12,000) full price; € 4.13 (Itl. 8,000) reduced price
<b>Location</b>	Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Piazza Mafalda di Savoia 10098 Rivoli (Turin)
<b>Education services and public programs</b>	Education Department ph. 011 9565213 - fax 011 9565232 e-mail: <a href="mailto:educa@castellodirivoli.org">educa@castellodirivoli.org</a>
<b>Shuttle bus service</b>	Saturday, Sunday and holidays departure from Turin, Piazza Castello information ph. 011 9565280
<b>Information</b>	ph. 011 9565220 <a href="http://www.castellodirivoli.org">www.castellodirivoli.org</a> e-mail: <a href="mailto:info@castellodirivoli.org">info@castellodirivoli.org</a>

## **Wolfgang Tillmans. *View from above***

International critics consider Tillmans one of the most innovative photographers of his generation. The artist became well known in the early 1990s with photographs that, on the one hand referred to pop and alternative culture and addressed sexual taboos, and on the other hand proposed an esthetic outside the usual mold. His works appear not only in publications such as *Interview*, *Index* and the English alternative magazine *i-D*, but also are used by the mass media and recognized by an increasingly broad public.

In 2000 Tillmans was the recipient of the prestigious Turner Prize, awarded by Tate Britain in London. Mary Horlock, curator of the catalogue, writes: "Tillmans is an artist who considers issues of esthetics and conventional codes of representation. [...] he pushes beyond the surface of contemporary culture and encourages us to do the same."

Tillmans was born in 1968 in Remscheid (Germany); from 1987 to 1990 he lived and worked in Hamburg, where he had his first solo exhibitions, and then moved to England, where he attended the Bournemouth & Poole College of Art & Design. In 1994-1995 he lived in New York. Since 1993 he has exhibited in Cologne, Frankfurt, Zurich, London, Paris, New York and Berlin. In 1995 the Kunsthalle in Zurich held a solo exhibition of his work; that same year he had exhibitions at Portikus in Frankfurt and then in Los Angeles and London. The following year his exhibition schedule included a solo show at the Kunstmuseum in Wolfsburg; in 1997 he had his first solo exhibition in Italy, at the Galleria S.A.L.E.S. in Rome.

His more recent exhibitions include a solo show at Espacio Uno, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, in 1998, and *Soldiers*, at the Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen, in 1999. Tillmans has participated in extremely prestigious group exhibitions, including *Apocalypse*, Royal Academy of Arts, London (2000); *Quotidiana*, Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Rivoli (2000); *Zero Gravity*, Kunstverein and Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf (2001); *Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis*, Tate Modern, London (2001). After being presented at the Deichtorhallen in Hamburg, Tillmans' solo exhibition *View from above* will be seen on the third floor of the Manica Lunga of Castello di Rivoli, before moving on to the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, from June 8 to September 15, and at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebaek, from October 11 to January 19 2003.

This exhibition presents a new phase in the artist's work, where he is showing ink-jet prints of an abstract nature, along with his photographs. The process of abstraction is achieved not only in the darkroom, but also can take place as the result of a particular shot: a foreground of a teacup, the folds in a garment, the detail of a snow-covered street. In the catalogue, Giorgio Verzotti writes of the most recent pieces: "Tillmans' recent work is a double register of images and abstract signs that coexist and run on parallel tracks. The realistic photos run up against the large surfaces where pure formal and chromatic values reign, which the artist names according to their formulation. These are works created without the camera, through a complex manipulation of light in direct contact with photosensitive paper [...]."

Catalogue by Charta, Milan. Text by Giorgio Verzotti and interview with Nathan Kernan.

## Foreword

(from the catalogue)

With his early pictures of young people who make no attempt to disguise their identity, desires and behaviour, not to mention his interiors, landscapes and still lifes, Wolfgang Tillmans, born in 1968, has emerged as one of the most influential and innovative photographers of his generation. Since the early 1990s, his work has been presented in countless exhibitions as well as published in such magazines as *i-D*, *Interview* and *Index*. The media have come to view the name Tillmans as virtually synonymous with the improvised fashions, the rituals and the self-perception of pop and sub-culture. The provocative and exciting nature of some of his photographs, the break with sexual taboos, on the one hand, yet the search for beauty in a seemingly “unaesthetic” reality, on the other – such are the polarities that recur in Tillmans’s oeuvre in ever-changing forms. This has contributed to his work, which has been widely spread by the media, having become well known to a broader public, beyond the confines of the worlds of art and photography. When Wolfgang Tillmans was honoured with the prestigious Turner Prize in 2000 in London, this ensured him recognition as an artist who, as curator Mary Horlock eulogized in the Tate Gallery catalogue, “questions conventional aesthetics and codes of representation. Tillmans reaches beneath the surface of contemporary culture and prompts us to do the same”.

