

THOMAS LANGMANN & ALEXANDRE AJA PRESENT

ELIJAH WOOD

NORA ARNEZEDER


OFFICIAL SELECTION
OUT OF COMPETITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

MANIAC

A FILM BY FRANCK KHALFOUN

THOMAS LANGMANN et ALEXANDRE AJA présentent à LA PETITE REINE / STUDIO 37 la production avec le partenariat de CANAL+ - ONE - la collection avec BLUE UNDERGROUND et avec BY FRANCK KHALFOUN ELIJAH WOOD NORA ARNEZEDER "MANIAC" GENEVIEVE ALEXANDRA JAN PROBERG MICHAEL DUFFY
ITANE BAI ADAM JOSHUA DE LAGUNA MURICA LOUIS ZAMPIROTTI scénario et dialogues de LISA FRIEDLSCHNIGER production de FRANCK KHALFOUN et ALEXANDRE AJA avec STEFANIE CHALANCA (2017) PATRICK EMANUEL ALBERTO FRANZOSI JOSEPH KUCINSKI (2018) PATRICK EMANUEL ALBERTO FRANZOSI
réalisé par FRANCK KHALFOUN avec ALEXANDRE AJA THOMAS LANGMANN WILLIAM LUSTIG (réalisé par) FRANCK KHALFOUN
production ALEXANDRE AJA THOMAS LANGMANN WILLIAM LUSTIG (réalisé par) FRANCK KHALFOUN

LA PETITE REINE

Studio 37

CANAL+

wild bunch

THOMAS LANGMANN
& **ALEXANDRE AJA**
present



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MANIAC

A film by **FRANCK KHALFOUN**

Written by **ALEXANDRE AJA & GREGORY LEVASSEUR**

Based on the movie *MANIAC* by **WILLIAM LUSTIG**

with **ELIJAH WOOD & NORA ARNEZEDER**

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Synopsis

Just when the streets seemed safe, a serial killer with a fetish for scalps is back and on the hunt.



Frank is the withdrawn owner of a mannequin store, but his life changes when young artist Anna appears asking for his help with her new exhibition. As their friendship develops and Frank's obsession escalates, it becomes clear that she has unleashed a long-repressed compulsion to stalk and kill.

A 21st century Jack the Ripper set in present-day L.A. **MANIAC** is a re-boot of the cult film considered by many to be the most suspenseful slasher movie ever made – an intimate, visually daring, psychologically complex and profoundly horrific trip into the downward spiralling nightmare of a killer and his victims.

Q&A with FRANCK KHALFOUN



Were you a big fan of the original MANIAC?

I was 12 when it came out so obviously I wasn't allowed to see it in a theatre and I had to wait a while until it was released on VHS. But beyond the memorable gore of the original, I thought it was one of those very rare captivating slasher movies mainly because of Joe Spinell's performance. You felt a lot of empathy for this crazy guy. Although he did horrible things, I felt heartbroken for him by the end of the movie, which is the main reason why I remember MANIAC so vividly. So when I was approached about the project, I knew it was something I really wanted to focus on in this movie. That and the violence. It was important for the movie to have a character we could

connect with and feel compassion for, as well as, obviously, the violence and the gore. The original SFX were created by the legendary Tom Savini so who better to do this version than maestro Greg Nicotero who started off working with Savini?

How did you first get involved in the remake of MANIAC?

Alexandre Aja and I have had a creative relationship for more than ten years. He's very insightful and very visual, and you can be certain that you will be involved in many interesting and creative discussions when working with him. When Alex and Grégory Levasseur had written the script and came to see if I'd be interested in directing it, my first

reaction was, "Does the world need another serial killer movie?" And obviously the answer to that was yes! So it was important to have a fresh take and to attempt going places where very few movies have dared to go – and so we decided to tell the story entirely from the killer's point of view, which no horror film had done before. Conceptually, I think this was a daring decisions and it was helpful to have producers like Aja and Thomas Langmann who were not afraid of having me take the movie in this direction.

How challenging was this?

First I had to rewrite the script into a POV film which is a lot different than a straight narrative. In POV since you are always with the killer and no longer with the victims you lose a considerable amount of tension. Usually not knowing where the killer is hiding is what scares audiences. So I was excited by the idea but also a bit apprehensive because it was such an unorthodox way of making a film. To start with, we had to figure out ways of seeing our character. Looking at himself in the mirror seemed a natural and obvious way to see him so that we'd be able to get the emotions we needed from him. But it did not seem like it was enough, so I came up with other ways of getting to see him as well. One of them was through out-of-body experiences when he kills for instance. He steps out of himself and watches what he's actually doing. It's subtle and the audience won't even know it's happening, turning the event into something powerful and almost spiritual. Another way of seeing our main character was through dreams or flash-backs. Since most of us see ourselves in our dreams that interpretation seemed entirely justified.

