

# Therón *J'Adore*

Oscar-winning actress, Hollywood producer, U.N. ambassador, and muse to Dior's John Galliano – life is beautiful when you're Charlize Theron, as Kim Reyes finds out. Photographed by Emanuele Scorcelletti

**I**n the magnificent Presidential Suite of the Four Seasons George V Hotel in Paris, Charlize Theron is getting ready to attend Dior's fall/winter 2009 fashion show. She herself is dressed from head to toe in Dior – from the wool black overcoat worn atop an embellished ebony dress to the pair of towering heels that reveal a flower tattoo above her right foot and a koi fish tattoo on her ankle.

But your eyes won't stay at her feet for long. There's no denying it – this blonde bombshell is stunning, all five-foot-10 of her (which has now gone up to six-foot-three with those heels), in possession of an Old Hollywood grace, mesmerising green eyes, legs that seem to go on forever and, lest you forget amidst all that beauty, a coveted Oscar statuette. A natural clotheshorse for high fashion and haute couture – a modelling stint in Milan at 16 and years of ballet training surely must have helped – it's no wonder Dior's current kingpin John Galliano is so enchanted with her, so much so that he has dubbed her his muse since 2004.

"Charlize sent me a rose petal and told me that she wanted a dress to match not the colour of the rose, but the yellow at the base of the petal when it begins to fade and die," the designer recalls of his first impression of

the star. "I said, 'Now that's fearless! That's my kind of woman!' I had to meet her."

As a result of their explosive meetings in 2004, the two inked a deal that made Theron the face of Dior's J'adore perfume, and had her starring in a memorable Nick Knight-directed commercial that had her literally stripping down to nothing but her bare essential – a spritz of the luxury fragrance.

"It's funny that John calls me fearless [because] I have a lot of fears," Theron teases. "I must be a good actress then!"

All joking aside, it has become standard knowledge that Theron is, in fact, a very good actress. If her decade-long track record of solid performances doesn't convince – playing Keanu Reeves' mentally unstable wife in 1997's *The Devil's Advocate* proved to be her breakout role – her back-to-back Oscar nominations for Best Actress will certainly do the trick.


But apart from being so gorgeous and talented (which is simply stating the obvious), who is she? Even with an intimate look behind the scenes of Theron's itinerary on this breezy March day in Paris – hair and make-up styling, a wardrobe consultation, a front-row seat at the Dior fall/winter 2009 runway show, and then a post-show chat with Monsieur Galliano – something still eludes even the most earnest

voyeur. Theron remains a distant figure, even to some in her inner circle.

"Charlize is an elusive muse," Galliano describes. "A curious yet mesmerising creature that I can see, yet can't tame. She is out of reach, yet tantalisingly close."

The truth is, the elusive anomaly that is Charlize Theron is a constant interplay of contradiction. She has never been married – nor does she intend to wed until same-sex marriage in the US becomes legal nationwide – but wears a ring and refers to Stuart Townsend, her partner of eight years, as her husband. She is the pride and joy of South Africa, the place of her birth, upbringing and mother tongue Afrikaans, not to mention where she devotes most of her time as a U.N. Ambassador of Peace, but she also became a US citizen in 2007. She currently lives a charmed life of glamour and celebrity privilege in Los Angeles ("I definitely don't see myself as a star," she contends), but she had to overcome childhood trauma – her mother shot and killed her father in self-defence – to get there.

Then there is the small matter of her film roles, specifically those which many have dubbed her "transformations" – a hot-button topic for Theron as it's a claim she is fed up with hearing – that in order for an actress to be



The Hollywood star  
takes on the City of  
Lights. Overcoat;  
dress; and heels  
(worn throughout),  
Dior by John Galliano



# LWomen in Luxury

taken seriously, she needs to “uglify” herself beyond recognition (paging Nicole Kidman’s prosthetic nose in *The Hours* and Hilary Swank’s crotch sock in *Boys Don’t Cry*). So when a string of Theron’s performances required her to look, well, less like her usual glamorous self, Hollywood naysayers were suddenly accusing her of using the make-under formula to fish for acting accolades.

“It’s not a case of wanting to be glamorous or not,” she’s been quoted as saying. “It’s about wanting to tell a good story. How many great stories can you tell by wearing a designer dress? The physical aspect is at the bottom of the list for me.”

Call it transformative, or call it authentic — just don’t call it “ugly”. Sure, Theron may have been rather unrecognisable as the real-life lesbian serial killer Aileen Wuornos in *Monster* — the performance for which she gained 30 pounds, wore prosthetics and took home the Best Actress Oscar in 2004 — and she may have had to smear some dirt on her face as a Minnesota mine worker fighting against sexual harassment in *North Country*, and completely did away with make-up and hair dye altogether for *In The Valley of Elah*, but it wasn’t to serve any higher purpose than to stay true to her characters. Physically on screen, she may not look like the A-list glamazon we’re used to seeing in the glossies, but she always brings an emotional rawness to every role, something distinctly Charlize no matter how much or how little eyeliner she’s got on.

