

LUC TUYMANS GRAPHIC WORKS 1989–2012

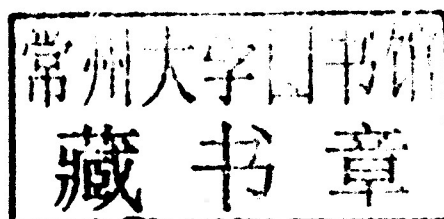


Manfred Sellink  
Tommy Simoens

LUDION

# LUC TUYMANS GRAPHIC WORKS 1989-2012

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LUDION

## COLOPHON

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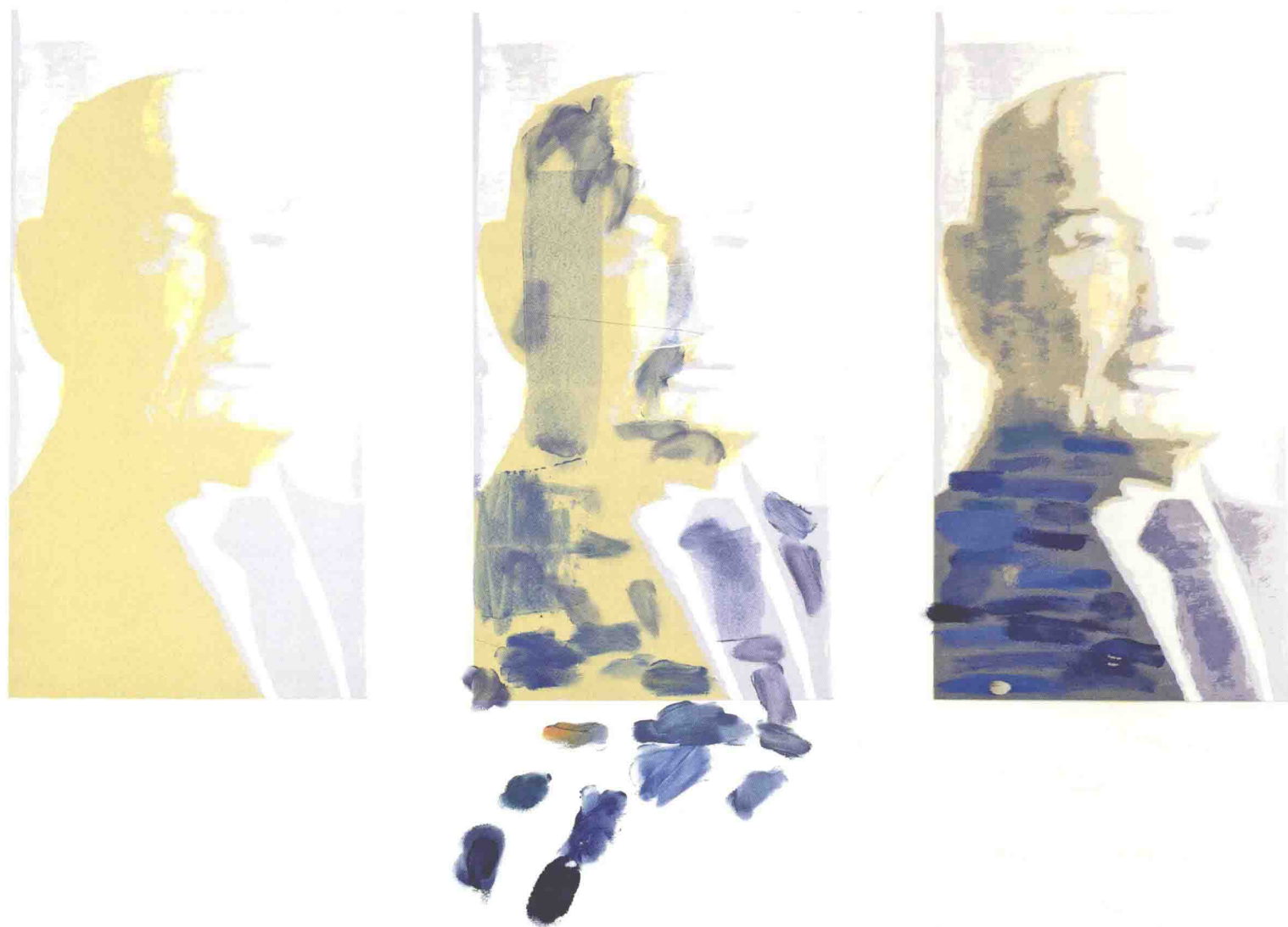


