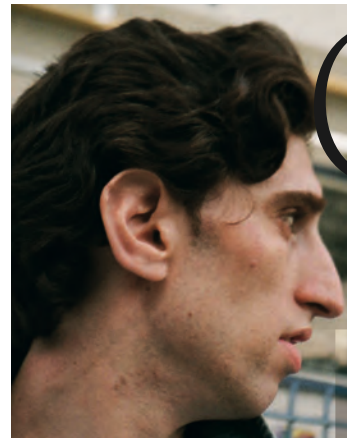


“I COULDA BEEN A CONTENDER. I COULDA BEEN SOMEBODY, INSTEAD OF A BUM, WHICH IS WHAT I AM, LET'S FACE IT.”

Buddy Duress is  
halfway between  
the streets and the  
stars

# A Man of Character



"So, what's it like in there?"

Buddy Duress, who could easily be described as the opioid generation's outer borough Belmondo, deliberates the question with pained introspection. "What's it like in there?" His born-and-raised Queens accent offers a glimpse of the street hustler we know and love. "Ah well, let's see: I saw a guy hang himself. I saw a guy's face get slashed open. I saw two guys get beat to death by corrections officers. It's hell, let's put it that way. It's hell on Earth."

Buddy is talking about the time he was locked up in Rikers—the infamous island jail just a short, seasick ferry ride from Manhattan. Buddy's resumé includes a colorful panoply of incarceration for minor drug offenses and two dynamic, electrifying movie roles. Discovered by New York filmmakers, the Safdie Brothers, who cast him in their first two features, *Heaven Knows What* and *Good Time*, Buddy Duress wears his heart on his sleeve, like a pack of unfiltered Camels.

The first to say hello when we meet, his introduction is more than just a customary industry nod to the guys who gave him his big break—it's a real and authentic moment of respect, deference and self-reflection. Where would Buddy be without the Safdie Brothers? "I met the Safdies on the street; they street cast me. I was struggling, but struggling builds character."

The cross that Buddy bears in real life is evident on the big screen with intense and magnetizing performances. In *Heaven Knows What*, a penetrating long-range focus, twenty-first century *Panic In Needle Park* about heartache and heroin in New York City, Buddy plays Mike, a drug dealing Romeo and street savior with mischievous bravado. In *Good Time*, he plays Ray, a man mixed up in a dark case of mistaken identity following a bank robbery gone awry. The film would go on to earn an official selection for the Palme d'Or. Yet, even with several new film projects in the works, and some major fashion editorials under his belt, it was clear he was hungry to be on set again. "You know I never went to college. I never went to university. I don't have anyone in my family that's in the film business. I did this all on my own."

Buddy has two upcoming film projects from the Safdie Brothers: a remake of the 1982 comedy-action flick *48 Hours*, and *Uncut Gems*, a crime drama starring Adam Sandler that just wrapped. His additional ongoing projects include a documentary about his life, and a yet-to-be-publicized film in which he plays a mob boss's son. "I'm actually the villain of the movie. I play the main antagonist." It's easy to see that Buddy's star is rising as the new antihero, the profligate you cheer on to succeed.

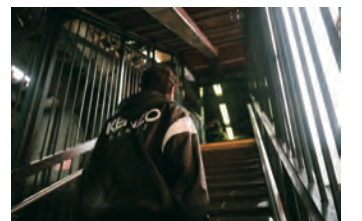
Our conversation migrates to boxing, as we stand up and start looking through the garment racks.

"I've been boxing for three years at Mendez Boxing Gym, one of the top



Denim jacket ,  **ULLAND**, T-SHIRT **HANES** 28  
 Loafers **FERRAGAMO** Track Pants **FILA**

Leather hooded jacket / **KENZO**,  
 Black denim jeans **LEVI'S**



**SHOES CHAMPION**



Denim jacket ,  LULLAND , T-SHIRT HANES



BUDDY DURESS A MAN  OF  CHARACTER   
PHOTOGRAPHS MAX LUZ TEXT Christine Kohler

five gyms in NYC. I even got a trainer, and I go as much as I can afford.” Buddy then gives a demonstration of his lightning-fast shadowboxing skills. As we travel to the shoot location, Buddy starts warming up in front of everyone on set and begins sharing more intimate details about his life. He explained how he wound up in jail for the first time—his account rich with the heartbreakingly raw storytelling that makes him so potent and persuasive as an actor.

“One of my ex-girlfriends lied and said that I broke into her house and stole something, because she wanted to ruin my life in the breakup process. I got five years probation. One of the stipulations was that I had to do one year in a drug program. I fucked that up and they gave me three years. I did twenty-seven months out of three years. Got off nine months early for good time.”

