

# Miu Miu

Photography JAMIE HAWKESWORTH  
Styling KATIE SHILLINGFORD



Anita is wearing a wool crepe coat with contrasting collar  
and suede boots by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2011.

If Prada is the elder statesman in the empire Miuccia Prada presides over with her husband, Patrizio Bertelli, Miu Miu is its intuitive, impulsive counterpart. Titled after the affectionate moniker by which the designer has been known by her closest friends and family since she was a child, Miu Miu has the sensibility of sibling rebellion. Each bears an echo of the other: Miu Miu's intellect is light-hearted compared to Prada's heavyweight approach; Prada questions luxury, whereas Miu Miu toys with its trappings. While also profoundly radical, Prada is more serious, the public face of Miuccia Prada and indeed the family dynasty – carrying the name of her mother, Luisa, who ran the company once her own father, Prada's founder Mario Prada, stepped down. Miu Miu, which launched in 1993, is conversely just Miuccia Prada's. It is a place where she can express herself freely. Prada is now co-creatively directed by Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons. Miu Miu is personal.

Words SUSANNAH FRANKEL

"The show in the mountains was personal – exactly that," Miuccia Prada says. Entitled *Brave Hearts*, it was filmed in March 2021, with Europe in the throes of the third wave of the pandemic. With references to both Tyrolean and Highland dress, *Miu Miu's* Autumn/Winter collection also draws on the dress codes adopted by its designer as a young woman. Those were unconventional. "I had so much fun in the mountains, skiing in a skirt," she remembers. "I skied in a bikini too. I did it back then. It was perfectly normal. And the mountains are my favourite place in the world. I am in love with the mountains. I enjoy them at any moment, under every circumstance. I don't know why."

Prada's clothing designs have always been drawn from her personal experience, personal history, personal tastes. She dressed in Saint Laurent as a rebellious, left-leaning student in the 1970s; later in the 1980s, butting against the direction of contemporary fashion, she bought her clothes from children's tailors and from suppliers of uniforms for nurses and chambermaids, before deciding to design her own. *Miu Miu* is of course no exception: it began life as a small collection of minimal, vintage-inspired pieces, the sort of thing she might dream of wearing. If the sobriety of Prada reflected the life of a committed feminist and businesswoman – albeit a creative one, with impeccably refined taste – *Miu Miu* spoke of the side of Miuccia Prada that grew up wanting to wear pink when her mother dressed her in navy, that secretly hitched up her skirt as she left her house to go out, and that skied in a bikini.

Miuccia Prada likes bravery – she is herself brave. And it is a quality she admires in others. "Bravery is something women always need," she commented at the time the collection was shown. "This talks about the fantasies of women, their imaginations and dreams of different places, different ideas. Following your dreams is courageous – that takes bravery and strength." Still, for Miuccia Prada, while women's fantasies are often the starting point of a conversation, fashion is always seen in the context of it being in the first instance a service to men (at Prada) but to women at both Prada and at *Miu Miu* still more so.

And so, at the Italian ski resort of Cortina d'Ampezzo, against a backdrop of the Dolomite Alps, models walked through the snow in boots – from ankle to thigh-high – and chubby coats in teddy bear fur, bombers, jumpsuits and miniskirts in *Miu Miu's* signature matelassé leather and boudoir satins in a sugary colour palette that seemed as sweet as it was incongruous, as apparently delicate as the look is ultimately fierce. Juxtaposing clothing designed to protect its wearer from the elements with more quintessentially feminine pieces – those aforementioned fantasies, evocative of an empowered sense of seduction – oversized satin padded jackets were layered over lingerie-inspired slip dresses in featherlight silks or lacy sweaters and skirts embroidered with twinkling sequins. Striped, pop bright and pastel crochet nursery knits framed faces and made for cosy cardigans, arm warmers, socks and tights. And yes,

there was indeed a bikini of sorts: a bralet and skirt – the dimensions of the latter, an over-anxious mother might not unreasonably argue, are more reminiscent of a belt. One can only imagine what Miuccia Prada's own parents had to say on the matter of their daughter skiing in her swimwear all those years ago now. Not that she would have let that stop her.

Idiosyncratically, sport has always been a passion for Miuccia Prada, long before the fashion world caught up. She was among the first designers to put sportswear on the runway: for Prada's final Spring/Summer show of the millennium she introduced Prada Sport, inspired by Bertelli's love of sailing and Prada's announcement of its involvement in the America's Cup in 1997. The red and white logo mirrored that of the lettering on the Prada Challenge boat, and the label, reintroduced in 2018, is now called *Linea Rossa*. Designer sportswear proved a rapidly expanding commodity across the board and Prada, with its luxury-industrial heritage, was well placed to capitalise on that. Clean shapes and technologically advanced fabrics with equally pragmatic shoes and bags were shown alongside the main collection, which was very much about both fashion and luxury in a more traditional sense: full, pleated canvas skirts and coats with broad, pleated ribbon edges, crumpled chiffon dresses, skirts and knickerbockers in tea-stained shades and richly coloured crocodile skirts and jackets all made an appearance, sometimes embellished with saucer-sized mirror embroideries. The wilful contrariness of the Prada handwriting – the space somewhere between the real and the unreal, the functional and the fashionable, the earthy and the otherworldly – was already well established.

Miuccia Prada needs no introduction, but here are the basics of her upbringing and career, the elements that formed her and still frame her current status and state of mind. Born in 1949, she grew up in Milan and left that city's Statale University with a doctorate in political science in 1970. A committed activist, she was a member of the *Unione Donne Italiane*, dedicated to establishing equal rights for women. She studied mime at the *Piccolo Teatro* before joining the family business in the mid-70s. She met Bertelli in 1978 and they married in 1987, a year before she began designing her own clothes. For her wedding, Miuccia Prada wore a dress made by the Ferrarri sisters, designers of clothes for the children of Milan's elite, scaled up to her size. With Bertelli, she launched the famous Prada nylon backpack in 1984, debuted Prada women's ready-to-wear in 1988 and *Miu Miu* five years later. Today, Prada is a multi-billion-dollar public company. It was floated on the Hong Kong stock exchange in 2011, yet remains under their control both creatively and financially.