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Colour studies for *Untitled (The Rumour)*  
by Roger Vandaele, Archive V-editie

# Image Search: Luc Tuymans and Printmaking

Though he is known primarily as a painter, Luc Tuymans fully engages with printmaking, which he views as an essential part of his practice. To consider the scope of his project and its myriad processes, one must first examine a fundamental element of his workflow: the image search.

Preparatory work for Tuymans's painting and printmaking activities begins with the creation of source images using various methods of image capture, such as computer screenshots, mobile phone photos and Polaroids, which form a deep cache of mediated reference materials. While freeze-framing these pictures for contemplation, use and reuse, Tuymans refines his subject matter, recording the transitory or ineffable: the movement of the ocean, flickering television imagery, or highly charged newspaper images. His investigations of these images can follow unpredictable paths, such as the process that resulted in the print series *Drum Set* (cat. 30–31), 2003. After creating a paper maquette of a drum kit, Tuymans made a sequence of Polaroids. He then created a painting based on the Polaroids, and next, after yet more Polaroids of both the maquette and of the painting, he made two different series of monotype prints, again, based on – but not seeking to replicate – the painting. These many intermediate steps with the ever-fallible Polaroid images are crucial for Tuymans to perform his requisite framing, re-framing and colouration – depending on the particular medium and technique – that generate re-contextualised works that maintain a certain distance from the original chosen subject.

These archived reference images are always available for – and subject to – varying degrees of alteration, as Tuymans works simultaneously in different techniques, often using different versions of the same imagery. His gouaches of a utopian, unrealised city became the sources of several paintings and a portfolio of three screenprints on PVC, *Transitions* (cat. 55), 2008. These gouaches were made from screenshots

of a televised documentary about Walt Disney's original model for the EPCOT planned community. At times it may take years before Tuymans revisits a reference image as a source for a new painting or print. For example, a single Polaroid of a figurine is the basis for a 1992 painting, a 2004 lithograph, *Angel* (cat. 38), and a 2012 mural in the Concertgebouw in Bruges, each with its own entirely distinct character, effect and meaning. Similarly, in 2005, Tuymans returned to another set of Polaroids to rework an earlier painting of the Belgian coast to create the screenprint, *Shore* (cat. 43). Pleased with this print (which shifted in format from horizontal to vertical) and considering it appropriate for the cause, Tuymans based a new painting on it six years later, which was donated to raise relief funds for victims of the Japanese tsunami in 2011.

As an intrepid researcher, Tuymans's processes of translation are deliberately positioned within the history of printmaking. As different printing methods were developed in the second half of the fifteenth century, fine art printing largely fell into the hands of printmakers who often specialised in a single technique, such as copper engraving, etching, woodcut or mezzotint. Rare was the true *peintre-graveur* (painter-engraver), a term used from the end of the eighteenth century for artists who worked intensively in painting and printmaking, such as Albrecht Dürer, Rembrandt and Francesco Goya, who excelled in both arenas. The second half of the twentieth century saw an important shift: the resurgence of printmaking as a means of material production that could be duplicated and distributed more widely than painting and sculpture. Tuymans is one of many influential artists since the 1950s, such as David Hockney, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Louise Bourgeois and Georg Baselitz, among many others, who created large and important bodies of graphic works via different printmaking techniques.