I quietly wonder if that’s where the name of his breakout film came from, since the Safdie brothers had incorporated some elements of Buddy’s life into the film’s story.

“All the stories you hear, it’s true.” Buddy continues on the Rikers subject.

“It’s the most notorious jail in the country. If you have a meek attitude, you’re done. I’m not a gangster, but I stand with my head held high. And I got into fights, I’ll tell you that. As soon as you get in one really good fight and really kick someone’s ass, no one will fuck with you after that. I’m a man, I’m thirty years old. I’m a grown man. No twenty-year-old gangbanger is going to bully me around. I hate bullies. It sucks. I never want to go back. I’m changing my life around.”

He brings the conversation back to his work as an actor—his commitment to the craft is evident.

“I did a voiceover from Rikers Island, from the jail phone. After *Heaven Knows What*, I got locked up. I called Josh [Safdie] every day, maybe every other day from there. One day, Josh said to me, ‘These guys want you to do a voiceover and they’re going to pay you \$250.’ I said, ‘Word!’ So, Josh asks, ‘When can you do it?’ I said, ‘Call me at noon, right before lunch. The morning is bad because everyone runs to the phone. Lunch is at 12:30, so call me at noon right on the dot—oh wait, don’t call me. I can’t receive calls!’”

Buddy pauses to laugh, then continues.

“Josh gave me the number. He said the guy will be expecting my call at noon. So, the next day I call the guy at noon and he says, ‘How long do you have on the phone?’ Well, every five hours I’m allowed twenty-one minutes on the phone. The guy says, ‘This will take about ten to fifteen minutes. I’m going to tell you a bunch of sentences and phrases, and I just want you to repeat them back to me.’ Now there are three phones in a row and I’m on the middle phone, there’s a guy on the left and a guy on the right. And then I’m talking about baseball in 1972, and having to narrate all these random phrases loud and clear with all these different deliveries. There are guys on either side of me looking at me like ‘What the fuck is this guy doing?’ So, this lasted like ten minutes, and then they asked me, ‘Okay, where do you want us to send the check to?’ Well you can’t send it here to Rikers, so write it out to my mom.”



We stop in front of a community church. Buddy starts to wonder whether his success is real or perceived. It can be hard to know what achievement really feels like in the film industry. Recounting his more self-medicated, hedonistic past and stints behind bars, the guilt for his transgressions are obvious. His emotion is so visible that the words are on his face even before he speaks, “I almost feel like I don’t deserve it, but I also don’t think it’s happening fast enough.”

You could package this type of acting as “the method” based on Stanislavski’s system of acting. Think Brando in *A Street Car Named Desire* or *On The Waterfront*, or James Dean in *East of Eden*. The common thread among these actors is how deeply they internalize a character’s underlying chaos and project it for the world to feel, like a raw nerve electrified to the point of transferred empathy. Just like Brando in *Waterfront*, the following line is particularly prescient: “I coulda been a contender. I coulda been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am, let’s face it.”

We’re becoming friendly now and he jokes about how much he loves film. “I’ll do anything. I’ll get naked on camera, I’ll fuck on camera, I’ll jerk off into the camera—ugh, I’m getting out of hand now. But really though, the part of my brain that has like, shame and embarrassment, that part of my brain doesn’t function anymore.”

Buddy’s comedic timing kicks in like liquid Codeine, and the jokes keep coming. We find ourselves outside a bookshop. Buddy brings the conversation back to boxing, laughing about some old Twitter beef: “Remember when Mayweather was talking mad shit about 50 Cent? So Fitty says to Mayweather, ‘I don’t give a fuck what you have to say, I’ll give you a proposition. I’ll pay you one million dollars if you can read one page out of a Harry Potter book without making a mistake.’”

Nearing the end of our day together, a local shopkeeper didn’t like the team taking photos in front of his jewelry store. One of the local boys who worked there was yelling at Buddy and he handled their aggression with street educated aplomb. I called Buddy a tough guy for how he controlled the situation. This time, he replied in a style that wasn’t quite Brando, but it could have been: “I’m not a tough guy, I hate tough guys. I’m a real guy, but I won’t take no shit.” ☺

**LOS ANGELES**  
8 JUNE – 10 AUGUST

# TRANS WORLD

15 JUNE – 17 AUGUST  
**BUCHAREST**

GALERIA **NICODIM** GALLERY

Denim jacket ,  HOLLAND , T-SHIRT HANES  
Track Pants **FILA**