



I believe in variety
Interview with Miuccia Prada
By Serena Tibaldi
Photos by David Sims

“What interests me are people’s stories, what can happen in their lives”. Clothes and culture, subversiveness and normality, Miu Miu’s 30 years... The designer tells her story: “life is rich if it is full of different things.”

The distance to travel from Prada’s style office to Miu Miu’s is short. They are in the same building on a quiet side street in Milan, on the second and first floors respectively. Only a few steps separate them, yet that’s enough for Miuccia Prada to change her mindset completely, moving from one style to the other, “As I change floors, my mood changes too. It becomes lighter”. More fun? “No, not that. I only have fun when I realise I’m doing beautiful and interesting things”. Which, she would point out, is exactly what has been happening for several seasons with Miu Miu. What began just thirty years ago as the ‘young’ collection compared to Prada, the company’s flagship line and today designed by her and Raf Simons, has become one of the aesthetic and cultural references of the new generations. It is well known that Miu Miu is a successful collection; what is striking today is how, in recent seasons, the brand has become one of the most trendsetting forces in fashion. One only has to think of the uproar unleashed by the spring/summer 2022 collection, in which the designer cut through school-style uniforms, khaki trousers and oxford shirts with scissors, reducing them to skimpy-thin garments. It was a risky idea but it immediately became the look of the year, viral in both the digital sphere and in the real world. The wave of enthusiasm from the public, which Miuccia Prada admits to perceiving and liking, shows no sign of abating, with sold-out collections and first places in the rankings of the most influential brands. But when asked to analyse this renewed and explosive success, the designer takes it a back and speaks of usefulness.

“Miu Miu has always been a somewhat subversive brand: Too weird? Too intellectual? Too difficult? Recently I decided to focus my energies and those of the people I collaborate with on making useful clothes”. As useful as a few centimetres of miniskirt? “Useful in the sense of clothes that people want to wear, I think the difference is that now I try to put my ‘against’ theories into practice: at the moment it is very difficult to stand between the reality that surrounds us and the world of luxury – a word I abhor: I would replace it with beautiful, precious or intelligent – and from there do your own work. So I try to find a way to use what I do and what I can do. It’s one of the advantages of this world...” The designer interrupts herself often, choosing her words carefully. She rarely speaks to the media, and when she does, she wants to be clear. The desk in her Milan office – while on the subject of floors, it is on the third – is a glass table without decorations or distractions, in the same grey as the light pullover she wears. The green, embroidered skirt, on the other hand, is coordinated with the tea that she’s drinking. But she was talking about the benefits of fashion. “... fashion attracts energy, partly because there are the financial possibilities, but mainly because those who work in it have to be curious; my assistants can talk about architecture, art, music, cinema. In almost all other professions, on the other hand, you are focused on your own work”.

The idea that usefulness and reality can create such a powerful style also has to do with her being a pure fashionista, as she describes herself. What attracts her in the end is more an everyday piece than one invented from scratch. which paradoxically she is more used to. In the end it’s about clothes that have to please: because if nobody likes what you do, then there’s no point in doing it. Miu Miu’s recent, vertiginous rise to the role of style leader has coincided with its decisive turn towards normality: the collection for this autumn/winter is absolutely everyday with its girls in sweatshirts, leggings and navy jackets, or with transparent polka dot sheath dresses and Church’s on their feet (a co-lab between the two brands, 500 pairs sold on the first day alone). “That’s what interests me today. The spectrum of what is potentially interesting to the public is getting narrower and narrower: that’s why I love working on clichés. It’s the same problem as in politics: to what extent can you

simplify your language to make yourself understood by as many people as possible. In the past, the target audience was small, and the dialogue was limited between people with the same cultural type; now you have the world in front of you, and how do you make yourself understood? By simplifying. but doing it without becoming useless is difficult". As the conversation goes on, it becomes clear that the crux of the matter, and the key to success – both of Miu Miu and of the entire Prada universe – lies in the balance Miuccia Prada has managed to achieve. "Between fashion and culture, subversiveness and normality, between simplification of language and complexity of themes: "There is nothing simple in life, and yet reality today is all in the moment: does something work? Let's use it. And then immediately away, deleted. But I don't think it has to be like that: there are a lot of intelligent people, and a lot of sophisticated kids who are often much more cultured than we were at that age. We should not think that there are only superficial people. On the contrary, superficiality is also needed: there are times in life when it is perfectly fine for it to be there. I believe in variety, and in the variety of lives. I often forget to say it, but the only thing that interests me are people's stories, and everything that can happen in their lives. Good moments, bad ones, idiotic ones, intellectual ones and also the superficial ones. A life is rich if it is full of many different things",

Miu Miu's origins are strictly pragmatic. "In the company they wanted a second, younger brand than Prada: I started to make some suggestions, and in the end I decided to take care of it myself," she recalls, laughing. These are the years when second lines, aimed at a lower and cheaper age group, were appearing everywhere. But Miu Miu from the start was another story. In an era of pumped-up glamour, Miuccia Prada used the very young and rather 'wasted' protagonists of *Kids*, a cult film by Larry Clark, sending a twenty-year-old Chloé Sevigny on the catwalk without make-up in sugar-paper blue trousers and polo shirt. The brand turned nylon petticoats and hideous old wallpaper patterns into fashion statements. It created a community around the brand aesthetic when in fashion the concept did not yet exist. Miu Miu has nothing of the 'second young line', not even the reference age. "Of course it's not just a collection for young people, we also have a lot of customers in their fifties, sixties and over. Isn't it said that age is a state of mind? Personally, I don't regret adolescence at all. On the contrary, I say to those who are betting everything on the beauty of youth. that we all grow old anyway: to base your life on that is to devote yourself to unhappiness". What's more, thinking only of one type of customer today is no longer feasible, not even with such a strong collection. "I'll give you an example. I have been wanting to do an exhibition on women's issue for years, but there is an infinite amount of different groups, points of view, thoughts, religions, theories and civilisations. The real difficulty today is to grab hold of this vastness, in fashion as in politics: before you have an answer, whatever it may be, you have to read reality. But reading the world now is almost impossible."

Her aim is to broaden the dialogue, by all means: fashion, of course, but also art. Miu Miu is one of the tools with which the designer pursues her agenda, and it is also this that makes the brand so much in the present. Although for years she refused to collaborate on her collections with artists, for fear of exploiting their fame for commercial purposes, her position has changed today. For instance, the set of each Miu Miu show at the Palais d'Iéna in Paris is designed by emerging artists: there were the animated monsters by Nathalie Djurberg and Hans Berg in March 2022, the underwater space crammed with telecommunication cables by Shang Li in October of the same year, the dozens of video screens designed by Geumhyung Jeong to analyse the relationship between body and dress last March. "At a certain point I had to declare that my two souls, which I officially kept separate, actually always co-existed," she says about her inner clash between fashion and culture, "so I am repositioning my two activities." What she meant by this became clear a few days after the interview, when it was announced that she had been appointed director of her Fondazione Prada, one of the most important artistic and cultural institutions in the world.

And then there is cinema. In 2011 Miu Miu launched *Women's Tales*, through which it has so far produced 26 short films by female directors. The first was by Zoe Cassavetes, who set her story in an elegant ladies 'toilet; the most recent was Antoneta Alamat Kusijanovic, who staged the relationship between a woman of Polish origin, whose marriage is falling apart, and her own father. "It all stems from my love for cinema: that is where my culture was formed, so as soon as I could, I tried to do something. With the Miu Miu *Women's Tales* project, we created a platform for talented female directors and, through their eyes, we opened up a conversation about the world of femininity, vanity and what they mean nowadays." A basic theme therefore exists, but in fact the female directors have carte blanche. "The original idea would have been 'women talking about vanity', but many of them follow different paths, following their own interests. That's fine, because talking to them

is such an enrichment, smart and intelligent as they are". It is also thanks to these initiatives that Miu Miu has earned its place as the subversive collection of the Prada Group; however, today being subversive is much more complicated. "The freedom of the 1990s is no longer there. Too risky, too dangerous: you feel the responsibility of a company and the people who work in it. It's bad news when you no longer have the courage to say something uncomfortable because you don't feel like paying for the consequences: a lot of young people tell me that if I, and all of us, don't say what we think, then we are making a mistake and impoverishing the conversation. I understand them, but today it's not easy". In the past, the fashion designer has often said that she cannot be political as she is a creator of 'luxury', but even this stumbling block seems to have been overcome. "It is perhaps the thing that interests me most. But I act in a subtle way, understanding what I can and cannot do, while remaining true to myself. That's the real difficulty: being who you are despite all the limitations that have appeared".

Captions:

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Right, two models in the backstage of the Mid Mid spring/summer 2022 fashion show. This year, the brand celebrates its 30th anniversary. First page, a recent portrait of Miuccia Prada by David Sims, stylist Katie Grand.

