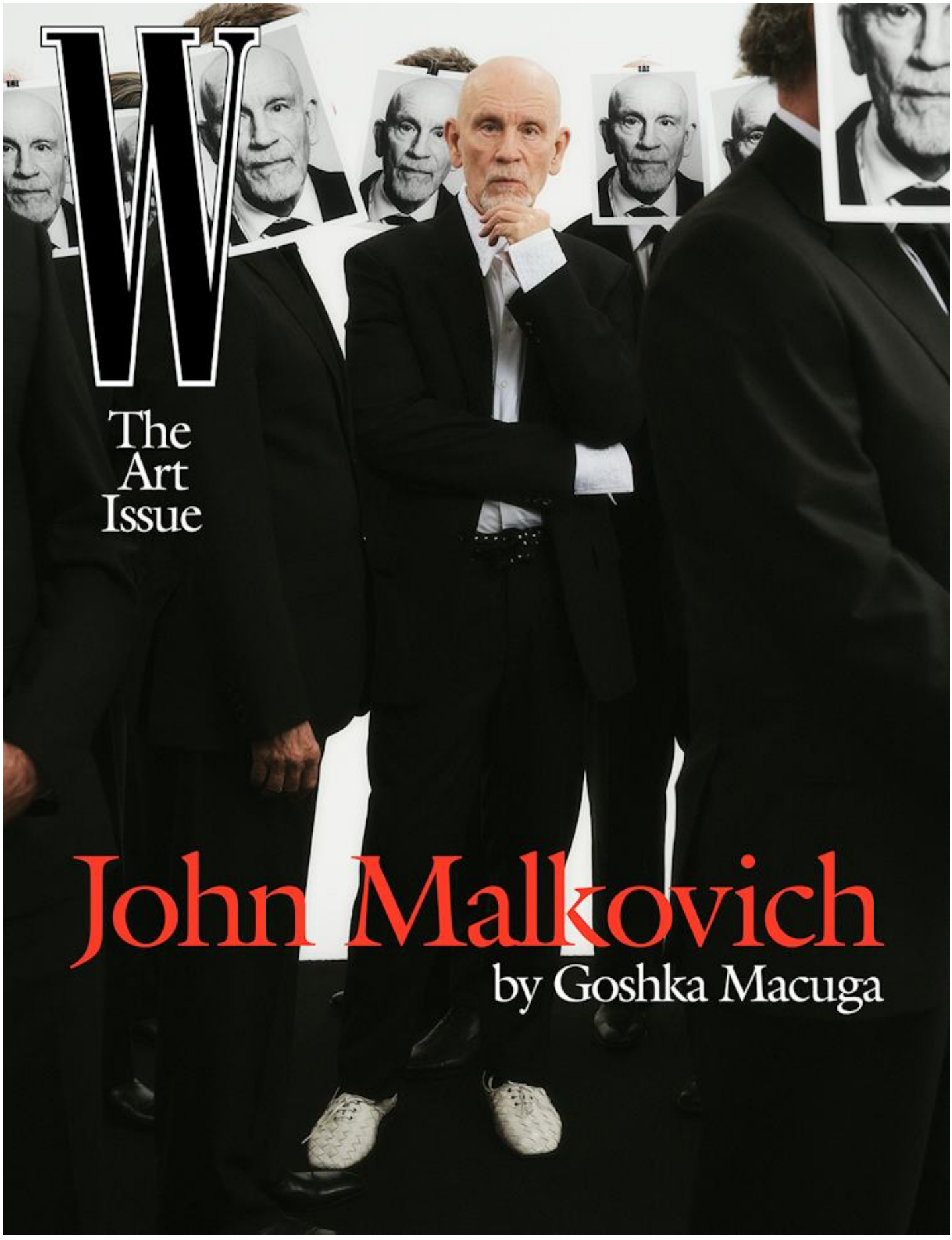

W
The Art Issue
John Malkovich
by Goshka Macuga

FROM THE MAGAZINE

The Many Faces of John Malkovich

For *W*'s Art Issue, the legendary actor and star of *Wild Horse Nine* joins artist Goshka Macuga for a one-of-a-kind collaboration—and considers his five-decade career.

