A photograph of a gallery track lighting fixture. A bright, vertical light strip is illuminated, casting a strong glow. To the right, a white cable runs vertically. The fixture is mounted on a dark metal track. In the background, a white rectangular object is visible. The overall scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the track fixture.

Wolfgang Tillmans

Serpentine Gallery



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Sponsor's Foreword

2010 marks the 75th anniversary of the Jaguar name; 75 years of looking forward, designing and building cars that represent the very best of technical innovation and design leadership.

Since our earliest days, we have been inspired to design and develop beautiful fast cars; cars that stand out and stand apart. At no point in our history has this vision been more complete than today with the all new XJ, the internationally renowned XF and the super sleek XK.

As part of our ongoing 75 year celebrations, we are delighted to support the 40th Anniversary of the Serpentine Gallery and proudly sponsor the 2010 Summer Programme and the influential work of Wolfgang Tillmans.

The Serpentine Gallery is widely recognised as one of Britain's most dynamic and creative arts organisations and one which Jaguar is honoured to work with. At Jaguar we endeavour to bring our own sense of passion, glamour and unrivalled style to all that we do. I'm sure that all visitors to this year's Summer Programme will experience this and be captivated by the exhibition throughout.

On behalf of everyone at Jaguar, I wish the 2010 Serpentine Gallery Summer Programme and Wolfgang Tillmans every success.

Mike O'Driscoll
Managing Director
Jaguar Cars

Directors' Foreword

The Serpentine Gallery is delighted to present *Wolfgang Tillmans*, the first major exhibition of the artist's work in London since 2003. He previously exhibited at the Serpentine fifteen years ago – in the group show *Take Me I'm Yours* – and his return to the Gallery is marked by an impressive display of recent work.

Since he made the United Kingdom his home twenty years ago, Tillmans has redefined photography and the ways in which it is presented. In this exhibition, which he conceived specifically for the Serpentine Gallery, he explores the complexities of photographic image-making and exhibition installation. The overall constellation of pictures, as well as each individual work, reflect his engagement with what he describes as 'an abstraction grounded in the real world'.

Tillmans rose to fame in the late 1980s and early 90s for his seemingly casual yet eloquent photographs of the world he inhabited. Astutely reconfiguring ideas about documentary photography and reflecting the discussions surrounding identity politics at that time, the work from this period also captured the fragility of human life and the profound beauty of everyday objects. This early work expanded to engage more fully with the genres of portraiture, landscape, still life and abstraction. But while appropriating and challenging these art-historical categories, Tillmans also maintained a curiosity and innocence about the creation of images, re-inventing these well-known genres with new energy.

Experiment and the unknown have always played a crucial role in Tillmans' practice. An experimental approach to making work has allowed him to move fluidly, combining themes and techniques with innovative exhibition strategies to change the way in which photographic images are created, presented and seen. His abstract work continues to push the boundaries and definitions of the photographic form. As a conceptual approach to photographic

image-making, abstraction has been an integral part of Tillmans' practice since he first started producing images, and was a particular point of reference in the conception of the Serpentine exhibition.

Tillmans uses a range of installation methods, often pinning or taping his work to gallery walls, displaying found material in study tables that recall museological vitrines, or creating wall-based Perspex cases for selected process-based works. Each exhibition is a renegotiation and rearrangement of material, ideas and subjects, and an investigation into the politics of exhibition and image-making – all under-taken with an eye on the smallest detail, but expansive in scope. In every new presentation of his work (which may just as readily take place in a magazine, newspaper or art publication) the artist reconfigures this vast network of accumulated images, mirroring our complex world with a distinct-ive energy yet capturing the essence of a moment. His exquisite yet challenging works capture the delicate balance between beauty and subversion that Tillmans has long embraced.

We are delighted that Wolfgang Tillmans accepted our invitation to present this new exhibition of work, created especially for the spaces of the Serpentine Gallery. It has been an immense pleasure to collaborate with him on this show, which reflects his acute sensitivity to contemporary society (in all its manifestations, including the political), his ongoing fascination with colour, and his conceptual engagement with the technical processes of photography. It has been an extraordinary experience to work with him on this exhibition and catalogue, both of which he devoted much time to conceiving and designing.

Our many thanks go to Wolfgang Tillmans for generously producing a Limited Edition Print on the occasion of the exhibition, to be sold to benefit the exhibition and the Serpentine Gallery.

We would like to warmly thank Jaguar Cars, in particular Mike O'Driscoll and Amanda Chick, for their exceptional support. Ross Wheeler and the team at Imagination made important contributions to this presentation of the work of this significant artist, and we are also indebted to the Luma Foundation, and in particular to Maja Hoffman, for supporting the exhibition. Maureen Paley and the team at Maureen Paley, London, must be gratefully acknowledged for their invaluable and considerable assistance in the realisation of both the exhibition and related events. Additionally, we are most appreciative of the generosity of the lenders, without whom the exhibition would not have been possible.

We are delighted to include essays by Michael Bracewell and Josef Strau, and we thank them both for their wonderful contributions to the catalogue. Koenig Books London continues to collaborate with us on the distribution of this book, the latest in the Serpentine Gallery series. Federico Martelli, Karl Kolbitz, Anna von Stackelberg and Tess Hurrell, working at the Tillmans studio, must also be warmly acknowledged for their committed work on the show and publication. We would like to thank Oliver Knight and Rory McGrath of OK-RM for their expertise and advice on the design and production of the publication.

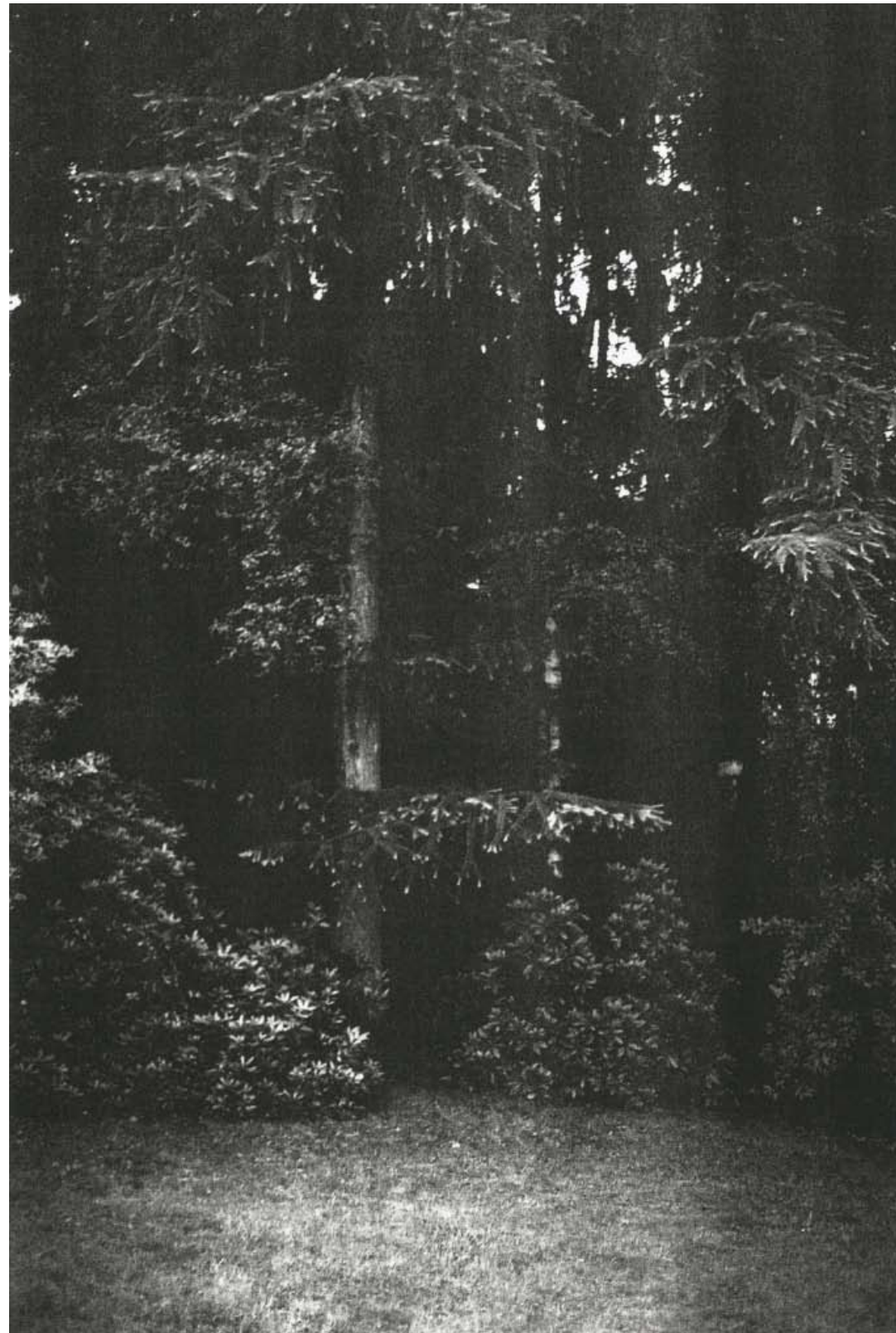
We would like to offer our extensive thanks for the generous contributions made by supporters of the Serpentine Gallery, which includes the Council of the Serpentine Gallery, an extraordinary group of individuals whose ongoing commitment is exceptional.

Last but not least we would like to acknowledge the team at the Serpentine Gallery for their work on the exhibition, particularly Sophie O'Brien, Exhibition Curator; Sally Tallant, Head of Programmes; Mike Gaughan, Gallery Manager; Leila Hasham and Christine Takengny, Assistant Curators; Hattie

Spires, Assistant Gallery Manager; Nicola Lees, Public Programme Curator and Exhibitions Interns, Daria Kirsanova and Charles Moffett.

Julia Peyton-Jones
Director, Serpentine Gallery and
Co-director, Exhibitions and Programmes

Hans Ulrich Obrist
Co-director of Exhibitions and
Programmes and Director of International
Projects



**Everywhere, all the time
and at once: the art
of Wolfgang Tillmans**

Michael Bracewell

I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.

Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*, 1939

There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening.

Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage: An inventory of effects*, 1967

The tall trees before us are dense and mysterious. Their foliage hangs majestically, in languor, as though sombre and dazed by clinging tropical heat, yet somehow alert and sinister. But we are faced, in fact, across a modest width of lawn, with the dark entrance to a temperate northern forest. Exuberant shrubberies give a garden-like air to the beginnings of this seemingly wild space. As the smooth trunks of the tallest trees soar straight and vertical, the gathering mass of leaves and branches creates a dark portal, like the entrance to an enchanted path. Higher up, patches of light can be glimpsed, glinting through the deeper canopy. The scene appears quite still. And yet, as you look at these trees, you might start to question the nature of this apparent stillness. Is the atmosphere on this lawn peaceful with birdsong and distant cheerful voices? Or is it silent, expectant and laden with portent? Perhaps it is simply neutral.

This black and white photograph by Wolfgang Tillmans (*Wald (Reinshagen)*, 2008) enfolds the viewer in such a succession of distinct yet overlapping emotional and psychological sensations. But throughout these responses, the image brings one back to its own unique location, its confluence of calm and mysteriousness, and the unwavering tension between its pictorial and atmospheric qualities.

With its visceral sense of place, this photograph transports the viewer to an immediate experience of landscape and nature; at the same time, our precise identification with this simple scene – a towering screen of placid trees, rising from Edenic shrubberies – is meticulously destabilised upon the axis of its empathetic capacities. For all its apparent serenity and calm, there is a semiotic undercurrent running deep within the image, as profound as a sub-sonic pulse: an animating tautness that derives from the precise balance – within the emotional weighting of the image, of the known and the unknown – of that which we can see and that which we intuit, reading, as it were, through the surface of the image and beyond its materiality.

A further image by Tillmans of the interior of a forest, *Wald (Briol I)*, 2008, depicts the play of bright light through the crowded trees. Scattering ingots of white brilliance create the illusion of a stroboscopic or Op-art effect, playing games with the scale and perspective of the image, and creating a dream-like or submarine other-worldliness that makes the viewer think of moonlit woodland. This image appears as filled with motion and clamour as *Wald (Reinshagen)* seems heavy with stillness and silence.

But photography is in many ways only the beginning of Tillmans' art. Indeed, over the last decade, he has made an important body of abstract works that are 'not made with camera' (the artist's phrase), yet are still directly related in process to photography. In both a practical and a philosophical sense, therefore, Tillmans engages and works with the photographic image on every conceivable level: as a consumer and reader of images, a producer of images, an editor of images, as their printer, replicator, publisher, arranger, curator, installer, and also as their mechanic, anatomist, politician, sculptor, technician, connoisseur and philosopher-scientist. He is thus the creator and director of an encyclopaedic lexicon of images, examining and exploring every aspect of their form, in terms both of medium and object. (Small

wonder a major publication on Tillmans' work is titled *Manual*, proposing an instructional handbook of the mechanics of the image). For Tillmans, photography has as many sculptural possibilities as it has representational, aesthetic or political capacities. It is the bearer of information as much as of 'beauty' (this latter quality being a charged and conditional term when applied to his work), a form that interrogates the viewer, individually and sociologically, as much as it is itself an object of scrutiny, appraisal or reflection.

The art of Tillmans is multi-allusive, in both the extent of his subject matter and his treatment of photography as a medium. From astronomy to portraiture, to luxuriant yet minutely poised studies of light on photographic paper, he creates a cosmology of images, tirelessly refining – as artist, editor, installer and curator – the semiotic chemistry of their interrelationship to one another. In this, Tillmans locates the visual equivalent of Proust's 'mot juste', identifying not simply the most eloquent images, in terms of colour, composition, mood, texture, light and emotional pulse, but those that appear to possess their own sentient meaning. For Tillmans, one feels, the potentiality of the photographic image is intimately related, at a profound level of empathetic understanding and philosophical awareness, to the messy but complicated business of being alive. In his art, spirituality and semiotics are held in balance, revealing moments of quotidian transubstantiation in which the subject is suddenly seen in a newly coherent and heightened form – as both its 'natural' self and as an image. Collectively, the images made by Tillmans seem to comprise a seamless keychain code of visual DNA, becoming – as 'pictures' and as objects – both meditative and filled with restless self-enquiry. Generationally, Tillmans was simultaneously informed by traditional art education and, perhaps more importantly, by the sub-cultural creativity and European clubbing scene of the late 1980s and 1990s. In its turn, this position was derived in great part from the

explosion in the earlier 1980s (and post-punk years of the late 1970s) of a creativity and artistic network that was derived from sub-cultural lifestyles as much as from arts institutions. Youth sub-cultures transform the personal space of adolescents and young adults (the teenager's bedroom in the family home, for example) into intensely private spaces, which are at once shrines to lifestyle choice and laboratories of image-making; they become both dressing room and theatre, their poster- and image-hung walls acting like altars dedicated to the icons of pop and fashion. (We might think of John Ashton's portrait of the British Pop artist Pauline Boty, for example, in which the artist poses triumphantly before a bed-sit wall collaged with found images.) There is an echo of such *dedication* to images in Tillmans' approach to hanging his individual work (with pins, tape or clips) and to its overall installation: the effect is chapel-like, at once secular and sacred in feel, balancing informality with reverence or meditative stillness: the personal becomes the political; the domestic, in its own quiet way, becomes touched by the devotional.

Throughout the 1980s, and extending into the 1990s, the subcultural worlds of music, clubs, fashion, new magazines and pop and fashion video provided both a subject and a venue for many young artists, writers, designers and image-makers. Indeed, in London, in the years prior to Young British Art, there was a sense for some artists that the 'underground' network of sub-cultural lifestyles, underpinned by pop music, clubs and fashion, were of more relevance, culturally and creatively, than the activities taking place within the institutional world of contemporary art. 'Style culture' magazines of the 1980s such as *i-D* (in which Tillmans would publish photographs) and *Blitz* and *The Face*, proposed a culture that was at once stylistically exuberant, elitist, aggressively trend-conscious yet politically aware and left-wing in attitude – a stance echoed by the development of dance music out of post-punk electronica.

(Bronski Beat's 'Small Town Boy', for example, no less than Heaven 17's 'We Don't Need That Fascist Groove Thang', were founding examples of politicised British pop music in the 1980s, proposing a sensibility – at once vibrant and actively political – that Tillmans would later inherit.)

The art of Tillmans – in all its variety as an edited and installed form – might thus be said to have engaged directly with the subcultural zeitgeist. (Marshall McLuhan's phrase from his classic analysis of mass media, *The Medium is the Massage*, 'When information brushes against information' seems an apt description of this engagement.) Tillmans' early use of photocopiers, for example, or even of faxes, encodes his work with the urban and Warholian imprint of mass mediation, which also had its place in the sci-fi futurism of the post-punk aesthetic. And yet Tillmans is always most concerned with the constitution of the image itself, to free it from anything but its own form, and allow it to declare itself in what might be termed a state of 'not knowingness'. Every image and configuration of images created by Tillmans has at its heart a tension of opposites: the precise balance of enigma and certainty. As such, Tillmans' art can also be seen to descend from classic Romanticism (the simultaneous activation of 'reason' and 'the senses' proposed by Friedrich Schiller, for example); this lineage is further affirmed by the political and spiritual concerns within his work.