Can you tell me more about the shooting tactics?

Having decided to make a film completely from the character's POV, the challenge was how to do it in a manner that remained realistic and scary. For a start, coverage in the classic sense was gone and we were left with a single perspective for each scene. Using Frank's hands became very important to the concept. How to shoot his hands without it seeming comedic was a challenge onto itself. Now focal length, depth of field, and the actual rigs we used became dominant factors in telling the story. For some scenes, we had three actors playing Frank's hands because of camera movements, and they had to be coordinated. Many days were trial and error and sometimes it took building three or four different rigs until we figured out a shot. Even though it seemed very simple and very low-tech at first, it was incredibly challenging.

How important was the cinematographer in the POV process?

Maxime Alexandre played a huge part in the POV because he became the character. Just as our hand double and Elijah had to coordinate their hands, so did Maxime who many times, because of certain restrictions had to play the hands himself. The three of them, Frank, Maxime and Elijah, were tied at the hip quite literally, with Maxime doing the camera work guided by Elijah's interpretation of the character. Whether the camera was on a body mount or Maxime was moving on and off a Segway, Elijah was there every step of the way guiding him in this elaborate and very technical dance. It was really interesting choreography to watch.

Does the POV shooting affect our perception of the female characters?

In past POV movies, actors would stare at the camera and keep talking. It was weird and very unnatural. So the first thing I asked the actors was to talk to the camera as if it were a character – and you don't always stare at somebody in the eye when you're talking. As a result, it allows the women to seem more natural and the audience to fall for them – just like Frank. You become engaged, especially in sensual scenes. When the woman tries to seduce Frank, she is trying to seduce the audience as well.

Is it also a love story?

Yes, absolutely, as was the original, although our film is probably a little more believable because it's easier to imagine our protagonists being together than those in the original. What's interesting about the love story is how it makes things more complicated for the killer, for whom these feelings are totally foreign. Our Frank is taken completely off-guard by this woman who enters his life. And so his whole world changes.

Can you describe Frank?

Frank is a lonely guy who has taken a lot of abuse in his life. During the writing of the script, it was important to convey the idea of what being lonely means in 2012 for today's audiences to identify with him. It was important for us to be more realistic and not to fall into the stereotype of the abused guy that becomes a killer. It's all about connecting to the character so that his choices really affect us in some way and we get an insight into his world.

What about Frank's mother?

She had total disregard for her son and very little respect for herself, which affected him profoundly. She engaged in reckless behaviour and didn't really care that her son witnessed it. Young Frank loved and needed her but she was never around. He'd wait all night for her to come home and she rarely did so alone. In her absence his friends became the mannequins, allowing him to disconnect from humanity. He began releasing his anger onto the mannequins, until hurting them turned into hurting people. Although well intentioned, it was a self imposed therapy which ended up producing a deranged human being.

Why does he bring women's scalps home?

The scalps became important because he spent hours and hours brushing his mother's hair. It was one of the very few moments when he could connect with his mother. She hardly ever hugged him and the hair was all that he could feel and touch. So it became a fetish and a way for him to have his mother back. For Frank, when you spend time with a woman and you want to keep her, you take what makes you feel good. In his case – hair.

Does he have killing patterns?

Frank has a couple of weapons of choice. One is a big hunting knife, and the other is his straight razor. He spends a lot of time sharpening and cleaning them. Both are very sharp – and very efficient at taking scalps. His victims are either strangled or stabbed.



What do his victims have in common?

Some remind him of his mother, some are just beautiful, and others simply have incredible hair. The fact that he has access to so many women has something to do with the renovation of downtown L.A. The mannequin store is situated in a once-affluent shopping area, which became rundown in the '80s only to be recently revitalized by hipsters and artists alike. Potential victims are literally knocking at his door to find what appears to be a secluded artist in a giant studio. What would've seemed like a strange and dangerous character, now seems like an eccentric and interesting figure to whom women are easily attracted.

Frank's mind seems to be constantly playing tricks on him.

For instance, after he kills Judy he wakes up next to her. As he's trying to communicate with his next victim, Judy's still sleeping in his bed. Did he actually kill her or is he fantasizing?

It was important to create a very normal environment to slowly introduce the idea that he's not normal but actually a maniac. You could think that he lives with a girl and that he's cheating on her and simply an adulterer until you find out the horrific truth. I thought it was important to create a relatable character, especially when he appears very few times on screen. This was a way to relate and to feel for him. I wanted to have a more insightful approach and not just portray a cliché of a serial killer.

Could you talk about Anna?

