

VICENTIA

29

SPRING/SUMMER

**LEE PRICE, WOODKID, ANA KRAŠ & DEVENDRA BANHART,
RUBENIMICHI, MALERIE MARDER, THOM BROWNE,
JD SAMSON, ANNE PIGALLE, MEADHAM KIRCHHOFF,
MIA HANSEN-LØVE, VIKTOR&ROLF**

ESP 10€
UK 10£
EUR 12€

9 771 887 344 006



2 9

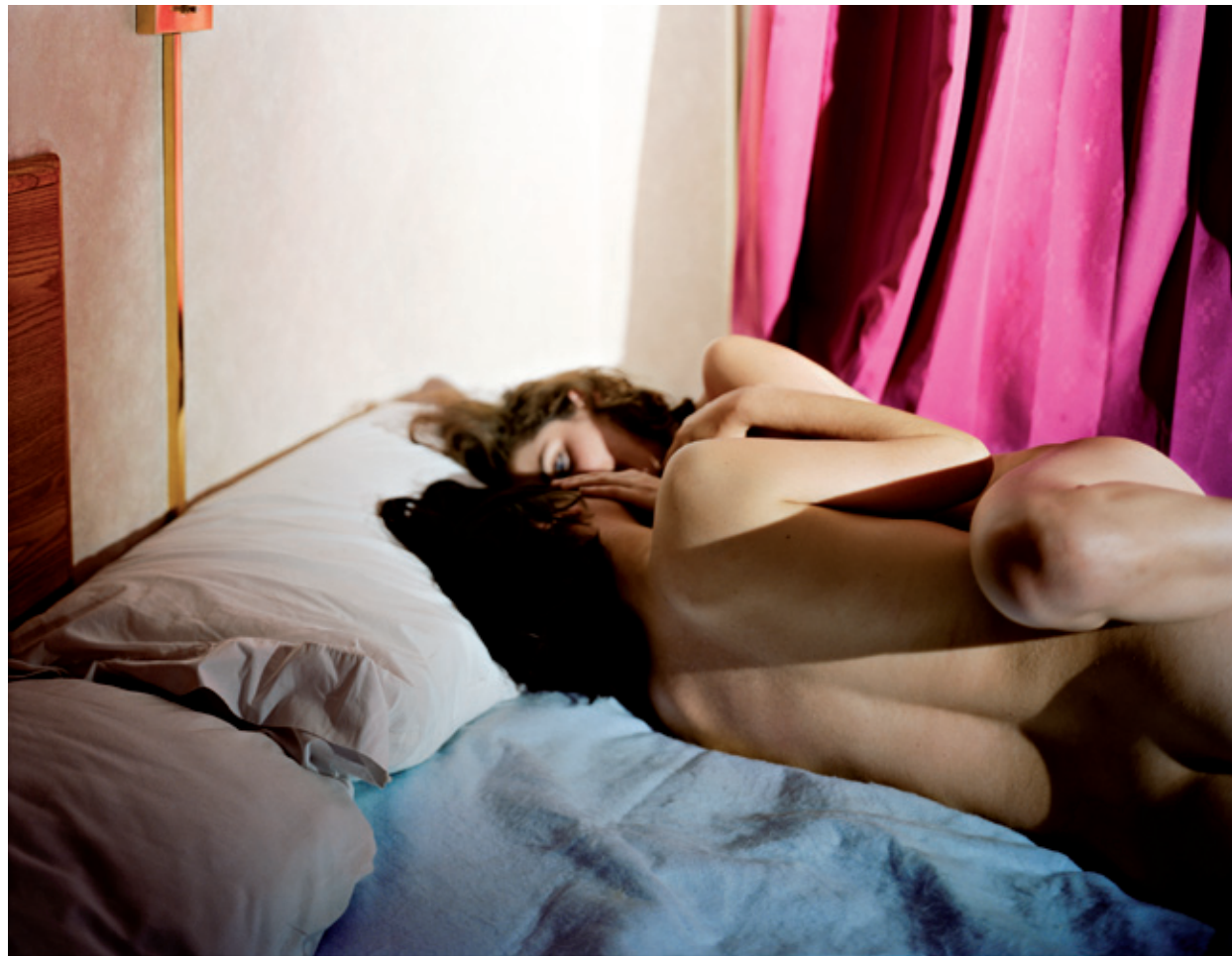


**THE NAKED TRUTH
TALKING ABOUT
EROTICISM AND INTIMACY WITH
MALERIE MARDER**

WORDS BY
CAROLYN BRENNAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
TATIANA
LESHKINA

While looking at an image by Malerie Marder, one is transported into a voyeuristic world of eroticism, intimacy, anonymity and confusion. A naked couple making out in a seedy motel room; a woman lounging provocatively on a raft in an above-ground pool, a trailer home parked in the background; the artist's mother sitting uncomfortably in a bathroom, arms crossed, while Marder's then-boyfriend actor Peter Sarsgaard looks on from the shower where he is standing naked.



