

PRESS KIT

LA PELLE LUC TUYMANS

24/03/2019 – 06/01/2020
PALAZZO GRASSI

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PALAZZO GRASSI
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PINAULT
COLLECTION

1 THE EXHIBITION 'LA PELLE' AT PALAZZO GRASSI IN 2019 CURATED BY CAROLINE BOURGEOIS AND LUC TUYMANS

As part of the cycle of monographic shows and 'carte blanche' dedicated to major contemporary artists, launched in 2012 and alternating with thematic exhibitions of the Pinault Collection, Palazzo Grassi presents Luc Tuymans' first personal exhibition in Italy.

Curated by Caroline Bourgeois in collaboration with the artist (Mortsel, Belgium, 1958), the show is entitled 'La Pelle' (The Skin), after Curzio Malaparte's 1949 novel. It includes over 80 works from the Pinault Collection, international museums and private collections, and focuses on the artist's paintings from 1986 to today. The exhibition path is not chronological. It suggests dialogues and comparisons and rather insist on the spatialisation of the artworks.

Considered as one of the most influential painters of the international art scene, Luc Tuymans has been dedicating himself to figurative painting since the mid 1980s and has contributed throughout his career to the rebirth of this medium in contemporary art. His works deal with questions connected to the past and to more recent history and address subjects of our daily lives through a set of images borrowed from the private and public spheres – the press, television, the Internet. The artist renders these images by dissolving them in an unusual and rarefied light; the slight anxiety that emanates from them is able to trigger – according to the artist himself – an 'authentic forgery' of reality.

As Caroline Bourgeois states: "Whilst taking inspiration from existing images, Luc Tuymans' approach to painting has nothing to do with perfect representation, but rather with taking a risk. The artist claims that painting should entail a void, a flaw, and it is in this 'absence' that the visitor should rewrite his own version of the story, its narrative. In this sense, his work could be better described as conceptual, rather than figurative. Another fascinating aspect of his work is its being silent: his paintings are often monochromes, with dull shades that range from warmer to colder, with a flattened perspective. He does not intend to take the visitor by the hand, he is asking him to make an effort to come closer; a reflection and a physicality instead".

The exhibition includes a site-specific artwork, conceived for the atrium of Palazzo Grassi: a marble mosaic of over 80 square meters which reproduces *Schwarzheide*, an artwork painted in 1986 by the artist. With a title that comes from a German forced-labor camp, the artwork refers to the drawing by a prisoner in the course of his detention period during the Second World War. The mosaic is the only non-pictorial artwork presented in the exhibition.

Schwarzheide, Mosaic**A site-specific artwork for Palazzo Grassi**

Luc Tuymans' exhibition at Palazzo Grassi opens with a site-specific installation conceived by the artist. It is a large-scale marble mosaic that covers the atrium and welcomes the visitors from the entrance throughout the exhibition, as it is visible from different points of view of the Palazzo.

The artwork reproduces *Schwarzheide*, the painting created by the artist in 1986. The title, 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 original drawing that inspired the artwork reproduced by Luc Tuymans is by camp survivor Alfred Kantor and shows the forest surrounding the camps, which made them invisible to local residents. In the installation format, the landscape is almost enlarged to the dimension of urban paving so the image appears as dissolved to the visitor who walks in. But symbolically, as soon as one stands at the level of the balustrades overlooking the atrium of Palazzo Grassi the image is reassembled again and it delivers its message, thereby showing that distance and point of view are essential when looking at an artwork.

The mosaic is realised by Fantini Mosaici and it is made of over 200.000 hand-cut marble tiles, assembled by the craftsmen of the historical Milanese company.

Schwarzheide

2019 (after the 1986 eponymous oil on canvas)

Marble mosaic

960 x 960 cm

Fantini Mosaici

2 EXCERPTS FROM THE CATALOGUE

Crimes of Dispassion: Materiality and Reality of Images

Jarrett Earnest

[...]

Luc Tuymans is contemporary painting's philosopher-thug. He's taken the image and snapped its neck, rendering it silent and still – *a body wholly body*, laid out as for an autopsy or on display as at a wake. Either way, the image hardly resembles itself. Forensic consideration of the effect must start with the question of what, in the first place, images even are. Today they permeate every aspect of our lives in ways that defy analysis – sliding among phones, laptops, televisions, billboards, magazines, and paintings and between material and immaterial. In the twenty-first century, we eat and sleep digital images. It is impossible to think outside them. Tuymans thinks *through* them – using them against themselves. This entails brutality.

[...]

