

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Campbell, Erica, "Bird Watching with Jean-Luc Mylayne," *Time Lightbox*, June 4, 2011

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## Bird Watching with Jean-Luc Mylayne

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Jean-Luc Mylayne, Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York

N° 425, Janvier Fevrier Mars 2007, 2007

*Photographer Jean-Luc Mylayne has fixated for more than 30 years on a single subject: birds. Celebrated in this year's Venice Biennale, Mylayne's work retains an intense resonance. Matt Witcovsky, chair of the Department of Photography at the Art Institute of Chicago, writes for LightBox about Mylayne's work.*

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French artist Jean-Luc Mylayne is the inheritor to a certain tradition, particularly strong in his native France, of the *peintre-photographe*: the painter-photographer. Daguerre started as a painter of panoramic scenes; Gustave Le Gray studied painting before making his glorious photographs of the ocean and the Fontainebleau forest. Around 30 years ago, Jeff Wall made his name by reinterpreting the *tableaux* of Manet, Courbet, and others as monumental luminous photographs; Wall and Jean-Marc Bustamante were among the pioneers of a "near documentary" approach that traded in the hyperrealism of conventional camera images while flaunting a deliberateness of composition akin to realist paintings.

And what has Mylayne done with this inheritance? He has spent it wisely on a project that is utterly, fabulously original. He has ordered magnificently expensive lenses that stack together to create partial optical distortions, such that select areas of his brilliantly colored, lifesize prints appear blurred while all else is in sharpest focus. He has traveled far and wide to find his "actors," common species of birds with a particular dispensation or coloring (bluebirds, for example: did you know that the three bluebird species native to North America—Mountain, Western, and Eastern—cross each others' migratory paths in West Texas?). For months at a time he has lived in solitude with his inseparable associate, Mylène—taking her first name as his own to mark their lifelong bond—spending everything they have to make a single picture. His interlocutors, besides his wife, are the birds who come to pose in these works, after months of patient encouragement by Mylayne. They get no food or water from the artist, but rather an enduring pledge of trust.

After maybe a hundred daily visits, and with a modicum of good luck, the chosen creature will sit just so on a branch, or hop to a precise spot on the ground or a fence that Mylayne has prefigured for his work. Everything must be just so for the picture—sky, shadow, tilt of the beak, direction of the gaze. These hushed scenes are *tableaux* in the most familiar sense: elaborate, expansive, "a moment of eternity" (to quote Baudelaire). Nothing could be more old-fashioned in our day, and nothing more enduringly modern.

—Matt Witkovsky. Produced by Erica Campbell.

*Matt Witkovsky is the Curator and Chair of Department of Photography at The Art Institute of Chicago. He has co-authored Jean-Luc Mylayne's most recent book, Into the Hands of Time.*

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Jean-Luc Mylayne, Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York

Nº 406, Avril Mai 2006, 2006

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Jean-Luc Mylayne, Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York

N° 306, Mars Avril 2005, 2007

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Jean-Luc Mylayne, Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York

N° 284, Février Mars 2004, 2004

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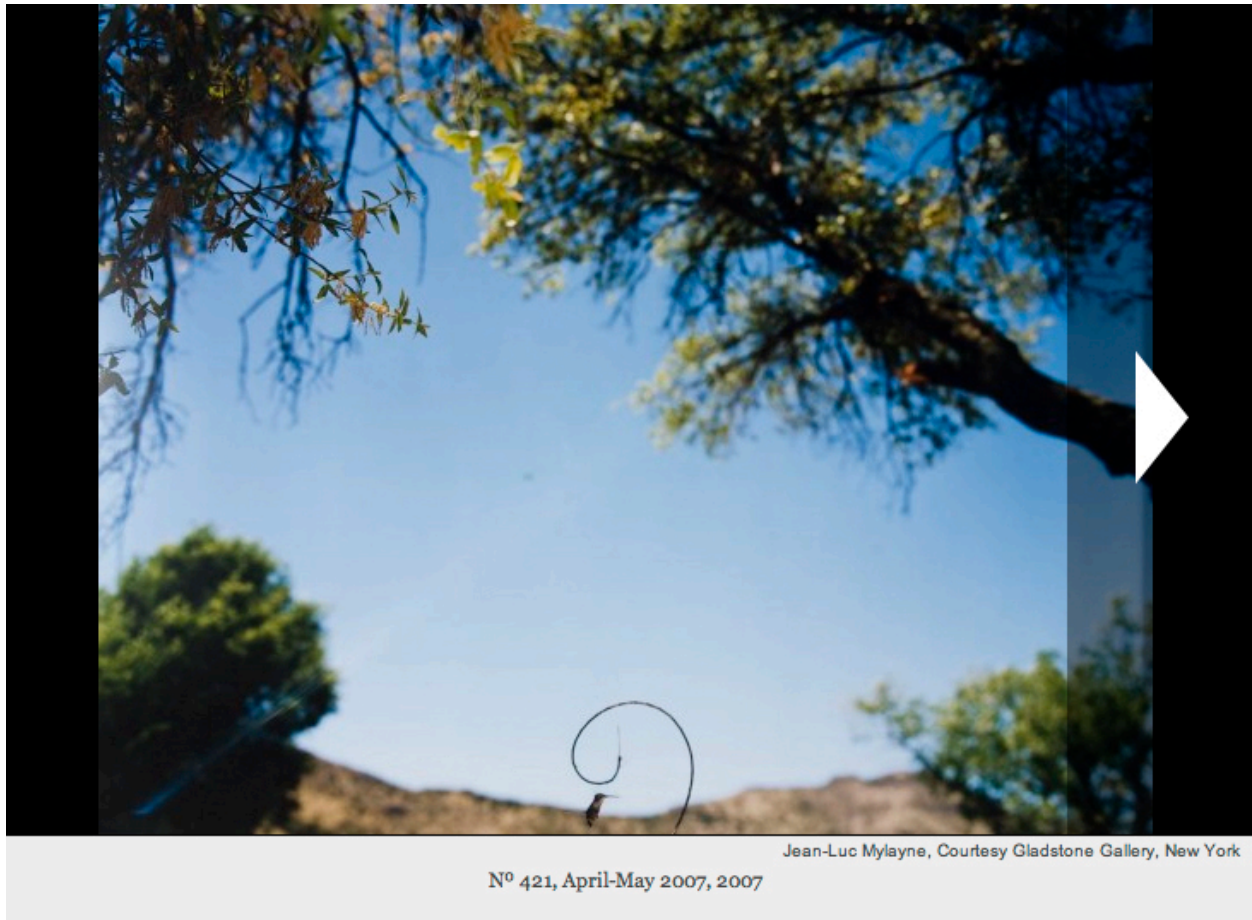


Jean-Luc Mylayne, Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York

N° 79, Juin Juillet 1987, 1987

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Jean-Luc Mylayne, Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York

Nº 355, Novembre Dicembre 2005, 2005

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N° 393, Avril Mai 2006, 2006

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N° 427, Janvier Fevrier Mars 2007, 2007

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Nº 342, Avril Mai 2005, 2005