

**Régis Durand, *Valérie Belin, Un, Deux...Quatre Éditions, Clermont-Ferrand, 2004.***

***Valérie Belin***

Strong works are those which perfectly accomplish the possibilities of the medium in which they are expressed and which, at the same time, resist the logic of this medium, putting it into a situation of paradox or imbalance.

With Valérie Belin, we are dealing with work that is strictly photographic without any manipulation or stage setting, with perfectly identifiable subjects treated according to a clear protocol (close-up frontal vision, sharp frame line, absence of decor or context, very contrasted black and white printing). Work, therefore, which catches its subject with an obvious and considerable precision and force that is both spectacular and spare and carried out with discipline, allowing for no projection or narrative drift.

And yet, this work is anything but neutral and “objective”, as it exudes a very great force, sometimes even a violence, which is not satisfied with describing appearances or surfaces but establishes a special relationship with the viewer. To what is this force, which does not call upon any expressive stratagem, due ? To the subjects themselves ? In some cases perhaps ( the body builders, the crashed cars, the transsexuals, the masks) but surely not in all of the classes of objects into which these subjects are grouped, (still life, portraits, adornments, ceremonies, for example).

Rather, we might say that Valérie Belin delivers an intense radiography of the photographed object, at the same time as she makes its appearance slip into something else. Not really an abstract character, as has sometimes been said, but more an ambivalence, a hesitation between the living and the inanimate. In any case, between antagonistic notions in a kind of generalized oxymoron (the idea of a “sombre clarity”, for example, often crops up in the photographer's intentions).

Among these opposing terms, we can notably retain : rigidity and austerity versus a certain baroque profusion; seduction versus repulsion; organic versus mechanical; presence versus absence; obviousness versus retreat. Basically, what emerges is the idea of a double movement: on the one hand, an obsessive search, a desire, as the artist writes, to “get to the heart of things” and, on the other hand, to make incertitude, latent mutations or metamorphoses at work actually appear while we are celebrating them.

Formally, this is translated by the feeling of something in excess, which is not resolved in “good form”. This may take the appearance of the gleam on a body builder's skin, of a “sombre clarity” on car motors, of a prison-like rigidity surrounding Moroccan brides, of a coexistence between the masculine and feminine features on the faces of transsexuals, of a hesitation between the living and the in-animate on models, dummies or masks.

In fact, as Michel Poivert, has noted, the subjects chosen by Valérie Belin constitute a veritable résumé of a certain type of “social material” that pierces the essential questions for us: sexual identity, the staging of oneself, the body and its transformations, amongst others. But these subjects only exist because the artist has found the technical mediation necessary to the advent of a sense (Adorno: “It is only there where technical legitimacy is accomplished that it is possible to judge whether a work of art has a sense or not”). Valérie Belin's art consists of implementing such “technical legitimacy”- a whole group of conceptual and photographic operations which produce the effects of sense - through a question that we might sum up in the following way: what is “the living” today? And how is it elaborated by incertitude, metamorphosis and the forces of destruction ?