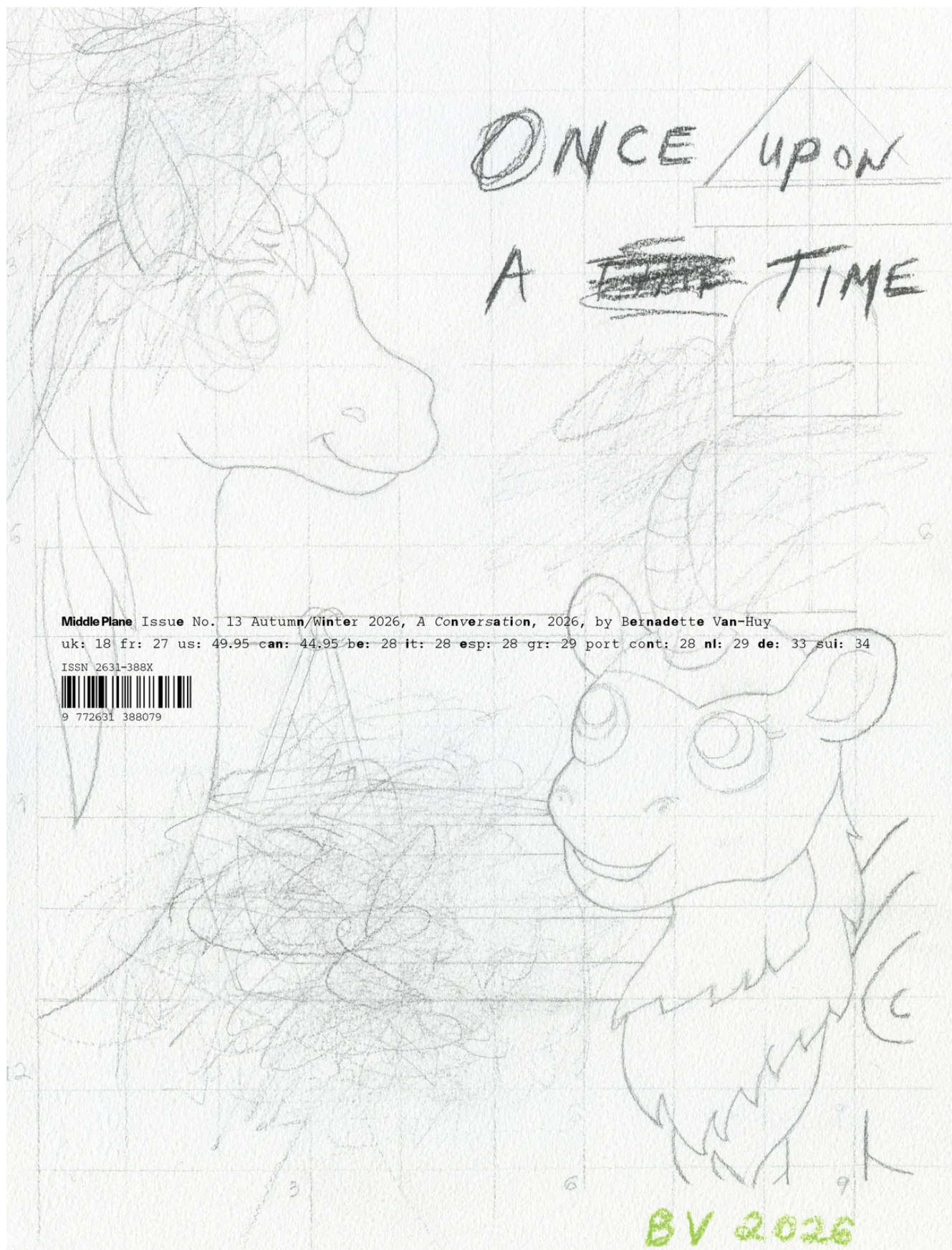


GREENE NAFTALI



Van-Huy, Bernadette and Lizzi Bougatsos. "The Screen Is Titled and Everything's on Wheels." *Middle Plane*, Autumn/Winter 2026: 452–67. (cover)



The screen is tilted and everything's on wheels. Bernadette Van-Huy by Bernadette Van-Huy.

