

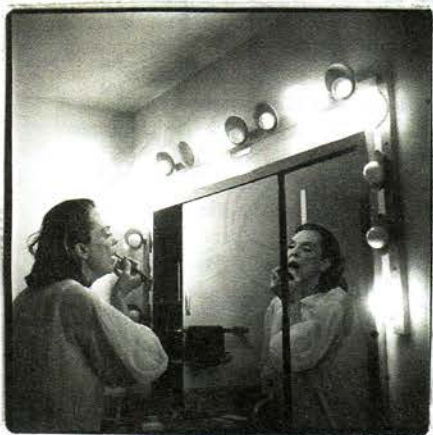
A matter of time

There were years when no one bought Marilyn Minter's art. There were years when no one would even look at it. It took a while, but things have definitely changed.

By **Howard Halle**

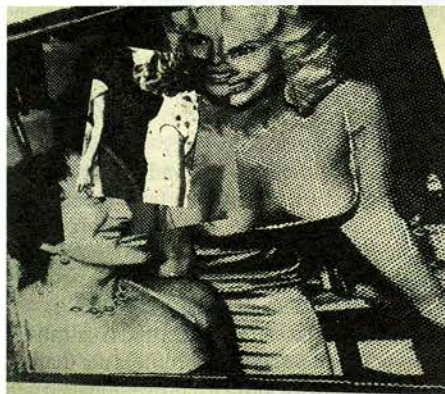
If you live in New York, you know the drill: Some artists find fame or infamy right away; others die in total obscurity. Many prevail against long odds by sticking it out, riding the ups and down of the career roller coaster until they achieve some level of recognition. Marilyn Minter, 60, falls into this last category. Since 1976, she's lived in the same Soho loft, producing photos and photo-based paintings that, for all of their

stylistic shifts, have been remarkably consistent in critically evaluating the way images of women are created by Hollywood and Madison Avenue. Yet it's only since a triumphant turn in the 2006 Whitney Biennial that Minter has achieved true high-profile success. *TONY* recently stopped by her studio, now humming with assistants, to look back at the highs and lows of her journeyman's trip through the art world.



Sink Study, 1978

▼After grad school and a brief sojourn in Syracuse, Minter moved to New York City, where she almost immediately landed a solo show at the James Yu Gallery—a venue that, as Minter puts it, “lasted for about one second.” There were no sales or reviews from the exhibit. This painting was one of several Photorealist canvases she did following the show, though they, too, failed to attract any attention. “People thought they were boring,” says Minter. “They weren’t shiny enough.”



Coral Ridge Towers (Mom Making Up), 1969

▲While an undergraduate at the University of Florida, Minter visited her mother, a recluse with substance-abuse problems. “I said, ‘Mom, put your wig on, I want to take your picture,’” Minter explains, “and she was happy to pose for me.” The feedback from her fellow students, however, wasn’t so positive. “They were like, ‘That’s horrible!’ And waves of shame came over me.” One person who did like the images was Diane Arbus, a visiting artist at the time. Though Minter swore she’d never show the photos again, she finally exhibited them 25 years later in New York and L.A. The L.A. gallery, Minter says, “went out of business without paying me for the prints it sold. The rest were sent back tattered.”



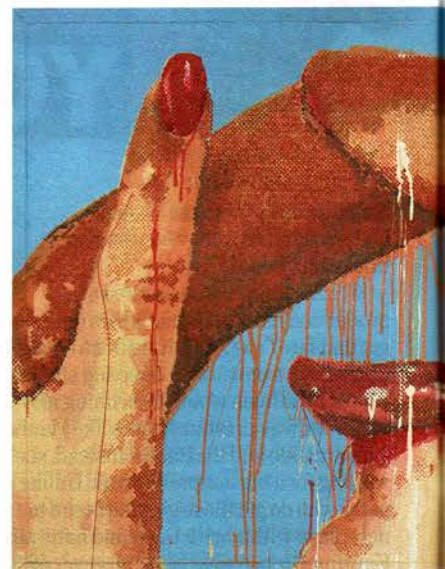
Untitled, 1984

▲Minter began to collaborate with the German Expressionist painter Christof Kohlhöfer. The two exhibited at the East Village’s Gracie Mansion Gallery in 1984 and ‘86. “Nobody bought anything—because we fought so much, they thought we’d split up.”



