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M I U, C C I A P R A D A

## 改写未来

FILL IN THE FUTURE

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改写未来

撰文 唐晓岚 摄影 许问

即使是PRADA,也正面临时代高速运转所带来的  
些许尴尬:市场只来得及给战术以回报,  
战略成为一种巨大的奢侈——今年70岁的PRADA  
品牌掌门人MIUCCIA PRADA女士试图为这个问题  
寻找解法,她希望将品牌所做的每一个动作都  
与一个更广的议题连接起来,通过连接和拓宽  
视野与思维,去化解增长模式的空洞和疲乏。



## “年轻人应该去拒绝、去厌恶这些另有所图的人，应该去拒绝被视为愚蠢推销的对象。”

“人们把千禧一代看作他们的推销对象，我从来没有听说过谁真正对他们的真实生活投以关注和关心。” Miuccia Prada女士说，“年轻人应该去拒绝、去厌恶这些另有所图的人，应该去拒绝被视为愚蠢推销的对象。年轻人是我们的未来，但现在，当提到他们时，人们其实并不真正在乎。”

2019年6月6日，中国上海，Prada女士和我们坐下来聊天。一天前，Prada 2020年春夏男装系列时装秀在这里举办，这是Prada首次在米兰以外的地区落地男装秀。

再几天前，官方宣布一位新生代偶像加入Prada品牌代言人阵容；一年多前，以运动和技术为灵感、诞生于上世纪九十年代的Linea Rossa系列回归品牌，价格相对低、形象更年轻的尼龙单品重新成为主打，Prada也终于有Cloudbust鞋款等社交网络上的“网红”单品陆续出现；不到两年前，Prada首次发布数字化转型战略，官网上线电商平台，陆续展开与街头潮流资讯网站Highsnobiety等线上平台的销售合作。

无论是与中国年轻一代偶像的合作还是电商营销，Prada比起其他品牌来，无不显著地慢上了几拍。近两三年来的品牌动作被市场广泛视为业绩驱动力的连续追赶：2017财年上半年，Prada品牌利润降至2011年上市后最低水平，在实体零售网络方面过度专注以及对入门价位签名款包袋、街头风格、运动鞋等主要潮流的忽视被认为是罪魁祸首。2018财年起，Prada集团销售额、总体利润水平开始回升。

整个过程期间，Prada女士虽说不是活跃，但在诸如《System》《Vestoj》等在产业内颇具口碑的独立杂志中，也有多个访谈专题出现。她从不聊商业，像与我们讲的一样，“我和我的丈夫没有一天是想怎样挣钱而醒来的，我们只是想做我们所热爱的东西，为这个时代呈现我们想要提供给它的东西。市场表现有不尽如人意的時候，那我们就考虑市场，因为我们还是在

运营一家公司。但我可以很有信心地说，无论如何，我们从来没有一大早就想着怎样挣钱。”相对地，在难得的、与公众交换观点的机会中，她聊推敲、聊推敲里的矛盾。矛盾包括她自九十年代用鳄鱼色、土黄色、棕褐色及尼龙搭带凉鞋、工装套装等去构建“丑时髦”(Ugly Chic)以挑战时髦；也包括，她批判政治正确会抹杀人们创作中自主思考的空间，与此同时，她将这个舆论环境视为一次品牌自身成长的机会，相比为危机公关而准备，Prada重新审视了内部的团队构成、设计的思路落点。

这种来自于Prada女士本人的独特思考与鲜明的知识分子形象，加上品牌在市场策略上延后的几拍，让Prada在第一波流量红利收割后的普遍倦怠期中，以另一种方式进入游戏。

让我们回到对话的起点——“眼下，人们对年轻人的不在乎让我愤怒，因为人们只是在考虑自己的利益。”Prada女士接着说，“我也不认为这是一个在历史进程中反复发生的事情，当我年轻的时候，七十年代的年轻人非常热衷政治，与现在相反，他们自己改变了自己的命运。我并不记得有谁像今天这样对我们推销。”与消费主义相对的，是从文化里出发、在文化里落脚的、有认同关系的双向选择。“我希望将品牌所做的每一个动作都与一个更广的议题连接起来。文化的学习对人们来说是重要的，并不只是因为它会让你看起来更聪明、更高级。在困难的时候，你对他人生活历程、思维思想的了解程度越高，他们也就越能帮助你去看和解决你自己生活中的问题。”