To help differentiate *Miu Miu* from Prada, principally shown in its hometown, the label staged catwalk shows in each of the major fashion capitals until landing, lastingly, in Paris in 2006. There *Miu Miu* was first presented at 34 avenue Foch, a hotel particulier in a chic residential *arrondissement*.



From the start, Miu Miu exuded the spirit of the renegade debutante, all puffed sleeves, empire lines, pie-crust collars and slightly off party dresses. The clothes perhaps owe a debt to the Ferrari sisters too, and to Cirri in Florence, which Miuccia Prada once said made the best sailor dresses around. They often play with childlike elements, taking liberties with scale by blowing up or shrinking details. When they are more adult – in the Autumn/Winter 2011 collection of broad 1940s shoulders and mid-calf skirts, for example – models somehow still resemble young girls dressed in looks far too old for them. There are mismatched graphic prints – of swallows in flight or kittens at play – and unlikely fabric combinations: pallettes on sludge-coloured wools. Elsewhere, 50s Americana meets 80s Anglophilia or 70s psychedelia, varsity jackets are worn over big knickers (Miuccia Prada calls them panties), leather is oversized, silver and inlaid with everything from art deco florals to stars, and French terry towelling bathrobes double up as summer coats.

Such diversity of fabrication, silhouette and thematic makes the fact that Miu Miu is so immediately identifiable and distinct from its sister, Prada, more remarkable still. Across these pages the overview of Miu Miu is Miuccia Prada's own, having delved into her archives to select pieces that best show her vision of her label. The edit reflects both past and present tense: the pieces are chosen from the label's back catalogue but with the designer's current mood and viewpoint in mind. They are the styles she feels are relevant for now. Miu Miu is always reactive: the shows are put together in a matter of weeks, sometimes even days. It is spontaneous, immediate, instinctive.

When we speak at the end of May, Miuccia Prada is alone. She is an elegant and conscious of the importance of good manners and humour as always, and a quietly contemplative mood prevails, one that acknowledges that we are living in a world that remains frightening in its uncertainty. While the designer's circumstances – as she herself is the first to admit – are privileged, there is a modesty to the conversation, if not quite so much to the surroundings. An opulent olive-green velvet covers the walls of the room she is working from and that same fabric, in brown, a plump daybed. Pieces from the personal collection of modern art Prada and Bertelli have been building for a quarter of a century hang behind her – a fluffy white Pietro Manzoni Achrome like a lost cloud, a John Baldessari pop portrait of Bruce Lee, the eyes cut out.

Since the first lockdown in March 2020, she has been based here, away from the crowds and mainly focused on her job. As perceptive and aware of the world as she always has been, she is grateful for the time that has afforded her – time to work, time to watch and to read, time to think. Many column inches have been dedicated to her wardrobe in the past and that too has moved with the times. Today she is wearing an oversized white cotton T-shirt that it's somehow life-affirming to imagine her rolling out of bed in – and a pair of vintage diamond earrings that reach almost to her shoulders. Some things shouldn't change.

Then as now, Miuccia Prada is the ultimate brave heart: a woman for whom courage and risk-taking are second nature – the driving force.

#### *Susannah Frankel*

Can we talk first about the Miu Miu show in the mountains?

#### *Miuccia Prada*

I'm not sure I would do it again now but at that point you didn't need many people, which was a good thing, and also there was so much snow. I said it's now or never. Then everybody got excited. It was a long discussion because of the difficulties of there being no physical show. That is much more complex for me but also more interesting. You have to turn your ideas into a bigger picture. If you call directors, good movie directors, they are not, I think, very good at doing fashion, and fashion people, of course, they don't know how to make movies. So we had to improvise, to reinvent our jobs. It all came out of this idea of bravery. The mountains, the walking in the snow, the symbol of being brave. Back then I was fixated on women being brave.

*SF* You're always brave.

*MP* I try to be. I wanted to be. We

decided to go, we dealt with whatever happened. We had very bad weather but also very good weather.

*SF* In one way the collection was mountain appropriate – the big trousers, the big boots, the Tyrolean references, the Highland references – but in another way it was about a skirt covered in jewels. That's very you. The conservative and radical, the appropriate and the inappropriate, often in one look.

*MP* That is what I always aim for and it comes instinctively.

*SF* It's about you.

*MP* Yes, it's me.

*SF* You were one of the first people to actually combine high fashion and sport in the 90s with Prada Sport.

*MP* I remember back then I never wanted to dress myself in sporty things. I didn't like them. Then I was always into inappropriate things.

And I asked myself why when you do sport, or ski, do you have to become another person? I want to keep my love of fashion, my ideas. I don't want to transform myself into someone else, into a sporty man or a sporty woman, wearing what everyone else is wearing. That was the origin of it.

*SF* And today you still combine two apparently contrasting worlds. The idea of the couture gesture – the gloves are big woolly gloves but they're still long gloves, the hats, the jewellery – with something much more obviously functional.

*MP* That's something that I really like. I like that when you do sport you retain your spirit. So if you run, why shouldn't you wear a pair of earrings? Be covered in jewels, running along?

*SF* You always work with extremes.

*MP* I like very different things. There were men's things in that collection and then there were feminine things. Probably I like the duality in myself.

