# MARILYN MINTER

## glamour and clit

***Steve Miller: You know, over the years, I've watched your work, from meticulous hand-painted enamel, metal, which you still do, but formerly with a nostalgic nod to the half-tone reproduction technique of magazine reproduction, to your latest video, which I just saw.***

**Marilyn Minter:** Those early pieces you're talking about—that was faking mechanization. They're hand-painted mechanization of half-tone, exactly.

***That technique that you used in the early work was a conscious nod to a kind of technique of reproduction.***

It absolutely was because I was just breaking out of a collaboration team, and I had this ability to always be able to copy anything I ever saw. And I thought at that time, after doing collaborations for three years with Christoff Kohlhoffer, I had to make something radically different. So that's when I started working with enamel paint, and that's when I took my copying ability out of the picture, and I started this fake mechanization.

***So you mimicked a very, kind of—in terms of today's perspective—a primitive look.***

Yes, exactly. It was faking it.

***I just saw your video, which is amazing, and I love it. It's über high-tech, slow motion, high-definition.***

It was pretty much right after I sort of got my act together. I got out of rehab and I was making new work. I was disavowing everything I did before, meaning being able to paint anything, or draw anything that I wanted to make or draw. I had this gift, and I sort of was disavowing it because I was trying to find my way, as somebody clean and sober. I hadn't worked in a long time without chemicals in my system, and the first thing that occurred to me to do was to use these reproduction methods. It took me

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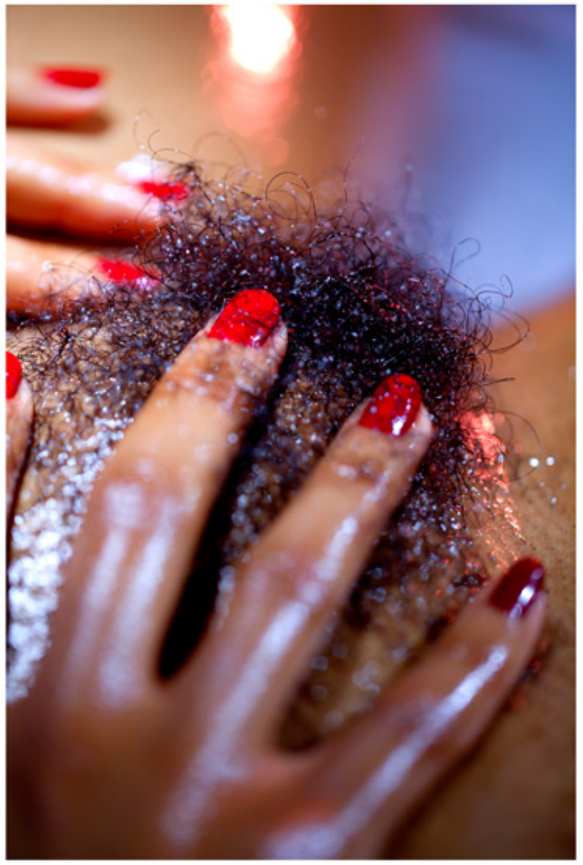