我们换句话来说，运用大数据系统也好，营销人才也罢，在今天，完全依赖摸索消费者的喜好去经营，逃不出两种结果：循环形成暴力的洗脑式引导和愈来愈差的市场环境，或者，永远都无法真正赶上消费者的步子。更多品牌看到的代际相接时的形象危机、产品断层，从Prada的处理手段来看，它更多被视为一次次交流的匮乏。所谓站在风暴中心的品牌形象和价值立场则应有



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充满能量的表达冲动。

更强的着力点，本质上不必为其所动。

Prada 6月发布的《人类几乎》(Code Human) 2019秋冬男装系列广告短片就是一次漂亮的议题连接、价值沟通。在这一邀请中国艺术家曹斐创作的影片中，Prada新晋代言人蔡徐坤被置于一个未来考古学的情景里，他同时是这座未来人类博物馆中“后人类纪”(Post-Anthropocene)展区的完美人类标本和参观游客，自己与自己隔着橱窗相遇。蔡徐坤在视频中身穿的衬衣来自Prada最新推出的Prada Tunder项目，其中印花融合艺术家Jeanne Detallante的特别创作，心形、电光、玫瑰、闪电的图样与世界第一部科幻小说中的“弗兰肯斯坦的怪物”意象紧密相关。短片中的这些元素、议题及对人工智能、完美偶像、记忆复制等相关概念的展开都在短时间内被蔡徐坤的粉丝以与理论相结合的方式梳理出来，得到百万级转发传播。

据中泰证券的分析报告，到2020年，预计包括音乐、影视及周边消费在内的中国偶像市场总规模可达1,000亿。即使明星引导奢侈及时尚消费的具体“带货”指数很难明确，任谁都看到这里的市场潜力。比起借去打“成为年轻人的第一只时尚包袋”的战役，在Prada看来，去成为年轻人第一次认知某事的窗口，进而成为年轻人所信赖的去了解崇高与广博、思考与批评的通道，这才是独一无二、值得付出的体验。在消费浪潮中，关于“第一只时尚手袋”的所谓仪式感只会逐渐薄弱，但在任何时代背景中，都很难有人会忘记第一次与杰作感到亲近、与艺术感到默契、在历史散点间找到连接的启发式体验，同时认知和打破与世界的距离。

消费始终是判断而不是表达——这也是毕业于政治系的Prada女士一度为自己从事时尚行业而感到“羞愧”的原因之一——今天，在Prada女士来看，我们甚至面对着比判断泛滥、

优越感通胀更严峻的问题，即判断亦不真实：“人们并不知道他们究竟是被什么所驱动(而去喜欢一件东西)，我们越来越难得到真实的、真诚的反馈。诚实对我来讲是很重要的品质，它在时装行业中远被低估了——人们往往不去分辨究竟哪些是无可救药的、伪装成新作的抄袭，又有哪些是对原作真诚的探讨、评论和发展。”

1993年，Prada女士和丈夫、Prada集团首席执行官Patrizio Bertelli提出创办Prada艺术基金会，彼时，时尚与艺术、公众文化传播之间的可能性还远未像今天一样被探索；2017年，Prada将负责修缮六年有余的上海荣宅面向公众开放，积极落地交流活动及展览，品牌在中国如此大规模的、非直接商业目的的投入没有先例。放小一些说，每一支广告、每一次项目、与其他领域创意人士的共同合作、对品牌档案的复兴重组，都是一次Prada式对文化语境的反应、为消费判断的补充、于自身平台的更新。

“我自己也正在去拥抱这个有趣的、变化多端的时代里所发生的一切，”Prada女士想要将对每一份具体传播作品的阅读空间留给艺术家和观众，与我们分享更广义上对品牌内容落点的期待，“前不久在黑洞探索上作出重大突破的的科学家都说，别问我关于未来的计划，因为我们也不知道。当下，有太多事情在发生，我最感兴趣的，是人们如何(在这个时代里)处理无比广泛的、关于万事万物的信息，对它们作出反应。”

