

Jean-Luc Moulène. Il était une fois

The French Academy in Rome – Villa Medici
Grandes Galeries, 30 April – 13 September 2015



Tronches / Slipknot, Paris, 2014, waxed concrete and cover
courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel

Wednesday 29 April 2015

11:30 a.m. press preview

6:30-8:30 p.m. opening

Curated by Éric de Chassey

From 30 April to 13 September 2015 the French Academy in Rome – Villa Medici presents the exhibition **Jean-Luc Moulène. Il était une fois**, dedicated to one of the major figures on the international contemporary artistic scene. The works of Jean-Luc Moulène – objects, photographs, films – express both a permanent reflection on the condition of the artist in society, a radical criticism of the manipulations and seduction of representation as well as a formal research often tinged with humor and derision.

Curated by Éric de Chassey, this exhibition focuses on recent works, created by the artist for this occasion, as well as earlier projects that offer an overview of his work. *Jean-Luc Moulène. Il était une fois* represents the third and last step of an itinerary that began with the *Disjonctions* exhibition, organized at the Center of Contemporary Art Transpalette in Bourges, curated by Damien Sausset in the summer of 2014, and continued with *Documents & Opus (1985-2014)* at the Kunstverein Hannover, under the direction of Kathleen Rahn. Each exhibition is dedicated to different aspects of Moulène's production, ranging from photography to sculpture, from drawing to painting, not forgetting his posters, brochures and other publications.

Jean-Luc Moulène. Il était une fois was prepared by repeated visits at Villa Medici that allowed the artist to immerse himself in the spirit of this setting and react to it. The idea of this monographic exhibition was conceived in 2010, and since then he has often resided at Villa Medici, a place that he already knew well, having participated in two collective exhibitions there: *La Mémoire* in 1999 and *La Fabrique de l'image* in 2004.

This exhibition presents an apparently heterogeneous selection of over thirty works that will enable the public to grasp some of the artist's distinctive characteristics: his use of the *objet trouvé* or the "given situation" as seized through a photographic

principle (what Moulène calls “*documents*”) or processed and elaborated according to the principles of drawing (which he calls “*opus*”); an approach to reality that does not reduce art to mere communication or narrative, but rather proposes a *presentation* of images; a way of conceiving his own works both as a thought experience as well as an experience of emotions, beyond their apparent formal diversity.

The exhibition opens with one of the oldest images of the artist, *Bubu 1^{er}* (1977), a primitivist drawing, here correlated to a large two-faced object realized with moulding and assembly, *Janus* (2014), and a photograph, *Manuel Joseph*, portraying the poet with whom the artist had collaborated for the exhibition at Villa Medici in 2004. These works make the presence of the body an explicit aspect of Moulène’s work, while the rest of the exhibition treats this theme more implicitly. The theme of a body producing objects or the body blending in with objects is also present in the series *Tronches* (2014), consisting of fifteen objects modeled in cement from carnival masks and placed on colorful covers, or the *Tricolore* series (2015), made with blown glass objects compressed by a steel structure.

Numerous works on display revisit history – that of the artist or of the venue – and this is one of the meanings suggested by the title, *Il était une fois* “*Once upon a Time*”. Some works evoke architectural or decorative elements in Villa Medici, such as the monochrome patinas that Moulène has chosen for two exhibition rooms and that recall – without being a faithful copy – the way Balthus applied color in the 1960s, when he was director of the French Academy in Rome. Or again, the film *Les Trois Grâces*, shown in the *Salon de musique*, which recalls one of the main bas-reliefs of the Villa’s façade.

As curator Éric de Chassey explains: “Moulène’s exhibition at Villa Medici – a venue predisposed to the embedding of the contemporary in the past – has a largely archeological slant, which consists in seeking what can be revived of the past so as to point the present in a direction seemingly vetoed by the chronological logic of a notional progress.”

One of the fundamental issues raised by Moulène is the relationship between art and work, between work and inactivity. According to Chassey, “Moulène creates objects that are the consequence of the inactivity of objects and bodies. Moulène responds above all by taking an *unmaking* as the origin of his *making* and leaving this *unmaking* permanently present and visible in his objects. If in doing so he aligns himself with a struggle against the ideal of productivity – against a commodification involving the quantification (and quantitative evaluation) of everything – he achieves this simply by slipping some slack or some imperfection into the process. Paradoxically, then, his work establishes a model for a possible world, one marked by a resistance active in its very inactiveness, by the passive body (imprint or trace, through breath or analog photography), which drives it and resists all commodification.” In this sense, the practice of Moulène is fully politic. His itinerary is witness to his “effort to be an artist integrated inside the real world, rather than isolated in his studio”, as affirms Philippe Vergne, former director of the museum Dia:Beacon that hosted his first major exhibition in the United States.

The relationship between the work and the viewer is another essential aspect to understand Moulène’s approach. He invites viewers to live a “visceral” experience, to take into account the discontinuity of the works on display in order to succeed in discovering what interests them, to be able to grasp the different meanings that enrich and render each other more complex. Thus viewers can appropriate the work and not to be driven out of it.

Jean-Luc Moulène

Born in Reims in 1955, Jean-Luc Moulène lives and works in Paris. He began his professional itinerary as a photographer, achieving recognition with the series *Objets de grève* (1999-2000) and *48 Palestinian Products* (2002-2005); from the end of the 1990s he has also devoted himself to the production of objects and drawings. He participated in *Documenta X* (1997), the São Paulo Biennial (2002), the Venice Biennale (2003), the Taipei Biennial (2004), the Sharjah Biennial (2010). Among the cultural institutions which have dedicated exhibitions to his work are: the Centre d'art contemporain in Geneva (2003), the Contemporary Art Center in Kitakyushu (2004), the Louvre Museum in Paris (2005), the Culturgest in Lisbon (2007), the Carré d'art - Musée d'art contemporain in Nîmes (2009), Dia:Beacon in New York (2011) and Modern Art Oxford (2012). In 2011 he created two huge objects, *Body* and *Body Versus Twizy*, produced by Renault. His works are part of the most important public and private art collections, such as the Centre Pompidou or Dia:Beacon. He is currently participating in the *Slip of the Tongue* collective exhibition in Punta della Dogana, Venice, curated by Danh Vo.

Jean-Luc Moulène is represented by the Galerie Chantal Crousel (Paris), Galerie Pietro Sparta (Chagny), Thomas Dane Gallery (London) Galerie Greta Meert (Brussels), Miguel Abreu Gallery (New York), Galeria Désiré Saint Phalle (Mexico).

Free Admission

Exhibition opening time: from Tuesday to Sunday (closed on Mondays) 10:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m. (last entrance at 6:30 p.m.)

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