



LUC
TUYMANS

The Philip Feldman Gallery + Project Space at Pacific Northwest College of Art is pleased to present an exhibition of prints by the influential artist, Luc Tuymans.

Though he is known primarily as a painter, Belgian artist Luc Tuymans (b. 1958) continues to produce extraordinary work in the discipline of printmaking. *Graphic Works – Kristalnacht to Technicolor* brings together an array of Tuymans' printmaking works. The pieces were produced between 1992 and 2013 and range in technique from color photocopy—*Kristalnacht*, 1992—to a twelve stone color lithograph—*Gene (Plant)*, 2004. The exhibition features examples of Tuymans' experiments in printing on non-traditional surfaces such as *Transitions A-B-C-D*, 2008, which was produced with multi-colored screenprints on PVC plastic.

Cover:
The Spiritual Exercises 2 2007

Tuymans' paintings and printworks are the results of a wide-ranging research process through a variety of source materials. Television snapshots, newspaper clippings, and most importantly his own Polaroid photography, are all amassed into his image database palette. Tuymans' prints exist side by side with his paintings. And like his Polaroids, Tuymans' paintings are also added to his image database palette. In some instances he will produce lithographic drawings based on paintings he created from these source materials. The seven-print portfolio, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 2007 was based on watercolors Tuymans created from his research into the lasting legacy of the Jesuit tradition in his home of Antwerp, which served as the cultural center of the late sixteenth century Counter-Reformation movement. The paintings and resulting prints were inspired by an illustrated edition from 1673 of the Jesuit publication, *Exercitia Spiritualia*.

With *Shore*, a five color screenprint from 2005, Tuymans returned to a 2003 Polaroid he shot of a beach with a ripple of water rolling in, from which he painted the oil on canvas *Oostende*, 2003. For the print translation of the photo, Tuymans chose to emulate the golden hues he originally captured, rather than the grey tones he used in the 2003 painting. The orientation of the print shifted from the rectangle of the Polaroid and 2003 painting to a square. Six years later, Tuymans will again return to these works for a vertically-formatted, oil on canvas painting, *Shore*, 2011, where he merges the grey tones of *Oostende* with the yellow highlights of the screenprint.

It is Luc Tuymans' dedication to form and his willingness to revisit subject matter that result in his refined images. Sparsely colored and hauntingly foggy renderings of forgotten children, light-swept rooms, and our televised past and present echo his research into Europe's wars, Belgian colonialism, and utopian impulses.

LUC TUYMANS: IN PLAIN SIGHT

Sarah Sentilles

They call the secret prisons outside the United States *black sites*. They call the detainees whose names they don't record *ghosts*. They call torture techniques that leave no physical marks *clean*.

Gaskamer (Gas Chamber) was the first Luc Tuymans painting I ever saw. I found it when researching the torture photographs taken at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. I wanted to know – I still want to know – if it is possible to look at violence, to represent violence, without participating in it, and this painting showed me how that might be done. Based on a watercolor Tuymans made while visiting the site of the Dachau concentration camp, *Gaskamer* looks, at first, like any other room, with its corner door, with its dark spots on the ceiling that could be recessed lights. Until you read the title. Until you see the drain.

Torturers often use what's easy to find – sheets, gas masks, police batons, light bulbs, buckets, cardboard boxes, water, ice, blankets, hoses – because if anyone were to come looking for torture devices, they wouldn't see any.¹ You can hide a blanket and a cardboard box in plain sight. You can let ice melt, point the hose toward a garden, fill showers

with gas. You can wheel the body of a ghost detainee you beat to death out of the prison on a gurney, covered and hooked up to an IV, so the other prisoners will think you're getting him the medical help he needs, so they won't realize he's dead and start a riot.

Of *Gaskamer*, Tuymans said, "The room remains incredible to the end. Its purpose, deception. The room deceives, the objects deceive."² *Our New Quarters* is also a painting of a place meant to deceive. It is based on a Nazi-era postcard of Theresienstadt, which Tuymans saw in a reproduction of the sketchbook belonging to Alfred Kantor, a concentration camp survivor. Theresienstadt was a collection center for deportations, housing prisoners between camps, who were given postcards like this one to send into the world, false images designed to create false ideas about what the Nazis were doing.³ When reports about the death camps began to emerge at the end of 1943, the Nazis presented Theresienstadt to the International Red Cross. Before the Red Cross committee arrived, the Nazis painted buildings and renovated barracks, opened fake stores and a coffee house, a bank and a school.

