

For immediate release

LUC TUYMANS

Corporate

November 6 – December 21, 2010

Opening reception: Saturday, November 6, 6 – 8 PM



Corporate, 2010. Oil on canvas
105 3/8 x 74 inches (267.7 x 188 cm)

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of new paintings by Luc Tuymans, on view at the gallery's 525 West 19th Street space.

Belgian artist Luc Tuymans is widely seen as 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: working within series, 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 Corporation, and the colonial history of his native Belgium, among others.

The works in the present exhibition, *Corporate*, examine the phenomenon of the corporation. Influenced, in part, by the work of American media theorist Douglas Rushkoff, which looks at the roots of modern-day corporate culture, the exhibition continues Tuymans's interest in power structures and collective history.¹ Rushkoff observes how the purpose of corporatism from the onset was to suppress lateral interactions between people or small companies, instead redirecting any created revenue to a select group of investors. Yet most people,

even corporate leaders, have little awareness of these underlying motivations or how automatically they are compelled by them. They identify with corporations and ultimately surrender their free agency in the process.

Taking their points of departure in the types of lighting found in corporate settings, Tuymans's works consider how abstract, formal structures impact decision-making and ultimately shape everyday lives. A seminal painting from the series, *Corporate* recalls the fleet of England's East India Company, one of the world's first corporate entities from the early 17th century. Against a bleak sky, and kept in subtle shades of gray and purple, Tuymans portrays a large galleon floating on still water. Its many sails are swaying in the wind, but the overall impression is one of disconcerting quiet and calm. Historically overflowing with rarities from the Far East, it drifts here like a ghost ship on a silent, invasive mission.

Painted from a monochrome, black model of one of the Company's ships, the painting evokes the historical roots of corporatism, which date back to the proliferation of towns in the Middle Ages: the growing independence of burghers challenged the feudal

¹ See, in particular, Douglas Rushkoff, *Life Inc.: How the World Became a Corporation and How to Take It Back* (New York: Random House, 2009).

system's monopoly over commercial transactions, and corporations were eventually established as a way for the aristocracy to participate in the new economy. Typically receiving military protection and special services from the Crown, they were granted the right to impose trade restrictions, thus limiting the individual's freedom to do business. In *Corporate*, Tuymans's use of blurred brushstrokes becomes a formal device that indicates how corporations have come to take on a virtual, abstracted, disempowering, and dehumanizing specter.

Other works exhibited examine the staged settings of conference rooms, public lectures, and discussion forums. *Panel* depicts a conversation between the artist himself and other art world actors. Reduced to basic, almost abstract forms, the figures are bathed in white light, whose artificial and almost supernatural quality mirrors the carefully staged format of the discussion. Like the electronic image of the television screen, the light seems to emanate from the speakers themselves, flattening out the group and suggesting how practices of corporate culture seep into artistic contexts, habitually regarded as creatively autonomous.

Another painting, *Butterfly*, depicts a moth with its attractive, complex pigmentation. The result of millions of years of evolution, the pattern seeks to confuse and mislead would-be predators, while the moth can also appear wholly camouflaged with its wings folded. Such qualities, along with the insect's attraction to artificial light, become synonymous with the mass media, which acts on behalf of corporations to persuade consumers to buy particular products, sometimes with deliberate misinformation. In *Anonymous*, Tuymans presents a portrait of a person from an advertisement, only he has omitted the face. This anonymous but strangely enigmatic person becomes a stand-in for a dystopian view of the individual in modern society: uniform, interchangeable, and bland.

Conspicuously handmade, Tuymans's paintings seem to offer a welcome antidote towards their subject matter. Yet, at the same time, their smooth surfaces and blurred painterly touch could also be seen as referring to the way in which the media and advertisements in particular subtly manipulate consumer behavior and desire. It is within this ambiguity that Tuymans's works operate: like abstractions of abstractions, they are history paintings of the mass media age.

