

Music Box Films Presents

MANOLO: THE BOY WHO MADE SHOES FOR LIZARDS



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LOGLINE

The in-depth portrait of legendary fashion designer Manolo Blahnik and how his extraordinary dedication to his craft led him to become the world's most famous luxury shoemaker. Featuring Anna Wintour, Rihanna, Karlie Kloss and more.

SHORT SUMMARY

Manolo is the in-depth portrait of legendary shoe designer Manolo Blahnik, whose impeccable dedication to his craft set a fashion standard among celebrities, stylists, and industry icons. Longtime fashion journalist Michael Roberts presents this never-before-seen peek into Mr. Blahnik's world, featuring a 'who's who' of the fashion and entertainment industries including Anna Wintour, Rihanna, Paloma Picasso, Iman, Naomi Campbell, Rupert Everett, Karlie Kloss, André Leon Talley, and more.

LONG SUMMARY

Manolo is the in-depth portrait of legendary fashion designer Manolo Blahnik and how his extraordinary dedication to his craft led him to become the world's most famous luxury shoemaker, revered by celebrities, stylists, and industry icons for generations.

Growing up on a remote Spanish Canary island, Manolo made shoes out of sweet wrappers for lizards that he caught in his family's garden. After opening his first store in London in 1973 and coming of age in fashion capitals such as Paris and New York, Manolo now has shops and department store concessions in over 20 countries and retains full control of the business, still creating every shoe, even hand-carving the wooden forms himself.

Director and longtime fashion journalist Michael Roberts presents this never-before-seen peek into Mr. Blahnik's world, featuring a 'who's who' of the fashion and entertainment industries including Anna Wintour, Rihanna, Paloma Picasso, Iman, Naomi Campbell, Rupert Everett, Karlie Kloss, Isaac Mizrahi, and André Leon Talley.

INTERVIEW WITH MANOLO BLAHNIK

What was the experience of making the film for you?

Although I am never completely relaxed and comfortable when a camera is hovering in the vicinity - I have managed to adjust. I am very happy with the documentary, the images are exquisite and they represent real glimpses of my life; designing shoes, long periods working at the manufacturers, or enjoying the tranquility of an English country garden.

What is your relationship with Michael Roberts and what made you decide to work with him on this project?

I have been friends with him for over 30 years, but even so I still had to give it a tremendous amount of thought - although, having said that, Michael is (uniquely) Michael. I came to the conclusion that if I was to agree, there would be no better person to tell this story than him. I knew that with the film's direction in his hands, my work would be photographed beautifully, my story represented truthfully and I could be myself throughout the entire process. He knows me so well. With all of this in mind, I said "Yes".

Can you explain the title of the film?

It really is what it is, when I was a small boy I did in fact make shoes for Lizards out of sweet wrappers oh and dogs!

The film is the first in-depth look at you as a creator but also touches on elements of your personal life, which you've traditionally been very private about – why do you feel this is the right time and medium to open up this side of yourself?

There simply is no right or wrong time, the opportunity came along and I decided to go for it, after all I have been talking about my friends all my life!

What do you hope audiences will get out of the film?

I hope that everyone who watches is entertained and that they experience a connection with the imagery as well as with the many people who have taken

part. The audience will get a little insight into my life, and the occasion to enjoy Michael Roberts' creative vision and inimitable wit.

We see a lot of what inspires you in the film, from a selection of muses, time periods and iconic cinema – could you talk a bit about how these elements come together for you and what stands out as your main creative drivers?

I don't have muses, I don't like that word. I am inspired by everything, by people, by books.

How do you feel about the worldwide obsession with Manolos?

I have no perception of it, I don't see it. Although when I hear about the people who attended my Art of Shoes exhibition in Milan and St Petersburg at The Hermitage, this really does surprise me.

What made you decide that footwear was your primary outlet for your artistic expression?

I always knew I wanted to be a creative, I started as a set and costume designer but following Mrs Diana Vreeland's advice I focused on the design of shoes. I must say I will always be grateful for her advice and support.

What inspires your designs?

Everything that surrounds me can be an inspiration. I might not know at the beginning but later on, it can appear in my imagination and I will translate it into sketches to finally sample the shoe. It can be a book, a film, an exhibition or a building ... I am a very visual person so if I like something I will never forget and it will somehow appear in one of my collections.

After decades in the business, how do you account for your recession-proof success and that your company remains independent and owner-operated?

I make good shoes which are good quality, there really is no other secret!

You recently collaborated with Rihanna – do you see any additional collaborations in your future? Is there anyone you would like to work with that you haven't yet?

I am currently working with and supporting a young menswear designer, Grace Wales Bonner. I designed the shoes for her Spirituals II Autumn Winter collection show in January and agreed to make them again for her next show. It is always a wonderful challenge and experience to work with young sophisticated designers. Grace has a special kind of magic, it's exciting to see!

