GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

Jean-Luc Moulène

REVUE DE PRESSE | SELECTED PRESS

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OCULA

The volcano will open alongside new sculptures by materials manipulator Jean-Luc Moulène and a huge collection of Christian devotional objects.

Artworks by Jean-Luc Moulène and Teams. Photo: Mona/Jesse Hunniford. Image Courtesy MONA Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

Jean-Luc Moulène will present four newly commissioned sculptures created using wax, metal, Triassic sandstone, and timber from ancient underwater forests in Tasmania. These works were created in collaboration with Australian materials experts.

Wallace said 'the resulting objects are at once mysteriously beautiful, and forthright about the means of their making.'

Sam Gaskin
Sigur Rós Singer Jónsi to Create Sonic Volcano at Mona
Ocula, July 4, 2023.
https://cutt.ly/Wwu6s8HM

art
press

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE de l'amour à l'œuvre

Jean-Luc Moulène
Laurence Lorenzi
Is-Land, 144 p., 32 euros

De 1975 à 2004, année de sa disparition, Laurence Lorenzi posa devant l'objectif de son compagnon, l'artiste Jean-Luc Moulène. Cette série de photographies intimes, initialement vouée à rester confidentielle, est dévoilée dans un ouvrage qui redéfinit les frontières entre œuvre d'art et vie privée.

■ Les éditions Is-Land publient un ouvrage singulier et déroutant autour de photographies inédites – seules deux d'entre elles ont déjà été montrées – mettant en scène une dénommée Laurence Lorenzi qui fut la compagne de Jean-Luc Moulène au début des années 1980. Leur rencontre remonte à 1975. Elle meurt prématurément en 2004. Dans ce laps de temps de presque trente ans, la femme aimée et désirée a pris la pose à intervalles irréguliers devant l'objectif de l'artiste. Mais Lorenzi ne se contente pas de poser. Elle interprète un rôle. Et « coproduit » une partie de ces photographies pour étayer un travail de recherches universitaire sur « la séduction dans l'image ».
Impossible dès lors de démêler les fils reliant sujet et objet. Sans même parler de leur réversibilité. Que Moulène ait attendu toutes ces années pour extraire ces images d'un contexte intime et sans doute hésité à les divulguer peut évidemment se justifier, l'artiste ne s'étant pas risqué jusqu'ici à exposer les « extrêmes limites » – nous citons Nathalie Delbard dans sa contribution au livre – d'une exploration de « toutes les nuances du dévoilement de soi par l'image » placée sous le sceau de la « confidentialité des échanges amoureux ». En effet, « pour qui connaît l'œuvre photographique de l'artiste, il peut paraître assez surprenant de le voir produire un tel assemblage d'images. Leur caractère sentimental et obsessionnel conduit […] Moulène vers une autre histoire de la photographie, qui est celle, mythique, de quelques grands noms n'ayant eu de cesse de photographier la femme aimée – et l'on pense évidemment à Alfred Stieglitz et Georgia O'Keeffe, ou encore à Harry Callahan et Eleanor Knapp ». « Deux références, précise Delbard, déterminantes pour l'artiste ».
La réticence de Moulène à les montrer tient peut-être au statut ambigu de ces images dont il se sait seulement le co-auteur. Les publier à titre posthume, sans l'imprimatur de Lorenzi, est bien entendu problématique. Mais leur ambiguïté réside aussi dans la difficulté à circonscrire, pour ne pas dire justifier, la dimension artistique de cette entreprise rétroactive.

DU PRIVÉ AU PUBLIC

À quel moment a-t-il été décidé de convertir ces images en œuvres ? A-t-il été acté qu'une fois érigé en ensemble, aussi hétérogène et inégal soit-il, ce fonds photographique d'ordre privé serait digne d'être diffusé sur la place publique ? L'essai de Delbard participe évidemment de cette opération de légitimation, tant l'auteure, incontestable spécialiste de l'œuvre photographique de Moulène, a cherché à contourner les pièges tendus par ce corpus, en le replaçant dans sa démarche, soulignant par exemple à propos des Photomatons le « cadre symbolique […] posé par le dispositif de la photographie d'identité et son arrière-plan juridique […] auquel même l'intimité la plus poussée ne semble pouvoir tout à fait se soustraire. À moins qu'il ne faille comprendre la chose inversement, comme la tentative répétée et complice d'un travail de déconstruction des modèles établis par la photographie, et des contraintes qu'ils entraînent pour les corps ».
Soit deux voies qui trouvent un écho incontestable dans l'esthétique kaléidoscopique de Moulène. Idem pour l'absence de style caractérisant cette « série ». Faire de ces images la pièce manquante d'un puzzle est extrêmement tentant. Mais il est encore plus tentant d'y voir une anomalie. Une aberration. Ces photographies ne sont pas, à cet égard, sans rappeler celles de Isa Genzken, très « posées » aussi, prises par Gerhard Richter. Ou d'autres clichés, puis peintures de l'artiste allemand s'articulant autour de sa propre sphère familiale ou sentimentale. On y retrouve un décalage similaire. Et la même impression d'une garde baissée. Richter s'est dit en 2002, à propos des portraits de membres de sa famille, « trop vieux pour ne pas montrer son amour ». Confidence sidérante au regard de ses prises de position antérieures. Certains ont vu dans cette palinodie une forme de trahison. D'autres l'insolente et bienvenue expression d'une liberté affranchie d'un dogmatisme pesant et des attentes qu'un artiste est supposé continuellement respecter. Richter avait à l'époque 70 ans. Quelques années de plus que Moulène aujourd'hui. ■

Erik Verhagen

Jean-Luc Moulène. Tricots. 1984

De gauche à droite :
Jean-Luc Moulène.
Poings aux hanches. 1982.
Profil diagonale. 1982

Erik Verhagen
Jean-Luc Moulène de l'amour à l'œuvre
artpress, N°498, April, 2022, p.93.

Le Monde

Dans le Perche, le plasticien Jean-Luc Moulène s'offre un cube de travail sur mesure

REPORTAGE | **A Saint-Langis-lès-Mortagne, où il vit depuis deux ans, l'artiste a fait dessiner son atelier par l'architecte Didier Faustino. Nichée dans la verdure, la structure futuriste offre un vaste espace brut pour façonner ses sculptures à l'abri du monde.**

L'espace, totalement décloisonné, est organisé en modules. TIMOTHÉE CHAMBOVET POUR M LE MAGAZINE DU MONDE

Un diamant noir, érigé à l'orée d'un chemin bordé de tilleuls, jouxte un champ de blé. Quoique caché dans les buissons, le nouvel atelier de l'artiste Jean-Luc Moulène tranche dans le paysage verdoyant de Saint-Langis-lès-Mortagne, dans le Perche ornais, où le plasticien parisien, 65 ans, considéré comme l'une des signatures les plus emblématiques de sa génération, s'est replié depuis deux ans.

Roxana Azimi
Dans le Perche, le plasticien Jean-Luc Moulène s'offre un cube de travail sur mesure
M, le magazine du Monde, August 27, 2021.
https://cutt.ly/2WzoRZe

De l'extérieur, la structure tout en bois dessinée par l'architecte Didier Faustino, autre grand nom dans son domaine, évoque tout à la fois un ovni punk ou un mastaba, voire la Kaaba, ce cube recouvert d'un tissu noir vers lequel convergent les pèlerins de La Mecque. Les surfaces, planes et asymétriques, aux arêtes prononcées, sont gainées d'un simple caoutchouc noir dont les défauts, laissés visibles, font penser au martyre d'un écorché.

Seul impératif : une orientation au nord

A l'intérieur, les murs en bois aggloméré sont à nu. *« On voulait une ambivalence entre l'élégance du dessin de la structure et l'âpreté de la matière, toutes coutures dehors, un côté totalement Frankenstein »*, revendique Didier Faustino, qui a livré le bâtiment en juin 2021. La mise en abyme est parfaite tant l'équilibre savamment fragile de l'édifice renvoie à l'œuvre rugueuse, faussement maladroite de Jean-Luc Moulène.

L'intérieur de l'atelier aux murs en bois aggloméré, avec des sièges réalisés par Moulène, inspirés du designer Gerrit Rietveld. TIMOTHÉE CHAMBOVET POUR M LE MAGAZINE DU MONDE

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Cet atelier de près de 400 mètres carrés, l'artiste français en rêvait depuis longtemps : coincé dans un espace de travail dix fois plus petit, dans le quartier de Bercy, à Paris, il s'est senti débordé par ses archives. Happé par la sculpture, après avoir consacré ses premières décennies à la photographie, le créateur s'interroge : *« Pourquoi rester à Paris alors que je ne suis pas mondain et que mes propres vernissages m'ennuient ? »*

En 2017, en quête d'un terrain constructible avec sa femme, Viviane, ils sont à deux doigts de trouver leur Graal en Bourgogne, dans les vignes de Chagny, avant qu'une bonne amie leur signale, dans le Perche, une ancienne ferme du XVIII^{e} siècle entourée de plusieurs hectares de terres constructibles. *« Les ex-propriétaires, d'anciens hippies, avaient pu reclasser ce terrain agricole en zone tourisme et culture »,* confie-t-il.

Jean-Luc Moulène dans son atelier. TIMOTHÉE CHAMBOVET POUR M LE MAGAZINE DU MONDE

Pour réaménager la ferme en lieu à la fois de vie et de travail, le couple fait appel à Didier Faustino, un *« architecte d'auteur »,* selon le mot du critique d'architecture Francis Rambert, qui a choisi de nommer son agence le Bureau des Mésarchitectures. Pour la construction d'un atelier à part sur le terrain adjacent, Jean-Luc Moulène lui laisse carte blanche. Seul impératif : une orientation au nord, pour jouir toute la journée d'une lumière blanche et constante.

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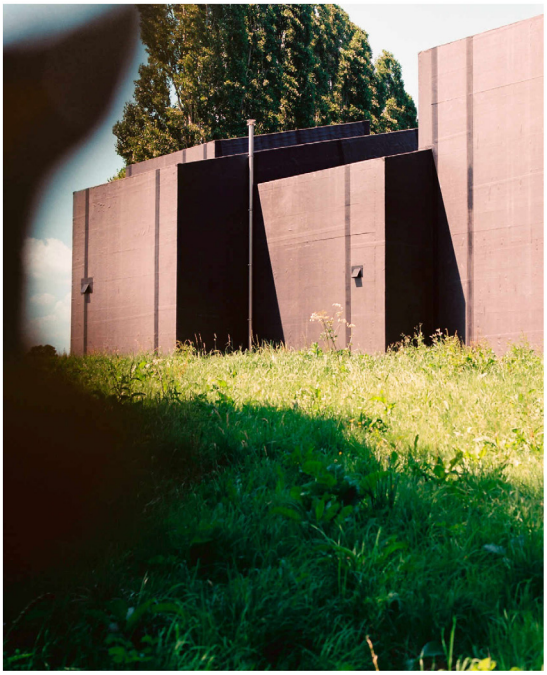
Grande baie vitrée

Habitué à déconcerter avec des créations aux formes à la fois monacales et futuristes, l'équilibriste Faustino songe d'emblée au noir, *« la couleur de l'ombre, celle qui passe plus inaperçue dans le paysage qu'un bâtiment blanc »*. Pour le couvert, il préfère le caoutchouc, *« moins bourgeois que les ardoises des longères du Perche, plus en phase avec la vérité de l'usage et parfaitement isolant »*.



L'édifice, revêtu d'une gaine de caoutchouc noir, se trouve à Saint-Langis-lès-Mortagne (Perche).
TIMOTHÉE CHAMBOVET POUR M LE MAGAZINE DU MONDE

Derrière la lourde porte coulissante, l'espace ouvert, sans aucune cloison, s'organise néanmoins autour de sept modules distincts. *« J'ai imaginé ces territoires en collant au plus près du processus créatif de Jean-Luc, dont le travail est très varié »*, explique Faustino. Dans un renfoncement à gauche de l'entrée, l'artiste peut tester la présence des nouvelles sculptures qui perturbent les matières et marient les contraires : une poupée en plastique prolongée d'une tête en verre posée sur une feutrine de déménagement ou une bulle de verre coincée dans un Caddie.

« Les ateliers d'artistes sont souvent des fantasmes, là, c'est une machine désirante. » Jean-Luc Moulène

Quelques pas plus loin se trouve la « salle des maquettes », avec une grande baie vitrée donnant sur les labours. Le seul point de vue sur le monde extérieur, les autres fenêtres n'ayant pas vocation à distraire le plasticien de son travail.

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Dans un autre renfoncement sont rangées les archives et les ponceuses, disqueuses et scies circulaires de ce manuel qui aime façonner ses sculptures lui-même. L'espace de conception se trouve sur la mezzanine, accessible par un escalier métallique. Là sont distribués le bureau, un salon *« pour s'écrouler, faire la sieste, bavarder »,* trois tatamis pour danser, faire du sport, *« penser aux formes à travers le mouvement »,* et une table de travail spécifiquement dévolue au dessin. *« Les ateliers d'artistes sont souvent des fantasmes, là, c'est une machine désirante »,* sourit Moulène, clope au bec.

De l'intérieur de l'atelier, une vue sur les champs alentour. TIMOTHÉE CHAMBOVET POUR M LE MAGAZINE DU MONDE

Chaque matin, désormais, il quitte sa maison pour suivre l'allée de tilleuls qui le mène à son étrange laboratoire-atelier. *« C'est une bulle au monde, pour un homme seul et non une ruche pour produits d'art contemporain »,* ironise l'ancien outsider qui, bien qu'adoubé par François Pinault, renâcle toujours à s'adapter au marché de l'art.

Dans ce lieu où il *« bricole »* des œuvres en tension constante, Jean-Luc Moulène se réjouit à l'avance de recevoir ses amis et tous ceux qui feront le voyage dans le Perche pour mieux comprendre un travail cassant les codes et la géométrie euclidienne. Bien mieux qu'à Paris.

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GALERIE
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The Saturday Paper

VISUAL ART

ACCA's *A Biography of Daphne* uses the Greek myth to explore contemporary notions of transformation. By *Melissa Bianca Amore*.

A Biography of Daphne

An installation view of *A Biography of Daphne* 2021, at ACCA. Andrew Curtis

Melissa Bianca Amore
A Biography of Daphne
The Saturday Paper, N°360, July 31, 2021, p.23.

In *A Biography of Daphne* at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), the richly intertextual classical myth of Daphne is reconfigured to examine notions of metamorphosis, agency and resistance. The show embodies a compelling exchange between myth and contemporary art, revealing Romanian guest curator Mihnea Mircan's extensive scholarly research in the field of contemporary myth-making.

The exhibition includes significant work by artists such as Lauren Burrow, Jill Magid, Jean-Luc Moulène, Candice Lin and P. Staff, who are anchored between two historical works. On arrival, the 17th-century etching *Apollo and Daphne* (1650s) by Anthonie Waterloo depicts Daphne fleeing Apollo, while on departure Agostino dei Musi's 16th-century engraving *Apollo and Daphne* (1515) shows her transformation into a laurel tree. Both works counterpoint states of being between mimicry, vulnerability and rupture.

French artist Jean-Luc Moulène's concrete sculpture *Fixed Fountain* (2021) powerfully pivots the exhibition between these transitional states. Centrally sited, the work serves as a bifurcation, a collision of figures in perpetual transition. Known for his sculptural entanglements and interlacing mechanisms – often rendered with a preposterous surrealist spirit – this work reveals Moulène's investigations into "knot theory" and directly references the structural techniques of rubbing stones as a method of binding employed in pre-Columbian architecture. Moulène articulates the embodied resonance of Daphne's myth; in the curator's words: "*Fixed Fountain* permits a further comparison to the becoming-another that unites Daphne's two bodies: her human form beginning to resemble a tree, her tree beginning to resemble a human body."

Western understanding of mythology is dominated by the Greek tales of gods, allegorical legends and fictional characters. Since the 17th century, the relevance of mythology to the contemporary world has often been discredited as a property of ancient and "primitive" civilisations. For some, including psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung, mythological archetypes were important means of interpreting the collective unconscious and the human mind. As he commented in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, "myths are original revelations of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings, and anything but allegories of physical processes".

Israeli artist, novelist and filmmaker Roee Rosen explores another kind of myth in his suite of works, which include *Physiognomies 04* 1928 and *Frankomas* 1930. Active since the 1980s, Rosen has dedicated most of his practice to creating fictional characters that examine the parallels between fiction and truth. In this exhibition, Rosen's invented artist Justine Frank – a Jewish–Belgian female painter who moved to Paris in the 1920s and became part of the male-dominated Surrealist movement – resurrects history and investigates how meaning is created in the process. Often erotic, sadistic, absurd and transgressive, the artist transforms into an actor, performing mime and spectacle as a gesture of cultural redemption and a re-creation of self.

Aside from redefining notions of parody and transformation, Frank establishes an ambiguous dialogue with American conceptual artist Jill Magid's clever *Auto Portrait Pending* (2005). Both works unconventionally challenge notions of metamorphosis in European myth, evoking an unexpected "double becoming".

In *Auto Portrait Pending*, death gives birth to the artwork's becoming. An empty

Melissa Bianca Amore
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gold ring – the artist's tombstone – is displayed in an enclosed wall vitrine, alongside two legal contracts and a testimony outlining the artist's requirements to trade her body to LifeGem Corporation to have her ashes converted into a diamond. "Make me a diamond when I die," she specifies. "Cut me round and brilliant. Weigh me at one carat. Ensure that I am real." Magid presents a precarious complexity that questions the parameters of authorship: at what stage in the ring or body's sublimation does it become a finished work of art, and who is its author following the artist's death? In the artist's words, *Auto Portrait Pending* is an inner "pregnant pause" awaiting transformation.

This redeployment of self is further obscured in the video *The Unmanned, Season 1, episode 3: 1953 – The Outlawed* (2018) by French collaborative artists Fabien Giraud and Raphaël Siboni, a poetic examination of transfiguration, computation and temporality. Hypnotic in its hallucinatory effects and deeply melancholic cinematic landscape, the video shows Alan Turing (played by actor Aurore Broutin) on a raft drifting out to sea as he endures chemical castration after his conviction for homosexuality in 1952. *The Outlawed* heightens the debate around gender identity and the harrowing effects of Turing's transformation. In a continuum with this work, although contrastingly whimsical, is Candice Lin & P. Staff's *Hormonal Fog* – a fog machine that emits a disorientating haze made from extracted plant tinctures that increase oestrogen levels.

A Biography of Daphne aims to "create an expanded contemporary landscape around Daphne's becoming, teasing out a dialogue between her 'biography' and some of the narratives that shape present-day notions of transformation and identity". Employing the myth of Daphne constrains the artworks within that context, which both reveals and obscures the artworks' meanings. Mircan skilfully renders the ambiguity of decoding myths while revealing their function as an encrypted message: a mode of signification and a semiotic system of relations.

Perhaps the real question is, how do we engage with mythological thinking? Is mythology history in a disguised form? According to American literary scholar Joseph Campbell, "a mythic figure is like the compass that you used to draw circles and arcs in school, with one leg in the field of time and the other in the eternal. The image of a god may look like a human or animal form, but its reference is transcendent of that."

Kawun (2005) by Pitjantjatjara artist Wingu Tingima holds echoes of hidden messages and transcendence. It illustrates the transformation of the Seven Sisters (Kungarrakalpa) into a constellation – known by Western astronomers as the Pleiades – to escape from Nyiru, who against customary law wants to force one of them to marry him. The origins of First Nations culture are often retold as mythological thinking, in central narratives of Dreaming, cosmology and connections to Country. Another imminent threat is also recalled in Lauren Burrow's *A stick developing eyes* (2020-21), which embodies an infinite stillness – a network of resin crocodile eyes swimming in a pool of cosmological darkness.

With a layered, lyrical vocabulary, *A Biography of Daphne* explores myth as a source of knowledge and as an essential clue into the collective minds of human civilisation and the spiritual. While works in the exhibition occupy a liminal space on the threshold of becoming, they oscillate somewhere between *mythos* (narrative) and *logos* (reason). In Claude Lévi-Strauss's words: "On the one hand, a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago. But what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past, as well as the future." ●

A Biography of Daphne *is showing at ACCA, Melbourne, until September 5.*

Melissa Bianca Amore
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GALERIE
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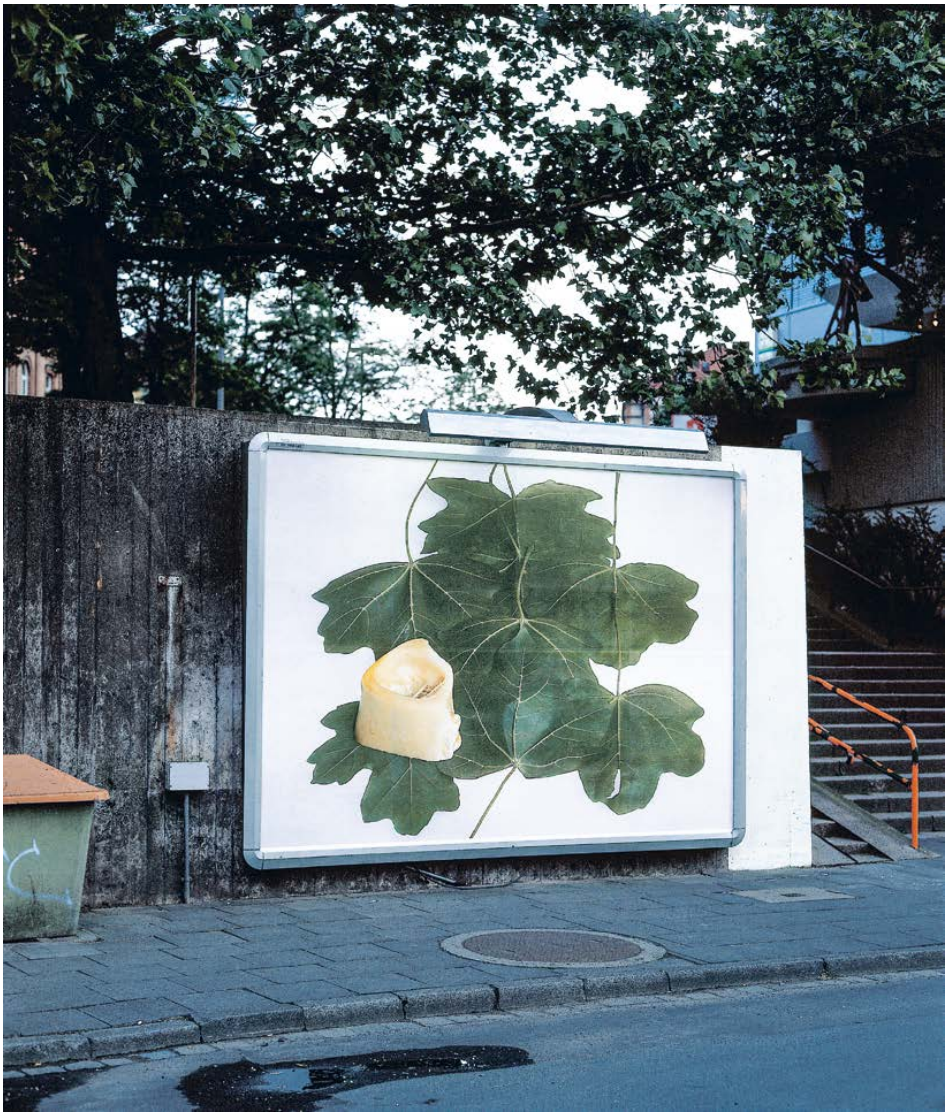
INFRA-MINCE



Etienne Hatt
Jean-Luc Moulène En Conversation Avec Etienne Hatt
Inframince, N°14, March 2, 2020, p.60-73.

ENTRETIEN /

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE
EN CONVERSATION AVEC ETIENNE HATT

Il n'est pas facile de présenter l'œuvre de Jean-Luc Moulène. Elle ne peut se réduire à un *statement* et impose son refus de l'homogénéité et du style. Au moins peut-on dire qu'elle se partage entre l'image et l'objet mais, là encore, il se peut que ces catégories s'effondrent. Alors, par image entendons pour l'instant les ensembles de photographies que l'artiste réalise depuis les années 1980 ; les plus connues sont sans doute Les Objets de grève qui datent de 2001, une sorte d'inventaire photographique qui emprunte au modèle publicitaire. Mais bon nombre de photographies de Moulène sont aussi le fruit de déambulations urbaines et ont des allures d'instantanés. Par objet, entendons, pour l'instant aussi, les nombreuses sculptures produites dans des matériaux, des formats et selon des procédés très diversifiés.

