

FASHION

Miuccia Prada Enlists Artist Sophia Al-Maria for Miu Miu Show

- Auguste Perret's Palais d'Iéna will be transformed into a landscape of technological ruins.

BY LUISA ZARGANI

MILAN – Miuccia Prada never leaves anything to chance and for her Miu Miu spring show on Tuesday, she has once again involved an artist.

"The fashion show is another opportunity to further comment on the moment we are living, it is not a decorative necessity but more about bringing another point of view to the conversation," the designer stressed.

To be held at Auguste Perret's Palais d'Iéna, the location will be transformed by Prada, AMO and Qatari-American artist Sophia Al-Maria into a landscape of technological ruins.

The room's columns will be complemented by a series of 20-foot-tall metal columns, some crowned by a capital-like cluster of speakers, others holding digital screens.

Mirrors covering the windows of the Palais and the catwalk, made of the same polished metal as the columns, will amplify the colonnade.

"I met Mrs. Prada in Venice and she asked for me to be involved and I was really excited about the prospect of doing something historically related because I know this is a shared interest," Al-Maria said.

"One of the things I am most interested in writing about history and narrative structures, is the ways we construct stories on columns, and I am also fascinated by the architecture of the space at the Palais. The set itself expands outward, it multiplies columns and the existing architectural features, so it becomes quite disorienting and less clear. Most of my work tries to complicate the stories we already think we know, historical stories and archetypes."

Screens will display Al-Maria's video "Gravity & Grace," inspired by the archetype of the jester and the king. The mirrors will create a kaleidoscopic display of the videos.

Contrasting with the metal, attendees will sit on rectangular benches covered in a soft blue carpet.

Al-Maria has asked Indigenous composer and artist Divide and Dissolve to create the soundtrack, arranged by Asma Maarouf, Daniel Pineda and Joshua Fay.

A petrichor scent was developed for the show space.

The artist expressed her excitement about the film element, "taking the archetype of the jester and the king, two points of view, both locked in dance and death. It's necessary for the king to see the truth and for the jester he needs the king to live and survive."

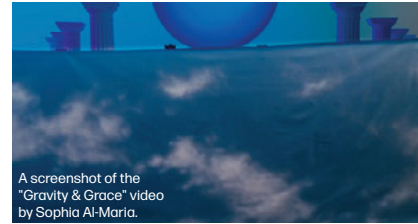
Al-Maria said she chose that specific archetype because she was handed a "particular jacket" to dress actress Ayesha



Hussain that reminded her of Harlequin, or a diamond pattern on a jester's costume.

She recreated the space inside the Palais and filmed Hussain there, dancing and playing the two roles.

Al-Maria was given free rein by Prada, and she admitted it was a new "quite



A screenshot of the "Gravity & Grace" video by Sophia Al-Maria.

special and different" experience for her to work with an architect studio such as OMA as a first step, given her background in theater, films and art.

Asked about the main challenge tackling this project, she said that "the situation was one of abundance, and sometimes when everything feels possible, it's difficult to [narrow things down]" but that she was happy with the final result.

Al-Maria has had solo exhibitions at the Tate Britain, the Whitney Museum of American Art and La Biennale di Venezia.

In March, Miu Miu linked with South Korean choreographer and performance artist Geumhyung Jeong. Miuccia Prada previously worked with artists Meriem Bennani on the Miu Miu spring 2022 show and with Nathalie Djurberg and Hans Berg on the fall 2022 show. For Miu Miu's spring 2023 show, the designer involved Chinese artist Shuang Li, who conceived a video and set installation.

ACCESSORIES

Manolo Blahnik Spotlights Craft

- "The Manolo Blahnik Archives, The Craft" will allow visitors to witness the making of a Hangisi.

BY SAMANTHA CONTI

LONDON – Manolo Blahnik is enriching its digital archives with a new, virtual space meant to highlight artistry and artisans.

The space, which was designed by chief executive officer Kristina Blahnik, will launch Tuesday and be called "The Manolo Blahnik Archives, The Craft."

It will feature eight vignettes that spotlight the craft process from design to technique to construction. Hundreds of pieces of digital content are meant to offer "unparalleled insight" into the art of shoemaking.

The walls of the virtual space will be covered in the house's signature polka-dot motif, and the focus of the experience is a replica of the designer's desk, which leads viewers into various parts of the new space.

Kristina Blahnik described the virtual archives, which launched in 2021, as "a place to celebrate more than 50 decades of my uncle's illustrious career," and said its development has been a passion of hers for many years.

