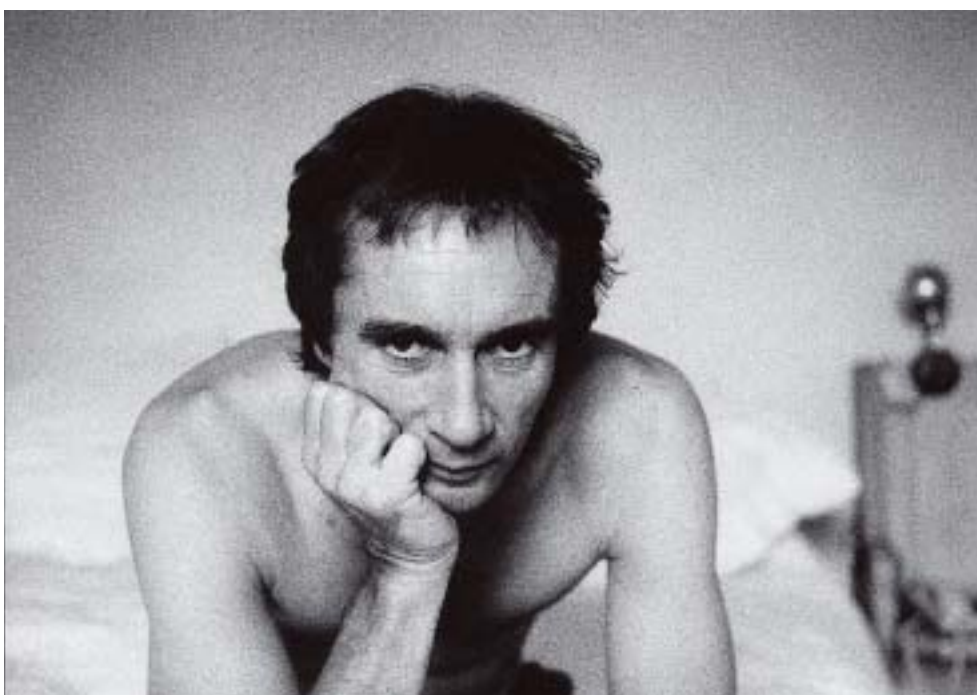


# In memory of Robert Carlos Clarke

## Dark Genius



Bob Carlos Clarke, Portrait taken by Bob's 14 year old daughter Scarlett Carlos Clarke

Robert Carlos Clarke lived many men's dreams. Shooting gorgeous women clad only in high heels and latex for a living, surrounded by the beautiful and the famous, enjoying notoriety and the wild life, and considered one of the most provocative photographers of the 20th Century.

Last March, he threw himself under a train. This sad knowledge, coupled with the sinister edginess of his slick, sexy images, leads you to acknowledge that beneath his glittering reputation was a darker character. Only his innermost circle of friends knew Carlos Clarke suffered from severe clinical depression. To the rest of the world, he was synonymous with glamour, fetish and high-class erotica.

Equipped with good looks, wit and charisma, the Irish-born photographer proved to be more than just the stereotype of the sexist, macho photographer. He was technically versatile, daringly creative and commercially savvy. A larger than life character who will be remembered as much for his off-the-cuff comments—"Do it to get laid, but get a real job"—as for his highly evocative images.

His large, lustrous coffee-table books straddle the fine line between erotica and porn. Although claimed that he made more money from selling his property than his photography, his books, particularly *Shooting Sex* (subtitled, *the definitive guide to undressing beautiful strangers*) that included his candid remarks about the shoots, have been best sellers. "It's not a job. It's an addiction," he's quoted as saying, "I could have entertained a fashionable class-A drug habit. But I chose instead to indulge an unfashionable dependence on A-class females."

This attitude, combined with his images that deliberately set out to provoke, did not endear him to the feminist movement. "It's the feminists and the lesbians that should be supporting female nudes," he apparently remarked to one interviewer. "Fashion poses a far greater threat to modern woman than pornography, with its wild demands that she conform to that freakish body shape. Helmut Newton's work and my own accept the imperfections of women's bodies. We want to show women as they are."

