Jean-Luc Moulène
Opus + One

Dia:Beacon, Riggio Galleries
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December 17, 2011–December 31, 2012

The Dan Flavin Art Institute
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Jean-Luc Moulène Opus + One

Since the early 1980s, Jean-Luc Moulène has developed a body of work informed by a critical investigation of authorship as well as issues of autonomy, immanence, and anarchic politics. Although he is best known for his enigmatic, large-format photographs, over the course of the past decades, Moulène has maintained a parallel exploration of materials—manufactured and found, industrial and organic—that he has collectively titled Opus.

Traditionally, the Latin word *opus*, meaning "work," has been used to identify musical compositions, providing a system for ordering the complete output of an artist. Although in Moulène's case individual pieces are identified with precise titles and accompanied by the month, year, and city in which the object was fabricated, his use of the term *opus* alludes to the unique characteristics these works hold within his practice, as well as to the process of production and recurrence of these objects, which total just under one hundred to date. Although selections from the Opus series have been exhibited—first in 2007 in Lisbon, and again in 2009 in Paris and Nîmes—the full scope of their resonance and correspondence with Moulène's broader artistic enterprise has not been examined until now.

After obtaining a degree in art and literature at the Sorbonne University in Paris in 1976, Moulène worked on and off with performance, although photography and drawing, because of their portability and compactness, were his most practiced mediums throughout the 1990s. Yet another form of creative output took form in the early 1980s, when he worked as an "artistic consultant" for the military manufacturer Thomson-Sintra. Moulène would spend almost a decade designing product presentations and learning about organizational hierarchies and industrial secrets. There, surrounded by engineers and factory workers rather than by artists, he retooled a slightly altered definition of what it means to be an artist. Meanwhile, his authorial voice was pointedly influenced through his encounters with the poetry of René Daumal and the irreverent work of Michel Journiac.

Opus + One brings together thirty-nine objects from the Opus series (1995–present) and the photographic work *La Vigie* (2004–11), part of a broader series titled *Documents* (1985–present), which also includes *Objets de grève* (1999–2000) and *48 Palestinian Products* (2002–5), in which Moulène strategically depicted, respectively, inventories of personal collections of artifacts manufactured by workers on strike and assortments of consumer goods illegally imported from Palestine. The pairing of these two bodies of work reveals, among other things, Moulène's interest in the overlaps of the social and the political, and in systems and orders—geometry, mathematics, social sciences, and human behavior—as well as his inquiry into the plasticity of materials.

The main gallery at Dia:Beacon is dedicated to the Opus works. Beginning with the wall piece *Head Box* (2004) to the left, the installation starts with an acknowledgment of the viewer's body as part of a collective body. Emphasizing a horizontal scanning of the room on the part of the viewer, the works have been installed in a grid of tables whose interrelating axes undermine predictable classifications of figuration and abstraction. Moulène's objects—some handmade and some industrially manufactured—employ a diverse array of natural and manmade materials, including bronze, cement, fiberglass, plaster, tobacco, and wood. The physical experience of Moulène's Opus is highly informed by the materials and also by their scale. His decision to display each object on a table or a slab of concrete on the floor, rejecting the common pedestal or plinth, accentuates a relationship to prototypes or scale models. Indeed, the objects' tabletop dimensions in certain instances grant them the quality of being *maquettes*, or architectural models for potential monuments (*Tricolore*, 2009) or buildings (*Model for Sharing*, 2007).

A certain sense of abstraction may be found in Moulène's three-dimensional work, which is predicated on a set of speculative principles. Once constructed these works provide ambitious, unimaginable forms that playfully compromise representation. Like many of his predecessors, from Donald Judd to Michelangelo Pistoletto, Moulène has declined to use the term *sculpture*, choosing *object* instead. This semantic preference affirms Moulène's kinship with the common and the habitual in his quest for an alternative process of creation that relates most closely to the act of issuing a manifesto. Each of the Opus works offer a different formal response from the alternative that
preceded it. “People have spoken of the image-object,” Moulène says. “I speak of image and object, of photograph and product, both transformed. What interests me are the functions of transformation. What then is an ordinary object? What orders organize it, construct and transform it? In concrete terms, the question comes down to: can one produce any nondescript [‘quelconque’] object with exactitude?”

