

COMMUNICATION AND
PARTNERSHIP DEPARTMENT

PRESS KIT



VALÉRIE BELIN

UNQUIET IMAGES

24 JUNE - 14 SEPTEMBER 2015

VALÉRIE BELIN

**Centre
Pompidou**

VALÉRIE BELIN

UNQUIET IMAGES

24 JUNE – 14 SEPTEMBER 2015

20 may 2015



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9 april 2015



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Valérie Belin
Isthar (série Super Models), 2015,
Pigment Print
Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia,
Paris/Bruxelles
© Adagg, Paris 2015

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Van Cleef & Arpels



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Nathalie Obadia Gallery



PRESS RELEASE

VALÉRIE BELIN

UNQUIET IMAGES

24 JUNE- 14 SEPTEMBER 2015

GALERIE D'ART GRAPHIQUE, LEVEL 4

Where does this sense of uncanny strangeness in Valérie Belin's photographs come from? From the living complexion of her shop window mannequins, or the fixed expressions of these women encountered in the street? From the organic aspect of these car skeletons, or the sculptural character of these flayed beef carcasses? Is it a double, or a wax figure?

From 24 June to 14 September, for the first time ever, the Centre Pompidou is devoting an exhibition to the work of Valérie Belin. It will feature around thirty works, organised around her most recent series, «Super Models». This new proposal revives the theme of the mannequin central to the artist's work, in relation to previous works from public and private collections.

Valérie Belin makes play with uncertainty through her treatment of light, contrasts, the proportions of the prints and other skilfully orchestrated parameters. When looking at these images, it is often hard to say whether what you see is alive or inanimate, real or virtual, natural or artificial: subtle details that interrupt daily continuity, harking back to Sigmund Freud's «uncanny strangeness». He defined this as «*raising doubt as to whether an apparently animate object really is alive, and conversely, whether a lifeless object might indeed be animate, with reference to the impression made on us by waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata.*» [Sigmund Freud, «Uncanny Strangeness», 1919]. This is precisely what gives Valérie Belin's works their singular power. The choice of the works brought together here (including «Michael Jackson», «Black Women I», «Lido», «Meats» and «Engines») illustrates this scientific aspect of her work.

2. LIST OF PRESENTED WORKS

Mannequins (Untitled), 2003

Gelatin silver print

105x 85 cm (with frame)

Collection Éric Salomon

Mannequins (Untitled), 2003

Gelatin silver print

105 x 85 cm (with frame)

Noirmontartproduction, Paris

Masks (Untitled), 2004

Gelatin silver print

160 x 130 cm (with frame)

Collection Emmanuelle et Jérôme de Noirmont, Paris

Meat (Untitled), 1998

Gelatin silver print

155 x 125 cm (with frame)

Noirmontartproduction, Paris

Mannequins (Untitled), 2003

Gelatin silver print

105 x 85 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Black Women II (Untitled), 2006

Pigment print

130 x 105 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Black Women II (Untitled), 2006

Pigment print

130 x 105 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Black Women II (Untitled), 2006

Pigment print

130 x 105 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Black Women II (Untitled), 2006

Pigment print

130 x 105 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Engines (Untitled), 2002

Gelatin silver print

125 x 155 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Masks (Untitled), 2004

Gelatin silver print

160 x 130 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Michael Jackson #1, 2003

Gelatin silver print

105 x 85 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Michael Jackson #2, 2003

Gelatin silver print

105 x 85 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Michael Jackson #5, 2003

Gelatin silver print

105 x 85 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Lido (Untitled), 2007

Gelatin silver print

162 x 130 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Lido (Untitled), 2007

Gelatin silver print

162 x 130 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Bob #1, 2012

Pigment print

215 x 164 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Bob #2, 2012

Pigment print

215 x 164 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Bob #3, 2012

Pigment print

215 x 164 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Bob #5, 2012

Pigment print

215 x 164 cm (with frame)

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Mannequins (Untitled), 2003
Gelatin silver print
105 x 85 cm (with frame)
Collection Ana & Bertrand de Montauzon

Crowned Heads #2, 2009
Screen-print on paper
196 x 155 cm (with frame)
Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Mannequins (Untitled), 2003
Gelatin silver print
105 x 85 cm (with frame)
Collection privée

Black Women I (Untitled), 2001
Gelatin silver print
166 x 130 cm (with frame)
Collection Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

Fruit baskets (Untitled), 2007
C-print face mounted
180 x 205 cm
Centre Pompidou, musée national d'art moderne

3. BIOGRAPY OF THE ARTIST

Valérie Belin was born in Boulogne-Billancourt in 1964; she lives and works in Paris. Since 2013, she has been represented by Galerie Nathalie Obadia (Paris & Brussels).

Valérie Belin trained as an artist at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Bourges between 1983 and 1988 before studying philosophy of art at the Université Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, where she gained a DEA (an MPhil equivalent) in 1989.