They planted flower gardens.⁴ When the Red Cross left, deportations resumed. More than 140,000 Jews passed through Theresienstadt; more than 30,000 people died there; more than 90,000 were deported to be murdered.⁵

In Tuymans' *Kristalnacht*, the mobs of November 1938 carrying flames to burn down stores owned by Jews are represented not by fire, not by torches that lit up the night sky, but by dark horizontal lines across the page, similar to the black lines of *Our New Quarters*. With these echoed lines – like words on a page, like sentences – Tuymans makes visible the real work the buildings of *Our New Quarters* were designed to hide. The lines of people carrying torches to burn stores to the ground become the lines of the floors and ceilings of buildings made to hold people, who, like their stores, will be burned.

In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler writes, "Representation must not only fail, but must show its failure."⁶ For Butler, "it is our inability to see what we see that is also of critical concern."⁷ Tuymans' work enacts this inability to see. There is a doubleness to his representations of the unrepresentable: Tuymans shows both

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how representations (the postcards, the newly planted gardens) can be used to hide violence, and how representations (*Gaskamer, Kristallnacht, Our New Quarters*) can render hidden violence visible, even as they protect the victims of that violence from the viewer’s gaze, a protection needed because the viewer’s gaze (or refusal to see) is part of the violence.

Just before the camps were liberated, Nazi soldiers planted trees to hide what they’d done.⁸ All that killing, all that burning, then shovels, then feet on shovels to push them deep inside

the earth, making sure the hole was big enough to give the roots room, spacing the trees evenly so they could grow, their branches reaching toward the light.

A new set of torture photographs – 50,000 of them – has been smuggled out of Syria. The digital images document the deaths of at least 11,000 people.

Every day there are choices to make – to look or to look away – and it is still not clear to me what is the right choice to make or when to make it. I don’t know which bodies ask to be seen and which ask to be hidden.

The Nazis also interned the Roma in concentration camps. One of the doctors at Auschwitz, Josef Mengele, killed some of their children and took out their eyes so he could inject a chemical dye into them to see if he could change their color from brown to blue. In *Die Wiedergutmachung* (Reparations), Tuymans painted these eyes.⁹ *Wiedergutmachung* literally means “making good again,” and in his painting, the eyes look out, still waiting. ☩

I cannot remember how I first came across the work of Luc Tuymans.

I do not associate him with any fellow students. I cannot recall any slideshows, lectures, or professor recommendations. There were no catalogs, no magazines. There were no conversations with friends.

Most often when I think of an artist, I can match them to a point of origin. Edward Kienholz to a cafe on Killingsworth. Chris Burden to a bar on MLK. Gerhard Richter and Eva Hesse to PNCA classrooms. Richard Serra, Paul McCarthy, Mike Kelley, and Paul Thek to slides in art history. Marina Abramović to a theatre in southeast. Henry Darger to a friend’s coffee table. Jean-Michel Basquiat to my mother’s TV.

These were our introductions.

But for Tuymans, there is no meeting place.

Not a physical one that I could walk you to or point out on a map. If I had to name a spot, it would be within the work itself. I know. I know. Just listen.

We met on a ski slope. A sexless skier was at rest some twenty feet downhill. They were looking back. They were looking up. Their face gone. White. Their skis tucked beneath their resting body, arms and poles out to their sides. They were waiting. Waiting for a photograph to be taken. Posing. Waiting for a friend or relative to catch up before continuing down the hill.

The image is so cold, so sterile, and so hauntingly familiar. It is eerily real. *Der Architekt* or “the skier”, as I have always referred to it, seems to be a painting of a photograph of a photograph. It has been shed of the sharpness one gets from a direct observation. It looks like a personal memory most of us could have stored away from a winter, either forever or not too long ago. It is absolutely chilling.

Although I can’t remember the time or place, I remember the painting almost too well. I have never been able to break the skier’s faceless stare. If it were a song, I was humming it in the shower the next morning, and for months and years to follow. I hum it still. I feel I have lived my whole life knowing *Der Architekt* and Tuymans. I can not imagine the art of painting without them.

Ty Ennis

¹ Rejali, Darius M. *Torture and Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007: 18.

