

I REALLY JUST WANT TO FALL IN LOVE, ASHLEY



The Miuccia Prada Interview

Words *Ashley Heath*
Portrait *Juergen Teller*

Anyone doubting Miuccia Prada's ability to reinvent fashion culture yet again needs consider the following. Here is a woman of determination, dignity and considerable grace. A woman currently full of doubts – almost defined by loss and fear – who is questioning, slowly reinventing, on a daily basis. Just my rhetoric? No hers.

She's done with Art. She wants to fall in love. She knows the 'old culture' is done. She wants to fall in love. Her closer confidants are moving towards meditation, prayer even. She can't focus long enough for that (she wants to fall in love.) She's getting into football instead. She's loving the 'deep truth' of a tribal sport and of 'years and years of happy men on Sundays.' But she cancelled her Linea Rossa, a tribal bucket hat moment that brought sporty new blood into her stores. 'It was successful, so I stopped it,' she chimes.

I'm enchanted far more than confused. [Linea Rossa was relaunched last fall.]

Your husband is going to really enjoy this stuff about wanting to meet someone to fall in love with, I point out. 'Exactly,' she responds. Better at the start or end of the piece? Both. 'I'm addicted to falling in love eventually,' repeats Miuccia Prada – and that 'eventually' could be Italian/English for 'ultimately' or it could be something between a wistful and steely take on love and loss and even female emancipation. *Eventually, Ashley...*

I have interviewed Miuccia Prada before, many years ago. I wasn't so touched as now. I was gently admonished for giving such a lot of time and space to her husband, Patrizio Bertelli. It was my failing perhaps. The late-nineties was all thrust and growth. Prada was acquiring. Particularly Patrizio. There was no way to second-guess debate in the Prada kitchen. You'd be flown in for impressive corporate-style announcements. Wonder at the facade. The first Damien Hirst piece had appeared in reception, a masterpiece of feasting then dying shiny dark flies. It worked great alongside all the shiny black nylon but the death poetry was surely beautifully prescient.

I will quote Prada in full on death in a couple of paragraphs. But let me first state that I believe she is the most important female creative in fashion since Coco Chanel. And, further, that I believe these women will both end up out-stripping all the men of all nationalities, whether they be gay, straight, tragically young or wonderfully old, whatever the corporate marketing strategies and new era brand building. This genius of fashion and it's vibrant, wider culture tells me to call her Miuccia, but I still feel happier somehow calling her Mrs Prada. If I'd met Chanel I feel conversely I'd have tended towards calling her Gabrielle, whatever her wish. Perhaps this is irrelevant. But respect/deference and dominance/submission are surely timely themes.

I'm addicted to falling in love eventually, Mrs Prada.

Here she is replying to my question, 'do you now think

about death most days?' In truth, you could just read this bit and go elsewhere. This is where I find that Miuccia Prada currently finds herself. I honestly can't tell you what comes next (more science/philosophy and less big fucked-up cars at the Prada Fondazione?) But neither can she. More importantly, I don't think her frank response should be underestimated. If fashion is in a period of great change – it is but that's also a cliché with much idiotic comment – then there are a handful of people with the power, talent and drive to effect it for the better.

'I think about death a lot. Fear is something that is now very near to me. Of what? Of everything. Fear is what disturbs me the most presently, a generic fear that I can't even exactly pin down. Probably, yes, it's about loss, about death. It's become an obsession. Is it linked to my obsession with politics, trying to understand the old culture facing the new culture? I think so. I want to do something, make a little contribution in this.

'Now I do know that there are a lot of young people that still lean very much to the old culture, obsessions with movies and with art... But what I'm trying to understand is whether to be clever is now almost useless, redundant. It might be like that, that really might be a possibility. *What now is the substitution of old culture?*'

I HAD FLOWN to Milan to meet Mrs Prada having provided her a short scattershot list of topics for discussion. It pretty much read: Pop Addiction / Addicted World / Spirituality & Death. She didn't address the list and tells me she hasn't prepared. 'But that last one... So much is not visible,' she responds now. 'Spirituality is the argument that I'm thinking about all the time now.'

There were a few reasons for pursuing this agenda with Prada, not least my conviction that yet another feature talking about her radical appropriation of the fabric of the proletariat would, indeed, just nudge us all closer to a slow death. Time with this incredible woman is very precious I believe. I'd balked at that challenge in truth. Not so much 'never meet your heroes' – of course I sporadically meet Miuccia and exchange creative pleasantries – as *have I really got it in me to get beyond cliché?*...

The list was a kind of test. Would she entertain me/it? Where is Mrs Prada at when it comes to our somewhat tragic world of empty spin and PR-controlled corporate agenda? Our world. Or mine at least.

Mrs Prada pours me tea in her office in front of that now well-known wall of painted doors, a series of iconic canvases by the contemporary master Gerhard Richter, and answers every last question, often with intoxicating irony and laughter. Her Carsten Höller slide is closed up. The monochrome Richters offer no escape for a woman who stresses she's now disenchanted with the art scene ('although I do

still think it's one of the best places to be'), a scene in which she nevertheless will always stand as poised Pop guru, as veiled European Queen, as The Chic Talisman.

How many times have you been in love?

'Six.'

[Laughing] You don't need to think about that number?

'Six... maybe five, four... No, six. It's already a lot!'

What's the secret to being a good mother?

'Love and time. The time and dedication is what's important. Not quality, but quantity!'

You were close to your parents?

'Yes, but not particularly. I never had a problem. Everything was okay.'

You still love fashion?

'More and more in fact. I am a super fashionista!'

If you had your time again, what one thing would you change?

'I like to do mistakes.'

If you could have three months off with someone who would it be and where would you go?

'I don't need time off. I just want to fall in love with someone. That's what I'd like to do in that time.'

You're sure about that answer...

'Very. Falling in love is something that I really like.'

Can you do whatever you like with your life?

'You know I can do what I like. Anything. But falling in love you can't predict. So I really just want to fall in love, Ashley.'

Are you a fantasy addict?

'I'm always, always thinking about something that I would like to do or achieve. Always. But I like things that are possible, so when you say 'fantasy,' for me the fantasy is always linked to reality.'

To your reality, Miuccia. Is that a slippery slope?

'No, I don't even like to talk about dreams because I obsess about what's achievable... And you? Do you find you now believe in God?'

THE ABOVE is a hasty assemblage of questions and answers from a couple of hours of conversation. My main point, beyond some easy entertainment, is that Miuccia Prada is not shirking from the challenge of the hour and in this – her sincerity, intelligence and bravery – I find the woman most wonderful.

Fashion needs leaders right now. It's that simple. The industry is almost defined by saming, by copycat. Problematically, fashion has been copying too much from sportswear, and largely without any reinvention or added inspiration. That way longer term disaster lies.

