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CULTURE

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ISSUE

ASIA ARGENTO PHOTOGRAPHED
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Mother Earth

STORY CHIARA BARZINI PHOTOGRAPHY JONATHAN FRANTINI
HAIR AND MAKEUP DAVIDE CATENA



MOVING TO THE COUNTRY, PLAYING it by ear, taking time, making time, spending time, being a mom, making love, having sex, feeling as if wrapped in a bubble and sent into outer space to create a new universe, going to the Indian desert, sleeping in tents, searching for Roma gypsies, playing drums, listening to music, dreaming, watching old movies, writing new movies. This is what Asia Argento's new life looks and feels like.

Fantasy world meets creativity meets domestic bliss—not what you'd expect from someone who has recently been praised at the Cannes Film Festival for French-kissing a rottweiler in Abel Ferrara's *Go Go Tales* and for daring to seduce Michael Madsen with a full-on masturbation scene in Olivier Assayas' *Boarding Gate*.

Argento has moved to a very unusual neighborhood for an international celebrity: the Cassia, a kind of suburbanish section in the northern part of Rome that has maintained some of its away-from-it-all allure. She is surrounded by fields, traffic, Roma gypsy shantytowns, and a whole lot of transvestites. "The fields and the transvestites are the reason I love this neighborhood. They don't work the sidewalks here. A lot of them work from home. It feels like a Fellini movie. Instead of *La Città delle Donne*—City of Women—it's a city of transvestites."

The actress and DJ does not set foot in the center of Rome. She despises opening nights and social events and is bracing a full-force return to Mother Earth. This attitude has given her a healthy and pure glow, a genuine smile, something generous in the way she speaks and sweeps around the house wearing Italian rock icon Loredana Bertè's nightgown. "I can't go downtown. I get a stomachache and I can't breathe. All showbiz events are anguishing. You have to force champagne down your throat before going to meet people you'd gladly do without. Out here I don't see anybody and nobody bothers me."

The home where she lives is sparse and huge, and Argento wanders barefoot from one room to the next changing clothes, changing music, drinking wine, and teasing her small Chihuahua, who humps pillows voraciously making lusty gremlin moans. Argento chuckles when she spies on him. Something about the way she laughs, the conversations she is having on the phone about traveling to India, her relaxation, and the fact that she is ecstatic because her live-in boyfriend, Michele Civetta, writer and director of *Friendly Fire* and *Coin Locker Babies*, will be home soon to bake her a chicken, is screaming the words "creativity" and "love" all around.

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It's like a hippie commune in here—but there's no hippies and only three people inhabiting this space, one of whom is a very intelligent six-year-old.

Living here with Anna Lou and Michele is a rebirth, one of my many transformations. I have very few close friends, if none, and cultivate kinship only with Michele, my daughter, and my family. I didn't even stop and ask myself once if what I was doing was right or wrong. It just happened.

You seem the happiest I've ever seen you, inspired and creative. What's the secret?

Let's not forget that Sex Magic has quite some power. It's one of the highest forms of self-expression and creativity, and it's keeping me grounded and stable. Making love for me is a similar experience to what happens in the film *La Planète Sauvage*: two people enter two bubbles and dance together on different planets. That is the magic about sex. It's transcendental, and I need it a lot, every day! It's the only thing that calms me and brings my feet to the ground.

I feel free in everything I do. Thinking about the film I'm writing with Michele is exciting. And so is being a mom. The very essence of my creativity has changed. It used to be a pissed-off creativity, but now I have no more anger.

So this is love?

I've actually always been a very solitary person. I've never been symbiotic with anybody apart from my daughter. Not even with my father, whom I've worked with, have I had such a feeling of collaboration as I have with Michele. This 360-degree collaborative process is what allows me not to feel judged. Michele allows me to be who I really am—not a caricature or a stale portrait. My creativity is free now, not castrated. I feel like I can invent new stories, new characters. I'm in a new phase: as an actress, as a director, and as a woman.