The figurative and 'representational' photographs by Tillmans relate social narrative to still life, nature and landscape photography; and yet there is a holistic unity to their vision and temper. The common denominator of this unity appears to be their visceral description of emotional and psychological texture: they reveal their subjects at peace – in humanistic repose – yet alert with life. They both assert the democracy of universal human experience, and describe the indifference of nature to the passage of human events – a philosophical position that transposes to the

contemporary urban world the Pantheistic belief in the higher power of nature, as it frames individual and social destiny.

In *Roy*, 2009, we see an infant sleeping in a carrying chair, secured backwards in the front passenger seat of a car to face out towards the viewer. In the rear-view mirror, we see the upper half of a woman's face, the edge of the reflected image cutting horizontally across her features, so that her dark eyes – concentrating on the road ahead – are only half visible. Her eyebrows, forehead and centrally parted hair give the viewer a good indication of her age and appearance. Pale but bright sunlight is coming into the car, highlighting the collected dust and dried raindrops on the windscreen, and the dragged arc of smeared water left behind by the perishing rubber of the windscreen wipers. In the bottom-right foreground, the infant's sleeping face is framed by the dark blue-black of his woollen pullover and knitted hat.

In one sense, this picture appears to take its place within the historical imagery of mother and child. One cannot be sure that the woman driving the car is the child's mother – it could be aunt, nanny, or a friend of family. And yet one intuits a relationship between the fragment of the female figure visible in the rear-view mirror and the intensely felt presence of the sleeping baby. In its undeniable modernity and sense of daily event, the image brings to mind Richard Hamilton's painting *Mother and Child*, 1984–85, in which a smiling infant, dressed in white woollens, attempts awkward early steps towards the viewer, its hand held by the smiling mother. In this image, too, we can only see a fragment of the mother's face, since it is cut across by the upper edge of the canvas. Her relationship with the child is defined by what we see of her jaw and smiling mouth, framed by her long brown hair hanging loosely to one side as she bends down to guide the stumbling child. The light within the scene – as in *Roy* – appears to be that of pale, bright early spring sunshine, suggesting new life.

Another image by Tillmans, *Heptathlon*, 2009, shows a female athlete at a track event. Behind her, two other female athletes can be seen, unheeding of the attention being paid to the principal figure, who is being filmed by a cameraman just visible at the left-hand side of the photograph. Again, the figure appears both tensed and in repose; the half-clenching of her hands might suggest nervousness or impatience, while her expression towards the camera is at once impassive and slightly confrontational. Knowing nothing more about the circumstantial context of the image, the viewer is nonetheless made fully aware of the emotional and physical challenges with which an athlete is faced. There is a quality of ruthlessness in her gaze towards the barely seen cameraman's raised lens: the expression of competition.

Heptathlon is an image filled with declamatory colour and complex geometry. The picture is divided horizontally, roughly, across its centre by the upper rim of the trackside advertising. In the upper half, beyond the insular world of the track event – fenced off – we can see the tops of trees and a suburban-looking rooftop. The lower half of the image is dominated by the bright orange surface of the track itself, and the busy criss-crossing of white markings, the bare legs of the athletes, speaker cables and numbered cones. In this lower half, we see how figuration begins to collapse and transform into abstraction, how that which is naturalistic begins to shed its narratives, and how the stuff of everyday life on Earth – its raw materials, technology and residues – can begin to acquire a form and appearance that rejects linear meaning.

This point of transformation within an image, when a subject in one state dismantles the container or borderline of its meanings and enters a new visual identity, is vital to Tillmans' art and has become increasingly so. This is doubly significant in the case of an artist

for whom the precision of reading – his minute scrutiny of print media, journalism and found imagery, for example, in his *truth study centre* tables – is equally important. To reveal yet preserve the 'tipping point' of an image, at which its representational qualities become first abstract and then sculptural, might be seen as a further example of the founding system of maintained tensions in his work. At this point, where the borders between our perceptions of an image become first broken and then dissolved, the photographic image achieves a form of closed aesthetic circuitry, in which subject and object cease to be determining values. Such, perhaps, is the artistic journey taken by Tillmans to date.

We can see the development of this process by first considering examples of Tillmans' camera-made images, the subjects of which are hard to ascertain, but whose colour, composition and textural power are richly beguiling. In *Economy*, 2006, *CLC1100*, 2007 and *glass factory*, 2008, for example, we see images of industrial and technological materials and equipment. All three are figurative, representational images, yet all examine their subject in a way that seems to highlight the visual tactility of the image itself: the satisfying, lozenge-like oblong of vivid purple glass resting against the vertical black bars of its industrial holding frame in *glass factory*; the bite of an elastic band into dense, carbon-coloured sponge in *Economy*; or the magnesium-like flare of white light off the opened photocopier in *CLC1100*. In all of these images, representational coherence is brought to the edge of collapse, to the point at which texture becomes marginally more dominant, in our reading of the image, than narrative or legibility.

The progress of Tillmans' exploration of the image (which might be likened to a study of sound), from representational camera-made works to non-camera-made pure sculptural abstraction, might also be seen to embrace his earliest photocopier works: the images from 1987, for example,

depicting incoming surf (*Wellen Lacanau*, 1998), or three seemingly random, UFO-like clusters of white dots against a graphite black background (*Genova*, 1998). The play of light and dark in photocopied images, and the interruption of their image surface by ghostly bars, shimmers and mottling of shadow, creates the impersonal, mass-media effect of classic American Pop art (specifically Warhol and Rauschenberg); and yet for Tillmans the medium appears once again to hold qualities in tension: intimacy and enigma, figuration and abstraction, knowing and not knowing.

A glacier seen from the air, an opened window, the shattered hulk of a bright blue wooden boat: as subjects of Tillmans' photographs these each explore texture and legibility, and the transformation of a tangible subject into abstraction. In one sense, such works run parallel to Tillmans' major non-camera-made and sculptural works. In the latter, however, he allows the image – its 'stuff' or raw material – to be completely liberated from 'meaning'; rather, process becomes image, in that the manipulation of light and photographic paper (by which the abstract works are made) both creates the subject of the image and transforms it into a sculptural object.

Tillmans' *Ostgut Freischwimmer, right*, 2004 is a vast, near billboard sized work (231.1 x 607.8 cm) in which particles of blackness appear to have been combed into diffusion across the horizontal breadth of the image. The seeming 'whiteness' of the image's background turns out to be as complex and subtle as the submarine-like play of diffused blackness that it contains. It is as though, from the top left-hand corner of the image, the white of cloud or dense fog has become gradually 'stained' by the evaporation or dilution of the particles of blackness, which appear to be losing their solidity – like a substance in chemical suspension that has gradually broken down. Thus the viewer might have the experience of being 'allowed' to witness some dramatic ritual from micro-biology, chemistry or the natural sciences; the image proposes its own

unnameable narrative, recounting the transformation of light from one form into another.

Ostgut Freischwimmer, right is an epic example of Tillmans' enabling process to become image; and there is a quality to the amorphous and diaphanous fluidity and merger, within the image, of light and dark, solid and dissolve, that is utterly disconnected to work in any other medium. The picture becomes a floatation tank of light, at once scientific and fantastical in its aura, as though it were some kind of sentient scientific 'performance' or spectacle. (It hung for five years in the Panorama bar in Berlin.) Another such work, *not knowing*, 2009 is as densely vibrant with vivid colour as *Ostgut Freischwimmer, right* appears subtly monochrome. One might think of the 'cosmic' imagery often associated with progressive and psychedelic rock music: the oil-and-water light projections shown during long improvised sets by Soft Machine or Pink Floyd, for example. The use of colour, form, light and scale is visually overwhelming, allowing the image to work foremost as a masterclass in spectacle.

It is as though Tillmans, in his epic exploration of the capacities of the image – one might say the 'physics' of the image – is charting the deepest primal recesses of his subject. What happens when the image is handed over to the effects of pure colour? As contemporary readers of the image, how might we respond to sheer aesthetic spectacle, to which no signage of 'meaning' is attached? Where might this image stand on the registers of taste and kitsch? Or do these concerns of cultural status have no relevance to such a work? Tillmans answers with the discursive void of the work, which proposes only its own abstraction, and its own vivacious, seemingly weightless suffusions of colour – somehow ominously pitted with black cavities.

In its study of diffusion, *Ostgut Freischwimmer, right* might be seen as the descendant image of *Urgency XIV*, 2006, in which the uniform, somewhat industrial

magnolia of the image's surface is speckled and stained with dissolving and sedimentary ribbons of bright blood red – a substance that is in fact nothing more (nor less) than light itself. In the bottom-right corner of the image, a pinkish scarlet hue appears to be diffusing – as though droplets of a scarlet substance were breaking up within the processes of dilution. Both works (like those configured in the multi-panelled *Silver Installation VI* and *Silver Installation VII*, 2009) dismantle the artistic borders between different media: they are painterly, photographic, sculptural installations – unfettered image-making that takes its place on the far end of a scale of continuum between figuration and abstraction.

In his *paper drop* and *Lighter* works, too, Tillmans creates a fusion between the coolly industrial or mechanistic and a luxuriance of form and texture. The *Lighter* works, framed in Perspex boxes, resemble metallic panels – some folded, others dented – that have been industrially spray-painted in high-gloss colours. Made from photographic paper, these works appear to collapse the medium of photography itself, while taking the form of beguilingly coloured abstract sculptures: sky blue, swimming-pool blue, a green-to-yellow fade crossed horizontally by a blue bar, ripe-corn yellow divided at a low angle by black fading to spruce green and glinting jet black. There is a coolness to these works that brings to mind the US colour-field paintings of Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland and Barnett Newman. At the same time, the metallic look of their dented or folded surfaces distracts the painterly references and re-connects the works to a somewhat science-fictional industrial strangeness, untethered to the formal arguments of fine art.

Bikers, the Moon, a snowy suburb seen from the air, a homeless person, a television in a coach, a national border, metal machine parts, a block of flats, a garden, the sky, newspaper articles, advertisements, plastic boxes on a window sill, a portrait of William of Orange, male necks, exhausted party-goers, colours: in Tillmans' art, image

is infinite – everywhere, all the time and at once. The metal frame of a seatless and backless office chair, the fold of sunlight, the tessellating blocks of text and image in magazines and newspapers: all are agents and bearers of meaning – as though 'meaning' might take a malleable and elastic form, reflexive to our perceptions and understanding.

The Medium is the Massage is subtitled *an inventory of effects*. This would serve well to describe Tillmans' work, since it takes the form of a ceaselessly cross-referencing visual encyclopaedia of the image. In his meticulous selection of images, his treatment and installation of them, Tillmans creates an epic directory and handbook of visual effects that is at once novelistic, journalistic, ethnographic, meditational, political and poetic.

For McLuhan, writing in 1967: 'Environments are not passive wrappings, but are, rather, active processes that are invisible. The ground rules, pervasive structure, and overall patterns of environments elude easy perception. Anti-environments or counter-situations made by artists provide means of direct attention and enable us to see and understand more clearly.'¹ Tillmans is precisely such an artist, born precisely into the image-saturated culture that McLuhan surveyed. In his art, Tillmans renders visible those patterns, rules and structures – aesthetic, sociological, cultural, political – under which an age of accelerated and saturation media strives to maintain lucidity. At its core, of course, there is a necessary fallibility to this endeavour: as W.H. Auden once remarked of the attainment of religious faith, there is a quality of *not knowing* that underwrites its sincerity. Tillmans is likewise aware of the necessity of doubt, and, arguably, it is from this sense of doubt that his art achieves its monumental humanism.

1 Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: an inventory of effects*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1967, p.68.





Alongside the abstract plane,
dots and bangs of latent
evidences and true relativity
exposed

Josef Strau

In the early 2000s, I was invited to co-curate an exhibition at Kunst-Werke, Berlin, called *Now and Ten Years Ago*, which referred to an exhibition of the same name held in New York a decade earlier. The exhibition was based on a by now well-established theory that assumes that if a cultural product reappears ten years later it will have lost its attraction, or at least might look pale in comparison to its first successful entrance onto the scene, but that after ten more years it might reappear as an interesting revival. This assumption was fashionable in some alternative art circles at the time, used as a tool to unmask the fickleness of the culture industry and its influence on even the most independently produced art objects. But being somewhat tired of theories whose sole aim was the denouncement of the quite obvious (but in some ways exciting, albeit rather destructive) mechanisms of cultural fashions, I wanted to find works that would exemplify the opposite qualities – works that might have even more meaning than they did ten years before. The strongest disproof I could find for the theory was the work of Wolfgang Tillmans. Looking back on his photographs of the early 1990s, and considering the political and art situation of that time, I realised that these images would have an even more radical effect on viewers of the early 2000s than on those of the decade before.

In *Now and Ten Years Ago*, Tillmans presented a large version of *Silvio (U-Bahn)*, 1992, a photograph of flowers in a Berlin subway station – the unofficial monument to a man who had been killed there by neo-Nazis. It became, for myself and others, the central piece in the show. The work had this strong effect because of Tillmans' ability to capture something that people are not yet willing to recognise as a phenomenon: *Silvio (U-Bahn)* was made at a time when many were reluctant to accept that there was a resurgence of right-wing violence in Germany, believing that the country had overcome these ghosts. It was a truth that had been left unnamed for too long. When shown for

the second time in this large version, the photo was exposed to a now transformed public, whose awareness of this frightening phenomenon had shifted from latency to consciousness. Tillmans' particular choice of display, with the work extending down to the gallery floor, bringing the image of the candles, the flowers, the handwritten letters and words of mourning from another place and another time into the space, made the tragic monument more present than ever before, and gave the exhibition a glimmer of gloomy subversive radicality.

And now, some years later, many of Tillmans' works have become more explicit in their emphasis on the photographic potential of latency. They display the fundamental photographic procedure of carrying a certain moment of the past into the future, but more than that, they freeze and transform latency into obvious visual evidence. These works are usually labelled as abstract, but they are quite often ambivalent to general definition and this practice of ambivalence is perhaps the most impressive achievement of his works. It is not the ambivalence of an in-between or of a double negation; it is the expression of a very contemporary political philosophy, exemplified in his almost literary or cinematic combination of radically diverse meanings and narratives in photographic images, or a combined pattern of diverse statements, as in the table-top works, *truth study center*, begun in 2006. This concept of ambivalent involvement doubled by subversive engagement is most obvious in works dealing with astronomy and religion. His interest in these fields is not of the pretentious sort, stemming from a fear of missing out on some fashion; quite to the contrary, they are interests, at least for the moment, avoided by the majority of artists.

Having started to work with texts and writing some years ago, I have often wished that I could create the same kind of perfectly contemporary novels that Tillmans makes with his camera. This literary quality comes from diving into various social and personal narratives, but also

from suddenly coming down, as in *Silver 1*, 1998 or *paper drop*, 2001, to revelations of the abstract, the concealed and the pure matter of photography, or even of light itself. It could also be called a fictional quality. As an observer standing in one of his exhibitions, I often feel that there is a moment when, almost automatically, my brain will start perceiving a narrative pattern in his work. Perhaps the best way to describe this pattern is as a new, completely reinvented science fiction – the result of Tillmans' idea of dealing with the contemporary situation through a permanent attack of extremely diverse imagery. This definition of his work as a reconsideration and transformation of science fiction is put forward in the context of the development of contemporary definitions of fiction writing, where fiction is not a completely invented structure, but more a transformation of real or daily events, recombined or sometimes appearing in a transgressive perspective.

Tillmans' combination of different formulas of image production might appear at first as a strategy to avoid the pitfalls of stagnancy and dead-ends often inherent in successful art productions. But with his strong theoretical awareness of social and productive systems, he seeks to influence his own creation of a system with these diverse patterns and waves of information. For example, if one looks at the display tables contained in the *truth study center* project, one repeatedly finds texts and information dealing critically with the most powerful institutions that administrate 'absolute truths', particularly religious institutions. Alongside this one can find a newspaper text about the recent findings of astronomical research. This is not an attempt to play the old game of religion versus science. During further exploration of his work, one finds a differentiated world exposed from different angles, sometimes even incorporated as modes of perception in his own personal methods of observation. Often, the objects observed by him are in some way representations of the photographer himself, although they are

not simply self portraits. This indirect involvement of the artist in the image as a model for the exploration of reality pushes the concept of ambivalence further towards contemporary ideas of science.

Photos of the night sky full of stars always make demands on the visual perception of the observer: they are just a bunch of dots on paper. They are abstract-looking images of the real in the most extreme form. Tillmans sometimes plays with achieving almost impossible photographic feats, like photographing the stars from the window of a plane with a non-specialist camera and still making them recognisable to the viewer, or capturing images of the planet Venus passing through the field of the sun. When he makes reference in his work to the discovery of exoplanets (the planets orbiting far-away suns) he touches on a very exciting step in contemporary astronomical developments – for many, one of the most exciting in astronomic history, although in fact it is just the conclusion gleaned from other observed data, like the diminishing light of stars when orbiting exoplanets cross their field. It is a similar operation to that in Tillmans' *Venus transit* photographs, but without the direct use of photography. The information proving the existence of these planets functions like a mirror of science itself, reflecting the long journey that it has had to undertake through the ages – the self-imposed limits that scientific knowledge and even the idea of enlightenment had to break through, even in the last few decades, to finally arrive at the proof of planets far away from our own solar system.

