

Jean-Luc Moulène

the dot the well the plain and the rain

October 16 — November 18, 2023



Jean-Luc Moulène, *Cluniale - Le Buisson*, 2023. Photo: Jayun Deng — Galerie Chantal Crousel.
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Galerie Chantal Crousel is pleased to host Jean-Luc Moulène's seventh solo exhibition, featuring a selection of new sculptures and black and white photographs.

Introduced as an experimental space, the works in the exhibition operate as an ensemble and have been arranged along the lines of "a ritual without liturgy"¹. They are organized in three sequences: relative dimensions, conditions of practice and sphere of representation.

The works reveal a multidimensional vision of the world, playing with human body mapping, abstraction, nature as a time marker. Within each space's *negative* dimension (dimension -1, -2,...), the object exists through an infinity of limited and minuscule spaces, like topological shifts folding onto themselves.

A first bronze collarbone work—a collarbone with a tiny key affixed to it—opens and closes the exhibition before turning itself into a key.

The sculpture *Bubu filtre* holds a very strategic place. It is the zero mark of the exhibition, the identification point and figurehead of the procession. It mimicks the experience of hindsight, only to make the physical impossibility of showing *negative* dimensions, tangible. With this glass doll face placed on a cut plastic bottle filled with used oil, *Bubu filtre* gathers both body and poetry through materiality.

The more we dive into those *negative* dimensions, the larger becomes the number of formal possibilities. Four sculptures in bronze display such solutions: *Figure et fond (tibia)* [*Figure and back (tibia)*], *Disque et anneau (fémur)* [*Disc and ring (femur)*] and *Articulation (humérus - clavicule)* [*Articulation (humerus - collarbone)*] are the dimensional variations of space, confronted to the exact size of human bones. Designed digitally, they are however produced by the traditional lost-wax casting process. In the exhibition space, they follow one another with precision and overwhelm us with their size, their green, blue, yellow and red colored patinas, as well as their presentation display on cylindrical bases. Extraordinary because of their volume and density, these bronzes are neither figurative nor abstract. And as Moulène would say: "The color could even be a fourth dimension. Any of the objects' specifications could be a dimension. And they can all be shared!"

Then we have both *Écorchés* [*Skinned*], placed as "guardians" on two sides of the main space and facing each other. Blind and mute as they are, they watch over the end of the demonstration. Adopting the same production process that was used for the series *Tronches*, 2014, the *Écorchés* are latex grotesque masks, whose orifices have been sewn. The masks have been overturned, filled with concrete, rubbed with waste oil than adorned with dangling culture pearls earrings.

The last and smallest cast bronze, *Main (tous les os de la)* [*Hand (all the bones of the)*], is of a more concrete approach. Having clearly expressed his attraction for this complex part of the human body, Jean-Luc Moulène discovers each time new ways to reflect on its numerous purposes, and on methods to deconstruct it. Captured, decomposed, and laid bare, all 27 bones have been gathered in the artists' palm, and reassembled.

*The hand was once the sculptor's supreme tool. But many sculptors today work with their hands in their pockets. Not Moulène. Not always.*² —Frédéric Paul

Unique object of the following sequence, *Abstraction d'organes* [*Organ abstraction*] is a work of abstraction. An assemblage of anatomical models of organs, paired with an organ of power, the Arc de Triomphe. The Arc is granted a second life, a new identity and a true role, which is to provide the work with a powerful presence, oscillating between stability and extreme frailty.

*We claim that it is the same problem that motivates Moulène: manipulating unconnected organs and senses to compose an 'emancipated body' and 'sensibility', and that is formulated as a strike of signification in a mixed-up unlinking.*³ —Alexandre and Daniel Costanzo

Tension between presence and representation is carried out through a new ensemble of black and white photography, with various dimensions. Landscape, objet and bodies are the subjects of this new body of work. Photography has always held a special place in Jean-Luc Moulène's corpus of work.

These photographs were taken with a 4x5' view camera, like a calotype⁴ then rendered with today's digital technologies.

Its subjects bear a unique depth, a large patch of greys and a strong rise in contrasts because of the very long time frame of the pose (up to an hour). The moment itself is not targeted, rather the combined mouvement of light and wind, *Stellaires* [*Stellar*] and *Le Jardin 1 and 2* [*The Garden 1 and 2*].

