

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE

selected texts & press

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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).

Art | Basel



Emmanuelle Lequeux

Unraveling the mystery of artist Jean-Luc Moulène

Within his Didier Faustino-designed studio, the French sculptor investigates the enigmas of nature

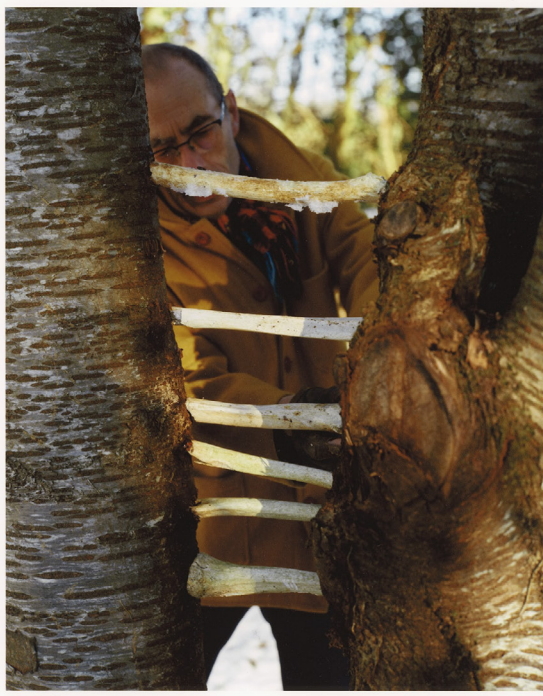
'I am not sure I can really describe the person you would like to profile...' There is no reason to suspect ***Jean-Luc Moulène*** of being coy. He admits it himself – he has quite simply changed. Deliberately disconcerting, in the manner of those who enjoy making others change tack, this is not the first of the French artist's transformations. After spending some years working in communications for Thomson-Sintra ASM on 'technical forecasting for naval engineering,' he made his reputation in the 1990s as a photographer with a conceptual bent.

For the past ten years or so, Moulène has been making his name as a sculptor. The strange forms that emerge from his studio have been met with astounding success – at the Pinault Collection in Paris and Venice, as well as at Dia Beacon, in upstate New York, where he was invited to exhibit in 2011. But the metamorphosis he evokes with us this misty winter morning is different.

Four years ago, Moulène left the 12th arrondissement in Paris to move into a vast studio in the heart of the Perche region of France. His home is now nestled in Saint-Langis-lès-Mortagne, a hamlet in the Collines du Perche, where he had a studio designed by artist-architect Didier Faustino. 'From the outside, it looks like a scuba diver, covered in black tire rubber, a skin that breathes from the inside,' as he describes it.

And on the inside? The entire studio is organized around a 'fairly concrete analysis of the phases of a work,' he says. 'In the most remote, darkest part of the space, there is the couch, where it all begins: in my head. And then it gradually moves toward the brightest part, which I object to the most: where the works leave.' A library is close at hand, a drawing room to the left, and there is an office, a living room, tatami mats. Downstairs, there are models, a production space, archives, and, most importantly, a test room. 'In my little Parisian studio, I never saw the works before showing them – I was so close to them, they were right under my nose. Now, I am constantly installing them as I work. I can get more of a distance. It's helped my practice, having storage and access to bring crates in and out.'





He has also found a new studio manager, Marie-Laure Gilles, who is 'brilliant, and very professional.' For any other artist, this description would be superfluous. Not for Moulène, who likes to shape concepts and processes as much as he does physical forms. 'Here, I can finally concentrate on the actual making. I am back to being the amateur I always wanted to be. An amateur in the strongest sense of the word: someone who loves.'

This radical move has not changed his practice, he attests, but it has doubtless changed him. 'I still don't know the person you are talking to very well,' says Moulène with a touch of mischief. Has being out in the middle of nature had an impact on his creative work? 'I don't really know what nature is. You'd have to ask *it*,' he parries. He calls on the American sweetgum trees that surround his studio to illustrate his point. In the 19th century, an engineer became interested in the amber-like resin produced by the tree – 'he found a previously unknown molecule that he named styrax. An English chemist tried to synthesize it, but he didn't quite succeed. Instead, he created something he called polystyrene. So, I took a block of polystyrene, hollowed it out into a half cylinder, and put it on the tree. I am asking the tree what it thinks of its ersatz. Because that is what it is about in the end: we plunder nature without asking its opinion.'



This is his revolution: in his view, he hasn't 'withdrawn.' For this son of the Lot department, in the southwestern part of France, this 'taste for the hills, for what we call the countryside, is something I have had for a long time.' He has created new circumstances for himself, because all he is looking for, in the end, is his own experience, and that of his exhibitions' visitors. 'I don't care about the form; what counts is the experience, how to make it accessible again, to make an event of it. To do that, you have to be able to bring the visitor to a standstill, to move them. When they leave, they can begin to build on that emotion.'

He moves onto questions of perception, then, on a semi-conceptual level, says, 'this is where the piece exists. I try to make it reveal itself when the viewer needs it.' In short, a time bomb. Known for his political series *Objets de Grèves* (*Strike Objects*) (1999-2000) and *Produits de Palestine* (*Products of Palestine*) (2002-2004), the artist has long worked on 'political representations, because that is the spirit of the age. Now, I try to create political presences. It is entirely different.'

This is how his sculptures – sophisticated in their conception and, in their realization, either the fruit of the most high-tech processes or the humblest cobbling together – have a sense of obviousness about them. In the lunar landscape he created for the Centre Pompidou in 2017, visitors moved from one block of enigmas to the next. 'In the end, art is an extremely serious, finely-tuned, precise farce. It has to be as hermetic as a conspiracy.' Carrara marble, sintered powder, jesmonite, biscuit porcelain, or coated foam, verdigris bronze or lapis lazuli – the artist, who studied alchemy and the history of magic as well, produces explosive alloys and unprecedented combinations of forms.

'If my pieces are blocks of enigmas, they are nonetheless open to interpretation. Hermeticism is a system of openings, like mysticism, which is knowledge through mysteries. And matter is a mystery. It is possible to be a materialist mystic.' And for him the primary material is sensation.



It is hardly surprising that Moulène has been more interested in poets than artists. First and foremost, the dark Romanticism of Arthur Rimbaud, Alfred Jarry, and the literary review *Le Grand Jeu* (1928–32). Today, he is more drawn to the Objectivist poetry of Charles Reznikoff and Manuel Joseph. 'Hence my mistrust of language. I try to remove language from objects. I propose silent objects that have passed away from language. But I love those who are able to transfigure language enough to do something to it, just to see what it is really able to invent for us and how.' Opposite his brand-new studio sits an old farmhouse in its original state, for the time being. He dreams of it becoming the site of his future foundation, where he promises that poets will have pride of place. But when? 'For me, since I do not have an heir, it is simply a way of passing on my legacy. But it would be impossible to give a precise timetable: I would have to work back from the day I die, so I am in no rush.'



Jean-Luc Moulène is represented by **Galerie Chantal Crousel** (Paris), **Thomas Dane Gallery** (London, Naples), **Miguel Abreu Gallery** (New York), **Galerie Pietro Sparta** (Chagny), and **Galerie Greta Meert** (Brussels).

His solo exhibition 'Jean-Luc Moulène and Teams' at the Museum of Old and New Art in Hobart, Tasmania, will end April 1, 2024. From February 7, 2024, he will participate in the group exhibition "When Forms Come Alive" at the Hayward Gallery, London.

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The Week in Arts



Installation view of Jean-Luc Moulène's "More or Less Bone (Formal Topological Optimization) (Paris-NY, 2018-19)" at SculptureCenter, New York.

2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ ADAGP, Paris/ Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York; Kyle Knodell

Art: More or Less Bone

Through July 29; sculpture-center.org

Jean-Luc Moulène designed his 28-foot-long fiberglass sculpture "More or Less Bone" in consultation with French aerospace engineers. In trying to find an efficient solution to an arbitrary mathematical problem, they arrived at a shape as functional-looking as a crowbar. It's not that it isn't complicated. But its gaps, crossbeams and pockets are all connected with a minimum of fuss, and its bulges are smoothed out as if to resist currents of air or blood. Just what the object's practical purpose could be, on the other hand, is difficult to imagine — unless it's to occupy the gorgeous former trolley repair shop in Long Island City that now houses the nonprofit SculptureCenter. That it does to perfection. *WILL HEINRICH*

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Jean-Luc Moulène, *More or Less Bone (Formal Topological Optimization)* (Paris–NY, 2018–19), fiberglass and epoxy paint, 63 x 335 x 177".

Jean-Luc Moulène

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves Street
April 29–July 29

Jean-Luc Moulène's new sculpture sits in a room like an unearthed piece of technology from the future. To think of its weight, one might consider the epigraph from Andrei Tarkovsky's 1979 film *Stalker*: "What was it?

A meteorite that fell to Earth? Or a

visitation from outer space?" For *More or Less Bone (Formal Topological Optimization)* (Paris–NY, 2018–19), Moulène collaborated with France's Aerospace Valley, a civilian and military aircraft engineering cluster, to render an optimal form that amalgamates a set of various shapes: spheres, stairs, and human knuckles. This seemingly random fusion, developed with modeling software (though the object itself was not 3-D-printed), yields something not too unlike a cattle skull.

With its coldness, this mammoth structure becomes the inverse of Ana Mendieta's *On Giving Life*, 1975, a photographic work in which the artist, bathed in sunlight reminiscent of Eric Rohmer's springtime romps, lies atop a human skeleton, lending warmth to ever-present death. Moulène's fiberglass-and-epoxy colossus defies such tenderness, trading sense experience for a work worthy of our technocratic era. But there is something impish in Moulène's grinning skull, faceless though it is. A bodily form, couched on the concrete floor, reaches toward a trapezoidal shape that dominates the construction, becoming a line break that ends in a snarled enjambment of splintered material at the trapezoid's tip. The incidental demarcations between these forms allow for the possibility of grace, an offering to climb inside and be cocooned there.

In an interview, Moulène stated that he sees his sculptures as "surfaces, with no inside or outside, only holes." His object suggests the physical representation of a cinematic idea, something approaching Soviet montage theory, which forces the question: If technology trickles down from a military to a civilian populace over a decade, what, then, is nature when photography is augmented by a third dimension?

— Matthew Carlson



Jean-Luc Moulène: More or Less Bone

SculptureCenter Apr 29–Jul 29, 2019

By Mark Bechtel

Upon entering the exhibition, one is confronted by a single monumental sculpture steadfastly planted at the center of the room. Despite its size it remains human in scale. Two seams stand out prominently at the joints to disassemble the object for easier shipping. The form is programmed to meet fitness requirements for "a set volume, scale, terrestrial gravity, the material properties of fiberglass, and environmental conditions like wind and earthquakes". In other words, this thing that appears like a massive mechanical joint is not neutral but designed to mediate social demands between the three absent forms.

Moulène, describing himself as a *technicien libertaire*, used state-of-the-art automotive engineering technologies from Aerospace Valley (France's Silicon Valley) to determine the CAD/CAM fabrication by Digital Atelier (Mercerville, NJ) to the manually made outcome by Seal Reinforced Fiberglass (Copiague, NY) in order to produce a state-of-the-art product-sculpture. As a professor of product and industrial design, I have used this technology in design experiments myself. It can be a very effective tool for

roughing out preliminary forms with superior lightweighting and improved material efficiency through an economy of form. Do more with less. If you image search online for topology optimization you will also find that, regardless of the tool's application, the end results always appear to look, more or less, like bone. Joris Laarman's much celebrated *Bone Chair* (2006) is a good corollary. The Dutch industrial designer applied topology optimization that simulated bone growth in order to produce a piece of furniture. In his words, "If Mother Nature wanted to create a chair, it would probably look something like the results we would get."

Following a basic understanding of how this mathematical CAD tool works, it is evident the artist has distanced authorship to a degree. He assumed an editorial role to specify the constraints, with the participation of engineers, for the software to automatically generate a solution. Therefore, this form was determined at the instant the concept was finalized by the artist and his collaborators. Presented with a range of options in the software from the boundary condition (the block) to total dissolution, Moulène ultimately chose one from many pre-determined possible forms that the algorithm will always solve the same.

While this sculpture is described as a juncture and could be mistaken for an idea of integration as a process of connecting different things, I would argue that it is an object better aligned with differentiation instead. In mathematics, these two concepts are used to study change. While procedures of integration are commonly applied for multiplication with changing numbers like integrating speed and time to determine distance, or length, width, and height to determine area, this is not an object that leads to anywhere interesting when considering its volume and area. It is like a diseased version of an undulating Henry Moore from that point of view. We are also not viewing the representation of an object synthesized from different subjects that would be a transcendent figure of integration like a Henry Moore. This object does not represent something else.

Following Moulène's clue, he describes conceiving of sculpture through surfaces and holes instead of Cartesian space. It is shape and proportion that takes precedence here, not volume and area. Distinctly different entities, the knucklebone, the sphere, and the spiral staircase, are globed together without diminishing their specificity. Opposite to integration, differentiation is used to determine the speed of a function by calculating instantaneous velocity. It is continuous division and cannot be confused with continually dividing entities like integration does by slicing up space to measure for area. Differentiation calculates derivatives, or the rate at which an output changes instantaneously with respect to the inputs. Derivatives can predict how a pattern will change, therefore enabling you to plot the past, present, and future to calculate maximums and minimums. By extension, topological derivatives are used for shape optimization.

While all of this becomes quite abstract, consider one of the greatest financial innovations of our time – derivatives as instruments for markets. The value of these financial contracts is based upon one or multiple

underlying assets whether it be actual assets or other derivative contracts that offsets the value of the original. It's a modular relationship, not a synthetic relationship, therefore enabling dissimilar entities to make short-circuit connections while remaining distinct. This makes them more or less exchangeable, hence more useful for hedging. It requires highly sophisticated computers to solve for such a level of complexity. However, in the markets the greatest risk of this financial instrument is that it becomes impossible to know any derivative's real value due to its complexity. This is precisely what caused the 2008 financial crisis that nearly resulted in the collapse of the world financial system.

In this light, the sculpture is derived from a mutable relationship that is equivalent in all its variations by topological terms. It is an alien juncture given as a form of limitless possibilities while seemingly remaining under absolute control. After all, Moulène did name the three absent objects in the press release. The sphere, the spiral stairs, and the knucklebone are respectively described to represent the abstract, the constructed, and the organic. In his own words, "all objects belong to these three categories..." and he is making the form that "can attract all kinds of objects".

However, to be cognizant of the prescient conditions that determined the form is also to recognize how temporal the final physical outcome is. It is more like a prototype to be tested than a final artifact. This is not a contingent object, but one fully determined version that could have been many others. It is both provisional and sufficient as a high-fidelity prototype. It does not communicate a concept as a representation but demonstrates through its potential, albeit ambivalent potential in this case. The real agency of this thing is not its execution, but rather the preemptive capacity for determining destiny. Unlike possibilities, which are incremental variations of what we already know, potential is immanent to something still in indeterminate variation. It often holds the promise to discover something unknown and to be liberated from repeating more of the same. However, such an aspiration suffocates under a foreclosed future resulting from sophisticated predictive tools of control. There is very little margin remaining to avoid always arriving at the best solution. During the talk, Moulène did acknowledge an error made by the engineers while computing his criteria, but perhaps the greater part of this margin is to become an active participant in the exhibition as demonstration. Perceiving the object as a prototype is also to inherently recognize that it invites the creative agency of the observer as much as the creator. While this kind of observer/participant claim is seemingly exhausted from being tautologically played out since the sixties, the key difference here is that Moulène's work is an active entanglement of the abstract, the organic, and the constructed. These three categories could also loosely align with mind/matter/becoming or language/body/event. In order to grasp the unintelligible dimensions of his work, we have to follow, as Reza Negarestani described, his labor of abstraction. Moulène has also often claimed his protocol is just as relevant for art as it is for industrial design, hence we're forced to recognize this object as a model for a tool of analysis rather than an artifact for contemplation.

For the MoMa exhibition, *This Is For Everyone: Design Experiments for the Common Good*, which featured Laarman's *Bone Chair*, the provocative title was taken from a Tweet by the British computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee who invented the World Wide Web. The statement, of course, implicitly begs the question if that is indeed the case, and MoMa accounted for this through a concurrent online exhibition titled *Design and Violence*. In an interview for the former exhibition, Paola Antonelli, the senior curator of architecture and design, stated, "I keep thinking that designers in the future will become almost like philosophers." Taken seriously, the statement challenges design that is too often seduced by the new powers and novel outcomes afforded by cybernetics and silicon to meet short-sighted goals, defined largely by markets, even when it improves the lives of people. Is it not problematic to naturalize technology as Laarman does? Taken further, the implications of the statement go beyond positing yet another new design methodology, or body of knowledge, that again remains ensnared in the same double bind to produce and cause harm or abstain and wither. It would require grappling with difficult questions beyond the typical scope of the design discourse. For instance, how could design exit the vicious circle of power relations to become truly ethical, and what would it mean to truly design ethically? To design absolutely ethically would be to design for all living entities opposed to determining which should be accounted for. What if that required design to make without authority over anything else, or, after Melville's *Bartleby*, to *prefer not to* meet what is demanded of it? All deeply complex questions of empowerment and control, and certainly pertinent for a human trajectory that would assume command of the rocks below to the skies above if it could.

Now long past the period of Foucault's disciplinary control societies, Moulène's work demonstrates a different set of control conditions for our era. Perhaps less an object riddled and fixed in contradictions, it is an elusive object of alternations and renaissance. Presence and absence become confused. For example, I continually catch myself identifying the absences by their positive-form names – the knucklebone, etc., opposed to a proper identification of their absence. Moreover, why am I certain these impressions are absences in the first place? This form was determined through ones and zeroes, not manipulated material. It's a perceptual/mental hole as much as a physical one. The shape for all of this object's potential versions are equally present a priori, simultaneously unknown, yet already fully determined by nature of its process. Following its path of production forces a shift in registers from quantitative rationale to qualitative reasoning. Causal accounting gives way to a consideration of destiny. Scales of maximums and minimums are superseded by the instantaneous determination of all points. The scaleless CAD model is transposed into a physical human scale model. As all models are – it is simultaneously real and abstract. Clear design criteria produces unintelligible value. Ultimately, this exhibition as demonstration is a work for extrapolation instead of interpolation. As a function of mathematics, interpolation predicts based on known observations while extrapolation makes predictions that extend beyond what is known at a higher risk of producing meaningless results.

Perhaps equal parts art, philosophy, and mathematics, this sculpture-product or prototype as analyzer requires stretching the bounds of familiar art discourse, and thought to say the least, in order to grapple with it.

In closing, I defer to an excerpt from the *Appendix: On the Death of Man and Superman* in Gilles Deleuze's book on Foucault. He writes about his speculation for a "formation of the future":

What would be the forces in play, with which the forces within man would then enter into a relation? It would no longer involve raising to infinity or finitude but an unlimited finity, thereby evoking every situation of force in which a finite number of components yields a practically unlimited diversity of combinations. It would be neither the fold nor the unfold that would constitute the active mechanism, but something like the Superfold, as borne out by the foldings proper to the chains of the genetic code, and the potential of silicon in third-generation machines, as well as by the contours of a sentence in modern literature, when literature 'merely turns back on itself in an endless reflexivity'.

The forces within man enter into a relation with forces from the outside, those of silicon which supersedes carbon, or genetic components which supersede the organism, or agrammaticalities which supersede the signifier. In each case we must study the operations of the superfold, of which the 'double helix' is the bestknown example. What is the superman? It is the formal compound of the forces within man and these new forces. It is the form that results from a new relation between forces. Man tends to free life, labour and language within himself. The superman, in accordance with Rimbaud's formula, is the man who is even in charge of the animals (a code that can capture fragments from other codes, as in the new schemata of lateral or retrograde). It is man in charge of the very rocks, or inorganic matter (the domain of silicon). It is man in charge of the being of language (that formless, 'mute, unsignifying region where language can find its freedom' even from whatever it has to say). As Foucault would say, the superman is much less than the disappearance of living men, and much more than a change of concept: it is the advent of a new form that is neither God nor man and which, it is hoped, will not prove worse than its two previous forms.

Contributor

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frieze

Jean-Luc Moulène

19 Apr 2018 — 29 Jun 2018

Galerie Greta Meert



Courtesy: the artist and Galerie
Greta Meert, Brussels

When Gertrude Stein wrote, 'act as though there is no use in a centre', she intended this positively. The works of Jean-Luc Moulène are similarly centre-less, without being obscure. Moulène's exhibition at Galerie Greta Meert is a selection of his uncanny objects as well as two-dimensional experiments in colour pairings. His works hover between categories, like the sculpture *Voïd* (Paris, 2017) (2017), which resembles an overturned black René Magritte hat. Meanwhile, a number of abstract works seem like colour studies in which gold or silver leaves on panel alternate with bright colours, using cheap materials (like felt-tip marker) with expensive ones (gold and silver). Moulène's sculptures are regularly enigmatic, and at times delightfully inscrutable: *Méduse* (Paris, 2018) (2018) is a bronze that is coloured an unreal blue patina; and the work *Mais* (Paris, 2018) (2018), meanwhile, is an oblong sculpture in which bead-like cold ridges show the outline of a cob of corn. Also on view is a promising selection of paintings by young artist Carlos Caballero, whose geometrical canvases pair abstract gestures with precise, figurative imagery.

- Pablo Larios

ARTFORUM

Jean-Luc Moulène

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

The work of the erudite, Sorbonne-trained French photographer-sculptor Jean-Luc Moulène can seem to be machinated by an artist more interested in theory than practice. Yet this sprawling, diverse show full of tenderly handcrafted objects revealed a profound joy in making.

For his second solo show at Miguel Abreu Gallery, Moulène presented eighteen new, midsize pieces in the venue's main gallery, in addition to two earlier works on view in a smaller space a few streets south, both of which had been recently exhibited at the artist's 2016 retrospective at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. While his 2016 presentation emphasized the continuous surfaces of mathematical knots (as evidenced by his 1995–series "Opus"), this new work instead showcased a multitude of holes, as made explicit by the grouping's title, "Hole, Bubble, Bump." The sculptures in Abreu's larger gallery, which demonstrated the artist's continued interest in the visual tension created by facing off voluptuously organic and dryly geometric forms, were replete with cavities. Holes were immediately apparent in two bronze casts—the supplicant female nude *Josephine* (Paris 2017) (all works 2017) and the fragmented face cast *Masque* (Marc Gilbert) (Paris 2017), which was mounted on its support like a severed head on a pike. The irregular abscesses in what would have been uniform casings mapping the surfaces of the human form were the result, per the artist, of information missing from the three-dimensional scans used to cast them. By contrast, the ceramic works *Campecino II* (San Rafael & Tlatepague, Mexico 2017) and *Torso Azul*—and the works of printed Lycra stretched over wood armatures, *Caisse à Souffle* (Moire Machine/Main) (Paris, 2017) and *Caisse à Vents* (Moire Machine/Main) (Paris, 2017)—were hollow by design. The nearby *Fixed Standard* (Paris, 2017) demonstrated amputation and suture: Its plastic lawn chair readymade was cut down the middle, and the missing arm was supplemented by a provisional cardboard frame. Meanwhile, bubbles and bumps were present in *Rubber Boot* (Paris, 2017), an incised and resin-dipped rubber boot with balloon pustules appearing to pop from its sides and top, and *Hump Hand* (Paris, 2017), a concrete cast of a glove with lumpy growths. Indeed, all of the works in this eclectic show revealed themselves to be united by a shared preoccupation with its three titular forms.

Moulène describes himself as a *technicien libertaire*, and he certainly takes liberties with his materials. "Hole, Bubble, Bump" evidenced a studio practice marked by spontaneity and a penchant for experimentation, as well as the artist's confidence in his ability to create without hewing to preconceived ideas of what the works needed to look like or be "about." As the artist states in the press release, he became aware of their unifying theme only after he had finished them. One wished, however, that he had provided slightly fewer justifications after the fact; the artist cites Gilles Deleuze's body without organs and explains that his interest in bodies riddled with holes is (among other things) born of a desire to update this theoretical concept. Moulène frequently draws on a vast array of concepts from the high reaches of philosophy and theoretical mathematics in generating his work. But this show, at least, was perhaps better enjoyed without them.

