Milan Fashion Week in flux, awaiting September

By Dominique Muret - June 23, 2021

The visual image of Prada's models exiting from a long red tunnel-catwalk directly onto a beach will remain the symbol of the latest Milan fashion week. Judging from their collection films, designers believe in the future, and hope to have finally reached the end of the tunnel. But a return to normality is still some way off. In a city that was virtually uninhabited - the Milanese fled en masse from the weekend’s stifling heat - and had been shunned by international buyers, the atmosphere wasn’t exactly festive during this fashion week dedicated to the menswear collections for Spring/Summer 2022.

With the fashion industry still in very low gear owing to the pandemic, and an almost entirely virtual show calendar, except for Etro, Dolce & Gabbana and Giorgio Armani, the only labels to show in front of a live audience, the Italian Fashion Chamber (CNMI) could hardly expect a miracle. “This was clearly a transitional fashion week. It marked a new departure, since we have finally been able to start seeing and talking to each other in person,” CNMI President Carlo Capasa told FashionNetwork.com, underlining that “revenue for the Italian fashion industry fell by 24% in 2020, and is forecast to start making up for lost ground by growing 17% this year.”

Capasa also said that “showrooms in particular were open and busy during the week in Milan. For the current sales campaign, they expect at least 70% of the orders they’ll receive to be placed in person, as opposed to between 10% and 20% last year.” A number of buyers from Russia and eastern European countries did make the trip, and likewise other Europeans, like Michael Kliger, CEO of German luxury e-tailer Mytheresa, seen at the Giorgio Armani show.

There was a palpable yearning for a return to normal life in the majority of the collection videos, most of them quite short this season, running on average to around three minutes. They featured a profusion of bodies in motion, dancing and promenading, often with slow-motion effects, and long frenzied dashes in search of the open country, to flee the claustrophobia of enclosed spaces.

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Like for example Prada's red tunnel, Zegna's labyrinth, Diesel's catwalk lift and David Catalan's goods elevator. At Jeda, the models were catapulted from a dark nightclub right in the middle of a forest. At Magliano, garments literally took flight and twirled around the model's bodies, which were lashed by the blast of a windmill-sized fan.

Not to mention the aquatic element, especially the Mediterranean Sea, which added a luminous, sensual touch to the collections. Especially when models plunge into the water fully clothed, as at Prada and MSGM, while at Numero 00 they have time to shed their clothes, and at Zegna they simply dip their feet and legs in a fountain. Federico Cina extolled his childhood's Adriatic beaches in Romagna, and Andrea Pompilio for Harmont & Blaine did the same for the bay of Naples, with a show at Castel dell'Ovo, a medieval castle standing right by the waterside.

It was very much a question of enjoying nature and dolce far niente in the sunshine. In the collections, this translated in pastel colour palettes with plenty of tie-dye effects and fabrics that looked sun-bleached or, conversely, in explosions of radiant colours. Designers favoured total looks, in which even shoes and socks are colour-coordinated with the clothes. Different items are featured in the same hues, to be mixed 'n matched at will, as dictated in the new menswear wardrobe designed by Zegna's Creative Director Alessandro Sartori.

Streetwear and formal wear blend in a new type of garment, at once elegant and comfortable, classic and casual, essential and chic. Cuts and proportions have been redesigned to soften and lighten up the silhouette. Shirts are worn unbuttoned, jackets morph into overshirts, and shorts are never inelegant.

These collections will arrive in-store next summer, when the fashion market is expected to be in full recovery. Hence, designers have calibrated them very carefully, focusing chiefly on commercial, evergreen high-quality clothes.

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