

English

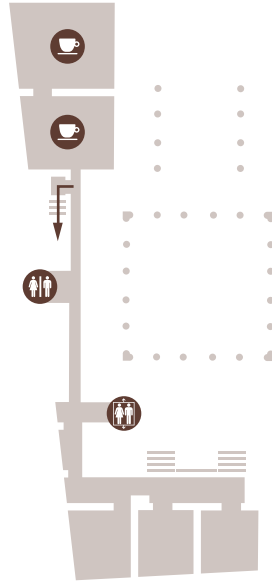
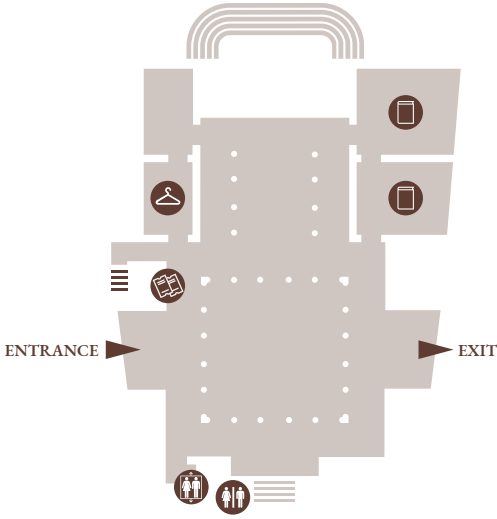
La Pelle

—

Luc Tuymans

ATRIUM

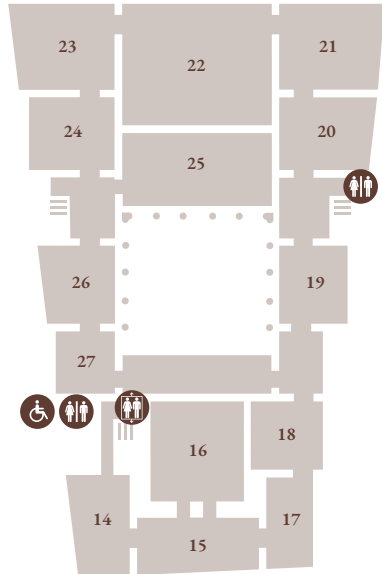
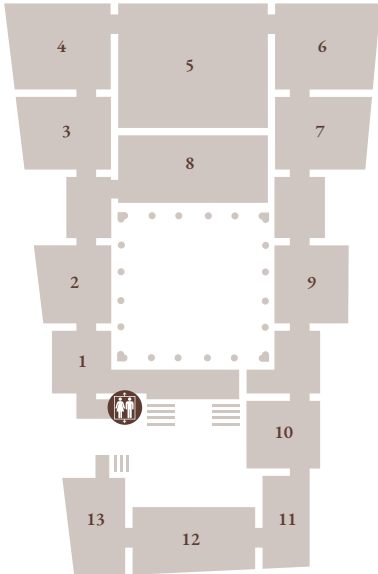
MEZZANINE



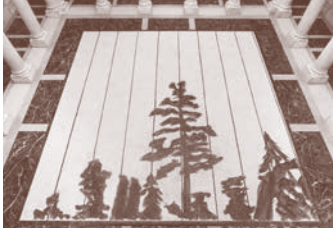
-  lockers
-  toilettes
-  lift
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FIRST FLOOR

SECOND FLOOR



Schwarzheide, 2019
 (after the 1986 eponymous oil on canvas)
 marble mosaic realized by
 Fantini Mosaici, Milan
 960 × 960 cm



The title, *Schwarzheide*, comes from a German forced-labor camp. Some prisoners secretly drew and cut their drawings in strips to hide them and avoid them being confiscated. Later, the strips would be reassembled so the drawings could appear as whole and their message be understood. The drawing that inspired this painting was made by Alfred Kantor, a camp survivor whose sketchbook was one of Luc Tuymans' main sources on this subject. The painted stripes evoke the deportees' uniform and the black trees the woods around the camps, which made them invisible to local residents. Furthermore, the gesture of reassembling what was previously separated can be interpreted as a metaphor for all the lives broken by war, which survivors must rebuild with their memory and the few memories they are left with.

Here, almost enlarged to the dimension of urban paving, the image appears as dissolved to the visitor who walks in. But symbolically, as soon as one stands at the level of the closed face of *Secrets*, and even more so at the level of the balustrades, overlooking the atrium of Palazzo Grassi it is reassembled again and it delivers its message, thereby showing that distance and point of view are essential when looking at an artwork.

Marc Donnadiou

Secrets, 1990
 oil on canvas
 52 × 37 cm
 Private collection.
 Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp



The closed-off, inward-looking face of *Secrets* is in fact that of Albert Speer, chief architect of the Nazi party and the Reich's Minister of Armaments and War Production. The plural form in the title indicates this is not an allegory of secret or silence but of the way a person's portrait shows or not the secrets, unspoken things or denial that they behold under their strict and formal appearance. In this sense, this portrait is very different from Himmler's more elusive one (*Himmler*, 1998).

Because it is a close-up, almost an ID shot, the contextualization of the scene is off frame and hence nothing explains why the subject doesn't want to see and shuts his eyes in front of reality. However, nothing prevents viewers from projecting their own interpretation of what history taught us about Albert Speer's life and involvement in Nazism, and what he himself said in the two books he published after his release from prison in 1966, *Inside the Third Reich* and *Spandau, the Secret Diaries*. Indeed, Speer doesn't mention once the 'final solution', which he always claimed not to have been aware of even though he was one of Adolf Hitler's closest aides.

MD

Room 1

Mountains, 2016

oil on canvas

283 × 187,5 cm

Pinault Collection



When visitors first see this large painting from a distance, they see a mountain flanked by a stretch of water from which bits of land emerge. No information is given about the place featured here: this arid land lined with metal-colored water under an evenly grey sky could be anywhere in the world.

It's only when getting closer that the viewer realizes it is a fake landscape. Luc Tuymans composed it with aluminum foil and soil, inspired, he said, by his observations of reflections on water during a train journey. The title *Mountains* contrasts with the image. Mountains are by nature colossal, testament to the phenomenal forces that shape the earth, but this mountain is nothing of the kind. It is not grand, nor solid as a rock; on the contrary, it looks as if it could crumble and it is partially hollowed. To the 'mountains' in plural of the title, which would signal some spectacular range such as the Alps or the Rockies, corresponds a poor, little, crumbling mountain set in a bare landscape devoid of life and direct light. "What is representation?" Luc Tuymans seems to ask by placing us in front of an image of an artificial arrangement made with next to nothing, a bit of aluminum foil and a few handfuls of dirt. Is it the representation of a mental landscape, a mountain that only exists in the artist's mind? Is it then less real? No, answers Tuymans, since this frail mountain does exist in front of our eyes.

Mountains is the opposite of the magnificent landscapes often shown in advertising, which reassure us, 21st century urbanites, about the

existence of nature. The painting seems to alert us about our disconnection from nature and the real risk of its cataclysmic depletion.

Caroline Bourgeois

Room 1

Body, 1990

oil on canvas

48,5 × 38,5 cm

Collection S.M.A.K. Stedelijk Museum

voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent



In order to make *Body*, Lucy Tuymans used a paint he knew would change over time so that both the painting and the body represented would age more or less at the same time. Similarly to *Superstition*, the body is only sketched with a few brown paint strokes against a backdrop of similar creamy colored shades. But the artist has introduced in this single tone, which is *a priori* dull and banal, an array of subtly colored nuances to give it density and texture.

The whole painting oozes disturbing strangeness: the close up leaves out the head and legs and we don't know whether this torso belongs to a little girl or a doll, whether it's natural or artificial or living or dead, even though it seems to intensely challenge and question the viewer's gaze. Similarly to the famous portrait "of Dorian Gray", this body seems to be dissolving and in a process of devitalization to the point of becoming the shadow of itself in order to let the painting be embodied and vitalized, as expressed in the cracks that run across it.

The work can also be seen as an expression of the relationship between a child and her comfort blanket, the transfer object *par excellence*, which preserves, carries and bears the traces of childhood so that the child can overcome it when she reaches adolescence. We speak of "still life" in painting, but this is almost the portrait of a "still skin", a sensitive surface, layers of memories and solidified remembrances showing traces of violence or underlying post-traumatic scars.

The reality is practically the opposite, but here lies the intentional ambiguity of Luc Tuymans' works. The source image is indeed that of a naked rag doll, and the two horizontal black bars are in fact two zips through which the body can be stuffed with material in order to gain volume and firmness, in other words flesh and life...

MD

Room 2

Pigeons, 2018

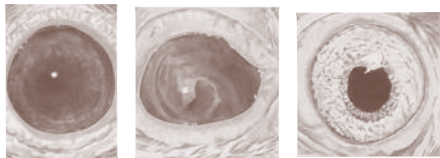
oil on canvas; triptych

94,5 × 67,8 cm

97,8 × 90,5 cm

95,7 × 95,4 cm

Pinault Collection



In his youth, when holidaying in Brittany, Luc Tuymans was fascinated by the large dovecotes that once housed pigeons reared for hunting or slaughtering. He learned that owning such a building was a privilege of nobility, and that the dimensions and prestige of an estate would dictate its orientation and size. These historic dovecotes and pigeon racing in general were the starting point of numerous works by Tuymans, including *The Rumour* (2001), which already features three large pigeon eyes shown in close up.

Sometimes magnificent, other times dirty and crippled by disease and decay, Luc Tuymans' pigeons compose a strange, creepy and threatening crowd, more artificial than natural, like some secret society parallel to ours, which symbolizes the shapes and images of political, religious, social, medical and environmental power...

In the 2018 version, the pigeon's eye, which is treated in bleak and mute tones and enlarged almost monstrously, is definitely not anymore that of the animal that embellishes our squares and streets, but rather a mutating or genetically modified eye, the frosty, icy embodiment of a society that is permanently under surveillance.

MD

Room 3

Technicolor, 2012

oil on canvas

199 × 150,1 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



Technicolor and *Peaches* were shown for the first time together with the paintings of the *Allo!* series at David Zwirner London, in 2012. The source images for both works come from a 1913 advertising film that impressed Tuymans because of its blurriness and low color saturation. However, what is immediately striking is the peculiar way in which the artist played with whites. They produce an almost ghostly halo effect in the whole painting that is reminiscent of the light cast by a cinema projector.

This effect recalls the theories of Sigmund Freud, the Austrian neurologist who invented psychoanalysis. As he was traveling in train, Freud noticed as he was getting up an "obnoxious, unpleasant and even creepy" man standing in the corridor. In fact, it was his own reflection in his carriage's glass door. The incident will become an illustration of the principle of *unheimlich*, which the philosopher Marie Bonaparte translated as "disturbing strangeness" and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan as "extimacy". This bunch of flowers that we should perceive as close, familiar and intimate appears here as a strange still life, artificial and very disturbing.