—Cat Kron



Jean-Luc Moulène, *Hump Hand* (Paris, 2017), concrete, 11 1/2 x 5 1/4 x 4 1/2".

frieze

Critic's Guide: New York

From re-examined positions, to explorations of gender and energy: a roundup of the best shows across the city

BY JOSEPHINE GRAF



Jean-Luc Moulène,
T.Body (Paris,
juillet 2017), 2017,
leather, epoxy
resin, and dye on
corset and wood,
73 x 66 x 41 cm.
Courtesy: the artist
and Miguel Abreu
Gallery, New York;
photograph:
Thomas Müller

Jean-Luc Moulène, 'Hole, Bubble, Bump.'

Miguel Abreu Gallery

29 October – 22 December, 2017

Moulène is a mercurial artist, whose flitting between rigour and insouciance can both seduce and frustrate. His second show at Miguel Abreu Gallery similarly traffics in ambiguity, but there's a material forthrightness to the assembled sculptures, each of which hews close to the body. Several are derived from 3D scans and picture the human form directly, while others – such as porcelain casts of tree trunks – trade in affinity. Still others seem more like tools of uncertain use, asking to be picked up and handled, and in so doing wink at a conversation between aesthetic and use value, a stale topic in most other hands. Throughout, a sense of lingering absence or pending eruption pervades, as suggested by the 'holes, bubbles, and bumps' of the show's title. But there's another action here, too, that of suturing: in one of the most poignant works, a plastic deck chair is sliced down the middle and its absent half cobbled back together in cardboard.

ArtReview

Jean-Luc Moulène *Ce fut une belle journée*

Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris 26 November – 11 February

Running in parallel to a supposed retrospective at Centre Pompidou that Jean-Luc Moulène twisted into what he calls a 'retro-prospective of protocols' featuring mainly new sculptures from 2015–6, *Ce fut une belle journée* presents another ensemble of recent works: 16 previously unshown hybrid objects, supported by knowingly naive drawings and two videos. Whereas the sixty-one-year-old Frenchman gained recognition during the late 1990s for his work in photography, his practice has since become essentially sculptural, leaving art critics chewing their nails over the impossible task of defining his overtly anarchistic, shapeshifting aesthetics. The way the artist verbalises his ideal sculptures should give you a hint as to why. Here is an attempt to paraphrase bits and pieces of conceptual gibberish from his latest interviews: 'my utopia for artworks is to produce mind tools to describe complexity, using mathematical knot and set theories to affirm disjuncts based on Michel Journiac's notion of *body as conscious social meat*.' Got that? Me neither.

Armed with the knowledge that mathematical knots are embedded circles with no ends to tie – not unlike Moulène's heteroclitic exhibitions – and for the sake of proceeding through this review without resorting to Journiac's performed cannibalism in his 1969 *Messe pour un corps* (he offered his public a sausage made with his own blood), I'll turn to *Seule au sommet*, Paris,

2016 (2016), displayed in the back of the gallery. According to the artist, this statuette, made from seashells and epoxy resin, was inspired by Bubu, mascot of the French literary review *Le Grand Jeu* (1928–32). This fictional character is the offspring of Baubo, a mythological female figure often represented with her face in the body and her vulva in the chin, and Ubu Roi, the leading protagonist of the 1896 eponymous play by Alfred Jarry, who was not only the French precursor of Surrealism, but also the inventor of 'Pataphysics, the wonderfully absurd science of imaginary solutions. (As chance would have it, for months I've contemplated joining the Collège de 'Pataphysique in exchange of a modest €40 fee, taking my commitment to useless research and nonsensical digression very seriously.)

Now call me crazy, but I swear I heard Bubu whispering to me: "Don't let Moulène fool you with maths, instead hijack his show with the first random idea that sparks a fire in your guts." Surveying the images and captions of his curious artefacts – among others, the stunning, reptile-like *Créature*, Paris, 2016 (2016) covered with false nails, the wood knot *Tête couronnée*, Paris, 2013 (2013) crowned with five of the artist's teeth, the portmanteau work *ConquOs*, Paris – Mexico (2016) joining together a bone and a conch shell, as well as *Silex neufs*, Barneville, 2013 (2013) and *Poing*, Barneville – Paris, 2016 (2016), both brain-shaped assemblages of flint chunks – the overall

ensemble begins to read as some kind of anthropological display, and by association, the name of an eminent French paleoanthropologist slowly emerges in my mind: André Leroi-Gourhan. Leafing through the latter's 1965 masterwork *Le Geste et la parole*, one might stumble upon this passage, which roughly translates into: 'Australanthropians seem to have possessed their tools the same way as an animal has claws [...] as if their brains and bodies had gradually exuded them.' Pataeureka!

It is now with a renewed faith in the nonsensical, then, that I'd like to advance the following hypothesis: whereas twenty-first-century technologies seem to alienate more and more of us, Moulène's tools exude bodies back, as if the latter were surrealistically pulled over the former. For example, in the show, which remains mostly organic, this subversion additionally assumes the form of *Inverse – Reverse*, Barneville – Paris, 2016 (2016), an intricate assemblage of branches covered with blue and red paint, which suggests a vascular system, and *Silver Puke*, Paris, 2013 (2013), a rounded arabesque of spoons, whose shape is equally reminiscent of a rotavirus (the agent that causes vomiting and diarrhoea). Whether or not you'll choose to validate my 'pataphysical proposition, Moulène's art is to neurons what an oyster is to gustatory cells: an exquisite acquired taste.

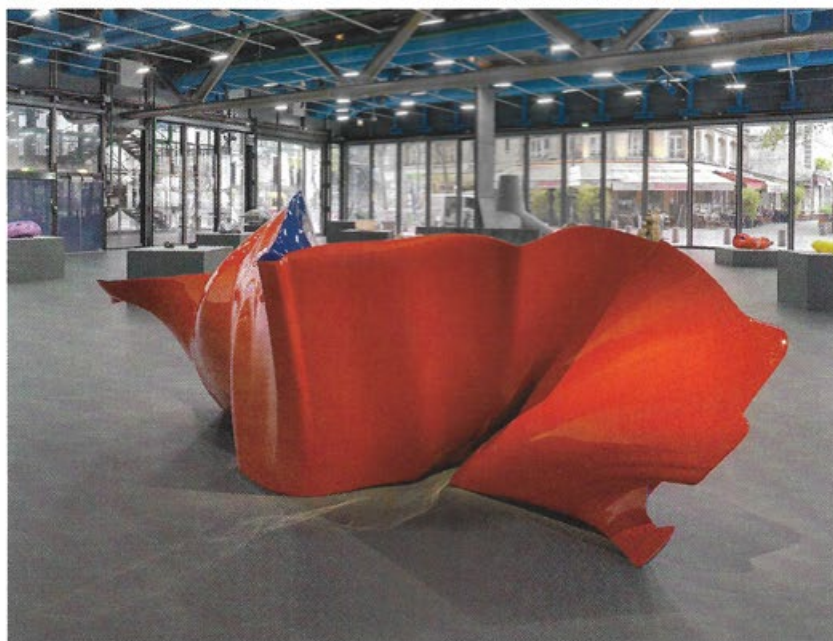
Violaine Boutet de Monvel



Silver Puke, Paris, 2013, 2013, silver soup spoons, silver dessert spoons, epoxy paste.
Photo: Florian Kleinfenn. © the artist / ADAGP 2016.
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

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Below: Jean-Luc Moulène, *Bi-face*, 2016, coated and painted hard foam, installation view. Photo: Florian Kleinemann.
Right: Jean-Luc Moulène, *Monsieur Propre jusqu'à l'os* (Mr. Clean to the Bone), 2016, foam, colored resin, 11 1/2 x 31 1/2 x 18 1/2".



Jean-Luc Moulène

CENTRE POMPIDOU, PARIS

Riccardo Venturi

near-metaphysical study of how things hold together, either on a small scale, as with the parts that make up a single sculpture, or on a large scale, as when he addresses the relationships between one sculpture and another, or between a sculpture and the world.

The Paris-based artist first came to acclaim in the early 1990s as a producer of singularly enigmatic, at times profoundly visceral photographs; only in the past decade have audiences begun to recognize his equally significant sculptural practice, which Moulène has underscored via a sequence of prominent international exhibitions: at Carré d'Art—Musée d'Art Contemporain in Nîmes, France, in 2009; Dia:Beacon, New York, in 2011; and the French Academy of Rome, Villa Medici, in 2015, to name just three. The artist's current show, a midcareer retrospective curated by Sophie Duplaix at the Centre Pompidou, adopts a similar focus. In fact, photography plays only a marginal role, relegated to printed matter around the exhibition's entrance. Copies of *Quiconque*, 2016, a forty-eight-page newspaper that Moulène printed in an edition of 131,000, sit in a stack on a wooden pallet. In a vestibule, four books contain photographic series made by the artist between 1996 and 2011. Aside from these examples (plus three videos), the remaining works are objects, all of them new, and most made using 3-D digital modeling.

Speaking with critic Jean-Pierre Criqui during a public conversation at the museum this past fall, Moulène joked

that the show is the opposite of a retrospective; it is really his first "prospective." It is also installed in a bewildering way: There is a total absence of clues suggesting why individual sculptures are placed where they are. At the entrance, visitors are greeted by *Bubuglu*, 2015–16, a small imaginary, nonanthropomorphic bronze deity, which reads as though it were an icon meant to protect the rest of the sculptures. The two largest works are installed at the opposite ends of the show: These are *Bi-face*, 2016, a slick, undulating object sculpted from foam and coated in bright blue and red pigment, and *No, no, no*, 2016, a work consisting of three types of barriers cast in Jesmonite—one, a tetrapod, meant to keep waves at bay; another a highway noise barrier; and the third a Jersey barrier, designed to keep cars from lurching off the highway. The other pieces—oscillating between barrier and focal point, border and center—are counterintuitively scattered throughout the open space, eluding any rational layout or defined path. Adding to the confusion, visitors can view this dizzying array from both inside and outside the museum: External urban elements—the Pompidou's colorful pipes, an advertising kiosk, a bus stop, pedestrian barricades, even the noise of traffic—penetrate the membrane of the museum's glass-curtain walls.

Moulène is not drawn to complexity in itself, however, but to the fact that complexity can be made visible—that it can be revealed through an image. This is the genesis of

PROTOTYPE AND PRODUCT, sculpture and document, corporate brand and abstract object: Jean-Luc Moulène's protean sculptures stubbornly resist our efforts to classify them. Yet the sheer multiplicity of his work, whether generated through high-end fabrication or via skilled traditional craftsmanship, inspired by esoteric mathematics or base bodily matter, is not simply meant to provoke or obscure. Rather, Moulène's objects are produced in service of an ambitious investigation of complexity, a rigorous,



Left: View of "Jean-Luc Moulène," 2016–17. Center: *No, no, no*, 2016. Photo: Florian Kleinfenn. Below: Jean-Luc Moulène, *Ça propre (trou)* (That Clean [Hole]), 2016. Rendering.



the artist's interest in advanced mathematics. A previous body of sculptures took inspiration from knot theory, a branch of topology that studies mathematical properties such as intersection, continuity, and surface. As much a tool for formal invention as a method of classification, the knot presents a radical challenge to classical sculpture's division between interior and exterior, opening up new possibilities for reckoning with—or even systematizing—surface, form, and matter. The works at the Pompidou build on those observations, variously employing a set of procedures inspired by set theory: *laterality*, *intersection*, and *cut*. These are executed using 3-D design software and fabricated using cutting-edge industrial tools.

Moulène employed at least one of these procedures to make each of the works on view. The first, *laterality*, simply involves joining individual forms together in a row, side by side. This action—which is visible in works such as *Indexes*, 2016, and *Voyelles* (Vowels), 2015—yields sequences of juxtapositions that might involve, say, quotidian domestic objects and intricate abstract shapes or, as in the case of the aforementioned *No, no, no*, three types of barricade. Intersection, meanwhile, involves using CAD software to make objects overlap in three-dimensional space, so that they simultaneously occupy the same

volume. The works in this category include *Voiture&Fille* (Car&Girl), 2016, featuring a somewhat inexplicable (and unavoidably Ballardian) form overlaying volumes in the shape of a car and a female torso, as well as *Un os bleu qui voit* (A Blue Bone That Sees) and *Monsieur Propre jusqu'à l'os* (Mr. Clean to the Bone), both 2016, composed via intersections of a bottle of Tide laundry detergent and a human knucklebone. The third of Moulène's procedures, *cutting*, is self-explanatory, most commonly realized as an incision or slice, as in the Hans Bellmer-esque *Jeanne* and *Bouboulina*, both 2016. In some works, however, it manifests in more oblique ways. To create *Bi-face*, for example, Moulène undertook a complicated series of interventions to stretch the primary surfaces of the weld line in *Voiture&Fille*.

By foregrounding these procedures in his work, Moulène may bring to mind Richard Serra's famous *Verb List*, 1967–68, a catalogue of processes such as "to split" or "to scatter" that could guide an artist's relationship to materials such as lead and rubber. For Moulène, however, intersection, cut, and laterality are not used to modify forms but to imagine relationships. They propose ways in which we might classify, organize, or interpret; they model possible systems. As Moulène says, somewhat

whimsically, "Since in the street, there are bodies and cars, then let's make bodies and cars intersect! We'll see what it looks like."

To this end, one should also consider *Bleu de costume* (Dungarees Suit), 2016, a men's suit inspired by (or, should I say, intersecting with) the typical French worker's outfit, produced in an edition of five hundred and sold for 140 euros at the BHV Marais department store a few steps from (and nearly lateral to) the museum. Here what matters, according to Moulène, is the layer between the work's interior surface and the skin of whoever wears it—a space that can only be revealed with a cut.

THE SHOW'S ECCENTRIC INSTALLATION makes it difficult to determine the part of the viewer, if there is one. "The role played by people in this exhibition is not at all calculated," says Moulène. "There is no scenography or choreography; the distances between works are not measured for the observer. Essentially, man is necessarily foreign in this space: he is welcome, yet foreign." The visitor's sense of estrangement only intensifies when he or she is face-to-face with the sculptures themselves, which are strangely indifferent. They neither ask for interpretation nor seek an external gaze to attain completion. They are

Below: View of "Jean-Luc Moulène," 2016–17. Foreground: *Body versus os* (Body Versus Bone), 2016. Photo: Florian Kleinfenn. Right: Jean-Luc Moulène, *Âne* (Donkey), 2016, concrete, donkey skull, 7 1/4 x 19 1/4 x 35 1/4".



alien objects. And it is often impossible to determine, simply by looking at them, the methods by which they were fabricated, the by turns luxurious and extraordinary material from which they are made (carved stone, porcelain, bronze, concrete, wax, polystyrene, foam, sintering

Moulène is not drawn to complexity in itself, but to the fact that complexity can be made visible—that it can be revealed through an image.

powder), or even to approximate their weight. More than touch them, I would have liked to lift them up, to verify them. (In fact, the burnished-bronze works *Ça propre [trou]* [That Clean (Hole)] and *Ça propre [anse]* [That Clean (Handle)], both 2016—intersections of a Tide bottle and a coffee mug—even sport handles.)

While Moulène's works may originate in such familiar ready-made forms as cars and detergent bottles, his deformations and intersections frequently conceal those origins, rendering the final object wholly nonreferential

and abstract. In works such as *Un os mauve* (A Purple Bone), 2016—a warped, striated, lacquer-covered foam object with indeterminate folds and curves—we fundamentally have no real grasp of what the object is. It exists in a state of raw indeterminacy and otherness, rejecting our efforts to make sense of it. Moulène's use of digital modeling and fabrication with these unorthodox materials echoes the most ambitious sculptural experimentation of our time, undertaken by artists such as Charles Ray and Jeff Koons, yet Moulène forthrightly rejects the figuration and representation that so viscerally inform their work.

There is, however, a through line connecting many of these heterogeneous materials and morphologies. Moulène repeatedly resorts to a substance that, curiously, could not be more bodily: namely, bone. This can be seen in works where the artist has taken the shape of the bone and fitted it together with other objects: *Os météorite* (Meteorite Bone), *Body versus os* (Body Versus Bone), and *La fille de l'os* (The Bone's Daughter), all 2016, as well as *Monsieur Propre jusqu'à l'os*, *Un os bleu qui voit*, and *Un os mauve*. He also uses real bone: Moulène made *Âne* (Donkey), 2016, by filling a rubber donkey mask with wet concrete, submerging an actual donkey skull in this

cement-filled mold, then violently cutting the thing in two after the concrete hardened. Real mammalian teeth project from the far end, embedded in the material like a fossil. The head—broken in two halves, in a play on the near-homophony in French between *âne* (donkey) and *crâne* (skull)—sits at the center of the show, like a fulcrum.

According to Moulène, the bone is "what's left of us when we die; it is the 'noyau dur' ['core'], but it is also an internal object, seen as whole when separated from the body." Amid his knots and sets, cuts and intersections, what is Moulène doing with bone, the *noyau dur* of sculpture? Bone indicates a kind of timelessness: As much as it is something that speaks to us of and from the past—a relic of deep, archaeological, and indeterminate time—it is also what remains of man after death, which survives his extinction. It implies deep structures or organizing principles that are otherwise unrealized or unseen. Bone has an essential quality: It functions not alone, but as an armature. □

"Jean-Luc Moulène" is on view through Feb. 20.

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Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

Visit our archive at artforum.com/inprint for Jean-Luc Moulène's portfolio of photographs "M. Chaudin's Garden" (April 2012).

ARTFORUM

Jean-Luc Moulène

11.04.16



Left: **Jean-Luc Moulène and Object Sens Function, *Bleu de costume*, 2016**, cotton and polyester. Installation view at Bazar de l'Hotel de Ville, Paris. Right: **Cover of Jean-Luc Moulène's *Quiconque*, 2016**.

The haunting photographs and sculptures of Paris-based artist Jean-Luc Moulène are material sleights of hand, vibrational time-space objects. Here, in a "discontinuous interview," he speaks about inhabiting fields outside art as well as his "retrospective of protocols," featuring thirty new pieces, which is on view at the Centre Pompidou in Paris through February 20, 2017.

SOPHIE DUPLAIX, the curator of this show, has come to my studio every year for the past ten years. To answer the question of an institutional retrospective, I originally asked to do it anonymously. So, I did two things for culture and communication. One is *Bleu de costume*, a unisex suit, which is being sold at the department store BHV. The other is *Quiconque*, a newspaper that I produced with graphic designer Marc Toutiou.

Retro-Prospective / capital is attached to names / That was not possible / An agreement between states / customs and etiquette / a protocol is an abstraction, the speed of the thought looking for its material /

The blue in *Bleu de costume* is derived from the traditional French worker's jacket. The suit is a link between the master who makes decisions and the workers—fit for business negotiations, as well as production in the factories. It is, however, not a political statement. *Quiconque* contains eighty-eight full-page images that I took over the past five years in different cities, from Paris to New York to Beirut to Mexico, printed on the same paper stock—eighty grams and white—as *Le Monde Diplomatique*, the monthly newspaper. One hundred thirty-one thousand copies are placed on eighty-one pallets outside the exhibition space.

I don't take pictures because I like this or that, but to know what it looks like / always out of territory, always migrant / solutions in the world. I observe, compare, and check. / an activity of knowledge, an exact chronology of something being known /

In the exhibition there are two new big pieces: one that looks like concrete and the other made with automotive surfaces—like everywhere in the world. *Bi-face* is made out of two big surfaces with automotive finishes, one side red, the other side blue. *No, no, no* is an assemblage of three huge concrete objects: a tetrapod that has been used in seaside towns since the 1960s as a breakwater; a sixteen-foot-tall wall similar to the separation barrier in Palestine; and a barrier like the kind you can find along highways.

Against sound / Against waves / Against entry / on pedestals almost twenty new artworks at body size / bones – cars – girls – Mr. Clean – coffee cups / Not belong. As a child, I also grew up in Spain and Morocco before returning to France. At that moment, I shared nothing with what it means to be French. I still don't. No belonging /

Often I do things without any practical knowledge. I make one piece and move on to another one. I don't need to dominate over materials. My objects are surfaces, with no inside or outside, only holes. Through the holes there are other surfaces. I am more interested in the water running unstable at the peak of the mountains than in the brook. In the show, some objects are done really rough, others by the finest fabricators, such as from the Coubertin foundry or handmade ceramics from Guadalajara, Mexico. I abandoned early on the idea that art is a personal expression. I engage in *pression* (pressure), not expression.

My objects block or guide you / point outward / the viewers find their way back / become aware of energy blocks as in butoh, to be conscious of their own condition / The world is going fast. Let's go slow. I will die, but I am not getting older / I am getting something else.

— As told to Jo-ey Tang

frieze





'products': a term that links their manufactured status to an acknowledgment of their commercial value and modes of circulation. This dense, composite understanding of the nature of his 3D work is embodied in *Purple Graces* (2016), a triplet of common, concrete neo-classical garden goddesses, whose slickly draped figures the artist doused in flamboyant purple paint, chopped, spliced apart and re-bolted together to make a new object (or sculpture, or product).

Moulène is neither a craft fetishist nor a readymade purist. He frequently embarks on collaborative works that require multiple partners with very specific technical expertise to whom he can delegate production. In an interview published earlier this year in *Elephant*, the artist said he likes to avoid using the same materials more than once; coupled with his playful employment of a vast range of processes and scales of production, this naturally yields incredible diversity. He may alter industrially produced objects, as with *Purple Graces*, but composing and fabricating some of his other work demands sharing knowledge and skills, and more technologically sophisticated means. Compare, for example, *Bitte à fruits* (Fruit Knob, 1999) with *Body* and *Body versus Twizy* (both 2011). The former is a gnarly, rectangular hunk of street bollard dunked into a smattering of softly contoured pebbles and stones that encrust its top like sprinkles on an ice-cream cone. Inspired by the hybrid car-scooter Twizy, the latter works result from Moulène's collaboration with the Renault car company and are the artist's reconceptualization and reconfigurations of vehicles into large-scale abstract sculptures. The softly faceted and brightly hued red, yellow and blue contours of *Body*, which fade to white, and the sexy volumes of its 12-sided lozenge shape recall an air, ground or water vehicle prototype, while the form of the original black and silver Twizy hybrid can still be discerned in the more solid six-sided *Body versus Twizy*.

Trying to untangle the relationship between Moulène's objects and images is a tricky business and possibly a bankrupt one. While recognizing their visual and material co-dependency, Moulène distinguishes

'Enigmatic' and 'eclectic' are just two of the adjectives that curators and writers have cleaved to French artist Jean-Luc Moulène's output over the past decade. His drawings and fabricated objects have gained as much recognition as the photographic series he has been producing since the 1990s, but the variety of his work as a whole has left some critics perplexed. Moulène has shot many of his photographic series – which comprise landscapes and cityscapes, portraits and still lifes – over long periods of time: some include thousands of images. Within the landscape/cityscape genre, 'La Vigie' (The Vigil, 2004–11), for example, traces the dissemination of the invasive Paulownia tree from a sapling the artist first noticed fenced in at the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industry building in the Bercy neighbourhood of Paris. 'Fénautrigues' (1991–2006) constitutes approximately 7,000 colour photographs Moulène took of the eponymous hamlet his family hails from in southwest France. Due to their classification in genres and as series, the photographs could be seen as cohering by default, while the sheer quantity of perspectives over time renders the act of aesthetically singling out and describing individual images difficult, if not somewhat incidental.