I can be very feminine, or very masculine, or both at the same time. In general, in a modest environment I like to put on the richest pieces. I like opposites together. Why? I don't know. For instance, in the Fondazione, when we did the house in gold, it was not my idea, it was Rem's idea, but I thought it was genius because it represents what I like to the maximum. What do you do in gold? The poorest, most industrial, most old-fashioned home. It's also about assessing the value of something by putting it with its opposite, making inexpensive things look or feel very rich and vice versa. I don't want to say it's a political approach because the word carries so much weight but, yes, the point of view is to find the opposite between two extremes, always, and to try to improvise. I don't question myself about that. It comes so naturally.

*SF* Perhaps that's the recognition that women are not simple or straightforward.

*MP* Yes, for sure. It's not enough to be feminine. Put simply, by mixing things you show the complexity of life, the complexity all around us. To be just one thing is boring.

*SF* Do you think bravery is particularly important now?

*MP* I think bravery is very important in general. Otherwise, why do you live? You have to try to make things, to do things.

*SF* In the past we talked about the idea that, in the 2000s especially, you in particular seemed to be taking bigger risks than smaller, independent labels, bigger risks than the avant-garde.

*MP* If you are small – niche – you can be avant-garde. It is very different in a bourgeois context. I struggle sometimes. And my husband tells me, you can't pretend to be left-wing, because the other ones are all rich, or bourgeois. It is true that with Prada and Miu Miu I want to make the impossible happen. We are a luxury group

with concepts that are not only about luxury. In fact, I don't like the word luxury but I have always appreciated beauty and sophisticated things. So it really is a constant effort.

*SF* A constant fight.

*MP* Yes, that too.

*SF* Miu Miu especially seems to be about female rites of passage – about a girl becoming a woman, a girl on the cusp of womanhood. Of course, that's not actually about age at all but about spirit, and about the slight fragility – but also the exceptional beauty – of that time in a woman's life, the time when you're a girl working out what being a woman means. That is something that continues, that comes up again and again at all ages.

*MP* That's right. That's great. It's true that Miu Miu is also about that fragility, the fact that you don't know who you are, who you want to be. You want to be beautiful, you want to be sexy – but you also want to be nasty, intelligent and political.

*SF* However brave you are – however brave Miu Miu is – we are all vulnerable.

*MP* I never think about that but, yes, actually Miu Miu is probably a lot about that.

*SF* People always say Miu Miu is younger but it's not about being young physically. It's about ...

*MP* The mentality.

*SF* It is also the embodiment of the fact that you can be 40, 50, 60, 70, but you can still flirt.

*MP* I strongly believe in that. Apart from I don't go out in miniskirts, which if you have the courage to and you want to, then why not, but apart from that, when I dress I'm not dressing like an old woman. When you become old, it's not easy to have fun with how you dress. When you are older, dressing is even more about bravery.

*SF* One of the things that has changed since you started designing clothes is that you really can wear what you like.

*MP* True. Good taste, bad taste ... It's very subtle.

*SF* This issue of the magazine is about hindsight, the idea of looking at the past to inform the future. That sentiment feels intense at the moment because the present is relatively quiet. Our present is lacking in outside experience, so people are looking back in a romantic way, though not necessarily a purely nostalgic way – it feels like something bigger than that.

*MP* That has something to do with looking for meaning. I hear a lot of people saying now that they don't want to go to stupid parties any more, that what they value is friendship, love. That, of course, is romantic. We are searching for something more complete, more true, not superficial.

*SF* You have always said you love superficial things.

*MP* Maybe because I would like to be that person but really I'm not. Now people are thinking more about the past, about things that count, about the heart, not about superficial things. The word romantic makes sense.

*SF* You have Prada and Miu Miu. Miu Miu is approaching its 30th anniversary, Prada is more than a century old. You shoulder a huge legacy. How do you feel now about that responsibility?

*MP* I don't think about legacy. I know I should but it's not what motivates me. Also because of our age, people say to me you should enjoy what you have done, celebrate your achievement. Listen, I'm not like that. I'm always thinking about what I can do next. I don't think of myself as someone who is ambitious but somebody told me recently, "You are a monster of ambition." In truth, I am very ambitious.

*SF* Historically, Miu Miu comes at the end of the ready-to-wear season.



It's reactive to what has come before it at the shows and is done quickly, in weeks rather than months. This situation must throw that slightly. The seasons are difficult to follow now.

*MP* That's why in the end I am still showing in seasons. It took so much time for the fashion world to get itself together, to facilitate the jobs of journalists and buyers and so on. So now I find myself in a place where I can do whatever I want, whenever I want. But I don't know if that's right. In the first place, you lose the sense of a season and with that, a little bit, the sense of fashion. I understand that it's exciting to be free but instinctively I decided to stick with the calendar. Otherwise it's going to be such a mess.

*SF* Fashion is a community – you move from one place to another as a group. The pandemic has left a vacuum.

*MP* Yes, but going back to normal shows is maybe like going backwards. Before, you did your job, your clothes, your show, then it was finished. This is the beginning of a whole different chapter and it's ten times the work. But I'm afraid that now just to go back to physical shows won't feel so exciting. Maybe you should do both. But both is double the money and more work again. We are discussing this all the time. In the end, somebody said, "People like being together. Who cares about the clothes? They just like having fun, like at a concert, in a football stadium." It's more the idea of being with people. Everybody always complains. But now that it is not possible people miss it.

*SF* Now you work with Raf at Prada, how has your work with Miu Miu changed?

*MP* It has changed. I decided that at Prada I wanted to work with someone else to create a new idea, to have more inspiration and to share, that's a priority. The priority is for Raf and me to do something together. I'm very happy with that. So Miu Miu is now the

place where I am completely myself. When I realise that, then I want to do even more, to really concentrate, to inject more passion, more of what I like. The show in the mountains was exactly that. It was very personal. Because of the location and the implications. For sure, Miu Miu is the only place where I am alone.

