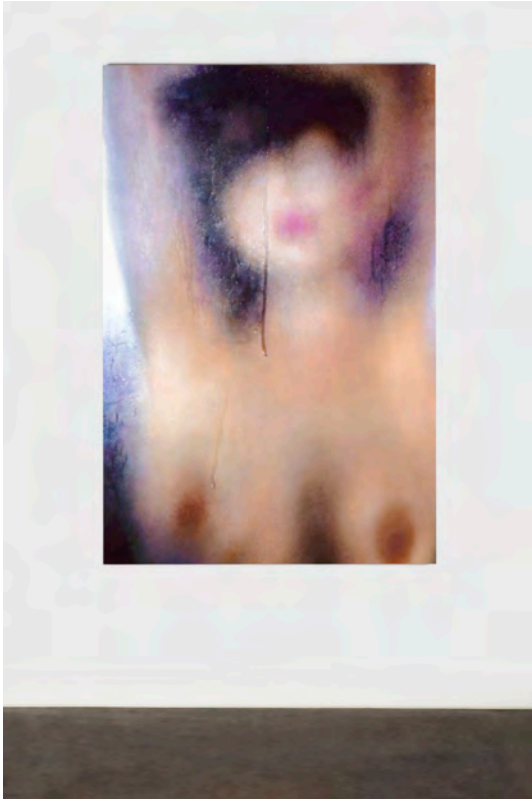


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Perfection is the Flaw: Phoebe Hoban on Marilyn Minter at Brooklyn Museum and Salon 94

By Phoebe Hoban

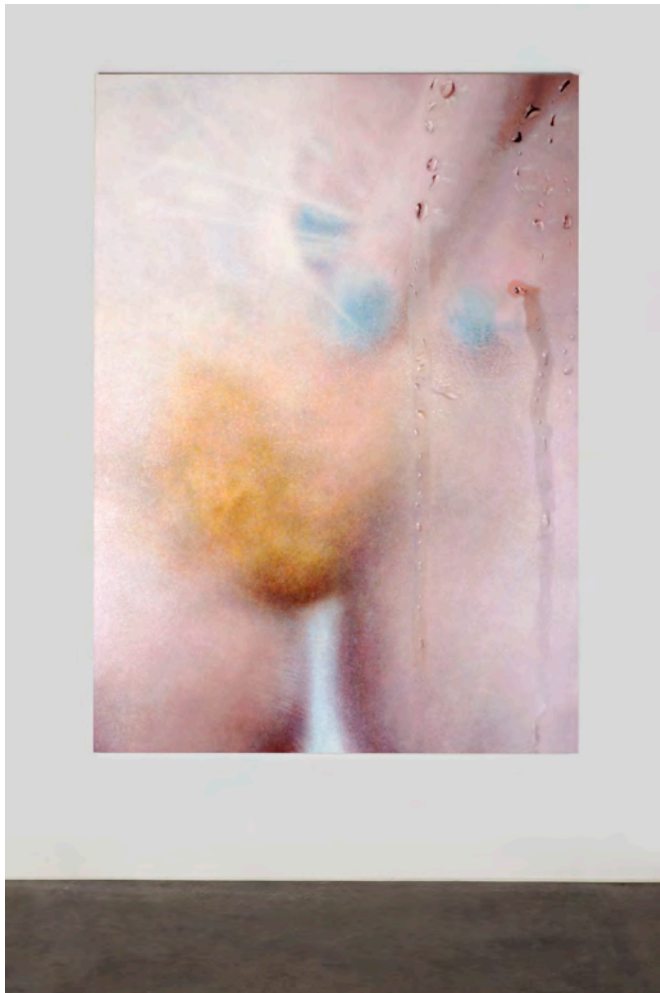


Marilyn Minter
Salon 94 Bowery, New York
October 27, 2016–December 22, 2016

Pretty/Dirty (retropective)
The Brooklyn Museum
through April 2nd
By PHOEBE HOBAN, DEC. 2016

Marilyn Minter has made a career of depicting the seamy underside of beauty and glamor--starting with her own mother. The black-and-white series of a faded Blanche DuBois type, lounging in negligee and carefully applied makeup, shocked her classmates at the University of Florida, where she was an undergraduate, but earned the praise of a visiting artist—none other than Dianne Arbus.