Tillmans seems obsessed with astronomy and physics, and with the changing nature and relativity of science and enlightenment itself. Not only has evidence of astronomical data progressed dramatically during the last years, but the relation between theory and evidence has made unpredictable changes in consequence. Whoever follows the now very accessible scientific texts and images in astronomy-related websites will experience a

dramatic shift in the language of science, and even in the culture of its communication. Many of the ideas and language of what some decades ago was only science fiction has recently become 'official' institutional expression, like the recent debate on parallel universes. For me, the verification of the existence of exoplanets made during the last years is so exciting because during my school years in the 1960s and 1970s, any suggestion of their existence was refuted with a whole list of impossibilities. Planet Earth was perceived to be the result of a singular incidence. Since then, almost every year, one of these 'impossible truths' has been proved possible, and former heresies have now become authoritative realities. The image of the universe presented by the defenders of scientific institutions during the 1960s or 1970s now looks like a weird human-projected abyss, a dark hole that now suddenly shines with infinite possibilities and endless varieties of other life forms and forms of intelligence. As Tillmans perhaps proposes, even in enlightenment there is relativity and it has to change its imaginative capabilities just as an artist has to change his comparably small mechanisms in order constantly to rethink, sometimes even dramatically, the theories for which his work is a tool.

As stated above, the appearance of scientific material and logic in the works of Tillmans is often a result of his reflections on the ambivalences inherent in them. One might speculate even further and propose that the same sensibility seems to be at work in his reflections on the religious authority of absolute truth. The subversive power of religious heresies in earlier centuries was in their refusal to obey the authority of dogma and institution, but even more, in their embrace of the personal qualities of religious practice – for instance, life as a power-free zone, religion as social awareness, religious celebrations as redemptive means for the transformation and relief of pain and suffering, placing a messianic emphasis on the poetic beauty of original texts and the hope for an era

without repression and injustice. It might sound incongruous to enumerate such old-time qualities in a contemporary art context, but seeing the texts and images that Tillmans has used in different parts of *truth study center* about the repression, injustice and the strangling of life caused by the authorities of religion, I feel the urgency of raising these arguments again. The radicality (at least in the context of contemporary art) of Tillmans' subversive practice of ambivalence does not diminish his critical statement; the opposite is even the case. The religious or quasi-religious qualities above seem latently to reappear in the way he portrays objects in his everyday still lifes or landscapes, although he does not represent faith in any traditional way. Their pictorial intensity appears to be touched by some transcendent latent light.

The famous Israeli documentary film *Trembling before G-d* by Sandi Simcha DuBowski about gay and lesbian people living in the Jewish orthodox communities documents their struggle for acceptance in societies where homosexuality is strongly rejected. Their vivid statements and stories of excommunication become all the more intense when they insist on continuing to celebrate religious holidays, to dress traditionally, to carry on singing their old and beloved prayers and songs. This reaches its high point at the end of the film when one of the men, who has expressed his suffering on the long road of self-determination to live both a gay and a Hassidic life, stands alone on the East River. In a lonely performance of one of the Jewish New Year rites, he casts the sins of the old year into the water, garbed in beautiful traditional dress, singing the old songs, alone, with the whole of Manhattan behind him. This poignant scene recalls Tillmans' process of combining seemingly opposite signs, and in that way giving a stronger subversive power to his critique of the institutions of absolute truth.



Interview with Wolfgang Tillmans

Julia Peyton-Jones and
Hans Ulrich Obrist

HUO You chose to live in London twenty years ago, and you've always kept it as your base. What was London for you then and what is it now?

WT I moved to Britain twenty years ago this year, so this show's like a small anniversary marker. The London that I got to know in the 1980s as a teenager and that I fell in love with forms the background to my London today. If I look at London now, I still see the potential that was there. In the 1990s a lot of that was totally intact and there were different layers of subculture in the city. I feel that with the rent explosion and with the property-price explosion and the commercialisation of absolutely everything, there isn't that much freedom anymore. It seems that Britain has such a work culture now. It's all about working but at the same time, the prosperity that Britain lived through was...well, that prosperity is, as it turns out now, a deficit prosperity.

It's like London has gone through a golden age in the last ten years. It's become the dominant city in Europe and a lot of good things have happened. Yet at the same time, I observe with a bit of sadness how so much quality of life has somehow gone. Young artists have to live in shitty unheated studios outside of Hackney Wick and pay four times more than you used to pay much closer to the centre. It's a contradictory situation. I don't know how much London does for nurturing what comes next. The only advantage it has is that – like New York – it's a continual magnet for people and so thrives off what outsiders bring to it. And actually I think that's the biggest change that's happened. The 1980s and 90s London definitely generated its output from inside Britain, and from the British provinces. But I think now its strength is that it's such a powerful Hoover that constantly sucks people in from all over the world who want to come and make it in London. They cover the shortfall that has happened from the decline in British art education. I don't think doubling and tripling the numbers of art and design

students in the UK schools without enlarging the facilities can have a good effect. But as a nation you don't notice that because it's covered up by the constant influx of people. That's just an observation. As a total, as a whole, it's probably similarly exciting for different reasons.

JPJ That's what's allowed London to really flourish and it does make it the most astonishingly vibrant place in which to live.

WT Yes. But the whole question of city and the influence of the place on my work is something that I've completely gotten over in the last ten years, whereas in the 1990s that was a huge question for me. In my movements between Hamburg, Bournemouth, New York, Berlin and London there was always a lot of soul-searching for the ingredients that make up my work. Then at some point I realised that it's really nothing to do with the city. Where the work happens is too unpredictable. Some pieces happen in the neighbourhood where I live and the conditions that I'm living in, and others happen in transit or in another city that I'm familiar with or that I've lived in. But there was this desire to find an answer to that and I'm really happy that for the last ten years or so I haven't felt as if I need to answer that question. I get asked a lot about my second base in Berlin: 'Berlin or London, which do you like better?' Again, I feel absolutely no need to decide that because the answer isn't really in the place. The work that I make ultimately comes out of me and that's wherever I am. So the world that I view with my work comes from a European perspective and it's not so much a particular city.

JPJ This show at the Serpentine Gallery reflects a specific period – it's work predominantly from the last five years. Was there a turning point in your work five years ago?

WT One could say that the camera-based work has become, in the last

few years, even less about covering one scene. It's not about an ideal scene, but more a look at the world at large.

HUO Looking at your work over the last ten years, you see the evolution of a continuum of ideas: for example, your very strong body of abstract work. You said in our previous interview¹ that you thought it had to do with the idea of slowing down, given the ever-increasing flow of images in our lives. Are there other reasons why abstraction became important?

WT The first group of sixty abstract and semi-abstract pictures I released was in 1998 and they were dated 1992 to 1998. So I had actively begun with that in the 1990s, but there was, let's say, an intuitive decision that one could also call strategic – because artists do reflect on their situation and make decisions where they want to take their work. Around 1999/2000, I actively felt the need for a complete shift of grammar. One could see it as quite a harsh move for somebody who so carefully picks from the real world and then chooses not to show any of that in large parts of exhibitions.

The first show where there were large abstract parts was in 2000. I think there were people who felt that these were – not aggressive – but a bit of a refusal, and that this wasn't what people wanted from me. But the underpinning of my work has always been the use of my medium and everything it offers in order to make a new picture. That's the only thing that I feel responsible for: my sense of duty is that I want to make new pictures. I believe that every time and every historical situation allows for the making of new things and demands a new response. They might be progressions of what has been going on before, but ultimately there has to be something that's specific to this time and this condition. Whether that's with the camera or without the camera is ultimately not so relevant for me, because it always comes from a sense of enquiry and curiosity and play and experimentation

– trying to see if it's possible to make something new. I use this word 'experimentation' freely, even though I always shun it when I read it in relation to my abstract pictures. I've observed that there seems to be a flaw with language, so that as soon as the work becomes abstract the word 'experimentation' comes into play, whereas for me every portrait sitting and every picture of a cityscape is just as much an experiment.

JPJ One of the things that I wanted to ask you about is the way in which you portray sexuality now compared to the way you portrayed it ten years ago. We can even take it back to the earlier work that you showed at the Serpentine, which was in *Take Me I'm Yours*, curated by Hans Ulrich in 1995. Sexuality always seems such a motivation in your work. How is it that it's taken on a different form recently? Is it as important for you to portray as it once appeared to be?

WT It is and was a motivation, but only in so far as I find it significant as a symbol or a litmus test: you can read the state of society in its relation to sexuality. I was never particularly interested in depicting sexuality as something for its own sake. I was driven by the political meaning of sexuality and that, of course, comes from my very personal experience of growing up as a gay man, which meant that I experienced the world as aesthetically divided in terms of what you find acceptable or unacceptable behaviour. So what I find beautiful, my parent's generation find disgusting to look at. And that is a question of aesthetics. Whether you like two male lips touching each other or not actually has huge political consequences. If people say they don't tolerate this, it actually messes up millions of people's lives, as it has done for hundreds and thousands of years. My approach to sexuality has always been that its potency shouldn't make anybody afraid, because nobody is harmed. I always found that so powerful. Nobody is harmed by the majority of sexual practices (and I'm

talking about consenting adults here of course), yet you still get such strong reactions. Whereas when people actually do get harmed, those activities are perfectly fine to be shown in the media and culture at large. I've never understood why two men killing each other is totally fine to be shown on TV before the watershed but two men kissing each other has been completely taboo and even now is only slightly okay. I find two men killing each other just so much more shocking.

I wanted to see sex as this normal part of life and not as being an extraordinary part. When I made my books and installations in the 1990s, they included sexuality in a matter of fact way, but not as a freakish moment. I wanted to make it all part of one world, making an idealised world, like a utopian world that I was working on, to make it look like it actually existed. I do acknowledge that at the same time, even though I want to portray sexuality as just normal, it does of course add a certain spice to the work. I am aware of that and there is a continuous desire to keep an edge. I don't see that, for example, by working with non-figurative photography means losing that edge, because the world has changed and the proliferation of pictures of young people today is so different from what it was twenty years ago. So I'm also reacting to that, and that's what I mentioned before in an interview about the slowing-down process. Depicting sexuality isn't a freeing or radical act per se, it's always a question of context and the context has changed. Twenty years ago, young people were barely considered a 'market', but today all marketing is about people under forty and nobody really matters over that age. That's done with sex and the body and so I reflect on that also.

JPJ The sexuality you depict is part of the portrait and that makes it fundamentally different from what you describe in terms of a promotion of sexuality per se. So while it might be explicit, it's very often tender; it's almost always revealing and in that sense it deals

with the taboos, but not in a provocative, sensational way. It's much more to do with a kind of tenderness and closeness to the subject that allows for that kind of exploration. This doesn't appear on the face of it to be present in the abstract works, but in fact there is an incredible sensuality in the abstract works. Does that resonate for you? Could one say it's sexuality taking a different form?

WT Sensuality is ultimately all about what we notice and what sensations we notice – to be aware and finely tuned receiving beings, to listen to what we're desiring and feeling, physically, but also to what we see and feel visually. I'm constantly studying and receiving visual information that's sensual. Colours are a pleasure. Colours are nature. I look at and find new colours, and there's pleasure in making these colours. It's the observation of physics, of nature, of how these processes work, and how different colours function next to each other. Those are psychological, sensual, but also simply neurological, possibly.

It's all about what it's like to be in this world, the sensual exploration. I was looking at the model of the Serpentine show in a happy moment, thinking 'This is actually really like a lab, a laboratory for studying the world in many of its facets and visual manifestations.' Sexuality is part of that. A large majority of the works don't have direct sexual connotations, but the body is in there. Sexuality isn't really in the portraits, but we're all sexual beings, and it's just an integral part – the physical body is present, I think, throughout the show. But it's also that body travelling through a world of great marvels in very real terms, like the matter, the buildings, the plants and the structures around us. And then it's also the marvel of what's possible with my optical and chemical process.

HUO There's a wonderful drawing on the back cover of your Tate catalogue called *if one thing matters, everything matters*. It talks about the structure of your

work, revealing some of the overarching categories in your photography. This includes people, still lifes, landscapes, cityscapes and skies. Abstraction is there, already present, as well as people, including self-portraits of friends, sittings, crowds. You also have the commissioned portraits you do, which are for magazines. All of this is a diagram, it's a body. It's an organic, holistic overview of your work. You had an amazing exhibition in Berlin, which was a kind of a *gesamtkunstwerk*, where you combined old and new work into a total installation. It would be interesting to talk about the Serpentine exhibition, where again you were deeply involved in the selection and installation. Your exhibition follows Richard Hamilton's show, and Hamilton has said that we only remember exhibitions that also invent a new display feature, a new way of hanging or showing the work. It would be great to hear you talk about the exhibition as a medium, and how you approached the Serpentine as a show. How do you bring this all together in bigger exhibitions?

WT I think what may have changed in the last few years is that I've become more at ease with separating out different rooms, different zones within the work, which is something that I could only start doing with a sufficient amount of work in general, but also a sufficient experience of dealing with large-scale, multi-room exhibitions.

The first of these large-scale museum exhibitions toured European cities, Hamburg, Turin, Paris, Humlebaek, Denmark 2001–2003 then the Tate exhibition in 2003, the Tokyo Opera City Gallery, 2004, and the project at P.S.1 in New York, 2006. The next period was the museum tour of four American cities: Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington D.C. and Mexico City from 2006 to 2008. This kind of 'world tour' concluded with my biggest show to date at Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin 2008. So in that period from 2001 until 2008, all those cities met their first large Wolfgang Tillmans exhibition, a huge

survey. There was the need to show everything and show it all as an integrated oneness.

2006 began with a project show at P.S.1, which focused on one cohesive, coherent body of work. From that point onwards, and over the course of the US tour, I realised the strength of making different rooms that didn't jar with each other and allowed the viewer to settle and not be totally overwhelmed by this constant possibility of the full spectrum. In order to pare down and show the viewer a room of only *paper drop* pieces needed a certain maturity, to relax and allow that to happen. My general tendency is to constantly counter one thing with another, and not make it too obvious. Being too obvious and too rhetorical is something that I've been very afraid of. I always want to show the multiplicity of the nature of things – that things are not so clear. I realised that, by paring things down, by showing them as groups, it reveals that there are still so many open questions. Answers aren't obvious and there's a certain clarity that's bringing things out. There's a clarity of presentation. I think this clarity that I've achieved over the last two or three years is something that I could have only got to by having gone through the previous fifteen years of other installations.

HUO Can you talk about how you installed your work for *Lighter* at the Hamburger Bahnhof and at the Serpentine? Your installations have become more complex. Can one also distinguish different types of installations?

WT Yes. What one can say is that the linear hanging has definitely become more present in recent years. That may be to do with the scale of the shows – the impact of walking into something like the Turner Prize installation is so big, because it's so extraordinary to see sixty-five pictures distributed from skirting board to ceiling in all sorts of sizes. Although I believe in every single one of these pictures as individual images, it is an overall

installation that becomes slightly more powerful than the sum of the works. If you repeat that in every room, of course, then that becomes the overarching experience; even though I expect the viewer to look at each picture, that overall experience stays with you from the start. There were many rooms of the Berlin and US exhibitions that I hung in a completely linear way, all at the same height, yet with an equally individual approach to the spacing between the pictures.

There is still something going on in terms of spacing, however. The first room in *Lighter* was a combination of photocopies from 1987 and 1988 with new photocopy work from 2007 and 2008, plus photographs, a photocopy of an object, the gong object made of gold, and a table. The spacing between these works functions with the same intuitive feeling about what's right and wrong that went into the larger all-over installations. The success of these recent shows – of the Venice Biennale room, for example – was that people really picked up on them as total installations, even though the works are actually not all over the whole space.

I think that's what's been the real advance-ment: this feeling that people come away with the freedom of free association, but it all belonging together. That's also how I approached the Serpentine show: having this sense of freedom, together with a heightened sense of clarity, whilst also making different groups of work recognisable, the images to be grouped together and also separate. Surprising juxtapositions, I think, happen in every room. As they're also happening within the pictures. I also feel like I can talk about them more; I can actually plan it more. It's not a matter of it just being a magical moment in the installation week when it all comes together. I think I know them better now, and can actually plan something like the Serpentine show by thinking it through from the model of the space. It has the same sense of freedom that previous installations had, but with a heightened clarity.

JPJ There is a new digital presence in your work. How did this come about?

