

ESTONIA

# NATALYA KORNEICHUK: GIRL WITH ESTONIAN CROWN

## STROKES TO THE PORTRAIT OF MISS TALLINN 2012

In the Miss Universe 2012 pageant final held on the night of last December 20 in Las Vegas 20-year old American Olivia Culpo won the crown. Estonia was represented by student Natalya Korneichuk, the winner of Miss Tallinn 2012 beauty contest and the first princess of Miss Estonia 2012 pageant. Although she failed to get even to the top fifteen American media called her performance "one of the strongest in the past years." Natalya said she was satisfied with the trip and experience.

*Were you afraid, Natasha?*

I was not very aware of what to expect in Las Vegas although I realized there will be 70 live broadcast TV channels and 700 million viewers. It adds responsibility. I know by experience that 15 seconds before the first appearance are the most horrible ones. Twelve... ten... eight... five... Everybody in position and you see the edge of the stage. You shiver, but there is no other option than to subdue the fear and come out with a proudly raised head. As soon as you go on stage all emotions move to the background. You have to do your job. The final is not the most important event when spectators see you on TV. The so-called preliminary performance before the jury which lasts some three hours is more significant as the

finalists are determined there. Then the show of national costumes follows and the final.

Preparations for such a large-scale pageant demand major effort. It is not an easy walk. Each day participants meet at 6 hours in the morning at breakfast: everybody has to be fit, relaxed and smile. You have to smile round-the-clock. We succeeded to excellently do it in the first days, but got tired of it soon. Every hour was busy and we could not even make an unplanned step without permission. We stayed all the time in the hotel and were allowed outside only a few times. We were divided in groups of four girls and each group had a mamma - a girl who looked after us, reported the news, and managed the work plan. Miss Italia was my neighbor. Her delegation asked for it as I was the only participant who spoke Italian. So I worked as a translator in the first days and helped Russian and Italian girls with interviews. As for communications, they tell various things about pageants, but all participants decently behaved themselves. As it usually happens the girls formed groups - Latin American countries, Asian, and English-speaking. We had a nice company - Russia, Ukraine, Israel, Italy and me.

### SEE A MODEL IN TEENAGER

*It is hard to meet a girl today who would not dream of showing herself out. Did you also dream of catwalk, stage, or screen?*



On the contrary, I was a diligent schoolgirl and studied well. There were no teenager problems with me and I did not trouble my parents. But all of a sudden my life changed: I was noticed and offered to try myself as a model, i.e. to use both intellect and appearance.

*How did they notice you?  
In the street?*

They saw my photos, not me. I placed them in a social network on a popular Estonian website. It was yet before the Facebook era. There were only two photos in which I looked like a true teenager with tumbled hair and a cap and in "military" trousers. I believe it was very

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### PAWN WANTS TO BE QUEEN

*What did the school of life teach you?*

I mastered the fashion industry step by step. I was a pawn and thought why can't I try and be the queen? I had to thoroughly study how the whole system operates. I specialize in management, business governance, fashion marketing which is haute couture marketing, fashion brand management, and public relations in the sphere. It is definitely a narrow niche however the range of knowledge is big.



You can use it any other business, not only fashion. But I am interested in the fashion industry which I properly know. Now I am learning how the mechanism operates from the other side, not only as a model sees it. It takes time to get to the top of the career ladder and decide yourself (e.g. who is to be the face of the season). It is a long way.

*It seems I heard some disdain when you said you were a pawn. A pawn is the only chess figure which does not backtrack. It is the main figure in a certain way.*

I meant biased opinion about models. "Are you a model? You are simply nothing! You do what they tell you to do". That is not true. Naturally we have to thoroughly plan the operating scheme - there is an agent who distributes models and is in charge of them. The work itself is not that easy and simple as it might look. The main problem is the psychological barrier as

every day you have to hear not very pleasant words. Today you are too slim, tomorrow you are too fat, the day after tomorrow you have the wrong shape of the nose. Every day you have to reconcile with someone's dislike of you. You have to go to castings for them to see you, fit you in their brand and decide whether to hire you or not. There are 7-8 castings every day. There will definitely be someone naughty who would spoil your mood and try to humiliate and offend you. The psychological component of the profession is difficult. You have to be very strong to pass the tests and climb to the top which few people can reach.

