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A Belgian artist's Journey through Time

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“In the swimming pool and nobody came,” he blurted, before the question about the venue of his first exhibition could even be completed. “I rented the empty pool for a day and sent an invitation to 5,000 people but nobody came except for a few friends and my mom. My mom went down the pool and cried,” narrated world acclaimed Belgian painter Luc Tuymans, whose works are currently on display at an exhibition at the Museum of Islamic Art.

A total of 100 paintings and about 70 drawings make up the artist's biggest volume of work ever displayed anywhere in the world. This is no ordinary collection. It records the artist's 35-year journey, accumulating good and bad impressions of life.

“During my career as an artist, I have seen art changing colours. It has changed completely.

During my early days, I chose sort of a personal isolation, which has changed now to a public isolation.

When I started painting, there was hardly any art market but now it becomes corporate,” Tuymans said.

He continued, “To give an idea, my dealer in New York, when I started to work with him, had just one assistant.

Now, he has a team of 200 people. It has turned into a billion-dollar industry now.” “Due to some logistics issues five of his canvases couldn't be brought here,” said Qatar Museums Director (Public Art) J e a n - P a u l Engelen, while talking to Qatar Tribune.

“One painting was too big to pass through the window of the Manhattan apartment, while the other one was too long,” he continued.

“But there was no reason to worry about, for Tuymans agreed to paint these missing ones on the walls of

the exhibition gallery. And it took less than a week for the artist to make those true to scale copies of his own work along side the other paintings,” said Engelen.

Ask Tuymans about subjects that intrigue him the most and he says, “Perhaps it is the silence that inspires me the most. Many of my ideas and motifs in the past had their roots grounded in the phenomenon of silence.” Tuymans has commissioned a series of six of his painting especially for this show named ‘The Arena’.

“I have met a talented cartoonist during my stay in Qatar and am planning to do some joint production with this local artist. Qatar in many ways has inspired me. I find lots of similarities between my home country Belgium and the host country Qatar. Both countries are small and have to fight for their existence against the big powers.

It is unique cultural experience for me to be here,” he said.

Luc Tuymans is regarded internationally as one of the key figures of a new generation of figurative painters, widely credited with having contributed to the revival of painting in the 1990s. His works are featured in museum collections worldwide, including The Art Institute of Chicago; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; MoMA, New York; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York; and Tate Gallery, London.

The body of the work shown in the exhibition explores Tuymans’s abiding preoccupations against the backdrop of rapidly changing format of the times he lived in. Well aware from the outset of his career that painting as an artform is the representation of the crisis of the values and the prevailing system he chose to confront his circumstances head-on.

“It took three years to bring this exhibition to reality,” Engelen remarked.

For the artist, the medium became a vehicle through which the most urgent and volatile feelings relating to history, identity, nationalism and belief or the socio-political events that he witnessed as an active observer, were all scrutinised on his canvas. “I do write when I am not painting and lecture too. I did some teaching but then I stopped. I want students to do their own things,” he said.

Among his major solo shows is the presentation of the artist’s portraits, Nice. Luc Tuymans, at The Menil Collection, Houston in 2013. Previous major shows include those organised by Moderna Museet Malm, Sweden, in 2009 and Tate Modern, London, in 2004. In 2001, the artist represented Belgium at the 49th Venice Biennale.

Through the contemporary works of exhibition of Luc Tuymans, Qatar Museums furthers its aim of creating a dialogue about the role of contemporary art and fostering an existing culture of artistic appreciation and participation in Qatar. Tuymans’s work will inspire and influence aspiring artists from

the region and educate the communities about international art.

‘Intolerance’ is currently open to the public at Qatar Museums’s Al Riwaq Gallery and will run until January 30, 2016.

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