You've built an extensive legacy, are there people still working with you that have been from the beginning? If so, what are your thoughts on the journey/relationship you've been on with them?

Yes everyone who I worked with the beginning, I still work with now – I don't like change. I like to work with people who I have fun with, that is the most important thing – to have fun!

This film chronicles a long and rich career which has spanned many decades - do you have any plans to retire? What is the future of the Manolo Blahnik brand when that happens?

No never, I just keep going, keep going! I just want to keep making beautiful shoes!

MANOLO BLAHNIK PERSONAL STATEMENT

Several times in the past I have been approached by people who wanted to make a film about my life, but I was never really keen on the idea. I do not like to see myself on screen, and I have always been quite private and very camera shy. Nor has it ever felt like it was the right time in my career to do it. So even when Michael Roberts, my friend of over 30 years, approached me with a proposal about his idea for a film about my work, I was still not completely convinced. I have never been a narcissist, and I certainly don't enjoy being the focus of attention. Although, having said that, Michael is (uniquely) *Michael*. So, having given it careful thought, I came to the conclusion that if I was to agree, there would be no better person to tell this story than him. I knew that with the film's direction in his hands, my work would be photographed beautifully, my story represented truthfully and I could be *myself* throughout the entire process. He knows me so well. With all of this in mind, I said "Yes".

Having worked with him before, I know that Michael needs to have complete creative freedom - to which I had no objections. He has now been following me to many places, for nearly two years, filming a diverse range of moments in my life. Although I am never completely relaxed and comfortable when a camera is hovering in the vicinity - I have managed to adjust. The rushes that I have seen so far - I have loved! The images are exquisite and they represent real glimpses of my life; designing shoes, long periods working at the manufacturers, or enjoying the tranquillity of an English country garden. All of my passions and my quirks; Michael understands so well what I do, and why I do it. Equally I know how extraordinary his many talents are, which he has combined to create this cinematic portrait of who I am.

I am very excited for people to see the film, and I hope that everyone who watches is entertained and that they experience a connection with the imagery as well as with the many people who have taken part, all of whom I truly adore and respect, from Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi and Professor Mary Beard to Anna Wintour, Rihanna, Paloma Picasso and Naomi Campbell.

I hope the images in the film will speak for themselves, and through them the audience will get a little insight into my life, and the occasion to enjoy Michael Roberts' creative vision and inimitable wit.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Manolo Blahnik is an international fashion legend, world-famous and yet strangely unknown. His A-List clientele spans three generations of Hollywood. Madonna is frequently quoted as saying his shoes are better than sex and when Carrie Bradshaw was mugged in a celebrated episode of *Sex and the City* the one thing she begged to hold onto was her signature pair of 'Manolos'.

During his professional lifetime, the designer has accumulated more than thirty major fashion industry awards but he is also Manolo Blahnik O.B.E (Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire), living a quiet, gentlemanly, mostly solitary life between his London pied-a-terre, a townhouse in Bath and a very private family home on the Canary Islands.

In contemporary society throughout the world, 'Manolos' have become synonymous with uniquely elegant, high end luxury shoes. They are said to empower women as a symbol of feminism, yet remain objects of great beauty and startling sexuality. There are, in fact, women perfectly happy to display his shoes as works of art rather than wear them, and even some, in cases of undying devotion, who plan to be buried in them.

Manolo's reach is broad - he has been the subject of cartoons in *The New Yorker* as well as the *New York Post*. Fashionistas pursue him to the point of obsessiveness, demanding he autograph the soles of their Manolo pumps. But what is it like to be Manolo Blahnik? How does he create? What is the personal history of this world-renowned shoe designer who is entirely self-taught.

Having known Manolo for over thirty years I can truly say he is a multifaceted intellectual and romantic whose omni cultural mind and ingenious work is made for entertaining cinema (he is a great aficionado of film) and who can engage with filmic admirers of his work such as Pedro Almodóvar on an equal footing. To film

him amongst the workers in one of his several Italian shoe factories, where he can be found intently sculpting the shape of his latest heel in wood on an old metal file, is to be put in mind of a possessed orchestral conductor or a master chef in white work coat and idiosyncratic white gloves whipping together the ingredients for a sumptuous feast. In capturing the world of someone who is both a public figure and cypher shrouded in solitude, the fascination and challenge lies in conveying the artist's rich inner life and fertile creativity.

Manolo: the Boy Who Made Shoes for Lizards covers young Manolo's formal family life and sheltered childhood on The Canary Islands, through to his student years in Geneva and Paris during the tumultuous student revolution of 1968. It will carry us beyond the splash he made diving into the heart of London Society during the razzle-dazzle Seventies and the real impact he made once he set his sights on a future designing luxury shoes. And what shoes!