Bernadette Van-Huy in conversation with Lizzi Bougatsos

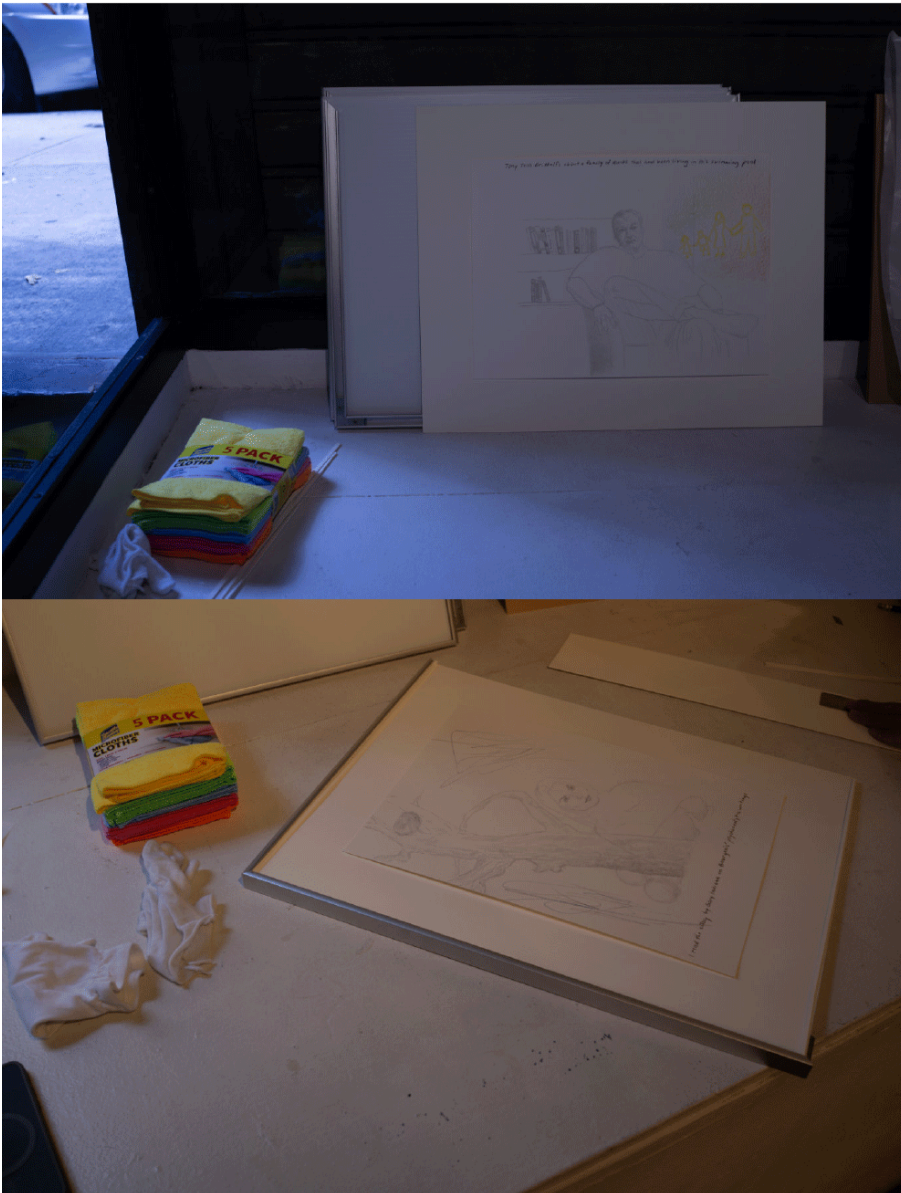
New York natives Bernadette Van-Huy and Lizzi Bougatsos share a longstanding friendship that places progressive practice at its centre. Both have built multifaceted careers: Van-Huy is a filmmaker, artist and co-founder of the art and fashion collective Bernadette Corporation; Bougatsos is an artist and musician performing in Gang Gang Dance. Here, they sit down to look back on the writers and artists, as well as the outfits, that shaped their creative practices. They discussed the dilemma of change, how they've grown to love it and their ongoing plans for the future.

