

REGEN PROJECTS

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V O I C E S

THE PEOPLE AND IDEAS SHAPING THE CULTURE

Artist MARILYN MINTER *and creative polymath* MICHÈLE LAMY *on* SEX, AGING, *and the* POWER *of* NONCONFORMITY

Through their respective creative practices, artist Marilyn Minter and designer, performer, and curator Michèle Lamy have each challenged and redefined traditional notions of beauty.

In the 1980s, Minter sent shock waves through the art world with her overtly sexualized images of women, which sought to reclaim the visual language of sex from what she viewed as an abusive and exploitative history and also railed against the commodification of the female form. As Minter's practice evolved, she began to create glossy, hyperrealistic paintings and stylized photographs of bodies—wrinkles, pimples, pubic hair, running mascara, and all—as a means of normalizing so-called flaws and critiquing the unrealistic standards of beauty propagated by advertising and fashion.

With her signature henna-dyed fingertips and gold-plated grill, Lamy—an indelible fixture within the fashion and art worlds and the wife of designer Rick Owens—continues to exemplify the beauty of individuality. As the cofounder of Owenscorp, which she launched with Owens in 2004, Lamy oversees the company's art and home divisions, curating multimedia exhibitions in museums and galleries around the world and collaborating on home furnishings in the duo's signature gothic-futurist aesthetic. Lamy has also served as one of Minter's subjects: In 2014, Minter photographed her for a series celebrating women who are aging naturally.

In mid-March, as Russian forces continued to advance in Ukraine, Minter and Lamy reconnected to discuss the roles of art and beauty in times of crisis and the importance of inclusive female representation.

MARILYN MINTER: As artists, our jobs are to take pictures of the way we live, to make images out of chaos that talk about who we are today. As human beings, we're shot full of imperfections. The world we live in is constantly trying to erase imperfection, especially on Instagram and social media. And it's just making us sicker. My work is all about celebrating imperfection, because that's where I find beauty: in things that are real. These days, even

the best photograph of the most gorgeous model is retouched. To try to achieve constant perfection is really so poisonous to the culture. We're going to look back on these filters, and history's not going to be kind to this era of contouring your face. Michèle, you, to me, are the epitome of beauty. It's why I wanted to shoot you for a series on aging in 2014.

MICHÈLE LAMY: When I was told you wanted to shoot me, I was very excited. But my fingers were freshly dyed black with henna, and you almost killed me, remember? When I got to the shoot, you said, "You have to have red lips and your nails red and your fingers natural," because everyone else in the series had that too. Oh my God, nothing could take the dye off!

MM: I wanted your grill in the photo, especially the diamonds in it. I thought red lipstick would accentuate it. And I loved that you hadn't had any work done to make yourself look younger. I'm not criticizing women for having plastic surgery at all because it's hard to be a woman in this world, with all the pressures on us. But you were natural, and I thought, "That's the face and smile I want."

ML: Men also get work done, no? Perhaps a little less, but they're doing it too.

MM: Almost everybody does it. When you have a certain amount of money, you're expected to erase the aging process. And if you don't do it, there's something wrong with you. Your look is so much more powerful than having everybody look the same. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. That's so corny, but it's true.

ML: The first time I went to North Africa, when I was 17 or 18, I saw these Berber women with tattoos on their faces and their skin all wrinkled. I found that so beautiful. I soon discovered that I have Moorish ancestors! Around that same time, I remember my grandmother putting powder on her skin because people would think that if she was so tanned, naturally she must be working in the field. That was the only reason she covered the way she looked—so people didn't think she was picking potatoes. You express who you are with your face and your gestures. I say what you can't fight, embrace.

MM: The media plays a huge role in making women feel like ►

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP AND LEFT: MICHÈLE LAMY BY MARILYN MINTER, COURTESY LGDR AND REGEN PROJECTS; MINTER PORTRAIT: NADYA WASYLKO

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*"To try to achieve
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MARILYN MINTER

Top and above: Lamy photographed
by Minter. Right: Minter in her
Manhattan studio.