His iconic, fetishist, often rubber-clad women of the '80s and '90s may leave you puzzling this comment.

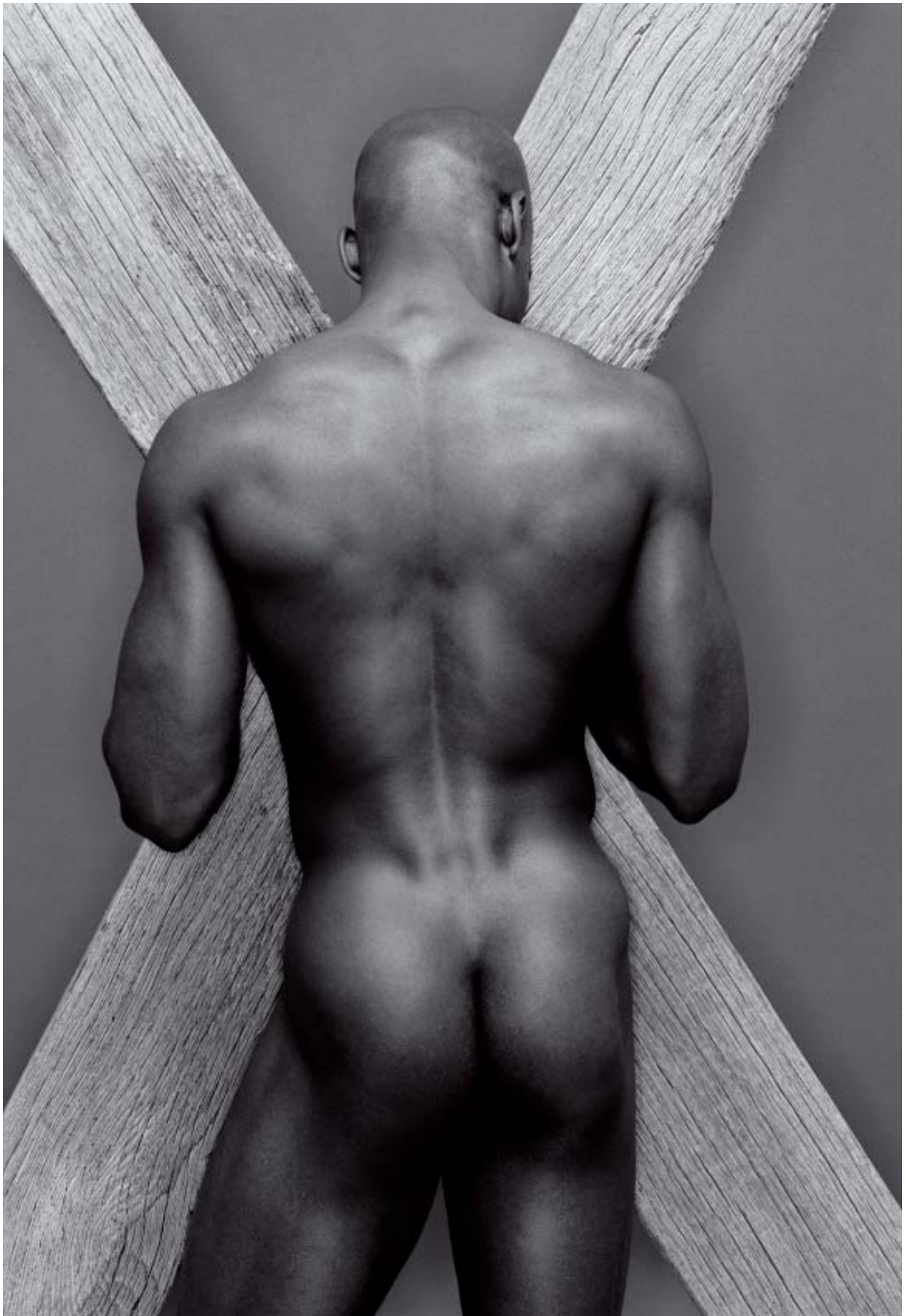
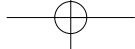
But without doubt, Carlos Clarke's photography is considered groundbreaking. His early style is said to have represented a sea-change in cultural attitudes and artistic representation. Throughout his career he sustained his reputation as an imaginative image-maker with a unique eye for beauty.