Anatomie [*Anatomy*] and *Jambe* [*Leg*] are both life-size prints. The materiality of the bone breaks through, whereas the plastic bones seems to vanish, finally blending the true and the false.

In the second space of the gallery, the sculpture *Excentrique* [*Eccentric*] is at the very center of this last sequence, with a spatial and temporal, individual and collective, vectorized and initialized presence, surrounded by flowers and landscape.

Beyond fiction where Jean-Luc Moulène's routine implies dissecting the object and submitting it to materiality, there is also life at its full force. Imperfect objects and images constantly echoing one another, battling each other even, for the privilege of the *authentic*.

1 Philippe Vasset, *Un rituel sans liturgie*, exhibition catalogue *Jean-Luc Moulène*, Éditions Centre Georges Pompidou and Dilecta, Paris, 2016, p.108.

2 Frédéric Paul, *How Many Fingers in My Pocket? A Polydactyl Fantasia*, *Jean-Luc Moulène*, Éditions Centre Georges Pompidou and Dilecta, Paris, 2016, p.125.

3 Alexandre and Daniel Costanzo, *The power of the open*, MOULÈNE 2007, p.33. Extract from a text by Eric de Chassey, *Once upon a Time*, *Jean-Luc Moulène*, catalogue *Jean-Luc Moulène, Il était une fois*, Éditions Académie de France à Rome, Villa Medici and Bernard Chauveaux Éditions, p.264.

4 The calotype is a photographic process on paper developed in 1840. One of its qualities is that it gives a slightly blurred image. This is because the texture of the paper blurs the light rays passing through it.

Born in 1955 in Reims, France.
Lives and works in Normandy.

For more than twenty years, Jean-Luc Moulène has developed a complex body of work, both analytical and mysterious, of which photography has long constituted the most visible and best-known part. From the *Disjunctions*—a series of seemingly banal, frequently urban images that function as indeterminate topographical references at the heart of the real world—to the celebrated *Objets de grève* ('Strike objects': product shots of industrial artefacts made by striking workers, subverting the tools of their trade), Moulène's photographs are strikingly raw, cruel and uncompromising, but always secretly metaphorical.

Drawings and sculptural objects have always played a part in his work, but both have assumed greater importance in recent years, superseding photography to become the chief component of Moulène's most recent, large-scale exhibitions, though the essential spirit driving his distinctive oeuvre remains unchanged. Moulène's works explore the question of representation in his chosen media, while at the same time drawing on their essential physicality and materiality to engage tirelessly with political, social and ontological issues 'made flesh'—notably through the concept of 'transaction', an economically and sensitively charged term applied to the ongoing transaction between the imagination and reality.

Jean-Luc Moulène's notable solo exhibitions include the Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart (Tasmania) (2023) ; Casa Sao Roque, Porto (2021) ; SculptureCenter, New York (2019); Secession, Vienna (2017); Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2016); Villa Medici, Rome (2015); Kunstverein, Hannover (2015); Beirut Art Center (2013); Modern Art Oxford (2012); Dia:Beacon, New York (2012); Carré d'art - Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes (2010); Centre d'art Passerelle, Brest (2008); Musée du Louvre, Paris (2005); Jeu de Paume, Paris (2005); CCA Kitakyushu (2004); Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva (2003); Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers (1994).

He participated to the 58th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale (2019); Taipei Biennial (2016); Biennale Internationale Design, Saint-Etienne (2015); Sharjah Biennial (2011) and to the Sao Paulo Art Biennial (2002).

Jean-Luc Moulène was also featured in several international group shows: Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2023) ; BY ART MATTERS, Hangzhou (2022) ; Drawing room, London (2021); Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon (2020); MAC VAL, Vitry-sur-Seine (2020); MoMA PS1, New York (2019); MAXXI Museo, Rome (2019); S.M.A.K., Ghent (2018); Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City (2018); Guggenheim Bilbao (2017); CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2017); Wiels, Brussels (2017); Jeu de Paume, Paris (2016); Punta della Dogana, Venice (2016); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2015); Aspen Art Museum (2015); Sharjah Art Foundation (2013); Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2012); CREDAC, Ivry-sur-Seine (2010); MARTA Herford Museum (2005); Museum Ludwig, Köln (2005), among others.