

LARRY CLARK IN NEW YORK, JULY 2010. SUIT: PRADA. SHIRT: BOSS BLACK. TIE: HUGO BOSS.

LARRY CLARK

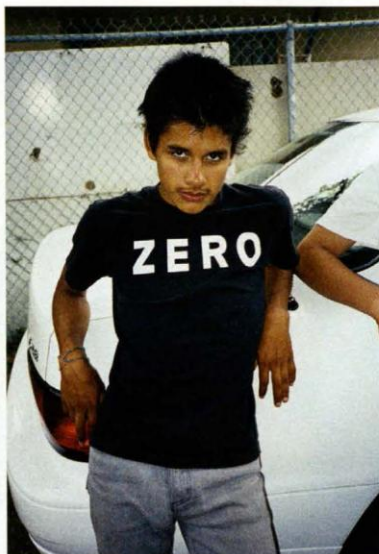
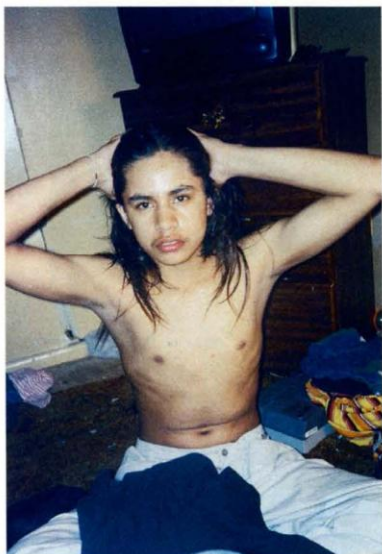
IN 1971, a MONOGRAPH CALLED *TULSA* CAUSED a CULTURAL UPROAR OVER *its* FRANK DEPICTIONS of SEX, DRUGS, and OTHER VICES of a CERTAIN RARELY CLOTHED SUBSET OF AMERICAN YOUTH. THIS KIND of HONEST, BLATANT, and often SHOCKING PORTRAIT STYLE WOULD COME to DEFINE LARRY CLARK'S AESTHETIC THROUGHOUT *his* CAREER. A RETROSPECTIVE in PARIS *this* MONTH CONFIRMS that the 67-YEAR-OLD PHOTOGRAPHER and DIRECTOR still STANDS as ONE of AMERICA'S TRUE OUTSIDER ARTISTS — an IRONIC POSITION for a MAN who CAPTURED so MANY ALIENATED KIDS by BEING on the INSIDE. By RALPH GIBSON
Portrait TERRY RICHARDSON
Styling KARL TEMPLER



THIS PAGE, UNTITLED, 1963. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: UNTITLED, 1971;
SPEEDY AND BARB, 1968; UNTITLED, 1971. ALL PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND L'UHRING AUGUSTINE, NEW YORK.



"WHEN I WAS 14 or 15 I STARTED out TAKING BABY PICTURES *with my* MOTHER."



For a generation of young filmmakers and artists coming into their own in the '90s and '00s, Larry Clark has served as a patron saint of provocation—a reverence well deserved after his unforgettable feature-film debut, 1995's valentine to downtown teenage brutality, *Kids*. Working with a script written by a then-21-year-old skater named Harmony Korine and using untested actors like Chloë Sevigny, Leo Fitzpatrick, and Rosario Dawson—and non-actors like Justin Pierce and Harold Hunter—*Kids* shook all senses of a moral line in cinema by portraying urban youth so honestly and openly that it came off as criminally obscene. Fifteen years later, the film reads far more as a compassionate portrait of a sometimes uncompassionate group of skateboarders and their friends, but *Kids* set Clark off on a now notorious cinematic odyssey through a maelstrom of drugs, sex, murder, domestic abuse, suicide, loitering, masturbation, AIDS, incest, and pretty much every other horror running through the teenage psyche in films such as *Bully* (2001), *Ken Park* (2002), and *Wassup Rockers* (2005).

