

Extra City Kunsthal, Antwerpen – Exhibition guide

JEAN-LUC
MOULÈNE:
ENDWARDS

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ENGLISH

Jean-Luc Moulène: ENDWARDS
Curated by Mihnea Mircan

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INTRODUCTION

“I recall the passage in Augustine, quoted by Artaud, where Scipio Nasica rather strangely declares that at the time of the plague the theatres had to be destroyed – it’s as if the body had been seized by some new urgency, literally by some new fire, that prevented it from making a scene: with such pressure on the body, there must be no theatrical unity, no scenographic organization.”

– Jean Louis Schefer

Extra City Kunsthal presents ENDWARDS, a project by French artist Jean-Luc Moulène. The exhibition is articulated around three new productions and includes a condensed retrospective, exploring genealogies for the new works and recurrent questions in the artist’s practice. ENDWARDS looks at the coextensive operations that configure Moulène’s objects and images and at the ways in which these intersect time and materiality, erosion and resistance. It shows the connections between “building a body for oneself”, as the artist defines the focal point of his work, and his radical avoidance of a signature style. In sculpture as in photography, Jean-Luc Moulène constructs and documents situations akin to Zeno’s paradoxes, that disunite media, genres and their strictures, or that confuse authorship, delegation and ‘co-production’ – with materials and circumstances.

This guide lists the works presented in the ‘exhibition’ segment of the project. The contents of its double – the

'retrospective' installed in what the artist calls the 'condensation room' – are presented separately. Yet this duality in how images and objects are exhibited is to be understood in the sense of an invitation, rather than in that of separation, as a play of symmetries, suspended conclusions and echoes. The notion of the 'cut' is crucial to the artist's work, yet it is systematically used to make, build and join: it is a form of montage and continuity – as in cinema – between different forms of reality or representation. New and old works draw upon and expand the same vocabulary and syntax, the same repertory of spatial or temporal dislocations: inward and outward, backward and – as the title proposes – endward. *ENDWARDS* works with and through a web of hypotheses and gestures, a choreography of palpable and abstract movements, where different perspective lines warp around – and hold to our scrutiny – the same object.

Jean-Luc Moulène describes his work as "one continuous performance": "My main activity is trying to build my own body. Each of us has a body built through representations, and these representations have to be questioned and criticized", consciously made one's own and dismantled. Glimpses of these manoeuvres of appropriation and deconstruction, as much semiotic as they are physical, are spread throughout the exhibition, and can be gathered from other statements by the artist. Moulène describes his photographic work as the gradual formation of an "impersonal diary", and his sculptural 'Opus' as a repeated attempt to create, with exactitude, a non-descript object. The artist's work takes, or makes, place at the boundaries between the individual assertion of the body and its social formatting; it notes the positions and modalities, the 'where-from' and the 'how', of a body, neither metaphoric nor precise in the sense of a stable identity, encountering the world. It demarcates the ways in which this body exists

both at the margins and in the thick of history.

As in Holbein's famous 'Ambassadors', anamorphosis is conventionally the coexistence of two perspectives within the same image or picture plane, requiring a readjustment of position between two images, each reducing the other to a smudge of colour or an indistinct shape. In front of that particular painting, the viewer has to choose between the intellectual Vanitas of the protagonists, and the devotional imperative proclaimed by the skull in the foreground. In Moulène's practice, the question of anamorphosis seems to be recoded via material or temporal coordinates. Can an object be said to have its own point of view, not necessarily identical with that of its maker – like Antonin Artaud's "hammer without a master"? Can an image or an object belong to – and bring together in its 'flesh' – two distinct chronologies, exist as the intersection of histories that take it to different directions? Stated differently, Moulène's use of disjunction as structuring principle of work brings to mind the notion of the oxymoron, and the detonating force of the paradox. Can we think, and make actual sense, in paradoxes? In its engagement with abrasion and growth, cutting and mending, acts of withdrawal and a politics of opening up, identity and its refusal, Moulène's work might function as a compass to navigate the world, the more of the less in the contemporary.

List of abbreviations:

- JLMCC courtesy of the artist and
Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
- JLMGM courtesy of the artist and
Galerie Greta Meert, Brussels
- JLMTD courtesy of the artist and
Gallery Thomas Dane, London

GROUND FLOOR

VIANDE / OS, BARNEVILLE,
16.02.2001 (FLESH / BONE),
JLMCC

DEUX CARREAUX, LE
GUILVINEC, 10.11.2008
(TWO SQUARES), JLMCC

This pairing of works—a collection of stones, in a sense—'sets the stage' for the project. While the first, natural lapidarium unsettles the categories of figuration and abstraction, or of figure and ground, 'Deux Carreaux' grounds this mimetic play by echoing the particularities of the exhibition venue.

