

Jena Malone Turns 30, Feels “The Galloping of a Horse,” and Births Her First Photo Show

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On Friday, Jena Malone turned 30, debuted her first solo photography show and celebrated the release of her latest film, *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay (Part 1)*, which went on to have the biggest opening weekend of any movie this year (though she only appears for a few seconds). All three pivotal events make up what she calls a “crazy triangle” influenced by Saturn Return, or the life-changing astrological transition that she says she’s been in the thick of for the past two years.

“I wake up in the morning and I feel this galloping of a horse,” she says of her Saturn Return. She’s speaking by phone on the morning of her birthday. “It’s all seeds. It can become a really fruitful time, with visions of the work that you want to do and how you can do that.”

Malone’s own vision came to her in a dream about visiting Myanmar. She’d seen an image of the Southeast Asian country online and immediately began researching it, only to discover “it’s this beautiful, untouched place that’s sort of on the brink of these giant changes.” Those giant changes are documented in “The Holy Other,” Malone’s series of 39 prints, which are on display through Friday at MAMA gallery in the arts district.

Myanmar, also known as Burma, only recently became a tourist destination following its 2012 election of a democratic party, which took over power from a military-controlled government plagued with corruption. More than one million foreign tourists visited Myanmar that year, and in 2013, that figure more than doubled. For ten days last summer, just after finishing up a tour with her two-person improvisational band *The Shoe*, the actor/musician/photographer joined the ranks of foreign tourists attracted to Myanmar’s rural villages and newly democratic government.

“I could already see how they were building things to help giant hotels and trying to change the infrastructure to accommodate bigger crowds,” Malone says. “I knew I was going to take photos because that’s just what I’m doing constantly. I was capturing things that happened above and beyond and I knew that was something I wanted to share.” The images, which are flooded with bright colors and vivid landscapes, feature double exposures that were created manually in-camera.

Traveling solo with the help of a guide and a translator, Malone says, “we felt like queens, hiking through the most beautiful terrain.” She stayed in a Buddhist monastery in the middle of the mountains, and connected with local girls she met through Girl Determined, an organization aimed at educating and empowering girls who are at risk of sex trafficking, child labor and other forms of oppression. While working with Girl Determined, Malone shot 25 rolls of 35 mm film, much of which documents the female farmers and merchants whom she said were as equally fascinated with her as she was of them.

“I remember this older woman was like — she was looking at my skin — ‘You have skin like a swan.’ I’ve never felt like such a beautiful woman,” recalls Malone, who stars in next month’s *Inherent Vice* and is rumored to be playing Robin in the upcoming *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*.

When she returned to L.A., she knew she wanted to show these images of the changing culture in Myanmar. So she paired with her good friend Adarsha Benjamin, who turned the photography series into the inaugural exhibit at her arts district gallery MAMA, which isn’t set to officially open until December. The first gallery show at MAMA is also a first solo show for Malone, who studied photography at community college in South Lake Tahoe when she was 18 and started shooting color photography again when she was 24.

“Every day you have to wake up and be this soldier for a to-do list,” she says of her careers in film, music and now art. “It’s exciting. Building something out of nothing is something that I’ve been training to do since I was ten years old,” when she scored her first acting role. Her breakout role came at age 14, when she was cast as Susan Sarandon’s daughter in *Stepmom*.

Last summer marked her first foray into the art world, when she performed a soundscape for the opening of Lola Rose Thompson and Morgan Gillio’s “Future Delegates” show at Dilettante gallery. “If you don’t enter it the right way, it can be very closed off and hard to understand,” she says of the art scene, which she’s navigated with the help of several mentoring artists.

She celebrated her 30th birthday at MAMA gallery on Friday night. “I think for a woman it’s a really beautiful year. It’s finally yours. And you’re like an adult in all the right ways.”

Mama Gallery is located at 1242 Palmetto Street in downtown L.A., mama.gallery. Proceeds from the show will benefit Girl Determined.