



Clockwise from top left: *Departed*, *Geisha Unmasked* and *Fallen*. Bottom left: Marlis focuses on her work during a Marv Ellis and D-fault show at WOW Hall

The Life Artistic

Marlis paints in the fresh

Art has increasingly moved out of its traditional boundaries and landed in some odd places. While the art world is busy fingering Banksy as the artist who mainstreamed graffiti (see *Print*, *The New Yorker*, *Wired* or any other art mag that hasn't jumped on the bandwagon yet) and other artists are going entirely online to make and spread their message (Google "hacktivism"), Eugene-based painter, photographer and fashion designer Marlis takes her craft out of the studio and into the frenetic nightlife scene, painting canvases "live" within the confines of a crowded, often eardrum-pounding music venue.

Educated at both Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle and more recently at Portland's Lewis and Clark College, Marlis' painting style builds off the Japonisme woodblock prints of the late 19th century, forming a flat world of melancholy faces amongst a crowded canvas. Perhaps you've seen her in action at the Indigo District, Latitude 21, WOW Hall or February's Deluxe District Mode fashion show. With a show opening in

Portland this week, *EW* caught up with über-busy Marlis via email and chatted about the preparations and challenges she faces during an evening of live painting.

Who are your influences?

I have been watching these documentaries on graffiti/street artists like Sam Flores, Doze Green, Herbert Baglione and Banksy — they have been amazingly inspiring in a way that conventional mainstream historical artists aren't. I especially enjoy the way they embrace the impermanence of their artworks, devoting hours, sometimes days, of work to something that could be immediately painted over. It has helped me as an artist to loosen up my attachment to the things I create and be more spontaneous in my choices.

What do you do to prepare for your live shows?

A lot of math problems. Seriously though, I find out the details: How long I have to paint, where I am painting, what my audience is like, what kind of lighting I am working with, etc. Then I get my canvas and

underpaint it with a ground color and map out a drawing. After I draw the outline on the canvas I try and decide on a palette so I am not on stage or at the show fumbling around in the dark trying to decide some sort of color composition that works. I like the challenge.

Live painting is both a performance and time-based art. Are there any theatrical, performance-related elements you find yourself playing out? Costumes? Stylistic flourishes?

Live painting goes against most of my personality so there is a lot of prep work I have to do in order to get myself up there. I usually wear something to let my wings out since people are staring at my back that whole time. People often come up and tap my leg and want to tell me something or give me a hug or get me a drink and I find myself smiling and nodding a lot because I am dissociated.

Please describe the pressure of a dozen or more people watching you work.

The first show I did was at the WOW Hall and I started before people really got there. I am looking at Marv Ellis like, "Marv I am nervous!" and he's nervous looking at me, too, and he's like, "Just get in your zone and I'll get in mine and just by being there we'll help each other relax." So I am like, sweet, I'll just start painting. I am up on stage working through my composition and suddenly Marv or Lafa Taylor's like "Give it up for the painter," and I turn



around and it's like BAM ... 400 people shouting out woohos for me and I kind of smile awkwardly, wave and turn around. I work from two to four hours straight and during that time I am in the creating mode and all my silly day-to-day anxieties about crowds and life are gone. All I have to focus on is getting this painting done.

When do you consider the painting finished?

The painting is done at the end of the show. Part of the allure is that they were created inside the time frame of the show. The whole point is I completed it during the event and that it is in their memory as part of the experience of being there — like a crumpled ticket stub. **EW**

"Oh Deer," Marlis' series of deer paintings, opens at the WereTiger Gallery in Portland on Thursday, June 7.

