

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE

Jean-Luc Moulène, a self-declared *technicien libertaire*, creates work that is stylistically ambulatory yet bounded by specific conceptual parameters: it must be separate and complete in itself; make clear the conditions under which it was produced; and establish a direct link with that from which it has been separated—which is to say, the world. His practice cuts diagonally across the oft-stratified spheres of economics, politics, and culture in order to reveal gaps in assumed knowledge and allow new figures and transparencies to emerge. Unlike a scientist or a mathematician, an artist must produce work that is not merely the outcome of an experiment, but must also render the experiment available to others; Moulène sees this as his task. The resulting forms are models for other lines of inquiry.

While his ‘objects’ and ‘images’ take three-dimensional materials and photography as their respective supports, they are not expressly sculptures or photographs. “I consider my images and objects as tools, articles of use: practical above all else,” Moulène emphasizes. He is not interested in occupying the symbolic position of the author, but rather, sees the role of the artist as one of authorization.

*Opus*, a body of work underway since 1995, is comprised of hanging, tabletop, and floor-bound constructions that seek to make complexity visible. A comprehensive presentation of these works took place at Dia:Beacon in 2012. They act on space and perception even from an apparently dormant state. “When you see a knife on the table, even if it’s not moving it nonetheless cuts the space,” the artist explains; “the function is inside the form.” While the works themselves appear discontinuous and fragmented, they are in fact influenced by topology and mathematical structures that generate continuous surfaces. Here, “objects are only a way to join other objects.” One subset of *Opus* is influenced by mathematical theories of knots, while another derives from the Lorenz attractor (an infinite, single-sided looping surface). The works are not created according to a system, which would constrain its elements, but rather derive from a protocol, which contents itself with their transformation. Forms result from an encounter between the imagination of the artist and the volition of materials.

Many of Moulène’s photographic images are grouped under the series *Documents*, which comprises subseries chronicling objects made by French workers while on strike (*Objets de Grève*), an invasive plant species in urban environs (*La Vigie*), minor statuettes at the Louvre (*La Louvre*), products illegally exported from Palestine (*Produits de Palestine*), and the French town that the artist’s family has inhabited for generations (*Fénautrigues*). Here, photography functions as a research tool, a form of recordkeeping for minutiae and ephemera. Like Malraux’s *Musée Imaginaire*, *Documents* unites the heterogeneity of the world under the sign of photography. His first series, *Disjonctions* (1984–1995) sought to destabilize and recalibrate familiar photographic tropes ranging from the cityscape to the portrait.

Moulène’s recent projects have investigated the intersections of advanced technology and contemporary material culture. For his 2016 Centre Pompidou survey exhibition Moulène presented a “retrospective of protocols” produced using 3D modeling. His production program engaged set theory as a conceptual premise, proposing the space of intersection as a metaphor of common social space. His monumental sculpture *More or Less Bone*, exhibited at SculptureCenter in 2019, was produced in close collaboration with engineers with expertise in formal optimization, wherein the form of an object is defined through a process that identifies the most efficient solution given a set of discrete variables. The result of this optimization is an object that looks remarkably like a bone. No work of art exists “without conditions and constraints...without material, economic, and historic conditions,” Moulène insists. If an art object exists alongside the social/material matrix of a certain moment in time, which could otherwise be called politics, then *More or Less Bone* posits that the conditions of optimized production drive all form toward the skeletal: fleshless, scraped clean, hard, and without waste; the absolutely necessary.

Moulène’s method is one of disjunction—it denies by denying. His work proceeds dialectically through rupture, discontinuity, bifurcation, and negation in order to seek new knowledge forms. It traverses from *l’objet altéré* to *l’objet d’alterité*. “Negation is the founding act of creation,” the artist writes. “You need to be able to articulate a negative position with a position of affirmation in the outside world: if creating is negation, showing is an act of affirmation.”

Above all, Moulène seeks to produce work that is itself a site of conflict—to employ the means of art's production to more effectively set it in total contradiction with itself so that moments of critical consciousness might occur.

*Jean-Luc Moulène (b. 1955, Reims, France) studied Aesthetics and Sciences of Art at the Sorbonne University in Paris. He lives and works in Normandy. Among the institutions that have dedicated solo exhibitions to his work are MONA – Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania (2023–24); Casa São Roque Centro de Arte, Porto (2021); SculptureCenter, New York (2019); Secession, Vienna (2017); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2016–2017); Villa Medici, Rome (2015); Kunstverein Hannover (2014); Dia:Beacon, New York (2012); Carré d'art-Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes (2009); Culturgest, Lisbon (2007); Musée du Louvre, Paris (2005); and Centre d'Art Contemporain de Genève (2003). Moulène has participated in the Venice Biennial (2019, 2003); the Taipei Biennial (2016, 2004); the Sharjah Biennial (2010); the First International Biennial of the Image (Laos, 2007); the Sao Paulo Biennial (2002); and Documenta X (1997). His work has been included in major group exhibitions at Hayward Gallery (London); MoMA PS1 (New York); Centre de la photographie, Genève; Miejski Ośrodek Sztuki (Gorzów, Poland), S.M.A.K. (Ghent, Belgium); MMOMA (Moscow); Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (Mexico City); Museo Tamayo (Mexico City); Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; Palais de Tokyo (Paris); Punta Della Dogana (Venice); WIELS Contemporary Art Centre (Brussels); Witte de With (Rotterdam); ARC / Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Grey Art Gallery (New York); Yokohama Museum of Art; Triennale de Milano; KW Institute for Contemporary Art (Berlin); Museum Ludwig (Cologne); De Appel (Amsterdam); Grand Palais (Paris); Kunstverein Nürnberg, and elsewhere.*

*Moulène's work is held in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art (New York); Tate (London); Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles); Dia Art Foundation (New York); Walker Art Center (Minneapolis); Serralves Museum (Porto); Sharjah Art Foundation; Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris; Tel Aviv Museum of Art; Pinault Collection; Centre National des Arts Plastiques (Paris); Fondation Louis Vuitton (Paris), among others. Monographs dedicated to his work include Jean-Luc Moulène and Teams (MONA – Museum of Old and New Art, 2023), Breves (Secession/Revolver Press, 2017), Jean-Luc Moulène (Centre Pompidou/Editions Dilecta, 2016), Jean-Luc Moulène: Documents, 1999–2016 (Sequence Press, 2016), Jean-Luc Moulène: Disjonctions, Opus & Documents, Il Était Une Fois (Verlag Für Moderne Kunst, 2015), Opus + One (Yale University Press and Dia Art Foundation, 2012), Jean-Luc Moulène (Walther König, 2009). Other books on his work include Matter and Form: Self-evidence and Surprise: On Jean-Luc Moulène's Objects by Alain Badiou (Sequence Press, 2019), "Untitled," in Collapse vol. VIII, edited by Robin Mackay, (Urbanomic, 2014), and Torture Concrete: Jean-Luc Moulène and the Protocol of Abstraction by Reza Negarestani (Sequence Press, 2014).*

*Moulène's recent solo exhibitions include Jean-Luc Moulène, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2025); Enlightenments, Thomas Dane Gallery, Naples (2024); Jean-Luc Moulène and Teams, MONA – Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania (2023–24); Le point le puits le plein et la pluie, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris (2023); Clearly, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2022); and Técnico Libertário, Casa São Roque Centro de Arte, Porto, Portugal (2021–22).*