

# PHOTOGRAPHY

*A Different Take*

The world's longest-running photography magazine, established 1854

US \$14.99    AUS \$14.95    £6.99



IMAGE © CHRISTIAN TAGLIAVINI

## FACE VALUE

THE PORTRAIT ISSUE

We take a look at the many faces of modern portrait photography

09 AGENDA JOHN MYERS 19 PROJECTS JUERGEN TELLER 26 ON VIEW PORTRAIT PRIZE 33 REPORT COLLABORATIVE PORTRAITS 48 INTERVIEW MALERIE MARDER 65 AWARDS CHLOE DEWE MATHEWS 78 LIGHTING BRONCOLOR SENSO 83 INTELLIGENCE WHAT MATTERS NOW 98 ENDFRAME TIM ANDREWS PROJECT

Ultimate quality: Phase One's IQ180 digital back + 645 DF camera » *Tim Hetherington's archive* » Scot Southern makes the year's most controversial photobook » *Lighting kit for portraits* » Side Gallery on surviving cutbacks





1 Untitled, 1996  
 All images © Malerie Marder.

## IN THE FLESH

Malerie Marder's enigmatically charged nudes hover somewhere between fiction and reality, portraiture and play-acting, finds **Diane Smyth**.

If the Yale School aesthetic implies a cinematic approach to photography, capturing carefully staged narratives that fall somewhere between fact and fiction, then Malerie Marder fits right in. A graduate of the acclaimed Master's course in Connecticut, set up by Walker Evans and now headed up by Tod Papageorge, she was taught by Gregory Crewdson and Philip-Lorca diCorcia (who'd attended the course in earlier years) and, 13 years later, her studied portraits still bear their influence.

Crewdson wrote the foreword to her first monograph, *Carnal Knowledge*, and her written and visual correspondence with diCorcia is reproduced within it. "If it's possible to distil what Philip-Lorca and Gregory imbued in me into a thought, it was to think of the camera as a manipulative device and to be unapologetic as an artist," she says. "Katy [Grannan] and I were both their students, and I see a lot of their discipline of perception in her pictures."

Marder's subversive images differ from the so-called Yale aesthetic, though, because while she carefully controls the location and composition of her images, she doesn't direct her subjects.

"I'm pretty dogmatic about the composition of the image, but it's a natural process when it comes to someone's pose," she says. "It's something often a person does instinctively and then I respond in kind. It's complicated. The idea that they [the images] function as portraits is misleading, but the idea that they [the subjects] are purposefully acting out a role is too far-fetched. I think my pictures exist somewhere between what's real and what's fake." That last statement is classic Yale, however.

Marder was born in 1971 and though she remembers having a camera as a child, she never thought of herself as a photographer, and went to Bard College as a history major. But, while she was there she had the opportunity to study with Stephen Shore and Larry Fink, and by her final year she was working on an independent study with Fink. Shore, who was (and still is) the head of the department, was so impressed he made her an art major, bypassing all the usual requirements. "I was ridiculously stressed out at the time since I had to write my thesis and have a show of my work, but it was thrilling and was my first indication of something," says

Marder. "That I was crazy, or not crazy, or both, simultaneously."

Marder found her subject matter early on, having started to shoot nudes after a brief, unsatisfying, spell of street photography, and attracted the attention of a close family friend. "She asked if I would photograph her and her lover, with whom she had been having an affair for 10 years," says Marder. "They drove for eight hours and got a suite at the nicest hotel in the area. In hindsight, the end of this story is obvious, but at the time I was keenly unaware. I arrived at the hotel the next

morning with my 4x5 camera that I had just received a demonstration of in class. I was ready to make pictures. They took off all their clothes and I was soon made privy to their kinky love affair."

The experience sparked an interest she's pursued ever since, and although these seminal images are now lost, some of her early, undergraduate work is included in *Carnal Knowledge*. As Charlotte Cotton writes in her introduction to the book, "there's an overwhelming sense of her as an almost fully formed artist from the outset, with a resolutely original path to follow".

"It's just something I've always done," Marder says. "I have no idea how many images I've taken. I recently threw away three large boxes of 4x5 negatives from college. I know it's practically criminal, but I tire of carrying it all around."

Marder asks her family, friends and strangers to pose for her, often including herself in the images and making awkward pairings, such as her mother and her then-boyfriend, actor Peter Sarsgaard. She's written that her images are an attempt to regain her early innocence "by losing it again, and again and again", but she says

she doesn't fully understand why she makes them - it's a compulsion, and "illogical". Critics have described her photographs as sexy or voyeuristic, and she says they could be right but that although she's "felt the extremes of both interpretations", she finds it hard to pin her work down.

"I love the word 'kinky', but I don't think my photographs fulfil on that sexual level, although I hope some are unusual enough to be considered idiosyncratic," she says. "I think sex is in the mind and the depiction of the naked figure predates the invention of



2 Untitled, 2005.

3 Untitled, 2004.



3

fire. Hopefully, the pictures can't be classified into one intention; otherwise they would be too repetitive and boring. Often my pictures are coloured by what my general state of mind is – just how depressed am I? Or am I currently in a state of heightened bliss?"

