

WWD

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Simple Pleasure

That's what Miuccia promised to deliver for resort in a collection. She aimed for a naïve, understated mood she said would be "the opposite of a big deal." Perhaps so. But if you love fashion, spinning simplicity into a perfectly cut coat and cotton skirt finished off with high-tops and a paillette-punctuated varsity scarf isn't exactly a small deal. *For more on Prada in New York, see pages 10 to 12.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY MASATO ONODA

Bridget Foley's Diary



Miuccia Cruises Into New York

- During a preview of her resort collection, Miuccia Prada talks openly smart simplicity, diversity and her fixing some commercial mistakes.

It's a gift to be simple – sometimes. At least when a powerful message underlies the simplicity. That's the premise from which Miuccia Prada worked for the resort collection she showed on Thursday night.

Prada returned to Gotham for a second consecutive year, showing the collection at her brand's New York headquarters. "I liked the experience," she said of the encore. "I like to do the shows in my own spaces. And it's an occasion to keep a link with New York."

In this case, her own space is the brand's Herzog and de Meuron-designed headquarters on West 52nd Street. During a Wednesday afternoon preview, one floor of the sprawling, industrial building flaunted fresh pink paint, plush beige flooring and circuitous seating. The impact of fluorescent pink lights, already fanciful by day, would surely heighten by show time, once night had fallen through the massive west-facing windows overlooking the Hudson River. "It's nice," Prada said, "an industrial place that becomes just the opposite with pink."

Prada allowed the unusual preview since the show's 8:30 p.m. start would be past deadline for today's Digital Daily [see wwd.com and the Monday, May 6 Digital Daily for the full review]. Like everyone else in the industry, she acknowledges the importance of the pre-seasons. She has also come around to a reality she fought for a while – the necessity of sometimes taking her collections on the road. The Prada business was built on, and retains, a product-first philosophy, and Prada admitted that the brand's messaging has, to date, played distant second fiddle. Yet she now accepts the importance of amped-up marketing, including visits to key markets around the world.



A look from Prada Resort 2020.

Therefore, despite its two-in-a-row status and the ease of scheduling around the Met Gala, New York is unlikely to become the ongoing site of her resort shows.

"It will be case by case," Prada offered. "Today, you are kind of obliged; you have to travel. You feel like different regions feel unhappy if you don't visit sometimes."

The preview foreshadowed a happy visit here, as the clothes looked fresh and interesting. The collection is based on classics, with an emphasis on men's wear shirtings. Cuts and proportions were manipulated and distorted, and often worn in layer upon like layer, "cotton on cotton on cotton; print on print on print." As for the interesting factor, no one tweaks and transforms mundane like Prada. What's not to love about a skinny, whimsical wool scarf jazzed up with graduated paillettes? Yet Prada was determined to keep the jazzy element in check. She described the mood as "about simplicity – naïve, cotton, simple. So the opposite of a big deal." Yet she then teased, "Simplicity is a provocation."

Here, Prada talks about the show, creativity, growth, communication – and the quest for simplicity.

WWD: Tell me about this collection.

Miuccia Prada: This show is all about simplicity – naïve, cotton, simple. So the opposite of a big deal. Because I think that sometimes, all of us, [with the itinerant shows] there's a competition for who does more and more and more, and I think it's not healthy.

WWD: So, simplicity.

M.P.: It's a joke, but simplicity is a provocation.

WWD: It can be.

M.P.: Simplicity is rebellion. So it's about cotton, blazer, skirt. There is a touch of little embroidery on white T-shirts. At the end, what came out looks fresh, and so I'm very happy. Fresh, naïve. But with an invention.

WWD: Before your last resort show, you also talked about simplicity and lack of complications.

M.P.: I feel when you do the main show, you have to put out more energy, more thoughts. With resort, I feel free to be more free. On the [spring/fall] runway, you have to perform. It's a moment when you have to show off what you're thinking.

WWD: You continue to believe in the runway for the major seasons, right?

M.P.: I also believe in this in-between. You know what? It obliges you to work better. It's difficult and so on and you put yourself in front of all these people, and they can like it or not. But it's the only way where you really put yourself [out there], so you're obliged to work better and [clarify] all your thoughts.

WWD: Before your fall show, you said that fashion actually has two sides, the industrial side and the social/political side.

