

Cosmic Dancer  
until 3 January 2021



Michael

Clark

# Michael Clark

## Cosmic Dancer

Charles Atlas  
BodyMap  
Leigh Bowery  
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  
and more

'I try to make dance that isn't about dance, not just for other dancers to see.'  
Michael Clark

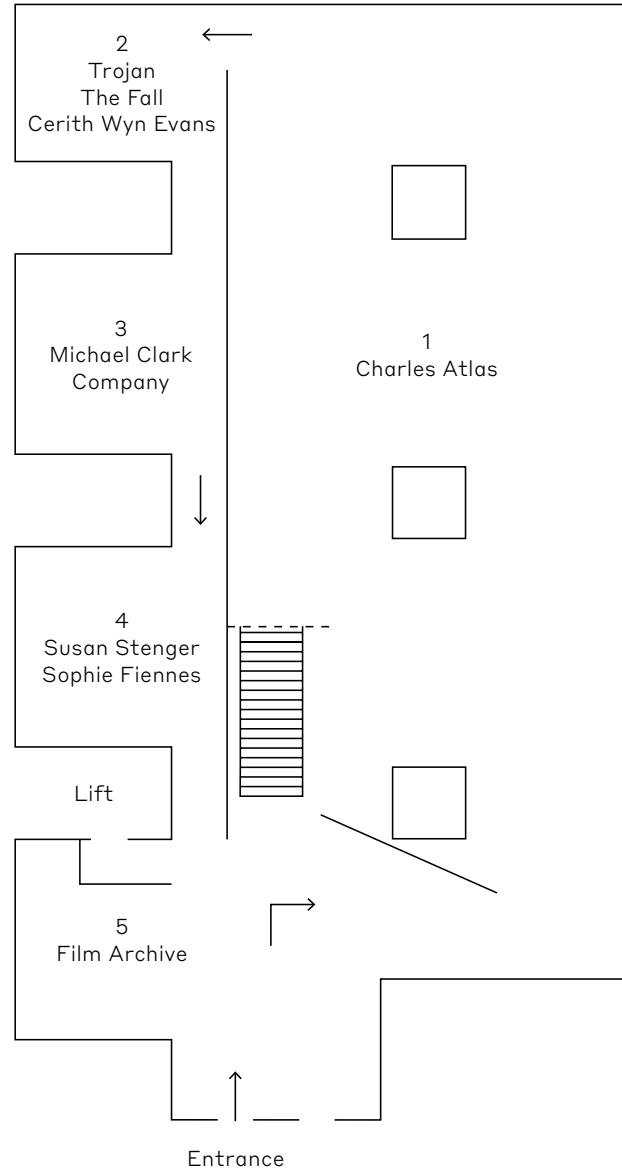
Moving between the worlds of dance, art, music and fashion, Michael Clark is a defining figure in the British cultural landscape. The exhibition explores the Scottish dancer and choreographer's work and creative collaborations, marking the 15-year anniversary of Michael Clark Company's partnership with the Barbican as an Artistic Associate. *Michael Clark: Cosmic Dancer* unfolds as a constellation of portraits of Clark, through the eyes of the artists who have worked with or been inspired by him. Film, sculpture, painting, costume and photography by his collaborators are exhibited alongside rare archival material, placing Clark within a wider cultural context.

Born in Aberdeen in 1962, Clark began traditional Scottish dance at the age of four before being invited to study at the Royal Ballet School, London, in 1975. He joined Ballet Rambert in 1979, thereby discovering a more contemporary form of dance. Following Clark's participation in a summer school with revolutionary choreographer Merce Cunningham and avant-garde composer John Cage, he created his first independent work in 1982, at the age of 20. He then became choreographer-in-residence at London's multi-disciplinary Riverside Studios in 1983 and created Michael Clark & Company in 1984.

