Santa Cruz’s Vicki Noble gets noticed for the tarot designs she co-created in the ’80s, and suddenly finds herself in the high-fashion world of Dior

BY GEORGIA JOHNSON

May 11, 2017: Few things will coax celebrities into the Santa Monica Mountains on the eve of summer, but Dior is one of them. For some, Dior’s 2018 Resort show locale is an excuse to dust off their furs and Stetsons in lieu of silk jacquards and twill trousers—think Charlize Theron meets McCabe & Mrs. Miller. Among the hundreds of fashion denizens in attendance is Santa Cruz resident Vicki Noble, tottering around the Bedouin celebrity tent. She sits right by Rihanna, though neither of them know it.

“Whoever that is,” Noble tells me later, with a shrug. “I wouldn’t know her if I saw her.”

Similarly, Noble, with her cropped white hair and square-rimmed glasses, is pretty much indistinguishable from many people you’d pass on Pacific Avenue. At 70, she’s a professor, a psychic reader, a gardener, and most importantly to her, a feminist. She had been invited to Dior’s 2018 Resort show because the artwork on the clothes parading down the runway was from the Motherpeace Tarot deck, which she co-created with Karen Vogel nearly 40 years ago.
Dior’s southwestern-inspired collection highlighted strong female figures, drawing inspiration from Georgia O’Keeffe and images from the Motherpeace Tarot. Christian Dior was a tarot aficionado rumored to have had his cards read before his shows. Dior’s new artistic director, Maria Grazia Chiuri, is also a lover of the tarot.

Chiuri is the first woman to run the Dior line in its 70-year history. An outspoken feminist herself, she is seeking to reinvent what the Dior name stands for, restoring Christian Dior’s original vision, according to Noble. Chiuri came across Noble’s work when she read her book, *Shakti Woman*, and stumbled on the Motherpeace Tarot deck.

The Motherpeace Tarot deck was published in the early ’80s, co-authored by Noble and Vogel. The two women created the deck to celebrate femininity and strong women of color, a break from the typical masculine focus of much of tarot arcana. With help from friends, they self-published the 78-card deck in Berkeley after mortgaging their home.

“We were revising world history to include women,” Noble says. “Maria Grazia saw that, and she wants to revise world history to include women, too.”

*April 12, 2017:* It’s the eve of Noble’s birthday, she has a plethora of activities planned—including getting tattoos—but when she checks her inbox she has an email from Paris, asking if the Motherpeace designs can be used in the Resort collection just three weeks later.
“I was there when she opened the email,” former student and longtime friend Teresa Diaz recalls. “She said, ‘oh, I am just going to delete this’ and I said, ‘oh, no you’re not. You open it right now.’”

“I thought it might be a joke,” Noble says now. Though she almost deleted the email, she says she had been feeling like something was a bit off in the universe around that time, and that something was coming her way—but she wasn’t sure what. So she opened it.

Noble lives in a little house off East Cliff Drive, within minutes of her three children. She prides herself on her two beehives and countless cherry tomatoes. She is a proud grandmother, and, like grandmothers do, dotes on her three grandchildren while spending countless hours in her garden. But there is nothing stereotypical about her.

She is a healer and professor of feminist studies and women’s spiritualism. She travels around the world leading women’s retreats and workshops.

“She always has been very much who she is as a healer, energetic being and oracle,” says Diaz. “She is pretty consistent with who and how she is, even as she moves through different contexts and cultures. She’s really a ‘bridge person,’ and streaming radical feminist qualities into mainstream fashion is just a perfect role for her.”

But Noble hasn’t always been a healer, or a feminist for that matter. Originally from Iowa, Noble was married with two children at 22
because she says that’s what you did at the time if you didn’t know what else to do. But she loved reading and writing, and came across Kate Millet’s Sexual Politics, where she found feminism while living in Colorado Springs.

“It hit me like a lightning bolt,” Noble says. “It was a heresy for me to even have that book on my coffee table, being an Air Force wife.”

She divorced and eventually moved to Berkeley, where the Motherpeace magic happened. Noble recalls buying her children a tarot card deck at the flea market, and drawing on the two blank cards—which got her thinking about starting her own deck, though she had little to no experience with tarot.

“We tried to get the deck published with U.S. Games, but they wanted artistic control,” she says. “Of course we said no to that.”

Though she has published eight books, Noble has always been on the wrong end of the publishing industry. She says many publishers want to change her, change what she stands for, and often don’t understand her methods and easygoing way of life.

“The last publisher told me she wanted me but she was concerned about my platform,” she says. “I had to Google, ‘what’s a platform?’”

She feels that this latest development with Dior is a way around the publishing industry, and that in a way, she has circumvented the establishment altogether. Even though her work isn’t very commercially successful, she says everything has always worked out, one way or another. “The universe has always taken care of me,” she says.

And so it has. Motherpeace has since sold more than 300,000 copies, and sales have doubled since Dior licenced the deck and debuted the line. Come August, Paris Jackson would wear Dior’s Wheel of Fortune sheer dress to the MTV Video Music Awards. Beyond that, Noble won’t see what the entire collection will look like until it’s released in November.

“My work is terrifically interesting, it just wasn’t making its way into the mainstream,” she says. “Until now.”

July 3, 2017: It is a hideously hot day in Paris, but Dior can’t afford to wait for weather. It is Paris Fashion Week, but perhaps more importantly, it is the label’s 70th anniversary. Everyone celebrates with lavish amounts of champagne and oversize brimmed hats, while frantically fanning themselves with Dior fans. Noble opts for a leather jacket given to her by Chiuri and long sleeves—a decision she comes to somewhat regret upon her arrival. Everyone is wearing Dior, and some are wearing Motherpeace designs on T-shirts or dresses. She rushes up to each of them to say hello and get a photograph. Just a week before, she had gotten her check from Dior and decided to take the month off, which she doesn’t often do. An invitation to Dior’s Haute Couture fashion followed, and the company flew her to France.

“Normally it wouldn’t have been possible, it was too spontaneous, I don’t live my life that way,” she says, noting that at her age traveling is more difficult. “But I said yes, and off we went.”

She still fully intends on keeping to her eccentric feminist roots, but she admits it’s nice to visit the “God realm” that is Dior’s world every now and then.

“It’s such a fantastic story of creativity,” says Noble’s neighbor, Tracy Shaw. “That’s why everyone should be creating things—just keep creating, and you never know. Forty years later you might get picked up by Christian Dior.”

Noble’s collaboration with Dior is far from over, she’s expecting to return to Paris in the fall to do some kind of event, as requested by Chiuri. Though the details aren’t clear and dates aren’t set, she thinks it’ll be in November. Until then, she is back to reality, having rewarded herself with a new laptop—which she is still getting used to—and car, which she fittingly named Dior.

For more information about Motherpeace and Noble’s work, visit vickinoble.com.