

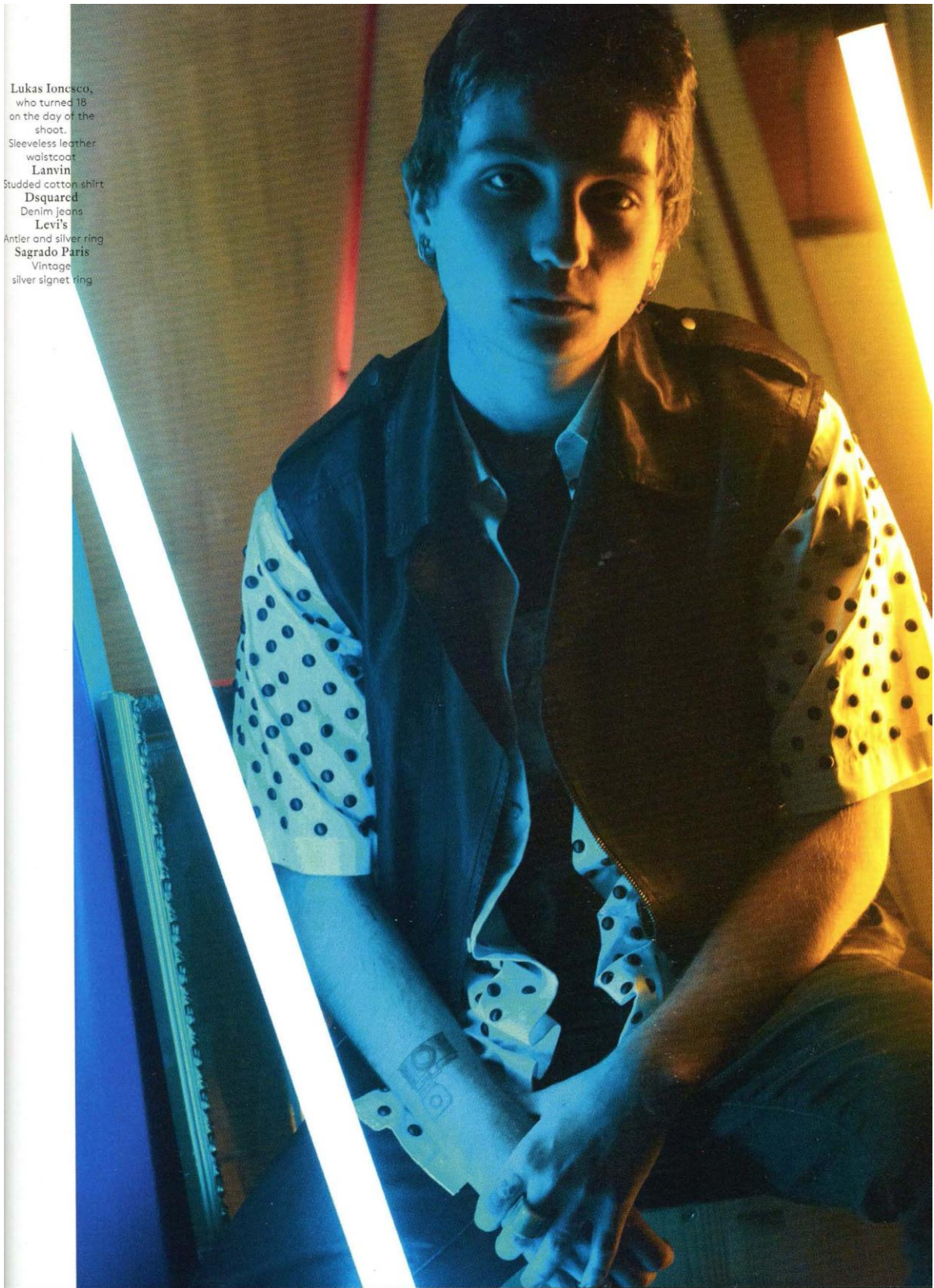
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When *Larry Clark*,  
controversial photographer,  
film-maker and  
*moralist*, hangs out in *Paris*  
with two captivating  
*young skaters* during  
their *night-time wanderings*...

