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The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is pleased to present a survey exhibition of over three decades of work by Marilyn Minter.



Marilyn Minter, *Blue Poles*, 2007. Enamel on metal. 60 x 72 inches. Courtesy the artist, Salon 94, New York and Regen Projects Los Angeles.

Marilyn Minter – Pretty/Dirty
April 18 – August 2, 2015

Opening Reception
Friday, April 17 | 6:30–9PM

Artist Talk
Saturday, April 18 | 2PM

HOUSTON, TX (DATE)—For over three decades Marilyn Minter has produced lush paintings, photographs, and videos that vividly manifest our culture’s complex and contradictory emotions around the feminine body and beauty. Her unique works—from the oversized paintings of makeup-laden lips

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and eyes to soiled designer shoes—bring into sharp, critical focus the power of desire. As an artist Minter has always made seductive visual statements that demand our attention while never shirking her equally crucial roles as provocateur, critic, and humorist. *Marilyn Minter – Pretty/Dirty* features over 25 paintings made between 1976 and 2013, three video works, and several photographs that show Minter’s work in depth. The exhibition was co-organized by the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver.

From the beginning of her career, Minter has been embroiled in controversies over the relationship of her art to feminism, fashion, and celebrity. As her own profile as an artist interested in these vexed cultural intersections has grown, her work has risked looking as effortless as a mirror held up to the most supercilious aspects of today’s “bling” lifestyle. Yet Minter’s work is not merely a mirror of our culture, and this exhibition provides, for the first time, a critical evaluation of her practice as an astute interpretation of our deepest impulses, compulsions, and fantasies.

Marilyn Minter – Pretty/Dirty begins with the artist’s earliest artworks, a startling photo series titled *Coral Ridge Towers*. While still in school, the young Minter shot one roll of film of her mother, a drug addled, darkly glamorous woman who was nonetheless “mom” for the artist. Completed in 1969 when Minter was 21, the works were not shown until decades later by Linda Yablonsky, a lifelong friend of Minter’s who used them as background images for a reading program. The series’ clear relationship to the artist’s later themes of degraded beauty has made these photographs into classics of the Diane Arbus-like genre. In *Pretty/Dirty* they are put back into their proper historical sequence as her earliest extant work.

The exhibition includes *Little Girls #1* (1986) from Minter’s monumentally sized series from the mid-1980s titled *Big Girls, Little Girls*. Minter employed a mechanically applied enamel technique to portray a young girl looking at her distorted reflection in a funhouse mirror. Here Minter focuses on how girls are trained at an early age to look critically at their bodies, only to see themselves as flawed. Also on view from this series is *Big Girls* (1986), which combines the little girl gazing at her reflection with an appropriated image of Sophia Loren anxiously peering at Jane Mansfield’s voluptuous figure spilling out of her dress. “These works, like the others from this period, fused a feminist critique of the construction of gender and femininity with other postmodernist hallmarks of the 1980s, including the appropriation of mass-media imagery translated in a cool, detached, style of painting,” says Elissa Auther, co-curator of the exhibition.

In every decade, Minter offers a smart woman’s critical look at issues that are otherwise presented by men for female consumption. The fashion world is full of male fashion house owners, designers, and photographers who create an image of being female. Rather than a blatantly naive critique of fashion, Minter shows the dual nature and slight imperfections of herself and her fellow woman, finding that true allure comes from the sensuality of imperfections. In one of her best-known paintings, *Blue Poles* (2007), Minter takes what is clearly a beautiful face and reveals flaws: a pimple, errant eyebrow hairs, and freckles. In real life these so called flaws make us human, attractive, and loveable, but in the beauty industry these imperfections need to be eradicated. In the age of Photoshop, where things such as freckles disappear from fashion and entertainment magazines, this painting can be understood as marking a final celebration of the attractiveness of the un-retouched human face.

Minter’s recurring investigation of how the fashion industry expertly creates and manipulates desire led her to depict in many of her paintings an image of a gorgeous accessory looking less than glamorous. In *Dirty Heel* (2008), viewers are treated to a close up of a woman’s dirty heel accessorized by an expensive looking pink-lined high-heeled shoe. In her 2014 video *Smash*, large female feet in bejeweled high-heeled shoes appear to be having a hell of a time—dancing, sliding across the floor, and smashing

glass—all in Minter’s signature silver liquid. As we become aware of the subject’s tattooed swollen feet, which seem to convey a wealth of experience, viewers might at first feel a wave of aversion, but the joy of her smashing time is impossible to resist.

The exhibition explores in detail the myriad image choices Minter has made as a painter and photographer, the evolution of her style and technique, and her mode of production, including her organization of an unusual studio of assistants trained to create hyper-real, sometimes dizzyingly painted surfaces. *Pretty/Dirty* illustrates Minter’s progress from a curious youth looking critically at the domestic landscape before her to the media-savvy cultural producer whose images simultaneously define and critique our times.