WT The funny thing is that I only really ended up being a photographer through the discovery of the first digital photocopy machine in 1986 in a copy shop in my home town, where I then started making art with photocopiers. And the potential of this digital printing – printing after scanning – allowed me to discover photography as my language. So I'd always been friendly with digital output. I'd used the ink-jet prints since 1992 and the large-format ink-jet prints many years before they became widely used by others. But I've always felt that film has a very physical translation of light into image information. For many, many years, the digitally generated picture was less soulful and less the way I see the world. But that's changed in the last couple of years with the advancements in camera technology. Now there are cameras that allow me to take pictures of how I see the world just as well as I can with film. But they have other features, like changing film speed, which you don't have with film. A lot of my new pictures are taken with a digital camera – new pictures have become possible because of that, due to the heightened light sensitivity they have. The most extreme example of this is *in flight astro (ii)*, in the first room of the Serpentine exhibition, which wouldn't have been technically possible five years ago. I'm both very curious and very traditional, in a way. I very much like absolute truth to the medium, and I think all my abstract work is true to the medium. It's only doing what the process does: collecting light. Different coloured light is being transformed into different colours on paper. All my works come from the very same nature of the medium: it transforms light into coloured pictures on paper.

There is also a very small family of pictures where I use digital manipulation. With these works, I feel absolutely sure that I don't want to make the kinds of manipulations that have become standard: those pictures where you can't tell

whether it's been cleaned up or not. I do want people to have faith in my work that everything they see is actually a direct result of this translation process. And it is a translation process. A photo is never reality; there are always many things that change it from reality. But it has to be translated and transformed within the same parameters. So one can't say, 'This area of a picture has gone through that parameter, and that has gone through this filter.' It's all as one and the viewer can trust that. On the other hand, I have found the potential of Photoshop fascinating.

I made a picture called *Gedser* in 2004, which is a photograph of a man with a mobile phone. For years I'd wanted to take a picture of a person with a mobile phone, because it's so obvious and therefore so difficult because it's so obvious – it's such a strong symbol. I ended up getting one that seemed to have a really interesting shape, of a person completely engaged in an internal way, but standing in public on the deck of a ship. The problem was, there was this other figure walking through the left of the picture; it didn't add any quality. I like chance to interject into the picture, but this was bad and ridiculously silly – a tourist with shorts and sandals and socks. So I got the stamp tool out, and crudely stamped him away, making him this ghostly white patch. When you look at the picture and are told about it, it's very clear that it's been hugely manipulated. But the interesting thing is that it's so much a part of the composition that most people who see the picture don't question it.

There's also a new picture in the show called *Heidelberg*, of motorcyclists in this cyber-looking protective gear. When you look at it, it's very clear that there's a figure on the right who's been taken out, but also on the left there's some weird spray paint on the tiny figure. So there is a bit of exploration of the potential of digital manipulation, but it's done with a sense of absolute revelation; I want it

to be super obvious. That's the only way I can ensure that people will continue to trust my work. So you'll never see a subtle manipulation, and I'll never take out a tree branch so it looks better. It's speaking about the reality of digital manipulation. These crass manipulations that I've done in two pictures are more like an illustration of dealing with this manipulation. It's almost a critique of it, but fun.

JPJ Another very strong part of the exhibition are the *Silver* installations. What is the relationship to the other abstract work?

WT These are obviously similar to the installation method I've been using since the early 1990s. But every single photograph has been replaced by either a photograph of pure colour or of colour and traces of the process, of dirt from the processing machine. One could, of course, see them as placeholders for photographs of a figurative nature. But I don't really see them as that. I think that's simplistic. They're there as themselves, as these objects with very different directions. The majority of them are of pure colour and have an infinite depth in that way. With others, as soon as there are dirt marks on them, this depth is interrupted and you're dealing with physical matter on the surface of the carrier in a way that you'll never actually deal with it in photography. All these colours are handmade in the dark room by mixing, for example, blue light, yellow light or green with red and so on. I do that in the negative process. It's a predictive process – for instance, there are three seconds of blue and a half second of red, and a particular angle hitting that paper that will give me a particular shade of green. This is something I've specialised in over the years, and I've further developed how to predict these certain areas of colour. So when the viewer sees this big corner installation of *Silver Installation VII*, there are lots of similar shades of the same colour, and then there are interjections of the opposite colours, or colours that

don't match. Often the slight shifts are not 'nice', so to speak. These are an observation and a study of colour. And I see them as a study of nature in that sense. They're connected to the very specifics of light and colours, and how they manifest themselves in front of you. I see them as a bit of nature in themselves, as well as an abstraction of nature. They're also a large-scale wall drawing, a mural, where the white areas are equally as active as the picture areas.

HUO Dan Graham has said that in every interview it is important to ask what music an artist is listening to. When we did previous interviews, you were listening to Antony and the Johnsons. What have you been listening to lately?

WT The two albums of John Maus, an American solo artist, who's yet to become better known, but I'm sure he will be. He makes these short electronic songs sound totally relevant and current. Also I listen a lot to Lady Gaga. There's something hidden in her music, a hunger that makes it different from what it first appears to be, something very touching.

1 Wolfgang Tillmans and Hans Ulrich Obrist - *Conversation Series 6*, Verlag de Buchandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2007.







Nacken (a), 2007

Kelbia, 2009

Aufsicht (night), 2009

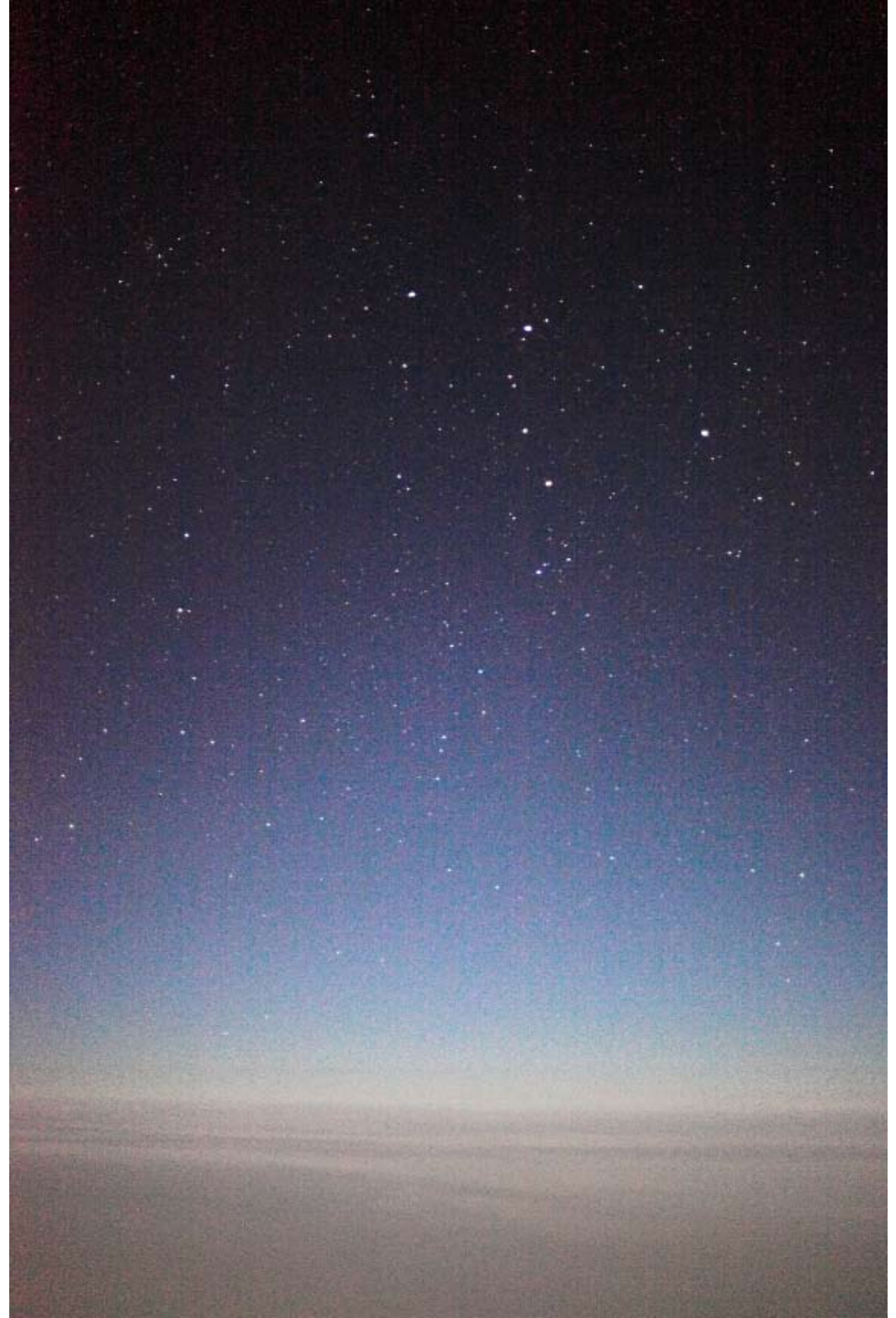


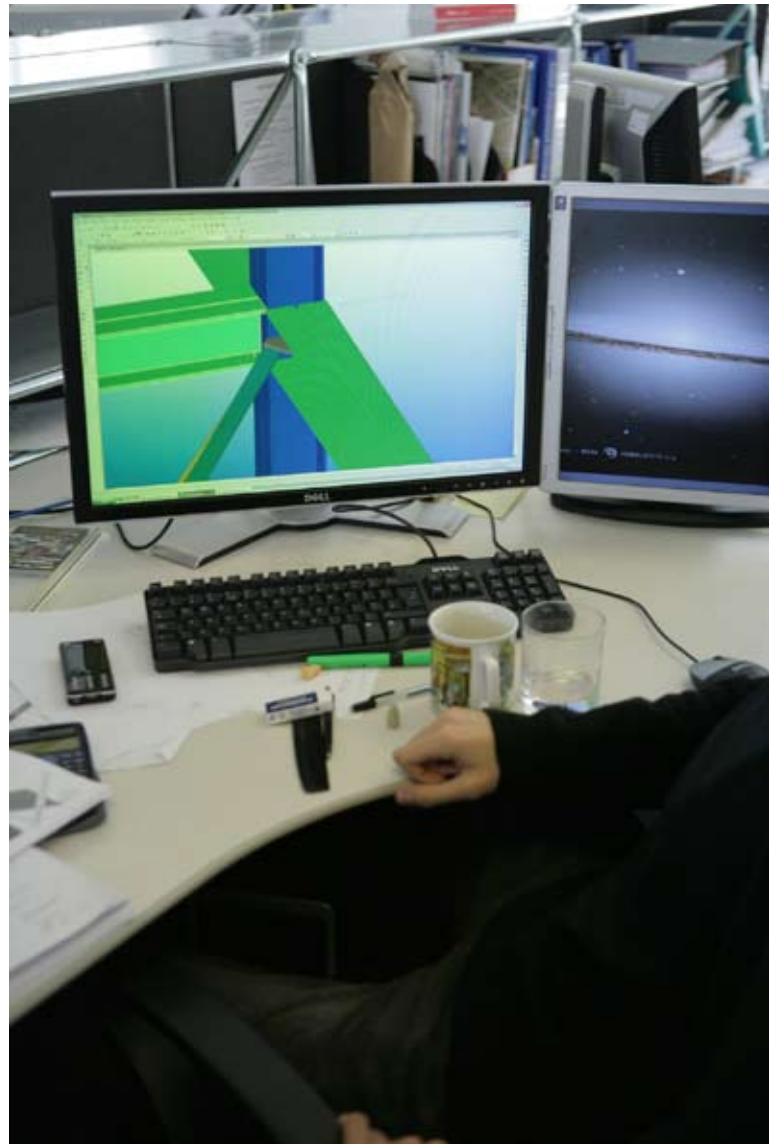
Oriental Pearl, 2009





Everlast II, 2009
in flight astro (ii), 2010





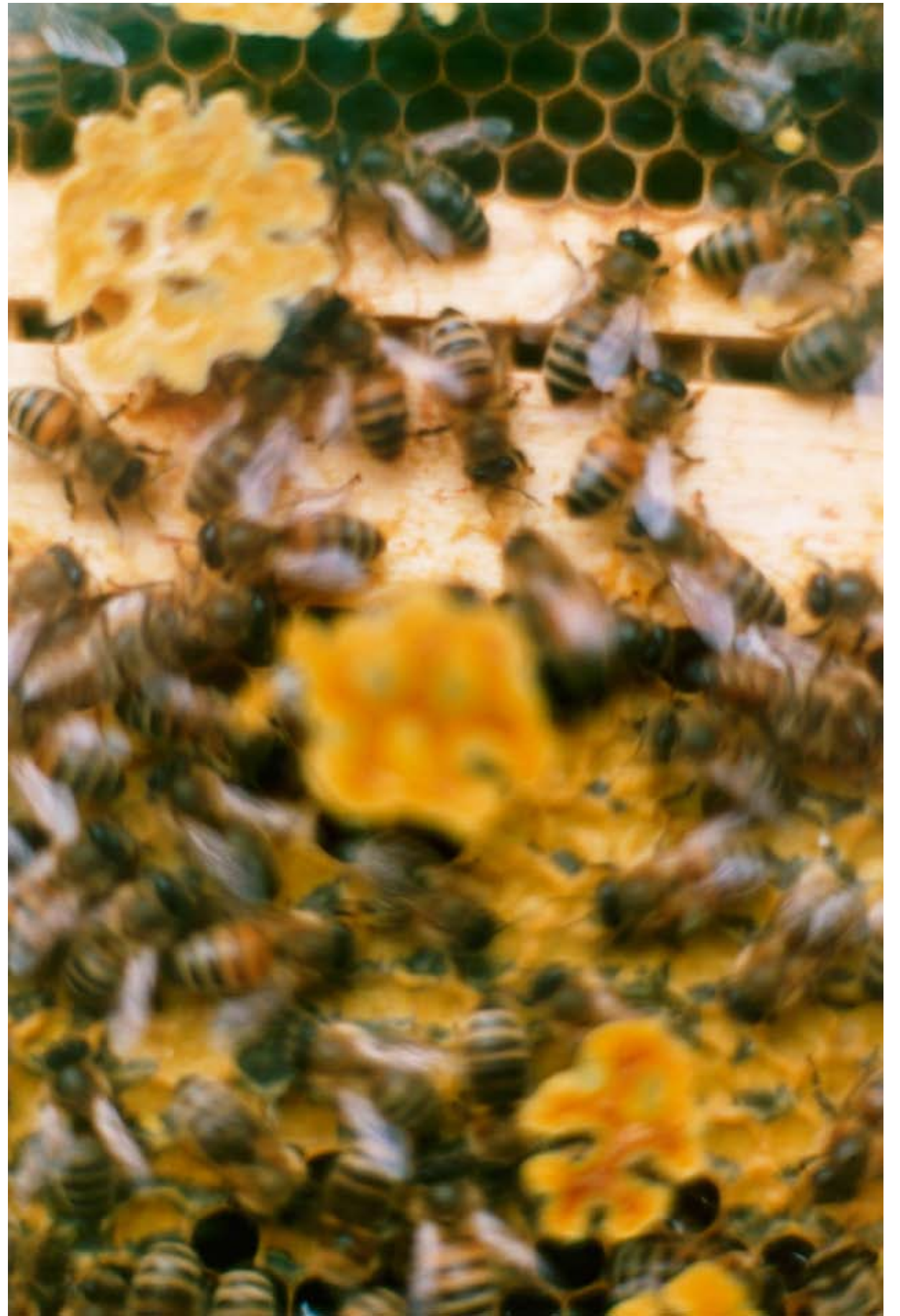
non-specific threat, 2005

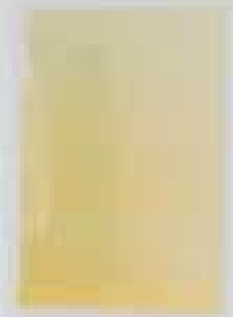
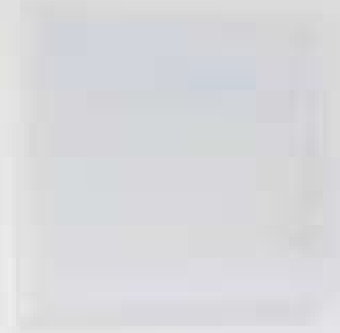
Arup, 2007

