



The Urte Kat Girl is Cool, Kind and Chic. We discuss with Urte the Geopolitics of Fashion, Business Lessons and Lithuanian Knit Ladies

N: Hi Urte , how are you? I remember discovering your work for the first time during the pandemic – I think it was a crochet dress... It's great to finally connect with you! Could you give our readers a brief introduction about yourself, your upbringing, and your label, Urte Kat?

U: Hi! Doing good, on my way to our first showroom in Paris, very excited! I am Urte, and I run the brand Urte Kat, which is based in Vilnius, Lithuania.



I was brought up in a small Lithuanian city, Siauliai. I had a pretty wild teenage-hood, got into many different subcultures because of my older brother, and grew up with a super chic mother who worked in a second-hand clothing distribution centre.

I think this contrast between the subcultures (I mainly got into skaters, emo, new punk, was briefly obsessed with skinhead style) and my mom's chic style is still the biggest inspiration in my work.

N: I know that after a period of living and interning in London, you made the decision to return to Lithuania to regroup and eventually start your label. You now operate Urte Kat from there and collaborate with a small network of local craftswomen who help bring your vision to life. I was about to ask why you didn't consider moving back to a big city now that you're more established. Then I thought, "that's such a dated vibe!" LOL. It seems to me that there has been a shift away from the glamorization of big cities, with creatives embracing their roots more. I think it was a combination of factors like the pandemic, people on social media becoming a bit more "real", rent prices... What are your thoughts on this?

U: I have been thinking about this for 6 years now. Every year I go through phases of 'I'm moving right this second, it's too stale here' and

'I love how calm and beautiful Vilnius is, and the close-knit community that is here'.

Really, there is no answer to what is better; to each, it's own. I sometimes love that there is no fashion industry here, I don't have to network or talk about the brand when I'm at a bar, it's very chill. On the other hand, sometimes I feel sad that I'm missing out on some things, I'm not having these conversations that could lead to great things. In the end, my main priority is to have a calm and pretty normal life, as much as this industry allows space for a normal life.. with the expectation of two yearly collections, "normal life" is a loose term.



N: Can you tell us the story behind the Urte Kat heart logo? I know your designs often draw inspiration from Lithuanian folklore. Could you help us understand the symbolism behind your design choices?

U: The heart logo was created by my friend **Ruta Vebraite**.

At that time, I was making clay charms in spiral and heart shapes and attaching them to the orders I

The clay heart became kind of like a brand signature in the very beginning, people would post the hearts to their story. We decided that that will be the logo. It has a very specific vibe that is a reflection of that time. The symbolism behind the heart is love, of course haha.

N: I find that fashion education often underestimates how crucial the business side can be. Can you share some experiences and challenges of your design journey from a business perspective? How did you acquire the know-how, and what are some lessons you have learned along the way?

U: This conversation has been happening for so long, and still, even the best schools are not including business classes into their fashion programs...that is insanity to me. In my local college where I studied fashion, we didn't have anything even close to business classes. That is where internships come in. If you are lucky, you'll see glimpses into the business side during that time. I found out what a line sheet was at Ashley Williams. My business journey has been, I guess, pretty different.



I didn't set out to create a business. The first two years, I was cutting and sewing the orders myself on my bedroom floor.

I made the first samples using restaurant job money. For the next years, I was working in a made-to-order manner, which meant I would go buy a piece of fabric only after I received the order. I always wanted to use the best fabrics, mainly wools. I obviously couldn't afford to buy them in bulk, so every time I'd get an order, I'd go to the fabric store by bus and buy 2 meters of that fabric. I would make around 100€ from an order, which would take me around one week to cut, sew, and pack. I would put all that I could from that 100€ back into the brand.

I am now, after 6 years, finally able to buy my fabrics in bulk, which is a big achievement for me. 6 years of work and we are on our way to our first Paris showroom. I can say that I did it on my own with a lot of help from my friends.

I had no financial backing, didn't know a single person who worked in fashion, no grants, I'm not a graduate of a known fashion school

which gives a lot of backing to your work.

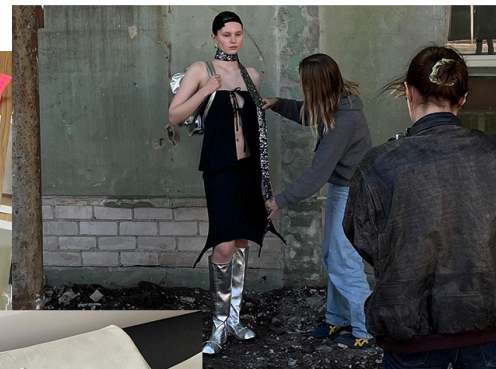
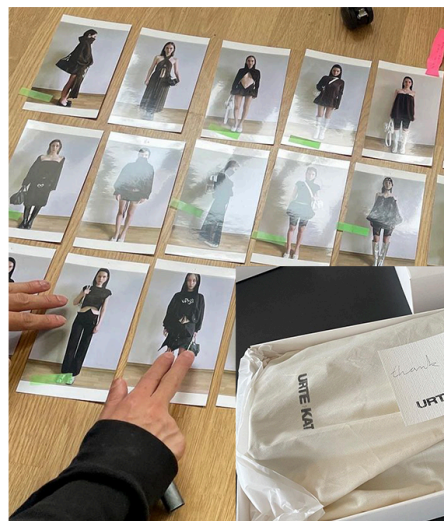
I am saying this only to say that it is possible if someone feels like the odds are against them. Just focus on the garment, do the work, and consume quality fashion content.

N: Your close collaboration with local craftswomen naturally affects your production capabilities. How do you plan to strike a balance between maintaining this sustainable practice and scaling your brand to its full potential? Is reconciling these two aspects something you actively work towards?

U: You'd be surprised how much three knit ladies in rural areas are able to produce haha.

The brand's full potential for me is to fully support these locals. When the brand scales to a size where our craftspeople can be calm about money and survive only on our orders, that will be the brand fully realised to me.

N: To wrap up, could you describe the quintessential "Urte Kat" girl for us? Who is she, what's her profession, where does she go out at night, and who is she dating?





U: Urte Kat girl is cool, kind, and chic.

It's basically me and my friends. I want to create a wardrobe for us to feel cool in. She's probably at a pub at night or an opening of some sorts. Most likely dating a cool artist, who was maybe a skater boy in the past :).

All images courtesy of Urte Kat

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