QUELLO CHE È NON È QUELLO CHE SEMBRA

VANITY FAIR

n. 39 Settimanale - 30 Settembre 2020

IN EDICOLA IL 23/9/2020 - POSTE ITALIANE SPA - SPED. A.P. - D.L. 353/03 ART. 1, CM. 1, DCB MI - PREZZI EDICOLA ESTERO: A € 3,60 - F € 3,80 - CH CHF 4,50 - CANTON TICINO CHF 4,20 - B € 3,50 - LUX € 3,50 - COSTA AZZURRA € 4,00 - UK £ 2,99 - GR € 3,50 - P € 2,95 - D € 3,60 - E € 3,00 - NL € 3,80 - CAN C$ 12,45

Le donne italiane

Un numero diretto da

FRANCESCO VEZZOLI

Francesco Vezzoli

SIMONE MARCHETTI *intervista* MIUCCIA PRADA

UNA CERTA IDEA DI PRESENTE

Più leggi per le donne, più politica nei nostri gesti. MIUCCIA PRADA spiega perché è ora di «fare un passo», dal lavoro ai social (che vanno usati nel modo «più radicale e spericolato possibile»)

COME LEMMY CAUTION
Ritratto di Miuccia Prada come l'agente segreto protagonista di *Alphaville* di Jean-Luc Godard, 2020.

Mai chiederle del futuro. «Il presente è una tale moltitudine di domande, figuriamoci se posso dire dove sarò tra dieci anni». Miuccia Prada ci risponde via zoom da una stanza foderata di velluto verde. Si muove tra due specchi di Michelangelo Pistoletto e altre due opere d'arte, tutti alle sue spalle, come farebbe il personaggio di un film distopico. Mentre la guardo, penso non sia un caso se Francesco Vezzoli, per questo numero, l'abbia ritratta nei panni dell'agente segreto Lemmy Caution, protagonista del film *Alphaville*, pellicola del 1965 girata da Jean-Luc Godard e ambientata in un futuro dove l'umanità è minacciata dalla dittatura tecnocratica. «Be', in effetti l'argomento mi interessa molto, ho passato tutta l'estate a discutere e interrogarmi sul ruolo attuale della tecnologia». Calibra ogni termine, ripete «questo lo dico però non lo scriva», ragiona ad alta voce e insegue le sue stesse parole come fossero gli abiti più idonei a vestire i suoi pensieri. Oggi è a capo di un impero che vale 3,2 miliardi di euro: «la signora», come tutti la chiamano, è un fiume in piena visto da lontano e la sua potenza, sapientemente mitigata dalla distanza che mette tra sé e i suoi interlocutori, si manifesta pienamente solo quando le si sta vicino.

Partiamo da Godard.
«Le racconto di quando l'ho conosciuto. C'entra Vezzoli, per altro. Nel 2012 abbiamo fatto una mostra a Parigi proprio con Vezzoli, *24 Hours Museum*. In occasione dell'apertura, avevo invitato artisti, scrittori, registi. Tra questi ho chiesto ci fosse anche Jean-Luc Godard. Mi sono detta: non verrà mai, ma voglio invitarlo lo stesso. Lui ha risposto subito dicendo che non sarebbe intervenuto ma che gli sarebbe piaciuto lavorare con me. Ho fatto un salto perché nemmeno pensavo sapesse chi io fossi. Abbiamo provato a incontrarci più volte e ci siamo scritti. Alla fine siamo riusciti a parlarci dal vivo in un albergo a Ginevra qualche tempo dopo. Gli ho chiesto cosa volesse fare con noi, abbiamo discusso e alla fine lui ha pensato di ricostruire il suo *Atelier*, luogo privato e di lavoro alla Fondazione Prada, a Milano, con tutti i suoi libri, le opere d'arte, i premi ricevuti e oggetti personali. Una sorta di installazione privata della sua arte».

Che cosa ha imparato da lui?
«La mia cultura è basata molto sulla cultura cinematografica degli anni '60, su Godard ma anche, tra gli altri, Antonioni, Rossellini, Buñuel, sulla cosiddetta avanguardia cinematografica. Sa cosa mi piaceva davvero di quel mondo? È un argomento per altro che ha molto senso anche oggi: la gente allora sapeva bene cosa voleva perché c'erano precisi progetti di vita. Penso che negli anni '60 tutti volevano quella vita, quei progetti: c'era un immaginario da seguire, un senso di appartenenza, un ideale preciso. Volevi far parte di quel mondo, un mondo di pensiero, di piacevolezza anche, di libertà. È anche grazie a quei film che io ho imparato cosa sia la società. Devo molto a quel cinema. E devo molto a Godard».

Sta forse dicendo che oggi, in epoca di sogni da social network, di influencer e di comunicazioni digitali, mancano progetti validi come lo erano allora?
«È una bella domanda e non so se ho una risposta precisa. Diciamo che innanzitutto ho capito che il digitale, intendo il web e i social network, è uno strumento. Come le dicevo, ho passato l'intera estate a tormentarmi con le domande sul digitale e alla fine ho preso una decisione: con tanti miei progetti, intraprenderò la strada del web e dei social nella maniera più radicale e spericolata possibile perché li ritengo lo strumento più importante di diffusione della conoscenza, uno dei più fondamentali in cui ti puoi esprimere. Disdegnarli sarebbe ridicolo. E poi, un'altra volta: basta giudicarli, sta a te decidere che contenuti metterci. Ecco, con la Fondazione, per esempio, io proverò a usarli per i miei fini. Del resto, sono strumenti che abbiamo il compito di imparare a conoscere fino in fondo. E quando dico così mi riferisco soprattutto a certa intellighenzia che li ha disdegnati fino a oggi, incapace di apprezzarne il valore. È ora di imparare veramente a usarli».

È sempre attenta alle avanguardie. Eppure anche lei non ha abbracciato questi mezzi fin dalla prima ora. Rimpiange di non averlo fatto?
«No. Però riconosco i miei limiti, tipici di una certa sinistra. Ammetto di aver sbagliato. Però trovo che rimpiangere sia inutile. È più utile agire e correggersi».

Parla di limiti di una certa sinistra: si riferisce forse a certi intellettuali che si sono ancorati nel passato facendosi sorpassare da tante Chiare Ferragni?
«No. Innanzitutto non sono d'accordo con i paragoni. Quello che posso notare è che siamo di fronte a una delle più grandi rivoluzioni della storia dell'umanità e la pandemia lo ha reso ancora più evidente. Pensi quanto sarebbe stato tutto peggiore senza la tecnologia di cui disponiamo. Certo,

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UNA DONNA, TANTE PASSIONI

Miuccia Prada è stilista, imprenditrice e collezionista d'arte. Dopo essersi laureata in Scienze politiche all'Università degli Studi di Milano e avere studiato Recitazione al Piccolo Teatro, è entrata nell'azienda di famiglia, fondata nel 1913 dal nonno materno Mario Prada. Con il marito, Patrizio Bertelli, l'ha poi trasformata in uno dei gruppi più prestigiosi della moda, tra i primi dieci brand del lusso per valore di mercato nel mondo.

il web e i social rappresentano un metodo di conoscenza immediata e sintetica tendente alla semplificazione, e questo può essere pericoloso. Però trovo che lavorandoci sopra possiamo trovare delle soluzioni. Nella mia azienda, per esempio, abbiamo recuperato il tempo perso introducendo nuove voci e nuovi ruoli, come quello di mio figlio Lorenzo».

C'è un'altra questione spinosa legata ai social network: si stanno trasformando in una gogna mediatica che promuove la punizione e che ha spesso bisogno di creare il mito del nemico. Stiamo tornando alle piazze dove si bruciavano le streghe?

«Questo è l'aspetto negativo che i social portano alla luce. Devo dire che io li sto ancora studiando. E poi c'è un'altra questione che non mi è chiara: i social creano un pensiero o semplicemente lo riportano? È una domanda complessa».

Di fronte a tutte queste domande, alla miriade di giudizi, di fronte ai processi pubblici del politically correct e del #MeToo, per esempio, lei si sente meno libera di prima di esprimersi?

> «La gente va e viene. Io ho imparato ad aprirmi a qualunque cambiamento. Altrimenti tutto diventa troppo difficile»

«Guardi, sinceramente ho cambiato idea sul #MeToo e anche sulle quote rosa. Riguardo a queste ultime, per esempio, se è necessaria l'esagerazione, lo so che non è l'ideale, ma se è necessaria va bene. Penso che ogni volta che ci sono delle rivoluzioni in corso succedano delle esagerazioni, e forse va bene così. Perché se non ci sono le esagerazioni, forse non cambia mai niente. Quindi adesso le accetto e penso facciano parte del processo. Del resto, i veri cambiamenti hanno sempre bisogno di momenti di rottura. E i momenti di rottura sono necessari e portano con sé esagerazioni».

A proposito di rivoluzioni: con la sua moda, col suo percorso estetico e culturale, ha contribuito allo scardinamento di molti cliché femminili. Oggi stiamo cercando di far tramontare la nostra civiltà patriarcale in favore di una più libera e inclusiva. Che cosa si può fare di più?

«Parlo per me e per quello che faccio. Fino a oggi, ho pensato di poter agire su un piano astratto e forse politico soprattutto con la mia Fondazione. Invece ora mi rendo conto che lo stesso impegno e lo stesso scopo possano essere introdotti nel mio lavoro di stilista. Forse devo imparare a essere più radicale col mio lavoro».

Ancora di più?

«Mi spiego meglio. Oggi forse non basta più dire soltanto "non sono razzista" o "sono democratica". Non basta elencare le proprie convinzioni teoriche, bisogna fare qualcosa. Sto tornando a quello che ho sempre pensato, ovvero all'ambito politico che va implementato. Ogni persona dovrebbe essere più politica perché la dichiarazione di principio non basta. Tutti dobbiamo fare un passo in più. Nel mio lavoro, però, ci sono tante contraddizioni: se lavori nel lusso, per esempio, non sei credibile. E così tendo a non fare dichiarazioni politiche».

Ma non sarebbe ora di pensare il lusso in termini di eccellenza?

«Sì, ha ragione. Ma questa è una cosa che, ammetto, non ho ancora superato. Forse è un mio vecchio preconcetto».

Sicura non sia una scusa?

«Può darsi, ci ho pensato. Anzi, può darsi benissimo. La mia paura, però, è di cadere in certe iniziative politiche degli stilisti che sono solo strumentali alla vendita. Allora preferisco sbagliare e non farle. La strumentalizzazione della politica per scopi commerciali mi fa orrore».

È più facile farlo con l'arte, con la sua Fondazione?

«Certo, perché toccano meno la realtà, sono più astratte, stanno in una sorta di limbo».

Torniamo all'arte e alla sua Fondazione: il Covid si è portato via Germano Celant, un grande curatore che con lei ha lavorato molto. Le manca?

«Celant è stato un grande maestro che ci ha insegnato la qualità. Tra di noi c'era un patto chiaro: io facevo quello che volevo e lui lo rendeva più scientifico, lo sviluppava in una prospettiva storica. Mi mancherà molto perché era un punto di riferimento anche per la sua grande intelligenza e la vastissima cultura, oltre a essere un amico. Non ci sono più storici colti e preparati come lui».

Come si fa ad andare oltre le perdite?

«Guardi, nel nostro lavoro mi sono abituata. La gente va e viene. Per risolvere il problema, io ho imparato ad aprirmi a qualunque cambiamento. Altrimenti tutto diventa troppo difficile».

A proposito di chi va e chi viene: difficilmente gli stilisti eleggono dei successori. Lei l'ha fatto scegliendo un uomo: il designer belga Raf Simons.

«Ecco, diciamo che lei è forse il primo a parlare di erede o di successione quando invece si tratta di un dialogo con un altro creativo. Ho sempre detto che non amo fare collaborazioni. Che vedo le collaborazioni con altri stilisti o come qualcosa per vendere di più o come qualcosa che finiva per essere troppo impegnativa. E io ho già abbastanza lavoro. Però l'intuizione di dialogare con lui è una bella idea che apre le porte e mette in discussione la leadership del creativo unico e solo».

Arriviamo a un altro uomo che ha scelto per la grande affinità elettiva che vi unisce: Francesco Vezzoli. Che cosa le piace di lui?

«Vezzoli è uno degli artisti più politici che io conosca, forse il più politico. Lui non vuole sembrare tale, fa di tutto per risultare frivolo, banale, superficiale. Ma di fatto è uno tra i più profondamente politici. E questo mi piace e mi rispecchia. Poi è davvero brillante. Mi diverte tantissimo quando commentiamo certe cadute di stile di molti intellettuali. Con lui posso affrontare gli argomenti più vasti e aver sempre in cambio un punto di vista propositivo. Mi piace il contesto delle sue idee e mi incuriosisce sempre. È coltissimo, anche se si sforza in ogni modo di apparire all'opposto».

Le somiglia in questo?

«Non lo so. Forse nelle intenzioni sì, ma non nei modi».

Fuggite entrambi dalla gabbia dorata di certi intellettuali...

«Oh sì, questo ci accomuna».

Eppure tanta sinistra continua a rifiutare il contemporaneo, il confronto col mondo.

«E questo è un grande errore. Che tutti stiamo pagando. Tutti. Ma c'è una giustificazione, a mio parere. Fino agli anni '80, il mondo era piccolo, bianco, limitato. E limitato era il punto di osservazione. Con l'ingresso del web il mondo è tutto insieme, tutto a disposizione. La lettura della realtà diventa difficilissima, hai a che fare con una moltitudine di culture, popoli, subculture, differenze. Una lettura globale richiede una mente agile, diversa da quella del Novecento. Era più facile prima dire chi stava dove. E quando non sai leggere il mondo non puoi nemmeno elaborare un'analisi e quindi una visione. E qui arriviamo al punto: qual è la visione che mi proponi? Qual è il vero cambiamento? E perché dovrei votarlo? Ci vuole una visione perché stiamo elaborando dei cambiamenti incredibili. E anche perché stiamo vivendo uno dei periodi più interessanti di sempre».

Lei come coltiva la sua visione?

«Leggo, parlo con le persone e nutro sempre la mia curiosità».

Quali sono le donne che oggi ammira di più?

«L'ho sempre detto: non ho miti né icone. M'interesso e mi appassiono di tutto. Devo dire, però, che sono sempre stata molto in ammirazione delle donne che lavorano e che devono affrontare ostacoli continui. Non voglio sembrare buonista, ma la fatica quotidiana delle donne che si sostituiscono allo Stato o che affrontano le violenze mi colpisce molto. Sono vere eroine».

Cosa si può, cosa si deve fare per loro?

«Leggi, ci vogliono leggi. Per loro, per il loro lavoro, per la loro tutela, per i loro figli».

Che cosa consiglia loro intanto?

«Di provare e provare ancora di più. La nostra è una lotta che continua e deve continuare sempre di più. Il problema delle lotte femminili, poi, è che sono doppie: devi fare una lotta politica pubblica e una privata. Nella sfera privata, devi perseguire i tuoi diritti mantenendo i rapporti affettivi e non rinunciando mai alla gentilezza e alla disponibilità. Mai rinunciare alle nostre qualità femminili. Io voglio usare tutti gli strumenti che ho. Quelli da donna. E quelli maschili».

Non è una questione che riguarda anche gli uomini?

«Sì, certo. Ma gli uomini, spesso, sono messi meglio di noi».

Non abbiamo parlato di moda. La moda è ancora influente?

«L'importanza della moda deriva dal suo immaginario, dalla sua presenza. La moda è come ti vesti, come ti rappresenti, come ti giudichi, come sei giudicata, come reagisci. La moda tocca le sfere più intime del pubblico e del privato, per questo è guardata con imbarazzo. E per questo è e resterà influente».

Ci vuole intelligenza per saperla usare?

«Sì, se vuoi che ti serva».

«Il problema delle lotte femminili è che sono doppie: devi fare una lotta politica pubblica e una privata»

Come vede certe nuove generazioni che la usano come una letteratura, come un linguaggio per emanciparsi da generi e cliché?

«Mi piacciono e le stimo. Ma vedo che siamo molto, molto lontani dall'eliminazione degli stereotipi e dei cliché».

Che cosa le fa più paura oggi?

