

Under the Tuscan sun, Linder conjures an erotic Eden

The feminist artist brings a new edge to 1960s pin-ups by glamour photographer Harrison Marks for an exhibition at Monteverdi Gallery



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The Goddess Who Makes the Wheel of Time Work, 2019, by Linder Sterling. Courtesy of Modern Art
(Image credit: Linder Sterling, Courtesy of Modern Art)

BY JESSICA KLINGELFUSS
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'I have become an expert on bush,' quips Linder Sterling as we step into her current exhibition at Monteverdi Gallery in Tuscany's Val D'Orcia region. The British artist (known as Linder) has been studying the pornographic image for 45 years, hand-cutting and pasting found imagery from 1970s and 1980s magazines as she embarks on an anthropological survey of gender roles and sexuality. 'The women's bodies I cut out from *Playboy* were vastly different to the women's bodies I cut out from *Vogue*,' she reflects on her earlier photomontages.



Artist Linder Sterling at Monteverdi Tuscany.
(Image credit: Jessica Klingelfuss)

Yet, there is nary a maidenhair in sight among Linder's new series of nude collages at the Tuscan gallery, where the models' genitalia have been airbrushed to an uncanny degree of modesty (quite curiously, the folds, blemishes and follicles that would typically be erased by modern beauty standards are left intact). When the prospect of the Monteverdi exhibition curated by Goldsmiths CCA director Sarah McCrory first materialised, Linder had 'by a wonderful act of synchronicity' recently acquired a 1964 book of outdoor pin-ups, *She Walks In Beauty*, by British glamour photographer turned pornographer Harrison Marks.

The photomontage artist has layered Marks' heavily retouched photographs with a sumptuous array of plant and animal life, welding painted lady butterflies and roses, shells and snakes, to his bare-skinned subjects. Linder's titillating troupe of goddesses bristle with fertility – much like the surrounding natural splendour – with elements of their bodies concealed or left revealed. Her interventions are minimal but compelling, skewing and shifting the narrative of Marks' glamour photographs.

'Glamour, as a word, has quite a sinister origin,' says Linder. Though it has since lost its mystical connotations, the English word 'grammar' was appropriated by the Scottish in the early 1700s to create 'glammer' (or 'glamour'), meaning 'a magic spell' (scholars of *grammatica* were regarded with suspicion in the Middle Ages because the teaching's link to the dark arts). 'Now, everybody wants to be glamorous, but if you were in the 15th or 16th century you would be burned for being glamorous,' she adds. It's only fitting that in the hilltop hamlet of Castiglioncello del Trinoro, Linder has put us under her spell.

Jessica Klingelfuss