It was at art school that Belin turned to a practice of photography characterised by a concern for the intrinsic properties of the medium, which led her to a new understanding of its aesthetic potential; she compares her approach to that of certain American Minimalist artists such as Robert Morris or Robert Ryman. Her first works were photographs of light sources, which had the appearance of X-rays or pure impressions of light.

In 1994, Belin showed for the first time in Paris, a series of black and white photographs of crystal objects. Through the rest of the 1990s, she developed a style based on this use of series, bringing out the “truth” of the object by stripping it of anecdotal context and of the expressiveness of individuality.

In 1999, the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs showed Belin’s *Bodybuilders* series, which marks the first appearance of the human figure in the artist’s work. The bulging bodies with their metallic sheen evidence an ambivalence always at work in her photographs: people and things are always photographed “beyond themselves”, for their image’s power to turn into a kind of evocation of absence.

Between 2000 and 2003 Valérie Belin embarked on an exploration of questions of human existence and identity, making series of black and white portraits, monumental in scale, among them the *Transsexuals* series, which looks at the blurring of gender boundaries, and the series of *Black Women*, whose faces, rendered almost sculptural, raise the issue of cultural filtering and its associated projections. This work on the portrait culminates in the series *Mannequins*, which paradoxically seem more intensely expressive than do real people.

In 2006, major American and French museums began to acquire her work: the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Musée National d’Art Moderne, the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, and the Palais Galliera in the French capital. The year 2006 would also see the appearance of colour in the photographer’s work, together with a new ambiguity of real and virtual. As the photographic medium she uses develops technologically, it comes to intervene in the real, to shape what it presents. The colour portraits of 2006 are characterised by an almost technological beauty, suggesting the aesthetic of the avatar.

The year 2007 saw the organisation of a joint retrospective by three major photography museums: the Huis Marseille in Amsterdam, the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris and the Musée de l’Élysée in Lausanne, while a second monograph on the artist was published by German publisher Steidl. The artist now moved away from the notion of the photograph as index, her style developing towards a more “magical” form of realism. At the same time Belin came to set her object in its changing times, and the new work is hybrid in character, placing the subject between the organic and the sublime. In 2008, Belin showed at the Norton Museum of Art in Palm Beach, Florida, alongside Bill Viola and Hiroshi Sugimoto. In 2009, the Peabody Essex Museum organised her first one-person show in an American museum. In July 2009, she was appointed Chevalier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

The late 2000s saw Belin embark on new researches. The series of *Vintage Cars* in 2008 offers a counterpoint of sorts to the series of crashed cars a decade earlier. As opposed to the “realism” of the older series, the artist here brings about the “derealisation” or “virtualisation” of the subject by means of all the artifice of which the medium is now capable, so, as it were, raising representation to the nth degree. Since then, Belin’s work has continued to develop, always in phase with developments in the medium: where before there was only analogy, now there is calculation, intention, manipulation, information, the printing... So it is that the artist has set about exploring, in the purest spirit of the Baroque, and often with joy, wit and humour, all the means of artifice available to her, in the treatment of tone and colour, solarisation, superimposition, saturation and accumulation. The fruit of these investigations have been the series *Crowned Heads* (2009), *Black Eyed Susan* (2010-2013), *Stage Sets* (2011), *Brides* (2012), *Bob* (2012), *Interiors* (2002) and *Still Life* (2014).

In addition to photography, Valérie Belin is also active in other fields of art, among them video and screenwriting. In 2011, she showed a video work in the context of an installation in Rio de Janeiro in which she took each of the photographs of the *Black Eyed Susan* series as still images on which she superimposed a moving video image, accompanied by a repetitive electronic music. These perturbing motifs are superimposed on the original image like an advertising message, giving a kind of “electronic background noise” that makes it even more difficult to read. In 2013 she conceived a live performance for the Centre Pompidou in which she returned to the subjects of one of her earlier series (*Michael Jackson*, 2003), whom she “brought back to life” in staging five corresponding tableaux vivants, as if once could constantly pass from life to waxwork and back again.

In 2010, one of Belin’s works was acquired by Kunsthaus Zürich (*Black Eyed Susan*). In 2013, she showed at the Edwynn Houk gallery in New York, and was given a retrospective by the Multimedia Art Museum, Moscow. In 2014, she showed her latest work (*Still Life*) at the Nathalie Obadia gallery in Brussels, and all her more recent series at the Fondation DHC ART in Montréal.

THREE QUESTIONS TO VALÉRIE BELIN

Interviewed by Clément Chéroux, curator at the musée national d'art moderne and organiser of the exhibition

Published in *Code Couleur* No. 22, May - August 2015

Clément Chéroux: How and why did you choose photography for your work?