Heidelberg, 2009



paper drop (Roma), 2007 Bio Bees, 2007





Lighter, green/black I, 2007



Lighter, white IV, 2010



Lighter, blue concave I, 2008



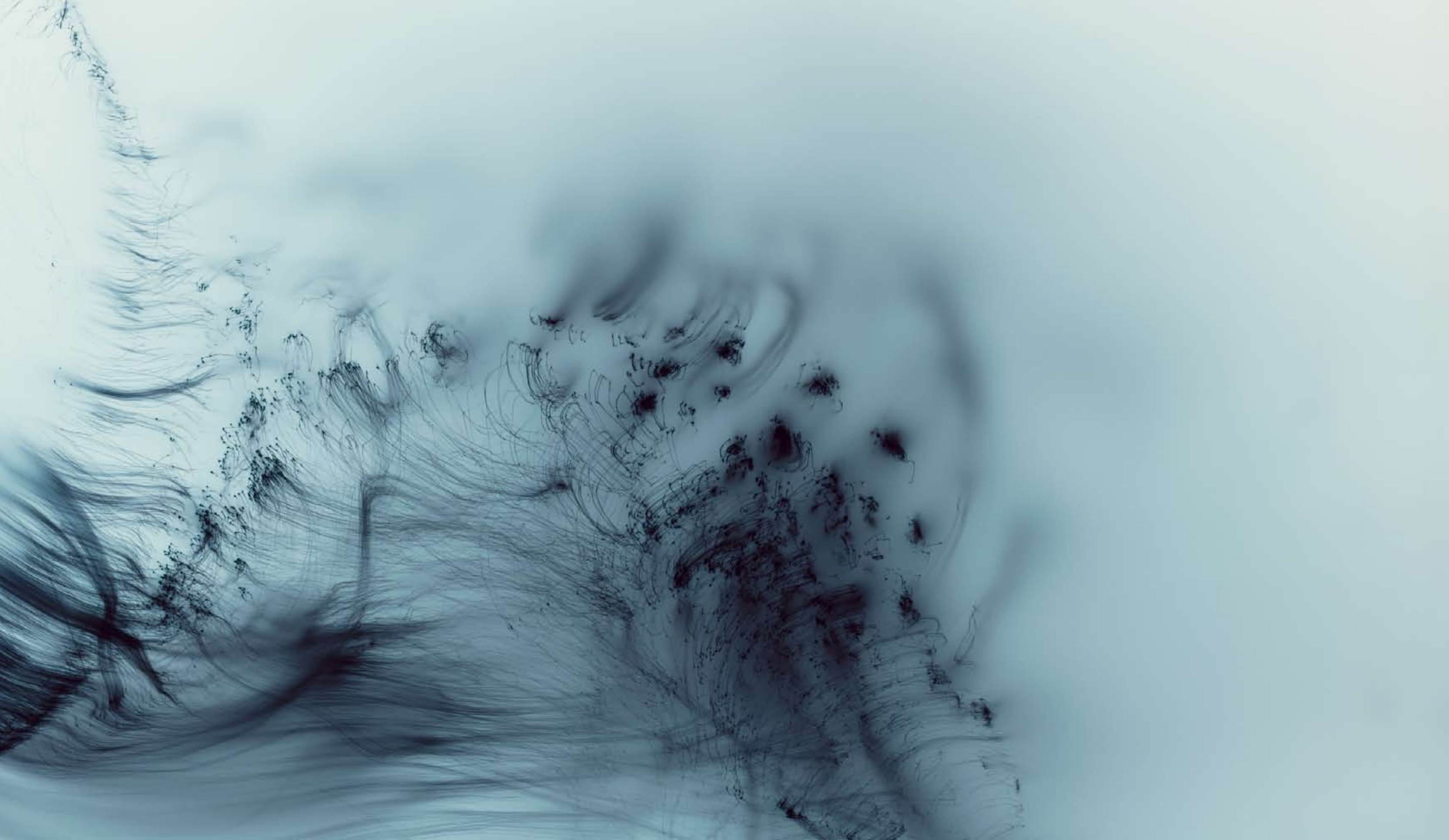
Lighter, yellow I, 2008











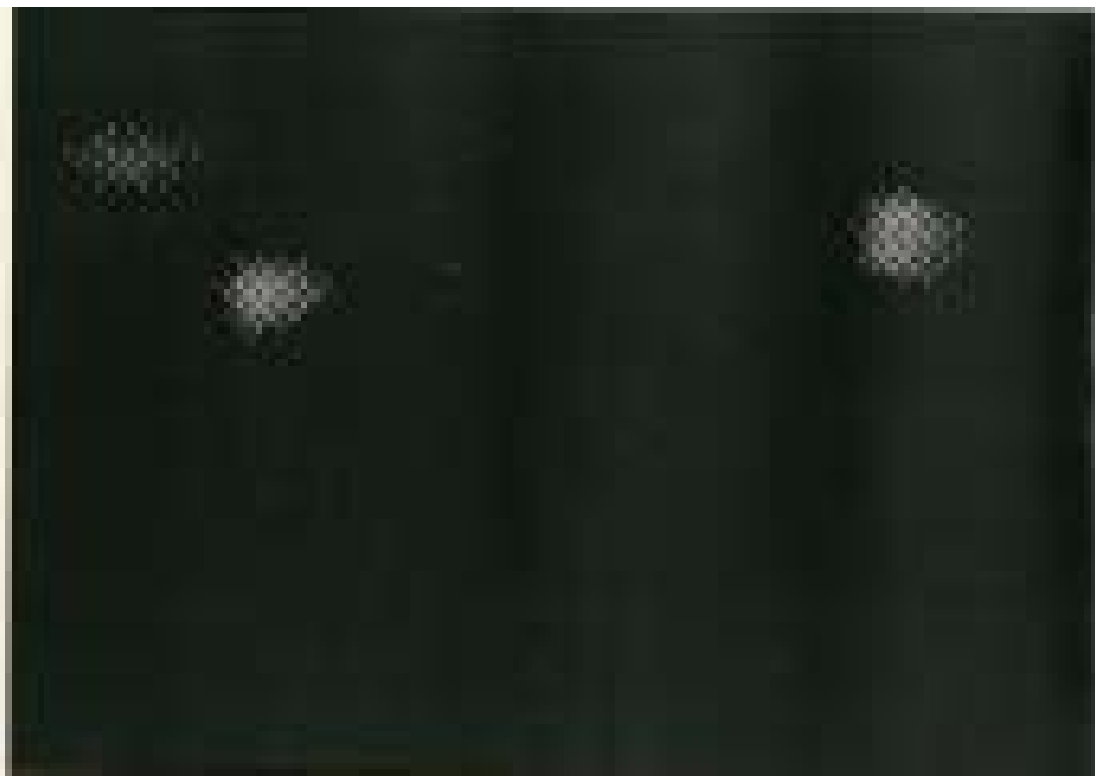




Wellen Lacanau, 1988

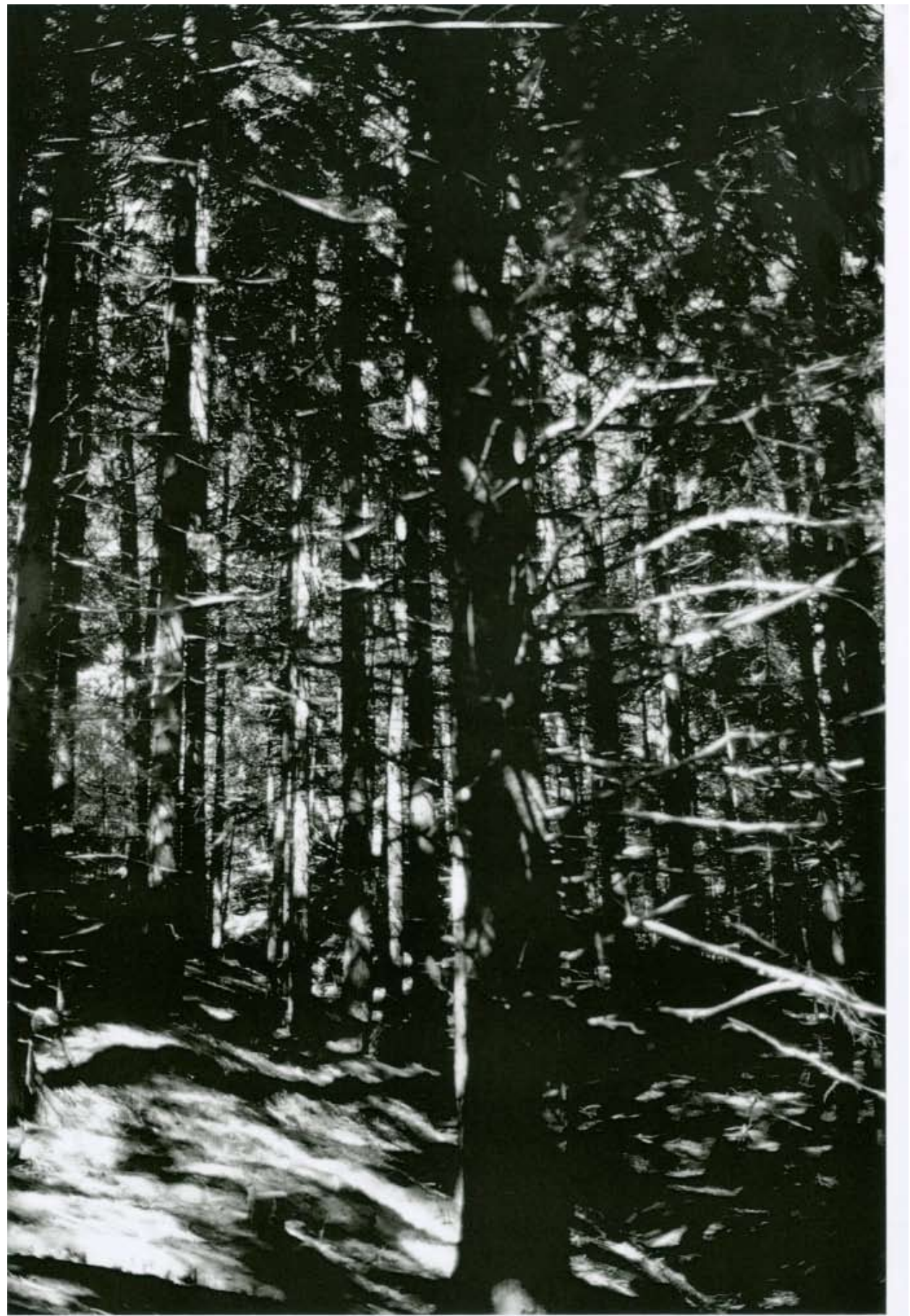
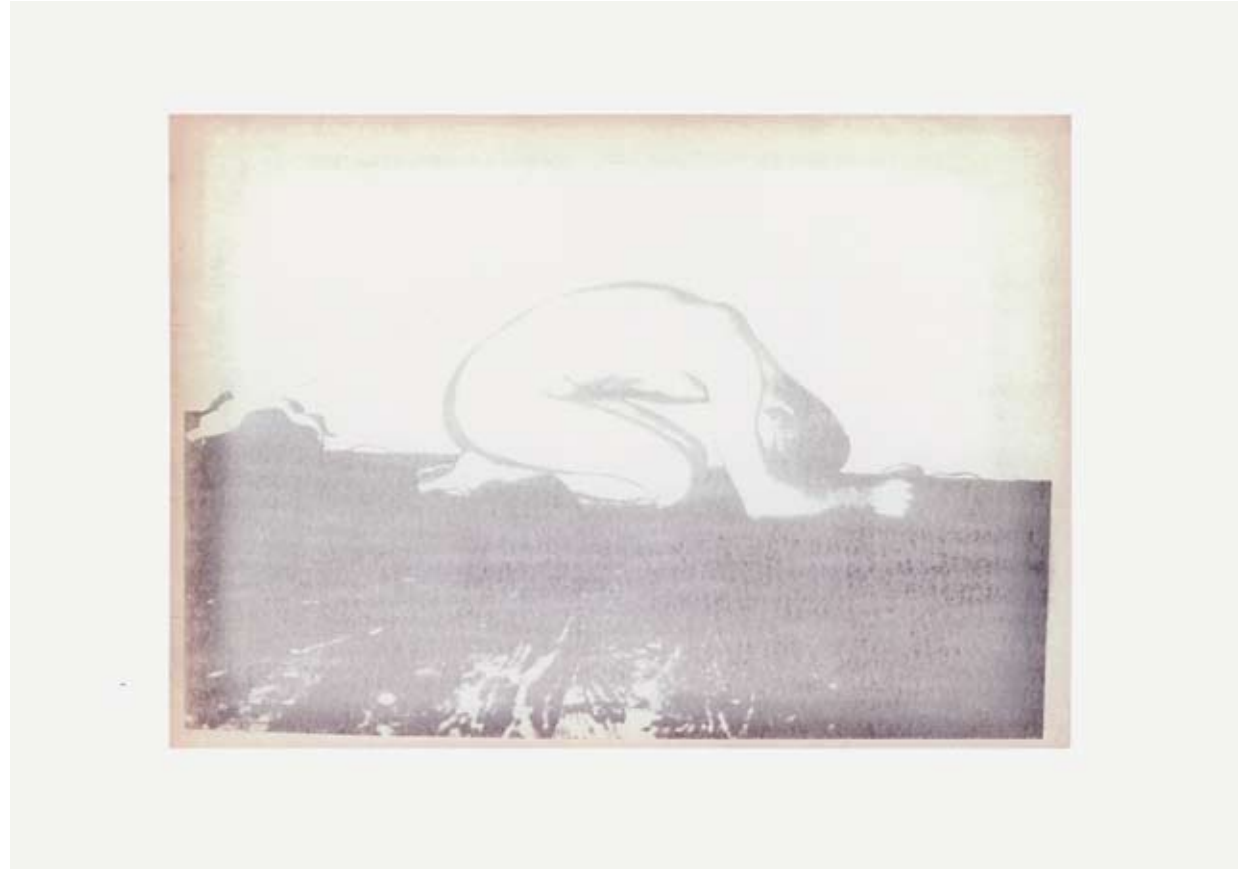
Genova, 1988

