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PAULA GARCES

words: David Crowley | photo: Philippe Regard © www.philipperegard.com

Hollywood is a tough town and actresses feel the pain like no other. Established stars and up-and-coming hopefuls continually feel the pressure of looking forever young, and fitting into that size two Prada dress. For some however, good genes go a long way. New York City-based actress Paula Garces is a fresh face who had the good fortune of creating a successful career out of a chance meeting with director, Martin Scorsese.

Paula was 11 years old when the opportunity of a lifetime fell into her lap. The famed director was searching for kids to appear in a public service commercial he was shooting. "It wasn't even an audition really," she says. "I went in, sat with him and talked. Then I went home and told my mom that I met with this director with funny eyebrows and she freaked out. I had no idea who he was." Even though she had no clue who Scorsese was, she landed the commercial that marked the beginning of her career.

Growing up in the Spanish Harlem has given Paula a unique perspective on life, and a fierce determination to succeed. While the story of her natural art and dance abilities leading her to a career in acting is nothing new, it does take a certain conviction to make it in Hollywood, when you live in NYC. But the east coast address hasn't been an obstacle thus far. She's landed bit parts here and there, but became recognizable for her starring role in the film *Clockstoppers*, where the then twenty-something actress played a teenager. For all the *Law & Order SVU* junkies, Paula has become a regular on the series. "I'm playing a young CSI tech in the show," she says. "I love doing a role like this because it gives me a chance to use big words and look very smart." But, her dream role is to play opera diva Maria Callas. "Her life seems so amazing and interesting," she says.

Unfortunately, you won't see her appearing nude in that movie, or any other. When Paula signs movie contracts, there is a specific 'no nudity' clause that is included. However, that doesn't mean she won't fudge the lines for the right role. "I'm not against nudity in a film, but I don't see the point for me," she chuckles. "But I certainly wouldn't have a problem going body shopping if I needed a double."

Back in Chelsea, you may see Paula wandering Manhattan streets or visiting her family uptown. Or maybe she'll serve you a muffin at her gourmet café, Earth to You. The café features a number of specialty items and delicacies guaranteed to tantalize the palate. "I wanted to start something in the city that people would make a point of checking out," she says proudly. "It's a friendly place in a big city. And, oh yeah, the food is amazing."

Between her shooting schedule on *Law & Order*, serving tasty sandwiches to busy Manhattanites, and traveling to Los Angeles for movie roles, Paula has little time to travel to her favorite destinations, or even visit her home in Columbia. However, the go-getter is happy with the way everything has worked out. "I'm a city girl," she says proudly. "My work is here. My family is here. Life couldn't be better."

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