

VANITY FAIR



Hunger Games Star Jena Malone on Inspiring Girls Everywhere to Catch Fire

NOVEMBER 21, 2014 3:42 PM

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Jena Malone is a rare bird. Having burst onto the scene at the tender age of 12, with an arrestingly mature performance in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Malone has been turning heads ever since. Malone is one of the few precociously talented child actors to successfully make the transition from kid roles (*Contact*, *Stepmom*) to hip, indie teen parts (*Donnie Darko*, *The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys*, *Saved!*) to adult performances in some of the biggest movies of 2014, including *Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 1* and *Inherent Vice**.

But despite some tantalizing rumors about a gender-bending role in another huge film franchise on the horizon, Malone isn't content to be just a movie star or the face of a new Gap campaign. The actress also pursues other avenues of expression including music and, most recently, a photographic exhibit called "The Holy Other," at MAMA art gallery in downtown Los Angeles. The show, which runs from November 21 through November 28, features 39 images from Malone's trip to Myanmar, Burma, this past summer, and benefits the Girl Determined charity, which works with young Burmese women to educate and empower them through societal shifts in their country.

We spoke with Malone this morning (her 30th birthday, by the way) about how *The Hunger Games* helped inspire this latest project and how she hopes to help women all over the world catch fire.

VF Hollywood: Your character Johanna Mason was a huge part of *Hunger Games: Catching Fire*. But when it comes to *Mockingjay - Part 1*, you're actually in more of the advertising than you are in the film itself.

Jena Malone: Right! You know, it's two movies and one book. I know the story, the fans know Johanna's journey and that she's a part of it. It's just in this specific way that the story is being told, she can't really enter it until a certain point. And that's for the benefit of the story. To me, that makes sense and it's exciting. It's exciting when people only get a taste of what's to come.

But only being in a tiny bit of the film didn't stop you from absolutely dominating the red carpet during the *Mockingjay* premiere. Were you having as much fun as it looked like you were?

If it was just a barren room with a bunch of photographers I think it would be harder to find the joy and light and want to dance on the red carpet. But when you enter and there's, like, 500 fans screaming and pulsing, I'm just feeding off of their energy. They're making me have a good time. You know, the older that I get, the more I enjoy the art of becoming a woman, dressing up, finding characters. And the art of giving back as well. Shaking hands and giving hugs and being anointed by some 16-year-old girl's tears on your shoulder.

Your photography from Myanmar has so much to do with children, and the show is actually a benefit for an educational girls charity. How much has interacting with the teenage *Hunger Games* fans helped make young women a priority for you?

I think what *Hunger Games* did for me is allow me to see, up close, the face of the new generation. I'm almost 30, I don't have a lot of friends who are 15 years old. So just being able to be in the same room with their passion and their hunger for truth and real art and love was completely inspiring. That's the biggest thing I've walked away from working on the *Hunger Games* series, the interaction with the fans. It makes me question what kind of art I want to make when I get to have such a personal understanding of what this next generation wants, what they're craving. Because the bottom line is we're telling stories for the younger generation. They're the ones that are the true revolutionaries, they're the ones who are going to change things. All we can do is help.

How did that translate to your time in Myanmar?

I realized that my camera had this sort of Pied Piper effect with children. I would bring it out and they would come out of their hiding places and bring me into their games. I was traveling in Yangon for two days without a guide and the first day I got there I went to this marketplace and I found this young woman who was 12 years old and she sold postcards and jewelry on the street. She was a little bit of a hustler and had an amazing sense of humor. She just took me over the whole city. I was sort of in awe of her. At 12 years old she just reminded me so much of myself. She was just the self-possessed young woman who was doing what she wanted to do, but she didn't really know all of her options.

The fact that she had to give up school to help her family, I saw so many young women do the same thing. But also it's a culture that's changing. So I decided I wanted to work with young women there and help them discover what they can do, where they can stand, that they can educate themselves.

Why Myanmar? Why now?

It's this country on the brink of a complete change. Basically since 2012, when they did a complete overhaul to their government towards more liberal democracy, allowing tourism from all over the world into their country for the first time in over four decades. It just seemed like, man, it's probably this time-capsule still of culture and art and people and tradition. And when you open the door and let the entire world in, things will probably change quite fast in how you can view it and how the locals respond to tourists.

Because when I went this time, it was open arms and mutual admiration and interest. They were just so beautifully warm and open. So, yeah, I just really wanted to go on an adventure to a place I hadn't really explored before.

You've got your fingers into so many projects, between photography, music, acting, etc. Are you our new James Franco? What do you want to conquer next?

I feel like I've been given an opportunity, with acting and making music, to have this sort of photojournalistic experience. I get to go to Romania, I get to do a mall tour in Ohio. I get to be invited into all these different cultures and ways of life and I get to have a camera and play and become one of them for a night.

I don't know if it's conquering anything. But as a young woman you should never be satisfied with what's in front of you. You should constantly be hungry and constantly be searching for a better way to express yourself. I was given such an opportunity as a young woman to become an actor and have a voice. But I guess I always thought of myself as more of a storyteller than an actor. Music is storytelling, photography is storytelling, and, yes, I'm writing something now and I directed a little something last year. You know, James Franco does his own thing, but I feel like I just want to keep exploring, and I'm not even sure about what's going to come out next.

Well, happy birthday!

Thank you! I guess 30 is kind of giant? So, I don't know. It's been so silly planning for this. It's like planning for three weddings and a funeral. Birthday, photo show, charity, Mockingjay! I'm so ready to sleep at this point.