Photographer: Bernadette Van-Huy

All drawings from the series 'Louise Bourgeois Dreams', 2026, Bernadette Van-Huy, exhibited at Letas Gallery NYC



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LB: Good morning Bernadette!

BVH: Good morning, Lizzi. How are you feeling?

LB: Right now? Better than ever.

BVH: I am glad to hear it. Do you ever get tired? Because every time I see you you're soaring with energy.

LB: Ha. I soar with energy when I see you. I do get tired so I try to limit my activities to once a week so I can work. Someone once wrote a song for me called *Everyone wants a piece of me*. This is still true twenty years later. I have to save my energy for my work. Like a mad intruder, my Leo rising slaps me in the face.

BVH: You limit your activities to once a week? My guess is you're probably miscounting ... but okay, if you say so ... Let's have a look then ... I'm just looking up Leo rising ... The traits are ... 'A bold and magnetic energy' ... True. 'Charismatic and radiant, they often light up a room and are often the life of the party' ... True. 'Theatrical presence, they often feel like they are "on stage"' ... True. 'They have big hearts and love to protect and spoil their friends' ... True. The physical-appearance traits are ... 'A thick, voluminous or very expressive head of hair is a classic Leo rising hallmark' ... True. You do have a very expressive head of hair. Expressive eyes, 'Leo ascendants usually have large, warm, and striking eyes' ... True. Ten out of ten! Yeah, with your expressive head of hair and big, warm, saucer eyes, people are going to want a piece of that.

LB: What can I say? Tick, tick and tick.

BVH: You just played at a rave in Philadelphia, right? [Honcho Campout, 2026] For four days? Can you give a scene report?

LB: Dude, that shit was crazy. Honcho festival was like diving into a mud pit of magic. We shared the stage with performers that are friends. And friends were among the three-thousand sold-out crowd. Some friends I never found. There was a suspension bridge built to hit all the stages and DJ floors. I had a shower look. Mugler sunglass-

es, a head wrap and a velour Polo maroon robe. People had tokens to shower and were hustling their coins. I had a full look for every day. I believe in dressing the part.

BVH: I would have loved to have seen it. That's how a rave goddess should look. I would lose my mind. What's it like, for you, being on stage? Does it just feel natural? Do you feel at home?

LB: I become something other than a person on stage. More a vessel to communicate to the crowd through my words, energy and sound. The first day I danced the part of Clara of the *Nutcracker*, I was probably sixteen. I remember staring into the stage light in the corner of the stage. That was all it took. It does feel like home. With I.U.D. [musical duo comprising LB and Sadie Laska], I don't know who the hell I become. Whereas Gang Gang [Dance] is more my spirit, I.U.D. is my angst, if that makes sense.

BVH: You know when the magazine said that there should be an interview of me for the feature, I thought it could be a conversation with someone where we just talk about the fashion collections, and do our best armchair commentating, like Snoop Dogg and Kevin Hart at the Olympics. And so, I started looking at the collections before this conversation, but I didn't get very far. I didn't see many conversation starters. When I mentioned this to someone, that the fashion landscape seems very different from some years ago, they told me that the industry's become more about handbag sales. That's what's become the priority.

