



A Fun Chat with Nicole Walker! We Discuss Glassblowing, Multitasking as a Life-Path and the Unwritten Hierarchies of the Creative Scene

N: Hey, Nicole, it's great to speak with you! Let's start this interview by going down memory lane: what was your life like growing up? Thinking back on your younger years, what were your dreams and aspirations? How do you reckon your school friends would have described you? Did they get it right?

N.W: Great speaking with you! :)

I grew up in a neighborhood that was very idyllic for a child; it is one of the few old city neighborhoods in Gothenburg.

My earliest memories are that we were a lot of kids running around in this neighborhood where we lived, just having fun and feeling free. It's a very comforting memory; my childhood is filled with those, fortunately enough. I was very fragile and gentle as a young girl. I was afraid of very abstract things; my mom had to carry me out of the water when we were at the beach, as I hated/was afraid of the feeling when you have wet feet, and the sand sticks to you.

I have heard from people that didn't know me very well that I was a geek in school, but I never felt like a geek or felt out of place, but I do remember feeling different, which I never ever felt was a bad thing. My mother and I had this intense bond, and she loved clothes and playing characters.

She would take me to thrift stores and let me pick out fun and hysterical outfits for myself, usually very historical items from the 1800s mixed with '90s stuff; it was a fun mix.

So, she really established my interest in clothing, and I don't recall ever thinking I would work with clothes as my occupation, but it was very early on something that meant a lot to me. But I was also in theater school, and I think I thought I would become an actress. Is it too late to change my mind??





N: When did you first start getting into fashion? And how about art? If you even see the two as separate entities!

N.W: In high school, I applied both for theatre major and for tailoring/design major, and I chose the latter, so when I graduated high school, I was already an educated tailor. At that point, I thought I would work as a designer, which a lot of my friends had as ambitions or was already doing. But at some point, somebody told me I should be a stylist, as they really saw that I had an eye for it, and as I absolutely hated sewing and both manual and technical pattern making, I was like, yes, working with styling and already finished garments seems like a great idea. And then time fucking flies, and now I have worked as a stylist for 15 years.



Meaningless Sacrifices, 2020

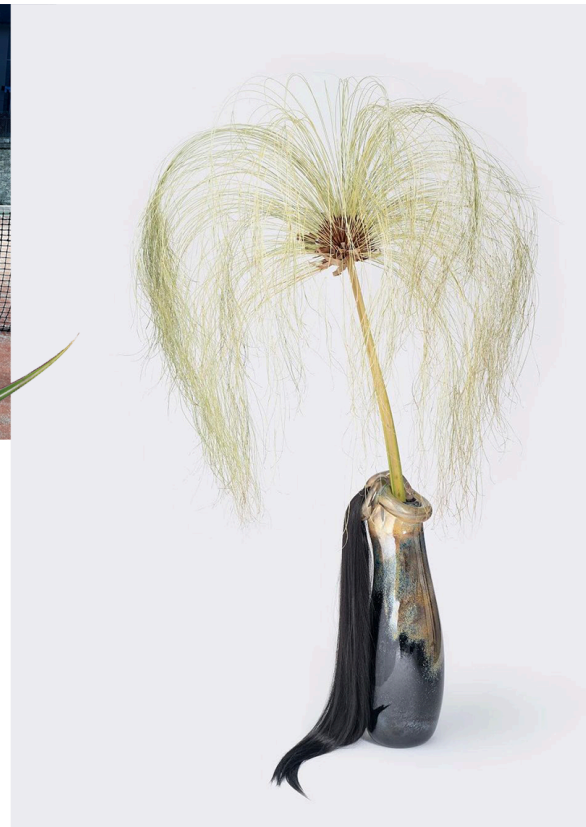
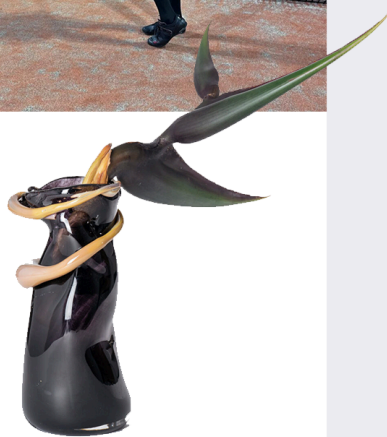
Art has always been there, present in my life from very early on, from the antique items me, my mother, and my brother would steal from attics in buildings that were being torn down, and then fill the big attic apartment we lived in with all these old and

memorable art and design objects...

or from the paintings my mom painted and filled the walls with. But she was a multitasker and multi-doer, and so am I. I have never felt a need to differentiate any artistic practice. I did finish my bachelor's in fine arts just because the art world does consider you somewhat of a loser or a "fake" if you don't have an actual education within it. Which is a joke, as I knew more about art history from the pure context of my life and interest than what they could ever teach me in the art history classes I was taking. I felt like a lot of my art studies focused on how to build a commercially successful artistic practice, like the whole education was filled with this angst of everyone knowing that most of us would not be able to fully financially cover the life of being an artist, so you better make art that will SELL, otherwise, you will have to work in your local grocery store your whole life as well.