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Above, a still from the short *The Powder Room* by Zoe Cassavetes, the first film in the *Women's Tales* project launched by Liu Min in 2021. On the preceding pages, the set for the spring/summer Miu Mia show at Palais d'Iena, Paris, a submarine space full of telecommunications cables designed by artist Shang Li.

"Fashion attracts energy. Because those who work in it have to be curious"

Annette Bening Queen Latifah Henry Taylor

Miuccia Prada



The
New
York
Times
Style
Magazine
The Greats
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EVEN BEFORE HEADING from the Fondazione Prada, a contemporary art complex housed in an old distillery on the southeastern edge of Milan, to Miuccia Prada's office about a mile away, I'm reminded of her towering presence everywhere I look. A docent, dressed in a black Prada uniform, shepherds a pair of tourists, both carrying Prada handbags, into a screening of "Four Unloved Women, Adrift on a Purposeless Sea, Experience the Ecstasy of Dissection," a short film by the Canadian director David Cronenberg accompanied by a

empire. (In 2022, the company's annual revenue was \$4.5 billion.) In addition to Prada, the couple has ownership stakes in Miu Miu, which might be described as Prada's unruly niece; the footwear brands Church's and Car Shoe; and the Pasticceria Marchesi pastry shops. (As of last year, they can also claim some of those dusty train tracks: Prada Holding, which owns 80 percent of the Prada Group and is controlled by the Prada family, is one of three entities that acquired the plot of disused land for roughly \$190 million to convert it into a park, housing, offices and the Olympic Village for the 2026 Winter Games.)

Those with no interest in fashion have at least seen the house's triangular logo and know Prada's name, whether through movies (in 1999's teen comedy "10 Things I Hate About You," a student explains, "There's a difference between like and love. Because I like my Skechers, but I love my Prada backpack") and TV shows (in a 2019 episode of "The Simpsons," Homer relieves himself behind "Prada Marfa," a replica of a Prada store created in 2005 near Marfa, Texas, by the artists Elmgreen & Dragset),

eager, to spar. She, too, is recording the conversation and taking notes. When I ask what she does to relax, her answer is "no."

Although she's less inscrutable than her intellectual peers — Rei Kawakubo rarely speaks to journalists; Martin Margiela never has — she's certainly not as flamboyant as Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana or Donatella Versace, flashier designers from the height of Italy's sex-bomb era. And while she refuses to acknowledge personal achievements ("I leave it to other people to say what I did," she says), she's not above engaging in some mythmaking of her own:

The designer reimagined fashion's relationship to art — and forever transformed what the world considers beautiful.

MIUCCIA PRADA

By Nick Haramis
Photographs by Collier Schorr
Fashion Styled by Suzanne Koller

wunderkammer of 18th-century anatomical wax sculptures. Once outside, I pass an abandoned rail yard and billboards for two other Fondazione exhibitions: a permanent re-creation of the home studio in Switzerland where Jean-Luc Godard edited his final movie, and a survey of videos, photographs and other works by the New York-based artist Dara Birnbaum on view at the Osservatorio, a satellite venue overlooking Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, the shopping arcade where Mario Prada, Miuccia's maternal grandfather, opened the brand's first store in 1913. Down another few blocks, an old woman in a pair of Prada sunglasses walks by with her dog.

At 75, Mrs. Prada, as she's known to strangers and friends alike, is perhaps the most peculiar and certainly the most innovative fashion designer of her generation. In 1975, she took over her family's leather goods business. Two years later, she met her future husband, Patrizio Bertelli, now 77 and the chairman of the Prada Group, with whom she began building a global

books (Lauren Weisberger's 2003 novel, "The Devil Wears Prada," which became a hit film) or music (Beyoncé, Doja Cat and Drake have all name-checked the brand). And yet no matter how far and wide her influence extends, Prada hasn't made it easy to know her, which is, like everything she does, deliberate.

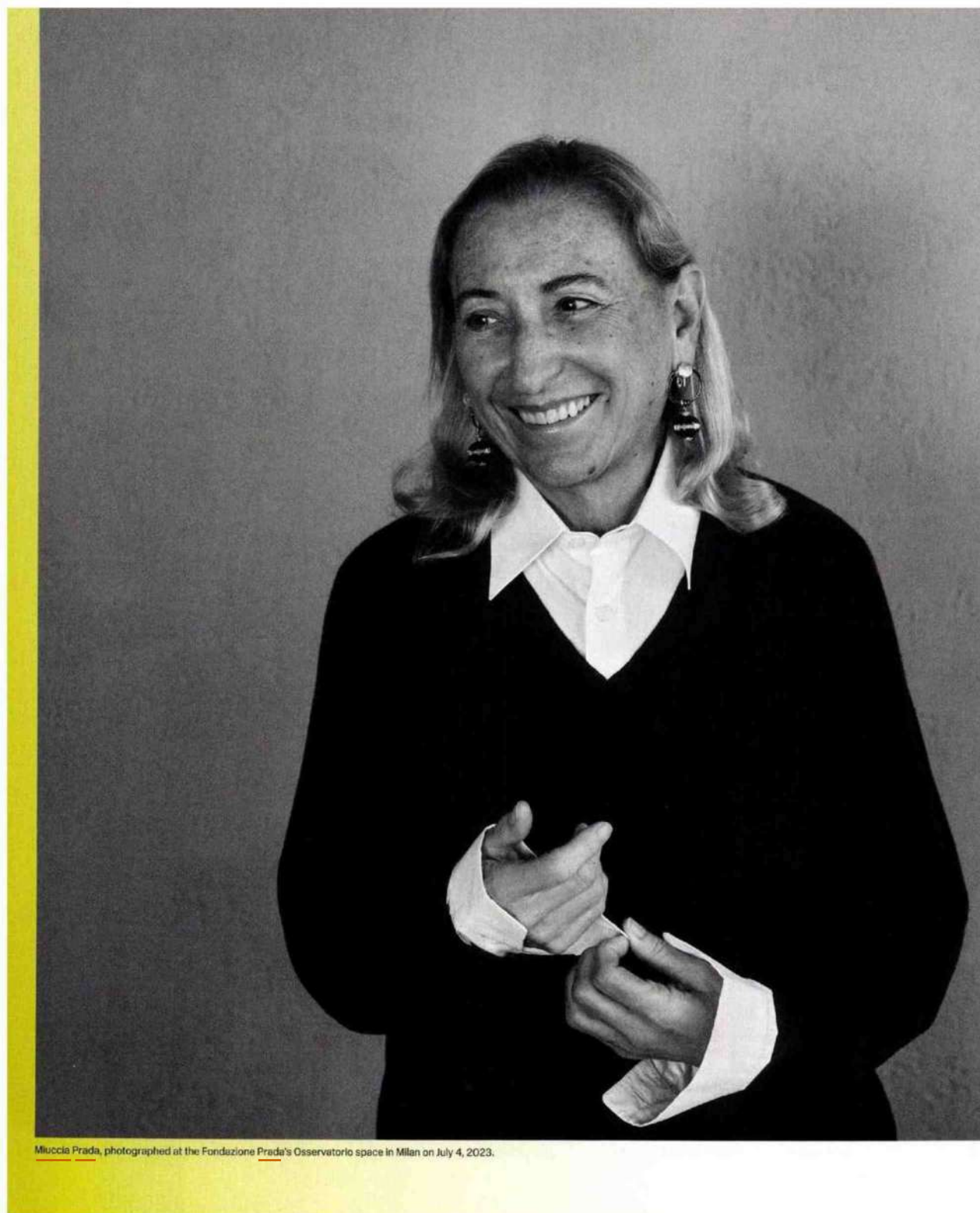
Upon my arrival at the Prada headquarters, a set of stern buildings that occupy approximately 108,000 square feet, I'm confronted by my potential expulsion: the notorious stainless-steel slide connecting the designer's third-floor work space to the courtyard. The German artist Carsten Höller, who installed it in 2000, says it was intended to help her "leave quickly, traveling through the floor under her office to have a glance at the people working there and then land right where her chauffeur is waiting." But, he adds, "It's also a good way to get rid of people."