Moulène's 3D works cannot be so neatly indexed. He insists they be called 'objects' rather than sculptures and has grouped them under the single heading 'Opus'. The terms 'object' and 'sculpture' both come with significant art-historical baggage, and the artist's choice of the former can be misleading, since he occasionally uses sculptural conventions, such as pedestals, and makes some of his 'objects' out of ready-made sculptures. But Moulène also often refers to his works as

Previous page
La Vigie (The Watchtower), 2004–11,
installation view of 'ENDWARDS'
at Extra City Kunsthall, Antwerp, 2013

1
Trichome 3, 2015,
glass, round steel, 40 × 67 × 44 cm

2
Fairy Fantasy, 2016, plastic, foam,
wood, epoxy resin, 57 × 40 × 38 cm

3
Il était une fois (Once upon a Time, detail),
2015, installation view at Villa Medici, Rome

Courtesy
Previous page the artist and
Extra City Kunsthall, Antwerp • 1 the artist and
Thomas Dane Gallery, London •
2 the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery,
New York; photograph: Florian Klienefenn •
3 the artist and Villa Medici, Rome



between them in this way: 'My wall images play on representation, while my objects play on presence.'¹ Here, he points to the common understanding that photography inherently registers the absence of whatever it depicts. This is poignantly visible in the series 'Produits de Palestine' (Products of Palestine, 2002–04): straightforwardly shot colour photographs of pairs of household items against plain backgrounds. These couscous packets, orange flower water bottles and cans of tomato paste are forbidden for sale outside the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but their representations can circulate on the global market as artworks. These days, the distinction between an object and its depiction becomes increasingly fuzzy. Moulène asserts that many contemporary objects (including those he makes) are post-photographic, by which he means they are digitally designed and essentially prefabricated by software: they already exist as images before they are produced as things.

Moulène's objects, photographs and drawings are increasingly entangled in exhibitions that eschew temporal and material boundaries within his *oeuvre*. A show taking place this year might include photographs from the 1990s and objects from the 2000s, or vice-versa, with no obvious thematic binding. Instead, an exhibition might be driven by one of Moulène's more general conceptual or formal concerns. In preparing his 2009 survey exhibition at the Carré d'Art in Nîmes, the artist studied the architect Norman Foster's plans for the art centre, clocked the organizing grid structure and decided to superimpose his own slightly displaced grid on top of Foster's. He then used the intersection points of these two grids to determine where he would place his works. In his 2015 exhibition, 'Il était une fois' ('Once upon a Time'), at the French Academy at Villa Medici in Rome, he winked at the Academy's former director, the Polish-French painter Balthus, by repainting the walls in Balthus's signature colours and by including one of the older artist's drawings from 1977: the final year of Balthus's tenure leading the Academy. Moulène further collided present and past by installing a row of 'Tronches' (Faces, 2012) – concrete funerary masks, cast from ordinary rubber costume masks of figures from popular and political culture – each displayed on a deep-blue, quilted packing blanket on the Villa's similarly patterned parquet floor. His solo exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, which opens this month, is not a retrospective but is organized around a set of artistic production protocols he's used previously – *la latéralité* (laterality, or the relationship between left and right sides of bodies and things), *l'intersection* (the intersection) and *la coupe* (the cut) – and will include new objects made in collaboration with designer Romain Guillet using 3D modelling.

What's most appreciable, and possibly radical, about Moulène's approach to making exhibitions is that he insists all of his work is equally relevant and timely. His various products can be put into circulation with each other at any given time, thus calling into question the value the art world might choose to identify as a consistent hallmark of, or as legibly new and original in, an artist's practice. And, while



Trying to untangle the relationship between Moulène's objects and images is a tricky business and, possibly, a bankrupt one.



What's most appreciable, and possibly radical, about Moulène's approach to making exhibitions is that he maintains all of his work is equally relevant and timely.



2

I'd ordinarily say it's lazy simply to reiterate that an artist leaves it to the viewer to finish the artwork; Moulène insists we take the time and make the effort to read his images and objects, without seeking to create a totality. He provides a formal framework and drops some hints, but doesn't bother with interpretation. Instead, he asserts: 'The form of a work has no stake in the game other than to make experience possible; it is a kind of rhetoric that helps communicate thought.'²

One thought that recurs when considering Moulène's production as a whole has to do with the nature of artistic labour, and of labour as such. The brilliant glossy contortions of the 19 intricate blown-glass 'knots' he's created over the past few years are exquisite. The real tension, however – for me, at least – lies in the making. A gripping YouTube video documenting Moulène's work period at the Centre International de La recherche sur Le verre et les Arts Plastiques (International Centre for Glass and Visual Arts Research) in Marseille, shows a crew of glass blowers heaving, hauling and fanning great blobs of molten stuff in an effort to inflate a transparent balloon or dome. The effort of this heavy labour is real and the sense of accomplishment sincerely dashed when, at the very last moment, the delicate, hardened form is released from its blowpipe and crashes unceremoniously through the hands of a worker to the ground.

Taking Moulène at his word, it could be said that his objects play on the presence of labour – as records of the manual or digital transformation of raw materials into commodities – while his wall images play on its representation. The initial title the artist conceived for his provocative, graphic series of nude portraits of sex workers, 'Filles d'Amsterdam' (Amsterdam Girls, 2005), was 'Workers with their Tools'. His 'Objets de grève' (Strike Objects, 1999–2000) provide meaningful access to French labour history,

by compiling a photographic catalogue of the objects striking workers have made, sometimes with the support of trade unions, using their tools of production to express their demands to a broad public and even, occasionally, to gain some income while off the job. Manufrance mail-order service workers, for instance, had the bottom of a frying pan imprinted with 'Justice, Liberty, Employment, Solidarity' to commemorate labour disputes in the 1980s (*La poêle des 17 de Manufrance*, Frying Pan for the Manufrance 17, 1999), while Lip factory workers created their own version of the Monopoly game board in 1976 (*Chomageopoly*, Unemploymentopoly, 1999).³

The co-existence of Moulène's photographs and objects interferes with critical drives for aesthetic coherence and narrative penchants for tidy artistic progressions. But it also reflects a particular understanding of artistic work, and work in general, in a changing world. By embracing both manual skills and digital technologies, individual and shared modes of production, Moulène's approach offers a compelling portrayal of the transformation of labour and its value in our time. ♦♦

1 Jean-Luc Moulène interview with François Piron, *Kaleidoscope*, issue 9, winter 2010, p.145

2 Ibid.

3 Moulène donated the collection of objects he photographed to the French state and they are housed at the Archives nationales du monde du travail (National Archives of the World of Labour) in Roubaix, France.

Vivian Sky Rehberg is a contributing editor of Frieze and director of the Master of Fine Art programme at the Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

Jean-Luc Moulène lives in Paris, France. He had a solo show earlier this year at Thomas Dane Gallery, London, UK. He has a major exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, from 19 October to 20 February 2017 and his work is included in the Taipei Biennial until 5 February 2017.

1
Indexes
2016, concrete, 138 × 74 × 50 cm

2
Tronche/Dragon
(Face/Dragon), 2014, concrete,
38 × 27 × 27 cm

Courtesy
1 the artist, Thomas Dane Gallery, London,
and Miguel Abreu Gallery,
New York • 2 the artist and Miguel Abreu
Gallery, New York;
photograph: Jeffrey Sturges

Flash Art

FEATURE

Conflicts of Interest

Laura McLean-Ferris on the work of Jean-Luc Moulène

68 — SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2016





Writing about the work of the French artist Jean-Luc Moulène (b. 1955, France; lives in Paris), I've reached, many times, for words that describe the deep center of a thing — bone marrow, heart, central core. Beholding Moulène's recent work involves not only looking, but attempting to reach into the innermost interior of another object, presence or material: to make an approach into the center. And in this way Moulène is an artist who allows one to think about both peculiar and important forms of empathy, one of the most critical problems of the current age. I don't mean a kindly, gentle thought about how someone else might feel. I mean an attempt to get inside something violent or difficult or alien in the only ways that are available to you: speculation, imagination, experience, logic, some kind of Stanislavskian embodiment technique. Don't forget that all of these strategies by which we try to understand others are rude, reckless and, by their very nature, flawed. And yet still the effort itself is deeply important in an era of confirmation bias, consensus bubbles, post-factual reportage and emotion-led politics. The structures by which we assemble ourselves politically — algorithms,

social networks, clickbait media, the markets — insulate us from those with whom we might disagree. We have entered an era of polarization and fantasy with cavernous moral and political divides that can seem, at times, unbridgeable.

Certain works by Moulène offer a material realization of that problem, presenting affective voids that are genuinely unreachable. For instance, *Tronches / Gardiens écorchés* (Paris, May 2014) (2014): an object made by using a full-head Halloween mask as a mold in which to cast concrete. Placing my own head before this concrete one, encountering it one-to-one, I'm struck by how hermetic an object it is — a concrete, sealed-in face turned inward, impenetrable. And yet, this head and its presence works its way into my own head, because the sense-making, relation-forming part of my brain wants to compare this head to my own. I fixate on two rows of strangely protruding teeth, an imprint seemingly taken from the back of a set of teeth, and suddenly my gaze tries to convolutedly swing inward. I think about a form of vision that could be located in the center of the head and look out at the back of my teeth, instead

Page 69:
Purple Graces (2016)
Courtesy of the Artist
and Thomas Dane
Gallery, London

This page:
Tronche / Slipknot
(Paris, 2014) (2014)
Courtesy of the Artist
and Galerie Chantal
Crousel, Paris

Next page:
Tête-à-Cul (2014)
Courtesy of the Artist
and Miguel Abreu
Gallery, New York



of on their exterior, as well as other views of the body from within. That sensation, of turning oneself inside out, seems particularly relevant to the monster masks that the artist selects. For a 2014 exhibition, “Torture Concrete” at New York’s Miguel Abreu Gallery, many more of the *Tronches* — made from other masks including the Joker, a dragon and a flying monkey — were laid on the floor on top of blue packing blankets (it seems that a *gardien écorché* [tormented guard] mask is a flayed-head mask). The works seem to suggest a difficult truth regarding the nature of empathy: you cannot materially turn yourself inside out in order to consider another being without being at war with yourself and your own body.

Creating something that is clearly and immediately fighting itself, choking, gagging, spitting itself out or questioning its own status as an object, is a central part of Moulène’s stock in trade. Take what is perhaps his best-known series, *Objets de grève* [Strike Objects]

(1999–2000), a series of photographs documenting products made by industrial workers on strike, each depicted cleanly and objectively on a neutral background. (Moulène worked primarily in photography until the early 2000s; these images in particular seem to draw from the time he worked in advertising.) A packet of Gauloises cigarettes, for example, has been produced in red instead of its signature blue, and has the words “occupée depuis le 23.2.82 pour le redémarrage, contre la fermeture de l’établissement” beneath the logo. A bottle of cleaning product announces that it is scented with “parfum de solidarité” and features the upturned palm of a striking hand, with the words “touche pas a mon emploi!” emblazoned across it. The back of a watch is engraved with details of a conflict from October 1974, while the base of a frying pan reads “relaxe,” encircled by the words “emploi,” “solidarité,” “liberté” and “justice.”

As fascinating as these objects are in an anthropological or historical sense, they also carry a strange form





of tautology at the core of their very existence. While “not producing” the objects, workers have nonetheless produced them, and so the markers of stoppage must be conveyed by other means. A product’s relationship with its consumer is conveyed and circulated by continuing to create and distribute that product, despite the fact that the very nature of its production is in dispute. The conflict is the core of the object. Moulène took a related approach to a later series, *Produits de Palestine* (2002–04), photographing products made in the occupied territories of the Gaza Strip and West Bank and branded as Palestinian. Due to sanctions, the products, which advertise a form of Palestinian identity, cannot leave the place in which they are produced. Bottles of olive oil and tinned tomatoes are beautifully depicted in pairs, in the style of lush, still-life product photography, yet they represent a kind of blockage within the circulatory system, an occlusion, a strangulation.

But human bodies and territories are not the only zones of conflict that Moulène’s works form themselves around. *La Vigie* (*The Lookout Man*) (2004–11), the artist’s monumental photographic essay, is a series of images of one particular species of plant, *paulownia tomentosa*, sometimes called the “princess tree.” The series began when the artist noticed a plant sprouting out of the asphalt next to the Ministry of Finance. Following the progress of this tenacious sprout in the area for the following seven years, the artist created a

suite of 299 images in which both artist and plant are intertwined as witnesses to a backdrop of escalating fear made physically manifest in Paris streets: anti-terrorist security measures such as bollards, fences and barricades instituted by the *Vigipirate* national security system. It’s a baleful irony that in the years since the series was completed, the relationship to terror in Paris and France has become ever more grim.

But what does it do to us to imagine that the plant, as much as the artist, is a kind of watcher, and to consider the world from this quiet being’s perspective at ankle-biting height? In the recently published novel *Pond* by Claire Louise Bennett, the protagonist describes the narrative of a half-remembered book in which the last woman alive realizes that she has become equivalent to any other type of object, for there is no species or community, just her singular body.

“For a few moments I looked away from the pages so that there was some opportunity for me to feel a little of what she must have felt when she looked at her face with the same sort of attention one brings to bear upon the bark of a tree, the surface of a rock, the skin of a peach, and in those few moments it was as if the pupils in my own eyes became tunnels and I was suddenly sucked backwards.” [Riverhead Books, 2016, p. 90]

Previous page:
Noeud 4.1 Varia 01
(Paris, 2012) (2012)
Courtesy of the Artist
and Miguel Abreu
Gallery, New York

This page, from left:
Alzahara – Nérolis
From the series “Produits
de Palestine” (2002-04)
Courtesy of the Artist;
Miguel Abreu Gallery,
New York; Galerie Chantal
Crousel, Paris; and Thomas
Dane Gallery, London

PPP-Ratidine
From the series “Produits
de Palestine” (2002-04)
Courtesy of the Artist;
Miguel Abreu Gallery,
New York; Galerie Chantal
Crousel, Paris; and Thomas
Dane Gallery, London

This description of an internalized gaze that is “sucked backwards” when confronted with the possibility of viewing oneself and the world on the same register, and even intertwined with animals, objects or rocks, strikingly evokes the experience of engaging with one of Moulène’s works — for example *Arthur* (2010), a sculpture in which a human skull is partly encased in cast concrete, so that only the crown of the head appears. Or *Tête-à-Cul* (*Paris, spring 2014*) (2014), a hanging sculpture of a boar’s jawbone and a doe’s hipbone connected by a pale balloon that has been inflated inside them, affixed with latex. Cream bulges protrude like eyes, cheeks and other forms of bodily swellings. Somehow it is possible to treat this head-body as a complete entity with a possible spirit and character, however truncated, malformed, squeezed and inhuman that presence might be.

Allowing a flexible and viscous material to react to a more rigid structure also informs one of Moulène’s most important bodies of work, which takes knots and knottiness as a formal point of departure. The artist is avowedly interested in the mathematical study of knots and knot theory; as he told me via email “The knot can be considered like a tool for describing the behavior of complexity and chaos, even at a first glance.” In several works, a lattice-like knot structure is made with thin steel laces before a colored glass form is blown inside the structure, as though it is attempting to rupture its encasement within the tangle. Other knots, such as versions of the interlinked Borromean rings, are made entirely of loops of colored glass, such as *Blown Knot 63 2, Borromean, Varia 03* (*CIRVA, Marseille, 2012*) (2012), in which linked and fused rings of sky blue, neon yellow and treacly orange seem to wrestle with each other around an empty center.

Returning to the question of empathy, Moulène’s knot sculptures also communicate, through material, an important commitment to complexity. “What interests me,” the artist has said, “are the functions of transformation.” [Jean-Luc Moulène in conversation with Briony Fer, in *Jean-Luc Moulène*, Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König; Nîmes: Carré d’art–Musée d’art contemporain de Nîmes, 2009, p. 139.] It’s for this reason that his upcoming exhibition at Centre Pompidou, in Paris, is not a retrospective, but rather a “retrospective of protocols,” which are positions that refuse to resolve. This thinking through of the unstable, tangled position is elegantly expressed by a series of slender bronze sculptures, “Nœuds” (2010–12), which resemble hipbones, blossoms or other folded forms on stalks. These works, which also begin with knot theory, are made by making wire knots in blocks of soft clay before pulling them tight and displacing the center of the block in cleaved-away slivers. Casting the spaces that are left in bronze, the artist thereby casts the heart of a knot, a space that is impossible for us to access, which is as strong a material definition of empathy as I can imagine. “Gently, the ‘Nœuds’ have occupied my thoughts with a clear complexity that has rejuvenated my world.” The works recall certain pieces



by the brilliant Polish sculptor Alina Szapocznikow, whose sculptures summon a sensual, degrading body, in all its joys and traumas. Moulène’s work, however, arrives in an altered, widened plane of existence. It doesn’t stop at the human body, but reaches toward the esoteric, the mathematical, and the flora, fauna and other objects of the planet — suggesting complex, elaborate binds with other materials and presences.

Jean-Luc Moulène’s retrospective exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, will be on view from October 19, 2016, to February 20, 2017.

Laura McLean-Ferris is Flash Art Associate Editor.

*This page:
La Vigie (2004-11)
Courtesy of the Artist
and Galerie Chantal
Crousel, Paris*

*Next page:
Trichrome 2 Marseille,
février 2015 (2015)
Courtesy of the Artist
and Galerie Chantal
Crousel, Paris
Photography by
Florian Kleinfenn*



the guardian

Sculpture

Jean-Luc Moulène review – who knew French art could be so funny?

★★★★★

Thomas Dane Gallery, London

If spliced buttocks, breasts and goat legs are symbols of a nation in decline, let's have more of them – this is modern art at its wicked best



📷 Rotting glamour ... Jean-Luc Moulène's Purple Graces, 2016. Photograph: Courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London

I am in a ghostly garden of some forgotten chateau where grey lichen-marked statues loom in the mist among once-pollarded, now madly overgrown, trees. OK, I made up the chateau, the mist and the trees – but they are all evoked by Jean-Luc Moulène's eerie installation of concrete rococo sculpture.

At first glimpse his groups of nudes and fauns appear time-worn and authentic. Then you see how he has hacked through these concrete casts with a powerful cutting tool and spliced them together in weirdly unsettling groups. Buttocks and breasts, goat legs and modest downcast eyes are disturbingly spliced together in a manic montage, the classical tradition gone psycho. Who says French culture is dead?



📷 'Spooky' ... Jean-Luc Moulène, La Faucheuse, 2015 Photograph: Courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London

Sure, they're all reading the pessimistic portrayals of a nation in decline in the novels of Michel Houellebecq. Moulène's carnival of broken forms similarly speaks of a proud culture in self-conscious decay. One of his collage sculptures is painted in the colours of the Tricolour, with a seedy suggestion of rotting glamour: red lipstick, a blue trumpet and white fake breasts. A huge fly has landed beside these hilarious icons of France's fading glamour.

Yet just as Houellebecq's audacious novels paradoxically prove the vitality of the very culture whose death they diagnose, Moulène's scintillating, macabre and joyful creativity is a spectacular manifestation of all that is sensual and subversive in French art, from Watteau to the Surrealists and Godard. Indeed, it seems clear now what happened to [Damien Hirst](#)'s talent. It took a French holiday.

Moulène's concrete wolf head, bisected to reveal a real animal skull, has the rawness of early, exciting Hirst. So does a drawing of a creature that is half ant and half dog, while the things Moulène does with pigs reveal a genius for charcuterie. This is modern art at its most viscerally funny and wickedly liberating.

Thank God not every artist of our time is lost in navel-gazing theory and subdigital drivel. And yet, few artists convey the qualities of now as acutely as Moulène - later this year he gets a major solo show at the Pompidou in Paris. His is an art of anxiety and distraction, restlessness and insatiable channel-switching. Lots of artists are using a collage aesthetic to evoke the information bombardment of our age, but most end up in trite silliness.



Rawness ... Mix, 2016, by Jean-Luc Moulène. Photograph: Courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London

“

The things Moulène does with pigs reveal a genius for charcuterie

”

Moulène makes montage work, because his sensuality and his impatience collide in a way that is both exhilarating and traumatic. All the sawing and chopping and remixing releases new and potent images. He cannot see a beautiful statue without imagining it bisected and shoved up against other fragments to create a nightmare version of the [Three Graces](#). He cannot sit in a garden chair without picturing death's sickle poised overhead.

His spookiest sculpture, a cheap plastic garden chair painted blue, does indeed have a tall scythe attached, ready to fall on your head as you sit in your garden ruminating. This, and other works in the upstairs gallery, claim inspiration from Rimbaud, the godfather of all cut-up imagery: there's an intelligence and literary depth to Moulène's art that plays marvellously against its vulgar violence.

A concrete cat holding a human skull presides over the debacle, its mystic eyes seeing the madness that erupts from sliced and spliced fragments of a world spiralling out of control. Who knew le fin could be so funny?

● [Jean-Luc Moulène is at Thomas Dane Gallery, London, until 28 May](#)

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS
Rome

Jean-Luc Moulène

FRENCH ACADEMY OF ROME, VILLA MEDICI
Viale della Trinità dei Monti, 1
April 30–September 13

"*Il était une fois*" (Once upon a Time): Judging from its (slightly ironic) title, this solo exhibition by Jean-Luc Moulène alludes to the artist's use of context, which is outstanding and laden with history. Numerous references connect the works on view, both preexisting and new, to the French Academy in Rome and to the splendid Renaissance villa that has housed it since 1803. *Monocromi* (Monochromes), 2015, sheets of bronze affixed to a wall, are the same size as certain standard sizes for historical European oil paintings; *Les Trois Grâces* (The Three Graces), 2012, a video based on the title's iconography, echoes a third-century AD bas-relief located on the villa's interior facade; *La Pucelle* (The Maiden), 2013, an assemblage of three figurative sculptures, establishes a dialogue with casts once selected by Balthus for the garden (he was director of the French Academy from 1961 to 1977); and so on.



Jean-Luc Moulène, *Les Trois Grâces* (The Three Graces), 2012, HD video, color, silent, ten minute loop.

Despite this central theme, the variety of materials, techniques, and registers is such that distracted viewers might be led to think they have wandered into the wrong wing of the building and are looking at a group show. Historical citations contrast with strictly contemporary references, such as in *Tronches* (Faces), 2014, twenty-four cement casts of rubber carnival masks, while figurative elements face off against abstract forms derived from geometric speculations, such as in *Gnou* (Wilbebeest) and *Samples* (Onyx), both 2015. As is usual with this sophisticated artist, one wonders about the deeper connection among the works, each of which tends to be presented as a the solution—often admirably precise—to an enigmatic problem that changes in every piece. When asked in a 2008 interview what holds his work "together," Moulène responded, quite enigmatically: "The obvious absurdity, horrible revelation, bursts of laughter."

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

— *Simone Menegoi*

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Jean-Luc Moulène, *Torture Concrete*

Dates: September 7 – October 26, 2014

Reception: Sunday, September 7, 6 – 8PM

*Il reste à systématiquement attaquer (et contempler) les systèmes pour les grouper
en piédestal et fondation nécessaire du Monument à l'Unité de tous les Délires.*

— Roger Gilbert-Lecomte

Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to announce the opening, on Sunday, September 7th, of Jean-Luc Moulène's *Torture Concrete*, the artist's first one-person exhibition at the gallery and in New York City.

On view both at 88 Eldridge Street and 36 Orchard Street, the show is comprised of a variety of 'objects' from *Opus*, a body of work in development since 1995, along with two drawings and four photographs. While the constellation of tabletop, floor-bound, and hanging works take three-dimensional materials and photography as their particular support, they are expressly not sculptures nor photographs. "I consider my images and objects as tools, articles of use: practical above all else," says Moulène, a self-described *technicien libertaire*. He points to the rudimentary idea of a tool: the relaying of tensions implicit to materials by both acting and being acted upon, and thus emphasizes the importance of the manipulable in his practice.

The various works in the exhibition, be they bronze or glass knots, cement sculptures of heads, or photographs, are unified by what Moulène calls his underlying *protocols*, his working paradigm of topology and dynamic systems. This unique *modus operandi* enables a non-monotonic entanglement between the producer, the production, and the product, that is between the artist, his imagination encountering the volition of materials, and the artwork. Following a protocol, or certain autonomous directives, implies acting in accordance with the ramifying transits between thought and matter. As Reza Negarestani writes in an essay accompanying the show, Moulène proceeds in "search for integrity in variation," looking "for opportunities to partake in variations on the basis of their underlying invariances."

