

# Albert Watson on his Golden Boy

By Katherine Oktober Matthews

New York-based Albert Watson (1942, Scotland) began his photography career in 1970, and has since captured celebrities, fashion, landscapes and portraits – creating iconic images in no short supply. He speaks with us here about his 1990 image, Golden Boy.

## Tell us the story behind Golden Boy. Who is he?

I was photographing children for the Gap, the clothing company. I photographed this boy that you see, and he was very nice. I got on well with him. And I noticed that he was just stunningly beautiful. He had black hair and just beautiful eyes. I got an idea to photograph him on a large format camera, an 8x10 view camera, because that camera does quite an interesting thing when you're very close to the subject. It's almost a distortion of the person. Because it's such a large piece of film, you're almost photographing 1:1. So, I spoke with his mother and asked him to come back at the end of the day, just for half an hour.

## What about the 'gold', how did that happen?

I asked the make-up artist to stay too, and we had some gold hair spray. We put something over his eyes, and then completely sprayed him with this gold hair spray. I was photographing him in black and white – in color doesn't work, because gold on the body can look kind of nasty, so I knew that if we photographed it in black and white, and then put some color back into the picture, it would look better.

Plus, you can imagine if someone has dark hair but you spray it gold, in black and white film, it becomes white. The clever idea here was the camera and also the gold paint, because it turned his hair from basically black to white, almost.

## How long did the shoot last?

He was fine for around six frames, and then for some mysterious reason, he suddenly got nervous and said to me, "I'd like to go now." He was very sweet. His

uncle was right with him, and everyone was being nice, but he was only five years old. Obviously, it's a child, so you know that you have to work very, very quickly. I think in total we did two 8x10 Polaroids, and then we did six to eight frames, no more than that. Because then he was gone.

## Do you know anything about him now?

I lost contact with the child, so who knows where he is right now. I'm sure he's got a family with three kids by now.

## What do you think makes an image iconic?

Among other things, it has to have two ingredients – simplicity and memorability.

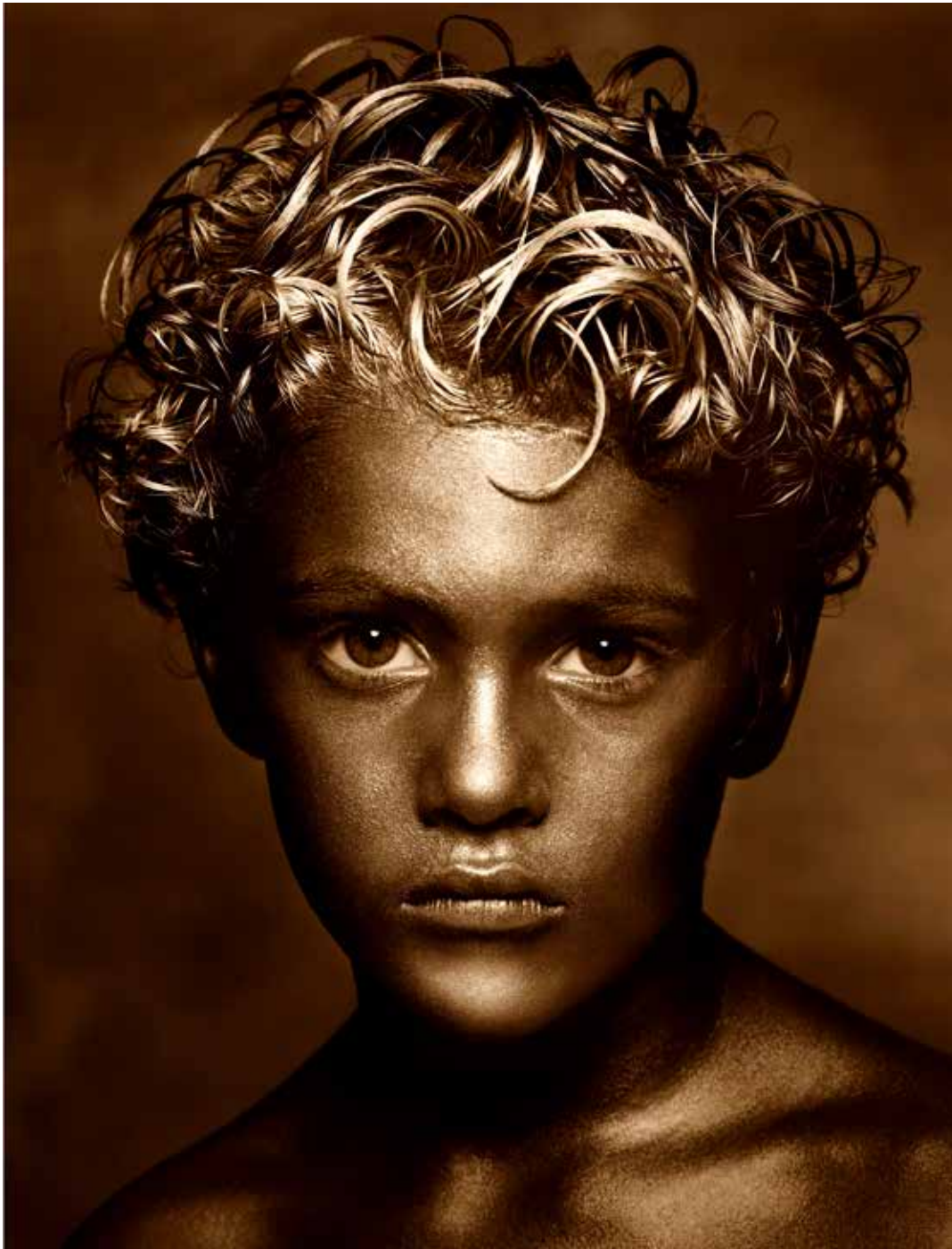
## What's your secret to getting the best sitting out of a person?

The person has to be totally comfortable, and has to feel that the photographer is totally confident in what he's doing. It's not unlike getting into a car with someone – if you suddenly find yourself trapped in a car somewhere, and you realize that the person behind the wheel is not a good driver, it's very uncomfortable. You've got to feel that the photographer is a good driver.

## What is it about the human body that you find so interesting to photograph?

For me, it's just another aspect of being human, obviously. Every part of it: the face, ear, nose, mouth, knee, leg, toe, hips, shoulders, collarbones. It's just very interesting to shoot, it's moving sculpture.

[albertwatson.net](http://albertwatson.net)



© Albert Watson, Golden Boy, New York City, 1990, Archival Pigment Print, edition 10/10, 107 × 142 cm.