Much more than a glamour photographer, Carlos Clarke also won acclaim for his advertising campaigns, photojournalism, celebrity portraits and personal artwork. According to one report, he said, "I've had to become a photographer who can survive by doing a little of everything, from cars, through the fashion, editorial and advertising work. Becoming known just for one thing was far too dangerous: those who have a reputation for being fashion photographers, for example, inevitably run the risk of moving in and out of fashion themselves."

He made campaigns for Levi's, Volkswagen, Wallis, and even, Alliance and Leicester Building Society. Always courting controversy by pushing the boundaries about what is acceptable, he's been credited with creating what one British tabloid called "the rudest ads ever seen", for Urban Stone. This cam-

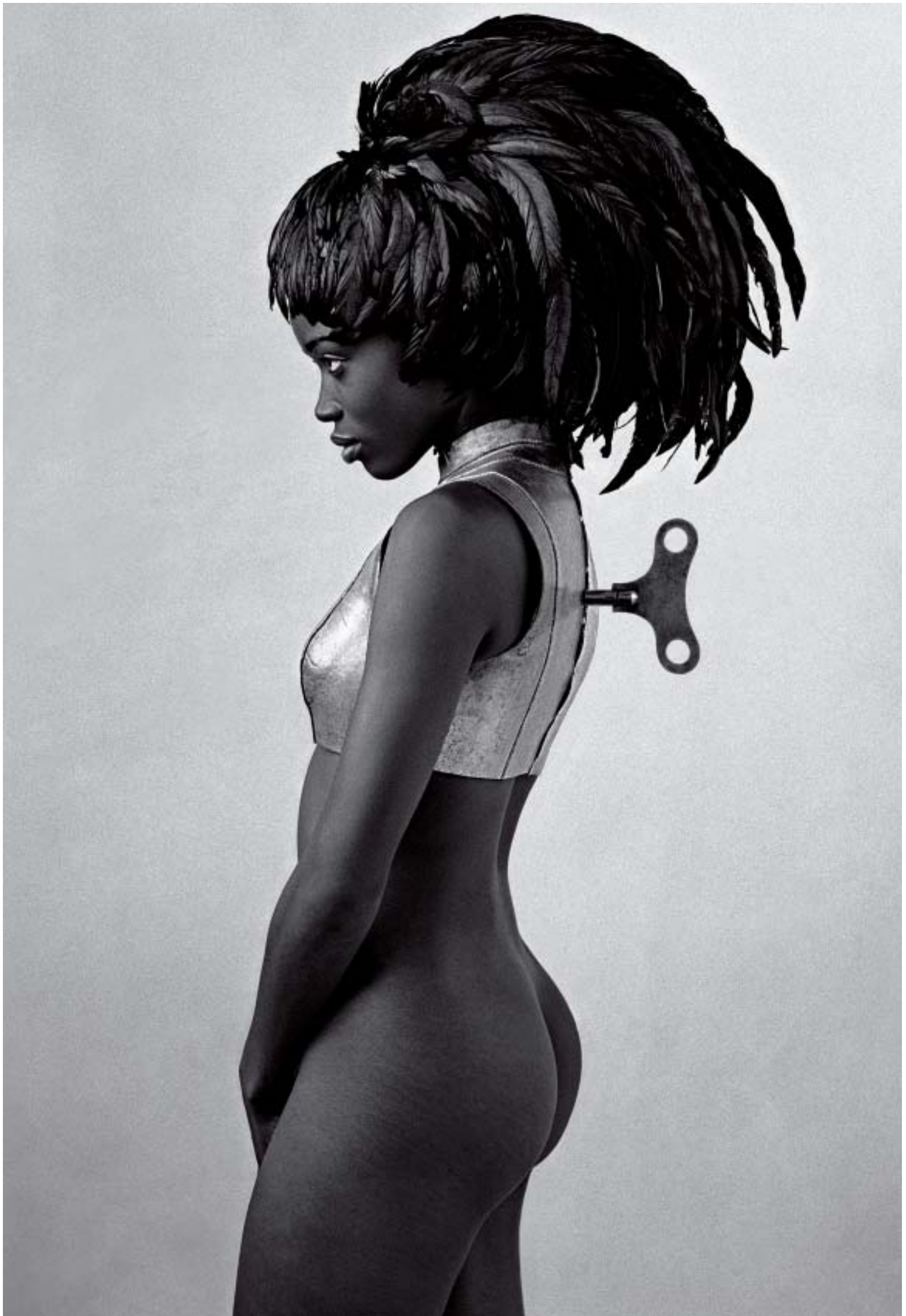


Fairy Bum, 2001, © the Estate of Bob Carlos Clarke



Oris, 1994, © the Estate of Bob Carlos Clarke





Wind me up, 2004, from the exhibition "Love Dolls Never Die" © the Estate of Bob Carlos Clarke



Duty Kills, 2004, from the exhibition "Love Dolls Never Die", © the Estate of Bob Carlos Clarke



Dita Doll, 2005, from the exhibition "Love Dolls Never Die", © the Estate of Bob Carlos Clarke



Chocholic, 2004, from the exhibition "Love Dolls Never Die", © the Estate of Bob Carlos Clarke

Untitled + undated, © the Estate of Bob Carlos Clarke



paign was made under his pseudonym "Jackal" in the '90s because, ironically, his status as an iconic '80s photographer got in the way of attracting the new school of art directors. He wrote in *Shooting Sex*, "...[I] got myself thoroughly rubber-stamped with a reputation that became something of an embarrassment... when pink rubber party-dresses became synonymous with bottle-blond bimbos and provincial sex shops."

It seems that he was most proud of his documentary photographs, best exemplified by his pictures of chef Marco Pierre White for his book *White Heat* (1987). Carlos Clarke portrayed the chef with a raw energy, as a passionate character with a meat cleaver. The style of cookbook photography he pioneered is still trendy today. Carlos Clarke said, "He's definitely the wildest chef we've seen