

# PROJECT 12

## Vanessa Beecroft

### 1998

*VB40*

2 - 5 August 1999

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

#### BIOGRAPHY

Vanessa Beecroft's work stands at the crossroads of postmodern sexuality and politics of representation. Her durational performance pieces predominantly employ women in near-nude or nude states. The extended duration of these performances has the disorienting effect of the traditionally objectified female form rejecting and returning the gaze. Beecroft's site-specific works extend these ideas, commenting on local notions of class, beauty, politics and taste.

#### FACTS

- Vanessa Beecroft has listed films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Jean-Luc Godard and Luchino Visconti as influences for different works and has referenced painters such as Rembrandt, Hans Holbein, Caravaggio and Giorgio de Chirico through lighting, costume and configuration.
- *VB40* was the 40<sup>th</sup> in Beecroft's series of works based on human tableaux.
- The first work in the series, *VB01*, was exhibited in 1993 in Milan. For the opening, she invited 30 young women to view the show, dressing them in clothes from her own wardrobe, as if for a live form of self-portraiture.
- *VB40* included 20 models who stood for a 2.5 hours for each performance. They were positioned by Beecroft and followed rules of deportment.
- For *VB40*, 20 performers were recruited from surf and lifesaving clubs as well as modelling agencies.
- Beecroft worked closely with the staff of the MCA to select the models and wardrobe.
- Models were given a list of 54 numbered instructions or 'rules' to follow.

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#### PROJECT OVERVIEW

Vanessa Beecroft's use of live models has developed into a prolific body of performances presented in museums, galleries and public spaces around the world. For Project 12 in Sydney, Vanessa Beecroft's *VB40*, 1999, was the 40th in her series of works, most using nude and semi-nude women, preened and presented in formation. At the Museum of Contemporary Art, 20 models stood for a period of two-and-a-half hours for each performance; positioned by Beecroft and following rules of deportment, they conformed to an overall configuration. Drawing from the iconography of fashion, film and painting, they became a collective portrait of idealised femininity and desire within a consumer culture.

In Beecroft's earliest works, at the start of the '90s, wigs and make-up were used to give an appearance of homogeneity; however later works achieved this through casting for uniform appearance and more professional staging, producing mannequin-like figures and more structured configurations. In Sydney, the performers were recruited from surf and lifesaving clubs as well as modelling agencies. Beecroft worked closely with the staff of the Museum of Contemporary Art to select the models and wardrobe. Conforming to an ideal image of 'Australian athleticism', the models chosen were tall, broad-shouldered and of 'Anglo-Saxon or Irish' appearance. They were dressed in red stockings, provided by Wolford, worn with flesh-toned bras and red Prada heels. One of the models wore heels only, standing nude in the centre of the group.

Beecroft positioned the models symmetrically along the marble squares on the MCA floor. They were given a list of 54 numbered instructions or 'rules' for their deportment:

*Be still. Go at ease. Move naturally. Do not move out of place. Do not move in real time. Use no verbal communication. Be detached. Be remote. Hold position. Look plain, boyish, quiet. Don't let your mood show. Do not laugh. Be compact. If you are bored show it.*

Beecroft's statement to accompany the exhibition explained:

*The purpose is to work on a specific subject and to create an image or a portrait that has the effect of a monument, even if it lasts briefly. The references are classical paintings and portraits, the girls are contemporary models. The practice is to stand, not talking, and to wait until it ends, being watched as a picture and photographed as though on a photo shoot.*

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Beecroft, *VB40*,  
1999, Museum of  
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Photo: Giasco  
Bertoli



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