Marder's art is so personal, not just because of the nudity, but because she invites her friends and family to be the subjects of her portraits, and often includes herself in her own images. She catches private moments between people in front of the camera that would otherwise be lost – the moments might not be complete reality, but what Marder captures is close enough. The setting and location of the photos are equally important to the artist, as they are the “other personality” in the picture, taking on qualities and traits of their own.

The American artist and photographer developed her skills from the best: she was taught by Stephen Shore at Bard and Philip-Lorca diCorcia and Gregory Crewdson at Yale. She moved to Los Angeles after college to continue on her own, and when a family friend asked her to photograph her with her lover in a motel room, the psychosexual aspect of Marder's work caught on, and kept growing for the following decade, flowering into a retrospective of provocative, personal and sometimes disquieting images with themes of privacy and secrecy.

Marder released her first book, *Carnal Knowledge*, in 2011 published by Violette Editions, including photos throughout a ten year span of her work, complete with a preface by Gregory Crewdson, texts by Charlotte Cotton and James Ellroy, and correspondence between Marder and her mentor Philip-Lorca diCorcia. This fall she will be releasing a new book titled *Anatomy* – the result of time spent in brothels in Rotterdam photographing prostitutes and their customers. Marder's photographs are included in the collections of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and The National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, among others.

You grew up in Philadelphia. How did your childhood and family life shape who you are today?

My parents were never really bohemian; my father is a hematologist and my mother worked for Pan Am, but it was the 1970s and they had friends who lived in mushroom houses and whose children were named Cloudy and Sunny. My father is in academic medicine and is naturally internal and deep in thought and my mother is intrinsically peripatetic, so I was lucky that each gave me the antidote of the other. He provided a firm foothold on the world and my mother kept our life from being dull. We spent a lot of time in airports and traveling abroad. When I was 11, my parents took my sister and me out of school and we went on a long trip through Kenya, which was certainly unusual for most middle-class families. What I'm trying to say is, I wasn't groomed to become an artist, but my growing up wasn't typical either.

When did you first become interested in photography?

I've weaved different yarns to provide an origin story. The simplest and most honest is that it's a mystery. When I was young I fell in love with a Florence Henri picture and then fell a little in love with her; the Stendhal syndrome gripped me. It's easy to be cynical since we are so overwhelmed and inundated with imagery, but when someone's imprint is pure, it really is unmistakable.

“WITH MY SERIES *NINE* I WANTED TO RECREATE A SHORT STORY TYPE FEEL AROUND MY FIRST PREGNANCY, SO THAT IT WOULDN'T BE A PROSAIC ACCOUNT OF MY BELLY GROWING, BUT MORE OF A HOSTAGE SITUATION – LIKE WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPENING HERE?”

How has living in Los Angeles affected the way you work?

It's eternal summer and time never passes so I'm not really aging. It allows for incredible deception and delusion...

You mostly photograph people in the nude – how did you end up in this direction as opposed to more conventional, commercial or fashion photography?

I wish I could answer this.

Your pictures are very sexual and erotic, but there is something more going on in the photos, something that might make the viewer slightly uneasy. Are you purposely trying to make the viewer uncomfortable? What do you want the viewer to feel?

I try not to anticipate a reaction since I think it can get in the way of risk. I try to let my own intrinsic process take over without over thinking how someone may or may not react. I simply don't have that vantage point.

Your photos also have a very voyeuristic aspect to them, can you explain the role of voyeurism in your work?

Maybe it's the nature of photography. The body of a camera is a voyeuristic tool. It allows you to be closer when you are actually farther away; it manipulates space and consequentially manipulates the way we register the world. I think when I'm looking at someone through the ground glass of my camera and I have the black cloak over my head and I'm focusing on the scene – I can feel the voyeurism of my positioning and it naturally creeps into my pictures.

The spaces that you shoot in are just as important as your subjects - can you explain why?

It's the other personality in the picture. Finding people is fairly easy, but finding spaces that speak to me is difficult. Unless the room unfolds in an enigmatic way, the moment feels off. There's an energy, a history with a house that is as alive as a landscape. For me, it's all integral to making a moment feel believable.

How do you decide which environment works for a certain subject?

I guess it's like a marriage. I intuitively try to decide what goes with what. Sometimes it's an antidote to what I feel the person inspires, other times it works in collusion. A lot of this alchemy is mysterious to me. It's not that I can't articulate or name it, but I don't like to weigh down explanations of my work with lofty descriptions.





What kinds of environments are your favorite to shoot in?

Same as people – the kind that engage me.

Can you explain the differences between shooting in color and in black and white? How do you decide?

Color I associate with the present tense and black and white with the past. My black and white pictures for me feel like a sensual memory. The color are more brutally honest – or confronting since there's less nostalgia in the image. The decision is partly an aesthetic choice – but it's also preconceived.

In another interview, you once mentioned that, “For for an image to be powerful it has to, in some regard, insinuate death.” Can you explain?

I can't remember what I said exactly but I imagine it had to do about the passing of time and that photography takes account of that passage so by it's very nature it's a melancholy medium.

How do you go about achieving spontaneity in a photograph?

I pray for an accident to happen.

Carnal knowledge is a retrospective of your works – what does the phrase “carnal knowledge” mean to you?

