CREATING THE
FEMININE FUTURE

A CONVERSATION WITH
KATIE MCINTYRE

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Katie McIntyre is a creative director, director, technologist, fashion and automotive designer. She studied design at The Rhode Island School of Design. Post graduation, she then worked as a designer at Google Creative Lab, developing technology approaches to equity through an understanding of XR and female empowerment. She was then hired by Apple as one of the youngest art directors in the company's history, where she worked across ID, HI, and Marcom on new product designs, films, and mixed reality inventions. She then launched her studio, which creates films, virtual and physical couture, album covers, and tech collaborations for some of the biggest artists and brands on earth. She is known globally for her design philosophy of "feminine futurism" which she has lectured on at Harvard University, Carnegie Mellon , USC, and Duke University. Her work has been featured in Hypebae, Vogue, Time Magazine, and others. She has created videos, album covers, and custom virtual and physical fashion designs for Nicki Minaj, Cardi B, Lizzo, Latto, Flo Milli, The Weeknd, Normani, Viktoria Modesta, and more. She has worked with Mugler, Goat, Nike Virtual Studios, and Dress X on collaborations in the virtual fashion space.

The Design Practice

My design practice is rebellious. I would say that I'm very technical and methodical and strategic, but also very heart-based in my design practice. I do what I think is right which also comes from a place of genuine empowerment.
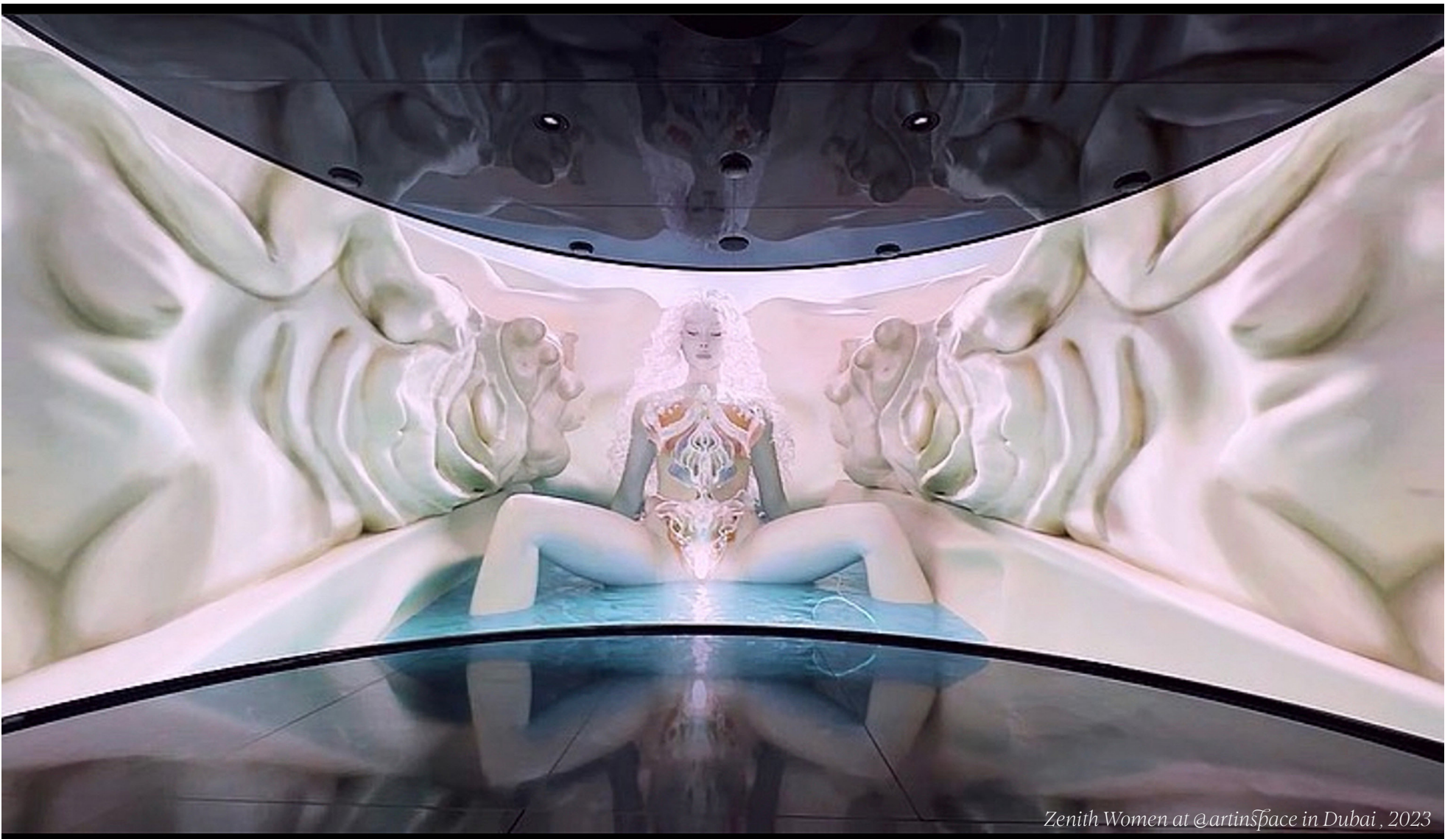
Zenith Women at @artinspace in Dubai , 2023