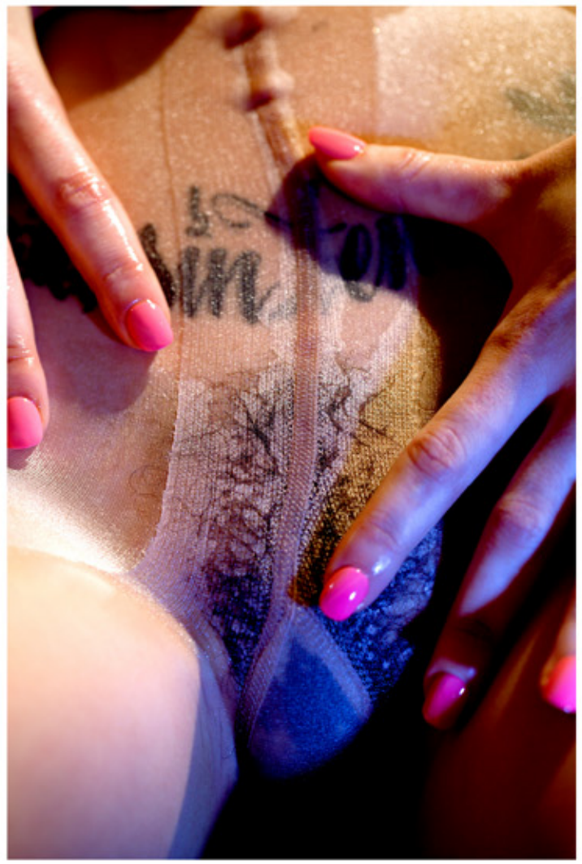

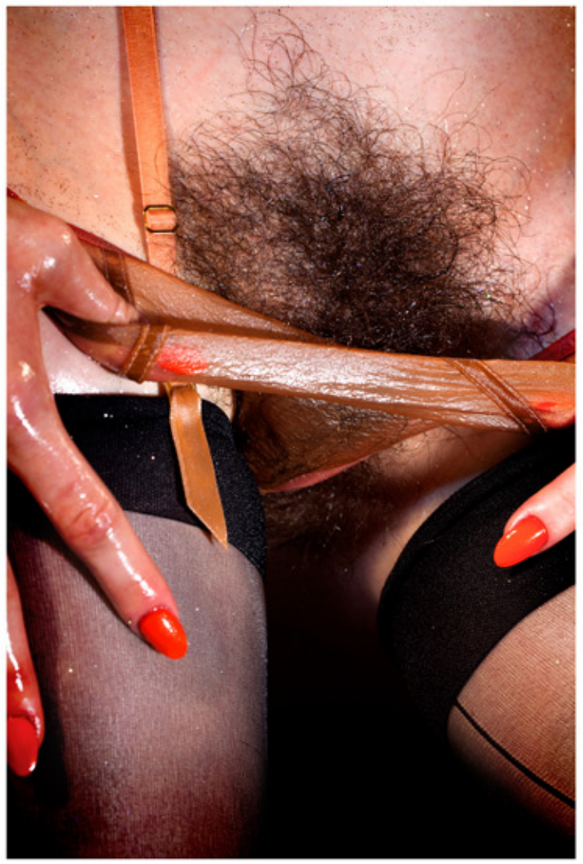

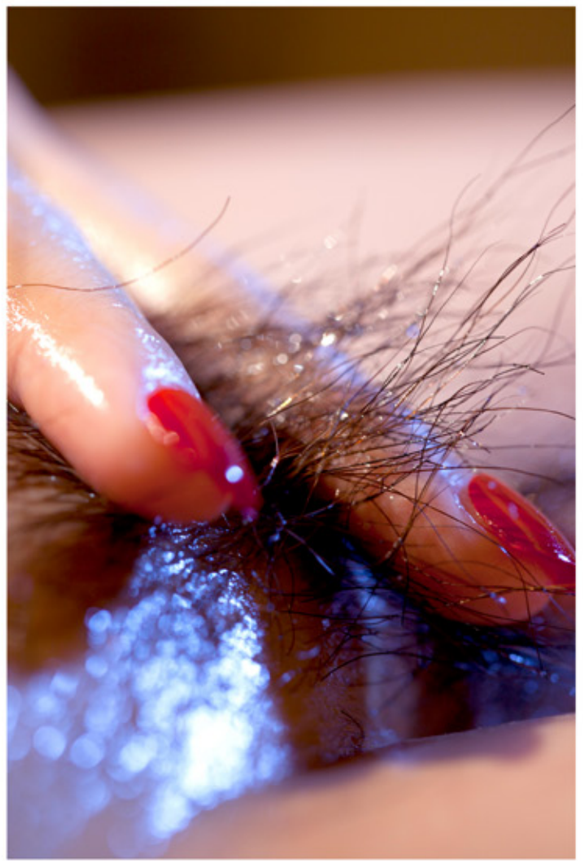

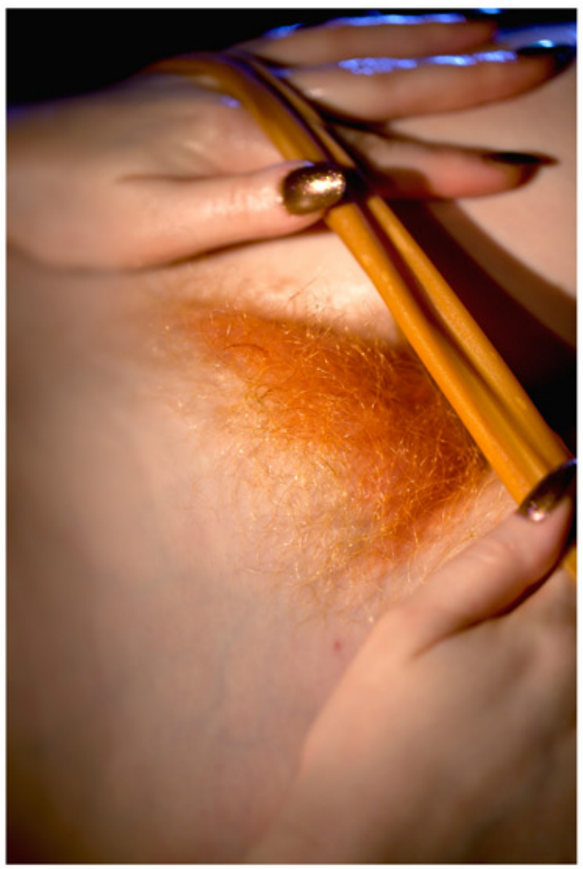

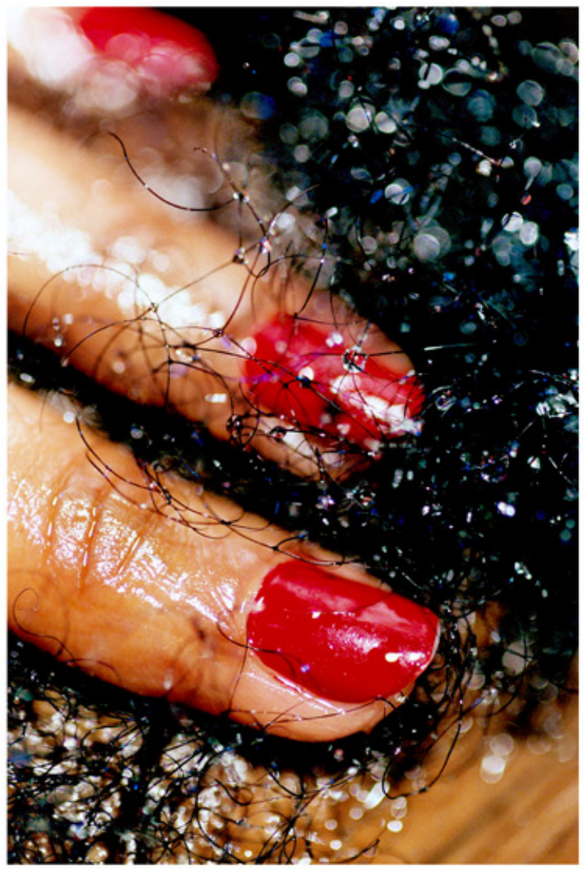

a few years to get back to what I was really good at, which is being able to use the skill-level that I think I was probably born with.

***What happened between this low-tech look that you cultivated consciously thirty years ago, to this amazing, incredible high-definition? How do you get from that to wanting to embrace the newest technology?***

I've always been into the newest technology. I've never been somebody who says, 'Ok this is where I'm going to stop learning things,' you know? That's why we're still friends. A lot of people in my age group, they're not technically savvy at all. Technology doesn't scare me at all. I actually taught myself—as soon as Tetris came out, I started playing video games. So I wasn't afraid of pushing the buttons. It's really just when you're a teacher you see almost everything new that comes out, so I've always just absorbed this from my students, and just incorporated into what I do. Whenever anyone comes around and says, 'Do you want to try to make a 3D print?' I say yeah, let's go for it. Or if someone asks me, 'Do you want to make a bitmap?' which was something I did for the New Museum. We just made a model and we poured that silver paint on the model of the museum, and then we projected it on the New Museum. And we made it in a half an hour. It was just learning something new. I'm always up for it. So when the Phantom Camera came out, I made a video with it in 2011. The new version, A4, just came out. Nobody's seen that yet, and that's what you just saw.