It means knowing someone as a lover, but for me I think it means having an experience that defies logic. It isn't meant to insinuate anything direct about the pictures themselves, but more to imply that even with all the bodies

being bared, we are far away from any real knowledge of what is being depicted. Or maybe it means the ritual of getting undressed only to get dressed again...

Can you tell me about your new body of work, *Anatomy*?

It's a new body of work that will be shown in New York City at Leslie Tonkonow gallery this coming fall. It's of prostitutes in Rotterdam. There will be a book published by Twin Palms of the same title. It's a project I became immersed in that has taken me a long time and a lot of effort to complete.

Your work is very personal and you shoot a lot of family members and friends – is it ever awkward or difficult to achieve the kinds of photographs you are looking for? How are you able to make them feel comfortable and at ease with you, when the situation in photograph itself can be uncomfortable?

I photographed a friend of my mother's (not naked) and she remarked that it felt like she was getting an x-ray – maybe it was the stillness of her pose or that she felt naturally exposed. I tend to think what is initially uncomfortable is overcome and the remainder makes for healthy tension. If someone is too comfortable with the camera than they are likely to pose. I've plied my subjects with wine, but with mixed results. It's nice when a person starts to daydream and forgets that you're there or what they're doing. When it's this really lovely, unusual interruption to their day. It's sort of like taking a mental trip. You both wander off together...

How were you able to convince your boyfriend and your mom to pose together with him naked?

I bribed them. (And begged). It was unusual for sure, but I liked the electric triangle it created between my mother, my boyfriend and myself. He is an actor and I was influenced by his desire to create situations that illicit a reaction and suggest a performance. The first photograph was a disaster; my mother stormed off in a huff, but after that initial trial, the others came easier. I was conscious to never have their eyes meet in any of the pictures.

Why is it that you sometimes place yourself in your pictures?

I'm more readily available and usually willing – though I still have to coerce myself. Sometimes it's because I couldn't possibly ask someone else to do what is inside my head and other times it's out of convenience. And, sometimes it's about introspection or narcissism or an experience that no one can have but you. I think my series *Nine* was that. I wanted to recreate a short story type feel around my first pregnancy, so that it wouldn't be a prosaic account of my belly growing, but more of a hostage situation – like what the hell is happening here?

What is your definition of love?

Sadly, I grapple with this question a lot. One of my favorite stories is Raymond Carver's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. The setting is two couples sitting around a table in Albuquerque drinking gin. The story is too complex to dissect here but it essentially talks



about the complications of love and of being in love. It contrasts spiritual love and carnal love and the destructiveness and consuming nature of the latter and the easiness of some loves (but hints that easy means “easy come, easy go”). It also talks about our desire for lasting love and the contemporary temporal nature of most modern relationships. They start their conversation drinking and the light in the room is warm and beautiful – that first intoxication – and then the room turns dark and they're too drunk to eat. So, yes love is intoxication, but is followed by hard truth.

Can you tell me about your children? How has having them affected your life and work?

I have a girl, Esme, who is seven and a boy, Hugo, who is four. I'm blessed. They've given me everything.

What is the most important thing that makes a relationship work?

I don't have an answer to this. Maybe the best glue is attraction, luck, and lack of fear, but just because something isn't forever doesn't make it any less meaningful or beautiful. I love Antonia Fraser's memoir of her life with Harold Pinter. She was married to a British MP and had six children when she fell madly in love

with Harold Pinter who was also married and had a child. They were both fearless enough to leave their marriages and embark on a life together – but she still found herself crying in a dark movie theater after her divorce was settled. It's never all neatly wrapped up and some things will always break your heart.

What inspires you?

Lot of things. Most things inspire – whether they're positive or negative – they still inspire. The inspiration is easy, it's the execution that is difficult. It's hard to get what's in your head out in the world. Sometimes it's material constraints, money constraints, other times it just doesn't come together how you envisioned it and that can be frustrating. All the myriad dimensions of what is in front of you and what you imagine, inspire. Sometimes, I'll witness something that inspires me or moves me even if it's to cause offense, other times something will unfold that will involve me that I can't ignore or where I'm overwhelmed. Art that moves me inspires too.

When do you feel most creative?

When I'm feeling emotional, or very up or very down. Or just when I need to get lost in my own thoughts. A lot of it is day dreaming, until it becomes more real.

Who are your favorite photographers?

Lee Miller, Man Ray, Florence Henri, Bill Brandt, William Eggleston and Philip-Lorca diCorcia.

Do you have a favorite exhibit of your past work?

I had shown a video *At Rest* first in New York City and it was a simple installation of the video projected over a fireplace. Later I was able to exhibit it again at the Edinburgh Film Festival and this time I lay a white soft carpet on the floor, painted the walls a bright white and projected it floor to ceiling, so it felt like the bodies were laying with you on the carpet. It's not my favorite but it was a more satisfying installation than the first and I learned a lot in the process.

What else are you working on at the moment?

I've been taking pictures at my psychiatrist's house.

What are your plans for the future? Where do you see yourself in five to ten years?

I make a point of not projecting too far into the future. ■■■■