ETIENNE HATT : Ce qui nous intéresse, c'est de savoir comment images et objets dialoguent et quel est leur espace commun dans l'œuvre. Pour commencer, on peut peut-être voir comment ces pratiques de l'image et de l'objet se sont organisées dans le temps puisque les objets apparaissent après les photographies, d'abord en 1994 puis pas avant 2003 à la Biennale de Venise.

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE : Je pratique l'objet depuis mes quatorze ans, donc bien avant de disposer d'un appareil photo. C'est d'abord une pratique de pur goût, de bricolage, de la réparation. J'ai donc commencé par une nécessité manuelle. Quand je commence officiellement à montrer de la photographie dans les années 1980, je suis déjà en train de faire par ailleurs des objets, mais vu mes conditions très simples d'habitat, je n'avais ni la surface ni le volume pour être ce que j'avais envie d'être, c'est-à-dire, à l'époque, quelque chose comme un producteur d'objets. N'ayant pas de place de stockage, pas de galerie, la photographie s'est imposée comme le moyen de faire et penser des objets. Il faut dire aussi que dans les années 1970, je m'intéresse d'assez près à l'art corporel. Or l'art corporel, dès ces années-là, présente de la photographie dans les galeries d'art et non pas dans les galeries de photographies. Il y avait là un premier hiatus de milieux. Comme dans les années 1980 la photographie n'avait pas bonne presse dans le milieu de l'art, c'était le moyen de faire une entrée problématique dans cette question de l'art et des images. J'ai donc pris l'option de produire des photographies, mais que j'ai toujours pensées comme des objets constitués, c'est-à-dire qu'ils ont un cadre, des dimensions, une vitre, etc. Ce sont des meubles, par opposition à immeuble.

De fait, je commence à montrer des images comme objets au début des années 1980.

Page de gauche : *04-07-1996 (Os)*, Offset 2.40 x 3.20 m. Installation DX Kassel 1997

Etienne Hatt
Jean-Luc Moulène En Conversation Avec Etienne Hatt
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DISJONCTIONS / *Sans titre (GTX) Bld de la Bastille*, Paris, été 1992. Cibachrome sur aluminium, 78 x 98 cm

Avec la série *Disjonction*, j'ai essayé de passer en revue toutes les pratiques existantes de la photographie, toutes les pratiques en place et catégorisées, que ce soit la nature morte, la photographie archéologique, la vue urbaine, la photographie de famille, etc. : *de la photo de famille à l'image de marque*. Déjà, la question de « ce que fait la photographie » se posait de manière largement problématique puisque la photographie fait tout, tout simplement tout et pour tout le monde dans tous les domaines. Au point qu'aujourd'hui, rien n'existe si ça n'a pas été photographié : c'est presque une des conditions d'existence des choses aujourd'hui. Ce qui ne va évidemment pas sans questions.

Ce terme de disjonction est un terme important dans ton lexique. Peux-tu le préciser ?

En termes mathématiques, la disjonction est une opération, c'est l'union moins l'intersection. C'est tout ce que l'on fait ensemble moins ce que l'on a de commun. Ce que l'on a en commun, c'est aussi bien ce que l'on sait que ce que l'on ne sait pas. Exclure certains champs pour en connaître d'autres a été une technique, presque une tactique, que j'ai appliquée et applique encore de manière systématique.

Et comment cette notion de disjonction se retrouve-t-elle dans cette série ?

Elle existe de deux manières, à travers la discontinuité des différents types d'images et à l'intérieur de chaque composition. Comme ça devient difficile à expliquer en termes d'image, je vais citer un ami qui le dit de manière plus littérale et littéraire : dans « Proust et la musique », le « et » marque bien une conjonction, mais on ne parle ni de tout Proust ni de toute la musique. En revanche, dans « le vide et le

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vent », ce « et », c'est tout le vide et tout le vent. C'est ça une disjonction : une manière de mettre des choses ensemble, de les croiser tout en les laissant parfaitement entières.

Il y a une autre notion importante qui est celle d'intersection. C'est aussi un procédé qui permet de faire le lien entre des séries de photographies comme les *Filles d'Amsterdam* et certains objets.

Il faut entendre dans le mot disjonction le mot jonction et dans le mot intersection, il faut penser section. Or, cette histoire de section dans l'histoire de la photographie, ce n'est pas rien. Certains sectionnent le temps comme beaucoup l'ont dit avec « l'instantané ». Mais simultanément, la dimension plate de l'image, et donc l'objet photographique, prend souvent l'allure d'une tranche. Et des tranches j'en ai, on s'en est payé plusieurs et on en a fait réaliser quelques-unes.

Lesquelles par exemple ?

Dans la voiture avec l'arbre coupé, c'est la coupe qui fait la jonction. Cette coupe peut s'identifier à des fonds. Quand on photographie un objet sur un fond, dans bien des cas la question est d'extraire cet objet du fond, l'extraire ou l'intégrer. Mais dans tous les cas, le fond peut se présenter comme une surface de coupe.

La série des *Produits* illustre-t-elle ce propos ? Ce sont des photographies que tu as faites pour le Confort Moderne à Poitiers en 1994 puis pour la documenta X de Cassel en 1997. Elles posent des questions de volumétrie assez intéressantes.

Elles pouvaient poser ces questions parce que, au préalable, j'avais clairement posé que l'existence d'une image photographique tient à trois moments et que tous ces moments ne sont pas nécessairement contrôlables et maîtrisables par le photographe. Il y a d'abord la prise de vue, qui est ce qu'elle est, le plus souvent de la mécanique hasardeuse. Il y a ensuite le choix, puis l'apparaître, c'est-à-dire que le premier tirage produit ce que l'on appelle l'aura : comment cette image fait une présence, comment elle apparaît, sachant que cette apparition est elle-même conditionnée par son troisième moment, par sa diffusion. Donc, si vous produisez une image que vous matérialisez dans un objet, ce n'est pas du tout la même chose que de la matérialiser dans le champ de possibles que sont les médias, dans lesquels par exemple le trois mètres sur quatre présente la même image exactement qu'une image dans un journal. Ça m'intéressait d'examiner ces rapports à la diffusion : comment cette diffusion modifie l'apparaître de l'image. Mais comme je savais en plus qu'il y avait de fortes chances que je produise des quatre par trois avec les *Produits*, j'ai donc fait un certain nombre de compositions que j'ai voulues « hors format ». Elles devaient pouvoir apparaître y compris en projection dans n'importe quel format. Autre chose est intervenu : je passais effectivement d'objets qui étaient accrochés sur les murs à des supports papiers qui circulaient. La nature de ces images est très différente. Dans les premières, les *Disjonctions*, je m'intéressais aux représentations et dans ces *Produits*, qui ont à voir avec l'espace publicitaire public, je produis tout simplement des icônes, au sens de la tradition orthodoxe : il s'agit de produire une image qui donne directement accès à l'objet, à la chose, aux dieux, enfin, à ce qu'on voudra. C'est un accès direct. On ne transite pas par une représentation. Une des merveilles de la photographie est qu'elle a été capable de succéder simultanément à l'histoire de la représentation et à celle des icônes.

Peux-tu nous en dire plus sur la planéité du fond et la volumétrie de l'os ?

L'os sert à montrer, à dimensionner ce plat qui n'est pas un plat. Il y a un conflit d'intérêts entre le plat et le volume, mais ce conflit d'intérêts se double d'un autre aussi assez bêtement : d'un os de mort et d'une des feuilles vivantes. Je ne suis pas un formaliste, je pratique la rhétorique pour rendre sensibles des expériences. Ce ne sont pas simplement des formes pour dire : « Regardez comme ça fait des volumes. » C'est essentiellement une question de dimensionnement.

Et l'os est assez amusant parce qu'il se pré-

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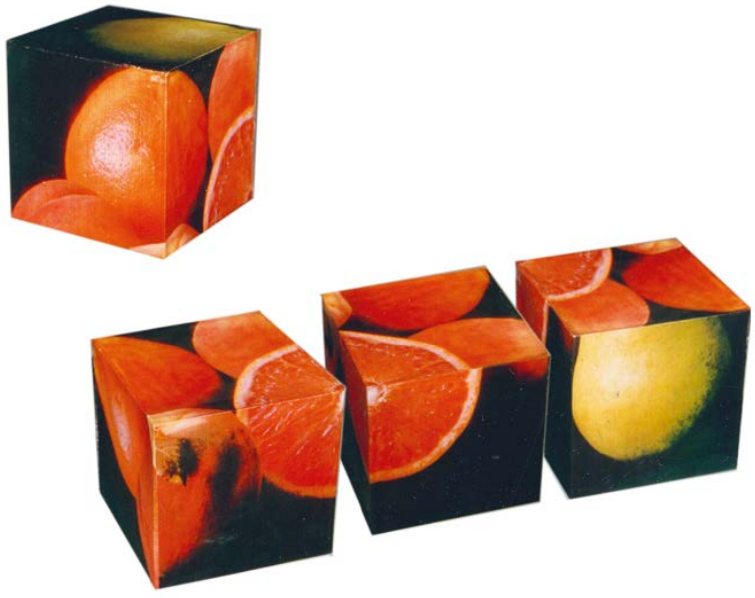
PRODUITS / *Jus allemand,* 28 09 1992. Sérigraphie 3 x 4 m.



OPUS / 1 000 litres de jus allemand. Paris, 1994

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sente, un peu en bas à gauche, comme une forme de signature, de logo. Il occupe par ailleurs exactement un huitième du volume cubique tracé par les nervures des feuilles qui servent de fond. Pour être précis à propos de ces feuilles, je dois dire que ce sont toutes les feuilles d'une même extrémité de branche, et c'est donc la progression géométrique de la croissance qui, rapportée sur le plan de l'image, apparaît comme une perspective axonométrique.
Ce sont des processus rhétoriques qui vont complètement à l'encontre de toutes les images publicitaires que l'on voyait à l'époque. À cette époque on s'y intéressait encore. Aujourd'hui, les images publicitaires sont totalement fluides et plus personne ne s'arrête dans le métro pour les regarder et les commenter. Elles n'ont plus beaucoup d'intérêt pour la simple et bonne raison que les publicitaires savent très bien que personne ne les regarde. L'image fixe n'est plus de mise. Ils ne font même pas l'effort.

Dans cette série des *Produits*, un ensemble d'images montre que tu pars de l'objet, que tu passes par l'image et que tu reviens à l'objet. Peux-tu préciser le processus ?

Tout à l'heure, quand tu as évoqué le rapport images/objets, je me suis dit qu'on était peut-être arrivé à l'ère où il n'y a plus d'objets et où il ne reste plus que des produits. Il y a un marché, des produits de l'art, mais l'artiste produit-il encore un art ? Quel que soit l'objet aujourd'hui, nous avons avec lui un rapport de consommateur à produit. L'image présente, dans bien des cas, c'est tout simplement l'image de marque et donc la marque. Ce n'est pas tout à fait une image, mais une image avec du langage. En me promenant dans mon Monoprix – parce que c'est quand même là que sont les paysages d'aujourd'hui –, je me suis surpris à observer des packs de jus de fruits Kergal avec trois faces imprimées illustrées qui, mises côte à côte, reconstituent une image entière. J'ai donc correctement commencé par redistribuer les packs dans le supermarché sur le rayon avant de faire ma photo, de façon à faire apparaître l'image entière de chacun des fruits. Dans un autre supermarché en Allemagne, j'ai aussi constaté que certains packs étaient cirés et que l'impression ne tenait pas. Avec le bon produit qui est de l'essence, si j'ai bonne mémoire, j'ai effacé les mots et obtenu une image de marque sans marque. Cela faisait partie d'un ensemble de travaux, *Errata*, que je faisais avec un mon ami Vincent Labaume. Je me suis alors dit que ça m'intéresserait de fabriquer une image qui reprendrait toutes les modalités de présentation de ces natures mortes sur les packs, donc à nouveau : la coupe, la chose entière, la chose seule, etc. J'en suis arrivé à une composition qu'il faut imaginer finalisée en quatre par trois. C'est une sérigraphie. J'ai repris la coupe, j'ai repris la poire seule, le renvoi du plein, le même fruit en diagonale devant, etc. Pour un photographe, la première chose qui concerne l'objet c'est la nature morte ou la chose qu'il va photographier. Vous constaterez que beaucoup ne savent pas installer une nature morte, ne savent pas ce qu'est une composition volumétrique. Il suffit de disposer en essayant de rattraper par la lumière. Sachant que j'allais faire un quatre par trois, j'ai divisé mon image en douze panneaux de un mètre carré, mais comme vous le constaterez aussi, la poire est en tangence, les éléments centraux des fruits sont aux quatre coins du carré, etc. Techniquement il suffit de fabriquer un modèle abstrait (ici la grille) dessiné sur un rhodoïd et glissé sur le dépoli dans le fond de la chambre. Je dispose les choses d'après ce que je vois à l'image. Je compose dans la contrainte.
Ce mouvement de pliage observé et repris déplié me laissait espérer que la mobilité du regard replierait instantanément l'image en volume, que les gens auraient la mobilité pour la replier à nouveau, en sorte qu'ils perçoivent que c'est un dépliement et que son passage au volume est pratiquement instantané. Je vous avoue que ça n'a pas été perçu. Il fallait continuer. J'en suis donc arrivé à découper mon volume, à fabriquer un morceau de bois d'un mètre cube et à l'envelopper intégralement dans mon image. Ainsi cette image, d'abord volumétrique, est passée à plat avant de revenir à son volume où d'ailleurs les points des angles s'organisent avec l'image.

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C'est ce que l'on appelle aujourd'hui un objet photographique, une œuvre qui met la photographie en volume.

C'est peut-être comme ça qu'on l'appellerait aujourd'hui mais, quand je l'ai faite, je t'assure qu'elle n'avait pas de nom.

Comment est-ce que tu la désignes ?

Je ne l'ai montrée que deux fois. Je pense que je l'appelais déjà *Opus*. J'appelle l'ensemble de mes objets volumétriques des *Opus*, tout simplement pour pouvoir les classer et les mettre en ordre. Ça souligne aussi la dimension de travail : un *opus*, c'est une fabrication. Le titre final de cet objet est : *OPUS, 1 000 litres de jus allemand*.

Ce que montre une autre série, les *Filles d'Amsterdam*, c'est l'importance du corps dans ton travail photographique, mais aussi dans ton travail de sculpture. Je pense, notamment, à cette grande sculpture qui s'appelle *Body,* mais qui ne ressemble pas du tout à un corps. Pourquoi cette sculpture s'appelle-t-elle *Body* ?

Tout simplement parce qu'en anglais, une carrosserie se dit *body*. J'ai gardé le mot anglais pour la relation au corps. Mon intérêt pour le corps est ancré dans les expériences de l'art corporel. Il est dû aussi à mon amitié avec Michel Journiac. En 1985, je crois, il a organisé un colloque à la Sorbonne dont le titre était : « Enjeux de la représentation : le corps ». Beaucoup d'intervenants avaient rappelé que pour être un corps il faut du langage ou des représentations. On n'est pas un corps en soi, mais un bout de viande. Pour devenir corps, il faut des représentations et c'est tellement vrai que la photographie nous le signifie clairement : les corps réels d'aujourd'hui sont extrêmement distincts des corps d'avant la photographie, simplement parce que les représentations sont différentes. De la même manière, quand sont apparus les premiers scanners médicaux, d'un seul coup on a eu encore un autre corps. J'en suis arrivé à la conclusion que les corps sont à la croisée – et c'est encore une représentation – simplement d'une construction collective sociale et d'une construction individuelle. Puisque du coup on en vient à parler de mon corps, j'ai pris l'option de le fabriquer à la main tout seul. Se construire un corps émancipé supposait donc une rupture et une déconstruction des représentations existantes. Voilà pour l'ancrage de ma relation au corps. J'ai très peu utilisé de figurations corporelles précisément parce que je crains toujours que l'on me parle du corps comme d'une donnée avérée. Or, on ne sait pas ce que c'est. Le corps n'est même pas l'espace commun. Pour que ce soit un espace commun, il faudrait partouzer plus sérieusement que ça. Cela dit, une des représentations très importantes dans le domaine des corps, c'est la médecine. Par exemple *04-08-1996 (Nu assis)* fait partie des *Produits* même si elle est bien postérieure. Sa géométrie est rigoureuse, les jambes partent exactement à 30°, le bas du dos est à 60°, la ligne du bras parfaitement verticale arrive exactement dans l'occiput. Le travail du modèle est tout à fait précis, à nouveau déplié, plié à la contrainte de l'image. Sa position par ailleurs est tout simplement la position que l'on prend pour être observé par un toubib. Il s'agit donc d'une image qui, dans le fond, fait le « dos rond », se met dans la position de recevoir tous les regards scrutateurs de la médecine.

Alors peut-être que l'on peut parler maintenant davantage de ce que j'appelle des objets, mais le terme d'objets est visiblement polysémique aussi.

Il y a déjà la sculpture. Pour moi la sculpture est juste un champ historié de l'objet. Il y en a bien d'autres.

À partir des *Filles d'Amsterdam* et de cette notion d'intersection, on peut faire le lien entre la photographie et l'objet puisque dans une même image tu rejoins Belloc et Bertillon, l'image pornographique et le portrait d'identité. La notion d'intersection est importante ici. On la retrouve dans certains de tes objets, notamment *Car and Girl*.

Au vu des dernières pièces volumétriques, c'est intéressant que tu renvoies cette question de l'intersection vers les *Filles d'Amsterdam*. Je ne serai pas aussi sûr que toi parce qu'en

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Carmen. Amsterdam, 08 04 2004. Cibachrome sur aluminium, 119 x 152 x 6 cm

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fait, la vraie question pour moi est : comment produire quelque chose d'entier ? Mais est-ce qu'une intersection va pouvoir rester entière ? C'est ce que j'évoquais déjà à propos de la disjonction. Dans les *Filles d'Amsterdam*, ce qui m'intéresse c'est la chose entière qui reste de la coupe coupure, donc induite par le bertillonnage, ou de la pornographie, puisque l'un comme l'autre éliminent la moitié du corps. Ce n'est pas une idée facile à exposer parce que l'on peut être entier avec des manques. La question de l'entièreté d'une chose fait partie pour moi des conditions que je mets à une pièce ou une photographie avant de l'exposer, car si je ne la sens pas entière, *complétée* diraient les Anglais, je n'y vais pas. Dans le cas des *Filles*, il s'agissait de rassembler, dans une seule représentation, tête et sexe, notamment pour contrer cette coupe coupure qui avait été produite aussi bien par la police des mœurs que la police des personnes et qui, dans le fond, reste encore très ancrée dans nos conceptions et dans notre perception du corps : on continue à couper le bonhomme en deux. Dans les cas des *Filles*, rassembler, donner une image qui contre cette division ancienne tout simplement parce que l'entièreté c'est une évidence. Revenons à *Cars and Girl*s. Là on est effectivement en présence d'une vraie intersection, au sens inverse de ce que je vous disais d'une disjonction : c'est-à-dire que nous n'avons ni une voiture entière ni un corps entier, mais seulement l'espace qu'ils partagent dans cette pièce. On nous a bassiné avec les identités, on continue à dire qu'il n'y a pas d'identité s'il n'y a pas deux termes… Une identité nationale je suis désolé c'est une connerie ça n'a pas de sens mathématiquement et à force d'entendre tous nos politiciens, je me suis dit que ce serait peut-être intéressant d'essayer de voir à quoi ça ressemble effectivement ce qui est commun, parce que ce « à quoi ça ressemble » a toujours été ma raison de photographier. Je ne photographie pas quelque chose que j'aime ou quelque chose que je veux rendre. Je ne cherche pas non plus à produire un effet. Je photographie pour voir ce que ça change, ce que ça donne une fois photographié. Je me suis donc dit : « Fais-en autant avec des objets. » *Body* est entièrement calculé numériquement. Ce sont des fonctions mathématiques et de la programmation. On a évoqué les coupes dans *Body.* Il faut dire que ces coupes planes sont premières et que la/les surface(s) est/sont engendrée(s) par le/les bords des coupes. Ce sont des plans de coupe. On utilise des surfaces qui sont dites minimales, des surfaces qui ont le minimum de tension sur leur bord. Une surface minimale exemplaire, c'est la bulle de savon. Les bulles de savon entre les doigts ça bouge, mais c'est une surface de tension minimale. Toutes ces coupes ont été rejointes entres elles par cette fonction, ces surfaces minimales formant un objet clos sur lui-même. Ensuite, de l'intérieur, on a glissé un « souffle » numérique qui a gonflé chacune des surfaces suffisamment pour qu'elle bombe vers l'extérieur. Ça nous permet de revenir à cette question du *Car and Girl* où il y a vraiment une intersection numérique, ce que les programmes 3D appellent une booléenne. Pour la réaliser, j'ai pris le modèle 3D d'un corps de femme artificielle, un alias numérique, même pas un scan, et celui d'une carrosserie d'Alpine Renault. On les place dans la bonne position l'un par rapport à l'autre et la machine délivre le fichier numérique de ce que l'on a aujourd'hui sous les yeux. La production est en marbre gris. Les gris parce que les machines de tirage existent. Elles s'appellent fraiseuse tourneuse, tour, CNC, imprimantes etc. De l'impression numérique. Et, comme en photographie, il commence à exister des technologies tout à fait sérieuses de matérialisation et c'est la matérialité des choses qui fait que lorsque l'on est devant quelque chose, il y a une présence.

Et c'est vrai que les matériaux imposent généralement leurs conditions. Avec les nouvelles technologies 3D et les fraiseuses dont tu parlais, les conditions des matériaux sont-elles toujours présentes ? Une œuvre peut-elle ne pas avoir de conditions ?

Je m'y opposerais. Pour moi, une œuvre est conditionnée, une œuvre sans condition, c'est l'idéal de la bourgeoisie qui se dit : « Oh, oh, comme ça on est sûr d'acheter de la liberté. » Or il n'y a pas d'œuvres sans condition, pas de

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Car & Girl. Paris-Bolzano, 2016. Marbre gris de Carrare. 47,8 x 172 x 71,9 cm, environ 600 kg. Design 3D : Romain Guillet. Fabrication : Gabriele Vason, Giuseppe Dalle Nogare, Bolzano-Verona, Italia

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liberté sans libération. Je vous rappelle à ce propos ce texte d'Artaud, « Insultes à l'inconditionné » (in *Artaud le Mômo*, 1947), qui est quand même assez sévère.
Aujourd'hui, ça m'intéresse de produire une pièce qui ne serait que sa propre condition d'existence et en même temps de manière totalement parfaitement impersonnelle. J'y travaille avec des ingénieurs qui pratiquent l'optimisation formelle topologique. Les technologies (du capital), d'une certaine manière pour la première fois, commencent à s'intéresser à la forme dans l'objectif, pas vraiment expérimental, de leur rentabilité. Le capital, comme la nature, n'aime pas beaucoup dépenser quand ça ne sert à rien. Donc, puisque l'on commence à savoir imprimer des objets en numérique, les industriels sont en train de préparer le tournant qui va nous faire passer de l'usinage traditionnel, et donc d'une pensée liée aux trois dimensions habituelles de l'espace, vers des technologies d'impression qui, elles, sont du point à point. Ces programmes d'optimisation prennent en compte absolument toutes les sortes de conditions possibles et imaginables. Elles tiennent compte de la gravité, des vents, des matériaux, des transports, etc., si la gravité lunaire ou terrestre peut intégrer la vitesse des vents, le poids du matériau. D'une certaine manière je calcule avec des machines des volumes d'objets sans fonction qui ressemblent à des pièces d'industrie, mais qui ne s'appliquent justement pas à des objets industriels.

Quel en sera le titre ?
Plus ou moins d'os. Si je fais ce type de pièces avec ces techniciens et ingénieurs, alors que je préfère bricoler tout seul dans mon atelier, ce n'est pas simplement pour faire une nouvelle pièce c'est parce que je voudrais montrer au public ce qui nous attend. Comme *Body* que j'ai fait pour rappeler au public que l'on a de plus en plus d'objets, mais que des objets intermédiaires simples, des objets de transition, sont devenus inaccessibles et d'une certaine manière illisibles en termes de technologie comme en termes de finances et de production, car il s'agit ici de machines qui coûtent super cher. On est en train de nous fabriquer un monde avec des outils auxquels on n'a pas accès. Il vaut mieux le savoir afin de pouvoir les reconnaître et se laisser emmener dans des délires d'industriels. Je rappelle que *Body* a été fait avec Renault.