M.P.: People expect a great deal from fashion – not only fashion, but also politics and a much more complex message. I very often feel uncomfortable, being a luxury company, to which extent can you try to be intelligent or political without really looking, I wouldn't say ridiculous, but out of place. Because you are still a luxury company. That's why I always want to avoid the political declaration in general, because I'm very aware of what we are. I try always to be intellectually honest.

WWD: Is it more difficult today than it's ever been to design creatively while still being mindful of the cultural moment?

M.P.: Yes, because sometimes you feel that communication, that it's your only job. So the clothes, who cares? But at the end, I don't think it's true because when women are wearing something, it's important. [At Prada] we are very often criticized because we are much more product-driven than image-driven or communication-driven. That's the only way we're used to working. It's about trying to do good stuff, good things. And now it's very important how you sell it.

WWD: What do you mean?

M.P.: The communication. Marketing.

WWD: You've always been focused first on the clothes, the product.

M.P.: Yes. And at this moment, [that approach] doesn't pay. In theory, you should just do promotion. [Laughs.]

WWD: As someone who covered fashion during that period from, say, early Nineties through the early 2000s when creativity was the driving force, I agree that the focus has shifted.

M.P.: Now money is the driving force. Money is the driving force everywhere, even in the art world.

WWD: Money.

M.P.: Everywhere, the guide is the money. I've always said that my husband [Patrizio Bertelli] and I never woke up on a single day thinking about making money. Eventually we did, and there were times when we'd make mistakes, so we'd have to try to correct. But [today] – money is driving every field, including art.

WWD: Do you think it's only the money chase that hampers creativity today? As a creative, you must be so careful of what you say, what you do and what you project.

M.P.: That's why I always feel uncomfortable talking about politics.

WWD: You had the issue with the handbag charms, and then you established the Diversity and Inclusion Council. Will the activities of the ►

council impact your design process?

M.P.: No. I like people in general, so I like different [groups]. I don't feel I have a problem with that. But of course with the puppets, we made a mistake. If there is a company that is not racist, it's ours. But these mistakes can occur. That isn't good, so we have to be careful.

WWD: There's so much to be mindful of today. What is the affect on the creative process?

M.P.: Anything you are doing, [you might think], "Oh, my God, I might do something wrong." I'm not criticizing it because I understand. You have to adapt your creativity to the world that is now. Let's say this is really the first time, [because of] the Internet, the social media and so on, that the world is really all together. Before, it wasn't like that. We were more divided.

It's difficult to be educated [on so many cultures]. But there are so many religions, so many races, so many different groups, and each one is equally important. Maybe what we had before was wrong, it was egoism. So I think it's good. Creativity has changed because the world is changing. So I don't complain about it.

WWD: How do you approach a collection?

M.P.: Sometimes, it's about what I don't want to do. When I don't know exactly, I start thinking of what really impressed me in the last month or two months. So I start from there. Now, there's a point that is very important for me: the simplification. It's the most complicated and difficult thing on Earth. Because there are so many voices; everybody is talking at once, and so you have to simplify. Otherwise, people are bored. But how can you be vaguely deeper and intelligent if you simplify too much? There is a certain point where too much simplification will equal nothing. So that's what takes a lot of my thinking.

WWD: Are there things in the air right now that you would like to explore through fashion that you haven't done yet?

M.P.: Sometimes my husband says, "You are too rich, too sophisticated, you should work in [more modest circumstances]. Because too much sophistication takes away the freshness and the ideas. So at the moment, I like that concept of fashion – you have too much sophistication and it's boring.

WWD: When designing, do you find yourself fighting against your sophisticated self?

M.P.: Yes, absolutely.

WWD: What happens?

M.P.: That's the work. You see it sometimes when you succeed in what you have in mind, for instance, this collection coming together. Last night, I finally got to something that was exactly what I had in mind. It's kind of new and interesting for fashion. Fashion is special. I respect fashion, and I like fashion. So you know when you achieve what you are searching for.

WWD: How do you know that? Is it just a feeling?

M.P.: Usually, it's a smile.

WWD: Do you have favorite collections in retrospect?

M.P.: No. I have a few at the beginning of my career that I didn't like.

WWD: Which ones?

M.P.: One of the first two [I loved]. It was totally myself, but everybody hated it. I thought it was fantastic but it was super-criticized. So after, the whole company



A look from Prada Resort 2020.

want to convince me to become "a serious designer." So I remember doing a jacket with Prada buttons. I had a French assistant. I remember him [adding uncharacteristic elements]. So there are a few shows that I really hate. I decided then, that don't ever try to ask me to do something in the show, because I really can't stand it.