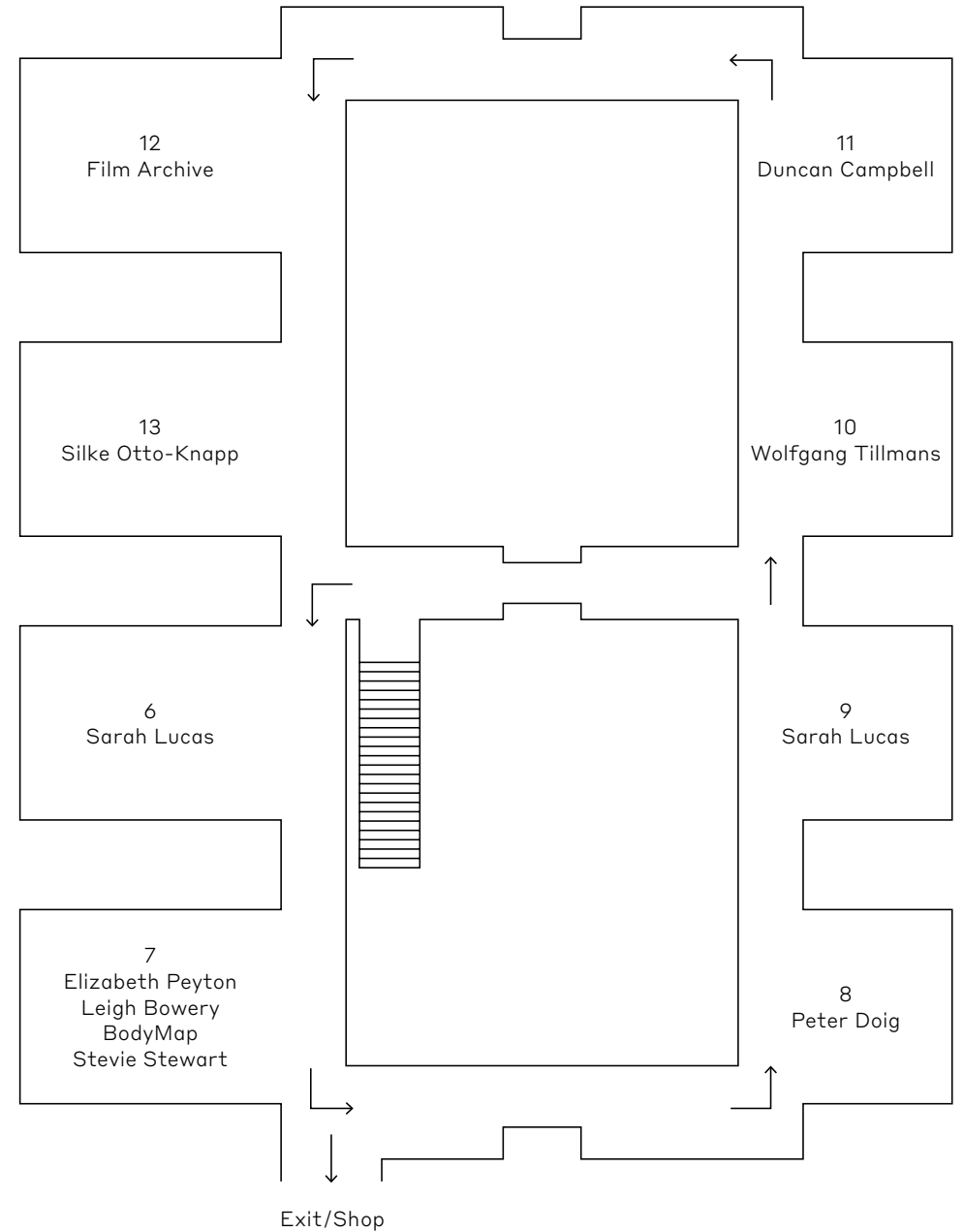
Surrounded and inspired by London's club and punk cultures, Clark's choreography changed the landscape of British dance by weaving together pantomime, drag performance, queer subculture and post-punk energy with the virtuosity and grace of his classical training. His work redefined gender representation and stereotypes within the heteronormative tradition of ballet history, advocating sex as a repressed part of modern dance. Clark explains: 'There's this mistaken idea we were just prancing about in platform shoes and bare bums to go against the grain. I was reacting to a particular dance ethos — which had always seemed to mean saying no to spectacle, to comedy or narrative, no to virtuosity. I wanted to say yes to all those things, to acknowledge those elements as part of the visual aspect of dance, which has to include how people are dressed.'

Featuring outrageous costumes and set designs, Clark's choreography challenged notions of conformity and conservative values within the context of Thatcher's Britain. Trained in the Cecchetti Method's principles of clarity, balance and harmony, Clark created a tension between his training's formal authority and his personal iconoclastic energy, pushing the extremes of dance. At the forefront of interdisciplinary experimentation, Clark continues to broaden the possibilities for both dance and visual art. By exploring the influence of Clark's collaborators' diverse disciplines on his work, this exhibition establishes his radical presence within Britain's cultural history.

# Downstairs



# Upstairs



# 1 Charles Atlas

Born in 1949, St. Louis, United States. Lives and works in New York.

Created especially for this exhibition, *A Prune Twin* (2020) is a large-scale, multi-screen installation by Clark's long-term collaborator Charles Atlas, spanning across nine hanging screens and four monitors in the gallery space. Conceived as an immersive collage of sound and moving image, Atlas re-edited two previous films on Clark, *Hail the New Puritan* (1986) and *Because We Must* (1989), with the installation's title functioning as an anagram of 'New Puritan'. A pioneering filmmaker and video artist, Atlas created a new way to film dance termed 'media-dance' and has designed lighting for almost every Clark production since 1984. His directorial aim is to 'translate to the screen the kinaesthetic experience you get from watching live dance.' The exploded choreography from edited fragments creates a sense of rhythm, inviting visitors to walk through the space in contrast with the static viewpoint of a theatrical audience.

For Atlas, *Hail the New Puritan* is an anti-documentary where 'everything in the film is constructed reality.' Clark and his friends are directed to exaggerate their behaviour for the camera, blending together art with life. Atlas shows a fictional day-in-the-life of Clark as a young dance prodigy on the cusp of fame. Practicing ballet by day and clubbing by night, Clark's choreography of hand gestures leads a group dance in a club, before walking home at dawn. Atlas has called the film 'a love letter to London', providing a unique insight into the creative scene and underground queer subcultures that Clark emerged from, amidst the backdrop of a city beset by mass unemployment and the AIDS crisis.

*Because We Must* is framed around Clark's 1987 stage production. As Atlas recalls, the 'dance performance started on stage and ended up inside Michael's head, in a drug-induced hallucination.' Chopin's piano prelude gives way to Leigh Bowery and dancer Leslie Bryant gossiping, before singing Stevie Wonder and Paul McCartney's duet, 'Ebony and Ivory' (1982), by the piano. This contrast of perceived high and low culture — with Clark's classical training performed by dancers wearing inflatable dinosaur headpieces — is taken further by a sing-along medley in the bar. The sequence choreographed to The Velvet Underground's 'Venus in Furs' (1967) is 'the climax of the drug fantasy.' Atlas shoots the dancers against a green-screen of Bowery's sequined costumes, in order to 'float them against moving close-ups of the floral pattern, to make the scene really dreamlike.'

