

Congratulations on winning the Swiss Grand Award for Design!

Thank you very much! I am delighted with this award!

You posted a picture of a fox instead of a portrait on social media. Why?

I like to be anonymous and autonomous when I move around in the digital world. The fox in my profile is a real urban fox: skinny, shy, and with an alert, critical gaze. Always on the move, always hunting, curious, and hungry. I see myself in that fox, and not only because I'm a redhead. I've always been driven by curiosity. And if I'm not curious in this world anymore, if I don't stop to bend down and pick up a beautiful leaf on the ground, then I'm dead. It's always worth paying attention to small, unimportant things and giving them a value. I'm a hunter and gatherer at heart.

Your CV is anything but linear and conventional. What you do and the skills you have can't be learned in school. On Instagram, you call yourself an interior stylist and exhibition architect. Aren't you also a curator, journalist, consultant, design mediator...?

I trained in visual merchandising but in every other respect, I am self-taught. So autodidact is missing in the list! I also curate exhibitions, I am a consultant and have also worked as a journalist for almost 20 years. There is no job description that sums up all these activities.

The items you show on your platforms—exhibitions and social media—are primarily by young designers. You also negotiate with producers and buyers, so you actually promote designers and act as an agent.

Promoting young designers is a real passion of mine. When opportunities come my way, I make use of them. For example, I use the trend page in the magazine *Annabelle* as a platform to introduce young designers—naturally always in combination with classical products. Since 2010 I've been responsible, along with others, for designing Vitra's stand at the Salone del Mobile in Milan. I started adding objects by young designers to Vitra's project range. These collages generate an entirely different kind of interest and also bring some new designers and producers in contact with each other, a win-win situation.

The word collage already kept cropping up in our preliminary talks. You use the word to describe both works that are printed as well as works in space.

Yes, collage or mix-and-match is the way I approach a subject; it's my point of departure. But a collage is not a mood board, which I use for clients to visualize an idea and choice of products. In collages, I juxtapose objects that enter into a dialogue both in terms of content and optically; it looks almost aimless and happens mostly intuitively.

When I look around these rooms, I must say that your studio is actually a collage, too!

Yes! Absolutely. It's a collage that you can walk around in. Full of set pieces, knickknacks, prototypes, pictures, books and magazines, and in between precious pieces of immeasurable value—but also junk and kitsch.

Do you take inspiration from other creative practitioners?

Let me tell you about a seminal experience I had in Los Angeles. Eames Demetrios, Charles Eames's grandson, once organized a private tour of the Eames House for me. Because the well-known living room was closed for renovation, we were in the kitchen and I was allowed to open the drawers and the cupboards. What I saw there really touched me, as if I had discovered a kindred soul in Ray Eames. The drawers looked like mine at home! They were full of lovingly chosen things, full of knickknacks, everything neatly arrayed. You could feel the passion, the magic, and the warmth devoted to even the smallest of things.

Are you also an influencer?

I don't like that word at all. I clearly influence certain people, the way many others influence me. But influencers exploit their status and do everything in their power to capitalize on it. They work for money. That's way different from what I do. Besides, I really like Instagram because it's a medium in which communication is purely visual. Networking, discovering, and communicating quickly on Instagram—to the point of a possible purchase—really simplifies my work.

Your biography starts with a garage. As a child you wanted to be a car mechanic.

That actually was my childhood dream. My father was a car mechanic and we lived above his Volvo garage, so I grew up with the smell of gas and the sound of engines. Nearby there was a brewery, a soccer field, two shooting ranges, a ranger station, a lot of countryside—and not a single girl in sight, besides me. That obviously influenced me: I played soccer, was in the rifle club, drank beer (and still prefer it today), and knew more boys than girls. And I still love Volvos. Looking back, I realize it wasn't necessarily the technical aspect that appealed to me but rather the social component: the customers who came to the garage with a problem and stayed to have a chat.

But you are still enamored of cars. You have a whole wall full of Volvo memorabilia.

I love cars. One of my most wonderful experiences was when my father, my brother, and I took apart and restored my first great love, a 1972 Volvo 144 Deluxe, bright red including the sun roof. My car is my home. It means absolute freedom and independence. The idea that I can get into my car any time and just drive off means that I can be mobile and stay mobile—but it also means that, on some days, there are only a hundred steps on my pedometer!

Is there any connection between your dream job as a child and what you do today?

Yes, the human component. I admired my father so much, how customers came to the garage and he would look for a solution to their problem no matter what time of the day. I have a number of longtime customers, like my father had—and that only works thanks to mutual trust and honesty.

What influenced you as a young adult? What was your social context?

