



Linder, *Danger Came Smiling* (2025)

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Danger Came Smiling is an inspired, perfect title for Linder's newly opened retrospective at the Hayward Gallery, because no one can say she didn't warn you. Spanning five decades, the exhibition brings together the renowned artist's works across photography, textiles, fashion, performance, sculpture and, of course, photo montage – her most lethal weapon of choice. Linder's artworks are seductive, beguiling. But they'll lure you in at your peril, because there's something dangerous, threatening, disruptive at their heart; a quick flash of medical grade scalpel.

Emerging from the punk and post-punk scene in 1970s Manchester, Linder came to prominence with her band Ludus (with whom she notoriously performed in 1982 wearing a dress made from raw meat – yes, decades before Lady Gaga) and her pioneering album covers. Her photo montage for the cover of Buzzcocks' 1977 single "Orgasm Addict" has endured as one of the memorable images of its time. Since then, she's retained the vigour, the irreverence (and a touch of the violence) of punk, while drawing on a much broader, but no less potent, constellation of references.

With *Danger Came Smiling* Linder creates something spiritual as well as subversive. Often working with images from magazines, her surreal assemblages transfigure popular cultural artefacts into almost mystical symbols. It's a potent visual language of pornography, interiors, beauty and fashion as something Jungian, arcane. Five decades later, even her earliest photo montages still resonate. Her critique on the commodification of women's bodies, evolving notions of glamour, and the tyranny of beauty ideals, consumerism and pornography is still as pertinent as ever.

I met with Linder at the Hayward Gallery's concrete cafe to discuss *Danger Came Smiling*, the horror of deepfakes, the true power of glamour, and much more...

How would you define the guiding principles behind your practice?

Linder: I think it's the love of the cut – of cutting through and cutting across – and the ability to discern, which I think is a really useful life hack. It's also the ability to make things stick because it's no use cutting things up if you can't then pin things down and make them stable. It's important to leave your mark, whatever age you are, that's something to be really mindful of: how to leave a trace for people coming after you, especially the further we drift away from the metropolitan centres such as London, Paris, New York, it becomes more and more important. Nowadays we have social media, which is a digital trace, but I'm still so in love with paper that I encourage letter writing, scrapbooking, whatever. It's important not to always look at everything through a piece of glass, the rectangle of glass on a phone, a laptop.

Something tangible, a trail of breadcrumbs...

Linder: Exactly that. The timeline [for this show] goes way back to Ancient Greece, so we can extend the breadcrumb trail back in time and also to imaginary places, just as we can project our hopes, desires and fears forward in time.

Like a kind of divination? I always feel there's something akin to tarot in the way you select very totemic symbols and place them side by side, then ask us to make sense of them for ourselves.

Linder: I'm really glad you said that because often, when I have a table full of cut-outs, it does feel a little like selecting tarot cards – choosing who's going to occupy the plane. There really is that sense of that. And then handing it over to the reader without too much interpretation from me, because we all bring along our own projections and understandings.

There's an association between witchcraft and magic with the origins of glamour.

Linder: Glamour has this extraordinary history. We use 'glamour' to describe a new lipstick, but the very root of the word is 'grammar'. It was bound up with language and the ability to fascinate people and cast a spell on them with words. So to be glamorous in its true meaning is quite a remarkable skill.

Yours is a spellbinding visual language. And there's something quite magic that happens in your work by placing two seemingly disparate pictures together, thereby creating a new piece of information. It's glamorous in the original sense, but it also disrupts a contemporary consumerist vision of glamour.

Linder: Sometimes it feels like a form of alchemy where something is greater than the sum of its parts. When you place an iron over a woman's head and mouths over her breasts, the optic nerve struggles to work out what's happening on that pictorial plane because we shouldn't see a woman with a steamer on her head. More and more, I think some of those early images in particular look quite cyborg.

I do think you are a very visionary artist. There's something prophetic about your work.

