



Comme des Garçons' 25 Years in Images

By Sherisse Pham

BEIJING — For its first retrospective in Mainland China, Comme des Garçons didn't delve into its archives of avant-garde fashion. Instead, the Japanese label converted 5,300 square feet of gallery space into a maze of iconic Comme des Garçons print matter — corporate images, magazine advertisements and invitation cards — from the past 25 years.

"Printed matter is a crucial part of expressing the spirit of Comme des Garçons," Adrian Joffe, the company's managing director and the husband of creative director Rei Kawakubo, told WWD before the exhibit's opening this month. "In a way, seeing a dress on a mannequin is less powerful than seeing [printed matter] blown up."

The opening attracted a large crowd, including Chinese actress Zhou Xun, clad in a formless Comme des Garçons dress with three Peter Pan collars. Kawakubo made a brief appearance, but true to form, she steered clear of the busy traffic inside the gallery, lingering in an alley outside.

While many visitors said they liked the brand and its creative presentation, only a few said they actually own any of the fashion label's pieces. Andy Yu, a guest clad in a T-shirt from the Play collection, praised the unique designs and said the brand is getting "more and more popular."

Building on that momentum, Joffe confirmed that Comme des Garçons will open a flagship here in the Sanlitun area this year. Known as the city's main bar drag, Sanlitun is transforming itself into a key

shopping district, housing the recently opened Adidas megastore and Uniqlo.

One of the goals of the exhibition, which runs through Sept. 30, is to create brand awareness and educate consumers.

"We see great potential here," Joffe said. "Chinese people get [Comme des Garçons], they understand it more than other markets."

Comme des Garçons opened its first store in Mainland China in April in the new Beijing shop of I.T, a Hong Kong-based retailer and the label's China distributor.

Joffe was mum on the Beijing flagship's design concept except to specify that it will be grander than the new "pocket stores" the company will open this year in Paris that will measure less than 200 square feet and carry mostly wallets and perfume.

"Rei doesn't want to demean the intelligence of the population," Joffe said. "She wants to give Beijing the strongest concept, a flagship store, first."

At the exhibit, visitors move between rooms plastered in the brand's landmark campaigns and advertisements. The first area brings viewers into close contact with black-and-white images from the early years: elephants shot by André Kertész for spring-summer 1988, a gritty



portrait of a female model shot by Peter Lindbergh in 1991 and a 1994 Paris collection invitation showing two nerdy-looking men dressed in identical suits and ties with the words "Gilbert & George" scrawled in the background.

Kawakubo's avid interest in the Argentine art collective Mondongo dominated the rest of the exhibition. Mondongo creates images using everyday items such as plasticine, sausages and cheap biscuits. The group collaborated with Kawakubo to tweak some of its provocative works, like piles of nude, cherub-like babies and stimulating profiles of couples mid-kiss, for use in Comme des Garçons' 2008 campaign.

There are few direct references to fashion in the exhibit except for a neon advertisement with the words "power of fashion" inside one room and a few campaign images that actually show models in Comme des Garçons clothing. There is also a small space set up like a minishop, complete with racks of T-shirts from Comme des Garçons' Play collection. At first glance, most people confused it for a gallery shop, but staff informed the inquisitive guests that the T-shirts were not for sale.

At the opening, people gravitated to two narrow, tunnel-like rooms with overhead spotlights. The rooms seemed to inspire impromptu photo shoots. One group of twentysomethings struck a pose worthy of their bizarre Mondongo backdrop: a girl sprawled on the ground while two friends balanced storklike in outlandish poses, all three sporting slightly maniacal expressions.

As Joffe put it: "You can't control how people will react to your creativity."



Images from the Comme des Garçons exhibition.

Armani, Yoox and E-fashion: Firms Launching Scholarships

MILAN — With e-commerce sales set to exceed \$300 billion by 2012 according to recent estimates, leading fashion companies from Giorgio Armani to Valentino have been setting up shop online.

Now, some of them are looking to invest in the next generation of e-tailers.

Giorgio Armani said it plans to join Internet fashion retailer Yoox Group in sponsoring students at a new one-year master's degree in e-fashion program at the Politecnico di Milano's business school MIP.

From the next academic year, when the program begins, Armani will offer one annual scholarship — covering the tuition fees of 15,500 euros, or \$24,600 at current exchange — including a work experience opportunity with the Emporio Armani online store project team, which is powered by Yoox.

