

Jean-Luc Moulène - Works



Jean-Luc Moulène, *3 Standards*, Le Blanc, December 26, 2004. Printed in 2008

Jean-Luc Moulène is a French artist whose career has spanned over a period of four decades. For this exhibition the artist is presenting works in different media, ranging from photographs, drawings with BIC inks, objects, video, as well as a large-scale structure especially produced for the show. These works are organized in four different sections and address multiple themes. If there was one thing the artist wishes you to do, it would be to approach the exhibition with an open mind and be receptive to the different possibilities that may present themselves to you. If there was one thing he would insist on, it would be that you be the author of the work.



What is immediately striking about this exhibition is the absence of texts on the walls. How do you interpret this absence?

P E R S O N N E

Shot in different cities and at different times, most of the images you see reflect on the body in everyday situations in the public and private spheres. They depict individuals performing their day-to-day roles, professional or otherwise. Some of these images emphasize on elements like costumes and apparels, or even attitudes, through which identity is constructed and roles are performed. Others reference the omnipresence of media in our lives or the ways in which we participate in the economy of mass production.

Spend some time looking at each image. Can you extract the themes of each photograph?



Compare *Masque* and *Phrères*. Why were they placed opposite to each other?



Moulène's unwillingness to impose a meaning onto every work is an idea that was advanced by **Roland Barthes** in his essay "Death of the Author," published in *Image-Music-Text* (1977). Barthes argues that "to give a text an author [...] is to impose a limit on that text," because the text must be free from a single, well-defined interpretation that is dictated by the original author; instead Barthes believes that the reader must have the agency to derive a meaning from a source.



? One can say that Moulène is a **photographer of the mundane**, recording or capturing scenes from everyday life in the public sphere.

Are most of these images staged? If not can you imagine the process leading up to the photograph being taken? What do you learn about Moulène's practice? Can you explain why the artist refers to his photographs as «documents»?

Debrayeur

It is a work that was specifically conceived for this exhibition. Its dimensions correspond to the specifications of the surface. In colour theory, one learns that red advances, whereas blue recedes. The L-beams are superimposed, creating a movement in this heavy, immovable structure that is made of steel.

Pick up a plan of the exhibition from the reception desk, and walk around the space following the numbers. What is the adjective that best describes your movement?

Does the form and colour of the **Debrayeur** reinforce your movement? How so?

? Debrayeur is the French word for "clutch pedal" in a manual transmission car. The clutch pedal is a necessary step before one can switch gears.

As you experiment with the space think about the reason why he gave the structure such a name?



There is more to the *Debrayeur* than its form. It is a transitional space that has the possibility for gatherings, negotiations, and change. It is also reminiscent of a playground for children. But the *Debrayeur* is also indicative of a tension of inside and outside, the *personae* in the images with the alienation they may experience, and a community of individuals constructing this space in new ways. In some ways *Personne* is like a theatre set with the potential to enact a societal change. The question is, will you participate?

As a viewer, experiment with the space. How do you and others interact with the *Debrayeur*? Are visitors walking inside the structure? If the answer is no, can you give the reasons why?

STANDARDS

With the onset of mass production and globalization material goods, ubiquitous products--«standards» so to speak--spread out across the corners of the earth.

Some works in this section look at the juncture between these standardized products, and their (lack of) connections to individuals. **Standard** is an image of the internationally recognized 'plastic chair,' or monobloc chair, undoubtedly the most popular seating apparatus around the world; yet it is a design without a designer. Here, the artist has decided to photograph the product so well known, empty.



How would you interpret the fact that the chair is empty, i.e. no one is sitting in it?

What is Moulène trying to say vis-à-vis standardized products and cultural/individual specificity?

Aura d'enfant is an object made of glass, another ubiquitous material, only here the labour and artisanal qualities are emphasized, since it is blown glass. It is a cast of a small chair and a representation of the «aura» of a child that would be seated.

Compare *Aura d'enfant* with *Standard*. How are they similar?

Why do you think the artist chose to represent the child's aura rather than a child?



4 Monochromes—Echantillons is a series of four paintings. Moulène uses a palette knife to apply BIC ink and fully cover large wooden panels, thus removing the ink from its recognized form of a thin stream out of a ballpoint pen, and into a larger, macroscopic format. He employs a Renaissance painting technique by applying several layers of oil, prime, glue, and in this case, BIC ink.

What were Moulène's strategies of re-appropriating this common product? Why does the artist refer to the monochromes as «echantillons» (samples)?