*Were you upset? Did you cry?*

I did when I was small. Just imagine: you are sixteen, you go to school where everybody praises you as a good girl. Then you arrive in a new place where nobody cares whether you are good and smart. They closely look at you and say: "Something is wrong with her. Definitely something is wrong. We have to think whether we want to work with you. We have to think hard. And you go to castings while we are thinking." After a week you no longer remember the words as everyone is caring for you and saying you are so wonderful! Everything is unreliable and fragile in the profession. You can never be hundred percent convinced in tomorrow.

*Did you get used to it for long?*

I had no time to get used to it as I had to work. First I had to learn to properly walk on high heels. It is an art specifically if you wore only flat shoes before. High heels can deform you leg. So

you have to gradually get used to them. I did it with time and even enjoyed it as there was a reverse effect - I stopped wearing jogging shoes and abandoned my sport style. I began to pay more attention to my clothes and to what is fashionable at present. It was a maturing stage when you abandon your previous indifference to how you look. Naturally, it affected my development as a girl and female - you care about your look, you want to be beautiful regardless of the situation, you want to enjoy yourself.

The work was different. When I first came to Milan and I began with presentations and worked for the American Guess firm. I am not very tall for the catwalk - 175 centimeters. Milan and specifically Paris like very tall girls and I was too small for the catwalk. My appearance better fits photos, they call it commercial appearance. That is why I mostly posed for pictures: cosmetic brands, e.g. L'Oreal, clothes brands - Fornarina, an Italian brand.

*You had to quit your natural look, didn't you?*

It is not that easy. Take the hair color, for example. Now I have brown hair. I changed my natural gray color at the age of 15. "Feathers" were fashionable at the time and I had a multicolor hairdo which I greatly enjoyed. When I first came to an agency they told me I can try myself in the business only if I immediately go to the hairdresser to return my natural color. In contrast to beauty industry the model business prefers it natural. No sunrooms, no buildup hair or extended eyebrows. You have to show your natural appearance.

## MUCH DEPENDS ON YOU, BUT NOT EVERYTHING

*Is it a myth that all models are stupid?*

Don't forget there are models for sale. It specifically concerns popular models. Why did they become so famous? Because they are for sale. Our Estonian models Karmen Kass and Karmen Pedaru are very intelligent girls. To rise to the top of success you have to be

psychologically strong and keen in the fashion industry. You have to know what is happening in it, communicate and be of interest to various people. We work in Milan, Paris, New York, and Asia. There are different cultures. You have to be tolerant and know how to share your culture. These are not vague generalities! If you are an interesting person and psychologically strong individual who leads a healthy way of life you can achieve success.

*Luck is not important, isn't it?*

It is not the only reason, so to say. I have a close friend who is an ideal person without exaggeration. Since the age of 13 she has been dreaming of going to New York and rising to the top of the fashion industry, be recognized

and successful. She did a lot to achieve it. She is very intelligent, educated in law, an open and interesting person with a healthy way of life. She did it for her dream, but it did not come true.

*What is she doing now?*

She is a lawyer back home in Croatia. She was 22 when we met in Milan. She had a higher education, a record in model business, and she helped me a lot. However she failed to succeed in her model career no matter how hard she tried. She went back home and was hired by a law firm. Somebody would say she has a good and prestigious job. But her eyes no longer burn like they did in Milan. There are opposite examples: a girl walked in a street, they noticed her and invited not only as a cover girl, but to the best IMG agency in New York. It was a loud start from the very beginning, a big career. It was luck! Unfortunately, not everything depends on you. But I believe if there is a dream you should try and do everything possible to make it come true. If you fail you will lead a life like all other people do.