On a l'impression que, chez toi, le faire s'incarne dans le langage. Il y a des mots importants, comme intersection, tu as parlé de la coupe. Il y a aussi la latéralité.
Faire, incarner, dire, voilà une belle dialectique ! Aujourd'hui, la « latéralité » est utilisée par les agences de conseil en recrutement ou en création dans les entreprises. On sait que dans une équipe qui n'arrive pas à trouver la solution créative, il suffit d'ajouter (latéralement donc) quelqu'un qui vient « d'un monde totalement différent » et qui va donc parler avec l'équipe d'un point de vue complètement différent pour tester des solutions nouvelles.
La latéralité dans le domaine de l'industrie est l'idée de faire venir un expert que l'on colle au groupe, mais c'est aussi une technique réelle d'observation, une manière d'expérimenter. Si l'art consiste à mettre ensemble des choses qui n'ont rien à voir et qui pourtant sont traversées par un même principe, si l'on arrive à faire ça je crois que l'on a fait une œuvre qui sera un objet entier.

Dans certains cas, tu joues avec les niveaux de technologie comme avec les sculptures de jardin qui ont l'air de venir d'un tout autre type de fabrication.
Il s'agit de sculptures en ciment que l'on met dans les jardins. Le plus souvent ce sont des figures copiées d'antiques ou du XIX^e^ siècle, de plutôt mauvaise qualité puisque l'on est obligé de refaire un moule sans avoir accès à l'original de reproduction. C'est loin d'être de la grande sculpture. J'ai trouvé plusieurs modèles copiés du même original, tous différents. C'est donc du ciment, je ne les ai pas nettoyés, la patine et les champignons sont restés visibles.
Ces figures sont coupées verticalement et ajointées. Les coupes ne sont plus planes, mais courbes, elles suivent une courbe de niveau de la figure. La coupe est destinée à produire une

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entièreté. Ce n'est pas une coupe droite, mais une courbe et pas n'importe quelle courbe. J'ai projeté avec un laser une ligne qui a une courbe de niveau, donc oblique, ensuite on a coupé la pierre selon cette courbe de niveau. Et comme c'est évidemment une machine qui coupe, on a mémorisé cette forme et on l'a appliquée à la figure suivante de façon à ce que leur contact soit exact, et ainsi de suite latéralement de figure en figure. C'est un système de production d'un entier à partir de coupes.

Il y a souvent dans tes expositions une publication, une forme journal qui vient en pile construire un espace. C'est une partie importante de ta production. À certains moments stratégiques, tu as donné à l'image la forme du journal.

Ça dérive de ces réflexions sur la nature de l'image et la nature de cette diffusion. Ce ne sont pas des cibachromes, mais de l'impression sur papier journal. Ce n'est pas toujours de grande qualité technique. Celui qu'on a imprimé à Tirana a été fait avec des films qui ne sont même pas transparents, des films sur calque. Quant à celui fait à l'imprimerie nationale du Laos!... C'est pour ça aussi qu'on a fait une composition années soixante-dix sur les presses de l'imprimerie nationale. Imaginez que pour faire des couleurs vous avez la presse noir et jaune qui tire à droite et la presse rouge et bleu qui tire à gauche! Bonjour le calage! Cela dit, beaucoup des photographies que je vois me vient *via* la presse. Pourquoi ne pas réintervenir dans ce circuit-là? Le revers de la médaille, c'est que l'intérêt portant sur les journaux eux-mêmes, personne ne parle des images. La diffusion devient tellement massive, quarante, cent mille exemplaires, que le poids de papier empêche de dire «tiens, voilà une image intéressante à voir». Le journal permet une diffusion supérieure, mais je me pose encore des questions sur l'efficacité du regard qu'il crée. Peut-être que supprimer la dimension symbolique qui qualifie l'art disqualifie la qualité du regard.

On a l'exemple de ton exposition au musée du Louvre caractérisée par des œuvres produites sous forme de stèles et la masse des journaux qui sont toujours gratuits. On pouvait repartir avec le journal qui est en soi une production de l'artiste, une œuvre.

Parlons alors de la production de ces photographies d'objets d'art. Au Louvre, on ne peut pas échapper à la question de l'art. Entrer au Louvre sur invitation, soit, mais ne pas y rester, de là ce journal *Le Monde Le Louvre*. Mon premier objectif était d'être invité, mais pas d'y rester, parce que le poids symbolique que l'on accorde à l'art empêche un regard sérieux sur les choses. J'ai commencé le protocole avec la sélection de vingt-quatre pièces de petit format dans la banque de données numériques du Louvre. Je les ai donc choisies d'après d'autres photographies dont certaines, d'ailleurs, sont des merveilles.

On va maintenant parler effectivement sculpture et photographie même si c'est une vieille question. Je me souviens déjà que dans les années 1970, des gens critiques, savants, comparaient la photographie et la sculpture: l'une était issue d'un négatif, l'autre d'un moule, etc. Je voulais que ces sculptures du Louvre soient vues de face. Parce que ce qui fait le plus souvent une bonne photographie, c'est le regard qui est à l'image. Toutes mes prises de vue sont donc «regard en face» alors que dans la tradition sculpturale, le volume est séparé du regard. En fait, avec le regard d'une sculpture vous avez sa partie la plus plate. Le volume, s'il fallait le montrer, il faudrait biaiser, il ne faudrait pas se mettre en face. En manipulant les objets, je voyais bien que si je me mettais dix ou vingt centimètres à gauche ou à droite, j'allais restituer plus de relief. Mais je voulais le regard de l'objet et c'est d'ailleurs pour ça que je commence la séquence par cette pièce cycladique où il n'y a ni regard ni corps, mais des plis.

Peut-on parler des interactions que tu crées entre l'image et l'objet dans l'espace d'exposition et je pense notamment à Nîmes où il y avait images et objets dans le même espace?

Je peux te dire comment je l'ai produit, comment ça dialoguait. C'est évidemment de l'ordre du promeneur, du visiteur. Le Carré d'art de

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Le Monde, Le Louvre. Musée du Louvre, Paris. 2005-2006

Nîmes est un bâtiment de Foster modélisé sur le temple gréco-romain, la Maison Carrée qui lui fait face, au point qu'il en a pris les mêmes mesures et les mêmes divisions harmoniques. Le bâtiment du musée est donc, en fait, un bâtiment hyper-classique. Je voulais trouver une solution d'accrochage pour montrer objets et images ensemble et avec une équidistance, et donc chacun le même poids d'exposition. Une méthode objective partait du principe de l'équidistance des pièces les unes par rapport aux autres. Comment faire réaliser cette équidistance aussi bien au mur qu'au sol ? J'ai repris la grille de composition modulaire du musée, je l'ai un peu soulevée et tournée de quelques degrés sur plan. À tous les endroits où cette grille coupait les murs, j'ai mis une image, et à tous les endroits où cette grille était au sol j'ai mis un objet. Il pouvait y avoir des murs pratiquement vides avec une image dans un coin. La distance entre les choses ne tenait finalement absolument pas compte de l'espace donné. En décalant cette grille, j'arrivais à l'annuler, à la retourner sur elle-même de façon à laisser mes propres trucs libres et équidistants, justement pour que cette expérience du rapport entre *une* image et *un* objet puisse se faire.
Par ailleurs, une image est toujours le plus souvent vécue comme une représentation ou une icône alors qu'un objet est toujours vécu comme une présence. C'est quelque chose qui fait obstacle. Quel dialogue peut-on imaginer entre des présences et des représentations ?
Une fois la méthode installée, j'ai commencé à choisir les images et les objets.

Comment s'est fait ce choix ?
Comme toujours l'arbitraire existe.
C'est un des trucs que je disais à mes étudiants : vous avez cinq ans pour vous, il faut d'abord bien se nettoyer de votre arbitraire, après vous pourrez l'utiliser, mais d'abord nettoyez votre arbitraire parce qu'il est en général traversé de choses pas forcément propres.

Ces objets sont parfois qualifiés de post-photographiques, que faut-il entendre par là ? Est-ce parce qu'ils viennent après la photographie ou parce qu'ils en sont issus ?

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J'ai toujours été plutôt méfiant avec cet intitulé, comme avec postmodernisme. On est post quelque chose tant qu'on n'a pas trouvé le nom. Or, de quoi ces objets sont-ils le nom ? C'est la question que poserait monsieur Badiou. Personnellement, je n'en sais rien. Je ne les appelle pas comme ça en tout cas. En revanche, il est clair que ma façon d'agir, par prélèvement et assemblage, est pratiquement un mode d'enregistrement du réel.
Je pense que je ne suis pas le seul. Tout l'art contemporain, le monde au fond, est dans cette condition postphotographique, dans la mesure où la modernité même s'invente avec la photographie. Tout ce qui est moderne ou vient après la photographie lui doit nécessairement quelque chose. En Europe, ce n'est pas trop évident parce que l'on a une vieille tradition de l'image, mais aux États-Unis, c'est clair, la photographie inaugure l'art américain. Mais ça, je pense que c'est plutôt en attendant que l'on ait trouvé un nihilisme plus fin, c'est le boulot des critiques, c'est ton boulot.

J'avais envie d'évoquer une chose qui est cette présence tout à fait incroyable des œuvres et la manière avec laquelle tu as travaillé la question de la sensualité de ces pièces qui sont extraordinairement polies au point qu'on ait envie de les toucher. Elles sont à la fois de vraies projections de machines, des productions numériques ou autres et, en même temps, elles ont un caractère très organique.

Il y a une exigence, le travail des mains, ça pense. J'essaye de travailler au plus près avec ceux que j'appelle mes gars, mes collègues, mes camarades, mes ingénieurs. Dans bien des cas, ce sont des gens qui travaillent dans des entreprises qui ne produisent pas ce genre de trucs. Il faut imaginer par exemple que *Car and Girl* est produit dans une entreprise qui fait essentiellement du tombeau, parce qu'aujourd'hui qui taille les pierres avec des machines ? Les fabricants de tombeaux. Pour faire les têtières, il y a des courbes, etc. Quand vous arrivez dans une entreprise comme ça pour demander une pièce comme *Car and Girl*, il se passe quelque chose d'abord d'humain. Ils vous écoutent en se disant : « Ce type est barjot, mais on va le faire parce qu'on sait le faire, ça nous plaît. » Au fond de l'atelier, après avoir traversé une double rangée de posters de pin-up et de Formule 1 on trouve le vieux : c'est lui qui a la main, c'est lui qui sait !
Ce n'est pas ma volonté de donner une position sur la femme ou sur la bagnole avec cette pièce. J'essaye simplement de montrer des faits d'imaginaire collectif, de dire : « Voilà une image mentale qui se promène, qui ne traîne que trop, essayons de lui donner une forme concrète pour éviter qu'elle ne traîne justement. » La photographie pour moi c'est ça, une manière d'avoir une vraie chose concrète, un vrai objet pour éviter que ça continue à se promener sans forme dans les têtes de manière malsaine.

Donc « de l'image à l'objet », c'est peut-être avant tout de l'image mentale à l'objet concret ?

Ou à sa matière. De l'image mentale à sa matière. La question de la sensualité est liée à la main, au respect, au goût du travail bien fait, même si dans certains cas ça peut être une arnaque et la question organique à l'organisation du travail. Le travail salopé peut à un moment parfois être beaucoup plus juste pour certaines pièces. Il y a des pièces que j'ai faites en dix minutes qui sont absolument pleines d'échardes et ces échardes font en grande partie la pièce. Donc, oui, il y a ce goût du travail, peut-être parce que derrière organique on entend quelque chose qui vient, qui est la question, et des organes, et des organisations : comment est-ce qu'on s'organise, quel corps social on va faire construire avec quel organe parce qu'un corps social a besoin d'un cœur, d'un poumon, etc. A-t-il même un genre le corps social ? Je pense que mon engagement d'artiste tourne de ce côté-là : voir ce qu'on fout ensemble.

Cet entretien, réalisé en novembre 2018, est issu de la leçon inaugurale du Collège international de photographie du Grand Paris.

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ARTFORUM

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

NEW YORK

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?

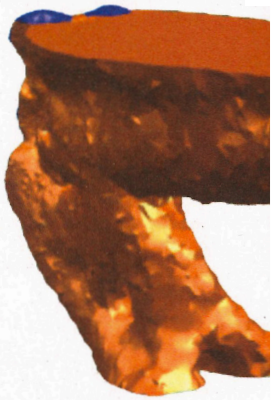
— *Matthew Carlson*

Matthew Carlson
Jean-Luc Moulène
Artforum, May, 2019.
https://cutt.ly/mwsMVklg

L'OFFICIEL ART

Jean-Luc Moulène Optimisation Formelle

by Miguel Abreu



More or Less Bone (Formal Topological Optimization) (Paris-NY, 2018-19) is a monumental work in fiberglass and epoxy paint by Jean-Luc Moulène (b. 1955, Reims). Produced for his solo exhibition at SculptureCenter in New York, the commission has been conceived as the result of "material, bodily, economic, and historical conditions." In conversation with Miguel Abreu, the artist discusses the relationship between sculpture and formal optimization, offering deep insight into the new work.

"JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE," SCULPTURECENTER, NEW YORK. APRIL 29 – JULY 29.

Jean-Luc Moulène, *More or Less Bone (Formal Topological Optimization) (Paris-NY, 2018-19)*, 2018-19 (early software calculation); fiberglass and epoxy paint; 160 x 850 x 450 cm. Engineering: GDTech Engineering (Alleur, Belgium); Benoit Gicquel, Michael Bruyneel, Sebastien Gohy, Chiara Grappasonni, Ismael Juhoor. Fabrication: Digital Atelier (Mercerville, NJ), Seal Reinforced Fiberglass (Copiague, NY).

Miguel Abreu
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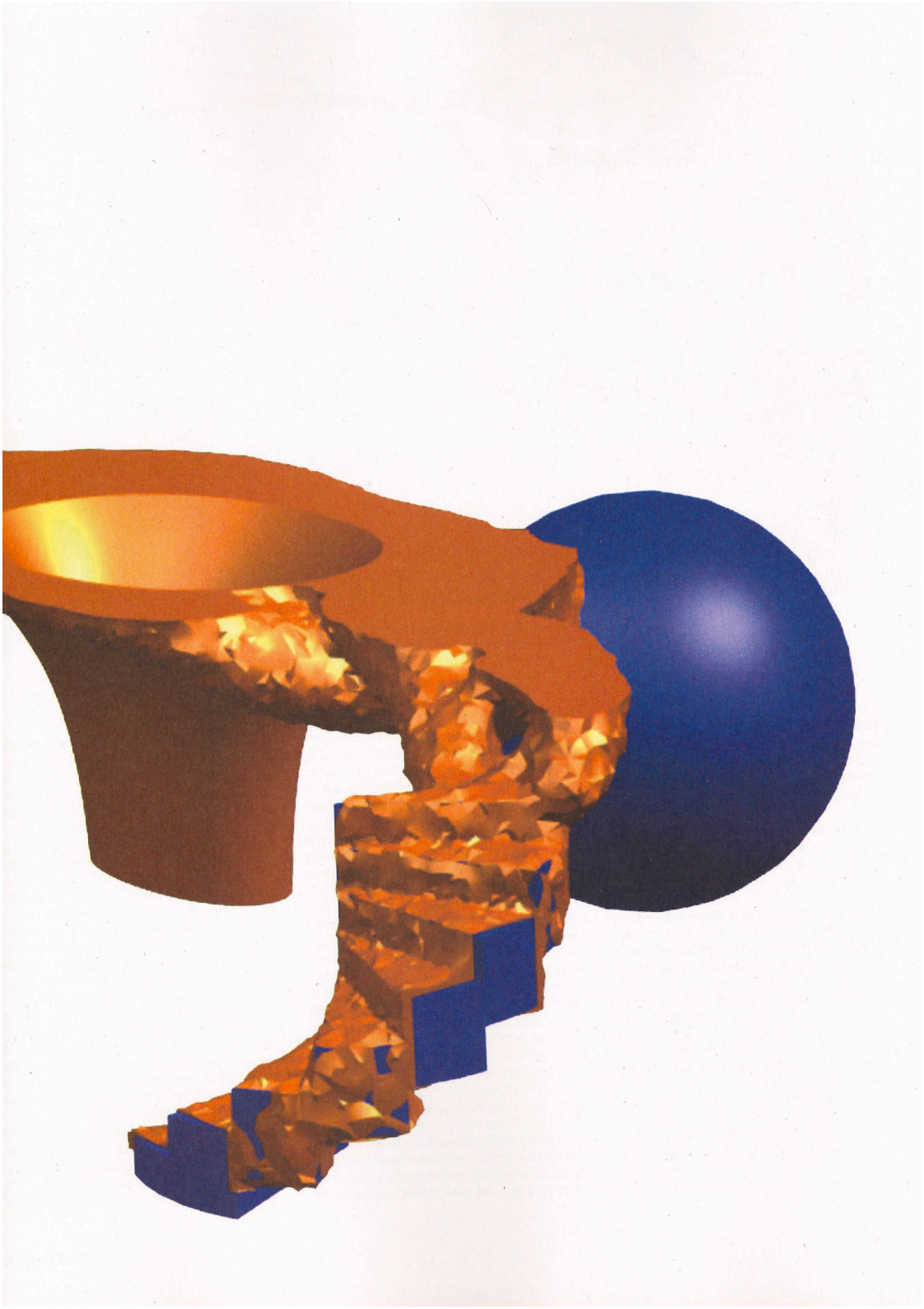

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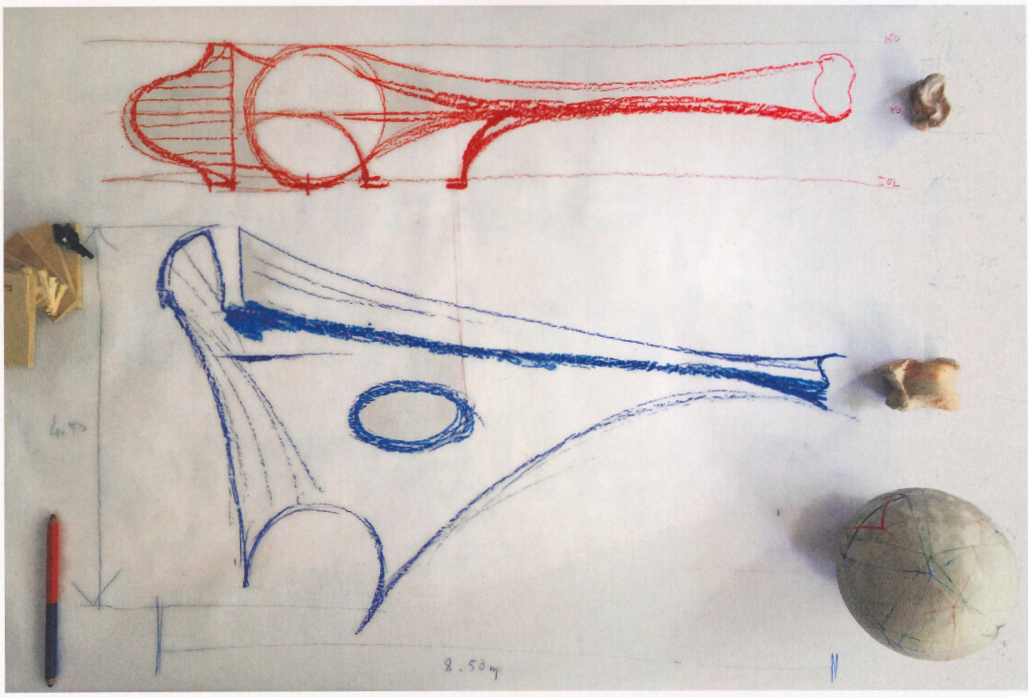

Jean-Luc Moulène, *More or Less Bone (Formal Topological Optimization) (Paris-NY, 2018-19)*, 2018-19 (preliminary sketch); fiberglass and epoxy paint; 160 x 850 x 450 cm.

MIGUEL ABREU: Formal optimization is the theme of your exhibition that will take place at the SculptureCenter in New York at the end of April. What does this idea imply?

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE: I think the first thing that needs to be solved is the question of form. What is the point of form? Has Moulène become a formalist?

We are talking about a very large work, more than eight meters long, a monumental object created by using very sophisticated aeronautical software.
With the help of GDTech, a European consulting, development and research company in engineering, analysis and numerical modeling.

The object has three parts, which you could describe for us.
Yes, but before getting to this work itself, I would like to address the question of form in general. Because in our hearts we know that form cannot suffice. This means, quite simply, that a formal argument is not reason enough to create a work. On the other hand, I am not certain that complete suppression of form in favor of "process," as in certain contemporary experiments, i.e. the famous dematerialization, is not an impasse for art. Form allows me to establish either a descriptive rhetoric of the experience, or to produce the experience in the viewer. To produce the experience is simply to produce a relationship of consciousness with regard to objects. It's something that I've always used. That is, I make forms that account for or produce experiences. I'm not interested in knowing whether the square is better than the circle or the triangle. I'm not at all into that kind of thing. It turns out that today, advancing technologies are in some sense just starting to take an interest in form. And they are starting to take an interest in form simply with the objective of their profitability, which is not really experimental. We have heard about this story of the profitability of forms long ago, in the United States. Minimalism is the maximum of effect for the minimum of form! This maximization of effect is not my problem at all. I am not here to make experiments profitable. So we can forget about this maximization of effect. If I indeed produced effects, I would be a cosmetics manufacturer, like many artists are today. That is, they make surface effects. The human experience is simply made static in these surface effects. So to get back to this piece, technologies have invented methods of formal optimization, which consist in creating profitable pieces, often mechanical pieces, structural objects. These objects meet needs, they are ultra-light, often fiberized, and have left behind machining for printing. Their atomic composition can be precisely observed. There is total control of the amount of material needed etc. And why is this? Because it's expensive to send satellites into space! So, in the end, formal optimization, as its name suggests – just like tax optimization – is about producing profit. (Profit being the thing which, in the end, no one speaks about anymore). Everyone is supposed to profit. Profit, in principle, is only the profitability of capital. So we end up today with a capitalism that produces a technology that deals in forms. Which even does so experimentally. I would say this is a tendency: all the objects that surround us will be produced in an optimized way. Obviously, this pays. It means that we are at the dawn

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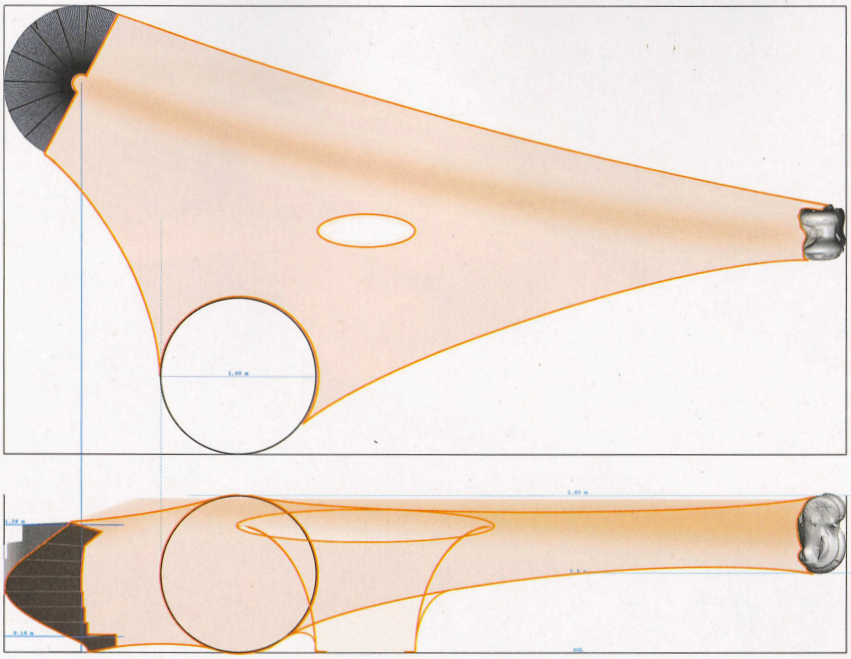

Jean-Luc Moulène, *More or Less Bone (Formal Topological Optimization) (Paris-NY, 2018-19)*, 2018-19 (design profiles); fiberglass and epoxy paint; 160 x 850 x 450 cm.

in a way, of the invention of a new style; just as we had the Louis XVI style, now we will have an optimized style!

Just as there was functionalism?
Just as there was functionalism. And given that this optimization is extremely expensive, and that for the moment these tools for optimization are not accessible, it seemed important to me to show, from today on, what technologies are going to tend towards. It turns out that what they are tending towards is, well... The first time I saw an optimized piece, I burst out laughing, because it tends to produce something that looks like a bone.

Hence the title of this immense sculpture called *More or Less Bone*.
It looks like a mechanical part, a mechanical structure, something that has both bones and elements of classical mechanics. At the same time, that's what's beautiful. One could almost say that the formal ideal of capital is the cadaver. Because for us, who are living, a bone is only perceptible on someone who has been accidentally opened up, or who is dead. This is what will survive us, in theory: the bone. In the sense of surviving our dead selves.

In the material sense.
Yes, that's it. An execution.

