

CLOSER | DANIELLE NEU

In discussion with Tenko re. 'Head'

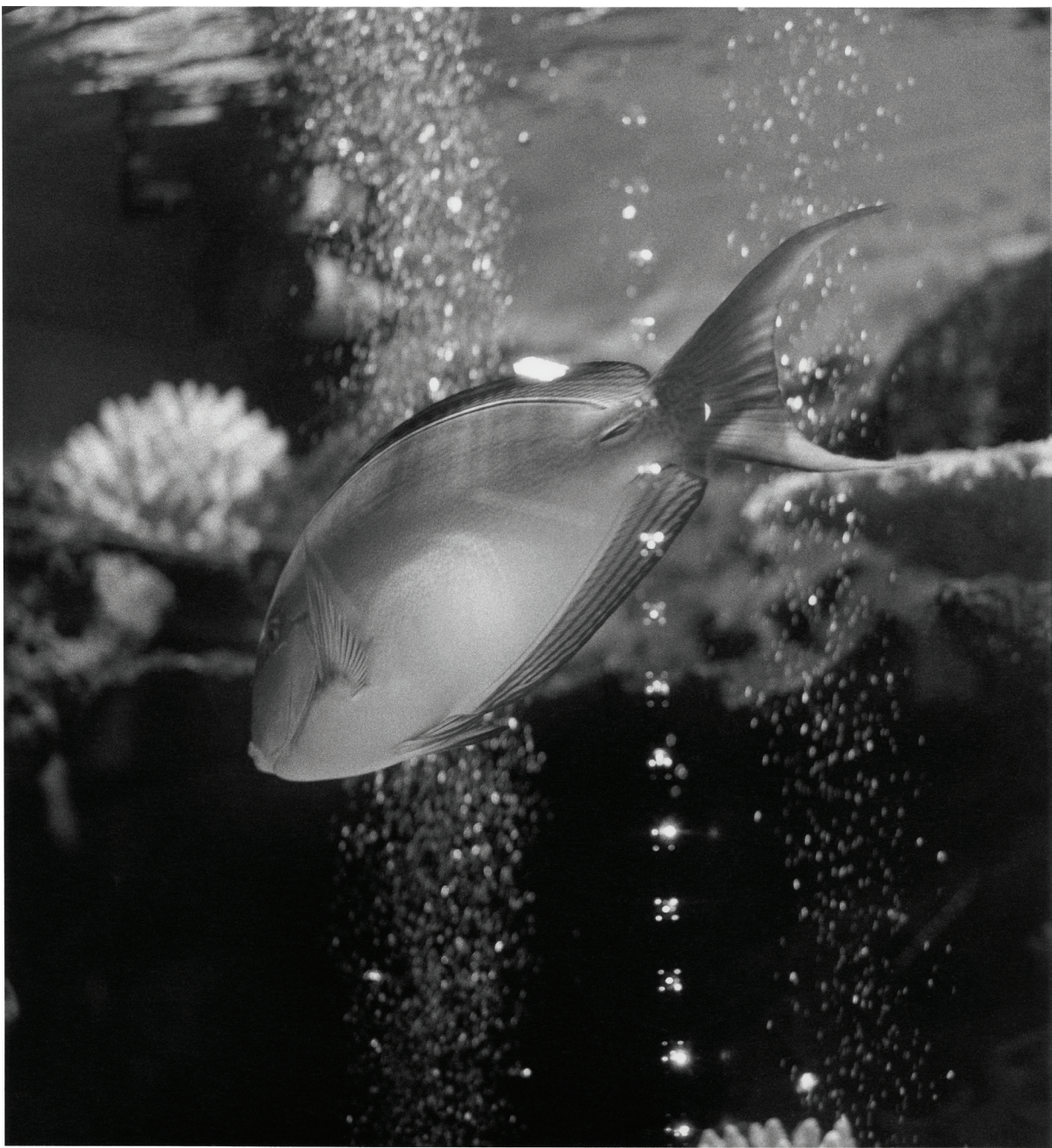
Photography DANIELLE NEU