INTERVIEWING

MIUCCIA PRADA, unlike talking to her, can be a tricky enterprise. From her desk in an austere room with white walls and poured concrete floors — what might be mistaken for an operating theater, were it not for the Gerhard Richter painting and a silver bar cart stacked with cookies — she seems to begin every other sentence with, "Between us. . ." She is 5-foot-4, with hazel eyes and wavy blond hair, and has the measured confidence of someone who's about to deliver the bad news first. Despite her warmth and frequent laughter, she also seems ready, maybe even

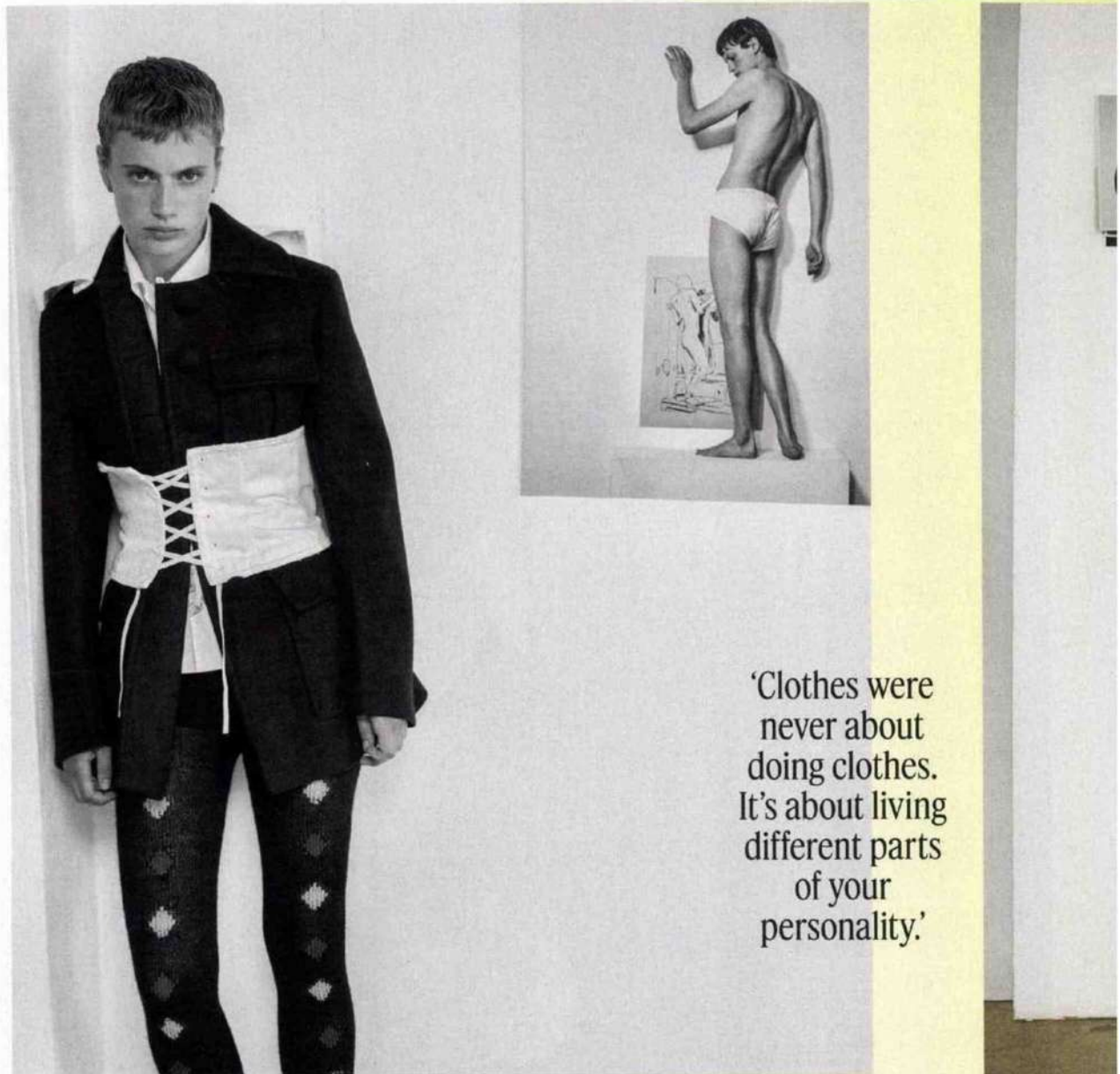
There's a reason her last fragrance was called Paradoxe.

"If Harvard was a billionaire woman, it would be Miuccia Prada," says the Italian artist Francesco Vezzoli, her close friend and frequent travel companion. The Belgian stylist Olivier Rizzo, who has worked with her since 2005, tells me she's changed the way we dress and think about clothing "on every possible level on all levels forever and ever." She's "a challenger," says the Italian creative director Ferdinando Verderi, who has consulted for the brand since 2019. "She'd even challenge the idea of being a challenger." The American artist Theaster Gates, chairman of Prada's Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council, says, "If you're trying to get a character sketch of Miuccia, she's [expletive] sincere. And sincerity is better than being right all the time." The actress Uma Thurman, who developed a relationship with the designer after wearing a lilac Prada gown to the 1995 Oscars, likens



Miuccia Prada, photographed at the Fondazione Prada's Osservatorio space in Milan on July 4, 2023.





'Clothes were never about doing clothes. It's about living different parts of your personality.'

Prada double-cloth jacket, poplin shirt, faded denim stretch waistcoat and alpaca micro **ergyle** tights from the fall 2016 women's collection.

her to "a growing tree, letting herself have new barks," while the musician Frank Ocean, who was photographed for the brand's spring 2020 campaign, draws an analogy between her "tone," he says — "how she resonates, basically" — and the meditative sound of *om*. The Italian gallerist Carla Sozzani, the founder of the 10 Corso Como concept store in Milan, who remembers

"applauding like children" with her friend at runway shows in the 1970s, says, "Some people are more reserved when they're in public. I'm not saying she's another person [in private], but she's more open."

Though that might be accurate, it's also true that no other female

designer has produced such a robust body of autobiographical work. (The punk iconoclast Vivienne Westwood came closest; one screamed, the other sublimates.) Prada may not seem especially eager to reveal herself in conversation, but she's always





Prada combed-cashmere silk cardigan, silk damier shirt and cloqué Lurex skirt from the spring 2002 women's collection and patent leather slingbacks.

communicated more freely through her clothes, which make the case against what she calls "cliché beauty" and "the isolation of fashion." Instead, she has grounded her work in the idea of a uniform — she's as likely to find inspiration in nuns as in sex workers — craving the proximity to what she considers more noble, or at least more honest, professions. If Yves Saint Laurent created a wardrobe for the modern woman in the 1960s, then Prada, a champion of bad taste and the *jolie laide*, gave her permission to be weird and mercurial; to be, in a sense, her. "One of the reasons I started doing clothes was because I couldn't find anything to wear," she says.

It's almost as if she comes up with her designs because they could be — and maybe so that they will be — deemed unflattering or unsexy. "She's always looking for something that's unseen," says the Russian stylist Lotta Volkova, who consults for Miu Miu, which was established in 1993 as a less intellectualized and slightly less expensive alternative to Prada. Earlier this year, at Miu Miu's fall 2023 show in Paris, some of the models wore underwear as outerwear; many had frizzy hair and cowlicks. The British hairstylist Guido Palau, who contributed to his first Prada show in 2004, says that the designer wanted the models to look as if they'd been caught in a gust of wind. A few seasons earlier, for Miu Miu's spring 2022 collection, Prada delivered raw-edge chino micro-miniskirts belted below the hip bone. "Sometimes it's the breasts, sometimes it's the back," she says about fashion's obsession with the female form. "What wasn't trendy was the lower waist, so I said, 'Let's make it as low as possible.'" The garment, which was her way of poking fun at things like fashion magazines, showed up in all of them.

"It's a lot about being against something," she says. Prada's spring 1996 collection, its first of many "ugly chic" offerings, incorporated jarring colors (rust, mustard and "bile green," as one critic would call it) and banal prints (later described as "Formica"), a response to the relentless sex appeal at the time of brands like Gucci, then stewarded by Tom Ford. But for fall 2002, to avoid being reduced to her somewhat prim, vaguely retro aesthetic — which had, however improbably, come to define Italian style as much as an Armani suit — she

released what became known as a "porno chic" collection of transparent PVC coats and knee-high black leather boots. "Clothes were never about doing clothes," she says. "It's about living different parts of your personality."

PRADA STILL RESIDES in the Milanese apartment where she and her two older siblings, Marina and Alberto, grew up. In 1958, her mother, Luisa Prada — a "beautiful, elegant lady," says Sozzani — took over Miuccia's grandfather's shop, which she then ran for nearly 20 years. Her father, Luigi Bianchi, owned a company that made putting-green mowers. The details of that period bore her. "Nothing bad, nothing good," she says. But

she sits a bit straighter when it comes to her teenage years. "That," she says, "was the big political moment."