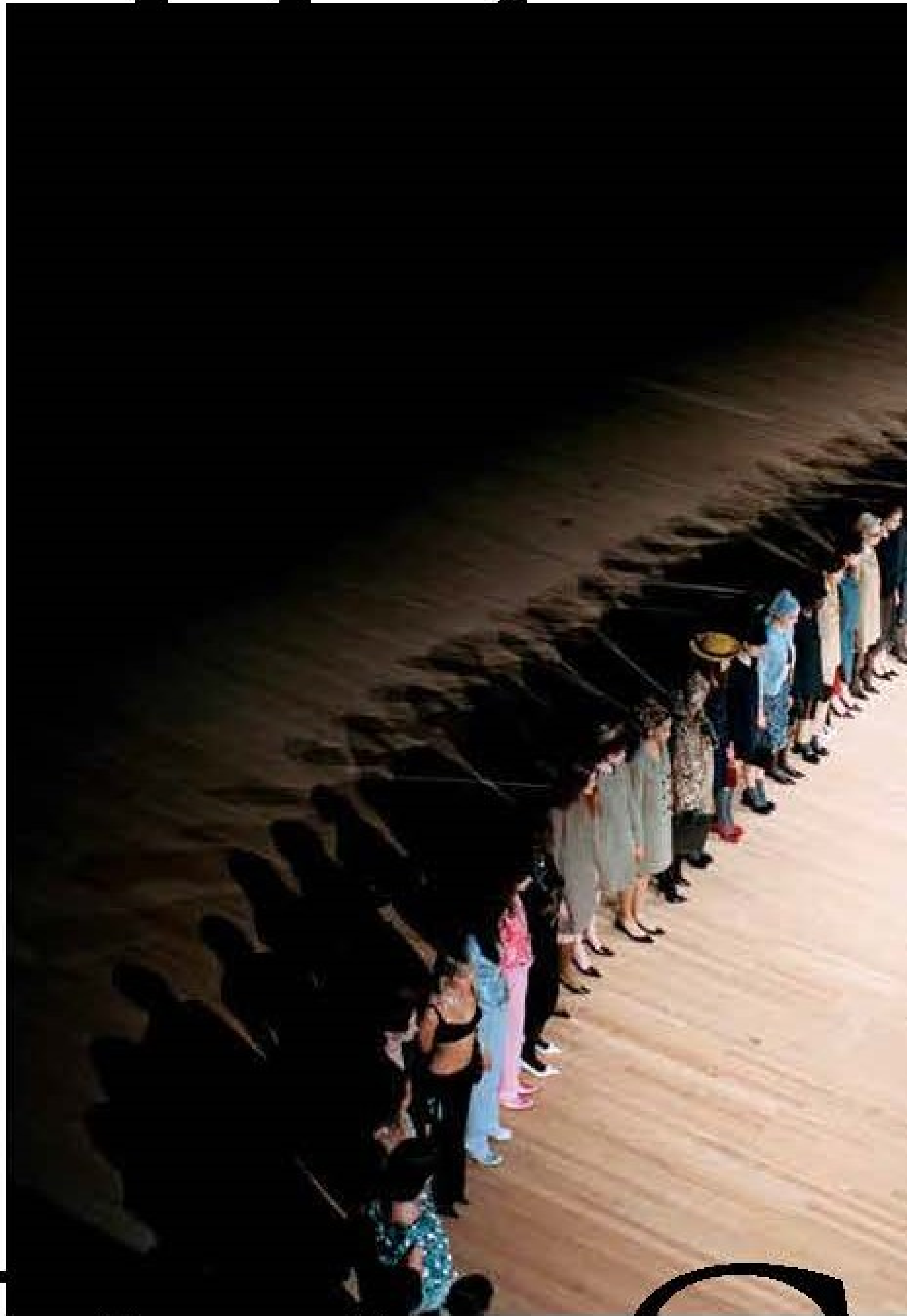
«Mi spaventa la sottovalutazione dell'importanza della cultura. La pandemia, in un certo senso, ha riportato in auge gli esperti mentre negli anni precedenti abbiamo assistito alla demolizione di tutte le élite, comprese quelle colte. Io, invece, credo fermamente nella cultura e nella conoscenza come valori fondamentali».

Un'ultima domanda: dove si vede tra dieci anni?

«La verità? Non ne ho la minima idea».

→ Tempo di lettura: **18 minuti**

THE



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LOST ON

Fashion's leading designers spent the past half-year reconsidering everything from the relentless pace of consumerism to their own relationships with creativity. What do they have to show for it?

By **CATHY HORYN**

←
Marc Jacobs's fall show at Manhattan's Park Avenue Armory in February.

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IN THE DECADES I'VE BEEN WRITING ABOUT FASHION,

I've always loved the contrast between certainty and surprise. Shows happen with an inevitable rhythm. I might travel to the same city to sit in the same seat, in the same building, for the same brand, year after year. Routine but rarely boring—in a good season, I am rejuvenated by the ideas behind a show or the smart use of double-faced wool. I find there's always something to enjoy and hopefully that eureka of recognition for a truly modern garment.

Of course, never has there been a year like this: completely adrift, everything canceled, factories shuttered, no customers. For what few shows will go on this season, I will not be traveling. That doesn't mean nothing has been happening. The people I most respect in the industry did not waste this spring and summer, even if their workflow was wildly disrupted. I wanted to survey them about the future of fashion but also its recent past—what works and what doesn't.

Turns out they wanted to talk too. For a tight-lipped bunch of creative people, I found them uncharacteristically open to speaking freely. The first interview took place in mid-May and the last in mid-August. I checked back in with most of them multiple times.

In some cases—Demna Gvasalia of Balenciaga, Alessandro Michele of Gucci, and Kerby Jean-Raymond of the American brand Pyer Moss—I discovered a dimension to their work that I hadn't previously realized. One surprise was how often the retired Belgian designer Martin Margiela came up. In addition to my conversations with them individually, these designers talked to, and about, each other admiringly. Common themes emerged: enjoying having a moment to cook and recharge. Gripes about the acceleration of production and design cycles. A lack of support for new talent. The universal recognition that things need to be more inclusive.

It seems inevitable that once people are free to circulate again, there's going to be an explosion of creativity and self-expression. Call it "Cathy's Logic" or simply Newtonian physics, but all the pent-up energy and emotion will mean a new excitement for live performance, new restaurants, and a renewed interest in style. The Roaring '20s followed the last pandemic, after all.

History provides a good way to understand both the fervor for fashion and the feeling that the industry has lost its center of gravity. The 19th century brought the rise of mass culture—through the invention of department stores, the proliferation of magazines, and the advent of all-powerful designers. The 20th century accelerated that phenomenon, and the 21st ushered in the total disruption of it. That explains why designers who became stars in the late 1990s (many of whom still hold top positions) nowadays express concern that they have lost control of their world. To an extent, they have.

It's also true that designers never had as much control as a customer might think—they're always beholden to their bosses to some degree. They can press for diversity on their runways and in their studios, for instance, but it's clear that meaningful adjustments must come from the chairman and chief-executive levels. I called Michael Burke, the CEO of Louis Vuitton, who remembered getting resistance to hiring Virgil Abloh as the men's artistic director: "Beyond Bernard Arnault [the chairman of LVMH], I didn't have too many people in my corner—inside and outside."

Burke, who is American, told me emphatically, "The CEO has to set the stage and has to make decisions that are understood by everybody, and everybody understands there's no going back." Two years ago, he promoted a woman—over a list of male candidates—to run Vuitton's French ateliers, which, with more than 3,000 employees, make up its largest division.

"It's taken eight years to make a difference," he told me. "Most CEOs are in a job for three, four years. And if you really want to do something culturally important—if you want to do something for Black talent or gender equality—it's going to take you ten years. So with most executives, you're not going to be around to get the credit for it. And that's another reason it doesn't happen."

That's a pessimistic view, perhaps, though I can see the challenges are real. And yet the ways we've all adjusted to the circumstances of the past six months make me think change can happen faster. It's dazzling to imagine what things will look like a decade from now. But I relished spending time with some of the leading designers right now, at such a strange moment in time. There was one more thing we could all agree on: Sweatpants are not the future.

PHOTOGRAPH: PREVIOUS SPREAD, BRIAN KARLSSON/COURTESY MARC JACOBS

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MARC JACOBS

Is Putting On His Heels and Going for a Walk in the Real World

When I spoke to Marc Jacobs in May, he'd just watched *Martin Margiela: In His Own Words.* "I thought it was probably the most moving, touching, beautiful documentary I've seen on fashion in—forever," he said.

Since moving into the Mercer Hotel, where he lived during the lockdown (he and husband Char Defrancesco's home in Rye was being renovated when the state halted all construction), Jacobs had been doing a lot of thinking and watching. He'd been posting on Instagram with incandescent resolve—in huge platform shoes, in purple eye shadow, vamping as Edie Beale.

I asked him what he liked so much about the documentary, which revealed the mundanities of Margiela's childhood in Belgium—the wigs his mother sold at his father's hair salon, a Barbie-doll jacket—that fed his imagination and, thus, the designers Margiela influenced, including several in this story.

"In my hotel room, I feel like 9-year-old Marc, who went to his room to escape his dysfunctional family, and in my little room, in my little world, I could be whoever I wanted to be. I was safe, I could play with dolls, I could put glitter on construction paper and hang it on my wall. So any insight into Martin's youth, I thought, *This I get.*"

During the years when Margiela was active—he quit in 2008—he avoided the media, preferring to let his work speak for itself. There was no Instagram to worry about then. Jacobs said he couldn't help but note Margiela's decision to get out just as the internet became so important.

Even before the coronavirus, because of social media's predominance, Jacobs knew things were amiss. "Social distancing was something we already did with this addiction to phones, iPads, and computers. And people, even when they are given the gift of a live experience, don't show up for it. They aren't completely *there.* A couple of years back at a show, I insisted that everybody put their damn phones away and just look at the clothes."

Founder and artistic director: **Marc Jacobs**

Founded: **1993**

Owned by: **LVMH**

Consolidated retail revenues: **Est. $300M in 2018**

Previously: **Creative director, Louis Vuitton** *(1997–2014)*

The day before we spoke, Jacobs posted on his Instagram the video from his February runway show, above the caption "MOOD AS FUCK" (since deleted). Held in the vast drill hall of the Park Avenue Armory, the show was the most personal, the most singular, in a career marked by self-expression. Jacobs worked with the choreographer and dancer Karole Armitage, whom he did not know before. He wanted to create something fun and nostalgic and, above all, urgent. At one point, 143 dancers and models moved across the floor, both apart and in serried groups—models flowing through dancers, dancers flowing through models, and everyone flowing through the audience. With Jacobs, it's never about the fashion as such, though the clothes—plain and impeccable New York clothes—were fabulous.

"I feel like I still have stories to tell—I don't know what they'd be right now," he said. "But with that last show, almost unknowingly, I felt like I was telling my history of New York and what I had learned and my heroes. If this were my last show, I would feel that I had told my story thus far."

As with every collection, fall began as a reaction to the previous one, with Jacobs talking with his closest collaborators, including the stylist Katie Grand and Joseph Carter, his director of women's design. "We said, 'How can we take the energy of the spring show but bring it back to gray, camel, black, with a bit of yellow, red, and blue—the three primary colors?' So I made rules around the colors, and that was already a big hoop to jump through. There was plenty of room. So that was our minimalist reaction to the maximalist spring. And for spring, we had the whole group of models walk out—it was all these individual characters. It didn't matter whether they were cisgender male, cisgender female, fluid. Body shape didn't matter. We weren't trying to be inclusive. I didn't care. I just wanted to dress people who inspire me."

Jacobs continued, "And then I saw that Karole Armitage had done a piece called *Drastic Classicism.* Then Katie and I had a discussion about controlled chaos. All of these things that I kept hearing over the course of months, all these conversations—whether it was with Lana Wachowski, Sofia Coppola, Steven Meisel, or Anna Sui—all of them took me to this place of what New York is. New York, in my mind, is a really classic idea of fucking with the rules. And it's also this unbridled urgency, and a sense of nostalgia, and our footprints, and our self-expression. I didn't know how to tell it without someone else to take it past the idea of models parading around en masse. And I wanted contact with the audience—very important. I wanted all the people who were modeling the clothes to look at the audience. I learned that from Bob Fosse, actually—that it's very disturbing to be pointed at or looked at, because there's this distance that the audience has from the show."

It was something Margiela had done in one of his early shows, as Jacobs reminded me: "He told the girls to look at the audience, and a kind of chaos ensued. People don't know how to deal with that. They're forced to meet what they're looking at. It's a great tension to break, but when that tension is broken and you're delighted by it, you think, *This is what contact is.*"

When I spoke to Jacobs again in July, so much had happened—the protests and riots in response to George Floyd's killing, the rage over systemic racism, the disturbing presence of paramilitary units in some cities, the tyranny of cancel culture—that it produced a jangle of new sensations on top of anxiety. But there was good reason to believe that things would change, at least in the industry. Many companies pledged to have greater Black and brown representation at executive and director levels, after decades of zero representation, and new groups like the Black in Fashion Council pledged to hold them accountable.

"I'm not a great teacher for this, but I *do* feel that I've had an awful lot of insight sitting in that room for four months," Jacobs said, echoing a sentiment voiced by other designers as they emerged from their caves in Antwerp and Rome and Brooklyn.

Jacobs was as sanguine as he was in May, though perhaps less keyed up. He had left the Mercer and settled in a rental in Rye with his husband and their dogs. He confessed, "I could be here all the time."

And he still did not want to predict what the future of dress might be post-pandemic.

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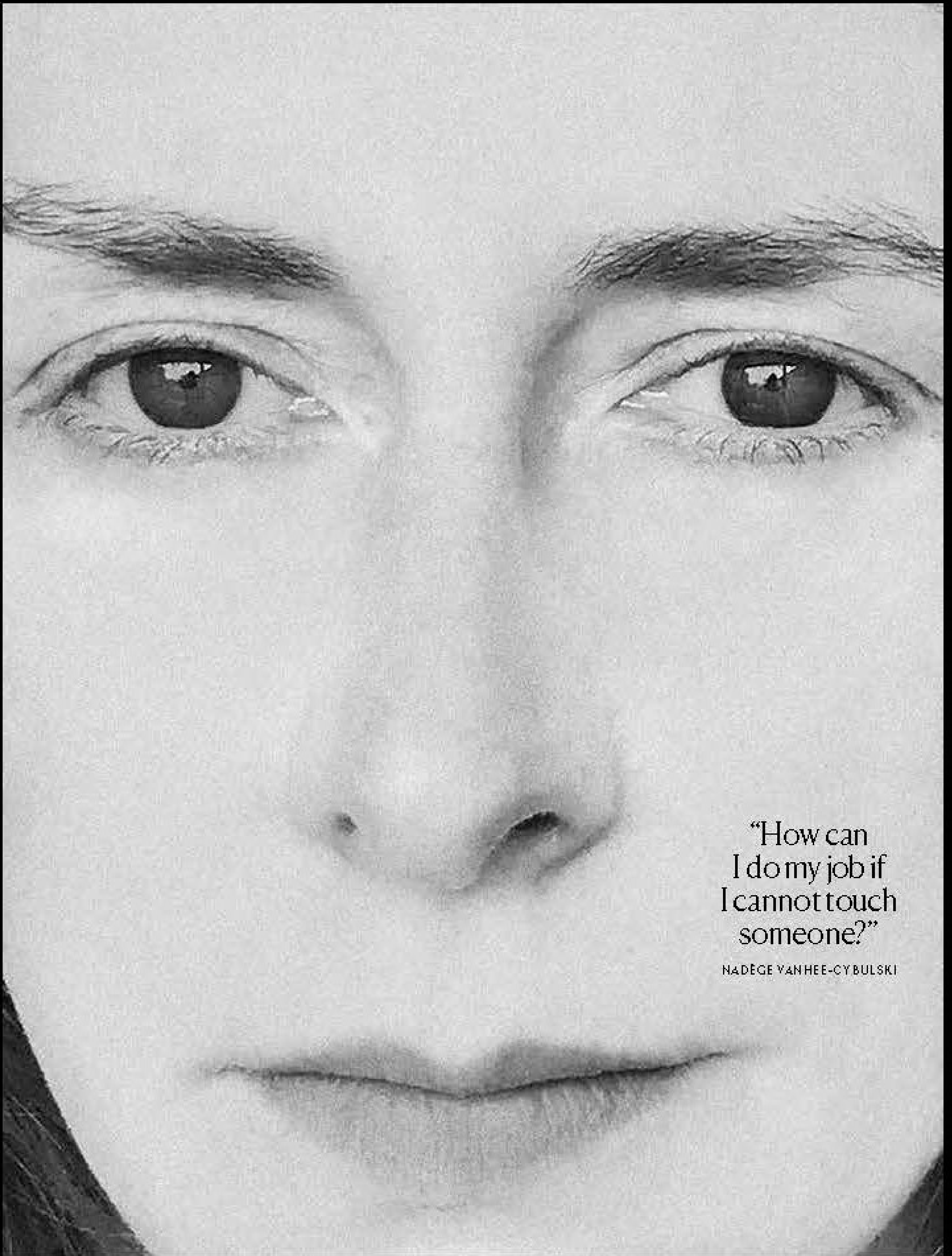
> “I feel like I still have stories to tell— I don’t know what they’d be right now.”
>
> MARC JACOBS

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON/MAGNUM

Portfolio by CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON



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"There's always that question—is fashion a mirror, or is it an escape? I think it's both."

After a pause, Jacobs said, "When I went out for a walk, I didn't go in jogging pants and sneakers. I wore a mask, but I got fully dressed. I had pearls on, I had a Celine blazer and Rick Owens platform shoes. If I had to go out for a walk, I'd put on my fanciest fucking coat, and I'd put on my highest goddamn heels. There's nothing I'd love to see more right now than a girl, in full daylight, walking down the street in a sequined dress—just, you know, with a mask. I don't really want to see a girl in a uniform. I want to see health workers in their uniforms, but I'd love to see these streets filled with people who are expresing themselves.

"I don't want to see people conforming. I want to see people spreading their wings. And that's what I keep trying to say with these posts. I'm spreading my wings. I'm painting my eyes, I'm putting on my heels, and I'm saying, 'You know what? This is the world the way I see it, and I'm going to live in this world, and I'm going to go out with a mask on.'"

NADÈGE VANHEE-CYBULSKI

Is Ready for the Nurses to Take Over Instagram

"Confinement can be very difficult for a human being," Nadège Vanhee-Cybulski asserted when we spoke in June. She was still in the Paris apartment where she'd spent months with her husband and baby. It is a comfortable apartment in shabby Pigalle, but life inside and out took on a considerably smaller dimension when people were forced to stay at home. "We were only allowed to go out for an hour, and anytime you went out you had to bring a form. So there was something quite obstructive about it. Our freedom was gone."

By August, freedom had become the main feeling of the new collection that Vanhee-Cybulski, the chief of women's ready-to-wear at Hermès, had designed remotely with her team.