And yet, behind it all we can consistently see Manolo, a small, intense boy fashioning his sweet wrappings into tiny shoes for the unsuspecting lizards zigzagging here and there around his family's island home.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

Often described as 'visionary', Michael Roberts is former Fashion Editor of *The Sunday Times*, Style Director and Art Director of *Tatler*, Design Director of *British Vogue*, Paris Editor of *Vanity Fair* and contributing Editor of *Condé Nast Traveller*. A celebrated Illustrator, particularly collage, and acknowledged Film Maker, Michael Roberts is a recipient of an MTV award.

For over twenty-five years, Michael Roberts has been a contributing photographer and illustrator to *L'Uomo Vogue*, *British Vogue*, *Vogue Japan*, *French Vogue*, *Vogue Hommes*, *Vogue España*, *GQ* (US, British & Italian), *Vanity Fair*, *The Sunday Times*, *Independent on Sunday*, *Interview*, *V Magazine*, *i-D*, and the *New Yorker*. In 1997, Michael Roberts was appointed the first Fashion Director of the *New Yorker*. The following decade Graydon Carter made him Fashion & Style director of *Vanity Fair*. He continues with his honorarium title, Style Editor-at-Large.

In 1998, Callaway published his first book of A-Z illustrations entitled *Jungle ABC*, which was followed in 2000 by *Mumbo Jumbo*. Chronicle released his first character-based illustrated story *Snowman in Paradise* in 2004, which inspired the Unicef/Gucci book *Snowman in Africa* in 2009. Steidl published *The Snippy World of Fashion Artist Michael Roberts* to much acclaim in 2005, a collection of his illustrations for which he was described as the "Cocteau of the fashion world". Fall 2007 saw the publication of his first photography book *Shot in Sicily* which presents Michael's complex view of Sicily beyond the world of fashion over a period of twenty years. Fall 2008 he published a book of illustration and verse *Fashion Victims*, an acutely witty and tongue-in-cheek observation of the fashion world which was glowingly reviewed as an "instant artifact" by *The New York Times*. He has also been a columnist for newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal*.

Michael has written Grace Coddington's memoir and edited the two volumes of her work, *Thirty Years of Fashion at Vogue* and *The American Vogue Years*. He wrote and directed *Manolo: the Boy Who Made Shoes for Lizards*, a documentary on the celebrated shoe designer Manolo Blahnik for whose book *Fleeting Gestures and Obsessions* he was the principal photographer. His collage ceiling commissioned for the London restaurant Sexy Fish sits alongside the work of Frank Gehry and Damian Hirst. His book *GingerNutz*, the story of an orangutan born in the wilds of Borneo who has dreams of making it big in the fashion world, will be published in September.

ABOUT MANOLO BLAHNIK

With a career spanning over 45 years, Manolo Blahnik has become one of the world's most influential shoe designers. His shoes have spellbound an international set of adoring and loyal devotees across the globe.

Born in the Canary Islands to a Spanish mother and a Czech father, Blahnik studied languages and art in Geneva before moving to Paris in 1965 where he decided to become a set designer. On a visit to New York in 1969, he showed his theatre designs to Diana Vreeland, then editor-in-chief of *American Vogue*, who honed in on his shoes and encouraged him to concentrate on them.

Blahnik learnt the art of making shoes by visiting factories where he talked to machine operators, pattern cutters and technicians. By 1971, he was in London making shoes. A year later, Ossie Clark, then the most famous designer in London, used his shoes and from there his career blossomed. In 1973 he opened his first boutique in London's Chelsea.

Blahnik is a craftsman. The exquisitely shaped lasts and heels he creates for his shoes are still perfected with his very own hands. The lines and silhouette of his distinctive designs, however, remain instantly recognizable as unique, inimitable exercises in precision and balance, exquisite workmanship and luxury. "Shoes," he says, "help transform a woman."

With four seasons a year, Mr. Blahnik still designs every shoe himself. He travels to the factories near Milan where the shoes are produced and personally works on the lasts and heels, chooses materials and accessories as well as overseeing the artisans who develop each prototype. The brand is known for its original, creative flair as well as timeless classic styles for which loyal customers come back again and again.

From the flagship store in London, the brand has expanded worldwide. The United States has recognised Manolo Blahnik's exuberant brilliance over the years, with the CFDA honoring his talent with awards in 1987, 1990, and 1998. The British Fashion Council presented awards in 1990, 1999 and 2003, whilst his native Spain has presented him with La Aguja de Oro (2001) and La Medalla de Oro en Merito en las Bellas Artes, awarded by His Majesty Don Juan Carlos I, King of Spain.

Manolo Blahnik by Colin McDowell, the first book about Manolo's life was published in 2000 written by the renowned fashion historian, who having spent a lot of time with the designer takes the reader on a journey through Manolo's youth, travels and his biggest passion: work.