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There's a problem with the size of John Malkovich's head—or, more precisely, with the headshots depicting his likeness, which the London-based artist Goshka Macuga plans to use as masks in *W*'s annual Art Issue cover shoot. The black and white portraits of Malkovich are laid out neatly in a grid at Milk Studios, in Los Angeles, like some sort of evidence table proving just how wildly varied and storied the actor's five-decade-long career in film, television, and theater has been. We have Malkovich clean-shaven, or with a swath of scruff; here is Malkovich in a white powdered wig, and there, with no hair at all. There are Malkoviches in rakish hats, Malkoviches looking professorial in glasses, and one Malkovich sporting a Dior blouse with an Elizabethan neck ruff at the premiere of his latest film, *Wild Horse Nine*, at the Venice Film Festival, where his deft turn as a terminally ill CIA agent earned him the festival's best actor prize and an immediate front-runner position in this year's Oscars race.

"On guys, when they stand up in a suit, these heads will be too small," says Macuga, wearing Miu Miu pants and a pale pink vintage top, as she gestures toward the photographs. She pulls a stainless steel ruler out of its casing to figure out with the photographer, Jeff Henrikson, the correct ratio for the portraits. (Eventually, the too-small Malkovich visages are easily corrected with larger paper and a guillotine trimmer delivered via Amazon.) Macuga, a Turner Prize nominee whose work can be found in the permanent collections of the Tate,

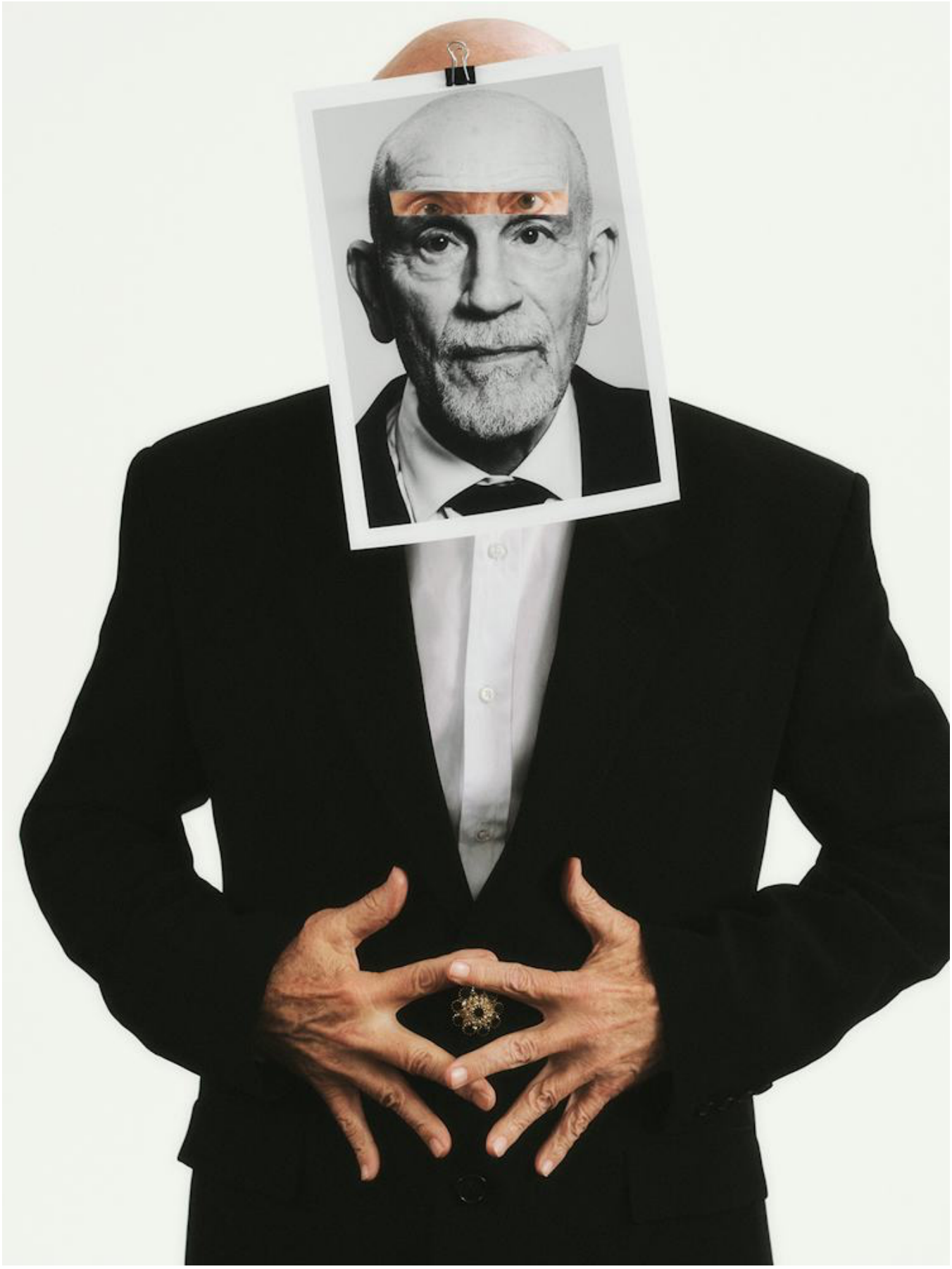
MoMA, and Fondazione Prada, among others, was born and raised in Soviet-era Warsaw. She only encountered the kind of art that she wanted to make at 17 years old, when she got ahold of her first copy of *Art in America*, a scarce commodity in Communist Poland. She exudes warmth and an improv actor's enthusiasm for spontaneity.



