

# REGEN PROJECTS

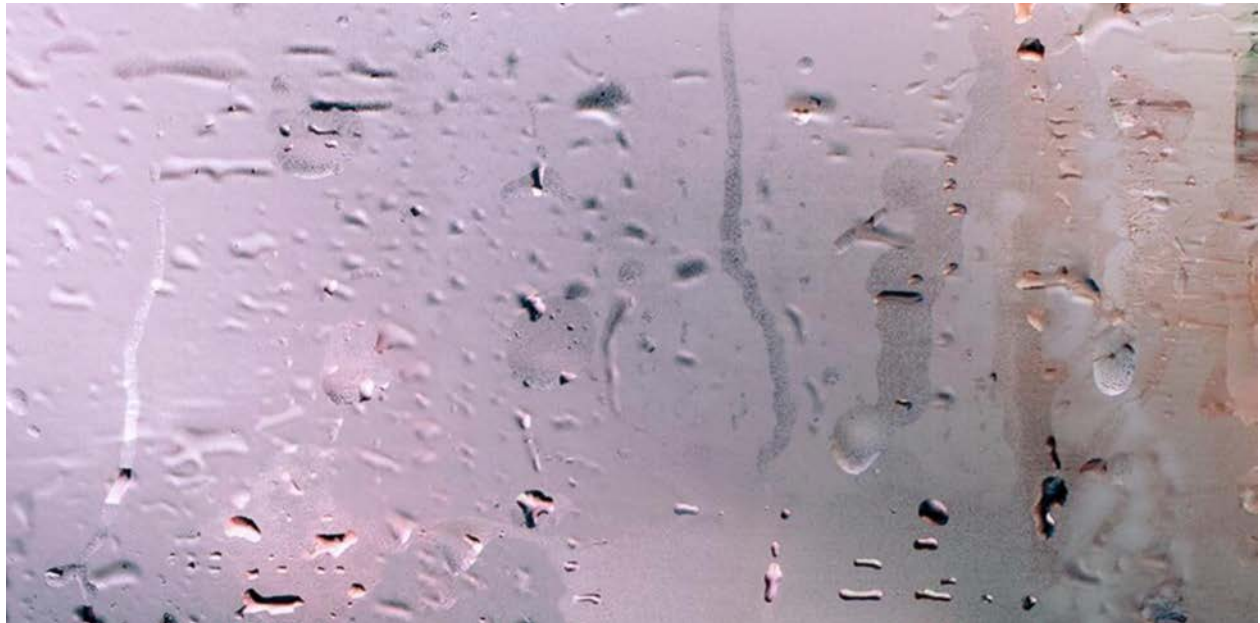
Stead, Chloe. "Marilyn Minter on Overcoming Censorship and Bringing Back Pubic Hair."  
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## FRIEZE

BY CHLOE STEAD AND MARILYN MINTER IN INTERVIEWS,  
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### Marilyn Minter on Overcoming Censorship and Bringing Back Pubic Hair

With a solo exhibition at MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain, the artist speaks to Chloe Stead about the female gaze and why as an 'old lady' you can do just about anything



**Chloe Stead:** 'All Wet', your first institutional solo exhibition in France, features the video *Green Pink Caviar* (2009) alongside 12 paintings from 'Bathers', a series you have been working on since 2014. What was the genesis of this project?

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**Marilyn Minter:** It all started when writer and curator Neville Wakefield was appointed creative director of special projects at *Playboy* magazine and asked me if I wanted to contribute something. At the time, some of my students at the School of Visual Arts in New York were having their pubic hair lasered off and I thought: 'Well, I'll take photographs and show them that it can be attractive, too.' We found amateur models of all different races, and I shot them over a period of a few months. *Playboy* paid for everything – these were probably US\$10,000 shoots – but, when the art director saw the pictures, they hated them. [Laughs.] I still really wanted to make a case for bringing pubic hair back, so I decided to make a whole series of paintings that would be beautiful enough to put in your living room.