The exhibition is co-curated by Bill Arning, Director of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and Elissa Auther, Associate Professor of Contemporary Art at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and an Adjunct Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver. The exhibition is on view at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston April 18 – August 2, 2015 and at MCA Denver September 18, 2015 - January 18, 2016. The show will travel to the Orange County Museum of Art, CA, May 15 - August 28, 2016 and the Brooklyn Museum, September 19, 2016 - January 22, 2017.

PUBLICATION

Marilyn Minter - Pretty/Dirty is accompanied by a significant monograph of the artist’s paintings and photographs. The publication will include an introduction and significant essays by the organizing curators, Bill Arning and Elissa Auther, and a long-format interview with the artist by Linda Yablonsky. The publication will also contain essays by Nick Flynn, K8 Hardy, Richard Hell, Colby Keller, Catherine Morris, Eileen Myles, Jenni Sorkin and Neville Wakefield. The monograph features over 60 color and black-and-white images of the works presented in the exhibition, including newly restored images of her influential *Food Porn* paintings, a bibliography of general reading, and a chronology of the artist’s life and work. The catalogue is published by Gregory R. Miller and Co.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

Marilyn Minter – Pretty/Dirty’s Houston presentation is supported by generous grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Marita and J.B. Fairbanks, Barbara and Michael Gamson, Poppi Massey, and Elizabeth and Barry Young.

Marilyn Minter – Pretty/Dirty’s national presentation, co-organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver and the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, is supported by generous grants from Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch and Amy and John Phelan.

This exhibition has been made possible by the patrons, benefactors and donors to the Museum's Friends of Steel Exhibitions: Director’s Circle - Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, Faye Sarofim, Michael Zilkha. Curator’s Circle - Marita and J.B. Fairbanks, Dillon Kyle Architecture, Inc., Mr. and Mrs. I. H. Kempner III, Ms. Louisa Stude Sarofim. Major Exhibition Circle - A Fare Extraordinaire, Bank of Texas, Bergner and Johnson Design, Jereann Chaney, Elizabeth Howard Crowell, Sara Paschall Dodd, Ruth Dreessen and Thomas Van Laan, Jo and Jim Furr, Barbara and Michael Gamson, Brenda and William Goldberg, Blakely and Trey Griggs, George and Mary Josephine Hamman Foundation, Jackson and Company, Louise D. Jamail, Anne and David Kirkland, KPMG, LLP, Beverly and Howard Robinson, Lauren Rottet, Robin and Andrew Schirrmeister, Leigh and Reggie Smith, and Yellow Cab Houston.

EDUCATION SUPPORT

The Museum receives support for its education programs from: Anonymous, Vera and Andy Baker, Mary and Marcel Barone, Frost Bank, Louise D. Jamail, Kinder Morgan Foundation, Robert and Pearl

Wallis Knox Foundation, Leticia Loya, Elisabeth McCabe, M.D. Anderson Foundation, Marian and Speros Martel Foundation Endowment, Andrew R. McFarland, Cabrina and Steven Owsley, Ms. Louisa Stude Sarofim, Texas Commission on the Arts, Bridget and Patrick Wade, and Elizabeth Satel Young.

Teen Council is supported by Ms. Louisa Stude Sarofim. School tours at CAMH are supported in part by Vera and Andy Baker.

GENERAL SUPPORT

Funding for the Museum’s operations through the Fund for the Future is made possible by generous grants from Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, Anonymous, Jereann Chaney, Marita and J.B. Fairbanks, Jo and Jim Furr, Barbara and Michael Gamson, Brenda and William Goldberg, Leticia Loya, Fayez Sarofim, Robin and Andrew Schirrmeister, and David and Marion Young.

The Museum’s operations and programs are made possible through the generosity of the Museum’s trustees, patrons, members and donors. The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston receives partial operating support from The Brown Foundation, Inc., Houston Endowment, the City of Houston through the Houston Museum District Association, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Texas Commission on the Arts, The Wortham Foundation, Inc. and artMRKT Productions. CAMH also thanks its artist benefactors for their support including Jules de Balincourt, Jack Early, Mark Flood, Keltie Ferris, Barnaby Furnas, Theaster Gates, Trenton Doyle Hancock, Mary Heilmann, Jim Hodges, Jennie C. Jones, Klara Lidén, Maya Lin, Robert Mangold, Melissa Miller, Marilyn Minter, Angel Otero, Enoc Perez, Rob Pruitt, Matthew Ritchie, Dario Robleto, Ed Ruscha, Rusty Scruby, Cindy Sherman, Lorna Simpson, James Surls, Sam Taylor-Johnson, and William Wegman.

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CAMH MISSION

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GENERAL INFORMATION

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is located at 5216 Montrose Boulevard, at the corner of Montrose and Bissonnet, in the heart of Houston’s Museum District. Hours are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday 10AM-7PM, Thursday 10AM-9PM, Saturday 10AM-6PM, and Sunday 12PM-6PM. Admission is always free. For more information, visit www.camh.org or call 713 284 8250.