

## COVER STORY



# Connor Storrie for Vogue Adria on sudden fame, (un)seriousness, and the role of art today

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**In the days when the collective euphoria surrounding the series “Heated Rivalry” is reaching its peak, Teodora Jeremić spoke with Connor Storrie about what it feels like to become famous overnight, why you shouldn’t take yourself too seriously, and how the role of art manifests today.**

At its core, life is unpredictable. That is both the best and the worst thing one could ever say about it. More often than not, despite all our attempts to plan it, control it, anticipate it, we have absolutely no idea what will happen next. The tools we rely on—those we even practice and perfect—often prove insufficient in preparing us for what lies ahead. In truth, we can never be absolutely certain of anything, because unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately),

ing depends solely on us. Milan Kundera was right: the lightness of our being truly is

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*Heated Rivalry* is a seven-year-old novel by Rachel Reid that belongs to that particular category of books not everyone stumbles upon. So niche—tailored for devoted romance readers with a very specific sub-genre—that while it could certainly have become a hit on BookTok within a defined demographic, its chances of reaching a truly massive global audience seemed slim. The series adaptation was filmed in under forty days for a Canadian streaming platform most of the global population had never heard of. The same could be said for Connor Storrie or his co-star Hudson Williams, who cast as two impossibly charismatic, self-assured professional hockey players who, beyond their passion for the sport, share another, far more intimate one. Each other.

If we were to follow the “standard parameters” of global success, *Heated Rivalry* would hardly seem like a guaranteed triumph. And yet, what happened instead transported us somewhere entirely different. It turned a page in the sacred book of popular culture, carving out new space for how we perceive success and collective fandom. Over the past few months, conversations about this series have reverberated across all meridians and in all the fields – from memes to podcasts and everything in between. And it is easy to understand why. Beautiful people. An amalgam of longing, love, and rivalry. Charged dynamics. Tension. Women existing beyond standard heteronormative roles. A niche experience with a happy ending. In short, almost everything we wish would surround us—on screen and in life.

