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I stand united

No-one explores the physicality of beauty with such in-your-face chutzpah as Vanessa Beecroft. Her legendary performances confront the viewer with sexually provocative real-life mannequins in various states of dress; an objectified, homogenised vision of perfection. Get ready then for *VB51*, Beecroft's latest project, which marks an attempt "to realise a less iconic and rather more narrative performance", and her first move into film as a stand-alone medium. To understand this work, you need to understand its cinematic influence and reference point. Described by some as a rewrite of the Orpheus myth, Alain Resnais' 1961 film *Last Year At Marienbad* is the elegant story of participants in an affair at a German spa hotel, told from a disturbing array of points of view. The characters, dressed in black or white evening dress to symbolise their wakefulness or dreaming, appear as if on a catwalk. Although sumptuous, it is an intensely psychological work squabbled over by film scholars ever since its making. Little wonder the film chimed with Beecroft. Set in a German mansion, Beecroft's customary phalanx of females are but facets of one unnamed woman who might be Beecroft herself; the artist draws on family, friends and Fassbinder's muse Hanna Schygulla to make up her components. Schygulla gets a speaking role, intoning snatches of Schubert's *Winterreise* - a first, as Beecroft usually likes her girls silent and symbolic. If you've been resistant to Beecroft thus far, those parading before you are never about titillation, even at their most bare. Her move into film is significant - unlike more conventional installations, this piece is intended to be analysed as assiduously as the work which inspired it. And if close proximity to idealised women freaks you out, the Prada shoegazing is still where it's at. **SUSAN CORRIGAN**

Vanessa Beecroft 'VB51' at Cosmic Gallery, 76 rue de Turenne, Paris from April 8-May 24.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VANESSA BEECROFT