Whether that be with the clients I'm working with, or even myself sometimes, like, sometimes it's a personal thing, where I'm feeling angry about being a woman in the world, or just my experiences and wanting to channel that into something productive and creative. And sometimes, I would say that my practice is just geared around my visual philosophy.

What was the journey of starting your philosophy behind creating the feminine future? My RISD graphic design thesis was called feminine future. That's so I've been doing this for a long time before it was even really understood. After I left RISD, I was fully in the tech world. So I worked for Google Creative Lab and then for Apple, I was one of the youngest art directors in Apple's history. And I experienced the worst of the patriarch, like the most toxic side of it that people often don't see or discuss and I think all of that was major fuel.

What are some challenges that you might have faced when you were kind of preparing or working to launch your studio and could you talk about this from the perspective of being a female entrepreneur and designer, but also as an international person starting something in the States? Actually I had to come back to Canada to start my studio but it's really easy for me to travel back and forth to the US. I have an agency now, which helps. So I'm applying for a special talent visa through my agency. I think my studio

just came as a natural thing. And then I was, I still had like, even though I'd worked in these tech companies, I'd been doing these music projects for years. I think that sticking to your kind of theory and creating a visual background to your studio actually gives it a lot more wings because you can scale horizontally. But yeah, my agency represents like, like 40 of the top creative directors in the world.

The future of design & technology

I personally think that mixed reality is having to look through a screen to see something is still there's a layer of disconnection, we ideally want to not have to look through a screen and see an infinite digital adaptation to a garment. I think ideally, we'll see in like 20 years, a cool little kid walking home from school and his garment changing into all these animations that he's making on his tablet and he looks super cool. I think the best case scenario is that we see more independent creative thought through fashion as a result of the technology versus restricting it and having it be less accessible. So that's sort of my grand vision.

They work a lot across like live music events, but also fashion and technology and design. And they have a roster of really incredible people. So yeah, I would also say, having big long-term projects that you want to execute that are like masterpieces, but then having intermittent projects, like client stuff is totally fine and should be how you run your practice. And that's part of how I run my studio.

World's first feminist futurist car, "Dakini", 2023

to find feminine joy in the act of resistance

As femme-presenting/female designers, how should we thrive in the design community where men currently dominate the industry? There's kind of two things that I see happen in the world sometimes with anyone who is femme-presenting in any capacity. Which is that you either cave. There's a lot of pressure. It's very hard. You're constantly being beaten down in different directions. Some people will try to undermine you. Will you push you out just because you don't fit that prescribed identification of what a technical person, or even an artistic person or a creative person. And then there's women, or even femme-presenting people, or anyone who doesn't confined to the norm, who just become. And I say this in the most, the best way possible. Savage. just become a savage. I'm gonna stand by what I stand by. If this person doesn't believe in me, I'm gonna believe in myself. I'm gonna put in so much work

that no one can doubt my ability. I'm going to continue fostering my skills in a way that I reach my goals, even if there's so much noise going on around me, I'm not gonna listen.