While enrolled at the University of Milan (where she also earned a Ph.D. in political science), Miu Miu, as she'd been known to her family since childhood, joined the youth-led demonstrations and worker strikes that became referred to across Europe as the protests of 1968 (an era that in Italy would morph into the violent Years of Lead). "I really believed we could transform the world," says Prada, who also studied mime for five years at Milan's Piccolo Teatro. When she was a young member of the Union of Italian Women, a feminist

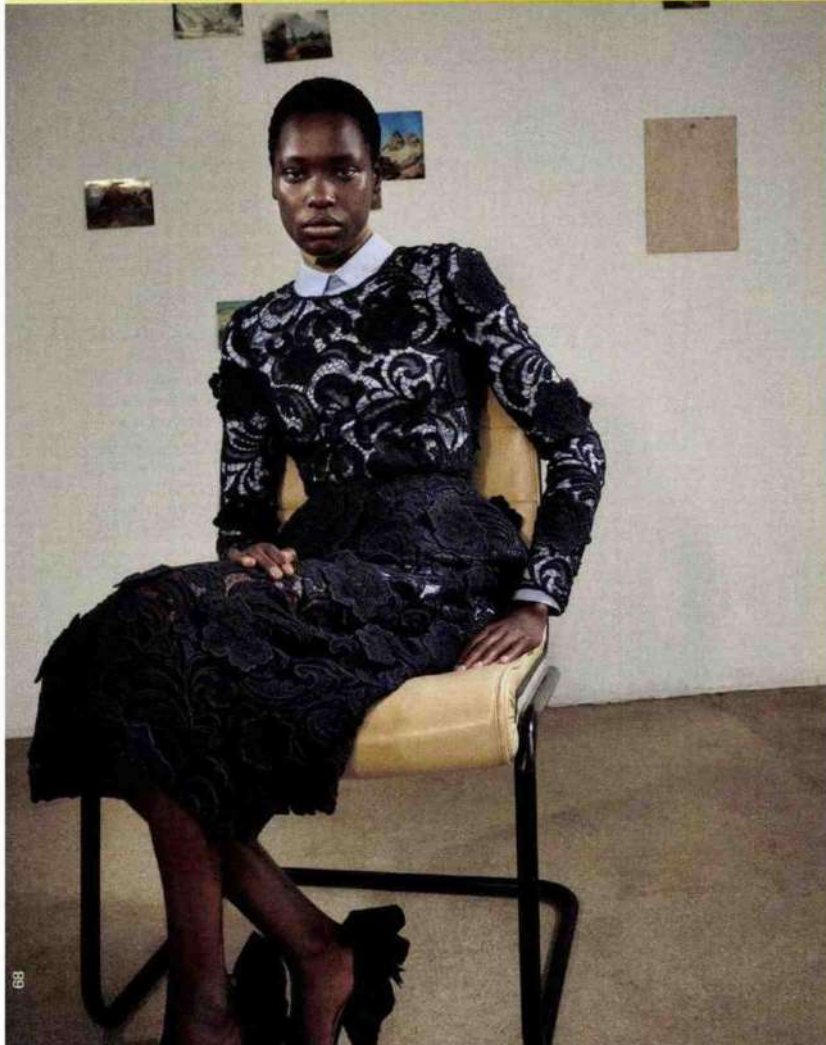
offshoot of the Communist Party, the films of Godard and Pier Paolo Pasolini, both avowed Marxists then, greatly influenced her; fashion, on the other hand, was considered an inconsequential pursuit. "I was ashamed," she says. "But nevertheless, I pursued it because I liked it."

She was also compelled by a sense of duty. "I started kind of against my will," she admits. "Somehow it just happened." A couple of years after taking control of the company, she attended a trade show where she met Bertelli, who had recently given up on an engineering degree to run a leather factory that manufactured belts and bags. "We started as competition, and we're still competing," she says fondly. "In the end, that's something that keeps us together."

People tend to speak about Bertelli, a shrewd industrialist who collects vintage sports cars and sails several yachts — and with whom Prada has two children, Lorenzo Bertelli, 35, the Prada Group's head of corporate social responsibility, and Giulio Bertelli, 33, a sailboat racer — as if they were describing a movie villain they're secretly rooting for. "He has amazing charm," says Sozzani. "You have to love Bertelli. Or you don't." Francesco Riso, Marni's creative director and a member of Prada's design team for eight years until 2016, recalls "the most theatrical fights" between the couple. "It didn't feel unhealthy ever, but it felt like fireworks, that's for sure," he says. But as much as they might bicker — he was initially against, for example, her decision to do a sneaker collaboration; she released it anyway — Bertelli is also quite protective of her: Seldom does one approach Prada about a project without going through him first.

"If I hadn't met my husband, I don't know if I would've done this job," says Prada, who set out opening factories with Bertelli and creating an international brand for "good women, bad women — the richness of all these different people." The designer, who has no formal training and doesn't sketch, begins each collection with concepts rather than silhouettes. One of her earliest pieces, in 1984, was a statement of intent: a modest backpack made not from crocodile or calfskin but black Pocono, an army-grade nylon more commonly associated at the time with parachutes than with purses. Nearly 40 years later, that utilitarian bag and its many iterations remain unlikely objects of desire. "Any bourgeois subject that I approached," she says, "I always wanted to destroy it." (Well, maybe not *any* bourgeois subject: "You shouldn't eat, you

Prada cotton guipure-lace dress, poplin shirt, silk stretch collar, cotton guipure-lace basque and suede shoes from the fall 2008 women's collection.





Prada poplin dress featuring a three-dimensional floral design from the fall 2023 women's collection, prada.com.

shouldn't drink, you should just work and work and work," Riso recalls Prada telling him at one of his first staff meetings. "I could see that she was trying to push me to be better."

With the 1988 debut of her ready-to-wear line — some models came out in black and brown jackets inspired by men's tailoring, others in hot pink dresses with 1950s silhouettes; almost all of them in flats — she introduced house codes that now include

specific garments and accessories (knee-length skirts, bucket hats) and signature styles (geometric prints, color blocking). It's often said that she and her trusted design director, Fabio Zambonardi (who is leaving the brand this month after more than three decades),



determine the trends one season that others follow the next, which, though true, is incomplete; the clothes are only one part of it. At some point, it became almost obligatory for luxury brands to mount cultural, educational or philanthropic initiatives. But back then, she was the only one. "Basically, now every fashion house is a cultural platform," says Vezzoli. "Bottega Veneta does a show with Gaetano Pesce chairs and Gaetano Pesce becomes the most sought-after Italian designer. Saint Laurent produces a movie for Pedro Almodóvar. But Prada did it 30 years ago."

The Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, whose research and design studio, AMO, has created the environments

for every Prada show since 2004, says that each season the conversation starts with a word or two to "trigger intentions." The prompts for the spring 2024 men's presentation, which featured curtains of slime dripping from the ceiling down to an industrial steel grate on the floor — the cascading goo also made an appearance at September's spring 2024 women's show — were "creepy," "flesh and skin" and "organic minimalism." James Jean, a Taiwanese

American painter who in 2007 designed the wallpaper for the brand's SoHo store (his drawings of fantastical creatures and flowers were later printed on Art Nouveau-inspired skirts, trousers and bags for the spring 2008 collection), recalls their project beginning with three adjectives: "romantic," "nonlinear" and "surreal." The French sound artist Frédéric Sanchez, who has scored most Prada shows since the mid-90s, was, in a similar way, also creating for an idea of clothes rather than a finished garment. "With Margiela," says Sanchez about his other longtime collaborator, "it was very physical"; sometimes they'd even repeat the same soundtrack

Prada fur mohair, feather and paillette coat, cloqué wool skirt, silk socks and tricolor satin sandals from the fall 2007 women's collection.



To explore a map of Miuccia Prada's expansive influence on the fashion world, visit tmagazine.com.

