

Wolfgang Tillmans

“Silver”

28 November 2013 – 18 January 2014
Opening reception Thursday, 28 November, 7-9 pm

In his 11th solo exhibition at Galerie Buchholz Wolfgang Tillmans shows new abstract ‘Silver’ works. This will be the first Wolfgang Tillmans exhibition to be dedicated exclusively to this group of works.

The ‘Silver’ works were first developed by Wolfgang Tillmans in the late 1990’s. Photo paper, at times unexposed, at times exposed to various sources of colored light, is led through the processing machine in which is left – in varying degrees of concentration – water and traces of used chemicals, particularly silver nitrate (thus the name ‘Silver’). Streaks, scratches, dents and deposits occur as the photo paper travels through the machine, altering not only the colors but also the physical surface of the paper. In this way, the ‘Silver’ works stem from an interplay between mechanical procedure and a natural mineral-chemical process. Wolfgang Tillmans likes describing the ‘Silver’ works as the result of an observation of nature.

It is thus that incomparable, unexpected photographs come into being, unrepeatable, whose beauty and idiosyncrasy lie as much in the level of detail as the infinitude of the information they contain. The role of chance in the creation of the pictures, and the fine nuances that result, strengthen a factual and material assuredness that here is not least closely connected to a physical desire. The reality effect of the ‘Silver’ works so corresponds to a physical reality of affect, one that refuses a purely abstract, distanced, name-able perception. In this experience of coincidence and physical reaction can also be read as a kind of symbol for the status and the end of analogue (silver-) photography: here specifically the traditional process of analogue photo development as the process of a reaction of chemical elements.

The ‘Silver’ works, which I began in the late 1990’s, are in some ways the opposite of the abstract pictures that I make with lights on paper in the darkroom (like ‘Freischwimmer’, ‘Blushes’, ‘Mental Pictures’, ‘Super Collider’ etc.). They are actually chemograms and all I do is set up the parameter surrounding their making. The imaging process is subjected to the inherent logic of the material; it is mostly purely mechanical. The undeveloped photo paper – sometimes exposed to colored light, sometimes unexposed – passes through a photo-developing machine, which I leave dirty or clean to varying degrees. Because there are remnants of chemicals, diluted more or less with water in the machine, the photo paper continues to develop, though only partially, over time. In addition, dirt and silver particles from the traces of chemicals settle on the paper’s surface, which often produces interesting scratches and brings about a sense of alchemy. Here you are dealing with physical matter on the surface of the carrier in a way that you’ll never actually deal with in conventional photography. Some pictures, then, really have a light, metallic reflexivity especially when seen from the side – and for that reason ‘Silver’ is the title of these pictures.

(Wolfgang Tillmans, in: Phaidon monograph, second expanded edition, release date 2014)

Wolfgang Tillmans’ works have been shown lately at the following major institutions: Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Kunsthalle Zürich, MAM Museu de Arte Modernas de Sao Paulo, Museo del Banco de la Republica, Bogota, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, K21, Düsseldorf, Museo de Arte de Lima, Rencontres d’Arles, Arles, Museo de Artes Visuales, Santiago de Chile.

Michael Kerkmann