

Modern Mannequins

When Eva Gödel had her portrait painted by the artist Lucy McKenzie, it featured no obvious likeness — instead the model agent's business card, a photo of her brother and a backstage pass to a Raf Simons show. But Eva's life goes way beyond the business of spotting and booking male models. Through her agencies Nine Daughters and a Stereo, which she co-founded in her hometown of Cologne in 2002, and now Tomorrow Is Another Day, Eva, 39, has introduced a radical male beauty to replace square-jawed beefcakes. It is, she says, a question of choosing the interesting boys you'd wish to spend your life looking after.

Andrew: Tell me how you approach a potential model on the street.

Eva: First I follow them, walk around them so I can see them from the front and side. Normally they'll give me a funny look, but if I still like them, I'll say, "Excuse me, I run a model agency and I'd like you as a model." Most are taken aback, so I tell them I think they look cool and they should give it a try, they've got nothing to lose. That it can easily be done alongside the other things they do. It's not a full-time job. And most of them say yes.

A: Most people agree on the spot?

E: Ninety-eight per cent. I'm very good at persuading them!

A: What if you change your mind once you've got their attention?

E: Then I pretend I'm lost and ask for directions so they're none the wiser.

A: I'd be worried that I'd come across as some kind of predatory perv. Is it easier for a woman to make the approach?

E: Perhaps. I don't look at all suspicious. I dress for comfort: a parka, a white shirt, trainers. I don't want to get cold or

for my feet to hurt. Normally I go out at 10am and finish at 9pm.

A: That's 11 hours!

E: I'm really motivated. I have a client who specifically wants Indian-looking boys, and London's a great place for that, so I've come over from Düsseldorf solely for this.

A: Do you set yourself a daily target?

E: I've found 28 boys over the past two days, but those will probably be whittled down to five or six. I rented a studio for Sunday so the guys I've cast can be photographed properly.

A: Where are the best places to scout?

E: Shopping streets because they're super-busy. London's the most racially diverse city in Europe, and a lot of my clients are here so you don't need to worry about models missing a week of school for a job. So here, places like Oxford Circus, Piccadilly Circus, Liverpool Street station... Outside concert venues, at festivals, street parties — anywhere young people congregate, providing they have to stand. Sitting's no good. Where I'm from, Düsseldorf and Cologne are good

Interview
Andrew Tucker

Portrait
Katja Rahlwes



Here, Eva wears her own blue-and-white striped cotton shirt by CÉLINE and her own watch.

too; Berlin. I'm in Marseilles next week. To be honest, you can spot an amazing guy at the supermarket if you're looking.

A: The apocryphal tale.

E: I first saw Paul Hameline next to a supermarket, actually. He was standing at an ATM in the Marais.

A: And now he's the Vetements muse. Your agency is known for that strange, geeky type of male beauty, not the classic beefcake. Are you conscious of using specific criteria in choosing them?

E: Well, it's just me scouting. I've been doing this for 14 years now; I think I'm pretty good at it. I always surprise myself by just how many really good boys I can find! I like to see the way people move, how they dress and do their hair, how emotion crosses their faces. And yes, I tend to go for the guy who isn't the one the girls fancy at school. I tell them all that will change once they start! They're generally five foot eleven and above in height, slim and interesting-looking. You can tell as soon as they take off their shirts, really. Also their walk is crucial — you can judge the attitude, the energy, and not just the aesthetics.

Eva Gödel



Eva Gödel

A: And that's why you prefer street casting to looking for boys on Instagram, where filters and poses can mislead.

E: Nor do we do traditional agency portfolios, with all the old tear sheets. Instead we post Polaroids of each model on our website every three months. More often if they change their hair.

A: With young girls, there's a culture of expectation, the model scout myth. Is it different with boys, where there's not that ambition in the first place?

E: Actually, that's changing. I'm getting so many applications these days. But I mostly prefer the guys who may not consider themselves good-looking enough to apply. Certainly, they're the ones that tend to do best in my agency.

A: Has the industry shifted away from that American masculine ideal – you know, muscle-bound, square jaw?

