Marilyn Minter and Laurie Simmons, two of the most innovative and intelligent people in the art world, have been close friends for years, making them a pretty intimidating pair. What is more, they have always used this influence for good. Last year, Minter and Simmons (alongside Cindy Sherman) chaired a benefit auction for Planned Parenthood—an organization that provides essential medical care and sexual health education—and raised an impressive $2.3 million.

Since the 1970s, Minter and Simmons have been concurrently investigating what it means to be a woman in an increasingly commodified world. Still, the stylistic affinities between these two icons has yet to be fully explored, so here we present a selection of their work to be considered together.

It is clear that both artists recall the innovations of the Surrealist and Dada avant-gardes of the early 20th century, thereby combining a European flair for subversive manipulation of reality with a distinctly American twist. Once you contend with the impact of the images, you start to notice a variety of details that reveal how truly vast the Simmons/Minter world can be. Take, for example, their allusions to the masculinist lineage of Minimalism, or their sumptuous, comical, and, at times, dark, references to images that we frequently take for granted. Linoleum floors and simple white pumps become nuanced vehicles for revolution and social upheaval. Simmons and Minter embody the essence of the uncanny; they show us what we have already seen and yet when these images return to us, glamorous and teeming with emotion, we hardly recognise them.

WORDS BY WILLIAM J. SIMMONS
I have a vision about what I want something to look like. Sometimes it’s a rainstorm, like a eureka moment, and other times I get a thought about a video, painting, or photo and I will just sit with it for a while, deciphering whether it stands up over a period of time. I never make something in response to theory or illustration. It’s always metaphor.

One example is Treasure Trail. I think it’s because of the androgynous nature of the piece. People of both genders, regardless of their sexuality, are attracted to its ambiguity. Women think it’s a woman, men think it’s a man— I’ll never tell!

Spill is my favorite painting from the whole series. At the time I was making it I thought it was really smart and conceptual, but then everyone told me that I was a photorealist— just a really boring one. I love the idea of being a boring photorealist, especially in relationship to what other people were doing at the time— shiny balls and technical masturbation.

I have always admired Laurie. I think she’s a great artist— she’s in the canon and she changed photography. Our careers have both focused on what it feels like to be female and we try to make a picture of how we see the world according to our different visions.