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Painting for effect – using material process and technique to create atmosphere and eeriness in paintings of domestic interiors and spaces.

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**Title – Painting for effect – using material process and technique to create atmosphere and eeriness in paintings of domestic interiors and spaces.**

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## The Practice

Starting with me sitting in my living room and deciding I wanted to paint the walls that surrounded me, my practice delves into an intricate web of questions surrounding themes of atmosphere, eeriness, experience, encounters, nothingness and the unknown and has had a natural progression into the realms of what I can only describe as an unknown experience of our daily domestic encounters.

By photographing and painting domestic interiors and spaces, my work attempts to pinpoint the exact moment if and when the effects of atmosphere and eeriness are created and understanding whether specific painting techniques can be the reason for these effects. Is it from the colour the walls have been painted in? Is it the subject and space that is being represented? Or does it originate in the processes that lead up to making the painting.

I am also investigating how paintings can affect our mood and feeling when being viewed. This could be through how and where they are exhibited or through the enhancement of other senses when being viewed e.g., playing certain music in the exhibition space.

In order to investigate how we can create these effects and affects in paintings I am attempting to answer questions such as, how do we represent and interoperate the space in our everyday domestic places? What exactly is the eerie and where does it come from?

My theory is that through the different ways we create paintings we can alter and change the effect they give. By writing this essay I will hopefully begin to understand if there can be a specific method for creating effects. I am using my painting practice to underline this essay to incorporate theory with practice and will use my painting practice at the end of the essay as a way of testing out theories that are generated throughout.

I have included some images of my paintings that best demonstrate my practice. This will help the reader visualise my practice before reading the essay.





















## **Introduction**

In this research project I will be attempting to see if it's possible to create paintings that display the effects of atmosphere, eeriness and the unknown through a range of material processes and techniques. Specifically, paintings of domestic interiors and spaces that aren't typically characterised as eerie. I will investigate how through colour, subject, cropping, point of view, chiaroscuro, mistakes and painting style we can manipulate paint onto surface to become a space of question and mystery. This will be done through the analysis of the painting practice of Contemporary artist Luc Tuymans, unravelling the dark meanings and purpose behind his interior paintings. I will draw on and analyse the research of Mark Fisher to help me theorise what I believe to pertain to the eerie, atmospheric and the unknown. I will also use my own painting practice in an attempt to understand the research I have gathered from an artist's point of view.

## **Literature Review**

In this research project I am attempting to find out if it is possible to use certain processes, materials and techniques to create the effects of atmosphere, eeriness and the unknown in paintings of domestic interiors. This chapter will be a review of the existing literature in the areas of painting techniques, effects and affect theory which I believe have influenced me to conduct this research. I will be splitting the literature into two sections.

- Section 1 will be a review of work that investigates affect in relation to viewing and talking about artwork.
- Section 2 will be a review of literature that investigates effect (specifically the effects of atmosphere, eeriness and the unknown), and how effects can be created through processes, materials and techniques.

In order to understand each piece of literature I am going to be giving a brief explanation of the piece, how it relates to my research topic and then highlight why my own research is important to supporting or expanding upon it.

### **Section 1 - Affect / Viewing Artwork**

This section will be a review of literature that concerns the ways we view and talk about artwork and the affect it can have on the viewer. It is important to review this because I aim to enhance my understanding of how art has and is talked about, as well as seeing the different artwork is viewed. This will help me when it comes to viewing and analysing the artistic practice of Luc Tuymans work because I can construct a more dynamic viewpoint on it.

#### **John Dewey - Art as Experience (1934)**

“Dewey's theory is an attempt to shift the understandings of what is essential and characteristic about the art process from its physical manifestations in the ‘expressive object’ to the process in its entirety, a process whose fundamental element is no longer the material ‘work of art’ but rather the development of an ‘experience’. Experience is something that personally affects one's life. That is why these theories are so crucial to people's social and educational life”.

This is an important piece of writing because it is a steppingstone to helping me understand that viewing art is an experience rather than just seeing it. I am taking the theories that Dewey puts forward and developing them by suggesting how this ‘experience’ he talks about can be created, enhanced and changed through the differing ways we see artwork. This will be key for me when I am looking at Tuymans work because it will help me engage with what is viewing and what is experience and whether the two lie together. Again, making my reading of his work more accurate.



## **John Berger- Ways of Seeing (1972)**

Ways of seeing is a book that explores the ideas of how when we view something, the experience can be changed by a “whole host of assumptions concerning the nature of beauty, truth, civilisation, form, taste, class and gender” (Berger, J. (1972)). It is about how we view and interoperate our history. This work applies to my research because we can assume that every painting is viewed differently by each person, but the viewing experience can be shared by people. It can help me to understand how the viewing experience can change by different ways of viewing, so when I view Tuymans work how this can affect me differently by the way it is seen.

I will be expanding on this work because I am talking about specific materials and processes that change the outcome of a work and the different ways we can change the way an artwork is exhibited to change its affect.

## **Effect / Painting Processes, Materials & Techniques**

This section will be a review of the literature which deals with effects. This is anything that talks about the effects of atmosphere, eeriness and the unknown as well as any themes that surround these effects. It will also be around how the specific effects are created in paintings through process, technique and material.

## **Luc Tuymans**

Tuymans is a Belgian contemporary artist who creates representational paintings from historical, social and political events. The purpose of his work is to prompt thought and evoke feeling towards, often, horrific historical events that humans may have fallen ignorant too. Tuymans strengths as a contemporary artist lie in the outcomes of the processes he uses, this is his

ability to represent tragedy in an aesthetic pleasing manner, the way he can involve people in history through art (most of the times without them being aware of it) and in his is extensive collection of paintings of interiors and spaces. Within this research project I want to develop these ideas as a way of understanding whether they are key to making paintings that are eerie and atmospheric and understand how important processes are to an artistic practice. Unlike the analysis of Tuymans work before I am not just focused on what processes Tuymans uses but how these processes create effects of atmosphere and eeriness.

### **Mark Fisher - The Weird and the Eerie (2016)**

In his book, Mark Fisher investigates what exactly constitutes as the 'weird' and as the 'eerie'. This book talks through a selection of stories that surround themes of the unknown, and demonstrate the differences and similarities held in the weird and the eerie.

This piece of literature is a key text for my research because I am trying to find the eerie in paintings of domestic interiors and being able to understand what constitutes as the eerie in relation to the weird and in relation to 'the normal' will help be understand the paintings better. Understanding the eerie is a dilemma held within this essay and within my own painting practice. I am hoping that by using this book I can not only determine what parts of Tuymans work can be eerie but how I can personally paint the eerie. I am expanding on this piece because while Fisher talks about what the eerie is and where it could be found I am also finding how we can intentionally create it.

### **Sebastian Tay - How do contemporary works of art engage the concept of 'nothingness'?**

Through the analysis of three contemporary works of art, Sebastian Tay explores how the concept of nothingness can be created in artwork using certain techniques ‘through the use of associative concepts like ‘darkness’ and ‘emptiness’” (Tay, s. (n.d.)). The concept of nothingness in the three artworks is then theorised “through the literature of ‘Being and Time’ by Martin Heidegger and ‘The Classic of the Way and Virtue’ (*Tao Te Jing*) by Lao Zi” (Tay, s. (n.d.)). As my research is concerned with the many themes of atmosphere and eeriness terms and experiences like nothingness interact with it. Tay has introduced to me the concept of using specific ways of creating and presenting artwork is a way of creating a certain effect e.g. nothingness. He is also theorising the effect of nothingness using literature which is what I intend to do with Mark Fisher’s *The Weird and the Eerie*. I want to develop this concept because Tay is only describing how the works engage with the effect of nothingness as something that exists within the piece of artwork. What I am going to be investigating how we can use certain painting techniques to create effects in paintings, the effect will be more literal.

## **Methodology**

### **Aims**

The purpose of this research project is to further our understanding of how the effects of atmosphere, eeriness and the unknown can be successfully created within paintings of domestic interiors and spaces through literal material processes and techniques for making paintings.

### **Research method I have chosen to use**

I will be using a qualitative research approach to achieve aims of this research project. This will enable me to answer the questions I have around how effects

are created in paintings because it will provide the opportunity to test out the theories I have gathered relating to how effects are created through the materials, processes and techniques of a painting practice. (Given, L. M) states “Qualitative approaches are typically used to explore new phenomena and capture individuals’ thoughts, feelings or interpretations of meaning and process” (pg. xxix. (2008)). The qualitative deals with language, feeling and thought. It is appropriate to this research project because it deals with the effects and affects in paintings which are only describable through feeling and thought.