*SF* Is there more of a sense of your renegade spirit in Miu Miu?

*MP* Absolutely. It's what I like in life. I have not always been able to be enough like that perhaps. I was when I was young, with my political ideas and activities, I kind of did it. Probably not enough. But that's what I like.

*SF* I think your son said to you that, as someone in a position of power, you're obliged to speak out and say things that go beyond fashion. Do you believe that?

*MP* That's a big question. I always hated it in the past. I never wanted to answer any questions that weren't specifically related to what I do, related to art or fashion. I didn't want to talk about politics or any of the things that I care about most. That is partly out of a sense of decency, about being a rich fashion designer. Having said that, because of the influence we have, we probably should speak out more. I should probably speak out more. But that goes against my spirit and my thinking completely. I'm thinking about it, about how to try to speak to people more.

*SF* People often talk about a certain woman they design for. Is there a Miu Miu woman?

*MP* You know that's something I don't like. I design what I think is right. It's theoretical. I never had a woman in mind, I don't have an icon in mind. I do like a renegade. Usually, every brand has its target. I don't. But I always said I do what I feel is right and if I am in contact with reality, if I know people through reading, through

movies, through meeting them, then it will work. The more I am in contact with reality the more what I do makes sense. If it works it means I was connected and my thoughts were realistic. I'm trying to do something that is relevant, to translate that into clothes, because that is my job and something that I am able to do. You know that I am fanatical about the life of people, that is the reason I love vintage. I love thinking about who the woman was who wore something, about what their life was like. People's lives. I like thinking about that a lot.

*SF* You recently put exactly that idea into practice with Upcycled by Miu Miu, that idea of finding vintage clothes and letting them tell their own story all while putting your mark on it.

*MP* When I did my first show for Prada, I was very much criticised for appropriation. It was the 80s, the art world did it the whole time, but in fashion it caused a scandal – a dress that was totally 60s, totally 70s. But I loved it because I like history, I like stories of periods, stories of women. I think, OK, modernity, the future, but all our ideas come from what we saw, what we heard, what we read. We are our past. How can we pretend it doesn't exist? Now, with Upcycled, it's conscious and we want to build on it, but in the first instance it came from a place of naivety, from a love of vintage and the fact that vintage pieces entertain the people who wear them. It is a piece of clothing but it expresses a whole life – how was it worn, what was it worn for, what did its original owner do while they were wearing it?

*SF* In fact, that's what we love about clothes generally.

*MP* Yes, because clothes are instruments for living, basically. To conquer or not to conquer, to do whatever you want. I always think dresses have to be useful.

*SF* As a young woman you were active in the second wave of feminism.

**"People are thinking more about the past,  
about *things that count*,  
about the heart, not about superficial things"**

Do you think things are better now for women than they were then?

*MP* There's a long way to go. That is one of my biggest questions – how long does it take? Sometimes it seems like we're going backwards rather than forwards. Sometimes when you see movies about the suffragettes, you see how they really struggled. For sure in our countries, for people who are richer, more educated, things are better, but that's easy for us to say. There are still things happening to women all over the world that are terrible – unbelievable.

*SF* The upheaval of the past 18 months has meant we have all been forced to acknowledge a shift in our perspectives and change the way we look at things and how we prioritise.

*MP* I think so. Six months after the pandemic started, my son told me that if it finished now things would go back to how they were before but that if it lasted longer things would change. I am very much changed. I'm changed in general but mainly in thinking that anything I used to do in a certain way I should now do differently. I have an instinctive desire for change, for not repeating things we did before.

*SF* And when you're designing, thinking about bravery and about fighting, you're also dreaming.

*MP* I always say that I don't like dreaming. If I dream about something I want to make it happen.

*SF* For someone who sometimes thinks they are not ambitious that's quite an ambitious idea.

*MP* Now my ambition at the Fondazione is doing science. We are preparing a show for the next biennale with the most important scientists in the world. It's about the human brain. I always want to do shows that are about religion, feminism, science, big subjects that are floating in our heads but that many of us don't really understand. And they said they wanted to do it only if the Fondazione Prada in

Venice becomes a permanent place for exploring ideas about neuroscience. So, yes, that's also ambitious.

*SF* The idea of the same woman who grew up skilling in a skirt now doing that is inspiring – uplifting. Can we talk about Miu Miu as a community of women who shop but who also exchange and share ideas about culture, about things they are excited by and that they love? You have Women's Tales, dedicated to supporting female talent in film, Miu Miu Musings, conversations between women about issues that are culturally and socially pertinent, Miu Miu Club –

*MP* We do and that's very important to me. I love film and know that, even now, it is not so easy for women to break through, so if we can help we should. I also believe in giving women a voice, in projecting a feminine point of view. I have this idea that, during the day, our shops are shops, about shopping for fashion. Then, during the night they are about a community.

*SF* Have you missed your teams during this period? Have you felt restricted?

*MP* For the past 18 months, I have worked on Zoom. I don't know if I miss my teams physically because I am discussing with them all the time. Sometimes when I am at work, there are so many distractions, so many empty moments, so many boring moments. Now at home maybe I've found the excuse to do other things. And that is fantastic. I want to be careful not to lose that privilege. Also, I can do so many more appointments. Before, you had to go to the office, to a bar. A ten-minute discussion might take two hours. This is easier, simpler. Also, I am lazy. I like staying home very much.

*SF* So there is an element of relief?

*MP* I am happy here. This pandemic has changed my way of thinking on so many levels. I've had more time to consider things. We were so afraid, there were so many difficulties – all

the shops were closed and every thing was a disaster. We were forced to react, to find new ways of doing things, new ways of taking care of clients. When we were closed there was a real sense of solidarity between human beings. Perhaps we had arrived at a point that was repetitive, generally decadent. When the world changes it signifies the rebirth of something, there is a new energy.

