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**PHOTOGRAPHY**

THE PROFESSIONAL'S WEEKLY

**Albert Watson exclusive:**

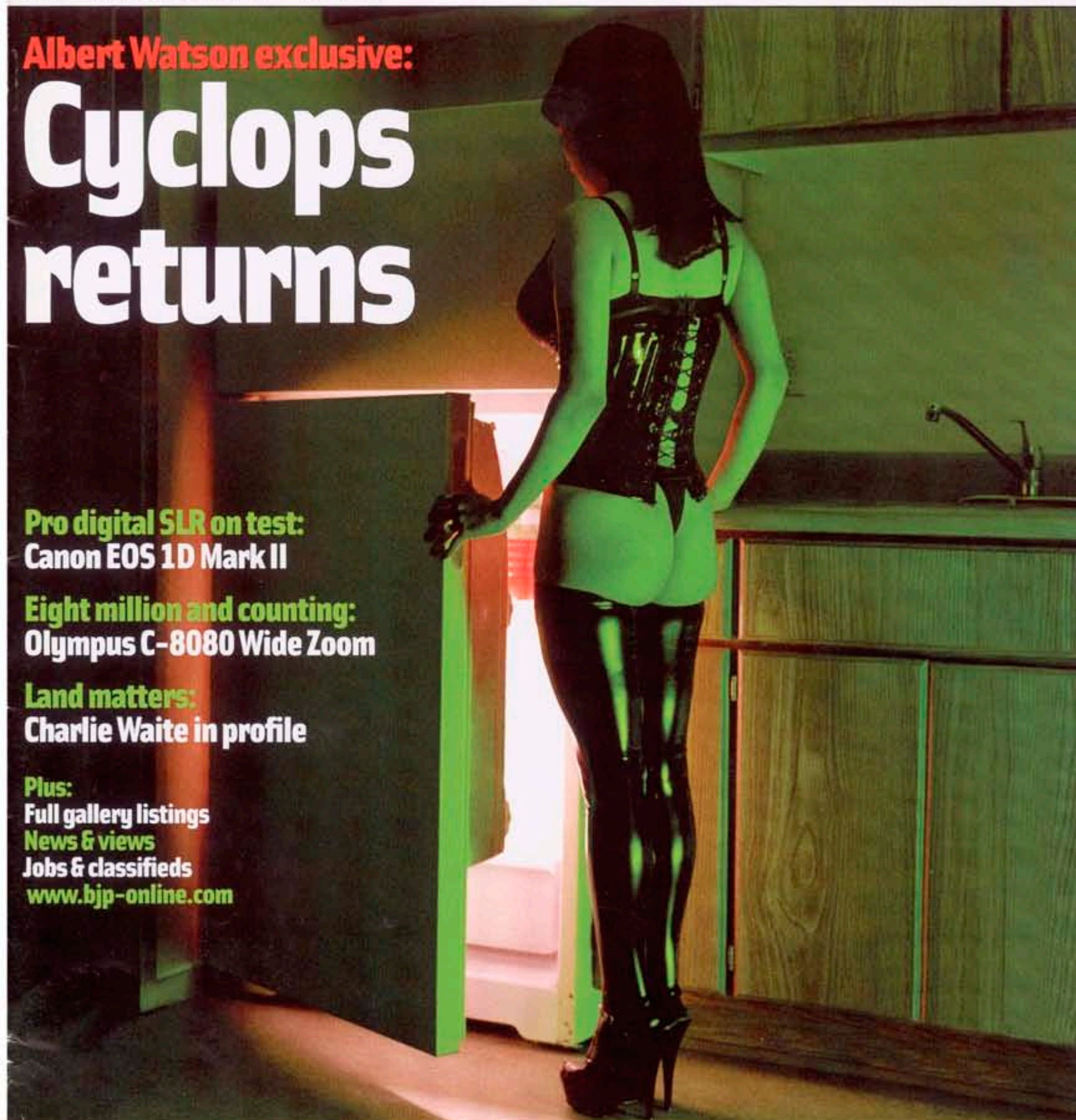
# Cyclops returns

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# A man for all seasons

No living photographer fights against pigeonholing more than **Albert Watson**, but people are confused by his consummate ability to deal with disparate subjects across a variety of media. **Diane Smyth** finds out more

**ALBERT WATSON'S** body of work is so enormous, and so broad, that his clients sometimes think he has a double. 'I remember one fashion editor, who I'd done a lot of work for, saying: "It's a funny thing, there must be another photographer called Albert Watson. There was a cover of *Rolling Stone* that had the name". I was amazed she didn't realise it was also by me.'

Amazed he may have been, but it was an understandable mistake. Since hitting the United States 30 years ago, Watson has worked in colour and black-and-white, in editorial, beauty, fashion, music and advertising, and produced two iconic books.

And Watson doesn't just take still photographs. He set up *Cyclops*, a

film production company, in 1994 and estimates that he now spends 60% of his time on moving images. The move hasn't helped his doppelgänger problem. 'Sometimes the people I'm shooting for say, "I didn't know you did stills". It's quite frustrating that they don't connect the names. I've put together two DVDs to try to dispel the confusion once and for all.'

Watson says this versatility didn't stand him in good stead when he tried to get his first book published either. '*Cyclops* [the book] wasn't 220 pages of variation on a theme and people couldn't understand it. They didn't get where I was coming from,' he says. 'And I had a lot of trouble getting it published.'