### How I will undertake the research

In order to investigate this, I will be doing an in-depth study into the painting practice of contemporary artist Luc Tuymans. Exploring the processes Tuymans uses in the creation of his paintings as well as an analysis into 4 of his paintings through which I will attempt to pick out the materials and techniques he has used that create the effects of atmosphere, eeriness and the unknown. To help me theorise what constitutes the eerie, atmospheric and the unknown I will be carrying out a close reading of Mark Fisher’s book *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016). In order to analyse the paintings most consistently, I will be categorising the materials and techniques into 5 areas; Colour; Subject; Cropping and Point of View; Chiaroscuro; Mistakes and Painting Style.

To conclude the research and in order to put my theories to the test I will be using my own painting practice. As a method for understanding processes, I will be explaining the processes I go through when creating a painting. Then using what I have gathered for how Tuymans creates atmosphere and eeriness in his paintings I will create my own painting that essentially combines the processes, materials and techniques. ‘A formalistic analysis of a work of art

would consider primarily the aesthetic effects created by the component parts of design. These parts, called formal elements, constitute the basis of the artists visual language. They consist of line, shape, space, color, light and dark' (pg. 17 Adams, L. S. (2007)). This will all be in an attempt to find out if it is possible for specific materials and techniques to create desired effects.

### Explanation of chosen methods

I will be carrying out close visual analysis of 4 paintings by Luc Tuymans and using my own painting practice to support the research. For the analysis of Tuymans work I will be going into detail about the importance of his work to Contemporary painting today and why I have chosen him as a study for this research project as well an in-depth analysis into his artistic practice. (Tate. (2004)) "Luc Tuymans work seems to be open to understanding from a wide range of perspectives. It can be approached from the standpoint of painterly practice, or from the perspective of the critic or indeed from that of the viewer" (pg. 116) By choosing a renowned artist like Luc Tuymans (an artist whose work has been subjected to a lot of consideration over a long period of time) I will be able to use the copious amounts of studies and interviews on him combined with my own thoughts and feelings as a painter to create a piece of research that hopefully holds a lot of integrity and ground.

I will conclude the research with a consideration of my own practice, and how as a contemporary painter, focussing on domestic interiors and spaces, his work has affected me. By using my own research, I am able to think about every aspect of painting as a painter and not just a viewer giving me a wider view of for example how paint applies to paper and what outcome this has, through time (Adams) has said "various methodological approaches to works of art have developed, and these provide us with different ways of thinking

about images, artists, and even critics' (1996). By using my own painting practice, I am able to consider Tuymans work as a painter and a viewer which will make it easier to unlock a lot more thoughts and feelings elicited by his paintings. I am also then able to 'test out' these materials and techniques as a method of research and informally determine whether they are key for creating certain effects. This is where the method of research lies. I will put the theories I have gathered into paintings I make. I will use my abilities as a painter to create a painting which will be based solely upon the data, I have gathered from Tuymans paintings practices.

My research takes on a formalistic method of approach to how art is viewed and interpreted. 'Formalism describes the critical position that the most important aspect of a work of art is its form – the way it is made and its purely visual aspects – rather than its narrative content or its relationship to the visible world. In painting therefore, a formalist critic would focus exclusively on the qualities of color, brushwork, form, line and composition'. (Tate.org) in doing this I hope to be able to, eventually, create a precise methodology for how we can literally use specific materials and techniques to be able to create atmosphere, eeriness and the unknown in paintings of domestic interiors and spaces.

### Understanding processes

Before I begin analysing Tuymans work and trying to understand the processes he goes through when creating paintings, I firstly need to understand why my own painting practice is so important to me as a method for generating new research and making the reader aware of my painting process should help clarify how important process can be in painting practice. This means talking about the experience that I go through when painting. This is from taking



photographs, editing photographs, paint to surface, to a representation of something, all while considering how the painting may be viewed. Considering every aspect experienced throughout the process of painting to viewing 'I have spoken of the esthetic quality that rounds out an experience into completeness and unity as emotional' (John Dewey (1934) pg. 43) The processes that I go through when I create a painting is as needed as the outcome of the painting itself. 'Practice-related researchers push this examination into a more direct and intimate sphere, observing and analysing themselves as they engage in the act of creation, rather than relying solely on dissection of the art after the fact'. (Skains, R.L. (2018)). I need to understand my own methods for creating a painting in order to understand someone else's.

In order to evaluate my process, I must consider the ideas I am putting forward about how atmosphere and eeriness can be created using specific painting materials and techniques, meaning I need to be aware of every material, process and brush stroke I use. To do so I am including a run through of the processes, thoughts, materials and techniques that I use when creating a painting along with example images for reference.

### Taking Photos

- I begin my process by taking photographs that I will use as the source for my paintings. These are taken in a variety of places including my own domestic interiors as well as places and spaces of the buildings and homes I visit.

- The photographing stage is a middle ground in the creation of my paintings. It sits between the real space I'm painting and the painting itself. It is an important stage because it can change what the outcome of the painting will be.
- It's important that when I'm taking photos, I am taking into consideration every angle and line, already introducing cropping and geometric abstraction into my work. I am manipulating the camera to miss out certain areas of the capture as well. Really considering the space within the area when I'm taking a picture and how it looks on the camera compared to in real life.
- It must be made clear that whether the subject in the painting is obvious or not, the painting is only ever a portrayal of the reality. 'Representational painting, however, can never be reality itself' (Elger, D. (2017). Pg. 7) Using this view allows me to convey a point that a painting can always represent an unknown of some sort, this is where the eeriness begins to appear.



### Editing Photos

- I use this time to control the photos, some of which I will completely edit down to an unrecognizable image. Some kept as pure as they were taken.
- I use this time to concentrate mainly on the cropping and enhancing the chiaroscuro. By cropping the images in ways where it is not obvious what the photo is of, I am already challenging the viewer and making them question the painting before its even painted. I will enhance the dark areas and shadows as this is a keyway for me to create atmosphere in my paintings. The colour of shadow can be anything shade of the colour you are using to paint, its only ever darker. Meaning I can use

whatever colour I want in the painting, whether it be pink or brown and still have the shadow creating an eerie feeling in the painting.

- In any sense my photographs and paintings cease to be literal reality and as a viewer this can add to their feelings towards their current reality 'It was precisely in view of this type of intellectual approach that abstract painting offered new and unsuspected possibilities. It could be autonomous and did not have to refer to a known reality. Indeed, abstract painting functioned instead as an analogy to an unknown world' (Elger, D. (2017). Pg 7) The possibilism we can achieve in changing the photo from what the reality is, is key for unlocking the images full potential to be atmospheric, eerie and the unknown.





## Painting

- This is where the space that I photographed is brought into a representation of a space. I am no longer painting a space I am painting a representation that I have edited and manipulated to be most effective.

This is the stage where I choose colour, surface, painting materials and painting style. These are key decision to whether my painting will be effective in being atmospheric and eerie. Colour must be considered carefully, there must be a balance between what is fitting within the

interior or space that I have taken a photo of and what doesn't fit well because it's in-between these two where the unease starts to arise.

- I choose to paint in oil as it is a medium that can be reduced and thickened so the bristles of the brush can always show through. It is important to keep the rawness of seeing the brush strokes in my paintings because it creates texture and dimension which deepens the space within the painting.
- My chosen surface and painting techniques affect each other when changed. If I choose to paint on aluminium surface, then the way the paint applies to the surface is completely different. The oil paint slides on the metal instead of absorbing into it like on paper or canvas. The motion and speed created by this can affect the life that the painting has. It also means once the painting is finished the brush strokes are a lot more clearly visible meaning you can see directly where brush strokes were made.









### Viewing

- The last process within my painting practice is the viewing, this holds how a painting is exhibited. There is a great deal of power that this can hold. If exhibited wrong the painting/paintings could be completely

misread. I have found through work that having my aluminium paintings displayed on a screen can really have an effective outcome because the brush strokes and colour is enhanced by the screen pixels.

- I also value how the exhibiting experience can be enhanced through the use of other sensory heightening such as listening to a sound or music while looking at the paintings. Turning the viewing into an experience could really affect how the viewer feels about a painting.



### Why I chose this Research Method over others

The advantage I am getting by using a practice led approach means I can create work and analyse all in the same moment. Retrospective reflection – ‘reflection-on-action’ – is a critical research skill and part of the generic research processes of review, evaluation and analysis. ‘Reflection-in-action’ is a

particular activity of professional practitioners and involves thinking about what we are doing and reshaping action while we are doing it. In this sense it is improvisational and relies on feeling, response and adjustment. (Gray, C., & Malins, J. (2004). Pg 22). When we are talking about the affect paintings can have on us, a less intimate method wouldn't be appropriate as the outcome may not reflect what we are trying to achieve. If I didn't involve my painting practice, I wouldn't be able to comment on a personal level. We are trying to establish what is perceived when paintings are viewed not just from a hypothetical point of view.

