

Pick any recent interview with artist Chloe Wise, and one thing becomes very clear – she has moved on from talking about The Bagel N°5. Still, the role this most exclusive carb played is essential to the story. It was one of many in a series of Bread Bags; a bunch of oil painted plastic mould figurines of toast, baguettes and bagels – a clever pun on the It-bags of the early 2000s.

# Of Carbs & Cats

Photography: Emon Toufanian  
Styling: Emily Dawn Long  
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Maryam Nassir Zadeh skirt, blouse, bra, necklace & heels



Sacaï dress, stylist's own T-shirt

Today, the collection includes timeless classics such as *The Ain't No Challah Back(pack)* – a loaf of bread decorated with a Prada logo, and the *Louis Vuitton Baguette*, but it all began at a Chanel event in 2014, when the sneaky bagel made its red carpet debut dangling on the shoulder of actress India Menuez. The bag, though divinely absurd as an accessory, is a piece of art meant for mounting, and absolutely rubbish as a bag. But still it ended up making a huge impression on the fashion world – no one knew it was art. People were craving this new Chanel bag, until Chloe came forward as the artist behind the piece and the fashion world fell in love with her instead. When I ask her if the “fashion darling” label affects her work, the answer is “No, I want it gone, take it away!”

Honesty mixed with humour is the signature of the multidisciplinary artist Chloe Wise. As a self-pronounced megalomaniac, her practise varies from painting and sculpture to poetry and performance, all tied together by that ingenious wit. Over the last years, her humour has developed way beyond the early puns of bread bags to more layered comments on the complexity, and sometimes ridiculousness, of our society. Not that the puns are gone – thank God – there is just another level of depth. “Humour is an imperative way to negotiate the injustices, cruelties, and abject nature of reality,” Chloe says. “Reality is gross and messed up. We can't, as mere mortals, understand it. So we pretend to, or make jokes.”

Chloe Wise was born in Canada, but with her quick wit, and ability to pull off an haute-couture look, she is very much a New Yorker. In her Brooklyn studio she, together with her constant companion, Siamese cat Pluto, makes sculptures and paints portraits.

“Siamese are quite chatty and talkative, not unlike American Jewesses”, she says. “We are two peas in a pod.” And when asked if this deep kinship includes her unique fashion sense as well, she replies, “He does engage in some looks. He has a few hats. Marc Jacobs sent him a tiny red beret, and I just brought him back a tiny sombrero from my trip to Mexico.”

In one of her latest exhibitions, *Of False Beaches and Butter Money*, there was much more going on than first met the eye. A bare-breasted blonde pressing two onions against her chest, and a kneeling woman carefully cradling a carton of almond milk, are two examples of the portraits of milk dripping venuses that were on display. The show centered around themes of food fetishism, health and nutrition – digging around the vast question of why we try to find truth in the murky world of clean living. “I was in Thailand when I first started thinking about the wholesome moral narrative attributed to dairy in the West,” Chloe begins. “Milk, in Thailand and Korea, pops up in advertisements for soaps that whiten the skin. Which is pretty creepy when you think about it from an American standpoint, where we are dealing with deeply entrenched white supremacy. That made me look at the way advertising for milk can easily co-opt different moral narrative qualities, such as this ancient-old-timey-historic-alpine-swiss-mountain-top-cattle-and-buxom-milkmaid imagery that we are used to seeing all over supermarket aisles. That fictional aura contrasts starkly with the reality of the dairy industry. It's funny to me how far off the advertising is, purporting milk to be ‘natural.’”

This interest in commercialism manifests itself not only through the objects Chloe chooses to portray, but also in the way she portrays them. Her paintings are basically the illegitimate

love child of a Jan van Eyck portrait and a mouth-watering McDonald's commercial. “I like looking at the way advertising capitalizes on our utterly human desires. The desire for power, sex, and fear of death – aka desire for youth – by selling signifiers of those things, promises of ‘the good life’, to us. A glimmer on a smile, or a diamond, a dew drop on an apple, an oozing cheesy pizza slice, gleaming youthful skin, the promise of money and power and all with a moral green-light – allowing you to feel okay about your consumption.”

