

Two and a half years after the tragic death of acclaimed photographer Bob Carlos Clarke, his widow Lindsey is opening a Chelsea gallery in his honour. It's a fitting tribute, says Sophie Bishop

LITTLE Black ADDRESS

WHEN BOB CARLOS CLARKE committed suicide on March 25, 2006 the photography world was aghast. Aged just 55, Bob was renowned for his erotic images of semi-naked women in latex, as well as his portraits of famous friends including Keith Richards, Rachel Weisz and Marco Pierre White, who he shot for the seminal cook book *White Heat*.

Despite this success, Bob was plagued by self doubt and at the time of his death was being treated at The Priory for clinical depression.

Following his death, tributes poured in from friends and colleagues alike, and the art world mourned the loss of one of photography's favourite bad boys.

“I don't want the gallery to become a tomb. I want it to be fun and exciting and to make it interesting”

Lindsey Carlos Clarke



Previous page:
Adult Females Are Impossible To Satisfy

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Left:

Floating, Alistair Taylor-Young
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Middle:
Automatic

Right: *Keith Richards*

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Now, more than two and half years later, a new gallery is being set up by Bob's family and friends, to celebrate the life and works of the Irish photographer as well as showcase works by contemporary photographers.

The Little Black Gallery is the result of a “long-term conversation” between Bob's widow Lindsey Carlos Clarke, his agent Ghislain Pascal and long-standing friend Tamara Beckwith.

“It's something we'd spoken about for a long time,” says Lindsey. “And then obviously when Bob died, Ghislain and I really talked about it. But then we just thought, ‘Silly old fools, what a silly idea’. Secretly, though, both of us thought there was something there.”

Together for 30 years, Lindsey was Bob's model, muse and the mother of his

child, before becoming his wife in 1998. They had first met, naturally, at a photo shoot – Lindsey the model, Bob the photographer.

Tamara is a long-term collector of photography, and her relationship with Bob was as a friend, collector and model. Over the years, they did countless shoots together and Bob often took photographs of Tamara's glamorous parties – although he didn't like to be thought of as a social paparazzi. “That would be his idea of a disaster,” says Tamara.

For the gallery, all agreed that it should be located around the Park Walk area of Chelsea – Tamara and Lindsey live round the corner – and that it should not be a gloomy shrine to Bob. “I don't want it to become a tomb,” says Lindsey. “I want it to be fun and exciting

and to make it interesting.”

As such, a large proportion of the gallery is dedicated to showcasing new works by contemporary photographers. The opening exhibition, entitled *Most Wanted*, is a mixed show of works by established names such as Terry O'Neill and John Swannell as well as lesser knowns like Alistair Taylor-Young and Nadav Kander.

The downstairs gallery, however, is dedicated to Bob, and a rotating selection of his works will be on permanent display.

A Bob Carlos Clarke foundation is also being set up, with an award being presented each year to an up-and-coming photographer.

The archive of works left to Lindsey is immense and a large retrospective is

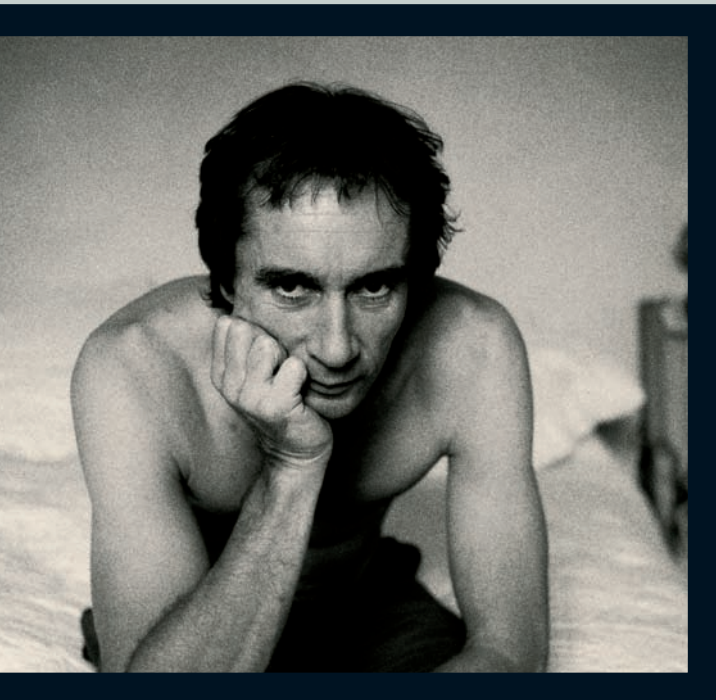
planned at the gallery next year to coincide with the publication of a biography on Bob by Simon Garfield. “I don't know quite how I feel about it,” says Lindsey, of the book. “I had to be interviewed for it and it was an odd journey for me. Somebody said to me, ‘Is it cathartic?’, and I said, ‘No, it's just odd’.”

Odd is a word used frequently by Lindsey, who is clearly still grappling to come to terms with Bob's death, despite appearing admirably strong and stoic. In the immediate aftermath, she says she “battled” to go through the things in Bob's studio and had “a terrible desire to not look at his works ever again”.

“I felt so damaged from what happened that I couldn't look at them,” she recalls. “And then suddenly I

“I think Bob would be so chuffed”

Tamara Beckwith



Above: *Bob Carlos Clarke*
© Scarlett Carlos Clarke

thought, ‘Do you know what, this is really silly’.”

The walls of Lindsey’s Chelsea town house are now covered in Bob’s huge, iconic prints and the coffee table is heaving with his books.

She loves them, but it can still be terribly hard. Every picture tells a story, and she can pinpoint every one of his works to a particular event or time in the 30 years they spent together. “And that’s what’s weirder,” she says. “It’s not about the photograph, it’s about knowing the other piece of the story.”

A huge part of that story is Scarlett, Lindsey and Bob’s daughter, who, aged 16, appears to have inherited the photography gene. While naturally delighted, Lindsey is also wary of her daughter becoming burdened with the

legacy of her father.

“[Sotheby’s photography expert] Philippe Garnier said to me one day, ‘Don’t get trapped. Don’t get stuck in that blimp where you have no other life, when you’re just tied to that one thing and that’s what you do’. So one does have to be careful of that. And I want Scarlett to enjoy it and understand it, but not to feel burdened by it.”

Lindsey admits she herself has been burdened to an extent, but planning the gallery has helped lessen the load. “It was very tough at the beginning because it was a terrible disaster in every way,” she says.

“But I think, in a funny way, doing the gallery is actually probably a great way of dealing with it, because it’s not just his photographs. It has reminded me that photography is a world I know very well.”

For years, Lindsey managed Bob’s studio and career – not an easy job, considering his “phobic attitude to galleries” and reluctance to sell his works.

For Lindsey, though, it is a genuine pleasure to see other people buying Bob’s works. “When somebody says, ‘I just have to have this’, when there’s real passion for Bob’s works, that for me is great,” she says.

Quite what Bob would make of it all, who can tell. But all, of course, hope he would approve.

“I think Bob would be so chuffed,” says Tamara. “I think he wouldn’t actually believe that us three had got it together.”

“But you know, although he had a huge ego, he was very insecure. I think he would find it on one hand outrageous that we were doing something like this, and on the other hand he’d be privately thrilled to bits.”

Most Wanted runs until January 30 at The Little Black Gallery, 13a Park Walk.