The idea of evaluating existing artworks can provoke a change in our thoughts and feelings about our own work or other paintings based on what we view in a painting. 'This systematic method of analyzing artistic data encourages the researcher to ask various questions to him/herself and interact with the data by creating intuitive art forms as responses to internal dialogue and feelings'(Gray, C., & Malins, J. (2004). Pg 22) I am basing my research of existing artwork to see what correlation there is between the certain ways they are painted and the effects that are produced. The literal processes of me analysing Tuymans work through a close visual analysis and the making of a painting is the methodology of my practice and by doing this I am also seeing what my own response to the work is and how these paintings affect me. 'In this discussion, the product of making – i.e., the artefact created in art and design practice – is conceived as having a central position in the research process" (Mäkelä, M. (2007)). This will allow me to connect the painting effects of atmosphere and eeriness with material process. The two methods of analysing his work and using my own practice will be invaluable.

### Evaluation

In order to understand how a painting can exhibit effects that can then affect a viewer, it is crucial we understand how the painting is created to begin with. Expressing the experiences, I go through when creating a painting, has been a means to an end because I can now move on to what I am really investigating. How, theoretically, we can use specific materials and techniques to create paintings that have an outcome of a desired effect. The work in general isn't about my personal connection to the art but the overall connection paintings can exhibit in a range of different ways. Explained by Roger Fry, the influential formalist critic 'focused on the emotional effects created by works of art' (pg. 16 Adams, L. S. (2007)), here I have established the grounds for processes being at the forefront of painting practice, I will now find out how materials and techniques are key for creating these emotional effects in paintings.

### **Luc Tuymans Artist Analysis**

I am attempting to develop a concise method for creating atmosphere, eeriness and the unknown in paintings of domestic interiors and spaces. Through the material processes of making paintings.

I will be doing this by undertaking a deep visual analysis of artist Luc Tuymans. An artist whose work isn't necessarily known for being atmospheric or eerie yet encompass a range of outcomes which display these effects. I will be developing a list of processes used by Tuymans to help me understand how the paintings he creates come about. I will then be conducting an in-depth study into a set of paintings of domestic interiors by Tuymans. Each painting has been picked somewhat randomly, each with their own setting, 'style' and colour palette. The study will be an analysis into the materials and techniques Tuymans uses paired with the theorised affect the paintings have using *The*

*Weird and the Eerie* by Mark Fisher (2016). I will then be creating a painting of my own using my abilities as a contemporary painter. This will be done using the collection of processes, materials and techniques that Tuymans uses. I will be doing this to see if specific material process can be used to distinctively create the effects of atmosphere, eeriness and the unknown.

## Chapter 1

### 1.1 Introduction – Contextualise artist

Luc Tuymans is a Belgian Contemporary visual artist known for his representational paintings that are sourced from popular news imagery and films that “are characterised by their understated, cool appraisal of history, power and memory” (Eastham, B. (2015, August 8)). His work has paved a way through contemporary still life paintings by its ability to represent a deeper meaning of life within the normality of everyday objects, he “pioneered a decidedly non-narrative approach to figurative painting, instead exploring how information can be layered and embedded within certain scenes and signifiers” (Zwirner, D. (2020)). Through layers of paint and process Tuymans work boasts question without many answers, it “demonstrates the power of images to simultaneously communicate and withhold”. (Zwirner, D) “Emerging in the 1980’s” (2020) Tuymans has been an inspiration to a collection of artists that have followed him since, their representations and readings of Tuymans work have not only emphasized the importance of Luc Tuymans to Contemporary art but also increased and highlighted the value in the processes, materials and techniques he uses to create paintings. “the most salient interpretations of his art have come from those younger painters who flesh out these signature devices in their own work. Members of this next generation of painters,

including some of Europe's most promising emerging talents, appear to have Tuymans spectral oils in mind as they squeeze out blobs of paint, mix up some turpentine-heavy medium, and take brush to canvas." (artforum).

Tuymans is known for paintings sourced from recent and historical, social and political events as well as his own personal trauma from childhood, he explores a relationship between humans and their memory and ignorance to major events by creating a way of viewing news in artistic form. By "examining the visual residue of trauma and the collective desire to forget" (Spears, D. (2010, February 3)) he has been able to create paintings that "deal with the Holocaust, the post-9/11 social and political climate in the United States" (Spears, D. (2010, February 3)). He mainly uses popular media film and imagery to recreate his paintings as a way of exploring the depths of its resonance. Described to "picture the unpicturable" (artforum) his work is an attempt to understand a feeling or emotion that someone may have had living through a part of history. There is a great vagueness to his work, translated through the empty spaces and dull colours, representative of the vagueness of news imagery to society.

Tuymans skilfully uses a range of processes, materials, techniques and ideologies to represent horror, sorrow and profound meanings through paintings of rooms, people and objects that on the outside seem quite aesthetically pleasing. 'The superficial banality of these appropriated pictures is laced with darker implications' (Eastham, B. 2015). Through doing this he has found a way to successfully make paintings which have the ability to affect the viewer without them even being aware of it, for example (Lichtzier, R) has said that "Though the viewer encounters the mosaic upon arrival, they cannot



really see it” (2020). I will use the importance of Tuymans work, his profound paintings and my own experiences with his work in an attempt to understand what it is he is doing and how he’s doing it.

## 1.2 Coming across his work and why I have chosen to study him

It is important to mention how I came across Luc Tuymans and for the reader to appreciate the deeper relationship that I have grown to have with Tuymans work in order to understand why I have chosen him as a study for this research project. I discovered his paintings, specifically *ceiling (1992)*, when I began painting domestic interiors and was looking for other artists who painted them. I was initially intrigued by his use of duller colour palettes and his interesting take on cropping but fascinated mostly by the vast difference between him and the artists I was researching at the time. I was very interested in Hector McDonnell and his work *Sunlight in The Private Dining Room (2015)* and Jennifer O’Connell’s *Topiary (2012)*. Two artist whose works were so vibrantly colourful, detailed and focused on the objects and liveliness within domestic interiors “The process of painting gives substance to the wordless. The daily artifacts found in the rooms we inhabit are charged with life; everyday poetry”. (O’connell, J. (n.d.). *Statement*). These major differences I now found in Tuymans work, so opposite to these two artists, is what really initiated my considerations about the associations we have with objects in domestic interiors and what can happen when they are removed. As I delved deeper into his practice, I lived for everything else Tuymans work offered/offers; mood, feeling, tension and an ability to present emptiness in ways I hadn’t seen before.

Jumping back to now, there are many reasons why I have chosen to use Tuymans as a study for this research, including his ability to create paintings that can have so little actually in them but that explode with mystery and darkness and show a deeper meaning of history without banality. I have also connected with it massively as someone who is inspired by it in general and as a viewer of his work, I appreciated the fact that I would be analysing and talking about his work from the point of view of how it's affecting me. Therefore, it is essential to find out how his work is so effective, and by doing an analysis into his work I will be able to understand how he can create the effects he does.

### 1.3- Processes

The framework that the transcendence of an artist's work lies upon is rooted in the processes an artist goes through when creating work. Tuymans work is made up of a range of processes and methods that hold the key to why his work is at the forefront of contemporary painting. Not only through the dissection of his work but through the study of artists before and inspiration he has given to artists after him, we have been able to understand so much more about Tuymans methods and the importance of them. I am going to talk through the processes that I recognise as key traits that Tuymans uses in the creation of his paintings. I have categorised them into 4 main sections, Meaning and Title, Source, Method & Placement and Display.

Meaning and Title - The 'meanings' and titles Tuymans uses to create his paintings are a large brick in the construction of his work. It is no secret the importance he puts on the rapport between the naming of the painting and the painting's overall outcome. "Tuymans has said that the meaning is always

more important than the image, and the title of a painting often provides the key for unlocking the meaning of the work” (pg.17. Tate. (2004)). Whether this meaning, title or historical reference is necessary when the painting is viewed remains undetermined for now, yes, but what I’m wanting to understand now is why and how Tuymans puts so much emphasis on it. In order to do so I will be using the example of Tuymans painting *Gaskamer (Gas Chamber 1986)*. The painting is made up of a range of brown shades merged into what seems to be walls and doors subtly pointing to some kind of room or interior. The warm colours are homely, and there is no indication in the viewers mind that this is anything but a normal room. In hearing the name, on the other hand, you are unsubtly pointed in a whole other direction. The name now making you question every corner of this painting. The colours that “was also intended to resemble skin tones”, the holes in the ceilings and the smears of brown paint that you know horrifyingly associate with what areas of a gas chamber they might be. After hearing the title of the painting, the nice thought of a warm, cosy interior is not so prominent anymore. So, it is unsurprising why this painting has been pulled in every which direction of scrutiny, an obvious thing to happen when representing a horrific event like the Holocaust. The book *Thinking through Painting* holds the chapter *Painting and Atrocity: The Tuymans Strategy*, where Peter Geimer discusses the thoughts on representations of the holocaust being allowed. “should this mean that one cannot represent the Holocaust? But to what exactly can this inability be attributed? And must one then separate history into representable and unrepresentable events?” (pg. 33, Graw, I., Birnbaum, D., Hirsch, N., & Geimer, P. (2012)). My point for bringing this up is as follows, in this sense the title Tuymans has given to the painting puts it leagues above others to be scrutinized. Could this be why he does it? Am I being naive to assume this

could be a reason for Tuymans naming his paintings and involving such horrific historical events into his paintings? To draw much more attention than what just the painting would give? Tuymans 'defence' ... "to approach the really terrible thing that cannot be depicted" (pg. 33, Graw, I., Birnbaum, D., Hirsch, N., & Geimer, P. (2012)). I am not trying to tear down Tuymans whole practice with my thoughts on his use of historical events, I merely want to understand why in the cases of Gaschamber the title seems to overshadow the painting, so what does that make Tuymans a titalist not a painter?

