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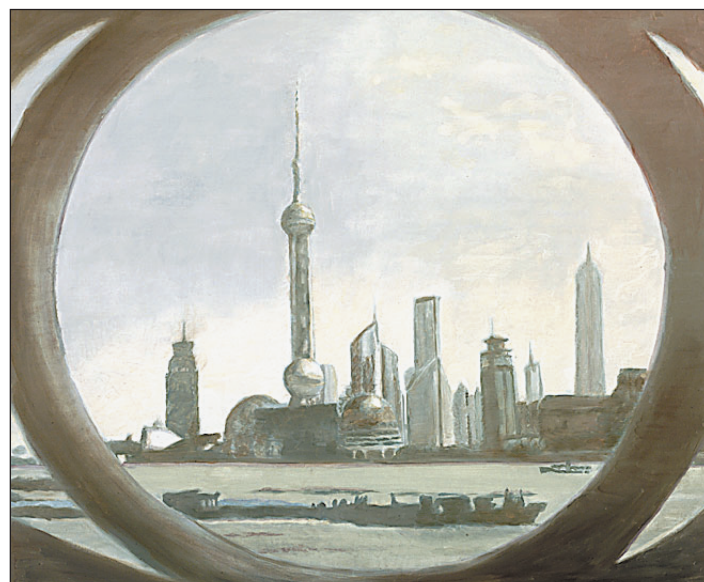
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The Arts



A muted palette helps to strip away the romanticism of Shanghai's gleaming skyscrapers in Luc Tuymans's Morning Sun

Grey-tinted spectacles

LUC Tuymans, who is in his mid-forties, is the most important European painter of his generation. His deadpan style and engagement with his subject matter, ranging from the banality of domestic objects to the Nazi death camps, has wrought enormous influence over younger artists — especially in Britain and Germany.

In his first major retrospective in the UK, some 70 works appear to be haphazardly displayed, eschewing the logic of either chronology or theme. Images that carry with them the expectation of significance — such as Gaskamer, of a gas chamber, or Navy Seals, which copies a television image of American troops victoriously relaxing in one of Saddam Hussein's palaces — hang beside representations of door handles, simple portraits and casually abstract studies.

The juxtaposition is deliberate, though, as is the deadening mutedness of Tuymans's palette and the general quickness and lightness of his painting. It strips away all romanticism and cruelly mimics the operation of human memory and thought, in which the quotidian and the profound sit side by

EXHIBITION

Luc Tuymans
Tate Modern

Nick Hackworth

side without contradiction. This ruthlessness is exemplified in Still-Life, a huge painting made in response to 9/11, which sets some fruit and a jug of water, vaguely depicted in washed-out colours, against an expansive white background. The work delights in its visual awkwardness, the objects being absurdly large and almost insubstantially faint, and in its apolitical content, which undermines all clichéd responses to such events.

Tuymans's melancholic vision extends from the reality he depicts to the medium through which he does it. Painting can no longer be heroic, he seems to say, but is as insignificant as all the objects and events in the world. A truthful, though depressing, conclusion.

● Until 26 September. Information: 020 7887 8008.

A brief history of his time

IT IS unusual for such a prestigious photographic exhibition to include 100 photo albums inside glass cases, and only 120 prints mounted on the walls. But for this magnificent show of the life's work of French photographer Jacques Henri Lartigue (1894-1987), it is entirely appropriate.

Lartigue's albums were sophisticated vehicles for documenting his world. Initially, they held memories of the carefree, luxurious lifestyle of his family and friends. Then, beyond childhood, they showed scenes in Paris and the South of France, images of two World Wars and fashionable portraits of celebrities. He transformed the large hardback books into sophisticated photo-journals, which were designed to look like magazines using enlarged, cropped and juxtaposed photographs.

Lartigue was an obsessive photographer who began as a six-year-old, with a glass-plate camera and a tripod that was taller than him. He remained wide-eyed and awed by the world all his life. His fascination with movement and his scientific curiosity enabled him to freeze people, balls, cats and flying machines in mid-flight as effectively as any modern sports photographer. For much of Lartigue's

EXHIBITION

Jacques Henri Lartigue:
Photographs 1901-1986
Hayward Gallery

Sue Steward

life, he earned money by painting; photography was only a hobby. But after the Second World War, he became a fringe member of the Paris scene.

In 1963, after an exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art, Richard Avedon brought the septuagenarian a new career — as a fashion and portrait photographer for magazines. Lartigue's pictures of mini-skirted girls in London and Paris have the same relaxed elegance as his photographs of the women in floor-length dresses in the Bois de Boulogne 50 years earlier.

The exhibition closes with Lartigue's last obsession: photographing his shadow. He leaves behind this 90-year-old companion — and it lives on with these marvellous memoirs.

● Until 5 September. Information: 020 7960 5226.

More reviews on pages 34, 35 and 36

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