

AYMELINE VALADE

ON-SCREEN MODEL

“Every time I hear about a model doing movies, I hear lots of shit about her,” says 31-year-old Aymeline Valade. Despite the recent cinematic success of fashion favorites like Cara Delevingne and Dree Hemingway, catwalkers transitioning onto the silver screen have a tough time shaking the model-slash-actress cliché. But thanks to her uncanny portrayal of Yves’s leggy muse Betty Catroux in Bertrand Bonello’s *Saint Laurent* (2014), Valade is lucky, or, more accurately, talented enough to have avoided that pigeonhole. She received rave reviews from critics and moviegoers alike, and Catroux herself even applauded Valade’s performance. “She gave me a thousand compliments and I was like, Wow, oh my God,” recalls Valade. “She was a woman in charge of her future, and she’s a role model. Every day when I’d go to set, I had two words in my mind: respect and honor. That’s all I wanted to do was respect and honor her.”

Wearing baggy, tattered jeans and a white T-shirt, Valade sits on the curb outside New York’s Root Studios, dragging on a cigarette. She’s as much a dead ringer for Catroux in the flesh as she was on-screen, what with her wiry frame and tomboyish sex appeal. But while they both share an enviable French nonchalance, straight blonde hair, and razor sharp jaws, their greatest similarities are self-confidence and a free spirit.

Free-spirited is precisely the term to describe Valade’s modeling career, which began, she says, as a “student job.” “I studied journalism and communication, but I was doing a little modeling here and there – it gave me the opportunity to travel the world. I was making good money, I was being creative, and all my needs were met,” she explains. “After I graduated, I compared myself to my other friend, who was working at McDonalds, and I was like, Thank God.” Her student gig took her from Tokyo to South Africa to Milan and beyond. Eventually, it led her to Nicolas Ghesquière – then at Balenciaga – who put her on exclusive for the S/S ’11 season. Somewhat ironically, Alexander Wang followed suit, tapping her to open his F/W ’11 show and making her the face of his first-ever campaign. Ad and runway work with Chanel, Bottega Veneta, Kenzo, and many more followed.

While Valade’s modeling success was propelled by her anything-goes attitude, her film career launched largely thanks to serendipity. She landed her first major acting role – that of Catroux – by chance after meeting actress Amira Casar, who plays Saint Laurent’s first assistant in the film, at Chanel’s 2012 Métiers d’Arts show in Scotland. “She put me in touch with Bertrand Bonello because he was having trouble finding somebody who looked like [Catroux] and had the attitude,” she says. “We spoke and had a few meetings, but I was kind of scared because I’m a model. I’m not an actress. It’s not my job.” Clearly, she’s gotten the hang of it, because shortly thereafter, *Saint Laurent* castmate Louis Garrel tapped her to appear in his directorial debut. “I was more like a guest,” Valade says of her role in *Two Friends*, a romantic dramedy that premiered at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival. “She doesn’t have a name – she’s called ‘Woman in the car.’ But she’s super chic, and heading to the opera in a convertible wearing pearls and a Lanvin dress and drinking a bottle of wine. It’s actually a very funny scene.”

For the moment, Valade plans to shift her focus back to modeling. “I feel like a lot of people in the fashion industry think I’m more into acting. I want to remind them that I want to keep modeling,” she asserts. “I cannot be satisfied with only one mode of expression. My acting would be nothing without modeling. They’re completely different, but complementary, and I need a little of both.” However, when she does return to the big screen, she wants to conjure a different kind of character. “It would be great if the girl was a bit fucked up. I don’t want to only play the beautiful woman with attitude. I don’t want the only substance of my characters to be beauty,” she says. “I want the substance of my next character to be her mind.” **KATHARINE K. ZARRELLA**

VALADE WEARS CLOTHING SAINT LAURENT BY HEDI SLIMANE
SHOES STUART WEITZMAN