N: I stumbled upon the fact that you have been trained in the art of glassblowing. That's so interesting! How did that come about?

N.W : I was doing a lot of ceramics for a while (like everyone??) and then I started studying glassblowing during the pandemic, and I became absolutely obsessed with the material and the process of working with it. It is interesting; in a glass workshop, it is very much a communal effort, almost everyone works with either a partner/assistant or with an even bigger team, and everyone works on this one glass piece together.



Goldendream, 2023 (right)

SOMETIMES WHEN YOU WATCH IT FROM OUTSIDE, IT FEELS ALMOST LIKE A REHEARSED AND EXTREMELY SWEATY CHOREOGRAPHED DANCE.

And so for me, as I am a natural loner, I got sort of intrigued by the idea of doing it all on my own. And doing a lot of things the "wrong way" when working with the material, and even though the material is so extremely violent and HOT, I found working with it on my own very meditative, filled with focus and concentration. I love glass because of its contradictions - it's aggressive, and it's fragile and as close to working with lava, I think one can ever come, playing with fire.

N: I've heard from many artists over the years that constraints, whether they're tied to a specific theme or the limitations of a particular material, can paradoxically feel liberating. Can you relate to that sentiment? Considering your unique position navigating between the roles of an artist (with its perceived total freedom) and a stylist (where you're often required to align with the aesthetic vision of a client or magazine), how do these contrasting approaches resonate with your creative instincts? How do the two experiences "feel" in comparison with each other?

I think my artistic practice was born from the limited structures of being a stylist. Being a stylist is being play-dough; you need to always adapt or consider the clients, the musicians, the photographers, the magazines' visions, and then I work within the framework that they laid out for me, so it is very rare that I get to create completely freely.

As I have been a stylist for my whole professional life, I have really done a lot of shit work, where it felt like I was selling my creative expression and the heartbeat of that to the "devil." Which has led to me being more careful and hesitant to work with commercial clients, at some point recently I thought I would completely stop being a stylist and only dedicate my time to my art and curation practice. But at the exact same time as I was ready to give up styling, I started working with a few people that I truly love working with, and then it became clear to me that I don't have to think like that; I don't have to stop doing one thing to be able to do another; I am, just like my late mother, a multitasker; that is my nature. I love doing lots of different things at the same time; it leaves my restless soul highly entertained. There are limitations everywhere; when I do my art shows or sculptures, there are never any budgets (so far at least), so I use the money I earn in fashion to fund my artistic practice. Which for now is a functional system.

Maybe when I'm like 50 and everyone in the fashion industry will find me old and boring, I can dedicate my time fully to my art practice. But also, who fucking knows at this point, maybe my restless soul has figured something else out at that point.

N: I was recently reading an article by Philip Clarke, a professor at Central Saint Martins. He touched upon the overlooked contributions of "the stylist" as a cultural producer, be it in the shadow of photographers who hold the rights to images or even the music world where the stylist's impact on the artist's image is often substantial. What's your take on this dynamic?

N.W: This is super interesting to me, this topic, because I do often feel that the stylist gets way too little credit for what they usually contribute to any production. And to me, it is sort of comical that this hierarchy where the photographer always gets more paid (usually double the amount of the stylist) and gets treated like their role is more important. I work with a lot of talented photographers where this unfair divided system is less present, but it is always there. I mean, that's why I also do art direction, curation, and I think that is the main reason most stylists I like a lot end up being creative directors or similar.



SUPER-ÉGOÏSTE, 2023



Lean Land, Thaiboy Digital, Nuda Paper



Because the role of the stylist constantly gets minimized and seen as less important than what it actually is. Being a stylist is hard work AF. Anyone who has tried it knows that, and most ppl don't have it in them to do it. I also don't think you necessarily can educate yourself to become a good stylist; maybe that is quite an

unconventional thought, but I truly feel the only way to become a stylist is practicing

No school can teach you what it feels like carrying 115 Ikea bags filled with shoes or requesting clothes from annoying PR people or selling yourself to clients while pretending to be extremely excited about working with them specifically.