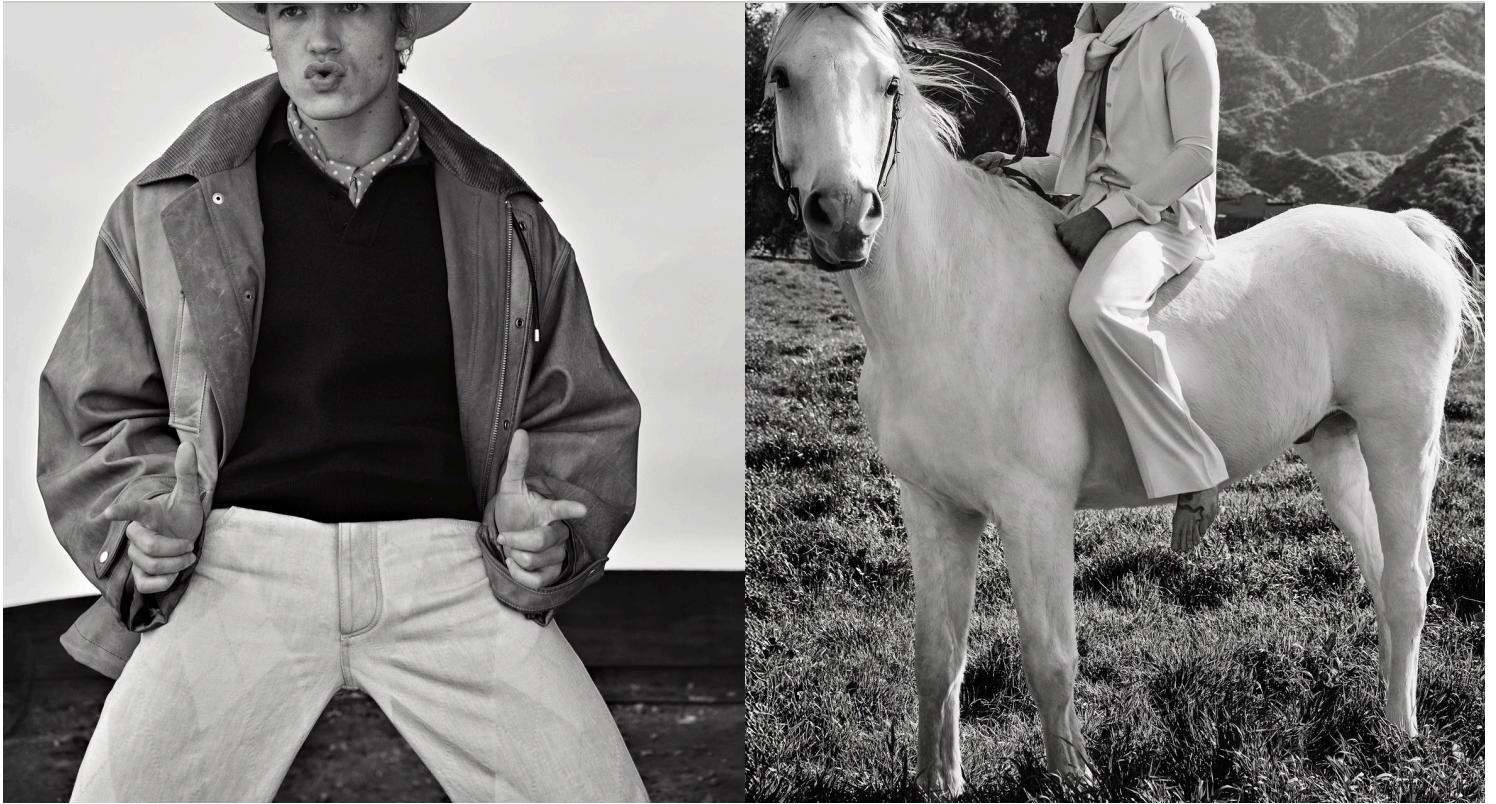


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In the thirty-second pause between a charming “Ćao, kako si?” delivered in flawless Serbian with the softest Russian inflection, and a casual “I will be back in no time,” I found myself contemplating the dizzying speed with which *Heated Rivalry* fever swept the world—launching Connor and Hudson into the stratosphere of not only film stardom but fashion as well. I mentally recount the months between the start of filming and the global hype. Not too much. At that moment, Connor returned to his armchair, coffee in hand. In Los Angeles, the day has only just begun, and after an all-day shoot for the *Vogue Adria* cover, he appears rested, enthusiastic, almost untouched by exhaustion. There is an honesty about him—rare, necessary, and impossible to manufacture.

A once-in-a-generation talent like Connor Storrie, photographed at Sable Movie Ranch—the legendary backdrop to more than 10,000 feature films, television series, and music videos including *Oppenheimer*, *Top Gun: Maverick*, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*,

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deserve to be savored.



“How insane does everything that’s happened over the past few months feel?”

“It feels great,” he laughs. “But honestly, I haven’t even had enough time to think about any of it. I always have a little emotional delay. When something happens, it takes me weeks to process and connect with it. And in this case, maybe that’s not a bad thing. If I had sat down and really thought about everything, I have a feeling it would have become overwhelming.”

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relentless flood of information, faces, opinions, actions. It becomes nearly impossible to discern what is truly relevant, what is worth fighting for, which direction to move in, whom to listen to. Perhaps the greatest challenge of modern existence is remaining present and devoted within it all.

“I don’t even know the answer,” Connor admits. “But I consciously try to be present and aware of what’s happening, because it’s very easy to forget when you’re constantly on the treadmill. There’s so much going on. I put a lot of energy into staying grounded in where I am, what I’m doing, who I’m speaking to. I also limit my time online, how much I expose myself to both positive and negative commentary. We often forget—especially because of social media—that just because everyone has a public platform for their opinion doesn’t mean it is really important. It comes and goes. Someone being loud doesn’t make them right. I’ve also realized I need a creative outlet. After a few weeks of not writing, creating, thinking, planning, I feel lost. I need tactile things to ground me. Making music, writing, planning films. That brings me back to my center. That’s where I have control. Where I’m not just playing a role.”

Does that mean that, unlike Rozanov—whom we might describe as a hedonist in constant pursuit of the new, the thrilling, the different—Connor might instead carry the label of a perfectionist?



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“When I was younger, I did gymnastics,” he says. “And honestly, I’ve never been great at team sports, because I love collaboration, but I don’t like my success depending entirely on others. So yes, that’s where the perfectionism comes from,” he laughs. “I’m competitive. I like control, precision, nuance, dedication, hard work. I believe in those things. You need them if you want to be an actor. On the other hand, my family moved a lot—I changed 13 schools,” he laughs again, “and that gave me flexibility. I’m comfortable with new people and starting over.”

A perfect balance of opposites. But how difficult is it to reconcile those extremes in everyday life?

“In acting, it’s easier to calm the perfectionism because I come in with the attitude that I will do my absolute best, and I truly trust the director to guide me. When I write or direct

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wanted to act—but I also knew I wanted to create my own work. Over time, I've gotten better at adapting to circumstances, and now limitations actually attract me. The film I'm finishing now, my directorial debut *Transaction Planet*, was shot on an iPhone, on locations around LA, with almost no budget. I find that limitation inspiring. I think it forces you to focus on what is important rather than get lost in production value or aesthetic. It makes you focus on the story—on what people say, what they do, and finding creative ways to make it happen. Being forced to adapt stretches you in such a cool way, and that brings a new form of creativity.”

