

# SPRÜTH MAGERS BERLIN LONDON

**Jean-Luc Mylayne**

**29/06/12 – 25/08/12**

Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are pleased to present a solo exhibition by Jean-Luc Mylayne for the first time in Berlin. In his exhibition, the French artist brings together selected photographic works created between 1991 and 2008.

Jean-Luc Mylayne has remained unremittingly interested in philosophical issues which examine the concept of existence and the experience of time. Proceeding from his activities as a philosopher and poet, he pursues investigations in his artistic work, through the medium of photography, in which he focuses on the motif of birds living in the wild as a metaphor for his philosophical research. In a time-consuming procedure, for the last more than thirty-five years, on journeys through the entire European continent as well as in America, the artist has observed songbirds such as sparrows, thrushes, and wrens. He shows them in secluded wilderness settings as well as in proximity to rural settlements and agricultural operations, which he considers to be sites of transition between civilization and nature. Besides areas in his native country of France, Mylayne has spent extended periods of time shooting his pictures in Santa Fe, New Mexico and in Fort Davis, Texas. His nomadic way of life is based on comprehensive research with respect to the habitats of these animals and, like a natural scientist, he comes back to the same places again and again. Some aspects of Mylayne's working mode are the exploration of the terrain, the establishment of the photographic setting, the period during which the birds get used to the new situation, and the alert waiting over a period of several months. As a patient observer, Mylayne builds up a trusting relationship with the animals and immerses himself without interventions in the world which he is investigating until finally, at a moment determined by him beforehand, he records it. In contrast to the photographer of wild animals, who searches for spectacular views, Mylayne's goal is to produce an autonomous image which represents and stores the instant when the picture is taken as a temporal continuum. The work titles likewise emphasize the importance of the passage of time: They consist of an ongoing enumeration and an indication of the months during which the pictures were created. Most of the time, Mylayne produces his photographs as single copies, and they become part of a longtime pictorial archive in which the individual works stand in relation to each other.

In his solo exhibition, Mylayne is presenting works which, through changing lines of vision onto nature, give rise to various levels for perceiving time. In a series of photographs, Mylayne focuses intensively on the reconstruction of observation as a temporal movement. In these pictures, he often does not present the birds at the center, but as tiny figures within the landscape. They are cut off by

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the frame, appear blurred, or have already flown away from the pictorial segment. Mylayne often sets the horizon of the landscape very low, so that the sky becomes the dominant background. He repeats a view leading from the ground to a high altitude, just like the flying motion of the birds. In the photographs *No. 268*, *No. 269*, and *No. 270*, all of which were created between February and March 2004, he shows three successively altered views of the same tree. In the photographs, there are respective modifications in the perspectives of a bird sitting on a branch, in the exposure to light, and in the color of the sky, until the tree in the foreground of *No. 270* is no longer in focus, and only diffuse shadows indicate the presence of the bird. The pictures acquire the quality of stills which, as individual images, evoke a filmic succession or an ongoing pictorial sequence. In a subtle fashion, as in *No. 284, Février - Mars 2004*, Mylayne ushers such traces and equipment of human beings into recognizability in the background as a fence, a wood saw, or a windwheel. The indication of human presence sets a dynamic oscillation between presence and absence in motion, which is repeated in the constantly changing positions of the animals. As in a puzzle picture, the viewer is required to reconstruct Mylayne's scenes and can recognize the birds with a groping, gliding gaze only after a certain time.

In addition to photographs which concentrate on the temporal progression of observation, Mylayne also creates contrasting works such as *No. 443, Avril -Mai 2007* in which the birds are at the center of the pictorial segment. He shows them in close-ups as single figures recorded in front of a landscape which has become an abstract background. The animals often turn their backs to the viewer and thereby extend his own view onto nature. In these photographs, Mylayne activates an introspective view of the world and requires a self-reflective standpoint from the observer. The abstraction of the forms of nature plays an important role here and is achieved through special lenses which he himself constructs and inserts into the large-format camera. With them, he can calibrate the impression of the depth of the landscape according to his needs, and can focus on selected points and elements of the pictorial background with varying degrees of sharpness. Just as a painter composes his picture, so does Mylayne utilize blurriness, colors, and relationships of light in his photographs so as to introduce into the technical medium of photography an aspect of personal handwriting and subjective decision. In an experimental manner, he disrupts reality with abstract forms and lines of light and shadow which he finds preexisting in nature, and he depicts them as visual processes which further influence the temporal expression of his *mise-en-scènes*.

An approach to abstraction and to the stylistic means of painting is likewise apparent in Mylayne's use of the diptych and triptych, the original format of the meditative image. The multiparty structure allows Mylayne to intensify the duration of contemplation and the variable perspectives within his pictures. In the oldest work of the exhibition, *No. 105, Septembre - Décembre 1991*, he transferred a photograph into an eight-part, mirrored montage. This work represents a fundamental philosophical idea of Mylayne: The perception of time renders human beings capable of drawing, something which distinguishes them from all other creatures on Earth. By means of drawing - as an abstraction of the experience of time - human beings can remember the past and anticipate the future. Thus the structure of *No. 105* adheres to a previously established concept in which the pictorial segments and the mirrorings of vegetation and birds are brought into precise correspondence with each other. Like a graphic structure, Mylayne's work stores time and unites past, present, and future

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simultaneously in the picture. Like a Rorschach test, the vegetation evolves into abstract ornamentation, and the delicate bird remains the sole point of orientation for the viewer's point of view. Mylayne's pictures are characterized by a contemplative impact which, in the complex mirroring of *No. 105*, gives rise to an internalized perception of nature. Through intimate, meditative dialogues with the living environment of birds, Mylayne constantly attains a visual realization of time in his pictures and constantly raises universal questions concerning existence and its transience.

Jean-Luc Mylayne was born in 1946 in France, and he lives in various places throughout the world. His work was featured in *ILLUminations* at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. In 2010, he presented an extensive retrospective at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid. In recent years, he has had solo exhibitions at the Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon (2009), at the Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York (2009), at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland (2008), at the Blaffer Gallery and at the Texas Gallery, Houston (2007). The Lannan Foundation in Santa Fe, New Mexico supported his residence at the Bernal ranch and presented an exhibition of his works in 2005. In 2004, Laurent Busin curated a presentation at the MAC, Grand Hornu, Belgium. In his native country of France, Mylayne's works were to be seen at large exhibitions such as at the Musée d'Art Moderne, Saint-Etienne (1991 and 1994), ARC/Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1995), Musée de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix, Les Sables d'Olonne (1993), Musée Bonnat, Bayonne, "Le Carré" (1992), at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (1990), and at the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Calais (1989).

Sprüth Magers Berlin will also be concurrently presenting the solo exhibition *A Long Day for the Form* by David Maljković.

For further information and press enquiries please contact Silvia Baltschun (sb@spruethmagers.com).

Opening reception: 28.06.2012, 6 - 9 pm  
Hours: Tue - Sat, 11 am - 6 pm