

PUSS PUSS

# Hello, Kitty!

Words: Gemma Lacey  
Photography: Amber Mahoney

Few creatives seem as in control of their destiny the way Chloë Sevigny is, so it's little surprise she's now adding director to her impressive roster of skills. With *Kitty* debuting at Cannes, she tells us about her new foray into filmmaking, while making time for some fashion and feline chat too.



Miu Miu wool coat dress & belt



LRS dress, floral blanket coat & boots

## Hello, Kitty!



Stella McCartney dress, Wolford tights, Simone Rocha shoes

Watching *Kitty*, it's clear Sevigny has employed her exceptional eye and endless good taste to create a romantic and entrancing short, welcoming us into her world through a sequence of dappled sunlight. Yet to focus purely on the aesthetics of the film detracts from the sophistication she has employed in bringing Paul Bowles' story to life. Anyone who has read it will be moved by how true to his vision she's been. Discovering his work at 19, she describes him as "godfather to the beats" and talks about how the story of *Kitty* held her interest ever since then. It may seem surprising it's taken so long to come to fruition, but there were a multitude of reasons for this, "It somehow just never happened, or I didn't have the confidence, or timing wasn't right." Given Sevigny is also a master of great timing, it feels like she's done this at a point where she can do it in the most authentic way possible, as she puts it, "I wanted to make my first film venture as pure as I could, meaning, not having it involved with any brands or even musicians, like bands or anything. I just wanted it to be a pure expression." Interestingly, she cites her recent work on *American Horror Story* as a catalyst, that working with "practical effects and shooting 35mm" inspired her to produce her own work and then *Kitty* seemed the perfect fit for this medium.

Going behind the lens has also given her a 360° perspective on her industry, and one she has found liberating, "I've always been very aware on set, of time and the way people are shooting stuff, and I feel like it has kind of made me enjoy acting more. I feel like it has freed me up, now that I have a thing that I can call my own." The upshot of this is a newfound generosity, as performer and in herself. She is warm and effusive, with a contagious enthusiasm for her new ventures.

Even so, it seems a brave choice to take on working with animals for her first short, and given the cats take centre stage in *Kitty*, this must have been challenging. However, perpetually cool-headed, she had things well in hand, courtesy of an "incredible" female cat trainer, "Every action that I wanted the cat to do, I had to break down, like, walking across the lawn, rubbing against someone's leg, jumping on their lap, every single action had to be broken down into these tiny sequences, and then she would train them for each section." In fact, the only effect employed was some post production to change the colour of their eyes and dilate their pupils giving them an almost anime like cuteness. It's not just the eyes that gave her kitties a little edge though, true to form, they have ultra hip names too –



This page: Simone Rocha dress, transparent plastic harness & embellished stockings  
Opposite page: Simone Rocha dress



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Rocky, Bullwinkle, Jaguar, Hero and Handsome – fitting for an indie queen's debut.

Her affection for cats is notable too, and she's clearly a lifelong kitty lover, growing up with two calico cats called Bumble and Tortoiseshell and then a Maine Coon called 'Augustus Fly by Night'. As with their mistress, these were independent and free-spirited outdoor kitties Chloë describes as "huntresses", who stalked birds and hid in closets. As befits her name, Augustus or Gussy, as Chloë refers to her, was also very mysterious and mystical with a slightly spooky and human sense about her. "I feel like there was someone reincarnated in there," she muses before asking, "Do I sound like a quack?" But of course, coming from her, this all sounds entirely plausible.

In terms of her own choice of roles in front of the camera, she is equally diverse, transitioning seamlessly from indie sweetheart to more mainstream roles. There's no doubt TV has given her financial freedom, but as someone who's an auteur of her career, Sevigny has a clear sense of the value of all this beyond money. "I feel like it's a lot more low stakes with acting in TV, so you can try stuff and push things a little further, but I believe in movies as a form of art, there's room for all of it." Her creative spirit is inherently the driving force, as she puts it, "I've been trying to maintain working with good directors, good stories and interesting creative people in television as well." In all areas, she embraces the narrative, which no doubt serves her well as a director too. That said, her newly honed skill doesn't mean we'll be seeing less of her on our screens, as she says she is "bad with downtime". It's not just a question of being prolific though, she's resourceful too, "If I find something that I really want to do, I'll just make the time to do it."

Given the quality of her work and diversity of her roles, I was curious if any stood out. However, for someone who is renowned as an individual, much of her joy seems to come from collaboration, "For me, saying I'm going to do something, doing it, completing it, getting amazing people involved; that's been really good." Her love of the creative process is evident, and seems to play into her instinct for choosing interesting roles. "I mean, there are things that have hit the zeitgeist, like *Kids*, or *Boys Don't Cry*, or *American Psycho*; and when those things land, it's super fun because they move people in different ways. They become iconic films, and that's great and I'd hope for that to happen more. There are still obviously great movies being made all the time, but would they ever have such a cultural impact? Because, then, the next week something else comes out."



