

# TREND SHREDDER

CHRIS BUCK

## THE STILLS YOU'VE ALWAYS IMAGINED BUT NEVER EXPECTED TO SEE

• Toronto-born Chris Buck is an internationally celebrated photographer for many reasons, but most notable may be his ability to approach his subjects with equal senses gravitas and oddity. Whether turning his lens on George W. Bush, a monkey or Dolly, the cloned sheep, Buck is alternately quietly absurd or absurdly quiet, making even his most straightforward portraits come across as disarmingly assertive. His client list ranges from HP, IBM and Citibank to just about every glossy rag of note, and he wades in the strange without quite swimming in novelty (see: his Microsoft campaign featuring office workers with dinosaur heads). His "Isn't" series features double-take-worthy celebrity look-alikes in offbeat yet true-feeling frames: someone who isn't Oprah Winfrey in cheap hotel room with cigarette in mouth and can of Slim-Fast in hand; someone who isn't Justin Timberlake shaving the head of someone who isn't Britney Spears. His current long-term project has been finding people across the globe who share his name (he now has about 30 Facebook friends named Chris Buck) and taking photos of them, just because.

### SNOOP DOGG & BLACK MAMA (DOG)

Los Angeles, January 31, 2008

"I don't want to say anything against Snoop Dogg, because obviously he's, like, an icon, a legend. But for a guy named Snoop Dogg, he's got to learn how to deal with his dogs better. He's got to watch *The Dog Whisperer*, because those dogs, they're the ones in charge. In most of our pictures, the dogs are pulling him. I know he's the top dog in the world of hip-hop, but in his home, I think the dogs are the top dogs."





## 50 CENT

New York City, January 27, 2005

"You want to do something that usually isn't seen. Maybe for some people it's taking 50 Cent's threatening, tough-guy quality to a new level of awesomeness; but for me it's usually trying to do something that you don't usually see him doing. When we did that shoot with him, he was promoting his new record, and he was kind of promoting the movie based on his life. The movie had more sensitivity to his vulnerabilities and his background, so I think that was one reason he was open to doing something that was less tough looking. And also, [there was] his new single—I think it was actually called 'Lollipop' [Ed. note: 'Candy Shop']—so that's why we suggested this picture. It was a way to show him being a little more vulnerable, a lit more playful, but also it would tie into something of his work."



## TLC

Atlanta, September 23, 2002

"They had lost a member of the band, and this was the first time they had done press [since they became] a twosome. I wanted to show sense of loss, and I wanted to do it in a way by not showing their faces, to show them in mourning. We didn't really talk about it. I just said, 'I'd like you to do this,' and they didn't ask, 'Well, is it because we're down to two?' I think they kind of got it."



## TIMBALAND

Trump International Hotel, New York City, August 28, 2006

"We did a few different setups with him, and he was great, very relaxed. I had him sitting down, and he fell asleep while we were shooting. I think he was just exhausted. [He was out] for maybe five minutes. We had some shots with him where his eyes were half open, but they just ended up looking too creepy. When he woke up, he was quite apologetic, but he just shook it off and moved on."



## NAS

Los Angeles, December 20, 2007

"The N is supposed to represent the name of his album that he was putting out, and it also represents his name. I like to leave it open-ended. It was supposed to be connected to the [title of the album], like the idea of the burden of the history, the burden of the history of African Americans in slavery. But in the larger context, I don't mind it being ambiguous. Maybe it's the persona of Nas on Nas, maybe holding him down or being a burden on him."





## EVE

New York City, July 10, 2002

"I just thought it was kind of fun. There's not really a lot of meaning to it. I knew the photo studio had those screens in its reception area, so I rented the video for *All About Eve* and brought it along. It's a great film about the backstabbing in show business, so in a way, it's something that still lives on now—not that Eve is backstabbing at all, of course."



## JAY-Z

Marcy Projects, Brooklyn, October 6, 1998

"We basically shot him in and around the Marcy Projects, where he grew up. I think he felt very comfortable. I love it because you never see him like this anymore. In a lot of the pictures, he's kind of making fun expressions and stuff, and he just would never do that now."



## DIDDY

Bridgehampton, New York, July 12, 1997

"He has a house on the bay side of the Hamptons—that's where he always throws his White Parties. The tide comes and goes, and I saw that there were some rocks just below the surface, and I thought it would be cool to shoot him there. He said, 'No, I don't think we should do that.' But I sent my assistant out there and made them stand on the rock, and I took a Polaroid of him. Then I brought it back to Puffy and showed him and said, 'Look how cool this looks.' And he said, 'Yeah, that's cool. You're right, we should do it.' The way I got this particular shot is there was this girl he was dating or something, and she walked out there just to say hello, and I said, 'Hey, put your arm on her shoulder.'"



## EMINEM

London, March 28, 1999

"I don't really remember why I wanted to do this. I think it just came down to doing something different. The funny thing I remember about it—I don't think you can see it in the picture—but he had been up drinking the night before and was hungover. He was very nice, but was kind of a little bit distracted, but he wanted to put the liquor bottle in the shot, so he put it behind the case. That was his little addition to the shot. I basically just told him, 'I want you to stick your head into the fish tank,' and he was like, 'Okay. You mean like this?'"





