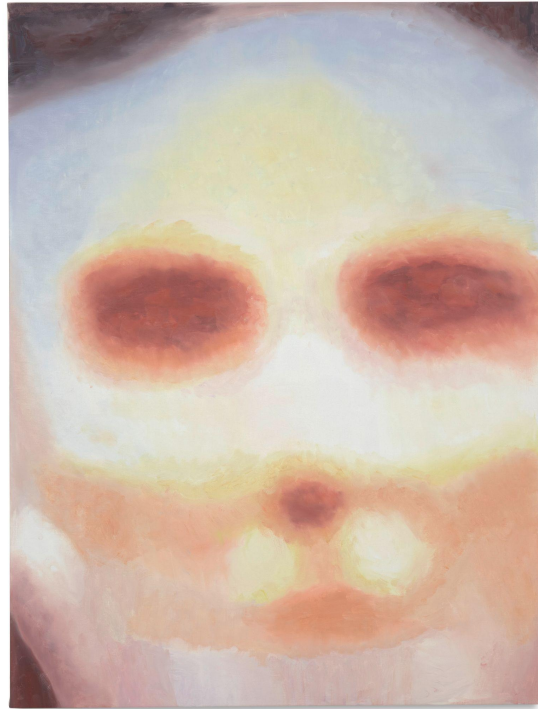


Luc Tuymans *The Barn*

May 11–July 21, 2023
537 West 20th Street, New York



Luc Tuymans, *Abe*, 2022. © Luc Tuymans. Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

David Zwirner is pleased to present new paintings by Belgian artist Luc Tuymans on view at the gallery's 537 West 20th Street location in New York. Tuymans has been represented by David Zwirner since 1994; this is the celebrated artist's seventeenth show with the gallery.

One of the most important painters working today, Tuymans pioneered a distinctive style of figurative painting beginning in the 1980s that has been singularly influential to his peers as well as subsequent generations of artists. Tuymans's deeply resonant compositions insist on the power of images to simultaneously reveal and withhold meaning. Rendered in a restrained and muted palette, the artist's canvases are based on preexisting imagery from a range of historical, cultural, and popular media sources. Their quiet and restrained appearance, however, belies an underlying moral complexity that engages equally with questions of history and its representation as with quotidian subject matter. Tuymans has in recent years increasingly turned to the internet for visual material, cannily selecting images—often re-photographing them with his iPhone before translating them onto canvas—that straddle the mundane and the profound, thereby continually asserting the relevance of painting in a digitally saturated world.

The Barn is conceived by Tuymans as the third in a trilogy of exhibitions of his work at David Zwirner—following *Good Luck*, which was presented at David Zwirner Hong Kong in 2020, and *Eternity*, held at David Zwirner Paris in 2022—and debuts a group of new, large-scale paintings by the artist that together convey a pervasive atmosphere of dissolution. Referencing a disparate

range of source imagery, the canvases in the exhibition are painted with heightened contrast and intense color than the artist's work heretofore, thereby addressing an ascendant sense of socio-political uncertainty with a newfound clarity and urgency.

The exhibition takes its title, *The Barn*, from a painting of the same name, which is based on an image the artist came across on YouTube and subsequently photographed, as is made evident by the iPhone photo roll shown along the bottom edge of the composition. Painted in vibrant hues, the bucolic scene of plentitude ostensibly masks an undercurrent of emptiness and cruelty. Another key painting in the exhibition refers to an image from the 1980s of populist television personality Bob Ross on set for an episode of his educational broadcast show "The Joy of Painting." Ross is shown under bright television lights, his signature hairstyle shown in profile, palette in hand and surrounded by camera equipment, which Tuymans has rendered in abstract, stark forms that emphasize the artificiality of the scene. Here, he follows the art historical trope of painting the artist at work. However, while the composition is reminiscent of Diego Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas* (1656), among others, here the artist is presented as a constructed media figure, a comforting personality that provides a touch of empathy. The surface of the painting Ross is working on remains obscured by a visual void produced by bright light. Similarly, *The Frame* (2023) depicts an empty frame the artist photographed at the Louvre, showing instead an inaccessible, unknowable image, or the artifice of display.

Smiley (2022) presents a hot air balloon with a generic smiley face depicted on its surface, hovering ominously in an otherwise empty, hazy sky; the smear of Tuymans's iPhone lens is markedly visible in the composition. Also on view is *Abe* (2022), which reads as a hollow skull, but, in fact, actually depicts a blurred close-up of the face of the animatronic representation of Abraham Lincoln from the stage show "Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln" that has been presented at Disneyland since the 1960s. Here, the visage of the 16th US president (and, by implication, all that he symbolically represents) is shown as a degraded, unrecognizable specter, while also pointing to Tuymans's past works based on the darker undercurrents of Walt Disney's legacy.