USURE, 2013 (WEAR), JLMCC

The sculptural assemblage 'Usure' references building techniques in pre-Colombian architecture. One explanation for the robustness of megalithic walls such as that of Sacsahuaman in Cusco, Peru, is that systems of cranes and pulleys, and considerable amounts of physical work, were employed to rub the stones against one another until they became seamlessly joined, making unnecessary the use of

GROUND FLOOR

mortar. 'Usure' applies this method to three life-size sculptures: through distinctly oriented rotating and swinging motions, a male bust, a female figure and a vulture abrade each other into figurative and temporal appeasement. Somewhere between a collage of antagonistic positions and the metonym (or residue) of a convulsive history, 'Usure' cuts across museological and political spaces: it moves from discrete objects, each with its caption and fixed role in narratives of becoming, to collapsed distinctions, breached distances and crossbred figures, both uneasy and stilled. If these separate bodies come from the storage of a museum, an institution whose art-historical exercise is as much the meticulousness of dating and attribution as it is the writing of a genealogy, of a past from which we desire descent, then which past does the construction, and the spasms and grinding through which it came into being, make present? 'Usure', a whole that is not one, employs erosion and attrition as instruments of consolidation, rather than as correlates of vulnerability.

DESSIN ASSERVI
(SUBORDINATED
DRAWING), 2013

The work reproduces at the scale of Extra City's main hall the intersection of a sphere and an ellipsoid, registering on walls, ceilings, floors and pillars. It makes use of simple gardening techniques—transformed, but not exalted, by volumetric expansion—and echoes Moulène's long-standing interest in the sinuous dynamic of knots and Borromean rings. Taking possession of the entirety

of the space available to it and theoretically capable of extending its marks beyond it, the work is a homeless drawing and a site-resistant (as opposed to site-specific) visualization: there is no space where the drawing could indeed fit, no space that would not have a reductive effect on its centrifugal accelerations. A model for utopia or for a logical netherworld, eroded by space and picturing an uninhabitable place, 'Dessin asservi' is described by the artist as a "tool for looking outside": a gesture that bridges between the semi-publicness of the gallery and situations that, because of their vastness or because of their secrecy, an art institution cannot accommodate.

NU QUOTIDIEN, 29 JUILLET
2011. AVEC MARION
ROMAGNAN, PARIS, (DAILY
NUDE. WITH MARION
ROMAGNAN), JLMCC

ORDRE EN TAS (ORDER IN
A HEAP), 2011, JLMTD

GROUND FLOOR

'GIRLIE' BIC DRAWINGS,
2013, JLMCC

ANONYMOUS, 'GIRLIE'
SAMPLE, 2013, JLMCC

CATHÉDRALE, 2011
(CATHEDRAL), COLLECTION OF
FRÉDÉRIC MARIËN

This ensemble of graphic and sculptural works pair two preoccupations in Moulène's recent work: geometric ordering – or, rather, the distance between order and clarity – and the chromatic standardization of BIC ballpoint pen inks. Protected by the law of industrial patent, BIC inks – in their 'boy' or 'girlie', classical or more exuberant tones – have been used by the artist them to create a series of monochrome paintings. Their impasto reverts the modernist function of the monochrome, which is to arrest vision and to confine its motion to the epiphanic concreteness of the picture plane. The BIC monochromes establish a continuity between the picture plane and all the users of this global brand, their notes and scribbles. While one drawing shown here appears as a grid-like watercolor, the other was sent to Moulène by an unidentified worker in

a Mexican BIC factory. The intensity and organization of this 'sample' bring the sheet of paper closer to the status of a drawing, and extend Moulène's logic of overcoming authorship, opening it up to chance and context. In 'Cahtédrale', the inks are applied monochromatically to the four sides of a model in wood, while, in the antinomically titled 'Ordre en tas', found materials are assembled in a rotating succession of geometries and covered in a layer of resin and black ink.

