

## Mutating Contexts in Professional Practice within the Fashion Industry

The practice of fashion remains diversified with regard to conceptual and production models, even in an ever-increasingly global context. This represents a crucial point in the analysis of the state of the system. Italy will be used as a backdrop for these reflections.

The Italian experience (referring to the entirety of the system) from the idea and concept to the manufacturing and distribution is singular when analyzed within the context of the four western points of reference: Italy, UK, France and the United States. After having recently experienced a few critical seasons, Italy is now having a positive recovery. This is both an opportune moment to analyze the definition of the roles of the various protagonists within the fashion system, and also to consider our role in forming future professionals. Artistic and professional training is intricately linked in a close relationship with the reality of the system through continuous analysis of its transformations and needs. The role of educator or instructor is active and undogmatic; it requires ongoing participation and the ability to interpret current contexts in order to be able to prepare for and even propose the future of the system itself.

Substantial differences exist in the approach to fashion design training—a profession that, for a long time, has not been limited simply to the design of clothing and accessories, but rather one dedicated and guided by a broader vision of design. The academic approach of educational institutions is influenced by the territories in which they are rooted. The territories with their specific culture (and even specific approaches to the arts) combined with local markets, supply chains and production capabilities have all generated differences.

There has been, however, a fading or obfuscation of these specific influences in favor of greater intercultural exchange due to the general and specific effects of globalization. Formation within the fashion industry, with particular reference to design, must necessarily reflect the needs of an evolving market. There are many factors in recent years that have changed the structure of companies, brands, and brand communication—in fact, the entire system. Certainly, this transformation is a process that is not yet finished. By analyzing the factors that have driven these changes, we can extract the most relevant: Globalization, the Economic Crisis, Financing and the Press.

### *Globalization*

The effects of globalization are not limited to the opening of new markets; other phenomena such as the delocalization of manufacturing, as well as education and training (designers, managers, etc) are also generated. For this discussion, the most notable emerging markets are from the BRIC nations: Brazil, Russia, India and China. In many ways, these markets have already gained and will continue to gain increasing importance in the future of the fashion system. The proliferation of local fashion weeks is an indicator of both national and international interest in these countries. A similar, analogous phenomenon is also being witnessed in the art market with the proliferation of contemporary art biennials in countries that have been outside the traditional circuits.<sup>1</sup>

## *Crisis*

The pressure placed on the fashion system in recent years from the Western European economic crisis now seems to be easing. The earnings of Made in Italy companies for the first quarter of 2011 increased by 13.6%, helping recover from the losses incurred in the last few years.<sup>2</sup> The crisis, however, has generated the loss of many jobs (particularly in the creative sphere) as well as inhibiting the development of key figures in the areas of marketing and brand communication. Recently we are witnessing a reversal or inversion of this trend. In fact, according to recent studies of emerging professions, alongside web/media and highly specialized figures (such as pattern makers, etc.), for the first time in years, companies are actively searching for creative figures dedicated to style.<sup>3</sup>

Companies that perhaps have emphasized branding and brand communication over other areas are now finding a need to reinforce product development. This emphasis on creativity and the product has encouraged another phenomenon: an increasing number of young designers, after having graduated from fashion schools (all around the world), are creating small lines and brands, often supported by intelligent and innovative use of the web and information technology. Although they face many difficulties, they are able to find space in showrooms currently suffering from unified product offerings caused by the globalization of the international brands.

## *Financing & Press*

Recent statements by Giorgio Armani have fueled a long-discussed argument within the industry on the ever-increasing influence of stock market on fashion brands.<sup>4</sup> He argues that effects of financing have killed creativity and personalization, favoring communication that is at the service of the press—referring to brands that create collections that are not wearable and presented for pure entertainment, or hollow, brand reinforcement.<sup>5</sup>

The Tunisian-born designer, Azzedine Alaïa has also weighed in on this argument. He has stated that the fashion industry today has become unmanageable; the quantity of collections to draw each year subjects the designers to excessive stress that can only undermine the creative quality of collections.<sup>6</sup> In an article, he states, "... for a long time now, the system of fashion has had nothing to do with our time--it does not suit our time at all. The world is changing rapidly.... Young people want to change in this industry.... We continue, just like in the 19th century to do desfilés. There is no need, no interest--really. We could do fewer collections and obtain the same result. We don't lose any money if we do less."<sup>7</sup>

