



THE CLASSROOM/ TOMMY LEE

The Masterful MARKUS KLINKO

AN ICONIC CELEBRITY PHOTOGRAPHER WHOSE INNOVATIVE, INFLUENTIAL IMAGES SPAN DECADES.

BY MIGUEL COSTA

Fashion photographer Markus Klinko has spent over 30 years behind the camera, continually pushing boundaries with a compositional technique that underlines the unique characteristics of his celebrity subjects. From his imagination came the 2019 photo of singer-songwriter Billie Eilish sandwiched between expressive duplicates of herself and the 2023 image of New York City rapper Ice Spice reclining in a bathtub, surrounded by a richness of orange elements designed to accentuate her ginger curls. It took some time, but throughout Klinko's lengthy career, prominent figures began appearing in his photo gallery, distinguished with visible tattoos. The staged photo of Mötley Crüe's legendary drummer, Tommy Lee, in a classroom, sprawled over a pair of desks with his tattooed sleeves on full display contrasts nicely with the profile shot of the guardian angel piece on the right side of Pharrell Williams' neck. There's even a conceptual image of Klinko's contemporary, David LaChapelle, lying in a coffin with a camera resting in the middle of his tattooed hands.

These photos are indicative of an increasing trend that has seen influential creatives throughout every market of the entertainment industry make a few tweaks to their appearance with body ink. It's an upswing that raises a fair question: Is there any chance Klinko's name will be appearing in the digital appointment book of a tattoo artist anytime soon?

"No," answered Klinko without an ounce of hesitation during a Zoom interview. "It's not something that I'm drawn to myself... I kind of like

simplicity... But I really like tattoos on my subjects. I think it adds to the dramatic effect of a person's appearance and personality. It plays a role in the styling choices, (like) do we want to show the tattoos? (And) do we want to focus on them?"

Interestingly, Klinko's most famous photo session of all time directly inspired the biggest tattoo piece he has ever captured on film. The incidents occurred decades apart from one another, and now, they are forever linked by his backstory.

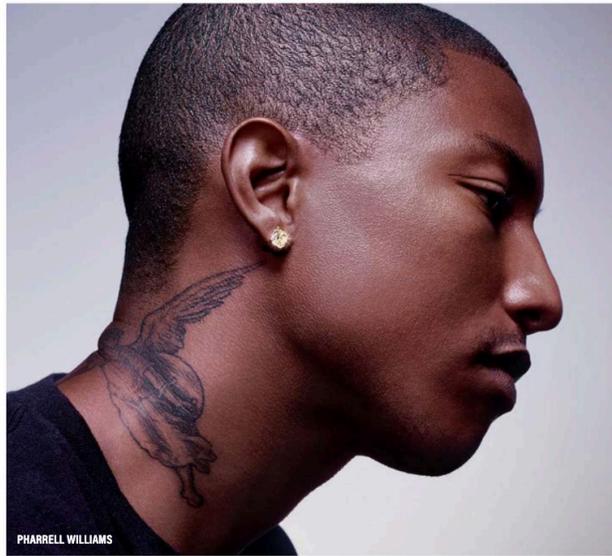
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In 1994, the darkroom process was a standard industry practice in post-production, but Klinko bypassed the traditional methods for achieving museum-quality images by digitalizing his film negatives with a drum scanner. At the outset of Klinko's career, he gained exclusive access to high-end post-production facilities through his association with some affluent figures who put their resources behind him after realizing the enterprising potential of his art.

Not being bound by the early limitations of SGI workstations, as his profession gradually evolved



SERPENT / DAPHNE GUINNESS



PHARRELL WILLIAMS



THE WAVE / DAVID BOWIE



DAVID BOWIE, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: HEATHEN / SMOKING / THE CROSS



JOE PERRY

from analog to digital, enabled Klinko to let his imagination run wild. He adopted the principles of automation before software programs like Photoshop 3.0 became widespread and curated a signature style where high-resolution shots of his celebrity subjects were enhanced with a colorful approach to image overlaying and split toning to add depth perception to his backgrounds.

In the process, he piqued the interest of the late David Bowie, a rock/pop icon and one of his first celebrity admirers. Their shared interest in turning controversy into a creative activity spawned a pair of iconic photo shoots in the early 2000s, where Klinko pulled out all the stops, employing a newborn baby as a visual element, multiple body doubles, digital face replacement, and more.

Ironically, it was Bowie who first suggested that Klinko experiment by adding more antiquity to his pictures and stripping them of an essential element that made his projects so distinctive as a rising star in fashion photography. It happened during the fall of 2001 after their pre-scheduled shoot day had been postponed multiple times due to 9/11. When Bowie finally made it to Klinko's studio in NYC, he brought with him an unprecedented request.