"To finally bring it to life in 2021 was a dream come true. To be adding a further room this year, and highlighting a key pillar of our business, is another milestone I'm incredibly proud of. Craftsmanship really is and always will be at the heart of

everything we do," she said.

Two rooms within the virtual archives have been closed to make way for this new focus on craft, and there are eight key areas: design, construction, typologies, techniques, accessories, materials, making and men's shoes.

Visitors will be able to follow the making of five different shoe models, one from each decade of Blahnik's career. They'll be able to examine components; look closely at embellishments, accessories and embroidery techniques, and delve into the textile research that goes into the various collections.

They will also be able to follow the 60-plus steps that go into making Manolo Blahnik's bestselling Hangisi style at the brand's Italian atelier.

The company said a "physical launch" of the new space will be taking place simultaneously in New York and London throughout the month of October.

The Manolo Blahnik virtual experience debuted in 2021 to mark the 50th anniversary of the brand and has attracted more than 1 million visitors to date.

The space subverts the idea of an archive, turning the sketches, designs, history and legacy of the designer into an immersive and interactive experience.

It is part museum, part VIP gallery tour, part pop culture lecture that brings the designer's work, inspirations and memories to life in a 3D experience that stretches across five separate "rooms."

Bold, colorful and animated as a Disney

production, it has top-notch content and is easy to navigate.

When it launched, Blahnik said he wanted the archive to be a space "where others can learn and feel inspired to create. It's very important to me personally that even those who can't buy my shoes are able to feel a connection to Manolo Blahnik and who we are."

"It has been such a joy to relive some of the magnificent moments in my career and uncover things I have not thought about – or seen – for years! Also, to celebrate the team behind Manolo Blahnik is very special to me, none of this would be possible without them," he said.

This year has been one of change, and renewal, for Manolo Blahnik.

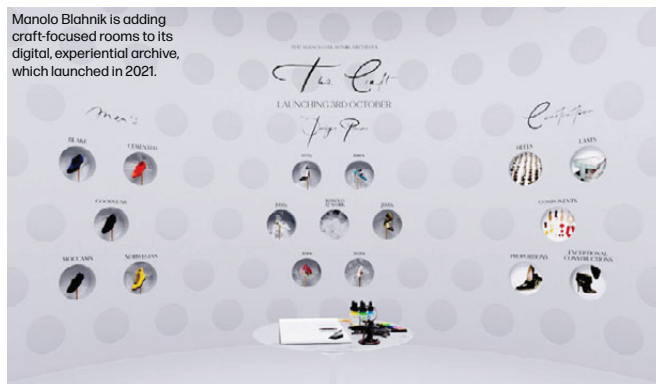
The addition of The Craft rooms comes just weeks after the company moved into its new home in Mayfair at 31 Old Burlington Street, a few steps from the brand's shops in Burlington Arcade.

The six-floor town house spans 14,500 square feet and dates to the early Georgian era, an historical period beloved by the house's founder Manolo Blahnik, who lives part time in Bath, a capital of Georgian architecture.

According to market sources, the company acquired the property for 35 million pounds, although it has not confirmed the price.

As reported earlier this week, the company marked a milestone year in 2022, with sales rising 69 percent to 118.2 million euros and pretax profit more than tripling to 21.9 million euros.

Kristina Blahnik, the chief executive officer who has been spearheading that growth, said the company thanked its employees by handing out more than 1 million euros in bonuses in November.



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Miuccia Prada: now you simplify everything but you need intelligence

The interview

Miuccia Prada

"There's still room for intelligence."

PARIS if you want to get your ideas across, to carry out the principles you believe in, and you have in clothes your means of communication, you have to make people understand them. If no one likes what you do, everything remains an end in itself. That's why I'm interested in working on reality today." For Miuccia Prada, the resounding success of the last few seasons of Miu Miu, the other Prada Group brand she designs, launched 30 years ago, stems precisely from the designer's remarkable ability to understand, decode and reread reality. That is why one waits for the brand's spring/summer 2024 show scheduled for today in Paris-the last show on the last day of fashion weeks-to understand where fashion is really going.

