System collections autumn winter 2025-2026

Issue No. 1 – €30 / £26 / $34.95

Lulu wears **Duran Lantink**

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Awar and Athiec wear **Saint Laurent**

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Jacqui, Stella
and Caitlin wear **Versace**

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Ella wears **Fendi**

GUCCI

Gucci Lido
By Jim Goldberg, 2025

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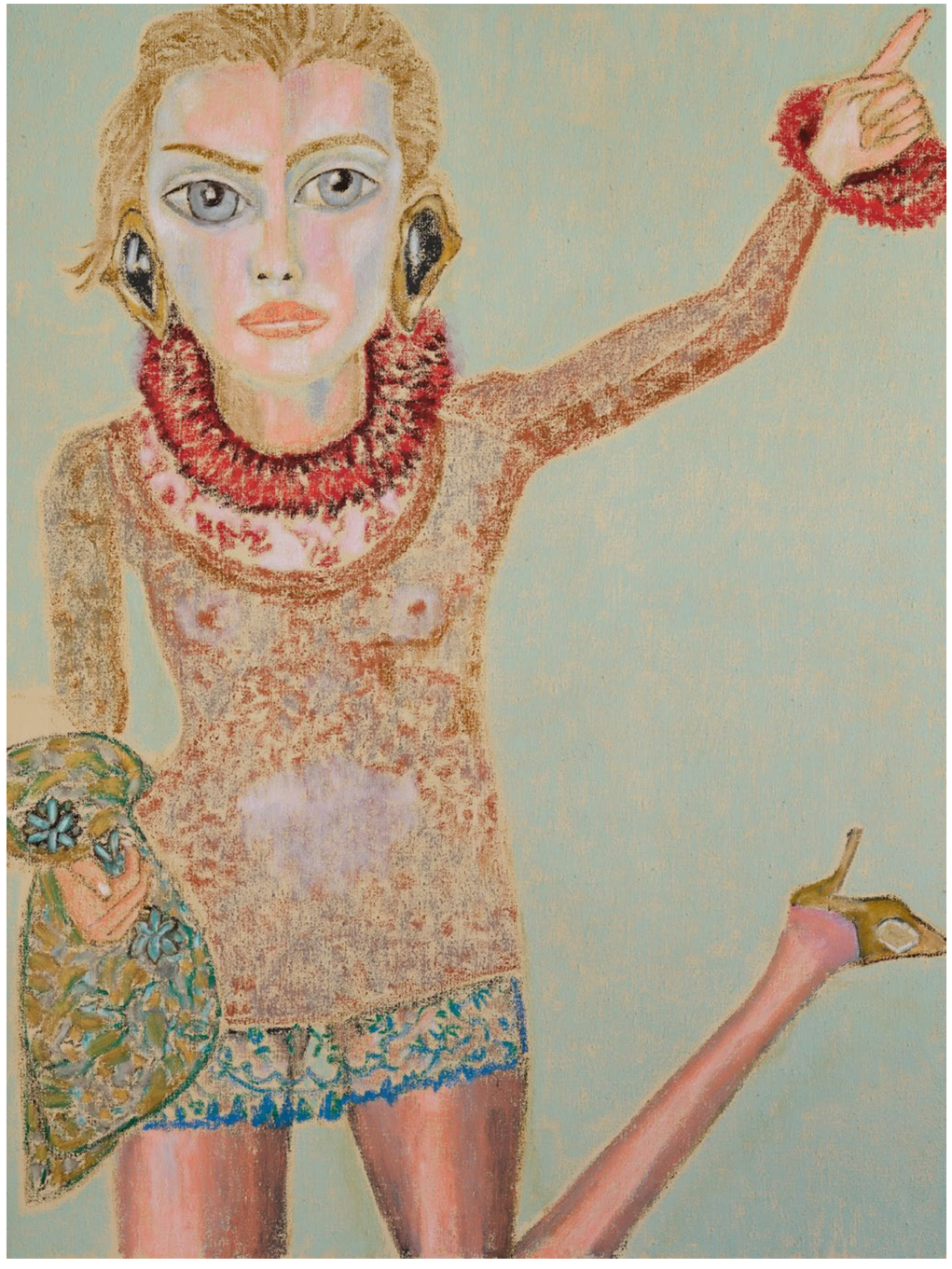
SAINT LAURENT



SAINT LAURENT SUMMER 25
BY FRANCESCO CLEMENTE
COMMISSIONED BY ANTHONY VACCARELLO

CHLOE.COM

Chloé

CHLOE.COM

Chloé

TOM FORD

GIORGIO ARMANI

27 FAUBOURG SAINT-HONORÉ
Jeanne Cadieu photographed by Mikael Jansson

TOTEME

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Contributors

COLLECTIONS

Coming together over three days to shoot the issue's 82-page portfolio of the Autumn/Winter 2025–2026 collections:

Mark Kean is a Scottish photographer based in London. Known for his precise yet intimate approach to portraiture, his work explores the shifting boundaries of identity and image-making.

Vanessa Reid is a London-based stylist. Her instinctive, reference-rich styling draws on art, subculture, and film to create fashion images that feel both grounded and speculative.

Tom Wright is a British hairstylist whose work merges technical precision with a quietly subversive energy, and reflects the codes of youth culture and the street.

Lucy Bridge is a London-based make-up artist. With a background in wig-making and a deep interest in traditional art, she's known for looks that carry a painterly intensity.

Piergiorgio Del Moro is an Italian casting director and founder of DM Casting. Across runway and editorial, his casting is marked by emotional intelligence and an ability to articulate beauty through character and contrast.

CONVERSATIONS

Osman Ahmed is a British fashion journalist and critic.

Imran Amed is the founder of The Business of Fashion.

Hanan Besovic is a fashion commentator behind the Instagram account @ideservecouture.

Tim Blanks is a writer and editor-at-large at Business of Fashion.

@boringnotcom is an anonymous fashion meme account.

Alison Bringé is the chief marketing officer of Launchmetrics.

Edward Buchanan is an American-born, designer and Milan fashion director of *Perfect* magazine.

Brigitte Chartrand is VP of womenswear and 'everything else'™ for Ssense.

Judd Crane is the executive buying director for Selfridges.

Angelo Flaccavento is an Italian fashion critic and journalist.

Katie Grand is a British stylist and editor, and the founder of *Perfect* magazine.

Beka Gvishiani is a Paris-based fashion enthusiast and the creator of @StyleNotCom.

Cathy Horyn is an American fashion critic and flower farmer based in rural Virginia.

Olya Kuryshchuk is the founder and editor-in-chief of *1 Granary*.

Charles Levai is co-founder of Paris-based creative agency Maybe.

Tim Lim is the group fashion director at Meta Media, and editorial director of both *Numéro* China and *Modern Weekly Style* magazine.

Susie Lau is a London-based writer.

Lyas is a Paris-based fashion commentator.

Luke Meagher is an American fashion critic and YouTuber, also known as HauteLeMode.

Carlos Nazario is an American stylist.

Emilia Petrarca is an American fashion and culture writer.

Marta Represa is a Paris-based fashion writer and consultant.

Luca Solca is the senior luxury goods analyst at Bernstein.

Leslie Sun is head of editorial content at *Vogue* Taiwan and *Vogue*'s Asia-Pacific (APAC) editorial director.

Rachel Tashjian is an American writer and fashion critic for *The Washington Post*.

Kevin Tekinel is co-founder of Paris-based creative agency Maybe.

Bryan Yambao is the editor-in-chief of *Perfect* magazine.

Steff Yotka is the global editorial director of *i-D*.

PRADA

PRADA.COM

Masthead

System Collections is published by
Paradis SARL
74, rue des Archives
75003 Paris
France

For subscriptions, please visit
www.system-magazine.com

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MIX
Paper | Supporting responsible forestry
FSC® C016870

Worldwide distribution by A.I.E., Via A. Manzoni 12, 20089, Rozzano, Italy.

Colour reproduction and print supervision
by LBH Labs.
Printed and bound by STIPA, France.

For more information,
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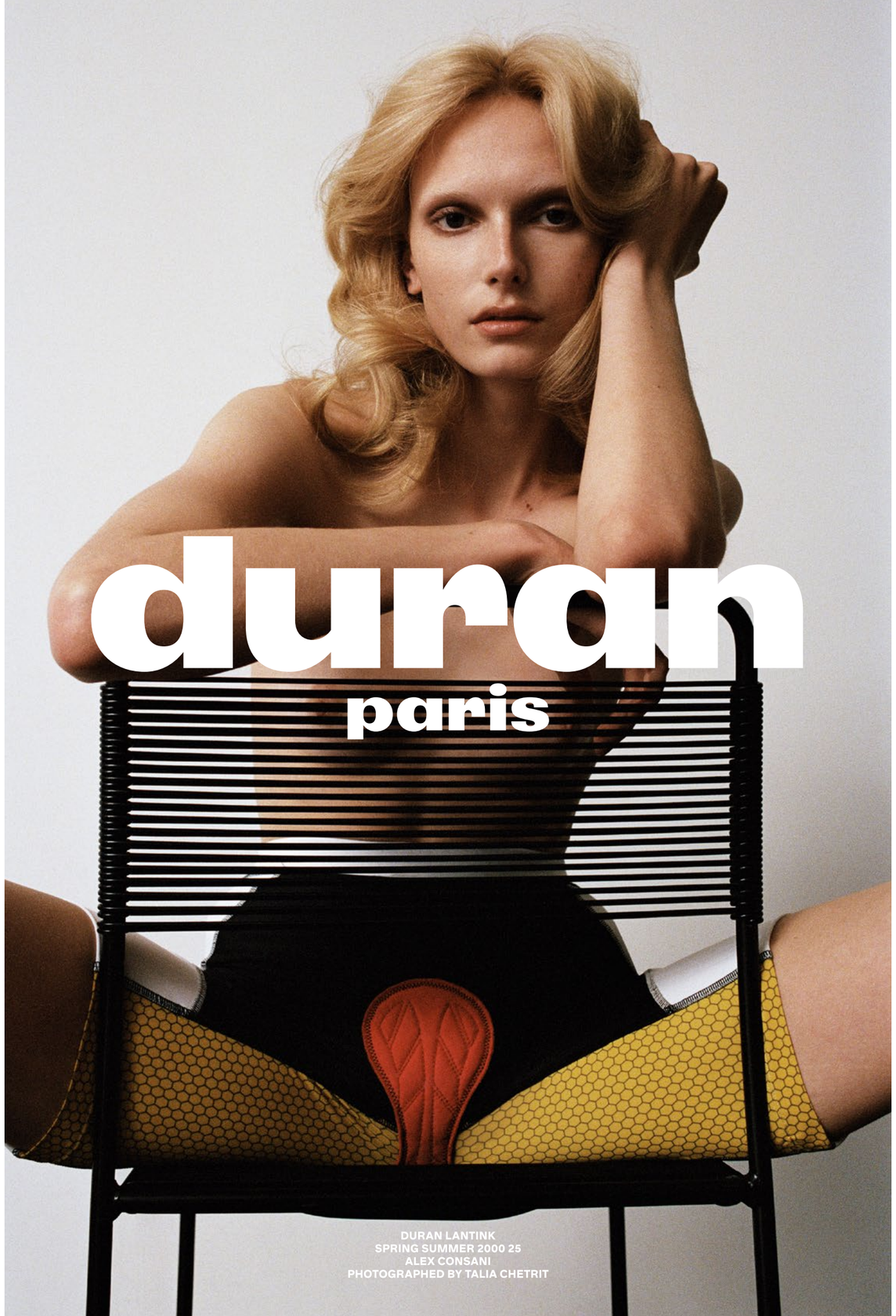


System collections is a seasonal time capsule.

It was assembled once the dust had settled on the frenetic, real-time social media coverage of the Autumn/Winter 2025-2026 shows. Launched a few months before those same collections arrive in stores and feature in the glossies. And created to capture a moment in time. To spotlight fashion's latest collections. To showcase the new faces who recently beguiled the runway. To record conversations about the season with the industry's best-placed critics, commentators and creatives.

The time capsule is a classical idea, dating back to ancient Mesopotamia, that was revived with great optimism in the future-obsessed 20th century. A cache of artifacts from a particular time that might be buried, say, in the cornerstone of a new building, to surprise someone hundreds or thousands of years in the future. The mark of the true collector is someone who believes that today's work is tomorrow's treasure. History has often borne out this theory, and it makes sense. A perception of dispensability naturally leads to scarcity.

When we were considering what *System collections* could be, we imagined Dashwood Books in New York or IDEA Books in London uncovering a rare publication from, say, Spring 1947, that contemporaneously documented Christian Dior's New Look collection through imagery and opinion; or one from 50 years later, chronicling the Autumn/Winter 1997 season – when, like today, the fashion industry was on the cusp of a major reshuffling of its cards, from which new designers, brands, faces, and attitudes would emerge.

So please enjoy and hold onto this debut issue of *System collections*. One day, it may become your perfect cultural cache from this season – and from an era defined by both uncertainty and expectation.

P.S. This debut issue of *System collections* is dedicated to the memory of our dear friend and *System* sub-editor Tom Ridgway, who passed away during its making. Tom taught us all so much because he cared deeply about language, the truth of the written word, and the many wonderful absurdities that characterize fashion. But more than anything, he was just a really lovely person. Our thoughts are with Tom's family and friends.

Collections Autumn/ Winter 2025-2026

Photographs by Mark Kean
Styling by Vanessa Reid
Hair by Tom Wright
Make-up by Lucy Bridge
Casting by Piergiorgio Del Moro


Awar and Athiec
wear **Saint Laurent**

Karyna wears **Sacai**

Nastassia wears **Alaïa**

Luka wears **Bally**

Ida wears **Rabanne**

Yura wears **Duran Lantink**

Marylore,
Lillian and Elina
wear **Chloé**

Libby wears **Prada**

Carol and Sara wear **Victoria Beckham**

Canlan wears **Tod's**

Ida and Karyna wear **Calvin Klein**

Caitlin wears **Diesel**

Ella M wears
Miu Miu

Canlan wears **Coperni**

Maya wears **Dries Van Noten**

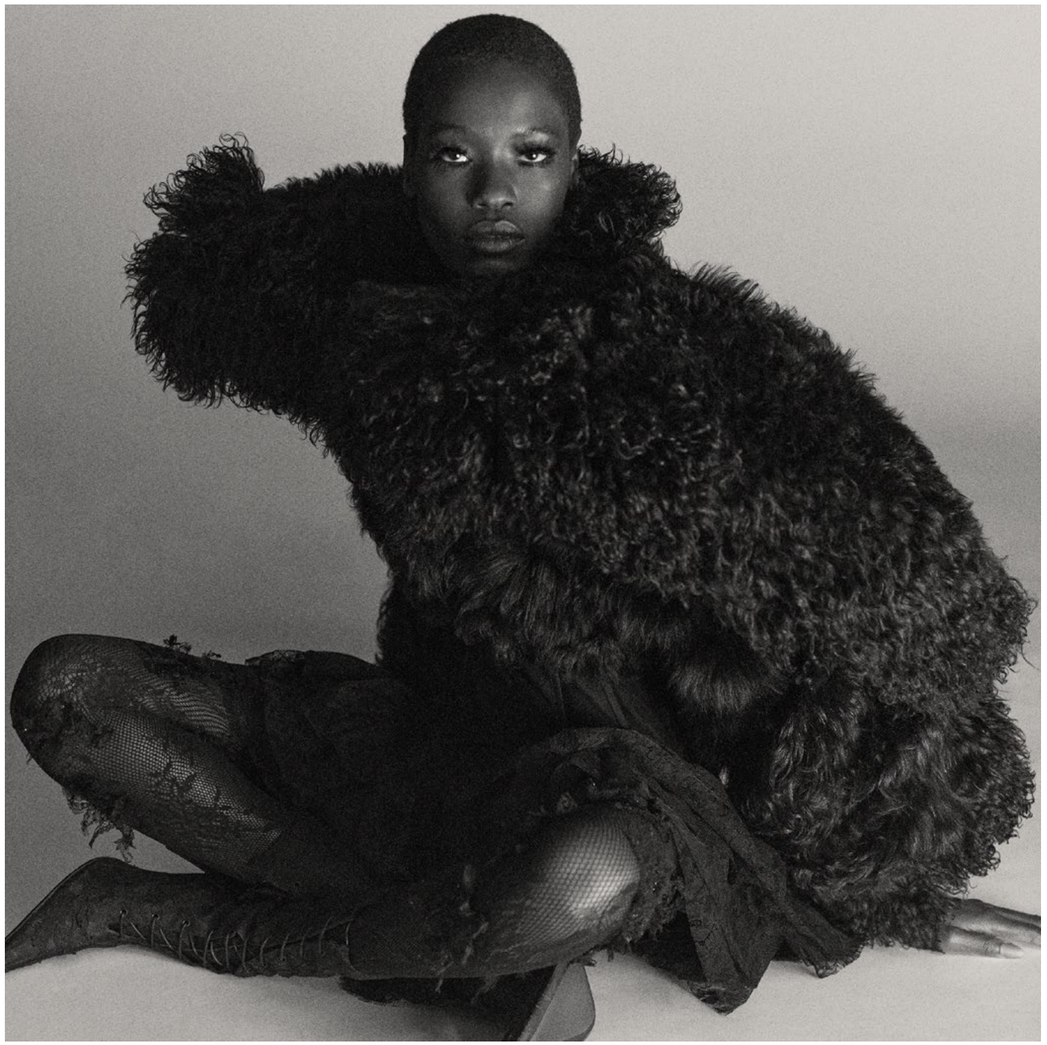
Stella and Maelle wear **Gucci**

Elina wears **Burberry**

Carol wears **Carolina Herrera**

Ella D wears **Valentino**

Rosciel and Douta
wear **Marni**



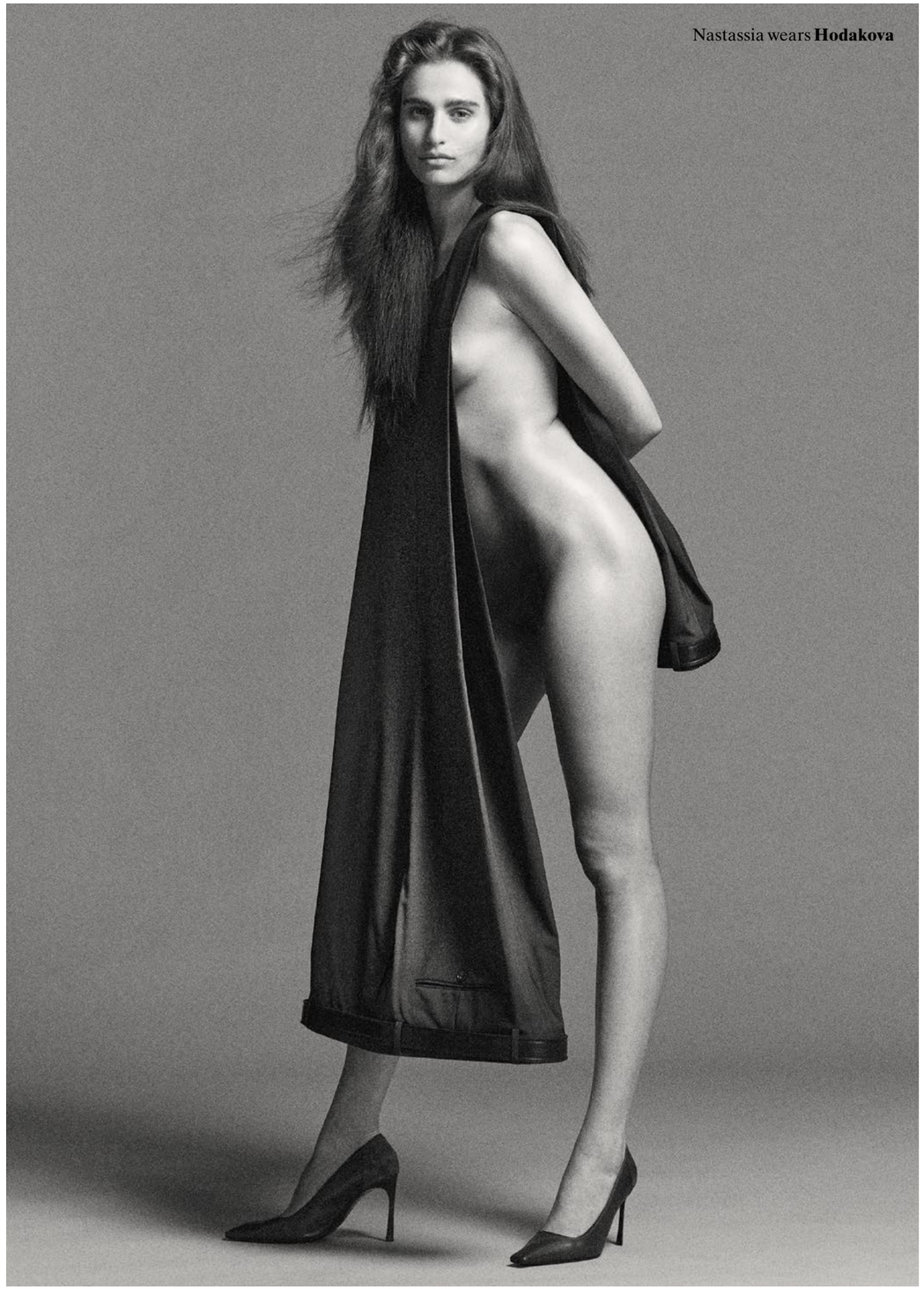
Awar wears **McQueen**

Charlie wears **Givenchy**

Maelle wears
Stella McCartney

Apolline wears
Toteme


Ella M wears **Marc Jacobs**


Nastassia wears **Hodakova**

Lauren wears
Collina Strada,
Carol wears
Our Legacy
and Athiec wears
Talia Byre


Bodine wears **KNWLS**


Ajus wears **Balenciaga**

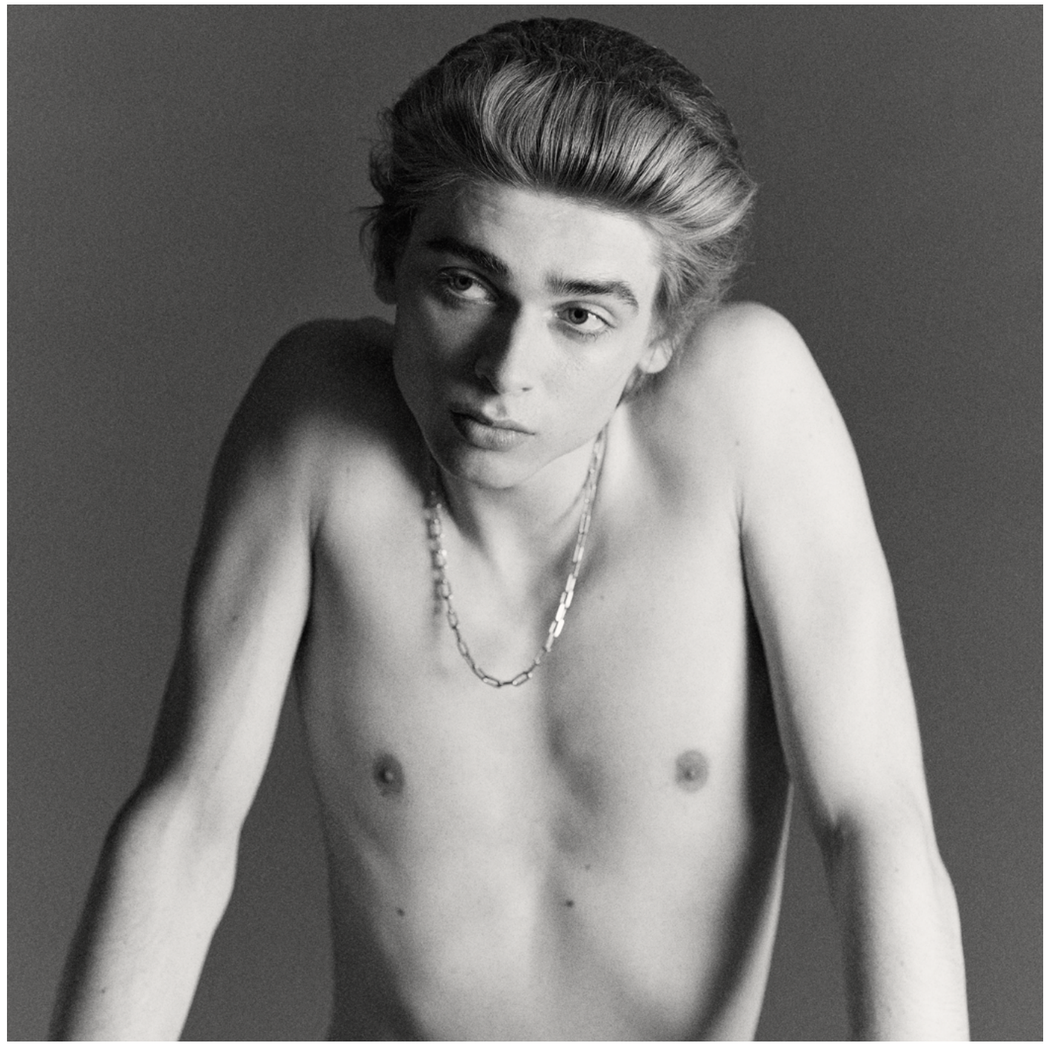
Awar wears **Proenza Schouler**

Jacqui wears **Rick Owens**

Sara wears **Moschino**

Charlie wears **Schiaparelli**

Lauren and Bodine
wear **Thom Browne**



Luka wears **Cartier**

Ajus wears **16Arlington**

Marylore wears
Giorgio Armani

Apolline and Stella wear **Chanel**

Lauren wears **Rokh**

Stella wears **Tom Ford**

Apolline wears **Chopova Lowena**

Ajus wears **Balmain**

Sara wears
Niccolò Pasqualetti

Athiec wears **Dilara Findikoglu**

Stella wears **Conner Ives**

Lillian wears **Max Mara**

Ella M wears **Fendi**

Noor wears **The Row**

Oskar and Luka wear **AMI**

Marylore wears **Missoni**

Jacqui wears **Dolce & Gabbana**

Rosciel wears **Hermès**

Luka and Noor wear **ALAINPAUL**

Lulu wears **Ganni**

Maya wears **Loro Piana**

Yura and Karyna wear
Christian Dior

Thea wears **Loewe**

Noor and Thea
wear **Tatras**

Lulu wears **Ferragamo**

Noor wears **Louis Vuitton**

Noor wears **Phoebe Philo**

Jacqui, Stella
and Caitlin wear **Versace**

Luka and Ajus wear **Ponte**


Oskar wears **Stefan Cooke**


Bodine wears
Ludovic de Saint Sernin

Ella D wears **Undercover**

Libby and Karyna
wear **Courrèges**

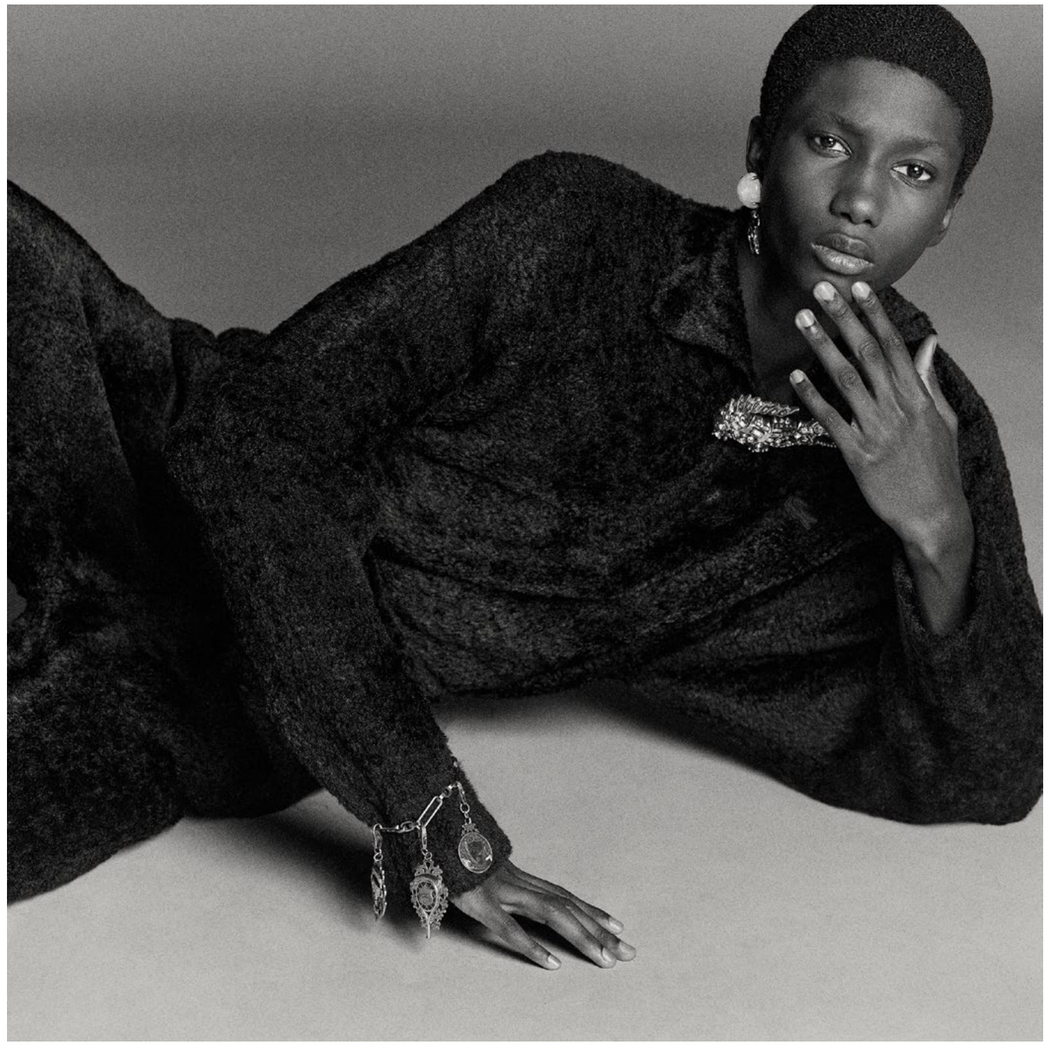
Ajus wears **Atlein**

Oskar wears **Commission**

Thea wears **Vaquera**

Lulu wears **Matières Fécales**

Noor wears **Erdem**



Douta wears **Lacoste**

Apolline wears **Kiko Kostadinov**

Maelle and Charlie
wear **Lanvin**

Ida wears **ALL–IN**

Caitlin wears **Celine**

Models: Ajus at Elite, Apolline at Premium Models, Athiec at Select Model Management, Awar at Ford, Bodine at IMG, Caitlin at Elite, Canlan at W360, Carol at Oui Management, Charlie at Next Management, Douta at The Claw, Elina at Ford, Ella D at Elite, Ella M at Ford, Ida at Women Management, Jacqui at Next Management, Karyna at Oui Management, Lauren at Viva, Libby at Elite, Lillian at Perspective Management, Luka at New Madison, Lulu at Ford, Maelle at NOAH mgmt, Marylore at Women Management, Maya at Ford, Nastassia at Women Management, Noor at MIKAs, Oskar at New Madison, Rosciel at IMG, Sara at Elite, Stella at Viva, Thea at ZZO, Yura at Oui Management.
Casting: Piergiorgio Del Moro, Helena Balladino and Brandon Contreras – DMCASTING.
Production: NILM. Post production: Studio Private. Videographer: Romain Wygas.
Photography assistants: Shane Ryan, Adrien Turlais. Digital operator: Alex Dow.
Styling assistants: Sam Wright, Kristen Humphreys, Brando Prizzon, Philip Sandau, Andreea Georgiana Radoi.
Tailor: Mattia Akkermans.
Manicurist: Ama Cauvas at Artlist. Lead manicure: Christine Pho. Manicure assistants: Yoana Tg, Sibel Altun, Betty-Ann Béthencourt.
Make-up assistants: Jana Reininger, Yin Liu, Mai Saito, Kyle Dominic, Jay Kwan, Gianluca Venerdini, Sarah Wandee Matthijnssens, Juri Yamanaka, Louise Rouger, Morgane Nicol.
Hair assistants: Laura Swaine, Meekyung Kim, Yuri Kato, Natusmi Ebiko, Hyacintha Faustino, Maya Roget, Ama Agbogan, Lucile Bertrand, Sandrine dos Santos.
Producer: Mona Perron. Production coordinator: Manon Kulesza. Production assistant: Manon Liautard. PAs: Ana Gabriela Camiza, Thomas Chapuis, Mathieu Berrou, Gaultier Krug.

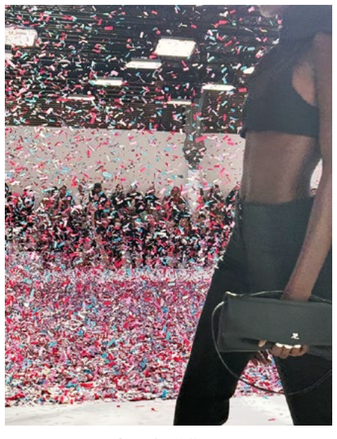
Camera rolls

Autumn/Winter 2025-2026, as seen by some of our favourite industry figures.

Eva Chen

Inez and Vinoodh

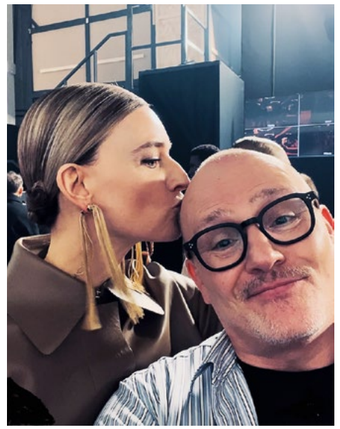
Mel Ottenberg



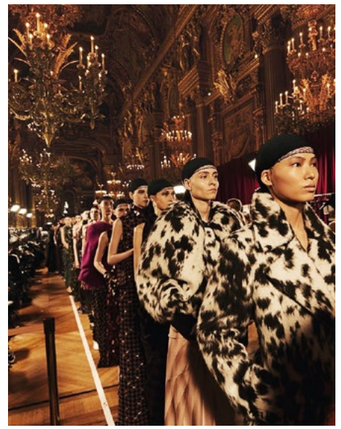
Samira Nasr

Vanessa Reid

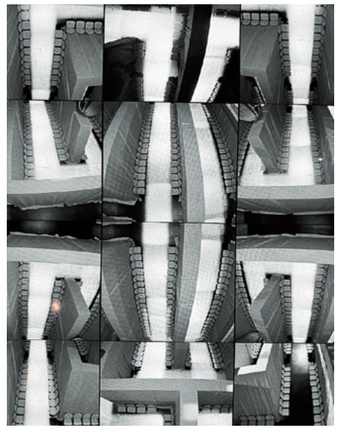
Mathias Augustyniak



Peter Philips



Piergiorgio Del Moro



Niklas Bildstein Zaar

Wes Gordon

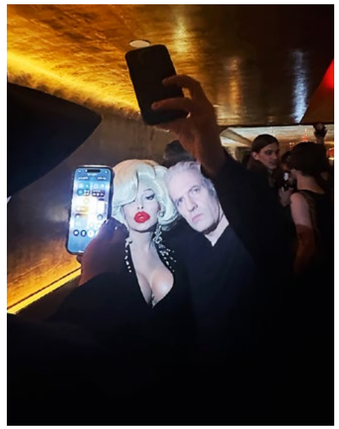
Fai Khadra

Lulu Tenney

Loïc Prigent

Thom Bettridge

Sara Moonves



Justin Padgett

Ib Kamara

Ferdinando Verderi

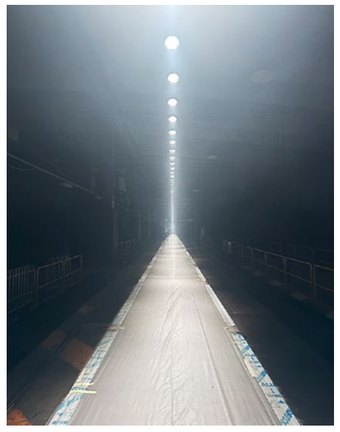
Lucien Pagès

Carlyne Cerf de Dudzeele

Alex Consani

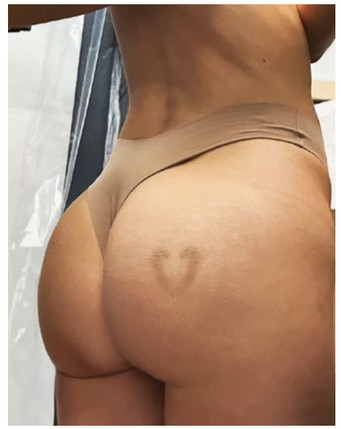
Soo Joo Park

Saskia de Brauw



Frédéric Sanchez

MJ Harper

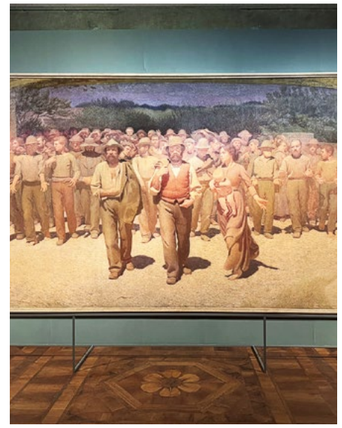


Nadia Lee Cohen

Law Roach

Lucy Bridge

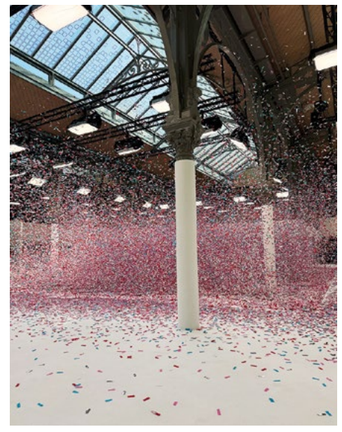
Leon Dame



Emanuele Farneti

Malick Bodian

Camille Bidault-Waddington



Isabelle Kountoure

Conversations

Cathy Horyn
Rachel Tashjian & Steff Yotka
Carlos Nazario
Lyas & Style Not Com
Tim Lim & Leslie Sun
Katie Grand & Edward Buchanan
Imran Amed & Luca Solca
HauteLeMode & I Deserve Couture
Charles Levai & Kevin Tekinel
Angelo Flaccavento
Boringnotcom
Susie Lau & Bryan Yambao
Tim Blanks
Brigitte Chartrand & Judd Crane
Launchmetrics

On a macro scale the world is awash with geo-political and economic uncertainty. While in the microcosm of luxury fashion we have three of the biggest brands, Dior, Chanel and Gucci, currently in a holding pattern, awaiting a creative reboot. Other brands are entering their own periods of transition: Versace, Balenciaga, Bottega Veneta, Loewe, Maison Margiela, Jil Sander… And with these changes come the wider knock-on effects that will be felt across the industry. It's a reshuffling of the cards, so to speak.

In the days following the Autumn/Winter 2025-2026 fashion weeks, we recorded conversations with 24 of fashion's best-placed critics, commentators and creatives – to get their thoughts on the both unsettling and exciting times ahead.

Cathy Horyn

‘People are sick of elites and their privilege. I say that, but of course you look at Instagram’s coverage of fashion and it’s still glitz and glamour and socialites. I just feel like everybody is lazily stuck in that marketing pitch of ‘fashion is luxury’, so they feel like it has to be presented in that way. It bores me.’

Interview by Jonathan Wingfield

Talk to Cathy Horyn about fashion and you quickly pick up on her need to see ‘the big picture’. As one of the industry’s most respected and feared critics, it stands to reason that her praise (or scorn) for any given collection be contextualized on both micro and macro levels. Combining silhouettes with sea change; designer’s whims with ‘the direction we’re all heading in.’

In recent years, fashion has been heading upwards and outwards, so often defined by its gargantuan scale. The sheer volume of brands, designers, shows, showrooms, VIPs, VICs, crowds, content, customers, collabs and, until recently, booming international markets, can make the industry seem indecipherable – fascinating to observe yet trickier than ever to summarize in neat soundbites. And it’s the big picture of Horyn’s own career which has afforded her the experience and authority to see it and say it how it is.

Back in 1986, the talented cub reporter Horyn answered an ad in *The Detroit News* looking for a ‘good writer, no fashion experience necessary.’ She got the job and quickly found herself dispatched to Milan and Paris to learn her beat while covering the seasonal collections. Stints at *The Washington Post* and then glitzy 1990s-era *Vanity Fair* soon followed, before, in 1998, she landed the plum role of chief fashion critic for the *New York Times*. Horyn’s 15 years at the *Times* cemented her reputation as both a truth-telling pundit and consummate writer. Inspired by the American New Journalists of the 1960s and 1970s, Horyn took to observing fashion’s great and good from within while always remaining somewhat removed, allowing herself the space to serve her readers, and not just the industry’s PR machine. As if to highlight this point, since 2016 she’s juggled her current role as fashion critic-at-large for *New York* magazine with becoming a one-woman industrial flower farmer in rural Virginia. The spectacular incongruity of a professional life that now spans the brilliance of both John Deere *and* John Galliano would, one suspects, be of some amusement to her literary heroes Joan Didion and Tom Wolfe.

Nonetheless, it was firmly in her role as fashion critic that Cathy Horyn recently sat down for a chat with *System*. With the industry currently in a holding pattern, awaiting numerous creative reboots and designer debut offerings – not to mention businesses facing market turbulence – now was an ideal time to get her big-picture take on where fashion might be heading. The conversation began on the final afternoon of Paris Fashion Week, and continued during follow-up phone calls in the ensuing weeks, as designers were being hired and fired, and tariffs loomed large.

‘When I think about the confusion that comes with all the designers moving houses, I think of that Joan Didion line, “The center is not holding.”

Jonathan Wingfield: Did you sense a direct response to current global affairs or fashion industry uncertainty on the runway this season?

Cathy Horyn: When the shows are on, and I felt it particularly keenly this season, it’s very hard to see the big picture. There’s such a bombardment of ideas and strengths and weaknesses. When I think about what’s going on in the industry right now, and all the confusion that comes with designers moving houses, I think of the Joan Didion line, ‘The center is not holding’.[1] Looking back over this season’s shows, it does feel quite business as usual, although the designer shake-ups have largely placed things in limbo. Nonetheless, I don’t think that’s affecting people’s interest in fashion – look at all those young people outside Miu Miu in a state of delirium.

What do you think draws them to the shows?

Is it fashion? Or is it the arrival of the celebrities and influencers? At Miu Miu, it seems like the celebrities fuel a huge level of interest. Thinking about that Miu Miu show: there was a reserve of energy for Miuccia, especially after the Chanel show just before it, which was so flattening and not very good. Chanel is obviously in a holding pattern, as is Gucci. It’s baffling to me that people – whether that’s executives or reporters – seem to forget that this is a historical problem, and so an equally historical solution is required, which is to put creative people in those roles as opposed to trying to run them with executives, with their executive ideas of what’s creative. So much gets run by numbers now, and you sense things are increasingly shaped by the marketing people. I mean, how many more celebrities can Gucci wrangle? It feels like they’re dressing *everybody*. I appreciate that it’s all about getting numbers and views, but that can only take you so far.

When you think of Gucci today, what is it that comes to mind?

It makes me think back to the dreadful state that Gucci was in when Tom [Ford] and Domenico [de Sole] took over in the mid-1990s. The problems were different then from what they are today – too many licenses, too much wholesale, it was too spread out – but they just came and revamped the whole thing, and gave it a different vision. The same thing with Alessandro Michele, he gave it a different vision. And that can have such a tonic effect on a brand. So I don't understand how Prada manages to have great revenue numbers *and* a real creative force to it, yet so many other brands seem to be adverse to that dynamic. I just don't get it. You need people with big, creative ideas. You need people who know what young people want to wear, and who are connected to what's going on in the world. You have to have trust in those people.

Demna raises the excitement *and* the revenue; that combination is so rare in this business. Yet there's this assumption that he's going to go into Gucci and sort of Demna-fy it. I don't think we should make those assumptions. He's one of those talents – and there are very few of them – who is able to get inside a brand, solve its issues, and figure out what it needs. He's really good with product. He's really good at motivating people around him and working with good talent. He's really good at orchestrating the big production, which makes people excited about fashion and seeing it in the big picture. And so, yes, I think it's a really good match. I particularly liked what Stefano Cantino [Gucci CEO] said during the press conference when they announced it: 'We needed a strong and opinionated designer.' I downside of Hedi: you sort of know what you might get. It's perfectly great, but it doesn't have the surprise element. The scuttlebutt is that when you talk to CEOs or headhunters who've worked with him, you hear that he wants too much control over the whole brand – the design, the image, the look of the stores. He's not wrong to want all that, but it's a question of tolerance. How much control would the Kering people be willing to give up? So I think that's probably the explanation. But you just don't have big, creative minds like Hedi or Demna every generation. It's somewhat worrisome that we don't have that coming through. Like, who is going to be the next guy or woman in their thirties – the age Demna was when he arrived at Balenciaga – who can take on something like that and transform it?

'How many more celebrities can Gucci wrangle? It feels like they're dressing *everybody*. Getting those clicks and views can only take you so far.'

Do you think Gucci needs a radical reworking, and is Demna the right designer for the job?
Yes and yes. The only puzzling thing is no one put two and two together. I'd heard rumours about Demna leaving Balenciaga, and then heard that he wanted to move to Los Angeles, where he already has a house, and have a baby, which would be quite reasonable at his age. I pictured him taking a break from fashion and enjoying his life. And so all I could think of, quite selfishly, was how much I'd enjoyed the whole arc of what he's created at Balenciaga – it's a prototype for how to approach a heritage brand. And so I definitely think he could do a great job at Gucci.

How would you define what it is that Demna brings?
mean, most big brands do. Gucci struggled with Sabato de Sarno; he wasn't the big engine that you need to create that narrative, or that big-picture view of what a fashion brand can be today.

Were you surprised that Hedi Slimane did not get appointed to Gucci?
Well, I think Hedi would have been really good at it. I think he would have been good at Chanel, too. I think you can put Hedi in pretty much any classic 'bourgeois' brand, and he can make it cool. At the time Matthieu Blazy was appointed the role at Chanel, Bruno Pavlovsky [Chanel's president of fashion] expressed in a comment in *Women's Wear Daily* his preference for not knowing what a potential creative director would deliver before their appointment. And I think that's perhaps the

You've been pretty vocal about your admiration for what Demna's done at Balenciaga. Do you have a highlight?
I'll never forget that parliament show.[2] I remember Juergen [Teller] and I were sitting next to one another, and we just started giggling because the depictions of people in those banal suits of power were so accurate. They could have been bodyguards, or they could have been bureaucrats. Then that lady in the rigid ball gown, like she's a little ballerina in a jewellery box. I remember talking to someone else right after the show who said, 'That was appalling! The utter hopelessness…' And Demna, of course, *loved* that reaction.

What surprises you about the fashion industry in 2025?
I naively assume that new designers are

going to bring newness, so I guess I'm surprised by the fact their ideas aren't all that new. What Duran Lantink does gets a lot of buzz, and he executes it really well, but most of his ideas have already been done by other people.

Would you say the lexicon of fashion design has been largely defined and now it's more a case of what designers do with that language, how they mix and match or rework it?
I think it is that. It's like R&B and rock, and how that continues to be redefined over and over again. Look at how much of Margiela's influence permeates what goes on today. Those kinds of people don't come along very often, and we are overdue another Margiela, another McQueen, another Helmut Lang, probably another Rei Kawakubo. As for Duran, a lot of people have been interested in him for the last two or three seasons. He is good, and there's no question he's got a wonderful sense of humour. I don't know him personally, but I see his clothes and think there's a *joie de vivre* there, there's a wit, there's an exceptional ability to manipulate shape and fabric and forms. All that's really positive… but it's not new. The floating waist was done by Demna at Margiela about 15 years ago. The tubular shapes could probably be traced back to Rei Kawakubo. But, yes, he does it in a fresh way that feels sparky and fun.

What did you see this season that you liked, and that felt genuinely new?
I like this kid in London, Yaku [Stapleton], a lot. He did a presentation in the [British Fashion Council's] NewGen space. Sarah Mower alerted me to him, and I'm glad she did. He set up these *tableaux vivants* that were supposed to be a group of people living on a desert island: they were playing chess, they were talking, and the way they were dressed was kind of streetwear, but placed into the arena of fantasy. Talking to Yaku, I learnt that he's 27, grew up in St. Albans, and graduated from Central Saint Martins. As a kid he began playing role-playing games. So when he created his brand two years ago, it combined elements of streetwear with Afrofuturism and the whole role-playing world. What you're seeing are these kinds of fantasy shapes combined with streetwear; there's not even a real language for it yet, which is what's so interesting. And he happens to be a very bright kid, fun to talk to. There's no hype or bullshit with him, and he already has a decent business.

Do you sense that someone like Yaku could have a future at a big house?
I don't even think that's the point. He doesn't belong in any of those houses; they wouldn't know what to do with him. The ideal scenario for him would be to have a wonderful partner with a good investor who won't screw anything up while giving him the means to build a better website, better distribution, all those kinds of things. I think he's so bright that he can get there himself, but you know how it works – you need investment to really get things moving. The other designer I liked a lot, also in London, is Steve O Smith. He's a finalist for the LVMH Prize this year. He grew up in London, studied drawing and painting at Rhode Island School of Design, then went to Central Saint Martins. He's very good at illustration: he does sketches of women – René Gruau, Joe Eula kinds of things – that he then converts into dresses. Each dress looks like a sketch.

What are they made of?
He emulates the tone and depth of the sketches by working in tulle, organza and crêpe to create these multi-layered effects. Everything is cut out by hand. The final result is quite different from the initial drawing, and even the first iterations of the layering, but you can see that it derives from a sketch, with that movement and energy incorporated into it. He lives in north London with his partner, they work in the business together. He's got one sewer, I think, a Scottish lady. He's strictly custom. Prices start at $12,000, and he's at capacity for orders.

That's not an easily scalable business.
Exactly, and it doesn't necessarily need to be scaled. Someone said to me, 'Well, how long can he keep doing that for?' And I was like, 'He's too young to be worrying about that right now.'

Is the LVMH Prize a poisoned chalice for someone like him?
I don't think it has to be. And, you know, what Steve does has to be done by hand. He wants to move into colour next, he was showing me these Paul Cadmus drawings because he was really interested in their colours.[3] He said half-jokingly, or maybe completely

'I just don't understand how Prada manages to have great revenue *and* a real creative force to it, yet so many other brands seem adverse to that dynamic.'

seriously that he wanted to do a dress based on a Matisse so it ends up looking like the painting. Not that it's going to look like Saint Laurent's Picassos,[4] that's not what he has in mind. He said the references kind of go through his hands and then become something else. I think Steve's very open minded about what he's doing, I don't think he's chasing anything. Like Yaku, Steve has a good head on his shoulders. I think he's comfortable in his life.

That feels almost like the antithesis of an LVMH Prize-winner's ambition?
Well, we may need to return to more traditional models of operating. It amazes me when I see some of these younger designers on the schedule. Is it family money or something? Because I'm wondering how they stay in business.

'Demna raises the excitement *and* the revenue – a rare combination. Yet there's this assumption that he's going to go into Gucci and sort of Demna-fy it.'

The eternal question.
The other guy in London that I like a lot is Michael Stewart from Standing Ground. I think his work seems to flow out of the tradition of Alaïa; not that it looks like Alaïa, but it seems to have the same discipline. Like so many young designers, his goal is to show in Paris next year, and I think he actually belongs in Paris. He makes beautiful clothes; again, it's pretty much a custom business. He might be able to do some scaling for certain things, but he probably needs an investor.

It's telling that his goal is to show in Paris.
I think if you can get on the couture calendar – and Michael would certainly qualify for that with the kind of work he's doing – you'll get the attention of a wider audience, and access to the couture customers who come here. It was Steve [O Smith] who told me that he came to Paris during one of the recent couture seasons and just took over a storefront somewhere. It probably helped that Eddie Redmayne and his wife Hannah [Bagshawe] wore his clothes to the Met Ball last year, but an American couture client, in Paris for the shows, stopped by and ordered something right away. So I think there's definitely a future if you're doing something that special. Ten years ago, everybody looked up to Margiela, McQueen and Alaïa, because of their originality. And I remember asking Azzedine about it at the time: 'Can new or younger designers have the kind of business that you have?' And he just said, 'Well, to do that you have to work all the time.' And he did. He was constantly working. But these young designers in London I'm talking about have exceptional skills at cutting, sewing… they can do all of that.

Do you think that London has reconciled itself to be an incubator for young talent rather than a city for dominant luxury businesses? When you think about Paris from an industry perspective, LVMH has become the defining 'brand' – it's come to represent what fashion means in the city. By the same rationale, you could argue that the most enduring and defining London 'brand' is actually Central Saint Martins.
I think designers in London may be heading in three different paths. The first one, the most lucrative, the most sustainable, is the students – coming out of Central Saint Martins, the Royal College of Art, and some of the technical schools in the north of England – who have ideas and skills, and who will end up working in a design studio in Paris or Milan, and who may end up becoming the design director of that team, not necessarily the creative director. And that's great. The other path, I hope, is the path of Yaku, who comes along once in a generation, maybe once every two generations, who has an idea that's based on his time, that you could only invent today because of, say, the language of the Internet or AI. I think the third path is the one that Steve O Smith and Michael Stewart are on. Michael is saving up money to show in Paris, and Steve is running a small, sustainable business; he's at capacity, the V&A just bought one of his dresses. He's very happy doing what he's doing. But I'd like to think that Steve and Michael can survive by making things that are couture, or custom. Where that goes, I don't know.

Do you think an important aspect of your role is to frame what you're seeing through the lens of the business, the markets, and how brands are performing? Or should that side of things not cloud your judgment on what designers are creating? Our entire discussion today could be exclusively about the state of the business, with little talk of clothes or new designers who've caught your eye…
Exactly. I was talking to a designer recently, someone I know pretty well, about this whole 'anti-rich' movement that's emerging across the world. People are sick of elites and their privilege. I say that, but of course you look at Instagram's coverage of fashion and it's still glitz and glamour and socialites. I just feel like everybody is lazily stuck in that marketing pitch of 'fashion is luxury', so they feel like it has to be presented in that way. It bores me. And I'm so tired of all these brand ambassadors. It just seems phony to me. The other day, I saw Tilda Swinton getting out of a black car on Rue Cambon and going up the stairs to Chanel. I just thought, 'I don't really believe that. What is she doing there?' It doesn't make sense to me, even though Tilda wears a lot of different brands' clothes. When I said this to a friend of mine, expecting him to agree with me, he just replied, 'It's all about mathematics now in the fashion houses.' It's pay to play. It's entirely transactional.

'Hedi would have been really good at Gucci, and at Chanel, too. You can put Hedi in pretty much any classic 'bourgeois' brand, and he can make it cool.'

Earlier this week I was talking to the people from Launchmetrics – the company that provides brands with all the data about the shows, the best-performing posts, the best-performing brand ambassadors and so on, in terms of what they call Media Impact Value. They had calculated that the average Media Impact Value for each front-show seat at a big show in Paris is now $77,000.
The other day, I talked to a woman at Schiaparelli who helps bring in VICs [Very Important Customers] – an international community mostly from London – and she was saying that the houses now expect ready-to-wear VICs to spend a pretty significant sum each and every season to be eligible for a show invite. And if you're a couture customer who last bought something two seasons ago, that no longer makes the cut. I think of the Nan Kempners of the world, who never bought over long periods of time; it was a blouse here, a jacket there, and that's how they built their wardrobes. In the current climate, Nan Kempner would have to up her spend or she'd be vetoed from the couture shows.