Grappling with digitalized images forced Tuymans to change the way he paints. Formerly, he laid down brushstrokes in uniform horizontal strokes, indifferent to what they might be depicting. His aim was to capture the coldness of one or another image-generating “apparatus.” The tension between technical vision and manual execution has marked Tuymans's art from its beginning. But his increasingly dominant digital subjects have called for giving entire surfaces a chilly tingle, never allowing any mark to align with whatever it may help to describe. Contours aren't drawn; they occur. Tuymans's atomization of the image essentially inverts Barthes's formula, giving us *the code without a message*. Maintaining that “an artwork should point in more than one direction”, Tuymans makes paintings that never dictate how they should be seen – much less how they are to be judged morally in terms of good or evil. Such subjects, in some of his work, as the Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler or the Japanese cannibal Issei Sagawa naturally revolt us. But Tuymans paints not *them* but received pictures that were produced by some blameless apparatus whose sole function is *to show*. By taking up images with strong political and emotional charges – the kind that exert control over us by inducing feelings of helplessness – he tests possibilities for neutralizing their power by identification with the means.

One profound distinction between photographs and paintings involves the role, in each, of time – both the time of their making and that of our looking.

[...]

Tuymans, too, maintains time parameters. He makes each of his paintings in one day – all-out, wet into wet, at a continuous single go. The rule fosters a particular look in his paintings, bespeaking the performance – the hurry-up mediation, as of a dream after awakening – of a human hand, the oldest and still the most varied and nuanced of image-making instruments. The time constraint gives his increasingly large canvases a subliminal visual rhythm, something like that of an expert plasterer at work – a rocking motion that snakes from the shoulder to the elbow to the wrist, covering an area swiftly but with precision. Tuymans applies dark colors over light ones, with an effect that he analogizes to watching Polaroids develop before your eyes. His paint is always very thin, heavily diluted with turpentine to make each layer no more than a skin.

[...]

Before the image**Patricia Falguières**

[...]

Luc Tuymans's paintings are always recognizable, whether in a group show, on the walls of a gallery, in a museum, or in an art fair. By contrast, it is only when we see them in solo exhibitions that we can see just how different each of his works are from the others, the extent to which the creativity, size, and subject matter make each one unique. These paintings don't form a system: they do not set out an identifiable process, scheme, or limited shapes, such as those of the modernist systematists – Josef Albers or Barnett Newmann, for example. We can just barely identify the series, which for that matter are short, which only their titles identify as such: *Die Zeit*, *Der diagnostische Blick*, or *Der Architekt* for example. Nevertheless, since the 1980s Luc Tuymans's paintings have had what might be called, for lack of anything better, a 'family likeness'. What immediately set them apart from other paintings they happened to have been hung beside was a hard-to-explain secret energy that relied neither on the large dimensions or painterly displays of brushstroke and impasto, nor on the emphasis on 'painterly gesture' that a whole generation of painters in the early 1980s considered to represent a 'return to painting'. At a time when resorting to narrative seemed *de rigueur*, when the next generation of pop imagery powered the pictorial avalanche that flooded the market (after the years of commercial famine of conceptual art), Tuymans's paintings remained 'in a class of their own', no doubt because of their size [...], his unique use of colors, and the image's relationship to the painting that, in some enigmatic way, defied narration.

Nowadays, it is difficult to gauge just how much of a hold the issue of size had on artistic debate from the post-Second World War period to the turn of the twenty-first century. American hegemony was also expressed through the monumental dimensions of the canvases "as big as the continent" that were produced by American painters, and at the same time endorsing the quantitative concept of color attributed to Matisse, in accordance with which "a square centimeter of blue is not as blue as a square meter of the same blue."¹ The 1980s and '90s merely reinforced that super-size supremacy, and even photography gave way to a yearning for the age of history painting and its heroic dimensions. This meant forgetting that the European avant-garde, from Rodchenko or Mondrian to Albers, produced their most radical effects on canvases of just a few dozen square centimeters. Tuymans's canvases were characterized by an unusual compactness: he painted small objects, as withdrawn and self-contained as his depictions of people with lowered eyelids or impossible-to-meet gazes – figures that seemed to float in an indistinguishable space, gray on gray, or in an area of 'noncolor', a *tonal* painting that muffled the chromatic effects from which it drew its strength. In short, his images were difficult to digest; they were paintings that kept the viewer at a distance. Indeed, this distance was cleverly exploited in the shows the artist took on: as if this undifferentiated space in each painting from which the image emerges (a space that might easily be called a 'reserve', or 'untouched area', if not for the fact that it is entirely covered in paint) found the opportunity to reach its maximum expansion in the context of the art gallery or museum room. The hanging plan is thus dictated by *the interior of each painting*, the interior of that neutral area, of that area of silence around which it is formed.

