

For immediate release

LUC TUYMANS

Le Mépris

May 5 – June 25, 2016

Opening reception: Thursday, May 5, 6 – 8 PM

Press preview with the artist: 11 AM



Model, 2015
Oil on canvas
47 5/8 x 47 3/4 inches (121 x 121.3 cm)

David Zwirner is pleased to present *Le Mépris*, an exhibition of new paintings by Luc Tuymans, on view at 533 West 19th Street in New York. This is the artist's thirteenth solo presentation at the gallery.

Widely credited with having contributed to the revival of painting in the 1990s, Tuymans continues to assert its relevance by addressing a diverse range of topics. Quiet, restrained, and at times unsettling, his works engage equally with questions of history and its representation as with quotidian subject matter cast in unfamiliar and eerie light. Painted from pre-existing imagery, they often appear slightly out-of-focus and sparsely colored, like third-degree abstractions from reality, or as if painted from a failing memory. Whereas earlier works were based on magazine pictures, drawings, television footage, and Polaroids, recent source images include material accessed online and the artist's own iPhone photos, printed out and sometimes re-photographed several times.

Taking its title from the 1963 Jean-Luc Godard film *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*), the exhibition comprises nine loosely connected paintings that capture, in the artist's signature muted palette, themes of isolation, melancholy, degradation, and nostalgia, which likewise characterize Godard's cinematic work.

In one group of paintings in the exhibition, the artist focuses on the artifice of parades as a celebratory construct and performance of collective adulation. In these works, Tuymans renders, with cool reserve, floats in the Zundert Flower Parade, which takes place annually in his mother's hometown of Zundert, the Netherlands. Like the artist's earlier investigations of The Disney Company's transformation of entertainment into ideology, the haziness and the faded color palette of his *Corso* paintings (2015) work to reveal the construction of memory by refocusing our attention on the isolated floats. Inherently bound up with the artist's personal history as well as broader notions of nostalgia, the imagery in these canvases is drawn from both archival photographs from the 1960s and old family photographs taken by his father. Viewed at a distance and devoid of human figures, these awkwardly shaped vehicles take on a darker affectation, resembling less purveyors of happiness and joy, but rather solitary vessels moving through a dense, gray fog.

Likewise, in three *Murky Water* paintings (2015), Tuymans presents fragmentary renderings of standing water in the canals of Ridderkerk, the Netherlands, enlarged to monumental scale. Based on Polaroid photos taken by the artist, these outsized canvases veer toward abstraction, each depicting in unnatural green and yellow hues a flattened vista of the duckweed-laden water glimpsed from above. Impressionistic details—such as the reflection of a street lamp and parked cars, leaves and other detritus that have fallen into the water, and hints of the curb—coupled with the eerie stillness suggested in these works point to the aftermath of a parade or other unknown public event, or an alternate dystopian reality. Tuymans initially explored this imagery in 2002, first translating the photographs into watercolors, and subsequently commissioning tapestries for Ridderkerk's council chambers, creating a self-referential setting for the town's governance.

Lastly, in the titular painting *Le Mépris* (2015), Tuymans references Godard's film only obliquely, depicting a fireplace from the Villa Malaparte in Capri, Italy, where it was shot. Nestled atop craggy cliffs that jut out dramatically into the Mediterranean Sea, this

modernist structure is known as an iconic example of Italian architecture. Tuymans, rather than depicting its scenic vistas, focuses instead on the formal qualities of this isolated architectural element of the villa—a window behind the fireplace that presumably looks out onto the sea is filled only with blinding white light—and in doing so expresses the tenuous quality of being both out of time and tied inextricably to a particular moment.

Born in 1958 in Mortsels, near Antwerp, **Luc Tuymans** was one of the first artists to be represented by David Zwirner. Since joining the gallery in 1994, he has had twelve solo exhibitions with David Zwirner. Previous shows at the gallery in New York include *The Summer is Over* (2013), *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), which marked his United States debut. In 2012, *Allo!* inaugurated the gallery's first European location on 24 Grafton Street in London and *The Shore* marked his second solo show in the space in 2015.

Opening in May 2016, Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) in Antwerp will host *Glasses*, a solo museum exhibition featuring a selection of portraits by Tuymans. A portion of the presentation will travel to the National Portrait Gallery in London. In the fall of this year, the artist's work will be presented in a solo exhibition at Lille Métropole, musée d'art moderne, d'art contemporain et d'art brut in Villeneuve d'Ascq, France, as well as the 9th Biennale de Montréal.

In 2015, a major survey of Tuymans's work, *Intolerance*, was presented at the Qatar Museums Gallery Al Riwaq in Doha. Comprising over one hundred works, this was the artist's largest presentation to date. A comprehensive publication by Ludion accompanied the exhibition with texts by renowned art historians, curators, and writers including, Jan Avgikos, Nicholas Cullinan, Jenevive Nykolak, and Nicholas Serota, as well as interviews with the artist by Lynne Cooke and His Excellency Sheikh Jassim bin Abdulaziz Al Thani. Also in 2015, the Talbot Rice Gallery at the University of Edinburgh hosted a solo show, titled *Birds of a Feather*.

In 2014, Tuymans was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Arts in Poznań. In 2013, a solo presentation of the artist's portraits, *Nice. Luc Tuymans*, was held at The Menil Collection in Houston, Texas. In 2009, his work was the subject of a retrospective co-organized by the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. It traveled from 2010 to 2011 to the Dallas Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; and Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels. Previous major survey shows of the artist's work include those organized by Wiels Centre d'Art Contemporain, Brussels in 2009 (traveled to Baibakov art projects, Moscow, followed by Moderna Museet, Malmö, Sweden) and Tate Modern, London in 2004 (traveled to K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf). In 2007, the artist was granted the title of Commander, Order of Leopold in Belgium.

Tuymans is the curator of the current group exhibition *The Gap: Selected Abstract Art from Belgium* at the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen Antwerp, which was first on view at the Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art, London. Later this year the Royal Academy of Arts, London will present *Intrigue: James Ensor by Luc Tuymans*. The artist previously organized *Constable, Delacroix, Friedrich, Goya. A Shock to the Senses* at Albertinum, Dresden (2013); *A Vision of Central Europe* at Brugge Centraal, Bruges, Belgium (2010); *The State of Things: Brussels/Beijing* at Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, which traveled to the National Art Museum of China, Beijing (2009); and *The Forbidden Empire: Visions of the World by Chinese and Flemish Artists* at Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, which traveled to The Palace Museum, Forbidden City, Beijing (2007).

A catalogue raisonné of the artist's paintings that will illustrate and document approximately five hundred paintings from 1975 to the present day is currently being prepared. The first volume is set to be published in fall of 2017.

In 2001, the artist represented Belgium at the 49th Venice Biennale. His works are featured in museum collections worldwide, including Art Institute of Chicago; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; The National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Tate Gallery, London. In 2012, Tuymans donated his portrait of Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands to Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. He lives and works in Antwerp.