

Michael Clark: Cosmic Dancer

Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK

7 October 2020 – 3 January 2021

Media View: 6 October 2020, 10am-1pm

#MichaelClark @barbicancentre

Supported by Bottega Veneta

Media Partner: AnOther Magazine



Michael Clark, during the filming of *Charles Atlas, Hail the New Puritan*, 1986

This Autumn, Barbican Art Gallery stages the first ever major exhibition on the groundbreaking dancer and choreographer **Michael Clark**. Exploring his unique combination of classical and contemporary culture, *Michael Clark: Cosmic Dancer* unfolds as a constellation of striking portraits of Clark through the eyes of legendary collaborators and world-renowned artists including **Charles Atlas**, **BodyMap**, **Leigh Bowery**, **Duncan Campbell**, **Peter Doig**, **Cerith Wyn Evans**, **Sarah Lucas**, **Silke Otto-Knapp**, **Elizabeth Peyton**, **The Fall** and **Wolfgang Tillmans**.

2020 marks the 15th year of Michael Clark Company's collaboration with the Barbican as an Artistic Associate. This exhibition, one of the largest surveys ever dedicated to a living choreographer, presents a comprehensive story of Clark's career to date and development as a pioneer of contemporary dance who challenged the furthest intersections of dance, life and art through a union of ballet technique and punk culture. Films, sculptures, paintings and photographs by his collaborators across visual art, music and fashion are exhibited alongside rare archival material, placing Clark within the wider cultural context of his time. Contributions by cult icons of London's art scene establish his radical presence in Britain's cultural history.

Jane Alison, Head of Visual Arts, Barbican said: *"We're thrilled to be sharing this rare opportunity for audiences to get to know the inspirational work of one of the UK's most influential*

choreographers and performers, Michael Clark. Michael Clark Company has been our Artistic Associate since 2005 and this exhibition celebrates the richness of Clark's provocative and electrifying presence in our cultural landscape and explores how art, film, music and fashion have been integral to his work."

Michael Clark was born in Scotland in 1962 and began traditional Scottish dancing at the age of four. In 1975 he left home in Aberdeen to study at the Royal Ballet School in London before joining Ballet Rambert in 1979. Following his participation in a summer school with Merce Cunningham and John Cage, Clark created his first independent work in 1982 and became choreographer-in-residence at London's multi-disciplinary creative hub Riverside Studios in 1983. Michael Clark & Company was launched in 1984 when he was only 22.

As a young choreographer, Clark brought together his classical ballet training with London's punk, fashion and club culture to establish himself as one of the most innovative artists working in contemporary dance. These impulses are highlighted in the ambitious new commission *A Prune Twin* (2020), by pioneering filmmaker, video artist and long-term collaborator **Charles Atlas**. This large-scale film installation will immerse audiences into Clark's early work and provide an opportunity to revisit Atlas' 'Love letter to London' *Hail the New Puritan* (1986) and *Because We Must* (1989). Featuring outrageous costumes and sets, Clark's iconoclastic choreography challenged notions of gender, conformity and conservative values within the context of Thatcher's Britain. A section of the exhibition will be dedicated to Clark's landmark performance *I Am Curious, Orange* (1988) which questioned the sectarianism and conservatism that characterised not only the 1980's but Britain's social and political history. **Cerith Wyn Evans'** music videos for **The Fall** filmed on stage are presented alongside recreated elements of set design originally conceived by Clark.

Since his meteoric rise to international recognition, Clark has developed a multi-disciplinary aesthetic language instantly recognisable in his choreographic form. His work continues to be marked by a mixture of technical rigour and experimentation, fine-tuned choreography and subcultural influences. Clark has always been drawn to artists who have challenged the boundaries of gender and normative representations of sexuality. The exhibition showcases a rare collection of **Leigh Bowery's** provocative costumes which proved integral to Clark's vision and radically disrupted the traditions of the dance world. These include the iconic bottomless leotards from *New Puritans* (1984) whose choreography was in turn inspired by The Fall's post-punk compositions and grotesque world.

Following Bowery's tragic death and a period of absence away from London, Clark's friendship with **Sarah Lucas** resulted in a shared exploration of the human body and sexuality across sculpture and dance. Lucas has conceived two installations for the exhibition inspired by their friendship and collaboration on *Before and After: The Fall* (2001). These include a series of hand

gestures, cigarette sculptures and a wanking arm as sculptural metaphors of Clark's choreography, as well as a parodic casting of Clark's body sitting on a toilet (*Cnut*, 2004). **Elizabeth Peyton's** and **Wolfgang Tillmans'** portraits of Clark capture the naked intimacy of the artist as a human being, without artifice and decorum, whereas **Peter Doig's** painting, which seems to merge Clark's face with that of Le Corbusier, is a playful rendering of their shared interest in the famed architect of the Cité Radieuse in Marseille. Doig's *Portrait (Corbusier)* (2009) is exhibited in dialogue with 16mm footage of Clark's dancers performing a pelvis-led choreography on the roof of the iconic modernist building in 2008, presented for the first time and resulting from a close dialogue with Clark and Michael Clark Company.

