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PHOTOGRAPHY

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Albert Watson: A Longtime Obsession with Photography

ALBERT WATSON IS UNDENIABLY ONE OF THE GREAT MASTERS OF MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY. WHAT PICASSO IS TO ART, ALBERT IS TO PHOTOGRAPHY. HIS COMPOSITION OF LIGHT MIXED WITH HIS PRECISE GRAPHIC SENSIBILITY IS UNPARALLELED.

Freddie Leiba, *Creative Director, Fashion Editor, and Stylist*

AS A MAKEUP ARTIST, I APPRECIATE HIS LIGHTING TECHNIQUE. HIS BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY HIGHLIGHTS AND CONTOURS THE FACE TO PERFECTION. WHEN I HAVE WORKED ON COLOR SHOOTS WITH ALBERT, HIS LIGHTING IS SO RICH AND COMPLEMENTARY TO MAKEUP.

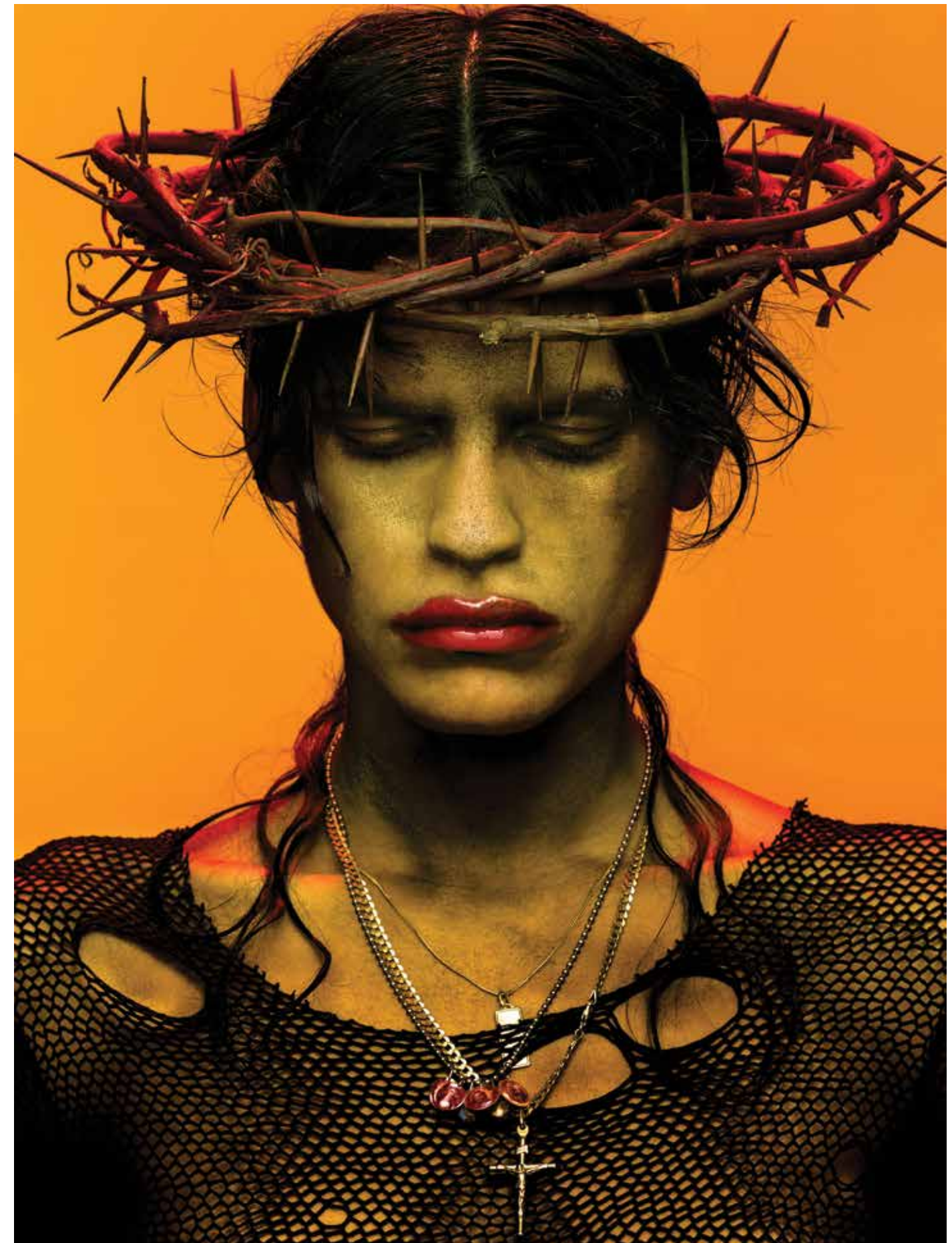
I AM SO GRATEFUL TO HAVE BEEN INCLUDED IN HIS TEAM FOR 20 YEARS. IT'S BEEN QUITE AN HONOR.