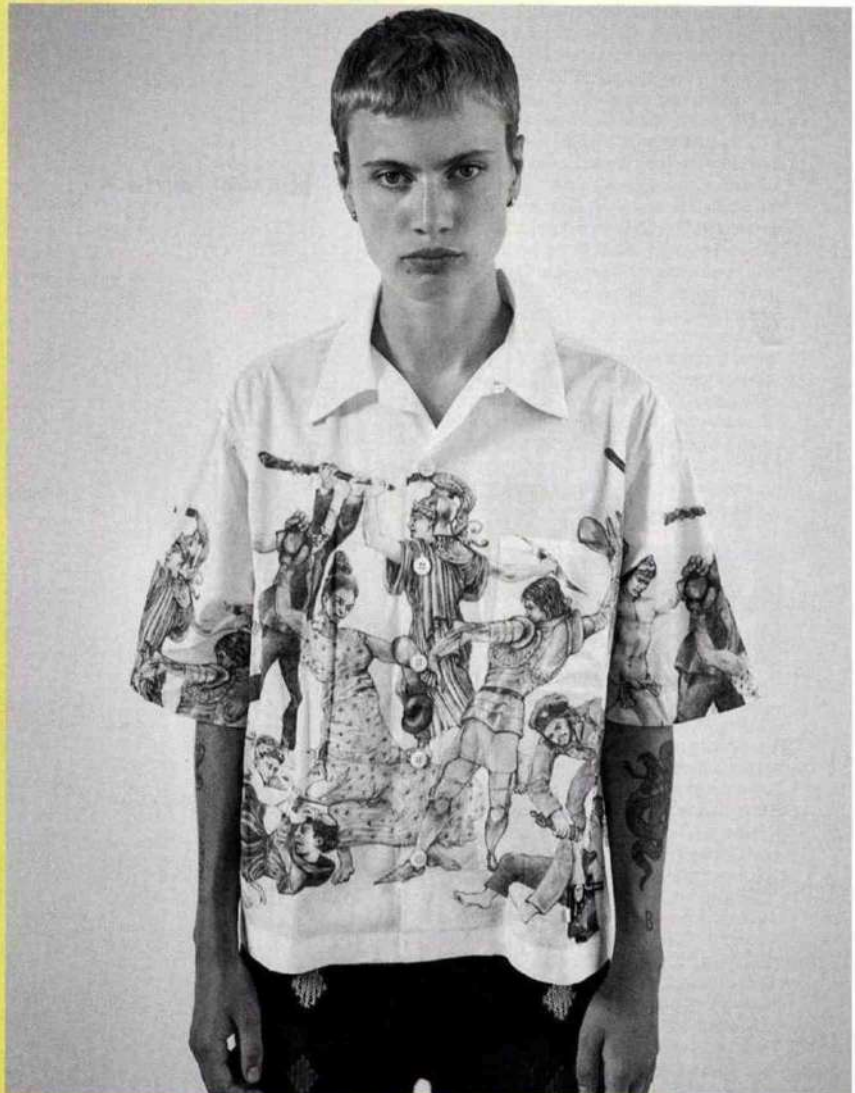
season after season. His experience with Prada, he says, has been more "cerebral."

It's difficult to overstate how radically Prada has changed the landscape of contemporary luxury, a word she hates ("hate," on the other hand, is one she really likes). These days, every reference seems to lead back to her, whether it's a padded headband or a utility vest. Such a fixture is Prada on other designers' mood boards that for her spring 2000 collection — which she referred to as "the ABC of fashion" — she paid homage not only to the work of Yves Saint Laurent but also, rather cheekily, to her own, in the form of reinterpreted cardigans and schoolboy shorts. And yet, what Prada has put out into the world feels more substantial and transgressive than a khaki crop top or the very notion of so-called quiet luxury — both things, mind you, that came from her. "It's much cooler than being eccentric," says the designer Marc Jacobs, a friend of hers. "With Mrs. Prada, it's that thing of style with substance. It's not just a shell that looks good."

THE SOUL OF the Fondazione Prada is the Haunted House, a four-story gilded tower that contains work by the sculptors Robert Gober and Louise Bourgeois. On the second floor, there's a Bourgeois installation called "Cell (Clothes)" (1996), in which pants and dresses appear to be trapped by a ring of wooden doors. On the top floor, there's a 2010 wax sculpture by Gober of a child's leg — almost Prada-like in a white sandal and matching ankle sock — weighed down by an anchor. There are no other clothes on this floor. Instead, Gober has installed a storm drain with water running beneath it. Under the metal bars, among the rocks and debris, sits an illuminated heart — discarded, but still beating.

Journalists inevitably like to bring up Prada's political past, and not just because she likes to bring it up, too — though as a New Yorker article about her from 2004 notes, "in the '60s it was almost a rite of passage for thousands of young middle-class Italians" to join the Communist Party. Prada, however, does seem to have a genuine need to reconcile the idealism of her youth with the choices she's made since; and if ambivalence can be paralyzing, in her case it appears to have had the opposite effect. In 1993, her days of on-the-ground protest behind her — she'd long stopped handing out flyers at rallies — Prada and Bertelli created Milano Prada Arte, which later became the Fondazione Prada. It would give them a place to house their growing art collection but, for Prada, it also became a way to funnel her revolutionary spirit — and her money. "I tell my people in the Fondazione all the time to thank me," she says. "I have to sell a lot of expensive handbags to run a museum." ("Handbags are not art," the British sculptor and painter Damien Hirst, a friend, recalls her saying. "Whereas when you meet other people, they're constantly telling you that they are art, and you need 100.")

From the beginning, Prada has been dutifully managing and scrutinizing every detail of the Fondazione's programming — even showing up at Gober's studio in Manhattan to convince him to contribute. Gober remembers that when she appeared on his doorstep, she said, "Like everything



Prada pongee printed short-sleeved bowling shirt from the fall 2016 men's collection and alpaca micro argyle tights from the fall 2016 women's collection.

else, I have to do this myself!" (Her exit was equally quotable: When Gober sent her home with some books, she took one look at the tote bag he offered and said, "I'll carry them.") In 1999, she and Bertelli dropped in on Koolhaas at his studio in Rotterdam in the Netherlands. "They were bored with their stores," Koolhaas says, and wanted him to oversee the construction of their New York flagship. "All my friends in the art world, or let's say in the cultural

sector, were extremely skeptical whether this would be a desirable collaboration," he says. Koolhaas reimagined the Epicenter, as it's called, on the site of what was once the Guggenheim Museum's SoHo location, with an undulating wood floor and motorized hanging displays. In 2008, OMA, Koolhaas's firm, was hired to design the Fondazione Prada.

Thirty years in, having worked tirelessly to earn her place in the art world, Prada has chosen to become the new director of the foundation. "My main track is [the Fondazione Prada]," she says. "I'd decided that I wanted to keep it separate from



fashion. And no one knew — I never told anybody." As she deliberates over what to say next, I'm reminded of something that the filmmaker Wes Anderson — who's partnered with her on various film and art projects and who designed Bar Luce, the 1950s-style cafe at the Fondazione Prada — told me. "You quickly sense her vulnerability, which can sort of disappear from a person with such authority. I think without a bit of that, you can't quite reach them. She can be fearless, but I don't think she's fearless," he wrote in an email. "Maybe it's because I'm getting older," Prada continues, "but I want to reconcile my whole life and declare my job: I run the Fondazione."

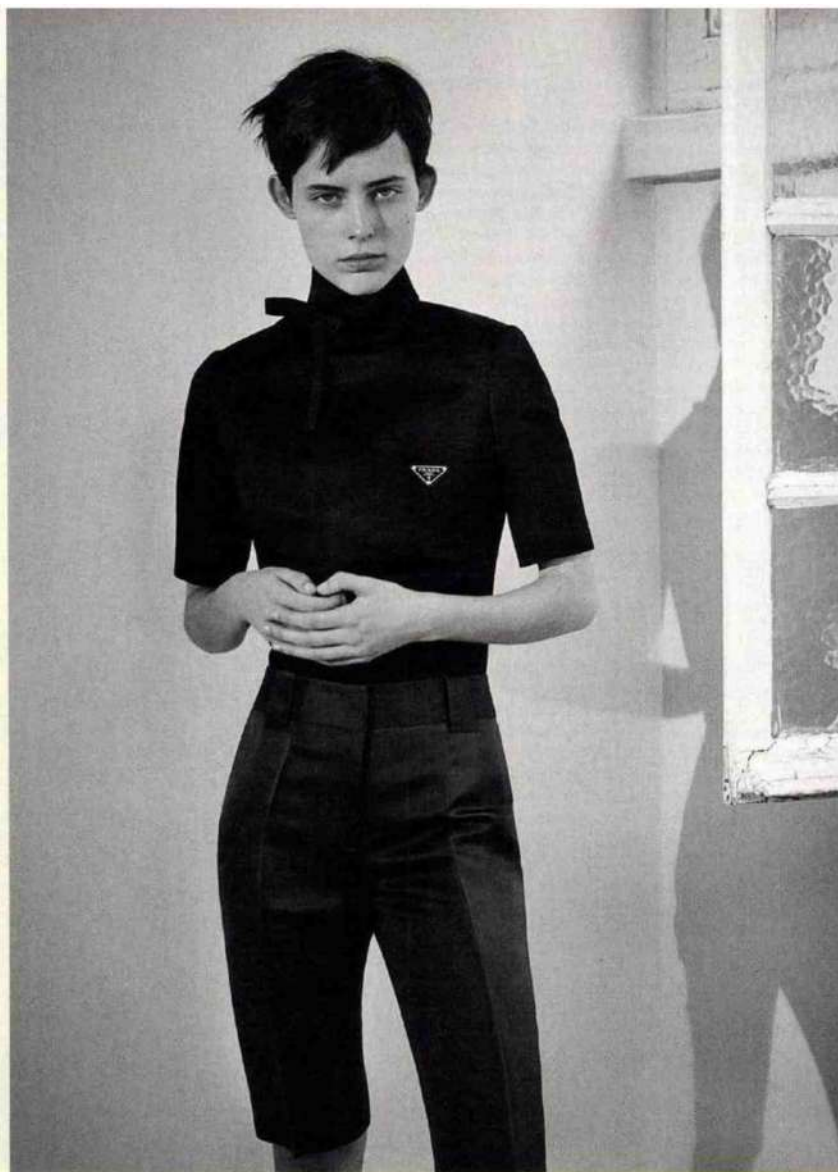
"She's properly a patron," says Hirst. "She really, genuinely sees art as something beneficial to other people." And unlike almost every other collector who tells him they're building a museum, he says, she actually did. The two were out to dinner one night when Hirst, who grew up working class, ordered caviar for the table. Prada sighed. "I really struggle to eat caviar," she said. "Why would you struggle with that?" he recalls saying. "And she was like, 'Oh, I was a communist!'"