In 2005 Michael Clark Company became an Artistic Associate of the Barbican and embarked on *The Stravinsky Project*, a three-year collaboration to create a trilogy of works to seminal dance scores by Igor Stravinsky. Clark's investigation of classical ballet vocabulary, extreme discipline and technical virtuosity in this trilogy inspired **Silke Otto Knapp's** new series of paintings commissioned for the exhibition. Clark's relentless drive to re-define classicism has seen him perform at theatres and galleries across the world. A section dedicated to Michael Clark Company's archive of ephemera, posters and programmes highlights the exposure of the company across Europe's most renowned theatre venues, with a vibrant graphic identity akin to the visual language of punk, rock and pop music echoing Clark's vision of his company as a band.

Michael Clark: Cosmic Dancer further showcases a large selection of archival film documentation, focusing on Clark's work with filmmakers (**Peter Greenaway**, **Derek Jarman**), fashion designers (**Vivienne Westwood**, **Alexander McQueen**, **Gucci**) and musicians (**Scritti Politti**, **Laibach**, **Bruce Gilbert** from **Wire**). The archive also displays a selection of interviews with Clark, as well as the documentary *The Late Michael Clark* (2001) by filmmaker Sophie Fiennes and the recent BBC recording of Clark's *to a simple, rock 'n' roll . . . song.* (2016) set to the music of **Erik Satie**, **Patti Smith** and **David Bowie**.

Artists featured in the exhibition include: Charles Atlas, Leigh Bowery, BodyMap, Duncan Campbell, Peter Doig, Cerith Wyn Evans, The Fall, Sophie Fiennes, Sarah Lucas, Silke Otto-Knapp, Elizabeth Peyton, Susan Stenger, Stevie Stewart, Wolfgang Tillmans, Trojan. Archival film presentation includes work by Angela Conway Peter Greenaway, Ann Herdman, Derek Jarman, Daniel Landin, Alexander McQueen, Scritti Politti, Laibach, Bruce Gilbert, Vivienne Westwood.

Michael Clark: Cosmic Dancer has been recognised with a commendation from the 2019 Sotheby's Prize.

Michael Clark Company is supported using public funding by Arts Council England.

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Notes to Editors

Press Information

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Press images available online from the Barbican Newsroom

A link to the image sheets can be found in the 'Downloads' box on the top right-hand side of the page from: <http://www.barbican.org.uk/MichaelClarkNews>

Press tickets

To ensure the safe flow of visitors through the Barbican, all press tickets will need to be booked 48 hours in advance by contacting a member of the Barbican's Communications team. You will be unable to enter without a pre-booked ticket and so please do get in touch prior to your visit. We look forward to welcoming you back to the Barbican.

Opening Hours

Monday – Friday: 11am – 7pm

Saturday – Sunday: 10am – 7pm

Ticket Prices

Standard: Monday – Friday, £15

Standard: Saturday & Sunday, £17

Members Free and Members Plus, Free (one visit per membership)

Young Barbican £5 (one visit per membership)

Concessions & discounts

Weekdays (Mon – Fri)

Unwaged: £11

Students: £11

NHS staff: £11

Over 60s: £13

Art Fund Members: £7.50

Under 14s: Free

Weekends (Sat & Sun)

Unwaged: £12

Students: £12

NHS staff: £12

Over 60s: £17

Art Fund Members: £8.50

Under 14s: Free

Important Notes

Parent/carers can bring children to see *Michael Clark: Cosmic Dancer*, however under 14s must be accompanied by an adult. Signage in the exhibition space will signal adult content where necessary.

Large bags, rucksacks and luggage are not permitted in the gallery. All bags are subject to search. Food and drink are not permitted.

The Art Gallery will be operating at reduced capacity, with timed entry slots to ensure a safe flow of visitors through the space, and tickets will need to be booked online at barbican.org.uk in advance of a visit.

Safety measures in place when the Barbican reopens will include social distancing, limited visitor capacity, one-way routes through the building, sanitisation points and regular cleaning. Access to all venues will be via the main entrance on Silk Street with lifts available for those who need them.

There will be takeaway refreshments and a pop-up Art Gallery shop on the Conservatory Terrace on Level 4, as well as toilet facilities available. Detailed visitor information will be available on the Barbican's [website](http://barbican.org.uk).