Words TENKO NAKAJIMA GLENEWINKEL











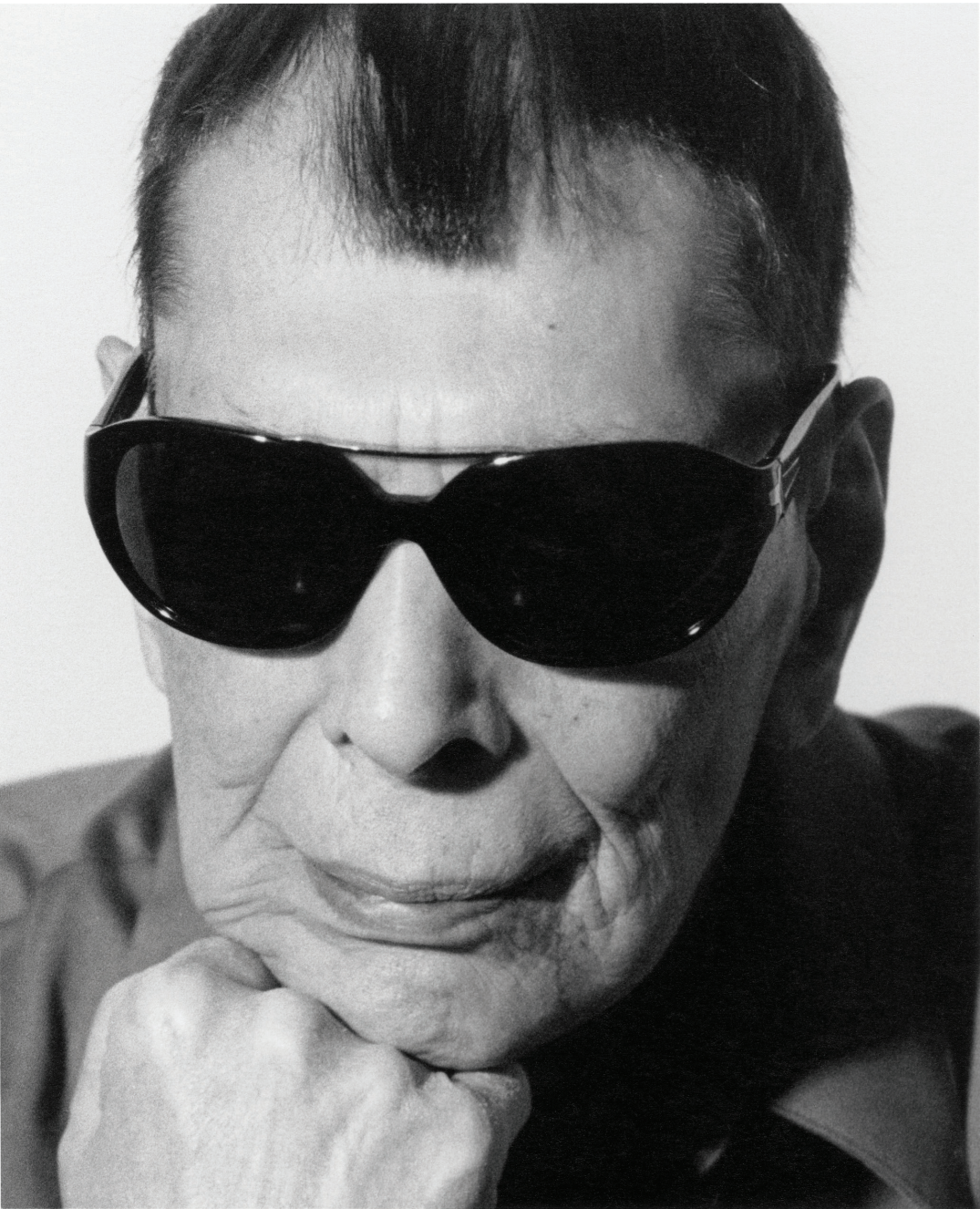




Fig i. Tenko Nakajima Glenewinkel, from 'Head' (2026)

