

Diane Pernet

(@ASVOFF)

Scarf as headpiece, sunglasses and shirt *TALENT'S OWN*
Gloves, coat and pants *MAISON MARGIELA*

In conversation with **MARIEN BRANDON**

Photographer **ALEXANDRA ALVAREZ GARCIA**

I think we can all agree that the word “Icon” is overused—especially when it comes to fashion journalism. In the case of Diane Pernet, the term applies in its dictionary definition sense. Throughout her career, Diane has been many things: fashion designer, costume designer, journalist, blogger, influencer, mentor, muse and most definitely, an icon. Passionate by cinema from an early age, Pernet merged her interest for filmmaking with fashion and went on to document the fashion industry with the aim of unveiling its secret to the larger audi-

ence. With an unmistakable personal style characterized by her iconic black-veiled headpiece and penchant for avant-garde fashion, Pernet has been a pioneer of online journalism and her blog is said to be one of the first to ever exist. Later on, she opened the first fashion film festival, ASVOFF, bringing recognition to talented artists worldwide—trailblazing once more. Diane answered my Zoom call from a room that couldn’t reflect more her personal aesthetic and agreed to share with me her shaded view on fashion.

Fashion Editor **CLOTILDE FRANCESCHI**

Make-up Artist **YULIYA ZALESSKAYA**
using **PRADA BEAUTY**



MARIEN BRANDON. Our theme for this issue is "Travel" which could mean various things, including a personal journey and an evolution or transformation of the self. ASVOF has been one of the first blogs to exist and your work has shaped the digital revolution in fashion—way before social media were a thing. What pushes you to seek for change and transformation in your work?

DIANE PERNET. It's funny because I never have a strategy. Everything I do happens organically. Before I started the blog in 2005 I was working on fashion films with Alex Czetwertynski. He had his own website and on it, we made a series called "Diane's diaries." We used to cover events and fashion shows. At the time, La Chambre Syndicale was definitely not into opening up the velvet curtains. It was 25 years ago. Rules were ridiculous! We were only allowed to show a certain amount of the front of the designs—no backs, no full shows. We decided to show how things were *really* working. I always loved behind the scenes. Around 2002 we had a commission from Les Galeries Lafayette to design their windows on Boulevard Haussmann. When La Chambre Syndicale heard about it, they tried to stop the project. I wanted to open things up and show the reality of the fashion industry to people. Sometimes we would have bad seats and we had rows of heads in our videos. [Laughs] But we wanted to show the *reality* of things so it didn't matter. They still tried to stop us! Progress in France is very slow... We ended up blurring out the faces of the models so we don't get into trouble and it was actually very successful. The first day of filming I went up to this guy called Gilles Dufour—he used to be the right arm of Karl Lagerfeld. Karl was jealous of Galliano getting too famous. So I went to him because I thought I'd give him some space in the project. I said, "I want to take a sound bite of you and I'm going to put it in the window of Galeries Lafayette." He said, "Come back at 06:00 PM and I'll give you an interview with Catherine Deneuve." Can you imagine?! Can you imagine how happy Galeries Lafayette was? But anyway, everything started organically. Then "Diane's diaries" became "Fashioned out" because I used to cover all the fashion weeks, which I don't know if you ever do, but it's really quite exhausting.

M.B. I don't think I could. Two weeks in a row is already too much for me.

D.P. Exactly. Now I'm quite happy I'm not doing it anymore. Later on, I got a commission from a designer to work on a film. Do you remember the brand, Eley Kishimoto?

M.B. Yes, I do. Also, I just rewatched the film you did for him when he launched his men's wear line.

"That's one of my big problems—even today. I do things in that manner, without thinking about the financial aspect of it. I would like to think about it before I die. I think it would be a good idea. I just like to feed people information—and it gives me pleasure. But it's hard to break something when it's your nature."

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D.P. Yeah, the Gumball rally! It was around 2005; YouTube didn't exist. Nokia had this phone which looked like a blue brick! On it, there was something called Lifeblogging. This was before Twitter and everything else that's followed. It was still in the Beta stage. If you had a problem with your carrier, you had to call Nokia in Finland. [Laughs] It was crazy! Because I was commissioned to film a roadmovie about the Gumball rally, I decided I'm going to Lifeblog, so it's immediately on my blog. We traveled 3000 miles in six days from Trafalgar Square to Monte Carlo and each time I changed countries, I lost the transmission. My phone bill was something like €900 in six days. It was horrible. It was frightening! Anyway, that was the beginning of my social media.