John Malkovich wears a **Ralph Lauren Purple Label** suit, shirt, and tie; **Gucci** shoes. Extras wear **J.Crew** jackets, shirts, pants, and ties; **Falke** socks; **Christian Louboutin** shoes (all throughout).

"Lots of artists like to have a very stable practice: Go to the studio, make the same stuff," she says. "I like the opposite. I like something completely new. John and I will be literally thrown into this thing for a few hours to produce images that will become representative of him and me," she said, then laughed. "It could go very well, or it could go very badly."

The concept behind the shoot is a matryoshka doll of references. It pays homage to Macuga's *Exhibition M*, a large-scale jacquard tapestry commissioned by MoMA, about the role of the museum as an institution. That tapestry, in turn, was inspired by a 1954 photo of André Malraux, which depicted the French novelist and art theorist leaning against a double grand piano, surrounded by images included in the second book of his trilogy, *Le Musée Imaginaire de la Sculpture Mondiale*. In June of this year, Macuga expanded upon her MoMA commission at Art Basel with *Exhibition M: A Re-enactment*, a mixed-media installation and performance featuring three actors masked with portraits of Malraux, Macuga, and former MoMA director Alfred H. Barr Jr., who moved around soft sculptures Macuga had created from the same fabric as the MoMA tapestry.



Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello jacket and shirt.



Loewe coat; **Bottega Veneta** shirt; **Marsèll** shoes; Malkovich’s own pants; stylist’s own scarf.

It is an interesting coincidence that heads are something of a theme in this collaboration between Macuga and Malkovich, considering that the majority of *Wild Horse Nine* is set on Rapa Nui, aka Easter Island, home to the mythical moai statues. "They're so enormous, some of them, you really can't imagine," Malkovich says of the Polynesian monoliths during our preshoot interview from his home in Lexington, Massachusetts, where he lives to be close to his two granddaughters. "The heads were just dragged"—from the island's main quarry to a variety of locations—"and set up by ropes, which seems crazy beyond belief. I think they all got knocked over in a big tidal wave in the '60s, and so they had to be set up again. That makes me tired just thinking of it."