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THE PAST few years, Miuccia Prada hasn't had to do quite as much all by herself. In February 2020, just before the pandemic forced Italy into lockdown, the Belgian designer Raf Simons was announced as her co-creative director. The two of them, she said, would be jointly responsible for Prada's women's and men's wear going forward. (She's still the sole designer at Miu Miu; "When I change floors, I change mentalities," she says.) The next day, Simons flew home to Antwerp. Upon his return to Milan that June, he mostly communicated with Prada through a screen.

It was a challenging start to an ambitious experiment. They both had simple reasons for wanting it to succeed. Prada was, as she puts it, "fed up working alone." She was also, of course, planning her succession. "But they don't want me to talk about that because they're afraid it looks like I want to leave," she says. "I don't want to leave at all." Simons, 55, had briefly worked for Prada and Bertelli before going to Dior and then Calvin Klein. (He was the creative director of Jil Sander from 2005 until 2012; the Prada Group sold the brand in 2006.) Following his two-year stint at Calvin Klein, a tumultuous period he describes as "hysteria," he'd vowed to never again run someone else's fashion brand.

"I'm not a stupid guy," says Simons, who now lives in the Milanese apartment where the first Prada shows took place. When Bertelli reached out to set up a meeting, Simons says he knew they wouldn't be discussing Church's shoes. "It was more like, 'Miuccia and I, this is our age, this is our reality,'" he recalls Bertelli saying. (In January, she and Bertelli stepped down as co-chief executive officers of the Prada Group and were replaced by Andrea Guerra, formerly the chief executive officer of the Luxottica eyewear conglomerate. Their son Lorenzo is expected to assume the role down the line.) Prada had wondered if Simons,



Prada double-satin top and shorts from the spring 2019 women's collection. Models: Elie Beranett at Next Management, Saunders at Oul Management, Awar Odhng at Ford Models, Jonas Gler at Lumien Creative, Chloe Nguyen at Select Model Management Paris, Estrella Gomez at IMG Models and America Gonzalez at Supreme. Hair by Cim Mahony at LGA. Makeup by Marie Duhart at Bryant Artists. Set design by Rafael Medeiros. Casting by DM Casting.

who'd overseen his own cultish men's wear brand for 24 years at that point (the line has since been discontinued), might want to look after the men's collections. "But in three seconds," says Prada, Simons suggested, "Why don't we do the two together?" And I immediately said, "Yes, why not?"

In practice, they couldn't be more different. Simons, whose cool aesthetic conveys restraint, would rather adhere to deadlines; she "loves to design today what needs to go on the runway tomorrow," he says. And yet they share an aversion to traditional

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QUEEN LATIFAH

ANNETTE BENING

HENRY TAYLOR

MIUCCIA PRADA



MIUCCIA PRADA

The designer reimagined fashion's relationship to art — and forever transformed what the world considers beautiful.

By Nick Haramis Photographs by Collier Schorr Fashion Styled by Suzanne Koller
EVEN BEFORE

heading from the Fondazione Prada, a contemporary art complex housed in an old distillery on the southeastern edge of Milan, to Miuccia Prada's office about a mile away, I'm reminded of her towering presence everywhere I look. A docent, dressed in a black Prada uniform, shepherds a pair of tourists, both carrying Prada handbags, into a screening of "Four Unloved Women, Adrift on a Purposeless Sea, Experience the Ecstasy of Dissection," a short film by the Canadian director David Cronenberg accompanied by a wunderkammer of 18th-century anatomical wax sculptures. Once outside, I pass an abandoned rail yard and billboards for two other Fondazione exhibitions: a permanent re-creation of the home studio in Switzerland where Jean-Luc Godard edited his final movie, and a survey of videos, photographs and other works by the New York-based artist Dara Birnbaum on view at the Osservatorio, a satellite venue overlooking Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, the shopping arcade where Mario Prada, Miuccia's maternal grandfather, opened the brand's first store in 1913. Down another few blocks, an old woman in a pair of Prada sunglasses walks by with her dog.

At 75, Mrs. Prada, as she's known to strangers and friends alike, is perhaps the most peculiar and certainly the most innovative fashion designer of her generation. In 1975, she took over her family's leather goods business. Two years later, she met her future husband, Patrizio Bertelli, now 77 and the chairman of the Prada Group, with whom she began building a global empire. (In 2022, the company's annual revenue was \$4.5 billion.) In addition to

Prada, the couple has ownership stakes in Miu Miu, which might be described as Prada's unruly niece; the footwear brands Church's and Car Shoe; and the Pasticceria Marchesi pastry shops. (As of last year, they can also claim some of those dusty train tracks: Prada Holding, which owns 80 percent of the Prada Group and is controlled by the Prada family, is one of three entities that acquired the plot of disused land for roughly \$190 million to convert it into a park, housing, offices and the Olympic Village for the 2026 Winter Games.)



Guy Marineau/Condé Nast/Shutterstock (2); courtesy of Prada (3); Firstview (4)

Those with no interest in fashion have at least seen the house's triangular logo and know Prada's name, whether through movies (in 1999's teen comedy "10 Things I Hate About You," a student explains, "There's a difference between like and love. Because I like my Skechers, but I love my Prada backpack") and TV shows (in a 2019 episode of "The Simpsons," Homer relieves himself behind "Prada Marfa," a replica of a Prada store created in 2005 near Marfa, Texas, by the artists Elmgreen & Dragset), books (Lauren Weisberger's 2003 novel, "The Devil Wears Prada," which became a hit film) or music (Beyoncé, Doja Cat and Drake have all name-checked the brand). And yet no matter how far and wide her influence extends, Prada hasn't made it easy to know her, which is, like everything she does, deliberate.

Upon my arrival at the Prada headquarters, a set of stern buildings that occupy approximately 108,000 square feet, I'm confronted by my potential expulsion: the notorious stainless-steel slide connecting the designer's third-floor work space to the courtyard. The German artist Carsten Höller, who installed it in 2000, says it was intended to help her "leave quickly, traveling through the floor under her office to have a glance at the people working there and then land right where her chauffeur is waiting." But, he adds, "It's also a good way to get rid of people."



Prada wool jacket, chiffon blouse and poplin skirt from the spring 2012 women's collection. Photograph by Collier Schorr. Styled by Suzanne Koller



Prada combed-cashmere silk cardigan, silk damier shirt and cloqué Lurex skirt from the spring 2002 women's collection and patent leather slingbacks. Photograph by Collier Schorr. Styled by Suzanne Koller

INTERVIEWING

Miuccia Prada, unlike talking to her, can be a tricky enterprise. From her desk in an austere room with white walls and poured concrete floors — what might be mistaken for an operating theater, were it not for the Gerhard Richter painting and a silver bar cart stacked with cookies — she seems to begin every other sentence with, “Between us. ...” She is 5-foot-4, with hazel eyes and wavy blond hair, and has the measured confidence of someone who’s about to deliver the bad news first. Despite her warmth and frequent laughter, she also seems ready, maybe even eager, to spar. She, too, is recording the conversation and taking notes. When I ask what she does to relax, her answer is “no.”

Although she’s less inscrutable than her intellectual peers — Rei Kawakubo rarely speaks to journalists; Martin Margiela never has — she’s certainly not as flamboyant as Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana or Donatella Versace, flashier designers from the height of Italy’s sex-bomb era. And while she refuses to acknowledge personal achievements (“I leave it to other people to say what I did,” she says), she’s not above engaging in some mythmaking of her own: There’s a reason her last fragrance was called Paradoxe.