I am confident in reporting that Miuccia Prada, the most important fashion figure since Chanel, is up to this challenge, aware of our worrying times. We meet on the day that the first news filters through regarding Raf Simons potential departure from Calvin Klein. Miuccia is concerned, disappointed. She cares for her friend, but clearly cares even more for her – for their, for *Our* – culture. When I see Raf a few weeks later he has already left his job and his concern is much the same... This whole thing is a bigger issue, more important than any one person operating to a broken design.

Mrs Prada, where do you see your company in ten years time?

'Please don't ask me because I do not know.'

You take advice on this?

'With my husband I address exactly this. We try sometimes to think very hard about this. Basically we're trying to reset the company.'

Do you think Prada should be concerned with high moral principle?

'Probably yes. My son wants to found a university. So I'm thinking hard... But the answer is yes.'

You know why I believe in her? Less 25 years of fashion media collaboration and mutual professional respect than the fact that in 2019 she so comfortably says: 'we're trying to reset the company.' Try getting that one past the conservative spin doctors, the lifeboat monitors on some leaking corporate fashion brand revamp last seen steaming towards a vague area on the map marked 'China.'

Prada has set herself high standards. Prada has positioned herself right in the rifle's cross-hairs. Prada could rightfully step back, dodge the sticky questions, enjoy those lovely homes and the grandchildren. (More on that at the very end.)

But Prada is not dodging the questions. Having effectively redefined cutting-edge pop culture since the effective death of the European music industry – record shops, sleeve design, silly expensive videos, cheap illegal flyposters – Prada is actually only half the way there. She's created the medium, but the full message is yet to have emerged. Her wonderful Prada Fondazione museum space in Milan was but a step, perhaps even a sidestep...

I believe there's a lot more to come from Miuccia Prada. She *senses* there's *a lot* more to come.

In the meantime, I sit at her contemporary women's shows and I see ideas that I want to share immediately with my eldest daughter, now in her late teens and also a 'super fashionista.' I see women on the Prada catwalk, beamed live around the internet, that look the way I'd be very proud to see my eldest child. So shoot me.

(Note: I buy the menswear. I buy jackets in denim and cord, I buy oversize shirts in perfect colours – people always comment – and I just bought the best boat shoes I've ever seen to wear on my new boat in Catalonia. Try capsized me.)

I love the woman. Enough polemic, here follows an edit of much of the rest of our frank conversation. There was just a little bit of family stuff that went off record.

AH First question: What would you really like to talk about with me today?

MP I want to know what you think. You're a clever person, so maybe you will tell me something [laughs]. I ask the questions! But, really, this is a very strange time. So much is not visible. Is it possible to survive in times when so much is being lost. I want to know what you're thinking.

AH I'll try and tell you what I think as we go along. But love is the answer, isn't it?

MP Love, yes, that one always. I was consoling this person and I told her about Édith Piaf and in that famous movie she says – it's her famous song – 'I begin from zero...'

AH Yes, *Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien*.

MP Exactly. Piaf was older and sick and reading philosophers or something like that and again it was exactly the same sentence – starting from scratch, from nothing... The only thing they asked her, 'any advice?' Her reply was always 'love.' Sorry I'm now distracted from the question... Can I give you some tea, you're English so I'm not sure if you'll enjoy my tea.

AH As long as it's black I'm happy, thank you. Is subversion still crucially important for you?

MP It's the only thing I care about. It's always there, but it has actually become more radical.

AH Really? Explain.

MP My problem is that I'm more and more split in two. One half is more about responsibilities and dealing with the world of where, so far, I want to be. And then there's my subversive side... But I need to be a bit careful. I did an interview where I talked about politics and in the end I cancelled the interview because it was kind of suicide. I was talking about politics and then I was talking about fashion... I'm happy to do that but in a way it's also impossible once it's put out there in a certain way. It's not a problem on one level because it's me, so it is what it is.

AH And in a way, you're 'damned if you do and you're damned if you don't'...

MP Well, it's the real me. I think about all these big ideas but after you have to also think about something very practical and real, which is the new shirt,

the new bag, the new shoes. I was always like this pretty much my whole life, I always have to face the tandem of the most practical, stupid stuff and the big thinking. Both are important.

AH At the moment you're thinking about politics, neuroscience, whatever, and also whether you'll change the proportion of a cuff or a collar.

MP Yes, that's exactly what I'm doing. Both important to me. I'm very much an insider but also such a complete outsider. So I do think in general from two very different worlds.

AH But the outsider is dominant isn't it?

MP Definitely. In myself, yes. So today I am really facing my fears regarding the so-called leftist intelligentsia, because it's dying everywhere in the world. Now I am actually very critical of this leftist intelligentsia, but I would very much like to find a solution, a new route... at least for myself. I don't want to finish in a place that doesn't count because it's too clever or too strange or too sophisticated.

AH So you asked me what I'm thinking... And I've been thinking a lot about addictions and people not being in the 'now.' A world bereft through addiction and requiring some spiritual salvation. A revolution even.

MP Interesting. You're the third person around me that's talked about spirituality and this kind of thing.

AH I don't want to talk about Karl Marx or about leftism today, please, but the unhappiness of the world is perhaps increasingly linked to a lot of Marxist critique, stuff that had been disregarded as ridiculously dated. I mean, specifically, a human's position in regard to their labour, their creativity and even its ownership. Interestingly, when I was thinking about 'how Pop is Prada?' and preparing ideas and questions for you, I was soon thinking about pop culture now shared via telephones and then about young people with attention and addiction issues... Marx was, ultimately, cautioning re human happiness. But also I do believe you might end up an old leftist lady in 20 years or what-

ever with a smile on your face. I hope so.

MP Now there's so much immediate information and it's impossible to know everything. There's so many different cultures, races and religions. The distribution of it seems that what the left is feeling... it's all based on an analysis that is old. Nobody is able to read the reality because it's too difficult, too complex. Maybe we will eventually have to take a pill to learn everything. This is something I've talked about recently with Ryan Trecartin. [His new work shows at the Prada Fondazione from April.]

AH Do we really need to know all this stuff, though?

MP Well, certainly, we can completely change perspective and be more human. There's a tendency to just think about yourself, pronto. Even when I end up in discussions with so-called 'intellectuals,' everyone now seems to care about their own problems a little too much. But I'm sure there's something new growing that is positive but not completely clear yet.

AH Do you ever meditate?

MP Totally unable.

AH [Laughs] Have you tried?

MP I tried for five seconds but I realised...

AH [Laughing] The idea is that you try a little longer than five seconds...

MP I know but my mind is always working too much. I'm not able to meditate. They tell me I should.

AH I think it might actually be one of the keys for a better world. They should teach it in school.

MP Perhaps, but I get bored even by the idea!

AH Do you gamble?

MP No, that's not me. No forbidden addictions, no official [illegal] addictions.

AH You don't think you're an art addict in terms of all your collecting, your art collection?

MP No, absolutely not.

AH Art helped connect you with a spiritual dimension?