If someone says that I'm not worthy to be in a space, I'm going to avidly rebel on the inside. Even if I don't say it on the outside. I'm not gonna let that get to me. And I think that is how I sort of recommend my warriors to go into the situation in the sense that there is resistance.

Grit-Breaking Through The Glass Ceiling. 2023

Dakini in a realm, 2023

What do you think is the most dangerous behavior/trait that you've seen derail female leaders in the design industry? I would say it's the group mentality. It's a hivemind. People think that it's not a hive mind. It is a 100% hivemind. I've seen groups of men push women out of rooms, strategically refuse to invite them to meetings, and keep them out if they speak as a power tactic actively. What's healed me in this process is talking to other people who are struggling with this, usually particularly like femme-presenting people and women about their experiences because when you start to put the math together, it's like, if you put a sticky note on the walls. It's like all of a sudden you're like, is it actually me, or is it the system? And then when you're going through some of the most damaging heart-wrenching experiences with patriarchy, you really feel like you have messed up. You feel guilt. You feel like they really make you feel like you're the worst person in the world you know that you're not strong enough to handle it. And I think that that is a very difficult thing to brave alone. But when you're in a room with other people, you're

to thrive in a male-dominating industry is to...

Resist. I would also say that sometimes I thrive a little bit off of the resistance in some way like one of my mentors. She said to me, about my car, because I was facing some resistance when I was making that, and she said, Well, Katie, a boat can't move without resistance, you know, which is a physics thing. But her whole thing was that like I was creating this movement that needed resistance, actually to move forward. In some capacity which is not a fun thing. No one wants resistance, but for me it was it. It is kind of true in the sense that if you're doing anything new, anything that's innovative, anything that pushes the boundaries, people will sometimes reject it for the sake of it, challenge where they want to

feel like they understand the world. So, presenting something new that goes against the structures of the world is a very conflicting and difficult experience for some people, but I think that when you know that that's what you're doing, you can kind of be like, oh, kind of accomplish this mission if like If Joe Blow hates this, then like it's kind of one, you know. And I do get support from men. I won't say that it's like it's a black-or-white situation. It comes down to just people's beliefs on patriarchy and expression and women's roles and it changes from person to person. There's no binary kind of thing. Prescription of the kind of person that will accept or not accept the work that I'm doing.

Katie and Dakini, 2022

able to discuss that openly and also see their perspectives. Then you start to realize there's nothing to do with you. It's not personal. There's nothing wrong with you, and it can be very crippling when you feel like there is something wrong with you to even want to continue because you feel a lot of shame and self-doubt But I think ultimately the kind I've noticed just in my experience in tech is that women that are extremely technical and really good at their jobs are often pushed out of those spaces, and women

that are easier to control with less ability, who sort of serve, reinforce this narrative, that women are lesser are often put in places of power, and then they typically also don't like other women and want to keep them down. So it's not just about having a woman in power. It's about the kind of woman that's in power like is she a girl's girl? Does she want to see other women thrive? Or will she happily throw them under the bus, if that will save her own neck?

any words of advice for emerging young female or femme-presenting designers?

Yeah, I would say, your spiritual practice, your sense of healing is just as important as your work, in a sense that you really take care of your mind, body, and spirit and don't participate in patriarchal norms. You don't have to destroy yourself in order to make work. No like, go to the Spa, take care of yourself. Take care of your mind, your spirit. And when you're feeling self-doubt, try to surround yourself with content that reinforces what you're doing. I often I will watch like feminist shows on Netflix, or I'll watch Neri Oxman's Documentary, or I'll go see an Adele show, or go see, like a music artist who is totally aligned with what I'm doing, so that when you hear those voices of self-doubt, you're reminded that there is a community that is there to support you. Your inner wellness is of utmost value, and take care of yourself. There's no way to continue on such a difficult path without really finding some joy in it. And part of the joy comes from just finding your own inner peace. Ultimately. if we're moving towards a world that's a little bit softer and kinder and more compassionate and nurturing, the natural traits of a woman, really. Part of that is how you treat yourself and take care of the self, mind, and body; and I've had to, you know, kind of learn that the hard way in some capacities but here we are! Learning.