When he employs the physico-mathematical entity of a knot as a protocol of construction, for instance, Moulène transcends the conventional view of art as a transitive between the artist and the world. He rediscovers the task of art in its power to rearrange and destabilize the configurational relations between understanding, imagination, and embodiment, which opens up an amplified field of ambiguity. This space of equivocality is generative, however, inasmuch as it demands new strategies and produces possibilities for the orientation of thought. Thus Moulène reactivates abstraction as "the art of rendering intelligible the mutual perturbations of thought and matter," Negarestani continues, "by organizing the space through which their respective forces are expressed." Here the artist sets out to exercise the emancipatory procedure of liberating thought from the grip of any external cause that might determine it. "The task of abstraction in this scenario," Negarestani explains, "is to liberate the virtual subject – the designated force of thought."

Bronze *Noeuds* installed alongside glass *Blown Knots* in one room produce the effect of breathing through contracted and dilated space – imploded by pulling a rope and exploded by blowing into glass. The concrete sculptures made by filling inverted latex Halloween masks with cement are another variation of the knot in its most condensed, simplest form of a single loop surface. Further, Moulène destabilizes and plays with the age-old artistic genres of

portraiture and monuments by purchasing pop-culture caricatures and neutralizing their representations as the two materials at work find a kind of uneasy equilibrium. In this sense, he constantly annihilates the dualities of the inside and the outside, the negative and the positive space, as well as of the abstract and the concrete.

Born in 1955, Jean-Luc Moulène studied Aesthetics and Sciences of Art at the Sorbonne University in Paris, where he currently lives and works. He participated in Documenta X (1997), the Sao Paulo Biennial (2002), the Venice Biennial (2003), the Taipei Biennial (2004), the First International Biennial of the Image (Laos, 2007) and the Sharjah Biennial (2010). Among the institutions that have dedicated solo exhibitions to his work are Dia:Beacon (2012), Centre d'Art Contemporain de Genève (2003), Musée du Louvre, Paris (2005), Culturgest, Lisbon (2007), and Carré d'art-Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes (2009). Moulène's work has been included in group exhibitions at the Witte de With (Rotterdam), ARC / Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Le Magasin (Grenoble), Grey Art Gallery (New York), Musée des Beaux-Arts de Beaune, Villa Médici (Rome), Yokohama Museum of Art, Triennale de Milano, KW Institute for Contemporary Art (Berlin), Museum Ludwig (Cologne), De Appel (Amsterdam), Grand Palais (Paris), Landesmuseum Joanneum GmbH Kunsthaus (Graz), Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris), Kunstverein Nürnberg, and elsewhere.

Torture Concrete: Jean-Luc Moulène and the Protocol of Abstraction, an essay by Reza Negarestani will be published by Sequence Press in conjunction with the exhibition.

Several monographs and exhibition catalogues are dedicated to Moulène's work, including: Yasmil Raymond, ed., Jean-Luc Moulène Opus + One (New York and New Haven: Dia Art Foundation and Yale University Press, 2012); Jean-Pierre Criqui, Yve-Alain Bois, Briony Fer, eds., Jean-Luc Moulène (Cologne and Nîmes: Buchhandlung Walther König and Carré d'Art-Musée d'Art Contemporain de Nîmes, 2009); and Jean-Luc Moulène: Opus 1995-2007/ Documents 1999-2007 (Lisbon: Culturgest, 2007).

For more information or for visuals, please contact the gallery:

Miguel Abreu Gallery

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New York, NY 10002

Telephone 212.995.1774 • Fax 646.688.2302 • post@miguelabreugallery.com

Hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 10:30AM to 6:30PM and by appointment

Subway: F to East Broadway; B, D to Grand Street; J, M, Z to Delancey / Essex Street

ARTFORUM

Jean-Luc Moulène

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY



Jean-Luc Moulène,
*Blown Knot 1 (CIRVA,
Marseille, June 2014)*,
steel, glass, 18 1/8 × 15
3/4 × 15 3/4".

After visiting Jean-Luc Moulène's "Torture Concrete" at Miguel Abreu Gallery this past fall, one would have been forgiven for scratching one's head. The artist's diverse, astringent work, which has ranged from monochrome paintings and landscape photographs to enigmatic sculptures comes wrapped in an aura of obdurate difficulty—the implacable air of the deadly and complex. Split between the gallery's two spaces, this show displayed thirty-seven pieces in various media, many (though not all) belonging to "Opus," 1995–, a series that was the subject of a major survey at Dia:Beacon in 2011.

In a 2009 interview with art historian Briony Fer, Moulène articulated a mission statement of sorts: His work, he declared, is born of a desire to create "any nondescript object with exactitude." The original French uses the adjective *quelconque*, which can also be translated into English as "anything whatever" or "unspecific" and points to the phrase's self-consciously wry inversion (if not involution) of Donald Judd's "specific object." Fer goes on to invoke Judd's statement that a "form that's neither geometric or organic would be a great discovery." Moulène responds: "We know about other mathematical models, other, less dualistic geometries." Could such geometries lead toward the *quelconque*? To be sure, several works in the show see Moulène borrowing from the esoteric netherworlds of higher math—specifically, from a branch of topology called knot theory—where he has found a rich vocabulary of forms and procedures in which the categories of geometric and organic break down.

In fact, one way to view this exhibition was as a veritable *Wunder-kammer* of topological knots. At the Orchard Street space, a pair of nuzzling blown-glass sculptures modeled something called the Hopf link; seven glass and bronze works mounted on vertical poles at Eldridge Street reconstructed the first five prime, or "nontrivial," knots; nearby, a compact ravel of red, blue, and yellow blown-glass loops expressed Borromean rings; and a group of concrete heads cast from Halloween-mask molds were, the press release informed us, "another variation of the knot in its most condensed, simplest form of a single loop surface" (or a self-contained sphere). The prevalence of blown glass was fitting, as the plasticity of that substance in its molten state has a natural affinity with a mathematical discipline that studies the continuous properties of three-dimensional objects in a dynamic state of change and deformation. And deform these knots Moulène does: He seems to relish destruction through creation. The majority of his sculptures—particularly the seven based on prime knots—steadfastly flout math-textbook ideals of depictive clarity. Rather than reveal their structure, the bronze *Noeud 5.1 Varia 02 (Paris, 2012)* and its ilk are blasted, bony wraiths.

That's because for Moulène, knots are a means, not the end. They are tools. "We can consider the surrounding world not in terms of forms and colours, but topographically," he said in his interview with Fer, "in terms of the number of holes." A concern with holes, and with classifying the world by holes, evidently inspired *Blown Knot 1*

(*CIRVA, Marseille, June 2014*) and *Tête-à-Cul (Paris, spring 2014)*—two works that, at first glance, could hardly be more different. To make the former, the artist shaped a length of wire mesh into a trefoil—the second of the prime knots—and then inflated a blown-glass vessel inside it. As the heated glass expanded to fill the metal structure, it bulged outward around the wire, swelling like a strangled balloon. For *Tête-à-Cul (Paris, spring 2014)*, meanwhile, Moulène began with an *actual* balloon, and inflated it inside a very different kind of object—an assemblage consisting of the jawbone of a boar affixed to the pelvic bone of a deer. Here, the swelling is disturbingly bodily and considerably more extreme: Latex protuberances spill like tumors from between the sculptures' gaps.

The shared submission to the forces of inflation, constriction, and distension in these works—this squeezing of substances through orifices and holes—suggests a vision of the world as a continuum of homeomorphisms. It is a place where the organic and the geometric might meet or entangle or overlap as they collapse onto a spectrum of continuous flux, as destabilizing expressions of the *quelconque*.

—Lloyd Wise

Art in America

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE Miguel Abreu

If Jean-Luc Moulène's "Opus"—an ongoing conglomeration of images and objects that the Paris-based artist has produced since 1995—constitutes a body of work, it is also what his fellow Frenchman Antonin Artaud once termed a "body without organs." In his notorious 1947 radio play *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*, Artaud evoked the body without organs as a figure released from "automatic reactions." As the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari later proposed, Artaud did not have anything against lungs and kidneys per se; rather, he challenged their apparently god-like *organization* into fixed hierarchical systems. While many of his works resemble body parts (pelvises, skulls and aortas come to mind), Moulène, who was exposed to thinkers like Artaud, Deleuze and Guattari at the Sorbonne in the mid-1970s and later took up a position as an artistic consultant at a manufacturer of military equipment, is attuned to processes of organization that undergird these corporeal resonances.

In "Torture Concrete," Moulène's first solo exhibition in New York City, selections of objects, photographs and drawings from "Opus" were on view at both of Miguel Abreu's locations. Rather than adhering to a received order based on medium, the various elements of "Opus" were engaged in subtle yet constant conversation. Two knots of blown magenta and turquoise glass rested on a table as a strikingly sparse and apparently lonely installation. Evoking models of vascular clusters, where blue and red tones indicate the coming and going of blood, these elegant objects, made in 2012, echoed other pieces on view. A duo of blue and red felt pen drawings from 2013 based on the Möbius strip, for instance, picked up the thread through a different process. Like the interlocking forms of his glass knots, which seem to endlessly evade the distinction between inside and outside, Moulène's attempted transcriptions of infinity point to his broader concern with the limits of representation.



Jean-Luc Moulène:
Tronche/Moon Face
(Paris, May 2014),
2014, polished
concrete, blue
blanket, 7¼ by 10½
by 12½ inches; at
Miguel Abreu.

The knot is a primary motif for Moulène, and knot-making is an integral part of his process, serving to reorganize the power dynamic between author and artwork. For his bronze series "Noeud" (2010-12), Moulène generated a number of objects reminiscent of hip bones by pulling on sharp wire knots embedded in blocks of clay and casting the petal-shaped voids left behind. While he chose the complexity of a given knot from a chart of "knot-theory" diagrams, Moulène could not predict the end results, which were determined by the internal structure of the wire knot and the force it exerted on the clay. Moulène further diminished his own authorship by allowing varying processes of oxidation to determine the final appearance of each piece. The patinas on these objects range from bright blue to near-black.

In the Western tradition, the head is privileged: it is both of and above the body. Moulène's "Tronches" series amusingly restructures this hierarchy with a sequence of bloated concrete heads cast from Halloween masks. Floor-bound, the procession of heads deflates the vertical identity of the *Homo sapiens*. This inversion mirrors Moulène's decision to turn the store-bought masks inside out to form the heads and to bring packing blankets out of gallery storage to display them on—linking possible reorganizations of the body to the larger economic "circulatory system" in which the gallery is embedded.

—Gillian Young

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE

The French artist came to prominence as a photographer, but he's long since moved into three dimensions, making works that he rather pretentiously declines to call sculptures. Shoulder-height, freestanding bronzes twist into calla lilies or funnels (the sexual implications are unavoidable); colorful blown-glass knots, aggrandized with lots of mathematical back story, challenge distinctions of inside and outside. The best pieces here were made by filling latex Halloween masks with concrete. A horned devil, a glowering alien, an encephalitic monkey: these are far more engaging exercises in boundary-crossing, and they get along just fine without any prolix defenses. Through Oct. 26.



The top five New York art shows this week

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By Howard Halle Mon Sep 22 2014

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Jean-Luc Moulène, Blown Knot 2 21, Rubyemerald, Varia 01 (CIRVA, Marseille, October 2012), 2012
Photograph: Courtesy Miguel Abreu Gallery

Jean-Luc Moulène, "Torture Concrete"

FREE

This show by the noted Parisian artist takes up both of Abreu's locations, and while drawings and photographs are included, the principal focus is on Moulène's sculptures in glass, steel and bronze, which could be described as organic or anatomical forms imbued with an ambiguously creepy vibe. A series of green-patinaed bronzes, for example, features what appear to be casts of pelvic bones, in whole or in part, impaled on tall, polelike stanchions.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Beirut

Jean-Luc Moulène

BEIRUT ART CENTER

Jisr El Wati, Building 13, Street 97, Zone 66

July 11, 2013–October 12, 2013

In 2001, the French artist Jean-Luc Moulène took a series of photographs in the Lebanese port city of Sidon, which included portraits of people he met there by chance or through friends. The resulting images were displayed on the crumbling facades of the old souk. Twelve years later, many of them are still there. One portrait in particular, titled *Abou Baker*, 2001, after its subject, was later borrowed by mourners for the young man's funeral. For Moulène's illuminating, inscrutable exhibition at the Beirut Art Center, *Abou Baker* and another picture from the same series—featuring three bare-chested young men, all tattoos, charm, and tender affection—are placed at the top of an industrial stairwell. They are the only clear link between artist and place. The rest of the show revels in shadows and echoes, which move and multiply among the objects, photographs, drawings, videos, and architectural installations on view.



Jean-Luc Moulène, *Arthur*, 2010, concrete, bone, 8 3/4 x 10 1/4 x 8 1/4".

With forty works arranged into four sections, "Jean-Luc Moulène—Works" loops around the center like a sequence of strange and compelling riddles, from a skull cased in concrete (*Arthur*, 2010) and a haphazard chunk of plywood (*Alexandria Made*, 1997) to a suite of ink drawings disguised as monochromatic paintings (*4 Bic Drawings*, 2013). Categories fall into disarray as Moulène collapses conventional understandings of what constitutes an image, an object, or a mode of communicating the meaning and status of one as the other.

Wrapping around the main hall are two fantastic L-beams—one red, one blue—that bifurcate the space. Produced in Beirut and commissioned for the exhibition, the steel structures, when viewed from above, form two rectangles bolted on top of one another but shifted slightly apart. Together, they are called *debrayeur*, French for "disengage" but also the word for a clutch pedal, itself an apt metaphor for Moulène's practice as a mechanism that controls how two things moving at potentially different speeds connect and decouple, if and when needed.

— Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

Photomonitor:

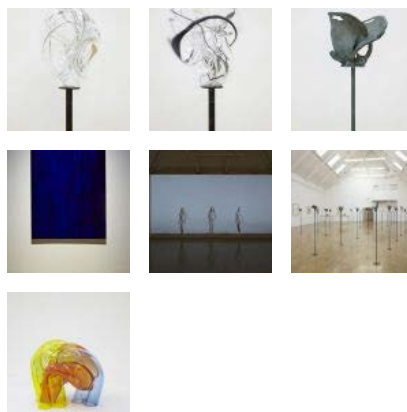
Paul Carey-Kent / Jean-Luc Moulène
February 2013

Jean-Luc Moulène (born Reims, 1955) came to prominence as a photographer in the 1990s and is probably best known for three series which explore – among other things – the nature of labour and the relationships between commerce and art: *Objets de Grève* ('Strike Objects', 1999–2000), goods manufactured on the assembly line by workers on strike, and sold in the parallel economy of the black market in order to help fund their cause; the closely related still life inventory of *Produits de Palestine* ('Products of Palestine', 2002–04) for which he photographed consumer products from the occupied territories, which sanctions prevented from circulating as part of the world market in the way they now circulate as photographs; and the somewhat notorious *Les Filles d'Amsterdam* ('Girls of Amsterdam', 2005, included in last year's Paris Triennial), which examines identity at work while also aiming to combine the historically separate genres of portraiture and pornography. Moulène depicts prostitutes – to whom he showed the relevant 19th century examples – under their stage names in poses which give equal and unified emphasis to face and genitals.

Moulène, however, has enough variety in his enigmatic photographic practice alone to justify his 1999 statement that 'I think of my shows as group shows'^[1] – an assessment which has been made all the more plausible since then by his decision to exhibit a wide range of films, drawings, paintings and sculptures (which he calls 'Objects' to emphasise their status as products) alongside his photographs (or rather 'Documents', as 'they are between media and fine art, and so are called post-photographic documents and not photographs'^[2]). Moulène has collectively titled his exploration of materials—manufactured and found, industrial and organic—'Opus', so reinforcing the link to manufacture which has been a constant – indeed, Moulène spent a decade working for the naval arms company Thomson.

The range of Moulène's work as a photographer is largely explained by his interest's deriving not from his surface subject matter, but from the social and economic factors of which they are Documents, and from how the images are used and circulated as a result of their differing roles as media reportage, advertising or fine art – 'unspecific objects but specific means'^[3] is one of his slogans. Similarly, his Objects set out to explore an underlying language of geometric forms and their mathematical expression. In both cases, it might be said, he starts from inside and tries to go outside. He also dances, as he himself has put it, between two extremes: 'on the one side poetry, which is an invention of language with no structure; on the other side the total formality of mathematics. I don't like the middle. So it's poetry or mathematics... but art can be both'^[4]. Or to put that, perhaps, another way: 'the main function of an artist is to work on chaos and freedom; all the rest is left to politicians.'^[5]

Moulène's recent Oxford and London shows featured a dizzying variety of ways to present a giddy range of potential themes. Modern Art Oxford featured a new film; a melted plastic bottle; a memorial stone; drawings of eyes; cast bronze knots set on trestles; a geometric construction which finds 'order in a heap'; a video of Moulène himself ordering a different heap, i.e., doing his washing up; and an eclectic mix of photographs in the tradition of the *flâneur*. Thomas Dane's two spaces contained his largest knot yet; birdcages enclosing 'lungs' of blue glass; explorations of the geometry of clocks; a cunningly simple collage of eye as finger; an adjusted model aeroplane; and photographs from his first stay in New York. This was in connection with his substantial exhibition at Dia Beacon and the Dan Flavin Art Institute, which itself included a hundred Objects, one scaled up by Renault to the size of a car, a set of monochromes and 299 photographs of weeds. Both British shows included three-coloured knots in blown glass; other sets of monochrome 'paintings' made with biro ink; and combinations of mirror and lycra – so perhaps we should start with those.



The topographic figure of the knot has recently become important for Moulène. He's interested in how its mathematics has been used by scientists to describe natural phenomena, and in Lacan's use of the three elements of the Borromean knot to represent the interdependence of the three orders of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. Moulène describes knots as 'tools to describe complexity', and adds that 'my utopia for artworks is to create tools.'^[6] Yet the sculptures themselves seem to cut through all that in favour of the resulting aesthetics, to move from inside to outside and from maths to poetry. The three-coloured knots, in particular, are quite a feat of glass-blowing – commissioned, in line with Moulène's principles, through the channels of commercial manufacture rather than artistic outsourcing. Their key characteristic is that no two of the three rings are linked on their own, but together all three are linked, and that leads to an immediate beauty.

If the knots generate complexity only to cut through it, bringing order to turbulence and chaos, then the ongoing series *Monochromes / Samples* (2011–) starts at the simple end but proves to have its complexities. Moulène uses a palette knife to slather the ink from everyday BIC biros over a glossy board. Black, red, blue and green feature, but not yellow because BIC don't make it, even though that – which is another topic – is a special colour for Moulène. That points to the industrial logic of the monochrome process, which seemed in America to parallel Dan Flavin's use of standardised industrial lighting, but felt more literary in Oxford, as if using the tools of writing to arrive at some kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of poetry. In Italy, no doubt, one would have thought of Alighiero Boetti's biro works and in France of Yves Klein's blue paintings. Moreover, the monochrome background has long been a characteristic means of Moulène denying unwanted spatial depth in photographic work. *Monochromes / Samples* also brings the viewer in, as partially reflected in the tactile smears. Complexity, then, reappears, along with another movement from inside to outside.

The *Stressed* series (2012) consists of a square metre of mirror set beside a square metre of brightly coloured lycra which has been nailed so that it's stretched to appear oblong. This visual paradox amalgamates concerns from the knots and the monochromes. The stressed element exposes how the underlying topography can be distorted by the time it reaches our perception, picking up the psychological undertones of the knots. *Stressed* also effects a separation of the monochromatic and reflective aspects of the biro works.

Yet perhaps the most striking presences in Moulène's British shows were more directly human. *The Three Graces* (2012) stand naked on a local hilltop in a nine minute silent black and white film, projected to the height of the gallery wall in Oxford. We're told they are – as specifically sought by Moulène – three sisters, two of them twins. It's far from obvious, though, which are the twins, setting up a dialogue with

Art Review:



Jean-Luc Moulène
Thomas Dane Gallery, London
22 November – 26 January

"I'm interested in both sides of the line of language," Jean-Luc Moulène told Tate's Chris Dercon during an interview at Modern Art Oxford last year. Poetry lay on one side, he said, mathematics on the other. "But I think art could be both," added the Reims-born artist, "because it's not language." Remember that when confronting Moulène's practice, which is formally ambulatory, somehow both clear and opaque, and consequently knotty. Literally so in his *Blown Knot* (2012) series of glass objects, produced during a residency at CIRVA, the Marseilles research centre for art and glassmaking. Bulbous blown forms in three colours (red, yellow and blue), wrapped complexly around each other and interfusing, these are at once deliriously aesthetic things – you can follow their soft transparent tunnels and glowing interplay of secondaries and tertiaries for a long time without getting bored – and the showy yields of applied physics.

Moulène enjoys this doubling-up, his artworks often feeling like traps for the empirical and open-ended alike. A series of mirrors, placed near corners and accompanied by swatches of colourful Lycra pinned tightly by its own corners where the walls meet, are both informative (here's what a part of the world, ie you, looks like; here's what material under multidirectional stress looks like) and amorphous, for what's the relation between you and this colour? Five photographs taken in New York in 2012 – a tree, the interior of the Strand bookshop, a pretty girl toting a mobile phone, foodstuffs laid out on Chinese newsprint, a half-blackened building whose burned frontage and plywood-blocked windows make the image

look semisolarised – are locally informative yet don't add up to a worldview. As the handout points out, they reenact classic pictorial strategies (still life, landscape, portrait), but they're highly specific. A categorical form meets an emblem of the world's irreducible variety, even as found in just one city.

For his previous show here, in 2007, Moulène exhibited *Products of Palestine* (2002–4), photographs of 58 consumer products that, due to sanctions, never leave the Gaza Strip and West Bank. That's as loaded a subject as you might find, but it's also a metaphor for circulation. The objects can't move, but an image of them can. Seemingly fixed things can move in diverse ways (here's where glass and stretchy material meet on the metaphoric plane): in the imagination, for example. So Moulène's two tastefully defaced advertisements for high-end watches, one from *Le Monde* and the other from *The New York Times*, both titled *Ralph Lauren's* (2012) – spokes in black or red felt tip pen radiating outward from pictured clockfaces – are at once comprehensible and suggest an attitude to luxury goods. Nearby, meanwhile, is *Trou d' A380* (2012), a model aeroplane retrofitted with bars erupting from the wings; from the crossbar dangles a vaguely noose-shaped twist of green wire. None of these works are exactly indicting; they foxtrot around critique, suggesting but not reifying an attitude to the thing modified.

If there's a model here for that equalising of prompt and constraint, it's Moulène's pair of iron birdcages, each filled by a glass object fitted near-perfectly to its dimensions, bubbling outward through the open cage door and the circular aperture at the top. The techniques involved in fabricating such things make the brain hurt to contemplate, and they're emphatically part of the work. But everything else about *For Birds 1* and *2* (2012) resides, tantalisingly, on the other side of 'the line of language'.

MARTIN HERBERT

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

JEAN-LUC MOULENE

by saul ostrow



In the mid-'90s, the Paris-based artist Jean-Luc Moulène, known for his large-format, sometimes politically inflected photographs, initiated a parallel project consisting of three-dimensional "objects." (Moulène eschews the term "sculpture," with its historical and esthetic entanglements.) Collectively termed "Opus" (1995–), these pieces, now totaling just under 100, are each identified with a title as well as the city, month and year in which the work was fabricated.

The yearlong exhibition "Opus + One," the artist's first solo exhibition in North America, takes place at two venues. Dia:Beacon offers 37 of the objects, along with Moulène's urban-photo suite "La Vigie" (2004–11). Meanwhile, Dia's Dan Flavin Art Institute in Bridgehampton presents newly commissioned works—wall-mounted panels slathered with ink using a palette knife—part of the series "Monochromes/Samples" (2011–).