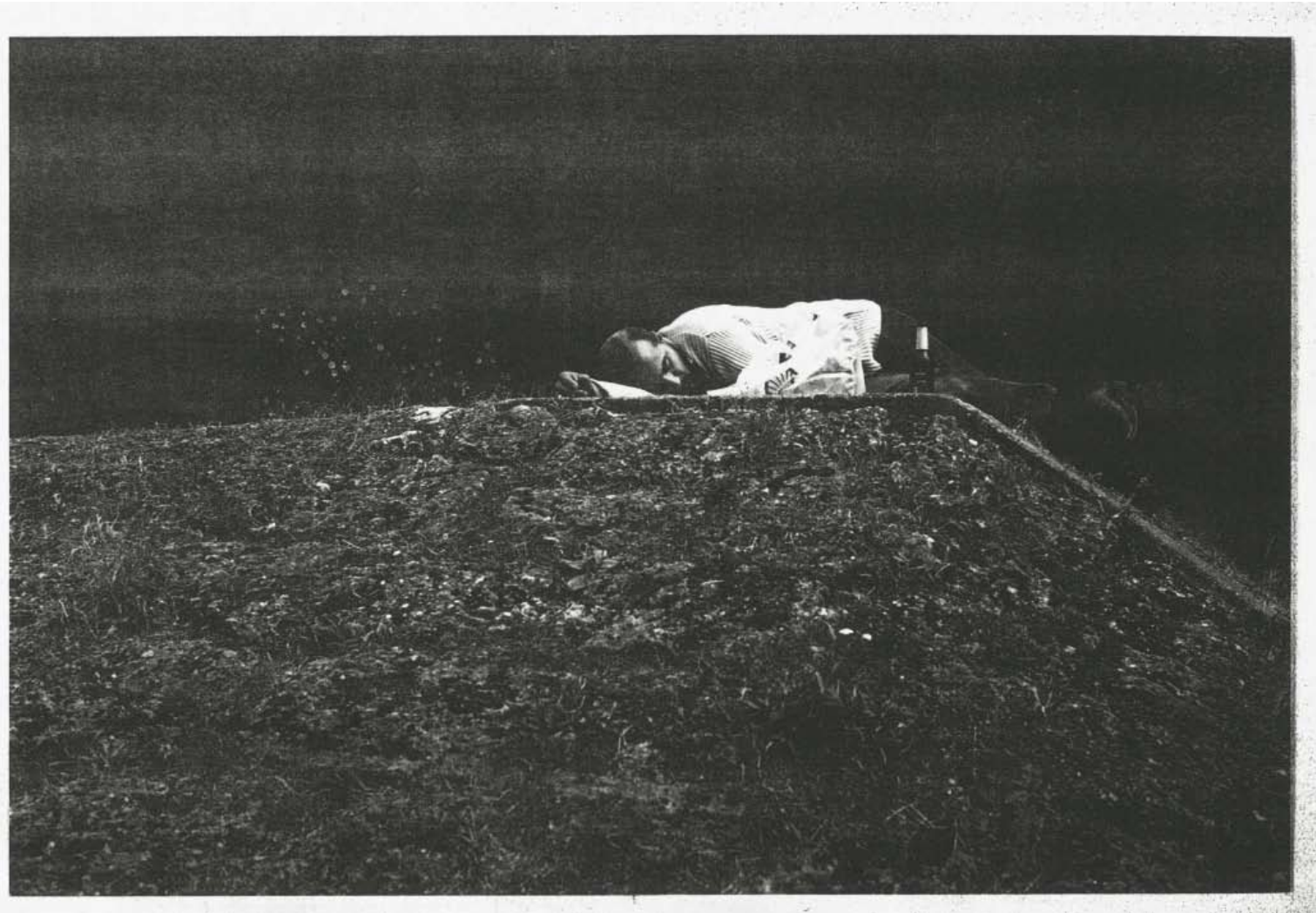
Edinburgh builders, a, 1987



like praying (faded fax), 2005

Wald (Briol I), 2008





growth, 2006
Silver I, 1998



Dan, 2008



Mark, studio, 2009



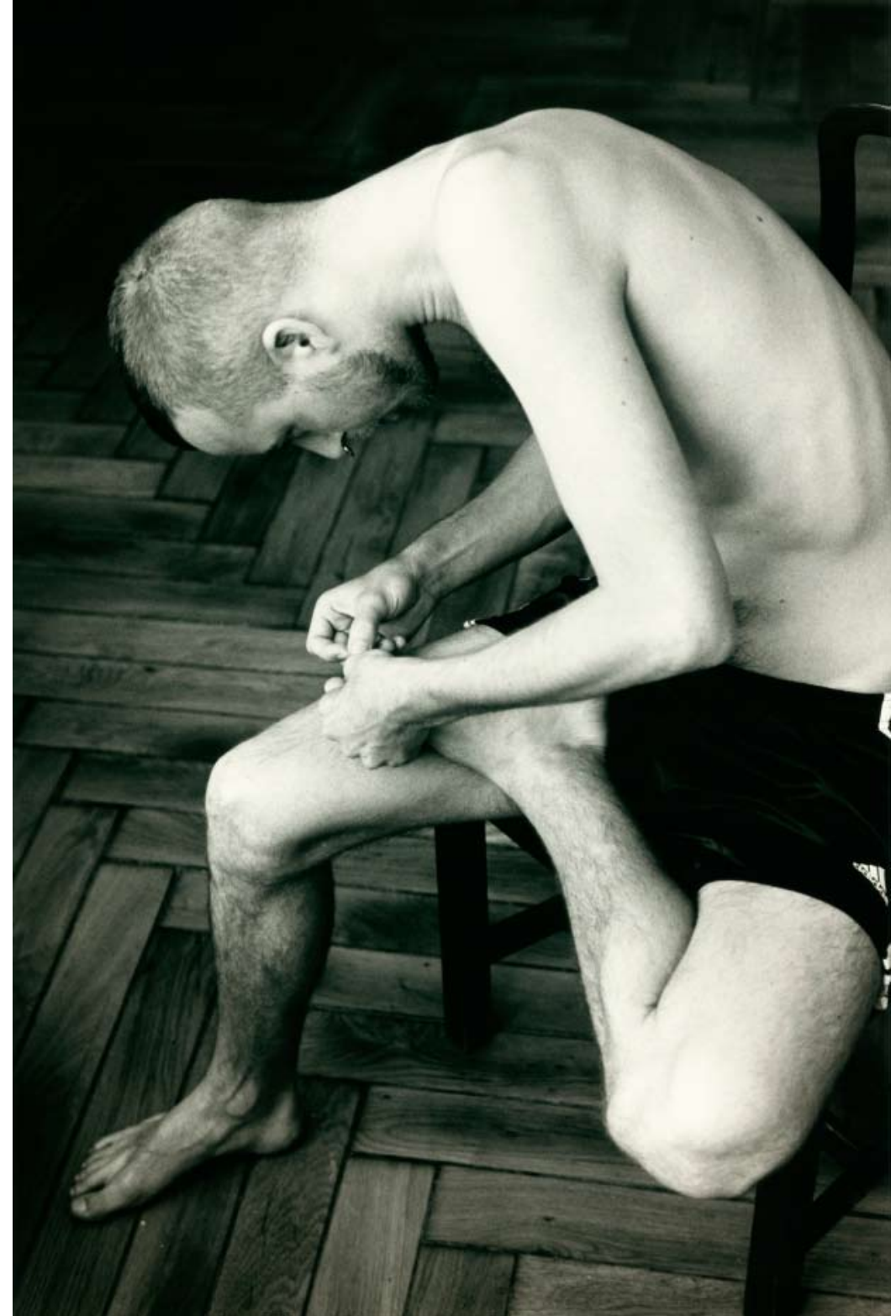
Karl on stool, 2009

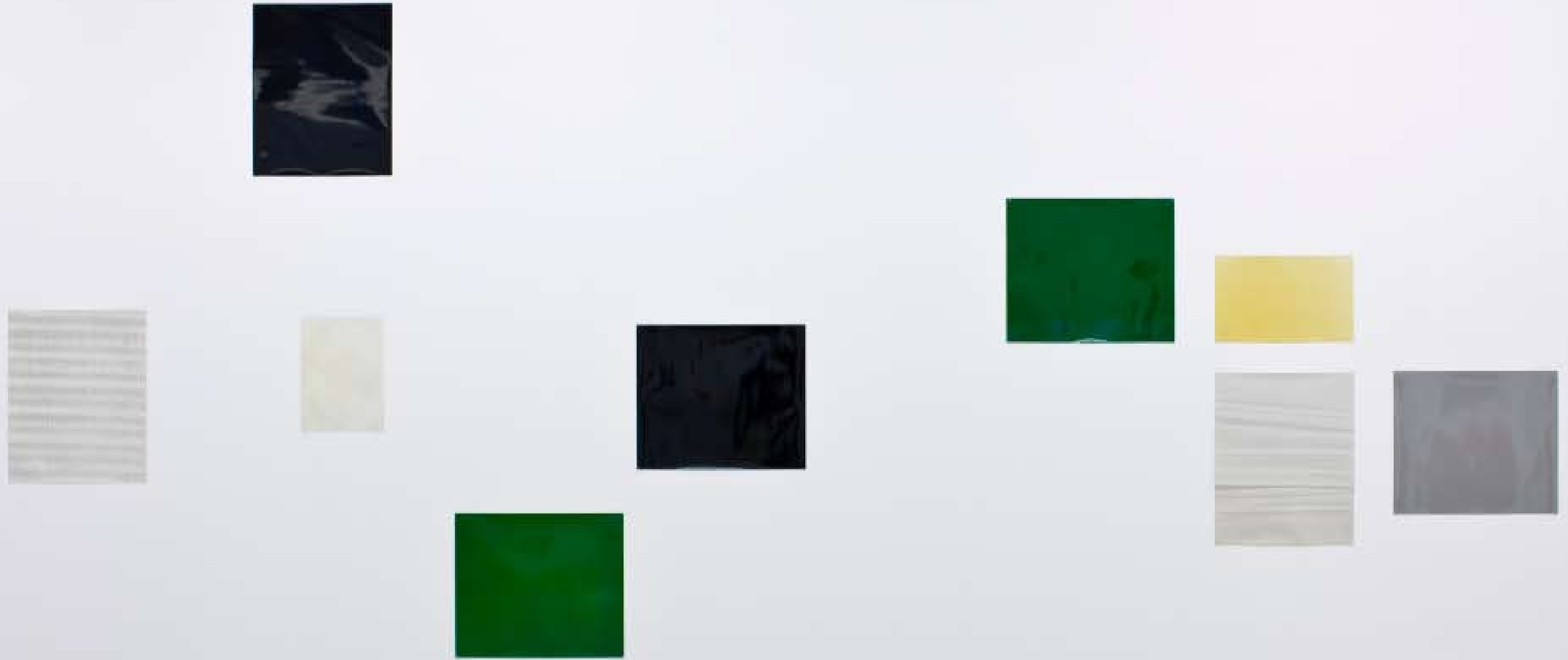


morning, 2009
Thirty & Forty Party, 2008
Baraclough, 2008



Anders pulling splinter from his foot, 2004











Quaker Social Action NEWSLETTER

New Articles

...the first large medical study of female genital mutilation has found that the procedure has deadly consequences when a woman gives birth, raising by more than 50 percent the likelihood that the woman or her baby would die. Rates of serious medical complications surrounding childbirth, such as bleeding, also rose dramatically in women who had undergone genital cutting, according to the research published Friday in the British medical journal Lancet.

"Reliable evidence about its harmful effects, especially on reproduction, should contribute to the abandonment of the practice," write the study's authors, members of the World Health Organization Study Group on Female Genital



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The first large medical study of female genital mutilation has found that the procedure has deadly consequences when a woman gives birth, raising by more than 50 percent the likelihood that the woman or her baby would die. Rates of serious medical complications surrounding childbirth, such as bleeding, also rose dramatically in women who had undergone genital cutting, according to the research published Friday in the British medical journal Lancet.



Two Iranian teenagers, sentenced under Sharia law, are publicly hanged for the 'crime' of homosexuality. Mashhad, 2005

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Genital cutting's deadly legacy

In **APOSTASY**

Bel...
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Vatican attacked over cardinal's claim of homosexuality and paedophilia link

Cardinal...
homosexually...
paedophilia...

Decades of abuse chronic in Irish report

Irish report...
chronic in...

Arts

The Washington Post

Senior, Mar 13, 2007

Vatican comment draws gay anger

BBC NEWS

Gay rights activists have criticised a Vatican official who sought to link homosexuality to paedophilia when commenting on child sex abuse statistics.

The Vatican spokesman said it was disappointed the pope was not seen as a "strong voice" for the LGBT community.

The Vatican spokesman said it was disappointed the pope was not seen as a "strong voice" for the LGBT community.



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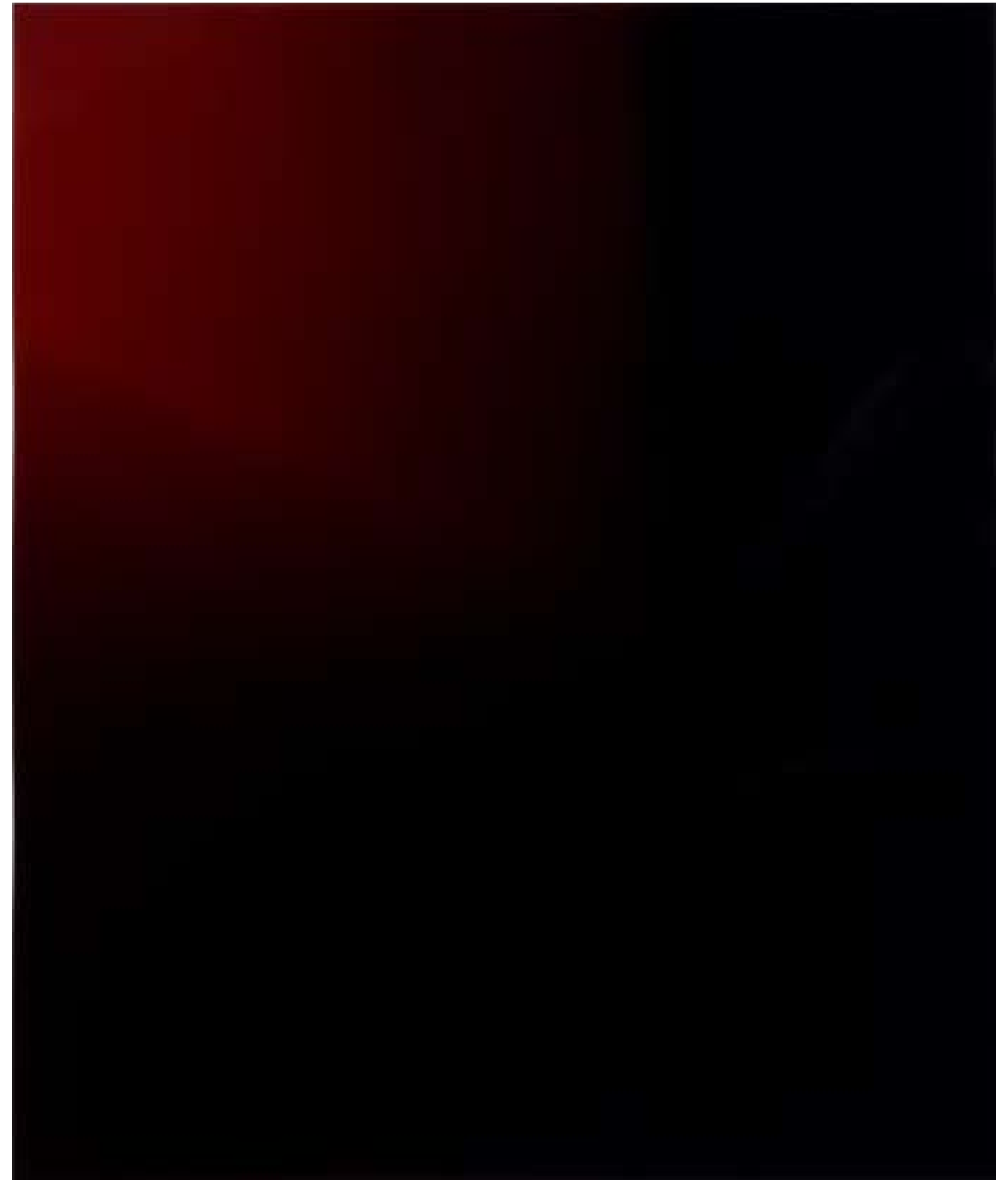
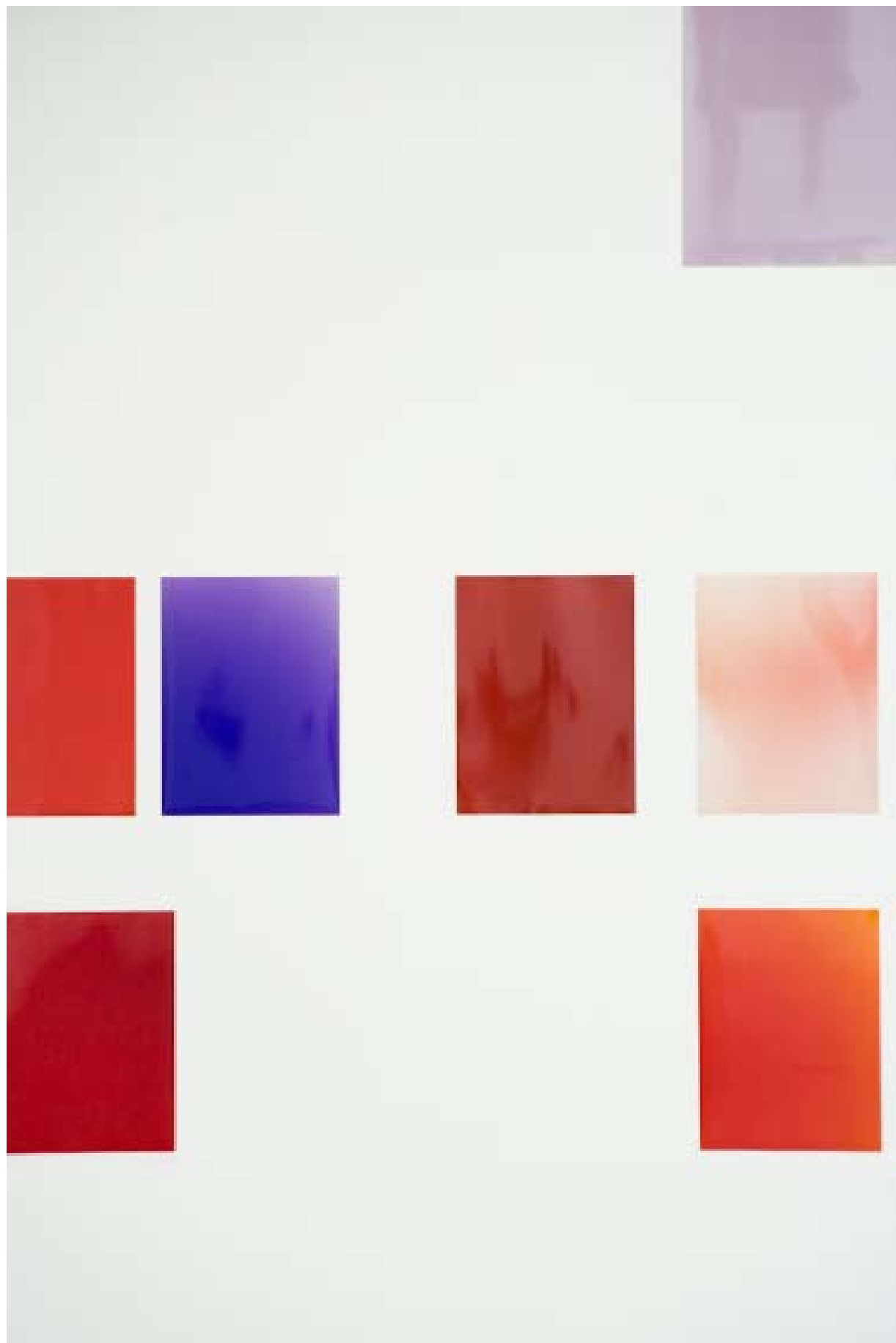
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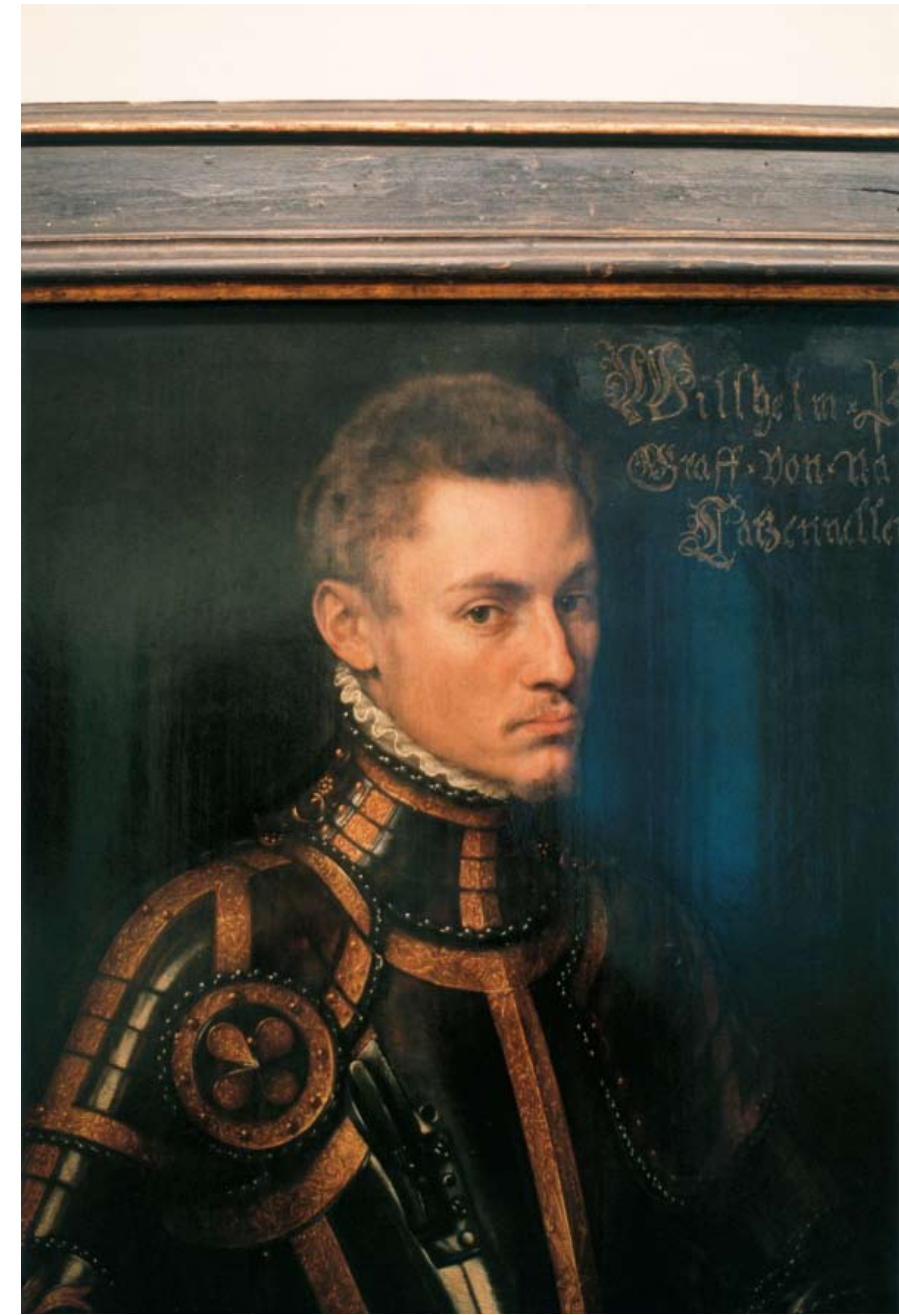