Exhibition

Michael Clark: Cosmic Dancer is at Barbican Art Gallery from 7 October 2020 to 3 January 2021. Following its opening at the Barbican, the exhibition will move to V&A Dundee and be on view from 26 February to 4 September 2022.

Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated book published by Prestel and designed by A Practice for Everyday Life (APFEL). An introductory essay by exhibition curator Florence Ostende and an exclusive interview with Michael Clark are featured alongside thematic texts by Catherine Wood and Arabella Stanger, and contributions by Charles Atlas, Jarvis Cocker, Kim Jones, Sarah Lucas, Elizabeth Peyton and Susan Stenger. The publication also features rare photography, previously unpublished archival material and a new chronology.

Events

To celebrate Clark's creative friendship with musician **Jarvis Cocker**, Cocker's recently formed band **JARV IS...** will perform an exclusive set of five songs across different rooms within the *Michael Clark: Cosmic Dancer* exhibition in the Art Gallery. The recording of the performance will be screened for free from Friday 16 October via the [Barbican's website](http://barbican.org.uk)

More events to be announced.

Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning

***Shape Makers* – a collaboration with Headway East London and Michael Clark Company**

As part of the *Michael Clark: Cosmic Dancer* exhibition, Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning will be working with members of brain injury charity Headway East London this autumn on a series of dance and movement workshops led by Associate Director of Michael Clark Company, Kate Coyne. The project will be taking place at the Barbican in the Theatre and will bring together members and staff of the charity with Michael Clark Company; inviting a collaboration of ideas, sharing techniques and developing new work.

***Michael Clark: Cosmic Dancer* Community View (November 2020)**

Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning will be providing a free online Community View of the exhibition including a series of creative activities for community groups, charities and schools. Online resources will include dance prompts created by Kate Coyne, Associate Director of Michael Clark Company, which will invite partners to create their own movement and dance in response to the exhibition. These contributions will then become part of a short film which will be shared on the Barbican's website in December.

The Sotheby's Prize, 2019

This exhibition was recognised with a commendation from the Sotheby's Prize 2019, which, in its third year, continues to celebrate curatorial excellence and champion the work of innovative institutions who strive to break new ground by exploring overlooked or under-represented areas of art history. Launched in May 2017, the Sotheby's Prize offers an annual sum of up to \$250,000 to recognise curatorial excellence and help facilitate exhibitions that challenge our understanding of art today.

The Sotheby's Prize is awarded by a jury consisting of Connie Butler, Chief Curator at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles; Donna de Salvo, Senior Adjunct Curator at Dia Art Foundation, in New York; Emilie Gordenker, Director of Mauritshuis in The Hague, Director Designate of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam; Sir Nicholas Serota, Chair of Arts Council England; and Allan Schwartzman, co-creator of the Prize, chair of the jury, and Chairman and Executive Vice President of Sotheby's.

Please find more information [here](#).

Barbican Newsroom

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communication team's contact details are listed on our website at www.barbican.org.uk/news

Barbican Art Gallery and The Curve

Our visual arts programme embraces art, architecture, design, fashion, photography and film. Many of our exhibitions explore the interconnections between disciplines, periods and cultures, and aim to imagine the world in new ways. Designers, artists and architects are our collaborators in this process.

We invest in the artists of today and tomorrow; The Curve is one of the few galleries in London devoted to the commissioning of new work. Through our activities we aim to inspire more people to discover and love the arts. Entrance to The Curve is free. Through Young Barbican we offer £5 tickets to 14-25 year olds for our paid exhibitions and free admittance for under 14s.

Our exhibitions are complemented by comprehensively researched catalogues and a full range of public events. We develop engaging online content for audiences and offer special tours for schools. In partnership with renowned museums and art galleries, many of our exhibitions travel to reach both national and international audiences.

About the Barbican

A world-class arts and learning organisation, the [Barbican](#) pushes the boundaries of all major art forms including dance, film, music, theatre and visual arts. Its creative learning programme further underpins everything it does. Over a million people attend events annually, hundreds of artists and performers are featured, and more than 300 [staff](#) work onsite. The architecturally renowned centre opened in 1982 and comprises the Barbican Hall, the Barbican Theatre, The Pit, Cinemas 1, 2 and 3, Barbican Art Gallery, a second gallery The Curve, public spaces, a library, the Lakeside Terrace, [a glasshouse conservatory](#), conference facilities and three restaurants. The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre.

The Barbican is home to Resident Orchestra, [London Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Orchestra, [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Ensembles the [Academy of Ancient Music](#) and [Britten Sinfonia](#), Associate Producer [Serious](#), and Artistic Partner [Create](#). Our Artistic Associates include [Boy Blue](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), Deborah Warner, [Drum Works](#) and [Michael Clark Company](#). The [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#) are the Barbican's International Orchestral Partner, the [Australian Chamber Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court, and [Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble.

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