You're acting in Michele's film version of Ryu Murakami's novel *Coin Locker Babies*, which tells the tale of two boys, Hashi and Kiku, who are abandoned by their mothers and put in coin lockers at a Tokyo train station. You wrote a heartfelt introduction to the Italian translation of *A Child's Life*, the graphic novel by Phoebe Gloeckner that deals eerily with themes of child abandonment, and your second film, *The Heart Is Deceitful Above All Things* is substantially the story of an abused child. Abandonment seems to be a theme you are attracted to, one that has haunted your life.

It's a theme that's dear to my heart because there is something about the innocence of children that I wish to preserve. I don't think there's a worse sin, or a more shocking theme, than the corruption of children. I always find something mortifying and excruciating in the blind faith they have in their parents and everything around them. There's a lot of that in Phoebe's comic book. I wanted to make a movie about it, but after my last film, I'm sure I won't be dealing so much with those same themes again. It was terrible for me. I don't want to tell that kind of story again. It was scarring.

What is your creative process like? Where does your inspiration come from?

It's a conversation Michele and I have throughout the day. A very tranquil, simple, and natural dialogue. We spend a few hours a day talking, processing. Then he writes. Since my last film, I have a complete block with the writing process. I started feeling inauthentic in everything I wrote. Like I was a liar, a thief, but I'm sure I'll start writing again soon.

The place where my work comes from is my uterus. I had some other places, too, when I was younger: I used to read obsessively starting when I was five years old and throughout all my childhood. I used to get under the covers and read with a torchlight. That was my place. Then it became the white wall. Now I think this place is just inside of me. I just need some time to myself and it happens right away. I get in the zone. All it takes is calm and peace and silence.





"It's alienating for me to be in Italy, but I am sort of at ease with the feeling of being misunderstood. I was born misunderstood. It's part of my destiny."

Italy is a country that encourages having affairs when you're married, rather than getting divorced, because "the family" is a sacred institution. Yet the films that are produced here are about men who chicken out before getting married or bourgeois elite looking for a way to escape. It's the only country in the world where a Minister of Justice (Clemente Mastella) who's forced to retire from the parliament because he is being investigated for corruption receives a standing ovation from the members of parliament on the day of his withdrawal. We're living in a continuous contradiction in a country where an ancient moral code dominates the scene in a completely arbitrary fashion.

I don't feel linked to any of that ancient morality. I don't feel like it's in my DNA. I tried to perform like I belonged to this country, and I just couldn't believe in it. And neither did the people around me. I don't feel Italian. I think my morality is much more vast and has nothing to do with the bigotry I see here. As much as they've tried to keep me down, I know I'll never change. Sure, I can change, mature, and evolve as a person, but not to please the standards of a country. I've decided I will not pursue a rebellion against this country anymore. But I have in the past.

So you're living here, but you're not working here?

I'll never be able to work as an actress here or make my films as a director here. I'll always be dealing with foreign territories when it comes to my work. I have no chances here. I tried. I went to auditions in Italy and they didn't pick me.

In Italian cinema there's a lot of hysterical women roles, women who are the fruit of precisely the repression we were speaking of.

Yes, the roles are for frustrated, dormant women—roles that are in dialogue with a kind of Catholic morality that deals with repression and produces dissatisfaction and neurosis. I don't recognize myself in any of that. It's alienating for me to be here, but I am sort of at ease with the feeling of being misunderstood. I was born misunderstood. It's part of my destiny. Sometimes it's painful. Sometimes I've had so many satisfactions abroad that I don't care. I thought that having worked so much abroad would make it a lot easier to come back and find an opening. Instead I found everything as it was when I left. I am a renegade. But I still choose to live here. This is where my family is, it's where the food tastes good, where there's no war, and there's a good climate. It's where I went to school and where I want my daughter to go to school. **S**