



Ridley Scott and Lady Gaga in Los Angeles before "House of Gucci" premiered in London. Ryan Pfluger for The New York Times

THE PROJECTIONIST

Lady Gaga and Ridley Scott on 'House of Gucci': When Beauty Turns Ugly

To play a fashionista willing to kill in the director's fact-based drama, his star plunged deeply into character. "How could I possibly turn it off?" she said.

By **Kyle Buchanan**

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LONDON — The day after "House of Gucci" had its splashy [London premiere](#), Lady Gaga met me in a hotel room near Trafalgar Square, offering a little bit of a disclaimer.

"If I'm being honest, I do feel that it's been sensationalized that I worked on my accent for so long, and that I was in character for so long," Gaga said Wednesday, platinum hair cascading over one eye. "But if I could explain it to you and clarify . . ."

The 35-year-old superstar was referring to recent headlines about [her acting technique](#) on the set of the Ridley Scott-directed drama, which slinks into theaters just before Thanksgiving. To play Patrizia Reggiani, who plotted the murder of her Gucci-heir husband in 1995, Gaga spoke in a vivid Italian accent for nine months and plunged so deeply into character that she would think and feel as Patrizia even when cameras weren't rolling.

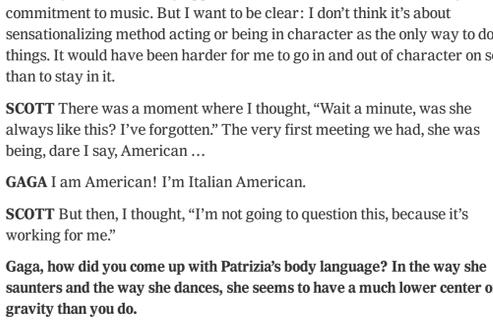
But as she told me, she had her reasons. And so, for that matter, did Patrizia.

Based on the book "[The House of Gucci: A Sensational Story of Murder, Madness, Glamour, and Greed](#)" by Sara Gay Forden, the film follows the ambitious Patrizia as she romances Maurizio Gucci (Adam Driver) and marries her way into the dynastic Italian luxury label. The family business holds little allure for bookish Maurizio, and the real power is held by his father Rodolfo (Jeremy Irons) and his uncle Aldo (Al Pacino). If an outsider like Patrizia wants to be a true force at Gucci, she'll have to pit the rest of the family against each other. Eventually, even Patrizia and Maurizio find themselves at odds, and her rage at him soon turns murderous.

"I was in a really complicated place in my life when this script came to me," Gaga said of her first starring role since "[A Star Is Born](#)" (2018). She was [struggling with depression](#) as she recorded her [2020 album](#), "Chromatica," and the woman born Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta even wrestled with whether she really wanted to be Lady Gaga anymore. When "House of Gucci" offered her someone else to become, she jumped at the chance.

Now that she's on the other side, she beams as she discusses Scott's trust in her transformation. "I've never had a better experience with a director," she said. "He loves artists, and some directors don't. They love themselves." As the 83-year-old Scott joined us via video call, Gaga talked about how that bond allowed her to do her deepest character study yet.

Here are edited excerpts from our conversation.



Lady Gaga as Patrizia Reggiani in "House of Gucci." MGM

Gaga, the film starts with a line about people staring into the windows at Gucci, wishing they could buy even the second cheapest item in the store. What was it like once you were not only able to afford all those things, but even have them offered to you?

LADY GAGA As soon as you ask me that question, I'm catapulted instantly to when I said those words on set. I remember thinking I was the second cheapest item, that Patrizia was the second cheapest item in the store, that she would never be the best.

I also thought of when I was finally able to buy things that were nice or have them offered to me, that there was something always inside me, scratching at my heart, telling me that it didn't belong to me. But I think part of being an artist is just this endless idea that we're not good enough. Material things are wonderful, but we see in this film how power and privilege can be inherently evil.

What to Know About 'House of Gucci'

"House of Gucci," Ridley Scott's film on the dynasty behind the Gucci fashion house, arrived in theaters across the United States on Nov. 24, 2021.

- **Method Acting:** To play a fashionista willing to kill, Lady Gaga spoke in a vivid Italian accent for nine months, [continuing to inhabit the character even when cameras weren't rolling](#).
- **Spotlight on Fashion:** Janty Yates, the movie's costume designer, delved into the Gucci archives, vintage dealers and Eltsy [to dress the film's cast](#).
- **In Demand:** The French actress Camille Cottin, who stars in the movie as Paola Franchi, a girlfriend of Maurizio Gucci, talked about [her sudden rise to international fame](#).
- **A Star-Studded Race:** Talks about the 2022 Academy Awards are intensifying. [Can "House of Gucci" achieve Oscar glory?](#)

Patrizia is ambitious in the way she pursues Maurizio, but you're initially rooting for them as a couple.