The artist is currently the subject of a major U.S. retrospective, co-organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio. Also exhibited at the Dallas Museum of Art, it is currently on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (October 2, 2010 – January 9, 2011) and will next travel to Bozar: Centre for Fine Arts (Palais des Beaux-Arts) in Brussels (February 18 – May 8, 2011). Luc Tuymans is also the curator of *A vision of Central Europe* at the Brugge Centraal in Bruges, Belgium (October 22, 2010 – January 30, 2011). Previous major solo shows include those organized by the Tate Modern, London, 2004, and Moderna Museet, Malmö, 2009. Tuymans represented Belgium at the Venice Biennale in 2001, and his works are featured in the collections of prominent institutions worldwide, including the Art Institute of Chicago; the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and the Tate Gallery, London.

Special events with the artist

Friday, November 5, 10:30 AM

Press preview with the artist at the gallery. (For members of the media only.)

RSVP required to Ben Thornborough

212 727 2070 or bthornborough@davidzwirner.com

Friday, November 5, 6:30 – 8:30 PM

Reception and book signing for the new publication *Luc Tuymans: Is It Safe?* (to be published mid-November 2010 by Phaidon Press)

Phaidon Store, 83 Wooster Street, NYC

Free & open to the public. RSVP: store.soho@phaidon.com

212 925 1900 or phaidon.com/store-soho

**Luc Tuymans***Anonymous*

2010

Oil on canvas

37 1/2 x 44 7/8 inches

95.3 x 114 cm

In *Anonymous*, Luc Tuymans presents a portrait of a person painted from an advertisement photo, only he has omitted the face. In its place is a dark void, set against short, orange-colored hair. This anonymous but strangely enigmatic person becomes a stand-in for a dystopian view of the individual in contemporary society: uniform, interchangeable, and bland, devoid of personal characteristics as all preferences and tastes are shaped by the mass media.

Part of Tuymans's recent series, "Corporate," it further signals the menial role of the individual within the corporate business model, which effectively removes most people from independent value creation (through crafts or as vendors) in favor of the abstract good of the corporation. Central to the series is the artist's employment of light to indicate how corporate culture shapes and directs everyday life, and the lack of sufficient light to reveal the identity of the subject here testifies to its strategic and sometimes manipulative uses. With the absence of a face, difference is obliterated: the human being becomes a cipher enslaved to a life dictated by other interests. The fact that the source photograph for this painting derives from an advertisement is a further comment on the uniformity of desires, as media campaigns usually rely on people's ability to substitute the person in a given image with themselves.



Luc Tuymans

Corporate

2010

Oil on canvas

105 3/8 x 74 inches

267.7 x 188 cm

Corporate belongs to a new series of paintings by Luc Tuymans which refer to the phenomenon of the corporation. Based in part on an essay by American media theorist Douglas Rushkoff, "Once Removed: The Corporate Life-Form," which discusses the origins of corporations from the middle ages to the present day, the series continues the artist's interest in power structures and collective history.¹

Against a bleak sky, Tuymans depicts a large galleon floating on still water. Its many sails are swaying in the wind, but the overall impression is one of disconcerting quiet and calm. Portrayed in subtle shades of gray and purple, the ship recalls the fleet of England's East India Company, one of the world's first corporate entities, dating from the early 17th century. The joint-stock company functioned in concert with the monarchy, strategically limiting investors' liabilities and protecting their anonymity whilst ensuring that their wealth would be carefully preserved within well-defined boundaries.

Painted from a monochrome black model of an actual ship from this era, Tuymans presents the vessel drained of any life, lacking materiality and appearing almost ephemeral—as if it could disappear at any moment. Historically overflowing with rarities from the Far East, it here floats like a ghost ship on a silent, invasive mission. The painting, in this way, acts as the artist's mirror into the soul of modern-day capitalism in which corporations have come to take on a virtual, automated, disempowering, and dehumanizing specter. The blurred painterly effect applied by Tuymans further draws attention to the subtle manipulation of consumer behaviors and desires through marketing. While the artificial "life form" of the corporation usually outlives people, Tuymans's painting nonetheless provides a reminder that artworks similarly endure many generations, and thus—if employed critically—might serve as antidotes to the ubiquitous landscape of corporatism.

