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“Wolfgang Tillmans: Photography” at Andrea Rosen Gallery

By: Simmy Swinder



*Installation View of “Wolfgang Tillmans: Photography.” ©Wolfgang Tillmans. Photo by Jeremy Lawson*

Wolfgang Tillmans is a German artist who works primarily in photography. He was the 2000 recipient of the Turner Prize and a 2009 judge for Bloomberg New Contemporaries, an annual exhibition of Britain’s emerging art stars. Given his international reputation and prolific exhibition history, I’m increasingly curious as to why the 41 year-old has been met with such success. In particular, Tillman’s current show at the Andrea Rosen Gallery left me feeling more swindled than sold.

Upon entering the gallery I was pleased to see artworks immediately to the right of the entrance. In this foyer space, a systematically organized collection of standard 4x6 glossy photos were elegantly framed and flanked by similar photos, which were visibly scotch-taped onto the wall. The subject matter was of everyday domestic scenes. I looked closely to see if these photos held artistic authority beyond what the average junior in college studying abroad could produce given visually stunning environments, and couldn’t find any. Disappointed, I reluctantly entered the main gallery where I was confronted, once again, with mediocre photographs. The democracy of image-making has completely submerged our society in photographing day-to-day scenes and subsequently an inclination to share these photographs with others. However, one expects the artist to provide more than a commonplace photo and make something that “wows” us, something we ourselves are unable to produce, or even see. Tillmans seems to abandon that sacred role and does what many Facebook and Twitter users do daily—holds up a mirror and “addresses life on the planet now.”

Just as I was getting frustrated, the photographs in the hallway and last room checked me. The colors were striking, the compositions were thoughtful, and the relationship between the scale of the image and the closeness to the object was well balanced and visually engaging.

Wolfgang Tillman’s solo exhibition is buttressed by its curatorial arrangement of works. With different size images at different levels, I was instantly engaged to look up and down and closely. However, upon further scrutiny, the question inevitably asked of any art connoisseur, “Is this Art?,” would be met with a sense of ennui on my part, and return me to the decade old question of what digital photography has done to fine art.

“Wolfgang Tillmans: Photography” runs through March 13th  
525 West 24th Street

Take the C or E train to 23rd Street and/or the M23 Bus to 23rd Street and 11th Avenue  
Gallery Hours: Tue-Sat, 10-6

Gallery Website: [www.andreareosengallery.com](http://www.andreareosengallery.com)