即使面对时装，真正的创作不是回应市场的需求，不是源于情感的宣泄，甚至不是来自对社会话题的批判，而是一个饱含诚意、充满能量的表达冲动，它肯尽力深入下去，放眼人类的创造，挖掘整体的结构，托出广阔的视界。如果说在这个碎片的时代，还有任何一位时装设计师和她的品牌可能做到这一点，那就是Miuccia Prada。●



## Fill in the Future

*Photographer Xu Chuang*

*Author Tang Xiaolan*

*Editor& Producer YMAN HUI*

*The market has no more time to pay back other than tactics. Strategy is becoming great luxury. The 70-year-old Mrs. Miuccia Prada, head of Prada, is trying to find solutions to the problem. She hopes that every move of the brand can relate to a wider concept and to the moment. She intends to use a more connected and broader vision and idea to cope with the current growth pattern.*

“People very often see the millennials or the generation Z as a group of people to sell something to, I’ve never heard people worrying about the lives of young kids.” said Mrs. Miuccia Prada, “They should refuse it and struggle in order not to be considered a goal for promotion to sell something. The young generation is our future. Right now, when people are talking about the young people, they seem to don't care about them as individuals.”

We had a talk with Mrs. Prada in Shanghai on June 7, 2019. One day ago, Prada Spring/Summer 2020 Men’s Runway Show took place here, which was the first time for Prada to stage its men's show outside of Milan.

A few days ago, Prada has just invited Cai Xukun, a Gen Z Chinese singer and idol, to participate in its advertising campaign. Over a year ago, Prada has relaunched Linea Rossa which, born in the 1990s, underscores technical sportswear featuring more affordable and energized Nylon in textiles and has been releasing those internet-famous products ever since, such as Cloudbust footwear. Almost 2 years ago, Prada has embarked on its first digitalized transformation strategy that includes e-commerce partnerships and successive collaborations online such as the one with Highsnobiety, the streetwear news website.

In either the collaboration with young idols in China, or e-commerce marketing, Prada has been underperforming compared with its opponents. The market sees its activities in recent years a continuous catchup driven by brand performance. On the first half of fiscal year 2017, Prada’s profit has hit a record low since its listing in 2011. It is believed that its overwhelming focus on the brick-and-mortar sales, and overlook on entry-level-price signature bags, streetwear styles and footwear are to blame. Since the fiscal 2018, it has started regaining its sales back on track and its aggregate profitability has begun to rise again.

Active as she may not be, Mrs. Prada has been the subject for interviews throughout the process by multiple magazines including System and Vestoj which all enjoy a quite good reputation in the industry. She never talks about business, just like what she told us, “There is not a single day that me and my husband wake up in the morning and think about how to make money, we just want to make what we love and think is beautiful. There are times

when the business is going weak, so we have to think about it, because we're still running a company. But I can confidently say that we've never woken up in the morning thinking about how to make money." In comparison, she talks about scrutiny and the contradiction within, which includes Ugly Chic that she has built since the 1990s with the colours avocado ochreous and khaki, and sandals with nylon buckled straps, and uniforms to challenge fashion, and her criticism of politics correctness for obliterating the space for people to think independently in their creation. Nevertheless, she sees the environment where public opinion prevails as an opportunity for the growth of the brand. Instead of preparing for crisis management. Mrs. Prada re-examined the internal team building and foothold from which design ideas start.

It is her unique idea, distinct image as an intellectual, and marketing strategy of the brand that enable Prada to access the game in a different way in the all-pervading burnout after the first wave of bonus brought by large amounts of traffic is ripe for harvest. Let's go back to where it begins. "That upsets me, the people who don't care about the young people as individuals, but do it for their own interests." Mrs. Prada said, "I don't think it's something that always happened in history. When I was young, young kids were super into politics in the 70s, they were just the opposite, and they changed their lives themselves. I don't remember people selling stuff to us like today." Against consumerism, bi-directional selection starts from and ends in culture, which embraces identified relations. "I hope that every move of the brand can relate to a wider concept and to the moment. Culture is important for your life not because you will look more chic or intelligent or cultivated, actually, in difficult moments, the more you know about the lives and thoughts of others, the more they can help you to see and solve problems in your own life clearly."

In other words, if we run our business purely based on our prediction of customers' preferences, whether through big data or the use of marketing talents, there will be only 2 results. One is the formation of a vicious cycle that includes violent brainwashing and an increasingly worsen market environment. The other is, we may never be able to catch up with customers. More and more brands are seeing their crisis of the brand image and shortage of products between generations. However, it's nothing more than a lack of communication regarding the way Prada handles it. The so-called brand image and standpoint of values under the discussion of the public should have deeper roots and not change in its nature along with it.