To go back to the original question, do you feel that it's important to be aware of the business when you're going in and looking at collections?
Just from experience, I do understand the types of business. I've always had good relationships with a lot of executives over the years – at Kering, LVMH and Richemont; people like Domenico De Sole, Sidney Toledano, Michael Burke, Ralph Toledano, or Siddhartha Shukla, who's now at Lanvin. I have regular conversations with those guys because they're great to talk to about the industry. But you have to really get into the nitty-gritty of what each company's issues might be; maybe one company is not doing so well because they've stopped selling knits, or they've shifted the cut of their clothes, or they've lost their merchandiser or one of their design team… So I'm aware of all those elements that can explain what's going on in a house. But given the choice, I've always preferred talking to creatives.

Do you think the pendulum is swinging back towards the culture of the designer? It felt like some of the brands had a moment of operating in a post-designer manner, with the CEOs and marketing teams steering creative decisions.
It's a historical fact that houses work better when you have a very talented creative director and a very capable CEO. That combination of Pierre Bergé and Yves Saint Laurent, of Domenico De Sole and Tom Ford, of Giancarlo Giammetti and Valentino. I do think we're beginning to see the pendulum swing back. I don't think it's completely reached its full swing. It certainly appears that there was thinking, both at Kering and LVMH, that the strength of 'brand' would prevail, and that the marketing departments would be able to carry some of these big houses forward. Yes, those things are really important in today's world, particularly the marketing, there's just no denying how that works today. But look at Chanel. I used to get so annoyed when editors or stylists would say to me during the Virginie Viard years, 'They'll never fire her because she makes them so much money.' That's not the point! Money isn't everything. It is really about a long-term game. And I always think that the Wertheimers [Chanel owners] are really good at that, although they don't have a lot of expertise in replacing designers.

They haven't needed to.
That long Karl Lagerfeld period extended into Virginie Viard, and more recently the studio team that's been managing it, so we're talking 45 years of one person's vision – albeit one of the most modern, revolutionary designers of the 20th century. So the public has not seen a Chanel besides the one that Lagerfeld supplied. I'm not knocking Karl. He had the experience and the wit to be a wonderful designer. But now, with Matthieu Blazy, I think Chanel made the best decision it possibly could.

It's a chance to write a whole new chapter without Lagerfeld, which is really important. This is the challenge for Matthieu, and I think this too should be a sweeping change. So, to answer your question, yes, I do think this is a testament to the capabilities of a designer. There are other signs in other houses: putting Sarah Burton at Givenchy is a really positive thing. She's a total pro. I'm hoping that Dario Vitale at Versace will also be a really positive sign.

What about Dior? Jonathan Anderson is all but confirmed in writing to be taking over most of Dior. It got me thinking: Celine's revenue at the point of Phoebe Philo's departure was probably between €500 million and €1 billion. Hedi Slimane came and effectively dismantled that brand *and* business – the existing customer went elsewhere – and LVMH then had to invest hundreds of millions for it to get to today's scale, which is more than €2.5 billion. Ultimately, the risk paid off. But when you think about the prospect of Jonathan Anderson's quite radical creative direction potentially dismantling Dior's existing €10 billion business… that's a monumental risk. I mean, what happens to all those Peter Marino-designed Dior stores? Are they suddenly subject to a Jonathan Anderson makeover? There is risk and uncertainty built into all of these creative reboots, but the further up the scale, the higher the stakes become.

You're right, it's not comparable. It's so interesting on many levels because Jonathan did wonders at Loewe – he created great accessories and all of that – but the thing that was interesting to me was when he made that shift about two and a half years ago, with that first surrealist collection. It looked so different to all the hippy-dippy Ibiza stuff he'd been doing in various iterations. That showed a maturity in Jonathan and his stylist Benjamin Bruno. It took a lot of risk to do that, but the risk at Dior is undoubtedly bigger. I do think they have to do it, though. I do think it's time, and it's going to be a real test for Delphine Arnault and the powers that be within LVMH, and obviously Bernard Arnault, to see if they're willing to make all those changes.

Would you say he's a good fit there?

Dior is a couture house, a fashion house. It is based on making clothes, and it has a look. So it's going to be interesting for Jonathan, because he very much thinks about how things are presented. He has that supertanker to turn within the Dior organization to convince people that there's another way to think about fashion, and to think about Dior. The second, and much bigger challenge is he has to create a universe that women want to enter. But Jonathan now has to do that with clothing that is based on an historical form, that you can't deviate too much from. He's also got to be much more familiar with a woman's wardrobe, much more familiar with a couture atelier – assuming he does couture, which is another challenge, because I don't think it can be too conceptual. It's a lot to get his head around. To go back to your question, I think they do have to make a radical shift. Maybe not what John Galliano did – that was in the late 1990s; it was a different time, different fortunes, different tolerances – but I think the expectation for change is there, and it should be a significant change.

Would you say the relationship between a designer's creativity and the fashion house they work for is being constantly redefined?

Jonathan may become a good example of this. He's plugged into what's going on and super aware of the creative side, the business side, the marketing side, the curatorial side, the cultural side, the need to be a public figure… It would be so fascinating to hear about the give and take that he has with his CEO. It's got to be one of the biggest challenges that there is, one that I don't think I'll ever fully appreciate as I'm not inside the day-to-day experience of producing for a machine. But I think that if fashion businesses don't factor in the time that's required to be creative, and the pauses that designers really need, then I can't imagine what that's like. You have the brutal scenario that you had with Galliano. I think Marc Jacobs could attest to that. I think McQueen, in his time, could have attested to it. Honestly, it would make an interesting case study for Harvard Business School.

You mentioned Sarah Burton at Givenchy before. Is there enough in the Givenchy brand, beyond Audrey Hepburn and the Little Black Dress, to transform it into a dominant cultural force?

It's always been a bit of a challenge. The most important thing that Hubert de Givenchy did was tailoring. Sarah was showing me images of that 1952 debut collection, it was really exquisite.[5] You could see the influence of Balenciaga, you can see that continuous line of ideas. I think Sarah has pretty much an open palette to work from, but starting from tailoring, which was what we saw, I think she can define her space. I was pretty impressed by what she did at her show; for a first collection, it felt like it was being done by a pro. I got text messages from girlfriends saying, 'I want everything here!' That said, I'd love to see things be softer. That, to me, is Givenchy. Yes, it's tailored, but it doesn't have quite as much padding and construction to the jacket, and maybe it's a dress. I mean, could somebody actually make a great-looking dress that you would wear during the day that doesn't look frou-frou and silly, or uptight? Sarah makes great dresses; she did dresses for McQueen all the time. When I was up at the Givenchy studio with Sarah, we were looking at a fabulous suit that Eva Herzigová wore in the show. Elegant, not too dressy, just fine. But I think some of that softer fit would be really great from her.

Do you think she will revive the couture immediately?

No, but the plan is she will. That's what Sidney Toledo told me. I think she has to get the house together first, and maybe just deal with the ready-to-wear and accessories for a minute. But it would be great to see her Givenchy couture, and I think there would be demand for it. The good thing about Sarah, which gives me so much confidence, is that she knows how to build up a really good work room, and will know how to work with all those pattern makers. She's brought at least two of her design assistants from McQueen, as well as the head pattern maker and her merchandiser. I've talked about this with Sarah when she was at McQueen: in the early years of the 1990s, the clothes were less built up. Partly because there wasn't a lot of money, and they were working with really cheap fabrics, but the construction was perfect. And when you look back at that era, everything – including the shoulder line – is softer looking. And that's what I'd love to see from Sarah today. We see oversized pretty much everywhere, and it'd be nice to see someone do a different shoulder. She actually had three or four different shoulder lines in that collection. So it's definitely possible.

You asked, rhetorically, why is no one capable of making a beautiful modern dress without it being frou-frou? Can you answer your own question?

I just think it's one of those things that until you see it, it's hard to imagine it. It may be down to the limited skill set of designers today, or maybe a lack of confidence. You know, we love tailoring, but how well does it actually sell in this day and age? I think Michael Stewart does a great job with dresses at Standing Ground. And it's interesting to see how other designers try to blend the casual with something that feels a little like high fashion. Look at Prada this season, for instance, with that more undone look that Miuccia and Raf were pursuing. One of the hot things in the Milan collections were the opening dresses at Prada; that kind of unconstructed first black dress that Julia Nobis wore. Who knew that was going to come out? I've talked to so many women who want that dress, or one of the opening dresses.

What's your rapport with attending shows these days?

New York magazine allows me to pick the shows I want to see. I can't say I go to everything but I go to all the major stuff, and I see as many young designers as I can. When you cover the shows you're operating on adrenaline, and even if you're tired you thrive on the pace of the day-to-day. It's much easier to file every day than it is once a week.

Do you need to be in the room to understand and evaluate what's going on at a show?

No, absolutely not. And there's some pretty good people on Instagram making astute comments about collections that they've only watched online. It reminds me that I didn't meet Margiela until a decade after he retired, and I went to all of his shows without ever hearing a brief or seeing a preview, so I might have been wrong about what I was seeing. Phoebe Philo's the same way now; I sometimes have a conversation with her team if I happen to be looking at a collection that's coming out in six months, but that's about it. Which is fine, because the clothes kind of say everything you need to know. She did that one interview with the [*New York*] *Times*, but I think she spelled it out most articulately in the beginning through her ideas. What I love about her is that without doing a runway show or any real advertising, from day one

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'With Matthieu Blazy, I think Chanel made the best decision it possibly could. It's a chance to write a new chapter without Lagerfeld, which is important.'

she's constructed a vision of how her customers should look. And to me it's about the most modern thing out there, in terms of a brand. It's like, here's the tailoring, here's something that's casual... Her influence has been huge, whether that's the sharp shoulders, the high collar, the cargo pants, the shoes. She does things that you can't imitate. Of course, the mass retailers try to imitate them, but they can't quite get there.

Let's talk about Haider Ackermann's debut at Tom Ford. Do you think Estée Lauder and Zegna have the appetite to develop that ready-to-wear business?
I do. It's ultimately good for the fragrance and cosmetics business if they have a bigger presence in clothing. Haider is on the right track to doing something with that. I like what he did.

'To me, Phoebe Philo is about the most modern thing out there. Of course, the mass retailers try to imitate her, but they can't quite get there.'

I didn't like the hair and the make-up – the beauty part of it, ironically – it was just too much, it didn't have to be so over-the-top alien. But I thought his tailoring was good, the colours were great. I thought he imagined what Tom Ford should look like today. It felt faithful, but it was definitely his own thing. It was a template roadmap.

Do you think those clothes are going to sell?
It's a question of how much of that slick glamour do you really want? As a fashion critic, I look at this shift towards everything becoming more relaxed, casual, not overdone, not overly luxurious looking, and I find it all pretty boring, because I don't think it moves the needle of fashion. What Hermès does is a different kind of luxury, it's about how they make things. I had a great conversation with Axel Dumas [Hermès CEO] the other day about the possibility of there being Hermès couture. They're investigating it right now – Nadège and the creative team have been given the task – and it could launch next year. To counter that though, Axel said they'd always resisted doing couture, that they're basically into ready-to-wear. They don't do *flou*,[6] they're really good at leather though, so maybe there's a [couture] space for them in that world. Then he went on to say, 'But if I don't like it, we'll never launch it.'

That says everything you need to know about Hermès.
There's no reason or obligation for them to do it. He said that they were getting the Fédération [de la Haute Couture et de la Mode] asking about it a bit, because of course, they'd love to have Hermès on the couture schedule. But I love that he said, let's investigate it, let's do some trials, let's see what we come up with, and then make a decision. We're in no hurry. There's no timetable to do it. Hermès can do whatever they want. They can take their time. They can really question why they should be in that particular business.

What did you make of the Saint Laurent show?
Anthony Vaccarello is like a hammer to a nail, in that he takes just one or two themes from the Saint Laurent story each season. Last season it was the trouser suit, which he just repeated and repeated until he got to what I called these rather strange-looking Scheherazade dresses. Not strange-looking, I just didn't think they were very well done, they seemed like an afterthought. And so this time, it was all about a blouse and a skirt and some dresses that were like a tunic dress, very Saint Laurent, and those great colours that we've been starved of. I mean, he's done colour before at Saint Laurent, but this season felt explosive. They're the Saint Laurent rainbow, basically. I like this collection because we had just come from Miu Miu, which was about a skirt and a top, basically, and here was Anthony giving us the same thing but à la Saint Laurent, in a dressier way. That's the world that Anthony has embraced. It's a dressier style.

What's the future of Saint Laurent?
The cool thing about Saint Laurent is that it's been redefined many times, and will continue to be redefined again in the future. Initially, like a lot of people, I didn't like what Hedi did there. But then, after reconsidering it and thinking about the era that he'd identified as the cool years of Saint Laurent – the late 1960s – I thought, this is actually pretty smart, and it obviously had a big influence on fashion. Ultimately, there's lots there for people to work with: for anyone who has a strong sense of construction and colour, and hopefully a sense of cool, they can do a good job there.

It helps that the brand is so anchored in Paris as well, partly because of the city's industry dominance, but also because Paris feels cool again, more international than ever, a place that's appealing for young people to gravitate to.

Paris has always embraced international designers, going right back to Charles Frederick Worth, and certainly in the 1920s and 1930s with Schiaparelli, and then the 1970s and 1980s with Yohji and Rei Kawakubo and Issey Miyake, and then the Belgians. Personally, I'm very fond of Paris, more than any other fashion city, because you have incredibly devoted people in the workrooms who really know how to make clothes. Then you think of Azzedine Alaïa coming to Paris, and the whole culture that arose around that one man. But I think you're right, Paris feels good at the moment, because of Matthieu Blazy, because of Pieter Mulier, because of Demna.

What does this womenswear season say about women today?
Good question. I didn't quite agree with Vanessa [Friedman] in her piece with the headline 'The Weaponization of Femininity', because that's been going on for a while. We don't even have to go back to the Gaultier or Mugler years. There have been many examples of that in the last decade. Yes, there is a lot of leather around, but I think women are already past that; I think they already accept that they have control over their lives and their bodies. That's been Dilara [Fındıkoglu]'s message in her fashion in London. She takes a more aggressive point of view because from her perspective it's about the oppression caused by men. It would probably have been easier to respond to your question a couple of seasons ago, when you'd see collections in New York and, to an extent, London, where you saw all this nakedness on the runway, and the New York designer Elena Velez presented a particularly interesting collection. She did a show in one of the old warehouses in Bushwick in Brooklyn, where it was a mud fight, which people got really upset about. But I liked the aggressiveness of it, and she's good at making clothes look great on a woman's body. But we've seen the whole nakedness thing spread through fashion, with things being much more flagrant than we were probably used to or expected. And maybe that's a very strong feminist point of view. I think younger women have some amazing ideas about how they want to look and the freedom that they have. But a lot of that doesn't necessarily translate into the bigger shifts in high fashion that I like to observe – where the direction of fashion is going. Yes, I see the smaller movements, but I'm really looking at the broader evolution of fashion, and who can make those moves.

'Milan and Paris are healthier when there is some creative competition. Milan is all about Prada, but with Demna at Gucci, it's going to get interesting.'

To what extent does heritage matter today?
For better or for worse, it's huge. Look at Chanel: it's just a great story to tell. I think the most radical or revolutionary thing that Matthieu can do is look at Coco Chanel's designs in the 1920s and 1930s. They were in the Chanel Manifesto exhibition,[7] the early suits that look like they're blown on the body. They're all made by hand, and it's couture, but it's not the overbuilt, over-designed shapes and styles that we've seen in the last 20 years, with all the camellias and the pearls. You could see a woman's body in those early clothes that Coco Chanel designed, with her whole notion of interpreting 'poor style', taken from maids' uniforms and sailors and fishermen, workers. Of course, there's many other things Matthieu can look at, but it might be quite radical to see something like that. So in that sense, heritage definitely matters. It also matters because the likes of Dior and Chanel and Saint Laurent can tell two stories at the same time. They can mount their exhibitions about the heritage, but also have the current creative directors tell their modern-day story. They work simultaneously.

Then someone like Rick Owens has come to represent his own heritage. He's 30 years into this, and so his evolution from LA to Paris and the world he's created is almost self-referential.
And the Palais Galliera is about to do a big retrospective on him. Rick is one of our best examples of: have an original idea, create a distinctive look, and stick with it. Of course, he's expanded it so much over the past 20 years since moving to Paris. Rick always says that he'd never have been able to survive had he not had the time and the patience of the press to see his work develop. I remember his early shows in Paris being not that great. He was trying to be really experimental – shifting away from his original California, LA goth thing – and it wasn't working. He's been very fortunate to have a manufacturing partner too, and these days he continues to amaze. I really liked his last collection. Some people found it a bit dreary, but there was so much depth in it. It was fairly bleak – maybe that's the way he feels about the world at the moment. And then there's Phoebe who's already

developing her own sense of heritage, as are The Row to a certain extent. I sometimes fault The Olsens for what they do, because there's not a lot of depth, but they too have been developing their story, their sense of heritage.

The Row feels steeped in the personal heritage of these twins who were two of the most recognizable people in the USA when they were still only toddlers. Since launching their brand as young adults they seem to have bathed in their need for privacy. Everyone talks about the word 'authenticity' these days, which sometimes feels like a red flag for phoniness, but the luxury of privacy and discretion that The Row is anchored in couldn't be more real for The Olsens.

I agree. That was the sense that I got from this last show, with the stocking feet and the people sitting on the floor, as if we're in their private home. People think it's all about being well-to-do, but it's not. It's about privacy. It's about closing out the world. And the Olsens have become even more careful about that; you just don't see them anymore. They're in the back, but there's no backstage access, no interviews. You can make what you want of it in terms of a marketing calculation, but I think their clothes speak exactly to what you're describing – the luxury of a private life, which is contrary to pretty much everything else that's out there. Being in Paris has made a huge difference. They're clearly in the right place.

What do you want to see more of during fashion week?

This goes back to one of your earlier questions. I want to see something new. We're hopefully going to see a really interesting transformation at Chanel, and I think Louis Vuitton is probably in need of a bit of a change. I wrote a piece for *New York* magazine two years ago about the downstream effect of not taking risks on the runway, and what happens to fashion when you don't do that. People can argue that companies with multi-billion-dollar revenue aren't in the same position that they were in at the end of the 1990s when the likes of John Galliano, McQueen and Marc Jacobs were coming into them. But I don't think that's true. I think the public has a real craving for fashion. We've seen it explode in so many ways, and it's now so international, with brands doing shows in Shanghai and Tokyo and South America. The appetite is enormous for it. Just look at the extent to which the entire Paris Olympics had a fashion gloss to it.

What would you like to see less of?

Companies resting *too* much on their heritage. It's such a solid base that they can always sell certain products over and over again. Gucci's Bamboo bag or Jackie bag are great, but nobody wants to see that on autopilot. It doesn't help fashion. Milan and Paris, in particular, are healthier if there is some creative competition. Right now, Milan is about Prada, but with Demna coming into Gucci, that's going to be interesting. And I'm always amazed when people have said to me over the past year, 'Does anyone care about Versace?' And I'm like, they definitely care about Versace. It's an amazing house with a great legacy and a great opportunity. Prada buying Versace is going to be very interesting.

Finally, what does success look like for a luxury fashion brand in the current climate?

Being honest, I'd just say that success is always based on profit – an 8%, 10% turnover every year in order to pay salaries, keep stores open, things like that. And I suppose that's all wrapped into the new mathematics of fashion, which is, as we've discussed, the number of clicks and eyeballs you're getting around the world; the success of local influencers who we may not know or even see, but they're out there. To a lot of people, that is contemporary success. But I think fashion remains a fundamentally creative business. And if you don't have that balance, then you're not fully a success. I've had some really great conversations with fashion's CEOs over the last 25 or 30 years, and they almost all say the same thing – it's a long game. And you have to have creativity in the midst of that. Because if you lose that creative edge then you'll have neither integrity nor the engine to carry you forward. That's what you need to take care of. And that, I think, is the big picture.

1. The phrase 'the center is not holding' refers to a line Joan Didion wrote in her 1968 collection of essays entitled *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, echoing the W. B. Yeats poem 'The Second Coming'.

2. 'The parliament show' refers to Balenciaga's Spring/Summer 2020 runway presentation, staged in a venue designed to resemble the European Parliament chamber in Strasbourg.

3. American artist Paul Cadmus (1904-1999) used muted, flesh-toned colours to heighten the sensuality and sculptural precision of his figures, lending a classical softness to charged, often erotic scenes.

4. For his Spring 1988 haute couture collection, Yves Saint Laurent took inspiration from the paintings of Picasso, Georges Braque and Vincent Van Gogh.

5. Givenchy's 1952 debut collection revealed precision with tailoring—crisp lines, sculptural silhouettes and an ease that set his work apart from the heavier couture of the time.

6. *Flou* refers to the softer, draped side of couture, focused on fluidity, movement, and delicate construction – often contrasted with the more structured art of tailoring, or *tailleur*.

7. *Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto* was held at the V&A from September 2023 to March 2024. The first UK exhibition dedicated to Chanel's work, it traced her design legacy through over 200 looks and accessories from 1910 to 1971.









Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Cathy Horyn.

Rachel Tashjian & Steff Yotka

‘I can’t wait to see the influencers wear the bullet bra.’

Interview by Emilia Petrarca

There are no two people whose fashion week dispatches I follow more closely than Rachel Tashjian and Steff Yotka. Tashjian is the fashion critic at the *Washington Post*. You might also know her byline from when she wrote much-shared fashion commentary and analysis for *GQ* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, or from her pioneering, ‘invite-only’ newsletter, Opulent Tips, which has gained a cult following since it launched in 2020, notably, not on Substack. Yotka, the former global director of social media for *Vogue* and *Vogue* Runway, who cut her teeth writing thoughtful reviews on countless collections, did a stint as the head of content at Ssense before joining *i-D* as its global editorial director in November 2024. Both currently hold very different roles and are each thriving in their lane, but together, they are always one step ahead. I turn to them for fresh, contemporary takes on fashion and shopping, as well as deeply researched reflection. They know their history, but they’re also always seeing what others aren’t – what’s new and who’s next; what we want now and why we want it. As I’ve gotten to know them personally over the years, I’ve also come to admire their unwavering enthusiasm and dedication to what they do. Spread out comfortably on Tashjian’s couch in New York, we could have talked late into the night about the Autumn/Winter 2025 collections, but here is one and a half hours’ worth of passionate, laugh-filled discussion. Reliving the month through their eyes was thrilling.

‘The Virgil-Alessandro-Demna spectacle of celebrities on the front row, memeable clothes on the runway, and crazy accessories is very over.’

Emilia Petrarca: I feel like we should start with the fact that, right before this interview, all three of us ended up at the 6397 showroom in SoHo for a press appointment to see the new collections, at the same time, without planning it. What made you guys go to 6397 today?

Steff Yotka: I have known [founder] Stella Ishii for over a decade at this point, because I reviewed the 6397 collections for *Vogue* Runway. The brand is the secret hero of my closet – it’s the only ‘elevated basics’ that I own. I’m probably wearing something from 6397 almost every day. So I had to see what clothes I’ll be wearing in six months. I also think Stella is a really magical figure in fashion. Her business is so organic and thoughtful. She’s been in the fashion business for like 40 years, and she’s still as inspired and interested in new things as she always has been. Getting to have face time with someone very broadly what the mood was this season? Not so much in terms of the clothes, more the atmosphere. It seemed like a moment of uncertainty, with all these changes happening at the houses, but also in the world at large. Was it weird?**

Steff: I think it did feel like an in-between season in that there was no single collection or cluster of collections that everyone universally agreed was fabulous or important. Sometimes, it’s a really small independent brand, like ALL-IN last season. Everyone was excited about it. But this season, there wasn’t one thing that everyone glommed onto in any city. It didn’t congeal into one big point.

Rachel: It was ambivalent.

Steff: Yeah, it was very ambivalent. And with smaller budgets and looming recessions or financial instability, you could really feel that people were thinking about that at the brand level. The spectacles weren’t as spectacular as they had been six months ago, or a year ago, or two years ago.

Rachel: It was really interesting how much smaller the shows were in terms of the audience size. I don’t know if this is true, but the Miu Miu show felt like it was half the size that it usually is. Louis Vuitton did a really, really small show. In the fashion industry, you never know why those things are happening. You get double-speak from brands and various publicists. Is it a budget thing, or is it an exclusivity thing?

Steff: I don’t know why these changes were happening, but you could see across almost every brand, big or small, that they were trying to cultivate a new one who feels more seasoned and more experienced but still full of that sense of wonder is so important.

Rachel Tashjian: The publicist mentioned that Stella had worked with Margiela and Comme des Garçons, and that Judy [Collinson, who joined Ishii’s team last year] had worked with Barneys for such a long time. One funny thing I kept hearing this season from both people at shows and from readers was an intense nostalgia for Barneys. I think people really want to connect with clothes in a different way, aside from seeing them or reading about them, and that was a place where you could really do that. So that’s why I went.

Well, I’m really honoured and excited that you asked me to moderate this conversation. Could you describe for

feeling in the room. There were still shows that were spectacular – the Dior set clearly took bajillions of dollars and millions of meetings to come to fruition. But every brand was striving for a new sensation. Some came together nicely; others, you couldn't make heads or tails of. But everyone was trying to find a new playbook. The Virgil-Alessandro-Demna spectacle of celebrities, memeable clothes on the runway, and crazy accessories is very over.

It sounds like it was a little squirmy or unsettled.

Steff: Fashion people are very uncomfortable with change, because it makes everyone question their place in the industry. If shows are changing their seating, or things are happening on different days, or some shows are bigger, or some shows are smaller, suddenly you're left fending for yourself.

Speaking of seating, I want to hear more about The Row show.

Rachel and Steff in unison: *Oooohhhh!*

But! Before we get there, I feel like in these moments of squirminess, it can be useful to ask the most basic questions. I wanted to ask each of you: what is your job? Not your literal job description, but how you would describe it. What do you do?

Rachel: I rethink it every season. Beforehand, I'm thinking about the debuts, or someone who had a great season last season, or someone who I know has made some kind of personnel changes, or stylist changes, or something like that. I look at what is to come, and I think about what the possible narratives might be, and how I want to approach them. This season and the one previous, my readers and I were thinking about quality, design, the purpose of beauty, and how to find good and interesting clothing. So this season, I had this project in the back of my mind that was percolating the whole time: I'm going to go to the showrooms of designers who do not do shows, either because they can't afford to or they're not interested, and talk to them and see what their relationship is to fashion and their customers. The *Washington Post* reader should know who Sofie D'Hoore is, and may not necessarily care about Dior.[1]

Steff: Starting a new job, I've really tried to think about why we're doing this. At its heart, *i-D* is a culture magazine. It's been so involved in the fashion industry from the start – Terry [Jones, its founder] worked at British *Vogue* as a creative director and art director – but it has to be about how fashion bleeds into other arenas. All of us and our friends, the way we talk about Alaïa and the way that show really gets your heart rate going, is, to me, an analogous experience to going to a concert where you don't know the band, and so every song is new, and you're excited and into it. I want to capture the emotions that you feel at fashion week and try to give that to our audience. We're a 'youth culture' magazine, but I think that's also about a state of mind. We have readers who are 70, and we have readers who are 17, and I think every person wants to feel something when they look at a fashion show or feel something when they read an article. We don't do hard-hitting news reporting. So you should come to *i-D* to read something interesting that makes you rethink something about music, culture, politics, fashion, art, whatever…

Rachel: …being a girl.

Steff: Being a girl! So I have one eye on the fashion shows, and the other eye on everything else: Where people are eating, which DJs are playing, which interesting people are coming to town? How are they dressing? Where are people hanging out? What areas of the city are cool? We want to have an anthropological lens on fashion week.

Rachel: The main characters at fashion week are always more interesting than the celebrities. There's always a new main character every season. Dara [Allen, stylist and fashion editor at *Interview*] was the main character a year ago.

And what do you think a designer's job is these days?

Rachel: Speaking of the ambivalence this season, designers are asking that question. It came up a lot backstage. Either they would answer the question without having been asked, like Mrs. Prada and Raf, immediately, before anyone started asking questions, said something to the effect of: 'It's a very difficult moment, and so we're working very, very seriously.' I loved that. I wrote it down in my journal. And then you had other designers, like Pieter Mulier, who spoke backstage about wanting to reference and meld different cultures together without making it clear where the references were coming from; he just wanted it to feel new and different, but also somehow relatable and globalized. But, yeah, it does seem like many designers don't really know what their purpose is. At this moment, it's so complicated knowing the answer to that question, whether it's 'I design real clothes for real women,' or 'I design clothes that are a solution for your wardrobe,' like the designers we saw today at 6397. Or, 'I provide escapism.' Those are interesting and important answers… It's funny, I'm ironically doing what I'm accusing designers of doing. But I do think the answer is that a designer's job is to know what their role is – to know what they want to say and what their place in culture or a person's wardrobe is.

Steff: I agree. The best designers, whether they're operating on a billion-dollar business scale or a million-dollar one, have to have an idea of what they believe in and be able to communicate it to an audience. We saw a lot of shows that were short on ideas, short on the point. I always think that 'we're dressing a modern woman' is a bit of a cop out. Like, that can't be the *raison d'être* of a collection. Because, of course. That's the point of fashion week. Like, *duh*. The best designers are convinced by their ideas and can convince us, too. Whether their ideas are beautiful like Alaïa or sinister like Demna. Hillary Taymour of Collina Strada is usually so optimistic, but even she was like, 'The moment is weird.' She was willing to say it, whereas a lot of people are hiding. It felt like a season where people were just keeping their heads down and trying to move forward.

Rachel: You know who I thought was really intentional, too? Armani. There's a difference between someone who's on autopilot and someone who has total authority. The former is like, 'I've done this forever, and we're coasting. We're a cruise ship. We can hit the button and put our feet up.' But the latter knows exactly what their customer needs now, and can give it to them, and it's not exactly what they thought they would see; it's even more beautiful.

I got the sense that designers are being given the directive: 'Make clothes that make money.' But, as you wrote, Rachel, does anyone actually want this stuff? It can all feel a little pointless sometimes. But let's get deeper into it, starting with The Row. Please, someone set the scene. I'm dying to know what it was like in the room.

Rachel: I mean, it was the greatest fashion theatre. We were each assigned a room, but they were like, 'Sit wherever.' A couple of people had chairs saved for them. There were these two women seated on a couch – Emilia, you would have lost your mind over this – with a Margaux bag taking up a seat in between them. It was unclear who these two women were. They were really beautiful. I thought they were maybe VICs or something. People would ask, 'Can I sit there?' And they would say, 'No, no, sorry.'

This is like performance art.

Rachel: And then it became clear that they were saving the seat for Anna [Wintour].

Oh my God. Was there confusion pre-show? Were you like, 'What am I walking into?'

Rachel: Usually, it's a very small show. So, you walk in and someone says, 'Oh, hi, Steff, you're over here.' But I was in the car with the *Harper's Bazaar* team, and suddenly, someone looked at their texts and said, 'It's not assigned seating!' And we ran in. There weren't enough chairs for everyone.

Do you think they did that on purpose?

Rachel and Steff in unison: Yes.

Rachel: Editors-in-chief and very senior people tend to come in closer to the start of the show, so a couple of them started sitting on the floor. Lindsay Peoples sat on the floor. Sara Moonves sat on the floor. And then it was suddenly like, 'Oh my God, all the cool people are sitting on the floor!' I wrote in my review that this is how The Row works. You're like, 'that's not quite right,' or 'that's not interesting.' And then someone who's really chic wears the jelly shoe, and you're like, 'No, actually, these are incredibly sick.'

Steff: Exactly. This was my first The Row show, ever, and talk about cultivating a vibe in the room… It disarmed everyone, and created a sense of conviviality in the space where we were all kind of like, *hehe*. Mel Ottenberg was across from me, sitting on the floor in his jeans, looking hot and fabulous. It made watching the show so much more enjoyable, because I think how you watch a fashion show informs what you think about it. I remember at the last Dries [Van Noten] show, we were all sitting in a row. Me, Emilia, Sam [Hine], Willa [Bennett], and José [Criales-Unzueta], and it felt like such a beautiful moment. We all started doing this or

'Celebrities have never looked worse, and I really want them to look better, because I think that's how we shape a lot of our perspectives on beauty.'

'As a person who wears unflattering clothing, when I saw the Prada show I was like, 'I've won the lottery.' Miuccia and Raf are endorsing slobbishness.'

obsessing over this when we were teenagers, and now we're at this show – the last show of this legend – and gold foil or whatever is floating through the air, and David Bowie is playing. After the show, Sam and I had a beer, and we're watching the disco ball with tears in our eyes, like, 'It's happening for us.' And The Row created this slightly mischievous, gossipy energy during the show. It felt OK to lean over on the couch and say, 'I love that look.' Usually, I try to be quiet at shows, but there was this high school hangout spirit, which gave a nice energy to the clothes, too.

Rachel: It's funny how The Row is, in some ways, a reduced and quiet brand. Emilia, I think you once wrote about how their magazine ad campaigns were just 'THE ROW' written on a white piece of paper. But when they do speak, they really say something. The fact that the seating was this really casual thing, and none of the models were wearing shoes, and some of the looks were just a jacket and ribbed tights, or a really simple dress with a beautiful roll at the sleeve – it was really easy and *soigné*. And then they always give out food after the show. They were giving out madeleines for a while. This was also when they were doing a lot of vintage Romeo Gigli and Issey Miyake references, and it was very Proustian to me – these memories of fashion past. This time they gave out club sandwiches and bone broth, which was very nourishing and very…

Steff: American. There was no vegetarian option. As someone who doesn't eat meat, I left hungry. But the sandwiches got really good reviews.

It doesn't sound over-explained. You guys came away from this experience and could fill in the blanks, and that's so much more satisfying. They didn't need to write it out in a heady press release; it's more subtle.

Steff: There's something really freeing about going to a show where the designers are completely in control. Ashley and Mary-Kate own this brand. They're beholden to no one, right? They can choose to show whatever they want. If they're like, 'We don't like shoes this season,' they're just not going to have shoes. It's gratifying as a viewer to see something where you don't leave questioning, 'Was the marketing budget slashed?' Or, 'Did they change the sound designer?' The longer you do this, the more you start to understand the behind-the-scenes machinations, and at The Row, you're seeing the purest creative expression of their interests and their design teams' interests. There are very few shows where you feel like that's the case.

Rachel: What else did you like in Paris?

Steff: *Hmm*. Well, I loved Miu Miu. I thought it was very Rachel-coded, which I texted you during the show. Intelligent, sexy women in weird hats? I know one of them.

Rachel: I thought that show was one of Mrs. Prada's strongest shows since the Miu Miu-aissance.

Steff: I thought it was a very clever step away from the teenage sexiness that they had been exploring for the past couple of seasons, since the infamous midriff collection. There's always a girlishness, but this was an adult's wardrobe done in a fucked up way.

Rachel: I can't wait to see the influencers wear the bullet bra.

I'm curious to talk about the Miu Miu show in conversation with Prada, because they seemed so different, but there were obviously similar notes. I really struggled with the Prada show. I got it on an intellectual level – and I'm down with the idea of offering something generally considered unflattering. But I'm a Prada shopper, and looking at the photos, I was like, 'I don't want any of this.' Not only that, 'I would look bad in it.' And I'm pretty confident that it would be hard for most people who aren't models to pull it off. The point is that it wasn't flattering, and I get it. But I was frustrated because I felt like my two options this season were: Be a pretty Chloé woman or a hot mess. I'm neither of those people. So, what do I do?

Rachel: Did either of you notice that people went really wild for the Phoebe [Philo] stuff this season?

The Phoebe pitch was higher than ever.

Rachel: I wonder if that was a reaction to what you're saying, because I previewed the drop before it came out, and afterward I was like, 'I need to throw out everything I own.' It really answered all of these questions. It's not a hot mess; it's very strong.

Steff: Yes, but it's still slightly silly. What does that pin say?

'Semi Rough.' She has a sense of humour, which I'm not sure Prada did.

Steff: As a person who wears unflattering clothing, when I saw the Prada show, I was like, 'I've won the lottery.' Miuccia and Raf have finally given up on traditional beauty and are endorsing slobbishness, which I think many people had a very visceral reaction against, because ultimately, being beautiful is still such a driving force in getting dressed. I was so convinced by the red knit 1960s dress worn with a button-down shirt underneath and over jeans, I thought I was going to run out of the re-see with that mannequin. It's disgusting in a way that is going to make everyone who sees it have this icky, visceral reaction, and I really liked that sensibility. I don't know if it's just because I just got back to America four days ago, but it feels very anti-Trump to make clothes that are so obviously ugly. There's this really traditional sense of beauty that is becoming a dominant trend in the US…

Rachel: It's extremely Barbie glam.

Steff: To make something that is so luxurious yet frumpy feels like a radical, total opposite. It was invigorating to me. In a weird way, I felt like the Prada show had some commonality with what Bryn [Taubensee] and Patric [DiCaprio] are always dancing around at Vaquera: They make clothes that are ill-fitting on purpose, and give you this oversized or shrunken or demented sense of proportion. It's also very Comme des Garçons. That's always been very liberating for people trying to find a new aesthetic. It's interesting to see Prada getting to this place because it has always been glamorous. Even the 'ugly-pretty' Prada shows are still glam and so beautiful. But it finally tipped more into ugly, and I loved it, but I understand…

No, no, you're convincing me.

Rachel: You brought up glamour – wasn't that the collection's name? I had already sensed that glamour was a theme for a lot of the designers in New York, and maybe London as well. They're grappling with how to offer an alternative, either aesthetically or intellectually, to this very hyper-feminine, hyper-traditional glamour that we're seeing in the United States. Tory Burch's collection, for example, was really effective for that reason, because it looked very modern. It was easy and it was sexy, but it also had a bit of archness to it.

Steff: I also thought Altuzarra had a lot of good answers to that question. Joseph makes a pretty dress prettier than anyone else, but there was so much strangeness in that collection, with those big feathery hats, tubular, chunky skirts, and different silhouettes that I thought, 'Oh, if you're a designer who has built a customer that is a society woman who is going to galas, or who is on the boards of museums, and she feels the need to differentiate herself from other women who are more 'American glamour', these are amazing options.' The clothes felt smarter and sneakier.

You're making me rethink the definition of 'flattering'. I do think people who wear Vaquera and Comme look amazing, and they could in the new Prada collection, too.

Rachel: Remember when Rihanna wore that enormous Vaquera diaper or something, and we were all like, 'She looks so hot!'

I'm curious to see how that Prada collection looks in stores.

Rachel: I'm also very curious what those dresses will look like in the store, because Emilia, they looked *so bad* on the mannequins at the re-see. It was like a John Waters housewife fell asleep on her La-Z-Boy and lit her polyester dress on fire with a cigarette.

[Sighs] Yeah, that's cool. I guess.

Rachel: I kept thinking at the re-see: 'Who is this woman?' I thought about it at the Calvin Klein show, too. 'Where am I encountering her?' I imagined a woman trying to sell a $2 million painting at Frieze, and she's wearing this dress, and I'm like, 'OK, she gets something that I just don't understand, and so I'm totally buying this $2 million painting from her.' The ugliness becomes alienating, and therefore convinces me that I am not the expert.

Are there any collections that you've changed your mind about since you first saw them?

Steff: Rachel and I had very different knee-jerk reactions to the Tom Ford show. Rachel was there, and I wasn't. I watched as the pictures came in on the *Vogue* Runway app – without context, without the press release, without the music, without being in the space – and I remember texting her and saying, 'It looks like a Haider [Ackermann] collection. It's very chic. But I feel nothing for this.' When you explained the show to me – the show notes, the way the models walked, and how Haider came out and gave Tom Ford this intimate embrace – my point of view on the collection changed.

Rachel: I can get swept away by shows, but I'm also super tethered to reality.

'I think this season introduced that question: 'Do you have to have a show to be relevant?' And if you have a show, what must you provide the audience?'

'Duran's clothes have such a physicality to them – the way they look from every angle is completely different, and can't be captured in a single image.'

I've never had the experience of being like, 'this is the most amazing thing,' and then changed my mind. When I feel something blowing my mind, I'm always like, 'is it really blowing your mind? Keep your cool.' So with Tom Ford, I was like, 'This is pretty extravagant. It's pretty amazing.' But I was also thinking, 'if you're not here, will it hit you?'

Oh, it hit me, and I was also scrolling *Vogue* Runway. It just felt so sexy and very Hollywood in a way that made me realize how much I'd been missing that.
Rachel: That's an important point. Celebrities have never looked worse, and I really want them to look better, because I think that's how we shape a lot of our perspectives and our standards on beauty. I was very hopeful that there would be beautiful suits and great

'Rachel told me about the experience of buying shoes at the Prada store next to the Duomo, and how the salesperson was so Miuccia-esque.'

gowns – gorgeous, gorgeous gowns – and there were, and they were very different, but they were accessible. It reminds me of Adrian's costumes,[2] where Greta Garbo walks in, and you're like, 'that is so bizarre, but you are fantastic and otherworldly.'

What else did you love?
Rachel: The show of the season was Duran Lantink.
I'm glad you brought him up because I was at home being like, *what?*
Rachel: The show blew my mind. It made me laugh. It made me excited about the future. With all of the nostalgia in fashion, people ask, 'Why is this happening?' But the future looks terrifying right now. If you think about it, in the 1950s, when the future was imagined with flying cars, the Jetsons, and progress, it was exciting. There's nothing like that at this moment. Every vision of the future is dystopian, and so for Duran – or Kiko [Kostadinov], Laura and Deanna [Fanning], who are also committed modernists – to show you something that you've never seen before, even when it's not always working, it's electrifying.
Steff: It's *electrifying*. We were giggling as we left the Duran show. It was so convincing. The clothes have such a physicality to them – the way they look from every angle is completely different, and that can't be captured in a single image. Half of the looks are completely backless; the models had their entire ass out. Two models just wore body paint and underpants. Every time a model came out, I had no idea what they were going to be wearing or how it was going to make me feel. It's so exciting to see a young designer that committed to the expression of what they believe in.
Rachel: Backstage, Duran was not necessarily able to explain what he was doing, and I actually find that really cool. He said it was important for him to design from a very free space, which, first of all, I really like that, because freedom is something that is a huge cultural lightning rod at this moment. Not that he was thinking about the United States, but there are a lot of people on both sides of the political spectrum in the United States who feel like their freedoms are being impinged upon. So to say, 'I'm coming from a place of freedom in my creation,' is really cool. On top of that, Megyn Kelly discussed the show on her podcast. She was upset by it because there was a male-presenting model wearing fake breasts. She was like, 'This is what the elites in Europe are trying to convince you that you should be wearing.' I thought, 'God, she's fallen right into his trap.' It was a great example of how in this season where you have all of this ambivalence at the big houses – even at Valentino, where there's a feeling that Alessandro [Michele] isn't that into what he's doing – at least there are smaller designers, new designers, who can come in and grab the attention.

This show was funny to me because suddenly, everyone I follow who was in Paris was excited about this name I've never heard of, talking about him like they've known him their entire lives. So I tried to learn more, and I see all the headlines about the boobs. But then it seemed like the show got too much press, and fashion people were, like, 'just kidding, it's overhyped, it's gimmicky.' I couldn't get a read on it. Sounds like you guys are still down, though?
Rachel: From my perspective, he used the two viral body stockings as bookends to get people to look at the collection. But then the rest of the collection was amazing.
Steff: His whole design language is about pushing your body into new forms. If you go back and look at previous collections, the clothes grow around the models like tumours. So, in that way, Mica [Argañaraz] with the eight-pack abs, and the male model with the breasts felt like another way to push your body into a new dimension – maybe the most obvious way, but it became the most upsetting. It's interesting to me

that for years, he's made clothes that are also kind of ugly and unwearable, and everyone was so into it, but the second he made something that looked slightly more human, it became like a hot-button issue. It says a lot about how we see our bodies and attractiveness.

Speaking of bods, should we circle back to Calvin Klein?
Steff: Let's talk about Calvin Klein, because I've never felt more devotion to an ad campaign.
Oh my God, I watched the Bad Bunny video so many times.
Steff: Me too. When he says, 'The vibe is infinite.'
Rachel: Did you see Mel's photo of people kneeling before the billboard?
Steff: Yes, I was like, 'I want to be there.' Take me to the prayer session at

'Calvin Klein's unimpeachable formula of hot people in their underpants consistenly blows my mind. I've never felt more devotion to an ad campaign.'

the Bad Bunny billboard on Houston Street. As someone who worked in the marketing department at a retailer and was constantly tasked – on a way smaller scale, because Ssense is independent and Canadian – with rethinking how we present our products to our audience, it consistently blows my mind that Calvin Klein has an unimpeachable formula of hot people in their underpants, and they still do it better than anyone. You'd think that other brands would be able to do this, and Calvin Klein would have to do something else, or that they'd be choosing the wrong hot people, or their campaigns wouldn't work, yet somehow it is always the most incredible. Last year, when they had Jeremy Allen White, it broke people's brains to see him on that couch. And now Bad Bunny has us on our knees, and he's just wearing underpants. I don't know who took the pictures.[3] It's just about the sheer power of the hottest, most famous, compelling person being nearly naked, and in contrast to the fashion show, I just was like, *what?*
Rachel: The fashion show was clearly trying to speak to a sophisticated, well-off American woman who's a little bit of an intellectual. I wrote this piece about 'Rowdent' brands, or brands that emulate The Row, and it was partly inspired by that show. Everyone is after that woman right now, in part because a lot of women are like, 'Ah, how do I have a personality?!' That seems to be a big obsession on Substack – not in yours, Emilia – but everyone's asking: 'How do I indicate to people that I have a rich inner life through clothes?' There were moments of beauty in that show, and there were certainly wonderful fabrics, but a lot of people responded to it somewhat coldly. And then this ad campaign comes out with Bad Bunny, and every brilliant, creative, intellectual woman I know is texting each other, '*This* is the hottest thing I've ever seen.' It's interesting that that is what that woman actually responds to.
Steff: There were a couple of looks I liked. One was sort of orangey, and another had lilac jeans with a tight gingham or flannel shirt, maybe with a sweater over it. They were my favourites because they still have that kind of sexy, crisp Americanness. It's an important time for a brand like Calvin Klein – our most American brand, aside from Ralph Lauren – to do something subversive and American and sexy and free. The clothes at the show were beautiful, but they did feel very indebted to a European sense of design and beauty, especially an Italian sense of tailoring, materiality, and tastefulness.
I feel like I can say this: it was *so* Italian to me. When I read the interview that the designer did with Vanessa Friedman, where she called it 'sextitude'...
Rachel: That's a Dolce & Gabbana word.
As soon as I read that, I was like, 'this will not go well.'
Rachel: I've long thought that Eckhaus Latta has a Calvin vibe, or they have an American sportswear vibe, and I felt like that show answered the questions that Calvin Klein should be right now.
Steff: I thought this was one of Mike [Eckhaus] and Zoe [Latta]'s best shows.
Rachel: I think it might be their best show ever.
Steff: It was so simple, but so sexy in its simplicity. There were no frills in this collection. And I think we're living in a moment where something simple and comprehensible and hot is really desirable. The girlhood moment of coquette-core and the maximalism that came right after the pandemic is going out of style to favour a smarter, kinkier minimalism that you see in Phoebe's collection. I think Mike and Zoe really hit the bullseye. Those leather pants that they made with Ecco[4] look fucked up in the right way. I left that show feeling like I should dress like a normal woman, and I've never felt that way.
Rachel: I also thought there was a political undertone to that show. They didn't say this, but the attitude I got from the show was: 'You guys are doing your weird stuff in Washington, and we're

here in New York making art, making music, making clothes, hanging out with our friends, smoking weed…' They did a bong collab, right? Like, 'we're protecting our people, and what you guys are doing is horrible.' It reminded me a little bit of the attitude fashion designers had in the 1970s. I've been looking at old Zoran shows so much, and he used to show in his loft.[5] Lauren Hutton was there – she'd just come from the grocery store. She's got her bag, and she's yucking it up with Bill Cunningham. It felt like that.

Steff, what was your experience in London like this season? You've always been such a champion of young British designers, and of course *i-D* is also based there.

Steff: I love going there, and I'm always really inspired when I'm there. So I'm shocked when people say they don't enjoy it, and by Imran [Amed]'s BoF piece about how London and New York Fashion Week should only be once a year. People were enraged by this, and I am also slightly enraged by it. I understand from a business perspective that it takes a lot of money to put on a fashion show, but to me, London is the most exciting fashion week because you can go completely off-calendar and find cool designers everywhere. Dilara [Fındıkoglu]'s show this season was a real triumph. She shows once a year, or maybe every other year, and she came in with a bang. The clothes were impeccably made. The ideas about femininity and freedom and sexuality and sensuality were so fully realized, and done in such a contemporary way, and she's so fearless in how she designs. She will put a naked model on the runway, just with hair. She's not compromising, in the way that Duran will put a guy in boobs. The ambience is always right in the room. The casting is always right. There's a feral energy, like anything could happen. A model could smack me across the face, and I would love it! I also thought it was a beautiful show of confidence. When Sarah Burton left McQueen and they hadn't named her successor, the online fashion community was really gunning for Dilara to have this or that job. Many independent designers can feel very scorned when they're not approached by mega brands. And I think this was the ultimate: 'You don't want me? Well, I don't need you.' She didn't say this backstage, but for those of us who have been following her career you could read between the lines. It was a provocative *fuck-you* energy that Lee McQueen was so known for, but coming out through a young woman today. She has that spirit of: 'I do this my way. I'm uncompromising in what I stand for. I understand history, but I also understand contemporary life, and I'm just going for it, full throttle.' Designers are so often defeated. I understand it's so hard and thankless, but to see her come back with such grace and vitriol at the same time, and how it manifested in such a beautiful way, I was taken aback. I thought it was outstanding, and I wish that more people were in London to see it.

Rachel: It's frustrating when you're trying to follow from afar. I want to read a really great story about Conner Ives. I want to hear what's going on with Toga. Why is that so good all of a sudden?

Steff: I also loved Jawara Alleyne. Stefan Cooke hosted a pop-up instead of a show, and people were shopping. The Paolo Carzana show was in a pub, and it was incredible. London has such an important energy. On the one hand, you hate to see brands leave. Kiko, for example, whose shows we've both really enjoyed, basically moved its whole operation to Paris, partially because of Brexit, but also because more people are there, so more people will see their clothes. It's great to see an independent brand have such a successful accessories business. One of my colleagues said that he owns *seven* Trivia bags. If I were a headhunter at a mega brand, I would be like, 'Well, these two young women clearly know what other women want, and we must hire them.'

'Ten years from now, when someone asks me what happened this season, I may have forgotten all the collections, but I'll always remember Patti Smith.'

OK, lightning round. Best meal you had?

Steff: My favourite meal was the lunch you, me, Nicole [Fritton], and Lynette [Nylander] had before Dries Van Noten. It was a perfectly portioned sushi lunch.

Rachel: That was my runner-up. I had a morning where I saw Margaret Howell, and then Duran, so I was riding high. Then we had a horrible lunch.

Steff: Yes, the worst salad and Coke Zero experience of our lives.

Rachel: Then I went to the Valentino show, which I really did not like, and then I went to the Balenciaga show, which I found very depressing. So, I was like, 'I need to go out and find the most extravagant, bizarre food that I can.' And I ate a chicken gizzard salad.

Steff: I would also enter the vegetable soup and a martini we had at Rick Owens' house.

The best thing you bought while you were gone?

Rachel: I got some great shoes at Prada.

Steff: And *so did I*. Rachel told me about the experience of buying them at the Prada store next to the Duomo, and how the salesperson was so Miuccia-esque, and gave her all these styling recommendations. So then we went together the next day to buy the shoes, and it was a comedy of errors: they didn't have them in my size, and they didn't have the press discount. So, I ultimately bought them in Paris. I got the re-editions of the sandals from the ugly-chic collection from 1996 that are big, black, shiny leather with a tortoise buckle.

Steff: I got the loafers from the current season with this big, metal door knocker on them. They really are so powerful.

Did you cry at any point this season?

Steff: I definitely cried. One time was at Bottega's 'Intermezzo' performance – one of the best things a fashion brand could ever decide to do. Put this on the record: rather than having a studio show or a presentation, they presented us with the most powerful, bone-shaking performance by Patti Smith. She performed the song 'Because the Night' and everyone in the audience was singing, and at one point, she stopped to cough, but it didn't matter, because all of us were singing, so the song kept going. It was exquisite. No one can command a room like Patti Smith. It was a very small crowd, and very hot, but very transformative.

Rachel: I'm constantly frustrated by waste in the fashion industry – waste of material, waste of energy, waste of time – and these studio collections so often feel that way. So I thought it was really beautiful and frankly, a generous and elegant thing to instead say, 'Let's do a performance.' You don't need to make stuff and have a fake thing about how there's a fake idea.

Steff: Like you said before, fashion consumers are questioning, 'How can I signal that I have a rich intellectual life through my clothes?' And Bottega was just like, 'Oh, we have that.' Like, we have a rich intellectual life. And here's Patti Smith. Ten years from now, when someone asks me what happened during this season, I may have forgotten all of the collections, but I will always remember Patti Smith.

What do you never want to see again?

Steff: The sound of a toilet flushing at a fashion show.

Rachel: I'm so tired of fake Instagram accounts and social-media posts being like, 'I've heard that Hedi Slimane is going to Armani.' People I know will send these things to me. They're like, 'So, is this true?' It's like, 'Why do you believe this?' It's an issue of media literacy that really concerns me as a newspaper reporter. It's a lot of fun, but it doesn't add to anyone's understanding of fashion to be trading rumours.

What are you looking forward to in September?

Steff: I'm excited about another season of change. I'm excited about Matthieu [Blazy] at Chanel. I'm so stoked to see whatever happens to Jonathan Anderson. I'll be excited to see Glenn Martens at Margiela.

Rachel: Demna at Gucci. Proenza guys at Loewe. Louise Trotter at Bottega.

Steff: It will be an interesting season for the future of what a fashion show even is. I think this season introduced that question: 'Do you have to have a show to be relevant?' And if you have a show, what must you provide the audience? Should it be a spectacle? Should it be an intimate show in your atelier? Should it be sitting on the couch or sitting on the floor? In September, that conversation will continue. Condé Nast is having fashion shows now, and they're almost dwarfing fashion week in their grandeur. The next *Vogue* World will take place in LA on the Paramount Pictures lot and will have historic cinema costumes integrated into it. People at home care about that so much more than what happens at fashion week.

Rachel: More than: 'Will Sarah Burton forward the legacy of Hubert de Givenchy???'

Steff: On top of the undercurrent of all these designer debuts and industry changes is the question of: 'Why are we even doing these things to begin with?' When what we're most moved by is a Patti Smith performance, and standing in Stefan Cooke's garage, going through clothes, and having the best time. To come full circle, the three of us just stood in a showroom trying on jackets and cheering as we put on clothes by a small brand that didn't show. So, yeah, I think the purpose of a fashion show at fashion week is definitely something that is in question.

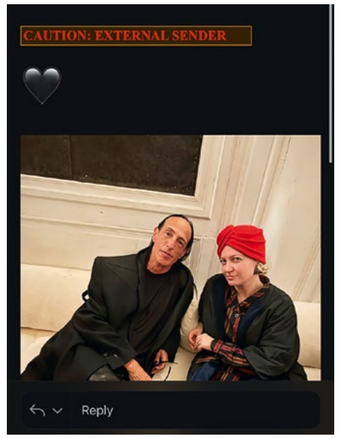
1. Born in Antwerp in 1962, Sofie D'Hoore might be described as an 'if-you-know-you-know' designer, whose work is often described as minimalist and understated. She has, since opening her eponymous label in 1992, engaged little and rarely with the typical fashion system which has only added further mystique to her purposefully discreet operation.