I considered Gaschamber to be an anomaly in the paintings of Tuymans, but it simply is not. In an interview between Tuymans and Juan Vicente Aliaga, Tuymans talks about the importance of the name of the painting 'Silent Music' towards the understanding of the picture. "The title is correct because the painting reminded me of silent music. The title itself is the heart of the image and can never be depicted: the missing image. The title is correct because the painting reminded me of silent music... but when you read the title it becomes threatening, the whole image changes" (pg. 20. Loock, U. (2003)). Again, what Tuymans is suggesting is that once the name is heard by the viewer there will be a change in the thoughts and feelings about the painting.

Source - Tuymans practice involves the use of photographic and film stills as source material and "His paintings, typically derived from pre-existing imagery including photographs and film stills, are characterised by their understated, cool appraisal of history, power and memory" (Eastham, B. (2015, August 8)). Representing news imagery and photograph to oil on Canvas has aroused question from artists and art historians such as (Peter Geimer) "Is a painting that transmits and photograph from the internet into oil on canvas automatically political, reflexive, or media critical?" (pg19 (2012)). Before

Tuymans work can be even viewed as 'art' the piece as it exists is already a remark or answer to the event it is representing. "I work from a reaction upon images that are already represented," he told me over the phone in May, "because I believe nothing is really original. But then I have to make my take on it — and figuration in that sense becomes rather abstract, because everybody can have different connotations." (Fitzpatrick, J. (2020, October 20))

There is no doubt Tuymans work is constructed on top of the backs of many other contemporary painters before him as answers to paintings problems, but it can't be forgotten that his work wouldn't exist without the photographers, reporters who take pictures of events and by the people who have lived through the events that tell their stories. His paintings don't solely exist on their own. Tuymans is reliving the history by painting from media sources. "By making individual paintings part of a larger whole in which backstory informs interpretation, these artists present fragmented visions that thematize their ineluctable contingency" (N. A. (2004)). There is a need to construct his paintings upon important subjects in order to resolve dilemmas in contemporary painting and that art doesn't represent important issues properly. There is also benefit to this though. He avoids some scrutiny by not painting from real life "thereby overcoming the modernist injunction against depiction by only depicting representation" (pg. 22 Tate. (2004). *Luc Tuymans*). It is in this that Tuymans creates the mystery that his paintings hold, because the painting can never properly be depicted therefore never properly be resolved.

Method – There are many practical measures that Tuymans takes when he is creating a new painting. "I really premeditate, so that when I start painting don't have to think about it anymore. I'm not going to think of canvas" (Fitzpatrick, J. (2020, October 20)). This is linked to the use of Tuymans

historical references, where he researches and where the bulk of his work lies. Tuymans also uses an element of speed when the actual painting is created on canvas, although there are months of preparation. “never spending more than a single session of any individual canvas” is an ideal taken by Tuymans to help keep “the intentionality in the work. Not to lose yourself in painting details, you really have to force yourself to that moment, which is quite harrowing in a sense. It is quite nervous. It is a build-up towards that one day” (Gavin, F. (2017, December 4)). The way he talks about his paintings is almost with disregard for them, not in a sense that he doesn’t care about them but in a way that says they will take care of themselves. He knows that with the research he puts into it each piece is enough to let the painting be what it needs to be when he finally comes to paint it. This process is most near to a literal thing he does that leads to a painting being made. There is no theory that must support it.

#### Placement and Display- (The seen)

*The Desire to Forget, Luc Tuymans “first full-scale solo exhibition in Italy”* Lloyd-Smith, H. (2019) held at *the* Palazzo Grassi in Venice. An exhibition where the lay out of the paintings is part of the experience the viewer has with the paintings. “Though the viewer encounters the mosaic upon arrival, they cannot really see it, not fully. They are too close already.” (Lichtzier, R. (2020)). To encounter is “to experience something”. So, does this mean when we view something were not experiencing it? or does it mean every time we view something we are encountering it? Surely every time we view a painting, we experience it in some way. Is Tuymans ability then in the way he lets us experience it? And in the way he enhances the viewing experience. A process by which Tuymans work has become so renowned is his unique way of

displaying his work so that the viewer can experience it, and even better yet experience it without them even knowing. “*La Pelle* is organized not through a chronological procession, but as a series of visual arguments” (Lichtzier, R. (2020)). This is typically the first interaction a viewer will have with a painting so in Tuymans eyes this part is just as important to anything else he is doing to create a painting. By involving the viewer in the painting Tuymans is heightening the experience, surely making the work better to view?

Viewing experience is an interesting concept to consider going forward in this essay because we have to remember that initial encounter will stick with the viewer and will always be present for any time that painting is viewed then after. As the reader of this essay, I want you to consider and remember what your initial reactions are when you view the paintings I am analysing of Luc Tuymans as a way of putting yourself in a viewing experience to understand deeper the premise of this research.

#### 1.4 Introducing the 4 paintings I will be analysing & unpicking materials and techniques

In this chapter, I have selected 4 paintings by Luc Tuymans. I will be unpicking each painting to find the materials and techniques used in their creation. In order to analyse the paintings consistently, I will be categorising the materials and techniques into 5 areas; Colour; Subject; Cropping and Point of View; Chiaroscuro; Mistakes and Painting Style. I will be talking about the paintings collectively to highlight their similarities but also separately when necessary. I will be using *The Weird and the Eerie* by Mark Fisher (2016) in order to theorise my observations of Tuymans work with the effects of eeriness, atmosphere and the unknown in order to understand if my observations meet the stipulations of what is regarded as the eerie.

I will begin by introducing the 4 paintings, with photo reference. *Ceiling* (1992), *Blacklight* (1994), *Interior Nr III* (2010) & *Silent Music* (1993).





Figure 1) Ceiling (Tuymans, L. (1992). Ceiling In Loock, U., Aliaga, J . V., Spector, N., & Reust, H . R. (2003). *Luc Tuymans* (p.78). Phaidon Press).



Figure 2) Blacklight (Tuymans, L. (1994). Blacklight In Loock, U., Aliaga, J . V., Spector, N., & Reust, H . R. (2003). *Luc Tuymans* (p.85). Phaidon Press).



Figure 3) Interior Nr III (Tuymans, L (2010). *Interior Nr III* Art Observed).



Figure 4) Silent Music (Tuymans, L. (1993). Silent Music In Loock, U., Aliaga, J . V., Spector, N., & Reust, H . R. (2003). *Luc Tuymans* (p.18). Phaidon Press).

Firstly, it is important for me to explain the reason for picking these four paintings over the many others by Luc Tuymans. The way I selected the 4 paintings was through the affect they had on me. I felt that importantly there had to be an initial 'feeling' that I got when I first viewed the painting, mainly a feeling that made me question the painting, questions such as... what was going on? Why is the room and furniture set up in that specific way? why does the room feel so empty when it's so full of objects? Etc. These questions have become an indication to me of the atmospheric, the eerie and the unknown. I can recognise that if an artwork is making me question such things, then it must be doing something to provoke the unordinary. Upon closer inspection of the paintings, I had chosen (even though each painting was of vast difference) I began to see many similarities within them. The absence of any living person or people, the adjacently placed objects that reflect a lived-in room with special mention to the empty chairs in most of the paintings and the deadened colour palettes and shadows. This was a confirmation of crucially what Tuymans work does and why it felt important for me to understand it more. By having paintings that are so different in so many ways, yet all hold this similar aura about them, there must be something that Tuymans is doing within his paintings that all leads to the same effects.

While there are obviously a lot of very well-known paintings by Tuymans, I also wanted to pick some of his 'lesser' known works as I felt this could help with looking at the from a fresher perspective.