"La Vigie" (The Lookout Man), which consists of 299 photographs (some black-and-white, some color), documents a type of nuisance vegetation, the Princess Tree, that grows in vacant lots, neglected buildings and cracked sidewalks. One tree Moulène has photographed over the span of seven years stands in the Parisian neighborhood of the Ministry for the Economy, Industry and Employment. Evidence of social changes—including posters and graffiti as well as the installation of antiterrorist barricades—can be detected here and there in the periphery of the images. Nevertheless, Moulène allows the works to speak for themselves. He does nothing to prompt a specific reading, beyond titling the extended series "The Lookout Man"—which may refer either to the tree or to the photographer himself.

Perhaps all that connects "Opus" to Moulène's other projects is its cumulative nature: the objects accrue over time with no predetermined end. They seem cut off from any overriding narrative, though they can be grouped, after the fact, according to themes (serial process, the body, decay). Most have been installed on white wood tabletops mounted on metal legs. This formal configuration is disrupted occasionally by larger pieces, which sit directly on the floor, as well as by several wall-mounted works and two pieces suspended at eye level.



Moulène's objects are made, either industrially or by hand, from a wide variety of materials, including bronze, cement, wood, bone, fiberglass, plaster, tobacco and plastic. Most range in scale from hand-held to body-size.

A number consist of interlocking planar forms: *Model for Sharing*, Paris, December 2007, for example, looks like a hastily slapped together architectural model. Others verge on the abject, such as *La tête noire (The Black Head)*, Paris, January 2007, a brutish, lumpy headlike form with pushed-in features. *Head Box*, Kitakyushu, October 2004, which hung on the wall, is pristine and minimal, while *Bitte à fruits (Fruit Bollard)*, Paris, September 1999, is a cast-concrete still life of apples set atop a short, crumbling concrete-and-aggregate column. Some works are slightly macabre. *Arthur*, Paris, August 2010, has the upper portion of a human skull protruding from cast concrete, making the whole work look like an eerie helmet with visor. *Mi-tronche (Nonosse) (Half-mug [Bobone])*, Paris, September 2010, is a head-shaped concrete cast that has been cut in half to reveal a child-size skull encased within.

Somewhat out of keeping with the other works is *Soleil noir (Black Sun)*, Paris, September 2008, a silent color video of the sun, its small cubelike monitor mounted high overhead on the wall. But the most striking anomaly is *Body*, Guyancourt, October 2011, a sleek, multicolored aerodynamic form, 28 feet in length, produced from 12 molds with the help of automotive engineers at a Renault factory. Resembling a brightly hued speedboat, the piece seems out of place in terms of material, size and logic, yet it contributes well to the show's formally open-ended effect. With its great diversity of works, "Opus" is an intense investigation of the formal possibilities of contemporary photography, painting and sculpture.

Photos: (left) view of Jean-Luc Moulène's exhibition "Opus + One," 2011-12 (right) view of Moulène's Body, Guyancourt, October 2011, 8 1/2 by 28 by 11 1/2 feet. Both at Dia:Beacon.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Beacon

Jean-Luc Moulène

DIA:BEACON

3 Beekman Street

December 1, 2011–May 24, 2012

Jean-Luc Moulène's yearlong exhibition "Opus + One" comprises three distinct modules dispersed throughout the vast building. The most beguiling of all is the large gallery of objects titled "Opus," 1995–. Resting on the floor, hanging from the ceiling, and placed on tables that are so delicate they nearly float in space, thirty-five sculptures—made across the span of sixteen years—fill the cavernous space. The materials, though crude, never quite give themselves away; Lycra resembles liquid glass, water hoses twist and torque into perfect ellipses, and fiberglass takes on the appearance of dehydrated cartilage. No bigger than the human body, or what the human body might be able to cradle, these opuses are propositions rather than determinations, each with its own unique set of terms and conditions. The +1 suffix in the exhibition's title alludes to this endlessly additive equation, which not only begins at zero, but replicates at the most comprehensible pace possible.

The other galleries take on unique strategies. Two adjoining rooms house Moulène's photographic series "*La Vigie*" (Lookout Man), 2004–11, in which two stacked rows (totaling nearly three hundred images) snake around the walls. They picture the same rogue weed—sprouted from a Parisian sidewalk in front of the country's Ministry for the Economy, Industry, and Employment—as it blooms and retreats in a hostile environment over many years. In the back gallery, a large, opalescent aluminum sculpture, titled *Body*, 2011, stands alone. Built to order by Renault, the piece takes a smaller opus made by Moulène and enlarges it to the power of several hundred. While its leguminous figure and hyper-glossed surface are sexy, the overall slickness of the form is counterproductive to Moulène's project: His art is most successful when the work teeters at the brink of potential and failure, as structural models that will never quite be realized.



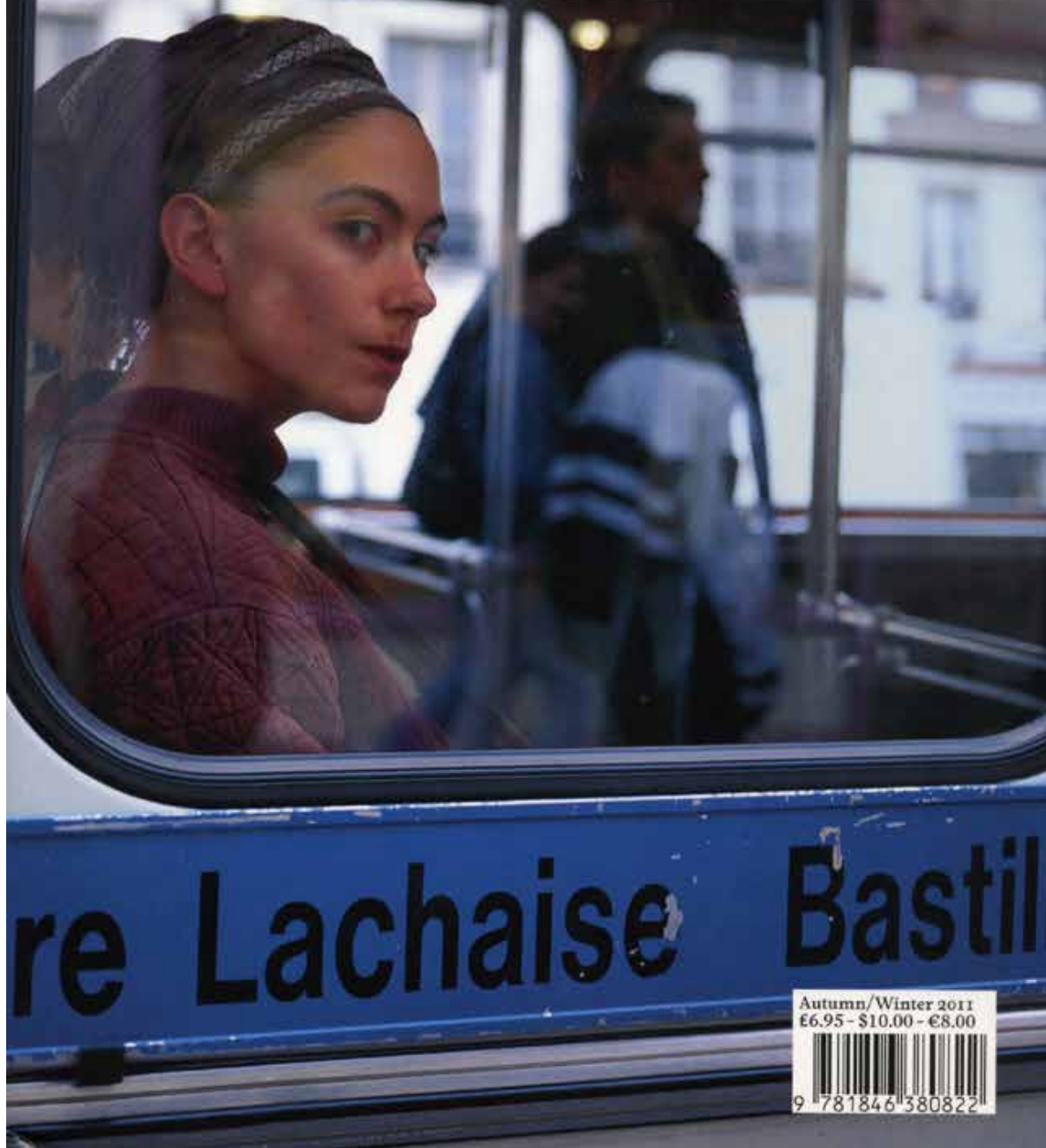
Jean-Luc Moulène, *Météo (Weather)*, 2009, plastic hoses, 14 x 25 1/2 x 10 1/4".

— Carmen Winant

Afterall

A Journal of Art,
Context and Enquiry

Ricardo Basbaum
Emily Wardill
Jean-Luc Moulène
Hélio Oiticica's 'Tropicamp'



Autumn/Winter 2011
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Jean-Luc Moulène: A 'Plasticien'

— Caroline Hancock

Particularly since the 1960s, the French language has rather uniquely championed the term 'arts plastiques' ('plastic arts'), a term long-abandoned in other languages and contexts in favour of alternatives like the 'visual' or 'fine arts'. Probably because of this, some artists still define themselves as 'artiste-plasticien' ('plastician'), as opposed to 'artiste-peintre' ('painter') or 'artisan-designer'. The term suggests an emphasis on matter rather than image, and points at artistic activity as an exploration

Caroline Hancock explores Jean-Luc Moulène's analysis of material production via sculpture and photography.

of materials and forms through a variety of modes. Jean-Luc Moulène tends to call himself a 'plasticien', even though photography is the medium for which he first gained recognition in the 1990s. But this choice is not just a matter of French habit — rather, it is a revealing move that suggests not only that image-making is just part of his practice, but that the idea of materials, their manipulation and what they might say about the form of society and the possibility of its transformation is at the core of his work.

Moulène studied *arts plastiques* (and literature) in Paris during the 1970s, after which he worked as an artistic adviser for a branch of the French electronics company Thomson, from 1981 to 1989, and, for a brief period in 1989, in commercial advertising. These early experiences with the fabrication of the imagery of products and brands familiarised him with the specific methodologies used in publicity and communication, and helped him analyse the desired effects of images on the social behaviours of consumers. As a result, his photographs, which span the genres of portraiture, still life, landscape and the street scene, critique the seductive character of conventional

media representation, and the manipulations it allows. Though he prefers his titles to remain untranslated — lest they lose the wordplay and linguistic specificity that is key to his practice — he specifies that many of his photographic works from the last fifteen years are accompanied by contextual information, indicating the date and location of the picture, as a way to make explicit every factor that intervenes in the construction of the images. This information is on occasion heavily nuanced, for example with the title accompanying the series *39 Objets de grève présentés par Jean-Luc Moulène* (1999–2000), which integrates a disclaimer, stating that they are not 'by' Moulène but simply presented or made visible by him. Likewise the names of the photographers of his sculptures or installations is often credited in his captions. (Such concern with authorship or agency reflects his consistently critical standpoint on copyright, reserved rights and originality, which often emerges in his work.) By systematically deploying that level of clarity, each caption emphasises power struggles at work during the making of works of art and post-production, and also pre-empts future confusions, erroneous interpretations or uninformed appropriations of his work. That is, Moulène's interests lie in the full life of the artwork — in the process, on the one hand, that goes from the production to the circulation and reception of the object and its image, and, on the other, in the social conditions in which the artist and the labourer operate in the contemporary world.

Despite this apparent focus on the image as an entry into this discussion, Moulène's artistic practice has also always included traditional, assembled or manufactured sculpture, work with found objects and the production of drawings and prints. Boundaries between disciplines often blur in his work, for example when photographs capture his found objects, combining 'actual work' and 'documentation' in an



Jean-Luc Moulène,
Bitte à fruits,
 Paris, September
 1999, cement,
 sand and stones,
 72 x 30 x 30cm.
 © Jean-Luc Moulène
 — ADAGP. Courtesy
 Chantal Crousel,
 Paris; Thomas Dane,
 London and Greta
 Meert, Brussels

Previous spread:
BGB Bleu Gauloises
Bleues — 441,
 Fleury les Aubrais,
 Lille, June 2000,
 7 x 5 x 2cm.
 Collection Fond
 National d'Art
 Contemporain,
 France

almost undifferentiated manner — as the title of the catalogue that accompanied his exhibition at Culturgest in Lisbon in 2007, *Jean-Luc Moulène. opus 1995—2007 / documents 1999—2007*, indicates.¹ This heightened awareness of and experimentation with ideas of reality, plasticity, image and documentation bring his work close to that of the Nouveaux Réalistes — a genealogy he has himself acknowledged. Speaking about ‘60—72. Douze ans d’art contemporain en France’, an exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris in 1972 that showcased the more political, sculptural and site-specific work produced after the heyday of painterly abstraction, he said:

*Suddenly, everything was possible. All the materials were available for us to use. It was as if the exhibition was trying to tell us something like: ‘Go ahead boys, take over the space and do whatever you want’.*²

Rather like Nouveau Réaliste Raymond Hains, whose phenomenal photographic output has yet to be fully acknowledged, Moulène is open to chance encounters, making art from street-level reality, and infusing it with both humour and critical rigour — photographically or otherwise.³ He shares this approach with artists of his generation from other locations, such as Gabriel Orozco, who invited him to exhibit objects within ‘The Everyday Altered’, the show he curated at the Venice Biennale as part of Francesco Bonami’s ‘Dreams and Conflicts’ in 2003.⁴ *Bitte à fruits* (Paris, September 1999), a work Moulène presented in that context, consists of a concrete bollard with a crumbling top that reveals stones and pebbles resembling, as the title suggests, pieces of fruit, giving the impression of being a sculpted still life. *Bleu Gauloises bleues 441* (June 2000), also included in ‘The Everyday Altered’, is a limited edition (441 copies) of the legendary blue Gauloises cigarette pack without any

of the manufacturer’s ‘fine print’ in the design. Again, by recasting a commercial product within an artistic context, like Orozco in his work, Moulène captures and conjures the unexpected and the banal.

But these subtle, fleeting, seemingly unintentional interventions are accompanied in Moulène’s oeuvre by a conspicuous, explicit appropriation of art history. In terms of sculpture, to cite just a few examples, he often refers to Alberto Giacometti in his interviews; ancient and classical art is the basis of his project *Le Louvre* (2005), for which he photographed objects from the museum’s collection; and homages to Marcel Duchamp and Bruce Nauman are at play in *Cinq concentrés concentriques* (Paris, April 2007), a sculpture composed of the five grey polyurethane fingers of a hand that, instead of being attached to the palm, all point to a precise point, where the fingertips touch, composing a figure that is both an axis and a vortex, and suggesting at once conflict, tension, connection, visibility and actuality. Mathematics and geometry are in fact at the core of Moulène’s thinking: abstract, geometrical and scientific forms pervade his work — concentric circles, suns, plastic basins, pierced found stones, contorted staircase fragments fashioned from scrap-heap material, bronze knots on wire stems — offering an seemingly comprehensive catalogue of articulations of how the world functions (or does not). For example, *Boule fixe (sphère de Lisbonne)* (Paris, 1 May 2007) looks like an oversize disco ball firmly grounded on the floor, lined with cobblestones from the Portuguese capital instead of mirrors. Recent abstract works utilising plastics like epoxy resin and polyurethane (for example, *n Trous Outremer Rose* (Paris, May 2009)) are placed on plinths or tabletops like modular or cellular sculptures or architectural models, inviting us to consider notions such as clamping, knotting, expanding, transparency and density, as well as vanishing axes, grids, intersections, edges,

Jean-Luc Moulène,
Boule fixe
(*sphère de Lisbonne*),
Paris, 1 May 2007,
polyurethane foam,
epoxy, black
cobblestones
from Lisbon,
diameter 88cm.
© Jean-Luc Moulène
— ADAGP. Courtesy
Chantal Crousel,
Paris; Thomas Dane,
London and Greta
Meert, Brussels

¹ See Jean-Luc Moulène, Rosário Sousa Machado, Marc Tovitov and Miguel Wandschneider (ed.), *Jean-Luc Moulène. opus 1995—2007 / documents 1999—2007*, Lisbon: Culturgest, 2007.

² Interview of J.-L. Moulène by Florence Ostende concerning ‘The Pompidou Show’, *cataloguemagazine.com*, issue 6, March 2011. Available at <http://www.cataloguemagazine.com/contemporary-art/magazine/article/jean-luc-moulene/> (last accessed on 13 June 2011).

³ This element of the work of both artists was highlighted by Pierre Restany, the art critic who coined the name ‘Nouveaux Réalistes’ in 1960, when he curated both artists in a group show, ‘Cette culture qui vient de la rue’ (‘The Culture that Comes from the Street’) at the Galerie municipale de Vitry-sur-Seine in 2000.

⁴ See Francesco Bonami (ed.), *Dreams and Conflicts: The Viewer’s Dictatorship* (exh. cat.), Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 2003, pp.310—11. Orozco also presented work by Abraham Cruzvillegas, Jimmie Durham, Daniel Guzmán, Damian Ortega and Fernando Ortega.





directions and gaps. The plasticity of the materials is at the core of these exercises. Underneath the undeniable visual quality of the photographs and sculptures, Moulène's interest lies in moulding and manipulating the things that he makes and finds, to the point that they are (or seem to be) no longer how they began.

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I conceive of them all like objects after a world of photography. Therefore they are not objects in the sense of statuary or sculpture. They are objects linked to the questions of production, representation, post-photography objectivation. As such, photography continues to be the research tool for these objects, even if at the end of the day I don't propose a print.⁵

There is something sculptural about most of Moulène's photographs, as if the objects were about to pop out of the printed surface, igniting desire in a manner akin to advertising. Some of them could even

be argued to be meditations on sculpture or puns on three-dimensionality laid flat. For example, *Méduses* (São Paulo, 7 April 2002) shows two jelly shoes ('méduse' means jellyfish), placed sole against sole in a manner that resembles the aquatic creature and simultaneously offers a volumetric study of light and shade. A sculptural conceit is at work again in his photographs of chewed gum, which also dwell on the incongruous malleability of the substance and delight in endless permutations of transparency and opacity.

In both of these works there is a play between document and reality: the 'thing' and its registration are distinguishable but at the same time permeable, and are given equal weight. Moulène inserts photographs in exhibitions together with sculptures or actual objects, creating disjunctions and/or associations that recall the visual games of *Documents*, the magazine through which Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris and Carl Einstein attempted to offer a common front against positivism, idealism and André Breton's Surrealism, published in

Jean-Luc Moulène, *Le Monde*, newspaper insert, *Le Louvre*, 2005. Installation view, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 2005. © Jean-Luc Moulène — ADAGP. Courtesy Chantal Crousel, Paris; Thomas Dane, London and Greta Meert, Brussels

5 J.-L. Moulène, 'Series Entretien avec les artistes, Académie de Paris', http://www.ac-paris.fr/portail/jcms/p1_124706/jean-luc-moulene (last accessed on 13 June 2011).

6 Sophie Berrebi discussed Moulène's work in relation to *Documents* at 'The Use-Value of Documents: Bataille/Einstein/Leiris', a symposium at the Courtauld Institute, London (23 – 24 June 2006) that accompanied the exhibition 'Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and the Magazine Documents' (2006) at the Hayward Gallery, London. The paper, titled 'Jean-Luc Moulène's Dialectical Documents', was subsequently published in *Papers of Surrealism*, issue 7, 2007, and is available at <http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal7/acrobat%20files/articles/Berrebi.pdf> (last accessed on 13 June 2011).

Paris from 1929 to 1930.⁶ The use value of documentary evidence essential to *Documents* has echoes in Moulène's attention to varied modes of presentation — including spatial presentation. Indeed, the *mise en espace* of his photographs could be compared to the practices of Richard Wentworth or Wolfgang Tillmans, and their non-hierarchical, formal and sculptural considerations and installations.

In 1998, for the exhibition 'Tu parles / J'écoute' ('You Talk / I Listen') at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum and the Ferme du Buisson near Paris, Moulène was invited to work with the haircare and cosmetic company Shiseido. He directed a series of photographs of two naked female models covered with Shiseido's Perfect Refining Foundation. The function of this product — to cancel out any facial blemishes — was pushed to the extreme by Moulène, as the foundation was applied to the models' entire bodies. The resulting images, *We Were Here and There* (1998), are subtly pleasing and ironic: the women's bodies are redolent of mediaeval statuary and recumbent figures on tombstones,⁷ while at the same time Moulène subverts contemporary commercial publicity tactics via their installation as traditional prints within the exhibition and on billboards outside it.

If on that occasion bodies were turned into objects by means of the image, in other works the transformation is of objects into images and again into objects: at the Louvre's invitation in 2005, Moulène selected 24 small statuettes, fragments and amulets from different departments of the museum — objects that he considered overlooked in their conventional presentation context (often a large vitrine filled with other artefacts). They were brought to a studio, where he photographed each of them against a plain background, in typical archival or museal fashion. Enlarged to approximately 50 by 40 centimetre photographs, the objects were then exhibited in the museum as flat images, but images endowed with an object status: the bare prints, mounted on aluminium, were placed directly on

plinths, which were installed in a manner that overemphasised the shadows resulting from the museum's overhead lighting. Tracing this movement from object to photograph and back to object, Moulène also published this series as reproductions in a special *Le Monde* newspaper supplement distributed both in the museum and within the regular paper on the day of the opening. Exponentially broadening his audience, Moulène often distributes pamphlets, prints, leaflets and flyers through different channels, or leaves them to be picked up from piles (paper mounds that are objects/sculptures in themselves) included in his displays — the image, again, becoming object, and through it, witness to a materiality that might otherwise have left behind.

Moulène's systematic questioning of the function and productivity of images has also entailed the analysis, replication and transformation of the mechanisms active in different photographic genres, from advertising to pornography (as in the series *Les Filles d'Amsterdam*, 2005), from investigative or crime scene photography to archiving practices. It could be said that he plays at creating documents, material proof or evidence of sociocultural facts and projections. He repeatedly refers to police vocabulary — his exhibition at ARC, Paris in 1997, for example, was titled 'Deposition'. As suggested by *Cinq concentrés concentriques*, Moulène's work denounces and points fingers. Notions of scrutiny, enigma, excavation, observation, forensic light and vigilance recur in and around his images and titles, as if they were captured events, peppered with strange clues for varied interpretations.

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Moulène says he has been a handyman ('bricoleur') since his youth.⁸ He talks of working as an assistant carpenter as well as an artist, and maintains that both should be understood as labourers. He sometimes appropriates for himself a qualifier used for Jean-Luc Godard: 'technicien libataire', or 'libertarian technician'.⁹

7 For this comparison, see Cécile Bourne, 'Jean-Luc Moulène', in *Tu parles, j'écoute. You Talk, I Listen* (exh. cat.), Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 1998, pp.70–73.

8 See interview between Patrick Javault, Jean-Luc Moulène and Daniel Foucard, 'Jean-Luc Moulène / Une photographie polymorphe', *Entretien sur l'art*, Paris: Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, 23 septembre 2010, <http://fondation-entreprise-ricard.com/en/conferences/entretiens/art/moulene/> (last accessed on 2 August 2011).

9 See Raphaël Brunel, 'Jean-Luc Moulène', *O2*, Spring 2009, pp.11–14. www.zerodeux.fr/jean-luc-moulene-par-raphael-brunel (last accessed on 2 August 2011).

Labour-intensive sculpture did not have pride of place in French post-War art and criticism — for example, Robert Filliou made fun of it with his DIY *Principe d'équivalence: bien fait, mal fait, pas fait* (*Equivalence Principle: Well Made, Badly Made, Not Made*, 1968), an absurd collection of objects, both crafted and found.

