

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Genocchio, Benjamin, "It's Not Just About Birds" NYTimes.com Global Edition, from: New York Times, July 31, 2009

ART REVIEW | LONG ISLAND

It's Not Just About Birds

By BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

Published: July 31, 2009

The Jean Luc Mylayne exhibition at the [Parrish Art Museum](#) represents something classically American, not just in its subject matter — the landscape of the Southwest — but in its embrace of an idea that is both unpretentious and extremely ambitious: that through hard work and perseverance, one can capture the truth of nature. What is especially interesting is that the artist is French.



Parrish Art Museum

CLOSE TO NATURE Jean Luc Mylayne used no telephoto lens or digital camera for his large, carefully composed photographs of West Texas birds.

Mr. Mylayne, who is 63 and lives in Riez, in southeastern France, might best be described as a wildlife photographer; he takes pictures of birds. His approach to image-making is, however, rooted less in documentation or science than in a personal, even philosophical exploration of nature. After spending months in the landscape familiarizing himself with the birds and the location, the artist sits and waits for the one perfect shot, which is why many of his titles refer to a date spanning two months.

There is a great deal more to his working process than I have room to describe here, but the point is that he does not take multiple shots and choose the best one, as most photographers do. Nor does he use a digital camera or a telephoto lens, preferring to allow the birds to become gradually accustomed to him and his equipment so that he can get close to them. The size of the bird in his pictures is a true indication of his distance from his subject.

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Genocchio, Benjamin, "It's Not Just About Birds" NYTimes.com Global Edition, from: New York Times, July 31, 2009



Parrish Art Museum

Jean Luc Mylayne let the birds grow accustomed to him and his equipment so he could photograph them up close.

There is a great deal more to his working process than I have room to describe here, but the point is that he does not take multiple shots and choose the best one, as most photographers do. Nor does he use a digital camera or a telephoto lens, preferring to allow the birds to become gradually accustomed to him and his equipment so that he can get close to them. The size of the bird in his pictures is a true indication of his distance from his subject.

About two dozen large-scale color photographs of bluebirds, hummingbirds, juncos and other species taken in West Texas from 2004 to 2007 make up the current exhibition, organized by Terrie Sultan, the museum's director. Besides being beautiful and somewhat mysterious, the photographs marvelously evoke a sense of place.

Look at "No. 305, March April 2005" (2005), in which a lone bird rests on the branch of a tree in the foreground. Is that all? No. Look closer and other details emerge, beginning with the lovely gradations of blue sky hanging over a dry, hilly landscape bisected by a dirt road. The wind is still. Two horses silhouetted against the arid hills soften the bleakness of the landscape.

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Genocchio, Benjamin, "It's Not Just About Birds" NYTimes.com Global Edition, from: New York Times, July 31, 2009

"No. 305, March April 2005" was taken in scrubby landscape surrounding the Davis Mountains. But how did a Frenchman end up in Texas? According to a 2007 book on the artist, it appealed to him and his wife, Mylène, who collaborates on the images, because of its rich bird life; the Eastern, Western and Mountain bluebirds, for instance, can all be seen here.

To date, the artist has taken more than 200 images of different kinds of birds in Texas. Most show a single bird, sometimes featured prominently in the image, as in "No. 284, February March, 2004" (2004), or seemingly escaping our notice, as in "No. 334, April May 2005" (2005). The bearing and conduct of the birds varies from one image to the next. Sometimes they are at rest; at other times they are moving about, feeding or flying.

The environments in which the birds are depicted also varies, although they tend to be places where humans' presence in the landscape is visible, as Lynne Cooke points out in her essay for the 2007 book on the artist. He seems to favor rural settings, especially on and around ranches, suggesting the possibility of a happy coexistence of humans and nature. At least, that is my take on the juxtaposition.

The pictures are not entirely devoid of manipulation. The use of specially designed lenses enables the artist to obtain multiple points of focus within a single image, something that is especially noticeable in a picture like "No. 290, February March 2005" (2005), in which some areas are in focus but a bird on a fence post in the foreground is not.

Overall these photographs are so sensitive — the lovely soft blue skies, the dynamic layering of foreground and background imagery and general warmth of tone — that it is hard not to be beguiled. I certainly was.

"Jean Luc Mylayne," Parrish Art Museum, 25 Job's Lane, Southampton, through Sept. 20. Information: (631) 283-2118 or parrishart.org.