[...]

Luc Tuymans: flesh and photography

Marc Donnadieu

[...]

The contribution of photography – particularly Polaroid or smartphone images – in Luc Tuymans’s pictorial process has often been studied.² Tuymans himself says of it:

I’m a contemporary artist, which means that I work with images. There’s nothing unusual in that. By contrast, the choice that one makes is extraordinary, because it’s not really immediate. To my mind, it’s important to discover the meaning of things. If I see an image, I need to know where it comes from, what it might mean. Or it might be that I don’t understand it, and that’s why it attracts me. That doesn’t mean that everyone has to see the same things in it, or have the same information about the image as I do, because that’s not possible.”³

Luc Tuymans was born in 1958 in Mortsel, a municipality on the outskirts of Antwerp. He belongs to a generation that reached adulthood lulled by a visual culture in which movies, TV, and the illustrated press played a leading role. In the late 1970s and early ‘80s, when he was studying at the Institut Saint-Luc in Brussels, the La Cambre national school of visual arts, and then the Antwerp Academy of Fine Arts, he became fascinated by the technologies of image production, and between 1981 and 1985 he therefore gave up painting to concentrate on photography, starting with Super 8mm and then 16mm and 35mm movies before moving on to writing screenplays and/or illustrating storyboards.

Luc Tuymans’s undimmed love of painting didn’t resurface until the mid-1980s, drawing inspiration from his personal collection of source images, taken mainly from the Polaroid or smartphone photos he shoots in urban spaces, in his studio, or at home, or from archive or news photos that he often sources in magazines or newspapers, from television programs or movies, or on his TV screen or the Internet. “Since I started, I’ve had this concept of what I would call ‘authentic falsification.’ In other words, rather than doing new things, it was a concept of reworking images that already exist in the collective memory and that we all have a claim to.”⁴ For this reason, his painting method resembles a unique form of absorbing the images produced by reality, our civilization, the media, or the artist himself in order to better return them to the spectator’s gaze as ephemeral and fleeting impressions, or vague, somewhat blurred recollections. Through this to-and-fro from the conscious to the unconscious, from the known to the forgotten, Tuymans’s works hark back both to our innermost being and to the most common collective memory. “It’s a way of creating an inner distance with regard to the image,” he claims. “I don’t believe that all images are real. I’m wary of them, and of my own images too. We should always mistrust, ask ourselves questions.”⁵ Thus, caught between subject and object, real and representation, he forces us to look differently at the image he presents to us, to withhold our senses, emotions, and judgment so we can more easily reassess our ability to feel, perceive, and understand the world around us.

But there are even deeper connections at the heart of Luc Tuymans’s relationship to painting and what photography is in itself. Allow me to turn one of his own remarks on its head: “We are used to accepting photos. Painting, on the contrary, is something that we must truly study, that we have to contemplate, decipher, and interpret”⁶ in order to ask instead this paradoxical question: we’re used to accepting painting. Is photography, on the contrary, something that we must truly study, that we have to contemplate, decipher, and interpret? ... As if photography, like writing, “manifests an essence and holds the threat of a secret.”⁷

[...]

- 1 Eric Alliez and Jean-Claude Bonne demonstrated the complexity of Matisse's approach to color in *La pensée-Matisse*, Paris, Passages, 2005.
- 2 See Luc Tuymans, Gerrit Vermeiren, Dieter Roelstraete, and Montserrat Albores Gleason, *Luc Tuymans: I Don't Get It* (distributed by Art Pub Incorporated, 2008).
- 3 "La Suspension du regard. Entretien avec Luc Tuymans" (Suspended gaze. An interview with Luc Tuymans), *H-art* 133 (2014): 5; also available at <http://www.septembretiberghien.com/Entretiens/Luc-Tuymans>.
- 4 *Luc Tuymans, Doué pour la peinture. Conversations avec Jean-Paul Jungo* (Luc Tuymans, A gift for painting. Conversations with Jean-Paul Jungo) (Geneva: Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, 2006), 20.
- 5 Presentation to the exhibition catalogue for *Luc Tuymans, Suspended. L'œuvre graphique (1989–2015)*, La Louvière, Centre de la gravure et de l'image imprimée, 2015.
- 6 Presentation to the exhibition catalogue for *Luc Tuymans. Portraits: 1975–2003*, Geneva, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, 2006.
- 7 Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), 20.

