

VALÉRIE BELIN

LES IMAGES INTRANQUILLES

24 JUNE - 14 SEPTEMBER 2015

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", which revives the theme of the mannequin central to the artist's approach. By creating links with previous works (now in public and private collections), and bringing out their points of convergence and tension, the exhibition reveals the powerful uncanniness that emanates from her output.

What causes the latent unease produced by Valérie Belin's photographs? Is it the way her shop window mannequins look like real people, or on the contrary, the disturbingly fixed expressions of her mixed-race women? Are her Michael Jacksons genuine doubles or wax figures? What makes her images shake? When looking at these pictures, it is often hard to say whether what you see is alive or inanimate, natural or artificial, reality or fantasy. The artist cultivates this state of uncertainty.

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Valérie Belin was born in 1964 in Boulogne-Billancourt (France). She studied art at the École Nationale des Beaux-arts in Bourges from 1983 to 1988, then art philosophy at the Université Panthéon-Sorbonne in Paris, where she obtained a Diploma of Advanced Studies in 1989. She lives and works in Paris.

THE UNCANNY

Analysed in 1906 by the psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch, and popularised in 1919 with the publication of Sigmund Freud's essay *Das Unheimliche* in the review *Imago*, the notion of the uncanny (*Das Unheimliche* in German) describes an emotional experience where a person is faced with something that seems familiar but has an incongruity and a distance in relation to the "well-known" thing it refers to. The thing resembles what it seems to be, but it is not what it is – or more precisely, the person looking at it cannot be absolutely sure that it is.

"Of all the psychic uncertainties that induce a feeling of the uncanny, one in particular is able to produce a relatively regular, powerful and general effect: namely, doubt whether a living being really is animate, and conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate – and more precisely, when this doubt only makes itself felt obscurely in one's consciousness." Ernst Jentsch, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny", 1906.

THE MANNEQUINS OF VALÉRIE BELIN

Since the early Nineties, the subjects chosen by Valérie Belin – whether mirrors, masks or series dedicated to carcasses and remains – have conveyed a general sense of anxiety. A recurrent theme in the artist's work, the mannequin (also the subject of her latest work, *Super Models*), continues to explore this climate of uncanniness, generating it to perfection. Because when they look at Belin's mannequins, viewers do not know if they are seeing a real person or a manufactured effigy. They are seized with uncertainty and "unease" before this appearance of familiarity. Are these beings in front of them reified humans, or humanised things? Are they animate or inanimate; natural or artificial? Belin's creations make play with this ambiguity. Her work, which often stages transient states of bodies or identities – such as her "Bodybuilders I", "Bodybuilders II" or "Transsexuals" series – highlights the uncertain, unsettling *quality of being* they evince.

THE "CAMERA SHAKE" EFFECT

While Valérie Belin's subjects have links with popular culture – from Michael Jackson to packets of crisps, carnival masks, beauty queens, magicians and Lido dancers – it is the way she treats them that makes them disturbing.

Up until 2006, the photographer processed her subjects in black and white, introducing a kind of distance from reality (in colour). In 2008, she began to use techniques invented by the avant-garde photographers of the Twenties and Thirties, which the advent of digital technology has reintroduced into contemporary practices.

Through solarisation, double exposure, wide angles and superimposition, Valérie Belin imposes on her images what she calls a "camera shake effect".

The idea is to render an interpretation "more complex, more disturbing, less immediate, less obvious, less straightforward." Using these techniques, the photographer makes her images feel out of step, imbuing them with a sense of un-quietness. The images abandon the reassuring immobility of the familiar, and are literally disturbed.

A CRITIQUE OF STEREOTYPES

While Valérie Belin's work certainly reflects a tradition of anxiety, one notably present in Romanticism and social fantasy, it is totally different. Where Romantic unease flourishes in the countryside, deep pathways and dark forests that harbour witches, vampires, golems and demons, the unease of social fantasy is more urban, haunting city nights and feeding off the anxieties of modern society. With Belin, the feeling of the uncanny is found in neither the imagination nor reality, but inhabits the world of images in the post-modern era. Its chief abode is the stereotype. For Valérie Belin, it means challenging the clichés of appearance and questioning the contemporary fantasies spawned by ultra-capitalism: wanting to be other than oneself, to be white when one is black, to look strong, to resemble an image in a magazine, and so on. Though her "camera shake effects", Valérie Belin falsifies the model, sets the cliché at a distance, and thus reveals what it contains of the fake, the grotesque – and the morbid, too.

EXHIBITION

CURATOR

Clément Chéroux
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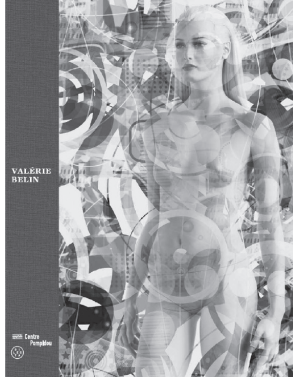
The exhibition is supported
by the Nathalie Obadia Gallery

CATALOGUE

Valérie Belin.

**Les images intranquilles /
Valérie Belin. The unquiet images.**

Edited by Clément Chéroux
Co-published by Centre Pompidou/
Dilecta
144 pages
Price: €32.00



INFORMATION

01 44 78 12 33
www.centrepompidou.fr

EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

24 June to 14 September 2015
Museum, Galerie d'Art Graphique,
level 4 (Entrance by level 5)
Every day except Tuesdays and 1 May,
from 11.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m.
Ticket offices close at 8.00 p.m.

PRICES

**Admission with
the "Museum & Exhibitions" ticket**
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to each area, the Museum,
all the exhibitions and the View of Paris
€14; reduced price €11
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Graphic design
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Printing
Graph 2000, 2015