Code Human, the advertising campaign for Prada Fall/Winter 2019 menswear collection released in June, is a fantastic exchange of topics and values. Cao Fei, the renowned Chinese artist, has been invited to create the campaign in which Cai Xukun is placed in a futuristic archaeology environment, who plays a perfect specimen on show in a cabinet in the Post-Anthropocene Era and also a visitor to this Museum of Mankind, and the latter sees a specimen that looks exactly like himself outside the cabinet. The shirt that Cai wears comes from latest Prada Thunder collection, whose stamps are specially designed by Jeanne Detallante the artist. The design includes heart, lightning, roses and thunderbolt, which are all closely related to the monster in Frankenstein, the first ever science fiction in the world.

The elements, topics, as well as development of artificial intelligence, perfect idol, and memory copy in it are all analyzed based on theory by Cai's followers in a short period of time and reposted for several million times.

According to the report by Zhongtai Securities, it is estimated that the total market of Chinese idols including music, movies, dramas and relevant consumption will reach 100 billion RMB by the end of 2020. The potential is obviously huge in here though the exact index of influencer marketing in luxury and fashion consumption is not clear. Prada believes its unique and worthy experience to become the window for the young generation to first perceive and further the trusted channel through which they get to understand eminence, broadness, thinking and criticism, instead of fighting for 'being the first fashion bag of young people'. In the wave of consumption, ritual sense of 'the first fashion handbag' will only weaken over time, but it can be difficult for anyone at any time to forget the enlightenment brought by the closeness with a masterpiece, the tacit understanding with art, the discovery of a connection between historical dots, or the process of recognizing and breaking unfamiliarity to the world for the first time.

Consumption has always been judgment rather than expression, which is one of the reasons why Mrs. Prada, who studied politics in college, was once "ashamed" of her career in fashion. Today, we, in Mrs. Prada's view, are encountered with an even more serious problem than the widespread judgment and superiority - the untrue response, "People don't realize what they are driven by. It's harder and harder to get a genuine response. Honesty is something that is very important to me, it's not appreciated enough in fashion. People sometimes don't distinguish what is copying from what is new or something that is honest about the original subject. When creating there is always a starting point that comes from the past discussing, commenting and developing on the idea with the eyes of the moment is what moves it forward and changes it into something else"

In 1993, Mrs. Prada and her husband, Mr. Patrizio Bertelli, CEO of Prada Group, established Fondazione Prada. At that time, the possibility between fashion and the spread of art and public culture was far from being explored as it is today. In 2017, Prada opened Prada Rong Zhai in Shanghai to public, which had been renovated for more than 6 years, and started activities and exhibitions to exchange ideas. There is no precedent in China for any brand investment on such a large scale and for indirect commercial purposes. To put it mildly, every advertisement, project, cooperation with creators in other fields, and the reorganization of brand archives is a Prada-style response to cultural context, a supplement to consumer judgment, and an update on its own platform.

"At the moment, I'm into embracing what's happening in this very interesting and revolutionary time." Mrs. Prada wants to leave space for artists and viewers to interpret each specific piece of work for communication. She hopes that they share with them the broader expectations of where brand content will fall. "Scientist studying the black hole even said that don't ask us anything about the plan of the future, because we don't actually know much about it. There's so much going on. I'm interested in understanding how to deal with the



knowledge of everything.”

Even in the face of fashion, the real creation is not to respond to the needs of the market. It does not originate from emotional expressions, not even from criticism towards social topics. But it is an impulse for expression that contains sincerity and energy, and we're willing to try our best to go deep into it, look at the creation by human beings, explore the overall structure, and show a broad horizon. If any fashion designer and the brand of him or her can do this in the age of fragmentation, it is Miuccia Prada.