These statements lead us the identification of two important realities: the financial system (together with other wider cultural and economic influences) has generated a polarity between creativity and marketability of products and the predominant importance of the presentations of collection, themselves. In fact, it is widely recognized that the most substantial sales of the collections take place well in advance of specific fashion weeks and that the purchasing mechanisms or scenarios have inevitably become much more rapid, occurring earlier than in the past in order to remain competitive in the market—leaving aside for the moment the shortened and increased buying cycle introduced by fast fashion. The fashion weeks are occasions increasingly dedicated to the presentation of the mood, the brand

philosophy and the collections that are specifically oriented to the press rather than moments for commercial exchange with buyers.

However, it is necessary to remember that proposals of look that might seem at first excessive in a market such as the Italian (a principal character of the Italian market is the balance between experimental and wearable) are actually positive. Creativity, even the most extreme, feeds the phenomenon of fashion. To contain creative expression, especially on occasions of runway presentations, risks flattening and eroding the very energy that helps differentiate fashion from clothing.

In Italy, alongside the consolidated Fashion Weeks (with particular reference to Milan), Pitti in Florence has emerged as an international reference point for men's fashion, becoming a prominent showcase for alternative brands specializing in styles other than the classic. Increasingly, womenswear and accessories are also becoming important. In Italy,



**Figure 1.** Frankie Morello advertising, women's collection FW 11-12.

there has developed a segmentation of the market; Milan has become the reference point for formal elegance, leaving space to Pitti for less institutional expressions and sportswear.<sup>8</sup> The European and Western system as a whole is, however, becoming taxed by the intensive rhythm and the obligatory events of the four principal fashion weeks (London, Paris, New York and Italy). There is evidence of an increased difficulty in coordinating the de rigueur presence of the international press in each region. The multiplication of the number

of events around the world is likely to lead to an implosion of the system unless it is completely rethought, perhaps assisted by new technology.

These topics are closely linked and complex; a specificity of direction for the future is not easily determined. To help arrive at an expedited and hopefully more comprehensive vision of the present situation, with suggestions of possible future scenarios, I sought out the contribution of several key figures in the industry. I posed questions concerning the state of the current system in general as well as questions regarding creative approaches in design. The objective of this approach was not to arrive at any scientific certainty, but rather to collect a series of reflections that could assist in formulating a rudimentary road map based on direct observations and reflections of practitioners—those that confront the system, not in academic but in real terms. The goal was to document, in part, the reality that students will face when leaving schools, academies or universities—to highlight contexts, or if you will, to offer proposals rather than specific responses within an industry such as fashion that is, and must remain, in constant evolution.

The various figures who kindly agreed to be interviewed in this survey are important protagonists in the system and cover a variety of roles. While the principal argumentation of this paper is prevalently oriented to the area of design, the contribution from those who are actively involved in the industry on a daily basis (and from different perspectives) was instrumental in formulating a comprehensive picture.

The following people collaborated:

Pierfrancesco Gigliotti and Maurizio Modica, founders and designers of the brand Frankie Morello. They are testimony to various professional stages within the industry: starting from their own self-produced start-up through the establishment of an international brand produced and promoted by industry;

Roberta Valentini, a unique buyer, founder and owner of Penelope Store shops, internationally known as a center for discovering new talents and customization;

Riccardo Grassi, founder and owner of the showroom Studio Zeta in Milan, a point of reference in the industry for the past three decades, also known for discovering and promoting new talent such as Maison Martin Margiela;

And finally Sara Maino, Senior Fashion Editor of Vogue Italy, the heart and soul of Vogue Talents, as well as being known internationally for her constant work of scouting and promoting young talent.

The questions posed to the participants were based on the same themes in order to be able to compare and contrast the individual points of view. The topics included the differences of the system between yesterday and today (the approach to creativity, the method, selection); the cause and effect relationship of globalization, both in terms of approach to the collections as well as the selection of new talents; and the fashion weeks, from the current context to the direction and development in the future (also in relation to new technologies). The responses merit a more extensive illustration than what is possible here. I have attempted to extract and synthesize the most relevant information in a sort of virtual discussion that presents stimulating points of contact.

