

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Jeff Gibson, "T. J. Wilcox," Artforum, April 2020

## ARTFORUM



T. J. Wilcox, *Spectrum*, 2020, six HD videos, color, sound, various durations.

### T. J. Wilcox

GLADSTONE GALLERY | WEST 24TH ST

A luxuriant garland of rainbow-hued video projections greeted visitors to T. J. Wilcox's solo show at Gladstone Gallery. Landing shoulder to shoulder upon a long narrow screen diagonally spanning the main space were six silent, color-drenched, filmic vignettes, subjective meditations on the chromatic components of the original LGBTQ pride flag. The color sequence here ran left to right as the flag does top to bottom—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet. Kicking off proceedings, the video on the far left zeroed in on the extravagant scarlet living room of the legendary *Vogue* editor Diana Vreeland (1903–1989). A paragon of elegance and provocative

## GLADSTONE GALLERY

individualism, Vreeland famously quipped to her interior decorator, “I want this place to look like a garden: a garden in hell.” That statement, and others demonstrating her extreme penchant for redness, appeared here in a plain sans-serif font, floating gracefully over still images and borrowed footage depicting the archetypal style maven in her element, spinning her myth. Wilcox encapsulates Vreeland’s persona as the poetic distillate of characteristic appearances, gently blending only a handful of referents into a tender portrait of an iconic figure of difference, defiance, and self-determination.

All six videos decocted just such an essence from their subjects, which include other icons (Yoko Ono [yellow] and Oscar Wilde [green]), myths (the starlit dance of prima ballerina Marie Taglioni [blue] and the homoerotic Greek legend of Hyacinth and Apollo [violet]), and natural phenomena (the heroic perseverance of the monarch butterfly’s life cycle [orange]). A pervasive romanticism, perhaps most fervently expressed via the entrancing *en point* pirouettes at the center of the blue segment’s animated portrayal of Taglioni’s fabled wintry performance (upon a panther’s skin atop a bed of glistening snow, no less), bound the various thematic facets to the whole. Wilcox, a gay man in his fifties, recently stated, “I believe I’m probably the last generation that grew up with absolutely no evidence of any homosexuals in the world.” Though he was surely exaggerating for dramatic effect, the point is taken: When cultural semaphores fail to connect, one hitches one’s wagon to whatever resonates. It is reasonable to surmise, therefore, that each video constitutes an act of devotion toward some sacred mooring point to which the artist, in securing

## GLADSTONE GALLERY

his own sensibilities, has over time tethered his faith and affections. In an adjacent room hung a sextet of corresponding bedsheet-size draperies bearing emblematic imagery pertaining to the videos—a close-up of a hyacinth plant, a swarm of monarch butterflies, and so on. The images were ink-jet-printed onto a white-fabric base, then overlaid with a duplicate print on diaphanous silk so fine that the faintest breeze caused the superimposed imagery to quiver and misalign, resulting in a subtle shimmering. Though conveying a certain lo-fi iconographic delicacy, the reductive abridgment here had an attenuating effect where one might have hoped for a more crystalline intensity.

Wilcox knows well and successfully exploits the hermeneutic limits of the gallery context. An old hand at reconciling the short attention span of an audience conditioned to the apprehension of static objects with the processing demands of a time-based medium, he is skilled in the art of charming accommodation. The brevity and simplicity of the videos were key in this regard. Running less than two minutes each and composed of a moderate number of lush, richly compressed—at times, even meme-like—elements, the individual vignettes were a pleasure to behold and parse, handing off one by one as viewers worked their way down the line. In addition to insightfully unpacking the means and ends of the artist's own psychology, such amenity allowed the reverential nature of Wilcox's ruminations to seep into the emotional fabric of one's own subjectivity. Indeed, standing before the green-themed Oscar Wilde video—a heartrending thumbnail account of fellow writer Robert Hichens's inadvertent role in Wilde's appalling persecution—I, a very-long-lapsed Catholic, felt the impulse to genuflect before the martyred figure, as though

## GLADSTONE GALLERY

slogging my way through the stations of the cross. I was then put in mind of McDermott & McGough's *Oscar Wilde Temple*, 2017/2018–19, an unfeigned homage and canny co-option of art's aura-bestowing religiosity as a place of worship on one's own terms. Praise be to secular self-invention.

— Jeff Gibson