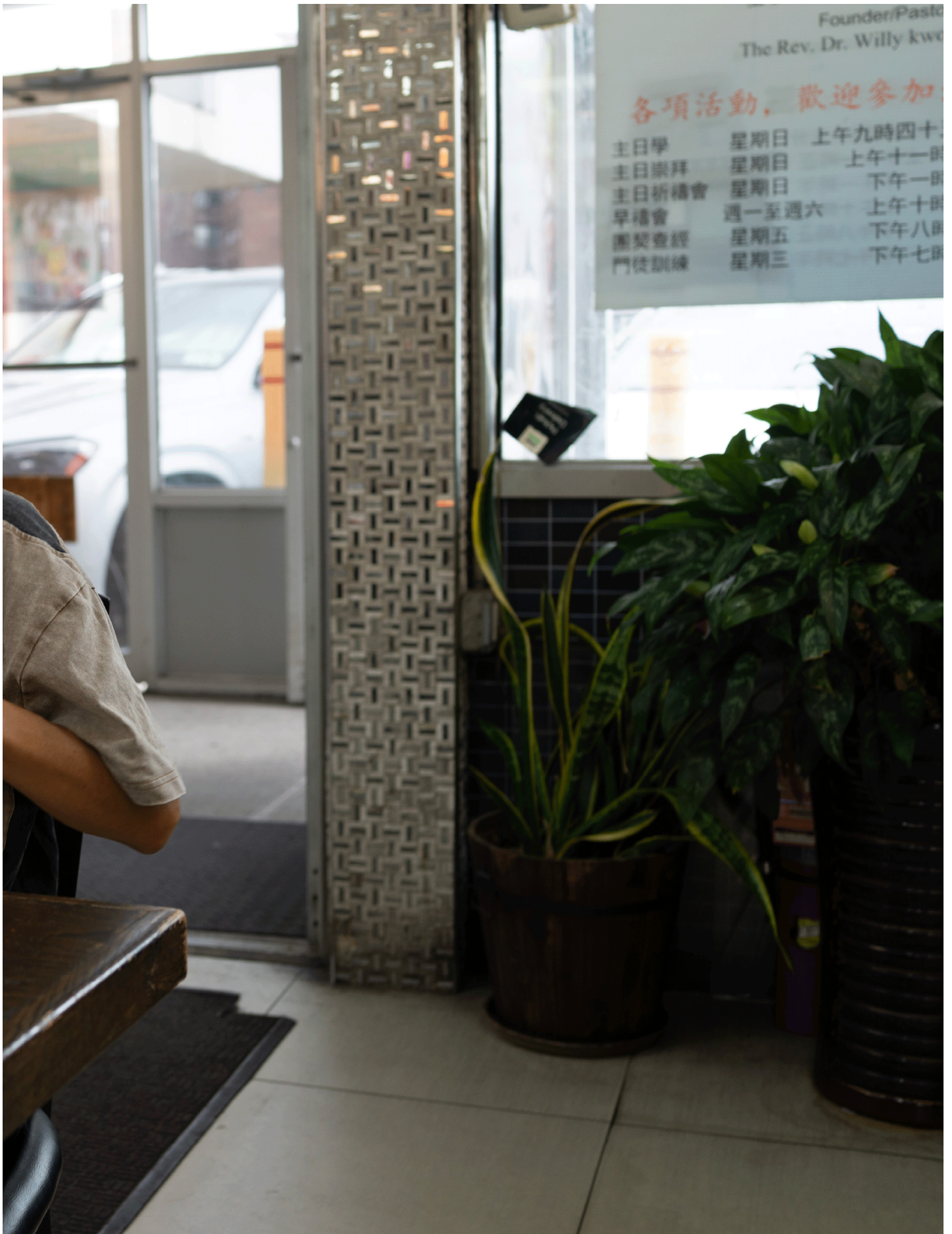
LB: I coined the term Bushwick Birkin for the Telfar bag. A friend was trying to make clothes, so I bought her a magazine of the latest collections at the magazine stand at the airport. I do this when I'm on tour. Yeah man. I think a handbag is always a hit.