Prada double-cloth jacket, poplin shirt, faded denim stretch waistcoat and alpaca micro argyle tights from the fall 2016 women's collection. Photograph by Collier Schorr. Styled by Suzanne Koller



Prada poplin dress featuring a three-dimensional floral design from the fall 2023 women's collection, \$3,750, [prada.com](https://www.prada.com). Photograph by Collier Schorr. Styled by Suzanne Koller

“If Harvard was a billionaire woman, it would be Miuccia Prada,” says the Italian artist Francesco Vezzoli, her close friend and frequent travel companion. The Belgian stylist Olivier Rizzo, who has worked with her since 2005, tells me she’s changed the way we dress and think about clothing “on every possible level on all levels forever and ever.” She’s “a challenger,” says the Italian creative director Ferdinando Verderi, who has consulted for the brand since 2019. “She’d even challenge the idea of being a challenger.” The American artist Theaster Gates, chairman of Prada’s Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council, says, “If you’re trying to get a character sketch of Miuccia, she’s [expletive] sincere. And sincerity is better than being right all the time.” The actress Uma Thurman, who developed a relationship with the designer after wearing a lilac Prada gown to the 1995 Oscars, likens her to “a growing tree, letting herself have new barks,” while the musician Frank Ocean, who was photographed for the brand’s spring 2020 campaign, draws an analogy between her “tone,” he says — “how she resonates, basically” — and the meditative sound of om. The Italian gallerist Carla Sozzani, the founder of the 10 Corso Como concept store in Milan, who remembers “applauding like children” with her friend at runway shows in the 1970s, says, “Some people are more reserved when they’re in public. I’m not saying she’s another person [in private], but she’s more open.”

Though that might be accurate, it’s also true that no other female designer has produced such a robust body of autobiographical work. (The punk iconoclast Vivienne Westwood came closest; one screamed, the other sublimates.) Prada may not seem especially eager to reveal herself in conversation, but she’s always communicated more freely through her clothes, which make the case against what she calls “ cliché beauty” and “the isolation of fashion.” Instead, she has grounded her work in the idea of a uniform — she’s as likely to find inspiration in nuns as in sex workers — craving the proximity to what she considers more noble, or at least more honest, professions. If Yves Saint Laurent created a wardrobe for the modern woman in the 1960s, then Prada, a champion of bad taste and the *jolie laide*, gave her permission to be weird and mercurial; to be, in a sense, her. “One of the reasons I started doing clothes was because I couldn’t find anything to wear,” she says.



It's almost as if she comes up with her designs because they could be — and maybe so that they will be — deemed unflattering or unsexy. “She’s always looking for something that’s unseen,” says the Russian stylist Lotta Volkova, who consults for Miu Miu, which was established in 1993 as a less intellectualized and slightly less expensive alternative to Prada. Earlier this year, at Miu Miu’s fall 2023 show in Paris, some of the models wore underwear as outerwear; many had frizzy hair and cowlicks. The British hairstylist Guido Palau, who contributed to his first Prada show in 2004, says that the designer wanted the models to look as if they’d been caught in a gust of wind. A few seasons earlier, for Miu Miu’s spring 2022 collection, Prada delivered raw-edge chino micro-miniskirts belted below the hip bone. “Sometimes it’s the breasts, sometimes it’s the back,” she says about fashion’s obsession with the female form. “What wasn’t trendy was the lower waist, so I said, ‘Let’s make it as low as possible.’” The garment, which was her way of poking fun at things like fashion magazines, showed up in all of them.

“It’s a lot about being against something,” she says. Prada’s spring 1996 collection, its first of many “ugly chic” offerings, incorporated jarring colors (rust, mustard and “bile green,” as one critic would call it) and banal prints (later described as “Formica”), a response to the relentless sex appeal at the time of brands like Gucci, then stewarded by Tom Ford. But for fall 2002, to avoid being reduced to her somewhat prim, vaguely retro aesthetic — which had, however improbably, come to define Italian style as much as an Armani suit — she released what became known as a “porno chic” collection of transparent PVC coats and knee-high black leather boots. “Clothes were never about doing clothes,” she says. “It’s about living different parts of your personality.”



PRADA STILL resides in the Milanese apartment where she and her two older siblings, Marina and Alberto, grew up. In 1958, her mother, Luisa Prada — a “beautiful, elegant lady,” says Sozzani — took over Miuccia’s grandfather’s shop, which she then ran for nearly 20 years. Her father, Luigi Bianchi, owned a company that made putting-green mowers. The details of that period bore her. “Nothing bad, nothing good,” she says. But she sits a bit straighter when it comes to her teenage years. “That,” she says, “was the big political moment.”

While enrolled at the University of Milan (where she also earned a Ph.D. in political science), Miu Miu, as she’d been known to her family since childhood, joined the youth-led demonstrations and worker strikes that became referred to across Europe as the protests of 1968 (an era that in Italy would morph into the violent Years of Lead). “I really believed we could transform the world,” says Prada, who also studied mime for five years at Milan’s Piccolo Teatro. When she was a young member of the Union of Italian Women, a feminist offshoot of the Communist Party, the films of Godard and Pier Paolo Pasolini, both avowed Marxists then, greatly influenced her; fashion, on the other hand, was considered an inconsequential pursuit. “I was ashamed,” she says. “But nevertheless, I pursued it because I liked it.”

She was also compelled by a sense of duty. “I started kind of against my will,” she admits. “Somehow it just happened.” A couple of years after taking control of the company, she attended a trade show where she met Bertelli, who had recently given up on an engineering degree to run a leather factory that manufactured belts and bags. “We started as competition, and we’re still competing,” she says fondly. “In the end, that’s something that keeps us together.”



Prada cotton guipure-lace dress, poplin shirt, silk stretch collar, cotton guipure-lace basque and suede shoes from the fall 2008 women's collection.
Photograph by Collier Schorr. Styled by Suzanne Koller



Prada poplin dress. Photograph by Collier Schorr. Styled by Suzanne Koller

People tend to speak about Bertelli, a shrewd industrialist who collects vintage sports cars and sails several yachts — and with whom Prada has two children, Lorenzo Bertelli, 35, the Prada Group’s head of corporate social responsibility, and Giulio Bertelli, 33, a sailboat racer — as if they were describing a movie villain they’re secretly rooting for. “He has amazing charm,” says Sozzani. “You have to love Bertelli. Or you don’t.” Francesco Risso, Marni’s creative director and a member of Prada’s design team for eight years until 2016, recalls “the most theatrical fights” between the couple. “It didn’t feel unhealthy ever, but it felt like fireworks, that’s for sure,” he says. But as much as they might bicker — he was initially against, for example, her decision to do a sneaker collaboration; she released it anyway

— Bertelli is also quite protective of her: Seldom does one approach Prada about a project without going through him first.

“If I hadn’t met my husband, I don’t know if I would’ve done this job,” says Prada, who set out opening factories with Bertelli and creating an international brand for “good women, bad women — the richness of all these different people.” The designer, who has no formal training and doesn’t sketch, begins each collection with concepts rather than silhouettes. One of her earliest pieces, in 1984, was a statement of intent: a modest backpack made not from crocodile or calfskin but black Pocono, an army-grade nylon more commonly associated at the time with parachutes than with purses. Nearly 40 years later, that utilitarian bag and its many iterations remain unlikely objects of desire. “Any bourgeois subject that I approached,” she says, “I always wanted to destroy it.” (Well, maybe not any bourgeois subject: “You shouldn’t eat, you shouldn’t drink, you should just work and work and work,” Risso recalls Prada telling him at one of his first staff meetings. “I could see that she was trying to push me to be better.”)

With the 1988 debut of her ready-to-wear line — some models came out in black and brown jackets inspired by men’s tailoring, others in hot pink dresses with 1950s silhouettes; almost all of them in flats — she introduced house codes that now include specific garments and accessories (knee-length skirts, bucket hats) and signature styles (geometric prints, color blocking). It’s often said that she and her trusted design director, Fabio Zambonardi (who is leaving the brand this month after more than three decades), determine the trends one season that others follow the next, which, though true, is incomplete; the clothes are only one part of it. At some point, it became almost obligatory for luxury brands to mount cultural, educational or philanthropic initiatives. But back then, she was the only one. “Basically, now every fashion house is a cultural platform,” says Vezzoli. “Bottega Veneta does a show with Gaetano Pesce chairs and Gaetano Pesce becomes the most sought-after Italian designer. Saint Laurent produces a movie for Pedro Almodóvar. But Prada did it 30 years ago.”



The Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, whose research and design studio, AMO, has created the environments for every Prada show since 2004, says that each season the conversation starts with a word or two to “trigger intentions.” The prompts for the spring 2024 men’s presentation, which featured curtains of slime dripping from the ceiling down to an industrial steel grate on the floor — the cascading goo also made an appearance at September’s spring 2024 women’s show — were “creepy,” “flesh and skin” and “organic minimalism.” James Jean, a Taiwanese American painter who in 2007 designed the wallpaper for the brand’s SoHo store (his drawings of fantastical creatures and flowers were later printed on Art Nouveau-inspired skirts, trousers and bags for the spring 2008 collection), recalls their project beginning with three adjectives: “romantic,” “nonlinear” and “surreal.” The French sound artist Frédéric Sanchez, who has scored most Prada shows since the mid-90s, was, in a similar way, also creating for an idea of clothes rather than a finished garment. “With Margiela,” says Sanchez about his other longtime collaborator, “it was very physical”; sometimes they’d even repeat the same soundtrack season after season. His experience with Prada, he says, has been more “cerebral.”