# 2 Trojan

Born in 1964, London. Died in 1986, London.

The fried egg, lemon and underpants in Trojan's painting *Female Trouble* (1984) are re-imagined as elements of set design in Charles Atlas's film *Hail the New Puritan* (1986), choreographed by Clark. Fried egg on yellow stalks loom over the dancers like surreal trees. The suspended giant, red Y-fronts juxtaposes with Leigh Bowery's oversized jackets, which are continually lifted to reveal the dancer's underwear, as well as Clark's Y-fronts through his cut-away pinstripe chaps. Trojan's paintings were made of found objects and materials that he collected — cheap paintings with plastic frames and synthetic fried eggs, likely picked up from one of his favourite joke shops in London.

Trojan's still-life composition and cartoon-like illustrations inspired the set design of several Clark's performances from the mid-1980s. In *our caca phoney H.our caca phoney H.* (1985), objects taken from his drawings — such as bottles, crosses and chains — are blown up as large inflatable props, carried by the dancers in their arms or across their backs. The grotesque, over-sized props are reminiscent of objects found in Dada collages, Surrealist paintings and Pop art, anticipating the set design for Clark's *I Am Curious, Orange* in 1988.

In *Hail the New Puritan*, Clark and his dancers applied make-up in the guise of Trojan, using primary-coloured paint to offset their noses, mouths and eyes, conjuring up distorted faces that recall Pablo Picasso's Cubist portraits. Trojan described himself as an artist and prostitute: 'My paintings are about fights and fucks in nightclubs.' A key figure on the London club scene, Trojan lived with Leigh Bowery, and their Star Trek-wallpapered flat features as a backdrop for a scene in *Hail the New Puritan*, in which they prepare to go out clubbing. 'Trojan was a muse for Leigh,' remembers Clark who — following Trojan's death from a drug overdose in 1986 — wrote a dedication in the programme for *No Fire Escape in Hell* (1986): 'In memory of Trojan: way out was his way in.'

Band formed in 1976, Manchester.

This room focuses on *I Am Curious, Orange* (1988), Clark's most significant collaboration with The Fall. The post-punk band composed the performance's soundtrack which was released as the studio album *I Am Kurious Oranj* in October 1988. Led by frontman Mark E. Smith, the band's physical presence was crucial to the staging of the work. The musicians interact with the set and the dancers, including Brix Smith playing her guitar whilst being spun around on a massive Big Mac burger. This section brings together music videos by The Fall that were shot on the set by Cerith Wyn Evans, recreations of props and set design elements originally conceived by Clark, as well performance documentation filmed at Sadler's Wells in London.

*I Am Curious, Orange* was commissioned by the Holland Festival in Amsterdam to commemorate the 300<sup>th</sup>-anniversary of the Dutch-born William of Orange's coronation as King of England. Clark and Mark E. Smith's creative friendship drew on their shared interest in how historical events resurface in present-day parallels, stemming from a shared unconscious collective memory of the past. Smith's lyrics draw upon William Blake, British and Dutch colonialism, the AIDS crisis, sectarian violence and the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Clark reimagined the division between the Dutch Protestant King William III and his predecessor, the Catholic King James II, into a choreographed football match between the Scottish rival clubs Celtic and Rangers. Without wanting to 'make a big deal out of it because that's what people expect of me,' Clark alluded to William's rumoured homosexuality by presenting him as a dancing fruit, dressed as a sculptural orange. The work premiered in 1988—the year Margaret Thatcher introduced Section 28, banning local authorities from 'promoting' homosexuality.

This landmark production furthered Clark's all-encompassing vision of dance, bringing together music by The Fall, costumes by Leigh Bowery and BodyMap, and a set that Clark designed himself for the first time, which was infused with Pop art imagery. Combining a backdrop of the Houses of Parliament with oversized props of fast-food culture and consumerism, the large-scale spectacle created an abundance that railed against Thatcher's austerity measures of the time. Visiting McDonald's headquarters in 1983, Thatcher encouraged the fast-food revolution in 1980s Britain as part of her political agenda and advocated the value-for-money ethos, describing the Big Mac as 'absolutely enormous.'

Born in 1958, Llanelli, Wales. Lives and works in London.

The projection in this room features the artist Cerith Wyn Evans's music videos for The Fall, shot on the set of Clark's *I Am Curious, Orange* (1988). 'Big New Prinz' and 'Wrong Place, Right Time' were composed for the performance and released as part the band's 1988 album *I am Kurious Oranj*. Wyn Evans's fast-cutting technique conveys the shared energy between the dancers and musicians. Decomposing the stage into a fragmented collage of dance and music, close-ups show Mark E. Smith's fellow band members and Clark's dancers grinning and leering into the camera, spurring each other on to create an exaggerated performativity. The dancers strike poses of devotion, raising their arms as if seeking spiritual guidance. Wyn Evans filmed the action from multiple angles, rather than a straightforward shot on a theatrical stage, to capture the piece's humour and subjectivity.

