

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

BRUSSELS

Valérie Belin

Still Life

22 APRIL — 21 JUNE 2014

Rue Charles Decoster 8 - Brussels 1050



Valérie Belin, *Still Life with Dish*, 2014. Pigment print on Enhanced Epson paper, 135 x 171 x 6 cm encadré.

The Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Brussels is delighted to be staging the second solo show by Valérie Belin in Belgium, three years after her previous solo show 'Hungry Eyes', at the FOMU in Antwerp, presenting a new set of photographs.

The exhibition revolves around works from the *Still Life* series, in which Valérie Belin shows us for the first time her own 'collection', lush and dreamlike. Her new 'still lifes' form a completely coherent dialogue with the *Intérieurs* series. The almost obsessive accumulation of objects is the grand finale linking the two series. The point is that both in her *Still Life* and in her *Intérieurs*, Valérie Belin takes us to the very edge of the border between disturbing reality and fantasy. This is a theme that has been close to her heart since as long ago as 2003, when her famous *Mannequins* series, in which she photographed waxwork dummies to which she had applied make-up, questioned us about the way that reality and fantasy are represented.

In her *Still Life* series, initiated in 2013, the artist creates some genuinely fully-fledged 'compositions' and uses them to take us on a journey into the intimacy of a sublimated expression of what we can see, perceive or feel.

Through her photographs, whether in black and white or in colour, Valérie Belin continues to explore the field of possible representations of objects: researching light, details and the textures of materials.

This formal trilogy, which benefits from the latest digital technologies, including pigment printing (inkjet) for the colour proofs, is served by the abundance and diversity of the objects represented. Thanks to their almost extreme superimposition, the table – the location for the staging – almost disappears. The furniture element is nevertheless of importance, since it marks out the boundaries of the tight framing of the compositions in the style of 17th-century Flemish and Dutch still lifes.

At that time, the trend was already towards accumulation, following the taste of the collectors of the time, who, like Valérie Belin, had fallen under the spell of unusual, exotic objects. Here, on the other hand, the French artist adds accessories from her everyday life, as if she wanted to give us some fragments of her intimacy. While her *Intérieurs* series draws a 'hollow portrait' of the 21st-century collectors, Valérie Belin's *Still Life* series seems to unveil for us her personal 'collection', which is astonishingly heterogeneous, and has a profusion which is both baroque and surreal. There are so many objects that some of them are in an unstable equilibrium and are threatening to fall off the table. Another procedure inspired by the Northern painters, who made use of this trick to signify the emptiness and fragility of the world they lived in.

Have times changed since then? Valérie Belin's still lifes subtly breathe us the answer. In 2008, the artist had already demonstrated her fondness for old painting, at the 'Correspondance: Belin / Manet' show, where her *Corbeilles* (baskets of fruit) were involved in a dialogue with Manet's still lifes. This invitation from the Musée d'Orsay gave her the opportunity to experiment with the saturation of colours and light that likewise characterises the *Still Life* series, exhibited at the Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Brussels.



Valérie Belin, *Still Life with Shoes*, 2014. Pigment print on Enhanced Epson paper, 188 x 237,5 x 6 cm encadré.

Her still lifes in black and white are processed in a specific way to give them their gleaming look. Valérie Belin tackles them like a 'science fiction landscape' whose 'lunar' appearance comes from the technique of solarisation which reverses the light source in flat black tones. The effect of this is to smooth out the natural relief of the details and textures, while the metallic treatment of the light paradoxically increases their physical presence. This illusion of reality, which we might term surreal, seeks to create 'symbiosis between the material characteristics of its object and the luminous essence of the physical medium itself'. In this way, the objects photographed become themselves 'light imprints', linking them to the photograms of László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) and the surrealist photographs of Man Ray (1890-1976), historical references claimed by Valérie Belin as a 'starting point' for her current work.

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BRUXELLES

In the show at the Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Brussels, the still lifes are put into perspective with the black and white photographs from the *Intérieurs* series, which uses the same solarisation process. Here, the use of a wide angle to achieve the shots accentuates the expressiveness of the locations through a 'first impression' effect (what strikes us when we enter into a room, and before we fragment the space by selections, as Valérie Belin explains). The artist also explains to us that the small size of the format, close to a miniature, achieves the effect of a snapshot, because we see everything in 'an instant'.



Valérie Belin, *Cornelius* (série *Intérieurs*), 2012. Gelatin Silver Print framed with non glare glass. 30,48 x 38,1 cm



Valérie Belin, *Le chapeau de paille*, 1625 (série *Intérieurs*), 2012. Gelatin Silver Print framed with non glare glass. 30,48 x 38,1 cm

Born in 1964 in Boulogne-Billancourt, Valérie Belin lives and works in Paris.

Regarded as one of the best photographic artists of her generation, Valérie Belin came to prominence thanks to her emblematic *Mannequins* series in 2003.

She has been involved in major monographic exhibitions of international standing, such as those at the *Maison Européenne de la Photographie (MEP)* in Paris and the *Musée de L'Élysées* in Lausanne in 2008, as well as the one at the *Huis Marseille Museum* in 2007, and the *Multimedia Art Museum* in Moscow in 2013.

In 2008, the *Musée d'Orsay* in Paris invited Valérie Belin as part of the exhibition 'Correspondance: Belin / Manet', where her *Corbeilles* (baskets of fruit) were involved in a dialogue with Manet's still lifes.

In September 2014, the prestigious *DHC/Art Foundation* and the *PHI Center*, both in Montreal, will be staging a retrospective of her work.

Valérie Belin will likewise be part of the group show at the *Huis Marseille Museum* in Amsterdam in October 2014.

Her photograph from the *Mannequins* series, acquired in 2003 by the *MOMA*, is currently being presented in the show 'A World of Its Own: Photographic Practices in the Studio', curated by Quentin Bajac, at *MOMA* in NYC.

Her works are held by many institutional collections, including *MOMA* in New York, the *Musée National d'Art moderne*, *Centre Georges-Pompidou* in Paris, the *Huis Marseille Museum* in Amsterdam, the *Musée de l'Élysées* in Lausanne, *MUDAM* in Luxembourg, *LACMA* in Los Angeles, the *Museum of Modern Art* in San Francisco, and the *Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain* in Paris, the *Capital Group Companies Inc.* in Los Angeles, the *Société Générale d'art contemporain* collection in Paris, and the *UBS Art Collection* in Luxembourg.

Éditions Steidl published the first part of the Valérie Belin monograph in 2007. Volume 2 will be published in January 2015.

Valérie Belin has been represented by the *Galerie Nathalie Obadia Paris/Brussels* since September 2013.

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