You need to be a good actor to do that shit, I tell you.

N: Your sculptures and installations, like "Not Evil Give-Up", "Skin," and "SUPER-ÉGOÏSTE," definitely emanate a strong sense of "style". It's evident you embrace the convergence of fashion and art in your work. Could you share how your fashion instincts intertwine with your art practice?

N.W: I mean, everything bleeds out of me. For me, the separation is not so interesting. I think the art world gets inspired by the fashion industry all the time, but in most cases, it seems to be sort of ugly to have fashion as a reference. And obviously, in the last year, every fashion house has had an artist or a specific art piece as a reference for every collection



Skin, 2023

...like the fashion industry looooves the art world, because the art world is high culture and the fashion industry always has anxiety about being low culture.

Fashion is the art world's tiny sibling who always wants to play with the older sibling's toys to somehow legitimize its worthy existence. And for me, personally, I don't care; I stand with one foot in the fashion industry and with the other in the art world. I pick and choose from both fields. I do know a few people in the art world that find it very frustrating that a "fashion person" like me also practices art, but that is just very stimulating to me. That my work or my practice somehow annoys someone, this just inspires me to annoy them even more, tbh.

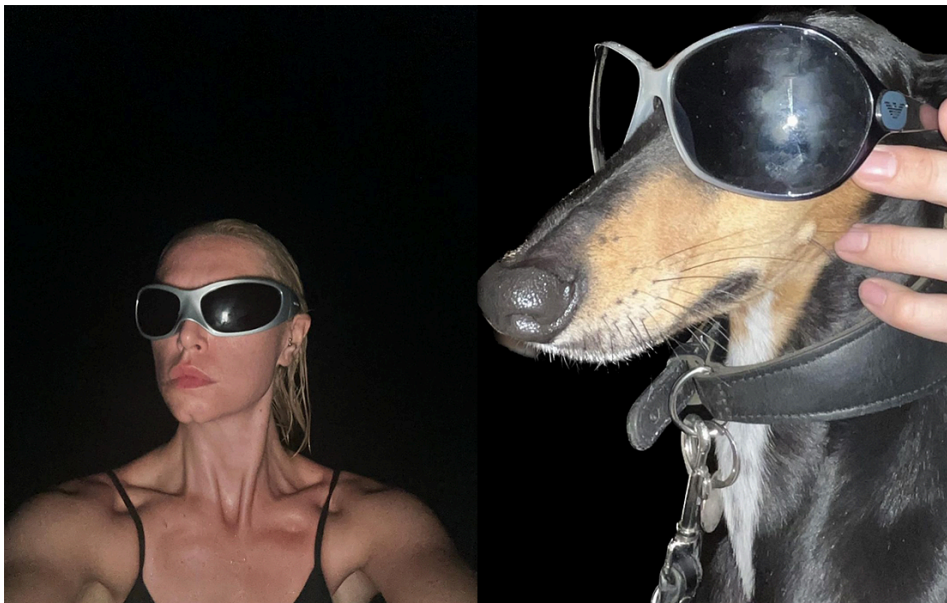
N: Born in Sweden and now residing in Berlin, do you find elements of your Swedish heritage influencing your work?

N.W: Actually, I'm mostly based in Sweden since the pandemic. I left Berlin because during the pandemic there was no work there, and the pandemic in Sweden was sort of non-existent, so I spent most of my time here. Since then, I've been using Stockholm as my base and travelling all over the world for work.

Now, my plan is to split my time between Athens and Sthlm, starting 2024. I don't think about my heritage a lot; most of the time, I try to erase it as much as possible. Being Swedish is not something I am very proud of, nor like exploring as a topic. Nationality is really vague for me. I mean, I am very thankful for all the privileges my nationality has given me: the freedom I get to experience. But, I don't like where Sweden is heading. It has been heading in the wrong direction for a long time, and now it is just really bad here. The right-wing government is just rising, and it breaks my heart.

N: To wrap up on a fun note: What's catching your eye in fashion at the moment? Are there any standout brands or shifts you've been observing?

N.W: All-In Studios - I loooove Bror and Benjamin's work! Laura Andraschko, Ponte, everything Shayne Oliver is doing with Anonymous Club always. <3



All images courtesy of Nicole Walker

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