² Madeleine Grynaztejn, and Helen Molesworth, eds. *Luc Tuymans*. New York: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 2010: 76. The editors are using a Luc Tuymans’ quote from an essay titled “Disenchantment” (1991), translated by Shaun Whiteside and found in *Luc Tuymans*, by Ulrich Loock et al., Phaidon (2003).

³ Madeleine Grynaztejn, and Helen Molesworth, eds. *Luc Tuymans*. New York: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 2010: 72.

⁴ <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/about/03/terezin.asp>

⁵ <http://www.usmmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005424>

⁶ Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. New York: Verso, 2004: 144.

⁷ Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable*. New York: Verso, 2009: 100.

⁸ Baer, Ulrich. *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002: 77.

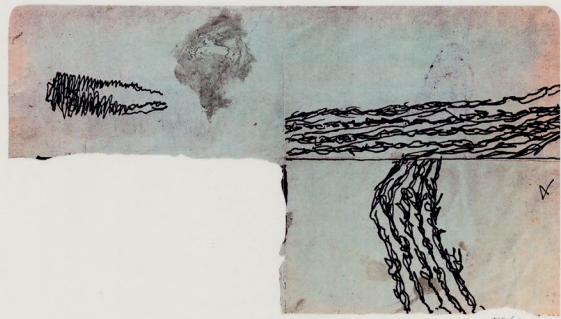
⁹ Madeleine Grynaztejn, and Helen Molesworth, eds. *Luc Tuymans*. New York: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 2010: 89.



The Spiritual Exercises 1 2007



The Spiritual Exercises 5 2007



Les Fyamas "Krisalnacht" 1992

Kristalnacht 1992



Gene

1/100

Gene 2004

LUC TUYMANS

James Yeary

"A white so bright the print is brown"



Technicolor 2015

*Following Spread:
Transitions A-B-C-D, 2008*

Seagulls are circling around the god-soldier
She's trying to explain that the child strapped to
her back is not hers

Surface reading history

No translation available

The imaginary experience

Of real feeling

The thinness of

Husk surrounding that

Or experience raised between thinnesses

Born on screen — facets phrased and fastened

The alphabet

A glow this sentence gives off

Or of

Or up

Turning off as

You close it

To stay cold

Yield kept out

these CDs without their booklets

"would often walk around in the dress of an abbess;
he would wear roller skates as he moved around
the house"

The sound gleams

Whose celebrity preserved

in one detail: the vial at the end of
a needle

Or letter lost to a blown-out page

Emperor and apostle rehabilitated

Coq au vin, poached apple custard

Nothing was too good

British clay bowl salmon pie & sweet corn sauce

He's calling it a "lunch pie"

It organizes "evening people"

In 1977, in Bangui, he crowned himself emperor

An ermine coat, 32 horses from Normandie Express

& hundreds of swords of officers lent by France

Annette Van Helst

Daisy Green

Martine Nguyen

Jacqueline Nguyen

Astrid Elisabeth

Catherine Denguiade

Christine Tangui

Marie-Joëlle

Marie-Jeanne

Eliane Mayanga

Drimbo Gabriella

Chantal Belleka

Marie-Charlotte Uta

Rita Carlos

Brigitte

Augustine Assemat

Ivàn told me that the philosopher was against painting, as one
holdover from Renaissance thought held that color distracted
from the illuminating properties of light, indeed was light's
"dark side"

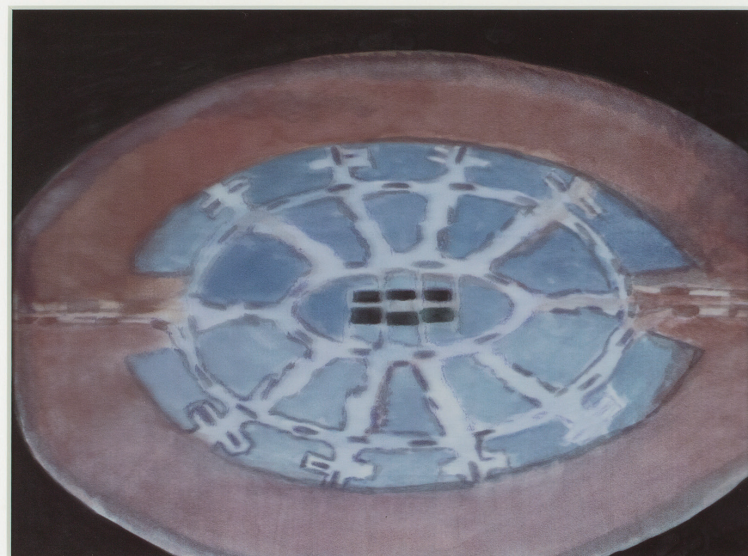
Lower, but also more broad, than the Deity

