

# REGEN PROJECTS

Wortham, Jenna. "Marilyn Minter Finds Art In the Female Form." *The New York Times Magazine* (February 19, 2017) p. 58 [ill.]

## The New York Times Magazine

Talk

### Marilyn Minter Finds Art In the Female Form

Interview by Jenna Wortham

**Your current retrospective, "Pretty/Dirty," is part of a larger, continuing exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum called "A Year of Yes: Reimagining Feminism." Does feminism need to be reimagined?** It needs to be inclusionary. Well, it's called intersectional, but I don't like that word. I had to look up intersectional; anyone knows what inclusionary means. Feminism needs to include male feminists, it needs to include people of color.

**There is an entire wall of your paintings, which were commissioned and ultimately rejected by Playboy, of women's pubic hair. I'm trying to make a case for it because it's not a terrible thing, it's beautiful. Yesterday's smut is today's erotica.**

**What if you're the reason that pubic hair makes a giant comeback in the next decade?** I wanted young girls to stop lasering, because laser is forever, you know. Do whatever you want for fashion, just don't laser. I've been around. You're going to be a baldy when you're 80?

**Your aesthetic has been described as "off-glamour" and "off-beauty," and your work plays with extremes and challenges what we believe to be the photographic truth. What is appealing about that to you?** Fashion is one of the engines of the culture. You see who your tribe is by the way they present themselves — and even if you're someone who doesn't care what you look like or you don't put yourself together, that's a tribe! So I thought, How do I make a metaphor for that? I want to contain two different ideas in the same image, so I had to make it sort of disgusting but absolutely, ravishingly beautiful.

**There's an inherent duality of manufactured beauty: There's the labor of**



**Age:** 68

**Occupation:** Artist

**Hometown:** Shreveport, La.

Minter is a visual artist and a professor at the School of Visual Arts. Her exhibit, "Pretty/Dirty," is currently on view at the Brooklyn Museum.

**Her Top Five Planned Parenthoods to Donate To:**

1. Gulf Coast P.P.
2. Greater Ohio P.P.
3. Indiana and Kentucky P.P.
4. Southeast P.P.
5. New York City P.P.

**construction, but there can also be an ugly side to the psychology of what we're trying to do when we're trying to transform ourselves.** I love that there's this big backlash where people aren't wearing any makeup at all, like Alicia Keys. You could say all that makeup could be war paint. Why can't we embrace them both? If that's how you feel good! It's hard to feel good in this world.

**What sort of artist catches your attention?** The artists that I'm interested in are the ones that make a picture of the times they live in. If you can listen to that inner voice, you'll be fine. If you make your work from love, you'll be fine. Just don't try to fit in to the prevalent movement. If everybody's doing video around you, then you should probably start painting. The eye always craves what it doesn't see.

**Can you name a few?** Roxane Gay, Frank Ocean, Childish Gambino, Cindy Sherman, Lorna Simpson. I love Elena Ferrante. I think that she writes about competition better than anybody.

**You've been publicly sober for more than three decades. Does that help you with your creative work?** I'm much more connected to that inner voice. I get struck on the street sometimes. Just like the Greeks talked about it. Struck! Like, "Wow, that's my next body of work." This happened to me twice.

**In the 1980s and 1990s, your work was rejected by feminists for using images from pornography in ways they felt objectified the female body.** Yeah, well, there was a prescribed way of being feminist in those days. My side won.

**How are feminists receiving your work now?** Well, everybody loves those paintings now.

**Why do you think that is?** They're rational. Until recently, celebrities haven't felt comfortable speaking out about political causes. Celebrities have a hard time because the public grades them on a different curve. Artists have no problem, they're fearless. What are they going to do, not buy our work? Boycott?

**I think it means a lot to younger artists, especially women, to see older women artists saying, "This is important, this is the priority."** I'm not trying to be any kind of leader, 'cause it's not my generation. I don't need an abortion, and I'm not going to get deported. It's your generation. I just want to be with you. ♦

Interview has been condensed and edited.