

A N D

We caught up with 1883 long-time friend, NY-based visual artist Androxx to talk art, politics and social media and have a sneak peek at his much-awaited new series – Pop Life

R O X X

In the midst of a global health crisis, with a possible economic recession looming upon us and one of the most anticipated US presidential elections in modern history just around the corner – an election on which the hopes of many are pinned of ending the Trump era – there is no better way to find respite from the distress of the present than to look to the arts.

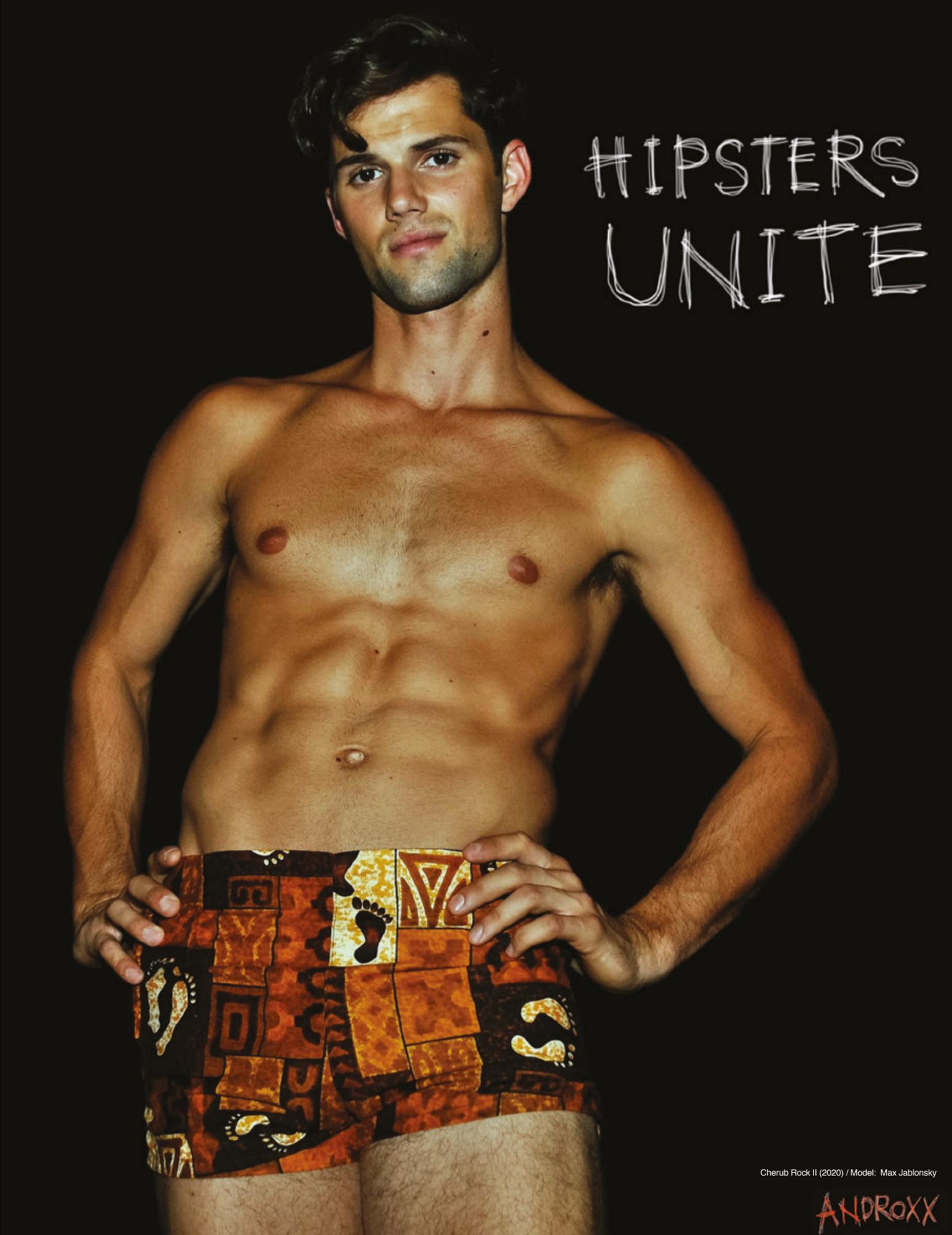
When New York based visual artist Androxx – a friend of ours since 2012, when he came into prominence with his photos of super model Sebastian Sauvé – offered to preview his new and much-awaited series Pop Life in 1883, we could barely contain the excitement.

