

# Around Town

## Closer to Corbijn

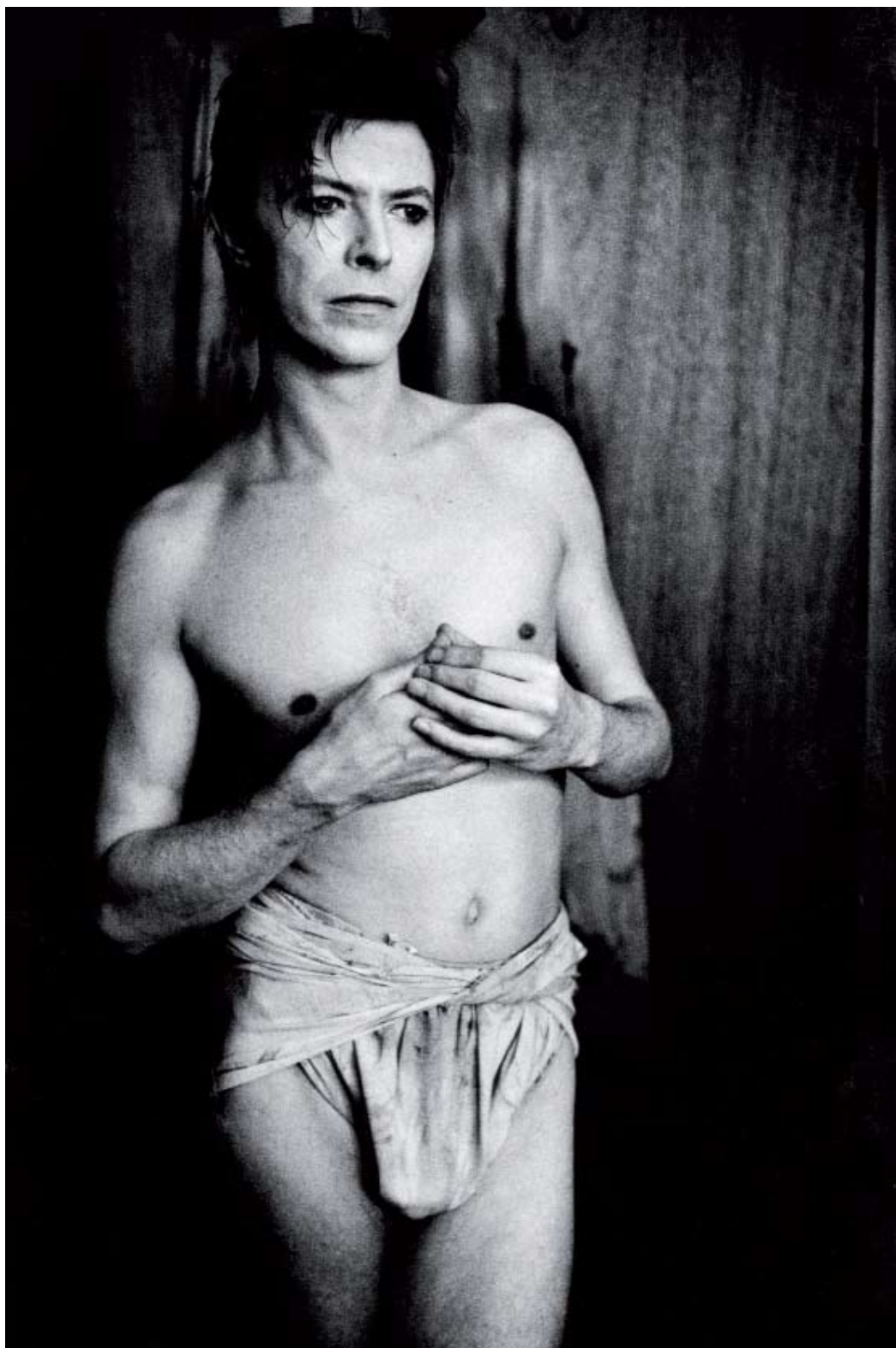
Anton Corbijn is best known for his photographic and film work with Joy Division but a current retrospective at the Ludwig Museum shows many more facets. Here he talks hardship and Hollywood with **Dan Nolan**.

