

MARILYN MINTER

MARILYN MINTER AND BEN SULLIVAN HAVE BOTH SHOT PHOTO-ART COLLABORATIONS WITH MAKEUP BRANDS

Red lips, copper hair, rock star presence. At 61, painter/photographer Marilyn Minter is as bombastic and glamorous as ever, and so is her work. Born in Shreveport, Louisiana, Minter has lived in New York since the 1970s and continues to call the city home. A visit to her studio, a small yet impressive space in Soho, is a fascinating introduction. Having collaborated with MAC Cosmetics on their Fall 09 collection, Minter has opened her doors to media and significant others for a lucky glimpse into her world. The artist herself is present, fielding questions and queries, greeting and mingling – and appears to be enjoying the energy of an inhabited space. Good-looking wait staff ferry pink lemonade and ice-cream topped with sugar crystals; a fitting combination as decadence, cuisine and beauty are three of Minter's key inspirations.

Several unfinished works line the walls – production on material for Minter's upcoming exhibitions at Regen Projects in LA and the CAC in Cincinnati has been stalled for tonight's event. The only complete piece is a reproduction of Pamela Anderson, who, oddly, has become the artist's chief muse since posing for an editioned photograph Minter produced for art publication, Parkett in 2007.

Odd – or perhaps not. Unabashed sexuality has long been a theme in Minter's work. Intrigued by the raw energy of sex and erotic fantasy, her aesthetic is typically sensual. Having launched her career with a series of black and white photographs of her drug-worn mother, Minter went on to explore parallels between straight porn and advertising, and continues to address the blur between in a lot of her compositions.

Though not as controversial as her early catalogue – much of which took inspiration from hard porn – Minter's current approach is largely a nod to highbrow fashion and catwalk funk. At the same time, she subverts ideals of beauty and glamour, demystifying them in a fun, vivid way to laugh at the love/hate relationship many have with high fashion and advertising, a relationship Minter herself describes as: "looking at a glamorous image and knowing you're never going to look that good." She bats away puritanical criticism of her work. "If I get criticised by artists I really like, it's devastating. Otherwise I don't really care."

In 2006, the same year she was included in the Whitney Biennial, Minter was commissioned to fill a series of giant billboards in Chelsea, NY; she delivered im-

ages of dirty heels kicking around in bejewelled shoes. Using vibrant colour and humour to deconstruct the (highly constructed) ideals many aim to create, Minter is renowned for reveling in what most photographers edit out. Asked why she is drawn to perceived flaws – dirt, moles, pimples – she laughs. "Isn't everybody?! More seriously, it isn't that I'm drawn to dirt and hair and pimples, it's just that perfection is an illusion and I'm trying to make a picture of what things really look like. I want my photos to be as close to life as I can get."

Interesting then that in recent times Minter has dabbled more and more in commercial work. Though she swears she doesn't "know anything about fashion", collaborations with the likes of Versace, Tom Ford and Francis Ford Coppola indicate the opposite is true.

The MAC project came out of the brand's desire to reconnect with their "art heritage". By commissioning Minter, along with artists Maira Kalman and Richard Phillips, to create work inspired by their latest collection, MAC hoped essentially to sanctify makeup as an artistic tool. Given Minter has always considered the face a canvas, and that her work is typically glitzy, sheeny and larger than life, MAC senior vice president and creative director James Gager threw the new line's glitter pigments her way and let her loose.

The result, a close up of a woman's glitter encrusted eyelid, sweaty cheek and tangled, wet hair, is quintessentially Minter. Her style is vivid but tasteful, in your face yet arresting. Her subjects are often drenched in cosmetics and/or paint and garnished with glitter, jewels and candy crystals. Either that, or left completely bare.

In *Green Pink Caviar*, one of her most recent works, models push liquid candy around on glass with their tongues. In other pieces, perfect teeth crunch fiercely onto strings of glass beads and pearls; there are close ups of unshaven armpits and unplucked facial hair. It's a realist take on fashion photography – and in theme, Minter neither digitally shoots or alters any of her photographic work, saying she prefers film "because of the depth you can get in the darkroom process that you can't get digitally." Unpack her imagery and it's obvious Minter is as enamoured by glamour as anyone else. Instead of a dig, it seems she's just having a laugh. Interview Sarah Illingworth Image Marilyn Minter

