

For immediate release

LUC TUYMANS

Allo!

October 5 – November 17, 2012

Opening reception: Friday, October 5, 6–8 PM

Press preview with the artist: Friday, October 5, 9:30 AM



Peaches, 2012.

Oil on canvas, 68 ½ x 46 ½ inches (173.8 x 118.1 cm).

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of new paintings by Luc Tuymans, which will inaugurate the gallery's first European location on 24 Grafton Street in Mayfair, London.

The Belgian artist joined David Zwirner in 1994 and this marks his ninth solo show with the gallery and the first in London since his 2004 retrospective at the Tate Modern. A forthcoming catalogue published on the occasion of Tuymans's tenth show, *The Summer is Over* (opening in New York on November 1 this year), will present a detailed overview of each gallery exhibition as well as a conversation between the artist and David Zwirner.

Tuymans is widely credited with having contributed to the revival of painting in the 1990s. His sparsely colored, figurative works speak in a quiet, restrained, and at times unsettling voice, and are typically painted from pre-existing imagery which includes photographs and video stills. His canvases, in turn, become third-degree abstractions from reality and often appear slightly out-of-focus, as if covered by a thin veil or painted from a failing memory. There is almost always a darker undercurrent to what at first appear to be innocuous subjects: Tuymans has, in this way, explored diverse and sensitive topics including the Holocaust, the effects of images from 9/11, the ambiguous utopia of the Disney empire, the colonial history of his native Belgium, and the phenomenon of the corporation.

The present exhibition comprises a series of paintings entitled *Allo!* While an initial source of inspiration was Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), the visual reference for the works was the final scene in the 1942 film *The Moon and Sixpence*, which itself is an adaptation of W. Somerset Maugham's eponymous novel from 1919. The plot is loosely based upon the life of Paul Gauguin and revolves around a stockbroker who leaves his job and family to become an artist, eventually settling in Tahiti. Following his death several years later, his doctor travels to the primitive studio he left behind and discovers his paintings—swirly, colorful landscapes and nudes—moments before the late artist's Tahitian widow sets fire to everything.

Tuymans's interest in this topic has to do with a general negation of modernism and Hollywood's longstanding idealization of the artist as a romantic savage. Along with the colonial context of *Heart of Darkness*, which is based in the Belgian Congo, the indirect reference to Gauguin evokes recent critiques of the early avant-garde's fascination with lesser industrially developed civilizations as the "other." The works are titled after a talking parrot's greeting to patrons of an Antwerp bar near the city's red light district, a tongue-in-cheek reference, perhaps, to modernist artists' fascination with the exotic.

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Yet Tuymans's presentation of the film stills complicates a straightforward reading of the subject matter. His works successively depict the doctor in the darkened interior with the partially illuminated artworks, which in original screenings of the black-and-white film were dramatically rendered in Technicolor, a now obsolete process that was widely used in Hollywood until the early 1950s. The doctor becomes merged with the background narrative, while a further presence is subtly indicated by a dark shadowy outline—that of Tuymans himself, whose reflection was visible in the photographs he took of the stills.

While the sequential series is reminiscent of graphic illustrations or cartoons, the multiple layers of representations featured within a single composition draws attention to the medium and exercise of painting itself. By exposing the formal construction of his works—paintings of facsimile paintings reproduced on film and in turn photographed from a computer screen—Tuymans at once creates a *trompe l'oeil* effect in which all media appear simulated, while also exaggerating their technical differences.

Other works in the exhibition likewise engage with issues of copying, reproduction, and layering. The source material for two paintings—*Peaches* and *Technicolor* (both 2012)—was an early commercial shot in Technicolor, and their almost fluorescent glow was produced with the same color palette as the *Allo!* works. Two further paintings—*10 PM* and *Social Housing* (both 2012)—stand out from the brighter works and present shadowy views of a city garden and a social housing project, respectively. While the former is Tuymans's own backyard, the latter has more sinister undertones and was inspired by a documentary on a self-contained community scheme developed by the Nazis in wartime Germany. Also painted from photographs (and in the case of the latter, a photograph of a television screen), they appear both figurative and abstract, as if turning a longstanding dialectic about surface and depth into a new painterly challenge that concerns/affirms the medium's uniqueness in the mass media age.

Born in 1958 in Morstel, near Antwerp, Belgium, **Luc Tuymans** was one of the first artists to be represented by David Zwirner. He joined the gallery in 1994 and had his first American solo exhibition that same year. Tuymans's work was recently 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 the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels. Previous major solo exhibitions include those organized by the Moderna Museet Malmö, Sweden, in 2009, and the Tate Modern, London, in 2004. Other recent solo exhibitions include the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga, Spain (2011); Haus der Kunst, Munich; Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw (both 2008); Műcsarnok Kunsthalle, Budapest (2007); Museu Serralves, Porto, Portugal; and the Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva (both 2006).

In 2009, Tuymans was the curator of *The State of Things: Brussels/Beijing* at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, which traveled to the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, and *A Vision of Central Europe* at the Brugge Centraal, Bruges, Belgium, in 2010. A catalogue raisonné of the artist's paintings is currently being prepared by David Zwirner in collaboration with Studio Luc Tuymans. Compiled and edited by art historian Eva Meyer-Hermann, the catalogue raisonné will illustrate and document approximately 500 paintings by the artist from 1975 to the present day.

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

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