MD

Room 3

The Book, 2007

oil on canvas

306 × 212 cm

Pinault Collection



The Book reproduces in monumental format the open pages of a book on religious architecture. The fold mark is clearly visible in the center of the painting, jarring the order of the Baroque church's nave. This painting can be compared with another one painted the previous year and titled *Church*. Both are treated with similar yellow, earthy and greyish white, slightly fuzzy hues, thus disrupting the splendor and magnificence of the place.

In so doing, Luc Tuymans inverts the illusionist character of religious architecture by blurring the sculpted and painted representations meant to inspire the faithful and strengthen their faith. Hasn't it been said that a cathedral is the Bible in three dimensions? But here, the viewer's mind is in doubt and confused, almost dizzied by this book which has been enlarged to the dimensions of their own body. And the more they feel they could enter the painting and the perspective it reproduces, the more the latter slips away to the point of becoming almost a visual hallucination.

Isn't it similar to our relationship with religion? As churches, deserted by the faithful, have become tourism venues, religious power has grown significantly, in particular in the areas of morality, education and lifestyle.

MD

Room 3

Hut, 1998

oil on canvas

123,2 × 115,2 cm

Collection Pinault



Hut is based on a simple, white, folded paper model that was transfigured by first photography then painting, delivering a twilight vision of an anonymous, precarious dwelling that looks more like a storage space than a home. Anglo-Saxon languages distinguish between "house" as a building or as a home, the latter conveying psychological, emotional value.

This paper house, which seems almost suspended in the spatial void or in the infinity of time, expresses material and symbolic fragility rather than warm and reassuring stability, like a skiff adrift in the world's darkness.

MD

Room 3

The Valley, 2007

oil on canvas

106,5 × 109,5 cm

Pinault Collection



The Valley is part of a series of works that Luc Tuymans made in 2007 about the enduring influence of religious power, in particular that of the Jesuits, an order founded in 1539 by Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Francis Xavier that paved the way for the Counter-Reformation's rigor in the face of rising Protestantism. The stern, stubborn gaze of the portrayed child, his strict haircut and clothes signal harsh educational and social norms or quasi-military upbringing.

It is in fact the face of Martin Stephens as David Zellaby, the hero of the film *The Village of the Damned*, which Luc Tuymans renamed *The Valley (of the Doomed)*. Following pressure from religious groups, this project initiated in the United States only came to fruition in the UK in 1960, under the direction of Wolf Rilla. The script is a parable about mental control. All the residents of the village of Midwich become suddenly unconscious for several hours. Months later, twelve local women and girls give birth the same day to albino children with phosphorescent eyes. Precocious and able to communicate by telepathy they will quickly reveal hostile intentions. Gordon Zellaby, the father of one of them, tries to break their mental processes, which leads him to an inevitable death under the eyes of his own son.

If the piercing eyes of *Pigeons* gave the impression that animals can have the power of observation of a surveillance camera, the radiating gaze of *The Valley*'s hero invites us to question the human quality of human beings and their inevitable fate as "replicants."

MD

Room 4

Our New Quarters, 1986

oil on canvas

80,5 × 120 cm

MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt
am Main. Gift of the artist. Inv. no. 1994/62

Our New Quarters reproduces the model of one of the postcards that detainees at Theresienstadt, a “model” transit camp set up by the Nazis in Czechoslovakia to mislead foreign media about the reality of concentration and extermination camps, and as such instrumental in the implementation of the final solution. There, prisoners could be granted privileges. Postal mail was authorized; there was a school and sometimes visits were organized outside. It is there that several internationally renowned figures were detained as a way for the Nazis to show they cared, even though most of the prisoners died.

By reproducing one of the postcards sent from Theresienstadt while making it mute and opaque, Luc Tuymans highlights the inherent ambiguity of all images and the need to check the sources, the context and what goes on off frame. As in any investigation or trial, there can be decoys and manipulation between the media image (power), the human testimony (memory) and tangible proofs (reality).

MD

Room 4

A Flemish Intellectual, 1995

oil on canvas

89,4 × 65,5 cm

Musée d'arts de Nantes



The man portrayed in *A Flemish Intellectual*, which was presented in 1995 in Antwerp at Zeno X Gallery for the exhibition *Heimat* and later at the Nantes Museum of Fine Arts, has an almost generic and archetypal character because of the intentional blurring of the surface and facial contour and the absence of a gaze. Treated as a tutelary and reassuring figure, it does not belong to any age or place. The presence that comes across is more that of an age-old ghost rather than a flesh and blood individual.

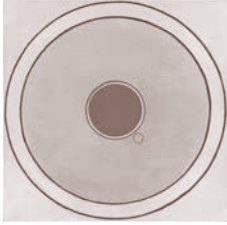
In fact, this is a portrait of the Flemish writer Ernest Claes, author of famous patriotic and regionalist novels who was exhumed from the realm of literary shadows by Flemish nationalists. He is thus represented by Tuymans as an outdated vestige, the bearer of pathetic manipulation and falsification.

MD

Room 4

Disenchantment, 1990

oil on canvas
84,5 × 84,2 cm
Private collection



This image represents the top of a cardboard box where paint pistols, such as those used by the artist, are packaged. But our perception tells us something else: this image seems to be of a target. A shooting target? A dart one? The viewer must decide. As often with Luc Tuymans, the image he's interested in has various meanings. It also reminds of Jasper Johns' targets: indeed, the famous American painter frequently featured them. The title, *Disenchantment*, also gives food for thought because it conjures up something that is deceptive. Is it about the reality shown in the image? Or just a feeling? This image is more abstract than figurative, as if something was disappearing.

"I first saw an exhibition of Luc's work in 1991, called *Disenchantment*. I couldn't place these works in any of the 'isms' that were around at the time. It wasn't about a 'return to figuration', a plea for 'abstraction' or a flirt with 'sensationalism'. It was actually about disenchantment. Not how it looks, because disenchantment isn't a thing, it's about how it feels. It is about universal psychological truths and at the same time it is about the specific and limited meaning of images as images and confronting that understanding," wrote artist Marlene Dumas about Luc Tuymans. Here, Luc Tuymans chose clear and simple lines, a very direct approach compared with other works he treated in a more singular manner, and this enhances the subject's threatening aspect.

CB

Room 4

München [Munich], 2012

oil on canvas
158 × 79 cm
Pinault Collection



Luc Tuymans said about *München* that it "holds a threat; you feel something is happening but you don't know exactly what." The source image is that of an imposing character wearing a mask, wrapped in a blue cape that covers the whole body, a figure of the Haus der Kunst carnival parade in Munich, in 1933.

The contemporary building housing Munich's Haus der Kunst was erected at the request of Adolf Hitler in 1933, soon after he came to power, with the aim of making it one of the most important centers of Nazi cultural propaganda. This is where an exhibition was organized in 1937 about "degenerate art" [*Entartete Kunst*], which drew more than two million visitors over a period of a month and a half. Some 70 years later, Luc Tuymans exhibited there a retrospective of his work, in 2008.

The theme of carnival, which is recurrent in Luc Tuymans' oeuvre, is for him this ambivalent moment when collective rejoicing can turn into a devastating crowd, depending on how events unfold. *München* thus strives to perceive in an "innocent" character the premonition of the inevitable. Would it be the same for every fact?...

MD

Room 4

Embitterment, 1991

oil on canvas ; triptych
 38,7 × 41,3 cm
 39,4 × 41,3 cm
 39,4 × 41,9 cm
 Private collection



A major triptych in Luc Tuymans' oeuvre, *Embitterment* is emblematic of his interest for the representation of emotional states and moods. He described this work as an "emotional self portrait that coincides with the body and shows the interior of the body. This work was borne out of a feeling of rage and of being excluded from oneself." Here, the usual horizontal reading of triptychs, from left to right, is inverted: it is vertical. Furthermore, it is positioned at the height of a man and precisely that of Tuymans himself. The triptych is thus a representation of the artist's physical and emotional body, which is symbolized by three shapes that look like flattened, faded flowers. Each has a circle in the middle, which is akin to a spine stretching across the three paintings from top to bottom. The dark orange hue of all three paintings reminds of flesh and blood, and the three flowers of collapsed and damaged bodily organs. This triptych is testament to something impossible, which is to understand beauty although it is possible to create it, said the artist. "It is a very existential work, a sort of regression... It is not a representation but simply a work that exists."

CB

Room 5

Issei Sagawa, 2014

oil on canvas
 74,3 × 81,9 cm
 Tate



Luc Tuymans based this painting on a picture he took with his smartphone of a documentary on Issei Sagawa, a Japanese who had murdered and cannibalized a female fellow student at the Paris Sorbonne, in 1981. Sagawa spent several years in jail in France before being extradited to Japan. The original picture was taken before he committed his crime, and he's shown wearing a mask that renders him unrecognizable.

Luc Tuymans painted two other paintings on this theme prior to that one, in particular *Issei Sagawa*, 2012, which is also shown in the exhibition.

Here, Sagawa wears a colonial hat that is too large for him and casts a shadow on each side of his face. The painting technique mirrors the blurriness of the image (a photograph of video images) with large, quickly applied paint strokes, which render the face barely recognizable.

Although the hat, the shirt and the background are blurry, one feature is particularly striking: the hallucinated look of the character. The eyes were painted as fast as the rest of the painting, but they are remarkably expressive, full of madness and despair.

Issei Sagawa forms part of Luc Tuymans' series of paintings on extremely violent acts or historical characters. He often uses the same quick and rather loose technique for this kind of painting, always completing them in just one day.

CB

Room 5

Le Mépris [*Contempt*], 2015

oil on canvas

112,4 × 142,6 cm

Collection of Mimi Haas



The image in this painting is a unique shot of a cult house, i.e. the villa that Italian writer Curzio Malaparte (1898-1957) had built on the island of Capri by architect Adalberto Libera between 1938 and 1943, where he lived and wrote *The Skin* [*La pelle* in Italian, 1949], which is also the title of our exhibition at Palazzo Grassi. Jean-Luc Godard shot *Contempt* (1963) in this spectacular villa, with Brigitte Bardot and Michel Piccoli, a film inspired by Albert Moravia's eponymous novel *Il disprezzo*.

Like many movie lovers, Luc Tuymans considers *Contempt* [*Le Mépris* in French] to be one of the greatest films ever made even though he said his painting is more about the feeling of contempt than about the film. "There are so many elements in this film: mythology with the Greek sculptures; France's three-color flag, even though Godard is Swiss, and Curzio Malaparte, the megalomaniac Italian writer who claimed he had personally built his villa when he actually had an architect do it," said Tuymans.