Artistic director: **Women's ready-to-wear, Hermès**
Joined: **2014**
Publicly traded since: **1993**
Consolidated revenue: **Est. $7.5 B in 2019**
Previously: **Women's design director, The Row** *(2011–14)*

Hermès has always said that its customer is "moved by art, design, sensuality"—and "in the middle are the craftsmen." The Birkin might be a status handbag, the Cape Cod watch with the double-looping strap a mark of cool taste, but what finally distinguishes these iconic designs is craftsmanship. Nonetheless, the brand has employed several of the most famous designers over the years, with varying results. Jean Paul Gaultier's vision for the house during the aughts tipped the craftsmanship further toward "Fashion," which, after the sublimity of the Margiela era (1997–2003), was like sitting down to a whole foie gras served up by Eric Idle. Vanhee-Cybulski, who worked with Margiela at his own brand, is the best women's designer to work at Hermès since him and among the very best working in fashion today. What's different about her work, especially as she has become more familiar with the range and creativity of Hermès artisans, is that at its core it's calm. Sure, she can leap through the technical hoops, like the leather that made up 70 percent of her spring 2020 collection, but the result is something both functional and sensuous, never overdone—like a Bauhaus design puzzle.

"Before the lockdown, we had already made good strides with the spring [2021] collection," she told me. What they hadn't finished, they let go. She wasn't even sure how to make the rest of a collection. "How can I do my job if I cannot touch someone? You fit clothes on a body; it's a very tactile process," she said.

For inspiration, she turned to the collages by Georges Braque and other early modernists made out of non-art materials like newspaper. "To bring a specific finishing or proportion, it's actually quite easy now with Photoshop and the iPad. You can reduce the image or add another layer, and you can sketch and add to it. We could drape and then take a picture, and we could work on the silhouettes."

She got the whole team to work this way, collaboratively, on a single shared file. "Everybody was at home, so it was a way to keep the bonds. I'm privileged, I have a family. But the young people on my team, they're alone in a small flat, and it could be quite difficult."

Two months later, when I asked Vanhee-Cybulski what aspects of her lockdown process she'd like to retain, she replied, "Creative agility."

She told me, "I think we are actually entering the 21st century—now." The pandemic and its consequences are "proof that we have totally integrated into this globalized civilization. I don't think it's about going back [to what was normal]. It's about how we can evolve."

I asked her to look ahead: "We'll stay more indoors than outdoors for the next six to 18 months. I think we'll be less inclined to travel. It's almost like the public sphere is shifting away, and it's more about being inside. I'm not saying we're going to dress in pajamas. It's a question of clothes having a different function inside, so that's interesting."

She added, "People are also looking for meaning—the balance of working in a respectful manner for myself, my collaborators, my country, and, of course, other countries. More than ever, there is definitely a whole context of values that has to be created through a garment." That has been true for a while. But, she told me, "it's accelerating."

Vanhee-Cybulski, who is 42, grew up in Lille, in northern France, the daughter of an Algerian Muslim and a French Christian, and she has said her upbringing was "a great asset because I had a bigger world to look at." When we first spoke in June, she recalled that as a student at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, she admired the early designs of Raf Simons for their "sharp" silhouette.

"It was the look that I liked so much," she told me. "But I think today a woman of 20 wants something more than a look." More and more, she wants to know that her clothes are sustainably made. Vanhee-Cybulski doesn't think she has all the answers but feels that the bigger the company is, the more altruistic it should be. I mentioned that although fashion magazines are quick to promote new designers or the latest performer or artist—something they've done for decades—they rarely do it today with the same sense of mission or delight or discovery.

"I totally agree," she said. "They've dislocated themselves from the center of gravity of fashion. I think publications have lost the meaning of their jobs. I mean, they don't know anything about fashion! There are so many ways to present fashion, talk about fashion, bring in different subjects."

Vanhee-Cybulski suddenly laughed and said, "You know what's good about the pandemic? It's that all those celebrities are flushed out of the Instagram world, and it's more about nurses, doctors, the woman who goes to the supermarket and works at the checkout. That's such a good shift."

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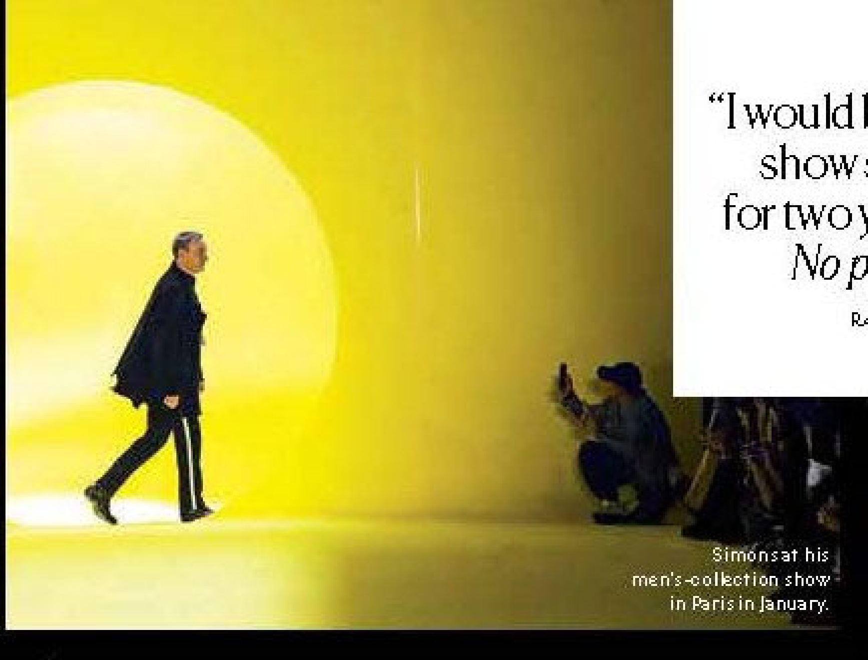
Simons at his men's-collection show in Paris in January.

> "I would be fine to not show something for two years, maybe. *No problemo.*"
>
> RAF SIMONS

RAF SIMONS

Hasn't Worn a Piece of Fashion in Months

Born in 1968 in a small Belgian town on the Dutch border, Raf Simons is considered one of the most influential designers in the world. "He did everything before anyone else, and everybody has copied him," the stylist and writer Marie-Amélie Sauvé, who works with Nicolas Ghesquière, told me in 2005. At the time, Simons was known mainly to the (then) tiny world of men's fashion as the person who introduced a generation of men to the skinny black suit. (His explanation for why he did the suit, and showed it on non-agency models, reflects his simple and direct approach to most things: "It was just because we were so small.") He went on to design women's fashion for Jil Sander, where he redefined minimalism, then to Christian Dior and Calvin Klein, with the portents of disaster of his last shows, in 2018, suddenly seeming prophetic.

Founder and creative director: **Raf Simons**

Co-creative director: **Prada** *(2020)*

Chief creative officer: **Calvin Klein** *(2016–18)*

Creative director: **Christian Dior** *(2012–15)*, **Jil Sander** *(2005–12)*

Now Simons has joined forces with Miuccia Prada. Their first collection will be shown in Milan in September, although details on exactly how that will happen have not been settled. Still, for any number of reasons, COVID included, it can't come at a more welcome time. As Ghesquière told me this summer, "That's one of the best pieces of news in our industry for a long time."

When Simons and I first talked, in May, much of the world was shut down. He was in his apartment in Antwerp making the most of the quiet. "You start to realize what you already knew," he told me. "For example, in fashion, we work with design teams and other commercial teams, like marketing. You're involved in this thing, it's just ongoing, and yet you know the way it's going is not exactly the way you like it. But you do it. I don't know what it is, but something just sucks you into this systematic kind of behavior. It's almost boring to talk about it. When to show. How to show. And how to build that up. Everything we do right now is following a timeline that is ridiculous, and very often it's not about what you want to say. I would be fine to not show something for two years, maybe. *No problemo.*" Now there's a radical idea!

When Simons started in fashion, he didn't really know about all the structures in place. "I felt I really wanted to say something, and I didn't even think about how it would evolve." He thinks about the young designers and wishes they would think about things in bigger terms, not just about the clothes. He wants them to challenge norms, even as he knows how hard that is.

"The older generation might have the desire to change the system. Now it's popping up everywhere: *Change the system, change the system.*" But, he said, even if you are the decision-maker at a brand, no matter what you want, "those decisions are not made by you alone anymore. There are so many other things that come into the picture that you cannot just shake it off."

For the past month, Simons had been conferring with Bianca Quets Luzi, the CEO of his brand, about what they could offer for spring 2021, and they decided to reissue pieces from the archive. It made sense, they felt, because of the industry's production challenges and the fact that it's the label's 25th anniversary. "All of us, because we're in this system, do way too much, and now we are obliged to do less for economical reasons," he said. "In a way, it's fantastic."

Simons isn't sure how this period will influence fashion. Free associating, he asked, "There are all these things people think they need, but do they really need them?" He laughed. "I'm not sure I'm the best person to talk about this, but honestly, I haven't worn a piece of fashion in months."

DEMNA GVASALIA

Discusses Fashion With His Shrink Every Week

Demna Gvasalia has been the creative director of Balenciaga since 2015—the first person from the former Soviet Union to achieve such a perch in fashion and the most important designer from that part of the world since Valentina Nicholaevna Sanina Schlee, the New York couturier known simply as Valentina, who, between 1928 and 1957, created clothes of astonishing originality.

One was born in Kiev in 1899 and fled during the Revolution; the other was born 82 years later in Sokhumi, on the Black Sea, where his family endured Georgia's civil war in the early '90s and eventually settled in Germany. What separates the lives of these two people—and explains the immense gap in between—is totalitarianism, of course. It crushed the ambitions of generations of writers, artists, thinkers, and, presumably, designers in the USSR as well as in the nations of the Eastern Bloc.

Creative director: **Balenciaga**

Joined: 2015

Owned by: **Kering**

Revenue: **Est. $1.2B in 2019**

Previously: **Head designer, Vetements** *(2014–19)*

Gvasalia has shown, first with Vetements, the label he founded in 2014,

PHOTOGRAPH: FRANCOIS GUILLOT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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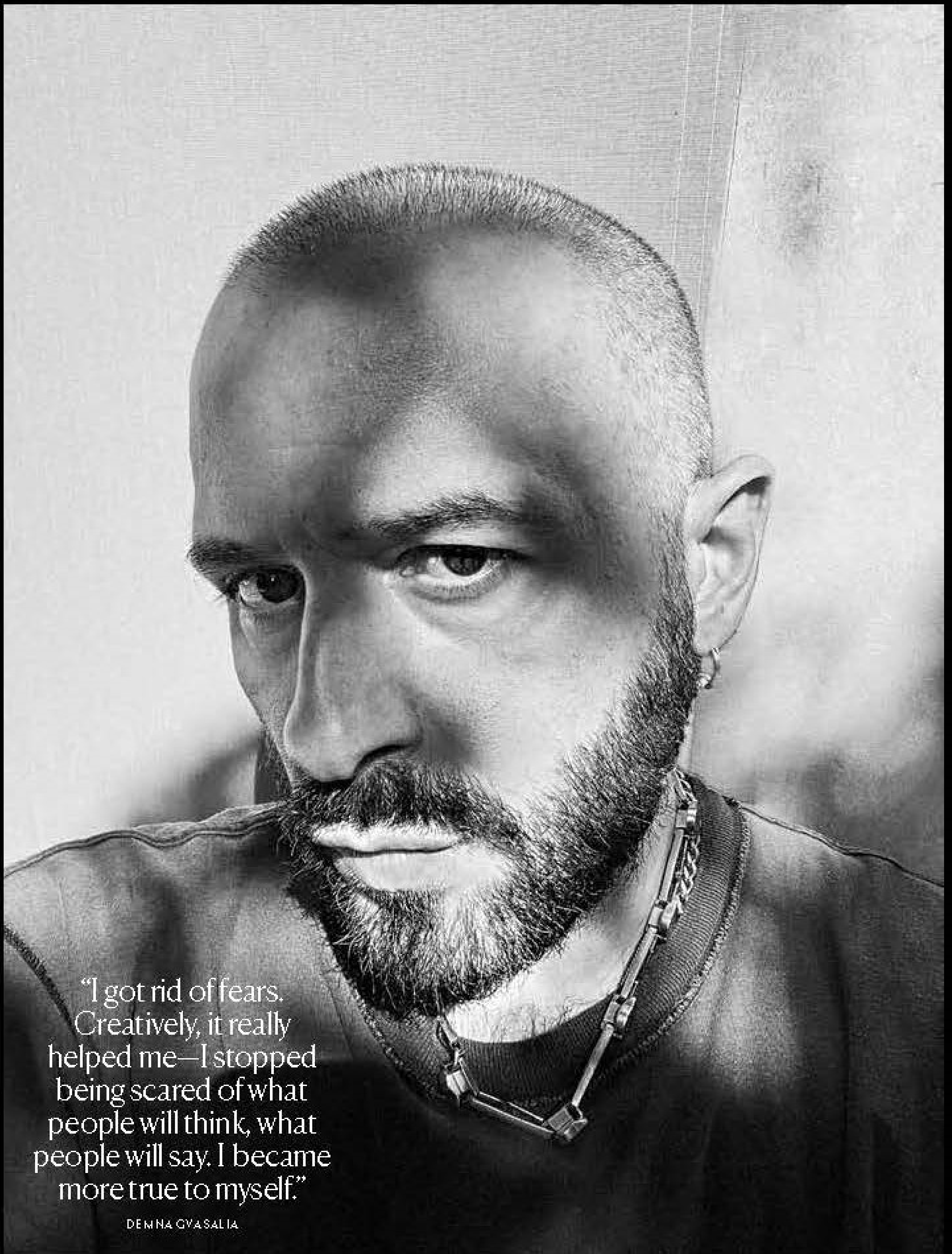
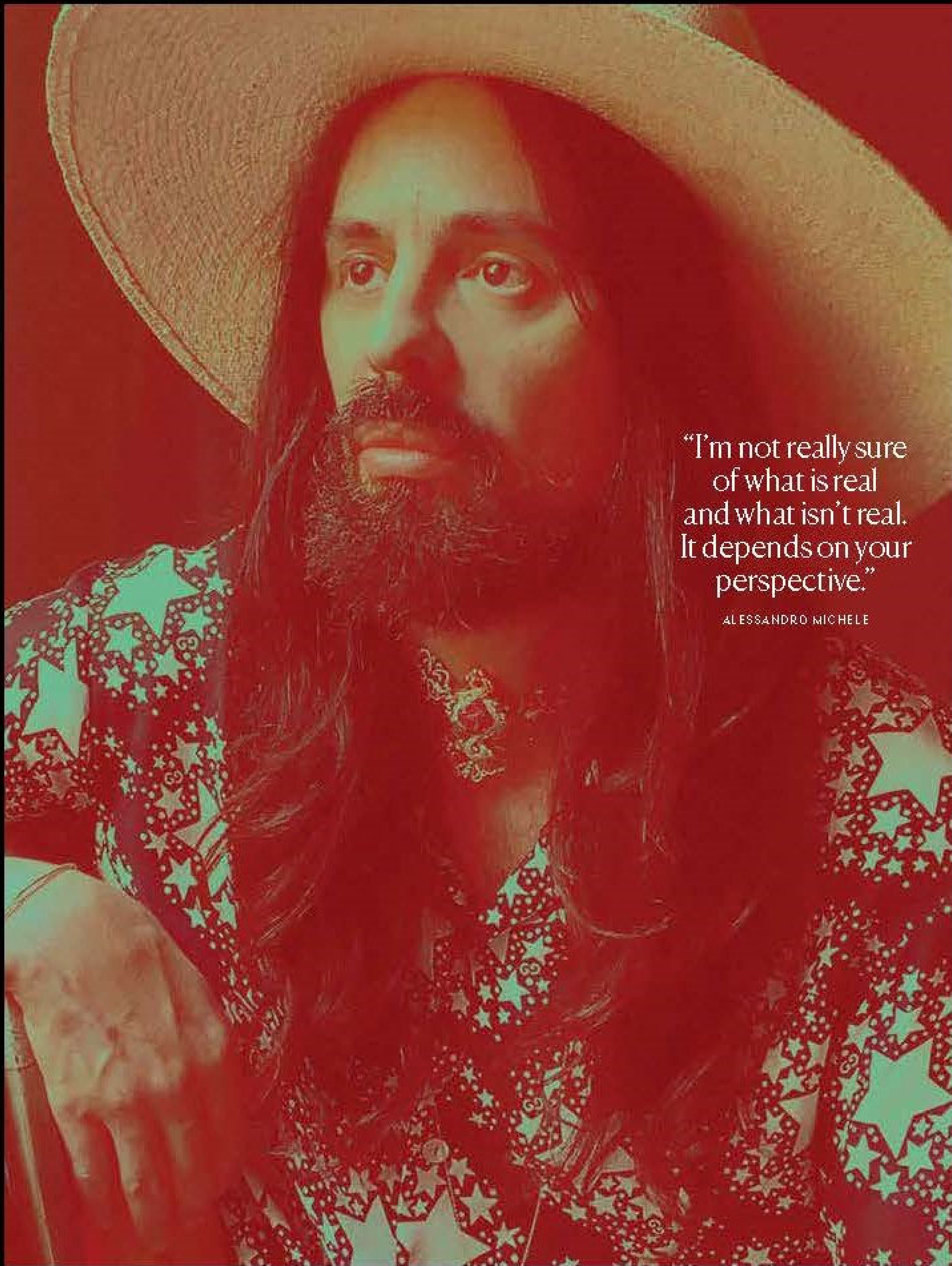


“I got rid of fears. Creatively, it really helped me—I stopped being scared of what people will think, what people will say. I became more true to myself.”

DEMNA GVASALIA



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and more ambitiously with Balenciaga, that coming from a repressive state was not a creative dead end—that the experience of fear, isolation, propaganda, secret police, and bad clothing was as valuable a birthright as any in the West and maybe more relevant, given everything that's happening. And he has proved that even great houses like Balenciaga need not depend for their survival on the values and feelings of the West, that they can go outside for creative expression and actually thrive. Since Gvasalia joined the 83-year-old French company, annual sales have more than doubled to $1 billion.

