

# VALÉRIE BELIN & I COULD NEVER BE A DANCER

**CONCEPTION AND DIRECTION: VALÉRIE BELIN & I COULD NEVER BE A DANCER**  
**LIGHTING DESIGN: CATY OLIVE**  
**MUSIC: YASMINE HAMDAN**  
**PRODUCTION : CENTRE POMPIDOU**  
**DELEGATE PRODUCER: HÉLÈNE ORJEBIN**  
**WITH: BEN JACK'SON, KRISS JACKSON, MJ LIL, MO JACKSON, SMELLY JACKSON, T-VAIN JACKSON**

For the first time, the photographic work of Valérie Belin is literally “coming to life” in a staging devised in collaboration with the duo I COULD NEVER BE A DANCER. Viewers are invited to discover the humanity of the photographer’s models, but also the ambiguity that is always the basis of her approach, and which places her models between living and inanimate, original and imitation.

The staging devised by the directors focuses on the surface of the confection of images, where the human gives way to artifice and reveals the power of the icons represented. By putting on stage, all at the same time, a host of Michael Jackson lookalikes, the performance highlights the dialectic already at work in the photographic series made by Belin in 2003. The performance is like a visual score, playing serially across these different portraits of the same and bringing out the contrast between the humanity of the performers and their emptiness as images. It also conveys the foundations of the photographer’s interest in popular culture and the way in which globalisation creates a sense of unreality.

A major figure in contemporary photography, Valérie Belin was born in Paris in 1964. In the 1990s, after training at the École Nationale des Beaux-arts de Bourges and studying the philosophy of art, she began producing photographs based on a strict protocol. Obsessed with the question of how to “appropriate the real,” she focused her lens on the surface of her living and inanimate subjects, the better to reveal their density and mystery, and worked in series, playing subtly on the repetitions and variations between the different images. This serial aspect draws on both the rigour of Minimalism and the profusion of Baroque, two of Belin’s great inspirations. Seeming at once flat and sculptural, two- and three-dimensional, the models in her images stand out clearly against their ground, seeming to “peel away” from the background while being inscribed in the paper like light itself. Twisting documentary form, these troubling works exude a “dark clarity” that reminds us of the paradoxical alchemy of the photographic medium, as both an art of light and an art of embalming. The *Michael Jackson* series sees Belin directly addressing the theme of the simulacrum. The people she photographs are trying to be doubles of the American pop singer, and yet the very nature of their model undermines this exercise in resemblance from the outset. A supremely protean figure, Michael Jackson is a copy. By representing these imitations of a copy, Belin takes us into the vertiginous nature of representation where true and false, the authentic and its reproduction, and the subject and its reflection in the mirror are all inextricably linked. In a genuine *mise-en-abyme* of the photographic process and its power of infinite duplication, this ensemble prompts us to reflect on the emptiness and absence at the heart of all images.

Valérie Belin’s work was the subject of a retrospective at La Maison Européenne de la

Photographie, Paris, in 2008, and, among many other spaces, has been shown at the Musée d'Orsay (2008), MoMA, New York (2010), Les Rencontres d'Arles (2012), and the Centre Pompidou ("elles@centrepompidou", 2009).

**[www.valeriebelin.com](http://www.valeriebelin.com)**

I COULD NEVER BE A DANCER is an unusual, polymorphous entity which creates pop culture images (advertisements, video clips, fashion shows, etc.) with brands like Chanel, Hermès and Uniqlo and artists such as MGMT, Willy Moon, Keren Ann, Mirwais, Two Door Cinema Club and the Pet Shop Boys, but which also overturns and subverts their codes in performance and installations.

Their pieces *Beaux-Arts* (Centre de Développement Chorégraphique de Toulouse/Printemps de Septembre - 2002, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris - 2008) and *Cubismes* (Villa Noailles - 2003, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand Duc Jean [Luxembourg], Nuit Blanche - 2005) staged an immediate yet distanced rendering of video imagery and dance, while *Babydisco* (Villa Noailles - 2004, Palais de Tokyo - 2008/2009), a discothèque for children from 3 to 7, played on nightclub clichés and their accessibility to children, by questioning parents' imaginings about a space of freedom from which they are barred.

*Is this it*, a performance for 5 models, shown in the framework of the exhibition *Dysfashional* (2009), showed the sacrificial dimension of the model's body through a series of poses inspired by Michael Jackson.