

# bernard jacobson gallery

William Tillyer

À Rebours

15<sup>th</sup> February – 24<sup>th</sup> March 2018

Bernard Jacobson Gallery is delighted to announce *À Rebours*, an exhibition of the new folio of 52 prints by William Tillyer inspired by Joris-Karl Huysmans' seminal 19th century novel. The folio will also be accompanied by the publication this February of a new translation of *À Rebours* by acclaimed author and translator, Theo Cuffe, illustrated throughout by Tillyer.

*À Rebours (Against Nature)* has been an enduring source of inspiration and fascination for Tillyer from his earliest practice as an artist, representing the dynamic polarity of the natural versus the contrived - and good versus evil. The tension between these opposing sides is seen repeatedly in Tillyer's work and perhaps is particularly evident in the use of metal grids in his landscape paintings.

This might seem at odds with an artist who is equally passionate about the naturalism of Constable but this contradiction is eloquently explained by the art historian, Norbert Lynton '*Constable's art involved hard-won and hard-worked artifice to achieve the effect of naturalness...Huysmans's artifice is patent: ascribed to des Esseintes, it is the theme of his book*' (*À Rebours*) \*. Whilst Tillyer is certainly alive to the beauty of the natural world, his attempts to portray it are always firmly rooted in an understanding that all art is artifice.

Themes from *À Rebours* have appeared in Tillyer's paintings over many decades and the folio for this exhibition began life in 1974 with 61 prints produced over a period of 5 years. These prints are characterised by dazzling variety, both in technique and pictorial approach; Tillyer never appears circumscribed by working within the framework of *À Rebours*, rather it seems to release a particularly rich seam of invention and experimentation.

In creating this folio Tillyer deploys an array of intaglio techniques including etching, dry point, engraving, aquatint and copper plate, whilst visually they range from the expressionistic use of colour to monochrome and from loose and atmospheric mark-making to precise and detailed representation. This includes the pop-like coloured lines used to render the female curves of *The Acrobat*, to the dark and gothic cross-hatching employed to atmospheric effect in *The Duc de Esseintes Addresses his Servants*.

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Overall, one is left with an impression of richness and an energetic dialogue with the text, rather than a literal interpretation; the wonderfully confected world of *À Rebours* re-imagined by Tillyer retains all the power of the original to unsettle and provoke, even after a span of many decades from its first conception.

A new translation by Theo Cuffe of the original novel, with illustrations from the portfolio by William Tillyer, will be published this February by 21 Publishing.

## **PRESS ENQUIRIES**

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