M.B. What's interesting to me, as you were explaining your debuts making fashion films, is that the platforms to watch films were not fully developed yet. I feel like nowadays, if we onboard ourselves in that type of project, we have to see a potential financial outcome to it. I guess you were doing it for the beauty of doing it, because it was not something you

would ever make a business out of at this point.

D.P. Well, that's one of my big problems—even today. I do things in that manner, without thinking about the financial aspect of it. I would like to think about it before I die. I think it would be a good idea. I just like to feed people information—and it gives me pleasure. But it's hard to break something when it's your nature. I want to connect people, to feed people, without thinking of financial gain. It's hard to change that because it's in my DNA—trust me, I would like to change it.

M.B. We need people like you. It would be quite sad otherwise, if everybody was

in it for the money.

D.P. But that's how it is now. It's funny because to me, to promote something you believe in comes naturally. I'm not expecting to be paid for it—although I don't mind getting paid! I have no objection to money. In fact, I welcome it. Some wouldn't make a simple Instagram or TikTok post unless they're getting paid for it. To me, it's not a big deal. But that's not the way it goes. It was the same with the beginning of blogs. I'm not in this category, but in the beginning, bloggers were mostly consumers and they would say exactly what they thought. Like Bryanboy. I'm always doing things too early because it's the second in line that cashes in on it, never the innovator. There was a site called IQONS. It was before Facebook. They had me to be the face of it—to bring people into it. The idea was to make a platform for *all* aspects of the fashion industry. Then, some rich guy invested in it and I got paid. This was great! He lasted six months. Everything was free so he saw he wasn't making any money from it... I think he only did it because

Scarf as headpiece, sunglasses and shirt TALENT'S OWN
Gloves GANT
Coat AVELLANO



he wanted to meet models; he was a sleazy guy. We did one print issue out of it. Instead of starting with prints and going to the Internet, we started with the Internet and did a print issue which continued the stories. It was fun.

M.B. Interesting. It only lasted one issue in the end?

D.P. Yes, because he didn't want to put any more money into it. But it was great; we had Bryanboy, Nicola Formichetti and Franca Sozzani—*everybody* was in it. I gave Ben Gorham from Byredo his first ad. I told him: "You have to put your face in it because you're a good looking guy." [Laughs]

M.B. And why do you feel like we lost that passion that you guys had, making projects for the beauty of it without it aiming to be marketable nor to be profitable? Why do you think, nowadays, we are so centered around marketing in fashion and we have lost the emotional side of it?

D.P. Everything is money, isn't it? I mean, the government is money. Look at the war going on, it's about money. At the beginning of blogging, like I was saying, it was mainly people like Bryanboy, who loves to buy clothes. The whole thing started out of a stolen credit card or whatever. In the beginning, traditional journalism was really frightened by blogging, by people that didn't go through all the paces. A couple of years went by and brands realized the importance of it and started getting ambassadors. Once you're an ambassador you are not so free anymore. I don't know if Bryanboy really thinks that Chanel is the best brand ever. *Nothing* is pure anymore. That's just the nature of things now. Same with critic journalism. How many real critics are there? Very few. Because if you say: "I don't like this brand" it is going to affect your wallet. Are you going to get an invitation to the next show? If you say something negative, probably not.

M.B. I feel like this is also linked to the fact that you are a mentor and a cheerleader for emerging talents. You were seeking a platform which isn't ruled by advertisers when you created your blog. You've never been so interested in writing about institutional brands, right?

