

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Billie Muraben, An Exclusive Interview with French Artist Jean-Luc Moulène on his New Exhibition *Larvae and Ghosts* at Thomas Dane Gallery, *Purple Art*, April 15 2016



Donkey, 2016

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE's practice is both clear and opaque. An often loaded mix of subjects, mediums, and contexts that convey his primary concern of the relationship between objects and images. Through metaphors, visual impact and propositions of and around the body Moulène employs his works as tools to reveal the nature and flaws of social and historic phenomena.

Born in Reims in 1955 and based in Paris, Moulène's work dances around critique. It is suggestive without conveying a decisive point or side and in *Larvae & Ghosts*, at London's *Thomas Dane Gallery*, the artist presents a series of ambiguous sculptures and drawings which continue this act.

The exhibition is his fourth solo presentation at the gallery, having also shown at *Dia: Beacon*, New York, *Musée D'art Moderne de la Ville*, Paris and *Modern Art Oxford* amongst many other locations. *Larvae & Ghosts* also forms a sort of a prelude to Moulène's forthcoming exhibition at the *Centre Pompidou*, where he will present a programme of works considering the protocols of material and space in his practice.

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As he prepared for the show's opening, we spoke to Moulène outside a nearby cafe in London's St James.

BILLIE MURABEN — *Your work has often been about giving concrete existence to mental images, how does that principle apply to this exhibition?*

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE — This exhibition is, as always, experimental. I am not trying to produce an effect, I just try to think – and thinking is really abstraction. It's a process of thinking what might evoke, engage and encourage interpretation. In *Larvae & Ghosts* I have essentially made some abstract gestures, but applied to figurative objects. The main question is, what is the significance of a cut? What does it mean to fit with someone, fit with a world or a culture. So we took diverse objects, such as garden sculptures, cast skeletons and plastic furniture and made cuts in them in order to make them fit with each other, in a concrete sense.

And in terms of interpretation, I'm sure some people will see the abstraction of the gesture, others will go directly to figuration, or try to interpret in terms of mythology. But all are interesting, because I think that the interest is precisely about concretising the thinking – but not only mine.

BILLIE MURABEN — *A lot of the objects are quite loaded, the figure of the woman for example features prominently in the show.*

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE — Absolutely. The representation of the woman is very loaded, and complex. There are problems in the evidence that it is often only the man who is dressed in these depictions, as the figure of the intellectual. I am interested in these objects as a means of affecting and challenging historical tradition, not only in art history, it's important as an artist to take a position and make a political statement.

BILLIE MURABEN — *Could you tell me about the title for the show, 'Larvae & Ghosts', which hints to the notion of both the not yet born and the already dead?*

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE — [Laughs], Yes, both sides of life. No one knows, but it's possible that these both sides are only one side? I think of this often because I am at the age where a lot of people die and, you know I don't remember before I was born, so why remember when I die?

Life is so much better than art when it is done well. Art is just something in between. What is interesting to me is life, which is why I consider myself more like a lyricist – I'm interested in love, life and death and the rest is nothing.

BILLIE MURABEN — *Your work is often concerned with interrogating the canons and typologies of artistic tradition, such as sculpture, photography and drawing, can you expand upon that?*

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE — You must be contemporary, and create patina for the next century. A problem is that we only have so much available, for example there are not so many colours to choose from, this is a problem for artists.

BILLIE MURABEN — *How does the body work as a tool as a negotiation point between text and image?*

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JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE — You know, in France the main culture is literature. Literature, philosophy, language. A lot of words, all the concentration in French culture is around that. And a long time ago, when I was abroad people were telling me that French art was illustrative. And I say, illustrative of what?! Of the French philosophy.

No I thought, I have no need to illustrate, but abroad this was always considered. So I decided 30 years ago to fight that situation and to try to make art out of language. Experimental. It's really difficult. And that's why in this show the figurative part has something to do with, not literature, but words.

Art can provoke diverse language, from mathematics which is pure formality to poetry and the long line between the two; taking in Deleuze, administration and common language, all of which I would describe as alienated forms. Poetry, on the other hand is the freedom of words. I am of course influenced by poetry but also by mathematics. A philosopher cannot consider themselves a thinker if they don't know contemporary mathematics, it contains the complexity of our world.

BILLIE MURABEN — *You've often questioned what it means to author artwork, could you elaborate on how that is visualized in your work?*

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE — Yes, the question of the author. The more I work, the more I think it's a problem because as an author you are party to laws that authorize you to do things that others cannot. Is that democratic?

Sometimes I think that art as the production of the author is the remain of past centuries, it was a type of symbolisation of power that doesn't correspond to our lives today. But I suppose I do use my name, I think as a way to pass through to a new status but I don't know what. Perhaps the artist as researcher, but that is not quite sufficient.

We must shift from these grand masters who were directly infused by God and the sun. I hate that. I am for an art of the little, a common art.

BILLIE MURABEN — *Could you tell me about the work decoding Rimbaud's 'Les Voyelles'?*

JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE — This poem is one of the main acts of the millennium, and for a long time it was interpreted through a system of correspondences between color, sound and imagination. But with an old friend who is a poet, we realized this interpretation was no good, the poem is actually totally objective. It is a love poem, describing his mistress from bottom to top – finishing with the eyes and the aura. So I decided to try to consider how the letter exists in public space, and gathered a montage of parts to communicate Les Voyelles as an object.

BILLIE MURABEN — *And could you tell me about your plans for the Pompidou exhibition?*

They asked me for a retrospective, I said no. I wanted to show only new pieces, so I set it as a retrospective of protocols, previous experiments applied to new objects in materials such as bronze, stone, plastic and concrete.

There is something in contemporary art that is quite strange to me. Slowly we have passed from the work to the exhibition as art work. And this drives a lot of artists to the spectacle as a work, not for me. I wanted

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to continue to get away from this process so I decided that the show would be a programme. Not a programme of showing, or neither a retrospective but a programme of production. As for any worker. It will look almost like a group show, “me and me, we are millions”, millions of authors.

On view until May 28th, 2016 at *Thomas Dane Gallery*, 5 & 11 Duke Street St James's, London.

Text Billie Muraben and photo Sasa Stucin

<http://purple.fr/diary/an-exclusive-interview-with-french-artist-jean-luc-moulene-on-his-new-exhibition-larvae-and-ghosts-at-thomas-dane-gallery-london/>