#### *Past and present--creativity, method, selection*

The experience recounted by the two designers of Frankie Morello, from their debut to today, highlights significant differences in the stage of development of their brand and the consequential change of pace. In the beginning, they were self-produced and managed, subsequently making the leap to a large manufacturer and thus to a much more complex market and industrial level. Their role has changed and as a result also their methodology in approaching the collections. In the beginning, the relationship between creativity and the product was direct. Today, the structure of the company leads to managing a system in an approach that is less improvised and spontaneous. They are now more sensitive to the needs of the clients. This is especially true after the crisis that has shaken creativity. There is a delicate balance that must be found; a highly creative approach is required. They have found the necessity to do more research in order to differentiate themselves farther from the *fast fashion* sector, which they admit is the industrial and economic future of the industry.

It is increasingly necessary to differentiate yourself in Prêt à Porter by producing more creative collections. A certain degree of wearability can be sacrificed in favor of creating a collection that is less copyable. One still ends up providing additional stimulus to the fast fashion companies sector. In the future, it will be increasingly critical for the brand to have a strong identity because the customer will choose to buy the identity that differentiates itself from fast fashion. However, this approach is complex. Working on and developing identity also means working on the product, differentiating it—and the costs increase. At the moment,

the most important job is to be consistent in communicating the brand through high-quality products but without increasing the cost. Today, a seven hundred euro white shirt is anachronistic. Current work must be focused on total quality.

By now, various brands that were introduced as fast fashion are now presenting themselves to the general public as prêt-à-porter brands—one need think of the use of supermodels or the advertising campaigns, often more powerful than the actual high level brands themselves. There are many multi-brand retail stores that tend to mix brand typologies in terms of level in order to provide the customers alternatives in terms of price. This is understandable and logical, but sometimes risks causing confusion with the consumer. It is correct to mix but with coherence and competency with respect to the product, with an understanding of what is being bought. This brings us back to the fact that the identity of who works on prêt-à-porter is of prime importance. Development in this profession is difficult today; it is necessary to



**Figure 2. Maurizio Modica Pierfrancesco Gigliotti final catwalk women's collection FW 11-12.**

focus on quality and originality to emerge from the homologous. There is no point in having many designers, even very talented ones that are all the same; difference is important. In the future creativity will also be increasingly important, because in a company, collections might be directed by the merchandisers who already know what the retail points need. There would no longer be any need for designers, but this would be a serious deprivation of the system.

Roberta Valentini's strategy for the showroom Penelope is particularly interesting. From a figure that is responsible for the selection and sales to the final customer, one would expect a commercial attitude; however, her point of view is close to that of a designer—perhaps part of the success of her showrooms is exactly that. According to her, we are witnessing a pivotal moment of transition. Recent market phenomena and the crisis have made everyone more insecure. The selection criteria are changing. In the past, it was possible to move between intuition and the commercial considerations with spontaneity; today the situation is more complex: now it is necessary to take greater account of the needs of the consumer while respecting the character of the store and brand.

Penelope has always been particular; the choice of leading brands never represented an exclusive venue, and space was always left for experimentation. Valentini admits that it might have been easier to manage the market in those terms, but the brand, even as important as it is, does not make the difference. “It is particularly decisive at this moment to maintain your own individual style while not forgetting about business. There is a need to have an open dialogue with your niche or market segment, interpreting each time the proposals (products), with consideration also for those less known, to create a sort of ideal wardrobe in which customers can recognize themselves.”

Roberta Valentini also responds to the issue of increasing the number of proposals. In particular, commenting on the pre-collections that are reshaping the time of sale, “The pre-collections have become the most valuable time for sales, typically sixty to seventy percent,

but not for Penelope. I observe and I buy, but I always leave some budget for the less institutional collections so as not to lose the freshness of a product not bound by typical



**Figure 3. Roberta Valentini.**

commercial canons. In a store such as ours, the customer is not simply looking for a product. Today, more than ever, when buying we need to think about lifestyles, situations and uses. The goal is and has always been to combine continuity and innovation." What emerges is the construction of a real collection as a designer would create in which the instinctive forces impose themselves through specific choices that then emerge from the store with great coherency. Another important feature of Penelope is the attention dedicated to young international designers: "...if we feel it's right,

we take the risk and follow them throughout their development until they become real brands."

