

SHIA LABEOUF

by Roberto Croci

We meet in a run-down Persian restaurant on Hollywood Boulevard: kebabs, falafel, and cigarette smoke. "When I'm not on the set, my life is the gym, a light meal, long walks with my dog Brando, and home. I've been spending lots of time alone lately. I'm preparing for my next film with Werner Herzog where I play a hermit: that's the reason for the long hair and scraggly beard. I even built myself a shed on the mountains. Before I go on set, I have to keep myself occupied. There are too many temptations for a young person in this city, so it's better to focus on music, reading, and work". He is candidly referring to his troubled youth passed in Echo Park in the primarily black and Mexican area of Los Angeles. "I grew up quickly. I'm an only child: I cooked for myself when I was nine because my father was a heroin addict and my mom worked three jobs to support us. There weren't today's bullies at school, but we endured military-style hazing designed to humiliate you in front of the others. I was already a man at age ten". Everyone knows the milestones in Shia's career (the "Transformers" movies, "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull", "Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps"). At 26, he's already 'Hollywood's next superstar'. "I grew up admiring sensitive, honest actors like John Wayne and Montgomery Clift in 'Red River', which is my favorite film along with 'Pulp Fiction'. Of the directors I've worked with, I have to put Oliver Stone at the top: he was decisive for me, from a creative and human perspective. He took me by the hand and we exchanged roles. We got drunk together. He taught me that to make a relationship work, you have to be vulnerable and honest". One of his latest films is "Lawless", which was presented at Cannes and will be released in Italy in December. He co-stars in the film with Tom Hardy, Guy Pearce, Gary Oldman and Jessica Chastain. "It was a very intense experience: people with different personalities giving their all in their performance, seeking truth. In our business you have to find that moment in front of the mirror that enables you to lie to yourself and fool the public. Once you discover the magic, other people's opinions don't count. Someone told me that while filming 'Lincoln' Daniel Day-Lewis walked in a room full of photos and portraits of the real president, looked around and asked, 'Who's that man? Get rid of those images: I'm Abraham Lincoln'. Personally, I do my best in the first takes, but I admire directors like Fincher and Kubrick who perfected their art through repetition that reached perfection after 10, 15 and 20 takes". Another experience that left its mark was the role of Ben in "The Company You Keep", the thriller directed by Robert Redford based on a book by Neil Gordon that will be shown out of the competition at the Venice Film Festival. "Robert is really cool. He's not just a director, but he's also an actor, so he knows that giving the cast certain creative responsibilities can only bring benefits. Stanley Tucci and I immediately connected and we memorized each other's lines so there were never pauses in the dialogue, the way Redford and Hoffman did in 'All the President's Men'. Robert knows how an actor thinks. He doesn't need to lecture or explain the magic of acting. He comes to the set and asks, 'Show me what you worked on: show me what you've got' ". During the interview, many people approach him and Shia is always friendly. "I give autographs but don't allow pictures: my face is one of the few things I control. I've been compared to Tom Cruise, but I don't resemble him. I live a real life. I go out with normal people, which helps me stay in contact with the world. One day Spielberg told me that fame turns you into two people. When Tom Cruise leaves the house, he doesn't stick his finger up his nose. I'm not interested in this lifestyle: I didn't start acting to become someone else. I'm a human being first, and then an actor. I behave like a human being, mistakes and fuck-ups included".

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L'UOMO VOGUE

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