His clothes convey a sense of control and a sparseness, occasionally taken to extremes, with molded suits and steroidal puffers. They don't attempt to ring the usual aspiration bells. The shows seem designed to throw you off your bearings. Is a thing real, or is it fake? The spring 2020 show was set in a modern government chamber, totally fabricated, with models clad in democratic power dress. Was the show disturbing because it seemed to normalize the banal uniforms of power and therefore power itself? A colleague thought so: "Detestable—without hope." Or was it a bit like a political meme, funny but not really funny? Then in March, shortly before the lockdown, Gvasalia invited us back to the same space, now virtually blacked out with a deep, dark chasm in the center. Except it was a fiction, or a double fiction, because the chasm turned out to be a shallow pool of petrol made to look like water, and the narrative a dystopia. Manipulating your ability to perceive reality, creating what cybersecurity experts call "media mirage," are tactics of Russian trolls and propagandists. Gvasalia plays with these references constantly.

Three years ago, Gvasalia moved to Switzerland, and that's where I found him in mid-May, sheltering in place with his husband, the well-regarded musician and composer Loïk Gomez, at their rural home near Zurich. Before the pandemic, he commuted once a month to Balenciaga in Paris by train. He is warm, quick to laugh, and extremely polite. He speaks seven languages, holds degrees in economics and fashion design, and is 39.

Before the pandemic even hit, he'd asked his creative team to imagine what fashion might look like in 2030. To imagine a kind of fashion time machine. What would the world need then? Why not make it now? Gvasalia said he picked a year in the foreseeable future because our own accelerated period of change backs up belief in the imaginary. "We can still connect to it," he said. "One of the most important things to us [on the team] was the idea of reducing, because it's also something we're facing now because of the pandemic. Do we need so many products?"

Indeed, budget cuts as a consequence of plunging revenues have forced designers everywhere to be nimble. Gvasalia gave himself the challenge of doing the whole collection in sustainable fabrics—a first at the house and eons from the silk bombazines and zibelines of Cristóbal Balenciaga's day. "Nobody will see much of the difference, but it just feels different," he told me.

He has also been pondering different methods of communicating his vision, namely, "the show." Or will shows go the way of dear old bombazine and zibeline even after it's safe to gather again? "It shouldn't always be a repetitive kind of thing, a show *always* during Fashion Week. You have the 200 people who are invited to the show and 80,000 watching it online. And all this effort and expense of making this huge set and 20 minutes—that's the longest show I've ever done."

He laughed. "It's quite 2010. It doesn't go well with the whole idea about the future." Digital is one option, he said, but "I think we can also create more experiential events, where … it's something that takes place over a longer period, so the investment in the scenography actually makes sense. And the event doesn't have to happen only in Paris."

Gvasalia talked about work he has done on the issue of identity, both personally and artistically. ("I can tell you, I discuss it with my shrink every single week.") I asked him again about the difference at Balenciaga—what had released that wonderful, chilling remoteness into the world? "I got rid of fears. Creatively, it really helped me—I stopped being scared of what people will think, what people will say. I became more true to myself."

ALESSANDRO MICHELE

Owns 35 Editions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

In August, I spoke for a second time to Alessandro Michele, Gucci's phenomenally successful creative director, who was staying at his Umbrian estate about two hours from Rome. Ever since our first conversation over WhatsApp in June, something had gnawed at me.

Michele's approach has been called curatorial, maximal, even excessive. But that's not the feeling I got during our first meeting. It was innocence. He was so gentle, even dreamy. Although I knew his work well enough, one thing our conversation made abundantly clear was just how much Michele has the support of his CEO, Marco Bizzarri. Without that backing, no designer could have done what he did in 2015-16—essentially throw the baby out with the bathwater. Michele's fashion was geeky; it relied on vintage styles; above all, it was unsexy. Nothing could have been further from the knowing glamour of Tom Ford's Gucci. It was a creative shift that worked. In the past five years, Gucci's revenues have more than doubled to $10.5 billion.

Creative director: **Gucci, since 2015**
Joined: 2002
Owned by: **Kering**
Revenue:
Est. $10.5B in 2019

Where Ford expressed the grown-up world of sophistication, Michele expresses childhood—before we're spoiled by civilization. By fashion! He shows many gawky-chaste long-sleeved dresses—and, often, one or two outfits symbolizing authority, like a matronly gray suit that appeared in his February show. Michele's clothes are not just different from Ford's; they are the opposite. "From the start, I was not thinking about fashion," he said. "I was thinking of the beautiful shirts on our teachers. I was thinking of the beautiful things I saw on my mom and my granny."

Michele owns 35 editions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* and, as countless critics have pointed out, a key theme of *Alice* is the insanity of adulthood. Which, of course, she rejects at the end. "I love that it is kind of a psychedelic experience of your childhood," he told me. "Because I'm not really sure of what is real and what isn't real. It depends on your perspective. Fashion is a piece of this huge story. I always say it's a floor in between. It's like the hole that Alice enters."

Gucci's success affirms why trusting a creative's intuition, and not market data and surveys, matters. Michele, who spent the lockdown in his Roman apartment, said he talked to Bizzarri early on about reducing the number of annual shows from five to just two. He felt exposure to so much fashion was lessening its cultural power. "People don't care," he said. Above all, he worried that the industry should have made changes before a crisis like the pandemic hit.

But that naïveté sometimes gets him in trouble. Sweaters from his February 2018 show half-covered models' faces with knitted balaclavas or yanked-up turtlenecks with an outlined cutout for

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the mouth, "suggesting a post-operative state," as one writer put it. One of those sweaters—in black, with a red lip outline—led to charges of racism against Gucci a year later, when someone on Twitter posted an image of it as an example of blackface. Bizzarri flew to New York for a meeting organized by the design legend Dapper Dan, who is also a Gucci partner, with corporate leaders and inclusivity experts. The next month, the brand announced the $5 million Gucci Changemakers Impact Fund with grants for scholarships and U.S. nonprofits focused on creating opportunities in diverse communities.

Michele admits that all of this was something of an accident: "It's something that happened because I was ignorant. I didn't know. But there is always a time to learn, and I learned a lot. I feel myself really on another land after that episode. We are getting so much energy, and we are sharing so much with everybody. I want to say thank God that it happened. We know more than we knew before."

Prada at the Miu Miu show for Paris Fashion Week in March. →

MIUCCIA PRADA

Is Too Wise for Post-Pandemic Predictions

The late writer Ingrid Sischy once described Miuccia Prada's approach to design, or to most anything that interests her, as "sparring and talking." I've had conversations with Prada—before her shows in Milan, a very long lunch interview in 2014—and been aware of how open her mind is. But equally, and with a nice, sweet jab, she can reject an idea. Followers of Prada are familiar with everything she has done over the past three decades—she showed her first collection in 1988 at the age of 39—but to be confronted by her brilliance, even over Zoom, is to again be reminded that fashion is defined less by craft and materials than by well-thrashed ideas.

Undeniably, though, the Prada company is at a turning point. The Lombardy region was hit hard by the coronavirus, and Miuccia and her husband, Patrizio Bertelli, Prada's chief executive, had initially focused, like many Italian business owners, on protecting lives and livelihoods. In a conference call last month with financial analysts, Bertelli, with typical candor, acknowledged the severe effects of the recession. And then there is Prada's new partnership with Raf Simons, which officially began over the summer. It promises both excitement and the unknown.

Chief designer and co-CEO: **Prada**
Joined: **1978**
Publicly traded since: **2011**
Revenue: **Est. $3.6B in 2019**

When we spoke in July, Prada was in the living room of her Milan apartment, a large, loftlike room with books, artwork (a huge Baldessari was to her right), and a pair of deep-green sofas. She had on a golden-yellow silk dress.

She wasn't in the mood to ponder the ways the pandemic might change society. "Maybe what I don't like about this moment is the rhetoric of what will happen post-coronavirus—that we will all be good, that we will all be better," she said, somewhat grumpy but thoughtful. "The intelligent will stay intelligent and will understand even more, and the ones who don't care or who are superficial will stay the same. So let's see if people learn something."

She wasn't finished. "The other rhetoric that I don't like is that 'we are in a moment like after the war.' It is difficult to define, but I have the impression that the First World War and the Second were moments when people were somehow more innocent, and so there was a really pure joy and pleasure during the reconstruction. People were dancing in the street when the war was finished. I don't see happiness now. First of all because we are still under the threat and also because the world is so complicated, so many negative things [are still] happening. And of course the internet amplifies more the bad things than the good. So you're constantly submerged by negativity."

I said, "People often point to Dior's New Look in 1947 as an example of a rebirth of creativity."

She wasn't having it. "I'm not negating that you can have moments of dressing up and trying to cheer up. Of course that will happen. But not like that moment—it was so different. I don't see any similarities with that moment."

> "Being a rich fashion designer, I always refuse to talk about politics."
>
> MIUCCIA PRADA

I mentioned Simons's comment that the "pandemic has shaken us out of systems" and that Marc Jacobs had said something similar. Prada was more practical, acknowledging that there's a fashion-show arms race. "Basically, as designers, we are at the service of the company. And so if the company decides it wants to do 20 shows and accelerate—and there will always be somebody big that accelerates—then you have to accelerate." If you decide to go small, she told me, "you risk to go out of the system."

The system of capitalism, to be exact. "We also felt that there was too much stuff, too much of everything. But designers cannot change the economic system. We can try to do less, be more conscious of the environment, but this is so little compared to the reduction of the huge waste in the world. Any critic should be more deeply political than just of the system of fashion. I totally agree with what my colleagues say. I totally agree. But I am more cynical in trying to understand the difficulties of something like that."

PHOTOGRAPH: HOLLY SJ LOWE

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So how will change come? "First of all, people should go back to voting. I know a lot of young people who say, 'I don't like politics, I don't vote.' And I say, 'Listen, that is a way you can influence politics.' The only solution I see if you really want to change things is to be more political and dedicate more time to think about it. It must be a collective answer."

Prada has been invested in "the collective" since she joined the Communist Party as a university student in Milan in the '60s, though for young Europeans at the time it was a pretty typical thing. Politics clearly still anchors her, though she knows that, as a fashion designer, she's compromised.

"Politics is one of the things I care about most," she said, laughing, and added, "but being a rich fashion designer, I always refuse to talk about politics. I don't want to do politics because I am a fashion designer who does clothes for rich people, so how can I be a politician? The moment that I eventually will stop doing clothes and I change jobs, actually I could do it. I do politics in all different ways, through action but never as a declaration."

REI KAWAKUBO

Didn't Stop Working for a Minute

Few individuals have had more impact on how people dress than Rei Kawakubo, the founder of Comme des Garçons. Her experiments with patternmaking in the early '80s turned the conventions of tailoring inside out and led to the method known as deconstruction. That broken-looking dress of yours, with the slashed sleeves, can be traced back to her influence. Those pop-up stores? That too was her invention in 2004, though she called hers "guerrilla" stores. Ideas come to her randomly and intuitively—a crumpled piece of paper handed to her team became the basis of a dress that crumpled around the body. One of my favorite collections—of all collections—featured 34 variations of one garment, a skirt. No tops and shoes, though some funny horn-shaped hats. Shown on a plywood runway in a gilded Paris salon in 2003, it was a fantastic display of abstraction and a nice way to mull on uniformity. A small woman with a birdlike build, Kawakubo is now 77. She lives in Tokyo, and because her husband and business partner, Adrian Joffe, who is also her translator, was in Paris in mid-July, we did this interview by email. Contrary to the impression that Rei K. is a perfect enigma, she revealed some surprising things about herself.

Founder and creative director: **Comme des Garçons**
Founded: **1973**
Owned: **Independently**
Revenue: **Est. $320M in 2018**

Unlike many of her peers, she didn't stop working. "I strongly fear that once I take a break from my work of creation, I won't be able to get back there again, that I won't be able to move forward anymore," she wrote.

"To create means to keep looking for something new all the time, no matter where you are, no matter what kind of situation you are in, and that is the truth. Sticking to this policy, we at Comme des Garçons have had 30 percent of our staff come to work every day to keep the company going while maintaining the utmost precaution of not spreading the virus during this period when the government requested people to 'stay home' (never 'locked down' in Japan). Me, too. I went to work every day from early morning to keep working on creation as well as on administrative stuff of the company."

I asked how isolation and separation from Europe shaped her early ideas. "I have always been outgoing. I have visited a small village in Peru, a Maasai tribe in Kenya, and numerous cities in Europe and America and so on. I have never felt or thought I was isolated or separated from anything ever. I have always been free. It was least expected that you would ask me such a question," she said.

The pandemic is very hard to fathom, but Kawakubo has actually evoked loss and fear in several collections. I asked her how the consequences of the pandemic might affect the look of fashion, perhaps not immediately but later?

"I never imagined or expected this global situation we are facing right now would come about. It feels like what I have built in my life so far has vanished all at once, that I have to start all over again from scratch, but I don't have much time left to restore the loss. There isn't any other way, however, except to start working again in order to move forward. Having had such a terrible experience as this, people will most probably conform to live their lives within their boundaries, which would in a sense keep us from moving forward. And that is what I am worried about. To create fashion and art, we need a mind to do outrageous things, to be different from others, and to let yourself go."

I told her that many designers have expressed frustration with the "fashion system"—the crushing show schedule, the overproduction, etc. Yet this is not a problem she faces, because she has kept her independence and creative freedom. While designers like Alessandro Michele at Gucci are finding their way back to making and showing less, the team under Kawakubo has been repeating the same formula of two shows a year, taking wholesale orders, and making products. "In other words, we run a steady, well-grounded business," as Kawakubo put it.

"The fashion industry has derailed off its steady course because it has surrendered to the worship of money and been affected by the mass media, which is also controlled by Mammonism. The current situation is brought about as the result of having forgotten the value of taking time in making good things and how important it is to make new things. We must get back to our basics."

But basics for Kawakubo mean something slightly different. Her women's collections in recent years have been intentionally abstract. As she has described her garments, "Not an object of art but also not an item of clothing." I wondered, for her, what is the value of abstraction?

"We live in a time when diversity is more appreciated than ever. We must approve and find values in different styles and tastes: easy clothes one can wear without much thought, low-priced clothes, dresses that uplift the spirit, uniforms, poison-like clothes, etc. [Kawakubo meant poison, or *doku* in Japanese; but her meaning here is something "very strong—much, much better than boring." So not necessarily bad.] I wish the media would fight hard against the worship of money and support diverse ideas and values."

She has no intention of making easy clothes. "I want to make clothes one must think about, search for, sympathize with, and struggle to wear."

At the same time, her men's collections are full of actual clothes—playful, progressive. In a 2017 interview, she noted that women have become more conservative and men are more expressive. She told me, "Young men today are full of energy. They try to express themselves through what they wear. They don't mind working extra hours to get money to buy the clothes they like. On the contrary, I am not so sure about women. I don't

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Kawakubo backstage at Comme des Garçons in Paris in January. ←

know whether they don't know what they want or they don't like to look strong. I feel frustrated with them. They think they can fight quietly? This trend surrounding today's women is not good for my business, either. I want them to express themselves through what they wear and fight against this world."

I asked her if she thought anger could ever be a force for change. "This world is full of injustice and absurdity. I put this energy of anger into creation. I get angry and work hard every day and night. That's the least of what I can do now."

"The fashion industry has derailed off its steady course because it has surrendered to the worship of money."

REI KAWAKUBO

STELLA McCARTNEY

Might Not Recognize You Anymore

I'm literally in any fucking room where I can get Wi-Fi. It's the comedy of life here," Stella McCartney told me in June. She spent the lockdown with her husband and their four children at their country home in Wiltshire. "It's very scary for everyone. Business is affected dramatically."

In early February, the Boston-based management consultancy Bain & Co. identified sustainability and social responsibility as ideas strengthened by the pandemic and advised luxury brands to take action. This is not news to McCartney. She is the leader in sustainable and traceable fashion, a path she took when she founded her company in London in 2001 and that she has imaginatively widened in the past decade to include garments made from recycled bottles, fishing net, even spider-spun silk. Last year, McCartney sold a minority stake in her brand to LVMH and became a special adviser to chairman Bernard Arnault on ways for the luxury group to reduce its carbon footprint.

Founder and designer: **Stella McCartney**

Founded: **2001**

Bought back from: **Kering** *(2018)*

Brand sales: **Est. $320M in 2017**

"We're looking at the world today as more uncertain than ever, and obviously I have this bittersweet moment—I have a full day ahead of me, like I would if I was just normally at work, and yet I'm not in the city. I have time to do things I wouldn't normally do. It has a very interesting, double-edged quality," she said. She's not sure when or how she will go back to an office, but she acknowledged the whole mess has taken a financial hit on everybody in her business. Eighty percent of her employees are women, many of them mothers, and with kids out of school, she's asking the obvious questions. There's a fair amount of wondering, "How do we manage this in a way that we can actually do our jobs?"

Ethical consumption—from the environment to inequality—was already a high priority for her company, but the pandemic has accelerated that conversation for millennial consumers. McCartney may be well poised to talk to that trend. She thinks so, albeit tentatively. "None of us saw *this* coming. I am driven by a belief system that will be better for all of us on Earth, if we can try to have better business models that slightly mirror what I'm trying to do with the Stella McCartney brand. It will help not only the planet but the creatures that we inhabit it with, and that is weirdly at the core of this whole frickin' virus."

Meanwhile, the situation with her suppliers changes daily. It sounds as though there's almost no routine: "When you work in a sustainable way in any industry, you have to be so much more ahead with timing. I have to work three or four years in advance to source sustainable viscose, for example."

That makes it hard to plan for a spring collection that needed to be produced while the world went into various states of lockdown. But McCartney was, typically, ahead of the curve. "I started with the new collection before the show in March and, funnily enough, I had already said to my team, 'I don't want to order any fabrics this season. I actually want to use what we have in the warehouse.'"

Many designers see the pandemic as an opportunity for a collective reset, to slow down. Yet others are skeptical of whether that can happen. McCartney insisted otherwise at first. "Our industry should be at the forefront of change. I said before the COVID-19 situation that we've relied far too long on a sourcing platform that's hundreds of years old. We need to shift. That goes for everything—how you present a collection, how you price it, how you work with the people who make that collection visible, how you sell it. Everything is up for grabs right now."