But at a time when work is becoming increasingly dematerialised, Moulène defends making things as fundamental to human activity. His attention for some time now has focused on the preservation and valorisation of objects produced in the context of working-class cultures, in particular that of trade unions and industrial action. The photographic series *Objets de grève présentés par Jean-Luc Moulène* constitutes an invaluable archive of French industry, manufacture and craftsmanship of the Years of Lead, from the 1960s to the 80s, that is not dissimilar in spirit to Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane's *Folk Archive* (1999–2005), their collection

At a time when work is becoming increasingly dematerialised, Moulène defends making things as fundamental to human activity.

of contemporary British popular traditions and culture. The objects themselves are now part of the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail in Roubaix, in northern France, and the ethnologist and archivist Jean-Charles Leyris has produced a detailed account of each of the forty objects preserved as national industrial heritage.¹⁰ Among those objects is a 'three 8s pipe', carved in France in the late nineteenth century, when the idea of dividing the working day between three teams working for eight hours each was a proud labour claim rather than the normal practice it is today in some countries; also in the collection is the red Gauloises La Pantinoise packet made from 1982 to 1983 by strikers protesting the closure of their tobacco factory in Pantin, in northeast Paris.

This interest in the representation of the working class is part of a wider engagement. Moulène has collaborated with, or made reference to in his work, the French workers' unions Lutte ouvrière and CGT (Confédération générale du travail). In 2003, he collaborated with *Nouvelle Vie Ouvrière* to publish a special edition of the *Objets de grève* series for the CGT's 47th congress. The arresting use of the colour yellow as a background in some of his photographs (for instance some of the *Produits de Palestine* series, 2004–05) or painted on his sculpture and objects (*Marche (palière et balancée)*, Paris, 1994, and *Croix Jaune*, Paris, 2004–05) presumably refers to the historical use of the colour in syndicalist movements and its regular appearance in bold political communications.

Bridging formal and social concerns, Moulène connects the 'arrêt du travail' ('stoppage of work') with the 'arrêt sur image' ('stop-frame' or 'still'):

*The notion of work stoppage is a useful metaphor to use in relation to what I do: I stop things, make the image concrete. The idea is simple: if you objectify floating mental images, they no longer float, they become legible. My work has often been about that: giving concrete existence to mental images.*¹¹

As if they were calls to action, his object/sculptures function autonomously like dissonant, ethical, potentially empowering ammunition.

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The effectiveness of Moulène's individual works lies in their capacity to occupy space and imagination. In tandem with his focus on arrest and occupation, Moulène also seeks movement, visual slippage and enquiry. The codification of movement through ritual and conventional or unconventional modes of social circulation is deeply ingrained in his practice, probably as a result from his work with French performance artist Michel Journiac during the late 1970s. Corporeal awareness, exchange and confrontation were central

¹⁰ Jean-Charles Leyris, 'Objets de grève, un patrimoine militant', *In Situ*, no. 8, March 2007, http://www.insitu.culture.fr/article.xsp?numero=8&id_article=leyris-0 (last accessed on 13 June 2011).

¹¹ 'Entretiens avec Régis Durand', *Jean-Luc Moulène. Document 1*, Paris: Jeu de Paume, 2005, p. 10. Translation the author's.



Jean-Luc Moulène,
Mondex, Paris, March
2006, plastic basins,
diameter 42cm.
© Jean-Luc Moulène
— ADAGP. Courtesy
Chantal Crousel,
Paris; Thomas Dane,
London and Greta
Meert, Brussels



Jean-Luc Moulène
Riche, Le Havre,
 January 2010,
 reduced plastic
 bottle, water,
 fake diamond top,
 diameter 7cm,
 height 32cm.
 © Jean-Luc Moulène
 — ADAGP. Courtesy
 Chantal Crousel,
 Paris; Thomas Dane,
 London and Greta
 Meert, Brussels

to his collaborations with dancer and choreographer Boris Charmatz (for example, *Ouvrée — artistes en alpages*, 2000, and *Statuts. Exposition à géométrie variable*, 2001–02). But variable geometry is also at work in his photographs, sculptures, objects and take-away piles of posters and printed papers. Across his whole body of work discontinuities, articulations, instabilities, tensions and release come together to produce a heightened interrogating presence, which translates into installations in which the relationship between work and space (and therefore the institution) is key. In the exhibition ‘Mental Archaeology’ at the Centre d’art contemporain d’Ivry last year, Moulène showed *Riche* (Le Havre, January 2010), a sculpture consisting of a plastic bottle (Moulène began collecting bottles in 2000) sporting a disproportionately large fake-diamond cap and sitting atop a precariously tall, narrow plinth. The bottle was partially filled with water, which emphasised the tilt of the floor and, through it, the original function of the space as a cinema. Material relations here suggest, like in *Objets de grève*, wider social relations.

*I am interested in producing work that is, in itself, the site of conflict, that presents existing conflicts in pre-sensitive and therefore sensitive form. From these forms, a detachment and a gap are created and a critical consciousness can occur.*¹²

Moulène’s forms defy typology, in that they are fabricated from resemblances and alterity, preferably nondescript, formless, with no clear usage. His plasticity of choice has ‘patatoïde’ (potato-shaped) qualities — that is to say, his forms are somewhat absurdly undefinable and challenging.¹³ He confirms his predilection for this term in interviews such as one regarding the maquette for a body (2007–2011) presented in the ‘Paris-Delhi-Bombay’ exhibition at the Centre Pompidou this

year. His recent exhibitions, like the one at the Crédac, which then travelled to Nuremberg Kunstverein, and his solo show at the Carré d’Art in Nîmes in 2009, incite new or different volumetric perceptions against a flattening out in capitalist production, projecting out of the box and beyond the frame. Moulène is now preparing his first US exhibition for Dia: Beacon, opening this autumn, continuing his exploration of political meanings inherent in images and objects and in the production behind them.

‘One should reward anticipation.’
 — Jean-Luc Moulène¹⁴

‘When we have decorticated, deconstructed, destroyed the real, there still remains this network of extremely solid metallic threads, a very potent human construction. This is where the work continues. These wires, we take them and we tie them together: new figures are formed, new realities are imagined. Imagination liberates. On this horizon of being, freedom is maximal, and *potenza* approaches possibility. New subjectivities, new fields of action, new syntheses of cooperation can thus be glimpsed.’ — Antonio Negri¹⁵

12 J.-L. Moulène quoted in *Mental Archaeology*: Matti Braun, *Thea Djordjadze*, Jean-Luc Moulène (exhibition leaflet), Ivry-sur-Seine: Centre d’art contemporain d’Ivry — le Crédac, 2010, p.39. Translation the author’s.

13 See ‘Études pour Body’, interview with Jean-Luc Moulène recorded on the occasion of the exhibition ‘Paris-Bombay-Delhi’, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2011: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xj5okc_paris-delhi-bombay-jean-luc-moulene_creation (last accessed on 2 August 2011).

14 Hans Ulrich Obrist and J.-L. Moulène interviewed Antonio Negri in Italy. An extract from the interview was published in the magazine accompanying the exhibition ‘Voilà: Le Monde dans la tête’ at the Musée d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris in 2000 (published by Paris-Musées and Les Inrockuptibles).

15 Antonio Negri, *Art & Multitude*, Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 2009; English edition, trans. Ed Emery, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011, pp.36–37.

Jean-Luc Moulène,
Père Lachaise —
Bastille, Paris,
15 September 1998,
Cibachrome print
mounted on
aluminium, 67×56cm.
© Jean-Luc Moulène
— ADAGP. Courtesy
Chantal Crousel,
Paris; Thomas Dane,
London and Greta
Meert, Brussels

Jean-Luc Moulène: Photography as Training Manual

— Sophie Berrebi

It is not unusual for one artist to display admiration towards another, but it is more so perhaps when the two are almost contemporaries (give or take a decade) and the appreciation takes the form of a dedication at the beginning of a book. In giving 'tribute to the work of Jean-Luc Moulène' on the credit page of *Akram Zaatari: Earth of Endless Secrets* (2009),¹ Akram Zaatari acknowledges the undeniable formal proximity that exists between his photographs showing material evidence related to the stories he presents in his films and installations projects and

in the form of a photograph, the folded letters become illegible and the tapes inaudible. For all their clarity of composition, these images show the limits of photographic evidence. As with the work of Jean-Luc Moulène, they underscore the muteness and codification of the image.

If Moulène's photography seems to offer guidance for Zaatari's practice, it could be said, in turn, that photography functions as a training manual for Moulène himself, furnishing him with a way of critically looking at and learning from the world. From Moulène's early acquaintance with the medium in the 1980s to his most recent work, photography, most often practiced in the form of long-term and open-ended series, appears as a means of studying his surroundings, uncovering conventions of seeing as well as economic, social and political networks of production and exchange. Within this practice, the notion of the document, understood in different semantic contexts that include the legal, the scientific and the historical, plays a central part.

'All [the artists] were using photography as evidence. That's where I took up the work.'² Looking back at his formative years in a recent interview with Briony Fer, Moulène underlined the importance as well as the limitations of the use of photography in the context of performance art. He came to photography in the context of the Art Corporel movement, which developed in Paris in the first half of the 1970s. For artists like Michel Journiac and Gina Pane, the key figures of this French body art scene, photography was an integral part of the work rather than simply ad hoc documentation of live performances. Journiac, for instance, differentiated 'photographic actions' ('actions photographiques'), which were made

Sophie Berrebi elucidates the history of visual culture and typology of skills found in Jean-Luc Moulène's photography and objects.

Moulène's photographs of objects set against neutral grounds. More than that, however, and despite tackling different subject matter, Zaatari's images consider the ambiguousness of the photograph as evidence — a reflection that can be traced back to Moulène's own experimentations. Rather than the industrially manufactured objects of daily life that commonly turn up in Moulène's images, Zaatari's photographs most frequently present objects that bear the marks of the conflicted history of Lebanon, from postcolonialism to intermittent war. A handbag stuffed with letters from a war prisoner, vintage audio and videocassettes, an archive of old photographs and pages from a diary are shown as material traces of the narratives that unfold in such films of Zaatari's as *Al-Sharīt Bikhayr* (*All Is Well on the Border*, 1997) and *Fi Hazā al-Bayt* (*In This House*, 2005). But, once they are captured

1 Karl Bassil and Akram Zaatari (ed.), *Akram Zaatari: Earth of Endless Secrets* (exh. cat.), Frankfurt, Hamburg and Beirut: Portikus, Sfeir-Semler Gallery and Beirut Art Center, 2009.

2 'Each Any — Interview with Jean-Luc Moulène, Paris, October 2008', in Jean-Pierre Criqui (ed.), *Jean-Luc Moulène* (exh. cat.), Nîmes and Cologne: Éditions du Carré d'art and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008, p.135.



specifically to be recorded on camera, from ‘photo-documents’, which amounted to documentation of performances. The phrase ‘constat d’action’ (or ‘certified report of an action’) was the most frequently used term to define the data collected from a performance, likening the document to a certificate or an affidavit and conjuring up legal associations. Having once participated in a collective event directed by Journiac, Moulène was asked to record ‘photo-documents’ of several performances.³ Even in these early works, well aware of the clear categorisations of photography’s role, some of the resulting images, such as *Espace du sacré* (1985), implicitly acknowledge the blurriness between straightforward recording and staging for the benefit of the camera, and suggest one of the directions that Moulène would follow from the 1990s onwards.

In *documents / Journal impersonnel*, the open-ended series that regroups a large number of his photographic works since 1999, Moulène uses again the term ‘document’ to define his own work. But while the term remains a trace of his involvement with body-art documentation, its meaning becomes more complex in his reuse. The series contains pictures made in different geographic locations and belonging to various genres: still life, portraiture, street photography, architectural views and so forth. They include both un-staged, snapshot-like photographs and carefully arranged still lifes. The precise date and location given for each picture offer a connection to the artist’s own life: many images appear to be made in his Paris neighbourhood or in the context of travelling, with a broad diversity of subject matter and geography, and an enigmatic touch. Yet while the series borrows qualities from the diaristic form, *documents / Journal impersonnel* presents a selective choice of images. Many linger in one’s mind, conveying a feeling of intimacy and triggering a vague impression of *déjà vu* that operates on personal and art-historical levels.

Exemplary in this respect is *Père Lachaise — Bastille* (Paris, 15 September 1998).⁴ The picture shows a Parisian bus —

easily identified by its blue destination plate — steering away from the sidewalk on a busy street in Paris. The reflection in the glass window of the bus hints at the commotion on the rue de Rivoli, which the bus’s route follows for part of its journey. Amidst this tumult, Moulène has caught a moment of respite in the form of a fleeting look addressed to him by a young woman on board. Responding to the camera pointed towards her, she turns her head slightly, letting appear a turban hairdo, widened eyes and an inscrutable expression. The image, snatched in an instant, conveys something of a flâneur’s accidental encounter, such as Charles Baudelaire evoked in his ‘Tableaux Parisiens’ poems, published in *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857). ‘A lightning flash... then night!’ is what marks, in ‘À une passante’, a sudden — almost photographic — exchange of glances between individuals that will never meet again.⁵ But the image that *Père Lachaise — Bastille* brings to mind is stronger than a literary one: the anachronism or exoticism of the headdress, the three-quarter profile framed by the bus window and the modest, perhaps teasing look eerily but unmistakably recall Vermeer’s *Het Meisje met de Parel* (*Girl with a Pearl Earring*, c.1665). The bus window encloses the figure like the painting in its frame — only the reference seems to act the other way round, as if the Vermeer image were the imperfect mirror of Moulène’s. If in Baudelaire’s text, the momentary exchange of glances enables the narrator to be ‘suddenly reborn’, the recognition of the similitude between photograph and painting is what makes the photograph suddenly come to life for the viewer. This recognition, which turns the photograph from a mysterious and mute image into a familiar one, recurs elsewhere in the series. A close-up view of the Cologne cathedral (*Cathédrale*, Cologne, 16 March 2002), evokes in its particular framing Claude Monet’s serialised depictions of the cathedral of Rouen (*Rouen Cathedral*, 1892–94). A picture of the Seine, as dirty and muddy as a roadside gutter (*La Seine à Paris*, 10 March 2010), reverses the effect

Jean-Luc Moulène,
Cathédrale, Cologne,
16 March 2002,
Cibachrome print
mounted on
aluminium, 77 × 65 cm.
© Jean-Luc Moulène
— ADAGP. Courtesy
Chantal Crousel,
Paris; Thomas Dane,
London and Greta
Meert, Brussels

3 Moulène recapitulates his work experience with Journiac in his statement ‘Histoire de l’image de Darek. Temoignage de Jean-Luc Moulène’, in Vincent Labaume (ed.), *Michel Journiac* (exh. cat.), Paris and Strasbourg: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, Les Musées de Strasbourg, 2004, p.166.

4 Moulène often includes identifying information alongside his titles beyond the traditional date.

5 Charles Baudelaire, ‘À une passante’, in *Les Fleurs du mal*, Paris: Poulet Malassis et de Broise, 1857. English translation by William Aggeler, *The Flowers of Evil*, Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild, 1954.



achieved by André Kertész in a 1929 close-up view of a gutter that is surreptitiously transformed into a river.

Transposition, transformation and displacement are some of the ways in which images, and in particular artworks from the past, are summoned in Moulène's photographs. Hence *Ongles* (Paris, 5 November 1999), which depicts a row of cut fingernails (or perhaps toenails?) aligned, not in a row, but turned around and stacked vertically in a column from small to large, evokes Jacques-André Boiffard's well-known photographs of an isolated big toe on a dark background, which were published in 1929 in issue 6 of the Surrealist journal *Documents*. The reference, even though it jumps out, is indirect, and partially relies on an affinity of texture and body parts, but mostly acts through a parallel process of anthropomorphism — in which *Ongles* suggests a thorax and Boiffard's *Big Toe* a human face.

This extensive network of visual references, which is never suggested directly nor explicitly acknowledged, sheds light on the second part of the series' title: 'Impersonal Diary'. The expression recalls Claes Oldenburg's response to a journalist who questioned him about his habit of quoting or referencing the work of other artists in his early practice: 'It's true that every artist has a discipline of impersonality to enable him to become an artist in the first place.'⁶ The 'discipline' of impersonality self-imposed by Oldenburg as a learning system appears in a slightly different form in Moulène's work. While the latter's working practice also suggests an idea of training through making images that bear the traces of others, the resulting images also suggest the impossibility of making an innocent, spontaneous photograph. Even though *Père Lachaise — Bastille* was in all likelihood the result of a split-second decision, the result of the artist acknowledging a 'decisive instant', as described by Henri Cartier-Bresson, the picture, perhaps having been selected from a series made

at the time, acquires permanence and timelessness once the artistic reference appears. In Moulène's *documents / Journal impersonnel* every image is triggered by the memory of another image. This realisation reconfigures Cartier-Bresson's motto of photojournalism and complicates the notion of document as straightforward evidence. It proposes that documents are not objective manifestations, but the subjective traces of culture, be it of the image's producer, recipient or both.⁷

The pictorial and cultural references that slip in between the decisive moment of the camera shot and the artist's cultural baggage suggest something of a history of visual forms. In other series, however, Moulène's interest lies in the visual conventions through which images are composed and produced in a particular area of knowledge. They follow the principle, developed by photography historian John Tagg, that 'the idea of what constitutes evidence has a history [that] implies definite techniques and procedures, concrete institutions and specific social relations'.⁸ Moulène has investigated a number of these fields in different projects. *Plant* (rue de Bercy, Hôtel Mercure, Paris 12e, 1 September 1997–24 December 2002), an observational project that is supported by an academic essay by a botanist, follows the spontaneous growth, disappearance and re-emergence of a foxglove tree on the sidewalk.⁹ *No Foto* (1995–98) collects press photographs censored or legally contested in the press. *Documents / Le Louvre* (2006) explores conventions of museum archives and artwork reproduction, whereas *documents / Le tunnel* (boulevard de Bercy, Paris, 12th arrondissement, 1996–2001) suggests ethnographic fieldwork and the issues that arise from its documentation. Originally presented as a newspaper offprint, *documents / Le tunnel* is concerned both with a sampling of city signs (somewhat similar to documents resulting from the Situationists' *dérives* in the city and their efforts to organise the results into psychogeographic studies). It consists

6 Quoted in Bruce Glaser, 'Oldenburg, Liechtenstein, Warhol: A Discussion', *Artforum*, vol. 4, no. 6, February 1966, pp. 20–24.

7 The tendency on the part of photojournalists and photography editors to select pictures of disaster that recall in their composition Christian religious imagery is a simplification and broadening of this phenomenon.

8 John Tagg, *The Burden of Interpretation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, London: Macmillan, 1998.

9 See Audrey Murate, 'Paulownia tomentosa (Thunb.) Sevd.', in *Jean-Luc Moulène, opus 1995–2007 / documents 1999–2007* (exh. cat.), Lisbon: Culturgest, 2007, pp. 211–15.

of a series of twenty photographs of graffiti discovered by the artist in the covered section of the boulevard de Bercy, close to the Gare de Lyon and the Palais Omnisports de Bercy in the twelfth arrondissement of Paris. Returning to the site over a period of several years, Moulène recorded in photographs the insults and notices and slogans scribbled across the walls, creating a disjointed narrative with recurring protagonists and thematic obsessions of sex and violence: 'Solange Cavagna la triple putain la criminelle la tueuse' ('Solange Cavagna the triple whore the criminal the murderess'), 'R. merde bique neron vient ecrire matraque salo' ('r. oldgoat shit nero come write beat me basturd').¹⁰ This collection is presented in spreads in books or as diptychs juxtaposing a photograph of graffiti with a transcription of the graffiti

Moulène argues that most objects now produced can be described as 'post-photographic', meaning that they are designed before they are manufactured, and they exist in two-dimensional computer visualisations before emerging as material things.

words in printed letters on the facing page. The anthropological characteristics of this display are enhanced by the claim of anonymity that accompanies the title of the work: 'Le Tunnel est anonyme' ('The tunnel is anonymous'), and together they give a sociological and an anthropological dimension to the project. How many voices authored these graffiti? What kind of exchange is going on through these injunctions? What does it say about social relations, about hopes and fears and menaces?

The project makes visible, for instance, the tension of the formerly working class neighbourhood since its gentrification through the import of a middle class and the development of cultural centres (for example, the Frank Gehry building now hosting the French Cinémathèque, on the nearby rue de Bercy). The *tunnel* photographs' ability to indirectly reflect this suggests they are less accidental

encounters between graffiti and camera than the results of a deliberate investigation over a period of time, in which raw material has been systematically collected and transcribed according to particular rules — those of typography. The graffiti, in other words, has been framed and organised in order to make it legible and interpretable in scientific terms. Though presented as an art project, Moulène's *tunnel* leans towards the social sciences, and the work gives credit to his statement: 'I operate in the more or less of anthropology, of culture, of sociology, etc.'¹¹

✱

The process of showing how documents are produced from within sited forms of knowledge and ideologies, which shape these images through specific conventions, continues beyond Moulène's photographic work to inform his sculptural practice. The 'objects' (a term he favours over 'sculpture') he creates can be seen as direct extensions of his photographs in several ways.

Firstly, Moulène argues that most objects now produced can be described as 'post-photographic', meaning that they are designed before they are manufactured, and they therefore exist in two-dimensional computer visualisations before emerging as three-dimensional, material things. An object typical of this 'post-photographic' condition is the Tÿ Nant mineral water bottle shaped to evoke flowing water as captured by a camera, which Moulène has taken as subject for a photograph (*Bi-Fixe* (Paris, 7 September 2007). Images such as *Bi-Fixe*, along with other still lifes from the *Documents* series, seem to function as research for making his own objects, and indeed several of Moulène's 'sculptures' also result from computerised pre-conceptions, while others are made using special industrial-production methods. The latter follow a process reminiscent of the *39 Objets de grève présentés par Jean-Luc Moulène* (1999) series that documented specially produced objects by industry workers on strike. Other works, by contrast, openly oppose industrial finish and production, and are made using manual techniques that include casting (*Enfant*, 2006 and *Baignoire*,

¹⁰ Translated in *Le tunnel / documents de Jean-Luc Moulène*, Paris: Éditions al Dante, 2005.

¹¹ 'Each Any — Interview with Jean-Luc Moulène, Paris, October 2008', *op. cit.*, p. 136.



Jean-Luc Moulène,
Cinq Concentrés
Concentriques,
Paris, April 2007,
black polyurethane
elastomer,
18 × 18 × 18cm.
© Jean-Luc Moulène
— ADAGP. Courtesy
Chantal Crousel,
Paris; Thomas Dane,
London and Greta
Meert, Brussels

1995), welding (*Chrome*, 1999), paving (*Boule fixe (sphère de Lisbonne)*, Paris, 1 May 2007) and carpentry (*Croix jaune*, 2004–05), amongst others. Not a specialist in any of these crafts, Moulène learns them through practice, and the degree of imperfection varies from one object to the next. In this way, when exhibited as an ensemble, the objects display a broad typology of skills and modes of production, from the shabbily executed *Marche (palière et balancée)* (Paris, 1994), one of his earliest objects, to flawless industrial production in *Bière totale* (special production Carlsberg Brauerei GmbH, Hamburg (Saarpfalz), May 2004), produced specially by Carlsberg under Moulène's direction.

This typology of skills and techniques is suggestive of a 'training manual' that comes to existence in the very process of making, and which is perceptible in the objects' diversity of polish. At times, the act of making itself seems on show. The strange sculpture *Cinq concentrés concentriques* (Paris, April 2007), for example, reprises the procedure of disorientation experimented with in *Ongles*. Here, it is fingers rather than fingernails that have been submitted to an impossible dislocation. Cast from the artist's five fingers, in black polyurethane elastomer, the fingers are detached from the hand and joined at the tips. Rather than God breathing life into Adam, as in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, and the infinite reproductions of this image, it is the artist's fingers that designate the centre point of finite creation. They suggest manual activity, but their converging position, more importantly, evokes the necessary reflexive quality of an artwork. Instead of pointing outwards, they converge towards a centre. This centripetal quality is a central feature of Moulène's art, and unifies his production beyond its diversity of subject matter and mediums, and his work's sometimes opaque quality. Moulène has said: 'In my view the work is also a theoretical act. As for its conditions of existence, it must be reflexive.'¹² The statement echoes the idea of the theoretical object as defined by Hubert Damisch, for whom it is 'an object that obliges you to do theory but also furnishes you with the means of doing it'.¹³

In Moulène's work, both theorisation and the means to do it are closely intertwined: just as the photographs contain a history of visual culture, the objects reflect a typology of skills. The photographs obey a similar principle as that which directs the creation of objects: both types of works are documents of the real that reflect on what this reality may be, and how it might be changed, through the artist's practice and the very process of making.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.142.