In this painting, we see a fireplace, but we also notice the window behind. Apart from the title, nothing tells us we are in Malaparte's villa where, in reality, each window opens on an enchanting Mediterranean landscape. Here, on the contrary, there is no luxury or spectacular views, only a massive fireplace without a fire and a window to nowhere, perhaps a metaphor of the extinguished love leading to nowhere that Bardot and Piccoli experience in the film.

The colors remind of the simple architectural style of the villa and of its raw materials, such as wood. But given the famous images of Jean-

Luc Godard's film and the singular history of this house, which is both legendary and modernist as sought by the writer and the architect, the painting is deceptive.

CB

Room 5

Murky Water, 2015

oil on canvas; triptych

I: 235,5 × 235,5 cm

II: 237 × 232,5 cm

III: 235,5 × 232,5 cm

Collezione Prada, Milan



Here is a subject matter that has already been worked on and revisited by the artist, something he does from time to time, here with different materials. The starting point was a commission by the Dutch municipality of Ridderkerk of a tapestry to ornate the Town Hall. Luc Tuymans found inspiration in the town's canals, whose water is murky, littered and fetid, with a lot of algae on the surface and floating beverage cans. Luc Tuymans thus proposes a theme that is anything but a source of pride for the municipality, even though the three paintings are not realistic enough to shock viewers. The artist managed to convince municipal officials that the reflections on the water (a car, a street lamp, a fence) also tell a story about the town. The images Tuymans took first with a polaroid have a cinematic feel, which is often the case in his work. They are highly subjective and the palette work is like a reflection of the canal's dirty matter, which takes the aspect of an aged mirror.

The triptych is also a reflection on time as it passes and "floats". "In painting, the painted time is different from the real time. We could say there is some melancholy and nostalgia, but it is somehow skewed. In this sense, it is torture. For me, torture is only effective when it's really tender."

CB

Room 6

Isabel, 2015

oil on canvas

144,9 × 124 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London

Orange Red Brown, 2015

oil on canvas

147,5 × 125 cm

Private collection



Isabel and *Orange Red Brown*, the titles of these paintings, are the names that go with the genetic information on these two types of bird.

Both paintings are inspired by photographs of a book on canaries that explains, among other things, how they can be genetically engineered to give them a different color. These birds are thus akin to clones, or even taxidermy, in any case more abstract than real since there is nothing real in these images. In fact, viewers can better *see* and *feel* this reality than in the original photographs, even though they were for documentary purposes.

The artist quotes here the Scottish painter Sir Henry Raeburn (1756-1823), a master portrait painter who Tuymans featured in his exhibition *Birds of a Feather*, that he presented at Talbot Rice Gallery in Edinburgh in 2015. In these two paintings, the artist deals with the question of the portrait and in particular the eyes of the subject, as if the eyes could bring life to the subject portrayed. He also refers to Scotland and in particular Edinburgh, which is known for the taxidermy collection of its University.

But here, tackling the theme of the portrait, the artist turns away from Raeburn's mannerism and renders real the portraits of the unreal birds. Maybe the subject is how to bring life to a dead subject, taking a distance from traditional portraits, which thus become like vanities?

CB

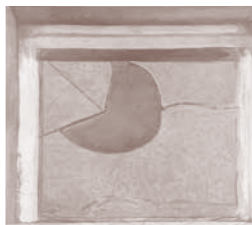
Room 6

Morning Sun, 2011

oil on canvas

233,1 × 259,4 cm

The Broad Art Foundation



In 2013, on the occasion of his tenth exhibition at David Zwirner New York, titled *The Summer is Over*, Luc Tuymans presented a series of paintings about his personal environment, from a self portrait to a view of his garden and a detail of his leg as he is sat in an armchair in his living room. *Morning Sun* shows the rectangular window of a building situated in front of his old house. However, through a slight shift in perspective, it is not so much the window that seems to be the subject of the painting than its combination of frames and the shattered glass outlining a sort of black sun appearing between the fragments of the broken window, which reflect the pale blue light of dawn.

It has often been said that a painting is a window open to the world, but here it opens on nothing but itself: a sophisticated work about what a painting is beyond the mere representation of reality. *Morning Sun* seems to signal a derelict reality behind things but also behind the painting, its chassis and raw canvas showing only a few traces of paint. Furthermore, between the idea of a summer that is ending—*The Summer is Over*—and that of a day that is breaking—*Morning Sun*—a feeling of sweet melancholy appears, a moment of withheld poetry, of a true sense of the nature of things... or of beings?

MD

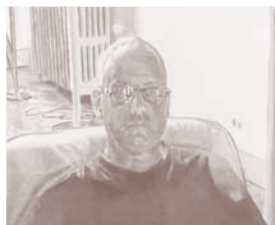
Room 6

Me, 2011

oil on canvas

110,4 × 136,3 cm

The Broad Art Foundation



Me is a very rare self portrait where Luc Tuymans is perfectly recognizable. But if the environment refers directly to a domestic space, the framing, the pose and above all the fixed glance denote the idea of screen as if it was, for example, Luc Tuymans as seen by his computer camera, an effect that is enhanced by multiple light reflections on his glasses that obliterate his gaze.

The “glasses” motif in Luc Tuymans’ oeuvre was the theme of an exhibition in Antwerp, in 2016, and in London, in 2017. Across his work, spectacles have played the role of total transparency, magnifying glass or, on the contrary, perfect mirror, protective opacity, and impenetrable mask. With their shimmering, reflection and shine effects, they also open the space of representation to the off-frame of a scene, a situation or a context within which the viewer is symbolically placed by projection. In front of *Me*, are we this computer camera, this camera lens that observes, spies on or monitors him? And what image or secret would we like to have, to know or to keep about an artist at work?

MD

Room 7

My Leg, 2011

oil on canvas

192,2 × 142,2 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy Studio Luc Tuymans, Antwerp



My Leg shows part of the artist's leg as he was sitting in the same armchair as in the painting *Me*. Both paintings were actually presented together, in 2013 in New York for the exhibition *The Summer is Over*. They are based on photographs taken by Luc Tuymans' partner—the artist Carla Arocha—, which are poor, without object or intention, as are snapshots taken by mistake or chance. However, the picture on which *Me* is based is cold, frontal and almost impersonal, whereas that of *My Leg* seems extremely sophisticated in its composition, the intricate combination of diagonals, its muted lights and subtle textures. Tuymans' painting underlines all its potential and wealth of effects, and the image therefore seems to be generated by the very matter of the painting.

MD

Room 7

Rearview Mirror, 1986

oil on canvas

68 × 190 cm

Private collection



With a format akin to a panoramic screen, the subject of *Rearview Mirror* is clearly announced in the title. But this rearview mirror seems suspended by itself against a monochromatic, dirty yellow backdrop, without any other element telling us whether we are in a car or if it's driven by anyone. We can see the reflection of what seems to be a road, but it is equally undefined, without any landscape around. This rearview mirror invites us to look behind us. Its wide-screen format and the title in English suggest we are in an American car, the symbol *par excellence* of our consumer society. What it shows doesn't look at all like an American road: everything is black around it and the road is crossed by thick black lines that remind of a railway track. Could it be a railway line to the end of the night? Like deportation trains during World War II? Luc Tuymans has worked a lot on Nazism and this painting, made in 1986 when WWII was still very present in the public debate, seems to be taking a look at this past from the point of view of American modernity. Beyond this, it questions the act of looking, what one sees or refuses to see, and the power of images. It also reflects, literally and figuratively, on the condition of all images, which are by nature always seen in retrospect since they are always the memory of a moment.

In so doing, the artist takes us to a zone situated between reality and the representation of reality as proposed in this painting.

CB

Room 7

Baroque, 2017

oil on canvas
99,5 × 66,8 cm
Pinault Collection



The title of this painting refers to the artistic movement that appeared at the end of the Renaissance and sought to represent passions and emotions, in particular religious, as opposed to the calmer rationality of the previous period. It is an era in which Tuymans is very interested. He curated an exhibition on the Renaissance (titled *Sanguine/Bloedrood*), which was presented in the summer of 2018 at M HKA in his hometown of Antwerp—a major center of Flemish Baroque, notably through Peter Paul Rubens—and after that at the Prada Foundation in Milan. Besides its lyricism and flamboyant quality, the artist is also interested in Baroque because it was the first artistic movement that could truly be qualified as global as it encompassed all the arts and spread across European borders.

Lucy Tuymans painted *Baroque* when he was preparing that exhibition. The painting is based on a photograph taken by the artist with his smartphone of a religious sculpture from the Spanish Baroque. What is striking is the contrast between the Baroque announced in the title and what is represented: there is no lyricism in this scene, no overflow of colors, no representation of the body, of passion and death..., nothing but a close up of a face sculpted in wood some four centuries ago and above all, a look.

Luc Tuymans uses the language of cinema—a Bergmanian close up—and the painted image of a black & white/sepia digital image to represent the very essence of Baroque: the pain and depth of soul reflected through these wide, dark eyes.

CB

Room 7

Magic, 2007

oil on canvas
122,6 × 165,7 cm
Private collection, Brussels



Magic was first presented jointly with *Turtle* and *Simulation* in 2008 in New York in an exhibition titled *Forever, The Management of Magic*. This painting focuses on a character popularized as “The Dream Collector” who collects ideas and dreams in order to create new inventions. Here, its image is paradoxically dissolved within a pictorial matter where all blacks and whites are abolished and replaced by almost nondescript blue and brown hues. He also seems to be almost forgotten, if not abandoned, in the midst of other nondescript objects that do not have any real nature. In order to create such peculiar effects, Luc Tuymans used for the first time clear indigo hues that produce specific contrasts akin to an old black & white movie that would have been colored by thought, memory or dream. This work thus expresses in an original way the passing of time and the disappearance of precious childhood memories, whether fond or scary.

MD

Room 8

Turtle, 2007

oil on canvas

368 × 509 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



Turtle was shown in 2008 in an exhibition titled *Forever, The Management of Magic* dedicated to the Walt Disney company's various productions, in particular the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT). Contrary to official representations of the Walt Disney universe, where everything is bright, joyful and colorful, this painting is treated with an array of greys and gives a particularly ghostly impression. This is enhanced by the monumental size of the painting, which the viewer cannot grasp in one go.

The viewer wanders and struggles to perceive a subject that is too large for them: it is one of the boats of the famous "Main Street Electrical Parade", lined with tiny lights that are represented with white dots that look more like dull, sloppy, whitish stains than bright light bulbs.

In all the works exhibited here, Luc Tuymans casts the grand vision of the American dream as a series of fuzzy, opaque and disenchanting reflections.

MD

Room 8

Instant, 2009

oil on canvas

103,5 × 70 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



Instant shows a woman as she is taking a photograph with a flash. The instantaneous flash sheds light both on the camera and the hands that hold it. The eyes almost shut and the use of a single, orange color add to the unreality of a scene that is nevertheless ordinary.