3 LIST OF ARTWORKS*

Schwarzheide, 2019
(after the 1986 eponymous oil on canvas)

Mother of Pearl, 2018
Private collection

Penitence, 2018
Private collection

Pigeons, 2018
Pinault Collection

The Return, 2018
Igal Ahouvi Art Collection

Toter Gang, 2018
Private collection

Ballone, 2017
Private collection

Baroque, 2017
Pinault Collection

Indelible Evidence, 2017
Peng Pei Cheng

Niger, 2017
Private collection

Oregon, 2017
Private collection

K, 2017
Private collection, Singapore

Twenty Seventeen, 2017
Pinault Collection

Venedig, 2017
Private collection

Candle, 2017
Private collection

Brokaat, 2016
Pinault Collection

Mountains, 2016
Pinault Collection

Corso II, 2015
Private collection

Le Mépris, 2015
Collection of Mimi Haas

Murky Water I, II, III, 2015
Collezione Prada, Milan

Orange Red Brown, 2015
Private collection

Isabel, 2015
Private collection

Bedroom, 2014
Pinault Collection

Issei Sagawa, 2014
Tate

The Shore, 2014
Tate

William Robertson, 2014
The Broad Art Foundation

The Arena I, II, III, 2014
Private collection, Singapore

Cook, 2013
Private collection

Head, 2012
Private collection

Issei Sagawa, 2012
Private collection, Belgium

München, 2012
Pinault Collection

Peaches, 2012
Private collection

Technicolor, 2012
Private collection

Allo! I, 2012
Private collection

Me, 2011
The Broad Art Foundation

Morning Sun, 2011
The Broad Art Foundation

My Leg, 2011
Private collection

Instant, 2009
Private collection

- Sundown*, 2009
Private collection
- Against the Day I, II*, 2008
Private collection
- Big Brother*, 2008
Private collection
- Donation*, 2008
Private collection
- Seal*, 2007
Edward Lee 2002 Trust
- Simulation*, 2007
Pinault Collection
- The Book*, 2007
Pinault Collection
- The Valley*, 2007
Pinault Collection
- Turtle*, 2007
Private collection
- Magic*, 2007
Private collection, Brussels
- The Park*, 2005
Private collection
- Frozen*, 2003
Pinault Collection
- Dirt Road*, 2003
Private collection
- Untitled (Still Life)*, 2002
Pinault Collection
- Bend Over*, 2001
Private collection
- Portrait*, 2000
Private collection
- Die blaue Eiche*, 1998
Grażyna Kulczyk Collection
- Lungs*, 1998
Collection of Beth Swofford
- Orchid*, 1998
Private collection
- Hut*, 1998
Collection Pinault
- The Heritage VI*, 1996
Private collection
- A Flemish Intellectual*, 1995
Musée d'arts de Nantes
- The Heritage I*, 1995
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
- Fingers*, 1995
Musée d'arts de Nantes
- Superstition*, 1994
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.
- The Rabbit*, 1994
Private collection
- Pillows*, 1994
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; A.W. Mellon Acquisition Endowment Fund
- Intolerance*, 1993
Private collection, Belgium
- Bloodstains*, 1993
Jenny & Jos Van den Bergh-Quermia
- Angel*, 1992
The Art Institute of Chicago.
Gift of Fred McDougal & Nancy Lauter McDougal
- Der diagnostische Blick IV*, 1992
De Pont Museum, Tilburg
- Der diagnostische Blick VII*, 1992
Kunstmuseen Krefeld
- Der diagnostische Blick VIII*, 1992
Private collection
- Der diagnostische Blick X*, 1992
Private collection
- Embitterment*, 1991
Private collection

3

Heillicht, 1991
Mu.ZEE, Ostend

Body, 1990
Collection S.M.A.K.
Stedelijk Museum
voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent

Disenchantment, 1990
Private collection

Secrets, 1990
Private collection

Child Abuse, 1989
Private collection

Die Wiedergutmachung, 1989
Private collection

Recherches, 1989
Private collection

Wandeling, 1989
Private collection

Die Zeit, 1988
Private collection

Our New Quarters, 1986
MMK Museum für Moderne
Kunst Frankfurt am Main

Rearview Mirror, 1986
Private collection

* The list of works could vary

4 BIOGRAPHY AND CHRONOLOGY OF THE ARTIST

Luc Tuymans was born in 1958 in Mortsel, Belgium. He lives and works in Antwerp. Widely credited with having contributed to the revival of painting in the 1990s, Belgian artist Luc Tuymans continues to assert its relevance by addressing a diverse range of topics. His works, based on pre-existing imagery, engage with questions of history and its representation and with daily subject matter cast in an unfamiliar light.

