



SUEY MENDES THE MAN WITHOUT THE SEAT AT GUCCI
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Fashion Milan

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SUZY MENKES SPECIAL REPORT



Many in Italy say Mattteo Renzi, expected to be the next prime minister, will create a new sense of prosperity and energy.

Hoping for a youthquake

If Mattteo Renzi becomes prime minister of Italy, as political indications suggest, there will be an interesting statistic for Italy's fashion world. At 30, Mr. Renzi, now the mayor of Florence, is almost exactly half the age of Italy's noble icon, Giorgio Armani, 70. The gerontocracy that political observers claim has petrified the country's progress might also apply to the international fashion collections, which opened in Milan on Wednesday and are dominated by designers who have been famous for at least two decades. But as fashion always holds up a mirror to society — often even acting as a precursor to larger events — the focus for the winter 2014 shows is on the new talent, rather than a triumphant past. The shows opened with two initiatives: Gildo Zegna, chief executive of the Ermenegildo Zegna Group, and his brother, Paolo, its chairman, announced on Wednesday a generous founder's scholarship. It will be offered to talented Italian graduates to study abroad and, in the words of Gildo Zegna, "bring their expertise back to Italy." The grant will be 1 million euros, or \$1.5 million, a year. And the aim will be to continue the program with different designers over the next 25 years, essentially committing €25 million to the pot. Another initiative, which put down its roots 10 years ago, is a collaboration between Franca Sozzani, editor in chief of Italian Vogue, and Federico Marchetti, the founder and chief executive of the online retailer Yoox. A Yoox company, theestore.com, has partnered with the Vogue Talents competition for the past three years to offer designers an opportunity to sell online and establish their businesses. There are other small, but significant, gestures to show that Milan is reaching out to try to make the fashion events as global and appealing as the more dynamic Salone del Mobile furniture fair. Billboards at Linate and Malpensa airports and at the train station proclaim — in English — "Welcome to Milan Fashion Week." Jane Reeve, who recently became chief executive of Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana, fashion's governing body in Italy, thinks it is a positive statement. Ms. Reeve, who is of English origin but has lived for 35 years in Italy, formerly was head of the Italian division of the global advertising agency JWT. She has all the credentials to make Italian fashion move forward. Ms. Reeve says one of her first jobs is



Jane Reeve, the new chief executive of Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana.



GUCCI

'60s without the sex

What excitement at speed! Smartphones were waved daintily, photographers fought for position and, above the melee, a black cap peeked out as if there were a soldier on parade. Actually, it was the actress and movie director Salma Hayek, wife of François-Henri Pinault, the chief executive of Gucci's parent company Kering. She was causing all the uproar in her front row attire of black dress (by Gucci), bold bag (by Gucci) and that military cap (by guess who?). How dynamic it all was compared to the sweet and sour colors on the runway: shades of faded Miami beach-frosts, a touch of sugary macarons and off-color painterly panels sunk into SEX, PAGE 2



Salma Hayek and François-Henri Pinault arriving at the Gucci show.

FENDI



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FASHION MILAN SPECIAL REPORT



ALBERTA FERRETTI



FAY

Woman becomes tree

It was almost like the Greek legend of Daphne, the woman who is transformed into a tree...

The designer's collection on Wednesday was poetic, peaceful, magical even. And if it seemed to be too much of a spectacle at times, it was so beautifully realized that it was a pleasure to sit back and watch.

The idea was to take relatively simple silhouettes — delicate dresses, perhaps with the long sleeves that the Valentino duo have made so fashionable. And then to treat these pieces with the kind of handwork that few but Italian craftspeople can do.

Right from the start, when coats with coppery surfaces in rusty orange and green colors were followed by dresses

strewn delicately with rose petals, nature took control of the collection. After such a long run of the urban red carpet dress — not least from Ms. Ferretti herself — it is interesting to see how fashion is turning toward something much less full on and more fairylike.

The colors in this collection were exceptional; all "soft" shades, meaning that there were no primary colors but instead painterly mixtures that looked as though they had been mixed by hand and brushed on by an artist. The feathers then cling to the hem as though they were growing from the fabric.