When Frank meets Anna, he totally falls head over heels for her. It's shocking for him because he never expected to be so enthralled by somebody. It probably has to do with her funny little accent and charming smile. Nora [Arnezeder] exudes something hypnotic when she looks at you – you feel as if she's looking into your soul. So when you're doing a film in



POV, and you have somebody who looks into your soul, as an audience member you fall for her and you want this relationship to happen, even though you know the outcome will not be good. At that moment you are torn because you want the story to continue but if it does, you know that it will not end well.

What do you think connects the two characters?

They're both artists in a way. They both work with their hands and with the image of beauty which manifests itself in their passion for mannequins. That's the connection. Frank realizes for the first time in his life that he shares something with someone and it makes him stop what he's doing – almost. He's actually going to try to have a normal relationship and date this girl. He sees her several times and he has no urge to hurt her because she's not like the others – she's simple and she's not using her sexuality to get what she wants from men. She's almost boyish in a way when you first meet her. But by the end of the film, she's made-up and gorgeous and uses charm and seduction to get what she wants, making her no different than the others. And she has a boyfriend!

Do you think she falls in love with him or she's just fascinated by him?

I think that by the time Anna starts to fall for Frank, it's too late. She's fascinated by his work and interested in his ability to bring these old mannequins back to life. It mirrors what she does with her photography. Plus, he's a good-looking guy. He's soft-spoken, dark and brooding and does things that are totally unexpected. I think she probably finds

that attractive. Yes I think she falls for him but by that time she's completely exposed and vulnerable.

There's a direct reference to THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI in the film...

Obviously the character of Cesare in that film is a predator just like Frank. But it's actually uncanny how much Cesare and Frank look alike. Frank and Anna are watching the movie on a date and there's a scene where Cesare pulls out his knife and reaches for Jane's scalp to kill her and it's an eerie foreshadow of things to come in our story. It fits our film perfectly!

How did you find shooting in downtown L.A.?

Downtown L.A. is filled with beautiful architecture resembling NY which not only brought production value to the film but also played a huge part in establishing the tone in our movie. There's a fascinating mix of these old buildings from the '40s and newer high-rises. I felt this physical dichotomy personified our protagonist's state of mind. A young guy living in the past. Also many of our locations are purposefully devoid of people – as is Frank's life.

Can you tell me about Stefania Cella's production design?

I wanted to make a stylized movie that would pull you in and hypnotize you with beautiful images. This would contrast with the violence, making the gore that much more horrific. What better way to do that than with an Italian production designer? Her sets are rich, textured, colourful and decrepit all at

once. All the sets were layered and complex and provide some insight into the characters. Frank's place is absolutely gorgeous while at the same time being a house of torture.

How did you play with light and colors?

Actually, there's lots of color in Frank's life, but it's been covered or subdued, making him a dark and sombre character. Anna is the one who brings color into his life. Until she appears everything is dark. The film is actually all night until we see her for the first time. When she appears a gate opens, filling Frank's place with sunlight and revealing all the colors inside. Progressively, the film returns to the dark by the end taking the audience full circle. Maxime Alexandre our DP created a beautiful yet dark and edgy film with slashes of color, highlighting some of Stefania's details. That's two Italian working together, so you know it's going to be stylish.

What are the main differences between Joe Spinell who portrayed Frank in the original MANIAC and Elijah Wood?

The obvious physical differences aside, Elijah Wood and Joe Spinell are both amazing actors. Both are very engaging and very deep performers with a wide range of emotion that inspire not only compassion but also so much more. Whereas Joe Spinell plays kind of a monster in the original, Elijah portrays more of the shy guy next door – he's charming and creative, which is disarming for his victims who are attracted to him. I find him to be a slightly more realistic predator.

Can you tell me a bit about the music?

Obviously, music is always important in establishing a mood and tension, and since there's something incredibly hip about the '80s right now and the original movie was made in 1980, the producers found a French composer named Rob who is heavily influenced by that period. I knew immediately when I heard his music that it would hit the tone of the film perfectly. The score is an homage to those old horror films while providing something incredibly hip, exciting and emotional.

How about the editing?

Everything we shot is POV, so we didn't have any coverage. This made the editing process a real journey into the character. The cutting was not dictated by the narrative, but purely by the character's state of mind. For the establishing shots, you have to believe the images are coming from Frank's mind. Baxter did a great job connecting us with the emotional core of the character through some very creative and often unexpected cuts. Unexpected and exciting things happened during the writing, during the shoot, and in the edit as well keeping this film making experience highly creative at all times. It was a lot of fun as a director.

How was it working with Thomas Langmann?