***Well, it's amazing. The video work now says high-tech, today. It shows you a vision that you could never see with the normal eye. Now, I think your work has gone to this level of high-tech. Your painting has that same kind of alter-realism, something the eye couldn't see.***

That's all true, yeah. It's like Chuck Close created this technique for himself, and I always think of myself as someone who is, on so many levels, a little slow when it comes to math, and spelling and all of the measured kinds of intelligence. I fail. Whereas I have a certain vision and I trust it. It took years to believe in it. I've always been somebody that sees things that other people don't see, and that is kind of just slowing everything down, and zooming close-up—things that everybody acknowledges exist, but they don't really think about it, which is the first thing I think about. I actually trust it, and I've been letting it take me. It took many years for me to be able to communicate to an audience the way I see. I always think I've been doing the exact same thing since I was 12 years old. I've just never been referred to technology. So I just jumped it as soon as I could, really just making the organic vision that I've always sort of had in the back of my mind. I trust my own instincts.

***Part of the reason that Musée is interested in your work, is because your work has always been photo-based, yet the photo source always morphs into these different possibilities—photography, painting. What motivates the decision to make an image as a painting, photograph, or a video?***

If it's a photo, it's actually pure—we call it the perfect photo. I don't manipulate it at all. It's not Photoshopped; it's not even cropped. It's not like I have that rule, if I need to crop something I will, but most of the time it's what I see in the camera when I'm in the zone.

***So you don't manipulate the image in Photoshop?***

Not usually, no. I don't have to because I have a good eye. But I have. Out of all my images, hundreds maybe, there are maybe five that have been cropped. Photoshop will pump up the color, but we won't alter it radically, whereas the paintings are combinations of the layers and layers of Photoshop. So I think of the photos as for traditional artists, they are like the drawings. The paintings are what we make out of the different snatches of information from the raw footage. So the paintings never exist as a photo, since I started really. When I started they did. They were just replications of a photo, but now, why would I ruin the photo if it's perfect? I just use it as a photo. I don't want to fuck it up.

***So when you do your photo editions, like the one you did on Wangechi Mutu, do you alter them?***

Oh yeah, they are altered in ways, as a matter of fact, they're film. All of the Wangechi are not digital, they're analog. I work analog as much as I work digital. Maybe not recently, because I'm working with

Previous Spread: Marilyn Minter. *Bush, Mound, Muff, Pelt, Beaver, Thatch, Carpet, Fur*, 2013

water, and digital works better because I see exactly what I get immediately.

***With the Wangechi photographs, to me they look like the remnants of a performance.***

Well, we were just playing because the whole idea of the Wangechi started with me getting a phone call from her saying, 'I'm eight and a half months pregnant, and I'd like you to document it.' We've known each other for a while, so she and I said, 'Sure let's try it, let's play.' My idea was to make this fierce, African woman from the 21st century, and I wanted to stay away from wood and feathers. We wanted to use diamonds and gold and silver. She styled it, and she sort of made herself into one of her collages. She's very shy—she was brought up in this very prim family. And she would never get naked if she weren't pregnant. Isn't that interesting? She told me that later. She was just brave. When you're pregnant, apparently you're just fearless. Which is really fascinating to me. She was taking that vodka and silver and gold mix into her mouth and spitting it out. I mean she's eight and a half months pregnant, so she can't swallow. We were just playing all afternoon, and these are all the things we came up with. She managed to make a bunch of collages out of that, and I ended up with five paintings.

***How did the paintings differ from the photo editions?***

The photos are just these beautiful, perfect photos. The paintings are like Frankenstein. I used the necklace from one negative, and the lips from another, and a drip from another. None of that exists as a photo.

