



SALMA HAYEK

SHE COULD HAVE BEEN THE BOMBSHELL, PERIOD. INSTEAD, SHE BECAME A RISK-TAKING, SNAKE-CHARMING, SHOW-RUNNING CHARISMA MACHINE—UNAFRAID TO TAKE WHAT IS RIGHTFULLY HERS, BOTH IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA AND BEHIND THE SCENES

Salma Hayek was playing the title role in the popular tele-novela *Teresa* in 1991 when she left Mexico to try to crack into Hollywood. One night she landed as a guest on a Univision talk show hosted by the comedian Paul Rodriguez. “Why are you here?” he asked her, in Spanish. “In Mexico you are a big star, and here you are an extra. There are no roles for us here, haven’t you noticed?”

“I have. And I am going to change that,” Hayek replied.

Director Robert Rodriguez, who had been searching for the female lead opposite Antonio Banderas for his thriller *Desperado*, caught Hayek’s appearance. The next day, he called her to audition, and, after doing some convincing, she got the part.

In the 20 years since, that fire within has come to define not only Hayek—one of Hollywood’s fiercest social and political activists—but her roles as well. As Santanico Pandemonium in the 1996 cult classic *From Dusk Till Dawn*, Hayek did a snake-charmer dance that left Quentin Tarantino’s psychopath speechless and made her a sensation (8 million YouTube views and counting). She played steely and damaged as a singer in Mark Christopher’s *54*; she riveted in an uncredited turn as Benicio del Toro’s mistress in Stephen Soderbergh’s 2001 award-winning *Traffic*. And with scene-stealing arcs on *30 Rock* and *Ugly Betty* (the latter of which she also produced), she demonstrated that she was a seriously funny actress in addition to being a serious one. “She brings enormous passion, enormous mystery, enormous beauty,” says Eve Ensler, the playwright of *The Vagina Monologues*, in which Hayek appeared in 2008. “And not just her own, but that which she creates.”

Her career as a film producer began out of a kind of necessity with 2002’s *Frida*, Julie Taymor’s elegiac portrait of the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, which Hayek battled for eight long years to bring to the screen. “I was obsessed with her since I was 14,” Hayek, 49, says of Kahlo, whom she played to sweeping critical acclaim. “Then, when I came [to the U.S.], they were going to do that movie, and I tried to audition and couldn’t even get a meeting with the casting director. Then that movie fell apart, and I realized, No one is going to give me this. I have to create it for myself.”

Hayek’s instincts proved spot-on: *Frida*, made for just \$12 million, grossed more than \$56 million globally and earned six Oscar nominations, including one for Hayek as best actress. (It won for original score and makeup.) “I ended up producing because I did not like myself complaining, complaining, complaining about the system,” she explains. “I said to myself, You know what? I’m not going to whine about anything that I didn’t make any effort to change.” Hayek’s *Frida* costar Alfred Molina puts it plainly: “I’ve said that if Salma had been white and male, she would have been bigger than Harvey Weinstein. I still believe that. Salma is a great businesswoman; she’s creative in a way that takes people by surprise.”

This year, Hayek’s proudest achievement as a producer (and as a voice actor) is Kahlil Gibran’s *The Prophet*, an animated telling of the best-selling fable of spiritual renewal voiced by Hayek, Liam Neeson, and Quvenzhané Wallis. “Imagine what I faced when I said I want to turn this philosophy book into an animated movie—for everyone at every age to enjoy a piece of it,” she says. But the 5’2” powerhouse, who with her husband, the Parisian Kering CEO François-Henri Pinault, has an eight-year-old daughter, Valentina, has hardly abandoned acting. This month, we’ll see her as an evil queen in Matteo Garrone’s *Tale of Tales*, a surrealistic take on fairy tales, and as Farnez, the wife of a wealthy Jewish jeweler who finds her life turned upside down by the 1979 Islamist uprising in Iran, in Wayne Blair’s haunting, harrowing *Septembers of Shiraz*. “I’ve always found Salma full of life and enthusiasm; she brings that same energy and curiosity to her work as well,” says her *Shiraz* costar Adrien Brody. “She was the most supportive and committed partner.”

Hayek, a UNICEF advocate, whose latest charitable crusade is working with Syrian refugees, also makes a point to support other women in Hollywood. Meeting her at a party a few years ago, Zoe Saldana was thunderstruck when Hayek literally took her by the arm and introduced her to everyone she knew there. “Ever since that day,” Saldana says, “I have made myself a promise to introduce every woman I meet to every other woman I know.” —*Michael Callahan*



Dogma, 1999 “At the time I was Catholic. But I also believed in going beyond yourself. It was scary, but there was something really smart about it.”



Frida, 2002 “I knew she was misunderstood. I wanted to set the record straight—and inspire other women with the one thing I knew about her, which was her courage to be unique.”



30 Rock, 2009 “I love Tina Fey. She’s a girl’s girl: She’s smart, she’s brilliant, she’s fun. She does genius with a light heart.”



Savages, 2012 “Oliver Stone said, ‘I know you’re tough, but now you’re a mother. Do you think you can be that tough?’ I said, ‘Oh my God—motherhood just makes you tougher.’”



Tale of Tales, 2015 “I love this film. I think it’s a masterpiece. But it’s not for everyone. You know how much I like being a rebel.”

Hair by Peter Savio at Opus Beauty; makeup by Jo Baker at Forward Artists; manicure by Ashlie Johnson for Chanel Le Vernis at the Wall Group; fashion assistants: Ahmad Francols and Dolly Pratt; produced by Brandon Zagha for Brachfeld; film stills, from left: © Miramax/courtesy Everett Collection (2); © 2015 Archimede s.r.l./JFC Films; Jessica Miglio/NBC/NBCU Photo Bank via Getty Images



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Styled by Simon Robins