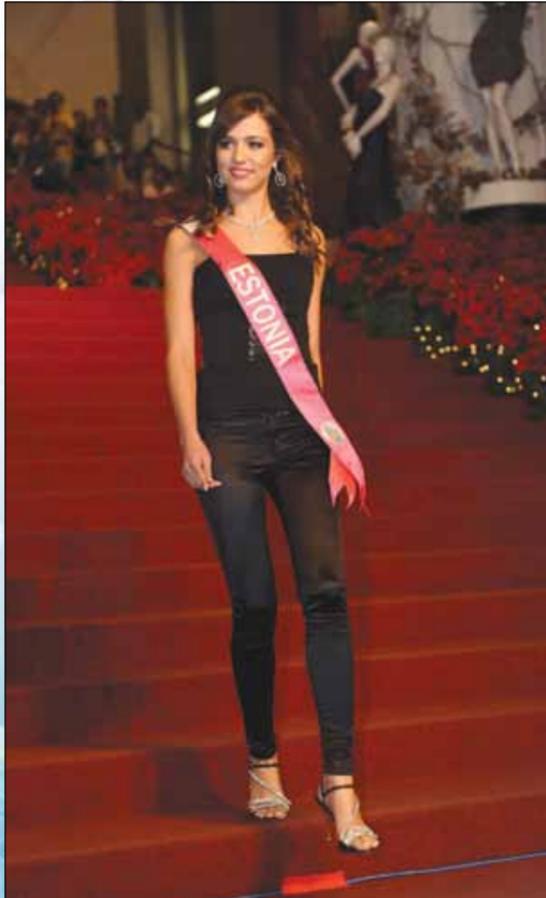
*Each model dreams of coming to New York. I thought they preferred Paris.*

It was Paris before as it was the trendsetter in the fashion industry. Milan as well. Now it is New York. Today you cannot just decide and go to New York. You can go to Milan. Let's take a beginner model in Tallinn. You can ask to send you

to Milan. It is possible to find an agency in Milan that would agree to accept you. It is impossible in New York. There are two options: if you are 14-15 years old and an absolutely new face you have a chance: if you correspond to their criteria they will make a model out of you and will help you. There is no guarantee you will succeed but they may take you because you are young and have a potential. The second option: you have a record in Milan, Paris or London, possibly Madrid or Barcelona, you have a weighty portfolio. Then you may go to New York. They take very strong girls, as a rule. New York is the final stage. Milan is most open today. Paris is more difficult as they are very demanding and captious there. They want every girl to have an ideal shape and appearance. The model industry is quickly developing and girls began to go to Tel Aviv where they shoot excellent photos. Had I earlier said I am going to Tel Aviv it would sound strange, to say the least. Today Israel is a new market with excellent photographers and interesting offers. It is an excellent possibility to fill your portfolio. Or take Asia. Earlier it was considered a secondary market. Now it is very prestigious to work in Singapore or Hong Kong.

## PAGEANT – THE RULES OF THE GAME

*This year you won Miss Tallinn title and were the First Princess in Miss Estonia pageant and represented the country at Miss Universe 2012 in Las Vegas. Isn't it enough to be a model? Is it also necessary to be a recognized beau-*



*Miss Russia told me she had a busy schedule of meetings and events. It is very honorable to be the first beauty of the country.*

ty? How does a model differ from a Miss? Is it a wrong question?

No. There is a difference. A model means classical facial features, but no bright individuality, no zest, as they say. Actually there is, but it is different, that of a model. As a rule, it is a bright-haired girl with unclear facial features and not very expressive eyes. They can paint whatever they want on such a face and adjust it to any style or brand. A beauty or miss has a catchy appearance with a zest - either bright eyes or puffed lips. A gorgeous girl cannot be a model, as a rule. Naturally, there are exceptions. Brazil's super model Andriana Lima is very beautiful and popular. But she is mostly a show girl. Suffice it to recall the show of the famous Victoria's Secret Fashion brand.