WWD: That approach has worked out very well.

M.P.: I mean, something can sometimes be better, worse, more commercial, less commercial, difficult, easy, boring, whatever. But I like to make my own mistake. I remember those mistakes that were not done by me – that I can't stand. I

want to be responsible for the badness, but not pushed by others.

WWD: What are the areas of growth now for Prada, geographic areas or categories?

M.P.: For sure the East is a priority. We are one-third Europe, one-third the East, one-third North America. And we are fixing the mistakes.

WWD: Mistakes? What do you mean by that?

M.P.: Retail mistakes, product mistakes, mainly buying mistakes.

WWD: What do you mean?

M.P.: The translation of Prada [to retail] – it's more difficult than for other brands because we don't have a title. You can't express Prada with just one word – the brand is romantic, the brand is classic. First of all, no one dedicates enough attention – I probably shouldn't say that – to sales. We are not driven by sales.

WWD: You think you should pay more attention to sales?

M.P.: We should be more driven by sales, more careful, more attentive. The buying of Prada is complicated, at least for our shops, because it's contradictory. There's not one idea; we do too many products. We are trying to adjust our ideas commercially. ▶

WWD: That's very honest. Will you give me specific examples?

M.P.: I have a feeling in general. If you want to have a serious conversation on this subject, it's not [with] me. But we've grown up with the [focus on] product, on great product and not on selling, basically. And so we are trying to fix it. Now, the company is bigger so it will be [a challenge] to fix this commercial-buying process. We don't [always] take advantage of ideas, maybe we don't buy enough, or sometimes we buy too much of what is clearly impossible to sell in those numbers. So we have to adjust.

I think that with some companies, the money is the first drive. We check when things are not doing well, but we're not driven by that as a company; my husband and I aren't driven by that. So the company inherited [that philosophy], good and bad. I'm proud that we're not driven first by money.

WWD: Suppose you were to hire a commercial director and he or she came to you and said, "Miuccia, this fashion is fabulous but it's not going sell." What would you say?

M.P.: So far I haven't had that problem. But sooner or later, I think we have to approach that.

WWD: You said earlier that you don't want anyone interfering in your design process.

M.P.: Now, I think if I would have somebody who would tell me, I would probably appreciate it.

WWD: Wow, you're honest about this.

M.P.: Yes.

WWD: You do know there are plenty of boring clothes out there. We don't need boring from Prada.

M.P.: It's a serious discussion because nowadays everything is too big, and you have to deliver numbers and sometimes you are judged more by if you sell or if you don't sell than on what you are doing [design-wise]. So I have to face the problem. We are facing the problem. But it's a little bit against our nature. So it will take longer.

WWD: Also, there's just so much out there, even in the luxury level.

M.P.: And also now, if anyone does this and it works [she picks up a pencil from the table], in the next month and a half, everyone has this. I'm not complaining, because the world is like this. I have a company so I have to face it and try to sort it out. But it's not something that comes naturally. Maybe the answer is [that we are] too sophisticated, and people want simplification, a clear, easy message, which is literally the opposite of what I am.

WWD: Let's go back to the show. You said it's simple. Would you say it's a casual attitude?

M.P.: It's not casual. The fashion problem of the moment is that athletic wear and sport and street style, is not trendy anymore but – yes and no. So you have to do something that's not too formal. Also, I feel like I want to do what I would like to wear or and [address] what people really care about, what people would like to wear. So kind of to go back to the rules of fashion.

WWD: The rules?

M.P.: The rules of fashion. It's an industry that should help people to be happy with

what they're wearing. So to be kind of modest in principle.

WWD: How do you gauge what women want to wear, or will want to wear?

M.P.: I never think about what people want because I don't know. I respond more to myself. So I get it or I don't. You're a person, you live now, you have to travel or you have a lover, you have a home, you are a mother, you are whatever. And you want to dress in a way that you feel is both reasonable and not ridiculous but interesting.

WWD: Do you think "fashion direction" matters anymore? Today, there's much focus on the individual as opposed to the fashion.

M.P.: Of course, we are all individuals. And everybody is free to do whatever they want...It's true for myself. You dress a model and you have a feeling when she's happy with what she's wearing. Today, you have more influences in the shows. [While focusing on greater diversity in casting], I discovered something really relevant over the past since two, three, four seasons. Now, I look at the beauty of people; I look at the people. Before, it was more fashion for fashion. I could not care less who was wearing it. Now, since the differences are relevant, I like the differences very much. So now I look at the people much, much more.