in a century. The experience of working in a buzzing, dangerous and exciting kitchen like Dante's Inferno got the adrenalin going and made me realise life was a great deal more interesting than fantasy. What happens in the street, a restaurant, a club," he explained, "is actually more intriguing than anything you can invent in the relatively sterile environment of a studio."

In most recent years, Carlos Clarke continued to explore documentary and still life photography further, producing pensive, anthropomorphic images of cutlery and stones. "The still lifes are very much myself...I shot the cutlery to stop myself going crazy, and I consider these and the stones to be among my best photographs.' Many will agree. These images of inanimate objects are undeniably sexy, sculptural and sensual. His agent, Ghislain Pascal, commented: 'Whether creating pictures of sexy girls, celebrities, or everyday objects, Bob's photos were always iconic. He was the last of the greats.'

During the eulogy at the funeral, the minister said, "In retrospect, the signs were there that he might choose one day to end his life in some sudden and violent way. His own work is full of allusions to such things, and many of you here may well have your

own insights. For Lindsey [his wife] certainly, the manner of his death, although deeply shocking and wounding, was not entirely a surprise."

Carlos Clarke himself reflected, a few years ago, when discussing fellow photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's life and work, "For the purposes of deification, an early and appropriate death is essential. If you want to qualify as a legend, get famous young, die tragically and dramatically, and never underestimate the importance of your unrepeatable, irreplaceable, iconic photographs."

TEXT BY KIRSTEN SPRY

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**Courtesy:**

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Bob Carlos Clarke, photographer, was born on June 24, 1950. He died on March 25, 2006, aged 55.

The Bob Carlos Clarke Foundation has been set up to support young photographers. For further information and to view his portfolio, see www.bobcarlosclarke.com

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