

EGOYAN ON LOCATION

With his new film, The Adjuster, Atom Egoyan continues to explore the territory of illusion

By Deborah Esch

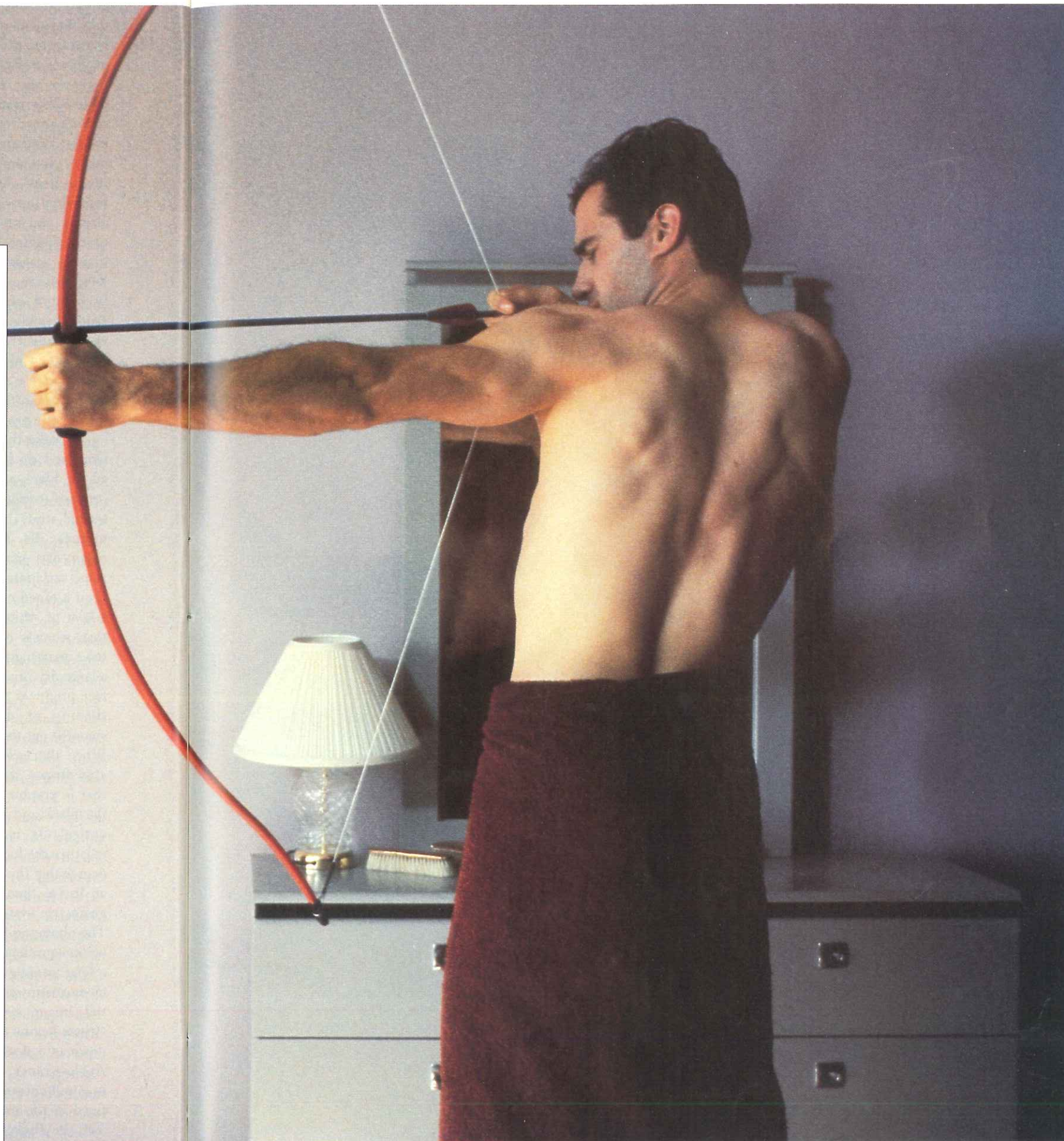
Portrait photography by Johnnie Eisen

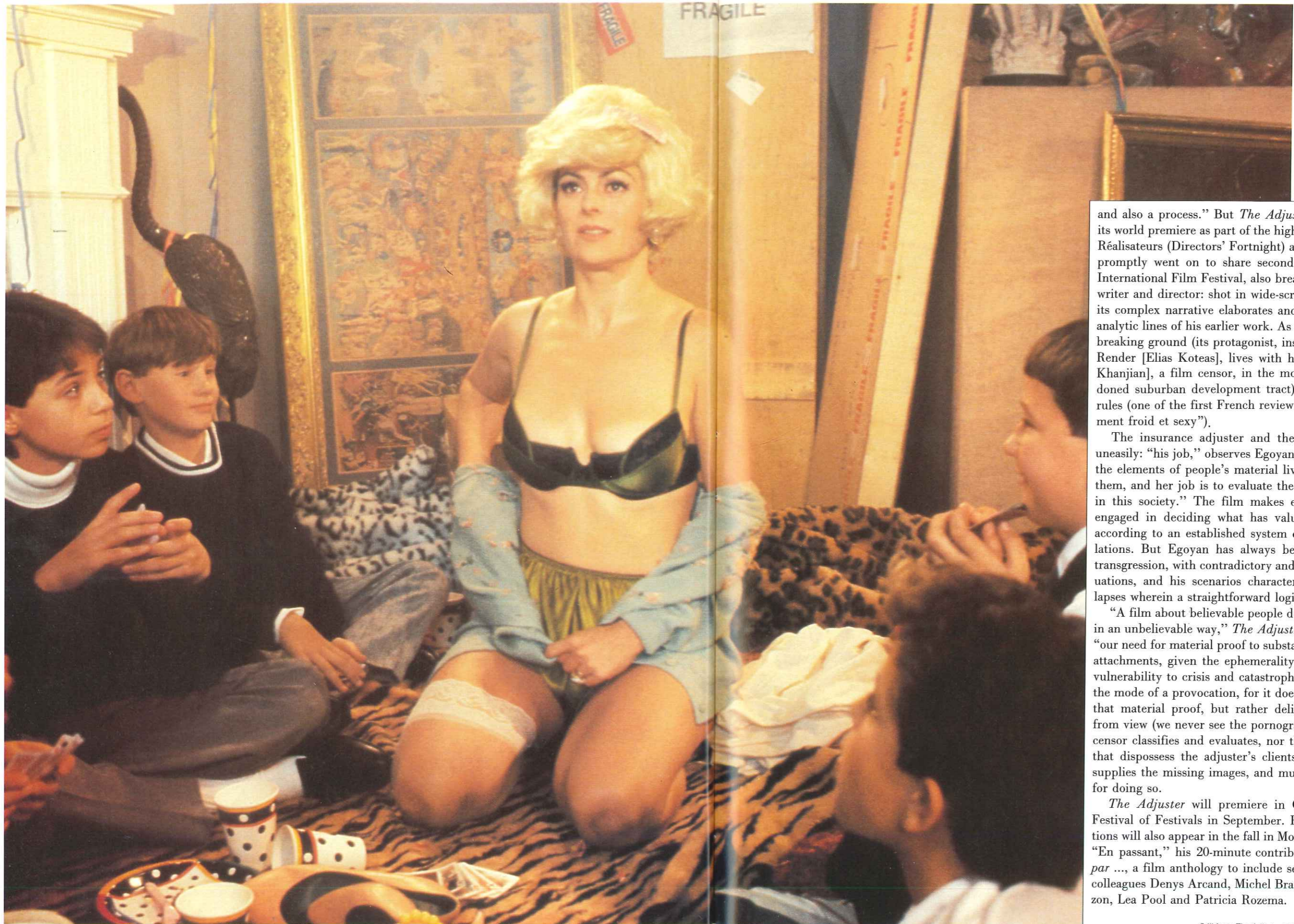
Produced by Kelly Rude

In the Director's Statement for *Speaking Parts* (1989), his third feature, and his first to be invited to the Cannes Film Festival, Atom Egoyan noted: "I have worked in a hotel for five years. I have worked in film for ten. Both of these professions involve the creation of an illusion. In one, the territory of illusion is a room. In the other, it is a screen.... *Speaking Parts* explores a terrain which moves between rooms and screens; a terrain of memory and desire." This considered self-assessment also applies to the Toronto-based filmmaker's earlier features, *Next of Kin* (1984) and *Family Viewing* (1987), both enigmatic films about the production and consumption of images. Memory and desire are for Egoyan "emotional states intrinsically linked with notions of projection, which has a psychological significance as a term and as a process, and also a cinematic one. So there is a crossover for me working as an artist in both terrains."

Egoyan's latest effort locates itself in much the same illusory territory — indeed, one of its working titles was "Location" "because of the double sense of its being a site

Still from *The Adjuster* 1991





and also a process." But *The Adjuster* (1991), which had its world premiere as part of the high-profile Quinzaine des Réalisateurs (Directors' Fortnight) at Cannes last May and promptly went on to share second prize at the Moscow International Film Festival, also breaks new ground for its writer and director: shot in wide-screen and Dolby stereo, its complex narrative elaborates and amplifies the tersely analytic lines of his earlier work. As well, it is a film *about* breaking ground (its protagonist, insurance adjuster Noah Render [Elias Koteas], lives with his wife Hera [Arsinée Khanjian], a film censor, in the model home of an abandoned suburban development tract). And about breaking rules (one of the first French reviews termed it a "dérèglement froid et sexy").