“I find pieces of myself in every character,” she says. “I can relate to their strengths, their loneliness, their vulnerability, their hardships — it’s always different. I try to find the humanity in each of my characters. Part of what I love about acting is exploring the human condition and in that I find similarities.”

It’s this conviction of values — the fearless attitude Galliano described, making brave choices that other play-it-safe actresses would shun, the kind of daring career decisions that warrants her a US\$10 million paycheck per film — that makes Theron the ultimate complement to Dior, itself a fashion house led by a valiant, daring designer.

“John is an incredible artist and talent,” she coos. “He constantly amazes me as a designer and a man. He is a master in his field. He has

John Galliano’s  
stunning movie  
star muse



changed my idea of fashion — he has certainly spoiled me rotten!”

Galliano counters: “Charlize embodies the modern conviction of the Dior woman — beautiful inside and out, unique, aspirational, exciting, inspiring — all the elements that I strive to ensure are part of all designs at Dior.”

Professionally and personally, Theron and Galliano make a perfect match. “We are both perfectionists and share a similar sense of humour and love of adventure,” the designer reveals. “I think we spark well off each other. We are both the last to give up — be it on a project or on the dance floor!”

This symbiotic relationship between master and muse has predictably resulted in some of Theron’s most memorable moments on the red carpet. There was the ethereal powder blue tulle confection she wore to the 2005 Academy Awards, the midnight satin mermaid gown she sported with her black *Aeon Flux* crop to the 2005 Golden Globes, and the lovely red Vermeer-inspired taffeta frock at 2006’s Costume Institute “Anglomaniya” Gala, accessorised by the designer on her arm. And who can forget one of the most written-about dresses in Oscar history — the sculpted forest green gown she wore to the 2006 Academy Awards, with the infamous big shoulder-bow?

“I was always a great fan of his collections, and meeting him made me fall in love with the clothes even more,” Theron says about Dior’s creative director. “I am so lucky to wear his clothes. They make me feel empowered, strong, sexy, all of it! Having a couture creation

[by John] is like having Monet or Picasso specifically create a painting just for you, or Beethoven write just for you. It’s an honour.”

Galliano is equally smitten by his multi-talented muse. “[That] is high praise indeed, and something I will spend the rest of my life trying to live up to. I want to create designs that will enhance her character, empower her, and add to her allure. Obviously, I love to see her in my designs, but equally I love to see her looking beautiful and looking happy [even in someone else’s dress]. That is what fashion is there for. I haven’t ever seen her do a fashion faux pas, but dressing is as much about how it makes you feel as how it makes you look. I am sure she can carry off anything.”

That goes about double for her film roles. Amidst “weightier” dramas like last year’s *Sleepwalking*, *Battle in Seattle*, this year’s *The Burning Plain* (on which she is also executive producer) and a bit part in the upcoming screen adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, Theron played the babe opposite Will Smith last year in the irreverent superhero comedy *Hancock* and is currently working on *The Brazilian Job*, the sequel to 2003’s blockbuster caper flick *The Italian Job*. She is also developing films with her production company, Denver and Delilah, including a remake of *Sympathy For Lady Vengeance* by this year’s Cannes Film Festival Jury Prize winner Park Chan-wook. All the while, Charlize manages to stay true to herself and the stories she believes in, whether or not they are star vehicles or money-makers.

And there it is — that elusive quality of Charlize Theron. Whether she’s plastered in Hollywood prosthetics or going au natural, wearing couture by Dior or stripping it off for J’adore, there’s a spirit of bravery, an unbridled courage about her that is so undeniable, it emerges even through the gaze of the silver screen or a paparazzo’s camera.

Perhaps Monsieur Galliano says it best: “The thing about Charlize is her versatility. She is a chameleon and makes every role, every dress, her own. She has a symphony of smiles, gestures and characters that would inspire a great master. She can work with or against her beauty; work with or without her femininity. She is unafraid of herself.” ■

HAIR: ENZO ANGILERI; MAKE-UP: SHANE PAISH FOR DIOR COSMETICS; SHOT ON LOCATION AT FOUR SEASONS GEORGE V HOTEL, PARIS





Leaving the  
George V  
for the Jardin  
des Tuileries



A last-minute  
touch-up before  
showtime



“Having a **couture** creation [by John] is like having **Monet** or **Picasso** specifically create a painting **just for you**, or Beethoven write just for you. It’s an **honour**.”

Front row at Dior’s fall/  
winter 2009 show