

TWENTY

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McQUEEN

ENIKO



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INTERVIEWED by NATHALIE MILLER

Eniko Mihalik was born in Hungary. After winning a model competition, she launched an extensively successful career in the fashion industry. She splashed onto the fashion scene in 2008 by walking the runway for Gucci and subsequently landing her legendary Gucci campaign. She has since walked for every major designer including McQueen, Moschino, Versace, Givenchy, Max Mara, Blumarine, Alberta Ferretti, and more. Mihalik has over 60 magazine covers including Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, and Self. She is an active marathon runner and also volunteers with UNICEF Hungary to raise funds. In 2021, Mihalik married Dávid Korányi and they have recently welcomed a beautiful daughter into their family.

TWELV sits down with Eniko and discusses modeling, married life, and the fashion industry.

Photography CHAMA
Styling HISSA IGARASHI

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You grew up in Hungary. Can you tell me a bit about what your childhood was like? Were you always interested in fashion and the creative world?

I think I had a typical childhood, I don't have anything bad or traumatic to say about it. As a matter of fact, I think it was kind of boring in an average way. I was a very happy little girl, a typical girly girl, I drew princesses and I wanted to wear pretty dresses. However I have a sister who is nine years older than me and obviously I used to be the annoying little sister. I was about six years old and she was 15, so that was a huge age gap. She was already putting on makeup, dressing to go out, and probably interested in boys and always had cool clothes and everything. She had these amazing fashion magazines that exposed me to fashion back in the 90's, 90's designers, the models and clothing. I remember going through them page by page until she would come into the room and scream at me. This is what got me first exposed to fashion, they got my interest. I remember the covers and I always thought, like they were beautiful women. As a little girl I already looked up to my sister as one of the most gorgeous girls I have ever seen in my life, I always wanted to be like her, look like her. To me, my mom was an eternal beauty, like the definition of a woman. But those magazines with the 90s top models on them, I just couldn't believe that's what women looked like. As a six year girl I couldn't believe that was what I was going to become. I think Claudia Schiffer was one of the girls, and I thought holy cow she is gorgeous. I think my drawings as a little girl started with princesses but then I started drawing designs. Constantly drawing women and clothes. These magazines had a lot of influence on why I did that.

You started modeling when you were 15. In what ways do you think you've grown since then and what has stayed the same?

I still have the same roots. Somehow I still think of myself as the 15 year old girl from Hungary who is just super enthusiastic to work. My excitement never really died down for my job, this industry. I just grew up and became mature and wiser, more sure about myself in my decisions. I think it's part of growing up, but back when I was fifteen, I was very unsure and always looking for answers in other people. Now that I've grown up, I'm more and more sure of myself, what

I want from life. But deeply rooted, I think I'm still the same little girl. I don't think I've ever looked at myself in the past and said this person is not me anymore. I know some people look back and say "how could that be me," I look at myself when I was younger and I just smile and think "yep that's me." That's still me.

“THIS IS LIKE THE NBA, THE SUPERBOWL FOR ME IN MODELING”

What would you tell 15 year old Eniko if you could talk to her?

I would just boost myself with confidence, I'd reassure myself that things are heading the right way, everything is going to be OK. Although I could be making better choices, I'm making good choices. To keep going in and trust in myself.

You've worked with almost every designer or fashion photographer I can think of. Is there a shoot, or a runway, or anything that stands out to you as your favorite?

I was twenty years old when I first came to NY and shortly after, I walked in the fashion show for Gucci. I remember this one because this is my first prêt-à-porter runway that was a major runway, major designer for me and also because following that I got to be in the Gucci ad campaign. This photo shoot to me is like the jump start of my career and I feel like they come hand-in-hand because one happened after the other or one happened because of the other. It was very very special to me, it gave me the opportunity to become a successful model and for me to be where I'm at today. If there is one moment in my career it's that, or that combination that I remember because this is where it all began for me .





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If you had to pick 3, what were the 3 most defining moments of your career so far?