BVH: If a designer approached you to do a Bougatsos bag, how would you like it to look?

LB: When I was younger, my dad made me one for my ballet shoes. He also made me a small bag that went under my shirt with a zip-



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per in it to hide my money when I went to live shows in the city. Maybe that's why I never lose anything. I also have a hawk-eye. Aside from those, I definitely do not want a Bougatsos bag. Girl you crazy. I would love a perfume though ...

BVH: I can see that. Well then instead of talking about the collections, maybe instead we can borrow that Vogue format, where they make someone explain some of their past outfit choices. For Gang Gang Dance's Spotify profile picture, you're wearing a bunny costume. Why don't you explain that?

LB: Chloé [Sevigny] and I were in P-Town and we went into a campy store. They had that bunny sweatshirt. I think I bought it as a forty-year-old 'cos I was having an identity crisis. I needed one piece to shake it up but maybe I thought I was in my twenties. I try to 'age appropriate' dress these days.

BVH: Yes, nowadays I have this funny talent ... It's pretty remarkable ... I'm super slow-moving, as well as blind, but strangely, if there's some mishap and something's falling, I have excellent reflexes and become lightning-quick and usually catch it. How about you? Do you have any unusual talents?

LB: Hmm ... I am really good with interns. This is one of my great talents. That and multitasking. I have ADHD so it takes me a minute to get in the groove in the mornings.

BVH: Shout-out to our friend Taka [Imamura], who does a now-and-then gallery called Letas, where I just had a show with our other friend Danny McDonald ['Drawings & Objects', Letas, 2026]. I think some of my drawings from that show will be featured in this [Middle Plane] feature. Anyway, what I did for that show was come up with a fictional premise of being haunted by that famous Louise Bourgeois portrait by Mapplethorpe, of her wearing monkey fur and carrying a penis [Louise Bourgeois, 1982]. Anyway, what I love about Louise Bourgeois ... I just recently got into her ... I had never looked into her before. It was because

I read a posthumous essay that Gary Indiana [writer and art critic] wrote about her and her psychoanalytic writings ['A Coneys Island of the Viscera', Ursula, 2019]. It's such a beautiful essay. Gary wrote how terrifying she was! But so, I started looking into her, and her drawings are so intriguing. They're completely inhospitable. They're mostly awful drawings. Like as if they're made by someone who doesn't know how to draw and doesn't bother or care to try. I was shocked when I learned that she had formal Beaux-Arts [Renowned Paris art school] training. But her thinking was so insular, and she was tracking her inner landscape, so her marks were very private symbols. Like mathematical notations. Also she was a woman artist during those decades when it was as if there weren't any, because no one cared about women artists and so no one was paying attention to her art anyway, so her art really was a private affair. But her thinking and drawings are so reduced, so unflinchingly bare-boned. You went to one of her salons, didn't you? And wrote poems about her?

LB: Gary was right! She is terrifying. Rita [Ackermann, artist and vocalist of Angelblood] and I went to her salon to bring her our Angelblood album. I was terrified as she asked me to sing! I think we just played her the songs on the CD. She liked it. She would sit on like ten pillows, towering over everyone in a circle. At that time, I was carrying around Gang Gang flyers. She signed one, Glenn from Danzig and a fierce R & B star but I forgot who it was. I hope it wasn't R. Kelly? Yeezus. It was! How did I get R. Kelly's signature? No idea. Yes, a magazine asked me to go to Bourgeois's exhibition and write a response to her work. I made drawings and wrote poems. The curator thought our work was similar. I have always been intrigued and mesmerised by Bourgeois. I need to read this essay you mention. I knew Gary and I loved him. He gave me reason to accept myself really. He lived like me, had an apartment

like me, travelled like me. His emails were genius: memes with Lana Del Ray, bleeding out of her mouth, saying, 'Merry Fucking Christmas.' He made me feel alive. We acted in a film together [Tour Without End, 2018]. He planted a big wet kiss on me on screen. Then he made out with Kate Valk. One of my favourites was when he put on a Jewish hat and a fur coat in a performance and denounced Jesus Christ singing show tunes. Damn, this interview is getting spicy.