# VANITY FAIR

## Miuccia Prada, Luxury-Fashion Pioneer



### Full Text:

There's something dystopian about the expansive seventh floor of Prada's USA headquarters. The ceiling is unfinished cement, the overhead lights are neon fuchsia, and the building's massive cylindrical supporting columns, like something from a ship or a parking garage, are painted pale matte pink—set details left over from the resort show, held a couple nights before. Headless mannequins dressed in an enviable wardrobe dot the space, numbered tags dangling from their rigid, willowy wrists. The view from some of the oversize windows is the roof of a luxury car dealership, Lamborghinis and Bugattis stretching out under the midday sun; from others, it's a bright glimpse of the Hudson. It's a setting that might appear in a beautiful, disturbing film by someone like Sofia Coppola (a frequent face in Prada's front row) or Nicolas Winding Refn (who participated in a project called *Soggettiva* earlier this year at Fondazione Prada, the contemporary art institution, in which artists present a survey of personally inspirational films).

Miuccia Prada, who celebrated her 70th birthday in May and possesses the kind of timeless features that beg to be rendered in oil paints, would herself look more at home in the lush, rich palette favored by Luca Guadagnino (another fan, who once called Mrs. Prada “a constant source of inspiration”). Her hair, curling gently at her collarbone, is buttery blonde. Maroon

orbs dangle from her ears like dragon eggs; her marigold knee-length pleated skirt is a staple style for both Prada the brand and Prada the woman. Under a caramel-hued short-sleeve sweater she's wearing a tight, crepe-thin white undershirt that peeks out just so at her sleeves and neckline. It's unexpected. It's perfect.

This is, after all, the creative force behind the sartorial juggernaut that is Prada Group, which, between Prada mens- and womenswear and Miu Miu, puts out 10 complex and cinematic collections each year. This is a woman who has spent a lifetime perfecting the art of personal aesthetics, who honed her eye as a teenager and college student in Milanese vintage shops scouring for Yves Saint Laurent, and donned children's clothes so as not to blend into the crowd. But when I ask her whether she still finds such joy in putting on clothes every morning, she makes a particular, unnameable expression—lips turned down and pursed, head pulled back—that somehow communicates both “perhaps” and “absolutely not.”

“I tend to dress in uniform,” she says. “Most of the things that I love, I can't wear because of my age.”

Like what?

She smiles. “Like miniskirts.”

“The miniskirt she mentions a lot,” says Verde Visconti, Prada and Miu Miu's longtime PR director, a balletic attaché who accompanies Prada to most public appearances and has been with the company for more than 20 years. For the duration of our interview she sits, catlike, about five feet away. I'm not sure if she means that Prada often mentions her personal desire to wear miniskirts, which might be true, or that she does in a grander referential sense through her work, which definitely is: a pleated olive knit number in 1994; raw-edged silk printed with a beach scene in 2010; Lilliputian patterned shorts in 2017. When they haven't been scanty in length, they've often been so in opacity. Gauzy '90s cuts over black leotards. Webs of iridescent plastic gems. She sent male models down the spring 2019 runway in shorts so tiny they seemed destined to inflict genital harm; she called them miniskirts for men.

“Provocative,” Prada says gravely, still imagining the skin-baring clothes she'd be wearing were it not for the burden of time. “Seriously.”

We may be sitting among the resort collection, but due to the garbled chronology of fashion and magazines, we're talking about fall/winter 2019, which she showed in February and which evokes provocation more cerebral than sensual. The manifold themes were sparked by Prada's fascination with the women writers of late 18th- and early 19th-century England, so often underappreciated during their lifetimes: Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters, whose novels she fell in love with decades ago, and Mary Shelley, whose *Frankenstein* she started reading for the first time just recently. The social acuity of these writers coupled with the dark romance of Shelley's classic work propelled the collection, but like everything Prada creates, there's an injection of wry humor as well. Cartoon images of *Frankenstein's* monster and his bride adorn the clothes, along with oversize roses and lightning bolts—symbols and motifs stretched to the extreme. “Now we are working on explaining the complexity in a simple way, because people have no time, have too much information—but there is something not good in that,” says Prada. “How much can you simplify without saying nothing?” Do you get it? Do you? the clothes seem to needle. “I never declare my political intention, because I think in fashion, in luxury business, it's better to shut up,” she says. And then, as though she can't help it: “But it was also symbolic of the love of the rejected, the people that have such a difficult life now, and how much love is needed for all these people.”