Wyn Evans met Clark in 1980 at the filmmaker Derek Jarman's London flat whilst a film student at the Royal College of Art. They first collaborated on *Of a feather, FLOCK* (1982) and experimented further with film and dance in *Parts I–IV* (1983), with one of its films showing two walls gradually enclosing the dancers' space. The film archive section presents documentation of *our caca phoney H.our caca phoney H* (1985) filmed by Wyn Evans, as well as two of his films featuring Clark: *Miracle of the Rose* (1984) and *Degrees of Blindness* (1988). Wyn Evans's techniques of fast-cut montage and superimposed shots challenge a typical narrative-led cinematic structure in much the same way as Clark subverted norms within ballet.

As part of their long-standing collaboration, Wyn Evans was a member of the band Big Bottom in Clark's *current/SEE* (1998), which is exhibited in Room 4. In 2003, he also designed sound and lighting elements for *Would, Should, Can, Did* and invited Clark to perform at his exhibition *Look at that picture How does it appear to you now? Does it seem to be Persisting?* during the same year. Wolfgang Tillmans's photography of Clark's performance is seen in Room 10, showing the dancer accompanied by flute-playing Susan Stenger underneath Wyn Evans's crystal chandeliers.

## 3 Michael Clark Company

This room presents a collection of posters, programmes and flyers retracing almost 35 years of Clark's career and the history of the Company. Presented in chronological order, the array of graphic ephemera ranges from Clark's early work, such as *Parts I-IV* (1983), to the Company's most recent production, *to a simple, rock 'n' roll . . . song*. (2016). By the time Clark launched Michael Clark & Company at the age of 22 in 1984, he was choreographing work for a close-knit group of dancers, akin to family that rehearsed, performed and toured together. This sense of an evolving collective can be seen on the programme cover for *No Fire Escape in Hell* (1986), the football team series for *I Am Curious, Orange* (1988), and the presentation of Clark's collaborators in the *Because We Must* programme (1987) as a cast of characters. Clark often referred to the dancers from the Company as a band with himself acting as its front man, as demonstrated in the design for *Because We Must* (1987) where Clark floats above his company dressed as a Christmas star.

Looking beyond performance documentation and traditional dance photography, Clark has developed a unique visual language for the Company. The newspaper-style programme for *current/SEE* (1998) brings together diagrams of ballet foot positions, body measurements and furniture advertisements that investigate the everyday iconography of discipline, order and power structures. Inspired by the creative identity of Pop art and rock music records, Clark initiated a creative dialogue with a pioneering generation of British graphic designers such as Malcolm Garrett, Scott King, Jamie Reid and Peter Saville. Known for his album covers for the Sex Pistols, Reid designed a Dada-inspired photo-collage composition for the poster of *New Puritans* (1984). Recurring circular shapes in the graphic identities created for *Modern Masterpieces* (1991), *O* (1994) and *The Stravinsky Project* (2005–07) also invoke the shape of a vinyl record cover. Promotional photography for *come, been and gone* (2009) restaged the album artwork of *The Velvet Underground & Nico* (1967) with Clark and his dancers photographed under projected dots of light.

## 4 Susan Stenger

Born in 1955, Buffalo, New York. Lives and works in London and West Cork.

The film and sound installation of *current/SEE* was choreographed by Clark in 1998 with music by Susan Stenger and her all-bass guitar band Big Bottom, as well as costumes by Hussein Chalayan. Filmed by Sophie Fiennes in 2001, *current/SEE* culminated with the piece 'VPL', exhibited here for the first time as a stand-alone installation, staged by Stenger with Big Bottom's original Ampeg SVT amplifiers. The amps and band members are positioned in a Stonehenge-like semicircle formation around the dancers. During the process of creating this work, Clark revealed his vision for the dancer's body, where the feet are the drums, the pelvis is the bass and the arms are the vocals. The choreography is driven by the floor — from the feet to the pelvis — whilst any expressive gesture of the arms is avoided in favour of functional movements. Stenger recalls: 'it was like the sound of the bass was bringing him back to life. Every shift in overtone or emphasis seemed to affect him. But then, sometimes, it felt like every gesture of his was influencing the sound.' Stenger's arrangement for 'VPL' intertwines ghosts of rock and metal riffs that emerge from a primordial sludge of drones and tremolos, culminating in an ode to Black Sabbath. Both artists were drawn towards the fundamentals of their disciplines, stripping down movements and sounds to their foundations.

## Sophie Fiennes

Born in 1967, Ipswich. Lives and works in London

Sophie Fiennes met Clark when he played the role of Caliban in Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991), an adaption of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and went on to manage the re-launched Michael Clark Company in 1991–93. Fiennes directed the film *The Late Michael Clark* (2001), charting Clark's return to dancing after a four-year absence. Clark moved in with his mother in Scotland after struggling with alcohol and drug addiction, along with the death of Leigh Bowery and a knee injury. Fiennes and Clark restaged *current/SEE* (1998) in the film, culminating with the choreography to Big Bottom's 'VPL' projected in this room.

These two rooms bring together moving image from throughout Clark's career, comprising of performance documentation, studio recordings, documentaries, artists' films, music videos, fashion shows, as well as a projection of television interviews.

The earliest film shown is a rare recording of Clark's solo *Soda Lake* (1981), choreographed by Richard Alston for Ballet Rambert. Clark's mastery of weight distribution, in his controlled fall and off-balance movement, responds to the shape of Nigel Hall's abstract sculpture that served as the work's set. In New York, Clark encountered the work of classically trained dancer and choreographer Karole Armitage, who performed alongside punk rock bands from the city's downtown experimental scene. This disruptive fusion was an inspiring experience for Clark who later performed in Charles Atlas's films, *Parafango* (1983–84) and *Ex-Romance* (1987), choreographed by Armitage.