A wash on the cornea, dream of stars fixt & unfixt

Projected color moving

Across the window

Don't overdo this stage & burn the sugars



In preparation for *Graphic Works – Kristalnacht to Technicolor* curators Modou Dieng and Mack McFarland spoke with Luc Tuymans about his printmaking practice.

Mack McFarland: Luc you're well known for not working with any studio assistants and for not spending more than one day on a canvas. With that in mind I became curious to know about your strategies of working in the print process, which involves many steps over many days, and working with printmakers.

Luc Tuymans: Well, in a way it's quite similar because it's the way I work with them is quite intense. I even had a project in Copenhagen where we were able to work overnight. But of course it's a different way of assessing the imagery because you have to address, as you said, step by step. And you sometimes have to learn things, like when I did my first

color etchings with (Peter) Kneubühler, those were the first I'd ever made, so I had to be with an informative printer, an expert of course. And that is quite interesting. I actually quite like it, I mean it is a bit less isolated than working by yourself in the studio. And also from the point of technique, when I worked with Kneubühler I had a fixed idea in my head of the aquatint I wanted and we got there.

MM: What's your process for deciding which paintings or which images are suitable for a translation into a print?

LT: Well, there are some prints that are based upon the existing imagery or paintings or drawings or whatever, but there's also some that are just made as prints as a series. What you will see in Portland are mainly lithography and then serigraphy, which are totally different processes.

The serigraphy is something that I've been doing with my printer for like the last thirty years, we have a whole history of it. It was actually one of the first printing methods that I used. The other, lithos, I have done with several ateliers and is of course a completely different technique, and some prints that will be there have five to six to seven or more stones in order to create the imagery. So it can begin to get pretty elaborate.

MM: And when did you start using Polaroid photography? You're known for your period as a filmmaker, and are those things connected at all?

LT: Well I started using Polaroids in '95; that was the first I ever used it, actually. And the first image that was derived from it was the Flemish flag (*The Flag*, 1995). It was actually just paper that I painted, the Flemish flag on and then crumbled it up like a flag and then just pinned

it on the wall and made a Polaroid of it, which became a very strange quick picture which looked real in a sense. And the thing with Polaroids is that it's not quite photography. It's actually quite similar to a fluid. It develops a little bit from the back to the front. And also the inconsistency of the medium I find quite interesting.

Modou Dieng: Is it easy for you to go from painting to prints and how do you manage that transition?

LT: Well, I use all sorts of mediums from drawings to maquettes, Polaroids, websites, Photoshop, so of course there is a very particular way to turn it into either a print or into a painting. Moreover, I try to keep quite a painterly feel to the print and the painting. Even if it's not right for the painting, it's important to have a painterly aspect in the print.

MM: I'm thinking too now about this translation from the source material to the images that you create, and the tools I know that you use are important, as they are to many artists. I'm wondering about these tools, and how they change from working in the studio on the canvasses to working on the stones?

LT: Well, first of all I also have to say that before I go into the printing studio there's been a lot of preparation so I come very well prepared. And then especially with the lithos you have to deeply analyze the imagery and know how your going to do it. You discuss it with the printers, mix the color, and then testing that, making a couple of more tests, and then working to the point until it's satisfactory and that it actually can be printed.

MD: And finally how do you arrange your exhibition? What is your decision process of how to put the work up?

LT: Well that you will experience when I get there, but we made the (3D) Sketch Up in accordance to the space, so we have a skeleton. So we do that in the office, and then we can actually start right away, and we don't have to run the works around aimlessly and try out things. But of course we can't guarantee it's good because every time we enter a space in a Sketch Up, it's a different physical experience of being in the space, so you have to adapt things. Sometimes doing the Sketch Up and that sort of preliminary work helps a lot to understand the space faster, even when there's a change, so, we'll see. ☺



LUC TUYMANS:
GRAPHIC WORKS—
KRISTALNACHT TO TECHNICOLOR

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Curated by Modou Dieng & Mack McFarland

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