Previous recent survey shows of the artist's work include: 'The Swamp' at Reset Gert Robijns, Borgloon, in 2017, 'Glasses' at the Museum aan de Stroom (MAS), Antwerp, in 2016 and later presented at the National Portrait Gallery, London, in 2017, 'Intolerance' at the Qatar Museums Gallery Al Riwaq, Doha, and 'Birds of a Feather' at the Talbot Rice Gallery University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, in 2015, 'Nice. Luc Tuymans' at the Menil Collection, Houston, in 2013.

Luc Tuymans has also curated various group exhibitions: 'Sanguine – Luc Tuymans on Baroque' at the Contemporary Art Museum of Antwerp, Antwerp, and then at the Fondazione Prada, Milan, in 2018, 'Intrigue: James Ensor by Luc Tuymans' at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, and 'The Gap: Selected Abstract Art from Belgium' at the Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art, London, and later at the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp, in 2016, 'Constable, Delacroix, Friedrich, Goya. A Shock to the Senses' at Albertinum, Dresden, in 2013, 'A Vision of Central Europe' at Groeninge Museum, Brugge Centraal, Bruges, in 2010 and 'The State of Things: Brussels/Beijing' at Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, which traveled to the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, in 2009.

The exhibition 'La Pelle' at Palazzo Grassi is his first personal exhibition in Italy to date.

5 EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

216 pages

1 edition in three languages (Italian, English, French)

48€ / 43€ at the museum bookshop

Published in co-edition by Marsilio Editori, Venice, and Palazzo Grassi – Punta della Dogana

Graphic design by Philippe Delforge, Les produits de l'épicerie

With texts by:

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6 BIOGRAPHY OF THE CURATOR

Caroline Bourgeois

Caroline Bourgeois is currently curator at Pinault Collection.

Born in Switzerland in 1959, Caroline Bourgeois graduated in Psychoanalysis at Paris University in 1984. She was director of the Eric Franck Gallery in Switzerland from 1988 to 1993 and co-director of the Jennifer Flay Gallery from 1995 to 1997.

From 1998 to 2001, she worked on contemporary art installations in tube stations in Paris with a number of artists, including Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster. In 1998 she was appointed to be in charge of the video section of François Pinault's collection. In this context she gave the collection broad horizons that enable to trace the history of the moving image through art installations.

In 2001, with the Pinault Collection, she worked on the production team of Pierre Huyghe's artworks for the Biennale's French pavilion. She has also worked on a number of independent projects, among which: the video program 'Plus qu'une image' for the first edition of the Nuit Blanche in Paris (2002); the exhibition 'Survivre à l'Apartheid' at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie during the Paris photography month on the theme *Emergences Résistances Résurgences* (2002); the production of the video collection 'Point of view: an Anthology of the Moving image', in collaboration with the New Museum of Contemporary Art (2003) and 'Valie EXPORT – an Overview', a travelling exhibition co-organised with the Centre National de la Photographie (CNP) of Paris (2003–2004).

From 2004 to 2008 she was Artistic Director of the Plateau, a contemporary art centre in Paris, where she curated several exhibitions: 'Ralentir Vite', 'Joan Jonas', 'Loris Gréaud', 'Diaz & Riedweg', 'Jean-Michel Sannejouand', 'Archipeinture', 'En Voyage', 'Adel Abdessemed', 'Société Anonyme', 'Nicole Eisenman', 'Dr Curlet reçoit Jos de Gruyter et Harald Thys', 'L'Argent', 'Cao Fei', 'Melik Ohanian'.

She has been curating exhibitions of the Pinault Collection since 2007: 'Passage du temps' (2007) at Lille's Tripostal, 'Un certain état du monde?' (2009) at the Garage Center for Contemporary Culture in Moscow, 'Qui a peur des artistes?' (2009) in Dinard, 'À triple tour' (2013) at the Conciergerie in Paris and 'Debout !' in Rennes (2018).

In Venice she has curated 'In Praise of Doubt' (2011–2013), 'Prima Materia' (2013–2014) with Michael Govan, 'Slip of the Tongue' (2015), in collaboration with Danh Vo, 'Accrochage' at Punta della Dogana, and 'The World Belongs to You' (2011), 'Madame Fisscher' (2012), 'Voice of Images' (2012–2013), 'The Illusion of Light' (2014–2015), 'Martial Raysse' (2015) and 'Cows by the Water – Albert Oehlen' (2018) at Palazzo Grassi.