There is no doubt that serenity is taking over from sensuality in evening clothes and Ms. Ferretti's artistic collection caught that changing style.

It has been a smart move for Diego della Valle, the owner of Fay, one part of his Tod's empire, to have called on the designers Tommaso Aquilano and

Roberto Rimondi to give depth and fashion intrigue to sporty clothes.

Expanding far beyond the brand's toggle-fastened coat, the duo, who make lush and often historically inspired clothes for their own line, took sporty symbols and batted them to another place.

They started with houndstooth checks, interpreting them digitally or inscribing them as embossed work onto the back of a jacket. It made for competition between simple, striped casual clothes in soft fabrics set against the more dramatic shiny fabrics of the checks. And sometimes the houndstooth came as just a front piece, like an apron.

With their love of fabric and its textures, this design duo brought their skills to sportswear and gave depth to what might otherwise have been just another striped scarf or checky Woodstock bird print. SEE MENKES

'60s without the sex

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The feeling was the 1960s but a more polite society than one built on free love and miniskirts. There were smart double-breasted coats in a bluish pink, short high-waisted dresses in mustard and leather bodices in that particular dark red that looks like a posh car's seat covering.

Then there were the endangered species spots: animal prints all over coats, jackets and even a shirt and pants that seemed to mix cheetah and leopard.

In her program notes, Frida Giannini, the creative director, said she "felt the need to materialize the essence of Gucci," which included remembering its early fame with those leathers and extending them to fabulous knee-high boots. The signature horse bit decoration remained on the mistle.

It also appeared as embellishment on the short dresses sent out for the cocktail hour. That metallic signal was further extended to panels of crystal on bodices and fastenings on belts.

It was all good, luxurious stuff, but without any frisson of surprise. How odd that Ms. Giannini, whose recent Gucci movie showed how much work goes into each collection, should have created for the runway perfectly nice neo-1960s outfits that were outshone by the boss's wife. SEE MENKES



GUCCI

Hoping for a youthquake

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to try to sort out the fashion calendar, which has the events in the four major capitals overlapping one another.

As for Milan week itself, "I want to re-visualized the image but also to get to grips with the digital platform," she said. "The aim is to have a matrix with different topics, so that press and buyers and small and medium players have credible information."

Even more than in other fashion capitals, the enormous success, and therefore huge size, of the major brands makes it daunting for small designers trying to make their marks. Although Mr. Armani, for example, is making a point of encouraging newcomers by giving them a chance to use his own Teatro Ando-designed building in Milan for their shows.

What about funding young talent? During Milan's golden fashion years of the '70s, mighty manufacturers supported designers and built new brands with them. Now, competition from Asia has pushed many of these industrial companies on the defensive and certainly discouraged them from taking risks on new names.

"I am open-minded about start-ups. I haven't got to grips yet with the budget, but if we can't give money ourselves, we can introduce them to people who can facilitate things for them," Ms. Reeve said, adding that "negativity can be a state of mind in European countries."

Because she, herself, does not come



The Milan Fashion Week greeting, posted for travelers at Milan's airports and rail station.

from the fashion industry, she believes that she sees things that other people take for granted.

"I am an outsider living it for the first time," Ms. Reeve said, noting that the Camera has arranged for students from the Istituto Marangoni fashion school in Milan to participate in fashion week for the first time, and that she would welcome students from other countries.

And if we think of Milan as being a

call center for different disciplines — art, music and fashion — we should put those things together," Ms. Reeve said.

The conversation returns, like so many other discussions among Milan executives, to the putative new, young prime minister.

"Renzi is what we need — whether it is for fashion or economics," Ms. Reeve said. "Energy is generally a positive thing." SEE MENKES

Advertisement for Max Mara featuring Jennifer Garner. Text: TIMELESS IS NOW, Jennifer Garner, MaxMara.

Advertisement for Vogue Talents featuring a group of young designers. Text: Vogue Italia & thecorner.com present THE VOGUE TALENTS THE CORNER, Nurturing a new generation, Federico Marchetti, Franco Sozzani, etc.