***Do you think that painting lets you go to another dimension that photography cannot take you?***

Absolutely, yeah. Photography can't get the kind of lushness that I can get in a painting.

***What made you get into video?***

I'm not interested in a video unless it's surreally slowed down. As soon as I saw the Phantom Camera, I've been working with it ever since. Green Pink Caviar was the first video I had done since 1989.

***That was in the MOMA lobby, right?***

Yes. That's not really a Phantom, that's just slowed down video. Once the Phantom Camera came into other than scientific use, I grabbed it immediately, and I made three videos with it: one for the Whitney, one for my last show in 2011, called Playpen, and then a video called I'm Not Much But I'm All I Think About, all about the M&Ms dropping into the silver paint in slow-mo.

***You have a show coming up at the Brooklyn Museum—two shows, correct?***

I'm in a group show that opens on September 10th at the Brooklyn Museum, and I have a retrospective travelling, and that will open at the Brooklyn Museum in 2016.

***What are you showing in September?***

It's a video called Smash, and it's with the latest technology in the Phantom.

***I've noticed for a long time your point of view. Predominantly and naturally because you are a woman your work reflects a woman's point of view.***

I don't think I'm a typical woman's point of view though.

***Let's talk about that, because certainly the images of your mother are not a typical point of view.***

No. You know, it is for anybody who grew up with addiction. The people who really responded to the pictures of my mother are people who grew up in families who had mothers like mine. High-end addiction, not

just somebody with a needle in her arm—that's been my experience. It's more prevalent than you think, but there are not a lot of images in the culture of high-end addiction. It's always much more raw, street addicts.

***What was going through your head when you had the camera in your hand? You knew what you were doing, presumably.***

I didn't at all. I was just taking a picture of my mother. I didn't realize how dysfunctional that looks to other people, and I still don't. Actually, my brothers and I still look at them, and that's mom. We don't know what you see.

***What year did you take those pictures?***

1969.

***And then you waited a long time to show them, correct?***

That's because when I showed them to my class, fellow Floridian art students at the University of Florida, they were appalled. 'Oh my god, that's your mother?' I had waves of shame come over me, and I didn't show them for years. I finally showed them in 1995 at Postmasters.

***Well, you go from your mother to someone that's in the throes of an addiction, and then your next set of photography, if I remember, was of mouths. Was that the next thing after your mother?***

Yea, the little girls with braces. I started to see adults wearing braces, and I thought that was so cool, that you finally could afford to get your teeth fixed. I thought that was brave and a really neat thing. Then after that I started taking dirty feet with really good pedicures. Then from pedicures I went to dirty feet in really nice shoes, and then I took that to dirty feet getting dirty because of mud puddles. The mouths and the jewelry. That was right after. That was my student with the freckles. I just took regular fashion tropes of lightly kissing jewelry, and she just shoved the pearls in her mouth till she started to gag. That was just taking what's already out there and just pushing it.

***But when you did the first porn stuff, the painting of the actual images of pornography, you and I had a big argument. I was saying, 'Well you know, men are just going to get off, and this is a voyeuristic experience.' And you said, 'No, it's about women taking their power.'***

Well, it was asking the question, what changes the meaning if women show pictures of other women and men having a good time sexually? I didn't have the answer at that time, and I still don't. But I wanted to ask that question because I saw Mike Kelly worked with stuffed animal sculptures and stuffed animal paintings, and I thought that was genius. It occurred to me that if it were a woman artist doing that, nobody would pay attention. So then it just logically hit me, well what subject matter have women artists never embraced? A male artist taking stuffed animal sculptures and stuffed animal paintings changed the meaning radically. Everyone could see this adolescent little girl's mind—banners made out of felt. He's just genius. I thought, 'Does the meaning change if women use the same imagery? Can we capture these images from an abusive history and re-contextualize them?' Then I thought, 'Why couldn't women own images of their own production for purposes of pleasure?' I am a feminist, and I went through the second wave of feminism as a young kid, but I worked my way through. I love sexual imagery. It turns me on. Why can't we own the production of these images? Nobody has politically correct fantasies. So I was just asking these questions—what does it mean? And it was at a time when everybody just assumed. First of all, the Internet was in its nascent stages. First, pornography is the only reason there is an Internet, I should mention that because that's another reason I'm interested in it. It seems like it's this shallow, debased subject matter but it rules the whole fucking country—the world, really. You're never going to be able to block the Internet because of that, because of sexual appetites.