Valérie Belin: I started to do my first photographs around 1984. It was a period when what was called Conceptual Art was still very prevalent. American Minimalism was also an early influence. Why photography? Perhaps because of its capacity to engage directly with the real through experiment, and the possibility of immediately getting a visible result. In those days I was interested in "things" and the way they manifest themselves through this process of objectivation that is photography. It seemed to me that there was a kind of symbiosis between the purely luminous being of the objects I photographed and the nature of photography as a medium. Photography imposed itself as a way of being. The "camera" became a tool that I used, as the typewriter is used by writers. It became a system, and my way of working.

CC: There's a new series, shown for the first time at this exhibition, which returns to the theme of the mannequin. What's the fascination?

VB: I did a first series of photographs of mannequins in 2003, after photographing real models in 2001. I did these "portraits" with the same concern for realism, as if to achieve a kind of equivalence. In my photographs, wax mannequins seem as alive as the models: it's this paradoxical nature of representation that I try and capture. The mannequin is a perfect, ideal creature, but also ambiguous; it problematises representation. That's a fairly recurrent theme in my work: I photograph faces as masks. I'm fascinated by the idea of the animate and the inanimate. I've returned to the theme in my most recent series, but using other kinds of representational artifice, using a motif or background so as to achieve a greater effect of "humanity".

CC: How do you explain the sense of the uncanny your images often produce?

VB: This idea of the uncanny that operates in my work is very present in 19th-century German Romantic literature; it also became a Freudian concept. It's the irrational feeling prompted, for example, by "doubt as to whether an apparently living being really is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate". It's this paradox I put to work. Unease arises in that moment of doubt when you think you see someone who is not yourself in your reflection in a mirror or window. Photography can be this mirror in which you don't recognise yourself.



4. PUBLICATION

To mark this exhibition devoted to Valérie Belin, the Éditions du Centre Pompidou and Éditions Dilecta are jointly publishing a catalogue that will be a definitive work on one of the major artist-photographers of our day. Edited by Clément Chéroux, the catalogue features the thirteen series featured in the exhibition, exploring some of the artist's favoured themes: the surface of inanimate objects and animate beings, the stilling of time, and the question of identity.

Essays by Clément Chéroux and by art historian Dr Larisa Dryansky of the Centre André Chastel at the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, and also an interview with Valérie Belin by Roxana Marcoci, senior curator in the Department of Photography at MoMA (New York), offer insights indispensable to understanding the artists' work.

An Éditions du Centre Pompidou – Éditions Dilecta joint publication

Edited by Clément Chéroux

Publication date: 19 June 2015

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130 illustrations

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In French and English

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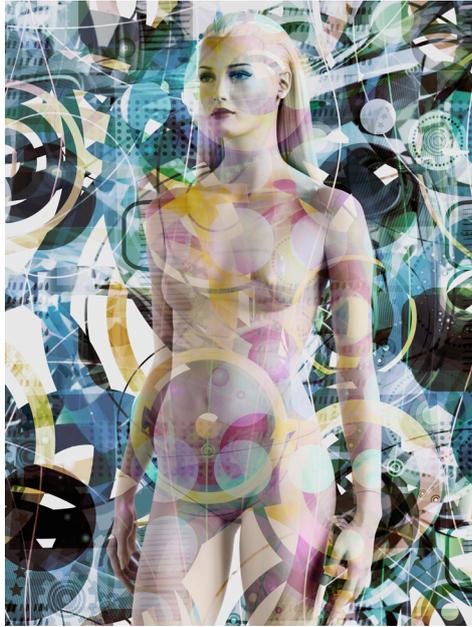
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Valérie Belin

Isthar (Super Models), 2015

Pigment print,

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

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Valérie Belin

Mannequins (Untitled), 2003

Gelatin silver print

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Valérie Belin

Black Women II (Untitled), 2006

Pigment print

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

© Adagp, Paris 2015



Valérie Belin

Crowned Heads #2, 2009

Screen-print on paper

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

© Adagp, Paris 2015



Valérie Belin

Fruit baskets (Untitled), 2007

C-print face mounted

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Valérie Belin

Lido (Untitled), 2007

Gelatin silver print

Courtesy Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

© Adagp, Paris 2015

6. PRATICAL INFORMATIONS

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Opening times

Exhibition open from 11:00 a.m
to 9.00 p.m every day except
Tuesdays and 1 may

Tarif

14 €

Concessions : 11 €

Valid on day of issue for the musée
national d'art moderne and all
exhibitions.

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LE NOUVEAU FESTIVAL

6^{ÈME} ÉDITION: AIR DE JEU

15 APRIL - 20 JULY 2015

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NOUVELLE PRÉSENTATION DES

COLLECTIONS MODERNES

(1905-1965)

FROM 27 MAY 2015

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1ST JULY - 21 SEPTEMBER 2015

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