

Eniko Mihalik

TEXT MARK JACOBS

PHOTOGRAPHY INEZ VAN LAMSWEERDE AND VINOODH MATADIN

BACKSTAGE PHOTOGRAPHY SEAN CUNNINGHAM

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Model Eniko Mihalik at Marilyn NY.

Eniko Mihalik is the cover star whose plump cheeks and doll-like features are influencing the catwalk and the celebrity world alike with her 'New New Face'.

There is no beauty without strangeness



“When I was 16 or 17, I was in a make-up chair and the make-up artist asked, ‘Oh my God, are your cheeks silicon?’ And I was like, ‘No’. ‘Because this is the big thing in Hollywood and all the big stars are having their cheeks done because it makes you look so much younger!’ I was like, ‘I’m sorry, but I’m only 17. I’m not allowed to have plastic surgery!’ She seriously thought they were fake.” Meet Eniko Mihalik, rising star and model muse to photographers Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin, whose soft beauty is a Hungarian blend of Sharon Tate and The Childlike Empress from The Neverending Story, with cheeks so full they cast shadows. “I call them my cheek meats because when I’m smiling there are these two huge—cheek puffs!”

In photographs, Eniko’s puffs are extraordinary. In person, they’re just about believable – as opposed to the wide-set eyes and impossible lips of former DKNY heroine Esther Canadas. Plump cheeks like Eniko’s are the focal point of what the writer Jonathan Van Meter calls the “New New Face”, a state-of-the-art beauty ideal that relies on injectable fillers to “give an older woman the look of a baby” – as opposed to the stuffed, stretched, and sharpened “Old New Face,” which has more in common with Cher. Eniko lights up when I mention the unconfirmed assumption that Madonna has been refreshed this way (which is an icon’s prerogative, although she would impress all over again if she allowed herself to age more defiantly). “She did it with her face! She did that thing!” the 21-year-old exclaims innocently. “Maybe she saw my picture and was like ‘Oh my God, I want her cheeks!’”

Eniko is relatively new to the industry’s stratosphere. She only relocated from Hungary to New York City in July. She is goodnatured, wants the Prada lace pants she wore in one of her shoots for Italian *Vogue*, and loves SpongeBob Squarepants. “If you come to the agency and ask about me, everyone knows that I’m a big fan of cartoons,” Eniko says. “At home, my roommate goes crazy because the TV is always on the Disney Channel.” She is shy at first, “And then I open my mouth and say a little too much! I get this hyper energy.” She was particularly nervous when meeting Daria Werbowy, who also has big fashionable doll eyes. “I was scared of my big sister! They call me Daria’s little sister,” Eniko explains.

“I made myself look really silly. All I could think of to say was, ‘Hi, people say I’ve got your eyes!’ She looked at me and was like, ‘I’ve got my eyes. You’ve got eyes that look like mine. She was really nice but looked at me really weird! I didn’t talk to her that much.” Eniko grew up in Békéscsaba, a modest city in Southeast Hungary close to the Romanian border. Her father is a police officer, her mother assists a judge, and her older sister lives on a farm with her boyfriend. Eniko learned English by watching the Cartoon Network and listening to Destiny’s Child. “They were my favourite band ever,” she says. “And then there was the Spice Girls and Britney Spears and Jennifer Lopez, because she was the favorite singer of my best friend. When I went to school I learned what all of the words meant.” Eniko was always skinny and her classmates teased that she couldn’t be found standing behind a blade of grass. “I was pretty average,” she says. “People knew me because I was always loud, but I wasn’t the boys’ favorite or captain of the girls’ team.” Eniko was 15 when she was discovered at a local shopping centre. She signed with an agency and then won the 2002 Hungarian Elite Model Look contest. After several quiet years of fashion finishing school, she made her runway debut at the Fall 2006 Chanel Couture show wearing black ruffled water wings, the season’s thigh-high boots, and pearls in her hair. Then in early 2008, Eniko met Inez Van Lamsweerde, a career-defining appointment that came with only fifteen minutes notice. “I just grabbed my clothes and ran there,” she says. “Two days later my agency called me at nine in the morning and was like, ‘Girl, you got the Gucci campaign!’ I started to scream and woke up all of my roommates.” Eniko’s next shoot with Inez and Vinoodh, for one of the multiple covers of *V* magazine’s Fall 2008 issue plus a page in the accompanying model encyclopedia (Natasha, Lara, Eva, Anja, Christy, Naomi, etc.), grew into a dreamy 20-page solo showcase titled “The Eniko Show”. The working relationship developed into a six-month exclusive with the photographers, similar to the arrangements between Mario Testino and Catherine McNeil, and Steven Meisel and Coco Rocha. “It wasn’t a contract. It was about looking after me and making sure that I do things that are good for my career,” Eniko says. “They make you feel comfortable and beautiful and