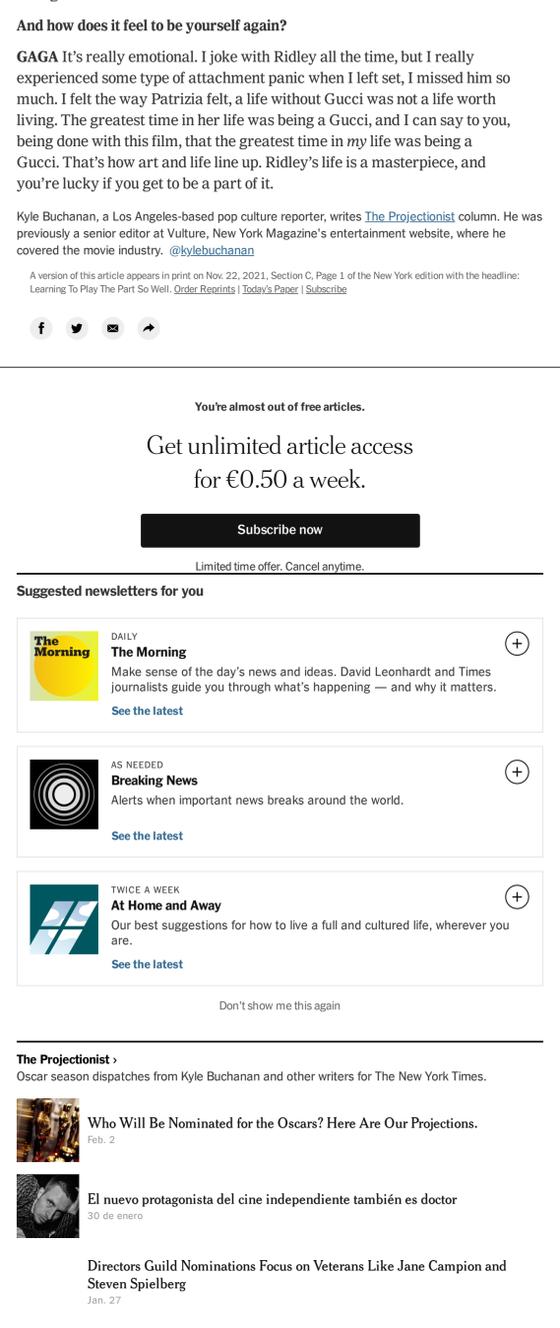
GAGA One of the first things I said to Ridley was "I don't know that she had really loved Maurizio." And he said, "Yes, she did."

RIDLEY SCOTT The key thing for me was that however bad it gets, there was something that you liked about these people. She goes after him by design, but I think she is enchanted by his gentlemanly behavior, and it evolves into affection and love. Love is a powerful bond, but you've got to be very careful, because love can turn easily into hatred in a flash.

GAGA As soon as Ridley said it was love, I abandoned this idea that she was a gold digger and I investigated every possible article that I could find, any interview about her. I did not read the book.

Why not?

GAGA I started the book and it was filled with opinions, so I threw it out. I didn't want anyone to shape my thinking. Even the idea of meeting Patrizia Gucci, once I watched her in her interviews, I thought, this would certainly be a bad idea, because she would have an agenda and want me to tell the story in the way she wants it to be told.



Lady Gaga said she understood her character's fear that she would never be best: "I think part of being an artist is just this endless idea that we're not good enough." Ryan Pfluger for The New York Times

Talk to me about staying in Patrizia's accent for so many months. Was that tiring?

GAGA I think it would have done more of a number on me had I not practiced it so much. I would be talking like this with my mother, with friends, so that I, Stefani, could speak like this and it would be totally natural. It's like muscle memory, so that when you're in the scene, the accent is not in the way of the visceral quality of what's happening in the room.

If I had a jazz show next week, if I don't rehearse ahead of time, my voice is not ready for the show. My approach to this was not different than my commitment to music. But I want to be clear: I don't think it's about sensationalizing method acting or being in character as the only way to do things. It would have been harder for me to go in and out of character on set than to stay in it.

SCOTT There was a moment where I thought, "Wait a minute, was she always like this? I've forgotten." The very first meeting we had, she was being, dare I say, American . . .

GAGA I am American! I'm Italian American.

SCOTT But then, I thought, "I'm not going to question this, because it's working for me."

Gaga, how did you come up with Patrizia's body language? In the way she saunters and the way she dances, she seems to have a much lower center of gravity than you do.

GAGA In some techniques of acting, they call it "using the animal." I used three different animals for Patrizia. I began as a house cat, which has this kind of alluring quality but also can be a bit aloof, and I used that with her physicality. Then she transforms when she sees Aldo embrace Maurizio. She thinks to herself, "Maybe I can convince Maurizio to become closer with the family, be part of the family business." In that scene, I made the choice to transform from a cat into a fox.

Then, when [a Gucci lawyer] comes to my daughter's school to serve me divorce papers — meaning Maurizio didn't have the courage to do it himself — I transform from a fox into a panther. It's something that I worked on, studying the panther. What are the ways in which the panther seduces its prey? What are the ways in which the panther is slow before it pounces? What happens when the panther is so engaged with starvation and hunger that it goes into survival mode? I always felt like Patrizia was surviving her whole life.

How so?