¹ Douglas Rushkoff, "Once Removed: The Corporate Life-Form," in Douglas Rushkoff, *Life Inc.: How the World Became a Corporation and How to Take It Back* (New York: Random House, 2009).

**Luc Tuymans***Factory*

2010

Oil on canvas

80 3/8 x 60 1/4 inches

204.2 x 153 cm

Factory belongs to Tuymans's recent series, "Corporate," in which he addresses the phenomenon of the corporation and its changing, but always dominant, role throughout history. Central to the series is the artist's employment of light to indicate how corporate culture shapes and directs everyday life. Painted from a photograph of a factory ripped from a magazine, this painting by Luc Tuymans presents a marked contrast between the industrial connotations of the building and the soft brushstrokes used to depict it. The three chimneys and the surrounding landscape appear almost abstract, and the color scheme is bleached, bathing the scene in an absorbent white light with light-orange tones, as if suggestive of pollution. The dark, curved section at the top of the canvas was part of the original photograph, a visual "error," and highlights the artificiality of the image and the constructed nature of the artistic process.

**Luc Tuymans***Gold*

2010

Oil on canvas

52 7/8 x 39 inches

134.3 x 99.1 cm

Gold forms part of a new body of work by Luc Tuymans which explores the phenomenon of corporations. As a recent study by American media theorist Douglas Rushkoff notes, “the corporation is a very specific entity, first chartered by monarchs [in the early 17th century] for reasons that have very little to do with helping people carry out transactions with one another. Its purpose, from the beginning, was to suppress lateral interactions between people or small companies and instead direct any and all value they created to a select group of investors.”¹

Central to the series is the artist’s employment of light to indicate how corporate culture shapes and directs everyday life. In this painting, Luc Tuymans depicts liquid, luminous gold flowing from a melting container. Its dense, yellow color contrasts with the empty, monochromatic gray background and illuminates the painting from within. A symbol of wealth and a measure of value throughout history, gold is the most malleable pure metal known. Its recyclability makes it possible to mold it into different shapes any number of times, and it has for centuries been used as currency. This changeability also makes it anonymous, and unlike other assets, its value is steadfast: the amount of gold in the world is finite.

Presented as an overflowing horn of plenty, Tuymans creates a link between the soft and shiny metal, on the brink of being shaped, and the world of art, where paintings and other works circulate within their own value system. Being symbolic goods, their values are based on intellectual and ideological relevance and taste: criteria far from anonymous and steadfast. Superseding concrete measures of price, they stand out against the prevalent corporate system which directs financial values in contemporary society. Tuymans’s painting can thus be seen as a confessional, self-referential work, critically aware of its own status as an exchangeable good, while also representing a unique kind of value: that of artistic creation.

¹ Douglas Rushkoff, “Once Removed: The Corporate Life-Form,” in Douglas Rushkoff, *Life Inc.: How the World Became a Corporation and How to Take It Back* (New York: Random House, 2009), p. 3.



Luc Tuymans

Speech

2010

Oil on canvas

81 1/4 x 54 1/2 inches

206.4 x 138.4 cm

Speech belongs to Luc Tuymans's recent series, "Corporate," which examines the phenomenon of corporatism and its impact on everyday life. The painting presents an image of a standing man lit from above. Delicately rendered, the figure looks isolated and fragile as he clutches his notes in his hand, facing an invisible audience.

This is, in fact, a painting of Paul Dujardin, Director of Bozar: Centre for Fine Arts, the influential Brussels-based arts institution and an acquaintance of the artist, and thus indicates how practices of corporate culture also seep through in artistic contexts, which otherwise tend to be regarded as creatively autonomous. As if bestowing itself on Dujardin in a heavenly light, this corporate aura appears to be overpowering him, leaving him unable to speak.

In 2009, Paul Dujardin was the subject of a documentary film by Manu Riche, *The Long March*, which also featured Tuymans. Taking its point of departure in Dujardin's efforts to develop a cultural cooperation project between Belgium and China, it looked at the socio-political undercurrents of the art world and highlighted the impact of globalization on the "fine arts." The artist has also described his interest in how Dujardin's mannerisms and presentation techniques are themselves the products of a formal Jesuit education (thus referring back to Tuymans's recent body of work *The Apparitions (les revenants)*, which addressed the Jesuit order). In this way, this painting shows how the conventions and codes of public speaking animate the individual, while ultimately controlling the performance in the manner of a puppet show or otherwise constructed event.



