

PHOTO LONDON

Valérie Belin: Silent Stories

Photo London Master of Photography 2024

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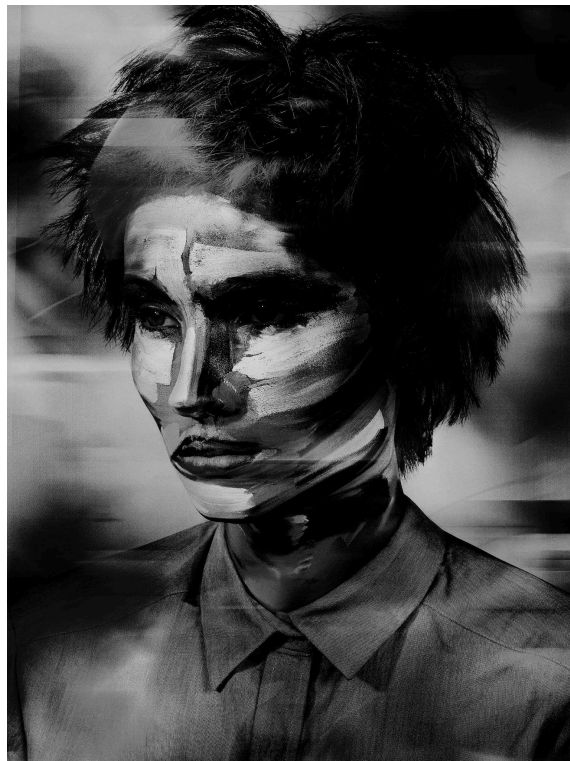
Valérie Belin, *Galatée*, 2023. Copyright Valérie Belin.
Courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia Paris _ Bruxelles

Photo London's Master of Photography for 2024 is one of France's most popular and acclaimed photographers, Valérie Belin. With the exhibition 'Silent Stories', Belin presents three decades of work, reflecting an iconography that is deliberately silent, through images that — in the words of their creator — *"are neither narrative nor documentary and tell no particular stories, but are designed to be seen as the mirror of fictions without words."*

Showcasing a selection of large-format photographs that span from the late 1990s to today, and featuring her latest series, *Lady Stardust* (2023) presented for the first time in London, 'Silent Stories' sees Belin's progression from black and white to colour, and from silver to digital, appropriating the technological changes in photography in her search for a new ontology.

Belin's subjects explore our innate desire to tell stories and the increasingly blurred lines between illusion and reality: from the earliest series *Venice* (1997) and *Cars* (1998) in which humans are the absent protagonists; to bodies of works that explore the complex interplay between man and man-made — such as the *Body Builders* (1999), *Michael Jackson* (2003), *Mannequins* (2003) and *Mask* (2004) series; through to the layered pigment prints made over the past decade — *Black Eyed Susan* (2010), *All Star* (2016) and *Modern Royals* (2020), for instance — in which post-production plays an essential role in the definition of women.

Proceeding from absent protagonists to lookalikes, and from stereotypes to constructed icons, her work addresses the theme of the simulacrum that is so central to contemporary existence. Belin explains: *"We are in a superimposed society saturated with too much information.... You don't know what's real or not. You have this dimension of metamorphosis of the living in which every person wants to become the equivalent of a stereotype."*



Valérie Belin, *Lady Stripes*, 2017. Copyright Valérie Belin
Courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia Paris_Brussels.

Belin's approach to photography is informed by her art school education and brings together the influences of Baroque and Pop Art with Minimalism, mining visual culture while making the viewer hyper aware of their own response. Her works use the medium of photography itself as a dimension that can be worked on, superimposing and manipulating images to create richly layered images from which the viewer can elaborate their own stories. The aim is ultimately to challenge the viewer's perceptions and perspectives: for us to question our role as bystanders and instead to project our own identities onto images in which true and false, and the authentic and its reproduction, are intricately intertwined.

On receiving the Master of Photography accolade, Belin said:

I am deeply honoured to have been chosen to showcase my work as the 2024 Master of Photography. For me, this award represents the recognition of 30 years' work and will be an opportunity to show the Photo London audience the vitality of contemporary photography by women."

Fair Founders Michael Benson and Fariba Farshad comment:

"The work of the acclaimed French photographer Valérie Belin is intriguingly positioned at the intersection of art and photography. Over the course of her career her image making has attracted significant international recognition. She is represented in many important private and public collections around the world. In 2015 she became the first woman to win the Prix Pictet. Her winning series 'Still Life' typifies her approach featuring arrangements of cheap consumer items in elaborate compositions that echo classical vanitas and memento mori paintings. At this point in our own development Valérie's brilliant playful mix of art and photography makes her the ideal Master of Photography."

For further information about Photo London 2024 and to book tickets visit:

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PRESS INFORMATION

For information on the exhibitors at Photo London 2024 and to access press images, please visit the [media kit](#).

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Valérie Belin (b. Boulogne-Billancourt, 1964; lives and works in Paris) graduated from the École Nationale des Beaux-arts in 1988, where she focused on American art of the '60s and '70s. She furthered her studies by pursuing philosophy of art at the Université Panthéon-Sorbonne in Paris. Her work has gained global recognition, with solo exhibitions held at prestigious institutions such as the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA; and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; amongst others. **Her work is subject to a major retrospective at the Musée des Beaux-Art de Bordeaux from 24 April – 28 October 2024.**

Belin has been recognized for her contributions to the field of photography with numerous awards, including the Paris Photo prize in 1997, the CCF (HSBC) Foundation for Photography Prize in 2000, and the Prix Pictet in 2015. In 2022, she was appointed Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres, **and in 2024 the Académie des beaux-arts elected Valérie Belin to chair VI of the photography section**, along with Yann Arthus-Bertrand, Sebastião Salgado, Jean Gaumy, Dominique Issermann and Françoise Huguier.

Her work investigates the tension between the superficial appearance of things and their true nature, between reality and artificiality. Often using the human body as a vessel for abstraction and projected meaning, she has photographed live models and mannequins, masks and card sharks, dancers and bodybuilders, questioning the construction and fetishization of mainstream beauty ideals and enduring gender constructs.

The **Photo London Master of Photography** is presented every year to a living artist who has made an exceptional contribution to photography. The previous recipients are: Sebastiao Salgado (2015), Don McCullin (2016), Taryn Simon (2017) Edward Burtynsky (2018), Stephen Shore (2019), Shirin Neshat (2021), Nick Knight (2022) and Martin Parr (2023).

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