Rising Above The Glass Ceiling, 2022

the thing about angry feminists...

You don't let these systems keep you from laughing and enjoying yourself and having fun. But the whole thought around that is like true feminine joy needs to still be a part of this movement, and I think that embracing that side of the movement is that you can have fun and laugh and be mischievous while doing this, because I think that feminism is often painted like, oh, angry women! You're all so angry. It's like, No, I'm living my life, and I'm choosing to do it my own way; it's not about anger, it's about freedom and expression and equality. And I think that keeping that in the forefront of your mind as you're facing kind of difficult things throughout your career is a is the important thing; learning to laugh at it, and not let it truly hurt you sometimes and almost enjoying heichievousness of the fact that you know you're coloring outside the lines.
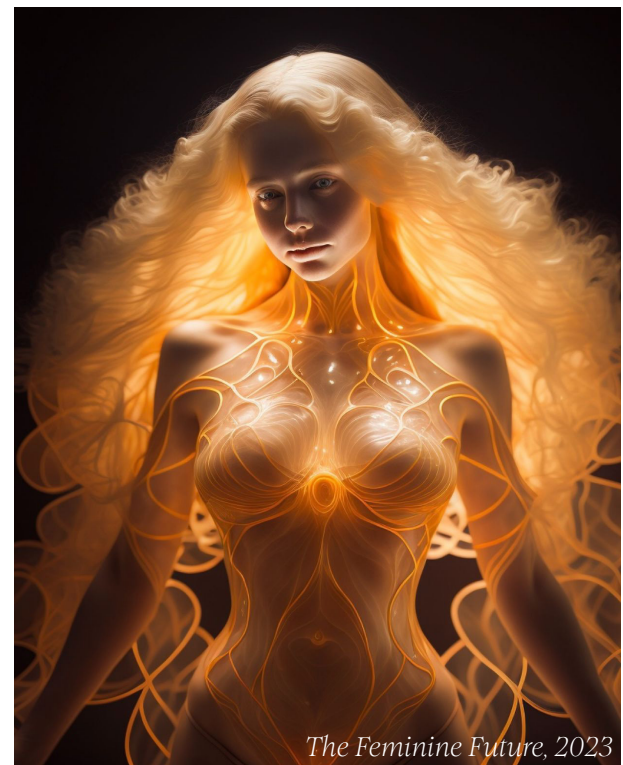
for when you feel stuck:

I would also say if you're ideologically struggling ever on a project definitely like, look into the past like the same way we do research. Do it like you do your history research, you open books, you look online, you watch films. You look at old films. By the way, Queen Christina, one of my favorite films, a non-binary film from the twenties. It's insane. But I would recommend looking that up. It's an amazing film. And it's all about power dynamics. And like with Greta Garbo, who was a huge movie star at the time. But watching stuff like that, you're like, oh, wow! History is not linear. I think that that's one of the things RISD gave me. That continuously inspired me was that you've realized like there's been movements. But ultimately there's been periods of time where we've seen progress. They aren't all modern. Some of them are ancient, even, and so just sort of understanding that I think helps motivate you and inspire you in your work.

Self-Portrait, 2022

The Feminine Future, 2023

I'm also gonna release it on my website, Random. But I'm going to release a resource section to my info page, which has all the tutorials I watched in my early career. All the books I read, all the movies and films that influence me. There will be a little resource log of things to go back to. So I'll send that to you guys when it comes out. But yeah, I think that having those kinds of things definitely helps along the journey and continues the momentum for sure.

That's so generous of you to share all your resources. I think that's what a lot of people would look for in general outside of what they're currently searching for in school. We both feel very empowered just listening to you. Of course! And yeah, and be happy; the more unique you are, and the more you stand out, even if you face resistance, I guess this is my last bit of advice for any students.
Hopefully this was so somewhat helpful listening to me rant for like an hour. But yeah, so thank you very much. So nice meeting you both and stay in touch! DM me whenever and yeah, good luck through RISD.

Get a good night's sleep for me!