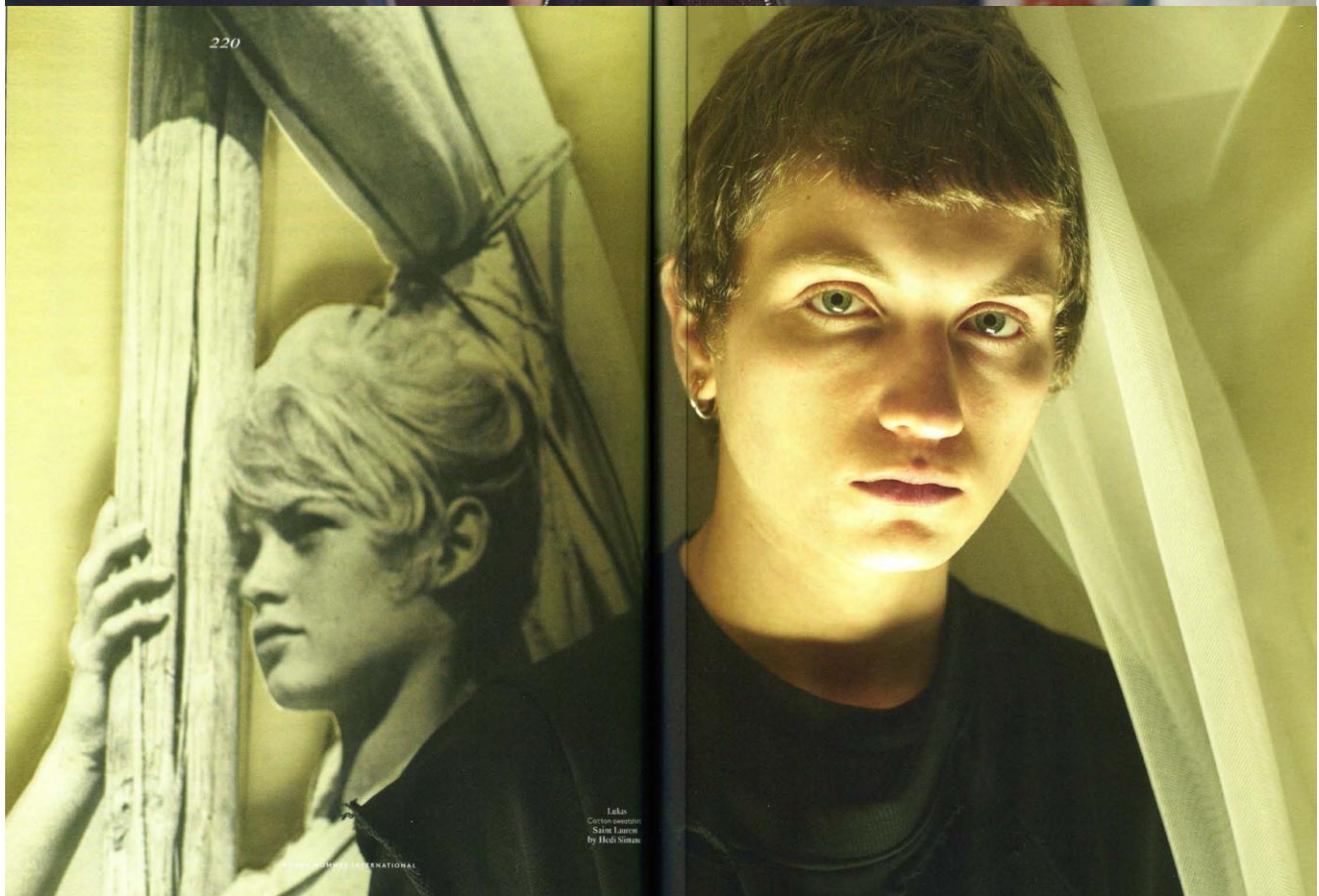
Photographs LARRY CLARK  
Styling YLIAS NACER

# LARRY BY NIGHT

Lukas Ionesco,  
who turned 18  
on the day of the  
shoot.  
Sleeveless leather  
waistcoat  
**Lanvin**  
Studded cotton shirt  
**Dsquared**  
Denim jeans  
**Levi's**  
Antler and silver ring  
**Sagrado Paris**  
Vintage  
silver signet ring













Interview by DIDIER PÉRON

— For the first time, Larry Clark is going to shoot a film in a foreign language — French — which he doesn't speak but likes to hear spoken. *The Smell of Us* is finally going to be shot in Paris after many false starts — the time it took to raise the necessary funding. Clark, 70, has always been an edgy, controversial artist, a visual pioneer who, in his photos and then in his films (*Kids*, *Bully*, *Ken Park*, *Wassup Rockers*, etc.), was ahead of the curve for today's DIY imagery, which is simultaneously raunchy and plain. You only need to watch the "I don't like" video by Chief Kief or photos of a drug-fuelled party posted on Facebook to understand that Clark's eagle eye was way ahead of this kind of uninhibited narcissism. A legendary photographer (*Tulsa*, *Teenage Lust*, *The Perfect Childhood*) and film-maker observing chaotic teenage lives, Larry Clark answered our questions in a bistro before jumping into a taxi to go location hunting, less than a month before the first day of filming.