*SF* Do you have a sense of it being wonderful to spend your life making beautiful things?

*MP* For sure. And now I have much more time to do my job and to do it well. Before I was distracted. Even though I have barely any social life there were still too many distractions. And the idea that I could maybe stay in one place, for just one day, and think about clothes – that was such a joy.

*SF* You have been one of very few designers who have actually changed our aesthetic, changed the way people – women and men also – dress. At the beginning, you had to fight to be understood, people described your work as ugly, and certainly it played with received notions of taste. Now though, with Prada and Miu Miu, there is an understanding, and a love of the things you have done and still do. Do you feel proud of that?

*MP* Of that, yes, I am proud. I think that if I have achieved anything it is that. But it wasn't revolutionary. It was subtle. Early on the avant-garde thought I was not avant-garde enough, the classicists thought I was very disturbing. And I loved that. It is the in-between that interests me. In that sense, little by little, probably because I didn't come from the fashion world, I changed things. It was only in fashion that there was this obsession with beautification in a conventional sense. In art, in the movies, in books, those ideals were questioned. And I too thought that was so old-fashioned, so conservative. Now it's normal to question those values. I think I have contributed to that.





This page: Anita is wearing a wool crepe coat with contrasting collar by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2011





This page: Mira is wearing a natte fringed top and skirt with embroidery by MIU MIU, Spring/Summer 2014. Opposite: Lucy is wearing a vichy-printed mohair coat with ruffles, technical fabric polo shirt, vichy-printed cotton poplin shirt, acrylic headband with crystals and feather and crystal necklace (in her hand) by MIU MIU, Spring/Summer 2016







This page: Garfield is wearing a cable knit wool jumper with oversized collar, denim shirt, checked wool trousers and brocade belt by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2018. Leather boots with chain detail by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2021. Opposite: Mira is wearing a cotton poplin dress by MIU MIU, Spring/Summer 1997







This page: Anita is wearing a gabardine dress by MIU MIU, Spring/Summer 1998. Opposite:  
Mira is wearing an art nouveau floral-printed georgette dress by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter  
2001. Stylist's own tights. And suede heels by MIU MIU, Spring/Summer 2005

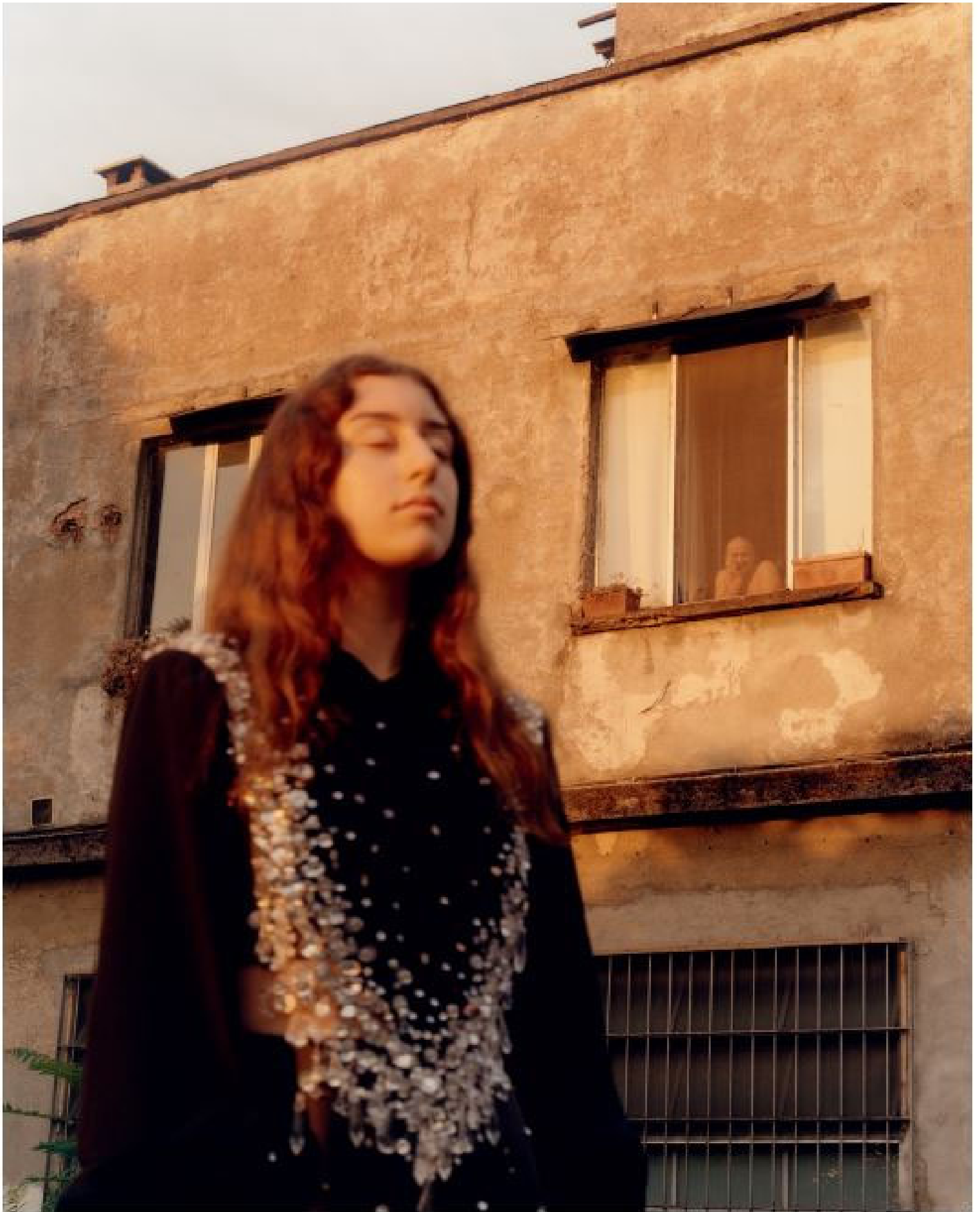






This page: Valeria is wearing a felt coat (over her arm), paisley crepe de chine dress and straw hat by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2000. Leather wedges by MIU MIU, Spring/Summer 2002. Opposite: Anita is wearing a tulle dress with crystal embroidery and technical fabric sleeves by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2020







