

TIME

Double Vision: Valérie Belin's Black Eyed Susan

By Kira Pollack

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French photographer Valerie Belin has photographed body builders, potato-chip bags and car wrecks. In her latest series *Black Eyed Susan*, she turns her lens on a dreamy montage of women who embody the ideal post-war female, interlaid with sharp images of flowers. The work, now out in a new book out by JRP Ringier, show how Belin's background as a painter, and technical skills as a photographer, continue to create surprising images which toy with the idea of illusion and image.



To get the interlay of female and flower right, Belin first cast models who could pull off a particular look—a plastic beauty coupled with Grace Kelly glamour. She then styled them with make-up, hairstyles and jewelry inspired by the 1950s aesthetic. The sculptural quality of the hairdos and the roundness of the pearls, would, Belin envisioned, create the a perfect relationship with the baroque shapes of flowers.

Once she had the photos of the 11 models, Belin set to work selecting, arranging and shooting formal portraits of bouquets. (For weeks her Parisian studio, filled with pails of blooms, looked like the backroom of a florist's shop). The final prints were made by interweaving both images—bouquet and model—and simplifying the color palettes, choosing just two or three shades. The resulting life-size photos, have Belin's take on artifice and affectation.

For her next project, the artist, building on some of the techniques learned while working on the "Black Eyed Susan" inlays, tackles a project using the backdrop of cities around the world. Belin's work can be seen on her website valeriebelin.com and is exhibited in multiple museum collections, including Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée d'art Moderne, The Museum of Modern Art, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and The Los Angeles County Museum of Art.