Moulène’s interest in transformation takes on new dimensions in the next gallery, which is dedicated to a single oversized Opus titled Body (2011). The colossal scale of the form—an exception to the majority of Moulène’s proposals—masks the modesty of its origins. According to sketches and three-dimensional renderings in the artist’s studio, Body was generated by Moulène’s recent focus on topological structures or what is known in mathematics as bifurcation theory (an interest that appears also in Fig. Bifur. [Bifurcated Figure] and Etude pour Body—maquette Ill, 2009). Moulène worked closely with a group of automotive engineers at the Renault manufacturing plant in Guyancourt, France, to generate ... together produce the overall form. “Making a work from cuts,” as the artist describes it, has been a recurring method and process whereby Moulène interrogates the notion of a unifying whole. In this instance, the lines that “cut” apart the whole are joined together without the need for an interior structure. The space inside Body is implicitly empty, and for Moulène it recalls Antonin Artaud’s “body without organs,” from his infamous 1947 radio play To Have Done with the Judgment of God. Moulène’s Body is a vehicle without a motor—a shell, an autonomous carcass freed from function, and therefore infused with inevitable subjectivity and receptivity. It is not incidental that there are no visible openings in Body that might allow a peek into its interior. On the contrary, there are only seamless cuts that merge so tightly into one another as to become illegible, creating a plasticity of surface that is at once familiar and yet uncanny. Moulène has frequently maintained that “negation is the founding act of creation,” arguing that “you need to be able to articulate a negative position with a position of affirmation in the outside world: if creating is negation, showing is an act of affirmation.” The manufactured surface of Body, which infuses the artwork with the technical semantics of automobiles and with the alienated labor of assembly-line workers, offers the “negation” that Moulène considers to be a condition of art.

The third gallery at Dia:Beacon contains La Vigie, a photographic work centered on a single subject: Paulownia tomentosa, an ornamental plant generally known as the “Princess Tree,” which grows in the cracks of sidewalks and buildings. Comprising 299 photographs, printed in color and in black-and-white, the work chronicles, over the span of seven years, the evolving appearance of one such plant in the Parisian neighborhood surrounding the Ministry for the Economy, Industry, and Employment. La Vigie, which roughly translates as “The Lookout Man,” borrows part of its title from the official name of France’s national security system known as the Vigipirate.

Parallel to Moulène’s documentation of the ever-shifting urban landscape of barricades, stanchions, and bollards is the reciprocal “gaze” of the plant: an outsider, camouflaged within the topography of the city, and growing despite the hostility of its environs. The images are organized in two rows: the top one focusing chronologically and continuously on the plant, and the bottom one focusing randomly and discontinuously on the plant’s surroundings. This strategy of opposition recalls the artist’s earlier work Disjonctions (Disjunctions) (1985–89), which employed an operation of “disjunctions that declare a rupture with continuity in favor of discontinuity and ultimately difference,” the idea being that knowledge in the street and knowledge in the studio are the same: formulations, prophesies, and proposals that generate new forms in real time and space. The systematic classification and documentation found in La Vigie resonate with the overriding principle governing the installation in the Opus gallery.

The last section of the exhibition, located at the Dan Flavin Art Institute in Bridgehampton, New York, is dedicated to a newly commissioned work titled Monochromes/Samples (2011), which is part of an ongoing series of single-color wall-objects painted in signature hues (black, blue, red, green) that examine the notion of industrial "standards." Using a palette knife to apply the "paint," in this instance Bic® liquid ink, and treating the physical qualities of the ink as malleable...
matter, Moulène renders glossy surfaces of furtive tactility. Moulène’s inked boards appear to pay homage to Flavin’s own study of the standardized products—fluorescent lamps—that would become his preferred medium in the creation of his light environments. The monochrome, nevertheless, is a recurring motif in Moulène’s work, dating back to the Disjonctions series, when he made Le grand monochrome rouge and Le monochrome jaune Kodak, and later on in the multipart Opus entitled Bleu Gaulois bleus (2000), included in the presentation at Dia:Beacon.