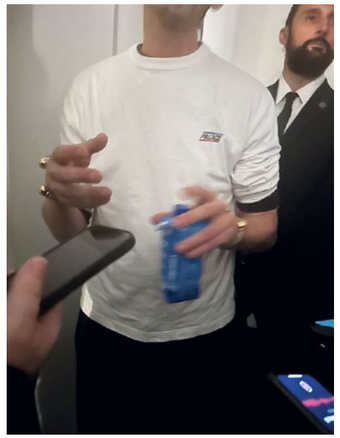
2. Adrian Adolph Greenburg, widely known by his first name only, was an American costume designer working in Hollywood between 1928 and 1941. He worked with many of the biggest actresses in Hollywood at the time, including Greta Garbo, Norma Shearer, Jeanette MacDonald, Jean Harlow, Katharine Hepburn, and Joan Crawford.

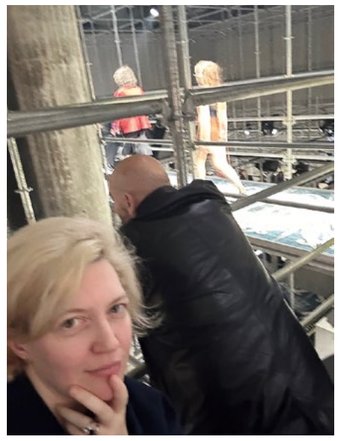
3. Mario Sorrenti photographed the Calvin Klein Underwear Spring 2025 campaign.

4. Ecco is a Danish premium shoe manufacturer, founded in Bredebro in 1963. In 2022 they launched ECCO. Kollektive, consisting of a series of collaborations with some of luxury's foremost fashion and homeware labels, inviting them to work directly with their innovative leather tanneries and factories.

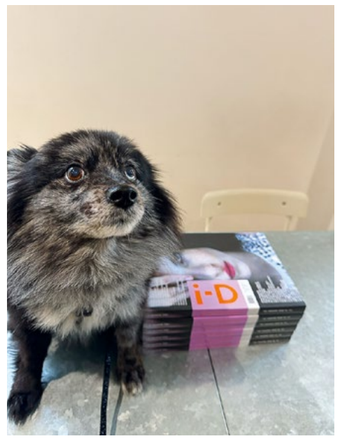
5. American designer Zoran Ladicorbic, commonly known by his first name Zoran, launched his label in 1976 and his designs became known as 'Gap for the very rich' due to the simplicity of their design.







Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Rachel Tashjian.



Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Steff Yotka.

Carlos Nazario

‘My role as a stylist is so drastically different based on the client. At Michael Kors, we do 12 days of prep before the show. I don’t touch clothes. I dress in a suit every day, fabulous shoes, and my job is to entertain Michael, to help edit, and just say, ‘Oh, make it like that, push the sleeves up.’ At Willy Chavarria, I’m on my fucking hands and knees making boards until 4am. I’m literally in the pattern room with them saying, ‘No, more like this,’ or getting sent pictures from some kid at Mood Fabrics like, ‘Which red velvet should we get? We only have enough money for one pair of pants.’ It’s a different part of the brain. I understand why everyone wants to do it.’

Interview by Osman Ahmed

Carlos Nazario is one of the fashion industry’s most prolific stylists. Our paths first crossed in 2017 when we started working at *i-D*, climbing up the ranks to both become fashion directors in our respective skills – he as fashion director, taking care of images; me as fashion features director, focusing on the words. We spent a lot of time together, discussing fashion while shuttling between shows, interrogating what makes a great image while on set, and reflecting on our roles in a fashion landscape where we were two of only a handful of people of colour occupying senior roles. Often, those conversations were private, but informed our outlook as editors who both strive to create work that feels timeless and meaningful. What I’ve always loved about Carlos’ work is that it reframes the 1990s imagery we grew up with, shifting notions of aspiration, and bringing together references and cultures that have previously been exoticized or misrepresented. He makes people look like the best version of themselves – and that’s ultimately what style is about. Despite his standing in the industry, Carlos is not someone who enjoys playing by the fashion game’s rules, which makes his perspective all the more interesting. We reconnected after the Autumn/Winter 2025 shows to discuss our thoughts on the current state of design, representation and the industry at large.

Osman Ahmed: What’s your current state of mind?

Carlos Nazario: I’m feeling slightly disillusioned, a bit forlorn if I’m honest. However, cautiously optimistic because – you know this about me – I’m a deeply spiritual person, and I truly believe that things get really bad just before they’re about to get really good. I think you and I occupy a very unique, specific space in the fashion world, in the sense that we’re some of the few people of colour who were let into the upper echelons. And now we’re generally accepted as part of the status quo, but our intentions are drastically different from most of our peers. Now conversations around not only diversity – a term I’ve grown to really despise – but also representation and the importance of diverse, alternative, and versatile points of view have been pushed to the back burner in a major way. In fact, most people find them really annoying. But they’re so built into the foundation of my work, not only as a statement but also as an aesthetic. It’s just what I like, what I do, who I am. So there’s this feeling of, ‘What’s my place in all this?’ How do I maintain my influence without alienating clients, collaborators, allies who don’t want to be having these conversations anymore, but still remain true to myself and still perform the service I truly believe I was called to perform? Which is to make images that don’t exist in the lexicon of fashion imagery, even if that’s simply because no one ever thought to shoot a Black girl skiing. It’s not an easy moment. For sure, I’m feeling less and less supported, but I still feel there’s a community of people who value all the things we do. And because of our political atmosphere right now, people who aren’t charged and fired up yet hopefully will be soon. And I think that will result in people taking a stance, sort of like the way George Floyd really corralled everyone around this central point. It’s sad that it requires such despair and tragedy to do that, but sometimes it does. Trump is really fucking showing off, and it’s only a matter of time before his cronies in different countries start performing in similar ways, and then people are going to be like: ‘You know what? I’ve had it.’

In 2020 people were educating themselves, and reassessing the kind of imagery and talent that deserves a platform. Fast forward five years and it seems like that’s been forgotten. Fashion consumes anything meaningful and then spits it back out. When you’re part of those conversations, you really hope there will be lasting change, but from experience it often ends up being superficial or just a business-driven engagement motivated by fear. I’m worried now – was it just another passing trend?

‘Conversations around diversity – a term I’ve grown to despise – and representation have now been pushed to the back burner in a major way.’

I don’t think people care. I mean, the reality is, after Black Lives Matter, George Floyd, 2020, a few really great things happened for a few really great people. A lot of things were sort of thrown at the wall, and some of them stuck. It wasn’t that any of us were invented during 2020, we just were suddenly sought out and viewed in a respectful manner. People were like, ‘Oh wait, he’s a really incredible editor and writer.’ Suddenly our points of view were valued because we were the ones who could execute certain things with authority, in a way the audience at that moment was demanding. But for every Ib [Kamara], there are 50 people

who were the first, or they got the thing or won the thing, who now are back at square one. And for every Tyler Mitchell, there's 10 or even 50 other talented people whose names I don't remember now. That means the progress we've made towards true diversification and representation has been wildly overstated. This collective pat on the back that fashion gave itself was premature at best, and now we see it was purely performative. Because at that moment, culturally, it felt uncool to not acknowledge there weren't enough female photographers, Black photographers, enough impact – but once the audience at large decided they didn't care as much about that, people moved on. Because no people were placed in decision-making seats who truly valued an alternative train of thought to carry this forward. You're just saying, 'Oh, put a Black model in it,' but it's still the same fucking racist casting director and the same entitled designer, you know what I mean? If they're still the ones making the decisions, nothing is really going to stick. Sorry to say.

There's that saying: 'The more things change, the more they stay the same.' But tell me, how is your work structured now? You're always doing personal projects, shows in every city. How have things changed, and what's the fashion week experience like for you?
I think that fashion week, the charge it's got, it's like the stakes feel higher or something. There's a lot of emphasis placed on the shows now and it almost feels like a contest in this way that I've never really felt before. I don't think designers or houses did either. It was really about showcasing the best of what the creative director had to say that season. It was about selling your new character, speaking to your audience while hopefully convincing a few more people to come on over. It really was about providing a compelling proposition for what the story was that season, and also providing a foundation for the merchandisers and the stylists and stores. I think what's happened now – because the stakes have got so much higher, thanks to LVMH – is that every show is like a rock concert, and the Internet ultimately determines who 'won the week,' right? People literally say, 'Who won the week?' The intention is very different now. It's about who can have the biggest viral moment, who can have the most star-studded cast, who can have the most gaggy guest appearance, who can have the most 'like-worthy' front row. It's really taken the emphasis away from the initial intention of what a fashion show was and could be. Because now the creative directors' heads are in so many different places, it feels different. The stakes are higher. It also feels harder to get people to focus. There's just so many places to look, things to do, never mind the very ironic phenomenon of people not even watching the show because they're looking at their phone, or they're watching the show *through* their phone – which I'm guilty of as well. Then you suddenly realize, 'I don't even really remember what I saw.' I was too busy looking at Timothée Chalamet, or looking at people's reactions like, 'What look is Kylie Jenner responding to?' Or trying to make sure that I get the best content and get it up quicker than my seatmate. As a spectator, and also as someone who works on shows, it's changed a lot. I don't know if it's changed for the better.

How is it working with designers at the moment? What's your role when you're working on these collections, and how do you see your role shifting in response to this environment?
Well, I think designers and creative directors have so much more to think about, and so much more to do. Not only are they designing more collections than ever, but they're having to show up as Chief Brand Ambassador, creating content, doing tons of interviews, collaborating with this person and posting with that person. They have to engage with sponsors because shows are impossible to fund otherwise. And there's the massive responsibility of like, 'Oh, that didn't work last season, don't do that again,' or like, 'Pink is really in.' There's a lot of noise, and I see myself as the outside entity that can come in and help clean up a lot of that noise, really home in on what feels important, what's worthy of platforming, and what's worth expanding upon. My role as an editor – or any stylist's role as an editor – is more important than ever. It's about helping these guys focus. A lot of collections now have something for everyone and aren't very opinionated because people are afraid of alienating anyone or not appealing to everyone. So many people are like, 'Oh, my girl is timeless and seasonless. She's 19, but she's also her mother and her grandmother.' Like, no she's not, to be honest.

'For every Ib Kamara or Tyler Mitchell, there are 50 other talented people whose names I can't remember, who are now back at square one.'

She's none of those things.
No one's going to buy it, because no one feels that the product or experience was really made for them. They don't feel seen or respected or catered to, and that's what fashion's about. Like, the Rick Owens girl – she fucking knows who she is. The Comme girl knows who she is. Our fabulous French woman – Isabel Marant – there's no mistake about her: She has beachy hair, she shaves her legs twice a week, oils them more, now she's getting laser. She loves sex, drinks too much red wine, and absolutely still smokes and doesn't give a shit. You know the music she listens to, the boys she's attracted to. You know her completely, and that's missing from a lot of brands, especially as they scale. So my role as a fashion editor is to help brands get back to that. Let's be honest. No, you don't. You look at it on *Vogue* Runway, and it's fine. But do you need to go to a Dries show, sit on the sofa, smell the scent, see all the furniture, notice the tiny details you'd never otherwise experience, and drink mint tea? Yes, that's something you want to be at. Or like at Tom Ford, to feel the electricity in the room and know you're one of 200 people experiencing lipstick dripping off a girl's face, seeing the first girl is nervous – that energy is inspiring. It compels you to support the designer, shoot the designer, maybe even inspires your look. Honestly, I went to that Haider [Ackermann] show, and though I had issues with some of it – I'm not a huge Haider person – I loved it. The choreography, the sharpness, the tension, energy, colour, the stacks. Then when I looked at it on *Vogue* Runway afterwards to pull stuff I thought, 'This looks old and kind of cheap.' Without experiencing it in person, I would've written it off. And people at Sarah [Burton]'s show [for Givenchy] probably felt similarly. I thought it was atrocious, awful, but people who were there were like, 'It was great.'

As long as I've known you, you've never particularly enjoyed attending shows, doing them reluctantly. How important is it to be in the room now? If you're not there, how are you engaging with it? Because the reality is, you're styling stories, working for magazines – you need to know what's out there.
I think it really depends. There's an exchange of information and energy when you're physically in a space that can't be replicated. For the designers who excel at creating experiences, it's valuable being there to truly understand their proposition. With the vast majority of brands though, it's just *stuff*. Chairs in a different space, a different coloured backdrop, maybe some trees. The collection is nice, there's a shoe, a camel coat, a new lady pump – who gives a shit? Do you need to go to a Dior show?

I saw the pictures and even checked the YouTube video, thinking maybe there was something special to be found in seeing it in motion, but I found nothing. Yet people were raving about it, losing their minds.
People like Sarah, and people like Haider. They were never going to say it wasn't great.

I understand it's important to have women at the helm of these houses, but I was like, 'Huh, OK?' There's definitely a herd mentality in that room. I've seen people change their opinions as the winds shift.
Look at Balenciaga – everyone was obsessed, they could do no wrong, then suddenly it wasn't cool to love Balenciaga. Everyone's like, 'It looks the same, I'm not into it anymore.' That's why I'm hesitant about going to too many shows, I like retaining freedom of thought. I like making my own determinations, creating my own stories based on what I'm instinctively drawn to, rather than being told or influenced by the room. Sometimes I'll think, 'This was fucking sick,' then leave, and everyone's like, 'It was OK,' and you're like... [pauses] We're human, influenced easily. I limit my intake to shows that feel considered, unique, conceived by thought leaders, serving a purpose – whether it's someone young with potential or established designers. I go to every Comme show. I've been going since I was sneaking in, it feels like a privilege every time. Same with Rick [Owens] – the meticulousness, even if it's not my thing… I don't actually like those clothes, but the execution is so fucking impressive. You're just like, 'Yes, *this* is fashion.'

It becomes believable when you see kids outside the show doing their own tribute. There's that cult community thing, which sometimes transforms how I see something. When I see it and believe it, that's when I realize: working in fashion, we're in an echo chamber. But what cuts through? What does a 14-year-old see that gets them into it, the way things pulled us in when we were that age?

'There's the very ironic phenomenon of people not even watching the show because they're watching it through their phone – which I'm guilty of as well.'

I remember looking at Prada shows. One season had all these boys in tiny, tiny shorts, and I thought, 'I'd better go on a diet because that's the silhouette I want to have.' I was just so impressed by it. I wonder now, what are those ideas and things that break through to the street? Often you think, 'Who are we doing this for? Who's going to wear this?' Seeing people genuinely inspired, whether they can afford the actual thing or do their version of it, that's imperative to keep us motivated.

What else did you see – either in person or from afar – that really resonated with you this season?
I really loved Pieter [Mulier]'s Alaïa. I thought it felt like exactly what we need right now. It was opinionated, polarizing, meticulous, beautifully executed, exactly as himself, made zero compromises – it was just Willy doing Willy. It was moving to see how it resonated. It told me people are looking for substance and meaning behind the collections they support. That was very good. On a less positive note, I thought it was interesting, and disappointing, watching young people become more obsessed with conformity.

Do you think it's an obsession with luxury or that people don't have as much conviction in their taste?
People have to keep the lights on and if there is a strategy, it's the wrong one. This idea of making it cheap or commercial so it works – whatever that actually means – it's counterintuitive. No one needs another trench coat or black suit or fucking anything. Things that make people compelled to shop feel special, thoughtful, or are a fresh version of something they already own. If everyone's making the same thing with a different logo, why shop? Young brands can't sell inexpensive clothes because shit is fucking expensive. If I can afford a $2,000 coat from you and there's nothing differentiating it from that Loewe coat or whatever, why would I buy yours? Usually, there are a few younger designers who feel inspiring.

Duran [Lantink].
I didn't like the boobs and shit, but a lot of people are copying him, which is a sign of someone making an impact. So, I think there was something interesting there. The clothes are beautifully made, ideas fully fleshed out, and instantly commercial. But in general, it's all...

It's all Paris now, right? Even London doesn't have much coming through in the way it used to, it's too difficult – nobody can afford it. What's the sense in New York creatively right now?
Well, obviously there's a strong cultural foundation in New York. In America, the focus is really on commerciality more than anywhere else because it's fucking expensive, and factories and luxury fashion are in Europe. New York used to have things inspired by cultures unique to here – downtown New York, the Upper East Side woman. But now these people just wear European designers. Why buy Oscar de la Renta when you could buy Giambattista Valli or a million other brands? The downtown scene – ThreeAsFour, Hood By Air – doesn't exist anymore because that culture doesn't exist. Nightlife, actual cool kids making weird fucking art, that doesn't exist. Everyone's too rich. Every cool club has been replaced by a members' club – eight have opened in the past year alone. Until that culture of creativity and craft returns, I don't know what these kids will do. Anyone with true spark goes to Europe now. Vaquera, to me, was the last convincing, avant-garde proposition out of America, and even they said it's too hard.

Even The Row, which is kind of the most relevant luxury brand from America, is now in Paris.
Yeah. Willy had to go to Paris in order to feel that his brand was making an impact, but also so that he could sell to the buyers because they don't come to America anymore. It wasn't about attention; it was about where the

'The ThreeAsFour, Hood By Air scene doesn't exist anymore because that culture doesn't exist. Every cool club has been replaced by a members' club.'

business is. I do think culture moves in cycles, and I think New York will be back. I think we need some of the marquee names to come back and support young people. Ralph Lauren should be showing during fashion week, Marc Jacobs should be showing during the week, Tommy Hilfiger should be showing during the week.[1] Brands that actually have the pull to bring in the buyers, the press and the celebrities should be showing so they will extend their stay to go and see something weird.

I've noticed that a lot of young designers are now working with some of the industry's biggest stylists, from very early on. You go to that designer's show and you notice a big shift from their earlier collections to when they start working with an established stylist. Some stylists have a very particular aesthetic that's brought into the collection, and it can be quite heavy-handed. You've always been good at this, though. All the shows you work on are very different, but there's a Carlos touch – very clean, polished, you understand it for what it is. What do you make of this new model?
On the one hand, fashion is inherently a young man's sport, right? Every stylist wants to be seen to have a finger on the pulse. They want to be part of evolving conversations. Chloé is great, Ferragamo is great, Max Mara – all these brands are great, but once you get four, six seasons in, and it's still *great*, the buzz wears off. But what *does* have buzz? The new cool kid coming up – Hodakova, Duran, Willy. Those are conversations you want to be part of. They're exciting. We're only human, too: once you get into the groove of, 'OK, this is what this brand should be,' and there's a machine behind it, you want to be part of something where you can be more involved. At Michael Kors, who I adore, we do 12 days of prep before the show. I don't touch clothes. I dress in a suit every day, fabulous shoes, and my job is to entertain Michael, to help edit, and just say, 'Oh, make it like that, push the sleeves up.' At Willy's, I'm on my fucking hands and knees making boards until 4am. I'm literally in the pattern room with them saying, 'No, more like this,' or getting sent pictures from some kid at Mood Fabrics like, 'Which red velvet should we get? We only have enough money for one pair of pants.' It's a different part of the brain. I understand why everyone wants to do it. My role as a stylist is so drastically different based on the client. Some clients know what they want. They have a strong point of view and you're really there to facilitate, to help sharpen it. Maybe give feedback on casting, yell at people to keep things moving, sort of be the support staff. Then other designers don't know. You walk in, and it's a room full of *stuff* – and you have to create whatever story you think is relevant. I have clients who literally say to me, for the first two days, 'I don't want to give you any guidance. I want to see where your mind goes.' You're like, 'Really, what is this – *Project Runway*?' It's crazy. Sometimes I walk in and say, 'I don't like any of these dresses; we should kill all two rails. This floral print is not happening this season.' The poor design team is just like, '*What*?' But the designer says, 'Yeah, you do your thing.' I don't want to diss anyone, because it's really hard. A lot of times, designers have so much to do and to consider, they really need that outside opinion. That's why you see a lot of the same stylists getting jobs, because they become the voices of authority, people whose taste level is trusted. People think, 'She likes it, she'd wear it like that, and her followers will wear it,' or 'She did so well there, hopefully she can do the same thing here.'

That's when you start to see the same ideas everywhere, the same look.
When I was assisting, Camilla [Nickerson] was having her second peak – her first peak was late 1990s, early 2000s, but her second peak was when she was doing Calvin Klein, Céline, McQueen all at the same time. You'd start in New York with Calvin, see the Geoffrey Beene reference, the chic version of the Converse, then you'd go to McQueen and see the Geoffrey Beene reference Sarah's way, the sweet version of the Converse. Then you'd end up at Céline and see the best version of it. But a lot of those Calvin and Céline collections could have been the same collection. Not to gossip, but ultimately that's why she didn't work with Phoebe [Philo] anymore. I understood the influence of the super stylist then – suddenly Camilla said expensive Converse were cool, and then that's all anyone fucking wore.

On the flip side, you worked with Joe McKenna, who spent his whole life in search of the perfect white shirt, another level of meticulous fashion neurosis. It's interesting to see the influence of stylists on designers, but perhaps many

'We're so busy now, constantly needing to feed this insatiable appetite for content, collections, *stuff*. Who has time for a seven-day editorial trip to Goa?'

designers are a bit too reliant on that.
I think a good example is Benjamin Bruno, who to me is singular in his craft. I think he's an excellent stylist and, frankly, creative director. I think it's almost embarrassing, though, if you're a designer, to just give the stylist so much influence. But maybe people want that. Maybe people get bored, and they're just like, 'Oh, I want a new take on this.'

I think your legacy, so far, is in imagery. The imagery you've created, and been a part of creating, is incredibly timeless and will be remembered. On one hand, we're here talking about fashion week, which is now about immediacy – you know, 20 shows a day for a month, and then another month, and another month. It's product. Yet, when it comes

'Let's face it, fashion used to be for a couple of fags and some rich ladies, and now it's like football – just about *everyone* seems to care about it.'

to creating imagery, that's often what we *remember*. Our memory of fashion history is usually related to fashion photography. It's Dior's New Look on the street in Paris, which for me is Willy Maywald's imagery.[2] When it comes to thinking about the kind of imagery you want to make and how clothes come into that, how does this frenetic system translate into the process of creating a static image?
I've always been really inspired by people with a very distinct point of view, whether that's a designer, photographer, stylist, architect, painter… I think Japanese designers are always incredibly inspiring because you understand their inspiration and references, and it feels like every collection is an evolution or a commentary on what's happening at that point in their lives, or in the world, but always through the lens of what they're inspired by, what they have to say, and what they think is important and beautiful. Those are the kinds of images I like to make. I like to respond to things going on in the world and react to people who represent modernity – but also timelessness. I like to think about images in terms of how they'll age, editing things based on what feels like the most important idea of the moment. I've always viewed clothes as tools, as a medium to tell a story. Honestly, I don't love most clothes we have to work with right now, but as a tool to build characters, you can always find something inspiring and relevant. At its essence, being a stylist is about being an editor: sifting through the noise, finding the most important idea, the most important silhouette, creating a story around it. Making images is the most important part of what we do because images are so powerful. They influence, inspire, charge, and help people form opinions about things they otherwise wouldn't think about. I remember looking at Bruce Weber's pictures when I was coming up and being so moved by them. I didn't fully know what I was looking at, but I knew I wanted to be part of it. When I started making my own work and understanding the politics behind fashion imagery, I said, 'I'm never going to work on a picture that's just a pretty girl in a pretty dress in a pretty field – that's not what I do.' Other people do that well, but I want to make pictures that don't exist, either because the protagonist isn't someone that's ever been considered beautiful enough to be platformed, or because the fashion exists out of time and in spaces you wouldn't consider. Otherwise, what's the point?

So many of these collections can be shot beautifully, but it's very rare that there's symbiosis: getting this amazing energy from a show and seeing it interpreted visually in interesting ways. I feel it used to happen more when magazines held more cultural weight – and there were more of them. You'd see a Prada look done a million different ways, with different interpretations, but now it can be very one-note.
I think the value of editorial and fashion imagery has decreased immensely. The Internet created this even playing field – self-generated content and professional images are given the same platform. There are fewer resources dedicated to making fashion images. Before, a *Vogue* February-March issue had an elaborate location shoot, showing spring collections in Puerto Rico or the South of France, whatever. There were entire teams investing time and resources, thinking about how to make these ideas as good as possible. Now, you don't have those resources. No market editors, the photographers won't do it – they're just like, 'Is this going to get me a money job? No? Then I'm not investing in that.' It's different now. The group of people who really care about editorial and impactful images has shrunk immensely. The group of magazines who will run impactful, powerful, memorable images is even smaller. It's tough out there. Magazines are all dead.

It's mainly studio shots now. I remember growing up and you'd get a copy of

***Vogue* and I learned so much about the world because I was travelling through the magazine. I'd never been to those places, but it opened my eyes – everything felt eclectic and global. Ironically, now that we're so globalized as an industry we're not seeing fashion placed in those contexts like before. It's a shame. A lot of earlier imagery, when Mario Testino would go to India, it was always shot on a white girl. Now is a good time to reframe that, but it might really be a budget issue.**
Budget, resources, time – all issues. We're just so busy now, constantly needing to feed this insatiable appetite for content, collections, *stuff*. Who has time to take a seven-day editorial trip to Goa?

I've got every copy of Italian *Vogue*

'I've been told I have to stop saying the word 'woke' – it's like a dog whistle now. I'll *rebrand* woke, so now it's 'aware'. Aware and present.'

from the last 25 years, and all those Meisel shoots were like social commentaries. Seeing fashion through that lens was quite radical, uncomfortable, glamorous in a different way. It doesn't exist anymore – no probing of war or what's going on in the world, no satire, no characters, no cinematic stories leaping off the pages. It's become too much about shows now and not enough about imagery.
Yes, I agree.

Before, shows were just for industry people.
Totally. If you were Louis Vuitton, of course you'd let Marc Jacobs build a train station. Of course, Karl could build something huge. But otherwise, it was really about something else – the importance of inspiring people in the room. Those people would then go back to their corners, make work, spread the word, inform the world. Now, a lot of that power has been divided, resources stretched thin. Those incredible Meisel stories with insane $300,000, $400,000 fashion sets – please, are you kidding me? We need to get back there. We can't always rely on Tesla sponsoring a shoot, you know? We have to figure out something else.

I'm sure you're following this because I know you're spiritual. We're entering the Age of Aquarius – and it's all about the shifting out of the old ways.
Your mouth to God's ears, my love. Enough is *enough*, you know what I mean? But at the same time, I feel very proud and inspired to be part of a generation that gets to reimagine what this thing, this industry, this wacky family vortex looks like, and what it means given our new importance within the cultural landscape. Because, let's face it, fashion used to be for a couple of fags and some rich ladies, and now it's like football – *everyone* cares.

Sometimes I see criticism online, and I'm like, 'Who *is* this person commenting on it?' But sometimes it's great and I'm like, 'Whoever this teenager is – I love this take.' But within the industry, everyone's a cheerleader now. There's so little criticism. Everyone wants to collect a cheque. It's important to use our experience to actually say: 'This is ugly, this is bad, this is great, this can be developed, this is where we should look to do better.'
Do you think, though, with the rise of the TikTok critic, there's actually no criticality, just critique from that group? I feel the snarkiness is more like an identity thing – negativity as identity.

Negativity, for sure – which disappears the minute they're invited to a show.
Yeah, then it's this self-aggrandizing thing. But that's another story.

We're not in a time of nuance. We're living in such extremes that it needs to either be the best thing ever or the worst thing ever. Life's not that simple. I mean, there's Cathy Horyn and Rachel Tashjian in New York, but generally speaking, there's no intelligence in fashion criticism these days. It feels as though back in the day designers approached their work with more intellectual rigour. They cared if something was written well, had a fresh point of view. I'll never forget getting a note from Miuccia Prada saying she liked how I wrote about her collection, and because of that she discovered something new about it. Now, success is measured by YouTube views, TikTok impressions, celebrities, and crowds.
Well, we have to believe it's going to get better. All it takes is a few good eggs to be like, 'Look guys, look what happens when you do this.' I just hope the right people end up at the right houses.

Every element of the structure needs to change, including the front row. Carlos, we didn't even talk about this – the front row in Paris hasn't changed in the 15 years I've been going!
Since I was an assistant! They still have the stamina – like, what?

There's a handful of people, but 99% of the audience – same people, same mentality, same old shit.
Clearly, these people aren't interested in relinquishing their grasp on whatever level of influence they have. Another thing that bothers me – many people don't appreciate how privileged they are to be there. Or they don't even really want to be there. They just don't want to *not* be there.

Any last words before we wrap up?
Now, more than ever, we have to band together to all figure out what's next. How do we collectively address this rut that we're all talking around but not *about*? Everyone feels burnt out, lacking inspiration, stuck on a hamster wheel. We're not lazy people. We're incredibly hardworking. It requires more energy to run around a hamster wheel than to actually make progress. And if there's one takeaway for me this season, it's *terror* – I felt frightened by the leaps backward we're taking. It's not OK that Paloma [Elsesser]'s the last non-anorexic person standing, not OK we're seeing fewer models of colour. Someone said to me recently: 'Do we still have to do the diversity thing?' Imagine what they're saying when I'm *not* there. We need to be more vigilant and aware.
It can very easily slip.
Someone recently sent me Proenza [Schouler] shows from 2000 as evidence of why they'd be good for a job, and I was like, 'Do you not notice there's not a single fucking Black model there?' Honestly, I'm scared we could very easily go back.

Look at Trump being re-elected – everything can be dialled back. History can repeat itself. At the end of the day, this industry is owned by white men interested only in tax breaks and exponential growth. They really don't care about 'diversity'.
I've been told I have to stop saying 'woke' – it's like a dog whistle now. I'll *rebrand* woke, so now it's 'aware'. Aware and present.

1. Marc Jacobs presented his Spring 2025 collection three days before New York Fashion Week's Autumn/Winter 2025 shows officially began. Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger opted not to show at all.

2. Willy Maywald shot a 1955 version of Dior's bar suit, dubbed the 'New Look' by editor Carmel Snow, in 1957. This is the image that would become synonymous with the groundbreaking design in the annals of popular fashion history. Richard Avedon's photograph of the outfit from August 1947 at Place de la Concorde in Paris has become equally tied to the New Look. Shot a decade prior, it would come to represent the dynamism of the new modern woman Christian Dior had envisioned.







Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Carlos Nazario.

Lyas & Style Not Com

‘Whenever I sign a contract, there’s a clause that states I get creative freedom and the client gets one round of feedback, no more. And you can’t force me to say something nice. If you’re hiring me to do something, I’m gonna do what I do.’

Interview by Marta Represa

One built a media empire out of Instagram slides, the other delivers instinctive, unfiltered takes straight from the front row. Together, they reflect two sides of contemporary fashion commentary: data-driven observation versus sensorial immediacy. With Style Not Com – the nom de plume of its founder Beka Gvishiani – now a daily destination for the industry, and Lyas bringing a performative, front-facing energy to fashion criticism, the following conversation unpacks their differences – and their shared belief that fashion is finally becoming exciting again.

Marta Represa: What’s your relationship with fashion week these days? Is it important for you to be in the room?
Beka Gvishiani: That’s a very relevant question for me this season because, for the first time since starting Style Not Com in 2021, I skipped London and Milan entirely to go to Brazil for carnival. I did attend New York and Paris, and was reminded how important it is for me to be in the room. I want to feel the vibe, the music, the smell, the people… I wouldn’t feel right judging a Milan show without having been there.
Lyas: I also took a step back this season! For the first time, instead of doing everything, I’m just doing what I really want to do. I gave myself permission to slow down. I think that’s important, because I realize I get more excited about what’s to come when I allow myself some freedom in between shows. I can focus on three shows a day, not seven like I did before.
Beka: Totally! To me it was also about getting out of my comfort zone, which is doing as much as I can do. It actually felt liberating. All in all, I think I did 12 shows in New York and 15 in Paris.
Lyas: I did 40 shows in total. So intense but I just love it.

What was your most memorable moment of the season?
Lyas: The Valentino set! I thought it was so fresh. I was sitting third row, so I couldn’t really see the clothes, but the set design, the production, the Lana Del Rey soundtrack… It was such a rush. At the end of the show I was like, ‘This is the best thing I’ve ever seen!’; then I looked at the clothes up close and I was like, ‘huh’. It was really about the spectacle.
Beka: Alessandro [Michele] really is all about creating feelings. Seeing that set reminded me why I like him so much. From a fashion perspective, I loved Duran [Lantink] so much. I rearranged my whole schedule that day to make sure I wouldn’t miss his show.
Lyas: The controversy around his show was so blown out of proportion. I don’t think people got the message. To me it felt elevated; Bureau Betak was on it… It really felt like a stepping stone for something bigger to come. Also Matières Fécales! I loved the contrast between the Versailles-like room and the clothes themselves.
Beka: The shoes!
Lyas: Yeah, the Louboutin collab – everything was so high quality. It was insane. I had just come from Givenchy and I kept thinking about the way young designers with no means are outshining huge brands. It really says a lot about the current state of the industry. Think of what we could have if we weren’t playing it safe for fear of losing sales.
Beka: It feels like we’ve been waiting so long for some excitement! I keep saying this year is going to be the new 1997, you know, when all the big things happened – from Marc Jacobs going to Vuitton, to Galliano, McQueen, and Tom Ford being at the helm of heritage brands [Dior, Givenchy and Gucci respectively]. There’s that kind of vibe in the air.

You sound pretty optimistic.
Beka: I am!
Lyas: Me too! Because we’ve seen such a lack of creativity for so long, and we’re finally opening up the room to some. We might yet see the fruits of that.

How do you approach commentary and criticism to stay relevant?

‘I went straight from Givenchy to Matières Fécales, and I kept thinking about the way young designers with no means are outshining huge brands.’

Lyas: I’m lucky to have built a platform around being honest, and I’m lucky to still be allowed to be honest. I mean, curated honesty, but still, when I have something to say, I’ll say it. I wouldn’t call myself a journalist or a critic; I’d say I talk about fashion, which gives me the freedom to diversify my content and show fashion in any way I want.
Beka: Around the time I started my page, I was re-reading all these vintage magazines from my collection, and it made me realize I was longing for that level of excitement in fashion again. That has always been my drive: creating exciting fashion news for people to read. Of course, I was only doing it for around 200 friends and insiders; but then Loïc Prigent followed me.
Lyas: Loïc was also the first to spot me. He just gets it.

Beka: Things changed then. I started going to the shows and putting the accent on the things no one talks about: the number of models, guests, kilograms of sand used on a set… Then I looked for quotes, and things started really taking off. When it crossed the 50,000 followers line I realized I was no longer in the fashion bubble.
Lyas: How did the content change at that point?
Beka: I started doing more fact-checking and let go of some niche, hyperlocal content. Like you, I don't call myself a journalist or critic, that's the job of Tim Blanks and Cathy Horyn. What I do is report on whatever is exciting in a news format, because I want to focus on the actual fashion and filter out all the circus and hysteria around it. I get so tired from that; I feel like a need to retreat for a while after every fashion month.
Lyas: You know what? I get recharged! Those fashion-week interactions with people make me recharge.
Beka: For me it depends on the context, who I'm with…
Lyas: It is important to protect your peace. These days I simply don't stay wherever I feel like I'm not welcome, those events where I'm just invited because they kind of have to have me.
Beka: And then they don't talk to you!
Lyas: Exactly! So now I just leave!
Beka: I've started doing the same.

Beka, would you describe yourself as an introvert and Lyas as an extrovert?
Beka: We always talk about!
Lyas: We had an argument about it!
Beka: I still don't know how to answer.
Lyas: I'm an extrovert.

Beka: This blue cap was created by introvert Beka, as a kind of ice-breaker so people would come and talk to me. Once the conversation gets going, the extrovert Beka comes out. But I can never take that first step myself. I like to observe from the sidelines.
Lyas: I just love to go talk to people. Anna Wintour? I'll just go up to her and ask her for a selfie. Although she never says yes!

How do you deal with the public aspect of your job?
Lyas: Personally I love it; I thrive on it. Because I see life as a performance, so having an audience watching feels natural. I perform. And my face appears quite frequently in my content, so it's obvious I want the attention. It would be ridiculous to pretend otherwise.

Beka: For me it's the opposite because I don't show my face on my page, and I never like any of my photos. I've always been a behind-the-scenes kind of guy, from the days when I was working in fashion in Georgia. And I like that. I don't feel comfortable whenever there's too much attention on me.
Lyas: Doesn't the attention build up your ego?
Beka: Yes and no. Sometimes people make you feel more important than you feel yourself, but it's only because they want to make use of it, and of you.

What are the pros and the cons of working solo?
Lyas: Not so long ago I started working for a publication and had to stop because it was muzzling me. I didn't have the freedom I have on my own. The most important thing for me is to keep my voice, and I'll do anything to preserve that. If that means I can't work with a big publication, that's OK. I value my freedom more than anything.
Beka: People call me a one-man show, because I like to do everything myself. I'm a control freak; I like to struggle, to stress myself. But the thing is, I worked with teams before, managing up to 70 people, and I realized that's a surefire way to lose all your creativity and just become a manager. Now I have a manager and my editorial assistant, who helps me with research, fact-checking and editing, but I won't ever be able to have more than two or three people with me without losing my creativity.

How do you keep your content unfiltered with brands now approaching you?
Lyas: Whenever I sign a contract, there's a clause that states I get creative freedom and one round of feedback, no more. And you can't force me to say something nice. If you're hiring me to do something, I'm gonna do what I do.
Beka: My contract states that I work kind of like a magazine, with brands paying to place ads. But I make it very clear from the get-go: content is going to be completely separate from the show. And I never guarantee coverage, even if people think I do because I made 12 posts about Saint Laurent.
Lyas: I would make 20 posts about Saint Laurent.
Beka: By the way, let's talk about Dries. Do you have a feeling that it got lost among the multitude of shows? No one talked about it.
Lyas: It got instantly forgotten.

'The blue cap was created as a kind of ice-breaker so people would come and talk to me. Once the conversation gets going, extrovert Beka comes out.'

Beka: But I keep thinking about it.
Lyas: Me too! Maybe we didn't do our job right, because Dries was, along with Duran and Matières Fécales, my favourite.
Beka: I couldn't do my top three without Saint Laurent though.
Lyas: I mean, Saint Laurent is ground level. The low-waist gowns with the leather jackets? Incredible.
Beka: And let's talk about Balenciaga. I have so many mixed emotions because part of me loved that Puma-Balenciaga contrast. You know, the tracksuit and then the evening dress. But then there was the speeding. The show lasted a little over six minutes. I was sitting at a corner and whenever a model passed by I had two or three seconds tops to catch a glimpse of them. Actually, at the beginning I thought it was a retrospective show, because of the first five looks with the kind of hourglass shape. It felt reminiscent of Demna's first collection for the brand. What did you think?
Lyas: I did a review about it and people were mad at me, because I thought it was genius to open with all those tracksuits. I thought it was a reflection of what the brand has become – nothing. Looks giving nothing, just basic clothing. Then the red gown came out and I thought: 'Oh, well, it's back to business as usual, it wasn't so genius after all.'
Beka: I immediately did a review on the show and people wrote to me saying it felt really flat and that was a reflection of the show. Still, Demna is the most important designer of the past decade, along with Alessandro Michele and Jonathan Anderson.
Lyas: I didn't get to go to the Loewe presentation? How was it?
Beka: It was the most Jonathan art exhibition ever. Truly meaningful.

What did you make of Sarah Burton's debut at Givenchy?
Beka: I can tell you that my female friends who are able to afford these clothes all want to wear the whole collection. It's funny how it was such a divisive show, with radical emotions from both sides. I think there are ways to develop it and Sarah Burton can undoubtedly cut a beautiful dress. The real test for me is going to be her menswear, because she doesn't have as much experience in that department. But I do have friends in retail who said they ordered most of the collection.
Lyas: I've got to say, Beka… You're really well media trained. I was at the show, and when I saw that first look with the logo coming out…
Beka: That first look was bad.
Lyas: You know what? I kind of thought it was genius, going back to 2016, bringing back logomania.
Beka: No, I understand the thought behind it; approaching Matthew [Williams], Riccardo [Tisci] and Hubert de Givenchy in one single look.
Lyas: That's true! It felt tacky to open the collection that way, but a clever kind of tacky. The rest of the collection was interesting, the palette tasteful… But I don't think it's going to be a collection I will keep thinking about.

What about Haider Ackermann for Tom Ford?
Beka: The expression everyone used, including me, was 'very seductive'. Tom Ford kissing him on the lips was a reflection of what everyone wanted to do after the show.
Lyas: Sex still sells!

Did you go to Vaquera?
Lyas: I loved it, and I thought it was their most accomplished collection ever. It was also the first time they worked with Michel Gaubert, who did this soundtrack composed exclusively of acapella versions of songs like 'Total Eclipse Of The Heart' and 'Gypsy'. You could only hear the vocals and the click click of the models' shoes… Just the coolest. So New York.
Beka: Not saying this about Vaquera, but Michel saves shows with his music.

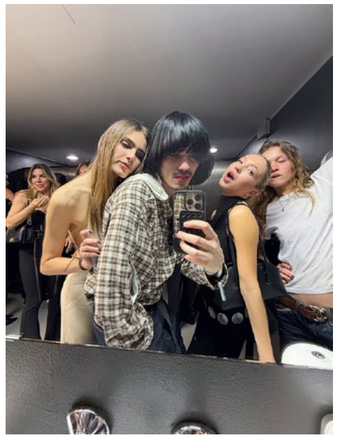
Is Paris still the best city to showcase emerging brands?
Lyas: Yeah, but they only have one shot. They have to get it right the first time, otherwise no one will ever come back next time.
Beka: Showcasing emerging talent used to be London's role. And people undervalue London Fashion Week saying it's only about Burberry, but it's not! I think the British Fashion Council is under new leadership, and one of the things they should do is bring back the excitement of new brands. If you are an emerging brand, where better to show in London, where there is so much time!

Do you think runway trends are still relevant today?
Lyas: Not to me. I kind of hate trends.
Beka: Trends? Nooooo! Because every trend is so short-lived now. The trend of trending is gone.

'I just love to go up and talk to people. Doesn't matter who. Anna Wintour? I'll just go up to her and ask for a selfie. Although she never says yes!'









Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Lyas.





Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Style Not Com.

Tim Lim & Leslie Sun

‘The megabrands remain very present in Asia. What’s surprising though is that it’s Gen Z twentysomethings who want Hermès bags, and who are wearing total look Chanel. Five years ago they’d have been wearing head-to-toe Balenciaga. There’s been a big shift, and a lot of that is driven by celebrity – Jennie has had a huge impact on this younger generation of Chanel fans.’

Interview by Jonathan Wingfield

Tim Lim moved from Toronto to Hong Kong in the late 1990s, landing the position of fashion editor at the *South China Morning Post* at the tender age of 23. In 2006, he joined Modern Media (renamed Meta Media in 2022), and has since held the role of group fashion director, overseeing all titles and platforms, while also serving as editorial director of *Numéro* China and *Modern Weekly Style Magazine*. Leslie Sun is head of editorial content at *Vogue* Taiwan and *Vogue’s* Asia-Pacific (APAC) editorial director – comprising the Japan, India and Taiwan markets. Born in LA, but raised in Taipei, she cut her teeth designing exhibition catalogues and artist monographs for museums and galleries in the US before returning to Taiwan in 2012. Today, Lim and Sun oversee major publications in China and the Asia-Pacific region respectively – huge geographical locations with widely varying readerships. *System* sat down with Leslie and Tim the day after the Paris shows had ended to discuss how Asian perceptions of Western luxury fashion – and indeed, how Western perceptions of Asian media and consumers – have changed over the years, how fashion can be used to cross cultural boundaries and, of course, their highlights from the Autumn/Winter 2025 season collections.

Jonathan Wingfield: Tim, you’ve been attending shows in Europe for many seasons. Could you paint a picture of how it was to be a member of the Asian press when you began coming, and how that experience has evolved over the years?

Tim Lim: Back when I started, Asia basically meant Japan. I’d receive invitations addressed to ‘Tim Lim, *South China Morning Post*, Japan’ – on more than one occasion!

Leslie Sun: This is the early 2000s, right?

Tim: Yes. By the early 2000s, the bigger brands had become more familiar with the Asian press, but overall, there was still a lack of awareness. Hong Kong was slightly more on the radar because it was home to a lot of regional headquarters, yet there was this sense that the industry wasn’t truly interested in our part of the world – certainly not in the mainland Chinese media. People would say things back then that would absolutely get them flattened today. That started to change around the time *Vogue* China launched in 2005. There was real momentum building, and the market was clearly growing.

‘Back in the early 2000s, Asia basically meant Japan. I’d receive show invitations addressed to ‘*Tim Lim, South China Morning Post, Japan*.’’

I remember there being a lot of anticipation in Europe around the launch of *Vogue* China. It was a big deal.

Tim: When I think back to that time, the momentum and the need to deliver something at a certain level – along with expectations about what the magazine would mean in the market – meant the bar was raised. But the reality of the situation at that time was that the mainland China industry was in its earliest phases. There weren’t the talents to produce the magazine. So the industry accelerated very quickly after that. Especially within the last 10 years, we’ve reached a point where we now have a confident creative community and wider media industry that’s asserting itself more and, of course, the world is more aware, interested and conscious of what’s happening in this part of the world – not just in mainland China. There’s a growing Asian confidence, a regional assertiveness, that is exciting. More dialogue is happening on equal footing with the West.

What was the appetite of your readership like when you were starting?

Tim: Mainland Chinese audiences always liked to see Chinese or Asian faces. That was the difference for me, because in Hong Kong or Singapore or Japan at the time, that was not the case. So already in mainland China, people were interested in the representation of their own culture, their own personalities. At the same time, they were also quite interested in the outside world: actors, artists, singers. There was more curiosity. The West represented modernity and there was this impulse in China to be modern and engaged with the wider world. But that interest has declined over the past five years. People are now much more inward-looking, focusing on figures from their own pop cultural landscape.

Leslie: Also understanding how rich their culture is. I remember when I was living in LA, and this was the 2000s or the 2010s, people would ask, ‘Where are you from?’ When I’d say Taiwan, they would ask, ‘Oh, as in Thailand?’ I’d get that all the time! I feel like Taiwanese people take a lot of pride when they are being seen and recognized by the rest of the world. I might sound too obnoxious saying this, but I kind of knew that the *Vogue* Taiwan formula I

put in place would work – to showcase the landscape, to showcase the talent and to have the world talking about us. It quickly became successful. Even if it's just a tiny aspect of Taiwan being displayed on this public platform, to our audience it is really gratifying.

In what ways did you look to make *Vogue* Taiwan more compelling to both local and global audiences?

Leslie: Considering the Taiwanese market, we don't have a robust fashion industry. Everything is foreign in terms of fashion. The closest would have been Japan back in the day, now it's Korea, and everything else is coming from the West. When most fashion is coming from the West, it's not so much about a creative relationship – it's more transactional. So how can we make it more compelling to the public, rather than just a cover that looks like another commercial with a celebrity on it? That's why I decided to use storytelling to attract those who may not be completely interested in fashion. At *Vogue*, we're supposed to see everything through the lens of fashion, but with Taiwan, specifically, it sometimes has to be fashion through the lens of culture or current events. To capture the audience's eyeballs *first* and then get them into fashion. There's fewer people we can capture with fashion alone. Edward [Enninful] did that beautifully at British *Vogue*, to be able to talk about activism and so on, but not lose that *Vogue* DNA.

It always felt fashion.

Leslie: Exactly. I had the pleasure to get to know Edward and the way that he thinks and works. So I took inspiration from what was happening in his mind to figure out how I could apply that to my local market. The most successful cover we've had to date was January 2022. It was actually two covers: one with the model in contaminated water – it was not a set, the water was literally contaminated, although obviously not deadly. She was photographed rather like a mermaid, but in a Gucci dress. That created a lot of impact because of how much that single image was able to say. Then it was accompanied by a second cover with no fashion credits, where she's holding a popsicle up to her mouth. The popsicle was actually a piece of work by an art collective who took polluted water from sewers in Taiwan and made them into popsicles. Then they used resin to replicate the popsicles.[1] So the messaging is, 'OK, if we're going to continue doing what we're doing now, in the future the popsicle that you're eating is going to be trash.' It's a very straightforward message, but because of the way the image was presented it garnered a lot of conversation globally. That was when we were like, 'Wow, OK, that's the power of imagery, and this is actually something we're good at, too.'

It transcended the fashion readership.

Leslie: Exactly. People started paying attention to *Vogue* Taiwan. That was the first goal of the trajectory: to have people pay attention to Taiwan. And then we talk about fashion.

What about for you and the titles you oversee, Tim?

Tim: Both *Numéro* China and *Modern Weekly* approach fashion through an arts and culture lens. It's our DNA and we started working with artists early on. One of the first collaborations, I think, was with Cao Fei – I dressed her avatar, China Tracy, in Hussein Chalayan for a shoot in Second Life. Those images ended up in Italian *Vogue*, and from there, we kept going, bringing in artists like Wolfgang Tillmans, Yang Fudong, Ryan Trecartin, and Ren Hang. One of *Numéro* China's most successful covers was the one we did with Katerina Jebb – she created a full-body scan of the actress Zhou Xun in Chanel couture. What's amazing is that we're a mainstream Chinese media group with a very broad readership. I doubt that our peers in the most developed markets could have gotten away with what we were doing at the time. This speaks not only to our curiosity and daring but also to the hunger of the Chinese audience for bold new ideas. The situation has evolved, of course, but I think that's still true today. Chinese audiences are now incredibly fashion- and media-fluent, and they have very high expectations when it comes to covers and content. You constantly have to push further and surprise them with every issue.

Would you say that the growth of art and fashion have gone hand in hand in China?

Tim: Yes, I think that's quite accurate. We were speaking to a cultural elite that felt slightly apologetic about loving fashion, and back in the early 2000s, fashion wasn't the medium in which mainland China excelled. We didn't have many great designers or photographers, but what we did have was a vibrant and groundbreaking art scene. These two fields would often intersect and amplify each other in a way that was very aspirational to an audience that might otherwise have been reluctant to embrace fashion full-on. Now, of course, they are very much entwined.

Has the rise of social media triggered a desire for younger people to want to become photographers, stylists, make-up artists… to want to engage with fashion professionally?

Tim: When *Vogue* China launched, there were only really one or two fashion photographers, but now you have an entire new generation that is fluent in the vernacular of fashion. In many cases, they are coming back from abroad, having studied in the States or in London. They have that knowledge, but also want to create a new visual language that's closer to Chinese culture.

Leslie: In Taiwan, not so much. It's been an ongoing issue for us in terms of visual talent. Not to get really political, but the Taiwan–mainland situation isn't helping us at all. We would have a huge pool of talent to work with, if not for the political situation. Chinese talent cannot come to Taiwan. Sometimes they don't want to be associated with us. Excluding China, it's not easy to find talent that has a strong point of view, and when someone with real singular talent does emerge, they quickly end up shooting for *everyone*.

For Western photographers and stylists, there is so much that precedes them. It's almost impossible not to be influenced by the medium's canon – Avedon, Newton, Guy Bourdin, David Sims, Juergen Teller… Are those the same mainstay references for younger Asian image makers, or would you say refreshing and alternative aesthetics can emerge because they don't have that canonical reference point?

Leslie: In terms of photographers, I'd say both. Sometimes you find those who are just originals. You know what references they're using but they are able to twist that into something deeply personal. Then there is the other type of visual talent, who take references but do them really beautifully, which feels almost more about the craft. They're referencing something from Viviane Sassen, but they do it exquisitely. I don't want to speak for stylists in Taiwan, because I think it's a bit unfair. They work with very limited resources. The samples that are available to the APAC markets – excluding China and Japan, but for Asia-Pacific – we get things late; we don't get as many samples. There's not as much to work with for them. The brands then want full looks and there's not a lot to play with.

Tim: We have access to more resources in mainland China. In fact, the biggest challenge can sometimes be having too much at your disposal – you can become a victim of your own success. Take a singular talent, a photographer or a stylist, and as Leslie says, the minute someone is good, these talents are quickly snapped up – not just by the market and the brands, but by the media. There's a lot of opportunity in our market and Chinese brands and titles like to work with local talent. They can become successful very quickly, and then they have to become many different things to many different people and that singularity is somewhat diluted. But then again, if I were a 25-year-old photographer and someone was throwing all of these opportunities at me – all these celebrities, all of this money – would I be strong enough to say no? So there's less time for them to mature.

Leslie: To refine their craft.

Tim: That's also our fault as editors, I would say.

What do you consider the best of Chinese fashion design at the moment?

Tim: A lot of our young designers are now on an equal footing with the best young international designers in New York, London or Paris. The question I'm asked most is: 'Who is the Yohji [Yamamoto] or the Rei Kawakubo of China?' Of course, these people do not come along every day; I don't know that we've really found that 'one'. There are certainly talents though, and we're seeing them on an international platform. There's Uma Wang, obviously, very established. Shushu/Tong. And also finding an audience overseas, we have Robert Wun from Hong Kong. We have Windowsen and Bad Binch Tongtong who are finding interesting ways to work through celebrities. We have Penultimate, a finalist for the most recent LVMH Prize. Then there's Rui, Ruohan and Dido [Liu].

Is the ambition for these young designers to grow their brand and to have a real presence across mainland China?

'When *Vogue* China launched in 2005, there were only one or two fashion photographers; now there's an entire generation fluent in the fashion vernacular.'

'Of course, Beijing and Shanghai dominate, but on social media, you've got kids in the Chinese countryside fashioning runway looks out of refuse.'

Or do they dream of becoming, say, the next creative director of Balenciaga?
Tim: It was interesting watching that latest Kawakubo show where she said, 'smaller is stronger'.[2] This younger generation isn't necessarily looking to scale, they're trying to do something that's very specific and personal. There are, of course, those who are more ambitious, whose sights are international. But a lot of the new generation want to do something that is more craft-based and meaningful to them and speaks to their home market.
Leslie: To be completely honest, in terms of Taiwanese designers, there are only a handful who have made it outside of Taiwan. Not in the past two years, but in the past two decades! Our government is really trying to support the fashion industry, but that is also a downside because designers become complacent as they're always getting government funding. They're like, 'Oh, well, I have a platform anyway. I get to show a collection. I have government support.' There's just no growth because designers don't feel the need to grow. Those who have made it overseas, or made a name for themselves, don't want to associate themselves with the Taipei fashion scene. They're like, 'We're the ones really working hard trying to make it and these people are just swimming in the fish bowl.' So we're launching a fashion fund in Taiwan to try to create more competition in the market – we're trying to strike a balance and target those who are serious about building a career. The fund is attached to *Vogue* Taiwan, officially named the '*Vogue* Taiwan Fashion Fund'. *Vogue*-owned and operated markets are trying to align our fashion funds as much as we can globally, so the application requirements and structure for Taiwan is based on referencing existing ones in the US, UK, and China.
Tim: Uma Wang won Modern Media's inaugural fashion prize back in 2006, and we have been growing with and celebrating the best of Chinese design ever since. We do this editorially through *Numéro*'s annual Talent Call and design awards across the group, but also in daily ways by connecting designers with brands and manufacturers, and also artists, photographers, and stylists with their peers overseas. That is really the most exciting part of my job – bringing together a diverse, like-valued community of creators and giving them the space to do their best work. And it is something that Meta Media prioritises through its relationships with different cultural institutions and fairs to bring Chinese talents to the rest of the world. We just curated a survey of Chinese fashion photography from the last 30 years to tie in with a show that we organised with the V&A in Beijing. And an ongoing project documenting the life of Madame Song – the late Chinese style icon, Pierre Cardin muse and cultural catalyst – was featured in the first major exhibition of her legacy at M+ in Hong Kong. So a big part of what we do is inspiring the next generation of creators – by bringing context and depth to fashion, and by holding up new role models.

