Conie Vallese – Travelling Light

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Conie Vallese is hard to pin down. At the time of our scheduled phone interview, the Argentinian artist and designer is hiking through the Patagonia mountains on a rare visit to her native country. When I finally reach her, it's late in London, and the line sounds as if it's struggling to reconcile the roughly 11,000 kilometer distance between here and there. Conie tells me she's been drinking wine with a friend and discussing matters of the heart: love, life, mortality. Now, it's difficult to shift into speaking about her own artistic practice – something that she would prefer to create spontaneously rather than pontificate on in an interview.

Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello earrings & bracelets

Over the course of our conversation, it becomes clear that such spontaneity is in fact a leading principle of both Conie's life and work, which has taken her everywhere from New York to Portugal to Milan, the city she currently calls home. Her whirlwind journey began at a young age, when she was growing up in Argentina with an interior designer mother and a painter grandmother. While she was surrounded by creativity, Conie never had ambitions to become an artist herself. Rather, it was film that caught her attention.

"I always liked movies because they are a way to get out of your own reality," she explains. "They really allow you to go to something that is beyond your own self."

Eventually, this passion for cinema led her to the University of Buenos Aires, where she enrolled on a film course. Although Conie was pursuing a lifelong dream, she felt unfulfilled. "I thought that I wanted to tell stories through film, but I realise now that I was always more focused on aspects like set design and colours," she reflects on her early days at university.

A trip to New York at age 23 quickly put things in perspective, opening her eyes to a world of fast-pace change and fresh inspirations. Conie moved to the city shortly thereafter, her first in a series of departures. It was in New York that she officially embarked on a new identity: artist.

Agnona shirt, Super Yaya skirt

The Attico top & skirt, Giaborghini shoes

Fendi jacket, skirt & bag, Ports 1961 belt skirt

Conie soon set about cultivating a rich artistic practice spanning sculpture, decorative objects, glass, and textiles. While she tells me that she doesn't like to dwell on her past work (in fact, Conie doesn't even own any of her own pieces, preferring not to have them cluttering either her physical or mental space), a quick survey of her early efforts reveals an impressive debut.

In one preliminary series, Conie cast small-scale plaster heads turning towards each other and the viewer in moments of apparent conversation. The mysterious kinetic energy running through the pieces enlivens them in a way which makes them appear almost threatening: one half expects the spirits surely lurking inside to unlodge themselves from their exterior masks and make a run for it.

When I ask Conie how she manages to imbue her works with such a forceful spirit of independence, she demurs, instead offering insight into her instinctual creative process: "I don't necessarily have a plan or a focus on one material or another. When I'm creating, it's more like a continual exploration. I like to try different approaches with every different project."

This kind of exploratory approach paid off, attracting fans across the five boroughs and beyond. After establishing herself on the New York art scene, Conie went on to present work in solo and group shows around the world, from Numero Venti in Paris to the Collectible Fair in New York to Milan Design Week.

Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello jacket, top, skirt, earrings & bracelets

Prada top, skirt & shoes

As Conie gained more notoriety, so did one of her signature motifs: flowers. From bronze chairs with blooms shooting off the seat and back to blown glass vases featuring delicately sculpted petals, a variety of flora appear time and time again in the artist's work. Their constancy across Conie's oeuvre suggests some level of obsession or at least identification, which she confirms.

"I always make things with flowers, not because I find them pretty, but because I like their cycles," Conie explains. "They bloom; they go through so many different stages. In a way, I feel like that is how I approach my life. I relate with their sadness and also the idea that their beauty is fleeting."

Conie's sense of kindredness with flowers is understandable, especially when one considers her ability to set down roots almost anywhere. After leaving New York in 2020, the artist moved to Portugal, where she weathered the bulk of the pandemic years. In the southern European country known for its stunning beaches and sunny climate, Conie enjoyed a simpler life, tending to her own farm where she grew flowers, among other plants.

However, it was not long before her roving spirit kicked up again. In 2023, she left Portugal for Milan. "I don't like the feeling of being stuck," she admits of her need for change. "I don't like things or places to hold me back. Being too attached to a space or to material things can make it difficult to develop oneself."

It's an interesting perspective from an artist whose job is the creation of those very material things. Perhaps, I propose, making them is a way of releasing them from her psychic possession, a kind of decluttering of the spirit. Conie ponders this suggestion, then agrees, likening the effect of producing her art to that she derives from travelling. "I feel a lot of freedom and lightness when it comes to making my work," she shares. "I think that as I start to move more and more, I start becoming lighter as well."

Looking to the future, Conie plans to continue travelling as much as she can, as well as producing and exhibiting her work across the globe. She recently partnered with Danish fine jeweller Orit Elhanati on a selection of pieces handcrafted in sterling silver, and often completes modelling assignments alongside her other creative projects. In a life dictated by the total absence of routine, art remains the one constant.
"It's such a comforting feeling to know that your work is making someone feel something," she reveals, "whether that be beauty or anything else."

Ferragamo coat & shoes, Blumarine bra & trousers

Missoni coat, Tory Burch trousers, Paris Texas shoes

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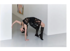

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