Anticipation plays a crucial role both in the creative process and in the viewing experience. Between the poles of an intuitive pursuit of the unknown and the precision of a premeditated approach lies a type of work that is ever-pending and in a state of constant calibration. In Moulène’s work, anticipation extends beyond the working process into what appears to be an uninterrupted state of perpetual becoming—a continuous event that postpones resolution on the part of the viewer. In all its forms—still and moving images, tabletop objects, and freestanding floor pieces—Moulène’s work is informed by a vigorous investigation into the realm of the possible, animated by, as the artist has stated, “the desire to attempt to describe the world” yet without authorizing a finite conclusion.⁵

—Yasmin Raymond, Curator, Dia Art Foundation

Jean-Luc Moulène was born in 1955. He studied Aesthetics and Sciences of Art at the Sorbonne University, Paris, and completed his degree in 1976. He held his first official solo exhibition Œuvres at Galerie J & J Donguy, Paris, in 1989. By the mid-2000s, Moulène had gained international recognition for his photographic works, including Objets de grève (1999–2000) and 48 Palestinian Products (2002–5). Over the past three decades, Moulène has held solo exhibitions at international venues such as Centre d’Art Contemporain Genève (2003); CCA, Center for Contemporary Art, Kitakyushu, Japan (2004); Musée du Louvre, Paris (2005); Culturgest, Lisbon (2007); and Carré d’art-Musée d’art contemporain, Nîmes, France (2009). In 1996 he participated in the DAAD: Berliner Künstlerprogramm. Among many group shows, he has participated in Documenta X, Kassel (1997); São Paulo Bienal (2002); Venice Biennale (2003); Taipei Biennial (2004); 1st International Image Biennial, Laos (2007); and most recently the Sharjah Biennial (2010).


notes
1. Jean-Luc Moulène, interview with Briony Fer, in Jean-Luc Moulène (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König; Nîmes: Carré d’art—Musée d’art contemporain de Nîmes, 2009), p. 139.
2. See To Have Done with the Judgment of God (Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu) in Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
selected bibliography


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**Opus Gallery**

1. **Head Box**, Kitakyushu, October 2004  
enamel paint, wood  
8¼ x 7¼ x 8¼ inches  
Collection Kadist Art Foundation, Paris

2. **Soleil noir (Black Sun)**, Paris, September 2008  
video transferred to DVD, silent  
color, 2:26 minutes looped  
Video edited by Ziad Antar  
Edition of six, exhibition copy  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crouse, Paris

3. **Cinq concentrés concentriques (Five Concentric Concentrated)**, Paris, April 2007  
plastic, rubber  
7¾ x 7¾ x 7¾ inches  
Edition one of two  
Private collection, Marseille

4. **Os non os (Bones No Bones)**, Paris, January 2009  
bone, epoxy paste  
5¼ x 5¼ x 5¼ inches  
Private collection, Lichtenstein

5. **Bitte à fruits (Fruit Bollard)**, Paris, September 1999  
cement, sand, stones  
28½ x 11½ x 11½ inches  
Collection Aaron and Barbara Levine, Washington, D.C.

concrete, rope, rubber  
9¾ x 9¾ x 9¾ inches  
Collection Guillaume Houzé, Paris

7. **Cristal Sex**, Paris, April 2006  
Cibachrome photographs, paper fasteners  
19¼ x 17¼ x 15¼ inches  
Courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London

8. **Mort et vif (Dead and Alive)**, Paris, May 2009  
epoxy resin, iron, Lycra, pigment  
19¼ x 27¼ x 29¾ inches  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

oil on cardboard  
18¾ x 24¼ x 27¾ inches  
Courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London
10 Drapé nuit (A Drape of Night), Paris, March 2009
epoxy resin, pigment, rubber
7% x 15% x 13% inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Pietro Spartà, Chagny

11 Cartilage, Paris, October 2009
epoxy resin, rubber
13 x 19% x 19% inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Greta Meert, Brussels

12 Arthur, Paris, August 2010
concrete, bone
8½ x 8½ x 10½ inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Pietro Spartà, Chagny

13 Mitronche (Nonosse) (Half-mug [Bobone]), Paris, September 2010
concrete, bone
7% x 7½ x 4½ inches
Private collection, France; Courtesy Galerie Pietro Spartà, Chagny

14 Boîte à jus (Juice Box), Paris, Summer 2005
excrement, plaster, urine, wax, wood
12% x 23% x 14½ inches
Collection Tim Walsh and Mike Healy

15 Modèle pour quelque chose généralisée (Model for Whatever Generalized),
Paris, July 2011
polyurethane, steel
30% x 30% x 30½ inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

16 Unispace, Paris, April 2010
epoxy resin, Lycra, pigment, steel
19½ x 35½ x 31½ inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

17 Chute d’escalier (Staircase Fall), Paris, October 24, 2008
graphite, rabbit-skin glue, wood
17½ x 47½ x 43½ inches
Courtesy the artist and carlier| gebauer, Berlin