the pictures are coming out beautifully. They’re just really talented people and it’s amazing to work with them. I’ve learned a lot.” For the cover of this winter’s edition of *Self Service*, they painted Eniko with body make-up and outfitted her in designer fur and rich accessories, like Kembra Pfahler lunching at Bergdorf Goodman. For a story in November’s French *Vogue*, they interpreted her as a woman in every decade of her life between the ages of 10 and 60. “And the i-D cover is coming out. Yay! For me it’s a really big thing,” she says. “There are certain other things that I would like to do, like *Numero*. Maybe a Chanel campaign.” She understands her good fortune and the exceptionally chic positioning that makes her a model to watch. “For me it’s about being proud of myself and appreciating the things that I’ve reached. I’m from Middle Europe and if I hadn’t done modelling, I probably wouldn’t have travelled to Italy for even a holiday,” she says. “And it’s not just for myself but for my parents as well, because I’m from a place where they aren’t able to buy expensive stuff. So seeing me on a Gucci billboard is a really big thing.”

You can tell a lot about a model by her Halloween costume, like when Gisele Bündchen arrived at a party dressed as Wonder Woman (moments after a civilian also dressed as Wonder Woman drove off in a taxi, oblivious to the unsettling encounter she narrowly avoided). This year, after shooting another Italian *Vogue* story, Eniko went out as a hippy – mostly so that she could wear a particular fur vest. The lesson is that she loves clothes. She is proud of her first leather jacket, a military-style number by Yigal Azrouël. “I really wanted to buy a Rick Owens jacket but everyone has it and my roommate has it, too,” she says. At our meeting, she wears it with serious black patent lace-up platform Burberry boots, tailored black Helmut Lang stretch pants, a slouchy Alexander Wang tank, and a perforated metallic leather Chanel bag that she used her agency’s discount to buy while shooting this feature in Paris. There is also a French Connection sweater in the mix that she promises is indicative of more modest spending. “So what about your socks and your underwear!” she says and then laughs.

The last bit of business regards a story that referred to Eniko spending “raucous evenings at 1 Oak”, the

celebrity-happy New York City lounge. She had mentioned the venue’s name to an interviewer in passing, only to discover, while clicking through the Fashion Spot and reviewing young photos of herself that she didn’t even remember existed, that the website’s message boards were not happy about it. Of course, getting hassled by the Fashion Spot is a sign of affection, like pulling on the hair of the girl you like, a kind of approval, another model rite of passage. “It wasn’t a good look! They started to talk about, ‘It’s not a good club, why is she going there? All the old guys go there to have something with the models’. And it’s hard to explain that you’re not one of those. The owner is my friend and I’m with people who are taking care of me. I’m not going there and getting drunk!” Developments like this will only multiply as her career takes off, and so I invite Eniko to lean into the digital recorder and say for the record, “I do not go to 1 Oak every single night!” And to think that she might have been a school teacher. ☹



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