MP My spiritual dimension is far more on reading and more on movies. When we decided to do the Fondazione – actually my husband decided – we had friends who saw our spaces, industrial spaces here in the early time

when those were totally new... Anyway, we discussed to use these spaces for sculpture, for big art exhibitions, I said 'ah that's a good idea' and my husband said 'let's do it.' For me, the Fondazione has been years of study. It's just been a learning process, no more. For sure, 'art' was easier for me in some respects because the problem is the same as of literature and the movies. To go from literature and movies to art was not such a difficult change. The content is the same. It was not so difficult to start learning something in art in 20 years. And that was an obsession, a deep dedication, because the practice led the knowledge. An obsession but not an addiction. We had to do it, because we decided to do the Fondazione so we then had to learn.

AH Do you think there's any more value in a painting than in a piece of music?

MP No, there's no difference. If it's genius it's genius...

AH You collect tiaras right?

MP I hate to be a collector, I don't like it. I'm not a collector. Why did I start buying art? Because I was studying and I wanted to process all that and have it in front of me. To enjoy it, sure, because it was an important part of what I had in my mind in that moment. But I move on. Now, for instance, even with my jewels, I was buying all that until I had to discover something new. Now I don't buy jewels anymore. I don't have anything more to discover there... Also I kind of do have everything from every period. But all my buys were always connected to discovering... My husband is a collector, though, and actually he's still buying...

AH I saw him the other week at the Kerry James Marshall show in London. He was eyeing up the best painting in the gallery, the most interesting and challenging one. He has good taste. The paintings were officially 'not for sale' yet, but he seemed very determined. I'm sure he got it...

MP Kerry James Marshall? [Miuccia simultaneously sighs and nods in affirmation.] Ah yes, because my husband really is a collector. He likes art. And I like ideas.

AH Francis Picabia said something to an old friend of mine in Barcelona...

MP Picabia!

AH [Laughing] He's the best, right... So you're not altogether done with art!

MP I love Picabia! I love art!... Remember what I say is mostly a provocation, Ashley.

AH Me too. Apparently near the end of his life Picabia said, 'you spend your life building a home, or homes, and then eventually you realise that actually you're just returning home...'

MP I like the idea of coming back to earth. I'm very happy with that. You?

I SPEND a good period of my time with Mrs Prada going through Richard Hamilton's famous list of the attributes of 'Pop.' There was a reason for this beyond any vain 'intellectual' pursuit. It came far more from the gut, a visceral response to Prada fashion shows and to the kind of collage aesthetic that Miuccia Prada conjures when she is at her very best. [I have elected to publish that particular discussion as an appendix at the end of this feature.]

It is difficult to describe the effect of a great Prada show to someone who has never experienced this still unique fashion phenomenon. (How is that in itself even possible?) Catwalk shows are clearly clothes and girls and hair and make up – and boys with all of this – and music and staging and lights. Same with Prada.

But Prada is *Awopbopaloobop Alopbamboom*. And Prada is Paddy McAloon cooing *Cars And Girls* too and it's a nagging melody – this haunting, familiar truth – but actually you're not looking at cars at all... You're looking at a new girl of the moment – This Moment – and she's wearing cartoon bulldozer print or else reflecting some Twitter-era outburst or it's something that Mrs Prada first created many years ago, but now reworked for the digital kid that's scratching away inside almost all of us.

See, it's pretty difficult to describe. I think I failed. Because sometimes it's also just a great line of coats. And I really don't want to wax lyrical about a list of recreation furniture and OMA projection and eerie sets with more conceptual rigour than half of what passes for contemporary art

these days. But what I can tell you is that if you dive deep into this Prada universe it often provides the same kind of (indescribable) aesthetic and emotional rewards that all the great Pop culture has – at least for me.

And here's the thing. It goes beyond the clothes. It supports and bolsters and empowers the clothes. Like pop culture always has done. And it's way beyond some arc from Little Richard to Lil Wayne courtesy of a DJ with less memory than memory stick (schtick!) Prada is Mod – but without all that uptight British neurosis.

Actually maybe Prada is Mod but with added uptight neurosis.

AH Are your fashion shows meant to make sense, Mrs Prada?

MP Yes. Anything I do I try to make sense. They are always touching on subjects that I am investigating. It's a combination of what I'm obsessed with at the moment and fashion, because I love fashion. Fashion in the sense of a trend. I love fashion very much because it's my work. I have my observation, my knowledge and you try to translate that into an object. Architecture probably is more relevant for life, but for sure fashion is like a car, a hotel... a useful object.

AH *Vogue* reviewed a recent Prada show and said, 'it's like an especially intricate crossword puzzle, one that's designed never to be solved.' True?

MP No, that's not correct. The shows make sense. At least for me...

AH So let's talk more specifically about our mutual friend, Raf Simons. I'm choosing to talk about Raf here because I go to one of Raf's shows and, for example, I look at *Jaws* – I can't miss it, it's not just on the T-shirts, it's on this incredible, huge screen, and I'm all ready for shark attacks but then the music is all folky from *The Graduate* and they're wearing the mortarboard hats. I'm thinking, how do these things go together? 'Ah, maybe they graduate and then go down the beach to celebrate like in the opening scene of *Jaws*!' But, no, it's not that, of course... But is it actually putting two things

together that really don't belong together at all. A wilful decision regarding that. Moreover, I think fashion – Our Fashion – is in an interesting place because once upon a time there was an interesting but ultimately good taste 'mood board' if you like, one that was all about 'this likes to go with this' or 'oh this could be really interesting now put with this.' It was new ideas on how this and this go together, but somehow the mood board perhaps became a competition in ridiculous juxtaposition. Are we at a place where there's actually no coherence on purpose?

MP This is a choice to do something wrong out of principle.

AH Well, I'm not saying it is for sure in this case, with Raf's last Calvin Klein show... But perhaps it is. And perhaps we're in a strange place when everyone is now creating 'wrong' out of principle.

MP What do you think?

AH It's difficult. Like you, I'm pulled in two directions. I think I like to stand a little outside of fashion, actually a lot given my history, my professional roles, and I like to watch. We live in this world of so-called stylists and creatives and their perverse mood boards. They're all referencing, they all have clients, they're all like 'hey, I'm not going to put A with B with C, I'm going to do A + L + T or whatever...' Except it's probably some random hieroglyphic not a letter at all... Now I'm not picking on Raf at all, because you know I hold him in the highest regard. I wrote in his monograph about his juxtaposition methodology... But now we find ourselves in this world of the ubiquitous perverse mood board, the fucked-up juxtaposition.

MP I think you're touching a point that's very interesting.

AH The mood board is not coherent anymore by design. It's 'The Wrong Mood Board'... Perhaps intriguing? Perhaps selling our culture short? The cutting edge is by definition a bit fucked-up.

