



BLUE CHIP

Luc Tuymans THE BARN
at David Zwirner
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Most pieces written on the work of Luc Tuymans approach his paintings from the conceptual. Treading in the land of images, how they function, his contribution to that epistemological body etc. This consistency amongst critics and scholars makes sense to me, especially in 2023 where very few people who write about artwork see it in person. But in the context of Luc T., his work in person sings an entirely different song, like a .wav pattern that gets deleted from the file whenever his work is photographed and uploaded to the web.

Don't get me wrong, I'm so down to talk images and how they shape us and how we shape them. Especially the ones Luc chooses; pulled from the attic, slipped behind the sofa, fallen off the fridge, sun-dyed, vague and decayed. He's just as much in the realm of Stuart Hall as he is with Garrett Bradley in his fluency of media, politics, and the intentionality in which he engages with them.

But what is cold and detached to the point of clinical in his digitally reproduced images pop with vibrant vitality in the flesh. In person, the body is able to perceive his pigments and gestures on a cellular level. Feeling through his varied brush work, loose and gestural, it's as if he's dancing a waltz with us on the canvas. Often painting wet in wet, the physicality of his application holds a somatic directness that is lost in the ambiguity of a photograph.

Image courtesy of David Zwirner Gallery



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Abe, 2022
Oil on Linen
61 x 46 1/4 inches
Image courtesy of David Zwirner Gallery



Vilnius, 2023
Oil on linen
48 x 45 inches
Image courtesy of David Zwirner Gallery

Conceptually, I found “The Barn” at David Zwirner to be underwhelming. There was no real through-line amongst his image choices besides the fact that many of them were taken from pop culture moments like an abstracted painting of Bob Ross. None of them offer much commentary or engagement for me other than that he's Bob Ross; a painter painting a painter.

I also wasn't fond of the scale (almost all the works in this show measured no smaller than 48”x 45”). I miss the intimacy of his earlier works; they hold a potency in their compactness that I find utterly unpalatable in the best way possible. The words that come to mind are vile, putrid, pungent...but so cute in their petiteness. Their contradictions make them challenging; one might even say, honest. This show did have a hint of that in “Vilnius” but by and large, the show felt like a grouping of overly grand non sequiturs.

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On the craft level, the physical-bodily-somatic level, I loved every minute of this show. It's honestly such a treat to view his work in the flesh. It's like sitting down and having a conversation with him. I am always astounded by the visceral effect his vulnerable painting has on me. People describe him as cryptic, removed, "cool", which he probably is, and his color choices often support this read in their muted simplicity and limited value range. But I also see that as simply a productive constraint for a romantic who loves to paint, and I feel that joy anytime I'm around his work.

It's in the multitudes of these contradictions (fresh brush work, decayed imagery, decisive marks, obscured tonality) where the vortex of Luc's work swirls and emits its pathos. Experiencing a painting that shows us the horridness of humanity crafted with such levity, it's a tension worth living for.

Chris

The Frame, 2023

Oil on Linen

91 x 61 1/2 inches

Image courtesy of David Zwirner Gallery

