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IN CONVERSATION

Doutzen Kroes Is “Finally Connecting the Dots” in Her Modeling Career

As the global ambassador for the anti-poaching initiative Knot on My Planet, Kroes finds a purpose.

→ by H.W. VAIL

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Courtesy of Tiffany.

Though trends are famously fickle in fashion, activism is decidedly in, be it fighting AIDS or ensuring protection for under-age models. **Doutzen Kroes**, 15 years into her modeling career and not slowing down, has spent the last **two years** lending her face to a cause she sees as the zenith of her career: raising money to fight elephant poaching as the global ambassador for Knot on My Planet.

“After all these years modeling, I’m finally connecting the dots,” Kroes said before a photo shoot on Sunday, with a manicurist attending to her nails and an I.V. bag pumping B12 into her veins. “Because many times I thought, ‘Why am I in this job? What’s my contribution?’ Now, finally, this job—creating the Knot on My Planet campaign—created a purpose for why I’m doing it. I could use my connections and create something like this.”

The photo shoot was for a collaboration campaign with Tiffany & Co., which has been a partner in the Knot on My Planet initiative since **Reed Krakoff** took over as chief artistic officer last year. While some of the items in the Save the Wild collection, which this year debuts rhino and lion pieces, may be prohibitively priced (Kroes wore a \$35,000 pavé diamond elephant brooch to that night’s dinner), all proceeds do fund conservation projects.

Kroes has found her voice as an elephant activist at a time when the fashion industry is going through its own #MeToo reckoning—though Kroes considers herself “lucky,” given some of the stories that have emerged in the last year. “I established myself at a certain place in the fashion world where I’m respected,” she said. “I think it’s more the girls that are not high profile, or not known, and they’re just starting—girls that want it really, really, really bad, and then they’re scared to say no. I think you just have to find your line, and if you’re willing to go naked, then that’s fine too. It’s the same with sex: if you’re able to tell a guy no, but if you want to, you should also be free to do it.”

When Kroes was 18, she was asked to kiss someone during a shoot; “devastated,” she called her boyfriend afterward to tell him about it, and he broke up with her. “But I’m a grown woman now,” she continued. “I’m not this 18-year-old girl anymore that was insecure, and this is the problem: they’re not asking grown women to do these things. It’s young girls. The abuse of power—that’s the problem. And for men, for boys, it’s worse sometimes.”

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That abuse of power, and dynamic that makes the young models feel less powerful than the men who often run fashion shoots, comes up in other ways. "I think with asking to be nude, or having inappropriate sex, is a step further than wearing fur to me," Kroes said. "But I did that in the beginning, and I would never do it again. As an 18-year-old girl when I first started, I would sometimes be in tears, but then when *American Vogue* asks you, I didn't dare to say, 'I don't want to wear this,' because then I wouldn't be working anymore."

Kroes appears in the new Tiffany's campaign alongside **Naomi Campbell**, another longtime supermodel who has never shied away from speaking her mind. Freshly arrived from watching **Serena Williams's** controversial U.S. Open loss on TV, Campbell explained that with a home in Kenya, she feels deeply connected to the elephant-conservation cause: "Africa is a country, for me, that I go to for pure, real peace. You don't go and take and kill livestock for material bullshit."

Asked how she contended with resistance to her advocacy efforts, she replied, "Not everybody's going to like what you say. I've never had a fear of resistance. Resistance is ignorance."