As a painter and draftsman favouring intimacy and indeterminacy, Tuymans's working methodologies might be



described as quick, though intensive. Born in 1958, at the same time as original fine arts publishers such as Universal Limited Art Editions and Editions Copenhagen were founded in the United States and Europe, Tuymans first came into contact with printmaking while in art school in the 1970s, but at the time, found the urgency of photography and film to be more captivating. But by the late 1980s, after achieving a degree of recognition for his painting, Tuymans began to reconsider the process of printmaking as an extension of his practice, opening up possibilities that were, in fact, consistent with the direction his work was taking.

Since the early 1990s, works on paper have become an intrinsic component of Tuymans's oeuvre. The technical and indirect aspects of printmaking – like filmmaking – require graduated stages of preparation, production, working and reworking – a significant commitment of time for the completion of each work. Tuymans respects and utilises the specific characteristics and limitations of various media, and among the qualities he values in printmaking is the obstinacy of the relationship between materials and methods. Finding ways to preserve his intuitive process while working through technical applications, Tuymans summarises his paradoxical attitude as 'seeking speed in a medium without speed'. The process of preparing prints, printing them and, time and again, correcting proofs, requires a tremendous amount of focus.

Tuymans continues to experiment with unusual surfaces and supports such as wallpaper (cat. 11), security glass (cat. 46) and PVC (cat. 55). Such choices do not come about for novelty's sake, but through searching for a support appropriate to the desired end result. The format, position and framing of the printed image are all crucial elements. In 1990, on the occasion of his solo exhibition at The Contemporary Art Museum Association in Ghent (the predecessor of the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst), the artist collaborated for the first time with the Antwerp master printer Roger Vandaele on the series *Recherches* (cat. 3). Four screenprints of an average size of 8 × 10 cm (3 1/8 × 4 in), are mounted on large grey cardboard sheets of 108 × 62.4 cm (42 1/2 × 24 5/8 in). With such wide margins, the images are set back firmly from their

surroundings and the viewer is forced to consider the reductive depictions of World War II concentration camps in Germany and Poland in an intimate manner. Based on his drawings and watercolours made during travel and personal observation, the prints gain power by stripping reflections of immense historical trauma into sparse, diminutive images. *Recherches* exemplifies the way in which Tuymans alters our experience with images through the relationship between print and sheet.

Through exhibitions, the medium of printmaking may work to expand the conversation around an artist's work. Tuymans has collaborated with museums, galleries, and publishers to disseminate his images, some of which can push the form and its formatting to the extreme. For *The Rumour* (cat. 28), 2002–03, Tuymans mounted an installation of seven lithographs in panels, creating a double-walled wooden box frame that also contains a sculptural birdcage-like object. This presentation deviated considerably from the original source images, *Untitled (The Rumour)* (cat. 25), printed for the Bonner Kunstverein in 2001. Similarly, his series *Le Verdict* (cat. 11), 1995, was printed on seven rolls of wallpaper made to fit the exhibition site, a fabled villa housing the Centre genevois de gravure contemporaine. The printed images were pasted in strips to the walls in various rooms, creating a remarkable site-specific print edition. A sense of space is also sometimes evoked by design. In *Lamproom* (cat. 5), for the Kunsthalle Bern in 1992, the horizontal composition, consisting of a window and three hanging ceiling lamps, is printed at the top of a large sheet, its placement suggesting the proportion of a vintage door. The screenprint is a larger version of another print that appeared in the artist book *Zayin* (cat. 4), 1992, in which thirteen Tuymans prints were juxtaposed with poems by Wilfried Adams.