'The idea of the sexualized 1970s Halston woman won't necessarily translate. Women from certain parts of Asia don't express their sexuality that way.'

Would you say 'niche' in mainland China still represents enormity when it comes to actual numbers? Compared to, say, a niche title based in Europe?
Tim: It's certainly growing, but the numbers are not exponential. I mean, I could talk publication figures, but I don't know how insightful that would be. Subculture is less pronounced in mainland China. Of course, there's a lot of different of lifestyles, interests, and regional or local experiences. But subculture, as expressed in the style media, isn't nearly as articulated as it is in the West. It's harder to speak to niche groups in that way.

Where is your readership geographically – in Shanghai and Beijing, or also in the other regions?
Tim: It's always been more of the first-tier cities with print, but now that things are digital, they reach everywhere. We're seeing different cities grow in influence and assert their own identities. Chengdu is a strong fashion capital and we have Xiamen in Fujian, which has been called 'the Antwerp of China'. Of course, Beijing and Shanghai dominate, but it can go anywhere: on social media, you have kids in the Chinese countryside fashioning runway looks out of refuse.

When did you first notice that fashion's reach was really spreading?
Tim: Around 2018 it had reached a boiling point and this trend of *guochao*, or 'national wave,' really started gaining momentum. The conversation around fashion began to shift – it moved beyond the usual status symbols and big Western brands and began reaching a much broader audience. For instance, the sportswear brand Li-Ning had its first fashion show in New York at that time, incorporating a lot of nostalgic Chinese iconography, and it went viral. Suddenly, it became cool to be Made in China, to embrace traditional dress, and to explore socialist aesthetics – not just in fashion, but in architecture, graphic design, beauty and travel. That moment coincided with a new cultural confidence and assertiveness which only grew during the pandemic. It culminated in the rise of the Gen Z hashtag #*xinzhongshi*, or 'new Chinese style,' which exploded on the social media platform RedNote [*Xiaohongshu*]. As a trend, it's probably played out by now, but there's still this deeper desire among many Chinese creatives to redefine and reconstitute what Chinese elegance and identity mean. Designers like Samuel Guì Yang, Ms Min, and Yueqi Qi are doing this in nuanced and very personal ways, as are photographers like Leslie Zhang, Luo Yang, and Feng Li. That is a much bigger project.

'If you go to Shanghai, or even Chengdu, people can be really daring; there's gender fluidity, using both fashion and beauty as a means of expression.'

Leslie, the fact that you work across such vastly different regions – you have *Vogue* in India, Japan and Taiwan under your editorial remit – when you come and see the shows, how do you try to view them for each market?
Leslie: I am focused on quality control: ensuring visuals meet high standards, storytelling and content aligns with the *Vogue* brand, and supporting the local teams. When it really comes down to knowing the market, we have heads of content for each individual market. So Tiffany [Godoy] and Rochelle [Pinto] would be the experts for Japan and India.[3] We are such distinct markets that I would literally be bipolar if I was going to know what would work for each market.
Tim: Tripolar!
Leslie: [Laughs] I mean, there are times where it is specific, like, 'I have a feeling this is going to work really well in Japan.' But more so, I look to that bigger scope of messaging: what is this season trying to say? What is this collection trying to say? We'll get together as a collective and we discuss the collections, and we brainstorm the global stories that we are going to produce that will speak to everyone. Not to say that one size fits all. It does not, but there are still certain tidbits of messaging that could work for everyone. When it comes down to details, if someone's doing down puffer jackets, it's not going to work for India because of their climate. But then we ask ourselves, what does *Vogue* offer? A bit of fantasy, right? Plus, people travel, they go skiing. Once we all collectively agree on the messaging that we're going to send globally with those stories, we'll then go and tend to our local markets – either in the way we shoot the cover, or the way we do features or cover certain designers. We've reached a point where we no longer try to force similarities between the Taiwanese, Japanese, and Indian markets. There's much more in common between Taiwan and Japan than with India, but there's a large Indian diaspora in Singapore and the Middle East. This has been a learning process – understanding the cultural nuances and allowing connections to develop organically.

Do you find there are particular brands or designers that perform disproportionately better in one market over another?
Leslie: India is an evolving market, which is something I've only really discovered since stepping into this role. Despite the massive population, it's still considered a small market for luxury. It's a growing market for luxury and a lot of the brands are homegrown; they have their own ecosystem going on, it's a bit like Bollywood. There's actually a degree of difficulty to convince them to buy Chanel when they have their own version of high to low.

There's a maturity to the market.
Leslie: Exactly, it's actually quite robust. Similarly in Japan, but culturally they gravitate a lot more towards what's happening in the West. But the way that Asian figures tend to be built, certain things would look good on us and certain things less so. So that also helps decide which brands are more popular. The megas: the Hermèses and the Chanels and the Vuittons are definitely still doing really well in Asia. In Taiwan, specifically, we are in the top five for watches and fine jewellery consumption. We have a tiny population but very deep pockets and a lot of these high spenders are extremely low-key. So Loro Piana is doing so well in Taiwan, even before the whole 'quiet luxury' trend. Same for Brunello Cucinelli, and obviously Hermès.

Is that a characteristics thing?
Leslie: I think it's cultural. We're known to have very sophisticated buyers and very loyal consumers. Once you hook them with that story, then they're yours –

which means brand story and heritage are fundamental for the Taiwanese audience. I tell the brands whenever I can: Taiwan is actually far more similar to Southeast Asia – in taste, in the ways that we receive communications and consume – than to China and Hong Kong.

Is that a surprise for the brands?
Leslie: Yes!
Tim: I mean, Taiwan has always had very strong brand attachment, certainly within the watches and fine jewellery markets. Whereas mainland China has been a lot more promiscuous in terms of brand loyalty and taste.

Tim, can you tell me about some of the brands that have a real presence across mainland China?
Tim: The megabrands remain very present. What's surprising to me is that it's Gen Z that are still very much into these brands. With Hermès and Chanel, it's twentysomethings who want those bags and those hairbands, and who are wearing total look Chanel. Whereas five years ago they might have really liked Balenciaga. So there's been a big shift, and a lot of that is driven by celebrity – Jennie [Kim], for instance, has had a huge impact on this younger generation of Chanel fans. Also, because the market is troubled, people are more reluctant to spend. And when they *are* spending, they're looking for things that are more investment-based or are signifiers of a certain level of taste. You'll have young editors searching second-hand online platforms for vintage Hermès – but Margiela Hermès.[4] For years now, we've also seen huge interest in The Row on platforms like RedNote. These might seem counterintuitive to the more ostentatious idea of a Chinese fashion customer but they've taken hold quite quickly. Beyond that, because China is often very trend-driven, brands like Miu Miu are very popular.

Do you think that could shift quickly if a new, very strong fashion vision comes along, like what Alessandro Michele brought to Gucci?
Tim: Definitely. That's a good example. It's both exciting and slightly terrifying at the same time. There's so much possibility and it makes my job very dynamic.

Generally speaking, how do Asian customers and audiences relate to the cultural references that Western designers often embed in their collections?

'India is an evolving homegrown market. There's a degree of difficulty in convincing them to buy Chanel as they already have their own versions.'

Say, for example, Saint Laurent referencing an early 2000s Hollywood movie like *American Psycho*, or the photography of Helmut Newton. Or when a brand is said to be referencing Tom Ford-era Gucci. Are Asian customers and audiences finely attuned to these references?
Tim: You'd first need to distinguish between mainland China and then Taiwan or Hong Kong, which have a longer history of both fashion – with pioneers like Joyce Ma who lived through the late 1960s,1970s and 1980s – and, of course, the film and entertainment industries. People there would more likely understand a 1970s or a high-1980s reference. In mainland China, it's different. The fashion culture is much younger so we, as editors, need to familiarize people with those references. A good example is something like Chemena [Kamali]'s Chloé. It's not the distant past, it's 2000s boho chic, but it wouldn't be part of the collective consciousness of mainland China. People would access it from a different point of entry, either through our storytelling or by seeking out the references which are now much easier to find online. Or simply by viewing it through completely new eyes and just seeing it as a proposition that feels relevant. Some references might be more challenging or might need to be adapted; like how the idea of a sexualized 1970s Halston woman won't necessarily translate in the same way. That may not be how women from certain parts of Asia would express their sexuality.

Does that create a sense of disconnect?
Tim: Maybe. They might just not engage with it, or they might find their own way to it. This is the wonderful thing about fashion: you adapt and take what you want from it. You might end up coming across something in the hair or make-up, or it might be the spirit of something that is appealing.
Leslie: There are certain cultural aspects from the West that are totally relevant or popular in Asia, while some are really farfetched. If people can't relate too much, then it becomes a spectacle. Not to say that spectacles don't sell – it could still strike up a conversation, but it's not really up to us to generate that kind of storytelling. For example, with the Saint Laurent collection, people don't really understand the Michelle Pfeiffer Hollywood aspect of it, but then if we say 1980s power dressing, or suiting, it becomes compelling to our audiences. In the West, people just know it's *American Psycho*, but in Asia they generally won't. As Tim said, because of the Internet and the rise of social media, people can easily find out what it is, if they want to.

Are there relatively obscure Western references which are becoming popularized in mainland China via fashion's ubiquitous presence on social media?
Leslie: You mean like Uggs? [Laughs]
For example, Anthony Vaccarello might do a Saint Laurent collection inspired by Betty Catroux. When presenting her to a market where she is completely unknown, I'm curious to know if she could become a cult fashion figure on Asian social media.
Tim: Because of the curiosity that I told you about, within the mainland, this kind of storytelling is quite common on WeChat. People are going quite deep to construct not only Western fashion history but also their own history, because so much of it has not been documented. *Modern Weekly* has started a series of oral histories, in print and on podcasts, to capture the key moments in China's modern fashion history. The industry has evolved so quickly that there hasn't really been time to pause and reflect – let alone remember those chance encounters, seized opportunities, and connections that brought us to where we are now. A great example is Alber Elbaz's first show in Shanghai, in 2002, just months after his debut at Lanvin in Paris. I remember it well because it was the first time I did a shoot on the mainland, and it was also the first time one of China's early power brokers, [fashion PR guru] Melvin Chua, worked with Alber. That collaboration sparked a lifelong friendship that was catalytic: Alber immediately commissioned Chinese artist Liu Jianhua for a global Lanvin campaign and brought a group of Chinese models to Paris for his next show – both things we take for granted today. It was a major turning point – just like the Fendi show on the Great Wall or Yang Fudong's iconic Prada campaign – but there was virtually no record of the show ever taking place.
Leslie: I think there's a difference between Taiwan and mainland China. In China there is a massive population of young people who are genuinely curious, and who go really, really deep into the stories, the heritage, the history of fashion. I feel like that level of sophistication or curiosity for Taiwan happened with the older generation – before the Internet existed. It was more a question of, 'Oh, we're the insiders, so we know this.' Whereas now, with the younger generation, it's more surface level compared to China. A lot of times I go on *Xiaohongshu* or WeChat and there would be these entire thesis papers on fashion history!
Tim: People definitely read.
Leslie: Those writers will spend the time to go and dig and do the research. Whereas in Taiwan, we as the media need to build these stories for the younger consumers.

'Taiwan is in the global top five for watches and fine jewellery consumption. We may be a tiny population but we have very deep pockets.'

Tim, what part has fashion played in the shifting rapport with individualism in mainland China? Given that a few generations ago individualism through dress was not really an option.
Tim: I mean, it's a human impulse to want to differentiate yourself. Culturally, of course, that varies. I would say that within mainland China it's generational, but it's also regional. China is so vast, there are so many different realities. Within those first-, second-, or third-tier cities, I think fashion has become one of the most important vehicles for expressing who you are. If you've been to Shanghai or Beijing and walked through the streets, youth culture exists like any other place – it's very accentuated, because people kind of embrace a look. There's a Balenciaga tribe, or there's a streetwear tribe, or a hip-hop tribe. It's more embedded or defined by sartorial signifiers than it is by a deep cultural connection to music or club culture. Unless we are talking about fan culture, which is less about individuality and more about different tribes distinguishing themselves from each other – followers of one idol versus the followers of another idol. They can be very distinct and combative in how they shop and express themselves, and as a group have a collective buying power that they don't hesitate to flex.

Let's talk about one of the most impactful fashion developments of the past 15 years: the rise of Asian models on the runway at Western shows, and the presence of Asian KOLs [key opinion leaders], influencers and celebrities on the front row.
Tim: Asian models have become normalized, absorbed into this system. It's a general shift towards representation and it's obviously a good thing.
Leslie: They're just embedded now.
Tim: And there are increasingly

broader expressions of what that looks like: not just Han Chinese, Korean or Japanese; you now have more Southeast Asian faces. And yes, in terms of the KOLs, there's now a second or even third generation of influencers working with different platforms out there.

Can you remember who the first generation were? When that would have been and who it would have been?

Tim: On an international level, I remember I sat next to Tommy Ton at that pivotal Dolce & Gabbana show in Milan in 2010.[5] But in terms of influencers coming out of Asia, I mean, who are the OGs?

G-Dragon out of Seoul?

Tim: Yes, I would say G-Dragon was probably one of the earliest ones, and Fan Bingbing out of China.

Leslie: In my memory, it was influencer culture, and then brands started to bring celebrities to shows to get more exposure, and then all of a sudden, it's like – blink, and every fashion house has a K-pop ambassador.

Without sounding too cynical, there is undoubted influence but then there's the purely transactional nature of the ROI associated with these kinds of ambassadors.

Tim: There's a big question about this at the moment, because, of course, in good times it's easy to bring in exposure.

Leslie: It's one thing to bring eyeballs and a different thing to bring revenue.

You mean that brands are scrutinizing the value more?

Tim: Yes, definitely scrutinizing. It seems like they're everywhere, but from my point of view, I've observed there are maybe less…

Leslie: I have a feeling too that this season – I mean, they're still very much present, but slightly less.

Tim: The brands don't have as much budget to bring them, for one.

You were also saying to me, Tim, there was far less Asian press present in Milan this last season.

Tim: In Milan, there's a tradition of sponsorship, and that has been tightened.

What about Paris? Do you sense there is still a very robust presence in terms of Asian media?

Leslie: I mean, I only go to Paris. I should be going to Milan, but it's similar with other members of the Asian press: if you don't have the time bandwidth, you always prioritize Paris.

Turning our attention to the collections themselves: what stuck out from the Autumn/Winter 2025 shows?

Tim: There is this sense that we're on the precipice of something, that we're all waiting to see what that is – positive or negative, because I don't know if it's a given either way. But for me, the designers who stick out are those who are world-building and who have a very specific message. Just to name a few: what Pieter Mulier is doing at Alaïa, that was universally loved. You always go to Milan for Prada, and I think what Francesco [Risso] is doing at Marni is interesting, because, again, it's a world. What we saw at Miu Miu or at Marni, there was this kind of oddball, idiosyncratic, [John] Waters-esque persona through the casting – they stood out. Everyone was a character – young, old, unknown, famous, vaguely familiar – and yet they all seemed native to the alternate realities the designers had conjured up for their collections. Who else stood out? Duran [Lantink]. Aside from the obvious titillation – excuse the pun! – it's a specific language, and it was great to see him incorporate some new vocabulary this season, an element of perversity.

Is there an appetite for really expressive, outlandish clothing in mainland China?

Tim: There are certainly people who are fully living their truth in the bigger cities. If you go to Shanghai, or even Chengdu, people can be really daring; there's gender fluidity and street pageantry, using both fashion and beauty as a means of expression. There's often a discrepancy between what one reads about the level of freedom in mainland China and the lived reality of people in urban areas – which, of course, varies depending on where they are and their circumstances.

What about in Taiwan?

Leslie: We have a very laid back culture. There are not a lot of heavy dressing-up occasions, but there are people who like fashion in the sense of self expression. A lot of things I'm seeing this season are very wearable. There's a twist or there's some creativity in it, but it's still contained. You're seeing these nipple statements at Miu Miu but they still break it apart and do everyday wear with the jackets and so on. So they're giving you maybe 30% of a statement, but 60% wearability, and then 10% whimsy. So the mix is very consumer-friendly, but also much more sophisticated. I personally am very happy to see that grown-up dressing is coming back. And tailoring.

‘Interest in the West has declined. People from mainland China are now more inward-looking, focusing on figures from their own pop culture.’

Everyone in Paris was talking about the state of the market and the sense of impending doom. Asia has been driving astronomical levels of growth over a sustained period of time. Brands of all sizes have gotten used to that, and there's now an immediate sense of, 'Well, that's it. It's over. It's reached its peak. It will never perform in the same way.' What's your take on it all?

Tim: It's not just the brands in the West that relied on this upward trajectory. Chinese people also took it for granted. It's been quite jarring to the market and the industry, spurring a reluctance to spend. So, it is definitely real. We've had a number of economic challenges over the years, but I feel a greater shift this time.

Why do you think it has happened?

Tim: Globally, it's messy. We came through Covid, and then because of the real-estate crash people are not confident.[6] They don't want to spend. There's also been a shift with the younger generation aspiring to different ways of expressing themselves, looking more to experiences.

Would you say there's a luxury fatigue?

Tim: I'd say there's a consumption fatigue, to a certain extent. Obviously it's a product of this moment. There's this phenomenon of young people 'lying flat' in China, of disengaging from consumer society, rejecting the expectations of their parents in terms of them finding success.

As an act of rebellion?

Tim: It's kind of a natural development. People realize there are other things that matter. The prospects for youth today, like everywhere in the world, are not the same as the opportunities their parents had. They're looking in different directions for meaning – you know, there was a movement towards farming, or moving to rural areas. These are, of course, microtrends, but they're real and they say something about the times, about the environment.

Does that weigh heavily on the kind of work that you're doing?

Tim: As journalists, the shifts sometimes result in the most interesting stories or developments or solutions. We're asking ourselves those questions as a platform. What sort of proposition do we want to make? What is the value we're attaching to these brands, or this sort of storytelling, or how we want to approach consumption? Because we've never really been about 'Buy this, look rich, be cool.' That's never been how I've approached my job. It's more about celebrating creation and showing how fashion can be a form of expression.

‘There's this phenomenon in China of young people now 'lying flat': disengaging from consumer society and rejecting the expectations of their parents.’

Do you think the designers and the brands that have invested more time into genuinely understanding the nuance of the market will have more sustained success?

Tim: Yes, and I would say the same thing about the rest of the world. The more you know who you are, and the more specific your proposition is, the easier it is for you to find your market. Uma Wang, to give an example, just opened her first *maison*, and it's a very clear and authentic reflection of her brand – and she definitely has her customer. Not everything has to be super scalable.

Leslie: To rewind a little bit, when I'm talking to brand PRs on this trip in particular, if we're talking about the rest of Asia, it's always a little more positive. Thailand is growing at an exponential pace. People are very curious about India, the Middle East, obviously. There are other markets that they feel like are quite promising in the rest of Asia. But to speak for Taiwan in particular, there's that older generation who will stick to their Hermès and Chanel and Loro Piana, but there's really a lot of individuality with the younger group of consumers. Brands like Acne Studios and Loewe and Bottega Veneta are doing really well in Taiwan. Our economy has been stable, relatively speaking. I mean, the top of the pyramid will still spend no matter what the economy looks like, right? And then the bigger you are, the more things fluctuate with the rest of the world. But because we are small, the turbulence isn't really so heavy, so spending doesn't fluctuate as much. At the same time, spending habits are more conservative. Consumers tend to speculate, and then when they feel like, 'OK, something's about to happen, things seem a bit unstable,' it's more, 'OK, we're going to spend money on the things that we know.' The reason why Acne Studios does so well in Taipei is because it is a little more sophisticated than streetwear, but it's also easily mixed and matched, and the price point is relatively friendlier than their counterparts.

That really works for the younger generation who don't want to look the same as everyone else. Loewe really caters to those who like the sophistication of good tailoring, of craft, but don't want to be like their moms or dads or whatever. But then there's still an element of artistry and storytelling.

That brings me to the idea of craftsmanship. Is the notion of 'Made in Europe' still as coveted in Asia as it was 10 or 20 years ago?

Leslie: The craftsmanship messaging is probably much more relatable in Japan. I want to say it's relatable to some parts of China too, because of the cultural heritage. It's definitely relatable in Taiwan and in India, of course. But because I don't know how it's being perceived in the West, I'm not sure if it's similar or different, or if it's in tune with the intended messaging. I do feel there is definitely added value when there is that idea of craftsmanship attached. If you don't have an occasion to wear a couture gown, then it's just about spectacle and storytelling. OK, I get it: you're spending 5000 hours to make a skirt. That's how well you can do it. That aspect of branding remains important – even if you're not buying this couture skirt, everything else that you're buying from the brand is supposedly the same standard.

Tim: Did you go to the Loewe exhibition?[7]

Leslie: I did.

Tim: It was a very successful approach to how you show heritage, and how craftsmanship can be modern. I actually had a little preview with Nadège [Vanhee-Cybulski] before the Hermès show, and she said something that seems basic but it's very true. For her, 'heritage is today'. I think you really need to look at it that way, that it's not something from the past. It's something that you live with. It's going to take on more meaning if you're investing not just in a garment, but in a sense of self.

Lastly, Leslie, how do you want *Vogue* Taiwan to be viewed on the global stage? Do you have a particular ambition?

Leslie: A market like Taiwan is so different in scale and capacity compared to mainland China, Japan or Korea. What I can do for the market is to offer more understanding on who we are as a culture. And when I explain my title, it's not a one liner… There are so many nuances and reasons behind what each and every market does. It's like if people saw the European markets and said, 'Oh, well they're all the same', but they're definitely not! It's just so funny, I almost feel like Asia should not be a singular region. So my goal is to create more awareness and understanding of how different and diverse we are.

Do you think that nuance is lost on most people?

Leslie: There is a lot more awareness across the world. But I feel like it's still very much bundled up like, 'OK, so there's Japan and Korea, and they're a certain archetype, and then there's greater China, and they're a certain archetype. Then there's Southeast Asia, they are a certain archetype.' Not to forget that Australia is also part of Asia Pacific, you know! And India! Like, how diverse is Asia Pacific? How can you just say, 'Oh, well, the APAC region…'

Tim: Especially in times like these with the shifting geopolitical landscape. Being based in China, it has always been about establishing dialogue and creating new axes of exchange. We use the language of fashion and creativity to find common ground and foster understanding – both on a broader scale and within my own creative community.

Do you think fashion has the ability to help make those changes whilst almost hiding in plain sight?

Tim: You know, there are many topics that we can't address directly in our work, but it's a great space for us to celebrate creation and diversity; to bring in different realities and different talents. It's a privilege for us to be able to present other peoples' views on the world. It's not something that we should take for granted. It comes with a lot of responsibility.

Leslie: Asian consumers, and I'm speaking more so for Taiwan and the Southeast region, we are as curious about you in the West as you are about us. Not everything is readily available to us, perhaps because of the size of the market, but a lot of consumers will go on these online shopping platforms and do their research. They already know some parts of you before you even know that they know. We're very welcoming and we're very curious.

Ideally, how would you want that cross-cultural dialogue to manifest itself?

Leslie: In exactly that – a dialogue. Not specifically, 'Oh, you designers or brands have to spend some time in Taipei, and then you have to spend some time in Bangkok, and then you have to go to Jakarta,' not like that. But to invest more in understanding the culture and finding ways to speak to us that is not one size fits all.

Tim: It's the same discourse that's happening in the West about being part of your own storytelling. I feel that brands are starting to listen more to their regional teams about what resonates in their markets and engages them emotionally – something that was not so much the case at headquarters before. We need a more equal footing, or at least a constructive dialogue. There has been more of that recently, and when it works, it really works. When it doesn't, the repercussions are stronger, which I think motivates a lot of brands to act more carefully and responsibly.

Leslie: I mean, we can't demand genuine interest from everyone.

Tim: There are people who are going to be interested in what we're doing in our part of the world, and there are those who are not. I mean, that's completely fine, I'm happy to engage with the people who are interested in engaging with me.

Leslie: I rephrase: I don't expect anyone to be genuinely interested but when you are, it definitely adds value.

Tim: And it's wonderful when that happens, it's magic.

'It wasn't just the Western brands that relied on our market's upward trajectory. Chinese people also took it for granted. It's been jarring for the industry.'

1. According to the Tumblr of 'jeou', the polluted popsicles were 'an art project of a team of Taiwanese art students, who turned 100 dirty H20 samples into polyester resin popsicles to showcase the harmful long-term effects of pollution in the environment.'

2. Comme des Garçons' Autumn/Winter 2025 collection was titled 'Smaller is Stronger'.

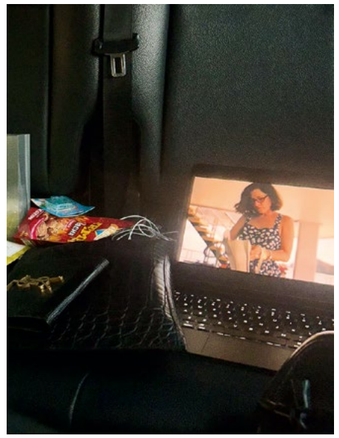
3. Tiffany Godoy is the head of editorial content for *Vogue* Japan and Rochelle Pinto holds the same title for *Vogue* India.

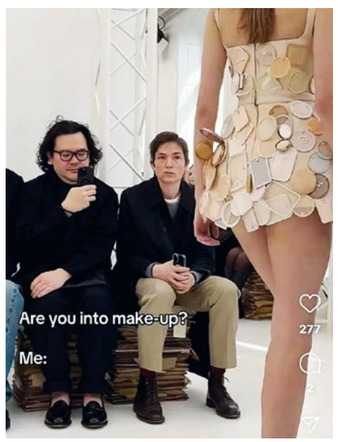
4. Martin Margiela was the creative director of womenswear at Hermès from 1997 until 2003.

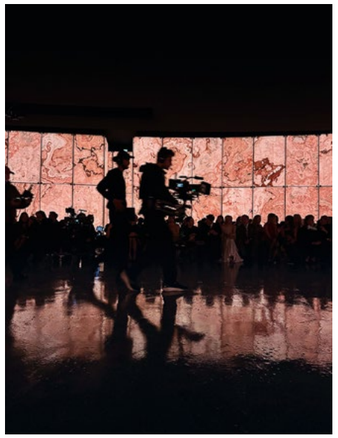
5. At the Spring/Summer 2010 Dolce & Gabbana show, Bryanboy, Tommy Ton, Garance Doré and Scott Schuman all sat front row, causing a furore in the typically hierarchical fashion press.

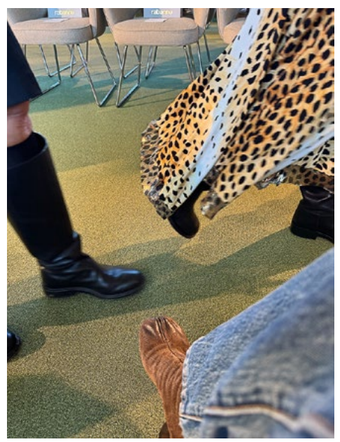
6. In 2020, there was a real-estate crash in China, ending the boom which had been spurred on by rapid urbanization and speculative markets. In this issue's conversation with Luca Solca and Imran Amed [p.186], it becomes clear that the Chinese market isn't out of the woods yet.

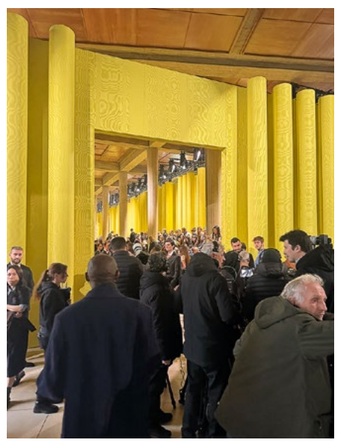
7. Jonathan Anderson's final Loewe collection, Autumn/Winter 2025, was staged as an immersive exhibition at the Hôtel de Maisons in Paris' 7th *arrondissement*. Created in collaboration with the Josef & Anni Albers Foundation, the presentation fused modernist craft with fashion, highlighting Anderson's enduring commitment to materiality and form.











Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Tim Lim.

Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Leslie Sun.

Katie Grand & Edward Buchanan

‘There was very much this feeling of ‘Are we documenting fashion here, or are we chasing celebrity?’ Then by the time the season got to Paris, it was more about, ‘Are we chasing gimmick?’ I don’t mean gimmick in a patronizing way either; I’ve been behind the scenes at enough shows to know that you can’t just do *nothing*.’

Since launching *Perfect* in 2020, Katie Grand has channelled her signature blend of spunky personality, va-va-voom styling, and unfiltered energy into the title’s ultra-glossy print magazine, raucous, celeb-fest parties, brand partnerships, a sassy and creative community… *everything*. Here, she goes head to head with *Perfect*’s Milan fashion director, Edward Buchanan – the respected designer who runs his own label Sansovino 6 and who was Bottega Veneta’s first creative director in the late 1990s[1] – to unpack the season.

Edward Buchanan: Alright, recording in progress!
Katie Grand: Recording!
Edward: OK, how are we framing the season? The first city to start with is New York. And I think the first designer to start with is Marc Jacobs, because he starts before everyone.
Katie: When we were hanging out with all the digital guys – not just the *Perfect* digital team – there was very much this feeling of ‘Are we documenting fashion here, or are we chasing celebrity?’ I think by the time the season got to Paris, it was much more about, ‘Are we chasing gimmick?’ I don’t mean gimmick in a patronizing way either; I’ve been behind the scenes at enough shows to know that you can’t just do *nothing*. I think that brings us nicely back to Marc Jacobs, because although it was *super* fashion, and it did have ‘tricks’, it didn’t really have celebrity – it wasn’t a major front-row minute.
Edward: Marc Jacobs is like the designer’s designer. Any designer, including myself, has always admired and watched Marc Jacobs for his kind of fuck-it-all attitude. He does what he wants to do. But what I thought was really intriguing about that show is that his tricks were his opinions. He based his design on what’s going on around him, as a New Yorker. He spoke about freedom, American politics, about craft. It’s funny, I’ve always considered Marc Jacobs the quintessential ‘new designer’, even though he’s been around for ages. He’s the one you go to for new ideas.
Katie: Not that Diane [Kendal] didn’t do a spectacular job, but it was lovely to see Pat [McGrath]’s make-up with Marc again. I think they just push each other’s buttons. That dummy, kind of glitter mouth, beauty spot thing was just so simple. It was one of my favourite beauty looks of the season.

‘So often, you see male designers designing for an idea that they *think* this woman should be, rather than understanding what a woman actually wants.’

Edward: That little lip. I think Alex Consani had that as well.
Katie: Well, let’s talk about Alex Consani.
Edward: You know, Alex Consani can talk about *anything*, it’s crazy. Normally when you’re talking to a model they have to prepare a response, but Alex is ready no matter what you ask her. Besides the fact that she’s a beautiful model, she’s just so clever. Also being an openly trans model who’s always protective of the space and talking about the community. Again, politically speaking, it’s not a great time for trans folks across the globe.
Katie: I think she can almost morph into a show, like she did at Hermès. I thought at Schiaparelli, it wasn’t like, ‘Here’s Alex!’ like when she walked Versace and you felt the audience lift up their phones. She’s very professional in how she presents herself on the runway. Closing Moschino was a great moment.
Edward: She was ready. That’s what she always says: ‘I’m ready.’ From designer to designer, she blends into the casting. Depending on what the ask is, she gives it. So if she’s asked to be subtle and chic, she’s giving subtle and chic. If she’s asked to be loud and exaggerated, then she gives that. Let’s talk about Calvin Klein because obviously in New York, it was one of the big returns.
Katie: Can we just say: Veronica Leoni was a female designer having a debut, which was one of only two debuts this season. Actually there was a third debut: Francesca Nicoletti, the new design director at Miu Miu, who definitely needs mentioning because she’s such a wonderful designer.
Edward: Why do you think this is such an issue?
Katie: The women are in the studios. You know, Jane Whitfield at Vuitton, she’s been there since the *very* beginning. Now over 20 years. There are so many important figures in the studios, but they never make it to number one. I don’t think it’s an easy ride from being the number one inside the studio to being the name above the door, but I wish that those who own these billion-dollar brands would take a leap of faith with some of these female creatives. You’re not getting to a ten-billion-dollar brand without taking a bet on someone to take it from one-to-two billion.
Edward: Working in a woman’s studio and designing clothing for women, it’s so important for me to have the perspective of a woman. You see so often

designers designing for an idea that they *think* this woman should be as opposed to really understanding what a woman wants. Yes, this can be subjective, but I find that in general, women's perspectives on design – and especially for women's clothing – is really missing.

Katie: You know who I really enjoyed as a bit of a surprise on Super Tuesday?[2] Véronique Leroy. It was a really beautiful show and reminded me a little of the Calvin show.

Edward: I loved it. I think the last time Véronique showed was five or six years ago. It was a nice reintroduction to her ethos: her cuts were still there, the sex appeal was still there. I thought it was really covetable.

Katie: I thought it was gorgeous. Not that it was anything like Calvin, but something in its ease was very similar.

Edward: I thought Coach was cool. It's an institutional New York brand at this point, with a big reach. But it felt like a cool New Yorker, and Stuart [Vevers] is now basically a New Yorker.

Katie: I thought what Coach nailed this season were the pieces themselves. It was very Balenciaga-esque in its format, with a lot of very wearable clothing, but it shocked while you looked at that show. It was great.

Edward: I wanted to talk about Luar and Willy Chavarria. Willy showed in Paris, but it's very interesting to see that kind of Latino energy in New York. Willy has been very consistent about that energy, and speaking about where this actually comes from. What Luar said is that this collection is about the Gallianos, the Gaultiers, the Lacroixs. That's what I love about him. You go to that Luar show, and you know it's going to be madness. He's going to have the ballroom children there. It reminds me of going to clubs in New York in the 1990s. There aren't so many designers in New York that are consistent about that kind of energy. It's a very London thing, actually. I'm sure you had a lot of those shows in that period.

Katie: We did. They were always two hours late and you waited. That Hussein [Chalayan] show where it was two hours late. It got to the point where we sat there for so long that we wondered, 'Is this the show? Is this the joke?'

Edward: So let's talk more about London this season.

Katie: I thought Dilara [Findikoglu] was fabulous. A special shout-out to Whitaker Malem for that final leather look in her show, which was a masterpiece of engineering.

Edward: People really want to associate her with McQueen and its history. I think what she's doing could be aligned with that world, but she's doing something which is really of this generation. They really want to talk about handcraft, they really want to talk about understanding the body. It's not necessarily so referential.

Katie: She's got the bite of McQueen, hasn't she? We all loved Duran [Lantink] and, you know, he's cool and it's sexy, but – this is generalizing – it's from a much more conceptual place. Dilara has that London gnarly girl vibe.

Edward: There's a grit to it.

Katie: It's great that it's a woman designing sexy clothes for women.

Edward: It is. I actually want to talk about Duran a bit. Even before the end of Paris, I made a statement that this was the show of the week. I defend that comment. I talked to him beforehand and he gave me the liner notes of what his *intention* was with this show. It blew up. And it blew up because of the male model wearing the breast top at the end, but a lot of people didn't see the first look, which was a female-identifying model wearing the chest of a 'man'. Then there was this beauty that happened in between. What Duran said to me at the beginning is that he was really concerned politically and wanted to lean into what was happening in the world. But he wanted to approach that in a very natural way. There were some beautiful clothes in that collection. Yes, there were tricks and things that went viral. But you know, when you walk out of a show and you're just like, 'Wow'. There was this uplifting energy. You saw beautiful design, it was cool, the music… In terms of an independent designer really having the platform to express what he had in his heart, that was a solid show for me.

Katie: There was no fat on that show. There was nothing in there that they could have cut. It was so precise. I wasn't actually at the show, but that Sunday was the day I thought, 'Oh, I *really* wish I'd been there in person.'

Edward: Then you go to a show like Valentino or Balenciaga, with highbrow production. The production of the Valentino show was really impressive. You walk through this bathroom, and enter into this red space, and there's the smoke, the lighting, the energy, the cutting of the music. Everything was so beautiful in terms of show production.

Katie: I loved the clothes at Valentino. There were so many beautiful things.

Edward: What's really nice about Alessandro is that Alessandro does Alessandro. I don't know what everyone is expecting from a creative that really hones and owns an idea or a style. You *want* them to continue to do that. That's what you love about them. Having moved to another fashion house, I think his starting points come from a different place, but the interpretation is Alessandro's. It's always quite confusing to me when people are expecting to have something that's really not Alessandro Michele.

Katie: If you think back to that first Gucci men's show [Autumn/Winter 2015] that he did in eight days, not only did he rip up the catwalk that was already being built, but he ripped out the studio. He needed to work in a very specific space and he wanted that first show to be specific. When you go back and look on *Vogue* Runway, you'll see that on some of the jackets, they managed to shorten one sleeve but not the other – it was done so last minute. You don't show in eight days unless you know who you are.

Edward: Taking a lot of risk, too, because it was very, very different from what anyone might have expected from Gucci at that moment. People were annoyed or even disturbed. But *nothing* in the history of fashion has come without a degree of risk. You know, Chanel took off the corset, Giorgio Armani took out the construction. Nothing in fashion that we're ever interested in comes without risk. You know, I *want* to be annoyed, rather than bored. Anyway, what else happened in Paris?

Katie: Sarah Burton's Givenchy debut. I wasn't there, but everyone seemed to have such energy around what she'd shown, I really wish I'd been there.

Edward: Me too.

Katie: Maybe it's hard for us to get really into that, because I've not seen the clothes up close, except for Gwen [Gwendoline Christie]'s outfit, which I saw some detailed photographs of. It looked stunningly well made, the fabric was gorgeous.

Edward: From what I saw online, and the bit of research I did about the collection – because I was also curious about it – I liked that she studied some of the more obvious codes of Hubert de Givenchy, like the backwards jackets. A lot of those ideas come from the archives. Here you have a really talented woman who has a history in design and an idea about design, and she has the opportunity to really express that. I think a lot of people were really excited about this collection, once again, with it being about a woman's perspective. And so, if nothing else, I'm really happy about that.

Katie: What else happened in London?

Edward: In London…

Katie: We had a party! We rolled around on the floor.

Edward: Exactly. You know, I was only there for two days, but there's a brand called Maisonartc by Artsi Ifrach, a Morocco-based designer. He didn't necessarily come from design and he's working with upcycled objects and artefacts and materials found in Morocco. But the most interesting thing about my conversation with him, which I've heard from a lot of independent designers, is he's talking about working with his hands, much less industrial. I thought that that show was fucking fierce.

Katie: That takes us nicely onto the LVMH Prize, actually, because that was a lot about upcycling. My personal favourite – because of my love of hand knit – was that guy who did Pillings [Ryota Murakami]. There was this gorgeous ecru, very heavy cashmere cable knit cardigan – my favourite thing of the season – that had these wooden hand painted angels on it. I just found it so charming; I was really blown away. Then there was Boyedoe from Ghana, who'd done all the slash denim pieces that he'd stitched together.

Edward: What about the guy who does the suits, Soshiotsuki.

Katie: Just phenomenal.

Edward: The construction on the inside of those jackets was sort of crazy.

Katie: I spoke to him for a long time that day. He was saying that when you go to vintage stores in Japan, quite often you will see a fancy Western jacket that has been shortened. So that's what he was inspired by, the re-proportioning of vintage suiting through the years. It just looked so cool and easy.

Edward: It's so very meticulous, nothing looked like it shouldn't be there. You look at it and it just seems very basic, but it was quite twisted.

Katie: And such nice colours. But while we're here, I was just thinking about Sinéad O'Dwyer – I really enjoyed seeing her as part of the LVMH Prize.

'One Hussein Chalayan show started over two hours late. It got to the point where we were sat there thinking, 'Is this the show? Is this the joke?''

'Alessandro did his first Gucci show in eight days. On some of the jackets, they'd managed to shorten one sleeve but not the other – it was so last minute.'

She's another female designer, and in a season where many of the diversity conversations from recent years seem to have fallen by the wayside, I think it's important to give a shout-out to Sinéad, as well as to Fendi, Susan Fang, Marni and Ludovic [de Saint Sernin]. I think the people that continued to show [diverse] bodies on the runway, well done to them. We had an interesting casting when we were doing Susan Fang in Milan. There just weren't any curve girls there, so we ended up street casting. I think there just wasn't the work for a lot of plus-size girls in Milan this season. The agencies just didn't have them there, or certainly not by the end of the week. That was very disappointing.

Edward: A few seasons ago, all those conversations that came up during Covid – about size, colour, gender – were doing. There was also Torishéju who is UK-based.

Katie: She's Nigerian-Brazilian, she shows in Paris once a year.

Edward: I saw the show last season and I liked her perspective. I hadn't seen all of the complex cutting in her clothes when I saw it on the runway, it somehow seemed very minimal. But I liked the complexity when I dove in. It was good to see at the LVMH exhibition.

Katie: And also Tolu Coker, who I think has a really interesting work process. It's not easy to show in that New-Gen space in London. It's a great space, but it's very difficult to make it feel warm, like it's yours. Tolu's done a really good job of that.

Edward: Again, we're talking about young, independent designers really wanting you to understand what the

'There weren't many plus-size girls in Milan this season, so we ended up street casting. There just wasn't much work for them – it's very disappointing.'

actually on the table. Maybe in a time when global politics is shifting, that even seeps down into the work we do in creative spaces… Which makes me just think, 'Fuck, here we are again.' But bravo to those brands.

Katie: I really enjoyed talking to Sinéad about her process. She really reminded me of Karoline Vitto in many ways, just looking at designing for bodies. Neither of them are like any of the designers that I've worked with in the studio.

Edward: Sinéad is major also because she had to build her forms based on those bodies. Most of the brands don't even cut up to those numbers. Same with Karoline. Oftentimes they have a hard time getting purchased by stores, because they don't think that they have valid consumers who are purchasing based on the cuts that they're craft is. She created a kind of a studio in the interior where she had her machines, and she had her craftspeople in there working. She showed you her pattern work. She showed you her design process and then on the outside of that space was the actual presentation, where she had music and you could see the clothing on mannequins or models. She's so intelligent. I really loved talking to her. I think she's one of the cleverest and well-versed creatives that I've talked to in a while.

Katie: I also liked the reality check this season, like Feben. She had someone help her out with some sponsorship for a dinner and people wore the clothes. It was nice to see the clothes being worn at an occasion. It's very London, isn't it? That thing of, 'Oh, well, I don't have the tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds to put on a show, but I'm going to turn up with something.' I think the London kids today are good at that. You know, this never happened in the 1990s, everyone just went bankrupt instead.

Edward: I'm still quite new to the editorial space and going to shows, but I always expected that level of creativity from London. At the end of the day though, in terms of institutional brands, there are not many that show in London. I don't think enough people pay attention to those smaller brands because a lot of people don't go to London, or they don't stay through to see Burberry, which ended the week.

Katie: I went back and looked at the Simone Rocha show this morning and I think she really led the way for some other shows this season. The kind of extensive use of fake fur, this belief in the ruggedness in the pieces, the toughness in the styling.

Edward: A lot of cool casting as well.

Katie: That was a great London show.

Edward: I felt the same way. The space was so beautiful. It was a very well-articulated show. And again, we have a woman's voice, a woman designer, understanding exactly who the consumer is that she's designing for.

Katie: So going to Milan. Francesco Murano, who is also nominated for the LVMH Prize, is probably also worth mentioning. And Giuseppe di Morabito, who showed in Milan for the first time.

Edward: The one with the robots.

Katie: Exactly. Francesco's only 27 and I just love what he does. There's a sass to it. He's dressing his friends. It's very sexy but really beautifully done.

Edward: He is a dressmaker. That show was held at the Fondazione Sozzani, so it was kind of small and intimate. He had a lot of control for such a young designer, because it was quite minimal. The only thing you saw were these silver balls that the models were holding.

Katie: I thought that was really clever.

Edward: It was really, really nice. They walked very slowly and looked like these really elegant statues. The maturity of that show was beyond his years as a designer.

Katie: I think he's the next Ludovic kind of designer. He's out, he's dressing his friends…

Edward: Giuseppe di Morabito is another thing. The clothes were very *maximum* design. There was a lot of ruching and metalwork and fake fur, but

'I still consider Marc Jacobs the quintessential 'new designer', even though he's been around for ages. He's the one you go to for new ideas.'

done in an Italian way. And like Luar or even Willy in New York, these designers know what the viral moments might be from the show. I think he's the Italian version of that for me. There were a lot of things happening: you walked into the space, with this robot, and we were like, 'What's going to happen here?' It was very digital. I think young designers who don't have a lot of marketing budget really have to think about what might potentially be a moment that people are going to talk about after the show. A brand like Coperni, for instance, always thinks about that. I really enjoyed the Avavav show in Milan. These Milanese kids have no money, but they always manage to come up with an idea where you're like, 'What the fuck?' Avavav had models coming out of a grave. The show opened with this hand coming out of the ground, and then it caves and the models are walking out of the grave. That was a good show for a young designer.

Katie: Silvia Fendi should have a shout out. I'm very conscious of the women!

Edward: I walked out of Fendi feeling *high*. It just reminded me of the old-school fashion show: everything is together, the Barry White music starts pumping, the models look gorgeous, it's rich, there's a carpet, there's mirrors, there's banquettes. It was sexy. It was the extravagance and beauty that you expect from Fendi.

Katie: And everyone looked stunning. They looked so beautiful.

Edward: For me, that was a major show.

Katie: It was just nice to hear that it was pretty much an all-women team. You felt there was probably champagne before the show started, you know, they were all having a really good time together. You kind of got that at Miu Miu as well with Francesca now as Head of Studio, Miuccia, Lotta. You know, it felt like women dressing women.

Edward: Which is correct! What happened at Miu Miu was interesting. Up until now, it has been more sports-oriented with the Carhartt-esque jackets and the hoods. It became very Miuccia again, no? They walked out with that bag, and there was lingerie… it became very Italian *sciura*[3] which is very Miuccia Prada. It felt pro-woman in its design, and that's the Miuccia I love.

Katie: Yeah, me too. I don't know what was going on behind the scenes at Gucci, but it certainly looked like Suzanne Koller wrangled that collection together so beautifully. I thought there were pieces in there that looked very Suzanne. The whole Gucci crew did a really nice job and it was such a beautiful presentation. Then actually segwaying into Chanel, which I thought was also a really great team effort without a designer there. Not taking away from any of the shows at Gucci or Chanel that have had great designers behind them, but both teams did well.

Edward: I always think you get a gauge of the temperature when you walk into a space, and the Gucci space felt sexy, in an almost Tom Ford way.

Katie: That shade of green.

Edward: There was this body with the jacquard logo that went around the middle of it. I think it was one of the last looks out. It was like a send-off; really, truly charged.

Katie: Which takes us nicely to the Tom Ford show. As a presentation, that room was so lovely, and the fact that they were serving martinis and that it was dark and felt louche. It was very decadent. It felt very Tom.

Edward: Did you have a martini?

Katie: I had one and a half! Susannah Frankel had three and was smashed. In its staging, it felt very much like an old Helmut Lang show, even though it was nothing like that, just in the way that the models kept coming out. Edie [Campbell] and Kristen [McMenamy] and all those ice white blondes with the bleached eyebrows and the red lips. They completely nailed the look.

Edward: I wasn't at the show, but you could feel Tom Ford in terms of the brand alignment. Did you feel Tom Ford in the clothes?

Katie: It had a simplicity that was very

Tom. He always used to say, 'Get the hair and the shoe right, and everything else in between just falls in place.' When you go back and look at that red leather coat, maybe with snakeskin, or the green satin suit, they're quite simple pieces, but very nicely done.

Edward: I'll be interested to see how that goes. It's interesting how the natural hand of Haider is a bit more romantic than what I remember from Tom's and it's interesting how those can bridge. Haider is not Tom Ford, and he shouldn't be, he's designing for the Tom Ford brand.

Katie: I really enjoyed the Chloé show, talking of female designers. It was really pretty. And a shout out to Isabel Marant too!

Edward: At Chloé, I liked the fact that she hit all those textbook codes that we think of when we think of the Chloé woman. Without even a tag on it, you just know that it's Chloé.

Katie: I think a lot of the shows that people seemed to enjoy this season were those that respected the codes of the brand. Gucci, Fendi, Dior.

Edward: OK, so we have some additional questions here. Do runway trends still matter?

Katie: No. I was never that kind of stylist or editor. I mean, I would always say if look 25 is not available, look 24 is fine. I'm not gonna kill myself if my short-skirt story has a long skirt in it! That's not how my brain works.

Edward: Yeah, I don't think so either. When you're moved or inspired by something, then you just kind of go with it. Considering you have been going to shows for so many years, Katie Grand…

Katie: I'm not *amazing* at going to shows!

Edward: How many do you physically attend? How important is it these days for you to be in the room?

Katie: I think the livestreams these days are so good. However, I think you can only ever really feel stuff if you're in the room, which contradicts the fact that I don't go to that many things.

Edward: But you did it for so many years.

Katie: I just got into being behind the scenes. I think *you* have such a passion and such a tolerance for the relentlessness of it. And, you know, so do Sid [Rounthwaite – *Perfect* staffer] and Bryan [Yambao – *Perfect* editor-in-chief]. It's not that I'm cynical about it, I just get a bit anxious about it all.

Edward: Going to shows now, it becomes increasingly difficult because of what happens out front. All the photographers and all the crowds of people. It's not just industry.

Katie: The security is unnecessary.

Edward: There were so many this season, and they're not just holding you out, they're putting hands on you. And the celebrity element. Chappell Roan and Doechii were at so many shows and they were all dressed specifically for each show. I often wonder: is this celebrity seeding actually a disservice to the brand? Maybe it helps online, but does it really help on the sales floor? I don't know.

Katie: There was that article recently on the Business of Fashion about the social reach from the Milan shows and I thought it was really interesting that Moschino was number two but didn't really have that many celebrities. There were a few tricks – the spaghetti bag, or Alex Consani with the bin bag which are very Moschino codes – but I thought it was really interesting that it had a lot of social reach without, you know, Chappell or Madonna.

Edward: I think it had a lot to do with the joy that happened in that show. In the same way I walked out of that Dsquared2 show like, 'Wow!' It was so fucking fun. That show just felt so good, it felt so joyous.

Katie: What's interesting is that Doechii had been offered a bunch of stuff in Milan, but she wanted to appear in the Dsquared2 show. She's a superfan of the brand and she wanted to perform. I was happy for them in that someone who's so hot in terms of youth culture right now, was like, 'Yeah, that's what I want to do.' And JT did it, too. They felt like the right hot talent to be in the room that night.

Edward: It doesn't always work out to be that honest. I sometimes question if the return is strong when working with a celebrity or influencer. Sometimes you go to shows and they're just people dressed for the sake of dressing. The next question they want to know is, what is *Perfect's* approach to covering the fashion month shows, how has this evolved since you launched in 2020?

Katie: We're obviously very tight, aren't we? We're all on a group chat from 7am, and I think we're all pretty flexible in our approach. You do need a lot of stamina to get through these shows and have joy for it every day. It does start at 7am and finishes at midnight. Sometimes you think you've got the formula for the season down, don't you? You're like, 'Oh God, everything's about celebrity and everything's about the front row.' But then you get days like Sunday and it's just non-stop numbers all day – that's Duran, Valentino and Balenciaga.

Edward: The beauty in doing this job is building relationships. I'm not saying this just because he's probably there listening, but I love working with Sid.

Katie: He's here, he's not listening.

Edward: He's a fucking disaster, but I love it! That makes things easier. I guess if you find yourself navigating these spaces with people that you don't enjoy being around, then it would probably make it that much worse.

Katie: I think it's just great having someone who's 22 on the team, because they are seeing it for the first time. There's no cynicism.

Edward: What do you think is the influence of the fashion critic in 2025 and do you have any favourites?

Katie: Lyas. Lyas. Lyas. Lyas and Lyas.

Edward: And why is that?

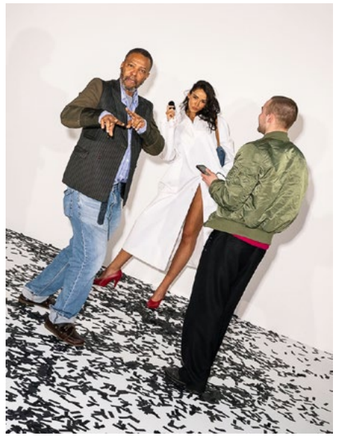
Katie: He's young, he's not been doing it for that long. He's the same age as the models, he can go backstage and slots in really well. His post at the end of the Saint Laurent show where he'd got them all as statues – he'd managed to get a room full of fashion people, fashion people that had no energy left, and they performed for him. And I was like, good for you.

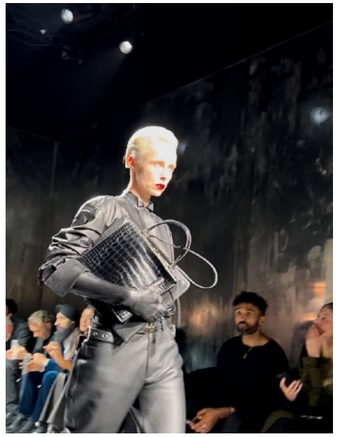
'I think a lot of the shows that people seemed to enjoy this season were those that respected the codes of the brand – Chloé, Gucci, Fendi, Dior…'

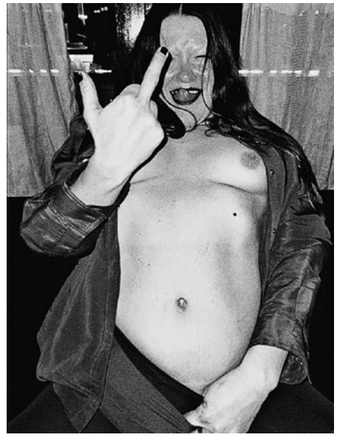
1. Back in 1996, Edward was fresh out of fashion school and got asked to create the fashion line at Bottega Veneta. 'At this time, [the brand] was solely about the Intrecciato bags and not so cool; we thought it was something for old ladies,' he told *Vogue*. Until 2000, he acted as their design director and around the time of his departure, the company was bought by the Gucci Group [now Kering].

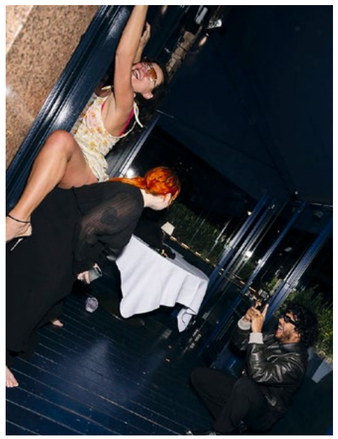
2. A peak day on the Paris Fashion Week schedule. On Tuesday 11 March 2025 Chanel, RUIbuilt, Kiko Kostadinov, Agnès b., Miu Miu, Véronique Leroy, Xuly Bët, Burc Akyol, Ujoh, and Saint Laurent showed.

3. A *sciura* is an elderly lady from the city centre of Milan, who is essentially rich, elegantly dressed and often easily recognizable by her 'careless attitude'.









Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Katie Grand.

Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Edward Buchanan.

Imran Amed & Luca Solca

‘In a world where nationalism rises and globalization unwinds, luxury fashion, as a symbol of cross-border aspiration, could face its greatest test in decades.’

Interview by Jonathan Wingfield

Since 2007, Imran Amed has transformed his blog, The Business of Fashion, into a ubiquitous industry resource and global media business – along the way becoming one of fashion’s most trusted and influential voices. A regular BoF contributor, Luca Solca is also one of the most respected equity analysts in the luxury goods sector, and since 2019, has been Senior Analyst of global luxury goods at Bernstein, based in Geneva. In the following conversation with the pair, Imran and Luca bring a sharp, analytical and data-driven lens to this season’s shows and the industry’s many shifts. They unpack what the numbers reveal, what the mood suggests, and how fashion is positioning itself for what comes next, all in the shadow of looming trade policy changes with potentially far-reaching consequences.