As Clark developed his own choreographic vision at Riverside Studios in the early 1980s, film documentation of *Do you me? I Did* and *New Puritans* (both 1984) displays the innovation of his early style. The former's intimate and atmospheric composition contrasts with the frenetic abandon in the latter. A studio version of *No Fire Escape in Hell* (1986), first broadcast by the BBC in 1987, shows Clark employing drag, pantomime and vaudeville to subvert totalitarian imagery and police brutality. In contrast to the excess of these earlier works, the vulnerability present in Clark's 'Heroin' solo in *Heterospective* (1989) comes at a time when his personal life, sexuality and addictions became explicit in his choreography.

Clark was involved in the London experimental film scene, performing at the opening of Derek Jarman's 1984 exhibition at the ICA, which Jarman captured in the Super 8 film *Working for Pleasure* (1984). Dressed in a white tutu and black T-shirt emblazoned with a skull, Clark pirouettes in front of the naked Christine Binnie, a member of the Neo Naturists performance group. Footage of Clark's *our caca phoney Hour caca phoney H.* (1985) culminates with the Neo Naturists joining his dancers on stage in a carnivalesque finale, filmed by Cerith Wyn Evans. In *Degrees of Blindness* (1988), Wyn Evans filmed Clark's youthful beauty and Dionysian choreography as a lyrical subversion of the mainstream gaze, represented by Piccadilly Circus's flashing neon signs and arcade games. Later in 1991, Clark designed his own costume and writhing bestial choreography for the role of Caliban in Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*. Another remarkable performance presented in this section is the 1992 'chosen maiden'

solo in Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913), where a young girl is elected to dance herself to death. Clark's choreography pushes Joanne Barrett's gymnastic training to extremes, as she twists her bare body into taut angles by collapsing and restructuring herself.

Having featured in numerous fashion shows, shoots and campaigns, Clark also makes a brief appearance in a 1990 documentary on Vivienne Westwood, performing the well-known Highland Dance 'Ghillie Callum' (The Sword Dance). In 2004, Alexander McQueen invited Clark to choreograph his revered runway show 'Deliverance', in which dancers are paired with models — dressed in Depression-era influenced designs — and extravagantly circle around a race track-like ballroom stage.

Clark's collaborations with musicians led him to choreograph and perform in music videos, including for the new wave group Scritti Politti, industrial band Laibach, and Bruce Gilbert's experimental score for *The Shivering Man* (1986). His company also danced alongside The Fall for the BBC's *The Old Grey Whistle Test* (1984), which culminates with Clark stuffing his fist into the mouth of a pantomime cow whilst Mark E. Smith spits out sardonic lyrics to 'Lay of the Land'. Clark began his most recent musical collaboration in 2012 with Jarvis Cocker's Relaxed Muscle performing live in a film shot at the Barbican Theatre. In 2009, *come, been and gone* pays tribute to the choreographer's rock icons with music by David Bowie, Iggy Pop and Lou Reed. Documentation from Kochi, Japan, shows the company dancing to 'Heroes' (1977) in front of a recorded projection of Bowie's original performance. Featuring music from David Bowie, Erik Satie and Patti Smith, Clark's *to a simple, rock 'n' roll . . . song.* (2016), filmed by the BBC at the Barbican, is also shown in full here.

'Rock is my rock. It has been vital to me at a personal level; it has shaped me as an individual as well as an artist.'

Michael Clark

Born in 1962, London. Lives and works in Suffolk.

Room 6 presents Sarah Lucas's work *Cnut* (2004), a concrete cast of Clark's body sitting on a toilet and smoking a cigarette. Cut at the torso, the slumped figure rests upon the sculpture of a ham sandwich. Clark was 42 years old when Lucas made *Cnut*, and the cracks in its rough concrete surface subvert the canonical beauty and virtuosity of the young ballet dancer. Forced to adjust to his ageing body, the choreographer is portrayed as a motionless, defecating statue. The parody of wounded masculinity runs in the title 'Cnut', a vulgar anagram that alludes to the medieval King Cnut the Great, who famously failed to stop the tide. Atop a throne-like toilet and slice of dull, white bread, this tragicomic portrait of Clark as a guillotined king turns into a symbol of global mass food production. As Lucas has said of the work: 'CNUT can't stop the tidal wave of shit food that's engulfing the planet.'

Lucas created a new version of the wallpaper work *Tits in Space* (2000–20) 'to match the pink ham' of *Sandwich* (2004–20). Initially produced during the early years of their friendship in 2000, the backdrop of cigarette-covered breasts is also expanded for Room 9 of this exhibition. Clark recalls: 'I had no money and was living with Sarah for a while, dreading to go back into dance — which is ridiculous, because I love what I do. I was helping in her studio, sticking cigarettes on things for her. I was terrible at it. [...] She told me, "Oh, why don't you just go in and make the worst thing you possibly could and see how that turns out?" And it really worked!'

The sculpture and photography in the vitrine explore their shared interest in sexuality, body language and arm gesture, as manifested in their collaboration for *Before and After: The Fall* (2001). Lucas conceived the costumes and set design, which consisted of fluorescent tubes for Clark's choreography to Nina Simone's 'Four Women' (1966), as well as a giant sculpture of a masturbating arm that dictated the dance's rhythm. For Lucas, 'wanking is mechanical, as regular as a clock [...] and I realised dance is about the same thing. It is structured in time.'