Drawing inspiration from Pop Art and its wholesome embrace of mass and everyday culture, Androxx combines image and text – namely the elated physicality of his models and lyrics from iconic songs – into a flaming burst of eroticism and sensuality. Far from being a mere exercise in aestheticism, his work also tackles such themes as homophobia, feminism, younger generations' engagement with politics, and the impact of social media on our daily life.

P O P

In a time where everyone is obsessed with media exposure, Androxx – whose real identity is yet to be revealed – has decided to shun the limelight and let the art speak for itself, rarely giving interviews. This is why we are particularly grateful for his time and words.

L I F E



HIPSTERS
UNITE

Hello, Androxx. Thank you for your time! With regards to creativity, what themes, life events and emotions have had the most profound impact on your most recent work? Hi, Jacopo. It's good to talk to you again. And wow – that's a big question. For me personally, it's been a tough year. One of my best friends passed away. She was an older woman – and was kind of like my “Auntie Mame” – a vivacious, bohemian soul with a heart of gold. A feminist, an activist and an amazing person. I met her when I was 18 – and she was really a catalyst / motivator for me to abandon college, follow my passion and lead a creative life. I miss her terribly.

And on a “macro” level – well, I even hate uttering the “T” word – but it continues to be the horror of Trump. If we don't oust him in November, we're screwed.

Your new body of work, Pop Life, which includes Royals II, Cherub Rock II, Los Ageless, National Anthem, Hello, I Love You, Stayin' Alive and of course Pop Life (all previewed here), comes eight years after your first-ever series, Poptopia. Where the latter resonates with a certain optimism (not coincidentally, it was conceived during the Obama administration), Pop Life stems from a different, more somber political temper.

How would you say the present state of affairs in America has informed your art practice? It's the “T” word again. There's a tension in the air with him in office. And that's putting it mildly. Everyone – at least those who didn't vote for him – is on edge. Each day brings a new WTF moment, you know? It's almost too much to process. And that is definitely reflected in a few of the new pieces. I also try to embrace humour in some of them. Call it gallows humour, if you will – but a couple of the pieces (like Pop Life) are really exercises in escapism, while some of the others have more of a message. And “serious” or not, I always want the piece to feature a subject captured at just the right moment. You know that's a huge part of whatever I do. I want to give the world something beautiful to look at – even if the subtext is serious.

Cherub Rock II, featuring Max Jablonsky, has a decidedly political edge to it, referencing the fractious state of young Democrats in the US and their “protest vote” in the 2016 election; who do you think is the best candidate to beat Trump in 2020? I'm really glad you brought that up. So many young progressives were not into Hillary Clinton in 2016. I certainly had my issues with her. But I also voted for her and thought she would've made a good president. I thought Jill Stein was great – and she made the final ballot in 45 of the 50 states as the Green Party candidate. But since no one thought Trump had a chance of winning, some progressives voted for Stein. And in several key states won by Trump, if those voters had gone for Clinton, they'd've flipped the state – and things may have turned out differently.