The idea to participate in a pageant appeared long ago. At that time I did not study but worked in Milan. It came not to my mind, but to my friends. They suggested participating in a contest. I thought it might be an interesting new guideline. The first pageant was international and rather difficult. I represented Estonia at Miss Globe International 2011 held in Northern Cyprus. I was very proud of myself when I went there as I had a record in the industry, knew how to walk and how to do the makeup. Everything will be easy and simple! You should have seen how the girls laughed at me when I walked my model way at the first rehearsal. A beauty contest has different rules of the game. Absolutely differ-

ent! At the first show which introduced each country I put on a black dress, straightened my hair and used shiny lipstick. Then I saw all those dollies with glued eyebrows, buildup hair curls, and bright dresses. God, what is it? We went on stage and I got lost among them. The second rule: natural look does not work at a beauty contest. It does not matter how beautiful or nice you are. You have to be bright and catchy. It is no catwalk, it is a show. Everything is different - bright dresses, curly hair, red lips. In this sense beauty contest participants are true dollies. I realized that if I want to be catchy and equally compete with them I have to play their rules. It was a good lesson: I learned what a pageant is and how it differs from the model industry.

Still I was in the top ten at the pageant and won Miss Photogenic title. It was important that I communicated with girls from various countries. I was surprised to know that beauty contests are very important for many countries. In Venezuela or Spain, for example, the contests are a religion! The culture ministries allocate huge money for them. Girls who want to join Miss Venezuela contest prepare for it since the age of 16. At the age of 18 or 20 they may get to a casting. Miss Venezuela meets the ruling elite and participates in charity. She goes to the United States as it is an important part of national culture for the country. Not only in Venezuela, but in the whole of Latin America. Miss Russia told me the same things. She has a busy schedule of meetings and events. It is very honorable to be the first beauty of the country. It is different in Estonia. Unfortunately, too many pageants have appeared of late. People get confused as there are too many Miss as if there is nothing else to do. Had there been a single national high-level contest which elected the only Miss, the result would be better on the international level, I believe. Last time Miss Estonia enjoyed success at Miss Universe contest 12 years ago. She was among the top ten. Miss Universe pageant was held for the 61st time. In the past 60 years Estonia was in the top ten only once. Competition

was tough this time but I did everything possible to properly fulfill my mission.

Preparations for the pageant were the most difficult time as they required a lot of effort to find support and distribute information about the upcoming event in our country. Most participants from other countries arrived in Las Vegas from resorts after rest. They were full of strength while I was already tired by the time of the pageant.

There were people who helped me selflessly in preparations because they cared how I represent the country. However there should be a special professional team to arrange preparations for such a large-scale event. They say "one cannot conquer alone". I have mixed feelings at present - joy and disappointment. Joy is because of unique experience which will help progress. I was noticed by international media which positive commented my performance. Interesting options of my career in fashion and show business appeared. Participation in Miss Universe pageant gives you a certain status which is important if you want to work in America or Asia where interest in pageants and the world of beauty is high. I am glad I got new acquaintances and opportunities. Disappointment comes from too much time and effort used in preparations and the result itself. Many people ask which place I occupied. Only top 15 are announced, other results are not published. Anyway, there would be much more chances had the Estonian representative enjoyed strong support of her own country and had a Miss Estonia delegation been present at the pageant with a well-known official sponsor like most countries did. I believe the rest was done as properly as my personal resource allowed me to prepare for the pageant.

File. **Natalya Korneichuk**  
Student of the Design University in Milan specializes in fashion industry marketing and PR.  
Participant in Elite Model Look 2006  
Titles:  
Miss Tallinn 2012 (winner)  
First Princess in Miss Estonia 2012 pageant  
Miss Globe Estonia 2011 (winner)  
Miss Globe International 2011 (top 10, Miss Photogenic)  
Speaks Russian, Estonian, English, and Italian.

Ella Agranovskaya,  
for Amber Bridge