Sandy Linter, *Makeup Artist*

I HAVE WORKED WITH ALBERT FOR MANY YEARS, DOING HAIR FOR MANY OF HIS IMAGES. HE ALLOWS ONE TO BE CREATIVE AND ENCOURAGES YOU TO EXCEL IN YOUR FIELD WHICH I FIND VERY INSPIRING.

HE IS A MASTER OF LIGHT. I ALWAYS LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING ON PROJECTS WITH ALBERT AS THEY ARE ALWAYS SO VARIED.

Kerry Warn, *Hair Stylist*



(Page 57) Waris, Ouarzazate, Morocco, 1993 / (Above) Omahyra, Crown of Thorns, New York City, 2004

Introduction by Michael Comeau Portrait Photographer

Albert Watson might be the world's greatest living photographer. Armed with an education in graphic design and film, Albert has been breaking the rules of photography for nearly 50 years. His body of work is best described as intimidating. In a world of specialists, he has created iconic pictures in virtually every genre, including portraiture, fashion, landscapes, and still life. Even more unusually, his visual fingerprint can be seen in every image he produces. That fingerprint is an uncommon dedication to visual excellence, determined by his taste. That could mean lighting a supermodel with a sharp beam of hard light. Or focusing on a boxer's neck. Or even handing a gun to a chimp.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT PHOTOGRAPHERS NEVER RETIRE AND THE BAD NEWS IS THAT PHOTOGRAPHERS NEVER RETIRE.

Albert Watson, *Fine Art, Commercial, and Fashion Photographer*



'Feet Up,' Blumarine in vintage Thunderbird, Phoenix, 1991



Teresa Lourenco, 'Frida,' Marrakech, Morocco, 1998



Breaunna in Desert, near Las Vegas, 2001



Fanny 'Daydreaming,' New York City, 2010



What inspired or motivated you into your career?

I would say that the minute I discovered photography, I was pretty obsessed with it. All the aspects of photography are the driving forces of my career. In other words, my deep passion for photography has been my motivation and driving force throughout the years.

What is your work philosophy?

I try my best to combine two elements together: creativity combined with absolute professionalism.

What aspect of photography do you most enjoy?

Although I enjoy proper work, whether or not it was done yesterday, a year ago, or two years ago, I enjoy looking at the work and criticizing it... saying whether it was good or not. I would say that the moment of taking the picture is the most enjoyable.

Who is or was your greatest mentor?

The very first photography teacher I had, Joseph McKenzie. I was very lucky because he was a dark room maestro and the lessons he taught me have stayed with me my whole life. Now, because of his influence, we can do everything in house. Yet, we are completely self-contained and we don't send out prints. I would say that McKenzie was someone that certainly created a foundation for me.

How would you describe your process?

I would say that there's three words for that: preparation, preparation, and preparation. In other words, it is all about organization and the planning of the shoot. Not only creative planning, but planning for the mechanics of the shoot. The mechanics are how you're going to approach it, and fulfil an already established philosophy of how to use black and white, or color. Of course, you always leave some space for spontaneity. For example, sometimes you say it is definitely going to be in color, but then at the last minute you change your mind. It can be very impulsive.

What is your most difficult challenge you've had to overcome?

I had a lot of problems with the technical side of photography. A lot of photographers think of me as being very technical now, and say that everything I do is technically well done. I like to think that it is, but to get to this point was enormously difficult because I was not a naturally technical person. There are many photographers out there that have this technical side come very naturally. I was not one of them, so I had to overcome that. You do the best you can and I did, but it was hard work. It wasn't easy.