The insurance adjuster and the film censor cohabit uneasily: "his job," observes Egoyan, "is to go and look at the elements of people's material lives and to reconstruct them, and her job is to evaluate the images that we allow in this society." The film makes explicit that both are engaged in deciding what has value and what doesn't, according to an established system of guidelines and violations. But Egoyan has always been preoccupied with transgression, with contradictory and even undecidable situations, and his scenarios characteristically turn on the lapses wherein a straightforward logic no longer serves.

"A film about believable people doing believable things in an unbelievable way," *The Adjuster* concerns itself with "our need for material proof to substantiate our claims, our attachments, given the ephemerality of the quotidian, its vulnerability to crisis and catastrophe." And it does so in the mode of a provocation, for it doesn't so much offer up that material proof, but rather deliberately withholds it from view (we never see the pornographic images that the censor classifies and evaluates, nor the destructive flames that dispossess the adjuster's clients). The viewer, then, supplies the missing images, and must take responsibility for doing so.

The Adjuster will premiere in Canada at Toronto's Festival of Festivals in September. Egoyan's next projections will also appear in the fall in Montreal, under the title "En passant," his 20-minute contribution to *Montréal vu par ...*, a film anthology to include segments by Canadian colleagues Denys Arcand, Michel Brault, Jean-Claude Lauzon, Lea Pool and Patricia Rozema.

Still from *The Adjuster* 1991