

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

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Malerie Marder

LESLIE TONKONOW ARTWORKS + PROJECTS

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For her most recent exhibition, Malerie Marder presents a series of photographs depicting prostitutes in brothels in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, places where sex work is both legal and normalized, affording those within it greater dignity than other places. Marder's photographs visually reaffirm this: Each of her images show her subjects—all women—relating to their own bodies in moments that are at once intimate and blunt. The women are pictured lying on beds, while bottles of cheap lotion and boxes of tissues are neatly displayed against wall-length mirrors and painted murals of island paradises. They pose like pin-ups inside black chiffon tents and lie like Goya's *La maja desnuda* on red velveteen sofas. But beyond documenting these prosaic site-specific details, the "Anatomy" series, which she created over five years, from 2008 to 2013, and is the sole subject of this show, exhibits a tender and forgiving aura of human sexual desire.

The women's bodies exude not sex or even beauty but rather comfort, acceptance, and intimacy. With their heavy, natural breasts, rolls of flesh, and aging skin, their appearances pose questions about the economics of sex as well as standards of beauty that are often tied to pay-for-pleasure situations. Age, radical weight-loss, childbirth, and excessive eating have touched each of her subjects and do everything to present them as individuals, even when some coyly cover their faces with cloth. By imaging these women shaped by life experiences unrelated to their profession, Marder widens the scope of their identity to reach beyond their work (which, in the case of prostitution, is often considered less an occupation than an identity), while still depicting them within their site of employment. One middle-aged woman's meaty thigh bares the delicate imprint of an embroidered pillow daintily displayed on the bed where she works. That tiny detail is the only evident mark distinguishing Marder's models from any other woman, seen anywhere.



Malerie Marder, #23, inkjet pigment print, dimensions variable. From the series "Anatomy," 2008–2013.

— Ana Finel Honigman