This dichotomy—to be political without declaring herself so, to do what those in the business of selling expensive goods should do—has created a nearly lifelong internal struggle for the designer, who grew up traveling to France, England, and Ireland, and earned a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Milan. “I was interested in everything, but I studied very little,” she says. When I ask what she was doing instead, she raises her eyebrows, mischievous. She was famously a member of the Italian Communist Party and an active feminist who spoke out in favor of reproductive rights and accessible childcare. “I was so embarrassed when I was young,” she says. “To be a leftist feminist and doing fashion, I felt so horrible and so ashamed.” But she couldn't help it; her curiosity and appreciation of culture was omnivorous. She went to the movies, sometimes three shows a day, coming of age in the '60s boom of great Italian cinema: Antonioni, Fellini, Bertolucci. Sergio

Leone, whose work inspired a cavalcade of spaghetti Westerns. Luchino Visconti, of *The Leopard* and *Death in Venice*. (The aforementioned Verde is his great-grand-niece, perhaps less coincidence than kismet.) She was a devotee of the theater and would study corporeal mime at the famous Piccolo Teatro for five years. “In the end,” she says, “the love for objects prevailed.”

After first designing items for her family’s stores, Prada (then still going by her given name, Maria Bianchi) inherited the business from her mother in 1978. The leather goods company—founded in 1913 by her maternal grandfather, Mario Prada, who had designed trunks for the Italian royal family—was still a small family business. But Prada had recently met the man who would become her husband, a then rival in the world of leather goods named Patrizio Bertelli. The pair saw the project as an ambitious adventure; he would head the business side, she the creative. She had her unmarried maternal aunt adopt her, thus legally granting her that all-important family name. “We started building a company,” she says. A decade later, Prada launched her first womenswear collection. Miu Miu and Prada menswear were born in 1993.

Earlier this year, the elder of the couple’s two sons, professional race car driver Lorenzo Bertelli, joined Prada Group in an executive role; since then, he’s been integrating the brand’s digital presence with its brick-and-mortar stores. But when I ask if family legacy is important to her—she does, after all, still live in the Milan villa where she was born—Prada shrugs. “Not really,” she says. She sees the company as a passion project between herself and her husband, and seems neither convinced nor concerned about whether her son will one day take it over. “He’s going to see if he likes it.”

Prada and her husband share a devotion to the fine arts, and their house is, according to friends, home to an impressive collection of paintings and objets. During that busy stretch in the mid-’90s, the couple also founded Fondazione Prada, the contemporary art institute that serves as a stand-alone exhibition space, siloed from the capitalism and commercialism of fashion, where artists including Laurie Anderson, Carsten Höller, Theaster Gates, and Dan Flavin have put on solo shows. Prada calls it her solution to the existential crisis of being a politically minded person who also owns a fashion company. “In my mind,” she says, “it’s so connected, the fashion, the art, the culture, the politics.” But in order to be taken seriously in the art world, she felt, she needed to create clear divisions. Not once has she collaborated with an artist on a collection. “I didn’t want, for any reason, people to think that I wanted to take advantage of the art to make my work more glamorous,” she says. “Maybe I’m the last professional moralist.”

There has, however, been seep in other ways. At the brand’s Milan headquarters, one of Höller’s signature slides extends languidly from Prada’s third-floor office down to the street below. Both Höller and Gates have created pop-up clubs under Prada’s purview—though with total creative freedom—during Art Basel Miami. “If there’s anything that I’m doing that is ambitious, that’s audacious, that’s unreasonable, that’s seemingly miraculous,” says Gates, who first met Prada when she went to see his band, the Black Monks of Mississippi, play at London’s Ronnie Scott’s in 2012, “it’s only because I have people like Miuccia who do it every day and refuse to take accolades for it.” In 2011, Prada started hiring women filmmakers to create shorts for an ongoing project called Miu Miu Women’s Tales. The films, which have included *The Wedding Singer’s Daughter* by Haifaa Al-Mansour (2018), *Carmen* by Chloë Sevigny (2017), *Somebody* by Miranda July (2014), and *The Door* by Ava Duvernay (2013), have, like the art pop-ups, allowed the filmmakers total creative freedom, with the caveat that they dress their actresses in Miu Miu. For some, like Duvernay, the collaboration came at an important time. She had just won best director at Sundance for *The Middle of Nowhere*, and yet she wasn’t being hit with the feature film offers her white male counterparts had historically enjoyed. She needed the work. *The Door* “is still one of my favorite pieces I’ve ever made,” Duvernay says.