A shift in perspective may well be the fundamental premise that makes *Heated Rivalry* a meeting point for the most unexpected fandoms. It brings us all to the same place, orbiting one essential theme: love. I will never forget the first time I watched *Eat Pray Love*. By the standards of high cinema, it might not rank among the most refined works, but its opening—when the author reflects on her friend working at a refugee center where, despite all tragedy, people speak most often about love—remains a lesson worth remembering forever. It's all about love. For a long time, love was out of fashion. And yet, we missed it desperately.

“When it comes to film, I've always been drawn to darker, more brutal, moody things, like work of Yorgos Lanthimos. I don't always gravitate toward feel-good movies. That is also funny because the things I write are darker too, but they always end up as love stories. I love absurd sensations, films that make you feel something—but I also love human relationships. As a teenager, I had that idea that only art films mattered, that commercial films had no soul. And then you watch a romantic comedy and you're like, ‘Oh. I get why everyone talks about this. It's actually good.’”



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So we agree—love is what gathers us?

“I really like that theory. And I think it’s true. For as long as I’ve been aware of popular culture, longing, devotion, love—the whole package—felt deeply uncool. It didn’t matter. On the other hand, it’s hard for me to explain why *Heated Rivalry* resonated the way it did, because I see it from the inside. What I find important might not be what audiences see. But one theme always comes up: the chemistry between Hudson and me. We genuinely love and understand each other, and I think that shows. And there was so much enthusiasm poured into this project. That energy radiates outward. Also, individually, the characters are compelling. That’s why I fell in love with Ilya. When Jacob sent me the full script, I gave myself completely to it. I cried, I laughed, I cared about every dynamic. He goes through so much—with his mother, his father dementia, his awful brother. He carries the immigrant experience. The accent that sets him apart. All of that makes him fascinating. People fell in

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experience. Not unlike the central entity in Connor's *Transaction Planet*, where an alien spirit inhabits a human body simply to experience this hyperbolic, strange sensation we call reality. To learn what it means to have a body. To connect. To desire. To obtain. That is why popular culture is powerful and perhaps louder today than ever. If nothing else, the success of this series and the explosive performance of Bad Bunny at the Super Bowl reminded us just how political it can be—both platform and instrument in representing communities that need visibility and representation. In that sense, *Heated Rivalry* opened an essential conversation about vulnerability and queerness in sport—an arena traditionally perceived as hostile to both.

“I think that’s beautiful,” Connor says. “It’s a subtext, a purpose of creation. Rachel Reid wrote this story in a very specific genre, consciously and intentionally. She’s said herself she wanted to address homophobia in hockey and spark conversation. And Jacob was very vocal about wanting to create a gay love story that wasn’t tragic. Not about people being torn apart, about lives destroyed without a happy ending. It’s important to return to Rachel’s intention and how Jacob translated it to screen. They’re brilliant. And it makes me so happy that it resonated. I receive so many messages, especially from queer people, who feel seen through Ilya. Who feel validated as bisexual. Who genuinely connect to that narrative. This could have remained just a sweet love story with a twist. But it’s incredibly moving how deeply it echoed, how many people globally saw themselves in it.”

Art, in any form, has always carried a potential for social change—even when it arrives late, after our patience has worn thin. Time spent in collective struggle, connection, questioning, and even micro-shifts in consciousness always counts. “I think the role of art is to present an experience, and the conversation we have around it is what creates change. It’s a delicate line. Art that tries to be didactic can backfire. *Heated Rivalry* wasn’t created as a pretentious lecturing. It simply shared an experience so people could understand a different position. That honesty is what drew people in. You can connect to a story on a human level. That’s why it matters. Not because it’s over-intellectualized or academic. It’s about specific human experiences you can witness and understand, even if you don’t identify with them, and that

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enough to make people reflect on their own experience.”

And speaking of reflection—how often does he fall into that all-too-familiar spiral of self-sabotage and fear of future expectations, real or imagined? How does he define success?

“I’ve had enough minor disappointments that I’ve become disillusioned with expectations and chasing specific outcomes. You can’t put that much weight on anything. Let’s say I do a movie and it’s not good and people don’t like it. That hurts, of course. But if I have faith in my vision, in my creativity, and there are people out there who see me as an artist, then it’s like—okay, we did that, let’s move on. Some of the most brilliant actors have been part of things that weren’t great. Projects can take a sour turn. We never know. And that’s okay. It can be scary. But that’s not proof of quality. Even with *Heated Rivalry*, I was fully aware it could have been cringe. It could have gone wrong. That doesn’t mean someone did bad work. Reception is partly out of your hands. Some great films fail commercially and become classics 25 years later. I try to remind myself of that constantly. All you can do is your best, go for it. Time keeps moving. So just go big and don’t get too lost in it.”

*Photo: Cass Bird*

*Fashion: Taylor Angino*

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