MP But let me tell you, I don't have a mood board. I don't work like that at all. I'll try to explain to you how I work... I work from two separate ways. One is motivated by what I always am in the end – morally and politically. So the last season [AW18] was fixated with the freedom of women going out naked or super visible if they wish. That's why there was the neon and actually what they said about that show was that it was about 'protection.' But it was the complete opposite! It was not about protection at all. It was about outside freedom and neon colours, alone in the night and not be bothered. And that's kind of a political, personal part.

AH And the other part is Miuccia the fashionista...

MP Yes, fashion, but talk and consideration about fashion. I actually start usually from what I'm most bored with and what I think just isn't right anymore. It could be street style, it could be shape and construct. Anything I feel is no, no, no, I start to build from, build on what's left there for me. So I decide maybe on the material, a new direction that interests me.

AH There's no mood board, even mentally, in all that?

MP No, I'm obsessed with a title instead. The truth is with what I'm doing is that I don't know what I'm doing until actually the week after the show – then I start to understand what I did. But because I have to talk to journalists immediately after I have to have something. I say A Title, because that at least is a simplification of a fixation. So I work on many different things and then after you narrow them and narrow them, and after the political, personal, social influence comes in, there is an end result.

AH No happy accidents?

MP Yes, of course, I truly really love mistakes. But I try to be very precise. I really try to understand what it all is two or three days before the show. And I have to try to understand then because then you prepare the show and you focus on also what can be done better. The prints are key. In fashion what is the best instrument of telling a story without a narrative? The prints sometimes help enormously. And this is probably the most difficult part for me, because then I have to define and

decide, and I never want to decide. There I have to become concrete. The print is my obligation; at this point you need to be precise. But I particularly like the idea of mistakes because they're a part of life. Life is not a mood board. I envy these people who have a mood board because they know exactly what they're doing.

AH Do you think fashion shows are important?

MP Yes, very important. I think first of all for myself. Because as I've just explained you have here your precise point of view, you have to say something because of a moment. You also have to be ready for immediate criticism and everything. So for this point of view the show is very important. But also for the company, the show is the moment you grow. Now I realise in more and more fashion companies the show is just a moment of entertainment because the sales are actually done via something else. And in this respect, maybe fashion shows in the future maybe will become less important, especially if everything becomes based on commerce. That is the reason why you have a company, after all. And I'm not an artist or politician, I'm a fashion designer and what I have to do is to sell clothes, shoes, bags and the rest, because it's my job. It seems like there's less and less space for a kind of old-fashioned proper creativity, like a freedom. Or at least I don't see so many young kids being creative in a new way. I don't have examples of a different way of being creative in fashion. But I do know that the fashion show makes my work and my company move forward.

AH I'd like to ask you about the way you're self-referencing. Not just the way you're using old prints – that's obvious stuff, although wonderfully done when you literally collide them – more the way you're using the colours, the silks, the fabrics... I'm very interested in all that. Why are you self-referencing, bringing back yourself?

MP I don't know the answer. For sure to be super honest there is an element of pride. Like we reintroduced Linea Rossa literally because we thought, oh my god, we did all that, we want people to remember that we did all that.

AH If you don't tell people then not enough will ever remember.

MP Exactly. And the prints were different because we were constructing this idea around the industrial, the logo-mania. My assistant Fabio did that thing with the shirts with the two juxtaposed prints.

AH I think you're doing something quite brilliant, coming back to your left-wing ideology, you're bringing a new longevity into something that's also still radically changing, evolving so fast every season. I was reading on the plane earlier this piece by the critic Angelo Flaccavento about Italian fashion. He believes that there's no real chic anymore, no real 'Fashion' – it's just trends and it's disposable and it's gone. But what you are doing is an interesting fusion of two approaches, high fashion signatures and the dramatic 'disposability' of the super modern hypebeast. You're putting in new stratas of longevity. We've been putting together this tribute to 90s Prada menswear for *Arena Homme+* and I see how you've recently given your 90s world whole new vibration, for want of a better word, in an interesting way.

MP Nylon for a moment was less relevant but now it's my favourite fabric again. Yes, I succeeded. You know, sometimes I'm not very conscious of what I'm doing, even if I reason a lot I'm also very instinctive. I knew it was right to push that. As I said, Linea Rossa had to stop because it became too popular so... I was right and we sold too much, therefore we stopped it... [Laughs]

AH Flaccavento writes 'fashion is a discourse of self and you're projecting it.' I could counter, 'well, fashion could become a discourse about yourself and how you relate to Prada history... a history that is now looping back on itself and warping again and again.' It's no longer as simple as the fashionista and their take on, you know, Prada AW2002... It's now, no, it was AW2002, it was SS2018, it was SS2019 too... and then it came back in 2022. And all were actually different.

Take your pick on eBay. Isn't that actually quite interesting in the culture. This layering of post-eBay fashion and trends. It certainly encourages, if you like, recycling.

MP It's a very relevant discourse. And there's always another Prada bag on eBay, we see that...

AH It's not fashion being hip hop and 'sampling.' That idea feels so dated to me. It's about important ideas looping and morphing. From the original creator...

MP A way of thinking, I understand. But I'm not able to answer. I'm very curious to hear all that.

AH I wanted to talk to you about obsession, because that's what I'm talking about here in a way. Pop Obsession. You can see and hear that I'm worryingly obsessive, I've even tried to rid myself of some of that stuff. And I love how you often talk about fantasy, like 'I want fantasy, I'm interested in the fantasy.' This is the big question I sent you in advance: do you believe our world faces fantasy addiction meltdown? Are we all fantasy addicts?

MP First of all, what I declared at the beginning, to know what the world is doing is really difficult; to understand and to take it all in. What is happening? I don't want to change the subject but... well, I saw a BBC documentary on science where they said 'don't ask us to predict the future, because we didn't predict the telephone so we are not able to predict what's going to happen.'

AH My Dad worked in the field and he didn't foresee the invention of the microchip...

MP Exactly. Where is the world going? It's impossible. It's scary. And we just don't know where the soul of the world is going.

AH Are you surprised to see the riots in the Paris streets?

MP No, not at all. People are only angry about who's in charge, the chief, the elite. Trust is broken between the people and the elite. The success of the Five Star Movement here in Italy too... It's because people are really angry. We are not in such a bad situation as 100 years ago in some ways because we are much richer as a society, but the

middle class is poorer and there is an anger... at least in Europe. An anger in England, an anger in France, an anger in Italy; probably an anger in America too, of course. And I think it's the lack of a religious phase, yes, the lack of any new political phase. I'm lucky because I had so many political ideas in my culture, but young people... That's why I think museums now probably have a position because so many young people go to museums, because they see there a place with some kind of morality and teachings, knowledge, like what was a church or a party a few years ago.

AH I think museums are becoming so popular in some respects because they help people be in the 'now,' just interacting with the ideas on the wall in front of them and nothing much else. They're the new church in that regard.

MP People need masters too. They need teachers, something that explains the reality. They want to know about something. That's why I think magazines are relevant still, because still there are some clever people and you know they can tell you something if you respect them and you trust them. That's very important.

AH Would your sons read magazines, though?