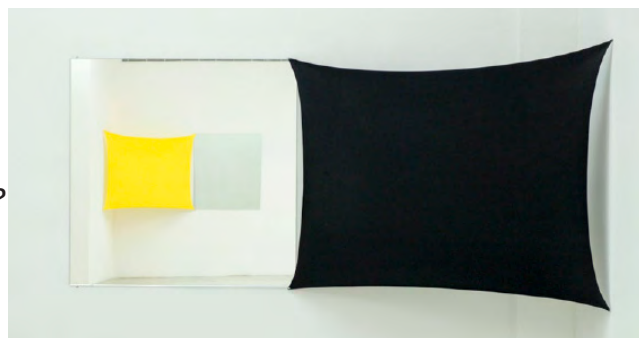
i BIC In 1950 France Marcel Bich unveiled the BIC Cristal, what people now refer to as the BIC pen. With its plastic hexagonal casing, to emulate the stability of a pencil and ballpoint tip, the BIC pen, is the standard pen worldwide. Mass produced and marketed as an "inexpensive, disposable, ballpoint pen," the Cristal model is an embodiment of today's consumer culture: globally accessible, mass-produced, cheap, and thus disposable.

i Alighiero Boetti (born in 1940) is an Italian conceptual artist, associated with the Arte Povera movement. He also experimented with drawing with BIC pens on wooden panels, often producing calligraphy. Moulène takes this a step further and uses BIC ink proper as a medium for painting.

Cosmo (two versions **Yellow** and **Black**) is a mirror with elastane cloth stretched on the wall from two angles of the mirror, as if the cloth was an extension of the mirror.

Reflect on the title. What does the title of this piece conjure in your mind? How do the mirror and the elastane material interact in this piece? How are they similar?

Observe how visitors interact with *Cosmo*. What do you notice? Can you explain your observations?



All things considered, the monobloc chair could be considered to be worthless, and yet, its ubiquity imbues it with a sense of significance in contemporary times. The same is true for BIC pens. We all have fond memories and associations with the plastic chair and the BIC pen. Moulène's works certainly acknowledge the tension where standards are at once worthless, yet meaningful clichés, and this is especially evident in a work like *Aura d'enfant* for its overt reference to childhood. This explains his reasoning when he says "il faut pratiquer le standard"—and that is in new ways, of course.

DOCUMENTS

If previous sections address the body—or its absence—in space, this section looks at the construction of the body *per se*. Go around the space, how many works address ideas related to the body?

Arthur is created from a human skull and concrete. Compare it with **Viviane**, a portrait of the artist's wife.

What is the major difference between the two works? In what way is the artist critical of biodesign?

This section is also related to the notion of trace. Locate the images that address this notion.

Do you think it is a pure coincidence that **Ongles** and **Digest Sound** face each another?

What are the ideas—common or paradoxical—that they share?



SIGNS



? What is the overarching theme in this section? What do you learn about the potentials of repetition? The artist once referred to this section as the “salle d’ouverture,” or the “room of openness.” Why might that be?

Alexandria Made

Rather than referring to the global economy and the marketing of standards, Moulène is interested in creating an interpretation from a local economy based in Alexandria. Asked about this object, the artist recounted his encounter with a local mode of thinking about wood. Since this resource is scarce in Alexandria, the inhabitants have devised ways to save as much wood as possible by not cutting planks of wood, even for the sake of symmetry, and recycling these same planks for different projects. In temporary structures the finished structure is asymmetrical and oftentimes meandering, while remaining functional. *Alexandria Made* is an exaggerated application of this local strategy, produced in the same city. The artist explores different possibilities of placing two planks of wood together.

In what ways does this work differ from *Standard*?

+D'ordre -d'ordre

In this video performance, the artist demonstrates different ways of doing the dishes. He fills up the sink with soap and water, and begins washing and drying the dishes in different gestures, arranging them in different patterns. In this performance, even a mundane act from everyday life becomes captivating to watch. How do you explain this?

BIC Drawings

In these drawings the artist has used the patches of BIC inks that stayed on his palette after painting the **4 Monochromes - Echantillons**. Using the same colours and shapes—curves and straight lines—the artist explores the infinite possibilities with limited media and forms.

Spend time looking at these drawings. Does any of them especially appeal to you? Can you think why?



S A I D A

During his visits to Saida in 2001, the artist photographed the city and the residents that he befriended. These images were exhibited on the walls of the Old City, and today they are found in different places and with different people in and around Saida. In other words, they have a life of their own, not in a gallery but in their original context. For instance, years later, **Abu Baker**, Moulène's portrait of the young man was displayed for the mourners during his funeral.