WWD: On the runway or in general?

M.P.: I'm talking the runway. I look at the different beauties and I like to put them in something that I think is really good for them, which is something that I did much less before. I had my favorite models. The first show, Kate

Moss doing five exits, because we used 15 models, and so they had to change and change and change. Now I really like the different personalities, and I like to dress the models according to who they are. I try to interpret.

WWD: So the casting becomes a more important part of your collection message.

M.P.: Sì, sì. And that is a merit of the differences. I realize I'm so interested in the [models'] different beauty.

WWD: Speaking of messages, what did you think of Alexandra Schulman's comments about Helena Christensen, that she's too old to wear a bustier in public?

M.P.: I haven't read the whole thing. I think if you choose something and you like it, you can go out naked when you're 85. It's your choice. I respect any decision by anybody. The only thing that I don't like is when women dress for finding a rich husband. That I hate. Otherwise, you're free to do whatever you want.

WWD: Back to the collection, the major message is interesting simplicity.

M.P.: Naïve, and trying to make something new with something so simple.

WWD: Can you elaborate?

M.P.: In the silhouette, there's this play of proportionality. The other thing that I like very much is layer on layer on layer. Five layers of the same material. Cotton on cotton, on cotton. Print on print on print on print on print. Sometimes layering the same color. Stratification with exactly the same thing. That I think from a fashion point of view, is new. ■

EYE

Liz Diller and Carrie Mae Weems In Conversation at Prada

● Prada kicked off their Prada Invites series Wednesday with a discussion and cocktail.

BY LEIGH NORDSTROM

The night before staging its resort show in Manhattan, Prada kicked off a series titled Prada Invites, a collection of projects engaging various artists and creatives in the "universe of nylon," Prada's signature fabric, as the brand describes it.

First up was a conversation between architect Liz Diller and artist Carrie Mae Weems; Diller, along with Cini Boeri and Kazuyo Sejima, designed a piece for Prada shown last September, and she took the stage to explain "The Envelope" garment bag she created as well as her career highlights including The Shed at Hudson Yards and the High Line.

Of designing the garment bag dress for Prada, she said she was excited by the turnaround time, which was only a matter of weeks before it was on the runway. "We don't work fast in architecture," she said. "This was a really fun and fast assignment."

Diller and Weems are partnering together on a next large-scale project, due in 2021 or 2022.

"I think that we have a lot in common even though our work is very, very different," Diller told Weems. "This concern about space and the politics of space and the coating that we basically inherit in our buildings and our institutions in our stores and our everyday world that we typically sleepwalk through,



Carrie Mae Weems and Liz Diller

because they're so familiar that we never really question them."

She also praised Weems' delivery in what her work says to the consumer.

"You don't beat people over the head with a message. It's beautiful," Diller said. "The work is so beautifully done and it's so crafted that one just looks at it and through that

sort of beauty and poetry the politics come through in an even more pointed way."

"I'm not really sure if I had a message," Weems replied. "I had concerns, I think. Things I want to fill in that I'm pointing myself toward, I think, in the same way that perhaps you're pointing yourself towards. You are interested in focusing some attention on that."

She returns the compliments to Diller. "You raised the bar and gave us a sense of audiences and cities and citizens, ideas about what could be made," Weems told her. "And that, I think, is an extraordinary thing that the work that you've produced over the course of your career; your life has been so incredibly influential. That it's had that sort of ability to reach out beyond itself, to be bigger than and to scale larger than itself. And to use the platform as the platform, the form as the platform for generating new ideas, new concepts, new possibilities, and how we might engage this."

Of her own work, Weems spoke about influences from pop culture.

"Appropriation we'll probably always do to one degree or another because I get to have something that doesn't belong to me, otherwise to think about them," she said. She added that she started going to movie sets and photographing herself there to understand what was happening in the pop culture landscape.

"People like Lee Daniels are really changing the playing field in terms of what something might look like intuitively popular culture. It's a great TV. Even though I don't watch as much TV, I'm aware of television and the role that these shows like "Scandal" that had in shifting this architecture of the imagination in relation to what is seen and how it's seen.

"If you get out of the way of the work, the work will do the work that the work needs to do," Weems added.