D.P. It's funny because I've been on a lot of fashion school juries, so I know a lot of the designers in the big brands from when they were younger. I love Matthieu Blazy. I was at his school show in La Cambre. I sent him a message after his first show for Bottega Veneta. I thought he did a great job. The next day he wrote back and he said: "I still remember the day after my first show. I saw you on the street and I was very worried. You told me I had nothing to worry about." And the next day Raf Simons offered him a job. I am pleased

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that he remembers that because most people have fashion amnesia. They don't want to be remembered as a beginner. They only want to be remembered at the top. For example, Anthony Vaccarello. I knew him from the very beginning too. I don't think he ever wants to remember that he wasn't at the head of Saint Laurent. I was also in Demna's jury in Antwerp, that's the reason why I was in his catwalk. He said I was the first person to interview him and to believe in him. I remember Glenn Martin was a model for Demna's graduation show. 2006 must have been a magical year because that was the year of Anthony Vaccarello, Demna and Iris Van Herpen—I was also on her jury. So I know these people from the beginning, and I *love* to watch them blossom! It's great. But yes, I support emerging designers because of the way things go. I used to work at Vogue and Elle online. And if you're not an advertiser, you can forget it. That's why independent magazines, I think, are rising now. I've always liked independent magazines, obviously, but I think they're rising now more than ever. Remember when magazines were supposed to be dead? For a while, everybody said

"Print is over." One thing *isn't* replacing another. They can still coexist. Frozen images will always have a value; they weren't replaced after the first movie. Now everybody's concerned about AI generated images and films, which I find very interesting. Everything that's happening now, in the time that we're living in, is really interesting to me and I want us to be open to it. There's good and bad things about it. If you take three seconds of my voice, you can make a whole lecture out of it, and I would have nothing to do with what's coming out of my mouth! [Laughs] I find that scary, but on the other hand, I'm fascinated by it. I love RICKDICK. I like what he does. I also like that guy called @demonflyingfox, the one that did all the fake

Balenciaga ads. I think that stuff is great. I love it! I'd love to be in a game. I'd love to be a character in a video game. *All of that is interesting to me!*

M.B. I liked what you said about one thing not replacing another, because it's true that in the fashion industry that's the way we tend to think about things. I remember when the pandemic hit, all the headlines were about fashion shows being over. That lasted maybe six months. [Laughs] As you said, we have to learn how to make things coexist.

D.P. Yeah, think about radio and TV. I listen to internet radio all the time. And I think radio, in general, is on a rise again because of podcasts. People are always in fear of something. Real journalists were in fear of bloggers, and then bloggers turned into influencers, and people were afraid because the structure of the front row had changed. With influencers came pop stars and kpop stars. It's all money. *Everything* is based on money!



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TALENT'S OWN
Gloves and coat MAISON MARGIELA

M.B. I think it's especially true in France. I can only assume what being a blogger at the very beginning must have been. Culturally, French people have a problem with success. That is such an American concept to be working on your own and becoming successful from it. In France, you would have to work your way up inside an existing structure, to start as an intern in a magazine and show dedication to the company. I think that's very scary for French people to see someone making it on their own, like you did.

D.P. They don't like it! They are so against it! I worked for print publications at the same time as I had my own blog. "La Chambre Syndicale" would accreditate me through whatever publication I was working for but they wouldn't accredit the blog for ten years... Back in 2005, I would be invited to New Zealand or Tokyo for one post but they wouldn't understand the number of people that you reach by Internet.

M.B. You always wanted to unveil fashion behind the scenes and offer knowledge to a broader public. What were the reasons behind that strong gatekeeping of the industry when it comes to your content? Do you still feel like there

is too much gatekeeping nowadays?

D.P. Yeah, there is a lot of gatekeeping. It's crazy. You would think it'd be less because of social media. I remember one of my worst interviews ever. I was at pity! It was with Jun Takahashi. I knew Jun already because he DJed for my film festival when it was in Tokyo. A translator and his PR: Michèle Montagne, were present during the interview. He couldn't answer the most basic questions! Michèle was sitting there gatekeeping, saying: "You *can't* say this, you *can't* say that." If I had asked him what he had for breakfast, I don't think he could have told me! It was awful, which is a shame because I love him. The only thing she said at the end was: "Well, I guess you'll need some images." I thought: "What the hell were you doing there? I didn't *need* you. I got nothing. This interview is shit! Now I have to write 1500 words from nothing." It's horrible... Gatekeepers... I mean, that's useless. And I don't know what they're protecting.

M.B. They want to keep the mystery alive? I don't know. I think it's all an ego question in the end, right? People feel good having access to information.