The problem illustrated by Penelope is interesting because of the philosophy; the approach is to promote new brands rather than yield to the budget impositions of the large groups. This is undeniably a countercurrent choice that only a few multi-brand stores can afford to implement. It is, however, perfectly in line with the future. One of the most evident problems today is the fact that globalization has cannibalized the retail stores through a forced standardizing. Anywhere in the world, the same goods can be found. The paradox that emerges is that these large brands observe extremely carefully the choices of anomalous buyers; retail showrooms such as Penelope, read into their choices, the capacity of trendsetting.

Riccardo Grassi is another notable player in the Italian as well as international market. He also can be considered a trendsetter. He has offered his own vision of the past and current system from the privileged viewpoint of his Milan showroom. His showroom, like few others, offers a true bridge between the collection and retail stores. Over the last twenty-eight years, his selection has contributed to building and consolidating the foundation of the industry. Once again in his story, we find a vision in which the approach to managing business is guided not only by the commercial considerations but also by creativity.

Grassi believes the most critical factor for the showroom is the selection of the designers and brands. He states: "Until six years ago, the choice was easier; we knew the Minimal Chic market was dedicated to the United States and Europe. Then the economy changed and this changed the markets. Middle Eastern, Russian (former), and Asian (Thailand, Malaysia...) markets emerged.



**Figure 4. Riccardo Grassi in Studio Zeta with students.**

Choosing a line or investing in a startup has become much more complex. When selecting a collection today, it is also important to consider Brazil, Lebanon, China and even the south of Italy.... For a long time, Asia had been synthesized into four areas: Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Japan, grouped together by a similar taste. Today, every Asian country is different and has its own conception of fashion. This is why, when you are searching or when a designer proposes a collection, it is necessary to take into account many elements: style, color, texture, and different cultural references.”

He spoke of the context which he views as more challenging. Yet, even with the changes and pressures, his showroom Studio Zeta continues to promote new, young designers. The selection is made based on style without the consideration or constraints of immediate salability. “It is not uncommon to invest for two or three seasons as a trial. Continual scouting is necessary. Quality, reliable delivery, and price are all critical.” To summarize some of his other points, he believes the designer must be extremely professional from the beginning. The products will end up in the stores next to the big brands. In the past, stores were more flexible. This is not so today. The mixing of various types of brands together with collections of emerging designers must be perfect, even with limited resources. Only the major stores have space for young designers. “We have many meetings with the designers before the collection is created to help guide them with our experience. We are not designers, but we can offer advice and assist them in choosing the right direction.” Their staff travels all over the world to reach new customers, especially in the emerging markets. Selling in the Chinese market is not possible if one does not know it, especially since it is a place of constant change.

In reference to the future, an interesting aspect that emerged from the conversation with Grassi is the phenomenon of fast fashion. He states, “The big competition among the large groups such as Zara and H & M and fashion brands is not a real competition. In fact these groups help the industry because they educate the young about fashion. I do not believe in the near future people will wear only inexpensive fashion. Last year, we increased our high-end womenswear sales by seventy percent.”

Grassi explains how the showroom is organized, “We divided the showroom as if it were a store, and we receive about 1500 customers per season, most of them foreign. This is our home that we open up and present through the display as well as the parties during the Fashion Week. It becomes a very exciting place. Do not forget that fashion is glamorous. We respect the designers and the brands but we also respect our customers; they have followed us for the past twenty-eight years.” The subject of pre-collections also emerged. Grassi maintains that the pre-collections are true collections, often larger and sometimes more beautiful than the real, traditional collections. The volume in womenswear is around sixty-five percent. They work well for stores because of the early delivery, and in the end, the stores invest a large part of their budget on them.



Figure 5. Studio Zeta.



Figure 6. Sara Maino.

Sara Maino, senior fashion editor of the Italian Vogue since 1994, is engaged in the industry, having developed in recent years an expertise in the search of new talent. Her vision of the differences between past and future is encouraging. She confirms that in recent years, an increasing number of young people are interested in pursuing careers as designers. This generates a rich quantity of proposals. There are many possibilities for visibility; scouting occurs in schools and international competitions.