BVH: So cool. Gary makes me feel alive, even though he's not here anymore. I remember feeling so alive, and like three times more powerful when I first read him. It was his book Rent Boy [1993]. When I first started reading that book it was like hanging out on a couch with a brilliant private detective, who's glazed over from heroin. The analyses of the characters and the descriptions of humanity are so astute, but the mood is half-dozing.

LB: Totally, it's a very unique experience. I am reading your poem 'Seeing is Like', from your exhibition at the Maria Leuff Foundation [2022]. You wrote, 'Secondly, our brain spits out a Xerox.' How does your brain go there? It makes me think, when I read something like this, that we have a similar writing style. How and when do you write? Is there a specific time? I also love the line, 'Seeing is like translation' ... What do you mean by that?

BVH: Seeing is like translation because how we see is indirect. Basically, light has to bounce off of something, and enter our eyes, basically encoded with information about the object, and our brains interpret that encoded information. So it's like light is the witness and our brains produce a police sketch. That's how we 'see'. I titled that exhibition, which was about light and seeing, 'Seeing is Like', after the Nas song, Nas Is Like [1999].

LB: Girl.

BVH: I love writing in the hours around sleeping. I consider myself as basically a poet. Even though I don't write poetry. Except for the odd two or three that I've

written. Poetry is exactly that sublime, splendid thing that you can be a poet and not write poetry. Or read it. I've read poetry. But not much.

LB: Your drawing *Dusk*, from 2022, has a female figure facing the ground. Hans Bellmer and Daumier-esque drawings come to mind. Even Degas. So classic. I did notice in Bourgeois's drawings that her lines are erratic. Bare-boned as you mention. I think they are so reduced because they resemble her psychological states of being. Withdrawn, introverted. Her drawings often have patterns. I feel her installations carry similar lines. Even the large spiders. Lines as psychological states interest me. Do you relate to this?

BVH: I know what you mean, and I do somewhat, I relate to lines as psychological states. I have a definite preference for really sensitive, nervous, scratchy lines. Or out-of-place lines. Lines that have no business being there. When I was saying earlier that Bourgeois's drawings are so inhospitable ... well, the curators who would exhibit them, or the editors publishing them would ask her to write an accompanying description, for each drawing, what it's about, its meaning ... something, anything for the viewer to hold on to. Bourgeois hated the idea and didn't want to do it, but then she hated even more the idea that someone else would write the descriptions of her drawings, so she did it. And that's how we got Bourgeois's writing, which we wouldn't have otherwise, for the most part. Her writing is so great, so terse and compressed like her drawings. Actually, it was her writing that was my entry into her work. The psychoanalytic writings she did, that I mentioned earlier, that Gary Indiana wrote a perfect essay about, weren't written for the public. There was a period when she didn't make art, after her father died. She was in analysis, and she'd written those purely for herself, or her analyst; but Bourgeois never threw anything away. She had a fear of abandonment, and she identified with detritus, so she kept

everything. She'd stored these writings in a metal box. And one day much later, her assistant found them. And they were eventually made available to the public. Gary Indiana said about her that she knew how to survive. All the self-hate, the guilt, the rage she felt, that many people who grew up with an awful parent and traumatic childhoods live with, but she knew how to productivise it and to keep herself sane. To be honest, I'm talking like I know a lot about her when I don't! I've only scratched the surface. And just about her drawings and writings.

LB: I want to know your fashion/anti-fashion staples? Where do you go for inspiration?

