

VEE SPEERS

VEE SPEERS' SERIES INSPIRED BY THE BROTHELS OF 1920S PARIS REFLECTS THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S FASCINATION WITH DRAMA AND SEDUCTION.

VEE Speers' Paris apartment looks out on the infamous Rue St Denis – centre of the Jewish rag trade by day and the city's hottest red-light district by night. "More a Pedro Almodovar film set than a Paris street scene," Speers laughs.

An Aussie expat, Speers has channelled the theatrical decadence of her adopted home into fine art photography: *Skin*, a series of photographs of drag queens taken in the Pigalle cabarets, and most recently *Bordello*, seen here, which was inspired by flapper-era French brothels.

"Living here has certainly evolved my aesthetic," she says. "There is no way, if I was in Australia, I would have been inspired to do these subjects, nor would I have executed them in the same way. The light, the ambience, the people have a completely different look and style in Europe. Australian photography is much bolder; it has a different sense of humour."

Text Kate Hamilton

Speers grew up with the smell of fixer, spending her childhood elbow-deep in chemicals in her father's caravan-cum-darkroom. At the Queensland College Of Art she dabbled in ceramics, painting, filmmaking and animation before finally returning to her early intoxication. What followed were the "golden years", says Speers, of her job photographing celebrities at ABC Television in Sydney, which trained her eye for the dramatic and the poetic.

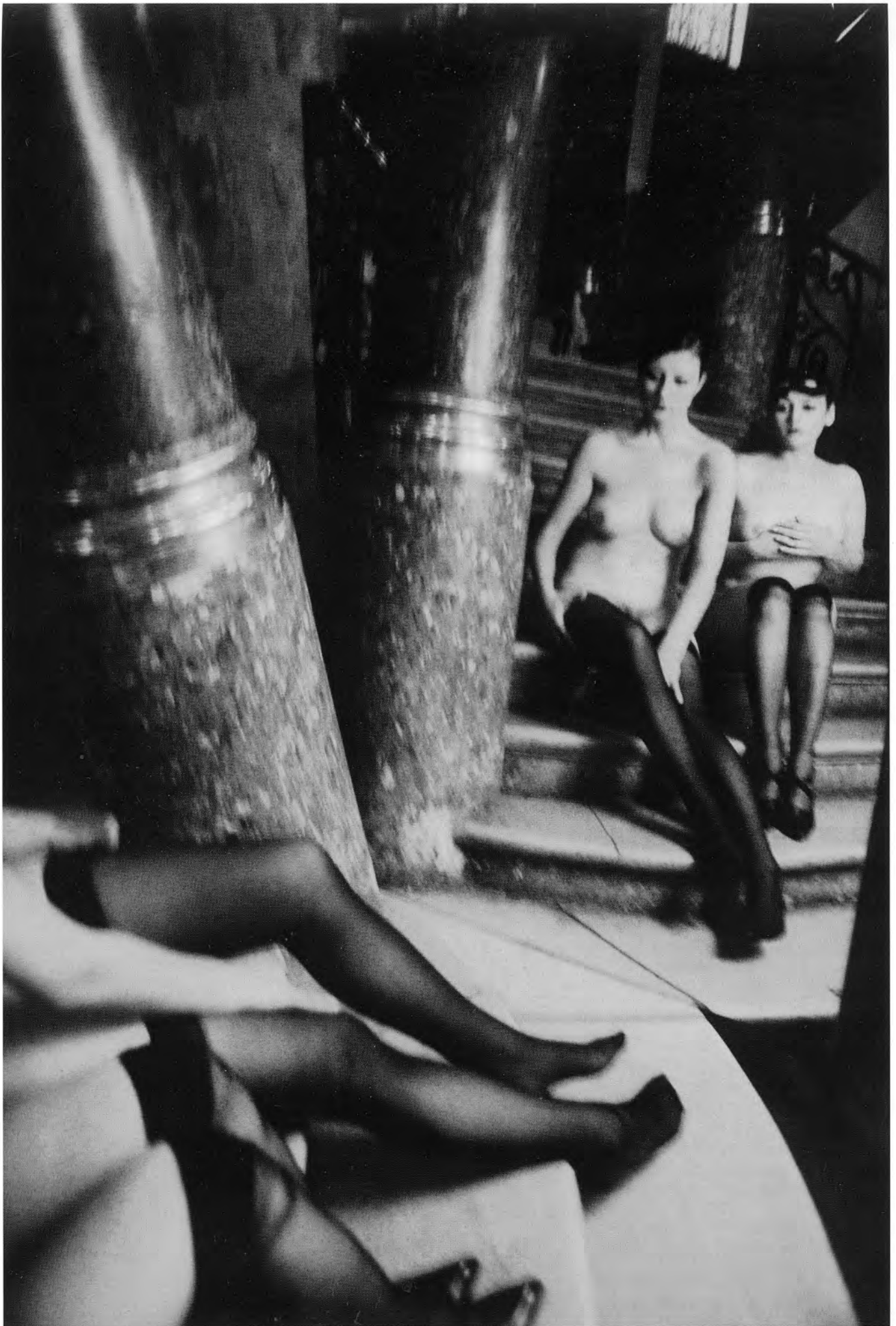
For *Bordello*, which has so far exhibited in Paris and Brescia, Italy, Speers took her cue from Brassai, the photographer famous for a series of works in Paris brothels in the 1920s and '30s. Speers not only created Fresson carbon prints – a 19th-century handworked technique that produces a painterly quality – she also shot in actual bordellos.

As a woman photographer from an all-girl family with three daughters of her own, it was important to Speers that she create something "respectful yet powerful. Women have a different way of seeing the body and the way the models respond to a woman behind the camera is also different. It's more a visual celebration of the game of seduction, and an exploration of sensuality and femininity, than an essay on prostitution."

After 12 years in Paris working in fashion, photojournalism and fine art photography, Speers is still enamoured of the city. "The building we live in is 300 years old," she rhapsodises. "I just totally fell in love with that."













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