All the paintings I have chosen are oil on canvas. Ceiling 1992 (43 x 34,5 cm), Blacklight 1994 (55 x 82 cm), Interior Nr III 2010 (235 x 233 cm), Silent Music 1993 (83 x 70 cm).

I have already talked about how Luc Tuymans uses of different source materials as a basis to his painting practice. “Tuymans sources popular media and news imagery, utilizing it to inspire his paintings both in subject matter, and techniques” (The Art Story. (n.d.). *Luc Tuymans*). Whether this meaning or historical reference is necessary when the painting is viewed remains undetermined, but for the purpose of constructing our list of Tuymans materials and techniques I wanted to outline the meanings behind the creation of the 4 paintings that I am analysing now. By knowing what sort of sources and reasonings Tuymans had when painting we can start to understand whether the underlining topics of death, violence and grief are necessary in creating an atmospheric painting or whether it can be done through the materials and techniques alone.

Blacklight (1994) – Blacklight was created as part of an exhibition ‘At Random’ in 1994. An exhibition that “included a number of works whose exceptional quality lay in a new kind of light: television light (pg.82 Loock, U. (2003)). The theme throughout this set of paintings was to do with the use of light within a painting and whether it is always known where the light source is coming from “Sometimes light is indicated by shadows, rather than painted as itself”. (pg.82 Loock, U. (2003)).

Interior Nr III (2010) – Interior Nr III was created as part on an exhibition in Belgian named *The Twenty Seventh of January Two Thousand and Eleven*. “the artist’s new works explore the use of light as a claustrophobic element in indoor intimate domestic spaces” (Proctor, R.A. (2011)). Originally taken as a photograph and painted from, the paintings in the exhibition deal with the space within interiors that is created in the taking of a picture, it “explore the

use of light as a claustrophobic element in indoor intimate domestic spaces”.  
(Art Observed. (2011)).

Silent Music (1993) – The reasoning for the creation of this painting isn’t known. Although there is a lot of talk about what the picture represents and displays. It has been referred to by (Tate. (2004). *Luc Tuymans*) “more like a prison than a place of play” (pg. 24) which begins our thoughts on what it is. But Tuymans himself refers to it as “a sort of universal kid’s room, turned into a prison cell” (pg. 20 L, Tuymans. (2003). *Luc Tuymans*) indicating it wasn’t painted as a cell but through the effects I will shortly talk about it gives of an eerie feeling like a prison cell would.

Ceiling (1992) – Another painting which the origin of is lost. Ceiling lacks much word said on it at all, yet I find the painting so powerful in the creation of atmosphere. I will attempt to pick out the effects created in this painting through space, colour and the prominent lines and brush strokes in it.

## **Colour**

When applying ‘dark’ topics to a painting such as death, sorrow and grief do we instinctively pick up a dark colour to try and reflect it? Or is it something we choose to do? A symbolic approach to painting suggests “Black has a wide range of associations. It can be linked with death, mourning, evil magic and darkness” (Bass-Krueger, M. (n.d.)). If we refer to images 1, 3 & 4 we can see that mainly light, warm colours are used. So, if typically, we associate eeriness and spookiness to dark colours, then we must ask ourselves how is it that Tuymans still uses colour effectively to create atmosphere when using lighter and brighter coloured paint? Well, in the case of 1,3 &4 it is through tone and value. A washed-out colour pallet is somewhat of a staple of Tuymans

“Tuymans art have been well-rehearsed in the ever-growing literature on the artist - including his distinctively crude rendering, his chalky palette and limited chromatic range”, (N. A. (2004)). By using washed out colours, the effect and texture is completely changed from if we were using bright colours. If we look at image 3, the painting has an almost grainy, blurred covering. There isn't much detail in its features either. There is a sort of misty fog over the painting, it gives it an impression as if it's been taken on an old camera and the smoke from the capturing of it has covered the lens. The highlighted arms of the chair that are almost bright white add to this idea of an old cameras flash going off. These effects on the painting gives it moodiness as it dims the contrast and vibrancy of the colours, and the graininess is reminiscent of an old horror film, like it was taken from a scene in *The Shining*. By “Using a restricted palette of eerily bleached-out colours and giving his paintings an apparently aged, cracked patina, he imbues everyday objects with a sense of impending menace, hinting at the terrors that lurk beneath the surface of everyday life” (back page. Tate. (2004)). This is interesting as Tuymans often incorporates his years as a filmmaker into his more recent paintings. “The function of the close-up, the framing and other visual principles, which the artists appropriated from cinema, is remarkable. Tuymans used to make films and the storyboard – like drawings such as *Lift* (1980) demonstrate his cinematographic point of view. The impact this has in Tuymans painting” (Villarreal, J . artdaily. (n.d.)). By using this signature dull colour palette, in unison with a washed-out application Tuymans is already creating a mood and atmosphere before even considering what's in the actual interior.

Turning our attention to image 4, colour theory suggests a range of ideas for what pink and blue colours might mean when put together. When we see the colours pink and blue together our mind is naturally drawn to think children,



specifically, the gender... girl or boy, as typically these colours are used to represent the birth of a boy or girl at a baby shower or gender reveal party. "The bed in unmade; the chair empty; the cupboard closed. The light source is unclear. You have the sense that you're peering in through an open door. And pink and blue are typically children's colours, for a child's room that someone else has prepared for you. In that sense is horrific". (pg. 20. Loock, U. (2003)). Through this over exaggeration of defining gender by two colours they have naturally become opposites. Not just in terms of whether they go together but literally through the symbol of boy or girl that they represent. By using these two colours next to each other, there a slightly unrestful, unpleasantry created in the painting. "Tuymans used colours that could be initially conceived of as cosy, but with minor alterations he transformed the mood into one of abandonment and melancholy, which creates an atmosphere of absence". (Stedelijk Museum. (n.d.)). Tuymans so cleverly uses colour is such a way to manipulate what we see in the painting, my point being is that the viewers eyes don't settle within the room because there isn't the restful feeling of cosiness, this comes from opposition of colour. It is almost so obvious it becomes subtle.

## **Subject**

Vanitas is a genre of painting known for the representation of life and the inevitability of death, it's "A type of still-life picture depicting an object or collection of objects symbolizing the brevity of life and the transience of all earthly pleasures and achievements". (Chilvers, I. (2015)) and could be an interesting concept to help us understand the furniture and placement In Tuymans work. It suggests that certain objects in a painting represent something, some of life and some of death. "An extinguished candle, an empty

glass, a watch and a skull. This is not a random collection of objects. Each piece serves as a *momento mori*, a reminder of death". (Konst, E. (2017, September 26)0. While Tuymans paintings may not have these specific objects, some, no objects at all, we can still use this premise that the subject is key for determining what is going on in the painting. A crucial object and similarity of the 4 paintings is the uninhabited chair that sits facing the viewer. The positioning of the chair acts as an invitation into the painting, pulling the viewer inside the room as though they are sat in it, an immediate interaction with the viewer. The lone chair kind of reminds me of a rocking chair in a horror movie that would creepily move on its own or an empty seat at the dinner table when someone has died. While viewing the room considerations appear for why its empty and why no one is sat in it, this creates "curiosity cabinet and the still life. Both are strongly characterised by the absence of the human figure. In the representation of a cabinet of curiosities, the presence of the human figure was seen as undermining and subverting any attempt to inventory the unknown. Such a figure would amount an intrusion of the familiar, the known, in a space devoted to the strange." (pg. 116. Fuenmayor, J. (2004)). There is a lot to be said about the removal of a human figure in a painting, especially in a room or interior where you are led to assume someone lives there. "The eerie, by contrast, is constituted by a failure of absence or by a failure of presence"" (pg.61. Fisher, M. (2016)). Most of Tuymans paintings of interiors don't have any human figures and only *Blacklight* (image 2) out of the 4 paintings I have chosen contains a figure (or the a representation of a body/ figure) "Blacklight contains the only nude, a corpse, barely distinguishable from the rest of the furnishings depicted; the body becomes an object among so many others in the room" (pg.18) Its slightly hard to recognise at first glance but quite noticeable once seen. The setting of this painting is really disturbing,

a dead naked figure lies on the sofa, illuminated only by the tv that is still on. The eeriness in the photo comes from the idea that there is a naked corpse on the sofa, yes, but without knowing this that eeriness is already present just by there being a naked body lay in darkness. This painting still doesn't present a life of a person in a happy, loving home.