GAGA She was never as prestigious or shiny or tailored as the Guccis. There was always something about her that was a little bit embarrassing and a little bit off. This is a woman that wants more for herself, but in my opinion, all of her power is really an illusion, the way patriarchy is endlessly an illusion. It's the way that as a woman, I can feel like I have power, but as soon as a man tells me no, then my entire world crumbles. She's simply disposed of, over and over, and I believe that's what compelled this murder.

How did you rationalize that act?

GAGA I believe with everything in my being that this woman is walking around Milan deeply regretting what she did. I think she was so traumatized that she made a big mistake. I didn't try to make her lovable, but I think that Ridley allowed her to be lovable because he empowered me as a woman.

I have to say this, Ridley: There's not a lot of men that are directors who would empower a woman to be ugly on camera. When I aged and had scenes where I was in this embarrassing, desperate state, he embraced the ugliness of this character and that should be commended, because it is ugly to be disposed of for your looks, it is ugly to be left for a younger woman. So I appreciate that Ridley took something that was sort of a "sexy murder" and he let it be ugly.

Ridley Scott has two films out this season: "House of Gucci," due this month, and "The Last Duel," which was released last month to poor box office results that he called "exceedingly disappointing." Ryan Pfluger for The New York Times

Ridley, not a lot of directors have been able to make major movies during this pandemic. You've made two, including "The Last Duel," which experienced a Covid-related shutdown last spring. How have you managed to weather that storm?

SCOTT My team is the best in the business. I remember I was making the first one in a rather beautiful place [in the French countryside], and I'm not a great countryside guy because it's deep-green and damp and I start thinking about that vodka martini around about three in the afternoon, which is fatal. Suddenly, there was this monster coming at us called Covid, so I said, "We're going to close down." That helped a lot because it enabled me to edit where I got to, but also to get full prep of two months storyboarding "Gucci."

GAGA I don't know if you felt this way, Rid, but because Covid was happening and the actors were either in our rooms or we were on set, life kind of floats away. I think it's part of why I liked to stay in character because what else am I going to do when I go back to my hotel room? How could I possibly turn it off? I have no interaction with the world other than with my actors and my director.

Ridley, how did you feel about the boxed office performance of "The Last Duel"? It got strong reviews and boasted big stars in Matt Damon and Adam Driver, but still underperformed in theaters.

SCOTT It was exceedingly disappointing. The fatal thing is when you think you've got it, you haven't — I thought I'd got it on "Blade Runner" and I hadn't! I was [crucified by a big critic at the time called Pauline Kael](#). It's why I never read critiques, ever. You have to be your own decider — if you worry about what the audience is thinking and what they may want, that's fatal. A good film will find itself, and now "Blade Runner" is in the Library of Congress.

But still, it must add some wind to your sails when people are excited about your work. Even while you were making "House of Gucci," the pictures from set caused an online sensation.

SCOTT No, totally. There's nothing like success to make you feel good in the morning, right? At the same time, if you get some kind of clip or hit, don't let it get to you. If you like what you did, move on.

GAGA I can't agree more. When you are making art to please people or seek praise, this is not sustainable. You're essentially passionate about getting people to love you as opposed to being passionate about the work. I know I lost my way as an artist for a while when I started to care about what would make people like me. Then I rebelled, because why should I follow a North Star that keeps moving?

My whole career, I've had ups, I've had downs. When you were talking about "Blade Runner" I was thinking about my record "[Artpop](#)" and how they put out critiques before it even came out. Because of freedom of speech, people can write whatever they want, even if it's lies, but years later, it's one of my most critically acclaimed albums.

We have no idea what this movie's going to do after it opens, but it doesn't matter because we know we made something great. When you get to be lucky like me and be in one of his movies, you know that no matter what, this is going to last a lifetime.

You look at Ridley with a lot of affection.

GAGA I love Ridley so much. I felt he was watching over me. He saw me falling into this character more and more all the time, and he used to say, "You good, dude? You OK?" I would reply with whatever the truth was and he would always say to me, "Whatever this is, I hope you leave it here."

So how did you feel when you left Patrizia and all of that behind?

GAGA To be honest, I was really ready to let go. She's a tremendously complicated individual and when you're living in survival mode all the time — and she was *always* in survival mode — it creates such a sentiment of trauma constantly. When I got on that plane back from Italy, I threw out my cigarettes. I threw out the booze, I landed in L.A. and cleaned my life up because I couldn't live that way anymore. It was killing me because it was killing her.

And how does it feel to be yourself again?

GAGA It's really emotional. I joke with Ridley all the time, but I really experienced some type of attachment panic when I left set, I missed him so much. I felt the way Patrizia felt, a life without Gucci was not a life worth living. The greatest time in her life was being a Gucci, and I can say to you, being done with this film, that the greatest time in my life was being a Gucci. That's how art and life line up. Ridley's life is a masterpiece, and you're lucky if you get to be a part of it.

Kyle Buchanan, a Los Angeles-based pop culture reporter, writes [The Projectionist](#) column. He was previously a senior editor at Vulture, New York Magazine's entertainment website, where he covered the movie industry. [@kylebuchanan](#)

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