A skeleton.
You see my head, my skull. It is quite beautiful that the technologies we are talking about today allow us to place, if you will, your face, your skull in bronze above your fireplace. Because we are able to print a medical scan or an MRI. So today you can have your collector's vanity on the mantelpiece. It should be possible to show and make others aware that the objectives of profitability are in fact objectives of reduction of the quantity of life. Who or what is in excess is unprofitable. Life is everything around the bone, everything around profitability, but this is not taken into account by profitability. And here, in my opinion, we have a real political problem.

So let's finally talk about how you started this piece from these three elements.
First I met people through the University of Toulouse, which has developed an IT hub, in modelization. It is very interesting, they are brilliant. Obviously, since they are in Toulouse, they are not very far from the Airbus aerospace teams. There is a lot of industry around. So first they invited me to speak in a professional conference about new printing technologies. A conference in which there were, obviously, mainly software manufacturers, machine manufacturers, manufacturers of control systems between machines on production lines... and also things that do not leave the labs.

They are engineers...
Indeed. But they are research engineers. They are not necessarily applied engineers. There is one who works on the digital printing of life: on cells. So they invite me in there. I do my presentation in front of fifty guys in suits, who are the salesmen for their companies. And I remind them of a number of fundamental principles regarding new inventions. For example, if they do not get the public on their side, these new inventions will not work. As in the case of theories in mathematics or physics. We must get the public on our side. As soon as there is invention, it must also invent a specific rep-

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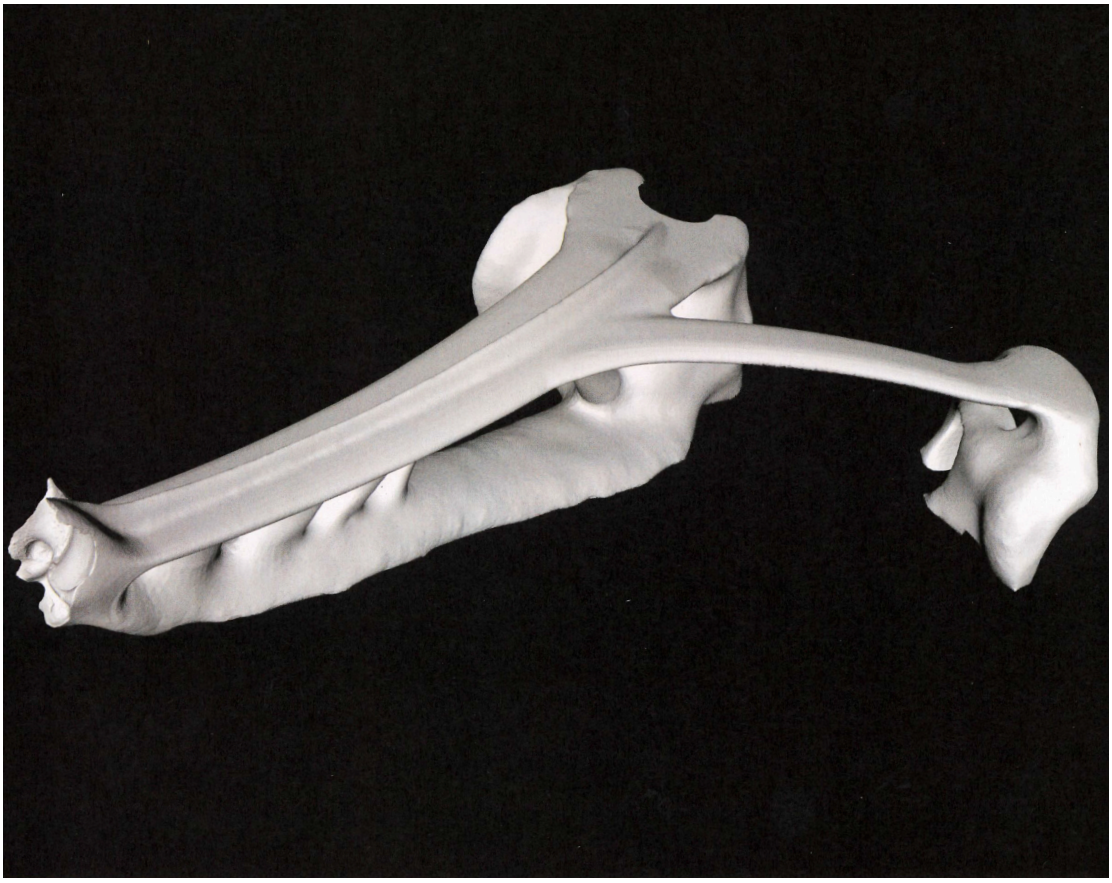

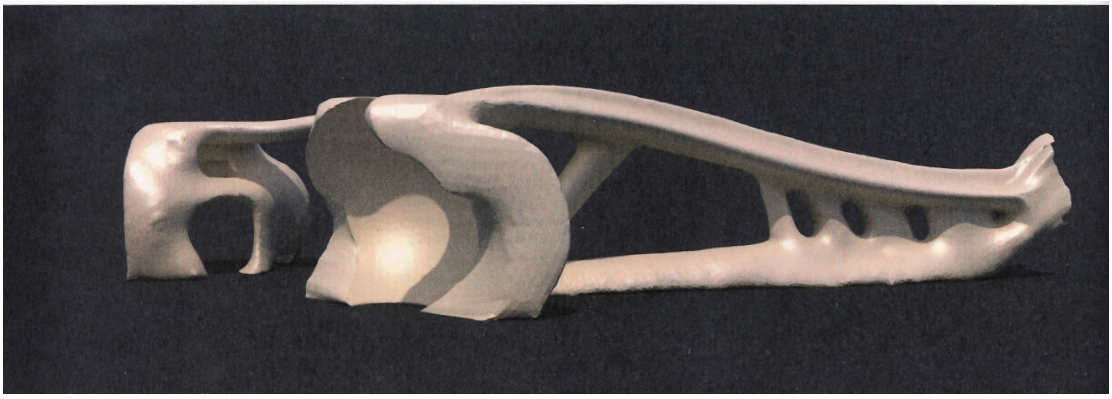

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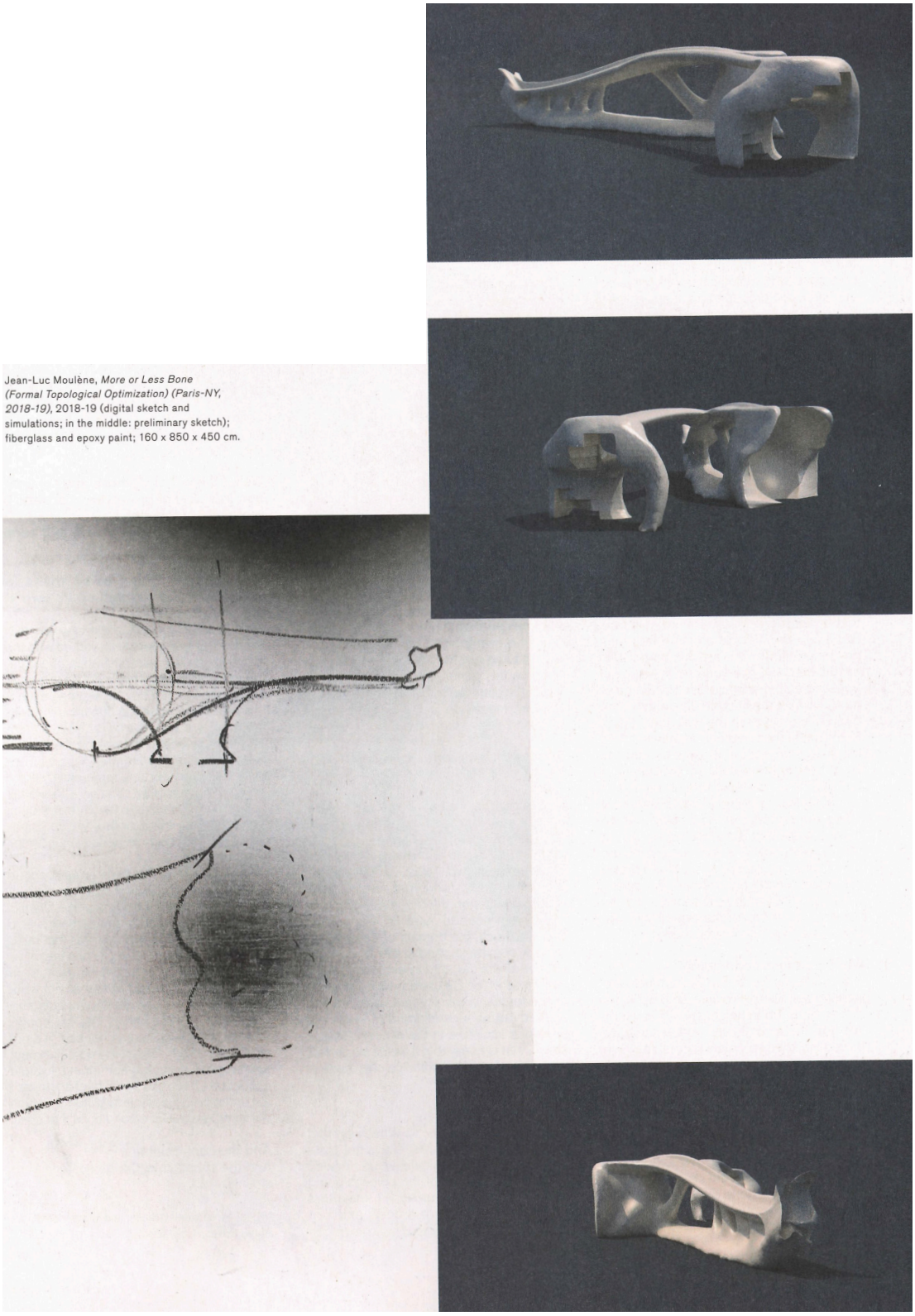

Jean-Luc Moulène, *More or Less Bone (Formal Topological Optimization) (Paris-NY, 2018-19)*, 2018-19 (digital sketch and simulations; in the middle: preliminary sketch); fiberglass and epoxy paint; 160 x 850 x 450 cm.

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resentation. We must invent our own popularization. I gave them my general speech, and I told them very clearly: if I accepted this invitation to spread a so-called cultural discourse it is because I need these machines. I do not have access to the machines. No researcher in the field of visual arts has access to these machines. It's just too expensive. Machines and programs... So I told them, "I need machines." And three teams came to me, including this person who deals with biological morphogenesis; this team of European engineers who are a consulting agency, called GDTech; and a small company from Toulouse. In the end, the GDTech team confirmed their commitment, which proved fruitful throughout the work. At that time I started to...

To imagine the piece.
To imagine the project we have in front of us. Why though? Because, from my point of view as an artist, I have always said that there is no work without conditions. There are no works without conditions. Without material, bodily, economic conditions, the conditions of history. The artist is now, tomorrow, or the day before yesterday. He was born in an optimum period, or not. So there is no work without conditions. And in my opinion this is an extremely important question, because I think many people think that art is free, because the artist is free. Not at all. The artist is no more free than any other citizen. The artist is corporeally conditioned like everyone else. Art is not free, and neither is the artist. On the other hand, works are systematic liberations. And thus concrete acts in the real world. There is no liberty, there are only liberations. And it's quite important in a piece like that to come back to this question of the condition, because what the optimization machines fundamentally take into account are exclusively the conditions. So I have tried to make a piece that is merely its own condition of existence. It is the calculators and the optimization machines that have drawn the object. What I provided are the conditions. I entered into the conditions, which, by the way, at the end of the experiment, are removed and are no longer visible.

What are these conditions?
The conditions are first of all the machine's working definition of volume, so 8.5 meters in length, by 1.6 in height, by 4.5 in width. We give the machine its work volume. At three very precise points of the space in question I placed a sphere (thus an abstraction), a spiral staircase (thus a construction), and a bone (thus something of an organic order). Three types of objects that, to be clear, together can form a world. I entered these three conditions. We gave these generic objects a weight. The sphere is a bubble without weight; the staircase weighs 128 kilos and the bone 80 kilos (also their height in centimeters). We entered conditions of gravity: the earth's gravity. We could, moreover, have entered a lunar gravity. Wind conditions. Earthquake conditions. All the legal conditions which were provided as necessary to install a public sculpture in the United States. What else did we introduce? The length of the fiberglass. Its weight, its breaking point, its coefficient of elasticity.

Is the fiberglass a condition in itself?
Yes, it was entered as a condition.

Okay, so there is a kind of stabilization of these three objects, which must stay in place. The machine will then link them, make them join together in some way.
Yes: the order given to the machine is to calculate a junction object.

So there is no fusion, a junction.
Absolutely. In my older works people instead talked about disjunction, discontinuity, heterogeneity, etc. And here, for the first time – because obviously one must always try what one does not know how to do – there is a connecting piece.

I think it's also interesting because we could say that today's world is nothing but disjunctions!
That's exactly what I think today. When I did the *Disjunctions* in the 1980s, I had the intuition that this was the only way to describe events in an intense and lyrical way. It turns out today that the world has become this generalized disjunction from which the common is excluded, each citizen has become a pure vector. So the question of joining comes back. It returns...

Because it is absent.
Ys, because it is absent.

And of course, we have to create a work, a work against the state of things.
With and against the state of things. In fact, art is there to implement the tension between these two states... So that's about the whole story. After that, the machine works. It works on the "negative," that is to say it does not add material. It considers that the block, the domain of definition is a block of material. And in this block it will remove all the parts that yield to the forces – all those which are useless to the tensions of the forces. In the present case, we had worked out as a condition that we would present a sculpture in the almost classical sense, that is to say that it would be closed. A closed volume that stands alone, made of a single material.

And with contours...
With contours, with an end. When I say that there are only conditions, this is not quite true, because, for example, when I decide that the bottom part of the piece is going to be 80 cm, this is because I know that 80 cm is the height of a desk, and that in the bodily pathway that will be traced around the object, there is a moment when simply the height of the object is going to be familiar, and thus will allow for contact, in a way, including the hand's reassuring touch. When I introduce the three basic elements, as I told you, I do not introduce just any three elements. I introduce three elements that a priori make a world. They will then be removed, since in the final piece we do not see the sphere, the staircase, or the bone, but...

The imprint.
The imprint, a hollow space, by which the piece joins with the absent objects. In a way, I can say that the piece is the result only of its own conditions, since I have removed mine. But there is obviously always ambiguity about the degree of involvement... it's always the same, as in artificial intelligence, there is someone behind it who says, "I want these conditions."

Well, I think that we have aptly described this kind of prototype of a work, a prototype of thought.
To emphasize all that, we made it bone white.

This piece is going to be made in America, and presented on its own at the SculptureCenter.
We should also mention the very committed team of engineers that worked with me in France on this demonstration about the future of capitalism. They put a lot of energy and desire into it. They were great. Even if this desire is precisely in contradiction with profitability. It must be said that this team is virtually inventing the optimization equations. One can imagine that for an inventor, for an engineer, it is more satisfying to work on a piece of art than on a cannon. If people do not do things that interest them, they will not do them; or they will do something that has been imposed upon them, but do it badly.
Obviously after all that, there is the concrete production of the object. The simple fact that we can make a file cross the Atlantic, in terms of the mode of production, is also rather new. These are processes that need to further experimentation. It soon becomes clear that manufacturers of objects in Europe and the United States do not work in quite the same way. So the manufacturing, which is local, enters into the conditions of the piece. I could not say, "It's not what I expected." Because I do not expect anything. If I expected something, I would expect an effect. I do not expect anything. I am in the process of manufacturing, which will incorporate all the conditions that arise.

And the constraints.
And the constraints. Conditions and constraints.

Miguel Abreu is an art dealer and founder of Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York.

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Jean-Luc Moulène, *More or Less Bone (Formal Topological Optimization) (Paris-NY, 2018-19)*, 2018-19 (early software calculation); fiberglass and epoxy paint; 160 x 850 x 450 cm.

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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 heteroclite 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 Kleinefenn. © the artist /ADAGP 2016.
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

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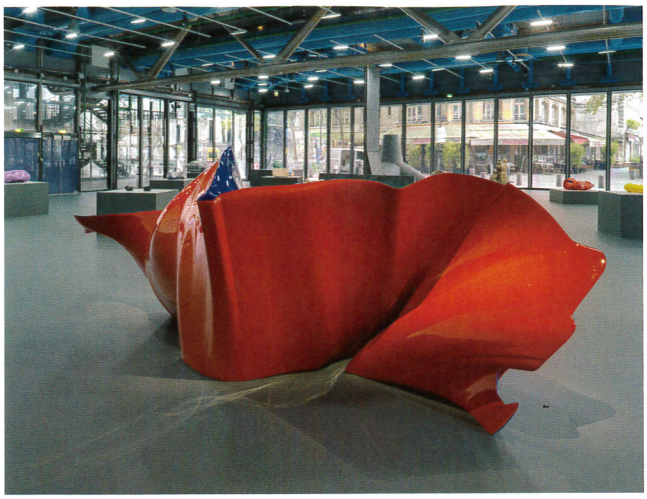
ARTFORUM

Below: **Jean-Luc Moulène**, ***Bi-face***, **2016**, coated and painted hard foam. Installation view. Photo: Florian Kleinefenn.
Right: **Jean-Luc Moulène**, ***Monsieur Propre jusqu'à l'os*** **(Mr. Clean to the Bone), 2016**, foam, colored resin, 11⅛ × 31½ × 18⅛".



Jean-Luc Moulène

CENTRE POMPIDOU, PARIS

Riccardo Venturi

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, 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

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Left: **View of "Jean-Luc Moulène," 2016–17.** Center: *No, no, no*, 2016. Photo: Florian Kleinefenn. 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

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Below: **View of "Jean-Luc Moulène," 2016–17.** Foreground: *Body versus os* (Body Versus Bone), 2016. Photo: Florian Kleinefenn. Right: **Jean-Luc Moulène, *Âne* (Donkey), 2016,** concrete, donkey skull, 7⅛ × 19¾ × 35⅜".

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).

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JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE
une leçon de sculpture

Erik Verhagen

Le Centre Pompidou présente, jusqu'au 20 février 2017, non pas une rétrospective de l'œuvre de Jean-Luc Moulène, notamment photographique, mais une trentaine de pièces inédites, axées sur son travail, plus récent, sur les objets. La technologie issue du design industriel, le recours à la théorie des ensembles associés à une réflexion sur la matière, la forme et la couleur mettent en lumière la complexité d'un univers à la fois ludique et déroutant.

■ Électron libre au sein du paysage artistique français, Jean-Luc Moulène a joui d'une importante visibilité ces vingt-cinq dernières années, aussi bien dans l'Hexagone qu'à l'étranger, comme l'atteste notamment la présentation conséquente de ses travaux à la DIA Beacon, près de New York, en 2011-2012. Il n'en demeure pas moins que son œuvre, au sens exhaustif du terme, demeure confidentielle, l'artiste n'ayant cessé de multiplier des pistes « complémentaires » traduisant une forte résistance à toute approche globale qui en épuiserait le potentiel. Aussi quand le Centre Pompidou l'a sollicité en vue d'une rétrospective, là où d'autres de ses confrères et consœurs auraient sauté sur l'occasion pour étaler leur trajectoire sous toutes ses facettes, Moulène a préféré proposer une exposition d'œuvres récentes et inédites sans pour autant se soustraire à l'exercice qui consisterait à *exposer* les « pratiques opérationnelles » et les « protocoles » caractérisant son parcours et ses différents jalons. Ne nous méprenons pas : l'artiste est joueur et le cahier des charges selon lequel ses protocoles seraient *exposés* à Beaubourg n'est finalement qu'un prétexte à la mise en place de nouvelles pistes, quand bien même celles-ci se nourrissent d'anciennes. Moulène affiche donc un refus de la rétrospective et de l'idée, qui la sous-tend, de « reconstruire ce que l'on a fait avant ». Il s'en est expliqué dans un entretien qu'il nous a accordé début octobre. Entretien dans lequel on peut d'ailleurs voir la métaphore même de sa manière, ludique et *déroutante*, de procéder. Initialement, il était question de publier une interview en bonne et due forme. Mais, au moment de commencer, l'artiste a finalement refusé de se faire enregistrer, se méfiant, à ses dires, de ses propres mots et de leur caractère définitif et irréversible. S'est cependant ensuivi un long monologue, ponctué par de rares questions, laissant transparaître, via le rythme de ses phrases, souvent saccadées, et la mise en place de silences bien dosés, une qualité toute musicale. À travers sa parole, à l'image de ce qui se trame depuis plusieurs décennies dans sa démarche, Moulène s'appuie en effet souvent sur des lignes « mélodiques » qui s'enchevêtrent par le biais d'un faisceau de voies (et de voix) discursives relevant du contrepoint. Cette qualité musicale, nous la retrouvons enfin dans nombre de références. Fils de musiciens, l'artiste travaille actuellement à la construction d'un atelier, dans le Perche, pensé par Didier Faustino. L'espace qu'il faudra le moment venu investir sera, dit-il, structuré comme une fugue de Bach. Le free jazz, le rock et le punk seront également mentionnés lors de l'entretien. Et si l'œuvre de Moulène relevait justement d'une vaste partition qui comprendrait les familles de travaux pris isolément, mais aussi leurs conjugaisons, telles qu'elles s'offrent à lui puis au public au moment de l'exposition ?
On a beaucoup glosé sur la prétendue dimension hétérogène de son entreprise artistique, fort heureusement battue en brèche par certains de ses commentateurs, tels qu'Éric de Chassey ou Nathalie Delbard, laquelle a signé une remarquable monographie aux Éditions Petra (1). Car cette *supposée* hétérogénéité n'est, à regarder de près, que la mise en accord de notes *prétendument* disparates que l'artiste parvient à fédérer. Dans sa préface, Delbard note

Vue de l'exposition au Centre Pompidou
(Court. de l'artiste, galeries Chantal Crousel, Paris, Greta Meert, Bruxelles ; Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York Thomas Dane Gallery, Londres © Jean-Luc Moulène Ph. G. Meguerditchian). *View of the Pompidou show*

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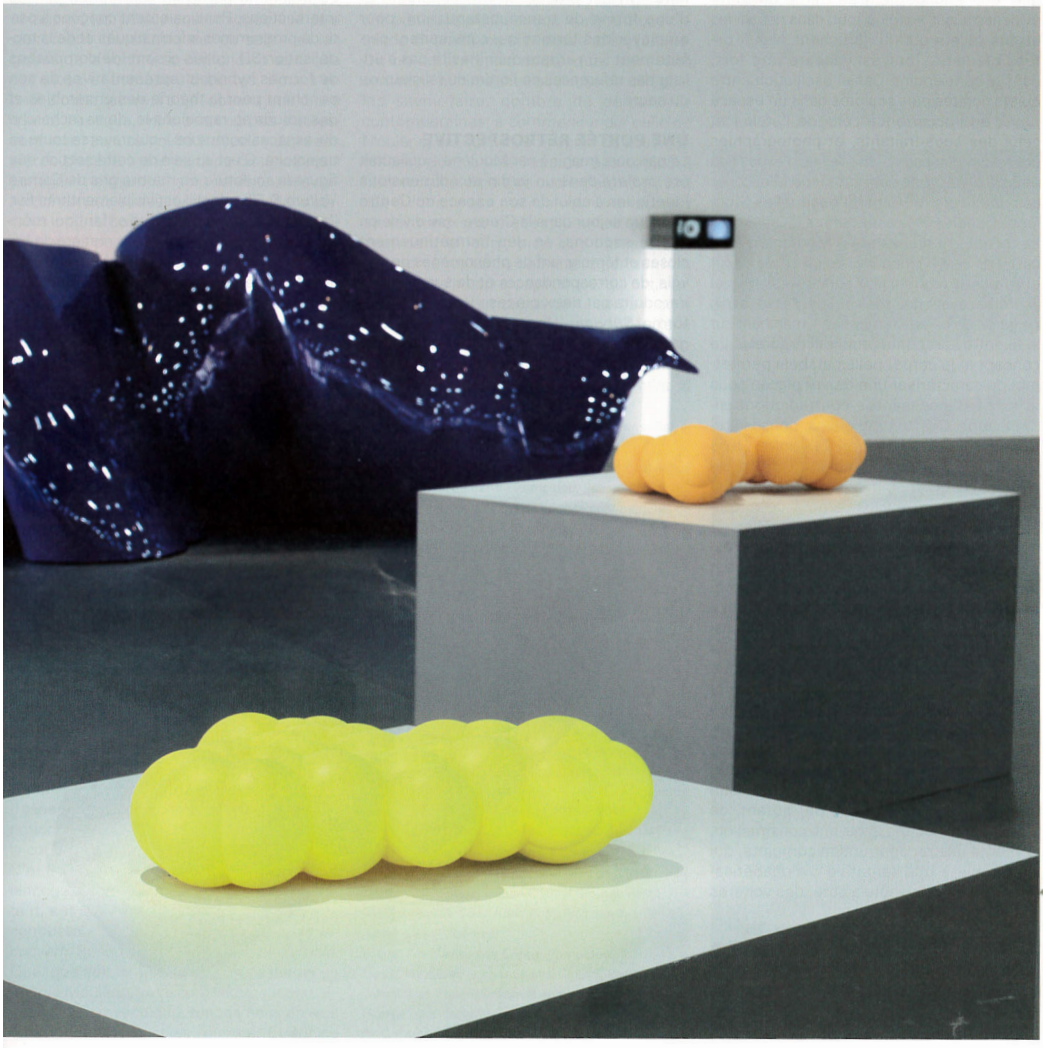
artpress, N°439, December, 2016, pp.44-50.

ainsi que chez Moulène, rien « n'est en réalité délié » : « Entre des images volontairement déconnectées des enjeux de société, et qui au fond ne paraissent vouloir s'occuper que de *photographie*, et celles qui empoignent au contraire frontalement des questions aussi fondamentales que la marchandisation des corps, par exemple *(les Filles d'Amsterdam)*, il n'y a pas [...] rupture ou incohérence ». Delbard parle à raison de la difficulté qui consiste à déceler, dans le *corpus* de Moulène, une « quelconque constance formelle ou thématique », renforcée par une absence de continuité stylistique ou technique, aucune « ligne de conduite apparente » n'étant susceptible de « cimenter les œuvres, sinon la relative variété des procédés, des sujets et des rendus ». Elle conclut toutefois que c'est dans le « "désordre apparent" que vont pouvoir se forger les conditions d'une position critique véritable ».