In image 4, specifically, we are filled with question surrounding the placement of the furniture, not just the empty chair but the extremely empty table and desk, and the bed with barrier supports on its sides which suggest some sort of hospital or care home bed. If the painting is empty of belongings and is also suggested to be some sort of hospital room, immediately the impression of life to death is there. "Anything banal can be transformed into horror" (pg.20. Loock, U. (2003)0. Its menacing that Tuymans has the ability to create eeriness, with or without the need for a corpse in the room. By so cleverly angling the furniture in certain ways he creates a balance between a room that looks lived in, yet shows no sign of life or presence. "The sensation of the eerie occurs either when there is something present where there should be nothing, or is there is nothing present when there should be something" (pg.61. Fisher, M. (2016)).

### **Cropping & Point of View**

Domestic interiors aren't typically considered atmospheric, eerie or have a sense of the unknown. We associate homeliness, and warmth with living rooms and homes "Happiness; home; warmth; light. The domestic interior in paintings is a charmed place." (Borzello, F. (2007) pg. 10). When we think about our own domestic interiors and the things that make us feel at home and comfortable, we often associate it with the objects and people in them. The coffee table with a coaster where you put your drink after a long day at

work or the family portrait that hangs on the wall. So, what happens when we take this away? Well surely, it's the feeling of emptiness. In image no1 *Ceiling*, Tuymans complete eradication of any resemblance of life in a home is so powerful for the creation of atmosphere. By cropping areas of a painting out, we are unable to even identify the dark rectangle in the bottom of the painting. Through Tuymans cropping technique we wouldn't even be sure what the painting was of, potentially a box? Or a corner of a room? Through the moments of uncertainty about what a painting is of is where we discover the eeriness and atmosphere that Tuymans work creates. The name 'ceiling' gives us a clear idea of what the painting is of yet knowing the name we are 1) still unaware of what the actual room is and 2) now even more concerned with the point of view. What is so horrifying within the room than it needed to be completely cropped out of sight? "The eerie concerns the unknown; when knowledge is achieved, the eerie disappears". (pg62. Fisher, M. (2016)) In the case of *ceiling* (image 1) the only knowledge we gain that could make it known what is going on is knowing the title of the painting but as I said, this knowledge only leads us further into question and concern.

Typically cropping could be used to elevate a painting, it can be used to centralise the main feature, cut off parts to make the painting say more than it does as a whole or just to get rid of 'boring' areas. But Tuymans uses it in a much cleverer way, almost opposite to this, he typically doesn't make the objects in the photos very central and often takes away key identifiers for what the interior is. Again, leaving us guessing more and more. These constant feelings of question are permanent throughout Tuymans work.

**Chiaroscuro** "light-dark and refers to the balance and pattern of light and shade in a painting or drawing" (Tate. (2021)).

When talking about shadow and light I want to firstly talk about image 2, *Blacklight*, as it's the main painting of the 4 where the darkness and shadow within the painting is such a key feature. Only when we look at the picture closely, behind the dimmed light and washy effect we can begin to pick out objects and features within the painting. A Tv, a lone chair which faces the viewer, a table with a lamp and lastly a sofa which is inhabited by a naked body lying face down. We can begin to answer questions in this painting because of the darkness of the room. The question creates suspense so "the eerie necessarily involves forms of speculation and suspense" (pg. 62 Fisher, M. (2016)). We can assume both the TV and lamp are turned off because the absence of glare from them both. We can also assume that it is night-time, purely though the lack of sunlight. The body, however, isn't distinguishable to be anything other than a body, dead or alive. As "Blacklight 1994 contains the only nude, a corpse, barely distinguishable from the rest of the furnishings depicted; the body becomes an object among so many others in the room" (pg. 18 Loock, U. (2003)). Is it in the knowing of the body being a corpse that creates the over whelming spookiness in the painting? Or is it more in the idea that the body is just merely in the room, hidden within all of the other objects as if the life of the person is as worthless as a TV or lamp. It is in deciding what actually it is about the painting that makes it feel eerie and spooky that we can decide exactly how Tuymans creates the effects he does.

Another technique in which Tuymans uses shadow and light to create the feeling of the unknown within the paintings is the complete blacking out of certain areas. Used in the doorway in image 3 and under the bed in image 4. I have considered a lot about the power of this in works by other artists such as Vilhelm Hammershoi who works consist of hallow rooms from his Copenhagen apartment that are occupied by his wife Ida, objects, doorways, hallways and

windows. I want to focus on the doorways and windows, which, hides or unlocks the key to the outside world that the paintings sit in and the power they hold. “Imparting the sense of a continuous hall of rooms with no exit, leading to more windows and more doors” (Almino, E.W. (2015)). Through the feeling of continuous doorways, or doorways that can’t be seen through there is an unsettling feeling of something that isn’t finished, like the painting it’s completed somehow. The continuation of the rooms will remain on going for as long as the painting lives. In Image 4, where the doorway is blacked out the feeling of the unknown is made by quite literally not knowing what is through the door. There isn’t even a hint at the door leading anywhere because of the total darkness “the eerie, and once the questions and enigmas are resolved, the eerie immediately dissipates” (pg. 62 Fisher, M. (2016)).

### **Mistakes and Painting style**

Allowing for mistakes is something that happens naturally in Tuymans work-through his abstract style. Already confessing to the speed in which he completes his paintings, there is room for error which is somewhat encouraged in the brushstrokes and painting style he uses “and undermining the very idea of technical expertise by highlighting “clumsy” brushwork – Tuymans has pointed toward new ways of working from photographic sources that do not rely on dated ideologically laden ideas of craft and skill”. (Kantor, J. (2004, November)). In ceiling specifically, a clear lack of precise brushwork and care is seen in the overflowing of paint in the lines, the thick layering of paint which has meant the grooves where the brush has laid can be seen and the wonkiness of the ceiling and object in the bottom middle. In an article (Kantor, J) talk about the similarities to Tuymans and Wilhelm Sasnal stating “both painters do deploy the aesthetic of technical failure as a way to thematize the

situation of painting today” (2004, November), It’s a metaphor for a situation so although Tuymans speed, and lack of precision is far away from being done to support my theories of creating atmosphere in a painting there is still a lot to be said for how this happens naturally in the way he paints. Within the messy brushwork and untidy lines there lies a feeling of chaos. It’s almost as if there’s no need for it to look well put together because what is being represented is already messy and chaotic. It draws a lot of unease into the painting. By “confronting them with highly-traumatic themes or narratives: (L, Tuymans.) Even states that it’s not about the aesthetics ‘Most of my work,’ Tuymans has said, ‘could at first look clumsy, deprived of aesthetic elements. I am not interested in aesthetics; I am into meaning and necessity’”.

Something I want to consider is the use of mistakes within paintings and how they change or create something new within Tuymans paintings. Not necessarily mistakes that can’t be helped but what can happen when we allow or encourage them. In the book *The Love of Painting* by Isabelle Graw there is a conversation between her and Wade Guyton (“contemporary American artist known for his black monochrome inkjet-printed paintings. Guyton’s work is formal in nature and can be seen as a visitation of Modernist ideals bracketed within the questions and issues of digital reproduction and the history of appropriation art practices.) The conversation diverts into a discussion on whether mistakes are necessary and what happens within the insertion of them, asking “Couldn’t one say that it’s here, in the mistake, where we sense something like a residual human decision or activity?” (Graw, I. (2018)). The mistake being present allows us to identify the realness within the painting. If we refer this back to Tuymans, by allowing the brush to create ‘mistakes’ it becomes a method for painting, so it becomes purpose, therefore eradicating it as a mistake. What I want to understand is whether a mistake is every really

there in painting because surely if it was gotten rid of, we wouldn't see it anyway?

### 1.5– Summary of the analysis of Tuymans paintings

In this chapter I am going to be gathering my findings. For each area of Tuymans processes, materials and techniques I will summarise my thoughts into a short paragraph. Deciding its effectiveness as its own method for creating the effects of atmosphere and eeriness in his paintings. I will also draw back onto the relation between Tuymans work and my own painting practice. At the end of this chapter, I will be using the list of processes, materials and techniques to create a painting that holds aspects of each one of Tuymans methods.

#### Processes

Meaning & Title – Tuymans indicates the importance he puts on the meaning and title he gives to a painting; he tends to place it above visual aspects stating, “The title sometimes is more important than the image itself” (pg. 25 J, Alaiga (2003). *Luc Tuymans*). I see this in his work because of the amount of research and study that goes into finding source material that is sometimes needed to create the titles. The perception of a painting is changed once you know the title or meaning behind one of Tuymans paintings, but we must remember before we know this, we still have thoughts and feeling towards a painting purely based on viewing it, it can't possibly be necessary for the meaning to be the only importance within a painting nor needed to give the painting validation. It is important to remember this as a key process for Tuymans though because there is a huge amount of Tuymans work that was been recognised because of the titles.