LA VIGIE, 2011 (THE LOOKOUT MAN), JLMCC

This is a monumental photographic essay in botanical Situationism, surveying the growth of a particularly resilient weed, *Paulownia Tomentosa*, in the cracks of sidewalk and concrete buildings in the neighbourhood of the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Employment in Paris. The images reveal an ever-changing landscape of urban gestures, from traces of children's play to the physical evidence of anti-terrorist vigilance, namely the Vigipirate national security system. While one digital slide projection follows the obstinate infiltration of the plant, the other often pictures the barricades, stanchions and bollards installed to protect national integrity, 'security and comfort'. A reciprocal gaze appears at times to unite the two screens, pitting against each other the plant's tenacity and camouflage in hostile environment and a regime of heightened political attention, calibrated to detect and suppress any deviant behaviour and potential threat.

FIRST FLOOR

COIN, PARIS XII, 15.05.2003 (CORNER), JLMCC

LOS PAVOS, TLACOLULA DE MATAMOROS (MEXICO), 29.05.2005, JLMCC

MODEL FOR SHARING, 2007, JLMCC

"I belong neither to the 99%, nor to the 1%", Moulène has said in response to the debilitating distinction that was one of the rhetorical props of the Occupy movement. 'Model for Sharing' is – in relation to this debate on world economy – a 'plus gesture', the thought of an additive possibility, echoed also by the nearby 'Marche'. Formally, 'Model for Sharing' resembles a pie-chart or an architectural maquette for a shelter, yet the work's central element is a fold, which negates the relevance of such readings. The fold produces an accumulation within the 100% of the surface, a different potentiality in its distribution, a point where resources and ideas multiply through their being-in-common. In the words of Philippe Vergne, "At a time

when the world is imploding in a tension between the 99% and the 1%, Moulène claims his territory (...) in the unthinkable 101%. His mathematics, akin to alchemy, liberates and creates not a bigger space, but an inconceivable space. (...) This ultra-thin addition of 1%, surpassing rational wisdom, constitutes a separate sphere of aesthetics and experience, an exception to the normal order of the sensible, an intricate hole between the sensible and the intelligible, where the mind can get lost and be a mind again."

HEADBOX, KITAKYUSHU,
2004,
COLLECTION OF KADIST ART FOUNDATION,
PARIS

MARCHE, PARIS, 1994
(STEP), JLMTD

NOEUD, BARNEVILLE,
20.08.2007 (KNOT), JLMCC

FIRST FLOOR

RÉGULIÈRE, BARNEVILLE,
24.01.2008 (REGULAR), JLMCC

PLAGE RÉGULIÈRE,
LOSTROUC'H, 1.02.2008
(REGULAR BEACH), JLMCC

MAQUETTE FOR
'PLEASURE DOME', 2013,
JLMGM

The project departs from observations of architectural ruins in Greece – new or old, quasi-mythological or late-capitalist, enshrined as relics or abandoned to the elements. Made of as many minute bricks as will be required by the future construction of a work to measure 3.20 m in diameter, this model of a ruin has an intact dome as inner surface, sheltered on the outside by a jagged, broken geometry of bricks. The two sides of the object articulate, materially and fictionally, preservation and ravage, in a narrative where the contemplative, reconciliatory purpose of the dome contrasts with the inscrutable force that ripped it out from an ampler construction, whose outline or function we can no longer discern. As postscript to the imaginary story

activated by the model, the work is to be immersed in the sea for an undetermined duration: the Pleasure Dome will be finished only once its angular, toothed brickwork will have been polished by the mechanical and chemical impact of the waves. The work reverts the regular purpose of a dome: supporting and redistributing the weight of the building, inviting pious contact with transcendence, turns here into a function of being held and suspended, while metaphoric weightlessness become sheer, threatening gravity. Fractured and preserved, manifesting two markedly different forms of smoothness on its two sides, coproduced by architectural history and documentary observation to the same extent that it is fashioned by nature, prey to tidal rhythms and rescued from them 'just in time', the 'Dome' appears as an accretion of contradictory movements, and embodies their paradoxical co-presence, or tense co-authorship.

Biography

Jean-Luc Moulène (1955) lives and works in Paris. Presentations of his work were organized at Beirut Art Center (2013), Modern Art Oxford (2012), Dia Art Foundation, New York (2011-2012), Carré d'art – Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes (2009), Culturgest, Lisbon (2007), Jeu de Paume and Musée du Louvre, Paris (2005). He has been featured in group exhibitions at Sharjah Biennial, CAC Brétigny, Brétigny-sur-Orge, Witte de With, Rotterdam, Venice Biennial and Documenta 10, Kassel. Moulène is represented by Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, Galerie Greta Meert, Brussels, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, Galerie Pietro Spartà, Chagny, and Galeria Désiré Saint Phalle, Mexico City.

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