Later, when I asked her about the future of Fashion Week, she was less certain. "The fear for me is that it really, really won't go away." She laughed. "We'll just be right back in it."

In July, when we spoke, McCartney was just venturing into the world of London, feeling strange to be back. "I went to a restaurant the other night for the first time in months," she told me. "I actually saw Phoebe [Philo]. But half the people, I was like, *I know that person*. I couldn't remember names. It was so bizarre."

PHOTOGRAPH: ILKER AKYOL

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“When you work in a sustainable way in any industry, you have to be so much more ahead with timing. I have to work three or four years in advance to source sustainable viscose, for example.”

STELLA McCARTNEY

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"There are so many brands that are stupid, not trying to move with the times."
KERBY JEAN-RAYMOND

KERBY JEAN-RAYMOND

Is Not Interested in the Scraps

"The fashion industry has never worked for me—like, none of it. The wholesale model, the press model, none of it has worked," said Kerby Jean-Raymond. "And I don't know if that's because of who I am, the kinds of clothes I made, whether or not my company ever understood merchandising, whether our fan base was willing to adhere to the same rules that have worked for legacy brands like Gucci and Saint Laurent."

Jean-Raymond is the 33-year-old founder of Pyer Moss, a men's and women's label based in New York City. In 2015, after several years of making contemporary sportswear—jeans, leather jackets, and the like—he began showing clothes that reflected Black heritage. Jean-Raymond had always referenced Black culture and his own activism to some degree, usually with messaging on a shirt, and gospel choirs were a feature on his runways. But that September, Jean-Raymond went further than he ever had. He completely abandoned the kind of clothing he had been doing, which, in all honesty, looked like an edgier version of Kenneth Cole, and instead showed dresses inspired by the drape of choir robes, except in pale blue and sunny yellow, and a T-shirt depicting a Black man grilling food, plus another outfit showing, in vivid colors, a Black dad cradling a baby. Not only did he represent "Black people doing normal things," as he put it, but Jean-Raymond also held the show at the Weeksville Heritage Center, on the site of one of the country's first free Black communities.

Founder and creative director: **Pyer Moss**

Founded: **2013**

Owned: **Independently**

Annual sales: **Undisclosed**

Last September, he took over the Kings Theatre in Flatbush, this time with a 90-member choir. By then, he had decided to show whenever he wanted to, counter to the industry practice of holding two or three shows a year. Close to 3,000 people came—the capacity of the theater. So did every major fashion publication as well as general-news outlets.

Jean-Raymond was at his home in Brooklyn when we spoke in late May. The son of a New York City electrical technician who emigrated from Haiti, he is a great mixture of intensity and droll humor.

"For my part, Pyer Moss was introducing a new generation to fashion that didn't care about fashion as much as activism and music and collaboration," he told me. "Our customer doesn't need four collections a year. We stopped doing that. We did one. We also realized that our client wasn't noticing all the nuances that were on our runway. For the most part, we have to post something on Instagram five or six times before people notice a graphic, for example.

"One of the biggest mistakes we made early on was that we thought, *Okay, we're going to compete with Margiela, with Dries*. We can't do that," he continued. "We weren't the only stupid ones, either. There are so many brands that are stupid—that are just trying to piggyback off the existing legacy customer and not trying to move with the times." Today, more than 70 percent of Pyer Moss's business is direct to consumer, via online sales and pop-up stores; the rest is wholesale to stores.

It always amazed me that so many young designers were advised to structure their businesses around the wholesale model. That system was already falling apart before the pandemic hit, and now with all the retail bankruptcies, many of those brands won't survive.

"Who the fuck are they getting advice from?" he asked. "And why? Because the person giving the advice is associated with a publication? It sounds really idiotic to me. Have those individuals ever run their own businesses?"

In lieu of a show, this fall Jean-Raymond had hoped to host a drive-in movie; the film chronicles Pyer Moss's development since 2018. There may also be a surprise performance and a pop-up shop. Jean-Raymond, who doesn't segment deliveries by season—he calls them Offering 1, Offering 2, and so on—will offer items from the Kings show along with new things. They'll be available online from October till the end of the year. Another point of difference is that the brand doesn't generally allow markdowns by retailers. It prefers to buy back stock and then create "archival" sales around them.

The next time we spoke was in July, after the most intense protests. "None of this surprised me," he said mildly. I mentioned a recent series in *Women's Wear Daily*, in which the trade publication had surveyed some of the biggest apparel corporations, including PVH, which owns Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger, and found that very few had nonwhites at executive and board levels.

Jean-Raymond said, "Do we want to continue to buy into and ask for help from a system that doesn't represent us? As you can see, most of these boards are all white, most of the creative directors are white, and when Black people are asked to help run these organizations, most of the time we're treated the same way Africa is treated. We have a lot of creative resources, and they take those resources and sell them abroad.

"So we've run into this weird conundrum. Do we play in, or do we play out? The obvious answer is we play out, but we don't have the resources to start businesses."

He paused. "It's like this fucked-up prison system, you know. It's like being in jail and being asked to join the prison basketball league."

He proposed that a company fund a group specifically for Black and brown fashion brands. "It means leveling the playing field. Not having to buy into these existing systems, but be able to have the resources to create our own systems. That's what the end goal looks like to me. I don't think asking [corporations] for scraps is the right thing. Instead of scraps, ask them for platforms."

REED KRAKOFF

Is Looking for a New Design Language

Early in the lockdown, Reed Krakoff got into a routine of watching documentaries. Working from his own list of nearly 100 titles, the 56-year-old chief artistic officer at Tiffany & Co. watched a documentary every night—on Miles Davis, Robert Motherwell, the Agnellis. Anything about geniuses and artisans, and why they made what they made.

"It was a really good way to create some sort of design language in my own little world, late at night," he told me in mid-June from Connecticut, where he was living with his

Chief artistic officer: **Tiffany & Co.**

Joined: **2017**

Pending sale to: **LVMH**

Reported sales: **Est. $4.4B in 2019**

Previously: **Founder and designer, Reed Krakoff** *(2010–15)*; **executive creative director, Coach** *(1998–2014)*

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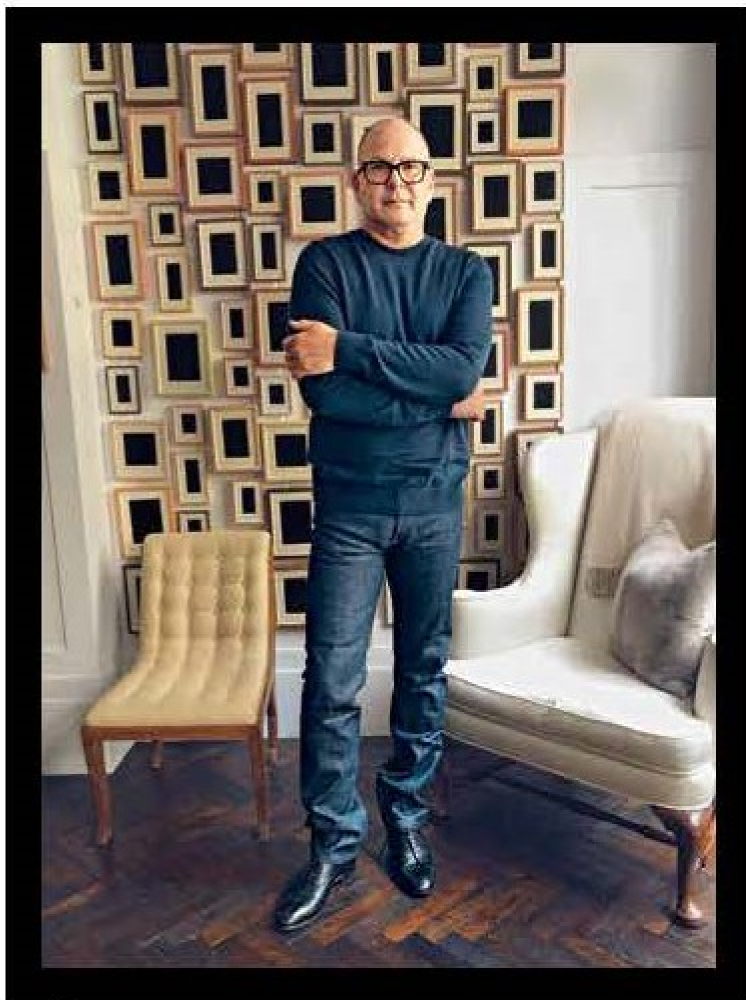

↑ Reed Krakoff

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON/MAGNUM FOR NEW YORK MAGAZINE

wife and four children. He wanted to keep his mind moving forward at a time when everything felt frozen.

Krakoff is used to things moving. He spent 20 years designing clothing and accessories for Coach and then his own eponymous label. The Tiffany gig, though, is something else: a leading role in redefining one of America's best-known status symbols, an institution that goes back to 1837 and has been behind major innovations in marketing. For example, the "Tiffany blue" packaging first adopted in 1851; notably, the modern, high-set engagement ring (1886); and the extraordinary work of a cluster of legends, including Jean Schlumberger, Elsa Peretti, and Paloma Picasso—the kinds of people you might watch a documentary about.

"With Peretti, you think of the bone cuffs—there may not be a more famous piece of jewelry," Krakoff said. "That was done 50 years ago. It's incredible. And it's as valid today as it was then." But the singularity of the cuff points to one of his bigger challenges: how to restore Tiffany's image as a design pacesetter.

Before the lockdown, he was well on the way, starting with overhauling the Tiffany flagship on Fifth Avenue, made famous by a Givenchy-clad Audrey Hepburn noshing on a Danish before its windows. The architectural landmark is now closed for renovation, which will take about two more years—perhaps fortuitous timing, since retail foot traffic has taken a hit for everybody. The Cross & Cross building, which features the spectacular, column-free main floor—a feat of engineering at the time—first opened 80 years ago. Krakoff is working with OMA, the architecture firm co-founded by Rem Koolhaas. At the same time, Tiffany has a pending $16.2 billion sale to LVMH. It's hard to think of a creative director who has that kind of scope or responsibility, but Krakoff is a serious, broad-gauged man whose interests range from photography to architecture (he's on the advisory council of the Glass House).

> "Your guess is as good as mine what the new normal will be."
>
> REED KRAKOFF

"Your guess is as good as mine what the new normal will be," he said. "But to know where things are going, I can only think of it as a creative person, as a designer. It's really important to make things that have a long life to them for all the reasons that people talk about. Jewelry fits into that ideal. You can make something by hand and use it and have it be a meaningful part of your life—as a marker of an accomplishment or a relationship. You have it your whole life and then perhaps pass it down. That, to me, is where the world's going in terms of luxury."

CLARE WAIGHT KELLER

Knows That Time Is the Greatest Luxury

The English designer Clare Waight Keller is interested in rethinking what, and whom, she's designing for.

"There is a woman who is being left behind. She's late 30s and up. She doesn't feel particularly good about walking around in a hoodie or a sweatshirt all the time. As a woman, you sort of evolve your style and you have over the years a collection of pieces. You're always looking for that one thing—a new coat, a new jacket. You might wear it and then put it away for five years and come back to it and wear it in a different way. Those are the things that are forever and are still relevant. I don't think people are designing for those moments anymore." She ought to know, having worked at Calvin Klein, with Tom Ford at Gucci, and, for many years, as creative director at Chloé. She recently resigned from Givenchy after three years as creative director.

Previously: **Givenchy's first female artistic director** *(2017–20)*

Former creative director: **Chloé** *(2011–17)*, **Pringle of Scotland** *(2005–11)*

Waight Keller spent the lockdown with her American-born husband and their three children at their home on the Cornish coast. She reveled in the pleasure of having time to think and described so plainly in our conversations this spring why forward-thinking designers actually have a hard time thinking about the future.

"Suddenly, the one thing you used to call a luxury—time—is in abundance. At Givenchy, I traveled between two cities"—London, where her family lives, and Paris—"carving out any moment for myself would feel like a guilty pleasure. I had so much to organize between the two places, and I was quite focused on that. Boredom lets your mind drift. And that's something that everyone is somewhat afraid to say. Because there's this ethos in fashion of constant creative output. But I'm not sure it's always conducive to thinking deeply."

Like many of the designers I spoke with, she worried about the intrusion of analytics

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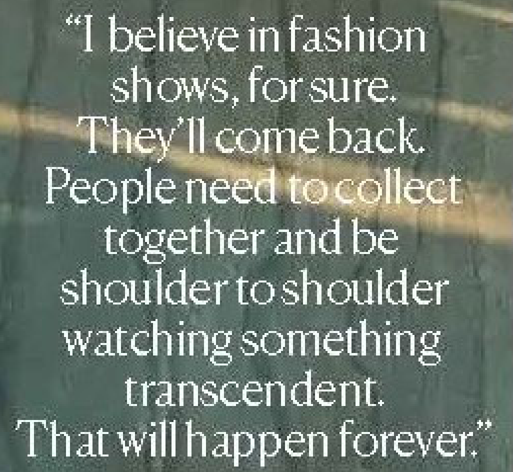
"There's this ethos in fashion of constant creative output. But I'm not sure it's always conducive to thinking deeply."
CLAIRE WAIGHT KELLER


"I believe in fashion shows, for sure. They'll come back. People need to collect together and be shoulder to shoulder watching something transcendent. That will happen forever."
RICK OWENS

into the making of collections. "Things really ramped up about 15 years ago, and just before the recession, there was this whole buildup. It went mental, allowing much more merchandising and economics to penetrate further into the creative process. Even if 2008 was a bit of a reset for the industry, everyone was so eager to recover business that we just resumed the pace again."

She recalled her time at Gucci under Ford, when things were simpler: "We would sit with a merchant once the collection was done and just before it hit the showroom. One meeting with one person. We might add, say, eight things to the line. One conversation. No charts.

"That's the part that's hard as a designer. It can't be analyzed. It's something that feels right, a gut instinct, very hard to define."

RICK OWENS

Knows He Shouldn't Say This, But ...

"I put in a press release that it was one of the best times of my life, and my press office told me, 'Well, you'd better not say that,'" Rick Owens told me. "You have to be so careful about everything you say now, and I've always been so unfiltered, and I've always made it a point to be so personal about everything that I say. But the world is so different now, and there are so many ways to offend people that I feel like I'm training myself to suppress myself as time goes on."

Owens's original fashion has been characterized as "drippy," "monotonous," and "pessimistic," and that's straight from the designer's mouth. In 2002, after nearly a decade in business in Los Angeles, he brought his clingy, insectlike silhouettes—to his many Hollywood fans, a "cult"—to the New York runway. He didn't linger, though. Within two years, he and his wife, Michèle Lamy, had set up home and studio in the center of the Paris Old Guard, in a building in the Seventh Arrondissement, where Owens picked up his pace. The basics didn't change—he still favors the look of dissipation—but his experiments in modern draping and construction became nothing short of breathtaking. Today, at 57, Owens is one of the very last of the big-name independents still standing. He is also a most-liked guy—funny, accessible, always up for a rap on brutalism. Or Kiss. We spoke in June, shortly after Italy reopened its borders. He was on the Lido, in Venice, before driving to factories in the region to check on production. He and Lamy spent the lockdown in Paris.

Founder and designer: **Rick Owens**
Founded: **1994**
Owned: **Independently**
Revenue: **Est. $140M in 2019**

"It was unique for us to lie under a tree and read poetry," he said. "It's exciting to be able to approach things from a new angle—that probably sounds douchey—and to be able to reset a little bit. Although I don't have half as much pressure as those other designers working for big companies do, with a lot of voices to answer to. But being independent gives me a whole other set of pressures."

Although Owens rarely comments on politics and social issues, his shows have nonetheless alluded to matters like climate change. So I was curious to know how he, of all designers, might respond to images of empty streets, people in isolation.

"I was thinking of the next step. What happens after a crisis like this? In the past—there is the easy example of Dior after the Second World War and how, after so much deprivation and restrictions on fabric, the response was this grand gesture of using so many meters of fabric. That was really exciting. And I don't think it was exciting just because you were able to be conspicuously sumptuous. There was more to it. There was a sense of bravado and wit to that gesture. And I'm thinking, *That is absolutely not going to work for this one.*"

Owens feels the weight of responsibility. "The word *responsibility* in fashion—we didn't have that ten, 15 years ago. And now we do. That's kind of a great thing. Sure, it can be a gimmick for a lot of people. I mean, people have jumped on the sustainability bandwagon. But as far as gimmicks go, that's a pretty good gimmick. If only 3 percent of it is authentic, that's already a win."

But can anything dutiful ever be stylish? Owens isn't sure. "After this whole experience, responsibility is something that people are going to think about. I don't know how it's going to manifest in clothes, exactly. It won't be witty. Any real chic has always had a sense of humor. Almost a touch of camp, bordering on ridiculous."

He's trying to analyze things logically. "There's an Italian house I'm not going to name, and I watched for a number of years what they did. This expression of reckless voraciousness. The message was 'We're taking the most exquisite things and piling them on top of each another.' They were saying, 'We don't have the time nor the necessity to appreciate the value of all of the elements.' It was thrilling, it was attractive, but I was thinking, *This is morally wrong. You are deliberately overlooking the value of individual, beautiful things.*" That bothered him, but he knew it made his own path clearer.

"Fashion will always be 80 percent status," he said. "There are going to be different ways of expressing status—intellectual status, financial status. Margiela was the perfect example of an anti-status status. He had more status than status. You were saying, 'I'm above status,' when you wore Margiela, which is just another form of status. Even in an atmosphere of humility and responsibility, those who show it will be the most humble of all."

He paused and laughed. "Yeah, that's cynical, isn't it?"

