Jean-Luc Mylayne
Reflection
September 10 – October 24, 2026
Public Reception: Thursday, September 10, 6–10pm
Sprüth Magers, Berlin

Press Release

Jean-Luc Mylayne has devoted his life to philosophical questions about our place on Earth – questions for which birds and their natural habitats serve as both subject and symbol, and through which he probes what it means to be human alongside nature. Made in close collaboration with his life partner, Mylène, each photograph is the result of months of patient work, a sustained investigation into temporality, perception and community. Made at the height of early debates about the Anthropocene, the images on view have only deepened in urgency since. Sprüth Magers is pleased to present *Reflection*, a solo exhibition of Mylayne's work, on the occasion of Berlin Art Week.

The majority of these images were conceived during a residency in Marfa, Texas, where Mylayne was drawn to the intense shades of blue found in the water and sky, and sometimes in the birds themselves. *N°498 - 499, Janvier Février Mars 2007* (2007) is exemplary in this regard. The diptych depicts a pair of mountain bluebirds, a female and a male, perched atop two dried stalks before an expansive, arid landscape, with a distant mountain on the horizon. In the left panel, both face outward into that vastness; in the right, their heads have shifted to the left, as though peering back at their previous selves. The work holds both moments at once, a meditation on time and presence in a landscape that predates any human claim to it. Installed to the left of the gallery's large windows – through which a tree and its foliage are visible – the large-format work also absorbs the living world outside, drawing the changing seasons into its frame.

Within its abrupt transitions from blurred to sharp detail, the image offers no single point of focus. There is no vanishing point to organise the landscape, no position from which the viewer commands the scene. The eye is compelled instead to move searchingly through sudden shifts in spatial registers – a formal refusal of the anthropocentric perspective that structures so much of how we think of, and thereby claim, the natural world. This quality is achieved using lenses of varying focal lengths, specifically built for the artist's purposes, lending the image a certain painterly character. It is reinforced by Mylayne's approach to scale: a bird is never portrayed larger than its actual size.

Mylayne's titles follow an invariable, archival logic – numbered chronologically and stating only the months and year of production, they make no reference to location or species. Time, they insist, is the fundamental dimension of his work, not the animals within it. As critic Lynne Cooke has observed, he "abjures a romantic identification with his appealing subjects" while also refraining from casting human and creature as opposites within their shared domain.[1]

The eastern phoebe in *N°561, Janvier Février 2008* (2008) sits on a branch in the foreground, its gaze directed outward, as if observing the couple across the room. The scene is carefully constructed; from

the positioning of the branch to the deliberate placement of some of the rocks visible along the image's lower edge, yet everything appears to simply exist. Where the nuthatch in *N° 577, Février Mars 2008* (2008) is portrayed in sharp profile against an entirely unfocused field, *N°311, Mars Avril 2005* (2005) asks viewers to parse the image slowly, searching for its subject as the eye adjusts to the image's terms. Together, the works illuminate the range of Mylayne's approach: at times the creature announces itself; at times it must be found.

N° 580, Février Mars 2008 (2008) closes the show. The entire image is blurred, but we can just make out a bird, its dark form filling the foreground. We cannot see where it is looking or what it is about to do, making this an image of pure imminence and a fitting conclusion to an exhibition whose title, Reflection, asks us to pause and consider. Across a career singularly committed to one subject, Mylayne has produced a body of work that functions as a sustained meditation on the Anthropocene: not through images of destruction or loss, but through the more unsettling proposition that the way we look is itself part of the problem. To see without a vanishing point, to share the frame rather than dominate it, to encounter another living creature at its actual scale: these are not merely aesthetic choices but philosophical ones that reflect on the unresolved future of the planet.

[1] Lynne Cooke, "Jean-Luc Mylayne: Between Contingency and Calculation," in *Jean-Luc Mylayne: Into the Hands of Time*, exh. cat. (Madrid: La Fábrica/Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Palacio de Velázquez, 18 November 2010–4 April 2011), 11–20, here 20.

Jean-Luc Mylayne (*1946, Marquise, France) lives and works in the world. Selected solo exhibitions include Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover (2020), Fondation Vincent Van Gogh, Arles, France, Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau, Switzerland, Long Museum, Shanghai (all 2018–19), The Art Institute of Chicago, The Arts Club of Chicago, Lurie Garden, Millennium Park, Chicago (all 2015), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2010), Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon (2009), Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York (2007–09), Lannan Foundation, Santa Fe, New Mexico (2004, 2005, 2010), Musée des Arts contemporains, Grand-Hornu (2004), Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1995), Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Saint-Étienne (1991). Significant group exhibitions include Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre, London (2020), S.M.A.K., Ghent (2017), 54th La Biennale di Venezia (2011), Neues Museum Weserburg, Bremen (1998), 10th Biennale of Sydney (1996), Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich (1995).

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Installation view
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Courtesy Sprüth Magers
Photo: Timo Ohler



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