If we take his profession to be that of a photographer, then Wolfgang Tillmans is self-taught. Long before taking a more theoretical than practical two-year course in 1990–92 at the Bournemouth College of Art and Design in the south of England, from 1987 he had worked in an artistic capacity in Hamburg. During his time on civilian service in lieu of military service, he concerned himself with the production of Xerox pictures and their various possible layouts. Since he required images on which to base the copies, he purchased a camera and began taking pictures himself. He soon started photographing friends and acquaintances in the sub-culture in which he moved. In 1988, he held his first solo exhibition in the Café Gnosa in Hamburg – an indication that the art scene was already starting to become interested in his photographs. One year later, in 1989, he commenced working with various magazines – such as *i-D* in England – firmly committed to sub-culture.

In 1992, Wolfgang Tillmans relocated to London, a city that strongly attracted him. At this point, he had started creating his first photo installations in galleries and museums. He was primarily interested in portraiture, and sporadically dabbled in fashion photography. Characteristically, from the very outset he chose to undertake only those contracts that he found artistically interesting. However, he used the opportunities afforded by the magazines to change and expand the context of his own photographic work. Unlike commercial fashion photography, in Tillmans’s pictures there is no dichotomy of product and model. His vision is that of an analyst for whom the crucial question is: who wears the clothes, and how are they worn, and how does the wearer use them to define him- or herself? Be it gender-specific, gay or androgynous – the improvised, imaginative clothing of young people presented, or so he felt, a reflection of the respective personalities seeking to forge an identity. In 1995, Tillmans himself reported on this period: “Suddenly, I myself was the one fostering beauty, and that was really exciting: presenting my generation as truly beautiful and not just as crazy, showing the

people in the midst of such a development – I had never viewed myself and those of my own age in this way.”

The exhibition conceived in close co-operation with Tillmans himself for Hamburg, Rivoli near Turin, Paris and Humlebæk marks a new phase in his work. With few exceptions, the selection includes photographs and ink-jet prints from the past four years. This restricted selection reflects Tillmans’s wish to avoid the repetition of older, now tried-and-true motifs, situations and patterns. It also relates to a shift in emphasis in the themes he addresses. The most striking evidence of this trend is his new preference for “abstract”, formally rigorous images. However, it bears asking what the “abstraction” and “rigorous forms” are in Tillmans’s work. [...]

Zdenek Felix, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg

Ida Gianelli, Castello di Rivoli Museo d’Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Turin

Jerôme Sans, Nicolas Bourriaud, Palais de Tokyo, Paris

Poul Erik Tøjner, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk

## Wolfgang Tillmans. View from above

Giorgio Verzotti

[...] The photographer's eye, in this case, is highly selective, and yet the visual schemes he constructs are not superimposed on reality but stem from it. This is why he does not have a single method for approaching the visible, but many, depending on the emotional temperature with which he encounters the outer world. Thus every Tillmans photo leads us to a different universe of meaning. It is this quality that introduces the intensity into his photos: not psychological tension, but the works' constant variation, their taking on meaning from variation and (re)combination, which speaks to us of the contradictory multiplicity of life, which cannot be grasped by a single, unambiguous interpretation.

And so it is from this irreducibility that Tillmans's images embark on their voyage towards abstraction, on a view from above, which – thanks to a changing perspective – discovers abstract schemes, visual modules around which the data of the visible can be organized. For reasons of consistency this elevation of the viewpoint begins with the humble dimensions of the everyday, i.e. with *Naoya Tulips*, 1997, the photograph of a vase of tulips, seen from above, where they appear (in a manner that could hardly be less natural) as a pure formal structure. Indeed, the image is captured as if at the beginning of its genesis, and further focus on details, or perhaps greater distance, would be required in order to read, in the open tulips, pure relationships of chromatic areas. Instead Tillmans shows us not only the entire mass of flowers, but also the leaves and other objects that surround it, as well as his own feet, which inevitably enter the visual field, since in order to obtain that viewpoint the artist has had to climb onto the table. In other words, the process of abstraction remains tied to the organic, as does geometry in Klee's work. Furthermore, it is delegated to an extremely simple act of "de-location" of the photograph and is achieved without any particular technical aid, using the usual exposure times.