MP Well my sons are sometimes more educated than me and the mystery here is I really don't know how. They've never read a book it seems... maybe they read it online. I don't know how people like them get their culture. There are different ways of getting knowledge clearly.

AH Your husband gave an interview recently where he talked a little bit about your son Lorenzo becoming more involved in the company and trying to keep Prada as a family owned entity. Is that something that's very much in your mind now – how to pass the business on?

MP Yes, of course. I have to think about that, yes.

AH Are both of your sons potentially going to be involved in the business?

MP One yes, so far.

AH Some people of that generation are very snobby about the whole fashion scene, they almost

reject our world, Miuccia.

MP That's exactly right. I've seen that. They would never do fashion because they're too snobby or too chic or too sophisticated, even if they love fashion. They think it's a fantastic and difficult job and in a way they would love to do it, but they don't do it because of the people working in fashion. This is a deep down confession, I never said this before. These people are young, 25, super top intelligence. And that's what they think.

AH You think we can change any of that, reverse that thinking?

MP We can try. Already I am trying, because actually even people like Rem [Koolhaas], they love fashion. Rem loves fashion and actually one of the reasons I was consoled doing my job through these years is that so many big intellectuals love fashion. People that work in fashion are generally very cultivated since they have to know about music, literature, movies and the real world. You know, every time we collaborate with architects or other regimes, they all appreciate the creativity and mostly the speed of fashion. They want to do the very best fashion project possible. You know I don't think people realise that these sort of people are actually very interested indeed in fashion.

AH Well I think they maybe try to hide it a bit to make them more alluring... If you look good and it looks like it's all without trying... well, you're more likely to get laid perhaps. Is that the secret of everything here? It all comes down to Erving Goffman and his theory of 'Impression Management.'

[Five minutes of chat re 'Impression Management' ensued. Google Goffman's work and ideas. Quite brilliant]

MP I don't want to throw about names here, but just to understand the level of the person, Louise Bourgeois said just the same to me. Seduction is important for everyone, being attractive, to please somebody. Fashion is the first way you present yourself... For me it's this fascinating world connected particularly to women.

AH You've always surrounded

yourself with quite brilliant people. One of the things that Flaccavento writes in this new article about Italian fashion is: 'Success pushes you into an ivory tower. Designers often observe the world through the lens of the people close to them, the people around them who report back to the designer...'

MP I agree to some extent, but I don't feel part of all that. I'm surrounded by the people who work for me, yes, but I'm not living in a tower. True, I don't do the social life. But my friends are very clever people and we talk a lot about lots of different things.

AH Flaccavento also claims designers give their best when they're poor...

MP Maybe it is true.

AH I'm not so sure it's a hard and fast rule. You need to read the article.

[Miuccia grimaces. Huge laughter again]

AH Tell me what is important about a woman's instinct?

MP It is the most important thing. You have the accumulation of information – you read, you see, you feel – and at some point this strange computer that you have in your mind, responds to all that. Which I call the instinct. With creativity... sometimes when it's needed, but sometimes even when it's not, the right solution just comes like this [clicks fingers]. I learnt to listen to that instinct. For instance when I had to see something in fashion – a dress or whatever it is – coming in, I retain my very first impression. Yes or no, in one second. I know the answer. And I learnt to retain that first impression.

AH Is it different for a woman?

MP I think so, because it's always criticised but for a woman your instinct is the best thing you can have. You learn to recognise your instinct as I just said. It's the best, because women retain a lot of things that men don't have, like care for children, care for the old. We care much more and we suffer much more in our lives in truth. Our lives are from the start more complex.

AH Did you always want to have children?

MP No, I went from never wanting to get married, never wanting to have children, to the opposite. At some point

– at 38 actually – I changed. When I had children very late, people said 'Miuccia with children?' because I was never at home, I was always out – late in the evening, late in the night so my life went from this to this. Complete change; but I liked it and I never went out anymore. They all thought I never wanted to have children, but all of a sudden I changed idea.

AH And it worked for you.

MP Yes. For my children I use the 'theory of the furniture.' I have to be there like the furniture; not to disturb them, but I have to be there until they realise that they don't want you around anymore. Besides working, I spent all my time with them. They didn't complain... And then everybody came to my home and I liked growing a kind of community there. Because my close friends and other people were always coming – they were always present and I lived at my home, so home became the community. So, yes, I think the quantity not the quality of time is actually fundamental with children and family. And they also recognise if you're interested. They feel the love.

AH You seem good Mrs Prada, in an interesting place, an exciting place. You're happy?

MP I'm happy because I like you, so I like talking to you.

AH And no grandchildren yet, right?

MP Not yet, but maybe they will come. I like to do homes because I always hope to have my family, my kids, near me. I have a place in the mountains, a place by the sea. Like we said, the idea of earth – coming back to earth... There's a big adventure yet, right?

HOW POP IS PRADA?

ASHLEY HEATH I thought it might be interesting to go through Richard Hamilton's original 1950s definitions of 'Pop' with reference to their applicability to Prada. I'd wanted to do this with you for a while actually. One of my convictions re your work is that it really wonderfully fills a hole left by the destruction of traditional pop culture, not least the music industry. And, interestingly, browsing through a business magazine while flying to Milan this morning I read the comments of a guy called Danny Rimer, the head of something called Index Ventures [they buy fashion companies], who said: 'fashion is replacing music as the cultural lubricant.' Which is crudely what I believe, although with Prada it's something far more pronounced and nuanced.

MIUCCIA PRADA I hope it is, yes.

AH So let's go through Hamilton's famous definitions of Pop and you respond quickly and instinctively if possible, just a 'yes' or 'no' is good, or obviously explain or qualify as you feel is fitting. I'm sure you've read this seminal list many times, but let's start with his 'Pop Is Transient'... Is Prada transient, meaning impermanent and ever-changing, almost sort of without a secure home.

MP I feel it's near-transient. But Prada is impermanent.

AH Okay, next: 'expendable?' Is Prada expendable or throwaway in any regards?

MP I hope not.

AH Is Prada 'mass-produced'?

MP No.

AH You're sure?

MP Yes I am sure.

AH And do you consider Prada 'low cost'?

MP Hmm, interesting. 'Low cost' I'm interpreting as simply 'it's not expensive.' And this is interesting to me, because I don't specifically do the prices now at Prada but I always thought a contemporary company should have some things not expensive and some things very expensive. That's my aim. How that answers the question, I don't know exactly.

AH You feel Prada has a spectrum of pricing including the 'low cost'?

MP I hope it does. It seems like we do not have enough of low cost.

AH Your answer is 'yes and no!'

MP Yes! 'Yes and no...' I would always answer with yes and no, only doubts never certainties.

AH Next. Is Prada 'young'?