Does dealing with reality, in her view, necessarily mean simplifying one's language? "No. There was a time when dialogue took place within the same cultural circles. Today we talk to the whole world, and then, in order to be understood, we tend toward simplification. I understand that, however, the question is to what extent one can simplify to make oneself understood, without being useless. So I am trying to do the exact opposite, valuing the complexity of life. Also because there are a lot of intelligent people, not just the superficial ones." So she does not like generalizations. "Fashion is a bit like politics: in politics the majority of voters decide, however, there are also those who do not vote. They, what do they believe in? Similarly, how many people turn away from fashion because they find it has become commonplace? Here, I think you have to listen to them as well. So I say there is room for complexity, intelligence, creativity, ideas. But to tell what you believe in, you need to have your own voice." And her voice, how does she express herself? "With my clothes and through the Prada Foundation. With fashion you can be incisive up to a certain point: you can reflect on women's empowerment, comment on the moment, but you cannot discuss the complexity of the world." So far, though, he has kept the fashion house and the Foundation separate. Has he changed his mind?

"I am trying to make peace with my activities. It's not a question of content, but of communication: it's clear that they were never separate, they always coexisted. But I used to be very rigid: I refused for a long time to talk about and promote my cultural engagement by keeping it separate from fashion, because a lot of political issues are somehow out of place in the context of luxury. Now I have realized that I want to bring clarity and make the world around me more cohesive. Through fashion I can collaborate with female directors on Women's Tales (a series of short films about vanity produced by the brand, ed.) and with female artists for fashion show sets: it's a way to broaden the dialogue regardless of the content of the fashion show and to have a commentary on today's world." Speaking of communication: she has always been curious about new media. She was the first to have Tiktokers at her fashion shows. "I'm interested in understanding how the world is changing. I may be critical, but I want to

understand first: it's all part of our life. You have to observe what is happening again and know how to use it for your own purposes. Too often the so-called intelligentsia rejects certain tools because they are not very "sophisticated"-and they are wrong, because they risk those who think differently using them. Of course, there is a lot of superficiality in today's use of certain media, but by stepping away from it you are not part of the conversation. And, once out, it is difficult to get back in. While perhaps others, less attentive and less educated, move on. That is why it would be important to speak one's mind. But often one does not do so for fear of the consequences." Do you find there is less freedom in your profession than in the past?

"It is more complicated and risky, political correctness holds back a lot. Also-but I don't know if that's an excuse I give myself because I don't always have the courage to speak up-I feel the weight of the company and everyone who works there. It's a big responsibility: before you say something, you think about it." That's quite a limitation for someone who does creative work.

"The difficult thing is to keep one's identity within the limits of today. I realize I live by my past certainties, but today a young person is helped by whom to get a culture, to get an idea? And knowledge of history is crucial." Kids seem to view Miu Miu as a kind of community.

"Maybe they perceive that there is a thought behind it, something we believe in first, and then they trust." You have said in the past that no one is wrong in priority dressing. Do you still think that?

"I actually said something very precise: I only notice if someone is particularly beautiful and elegant. Normality, I don't look at it or judge it." So when you travel, don't you happen to observe how kids wear Miu Miu around the world?

"Miu Miu doesn't just dress boys, we have customers well into their sixties. However, no. Actually, the question does not arise: if you pay attention to what is happening in the world, you are already naturally connected with the present. I do what feels right for the moment." He called Miu Miu his most subversive side.

"Miu Miu has always been a bit subversive: too weird? Too intellectual? Too difficult? Recently I decided to try to make the energies of my thinking, the collaborations we do and the people we work with useful. When I say useful, I mean the making of clothes that one feels like putting on: that's how I'm trying to put into practice my theories "against," which so far have been, precisely, only theories." How has brand work changed over the years? "The fundamentals remain the same, but this shift to reality is very significant and I've been working on it for two, three years. I think reality is in fashion because oddities are no longer so attractive: it may be that in some ways I'm a real fashionista, but I think it's much more right a classic object that belongs to our history than an invention for its own sake.

Maybe in three months, or three years, I'll change my mind, but for now I'm going ahead with this." He has always used unconventional faces for Miu Miu: Chloë Sevigny walked the runway in 1996, Emma Corrina March. How does he choose them?

"I choose those who attract me because of what they do, and because of the moment we're in. It's a very personal criterion, and I'd like to broaden the spectrum of people on the runway more and more. Even when I've worked with famous models, I've left them as they are in their everyday life. I've always been interested in how the combination of person and dress changes other people's perception." Last on the runway, you see all your colleagues' proposals: do you ever notice something that you did as well and change it at the last?

"Rarely, but it has happened. But now my criterion is not to look at anything: if I have thought of something that works for me, then I do it."

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