

Top by Jacquemus;
skirt by Ellery; hat
by Eugenia Kim

Portrait of an ARTIST

Whether it's a dramatic red-carpet choice or an all-consuming film role, actress NICOLE KIDMAN approaches everything with unwavering passion.

*She tells JENNIFER DICKINSON about the power of women and why *Big Little Lies* traumatized her*

*Photographs by YELENA YEMCHUK
Styling by TRACY TAYLOR*



Shirt by Jil Sander;
pants by Delpozo;
sandals by Valentino



Nicole Kidman is still searching for an Oscars dress. She's looking for something extra special for this, her fourth outing as an Academy Award nominee (she won a Best Actress statuette in 2003 for *The Hours*, her other shortlist moments coming courtesy of 2002's *Moulin Rouge!* and *Rabbit Hole* in 2011). This year the Australian actress is representing *Lion*, based on the true story of an Indian boy separated from his family – one of the 80,000 children that go missing in the country each year – who is adopted by an Australian couple, and she wants a dress that celebrates the film's heritage. “I have a sense of what I want to wear, I want it to have a real flavor of the film, but I haven't found it,”

“I'm dedicated to being the CHAMELEON... I change the way I LOOK and talk and move to CREATE the character”

she says, entirely unperturbed.

But then this is a woman who happily admits to going shoeless on one recent awards ceremony stage. “My feet were killing me. It was a long dress, so I said to Keith [Urban, the country music star and the actress' husband of more than 10 years]: ‘Do you think anyone will notice?’ And I just took them off,” she says gleefully. “It was *so* much more comfortable. I love the way that a high heel looks, but the actual wearing of it is a whole different thing.”

One thing you can be sure of: Kidman won't be playing it safe come Oscars night. “I have no problem being divisive,” she smiles. Take the spectacular green sequined Gucci dress, adorned with a parrot on each shoulder, that she wore to the Screen Actors Guild Awards the night before our interview – even her two youngest daughters had a critique. “My eight-year-old [Sunday Rose] said, ‘You're wearing *that*?’ My six-year-old [Faith Margaret] was like, ‘What's on your shoulder?!’”

The girls have no doubt picked up a strong sense of style from

Kidman, who views fashion as an expressive art (something she holds sacred in all forms), thanks to growing up around a mother and grandmother who loved to make clothes. So enamored of style is Janelle Kidman, that she will call her daughter to review her red-carpet choices: “My mum called me the day after [the Golden Globes] and said, “What were you wearing? You need to cover up more.”

She’s laughing, but despite a career spanning more than three decades, Kidman admits that she hasn’t become immune to criticism, of her wardrobe or her work. “I’m not a fan of ‘Worst Dressed’ things because I don’t believe in crucifying people for their individual [taste]. It just seems nasty and misogynistic, so that needs to go away. I have worked with directors who are divisive, so I’m used to [criticism], and as my husband says, ‘You don’t want to have a thick skin; that’s not a compliment,’” she says, shrugging, signaling her acceptance of an

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unwinnable situation. “Oh well, sticks and stones can break your bones, but names will never hurt you, right?”

Luckily – although luck is undoubtedly the wrong word for it – the 49-year-old’s career has been more weighed down with praise than detraction, and after a blockbuster start she is now considered one of the great modern character actresses. “I’m dedicated to being the chameleon,” she explains. “Since I was little I was taught that when you are an actress you change the way you look and talk and move so that you create the character. That’s what I love doing; small role, big role, it doesn’t matter.”

Such total immersion can have its downsides, though. In HBO’s



Shirt and pants by Jacquemus



Dress by Johanna Ortiz



Shirt by Ellery

much-anticipated *Big Little Lies*, premiering February 19, Kidman (who executive produces the show alongside Reese Witherspoon) plays Celeste, an ex-lawyer-turned-suburban-wife and mother whose perfect-looking marriage to Perry (Alexander Skarsgård) belies a volatile relationship. “I was quite traumatized after [filming] because we would shoot [the violent scenes] repeatedly,” says the actress. “I was emotionally and physically traumatized. I’d come back and I’d need Keith to hold me, just to feel soothed.”