A number of paintings in the exhibition connote violence and the undercurrent of fascism, threading together significant themes that Tuymans has investigated throughout his career. Recent war atrocities are the subject of *Bucha* (2023), which depicts news footage of high-voltage lamps shining on a place where shallow graves of civilians and prisoners of war were infamously discovered in the Russian-occupied city in Ukraine in 2022. In this ambivalent composition, what is being seen remains difficult to identify. Another work presents a figure shown from behind. Whereas the image is noted in the painting's title as that of a *Bell Boy* (2023), the man's stance and uniform quietly insinuate fascist military posture and garb. Similarly, *Creature* (2023) presents an image of a soldier as distorted by a computer glitch into an unrecognizable, monstrous figure.

The construction and dissemination of politicized and nationalistic ideologies is further abstracted in *The Flag* (2023), which shows in close-up the shine of a synthetic, plastic flag like those used in the backdrops of the amateur, cheaply made propaganda videos that circulate on the internet. The abstract and figurative elision in this work and others on view further underscores the sense of

ambiguity and uncertainty that pervades the exhibition, as well as the disjuncture between seeing and knowing that has become a hallmark of Tuymans's practice.

Likewise, a series of four canvases with converging red and blue starbursts set against a plain white background will be on view; this work debuted in Tuymans's 2022 exhibition at David Zwirner Paris and will be presented here for the first time in the United States. Though abstract, the patterns depicted in each painting have tangible meaning: they reproduce a visualization of data assembled by Mauro Martino and a team of researchers tracking the polarization of the US Congress over six decades. From this group, Tuymans has selected four years that span the project—1951, 1967, 1989, and 2011. In his re-presentations, Tuymans has rotated the infographics ninety degrees, indicated only by the orientation of the date in the top right corner of each. While the earlier panels show Democrats (represented in blue) and Republicans (in red) connected by swaths of gray (denoting bipartisan collaboration), over time, as the country moves toward a strictly partisan government, the gray areas disappear, and the blue and red stand starkly apart.

An extensive catalogue documenting the artist's three recent exhibitions with the gallery at David Zwirner New York (*The Barn*, 2023), David Zwirner Paris (*Eternity*, 2022), and David Zwirner Hong Kong (*Good Luck*, 2020), will be published by David Zwirner Books.

Luc Tuymans was born in 1958 in Mortsels, Belgium, and lives and works in Antwerp. His first major museum presentations were held in 1990 at the Provinciaal Museum voor Moderne Kunst, Ostend, Belgium, and the Vereniging voor het Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent. In 1992, the artist participated in Documenta IX in Kassel, in addition to having a solo exhibition at Kunsthalle Bern, which helped cement his growing reputation in Europe. In 1994, his solo exhibition *Superstition* originated at Portikus, Frankfurt, and toured several North American venues in 1994–1995, beginning with David Zwirner, New York, then in its second year of programming. In 2001, the artist represented Belgium at the Venice Biennale to great acclaim.

One of the first artists to be represented by David Zwirner, Tuymans has had numerous solo exhibitions at the gallery since joining its roster in 1994. Previous shows at David Zwirner include *Eternity* (2022); *Monkey Business* (2021); *Good Luck* (2020); *Le Mépris* (2016); *The Shore* (2015); *The Summer is Over* (2013), *Allo!* (2012); *Corporate* (2010), *Forever*, *The Management of Magic* (2008), *Proper* (2005), *Fortune* (2003), *Mwana Kitoko: Beautiful White Man* (2000), *Security* (1998), *The Heritage* (1996), *Francis Picabia and Luc Tuymans: Paintings* (1995); and *Superstition* (1994).

Tuymans has been featured in numerous solo exhibitions at prestigious institutions worldwide. Major recent presentations of his work include those held at Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2019); De Pont Museum, Tilburg, The Netherlands (2019); Museum aan de Stroom (MAS), Antwerp (2016), which traveled to the National Portrait Gallery, London (2016); Qatar Museums Gallery – Al Riwaq, Doha (2015); Menil Collection, Houston (2013); the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2009), which traveled to San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Dallas Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, and BOZAR – Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels; and Tate Modern, London (2004), which traveled to K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.

The artist has received numerous awards and honors, including the Medal of Honor, International Congress of Contemporary Painting (ICOCEP), Porto, Portugal (2019); the Coumts Contemporary Art Foundation Award, Zurich (2000); and the Flemish Culture Award for Visual Arts (1993). In 2007, the Belgian government granted him the title of Commander of the Order of Leopold. Tuymans is the recipient of honorary degrees at several institutions, including the Royal College of Art, London; University of Antwerp; and University of Arts, Poznań, Poland. His works are featured in museum collections worldwide, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Fondazione Prada, Milan; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; The National Museum of Art, Osaka; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Pinault Collection; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Tate, United Kingdom.

Tuymans's catalogue raisonné of paintings, from 1972 to 2018, is available from David Zwirner Books and Yale University Press. The three volumes feature full-color images and documentation of more than five hundred paintings.

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