

Press release

Jean-Luc Mylayne | The Autumn of Paradise

extended until 23 August 2020

The Autumn of Paradise is the first institutional solo exhibition by the artist Jean-Luc Mylayne (*1946, France) in Germany. With a major tour in France, Switzerland, China, Germany, and the Netherlands, Mylayne's oeuvre is being presented to an international audience for the first time. Mylayne has concentrated on encounters with birds for over 40 years, which he captures with analog camera systems—a Hasselblad medium-format camera and a Sinar view camera—and with lenses cut and ground in various ways. For each photograph he usually invests several months in pursuit of the right composition. He also addresses temporal aspects of the creation and perception of photographic images. The exhibition presents some 40 large-scale photographs taken between 1979 and 2008.

Together with Mylène Mylayne, his wife and artistic partner, the photographer traveled along with the birds from rural southern France to the steppes of the southwestern United States. Jean-Luc Mylayne's photographs depict the transitions between pristine nature and rural landscape with an interest in light and place, often with an emphasis on the azure sky. In addition to dominant nature, houses, streets, fences, and walls in the distance or on the edge of the picture appear as traces of human civilization.

Mylayne's photographs approach the animals in very different ways: sometimes clearly as a portrait, while in other pictures the viewer's eye must search through the picture to find the feathered protagonist. The focus is not on the geographic context of the scenery or the specific characteristics of the birds, but on the temporal engagement with a partner on even footing. Mylayne always focuses on a bird as an individual, not as a member of a particular species. He creates his pictorial compositions out of the precise choice and combination of lighting, weather, season, as well as the cropping of the picture and the placement of the bird. Each "tableau" is precisely thought out.

What seems at first like an ornithological study proves to be a poetic photograph constructed with a painter's eye. It is the result of months—sometimes years—of preparation. In the time span specified in the title of the work, the artist explored the surroundings, observed the animals' flight paths and resting places, and—without feeding or taming them—slowly gained their trust. This trust is the basic prerequisite for a relationship between the photographer and the subject—the bird—and thus also for the creation of the image at a place where the bird might arrive, which the photographer had long foreseen with his camera. Each of the bird portraits thus tells a story based on attentiveness and trust. They testify to a moment of silence in which coexistence, trust, and curiosity coincide.

Mylayne's photographic prints are just as singular as the moment they were captured: his analog pictures are all unique works. With all of his premises—the use of analog photography, the production of unique pieces, the use of the same subject over several decades, and, above all, the long time it took to create each work—Jean-Luc Mylayne has created an artistic oeuvre that is as radical as it is poetic. Even the title of the exhibition *The Autumn of Paradise* is based on a poem by the artist.

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The exhibition was created in collaboration with the Fondation Vincent van Gogh in Arles, the Argauer Kunsthaus in Aarau, the Long Museum in Shanghai, and Huis Marseille, Museum for Photography in Amsterdam. Works by Jean-Luc Mylayne will also be on view in Amsterdam at the Van Gogh Museum and the Museum De Pont.

Jean-Luc Mylayne was born in France in 1946. His works have been featured in numerous solo exhibitions at venues including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Arts Club of Chicago, Lurie Garden, Millennium Park, Chicago (2015); the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (2010); the Musée d'Art contemporain de Lyon (2009); the Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York (2007–2009); the Lannan Foundation, Santa Fe, New Mexico (2004, 2005, 2010); the Musée des Arts contemporains, Grand-Hornu, Belgium (2004); and the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris/ARC, Paris (1995). Mylayne's works have also been featured in group exhibitions at the S.M.A.K., Gent (2017); the 54th Venice Biennale (2011); the Neues Museum Weserburg, Bremen (1998); the 10th Biennale of Sydney (1996); and the Kunsthaus Zürich (1995). The work is regularly exhibited at Barbara Gladstone Gallery New York, Brussels since 1997 and at Sprüth Magers Berlin, London, L.A. since 2002.

The exhibition is supported by NORD/LB Kulturstiftung and the friends of the Kestner Gesellschaft.

Curators: Julika Bosch and Christina Végh

Catalog

An extensive catalog will be published in cooperation with the Vincent van Gogh Foundation in Arles. In the Kestner Gesellschaft edition, Christina Végh and Julika Bosch offer an introduction, with texts by renowned authors such as Jacqueline Burckhardt, Bice Curiger, Christie Davis, and Maja Hoffmann as well as the poem "The Autumn of Paradise" by Jean-Luc Mylayne. In German and English, 128 pages, 100 illustrations. Edited by Bice Curiger, Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2020, 24 Euro.

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