Linder: There is. I find more and more that my old photo montages feel like prophecy. Even later works when I was playing with the idea of voluptuous, overblown lips, and now suddenly they have been normalised, it's almost expected. You look odd if you haven't had [fillers], you're not joining in.

I grew up way before social media, so I try and make that empathetic leap and think, what's it like to be a 14-year-old prescribing to the notion of what beauty is at this time? I presume it must be overwhelming, how you create this kind of homogenised idea of beauty, and it has to be flawless. I don't want to criticise young women either, but I just think, please take a step back. One of the galleries in the show is called 'Seduction'. Again, the etymology of seduction is to be led astray; to be led to one side. Don't be so seduced by the images of beauty around you.



Dare to be bored. Leave your phone at home for a day. Radical, yes, but I recommend it – Linder



I've heard you describe your work as 'hijacking' dominant ideas of beauty.

Linder: Yes, very much so, especially if something's pompous or banal. Again, it's how you introduce the glamour. Some of the very early montages are really tiny, very modest. They're not heroic but they pull you in – come closer, come closer – and then they get you; you see that somebody's had their eyes burnt out by cigarettes. Is this a kind of seduction? I suppose so.

As you can tell, I get such delight when I'm working. I'm happiest with a pile of magazines, cut, cut, cutting. Although print media is only just hanging on. Even magazines like *Playboy* are just pixels now.

Pornography used to be something you had to seek out but now it's almost ubiquitous. How has that affected your practice?

Linder: Sadly, an eight-year-old can encounter far more graphic sexual imagery than I could as a young woman in 1976 when I had to go into one of the two sex shops in Manchester. But the thing I find deeply disturbing is deepfakes. There are two works in the latter gallery where I deepfake my younger self into *Playboy* centrefolds from 1968 – the year the Hayward opened. *Playboy* magazine prided itself upon its knowledge and promotion of design, yet those women on those sofas are still yielding. They're forever available and inviting.

It's possible to seduce but do you think it's still possible to shock people with art? Or is shock even still a valid aspiration?

Linder: We're still human, so thankfully we can be shocked. But global conflict alone is so shocking that even pornography almost fails in comparison. As we know, Dada and surrealism emerged from World War One – bodies coming back from war with legs and faces missing. So we have to remember that the idea of cutting up and collaging comes out of deep, deep trauma.



Sometimes you have to wait for culture to catch up with you – Linder



But do you think we're more dissociative as a culture than perhaps when you first began making work?

Linder: Definitely, I think there's been radical change even in the last five or ten years. Humans are becoming more uneasy with each other. Jung said that the dreaming self is always ahead of the waking self and we all need to dream more. It's about vibrating on a different frequency, and it does need stillness, and it does need time. The psyche will not perform to order, which you have to respect. We're less in touch with that part of ourselves in modern life.

We've eradicated boredom...

Linder: Boredom is so necessary. It's just so easy to stare at a rectangle of glass and be entertained. You need to leave a field fallow for a year or two to let it rest, and then you plant the next crops for the next harvest. I believe boredom – even for five minutes – encourages you to lie fallow. Dare to be bored. Leave your phone at home for a day. Radical, yes, but I recommend it.

Which leads quite neatly to my final question: what advice could you give to young artists?

Linder: Look back in time because life hasn't always been like this. If you are 16, 17, 18, whatever, you have to remember that life was once very different. I'm not saying it was better or worse, it was just different. There was more time to think, there was more time to contemplate. Right now, the right to stop, to contemplate, to think things through is being taken away from us by the society we're in and I believe we need to reclaim that.

Also, we need to fight for the right to fail, because the pressure to succeed paralyses your creativity. You don't all have to be a success all the time. I was invisible for decades. So take hope, because your success may take a long time to come. Sometimes you have to wait for culture to catch up with you. If that is the case, it's often nothing to do with you – it's how receptive and permeable the culture around you is. So remember, they just don't get it, but one day they will.

[Linder: Danger Came Smiling is running at the Hayward Gallery, London, until 5 May 2025.](#)