I had no job, no boyfriends, no reasons to stay – I would say. I lived in Los Angeles for ten years and I knew I had to get out of Manhattan – and I thought about New Paltz, I thought about Nyack, and then I heard about Beacon. I didn’t know anybody in Beacon or the one I grew up in. I wanted trees and a yard and a small community. I just decided to move to Beacon. I didn’t know anybody in Beacon or have a job here, but I moved anyway.

How did you decide on Beacon? Did you just throw a bunch of darts on a map of the east coast or something?

That is definitely a golden lesson I will take to my grave. I think this is what I was talking about when I make up artist. I think the way I grew up taught me that.

The point isn’t the outcome really. The point is that there was something you wanted to do and you went and did it. A friend might say, “Let’s just get in my Jeep with no map and drive south for five days.” I’m really good at that stuff. I love that stuff. So I guess the thing I really enjoy about myself is that I like to have adventures. I can’t say I do it so often anymore because I’m painting twelve hours a day, but talking to you makes me want to again.

You should. Yes, you’ll find you don’t have to have the correct answers all of the time. Sometimes you just have to throw a handful of darts on a board full of destinations for your life, and wherever they land, you follow.
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 back – 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, forming into a retrospective of provocative, personal and somtimes 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 Elkins 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 you who 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 perceptive, so I was lucky that such gave me the antithesis 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.

When and how did you first become interested in photography?

I was born and brought up in a utopian yarn 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 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 unassailable.

“With my series XVIE 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 a eternal summer and time never passes so I’m not really aging. It allows for incredible de- culation 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 inner 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 further away. It manipulates space and consequently 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 cloth over my head and I’m focusing on the scene – I can feel the voyeurism of my positioning and it naturally seeps into my pictures.

The space 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 stands in an emotive way the moment falls flat. 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 antithesis to what I feel the person inspires, other times it works in collision. 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?

Some are 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 is a associate with the present tense and black and white with the past. My black and white pictures for me feel like a sensual presence, I associate them with the kind that engage me. It defies logic. It isn’t meant to insinuate any hint of 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 conservation and the light in the room is warm and beautiful— that first intonations and then the room turns dark and they’re too drunk to eat. So, yes love is intoxication, but it is followed by harsh truth.

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

I bribed them. (And begged). It was unusual for me inspiration is easy, it’s the execution that is difficult. It’s hard to get what’s in your head out in the world.

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 the first project that I became immersed in that has taken me 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 overawed or difficult to achieve the kinds of photographs you are looking for?

Here are you able to make them feel comfortable and at ease with you, when the situation in photography itself can be uncomfortable?

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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?

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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 move 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 inspire 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 a day dreaming, until it becomes more real.

Who are your favorite photographers?


Do you have a favorite exhibit of your past work?

I have shown a video At Rest first in New York City and I was an 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, pasted 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 don’t have an answer to this. Maybe the best plus in attraction, luck, and luck of fate; 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 harmless 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 set.

It never all neatly wrapped up and some things will always break your heart.

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