It was the 1980s! I dyed my hair bright orange, had a 1960s look and was kind of rough-edged, uninhibited, outgoing. All of that and my homemade jewelry made me more of an outsider. I was impressed by strong women like Annie Lennox, Vivienne Westwood, Katharine Hepburn, and Rita Mitsouko. My first boyfriend was part of the so-called intellectual avant-garde group where they all ran around wearing black turtlenecks. The core members of the group organized concerts with a bar, followed by disco at the youth center in Zug. They called their series of events BTK (bar, dance [Tanz], concert [Konzert]). We invited Swiss bands like Crank, Steven's Nude Club, Züri West, and The Young Gods. One reason I got involved with BTK was because I had the idea of decorating the bar and the stage in a special way, always creating a new atmosphere that suited the respective band—it was very popular. Even if the band sometimes had to negotiate balloons and camouflage nets while they were playing... Once, to match the music, I made a giant bone out of papier-mâché in my living room and since it didn't fit in my car, I transported it on roller-skates. At night, so no one would see me!

After your apprenticeship in visual merchandising, you traveled around Europe for a year. What did you do after that?

I was lucky! Globus Zurich had a vacancy for a window decorator. In the 1990s Globus was by far the most interesting employer for decorators. Everybody wanted to work there. So you can imagine how many people applied. At my job interview, I took the chair that was placed at a respectful distance from the desk, plunked it down directly in front of the desk, propped my elbows on it, and answered Beat Seeberger's questions. I guess my uninhibited nature appealed to him! Throughout my career I have come across people who are looking for something different, people

who trust me, who understand how I look at things and appreciate my intuition.

What did you do next after working for Globus?

At the age of 30, I ventured out on my own. It was the time when restaurants, travel agencies, and events were beginning to go for theme-oriented decor. I had a lot of commissions of that kind. In addition I worked in the archive of the magazine *Ideales Heim* and spent several years setting up and managing the visual archive. I did that nights. And I also acquired my knowledge of design. That's when it grabbed me—design!

It looks like you're someone who has completely liberated herself from conventional work procedures (proposals, planning, organization, implementation)—is that true?

What are conventional work procedures? I'm a one-woman operation! Professional and organized in my own way. Sometimes it takes a long time for the work to meet my expectations, so calculating what it will cost is a particularly great challenge.

When did you go into styling for magazines?

I did my first styling for *Annabelle Création*, which no longer exists. At photo shoots, I realized that they combine all the components that interest me and are important to me: design, scenography, staging, organization, telling stories, and human interaction.

Your kind of work requires a good eye for trends and quite simply good taste. Can that be learned?

You can certainly train your perception and sharpen your taste and maybe it's even more important to know about bad taste. But there's always a great deal of research involved, mixed with intuition and paying close attention to the respective situation, the surroundings. Studying and combining. Like I said, I'm a passionate hunter and collector.

How important are furniture and design trade fairs for you?

The trade fairs are certainly an important part of my work. When I walk through a fair, I've got my antennae up and all my feelers out. I relax and just let myself drift intuitively. I like having designers explain their products to me; I watch really carefully and listen to them.

When you develop an idea, you naturally have the benefit of all the knowledge you've picked up over the years.

So many aspects are involved in developing an idea! But yes, when I have big job, I go to my archive and suddenly see something that suits the vague idea I have in mind. But a lot of other things naturally come into play as well, an unanticipated encounter, an art exhibition, a great movie. Or I look out of the window and see a squirrel in the tree opposite—you can't learn or predict where inspiration comes from. It's an art to put certain moments together and combine them so that they yield a cohesive idea. Noticing accidental things, supposedly insignificant things, and recognizing their strength

is probably my greatest talent. And things like that are unique; you can't restyle them.

But what do you do when you come across such "incidentals"?

Then I have a problem! I tense up; I'm blocked. In that case, the best thing is a change of scene, like going to a thrift store or buying magazines at a newsstand.

The magic of chance is also an important feature of the legendary catalog "Select, arrange" that you made for Vitra. The graphic designer Cornel Windlin had been asked to do the catalogs for the new Home Collection and he called you in as a stylist. Was it hard for you to convince your project partner to stage Vitra furniture in people's apartments, along with all the chaos they contained?

It certainly wasn't easy and there was certainly resistance that had to be overcome. Cornel came up with the idea of presenting Vitra's design icons as straightforward pieces of furniture that have to work in everyday life and in combination with a lot of other things. A kind of democratic approach. He wanted to avoid the clichés of elitist design and, to do that, he knew he had to produce different pictures. He invited a whole array of talented portrait photographers but also draftsmen, illustrators, and painters— and then me as a sparring partner and as a stylist.

So there it was again, the collage! I analyzed the situation in a number of different apartments and looked for intriguing corners, selected the Vitra furniture, and combined it with whatever happened to be in the apartment. That way, we created unusual pictures and changed the furniture branch worldwide. We celebrated the look and stylization of vibrant chaos whereas before, everything had been optimized and obsessively trimmed for luxury. Pretty soon magazines like *Apartmento*, *The Selby* or *friends of friends* jumped on the bandwagon and three or four years after *Select, arrange*, other international furniture companies got up the courage to stage their products in real-life spaces.

The first edition of the catalog received an award as one of the "Most Beautiful Swiss Books."

It was certainly unusual for a commercial furniture catalog to be given an award from such a renowned design competition. But funnily enough, people are still talking to me about it 15 years later and it's sold on eBay for exorbitant prices.

There are countless reviews of the catalog on the Internet but you're not named in any of them. The talk is mainly about the graphic design, the typography, and the photographers. The styling doesn't seem to be relevant. Does that bother you?