The seven-part series, shot over five months, took a toll on Kidman that she hadn’t predicted. “It worked on my psyche in a way that I didn’t quite realize.

“The LEAST I can do is act it with the deepest, most real TRUTH I can find. It’s my way of CONNECTING”

As an actress, I don’t clock in and out; it does bleed in and sometimes it’s hard to process. One of the craziest things happened after we’d done a lot of violent scenes. When you see them in the show they’re flashes, but we needed to re-shoot them and re-shoot them so [director Jean-Marc Vallée] could get grabs of stuff. I couldn’t sleep and the next morning I went for a run to try and get some of Celeste’s energy out. I came back and I’d left my key, I couldn’t get in the door. It’s a glass door, so I got a rock and I threw the rock through the door. I’d *never* done anything like that before. And then I realized, ‘Oh my gosh, that’s how much I’m holding all this in, the anger, the pain.’”

It must be hard for Urban to watch his wife suffering. “He doesn’t like it, but he’s an artist so he understands. And people have to live it so I should be able to act it, you know? That’s how I always see those things. The loss of a child, so many people in this world are going through that – the least I can do is act it with the deepest, most real truth I can find, and give

that to them as a way of reaching out. Compassion, if that makes sense. It's my way of connecting."

Celeste is one of five principal characters in *Big Little Lies*, and in a rare, very welcome twist, all of them are female. It was one of the elements to Australian writer Liane Moriarty's novel that made Nashville neighbors Kidman and Witherspoon so keen to bring it to the screen. "Bruna Papandrea, Reese's producing partner, read the book and called me and said, 'Nic, I think I've found it, I think we've got to do it together,'" explains Kidman, who promptly flew over to Australia to meet Moriarty and convince her to sell them the rights.

Networks were falling over themselves to sign the show, a fact Kidman attributes to the story, but also to her partnership with Witherspoon, whom she describes as her "sister". "As a singular lady [Hollywood is] much tougher; when we join forces [we're] so much more powerful," says Kidman. "We went to three or four different places to pitch it and they all

wanted it, which was an amazing feeling because I've been on the other side where you're calling in favors and begging for every cent."

The show seems to have been touched with something of a golden glow, from the pre-press to the set itself, with the cast appearing unusually bonded – perhaps because most of them were already so well acquainted. Laura Dern starred with Witherspoon in *Wild*; Zoë Kravitz and Shailene Woodley have the *Divergent* films in common. And, as Kidman points out, she has her own history with Kravitz: "Well, I knew Zoe because I was engaged to her father. It's all in the family! I love Lenny; he's a great guy."

Despite their connection, the younger actress says she found

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Dress (with belt)
by Rosie Assoulin



Dress (with belt)
by Johanna Ortiz



working with Kidman intimidating. “[Nicole] can be quiet and shy, which is interesting because the beast of an actress that she is, is so loud and clear,” says Kravitz. “She’s so good that sometimes it was distracting. After every take I wanted to just stop and say, ‘Wow.’”

Even industry veteran Laura Dern was surprised by Kidman’s perfectionism – and her apparently shockingly bawdy sense of humor. “[Nicole’s acting is] pure truth,” says Dern. “She is brilliant and luminous. Working with her on this was a gift.”

With women’s rights so high on the agenda right now, it’s a poignant time to be releasing a show produced by women, with five challenging female roles at its center. It’s something Kidman is proud of and wants to do more of. “I’ve worked with [directors] Sofia Coppola and Jane Campion this year. I just met with [writer and director] Rebecca Miller about a project and that’s exciting.”

But she’s not jumping on a bandwagon – it’s a cause she’s been

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supporting since childhood. “My mother was part of the Women’s Electoral Lobby and would take me to hand out pamphlets when there was voting on behalf of feminism. That’s how I was raised; we’d sit in the back rooms of the WEL while they were all talking. I remember listening, sort of not understanding but understanding that there was a movement happening, that as women we were powerful together, that we needed to have equality. I was teased at school for my mum being a feminist. I just said, ‘OK, it doesn’t matter. I’ll stand up for what I believe in.’”

And she’s been doing just that ever since.

SHOP NICOLE’S SHOOT ▶



Dress by Tome;
hat by Eugenia
Kim; belt by Alaïa