

VALÉRIE BELIN

Exhibition September 12 – October 28, 2002

Vernissage Thursday, September 12th

For her third exhibition at the Galerie Xippas, Valérie Belin presents three new series of portraits - transsexuels, black women and models. This work is the continuation of her previous series, notably the portraits of bodybuilders. Constant in her œuvre is the theme of metamorphosis, evoked by the painterly and sculptural aspects in her black and white photos, such as the musculare bodies of the *Bodybuilders*, 1999, the light in the details of baroque dresses worn by moroccan brides in the *Mariées Marocaine*, 2000, and the two dimensional flatness of car crashes in *Voitures*, 1998. The idea to approach the genre of portraiture of transsexuels, those that change their sex, continues her investigation of transformation. This also led her to explore in the series of black women and models the question of identity and beauty. One doesn't find any spectacular effect in the portraits; on the contrary, there's a feeling of liberation and abstraction that contrasts strangely with the subject. The three series consist each of eight photos in format of 60 x 50 inches.



Transsexuels

The transsexuels were photographed at the beginning of their transformation, before the surgical operation, at a precise moment when masculine and feminine qualities crystallize on the face in a morphing effect, illustrating a virtual notion of sexual identity. Each of these portraits is a collage of feminine features (the cared-for eyes, mouth and hair) and of male elements such as the strong facial bone structure.

Black women

The plasticity of the portraits of black women, at once extreme and natural, moves the subject into a field of abstraction and culture. It's as if the photograph constitutes the dark and brilliant skin and at the same moment, the high contrast use of lighting gives this flat and complete symmetrical image a fantastical effect. They are photographic sculptures, questioning the stereotype of African beauty. They participate in the existential ambiguity of transsexuels through the notion of masks.

Models

The series of models is the third part and complete the work by investigating the artificiality and uncertainty posed by the transsexuels. The girls are young and aspiring models with washed-out-faces, a *prêt-à-porter* ("ready-to-wear clothing") image of natural beauty.

A catalogue will be published on the occasion of the exhibition. For any questions or further information, please contact Jane Kim at tel: + 33 1 40 27 05 55 or email: jkim@xippas.com or visit www.xippas.com. Projects this year include solo shows at Galerie Patrick de Brock, Knokke, Belgium (April) and Galerie Ulrich Fiedler, Cologne (May) and her first US debut at Brent Sikkema Gallery, New York (Oct 12 - Nov 16). Her work will be seen in the group exhibition "vis-à-vis- Portraiture in contemporary photography", Landesgalerie am Oberösterreichischen Landesmuseum, Linz & Galerie Fotohof Salzburg, Austria (Sept 17 - Nov 2).