He is a throwback to producers who had balls and weren't afraid to take risks. He's very smart about making movies and has a keen understanding about what an audience will respond to or not. When he likes an idea, he goes for it and he doesn't need a committee

of people to get involved. He knows what he likes and he's not afraid to get it done. I have immense respect for producers who can do that these days and I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to make this film with both him and Alex Aja.



Q&A with ELIJAH WOOD



Were you familiar with the original MANIAC?

It's only a movie I had heard about and I hadn't seen. So I was actually given a copy of the script by way of Alix Taylor, Alexandre Aja's producer, who gave it to a friend of mine to give it to me. My friend told me that the entire movie was going to be in POV and that they wanted me to play the killer – and that I'd only be seen in a reflection! I was thrilled by this project, not only because I was getting to play a villain, but because I was getting to play a villain in this very unique way. To tell a story entirely from the killer's perspective is an exciting idea. And I was fascinated by the fact that I'd only be seen in fragments. Once I read the script, I was taken by it, and it's funny because usually I don't like the idea of

remakes, particularly in genre movies where there are so many classics that are remade in an upsetting fashion. But the style of this film was so different from the original that I was confident we were not just remaking what had already been done.

What has attracted you to the genre movie?

I grew up watching genre films – I was probably 5 or 6 when I watched my first horror film. I like all kinds – I like exploitation, ridiculous slasher horror films, and I like elevated, character-driven horror films, and I'm always in the mood to see a new genre film. As an actor, the opportunity to play a killer is exciting and it's not an opportunity I'd had before.

Can you sum up what this film is about?

It's about a psychotic named Frank who runs and operates a mannequin store that had previously been owned by his mother. We get some idea that he was abused and had a very complicated relationship with his mother. This is manifested in some kind of madness which has led him to kill women and scalp them. He has fantasies with these women that are kind of emblematic of his relationship with his mother and potentially of the relationship that he'd love to have with women but that he doesn't have. So it's a journey that we literally take through the character's eyes. As he goes on this rampage of killing women, he ultimately falls in love with this woman named Anna who visits his shop and who's an artist. He seems to connect with her in a way that he doesn't with other women. So Anna almost becomes a potential redemption for him – we see a side of Frank that is more human and that has the capacity for compassion and love.

How much of a genre film is MANIAC exactly?

It's a genre film but there's much more to it, because the tone of the film is uncomfortable. I think we feel that we sat in the mind of the killer and that we exist in the headspace of this individual during the length of the movie. What we're driven to do is take part in the killings, and that is uncomfortable and disturbing.

Is it a love story?

Not really because it'd have to be reciprocated, and it's not. It's an unrequited love story, I suppose. When he meets Anna, he genuinely

does not mean her any harm. He sees himself in a new light with her and I think he sees the possibility of leaving this part of himself behind. But that can't happen with what he's done and who he really is. So love is part of what drives the character in the end and it's ultimately something that he can't have. I guess it's the tragedy of Frank, too.

Can you tell me more about his relationship with his mother?

We get glimpses of what his mother potentially did to him. It seems like a lot of neglect and exposing him to being abused by other men. So in some ways, she was setting an example of how to treat women. He was subjected to her being sexually taken advantage of – she was an object to these men. There's probably a lot of correlation with the mannequins and ultimately with the women he deals with. I think he feels abandoned – he probably didn't have an upbringing or a social life that allowed him to interact with other people, so my impression is that he spent a lot of time alone in his adulthood. The mannequins have become his reality and his “friends” he's around the most. That's made him quite insular.

What do you think the mannequins represent to him?

I think he has a genuine appreciation of them and he cares for the restoration process. It's a craft he's good at and he enjoys the fact that he's resurrecting something that's old and bringing these “people” to life, which is ironic considering that he goes out and kills the living, ultimately trying to make the non-living come to life!

Do you think that is something that ties him to Anna?

It does. Anna was the first woman of the age that he tends to go for that has come into his space with genuine curiosity and appreciation for the work that he does, for the antique aspect of the restoration process. He thinks that they see things from the same perspective. He allows her to borrow some of his mannequins for her photo exhibits, so they get used in her artwork, and then he becomes part of her life. He would never have considered himself an artist, but she sees him like one.

What motivates Frank to kill?

He doesn't want to do it but there's a part of him that's operating subconsciously, almost independently of his conscious mind. Basically, it's a compulsion – he knows that if he goes out, he'll feel compelled to kill. But he just can't help it. There's the act of killing which is just a means to the ultimate act, which is to scalp the women and take a part of them and apply

it to his mannequins. So there's a part of them that lives on when he recreates an imaginary relationship with them in his space. Hair is the only part of the body for him that can't die – it is what makes inanimate objects come to life.

Can you tell me about Frank's look?