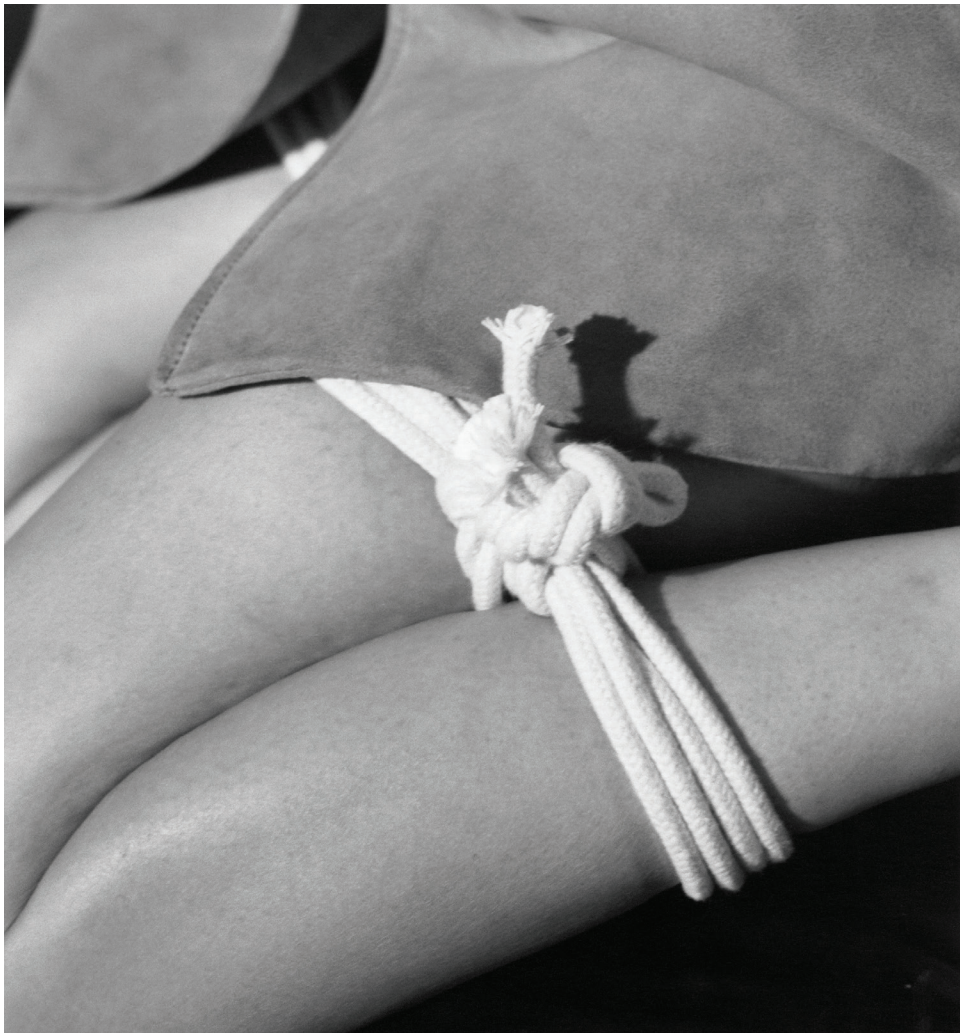


Fig ii. 'Shibari', from 'Head' (2026)

I met Danielle Neu on a photoshoot in Paris two years ago. She'd found me on Instagram and reached out to shoot me in shibari. It's the kind of thing that makes you wonder whether personality really can be read correctly through Instagram, because somehow she found me and we just bonded.

After six hours of shooting, tied in vulnerable positions in front of her and a full studio crew, we spent the taxi ride home afterward finally getting to know each other. Since then we've met up in LA and a few other places, and I could tell her vision wasn't that of a fashion photographer so much as a filmmaker's, where the subject performs for her in a particular way, and she's after that fine line between acting and something purer than acting. It's the same thing she's after in her still lifes: the aquarium fish, the bed on Elvis's airplane, Hollywood's non-spaces.

I've since watched her build out the body of work that's now become *Head*, her first book, a collection of photographs made over the past seven years, out this October from the Paris publisher Éditions Lutanie, with essays by Chris Kraus and Stephanie LaCava. Ahead of the book's release, we chatted about growing up in

Hollywood's shadow, and photographing scream queens, psychics, and erotica.

Tenko Nakajima Glenewinkel It seems like the element of staging has always attracted you, the play between the real and the performed. Does that trace back to your upbringing?