No, not at all, above all because people in the know are well aware of the role I played in this project and my reputation is still benefiting from it today. My work has recognition value. I also notice it when I haven't been named in the picture credits—once again—and people comment on Instagram, "Isn't this a Connie look?"

Do you think that luck is part of a successful career?

Absolutely. The good luck of meeting the right people at the right moment. It's also important to take advantage of the moment. And cultivating what people call a "network" these days probably doesn't hurt either.

Who has been the most important to you in the course of your career?

One of the most important door openers for me is clearly Cornel Windlin. We often worked together before the Vitra catalogs and afterwards as well. It's thanks to him—directly or indirectly—that I am where I am today. But I also had the self-confidence to keep my foot in the door and prove myself through my work and my personality.

The two of you also ran Reefer Madness, an illegal club in Zurich.

Reefer Madness started in the early 1990s as a casual series of soirées, making music here and there, under a bridge, in the attic of a condemned building, in the Villa am Parkring, or at the lake. It was about having a good time with nice people and the right music. An experience. Later we were offered a cellar for interim use in Zurich's 4th district and Cornel asked me if I felt like joining them. I sure did—obviously! And another friend from Zug joined as well, Patrick Lindon, an industrial designer specialized in acoustics and tech, people worked at the bar, etc. Everybody pitched in where they could; we all complemented each other. The whole thing took off really fast and ended up a huge success with as many as 1200 people attending every night. Suddenly we had to organize guards to put the bicycles away and discreetly ensure absolute peace and quiet—don't forget it was all illegal, and the club was in the middle of a residential neighborhood with a police station right around the corner. What a shock one night when somebody started floating around with a camera— "Undercover cops are filming us!" But it was only Fischli/Weiss, who needed footage for their contribution to the Biennale.

Every event was different, the music, too, and I completely revamped the space every time—sometimes decorating everything with flowers, thousands of real roses, the next time an apocalyptic environment with strobe lights gone wild for hard Jungle from London. But then it got out of hand. More and more people kept coming, some we didn't know and some we didn't want to know. Even cabdrivers started waiting outside the club. Cleaning up one morning at 7 AM, it just didn't feel right anymore. We decided to stop—on the spur of the moment. Utterly exhausted and white as ghosts, we went and had breakfast at Sprüngli. It was over, time to move on. The new restaurant ordinance in Zurich came out shortly after that and along with it commercial clubs with a business plan. What was left were wonderful memories of something unique. People still come up to me and talk about the evenings we had.

So far we've just been talking about past projects. What are you up to now—and in future?

I'm trying to keep up my interest in styling—that means bigger challenges; you automatically get more seasoned and more demanding. At the moment I'm still doing a few things for Vitra, but my capacity is limited. I find curating exhibitions and developing new products with designers more and more appealing.

Exactly, and you're working on your trademark if I may call it that. Last year at the Biennale Interieur in Kortrijk, Belgium, you curated an exhibition of your own, "Object with Love."

Yes, that's right. For a long time, I didn't feel confident enough to do that and had no opportunities either. But then I took the plunge when Dieter Van Den Storm, the creative director of the Biennale Interieur, approached me with the offer of a large space to do something in.

The title of the exhibition says it all: you love design objects. I love objects, not just design objects. At some point, I noticed that I was always saying, "Please do it with love!" For example, to a cook in a restaurant! For me it was probably more about awareness and about taking your time. Anyway, that's where "Object with Love" comes from. It's something that radiates love and warmth; it can be made by hand or it might embody some kind of longing or just be comforting.

What did it feel like to be standing in this exhibition, to be the center of attention?

My work is very much a part of who I am. There was a moment when I realized that I myself was being perceived as a person. It felt very special. I was proud of myself—after an incredibly strenuous phase, I had managed to assert myself and to carry out the way I envisioned the exhibition and the plans I had for it. I felt validated, and I also felt that I was ready to take a new step in my life.

Oh, what does that mean? Can you tell us what we might look forward to?

The logical step would probably be to professionalize the project "Object with Love" and put it on a firmer basis in order to produce a small, exquisite collection in collaboration with designers. But you can't do that from one day to the next. I'm looking into several inquiries that came in after the exhibition "Object with Love." For example, acting as a consultant for the wonderful Design Museum in Ghent, Belgium. But first I have to find a new studio, the one I had for 21 years has become a victim of gentrification. We'll see.

In conclusion the mandatory but important question: what does this award mean to you?

I am extremely moved and surprised that such an unconventional free spirit like me should receive this award. And I see it as an appreciation of what I have achieved. I think I have given a lot of people quite a lot in my life and I think it's wonderful that it is now coming back. To me, the award shows that it pays off to be yourself in life. Passionately so. I am

extremely grateful to the Federal Design Commission for being so open-minded and willing to go down such an unconventional path. I'm fully aware that this important award took a lot of people by surprise. Me too: I don't have the academic wherewithal and I don't do any promotion on my own behalf. I don't even have a website! I simply do what I have to do and do it as best I can—and that's hard enough! That makes me all the happier about this award and it means a lot to me.