Even though she likes to explore and invert the concept of consumerism in her work, Chloe is quick to point out that she doesn't have all the answers. “It's designed to make us desire more. To work towards achieving goals, spend more to achieve those goals, and keeping the capitalist system intact. But instead of trying to dismantle capitalism itself, a pretty hefty undertaking, I'm merely exploring the imagery and the visual language that these systems produce.”

In a world where people like Trump, Putin and Kim Jong Un are key players it's easy to see these desires grow deeper. During times of uncertainty consumer goods work as moral guidance – a feeling that is present in many of Chloe's most recent work. Her glossy expression is not only visually attractive, but a comment on the commercially driven life we are living. “I think we were taught to define ourselves based on what we own, wear, buy, and consume. So naturally, we would turn to our stuff to absolve us of our complicit behavior in these systems. Easier to buy recycled toilet paper and pat yourself on the back for an ethical decision, than to dig deeper and realise that helping the environment actually requires voting for someone who won't deny climate change.”



Loewe top & trousers, Chloe's own earrings





Chloe Wise is often depicted as an artist of her time: a true millennial. But when it comes to describing her own position, she is reluctant. “I don’t think we can describe our time because we are currently within it. We can look at the 90s and begin to describe it or theorise it, but I really don’t know if it does any good to try to analyse our zeitgeist from within. That being said, yeah I’m a millennial, and I guess my alleged love for avocado toast is ruining the housing market, or whatever; but I think we are just witnessing a moment of increasing access to information, true and untrue.”

Perhaps the knack for advertising aesthetics, interest in consumer behaviour and this uncanny ability to be very “now” is why Chloe Wise’s persona translates so well onto social media. She navigates the present with ease; it feels completely natural. Still, her account is somewhere in-between personal and a performance. You just can’t tell. It is a perfect mix of art, selfies, goofing

around and of course, cats. Last year she adopted a blue-eyed Siamese kitten dubbed Pluto Chicken Nuggets Wise. “It took a long time to name him. I was thinking he should have a strong, heroic, kinda tragic but beautiful ancient Greek or Roman name, like Heraclitus or Perseus. Pluto is the Roman god of the underworld. Also the name of the Disney dog, and the name of an ex-planet. I liked the multifaceted nature of the name, it suits him well because he is a multifaceted boy. Also, he looks just like a chicken nugget so that’s where he got the middle name.” I ask her to tell me a little bit more about him (I’ve been stalking them intensively on Instagram for the last couple of months and have developed an obsession with this kitten) and she continues, “He’s napping right next to me and he’s just the cutest boy ever. He is so gorgeous and he looks just like a little rotisserie chicken. He does the best snuggle-work in the whole world. I’ve really never met a cat that

cuddles the entire night with you. He climbs into bed with me and nuzzles under the covers and stays until morning, purring and being too cute to function, it really hurts. He is super social and always wants attention so I have to carry him in a Baby Bjorn when I’m painting otherwise he’ll just jump on my back and hang out on my shoulder.”

It’s not unusual for Chloe to post an Instagram story where she and Pluto – he is usually relaxing in a harness and lazely pawing at her paintbrushes – are working on a new art piece and I’m curious to know what the best thing is about having a kitten colleague. “Everything, he has great opinions. He hangs out in the Baby Bjorn and watches my paint brush move back and forth on the canvas. Sometimes he tries to catch it and then I have a total Jewish-mom freak out and wash the paint off his lil paws. Now that I have to save up to send him to college, I have to work harder than ever.”



This page: Chanel dress, boots & jewellery, stylist’s own cap  
Opposite page: Givenchy dress, stylist’s own earring



Moschino dress, Givenchy boots, stylist's own T-shirt & cowboy hat



Eckhaus Latta shirt, PRISCA Vera top & dress

Makeup: Nancy Siler  
Hair: Kelsey Morgan  
Stylist's assistant: Meetka Otto



Chloe's self portrait with Pluto



Calvin Klein 205w39nyc full look

Makeup: Nancy Siler  
Hair: Kelsey Morgan  
Stylist's assistant: Meetka Otto