

glass

WINTER'S BRIGHTEST STARS

Haley Bennett

*Dilone Lia Pavlova Rebecca Hall
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GLASS



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Dress
PRABAL GURUNG

Haley Bennett off the screen

*Glass meets an actor impelled by instinct
and inspired by film and literature*

Photography JASON KIM
Styling ANNA KATSANIS

“How cute is this place?”

The actor Haley Bennett, in her small wire-framed spectacles, peers around Brooklyn’s Plymouth Street Café. It is an old-school counter service deli, with a menu that lists item upon item of cold cut hoagies and fruit juices, and a bodega fridge stocked with sodas. It belongs to the deli-ilk of Brooklyn’s impossibly unpretentious. And it was her choice for our lunch.

The 29-year-old Ohio-born Bennett, who made her film debut in 2007’s *Music and Lyrics*, has the spirit of a sprite and the sentimentality of an octogenarian. Her movements are sweeping, unafraid of proximity or intimacy with anyone around her. She conveys the paradoxes of superstition (in her art and in her day-to-day) and of logic (in her business-mindedness). She speaks with whimsy, with a calming cadence, with an inflection that rises and falls within syllables. She laughs with her body – loudly and often.

I learnt, through her, that Truman Capote used to live in the neighbourhood, near to her new home, a history she embraces with curiosity and immense pride. Hearing his name, I was reminded of his famous essay, *Gathering of Swans*. He writes, of a woman mythologised in her poise and character:

“If she has kept buoyant the weight of her gifts, been faithful to the vows a swan must, she will have earned an audience all-kneeling; for her achievement represents discipline, has required the patience of a hippopotamus, the objectivity of a physician combined with the involvement of an artist, one whose sole creation is her perishable self.”

Capote has described Haley Bennett. She has cultivated her person and her craft with a dedication to the maturity of her creative process; she has remained committed to her artistry through her career’s ebbs and flows, and despite the gruelling caprice of her industry. After last year’s critically acclaimed roles in *The Magnificent Seven* and *The Girl on the Train* (both released in 2016), and being named the face of Chloé Fragrance, she has had an incredible whirlwind of a season. Bennett emerges from all this with no less a busy schedule, no less poise, and no less commitment to the creation of her perishable self.



Dress: DIOR

“
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”

Walking over here, you briefly retraced your steps to walk past a tree on the same side as me, so that the tree did not come between us. This revealed your superstition. You've also said you operate on instinct. Tell me more about how that affects your choice of projects.

I've always worked on instincts, and it has always very much been about stories for me. It isn't exactly the thing that agents are telling me to do, but things just speak to me and I want to be a part of them.

[For example,] I ended up doing a film called *Arcadia Lost* and it was with Nick Nolte. I thought it was so interesting. I could've been, you know, doing crappy television. [She laughs.] There was an incredible cinematographer, and I travelled to Greece. It was my first time abroad. When I was in Greece shooting that movie, I got a call from [renowned Indian director] Shekhar Kapur. Literally, a random phone call.

I have chills thinking of that film you made with Kapur, *Passage* (2009).

I have chills, too. I get really emotional. And it's come full circle actually. It's the strangest thing. [Kapur] saw [my first film] *Music and Lyrics*, and I was going, "What the hell attracted you ...?" Ok. That may be a silly question. [Laughs] But he's this auteur filmmaker and he's like, "My DP is in Greece right now [too]." There are all these kismet connections with our relationship.

Kapur asks, "Can you come to New York to meet me?" So I said, "Yes, of course! Of course!" I was 19 years old, coming off this romantic comedy [*Music and Lyrics*]. Even though it was an incredible door opened for me, I felt so uncomfortable shooting that film. But it was my gateway to the industry. Even though I was working with people that I looked up to – Mark Lawrence, Hugh Grant – it wasn't something that really spoke to my art.

And so meeting Kapur and the prospect of working with him was an incredible opportunity. I went to New York and I met him, I sang for him, and he told me he wanted me to sing opera. I was like, "Ok, I'll sing opera." And then he asked me to do the film, [*Passage*]. It was a short film. He works very much in the vein of [director] Terrence Malick with this fluid, experimental, improvisational filmmaking. But it was so different from *Music and Lyrics*. I was able to express myself in a way that was extremely new to me.

I arrived in Buenos Aires – we shot in Buenos Aires with Julia Stiles and Lily Cole – and the day that I arrived he said, "We're shooting you singing tomorrow. Here are the lyrics." And they were all in French. I don't speak French, but he handed me this script and we're shooting [the next day]. And the cinematographer is completely brilliant. What we were shooting was so evocative and beautiful. That really made a mark on me. It was a sense of freedom. From there on out, I wanted to feel that way again. This was such an influential experience for me, totally life changing. My pursuit became very different after *Passage*.



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BY ANTHONY VACCARELLO

”
I could be from anywhere. I feel like I'm from everywhere! I don't identify as "this girl from Ohio." I feel like a woman of the world
“



It was a first-time fulfilment of what you craved from your work.