***Right, it's the most trafficked and most popular part of the Internet.***

Exactly! Yes. So this is just such a big question. I thought, 'Well women don't touch it.' And I thought,

Marilyn Minter. *Ball Spitter*, 2012

'What does that mean?' Still, there's a huge glass ceiling—this is my experience. I was young-ish when I did this, and I think when you're young and doing it, you're just going to get excoriated. I remember when Tracey Emin was using sexual imagery in her own work; she was trashed by everybody. But if you're an old lady you can get away with it. What is it about young girls, pre-menopause, working with sexual imagery? I see the same thing happening with Lauren Nakadate, or anybody. There's a real glass ceiling. Miley Cyrus—perfect example—slut shamed all over the world. I don't think these questions have even been explored. This is such a big subject. Now that I'm an old lady, I can do anything and everybody loves it. The New Museum just gave a show to Dorothy Iannone and Judith Bernstein. They could've been arrested, till they turned into old ladies.

***The interesting thing- you said, early on in the porn business, it was the men that were the stars.***

I don't think so—they were always women. No, there were just a couple of them that were famous. But now, there are women directors. When I did the porn series, it was this nascent industry. Now, there's Adult Magazine—I love this girl, Sarah Nicole Prickett, and she's taking it a lot further. It's an erotic Internet magazine, and it's just brilliant what she's doing with it. This is the future. My side won!

***I'm going to have to agree with you, and not because you're because my friend but because I argued with you about it, and years later...***

He bought the painting!

***Full disclosure, I am the owner of the port grid, which has been widely reproduced.***

This has really confused me- why is it that once you saw it, it changed your attitude?

***Because I understood what I think is the overriding strength of your work, and it's something that I recognized then. I lost the argument, if there was an argument. When I saw the porn grid, I was like, 'Ok, I get it. You have the power in this imagery.'***

Academia has a real problem with pleasure. If it looks too good it has to be suspect. I've never understood that. One of the things that people object in my photography in real life is that there's no critique of people for getting pleasure from glamour and fashion. It gives me pleasure too. It's just an easy target. It's so totally fucked, the glamour industry, but it'll crush you. It's so huge. I'm interested in things that seem so superficial and debase but they really rule the world.

***When you were doing the early photographs of the women with the jewelry, and the swallowing and the beads—that was pre-fashion.***

Still, I thought it was beautiful. I thought they looked great, I never for a minute thought they were critique. Who am I to critique anybody? I don't have judgment. I don't have any morality. I'm working with the wrinkled elders right now, beautiful wrinkled elders, but I've no stake in someone getting a facelift or not. I don't care if somebody lasers off their pubic hair, I just want to show a picture of what it looks like to have a beautiful set of pubic hair. But why should I? Life is about the grey areas. It's so complicated. The love of fashion and glamour, it's really complicated. It has a lot to do with love and hate, self-loathing, and pleasure at the exact same time. It's a constant paradox. That's what I'm interested in—the paradoxes.

***If I look at the overall trajectory of the work, I see two things going on simultaneously. I see the strength of the point of view of the artist, who happens to be a woman—so there is a gender issue in terms of your work—and the strength of your vision. Then I also see—if you say that the work is non-critical about shaved or not shaved, wrinkled or smooth, full breasts or flat-chested—there always seems to be a roving eye towards a celebration of everything it is to be female. Would you agree with that? Or is that just too corny for words?***

It's corny, but the corny things are… clichés are real. Sunsets are beautiful, and kittens are adorable!

Marilyn Minter. *Big Mac*, 2014

Marilyn Minter. *video still from tktktktktk, 20xx*

Marilyn Minter. *video still from tktktktktk, 20xx*