

The Lion in Minter

A onetime scourge of art critics stages a triumphant comeback

by Jerry Saltz

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Marilyn Minter had a tough mid 1990s. Over the course of 36 horrific months, critics lambasted her work. This began when she exhibited a series of so-called "softcore" paintings featuring women's mouths, hands, and genitals and culminated in May 1995, when she showed a number of "Food Porn" paintings, in which she suggestively depicted bananas, cherries, and the like. During this three-year season in critical hell, Minter's work was branded as - "slick," "mainstream," "rote," "overly pleasing," "derivative," "banal," "gimmicky," "bombastic," "overblown," "familiar," and "feeble." It's a wonder she survived at all.

Since then, Minter, now 58, has exhibited, but she always seemed off to the side of things. That changed last April, when Minter, well past the age of being an "emerging artist," emerged again at the Whitney Biennial with three paintings that were universally praised. One of these images was even featured on the cover of that catalog.

In her first solo show at this uptown salon, Minter is at the top of her super-realist, in-your-face, ugly-is-beautiful, women-are-strange, men-are-clueless, post-impressionist-pop game in three large enamel-on-metal paintings. Each image, rendered in a technique that is a combination of Polke, Rosenquist, Lichtenstein, and Pollock, looks like a lurid sex fantasy by way of a cosmetics commercial.

In *Cyclone*, the best painting in the show, Minter depicts a woman's heavily made-up eye in extreme close-up. In two more works we see a woman wearing a fuck-me shoe and a woman eating a shrimp. There are also two large C-prints of women's shoes. *Cyclone* stands out because it is the most abstract, the most rabidly colored, and the least obvious. In fact, it's so aquiver that Minter's other two paintings seem a bit static beside it. *Cyclone* turns into something other than what it is. For me, this otherness included the storms of Jupiter, a Richard Diebenkorn on crack, and a close-up of Martin Sheen's eye in *Apocalypse Now*.