

TUTU GROSS?

Ballet student alleges teacher coerced girls into posing for lurid photos

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TORONTO — They were aspiring ballet dancers who travelled from Toronto and cities across Canada to realize their dreams at the renowned Royal Winnipeg Ballet School.

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TUTU GROSS?

Ballet student alleges teacher coerced girls into posing for lurid photos

But in a proposed \$185-million class-action lawsuit filed by Sarah Doucet of Toronto on behalf of her fellow underage students, she alleges they were coerced into posing for lurid photos by teacher Bruce

Monk who then sold their images online without their knowledge or consent.

In the statement of claim, former dance students from 1987 to 2015 contend the ballet and their teacher owed them a duty of care to educate them and nurture their career aspirations while providing a safe environment.

“All these duties were violated when Monk coerced and compelled many of the Ballet’s students into undressing and posing nude or semi-nude for intimate photographs, causing them profound humiliation and fear of imminent physical and sexual violation,” the statement of claim alleges.

The claim is seeking \$85 million in damages from Monk and \$100 million from the Royal Winnipeg Ballet,

According to lawyer Margaret Waddell, they’ve discovered more than 115 photos of former students online that identify Monk as the photographer. And the fallout has been difficult for the women, she said. Doucet, in her early ’40s, is in a “fragile state” and has been diagnosed with clinical depression.

In the lawsuit, Doucet alleges Monk was the ballet school’s unofficial photographer. When she was 16 or 17, she says she approached Monk to take photos for her portfolio. He called her in on a Sunday and they began the photo shoot in the dance studio before he suggested they move to a small, private office on the third floor, the claim states.

“He soon complained that the straps of her bodysuit were ruining her neckline and coerced her into removing the top half of the bodysuit, so that her torso was naked,” says the statement of claim. “Although Sarah was reluctant and embarrassed, Monk was insistent and used his position of authority as well as his intimidating physical presence over Sarah to bend her to his will.”

“Sarah obeyed as the Ballet had taught her, and Monk proceeded to photograph her with her top removed.”

Embarrassed and humiliated, she told no one and soon left the school, the lawsuit says.

“Over the years, as the School took no steps to stop Monk from photographing the Student Class in private and in nude and seminude states, Monk became increasingly emboldened and the photographs progressed to becoming increasingly pornographic,” the statement of claim contends.

This isn’t the first time these explosive allegations have been made against Monk, whose art prints have been prized in galleries, private collections and the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography.

After accusations first surfaced in a Maclean’s article in 2015, Monk was fired from the ballet school where he’d taught for 25 years. Winnipeg police launched an investigation but later announced no charges would be laid.

Two other lawsuits have been filed against him by former dance students, one in Winnipeg and another in Waterloo.

None of the allegations in the class action have been proven and neither the school nor Monk have yet filed a statement of defence.

Monk’s lawyer did not return a request for comment.

“When initial allegations against this individual came to light approximately 21/2 years ago, the RWB removed him from his role and subsequently terminated him,” said Kate Fennell, director of school operations.

“The RWB is committed to the safety, security and well-being of every student entrusted to our care and we take this responsibility very seriously,” she said. “We have a number of protocols in place to safeguard our students, and these are reviewed on a regular basis.”

Citing the matter is before the courts, Fennell wouldn't comment directly on the allegations.

The lawsuit claims Monk has been selling his large “cache” of intimate photos over eBay, Worthpoint and other online sites for years without the women's permission or even knowledge. Many only learned of the violation through the Maclean's article in April 2015, leaving the former students feeling humiliated and powerless, the claim states.

The class action is seeking a permanent injunction against Monk's selling their images and destruction of any photos still in his possession.

In the meantime, against their will, their naked bodies dance on through the Internet and beyond.

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