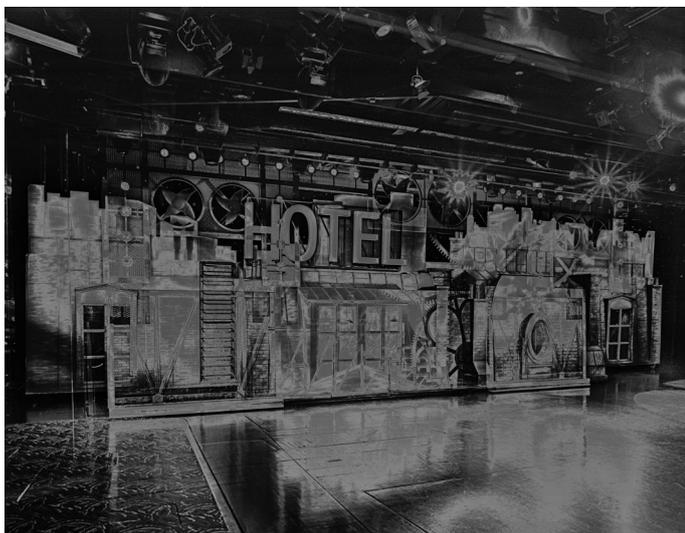


# MICHAEL HOPPEN | CONTEMPORARY

## PRESS RELEASE

Valérie Belin – ‘YOH0H0’  
31st May – 7th July 2012

Private view Wednesday 30th May 2012, 6.30pm – 8.30pm



Fancy Forest, 2011, silver gelatin print, 80x102cm  
© Valérie Belin, Courtesy Michael Hoppen Contemporary.



The Mirage, 2011, silver gelatin print, 80x102cm  
© Valérie Belin, Courtesy Michael Hoppen Contemporary.

Michael Hoppen Contemporary is pleased to present the latest series of works by the French artist **Valérie Belin**. The new exhibition will showcase twelve black and white silver gelatin prints, from her new series **YOH0H0**.

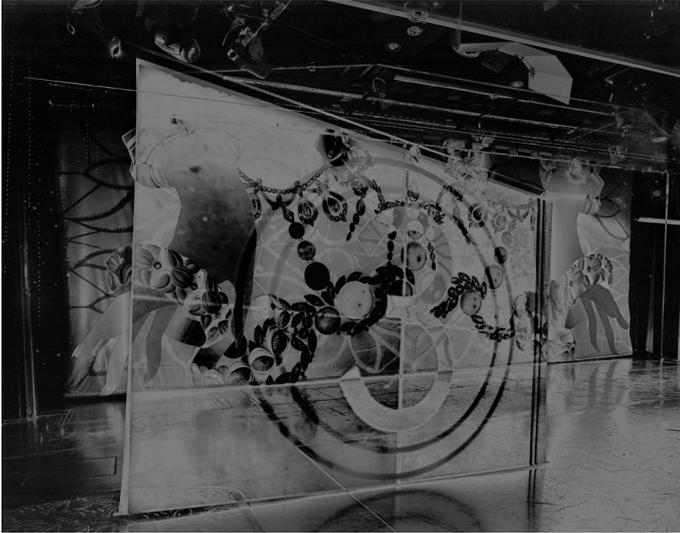
Taking as her subject the famous burlesque, cabaret clubs of Paris, Belin shot all the film at Le Moulin Rouge and Le Lido. She then carefully constructed each image by layering two negatives together, creating luminous studies of a familiar yet mysterious world, and all the time referencing the gaudy, historical stages of those places. Some years ago, Belin photographed two dancers from these clubs, and with this series she seeks to unearth more of that story. The personality and history of places and objects is a constant source of inspiration for her work. And these pieces are certainly more still life than landscape.

*“In my first series, and especially those dedicated to crystal vases and glasses (1993), I worked only on the light spectrum of the objects and remained very close to the primary process of photography. However, in my later work, whether colour or black-and-white, the new technologies have given me the option of using a freer, more pictorial, dreamlike treatment of the subject - for example, in the pictures of the magicians, of the dancer at the Lido and of the baskets of fruit (2007). Modern tools have led me to see photography beyond the analogue, as a means of creating a pure image captured directly by me at the very heart of my models. Much more than a figurative medium, photography offers me the possibility of probing the evanescent frontiers between reality and illusion, to reveal the profound supernaturalism of my work.”*

Her style is not detached, nor is it clinical or purely documentary. Instead, Belin uses her camera to revel in the exotic details of these stage sets to produce painterly views that are far removed from naturalism, forcing the viewer to question the ambiguous scenes that confront them.

Shot at oblique angles, otherworldly in their great swathes of black, the portraits of interiors are utterly devoid of any human presence and capture cabaret’s empty arena in all its disquieting and Baroque beauty. “Cabaret settings are false illusions of an external world; they are artificial images, enchanting fantasies,” Belin has noted.

Belin has never conceived of photography as a way of recording what we see, but rather works in a kind of symbiosis with the luminous essence of the photographic medium itself. It could be possible to describe Belin's new series as being more akin to drawing rather than photography: the solid and highly contrasting black and white images resemble thick marks on paper. Reflections and refractions seem to be drawn by light itself or the shapes and forms left in its absence. This effect, combined with solarisation, strips away any physical substance and make the image appear apparitional and the objects within it hollow.



Queen Ann's Revenge, 2011, silver gelatin print, 80x102cm  
© Valérie Belin, Courtesy Michael Hoppem Contemporary.



Caribbean Tales, 2011, silver gelatin print, 80x102cm  
© Valérie Belin, Courtesy Michael Hoppem Contemporary.

Belin's work harks back to Laszlo Mohly Nagy's 'photograms' and is even suggestive of Man Ray's brand of surrealism. However, the artist is equally eager to adopt digital technology when appropriate: her masterful control enables her to transcend the limitations of reality and formal resemblance. The precise technical choices generate a tension between the settings and their surfaces, magnifying and accentuating the sumptuous details, creating a chaos, which like the richness, only adds to the visual bouyancy of the prints. Once again, the "sur-réalité" of this French artist's photographs hover somewhere between illusion and image.

*"We could consider that I work on the idea of "cliché", but the difference with a pure "cliché" - empty and meaningless - is the fact that if I photograph a purported "cliché" then my work goes beyond the "cliché", and also beyond the subject itself. It becomes a pure vision, a photograph."*

Born in 1964 in Boulogne-Billancourt, France, Valérie Belin lives and works in Paris. Her work is in many private, public and corporate collections across the world – including MoMA NY; Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain in Paris; the UBS Art Collection; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the JP Morgan Chase Art Program, New York; and the Huis Marseille in Amsterdam.

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