"From the start, my work geared towards the idea of memory and also the question of power," said Luc Tuymans. *Instant* could be a contemporary interpretation of this. Indeed, although taking photographs is commonly considered as a way to keep a trace of a person, a moment, an experience, or an emotion, the vocabulary of photography is analog to that of war and weaponry: to trigger, to snap, to take, to capture... Even if contemporary digital cameras do not function like the old analog ones, the ambivalence remains between the photographer's power and the memory contained in the image they obtain. Here, the power and violence of the flash are its symbols: any image can only be taken by suddenly blinding the subject being photographed.

MD

Room 9

Still Life, 2002

oil on canvas

347,8 × 502,5 cm

Pinault Collection



Still Life is among Luc Tuymans' most monumental paintings although the subject is particularly intimate: a still life with fruits and a jar of clear water in the background treated in the manner of Cézanne's watercolors. It was first shown at Documenta 11 in Kassel (2002), which featured many artworks about the tragedy of 9/11.

Luc Tuymans' work, which raised a lot of expectations, wrong-foots this theme by highlighting that art does not illustrate reality but rather puts it into perspective, that it does not respond to a fact as such but turns it toward the viewer in an interrogative, mysterious or alarming manner. In other words that what counts is not the subject matter but how it is treated.

Positioned on a barely tangible horizontal line, almost suspended in the heart of the painting and considerably enlarged—on the scale of an American city, or the impossible facts, or the enormity of the terrorist act?—each fruit states its presence not through realistic representation but with a physicality that slowly emerges from the depth of time, space, air, emptiness and breath. The point is not to show the explosion, the two smashed buildings, or the bodies buried under the rubbles, but what is left beyond good and bad, after the catastrophe, once the cloud of dust has settled: the natural or human determination to keep going no matter what, to grow again, to rethink oneself, fruits and water, substance and color, the density of life being reborn. *Still life* can also mean that there is, still, life.

In this sense, the painting is like an inverted vanity: it doesn't signal that life is ephemeral and fragile, but on the contrary that it resists and is resilient. In a way, this is the first meal offered for sharing in the face of human madness.

MD

Room 9

William Robertson, 2014

oil on canvas

50 × 37,5 cm

The Broad Art Foundation



This painting featuring William Robertson was first presented together with portraits of *John Playfair* and *John Robison* in 2015 in London. The source images for these three paintings are three eponymous portraits by Henry Raeburn (1756–1823), one of the most famous Scottish artists whom Luc Tuymans first saw at the age of 16, at the Ghent Museum of Fine Arts. In 2014, shortly before the referendum on Scottish independence, Luc Tuymans went to the University of Edinburgh to see again the work of the painter he so admired. In this new context, the representations of these three key figures of the Scottish Enlightenment appeared to him more disturbing and ambiguous and he decided to revisit them from his own point of view.

He chose a close up, thus obliterating the background and clothes that would reveal their social position, and focused on the face, where thought originates. For *William Robertson*, he worked particularly on the piercing blue eyes in order to highlight the subject's far-sighted and visionary character. And even though he has always admired Raeburn's confident painting technique, Tuymans opted for a thicker, heavier style that better reflects the importance of doubt in intellectual or political thinking, as is the case in our current situation.

MD

Room 10

Superstition, 1994

oil on canvas

41,9 × 36,8 cm

University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; Museum purchase



Superstition is a strange and fascinating little painting. With a few loose strokes of deep brown, almost black paint, it shows a human torso on which is superimposed the alarming shape of an insect almost as large as the man—a reference by the artist to the idea of “poltergeist”. Looking more closely, we see that the insect's legs are on top of the character's legs in a sort of skewed mating scene reminiscent of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.

MD

Room 10

Against the Day, 2008

oil on canvas; diptych

I: 224 × 174 cm

II: 231 × 171,5 cm

Private collection



Against the Day was also the title of the exhibition where these two paintings were shown. Of a vertical format, they feature the same man digging at the back of a closed-off garden—that of Luc Tuymans' old home—shown in two slightly different poses as if he had been twice startled by a powerful light while he was working. The contrast between the height of the walls and the small size of the man, the harshness of the light and the thickness of the night, as well as the lack of perspective give an impression of dead end. Nothing can be immediately understood, reached or contextualized. With Luc Tuymans, the painting raises more questions than provides answers.

MD

Room 11

Seal, 2007

oil on canvas

50 × 70 cm

Edward Lee 2002 Trust



Seal shows an enlarged image found on the Internet of a Jesuit wax seal. This painting was first shown together with *The Valley*, *The Book* and *The Deal* in 2007, in Antwerp for an exhibition titled *Les Revenants* [The Undead]. All the artworks of the exhibition were about the might and influence of religious power on political, social, cultural and identity norms, in particular that of the Jesuits who have a significant presence in Antwerp. The legitimacy of a seal that, at the end of a text, defines its sovereign and inviolable character depends on its physical integrity. Here, the text and drawing are barely legible but the relief patterns are accentuated as if they had become tangible, almost insuperable physical limits. Seen from above and tightly framed, this seal is not so much an object anymore as a closed-off, circular territory from where it is impossible to escape, as is the case with Jesuit power's structure and operating mode.

MD

Room 11

Brokaat [Brocade], 2016

oil on canvas
201,3 × 154 cm
Pinault Collection



This painting is based on a photograph of a detail of the coat of Donatian, bishop of Reims, who stands on the right of the Madonna in the painting of Flemish artist Jan Van Eyck *The Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele (Madonna Met Kanunnik Joris Van Der Paele, 1436)*, from the Groeningemuseum in Bruges, Belgium.

Because it was first photographed and then painted, the brocade's colors are very different from those of the original painting and one can quickly see a 'mise en abyme' effect. The viewer doesn't know whether what he sees is a clothing or furniture fabric.

The rich, embroidered fabrics of the time, in particular brocade, were reserved for the aristocracy and high clergy. No one else could use them besides these two classes, not only because of their cost, but also because of their symbolic meaning. Furthermore, the use of colors was strictly codified. For example, it was forbidden to use red, which recalls blood and death, or blue and white, the Virgin's colors. Here, Donatian's brocade coat is particularly rich, with silver and gold threads.

Since at the time the middle class could not use the same colors and fabrics as the rich, they often used black, in particular in this region of Europe (today Belgium and the Netherlands). The painting thus also refers to social segregation, including in present times.

CB

Room 11

Pillows, 1994

oil on canvas
54,6 × 67,3 cm
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh;
A.W. Mellon Acquisition Endowment Fund,
1998.1



Pillows belongs to a category of Luc Tuymans' artworks that, in spite of an explicit title, have a loose and undefined quality with regard to their true subject matter. One could consider this heap of yellow-greenish pillows as an allusive, rather than concrete, variation on the idea of masses, shapes, textures and densities similar to an almost abstract topographic relief. What we perceive is thus not what we see or do not see, the motif that is represented, the underlying subject, the painted image and the materiality of the painting in itself, but a permanent balancing act between these different levels that creates persistent confusion and doubt in the viewer's gaze and thought.

MD

Room 11

Angel, 1992

oil on canvas
65,7 × 61,3 cm

The Art Institute of Chicago.

Gift of Fred McDougal & Nancy Lauter McDougal



A Polaroid picture of a Christmas figurine that the artist's mother used to place under the family Christmas tree was the basis of *Angel*. Even though this angel is easily recognizable with its open green wings, its hands holding a white harp and its white, red and blue coat, its head appears as a black, fuzzy, opaque and nondescript mass. In a way, this painting refers to the idea of beheading, which makes it almost violent, distressing and repulsive when it should, because of its subject matter, be reassuring, warm and pleasant. The same Polaroid picture was used for a lithograph in 2004 and for a wall fresco for a concert hall in Bruges in 2012. Each of these three versions has its own character, effect and meaning linked to the technique used, the exhibition space and the artist's evolution with regard to a given subject.

MD

Room 12

Der diagnostische Blick VII

[*The Diagnostic view VII*],

1992

oil on canvas

65,1 × 46 cm

Kunstmuseen Krefeld

Der diagnostische Blick IV

[*The Diagnostic view IV*],

1992

oil on canvas

57 × 38,2 cm

Private collection, courtesy Zeno X Gallery,

Antwerp, on long-term loan to De Pont Museum,

Tilburg, NL

Der diagnostische Blick VIII

[*The Diagnostic view VIII*],

1992

oil on canvas

68,8 × 39,1 cm

Private collection

Der diagnostische Blick X

[*The Diagnostic view X*],

1992

oil on canvas

48,9 × 55,3 cm

Private collection. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth

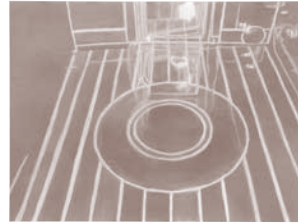
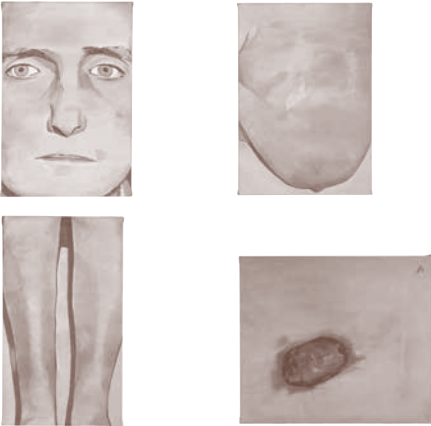
Room 13

Simulation, 2007

oil on canvas

221,6 × 294,5 cm

Pinault Collection



Luc Tuymans' made ten paintings for this *diagnostische* series, which was presented in 1992 in Antwerp. All the images were taken from a medical book (*Der Diagnostische Blick [The Diagnostic view]*) used by physicians to make a diagnosis. They thus rely on an external sign to understand a medical condition. Tuymans changed the framing of the images in order to dramatize the subject and render it more abstract, with none of the images being contextualized. In doing so, he presents to viewers images that seem to be sick themselves. The pale rose hues used for the flesh is disturbing and the only portrait featured—a face that could be that of the artist himself—could be used for a psychoanalytic diagnosis. Indeed, the character has a confused gaze that seems disconnected and not real. The artist attempts to represent trauma in the very making of the portrait. He tackles a subject that inspires deep fear in us: the signs of our mortal condition, which he presents in a clinical, cold manner, rendering them even more alarming.

CB

This painting was inspired by a test conducted in 1983 at Disney studio by John Lasseter for a 3D cartoon project based on Maurice Sendak's children's book *Where the Wild Things Are*. The pilot was abandoned and Lasseter left Disney to set up Pixar studios.