There has emerged a greater attention to this phenomenon. There is a perception of the necessity for a generational change, for new proposals. The spotlight is on the next generation. "What we're doing in Vogue, particularly in Italy, has helped to stimulate this process, though it is the beginning of a long process."

### *Emerging Countries in the fashion arena, markets and delocalization*

In this part, the theme of globalization has been considered within three different contexts: one, new markets; two, the relocation of production; and three, the search for talent. Once again this is an extremely broad area of interest, and it would be impossible to deal with the complexities in a few lines. This is however an essential starting point for photographing the past and present realities of the fashion system.

In this context, the approach of Frankie Morello represents a starting point for a concrete analysis. The principal accusation against the industry brands in recent years has focused on the loss of identity. Precedence has been given to the commercial needs as dictated by emerging markets. The two designers responded to this initial question: "Within our collection, there is always a part that is oriented toward individual markets. In reality, this is guided by a spontaneous process that is more related to the fit of the collections than any particular conceptual direction. From a design point of view, the process is internalized and develops spontaneously guided by experience. In each country where we sell, our collections have constraints but this does not translate into or necessitate ad hoc projects. Within each collection, pieces are chosen for appropriate color, fit, and culture. "

Grassi also supports this approach in the selection of brands and designers from emerging countries: "Before, I was worried about specifically choosing Made in Italy products. Not now. Interesting and quality products have started arriving from emerging countries. Besides the high-quality products from China, India and Brazil, unique things are coming from Turkey and Romania. For a designer though, it is important to find support to launch their collection within their own country."

Relative to the risk of uniform creativity on a global level, Grassi's position is encouraging. "I do not think that creativity has been standardized; certainly, the Internet seems to have uniformed many things, but at the same time, opportunities are everywhere. The personality of a designer emerges as much as it did in the past. Perhaps, in the large, low-cost companies it is possible to find uniformity in their offerings. In effect, they are similar all over the world. The real work of a designer is to find his own personality." Grassi goes on to add, that the Web really has become a tool for sharing and development rather than flattening. "Nobody thought that online business would be successful; currently it accounts



for seventeen percent of fashion sales. And it is not only the young who are buying. E-commerce is like a magazine: it helps the stores sell more. The internet will not close retail stores. Within five years, perhaps some stores will close, but the cause will not be the crisis or even the internet—there are too many stores for our market."

The intervention by Roberta Valentini of Penelope regarding these issues illustrates a potentially positive situation. Valentini hopes that this integration will lead to different models: the rebirth of a more humanistic approach that defends against the flattening of commercial dictates. From the creative perspective, cultural integration leads to the formation of a more hybrid identity, which in turn, will generate new models. The discovery of new talents, rooted in their origins but with the capacity to render them globally accessible, will become increasingly important in order to bring new ideas to the market.

In this regard, Sara Maino comments upon the commonalities among the presentations of young designers from various parts of the world. "The presentation of a portfolio has rules and, therefore, there are common denominators. Even though a certain uniformity in terms of presentation can be found, this is not so with the collections. This year, I requested books from all over the world, first from Italy, the UK and Belgium; and then we expanded our range of research, scouting even in more remote areas of the system." She concludes that the influence of the markets obviously impacts young designers to a lesser extent. They are confronting a commercial reality for the first time. The problem of the influence of the market for young designers at that design stage does not exist.

For better or worse, designers need to present themselves with their own identity. This is especially true for emerging designers who at the beginning cannot be influenced by the markets simply because they do not know them. Perhaps they can be guided by buyers or representatives. Designers should be influenced by culture. The cultural aspects are most relevant. It is impossible to satisfy all markets; the world has changed. There will no longer be a brand that dominates.

Today, new technologies allow even the youngest to emerge. For this reason, there are many new names, each one with their own small slice of the market, their own niche. The process of delocalization is not strictly tied to the creative process; if a brand or a designer has their own identity, the process is quite straightforward. One decides to go where they see fit. Delocalization influences more the quality than the creativity, even if one without the other is not sustainable. Delocalization influences the choices of the market. If a brand outsources everything, at least in part, it can be seen, it can be felt. The problem is that previously existing rules no longer apply. There are, however, still artisans of Made in Italy and the work can be recognized.