In 2003, the Design Museum in London opened a major exhibition of his work. To coincide with this event, Thames & Hudson published *Manolo Blahnik Drawings*, a collection of some of the best sketches Blahnik uses at the outset of the design process, and which are as coveted as the shoes themselves.

In 2005, his lifelong friend Eric Boman published *Blahnik by Boman* (Thames & Hudson), a photographic celebration of Blahnik's shoes, with an introduction by Paloma Picasso, whom they both met in the 1960s. Also in that year, he was asked by Oscar winning costume designer Milena Canonero to design the shoes for Sofia Coppola's movie, *Marie Antoinette* which went on to win an Academy Award for Best Costume Design.

In November 2007, Manolo Blahnik was awarded an Honorary Commander of the British Empire (CBE) in recognition of his status as one of the most successful and influential designers of our time. In September 2008 he was presented with the Rodeo Drive Walk of Style Award. In November 2011 Manolo received the Footwear News Lifetime Achievement Award in the United States. In 2012 he was awarded the British Fashion Council Outstanding Achievement Award and the very prestigious Premio Nacional de Diseño de Moda in Spain.

In September 2013 Manolo Blahnik for the very first time staged a presentation at London Fashion Week and in 2014 in New York City. 2015 was a very exciting year for Manolo as among other things he held a presentation at London Collections: Men in January, designed a capsule collection of limited edition socks with the German brand Falke, launched a new line of clutch bags, published a book entitled *Fleeting Gestures and Obsessions* and was awarded the 2015 Couture Council Artistry of Fashion Award by the Couture Council of America.

2016 saw the opening of a second store in London, 43 years after his first store opened. The new women's and men's boutique is located in the quintessentially British Burlington Arcade.

In February 2016, the brand also launched its much-awaited e-commerce site in partnership with FarFetch using FarFetch's 'marketplace' platform in a mono-brand environment for the first time ever.

In May of the same year Manolo Blahnik presented the first of the three collaborations with the singer Rihanna of a capsule collection of six styles of shoes designed by Manolo and the international superstar. In July of the same year, Manolo Blahnik collaborated with revolutionary label Vetements on their SS17 show, producing a range of limited edition styles.

Manolo Blahnik points of distribution total at 290 points of sale in 33 countries worldwide with 13 standalone stores and a recently launched ecommerce platform - manoloblahnik.com.

Along with a leading women's line which includes evening and day bags, Manolo Blahnik also has a successful men's collection.

MANOLO BLAHNIK AWARDS AND HONORS

- 1987 Special Award – CFDA (Council of Fashion Designers of America), USA
- 1990 Accessory Designer of the Year – British Fashion Council, UK
Accessory Award – CFDA (Council of Fashion Designers of America), USA
Antonio Lopez Award – Hispanic Designer Award Washington, USA
- 1991 Medal of Honor Award in Footwear Design – FFANY (Fashion Footwear Association of New York), USA
- 1997 Stiletto Award – CFDA (Council of Fashion Designers of America), USA
- 1998 Designer of the Year Award – Footwear News, USA
- 1999 Accessory Designer of the Year – British Fashion Council, UK
Silver Slipper Award – Houston Museum of Fine Art (first time ever awarded to a Shoe Designer), USA
- 2000 Neiman Marcus Award, USA
- 2001 Honorary Doctorate of Arts – Royal London College of Art, UK
Honorary Royal Designer for Industry – Royal Society of Arts of Britain, UK
- 2002 La Medalla de Oro en Mérito en las Bellas Artes – Awarded by S.M. Don Juan Carlos I, King of Spain, Spain
- 2003 La Medalla de Oro de Canarias, Spain
Shoe Designer of the Year – Footwear News, USA
- 2005 Pinnacle in Art & Design Award – Pratt Institute, New York, USA
Lifetime Achievement Award – Telve Magazine, Spain
- 2007 Honorary Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (CBE) – Awarded by HRH Queen Elizabeth of England, UK
- 2008 Rodeo Drive Walk of Style Award, USA
Prix De La Mode: Outstanding International Achievement Award – Marie Claire, Spain
- 2010 Felicidad Duce School Fashion Prize, Spain
- 2011 Lifetime Achievement Award – Footwear News, USA

- 2012 Honorary Degree from Bath Spa University, UK
Outstanding Achievement Award – British Fashion Council, UK
Premio Nacional de Diseño de Moda, Spain
- 2013 Spirit Condé Nast Traveller Award, Spain
Honoree of the Hispanic Society of America (Medalla Sorolla), USA
- 2015 Lifetime Achievement Award – Elle, UK
- 2016 Doctor Honoris Causa from the University of Laguna, Tenerife
- 2017 Collaboration of the Year Award, Vetements Footwear News

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