The painting features a cardboard model of a children's room used for the film pilot, but this representation is the opposite of a Disney cartoon set. Nothing tells us this is a bedroom as we only see bare, abstract lines on a cold blue backdrop, the opposite of Disney's rosy, utopian world. Luc Tuymans worked several times on Disney's "magic" and is also interested in 3D imagery. Here, viewers see a sketch, a skeleton, the backstage... and mystery reappears where it was least expected.

This painting was presented in the exhibition *Forever, the Management of Magic* in New York in 2008 on the theme of Walt Disney and the evolution of his entertainment company into a full-scale ideology.

CB

Room 13

Peaches, 2012

oil on canvas

173,8 × 118,1 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



Peaches and *Technicolor* were first shown together with the paintings of the *Allo!* series in 2012 in London. The following year, they were featured in two murals in the Dresden Schauspielhaus' stairway for the exhibition *Constable, Delacroix, Friedrich, Goya. A Shock to the Senses* curated by Luc Tuymans. Later, they were reproduced in two screen prints produced by Roger Vandaele in Antwerp. The source images for both works come from a 1913 advertising film whose blurriness and poorly saturated colors impressed Luc Tuymans. But what is immediately striking is the singular way in which the artist played with whites. Although their subject reminds of Flemish still lifes and paintings by Jean Siméon Chardin (1699-1779), Édouard Manet (1832-1883), Henri Fantin-Latour (1836-1904), Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) and Édouard Vuillard (1868-1940), only Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) experimented to that degree with white and emptiness as a way to produce space and light between things. Luc Tuymans thus reminds us that painting doesn't deal with reality but with the representation of reality, which involves distancing, discrepancy and diffraction.

MD

Room 13

K, 2017

oil on canvas

135 × 80,2 cm

Andrew Xue Collection, Singapore



The artist was inspired by advertising billboards he saw in Panama, which feature women's faces that have been smoothed out to the point of erasing their personality. As a filmmaker would do, he zoomed on this face so close that it is partially cut out and incomplete. By moving his "paintbrush camera" so close he treats this female face as if it was an object, which is precisely the purpose of advertising, in particular when selling beauty products. This approach renders the face empty, almost dead, especially because it is not contextualized. But by zooming this way, the artist also highlights the gaze of this woman who has been so objectified that she doesn't even have a name, just a letter, K. And her gaze is very expressive, as if she tried to exist beyond the image and the commercial profit that is sought through her. She seems defiant, aware that she is exploited and ready to stand up as she looks far ahead, maybe towards a future where women will not be treated as objects. The treatment is smooth, flat, and the pastel colors highlight the contrast between the artificial aspect of advertising imagery and the humanity of all women. *K*'s mouth is shut, but she smiles discreetly and her silence speaks volumes.

MD

Room 14

Ballone [Balloons], 2017

oil on canvas
185,6 × 151,2 cm
Private collection



Inspired by a scene witnessed by the artist of a clown walking at night with a baseball bat in his hand, the subject of this painting has become classic: it is the solitary and sinister clown who hurts children, a character who is even creepier and more dangerous than a “usual” criminal. As in other paintings representing violent men (such as Nazi figures and the cannibal Issei Sagawa), the contrast is stark between the character’s pleasant costume and what we guess of his intentions. This contrast is enhanced by the play on lights reminiscent of Francisco de Goya, whereby the clown is surrounded by a bright halo while his dark and sinister shadow is neatly projected on the wall. In addition, he looks out of the painting, which makes the scene even spookier because we ignore what he’s looking at and what he intends to do.

The treatment recalls expressionist films of the 1930s such as Tod Browning’s *Freaks* (United States, 1932) and there is a correspondence with the work of Belgian symbolist artist James Ensor (1860-1949), who prefigured Expressionism. Ensor created clown- and carnival-like characters that he caricatured savagely, making them monstrous and creepy as well as ridiculous. A great admirer of Ensor, Luc Tuymans curated an exhibition on him titled *Intrigue* at the Royal Academy of London, in 2017.

CB

Room 14

Recherches [Investigations], 1989

oil on canvas; triptych
36,5 × 44,5 cm
36,2 × 38,1 cm
41,9 × 46,4 cm
Private collection.
Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



In 1994, Luc Tuymans painted a simple lampshade and titled his work *Lamp*. The following year, he took up again this subject and titled that work *Home Sweet Home*. The painting on the left titled *Recherches* is the very first version of this work, dated 1989. You could say there is nothing special about this lamp sat on a table, painted rather hesitantly, except that it was part of the furniture of a Nazi officer at the Buchenwald concentration camp, and that the lampshade is made of human skin. Appearances are always deceptive. The tooth in the central painting and the showcase on the right come from photographs taken in Auschwitz and Buchenwald by Luc Tuymans during a trip to Poland and Germany, in 1986. They show how the Nazis profaned human bodies and stole precious objects from the dead, such as hair, teeth and wedding rings.

For Luc Tuymans, the apparent lack of expressiveness of these images is humiliating. They are testament to a conception of medicine, science and conscience where human beings and life have lost their purpose.

MD

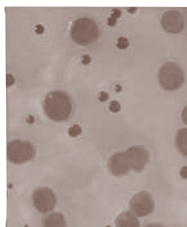
Room 14

Bloodstains, 1993

oil on canvas

57,5 × 47,5 cm

Jenny & Jos Van den Bergh-Quermia



The source image for *Bloodstains*, which is both realistic and abstract, is that of blood seen with a microscope. It is a reference to *Der Diagnostische Blick* in the sense that it is a body part that is clinically and medically examined.

We do not know whether the blood here is inside the body or if it has been shed, which would imply that an accident, or something more sinister, happened. We do not know either if this blood has been infected by AIDS. The artist said that even though he had not intended to address the epidemic, he might have been unintentionally influenced by it.

These bloodstains seem to move including for some out of the painting, which thus becomes something like a living organism.

Luc Tuymans said that when the painting is hung the bloodstains keep moving and the painting growing.

Here, he dared to make a disturbing painting whose subject is blood, the matter and symbol of both life and death.

CB

Room 14

Wandeling [Walk], 1989

oil on canvas

69,9 × 54,9 cm

Private collection



There are frequent references to World War II and Nazism in Luc Tuymans' oeuvre. He rarely addresses the topic directly but through details, traces, clues that can seem minor and unimportant. But the artist considers they are symptomatic of what has happened or will happen. For example, the source image for *Wandeling* is a simple photograph of Nazi dignitaries strolling around Berchtesgaden, near Adolf Hitler's residence in the Bavarian Alps. Nobody knows when and where it was decided to implement the final solution, which will lead to the extermination camps and gas chambers. Was it during a casual conversation outdoors or in an office at the Chancellery? In his oeuvre, Luc Tuymans enacts this doubt.

Placed along a diagonal crossing the painting, this group of men and women who are almost too small crosses an undefined, grey area that is neither the ground, snow, or sky, but just emptiness and even nothingness. Next to them, one single tree stands, too big and almost dead. Thus everything in this painting is about symptoms or premonitions about what is off frame—what has been left out of the image by the artist or because the framing is too tight to give us what we'd like to see—and what this means, i.e. what was said in the conversation, which we'd like to know.

MD

Room 15

Allo! I, 2012

oil on canvas

133,7 × 182,6 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



First shown together with *Peaches* and *Technicolor* in 2012 in London, *Allo! I* is part of a series of six paintings that are based on a series of television screens showing the movie *The Moon and Sixpence* by Albert Lewin (1942). The film is based on William Somerset Maugham's eponymous novel (1919), a romanticized biography of Paul Gauguin. Luc Tuymans is particularly interested in the last minutes of the restored version of the film, which shifts from black & white to an explosion of colors in the scene where a friend of Paul Gauguin's visits his cabin after his death and is stunned by the gigantic, colorful paintings hanging on the walls. The friend sees them as a vision of the Eden that the artist had always tried to reach but never managed to.

In *Allo! I*, we can see Luc Tuymans' reflection on a screen as he is taking a picture of the scene. We thus witness a visual game mixing art, reality and fiction with an artwork representing an artist as he is taking a picture of a man looking for an artist who happens to actually be looking for himself, as is almost always the case with Luc Tuymans.

The title is a reference to a parrot that lived in a bar close to the artist's studio in Antwerp and that would always welcome visitors with a squeaky, exotic "Allo!", a sort of joyful irony which is perfectly attuned with Luc Tuymans' personality. The parrot has now passed.

MD

Room 16

Frozen, 2003

oil on canvas

101 × 71 cm

Pinault Collection



This painting was first presented in the exhibition *Fortune* in New York, in 2003. It is the only time it has been shown.

It is based on an image taken in Chernobyl after the catastrophic accident at the Lenin nuclear plant, on 26 April 1986, in what was at the time the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, in the USSR. It was the worst nuclear disaster of the 20th century, classified as level 7, the highest on the International Nuclear Event Scale. Inspired by an image from a YouTube documentary on the decontamination efforts carried out in Chernobyl afterwards, the painting represents the gloved hand of a worker as he is cooling down and repairing a reactor element.

Luc Tuymans used a rich array of cold colors for this "frozen" painting, which he delicately combined to represent the ice that froze the reactor after it had overheated. As is often the case in his work, there is a bright halo in the bottom left of the canvas, which can signal the fusion, the quasi-nuclear Armageddon that happened. The image can be interpreted as an allegory of a man-made disaster whose consequences are overwhelming, similarly to ulterior events such as 9/11.

CB

Room 16

Die Zeit (Time), 1988

oil on cardboard; quadriptych

34,6 × 36,9 cm

36,5 × 35,1 cm

31,4 × 36,9 cm

34,6 × 35,1 cm

Private collection



Die Zeit (Time) comprises four, small, contrasted paintings. In the first one, a church in an abandoned village casts a cold shadow. There is a factory in the background and the words “nothing to see” appear faintly in the white sky. The second one shows empty shelves and triangular brackets that look like teeth. The third one features two round shapes, which are actually vegetable pellets such as those produced during World War II to feed soldiers. Lastly, the fourth painting shows a man whose face is hidden by his shades. This is in fact Reinhard Heydrich, one of the most powerful figures of the Third Reich nicknamed “The Butcher of Prague”.

This artwork does not directly describe WWII or the Holocaust but does so through touches of indistinction, strangeness and direct unease that disturb the gaze and cast a doubt in the viewers’ mind about the reality of what they are looking at and their ability to analyze and decipher the content of an image.

MD

Room 16

Big Brother, 2008

oil on canvas

146,4 × 225,1 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



This painting is based on a photograph of a television screen showing the reality TV show *Big Brother*. Luc Tuymans kept the video’s original grey-blue shades. Participants in this TV program are filmed 24/7 by video surveillance cameras placed all around the house. The banality of life thus becomes eventful. Here, Luc Tuymans shows the collective bedroom, the scene of voyeurism, sexuality, concealment, lies and, in fact, unconscious or conscious segregation, whether desired or endured, forced or suggested.