It’s difficult to overstate how radically Prada has changed the landscape of contemporary luxury, a word she hates (“hate,” on the other hand, is one she really likes). These days, every reference seems to lead back to her, whether it’s a padded headband or a utility vest. Such a fixture is Prada on other designers’ mood boards that for her spring 2000 collection — which she referred to as “the ABC of fashion” —

she paid homage not only to the work of Yves Saint Laurent but also, rather cheekily, to her own, in the form of reinterpreted cardigans and schoolboy shorts. And yet, what Prada has put out into the world feels more substantial and transgressive than a khaki crop top or the very notion of so-called quiet luxury — both things, mind you, that came from her. “It’s much cooler than being eccentric,” says the designer Marc Jacobs, a friend of hers. “With Mrs. Prada, it’s that thing of style with substance. It’s not just a shell that looks good.”

THE SOUL OF the Fondazione Prada is the Haunted House, a four-story gilded tower that contains work by the sculptors Robert Gober and Louise Bourgeois. On the second floor, there’s a Bourgeois installation called “Cell (Clothes)” (1996), in which pants and dresses appear to be trapped by a ring of wooden doors. On the top floor, there’s a 2010 wax sculpture by Gober of a child’s leg — almost Prada-like in a white sandal and matching ankle sock — weighed down by an anchor. There are no other clothes on this floor. Instead, Gober has installed a storm drain with water running beneath it. Under the metal bars, among the rocks and debris, sits an illuminated heart — discarded, but still beating.



Prada fur mohair, feather and paillette coat, cloqué wool skirt, silk socks and tricolor satin sandals from the fall 2007 women's collection. Photograph by Collier Schorr. Styled by Suzanne Koller



Prada pongee printed short-sleeved bowling shirt from the fall 2016 men's collection and alpaca micro argyle tights from the fall 2016 women's collection. Photograph by Collier Schorr. Styled by Suzanne Koller

Journalists inevitably like to bring up Prada’s political past, and not just because she likes to bring it up, too — though as a *New Yorker* article about her from 2004 notes, “in the ’60s it was almost a rite of passage for thousands of young middle-class Italians” to join the Communist Party. Prada, however, does seem to have a genuine need to reconcile the idealism of her youth with the choices she’s made since; and if ambivalence can be paralyzing, in her case it appears to have had the opposite effect. In 1993, her days of on-the-ground protest behind her — she’d long stopped handing out flyers at rallies — Prada and Bertelli created Milano Prada Arte, which later became the Fondazione Prada. It would give them a place to house their growing art collection but, for Prada, it also became a way to funnel her revolutionary spirit — and her money. “I tell my people in the Fondazione all the time to thank me,” she says. “I have to sell a lot of expensive handbags to run a museum.” (“Handbags are not art,” the British sculptor and painter Damien Hirst, a friend, recalls her saying. “Whereas when you meet other people, they’re constantly telling you that they are art, and you need 100.”)

From the beginning, Prada has been dutifully managing and scrutinizing every detail of the Fondazione’s programming — even showing up at Gober’s studio in Manhattan to convince him to contribute. Gober remembers that when she appeared on his doorstep, she said, “Like everything else,

I have to do this myself!” (Her exit was equally quotable: When Gober sent her home with some books, she took one look at the tote bag he offered and said, “I’ll carry them.”) In 1999, she and Bertelli dropped in on Koolhaas at his studio in Rotterdam in the Netherlands. “They were bored with their stores,” Koolhaas says, and wanted him to oversee the construction of their New York flagship. “All my friends in the art world, or let’s say in the cultural sector, were extremely skeptical whether this would be a desirable collaboration,” he says. Koolhaas reimagined the Epicenter, as it’s called, on the site of what was once the Guggenheim Museum’s SoHo location, with an undulating wood floor and motorized hanging displays. In 2008, OMA, Koolhaas’s firm, was hired to design the Fondazione Prada.

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Prada double-satin top and shorts from the spring 2019 women’s collection. Photograph by Collier Schorr. Styled by Suzanne Koller

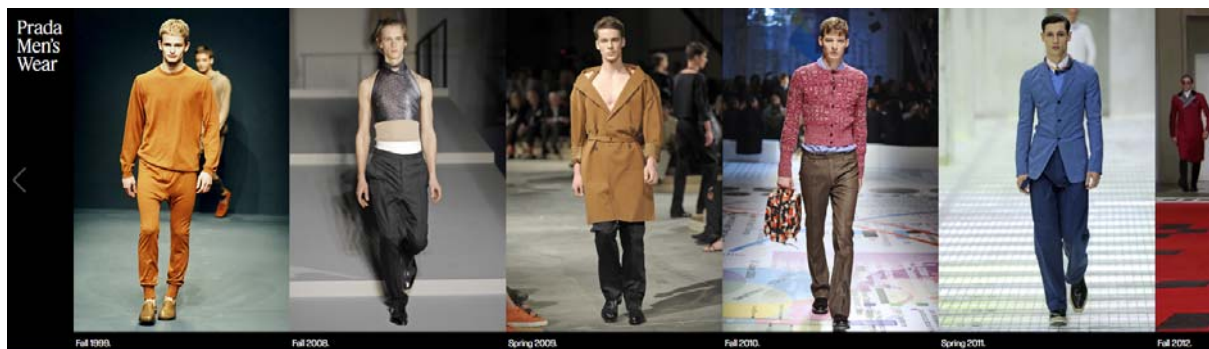


Prada embroidered-jersey dress featuring double strass and paillettes and viscose socks from the spring 2014 women’s collection and brushed leather shoes from the fall 2023 women’s collection, \$1,200. Photograph by Collier Schorr. Styled by Suzanne Koller

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It was a challenging start to an ambitious experiment. They both had simple reasons for wanting it to succeed. Prada was, as she puts it, “fed up working alone.” She was also, of course, planning her succession. “But they don’t want me to talk about that because they’re afraid it looks like I want to leave,” she says. “I don’t want to leave at all.” Simons, 55, had briefly worked for Prada and Bertelli before going to Dior and then Calvin Klein. (He was the creative director of Jil Sander from 2005 until 2012; the Prada Group sold the brand in 2006.) Following his two-year stint at Calvin Klein, a tumultuous period he describes as “hysteria,” he’d vowed to never again run someone else’s fashion brand.

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After years of having to make every decision on her own — even now, she’s thinking about the most recent installment of “Women’s Tales,” Miu Miu’s ongoing short film series, by the Croatian-born director Antoneta Alamat Kusijanović, and the Fondazione’s next two art shows — Prada is relieved to sit down with Simons and discuss the upcoming women’s collection. “Listen,” she says the day after the men’s show in June from her office, where she’s spent part of the morning reading the (good) reviews. “Every single moment you have to have ideas on so many things. Your brain evaporates.” Recently, she and Simons have resolved, at least temporarily, not to divulge the references or describe the characters in their collections with the world. “I decided that I didn’t want to tell stories anymore,” she says. “We’ll see how long it lasts.”

When it comes to how her own story is eventually told, she hopes not to have, as she puts it, “thrown my life out on superficial things.” Her goal, today, as it was in 1968, is to have done something good. “And deep down,” she says, “political.” But on my way out, I ask Prada if she ever wonders how her life might have looked had she not become a designer. “Always,” she says without hesitation. Then, as the elevator door begins to close between us, she smiles. “And never.”



Miuccia Prada, photographed at the Fondazione Prada's Osservatorio space in Milan on July 4, 2023. Collar Schorr

Models: Elio Berenett at Next Management, Saunders at Oui Management, Awar Odhiang at Ford Models, Jonas Glöer at Lumien Creative, Chloe Nguyen at Select Model Management Paris, Estrella Gomez at IMG Models and America Gonzalez at Supreme. Hair by Cim Mahony at LGA. Makeup by Marie Duhart at Bryant Artists. Set design by Rafael Medeiros. Casting by DM Casting.

Portrait production: Lumen. Fashion production: White Dot. Digital tech: Stefano Poli. Photo assistants: Ariel Sadok, Cameron Koskas, Vassili Boclé. Manicurist: Hanaé Goumri using Manucurist. Hair assistants: Alexandra Adams, Vincent Brière, Vira. Makeup assistants: Natsuki Oneyama, Joel Phillips. Manicurist's assistant: Akane Kanazawa. Set designer's assistant: Marek Dague.

Video: Queen Latifah directed by Rahim Fortune, shot by Dé Randle; Annette Bening directed by Katy Grannan, shot by Kurt Collins; Henry Taylor directed by D'Angelo Lovell Williams, shot by Clifford Prince King, edited and color graded by Alima Lee.

Digital production and design: Nancy Coleman, Danny DeBelius, Amy Fang, Chris Littlewood, Jamie Sims and Carla Valdivia Nakatani.