Frank is kind of from another era. Franck Khalfoun had this idea that his clothes may look both out of date and hip – as you have hipsters these days who wear vintage clothes. So Frank's clothing is somewhere in between being cool and outdated. Basically, what he wears is utilitarian – he wears boots, jeans, plaid shirts, T-shirts. We also had the idea that Frank tries to dress up for his dates and for events, but his idea of dressing up is pathetic. He wears these outdated vintage turtlenecks with a shirt over the top of that and a blazer over the top of that. So he looks a bit funny but it also reminded me of the way that Ted Bundy used to dress.



**Let's talk about the POV process.
Were you physically always present
on set?**

I've been around all the time except for two days. I've never worked so closely with the DOP and the camera operator before, and the cinematography has never been so important to me – because what Maxime [the cinematographer] was doing was what Frank was doing. I also had a counterpart who could “be” my left or my right hand because I couldn't always use both hands in a natural way, depending on where the camera was. So we literally held things together and handed things off as if it were the same person. It was a lot of choreography!

**What was it like working with
Nora Arnezeder?**

She's wonderful, lovely, sweet and funny! She's just a delight to be around. She's an easy person to fall in love with – she *is* the character! She has all the warmth and kindness that the character has. And she has that thing with her eyes that the character is meant to have – she really gets into your mind and soul when she looks at you.

What's Frank's relation to men?

I think he feels emasculated and slight. He has an aversion to any man who has anything to do with Anna and to men who have a strong sense of masculinity because deep down he is timid and he is not strong. And men pose a threat to the things that he loves.

**How was it working with
Franck Khalfoun?**

Franck is hilarious! He's incredibly passionate and he has a sensitivity that I love. His appreciation for the hard work everyone has put into the project is wonderful.

Can you tell me about Alexandre Aja?

He's just great. I've been a fan of his work for a while – ever since I saw HIGH TENSION. So I felt this project was in good hands. It was wonderful having him on set – he came up with great ideas and he has an eye for this kind of storytelling. Sometimes, he'll have the most subtle, simple idea that'll make all the difference. I also loved the collaboration between him and Franck. They understand and appreciate each other.

Q&A with NORA ARNEZEDER



What attracted you to the project?

The first thing that attracted me was Alexandre Aja. I love horror movies and it's a genre he's incredibly good at. I must say I'm a huge fan of *HIGH TENSION*. So I was very happy that he asked me to be a part of this project. And then I read the script and I was captivated by the POV process that allows you to be inside the killer's mind and to relate to him. You have compassion for this character who destroys everything around him, and wish things were different for him.

Can you describe your character in the film?

Her name is Anna and she's an artist who takes pictures of mannequins in store windows

with the reflections of the city. One day, she passes by a mannequin store which she finds particularly beautiful: she takes pictures of it and here appears Frank, the owner of the place, who's a very shy guy. It's the beginning of a beautiful friendship and – who knows? – of a love story.

How did the POV process affect you as an actress?

You can't see the eyes of the actor playing opposite you. So you have to focus on the camera, which was very intimidating at the beginning. Fortunately, Elijah was always on set, next to the camera, and he was giving me lines and so I felt his vibe and I felt he was there. His soul was there.

Is MANIAC more of a genre movie or a love story?

It's definitely a genre movie with a love story in it. It's a psychological movie – you're inside the mind of the protagonist and you find out about his past with his mom, what he has gone through with her, how much he craved his mother's love and attention which he never got, why he's become this horrible killer and why he falls in love with Anna. What's interesting is that there's so much tension in the script because you can feel that Frank loves her and you don't know if Frank is going to kill her. Those two characters are never judgemental about each other and they can be themselves when they're together. This is also what attracts Frank to her – she's not trying to seduce him, she fights for her art and mostly she takes the time she needs to discover his soul.

Do you think she actually falls in love with him?

I think at some point she falls for him. She has a boyfriend but things don't work out between them – he's very macho and she's kind of fed up with him. Plus, she has a really good time with Frank because, once again, he really understands her. The first time she meets him, she is amazed by his work on the mannequins and by the contrast between the magnitude of his "art" and this shy, unassuming, tiny guy. I believe you have to admire someone to fall in love with that person and there's something of that nature from the very beginning. And basically they're both artists – he creates mannequins and she takes pictures of them. So there's something obvious about their falling in love.

At some point, Anna finds out who Frank really is...

It's a shock to her to discover that the guy she fell for is a killer! She gets mad like an animal because she has this survival instinct and so she takes a knife and tries to cut him. It's a very physical and intense moment.

Do you think she's naïve?

I don't think she's naïve because he doesn't show her his dark side. He has a headache occasionally – but you can't possibly assume a guy is a killer because he's subject to headaches, can you? Basically, he seems like a sweet guy.