Wild Horse Nine is set in 1970s Chile, on the eve of Augusto Pinochet's military coup. It follows CIA operatives Chris Carlisle (Malkovich) and Lee Chesterfield (Sam Rockwell) as they take a sightseeing detour to Rapa Nui while U.S.-assisted political upheaval is being plotted in Santiago. Somewhat reminiscent of the critically acclaimed *In Bruges*, *Wild Horse Nine* is director Martin McDonagh's second film about strangers in a strange land—or two hit men in a foreign country, as it were—and crackles with hilariously profane, existential banter. The friendship between Chris and Lee is the beating heart of McDonagh's black comedy—a product of Malkovich and Rockwell's natural rapport, along with their mutual commitment to rehearsing scenes "hundreds of times," by Malkovich's count. Malkovich offers high praise for his costar, whom he's known for 25-odd years. "Sam's very funny, and he's also a real student of acting. He watches films 10 or 20 times as much as I do," he says, likening Rockwell's kinetic acting chops to an expert dolphin trainer at SeaWorld. "He knows what to do to make them jump really high out of the water to get their fish."



Malkovich wears a **Bottega Veneta** jacket, shirt, pants, and shoes.

At the start of *Wild Horse Nine*, Malkovich's character, Chris, is dying of cancer, suffering memory loss, and ruing his life choices, many of which involved getting a lot of innocent people killed. "Chris is looking back at his life and realizing, You know what? I don't think the end does justify the means," Malkovich says. In Chris's hazy swirl of remembering and forgetting, aided by a steady supply of morphine injections, he finds spiritual communion not so much with the moai, as expected, but with the remote island's wild horses.

While he's worked with horses throughout his career—notably, playing real-life horse trainer Lucien Laurin in Disney's feel-good Thoroughbred-racing film *Secretariat*—Malkovich finds the equine species somewhat inscrutable. "You can spend all day shooting a gun an inch from a horse's ear, and it doesn't seem to notice. It just goes on with its life. But if it sees a small plastic bag blowing in the wind across a field four miles away, it freaks out and takes off at a full gallop, like a lunatic. They're in their own world," he says, with admiration. "They do their own thing."





Top and bottom: **JW Anderson** jacket; **Dior** pants; **Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello** shoes; stylist's own scarf; Malkovich's own socks.

The same can be said for Malkovich himself. "Doing his own thing" is one way to characterize the 72-year-old actor's artistic legacy, which began with the Steppenwolf Theatre Company, in Chicago, and has ranged well beyond acting to classical music and opera collaborations, winemaking, and fashion design. He's seemingly at home in any kind of environment, even a complicated photo shoot like the one Macuga has

prepared. Once he settles in, he starts riffing and is in little need of direction. Take the first setup, with the group of his 10 doppelgängers, all dressed identically in black suits and ties to match Malkovich's Ralph Lauren outfit. "It looks like *Pulp Fiction*," Macuga says, excitedly. (And a little like the scene from *Being John Malkovich* where "John Malkovich" enters the portal to his own brain and encounters an entire restaurant full of Malkoviches uttering only one word: "Malkovich.") After the initial shots have been taken of the seated group, Malkovich breaks away from the pack and begins to improvise his own movements. While the other Malkoviches remain in their chairs, the original turns away from the camera, spreads his legs, and bends all the way over to touch his feet, thrusting his backside in the air until his face peeks out from between his legs. Moments later, he straightens up like a man half his age.



Malkovich wears a **Ralph Lauren Purple Label** suit, shirt, and tie; **Falke** socks; **Gucci** shoes.



In another group photo, in which all the suited men are standing, Malkovich—now outfitted head to toe in Bottega Veneta, with the leather lapel of his jacket finished in the Italian house's signature *intrecciato*—poaches the measuring tape from the tailor adjusting everyone's cuffs and hems in between shots and

assumes her role, taking the measurements of the would-be Malkoviches surrounding him. In preparation for a solo shot, Malkovich emerges from his makeshift dressing room in an oversize Loewe coat, and Macuga unearths an old Prada ad featuring the actor in a black trench as a reference. Henrikson asks the room if anyone knows the year the ad debuted. "Nineteen-eighty-eight," Malkovich says with certainty. (The photograph is actually from Prada's first menswear ad campaign, shot by Peter Lindbergh for fall/winter 1995, but who cares?)