One of them would definitely be the Gucci fashion show, even the feeling of it was incredible. The second one would be the V magazine photoshoot I did with Inez & Vindoo. It was for the cover. This was just an incredible photo shoot, just crazy what happened there. It was the black and white photoshoot, it was called the Eniko show and what a lot of people don't know about that photo shoot is that all the girls who were on the cover for that magazine, were also supposed to be inside the editorial as well. And all I know, I was so young and so clueless, I went to the photo shoot, they introduced me to all these big names, these big models, my legs are literally shaking. And we took my photos, right, it was supposed to be a long editorial and every model was supposed to have 2 to 3 pages in the magazine. And we take my two shots and then Inez says, "can you just sit down for a second and wait here, we need to talk to your agent." They come back like 20 minutes or so later and say "so we spoke to your agent, and this is what is going to happen. We are going to shoot the cover with all the girls, but only you are going to be in the editorial." I was like, "excuse me?" So, they had like 24 pages in the magazine, I don't even remember how many and they said no, we're not going to shoot any of the other girls. Like we're talking about Eva Herzigova, Naomi Campbell, like all these big names. And they were like you are going to be the only girl in the editorial instead. So, I was like oh shit! OK! This just got real, really quick. This was a lot to digest, and this is the first time when I really felt like this is playing in the big leagues. This is like the NBA, the Superbowl for me in modeling. This was a huge moment for me, and I don't even know if I can compare anything else to that. Then there is the Victoria's Secret show of course and I think even the second one more than the first (2009, 2014). I think the 2009 show came easily for me, because I was on the top of my career and didn't train for it as hard. But 2014 definitely came as a payoff for really hard and dedicated work. I feel like a lot of time in this industry, models feel like they're not in control of their work on a day-to-day basis and this to me felt like I got where I wanted to be. So, the 2014 Victoria's Secret show was just like a really great reward for me. And to be on that runway, I think I cherish it as one of the great later moments in my career. If they would bring that show back, I would pray to be on it again. It's so much fun, it's one of the greatest jobs that you can do as a model I think.

Can you tell me one of your favorite backstage fashion-week stories?

I do have a story, but it's not particularly a good one, and I don't think I can name names. I was at Stella McCartney backstage, and we already lined up to get out on the runway, and one of the girls was a friend of mine. She was supposed to open the show, but the second girl behind her, she was a big name, she was a very established girl. Not even our generation, I will say she's a bit older than us and was a really big model. Right when the music starts and the lights go on, the person behind the scenes tells the first girl to go. This other model pushed my friend out of the way and stepped on the runway as number one. It may not seem as crazy to people who are watching shows outside of the fashion world, but if you're inside you know that there's rivalry. But not at that level. I've never seen a girl push another girl. I've never seen a girl getting into a fight with another girl, there's rivalry. Like a mean look a girl might give to another or the cold shoulder treatment, but I've never seen one girl take over another one spot. I was like holy moly; it was just a typical moment in a movie, how you imagine what it is like and it was like that for a second. I'm not naming names, but it was funny. I thought, "this is power." If I had pulled that stunt, I would've been kicked out of the show. But the fact that this girl had the power to do it and people just said, "oh well," I thought. OK. She can do whatever she wants.

So being the first person in a show means a lot?

Yes, usually if you open or close a show, it is honorary. Opening the show is a huge thing and closing the show is the second best thing. And you know when you are in the fashion show if you are within the first 4-5 girls, it's almost like opening. They give you the first, second or third look, you are like in the beginning. In between (for the collection, everything is important) but as far as ranking the models, it's kind of like you are in the middle. The opening is the big wow moment while the final moment is where everybody will look at you the longest. If they are giving you the final look, they are giving you the most beautiful, the most important or the biggest outfit.



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Looking ahead, is there a creative endeavor within fashion that you haven't yet done, but are dying to try?

So circling back to when I was a little girl, always drawing women's bodies with different kinds of dresses on them. Actually working in fashion and living it every day, I still want to be a designer. I still want to create dresses. I'm not talking about couture or something very crazy, but I have my own taste, I have my own style now and I think my ultimate goal in the future would be to have a small line of clothing. A small brand, something very elegant, very tasteful, pieces that doesn't only last for one season but throughout a lifetime. I really would love to start with being part of a creative team at one of the brands or fashion houses and eventually get to the point where I make my own clothing. That would be amazing.

What would an ideal job be? Who's the photographer, the stylist, the brand or campaign, are there other models?

For me an ideal job is more artistic than just clothing. It could just be in front of a white wall and with an amazing stylist. It has to do with my age as well, that I want things to be elegant and simple, perfect. Like minimalistic where the model's body language comes out as opposed to clothes being too loud. Makeup focused on the girl's beauty rather than something super crazy. Clothes are shown by movement and not just as sculpture. When models have freedom to move, I think it is always more beautiful. The photo shoot is about the creative process and I'm lucky enough to say I participated in many photo shoots where I had creative freedom. In the modern fashion world, a lot of creativity is being controlled by brands. The photographers, stylists and magazine editors have less room to create art, so I would like to bring back no limits. The ideal photo shoot would be to let imagination fly free. You know we used to do shoots until 2am in the morning on a glass of water. No time limits, no budgets. I used to love it because I would die by the end of it, I'd wake up hungover from the physical activity it requires. But then you'd see the outcome, and it was always the photos worth the most. Those would become the photos that people use as reference and it was all worth it, because creativity runs free.

Is there anything you wish people would know about you?

I'm a funny person, I have a great voice, I am an amazing cook, fantastic wife and an incredible mother.

If you weren't a model, what do you think you'd be doing right now? Would you still be in fashion?