Perhaps, but his gratitude showed through. "I have this beautiful space in Paris with trees, and I'm reading. One of the writers I was reading was Edmund White, his novel *The Farewell Symphony*. It's about letting go and negotiating death. I was also listening to *Salome*, my favorite opera." In an opera, there's usually a fantastic death scene, and Owens has found comfort in the stories. "We are teetering on the edge of possible annihilation. How have we done it in the past? How did White negotiate the death of his lover? How did Salome deal with the rejection of John the Baptist?"

Owens has been plowing through books he's never had the chance to read. He's been enjoying the sun, making beautiful dinners with Lamy, lighting the candles on the terrace every night, and keeping track of his ideas. "I have lists and lists and lists. Masterlists and sublists. And I have lists that I've done for the past ten years with a sublist that pertains to the next collection. They're just weird little notes to myself." He added, "I do Xeroxes of my past collections and then I draw over them to see where I'll go next. Those are my first notes to start."

At the moment, Owens and his team have been organizing a digital showroom to sell their spring 2021 offerings, which was in the works before the lockdown. He plans to present those clothes in some intimate format in September and then produce small batches for stores.

Owens said, "I believe in fashion shows, for sure. They'll come back. People need to collect together and be shoulder to shoulder watching something transcendent. That will happen forever."

He added, "I was walking through the Esplanade a few nights ago here in Paris, and it was full of kids sitting on the grass." There had been demonstrations throughout Paris that

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week in support of Black Lives Matter and also protests against the French government. "It was glorious. Just that sense of unity. Everybody was cool, but somewhere beneath it all, they were clinging to each other."

NICOLAS GHESQUIÈRE

Just Wanted to Stay in California

It's striking that two of the most moving shows in recent times, those by Marc Jacobs and Nicolas Ghesquière at Louis Vuitton, essentially took place in large empty boxes. The first involved dancers; the other, choral singers who formed a living wall of figures in historical dress at one end of the Vuitton space. There was no technology, no sets, nothing to break the connection with the audience. As Ghesquière said, "It was about being with people—who were dancing toward you, who were singing at you."

Two weeks after the Vuitton show, which was held in Paris on March 3, people across Europe began to experience what it was like to lose human contact except through screens and phones and the odd aria performed from a neighbor's balcony.

Ghesquière, lean, dark-haired, with a warm smile and a watchful look, is 49. He has been the creative director at Vuitton since 2013, and before that he spent 15 years at Balenciaga turning a magical name that had largely succumbed to the licensing game into a coveted brand with stores and handbags, and also one with a reputation for risk taking.

When we spoke in June, Ghesquière was at an apartment on the Left Bank he uses as an office. His home is about 45 minutes outside of Paris, and he spent the lockdown there with close friends, the stylist Marie-Amélie Sauvé and the designer Julien Dossena of Paco Rabanne. He told me he had gone to Los Angeles soon after the show to help with a friend's wedding dress and to prepare for the Met's Costume Institute gala, of which he was co-chair. He wasn't in L.A. two minutes when he received an urgent call from his friends: "They said, 'Can we go to your house? There's going to be a lockdown.'"

"I said, 'You guys are crazy. It's never going to happen. I'm staying in California. It's so cool to be here.'" Ghesquière smiled. "And then ten days later, I was with them."

They cooked, cleaned, and gardened. They cut down trees. He mentioned a novel by Françoise Sagan, *Les Faux-Fuyants*, to convey the sense of camaraderie and, as well, the isolation they felt. Titled *Evasion* in English and set in 1940, the story is about four Parisians who, having escaped to the countryside, don't realize the German occupation has begun.

"We had a lot of nice discussions, long nights, with a lot of drinks," Ghesquière said. "We were questioning ourselves." He echoed what so many of these designers said to me. He and his cohort also bemoaned the loss of creativity at the hands of modern distribution methods. He mentioned Vuitton's shows, which, since the late aughts, when Jacobs was creative director, have typically included huge audiences and some shock-and-awe element, like a real locomotive moving inside the Louvre. "It's crazy to think of the extravagance of what we did for the last decade," he said. "Was it right? Yes, it was right because of the attention that fashion has received. But there are many other reasons why it was not right."

Artistic director of women's collections: **Louis Vuitton**
Joined: **2013**
Owned by: **LVMH**
Annual sales: **Est. $11.4B in 2018**
Previously: **Creative director, Balenciaga** (1997–2012)

His self-questioning makes sense. Ghesquière's career spans the most disruptive 25 years in fashion's long history. In 2001, Balenciaga was bought by Gucci Group (now Kering) in the fashion sweepstakes led by Bernard Arnault of LVMH and the Pinault family, along with Tom Ford and his partner, Domenico De Sole. In 2005, Ghesquière told *Women's Wear Daily*, "My big challenge now is to make Balenciaga become a brand and give the feeling that we can feed the stores like a brand." A few years later, though, as if balking, he was holding intimate runway presentations for a relatively select number of editors and buyers.

Ghesquière isn't nostalgic. He is an intensely curious man, as his work tends to show. But his privileged position in fashion over the past two decades has allowed him to see how the power of designers has been dramatically reshaped by newer developments like social media.

To put it another way: When he was creating trend after trend in the first decade of the century, he wasn't worrying about algorithms. "Social media is very reassuring for a lot of businesspeople." He told me. "But what does it mean, exactly? Of course, behind every phone there is a human. But algorithms also drive what people like, what is the moment to do things. I have doubts about the ultimate impact." He wonders if the algorithms will kill the possibility for real emotions, risks, surprise moments.

He broke into a laugh. "If surprises don't exist, then I'm quitting. I'm looking for another job." ■

"It's crazy to think of the extravagance of what we did for the last decade."

NICOLAS GHESQUIÈRE

→ Ghesquière directs and photographs his fall-winter 2020 campaign in July.

PHOTOGRAPH: AXEL MORIN

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The Cut, 04.09.2020

Miuccia Prada è troppo saggia per fare previsioni post-pandemia
"Gli stilisti non possono cambiare il sistema economico."

**Una versione di questo articolo è apparsa sul numero del 31 agosto 2020 del New York Magazine.*
Di Cathy Horyn @CathyHoryn
Cathy Horyn è critica di moda per The Cut.

Fotografia: Molly SJ Lowe

La scomparsa Ingrid Sischy una volta descrisse l'approccio di Miuccia Prada al design, o alla maggior parte delle cose che le interessano, con le parole "bisticciare e parlare." Ho avuto modo di conversare con Prada — prima delle sue sfilate a Milano, una lunghissima intervista a pranzo nel 2014 — e mi sono resa conto di quanto sia aperta la sua mente. Ma anche di come, con un affondo garbato e dolce, possa respingere l'idea. I seguaci di Prada conoscono tutto quello che ha realizzato negli ultimi tre decenni – ha presentato la sua prima collezione nel 1988 all'età di 39 anni — ma confrontarsi con la sua mente brillante su Zoom è un ulteriore promemoria del fatto che la moda non è tanto definita da artigianalità e materiali quanto da idee ben sviluppate.
Innegabilmente, tuttavia, Prada intesa come azienda si trova ad una svolta. La regione Lombardia è stata duramente colpita dal coronavirus, e Miuccia e suo marito Patrizio Bertelli, amministratore delegato della maison, si erano inizialmente focalizzati, come molti imprenditori italiani, sulla protezione di vite e sulla possibilità di sussistenza. In una conference call del mese scorso con gli analisti finanziari, Bertelli, con il suo tipico candore, ha ammesso i gravi effetti della recessione. E poi c'è la nuova partnership di Prada con Raf Simons, che è iniziata ufficialmente nell'estate, e che promette cose entusiasmanti e sconosciute.
Quando parliamo, a luglio, Prada è nel soggiorno del suo appartamento milanese, una grande stanza simile a un loft con libri, opere d'arte (un enorme Baldessari alla sua destra), e un paio di divani verde scuro. Indossa un abito di seta giallo oro.
Non è dell'umore per riflettere sui modi in cui la pandemia potrebbe cambiare la società. "Forse quello che non mi piace di questo momento è la retorica di quello che succederà post-coronavirus — che saremo tutti buoni, che saremo tutti migliori" dice, un po' scontrosa ma pensierosa. "Quelli intelligenti rimarranno intelligenti e capiranno ancora di più, e quelli che se ne fregano o che sono superficiali rimarranno uguali. Allora vediamo se la gente impara qualcosa". Non ha finito. "L'altra retorica che non mi piace è che 'siamo in un momento come dopo la guerra.' È difficile da definire, ma ho l'impressione che la Prima e la Seconda Guerra Mondiale siano stati momenti in cui la gente era in qualche modo più innocente, e quindi c'erano una gioia e un piacere veramente puri durante la ricostruzione. La gente ballava per strada quando è finita la guerra. Adesso non vedo felicità. Prima di tutto perché siamo ancora sotto minaccia e anche perché il mondo è molto complicato, con molte cose negative che [ancora] accadono. E naturalmente internet amplifica di più le cose brutte che quelle belle. Quindi si è costantemente sommersi dalla negatività."
Dice: "La gente spesso indica il New Look di Dior nel 1947 come esempio di rinascita della creatività."
Lei non è d'accordo. "Non nego che ci possano essere momenti in cui ci si vestirà eleganti e si cercherà di rallegrarsi. Certo che succederà. Ma non come quel momento — era molto diverso. Non vedo alcuna similitudine con quel momento."
E Dior, non per colpa sua, non sapeva delle notizie 24 ore su 24 e dei social media.
Prada osserva: "La mattina, cerchi di leggere questo, quello, ma come fai a leggere tutto? È la mia più grande frustrazione e anche uno dei temi più difficili. È il principale motivo per cui la gente si concentra sulle piccolezze. Perché cogliere il quadro completo è difficile e quasi impossibile. E le persone tendono a chiudersi.
"Devi pensare. E non è che puoi avere una risposta rapida per tutto. In realtà, non hai una risposta rapida per niente."

Menziono il commento di Simons che "la pandemia ci ha scrollato fuori dai sistemi" e che Marc Jacobs aveva detto qualcosa di simile. Prada è più pratica, riconoscendo che c'è una corsa agli armamenti delle sfilate di moda. "Fondamentalmente, come stilisti, siamo al servizio dell'azienda. E così se l'azienda decide di voler fare 20 sfilate e accelerare — e ci sarà sempre qualcuno di grande che accelera — allora devi accelerare." Se decidi di fare le cose in piccolo, mi dice: "rischi di uscire dal sistema."
Poi continua: "Anche prima della pandemia, abbiamo sempre detto che era troppo. Ma non è perché ci piace fare dieci sfilate - non è così. Ma, ancora una volta, è la globalità. Devi essere dappertutto, perché i tuoi clienti ti vogliono. Devi farti vedere. Se ti interessa solo l'Europa, significa che hai una mentalità ristretta.
"Inoltre, non possiamo dimenticare che viviamo nel sistema economico che creiamo — chiamiamolo capitalismo. È questo che domina gli eventi. Quindi non vedo tanto facile [cambiare il sistema moda]. È una speranza, naturalmente. Sentivamo tutti che la pressione era eccessiva, e sentivamo anche che c'era troppa roba, troppo di tutto. Ma dobbiamo essere pronti a mettere in discussione il sistema economico. Non è che gli stilisti lo possano cambiare. Possiamo cercare di fare di meno, di essere più attenti all'ambiente, ma è pochissimo rispetto alla riduzione degli enormi rifiuti del mondo... Qualsiasi critica dovrebbe essere più profondamente politica, invece che attaccare solo il sistema della moda. Sono del tutto d'accordo con quello che dicono i miei colleghi. Completamente. Ma sono più cinica nel cercare di capire le difficoltà di una cosa del genere."
Allora come avverrà il cambiamento? "Innanzitutto, le persone dovrebbero tornare a votare. Conosco molti giovani che dicono: 'Non mi piace la politica, non voto.' E io rispondo: 'Senti, è il modo con cui puoi influenzare la politica.' L'unica soluzione che vedo se si vogliono veramente cambiare le cose è essere più politici e dedicare più tempo a pensarci. Dev'essere una risposta collettiva."
Prada si è impegnata nel "collettivo" fin da quando entrò nel Partito comunista da studentessa universitaria a Milano, negli anni '60, anche se per i giovani europei all'epoca era una cosa abbastanza tipica. Chiaramente la politica è ancora il suo fondamento anche se sa che, essendo stilista di moda,
è compromessa.
"La politica è una delle cose a cui tengo di più", dice ridendo, e aggiunge: "ma essendo una ricca stilista di moda, mi rifiuto sempre di parlare di politica. Non voglio fare politica perché sono una stilista che fa vestiti per i ricchi, per cui come faccio a occuparmi di politica? Nel momento in cui smetterò di fare vestiti e cambio lavoro, potrei effettivamente occuparmene. Faccio politica in modi completamente diversi, agendo ma mai come dichiarazione."
Le dico: "Una delle cose che ho amato di questo progetto è sentire quanta passione hanno gli stilisti. Voglio dire, lo sapevo ma —"
"Cerco sempre di pensare al perché l'idea della moda può essere in un certo senso imbarazzante. Eppure, anche se ci sono così tante persone che adorano la moda, per qualcuno la moda è qualcosa di imbarazzante. Probabilmente perché parla del tuo corpo, della tua fisicità, della tua sessualità — per definizione, è così personale che probabilmente le persone non vogliono parlarne. Quindi non è come fare una sedia. È molto più difficile fare la stilista di moda. Per farlo bene bisogna pensare molto."
Sapendo che probabilmente non parlerà della sua collezione con Simons, chiedo a Prada del loro processo di lavoro. Lei scuote la testa. "Abbiamo appena iniziato a lavorare insieme per cui sinceramente non ho niente da dire al momento e specialmente senza di lui."
La primissima collezione di Prada si trova su YouTube. Vale la pena di guardarla, principalmente perché è molto diversa — più semplice, più disinvolta — di quello che cui è diventata famosa in seguito. Diverse modelle erano più vecchie. (Quando le ho chiesto nel 2014 perché non avesse mandato in passerella modelle più vecchie — una tendenza all'epoca — mi ha risposto che era un "cliché." E che l'aveva già fatto.)
Mi racconta che, dopo quella prima sfilata, le persone in azienda e intorno a lei "decisero che non ero una stilista di moda, e che dovevo esserlo di più." Lei ci provò per un po' e poi smise.
"Dissi: 'Sentite, adesso faccio quello che voglio. Okay, non sono una stilista di moda, sono quello che sono.'

"Inizialmente, a nessuno piaceva quello che facevo tranne, diciamo, alcune persone sofisticate che mi promossero. Per chi ama i classici, c'era qualcosa di profondamente inquietante, e per le persone all'avanguardia, non era abbastanza all'avanguardia. E in realtà adoro essere a metà strada tra dispiacere alle persone ma probabilmente intrigando tutti. Fare qualcosa di normale che sembra profondamente strano."
Fa una pausa, distogliendo lo sguardo. "D'ogni modo, siamo pronti per una nuova avventura."
Prada e Bertelli hanno due figli e nel 2018 il più grande, Lorenzo, che si è ritirato dalle corse automobilistiche, è entrato nell'azienda di famiglia in qualità di responsabile marketing e comunicazione. Le chiedo in che cosa il pensiero del figlio sia diverso dal suo e da quello di Bertelli.
"Di sicuro, ha una mentalità diversa. La globalizzazione, per la sua generazione, è normale. Comunque, non è che voglia tanto parlare di lui. È bravo. Siamo molto contenti." Prada non parla quasi mai dei suoi ragazzi. "No," dice con una risata, "perché non vogliono che ne parli". Ma aggiunge: "Di certo, hanno un modo diverso di imparare. La letteratura è, per molti giovani, qualcosa che non conoscono. Dico, 'Come possono vivere senza?' Se penso a quanta è stata importante la letteratura per me, ho imparato la moda attraverso la letteratura e il cinema. Ma ovviamente ci sono molti modi diversi di essere colti."
Accenno alle proteste di Black Lives Matter e al problema della maggior inclusività nel settore.
"I miei pensieri sono più o meno quelli che le ho detto prima", risponde. "Non basta dire: 'Siamo democratici, e ovviamente siamo contro il razzismo.' Non basta. Bisogna essere più proattivi. Mio figlio è molto impegnato anche su questo fronte. Tutti noi siamo molto impegnati per cercare di trovare modi di promuovere i cambiamenti dall'interno. Se le persone parlano, discutono e protestano, le cose cambiano. Ma c'è bisogno di un lavoro quotidiano. Non è questione di fare una dichiarazione, si tratta di trovare un modo che sia veramente più inclusivo. Volerlo fare è l'importante."
Aggiunge: "Certamente, più voci, più voci diverse — ne abbiamo bisogno per nutrire il cervello. Penso che sia veramente fondamentale. Arricchire il lavoro —" D'improvviso ride. "Suona un po' retorico." E poi ride di nuovo.

Miuccia Prada / Prada
Direttore creativo e co-amministratore delegato di Prada
Ingresso in azienda: 1978
Quotata in borsa dal: 2011
Fatturato stimato: 3,6 miliardi di dollari nel 2019

[didascalia]
Modelle nel backstage alla sfilata Prada il 20 febbraio 2020 a Milano.

[in risalto]
Essendo una ricca stilista di moda, mi rifiuto sempre di parlare di politica.

Alessandro Michele / Gucci

"Something was changing inside me," says Alessandro Michele, recalling his premonitory days between the a/w '20 Gucci show on 19 February and Italy's lockdown on 9 March. His collection confronted fashion with its own overload, presenting a voyeuristic view of the backstage preparations, in lieu of a runway. "I was thinking about my position; why I need to show all the time." In 2015, Michele's multibillion-pound Gucci makeover catapulted him into an incessant loop of fashion shows and red carpets. Suddenly, confined by the coronavirus outbreak to his apartment in Rome with his partner Vanni, he experienced an awakening. "I felt like a monk," he says. "I was travelling in my imagination, all by myself. It's the first time in a long time I was really by myself."