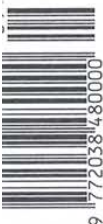
¹³ Yve-Alain Bois, Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss and Hubert Damisch, 'A Conversation with Hubert Damisch', *October*, vol.85, Summer 1998, p.8.

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KALEIDOSCOPE



Pedro Barateiro
The Mask of the Hunter, 2010
Courtesy: the artist
© Kunsthal Basel, 2010



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INTERVIEW

Jean-Luc Moulène

Having first achieved recognition for his photography in the late '80s, the French, Paris-based artist and his work have since and continue to radically evolve, incorporating a variety of media from drawings to objects, such that his ever-transmogrifying practice is almost impossible to characterize, and remains one of the better-kept secrets of contemporary art today.

MONO: JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE

"Art is and remains for us a thing of the future."

—Jean-Pierre Cricqui



Previous page:
Digest Sound, Paris, 23 septembre 2001, 2006
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène

This page, from top:
Croix jaune, Paris, 2004-05
Courtesy: the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London
Photo: Todd White

Phrères, Paris, 14th April 2002
Courtesy: the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London
Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène

All images © Jean-Luc Moulène – ADAGP



The composition of a monographic text on an artist, at least for me as a critic, is almost always fraught with the fear of failure: failure to fully grasp and convey the complexity and stakes of a given artist's practice, and, in doing so, misrepresent that artist's work. Such are the risks you take on as an art writer, and they constitute one of the essential challenges and thrills of writing criticism itself. In contemplating and approaching the practice of Jean-Luc Moulène, however, the fear of not doing his work justice is different. It is not a mere possibility; it is a certainty. I will fail. (There, I said it.) But if this awareness doesn't discourage me from the undertaking, it is only because I know that my failure is inevitable, and that others before me have failed—beautifully, I might add—and others after me will fail just as surely.

Yet we are not Beckettian buffoons. Our failures, although some more gracious, erudite, and dazzling than others, are reflective of a core quality of Moulène's work itself. I think that quality is this: The past of his practice is continually in the process of being fluidly and sometimes radically modified by the present of his production, and vice-versa. Upon first glance, this may seem superficially true of all art, but it is not. Most artists develop a given identity early on, to which they generally stick thereafter, thus spending the rest of their careers negotiating that identity. Any later variations are perceived as either confirmations (for instance, through a change in scale) or attenuations (mere repetition of early work) of that original identity and the basic concerns that shape it. Total departures in art-making are rarely tolerated, and can, as is generally feared, result in professional suicide. The Paris-based Moulène (born in 1955) has approached the issue of identity differently. Predicated upon disjunctions, discontinuities, and an apparent open-endedness, his practice has been protean almost since the beginning. As such, it is engaged in a continual "becoming." Hence the impossibility, and subsequent failure of the critic (me), to comprehensively represent what he does.

As might be expected, this continual "becoming" and lack of easily identifiable signature has not served Moulène well in terms of mainstream recognition (despite his on-going international appearances in exhibitions like Documenta in 1997, the São Paulo Biennial in 2002, and the Venice Biennale in 2003). If Moulène remains an artist for initiates and one of France's best-kept secrets, it is presumably because appreciation of his work resides within a quasi Zen-like paradox: although best viewed in large groupings, the more you see of it, the less you understand. At least initially. My first real exposure to Moulène's oeuvre came during his 2007 survey at Culturgest in Lisbon, Portugal, which featured a broad presentation of photographs and objects. Until around that time, Moulène had been primarily valorized as a photographer who worked in series, beginning in the late 1980s with *"Disjonctions"* (Disjunctions), skewed straight photography of everyday happenings; *"Objets de grève"* (Strike objects), photos of objects made by strikers, in the late '90s; and the *"Filles d'Amsterdam"* (Girls of Amsterdam), *"Produits de Palestine"* (Palestinian products) and *"Documents, Le Louvre"*—respectively portraits of prostitutes, contraband products, and religious fetishes—toward the middle of the past decade. Only later was the artist seen as a maker of objects as well, when his objects were included in "The Everyday Altered," the exhibition organized by Gabriel Orozco for the 50th Venice Biennale. Accordingly, the 2007 Culturgest exhibition presented an extensive selection of Moulène's objects alongside his photos, making no hierarchical distinction between these two apparently distinct aspects of his production, and thus allowing it to flower forth in all its alternatively intriguing and perplex-

MONO: JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE

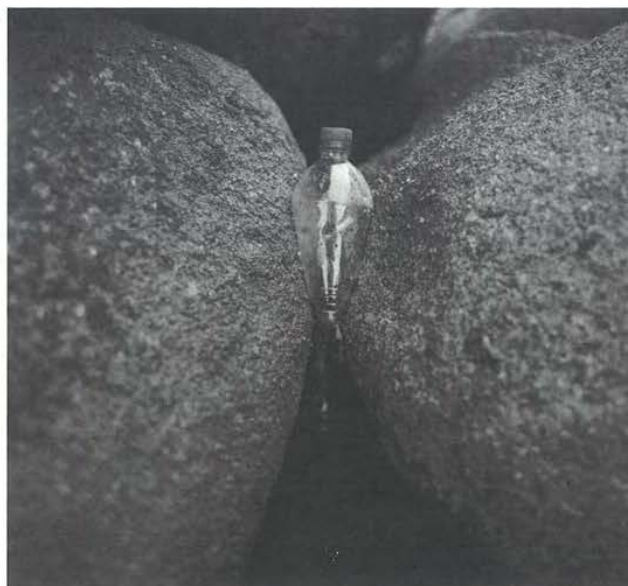


n Trous Bleu, Paris, February 2008
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Greta Meert, Brussels
Photo: Philippe Degobert
© Jean-Luc Moulène – ADAGP

MONO: JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE



Café, Paris, February 21, 2002
 Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
 Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène
 © Jean-Luc Moulène - ADAGP



Régulier, Barneville, January 24, 2008
 Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
 Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène
 © Jean-Luc Moulène - ADAGP

MONO: JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE

ing glory. Since then, the artist has continued to surprise and confound with his increasingly variegated ensembles of images and objects, as well as drawings, all of which are often less reminiscent of visual art per se than they are of unseemly artifacts, sociological data, and anthropological anomalies of a cultural and even physical order.

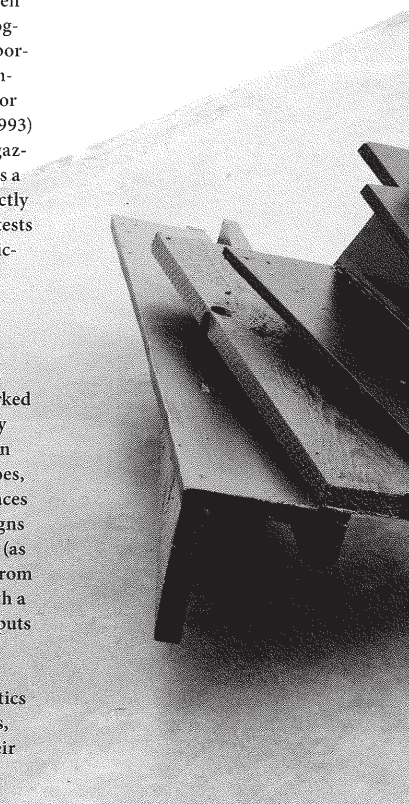
If any one factor could be said to unite the series of photos from the 1980s onward, it would be a preoccupation with questions of circulation. The “*Disjonctions*” series has often been described as an investigation of what constitutes the most banal categories of photography (still life, portraiture, street scenes, etc.) and how these categories, and what they portray, remain in circulation. Moulène approached the issue by misusing the terms and conventions of those categories to depict a given subject in such a way that was either subtly or directly unacceptable to that category. For example, *Untitled (Pont d'Austerlitz, Paris)* (1993) offers an ambiguously lyrical portrait of a street person, surrounded by his belongings, gazing at the Pont d'Austerlitz at sunrise. *Image Blanche, Paris* (1992-05-20), in turn, depicts a double portrait of a wall-eyed mother and her distracted child, finger in mouth, imperfectly framed in the image. In both cases, the discomfort produced by the photos exposes and tests the aesthetic, political, and linguistic parameters as well as the commonplaces that implicitly govern the production and distribution of images.

A natural corollary of Moulène's investigation of circulation would be the idea of resistance—and this characterizes the whole of his practice, from its very constitution to its methodology to its subject matter. However, the artist is not necessarily interested in resistance as a revolutionary force, or resistance for the sake of resistance, but rather as a force of production and possibility. (Or, to put it another way, “I say No,” Moulène remarked in a recent studio visit, “so the viewer can say Yes.”) Perhaps no other series more literally exemplifies this triad of interests and methods—circulation-resistance-production—than “*Objets de grève*” (1999–2001). This series consists of 39 photographs of objects (baby shoes, clothes, a watch, maps, etc.) fabricated by strikers while forcibly occupying their workplaces of production. Despite the essentially elegiac character of the series, Moulène shot the signs of resistance as an unassuming inventory of rare objects given a new lease on circulation (as images). “*Produits de Palenstine*” (2002–04), meanwhile, features contraband products from Palestine—bottles of orange water, chewing gum, cigarettes—and photographs them with a dispassionate objectivity on luminous white grounds. The series of images symbolically puts back into circulation items that are otherwise unavailable through international trade.

Finally, Moulène's most controversial series, “*Filles d'Amsterdam*” (2005), directly engages his preoccupation with the body: the body as object, as commodity, and the politics of aesthetics that govern depictions of the naked body. These decidedly unsettling photos, taken from above, unconventionally portray female sex workers from Amsterdam on their backs, legs akimbo, with their faces on the same plane as their sex. The blunt parity with which faces and genitals are presented prevents them from becoming pornography to be passively consumed, or pornography *tout court*, transforming them rather into active sites of conflict between viewer, convention, and image—and thus interrupting the flow by which such goods (images, bodies) normally circulate. In 2005, Moulène was invited to collaborate with the Louvre, the result of which was a newspaper supplement for the newspaper *Le Monde*. The artist selected a series of 24 ancient religious fetishes and sculptures of primarily polytheistic origin, shot them in natural light (once again, from above), organized them into a chain of association, and put them into circulation outside the museum in the supplement (Moulène had worked in the format of a newspaper supplement numerous times, notably for the São Paulo Biennial in 2002).

So far, so good. Even if, for the sake of brevity, I have had to forsake many crucial nuances of Moulène's photographic practice, it would seem as if we are dealing with a relatively coherent beast here, with nothing unmanageable or out of the ordinary. And yet were you to walk into “Ce que j'ai (What I have),” Moulène's 2009 exhibition at Chantal Crousel in Paris, or his 2009 survey at the Carré d'art in Nîmes, or his recent showing at the Crédac in Ivry (none of which feature examples of his well-known photographic series), you would most likely find it hard to believe that you were looking at the same artist. A good example of his radically disjunctive mode of working is his exhibition at Chantal Crousel. Featuring seven abnormal objects of a corporeal or geological nature, a constellation of plinths or tables, two photographs, one video, and six drawings, as well as older works, the exhibition reads like an elegant, idiosyncratic, group show, discreetly saturated with all the perverse corporeality of the poems of E.E. Cummings and the interdisciplinarity of Bataille's journal *Documents*.

The effect was one of a strangely organic collection of variously banal and teratological phenomena organized around Bataille's notion of heterology, succinctly defined by Branden W. Joseph as “[...] what remains ‘completely other,’ constitutively unassimilable within general cognitive systems, whether they be advanced philosophical speculation or



ARTIST'S BIO

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE (b. 1955) is a French artist who lives and works in Paris. He participated in Documenta X, Kassel, in 1997, and has also shown at CCA, Kitakyushu (2004); Jeu de Paume, Paris (2005); Thomas Dane Gallery, London (2006); Culturgest, Lisbon; Galerie Greta Meert, Brussels (2007); Centre d'art Passerelle, Brest (2008); Carré d'Art - Musée d'Art Contemporain, Nîmes; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris (2009).

CURRENT & FORTHCOMING

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE's first solo show in the United States, organized by the Dia Art Foundation, will be on view at the Hispanic Society in New York from October 2011 to June 2012.

FOOTNOTES

1. Branden W. Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 21.
2. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 149–50.

MONO: JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE



AUTHOR

CHRIS SHARP is *Kaleidoscope's* Paris editor. A writer and independent curator based in Paris, he has recently organized the exhibition "Under Destruction," co-curated with Gianni Jetzer, which opened in October at the Museum Tinguely in Basel and will tour to the Swiss Institute in New York in March 2011, while preparing *A Necessarily Incomplete Anthology of Withdrawal*, to be published by Archive Books in 2011.

From top:
Chute d'escalier, 2008
 Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
 Photo: Florian Kleinfenn

Môme, Paris-Batignolles, June 6, 1999
 Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
 Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène

All images © Jean-Luc Moulène – ADAGP

common sense."¹ For instance, the sculpture *Os non os* (2009), displayed alone on a table and fashioned out of bones and epoxy paste, looked like a skull with no face, while nearby one encountered *Head Box* (2004), a small green box hung open on a wall at average head height (as if to say "insert head here"). Ostensibly an ironic reflection on authoritarian modes of seeing, the work could have also just been a comment on one-point perspective. One particularly captivating photo, *Régulier* (2008), featured an empty plastic bottle wedged between two rocks in what was presumably a natural outdoor setting. Perfectly centered, the uncomfortably evocative container both mutely resists and seems manifestly resigned to its fate as an unassimilable object. Elsewhere, *Chute d'escalier* (2008) (literally "stair leftovers" or, better yet, "stair rind") comprised a dark segment of wooden stairs unevenly reconfigured such that they seemed to writhe in the middle of the floor. An unlikely grotesque, this improbable bit of bricolage resisted classification with a tenacity that bordered on the obscene. To say it was enthralling says perhaps more about me than it does of the object. And yet I am not so sure: for to enthrall is to arrest movement, to capture attention, to interrupt, and ultimately to ramify the flow of circulation. To use the adjective "enthralling," however, might also be a bit misleading, as there is nothing spectacular about Moulène's practice. If it produces fascination, it nevertheless does not disarm intellectually: The resistance at the heart of the work doesn't brook passive consumption. Instead, it invariably produces more questions than it does answers.

Moulène often speaks about his work in relation to the body, about how his practice is an attempt "to build his own body." While such a notion is linked to the influence on Moulène of the French performance artist Michel Journiac and his interest in the body as a site of social and political negotiation, it is also reminiscent of Antonin Artaud and his "body without organs." In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari transform the "Body Without Organs" into a strategy of circulation. They write, "It is not at all a notion, a concept, but a practice, a set of practices. You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it. It is a limit."² This is what they describe as "becoming." Nevermind that in the Crousel show, there was a work entitled *Bordel d'organes* (Mess of organs, 2008), which consisted of three objects, in addition to a drawing, arranged on a wooden display, one of which was a stone resembling a skull, another an amorphous knob of clay with half a set of human teeth jutting out of it, another a piece of dark oak, which resembled a heart. The cumulative effect was as if this emptying out were a mode of construction itself.

Despite the existence of such objects, it is also important to remember that Moulène issues from a tradition of straight photography: he perceives the street to be his studio, one whose center is inevitably unfixed and therefore continually shifting. Looking back at his past work from the vantage of his present production, I think it becomes clear that his practice is even less stable than it looks, that it is somehow organic and fluid. Although documentary, if anything is essentially registered in his work, it is a set of practices that seek to investigate and push against limits and resist dominant modes and myths of circulation, while nevertheless hinting at the existence of others. Exactly how this will add up or what it will engender is, as the French critic Jean Pierre Criqui trenchantly observes about Moulène's work, a thing of the future—which is to say, it is both the source of a potential alternative future and that which can only be resolved by a time that has yet to come. ♦



MONO: JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE



MEMENTO MORI

Simple portraits of products created in the spirit of protest, the photographs from Moulène's "*Objets de Grève*" are acute points of rupture—showing how meaning can be dismantled and realigned without necessarily dramatizing significance.

words by EMILY CORMACK

Le fuseau et le polo, 1999-2000
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal
Crousel, Paris
Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène
© Jean-Luc Moulène – ADAGP

Viewed from above, human activity could be seen as a series of three-dimensional Venn diagrams: with each sphere, a system. It is our onus to struggle between them, colliding and dividing as we progress through these sealed spheres within which we rotate. Whether they are biological, semantic, rhythmic, financial, visual, commercial, economic, or ontological, whether imposed or innate, systems are integral to existence. However, it is only when these systems fail, rupture, or spin from their axis that we become aware of their grip.

Within this network of spheres, there can be points of rupture so acute and potent that their effect ripples across the ecosystem, disorienting and displacing objects and processes. In his photographic series "*Objets de grève*" (Strike Objects), Jean-Luc Moulène articulates these breaking points through photographing objects that have breached the conditions and systems of their own production.

Created by disenfranchised factory workers embroiled in a range of industrial disputes throughout France since the late 19th century, the objects that Moulène photographs in this series were created in the spirit of protest and revolt. To create these objects, the workers commandeered the means of production, diverting the machinery ordinarily used to create commercial products, and redeploying it as an instrument within the worker's rebellion. A Manufrance frying pan, for example, was gilded with the words "Employment – Solidarity – Freedom – Justice" to commemorate attempts to preserve jobs at the Manufrance factory in 1984. A packet of Gauloises cigarettes was colored red and printed with the details of the workers' occupation of the Pantin cigarette factory in defiance of its closure in 1982. In all of the objects that Moulène documents, what was once domestic or utilitarian is transformed into a symbol of industrial agitation and unrest. Through the subtle modification of a pipe, a packet of cigarettes, or a newspaper, these objects shift from belonging within a commercial system of production to operating outside of any sanctioned economic system.

The front page of the *International Herald Tribune*, Friday 5 June 1987, which comprises one photograph in the series, was printed and distributed with large vacant spaces where photographs should be. These voids give the viewer, the reader, or the casual consumer space to think through the rupture in their daily read. The retoucher, whose hours had been cut, was on strike, and in this work, his revolt becomes emblematic of an increasingly rationalized work place, where hours and benefits are cut, as financial profit is valued over the worker's well-being. It is through these blocks of silence on the page that consumers are made aware of the mechanics of the systems of production and distribution and their role within them. The subtext of the newspaper's production and the vast human narratives within it is revealed through erasure. This judder in the usual flow of news and views destabilizes the newspaper's function, transforming it from a vehicle for daily news into a symbol of protest. Like a vocal inflection, this pause in the layout of the paper brings new significance to the meaning of this otherwise everyday object, shifting it from one sphere of meaning to another.

More generally, the objects that Moulène photographs in this series are representative of hot spots within the history of revolution. The objects cluster chronologically around 1968 and 1973–78, corresponding with the close of the *Trente glorieuses* in France—when France's economy grew steadily for thirty years—and the global oil crisis, followed by another spike in the late 1980s when the global financial markets crashed (Black Monday, on 19 October 1987), and again in the early 1990s, coinciding with the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle. They testify to the rebellion and defiance that percolated throughout Europe over the past 150 years, and can be seen to plot a subjective and intimate course through various upheavals and crises in recent history.

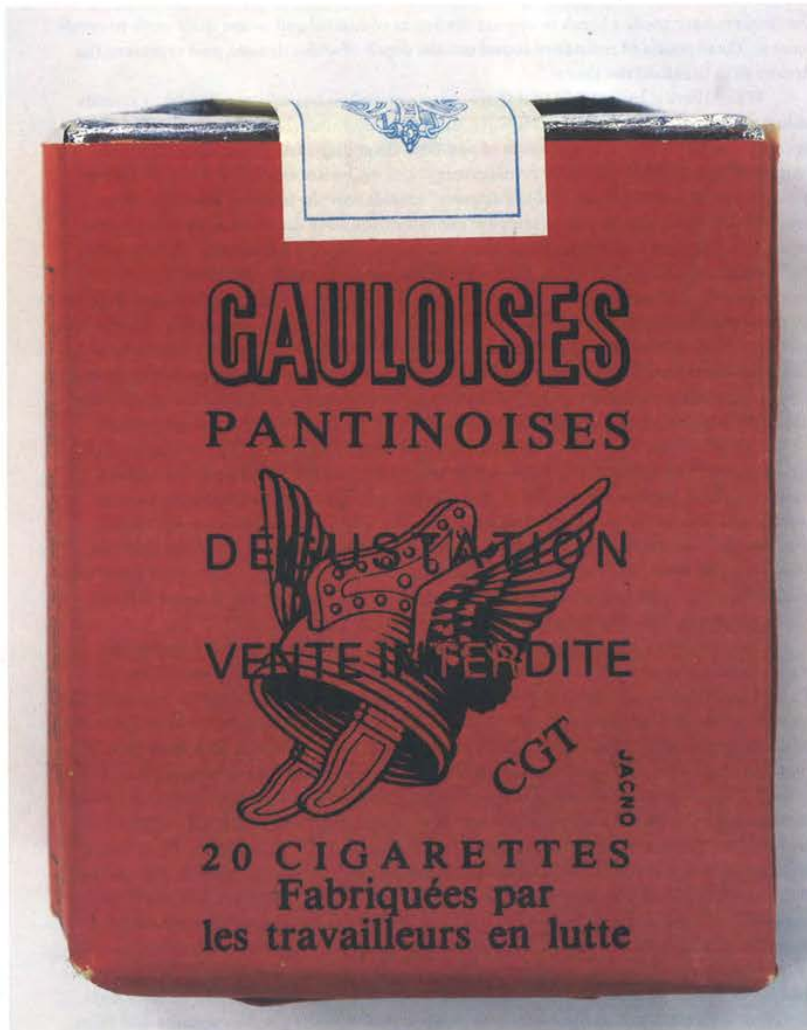
Lit by a dead gray light and placed uncompromisingly in the center of the frame, the objects are photographed like evidence. They are presented simply, economically, placed on backgrounds that seem unrelated, without any illusion of pictorial depth. The objects appear to have been found and placed before the camera, recorded for an as-yet-unknown significance. The objects are elevated through documentation, loaded with poignancy, and yet they are completely removed from the energy of their narrative.

Since the industrial revolution, the factory worker has become one of the most well-theorized professions of the 20th century. The treatment, status, and level of agitation experienced by factory workers both subjectively and collectively have come to be seen as indicative of much broader financial and political contexts. Factory workers' capacity as an active lobbying force has also been recognized and harnessed by numerous artists and theorists. Significant among the more recent commentaries on this force is Antonio Negri, whose own activism led to his incarceration for ten years. Negri speaks explicitly of the power of the workers to generate social change in a contemporary setting. "What liberates history, what frees us from slavery, is living work, the capacity of work to oppose capital. And only

MONO: JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE



From left:
 La poêle des 17 de Manufrance, 1999-2000
 International Herald Tribune, 1999-2000
 La Pantinoise, 1999-2000
 All images courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal
 Crousel, Paris
 All photos: Jean-Luc Moulène
 © Jean-Luc Moulène – ADAGP



when this occurs is capital forced to assume democracy. The time has come to put an end to it, once and for all."¹ In "*Objets de grève*", Moulène focuses precisely on this moment, when the workers have made a break to oppose the forces of *capital* and to use their work to revolt from it. These points of resistance sound out the depth of wider dissent, and represent the first wave to break on the shore.