Yoox, which kick-started the initiative, is to offer three scholarships and internships to the master's 40-student annual enrollment, and Diesel, Marni and Valentino will provide internships.

"Online shopping offers a new way of making purchases for an ever-increasing number of fashion clients," Giorgio Armani said. "However, it is still a sector that has been little researched and at this point there are few professional experts capable of understanding and interpreting the dynamics of the market. The future lies in the Web and... I hope that this academic program will assist aspiring students to express their full potential."

Yoox founder and chief executive officer Federico Marchetti said: "Yoox invented a profession in Italy eight years ago and now makes available its experience to help train the new fashion generation."

— Andrew Roberts, with contributions from Valentina Zannoni

Fashion Scoops

NEW PATTERN AT PUCCI? Emilio Pucci is apparently looking for a successor to Matthew Williamson, as the designer focuses more on growing his own business.

The London-based Williamson assumed the role of creative director at Pucci, a division of LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, three years ago, taking over

from Christian Lacroix. Pucci is said to have approached some design assistants about succeeding Williamson.

Matthew Williamson's first U.S. flagship is set to launch early next year in Manhattan's Meatpacking District. The 2,500-square-foot space will be the designer's second in the world, joining his five-year-old store on London's Bruton Street. Williamson started his own company in 1997 and his label is sold through 170 wholesale accounts.

Last summer, TSM Capital acquired an equity stake in Matthew Williamson Holdings Ltd. in collaboration with the Aronsson Group, spearheaded by Jeffrey Aronsson, former chief executive officer at Donna Karan, Marc Jacobs and Oscar de la Renta. The Baugur Group, which invested in the company in 2006, maintains a significant equity interest in the business, and Williamson and CEO Joseph Velosa retain a majority stake.

CHOO'S NEXT STEPS: Jimmy Choo Couture, the bespoke footwear business that operates as a separate company from the Jimmy Choo luxury goods brand founded by Tamara Mellon, could be in flux. A spokeswoman said Thursday that Choo plans to increasingly focus on his educational projects rather than his couture footwear business. However, she declined to say whether the business would close. Choo is a professor at the London College of Fashion and advises on the footwear and accessories courses there. The designer plans to continue to work with his existing clients, but the spokeswoman said the company will not actively seek out more clients. It's thought the business has been affected by a fall in manufacturing in the U.K., which means it's now more difficult to source the materials for one-off shoe designs.

Choo sold his share of the Jimmy Choo brand in 2001 to Equinox Luxury Holdings Ltd., the owners of Jimmy Choo Ltd. at the time, and established Jimmy Choo Couture as a separate firm focusing on special orders. Jimmy Choo Ltd. was most recently acquired by TowerBrook Capital Partners in 2007, in a deal that valued the company at 185 million pounds, or \$367 million.

DEMOLITION CREW: When throwing a party, it helps to have bold-faced friends, which is what 303 Gallery owner Lisa Spellman found out on Wednesday night as she celebrated the opening of a second space. Not only did old pal Thurston Moore help out by playing DJ, but 303 Gallery artist Mary Heilmann curated the films that played on the walls above the packed 5,000-square-foot raw space and Karen Kilimnik prepped "Fairy Food" — actually mini chocolate chip cookies. "I thought it would be fun to have a construction party," said Spellman, who plans to redecorate before hosting an inaugural show of Doug Aitken's new work. Meanwhile, Kirsten Dunst, Jessica Stam, Anna Sui, Pamela Hanson and Lazaro Hernandez joined artists Dan Graham and Richard Phillips in the cramped space. "Welcome to a sweaty box packed with hipsters," joked one man at the door. Relief was found in buckets of Champagne and mini ice-cream comes before hot band du jour The Virgins took the stage to play a set. "Look at my daughter," said Cynthia Rowley, who is friends with lead singer Donald Cumming. "She knows every word."

STILL FRIENDS, JUST SEPARATE: Society decorating firm Sills Huniford Associates — which has done projects for the likes of Vera Wang, Tina Turner, Anna Wintour, Alberta Ferretti, Linda Wells and Lauren DuPont — is dissolving after 25 years. James Huniford plans to open his own office near his house in lower Manhattan. Steven Sills will retain his offices uptown. "We wanted to grow our businesses in different directions, and I wanted to be close to my two young children," said Huniford.

"It's completely amicable and I look forward to 25 more years of friendship with Ford," added Sills.