With his princely locks in pigtails, like a Pippi Longstocking of the Early Renaissance, Michele lost himself in the writing and knitting that, he explains, felt "like a prayer". He visited online auctions and added to his art collection, and, as the days turned into weeks, he sang and reconnected with the guitar playing that gave him rock-star dreams in his teen years. "Harry said, 'I will try to teach you more.' Jared said, 'We must play together!'" Michele smiles, referring to Styles and Leto.

On his terrace, Michele saw nature in a new light. "Like my roses, I wasn't moving. I was just there, waiting. It was beautiful." He felt rooted in earth. "I thought, what have we done? We've been so stupid and crazy and completely blind."

Inspired, Michele composed a future philosophy for Gucci: fewer shows, more sustainability. "I will always need the beautiful work of human beings. I am sure that my reason for being on this Earth is the creative research of beauty. I can't stop," he vows. "But I want to be more connected with the Earth." We should never forget lockdown, he says. "We can't say that it's all the same, because it's not. We went through something powerful. Maybe, for the first time in this technological era, we felt connected with God. And God is the Earth." *Anders Christian Madsen* >

Photograph by Danilo Scarpati

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A CHANGE OF PACE

Forced from their studios under lockdown, leading designers describe how they learnt to embrace the quietude of home, taking the time to rethink the future of fashion itself

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Vogue (UK)

PAESE :Regno unito

PAGINE :237

SUPERFICIE :0 %

PERIODICITÀ :Mensile□□

► 1 settembre 2020

Pierpaolo Piccioli / Valentino

Every evening in quarantine, Pierpaolo Piccioli and his family could hear the singing of locals echo through the streets of Nettuno. In his native Roman coastal town, the Valentino designer spent his days painting, sketching his haute couture collection, and cultivating a Mediterranean dandy 'do. "During the lockdown, I decided to be radical," he proclaims, unveiling his manifesto for a new era. From the way he cuts his clothes to the values they embody, "I want to be more radical in every aspect of my job. Creativity has to be the leading force in a fashion house and that's what it's going to be. In the past, marketing and branding were more important than creativity. And I don't think that's right." Poolside, from his makeshift garden office, Piccioli called upon more than 20 of his famous friends – from Adut Akech to Mustafa the Poet – to photograph themselves for Valentino's autumn campaign. In place of paying them a fee, the brand made a hefty donation to the Lazzaro Spallanzani Hospital in Rome. When the Black Lives Matter movement took to the streets, Piccioli sensed in it the hope he wishes to convey through radicalism. "Being different is a value. We are connected by emotions. Through a brand, you can create a community that shares those values," he says. "As a person, I deliver my values through my Instagram. But as a creative director, I feel it's more relevant to do it through imagery. I want to be more radical through our communication." *ACM*

Photograph by Danilo Scarpati

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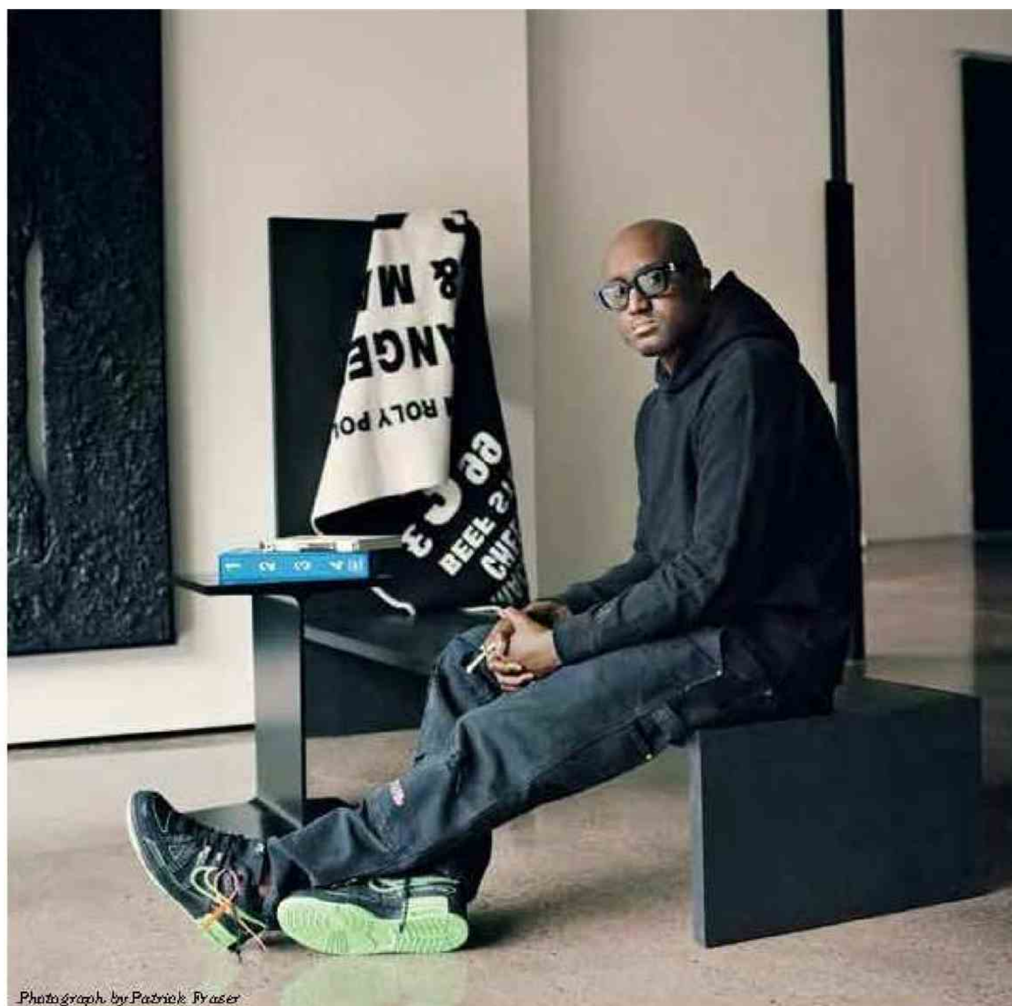

Photograph by Patrick Fraser

Virgil Abloh / Off White and Louis Vuitton Menswear

For Virgil Abloh – a man who has built his career travelling the world, taking eight flights a week, and never sleeping in order to ensure that he operates in every time zone – the beginning of lockdown, spent at home with his family in Chicago, offered a novel sense of relief. As calls were cancelled because "everyone was chilling", exhibitions were postponed, and fashion shows and manufacturing deadlines were pushed back, the enforced pause became like the holiday he'd never had. But then, at the start of May, when a video showing the killing of Ahmaud Arbery surfaced online, this industry's conversations continued to revolve around reworking the seasonal show schedule instead of addressing the seismic sociopolitical issues raised by his death. "Just imagine how that looks to me from a wider lens," Abloh says. "I was having a hard time being on calls about dates when the news – and the news in fashion – didn't reflect Arbery's death."

As an African-American designer who not only operates his own brand, Off-White, but sits at the helm of one of Europe's most esteemed fashion houses, Abloh often describes his career as a Trojan horse. "My power is to show black talent, black people, and black people inside of my output," he explains of his approach to inclusion. But, this time, the notable disparity between the conversations happening within the black community and the fashion industry struck him with particular intensity – not least because the collective nostalgia for fashion's past, which featured fewer collections, fewer fashion weeks and smaller audiences, was also a system that he'd once been refused entry to (literally: when working as Kanye West's creative director, the two were famously turned away from shows). "Does the fashion industry have a race problem?" he asks. "Well, it's so systemic and deep that it can't even look at itself when it represents itself."

Then, as support for the Black Lives Matter movement gathered global momentum following the death of George Floyd, brands hurried to release statements of solidarity – and faced a backlash from those who felt they were plastering over structural failings. "But nobody knows how to talk about race," he says. "It's so deep in our hearts, so full of different experiences. Or, in most cases, people don't even know what it could be to feel like you've been oppressed. So can we allow people to say the wrong thing, if they do?" Beyond the hashtags and donations, "I want to see systemic change, not reactionary change. I want to see the HR department empathise and sympathise with why this is an important issue, before they do it for PR," he asserts. "Everyone's on a race to get back to normal, to a clean image. But this is the critical moment to actually understand. I hope for conversations that are long lasting. But I'm an optimist. I believe the world will be a better place – and it's great that everyone's hearts and minds are open. It's broadened the message about how change needs to happen." *Olivia Singer* >

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PAESE :Regno unito
PAGINE :237
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Photograph by Paul Wetherell

Jonathan Anderson / JW Anderson and Loewe

"I feel like the world is spinning like a hurricane, and we're just in the middle of it all," sighs Jonathan Anderson. On the morning we speak, British politicians are in the midst of a frenzied conversation about the statues of slavers installed across the country, and newspaper headlines are debating the merits of their maintenance. "We're in this moment where we're wondering, do we look at history? Or do we draw a line in the sand?" notes Anderson. "What I've been thinking for a little while is that we need to learn from it, and then ask: how do we prevent that from happening again?"

It's a subject that has long fascinated the designer. The collections he presented in February revolved around examining the post-war aesthetics of the 1920s and 1940s: flapper dresses, the New Look and clothing that, after a period of upheaval, "was about entering the room with impact and confidence". Now, in an industry struggling to navigate the turbulence of our own era, "clothing can be used as a social, gender, race or political weapon," he attests.

Materially, that is manifesting as clothes divided between exploring the realities of classicism and fantasy. But he has also been considering the very role of an industry embedded in the lives of anyone who gets dressed in the morning. "I think we're going to have to be able to take our hand out and offer it to someone else to help pick them up – whether in the community or the workplace," he says. "Maybe clothing in the future is going to be about helping, in terms of bigger picture things. And who would have thought that, out of the First World War, you would have ended up with the Roaring '20s?" *OS*

Rick Owens / Rick Owens

If anyone's oeuvre is suited to the post-apocalyptic spirit that currently prevails, surely it is Rick Owens': a designer who has regularly rooted his career in a kind of foreboding fatalism. "I think what I've always done is try to present a realistic picture of the world," he counters. "It's the pursuit of beauty, but with an undertone of reality. There is a dark side to the world that we're all familiar with – and you can choose to ignore it and create a sugar-coated, Disney version, or you can acknowledge both the beautiful and the dark."

The pandemic offered an appropriate opportunity for Owens to retreat into interests that have long echoed that sentiment – the "brutal honesty" of Edmund White; the rhapsodic operas of Richard Strauss – while sequestered within the brutalist glory of his Paris home. "I've been looking at the balance of things," he says. "Fashion is so weird now: the sensationalism and garishness and cheapness and voracious status-seeking and voracious consuming, consuming, consuming... This gave me time to really reflect, and to enjoy stillness."

So he dived into his legendary archives, excavating lessons and pinpointing elements that felt too commercial, compromises that felt too severe. He wondered, he said, "What would thrill me now? What would thrill me at my age, after everything that I've seen?" But most of all, he realised that the core codes of the business he has built – rooted in outsider independence and staunch self-determinism – are more appealing now than ever. "It's a miracle we've gotten by for so long without something going wrong," he reflects. "Maybe we're being spanked a little bit, and hopefully now people will think about consuming differently. But who knows? Maybe everyone has already had their restraint and modesty, and now they're ready to party again. Or maybe we'll learn it for a while, and then gradually build back up to voracious greed, and the cycle will start over. Maybe that's kind of the way it's meant to go." *OS*

Photograph by Karim Sadli

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Vogue (UK)

PAESE :Regno unito

PAGINE :237

SUPERFICIE :0 %

PERIODICITÀ :Mensile

► 1 settembre 2020

"Dressed down, no hair, no make up? No, let's put ourselves together so that our brains stay together"

Donatella Versace / Versace

From cooking to crafting, life in lockdown made many rediscover the simple pleasures of domestic living. "Absolutely not. Never in my life," Donatella Versace says, dismissing any such notion. "I can make a salad," she quips. "But I don't." During the months she spent at home in Milan – "me, myself and I, and my dogs" – she did her hair and make-up every day. "Dressed down, no hair, no make-up? No, let's put ourselves together so that our brains stay together." Until Italy lifted its lockdown, the Versace matriarch left only one glam factor to the course of nature. "Listen, I had roots so long you have no idea. I'd forgotten what colour my hair was. The first thing I did when it was over was bleach my hair."

When Covid-19 hit Milan, Versace donated to local relief efforts. "They are heroes. True heroes," Donatella says of the medics. "In Italy, it's been really, really hard. We couldn't leave the house for two months. You look out of the window and there's no one in the street." Connected only by phone, her team became each other's confidants. "It made us say things you wouldn't have said in other situations. My team was very liberated," she recalls. Returning to work in the bruised economy, her mind is set on recreating jobs and making "everything sustainable". "That's my next war."

This month, Donatella is releasing a co-ed collection of 30 essential pieces, heralding a new business model for Versace. "Smaller collections and more often: that's what I came up with. Right now, in the summer you find winter coats in the stores. The weather doesn't match the season. I'm going to try to make this match." For September's main collection, her philosophy is the same. "Make it small and good. Nobody needs a lot right now. But," she pauses, "don't forget the glamour, the supermodels, the hair and make-up!" Is there still a place for glamour in a post-pandemic world? "After this, I think there's only a place for glamour." ACM

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Photograph by Danilo Scarpati

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"Everything is political. Politics is the basis of my thinking, the basis of reality, the basis of everything. Politics is not fundamental; it is reality"

Photograph by Alessandro Furchino Capria

Miuccia Prada / Prada

If the events of 2020 have divided us into optimists or pragmatists, Miuccia Prada identifies with the latter. "I hate the cliché that, after coronavirus, we'll all be saints. We will be as we were," she asserts. "We should take this opportunity to change – but change will not happen without a great deal of effort from everyone." It's an arrestingly honest sentiment, and one that likely speaks to Mrs Prada's position as a cultural oracle. In fact, even amid this year's unpredictability, she maintained her reputation as the prophetic voice of fashion. Only weeks before the world went into lockdown, she appointed Raf Simons as her co-creative director in an effort to promote progress within the industry. "It is absolutely time to rethink these systems and structures that have come to define us," she said in February. Recent months have only proved her point.

Now, she says, from her home in Milan, two things are clear. "One: I only have questions, of many kinds, and I am searching for answers. Mainly, how a luxury company operates within the wider construct of social, political and economic issues. Second: that I've had time to really work and enjoy the pleasure of doing what the core of my job is – making clothes for people."

Fashion's frenetic pace has been debated time and again, and even its most lauded designers are not immune to its demands. ("Another show, another spectacle, another event… I already told people I feel like I'm doing a different job," she laughs.) But perhaps more fascinating is how a woman whose personal identity has long been embedded within the political realm, but whose public role is designing and selling clothes, is now reconsidering "how you can coexist between making a successful company and democratic thinking," she says. After all, "Everything is political. Politics is the basis of my thinking, the basis of reality, the basis of everything. Politics is not fundamental; it is reality."

That was the impetus behind establishing the Fondazione Prada back in 1993: to create a separate space within which she could explore issues that "needed deeper thinking" – from racial prejudice to gender constructs. When it came to her brand, "I never wanted to make any kind of political or social declarations – even if they are at the core of my thinking – precisely on purpose," she explains. "I always thought we should be very careful in expressing ideas, because when you say something as a company, you have responsibilities if you want to be honest and not opportunistic." But, as coronavirus came to disproportionately affect marginalised demographics, and the Black Lives Matter movement was amplified in the wake of George Floyd's death, designing clothing that reflect her liberated ideals, while allowing the Fondazione to more explicitly explore their nuances, no longer feels sufficient.

"Changes in time have made me wonder how far a luxury company can deal with these issues," she admits. "I have to rethink my thinking. Somebody wrote, 'Go home and do your homework,' and that's the point. Let's study. Every time someone asks me something, I say, 'Study.' And I say to myself, 'Study more.' Think more. We're not there yet, but I have a direction for my thoughts." As the world and its industries grapple with institutional racism, generational disenfranchisement, the onset of a recession and the impact of a pandemic, acknowledging our failings and collectively moving forwards is of paramount importance. "I hope everyone is trying to go in the right direction: maybe fewer pieces, even more value," Prada reflects. "I have hope in general – because how can you live without hope?" *OS*

Tutti i diritti riservati

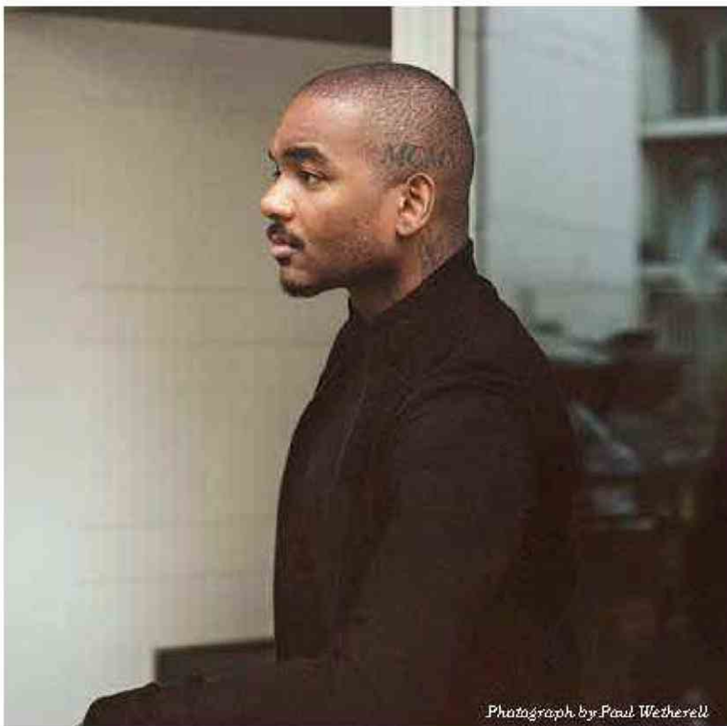
Sarah Burton / Alexander McQueen

Throughout spring, the artisans of Alexander McQueen continued creating from the confines of their homes, and Sarah Burton received daily pictures of her studio's works-in-progress. "It highlighted the passion of everyone in the team; knowing how much effort and pride had gone into the pieces while juggling personal lives, families and work," she says. "It made me realise what a gift it is to use creativity every day, and how we had all used it to quieten the noise of everything that was going on around us."