Born in 1965, Danbury, Connecticut. Lives and works in New York.

This selection of portraits by Elizabeth Peyton introduces Clark alongside the personal heroes who have shaped his life and artistic vision. Drawing from music, dance and cinema, these paintings and prints are presented in dialogue with costumes from Clark's productions. Together, they reflect the choreographer's blending of classical and contemporary culture across different periods. Peyton identifies 'something in Michael's work where he innovates from within the tradition of dance using contemporary references... I never saw anything truly total like that before, the sensory saturation, and I'd never seen a dance work that held this/our time somehow with no filter. So human and so now.'

During a conversation with Peyton about his trilogy *The Stravinsky Project* (2005–07), Clark revealed how he experiences the same feeling when listening to the Sex Pistols as he does with Igor Stravinsky's ballet and orchestral work, *The Rite of Spring* (1913). He also cites the parallel sensibilities of punk music with Stravinsky's avant-garde compositions. In the exhibition, Peyton's etching of Diaghilev's visionary dance company Ballets Russes — who first performed the ballet — acts as a counterpoint to the painting of the Sex Pistols' lead singer John Lydon, *Dallas, TX (January 1978)* (1994). Peyton's watercolour of Clark, *M.C.* (2006), also nods to his own punk roots with her inclusion of his trademark nappy ear-pin.

Peyton has selected the etching *Belle Belle Belle* (2007) — based on Jean Cocteau's 1946 film *La Belle et la Bête* — to convey the sense of drama and intensity that she sees in his work. For Peyton, Clark 'seems to focus closer, closer, closer to the thing that makes him live, in a way that is impossible not to feel as a viewer.' The linocut *David* (2016) depicts perhaps the choreographer's most revered hero, David Bowie. Clark has paid homage to Bowie and the long-lasting impact his music and identity has had upon his choreography and private life in his works *come, been and gone* (2009) and *to a simple, rock 'n' roll . . . song.* (2016). Aged ten, Clark watched Bowie put his arm around guitarist Mick Ronson during a television performance of 'Starman' (1972): 'It triggered this huge sense of relief in me as a boy. It was the only physical contact I had seen men do, apart from punching each other. It planted in me the idea that there was another way.'



## 7 Leigh Bowery

Born in 1961, Sunshine, Australia. Died in 1994, London.

Leigh Bowery moved to London from suburban Australia and met Clark in the toilets of the Cha Cha club, at Heaven, in 1980. Bowery became notorious on the London club and fashion scene for his extreme and shocking outfits. Dramatically distorting his body's shape, his quest to achieve the desired physical transformation meant putting himself in extreme discomfort and physical pain for hours at a time.

Bowery designed costumes for Clark from 1984 up until his death from AIDS-related illness in 1994. Contrasting with the trained bodies of the dancers, he often performed in Clark's productions during this period. Their friendship and collaboration developed through a shared desire to provoke and challenge societal norms of gender, sexuality and beauty, as evidenced by *New Puritans'* (1984) costumes with cut-out shapes revealing the dancers' bare buttocks. Bowery's appetite for transgression was coupled with the skilled labour that went into his extravagant, self-taught creations, often made with the assistance of his wife Nicola Bateman and corset maker Mr. Pearl. The orange bolero jacket for *I Am Curious, Orange* (1988) showcases Bowery's experimentation with construction; the hand-painted foam across the chest resembles wooden shutters, surrounded by an abundance of sequins to match Clark's opulent production.

Bowery's costumes were based on what he wore at the time, delving into ideas of queer monstrosity, parody and artifice. Clark's choreography to The Velvet Underground's 'Venus in Furs' (1967) — first performed in *Because We Must* (1987) — features Bowery's crewel-embroidered bodices and sequined Lycra tights. The concealment of the bodies underneath the costumes emphasises the dance's sadomasochistic role-playing structure. While Bowery's early designs were characterised by their sculptural quality and the intended constrictions they placed on the dancers' movements, the T-shirt dresses for *Mmm...* (1992) allowed the dancers to freely perform the galloping, athletic movements of Clark's interpretation of Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913). Bowery's masterful pattern-cutting enabled him to create these pieces at short-notice, which Clark and Bowery would embellish with words and phrases to costumes that could be removed or inserted at will. As the dancers' bodies carry words around the stage, Clark's choreography builds up to a Dada-esque introduction of puns and slogans: 'The Dentist' and 'Witch?', worn by Bowery and the choreographer's mother Bessie Clark, respectively.

## 7 BodyMap

Fashion label founded by David Holah and Stevie Stewart in 1982, London.

BodyMap was a foundation of London's club scene and a catalyst for British fashion, gaining worldwide recognition in the 1980s. With designs that revolved around complex prints and layering techniques, the label experimented with high-quality cotton, knitwear and Lycra to create close-fitting pieces that remapped the shape of the body and promoted size diversity. BodyMap generated much of their fame through wild fashion shows that centred on inclusivity, with models changing on the side of the runway.

Clark choreographed some of BodyMap's fashion shows and featured in their campaigns. BodyMap designed costumes for Clark's major 1980s performances, including *our caca phoney H.our caca phoney H.* (1985). This yellow patterned unitard with flared wrists and ankles was part of an identical set worn by four dancers in the opening sequence, scored to T. Rex's 'Cosmic Dancer' (1971). The group's choreography formed a constellation of shifting patterns — a vision of a multi-legged species creating a cosmic dance through circular movement.