Les quatre tomes de documents photographiques mis à la disposition du public du Centre Pompidou parviendront-ils à mettre de l'ordre dans ce « désordre apparent » ? On peut en douter, l'objectif de Moulène n'étant pas de clarifier des situations, mais, au contraire, de « rentrer en contradiction » avec le système – avec le genre rétrospectif imposé par l'institution ou celui de l'entretien cher à la revue d'art. Certes, l'exposition du Centre témoigne de « protocoles nommables et non nommables », traduit son goût pour les opérations d'addition et de soustraction et laisse transparaître sa volonté d'interroger les « espaces communs » et les différents vecteurs et facteurs disparates le composant. Cette ex-



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position, précise-t-il de manière elliptique, permettra(it) ainsi de divulguer, nous y reviendrons, « l'espace d'intersection entre une femme et une voiture ».

DES OBJETS D'INTERPRÉTATION

Fournir des « objets d'interprétation » aura toujours été au cœur du propos de l'artiste, quitte à engager le spectateur sur des sentiers *trop* balisés et trompeurs. Ses *objets de grève* ou *produits de Palestine* flattaient déjà les poncifs – surtout en raison de leur dénomination – de « l'artiste engagé », alors que ledit engagement se trame de toute évidence aussi, voire surtout, dans des séries et des objets qui ne l'affichent pas si ostensiblement. Tout est, encore une fois, dans le contrepoint. Dans l'oscillation entre objets cogités puis sculptés dans un espace *privé*, en l'occurrence celui de l'atelier et celui des sous-traitants, et photographies prises dans l'espace *public*, le lieu d'exposition étant la plateforme permettant de télescoper ces deux polarités à partir desquelles Moulène conçoit ses présentations.

La trajectoire de Jean-Luc Moulène n'aura cessé de se développer et de se *déplacer* sur et autour de ces (en) jeux paradoxaux, Michel Journiac l'ayant dès ses années d'études mis en garde de ne pas tomber en « marchant sur le fil entre l'art conceptuel et corporel ». Le concept et le corps : belle parabole permettant de caractériser une œuvre placée sous le signe d'incessantes contradictions simultanées. Ces contradictions, nous les retrouvons dans l'exposition du Centre. Dans le vestibule, le spectateur est invité à se procurer un journal, publié pour la circonstance, composé exclusivement de photographies. Récentes, celles-ci s'immiscent ainsi sur un mode déambulatoire dans un espace qui, à l'exception de trois vidéos, est rempli de propositions sculpturales. La première, *Voyelles*, sous forme de clin d'œil à Rimbaud, accueille le spectateur dans un espace intermédiaire. Placée sous verre, elle évoque le dispositif de présentation que Moulène a voulu ouvert sur le tissu urbain, révélant en conséquence l'une des constantes de son œuvre, à savoir la perméabilité entre intérieur et extérieur, privé et public, immuabilité, fixité et flux permanent. « Ma pièce, dit-il, pourrait être une objectivation du poème. Pour autant, ce n'est pas une lecture, mais une construction, et même une reconstruction complète, qui ressemble à une tentative d'alphabétisation. Des maisons côte à côte, des voitures alignées le long des trottoirs, des inscriptions sur les façades, des tags lettre à lettre colorés : la rue. Donc cette pièce se trouve à l'entrée de l'exposition, davantage pour marquer une objectivation de ce que l'on voit dans la rue que pour évoquer Rimbaud (2). » Dehors, la ville. Dedans, les sculptures posées sur des socles. Entre les deux, nous, spectateurs. Il s'agit pour Moulène de proposer des pièces afin de laisser les œuvres éclore. « Une fois qu'elles sont rendues publiques, elles ne m'appartiennent plus. On passe de l'objet à l'œuvre », précise l'artiste. On est proche du rite initiatique et d'une forme de transsubstantiation, pour employer des termes qui conviennent parfaitement à un artiste qui n'hésite pas à utiliser des références de l'ordre du religieux ou du sacré.

UNE PORTÉE RÉTROSPECTIVE

Le parcours imaginé par Moulène – qui aurait été *projeté* dans un jardin aux dimensions identiques à celui de son espace du Centre lors d'un séjour dans la Creuse – se divise en quatre sections, en rien hermétiquement closes et témoignant de phénomènes de renvois, de correspondances et de survivances, introduits par deux pièces : *Voyelles* et l'informe *Bubuglu*. Une première section regroupe des sculptures conçues à partir de coupes droites ou rotatives. La seconde relève de disjonctions et d'assemblages. Deux sculptures, *Jeanne* et *Bouboulina*, servent à ce titre de transition entre les deux sections. Anthropomorphiques et prothétiques, ces œuvres ne sont pas sans évoquer les poupées de Bellmer et reflètent la fascination exercée par le corps – dans ses possibilités organiques, sexuées et médicales – sur un artiste qui en appelle à la démultiplication des « genres ». « L'homme est mal construit. Il faut le reconstruire. Le corps s'invente », note-t-il.

La troisième partie se caractérise par les intersections. Principalement conçues à partir de programmes informatiques et de la modélisation 3D, celles-ci sont (dé)composées de formes hybrides représentatives de son penchant pour la théorie des ensembles et des nœuds et, rappelons-le, de sa recherche d'« espaces communs » qui traverse toute sa trajectoire. C'est au sein de cette section que figure la sculpture en marbre gris de Carrare *Voiture & Fille*, dont il est visiblement très fier, l'exhibant à la manière d'un enfant qui montrerait sa dernière invention en matière de bricolage. Car Moulène, c'est aussi ceci : l'artiste qui cherche à retrouver la fraîcheur du gosse « maniant le petit bout de bois sous la pluie ». En cela, tout geste produit par lui a finalement une portée *rétrospective*.

Ci-contre :
« Car & Girl - Paris-Bolzano, 2016 ». 2016
Marbre gris de Carrare. 72 x 48 x 172 cm
(Court. de l'artiste et galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
© J.-L. Moulène / Ph. F. Kleinefenn).
Gray Carrara marble

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GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

L'artiste peut passer de longs moments en parcourant l'exposition à établir l'identité des éléments disjonctifs fédérés par ses soins. Avec toujours le même émerveillement. Par exemple, l'anse de la tasse et la fiole de Monsieur Propre *(Ca propre [Anse])* ou les différents volumes géométriques de la *Figure intermédiaire*.

DU LANGAGE AU HORS-LANGAGE

Selon les cas, les intersections reposent sur des formules « harmonieuses » ou jouent une carte ouvertement disjonctive. *Voiture & Fille* se range à ce titre dans la première sous-catégorie, les détails anatomiques – le seul clairement identifiable est un sein – et les galbes de la voiture se confondant dans une symbiose et osmose sidérantes. Pour s'en tenir à cette œuvre, l'objet obtenu jouit d'une qualité haptique, mais ses courbes s'adressent aussi à un œil invité à déceler, dans des pièces placées à une certaine distance mais partageant le même champ de vision, des correspondances et des reprises. Il y a dans certains objets composés, et pour ainsi dire réinventés par Moulène, quelque chose qui serait de l'ordre du fondu-enchaîné cinématographique. Dans d'autres œuvres, les intersections sont au contraire plus abruptes et les soudures soulignées. Comme si l'artiste cherchait, à travers ces pièces, à dévoiler justement les interstices et les zones de transitions à la manière d'un compositeur (Webern) qui accentuerait les silences départageant des notes. C'est par exemple le cas d'*Indexes*, œuvre composée à partir de trois fragments de sculptures anciennes. Cette façon de procéder évoque une phrase de Carl Andre lue sur une cimaise du musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris quelques jours après la visite de l'exposition du Centre : « Pendant un certain temps, je coupais dans les choses. Puis j'ai réalisé que la chose que je coupais était la coupe elle-même. Plutôt que de couper dans le matériau, j'utilise maintenant le matériau pour couper dans l'espace (3). »

Quant à la quatrième section, plus anecdotique, elle enveloppe des sculptures qui interrogent, en s'attachant à saisir et agrandir la structure moléculaire de tel ou tel colorant, « la forme de la couleur ».

L'exposition du Centre Pompidou, la « rétrospective de protocoles », ce sont donc des notions comme la latéralité, l'intersection ou la coupe, auxquelles l'artiste a donné corps. C'est dire à quel point aussi le mot et le langage, ce langage dont l'artiste se méfie tant, est le dénominateur commun et le fil conducteur de sa démarche. Mais un fil *reconverti*. Rendu, à défaut d'être lisible, *visible*. Quel que soit le discours derrière lequel se réfugie Moulène, voire corollairement son *absence*, qu'il revendique, tenons-nous en à ce que donnent à voir ses œuvres. Et sur ce point, nul ne saurait nier l'extraordinaire inventivité formelle dont l'artiste sait faire preuve. En cela, la « rétrospective des protocoles » est avant tout la démonstration plus que convaincante d'une panoplie de propositions sculpturales témoignant d'un éventail de techniques, de pistes exploratrices, d'ambiances et de références contrastées qui connaissent peu d'équivalents aujourd'hui, bien que la sculpture contemporaine, à la différence d'une peinture souvent plus confinée dans un registre et une signature identifiables, n'a cessé, au cours de ces dernières décennies, d'engendrer des pratiques placées sous le signe d'une extrême diversité expérimentale et stylistique. On objectera sans doute que, dans une continuité minimaliste soucieuse de déléguer les savoir-faire, nombre de démarches contemporaines, à commencer par celle de Moulène, ont su s'accompagner de sous-traitances, dont on ne mesure pas toujours l'extensibilité. Il ne s'en cache pas, n'hésitant pas à louer « les mains » qui ont façonné ou terminé ses pièces. L'enjeu est évidemment ailleurs, bien que l'artiste soit par moments tenté de se réfugier derrière l'une de ces postures, agaçantes, qui ont marqué le paysage artistique de « l'après-mort » de l'auteur. Est-ce bien nécessaire ? Moulène aurait en effet tout intérêt à revendiquer pleinement la paternité de cette leçon de sculpture. Car elle lui revient. Légitimement. ■

(1) Nathalie Delbard, *Jean-Luc Moulène*, Paris, Petra, 2009.
(2) Jean-Luc Moulène dans *Jean-Luc Moulène*, catalogue de l'exposition du Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2016, p. 56. Toutes les autres citations de l'artiste sont extraites de notre entretien (Paris, 3 octobre 2016).
(3) Carl Andre, entretien avec David Bourdon, 1966.

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« Voyelles, Paris, 2015 ». 2015. Bronze, laiton, plastique, mousse, acier, résine époxy, colorants. 56 x 29 x 50 cm. (Court. de l'artiste et Thomas Dane Gallery, Londres ; © J.L. Moulène/ Ph. F. Kleinefenn). *Bronze, brass, plastic, foam, steel, epoxy resin, pigment*

« Tricolore 2, Marseille, février 2015 ». 2015. Verre, fers plats, 10 x 2mm. 44 x 78 x 54 cm Exposition « Jean-Luc Moulène. Il était une fois », Académie de France à Rome, Villa Médicis, 2015). (Court. de l'artiste et galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris ; Ph. D. Molajoli). *Glass (Gold Ruby/Brillantgelb/ Spring green), flat steel*

Vue de l'exposition au Centre Pompidou (Court. de l'artiste, galeries Chantal Crousel, Paris, Greta Meert, Bruxelles ; Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York Thomas Dane Gallery, Londres © Jean-Luc Moulène Ph. G. Meguerditchian). *View of the Pompidou show*

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Jean-Luc Moulène
Not Being Pinned Down

The Pompidou Center is currently showing some thirty pieces by Jean-Luc Moulène (thru February 2, 2017). In a way typical of this artist's position, this is not a retrospective featuring, for example, the photographs he is known for, but a selection of more recent, previously unexhibited objects playing with industrial design and invoking set theory and questions of form, material and color. It's all very much in keeping with the complexity and elusive, playful spirit of this artist who is both prominent and obscure.

Jean-Luc Moulène, who marches to the beat of his own drum, has enjoyed a high degree of visibility over the last twenty-five years, in France and abroad, as attested by the major show of his work at the DIA Beacon in 2011-2012. Yet the body of his work as a whole remains little known. He has ceaselessly explored new "complementary" pathways, fiercely resisting entrapment in any single, overarching line of attack that would exhaust its potential. When the Pompidou Center approached him about a retrospective, instead of doing what other artists might have done and seizing the occasion to present all the facets of his lifetime production, Moulène chose to mount an exhibition of recent, previously unshown work, and yet also bring out the "operational practices" and "protocols" underlying his long career and its different milestones. Let there be no misunderstanding: this artist is an inveterate jokester and his self-assumed brief to demonstrate the protocols underlying his work at the Pompidou is just a pretext for opening new pathways, even though they build on the old ones. In short, Moulène rejects the whole idea of a retrospective, which is "to reconstruct what you did before." He explained this position in an interview with *artpress* in early October giving a glimpse of the metaphor behind his method, the playful and disconcerting ways he does things. The original idea was to publish a classical interview. But when the time came, he refused to let himself be recorded, saying that he distrusted his own words and did not want them to become definitive and irreversible. Yet this was follo-

« La Pucelle, Paris, novembre 2013 ». 2013
Ciment. 90 x 120 x 76 cm. Exposition « J.-L. Moulène. Il était une fois », Académie de France à Rome, Villa Médicis, 2015. (Court. de l'artiste et galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris ; Coll. privée ; Ph. D. Molajoli). *Cement*

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wed by a long monologue punctuated by the occasional question. The rhythm of his often herky-jerky phrases and well-placed significant silences made his discourse highly musical. Moulène's way of speaking, so much like the approach he has forged over decades in his work, often relies on intertwining melodic lines, a bundle of contrapuntal discursive pathways (and voices). The son of musician parents, the artist is currently working on the construction of a studio in the Perche region designed by Didier Faustino. This space where he will one day work is structured along the lines of a Bach fugue, he explained. He also touched on free jazz, rock and punk during this interview. Perhaps Moulène's body of work could be best compared to a vast musical composition, comprising whole families of work taken individually and their interplay as well. This is how his work comes to him, and how he will offer it to the public on the occasion of this exhibition

APPARENT DISORDER

There has been a lot of commentary about the supposedly heterogeneous character of his artistic enterprise, a thesis fortunately countered by a few critics like Éric de Chassey, and Nathalie Delbard, who wrote a remarkable monograph about him.(1) When closely examined, this supposed heterogeneity turns out to be a harmony achieved by the allegedly disparate notes that this artist manages to bring together. In her preface, Delbard notes that "everything is tied together" in Moulène's work: "There is no rupture or inconsistency between the deliberate disjunct of images concerning social issues that in the end seem to be about nothing but photography, and those that on the contrary seem to directly take on questions as fundamental as the commodification of bodies, for example (*Les Filles d'Amsterdam*)." Delbard correctly talks about the difficulty of discerning "a formal or thematic consistency" in Moulène's corpus. This is made all the harder by the absence of any stylistic or formal continuity, "any clear guiding principle" that could "cement together his work, if not the relative variety of procedures, subjects and renderings." Still, she concludes, "it is this 'apparent disorder' that provides the conditions for forging a truly critical position."
Will the four volumes of photographic documents available to the public at the Pompidou Center succeed in bringing order to this "apparent disorder"? Not likely. Moulène's goal is not to clarify situations but, on the contrary, to repeatedly "enter into contradiction" with the system—in this case, the museum-mandated retrospective model or the kind of interview favored by art magazines. Of course, the Pompidou exhibition demonstrates "namable and unnamable protocols," conveys his taste for addition and subtraction, and reveals his desire to interrogate "the common spaces" and various disparate vectors and factors that make it up. This exhibition, he explains elliptically, makes it possible to reveal "the space where a car and a woman intersect." We'll come back to this later.

« Indexes », 2016. Béton. 139 x 74 x 50 cm
(Court. de l'artiste et Thomas Dane Gallery, Londres

OBJECTS OF INTERPRETATION

Furnishing "objects of interpretation" has always been at the core of this artist's enterprise, even at the risk of leading viewers down overly well-marked—and misleading—paths. In the past, especially because of their explicit titles, his "strike objects" and Palestinian products pandered to the cliché of the politically engaged artist, whereas that engagement is obviously—and above all—at work in series of far less ostentatiously political objects. Once again, the whole point is the counterpoint. Oscillating between objects he conceived and sculpted himself in a private space (his studio and the workplace of his subcontractors), and the photos taken in public spaces, this exhibition becomes a platform where these two poles that frame Moulène's presentations can come together. Moulène's work has always developed and revolved around these paradoxical and profoundly significant games. When he was a student, Michel Journiac warned him not to fall down while "walking the tightrope between conceptual and corporeal art." The concept and the body—an excellent metaphor characterizing a corpus marked by cea-

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seless and simultaneous contradictions. These contradictions are strongly present in the Pompidou exhibition. In the entry hall visitors are invited to take a copy of a newspaper published for the show, exclusively comprised of photos. These recent images actively interfere with a space that, with the exception of three videos, is full of sculptures. With the first, entitled *Voyelles* in homage to Rimbaud, visitors enter into an intermediary space. The sculpture under glass evokes Moulène's preferred mode of presentation, open to the urban fabric, thereby bringing out one of the constants in his work, namely the permeability between exterior and interior, private and public, immutability/fixedness and a permanent state of flux. "My piece," he says, "could be the objectification of a poem. Nevertheless, it's a construction, not a reading, a complete reconstruction that resembles an attempt to teach literacy. Houses standing side by side, cars lined up along the sidewalk, inscriptions on the walls, colorful letter tags: the street. This piece is located at the entrance more to mark an objectivization of what we see in the street than to reference Rimbaud."(2) Outside, the city. Inside, sculptures sitting on pedestals. Between the two, the visitors, us. Moulène has given us these pieces so as to let the artworks blossom. "Once they are made public they no longer belong to me. They go from being objects to artworks," he says. This is a rite of initiation, an act of transubstantiation, to use terms that are perfectly appropriate in speaking about an artist who does not hesitate to employ religious references or invoke the sacred.

A REAR-VIEW MIRROR

Moulène's exhibition layout was apparently planned during a countryside stay in the Creuse, in a garden of the exact same dimensions as his allocated space at the Pompidou. It is divided into four sections that, instead of being hermetically sealed off from one another, are full of mutual references, correspondences and survivals, introduced by two pieces: *Voyelles* and *L'informe Bubuglu*. The first section is a group of sculptures made with a straight or rotary cutter. The second is about the dislocations and assemblage of objects. Two sculptures, *Jeanne* and *Bouboulina*, serve as transitions between these two sections. Anthropomorphic and prosthetic, they bring to mind Hans Bellmer's dolls, and reflect the fascination that the body, in terms of its organic, sexed and medical possibilities, holds for this artist who uses the word "genders" to describe these multiples. "Human beings are badly constructed," he says. "They have to be reconstructed. The body has to be reinvented."

The third part is characterized by intersections. Principally conceived using 3-D modeling software, they are (de)composed of hybrid forms representative of his penchant for set theory and mathematical knots, and, it should be recalled, the investigation of "common spaces" he has conducted throughout his career. The gray Carrara marble sculpture *Voiture & Fille* appears in this section. Clearly he is very proud of it, like a child showing off his latest invention. This is who Moulène is: an artist who seeks to recapture the freshness of a kid "waving around a little piece of wood in the rain." In this sense, everything he makes has a dimension of looking back. He can spend hours walking through the exhibition as he identifies the disjunctive elements he amalgamated. Always with the same sense of wonder. For example, Mr. Clean's handle and bottle in *Monsieur Propre (Ca propre [Anse])* and the various geometric volumes in *La Figure intermédiaire*.

LANGUAGE TO OUTSIDE LANGUAGE

Depending on the case, the intersections may be "harmonious" or wildly disjunctive. *Voiture & Fille* (Car and Girl) belongs in the first subcategory. The anatomical details of the woman—the only one clearly identifiable is a breast—and the car's curves melt together, producing an astonishing symbiosis and osmosis. The object produced has a highly haptic quality, but its curves also invite the eye to discern the correspondences and reiterations among the various elements situated at a certain distance from one another but all within the same field of vision. In some of the objects composed and reinvented by Moulène, there is something analogous to a cross-dissolve. In others, on the contrary, the intersections are more abrupt and the welding more visible. It is as if he sought, through these pieces, to reveal the interstices and transition zones, like a composer (Webern) who accents the silences separating the notes. This can be seen, for instance, in *Indexes*, a piece made up of three fragments of ancient sculptures. This method brings to mind a quote from Carl Andre seen on a partition wall at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris a few days after going to the Pompidou show: "For some time I cut things. Then I realized that what I was cutting was the cut itself. Rather than cutting the material, now I use the material to cut space."(3)

As for the more anecdotal fourth section, it contains sculptures that by representing blow-ups or close-ups of the molecular structure of various dyes, interrogates "the form of color."

The "protocols" of which the Pompidou Center exhibition is a retrospective are conceptions like laterality, intersection and cut, which Moulène makes material. This shows how much words and language, despite his disdain for language, are the common denominator and the thread running through his approach. But this thread is recycled and made visible, if not legible. Whatever discourse he may hide, including, as a corollary, his self-proclaimed absence, we need to stick with what there is to see in his work. In this sense, no one can deny his extraordinary inventiveness. Thus this "retrospective of protocols" is above all a more than convincing display of a panoply of sculptural works demonstrating a wide range of techniques, paths of exploration, ambiences and contrasting references. This work has little equivalent today, even though contemporary sculpture, unlike painting, which is often confined to an identifiable register and signature, has never, over the last few decades, stopped engendering extremely diverse experimental and stylistic practices. Of course, one could object that in continuity with the Minimalist advocacy of delegating skills, many contemporary approaches, starting with Moulène's, have relied on subcontractors to an as yet unknown extent. He does not hide this; he praises the workers who make or finish his pieces. Obviously the making is not the point, even though this artist is sometimes tempted to hide one of those annoying postures that have marked the artistic landscape since the death of the author. Does it really matter? Moulène has every right to claim the paternity of this lesson about sculpture. It is his. Legitimately. ■

Translation, L-S Torgoff

(1) Nathalie Delbard, *Jean-Luc Moulène*, Paris, Petra, 2009.

(2) Jean-Luc Moulène in *Jean-Luc Moulène*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2016, p. 56. All the quotes from the artists are from our interview (Paris, October 3, 2016).

(3) Carl Andre, interview by David Bourdon, 1966.

Erik Verhagen is an art critic and art historian. He teaches contemporary art history at the Unversité de Valenciennes.