Tuymans is conscious of the potential for printed images to circulate beyond the commercial and institutional settings of the art world to effect social change. A strong public activist and advocate, Tuymans has made prints to support projects which were extensions of his political and social engagement. In 1995, Tuymans produced a series of eight lithographs (cat. 12–19) for the MUKA Youth Prints programme in Auckland, New Zealand. In this worldwide,

on-going project, images by esteemed artists are printed in large, inexpensive editions in the same format. Only children may visit the travelling exhibition, exposing them to thought-provoking art in a low-key and sensitive manner. Similarly, in support of the Vlaamse Vereniging Autisme (Flemish Autism Association) Tuymans contributed the screenprint *Zelfportret (1982)* (cat. 51), 2008, to a portfolio that included works by fellow Belgian artists Michaël Borremans, Berlinde De Bruyckere and Hans Op de Beeck. In another local project, his offset print *Untitled (Triptych)* (cat. 24) appeared with works by a group of seven leading Flemish artists in the 2001 portfolio *Red de Mosselpot (Save the Mussel Pan)*, to raise funds for the purchase of a work by Marcel Broodthaers, to keep it in Flanders.

Working with trusted, long-term collaborators, Tuymans has developed relationships that have continually served to advance his printmaking practice. Beginning in 1996 with Peter Kneubühler, the Swiss printer who worked with Peter Blum Editions, New York, Tuymans's watercolours of a television documentary on the Mormon Church were masterfully translated into aquatint etchings, an eight-part series entitled *The Temple* (cat. 20). This same series – which later inspired a painting, *Altar* (2002) – was revisited by Tuymans for a new group of digital and three-dimensional prints for documenta XI in 2002 (cat. 27). However, since Kneubühler's passing in 1999, Tuymans has not returned to the medium of etching. The technical skill and expertise of master printers such as Roger Vandaele in Antwerp, Maurice Sanchez in New York, and Rasmus Uswald of Editions Copenhagen (a master lithographer and expert in eighteenth century technique), has enabled Tuymans to consistently translate his nuanced sense of colour and composition into graphic forms. Following intensive trials, Tuymans is presented with options and possible variations, and then multiple working proofs. Once a final approval print has been achieved, Tuymans removes himself from the final printing process, relying on his printmakers to print the entire edition by carefully following the proof. Recently Tuymans has collaborated with the Antwerp-based publisher, Graphic Matter, on several projects, including a suite of three screenprints (also printed

with Roger Vandaele), based on three of the six *Allo!* paintings (2012). These printmaking and publishing partnerships extend Tuymans's broader practice beyond the studio, and carry his knowledge of – and appreciation for – historical methods forward, in the creation of his graphic works.

Whether his prints have two or twelve layers, Tuymans carefully modulates the tonality of the colours to achieve an impressive and unique rendering of illumination. His ambition is to 'allow an artwork to generate light'. Printmaking offers a wide range of ways to achieve this by allowing the paper – in terms of its texture and hue – to play a role in the process. Tuymans may leave certain areas blank, or may print others in (semi-)transparent inks, which allow the paper to shine through. Sometimes he wants the colouring of his paintings to be transcribed, other times he prefers the graphic effects of watercolour, gouache or Polaroid.

From his earliest experiments in printmaking, working with photocopied materials, to his recent painted portrait of Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, *H.M.* (2012), Luc Tuymans's practice has been motivated, in part, by his ceaseless discourse with images from the culture. Regardless of the degree to which Tuymans becomes engaged in the specifics of printmaking, with its rich and varied history, it remains a means to an end. The resulting artwork is of primary importance and must always, as Tuymans states, 'ask more questions than it answers'.

*Professor Manfred Sellink,  
Meeterkerke, September 2012*





GRAPHIC WORKS 1989–2012



# I **Untitled, 1989**

*Artist book*

Photocopy on paper, stapled and folded

Book: 21 × 14.8 cm (8¼ × 5¾ in); 12 pages

Published and printed by Ruimte Morguen, Antwerp

Signed in pencil on first page 'Luc Tuymans'

Edition of 50, unnumbered

**NOTE** Published on the occasion of the solo exhibition  
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