### *Fashion weeks, today and tomorrow*

The theme of the fashion week ideally closes this examination. In this section the various points of view of the different professionals are even more critical. On one point, there is almost exclusive agreement: for the designers, the buyers and the press, the fashion weeks will continue to exist as physical places, as fundamental moments for exchange. Technology will not be able to substitute these occasions.

With regard to the proliferation of new initiatives, Roberta Valentini acknowledges that although evolution of fashion week is inevitable, other forms of presentation will develop

as well. There will continue to be the necessity to move physically, not only virtually. The occasions of exchange are fundamental. The canonical moments of fashion weeks now occur at a time when commercial exchange has already taken place. Their purpose is precisely the possibility of interaction and the conferring of emotion, as well as offering a moment to physically touch the merchandise. This highlights an important consideration concerning technology. The greatest revolution within the industry with regard to technology has been the development of online retail. This has completely transformed the relationship with the customer. There is no longer a physical or direct exchange, but with the assistance of other, new instruments, there is the potential to achieve an equal, if not surpassed, level of fascination that may become indispensable. This perhaps is a new context that merits further examination.

Modica and Gigliotti acknowledge the impossibility for buyers and the press to participate in all the fashion weeks. "Everyone participates within a specific limit, necessarily limiting their presence, or else it would be impossible to manage. The world's major fashion weeks have a history, an identity; perhaps in another ten or fifteen years other fashion weeks will become more important, but for the moment, there are not great alternatives to the main poles. Technology has not yet managed to replace the traditional runway shows; to experience the emotion, the physical presence remains fundamental. To present a product, technology can assist, but the shows remain the fundamental element in conveying the dream." They conclude their predictions stating that there are other approaches and arguments such as the Web's ability to render fashion more user-friendly, even for niche designers. "The runway shows still remain important in a world also made up of parties and red carpets. Probably streaming will continue to develop but perception of the user is absolutely not the same."



**Figure 7. Frankie Morello backstage fashion show; women's collection FW 11-12.**

It is interesting to note that while the two designers have experimented often with technology, even creating virtual presentations, they stated: "We are always interested in innovations, including information and communication technologies; this too is part of our approach to work, but at the moment there is a concrete aspect to take into account. We actually looked into creating holographic runway shows but the system alone was prohibitively expensive and would have had cost implications for the products. This creates a paradox; the large companies that could more easily take advantage of such opportunities are often those that do not have the products or the content to be conveyed."

Riccardo Grassi also believes, at least for the moment, runway presentations will not change. "Some large companies have tried to use the new technologies but without great success.

The runway presentation is still the center of fashion and I do not think this will change over the next 20 years--also because it has to do with the ego of the designer."

In reference to the increasing number of initiatives Grassi asserts that they are becoming excessive for buyers who now need to make chooses where to go. It is positive that governments support new designers to achieve success but you still need to be present in the

major fashion weeks Paris, Milan, New York, London. Grassi says: "London is attractive for creativity; Milan is more problematic, but it's gotten better—still in the last three years we have gone down as compared to Paris. Collections such as Balenciaga, Celine, and Chloe are at the top. Paris has the world's three largest brands: Dior, Vuitton and Hermès. In Milan, groups such as Armani, Ferretti and Versace are more commercially oriented. We have an industrial system; even much of the French design is made in Italy. We are working with the city government to promote events, galas, etc. If before, the difference in turnout was at a ratio of sixty-five to thirty-five we are now at a ratio of fifty-five to forty-five. It is very difficult to do the "show" in Milan but it is much easier to sell."

Sara Maino also believes the system will be difficult to change yet the proliferation of new realities that supports the visibility of young talent is promising. She suggests that the protagonists of the system should do more to discover new talent from other places: "There are fashion weeks everywhere but the key points are always the same. Within the past few years, Berlin has inserted itself and now Stockholm and Brazil are also becoming important. There are other longer standing fashion weeks but they remain less important. I believe it's positive that these initiatives exist, and I think the protagonist of the system should seek out other realities. In fact the system has changed and perhaps conception of the fashion weeks have not yet adapted. It is a moment to return to dreaming, to seek out an overdose of creativity. If people have the chance to observe these new talents, then they will buy them. Previously there was no possible visibility; now the press and even the institutions are creating platforms and other occasions such as the event in Milan at Palazzo Morando. The best example is London which has always been active in this regard and for this reason, is considered the place to look for creativity. "

### *Conclusions*

Despite the different approaches and different professional profiles some common elements emerge. The frequency of certain key words and themes addressed enable us to underline (at least within our present context) some objective considerations.