The isolation of visual structures is never achieved in a manner that detaches them from their context. The search for language remains anchored to the data of the most immediate visual experience. Tillmans's tendency towards abstraction never takes flight towards the skies of idealism, and the flight itself has nothing Promethean about it, because abstraction is regarded from the outset as an inherent characteristic of the way things are. His recent work is a double register of images and abstract signs that coexist and run on parallel tracks: realistic photos on the one hand, large surfaces that measure up to four to six meters on the other, where pure formal and chromatic values reign, and which the artist entitles *Mental Pictures*, *Strings of Life*, *Blushes*, *Super Collider*, *starstruck* etc. according to their respective conceptual foundation, their basic morphological pattern. These are works created without the camera, with the aid of complex manipulations of light and photosensitive paper the artist presently prefers not to reveal. Naturally, chance and control meet in equal measure in the formative process, which is, like other creative processes, not entirely predetermined and governed by the artist. Thus what originates on the broad surfaces is an inscription of light that becomes event but is organized nonetheless in language, whether formed by evanescent chromatic zones, precise spatial scansions or agglomerations of intense colour. The coexistence of image and abstraction in the artist's recent work once again saves them from the dramatic pathos that these formal ends would achieve if they celebrated a definitive detachment from the visible world. If this doesn't happen it is because, as Tillmans himself says, a total acceptance of life, the ungovernable flow of desire, passes through the work, animating those abstract surfaces after having restored the phenomena of the world to the miraculous light of the "thing in itself".

## What They Are: Conversations with Wolfgang Tillmans

Nathan Kernan

**Nathan Kernan:** Your new work includes a lot of abstractions and abstract landscapes, which act to open it up to less subjective readings. Could you tell me how it came about that you started to make these new abstractions?

**Wolfgang Tillmans:** Generally speaking, the abstractions, the "Views from Above" and the *Intervention Pieces* are products of a self-reflective process that has intensified since I found my work increasingly circulated and discussed in the mid-1990s. My photographs and installations have always oscillated between an exploration of the autonomy of the photographic image as such in a given space or context and the photograph as a medium of social content. To keep this dialogue active, it's been imperative for me to keep questioning and refuting expectations that are brought to my work. By introducing semi-figurative and abstract images into my project a range of questions has arisen, which now equally affect my older, through-the-lens photographs.

**NK** You showed your first semi-abstract and fully abstract group of works in 1998 as the *Parkett Edition 1992–1998*, I believe. This was an act of rejecting expectations, in this case of producing what were perceived as typical examples of your work in a larger edition.

**WT** Yes, usually when I do editions I try to play with the concept of multiples and uniqueness. Ever since I started colour 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 use them as a chance to experiment, to shape the accidental. With a few exceptions I never showed any of these works until I was asked by *Parkett* magazine in 1998 to do an edition, and I gave them sixty of those darkroom accidents and interventions. So everybody got a unique picture. Some of them were manipulated versions of well-known images of mine and others showed only the strange traces of dirt from cleaning my processing machine with blank paper. In any case they all had a peculiar beauty that led me to continue experimenting with interventions onto the photographic image and paper.

I decided I wanted to be in control of this and developed over the past three years different abstract and semi-abstract image types that are at times diametrically opposed to each other, in both the impression they give and in the function they fulfil in space.

**NK** How do you make those *Blush* marks, those wire-thin lines and tiny particles?

**WT** They are all done in the darkroom, with me manually exposing the photographic paper to customized and modified light sources, such as torches. Afterwards the paper is processed normally. All is done by manipulating light on paper, not the negative. Most of the time the chemical process doesn't get manipulated either. It's quite an involved process, which I don't really want to go into because I want the images 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? Where is it? When was it made? How was it taken? A photograph is

always seen through its content and rarely through its presence as an object in itself, whereas when confronted with other art objects one always deals with both aspects. That's what I try to negotiate in my exhibitions by asking myself, for example, "What happens when I put six *Blushes* on this wall by themselves?" or "How does the framed c-print cohabit with the unframed, suspended ink-jet print?"

**NK** To me the *Intervention Pieces* as well as the *Blushes* or *String Pieces* 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?

**WT** It is an act, I mean it is a drawn-out process, which I have to get into. I don't want to over-romanticize it either, but it is a kind of intuitive process, and I need, in a way, to bond with the material that I'm using, and then over time I develop a sense of, say, how to filter to get the colour I want, or how to time the exposure exactly, or make a movement quickly 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.

**NK** "Painting with light."

**WT** Well, you know it's an obvious analogy that comes to mind, but I think it's been used in an apologetic way in the past, trying to bring photography up to what is deemed to be a higher level – well, to that of painting. But I don't want to mimic painting, and I think it's crucial that my works are perceived as photographs. In a way they do not do anything that photography doesn't do anyway, because they record light. They're inherently photographic, and they are not like painting. I mean they do not abuse the photographic process to do something else and so, in that sense, they are as truthful as any photograph can be. Again, I think it goes back to just letting them be what they are.

Another thing that is important about them – and which ties them into the rest of my work – is the simple manner in which they are made. Even though I don't want to explain the technical process, the fact is that they are very simply made, and, as with all my other pictures, I am interested in how I can transform something simple, or even something complicated, into something else. [...]

The conversations that make up this interview were held in February 2001, during Tillmans's show at the Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York, and in June of the same year. An abridged version of the interview appeared in the magazine *Art on Paper*, in May 2001.