MP I do think it is, yes. Let me explain why. Prada is always too early with ideas and new styles, so much so that when the other ones do what we did and then we repeat it ourselves it actually sometimes looks like we copied. We actually invented, of course! I have a particular strain in my job regarding all this. I know that we do things before many others and often in a complex, even difficult way. And maybe we don't want to promote everything too. Why? It's what I would consider tacky, because I am very focused on trying to retain some decency, at least until a certain moment. It's very much like how it was in the beginning of my career when those who like fashion 'classics' found Prada deeply disturbing somehow, yet for the avant-garde it obviously wasn't nearly avant-garde enough. Or wasn't avant-garde at all. But this place is actually exactly the place that I like to be.

AH You like the hybrid position?

MP Yes, I like to do something simple that disturbs.

AH And is that a 'young' position? Is Prada young: yes, no or 'yes and no'?

MP I think it definitely is, yes. And actually our fans are far more young than old. Buyers can be older because of the price.

AH Next on Hamilton's iconic list is 'witty'...

MP Well I hope so! [laughs]

AH I think witty is a really good word for Prada actually. Perhaps people haven't understood that particular element of your work so much... Maybe the biggest thing about Prada is that people get confused regarding your juggling of both more sensible and more frivolous themes. Many haven't understood just how witty Prada is I would argue.

MP Ahh... yes!

AH Now the next one you speak about quite often: 'sexy'. Pop is 'sexy', but is Prada?

MP Obviously it depends what you consider sexy. This I have spoken about a lot in fashion already. For me sexy is more about the person than the clothes.

AH Is Prada 'gimmicky'?

MP I get told that. But I actually don't believe it is, or at least I try to have a different impulse and provocation. So the 'gimmick' might be provoking something else. And then the real gimmick I'm working on is not because of any simple, obvious gimmick... I always mix high and low culture.

AH So the robot key rings or the heavy logo badges on the recent womenswear, is that gimmicky: yes or no?

MP It is just as I explained. Usually when it looks gimmicky in my mind it's actually not. In this example, the heavy play on logo, it was exactly that. It was a take on logos and a take on the industrial, which is a theme that I often consider.

AH So is Prada 'glamorous'?

MP Now that I don't know. With glamour I actually have very mixed feelings. I like exaggerated glamour, but those who criticise me for liking the aesthetic of poverty are in a way correct, because in the end it is my kind of taste... But me myself, sometimes I'm sparkling, totally sparkling in an exaggerated glamour. At the last Met it was fluorescent clothes! I was the only one visible in the dark!

AH I'd say you're obsessed with glamour.

MP Yes, but it's kind of more theory in truth. I observe glamour throughout history, what it meant and in particular what it meant for women. And so-called 'glamour' was often something very bad. This is another 'yes and no'

position. I always refused the cliché of beauty. Some times people say I'm not able to do beautiful clothes, glamorous dresses. It's not that I'm not able to. I just don't want to make them.

AH You won't make these dresses because of your personal political convictions?

MP Also but there's something deeply disturbing in the cliché of sexy beauty. The exception is somebody that truly likes to be like that and is totally independent regarding that and in being naked and thus super sexy to men and so on. But it is disturbing if it is for finding a rich husband. Basically glamour is something that I observe.

AH I would argue you have in fact reinvented glamour in the modern era. Do you believe you have reinvented glamour in any respect?

MP I'm trying to do exactly that all of the time. Beauty too – all the time I try to reinvent that. When I first started my job, through the famous 'ugly fashion' moment, it was an aesthetic trend that was everywhere in every kind of culture – in movies, in art – and only in fashion was it considered a problem. We've certainly moved on from then, yet still the world of fashion now and the future world of fashion we now see evolving is very reluctant to embrace this reality.

AH Interestingly, before Hamilton defined Pop and it evolved into the mass 'Pop Art' scene of the 60s, his area of practice had been tagged 'New Brutalism.' One of the notes I'd made regarding Prada and Pop is that when you talk about 'ugly fashion' I think you're kind of talking about a new brutalism in fashion... it's not about ugly at all, you're just subverting the conventions, aren't you?

MP Thank you, you probably explained it much better than me. For me the ugly is all related to introducing the reality. I'm very interested in the life of people. I'm really passionate regarding this: the dramas, the emotional moments... I'm interested in all the everyday life and all the badness too, so for me it's not actually an aesthetic position. I would say it's more of a moral thing for me to introduce reality, to embrace what's happening in the

world. What is the truth of things. It's not actually an artistic point of view or I do not realise it..

AH Right. When you look at the twisted or the darker stories in people's lives – the ugliness – do you find that sometimes from what appears to be ugly something beautiful comes? You're not talking about nature here, you haven't referred to the 'ugliness' of the natural world. You talk specifically about human existence.

MP The lives of people, yes! The poor, the trash, the bad taste and so on... that can be seen in real life but also in the movies, in art, literature, everywhere.

AH Often from the most sad and ugly stories in people in real life can grow the most incredible beauty – redemption

MP Absolutely. That's for sure. And with what I'm doing, whatever I see or think about, of course I have to eventually translate it into what in the end for me makes sense.

AH Physically attractive too?

MP Or physically attractive, yes. There was this book on women – Elena Ferrante's *L'awmica Geniale [My Brilliant Friend]* – which is a movie series now. And it was a title in *The New Yorker* talking about Prada [My Brilliant Friend]. The review: 'A prada ad for working class gloom, but with shades of humble tenderness.'

AH How does that sort of thing make you feel?

MP Very well! [laughs]

AH You sit right here and smile at it all, right?

MP Yes!

AH Let's finish Richard Hamilton's list. Two more to go. Is Prada 'big business'?

MP Kind of. Not super, super big. We did not decide to do the next step yet, I am afraid of it, of losing what Rem once defined so well about Prada: 'There is an ambition to do things in a different way. She has the courage to go against the obvious, against the expected, even against the commercial. All of that gives her an aura of independence.'

AH Happy about that?

MP That's a difficult question. Of course I choose not to be small because for some reason that was too easy for

me. I always was more drawn to things that are more difficult. Also I thought that I was learning more from a more vast reality. For me, the bigger stage was more exciting and still is. Recently, in the last ten years probably, the compromises that are required are more and more sizeable, so I don't like to answer: 'happy about this!' But I'm definitely interested in more mass. When I'm working at the Fondazione, for example, I think I've introduced a lot of things that I've learnt from my job elsewhere at Prada. My work is what anchors me to reality.

AH Give me more examples of that, please. It's interesting to me, in terms of big business or becoming too big of a business. What is the one thing you would say that you learnt in your job in terms of a rule or a motto that you then were able to take to the establishing of the Prada Fondazione? What had been your biggest lesson?

MP First of all, that culture should be attractive. This is my main goal – to make culture not something that's boring and worthy. I want to show people that culture is for them, it's for yourself. I learned my life through books and movies; I know culture is something that's very relevant for yourself. It is not a decoration. To say that culture is helping your life, you have to try to make shows, not fashion shows but exhibition shows that are more exciting and that I think would kind of be, not a big step but also to think more wide so the difference between different exhibitions that we are doing tend to be more wide than in general. [Mrs Prada goes off the record to explain forthcoming 'non-Art' exhibition shows for the Prada Fondazione.]