## CHUCK D

The White House, Washington, D.C., October 1, 1991

"We're in Washington, D.C., and we're shooting in a hotel room. There was a line about 'They crucified me like Jesus' in one of the songs, and I was like, 'We should go shoot at the White House.' We all walked over—it was only a couple of blocks from where we were shooting. We shoot the whole band first, and I say, 'Chuck, I want to shoot you alone as if you're being crucified on the fence.' He kind of looked at me and was like, 'I'll give you 15 seconds,' and he started counting. I was giving him direction, like, 'Put your head down a little more,' 'Raise your left hand a bit,' 'cause obviously I'm trying to make him look like Jesus. And I had to shoot the frames when his mouth was closed, because he was actually counting out loud. He counted off 15 seconds, and then he was done."



## Q&A BUCK

HOW DID YOU GET INTO PHOTOGRAPHY? WHAT WAS IT ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY THAT EXCITED YOU?

I was just very interested in popular culture in general, and music in particular, and photography is something that was just around. My father worked for Kodak, so it was something around that I was aware of.

WHAT DID YOUR DAD DO FOR KODAK?

You know how it is with fathers—they kind of change, shift around positions a little bit. At one point, I worked there as a summer job, and he was in charge of the film-coding building, and I was the lowest person in the film-coding building. While he was the boss of the building and the manager of it, I was the guy at night cleaning the cafeteria and the toilets.

DID YOU INTERACT WITH PHOTOGRAPHERS AT THAT TIME? OR WAS IT JUST A JOB TO PUT MONEY IN YOUR POCKET?

That was [just] a job. I didn't really intern with photographers or assist so much. People do that sometimes, and it could be a great way to learn, but it's not something I had a chance to do. Once I got out of school and got a little more ambitious, I made a point of contacting photographers in Toronto and just picking their brains. I wasn't shy about asking questions about the business, how to run a business, how to deal with celebrities or magazines.

DID YOU HAVE ANY FORMAL TRAINING?

I went to school for photography. Going to school for photography is a little absurd. It's essentially a basic craft. You learn it and then you get out and start taking pictures. Amazingly, it's a four-year program—four years of learning how to test exposure and take a decent print.

HOW DID YOU GET TO NEW YORK? WAS IT LIKE, "I'M COMING WITH MY CAMERA AND MY ROLL OF FILM, AND I'M GOING TO MAKE IT"?

It's a little more complex than that. I had just finished school, and a friend and I had decided to take a trip to New York and San Francisco, just as a fun postgraduation trip. Although, really, we only went there because that's where we knew people we could stay with for free—the classic kind of college approach. I had just made a portfolio in school, so I brought it with me to New York. I showed it around a little bit to all the music magazines, like *Spin* and *Rolling Stone*; I also went to *Esquire* and *Vanity Fair*, all the big magazines. I got a very nice response and was quite surprised at how friendly and welcoming people were, considering I was basically just a photo student from a foreign country. When I went back to Canada—I really hadn't shown my work yet—I decided to do the same thing, and I actually found it very difficult. The doors were largely closed, and the attitude was, "Come to us when you have something of substance to show us." Since I was just out of school, I only had a relatively modest portfolio. It was very disconcerting, and I realized New York was just a much more welcoming place to be an artist, so I began to make my plan to be here.

A LOT OF THE PHOTOS YOU TAKE ARE HIGHLY CONCEPTUALIZED. WHAT IS YOUR PROCESS?

The first thing I do is get to know their work. And then I try to get to know them as much as I can through interviews with them, any video footage I can find, so I can immerse myself in who they are and what they do and what they're about. It definitely helps me a lot—not always just to know what concept I want to do, but also to know what I would not want to do. I think oftentimes you might see pictures of one of your favorite artists and think, *That's kind of not really appropriate for them*. I think my pictures, even if they are conceptual, they're pretty appropriate to who the person is and what they're about.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHING HIP-HOP ARTISTS?

I really enjoy working with hip-hop artists, because I'm a fan of the music and the culture, but also I think that, more than rock musicians, they understand the show-business aspect of having your picture taken. Rock bands often will show up in regular clothes and just stand there, whereas hip-hop artists—not all of them, but oftentimes—they understand that there's an aspect to, as Frank Sinatra said, "You're not just an artist, you're also a star." I think hip-hop artists understand theater aspect.

YOU SAID THAT YOUR SHOTS ARE APPROPRIATE, BUT THEY DON'T SEEM TO BE WHAT WE'D EXPECT.

I find it a little bit limiting that men, especially African-American men, are shown as being tough and threatening all the time. Obviously they have a whole range of emotions and experiences, and I want to show more of that in my work than what we usually see. I find it more interesting. When I deal with African-American men, I don't find them threatening. I find them all kinds of things: I find them friendly or vulnerable or curious or whatever—all kinds of emotions and experiences with them, so I want to show that in my work. One of the things I like in pictures is vulnerability. As an artist, I feel like that's important.

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