‘Customers in the US and Europe are now trading off their spending on luxury goods with other things: travel, dining, health and wellness…’

Jonathan Wingfield: Since the three of us last spoke together, the global landscape has shifted dramatically. Back in 2023, Bernard Arnault was the world’s richest man, China’s luxury boom was peaking, and America felt relatively stable. What current world events or economic shifts are having the biggest impact on fashion right now?

Luca Solca: One of the most important factors has been the fall of the real estate market in China. This has caused a huge dent in Chinese consumer confidence and kept consumers on the back foot, as they’ve all felt poorer. They saved a lot of money – and they’re still saving, not committing to discretionary spending as enthusiastically as they have in the past, and definitely not showing the same drive to enjoy life that people in Europe or the US have shown coming out of the pandemic. I think this has been, by far, the most important factor.

Did the housing crash in China feel inevitable to you, or did it come as more of a surprise, making the knock-on effects just as unexpected?

Luca: The affordability was very stretched, so it was a surprise to an extent. The writing was on the wall that, at some stage, the market would have to correct. We’ve seen crises like this in other countries as well: in smaller economies like Spain, and in larger ones like Japan. I believed that at one point, push was going to come to shove – and so it did. So, not a big surprise, but clearly a major factor that luxury goods brands have had to adjust to nonetheless. They’ve tried, I think, several ways to address this issue, for example, by becoming far more relevant to rich consumers. I think in the past five years there’s been significant development of this consumer cohort. And by focusing on the US as a growth market – previously kept on the back burner and treated as a second priority – this shift now seems to be working to a large extent, albeit with 2024’s industry growth feeling somewhat like an atonement for the exceptional growth of previous years.

Given your role at Business of Fashion, Imran, which is all about decoding markets and offering real insight to the industry, how are you reading the situation?

Imran Amed: On the China phenomenon, the one thing I would add to what Luca has said is that a big part of the issue is that something like 80% of the wealth in China is tied to real estate. So when you have a real estate crash – or correction – imagine if any of us had 80% of our net wealth locked up in property and suddenly saw its value drop pretty precipitously. That would obviously impact our overall sense of confidence. The degree to which this has affected the Chinese consumer is really interesting. Alongside that, as Luca alluded to, Chinese customers are still saving money. Because they don’t have confidence in the value of their real estate portfolios, they’re not spending as much. So what’s happening now is the savings rate is growing – which means that, at some point, there may be an opportunity down the road to unlock some of that value.

Luca: The only thing is once Chinese consumers digest the new value of their property, and if property prices were to find support, there’s a lot of money they’ve kept on the sidelines that they could go out and spend. So I wouldn’t write off the Chinese consumer cohort with a medium-term view. That said, this recovery is probably going to be U-shaped.

Imran: They’re going to spend again, but what are they going to spend on? That brings me to my next point. I think what we’ve seen in the industry around the world, after what you might call the ‘pandemic gorging’ of luxury goods – when there were no other options but to spend on luxury products – is a shift. Customers in other parts of the world, in the United States and Europe, are now trading off their spending on luxury goods with other things: travel, dining, health and wellness, and other

experiences. I think this is the longer-term force the industry has to grapple with. There was a short period after Covid when everyone was consuming like crazy – that was an aberration. A temporary spike. But many luxury brands began planning and operating as if that surge would continue. They made decisions that are now coming back to bite them – most notably, raising prices. So when customers are now making those trade-offs and looking at a €10,000 bag that used to cost half of that, there's real pressure. The value proposition just doesn't add up. And when you combine that with the fact that those €10,000 products are being made in the hundreds of thousands – or even millions – there's a lack of differentiation. People are wondering: 'Why would I spend so much on something everyone else has?' This has forced brands to focus more closely on delivering something different, especially for the particularly important 2-5% of luxury customers who drive 30-40% of industry revenues. There's a lot that happened during the post-pandemic surge that the industry is now being forced to reckon with.

You mentioned a shift towards more experiential spending, but could there be a broader sense of luxury fatigue – one that might mean demand doesn't return as voraciously as before?

Imran: I think there is fatigue. I would go so far as to call it, in some cases, a rejection of the luxury model. For some customers it just doesn't make sense anymore. The combination of pricing, mass-produced luxury goods, and questions around ethics and supply chains is a lot to contend with. Then you have the extraordinary margins some of these brands are earning on potentially less-than-ethical manufacturing practices – some of which were exposed in the Italian investigation last year.[1] There are a lot of factors at play, and I think in some cases customers are saying: 'I just don't buy this anymore.' It goes deeper than fatigue – it's a rejection of the model altogether.

Luca: I'm not sure I would fully agree here. I think there's definitely a lot of homework that luxury goods companies need to do. In the post-Covid boom they were so busy making money and trying to satisfy demand that they focused on raising prices to balance supply and demand – but they forgot to update and upgrade their styles. They let gross margins explode. That definitely can't go on. We've already seen the best brands start tackling these issues. Just look at the Vuitton windows – now, magically, the bags on display are all between €2,000 and €3,000, which is where they should be. At the same time, we've seen a huge amount of musical chairs when it comes to creative directors. People want newness. If they're paying these prices, they want to be excited. They want to feel like they don't already own the product, that they haven't seen it before – and that they desire it. I think this musical-chairs game will only continue. We've already seen a significant number of creative directors being excused and a significant number being appointed. Coming from deep inside the industry and with a lot of sophisticated knowledge about the model, I'm not sure we should necessarily project our own understanding of the market onto the broader consumer audience. Consumers still like and embrace luxury goods. I have been invited to a debate on whether the luxury-goods crisis is structural, and one of the points I'm making in arguing that it's cyclical is this: the first luxury item ever found – discovered in a cave in Essaouira, Morocco – was a shell necklace dating back 140,000 years. Things can change, of course, but there is a deep-rooted human appreciation for products that enhance appearance, signal status, and offer a sense of identity. I don't believe that will ever fully go away.

Imran: Where Luca and I are aligned is in the idea that the industry's new focus has to be on creativity and innovation, and that's been sorely lacking in recent years. Not only have product ranges stagnated in many cases, but the way brands engage with customers and communicate about luxury has become formulaic. One of the reasons I'm so excited about the coming months in fashion is because I keep thinking ahead to Spring/Summer 2026 fashion week, when we'll see so many new creative debuts – whether it's Matthieu Blazy at Chanel, Demna at Gucci, possible changes at Dior, or new designers at Jil Sander, Versace and numerous others. It seems that brands are finally coming around to the fact that they need to inject fresh creative energy into these houses to reignite customer excitement. What I'm not convinced about is the industry's current approach to pricing, or its handling of ethical questions and structural practices over the past five to 10 years. I think those areas need more than surface-level changes. We may be approaching a genuine inflection point and for anyone like Luca or myself, whose job revolves around analyzing all of this, it's going to be a very interesting time.

Luca: I agree with you on that point, too. Pricing needs to be corrected. Part of that involves projecting higher value on the products being sold – whether that's through using better materials, offering more functionality, or giving consumers more perceived utility. For example, Vuitton's reversible Neverfull bag gives people the impression they're getting two bags in one. But there's also a huge amount of work to be done in introducing new entry-price products. Prices have gone to heaven and they can't stay there if you want to serve people who live on Earth. Dior's new bags are a step in the right direction. Meanwhile, jewellery has become more attractive in terms of value for money, because prices didn't rise as sharply – so it feels more accessible today. I wonder whether soft-luxury brands will eventually wake up and adjust their multiples back to where they need to be[2]. I think eight to 12 times was rich enough. And I also agree with Imran that after a lot of lip service around craftsmanship, ethics, and sustainability, far more needs to be done in terms of upstream manufacturing integration.[3] If brands want their marketing narratives to actually be believable, they certainly need to live up to them operationally. And so I think this is the shape of things to come in the short-to-mid-term.

Do you think brands need to meaningfully rethink how they operate? Not necessarily from an ethical standpoint, but from a purely operational one.

Luca: You know, these companies are run by human beings and if you don't give people incentives to change, they won't. If you're making as much money as you like, and business is as good as it's ever been, then you probably won't change very much. I think adjusting to a more normal environment is prompting a lot of soul-searching and is bringing these companies back in line. This is absolutely appropriate and I couldn't agree more with Imran: the post-pandemic boom was fuelled by the sense that we were all just happy to have survived. We wanted to enjoy life and spending money was no longer a problem. Everyone had the mindset of 'let's enjoy it while it lasts – nobody wants to be the richest person in the graveyard.' But that euphoria has been dying down. People are getting back into the swing of things. They're no longer fearing that they'll die tomorrow, and as a consequence, they've returned to a more normal level of discretionary spending. That shift demands a lot more effort from companies – not just in luxury, but across industries. I read recently that in New York some people have gone on a restaurant 'strike' because prices had gone up so much and the quality didn't match. There was a bit of widespread overexcitement, and now that needs to be reined in. People need to come back to planet Earth.

Imran: Operationally, what that means is that we're now talking about a game – an industry where people are fighting for market share. They can't just ride the wave of widespread industry growth anymore, where a rising tide lifts all boats. The tide is still right now, which means that to grow, you need to do something different. You need to find ways to take market share from existing players. There are definitely examples of brands doing just that. Growing steadily, and in some cases, astronomically, despite the sluggish environment. Look at Hermès, Loro Piana, Brunello Cucinelli – brands offering something that still resonates deeply with customers. Or Miu Miu, which is growing 80-90% year-on-year, even in a sector with very slow overall growth. That kind of performance would be impressive in a booming market, so seeing it now tells you something. It shows that customers are still being drawn to certain kinds of brands for specific reasons. I was speaking with a luxury department store executive late last year about the quiet luxury phenomenon and whether it's here to stay. He broke it down nicely: in the men's market, quiet luxury is still booming. Men tend to buy in multiples – once they find something they like, they'll buy it again and again, in different colours or styles. But in the women's market, quiet luxury is on the decline. There's a return to maximalism, to expression. Women are once again looking for something different, something more interesting. And this is where all the creative innovation we talked about earlier really comes into play. Some brands are succeeding operationally, but it's because they're winning market share from their competitors.

'The combination of pricing, mass-produced luxury goods, and questions around ethics and supply chains is a lot for the industry to contend with.'

'In some cases, customers are saying: 'I just don't buy this anymore.' It goes deeper than luxury fatigue – it's a rejection of the model altogether.'

For large-scale luxury fashion brands, what happens when you're posting results that are down by 20%? How do you weather that storm? One option is to go after market share – but from an operational, logistical, and financial perspective, do you sense that brands are being forced to make deeper cuts?
Imran: Absolutely. There are brands out there significantly cutting their store footprint. I think Gucci is one of the brands in China that's paring back. Someone told me that something like 50 Gucci stores in China are going to be closed. You can also see it in how brands are adjusting their budgets for discretionary spending. Fashion shows are getting smaller. Yes, for intimacy, but also because they cost less to stage. Over the past few months we've seen a number of brands combine their men's and women's shows – realizing that their earlier decision to separate them may not have been the right strategic move. A unified perspective allows them to cut costs more effectively. I think a lot of what we're seeing right now is a reflection of that. Brands are actively looking for ways to streamline and save.
Luca: Totally. You have to take into account that a lot of the costs in this industry are fixed. The cost of goods sold – the variable element – is relatively small. So when sales decline by as much as 20%, you really need to cut the fixed part of your cost base, which means rental costs and your own organization. And when it comes to discretionary spending, you have to tone that down as well. We've seen major events shrink and I suspect we'll see a lot of 'intimacy', as Imran said, being used as a rationale to bring costs back in line. But if you look at a brand like Gucci, it has still been somewhat protected at the bottom line. Operating profit margins have dropped – from the high 30s down to the low 20s – and unfortunately, that's the operating leverage of this industry kicking into reverse.

On one hand, we've seen a cooling of the Chinese market. On the other, President Trump's government seems to be turning its back on Europe. Do you think that shift affects the psyche of the American consumer when it comes to luxury fashion? And does it, in some way, undermine the strength of the 'Made in Europe' brand?
Luca: There's a risk of nationalism, which I think is the most important risk here – more than tariffs. Not only in America but in China as well, and in other parts of the world, nationalism could rise to a level where anything that comes from abroad, anything that is foreign, becomes bad by definition. Hopefully we're not going to go there, because the moment we go there, we could potentially be in the antechamber of war. But the risk is definitely there and it is quite clear that luxury is a global industry that has thrived on the back of markets opening up, on the back of globalization, and on the back of more countries participating in the global economy, benefiting by increasing their GDP and creating audiences for luxury goods. So I think it's the nationalist element that's the most potentially dangerous. Import tariffs, even if they were at the 25% that President Trump has mentioned, need to be considered in the context that luxury-goods companies would be selling to their own American companies at transfer price, and transfer price would, in most cases, be wholesale. Wholesale is 40 cents to the dollar, so even a 25% additional import duty would mean another 10 cents, which could potentially be offset by increasing retail prices by 10%. Not ideal, for sure, but not the end of the world either. So, import duties are less of a concern than what a nationalist escalation could potentially bring.
Imran: I think along with that escalation, my one observation in having seen the dynamics around this emerging trade war over the last few weeks has been that sometimes things move irrationally. Just the other day, in response to the EU responding to American tariffs on steel, President Trump said he was going to put the tariffs on European spirits and champagne to 200%. You're getting to this point where people are using these tariffs as bargaining chips as part of a very complex negotiating strategy, but it can get out of hand. Notwithstanding some of the kind of caveats that Luca has rightfully put forward, I just worry that we're entering this period where things are going to become irrational. And when you try negotiating with irrational people, you often don't get a good outcome. As a Canadian, I've been watching everything that's been happening. Canadians are not the most patriotic bunch of people. I've never seen a strong nationalistic surge in Canada since Quebec tried to separate from Canada in 1995. It's the only time I've seen Canadians waving flags and, around the

'I don't think Gucci can afford a complete overhaul and I don't think Kering can afford to commit huge investments before we see a turnaround.'

country, professing their love for our country – which we're all very proud of but we're very quiet about. But now my mom is sending me text messages about not buying anything American, not wanting to travel to America – you really see this surge has happened across the country. I think there is this sense of pride. So we're going to really have to monitor how this all develops.

Imran, you've just returned from the Autumn/Winter 2025 fashion shows, would you say this uncertainty has been felt on the runway this season? Did you sense much direct response to world affairs or industry turbulence?
Imran: Obviously, there were two important debuts this season – not at brands of the same scale or note as Gucci, Chanel, or Dior, but at Givenchy, an under-loved, neglected brand within the LVMH portfolio, and at Tom Ford, which is a big beauty business with a small fashion arm. Both of those debuts had such creative and emotional resonance for those of us who attend 40 to 100 fashion shows in a season. It genuinely brought my love for fashion back. So many shows I've been going to lately feel like designers are churning out the same heavily merchandised collections, focused on copycat luxury products that aren't distinctive. But when you see designers like Haider Ackermann and Sarah Burton – two very talented designers – bring real thinking, emotion, and consideration into what brands like Givenchy and Tom Ford can stand for in the context we're all operating in now, there was *absolutely* a sense that the catwalks were responding. If that kind of effort, thoughtfulness, emotion, and love is put into the collections we see over the rest of the year, I think the industry could see a real surge of creative excitement.

In our 2023 interview, Imran, you said: 'I think a brand's creative strategy is a function of its business strategy.' Would you say the current business strategy is one of survival, cost-cutting, or regrowth? And how might that translate into creative direction?
Imran: I think it goes back to the point I raised earlier about market share. When you're trying to win market share, you have to find a basis for competition – and I think many brands will be competing on creativity and innovation. Some of those brands are doing that while continuing to grow. Others are trying to execute a turnaround. Some, like Hermès, are focused on maintaining steady growth. Not every brand is going to approach the fight for market share in the same way. I think one general rule is this: there will be a renewed focus on creativity, design, innovation, and quality. These are the factors that influence how a customer evaluates the value ratio between price and product. They'll be asking: 'How unique is the design? How well is it made? How available is it to others?' Essentially, 'How special is the product I'm being asked to buy *vis-à-vis* the price I'm being asked to pay?' And where that ratio makes sense to people, they'll buy. Where it doesn't, they won't.

Luca, Kering's cash cow, Gucci, has been operating at a particularly significant loss. How much of an existential crisis does this represent to the entire Kering group?
Luca: It's difficult to understate how big this problem is for Kering. Gucci has to come back and it has to come back sooner rather than later – especially at a juncture where Kering is committed to very significant M&A [mergers and acquisitions] with the acquisition of Creed, the acquisition of Valentino, and also very significant real estate investments. And also at a time when the smaller brands like Saint Laurent and Bottega Veneta probably need to go back to the drawing board. There was this idea that they would need to produce operating profit margins in the 30s, but in order to get to that level with their relatively small size they had to cut a lot of corners. And in today's market, you cannot cut corners. You need to execute properly when it comes to the quality of your flagships, the quality of your products, and the amount of money you commit to your communication and marketing budgets. This is a fight for attention, and in communication what counts is the sheer amount of money you bring – so you cannot be saving on that. This is a very important turning point for Kering, which is why there was so much attention on the new creative director appointment at Gucci, and why I think the market today is expressing some disappointment about the name that has been brought forward.[4] Also because, to some extent, Kering's share price had started to rise on the back of hopes that the appointment would be more convincing and that the change might open up an opportunity for Gucci

'Gucci has been relevant to consumers in the past 25 years when it was over-the-top. Demna could provide this twist and disruptive element.'

to improve. Markets react very quickly to good news. Look at what's happened to Burberry's share price since September last year: a new CEO came on board, a new strategy was announced, it made sense, new communication was brought to market, which also sounded convincing. The share price has doubled on the back of the promise that this is all going to work. Here, the promise doesn't seem particularly convincing, and the share price is down today because I think the market in general is thinking: maybe this is not a good fit. The Business of Fashion was carrying out a survey on Instagram and I think the outcome of that survey – whether Demna is the right creative director for Gucci or not – at least in the minds of the 9,000 people who responded, seems to be very clear.

him without having to deal with pesky non-compete clauses that might slow their progress. So even though he's working on a couture show for Balenciaga in July, he can still be developing his plans for Gucci. Hopefully that means they can bring something to market soon. And when you consider all of these factors, I think the real test for Kering – and I agree with Luca that this is something of an existential choice – is whether Demna can move his aesthetic and design sensibility beyond what he's become known for at Vetements and Balenciaga. That, for me, is the fundamental question here. And having spent time with Demna over the last 10 or 12 years, since he first burst onto the scene, I truly believe he's a designer with real ability. He's one of *the* most thoughtful, most talented, and most provocative designers we have in our industry. We're lucky to have him. So the question is: can he deliver the goods? Can he change Gucci, and can he change himself? That's what this all rests on.

and I don't think Kering can afford to commit huge investments before we see a turnaround. If things play out in the right direction, there must be a way to re-energize consumer interest in Gucci without committing too much capital at this stage, because capital is short. I agree with Imran: even before we look at the stores, we need to consider what kind of new aesthetic Demna is going to bring, and whether that will have the power to add a twist to Gucci. I think what was missing under Sabato was precisely that twist. Gucci has been relevant to consumers in the past 25 years when it was over-the-top, in one way or the other. Even if this is once again an abrupt move in terms of how and where Gucci needs to go, Demna is someone who could potentially provide this twist and disruptive element.

'Look at Miu Miu today: incredibly successful, right in the sweet spot, but because of that visibility, they risk tiring the market in a year or two.'

Imran: It's interesting – I've written an editor's letter which will go out tomorrow morning that addresses this very topic.[5] I talk about the market plunge; I talk about the survey on Instagram. But having reflected a little more on the decision to appoint Demna, I understand where Kering is going. There are so few designers in the industry who are available, who have the proven ability to transform a brand, who have name recognition in the industry, and who have the calibre of experience that Demna has – from Margiela, to Louis Vuitton, where he worked alongside Marc Jacobs *and* Nicolas Ghesquière, to launching a startup like Vetements that disrupted the industry, and transforming Balenciaga into a multi-billion-euro brand. The fact that Demna is already inside the group means they could take

In parallel to Demna's creative input do you think there'll be a need for significant investment – both from Kering and from Gucci – to allow what could be quite a radical new vision to fully take shape and succeed? Not just in terms of communication, but in a deeper, more structural way. Would stores need to be redesigned, refitted, along with all the other costs that come with this kind of creative reboot?

Luca: I think that at this particular juncture, they will have to be very pragmatic and very practical. I don't think Gucci can afford a complete overhaul

He definitely did so in spades at Balenciaga and what he was doing back then resonated enormously with the market. His approach was to use irony and a sort of iconoclastic approach – think about the Ikea bags, or the garbage handbag he launched. It reminded me, to some extent, of Moschino and the irony within that brand. He also used a lot of streetwear. I don't know if either of those two approaches would be relevant for Gucci today. Gucci is very big and I don't think that being visible through something iconoclastic is necessarily the right recipe to make Gucci relevant again. And my impression is that streetwear is yesterday's story, so he will need to invent something new. That is why creative directors have such an important role in our industry and why they're paid so much. At the end

of the day, this is the challenge ahead. Then, once the heat comes back, we can talk about everything else. We can talk about making the stores nicer, communication, whatever, but first the heat has to return to the brand and the organic decline has to be stemmed if Gucci is to have a chance to play in the top tier.

Let's turn our attention to the other group, LVMH, for a moment. I read a Bloomberg article on BoF last month in which the writer explored the possibility of Louis Vuitton splitting and becoming a separate entity from LVMH, to increase the overall market value. Tell me more about that.

Imran: I think it's less about separating Louis Vuitton from LVMH, and more about refining the overall portfolio and removing some of the underperforming

Arnault. Some people are suggesting that Guiony's appointment could indicate an eventual plan to take that division out of the business altogether, especially given the structural shifts happening in the alcohol sector where many people – especially younger consumers – are drinking less. So, while I don't think we'll see Louis Vuitton removed from the LVMH group, I do think it's possible that some other parts of the business might be spun off or divested in a more strategic, opportunistic way, particularly if they're weighing down margins. I think the markets would reward that but I'm not the market expert, that's Luca. I'm curious, Luca, what your take is on the potential for structural change within the group?

Luca: Indeed, we were, as Imran pointed out, writing about the opportunity

completely different logic. It's entirely wholesale driven, focused on maintaining product consistency rather than newness. What they aim to do is maintain the taste of the champagne and the cognac year on year, blending as necessary to ensure consistency, while innovation is primarily in packaging. It's a very different setup. When it comes to communication, it's the heart and soul of Fashion & Leather Goods, whereas, in many markets, advertising is prohibited for spirits. Again, very different logics, no synergies, and not even a clear advantage from diversification. Maybe fifteen years ago, there was this idea that both Wines & Spirits and Fashion & Leather Goods would contribute similarly to the group's profits. But today Fashion & Leather Goods is very big, while Wines & Spirits is com-

'Brands are finally coming around to the fact that they need to inject fresh creative energy into these houses to reignite customer excitement.'

businesses that are dragging down margins for the core LVMH group. I'd be surprised if Mr. Arnault – at least while he's still in charge of the brand, possibly until the age of 85 – would take Louis Vuitton out, spin it off, and separate it from the group. I very much doubt that would be a good strategy. However, there are underperforming parts of the group, particularly in the selective retailing category – like DFS, the duty-free stores, which have traditionally been built around the travelling Chinese tourist customer. That segment is struggling, as we all know, with far less travel happening than before. I'll also be very curious to see what happens with the Wine & Spirits division at LVMH, which is now run by former CFO Jean-Jacques Guiony and Mr. Arnault's third eldest child, Alexandre

LVMH has to spin off the Wines & Spirits business, in the same way Richemont spun off its tobacco assets in 2008. The idea would be to place those assets into a special-purpose vehicle that's publicly traded. You put the Moët Hennessy assets into it and then distribute the shares to LVMH shareholders proportionally, based on their ownership of LVMH. This way, if shareholders like, they can keep the shares in their portfolio; I presume the Arnault family would do so. But I also presume many other investors would choose not to, potentially selling their shares, allowing controlling shareholders to gain an even bigger stake and to potentially split that business between themselves down the road. The advantage of this approach is that Wines & Spirits is not only underperforming, but also operates under a

paratively small, so this diversification no longer exists. Additionally, the presence of spirits prevents many investors, particularly those in the Middle East or in the ESG [Environmental, Social, and Governance] camp, from buying shares. So, where is the advantage? I agree with Imran. What triggered this discussion, and the reason why we wanted to be upfront about this logic, is the appointment of Jean-Jacques Guiony as head of this business. His capability as an M&A architect and CFO is unquestioned. So I wonder if, perhaps with a slightly better consumer demand environment, this could become a priority. As far as the rest is concerned, I agree that potentially selling DFS, which has been clocking significant losses, would be a very good idea, while investing to consolidate that triangular force of Fashion &

Leather Goods, Fragrances & Beauty, and Selective Retail – in particular, Sephora – which acts as an accelerator for Dior Parfums, Givenchy, and any future beauty brands LVMH might consider acquiring.

Chanel doesn't necessarily need to grow at the same rate as the LVMH fashion brands because it is not a public company. Tod's Group has delisted the company from the Milan Stock Exchange with help from L Catterton. To the layperson reading this, what are the pros and cons today of a luxury fashion business trading publicly or remaining a private enterprise?

Luca: I don't think it's the fact that you're public that forces you to grow. I think it's the fact that this is a fixed-cost industry that forces you to grow if small, you're dead. At best, if you're truly differentiated, you can be a high-quality niche player, like Cucinelli or perhaps Moncler. But if you're mainstream, it's difficult – as Ferragamo illustrates – to stand out and justify your place in the market. That primarily stems from a huge, escalating scale disadvantage. So that's my two cents. Even the biggest players, like Chanel, simply cannot afford to scale back to 15 or 10 billion euros, thinking 'we're good, we're a private company, we don't care.' No, you won't be able to compete if you're not in the same league.

Imran: Scale really matters for all the reasons Luca mentions. However, when you're privately run, you can operate your company differently, which I think is the important benefit to highlight. So, if you're Chanel and the Wertheimer family, you certainly want to grow your business and make money for all the reasons Luca mentioned, but you can take a much longer-term view. I know many CEOs – like former CEOs of Burberry, and Diego Della Valle of Tod's Group – are frustrated by how quarterly market reports impact their decision-making. Without analysts like Luca reviewing your performance quarterly, you can make decisions with a medium- or long-term mindset rather than a short-term one. Diego Della Valle, I'm pretty sure, delisted the company and partnered with L Catterton to adopt a longer-term perspective because he felt they'd better understand his business. But even L Catterton will definitely want that business to grow – they'll expect a return, too. That's the only thing I'd really add.

We've touched on Chanel, Hermès, Vuitton, Dior, and Gucci – the kings of the industry. Do you think a mid-sized or smaller brand could ever catch up and operate at that scale? Or have these giant houses now separated themselves to such a degree that they're effectively playing a different game – almost operating in a different industry entirely – compared to brands like Bottega, Loewe, or Celine?

Luca: That's a very good question. There's no evidence of it. We wrote a black book about the challenger's dilemma. At one point, Kering seemed able to challenge the leaders by growing faster, but this growth brought greater visibility and significantly higher risks, such as consumer fatigue or needing to cut corners to maintain momentum. At the peak of Gucci's boom, Monsieur Pinault indeed spoke of Gucci potentially catching up to Vuitton – we remember all that distinctly. It's very difficult because the industry's nature demands exclusivity, or perceived exclusivity. Think about Miu Miu today: *incredibly* successful, right in the sweet spot, but precisely because of that visibility, they risk quickly tiring the market in a year or two. We've seen this repeatedly. Smaller brands strike gold – think Phoebe Philo's Céline, among others – but eventually succumb to their own success. They become too visible, and consumers move elsewhere. They tend to be a flash in the pan or hit a glass ceiling, today around two or three billion euros, which is extremely challenging to break through.

Imran: I think it's very tough, honestly. Once you have scale, you have built-in advantages. Trying to achieve scale when dominant players control the best retail locations, lock in prime advertising placements, buy in bulk, and work with top talent creates huge barriers. The scale that big brands have established makes it very difficult for newer players to compete. I look at smaller, disruptive businesses like Jacquemus, which quickly grew into a €250-300 million business but then hit a ceiling and needed additional capital to continue growing. Brands consistently face ceilings at different points – €10 million, €50 million, €250 million, €1 billion, even €10 billion, as we see with Gucci. Continuing to scale a fashion brand is extremely challenging and very few businesses have proven able to do it. I've talked with people at Vuitton about how big their business could become,

'For an industry already navigating inflation, shifting consumer habits, and disrupted supply chains, the tariffs introduce yet another layer of uncertainty.'

'Nationalism could rise to a level where anything foreign becomes bad by definition. If we go there, we could potentially be in the antechamber of war.'

and perhaps there's a ceiling where further growth would only make the brand too available, too visible, too ubiquitous – and thus less desirable.

Luca, when you mentioned LVMH's Wine & Spirits sector earlier, you rightly pointed out that younger generations relate to alcohol – and the allure of champagne and spirits brands – very differently than previous ones. Do you think that same generational shift could apply to luxury fashion?

Luca: We carried out an in-depth study of how Gen Z consumers use their spare time, how they're behaving, and how they're feeling. It was interesting to see that these younger consumers spend significantly less time with their peers and don't have, proportionally, the same social experiences as people did 20 or 30 years ago – like going out, being part of a community, joining a political party, or having a boyfriend or girlfriend. Across the board, those numbers were lower. Interestingly, there was also a very fragile sense of identity, and responses to the question 'Are you satisfied with yourself?' scored significantly lower than in the past. To some extent, the level of exposure that social media brings is corrosive to that sense of identity. In this respect, I think luxury brands could actually become even more relevant today because, by my definition, they function as a kind of identity crutch. You can look better because you own a certain brand's product and that helps support your sense of self – who you are and how you're perceived within your community. I think this has made the aspiration to luxury broader and more universal than ever. So, in that respect, I'm actually a bit more relaxed. When it comes to affordability, we need to consider several converging factors that help explain how people continue to buy luxury goods despite price inflation. People are marrying later, which allows them to piggyback on their parents for board and lodging longer, giving them more freedom to spend their income on discretionary products and services. There's also been significant 'de-averaging' in the economy through discount alternatives – think budget airlines, Walmart, or anything that helps people save money. Then there's the rise of the sharing economy: capital expenditures like buying a car are no longer top priorities for younger consumers. Finally, there's a substantial inheritance effect, with younger generations set to receive wealth at a time when, in most countries, populations are declining, further concentrating wealth. Taking all of those factors into account, I feel quite confident that the foundation for luxury to grow and remain relevant is still very much there.

Last question to you, Imran. It's one you ask industry figures you interview, so I wanted to turn it back on you. What does success look like for a luxury fashion brand in the current climate?

Imran: I was having this debate with the CEO of a brand at a dinner we hosted the other night with McKinsey regarding our State of Fashion 2025 report. For me, it's about alignment and clarity around strategy. Previously, you referenced a comment I made during our 2023 conversation about how creative strategy is a function of business strategy; I think the reverse is also true – business strategy is a function of creative strategy. Where brands work best is when there's impeccable alignment between the creative leadership and business leadership. I've seen this yo-yo a lot over my time in fashion. When I first arrived in this industry back in 2007 and met creative and business people, I sensed that the creative people tended to look down their noses at the business side, believing commercial aspects should always be downstream from creative decisions. Recently, though, the pendulum has swung the other way – the business side is increasingly dictating fundamental creative decisions. Decisions are made based on what's happening in the market, what retailers are asking for, or what seems to

be working at other brands. For example, you'll hear, 'This brand has a bag of this shape that's doing really well because I heard it from department-store executives, so we need to have a bag of the same shape.' This has led to everything looking the same. What I think it takes to be truly successful in this current climate is having that lockstep alignment, clarity, and synergy between the creative and business sides of fashion. Strategy needs to come from both sides sitting together and asking, 'How do we create something genuinely special?' In the rare cases where there's this alignment between a CEO and a creative director, it's pretty magical. Right now, though, when you talk to creative directors in the industry, that's not how they feel. They feel like decisions and creativity are dictated to them rather than discussed collaboratively. Earlier, we were talking about all those exciting debuts, but for them to work, they'll require a strong synergy between creative and business leadership at the brands making these changes.

Postscript: A rapidly shifting global trade landscape

Since this conversation was recorded in mid-March, the global context for fashion has shifted significantly. On April 2nd, US President Donald Trump announced a sweeping set of new tariffs aimed at reducing America's trade deficit. And then on the 9th, they were paused for 90 days. The move has triggered a sharp escalation in global trade tensions, with retaliatory responses from China already in place and similar measures being considered by the EU. For an industry deeply reliant on cross-border production and international sourcing, these developments are more than policy adjustments – they signal a potential upheaval in the operating model of global fashion. With this in mind, *System* invited Imran and Luca back to share their initial reactions on what these changes might mean for the months and years ahead.

Imran: President Trump's April 2nd 'Liberation Day' announcement marked a turning point for fashion's global supply chain. No one expected the tariffs targeted at fashion to be quite as high or as sweeping. Virtually every fashion item sold in the US will be subject to additional duties, hitting an industry that already imports more than 98% of its clothing and 99% of its shoes. As it currently stands, goods from Vietnam will be taxed at 46%, Cambodia at 49%, Bangladesh at 37%, and China at an additional 34% on top of already high existing duties. This has rattled companies across the spectrum – from independents to multinationals – and fuelled growing fears of a broader trade war, especially as China and the EU prepare their own retaliatory measures. For an industry already navigating inflation, shifting consumer habits, and disrupted supply chains, this introduces yet another layer of uncertainty. The next few months will require not just agility, but enterprise-wide resilience.

Luca: At first, many believed these announcements were posturing – a negotiating tactic. But the reality is now settling in: this is not just a US-China decoupling. This is a US-global decoupling. We're currently seeing new average import tariffs of 23%, and a policy trajectory that seems internally contradictory – aiming to repatriate jobs while simultaneously raising taxes on consumption. These moves are unlikely to deliver either outcome effectively. What they are doing is eroding investor confidence, spooking markets, and pushing the global economy toward recession. Luxury is resilient, but not invincible. If stagflation sets in, discretionary spending will suffer. Our FY25 growth forecast has already dropped from +5% to -2%. In a world where nationalism rises and globalization unwinds, luxury – as a symbol of cross-border aspiration – could face its greatest test in decades.

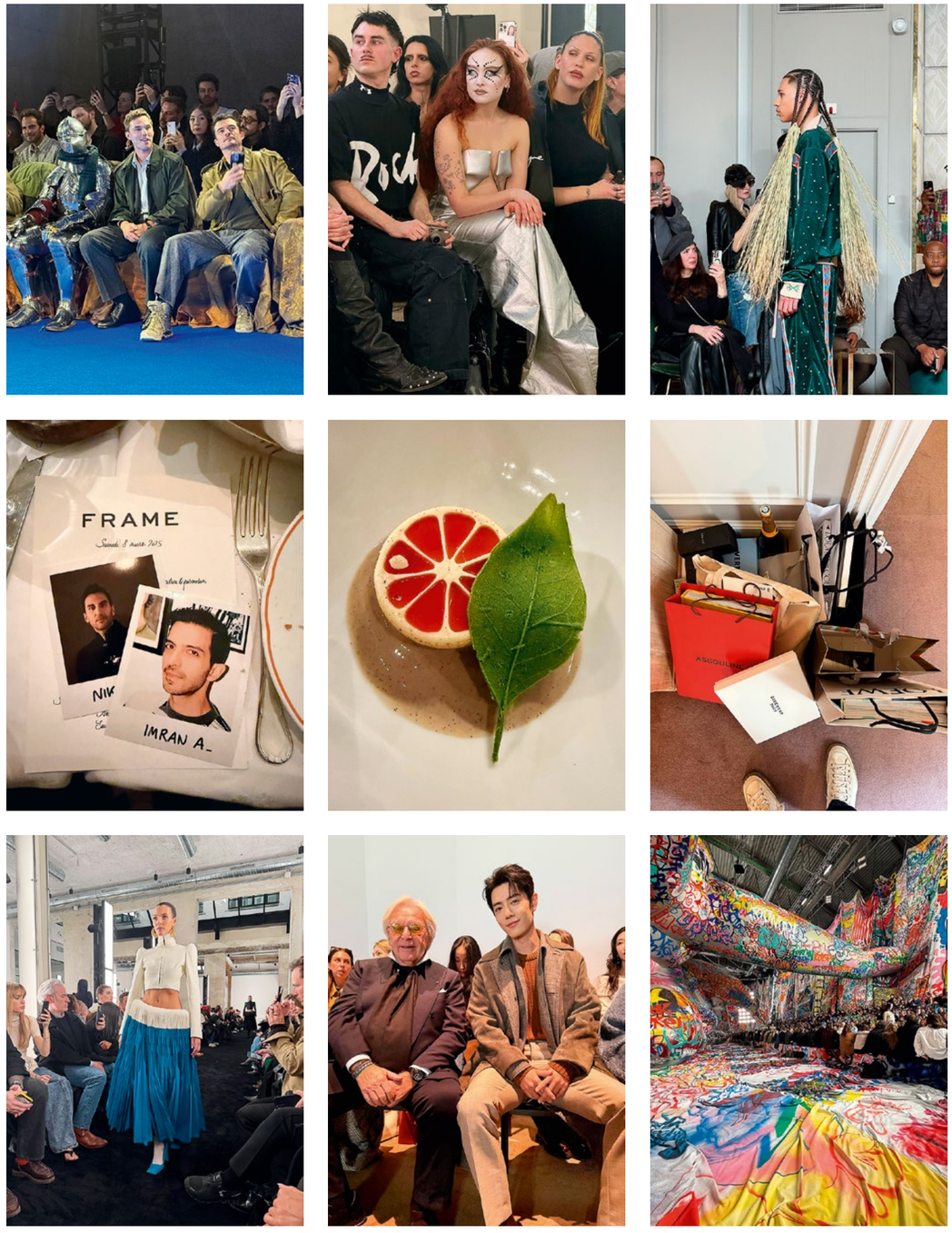
1. An investigation in 2024 into Armani and Dior's supply chains revealed that the companies subcontracted work to firms that extensively performed exploitative work practises. Both companies initially blamed it on a glitch in an 'otherwise robust system of control.'

2. 'Multiples' refers to how much a company is valued relative to its earnings – usually measured as a multiple of EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization). For example, a brand valued at 10× EBITDA means it's worth 10 times its yearly profit before those costs are deducted. Higher multiples often reflect investor confidence or market hype, while more conservative multiples suggest a focus on realistic long-term growth.

3. Optimization of the production process to improve the quality of the final product.

4. Demna was appointed as the new creative director of Gucci in March 2025. His first collection is expected to be unveiled in Milan in September 2025.

5. The newsletter referred to reads: 'Kering shares plunged by 12 percent on Friday morning after digesting the announcement. Of the more than 9,000 people who replied to BoF's Instagram poll linked to the breaking news on Thursday, only 10 percent of you believe that Demna is the right pick for Gucci to reassert its fashion authority. Sixty-seven percent of you think that Demna is not right, and another 23 percent are not sure, preferring to 'wait and see.''



Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Imran Amed.

HauteLeMode & I Deserve Couture

‘In a way, fashion week is a necessary evil.’

Interview by Marta Represa

From digital outsiders to front-row fixtures, Hanan Besovic (I Deserve Couture) and Luke Meagher (HauteLeMode) have built influential platforms that approach fashion from distinct angles – Hanan with his community-driven, emotionally honest commentary, and Luke with sharp, performative critique rooted in cultural analysis. As brands increasingly seek their approval, both remain committed to unfiltered opinion and fashion-first discourse. Here, they reflect on access, burnout, and the responsibility that comes with being watched.

Marta Represa: What is your relationship with fashion week like these days? Is it important for you to be present?
Luke Meagher: I always do New York, Milan and Paris. I did London once and realized four fashion weeks back to back is too much for me. In a way, fashion week is a necessary evil. It’s important to see most of the collections first-hand to have a full understanding of them. That said, I have taken a bit of a backseat this season and I’m not as obsessed as I once was with being at every single thing. It’s tiring and it’s hard to simultaneously do the job of sitting down and figuring out proper storylines, narratives and edits for my videos.
Hanan Besovic: We started outside the fashion ‘club’ and we kind of made our way in, so it’s great to be part of the room, especially because it’s the only way to really feel the show; to have direct access to the designer without having to wait around for show notes. But it does get tiring to run from show to show on your own. After all, me and Luke don’t get any help with organization and don’t have a car waiting for us at every venue’s exit.

What felt truly memorable and new this season?
Hanan: I think Tom Ford. I didn’t see it first-hand but it blew my mind. Chloé, as well. Chloé’s shows are some of my favourites to attend because I always feel like I’m seeing the growth and evolution of the Chloé woman. Other than that, Vivienne Westwood was a very pleasant surprise, and [Roberto] Cavalli was really good. Overall it was a good season.
Luke: I don’t think it was the most wow fashion week, but there were some good elements. There’s something I find more interesting than shows themselves…

‘I think it would be pretty unfair for us to be upset over someone having an opinion about our opinion. You know, no one forced us to do this.’

Hanan: The front row?
Luke: Yeah, but no. As much as I care about the celebrities, it’s the clients who’ve been catching my eye the most. At the end of the day, they are the true reflection of the brand. There were so many of them at Valentino, and I really enjoyed sitting in that sweltering room for 35 minutes because they were there – really embodying Alessandro’s vision with that vintage, maximalist look, with the sequins and the feathers. Same thing with Prada and Chloé.
Hanan: They wear clothes in a more organic way. With an influencer or a celebrity, you can always tell they went in for a fitting and have a stylist. With clients, it’s just true love for the designer’s aesthetics.
Luke: That’s also why I think it’s important to pay attention to those more commercial 45-50 looks in every collection: that’s the heart of what the clients will go for.

Which young or emerging designers caught your eye this season?
Luke: I went to Hodakova for the first time, and I enjoyed that weird cello dress bodysuit. It was funny and freaky.
Hanan: Not enough people are talking about Matières Fécales. To me they are the best out of the up-and-coming designers. You can see how much they love fashion, and that they 100% stand behind their designs, wear their own clothes and get all the weird and admiring looks because of it. That show was great; very McQueen-inspired. The other one people are going to mention is Duran Lantink. It’s good to see emerging designers getting traction.
Luke: Maybe it’s because I didn’t go to a lot of emerging designer shows, which was bad of me, but I don’t think there are so many of them. Even New York felt a bit scant in terms of young brands. Of course there are a lot of them who can’t afford to plan out a whole show every single season.
Hanan: That’s the thing really, it’s so tough, and the industry is not accommodating. When it comes to New York, I think emerging designers should all be grouped in one spot, so that people can see them all at once. Same with London: if they are all in the same space, even people who don’t want to see them will end up seeing them.
Luke: As it is, a lot of designers are unsure what to do. My advice? Don’t prioritize the show! Build your business, the hype of fashion week doesn’t

pay the bills. You don't have to have a show just because the fashion industry says so, because, no offense, but most of the time people just yap; it's just talk. I barely understand the struggles of being a young designer, but I do understand having a business, and if something doesn't benefit me as a business, I simply won't do it. Plus, think about it: if the biggest brands get lost in the noise of fashion week, you just don't stand a chance, unless you do something big and gimmicky, and that gets tiring after a few seasons.

How do you approach commentary in order to stand out?

Luke: I'm a very numbers-oriented person, so if I do a review and it doesn't have 100,000 views, I will beat myself up over it. But I understand in this day and age it's not as much about numbers as it is about the general vibe of a media brand. Brands care about whether or not they're getting press that is reflective of what they're trying to do, even if it's bad. And I think it's important to keep the spirit of fashion criticism alive.

Hanan: For me it's more about finding something interesting to talk about that my audience will appreciate, but I'm also very keen on sharing my opinion, good or bad… even if brands would prefer it if it's always good. It's how I create but also how I consume media: I follow more fashion commentators and less influencers, because I'm more attracted to an opinion than to mere aesthetics.

Which commentators do you follow?

Luke: I'm a Rachel Tashjian stan.

Hanan: You do love a Prophet Pizza!

Luke: Because that woman writes! She writes about the clothing!

Hanan: If I had a dollar for every time you mention Rachel, I swear to God.

Luke: Listen, you know me. I don't say willy-nilly 'Wow, this person's good.'

Hanan: You're right.

Luke: She's funny, and her criticism is culturally relevant; it tells us about society today. Just think of her recent piece about the Rowdents in *The Washington Post* [in it, Tashjian talks about brands emulating The Row's quiet-luxury aesthetic]. Other than her, I have to say I never read anyone's work until after I put out my review of a show, but then I will sometimes check Cathy Horyn just to be sure that we're aligned.

Hanan: I'm always curious to see what Alex Fury has to say. And Angelo Flaccavento. I like his takes because they are often the opposite to mine, but always so interesting. And Vanessa [Friedman]! I'm very much like you, though: I will give my opinion first, then contrast it. But I do like to back it up.

How do you feel about the public nature of your job?

Hanan: I think it would be pretty unfair for us to be upset over someone having an opinion about our opinion. My platform is opinion-based, and that goes for everyone. I like the fact that it's a place where we can all debate in a respectful manner. Plus, no one made us do this.

Luke: It is what it is. People can put out the kindest content in the world and someone will say something awful in the comments; but hey, if you can't take the heat, then get out of the kitchen. I know I can come across as not the nicest person online and I've said some horrible things that I'm sure people want to smack me across the mouth for. And you know what? I understand. People are allowed to have an opinion on me and what I do.

Hanan: We say things that can rub people the wrong way, but it's never out of malice. It's just an opinion on someone's work. We're talking about fabric, not being mean to people…

Luke: Well, I can be mean. But a lot of the time, within fashion, people are not free to publicly express themselves. I sometimes have people come to me saying, 'Oh my God, you're my intrusive thoughts; these are the things I would like to say but I'm not allowed to.'

Hanan: People will come to you at the end of a show and give you their honest opinion, and then that opinion will have nothing to do with the one they share on social media. I remember the day after the Dior show. I had kind of read it to filth on a video, and somebody came up to me and said, 'You are Leonardo and that video was your Mona Lisa.'

You mentioned the solo aspect of your work earlier. What are the pros and cons of not belonging to an organization?

Luke: The greatest thing is not having to answer to anybody. I mean brands can take issue with my work, but if they do, what can I say? Un-invite me; I still have access to the show's photos, and I will use them in the ways I see fit. At the end of the day, it's better if you allow me to the venue because that way I can at least have a 360° view of what you're trying to get at. Even so, no one is going to yell at me for falling out of favour with a brand. The con is that for the first five years of HauteLeMode, every door slammed in my face. And I mean every one of them. It was very dismissive. Then Covid hit and everyone was forced to go online, and things started to change. But that journey – not having the prestige of an organization – was difficult.

Hanan: What brands don't get is that they're not achieving anything by not inviting us to the show… We're still going to see the show. We're still going to form an opinion about it.

Luke: My reaction now is also to go like, 'Oh, you don't think I'm important enough to be there? That's OK, I just won't cover it.' I don't have to cover anything and everything. It saves me work.

Hanan: I don't like the way people won't value your opinion at some point, but then when they need you – and it's generally because they are in deep waters – they suddenly do value your work. When things are not good for them, they reach out.

How does your work stay unfiltered as brands take more of an interest in you?

Luke: That's a great question, because I've been struggling with that for the past two seasons, as I've been given the kind of access I didn't have before. I have to remind myself that a career is a marathon, not a sprint. That way I stay focused on what matters. You have to be OK with being banned or blacklisted by brands. But there is also a financial reality: I'm paying to go to Milan and Paris, so it's important to me to make as much money as I'm shelling out.

Hanan: A return on investment is the bare minimum.

Luke: Yeah. And I'm not staying at the Ritz or anything. I'd be lying if I said I'm not grappling with it right now. But, at the end of the day, my deference is to my audience. If they think I'm throwing them to the side, that's not great for my career. You don't just use and abuse the people who put you where you're at.

Hanan: Oh, absolutely. The people who follow our accounts don't get enough acknowledgement, but they are the reason we get to do this. In fact, my primary concern is answering messages, building a community, meeting up in different cities… I don't just want to be a face behind a screen, I want a conversation. When it comes to brands, generally the ones working with me are the ones that understand what I'm about. Recently someone came to me with a proposal, and when I said there were parts of the brand's campaign I didn't like and I planned to talk about it, they were very receptive. There has to be an understanding coming from both sides to make things work.

Coming back to this latest fashion week, what was the conversation everyone was having?

Luke: The main one? Gucci. People were very receptive to the idea of a studio collection, then the Demna news broke and upended everything. The other one was the return of Silvia Venturini Fendi. I mean, the Silvia era was always fantastic.

Hanan: In Paris it was all about Duran Lantink's breastplate. It really marked the week. But the most-asked question was: 'What did you think of Sarah Burton at Givenchy?' I actually really liked it. I mean, she's not going to give us all her greatest hits in a debut collection; she's easing into it. She has been doing this since 1997, had one of the best mentors fashion could offer and did a great job continuing his legacy. And we need more women at the helm of brands! This anti-women movement in fashion really irritates me.

Luke: The lack of women designers makes no sense, because the girls are doing it! I mean, The Row's vision?

Hanan: And on top of it, there is an understanding. I love Daniel Rosebery but he can't know how a woman feels in a skirt. Most male designers have an ideal 'woman' that's all about aesthetics but not comfort and functionality.

Luke: I don't believe in that conversation around women and functionality, though. I mean, look at Rei Kawakubo and Comme Des Garçons. People were leaving her latest show moved to tears, and it was all about fashion as sculpture, not about functionality.

Hanan: True.

What were your thoughts about the Loewe exhibition?

Luke: It was beautiful, haunting, sad… We all knew he was in the process of moving on. Was I sad that it wasn't a show? Yes, but at the same time it was great to see pieces up close.

Hanan: It was, in my opinion, one of the best if not the best collection of the season. I do think there should have been a farewell show, especially after he ushered the brand into a golden age. Talk about a tough act to follow!

'My advice for young designers unsure what to do? Don't prioritize the show! Build your business! The hype of fashion week doesn't pay the bills.'

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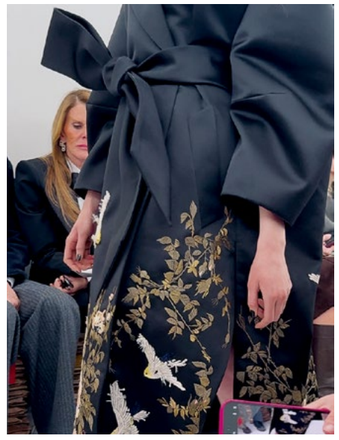
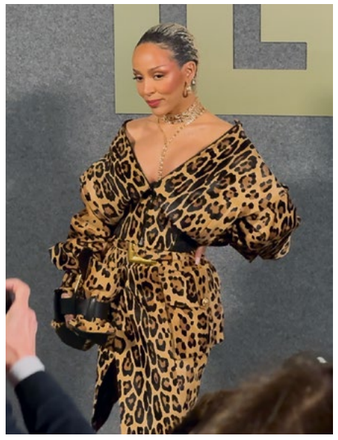
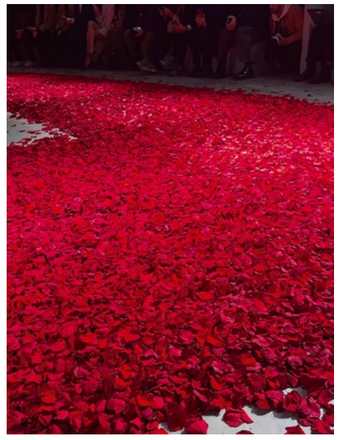
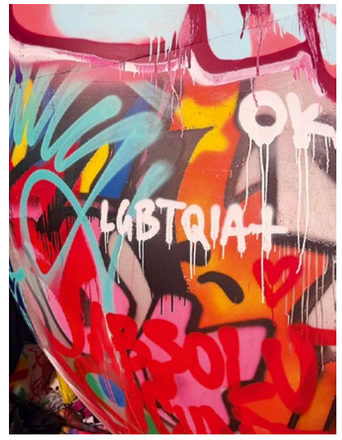
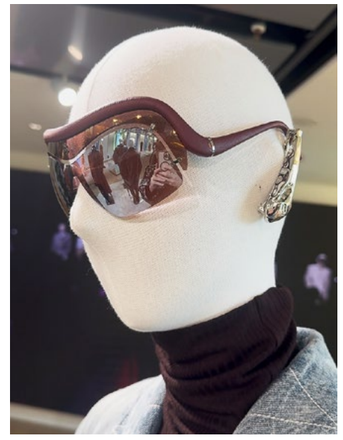






Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by HauteLeMode.





Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by I Deserve Couture.

Charles Levai & Kevin Tekinel

‘For better or for worse, the decision at Coperni was to make noise, as much as you can, and not necessarily rely on the clothes, but on something that’s bigger – spectacle. Putting the spray dress on Bella obviously made a big difference. It added a certain value, for sure. But it wasn’t intended to become viral. We just hoped it would work and that the thing wouldn’t fall apart mid-show.’

Interview by Thomas Lenthal

Charles Levai and Kevin Tekinel, co-founders of Paris-based creative agency Maybe, have rapidly become two of the most sought after creative directors working across both traditional and new fashion media. Since founding Maybe in 2019, they’ve crafted some of the industry’s most internet-breaking shows (think *that* spray-on dress at Coperni) and campaigns (Versace, Hermès, Louis Vuitton, Jacquemus, Miu Miu, Gucci…) while along the way working as, firstly, creative directors of *L’Uomo Vogue* and, since 2023, as *W* magazine’s creative directors at-large. Thomas Lenthal, *System*’s own creative director, sat down with the pair to get their read on the Autumn/Winter 2025 shows and the ever-shifting role of the art director within the sprawling fashion ecosystem.

Thomas Lenthal: Do you still attend shows in Milan?
Charles Levai: We used to do Milan when we were doing the Versace shows.
Kevin Tekinel: We haven’t done it in a while though.
But you *seriously* do Paris, right?
Charles: We do it seriously to the extent that we work hardcore on three shows during Paris Fashion Week – The Row, Coperni and Hermès – and then we just have three days at the end when we can go to other shows. We just go to the ones that we really like.

Traditionally, art directors weren’t really involved in designing, conceptualizing and putting together shows. And there are still very few art directors involved in shows, which is strange because it makes complete sense. How did you guys start doing this, and why do you think the brands came to you?
Kevin: It was because of Covid because, remember, there were these shows that were not live, so you had to sort of pre-shoot them. It became almost like a full day of shooting, like a campaign to some extent. The brands soon realized that this was different from what show producers were used to doing, because it was a full-on shoot where you could cut things, plan things a bit better and edit them in post-production. I guess Versace was one of the first brands who reached out to us.
Charles: We were working with them on some campaigns in the middle of Covid. So they planned to do this big show with a big set, but then turned it a bit more into a fashion film, with models walking down the runway.

‘Before being interested in fashion imagery or photography in general, we do what we do because we’re interested in fashion, in the actual clothes.’

Was this the one with the huge maze…
Charles: Yes, the big gold maze [Versace Autumn/Winter 2021].
Was it done in post [production]?
Kevin: No, no. It was a real structure with three floors, in a warehouse. I think they had the idea already to build this thing – but then when they started building it, they were like, ‘Wait, how are we going to film this? Do we need a director doing it?’ So then they got in touch with us. It was a week before! That was quite fun, and we enjoyed it. It was a different experience. It wasn’t so good for the models though, because they had a full day of working instead of walking a 15-minute show.