AH But don't you consider what you're doing here is redefining art. We both know that Art World is in need of a radical rethink. Marcel Duchamp concerned himself with science and the unknown, with the 'infrafilm' and the barriers between the known and unknown... Aren't you increasingly stepping into the true role of an artist via experimental curation?

MP [laughs]

AH That's the right answer.

MP What I'm trying to put in the Fondazione is the experience. Fashion has to always be exciting, glamorous, interesting and always surprising... So for sure I brought all that. After I brought the money. Any time I say listen, you feel like you're independent... I am independent because I earn my own money and if you don't earn your own money – forget independence. In the art world I do try to get money because I would love to have sponsors in principal.

AH Last one on Hamilton's list.

Do you consider Prada 'popular'?

MP You know it's difficult for me to have a sense of popularity. Sometimes I think, yes, but sometimes it depends on the point of view. From the point of view of Coca-Cola, we're not popular are we! [laughs]. I think some people probably think Prada is something that's too complicated or maybe they just don't want to understand. There's people who are not interested in fashion at all, that think they are a bit different from the rest.

AH When I first looked on the internet to quickly note down Hamilton's definitions of Pop, it said on some bad art encyclopaedia page, 'Pop was not just an art movement, but a way of life for Richard Hamilton.' Do you think Prada is a way of life?

MP A way of thinking, yes. And you simulate things, bring them to life, yes.

AH You've always designed as much to influence how people think as to how they look, right? I was aware early on with the introduction of your menswear that it was for a certain man who thought and behaved a certain way, this existential dimension to the Prada man...

MP Yes, probably. In fact, definitely.

AH Do you think an immersion in popular culture is important to enjoy Prada or you think you could stumble out of the mountains and get it, enjoy it? Do you have to have seen the right movies, read some important books, to really understand and fully enjoy it?

MP For that one, 'yes.' I'm afraid so, but yes you do.

AH Which is a good thing.

MP Yes! Definitely.

Miuccia Prada on Fashion, Football and Racism

Ahead of her Autumn/Winter 2019 show, the contrarian designer and billionaire businesswoman speaks exclusively to Tim Blanks about embracing ugliness, Prada's response to its recent blackface scandal, the lack of honesty in fashion and why she loves football.



Photography by Brigitte Lacombe | Source: Courtesy

BY TIM BLANKS FEBRUARY 21, 2019 05:15

MILAN, Italy — On a sunny Milan morning in February, **Miuccia Prada** arrives at the office in a sporty navy two-piece with a tracksuit-y edge, hair straight from the shower, like maybe she has just come from the gym. The very idea makes her laugh. I should have known that exercise wasn't on the agenda from the Byzantine-looking jewelry she's wearing, a necklace and matching dangly earrings, gold and tourmaline, 18th century. Miuccia hates the idea of appointments for anything as structured as a fitness regime. Ten minutes every four days if she's lucky.

Jewelry, on the other hand, is something she *can* get enthusiastic about. "I want to know who owned it, what happened to them," Miuccia says. "I enter in other people's lives." Like the life of the woman who once owned a pin she currently treasures: a rose and a spider web on one side, on the other, a sailing ship, enameled. "Can you imagine who gave this pin to this woman?" she muses. "Some man going to sea, knowing he would be gone so long. And she would wait and weave."

Miuccia finds such a notion romantic. "The romance of life excites me," she goes on. "There are so many different lives. The subjects of the world are so numerous, you have to choose which one at the moment means the most. But romance and love are always needed." Maybe now more than ever, if the tone of her collections for Autumn 2019 is any indication.

Of course, she serves up love in her own very particular fashion. She recently insisted she was a punk at heart, and the **men's show she staged in January** closed with an indelible image of punk romanticism. Attached to the final looks were hearts pierced with safety pins (cf. Patrik Fitzgerald's lovelorn punk classic "I've got a safety pin stuck in my heart for you"). One of the

collection's visual motifs was Dr Frankenstein's monster, a creature stitched and pinned together by its creator and, for Miuccia, a consummate symbol of the outsider. The monster craved love. Instead, he was rejected and isolated for his otherness. Attach to that any contemporary political analogy you choose.

For the women's collection, she has taken a different approach to romance. Miuccia is always thinking about what different elements of fashion symbolise. lace, for instance. Or dresses, which remind her of what she calls "deep moments of women's lives." They seem to be particularly cinematic ones, like falling in love, or travelling across oceans, or needing to escape, or even dying. As she's talking, I'm picturing Camille or White Russian princesses fleeing into exile or Bette Davis in "Jezebel." Something grand anyway. There's the rub. Lace, Miuccia loves. Those kinds of dresses, not so much. Naturally, that's the challenge she's set herself.

"So now I'm trying to work on dresses — fantastic, beautiful evening dresses — and everybody's laughing. I didn't want to make them, but I can do it if they're an example for me of being able to work on something I can't stand in a way that is intellectually acceptable for me. When it enters into clichés of femininity, I can't, even if I respect them. Every morning, I see those dresses and I strip away a piece of beauty. When they are too beautiful, there is an instinctive force in me. I have to make it somehow nasty or rough or different. That is beyond myself. So, who knows what's going to happen?"

I'm deeply against cliché or the usual or what everybody else does.

That's a textbook example of Miuccia Prada's contrariness. "Instinctively, I go the opposite way to consensus," she agrees. "I'm deeply against cliché or the usual or what everybody else does. If I see a black dress, I want to do red, if I see red, I want to do black. The opposite of beauty is ugliness, so I'd do ugly... That I do sincerely, because how can you still dream about the beauty of the past? It's so attractive but..." Her voice trails away as she reflects on the irrelevance of gorgeousness. "That beautiful elegance made sense for privileged people, an isolated group of princesses and the noble and rich, but today to follow that kind of beauty? You can refer to it as a symbol of the past. But it's totally out of reality." And "reality" is her lodestone. "I think if I did something in fashion, it was introducing reality."

But reality bites, as Prada learned late last year when its Pradamalia accessories range used monkey figures with black faces and big red lips that were disturbingly close to racist "blackface" depictions of people of African origin. It's hardly the first time that fashion has caused cultural offence. It certainly won't be the last. Think of Comme des Garçons with its striped suits, or Miu Miu with its yellow stars, or Loewe with its Andean images, or Gucci with its Sikh turbans and, more recently, its own blackface balaclava sweater.

But more and more brands are finally waking up to the problem. Prada, for its part, has created a diversity council, including Miuccia's friends, artist Theaster Gates and filmmaker Ava DuVernay. "We're trying to organize a group of relevant people, including academics, to take care of the argument in a scientific way," explains Miuccia. "It's not the right answer to say something superficial. You have to take this to a serious point where you're educating to differences. First of all, it's international. Secondly, it should be a group of serious experts who are prepared and experienced to confront these matters. And this should include people of all cultures. What is very important is to understand how to do it seriously. This is not public relations. We're searching universities, the United Nations...we've already been doing it with Fondazione Prada in the art world. Education comes from culture and ethics and the solution is through trying to unite people, not to divide them."