I love Bernie Sanders. But if Joe Biden turns out to be the Democratic candidate, no matter how progressive you are, you have to vote for the guy! Defeating Trump is the number-one priority. So that's the idea behind the “Hipsters Unite” line from the Smashing Pumpkins song Cherub Rock. And you know Max is one of my all-time favourite subjects to photograph. He's also very politically active. And he's definitely not a stereotypical “hipster” – and it's also kind of funny – for me, anyway – to see Max and those words together. But that's kind of an inside joke that the average art fan won't get. But you, he and I – and your readers – will. (Laughs)

Pop Life also reflects on the role of social media platforms as a means of “social distraction”. What is your relationship with such platforms as Instagram and Twitter? I don't do Twitter any more. It's way too “noisy.” I think it's best for politics and news. I mean, it's fun to read some comedian's live tweets of the Oscars or whatever, but it's just not my thing. I do use Instagram, as you know. And for a visual artist, I think it's the most useful of the lot. I've sold many pieces through it.

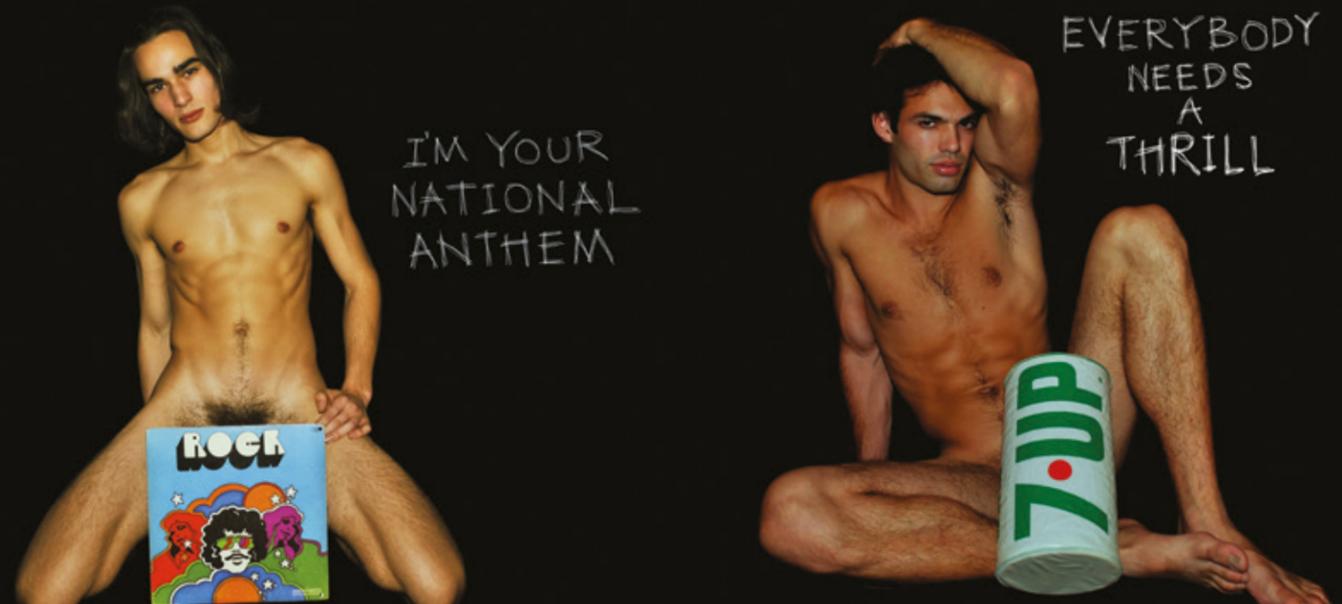
Speaking of IG, Royals II, featuring Jordy Murray, addresses how the platform instills unrealistic life expectations in the minds of its users; why are we so obsessed with projecting an image of ourselves that aims to live up to such impossible, impractical standards? Damn, Jacopo. If I could answer that question, I'd have a master's degree in psychology (laughs). But I do think it has to do with the lifestyle envy these platforms invoke. For Royals II and the “Let Me Live That Fantasy” line, I wanted Jordy to convey that longing that Lorde nailed so well in her classic tune. Lorde also brilliantly took the piss out of it – but this is meant to be a portrait of a blue-collar girl. Someone who wants to be on a yacht with Jay-Z or partying with Ariana Grande. And Jordy really nailed it.