Luc Tuymans

Fortis

2010

Oil on canvas

67 3/8 x 91 inches

171.1 x 231.1 cm

In this painting, Luc Tuymans has isolated a simple, graphic curve from an animated, Belgian commercial for Fortis Bank, aired shortly before the recent credit crisis affected the powerful institution. The red curve set against the beige background appears alternately as a fragment of a dollar sign, a hook, a flesh wound yet to be stitched up, or worse, a branding mark made by a red-hot iron. Titled "Life is a Curve," the advertisement pleaded consumers to invest with the Bank, assuring them that it would help with decisions along the way. Consisting of graph-like up-and-down movements of a red line to indicate profit and loss, with an animated figure stumbling atop it, the present "s" shape appeared towards the end of the short animation, before morphing into the Bank's logo.

Fortis Bank was hugely implicated by the credit crunch, in part due to managerial mistakes, and was bought by the Belgian government to prevent bankruptcy. The crisis was a dramatic shock to many small-scale Belgian investors, some of whom lost their life savings in the debacle. Responsible parties were fired, but when the government recently sold 75% of its ownership of Fortis to BNP Paribas, one of the largest international banks, the same people who were originally accused of mismanagement are again seen pulling the strings of the business.

As part of Tuymans's new series, "Corporate," this striking painting comments on the submission of the individual to the corporation. The simplicity of the graphic sign is at once attractive and unnerving, and as such, is reflective of Tuymans's oeuvre at large, which uses minimalist means to convey larger, complex, and often disturbing meanings.



Luc Tuymans

Armour

2010

Oil on canvas

43 1/2 x 31 1/2 inches

110.5 x 80 cm

Belonging to Luc Tuymans's recent series, "Corporate," *Armour* addresses the roots of modernday corporate culture. Originating back to the middle ages, the invented structure of the corporation was prompted by the proliferation of towns and cities as a result of technological and economical advances. The growing independence of "burghers," or citizens, challenged the feudal system's monopoly over commercial transactions. Corporations were established as a way for the aristocracy to participate in the new economy: typically receiving military protection and special services from the Crown, they were granted the right to exploit newfound regions and impose restrictions on trade, thus limiting the individual's freedom to do business.

The knight's helmet in this painting is a direct reference to chivalry and the first appearance of a corporation, in the guise of the legendary round tables used for important discussions in royal courts. While these were democratic in origin—intended to avoid hierarchy amongst the knights—they formed a prototype in which a powerful elite grouped together to protect its interests against the masses.

Keeping his palette in grayish colors, Tuymans depicts the helmet as if seemingly divorced from a body. Hard, impractical, and impersonal, it signals blind violence, and offers a reminder that the early days of the corporation also presented the conditions under which the first mercenary armies were born.

**Luc Tuymans***The Riding*

2010

Oil on canvas

49 1/2 x 53 1/4 inches

125.7 x 135.3 cm

Part of Luc Tuymans's recent series, "Corporate," *The Riding* stands out by depicting a leisurely scene: in contrast to other works from the series which deal more specifically with the history of corporatism with imagery drawn from advertising, the present painting shows a girl on a horse in a riding club. Wearing proper riding gear and keeping a straight posture, her silhouette is surrounded by a small edge of white light, as if bestowing a saintly aura upon her.

Central to the series is the artist's employment of light to indicate how corporate culture shapes and directs everyday life. The decisions that have led up to the girl's activity are determined by a set of social codes: like horses, children are often "groomed" to become part of a particular class as they grow up. Leisurely pursuits tend to be shaped by parents' wishes, which in turn are shaped by behavioral conventions in society. By cropping the girl's figure at the waist, she almost appears as a giant pawn in a chess game, and the light enveloping her figure gives the impression that she has been superimposed onto the given setting.



