

wolfgang tillmans – new world

written by: The Pandorian



The first exhibition in the Kunsthalle Zürich's new and renovated premises at the Löwenbräukunst is dedicated to a reunion with an artist who presented his very first institutional exhibition at the Kunsthalle Zürich in 1995. Since then, Wolfgang Tillmans (born in Remscheid, Germany in 1968, lives and works in Berlin and London) has tested and expanded the possibilities of photography in the most varied ways through his photographic and video works. Along with his latest abstract works, the exhibition *Neue Welt* (New World) presents photographs from the artist's new group of works of the same name, which were created in the course of numerous journeys and are collected here for the first time in a comprehensive show.

For Wolfgang Tillmans the exploration of the image, the question as to how meaning arises on a piece of paper and, accordingly, how an image actually becomes an image, is central to his work. His photographs range from portraits, still-lives, landscapes and sky photographs to scenes involving subcultures and the circulation of goods, spaces of living and transit, abstract and medium-reflexive images; they initiate a polyphonic visual discourse on issues that affect the contemporary world as a whole.

Since starting work as an artist, Wolfgang Tillmans has also focused on the basic and production conditions of photography as a medium. Over the past decade, in particular, he has created abstract works, whose production is no longer bound to the camera. They show traces of light on the photographic paper (particularly in the *Freischwimmer* and *Blushes* series) or involve the chemical and mechanical processing of the light-sensitive material as in the images from the *Silver* series. The *Silver* works, which Tillmans has been creating since 1998, reflect the reaction of the photographic paper to light as well as mechanical and chemical processes.

This focus on the interior perspective and the possibilities offered by purely studio-based activity is now followed, once again, by a focus on the external perspective. Twenty years after Wolfgang Tillmans first started to form an image of the world, he asks himself whether the world can be seen "anew" in an era characterised by a deluge of media images, and whether a sense of the whole can be formed. Tillmans is not only seeking the "new" in terms of political and economic change, but also in relation to the digital development of photography, which due to the potential now available in terms of resolution can now enable the presentation of details with a degree of clarity that no longer reflects the capacity of the human eye and vision. However, because our eyes have become accustomed to high definition standards, the high resolution is akin to a newly felt perception. Equipped with a digital camera, Tillmans travelled from London via Nottingham to Tasmania, via Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, India, China, Papua New Guinea, Australia and Argentina to Chile. He stayed in each place for just a short time—just long enough to focus intensively on the visible surface of the situation there: "The surfaces and even superficiality itself have always interested me, because we basically have to read the truth of things from the world's surface." (Wolfgang Tillmans) Hence, coverings, claddings and façades repeatedly feature in his photographs along with themes from technology and science, such as plants, animals, material deposits, means of transport, airports and shopping centres.

At the exhibition in the Kunsthalle Zürich, the artist juxtaposes these images of the global forward-march of science, technology and the movement of goods and their influences, which affect the most diverse societies in similar ways, with his latest *Silver* works. In this way, he formulates a visual encounter between the external images of contemporary global events and works based on purely mechanical-chemical processes.

As part of a collaborative venture between the LUMA Foundation and the *Les Rencontres d'Arles* photography festival, the exhibition, which is curated by Beatrix Ruf, will travel to Arles in July 2013.

Publication

Wolfgang Tillmans. *Neue Welt* is published by TASCHEN Verlag including numerous images and a conversation between the artist and Beatrix Ruf. 216 pages, German, English, French.