The sense of subversion in her work means that some of the people Marder approaches are unwilling to work with her, but she says she has developed a good radar for who will agree. Sometimes she's so compelled by an individual, she asks, even though she senses she will probably be refused; she wore her parents down over time through sheer insistence. Some of her subjects become muses "I could easily photograph for the rest of my lifetime"; others are one-offs. "The pictures of family, friends, lovers, I had the advantage of being able to hold them captive for longer periods of times and could be more experimental," she says. "A sizeable fraction of the people I only met once," she says. "Often it was a coincidence – a friend of a friend, or a chance meeting, where I hit it off with someone, at other times it was purposefully after I approached a stranger on the street or online."

### The smell of it

Marder carefully scouts the locations in which she shoots, seeking out environments that fit with the feeling she's trying to convey. They are as important as the people she's photographing because they provide "the other psychological component in the image" and are often harder to find than the people she wants to photograph. One of her very early locations, like her first sexually charged scene, came through sheer chance – she and Sarsgaard had to move into their landlord's empty home while they were studying at Yale, an untouched mid-century gem.

"Within a space that was markedly out of step with modern living, Marder was able to explore the extent to which she could strip away unnecessary contemporary details without entering overtly nostalgic territory, instead conjuring psychosexual energy to fill its sparseness," writes Cotton.

In her other series, Marder has worked in very different locations – *Inland Empire*, for example, which she shot in 2004, was largely photographed in cheap motels around LA. "Smell often exerts a palpable role in how my pictures

are formed, overriding whatever pre-existing thoughts I may have," she says. "The cornucopia of lurid smells in the pay-by-the-hour motel rooms created a different outcome than my former landlord's home. Sometimes you act in oppositions to your surroundings, other times it's impossible to overcome."

Marder has always included herself in her images, on the grounds that it would be unfair to ask others to do what she herself would not. She's also photographed herself in scenarios she felt uncomfortable asking other people to deal with, and is always harder on herself than her other subjects. When she wanted to create an image that drew attention to the body, for example, she shaved all her body hair in order to emulate Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' odalisque nudes, and photographed herself on the beach. She describes her treatment of herself as simply masochistic, but for Cotton, "because Marder reserves the most extreme objectification for her own body and biography, she stops us from caricaturing her oeuvre as a repeated act of visual exploitation of her subjects."

Marder also notes that her work is evolving over time – when she





5

was at Yale, John Szarkowski came to give a lecture and she found it hard to keep her eyes open through his comments on the quality of a white shirt in a Dorothea Lange photograph, she says, but “now I can relate more to his pure love of photography.”

She’s opted to mix up both chronology and her photographic series in *Carnal Knowledge*, which collects together her work from 1996 to 2007, picking out ongoing visual themes instead. She opens the book with a series of images in which the subject’s eyes are unseen, for example, to “open with a feeling of mystery unfolding”; later on she picks out a series of lone subjects from various stages in her career.

“When I first started talking to Robert Violette about publishing a book of my work, I began an edit of my images that was loosely chronological but more like a film, with the liberty to move back and forth in time,” she says. “I’d always wanted to see my pictures – both the black-and-white, and colour – mixed and flowing. I’m fairly certain I’m the only one who would have thought to edit them this way; I hope this is one of the reasons it engages, since it operates on a more subconscious, visceral level, even if it proves frustrating for some.

“Generally speaking, I think of the black-and-white pictures being like sensual memories, and the colour as more present and confrontational. Interiors influence

4-5 Untitled, 1998.

my choice as well, although strangely my strongest black-and-white pictures would have perhaps looked better in colour. I added in white pages to institute pauses, to allow for a breath or for a dramatic shift; there are different themes to each part but it’s nothing overt.”

Some of the sections are also separated by written texts, which include Crewdson’s foreword, Cotton’s introduction, and Marder’s written and visual correspondence with diCorcia, but also fictional reactions to the work by authors such as AM Homes and James Frey. By including both document and fiction, Marder hints at the ambivalent nature of her images, and it’s a theme she picks up again in her emails to diCorcia. “Supposedly we are always dreaming and what we experience is somewhat illusory because it’s so subjectively rendered,” she writes in one of them. “For me, the beauty of a photograph is that it translates this state of mystery by remaining enigmatic. It’s not an answer, but a clue, a 60th of a second cared in time, gone, not forgotten. It predicates the delusion that we can manipulate time and its passing.” *BJP*

.....  
*Carnal Knowledge* by *Malerie Marder* is published by *Violette Editions* (ISBN 978-1-900828-30-7), priced £50. [www.violetteeditions.com](http://www.violetteeditions.com) [www.maleriemarder.com](http://www.maleriemarder.com)