Jean-Luc Moulène

Né en/*born* 1955 à/*in* Reims
Vit et travaille à/*lives in* Paris
Expositions récentes/*recent solo shows:*
2015 *Documents & Opus (1985-2014)*, Kunstverein Hannover, Hanovre ; *Il était une fois*, Académie de France à Rome ; *The Lookout from the Kadist Collection*, collectorspace, Kadist Art Foundation, Istanbul ; *Verde Azul Blanco Negro Rojo*, Torre de los Vientos, Mexico
2016 *Larvae and Ghosts*, Thomas Dane Gallery, Londres ; *Jean-Luc Moulène. Circa 1977-2016*, Galerie Pietro Spartà, Chagny ; *Productions de Jean-Luc Moulène au BHV Marais*, Paris, 13 septembre - 31 octobre ; *Jean-Luc Moulène*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, 19 octobre 2016 - 20 février 2017

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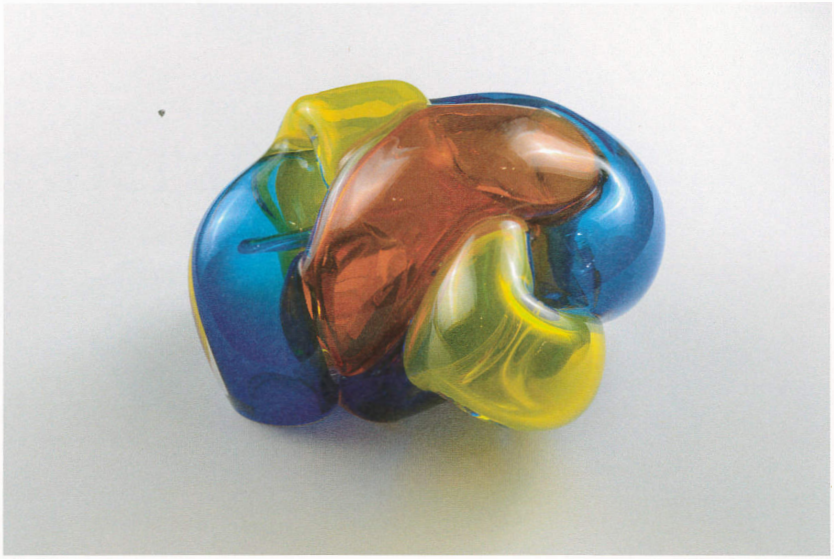
Flash Art



Jean-Luc Moulène, *Blown Knot 63 2, Borromean, Varia 03 (CIRVA, Marseille, 2012)* (2012)
Courtesy the Artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

The cover of this issue of *Flash Art* reproduces a painting by African American artist Kerry James Marshall. In the painting, titled *Untitled (Pink Towel)* (2009), an unidentified woman casually covers her naked body with a towel. She looks obliquely at the viewer and tilts her head, unveiling a pearl earring reminiscent of the jewel depicted in the renowned portrait *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1665), by Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer. *Untitled (Pink Towel)* is paradigmatic of an artistic practice that integrates a wide range of pictorial traditions in order to challenge platitudinous depictions of blackness in society, thus amending the portrayal of the black figure within the canon of Western art.

On the occasion of Marshall's traveling retrospective "Mastry" (opening at The Met Breuer, in New York, in October, and at the MOCA, in Los Angeles, in March 2017), the artist talked to MOCA chief curator Helen Molesworth. In their conversation, he discusses the racial dynamics of art education and specifically, his experiences as a university professor in contexts that fostered and reinforced privileged white art discourses. Marshall remarks, "it's challenging when there are so few students of color so you don't really get a chance to shape with them the conversation about what kinds of things are possible in making art, but you constantly have to keep doing it with students who already have access to that kind of experience." Marshall's description of how academic structures inhibit non-white artists' access to learning that may "rev up" transformations in art recalls the marginalized history of blackness in the pictorial iconography that his paintings so persistently challenge.

The question of how art explores the possibility of empathy is one that *Flash Art* Associate Editor Laura McLean-Ferris takes up in her essay on the work of French artist Jean-Luc Moulène, also the subject of a forthcoming retrospective, opening in October at the Centre Pompidou, in Paris. "Moulène's recent work involves not only looking, but attempting to reach into the innermost interior of another object, presence or material," wrote McLean-Ferris. "In this way he allows one to think about both peculiar and important forms of empathy — not a kindly, gentle thought about how someone else might feel; but an attempt to get inside something violent or difficult or alien in the only ways that are available to you."

Moulène's most recent works — for example, the sculpture *Blown Knot 63 2, Borromean, Varia 03 (CIRVA, Marseille, 2012)* (2012), in which loops of colored glass seem to wrestle with each other around an empty center —envision and materialize a space that is impossible for the viewer to access. One can read in them an invitation to empathize with what (or whom) is unreachable.

Good reading,

The Editors

Laura McLean-Ferris
Conflicts of Interest
Flash Art, Volume 49, N°310, September-October 2016, p.41 and p.68-75.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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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

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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*

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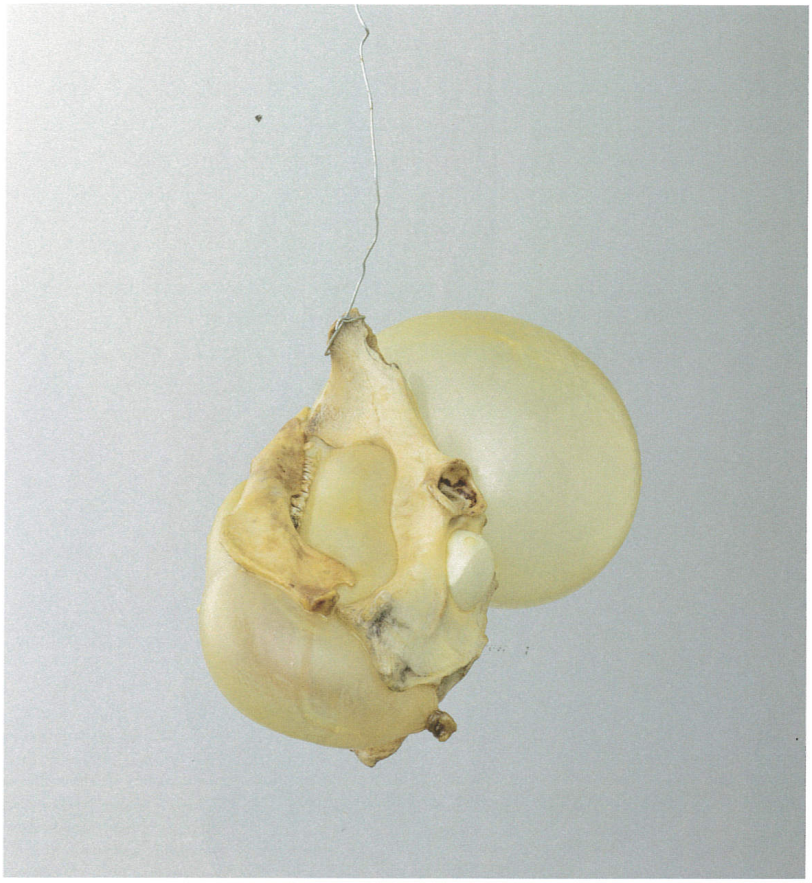

of on their exterior, as well as other views of the body from within. That sensation, of turning oneself inside out, seems particularly relevant to the monster masks that the artist selects. For a 2014 exhibition, "Torture Concrete" at New York's Miguel Abreu Gallery, many more of the *Tronches* — made 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 "ocupée 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 solidarite" 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

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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 – Néroli
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

Laura McLean-Ferris
Conflicts of Interest
Flash Art, Volume 49, N°310, September-October 2016, p.41 and p.68-75.

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 with Briony Fer, in *Jean-Luc Moulène*, Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König; Nimes: Carré d'art–Museé d'art contermporain de Nimes, 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.

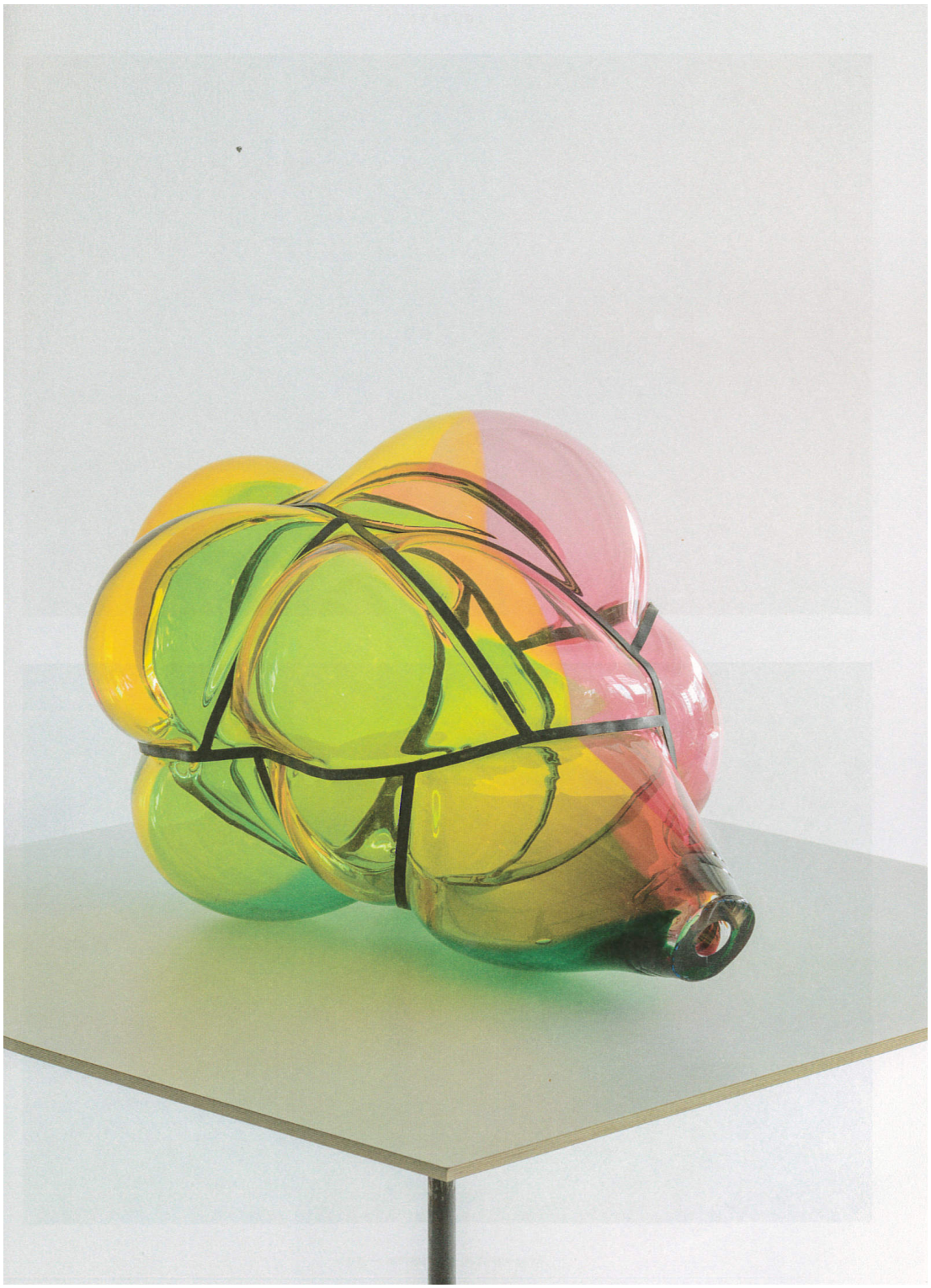
Jean-Luc Moulène's retrospective exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, will be on view from October 19, 2016, to February 20, 2017.

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 Kleinefenn

Laura McLean-Ferris
Conflicts of Interest
Flash Art, Volume 49, N°310, September-October 2016, p.41 and p.68-75.



Laura McLean-Ferris
Conflicts of Interest
Flash Art, Volume 49, N°310, September-October 2016, p.41 and p.68-75.

artpress 2

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE
NO FOTO

NATHALIE DELBARD

Pour parvenir à diffuser des images de presse pour la plupart interdites, Jean-Luc Moulène a articulé, visuellement, les images incriminées aux décisions de justice qui s'y rapportent, de façon à couvrir l'objet même du litige. Pour autant, ce serait mal comprendre les montages effectués pour *NO FOTO* (2005) que de les considérer comme une simple bravade à l'égard de la loi ; ce qui s'expose en réalité dans ces doubles pages de magazine recensées par l'artiste, n'est pas tant l'image interdite que le dispositif légal auquel elle est soumise, et le contexte dans lequel il s'exerce. Droit d'auteur, droit au respect de la vie privée, droit à la dignité des personnes ou droit à l'information notamment, sont autant de lignes de partage autorisant ou non la divulgation des photographies concernées. La grande singularité de *NO FOTO* est alors de rendre sensibles ces injonctions juridiques par le biais d'opérations strictement plastiques, un certain agencement formel, occultant éléments du discours ou morceaux d'images – tels ces post-it de couleur précisément disposés – pour mieux désigner ce qui fait problème. Le jeu visuel est efficace : il rend explicite, à la fois, le lieu dans l'image où se cristallise la pression juridique et le cadre qui, au-delà, l'organise.

L'impossibilité de donner à voir l'une des photographies de la série des *Filles d'Amsterdam* (2004) à laquelle s'est confronté Moulène lors de l'exposition *Gravedad*[1] à Mexico, s'inscrit à sa manière dans le prolongement de *NO FOTO*, la loi obligeant l'artiste à imaginer un procédé susceptible de dissimuler l'image tout en la maintenant présente (en l'occurrence, un coffrage de bois sur lequel est affiché l'article de référence). La contrainte juridique s'est ainsi vue retournée une nouvelle fois : la photographie certes n'est plus visible sur place (ailleurs toujours), mais elle porte ses propres conditions d'existence à notre attention. En particulier, elle donne à percevoir la loi mexicaine, qui à cet égard, mérite commentaire : assez similaire à l'article du code pénal français concernant la protection d'un public mineur – on se souvient de ce qui justifia la plainte à l'égard de l'exposition *Présumés Innocents* –, elle étend l'interdit à des « personnes incapables de comprendre », supposant une distinction difficilement recevable.

Reste à saisir le véritable motif de la demande de retrait. Si les *Filles d'Amsterdam* n'ont jusqu'alors connu aucun obstacle à leur présentation, le contexte d'exposition est ici déterminant, sur au moins deux plans. Dans le lieu lui-même d'abord, Moulène a installé *Errata*, un ensemble de palettes de canettes colorées, qui forment un chemin au bout duquel se tient la figure de la prostitution. Ce n'est donc pas la photographie seule qui dérange, mais son association directe à un contexte de production, qui désigne frontalement une marchandisation des corps en même temps que celle des biens de consommation. Ensuite, lorsque l'on sait que les objets en question ont été produits localement, dans une proche banlieue dont la surpopulation favorise la prostitution, on mesure ce qui, bien au-delà des murs du musée, résonne avec *Errata* – et ce d'autant plus fortement que selon le choix du commissaire, *Carmen* se révèle être la seule présence humaine parmi les œuvres exposées.

Il en va finalement de même pour les montages de *NO FOTO* et celui occasionné par *Gravedad* : le geste artistique vient toucher à travers la loi l'exact endroit où quelque chose de l'organisation sociale se refuse à l'entendement.

[1] *Gravedad*, Casa del Lago, UNAM, Mexico DF, Mexico, 17 mars - 29 mai 2016. Commissariat : Michel Blancsubé. Artistes : Carlos Amorales, Malachi Farrell, Sofia Goscinski, Jean-Luc Moulène, Fernando Palma Rodríguez, Jean-Marie Perdrix.

Doubles pages précédentes :
NO FOTO
2005
Magazines et textes imprimés

Ci-contre :
Au premier plan, *Errata* (détail)
2002-13
Neuf palettes de canettes de 500 ml en neuf couleurs monochromes (3240 canettes par palette), 181 × 141 × 112 cm (chaque palette)
À l'arrière-plan, *Carmen, Amsterdam, 08 04 04*
2004
Photographie encadrée, 152 × 119 × 6 cm, et panneau de bois vissé au cadre avec mentions imprimées
Exposition *Gravedad*, Casa del Lago, UNAM, Mexico DF, Mexico, 2016
Ph. Francisco Kochen
Court. Desiré Saint Phalle, Mexico City

Page suivante :
Carmen, Amsterdam, 08 04 04
2004

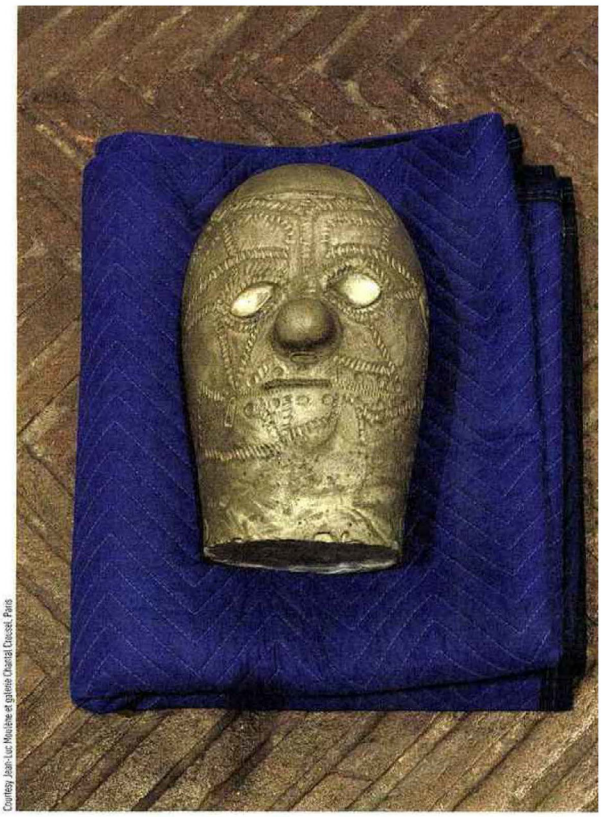
Nathalie Delbard
Jean-Luc Moulène. No foto
artpress 2, N°41, May-June-July, 2016, p.96-98.

Nathalie Delbard
Jean-Luc Moulène. No foto
artpress 2, N°41, May-June-July, 2016, p.96-98.

Nathalie Delbard
Jean-Luc Moulène. No foto
artpress 2, N°41, May-June-July, 2016, p.96-98.

les Inrockuptibles

expos



Courtesy Jean-Luc Moulène et galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

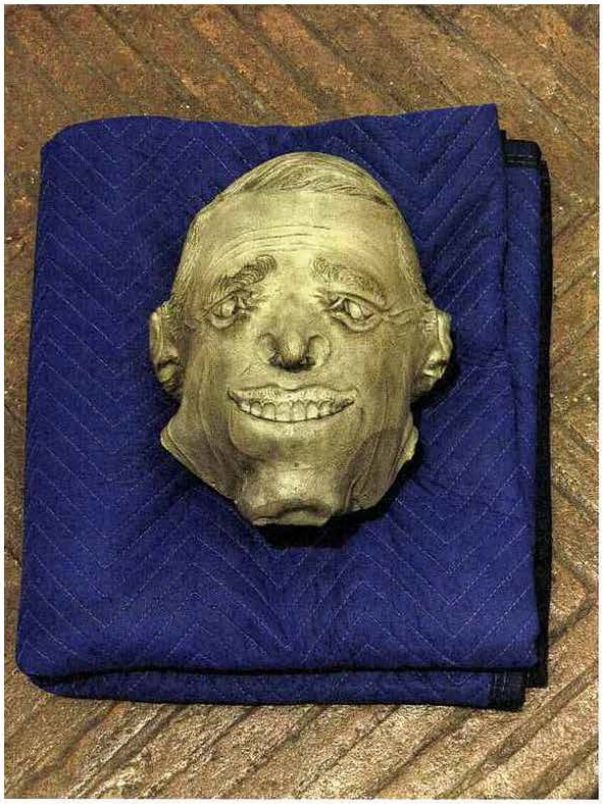
vice-versa

A Rome, **Jean-Luc Moulène** investit la Villa Médicis et accomplit tout en dépit du "bon sens". Des tête-à-queue et des conflits plus que fertiles.

Il suffit de parcourir les jardins de la Villa Médicis, jardin à la française par devant, portions sauvages sur la partie latérale, pour se rendre compte que Jean-Luc Moulène est un homme qui sait y voir. Et fait de son environnement la pierre sur laquelle aiguiser son regard tactile. Aussi, ses nouvelles sculptures en ciment aggloméré, dont on avait déjà pu voir certains spécimens à Venise lors de l'exposition orchestrée par Danh Vo ce printemps à la Pointe de la Douane, et que l'on retrouve ici dans une forme plus complexe encore (trois éléments, figure masculine sur figure féminine et faciès animal enchâssé), doivent sans doute beaucoup aux sculptures composites de ces chevaliers, bras croisés en guise de résistance passive, corps en granit et tête en marbre, qui construisent l'arrière-plan du jardin de la Villa. A cette statuaire suturée et donc impure, mais aussi à une technique venue du Mexique, où l'artiste séjourna récemment, qui consiste à fondre, à l'usure, deux corps étrangers par une technique d'abrasion.

Pour cette exposition à la Villa Médicis, Eric de Chassey, son directeur, aura su patienter quatre ans, depuis 2011, date à laquelle Moulène s'exporte pour la première fois outre-Atlantique au musée d'art contemporian Dia:Beacon. L'idée première était de faire voyager l'exposition. Puis, finalement, faute de place et face à des coûts de transport exorbitants – parce que Moulène n'aime rien tant que de se frotter aussi au surplace –, il est apparu évident qu'il fallait faire une "exposition romaine". Comme l'on demande aux résidents de la Villa Médicis de penser un "projet romain".

Claire Moulène
Vice-versa
Les Inrockuptibles, N°1025, July 22, 2015, p.88-89.



***Tronches* (série), Paris, 2014**

de ce monde à l'envers des Saturnales, Jean-Luc Moulène semble nourrir l'ensemble de ses productions les plus récentes

C'est ce qu'a fait Jean-Luc Moulène, qui réussit, avec la délicatesse et la précision qu'on lui connaît, à croiser ses obsessions avec un certain nombre de sujets directement inspirés par le lieu, depuis cette accumulation de strates encore perceptibles dans les sculptures des jardins donc, jusqu'à l'empreinte toujours palpable de Balthus, directeur mythique de la Villa Médicis de 1961 à 1977.

Ainsi, l'exposition ouvre par une salle bleue entièrement peinte à l'éponge par la restauratrice qui travaille actuellement à la réfection des fresques du peintre (à qui sera consacrée à la rentrée une grande rétrospective). Plus loin, c'est son pendant jaune poussin qui illumine et *"rapproche les objets"* que l'artiste a commandé.

Dans la deuxième salle, un accrochage très classique rejoue les standards de la peinture académique, dans les formats autant que dans les techniques utilisées, avec un ensemble de monochromes vert-de-gris patinés sur un mélange de cuivre et de fonte. Dans la salle jaune, c'est un plâtre taillé qui rappelle l'académisme dix-neuviémiste autant que la passion de l'artiste pour les figures mathématiques. La pièce, posée sur un imposant tronçon de bois brut (que l'on imagine tout droit sorti du jardin de la Villa Médicis) s'appelle *Gnou*. Elle est un clin d'œil au programme informatique Rhinoceros, normalement utilisé pour produire ce type d'opérations a priori inaccessibles à l'esprit humain. De même que la série de sculptures sensuelles à cinq branches, réalisées dans le nord de l'Italie, nécessite le concours de machines plus performantes que celles qui les ont créées.

Dans la grande montée qui servait autrefois à faire entrer les chevaux, c'est une armée de "tronches" que Jean-Luc Moulène a déposées à terre sur des couvertures de chantier bleu nuit. Quinze têtes sans corps, en ciment, coulées dans des masques retournés. Si bien que l'on reconnaît à peine, sous ces traits déformés, les contours des personnalités politiques (de Mitt Romney à Hillary Clinton) ou populaires (de Frankenstein à Dark Vador) que l'artiste renvoie ainsi à la longue tradition des masques mortuaires, des gisants mais aussi du carnaval.

Car ces figures monstrueuses disent bien l'opération à l'œuvre dans les pièces tardives de Jean-Luc Moulène, où plane l'ombre du charivari (qui signifierait "mal de tête" en grec et évoque cette tradition populaire, née au XV[e] siècle, qui consistait à recouvrir de cris et de sifflets la musique religieuse et l'ordre établi), mais aussi, puisque nous sommes à Rome, celle des Saturnales qui, sous l'Antiquité, célébraient le solstice d'hiver. Au cours de ces fêtes païennes, l'ordre hiérarchique volait en éclats, ce qui permettait aux esclaves de jouir d'une liberté provisoire et aux maîtres de se glisser dans la peau de ces derniers, délestés de leur toge à laquelle ils préféraient la simple tunique des pauvres. De ce monde à l'envers, Jean-Luc Moulène semble nourrir l'ensemble de ses productions les plus récentes.