## Stevie Stewart

Born 1958, London. Lives and works in London.

Since BodyMap ended their activities in the late 1980s, the label's co-founder Stevie Stewart has continued to design costumes for Clark. Echoing BodyMap's black-and-white graphic identity for *I Am Curious, Orange* (1988), Stewart's stylised composition for *come, been and gone* (2009) turns the sexual anatomy of the dancer into an abstract, generic body. The unitard for *The Stravinsky Project Part 3: I Do* (2007) references Igor Stravinsky's *Les Noces* (The Wedding) from 1923, choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska for the Ballets Russes, with costumes designed by Natalia Goncharova. The brown and white unitard draws on the colours of the peasant uniforms of Nijinska's dancers. The sashes across the dancers' bodies mimic the criss-cross peasant garters around the calves, while also recalling the ribbons of the ballet pointe shoes wrapped around the dancers' ankles.

Born in 1959, Edinburgh. Lives and works in Trinidad and London.

Peter Doig first encountered Clark's work in a performance of *New Puritans* (1984) at Riverside Studios, London. At the time, Doig was part of the same London club scene and worked as a dresser for the English National Opera: 'I witnessed a lot of classical dance, which is also the tradition where Michael came from. He was working in this medium, and yet totally fighting it. [...] Everything was incredibly formalist and, all of a sudden, this was something that had an element of the street — of what was happening in clubs.' Doig worked occasionally on fashion shows and dressed Clark for BodyMap's 'Barbie Takes a Trip Around Nature's Cosmic Curves' (1985).

This room presents Doig's painting *Portrait (Corbusier)* (2009), made for the set of Clark's *come, been and gone* (2009). Lowered onto the stage during The Velvet Underground's 'Venus in Furs' (1967), the work is set against Charles Atlas's purple and indigo lighting backdrop. Clark, in a black wig, approaches the painting and twists his body away from it as he recognises the portrait, which depicts his face merging with that of Le Corbusier. Doig's work is based on a 1950s photograph of the architect, at his seaside cabin in the south of France. Both artists have long been inspired by the pioneer of modern architecture: 'I know that Michael also loves a photograph of Le Corbusier with those particular glasses. The painting was like an homage to Le Corbusier but also an homage to a kind of look. It was slightly absurd as well.'

The painting is exhibited in dialogue with silent 16mm footage filmed by Clark, which is shown for the first time. The film was shot during 2008, on the rooftop of Le Corbusier's 1952 brutalist Cité Radieuse apartment block in Marseille, where Clark had spent considerable time. The dancers perform a slow elongated walk driven from the pelvis, initially choreographed to Iggy Pop's post-industrial anthem 'Mass Production' (1977). Amidst the wind and sun, the sequence reveals the dancers' technical skill as the thrust of their legs counterbalances the weight of their upper bodies, alternating angular and curved shapes reminiscent of the sculptural modernist roof. Clark's high-precision style, emphasised by the geometric floor and costume design, parallels Le Corbusier's measuring system based on the harmony and mathematics of the human body.

Born in 1968, Remscheid, Germany. Lives and works in Berlin and London.

Created specifically for the exhibition, this new installation by Wolfgang Tillmans brings together portraits of Clark with photography of live performance, taken over the course of sixteen years, from 1998 to 2014. Capturing the choreographer in various environments, Tillmans worked on a group of editorial pictures of Clark in 1998, during his preparations for his new work *current/SEE* at the Villa Rossi in Lucca, Italy: 'I found locations and situations, and Michael interacted with them. I saw elderly people playing bridge and asked if Michael could join them discreetly and do a particular pose that I noticed him working on earlier. Although I staged the pictures, these were all improvised, unscripted situations. The one where Michael rehearsed on a gym floor was more about observing him while he was working with his body.'

The surrounding natural landscape and domestic settings portray Clark in a rare state of intimacy, capturing the reawakening of the artist after a difficult period of four years away from London. Tillmans describes the process as a creative dialogue: 'I'm really grateful Michael trusted me to bring him into locations and backdrops that he maybe would not have chosen. He was generous enough to lend himself, in a way, to me to create the choreography.' Tillmans's personal approach contrasts with the highly-staged shots of the dancer's juvenile beauty that was seen in the media during the 1980s. *friends* (1998) tightly frames Clark lying on the artist Angela Bulloch's orange bean-bag surrounded by close friends, including Cerith Wyn Evans.

The performance photography was taken spontaneously from the audience's point of view, in an attempt to record and preserve dance's ephemeral nature. Unlike traditional dance photography that documents the virtuosity of movement, Tillmans shows the empty stage of *current/SEE*, the dancers taking a bow in *The Stravinsky Project Part 3: I Do* (2007), as well as other performances that took place in art galleries. Clark's interest in moving away from the frontal view of the theatre stage echoes Tillmans's process in the presentation of his work in this room. Playing with height, format, rhythm and repetition, the installation results from a performative exploration of the space, with the artist physically engaging with 'every square metre of wall with full attention and from all possible angles, until the room is fully charged.'

## 11 Duncan Campbell

Born in 1972, Dublin. Lives and works in Glasgow.