Before modeling I was accepted into university to become a teacher in Hungary. I have a daughter and now I'm starting to regain my passion for children and their learning process. Back then I really wanted to teach young kids, 6, 7 and 8 year olds. I thought teaching them to read and write would be the most incredible thing. But knowing myself for this long, I don't know if that would've been satisfying enough, I need to be creative, be my old boss and have freedom with traveling. I think if I wasn't a model, I would've eventually pursued designing, I think I'd still be in fashion. I think I'd just have a degree in teaching with a couple of years of experience behind me first.

How has the industry changed since you first started modeling?

One of the greatest changes is the outcome of social media, the number one biggest impact on the whole entire world I think. When I started modeling, social media wasn't a thing and it's funny because I recently scrolled all the way back to my first Instagram photos, and it used to be nothing like today. Instagram used to not be about advertising, it used to not be about fashion or looks. No filters, color themes and nobody shared personal information. Now I just see it as a business platform. I think it impacted the fashion industry by somehow bringing back the model celebrity. The way the 90s models used to be celebrities with paparazzi following them, being invited to the Oscars or always dating the hottest Hollywood stars. When I was at the top of my career that was not a thing. The girls who were the top models were famous within the industry, but not famous outside. Somehow with social media, and with children of famous people, it all came back. All the models now are actual pure celebrities with real followings, real influence. I don't necessarily think it's a negative thing. I also don't know if it's a very positive thing, it's just different. I was never a big fan of the spotlight, I liked being established in my field. I'm not sure I would have enjoyed being a celebrity. However, in some ways influence brings more power to the models and I think that is good.



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I saw you recently had a daughter, congratulations! How do you keep a stable balance between work and personal life?

Luckily this work comes with a flexible schedule and we made our personal life flexible too. When I have to work, the whole family understands work is work. My work is not Monday through Friday 9 to 5. If I have to travel and spend a couple days in a foreign country, it is what it is. It's important to me, it's important to my husband that I have something else other than my daughter going on in my life.

“I THINK CLAUDIA SCHIFFER WAS ONE OF THE GIRLS, AND I THOUGHT HOLY COW SHE IS GORGEOUS”

Is there anything about the fashion world that you wish would change before your daughter is old enough to be influenced by it?

The one thing I really wish for the fashion industry to change is sustainability. I think we are very irresponsible with our planet, with our home, this earth. I really hope that we can change that. If not, I know it's going to be my daughters job to try to reverse the damage the last past couple of generations have done. I hope that I will still be alive to be part of the change. I really hope the fashion industry will stop prioritizing irresponsible creativity and using creativity as an excuse to destroy our home. I hope fashion will slow down, I hate fast fashion. The brands that create fast fashion. I'm guilty, I shop fast fashion, I think everyone does. But I would love to see fast fashion slow down, and for luxury brands to take more responsibility because ultimately they are the ones leading the industry because they have fashion week. That's what I hope for my daughter, that when she grows up she see's responsible decisions, responsible creativity and different priorities in this world

Would you want baby Eniko to be a model?

If my daughter wanted to be a model, I wouldn't stop her, or anyone from trying that out. I would love for

my daughter to have better guidance, which I can provide. As for myself, as a little girl I wish I had been more confident and more cautious. I wasn't very sure of myself when I was younger, and I let a lot of people influence me and make decisions for me. I'm still very lucky that none of those decisions turned out very badly, and got me to where I am today. I wouldn't say no to my daughter modeling, I would just make sure I'm the eyes and ears are open to give her the guidance

Looking through your career, I can see one designer that you've worn countless times is Alexander McQueen. Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with the fashion house?

There is a funny story about this. I used to own a beautiful python snakeskin Alexander McQueen knuckle bag and I took that with me in my handbag. I usually pack most of my valuables in my handbag ,because I don't really trust airlines with expensive stuff in checked in luggage. I was going through the airport scanner, and you know knuckle dusters are considered a weapon, you're not allowed to fly with it. So at the airport they wanted to confiscate my McQueen knuckle bag. They wanted to take my bag away from me! It's worth a couple of thousands of dollars, and it was the python skin, not even the regular leather, the more expensive version. And I just couldn't believe it. I had to explain to them that it's a clutch. They looked at me so weirdly. At the end of the day I had to check in my handbag, which I was not happy about because it contained everything valuable that I traveled with. So I prayed the whole flight that nothing would go missing, luckily that time nothing did. So I learned my lesson to never travel with that bag again. I think soon I got rid of it, because I like things to be easy. But that was way before Alex McQueen passed away and now I actually really wish I still had a piece that he originally designed

What do you think baby Eniko would think about your life now?

Honestly, I am usually very hard on myself so I think maybe baby Eniko would be very proud of me. But if baby Eniko had the same mentality as me today, she would tell me to get my shit together because I can't believe you're 35 years old and you're still only dreaming about becoming a designer.She would tell me you have all the resources and all the opportunities, all you need to do is go after it, and I think she's right.





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