With the piece Pop Life, it's a more lighthearted version of the same message. Prince gave us the line “Everybody Needs A Thrill” 30 years ago. But in 2020, we're bombarded with distractions and “thrills”. And I loved being able to mix in the '60s pop art 7Up inflatable soda can. So we're mashing up several decades with this one (laughs). I like to think Prince is somewhere out in the ethersphere chuckling at this one.

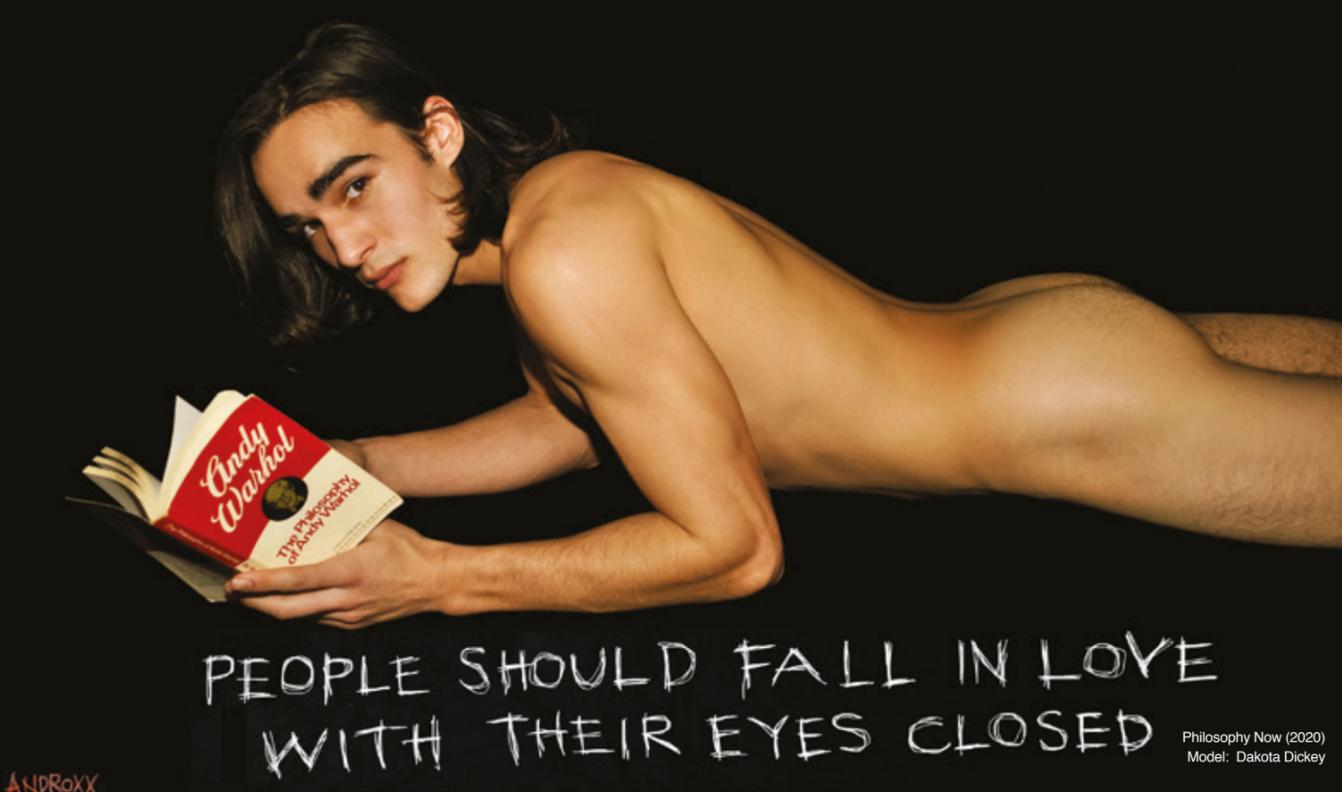
Besides all the fluff and distractions, don't you think social media can also provide younger generations with an opportunity for political – and authentically social – engagement? Absolutely. I'm not completely anti-social media. Not by a long-shot. Look at all the anti-Trump demonstrations that happened after the election. Those wouldn't have been possible without social media. But the ratio of fluff to substance – well... let's face it, it's tilted in the wrong direction. Don't get me wrong. I'm as guilty as the next guy of going down the “funny clip” rabbit hole. But I try not to waste hours doing it.