Vogue Hommes International What's the story of "*The Smell of Us*", the first film you're shooting in France, in Paris?

LARRY CLARK I spent some time in Paris in 2010 for my big retrospective *Kiss the Past Hello* at the Musée d'Art Moderne. I met Mathieu [Landais, a young poet from Nantes who has scripted the film] and we hit it off and hung out a lot together. We were both fascinated by the skateboarding spot called the Dôme, just behind the Museum. But it isn't a film about skateboarding. The film follows four teens who use the Dôme, but the question I put to Mathieu when I asked him to script the film was "What do these kids do when they split from the Dôme?" In *The Smell of Us*, there will be four main characters, two boys and a boy / girl couple. The two boys, for reasons that are too complicated to explain, get involved in the web-based escort business. That sort of thing couldn't have happened before the web came along, but these days, any kid can post their details and a photo up on a site, and bam! — they get contacted by hundreds of strangers. It's the sort of setup that can easily go awry.

VHI Are you fascinated by the web?

LC It's a kids thing. I've just hit 70, and I'm more distanced from it, but if you want to understand our times you can't just sit on the fence with your reactionary views. That's why I wrote, shot and distributed my previous film, *Marfa Girl*, for an audience of web surfers, the people who spend entire days watching videos on YouTube and posting stuff like mad on Facebook or Tumblr. The film didn't go on general release because this sort of independent film is stillborn in US theatres, which only show blockbusters. So why not cut out all the middlemen (producers, international sales, distributors — every last one a crook!)? So I posted the film on my larryclark.com website, and it costs five dollars to watch it.

VHI But do you think that the internet can be dangerous?

LC No way. At any rate, no more than anything else that

can happen to you when you go out the door. The virtual is no less real than anything else. So there's good, and there's not so good. But when I was a kid, if you asked an adult a question you got whacked across the face for an answer. Shut up! Children had to be seen and not heard. There was zero information, about life or sex. Nothing. Nothing at all! These days, it's the opposite. You have Google and Wikipedia: type in anything you like and you're suddenly awash in all this incredible mass of first-person stuff, videos, and chat room conversations. At the same time, innocence hasn't changed. At bottom, today's kids are no different from me, a country boy from 1950s Oklahoma. Technology will play a very important part in *The Smell of Us* because kids record everything all the time. They go to a concert or a party, they exist in a world of continuous self-representation. I have to take that into account if I want to capture the zeitgeist. It's a new generation, and at the same time they're still kids with the same old problems, the same old sentimental uncertainties.

VHI Your first film, "*Kids*", made in 1995, had a lot of very raw scenes. The film starts with a sex scene where a teen deflowers a girl who can't be more than 15. My sense is that this is a film that couldn't be made today.

LC Yes, a year or two later and I couldn't have made *Kids*, that I'm certain of. I was very lucky.

VHI Does that mean you have to be careful to be less shocking today?

LC No, I'm an artist. I don't obey any rules, or social or moral taboos — that never comes into it. I make no concessions and go straight for the jugular. In *Ken Park*, nobody believed it was possible to shoot that scene where the actor masturbates as he auto-asphyxiates, and people told me "you'll never get an actor to do something like that in front of a camera." And yet, the scene exists. I talk to the actors a lot, I don't cheat, I look them in the eye and I tell them that we're going to do it, for real. I'm honest, they trust me and I trust them. That's how it works. I'm a good guy. I'm cool. If I wasn't cool, they wouldn't even let me come near them. We live in very reactionary times. The pendulum never stops swinging between liberal laissez-faire and puritan conservatism, but, believe me right now, I've never seen such an ultra-rightist backlash in 50 years. What's happening is very dangerous. You want an example? The retrospective of my photos at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris was 18-rated! It's unbelievable, especially as it happened during the mandate of a gay, socialist mayor! But it blew up in his face, and his career is fucked.

