

Interview



Unlike in fashion, in the art world, you don't define work in terms of looks, models, and seasons. But then an artist like 31-year-old painter Katherine Bernhardt comes along and takes fashion photos, magazine spreads, and model poses as her subject matter. She basically turns the latest Versace campaign or Kate Moss editorial into an immortal, high-art form. The Missouri-born artist, who is usually in New York but has been jumping around Europe in various residencies lately, paints fast, with a brutal, slash-stroke brush style that hardly goes easy on beauty.

CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN: You're doing a residency in London now, right?

KATHERINE BERNHARDT: Yeah. But I'm in the English countryside for the weekend. I'm in this house from, like, 1632—it's a mansion. It's totally awesome.

CB: Do you work well when you're out of the city?

KB: Yeah, it's easier. New York is so distracting.

CB: How did you start painting fashion images?

KB: I guess it just kind of happened naturally. I always looked at magazines. Ever since I was little I was obsessed with *Elle* magazine and the models. I would watch the model TV shows, like the specials on Milla Jovovich.

CB: Milla's the best. Is it individual models or the fashion world in general that excites you so much?

KB: The whole thing. But maybe it's the models, because I have certain ones that I'm more obsessed with.

CB: Which are you most obsessed with right now?

KB: I'm really into Alice Dellal and Agyness Deyn.

Katherine BERNHARDT

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JACKET: MARK FUCHS;
SHIRT: ALEXIS BITTAN;
ABOVE: UNTITLED (GREEK) NO. 1004,
COURTESY OF GANADA, NEW YORK

CB: Your paintings have such speed. Photography is supposed to look faster than a painting. But when you put one of your paintings next to the original fashion shot, it makes the photo look slow.

KB: For me, preparing the canvas takes longer than painting. The actual painting takes about half an hour.

CB: Has anyone in fashion ever complained about the way you represented them?

KB: I don't think fashion people know about my work. Some collectors find some of the work too intense.

CB: The brush strokes could be seen as a hostile gesture.

KB: Yes. Some people ask if I hate the models I paint. I say no, I don't hate them. I'm obsessed with them.

CB: You're doing a series that focuses on the face, right?

KB: I made 65 this past summer that are all smaller than my previous paintings. Since I was in Greece on a residency, I felt like I absorbed the landscape. Everything started coming out Greek.

CB: You were doing Greek *Elle*.

KB: Yeah. They all turned Greek. So I named all of them after mythological Greek figures.

CB: What are you going to do for your London residency?

KB: There's a magazine here called *Countryside Life*. It's about houses in the English countryside. And they have these Girls of the Week, like, "Ms. Chatty Dobson, age 21, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Dobson, of Stratfield Turgess, Hampshire. Educated at St. Mary's..." I was going to paint them, but decided not to. They aren't sexy enough. ■