This page: Anita is wearing a printed cotton poplin shirt dress, acrylic headband and knitted nylon belt by MIU MIU, Spring/Summer 2005. Opposite: Corinne is wearing a leather minidress, technical fabric shorts and ballerina flats with paillette and crystal embroidery by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2018







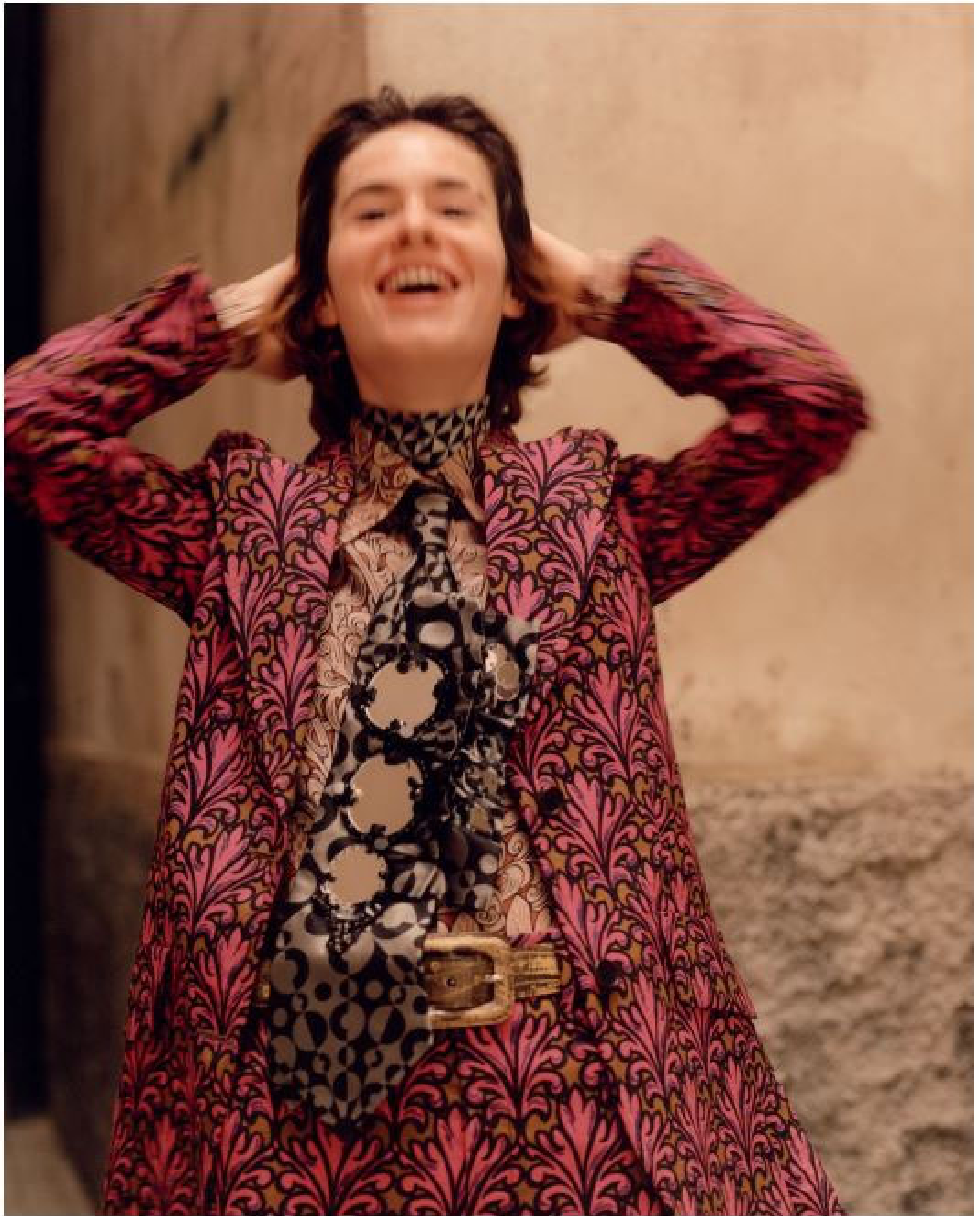
This page: Ludovica is wearing a printed silk jacquard minidress by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2006. Opposite: Elena is wearing a star-printed taffeta dress, jersey T-shirt and silk jersey gloves by MIU MIU, Spring/Summer 2006





This page: Yu Shan is wearing a striped gazar minidress and collar by MIU MIU, Spring/Summer 2008.  
Opposite: Garfield is wearing a volute-printed mohair suit, camellia-printed gazar shirt, embroidered jacquard collar and tie and leather belt by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2012