Your work draws on the legacy of Andy Warhol and the whole realm of pop music. What does Pop, or being pop, if you like, mean to you as an artist? Well, when it comes to Pop Art, you know that that's where I drew my initial inspiration from. Trying to do modern takes on the things that people like Warhol and Lichtenstein did. They managed to take concepts that had been considered lowbrow and twist them and turn them into “serious” art. The importance of that Pop Art movement still resonates today.

And as far as “pop” – meaning pop music – goes, it's just in my DNA. I think I said this the very first time we spoke in 2012, but I'll say it again. You will change. You will get older. But that perfect pop song from high school or college or even a few years ago will always remain the same. So for me to marry those lyrics with gorgeous subjects – in the “chalkboard” motif – it's a way of marrying and preserving perfect words with perfect people. And sort of presenting a “lesson”. When you get to see a group of the pieces in their proper large formats lined up in a gallery, it really does look like some sort of crazy / wonderful classroom.



Los Ageless (2020) Model: Alex Lundqvist
Royals II (2020) Model: Jordy Murray
National Anthem (2020) Model: Dakota Dickey
Pop Life (2020) Model: Tommy Spence



Philosophy Now (2020) Model: Dakota Dickey

Speaking of music, you have a background as a DJ. I know you are not particularly keen to reveal much of your private life and past, however can you tell us a bit about your time behind the decks, your involvement with the NYC club kids, and what made you want to ditch DJing for photography? Well, Jacopo, you know more about my “other life” than most people. And I only chose the “Androxx” tag for my art for one reason – I wasn’t sure how it was going to turn out! And I wanted to keep it separate, just in case what I created didn’t turn out as well in reality as the ideas I had in my head. So in retrospect, it’s kind of funny. I was very fortunate to find success with my very first series of work. And as far as DJing goes – it was a huge part of my life for over a decade. I loved it.

I was the guy who played the “other stuff”. I turned my back on house music and played a really wide mix of artists like New Order, Nancy Sinatra, The Violent Femmes, Lene Lovich, Soft Cell, T.Rex and Bowie. This was way before laptop DJing and you really had to work to dig and find the good stuff. And I was very much in demand. But I didn’t want to wind up being a forty-year-old dude staying up until 4:00 a.m. Not that there’s anything wrong with that choice. It just wasn’t the right choice for me. And by this time, I was also working in the daytime for an Internet company – and beginning to photograph the musical artists who came in for interviews. So I quit the nightclub scene – and the transition kind of happened naturally.

My time in the ‘90s club scene in NYC was amazing, though. I was a kid – and I was also in a band. It was a great era to be young in New York City. I met some of my musical heroes during my time working at nightclubs – Bowie, Madonna, Nina Hagen, Run-DMC – and some of my other idols like John Waters and Quentin Crisp. I was lucky. Right place, right time!

Three of the pieces from the Pop Life series feature new face Dakota Dickey. Why did you choose him? And tell us a bit about National Anthem – which is another of your “LP shots” you’re so well-known for.

Well, Jacopo, I plow through a lot of casting choices before I actually commit to a shoot. I’d rather shoot less often and make it great than simply constantly photograph people and hope for the best. I really plan the shots – and then I basically interview someone before I photograph them. I probably looked at 50 people before I met Dakota. And man, I’m so, so happy I got to work with him. He’s just one of those magic people who can turn it on and really get into the idea of a character. I would not at all be surprised to see him land an acting gig one day. He’s got that kind of presence and charm – and believe me, a lot of models just don’t. I’ve learned that over the past eight years.