MD

Room 17

Heillicht [Curing light], 1991

oil on canvas; triptych

85,5 × 63,3 cm

50 × 40 cm

37 × 40,5 cm

Mu.ZEE, Ostend



This triptych is composed of the title-painting, *Heillicht*, in the center, *Smell* (on the left) and *Incest* (on the right). They were painted independently from one another and Luc Tuymans decided to unite them in one single work because of their color. The central painting, whose German title means “soothing/healing light” is inspired by a book published in 1942 in Germany (and authorized in Canada) by Dr. Paul Wolff and titled *Meine Erfahrungen... farbig [My experiences... in color]*. The book is about a photography technique that makes colors look as if they were painted. Allowing for the first time the massive reproduction of color images, this technique was notably used by Nazi propaganda.

Here, the artist reproduced a picture from this book showing a doctor treating a young patient with light therapy, but he represented the two characters in a more perfunctory manner with large brush strokes. The light also radiates, but here it is darkened and certainly not as warm and optimistic as in the original photograph. Next to this painting is *Smell*, which gives an abstract representation of deodorant bottles: using an array of pinks and oranges, the artist represents fragrances with shapes and colors as if he was merging two senses in one.

Incest is in stark contrast with the two other paintings. In black & white, it evokes the sense of touch by representing a very close view of a hand going through an orifice. Such a violent and transgressive act is featured here in a cold, decontextualized and dehumanized manner.

CB

Room 17

Portrait, 2000

oil on canvas

67 × 39 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



Portrait is based on a commemorative photograph such as those distributed in Belgium for funerals, which the artist picked up in the street. The original image has no meaning for anyone who did not know the deceased and time erased the scant details and information it held. Furthermore, the fact that Tuymans chose the same hue for the face of the subject and for the background renders the presence of this woman in the painting even less real. Similarly, touches of orange-yellow around the eyes, lips and neck, far from bringing some joy to the face instill on the contrary unease and a feeling of resignation linked to the idea of the end of life and loss.

MD

Room 17

Cook, 2013

oil on canvas

229,5 × 169,3 cm

Private collection



Cook is among a series of paintings that were first presented in 2013 at Zeno X gallery in Antwerp together with works of Marlene Dumas, a South African painter based in the Netherlands who is a friend of Tuymans', both personally and as an artist. Indeed, the exhibition was titled *Twice*.

The painting shows a cook from a three quarter angle as he is skinning an animal before roasting it. Because the whole painting is treated with red, orange, yellow, white and bluish grey hues similar to those of a wood-fired oven, it seems the fire is shining a direct light on most of the scene while the white-clad cook comes out as a dazzling ghost.

The almost spiritual effect of this painting is akin to great Baroque painting, in particular that of Caravaggio, but rather than emulating the latter's chiaroscuro and his warm, dark, earthy colors and saturated reds, Luc Tuymans opted for inverting the contrasts in favor of white, cold light and hues that remind of sunset or a nuclear explosion, as he did for *Sundown* and *Instant*. Even though he regularly pays homage to the old masters, Tuymans is never ironical and doesn't parody. On the contrary, he builds on the heritage left by the elders in order to better revisit it in a contemporary light. In a way, this painting is as much a contemporary revisitation of the character of Vulcan—Peter Paul Rubens comes to mind,

including the details of the hat, the horizontal working table and the diagonal at the right hand corner—as a portrait of one of those trendy chefs whose sophisticated cuisine Tuymans appreciates.

MD

Room 18

Lungs, 1998

oil on canvas

158 × 95,5 cm

Collection of Beth Swofford



Light, color and depth are central in Luc Tuymans' oeuvre. Anaglyph viewing, whereby purpose-made glasses restore the third dimension, is the basis of *Lungs*. Indeed, the source image is a 3D representation of a sectioned lung found in an anatomy book. In this painting, this organ which is essential to life has been rendered almost ghostly by the artist through the uneven superimposition of brown, beige, muddy red and fluorescent green shades. By relying on scientific or medical imagery on the one hand and the interiority of the human body on the other, Luc Tuymans opened the painting on the infinity of representation's alternative or interstitial spaces.

MD

Room 18

Intolerance, 1993

oil on canvas

80 × 70 cm

Private collection, Belgium



This painting represents Luc Tuymans' mother's collection of 1970s candlesticks. The way these candlesticks, which hold unlit candles, are placed transforms the way they are perceived. They are represented stacked against one another, each of a different size and casting an imposing shadow on an ochre, rosy and brownish, dim backdrop. But everything is unlit here: the candles as well as the wall's color, and the source of light can only be seen through the shadow it casts. This gives an impression of exiguity: these unassorted and outdated candlesticks are tightly arranged. There is a lack of light, breath and space in this scene that can be interpreted as a representation of our interiors—in the literal sense of our homes and in the figurative sense of our minds—, which are so narrow (and *intolerant* as the title suggests) that there is no room left, not even for a small flame. This work also recalls, because of the flatness of representation, the Italian master of still life Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964) even though the elements' shadow is represented.

CB

Room 18

The Heritage VI, 1996

oil on canvas

53 × 43,5 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



What looks at first sight like the generic image of a rather pleasant and genial middle class American man is in fact the portrait of Joseph Milteer, a right-wing extremist from Georgia who was close to the Ku Klux Klan. He is often mentioned in conspiracy theories about the assassination of John F. Kennedy, but no one has ever been able to prove he was on site at the time. Luc Tuymans was particularly impressed by the way the thin-rimmed metal spectacles enlarge the eyes, which are Klansmen's only visible feature when they wear their white robe and cone-shaped hat. But it is those eyes as well as the smile and the thick hair that give this man an attractive, square look even though he is an embodiment of the "banality of evil" theorized by German philosopher Hannah Arendt. Contrary to other paintings by Luc Tuymans, there is nothing disturbing or confusing here; both the representation and the original face are decoys and dangerous traps.

MD

Room 18

The Park, 2005

oil on canvas

160 × 246,5 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



As *Dirt Road*, *The Park* doesn't represent anything in particular apart from various tree trunks seen from above, framed almost at ground level. The range of shades used by Luc Tuymans is relatively clear and muted and the painting seems to be of a night scene. It is also testament to the artist's work process, which starts from a photograph taken or found, which is then re-photographed once or several times with a Polaroid up until the right image is obtained and finally transposed on a canvas whose size may vary.

Here, the painting has kept a trace of the source of light that enabled the photograph to be taken—Is it a flash? A torch light?—as well as the typical Polaroid "discoloration" effect in some shades and details. On the other hand, the twilight eeriness of the painting reminds of the great masters of Belgian symbolist painting such as James Ensor, Léon Spilliaert, William Degouve de Nuncques, Georges Le Brun and Xavier Mellery.

MD

Room 19

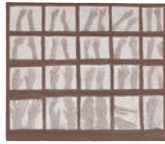
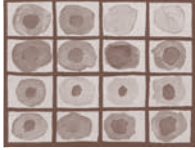
Die Wiedergutmachung
[*Compensation*], 1989oil on cardboard, mounted on plywood,
36,6 × 43 cm

oil on canvas, 39,4 × 51,8 cm

diptych

Private collection.

Courtesy Studio Luc Tuymans, Antwerp



The *Schwarzheide*, *Secrets*, *Our New Quarters*, *Recherches* [*Investigations*] and *Die Wiedergutmachung* series presented throughout the exhibition are all fragments of Nazi images that have lost their quality as proof or clue. The “banality of evil” theorized by Hannah Arendt is only perceptible through what is missing, erased and hidden or through formal incongruities.

For example, the two boxes of eyes and hands of the *Die Wiedergutmachung* diptych could be those of old dolls; they are in fact based on photographs found in the house of a Nazi doctor who conducted medical experimentations on Gypsy twins. After the war, the Gypsies never received any “reparation” as genocide victims.

Luc Tuymans’ sober and intense style enhances the reality of the original deed beyond the details that have been erased or smoothed out. Just as facts can never be erased from the memory of those who lived them, this series of paintings challenges time and oblivion.

MD

Room 19

Toter Gang [*Dead End*], 2018

oil on canvas

258,6 × 185,5 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



Here, Luc Tuymans once again tackles Nazism, a recurring theme throughout his oeuvre. He used the image of the steel entrance door of Hitler’s Berchtesgaden bunker and its network of tunnels. But here, nothing informs the viewer about the source and the German title, which means “the corridor of the dead”, is not directly informative either.

The artist hence did not wish to see this painting interpreted as a comment about Nazism. The theme that is clearly apparent, on the other hand, is confinement, but presented here in a paradoxical way. Indeed, on what side of this closed door are we standing? Inside or outside? Are we protected or detained? Both options are open.

As often in Luc Tuymans’ work, the subject is decontextualized: the door is not related to any architectural element and the composition is abstract, with two black horizontal strips—black being the color of all colors, rarely used by the artist and in figurative painting—framing the black, vertical rectangle of the door. It is surrounded by a semi-circular halo of light, which gives the door a surreal, metaphysical dimension, as if it was inviting us to cross over to the hereafter.

The question is whether there is a possibility of redemption behind the door, including for the absolute evil that was Nazism. The painting also questions the veracity of images. This image is an incomplete record of our history; it reminds us that we should not forget this dark period while also pointing to our own ambivalence.

CB

Room 19

Penitence, 2018

oil on canvas

195,5 × 141,2 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp



Luc Tuymans used a photograph of a sculpture seen in Spain, of the kind shown in Holy Week's processions. These figures representing the Virgin or a saint are generally dressed with an embroidered velvet coat. *Penitence*, which evokes a highly Catholic ritual, is here presented next to *Toter Gang*, which evokes utter evil and the possibility of redemption. Sculpted by craftsmen to be adored by the so-called "penitents" during Holy Week, these figures have also been used as models by great Spanish painters, such as the Baroque master Zurbarán. Here, the image is truncated and we do not see the head. It is taken from below, which places the viewer (of the painting and of the real procession, where figures are carried at arm's length above the crowd) in a position of both adoration and submission, reinforced by the figure's imposing format and the costume's deep black color.

By placing this penitence near the closed door of Nazism, Tuymans tackles the philosophical, almost psychoanalytical theme of guilt seen as a bad solution with regard to the atrocities of our history, of our human stories.

CB

Room 20

Venedig [Venice], 2017

oil on canvas

107,3 × 208 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp



Luc Tuymans took a picture of a low relief painting he saw at the Bauer Hotel in Venice. The image obtained gives the pictured artwork a distorted aspect, as if it was made in leather. It is built and painted as a sculpture, which ends up giving it quite an abstract aspect. Photography modified the original image and transformed it to the point of becoming a sort of caricature of the project. The resulting painting, with its earthy, ochre and yellow hues that are difficult to render, seems like a critical representation of the trappings of power, wealth and orientalism that are unique to Venice.