A painting can't purely be made up of just an intended meaning and title. The 'backstory' of a painting isn't just the history it's trying to portray it equally lives within the choice of canvas, the angle its painted at, the type of brush used to paint with or the colour of the paint. The importance of my research sits within this, because yes, although the 'meaning' and title is a huge factor of Tuymans work it's not always necessary because 1) atmosphere and eeriness is already seen in his work before hearing the name of his paintings and 2) in my own painting practice I have not reached a stage where I name my own paintings and they still exhibit the effects of eeriness and atmosphere.

Within my own practice I have tried to understand affect. The way a painting can affect a viewer through the way its exhibited and viewed. This is where Tuymans meaning and title section could prove most valuable because there is a lot to be said for the affect had when you hear the title or meaning of one of Tuymans pieces, the change is feeling or mood for knowing the underlying message in some of his work.

Source – By using existing imagery, Tuymans work isn't subjected to the same type of scrutiny than that of an artist that paints directly from objects. In drawing his research from history, media and films then painting from it, his work is a representation of much more than just a domestic interior or a bowl of fruit. He has made a practice that turns everyday normality into something we can't quite understand or comprehend because nothing is what it seems "are we looking at a painting of a real person or a painting of a photograph or a painting of a model of a person? Is the painting to be believed in or is it part of some elaborate and self-referencing sham? Paintings of stills taken from television or films, such as *Animation 2002* or *Blessing 1996*, which are blurred, indistinct and ambiguous, ensure we never know what we're looking at" (pg.

23 Tate. (2004). *Luc Tuymans*). In representing history, death and violence in everyday objects Tuymans ensures we are never 100% sure of what we are looking at and what we are meant to feel or think about it. It ensures a level of uncertainty into every painting he creates because even the most 'normal' painting could be representing something much darker. I haven't delved into much social, historical or political source within my own practice as its not something that concerned the way I was making paintings. Again, like title and meaning, source could come under a process that is used to create affect over effect. Its literal application doesn't create atmosphere or eeriness because most of the time the source is unknown, but in a viewer knowing that a painting is about the holocaust, for example, they may be affected differently.

Method – This process concerns the practical, how he literally applies paint to canvas. It's less about thought and more about execution. It's a very strict schedule of speed and premeditation. In developing a certain method for how he paints, he ensures a certain level of consistency throughout his paintings. Even though most of his paintings differ in subject, colour and meaning there is still a sort of aura or distinction that is carried throughout all his paintings that make them so recognisable as Tuymans. He can create mood and feeling through the ways he paints "He moves backwards and forwards between very different types of material, all of which have different moods attached to them' (pg. 16 (2003). *Luc Tuymans*). In this research, I have begun to unpick a lot of his key traits for how he paints but I am defiantly not at the bottom of understanding what it is about his paintings that make them so unordinary and profound. This method for painting can only exist with the other processes (the source materials and meaning) being prominent.

It's interesting to compare my own painting practice to this process of his because I would use the same idea that the paint will naturally come onto surface once the preparation has been done. However, Tuymans meanings, titles and sources are more prominent to the creation of his work than the importance I would put on them in my own practice. The method is defiantly something I recognise as important for creating paintings in Tuymans practice and my own and is needed but isn't direct in the creation of atmosphere and eeriness as such.

Placement and Display – Tuymans uses exhibitions, placement and the display of his work to interact with the viewer in different ways. His work is about memory and human ignorance. It is personal to him, and he wants it to personally affect. It concerns “how his images are activated by both individual experience and the collective unconscious” (Fitzpatrick, J. (2020, October 20)). As an artist I want to create paintings that will invoke question and feeling. In terms of affect I put a great deal of importance on how a painting is displayed, exhibited and viewed because it can really change how a painting affects the viewer. To create the atmosphere and eeriness through this process there needs to be a focus on what can be done with placement and display that would create it, something I haven't had chance to unravel quite yet.

### Materials and Techniques

Colour – The dull, washed-out colour palette that Tuymans uses is a crucial attribute to all of his paintings. There is an unease that comes in the many ways he uses colour in his paintings. The unease comes in the colours that don't quite sit right together, sometimes without explanation as to why, “by definition the uncanny is almost impossible to explain succinctly, as the concept oscillates between two opposites which are nevertheless deeply

related and interconnected” (pg. 25. Tate. (2004). *Luc Tuymans*). It is in the bright, warm colours that are representing a horrific historical event that doesn't quite feel allowed and it's in the colours that does hold much pigment giving them a hallow eerie feel. “Similar use of monochromatic color schemes and both create hallowing, eerie portraits” (Spilliaert, L. (2012)). It is prominent, and key in the creation of eeriness in his paintings as the range of colour is endless, meaning the mystery and question is too. In my own practice I found that using the dark often cool colours especially Paynes Grey was a good way to represent shadow and emptiness in my paintings but from this analysis of Tuymans colour palette I really recognise that colour can be used so much more representationally as appose too literally. The muting and dulling of bright colours are what is key for Tuymans in creating atmosphere and eeriness because of how unsettling they can be or how they can lead the viewer to thinking about what the interior might be etc.

Subject – There is a common theme throughout many of Tuymans paintings and that is the use of subject placement for example the empty furniture, namely, the empty chairs. The careful placement of the chair that points outwards or towards the viewer instead of being positioned under a table or desk gives the impression that the chair has been recently sat on. This creates an eerie feeling because it makes you wonder why the chair is now empty when it looks moved or sat on at one point. Its “because the most ordinary objects and interiors nevertheless seem to have a threatening aspect” (pg. 24 Tate. (2004). *Luc Tuymans*) and the use of every day, banal objects that hide the terror of something else. It is in this we feel more haunted because it is within everything that surrounds us daily. It is in the normal objects, to “disguise an aesthetically pleasing object, thereby making the revelation of the horror embedded within it more powerful by its virtue of its seductively

normalised appearance and context” (pg. 26 Tate. (2004). *Luc Tuymans*) that is key for creating atmosphere, eeriness and the unknown within Tuymans paintings. There is a lot to be said for the choice of object that is the subject of a painting. I have found within my own practice this use of chairs, mirrors, slightly ajar doors and unattended objects evokes such question. It’s in the objects and furniture that looks like they have been used once but aren’t quite being used anymore that are the most prominent features of Tuymans work that create atmosphere and eeriness best.

Cropping & Point of View – Cropping is a staple feature in Tuymans work. The displacement of a painting comes from the uneven cropping Tuymans uses. There is a ‘not quite right’ kind of feeling when something is off centre. He has understood the reasonings for cropping being used in news imagery “Apparently it’s the cropping of the photograph, which still is questionable because a lot of newspaper photographs are cropped according to layout” (Farago, J. (n.d.)). and he has exploited this in his work by realising the question can come from that, the elimination of answers by eliminating parts of the photo and objects. (L, Tuymans) has said “when the image is finished, I just paint a white ribbon around it to focus it” as a way of cropping it, this alters the size and finish of the painting”. (pg. 26 (2003). *Luc Tuymans*). He states that when the painting is framed and cropped “the visibility drops and a kind of gloominess appears on the painting” (pg. 26 (2003). *Luc Tuymans*). The framing of the painting puts it from reality into its own dimension and space. This interior now forever lives within the painting, which is quite morbid to think about. The power I have felt when cropping within my own practice is immense because you have the capacity to decide what the viewer does or doesn’t see. You can change what the viewer might think the painting is of, create an uneasy feeling through a uncentred painting or change the way a

space is represented. In Tuymans paintings the atmosphere and eeriness are heavily held accountable to the cropping because how much of the unknown the viewer is in.

Chiaroscuro – Tuymans uses chiaroscuro well in his paintings. It is a staple in his work “The notion of contrast, of outline and shadow, is very significant in my work”. He again creates these questions about what is going on by making it unclear where and what the light source is and where its coming from. The idea of weirdly placed light sources is quite ghostly, lights that illuminate out of nowhere, as we see specifically in *Blacklight* where there is an unknown light source lowly lighting up the dead corpse on the sofa. It’s all a metaphor for what we don’t really understand and our ignorance to the history and world we live in “lights which emit no light, illuminate nothing; metaphorically speaking, they are signs of enlightenment” (pg. 82 (2003). *Luc Tuymans*). The objects in Tuymans paintings are the key for answering the questions his works presents, but the Chiaroscuro is there to help us highlight and decide what objects we need to look at. I am repeatedly drawn to the shadow in paintings and exhibit this heavily in my own practice. I choose to take source material that has heavily shadowed areas in it as well as painting in colours that are representative of shadows. There is something so eerie and haunting that lies within a dark because we can’t see, again leaving us in the unknown which creates the eeriness and atmosphere.