A l'image de ses pièces en verre soufflé "tricolores" (mais dont le ratio bleu, blanc, rouge laisse place à une déclinaison rose, jaune, vert), véritable prouesse technique réalisée grâce aux efforts conjoints de trois souffleurs de verre. De la taille d'une cage thoracique, elles sont la représentation en creux, ou en négatif, d'une matière a priori impalpable : l'air. Comme ce *Janus* qui montre en recto-verso Bush père et fils, rappelant le *Tête-à-Cul* organique que Moulène présente actuellement à Venise, mais également, dans un autre registre, la série des *Filles d'Amsterdam*, où tête et sexe étaient présentés sur un même niveau, faisant ainsi coïncider deux traditions photographiques : judiciaire et pornographique.

Dans cette exposition composée quasi exclusivement de pièces inédites, seul un petit dessin de 1977 permet d'établir une filiation et une persistance dans le travail de Moulène. Intitulé *Bubu 1[er]*, figure tronquée et primitive là aussi, il est, comme l'expliquait Jean-Luc Moulène dans un entretien avec Briony Fer lors de sa rétrospective au Carré d'art de Nîmes, *"un mélange d'Ubu roi d'Alfred Jarry et de la reine mythologique Baubo qui lève sa robe et dévoile un visage en lieu et place de son sexe, puis se met à danser"*. *"Tout s'inverse*, concluait l'artiste à l'époque, *le haut vaut le bas et le corps est la plastique de la représentation"*, avant d'ajouter, comme s'il préméditait déjà ce tête-à-queue sous lequel viendraient se placer ses œuvres à venir : *"Mon travail est concrètement le lieu de ce conflit."* **Claire Moulène**

Jean-Luc Moulène – Il était une fois
jusqu'au 13 septembre à Rome, Villa Médicis, villamedici.it/fr

Claire Moulène
Vice-versa
Les Inrockuptibles, N°1025, July 22, 2015, p.88-89.

art
press

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE
une œuvre qui fait image

Anaël Pigeat

Depuis le début des années 1980, les œuvres de Jean-Luc Moulène ont été exposées, entre autres, au musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris (1997), à la Galerie nationale du Jeu de paume (2005), au Carré d'art de Nîmes (2009). L'artiste est invité aux États-Unis, à la Fondation Dia. Bien que nourri de culture populaire américaine, rock, punk, cinéma underground, il dit n'avoir jamais eu de fascination pour l'Amérique, ni pour New York, où il s'est rendu pour la première fois afin de préparer l'exposition *Opus + One*, en outsider.

« Body ». Guyancourt, octobre 2011. Structure aluminium, fibre de basalte, résines et peintures. 250 x 850 x 350 cm. Œuvre produite avec le concours de Renault Automobiles. (Toutes les photos, court. de l'artiste et galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris © J.-L. Moulène)
Aluminum structure, basalt fiber, resins and paint

Anaël Pigeat
Jean-Luc Moulène une oeuvre qui fait image
artpress, N°388, April, 2012, p.39-44.

■ C'est un geste de résistance : Jean-Luc Moulène empêche que l'on cerne son travail comme une image de marque – un sujet qu'il connaît pourtant bien, pour avoir, à ses débuts, travaillé dans le département de publicité de Thomson. Une évidence réunit toutefois ses œuvres : elles « font image », elles sont des images mentales égrenées dans sa tentative de description du monde. Jean-Luc Moulène cherche à savoir comment le regard fonctionne. Il montre tour à tour des photographies et des objets fabriqués. Et c'est la complexité du sujet choisi qui détermine si l'œuvre est en deux dimensions (de l'ordre de la représentation) ou en trois dimensions (de l'ordre de la présence, une affirmation politique). Ses œuvres sont conçues comme des outils, d'où leur ressemblance avec des maquettes.
En réponse à la question « Comment avez-vous commencé ? », Moulène raconte une anecdote de son enfance. Un été de vacances, avait lieu sur la plage un concours de châteaux de sable. Le premier prix était un appareil de photo et le second la maquette d'une Dauphine, la voiture Renault des années 1960. Il a été classé premier ex-aequo, mais c'est l'aîné des vainqueurs qui a reçu l'appareil de photo dont il rêvait – il était le cadet. Toute sa vie, Moulène a fait de la photographie, mais sa pratique consiste en réalité à monter des maquettes.

DES IMAGES MENTALES

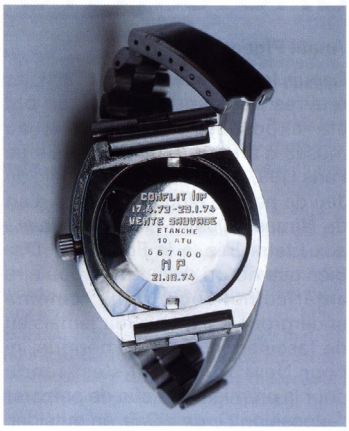
Jean-Luc Moulène est d'abord connu comme photographe du réel. Sa série des *Disjonctions*, dès le début des années 1980, pourrait être un filtre de lecture de toute son œuvre. En théorie mathématique, la disjonction est l'union de deux ensembles, moins leur intersection. Dans ses photographies, Moulène crée un écart, un déplacement, qui permet de percevoir le réel. Il prend en compte le hors champ pour éviter toute empathie avec l'image. *Sans titre (GTX), boulevard de la Bastille, Paris, été 1992*, montre une souche d'arbre sur un trottoir au premier plan ; une voiture grise est garée juste derrière. C'est une disjonction du mobile et de l'immobile.
S'interrogeant encore sur la manière dont le regard se forme, Jean-Luc Moulène a réalisé des séries de photographies prises sur un même lieu pendant une longue période. Il dit parfois que sa vie est « une performance au long cours » (1), une sorte de circonscription de la performance à son rituel, ce que Michel Journiac, avec qui il a travaillé autrefois, avait réalisé d'une manière si exemplaire. Au cours d'une résidence à Berlin en 1996-1997, Moulène a photographié la ville, se donnant pour principe d'éviter les scènes de chantiers et de reconstruction ; l'ensemble de ce travail formait un portrait atemporel. À propos de la série de photographies *Fénautrigues* (1991-2006), prise à la campagne, sans habitations ni figures humaines, Moulène parle de la grande usine de la nature, d'un lieu de travail lié à la promenade et à l'errance.
C'est encore pour décrire le monde, que Moulène classe des images par séries selon des thèmes, les *Objets de grève* par exemple, photographiés à partir de 1999 comme des publicités, souvent sur fond neutre, éclairés à la lumière du jour, chacun décrit dans un bref texte. Mais ces classements ne sont que l'apparence de l'ordre, car une image, un sujet ou un détail les perturbe toujours. Moulène ne dit-il pas son goût pour la géométrie, mais une géométrie non euclidienne, celle des perspectives aberrantes ? En parlant de ces images organisées, il cite les organigrammes des entreprises ou des institutions, qui sont sans cesse perturbés – la manière de faire avancer les choses, dit-il. Il rapporte aussi ces perturbations aux détournements érotiques de nos organes. Dans la série des *Filles d'Amsterdam* (2005), que l'on reverra bientôt au Palais de Tokyo à l'occasion de la Triennale, ce sont les questions de l'identité et de la pornographie qui sont explorées. Des prostituées dans des positions suggestives ont été photographiées à Amsterdam, dans un atelier ; chaque image est légendée par le nom de scène de ces femmes. Selon un principe semblable, pour son exposition au Louvre, qui était accompagnée d'un supplément gratuit du journal *Le Monde*, Moulène a photographié son musée imaginaire, en quelques œuvres, avec des notes d'historiens de l'art en guise de légendes, interrogations sur la circulation et la nature des images.
Le travail de Jean-Luc Moulène est engagé, hors des rapports de pouvoir. Ainsi *la Vigie* (2004-2011), actuellement exposée à la Dia Foundation, se compose de deux séries de photographies : une plante rebelle poussant entre les barrières Vauban installées dans le cadre du plan Vigipirate sous le ministère des Finances à Bercy, et le décor tout autour de cette plante, à quelques centimètres du sol, en hors champ de la première série. Il y a, dans ces images, un rythme qui relève de l'allitération. Elles sont tour à tour chaudes, froides, dures, douces, très nettes ou parfois floues. Les textes qui les accompagnent sont simplement des dates. Plus que l'image d'un artiste, *la Vigie* évoque ce que l'on croit être un artiste.

D'UN MÉDIUM À L'AUTRE : LA COUPE

En quête d'images mentales, Jean-Luc Moulène ne cesse de passer d'un médium à un autre, de la figuration à la non-figuration. Il a exploré le genre du monochrome à plusieurs reprises, que ce soit en deux dimensions avec la photographie *Grand Monochrome jaune Kodak* (1988), ou en volume avec la *Croix jaune* en bois (2005), dans laquelle on ne sait si c'est le signe ou la couleur qui prime. Pour l'exposition de la Fondation Dia, Moulène a peint quatre *Monochromes* sur des châssis aux dimensions standard, choisis parce qu'ils avaient été utilisés par Josef Albers en son temps. Avec des spatules, il a étalé, sur la toile enduite, deux couches d'encre Bic dont la formule est gardée secrète par la marque – nouvelle perturbation du système social. Rouges, verts, noirs, bleus, ces reflets mordorés sont moins une image de la littérature ou de l'histoire de l'art, que l'image populaire de quelqu'un en train d'écrire au stylo Bic. Ils se rapprochent du dessin qui est pour Moulène de l'ordre de l'expérience, une manière d'élaborer sa pensée.

« Les Filles d'Amsterdam / Monika ». Amsterdam, 3 avril 2004. Cibachrome contrecollé sur aluminium
"Girls of Amsterdam/Monika." Cibachrome/aluminum

« Souvenir 1er conflit ». Objets de grève. 1999-2000
Cibachrome sous diasec. 47 x 36 cm. *"Strike object"*



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Jean-Luc Moulène réalise aussi des objets (il préfère ce terme à celui de sculpture) qui sont une extension de sa pratique photographique. Il donne parfois l'exemple d'un couteau posé sur une table ; c'est une image, et pourtant le couteau coupe l'espace en deux. Alors que les photographies de Moulène sont presque toujours figuratives, ses objets le sont parfois moins, sans pour autant être abstraits. C'est la notion de « coupe » qui réunit, chez lui, ces techniques diverses, et qui donne à son œuvre toute sa cohérence. La photographie est en elle-même une coupe : elle tranche dans le réel dont elle extrait une vue partielle qui met le regardeur en arrêt. Elle condamne à des séquences. La sculpture, de même, consiste à trancher dans la matière, ou bien à la repousser. Le *cut-up* de Burroughs fonctionne de la même manière, comme un mode de connaissance du monde qui permet de faire apparaître ce qui est donné, mais pas forcément visible.

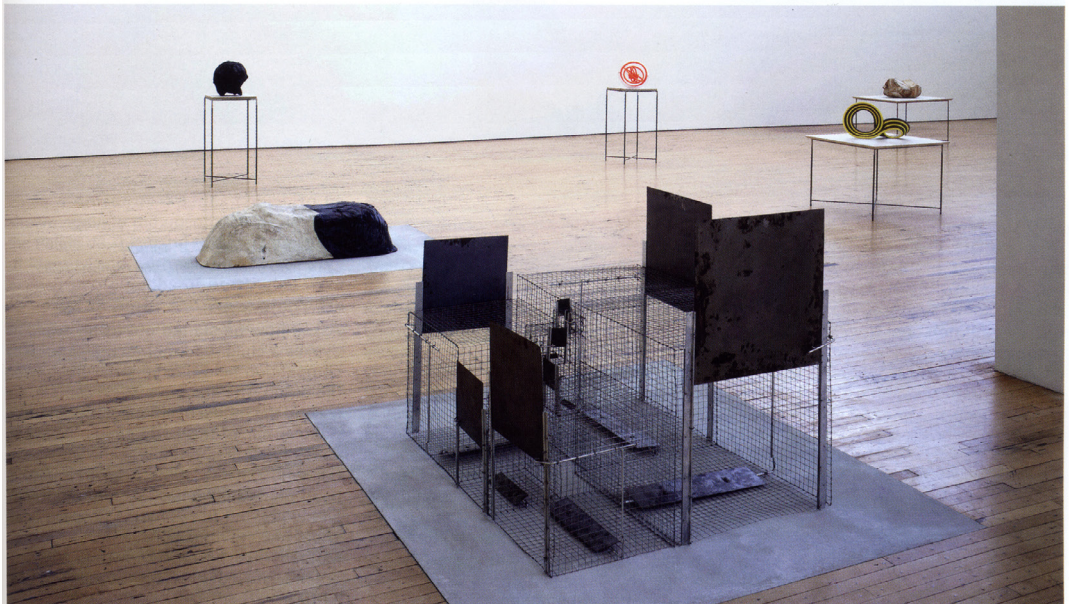
Depuis une dizaine d'années, Jean-Luc Moulène réalise une série d'objets qui, selon ses termes, vont du bricolage à l'industrie lourde. Cette vaste grammaire visuelle porte le titre d'*Opus*, comme l'œuvre achevée d'un musicien. En 2009, il a assemblé des sculptures d'Antoine Bourdelle, formant un corps à quatre dos, co-signé avec le sculpteur à titre posthume. Cette forme rejoint celle de *Body* qui sera analysée plus loin. Moulène a aussi poncé, avec du papier de verre, le moulage d'un plâtre de Bourdelle représentant une jeune fille dont il a redessiné les formes. Virtuellement, sa pièce pourrait loger à l'intérieur de celle de Bourdelle.

Alors que jusqu'à présent, Moulène ne s'était intéressé qu'à la banalité du réel, il vient de concevoir, pour la première fois, deux œuvres monumentales qui explorent le spectaculaire : *Body* et *Body Versus Twizy* (récemment exposées dans le jardin des Tuileries). Mais dans notre ère de l'après Debord, ce spectaculaire n'est qu'illusion. Plus ou moins précisément, ces deux objets évoquent de loin la forme d'une voiture, une forme qui se dérobe. *Body* évoque aussi un corps humanoïde, et le corps social des usines et des ouvriers. D'ailleurs une grande partie du matériel qui a servi à le construire se trouve cachée à l'intérieur comme un cheval de Troie. De loin, *Body* est une masse ovoïde rayonnant par ses dégradés de couleurs primaires dans lesquels on se perd si l'on s'en approche. Il se compose de feuilles de fibre de basalte assemblées, dont les coupes sont produites par des machines (à la différence de *Body Versus Twizy* qui a été fait selon des coupes déterminées à partir d'un dessin d'automobile). C'est grâce au soutien de la Fondation Renault, qui a relancé à cette occasion sa pratique de commande d'œuvres, que *Body* et *Body Versus Twizy* ont été conçues dans les ateliers de recherche automobile de la marque. La surface de *Body* ressemble à une topographie irrégulière, presque une carte de géographie, mais sans entrée. Cette œuvre est un manifeste sur la manière dont Jean-Luc Moulène conçoit ses expositions, avec des surfaces continues et des « coupes » mitoyennes qui engendrent des discontinuités.

Les images de Jean-Luc Moulène sont peut-être des objets post-photographiques, qui auraient intégré en eux-mêmes un appareil de photo producteur d'images mentales. Selon ses termes, « elles décrivent des choses quelconques avec exactitude. » Elles ne résolvent pas de conflits, elles ne sauvent rien, mais sont plutôt des espaces de tension dans lesquels s'opposent le visible et l'invisible. L'art n'est pas fait pour éclaircir mais pour complexifier le réel. ■

(1) Yasmil Raymond, *Jean-Luc Moulène, Opus + One*, 2011 (texte de la commissaire de l'exposition).

Jean-Luc Moulène
Né à Reims en / *born* 1955.
Il vit et travaille à / *lives in* Paris.
Expositions personnelles récentes / *solo shows:*
2009 Galerie Pietro Spartà, Chagny Carré d'art, Nîmes
2011 - 2012 *Opus + One*, Dia:Beacon, Beacon, New York, Dan Flavin Art Institute, Bridgehampton, New York, décembre 2011 - décembre 2012
Galería Desiré Saint Phalle, Mexico
Festival d'Avignon, Cloître St Louis, Avignon
Galerie Greta Meert, Bruxelles
Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, 28 avril - 16 juin 2012



Vue de l'exposition « Opus + One », Dia : Beacon, New York, 2012. (Ph. B. Jacobson, New York)
Exhibition view at Dia : Beacon

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Jean-Luc Moulène
The Mental Life of Images

« L'épouvanté ». Fénautrigues, Lot. Été 1991.
Cibachrome contrecollé sur aluminium
125 x 155 x 6 cm (encadré). *"The Frightened One"*

Jean-Luc Moulène has exhibited widely since the late 1980s, notably at the Paris municipal art museum (MAMVP, 1997), Jeu de Paume (2005) and Carré d'Art in Nîmes (2009). He is now the guest of the Dia Foundation in New York State. Strangely, for a man whose work draws on American popular culture, rock, punk and underground cinema, he claims never to have been fascinated by the U.S., or even New York. In fact he'd never been there before he went out to prepare this show, *Opus + One*.

Jean-Luc Moulène doesn't like having an image, a brand image, put on his work. But then brand images are something he knows all about, having started his career in the publicity department of French electronics firm Thomson. Now he resists all that. Still, one thing all his pieces do is "convey an image," insofar as they are mental images registered and recreated in his attempt to describe the world.
Jean-Luc Moulène is interested in taking apart the mechanics of looking. He makes photographs and he makes objects, and it is the complexity of the subject that determines this choice between two dimensions (the realm of representation) or three (presence, political statement). His works are conceived as tools, which is why they often look like maquettes.

MENTAL IMAGES

Asked how he started out as an artist, he evokes a childhood memory, a sandcastle competition held one summer holiday on the beach. The first prize was a camera, the second the model of a Renault Dauphine, a popular car of the early 1960s. Jean-Luc came equal first, but it was the older winner who got the camera he had set his heart on. Moulène has taken photographs all his life, but in reality his practice is all about making models.
Moulène first became known as a photographer of what everyone at the time was calling *le réel* (the real). In fact, his

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Disjonctions series, begun in the early 1980s, could be taken as a filter for reading all his work. In mathematics, a disjunction is the union of two sets, minus their intersection. In these photographs, Moulène creates a similar gap, a sense of displacement which intensifies our perception of the real, while using the sense of what is out of frame to prevent any sense of empathy with the image. *Sans titre (GTX), Boulevard de la Bastille, Paris, summer 1992*, shows a tree stump on the pavement in the foreground and, in the background, a parked gray car. A disjunction of the mobile and the immobile.

In another series, Moulène regularly took photographs of a given location over a sustained period. He has said that his life is like "a long-term performance,"(1) as if circumscribing performance to its ritual dimension, which is something that Michel Journiac, with whom he once worked, achieved in exemplary fashion. During a residency in Berlin in 1996–97, Moulène photographed the city while trying to avoid construction and reconstruction sites. As for *Fénautrigues* (1991–2006), the series of photographs he took in the countryside, with no human figures or dwellings, he spoke of the "great factory" of nature, of a workplace related to movement and wandering.

In other series, such as the *Objets de grève* (objects made by striking workers, from 1999), which are photographed like advertisements, often against neutral grounds, shown in natural light, each image is described in a short text. But the classifications here offer only an appearance of order, for they are always disrupted by some image, subject or detail. Speaking of these images, he mentions corporate organization charts, which are constantly being perturbed—that, he says, is the way things progress. He relates these disruptions to the erotic diversion of our organs. In the *Filles d'Amsterdam* series (2005), to be shown again in the upcoming Triennale at the Palais de Tokyo, he explores questions of identity and pornography. These very explicit photographs of prostitutes were taken in a studio and were given the working (or stage) names of each woman. For his show at the Louvre, which was accompanied by a special free supplement from the newspaper *Le Monde*, Moulène photographed his own imaginary museum, the pictures of a handful of works with accompanying notes by art historians by way of captions, questioning the nature and circulation of images.

Moulène's work seeks out a zone outside power relations. Now exhibited at the Dia Foundation, his *Vigie* (Look-Out, 2004–11) comprises two series of photographs: one showing a plant growing rebelliously

beneath the "Vauban" barriers positioned as a security measure below the Finance Ministry building in Bercy, Paris, and the other, as what is out of frame in the first, the surroundings of this plant, to only an inch or two above the ground. These images are linked by a kind of alliterative rhythm. They are alternately hot, cold, hard, soft, razor-sharp and hazy. The accompanying texts are simply dates. More than the image of the artist, this *Vigie* evokes the image people have of artists.

In his search for mental images, Moulène moves constantly from one medium to another, and between figuration and non-figuration. He has explored the genre of the monochrome on a number of occasions, both photographically, in *Grand monochrome jaune Kodak* (1988), and in three dimensions, with *Croix jaune en bois* (2005), in which we are not sure whether it is the color or the sign that is more important. For the Dia show, he has painted four monochromes on standard-sized stretchers which he chose because they were the ones used by Josef Albers. With spatulas he spread two layers of secret-formula Bic ink—another disruption of the social system—over their prepared surfaces. The resulting red, green, black and blue monochromes with their metallic highlights are not so much an image of literature or art history as of the most ordinary form of writing using a very common ballpoint. These pieces are close to drawing, Moulène's customary tool for articulating his ideas.

Jean-Luc Moulène's objects—he prefers that word to "sculpture"—extend his photography. He sometimes gives the example of a knife resting on a table: it's an image, and yet the knife cuts the space in two. Where Moulène's photographs are nearly always figurative, his objects can be less so. The notion of cutting is what links these different practices and makes his work coherent. Photography itself slices into the real, arresting the viewer. It imposes sequences. Sculpture, likewise, cuts into matter, or forces it into shapes. Gyson and Burroughs' practice of the cut-up, too, explores the world by bringing out what was always there but not always visible.

De haut en bas/*from top:* « Body Versus Twizy ». 2011. Mousse polyuréthane, résine polyester, peinture, vernis 140 x 230 x 100 cm. Œuvre produite avec le concours de Renault Automobiles. (Coll. Renault. Ph. M. Domage) *Polyurethane foam, polyester resin, paint, varnish*
« GTX ». Bld de la Bastille, Paris. Été 1992. Cibachrome contrecollé sur aluminium 80 x 100 x 3 cm (encadré) *Cibachrome mounted on aluminum*

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The objects that Moulène has been making for some ten years now range, in his terms, from bricolage to heavy industry. This vast grammar is called *Opus*, like a completed musical composition. In 2009 he assembled sculptures by Antoine Bourdelle, forming a body with four backs, and co-signed with the sculptor (posthumously, of course, in the latter's case). This form is related to *Body* (on which more below). Moulène also sanded one of Bourdelle's plaster casts of a young girl, thus re-shaping its forms. It would, theoretically, be possible to fit Moulène's piece inside Bourdelle's.

So far Moulène had been interested only in the banality of the real, but now, for the first time, he has made two more spectacular, monumental works: *Body* and *Body Versus Twizy* (recently exhibited in the Tuileries gardens). In our post-Debord world, the spectacular is of course an illusion. These two objects look more or less like cars, but the form is itself elusive. *Body* is also humanoid, evoking the social body of factories and workers. Indeed, much of the material used to make it is hidden inside, like Odysseus and his cohorts in the Trojan Horse. From a distance, *Body* is an ovoid form radiating primary colors which become less certain as one gets closer. It consists of assembled sheets of basalt fiber, cut by machine. *Body Versus Twizy* was cut in accordance with the design for a car. In fact, both pieces were made with the support of the Renault Foundation: the auto maker revived its old tradition of commissioning artworks specially for the occasion, and the two works were conceived in its R&D studio. The surface of *Body* forms an irregular topography, like a geographical map but with no point of entry. The work is a manifesto regarding the way Moulène conceives his exhibitions, with continuous surfaces and median "cuts" engendering discontinuities.

Moulène's objects could be seen as post-photographic objects which have integrated a camera that produces mental images. "They describe ordinary objects with exactitude," he says. They do not resolve any conflicts, they do not know anything, but are more like spaces of tension in which the visible and invisible are opposed. Art is made not to clarify, but to complexify the real. ■

Translation, C. Penwarden

(1) Yasmil Raymond, Jean-Luc Moulène Opus + One, 2011 (text by the curator).

De haut en bas/*from top:*
« La Vigie ». Paris, 23 juin 2005 Cibachrome sous diasec. 52 x 40 cm. *"Look-Out." Cibachrome*
« Dos ». Paris. Mai 2010. Bronze. 21 x 37,5 x 27,5 cm (Coll. part., France ; Ph. F. Kleinefenn). *"Back"*

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Jean-Luc Moulène, *Bitte à fruits*, Paris, September 1999, cement, sand and stones, 72 × 30 × 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 × 5 × 2cm. Collection Fond National d'Art Contemporain, France

Caroline Hancock
Jean-Luc Moulène: A 'Plasticien'
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Jean-Luc Moulène: A 'Plasticien'

– Caroline Hancock

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

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 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

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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 Touitou 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.

