Off With Her Wig

Transsexy porn star Karen Dior handles a hairy situation by going raw

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Perhaps it's not very delicate, but it's not something Karen Dior hides. While taking a bath, porn's drag goddess points to a purplish spot on a beautifully shaved leg and says, nonchalantly, "See, here's the first mark."

The Kaposi's sarcoma lesion isn't ugly to Dior. "It's part of my body, after all," he says. But this mark, in fact, does mark another of Dior's dramatic "coming out" experiences.

Sure, Dior is known as a tireless performer, award-winning porn director, bisexual porn star, mainstream actor, nightclub chanteuse and AIDS activist. But that isn't all he's known as. Some know him by the name on his birth certificate, Geoff Gann; others know him by a male nom de porn, Rick Van. Now, another new identity arises: The first porn star and adult-film director to announce having AIDS -- and then continue to work in the industry.

That announcement unleashed a spiritual transformation that caused him to shave his head, shed glamour for an erotic androgyny and create GODDESS, a dance duo with real-girl porn diva Sharon Kane. GODDESS is already rocking clubs throughout the country. "GODDESS seemed like the right thing to call us, since people have been calling each of us goddesses all our careers," Dior says. "People have fun when they hear our music. They just have to get up and dance."

The new Dior is more Grace Jones than RuPaul; the severe new look is a major departure. Dior's incredible cross-gender realism had landed him multiple gigs on television, including dozens of talk shows, a movie-of-the-week with drag poseur Loni Anderson and episodes of *The Commish* and *Red Shoe Diaries*.

Always insisting that the show goes on, Dior didn't let anyone know he had a dreadfully low T-cell count when he gave a teary-eyed tribute to late porn legend Joey Stefano at the Probe Men in Video Show in May. (Kane and Dior were close friends of Stefano, who died in 1995 of a drug overdose.) At the podium in a stunning red wig and a characteristic body-conscious gown, Dior announced: "I have AIDS. I am coming out publicly and I have a lot to say about it. I'm very healthy and I'm not going anywhere. I have the best life, best friends, best boyfriend and best plastic surgeon."

Always upbeat, Dior is a bit more philosophical sitting in the bathtub after one recent surgery. A

veteran of more than 100 porn videos, including hetero, trannie, gay and bisexual, he is creating an almost guru-like androgynous alien look that people find very appealing. Such appeal helps Dior speak about AIDS with his head raised high.

“I found that people freak out when they hear you have it. They freeze up and don’t know how to react,” says Dior, whose treatment includes protease inhibitors and a macrobiotic diet. Fears that the gay porn industry would no longer work with him -- despite his membership in the Adult Video News Hall of Fame -- weren’t realized.

“Gay companies support me, but straight companies are AIDSphobic,” Dior says. “The fans, I hope, will be supportive. Someone with AIDS is not unsexy -- we still have sexual desires. There’s not the stigma there used to be; people still make passes at me.” In fact, Fred Bercovitz of Video 10, one of the industry’s prime distributors of adult tapes, created a new line specifically to show support for Dior (and alias Rick Van).

Dior is now working on a porn project specifically to raise money for AIDS causes. Porn performers will donate their services for the cause, and all proceeds for the safe-sex hard-core video will go to fight the disease.

“I believe at least half the guys in porn nowadays are HIV positive. Some people don’t get tested. The point of safer sex is that you don’t know who is and who isn’t, so that’s why you have it. People criticized Joey Stefano after his death for being in videos and knowing he was positive, but everything he did was safe,” Dior says, a bit nostalgic. “On the hetero porn sets, they now have you bring in AIDS tests, but those are only as good as the last time you had sex. I mean, you could have gotten HIV the night before. That’s why we use condoms!”

Dior insists no one has been infected during the movies. “It’s people’s personal life when that happens. It’s when they do drugs and get fucked without condoms. That’s what happened to me.”

On a spiritual retreat a few years ago, Dior had a realization that he was HIV positive and then got tested to confirm. A boyfriend who said he’d never leave him quickly left. Being positive changed Dior’s whole outlook on life in a good way: He cut out drugs, cigarettes and most alcohol. “I became more grounded, more spiritual, more alive, and I decided I wasn’t going to get sick,” Dior says. “And I’m going to be around to sing in the new millennium.”

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