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V O I C E S

IN CONVERSATION

“You EXPRESS who YOU ARE with your FACE and your GESTURES. I say what you CAN’T FIGHT, EMBRACE.”

MICHÈLE LAMY



Lamy opening Rick Owens's Spring 2022 runway show in Paris

once they've hit a certain age, they're no longer sexy or desirable.

ML: It's so wrong. Didn't you think we'd be beyond this?

MM: Yeah. But I see female actors becoming producers now for the first time. Women need to own production, to be the producers of our own images for our own amusement and pleasure. We need more pictures of who we are. The more we see people like you, that's what's going to change everything. When I was growing up, the roles for women on TV were nurses, teachers, and librarians. Women weren't doctors. They weren't CEOs. They weren't powerful lawyers or Supreme Court justices or senators. I think that's how everything's going to change.

ML: The fashion world is changing too. There's a lot more diversity now.

MM: I love that. At least people can see representations of themselves in fashion and advertising and TV. That's the beginning. Also, the female writers of today—they write so differently than what I'm used to reading from men. That's where the female gaze comes in too. The Lisa Taddeos and Sally Rooney's and Jennifer Egan's—they have such a fresh way of looking at sex. I'm so impressed by them. In the '80s, when I started creating my sexually explicit work,

I was a pro-sex feminist and thought everybody thought like me!

ML: Exactly! That's why all your series about women have been so important. They show us the way we want to be seen.

MM: That's what I figured out. We're never going to get rid of sexual imagery. Sex rules the world. But women can be the agents and producers of it. I think it'll be healthier. All we are asking is to share power. We're not trying to take over.

ML: We want to share, but to share we have to take over.

MM: You're right! But the best we're going to get right now is sharing. This toxic masculinity. Putin and his power grab for Ukraine—he's from another century. Everybody sees these images of him bombing women and children who are trying to leave through the humanitarian corridors, which are supposedly safe. That authoritarian male, that patriarchy that's ruling the world—it's poisonous.

ML: It's absolutely depressing. And what can we do? We have to do our best to be good to our neighbors and try to take in refugees. As artists, we do our best to create things that say something and are powerful. Rick's show at Paris Fashion Week, which started four days after the invasion, was initially going to have music that could have felt quite harsh and ominous, but he switched to Mahler's Symphony No. 5 as it felt more apt for the current moment. It completely changed the tone of the show. Demna Gvasalia's show for Balenciaga was extremely powerful too. Demna had been a refugee himself, so it was very personal. It was a way for him to be part of the times and show that fashion could be a link to larger issues and ideas.

MM: I always admire Rick's shows. You know what blew my mind? Years ago, in 2013, he used female step dancers to show the clothes. That's one of the best things I've ever seen in terms of fashion. I thought that should have been in the Whitney Biennial.

ML: The step dancers reflected how ideas around beauty and the way women were expressing themselves were shifting at that time. Our creative process is a continuous conversation. It's the same with Lamyland; I'm mainly asking questions. It started with a pop-up at Selfridges in London in 2018 that was built around the theme of boxing, which I've been practicing for more than 35 years. We invited artists and designers to create punching bags and to collaborate on capsule items too. We had a fully functioning boxing ring and a series of boxing images. It was an ideal world; we were picking up kids from the local neighborhood to take boxing lessons, realizing that it's one of the sports that can lift kids out of trouble. Of course, it has also become a women's sport. But the fights of women versus the fights of men—the way they're treated is very different, even if they are equally strong and they train the same way.

MM: My work is about starting conversations too. There is a lot of contempt for popular culture and fashion and beauty and glamour, yet those industries are still the giant engines of the culture. Pornography too. These are the things that I'd like to take second looks at, in the way we're relooking at how we treated Monica Lewinsky and Britney Spears. We're appalled at the way we behaved to these young women. I want to tolerate complexity more, and I want to relook at things I have knee-jerk reactions to. **HB**