This isn't putting her off making her own work, just more determined to make something great and taking the role of director seems a natural progression. It's not surprising, as being in charge has always suited Chloë, whether it's on screen, at the helm of her own line for Opening Ceremony or curating a book of her style. Her love affair with fashion is another reason she has consistently stood out. From fielding an interview request from Jay McInerney by asking for payment in the form of a red rubber Helmut Lang dress, to her early days modelling and interning for the infamous *Sassy* magazine.

It wasn't fashion that drew her to *Sassy* though, "For the bands that they were talking about, the models that they were using and the stories that they were writing about, things that other teen magazines wouldn't. They were kind of breaking the rules – it was much larger than fashion, to me." I ask her how she feels about the current 90's revival, having been such a seminal part of the original scene, "I feel like there are the younger kids who were born there, now coming up and they're fascinated. In the way that I was born in the seventies, and when I was in my late teens, almost twenties, I wanted to look like I came from the seventies. I feel like that's kind of the natural cycle that happens. It's this time that you just missed, but you kind of remember, and how everything seems better then. I can totally understand that they think that about the nineties, because they were! The whole, pre-internet, pre-cell phone, all of that. I just think that things could be new. There hasn't been as much of a youth movement, in different ways, that people can latch onto."

Sevigny is refreshingly candid in her views on style too, "I think it's so hard for celebrities, there's so much pressure around the make up and the hair and wearing something current, to get in the magazines, to promote the movie. It's this whole cycle, and it's so unfortunate that there's no way around it without being criticised."

Given her status in the fashion world, it seems unlikely she'd feel this pressure, but she does, "I feel like now everybody has this expectation. You have to have your hair done, you have to have your make up done if you don't, you don't look as pulled together as everyone else. But then you look more plastic. It's this weird pressure, I feel it, I think everybody does."

Any doubt in this respect is far outshone by a new sense of empowerment at what she's achieved, "I feel like



This page: Stella McCartney dress, Wolford tights, Simone Rocha shoes  
Opposite page: Andreas Kronthaler for Vivienne Westwood shirt



Stella McCartney dress

I turned forty and I mean, what else are you going to do? I just felt like I wanted to do more for me. I feel like doing the Opening Ceremony collections and the book and the other things like I said before, really helped me build that confidence that I could do things and have my vision come into fruition. In ways that I was happy with, and in ways that were me, but still feel accessible."

That sense of accessibility is something, which despite her undoubtable cool has always made her so appealing. From her early days in New York hanging out in Tompkins Square Park, I ask if she skated, and she tells me, "I could, but I didn't. I was more interested in the boys than actual skateboarding." Including Jason Lee, who she had "a huge crush on". The New York of her youth seems a magical 90s playground hanging at Alleged Gallery, the Beastie Boys' X-Large store and Max Fish, where she played pinball because she was too young to drink. Though *Kids* would have you believe her time was a lot wilder, she tells me the contrary, "I think everything about that movie is exaggerated. The only thing real about that movie is Justin Pierce. The only thing real. Everything else is a total exaggeration."

Her love affair with New York remains, though she does have a sense of nostalgia for those days. Certainly, the culture that birthed *Kids* isn't in place any more, but its impact on her is undeniable, "People talk to me almost every day about it. It was like a whole other life for me. It's very alive all the time. It's a strange thing to have to navigate, something that has meant so much to so many people, that's so alive in you, and yet you did it so long ago. I remember, once, I interviewed Dave Gahan and I was like, 'What is it like to sing that same song?', every night, and keep it alive, keep it real. I guess people have that in all their different respects, it's attached to your face. I don't know, that movie is very complicated for me."

Maybe that's why *Kitty* feels like a new dawn for Chloë, there's a sense of joy as she describes mastering the techniques she used to achieve the aesthetic of the film. She's also embracing new challenges in her acting, taking on a period drama in Whit Stillman's *Love and Friendship*, and then, by contrast reprising her role in Netflix's gritty drama *Bloodline*. As she says, "If you're an artist, you're always growing, I mean, if you're human, you're always growing, whatever you have to do to fulfil yourself in different ways, through work, or learning, or challenging yourself or whatever." When I ask what's next she's clear on her direction, "I still really want to do stories that revolve around women, not really having to do with men. I feel like all the projects that I am kicking around are female-centred stories." If *Kitty* is anything to go by, this cat has a whole lot more to share yet.

Styling: Alison Marie Isbell

Hair: Blake Erik @ Jed Root

Make Up: Katie Mellinger using Tromborg

Production: Get It Productions

Photography Assistant: Sasha Frolova

Stylist's Assistants: Carly Caparros, Jonathan Yera

Production Assistant: Geoff Gibson

Black kitten: Janet