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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

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.

❁

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

5 J.-L. Moulène, 'Series Entretiens 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/Berrebipdf.pdf (last accessed on 13 June 2011).

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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.

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 libertaire', 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', *02*, Spring 2009, pp.11—14. www.zerodeux.fr/jean-luc-moulene-par-raphael-brunel (last accessed on 2 August 2011).

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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.

❁

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.

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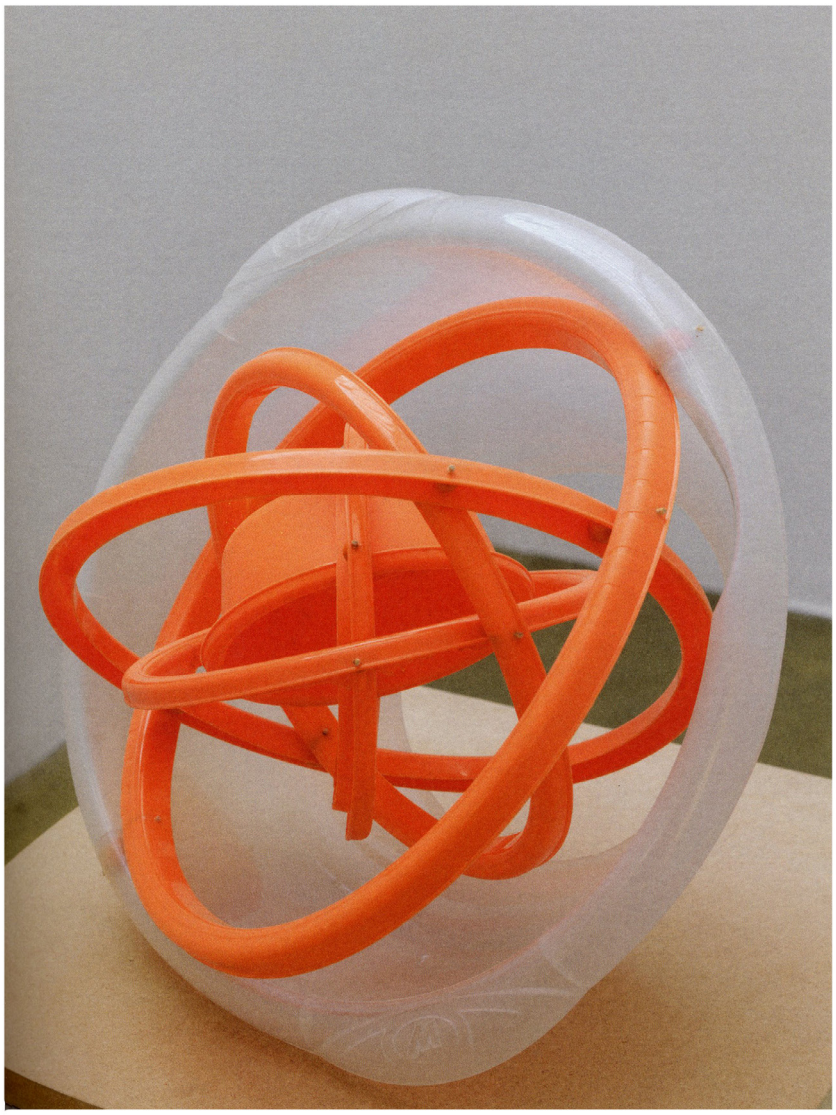

Jean-Luc Moulène, *Mondex*, Paris, March 2006, plastic basins, diameter 42cm. © Jean-Luc Moulène – ADAGP. Courtesy Chantal Crousel, Paris; Thomas Dane, London and Greta Meert, Brussels

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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 Moulène[14]

'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 Negri[15]

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.

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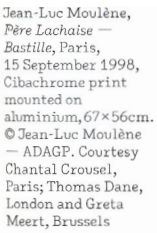

Jean-Luc Moulène, *Père Lachaise — Bastille*, Paris, 15 September 1998, Cibachrome print mounted on aluminium, 67×56cm. © Jean-Luc Moulène — ADAGP. Courtesy Chantal Crousel, Paris; Thomas Dane, London and Greta Meert, Brussels

Jean-Luc Moulène: Photography as Training Manual

– Sophie Berrebi

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

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 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-Sharit Bikhayr* (*All Is Well on the Border*, 1997) and *Fi Haza al-Bayt* (*In This House*, 2005). But, once they are captured 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

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.

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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 × 65cm. © 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.

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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 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.) Seud.', in *Jean-Luc Moulène, opus 1995—2007 / documents 1999—2007* (exh. cat.), Lisbon: Culturgest, 2007, pp.211—15.

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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. oldgoart 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 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?

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.

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 Tŷ 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.

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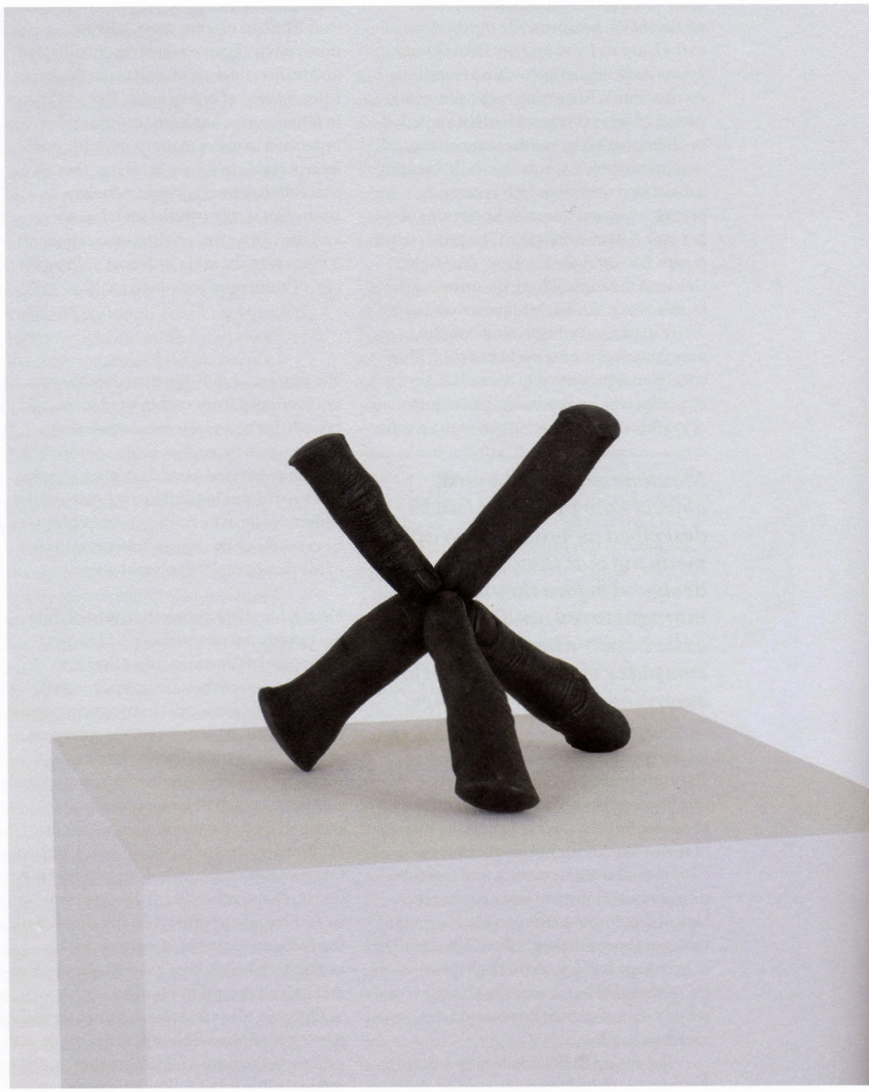

Jean-Luc Moulène,
Cinq Concentrés Concentriques,
Paris, April 2007,
black polyurethane elastomer,
18 × 18 × 18cm.
© Jean-Luc Moulène — ADAGP. Courtesy Chantal Crousel, Paris; Thomas Dane, London and Greta Meert, Brussels

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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 Karlsberg 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.

Sophie Berrebi
Jean-Luc Moulène: Photography as Training Manual
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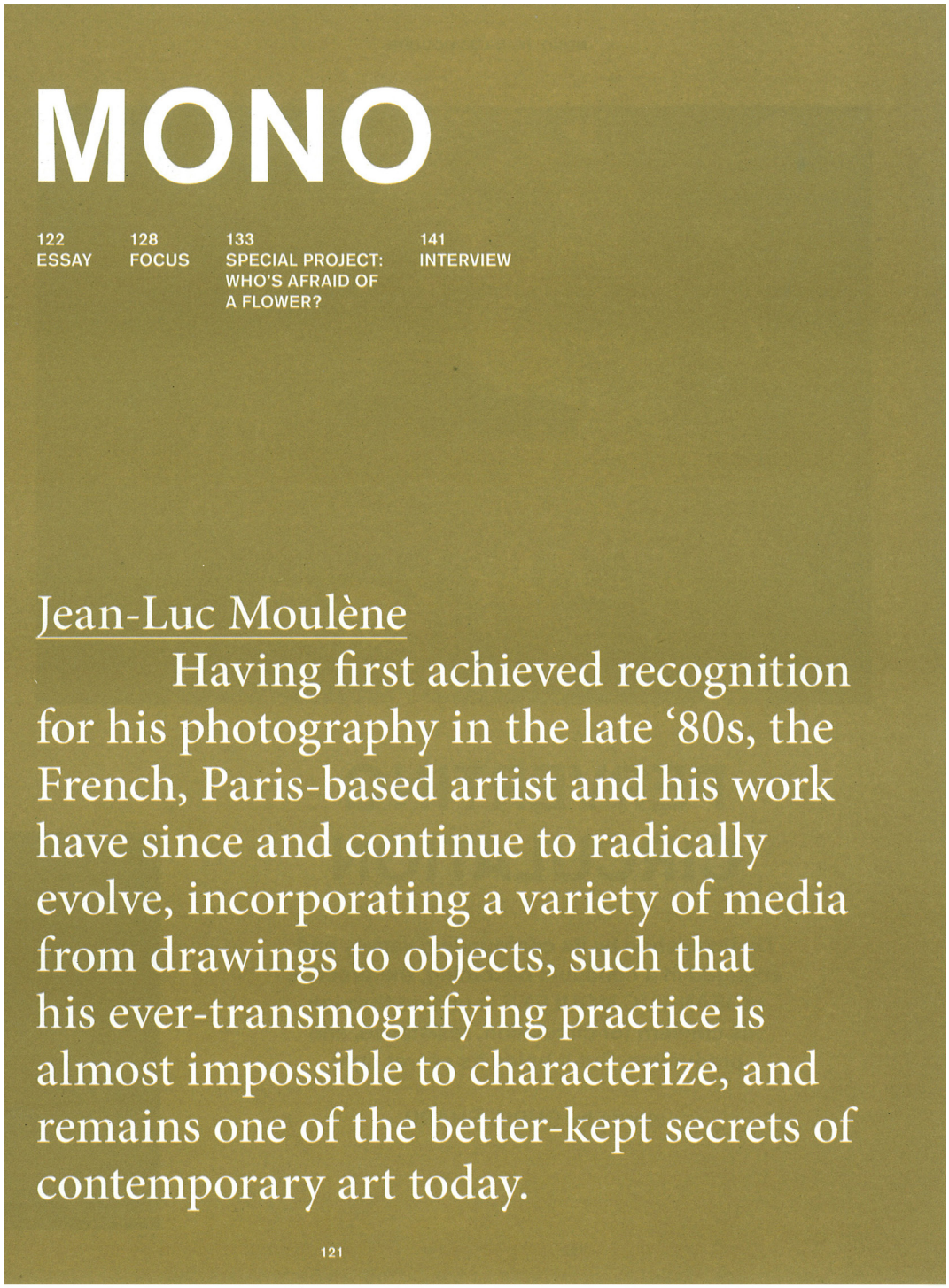
KALEIDOSCOPE



MONO

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141 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.

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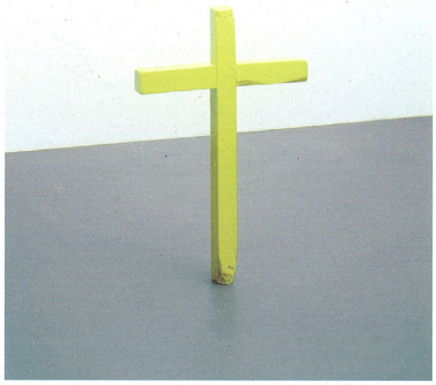
MONO: JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE

"Art is and remains for us a thing of the future."
—Jean-Pierre Criqui



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

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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-

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n Trous Bleu, Paris, February 2008
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Greta Meert, Brussels
Photo: Philippe Degobert
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Café, Paris, February 21, 2002
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène
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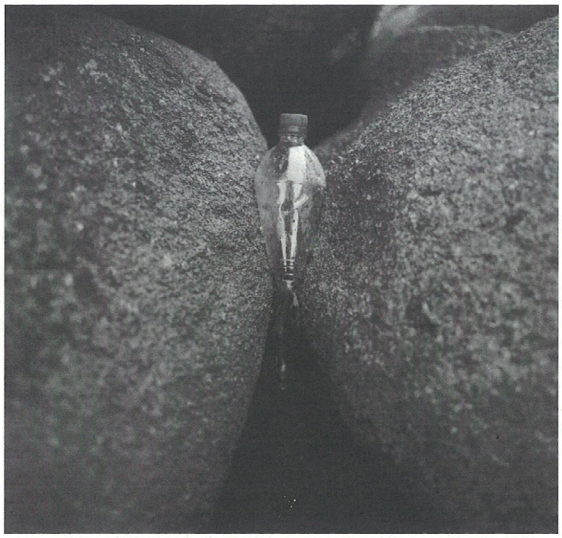

Régulier, Barneville, January 24, 2008
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène
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ing glory. Since then, the artist has continued to surprise and confound with his increasingly variegated ensembles of images and 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, Nimes; 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.

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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. ◇

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 Kleinefenn

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

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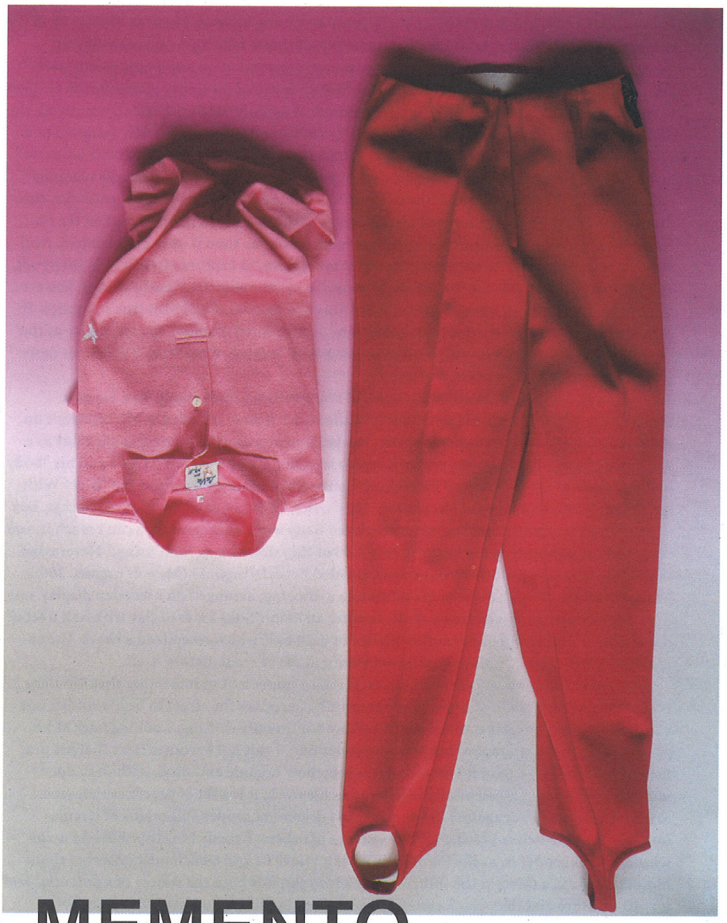

MEMENTO MORI

Le fuseau et le polo, 1999-2000
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
Photo: Jean-Luc Moulène
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Simple portraits of products created in the spirit of protest, the photographs fror Moulene'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

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MONO: JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE

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

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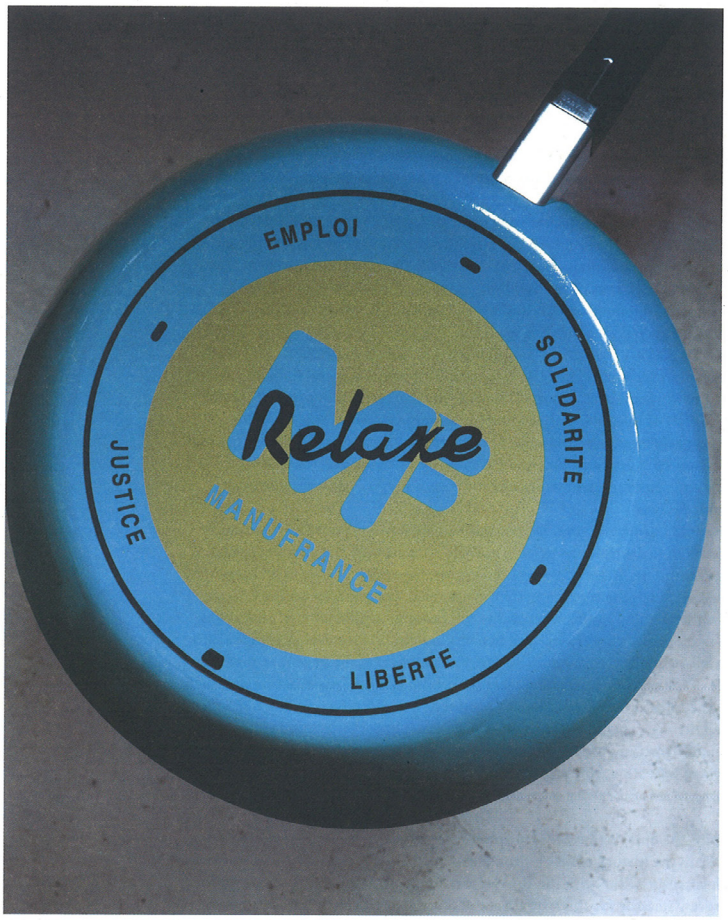

From left:
La poêle des 17 de Manufrance, 1999-2000
International Herald Tribune, 1999-2000
La Pantinoise, 1999-2000
All images courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
All photos: Jean-Luc Moulène
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GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

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.xsp?numero=8&id_article=leyris-0. Author's translation.

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A SERIOUS FARCE

(Pierre percée) percée, Les Arques, Lot, juin 2008
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
Photo: Florian Kleinefenn
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As described in his own words, Moulène's practice stems from the 1970s notion of art as an enigma—hence the programmatic discountinuity and the constant evasion of realism, leading a descent back toward a sympathetic space.

material collected by FRANÇOIS PIRON

François Piron
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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.*

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 Kleinefenn

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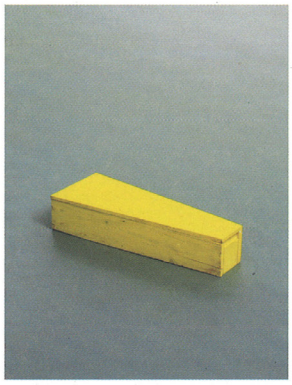

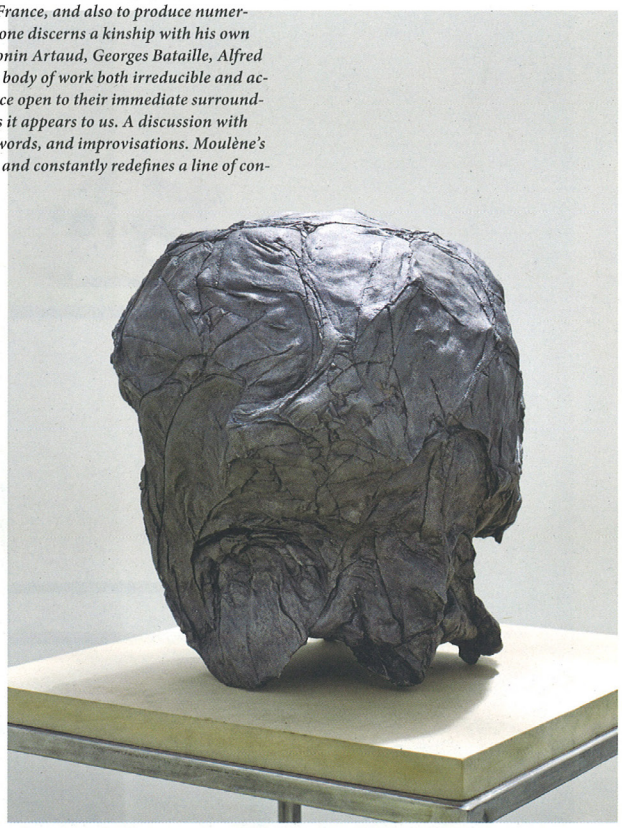

I became interested in art during the 1970s with the practices of body art, sociological art, or what was called "non-art" or "anti-art." Photography was important to this work as a record of a performance. I also became aware at that time that I had no taste for putting myself on show, or for occupying 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.

AUTHOR
FRANÇOIS PIRON is an art critic and a curator, teacher at th0e Lyon School of Fine Arts since 2002, and a founding member of castillo/corrales, 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).

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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 Kleinefenn

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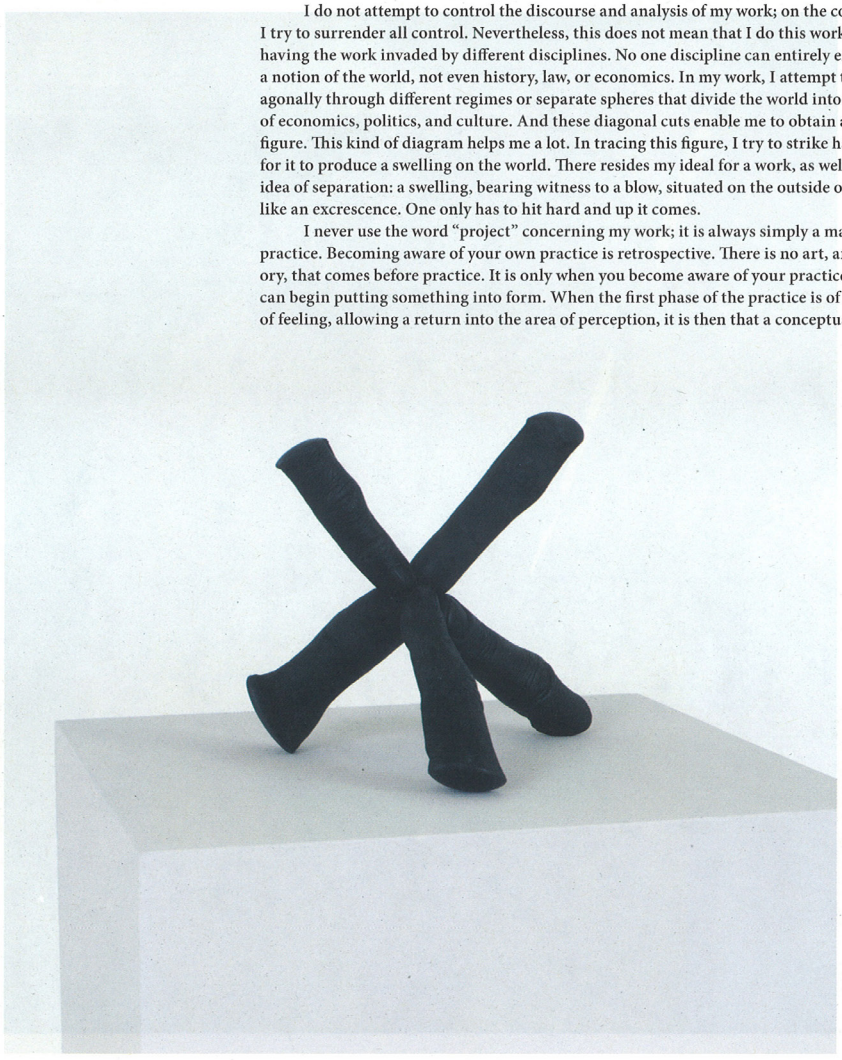
what it has been separated from, which is to say, the world. This separation I speak of is not pathological, but liberating. It is in being as impersonal as possible that I try to keep looking at the world. To separate oneself is first and foremost to elude the temptation of realism, of moralizing. My 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 to not 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



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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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