

## THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Simone Menegoi, "Jean-Luc Moulène," *ArtForum*, 10 July 2015



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

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

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

*Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.*

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