CB

Room 20

Candle, 2017

oil on canvas

134,6 × 108,5 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy Studio Luc Tuymans, Antwerp



As all painters are, Luc Tuymans is keenly interested in light, a subject matter he treated in various ways such as in *Sundown*, and *Instant*. Here, he tackles the subject directly: the painting is based on a photograph he took of a candle burning behind a sheet of paper. It is to be noted that Tuymans chose to paint this light behind a screen, i.e. the paper. As if it was necessary to use an intermediary to really grasp the nature of this fundamental and fascinating element, which is essential to life.

Light and the spiritual value we attribute it found our Christian civilization and the whole history of Western art. Here, the pictorial gesture is quite an achievement because Tuymans manages to show without explaining or being directly illustrative. Contrary to other of his artworks, the title here is literal and gives direct information about the subject matter.

CB

Room 20

Indelible Evidence, 2017

oil on canvas

87,9 × 97,4 cm

Peng Pei Cheng



The subject of this painting is an image of a chewed apple, although the subject is not immediately recognizable because the apple is not yellow or red but grey, as if it was made in stone or metal.

This particular apple is inspired by a real incident: a doctor managed to identify a criminal by analyzing the half-eaten apple he had left at the scene of the crime. This apple is hence a piece of indelible evidence. Luc Tuymans revisited this subject several times. He drew an apple in 1993 and comes back to this subject for our *La Pelle* exhibition, whose title refers to our relationship with our body as is also the case here.

But it is also impossible not to think of the first ever chewed apple in a crime scene, that of Eve and Adam, the doomed apple that will drive human beings out of paradise and make them for ever guilty, the indelible evidence of the first “crime” forever irreparable.

CB

Room 20

Issei Sagawa, 2012

oil on canvas

116,2 × 81,4 cm

Private collection, Belgium



As for the first painting of the exhibition, dated 2014, Luc Tuymans made this one (in 2012) from a picture he took with his smartphone of a documentary on Issei Sagawa, a Japanese who murdered and cannibalized a fellow student at the Paris Sorbonne, in 1981. Sagawa spent several years in prison in France before being extradited to Japan.

Here, the image of Issei Sagawa is blurry.

The painting reproduces the blurriness of the original image (a photograph of video images) and the face, which is almost abstract, seems to be disappearing, in particular the cannibal's mouth. Our gaze is drawn to the character's spectacles, which make him look studious and sensible. Here again, the image proposed and chosen by the artist brings a paradox to the subject matter: representing the unthinkable. Furthermore, the body's whiteness renders the character almost unreal.

CB

Room 21

Bedroom, 2014

oil on canvas

159,9 × 209,8 cm

Pinault Collection



This is an image of an unlit lamp in a bedroom devoid of any detail, lit with the flimsy light of dawn or dusk. Representing light is of course one of the most difficult challenges of painting. Here, it appears as a sort of crystal ball.

The light is shown from the artist's bed in his bedroom (hence the title). It is the only biographical element as no other detail is shown of this bedroom.

Light sources are a recurring theme in Luc Tuymans' oeuvre, in particular a certain type of glow featured in several paintings and subjects. Here, light doesn't bring any depth. On the contrary, it is rather flat and reminiscent of the glow of television or mobile screens. Similarly, it doesn't tell us at which point in time we are; it could be either morning or evening as in the timeless time of cyberspace.

CB

Room 21

Bend Over, 2001

oil on canvas

60 × 60 cm

Private collection



Bend Over refers to a situation of extreme vulnerability and intimacy: a scantily clad man or woman is bending forward, showing the curve of their back. Even though this is in fact a medical examination for a scoliosis case, Luc Tuymans has placed the viewer in the uncomfortable position of having to watch an almost humiliating situation, thus making us complicit with the power that science and medicine exert over individuals, as stated in the authoritarian tone of the title. In doing so, he affirms that images cannot be banal or neutral when human life is at stake.

MD

Room 21

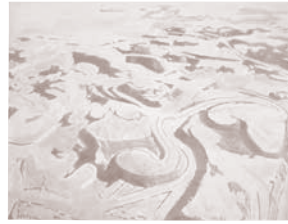
Niger, 2017

oil on canvas

180,7 × 236 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp



The image used in this painting titled *Niger* is the surface of an operating silver mine. As often with Luc Tuymans, the subject has a double meaning because it presents an almost abstract, monochromatic representation while at the same time evoking the exploitation of miners and colonization. Indeed, Niger was a French colony between 1900 and 1958. The colonization of African countries by Europeans is a recurring theme in Luc Tuymans' oeuvre, and he has tackled several times the Belgian colonization of Congo.

The area of land represented is almost lunar and in any case conjures up somewhere that is elsewhere. The traces remind of ornaments, shapes used in low relief sculpture or jewelry, but also of a labyrinth. Once again, Luc Tuymans proposes a subject that can be seen or read in different ways.

One could also see trenches, which would be reminiscent of old, black & white images of World War I, a period when European colonialists ruled over Africa.

CB

Room 22

Twenty Seventeen, 2017

oil on canvas
94,7 × 62,7 cm
Pinault Collection



The image is inspired by a Brazilian TV series titled *3%* about a dystopian society divided in two: on the one hand the rich (3% of the population) and on the other the poor. To access the society of the rich the poor can, when they turn 20, try their luck at an examination/game called “The Process”, but they only have one go and only 3% of them will succeed. When a candidate fails, he or she knows their fate is sealed and that they will be poisoned to death. The painting represents the face of a woman at the moment when she learns she will be put to death by poisoning. This situation and statement seem very in tune with our times, given the number of movies depicting a nightmarish future where most of humanity is enslaved as in *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) and more recently *Blade Runner 2049* (Denis Villeneuve, 2017). The painting offers a striking image of human beings’ powerlessness in the face of unidentified, absolute power.

CB

Room 22

The Shore, 2014

oil on canvas
194,2 × 358,4 cm
Tate



Luc Tuymans uses all the techniques of cinema and photography. He frames his subjects in original ways and uses close ups, blur, day for night and overexposure. *Surrender* refers to the opening scene of Don Chaffey’s 1968 film *Twist of Sand*.

An ex-Royal Navy officer is confronted with his past when he has to travel back to the Skeleton Coast near Angola to retrieve a load of diamonds. He is haunted by an episode from World War II of a seek and destroy mission of a German submarine and the killing of its crew. This trauma is strongly expressed in the opening sequence of the film, where the crew members are seen emerging from the dark one after the other with their hands up to signal they are surrendering.

This painting is rare in Luc Tuymans’ oeuvre, as the artist usually refuses to use black. But here, it sublimates the drama of the scene similarly to Francisco de Goya’s black.

MD

Room 22

Sundown, 2009

oil on canvas

182 × 239 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



Sundown is a large canvas featuring, as its title suggests, a sunset but it could also be interpreted as a nuclear cloud. As for *Instant*, the dominant hues of red, orange and pink suggest rather than represent the event, the physical phenomenon, the blast, the explosion or the induced heat. The source of this painting is in fact a very low resolution image taken from the Web without any relation with reality and digitally produced. The gradient of colors, which go from blue to white, that Luc Tuymans painstakingly reproduced in painting is hence more artificial than natural, more technical than emotional, more icy than warm.

Once again, the artist asks us to face the painting, representation and image to better decipher, understand and interpret them beyond their nature or appearance, and then to give them body and meaning.

MD

Room 23

The Return, 2018

oil on canvas

228,1 × 166 cm

Igal Ahouvi Art Collection



This painting presents a very cinematic and dramatic image of three characters climbing down stairs, inspired by David Lynch's most recent *Twin Peaks: The Return* miniseries. The black and white shades, the light shone on the characters from below casting their shadow on the wall, the stature of these three men who seem to be returning from the cold and the fact that they are pictured as they are moving down the stairs: all these elements make us believe that, as in a movie, something happened before and that these characters are about to dramatically advance the story towards a *denouement* that will happen off frame, after the instant of the painting. In so doing, the painting projects us in the history of cinema and, besides Lynch, Murnau and Orson Welles come to mind.

This is a cold, inward-looking painting, the opposite of *Pigeons*, which, even though based on images out of a book, seem alive whereas here time has stopped. It is the shadow, hence emptiness, which gives weight to the characters. However, the contrast effects that dramatize the situation are such that they make it almost comical.

The Return presents a scene without destination. Nothing tells us what these men are seeking as they come down these stairs. The scene reminds of Marcel Duchamp's famous *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) revisited later, in 1966, by Gerard Richter, which also featured characters coming down a stair without destination.

CB

Room 23

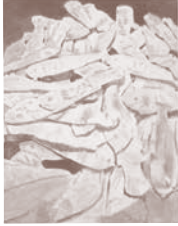
Mother of Pearl, 2018

oil on canvas

204,6 × 159,7 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp



The idea of vanity, which is recurrent in Luc Tuymans' oeuvre, is present in this painting. It is a close up view on casino chips photographed in Hong Kong, a city that is well known as a gaming hotspot, often featured in cinema such as in the James Bond series and in Orson Welles' films.

The mother of pearl chips represented here are particularly difficult to paint because of their shimmer, reflections and iridescent colors that are both rich and simple. The artist has used his palette to the max.

As often in his paintings, Luc Tuymans proposes a paradoxical position that allows for various readings and interpretations of the image. It can be seen as a representation of the fake money of our casino-economy; of the greed of those who can never amass enough, or of the impermanence and vanity of wealth since the chips are piled up without any care or order, as a pile of rubbish.

CB

Room 23

Orchid, 1998

oil on canvas

99,5 × 76,7 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



Luc Tuymans considers *Orchid* as a “violent painting” and said that the idea of “cutting” has sexual connotations. However, the artist didn't say whether this cutting-off refers to an act performed on the flower's physical body—graft of genetic mutation—or on the canvas. He also said that statistical measures show that men's semen is becoming less and less dense and fertile at a time when plants are modifying and enriching their sexual characters in order to adapt and survive the many mutations undergone by ecosystems.

Notions of naturality and artificiality—here intensified by the raw green color—are then disrupted in regard to the qualities of originality, purity and authenticity usually associated with nature and human beings.

In a way, *Orchid* is an unusual kind of contemporary vanity, an ode to the mutating and almost “replicant” beauty being engineered in laboratories.

MD

Room 24

The Rabbit, 1994

oil on canvas

59,5 × 72 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy Hauser & Wirth



Sweet, pastoral creatures, rabbits are considered in many cultures as related to the Moon, fertility and spring. This rabbit is lit by the Moon but from the inside and it seems to be about to chew a four-leaf clover, which is yet another symbol of abundance and luck. The scene could be either at dawn or dusk, when rabbits come out of their hole, but in any case under the rays of the Moon which give the painting a certain magic feel. This glowing quality, apart from being an amazing technical feat by the artist, is also a reference to one of his favorite subjects: the glow of television, computer and mobile screens. These screens shine a light on us but do they make us less blind? This rabbit glows but doesn't have eyes. One can hope the four-leaf clove will protect it from predators. But who will protect us from the illusions projected on our screens? Are we so enslaved to our screens that even a creature as earth-bound as a rabbit only appears to us as a glowing, disembodied image?