Danielle Neu Growing up in Los Angeles, the imaginary runs through my veins. As a kid, my dad's girlfriend was Sharon Stone's body double and I thought she was the toughest, most beautiful woman in the entire world. She was doing the real on camera: Robert DeNiro famously dragged her by the hair across the bathroom floor in *Casino*. When I set out making this body of work she was the first person I reached out to, but I never heard back. Regardless, her spirit looms large.

My childhood home was also used as a location in film and television, so that had an effect on me: the home as the stage. The symbols of childhood were doubling from a very young age, I mean I would see our house on the television. It was uncanny to see this structure of intimacy come to life as something else for everyone to

see. I used to have dreams about our house getting swept up into the sky like Dorothy's house in *The Wizard of Oz*.

TNG Growing up in LA seems like a big factor in your attraction to glamour, vanity, sadness, Hollywood, all of it. What's something you're afraid of losing in LA, something that already feels like it's fading away?

DN I think because we are all so interconnected through the internet, people feel less rooted in place — and places feel less specific — but Los Angeles in the 90s and early aughts felt very specific. There was still a real film industry in Hollywood and that is sadly fading away. There were costume houses and prop houses everywhere, I mean you could support yourself working as an extra or a waitress or whatever. The artistry of the industry was on every block and you could still go to the button store on 3rd street and get the exact button you needed for your 1940s zoot suit or 1970s suede jacket, but that's long gone. I remember bowling alleys, adult bookstores, exotic fish shops and things of that nature all over the city, but you don't see that stuff so much anymore.

TNG What do you enjoy about photographing icons like Z-Man and Barbara Magnolfi?

DN John LaZar played Z-Man in *Beyond The Valley of the Dolls*, which is such an iconic film for me. I'm an ardent fan, so sitting in the presence of a character I love is pure heaven and I think I try to stretch that character through my work. With cult actors there is something really interesting in the way that a role, even a very small one, can come to define a person's life. Fifty years on, Lazar is still answering questions on behalf of Z-Man.

TNG And how do you meet them, does it happen by chance, or do you reach out? What is it that draws you to want to photograph a particular woman?

DN It's intuitive but I'm drawn to persona. I think I also project onto the characters I'm drawn to, maybe they represent something I wish I had more of in myself? I always return to the archetype of the 'final girl'. There was a certain scream queen I wanted to photograph, but I couldn't find a way in, then I heard through the grapevine that she was giving psychic readings over the telephone and I decided to give it a go. I felt touched by our reading because she

could intuit that deep down I always wanted to be a singer... next thing you know I'm at her farm in Wrightwood photographing her in vampire makeup and lingerie. I knew I wanted to photograph you after I saw the ad for Tenko Presents, you in a sexy nurse cap. I felt like you were fully aware that you weren't just showing and selling art, but selling yourself too, and I found that hilarious. I think of you as a performer, and I like that you aren't scared of sex.

TNG We met in Paris for a shoot for a fashion magazine, and the photos ended up being too disturbing for the magazine to run. Is that a tension you struggle with, working as an artist within fashion?

DN Yes! In one sense I think I'm attracted to the challenge: I'm trying to take an interesting photograph but ultimately I'm being hired because someone else is trying to sell a pair of shoes. It's all so complicated, but let's just say I don't always see eye to eye with the French art directors.

TNG Capturing female sexuality is a forever challenge for any photographer, and it feels like something you commit yourself to and do well. Is there anything in particu-

lar you try to keep in mind, or stay true to?

DN I don't know, I don't think about it too much, but it always seems to be there — it just sort of comes out. But, I guess I could say that I am aware of the exchange and I try to hand the power over to my models, rather than keep it all for myself just because I'm the one holding the camera. I like to cultivate scenarios and see what happens — rather than stay in charge. Good things seem to happen there.

TNG If you could experience another era as yourself, which one, and where?

DN I would feel lost without a camera, so France in the mid to late 1800s, during the advent of photography feels right. I find so much emotion in those very first photographs. When I look at William Henry Fox Talbot's, *Soliloquy of the Broom*, I feel a spirit rising out of the broom almost moving through the doorway. And, I think I would thrive in the world of Victorian fashions. I could hold a lace parasol everyday, faint from a tight corset, and have my crinoline set on fire. That sounds romantic.

'Head', by Danielle Neu, is published by Éditions Lutanie in October

