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Post-Career Rehab, Marilyn Minter's Seedy Side Shows

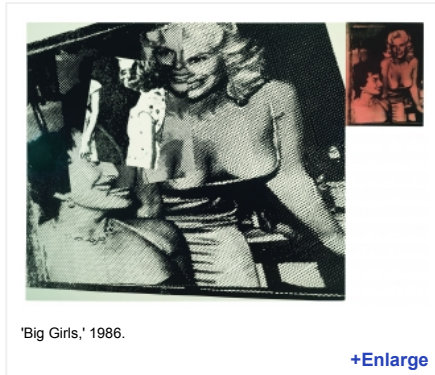
By Peter Duhon
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Wet pearls against red lips. Sparkling high heels walking through filthy water. A tongue encased in silver.

Before she became famous, Marilyn Minter was a product of much of the same "nightclub kid" scene of the 1970s and 1980s that begot Madonna. And the artist's works—hyperrealistic close-ups of gleaming body parts—were as censored and controversial as some of the pop queen's.

Ms. Minter's drug-addicted, bedridden mother was an early subject, and enormous breasts have figured large in her work, even sex acts. In 1989, she tackled a subject specifically because no other major female artist ever had: pornography. Her giant, glistening, explicit pieces, enamel painted on metal, were rejected by feminists and conservatives alike.



'Big Girls,' 1986.

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Despite her critics, Ms. Minter was "rediscovered" in the Whitney Biennial of 2006, hailed for *Stepping Up*, a painting from her skilled series about the seedy side of glamour.

Team Gallery invited her to hang the reviled works from early in her career, along with another series on children from the period, "Big Girls/Little Girls," at a show that runs through April 30. *The Observer* sat down at the gallery with the flame-haired painter and photographer right before she left for a solo show in Germany and talked to her, ruefully, about her "overnight" success.

The Observer: It's been 30 years since you've shown these works together. Why now?

Marilyn Minter: It was Jose [Freire]'s idea from Team Gallery, the director. I think he saw them in a talk I gave, and pretty soon after that he made a proposition: 'You want to revisit that work?' I said, 'Well yeah, I think we can find it.' And we did; it took us a year to find it. I still don't have everyone, everything—I couldn't find half of it.

The works weren't well received at the time.

In the late '80s, I think my vision was chasing people out of the room. Nobody else thought like this. I was really this pro-sex feminist. I did think that nobody has politically correct fantasies. And I thought that women should have imagery for their own pleasure. And I thought that everyone thought like that.

There was censorship?

My New York dealer shut my show down a week early once. And I got kicked out of a couple group shows. I was going to be in group shows, and then all of a sudden I wasn't in them anymore. It wasn't overt but covert; I think the reason was because I was considered a traitor to feminism. Disappointing when you have criticism from the left; you expect it from fundamentalists, but it is a big shock when it comes from the politically correct left.

What was going on in your life at the time you were making these works? You were collaborating with a team of artists in the East Village ...

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