And it was that that led to The Row calling you? [Laughs]
Kevin: The Olsens saw it and said right away, ‘Of course, we want exactly that!’ [Laughs] Joking aside, it did lead to other clients. With Coperni though, our involvement was a bit more intimate because we’re friends with the designers, so we would help with the shows because there was very little budget. Everyone was calling their friends. It was just this hodgepodge of everyone getting together to try to achieve something.
Charles: We started to work with The Row when they began to show in Paris [Autumn/Winter 2022]. It was kind of like a direct contact with the designers, it was very easy, we were always discussing the format and so on. It was quite fun. And it’s quite interesting to do it with The Row because it’s a brand with a smaller scale that allows them to do something a bit more out of the box.
Kevin: They knew they wanted to photograph the runway in a specific way that wasn’t the classic way of doing it. There were no outside photographers ever permitted, so from the beginning there was this desire to…

Keep it private?
Kevin: Exactly, and involve a point of view in how it’s captured. I think when you have a desire to have a directional point of view in how you photograph a show, you don’t want to call the usual suspects – you need a photographer that’s more of a fashion or art photographer, not just a runway photographer. Then that may mean getting art directors involved as well. So that’s how it happened, I think.[1]
Charles: When you think about the image of a brand, it’s very much about

control – about what you want to release and how you want to present things. So it kind of makes sense to also say, 'No outside photographers, no runway photographers,' and just come up with a concept and a way of picturing it that's exactly the way the brand wants to be perceived.

And then Coperni is of course more than that…

Charles: They relaunched as Coperni after they left Courrèges, in 2019.

So you've done about 12 seasons?

Kevin: The first two seasons there were no shows. So we did a photoshoot with Julien Martinez [Leclerc] – it was a sort of launch campaign. That was how the brand really came out.

I think some of that stuff was quite memorable – obviously the drive-in.[2]

and how to use it, how to show it.

Kevin: Putting it on Bella obviously made a big difference. It added a certain value, for sure. But it wasn't intended to become viral. We didn't even think it would necessarily go viral. We just hoped it would work and that the thing wouldn't fall apart mid-show!

That would have gone viral as well!

Kevin: [Laughs] Yes, maybe. But it was more about their desire to do something outside of the box.

Now it's expected that each season they come up with something quite…

Kevin: Spectacular. But I think there are going to be some changes, potentially, with that too.

Charles: Because everything is always changing. This industry changes so fast.

Kevin: Everything was wearable, but the way it was put together…

Charles: …with this idea of a character.

Kevin: And the casting. And yes, the set was super simple, but even the fabric that was chosen was very precise. I think it all comes together with the music and the casting, and the pacing. Miu Miu was impressive and gave you that feeling. Sometimes you go to a show, and you don't necessarily think about what you're going to expect, and you leave feeling different from when you came in. Because it gives you a rush, and you're impressed. In our case, sometimes it makes you excited for the future, and makes you believe there are still exciting things to be done within fashion. Because a lot of the time, we feel like we've seen or done it all.

Charles: I think the confetti at the

'Sometimes going to a show makes you believe there are still exciting things to be done in fashion. But a lot of the time, we feel like we've seen it all.'

Charles: For them, it's more about being a young brand – with the reduced budget that comes with that – and just trying to find ways to be noticeable and get reach.

Kevin: Obviously that's a decision that was made with the designers and people involved. But I think, for better or for worse, the decision was to make noise, as much as you can, and not necessarily just rely on the clothes, but on something that's bigger maybe than the clothes – spectacle.

Charles: But the end goal was not always to simply become viral or whatever. Because, for example, the Bella show with the spray dress was based on this technology that Sébastien [Meyer, Coperni co-founder], who's a bit of a geek, had found and was really into.[3] And then we just discussed the format

Everything is always a question of context. And I guess it's nice to…

Kevin: Evolve.

Charles: And switch things.

From an art director's perspective, what were the most visually compelling moments of this recent fashion month – whether you were attending shows or not? I assume you're looking at the shows no matter what, online.

Charles: Before being interested in fashion imagery or photography in general, we do what we do because we're interested in fashion, in the clothes. So I guess the impact of a show is always linked to the clothes. The new Miu Miu show was really great. In a way, the set was quite minimal, and the clothes you see on the runway are just clothes you can see in a store.

Courrèges show was quite striking visually and quite beautiful. We can never go to Courrèges shows because they're always an hour before The Row. But this one felt quite uplifting and beautiful in terms of the set and the moment.

So Miu Miu and Courrèges would be your two stand-outs for the season?

Kevin: I'm sure there's other ones. You went to the Saint Laurent show, Charles?

Charles: Yes, it was a nice show. I was touching the stone [set wall] to see if it was real stone or if it was something else. It was actually real sheets of marble or alabaster or whatever.

It was onyx.

Kevin: It just always seems – from an outside point of view – that everything

is so well thought out. The music, the lighting… even how the people in the front row are dressed. Across the board, it's just seamless.

Do you sense that the current socio-political and economic uncertainty came across in the shows or campaigns this season? How did that compute with fashion? Did you see something that felt like a mirror of the times?

Kevin: Going into the season, I thought there were two general things people were talking about. Obviously, this idea of an economic slowdown…

Charles: …and then the question of war, which wasn't noticeable to me, necessarily, in the shows. Or at least, I didn't notice anything that directly echoed that. But I know that some brands and people that we work with were concerned about some things in the clothes or in a show, to make sure it couldn't create a link with what's happening in the world right now, especially the war.

Kevin: I think everyone's much more sensitive – for whatever reason, whether right or wrong – about doing the right thing, having the right message. That's always in people's heads when they're putting on a show. There are these uplifting messages that some designers wanted to inject, looking at things from the brighter side, but I don't know if it necessarily felt like a response, or even that designers wanted to directly address things. It's more like avoidance.

What about the slowdown?

Kevin: I think the slowdown was a big topic going into it, and also the fact that all these changes are coming with all

these designers moving around. So everyone was like, 'Oh, maybe this season is going to be quite boring or it's going to be underwhelming,' because everyone's waiting for the Fall season.

Charles: Just knowing, also early on, that lots of big models were going to take the season off because they didn't want to engage too much with a house – not knowing what's coming next.

Kevin: Waiting for the new guard to arrive. But in fact I thought it was quite inspiring. There were good shows, especially in Paris.

I think that's the general consensus.

Kevin: And that's more and more what everyone's seeing – it's another topic, I guess – how everything is sort of being centred around Paris.

Charles: And how many brands – from

'The notion of 'heritage' is always going to be around, I think, unless you go to a complete AI situation. But even that references the past.'

London or New York and everywhere else – have moved to Paris? American designers are now being hired by French companies. It's less and less in New York, I guess.

In terms of campaigns, what visuals resonate with today's audiences? Is it authenticity? Escapism? Eye candy? Representation? Or something else entirely? Do you have a view on this?

Charles: I think there's always something about escapism that can attract consumers – or just the viewer – towards a campaign. There's always something about, 'This is somewhere I'd like to be.' But maybe it's more with perfume campaigns that are destined for a larger audience than fashion campaigns which can sometimes feel a bit more industry-oriented. I guess we see the

difference between a fashion campaign and a bag campaign – where you almost feel like it's talking to slightly different audiences.

Kevin: I think we've gone through a cycle where there was a desire – from brands – to just make noise and create a buzz. To have these peak moments on social media where everyone is talking about it for an afternoon, or a day, and then it's forgotten, and then it's on to the next one. It was this crazy cycle, just feeding the machine, creating these rushes, almost like a sugar high. I have a feeling that slowly we're turning the page on that a little bit.

Charles: It's being toned down.

Kevin: I think it's going more towards something that feels consistent and a bit more grounded in quality. Or maybe a balance between the two, in terms of the different types of content you create.

Charles: Beauty has been less of a concern in recent times. It was just about coolness or the weird aspect of things. Now beauty, elegance, seems to be a bit more present.

How important is 'cool' today? Does 'cool' still have commercial power, or is its relevance fading?

Charles: I think to have a bit of coolness never goes out of style. People want to be cool. But what's cool is always evolving anyway. At some point it was this Y2K aesthetic that was the coolest thing, and then something super minimal and almost austere can also be considered über cool.

Kevin: But it will always be part of the lexicon and part of what we try to aspire to. People aspire to be cool or to look

cool. It's just part of fashion.
Charles: And young demographics are always going to be attracted to coolness.

Do you think some brands have become too reliant on nostalgia or referencing past visuals and visual styles? Or is that inherent to what you do?
Charles: It feels kind of inherent, yes. Because the 'bla bla bla' in the industry is that *everything* has been done before – we know that. And I guess lots of brands are trying to maximize on their heritage a bit more now. This idea of heritage is something that's more important for the brands themselves, so it goes with referencing themselves in different ways each time.
Kevin: I think it's something that's just part of our job. Even if you present ideas to a client – or anyone that we work with – you have to show them a reference. And that reference is going to be... I mean, even if it's a painting from the 17th century, it's still referencing something. And we tend to reference fashion photography as well, a lot of times. So the notion of 'heritage' is always going to be around, I think, unless you go to a complete AI-type of situation. But even that references something, in a way.

It references a very strange well of imagery, seemingly from a tattoo parlour! The aesthetics of AI are very weird. We're not gonna go there, but…
Charles: It's off-topic!
Kevin: We're not very well-versed. We've started using a little bit of it.
Charles: Mainly for doing comps quicker.
Kevin: And some video stuff we've started exploring, which helps at certain times. Because you're like, 'OK, I need a yellow bird to fly through the living room from one window to another.' Where am I going to find that in a movie? And you can just type that in, and it gives you that.

It's a tool for presentation purposes.
Kevin: Exactly. We did an AI campaign once with Coperni, they're kind of tech focused, so it made sense with them. But we're not crazy about AI.

Whose visual work or opinion in the industry currently inspires you? Who do you think is setting the new visual standard today?
Kevin: Big question. I don't know if there's any one specific person who really inspires us.

Kevin: Yes. And maybe pushing certain changes in how we want to work, how *everyone* works, how we establish languages within this fashion world – in terms of communication.
Charles: Challenging the usual formats of everything that a house can do.
Kevin: There was this notion at some point, with the beginning of Instagram, that was like, 'OK, these people are doing these things, so we should do it too.' And everyone was sort of doing the same things. It would be like, at least two posts a day, a bag campaign like this, and it became something across the board. I think now, with all these changes, there's maybe a desire to re-evaluate everything and try to be different, more than doing what everyone else is doing. So hopefully that'll make a difference.

'A lot of the imminent changes in fashion are going to result in a new era for designers. Then it'll come to us in terms of how we interpret their new work.'

Or someone who challenges you? It's been building up for a while, but today – even more so than 10 years ago – you're being informed in real time of what your competitors are doing.
Kevin: I think you have to look at what's being done by other people, what's happening. Sometimes it just validates certain things, or makes you question other things. So it's important to know. But I feel like there's this sort of thing in the air that a lot of change is happening with all these fashion houses and designers. I think it's going to create a new era, a new chapter that's going to start with the designers and come to us in terms of how we interpret these new collections, new designers, new houses.

And so you're hoping for a reshuffling of the cards?

Would you say that there was sufficient knowledge within the houses to actually interpret the numbers on social media?
Kevin: Probably not. I don't know if there is even now.
Charles: I guess there's awareness, from potential clients, when you make noise on social media, and when people acknowledge you on social media. Of course it might translate at some point into sales.
Kevin: I remember us asking some of our clients – the head of art or head of communications – 'OK, for this holiday campaign, we know it had this many views, we know to some extent it was successful, but did that translate into sales?' And they were like, 'Oh, no one shared that information with us.' They didn't even know themselves.

Charles: The only thing that we know is when we did a digital project during the pandemic, the brand told us that after the campaign launched, a Chinese VIC managed to get one of the stores that was closed in China opened in order to acquire this exotic skin bag.

They hadn't seen it anywhere else but on social media? One customer!
Kevin: One single customer! Exactly. [Laughs]
Charles: I guess it was easier to know about that one customer because all the stores were closed.

What does visual success look like for a luxury fashion brand today? How do you know when you've created something truly impactful – besides selling…

he replied, 'Do you think a bad painter is an artist just because he operates in the world of painting, which is considered one of the fine arts? Art is not a category. It is the way you're doing it that makes it art.' And I thought that was absolutely brilliant. He's absolutely right. Is a bad painter more of an artist than an amazing photographer just because he is working in fashion photography?
Charles: There are some fashion photographers we work with who I truly see as artists.
Kevin: But since we have this commercial thing within our way of thinking…
Charles: After all, everything we're doing is about selling clothes.
Kevin: We're selling dreams, I guess, to some extent…
Charles: In order to sell clothes.

Kevin: Not always.
Charles: No, but I think it really helps.
I can remember shoots where the atmosphere wasn't so…
Charles: Pleasant? But the outcome–
…was amazing. Then days that were super pleasant but the outcome was… [Laughs]
Kevin: [Laughs] You're so happy and then you come back and you're like 'Ah, OK…' I think looking back at what we've done – and we've only been working together for five years or so, not that long – the things we're proudest of are those we created with the people we liked the most.

How do you stay creatively inspired and avoid visual repetition or burnout? I mean, your output is enormous. The magazine, the campaigns, the shows...

'At the beginning of Instagram, everyone was doing the same things. I think now there's a desire to re-evaluate everything and try to be different.'

Kevin: The bag? [Laughs]
You get hired for the following season?
Charles: [Laughs] Yes.
Kevin: I think there's a moment – I don't know if you'll agree, but I'm sure you know what I'm talking about – when you create an image: sometimes it all comes together on set, or maybe it's when you put it in the layout, or maybe when it's finally out and you see it in a magazine, and you just feel it.
Charles: You feel that you're proud.
Kevin: You want to show it to people. And when you want to show it to people and you get that reaction, it's a matter of sometimes just knowing.

I have a good line from Richard Avedon on art that just struck me. The American talk show host Charlie Rose asked him, 'Is photography an art?' and

Kevin: The success of an image, or a campaign, or something that you create – like I said, I think you just know it when it happens. And there's no recipe for it, or else everyone would know how to do it. We're usually happier with the projects we create when we work with people who are friends, or who we have good relationships with; who we enjoy working with or just spending time with. I think that makes a difference. I think that's the key to success, maybe, to be able to work with people you like.
Charles: Because it's such a collaborative thing. Making a fashion image involves so many different crafts from all the people on set. And to have consideration and be interested in all of these crafts, and in the people you're collaborating with – and doing it with a nice energy – I think it helps the result.

Kevin: It's probably not the healthiest thing, but our personal lives and our work lives are extremely intertwined, in terms of how we work together and in terms of how we work with other people. So I think that helps. I mean, we don't have kids, we don't have to come home and deal with those important things. We're just in this period where work doesn't necessarily feel like work.

Besides the fatigue, I was more thinking about you being inspired.
Charles: Yes, especially in the process of doing a campaign – the conceptualization, the moments when you get the ideas, that's the most draining moment of the process. When we're on set, it's easier to know what feels right, what feels good to us. But in the initial creative process, it's more about questioning

ourselves a bit more. And like you said, there's always this need not to redo things we've done before.

Kevin: And it's true that we don't always have the time to be like, 'I wish I could spend an afternoon in the library, looking at books, and watching this movie I barely remember from 20 years ago.' So we skip through things constantly. It's not ideal, but I guess it's a choice.

You're aware of the risk of repetition?

Charles: Yes, it's a concern.

Kevin: But there are also demands from our clients where they sometimes want to do things that they're comfortable with. Sometimes they just want something that's safe, they want something that's elegant. So it doesn't require that much creativity at times. Which is not the most creatively fulfilling thing, of course. So it's always a question of balance with specific clients. There are things where we find ourselves a bit more, kind of…

Delivering?

Charles: Yes. Ultimately, we are providing a service.

We briefly addressed the issue of the transitional periods of those three big houses – the reboots of Chanel, Dior and Gucci.

Charles: Besides the big ones, the list of brands rebooting next season is insane. It's never really happened in this industry to have so many changes at once.

I would almost say they were slowing the whole train. They were missing one wheel, and you had to drag this thing.

Charles: It's very true.

Kevin: I wonder if people had to wake up and be like, 'We need to make these changes just to give some fuel to the machine'?

Probably a good opportunity. What I find really striking about this is the question: did those big houses at some point think to themselves, 'Could we do without the designer? It would make our lives more comfortable'?

Charles: Just let the marketing people produce the collections!

When you see this, you understand that this is a really important parameter – who's missing at the top? Otherwise, how do you create magic? There's almost been an acknowledgment of the necessity to have someone brilliant.

Charles: Exactly. You do need someone brilliant. And there were so many designers who, because of certain contexts, ended up staying for very few seasons at a house. It's such a shame, because it's through time that you can establish something really strong, and it's nice when something becomes a real chapter of a house's history. It's a bit tiring to see all these designers staying so little [time] at some houses. I just hope lots of the new appointments are going to be great, and that we're going to be happy to see these positions take shape.

I feel there's a measure of enthusiasm around it.

Charles: There's excitement about next season, for sure – lots of beloved designers are changing roles. There's this question of how different it's actually going to be, and what the new vision is going to be with these new parameters.

It impacts everything. That's really something to look forward to.

Kevin: Not just the collections, but also, like we were saying at the beginning, how they're going to show their collections. What kind of shows they're going to do. Will it be a big spectacle? I think something else that happened this season was that shows became smaller and more intimate. I haven't been to many, but people have been talking about it. Like at Tom Ford, everything was a bit more intimate, scaled back, and made more about the clothes. So I'm curious to see how these big houses are going to react to this. Who's going to take the biggest space? Or will it be smaller and more intimate?

That brings me to another question. It seems like no one has really cracked the code to filming a fashion show in a really convincing manner. You go to a show, you feel engaged, it's powerful – and then it doesn't seem to translate on the phone screen. It's so strange as it's been quite a while now…

Kevin: I don't know if it's even been fully addressed. But is it even possible? I wonder. We've felt this ourselves – like, we'd talk with Sara [Moonves] from *W* about a show, and we'd watch it on our phones while working, and the reactions we had were not necessarily aligned. Being in that room, you have a different perception from what you see on your phone, for sure. Even though sometimes you can see the clothes better on your phone because you get to see the details of the bags and the shoes in the close-up shots. But there's something about being in that room, the presence of all these people and the soundtrack, and the way the models walk... That's hard to translate. And I don't know if it needs to necessarily be something that has to be fully translated to everyone.

It's strange that, in this day and age, the show is still this major moment in fashion, even though it seems somehow outdated for what it's supposed to perform more globally. But it's still approached as a performance, with an audience.

Kevin: Exactly – the same way it was when they first started.

From 70 years ago, maybe even a 100 years ago, and it's still more or less the same format.

Charles: But now it's really become a communication tool, which was less the case when this format was created.

It didn't change the way you would record it. At some point, you'd see shows with lots of cameras doing all sorts of things.

Kevin: When we started working with The Row, there was never video – only pictures. Then one season we said, 'Oh, let's just put one camera at one angle, filming the girls as they walk into the main room, that's it.'

Charles: It was a super minimal team. Shot on film, one point of view. No cuts.

Kevin: No close-ups, no music. And weirdly, watching that video, we always feel like it's totally captivating. You capture the real pace of the girls, because they arrive on screen one-by-one, and you're not cutting away to anything else.

Charles: It's the real point of view of a guest in the room.

Kevin: You can't zoom in with your eyes, you can't go to the other room they're walking through. So it felt like really watching a show.

Charles: It was just a document.

Kevin: I guess they did that in the 1980s, where there was just one camera. When you look at footage of the early Prada shows, I think there was one camera recording it. And you see the flashes of the photographers.

That was exciting to look at. What's more exciting than that?

Kevin: Yes, I guess now it feels exciting again because we're going back to referencing things.

Charles: And The Row video was more about documenting a moment, rather than trying to create something overly produced – just pure documentation.

Kevin: But we enjoy the spectrum. I mean, when you think about the Saint Laurent show during Covid that they shot in Iceland, where the girls were walking in front of that crazy frozen landscape, with the wind, and a drone flying after them. I'd never seen anything like that in the context of a fashion show.

Charles: It was more like one of these fantasy shows that couldn't happen in real life with an audience.

You could almost imagine that as the solution. But then again, I get it. It all needs to be packed into one week, or so they say… For some reason, everyone must come to Paris. Everyone must be present here for it to count.

Charles: Yes, and then it's an industry where everyone is so concerned about travel anyway. As a replacement, or as a solution, to build a spectacle around fashion that wouldn't be a fashion show – that was one example. During Covid, some of us really thought, 'Ah, well this will be the opportunity to figure out a new format.' Personally, I thought things were really going to change. I thought that with the concern around travel, that pre-show and cruise shows were going to stop. There was not going to be this constant travelling to crazy places all the time. But it stayed the same.

Kevin: But whenever we speak with designers, they're like, 'Oh, should we not do a show this season?' And instinctively, you're like, well, this person tried it and it didn't really work. If you stop being in that circle, in that system, it's hard to keep the momentum, or retain some kind of value. It's not easy.

Charles: When it's fashion week everything is shown within the context of the runway. And if you don't have a show, there's less correlation.

Kevin: You're just no longer part of the conversation.

The only one who managed to extract himself from the calendar was Alaïa.

Kevin: He would still do shows.

But outside the calendar. It's such a different size, a fraction of the size.

Kevin: Yes, you're right.

Back to the shows – the other one everyone was raving about was Duran Lantink.

Kevin: I think it had quite an impact.

Charles: It's true. Like other young designers, you can feel the craft in what

'Our personal lives and our work lives are extremely intertwined. We're just in this period where work doesn't necessarily feel like work.'

'Everything we're doing is about selling clothes. And I guess, to some extent, we're also selling dreams… in order to sell clothes.'

he does. And of course, it's fun and it's a new proposition. A new version of what's strange, or different, or cool today that we haven't seen much in the past few years. It just feels a bit different, with a point of view. And it seems well done, which isn't always the case with young designers.

Kevin: I think the clothes are well executed. I think he really has an eye for putting things that don't necessarily go well together but work somehow, in terms of prints, colours, and shapes. And I think he knows how to make noise. It's not a political message.

Charles: This one, though – you could see the underlining of a political message. Opening with a girl with a torso and closing the show with breasts – in the context of today, what's happening in the US right now, it felt a bit political.

Kevin: At the same time, I don't know if that's really what he was going for.

Charles: But it's easy to link the two.

Do you have fond memories of specific shows you've seen over the years?

Kevin: I've sort of 'infiltrated' shows in the past that were fun. In particular, the Marc Jacobs for Vuitton train show [Autumn/Winter 2012]. I knew a PR guy who knew someone, who told me to come at a specific time to a specific door where he just let me in. That was fun – and the show was epic. Just seeing a real train arriving in the room, that was crazy. I was mesmerized. I was happy to be there, to say the least.

It seems like those days are gone, no?

Kevin: Of infiltrating?

No, I mean the mega production.

Kevin: I guess so. I mean, they're still extremely expensive productions. And there are other deals being made with celebrities that cost so much money.

Charles: There used to be more stories or themes for collections, an era when it was more…

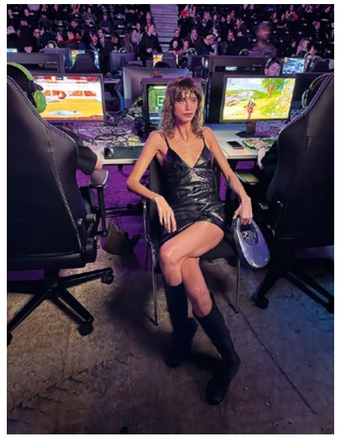
Kevin: …playful, maybe. I think it was also what Karl was doing at Chanel that was influencing everyone. Every season was bigger and bigger, so other people were keeping up.

Charles: Going back to what you said, with the houses at the head of the train changing right now, and everyone's waiting to see how that changes things.

Kevin: I do still think it would be fun if one of the big guys decided to go all in – do something *really* spectacular. It doesn't seem quite as current at the moment, but Balenciaga did a few things, like the one with the world going into the water [Autumn/Winter 2020].

Charles: And the snowstorm [Autumn/Winter 2022]. Even in terms of set design, when you think about the first Vuitton show that was done with Philippe Parreno [Spring/Summer 2023], with this giant structure in the middle of the Louvre's Cour Carrée – it was a different way to tell a story, it was pretty insane in scale. An artist like Parreno, who we all go to see, for instance, going to his exhibitions, seeing his work on a giant scale – it's impressive. I guess it's less of a story the way it used to be. Maybe it was a bit more literal before, which can also be nice. We'll see.

Kevin: To be continued...



Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Charles Levai and Kevin Tekinel.

1. For The Row, Maybe has worked with photographers including Jamie Hawkesworth, Jack Day and Senta Simond.

2. For Autumn/Winter 2021, Coperni staged a runway show in which guests were picked up from their homes and driven to the show where it could be enjoyed from the Covid-free safety of their car seat.

3. Bella Hadid was sprayed with 'Fabrican,' a spray-on textile, to form a dress for the finale of Coperni's Spring/Summer 2023 show.

Angelo Flaccavento

‘This is not the 1980s, when a bad review prevented buyers from buying that collection. Nobody cares. I think now it’s more a competition between critics: who is smarter, who is more bitter, who can say it in a nicer way. I hope fashion criticism creates a wider cultural debate, but I’m also aware that it’s a very narrow field of action.’

Interview by Jonathan Wingfield

One of fashion’s foremost critics, Italian journalist Angelo Flaccavento has spent the last two decades providing his razor-sharp analysis on fashion for titles such as *GQ*, *Fantastic Man, L’Uomo Vogue* and indeed *System*. Each season, he covers the shows for Italian newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore* and The Business of Fashion, where he is a contributing editor. A few days after the Paris shows had come to a close, *System* sat down with Angelo to take measure of the season.

Jonathan Wingfield: Has all the current uncertainty in the fashion industry been felt on the catwalk this season?
Angelo Flaccavento: I think the industry is operating at double speed. On the surface, it’s business as usual because we’re witnessing shows, it’s fashion week... In the case of a brand like Chanel, though, you go to the show and there’s a messiness that you cannot address to anyone in particular, because there is no creative director. It’s the studio designing. You think, ‘OK, so this is a collection that’s been made to keep items on the shelves until the real change happens.’ So when it comes to critiquing the show you hold off on a bit of the severity. Another case, Gucci, was clearly a show that was put together by a stylist. Suzanne Koller actually did a wonderful job. I could see her mark and, honestly, I found that there was more vision in what she did than in previous seasons with Sabato [de Sarno]. I think she stepped in almost right after Sabato was led away, so maybe half of the collection was already in place. She may have asked the studio to do some additional things, but she brought it together. It was a perfectly fine show, I have to say, with nice stuff – nothing special. It felt like one of the shows that you look at on the catwalk and say, ‘Oh, OK, this will be short-lived.’ There is no real fashion point. In fact, it looked a bit like old Prada, French killer-lady chic. At Balenciaga, we didn’t know anything [about Demna’s imminent departure], but the way it was made and the way Demna behaved backstage, we *knew*. After the backstage meet-and-greet-and-chat with him about the collection, I turned to my colleague and said, ‘This is his final act. It’s clear.’

Have you felt much direct response to global affairs this season?
I think the system behaves like nothing is happening outside of it. Brands *appear* not to be touching global current affairs, but of course they are. Certain topics, all of a sudden, are becoming less central or less important. Inclusivity or other political statements that were so relevant just a few years ago now seem to be fading to nothingness. American fashion is where there is still a lot of interest in these topics, because it’s the place where these contrasts are particularly harsh. In Europe, we are witnessing what is happening from afar. Fashion thrives on a certain urgency of the moment; we want to see right now what is ‘the new’. So if we already know that something will change at Loewe, Balenciaga, Gucci, it’s like, what happened just two or three weeks ago doesn’t matter anymore because there will be something new that will completely clean the slate. Announcing things right after fashion week makes sense in terms of business organization, but it’s also killing the collections. You deem them instantly irrelevant because they’re already old.

‘Paris can surprise or upset you, but in Milano, by the fourth day you’re thinking, ‘I can’t wait for this to be over.’ And I say that as an Italian.’

Do you think a brand entering a transitional moment could choose *not* to do a show?
What Loewe did with the exhibition was fantastic because it was coherent with Jonathan’s approach. It was a beautifully laid out and perfectly made show, in place of a collection. It’s something that I’m sure he did while working on his next gig, so that he could be there without the constraints of a fashion show, which is a machine that absorbs all your energy. But sometimes skipping one season *would* be better. Shows today cost millions of euros, so Gucci should have probably just stopped and waited until the next one. But as shows are increasingly media machines that generate posts and traffic, maybe there is no substitute placeholder? It’s complicated. From the perspective of the critic I’d sometimes say: skip the season. Let us have sorbet this season – no show – so we can clean our palate and be ready for what’s next.

That’s rarely the case, though, is it...
Never. Or in the case of Jil Sander, you put the announcement out on the day of the show itself. I mean, that was bad timing: the show felt very gloomy, almost funereal, with the designers coming out at the end with their long faces. Then three hours later the house puts out a press release which reads like a message of love – while announcing their departure!

Some brands have recently had moments of operating in a 'post-designer' manner, with CEOs or other management figures acting as creative decision makers. Would you say that we are now swinging back in favour of the designer?
My gut feeling is that the pendulum is swinging back to the role of the designer being central. We've seen that CEOs stepping into the limelight and making decisions isn't working very well. There are cases that work, but most of the time it becomes very bland and generic. What's needed is a very strong vision on the design side with the help of a CEO and a team that can bring those ideas to life and make them commercially viable. But a CEO as co-creative director doesn't work. Maybe a CEO can have financial creativity or

'Demna gave credibility to pedestrian hoodies and sneakers while creating a language that allowed one to be gloomy and still feel fashionable.'

business creativity, but what's needed from a brand is something completely different. In fact, what we've seen over the last few years is that everything has become the same. When the brand side of a house is not going very well, and you need to push your image, you get Juergen [Teller] shooting the campaign. So you have Ferragamo, Balenciaga, all of them… I mean, it's good for Juergen, but we have campaigns that are similar because his mark as a photographer is so defined. He can stretch and flex, but it's always Juergen and the strategies are more or less the same. Whereas a very strong creative director can create a language that fits seamlessly across the clothing and the campaigns. What Jonathan Anderson has done at Loewe is remarkable in that sense, because he has built a world around a brand that was previously a Spanish luxury house with no real resonance outside of Spain. He created a cultural entity of sorts, with many different activities, all of which came together as a very interesting whole.

Tell me how it felt to be at New York Fashion Week this season.
It was a bubble: I stayed there for three days and mostly walked around to show venues or appointments. I'm always very excited to be there because of that cinematic quality the city has. So for me, just walking around skyscrapers puts me in a good mood. I was staying around Times Square and I walked all the way down to SoHo, which seems to be the happening place again, where boutiques are being opened. And I'm really fascinated by this dynamic in New York, where one neighbourhood is hot, then it goes down a little bit, then returns again – it's like an organism.

You saw Veronica Leoni's debut at Calvin Klein – a brand which has long been an emblem of New York fashion.
I think that Veronica did a very sensitive job trying to revive the brand. What Raf [Simons] had done was very personal but also very disruptive. At times, it felt almost the contrary to what Calvin Klein was about, which was this simplicity that wasn't monastic but really sensual. Also, a debut needs to be seen with a mild eye, because it's always a first, tentative step.

You're right. It's a rare designer who arrives fully formed in their first season at a storied house.
This morning, when there was the Jonathan Anderson leaving Loewe announcement,[1] I went to *Vogue* Runway to revisit his early period there – it actually took him four shows before he got it right. I remember my exact feelings with each of those shows, and by the time I felt like, 'OK, now I get it,' it was the fourth show.

Back to Calvin Klein – how do you now regard the brand's 1990s heyday?
When we look at Calvin's shows from that time, there's a fundamental difference in that moment. Stripping things down to nothing was a really powerful act. Apart from avant-garde designers like Helmut Lang, Martin Margiela or the Japanese – who have always been in their own niche – everything was still quite loud at the time. The idea of reducing things to nothing was radical. Also the way the models behaved on the catwalk was different. A model like Kirsty Hume or Kate Moss would own those very simple dresses, and it made them look really powerful. Today, models are super cool, they walk super fast, but they rarely feel like they're interpreting an outfit. They're just themselves, running down a runway, doing the kind of walk you would do on the sidewalk in real life. That makes the whole spectacle a bit different. Also that language of simplicity has been swallowed by the high street. Cos has popularized minimalism, but it has also killed it. The worst and most bitter commentary I saw on Veronica's collection was the page from *Vogue* Runway, where someone had removed the 'Calvin Klein' and replaced it with 'Cos'.

Ouch.
That was really gross for me. The other thing is that if you're not at the show, you look at the collection as a series of digital pictures. Veronica has a particular way of working with movement, which in pictures looks really flat because you only see the front. The judgement online is quick: 'I see you. I don't like you. I said it right away.' You just spit it out immediately. Personally, I would like to see her revive Calvin's sensuality. I appreciate that saying it is very easy, but putting that into clothing is another thing. But, all in all, for me it was a good start.

As a brand, what do you think Calvin Klein should represent within the New York landscape?
America, at the moment, has these big kind of institutional brands – Tory

'The Calvin Klein language of simplicity has long been swallowed by the high street. Cos has popularized minimalism, but it has also killed it.'

Burch, Michael Kors – and then these renegade, super small brands with their own political agenda that sometimes feel like students who've just left fashion school. When Willy Chavarria showed menswear in Paris, to me he felt grotesque and out of place. Maybe if he'd kept the New York spot, the message would have been stronger. Of course, the fact is that if you are a designer, and you want to measure up to the big leagues, you have to be in Paris. For me though, Calvin should be the pragmatic aspect to American fashion, while Marc Jacobs is more fantasy-led. That kind of Calvinism – not in the sense of Calvin Klein, but the religion of purpose, purity and function – is something that, in my eyes, the brand still embodies. Of course, I'm not living in America. I don't see it just as an underwear brand. I think that Raf did somehow kill the brand because it was so fashion-forward, and it went completely off the track. For me though, if the company puts enough energy into it, it can reclaim the space it deserves. Honestly, the only truly international capital of fashion at this moment is Paris. They won. London has become the hub for ultra young talents and Burberry. That's it. Milano is very… I mean, maybe Demna can bring new energy to it. Gucci is a billion-dollar brand, so it can have that pulling power. But still, Milano is corporate. You go there, you know that you'll find nice clothes, and that's it. Paris is the place where you can be surprised, upset, where you can stay for 10 days without feeling like it's too long. Sometimes in Milano by the fourth day, you're thinking, 'I cannot wait for this to be over.' I mean, I say that as an Italian.

Vaquera now shows in Paris. The Row migrated to Paris some years ago. Proenza [Schouler] are now leaving New York for Europe at the first offer. Marc Jacobs had this lightning-quick show days before the calendar even began. What is all this saying about the future of New York fashion?
Marc Jacobs showing before fashion week starts is a way of saying 'I'm here and I'm not here'. I can understand his perspective, but it's not a nice message. My feeling is that New York is completely irrelevant at the moment, and it's on the verge of sinking as a fashion week. What's beautiful in fashion, though, is you can have these sad moments and then all of a sudden, things click back into place and it's back again!

Did you go to London Fashion Week?
I didn't. The way that fashion month is structured, it's really back to back. Sometimes you want to rest for a moment to get ready for the finale. Milano-Paris is two weeks full – solid. Plus, you go to check the schedule for London and say, 'OK, what am I going to see?' Maybe you want to see three or four shows, and they're all one per day so you wonder if you should really go.

Let's talk about Milan.
The first big show was Gucci. We went there knowing that this was a transitional show – just filler. I didn't go to the Versace show, but it was Donatella's final show. She's always looking at one moment from the past and trying to reenact it on the catwalk. This season was, in Italian we say *il fondo del barile*, she scraped the bottom of the barrel, because inspiration came from the Versace Casa [Casuarina, the former Versace mansion in Miami Beach], of all places. It feels like she has run out of places to look. Bottega, they had no show, which, as we were saying before, was better. Why have the team design a show when you can be just silent? They did a concert with Patti Smith. I didn't go but it was a perfect space filler for them. Fendi was actually a very good show with a very good energy that makes you wonder, 'Do they really need to be looking for a creative director when they have one in house already?' Silvia Fendi understands the codes of the house because she *is* the house, and is still willing to play with fashion. As a

woman designing for women, she had an understanding of how the Fendi client might interact with the accessories and the pieces. It's very personal and beautiful. Why not choose her?

Were you surprised to hear that Demna was appointed at Gucci?
Yes, because I finally discovered – at least I'm dead sure – that some of the names circulating as a potential creative director were put out by the management to have more attention paid to it. Around one week prior to the announcement, there was an article in *la Repubblica* that stated that it was Hedi Slimane.

That's a big thing for *la Repubblica* to publish.
They were interviewing Mr. [Stefano] Cantino [Gucci CEO], and although he didn't say the name, he made them believe it was the name – a very interesting strategy. I was completely convinced that it was Hedi. And for me, it made perfect sense. The 1960s clean, lean, young, aesthetic would fit perfectly with Gucci. Of course, there is a lawsuit between Hedi and Kering, but I thought, 'OK, business is business.' I was not – absolutely not – prepared for it being Demna. There was no sign that he was going to leave Balenciaga, even though the show was clearly a little bit lazy. His work doesn't feel immediately aligned with the Italian thing – or foulards, which is big business for Gucci, or the horsebit – but I think he has the ability to stretch his authorship to create an interesting perspective on it. When I first heard, however, I thought it was a desperate attempt on their side to grasp 'coolness', and it was easier to go to someone who was already in the group. Hedi was nonetheless a very interesting prospect.

As you say, it'll be intriguing to see how Demna's world will collide with the horsebit loafer.
It'll certainly be interesting to see how Demna is able to stretch his own sensibility in order to fit another thing. One of the discussions I'm having frequently of late is about how we see creative directors redoing things across brands, like Alessandro Michele at Valentino. It's a carbon copy, aesthetically and business-wise, of what he did at Gucci. Done within the frame of a label that's all about haute couture, or ladies in Argentina with a farm, you know? You feel the clash sometimes, and people say, 'OK, what were you expecting? This is Alessandro.' My personal take is that a real author must have the ability to stretch their language. The name on the house is not Alessandro. The name was Gucci, but Gucci was like a template for him, an empty shell. He built everything that he wanted, and it went well. But Valentino is not an empty shell. The work of Pierpaolo [Piccioli] has been completely erased. It looks like he was never there. Pierpaolo had his own language, very refined with a core sensibility which was his own take on the language of Mr. Valentino. This is the complete opposite: Alessandro's entering the room and saying, 'I'm here now, I'll do whatever I want and I'll kick everybody else out.' So for me, it's interesting to see if authors are willing to stretch their limits and find new ways of designing.

Each time we see a new Prada show, it feels like the result of a genuine conversation between Miuccia and Raf. Do you think that people are still as intrigued to decipher the dialogue between them?
I have a feeling that they care a little bit less. With this collection, the dialogue was clearer and more balanced. For me, it felt like a very good Prada collection with an edgy spin. The collection was really Martin Margiela in the methodology: you take one thing and you overscale it, or downscale it, or you change the material so you have a dress that's supposed to be fabric but you use knit. I could see that the roots of the execution brought the idea into Prada territory. It felt very well-made and well-balanced in terms of dialogue. The same season for men didn't feel as balanced. It felt like some things had not been digested for long enough. My warning to Mr. Simons would be that one could clearly see what he likes, while Mrs. Prada is more about taking one thing from one point and bringing it, in the end, to something different. It's something that's hers.

One of the first Paris shows I wanted to talk about was Vaquera.
I talked with the guys backstage before the show, and they told me that they are actually moving the whole operation to Paris. They've been showing in Paris for the last two and a half years. The first ones were really rough, really New York-style shows. We were not even sitting, but standing with these white paint marks on the floor where we should stand! Then they started doing proper shows, but a little bit of the New York roughness remained. I like them because there is this genuine ambition to become a fashion force to be reckoned with, but at the moment it is just an ambition. My joke is that I'd love to have the whole of fashion history from the 1950s to present day on a board and then remove a few designers. The second you take away Martin Margiela and Helmut Lang half of it falls away. And this show was really a Margiela show – the super big bra was about rescaling but going for macro instead of micro. It still felt very genuine and honest. They didn't feel like copycats. I admire them for keeping this energy and not sounding blasé just because they're in Paris.

'Of Seán McGirr's three McQueen collections, his worst was also his best – at least in the first one there was an idea of what the new McQueen could be.'

to say, looking at the show and looking at the pictures was completely different for me, because in the pictures everything looks a little older; not as modern as it did in reality. Don't ask me why, but looking at the pictures, I felt they had a very strong Giorgio Armani Privé kind of feeling. While in the flesh, I didn't feel that in any way. It felt very consistent. What Peter Hawkings did was so respectful of Tom Ford's path, in an almost blind way. You cannot step into the shoes of another designer and repeat the codes in infinite reiterations and not put your mark on it.

What about Givenchy, tell me about what you thought of that?
I really wanted to like it because I really liked Sarah Burton's work at McQueen, and I thought it was very good to have more decisions, even if at the beginning they are unpopular. One year on, I've found myself thinking that of the three collections Seán McGirr has done for Alexander McQueen, the worst was also the best – because at least in the first show there was an idea of what the new McQueen could be! A little bit sharper, a bit more dangerous, not sugary, further away from that Victorian or gothic fantasy, something more linked to the streets and to the East End of London. But East London today, not that of Jack the Ripper. Then the second show felt like, 'OK, you have to do what Sarah Burton was doing in your own way,' and it didn't go well. And this season was even worse because working on the theme of the dandy today is, for me, a no-go. We are now used to shows having no real narrative past the press release, fine, but at a place like McQueen, with that kind of heritage, you cannot have anything sloppily made.

'Announcing a change of designer right after fashion week makes business organization sense, but it also deems that collection instantly irrelevant.'

When you first heard about Haider Ackermann going to Tom Ford, did it make sense to you?
They have a connection because of his sense of colour. I always thought that his vision of a woman was a little too stiff, too sculptural in a way. But I think he is an intelligent designer so he can soften that side of his work and make it more adaptable to the language of Tom Ford. Honestly, it didn't feel modern at all, but I like the idea that Haider is not a designer that's trying too hard to be modern. He's just trying to be himself. He was respectful of what Tom had done, but also had his own way of doing things. The way he inserted the bright, almost fluorescent colour was very intelligent. It was respectful of that kind of sensuality that's a core element of the Tom Ford language. I have a woman designer at the head of such a house. But I had mixed feelings because it felt like there were too many different possibilities of what the brand could be. The first look was very Alaïa, but in a way almost Jacquemus-Alaïa, no? With that mesh bodysuit and the big logo. Then the tailoring was similar to what she did at McQueen, but with something a little more disorderly which felt fresh. The narrative was all about the atelier, which is good, but that's also a given when you're a couture house. I think that she will do couture at some point, so I'm curious to see where she'd bring that couture language. Again, this is a debut. But for me, it was too many different things. When there are too many different things, then you can't really see where the action is going. I would like to see more focus, maybe

Back to Givenchy for a moment – beyond the little black dress and Audrey Hepburn, what are the codes of the house?
I can't remember where, but I read somewhere that when he sold the *maison* to LVMH, Hubert de Givenchy was not super happy about it, so he destroyed all the patterns. For me, honestly, this is a great narrative. So you start anew! Everyone who stepped in there, apart from Riccardo Tisci, has felt this obligation to do this French lady thing – the French lady who wears couture. It's very difficult to succeed in that area, it's been done so many times that it has no meaning.

For a designer or creative director coming into a house, is heritage a help or a hindrance?
It is a double-edged sword. Sometimes if the heritage is too heavy, they are burdened and not able to move forward. Other times looking at it can be a way to anchor the new to the past. For me, what Demna did at the beginning of Balenciaga was very intelligent, because it was respectful of the heritage, in terms of having a constructed shape or a piece of clothing that suggests a certain movement of the body, then he went extreme with that in his own way. Worst-case scenario is when the heritage *is* the codes – those things that endlessly need to be reiterated, like the Gucci horsebit. So I'm very curious to see what will happen when Proenza Schouler go to Loewe. What is the heritage there? Is it Jonathan Anderson or is it the Spanish house?

When Matthieu Blazy starts at Chanel, the house codes are *so* strong that it actually frees him up. You have to use them, but they're great codes anyway, so go and have a ball.
The codes at Chanel are very graphic. A flower, a bow. Black and white. The necklaces… It's something that I can imagine him doing wonderfully in a modern way, without it feeling old lady or Rue Cambon.

Was there a standout show for you this season?
I really liked the Duran Lantink show because it felt very strong on ideas. Of course, I can see where his world belongs – the lumps and bumps collection from Comme des Garçons[2] or Viktor & Rolf or Jean Paul Gaultier. But I also liked that this was done in a very raw, sensual way, which I find very Dutch. It was done with a freedom that hit you very hard. It was a beautiful moment. The show happened in a corporate office space and the beautiful thing is that there were these cubicles in the front, with opera singers in them singing live. It was almost a liturgical moment in an office, with a collection that was very pagan and all about the naked body. In general, I find the shows where the production is smaller – where everything needs to stick to the collection a little bit more – quite effective. The mega productions are ways to distract you. The public restroom at Valentino was very heavily produced. Then again, it was also a public restroom! As Vanessa Friedman clearly noted in her article, staging a show in a bathroom is like, *hmm… no?* The subtext is a little bit dangerous.

The ones who always seem to get that right are Saint Laurent. It's in view of the Eiffel Tower, there's a great cast, and the use of scenography is really well executed.
I was not a big fan of Anthony Vaccarello at the beginning, but I have to say that I like his work because he has created a language, and that language includes the scale of the show. How small is the model compared to the scenography? And the music is always very emotional, but not in the Pierpaolo kind of way that can verge on cheesy. Anthony is Belgian, but I consider him to be French. There is always emotion, but only up to a certain point. It's never going to overflow. That kind of tension between control and abandon, for me, makes it so erotic. And so successful. I also like that he has one idea per show, and he admits that. The idea is there from start to finish. Reverting back to what we were saying about transitional shows: you'll sometimes see 15 ideas, 15 possible collections. In the end, you leave the show and think, 'OK, what is it that matters?' Anthony can get a collection completely wrong, but you cannot blame him for having too many ideas.

What's your rapport with shows these days? How many do you physically attend?
For me, I prefer to be in the room. If I'm not in the room, I don't review. Of course I look at them online and sometimes I regret not going. Also, as critics, there is the fact that we need to write and file the article by a certain time. So you need time. Sometimes, you don't go because you're exhausted and you want to take some time for yourself. I still try to go to as many shows as possible but I stick to my rule that if I've been to three shows from a brand and I still don't like it, I don't go anymore. For me to be in the room, however, is always important because movement is what really matters when you see clothing. I thought that the [Issey] Miyake show, inspired by Erwin Wurm's *One Minute Sculptures*, was beautiful, but you had to see the pieces on the models walking past you. Pictures give very little. Plus, for me as a critic, it's even more important to be in the room, because all the wannabe critics that are out there – the millions of them – only judge on the frontal pictures they see online. Their judgment is very harsh, very quick, very one dimensional.

Did you see a young or emerging designer that caught your attention this season?
There were a few interesting young designers in Milano. I look at them with particular interest because Milano is, even more than Paris, a pretty complicated place for an emerging designer. There is this Georgian guy called Galib Gassanoff whose brand is called Institution. He was previously one half of the brand called Act N° 1. It's interesting because its language is very stark, very Eastern European, with a kind of severity. He works a lot with weaving, with traditional techniques from the land. In order to make it modern, he uses shoelaces instead of cotton or silk thread. The show was very small, very few outfits, and very solemn. It was held in the Museo Bagatti Valsecchi in Milano which is very ornate, very neo gothic. I was particularly happy because I was in Milano, looking at a new designer showing in Milano and living in Milano, but not having been born in Milano. It had that kind of multicultural thing that Paris does so well. It was something that could grow, not into a big brand, but into something that can stay in its own niche and be something personal and mature.

What do you try to explore as a critic that feels unique?
What I try my best to convey to my readers is an opinion that isn't definitive – so not a final judgement on something. I try my best to provide them with instruments to read the things that they're seeing, maybe from another angle. My main gig is *Il Sole 24 Ore*, which is the *Financial Times* of Italy. It is a newspaper that ends up in the hands of the banker, the accountant, people in finance or who are working with lawyers. But besides covering the big brands, I have the freedom to choose whatever I want to write about. I've always pushed Rick Owens because I like him as a brand, as a vision, how consistent it is, and how it has evolved over the years. I find it very funny that I can propose him to a lawyer or a banker.

Why did you choose fashion criticism?
Ultimately, what's beautiful to me about fashion is that it allows us to change our identity. We change clothing, and we can change our identity. It's almost a way to survive destruction or the fear of death, because you can be a new person every day. I chose fashion criticism because I like how fashion allows me to consider reality from different perspectives. Clothing can tell you about the conditions of society in a certain historical moment. It's a complex mix of elements that is contained in something as simple as a piece of clothing. I don't want to over-philosophize clothing, but to explain how complex it is. I still enjoy the act of dressing very much. Writing about fashion, as well as looking at fashion, gives me endless inspiration on how to reinvent myself. My worst fear is becoming static in thinking and in writing. I think that fashion criticism forces you to revive it's been done before in another time, in another moment, in another way, so consider what you're seeing from another perspective.'

Has your approach to covering fashion week evolved over the last 20 years?
The more you do this, the faster you become. Not in judgement, but in knowing what you want to see. Sometimes I've noticed I've grown antennae. When I do the dailies, also for BoF, I hate to just be like, 'OK, this is day three. We had this blah, blah, blah.' I always try to find a connection. Sometimes you feel that day that the connection will be the plan. Then you see show after show, and the connection is there. Also, at the beginning of my career I wanted my prose to be very literary, almost to compensate for the fact that I was yourself. We all have our style, but you have to adapt to the times. Otherwise, you feel trapped in the past. You cannot sit still, otherwise you become passé. And becoming passé is really what kills you if you work in fashion. You don't have to enjoy everything, but the worst thing you can say is 'back in my day…'! Of course, back in my day, we saw wonderful Galliano shows. It's fantastic that we can keep these memories, but we cannot use that as a weapon on the readers because they've not seen those shows in real life. That's not fashion criticism.

I think that's a very obvious but very important thing to remember.
For me, adding that kind of knowledge can help me tell the readers, 'This looks brand new or super fresh but, in reality,

'I'm curious to see what will happen when Proenza Schouler go to Loewe. What is the heritage there? Is it Jonathan Anderson or is it the Spanish house?'

'I sometimes exchange very bitter comments on shows via WhatsApp messages with Jonathan Anderson, which is really hilarious.'

writing about fashion. Now it's becoming more straightforward. I think that's what happens when you age. You get rid of things that you don't need. The more you grow up, the more you can do away with. What you really need is an opinion, a point of view, and a way to get it across in a manner that the readers can get very clearly. I hate when fashion prose is confusing because you know that the writer doesn't want to give you their real opinion because they're fearful of what the big brands can do.

What do you think the influence of the fashion critic is in 2025?
What really makes me laugh is when you're banned from shows, because you know you've touched the ego of someone. You're not banned because you're affecting sales, because people who buy

'The Duran Lantink show was almost a liturgical moment in an office, with a collection that was very pagan and all about the naked body.'

stuff don't read critics. Also, my BoF or newspaper article comes out in March and the collection will be in the stores in September, by which time everybody will have forgotten everything I wrote. This is not the 1980s when a bad review prevented buyers from buying that collection. Nobody cares. I think now it's a competition between critics: who is smarter, who is more bitter, who can say it in a nicer way. I hope it creates a wider cultural debate, but I'm also aware that it's a very narrow field of action.

Do you get much feedback from readers, or brands, the industry at large?
I do, but in the end, it's like the lady at my bank. She asks me, 'So what's in fashion? What is the trend?' And I spend five minutes explaining that trends do not exist. But then at the end she asks me, 'Yes, but what's the trend?' [Laughs] But honestly, the feedback I love to receive the most is from students, from people who usually reach me on Instagram. I try to reply to all my direct messages. Writing is a bit like putting a message in a bottle and throwing it in the sea. You never know whose hands it will end up in.

Tell us some highlights from a memorable conversation you've had during this show season?
I had a very interesting conversation over Instagram DM with Charlotte Collet, the stylist. I really like her work and she had a very grumpy French point of view. She just said, 'Oh, I'm going to skip the whole season of editorial because I don't like anything.' I said, 'Come on, you're a stylist, you can make magic with whatever you have.' And she told me, 'Yes, I can, but the total-look policy that's being imposed by brands is really constricting.' I thought, OK, I sometimes feel like the victim because, as a critic, you cannot always fully express your opinion, but my constraints are shared with people who have other roles in the industry. Besides that, I had an interesting conversation about brand identity with Axel Keller from Dries Van Noten, because I really like what they did. He reached out because of what I wrote about the collection for BoF. I ended by saying that this was a heavier Dries than the past, but with a very personal mark, and that for me, from now on, comparisons are completely unnecessary. He told me he was really happy. At one point, when you are a new designer, if you're being compared to the past all the time, it can be a killer.

What does this womenswear season say about women today?
That the way you carry yourself is very important. For me, it was a season about *how* you're wearing clothes more than wearing clothes. Which is not about styling, it's how you interact with a piece of clothing. It's the effect of what Lotta [Volkova] has done at Miu Miu. I mean, she is really influential as a stylist because she presents a way to play with clothing that can be inspiring if you're not a stylist. You cannot replicate the Miu Miu look on your own but you can take a jumper and do something with it. Even the one that you have in your closet already, there is no need to buy a new one. You can have a new style and a new way to carry yourself because you decide to wear that in another way. I think that the curatorial world of 'I'm stylish, I can pick up these things which look very stylish,' is coming to an end, because everybody can be a curator of the perfect 'beige page', no?

Whose opinion, besides your own, are you most interested in hearing when it comes to the shows?
I read all my colleagues. I really like the point of view that Cathy [Horyn] has – it's very distant from mine, but I'm interested in reading her. I miss Robin Givhan being at the shows because I thought that her way of reading the shows was so inspiring. I always have interesting conversations with Susannah Frankel from *AnOther* because I always sit in the British press area.

I enjoy the super bonkers conversations with Ashley Heath from *Pop*. I sometimes exchange very bitter comments on shows via WhatsApp messages with Jonathan Anderson, which is really hilarious. One person who I really enjoy having conversations with is the newly appointed creative director of Jil Sander, Simone Bellotti. I've seen the guy around Milano since forever, but we never actually spoke. I first came to know him after he did that first Bally show, because his idea of taking the Swiss route of the brand and going so bonkers with it made me think, 'Oh, I need to know this guy!' Sometimes when you work in fashion, you meet interesting designers and then you discover that their reference points are the same as everyone else's: Giacometti, Brancusi, if they're very refined.

'I find it amusing that I can propose Rick Owens' latest show to a lawyer or banker who reads *Il Sole 24 Ore*, which is the *Financial Times* of Italy.'

I mean, you see a mood board and it's always the same thing.

Pina Bausch…
[Laughs] Yes! I went to Bally backstage, though, and on the board there was a big picture of Hugo Ball at the Cabaret Voltaire. I was like, 'Oh, wow.' This is someone who's taken Switzerland, but not the cows and the chocolate; he's looked at something underground and not pretentious. So I wanted to meet him. We sometimes speak or exchange messages, and his perspective is always interesting. Fashion can be a place where predictability still *can* be completely avoided, where you can create something new with the elements that everybody else is using. This is why I'm very excited for Simone to be at Jil Sander, as he'll have a bigger stage.