Who were some of your greatest past influences?

Painters, graphic designers, and of course five thousand photographers. I really can't say, "Oh, this was the number one person or that was the number one person." I like Russian Expressionist photographers and German Expressionists. I also like Czechoslovakian photographers such as Sudek. There are endless photographers that are inspiring, which of course helps you improve and grow.

Who among your contemporaries today do you most admire?

There are lots of very good photographers around today that are strong and who are trying to do interesting work. There are many that are trying to do new work. Sometimes the young photographers are a little bit lazy, I think, but there's also, amongst that, a lot of very good photographers.

Who have been some of your favorite people or clients you have worked with?

There's lots of people that were great to work with. I had clients like Levi's, Prada, and Blue Marine (the Italian clothing company), that were great to work with. With them, I had great freedom and could do whatever I wanted. Of course, within reason because I had to shoot the clothes, but I had a lot of freedom too. They were very good, and of course all of the Vogue magazines were good to work with over the years. In fact, I just got back from Japan where I did 50 pages for Japanese Vogue.

What are the most important ingredients you require from a client to do successful work?

As I mentioned, preparation. Sure, I check that I've got all the batteries for the cameras and I make sure the cameras are tested, my lights are tested, I've got my assistants and all of that. That, in my opinion, could be as little as ten percent of the prep. It's the creative aspect I'm referring to when I talk about preparation.

What is your greatest professional achievement?

I think it was finally coming to grips with a lot of the technical aspects of photography that were so hard for me. It is overcoming this hurdle and then using it as a key for creativity. In other words, being technically fluent creates more possibilities. Unfortunately, there are many photographers that get sucked into photography and what they really love is the equipment. Digital was made for these guys. A new software program, a new Photoshop filter, a new something or other... it goes on and on. I was never like that. I was never having an affair with my camera.

What part of your work do you find most demanding?

I think it's always trying to find the creative solution. This is what it is all about now. It used to be just getting the damn thing done, ya know, technically. Now I have to make sure that I truly maximize my day.

What advice would you have for young photographers starting out today?

Organization. This encompasses the technical side, which is a given, and it is important but not the most important. The point is to do creative planning, to think about, "What's my philosophy here? What am I doing? What is the concept? What's the idea here?"

What interests do you have outside of your work?

Museums, movies, galleries, and good TV. There is a lot of good TV that you can utilize for creativity.

What do you value most?

Right now, because I'm older, the thing that I value the most is time. Therefore, I don't do shootings now unless they're definitely worth doing. I have to make sure I'm really getting something out of it.

Where do you seek inspiration?

On a visual level, painters are my inspiration at the moment.

How do you define success?

50 years ago, I was happy when there was something on the film when it came back the next day. Now it's more complex and the success comes when the thought you have in your mind ends up in front of you after you take the picture. If all of



the effort you put into it comes through, the image you see in front of you is what you planned.

What would you change if you had to do it all over again?

I would do only 60 percent of the shootings that I have done. I did too many shootings. I worked for too many people. I was doing everything from fashion campaigns to movie posters to HBO posters to still life campaigns to TV commercials and I've done more than 500 TV commercials. So, basically I just did too many things.

What would be your dream assignment?

I'm in charge of it, it's my dream assignment.

Where do you see yourself in the future?

That is the most difficult question because sometimes you plan but life is like going up a mountain and you kind of get to the top and there's two ways of looking at the top... some photog-

raphers would say you never get to the top. I understand that because there's a certain amount of truth in that.

Since I'm still obsessed with photography, I see myself shooting... you just keep going. The good news is that photographers never retire and the bad news is that photographers never retire. I've got relatives who turn 65 and they retire. They say, "I've done it, I'm now retired, I'm going to go down to Florida, out on the beach." Photographers don't do that.

Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

In the 1960s when I was a Graphic Designer, I used to go to the library and pour over the Graphis Annuals. On my library shelf here, I have Graphis Annuals going all the way back to the late '60s and early '70s.

Albert Watson www.albertwatson.net

See his *Graphis Master Portfolio* on graphis.com.