E: Anything goes now. What I see on the street is reality, so that's what I base my judgement on. Last time I was here, I'd hardly found anyone within the first four hours in the usual places, so I took a wander down Bond Street. I saw this guy that I thought good-looking in a commercial sense – I assumed he must be a lawyer or businessman. So I went over to him and did the usual approach. Initially he was friendly, but when I proceeded to tell him who I was and about the agency, he became more and more unfriendly and said, "You don't know who I am?" Later my friend told me it was David Gandy! I was so embarrassed.

A: Do you have a minimum age?

E: I don't generally take on models under 16. And with younger boys I take it really slowly. I love finding out who they are, discovering their dreams and managing their expectations. The myth is that modelling's some sort of passport to fortune, but in the men's industry, that's a rarity. Even so, the experience can be amazing for the boys – the travelling, learning teamwork, how to be part of the creative process at a show. That's what I tell the parents; it can be a brilliant education, but it's just as important for their sons to finish school or university. Modelling won't jeopardise that. I've had models who'd never travelled abroad before, so it can really teach them life lessons.

A: What kinds of lessons?

E: How to adapt for one. They gain

an enormous amount of confidence and new responsibilities – they have to get up on time, arrive on time. I try to teach them how to interact with the client. To be fun, friendly and, above all, sensitive to the environment. Nobody wants a boy who talks too much, who quizzes the designer about the clothes. And those aren't instincts you learn at school. Good energy goes for miles in an industry where people are under pressure.

A: You witness their passage from boys to men.

E: Some of my models have been with me for 14 years. I took on Tillmann when he was 16 or 17 and I was just starting out. Now he's 31, but he'll always be a great model because he's always been an interesting personality. He did Raf Simons' show first – Raf was my first commercial client – then he did the Jil Sander campaign with David Sims, which was the first real money job. Then Dior Homme with Hedi... He works full-time as a carpenter now. He's got a kid. But he still does the occasional job – he walked in the autumn Prada show. I met most of them at parties when we were more or less the same age, then ended up attending their weddings. Now I'm older, it's more of a mentorship role.

A: It sounds like it involves a lot of pastoral care. How do you deal with issues of body image?

E: I'm looking for a natural-looking build. I can't work with people who do bodybuilding – with too much muscle you can't fit the clothes.

A: What if a model's a bit chubby?

E: It's embarrassing, but you have to tell them. I've had boys who got really successful and then, you know, they get a girlfriend, they smoke too much hashish, they order pizza all the time. It happened with one of my best models, and I was like, "Come on, it's worth making an effort. I can get a trainer, a nutritionist to get you back on track." But it didn't work out. If the will isn't there, there's not much you can do. Chubby and done!

A: You've ruined my dreams! What about too skinny? There is a rise in male anorexia, after all.

E: We won't work with them. Often you find that the skinnier younger boys eat like crazy. In Paris, they're drinking everything, eating McDonald's, and it makes no difference. But when they hit

22 or 23, that will change, and they'll put on weight fast. But that's OK. For many boys, this career is about a certain moment when it fits with their lives, and then they'll move on to other things – university, girlfriends, whatever. I do my best to find them work experience.

A: How did you get your start in the industry?

E: My first agency, Nine Daughters and a Stereo, started out as a thesis when I was studying for a graphic design degree in Wuppertal, but it took on a life of its own once I started working on Raf's shows in the early 2000s. I used to drive the models to Paris myself in a rented car, and work came through word of mouth – Stephan Schneider, then Hedi Slimane, then Rick Owens, Comme des Garçons... I'm originally from Cologne, which doesn't really have a fashion scene. There are more galleries and a really open sensibility, which, in my naiveté, I thought would be similar to fashion.

A: To be honest, I find most model agents quite scary. Are you tough?

E: Tough? Me? Yes! I'm tough, for sure. More than anything, I'm really straightforward, really organised. Super tidy – neurotically tidy! I need order around me to function.

A: Do you ever switch off?

E: My boyfriend's always telling me off when we go out shopping at the weekend because I hardly ever look him in the eye. I'm too busy scanning the crowds to see who might be out there.



The model Paul Hameline had been scouted on four occasions before he accepted Eva's proposal. "She seemed cool," he said. The Vetements darling also produces his own zines, such as the limited-edition *A Rave New World*, published in June 2016.



PH. JACKIE NICKERSON

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