D.P. Yes. I support people because I know, having been an independent designer [Diane had her own brand for 13 years in New York] and then working at Elle and Vogue, we couldn't cover people that didn't advertise. Only one a season. I remember how hard I had to fight to get Martin Margiela covered. Can you imagine? I mean, it was ridiculous! [Laughs] I know the issue from

both sides as an independent designer and as a journalist. So, I like to support people if I believe in them. To me it just seems like a natural thing. Although like I said, before I die, I would like to figure out a way of making money for what I do. That would be nice.

M.B. Gatekeeping and the ruling of advertisers in publication, whether it's online or print, also impacts the diversity or the representation aspect of the content we consume. Most advertisers are established designers from Paris, Milan or NY. In recent years fashion theorists have been researching ways of decolonizing the fashion narrative. I wanted to hear your opinion on that, because your film festival is a global platform. Do you see it as a way to help emerging creatives from all walks of life?

D.P. Definitely, yes. My very first film festival was in 2006. It was called "You wear it well." I was living in Paris and I had a correspondent from LA on my blog. I asked him to co-do it with me and to bring fashion to LA because we don't think of LA as a fashion capital. The festival then traveled to different countries. For me, the word "international" has always been *really* important. I don't want to think that only

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 Necklace and ring *D'HEYGERE*
 Dress *YOHJI YAMAMOTO*
 Gloves *GANT*



the four main fashion capitals are where creativity exists, because it exists everywhere. We've had winners at the festival that come from Macedonia or someplace, because they're really talented and they have a vision. In the beginning, the festival traveled to 12 countries in one year. Then of course, these countries got excited and they built their own fashion film festivals—which was unfortunate. [Laughs] The idea was always traveling and putting a light on talent, wherever it exists. I maintained that to this day because that's what interests me.

M.B. ASVOFF still travels, right?

D.P. I mean, less. There was the pandemic which was a three year disaster. Then, we've been to Rome a couple of times and to Bratislava. We were in Fotografiska Berlin for the last one. We were invited to Moscow but I had to refuse—which kills me because that was good money, but I couldn't do it. [For political reasons] It doesn't travel as much as it used to because a lot of places have set up their own festivals. However, my festival is quite different from most of the other fashion film festivals because mine is a cultural event. It's not a red carpet. It will always have a unique vision. Plus, it's the first in the world. It's funny because this guy in California contacted me and said: "You're the first in the world, but I'm the first in America." And I said: "Okay, great. I like competition. I have no problem with it. The more the merrier." It's the same with blogging. When I started, there was no one; now there's like millions of them. Now, there's thousands of Fashion Film Festivals. I've been on the jury of some of them. I'm happy to, because I see more films that maybe I would have missed. I think it's great.

M.B. I love your way of seeing this situation. I also like the way you approach travel and how the festival is traveling as well. I think that we tend to all follow the same route as fashion journalists. We all go to Milan, we all go to Paris, but it's so interesting to go outside this itinerary. Personally, my favorite work trip was when I went to Georgia, for the Culture Week Tbilisi. I know you have been as well.

D.P. Yeah, I've been there. That's where I met Guram Gvasalia. Even before Sofia [Sofia Tchkonja; founder of Fashion Week Tbilisi and Culture Week Tbilisi] started Fashion Week Tbilisi, she had this program called "Art Georgia." Art Georgia was a group of designers that Sofia brought to Paris, it was a little showroom, I think by Concorde, so that is where I met him. He had written a book on esoter-

ics, spirituality and he was selling and signing his book. I wish I could find it—I must have it somewhere here. I was there from the beginning of Sofia's fashion weeks. She even invited ASVOFF there early on and it was a very enthusiastic audience. But yes, Sofia, she's done a great job at supporting talents.

M.B. She's amazing!

D.P. She's a very wealthy woman, but with interest in humanity.

[Her smartphone rings and Diane answers in French. She excused herself and opened the door to a delivery man. She came back after collecting a bottle of champagne sent to her as a gift.]

"I've always liked independent magazines, obviously, but I think they're rising now more than ever. Remember when magazines were supposed to be dead? For a while, everybody said 'Print is over.' One thing isn't replacing another. They can still coexist. Frozen images will always have a value, they weren't replaced after the first movie. Now everybody's concerned about AI generated images and films, which I find very interesting."

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D.P. Ruinart is great champagne. Every year they send me something around Christmas. I was just thinking last week, "I didn't get my champagne." Half an hour later, I got a text message: they were delivering today. I don't drink but if I go to a party, it's a nice gift.