Which scene was the most challenging for you?

I'd say the car accident. It was cold, we were in downtown L.A. at night and there was blood all over my body! And I must say I have a problem with the sight of blood and the blood we used for the film looked so real that I almost had a heart attack!

What did you think of Elijah Wood?

Elijah has something very powerful because he's half-angel and half-demon. I love this contrast about him. I think that if he were just another big bully hurting girls, it wouldn't be half as interesting. Elijah has something sweet about him and there's a mix of tenderness and tension in his eyes, which I think fit perfectly the character of Frank.

Q&A with ALEXANDRE AJA



How did you become involved in the project?

I've been a huge fan of William Lustig's original *MANIAC* for a long time. My first horror movie, *HIGH TENSION*, was very much inspired by Lustig's work, and more specifically by *MANIAC*. We even shot a whole scene – the subway scene – that paid tribute to the original, by putting graffiti on the wall. It was a way of saying how much Lustig brought to the genre. I never thought of remaking this movie until Thomas Langmann came to me and said that he could get the rights. He was a huge fan of *MANIAC* himself and he'd seen it when it came out at the beginning of the 80s. I was very excited but I couldn't imagine doing it without Bill Lustig's approval and

support. So we met Lustig in Paris, and it so happened that he'd seen *HIGH TENSION* and noticed my references to his work, and he was moved. After a long talk, he was very supportive and open to the idea of having us reinvent the original *MANIAC* in the style of *HIGH TENSION*, as he was confident that if I was in charge, our remake would be faithful to the original. So he gave us his trust.

What is it about *MANIAC* that makes it so distinctive?

I've literally grown up watching *MANIAC* over and over with my friend Grégory Levasseur. There is actually something very radical about this film, something about the approach to the slasher genre that had never been done before.

People who saw the film back then remember it for the groundbreaking makeup effects by legendary makeup artist Tom Savini and for the suspenseful filmmaking and camera angles that Lustig came up with for the movie – but mostly for Joe Spinell who was an amazing actor. The film is so packed with tension that it sometimes becomes too much to bear – you feel that the killer is breathing down your neck in every single scene. So no wonder MANIAC, although it was made for very little money, became an instant cult favorite.

How did you go about the writing of the script?

When we started out writing the script with Grégory Levasseur, we wanted to be respectful of the original movie but we also wanted to reinvent it and update it for a new generation. From the beginning, we were facing quite a few challenges. The first one was New York. Everyone who's seen the original MANIAC remembers how much the city was a character unto itself and how much the film portrayed a city that doesn't exist anymore. New York was shown as a dirty, dangerous place, plagued by crime, as opposed to what the city is like today – a very clean, safe place that has lost the vibe of films like TAXI DRIVER, MEAN STREETS or MIDNIGHT COWBOY. For me, MANIAC was always the urban version of HALLOWEEN, which is defined by its suburban quality. So I wanted to bring back the MANIAC gritty spirit to today's streets, as it were, but we obviously couldn't shoot in New York because the city has changed so much. So the obvious option was to shoot in another place that has been abandoned and neglected for the past few decades – downtown L.A., which looks a lot like New York at the turn of

the '80s. Downtown L.A. is very unique in that it has wonderful buildings that go back to the early 1900s and some beautiful Art Deco architecture. But then, the city has been abandoned from the '40s until today and there are some 7,000 homeless people living on the streets. At the same time, there's a great deal of artists living there and hipsters that go to fancy clubs. So I was attracted by this kind of contrast – for a serial killer, it's a perfect crowd because you can easily blend in and be invisible, and it's also a great pool of victims.

What were the other challenges?

We wanted to create the same level of fear as in the original movie. MANIAC is perhaps one of the most intense films ever made. I remember that when I watched the film for the first time what disturbed me the most was that I felt really close to the killer and yet I couldn't understand his actions. So we wanted to keep that “so close-so far” feeling and the same storyline centered on Frank Zitto who walks the streets of a big town, preys on women and kills them, and brings back home their scalps – which he then staples to some mannequin's head. While the original film wasn't too specific about the backstory of the character, we tried to provide answers on his motives. So we decided he was the owner of a mannequin repair workshop where his mother and grandfather used to work. He grew up surrounded by mannequins, by body parts and plastic female bodies – by “artificial friends”. His mother was very self-centered and he's always felt neglected and not loved enough. That's why he means to keep girls to himself, to “own” them in a way, and never let them go, as he doesn't want to be alone anymore. I didn't want to give any kind of explanation

– as there's nothing to be explained about a serial killer's behavior – but to offer some biographical elements to create empathy with the character, even if he's the most dreadful serial killer. You almost want to feel sad for him.

How did you cast Elijah Wood as Frank Zitto?