This transformation from rogue artist to rebel icon was nothing new for Clark—it was only new for him in the genre of film. Clark first came into dis-senter collective consciousness in 1971 with the publication of his bleak, direct, and utterly mythic black-and-white monograph *Tulsa*. Shot over a period of years in the '60s and early '70s of his friends and speed-taking co-conspirators in his hometown of Tulsa, Oklahoma, the photographic series captured a rogue, nightmarish side of American youth with a documentary-style realism that would become Clark's signature. When the book first appeared, it caused a sensation; this was an intimate, irrefutable portrait of something going wrong in the middle of the country. As Clark himself explains, by 1971, the drug culture in America had already been around for several years, only the optimism of it was souring. *Tulsa* thus presented something of a flip side to the California hippie movement of the '60s. But *Tulsa*—much like Clark's equally stunning and startling series that came later, *Tenage Lust*, *The Perfect Childhood*, and *Punk Picasso*—is not offering a warning or a sermon. Rather, Clark captures his Oklahoma acquaintances in lyrical, deeply private, and often heroic ways. No wonder, as Clark remembers, one more amusing critique of *Tulsa* at the time came by way of a cartoon that ran in *The New Yorker* of hell with

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devils and fire, and on one side a man taking pictures. The message here is clear: Something as terrifying as *Tulsa* can only be taken by someone on the inside.

This month, the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris will unveil a retrospective of the 67-year-old Clark Clark's work. The exhibition will cover every chapter thus far in Clark's development as an artist—including his photography, film, and collages, as well as more personal items from his youth and never-before-seen images from works like *Tulsa*. Clark will also premiere his latest yet-untitled film. For this interview, Clark spoke with his old friend and fellow photographer Ralph Gibson. The pair met in New York in 1967. According to Clark, they were introduced at one of the weekly salons that the great photographer Philip Perks hosted at his Manhattan apartment. Clark was first drawn to Gibson, he says, "because he always had the most gorgeous women with him. We would go to a coffee shop and he would pick up the waitress. He was my big brother." When Clark first tried to get *Tulsa* published, he couldn't find a house willing to print all of the pictures without a heavy edit. Gibson, facing similar problems with censorship, had decided to self-publish his first monograph using a little company he set up called Lustrum Press. Gibson agreed to publish *Tulsa* at his press, and thus one of the seminal monographs in photography found its way into the world.

LARRY CLARK: Hey, brother. How are you doing?

RALPH GIBSON: Good enough. You and I go back to, what, '66, '67?

CLARK: '67.

GIBSON: And what year do you go back to for your retrospective?

CLARK: The serious work starts in 1962. There's also going to be some of my mother's photographs to start the show, because I worked for my parents when I was a kid. When I was 14 or 15 I started out taking baby pictures with my mother.

GIBSON: That's good experience.

CLARK: It put a camera in my hand.

GIBSON: So by the time you were ready to say something, you already had a strong communication with the nature of the medium, right?

CLARK: Yeah. But I didn't realize that you could use it for anything other than taking baby pictures until I left town. Actually I think it first occurred to me when I was a senior in high school. I was about 17.

GIBSON: That's interesting. That's when I started too.

CLARK: When we first became friends I thought it was kind of fascinating that I was doing amphetamines and was awake all the time, and you told me that you slept all the time. You were asleep and I was super-awake.

GIBSON: It's like night and day. But it's the results that count, I guess.

CLARK: Both of us must have learned from that. Your first book was called *The Somnambulist*.

GIBSON: I have always been interested in certain distinct aspects of your work. Above and beyond all of the virtuosity as a camera handler, I think there are threads that run through everything you've done—whether it be photography, films, or collage. There's always a narrative element to your work. You're essentially a raconteur, a storyteller, and you're using the story as a pretext for a self-portrait. I believe the great self-portraitists have to do their portraits in public, which is essentially what you do. Do you see what I'm saying?

CLARK: Yeah, exactly—and it's true. My work is always about me, just like your work is always about you. I am a storyteller. I've never been interested in just taking the single image and moving on. I always like to stay with the people I'm photographing for long periods of time.

GIBSON: That's an interesting concept right there. That completely separates you from how anybody else working in a so-called documentary vein would. They so often skate over the surface. You're shooting from the inside out, as opposed to the outside in.

CLARK: Going back to the great documentary