What do you want to see more of during fashion month?
Ideas. Not replicas of other people's ideas. A PR once told me that what designers find upsetting in my writing is when I say, 'OK, this reminds me of this, of that', because they feel like their work is being pigeonholed as a copy. When I started, I took inspiration from other writers because you have to find your voice. You look at the people you like and try to shape your identity. At one point though, you let it go and find your own voice. That's what should happen in fashion. But with everything being so quick in the process of creation, it's really hard to find one proper original language. Besides that, I would also like to see less of the crowds at the entrance! I don't want to feel like I'm going into a rock concert while running to the show!

I think that's probably here to stay.
Today, getting into a show is a physical fight, because of the throngs of fans screaming. I really don't understand the screaming. It is almost like an apotropaic signal, you know? 'I'm here!', and they scream. They scream and scream. This is at the big shows, the LVMH group or Kering group – at other shows it's OK.

What are they screaming at?
I don't know! All I hear is that, as soon as they see their idol walking by, they scream. It was like this with The Beatles fans in the 1960s, so it must be in human nature.

When did that start happening?
It must have been one of those shows when a K-Pop star arrived – or probably earlier in the 1990s, when Madonna was attending the shows.

Would people know that George Michael or Madonna were going to a Versace show? Now it's very easy and the address is just handed out.
Last week, the Vuitton show was very difficult to access because it was in a building at the side of the Gare du Nord. Apparently they didn't want to clog it with private cars, so they did this thing that was typically French and complicated. We gathered at the Vuitton headquarters on Pont Neuf and they put us in cars and drove us to the place two hours before the show began. It was like a ten-minute drive, so we ended up waiting forever. As soon as we got out of the car at the secret location, there was already a wall of fans screaming. I asked somebody, 'We didn't have the address of the show on the invitation, and yet all these people knew about it – how come?' She didn't have a reply.

On the subject of celebrities attending shows, it feels now that certain celebrities have as much power as the multi-billion dollar brands – and in some cases almost *more* power.
They're like brands on their own – almost competing. Or they're like brands that can operate across many other brands in order to build their own core brand. So it poses a lot of questions about brand identity. If you choose an influencer as your ambassador, it's because you align with their values. But then their values align with the values of other brands. So where do you fit in? Sometimes, for me, the very idea

of 'brand identity' is blurred. You really don't know where a brand stands apart from the logo. Sometimes you just recognize a brand because there is one logo in place of another, it's not because the world is completely different from one another.

The logo is interchangeable and the influencer is too.
You once had brand ambassadors who were genuine friends of the designer, of the house. They stuck to their own, like, I don't know, Betty Catroux with Yves Saint Laurent. Farida [Khelfa], even Naomi [Campbell], with Azzedine [Alaïa]. You saw them and you knew what they were wearing.

The Rick Owens front row certainly stands out. It sometimes reminds me of that tradition of guests attending the Chanel show wearing Chanel, which now feels a bit cosplay. There's a little bit of that at Rick Owens, where it's become slightly pastiche: 'We dress up goth because it's the Rick Owens show.'
It's almost like going to a Kiss concert! For me, it's the off-putting thing about the Rick shows. I enjoy the fashion, and then you see that the die-hard fans take the catwalk proposition as something almost like religion. They really replicate the looks in real life, including the contact lenses.

Lastly, what does success look like for a luxury fashion brand in the current climate?
Real success for me is to inspire people to buy something while also capturing their imagination. I think what Demna did at the beginning of Balenciaga, or Alessandro when he was at Gucci, was successful because they captured something that was in the air and they were able to materialize it in a product and a vision. People flew to it. Jonathan Anderson has done something similar at Loewe, but more rarefied, more sophisticated and in a more elitist way. Alessandro got the idea that the masculine and the feminine could merge, while Demna gave fashion credibility to items that were considered to be very pedestrian – like the hoodie or sneakers – all the while creating this expressive language that allowed one to be gloomy and still feel fashionable. Successful brands always capture the culture of the moment, but they also need to be flexible. What would be a mistake is that they think they can grasp the moment and hold on to it forever. I was talking with a friend of mine and telling her, 'OK, as much as I love his work, there will be a time when it will be boring to go to a Rick Owens show, because his moment will have passed.' I told her, 'Listen, he's going to have an exhibition at the [Palais] Galleria in June, let's see what happens after that?' Because that is a consecration, but also an interesting turning point.

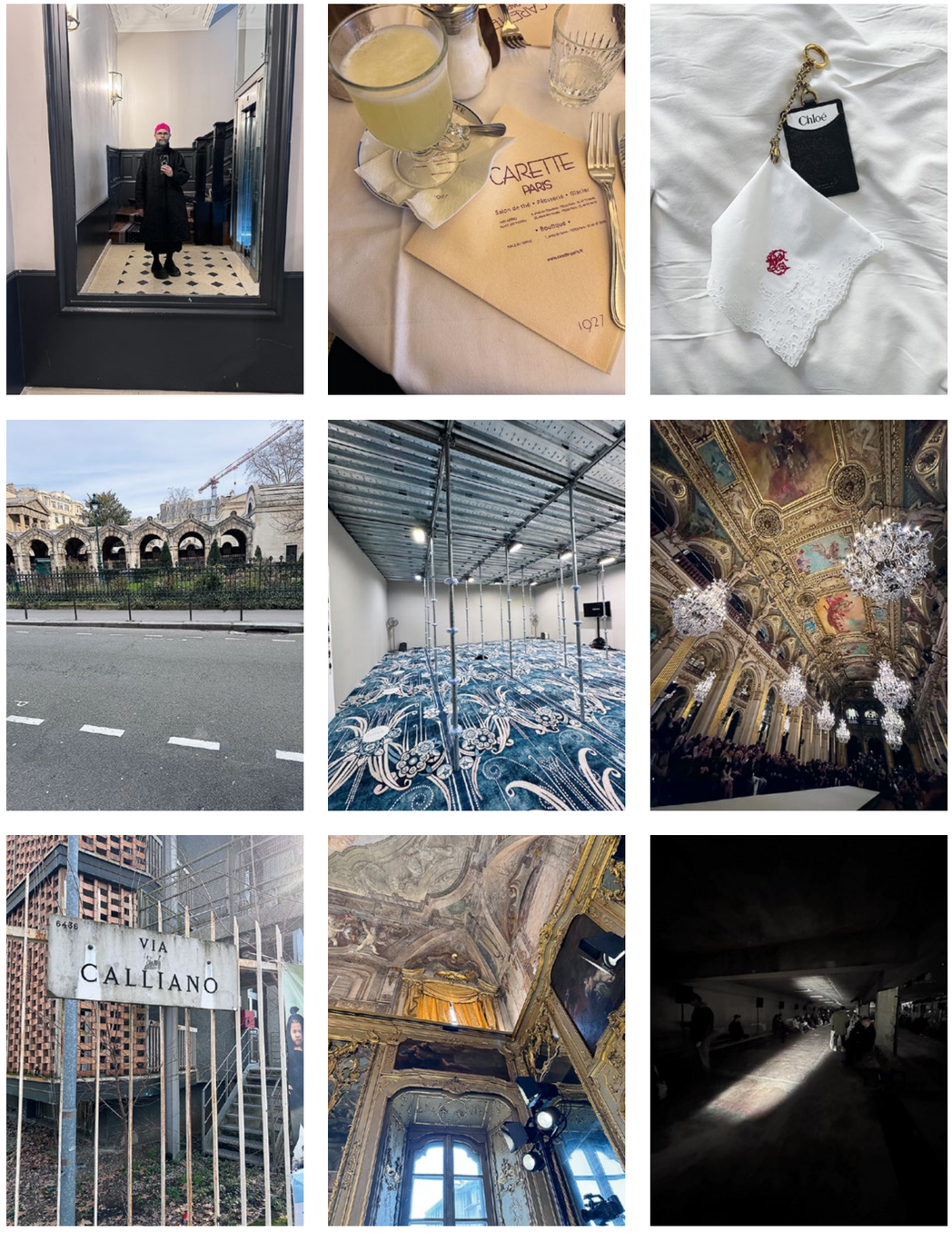
It's interesting that you talked about Alessandro, Jonathan and Demna, who all went into their respective roles about 10 years ago. Their work did require a little bit of patience.
Absolutely.

Particularly Alessandro Michele – people thought it was outlandish, almost jokey at the beginning. Do you think there's still that patience, to see how the work evolves?
Three collections is the minimum that one needs to establish something, but I don't know if there is the patience for it. When Alessandro started taking off, he was aided by a marketing team. Now they push from the first collection in order for it to be a hit. It's a lack of patience on every level of the ladder.

Interestingly, you say three collections is the minimum. Some people, from a business perspective, would say three collections is the maximum.
I've looked at all the collections that I liked and it's always from the third or fourth collection that you start seeing a point of view – like with Jonathan at Loewe. The first one is the foundation. The second one is fine-tuning the collection in the foundation. The third is, 'OK, I'll show you how I work.'

1. On 17 March 2025, it was announced that Jonathan Anderson was stepping down as creative director of Loewe.

2. 'Lumps and Bumps' is the nickname commonly given to Rei Kawakubo's Spring/Summer 1997 collection for Comme des Garçons, so-called for the unruly bulges the dresses give the models' form.



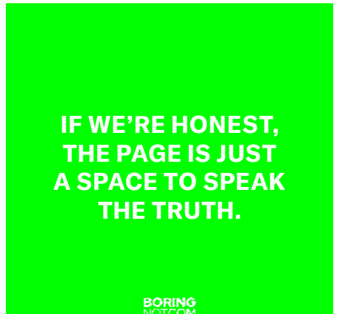
Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Angelo Flaccavento.

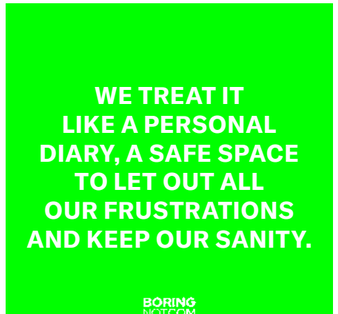
Boringnotcom

‘It’s hard to find people with an opinion of their own these days. I blame social media, and the constant pressure to either fit in, be liked, or avoid getting cancelled.’

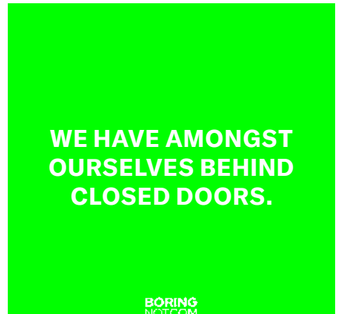
Has the socio-political and economic uncertainty of the moment, or perhaps the current upheaval within the luxury fashion industry, shaped what we’ve seen on the catwalk this season?

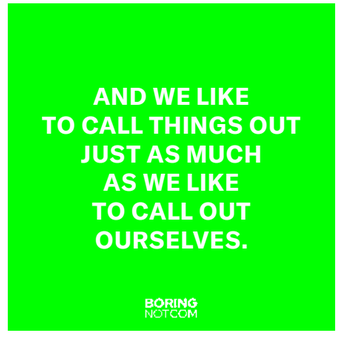
In an oversaturated marketplace for fashion opinion, tell us about the things that make Boringnotcom unique and relevant for today's fashion landscape.





How does your online Boringnotcom personality differ from your IRL personality?

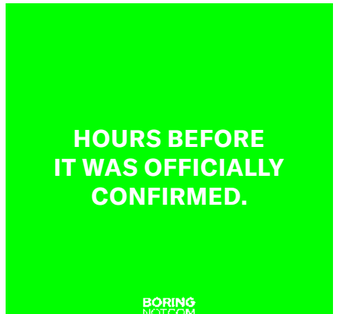


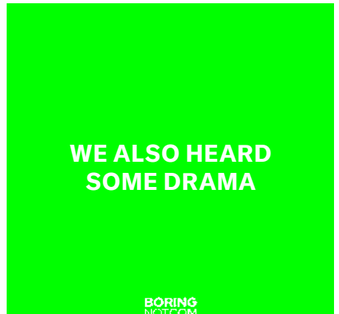


What's your rapport with shows these days? How many do you physically attend, and do you see the other collections online?

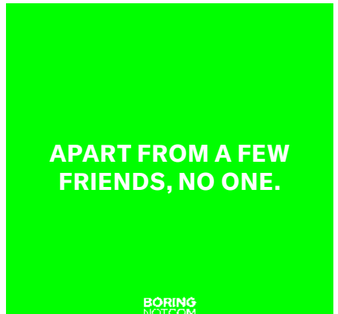
Tell us about something you saw on the catwalk this season that felt genuinely new.

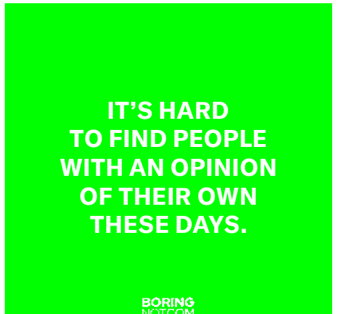
Please share some highlights from a memorable conversation you've had during this show season.



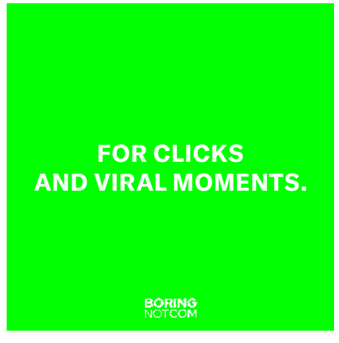


Whose opinion are you most interested in hearing when it comes to the shows and collections?





What does this womenswear season say about women today?



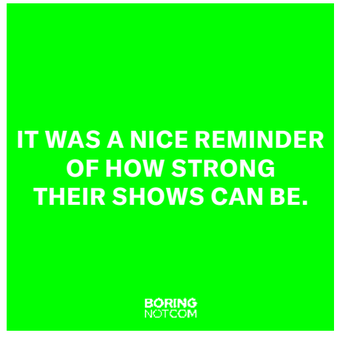
Does Silvia Venturini Fendi still need to find another creative director for Fendi?

Discuss the pigeon at Chanel.

Discuss the knight at Burberry.

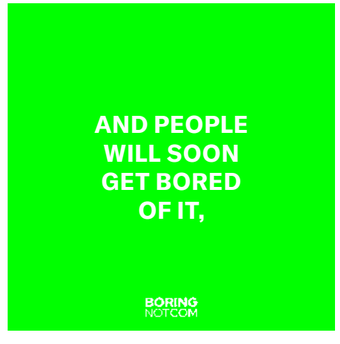
A word to describe the Duran show?

Discuss Doechii at DSquared2.



Thoughts on Veronica Leoni's debut at Calvin Klein, and Sarah Burton's debut at Givenchy?

The no-row at The Row.



Is London Fashion Week dying?

A final word on tariffs and trade wars?

Susie Lau & Bryan Yambao

‘All these rumours that are circulating – about the comings and goings of the designers – have social media pundits and even traditional press wading in with clickbait for views. I mean, why are we talking about personnel more than the actual collections? Why all the attention? We’re not *HR Weekly*.’

Bryan and I met up in his hotel room at The Westin just after the Miu Miu show had finished on the last day of Paris Fashion Week. We had one more show to see – Saint Laurent, the new closer to fashion month. We didn’t get a chance to debrief it despite us both agreeing it was a pretty stellar show by Anthony Vaccarello. Ballooning and exalting, and new territory for Vaccarello during a season where boldness felt not just welcome, but necessary.

Being safe won’t cut through the noise, especially as the noise mostly concerns comings and goings of creative directors at the fashion houses. Immediately after the shows, it was announced Demna would be the new creative director at Gucci. Bryan actually may have called it first because at the Balenciaga show, he noted that Demna was wearing a suit. ‘He’s in a new era,’ he said. Jonathan Anderson hadn’t yet been announced as creative director of Dior Menswear, with potentially more to come.

Bryan and I wondered why fashion weeks felt increasingly like a regular debrief of the United Human Resources Department of Fashion and how all this information of C-suite changes affected the creative ether. I feel tired looking at all the countless Instagram slideshows reporting the changes that were coming out during fashion week and after. Then we quickly realized we’re part of the problem. Or at least, our generation of content creators chipped away at the floodgates of information that was to be unleashed later on.

There was much to be hopeful for, though. Both myself and Bryan, the self-confessed ‘Department of Corporations lady’– and, in his day job, *Perfect* magazine’s editor-in-chief – began and ended our conversation enthusing endlessly about Duran Lantink, who would later be announced as Jean Paul Gaultier’s new permanent creative director. It felt good to see a buzzy show where C-suite changes don’t have to figure into the conversation. And so we landed on excitement as we both anticipated what’s to come. Final acts. Visions bedding in. Debuts. ‘*Goodbye my friend, it’s not the end…*’

Bryan Yambao: Hi Susie, welcome to my hotel room.

Susie Lau: Well, thank you so much for sitting down with me for a *System Collections* debrief of Autumn/Winter 2025. I feel like a lot of people didn’t have very high expectations going into this season. A few editors that I spoke to were like, ‘Well, it’s the transition season.’ There’s so many changes going on. How did the season turn out for you?

Bryan: Oh, that’s a loaded question. I mean, for me personally, there are a few gems. I think when you go to the weeks to watch a lot of shows, it’s the same as every season. There’s a lot of noise. There was a lot of flatness, but also there’s standouts. I think my show of the season was Duran Lantink.

Susie: I think that was a lot of people’s show of the season. And I wondered why? Well, obviously, Duran is very talented. I’ve been following his work from his very beginnings.

Bryan: I haven’t.

Susie: What was it about this particular one that just got everyone excited?

Bryan: I thought that was an amazing show. But when you go on socials, the coverage was mainly focused on the breastplates; Mica in the top made out of silicone. People were looking for that viral moment and reducing a brilliant show – with amazing silhouettes and textures and shapes and proportions – to a five-second reel of bouncing tits.

Susie: This was one of those examples of a show where I think you had to actually be there to experience the whole scope. Like the opera singers singing in their cubicles.

Bryan: And the body make-up that you can’t really tell if it’s a tattoo or something that’s printed on. I mean, everything just hit the right spot. It was sensory overload. All of the check boxes are there for me. It was humorous and funny. We just love something that stimulates us. And I thought that was really stimulating, both visually and emotionally.

Susie: It’s great to see that the best show of the season doesn’t necessarily have to be from a big house.

Bryan: I like to say I am more like a ‘Department of Corporations’ kind of lady. She loves to go to the big houses, you know what I mean. But particularly this season, I tried to make a conscious effort to go explore young designers. I used to do this when I first started, I would go to everything, but then one’s priorities change. Young designers definitely need the spotlight though. It’s not unexpected to see this coming from a young designer, because don’t forget: the bigger the brand, the more control a house will have in terms of merchandising in the commercial department.

‘There’s been a big focus on sex and sensuality this season. A sense of femininity and the female body – just look at Miu Miu, Alaïa, Duran and Dior.’

So a designer can't fully express themselves as creatively as Duran did.
Susie: OK, so who do you think in the big houses really went for it?
Bryan: Silvia at Fendi, for sure…
Susie: Which is also kind of unexpected, because we're talking about someone who's been with the house forever.
Bryan: And she still has it!
Susie: It's amazing to see her have the house to herself again. And even though I do like that co-creative director structure, after this show I kind of ended up thinking: does she need an artistic director?
Bryan: She should just have the house to herself and embrace it. What I loved about that show is that they went full-on, no holds barred. They really celebrated fur and shearling. Maybe not so much fur, but they had a few minks.

'After 11 years of creating his own Loewe codes, Jonathan's moving to Dior. So do you remain loyal to the designer, or to the house he's left behind?'

Don't forget, Fendi is a fashion house based on fur. And it's nice to see a house embrace their DNA, embrace who they truly are in a season when a lot of houses are putting out fake fur. Why not go for something more sustainable and environmentally friendly – the real thing?
Susie: I saw faux fur everywhere. Everyone was doing fake bourgeois. Some people did it really fun, like when Simone Rocha did these fur rabbits, and hares. But then it just kept on coming.
Bryan: Why do you think that is?
Susie: Everyone was talking about the boom aesthetic, the hangover of mob wife. And then maybe Gen Z aren't so anti-fur, because the faux stuff is actually polluting, as it's made out of plastics. But I also think it's just very traditional and safe. With a lot of houses pulling back creatively, fur seems to be like this kind of cozy cocoon.
Bryan: But they're not even bringing out, like, real fur.
Susie: It's just aesthetic – the look of it.
Bryan: So basically you have a new generation, Gen Z and Gen Alpha, buying vintage, real furs, going for that aesthetic, and then you have fashion houses responding to that by putting out fake fur. Make it make sense!
Susie: But a lot of them have already made their no-fur policy, and they've obviously got to stick to it. I don't think it's one of those things that you can cycle back on. I'm not sure how productive it is to also promote the look of fur with faux fur. I'm not a fur wearer or promoter myself.
Bryan: In a way, fashion is responding to what the new generation is buying, rather than setting the tone.
Susie: Another thing a few designers have talked about this season is the fact that we're in a tough situation. Miuccia actually said backstage after Miu Miu, 'We're at war.' Designers aren't responding to it directly, except for Miuccia, who I thought did it in the most overt kind of obvious way.
Bryan: It was very feminine, sexual…
Susie: But with this wartime kind of aesthetic, something that was very 1930s, 1940s, which she loves doing. Then she was asking questions about the presence of the cones and the bras. Are they relevant today? Do they help? Do they lift us up?
Bryan: If anything, there's a big focus on sex and sensuality this season. That's what I'm noticing. A lot of the collections I've seen have this sense of femininity to them. It's something about the body, like the Alaïa show. Also at Dior. I thought that was a very good Maria Grazia show.
Susie: I loved the show. Have you watched the documentary[1] that she just did with Loic Prigent, *Her Dior*?
Bryan: I missed that.
Susie: Obviously, we don't know what's happening yet…
Bryan: We *do* know what's happening.
Susie: We sense that her time there is coming to an end. So I watched that film, and I thought about what Maria Grazia has achieved. It is remarkable. And I don't think she really gets her dues, which I think is such a shame. Financials aside, what she's brought into the conversation about female artists, uplifting those voices, giving them those platforms, and then really giving women clothes that they want to wear… I only wish, with the latest show, that we got to see it a little closer. There were a lot of theatrics going on with the Bob Wilson scenography[2].
Bryan: The flying pterodactyl...
Susie: Fireworks, crystals, dry ice. It was a lot. I wish I could have seen the clothes closer. A lot of designers were doing smaller, more intimate shows.
Bryan: But were they though? I mean, maybe according to a *Vogue* Business article. It's fascinating when looking at media reports, and social media commentary talking about how the brands are scaling back, how the shows are more intimate. Louis Vuitton, for example, had 300 or 400 people. Miu Miu got smaller, but then when you're actually there, it doesn't feel like it. You see the same key players at the shows. You see a lot of the editor-in-chiefs, but maybe the fashion directors are not there. It still feels huge, and then there's more and more people outside. It's insane.
Susie: I think it's more about the choices that they make in seating. It's more strategic with who they invite. And the crowds outside Miu Miu were crazy. They had A$AP Rocky turning up to the show. But that feeling of intimacy, it's a specific strategy to gatekeep certain shows, to communicate this idea of, 'This is a very special house. This is a very special collection that you're seeing.' And that's how the brand wants to communicate that to the outside world.
Bryan: But will that actually work in this day and age of fame and clickbait and numbers and viral moments?
Susie: So you and I didn't go to Tom Ford, for example. I would love to have seen it. I heard it was good. It looked good on video. That somehow didn't translate when I looked at the pictures. I felt like I needed to take another look.
Bryan: At the same time, do you think it's also a generational thing? Tom Ford is a brand and a house that's associated with a certain generation. And when a lot of the show-goers or guests belong to that generation, there's a sense that you're nostalgic for something that existed previously. I mean, we weren't going to the original Tom Ford Gucci shows. We weren't there. But obviously those original Tom Ford shows were so groundbreaking that to this day they're still very influential.
Susie: Massively referenced.
Bryan: And even with Haider, I have so much respect for him. And you know, what he created in the past is also impressive. I would have loved to see it in person, because it's hard to judge if you're not there in the room… but it's a different aesthetic. I need to see a show that's rooted in the now, or relevant for the now, and something that has ties to the zeitgeist. Would an 18-year-old get that show? Maybe it's not for a younger generation, in a way.
Susie: With that kind of gatekeeping element, I do think it is a strategy that brands lean on. Like The Row has done it forever, and this season it was even more stringent. A journalist I was sitting next to said she took a video of just her notebook with the models' feet blurred in the background. But the PR asked her to take it down and delete the video from her phone. The video was of her notebook. You couldn't even see anything clearly in the background!
Bryan: It's like censorship, in a way.
Susie: It's this push and pull of wanting intimacy and exclusivity, which might have a counterproductive effect on the people who are needing to shoot it and see it and write about it. I don't know if it's like a one-off season thing or if it's actually a budget issue…
Bryan: For The Row it's never a budget issue. It's really a gatekept brand.
Susie: Because putting on a small show is not actually any cheaper than putting on a bigger show.
Bryan: I don't go to all the shows, obviously, and I don't want to take a seat away from someone who wants to be there or deserves to be there. And I usually go to the shows where I have an emotional and a personal connection with the designer. I'm either a huge fan or there's a working relationship. As communicators, we want to see as much as we can, but it's impossible to do it all. Would you have loved to see The Row? Is there a desire for you to be there, knowing your limitations and what you can do?
Susie: I'm not sure they would have me, but I guess it's not a brand that I'm personally connected to in any way. And if I don't have to go in a professional capacity, then for me it's totally fine.
Bryan: Do you own an item of clothing from The Row?
Susie: I do not. I can appreciate things from a distance though. That goes back to that thing of: if you didn't get invited, or if you weren't at the show, can you still appreciate it from afar? In some ways, brands are maybe banking on editors and stylists to appreciate things from afar, even if they can't always be invited to the show.

'Alessandro Michele has conviction. He really stands by the beautiful things he creates. I bought two Valentino turbans and lace gloves the other day.'

Bryan: I mean, I can.
Susie: What did I like from afar? I didn't go to many shows in Milan, but I loved a lot of the things that I didn't see. I liked Dsquared2.
Bryan: Dsquared2 was incredible.
Susie: I liked the little collaborations they did with Vaquera and Magliano and Bettter[3] – very cute and fun and by all accounts kitsch and funny.
Bryan: I also liked Max Mara. I have so much respect for Ian [Griffiths]. They don't have to please everyone, and they don't. They don't want to come up with insane concepts just to satisfy people who are hungry for a viral moment. You know you don't need a viral moment at a Max Mara show.
Susie: I like shows where you feel very much the presence of the designer, and that it comes from them. With some

designers you can sense when they are dialling it in a bit. When it doesn't feel of the heart. I always think Miu Miu is a really good closer. And I thought that show really came from *her* and you could really sense that, even without speaking to her afterwards.

Bryan: Another one that I enjoyed was the Loewe presentation.

Susie: OK, so we need to talk about that, because he [Jonathan Anderson] wasn't at the presentation. By all accounts, I think it's pretty clear that he's left the building.

Bryan: [Sings the Spice Girls' 'Goodbye'] *Goodbye my friend, it's not the end.*

Susie: I hope no one from the Spice Girls – Victoria – is watching or reading this. I thought it was incredible that they did a presentation, and even though he wasn't there, it was like his spirit was there; there was so much of Jonathan's imprint. It was kind of haunting.

Bryan: I'm actually having goosebumps, you know?

Susie: I felt sad to be honest.

Bryan: I'm grieving.

Susie: Because it's the end of an era at Loewe. But I'm also very excited for what's to come as well. When you have so much respect for a designer and their work and what they bring into the house… I mean, essentially, they work for a brand. And Jonathan literally obliterated what Loewe was and made his own imprint. Eleven years of creating his own codes, modernizing it, making it relevant, making it all about his craft. He's an incredible guy with clearly a brilliant mind and all of it is gone. He will move to another house. So what do you make out of it? Do you remain loyal to the designer, as opposed to the house that he worked for? It's very confusing. And what do they make out of Loewe next? What should Loewe be about? In these different transitions, some creative directors have certain remits. The powers that be – the CEO, merchandising team – want things to remain constant. I'd find it hard to believe Loewe would get rid of the Puzzle bag.

Bryan: They're never going to get rid of the Puzzle bag.

Susie: With all the transitions, I've been thinking about the idea that continuity is a good thing. I don't necessarily think it's helpful to have such a stark contrast of change – as we've seen at Gucci. It went from Alessandro maximalism and a very specific aesthetic to something…

Bryan: ...polar opposite: minimal, sleek.

Susie: It's something that didn't translate for the consumer. It is a little bit dangerous to play with these kinds of 180° creative director changes.

Bryan: But don't forget, there's also very few visionary creative directors that can actually do that, and have such a defined aesthetic and point of view.

Susie: And brands need time to bed visions in, to let things percolate. I think Burberry, for example, are really bedding Daniel Lee in – it looked a lot better this season –and it doesn't make any sense to me that they'd change it again after such a short period of time.

Bryan: Nothing is really successful overnight. Hedi at Celine took a while.

Susie: Even Jonathan at Loewe, it's the same. It wasn't kicking off in the way that it has done in the last five years.

Bryan: It takes time – one, two years minimum. So it's sad that after a year and a half, Sabato was let go. Two weeks before the show.

Susie: I actually don't know what to think of that period. We need to take care of people in this industry. It's not great for people's mental health to be dicked around like this. But, apparently he got a handsome payoff.

Bryan: I hope he did. But it's also all of these rumours that are going on, with all the social media pundits and even traditional press taking part in it for clickbait and views. I mean, why are we talking about personnel more than the actual collections themselves?

Susie: I literally said the same thing on Instagram.

Bryan: CMOs of brands don't deserve to be in a [Stylenotcom] blue square or have their own *WWD* press release. Why does it need all this attention? We're not *HR Weekly*. We should be talking about the collections rather than the changes. But it's the state of the industry at the moment...

Susie: I just think this constant speculation is killing the mystery a bit. It feels a bit linked to the overall luxury downturn and that by opening up the facade, the allure sort of diminishes. We're part of the problem. I was never really interested in C-suite changes, though. I'm more interested in creativity and how that happens, and getting into the minds of designers. It's just gotten to the level where you have memes about designer changes.

Bryan: Also if you're working in a studio with a creative director, imagine the morale and the mood of everyone in that team when you know your creative director is being talked about.

Susie: We should talk about Alessandro Michele at Valentino.

Bryan: Loved! That was a good show.

Susie: I'm resolutely a Michele stan only because, even if you might not like the aesthetic, he's very true to himself.

Bryan: Agree. He's a guy who has conviction in what he does. He really stands by it. He creates beautiful things. I bought two turbans and lace gloves at Valentino the other day.

Susie: I just love the frills, the bows, the excess. I like that it's more is more is more, and it isn't for everybody.

Bryan: Maybe some people want a classic black leather jacket from Hermès, or something like a black cashmere T-shirt from The Row. But sometimes I love a pink satin turban and a black lace glove with pearls. That's the beauty of fashion: there's something for everybody, and I hope it remains that way; that we have designers who create things for their own community and their own customers.

Susie: Valentino is so tied to its codes: red, archives and Valentino Garavani, and I wonder if it's at the stage where Alessandro just takes it to his own place, like how Jonathan made Loewe his own. Can we allow Alessandro to do the same thing? I'm just going off of what people have said about the show, that it's not Valentino.

Bryan: I read something really funny the other day. It's *Gucci Allora, Valentino Ancora*, you know, instead of the other way around. It would be amazing to see him push it a bit more. I think he's paid so much respect to the Valentino archive already, even though a lot of the Internet pundits – who don't own anything by Alessandro, don't know anything about his work – who keep saying 'Oh, it's not Valentino enough.' Instead of listening to all that noise, I just wish that he would go all out and do something that's very him.

Susie: He is!

Bryan: Couture was incredible. It was very Valentino, but blown up to Alessandro proportions.

Susie: He's doing his own thing, and it doesn't feel like it's strangled by merchandising. Like: we need to do a shoe that sells. I just hate when things look a bit strangled. I also thought this was going to be a season of transition, very tentative and a bit unsure of itself. But actually I saw some really incredible things where people just went all out, like Rei Kawakubo at Comme des Garçons, she just went for it. She always goes for it, but I felt like she really made a point that small can be beautiful, even though she's doing these big silhouettes and brilliant embellishments.

Bryan: It's the ultimate freedom when you own your own brand and you have financial power behind it, with Dover Street Market and everything that she does. She has the absolute freedom to not give a fuck about anyone. Same as Miuccia Prada at Miu Miu – they have so much freedom to do whatever, and it's such a joy to see that.

Susie: I just wish everyone could have that freedom.

Bryan: How do you feel about one of the debuts that we forgot to touch on – Sarah Burton's Givenchy?

Susie: It's a really solid beginning. She's feeling her way into the house. What I liked about is that it wasn't just a replica of what she did at McQueen.

Bryan: No, definitely not! Was it really important to send Look No.1 in a fishnet catsuit with a logo? I mean, it's a very strong statement.

Susie: That wasn't my favourite part...

Bryan: Me neither, but I loved the incredible embroidery, and the tailoring.

Susie: She was one of the few designers in Paris that used mid-sized models. Backstage I saw Sarah and Yseult hugging; she seemed genuinely grateful to Sarah. It was so heartfelt, and comes from her passion to embrace femininity in all forms. I'm intrigued to see it develop, and also whether she resurrects Givenchy couture.

Bryan: I mean, she can do couture. There's very few people who can.

Susie: I thought all the debuts were kind of great. Like Julian Klausner at Dries Van Noten. Brilliant, great succession plan. Someone who has worked with Dries, but can still do something that feels like himself as well. That was a really lovely start to the week. And then Rick, another act of freedom. He listed six designers in his press release that he worked with. I'm like, is this a Rick Owens press release, or is it a press release for other designers? I thought that was so great – to have the freedom and the generosity to give a platform to other designers. I thought about this actually: in this transitional period, what if Chanel collaborated with a young designer just for like a season? They have so much power and platform.

Bryan: Don't forget, Chanel is so precious, and they're very controlling of their image and their codes. They cannot. It's an institution.

'I don't think Maria Grazia gets her dues. Besides financials, she's brought female artists to the fore, and given women clothes they actually want to wear.'

'At The Row, a journalist took a video of her own notebook, with the models' feet blurred in the background. And the PR still asked her to delete it.'

Susie: Look at Gaultier. Dior has worked with Grace Wales Bonner for Cruise collections…

Bryan: Chanel's too precious. They work with different *métiers* and artisans, but for the house itself. No, I want my Chanel to stay Chanel.

Susie: Sophie Brocart is going there, from LVMH.

Bryan: For sustainability.

Susie: She's obviously a young designer champion. I just think, 'Share the wealth, share the love.' Young designers are struggling. Who better to support them than big houses?

Bryan: I'm a very conservative Chanel customer, I love pure Chanel. I'm so excited about Matthieu's first show.

Susie: Very! But that's next season.

Bryan: I know, but talking about today's Chanel show, what did you think?

'Having your own financial power behind your own brand is the ultimate freedom. Rei Kawakubo has the freedom to not give a fuck about anyone.'

Susie: Very good stop gap, very heavy on accessories. I've noticed quite a lot of the big heavy hitters were big on accessories, like pearls, bows, all the things that are pretty. Customer catnip.

Bryan: Chanel is another house that's so rich with codes, but Chanel has had them for a century. It's easy to create a universe based on those codes, and you can never get sick of it. I love the idea of a simple shoe with a giant pearl on the back, on the heel. That was cute.

Susie: Those were really, really nice. And I would buy them in a heartbeat, if they produce them. I thought Vuitton was very heavy on accessories, but very kind of cute, funny, the guitar cases…

Bryan: I loved the Paris street lamp bag towards the end.

Susie: The hip pouches.

Bryan: And the shoes were really good and graphic and colorful… Even the clothes, it's young, youthful, fresh. I really, really love Vuitton.

Susie: I thought it was nice that it was very light, because a lot of other collections were very heavy this season. Fur and waist and very restrictive, whereas, Nicolas [Ghesquière] was doing something more free-flowing, fluid and fast-paced. You could imagine them running around at the train station, on the concourse rushing to get a train.

Bryan: Maybe at Paris Charles de Gaulle, going to the first-class lounge.

Susie: You're allergic to train stations. You're always like, 'I'd never take a Eurostar.'

Bryan: I've done it once… Trains are not really luggage friendly. Put it this way, imagine me holding four suitcases.

Susie: You don't need luggage on a Paris-to-London commute, which a lot of people do. Jonathan Anderson must do it all the time.

Bryan: It's useful for a day trip. But I don't live in Paris or London. So, overall sense of this season: when everything comes to the boutiques six months from now, what would you buy?

Susie: I love that we're talking about what we're buying. I guess we are customers first. Editors, observers, second.

Bryan: But here's the thing: fashion shows don't end after the final model goes out on the runway. I mean, it's a whole process. The shows are there, what looks are going to be produced? There are shows in some houses where you won't see a single thing produced, because they're going to have their own commercial versions.

Susie: But we love a show look!

Bryan: I tend to buy only show looks, if they're available.

Susie: I would like one of those kind of lace teddy bodysuits from Valentino. They were left undone, I'd layer it obviously, but I just think they're really cute.

Bryan: I love the Duran denims with a bare back, it's something sexy. I'm a housewife. Do the bare bum at home, for my husband.

Susie: For his eyes only.

Bryan: Maybe I'll do it with a thong.

Susie: Miu Miu. I loved all the rumple crumble tailoring. There's quite a lot of rumple crumble tailoring in a few shows, actually. Prada, too.

Bryan: Were you at Hermès?

Susie: Yes. Oh, Hermès was beautiful. I thought the technique and the way that the leather was paired with the wool was really beautiful. I feel like she's [Nadège Vanhee-Cybulski] in a sort of different era from a few seasons ago.

Bryan: Just super strong. And the good thing about Hermès is that they produce everything.

Susie: Perfect for you. You're going to be running up a very big bill.

Susie: We've kind of only gone over Paris, because it's fresh in our minds. I feel bad that I can barely remember what I saw in Milan or London. Neither of us did New York, although Marc was incredible. That was a great show from a distance.

Bryan: Let's not lie here. If a show is remarkable and makes an impact, you'll never forget it.

Susie: We do still have one more show left, Saint Laurent.

Bryan: Maybe that'll be my show of the season. I bought so much Saint Laurent.

Susie: It's nice to end fashion week by the Eiffel Tower.

Bryan: Anthony's on a roll. It doesn't get any more Parisian than that.

Susie: It's bloody chic. I hate that word.

Bryan: I'll be there with my little Saint Laurent bomber, a little tuxedo, a little heel.

Susie: I'm not that woman. But I love it from afar. And I root for him because he's a brilliant designer.

Bryan: Another one with conviction.

Susie: To the point, where there's a stubbornness to it.

Bryan: How many years has he been there?

Susie: Feels like more than a decade because his vision is so entrenched and established – what he does is so great.

Bryan: In this day and age of designer musical chairs, I'm just happy that there are a few people out there who are solid and still going strong, and I hope they remain that way. We need longevity.

Susie: Karl-esque longevity. Will that ever happen again?

Bryan: I mean, Ian at Max Mara has been there for quite a while, and Nadège and Véronique [Nichanian] at Hermès. But these are houses that are not trend-driven. I don't think they're as pressured as much as creative directors in the other groups. Max Mara is independent. Hermès is independent. Chanel, for example – Matthieu is going to have that job until he croaks.

Susie: What if he wants to leave?

Bryan: Then he can leave. But who's going to want to leave Chanel?

Susie: That is true. There is no higher job. OK, last words. I want your takeaway from this season.

Bryan: My takeaway for the season is to spend more time with young designers.

Susie: Yay. That means that I can just give you pointers.

Bryan: I believe in instinct. I see so many images, like everybody else online, and when I saw pictures of Duran's previous work, it really made a mark – unlike anything I've seen in the current landscape. And so I said, 'OK, let me spend money on a car, drag my ass there', and it was worth the trip. That was a very good show.

Susie: Originality still stands for something. And I think even in this season – questioning who's coming, going, who's beginning – it's powerful. That's what I felt. I feel uplifted from this week.

Bryan: Did you feel this in any other show this season? Hand on heart, you know, tell the truth.

Susie: Not especially, but I saw a lot of beautiful things. And I really, really thought that I wasn't going to get that much. I came into this season almost being a bit Debbie Downer before it had even began. In fact, Taxi drivers have said that there have been less people in Paris for fashion week overall.

Bryan: Do you think it's a good idea to make it all more intimate?

Susie: I think it really depends case by case. I think salon shows do look really nice with some designers. But I also don't believe in gatekeeping for the sake of gatekeeping, to breathe this sort of 'We're exclusive' sneering tone.

Bryan: You didn't make the cut.

Susie: But brands should invite who they feel is important to them. What that means is obviously elastic. We'll see next season.

Bryan: If we even make the cut! Well, we can always look at pictures online.

Susie: I'm sometimes so fine with a livestream and the pictures online.

Bryan: Especially if the collection's bad.

Susie: And then you're like, 'Oh, OK, I'm not missing much.' I felt bad I didn't get to see my friend Jennyfax, a little Japanese label. I felt really bad that I didn't get to go and see Niccolò Pasqualetti. I feel bad all the time. There is only so much time you have in the day.

Bryan: Well, speaking of time, think about all the debuts that are happening this year, all the changes…

Susie: I'm excited.

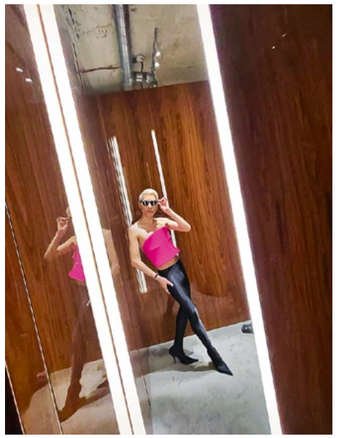
Bryan: *Goodbye, my friend…*

Susie: You gonna sing us out, Bryan?

1. *Her Dior*, a documentary by Loïc Prigent, explores Maria Grazia Chiuri's feminist vision at Dior through her collaborations with women artists, released on International Women's Day.

2. Robert Wilson's scenography for Dior's Autumn/Winter 2025 show transformed the runway into a theatrical spectacle. Inspired by Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, the presentation unfolded in five acts, featuring dramatic elements like a swinging mannequin, a soaring prehistoric bird, fiery meteorites, and an emerging iceberg.

3. For their Autumn/Winter 2025 show, Dsquared2 marked their 30th anniversary with playful collaborations from emerging labels Vaquera, Magliano, and Bettter, who reinterpreted archival pieces in a kitsch, theatrical setting.



Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Susie Lau.

Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Bryan Yambao.

Tim Blanks

‘The world right now seems to be specializing in unprecedented events – between genocide and tariffs and absolutely monstrous upendings of humanity and everything that we hold dear. And then fashion’s contribution is going to be this enormous change within all these different houses. It’s everything we’ve ever wanted, in a way. September is going to be so incredible, I’d be a fool not to return.’

Interview by Jonathan Wingfield

In early January, while strolling along London’s Bond Street, Tim Blanks gazed upwards at Cartier’s beguiling Christmas decorations causing him to trip on the curb and take an abrupt tumble. This momentary ‘fatal distraction’, as he now calls it, resulted in an arm broken in three places, five heavily cracked ribs, and fashion’s beloved writer (and reluctant critic) forced to sit out the entirety of the Autumn/Winter 2025 season fashion shows. It was the first time in almost 40 years – give or take a Covid season or two – that the ever-jovial New Zealander wasn’t casting his wildly descriptive eye over catwalk proceedings; instead, forced to watch the shows via livestreams as he licked his wounds at home in the English capital. During those four decades, he’s edited magazines in Toronto, hosted the much-loved Canadian TV show *Fashion File*, written wonderfully evocative show reviews during style.com’s heyday, and, since 2016, taken on the role of Editor-at-Large at The Business of Fashion. Beyond anything on his CV though, Tim Blanks’ longstanding contribution to fashion is his enthusiasm and unrivalled skill for expressing the thoughts and intentions of countless designers – in doing so, adding layers of cultural resonance, meaning and sheer emotion to what’s sent down the catwalk each season. Suffice to say his absence was felt between mid-February and mid-March.

Twelve weeks to the day since his fateful accident, Blanks graciously agreed to, well, remain sitting down for a chat with *System* about this most anomalous of fashion seasons for him, and indeed for the industry at large, as it navigated a combination of socio-political upheaval, economic uncertainty and an unprecedented number of luxury fashion houses on the cusp of a creative reboot. Furthermore, President Trump’s so-called ‘Liberation Day’ announcement sent further shockwaves on the very eve of our conversation, and so with tariffs firmly on his mind, and the equal discomfort of a be-slinged arm, Tim Blanks was ready to ‘get into it’.

Jonathan Wingfield: Given that you didn’t attend the shows this season, I’m curious to know if what’s on your mind is wildly leftfield of those that did, or exactly the same?

Tim Blanks: I guess I’m thinking about tariffs and Duran Lantink. I’ve just been a judge this week for the Woolmark Prize.[1] And Duran won. I’ve been a judge pretty much every year since the prize was relaunched in 2012, and there’s never been such unanimity. Lately, they’ve been adding more designers to the jury, but before it was mainly judges from retail or editorial – buyers and editors. Whenever there seemed to be a clear winner, that designer would have already won every other prize under the sun, and so the debate, at least from the perspective of the creative or editorial jury members, would be, ‘Let’s give it to somebody whose life it will change,’ because it’s quite a good prize. I remember the year that Rahul Mishra won [2014], the commercial side of the jury was fighting for Joseph Altuzarra, who had just got backing from Kering, while the creative side was fighting for Rahul. It was ‘little David’ versus Kering-backed Goliath. We *12 Angry Men*-ed it out for quite a while, and Rahul ultimately won. This year, you could say that Duran has won practically everything going, but it was just so inescapable. One of the criteria for the Woolmark is that the winner should be a good ambassador for wool fibre, and with Duran you have those extraordinary shapes that were hand knitted by 15 women in Amsterdam, and then there’s the science aspect of what he does in construction. That convergence neatly represents the future of wool.

Do you think Duran is deserving of the huge sways of interest and accolades that have been showered upon him this season?

Above and beyond his talent and his ingenuity, you can see people are feeling excited and looking forward to what he does, and that’s what fashion has been missing for so long. All the talk about him becoming the designer for Gaultier is interesting, because when you think about what a Gaultier show or collection meant it really was defined by that sense of excitement. I often ask myself, where is that today? And then Duran comes along with something completely leftfield, yet it isn’t gratuitously abstract. There’s a real logic to it. And there’s incredible technique coupled with strange sensuality, humour, a fabulous sense of anarchy, and social commentary as well – all the things that Gaultier bowled me over with when I began going to his shows in the 1980s.

‘I was this blimp from Toronto with a black tooth. Initially the whole Canada thing was crippling. Karl Lagerfeld just called me ‘Canada’ for years.’

Actually, what was the first catwalk show you ever attended in Paris?

When I became the editor of *Toronto Life Fashion* magazine in Canada, I thought it was very important to have a presence in Europe – utterly self-serving, of course – and so my first season in Paris was Spring/Summer 1988 couture. In fact, my very first show that season was Saint Laurent, the couture collection with the Braque doves and the Picasso guitar. It was just *beyond*. I remember walking along the corridors of the Intercontinental Hotel [Saint Laurent couture show venue] with Krystyne Griffin, the formidable fashion maven who ran Yves Saint Laurent Canada. Walking just in front of us was a woman whose ankles were so skinny they looked like they were glass and would shatter if she put her foot down too hard. When she turned around, it was Nan Kempner. Krystyne introduced me to her. I knew exactly who she was because I was an avid reader of *W* magazine which covered all the society ladies. Let's just say, it was a moment.

‘Alessandro was such a unique paradigm: pluck a complete unknown from obscurity, give him two weeks to do a collection, and he changes the world.’

After almost 40 years of attending fashion shows – give or take a Covid season or two – this was your first season absent from Paris. How did it feel to not be there in person?
During the pandemic, everybody was in a position of compromise, and so if I was watching a livestream of a show, everybody else was doing that. Whereas this season I was watching a livestream of something actually happening, with an audience – and possibly a seat in there somewhere with my name on it. But I think livestreaming got a glow-up since the pandemic. Some of the shows I was watching felt like they were being staged for the livestream. With Balenciaga, for example, I realized that if you were in the audience, you wouldn't actually have noticed any of the wider context that you saw on the livestream; you wouldn't have realized that you're sat in a small and walled section of a much larger labyrinth. But with a drone relentlessly covering every square inch of the venue, you see it all on screen, plus you see close-ups. The cliché is that it's the difference between the movies and the theatre, and while you may not be seeing the smallest drop of sweat on the model's brow, you're definitely seeing the shimmer of her sequinned dress up close. You're appreciating the masterful work of the hair and make-up team, too, more than when you're in the room. I was actually wondering if the livestream is now a principal consideration for make-up artists when they're working on shows.

So you're now a livestream evangelist.
Well, the other thing it captures is those step-and-repeats, where you see people wearing the brand's clothes before the show starts. I got completely mesmerized by that constant arrival of people, some of whom you recognize, and others you don't. There's a celebrity angle, like at Miu Miu, with all the starlets wearing them, but then at Off-White, it felt more like it was Ib [Kamara]'s friends. I found it so revelatory to see the clothes being worn on real people, not just on models in a fashion show. It really seduced me to watch and enjoy that collection.

This season aside, what's your rapport with attending shows these days? Does it remain the backbone of your professional activity?
For sure. I still think fashion is a physical thing, and it is important to be in the venue for the show. I talked to Haider Ackermann [remotely] before his Tom Ford show, for a preview piece I was writing for BoF, and he was telling me about the set that Niklas Bildstein Zaar designed for him – it was so good. And then I'm watching the livestream of the show, and I'm thinking, you can't really see it! I texted people who were attending if they could see what the backdrop was… It was quite subtle as it was dark in that room.

What was the concept of the set?
Haider used to work in a club in Antwerp's red-light district. All the hookers would come in at the end of the night and he'd have a drink with them. He knew the rooms that they worked in, where there'd be mirrors that people would write things on – obscene messages, doodles, phone numbers. And he said that the walls of the show set were supposed to duplicate those mirrors, with messages and scribbles and phone numbers on them. When Niklas showed me the set without anybody in it, and with no lights on, it did kind of look like what Haider had been describing. But when I asked Vikram [Alexei Kansara, editorial director at The Business of Fashion] to have a look on the day, he didn't get a strong sense of that. So watching it on a livestream, the story felt strangely more amplified for me than if I'd actually been sitting there. Obviously, I did miss the wave of emotion at the end of the show; that's the physicality and ambience of a fashion show… But for most people there, you'd have been hard-pressed to have actually seen that embrace. So there are all these little details that you miss if you're in the venue.

Katie Grand said they were serving martinis at the show…
…which is a perfect Tom Fordian thing.

Do you feel like you've missed a lot this season?
I think I'm past missing things. The world is in such a powerless state that regret is a really pointless indulgence. I enjoyed watching my livestreams, I didn't miss the early starts, the Paris traffic, the waiting, the late nights, the writing and the deadlines… although I probably will again.

‘Is Demna going to do something else equally strong for Gucci, and reveal another facet of his personality that we've yet to see? It's so intriguing.’

How do you feel about the prospect of returning next season? What with all the changes afoot…
September is going to be so incredible, I'd be a fool not to return. The world right now seems to be specializing in unprecedented events – between genocide and tariffs and absolutely monstrous upendings of humanity and everything that we hold dear. And then fashion's contribution is going to be this enormous change within all these different houses. It's everything we've ever wanted, in a way.

It reminds me of that exhibition at the Palais Galliera – *1997 Fashion Big Bang* – about Marc Jacobs starting at Louis Vuitton, Nicolas Ghesquière starting at Balenciaga, Galliano at Dior, McQueen at Givenchy, Margiela at Hermès, the Colette store opening… With the beauty of hindsight, you see it as this reshuffling of fashion. And next season feels like it's going to be a similar reshuffling.
One of the other Woolmark judges had made a list of all the changes coming up in September, and it was unbelievable.

Between all the imminent change in fashion and the turmoil in the wider world, did you sense that there was much direct response to global affairs on the runway this season?
I remember when Russia invaded Ukraine, you had a designer like Rei Kawakubo acknowledging 'the lie of war' in her collections. It felt to me like fashion decided to be the mirror. I've said this a million times before: fashion reflects and fashion projects. So there have been moments in the past where the horror could be encapsulated in a way that you could say something about it in your collection. But I think the horror right now has become so cataclysmic and such an offense to humanity that you're left thinking, 'How do you respond to that when you're… making a dress?' That said, many of the designers at the Woolmark Prize talked about the community that they work with, and that they serve. For someone like Raul [Lopez] at Luar, the threat to trans rights is obviously huge. So he will inject that element into his work, he will celebrate it, and that will be his way of confronting the monstrous things that are happening. Of course, there are other media – art, film, theatre, literature – where you can absolutely bare your soul, and fashion has been that at times. McQueen certainly was, but it's been a while since I've really felt like fashion's been torn from today's headlines.

Do you think that's because the role of the fashion designer is teetering more towards the commerce and less towards the art?
The system has been shaped so that we are all pawns in somebody else's game. All those designers are as well.

The other people we've been talking to for these interviews have mentioned that young designers seem to want to do things more at their own pace, at their own scale, and that the use of hand skills is returning to the fore.
Well, it's E.F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*[2] battle cry. That has a moment with each generation. What struck me with all these young Woolmark designers is their take on sustainability. Of course, sustainability is such a weird chimera, because the fashion industry is built on consumption, and consumption produces waste and so on. But these designers are now talking about after-sale care. So when you get tired of a Duran outfit you can take it back to him, and he will remodel it for you. Many of them are offering this repairing or remodelling or reimagining service, and that felt to me like a rebuttal. Everybody talks about Shein or Primark as the primary sinners in this buy-something-for-five-pounds-wear-it-once syndrome, but isn't the enormous product churn of the big luxury houses the same type of over-consumption – just at the other end of the spectrum? It makes you think, what

would fashion be like in a post-apocalyptic world? It would be dressmakers, it would be tailors, it would be cobblers…

It would be less moodboards.
[Laughs] Yes! I mean, men used to have suits made for them as a matter of course, not because they wore fancy pants. And so it seems to me that this sort of humanism is a response to the world, and that they're really trying to emphasize the humanity in what they do.

Is there a very real possibility that future generations of young consumers might feel less aligned with the values of the big luxury brands?
It's happening right now, and all those merchandisers are reeling about the fact that their bags aren't selling. The merry-go-round spun for a long, long while,

'When I got my CFDA award they asked me who I'd like to give me the award. And I said Trent Reznor. And they replied, 'Errr… anyone else?''

but it got so fast that entropy set in. And after entropy, there is this complete and utter stasis, and that's where we are.

Luxury fatigue?
I'd be more inclined to call it 'sticker shock'. Just astronomical pricing! Something that was £300 pounds is now £1,300. And yet – once again at the Woolmark Prize – when you look at the line sheets of these younger designers, they're all so price conscious, it's quite incredible. I asked one of them, 'Is this the wholesale price?' and they said, 'No, that's the retail price.' They're very, very reasonable, and they're very aware of the nonsensical pricing of many established houses. In any case, if you're a young designer setting out your stall today, there's little point in trying to sell a blouse for £20,000.

Is now the time to mention tariffs?
It's astonishing to read that tariffs are going to increase prices even more because companies aren't going to take a bite from their bottom line; they're going to just pass it on to the consumer by upping the price of the handbag even more.