Big Girls, 1986

▲After parting company with Kohlhöfer, Minter, who had substance-abuse problems of her own (“I’m genetically loaded,” she says), entered rehab. This painting was the first she did after becoming sober, and the first done on her own in nearly eight years that she “didn’t wind up destroying.”



Porn Grid #3, 1989

▲After the Shafrazi show, Minter began to generate “some buzz,” as she puts it. She landed a one-person exhibit at the alternative space White Columns, a rare if not unheard-of honor. For White Columns, she created the first of a series of paintings based on porn images—inspired, Minter says, by bad-boy artists like Mike Kelley. “I wondered, What’s the subject matter that no woman artist would go near? Hard-core porn! And I thought, What would it mean if a woman artist did that?” *Porn Grid* #3 was subsequently included in the group show “*Errotomania*” at Simon Watson Gallery. Watson then invited her to do a solo outing.

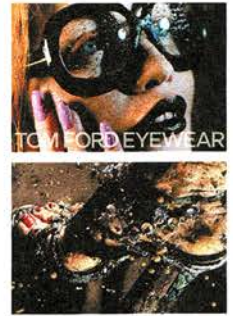
Money #3, 1987

▼This painting was part of a series shown in group exhibits around Europe and the U.S., and in New York at Tony Shafrazi Gallery. Again, none of them sold, but *Money* #3 attracted the interest of megadealer Larry Gagosian. “He put a hold on it, though he didn’t buy it. But that was the first time something like that ever happened to me.”



1970

1980



Tom Ford ad, 2007
Mudbath, 2006

▲Minter's appearance in the Biennial boosted her to a whole new level. Her work appeared on the cover of the influential art-world quarterly *Parkett*. Tom Ford asked her to create images for an ad campaign for his fall/winter 2007 collection, the Gap commissioned her to design a T-shirt as part of its benefit project for the Whitney Museum, and she found a new berth at the swank Salon 94 gallery uptown. Her show there last year sold out, and now museums are on a waiting list for her work. For the coming year, she's getting ready for shows at Salon 94 and Regen Projects in L.A. And of course, she crafted this exclusive cover for *TONY*. She's happy, but philosophical. "I'm always hungry," she says. "Success brings you a lot of things, but it can be as difficult to deal with as failure. The most important thing is to always protect the art."



Pink Eye, 2005

▲The San Francisco exhibit prompted a call from the organizers of the 2006 Whitney Biennial. "They asked me if I wanted to be in the show, and I said, 'Don't you want to make a studio visit?' And they said, 'No, we know your work.'" More calls came. "They asked, 'Can we use one of your paintings for the cover of the catalog?' And I was like, 'Uh, yeah.' Then they called again: 'Would you mind if we used your work for the banners outside the museum?' I became the poster child for that show."

Piquant, 1999

▼In 1997, Minter began showing with Chelsea dealer Xavier LaBouibenne. It was during this period that *Piquant* was bought by a West Coast collector with ties to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, leading to a one-person show at SFMOMA in 2005.



Lickety Split, 1994

▼Minter continued showing, but she says, "I felt beat-up critically, so I began to beat up my work." She applied acid to the metal sheets she used as her canvas, adding an Expressionistic texture to her familiar Photorealist approach. She also started to move away from explicitly sexual source material. After one more show with Protetch, in which again nothing sold, she moved on.



The Singer, 1992

▲At the Max Protetch gallery, Minter again showed the *Porn Grids*, and newer paintings like *The Singer*. But what barely raised an eyebrow in the context of a space like White Columns, or in a small, cutting-edge gallery like Simon Watson, elicited quite a different response in the larger, more commercial venue of Protetch's gallery. Reviews in *The Village Voice* and *The New Yorker* were scathing. Minter attributes the reaction to the era's political correctness. Nothing sold. "I was thrown out of the art world," she says.



100 Food Porn #8, 1990

▼Interest in Minter's work grew. The *100 Food Porn* series, painted on metal sheets, was done for the Simon Watson solo exhibit. In lieu of an ad in *Artforum*, Minter decided she wanted to create a TV commercial for it. "Late-night rates were cheap then," she says, "so we bought time on *Nightline*, *The Arsenio Hall Show* and on *David Letterman*." Minter adds that the paintings "sold like crazy."



Blowjob, 2008

◀Minter should blow up even bigger this year with new paintings like this one.