In Lustig's movie, Joe Spinell portrayed a kind of repulsive, fat, greasy, sweating ogre, who was very physical and strong. I thought it'd be interesting to go in the other direction and come up with a kind of "Norman Bates" character – a very elegant, skinny man who seems to come from another era. He also reminds me of Terrence Stamp in *THE COLLECTOR* – he has a pale beauty that made him very attractive. So obviously angel-faced Elijah Wood was a natural choice.

Besides, Frank is not only obsessed with making the mannequins alive, but he's afraid of turning into an inanimate object. There are scenes in the movie in which he sees himself with mannequin hands and plastic hair. He transforms into a mannequin. That's his ultimate nightmare. It was very important and we needed an actor that had a mannequin face – like a "plastic" face. Elijah has that kind of beauty, with his pale complexion and big blue eyes. And at the same time, I knew that he could be feral and I was interested in playing on the contrast of someone who can be charming and shy and who can jump on you in the next second, stab you and scalp you!

The film is told from the killer's point of view...

We couldn't do a slasher film the way we did *HIGH TENSION* ten years ago – we needed to reinvent ourselves and to bring a new concept. We didn't want to make a survival film that takes place over one or two days – this one develops over a longer period of time. Also, what was very important was to find out if our character would be able to save himself and find some redemption. That's how we came up with the idea of telling the whole film from the killer's standpoint and to remain inside his head. It takes voyeurism to a whole new level. This decision not only involved the writing process, but also the filmmaking since we shot the film with a subjective camera.

In all my previous films, I've always tried to be on the victim's side, so that the audience may relate to the victim. *MANIAC* is the first movie where we take the opposite stand. But I wanted to be on the side of someone you can empathize with, and so I didn't want Elijah's character to be the ultimate archvillain nor the ultimate victim, but something in between. When you look at actual serial killers, you realize that they sometimes look like you and me and you'd rather they were monstrous instead of being human, because then it means that you could be a serial killer as well! That's where the empathy comes from.

Does Frank share the typical characteristics of a serial killer?

There are several things he shares with serial killers. First, he's had a childhood trauma. The mother figure is a recurrent element in serial killer movies – like *PSYCHO* – because when maternal love is missing and when that love



is given to people randomly, it creates an increasing frustration which may turn into a killing impulse. Then, he lives in a delusional world that borders on schizophrenia. When he staples scalps on to some mannequin, that mannequin becomes a companion that lives with him. He knows for a fact that the woman he's killed will never go away. But hallucinations do not stop when he leaves his shop. He has visions of the past and of his mother, he sees mannequins instead of people and he sees people bleeding. He doesn't know where the truth stops and where the hallucinations begin. He also kills according to a pattern and the killing is like a sexual act for him. The way he uses a razor blade to slowly cut inside the flesh and pull away the woman's scalp is almost orgasmic. It's really a mix between Eros and Thanatos.

Could you tell us more about Frank's victims?

All his victims are alluring women – they wear a lot of makeup and they are very sexy. He goes for the women who remind him of his mother. She was promiscuous, but also a drug addict and as a result neglected him. And that's what explains his need to kill. Frank cannot understand that women may want to be free and independent – he wants them to be with him all the time.

How much does Anna influence the development of the story?

Anna is very different from the women Frank hunts down. She has charm without trying to be too beautiful. She is a young artist who takes pictures of reflections of buildings in display windows – and who's also fascinated by mannequins, but from a different



perspective: she tries to bring the mannequins alive by melting them with the reflections of the cityscape, whereas Frank tries to make the mannequins alive by stapling scalps onto their heads. So Frank and Anna both have an artistic sensibility and they share the same fascination for the inanimate world and there's an immediate connection between the two of them. And with Anna came this question, can she or can't she save Frank? Can she be the one who pulls him away from his impulse to kill and from his darker side? What was interesting about the screenplay was to make the audience feel and fear for Anna. You want to come up to her and tell her, "Please run away from this guy, he's going to kill you and scalp you alive!" But as the story develops, you also want to tell her, "Please do something to save him" – and at this point, the story becomes a love story.

Why do you think she's attracted to him?

First, she's intrigued by him. He's charming but he's very different, he's shy, he has bouts of anxiety and sometimes he has difficulty breathing. Now she has a boyfriend who's the opposite of Frank – he's this obnoxious, pretentious guy working in the music industry. With Frank, she feels like she understands him and she's understood by him. She considers him a friend and then she's gradually attracted to him even though she doesn't really fall in love for him, but she feels empathy for him.

How did you cast Nora Arnezeder?