The artist Duncan Campbell invited Clark to collaborate on the film *It for Others* in 2013. Clark choreographed a sequence responding to Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (1867). In preparation, Clark and Campbell studied the seminal text together, inspired by Marxist economic geographer David Harvey's teaching, and developed hand-written diagrams as a storyboard for the piece. Filmed at the Glasgow School of Art, dancers from Michael Clark Company perform against a white background in black costumes. The choreography focuses on Marx's equations, illustrating the economic forces at play within the capitalist system, particularly the measure of values and circulation of commodities.

Filmed in black and white from a bird's eye view, a series of short, scripted actions are performed by Clark's dancers. They cross the space from various points as they gravitate towards the centre, often interacting with a black stool or text written on the floor. Various configurations of the body interpret Marx's theory, such as repeated mechanical movements of the arms, as well as pauses where body parts produce shapes against the canvas-like backdrop. Clark described Campbell's film as a 'painterly' depiction of his choreography. The dancers' symmetry and synchronicity create a highly controlled and structured composition, recalling the mathematical rigour of Clark's ballet training under the Cecchetti Method.

Marx's economic formulas are turned into abstract choreographic forms, forming geometric and alphabet-like patterns. Akin to Bauhaus avant-garde experiments, this language was defined by Oskar Schlemmer as 'mathematics in motion', which is reminiscent of Clark and Campbell's stylised and forensic compositional methods. The mirrored-top stools are used like punctuation in a sentence; they form points of convergence, exchange and circulation between the dancers, who are turned into dehumanised vehicles. The spoken instructions were added in post-production, highlighting Marx's idea of movement forced into submission. A rare example of Clark's work without a musical score, the choreographer played Daft Punk during filming so that the dancers could 'attack the piece in the right way'. This sequence is presented for the first time as a stand-alone piece, which was originally featured in Campbell's Turner Prize winning 54-minute film on the value and exchange of artefacts and artworks in late capitalist, post-colonial society.

## 13 Silke Otto-Knapp

Born in 1970, Osnabrück, Germany. Lives and works in Los Angeles.

Silke Otto-Knapp's installation of ten paintings has been especially created for the exhibition. Her watercolours of group compositions and single figures draw from a restricted colour palette — black, white, grey and metallic hues — and she uses a pigment called 'lamp black' to create her monochromatic paintings. The artist sprays her work with water to dissolve the paint, controlling the drying process to leave a fine layer of pigment without visible brushstrokes. Building upon these layers, the borders between light and dark areas are softened, so that the figures are reduced in detail but remain recognisable. Staging these bodies against the abstract space highlights their silhouettes, drawing attention to the postures and movements. This technique echoes Otto-Knapp's own reading of Clark's choreography, which 'allows the dancer's body to have weight and the construction of each movement to be clearly visible.' The sequence of paintings, carefully arranged in the space by the artist, creates its own rhythm with the gaps between the panels acting as a stanza, or choreographic pause.

Moments from Clark's interpretation of Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913) in *Mmm...* (2006) can be perceived in the bending figures. Alongside defining episodes in modern dance, Bronislava Nijinska's group formations in *Les Noces* (The Wedding, 1923) for the Ballets Russes — borne from her experience of Communism and Constructivism — inspired some of the works in the installation. Clark created his own version of *Les Noces* with *I Do* (2007), placing the individual within the group but preserving specific positions for each dancer. Otto-Knapp's own examination of Clark and Nijinska lies in the tension between the individual and the collective: 'I am interested in their work because of its graphic formal quality and the way it shares an urgency that is always related to the social and political events of their respective worlds.'

During 2010, Michael Clark Company led a residency at Tate Modern with a group of non-professional dancers, including Otto-Knapp. Standing in formations of military cohesion, their synchronised arm gestures resembled a mass entity capable of subversive collective power. Otto-Knapp views Clark as the legacy of transgressive figures in dance 'because of the way he uses the vocabulary of classical ballet with its extreme discipline and formality to develop his own language, that is indebted to this history but seems to reject it simultaneously.'



## Dancers in the Exhibition

Gaby Agis  
Harry Alexander  
Joanne Barrett  
Kerry Biggin  
Jordan James Bridge  
Leslie Bryant (Les Child)  
Nick Burge  
Neville Campbell  
Joachim Chandler  
Ashley Chen  
Daniel Corthorn  
Sophie Cottrill  
Richard Court  
Kate Coyne  
Ben Craft  
Julie Cunningham  
Matthew Dibble  
Lisa Dinington  
Fred Gehrig  
Joshua Harriette  
Dawn Hartley  
Matthew Hawkins  
Melissa Hetherington  
Amy Hollingsworth  
Julie Hood  
Victoria Insole  
Fiona Jopp  
Amanda King  
Alina Lagoas

Joseph Lennon  
Adam Linder  
James Loffler  
Rachel Lynch-John  
Russell Maliphant  
Gisela Mariani  
Gary Nichols  
Michael Nunn  
Kieran Page  
Oxana Panchenko  
Rowan Parker  
Leesa Phillips  
Tom Pritchard  
Lorena Randi  
Stefano Rosato  
Hannah Rudd  
Andrea Santato  
Tom Sapsford  
Ellen van Schuylenburch  
Daniel Squire  
Carol Straker  
Alice Tagliento  
Clair Thomas  
Quang Kien Van  
Stella Vardi  
Benjamin Warbis  
Simon Williams  
Richard Windsor

'It's a very strange, intense relationship.  
It's like a love affair where somebody's  
always on your mind.'

Michael Clark

The exhibition is curated by Florence Ostende and travels to V&A Dundee from 30 October 2021 to 6 February 2022.

A fully illustrated catalogue published by Prestel is available at the shop and online.

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