

JAMES HARRIS GALLERY

312 SECOND AVENUE SOUTH
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JAMESHARRISGALLERY.COM

PRESS RELEASE



Guy Tillim:
Second Nature
February 2 - March 17, 2012
Reception Feb. 2, 6-8PM

Gallery Hours:
Thursday - Saturday
11:00am - 5:00pm Or by Appt

Top: "Tautira, Tahiti" 2010
Pigment Print on Cotton Paper
44" x 58 1/4"

James Harris Gallery is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in the United States of South African photographer Guy Tillim's new series taken in French Polynesia. This new body of work was inspired by the artist's interest in a landscape with profound art historical reference. Tillim's photographs capture the paradise discovered by Captain Cook in the late 18th century and painted by Gauguin. A book of these photographs titled Second Nature will be published by Prestel in April 2012.

Like other artists before him, Tillim states "In reading the accounts of the artists who accompanied Cook, I was interested to note that their debates on-board ship around the subject of the representation of landscape are very similar to those we have today: how much do you 'give' a scene and how much do you let it speak for itself?" His interest in the visual capacity of place, led Tillim to French Polynesia in 2010.

The six large scale photographs in this exhibition range from the panoramic to the everyday. In the piece titled "Hanaiapa, Hiva Oa," a chain link fence in the foreground echo the curtain of rain in the distance. In another work, a gravel road cuts along the edge of a tropical blue shoreline. The artist is certainly aware of the human presence in this paradise and deliberately includes contemporary elements to imbue an otherwise romantic landscape with contradiction. Seen together, Tillim's depictions of the of the supposed South Pacific idyll are anything but idyllic.

When Gauguin went to Polynesia, he told a journalist on the eve of his departure, "to immerse myself in nature, see no one but savages, live their life". But the reality he found was a far cry from his primitivist fantasy. Tillim went to Polynesia to "convey the components of the scene: either through detail or monumentality. But what of that which lies in-between, the indeterminate space that conveys the texture of the place, its feeling, its sensation, its quotidian elements alongside the spectacular? "

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Tillim was born in Johannesburg in 1962 and lives in Cape Town. Tillim's career began in the latter years of apartheid documenting its effect on South Africa. He has moved away from documentary photography of child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the famine victims in Malawi, or the decaying architecture that represent the loss of an African dream. His previous series, Avenue Patrice Lumumba, showed at at the Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson in Paris; Museu Serralves in Porto; the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; FOAM Fotografiemuseum in Amsterdam; and Extracity, Antwerp, in 2009; at the Kunsthalle Oldenburg, Germany, in 2010, and at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago and the Contact Photography Festival in Toronto in 2011. Tillim has received many awards for his work including the 2004 DaimlerChrysler Award for South African photography, the Leica Oskar Barnack Award in 2005 and the first Robert Gardner Fellowship in Photography from the Peabody Museum at Harvard University in 2006. His work was included on Documenta 12 in 2007 and the São Paulo Bienal in 2006. Current exhibitions include Appropriated Landscapes at the Walther Collection, Neu-Ulm/Burlafingen, Germany (11 June to May 2012), and Figures and Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography, V&A Museum, London (12 April to 17 July).