Nora has a great energy and a sparkle in her eyes. Even if she never played a physical role before, where you have to keep running and fighting all the time, she was a natural. Actually, she perfectly embodied Anna as we had imagined her – in other words, the exact

opposite to the rest of the girls. I'd looked at different actresses for the part and then I went on the set of my father's latest movie, *CE QUE LE JOUR DOIT A LA NUIT*, where she plays the lead, and I thought she would be perfect as Anna.

How difficult was it to get the film funded?

Shooting *MANIAC* as a full POV movie was a big challenge and the only way to keep our artistic freedom was to do it for a small budget and on a tight schedule. So we made it for around \$6.5 million, which is not a lot by Hollywood standards, and we shot it in 22 days, which is extremely short. But the good news about shooting in downtown L.A. is that all my friends and close collaborators live in town, from Greg Nicotero and his KNB people, who'd already done wonderful makeup effects in my previous films, to Jamison Goei, who'd worked with me on *THE HILLS HAVE EYES*. As they knew we didn't have much money, they were very collaborative and tried to find the best possible options within our budget.

How did you work on the cinematography?

I couldn't have done this film without Maxime Alexandre, who's been my DOP since 2001 and who's a close friend of mine. He's a full-time cinematographer now but for this film he was willing to work as an operator as well. As we were shooting the whole film in POV and using different ways of doing so, he had to be the camera operator. He didn't only handle the camera as the director wanted but also according to the character's moves and

reactions. It was a very interesting process because Elijah was on set every single day just to make sure that the way the camera moved was close to his own way of moving. Now just because we were shooting the film in POV didn't mean we had to stick to one single lens – which is, according to some people, the 40mm, or the 35mm, or the 27mm... We wanted to have the freedom to change focal lenses and go from long shots to closer shots. When Frank is confident and about to kill, we go for steady, smooth shots. But when he loses that confidence, we go for shaky, handheld camera shots. It all created a very stylized vision for the film.

How was it shooting in digital?

I've always been afraid of not using film anymore and I've never been impressed by any digital camera, as I have the feeling that it looks like video. It's only recently that I've discovered movies like *DRIVE* where I couldn't tell if it was film or not. My DOP told me that I should be a little more open-minded and that digital looks like 35mm now – and that sometimes it give you more leeway to play with light. In the end, I was willing to give it a try – maybe because I wasn't directing! – and I must say that I'm sold.

What about the music?

We were very lucky to have a very bright composer, named Rob, who comes from the electronic rock scene. I fell in love with the music he wrote for *BELLE EPINE*. It reminded me of Giorgio Moroder's music for *MIDNIGHT EXPRESS* and *SCARFACE* and of Goblin's scores for Dario Argento's movies. That kind of electronic music has

a gravitas to it which is almost romantic. For MANIAC, I wanted to have keyboard and guitar sounds from the 80s, with a very deep – almost kitschy – melancholia that enhances the story.

**How was it working with
Franck Khalfoun, and producing
a film instead of directing it?**

Ever since I started making movies, I've been lucky enough to work with the same group of people. It's almost like a rock band and a family for me. For instance, Greg Levasseur has been my best friend since we were 10 and he's like a brother to me. And then other people joined our "group", including DOP Maxime Alexandre and editor Baxter who began working with us ten years ago. As for Franck Khalfoun, I've known him for a long time and he first worked with us as an actor on HIGH TENSION. Then he helped on the editing of THE HILLS HAVE EYES and he's kept working with us on different scripts ever since – until we developed P2 together that he was going to direct. Even though the film was not successful, it was a great experience. And so when we were writing MANIAC, Franck was the obvious choice not only because he knows how to create tension, but also because he's very character-driven. It's quite a rarity in traditional genre movies.

CREW

Directed by

FRANCK KHALFOUN

Screenplay

**ALEXANDRE AJA &
GRÉGORY LEVASSEUR**

Based on the movie *MANIAC*

by William Lustig

DOP

MAXIME ALEXANDRE

Set Designer

STEFANIA CELLA

Costume Designer

MAIRI CHISHOLM

Editor

BAXTER

Music

ROB

Sound

**ZSOLT MAGYAR
EMMANUEL AUGÉARD
FRANÇOIS JOSEPH HORS**

Make FX

KNB MIKE MCCARTY

Visual effects

JAMISON GOEI

Associate Producer

JUSTINE RACZKIEWICZ

Executive Producers

**DANIEL DELUME
ANTOINE DE CAZOTTE
ALIX TAYLOR
PAVLINA HATOUPIS
ANDREW W. GARRONI**

Co-producer

EMMANUEL MONTAMAT

Producers

**ALEXANDRE AJA
THOMAS LANGMANN
WILLIAM LUSTIG**

Co-production

**LA PETITE REINE
STUDIO 37**

In association with

**CANAL +
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BLUE UNDERGROUND**

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