



Portrait Mode



Photographer Bettina von Zwehl's striking silhouettes and powerful profiles illuminate the many forms of beauty

Fashion JASON HUGHES

Nan wears top, £1,490, by **Valentino**



Letizia wears top, £865; skirt, £1,805, both by **Sportmax**



Jasroop wears jacket, £3,000, by **Anest Collective**. Shoes, price on request, by **Acne Studios**. Tights, £35, by **Wolford**

Art



Nan wears coat, £6,900; bodysuit, £1,290, both by **Fendi**



Adeline wears dress, £8,850, by Alaïa

Art





Jasroop wears dress, price on request, by **JW Anderson**



Nan wears jacket, £1,995; boots, £1,565, both by **Bottega Veneta**



Adeline wears jacket, £2,955, by Salvatore Ferragamo

Art



Adeline wears jacket, £7,410, by Chanel



Lauren wears stole, £3,300; dress, £8,500, both by **Prada**



Nan wears choker, £2,905, by **Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello**

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Models: Lauren Hilaire, Letizia Napoleone, Nan Mthembu and Jasroop Singh at Zebedee Management, Adeline Lim at Xdirectn. Hair: Cathy Ennis using Oribe Pro. Make-up: Nina Sagri using Chanel Beauty Fall-Winter 2021. Photography assistant: David Robinson. Fashion assistant: Kris Bergfeldt. Post-production: Jon Hempstead



Art



TURNING CORNERS

Bettina von Zwehl talks to art historian and disability activist Amanda Cachia about her abstract silhouettes imbued with a politics of difference

Bettina von Zwehl has put her models into a corner, both literally and metaphorically. In her new series of photographs commissioned by Wallpaper*, the artist has favoured the corner for all the complex associations that it offers – as a place to perform in, to hide, to emerge or be still, or to feel constrained, or conversely, to feel safe. When I inquire about the corner in her work, von Zwehl quotes philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who wrote in *The Poetics of Space* (1958) that the corner is ‘the chamber of being’. The artist continues, ‘for the fashion story, I felt it was a symbolic place for my group of sitters to perform in, and to resist the constraints of the space... and in the most subtle way, [it is also] a critique of the fashion industry.’

The fashion story features five models with unique characteristics. Four are represented by Zebedee Management, a specialist agency that aims to redefine the perception of beauty. Two women have Down’s syndrome and one has vitiligo; the fourth model has albinism and identifies as non-binary. They are joined by a fifth, a female model

from Xdirectn, an agency with a mission to represent ‘unique beauties’ and a street casting-based ethic. All of them wear black and white clothing and accessories (styled by Wallpaper* fashion director Jason Hughes), have clearly empowered facial expressions, and make direct eye contact with the camera. Their striking appearances remind the viewer that beauty can take many forms. Von Zwehl is drawn to the mix of profile view and silhouette, which both have long traditions in art history as visual tropes. She appreciates the mysterious and empowering characteristics of these forms, and how they easily lend themselves to the political embodiment of her sitters.

Alongside the corner portraits and silhouettes are von Zwehl’s cut-outs and collages, recent experimental studies that take the photographer beyond the portrait and the human form. Here, she is free to explore the sculptural elements of a photograph as a malleable object, where she can make deep gestural cuts into her original darkroom prints. Says von Zwehl, ‘I can tap into a more unconscious

This page, clockwise from top left, *Meditations in an Emergency, #14*, 2018; *Portrait of a Whippet*, 2019, both by Bettina von Zwehl.

Lauren wears dress, price on request, by **Acne Studios**.

Earrings, from the Precious Lace collection, with pear-shaped diamonds and brilliant-cut diamonds in 18ct white gold, both price on request, by **Chopard**.

FridaysForFuture, Stella, 2019, by Bettina von Zwehl

Opposite, clockwise from top left, *Eye portrait (Madeleine)*, 2012; portrait of Ola Abidogun for the *Road to 2012* project, 2010, part of a series of portraits of Olympic and Paralympic athletes; *The Symptoms, #22 (cut-out)*, 2020; *The Symptoms, #38 (collage)*, 2021, all by Bettina von Zwehl



creative process which has a surreal, organic and sometimes sinister quality that I enjoy.' These depictions also take the viewer outside the realm of normative representation, where bodies are without organs, and therefore freed, or cut, from the traditional definitions of beauty.

This is the second time that von Zwehl has worked with unconventional subjects. In 2010, the artist was commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery in London to capture portraits of athletes, including paralympians like Ola Abidogun, Nathan Stephens and David Roberts, for the project *Road to 2012*. Her goal, no matter who the sitter is, or how long her encounter with them, is to ensure that each person is captured with respect, empathy and dignity.

Von Zwehl wanted to create a fashion story spotlighting women and non-binary participants of non-conventional abilities and appearances primarily because these models want to be included and they want to be seen. As the mother of a teenage girl, von Zwehl is particularly inspired to showcase female voices, and especially those

from minority groups with overlooked histories. Her work dovetails with the push for more inclusive casting in the fashion industry – plus-size models, differently-abled models and those from historically underrepresented ethnic groups now have more professional opportunities than before, but there is still a long way to go.

Von Zwehl explains that she works on art projects where she spends months or years researching a theme, often in response to a political event. She is currently working on her next major project, which involves the slow process of decolonising the hidden histories in museum collections in relation to humans and animals. The display of valuable and controversial materials such as elephant ivory are of special interest in her investigations. As with this project, she aims to make visible what is often rendered invisible. 'Every image matters,' she stresses, and in regards to the representation of difference, von Zwehl's subject matter fosters inclusion, and casts a positive light on what may often lie in the shadows. ✨ bettinavonzwehl.com