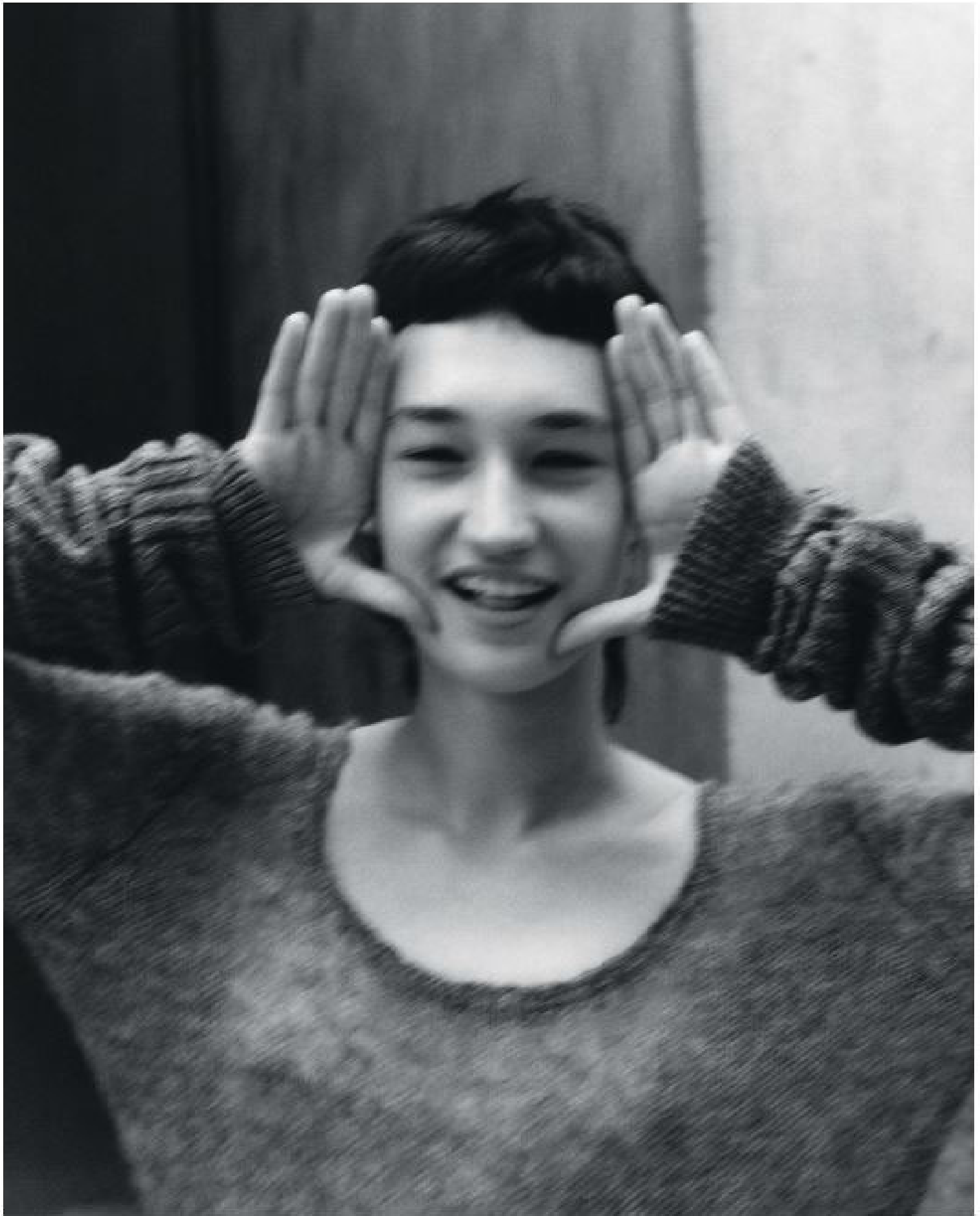


Yu Shan is wearing a loden dress with stud and crystal embroidery, satin skirt and faux-fur boots by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2021.





This page: Valeria is wearing a leather and shearling gilet, viscose rip-up top and loden trousers by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2021. Opposite: Mohair dress and cashmere sleeves by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2021





This page: Anita is wearing a polka-dot felted wool coat by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 1997. Opposite: Myrsky is wearing a lily-printed mohair suit, camellia-printed gazar shirt, embroidered jacquard collar and tie and leather belt by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2012. Leather brogues by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2003.







This page: Mira is wearing a nylon bra and skirt, knitted mohair top, crocheted wool scarf and stockings and faux-fur boots by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2021. Opposite: Yu Shan is wearing a quilted technical fabric jacket and Lurex top by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2014







Opposite page: Anita is wearing a satin and crocheted dress and faux-fur boots by MIU MIU, Autumn/Winter 2021





BOF PROFESSIONAL

## Miuccia Prada's Awakening

The designer launches an artist's collaboration at Miu Miu with a new attitude, writes Tim Blanks.

Miuccia Prada. Brigitte Lacombe.

**BY TIM BLANKS** OCTOBER 5, 2021 04:30

**PARIS** — For Miu Miu's return to the arena of live presentations, Miuccia Prada is collaborating with the Moroccan multi-media artist Meriem Bennani, who has made a video that will be revealed with the show and worked into the new collection's online launch. It's the first time Prada has collaborated in such a way, though she's been asked a lot. "I never liked the idea because, at the end, it was only just to use each other, to sell more." She was also sensitive to exploiting art for her own devices, "not using people to make myself more beautiful, more clever." Now Prada has clearly had a change of heart. "I think I gave up so much I could have done," she says ruefully. "I see that in collaborating with an artist, I share ideas with her so she can introduce something else to enlarge them."

Over the past ten years, Miu Miu's Women's Tales initiative has commissioned twenty short films from female directors, but, as Prada points out, it's not widely known. The collaboration with Bennani feels like a concerted effort to give the artist's contribution greater weight. Prada has bought her work. "She's really tough," she says. She is also political, which allows the designer to have a different kind of voice in her work.

The idea of having other voices speak for her, maybe saying something she would find it difficult to say, is a new feeling for Prada. "This is the first experiment where actually I had more or less everything behind it because I said okay, the video is going to be her, whatever she does. It's her voice completely." Tellingly, Prada feels the collaboration as it appears online will be more illuminating. She thoroughly enjoyed the experience of producing films rather than fashion shows during the last 18 months — "Much more difficult, much more complicated, but also much more rich" — she didn't want to turn her back on that audience with a straight runway redux.