Portrait photographer and filmmaker Anton Corbijn has maintained a Zelig-like presence in the world of entertainment for 30 years. As well as capturing iconic images of, among others, Joy Division, Robert De Niro and Nelson Mandela, he has directed music videos, including one for Nirvana, and emerged as a movie director with the Cannes and BAFTA-award-winning Ian Curtis biopic 'Control' two years ago. The Corbijn retrospective entitled 'Work' that runs at the newly pop-conscious Ludwig Museum from April 29 to July 5 showcases a career that began in the early 1970 when a gangly music obsessive from the village of Strijen, south Holland, started to take black-and-white shots of touring musicians.

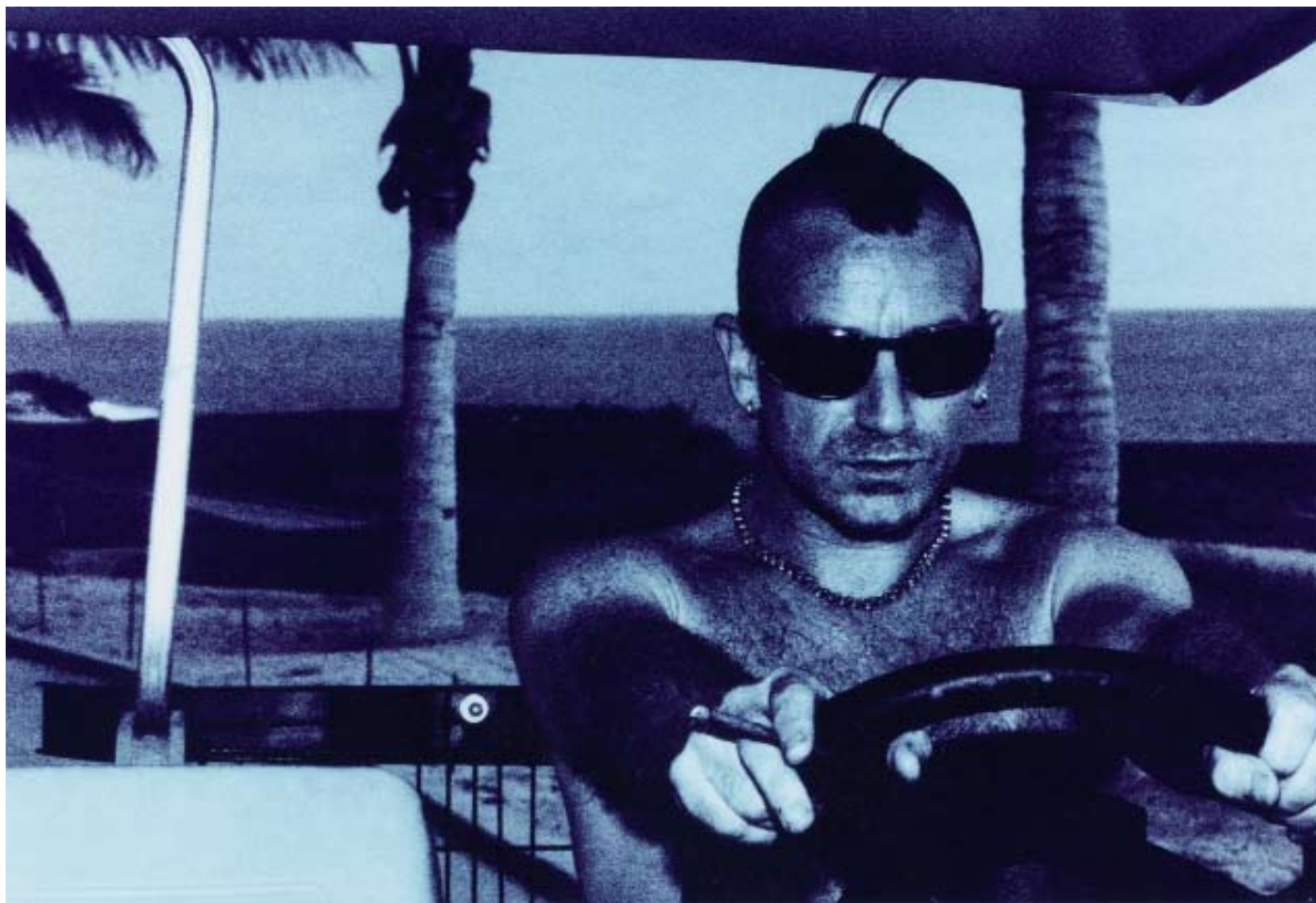
**'I wasn't doing too well at the time, though. In 1980 when I photographed David Bowie, I was living in a squat.'**

Budapest is a city Corbijn has known since he was married to a Dutch-Hungarian girl in the 1970s: 'It's a retrospective, so it concerns the four different periods of my work. The first period is the longest one, from the early 1970s up to 1989, with those black-and-white, documentary-like photographs,' he explains.

