

DURAN

DNBVM

By Jill Johnson

In his first month living in New York City after he finished college, Tony Duran was hit by four cabs, run over by a bus, mugged twice, and rendered homeless when his apartment building went up in flames. A decade later, his months are still action packed, but I think you could say his luck has changed.

Take July, for example. Duran shot three covers before I talked to him: Mena Suvari for *Entertainment Weekly*, Elisabeth Shue for *Movieline*, and Jennifer Lopez for *Premiere*. When I caught up with the 33-year-old photographer, he was shooting Gretchen Mol for *Movieline*. The guy is on fire and he is just as surprised about it as he was about cab #4 taking him down.

After witnessing Tony in action—commenting on each outfit Gretchen slipped on, determining the appropriate hair and makeup, while at the same time giving each of my questions careful attention—I am not so surprised. Tony has a decade of experience fueling his technique and confidence, he has a knack for capturing the unexpected side of high-profile personalities, and he has a down-to-earth demeanor that draws people to his set.

For the Gretchen Mol shoot, Tony brought his team to an abandoned men's club downtown near Wall Street. Tony prefers the unadulterated sweltering summer air trickling through the labyrinthine ancient halls and cobwebbed chandeliers to the chill and overkill of modern commercial studios. He carries no airs—just a boom box for some background music and a camera.

JJ: Let's start with some background. Where are you from?

TD: I'm from Winona, Minnesota.

JJ: How does one get from Winona, Minnesota, to the Big Apple?

TD: I went to school at the University of Wisconsin and majored in advertising. I wanted to be Darren Stevens. I thought his job was so cool. My last class was a photography course and I did a project called "Contrary to popular belief, not all girls at the University of Wisconsin are fat and ugly." One of the girls I shot in the picture ended up being a contestant in Elite's "Look of the Year" contest. Elite asked who did the picture, and they brought me to Chicago to test girls for the summer. When I graduated, I decided to be a photographer and I moved to New York.

JJ: You also have an art background right?

TD: Yes, I minored in art, so I took a lot of drawing and painting classes.

JJ: Does that affect your approach to photography?

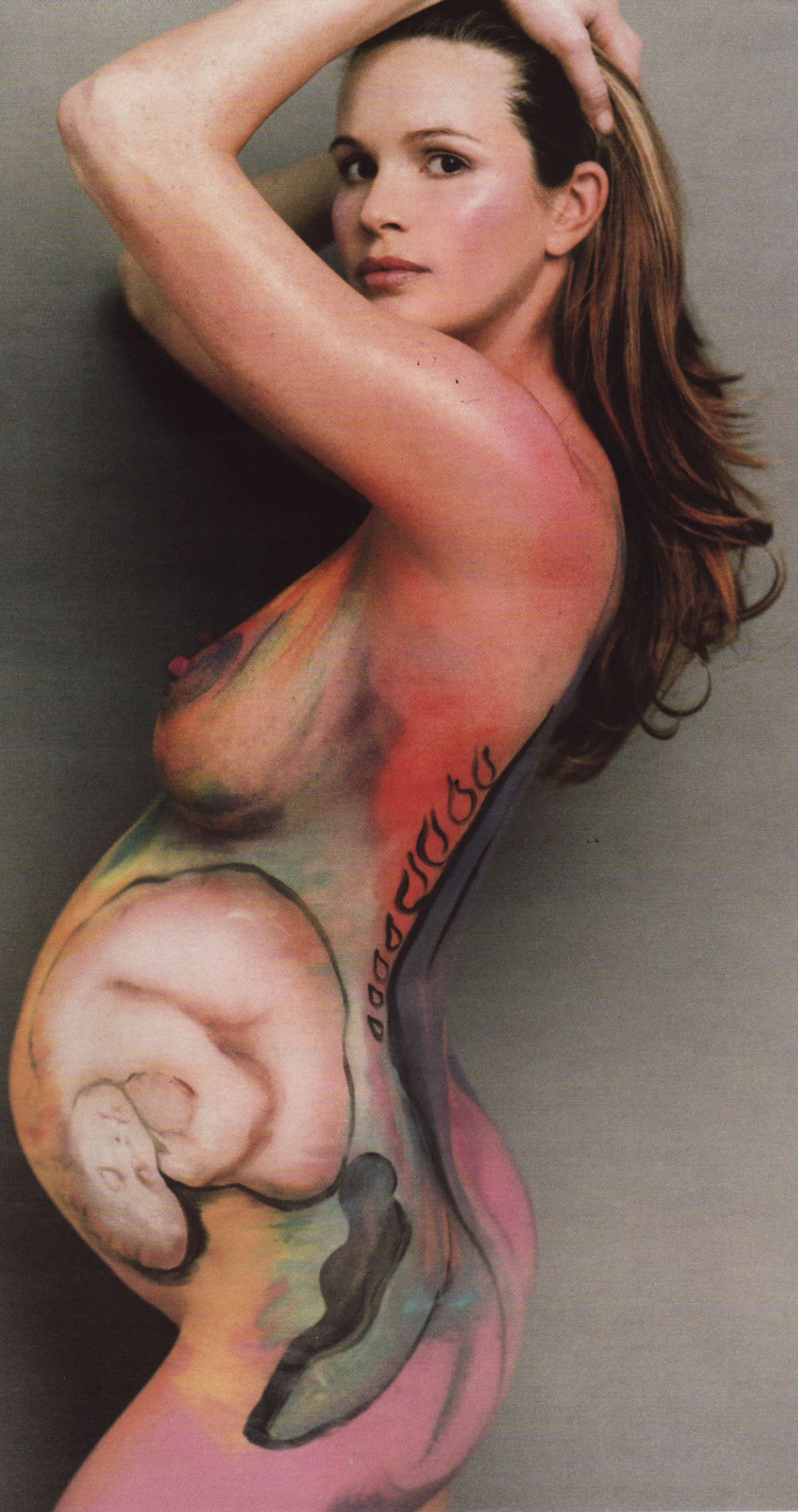
TD: Definitely. I had no photography background and probably a lot of people hate me for that. I work from my art background. It has helped me a lot in understanding colors, textures, composition. I still don't know anything about photography. I just have my one camera and that's it.