CB

Room 24

Corso II, 2015

oil on canvas

195,5 × 152,5 cm

Private collection.

Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



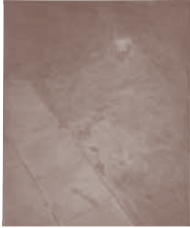
This painting is based on a photograph taken by the artist's father in his childhood, in the 1970s. It is a parade float from the Zundert Flower Parade, the village where the artist's mother is from, as was Vincent Van Gogh. This flower-covered float is the largest in the world. The fruit of months of work in secret, it is brought out in the streets only once a year for the parade held the first Sunday of September on the occasion of a community and festive moment similar to the Rio Carnival. When the picture was taken, Luc Tuymans was under the float along with other children, pushing it forward. This was for him a stressful experience that made him angry and which he assimilated to slavery, to man treated as a beast of burden. Tuymans only made a few paintings directly inspired by his childhood, and this one is the only one featured in the exhibition. In his pictorial treatment, he plays on the image's blurriness, a fading memory, and he uses a palette that is not realistic, which gives the work an unreal feel as if he wanted to open a space for critical viewing. "The floats were quite low so the children had to run under them and push. It was a bit like slavery," said the artist. "I've used those that had a singular shape and are somewhat flamboyant. They also have a very aggressive tension, which is enhanced by the fact that they move slowly."

CB

Room 24

Dirt Road, 2003

oil on canvas
153,5 × 127 cm
Private collection



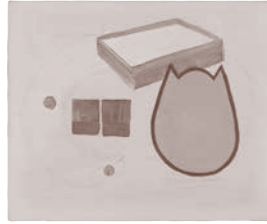
Dirt Road was first presented in New York for the exhibition *Fortune*. All the exhibition artworks referred one way or another to the state of the world after 11 September 2001, in particular in the United States. The painting doesn't show anything in particular, only a bit of sidewalk at night seen from above and from a sideways angle. This could be an image from a surveillance camera placed above a street door, or our own view when looking through the window to see who is ringing the door bell. The space is closed-off but at the same time seems to escape from all sides. Similarly, given that each texture is precisely, painstakingly detailed, the viewer is drawn into the depth of each layer of paint even though in reality they would only encounter insurmountable opacities. This is typical of Luc Tuymans' paradoxes: to open ways out or possibilities in the representation when, in reality, everything would seem inescapably closed and obtuse. In other words, breaking with the fanaticism and fatalism that is at the heart of the emerging suspicion and surveillance society.

MD

Room 24

Child Abuse, 1989

oil on canvas
55 × 65 cm
Private collection



This work is imbued with ambiguity and unease. The imagery and the simple shapes seem innocuous: a rectangle, two squares, two dots and a tulip inspired by an advertising logo. The light colors also seem harmless. But the title, *Child Abuse*, is shocking. The image is indeed inspired by an advertisement on risks for children, which is here rendered almost abstract. The work is about untold and potentially horrific stories that unfold behind the normality of appearances, something deeply disturbing as when familiar people or environments suddenly become strange and threatening.

CB

Room 25

The Arena I, II, III, 2014

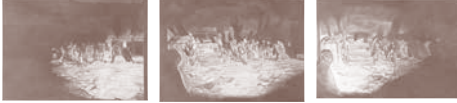
oil on canvas

176,3 × 252,7 cm

182,2 × 253 cm

169 × 242 cm

Private collection, Singapore



The Arena series of paintings is inspired by an 8 mm film made by the artist, from which he drew pictures. Seen as a whole, the three paintings feature a cinema sequence and camera movement, applying cinema syntax to painting. Two elements are immediately striking: a character who appears flimsily in the first painting comes out of the shadow in the second one and turns toward viewers in the third one. It is the only recognizable figure, isolated from a group of undistinguishable characters. The other element is obviously the bright source of light at the heart of each of the three paintings. Something is happening at the center of the scene that draws the attention of all the characters and the one at the forefront seems to want to alert us about it.

The amazing feat here is that the central feature of both the scene itself and the paintings, although brightly lit, is invisible! We do not know what is happening even though we see that something intense, even dramatic, is going on. But who is looking? And what do we see? How do we represent what we see? Luc Tuymans, painter and filmmaker, asks the question... and hides the answer in a flood of light.

CB

Room 26

The Heritage I, 1995

oil on canvas

145 × 79,5 cm

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Purchased

with funds from the gift (by exchange)

of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur A. Goldberg

and with funds contributed by the Committee

on Twentieth-Century Art, 1996



The Heritage is part of a series of ten paintings exhibited in 1996 in New York and painted the previous year. This series questions American cultural icons and symbols following the terrorist attack on a federal building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh, in 1995. In this painting, two heads positioned one on top of the other emerge from successive shades of grey-blue and a pale backdrop, both faceless and without much contour. They look the same but one has a simple basketball cap while the other has the same type of cap but with flaps over the ears like a traditional American hunting cap. This duality invites the viewer to redefine collective identification to an object, figure or event, and individual anonymity in the face of current news, history or tragedy.

MD

Room 26

Oregon, 2017

oil on canvas
326,5 × 186,4 cm
Private collection



The original image is a picture of a building in Portland (in the American state of Oregon) that Luc Tuymans took with his smartphone. It is one of his very few works inspired by a picture he took directly.

The artist sees a trompe-l'oeil mural with real and fake windows. The painting reminds of a classic fresco, except that this one represents the American idea of the new world, in the West, and the encounter between trappers and Native Americans. They are shaking hands! It represents a self-confident America although all the characters are armed.

The painting and painting technique enhance the “historicization” of the subject, which is the very young American history that aspires to appear old and deeply rooted. The work also questions the image: it is not hyper-realistic but it does come from somewhere, which creates a ‘mise en abyme’ of the subject matter: this trompe-l'oeil (literally “trick-the-eye” in French) also tricks the perception in photography and painting. Can a painting give historical weight to a subject?

The title, *Oregon*, refers obviously to the name of the American state where the picture was taken. But the word “Oregon” reminds of the word “origin”, which enhances the questioning about origin and history conveyed by the painting.

CB

Room 26

Donation, 2008

oil on canvas
24,6 × 31,3 cm
Private collection.
Courtesy Hauser & Wirth



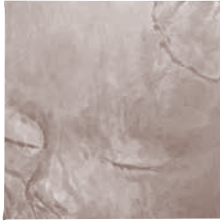
Donation is in fact the portrait of British intellectual Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) who gave instructions in his will for his body to be preserved as a “self-icon”. In spite of the efforts of physicians, his head could not be preserved and was replaced by one made in resin. Luc Tuymans’ painting was not made from this resin head but from filmed images of it, which renders even more ambiguous the relation between life and death and the natural and the artificial within pictorial representation. This confusion is even greater because of the model’s almost empty gaze.

MD

Room 27

Head, 2012

oil on canvas
66,9 × 66,2 cm
Private collection



A partial close up of a child's head covers all the surface of this almost square painting, painted with wide strokes and a subtle array of mauves, greys and bluish whites. Is it an ultrasound scan? Or a doll? But then the head seems to have been hurt or operated on as shown by the semicircular scar, or incision, at the top right of the canvas.

Luc Tuymans has often featured children's faces and dolls, striving to pinpoint what makes them different from one another, or when and how it is possible to represent embodiment, life as it appears, this moment when a face becomes human and inhabited or on the contrary when it becomes an inanimate object. In *Head*, the artist has erased the distinction between what is real and unreal, born and dead, between a sketch of what will become and an unfinished life project. The image is very intense and we guess that a lot is happening off frame, far from us. As often with Tuymans, the more one contemplates, the more one perceives what cannot be seen.

CB

Room 27

Die blaue Eiche [The blue oak],

1998
oil on canvas
176,5 × 105 cm
Grażyna Kulczyk Collection.
Courtesy Galerie Isabella Czarnowska, Berlin



The artist made this painting (titled “the blue oak tree” in German) from a drawing by Caspar David Friedrich, which he re-drew, cut out and photographed with a Polaroid. Luc Tuymans is fascinated by this German artist (1774-1840) because of the efficiency of his paintings and drawings, most of which are small-sized even though their subject matter is deep.

The image is hence a drawing that belongs to a series made by the famous German artist of wintry scenes showing a frozen nature, a theme in which he is considered a master. In the painting, Tuymans “flattened” Caspar David Friedrich's view, since the photographic image of a drawing re-drawn by Tuymans brings a distance with the subject matter and obliterates the singularity of the original drawing.

But in both cases the landscape is more mental than real. Tuymans does not reproduce reality but rather the mental image of a landscape, which is confusing because the fake landscape can actually give the impression of real nature. In so doing, he asks one of the fundamental questions of art: is it possible to believe in art, in this case painting, and its representations?

CB

Room 27*Fingers*, 1995

oil on canvas

37,5 × 33 cm

Musée d'arts de Nantes



Fingers pushes the limits of enlargement to the point of de-realization. Although these fingers do belong to a body, hence to a real person, the framing and use of a single color render them sculptural and almost archetypical. The notion of “close up” is recurrent in Luc Tuymans’ oeuvre; for example, it is present in the three eyes of *Pigeons*, the nondescript mass of *Pillows*, and the bulb in *Orchid*. The close up allows to transform—almost in a Kafkaesque way—humans into animals, normality into monstrosity, and the natural into the artificial. Here, our gaze is invited not to recognize the motif that is represented, or to go over the surface of the painting as we’d go over the surface of the skin, but rather to delve into the painting’s layers in order to better reach the flesh itself and its founding organicity.

MD*Photo credits*

Ron Amstutz. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London

Ben Blackwell. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London

Peter Cox. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

Matteo De Fina

Courtesy Hauser & Wirth

Paul Hester

Kerry McFate

Tim Nighswander/IMAGING4ART. Courtesy David Zwirner,

New York/London

Adam Reich

Studio Luc Tuymans, Antwerp

Felix Tirry. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

Luc Tuymans. La Pelle

Palazzo Grassi, Venice
24.III.2019 — 6.I.2020

Texts by Caroline Bourgeois,
curator of the exhibition,
and by Marc Donnadiou, chief curator
of the Musée de l'Élysée, Lausanne.

The catalogue of the exhibition
Luc Tuymans. La Pelle,
published by Marsilio Editori in French,
Italian and English in March 2019,
gathers essays by Marc Donnadiou,
Jarrett Earnest and Patricia Falguières.

La Pelle

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Luc Tuymans