



## Marilyn Minter Hires Dreamers

**By Robert Ayers**

Published: August 15, 2007

NEW YORK—**Marilyn Minter** lives and works in a classic SoHo loft. It's not a huge space, and she works cheek-by-jowl with her four assistants: Johann Olander, Agata Bebecka, and Chris Oh, all of whom paint, and Michelle Matson, the office person. "We're like a family," Minter says of the arrangement. Johann is an ex-student of Minter's from the School of Visual Arts who has worked for her on and off since 1992, Agata has been aboard for about a year, and Chris and Michelle are relatively new recruits.

Minter hardly disguises the fact that her increasing success over the last few years, with her solo show at SFMOMA in 2005, her inclusion in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, and her Creative Time billboard project in the same year, often takes her away from the actual process of painting. Between arranging commissions, overseeing publishing projects (**including a recent monograph for Gregory R. Miller & Co.** and features for *Parkett* and *Zoetrope All-Story*), and attending to the business and bureaucratic aspects of her career, she is ever occupied—at a time when demand for her work has never been higher. This has led to her needing more assistants.

Minting a Minter is a laborious, drawn-out process, lasting on average five months. Each canvas involves layer after layer of underpainting, and then a final layer that is applied with the fingers, a process the artist describes as "anal, time-consuming, labor-intensive work." Which is why she isn't looking for assistants with skills as realist painters—who are able to paint a Minter by themselves—but instead those who have what she calls "the knitting gene": who can daydream, lose themselves in the monotony of work, and even find it therapeutic.

Minter's administrative commitments mean that generally she and Chris do the underpainting, while the finishing layers are applied by Johann and Agata (ever generous, Minter stresses that it wasn't long before Johann could "paint better" than she could, and that when Agata joined the team, "she made us look like we couldn't even paint. We're good, but she kicks ass!"). Some works even leave the studio without Minter having touched them. But she says that she always



directs the entire production, guiding the assistants closely, making all compositional decisions, and creating the paintings' photographic sources.

Minter's paintings all derive from photographs, and this part of the process she keeps very much to herself. The photographs are almost all taken in the loft, and Minter does all the photography: "I know what I want; I have the eye; I'm the one who looks through the lens," she insists. Once the photographs are taken, though, the film is sent to a lab for processing and printing. When the prints are returned, Minter does not digitally manipulate or crop them. The photos are assembled to contribute different details of an image—one for the subject's hair, another for the eyes, for example—and up to half a dozen can be used for one finished painting.

On one level, it is clear that Minter's need for assistants frustrates her, particularly as she describes painting as "my first love," adding, "I'd rather do that than anything." But clearly it is this, rather than the pictures' conception, that she feels she is able to have others do on her behalf.

But when she takes a break from the city, at her upstate home? She paints. All the time. All by herself.