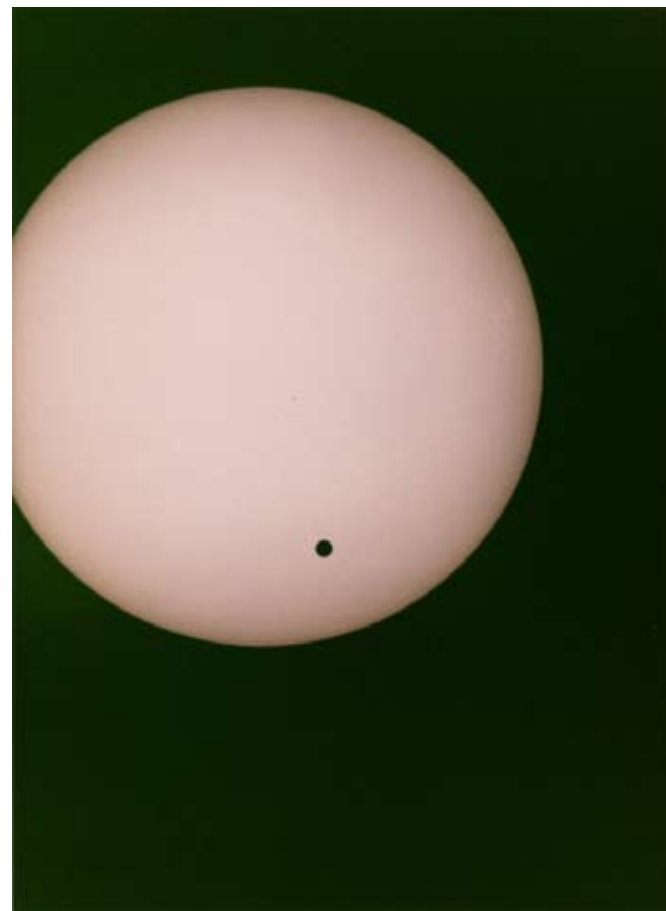












Previous pages: *Clouds II*, 2008

Venus transit, second contact, 2004

Venus transit, drop, 2004

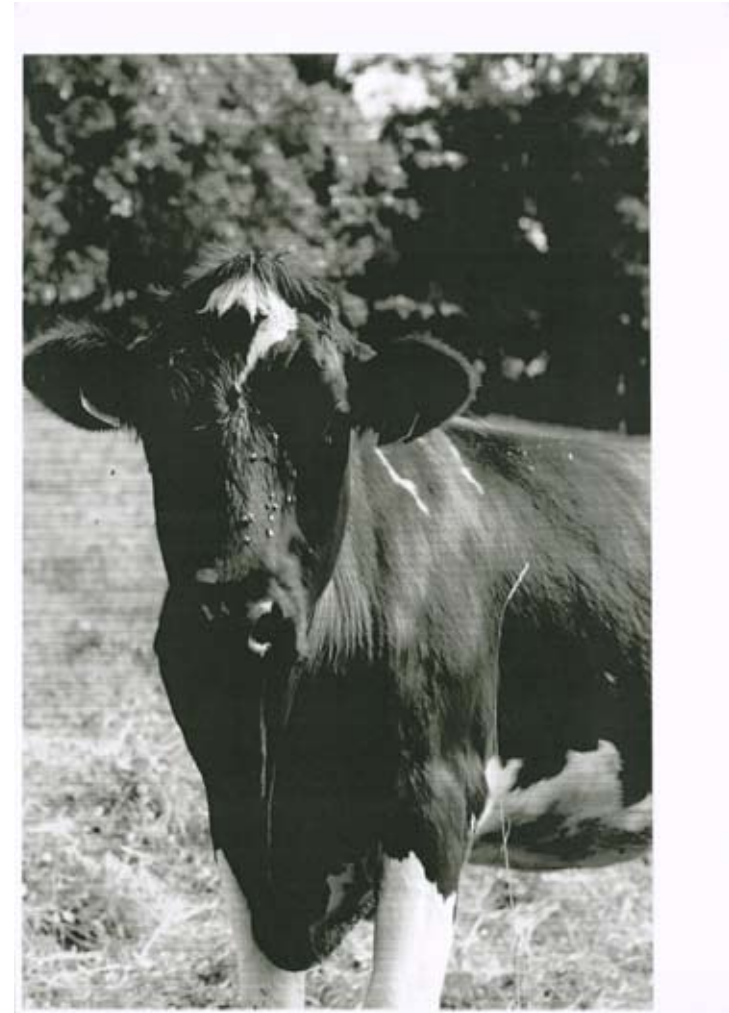
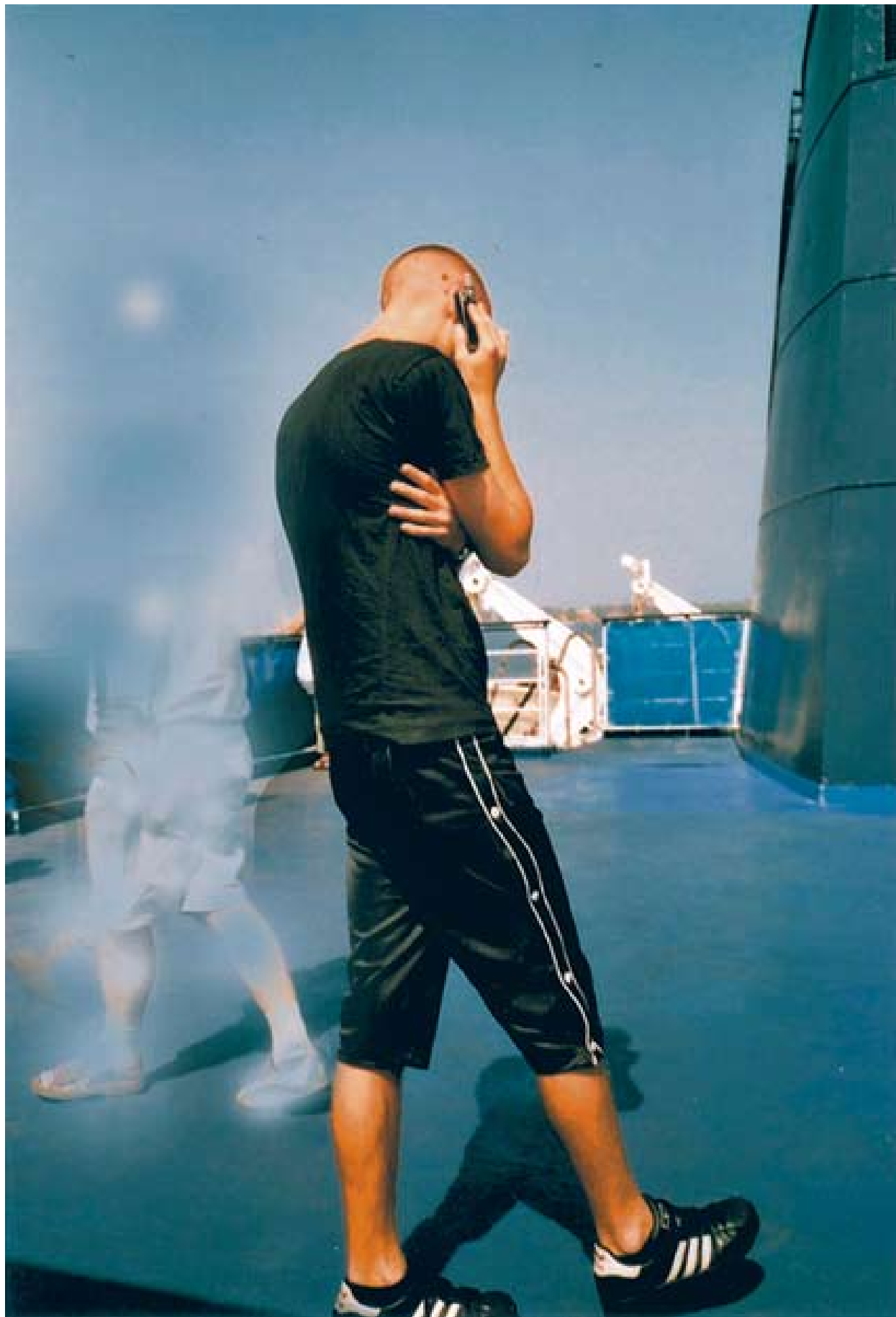
Venus transit, 2004