M.B. Your friends are lucky. I wanted to know if you can share any tips with me. As someone who has always been quick to anticipate change and evolution, you are seen as a precursor in numerous fields. Do you have advice on how to stay relevant in such a fast-paced environment?

D.P. I think it's about curiosity and living in my own time. I can't stand it when people get stuck in a decade. A lot of people are stuck in the '80s, which is interesting because people the same age as you [mid twenties] are fascinated by it. That's because they didn't live in that period. It was great but it was horrible also. That's when AIDS came out. It was a disaster! Some are still thinking the same way but that's not where we are. We're living with AI; we're living with social media. Life is different... Mobile phones didn't exist. Can you imagine?

M.B. I really can't imagine.

D.P. You had to be somewhere when you said you were going to be there—there was no way to contact people.

M.B. That's always the thing that scares me the most when I think of it. I would never be able to get places without a map.

D.P. Exactly! It's the same with calculators, right? People don't really know math because why bother? And languages

too, you can translate a language very easily. ChatGPT is great though! It helped me write this letter; it had to be formal and in French because it has to go to the Ministry of Culture. It worked perfectly! Staying relevant is just living in your time with an open mind and not living in fear. Of course, there is fear. Are we in a third World War? Is Donald Trump going to get elected? When the glaciers melt, how many prehistoric diseases are going to come out of that? There are a lot of things to think about, but staying relevant is about *not* living in fear. With the festival for example, I add new themes all the time which I think are relevant. Two editions ago, we had a TikTok category because it was, to me, relevant. In the current edition, we have a category for AI generated films. There is a continuation.

M.B. Definitely. Let's go back to talking about the importance of different cultures merging together. I think that's something which probably shaped you. you have a love story with Japan and a strong bond with Paris, where you have been living the longest—and still reside today. What influences have those different cultures had on you?

D.P. I was always really interested in foreign movies as a kid. There was this fascination of reading foreign magazines and publications. I didn't make my first trip to Europe until I was 21. Then, I went by myself for three months. That really shaped me to be somewhere where I had absolutely no support system—only with myself, meeting other cultures, expanding my horizons. I think traveling is the *best* education! My first trip to Tokyo was with four other NY based fashion designers. We were having a big meeting with all these businessmen at the top of the sunshine building. Suddenly it got sort of dark and we realized it was a robot cleaning the window. We'd never seen robots in action before. It was great. Everything about that culture: I love! I wouldn't want to live there because it's not really balanced for women. It is probably now more than it was in the '80s. It isn't in Paris either actually. It was really fascinating to me in Japan, seeing these old traditions existing with this really eccentric love of fashion and creativity. And the food is so refined... Do you know the film "Lost in Translation" by

Sophia Coppola? It's one of my favorite films. It is so true to the Japanese experience for a foreigner.

M.B. I know I already took a lot of your time, but can I ask you one last question? I was wondering, as someone who's been a mentor for so many young creatives—and from one journalist to another—if you have any advice on how to survive as a creative and how to navigate the industry?

D.P. I'd be the worst person to give you advice on how to make money! I think with anything though, if you have something to say and it's personal, if you have an angle, then eventually it works. There's so much bland nothingness out there. If you have something to say, somebody will notice eventually. Hopefully! My problem is that I'm missing a gene: the money gene... I do things because I *want* to do them.

M.B. Do you find freedom in doing things just because you want to?

D.P. Freedom. That is the *key* word. Somebody once asked me what luxury was to me and I said: "I love to be alone," which is a luxury because a lot of people need to feel surrounded. Of course, if I didn't have any friends or if I didn't have Internet to communicate, I wouldn't be happy. But freedom is the *most* important thing to me and I wouldn't give it up for anything! It costs a lot because to be free, you have to be outside the system and do what you're supposed to do. When I started the festival I thought: "if I wait until I get sponsors, I'm never going to do anything." If you want to do something, you just have to do it. That's my American side. Which is definitely not a French thing. I've been here 33 years and I still hold onto my DNA. People can try and squash you as much as they want, but you have to keep persevering, you have to do what you believe in. I don't have trouble sleeping at night because I stabbed people in the back. There are people that could attack me but I'm not vindictive, I'm supportive. Oscar Wilde said: "All little animals will be around him when he dies." [Laughs] I think I'll be okay.