VHI Bertrand Delanoë? Are you sure?

LC I don't know, and I don't care. What I do remember that it stank of low politics, and I kept telling them that they would do better to ban people over 18 from seeing the show, but I got the feeling they didn't think that was funny.

VHI Where did you find your French actors?

LC Casting took a year. Mathieu spent a lot of time in skate parks, and I went clubbing with him a lot in Paris, to the Social Club, the chic Catacombes, the bars in the Bastille district, with all those teens who, I can tell you, are taking amazing amounts of drugs, often the love drug MDMA, which has flooded the market and is relatively inexpensive. The four actors didn't know each other, but they've become good friends. They had to be very different from each other, and we had to feel that they didn't necessarily belong to the same social milieu.

VHI You were born in 1943 and you grew up during the Eisenhower presidency (1953–1961). What was the atmosphere like in prosperous Republican America as the first rumblings of the civil rights movement were starting to be heard?

LC It was a time of absolute repression and lies. America had forged an image of itself that was complete bull: there were no drugs, no alcoholism, there were mommies and daddies and their lovely little kiddies in lovely clean homes, with the white picket fence, the apple pie, and all that. But I only had to look around me to see that it didn't stack up. I was taking drugs when I was as young as 16. It was easy. You just went along to your local drugstore to buy Valo, an inhaler that was stuffed with amphetamines. We got high, we had sex. I used to see kids coming to school with busted lips because their parents had been hitting them. I knew a guy whose mother was completely wasted on drink and prescription drugs from morning till night, and I've never forgotten that girl in high school who was raped over and over by her five brothers, and her father probably wasn't there just to watch. Everyone knew: the school principal, the authorities, the students... but no one ever said anything. It went on because it wasn't supposed to exist. It didn't match up to the image that post-war society had created for itself. So I said to myself, why not show what I see? Why not take photos of my entourage? I never "stole" anybody's image. I need to spend time with the people I put in front of the camera, to hang out with them. You need to remember that in 1971, my first book, *Tulsa*, told the story of ten years of my life. I've always wanted to tell stories. My very first ambition was to be a writer. I'm a storyteller.

**"I'm an artist.  
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and go straight for the jugular."**

VHI What is it about skateboard culture that interests you so much?

LC I'm a visual artist and skateboarding in cities is something that is always interesting to film or photograph. Like rock or punk, I think that skateboarding has saved the lives of a lot of people. Kids who come from broken families have escaped suicide, substance abuse, and prison simply because of the sense of freedom being on a board gives them, to go where they like, with the whole city becoming one big playground. They're broke, they eat a two-dollar burrito, and after that, it's skate, skate, skate, skate. People are afraid of them because they're so free. They don't understand what goes on between skateboarders, the way they're constantly moving and at the same time are constantly together. The police would be thrilled if they were burglars, criminals, or junkies because they would have a reason to bust them.

VHI Skateboarding also has its own clothing styles that you have glorified. What relationship do you have with the fashion world?

LC For me, it's bullshit: I don't do advertising, or fashion shoots, and I don't accept to have film showings just to promote my films. I did it for *Wassup Rockers*, and *Marfa Girls*, and this time to launch the career of *The Smell of Us*, but that's all. I'm sorry, but I find fashion dumb. Yet I have friends who work in that area and I respect what they do, but it's not for me. It's a way of making a pile of dough, and I've had a ton of offers, of course. But I've always told them to fuck off. I just can't do it. It makes me uncomfortable to transform people into clothes horses. Here, for *Vogue Hommes*, we did it without an artistic director. We went into an illegal squat in Paris at night, with just a little light box. There was no bathroom, it was cold as all hell and the two kids nearly froze their balls off. But I'm pleased with the result.

VHI At bottom, you've always tried to stay outside the system, independent.

LC I grew up admiring the Beat Generation, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Greg Corso and those guys who stood by a single watchword: "Don't sell out!" I see myself as a post-beatnik. The other day an old school friend I hadn't seen for years rang me and asked me what I'd been doing all these years, and I said to her: "At least, I never sold out." I've never wanted to take dough to make dumb films and I can tell you it's tough getting financing for the kind of stories I tell. I regularly get taken for a ride by people who swear they have the money and then disappear into the woodwork. If you don't sell out, you have to have some idea of what the consumer society expects from you, how it fucks with your head. And today's younger generation isn't really armed against it: young people are in a big hurry to sell themselves at any price. VHI