Venus transit, edge, 2004

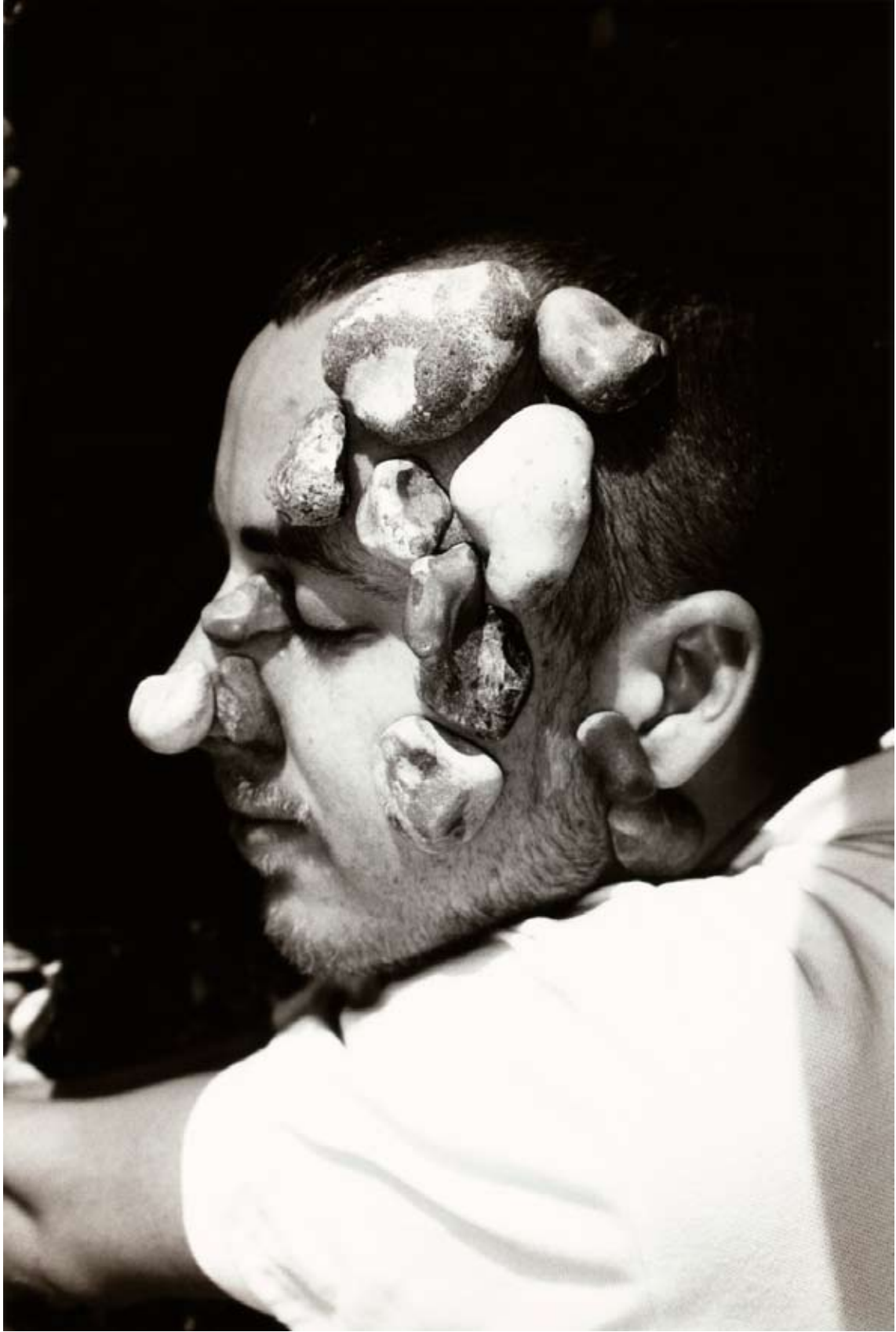
Venus transit, passage, 2004

This page: *Beerenstilleben*, 2007

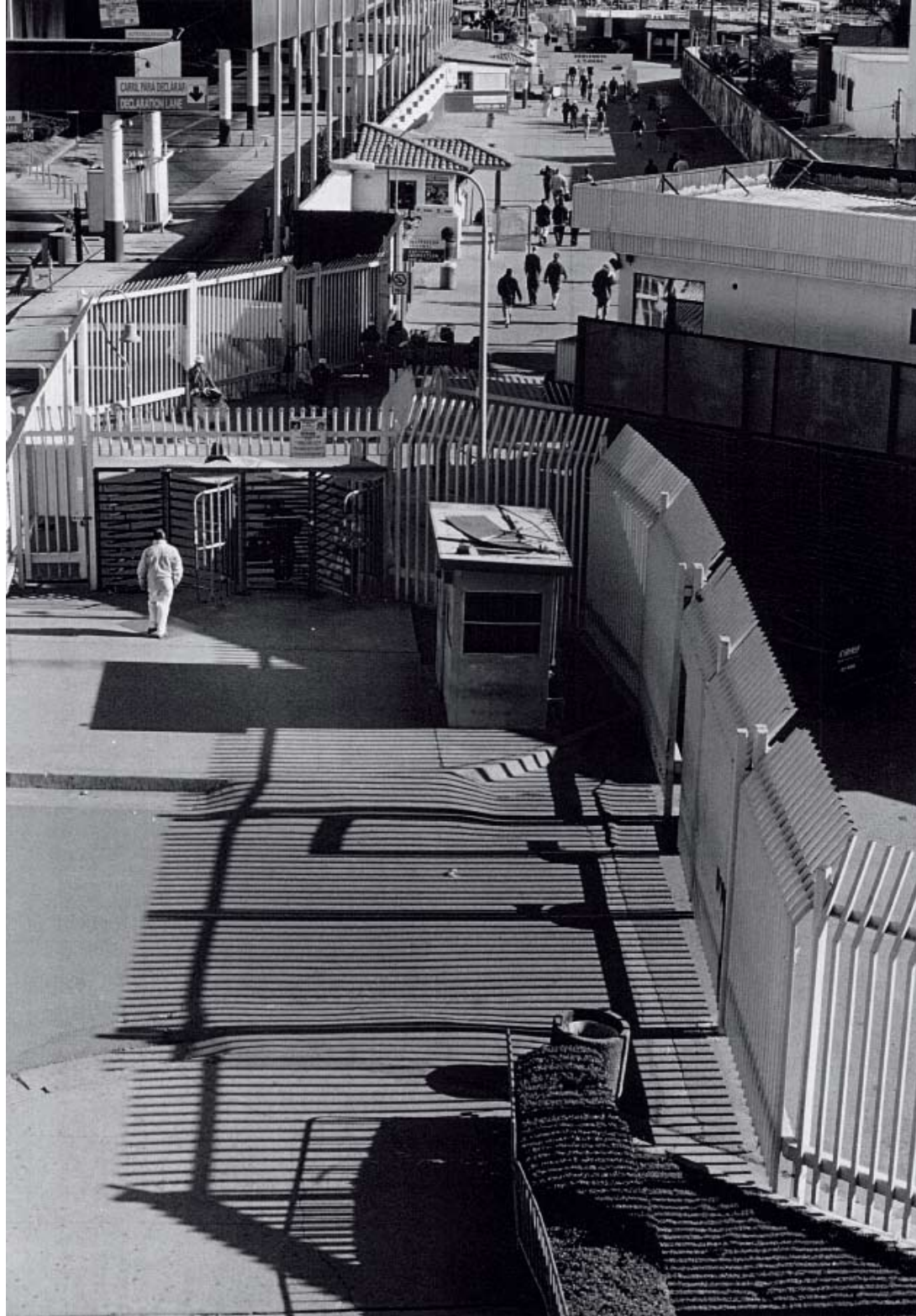




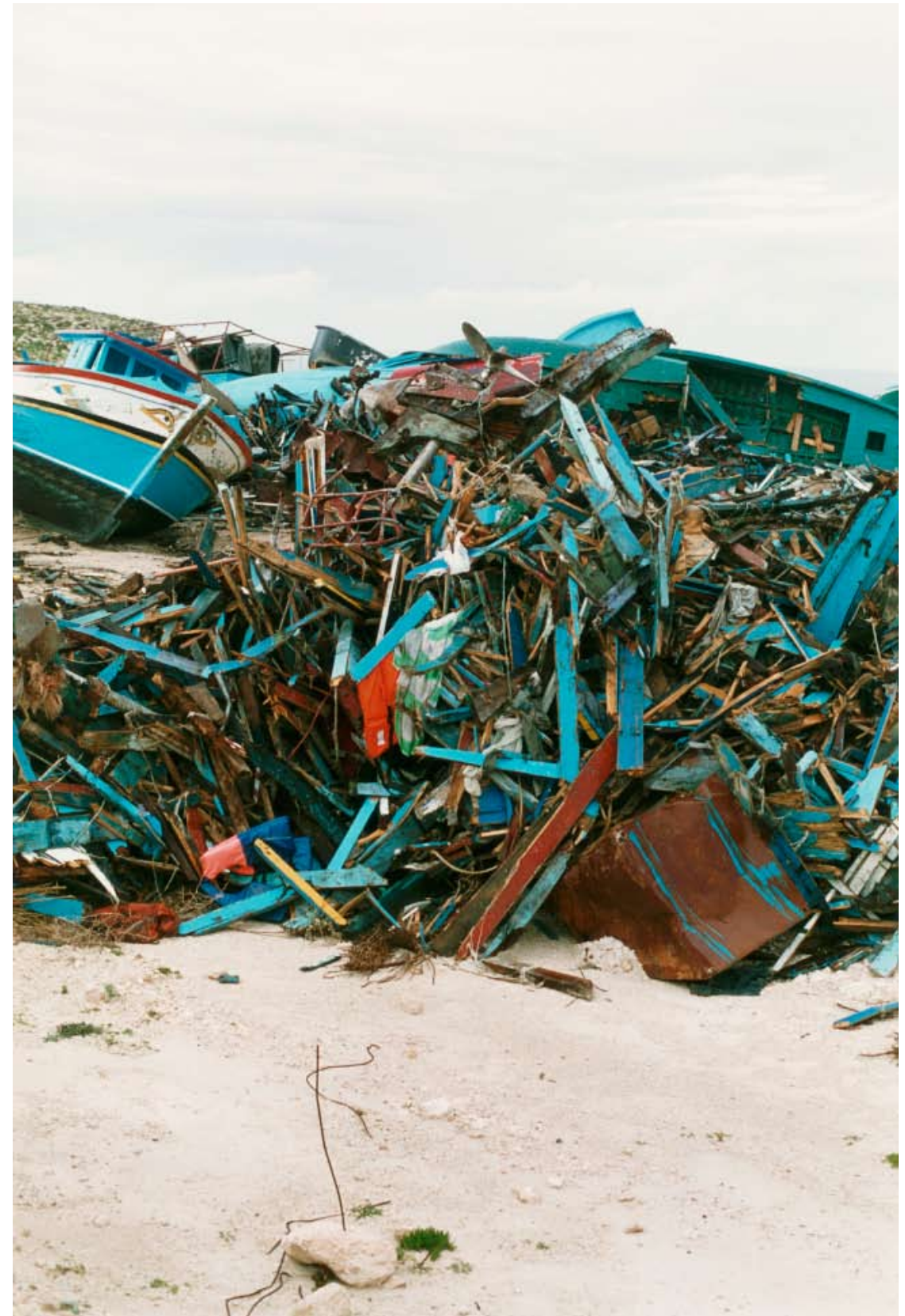
















Selected Biography

- 1968 Born in Remscheid, Germany
 1987–1990 Lives and works in Hamburg, Germany
 1990–1992 Studies at Bournemouth and Poole College of Art and Design, Bournemouth
 1992–1994 Lives and works in London
 1994–1995 Lives and works in New York
 1995 Ars Viva Prize, Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie e. V; Kunstpreis der Böttchstraße, Bremen, Germany
 Since 1996 Lives and works in London
 1998–1999 Visiting professorship at the Hochschule für bildende Künste, Hamburg
 2000 Turner Prize, Tate Britain, London
 2003–2010 Professorship of interdisciplinary art at Städelschule, Frankfurt a.M.
 Since 2004 Also lives and works in Berlin
 2006 Opens Between Bridges exhibition space in London
 2009 Kulturpreis, The German Society of Photography
 Since 2009 Artist Trustee on the Board of Tate, London

Selected Exhibitions

- 2010 Serpentine Gallery, London
 2008 *Lighter*, Hamburger Bahnhof; Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin; *Tegenwoordigheid van Geest*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Museo Tamayo, Mexico City
 2007 Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; *Bali*, Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hanover; *Beugung*, Kunstverein München, Munich
 2006 Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Helsinki-Festival, Taidehalli, Helsinki; *Freedom from the Known*, P.S.1 / MoMA, New York
 2004 *Freischwimmer*, Tokyo Opera City Gallery, Tokyo

- 2003 *if one thing matters, everything matters*, Tate Britain, London; Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, Netherlands; *View from Above*, Louisiana Museum for Moderne Kunst, Denmark
 2002 *Vue d'en Haut*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris; *Veduta dall'alto*, Castello di Rivoli—Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli, Turin; *Wolfgang Tillmans: still life*, The Fogg Art Gallery, Busch Reisinger Museum, Harvard; Cambridge, Mass; *Partnerschaften II* (with Jochen Klein), Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin
 2001 *Aufsicht*, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg; *Science Fiction/hier und jetzt zufrieden sein* (with Isa Genzken), Museum Ludwig, Cologne; *Wer Liebe wagt lebt morgen*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg
 1995 Kunsthalle Zurich; Portikus, Frankfurt a.M.
 1994 Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York
 1993 Daniel Buchholz – Buchholz & Buchholz, Cologne; Maureen Paley, London
 1988 *Approaches*, Café Gnosa, Hamburg

Selected Publications

- 1995 *Wolfgang Tillmans*, Taschen, Cologne, reissued 2002; *Wolfgang Tillmans*, exh. cat., Portikus, Frankfurt am Main; *Wolfgang Tillmans*, Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich, reissued 2008
 1996 *For When I'm Weak I'm Strong/ Wer Liebe wagt lebt morgen*, exh. cat., Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg and Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit
 1997 *Concorde*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne
 1998 *Burg*, Taschen, Cologne, reissued as *Wolfgang Tillmans*, 2002
 1999 *Soldiers: The Nineties*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne; *Total Solar Eclipse/Totale Sonnenfinsternis*, Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne; *Wako Book 1999*, Wako Works of Art, Tokyo

- 2001 *AC: Isa Genzken/Wolfgang Tillmans*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne; *Portraits*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne; *View from Above/Aufsicht*, exh. cat., Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit; *Wako Book 2*, Wako Works of Art, Tokyo
 2002 *Wolfgang Tillmans*, Phaidon Press, London and New York; *Wolfgang Tillmans: Still Life*, exh. cat., Harvard University Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass
 2003 *if one thing matters, everything matters*, exh. cat., Tate Publishing, London
 2004 *Freischwimmer*, exh. cat., Opera City Gallery, Tokyo; *Wako Book 3*, Wako Works of Art, Tokyo
 2005 *truth study center*, Taschen, Cologne
 2006 *Freedom From The Known*, exh. cat., PS1 and Steidl Verlag, New York and Göttingen; *Wolfgang Tillmans*, exh. cat., Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Yale University Press, New Haven and London; *Why we must provide HIV treatment information*, HIV i-base, London
 2007 *Manual*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne; *Wolfgang Tillmans and Hans Ulrich Obrist: The Conversation Series 6*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne
 2008 *Lighter*, exh. cat., Hamburger Bahnhof, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern; *Wako Book 4*, Wako Works of Art, Tokyo

List of Plates

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* Denotes work not included in the exhibition					
<i>Eierstapel</i> , 2009 C-type print 61 × 50.8 cm	<i>in flight astro (ii)</i> , 2010 Inkjet print 207.5 × 138 cm	<i>Lighter, yellow I</i> , 2008 Unique C-type print in Plexiglas hood 64 × 54 × 4cm	<i>like praying (faded fax)</i> , 2005 Framed fax 29.7 × 42 cm	<i>Silver Installation VI</i> , 2009 Unique C-type prints 231 × 563 cm	<i>Stühle</i> , 2008 Inkjet print 138 × 208 cm
<i>Wald (Reinshagen)</i> , 2008 Framed C-type print 237 × 181 cm	<i>non-specific threat</i> , 2005 C-type print 61 × 50.8 cm	<i>Lighter 83</i> , 2010 Unique C-type print in Plexiglas hood 54 × 64 × 12.5 cm	<i>Wald (Briol I)</i> , 2008 Framed C-type print 261 × 181 cm	<i>Details of Silver Installation VI</i> , 2009 Unique C-type prints 231 × 563 cm	<i>William of Orange</i> , 2007 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm
<i>Paper drop fused I</i> , 2006*	<i>Arup</i> , 2007 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm	<i>haircut</i> , 2007 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm	<i>An der Isar, II</i> , 2008 Framed C-type print 181 × 258 cm	Table A <i>Space, Food, Religion (TSC)</i> , 2010 Wood, glass and mixed media 78 × 198 × 76 cm	<i>Clouds II</i> , 2008 Framed C-type print 242 × 172 cm
<i>Wald (Tierra del Fuego) II</i> , 2010 Laser print 42 × 29.7 cm	<i>Heidelberg</i> , 2009 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm	<i>CLC1100</i> , 2007 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm	<i>Die Schwärze</i> , 2007 C-type print 50.8 × 61 cm	Table B <i>Space, Food, Religion (TSC)</i> , 2010 Wood, glass and mixed media 93 × 198 × 46 cm	<i>Venus transit, second contact</i> , 2004 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm
<i>Duomo</i> , 2009 Inkjet print 207 × 138 cm	<i>Economy</i> , 2006 Framed photocopy 42 × 29.7 cm	<i>Urgency XIV</i> , 2006 Framed C-type print 237 × 181 cm	<i>growth</i> , 2006 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm	Table C <i>Space, Food, Religion (TSC)</i> , 2010 Wood, glass and mixed media 83 × 198 × 61 cm	<i>Venus transit, drop</i> , 2004 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm
<i>Roy</i> , 2009 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm	<i>paper drop (light)</i> , 2006 C-type print 30.5 × 40.6 cm	<i>Ostgut Freischwimmer, right</i> , 2004 Inkjet print 231.1 × 607.8 cm Collection of Kunstmuseum Basel	<i>Silver 1</i> , 1998 Framed C-type print 238 × 181 cm Collection Charles Asprey	Detail of Table A <i>Space, Food, Religion (TSC)</i> , 2010 Wood, glass and mixed media 78 × 198 × 76 cm	<i>Venus transit, edge</i> , 2004 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm
<i>Nanbei Hu</i> , 2009 Inkjet print 207 × 138 cm	<i>paper drop (Roma)</i> , 2007 Framed C-type print 145 × 212 cm	<i>Detail of Ostgut Freischwimmer, right</i> , 2004 Inkjet print 231.1 × 607.8 cm Collection of Kunstmuseum Basel	<i>Dan</i> , 2008 C-type print 61 × 50.8 cm	Detail of Table C <i>Space, Food, Religion (TSC)</i> , 2010 Wood, glass and mixed media 83 × 198 × 61 cm	<i>Venus transit, 2004</i> C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm
<i>Heptathlon</i> , 2009 Inkjet print 208.5 × 138 cm	<i>Bio Bees</i> , 2007 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm	<i>Urgency XXI</i> , 2006 Framed C-type print 238 × 181 cm	<i>Mark, studio</i> , 2009 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm	<i>Werkstatt</i> , 2008 C-type print 50.8 × 61 cm	<i>Venus transit, passage</i> , 2004 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm
<i>glass factory</i> , 2008 C-type print 30.5 × 40.6 cm	<i>Lighter, green/black I</i> , 2007 <i>Lighter, white IV</i> , 2010 <i>Lighter, blue concave I</i> , 2008 <i>Lighter, yellow I</i> , 2008 <i>Lighter 83</i> , 2010	<i>Urgency XXII</i> , 2006 Framed C-type print 238 × 181 cm	<i>Karl on stool</i> , 2009 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm	<i>Silver Installation VII</i> , 2009 Unique C-type prints 306 × 843 cm	<i>Beerenstilleben</i> , 2007 C-type print 30.5 × 40.6 cm
<i>Nacken (a)</i> , 2007 *	<i>Lighter, green/black I</i> , 2007 Unique C-type print in Plexiglas hood 64 × 54 × 10 cm	<i>Wellen Lacanau</i> , 1988 Framed photocopy 42 × 29.7 cm	<i>morning</i> , 2009 C-type print 30.5 × 40.6 cm	<i>Details of Silver Installation VII</i> , 2009 Unique C-type prints 306 × 843 cm	<i>Gedser</i> , 2004 C-type print 40.6 × 30.5 cm
<i>Kelibia</i> , 2009 Inkjet print 208 × 138 cm	<i>Lighter, white IV</i> , 2010 Unique C-type print in Plexiglas hood 54 × 64 × 7 cm	<i>Genova</i> , 1988 Framed photocopy 29.7 × 42 cm	<i>Thirty & Forty Party</i> , 2008 C-type print 30.5 × 40.6 cm	<i>Kuh</i> , 2008 Framed photocopy 29.7 × 21 cm	<i>Zimmerlinde (Michel)</i> , 2006 Framed C-type print 211 × 145 cm
<i>Aufsicht (night)</i> , 2009 *			<i>Baraclough</i> , 2008 C-type print 30.5 × 40.6 cm	<i>meeting lights</i> , 2006 C-type print 30.5 × 40.6 cm	
<i>Oriental Pearl</i> , 2009 Inkjet print 205 × 136 cm					

Systematic Collection, 2008

C-type print

30.5×40.6 cm

Anders (Brighton Arcimboldo), 2005

C-type print

40.6×30.5 cm

Jerusalem Wall, 2009

C-type print

30.5×40.6 cm

Fenster, 2009

C-type print

40.6×30.5 cm

Empire (US/Mexico border), 2005

Framed C-type print

256×181 cm

Ursuppe, 2009

C-type print

50.8×61 cm

Garten, 2008

C-type print

50.8×61 cm

Tunisia bus, 2009

C-type print

40.6×30.5 cm

Lampedusa, 2008 *

Sesc Pompeia (a), 2010 *

Times Square LED, 2010 *

Lighter, black VII, 2010

Unique C-type print in Plexiglass hood

64×54×12 cm

we summer, left, 2004

C-type print

40.6×30.5 cm

we summer, right, 2004

C-type print

40.6×30.5 cm

All works courtesy of the artist and Maureen

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