It was a realisation, a complete revelation. "Ah. That's it. That's feeding my soul. That's what I want." I realised that if I can't do that then I don't want to do anything at all. And paying the bills will break you down, for sure. There were things in between *Passage* and now that I had to do for survival. But even in those uninspired choices that I had to make, [I'd ask], "How do I get from that point to this point without completely compromising whatever that artistic gate opened up in my heart?" Because I'm at the mercy of this industry, which is so cruel and unforgiving, and doesn't really give a shit about what you want to be.

Once I'd had that opportunity to work with Kapur, I gained more confidence in saying, "This is the direction – I want to do more things that give me this feeling," rather than, "Oh, this is a job." Now it's more about the connection with the filmmaker, the connection with the story.

To come full circle, I arrived [earlier this year] to shoot the campaign for Chloé – and this is ten years [after *Passage*].

One of the reasons I was so excited was Stéphanie Di Giusto, who did this gorgeous, lyrical, poetic film *The Dancer*, [who was directing the campaign]. Sure enough, I arrive in South Africa to shoot the film and the day before we shoot, I meet Stéphanie, and she goes, "Meet my DP" and it was Benoit Debie, [the cinematographer] who shot Kapur's film. And I immediately started crying. I told him, "You have no idea how you inspired me and how that experience ten years ago completely changed my life." It really shook things up for me.

[Also during shooting for the Chloé campaign] I had this weird, instinctual feeling. I sat there and I go, "I think I'm going to shoot my next film here." And two months later I found out I'd be back there for four months shooting *The Red Sea Diving Resort*.

So intuition, a connection with the filmmaker, and an appreciation of the story and the concept are all a part of what inspires your decision-making in choosing a project. You've also said you're drawn to characters that experience loss. What draws you to characters like that?

I don't know what it is. They are grieving; they are rising above their grief. There's a complexity to emotions of mourning. You're re-finding your way – it is so interesting to me.

This is why I was so fascinated with the character Saskia in *Thank You For Your Service*. It's hard for me to call [these people] characters because these are real people, dealing with real loss and real grief and real mourning. These [are] women who have lost their husbands and lost their wives to the war. But with Saskia there was something that was so interesting to me because she didn't actually lose her husband. He came home and he was completely vacant, and not there – a completely different person. [She was] grappling with an extremely complicated feeling: "Would it have been better to have lost him?"

That's such a specific mental and emotional territory. In that sense, you've explored an incredibly impressive landscape of characters. You've also travelled all over, literally, for your projects, and back and forth between the coasts as your home base. You're based in Brooklyn now, and you're originally from Ohio. It's tempting to compartmentalise or segregate your history into "your upbringing" in Ohio and "your life today" as a famous, world-travelling New Yorker. But life is so much more complex!

Oh, God! People want to put a finger on me.

There's a "public eye" mythology about you, as a sort of childhood character who shot guns and rode four wheelers and ran around barefoot.

This is just me! I don't know. I talk about my childhood and people want to latch on to that because they want to define me in one way or another. Hopefully I'm so much more than that [laughs]. I could be from anywhere. I feel like I'm from everywhere! I don't identify as "this girl from Ohio." I feel like a woman of the world.

”

Open your eyes and enjoy
– nothing will ever look
the same. Appreciate and
love and experience

“

Have you always felt like that?

I think so. I've always wanted "more." I still want more.

You've cited Anaïs Nin, Simone de Beauvoir, Leo as literary and intellectual inspirations. Do these texts offer you the "more" that you speak of?

To dive into these books, into whatever these prolific thinkers are saying, that saves my life. You'd lose your mind if you didn't find inspiration in other places. That helps influence what's important for me, what sort of messages I want to convey [in my work].

You have posted on your Instagram a quote from Homer's *The Iliad*: "Everything is more beautiful because we are doomed. You will never be lovelier than you are now. We will never be here again."

It was something that was said because the gods were jealous of the fact that we were mortal; every experience we had was precious. And that has stayed with me. [It's] right. Open your eyes and enjoy – nothing will ever look the same. Appreciate and love and experience. Make the most of everything. Look around. Connect with other people, with love, with pain. Time is so precious to us. If we lived forever, time would become so insignificant.

Do you feel you live this way successfully?

Yes. I feel things – deeply.





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It is clear, as I imagine it would be to anyone that meets her, that Bennett values, lives and breathes her emotion. She connects to her projects in a way that's almost spiritual, and to their artistic statements.

As we wrap up our lunch, Bennett looks ahead to her upcoming year. She'll witness the release of *The Red Sea Diving Resort*, and will be starring in her first role on the stage. She pulls out her phone and shows me pictures of her cat, and her dog, River. "I really like to knit," she says. "I envision myself in front of the gas fireplace knitting."

Perhaps this is where we will find her next. Yes, on stage and on the big screen, but also – true to her gentle, unaffected self, kept buoyant by the weight of her gifts, patient and objective, a woman of the world – consumed, in reverie, with art.

– By Emily Rae Pellerin