BVH: Lizzi ... I live in the country! Fashion doesn't exist up here. Currently I prioritise eating well and being reasonably clean ... and washing my clothes. Because as long as I look like I have a definite structure – a head on top of a neck, a torso, a waist, etc. – I'm happy and in good shape. Even with this low upkeep though, I'm very aware that I could completely let myself go, and it wouldn't matter. People in the country wouldn't regard me any differently. But what I feel at home in ... I don't have the figure or height that can wear many kinds of clothes, so when something actually looks good on me, whatever it is, that thing and I are married. We're glued for life. I would be very experimental stylistically, because my brain always cooks up styles and looks, but I can't go there. What I feel most comfortable in these days is the archetypal Hollywood screenwriter, bland anonymous look. Baseball cap, T-shirts, sweatshirts, jeans, I need everything in my life to be low maintenance. If I were to splurge on myself, I guess I'd get some fancy accoutrements to complement my T-shirt and jeans look, to add some luxury to it. Jewellery, or a classic handbag or cashmere coat. Or go the other way and get something sleazy. But yeah, to get back to my original thought for this conversation, let's talk more about

fashion. Maybe we can talk about some things from the collections from any time whatsoever that we remember and love. I remember the first time I touched a designer piece of clothing. It was like something from another world. It was by Jean Paul Gaultier and the fabric was so luxurious to the touch, I couldn't get over it! What about you? Specific memories of designer looks?

LB: The first collection that I was inspired by was YSL A/W 1976–7 Haute Couture. These looks really defined style to me in the late 90s. You know that whole *Babooshka*, Kate Bush vibe, head scarves, etc. Also, the classic trouser suit with the huge bow. I really liked ties and bows back then. We were on the front cover of a copy of *The Fader* [2007], I wore a Vivienne Westwood scarf on my head from the Sex shop she had with Malcom McLaren. Funny side note: Gavin Brown bought it for me at one of Rob Pruitt's *Flea Markets* in London.

BVH: Cool. What came after the head-scarves?

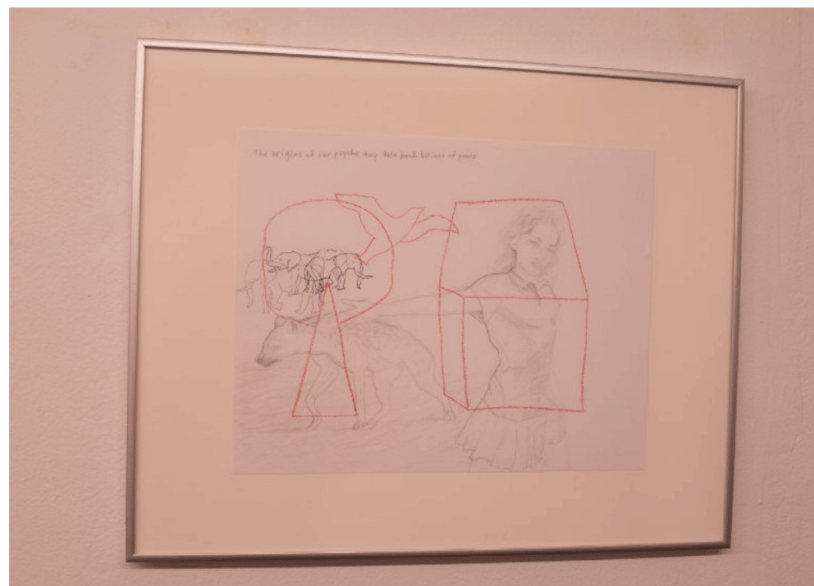
LB: So, then there was Miguel Adrover. Chloé introduced me to that first collection with the Knicks, I Love NY, Bob Marley tees [Manaus–Chiapas–NYC, S/S, 2000]. Have you seen the doc [The Designer is Dead, 2025]? Absolute game changer. I tried to make my own versions, so I went to Woodstock to buy a Bob Marley T-shirt. There was also a Balenciaga hat that looked like a welder's hat. Tried to replicate that specifically. I had a hat game. Collected hats for a minute, topping them like Erykah Badu. I'd dress in a black army suit, like a man, when we were on tour, to get paid. Became a staple until my butt kept ripping them. Then I started wearing lingerie over my tops, garters over skirts. I think I got that from Mel Ottenberg who was styling Rihanna. I was super into his looks. Oh man, then my Duck Rock tee that actually belonged to Sinéad O'Connor. Also from the Sex shop era. I need to write my memoir. The swan dress that Bjork, the queen, wore for the



