

Forbes

“Not a programmer. Not an artist. Someone in between.” Meet the Polish creative shaking up New York’s advertising world.



Forbes: “My husband is a director by profession,” goes the old saying. Are you, by profession, a director too?

Veronika Watson-Kuc: That’s always a tricky one, because most people have no idea what I actually do. Everyone knows what a lawyer or a doctor does, but a creative director? And one working in augmented reality on top of that?

On LinkedIn you describe yourself as “a creative living in New York.” What does that mean?

In Polish it’s hard to find a good equivalent, but “creative” sums it up best. A while back I realized I didn’t want to choose between being a programmer or an artist — I wanted to be something in between, someone who blends the two. That choice eventually led me into advertising in New York.

Where did that path begin?

Probably at home. My parents were freelancers, so from early on I knew what that meant: if there are clients, life is good; if not, well, it’s tough. That’s why I decided I wanted a more

stable job. But choosing a field wasn't easy, because I was drawn to both art and technology — I was writing short stories and coding simple websites at the same time.

In your "30 under 30" application you wrote: "I know what it feels like to be curious about the world but not have access to it." Can you explain?

I was born and raised in Warsaw, so technically I had more access to culture and education than many people in Poland. But still, I felt it wasn't enough, that somewhere else there was this "bigger world." When I moved to London, I discovered that was true. Suddenly, the things I had only seen on YouTube were right in front of me. I could walk into an electronics store and try on a VR headset — something unimaginable in Warsaw back then.

You ended up in London to study political science and social studies at University College London — not the most obvious choice given your interests.

At the time it felt like a good extension of my interests. I wanted to understand how societies function, what roles people play, and how to make things better. But I quickly realized change in the public sector happens painfully slowly — and I'm impatient. My bachelor's thesis was about how social media influences democratic processes. Around the same time, I got pulled into the advertising scene through a student association started by Marta Gąsik (herself a Forbes "30 under 30" alum). Then I landed a summer internship at Institute of Digital Fashion, a startup experimenting with 3D and AR in fashion. That's when I realized advertising could be so much more than TV spots or posters — it could be interactive, it could live in technology.

So I went for a master's in advertising at University of the Arts London, where I focused on chatbots, voice assistants, and AR. My dissertation on augmented reality in advertising opened the door to UNIT9, a production studio specializing in creative tech campaigns.

But you didn't start as a creative director right away.

Not at all. At first I worked on RFPs and learned from developers what was possible technically. I also handled a lot of business development — and turned out to be good at it. I brought in about \$7 million worth of new contracts. Less than a year later, I was promoted to creative director and started running my own projects.

And in the meantime you swapped London for New York.

Two things led to that. First, my husband got a job offer in New York. Second, our agency was considering opening a North American hub. I pitched myself to lead it, got the green light, and moved to New York to build a team. At first we focused on business development while production stayed in London, but eventually we started producing projects locally too.

You've worked with Nike, Coca-Cola, Barbie, MTV... What's it like doing projects for such huge brands?

There's no single rule. Some clients are dream partners, giving you full freedom and trusting the creative process. Others are extremely protective of their image and restrict you at every step. Sometimes they love everything, sometimes they nitpick endlessly. And sometimes the only feedback you get is: "Make the logo bigger." In the end, it depends on the company's culture and the people involved.

One of my biggest surprises was a project involving Barbie, Gap, Google, and Adobe. You'd think coordinating four giants would be a nightmare. Instead, everyone was laid-back and open to our ideas. We proposed turning Gap's Times Square store into a full Barbie dreamscape in augmented reality, and they all said, "Let's do it."

And then came The Met Replica — the project that won you global recognition, including five Cannes Lions nominations.

It started with Verizon, a sponsor of The Met, who came to us and said: "Metaverse is the hot topic right now. Let's do something with it." That was the seed.

We pitched bringing The Met's collection into Roblox, to give kids a new way into art. The idea was: come to New York, explore the museum as if it were a game, learn about the exhibits, and then continue the experience online with friends.

The results blew us away: 1.4 billion impressions, 200,000 new visitors to The Met. But what made me happiest was standing in the museum, watching kids run around with their phones, interacting with the art instead of just scrolling TikTok. That moment meant more than any award.

That project changed your career, didn't it?

Absolutely. Normally it takes 10–15 years to become a creative director. I got there much faster — impatience again! — but that also meant I had to prove myself with every project. First the smaller ones, then bigger and bigger until The Met Replica, which I led from start to finish. It was the moment I realized I could handle leading a team of 50 people, managing millions in budget, and still deliver something meaningful.

This year you moved to a new agency — NVE Experience Agency. Why the change?

NVE is very different from UNIT9. It specializes in real-world experiential projects — pop-ups, events, film premieres, live activations. For me it's a chance to step outside the purely digital space and learn how people engage face-to-face. At the same time, I want to bring my background in technology into these experiences. Once again, it's about blending worlds.

You've spent a few years now in the American ad industry. Not quite "Mad Men," I imagine?

Definitely not. We're not sitting in leather chairs smoking cigars with clients. We're on Zoom, laptops on our couches. And it's no longer a boys' club either. Sure, some people still think a creative director has to be a bearded guy in a black T-shirt in a Brooklyn loft. But that's changing. And I want to be part of that change — especially knowing how hard I worked to earn my seat at the table.

So what's next? Your own agency?

Someday, yes. For now I love what I do: working with amazing teams and global brands, experimenting with new technologies, sometimes even making a cultural impact. I'd like to start my own agency one day, but I'm not in a rush. I still have a lot to learn.

And would that agency be in Poland or the US?

I'm not sure Polish companies are ready yet to invest in the kinds of work I specialize in. But I do hope that changes — that brands in Poland will see advertising as more than TV spots people skip or posters they ignore. Sometimes it's worth taking the risk to do something unexpected. For now, though, I'm happy in New York. There's still plenty I want to do here.



Link to the article (in Polish)

<https://www.forbes.pl/life/lista-30-przed-30-polka-w-nowym-jorku-wywraca-swiat-reklamy-do-gory-nogami/bd36fx7>