

PRESS RELEASE

V&A unveils new Photography Centre commission by internationally-acclaimed artist Valérie Belin

Valérie Belin / Reflection

V&A Photography Centre, The Sir Elton John and David Furnish Gallery

19 October 2019 – 31 August 2020

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Today, the V&A unveils a major new photography commission by internationally-acclaimed artist Valérie Belin. Known for her monumental photographs exploring artifice, identity and representation, Belin has found inspiration in the V&A's photographs collection for her new series *Reflection*. Ten of Belin's resulting 173 x 130cm pigment prints will be on display in the V&A Photography Centre from 19 October 2019.



Belin was drawn to the street photography of Eugène Atget (1857-1927), Walker Evans (1903-75) and Lee Friedlander (b. 1934), alongside commercial pictures of shopfront window displays by New York's Worsinger Window Service and works by graphic designer, Robert Brownjohn (1920-70). Through this new series, Belin examines the visual vernacular of the street while emphasising illusionary effects created by layered reflections. *Reflection* continues her ongoing enquiries into the tension between the real and the imaginary, interrogating stereotypes, while furthering her interest in the visual language of commerce and typography.

As Belin delved further into the V&A's collection of over 800,000 photographs, it was Brownjohn's images of 1960s London, taken in the wake of post war-austerity, that resonated most. Brownjohn used his images as source material for his design process, and for *Reflection*, Belin took a similar approach. Revisiting the thousands of photographs she'd made of streets and shopfronts in American cities over the last three decades, Belin used her signature superimposition process to build up layers of imagery. Drawing on additional visual references from graphic novels, magazines and film noir, the resulting dream-like photographs comprise rich, textural layers, fragmented

narratives and dynamic juxtapositions conjuring themes of reflection, depth, representation, artifice and identity – drivers behind Belin’s conceptual approach.

Valérie Belin said: “The V&A is a treasure trove filled with amazing art, graphic design, fashion and photography. I go there when I’m between series to stimulate my gaze and see where I go next. The motif of the window recurs throughout my work; as a place of representation, fantasy and glamour it speaks to the line between artifice and reality. To me, the V&A is a big window display, so the shop window motif felt fitting for this commission. We live in a world where superimposition is part of our basic human condition. We are constantly dealing with different types of information, fielding multiple things at once. These photographs are like a broken mirror - perhaps they reflect that it’s easy to lose ourselves in the atmosphere generated by mass consumption. When encountering my works, I want viewers to question what it is they are looking at, and maybe challenge their way of seeing the world too.”

Martin Barnes, Senior Curator of Photographs, V&A, said: “Valérie Belin has a unique vision. Through her experiments in digital post-production she injects her photographs with a sense of fantasy and eerie surrealism that challenges viewers to question their perspectives on the world. By applying her creative vision to the V&A’s photographs collection, Belin interrogates ideas of seeing and being seen, past and present, light and dark, and transparency and opacity. Her contemporary perspective reimagines pictures from the past, bringing new relevance and meaning to our collections. We’re thrilled to acquire a selection of these pictures from Belin’s evocative new series for our permanent collection, increasing our holdings of such an inventive and influential photographer.

Valérie Belin / Reflection opens in the V&A Photography Centre on Saturday 19 October 2019 alongside pictures by Eugène Atget, Walker Evans, Lee Friedlander, Robert Brownjohn and the Worsinger Window Service that inspired Belin. The display is accompanied by an illustrated publication with texts by Belin and former V&A Curator of Photographs, Catherine Troiano. *Valérie Belin / Reflection* is the second in the series of V&A Photography Centre commissions, and follows Thomas Ruff’s *Tripe/Ruff* series created to celebrate the opening of the V&A Photography Centre in October 2018.

As part of the V&A’s commitment to supporting and spotlighting the work of contemporary practitioners, the museum has acquired a selection of pictures from Belin’s *Reflection* series through the generous support of the V&A Photographs Acquisition Group. The artist has also donated works from her *Still Life* (2014) series, which depicts consumer goods in ornate compositions echoing classical *vanitas* and *memento mori* paintings, for which she won the illustrious Prix Pictet in 2015.

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

About the V&A photography collection

The V&A holds the National Collection of the Art of Photography, one of the largest and most important photographic collections in the world. It encompasses approximately 800,000 works by leading historic and contemporary photographers as well as an extensive library and camera-related equipment. The museum has collected photographs since its foundation in 1852 and continues to

collect today, with many acquisitions funded through the generous support of the V&A Photographs Acquisition Group. In October 2018, phase one of the V&A Photography Centre opened as a new public space to celebrate, appreciate and study photography. When not on display, photographs from the collection can be viewed in the Prints & Drawings Study Room.
vam.ac.uk/collections/photographs

About Valérie Belin

Internationally renowned and critically respected, Valérie Belin (born 1964) is one of the most celebrated French photographers working today. Her monumental works explore issues of surface, identity and artificiality. In her photographs Belin utilises the human form and still life arrangements as a powerful vessel to project or subvert meaning, with the questioning of reality a central thread that weaves throughout her work.
valeriebelin.com

Image credits

- Valérie Belin, *Downtown Dresses, Manhattan*, 2019, Pigment print, purchase funded by the V&A Photographs Acquisition Group © Valérie Belin
- Valérie Belin, *Lights on Lexington*, 2019, Pigment print, purchase funded by the V&A Photographs Acquisition Group © Valérie Belin
- Valérie Belin, *Uptown Vision*, 2019, Pigment print, purchase funded by the V&A Photographs Acquisition Group © Valérie Belin

For further PRESS information about the V&A's photography collection and the new Photography Centre, please contact Laura Mitchell in the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 3949 4509 or email l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

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