Those moody monochrome portraits made him synonymous with indie cool throughout the 1980s but Corbijn's first photographs on display here are actually from 1973: 'I took my first pictures in the school holidays when I was 17. I wanted to go to art school but wasn't accepted. That's how I got my style – not getting the right tuition. During that period I photographed personalities



*The turn of the Thin White Duke Another star snapped by Corbijn in 1980*



**Bickle? Bobby? Bono?** Corbijn captures the Irish singer during a Hollywood moment; below South African artist Marlene Dumas

such as Elvis Costello, John Martyn and Steely Dan.'

'The late '70s was really happening for music. Joy Division's debut 'Unknown Pleasures' had a huge effect on me. There was also 'Metal Box' by Public Image and 'London Calling' by the Clash – and I just had to get closer to it.'

There were other reasons to leave though,' laughs Corbijn. 'For example some people in Holland didn't even think that I could take photographs.'

Asked whether this DIY attitude made him a punk, he says: 'I only consider myself a punk in that respect. I was far too shy to be a punk, but I photographed all those guys, Johnny Rotten, Johnny Thunders, the Clash. The camera helped me to overcome a lot of things. It's always helpful to give yourself a role and I was quite driven as a photographer. I wasn't doing too well at the time, though. In 1980 when I photographed David Bowie, I was living in a squat.'

'The second period covers when I moved to LA for a while and changed the format of my camera, as well as the people I photographed. Fortunately during this time I developed interests in things other than music. Litho prints, for example. I began to photograph

Hollywood actors, writers, directors and painters.'

'After that I did a series called '50 Still Lives', fake paparazzi shots that deal with the disappearance of mys-

**'A photographer's personality is all there is, because everyone has the same cameras'**



tery in the celebrity world, all with flash and on 35mm film. They are like film posters that have been hanging too long in an Arizona cinema, with all the colour drained out of them. The fourth period is a series of self-portraits I made in the village where I was born, in which I am disguised as deceased rock stars'.

Something that has set Corbijn apart from his peers is his long working relationships with musicians, most notably U2 and Depeche Mode, who are given a separate room at the Ludwig to showcase the set designs, photographs and graphic art Corbijn has produced for the Basildon trio. 'It's unusual because the music industry is quite fickle. In the case of Depeche Mode, I don't know of any such collaboration that has lasted as long as the 23 years I have worked with them. It's quite beautiful to do portraiture of the same person over time and capture things that you have felt for them.'

Outlining his own manifesto, Corbijn says: 'I wanted to give these things a value in their own right, so that in 20 years you could appreciate the photo, even if you didn't know the music. In the early days music videos and album sleeves were of much lower quality than the music. Too much photography only existed because of the artists.'

The retrospective bookends Corbijn's journey professionally and personally. Recently, and reluctantly ('it's not really where I like to be') he found himself in the spotlight with his nascent career as a film director – he also moved back to Holland. 'After 'Control' I felt that cycle of my life was over. I had moved to England for Joy Division. When I made the film it felt somehow quite natural to leave again,' he says.

Next up for Corbijn are two film projects. 'The first is a thriller based on an English novel, set in Italy, and as far removed from 'Control' as could be. It's contemporary, fictional and in colour,' the director revealed.

Quizzed on which personal qualities he has brought to his profession as a portrait photographer, the Dutchman deadpans, 'Oh, you know, I'm just an amazing person,' before concluding: 'I don't want to know what it is, to be able to turn it on or off. A photographer's personality is all there is, because everyone has the same cameras. Sometimes, like with Sinatra, Ginsberg and Mandela, it's just an excuse to meet these people.'

*'Work' Ludwig Museum, IX. Komor Marcell utca 1 (555 3444/ www.lumu.hu). Tram 1, 2, 24. April 29 to July 5, Tue-Sun 10am-8pm.*