JJ: So how have you become the sought-after celebrity shooter of the moment?

TD: That's what I wanted to do when I started. I wanted to do celebrities but I got into fashion. I learned a lot doing fashion and just kept going into it and into it, but I ended up quitting photography twice. The business is just so full of shit. People don't pay you. It's the only business where you can do a job and the client can just decide not to pay you. I quit the last time about a year and a half or two years ago, then I decided to come back to it at the end of last year, and I said, "Okay, I'm just going to do what I set out to







do." I had shot Jennifer Lopez previously and that opened up a lot of doors. I had shot her for *Ocean Drive* in Miami, then I went to Australia for six or eight months, and when I came back she asked me to do her album cover. After that people who wouldn't talk to me before were suddenly calling.

JJ: How does working with celebrities compare to working with models?

TD: Celebrities need a lot of convincing, whereas a model just pretty much has to do what you say. But I've been really, really lucky. I haven't run into any huge attitude problems at all. And I purposely try not to shoot people if I don't think I could take a good picture of them, because as soon as they see you falter or struggle a little, then they get insecure.

JJ: What's your edge?

TD: I don't know, I'm trying to figure that out. Umm, I think bringing out a side of celebrities that we don't usually see. People usually shoot Gretchen very clean. I hope to make her look very, very strong....That's where the fashion part comes in and an understanding of makeup, knowing what to do with lips and eyes and all that stuff.

JJ: Do you have a favorite celebrity?

TD: Oh, I guess people would say I should say Jennifer Lopez. She's always fun to work with and she does work really hard. That's what I'm trying to feel out right now—who I like, who else I want to shoot.

JJ: Do you have a favorite photo?

TD: I like my old ones. I think I took better pictures a long time ago than I do now. Commercially you start chipping away at yourself, which I want to get away from.

JJ: Do you have any idols?

TD: People like Karl Lagerfeld because he's a designer, but he does interiors, but he does photography—he does it all and he's respected. Or Andy Warhol because he made people believe he could do all these things. As far as photographers, I like Michael Jansen; I always have. He's starting to be really big again, but I liked him even when he first started. He takes such raw, beautiful pictures.

JJ: Do you have any advice for aspiring photographers?

TD: A photographer gave me some advice when I first started. He said that when I was testing, I should do stories and stay away from single shots. Editors will respond better to stories. It sets you apart to have a book with four-page stories as opposed to pretty picture after pretty picture after pretty picture. The same photographer told me it would take ten years before I would really find the success that I wanted. I laughed at him and said, "Yeah, right," but it's true. It's not that I take better or worse pictures now, it's just that I have the experience to be able to take the picture no matter what the situation. Like right now I need to communicate with the whole team, coordinate the styling, and do an interview, and I have no idea how I'm going to shoot this, but I know I'll get it. I wouldn't have always had the confidence to handle that. When you're first starting you're always second guessing yourself and thinking, "Did I get the shot? Did I get the shot?" Then you end up shooting ten times more film than you need. But you don't always have the option of doing that.

JJ: What are your long-term goals?

TD: To be sane. To enjoy what I'm doing. I'm a workaholic, but it's not about making money or being famous.

JJ: Where do you make your home now?

(Pause as Tony discusses the sheer outfit Ms. Mol has slipped on. Would she mind doing the Band-Aids on the nipples quick fix, as it's cheaper than re-touching? No, that's fine with her. No attitude problems on this set!)

TD: I have a house in L.A. and an apartment in New York.

JJ: Do you share your homes with anyone?

TD: No. It's kind of a drag. I need to get a life.

JJ: Your favorite restaurant?

TD: Sizzler. Boston Market. I'm really white trash, 100 percent. My big happy

meal of the moment is a big slice of ham that I smother in nacho cheese and put in the microwave. Yum!

JJ: Favorite designer?

TD: Alexander McQueen and John Galliano. Not necessarily because they're wacky, but because they do something interesting every year.

JJ: Plans for tonight?

TD: It's my one night off, meaning I'll probably be off from about 11:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. and I'll probably be taking a shower and going nowhere!

Tony Duran may not be going anywhere tonight, but he is definitely going somewhere. No question about that.

Tony Duran is represented by Daniel Bates in New York.