"Super amazing!" Macuga shouts, pleased with her collaborator's self-direction as he tries out a variety of poses. Although adapting the ideas behind *Exhibition M*, which involved countless hours of research, for a fast-paced fashion shoot with a legendary actor whom she's met only this afternoon has had the meticulous artist "very stressed" throughout the day, Malkovich's willingness—and ability—to bring his own ideas to the space allows Macuga to finally relax in a folding chair and be a delighted spectator.



Malkovich wears a **Ralph Lauren Purple Label** suit, shirt, and tie; **Falke** socks; **Gucci** shoes.



In his 1999 review of *Being John Malkovich* for *The Independent*, titled "Bald, Blank, Brainy. It Can Only Be John Malkovich," esteemed British film critic and historian David Thomson declared, "Malkovich is not a Hollywood leading man—audiences find him, variously, chilly, unattractive, repulsive, or anathema." Which may explain why, despite how often he is the most compelling player to watch in his 90-plus films, Malkovich has spent his career in a kind of liminal space between great character actor and bona fide movie star. His performance in *Wild Horse Nine* may finally convince audiences that Malkovich is, in fact, both—not that he's particularly concerned with accolades. "It's very nice that people care or think about it at all. I'm lucky to have a job and incredibly fortunate to do pretty much exactly what I wanted to do my whole life. That's already an award," he says. "I've worked with great directors: Bertolucci, Antonioni, Spielberg, Jane Campion, and on and on and on. But the gift is the work, of course. Most people spend their entire lives doing things they're not terribly interested in, to put food on the table and send their kids to school and do what humans do: get by."



John Malkovich wears a **Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello** jacket and shirt.

So what would Malkovich like his work to stand for, if trophies are of little interest? Much like his character Chris, he desires contemplation. "I think the point of a movie is to cause people to reflect on their lives, on their choices, on

what they've done or haven't done or should have done or might've done or couldn't do, and how that affects them. Good films or plays or novels, great artwork, great music, ask a question: What's important to us and why? How do we live?"

Grooming by Kerrie Urban for Oribe at the Wall Group. Extras casting by Dan Sap. Set design by Jeremy Reimnitz.

Produced By Ap Studio, Inc; Executive Producer: Alexis Piqueras; Producer: Blayke Kogan; Production Coordinator: Laicia Bouali; Photography Assistants: Milan Aguirre, Brandon Yee; Digital Technician: George Brooks; Postproduction: Studio Rm; Tailor: Irina Tshartaryan; Stylist's Assistants: Tori López, Alena Nitti, Makayla Godden; Set Assistants: Roland Cosio, Ryan Clough; Production Assistants: Eli Cash, Magnus Diehl, Susan Lucas, Alondre Peoples; Extras: Noel Schwab, Glenn Mako, Jack Mezzio, Kieran Mullaney, Gregrey Gorden, Matt Lagan, Scott Vanfossen, Joshua Fishbien, Don Frankel, Angus Webster; Printed Images: Snap/Shutterstock; James Devaney/Wireimage; Moviestore/Shutterstock (11); Movie Star News/Msn Via Zuma Press Wire Service/Shutterstock; Derek Hudson/Getty Images; Columbia Tri Star/Kobal/Shutterstock; Brian Hamill/Orion/Rollins-Joffe/Kobal/Shutterstock; Steve Eichner/Getty Images; Jc Olivera/Variety Via Getty Images; Ron Galella/Ron Galella Collection Via Getty Images; Warner Bros./Kobal/Shutterstock; Vittorio Zunino Celotto/Getty Images; Alan Singer/Nbcu Photo Bank/Nbcuniversal Via Getty Images.

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