#### Identity

Analyzed from both a creative and commercial perspective, the identity of a designer, perhaps more than ever, is an indispensable factor to enter the market. The challenges of the future will not be to build empires of luxury, but rather to connect groups of people who identify with the philosophy of a product even before the product itself. This already has and continues to occur: what will change with respect to the present is the direction of the market. There will be fewer products for fewer people; stronger personal approaches will emerge.

#### Creativity

Creativity is another key word that consistently emerged. As a word, "creativity" is generic and is probably overused. However, our reference context (the contemporary scenario) in which large business groups tend to produce homogeneity and publicity campaigns that are often more important than the products, creativity is becoming once again, paramount—an invaluable resource for the survival and development of fashion itself.

## Equilibrium

A balance must be found between creativity and the product; between individual identity and group identification. The necessity of balance is obvious, like that of creativity. However, within an approach and professional context that is increasingly complex, equilibrium becomes an indispensable value.

From these elements, two considerations clearly come to light. There is a renewed interest in the role of the fashion designer after a period that favored other emerging professional figures. While these other figures are necessary, it is becoming apparent that the majority of the creative process, the vision and definition of the brand identity, cannot be disproportionately delegated. If it is true that there will be an increasing demand for professional figures dedicated to brand communications, technology, and management who are able to combine commercial considerations with the ability to read the creative process, it is also equally realistic to expect that the designers will become the true art directors. This role will require them to be constantly informed of local and global dynamics in relation to the fashion system in order to operate consistently within it and to propose alternative solutions and visions.

In conclusion, if I could have found an accurate translation for the term *consapevolezza*, I would have probably included it as a concluding key word. The closest meaning in English would be something similar to awareness, consciousness. This concept is a determining factor; the awareness or comprehension to truly understand the contexts in which one is working is necessary in order to confidently make choices in accordance with one's own identity.

A reconsideration, or rethinking of the role of fashion designer, or at least the future role, is necessary; the professional should be able to conduct the creative process, to approach the collection as a unit or container in which the physical and virtual (or represented) are integrated from the start in a process in which the product and its potentialities are interconnected.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Alfredo Singolo, "Biennale e Fiere. Stiamo perdendo il conto?" Artribune June-July 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Milena Bello, "La moda vive il momento d'oro. Italiane a + 13,6% ed Estere a +13,4%," Pambianco Week 14 June 2011: 30-34.

<sup>3</sup> Vanna Assumma, "AAA Nuove professioni cercasi," Pambianco Week 14 June 2011: 85-90.

<sup>4</sup> Simone Marchetti, "In passerella sale la polemica," D La Repubblica, 21 June 2011  
<[http://d.repubblica.it/argomenti/2011/06/21/news/giorgio\\_armani\\_sfilata-389402/index.html](http://d.repubblica.it/argomenti/2011/06/21/news/giorgio_armani_sfilata-389402/index.html)>.

<sup>5</sup> Giorgio Armani, "Io e il Sistema. Non voglio alleanze ma una Moda Libera," Corriere della Sera 02 July 2011: 27.

<sup>6</sup> Simone Marchetti, "Alaïa contro Lagerfeld e Wintour" D La Repubblica, 23 June 2011  
<[http://d.repubblica.it/argomenti/2011/06/23/news/alaia\\_contro\\_lagerfeld\\_e\\_wintour-392967/index.html](http://d.repubblica.it/argomenti/2011/06/23/news/alaia_contro_lagerfeld_e_wintour-392967/index.html)>.

<sup>7</sup> Jina Kahyyer, "Alaïa loves animals, women," O32c, Summer 2011: 82-92.

<sup>8</sup> "Pitti e Milano Moda Uomo: Così cambiano le manifestazioni del maschile," Speciale Pitti Uomo, Pambianco Week 14 June 2011: 47.

## INTERVIEWS

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