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MTV [Video] Music Awards [SIGH].
Anyways, tell me about your
last exhibition at Greene Naftali
[‘Bernadette Corporation’, 2023].
How does that compare to the
collection you designed for
Supreme [2023]?

BVH: The last exhibition was in 2022
I think, and it was about the
rampant inflation, and value being
erased, and in a wider sense,
the rise and fall of things – of
systems, of species and so on.
We made a set of inflation monu-
ments – plinths fabricated with
dry-erase board material, which
we drew on with erasable mark-
ers. And we made arrangements
out of pennies that sat on top.
It’s amazing how respectful art
audiences are. At the end of the
show, I went in to see if any
marks needed touching up. Only
here and there you’d see a very
tentative finger swipe, at a small
part of a line. But otherwise,
ninety-nine per cent intact.
For the most part, with Supreme
collaborations, it’s their de-
signers who come up with the
clothes. The artist just opens
their archive to them. But in
my case, I did participate a
little bit, basically because I
didn’t know I wasn’t supposed
to [LAUGHS]. But mostly, I just
made some suggestions on the
stuff they had come up with.
Except with the basketball. I
was all in with the basketball. I’m
actually going to give them some
grief about it, because I had
shown them a preliminary sketch,
but then I went on and came up
with more designs and finally had
one that I called ‘the used-car
ball,’ that I thought was great,
but they went with the first pre-
liminary sketch I’d shown them! I
was so disappointed!

LB: Now when you look back, how do
you think your creative process-
es have changed?

BVH: Through the years, not so much
anymore, but mostly in the past,
people often asked me what my
daily life was like. Usually they’re
just actually confused about
what I did with myself ... if an-
ything. But it’s because when I
was young, that bohemian idea
of not producing being produc-
tive, got in my head. I swallowed

that program. It ran invisibly
inside me, I forgot it was there
and decades went by ... to not
produce is productive. It ran well
past the point of me even be-
lieving in that statement. Only
recently did I realise its intense
presence, and how I’ve real-
ly been programmed by it, and
now I enjoy being as productive
as I can be. So that’s one big
way that I think I’ve changed.
Recently at least. How about you?
What’s a big way that you think
you’ve changed?

LB: I really think that all I do is
work, but people think I’m a de-
linquent and rich, which is defi-
nitely not the case. I really want
to get what I deserve in my art
career. Looking back as of late,
I realise my schedule is just not
like others, and I am trying to
honour this. Artists never stop
working. I am spearheaded and
locked in. In the past, I didn’t
know how to deal with social dis-
tractions and people in general.
I wasn’t aware of this before.
I can’t give away my bread for
free. I realise this too now,
that I was way too generous with
my time for others. It didn’t
help that a friend passed away in
my band, and I had to leave town
to deal with my grief. I real-
ised that I couldn’t be a vessel
this time for others. All of that
emotion pours into my work. Now?
I guess this is the private time
for myself. And I watch a lot of
movies; I’ve always been a film
buff, but now I guess I’m a Mubi
maniac. Period.

BVH: My strongest relationship to
movies is that I think of life as
a Woody Allen film. The screen is
tilted and everything’s on wheels.

LB: Yes! I love that.

BVH: Totally.

LB: Let’s do it again sometime. You’re
a genius.

BVH: Take care of yourself.

LB: See you!