Miuccia is, of course, has been collaborating with Raf Simons on the creative directorship of Prada's signature collection, an unprecedented arrangement in fashion. Miu Miu, on the other hand, has always been her personal vehicle, the perverse, willful and spirited little sister of grown-up Prada. On Monday morning, she is, for instance, wearing a plain checked shirt and navy nylon blouson but she has a huge gold necklace round her neck, Van Cleef and Arpel from the 70s. "This summer, I wanted to buy something a bit vulgar," she says with a sly chuckle.

With Raf's arrival at the main line, Miu Miu may take on a new significance for her. "I can probably do a better Miu Miu. Prada is always more formal. And the Fondazione Prada is important. But with Miu Miu, I can sneak more in, I can be more out there with people." She'd like to be more radical. "But you have to be able to. One thing is having the will, the other is translating your will into reality." Maybe it's the prospect of that challenge that has helped boost Miucci's state of mind. "I felt fear for five years," she admits. "Fear was my only sentiment." She lost four of her best friends, and, plagued by death and anxiety, even before the pandemic, her mood was terrible. "Now I have a vision of something that I can do." She claims that every single day, she debates herself: should I stop working, start a different kind of adventure, introducing more ideas in different forms? "You have to be inspired. Maybe I hope I'm inspired because I've been in a good mood now for three or four months."

## ***Now I have a vision of something that I can do.***

Despite her angsty recent past, Prada's experience with the pandemic was actually the instrument of her opening-up. "I never did so much and never thought so much in my life as in [these] past two years," she says of her lockdown in Milan. "And I think it was very productive. I really changed a lot in my mind." The biggest change was her attitude to technology. "For me, it was kind of revolutionary. It's the first time I really faced the importance of it." Her skepticism, which she says was probably a generational thing, evaporated once she realised tech's relevance. And then came the question: how can *I* be more relevant?

"The relevance comes when you bring reality into your work," Prada answers her own question.

But it's not an easy answer because it hinges on confrontation. "Conflict is the story of my life," Prada declares. That's no surprise given that her greatest conflict is with the instrument of her good fortune. "Clothes are a part of life, but they're not the meaning of life," could be her motto. "Clothing is a little moment of fun, it's useful, I wouldn't underestimate the importance of clothing. But it's a moment in your day," she says at one point. "I think that people still consider fashion with some disregard," she suggests at another. And, resignedly, "The concept of a piece of art or a movie is a big deal. A dress at the end is a dress, but it's my instrument so I have to use it."

As a self-described leftist feminist, famously canvassing for Italy's Communist Party in the 1970s while wearing Yves Saint Laurent, Prada felt ashamed. "All my friends being politicians and intellectuals and me being in fashion meant it was very tough for me...I felt like this stupid girl, but I was not stupid. And actually, the person that gave me more value, the biggest intellectual, was the one who appreciated fashion the most." With the passage of time, shame has yielded to a degree of embarrassment. "The world is such a chaos. Now finally we have it all in front of us. Anything you do is everywhere. Anything you say is everywhere. And how do you relate your little world of fashion to all the problems of the world? I feel embarrassed all the time because of my privilege. And because I think that people should be more interested in what is happening, more proactive, more political."

She says she still holds more or less every single one of her beliefs from those days. “I changed a bit, but deep down, no.” Of course, she’s been asked to become a politician. “I say when I am old, and now I’m old I say when I’m *really* old. If I stopped working, I could do something else, but I’d have to stop working because as a rich fashion designer, I can’t do politics. That I’m sure about.” Maybe if she found a group she could be part of, she muses, “to be part of something if I would believe in it. But probably I would have done that already. And now the reality of politics is so bad that I can probably be much more political in my job, and my other activities.”

Speaking of which, Fondazione Prada in Milan is currently featuring a show cycle about neuroscience, an idea Miuccia nursed for years, until one morning she woke up, called the philosopher and ex-Mayor of Venice Massimo Cacciari and arranged to meet him in a bar, where she told him all about her idea. “After five minutes, he understood. So he started introducing me to these other scientists. They called the ten most important institutions in neuroscience from Harvard to China to Japan to wherever and they said they were happy to participate, but even happier if Fondazione Prada could become a permanent space for this encounter with neuroscience. And I said yes.” Miuccia is enraptured by the scientific miracles she has been exposed to. Ideas are her religion.

She has always been fierce, almost hysterical she says, about not combining her worlds, but she’s changing her mind here too. “Now I’m thinking that, with all that I’m doing, I should probably try to find a way to mix more... find a way to introduce more reality basically, more ideas, more thought, into the fashion conversation in my work.” Later, she’ll add, “I want to find a way to introduce more intelligence in my job because fashion is such a strong instrument. So I want to use it more. I want to try to give more tools — this is going to sound generic — to be more useful.”

With Simons as co-creative director, she’s no longer alone at the top. “By definition, it’s different from before. And I’m very open to his ideas because otherwise why did I call him. And actually, we are working together very well. We never had any problem of any kind, because if he doesn’t like something we don’t do it and vice versa. But I’m happy and he’s a very honest person, which is very good.”

Her longtime design director Fabio Zambonardi is still part of the equation, but Prada describes Simons as “my reference. And this is the first year we work together, so you have to learn to do it. Also, to have this part of somebody else is a bit liberating. It’s not only on my shoulders.” She hopes that means she’ll get more time for the rest of her interests. Time to stop and smell the flowers maybe, though it hasn’t happened yet. “Yesterday, I was thinking about the charm of flowers,” says Miuccia says. “How can it happen that flowers have this?” The wonders of nature await her.