

# Victoria Miro Gallery

## Press Release

### Bettina von Zwehl

30 January – 28 March 2002

German born, London based artist **Bettina von Zwehl** will exhibit her new body of work *Profiles*, 2001, which is inspired by the diptych of *Battista Sforza and Federigo da Montefeltro*, c.1470, by **Piero della Francesca**. Against a neutral background fourteen people are photographed in strict symmetrical profile. The individual portraits are then divided into seven pairs, and hung face to face, appearing to be, in some sense, coupled. The original scale of each figure has been adjusted - sized up or down - so that image to image, a consistent eye level is maintained that stretches through the series like an artificial horizon. The profiles present to the viewer a map of the contours of a face - silhouette, jaw, hairline - while the transient characteristics of gaze and expression, remain obscured. This adamant objectivity denies one of the most central characteristics of portrait photography - the illusion that something of the sitter - beyond their physicality - is revealed through the act of portraiture.

*"These couples are linked by their stare - by a gaze that is fixed, reciprocated, unsentimental, and one that the viewer will always be, necessarily be, excluded from. They seem to be looking at each other, yet equally, they seem to be looking into nothing, as if they are looking, but they are not seeing."*

As in previous work the images depict the sitter's upper body in matching t-shirts against a neutral background. The singular focus of the camera and the restricted conditions are reminiscent of the aesthetics of scientific experiment. In her earlier work **von Zwehl** documented her subjects in various constructed and extreme environments (hot, breathless and deprived of sleep) of the body. Minimal and elegant, her sitters merge with their surroundings exuding the subtlest of psychological and physical response. But despite their forensic overtones, **von Zwehl's** work is fundamentally concerned with both the relationship and expectations inherent in the act of portraiture.

Born in 1971 **von Zwehl** graduated from the **Royal College of Art** in 1999. Exhibitions include, *Chelsea Rising*, **The Contemporary Art Center**, New Orleans, 2001, *Breathless! Photography and Time* at the **Victoria and Albert Museum**, 2000 and *Modern Times*, **Hasselblad Centre**, Goteborg, Sweden, 1999.

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