While there is little doubt that these objects played an important role within various industrial disputes over the past 150 years, they also reflect the changing status of the object in contemporary society. As the forces of neo-liberalism diminish the potency of revolution by co-opting the language of revolutionary activity, we are also faced with the dramatic global rise in consumerism. "*Objets de grève*" reveals how the forces of neo-liberalism, coupled with the resultant rise in rampant consumerism, have deprecated the status of the object as a potential tool during revolution. As Moulène himself has stated, "We're producing fewer strike objects these days. In the 1980s, the product was the dominant mode of communication: when a strike needed to be made known, we manufactured objects. Today, spectacle has become the primary mode of communication..."² This community of codes has now been replaced by campaigns that are more media-aware, such as culture jamming and web- and social networking. Particular objects that signify revolution and protest in themselves are now comparatively scarce, indicating an increased dematerialization of rebellion, and enshrining Moulène's objects as *memento mori* for an age of protest that has passed.

A small ceramic pipe, for example, from the late 19th century, features three number 8's in relief on its bulb. The three eights refer to the late 19th- and early 20th-century trade unionists' mantra calling for an eight-hour work day, eight hours of leisure, and eight hours of rest. Although Australia and New Zealand passed a law assuring the satisfaction of these demands in the 1850s, France did not legislate this guideline until the Popular Front was elected to government in 1936. This utilitarian pipe therefore bares the stamp of a distant aspiration epitomizing a working class struggle that was not to be resolved for another four decades.

The valorization of an object such as a pipe—from utilitarian object to political symbol and call to arms—transforms its status as a commercial product and embeds in it a new load-bearing rhetoric. In the hands of the factory worker, the objects are shifted between spheres of meaning and their potential is freed for further signification. However, what does it mean for Moulène then to take these objects decades later and momentarily tug them from their resting places (in archives and pockets, and on mantelpieces) and reframe them? Collated as a series and presented independent of didactic captions, these photographs take on the formal qualities of documents within an archive. Positioned as such, the archival connotations of "*Objets de grève*" serve both to revive the object's revolutionary status and simultaneously to dull it, for as with any kind of archive, the energy of the original object is displaced. What was once so fierce, so full of fire is collated and itemized, sunk into the archive, which is, after all, another system, another sphere designed to corral human behavior. While Moulène resuscitates the factory workers' utopian voices for a moment, baring their narratives, opening them for discovery, their stories will fade as the viewer moves past the photograph hung on the gallery wall, just as the archivist's box is slotted back in the vault. And perhaps just as photography captures and freezes the everyday, empowering the photograph only to depict the appearance of things, these objects are only able to reveal a small portion of the actual events that they signify. Like fragments flaking from time, these formerly revolutionary objects, once they are archived within Moulène's "*Objets de grève*", become mere outlines of their fierce origins, revealing as little of their story as sediment in the rubbish heap of revolution. ♦

FOOTNOTES

1. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Commonwealth*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 2009, p. 291
2. Jean-Charles Leyris, "Objets de grève, un patrimoine militant," *In Situ*, n.8, 2007; http://www.insitu.culture.fr/article.php?numero=8&id_article=leyris-0. Author's translation.

AUTHOR

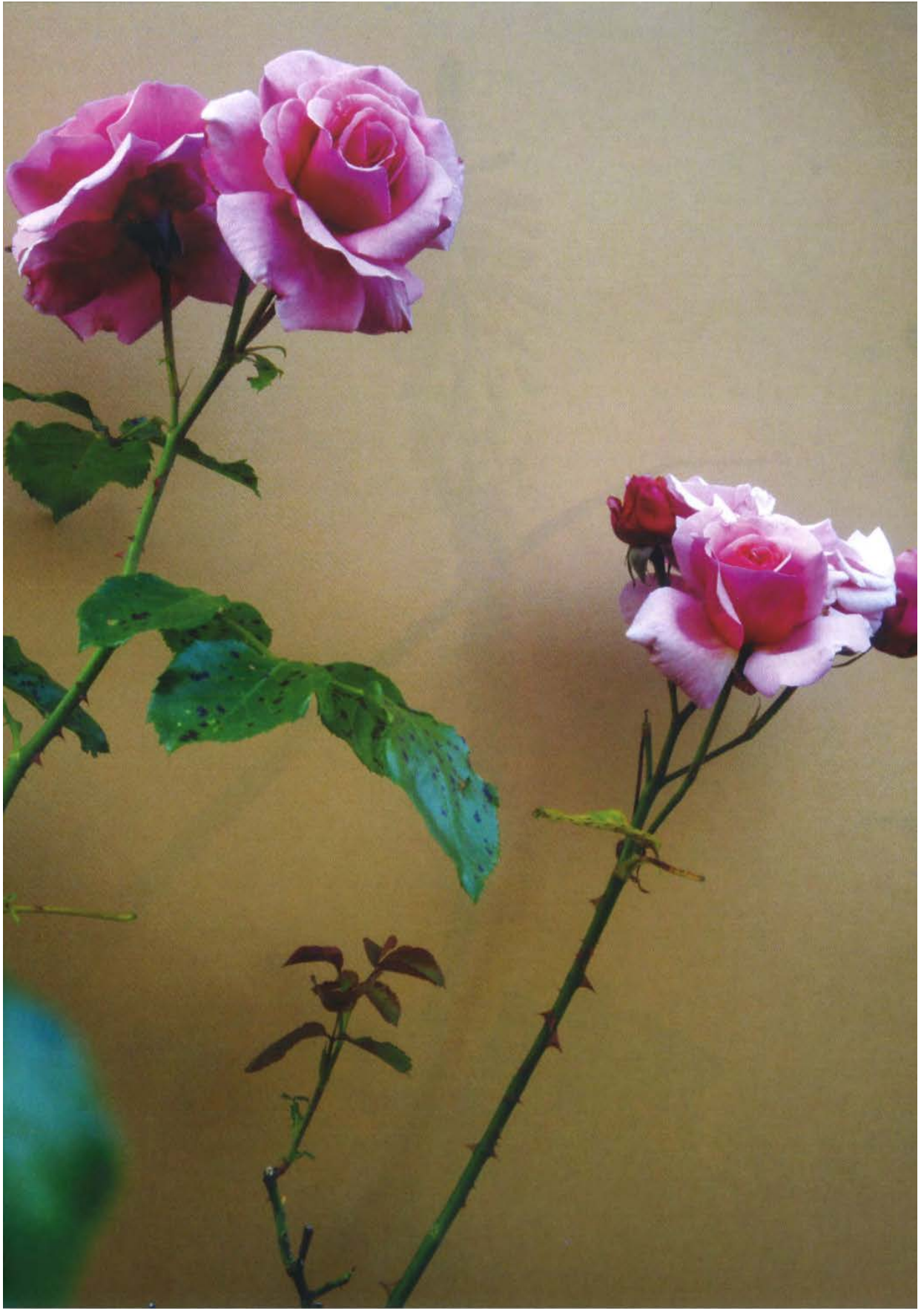
EMILY CORMACK is the Exhibitions and Public Programmes Officer at the Victoria University's Adam Art Gallery in Wellington. She is also an artist and was a founding member of the Melbourne artist-run space Conical.













MONO: JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE

A SERIOUS FARCE



(Pierre percée) percée, Les Arques,
Lot, juin 2008
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie
Chantal Crousel, Paris
Photo: Florian Kleinfenn
© Jean-Luc Moulène – ADAGP

As described in his own words, Moulène's practice stems from the 1970s notion of art as an enigma—hence the programmatic discontinuity and the constant evasion of realism, leading a descent back toward a sympathetic space.

material collected by FRANÇOIS PIRON

MONO: JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE

Jean-Luc Moulène continues to be recognized more for his photographic work than for his objects and drawings, which he only began exhibiting a dozen years ago. Some of his pictures are better known than their author, such as his *Objets de grève*, a photographic inventory of objects manufactured on the assembly line by workers on strike and sold on the black market to help finance their cause, the workers thus re-appropriating their skills and inventing a parallel circulation and economy. Both the economy and the circulation of objects are themes that arise frequently in Moulène's work. His thinking on the subject of the circulation of images has led him on multiple occasions to occupy the pages of wide-circulation newspapers, such as the Brazilian daily on the economy, *Valor*, or *Le Monde* in France, and also to produce numerous publications in collaboration with writers in whom one discerns a kinship with his own practice, which is anchored in the literary legacy of Antonin Artaud, Georges Bataille, Alfred Jarry, and René Daumal—writers who have produced a body of work both irreducible and accessible to many fields of knowledge, texts that are at once open to their immediate surroundings and founded on the radical negation of the world as it appears to us. A discussion with Jean-Luc Moulène involves a game of paradoxes, watchwords, and improvisations. Moulène's rhetorical choreography fashions thought on the tongue and constantly redefines a line of conduct that seeks, above all, to avoid being tied down.



AUTHOR

FRANÇOIS PIRON is an art critic and a curator, teacher at the Lyon School of Fine Arts since 2002, and a founding member of *castillo/corralles*, Section 7 Books and Paraguay Press in Paris. He formerly founded *Trouble* and was part of the editorial board of this contemporary art magazine (2001-2006).

From left:
Marche (palière & balancée), Paris, 1994
Courtesy: the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London
Photo: Todd-White

La tête noire, Paris, January 2007
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
Photo: Florian Kleinfenn

All images © Jean-Luc Moulène – ADAGP



I became interested in art during the 1970s with the practices of body art, sociological art, or what was called “non-art” or “anti-art.” Photography was important to this work as a record of a performance. I also became aware at that time that I had no taste for putting myself on show, or for occupying even a trace of the symbolic position of an author. I told myself that I would be a long-term performer, in the sense that presence is my goal, but my concern is to authorize rather than to be an author.

Culture consists in the coexistence of the singular and the commonplace. The movement to singularize the artist-individual, certainly necessary in the 1970s at a time when society was undergoing a process of normalization, has nevertheless today become concrete in capital, and consequently must be reconsidered.

My notion of art comes from this period of the 1970s, when it was thought that the work was an enigma to everyone, and not just a secret reserved for a few, and thus ought to be open to the whole of human knowledge—to aesthetics, to history, to psychoanalysis, to sociology. The work of art is a focal point of all disciplines; it is shot through by them without belonging to any of them. Today, I claim that non-knowledge is richer than knowledge of a discipline, in terms of its capacity to bring together elements belonging to separate fields.

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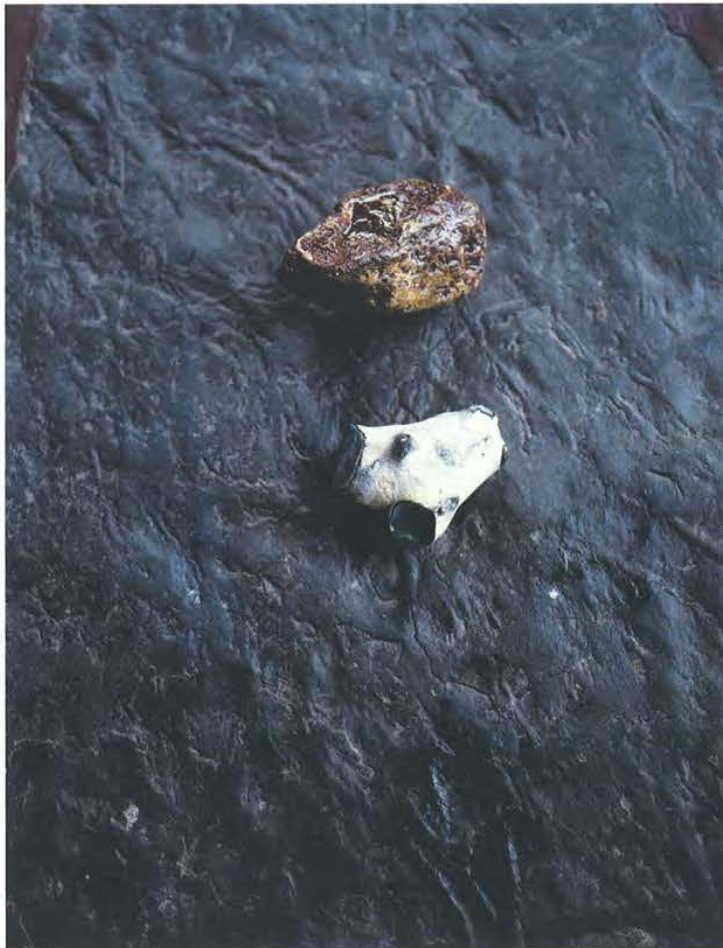
I am above all discontinuous rather than heterogeneous, and in this discontinuity I find a critical convergence with present-day modes of knowledge, which favor availability to the detriment of experience. I have never thought of my work from the perspective of a coherent whole. I think of my shows as group shows. As Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes said, "Me and me, that is millions!" I am interested in the work without art, rather than the artist without the work. I work on this hypothesis. I make works, but I am "on strike from art," and by the same reasoning, obligated to it.

A good proportion of contemporary art consists in introducing popular practices into a separate world. Art ennobles and celebrates these popular practices. Historically speaking, it was photography that forced art to take up a position: whether to regain the work by introducing the vernacular, or to withdraw from it into the self-sufficiency of radical abstraction. Photography forced the world into art, and the history of its practices is more interesting than the history of its authors, since most of its practices are anonymous. It might even have been considered a form of Outsider Art that had not been identified as such.

For my part, Outsider Art interests me because its productions, its works—if they have an aesthetic and an intentionality—exist prior to being regarded as art. This has to do with my own practice, in the sense that I consider my images and objects as tools, articles of use: practical above all else.

The point of departure of my work consists in images that have found a support in photography. I am not saying that I do photography, but that I make images, in the same way as I make objects, not sculptures, because sculptures are only a typology of objects.

What are the conditions of the work? My criteria are that it should be complete in itself, separate, and that it should bring with it, in such a way as to be plainly visible, all the conditions under which it was produced. But also that it should have a direct link with



From top:
Clous, Paris, December 21, 2003
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie
Chantal Crousel, Paris
Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène

Viande / Os, Barneville, February
16, 2001
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie
Chantal Crousel, Paris
Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène

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Page 144:
Bitte à fruits, Paris, September 1999
 Courtesy: the artist and Galerie
 Chantal Crousel, Paris
 Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène

Page 145:
La Main Noire, Paris, 4th September 2006
 Courtesy: the artist and Galerie
 Chantal Crousel, Paris
 Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène

This page:
Cinq Concentrés Concentriques, Paris,
 April 2007
 Courtesy: the artist and Galerie
 Chantal Crousel, Paris
 Photo: Florian Kleinfenn

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what it has been separated from, which is to say, the world. This separation I speak of is not pathological, but liberating. It is in being as impersonal as possible that I try to keep looking at the world. To separate oneself is first and foremost to elude the temptation of realism, of moralizing. My wall images play on representation, while my objects play on presence. To go into the sense of impression or expression doesn't interest me; rather, it is the tension between the two that matters to me. A work is an affirmation and, at the same time, a negation. It is a battlefield.

Duchamp said that he didn't choose his ready-mades, but that his ready-mades chose him. Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment" posed the question directly: who decides? In this decision, there is a suggestion of faith; there is even something weirdly divine about it. As for me, I avoid believing. In the same way, there is a double manner of thinking in Duchamp: if the ready-made is an additional object in art, it is also an object subtracted from industry. The decision Duchamp took may possibly involve both aspects: to show, in art, that an object has been taken away from the world. But he was very careful not to make this explicit, and this enabled him to avoid making works that bore an ideological stamp.

I do not attempt to control the discourse and analysis of my work; on the contrary I try to surrender all control. Nevertheless, this does not mean that I do this work before having the work invaded by different disciplines. No one discipline can entirely encompass a notion of the world, not even history, law, or economics. In my work, I attempt to cut diagonally through different regimes or separate spheres that divide the world into the areas of economics, politics, and culture. And these diagonal cuts enable me to obtain another figure. This kind of diagram helps me a lot. In tracing this figure, I try to strike hard enough for it to produce a swelling on the world. There resides my ideal for a work, as well as this idea of separation: a swelling, bearing witness to a blow, situated on the outside of the world, like an excrescence. One only has to hit hard and up it comes.

I never use the word "project" concerning my work; it is always simply a matter of practice. Becoming aware of your own practice is retrospective. There is no art, and no theory, that comes before practice. It is only when you become aware of your practice that you can begin putting something into form. When the first phase of the practice is of the order of feeling, allowing a return into the area of perception, it is then that a conceptual space



MONO: JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE

arises through the act of forming. The act of forming is of the order of technique. Academicism in painting consisted in finding a proper equivalence between a technique and its subject, and this problem is still present in my own work. Technique does not come first, and yet technique is necessary, closely linked to the problem of the subject that it put in place. To tackle a technique does not imply mastering that technique. Such knowledge does not concern me, except when it becomes a matter of construction, not of discipline.

The difference between art and other fields that require technique resides in its method: whereas the scientist or the mathematician publishes the results of his experiment, an artist has to produce something that is not merely the result of an experiment, but must also render the experiment available to others. This means that to create a work, having done the experiment, he has to go back to his sources, and the form created must make it possible to perceive and re-open a sympathetic space. The work consists in a descent back toward sympathetic space, toward the observer.

The form of a work has no stake in the game other than to make experience possible; it is a kind of rhetoric that helps to communicate thought. That's why what is common interests me far more than what is singular. I share something with the other, and that shared something is my playing field.

Thought, to my mind, is an act that forces one out of oneself, not an imposition of personal singularity. This means that I must take into account even what I reject. It is by starting from the center, not the periphery, that one can gain an overall view of what goes on in the world. Photography is an instrument of frontality.

I am often reproached for my seriousness. Whereas I work very seriously to manufacture artefacts (which is, after all, a scam), to savor a dirty trick that hits the right spot. A dirty trick is this admirable, surprising, unexpected, and successful space in which one encounters truth: like a set-up, in fact. I would say that my works lie on the side of serious farce rather than grim ardor. My works examine the evidence, which is something really close to imbecility. Robert Filliou and George Brecht are members of my family, and with them I share the aspiration to create works that make me ashamed. The ones that make me most ashamed are, in the long run, the truest. ♦



From top:
Deux Bassines, Paris, 11th February 2006
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal
Crousel, Paris
Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène

Nuquirit, Paris, 14th December 2004
(with Jeanne Balibar)
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal
Crousel, Paris
Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène

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ARTFORUM

Jean-Luc Moulène

CARRÉ D'ART—MUSÉE D'ART
CONTEMPORAIN, NÎMES, FRANCE
Jeff Rian

FOR THE ONGOING PROJECT "Documents," begun in the late 1990s, French artist Jean-Luc Moulène creates photographs that explore the interconnections between public commerce and art. Two well-known series within this project are "*Les Filles d'Amsterdam*" (Amsterdam Girls), 2005—close-up portraits of naked prostitutes, crouching so that their shaved genitals have equal billing with their hard-looking faces—and "*Objets de grève*" (Strike Objects), 1999–2000, which document what Moulène calls "objects of altered production" made by striking French factory workers: bright red shoes, strike maps, political figurines, a red adaptation of the original iconic blue Gauloises cigarette pack. Rather than keeping any of Moulène's series intact or otherwise conforming to the conventions of the retrospective format, however, his recent exhibition at the Carré d'Art instead emphasized the links between his photographs and his elegant pencil, graphite, and felt-tip-pen drawings, on the one hand, and his wood, rock, plastic, concrete, and metal sculptures, on the other.

Taking his cue from the grid of the glass box designed by Norman Foster for the Carré d'Art in 1980, Moulène arranged eighty works made between 1977 and 2008 along a kind of conceptual pathway. In the first gallery, which served as a kind of foyer, he presented works documenting what one might classify as the evolving construction materials of civilization—two color photographs of overgrown rock fortifications on the Corsican coast and one, titled *3 Standards*, 2004, of a suburban house, back-

yard playhouse, and doghouse; and sculptures, including one of a section of I beam with a miniature man seemingly swimming across it, and a concrete post whose top inspired the work's title, *Bitte à fruits* (Fruit Knob), 1999. The next room focused on iconic human images in various manifestations, with a cartoonlike child's head made of sandy concrete; a cluster of cut-up photographs of shaved female genitalia; photographs of a peeled orange (*Orange nue* [Naked Orange], 1991), a man with a scythe (*La Faucheuse* [The Grim Reaper], 2000), and a naked pregnant woman doing an awkward push-up (*Sphinx*, 2003); and two drawings—both titled *Le Nœud coulant* (The Noose), 1997 and 2007—made from cutout photographs of eyes and connected by a drawn loop, suggesting a means of knotting together sight and its representation.

The following gallery was the largest, in which, the artist says in an interview with art historian Briony Fer included in the show's catalogue, "the programme bears on certain ambiguities of representation and therefore proposes images and objects, tools of vision." The circular, cloudlike shapes in the three drawings in the gallery were clearly associated with the three spherical sculptures—*Quelque chose noir* (Something Black), 2005, a twelve-pointed star known in topology as a hyperbolic icosahedron; *Boule fixe* (*Sphère de Lisbonne*) (Fixed Ball [Lisbon Sphere]), 2007, a globe covered with black paving stones from Lisbon; and *Quelque chose généralisé* (Something Generalized), 2007, a large skeletal sphere made of crisscrossing triangular wooden lattices. These drawings and sculptures in turn played off the three photographs in the space—of two piles of blue-gray bowls, chalkstones washed by waves, and blurry sunlight on a checkered floor—in differing degrees of abstraction, up and down the ladder of logical types between handmade and photographed representations.

The rest of the exhibition built on this approach, with various arrangements of sculptures, drawings, and photographs, along with a side gallery featuring a video shot with a camera phone aimed directly at the sun and two galleries that contained only drawings. The through-line that emerged seemed to circle around the vague objectivity of the notion of *quelconque*, literally "whatever" but

translated here as *nondescript*, a word Moulène brings up repeatedly in the catalogue—describing, for instance, his work's probing whether it is possible "to produce [a] nondescript object with exactitude." The generic words in Moulène's titles—*ball*, *basin*, *something*, *standard*, *star*, etc.—likewise function as leitmotifs relating such terms to specific objects, pointing to the back-and-forth movement between the photographs and the drawings and constructions. Like spare concrete poems, the latter works function as abstracted forms around the revolving specificity of Moulène's photographs, connecting old physical patterns to new ones, like archetypes to clichés, with their spheres, crosses, and primary numbers recalling an *imago mundi* with a transcendent heaven and ignominious hell.

Moulène has claimed that "negation is the founding act of creation" in his critical reckoning with reality and his transformation of reflections into forms. Yet since Moulène confers iconic status on what he depicts, this negation paradoxically becomes an act of affirmation: Icons affirm rather than negate. Moulène's use of the color yellow, which he favors for its inherent link to light, offers a telling continuity here; the color appears in a number of the sculptures, such as his cemetery-scale *Croix jaune* (Yellow Cross), 2004–2005, and in photographs, including *Nuquirit* (Laughingnude), 2004, in which a naked actress (Jeanne Balibar) giddily emerges from a lemon-yellow background. Like Moulène's photographs of *quelconque* products such as plastic bottles and chairs, linoleum floor grids, and working and idle people, this photograph questions its subject's role in the hierarchies of culture and commerce. This is a world in which happiness is immediately suspect, and Moulène's starkly aggressive image, as off-putting as it is nakedly suggestive, literally and figuratively, brings to a head the sentiment that courses through his work even as it raises an unresolved problem that artists have been dealing with ever since fine art first began reflecting on its association with commerce: What kind of art can bring us beyond the escapism of a product-driven world whose images stimulate desire without actually fulfilling it, while they simultaneously steal something once called the soul? □

JEFF RIAN IS A WRITER LIVING IN PARIS.



From left: View of "Jean-Luc Moulène," 2009. Foreground: *Boule fixe* (*Sphère de Lisbonne*) (Fixed Ball [Lisbon Sphere]), 2007. Middle ground: *Cinq Concentrés concentriques* (Five Concentric Concentrates), 2007. Background, from left: *Etoile noire* (Black Star), 2006; *Quelque chose généralisé* (Something Generalized), 2007; *Boîte à jus* (Juice Box), 2005. Photo: David Huguénin. Jean-Luc Moulène, *Deux bassines* (Two Basins), 2006, color photograph mounted on aluminum, 49 x 49". Jean-Luc Moulène, *3 Standards*, 2004, color photograph mounted on aluminum, 49 x 65".