Marilyn Minter, *Ginger*, 2016, enamel on metal, 213 x 152 cm

**CS:** What is your interest in bathers?

**MM:** It struck me that, from the beginning of art history, almost all paintings of women grooming have been made by men. I wanted to know whether it would change the meaning if, as a woman, I painted other women bathing. From Jean-Honoré Fragonard to Pierre Bonnard, France has a rich history of paintings of bathers so, when I was invited to do this exhibition in Montpellier, I knew straight away that I wanted to show these works.

**CS:** Alongside your exhibition is a presentation of Betty Tompkins's 'Fuck Paintings' (1969–ongoing). Like you, Tompkins was heavily criticised in the 1970s for her use of sexual imagery. In the corridor between the two shows, the curators have also developed an expansive visual timeline of female artists whose artworks have been

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censored over the years. What is your relationship to Tompkins and other women included in this group?

**MM:** They're my heroes! I've always been a big fan of women owning their sexuality. Men find it threatening when young, beautiful girls make sexual imagery, but if you're an old lady like me then you can do anything you want. There's a famous photograph that Robert Mapplethorpe took of Louis Bourgeois holding what looks like a giant dildo (*Louise Bourgeois with Fillette (1968)*, 1982) and everyone thinks it's adorable, but if she were a young woman then people would be horrified – other women would be attacking her.



Timeline from 1969 to 2021 on the relationship between art, feminism, pornography and censorship

**CS:** Is that something you've tried to take advantage of as you've aged?

**MM:** Well, I have permission to explore it now that I'm post-menopausal. An old lady can do anything but, if I were 25, then forget it! I support any woman using sexual imagery and I try to give a picture of what it's like to identify as female, what it feels like to be constantly looked at. Western culture builds up young girls just to rip them apart. Kim Kardashian is a perfect example. She's a fucking multi-millionaire. She's got to have some talent! Lena Dunham had amazing success at a young age and people were vicious to her. She wasn't allowed to make mistakes.

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**CS:** You have said in past interviews that some feminists called your work ‘traitorous’ because of your use of explicit imagery. Has this changed over the years? It strikes me that social media is full of body-, sex- and kink-positive content nowadays.

**MM:** Feminists of my age were horrified by women owning their sexuality. I was ahead of my time. I thought that everyone shared my opinion because I was in a group of pro-sex feminists. I was attending National Organization for Women meetings and defending abortion clinics, so to be called a traitor to feminism was a real shock. [Laughs.] It was a time of political correctness, and this level of feminism coming out of the 1970s was really anti-men and anti-sex. Taking porn and owning it for your own amusement and pleasure, as I did, was seen as a slap in the face. I got where the fear came from, but there was a group of feminists who were trying to ban sexual imagery, and I was the antithesis of that.



'All Wet: Marilyn Minter', 2021, exhibition view, Montpellier Contemporain, France

**CS:** What was your work like back then?

**MM:** I was making cum-shot paintings. At that point in time, there was no internet. To get source images, I had to go to all these hardcore porn stores on 42nd Street and Wall Street. I would walk down the aisle and it would clear! [Laughs]. They must have thought I was an aging porn star. I didn't think I was doing anything shocking. I was just making my art from my own vision. A famous critic came to my studio in 1991 and said that if I showed these paintings, I would ruin my career. Because of him, I tried to temper down the next few paintings. Marcia Tucker did a show called 'Bad Girls' in 1994 at the New Museum in New York, and she thought I was too bad even to be included in 'Bad Girls'! [Laughs.] It's funny now, but at the time I was devastated. I was in my late 30s, early 40s and it took me until I was in my 50s to crawl out of it.

**CS:** How does it feel to have success later in life?

**MM:** People are playing catchup, but I'm not complaining. It's a great thing, and it happens to more artists than you would think. One good example is Philip Guston, my

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favourite painter, who had a volatile career. After some early success, he only achieved major recognition in his 80s. And look at Alice Neel. My god, she was totally ignored! I think the white heat burns you out. Once upon a time, Damien Hirst was an artist who really had something to say but, when everything you make is worth millions of dollars, no one is going to question you. Being marginalized keeps you hungry. That's my theory, anyway.

*[Marilyn Minter: All Wet](#) is on view at MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain France, until 5 September 2021.*