Luc Tuymans

Panel

2010

Oil on canvas

92 1/4 x 71 1/2 inches

234.3 x 181.6 cm

Panel forms part of a new body of work by Luc Tuymans which explores the phenomenon of corporations. As a recent study by American media theorist Douglas Rushkoff notes, “the corporation is a very specific entity, first chartered by monarchs [in the early 17th century] for reasons that have very little to do with helping people carry out transactions with one another. Its purpose, from the beginning, was to suppress lateral interactions between people or small companies and instead direct any and all value they created to a select group of investors.”¹

The present work by Luc Tuymans is based on a panel discussion involving Paul Dujardin, Director of Bozar: Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels; Hans de Wolf, an art scholar; documentary film-maker Manu Riche; and the artist himself. Seemingly mirroring the indifferent nature of this business-form, the light in Tuymans’s painting flattens out the panel speakers—like the electronic image of the television screen, lit from within, they appear without substance. The choreographed set-up further highlights the manipulative nature of the mass media, often enlisted by corporations to streamline individual tastes and desires.

Painting from a digital photograph of the event, Tuymans presents the speakers from a distance, as if showing the viewpoint of someone in the audience. Reduced to basic, almost abstract forms, the figures are bathed in white light, further obscuring individual features. As if emanating from the panel itself, the light partially brightens the large, almost monochromatic space enveloping them, creating a supernatural, artificial impression. As such, it mirrors the carefully staged format of this type of discussion, which usually follows specific, pre-determined rules. Participants tend to be seated according to their characteristics as public speakers, the most outspoken being placed towards the ends of the group (for the present discussion, Tuymans—famous for his bluntness—sits at the far right). Yet, the conversation appears muted, drained of life by some external force.

¹ Douglas Rushkoff, “Once Removed: The Corporate Life-Form,” in Douglas Rushkoff, *Life Inc.: How the World Became a Corporation and How to Take It Back* (New York: Random House, 2009), p. 3.

**Luc Tuymans***Butterfly*

2010

Oil on canvas

47 1/2 x 62 inches

120.7 x 157.5 cm

Butterfly belongs to a recent body of work by the artist which examines the theme of the corporation in contemporary society. Here, a moth rests atop a flat surface, its wings outspread. Its colorful, rich pattern is the result of millions of years of evolution, and like toxic warning labels, signals to predators to stay away (though the message is often feigned). Despite its conspicuous display, the animal can become entirely camouflaged when its wings are folded, resembling tree branches or dead leaves.

Based on a photograph that had been manipulated to look like a negative, Luc Tuymans's painting creates an intricate link between these evolutionary properties of the moth and the manmade structure of the corporation. The attractive-looking, complex pigmentation of the moth's wings contain various meanings in the natural world and is intended to orchestrate deliberate misinformation. Contemporary mass media, by comparison, acts on behalf of corporations to persuade consumers to buy particular products, and sometimes misinforms in the process. In both instances, camouflage is important, making it difficult to differentiate real from fake. Many of the works in Tuymans's "Corporate" series examine different types of light used in corporate settings. Here, the animal's well-known attraction to artificial light makes it a central part of this body of work.

**Luc Tuymans***Conference Room*

2010

Oil on canvas

39 x 57 7/8 inches

99.1 x 147 cm

This painting shows a large, empty table aligned with numerous chairs, ready to host an important meeting. The setting is stately, with a decorative mirror, draped curtains, and framed pictures, and suggests a prominent institution or conference center. The lighting appears to emanate from the upper ends of the walls, creating reflections on the shiny surface of the table as well as in the mirror, which stands out as the most luminous area of the image. The rest of the room is presented in mute, dark colors, and gives the overall impression of a nearly black-and-white space.

Presenting a place where significant decisions are made, Luc Tuymans's chromatic scheme points to the one-dimensional nature of large corporations. Typically making investments that are at a remove from aspects of individuality, as well as specific and local consequence, the corporation is typically partial to the needs of a few wealthy individuals at the expense of the (uninformed) masses. The painting forms part of Tuymans's series, "Corporate," a body of work which emphasizes the type of lighting found in corporate settings, often at the expense of the figures within the composition, or as here, leaving individuals out altogether.