Dakota’s background is multi-racial. Spanish, Cuban, French and Northern European. So I loved the idea of Lana Del Rey’s “I’m Your National Anthem” line being used with someone who wasn’t just 100% Caucasian. It’s kind of a “fuck you” to the white “purists” that have reared their ugly heads since you-know-who became president.

Los Ageless, another new piece, features one of the most famous male models of all time – Alex Lundqvist. It’s hard to believe he’s 47 years old! Yeah! No kidding! Every time I look at that photo, I immediately want to get down on the floor and do 1,000 abdominal crunches! Alex is wonderful. He’s still very much in the game and is also kind, politically active and has a beautiful family. I feel very fortunate that I was able to shoot with him. And Los Ageless features a lyric from a St. Vincent song. She is probably my favourite artist making music right now. And it also made me think a lot about unattainable perfection and desire – the kind of desire created by magazine ads when he was a young man – and, as we already talked about, IG and its kin in 2020.

I know this is a tough question: what do you consider to be your most iconic shots and why? Oh man – that is a tough one. It’s almost like trying to pick your favourite child. (Laughs) But seriously, I’ll Be Your Mirror from 2012 would have to be number one. It was that piece – and the fact that Interview Magazine tweeted it to 250,000 people (thanks to a couple of nights of wheatpasting we’d done in the wee hours downtown) that truly started my whole career. That shot of Sebastian Sauv  with the Warhol Velvet Underground LP was just... just... lightning in a bottle.

I’d also have to say Time To Pretend with Sebastian from the same shoot. It’s got a wistful quality that I think spoke to people. “We Were Fated To Pretend” – that MGMT lyric is an anthem for Generation Z, I think.

Oh... and Milkshake with Caio Cesar! It was 100% pure fun. No message – just joy. He loved fooling around in front of the camera – and again – we caught a great moment that worked perfectly with that Kelis lyric.

Then there’s Doll Parts. I know you’re a big fan of Madeline Kragh. And man, did she deliver when we worked together. We got several great shots – but Doll Parts is one I still get inquiries about. I know Courtney Love’s manager fairly well – and it even got a thumbs up from him, which was gratifying. And though I struggled with t being known as the “artist who uses LP covers” guy for a while, let’s face it... it’s been a great thing for me. Call Me and Hit Me With Your Best Shot both were big hits – and when I look at them, I’m still proud of both pieces.

Then there’s Heroes – with Max Jablonsky. It’s my all-time favourite Bowie song – and we shot it two weeks after he died. It holds a very, very special place in my heart. And like I said before, Max is a joy to photograph. He’s smart and funny and just walks in ready to roll with the ideas.

Finally, I know you also like and follow curator / writer Emily Colucci. So if I can name one more, I’ll add Don’t Leave Me This Way from the 2017 group show Night Fever that she curated. That image of model Ryan Winter gazing at the girl on the debut Vaccines album – it’s moody, sad and beautiful. It was a huge hit for me at that show and again, people still ask me about it.

And finally, what’s in store for 2020 and beyond? Well, a few weeks ago, we were looking at the best way to do a gallery show this summer / early autumn. But given the current world situation, needless to say everything is up in the air as far as that goes. Other than that, I’ll just be trying to live life – and trying to find moments of joy among all the difficult things happening in this world. Right now – as we do this interview – we’re suddenly dealing with the Coronavirus and a serious stock market slide. It feels almost apocalyptic.

In November, we’ll be having the most important presidential election in a long, long time. Possibly the most important one in U.S. history. So I’ll be doing what I can in my small way to help with that. It all feels like doom and gloom right now. Let’s hope that positive change is right around the corner, Jacopo.

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