The key word there is education. The goal, according to Prada, is not crisis management. It's to evolve the design culture of the company towards an organic diversity, with internships and apprenticeship programmes. That's a pragmatic way to address the problem that, until now, there just hasn't been someone internally who could tell Prada what's not to do. "I agree with the need of a whole new education," says Miuccia. "What I don't know is how to solve the problem. It's difficult to put it in place. Racism is a very complicated and deep-rooted issue, and we need to understand how fashion can contribute to the conversation."

"The position of fashion is like songs, because it's kind of popular," she continues. "You have to touch different subjects, but touching different subjects without being superficial is very difficult. I've said many times, fashion until the '70s and '80s served a narrow group of people, in the majority white, Catholic, European or North American. You knew who your clients were, society was very small. But now in front of you, there are different races, cultures, religions. You don't know them all well anymore. I am seriously interested in the world from all different angles. I hope that when I'm working all of this process in my mind will somehow come out and make sense to people, but you don't know exactly who the people are anymore. They're very different from when I started when the fashion audience was very precise and limited. It's a learning process every day to try and know all the cultural differences in the world because it's such a vast arena."

The major subject I am facing intellectually is the lack of honesty. In politics, in fashion, in art, there's too much pleasing.

Miuccia is a force in two worlds – fashion and art. As much as she insists fashion is her first love, it's easy to see how she might feel more comfortable in the art world. She's conflicted by the confines of luxury fashion. "Art can deal with a serious issue much better," she insists. "Fashion is a commercial work. And how political you can be is key. I'm very sensitive to how much I can refer to social issues." Given her famously leftist leanings (she drolly refers to her student days in the Communist Party as "the big myth of my youth"), Miuccia has clearly been living a double life her entire time at Prada. "The contradiction with luxury has always existed. All my life, I've been split like two people. How do I translate that into my job? That's why I never wanted to work with artists. They're my best friends but I refuse to do collaborations." Of course! She's been collaborating with herself, in that real WWII sense of the word "collaboration." Sleeping with the enemy! And she's not 100 percent happy about it. "For 15 years, I've said no to everybody. Probably I was wrong. Commercially I was wrong for sure!"

Opening at Fondazione Prada, her Milan-based art foundation, in April is a show by artist/filmmaker Ryan Trecartin. Three years ago, when they met up in New York, Trecartin's definition-defying video work had made him an art world golden boy. Miuccia asked him to do something for her on the condition that he start completely from scratch. Since then, he's been holed up, far from the madding crowd, working on his Prada project. Miuccia sounds gratifyingly awed that Trecartin would feel so passionate about what he did that he would be prepared to turn his back on success to do it, to run the risk of people forgetting him. She claims he was kind of fed up with what he was doing anyway, but it makes me wonder if there's a vicarious element in her respect. Had the idea of stepping away and coming back with a fresh perspective ever appealed to her? "In my work, that would be impossible," she counters instantly. "My process is an everyday process. If I would step away, it would be for something completely different and I probably wouldn't come back."

“An artist is an artist, it’s a different profession. I don’t think fashion is an art. The key point of our job is that, at the end, we create product. But the expectation of people, or the way we are exaggerating and proposing ourselves looks like we should be doing more than just making objects to wear. We should become philosopher, politician, social observer and so on. That is good *and* bad because superficiality is just around the corner.”

Interesting how Miuccia enlarges the scope of the fashion designer’s role. That’s what she wants – and maybe expects – from her job. She is fiercely demanding. She is also dismayed by the divisions she sees opening up in the world, which threaten a return to more conservative times, not only in politics. She notices in restaurants more men sitting with men, women sitting with women. “But the major subject I am facing intellectually is the lack of honesty. In politics, in fashion, in art, there’s too much pleasing, too much naiveté, and no one realizing it.”

What has stood out for me in Prada’s most recent shows is Miuccia’s simmering anger. There was a clutch of seasons where the ship drifted, where it seemed safe to assume that art — her Fondazione — had consumed her focus. And then it snapped back. She likes a fight, and now she has a combatant. Ignorance. When she was a student, it was the bourgeoisie that exercised her activism. “That’s over for me. I’m entering a phase of thinking about now, using references that make sense *now*. The obvious, the superficial, the simple pleasing. I notice, more and more, the tricks for being commercial. You know what you have to do to be commercial, and it’s a bit too easy and not what I am interested in.”

It’s always been my goal to make intelligence appealing and attractive.

Instinct kicks in. Miuccia trusts hers more than ever. She feels instinct is like a fantastic computer that distills your entire experience — everything you’ve ever lived or learned — into a response, an awareness of what really counts. Work, love, friendship. “And it’s always been my goal to make intelligence appealing and attractive, in my job and in what we do at Fondazione. To go against some current trend that considers that knowledge is not a value. How do you teach young people your life is made by your culture, make them understand how important knowledge is? I am what I am because I learned from books, movies, history, art... That’s what upsets me, that any kind of morality or knowledge looks old. Where do people learn principles and morality? I think museums are so successful because people recognize in museums some kind of authority and morality and the values that exist in an institution.”

Miuccia pauses, as she occasionally does, almost as though she’s surprised herself by what she just said. “I’m only guessing, of course. But I am optimistic. By choice, and also, at the end, by instinct.” I would never have taken her for a champion of tradition, however much she loves her diamonds. On the other hand, simple human curiosity — call it humanism — has been called into such question in this testing era that her conviction is inspiring. But I can’t follow her on her next journey.

Now that she no longer dances, Miuccia says she’s become obsessed by football. It’s sort of physical fitness by proxy. She got envious of the good times the men in her life were having every Sunday, the excitement, the sense of freedom and community they found in football fandom. “I was educated to hate football, professors at my school told me sport was like religion, the opium of the people. So, it’s a bit subversive for me to like it. But it’s so much genuine fun, which at my age I miss a bit.”

On Sunday afternoon, you’ll find Miuccia parked in front of the television like fans all over the world. Maybe there’ll be ten or fifteen guys, her sons and their friends. There’ll be lots of food. Or

maybe she'll be on her own. She'll still watch the game. Her team is Milan. A few days before we met, she'd been talking to publishing nabob Carlo Feltrinelli at a party and found out he was obsessed with Juventus. There's kinship in guilty pleasures. "It's such a beautiful feeling to be so passionate about something that you forget everything." Miuccia's found her bliss.

https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/professional/miuccia-prada-on-fashion-football-and-racism?utm_campaign=ccd461ed25-miuccia-prada-on-fashion-football-and-racism&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Subscribers&utm_term=0_d2191372b3-ccd461ed25-419054713¹

¹ GRAN BRETAGNA-BUSINESSOFFASHION.COM-PRADA-21.02.19