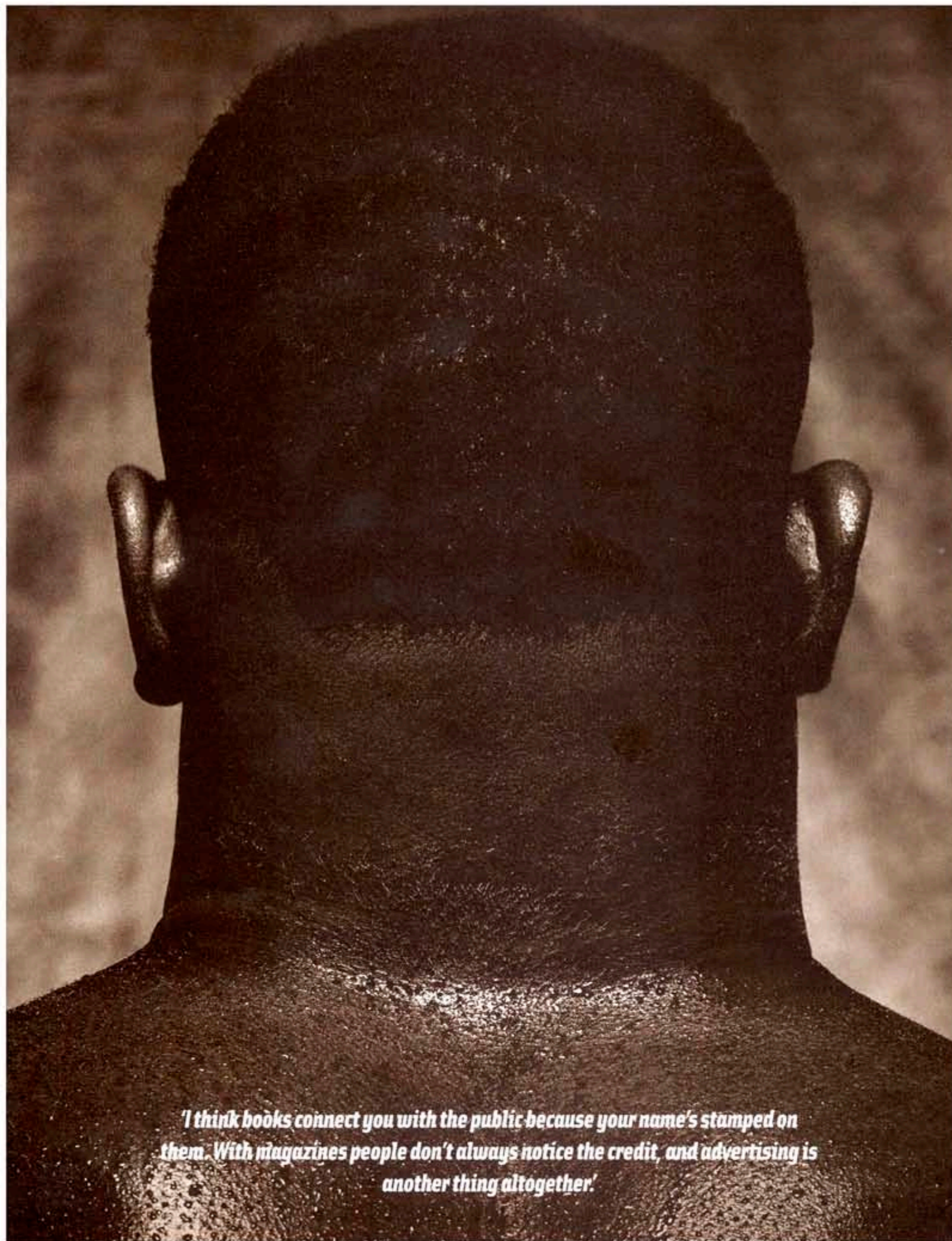
• All photographs © Albert Watson

But, as Watson adds, this diversity has also been a strength. Juxtaposing Moroccan fetishes with A-list celebrities such as Naomi Campbell, Mick Jagger and Mike Tyson, *Cyclops* became an instant classic and propelled Watson into the big time.

'*Cyclops* was very dramatic,' he says. 'Sometimes you can see the connection between the images, sometimes they fight each other. But every photograph was recognisably one of my shots.'

'Books connect you with the public because your name's stamped on them,' he continues. 'People associate books with the names. With magazines people don't always notice the credit, and advertising is another thing altogether.'





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format, creating impressionistic, near abstract images. He has also taken multiple 8x10s of the same scenes, painstakingly merging them by computer to create incredibly detailed negatives. 'On some of the



bigger panoramas, I would shoot a particular scene with a panoramic camera, mark the spot, and reshoot it four or five times,' he says. 'Then we reassembled them.'

This approach created an interesting problem, as the resulting negatives are so detailed that they almost defy printing. 'When we enlarged on the computer, you could see a cement truck on the horizon, zoom in and see its name and registration number,' says Watson. 'We made the print seven foot long, and couldn't even see the cement truck. We were saying, "Hang on, where is it? And why are we doing this?" The print is what is letting you

down.'

Watson is equally fastidious about exhibitions of his work, and is currently overseeing a major retrospective in Milan, going on show in September. Watson is investing what he describes as 'a huge amount of time and money' in the exhibition, going so far as to change the lighting in the museum and investing in a Lightjet printer.

'With the Lightjet you're basically loading the information digitally, scanning silver paper with light,' he says. 'It's fabulous – you can get gigantic detail. In fact it was originally developed for NASA, so that it could blow up images and see

really small details.'

Watson's excitement about this exhibition is palpable, despite the fact that his work can already be seen from LA to Tokyo on magazine covers, billboards and art books. Once again, he puts this down to the difference between commercial and personal work.

'If I could snap my fingers and take you any where in the world, we would probably find one of my images,' he says. 'I have no problem with getting my work seen. But if I have things in Times Square it's because I was paid for it. If I am exhibiting in a museum I can make a fine art statement.' **BJP**