

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: JEAN-LUC MOULÈNE
Clearly

Location: 88 Eldridge Street & 36 Orchard Street, New York, NY 10002

Dates: May 19 – July 9, 2022

Reception: Thursday, May 19th

Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to announce the opening, on Thursday, May 19th, of Jean-Luc Moulène's *Clearly*, his fourth one-person exhibition at the gallery. The show will be held at both our 88 Eldridge Street and 36 Orchard Street spaces.

"Movement at a standstill" is a phrase that speaks to our experience of an artwork's aesthetic capacity, coming to us from Adorno's late work. Jean-Luc Moulène, as a consummate technician, scientist, semiotician, and provocateur all wrapped together under the aegis of an artist, persistently puts this phenomenal aesthetic dictum to every possible material and perceptual test—and then some. Indeed, his decades-long, proliferate output of variant, nuanced and never-repeated analytic questions-qua-objects time and again invents the latest test for elucidating contemporary art, searching along the outer contours of aesthetic history's most troublesome complexities and responding with precisely engineered, incisive solutions. The works comprising *Clearly* are objects that on first impression produce a seductive enigma, an irrefusable riddle, and which then, upon further reflection, make apparent their own answers as though self-evident—explicitly, clearly.

The show begins from two related but diametrically remote basic forms that perfectly emit their distinct functions: the idol and the tool. First, the idol—a pristinely rendered, anatomically denuded doll occupies the initiatory position often held by a guardian totem from Moulène's ongoing *Bubu* series (other *Bubus* populate the exhibition as well). *Upgraded* is a different kind of idol, a deity of the commercial fetish. Here, its function is receptive; as the artist says, it is an "object of projection *par excellence*," a screen-silhouette capable of inhabiting the viewer's desires, conscious or otherwise, with unparalleled efficiency. It is a machine of deft cultural acrobatics, ready-made to substitute itself for every lapse of spiritual fidelity. And yet, a material problem of value presents itself: Moulène has chosen a French Petitcollin, a doll with over a half-century of upper-class pedigree and a blue-eyed model nonetheless, highly coveted and not easy to obtain. But in its modest plastic skin it seems to pale against the rarified materials that circulate in the art market. Without sacrificing any of its innate potential for projection, Moulène intervenes with a bronze prosthesis and opens a comical play conjoining 'high' and 'low', a dynamic of displaced opposites that runs throughout many of his series.

And second: the tool. Consider *Outils Flous* [*Fuzzy Tools*] and the possibility of a blurred stasis comes to the fore. The object's extremities each begin as though a common tool: the knife, the hammer, a ladle, and pliers. Taken together, they extend the four natural knowledges of the human hand: the edge, which cuts space by its mere existence; the brute force of the fist; the cupped hands bringing water to the mouth; and the pair, emphasizing the opposability of the thumb to the fingers. A whole anthropology of the tool is called forth at the same time that, joined at the center in a way that casts them as a new tool for reflection, their native functions are rendered simultaneously immobile. *Vaisseaux Verseurs* [*Pouring Vessels*] proposes a kind of complement. The blur becomes a pour and a new form is manifested by the subtly difficult operation of capturing the molded flows of differently shaped bottles. Not leaving behind the world of commercial signification too quickly, Moulène notes that "pouring out of a product can be called an act of pro-motion—setting in motion." Product and promotion compressed into one, what you see is what you get. Taken one step further, there is also the literal setting in motion, as the plaster begins to take hold immediately as it's poured, thus flipping the thesis and giving us "standstill on the go."

Proceeding toward greater complexity, a group of blown glass works are interspersed throughout the show, evolving in relation to a central object in the shape of a trefoil knot, titled *Quelque chose blanc* [*Something white*]. This chromatic, triple-ellipse infinity knot generates an encounter between two forms of color: luminous and material. The title invokes the luminous, by which we know that combining yellow, blue, and red light will result in white. With material colors—paint on a surface—however, mixing the three primary colors will only produce shades of brown. What Moulène attempts here is the transposition of the flat color spectrum, the two-dimensional surface reality of most color, into something closer to light, which accumulates and moves in volumes. What results is a synthesis of the objective and the elemental. Its double is a glass sphere of the same name in which the morphing primary colors are captured within an atmospheric orb.

An alternative title for the exhibition might have been *Nearly*, not because we should think of these works with any less precision, but because they all traffic in the objectification of distance. With Moulène's objects, we always seem to be immanently approaching some truth while its actualization serves only to make that truth more estranged—some crucial question is arriving at an answer that defers any final resolution. The perfect clarity of “motion at a standstill” seems always just out of focus, fuzzy or blurred, an exact approximation. It is like the way that an artwork exists in the world as an isolated entity while never fully severed from the presence of the artist, complete but not whole. In *Standard et Ornement* [*Standard and Ornament*], a standard plastic armchair is presented like an ideal place to sit. It is another tool, undeniably shaped for the weary body, but with the added ornament of a curious mound of bronze. In the relationship negotiated between the standard and the ornament we encounter two forms of absence: the absence of the participant, the artwork's viewer, evoked by the empty seat; and the absence of the artist, his hand's negative imprint preserved. The first absence is timeless, the seat is always available, an absent presence; the second absence relies on time, the ornament is a memory of pressure, a present absence. The artist has said he attempted to give the imprint a sense of lifting, imbuing it with a spectral motion not unlike imagining a spirit leaving the body. When both artist and viewer are stripped away, what we are left with simply is an artwork, that singular trace of our constellated thoughts and sensations: *nearly* you and me, *nearly* Jean-Luc Moulène.

Jean-Luc Moulène (b. 1955, Reims, France) studied Aesthetics and Sciences of Art at the Sorbonne University in Paris. His work was included in major international exhibitions such as the Venice Biennial (2019, 2003), the Taipei Biennial (2016 and 2004), the Sharjah Biennial (2010), the São Paulo Biennial (2002), and Documenta X (1997). Among the institutions that have dedicated solo exhibitions to his work are SculptureCenter, New York (2019), Fondation d'entreprise Hermès, Brussels (2018), Secession, Vienna (2017), Centre Pompidou, Paris (2016-2017), Villa Medici, Rome (2015), Kunstverein Hannover (2014), Dia:Beacon, New York (2012), Carré d'art-Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes (2009), Culturgest, Lisbon (2007), Musée du Louvre, Paris (2005), and Centre d'Art Contemporain de Genève (2003). His work is held in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art (New York), Tate (London), Centre Pompidou (Paris), Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), Dia Art Foundation (New York), Musée de l'art moderne de la ville de Paris, Kadist Art Foundation (Paris), Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain (Strasbourg), Centre National des Arts Plastiques (Paris) and Pinault Collection, among others. In 2021, Moulène's Técnico Libertário was held at Casa São Roque Centro de Arte, Porto. His work was also included in the Art Encounters Biennial: Our Other Us, Timișoara, Romania. He will have a solo exhibition, Jean-Luc Moulène and Teams at The Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania, opening in December 2022.

For more information or for visuals, please contact the gallery:

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