“ THAT WAS ONE OF THE FIRST BIG NEW YORK PHOTOSHOOTS FOR PHARRELL WHEN HE FIRST BECAME REALLY FAMOUS [AS A SOLO ARTIST]. I JUST LOVED HOW HE HAD THIS STUNNING PROFILE. ”

— KLINKO WHILE RECOLLECTING HIS PROJECT WITH PHARRELL WILLIAMS

“Bowie specifically wanted me to do black and white (photos),” Klinko said. “I asked him about it and said, ‘Why would you choose me to shoot the black and white album cover?’ I said, ‘You realize that I don’t do that?’ And he said, ‘Yes, that’s exactly why I’m asking you because I think it’ll get your creative attention and you will get extra motivated to try to do this.’ And he was right, it did open doors for me in my mental limitations because I just felt that I was more of a color guy. (But) after seeing the results of working and producing final black and white images, I was grateful to him for motivating me to incorporate black and white photography.”

Subsequently, the shots that Klinko snapped during the transformative photo shoot in support of Bowie’s “Heathen” album release were succeeded by new additions where other celebrity subjects such as Outkast, Keanu Reeves, Carmen Electra, and Jason Statham were also captured using a similar brand of raw monochrome photography. But, by and large, Klinko has reserved much of his avant-garde thinking for arranging colorful works of art at studios and on-shoot locations where he has captured editorial shoots and album covers.



THE RETURN/ JOE MANGANIELLO

During Klinko's rise in the early 2000s, album covers were an essential part of the marketing strategy behind musicians signed to major record labels. With apps like Instagram and Spotify still about six or seven years away from having a significant influence on fan engagement, the music industry relied heavily on hard copies of album covers, which typically included corresponding artwork booklets and decorative promo photos as a way of revealing an intimate look at the multifaceted purveyors of Top 40 hits. In turn, the collection of recording artists who stepped in and out of Klinko's camera frame saw firsthand what it was like to be the subject of creation from a leading artist on the opposite side of the curtain.

Within five years, the ex-musician who was once signed to EMI Classics, orchestrated a string of photogenic themes in support of albums like "Elephunk" by Black Eyed Peas, "Dangerously in Love" by Beyoncé, and "The Emancipation of Mimi" by Mariah Carey. The latter

The polished reputation of the acclaimed Swiss national with a keen photographer's eye was not lost on actor Joe Manganiello, who referred to Klinko as "the one who'd captured his favorite David Bowie shots of all time" when they were seated next to one another at the 2024 Hollywood Beauty Awards.

On the night when Klinko received the Outstanding Achievement in Photography award, Manganiello took the opportunity to pitch himself for an in-person photo shoot. They bounced ideas off each other throughout the spring until finally settling on a shoot date. Manganiello was so excited that he channeled his inner Bowie and brought forth an unexpected twist to the collaboration. Before his shoot with Klinko, the host of "Deal or No Deal Island" booked an appointment with a Los Angeles-based tattoo artist named Small Paul and obtained an elaborate Japanese-style tattoo that covered his arms and chest. In the process, he gave Klinko more elements to get creative with.



MARY J. BLIGE



MARKUS SHOOTING MARY J. BLIGE



MARKUS KLINKO

“ I LOVE THEM ALL. I'M ALWAYS THE MOST EXCITED ABOUT WHATEVER I'M FILMING AT THE MOMENT. I DON'T LIKE ONE PHOTOSHOOT MORE THAN THE OTHER. ”

two became amongst the bestselling LPs of the 21st century, thus making it apparent that when the foundational stage of a marketing plan for an upcoming album release called for the all-important "culling" process to begin, Klinko knew a thing or two about handpicking the final cuts out of hundreds of options.

"I have a very strong opinion of what the very best is," Klinko said. "Typically, my selection process is very narrow. Most of the time, I feel very strongly about 'This is the shot.' So, I use a lot of effort to convince my clients of that, which is not always easy because (labels) are used to being thrown these large amounts of possibilities. But I believe that since I know what I'm going to do with it in final post-production, I feel pretty strong that it's a decision I should be making. I'm very controlling when it comes to that."

"There was a substantial addition of tattoos that he specifically wanted to have done before the shoot. He's obviously a very physical personality. He's a huge guy. I'm 6 foot 4 and always considered myself very tall and generally the tallest person in the room, but when I met Joe, this guy was almost 6 foot 6, and he was twice as wide as me. He's full of muscles," Klinko said with a laugh. "I felt like a toothpick next to him... I think the tattoos just reinforce all of that. So, I think the whole concept was subliminally inspired by the total look that included the tattoos."

The result was a fascinating piece of conceptual photography by Klinko, which he named "The Return." In this picture, Klinko used a small amount of sunlight as his backlight to illuminate Manganiello's sturdy physique and body ink. Using CGI, he added a pair of robotic wolves, an homage to Bowie, which he knew his muscle-bound subject would appreciate.