



SALON 94

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Artifacts | Marilyn Minter's Oozing Desire

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It gurgles. It oozes. And it can eat you for breakfast — especially if your name is Marilyn Minter. It's "I'm Not Much But I'm All I Think About," a slow-motion video by the artist, known for excessively close-up paintings where freckles, open pores and beads of sweat all look more like glorious costume jewels.

In the self-mocking video, now playing 24/7 in the street window of Salon 94 Bowery, Minter stirs up a voluptuous brew of narcissistic pleasure that swallows her initials (in the form of M&M candies) and a sliver charm spelling the word "ME" that keeps coming back for another plunge.

If her beckoning matmos resembles the bubbling slime in "Barbarella," it does not have evil on its mind. The ingredients of Minter's omnivorous pool are vodka and sliver cake frosting suspended in glycerin, a delectable goo that coats or splatters through the faces and objects in the artist's four large, aqueous paintings inside the gallery.

One is classic Minter, a bubblicious, 15-foot-long image of strappy, high-heeled sandals worn by a woman who may be catching the spray from a cab driving through a deep, New York puddle late at night. Viewers might recall the subject as one Minter first explored on Chelsea billboards in 1996, when her paintings were a prominent feature of that year's Whitney Biennial.

Monumentality becomes her, as does intimacy. "Cheshire" is an extreme close-up of a woman's grinning, gold-encrusted mouth. The feeling in that and the shoe painting, "Heavy Metal," teeters between disgust and bliss, erotic territory that Minter has made her specialty. (It has brought her both collectors and commercial commissions from companies like M.A.C. cosmetics.)

She takes the heat up a notch in the 10-foot-tall "Mercury," in which a soaking wet baby boy crawls toward the viewer through a glistening rain shower — actually more of the vodka concoction pouring down a protective pane of glass. Five more tots splash through a syrupy goo — not vodka but rising pools of nontoxic watercolors — in "Play Pen," another new video that homes in on the fright, and the increasing joy, on their cherubic faces.

"Everything I do is wet and sweaty," said Minter during the show's installation this week. "I don't know why — maybe because I sweat so much? But my mother used to tell me that when I was a baby I'd turn on the water in the tub and watch it run for hours."

Her enamel-on-aluminum paintings are no less obsessive or time consuming. Each represents up to 50 different scans of photographic negatives that she shoots during long — and evidently fluid — sittings with her models. Afterwards, she turns to Photoshop, her most trusted tool, to stitch and rework the images, which she then paints in tiny patches (sometimes using her fingers), and in layers that disappear beneath the smooth, enamel surface. "Heavy Metal" took 80 layers and more than a year to complete.

"It's all illusion!" Minter exulted. "That's why I love painting. The images in these may fall apart when you get close, but that's why I'm not photo-realist. I hate it when people call me that. I'm a realist!" she said, with emphasis. "A photo-replacer!" She was also the first — and still the only — artist who ever made a television commercial to promote an exhibition. That was in 1989, when she spent her gallery's advertising budget by buying time on late-night talk shows like "David Letterman," rather than take out ads in art magazines.

The commercial, for paintings called "Food Porn," was fairly primitive compared to the videos in her splashy show on the Bowery, both shot with a Phantom, slow-motion camera. "It gets 2,500 frames a second!" Minter said, marveling as she watched her superhigh-resolution "Play Pen" images unfold.

"I'm addicted to close-ups," Minter added. "I like to make pictures of things that exist but that you don't really see — things like the indentations that socks leave on your feet when you take them off, or the down on a woman's upper lip. I love that soft fuzz!"

"Marilyn Minter" is on view through Dec. 4 at Salon 94 Bowery, 243 Bowery.