For much of her career, Prada has found success in making moves that some view as pioneering, a little bit outré, even risky—in her creative decisions, certainly, like her iconic 1980s fascination with industrial nylon, which she used the way others would silk or leather, turning louche backpacks into fetish objects—but also in her business savvy. In the lean years following September 11, as others in the luxury business were tightening their expenditures and fleeing downtown Manhattan, Prada surged forward with a \$50 million New York flagship store designed by Rem Koolhaas in SoHo’s old Guggenheim building, which opened in the last days of 2001.

“Sometimes she’s a little bit ahead of the curve, and the curve has to catch up,” says the filmmaker Baz Luhrmann, a longtime friend who shot the portrait for this story. The pair met when Prada designed the navy blue wedding suit Leonardo DiCaprio wears in Luhrmann’s 1996 *Romeo + Juliet* and have since collaborated on 2013’s *The Great Gatsby*, and traveled together to Shanghai for the opening of a cultural center called Prada Rong Zhai, and to Moscow to see John Cranko’s *Onegin* at the Bolshoi. He calls her Mooch. The actor and model Dane DeHaan, who has been appearing in campaigns for the brand since 2013, echoes Luhrmann’s sentiment. “Miuccia has such a knack not for what is popular right now,” he says, “but for what will be popular even years down the road.”

And yet she and the brand have also not been immune to troubling oversights. At the end of last year, Prada released a collection of figurines dubbed Pradamalia that a New York Center for Constitutional Rights attorney, Chinyere Ezie, photographed and posted on Facebook, pointing to some of the figures’ resemblance to the racist caricatures in the 1899 children’s book *Little Black Sambo*. “History cannot continue to repeat itself,” Ezie wrote. “Black America deserves better. And we demand better.” Prada (the company) pulled the figurines and issued a blanket apology which read, in part, “Prada Group never had the intention of offending anyone and we abhor all forms of racism and racist imagery.” It’s a familiar refrain, a version of which was delivered by Dolce and Gabbana earlier that month, following a set of ads showcasing Chinese model Zuo Ye attempting to eat Italian food with chopsticks, and another issued by Gucci two months later, after its release of a sweater with a balaclava collar that evoked blackface.

In most of these cases, the product is pulled, the apology is issued. But in the wake of what Prada herself soberly refers to as “this mistake,” she had a conversation with Theaster Gates. “What can we do to use this occasion to make things even better,” he says he asked her, “to check our designers and say, ‘Even with good intentions, sometimes racist images spew out’? How do we deal with that?” Last February, Prada Group launched a Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council, cochaired by Gates and Duvernay and advised by Harvard professor Sarah Lewis. The council, in its early stages at press time, is focused on educational efforts and broadening internal conversations, both within Prada and the industry at large. (Two days after Prada’s announcement, Gucci released a set of initiatives aimed at upping awareness, diversity, and inclusion.) “What is your practice? What has been comfortable in the past?” Duvernay says she has put to Prada’s team. “What I really talked with them about is not being performative in this process. I don’t feel like there needs to be a public presentation of what they plan to do. They just need to do it.”

Prada seems motivated by the challenge. “The whole world is full of so many different cultures and religions and races,” she says. “We should start embracing diversity of any kind. The fact seems that it’s happening more or less the opposite.” Nationalism is growing, she says. I think of the U.S.-Mexico border wall; she mentions Europe.

Other concerns are being addressed within the brand. This summer, after years of research and experimentation, the company released its first pieces made from recycled nylon, a sustainable update on an iconic piece of Prada’s DNA. In May, Prada Group pledged to go fur-free by 2020. “It’s very important that everyone seriously tries to do his best when it’s possible,” Prada says. She looks a little tired, but also determined. “It’s a process.”

As our time comes to a close, I ask what she does to de-stress from the work—from the designing, the artistic endeavors, the shows, the parties. She makes that face again. De-stress? “I like what I do,” she says. “The problem is only to have enough great ideas to be able to interpret the world, to be forward thinking, to create something new, interesting, to go to the next step.” But does she mind the constancy of it, the relentlessness of the fashion calendar, the press commitments, all the travel? She thinks. “I hate jet lag,” she says. “Of course, anytime you go somewhere, you learn something.”