People Like Them: T&A Q&A

Man of the Year's Dirk Shafer shows what he's made of

April 1, 1996 By Bruce Bibby

Dirk Shafer -- the *Playgirl* pinup boy turned film auteur -- is dressed for success. We're at Muse, the trendy LA eatery where everyone looks at you like you're from Oklahoma when you walk in the door. A similar gaze greets me when I arrive in jeans and a torn leather jacket. Meanwhile, Dirk, locks moussed, is already ensconced at the bar like he owns the place: Black vest, black jacket, black boots, black watch. I'm tempted to tell the maître d' that Dirk really *is* from Oklahoma, but I don't. Instead, I gab with the 33-year-old chiseled, hair-tinted muscleman about his prick-posing documentary, *Man of the Year*, and just where the hell AIDS fits into it.

Bruce Bibby: Are you an extrovert or an exhibitionist?

Dirk Shafer: Definitely an extrovert. I've always attacked everything I've done, whether it was ballroom dancing, working out or modeling.

BB: Tell me about modeling.

DS: I wanted to be the best at it I could be -- and that's when I realized how silly it is. Because what if you *are* the best at modeling -- what does that bring you? The fun part was that I would sometimes direct the shoots.

BB: Have you ever wanted to be in a porno movie?

DS: I've fantasized about that, but I would *never* do it.

BB: Have you been asked?

DS: Many times. I do think the idea of being watched is fun. It intrigues me. I think maybe it would be fun one time, but porn is degrading, really, and there's *no* future in it.

BB: Is *Playgirl* art or porn?

DS: It's gone through many phases. I wish it had aspired to be what *Playboy* is, because *Playboy* is

aesthetically beautiful. I don't think it knows what it wants to be. Right now, it's much more hard-core than it ever used to be. They're showing erections now.

BB: Tell me about Pledge, the PWA in *Man of the Year*.

DS: Pledge was my next-door neighbor in Santa Monica; we became really good friends. He had a great, open, honest air about himself -- he was from South Carolina. We got to be better friends as he got sicker. I was with him when he died.

BB: At which point did you decide to include Pledge in the film?

DS: He was always in it, for as long as I can remember. But I didn't want to get too heavily into that -- it's not a movie about AIDS, which is such a difficult subject to cover and accommodate. There were additional scenes of him sick and I pulled them out. They didn't feel right. But he was always there, grounding me and showing me how silly this farce called modeling was.

BB: There you are gorgeously moussed up next to somebody who's dying.

DS: Exactly. It makes you look even more superficial and that's the point. It's all a charade.

BB: The film's still a comedy, is it not?

DS: Yes. But I didn't feel it was fair to tell a story, a slice of a gay man's life, without bringing the subject of AIDS into it.

BB: Is that what we've become -- a disease?

DS: Well, I hope not. I mean, if I remade the movie now, I don't know if I would necessarily leave [Pledge's story] in, just because of what I've been hearing -- that there's a backlash because every time gay men go see a gay movie, there's AIDS in it. But at the same time, it was a true story, and it would have been irresponsible if I didn't portray it truthfully.

BB: You're in a long-term relationship?

DS: For five years.

BB: Do you associate sex with AIDS?

DS: I try not to, but every time I have sex it crosses my mind. I've been having safe sex for so long that the idea of *not* having it seems stranger than using condoms.

BB: Is unsafe sex something you would like to consider?

DS: Yeah, we would like to. But it's such a habit, wearing a condom. And the idea of having [unsafe sex] is scary to me. But I would hand my life over to Mike, definitely. I trust him that much. But we're still more comfortable having safe sex.

BB: If you were a sex toy, what would you be?

DS: I would *definitely* be a dildo.

BB: I don't know why, but that was the last thing I was expecting. I thought you'd say nipple clamps or something.

DS: [Laughs] A dildo is exactly what I would want to be.

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