Mistakes and Painting Style – Tuymans has a specific method to how he paints, he “paints each one in a single day” (Farago, J. (n.d.)) so its not shock that his brushwork and lines aren’t exactly neat. This leaves the painting looking uncared for, (Aliaga, J) asks “I have the impression that you paint in a half-hearted way, as though you do not want to make it precious. Some of your

paintings can even look shoddy” (Tuymans, L. (1993)). By doing this the effects of eeriness and atmosphere are created because what is left is an unfinished type of presence. It creates the atmosphere as if there is something waiting to happen within the painting. It is in the suspense, the waiting, the mystery. Its all there we just have to find it. (L, Tuymans. (2003). *Luc Tuymans*) says "I am not interested in aesthetics; I am into meaning and necessity". He is saying the painting itself isn't the finished product, it's in the interpretation and viewing that matters to Tuymans. If the painting is too perfectly painted it loses these crucial aspects. Within my own painting practice, I have experimented with both realistic 'neatly' painted work and a style of painting that is like Tuymans with very messy lines and this idea that I allowed for mistakes. The outcome of the paintings really differs, I have found that each style allows me to focus more on different aspects. The neater style paint allowing me to focus on the depth of shadow and light and the defining of the objects within the painting. Yet using a messy, fast brushed technique I am left with an unfinished looking painting much like Tuymans. Often leaving spaces of the surface uncovered with paint, creating a depth within the painting you don't get in the neatly painted one. Much like Tuymans that unfinished look creates a lingering suspense and presence within the painting.

### 1.6– The Painting



I have created a painting using the range of aspects that I have spent this essay unpicking and analysing. In the creation of the painting, I did take into consideration my own processes as an artist while using the materials and techniques Tuymans uses in the creation of his paintings. This work is an



interpretation of Tuymans work to allow me to test out the methods I have spent the essay discovering. The painting is done using oil paint onto canvas which is the same as most of Tuymans paintings and is on canvas that is 50cm x 60cm, so is a size similar to the 4 paintings that I analysed. I wanted to include a similar surface as I thought it would help me get more of a feel for being Tuymans when he was creating his pieces.

Colour- The colour scheme I used seems quite similar to Tuymans painting *Silent Music* and *Interior Nr III*. The colour wasn't intended to be a retake on either but to be effective in the same way. I used only 4 oil paints (Zinc White, Paynes Grey, Ivory & Rouge) which I mixed to create different shades. Using a grey colour mixed into the other colours gives the effect of a shadowy, murky hue to the painting like Tuymans paintings. It was important to incorporate colour into my painting instead of using a monochrome palette (like in my own practice) because of how much I have expressed the effectiveness of using different colours, especially bright ones in creating atmosphere and eeriness even when representing themes of death and horror. Through the colours I chose, the painting has a similar feel already to it. There is that aspect of question through the colour palette that doesn't particularly go with each other. There is a feeling of eeriness that creeps in through the dark hollowed doorway that's just sat next to the nice pink walls, much like Tuymans work it's meant to unlock an uneasiness within the viewer. The colour was successful in creating a feeling of atmosphere and eeriness within the painting.

Chiaroscuro- It was important for me to have a doorway or opening in the painting that I could fill with dark shadow. In the works of Luc Tuymans and Vilhelm Hammershoi this is a keyway for creating an eerie feeling because of the literal unknown that sits within the painting so blatantly. The contrast of

the bright walls and pink colours to the dark doorway that sits right next to them, doesn't quite feel balanced or well placed. The dark, hollow space is spooky, its quite obviously leading us out of the photo with no where to go. Its representative of some kind of black hole, never ending but never beginning. This placement of a dark area or shadow is an effective way to create eeriness immediately in a painting.

The shadow of the chair leaning on the piano is really effective for creating an atmosphere, much like in Figure 4 (Silent Music) because it kind of gives the impression of a bright light shining on the object out of nowhere, again highlighting the empty chair making it so prominent as if the viewer must know it's now empty. Which then makes the viewer question why its empty.

Subject- When deciding what I was going to paint, I used the same processes that I do in my own painting practice. Taking photos in my own domestic interiors, cropping and then editing. I wanted the painting to be of an ordinary, domestic interior. I felt it was necessary to include a chair into the painting as it's a key feature in all 4 paintings and in the work of Tuymans in general. The chair placed in a direction that didn't seem settled, as if someone had just got up from it. The chair is also placed in front an old piano, but not tucked underneath it, this in an attempt to show that someone had recently (or not so recently) gotten up or left, this absence of the human figure was key to the eeriness being created because of the question that remains, where did they go? Much like in all Tuymans paintings that I have analysed. Using objects that are empty or seem once used is a way we can create atmosphere and eeriness in paintings of domestic interiors.

Painting style and Mistakes – The main feature of Tuymans painting style I wanted to incorporate was being able to see the brushstrokes and uneven

lines within the painting. I have achieved this by layering the paint thickly and using a stiffer brush to apply it. There is that lack of aesthetic quality that lies within Tuymans work, it looks almost unfinished or like it needs a touch up with a paint brush. I have achieved this similar outcome to the 4 works of Tuymans that I have analysed. I have achieved the unknown quality that is prominent in Tuymans work because the painting looks unfinished. Within this painting, after testing out this technique I am not sure how effective this technique is for literally creating atmosphere and eeriness, it doesn't come through as easy as it does in other techniques such as colour and doesn't give me the same suspense as I get in other paintings of Tuymans and my own. This could be down to me trying to create the unfinished look and trying to promote the mistakes over letting them happen naturally.

Cropping – I have used cropping in a similar way to Tuymnas, as a way to cut out much of what is going on in the painting. There's no indication of what kind of room this is, leaving as much question there can be with a doorway, piano and chair remaining. I am using cropping cleverly to minimise space; it has closed the painting to just a few aspects which increases the unknown because the viewer can only consider these three aspects to try and discover what the room is, if anything. The atmosphere and eeriness are created through the abandoning of the rest of the room, because it makes the viewer question.

## **Conclusion**

In this research project I have attempted to see how it is possible to use material process and technique to create distinctive effects in paintings. I have undertaken this by doing a close visual analysis of the painting practice of Luc Tuymans. Attempting to pick out key processes and techniques that Tuymans uses to create atmosphere, eeriness and the unknown in 4 paintings of

domestic interiors. I have then used my own painting practice and processes to create a painting that reflects the research I have gathered on Tuymans paintings in order to see if my painting can display the same effects.

Firstly, I want to reflect on the method that I used to analyse Tuymans work as this was a crucial part of the structure of the research. I felt it necessary to break Tuymans practice into the two sections of processes and materials/techniques because they are both very different areas of his practice and I wanted to see if they were equal to the successes in his work. In terms of Tuymans processes, this concerns everything pre-painting, the history, the media, the research, the personal, the meaning and everything in between. The material and techniques concern the physical painting and then everything after. Splitting them into two sections was a successful method because it gave me an opportunity to think about his paintings in terms of their background and meaning without materials and techniques being involved but then also being able to look at 4 specific paintings and only think about the materials and techniques without process. This allowed me to see the effects of atmosphere, eeriness and the unknown emerged when it was only materials and techniques involved. However, in terms of Tuymans it's potentially not that simple because he isn't just a painter, his paintings only exist from the years of history and research that they sit upon so there is no way for me to conclusively say that his paintings are atmospheric for only the reason of either materials and techniques.

The basis of Tuymans work naturally falls into the realms of the atmospheric, the eerie and the unknown because his work is made up of history that involves death, violence and horror meaning it already has these influences of what we would determine as spooky. Tuymans places so much importance on

meaning and title. This shows through him being able to paint aesthetically pleasing objects, and ordinary scenes and rooms and still have them be perceived as eerie. Through analysing Tuymans work in terms of the eerie, I have begun to see more and more that the atmospheric, the eerie and the unknown exist within everything that we experience in our day to day lives. In the empty chair that sits vacant in a living room, in the dark shadow that lurks under a bed or in the picture that hangs on a dull painted wall. His work and the viewing experiences of his work highlights crucially how we can't quite be sure of anything in life or in painting.

What is key within Tuymans work and what has made him such a key subject for this research project is in the wonder and question that his work provokes. The direct affect his work has had on me has been question without answer. Within every process, material and techniques I have analysed it comes down to this one thing, why? And essentially this is what is creating that atmosphere and eeriness because the unknown is, well, the unknown. Its unsettling and uncertain and the uncertainty of anything is the key to complete destruction of our own reality and with every moment we experience Tuymans paintings we slip furfur into this realm of the unknown.

I couldn't possibly conclude this research here. In order to find out whether the atmospheric, eerie and unknown can be created purely through materials and techniques the research would have to extend further into the research of other artists, potentially artists who don't concern half of their practice on the importance of meaning. As well as using my own practice to really grasp if the materials and techniques were consistent throughout for creating effects. What I can say is that materialistic process, and techniques can prominently

affect a painting in so many ways. It has the ability to provoke thought and feeling and make us question the ordinary.

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