18 Météo (Weather), Paris, May 2009
plastic hoses
14% x 25½ x 10½ inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Pietro Spartà, Chagny

19 Mondex, Paris, March 2006
plastic, wood
23½ x 23½ x 39½ inches
Courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London

20 Chrome, Paris, June 1999
steel
16½ x 16½ x 16½ inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

21 Knot 3.1 Varia 04, Paris, June 2010
elastomer, lost-wax bronze, steel, wood
59½ x 19½ x 19½ inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Greta Meert, Brussels

22 Boule fixe (sphère de Lisbonne) (Fixed Ball [Lisbon Sphere]), Paris, May 1, 2007
cobblestones, epoxy resin, polyurethane foam
34½ x 34½ x 34½ inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

23 Piège à calibres (Caliber Trap), Les Arques, Lot, August 2008
aluminum, steel
armed: 55½ x 59½ x 47½ inches
closed: 28 x 53½ x 47½ inches
Fabricated in collaboration with Dominique Colombo
Collection Centre national des arts plastiques, Department du Fonds national d’art contemporain Tour Atlantique, Paris

24 Baignoire (Bathtub), Paris, December 1995
graphite, plaster, wax
16½ x 61½ x 24½ inches
Private collection; Courtesy BFAS Blondeau Fine Art Services, Geneva

25 La tête noire (The Black Head), Paris, January 2007
concrete, graphite
15½ x 12 x 13 inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

26 n Trous outremere rose (n Ultramarine Pink Holes), Paris, May 2009
epoxy resin, Lycra, pigment
23½ x 41½ x 27½ inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Pietro Spartà, Chagny

27 Knot 5.1 Varia 02, Paris, March 2011
elastomer, lost-wax bronze, steel, wood
59½ x 19½ x 19½ inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Greta Meert, Brussels

28 Tendu (Tensed), Paris, February 2011
bone, PVC, steel cable, wood
26½ x 64½ x 17½ inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

29 Monument pour Sainte Anne (Monument for Saint Anne), from the series
Bordel d’organes (Organ Brothel), Paris, September 2008
cement, liquid makeup, paint, paper, plaster, wood
15½ x 14½ x 7½ inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
30 Fig. Bifur. (Bifurcated Figure), Paris, June 2009

cotton, epoxy resin, pigment 19¾ x 31⅜ x 31⅞ inches inches
Private collection, United Kingdom

31 Bleu Gaulois bleues (Gauloises Blue's Blue), Fleury Les Aubrais and Lille, June 2000

paper, tobacco 210 units: 2¾ x 1¾ x ¾ inches inches each
overall dimensions: 5¾ x 17 x 13 inches
Produced by Altadis, S.A. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

32 n Trous bleu ( n Blue Holes), Paris, February 2008

epoxy resin, paper, paint, pigment, rope
19¾ x 55½ x 31⅞ inches inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Greta Meert, Brussels

33 Tricolore (Tricolor), Paris, May 2009

epoxy resin, paint, rubber, wood 10¼ x 12½ x 7½ inches inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Pietro Spartà, Chagny

34 Model for Sharing, Paris, December 2007

oil, rabbit-skin glue, silver, wood 19¾ x 23⅛ x 43⅞ inches inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

35 Etude pour Body—maquette III (Study for Body—Model III), Paris, October 2009

foam, oil paint 7¾ x 23¼ x 11¼ inches inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

36 Kyste dentu (Cyst with Teeth), from the series Bordel d'organes (Organ Brothel), Les Arques, Lot, June 2008

oak, teeth 4⅛ x 4⅛ x 4⅛ inches inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

37 Vivants cerveaux d'ordures (Living Brains of Garbage), from the series Bordel d'organes (Organ Brothel), Les Arques, Lot, June 2008

concrete 2¾ x 3⅜ x 2⅞ inches inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

La Viglie

La Viglie (The Lookout Man), Paris, 2004–11

black-and-white and Cibachrome photographs; 299 prints
298 prints: 20½ x 15¼ inches; 1 print: 25 x 32 inches
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; Thomas Dane Gallery, London; and Galerie Greta Meert, Brussels

Body

Body, Guyancourt, October 2011

aluminum, basalt fiber, pigment, resin
8¼ x 20 x 11½ feet
Fabricated by D3 Groupe
Produced by Renault Automobiles
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

The Dan Flavin Art Institute

Monochromes/Samples, New York, November 2011

Bic ink, Claybord
4 units: 24 x 36 inches each
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Desiré Saint Phalle, Mexico City

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