The experience evoked a formative time in the designer's life. "It felt like going back to the early days at McQueen. At that time, we had fewer resources and had to be very hands-on," she recalls. When lockdown began, Burton reflected on sustainability. "For both the men's and women's collections, I made a decision only to use fabrics that we already had; print on them, reinvent them and make them feel new." In place of their research trips around Britain, her team looked closer to home. "We took inspiration from everything we were experiencing as individuals and as a community."

For Burton, the pandemic only intensified her Alexander McQueen ethos. "We will continue to make clothes designed to be loved, cherished and worn; clothes that are of their time but also stand the test of time. I believe it's our responsibility to protect the things we love from the past, to preserve our values, signatures and history, but it is also our job to innovate," she says. "There is comfort in familiarity and excitement in experimentation." *ACM*

Photograph by David Burton



Photograph by Paul Wetherell

Samuel Ross / A Cold Wall

"I was incredibly happy to see that – as a result of Covid-19 – fashion shows no longer need to exist," says Samuel Ross. "As a designer of colour, it can feel like you're going to war every time you put out a collection, because you feel like you don't have the empathy or the allegiance of the industry. You feel like an outsider: a runway show isn't your playing field, isn't your territory. We didn't go through fashion school, we weren't invited into the conversation. We hacked our way in." His is a profoundly saddening statement about the industry – but it's one he has chosen to confront head-on. Since achieving stratospheric success with his brand, Ross has launched a wealth of initiatives to support the black community, from donating his 2019 NewGen bursary to young black designer Eastwood Danso, to launching grants for struggling black business owners and artists during coronavirus.

But his message achieved particular urgency in recent months. "The shift really kicked off as a response to the abhorrent hunting of people of colour – which stems back 450 years in the West, but specifically focusing on what's happening in North America. The killing of black people, my people. It's a time of action," he says. "I think this time is gonna force our industry to update its purpose and mechanisms. This is the age of service – in terms of community, relationships and business operations. We need to look at how our industry can actually add to the human narrative for the next hundred years. We're bringing black economics into the 21st century." OS >

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Photograph by Thomas Lohr

John Galliano / Maison Margiela

"Now," John Galliano declares, "there's a need for our vision to be more transparent." In Los Angeles just before the borders began to close, he managed to travel – via Yucatán and Mexico City – to the house he shares, with his partner Alexis Roche and their two Brussels griffons, in the French countryside. On his voyage, Galliano sought comfort in rituals: Classic FM in the morning followed by the news. Here, he became familiar with the American immunologist Dr Anthony Fauci. "His messaging was so direct. I needed to know the reality and he gave it as it was," the Maison Margiela designer recalls. Through the magnifying glass of quarantine, Galliano detected a desire for clarity in our collective consciousness, key to the future of fashion.

"It's not the first time I've been forced to stop, pause and reset, and be more mindful and aware. Once you accept the situation, you are able to move on and evolve," he reflects, hinting at his own recovery a decade ago. "When I came back into fashion, I remember saying to myself, 'Nothing will have changed, but your perspective on it can change, John.' I've been applying that to this situation: be patient, be kind to yourself. If we're going to take this time to reset, let's move forward. I say, 'Bring it on, John!' That's the job of a designer."

While striving for transparency, Galliano believes in preserving the authentic haute couture craftsmanship that feeds into every collection he creates. "I would love for people to witness the fittings we do – the work that goes into the process – so that when you do eventually meander into a store, you can connect with the values and ethics of Maison Margiela," he says. "For the creative process to disappear and turn into cookie-cutter fashion? No way! I will stand till the last one. There can't be fashion if there's no time for the dressmaker. And now, that role will be revalued." Galliano's romance with creativity has been affirmed. "Fashion is my lover. She taunts me, devours me, pushes me to strive for excellence; to create, to breathe, to live," he smiles. "The passion, the energy! Fashion is the blood that pumps through this house, and through my heart." *ACM*

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Grace Wales Bonner / Wales Bonner

If any designer is renowned for the depth of their research, it is Grace Wales Bonner. Her seasonal meditations on race and identity have traditionally been accompanied by page-long reading lists of academic texts or historic works of literature – but, in lockdown, "I've been embracing things that are a bit more sensory," she smiles. "It's been a much more instinctive, more immediate way of accessing research." Weaving threads of connectivity across seemingly disparate cultures or times has long been part of Wales Bonner's world-building narratives, but during quarantine she discovered commonalities through sound and movement; finding synergies between Peruvian, Indian and Ethiopian rhythms; or channelling the black ecstatic tradition through gospel and soul. "It feels like there's more space between things, which has allowed me to dive in more deeply," she explains. "That feels like a product of this moment."

Equally, that space has allowed Grace to forge new connections with industry peers, building "an ecosystem where everyone wants to support each other". During a time when fashion is coming under a wave of scrutiny for racism and whitewashed leadership, "I think there's been a change in mindset," she says. "I've always been very aware of this idea of lineage and ancestry; thinking about honouring the past; the people who've come before and created space for us. Now, I'm acknowledging the responsibility we have to open doors for a younger generation – and the work we're doing could have a real impact on what the future looks like." OS >

Photograph by Misan Harriman

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Marc Jacobs / Marc Jacobs

"Hold on, I'm just putting on my shoes," calls Marc Jacobs from out of frame as our Zoom call connects. "I want to be fully dressed for you." When he appears moments later, he's wearing Rick Owens platforms; a string of pearls; his hair meticulously coiffed; his outfit perfectly pressed. He's taken this same approach every day in quarantine, despite the fact he's been holed up alone in a room at New York's Mercer hotel for three months (he and his husband, Charly, sold their townhouse just before lockdown, and Charly has been stuck in LA), maintaining his appearance has remained of paramount importance. "I enjoy the ritual of creating the person I want to present to the world," he smiles. "The making of my identity is essential to my mental health, so whether the world gets to see it or not doesn't mean I stopped creating it. But the world did get to see most of it, because I posted on Instagram."

Jacobs has taken a slightly different attitude to lockdown from many other designers. While plenty of his peers have spent their quarantine in video fittings or remote styling sessions, he considered the period a moment of reflection that would reconfigure his entire approach to the industry, as well as informing his upcoming collections in a more abstract sense. In the first weeks, he found comfort in exploring his identity through make-up tutorials and DIY manicures; had therapy three times a week; and debated creativity and gratitude with Lana Wachowski, Hedi Slimane, Sofia Coppola and Miley Cyrus. But, as the Black Lives Matter movement took hold, he studied racism – and realised that "the greatest lesson I've learnt through quarantine was to stay quiet and to listen. And I've learnt more than I ever thought I would ever know."

Amid the wealth of resources he discovered, Jane Elliott – the lifelong anti-racist activist whose videos have proliferated across the internet recently – was particularly educational. "I'm not going to be perfect, but I'm going to make progress. Hopefully, if enough individuals progress collectively, we'll move forward in a way that's new. I don't want to go back to normal; I want to go back to new," he states. "Out of emergency, we can emerge. And when I emerge from this cocoon of quarantine, I have to think of it as a rebirth. What I've learnt is so vast, and it has made me very, very hopeful about the dawn of a new world." OS

Photograph by Nicolas Newbold. Art direction: Julio Espada. Hair: Sandy Hullett for Guido Palau. Make-up: Marc Jacobs

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Olivier Rousteing / Balmain

Between fighting the pandemic and supporting the anti-racism movement, Olivier Rousteing saw one common denominator: "Togetherness," he says. "We learnt that we need to be together." After spending lockdown alone, the Balmain designer can attest to it. "I was thinking, should I get a boyfriend? Or a cat, or a dog? But my friends said it wasn't easy having a partner during quarantine." Left to his own devices, Rousteing phoned his grandparents, and turned to his six million Instagram followers for interaction. "My grandparents lived through the Second World War, stuck in their houses, not knowing if their families were safe. At least we had our phones."

In his spacious Paris home, Rousteing says he had no reason to complain. "I discovered my washing machine," he laughs. "And I don't know how to cook, so I ate zucchini and eggs for two months. I lost 10lbs. That's superficial, though. Other things were more important."

His collection this September is rooted in Balmain's post-war period origins. "There's something emotional about the vision of Monsieur Balmain at the time: how to come back stronger after a crisis." Half of it will be made sustainably. "What's going to be important for tomorrow is not only how you present fashion, but how you made it," he predicts. "It will need to stand for more than fashion. Then, you'll see which designers and magazines are relevant."

A beacon of inclusivity in the industry, Rousteing marched for Black Lives Matter in Paris in June. "I hope everybody understands it, and that they're not just jumping on it as a trend," he says. "When I started pushing diversity in my shows and doing campaigns with hip-hop stars, and fashion was questioning it, it felt really weird. I felt that fashion should be avant-garde." Now, he says, change is on the horizon. "People's reactions six years ago were completely different to today. It's a completely new world, and thank God. It took a long time." *ACM* >

"It's a completely new world, and thank God. It took a long time"

Photograph by Joshua Woods

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Riccardo Tisci / Burberry

There was a moment at the beginning of the pandemic when Riccardo Tisci knew things were serious. His eight sisters – all based in Italy – came to a rare, unanimous decision in their WhatsApp group: coronavirus was going to severely impact the world. Not long after that, Tisci travelled to stay with his 92-year-old mother near Lake Como, in the family home that his parents built together. It's a house with remarkable sentimentality for Tisci: when, in 2005, his mother ran out of money and feared she'd have to sell, it's what prompted him to sign with Givenchy. "I didn't want to sign because I was young, I was punk," he laughs. "I wanted to do my own label, but when they told me how much they wanted to pay me... well, I said I'm going to do it because I can buy the house."

Since that time, he's only spent Christmases there – so the chance to spend weeks cloistered in its confines with the woman he describes as the love of his life "was a dream", he says. In the mornings, he'd work, designing a collection that he describes as his most personal yet for Burberry, and in the afternoons the two would garden and cook together, or sit at the kitchen table as he recorded stories of her life. As lockdown eased, his sisters would walk through the town in their pyjamas so they could all eat breakfast together in the garden. "It was really one of the most beautiful times I had in all my life," he says.

But besides that sense of idyllic togetherness – a spirit of unity that translated into the Black Lives Matter protest marches he later attended, first in Italy, then in London – the period offered opportunity, Tisci realised, to reassess the pace of his industry ("it was getting stupidly crazy," he sighs) and consider the broader issues at hand. The past months have "traumatised the world, and made everyone stop and think," he reflects. "How many people have been killed over the past 400 years? How many people have been killed the same way as George Floyd? But finally, the world – not only the black community – has taken the time to understand. George Floyd, he couldn't breathe. When people died from coronavirus, they couldn't breathe. It's a sign. Humans have to start breathing and reacting in more of a quiet, thoughtful way. And I think fashion needed a big shake. Now, there is no way back." *OS*

Photograph by Danilo Scarpati

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Silvia Venturini Fendi / Fendi

Bound by the duty of dynasty, Silvia Venturini Fendi has worked diligently for the family business since her teenage years. "When I was a little girl, we had three months' holiday," she recalls. "I went back to that same state of mind." Quarantined in the compound shared by the Fendi family on Monte Mario in Rome, surrounded by her five grandchildren, she felt "like a little girl" again. "I wanted to abandon myself to this condition," she says. "No plans, no duties. Those long days lying on the sofa..." Venturini pauses. "Then the news took you back to reality."

She regressed emotionally, too. "Like a child, you let your feelings go wild. You go from laughter to tears." As for the kids' schoolwork, the mindset was similar. "I left it to the parents. I never loved school and I don't like it now. I took care of their ephemeral culture: games, cooking, dance lessons, the garden." At the end of lockdown, the Fendi quarantine had expanded to more than 20 family members. Early on, Venturini decided to terminate her cruise collection, permanently. "I'd like to stop it and extend the main collections," she explains. "One show a season is more than enough."

This September, she's staging an intimate co-ed show in Rome, reflective of the reinvigoration she experienced in lockdown. "Our consciousness of time has been very strong. You want things that survive you. I belong to a very big family, so the transmission of objects is important." Now, Venturini's fashion desires are "simple, pure and delicate: something made by hand with love and care, which you can wear all your life". In a summer of change, she is committed to carrying on using Fendi for good. "We have a privileged platform and it's important that we use it. I will continue to do so, in an organic and real way." Positive industry change, she says, will come. "I have to be confident because of those little children that were playing with me in my garden." *ACM*

Photograph by Brett Lloyd

Daniel Lee / Bottega Veneta

Newsflash: Daniel Lee has not gleaned culinary skills during lockdown. He started off with high hopes but got bored and filed domesticity under things he isn't good at – likewise, a life lived in sweatpants: "It was quite good at the beginning. To be home and feel comfortable and not have to make the effort. But after a while you just start to feel like a bit of a slob," admits the 36-year-old Bradford-born designer. But he did hit upon the perfect crew neck, which, among other things, turned his thoughts towards the fashion calendar. "I really don't think we need four big fashion moments a year; two is ample," he says, referring to the main spring/summer and autumn/winter collections.

Lee and his team spent their days working on design ideas from home. On the first day back in the atelier, he gathered a small group to review their proposals and talk about how they wanted the collection to be. "After being locked up at home, you want something that feels cosy and safe; clothes that feel generous and that don't make you feel exposed."

Right now, he's navigating what luxury might mean in a post-pandemic world – and how to present that. "I love a fashion show, that element of dream and fantasy makes people feel great, and I think, and I *hope*, that we'll still long for that; I hope that doesn't fade. It's a moment for thinking maybe the fashion show isn't the be all and end all, and maybe you don't have to do one every season. There can be other ways," he offers. "I like an idea that travels to people. This is a time to be more intimate and almost go backwards. It isn't always about racing forwards, it's nice to take a step back and observe..." In short? "We don't have the answer yet," he admits. "But there's so much going on in the world right now, it doesn't feel like the time for fashion to be too noisy." *Sarah Harris* >

Photograph by Danilo Scarpati

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Photograph by Thomas Lohr

Maria Grazia Chiuri / Christian Dior

One night in lockdown, Maria Grazia Chiuri and her daughter Rachele Regini put her haute couture wardrobe to good use, dressed to the nines and danced around her apartment in Rome. "The girls did fashion looks every day," the Christian Dior designer says, recalling Regini and a friend, who joined them in isolation. "It was a great reminder for me that people react differently." It marked an uplifting moment for Chiuri, who was sensitive to the crisis's impact on gender roles. "The women I spoke to were exhausted," she says. "Working from home is 'beautiful'? Absolutely not. Women spent mornings in front of the computer and afternoons helping their kids with schoolwork. They also had to cook and clean."

When the pandemic broke out, Chiuri was in Puglia planning a Dior cruise show that would soon be postponed. But, having mobilised artisans from around the region, she felt a responsibility to see the collaborations through. "In Italy, the economic disaster was immediately clear. Italy is tourism and fashion," she notes, acutely aware of the domino effect of unemployment on a progressive society. "Should I sit in my apartment, cry and watch a film? No, we have to do something." In late May, after working via video calls for weeks, Chiuri returned to her ateliers in Paris determined to keep the wheels of her collections spinning. "Dior employs 7,000 people, so you feel that you have to do something." Amid post-pandemic proposals for change to the pace of fashion, she's listening to calls for sustainability. "But we also have to think about giving people work," Chiuri says.

"We are creating sustainability that can work for a big brand like Dior," she explains, referring to environmental measures taken by the house. But for Chiuri, who oversees some six collections a year, slowing down isn't an option. "A designer who works for a brand like Dior can't be precious," she shrugs. "When Mr Dior made this brand, he restarted an industry in France that was destroyed after the war. He was important not only because of the New Look, but because he gave work to people who'd lost everything," Chiuri reflects. "We can't think about the past. We have to think about now." *ACM*

"Working from home is 'beautiful'? Absolutely not. Women spent mornings in front of the computer and afternoons helping their kids with schoolwork"

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Nicolas Ghesquière / Louis Vuitton

Nicolas Ghesquière is in a good mood. Last night, in light of Paris's mayor allowing restaurants and cafés to reopen, he enjoyed his first dinner out in months. "You know how important cafés are to Paris?" He teases. "This is a big deal! It's a sign that we can live again."

In the days leading up to lockdown, Ghesquière was in California, but managed to get one of the last flights home to Paris and hunkered down just outside the capital, in his home of 15 years, with his dogs and a few friends for company. "I rarely have time to enjoy this house, but I actually got to plant a row of trees," says the designer, who can't remember a moment when he has stayed in one place for so long.

"Having time suspended made me realise that I don't want to return to a crazy schedule with lots of travel. I think this situation has made everyone think differently. The industry wasn't working; those conversations have been there for a long time before the pandemic," he says, adding that he wants to create support for smaller brands, to "make sure we're creating a space for everyone. One of the great things to come out of this is a sense of solidarity."

And what does creativity look like after the threat of Covid-19 eases? "If you think about times of crisis in the past, they were always followed by moments of creativity," he notes. "I want to propose something that is relevant, different and new, that is something I won't compromise on, but likewise, the level of functionality is very important, now more than ever. I'm also more concerned about the people around me; the way we produce and manufacture things, the impact that has, I want to be even more responsible. And," he adds, perhaps more than anything, "to enjoy my friends and family; to FaceTime my 99-year-old grandmother more." *SH* ■

SOCIAL DISTANCING RULES WERE FOLLOWED THROUGHOUT THESE PHOTOSHOOTS

Photograph by Annie Powers

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