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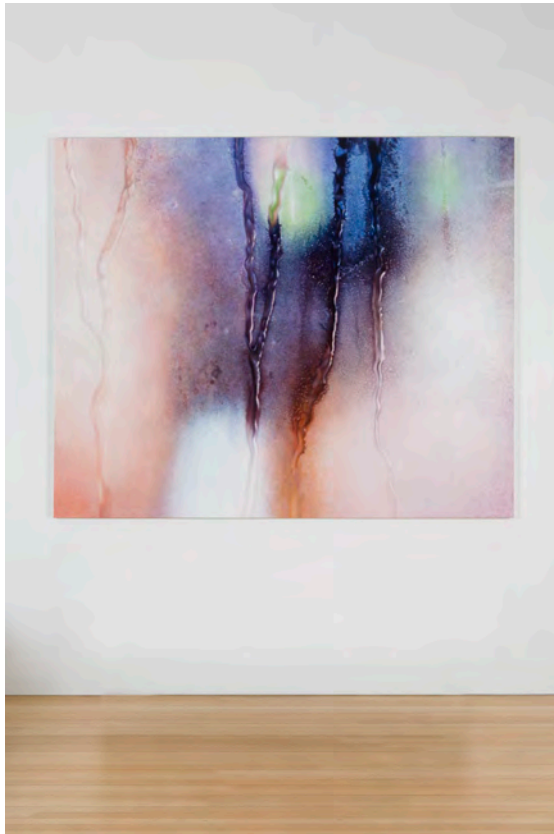


It is those 1969 “Coral Ridge Towers” images that open her traveling retrospective, *Pretty/Dirty*, at its final stop, the Brooklyn Museum, where it runs through April 2. Initially ashamed of the series, Minter didn’t show it until the early 90’s. But those off-kilter pictures planted the jolie-laide seeds of her trademark transgressive style.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Minter had moved away from her 1970s photo realist images of mundane things like dust and coffee grounds, (*Aluminum Foil*, (1976) *Spill* (1977) and *Sink Study* (1978), for instance) making the leap into her Food Porn series: funny pictures of food as sex objects—from a carnal-looking artichoke to a suggestive lobster tail. The series was accompanied by a three-and-a-half-minute spot (*The 100 Food Porn Commercial*) that Minter bought on late-night television to advertise her 1990 show at the Simon Watson gallery.

But her new vision, epitomized by the 1989 *Porn Grid* pictures--graphic depictions of hard-core pornography (blow jobs, etc.) taken from men’s magazines and shown at Max Protech in 1992--caused an instant backlash, turning her into a feminist pariah and sidelining her career for more than a decade. “I learned that there was a real glass ceiling about women owning sexual imagery,” she says.

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Not anymore. These days, the artist is a superstar, whose work is collected by friends like Madonna. Minter began the work that made her name in the early-2000's--images of models gagging on diamonds and pearls or covered in slippery suds, their freckles fetishized, their makeup smudged, their high-heeled sandals wading in mud puddles; a sort of ongoing chronicle of beauty as the beast. After Minter photographs her subjects--often through glass or water--and then photo-shops them, her troop of assistants painstakingly recreates them, with the artist adding the final touches.

Minter was featured in the 2006 Whitney Biennial with several paintings, including a bruised looking eye (*Pink Eye*, 2005), that was also festooned on the Biennial's invitation and catalog cover. In 2009, Madonna chose Minter's five-minute *Green Pink Caviar* video (shown in the retrospective) to accompany the first song of her "Sticky and Sweet" tour. The instant cult video—a visceral close-up of lips and tongue licking and drooling what seem to be gallons of oozing liquid color--stopped crowds at Times Square when Creative Time projected it on a billboard that same spring, and still stops visitors in their tracks at the Brooklyn museum.

Sexual imagery continues to play a major role in the artist's work. Minter's show at Salon 94 on the Bowery, which runs through December 22, celebrates a time-honored subject, naked bathers. While it is considerably more graphic than, say, radiant bathing images painted by Bonnard or Degas, it is one of Minter's kinder, gentler visions.



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The series was originally shot in 2014 for Playboy, and focused on women with brazenly unmanicured private parts—and in some images, sex toys and accessories. (A wall of mini-reproductions is featured in the retrospective.) Although the magazine rejected her “bush” series, the pictures were published in a book called Plush.

Minter used the Plush models for her current Salon 94 series, photographing them through steamed-up panes of glass and giving them an almost impressionistic spin. In fact, it is only by stepping away from the foggy-looking large-scale pictures—enamel painted on metal—that the images resolve to reveal their intimate details: Thigh Gap, drips of water running between a woman’s legs; Vapor, a misty bust of head and breasts; Ginger, three blue-tipped fingers inching towards red pubic hair; And deep frost, a tongue poking between open lips.

Whether she is reveling in the nitty-gritty aspects of conventional beauty—especially as it is celebrated in the fashion world--“Perfection is the flaw,” she once told me--or, as in her latest work, finding an unconventional way to let real beauty expose itself, Minter continues to push the envelope.