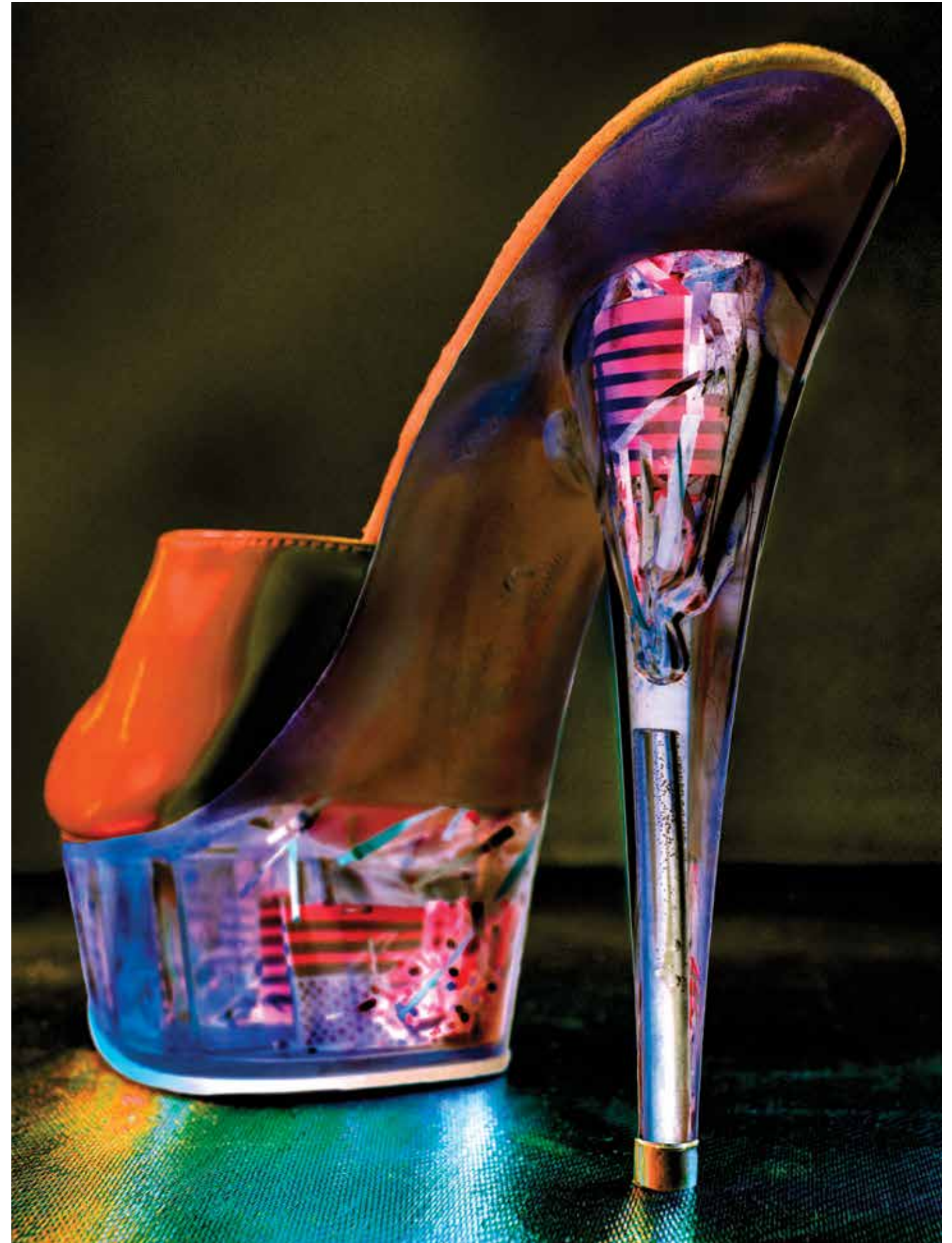
Breaunna on Leopard Print Bedspread, Las Vegas Hilton, 2001

50 YEARS AGO, I WAS HAPPY WHEN THERE WAS SOMETHING ON THE FILM WHEN IT CAME BACK THE NEXT DAY.

Albert Watson, *Fine Art, Commercial, and Fashion Photographer*



Myla Dalbesio in Mask, 'Dreamscape' Series, New York City, 2017



Stripper Stiletto, Budget Suites, Las Vegas, 2000



Neist Point, Isle of Skye, Scotland, 2013



Feather Woman, 'Lost Diary' Series, New York City, 1997