That's a sobering thought. Let's turn our attention to the shows themselves. Starting with New York, and Veronica Leoni's debut collection for Calvin Klein. It made me think, 'What role should Calvin Klein be playing today in American fashion?' And ultimately the broader and more complex question: What do you think New York can be today as a fashion capital?
I think people wanted and really needed that show to be good. Although I guess the response suggests that it wasn't. New York is a bit like London, in that it has its incredible moments and then it goes into a fallow period. But I guess all the young designers who are working away there would understandably feel insulted to hear me suggest it's in a fallow period.

The Row have been in Paris for a while; Vaquera have gone there too. Proenza Schouler are deserting their own New York label for Loewe… New York is struggling to hold onto its own.
I think American fashion has been a victim of Darwinism in the same way the movie industry has. It just feels like it's much harder to be a young, independent person operating in America. Maybe it always was, but it feels a lot more Darwinian there than it does elsewhere. Although I look at Luar, and Raul's passion and his commitment, and the fact that he's so articulate makes me think what a fabulous spokesperson he is for a fashion generation.

As you'd mentioned before, he's particularly emblematic of a designer who's designing for his community.
London is the same thing, it's always about community, but it's having a very hard time as well. And yet I look at someone like Jawara Alleyne, whose collection I loved, and wonderful people like Supriya Lele. You can see in an ideal world what those people would be… but we're not in an ideal world.

When you think about Paris from an industry perspective, LVMH has become the defining 'brand'. It's come to represent what fashion means in the city. And by the same rationale, you could argue that the most enduring and defining London 'brand' is actually Central Saint Martins.
What a fabulous thought. It absolutely defines London. That gives London its own niche. The problem is Brexit has fucked that up. I mentor 75 students in the fourth year at Polimoda,[3] and I don't know how many of them would have gone to Saint Martins if they could have, but it's just so hard to get in, and so expensive, so all the schools in Europe are getting this spillover business. But the idea that London's most durable contribution to the tree of fashion would be Central Saint Martins – or perhaps the broader notion of fashion education – is wonderful.

Let's talk about Milan. Did the news of Demna going to Gucci come as a surprise to you?
I felt it had been in the wind. I don't know why, because it's certainly a surprising idea. Maybe it was BoF where I read that Demna did an incredible presentation to get that [Gucci] job. I think he's a really, really fantastic designer, and he clearly has a very strong personal signature. But is he going to do something else for Gucci that would be equally strong and maybe reveal another facet of his personality that we haven't seen before? It's intriguing. The challenge of what's going to resuscitate people's interest in Gucci is a pretty major one, and that kind of Alessandro Michele lightning doesn't strike very often. It was such an interesting paradigm: you take a complete unknown,

'Is Jonathan Anderson going to sit down with Peter Marino and say, 'Let's redesign all your Dior stores'? Will Peter Marino say, 'Don't you touch my stores'?'

pluck him from obscurity, give him two weeks to do a collection, and he changes the world. It's the ultimate fashion fairy tale.

Demna was 10 years at Balenciaga, Jonathan Anderson was 10 years at Loewe. That's a particularly tough act to follow. They're big shoes to fill.
In Loewe's case, shoes so big they need two people to fill them.

Celine's business at the point of Phoebe Philo's departure was estimated to be about 500 million euros. Hedi Slimane came and effectively dismantled that brand and business – the existing customer went elsewhere – and LVMH then had to invest hundreds of millions, if not more, in order for it to reach today's scale, which must be nearer two or three billion euros. Ultimately, the risk absolutely paid off. But when you think about the prospect of Jonathan Anderson's quite radical creative direction dismantling an existing €10-billion business like Dior… that's a monumental risk. I mean, what happens to all those Peter Marino-designed stores? Are they suddenly subject to a Jonathan Anderson makeover? There is risk and uncertainty built into all of these creative reboots, but the further up the scale the higher the stakes become.
Yes, you're right. Is Jonathan Anderson going to sit down with Peter Marino and say, 'Let's redesign your all Dior shops'? Is Peter Marino going to say, 'Don't you touch my stores'? Can one single designer successfully do men's and women's and couture at Dior?

Is there enough in the Givenchy brand – beyond Audrey Hepburn and the Little Black Dress – for Sarah Burton to transform it into a dominant cultural force?
Givenchy was of a time, and it's since been through how many designers… seven… eight? Julien Macdonald, Ozwald Boateng, McQueen, Galliano, Riccardo Tisci, Matthew Williams, Clare Waight Keller… to the point that whatever the original personality is, it's literally Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. You can't get around that. Sarah acknowledged it by doing that little dancy thing which I thought was very smart. She basically said, 'Audrey Hepburn is in the story, here she is in the first look, and now it's gone.' There's no little black dress or anything. And I thought the collection was an audition for couture, because they're going to revive couture under her. It was a strong, classic couture collection that people wear in the daytime. I liked what she did. I thought it was a good start, and I thought I could see how it will adapt to couture well.

Tell me about something you saw on the catwalk this season that felt genuinely new?
I'm just trying to run through Jun Takahashi's Undercover collection, because he's usually somebody who can conjure up newness through attitude, and I often feel very emotional when I watch his shows.

I liked the idea that he would rework his own favourite collection from his past to celebrate the 20 years of Undercover. It was such an easy win, but it just felt – and I loathe this word – 'authentic'. It felt genuine.
Well, that's what he is. That's all he *can* be. And the whole idea of imagining Patti Smith and the stuffed animals was just so arcane![4]

That sounds like her new backing band: Patti Smith and the stuffed animals.
[Laughs] Did you read Keith McNally's Instagram post this morning about Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe?[5]

Yes, didn't he say they were the rudest customers to have graced his restaurants?
Yes, he did. So, I'm still thinking about what was genuinely new this season… The one thing that I'd never seen before

– that made me re-evaluate a piece of clothing that should be so utterly basic, but actually made me look at it in a new light – was Duran's double-wide denim. I think it was a skirt in the show, but I fancied it as shorts. And that double-wide effect is something of a signature for Duran. It transforms everything it touches with humour and surreal sex appeal. Very Gaultier!

Which emerging designer caught your attention this season?
The designer that struck me – because I knew nothing about him when I was looking at the collection, and I've since found out that he's a sort of protégé of Ib Kamara – is Jawara Alleyne in London. It's sort of raggamuffin-y, and quite complex. Let me read what Liam Hess wrote about him on *Vogue* Runway. 'Knowing irony… subvert traditional garment construction… Rihanna and Charli XCX wear it…' I like the volume, and the tribal quality of it, and the sense that there was a grunge and a glamour combined.

What's the reality for a young designer when they're trying to establish their creative vision, their profile, their business, their reputation?
I think it's really important to have a mentor type who can help you rise above the noise. It's where somebody like Ib Kamara comes in because he's so committed to that sort of thing: promoting people who are new and who he sees something in. And when he does, he *really* pushes them. That idea of the community, or of kindred spirits, comes with stylists and photographers and models and all those independent magazines that people put out. So younger designers do have platforms at their disposal.

In the past five years, designers like Jonathan Anderson have become great cheerleaders for slightly leftfield celebrity dressing. To the extent that there's now an established culture of younger celebrities – some of whom are huge pop stars or actors – taking a real interest in fashion, in young designers, in mixing up different things to wear. Alongside this, you sense there are young designers making clothes in their bedrooms who can now land on the radar of these celebrities via a stylist, or a friend, or just their Instagram feed, and it might be enough to propel them for another season. It's great.
Exactly what we were just saying about Jawara Alleyne. It's often the same names: Rihanna, Charli XCX, Emma Corrin, Rita Ora… Then there was Beyoncé wearing all those new local designers on her world tour.[6] And the point of entry is a Harry Lambert or an Ib Kamara or a stylist who works with Naomi Campbell. What Harry Lambert did with Harry Styles was pretty amazing. And you see what a difference it makes to people's business.

One can be cynical about what celebrity represents, but in these instances, it has a pretty profound effect on the bottom line.
Celebrities are often tuned into that creative community on some level; they understand they're no longer just a show pony. They understand that they're there to kind of turn people on to things, they have a part to play as well. It's no longer just a paid sponsor situation.

It's post-transactional.
It is, and it's all done with a sort of love and an awareness of how impossibly difficult the world is getting for young creative people, whether they're designers or musicians or whatever. So it becomes a point of pride, of feeling positive, and of propelling people.

As we've seen with Duran, there can quickly and suddenly be a seismic shift, with the industry, celebrities, and clued-up customers saying, 'OK, we're really into this.' Hype doesn't always mean growth of scale, but it can definitely help on some level.
It's funny, because you always have the problem of scale. It was so interesting listening to Alessandro Sartori from Zegna talking to Raul from Luar at the Woolmark Prize. They were discussing the difficulty in getting paid. Alessandro said, 'Listen, that's across the board, that isn't just an issue of being a young designer and, you know, last-in-first-out. This is happening to the big guys, too.' Obviously, certain people are more inured to the slings and arrows of whatever it is, but it is across the board.

In an oversaturated marketplace for fashion opinion, what do you try to say that feels unique? Why do you choose fashion criticism as a space of action?
I'm not a critic, Jonathan. What I write about now is people, and it just so happens that most of them seem to be

'I remember when Russia invaded Ukraine, you had a designer like Rei Kawakubo acknowledging 'the lie of war' in her collections.'

fashion designers. But I write about actresses and musicians and other people. I'm curious about what they do, why they do it, how they do it. I want to get to some kind of human truth. I loved Cynthia Erivo when I spoke to her, I thought she was so fabulous. And I loved Niklas Bildstein Zaar when I spoke to him. And you just want other people to love them too. We turn our lip up at 'authenticity', just because it's become such an overused word, and so has 'storytelling'. But I do like to tell stories. I love it if I can make people laugh, or make people look something up, or make people go and read *The Overstory* by Richard Powers.[7] In the same way I used to love it when David Bowie would be talking about Colin Wilson,[8] and I'd run out and buy every one of his books. It's about sharing. Again, it's community.

I know you say you're not a fashion critic, but has the way you look at and consider things evolved since you began writing about shows on a regular basis?
Everybody uses that word 'respect', and I've heard it quite a lot recently. When you're talking to someone like Honey Dijon, respect is a big thing with her. Well, the longer I've been doing this, the more kind of respect there is.

Do you mean from you towards the people you're writing about, or from other industry people towards you?
Towards me. When I started, it was tough, and a very different world: it was all about Elsa Klensch and I was just this blimp from Toronto with a black tooth. I actually had a black tooth at the time! I had standing tickets for the first few years I went to shows, and the

When did that change?
When I was doing *Fashion File*. It happened in Europe quicker than in America, because I sent flowers to Denise Dubois, the Chambre Syndicale and all that. I did a sort of fan dance for those people. It still took about five years.

***Fashion File*'s international syndication must have helped, surely.**
No, not really. We were on in 130 countries, and we still couldn't get arrested in some places. And then, all of a sudden, it did change, when people began to understand the power of fashion on TV. To the point where Pierre Bergé would be pushing Saint Laurent in front of the camera to be interviewed for the show. But, initially the whole Canada thing was just crippling. Karl Lagerfeld called me 'Canada' for years.

'I had a great talk with Tina Brown the other night, but it wasn't about fashion. We were talking about politics, and then she quoted me in her Substack.'

Who's the person that you'd most want to delve into and tell their story?
Trent Reznor.[9] Just because I absolutely love his soundtracks, they're incredible! Luca Guadagnino and Carlo Antonelli, who are doing a collector's book about *Queer*, have commissioned me to write a story about the style of the film. And I said I wanted to write about how the look of it and the sound of it mesh, because the use of music in that film is so good. Actually, when I got my CFDA award, they asked me who I'd like to give me the award. And I said Trent Reznor. And they replied, 'Errr… anyone else?'

[Laughs] Tumbleweed!
Then they said, 'We were actually thinking Linda Evangelista.' And I was immediately like, 'Yep, that's good!'

way you made any inroads was just by the designers being interested in you. I'd go to the Calvin Klein show and Paul Wilmot, the brutal publicist guy – one of those sort of piss elegant, old-school New York PR types – would be there. I'd go up to him with my standing ticket and say, 'Oh, Paul, did you see the 10-page Calvin Klein special we just shot?' 'Yeah, Tim, it was great.' 'And you still can't give me a seat for the show?' 'Oh no, we're completely oversubscribed.' And we're standing talking in front of five empty seats that have been reserved for The Boise Idaho Shoe Bugle team or whoever – none of whom have shown up! KCD wouldn't seat me either, even when I was friendly with Marc Jacobs or Anna Sui. When you were from Canada, you were way below Poland in the pecking order.

Did you always have the kind of enthusiasm that people associate you with these days?
I suppose I am remarkably untouched by the passage of time – not physically, obviously, I'm ruined by the passage of time physically – and I do think my enthusiasm for the job remains unscathed. When I first started writing for style.com things went up a notch; I remember being so excited, so enthusiastic, and it was all so energizing. Never in a million years would I have imagined it would happen, but I lucked into something that I enjoyed and that I was good at. It wasn't an ambition of mine. I sometimes wonder where I could have applied the same kind of aptitude and enthusiasm, and I can't imagine where I would have been able to pull so many things that I love – like movies or music

or that book I'm reading or a TV show I'm obsessed with – into this thing I write about, which is fashion. And fashion is everything, I suppose, in the end, isn't it?

Tell me some highlights from a memorable conversation that you've had this show season.
I had a great talk with Tina Brown the other night, but it wasn't about fashion. We were talking about American politics, and then she quoted me in her Substack.

And a conversation about fashion?
An Vandevorst is the head of the course at Polimoda, and she and I have had some pretty interesting conversations. She doesn't have her A.F. Vandevorst label anymore, but the bug still gnaws at her. She talks about how when she's with her 75 students she has to physically stop herself jumping in and redoing something a student's submitted, redoing their moodboard. I thought A.F. Vandevorst was an amazing label and incredibly underrated. They ended it the way they wanted to end it: she's a DJ these days, and working at Polimoda. Nonetheless, given the opportunity, she says she'd still desperately love to design. She wants to make something, create some newness. Once a fashion designer, always a fashion designer.

What does this womenswear season say about women today?
If you think about Jun Takahashi's Undercover show, it was the projection of womanhood, from girl to grandmother, that incredible spectrum that he presented on his catwalk. A show like that is a reminder of the sensitivity he has towards women, which I think is unique in fashion. You look at that and you can see what it says about the permanence of women, a respect and an elevation. To be honest, when you look at a lot of other stuff on the catwalk it looks like cosplay.

Yes, there's a lot of that at the moment.
Why is that? You ask yourself, 'Is this about escape?' And if it isn't, then what is it?

The final day in Paris had some interesting and varying takes on womanhood.
The last show in Paris was Saint Laurent, and that vision was stunning, it was absolutely incredible. But the spectrum between Saint Laurent and Miu Miu, the show before it, says a lot about women today. There were women of all ages and all accomplishments in the Miu Miu show; Miuccia Prada makes a big point of that, so you've got your model and you've got your doctor or whatever. Then in the Saint Laurent show, the models were girls, but they looked very much like women. It reminded me that in Yves Saint Laurent's heyday, his models were women. I mean, women of a certain age.

They were statuesque. There was such an ownership of womanhood.
Besides Undercover and Miu Miu, I'm trying to think of any other respectful, more inclusive projections of women. Those particular shows felt semi-political to me, and I think that's only going to get more intense. Demna showed that as well. He always has that range of women in his Balenciaga shows.

I sense with him it's more of a study in archetypes, almost like going to a Duane Hanson exhibition or something. But then he's created his own archetypes as well.
Yes, he has. What do *you* think the season says about women?

I just think that women have never been more exposed to fashion, and therefore they've never been so exposed to the opinions and the projections of a handful of people who are steering and shaping what it is they're seeing and wearing.
Wow. Wouldn't you say that it used to be more intense when there were trends?

Ironically, my next question was going to be, do runway trends still matter?
There aren't any anymore. But once upon a time, there were trends.

Whose opinion, besides your own, are you most interested in hearing when it comes to the shows?
I quite like talking to Katie [Grand] about shows, but she always has the exact opposite point of view from me.

What's the influence of the fashion critic in 2025?
Severely diminished. Not diminished, but I think there are so many voices now that I don't think there are any particular voices that can claim authority.

Tell me about a recent piece of fashion writing that you've enjoyed reading.
I liked Rebecca Mead's story about Jonathan Anderson in *The New Yorker*.

What do you think it is about those *New Yorker* stories that when they land, they *really* land. Is it the level of access they're able to commandeer?
Yes, there's that. But then again, Michael Specter used to write all the fashion stories, and his never landed. I think it's that sort of awareness of the subject, a sort of familiarity with the context, so it's never an anthropological expedition. I guess I do read other fashion critics when I'm curious to see what they think of something that I've had a strong opinion about, like Alessandro Michele at Valentino, which I absolutely loved – I loved the couture, and I loved that last show that I watched online. I appreciate that there are things that people don't enjoy. Nicole [Phelps] was describing the Valentino venue being so hot and dark, and I just thought, 'Yeah, amazing, this is a sensory experience.' But I could understand why feeling hot in the dark, sat in difficult seating watching a fashion show would piss Vanessa Friedman off. But at the same time, I just love what Michele does. I'm very irrational about that.

When you read what someone else has written about a show, are you surprised by how vastly different their opinion can be from your own – given that both opinions have been informed by the same experience?
Not anymore. Much more so with a music or film review.

Why? Because you think fashion is inherently up for wildly different interpretation?
No, I just think there are so many voices to read now. There are all those people online coughing out their fur balls live to camera.

What do you want to see more of during fashion week?
I was very excited when I saw Sophie Thatcher at Valentino. I want to see more of Sophie. And I want to see more of those great intangibles; things that I don't expect to see, which I can't possibly predict. But I also look forward to seeing my old favourites. I wouldn't want to call Rick Owens a comfortable old shoe, but they're insanely reliable and thrilling and original spectacles. I think what Jonathan Anderson said about originality in that Rebecca Mead interview was so interesting: 'Authenticity is invaluable. Originality is nonexistent. Steal, adapt, borrow. It doesn't matter where one takes things from. It's where one takes them to. Devour old films, new films, history books, paintings, photographs, poems, dreams, whatever. Only steal from things that speak directly to you. If you do this, your work will be authentic.' And rather fittingly, that quote itself is half-lifted from a Jim Jarmusch quote.

I think for someone like Jonathan Anderson, who has to be constantly generating so many ideas and solutions, your antennae have to be open and attuned at all times, just in order to pick things up and apply them to the vast number of tasks he needs to complete in any given day, week, month, season. What do you want to see less of during fashion month?
People.

[Laughs] The volume of people, or just the familiarity of the people you see?
I sometimes feel bamboozled by the sheer number of people who are drawn to the shows these days. That sounds like a terribly old lady thing to say. These days, I have the luxury of only really going to the shows that I want to go to. So I'm in a position where I'd rather see more of those particular kind of things. So the less thing would actually be less about what's happening on the catwalk and more about what's going on around, on the periphery – the mob, the pushing and shoving, everything seems to be a lot more physical than it used to be a few years ago.

Finally, what does success look like for a luxury fashion brand in the current climate?
Given that it's the most successful luxury brand, and Nadège [Vanhee-Cybulski]'s latest show was her best, I'd say Hermès. I said to Nadège, 'Oh, my God, all that black leather. It's a hard-ass lady cop.' She'd been thinking about Alain Delon in [Jean-Pierre] Meville's masterpiece *Un Flic*. Worked for me! I thought the collection was fabulous.

One could argue Hermès is not strictly a fashion brand.
I think Nadège definitely made a fashion statement though. She really did. If you think about Brunello Cucinelli or Loro Piana, and then you look at Hermès, Hermès has so much character, and so much of everything that gives

'I just think there are so *many* critics out there today. I mean, there are all those people online coughing out their fur balls live to camera.'

'I loved watching Valentino's sensory experience online, but I could understand why feeling hot in the dark would piss Vanessa Friedman off.'

fashion its power. It has strength. It has timelessness. It has seduction. It's like when you look at a masterpiece of art or film: you don't say, 'Oh, that's old.' You're responding to it in the moment. And with Hermès you can go back and look at Véronique [Nichanian]'s menswear collections in the same way. Interestingly, I don't think Véronique's Hermès man goes that well with Nadège's Hermès woman. I think they're very different people. But then that's the power of Hermès. I think that it's a community of opposites attracting. And the other thing about Hermès, and it's not glib, is that it is an object lesson for everybody else. I mean, you can look at it, study it, and you can see what you need to do; and you can see the infuriating ineffability of what they do. That absolute defiant complexity of what looks like something that's quite logical and simple…

…yet so impossible to replicate.
Exactly. Hermès is utterly fabulous. That's a nice way to sign off.

1. The International Woolmark Prize was established in 1953 by the International Wool Secretariat (IWS) to promote the global use of Australian Merino wool. Its 1954 edition famously launched the careers of Karl Lagerfeld and Yves Saint Laurent, who won in the coat and dress categories respectively.

2. E.F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* argues for human-scale, hand-focused work over industrial growth – a spirit that resurfaces with each new generation.

3. Polimoda is a leading fashion school based in Florence, Italy, offering programs in design, business, and art direction. It was founded in 1986.

4. According to *Vogue* Runway, Jun Takahashi decided to return to a personal favourite collection: fall 2004, which was inspired by the plush creations of the French artist Anne-Valérie Dupond and the style of Patti Smith. 'At the time Takahashi asked himself, "what it might be like if Smith wore clothes reminiscent of handcrafted stuffed animals?"'

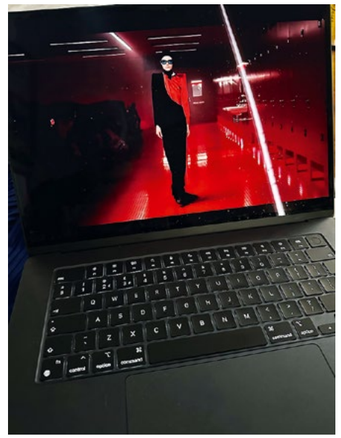
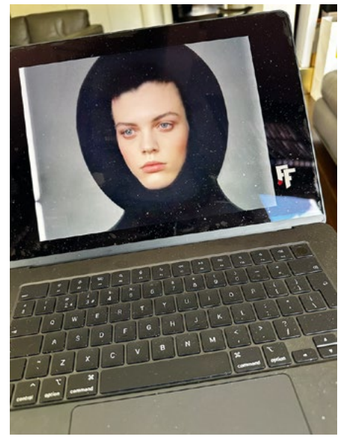
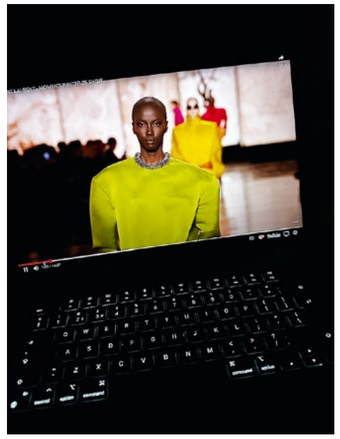
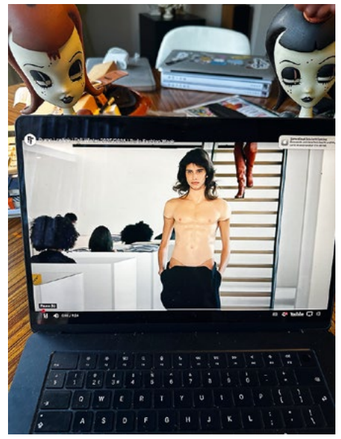
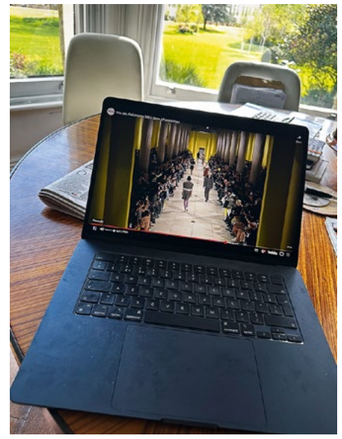
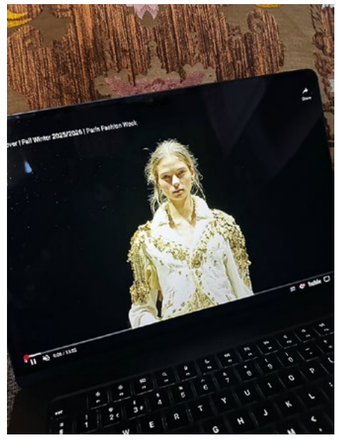
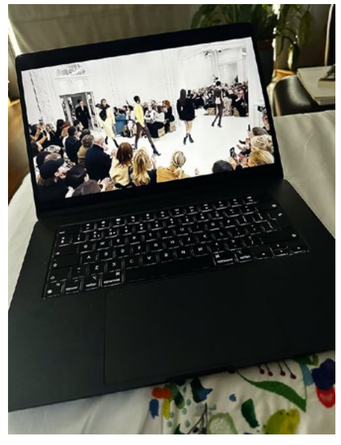
5. In a March 2025 Celebrity Book Club Instagram post, famed New York restaurant owner Keith McNally recalls Patti Smith, who lived above restaurant One Fifth, where he worked at the time, as being a terrible customer. 'Smith, who wasn't yet famous, was unbelievably rude to the servers. It's impossible for me to listen to a Patti Smith song today without remembering her reducing a waitress to tears because she forgot to put bread on the table.'

6. Throughout the Renaissance tour, Beyoncé showcased over 140 custom looks, many made by emerging and local designers from the cities she performed in.

7. Richard Powers' *The Overstory* is a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, published in 2018, that explores the interconnected lives of people and trees, blending lyrical storytelling with ecological insight. Its structure mirrors the growth of a tree, making it a landmark in contemporary eco-literature.

8. Colin Wilson was a British writer and self-styled outsider intellectual best known for *The Outsider*, a study of alienation in modern culture. His work on existentialism, the occult, and human potential fascinated David Bowie, who cited Wilson as a key influence during his early, searching years.

9. Nine Inch Nails frontman Trent Reznor has composed film soundtrack scores since 2010, often in collaboration with British musician and record producer Atticus Ross. Notable works include *The Social Network*, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *Gone Girl*, *Watchmen*, and *Soul* – the latter two earning Emmy and Oscar wins, respectively.


Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Tim Blanks.

Brigitte Chartrand & Judd Crane

‘Price points have gone up so much. Shoppers are thinking twice before spending $5,000 on a handbag. They want the reassurance that it’s not just a fleeting trend – they want to know it will carry them into the next season and beyond.’

Interview by Olya Kuryshchuk

Fashion buyers rarely speak publicly – but they shape everything we see, shop, and wear. In the following conversation, two of the sharpest and most experienced voices in the field, Judd Crane (Executive Buying & Brand Director for Selfridges) and Brigitte Chartrand (VP of Womenswear and Everything Else™ for Ssense), come together to talk frankly about what’s driving fashion today – and what’s dragging it down. Moderated by Olya Kuryshchuk, founder of *1 Granary* and longtime advocate for emerging designers, the conversation moves between fashion week fatigue, the pros and cons of e-commerce and brick-and-mortar stores, AI, retail sameness, tariffs, and what buyers actually want from brands right now. A clear-eyed look at the system, from those steering it.

‘Branding has become subtler – like Marine Serre’s moon, Margiela’s stitching, Prada’s triangle – but we still sell an awful lot of product with blatant logos.’

Olya Kuryshchuk: I would imagine the past six years for you were pretty intense, starting with Brexit, Covid, wholesale reset, tariffs, AI… Yet despite these upheavals, Ssense and Selfridges have each carved out distinct, resilient positions in the market. I’m interested in hearing your perspective on what makes your approach stand out.

Judd Crane: Well, there’s a lot to say about Selfridges. The first thing is that we see ourselves as more than a shop, as more than a retailer. We endeavour to tap into a cultural zeitgeist in new and imaginative ways, through the way we approach creativity and the design and use of our spaces. A big difference between Selfridges and Ssense is that we’re foremost a physical shop and I believe Ssense would describe itself as a digital shop. Our flagship in London is one of the top flagships in the world in terms of turnover, but I think what makes Selfridges really different from other department stores is its history. You could say that Selfridges – and Harry Gordon Selfridge, the founder – really inaugurated experiential retail. If you look back to the years when he was alive and running the store: he displayed the first airplane to ever cross the English Channel; the store also gave the first public demonstrations of televisions. As documented in *Mr Selfridge*, the TV show, there were lots of other pioneering details, such as putting fragrance at the entrance of the store or having themed window displays. We’re obsessed with continuing this search for great ideas. Increasingly, we see ourselves as an entertainment destination as much as a shop. We’re the first store to have a permanent cinema. We even have a skate bowl in the store. There are spaces in Selfridges that we’re dedicating to concepts that don’t necessarily bring in a lot of revenue, but we think they give our customers something exciting to engage with. It’s this that distinguishes us from other stores within the landscape of London – I think globally as well – and it pushes us to do things that are unexpected in terms of our product strategy. The way we’re approaching fashion is to push ourselves to make surprising juxtapositions between brands that you wouldn’t ordinarily see next to one another; to venture into creative areas that are beyond the commercial roadmap that one could take.

Brigitte Chartrand: On our side, what really differentiates Ssense and puts us at the forefront of online e-commerce is the approach we’ve taken to our edit and our POV. Navigating the site is simple and easy and people really love that. It’s also the combination of our cultural platform, our editorial, plus the mixture of the POV, the edit, how it’s styled, the casting direction that we have: everything put together makes us quite distinct from our competitors. I would say that remaining focused on what we do best has helped, especially during these times. People come to Ssense to discover new brands or styling ideas. That sense of discovery is what we’re continuing to focus on because when you think about our customer, which is always top of mind, we know that this is what they love the most. They become obsessed with our new arrivals page. When I’ve met some of our top clients, they know the latest product that was uploaded the previous day. Also, like every great brand that’s doing well right now, stability and leadership also helps.

What is your relationship with the runway shows? At the moment, do you prioritize physical attendance?

Brigitte: Things have really changed for me since Covid. I’ve moved to Los Angeles, which is a lot further from Europe, and even going to New York feels like taking an international flight. So I have taken a bit of a step back. I’ve limited my travel and try to focus mainly on Paris. Prior to Covid, the idea of missing any of the fashion weeks would probably have given me FOMO, but I think it helped us focus on our families, which is what I’m doing: I’m focusing

on my son. All of the shows are on our phones now, so I'm always on *Vogue* Runway looking at all of the uploads. The shows that I miss, I try to see them in showrooms, at least, so that we see the product in person. But I think connecting to other people that do the same thing as us, like seeing Judd and talking about a few things, is also very important. Do we have to be at every single show though? No, and I think we have to also give opportunities to our team members to attend some shows.

Judd: Brigitte, as you were telling that story, I suddenly remembered: one time, neither of us were in London and there was a certain Burberry show. I believe we started texting one another while I was in a parking lot in upstate New York. We were both looking at the pictures immediately as they were post-

Milan Fashion Week, and it made me think a lot about all the fashion brands that are doing impressive presentations as part of – and maybe spending even more money on – design week. Maybe there's a little bit of a shift away from the status quo in terms of the way brands want to express themselves.

What's your criteria when you go to fashion week? How do you filter through the noise and choose brands or collections that are most relevant to your stores?

Judd: There's two things. One is that there's a finite size of display space or open-to-buy budgets. There's also a finite amount of time, not only for us as individuals, but that our teams can spend in market looking at things to make selections. There are so many

now working with this season. One of the things I admire most about Ssense, actually, is how quick they are to pick up new designers, which means they have a really valuable place in the ecosystem. There are times when we say, 'OK, we're ready to buy that, but we actually just want to wait a couple seasons and make sure,' or one season at least. We want to make sure that the brand is ready for us, and we're ready for the brand as we have a pretty competitive shop floor. In other words, we really want to make sure something is going to make sense with the adjacencies that we can offer.

Brigitte, what's the criteria you have when you go to showrooms?

Brigitte: I try to do as much as I can. But like Judd said, there's only so many

'People say Salone del Mobile is becoming more important than Milan Fashion Week. Brands are shifting how they want to express themselves.'

ed on vogue.com! But I think within that story is a key point: even if we're not physically in a place, we're conscious of what's going on and paying attention to the creative direction of the shows. I have also relaxed a little bit in the last couple of seasons in terms of how many fashion weeks I attend, leaving it to the team to cover in some cases. I think that also speaks to the power of Paris Fashion Week. It has become *the* dominant fashion week, even more now than it was 10 years ago. It's hard to make a trip all the way to New York or even Milan just for a few shows when we've got so many other work pressures or personal responsibilities. I was just in Milan last week for Salone del Mobile, and was struck by the amount of press there too. People are saying that design week has become so much more important than

brands out there. I think the first challenge is to figure out how to best spend our time when there's only a period of a week to 10 days in Paris where we see pretty much all the brands that are based in the United States, London and Paris. Everything has to be viewed in a very short period of time. Deciding what you're going to be able to check out for the first time is hard. Fitting that in my schedule, or my team's schedule, is really difficult and I'm conscious that it's really easy for something to slip by. That's why it's great to have friends like Brigitte, who tipped me off about an interesting brand just a few months ago, Christen, that we're really excited to have discovered.

Brigitte: I was harassing you!

Judd: It turned out to be one of the most exciting new brands that we're

hours in the day and Paris Fashion Week has become really busy. It's making it difficult to see everything. I do like to see emerging designers as well as the very well-established. A show like Valentino is a must-see, especially this season – you don't want to miss that. I like to make sure that I've met some of the most recent brands we've onboarded and to see the product in person. It means our team is extremely busy going from one showroom to another. As our team is principally based in Montreal and Toronto – with some people also based in London – we want to be sure to have meaningful conversations with our brands whenever we can.

Besides the Valentino show, what else excited you this season and that felt particularly on-brand for Ssense?

Brigitte: I still think the best show of the season – which actually took place in January – was Willy Chavarria. In terms of energy, it was incredible and it really aligns with the Ssense POV overall. But Valentino was incredible: the music, the room. We were sweating in there. It felt like we were in a club.

Judd: It's funny, referring back to your question about choosing brands for the store, I don't know if I'd prioritise something that's going to fly off the shelves. That's not really what I'm looking for in the show experience. But my favourite show of the season was Undercover, which was the 20-year anniversary show for Jun [Takahashi]. I loved everything about it. I've been a fan of the brand for a long time and I felt it expressed the codes of Undercover so well. In terms of collections themselves, I really liked

the items that are in the show. You need to evoke a mood that informs the collection. We've been buying long enough, we know how it works: once you pick a collection apart, you find things that are consumable. I think that nowadays, though, it's really about that spark of what the brand is and what that seasonal collection means. The emotion that will lead people to want to buy it is really, really important.

Brigitte: I am definitely looking for excitement – to walk out of there and feel like it was worth every second. I don't want to be sitting there like, 'OK, when is this ending?' Although it sounds so glamorous to be going from show to show, fashion week is chaotic and tiring. So you really want to be surprised, excited. Designers have to push that energy towards their buyer, make

Judd: I agree with Brigitte on this. I think what we're also finding is that increasingly what resonates with people is something that has emotional currency. Something they have a reaction to, especially at a luxury level. I don't think anyone needs another garment... Except for me, I can't seem to stop buying black shirts – I can't explain it!

Brigitte: The emotional items, sometimes they're more scarce. They're more risky pieces. I think the reason people are making those transactions is because they know that it's going to feel more special. It's not something that you'll see on other people because these items are most likely not produced in larger quantities. I think that's actually one of the trends that we're seeing: high-price-point items that we've probably just bought two or three of are selling

'It would be much smarter for brands to drop what people want to wear precisely when they want to wear it, regardless of traditional seasons.'

Prada this season. It felt so... Prada – after all, Prada *is* an adjective. [Laughs] There were also turning-point shows from some young designers. I thought S.S.Daley really clicked this season. Obviously a lot of people have been talking about the Duran Lantink show and now his recent appointment [as creative director for Jean Paul Gaultier]. So I thought that was really cool. I first met him a few years ago when he was just starting out and we did a couple of projects with the upcycled fashion he was doing. So I'm really excited to have seen that development.

What is it you're looking for when you walk into the room?

Judd: Sometimes the purpose of a show is to get people excited about the brand. You don't necessarily need to sell any of

them think: 'Oh my God, the show is amazing.' So then they get excited to go to the showroom.

How would you describe the relationship between the runway collection and what actually lands in store?

Brigitte: Brands are asking us to buy more full looks. I can understand why: to ensure that the key messages from the collection are represented within the buy. I think as much as customers have been focused on building their own personal wardrobe, emotional purchases are still happening – so we're seeing a lot of special pieces that are selling out right away that are not necessarily things that you would wear on a daily basis. But there's a balance: we have to make sure that the ones we pick will resonate with our customers.

well – these more emotional purchases. It's almost like what you have with vintage pieces. Someone says to you, 'I love your skirt!' or 'I love your jacket!' and you can say: 'Oh, sorry, it's vintage.' You cannot buy it. It's similar to that within these luxury price-point pieces.

Any specific brands that you can mention that are performing really well?

Brigitte: For us, the brands that are most popular are the ones where there's been some stability in terms of the creative director. I think customers are being a little bit more cautious because the price points have gone up so much. People are thinking twice before they spend $5,000 on a handbag. They want to know that the bag is going to be produced the following season. So Rick Owens does extremely well for us, and

The Row, Margiela and Bottega are performing very well. Acne and Marine Serre as well.

Judd: A great example of a brand that has been really consistent in the last few turbulent years – particularly in terms of accessories – is Chrome Hearts. I think that's a great example of a brand that has really controlled how much of their product exists, and they've been really, really consistent in terms of where you can find them over the years. It's a really interesting case study. I remember a few years ago, I went into their store in New York and I was shocked by how young the customers were. I had no idea that super young people are flocking to that brand. It's a testament to how they've developed over the years.

Brigitte: We're lucky to have them! The value of that brand is crazy too.

Judd: I know! They're really nice people as well, so it's a lovely situation that you don't come across very often: to have all of those qualities line up. A lot of the brands Brigitte mentioned are working well with us too. Another one I would have to acknowledge is Miu Miu. It's become an incredible force. I have a lot of respect for what they've done with the brand. I was able to meet the team a couple years ago and hear the story around what they decided to do during Covid. They reoriented as a brand – it was incredibly brave and it's really worked out for them.

What's your take on logomania? Is it something that, as an industry, we may have finally moved on from? Or are customers still buying into it?

Judd: My quick answer is that it's evolved. Logos have not disappeared. We still sell an awful lot of product that have logos on them. But a subtler approach to logos has developed. If you look at Martine Rose, Marine Serre, Cowboys of Habit, I think there's a different approach. But certainly, we still sell products that have a blatant callout to a luxury brand front and centre.

Brigitte: I agree. It has evolved. But Marine Serre is one of our strongest brands, on my side. With the moon logo, she's really developed a visual identity that's recognizable. At the end of the day, that's what people are looking for. The Margiela stitching is another simple way to develop a visual identity that's recognisable, or the Prada triangle, and so on. I think these are important elements that young brands need to think about because they are revenue drivers and they allow you to push the boundaries of what you're doing. It's become a very important part of building a brand and an identity.

Judd: Thom Browne is another really good example. Even without a logo, you can tell what a Thom Browne garment is – or at least the ones that sell well are all recognizable.

Brigitte: Also Rick Owens. Back in the day, the inner sleeves of the leather jacket were really identifying.

To what extent do fashion critics or social media opinion influence your buying decisions?

Judd: To be honest, I think it's more subconscious than conscious. I pay attention to all that stuff more for entertainment value, especially if it's in a period where I'm actually at the shows. That said, seeing 10 negative comments about something is definitely going to influence you. I often disagree with it too, like they could be people clamouring and saying this was a really great show. It doesn't really change my mind if I didn't have a visceral positive reaction to it.

Brigitte: Personally, I'm not on any social platforms. I'm a bit off the grid in that sense. I don't really read the reviews on *Vogue* either. If I read them, it's because someone said something and I was like: 'I'll check quickly,' but I really just trust my gut.

Judd: I really respect that, Brigitte. And during the men's shows, I took a break from Meta because that was right after the US inauguration. But to be honest, I didn't miss following the shows on social media at all. Like I said, it's become a weird personal entertainment value to me, which is probably really not that valuable.

How do you navigate the tension between educating the consumer and meeting business expectations – especially in a tough economic climate?

Brigitte: I'm jealous of Judd because he can just go downstairs and talk to customers. Because at the end of the day, I used to have my own store [Reborn] and I love to sell. So I miss that part of my job tremendously. But last summer, I went to Montreal and did special appointments with top clients. It was so cool. Connecting with your customer is a priority, so we're doing a lot more. Like we did a clientele event with Phoebe Philo; these types of things get the customers so excited. I think this is a crucial time for everyone in retail to be really obsessing over their customers and giving them the best service, and showing them how much you care by spending quality time. We're doing something else in May with Nina Christen. It's rare that customers actually meet creatives, and it makes them even more obsessed about your brand because of the treatment that they get.

Judd: I don't really think of my team as educators per se, but it's an interesting approach. One thing we've been spending a lot of time talking and thinking about is how we want to show up on our social media channels. Ultimately, it's a direct and personal interaction with the largest part of our customer base. Trying to create excitement or help people discover things in a new way on these platforms has been really fun for all of us.

What shifts have you experienced in your role as a buyer? Has anything fundamentally evolved in response to changing consumer behaviour, supply chain issues, customer values?

Judd: Surprisingly, things have gone back exactly to the way they were. There was a lot of talk about the industry changing, but I don't really think that happened. For me personally, what's really changed is how much I appreciate seeing things in person – touching garments, and interacting directly with the people from the brands. I see some of our brand partners more frequently than I see my family; it's always been that way in my career. Not seeing these people regularly for a couple of years made me realise how valuable the human aspect of our industry really is. Even though fashion month can be exhausting, that personal interaction is so valuable to me.

Brigitte: I agree with Judd that things are pretty much back to pre-Covid times. Customers want experiences again, they're travelling, shopping, and spending – not just on clothing. So that's why connecting with customers has become so important.

And why do you think the industry didn't take this opportunity to change? Or do you think maybe it didn't need to?

Judd: I think it's just human nature. The pandemic was a radical and somewhat traumatizing experience. I think there's comfort in simply returning to how things always operated. It might be as basic as that. But one thing I wish had really changed is the frequency with which brands show new products. There's simply too much out there, and we're always buying. One negative effect of Covid was breaking the seasonal cycles – brands now show collections randomly, meaning we're either constantly traveling or doing virtual appointments. It's really hard for our teams to keep up with that relentless pace.

Brigitte: Something else I've noticed is the shift away from people buying items months ahead of the season. Seasonality and timing have become really important. Customers now want to buy something and wear it right away. I'd like to see brands obsess more over this, ensuring deliveries match the right season. Receiving outerwear in July, for example, no longer makes sense. Sandals, outerwear – people used to buy these items well in advance, but not anymore.

Judd: Whether due to Covid or just constant access, things deliver all the time now. It's not like Spring/Summer delivers all at once and then there's nothing new for months. There's always something arriving. It would be much smarter for brands to drop what people want to wear precisely when they want to wear it, regardless of traditional seasons.

Judd, what's the ratio between your online and in-store sales? How has this shifted recently, especially given the ongoing debate about physical versus digital retail? For Selfridges specifically, e-commerce doesn't feel dominant from the outside, but it's clearly there.

Judd: That's a complex question, and a comprehensive answer would take some time. But briefly, Selfridges.com is essentially our fifth store, alongside our flagship and three regional stores. We've continued to grow our domestic UK business, but we're still navigating the best business model internationally. Initially, we aimed to have everything from our flagship store online, but we've realized every location is different. Now we take a much more curated approach online. For me, the fun advantage of Selfridges.com has always been the diversity of its product range – you can buy a runway jacket, lipstick, champagne, even a screwdriver, all in one place.

Brigitte, Ssense has a physical space in Montreal, albeit much smaller than Selfridges. How important is that, and how do you use it? Is it primarily a testing space?

Brigitte: Our Montreal store provides a

'Riskier, scarcer, high-price-point items are selling out right away. Because like with vintage pieces, these are not something you'll see on other people.'

'At Ssense, the most popular brands are the ones where there's been stability in terms of the creative director – Rick Owens does extremely well for us.'

wonderful experience. It's built around data. We found previously that 80% of purchases came from people calling in and requesting items rather than shopping off the rack. So we now have an appointment-based model with large fitting rooms, where customers select items from our website beforehand, choose their stylist and appointment time, and everything is ready when they arrive. Stylists might even bring additional items based on customer preferences. It's incredibly productive, a very high percentage of appointments convert into sales. We also transform the store visually several times per season, keeping the experience fresh and bringing customers back regularly.

There's ongoing industry discussion about fashion 'sameness', or the homogenization of everything, and that there's less excitement happening on the runway. Do you agree with this assessment? Do you think this uniformity within the brands helps you drive sales, or is it something that you actively push against when you work with these brands?

Judd: Certainly, there's a wave of brands that you could say are putting out similar products. There was a lot written a couple of months ago about the effect The Row has had on other collections, I think that's a good example. It's a very commercially viable aesthetic that works for a lot of brands. But for me, while I was listening to your question, I was thinking about how those brands that have really distinctive DNA seem to be flourishing. If you look at Jean Paul Gaultier or Issey Miyake, these are brands that are unmistakable. When you see those garments, you know who they're from. And it's interesting that those brands have actually maintained quite a consistent business while there's been a kind of turbulence within trends. Alaïa is another example I would give. It took Pieter Mulier a couple of seasons to really nail that aesthetic, but now it's really, really clear what the house is doing. That's another brand that's working really well for us.

Brigitte: I think merchandisers play a big role in this homogeneity element you're talking about. I think what's important is that when there's a boom in a particular category, brands shouldn't necessarily jump on that trend if it's not authentic to them. For example, if ballerinas are trending, does it make sense for you to be doing them just because everybody wants ballerinas at this time, or vintage-style runners? For us, when we see certain categories booming, we want to buy them from brands we feel are the most interesting and that continue to really push and produce the best product. I think Miu Miu and Dries [Van Noten] did great jobs doing vintage runners – they've done it in ways that felt both authentic and exciting. That at least keeps things interesting. And when you look at the homogeneity of products, like chore jackets and so on, Auralee did some great jackets, The Row did jackets, and they all complemented each other in a meaningful way, if that makes sense.

When you buy brands, considering the adjacencies and juxtopositions you mentioned earlier, how do you decide what new product to bring on board?'

Judd: I think it's a complex jigsaw puzzle, right? What looks best next to one another. I think it's getting the right balance between synergy and friction – that's a good way of looking at it.

One evolving issue we can't ignore is tariffs and changing trade realities. How is it affecting your buying approach for upcoming seasons?

Brigitte: It wasn't a surprise – tariffs were anticipated. We've been preparing by unlocking new capabilities to reduce our risk and improve customer experience. The situation changes daily, so we're constantly adapting.

Judd: Similarly, who knows what will happen with tariffs in the long term? Being based in the UK may narrow the effects slightly for us, but ultimately, it will have a significant impact on global commerce. We'll have to wait and see. It's especially difficult for smaller brands based in the US importing raw materials or finished goods. Brands are now looking into alternative shipping methods, such as drop-shipping directly from factories to international businesses, rather than through the US first.

Brigitte: It's extremely complex because everything keeps changing. Brands are exploring moving production elsewhere, increasing prices, and more. But most haven't settled on a strategy yet – they're waiting to see how things evolve.

Let's end with some quick-fire questions: tell us about something you saw this season that felt genuinely new.

Judd: I thought the Loewe exhibition was a fresh approach to showing a collection and extremely well executed, not to mention emotionally impactful. Alternative ways of revealing creative ideas to a traditional runway show really interests me and gives energy to the fashion calendar, almost like a kind of palette cleanser.

Brigitte: I loved Alessandro Michele's Valentino show with the 80 bathroom stalls and the randomly appearing models which created the atmosphere of an after-hours techno club bathroom.

Share some highlights from a memorable conversation you've had during this show season.

Judd: I recall an interesting conversation about the expectations the industry now places, subconsciously or consciously, on creative directors newly appointed to a major house to be successful from their first collection – both commercially and creatively. With so many changes happening across the brands, this one expectation is becoming more and more pervasive. And my thought is that it wasn't always the case – there were healthy slow builds in tandem with past changes of creative direction, where it has taken a few seasons for a new creative director's vision to develop into a cohesive success.

Brigitte: I recently had the privilege of participating in an *A Magazine Curated By* panel discussion alongside [brand strategist] Patricia Lerat.[1] Our conversation centered on the future of creative talent-scouting within the industry. It was a particularly important conversation in today's climate, underscoring the importance of actively supporting emerging creative voices.

Whose opinion are you most interested in hearing when it comes to the shows and collections?

Judd: Actually, I'm interested in what people who aren't in the fashion industry think of the shows.

Brigitte: I usually go with my gut, but I always love hearing what my team thinks. I genuinely value their opinion.

What does this womenswear season say about women today?

Judd: Strength and power – with all those radically exaggerated shoulders.

Brigitte: While the search for wardrobe staples continues, there's a growing desire for reinvention, and women are increasingly drawn to unique, standout pieces – those rare finds that spark an emotional connection and offer lasting impact beyond trends.

What do you want to see more of at fashion month?

Judd: Pure creative energy.

Brigitte: More intimate events where you can truly connect in a meaningful way, while also forming new relationships. This season, I especially enjoyed the Sophie Buhai opening at the Galerie Anne-Sophie Duval, and the Marie Adam-Leenaerdt private dinner at Galerie Paradis. I don't usually go to parties but I always make an exception for Lu'u Dan as it's always one of the funnest events during Paris Fashion Week.[2]

What do you want to see less of at fashion month?

Judd: All those crowds of fans outside waiting for the celebrities.

Brigitte: Rainy weather!

What does success realistically look like for a luxury fashion brand in the current climate?

Judd: Focus on doing one thing incredibly well.

Brigitte: In today's climate, consumers are particularly craving stability. With prices continuing to rise, there's a noticeable shift toward more thoughtful spending. Before investing in a new bag, shoppers want the reassurance that it's not just a fleeting trend – they want to know it will carry them into the next season and beyond.

Lastly, have you felt that there has been much direct response on the catwalk to global affairs or the industry's imminent changes?

Judd: It felt to me like an off season, a pause, for many houses. In some cases, this was refreshing, especially at Loewe. But in other cases, it felt like a missed opportunity to explore a creative solution.

Brigitte: Although many of the shows felt relatively safe – understandably so, given the current climate – I experienced a resurgence of excitement with the Willy Chavarria show. The energy was electric, the kind that lingers and leaves you wanting more. It felt like a spark, reigniting the creative environment and setting the tone for next season.

'With the tariffs, the brands are looking into drop-shipping directly from factories to international businesses, rather than through the US first.'

1. Patricia Lerat is a Paris-based brand strategist and founder of PLC Consulting. Known for her practical, forward-thinking approach, she has supported emerging labels like Y/Project and Egonlab, and ran one of Paris's first genderless showrooms between 2015 and 2018.

2. Lu'u Dan's fashion week parties held in karaoke bars and Chinese restaurants have become one of Paris Fashion Week's most anticipated events. In September, they held a mahjong party in Belleville featuring custom-printed money with Hung La's face, karaoke and dumplings.





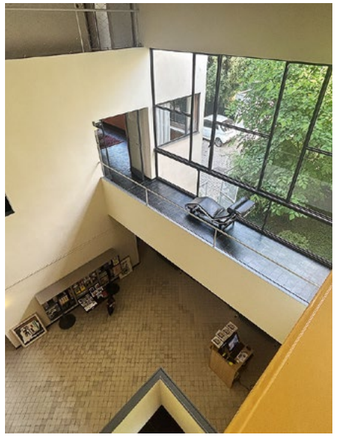



Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Judd Crane.








Autumn/Winter 2025, as seen by Brigitte Chartrand.

Launchmetrics

‘We’re now moving beyond quantitative metrics and using AI tools to slice the data down to reveal what people are *really* saying about brands – going beyond sentiment analysis, which is just ‘positive’ or ‘negative’, to something that can actually guide brand strategies. For example, across all the fashion media and social coverage of your recent show in Paris, were people describing your brand as ‘innovative’? Or ‘elegant’? Or ‘sexy’? If your brand positioning is meant to be ‘young, fresh, cheeky,’ but the conversation is skewing toward ‘heritage’ that tells you something. You might have had the highest Media Impact Value, but if the narrative doesn’t match your intent, that’s a brand alignment issue.’

Interview by Jonathan Wingfield

As fashion grapples with fragmented platforms, shifting audience behaviour, and the pressure to quantify visibility, Launchmetrics has become a quiet force in the background – transforming how success is measured, stories are shaped, and decisions are made. Since forming in 2016 through the merger of Fashion GPS, a platform that supported PR teams in managing samples and invitations, and data start-up Augure, the company has evolved into an indispensable partner to brands navigating the increasingly complex intersection of culture, content, click-throughs and commerce. Its proprietary metric – Media Impact Value (MIV) – has redefined how brands understand the return on media exposure. Rather than relying on outdated equivalents, MIV assigns a real-time monetary value to coverage across print, online, and social platforms, factoring in nuances like audience quality, platform authority, and regional impact. A Gucci mention in *Vogue* is not the same as one in the *Daily Mail*, or indeed a pair of horsebit loafers featured in a Bollywood influencer’s Instagram post – and Launchmetrics quantifies those differences.

This granularity has become critical in an industry where success often hinges on intangibles – mood, gut instinct, cultural relevance. Launchmetrics turns those instincts into actionable intelligence, whether it’s deciding who sits front row (and why that seat might now be worth $77,000), or determining which influencers and media voices actually deliver ROI. The company, it says, now works with 85% of brands showing seasonally across New York, London, Milan, and Paris fashion weeks – supporting global luxury houses and emerging independents alike. Through strategic acquisitions – from backstage photography provider IMAXtree to influencer platforms in the US and China – Launchmetrics has steadily built a global infrastructure. In 2024, the company itself was acquired by Lectra, a French software company, further expanding its reach. But at its core, Launchmetrics remains defined by a core principle: data is only valuable if it’s clean, contextualized, and decision-ready. Internally, the company is structured around this commitment to insight. Alongside its business and marketing teams, there are dedicated data specialists working on everything from algorithm development to brand disambiguation – making sure, for example, that Coach the fashion brand isn’t confused with coach buses or Celine with Céline Dion.

‘Data specialists work on brand disambiguation, making sure that Coach the brand isn’t confused with coach buses, or Celine with Céline Dion.’

“It may not be the sexiest part of the industry,” says Launchmetrics’ Chief Marketing Officer Alison Bringé, “but it’s becoming one of the most essential. Our clients need clean, specific, relevant data. That’s what helps them act with confidence.” In the following conversation – recorded shortly after Paris Fashion Week concluded, and just as Launchmetrics was publishing its data findings for the Autumn/Winter 2025 show season – Bringé sat down with *System* to unpack what’s really cutting through in today’s fashion-media landscape (hint: it isn’t just visibility, it’s insight) – and explain why custom metrics is fast becoming one of fashion’s most valuable currencies.

Jonathan Wingfield: To start, could you give a sense of how Launchmetrics works behind the scenes? You’re pulling data from so many different places – social media, editorial, influencers, backstage imagery – but how is that information gathered, verified, and made meaningful, into something brands can use?

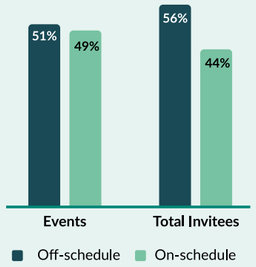
Alison Bringé: Let’s approach this in two ways. Firstly, by exploring the kinds of data that we monitor, across print, online, and social media. While a lot of print monitoring remains quite *un*-technological, because we acquired two print-monitoring companies, we have digitized data from about the last 20 years. Then we’re monitoring thousands of online publications in detailed ways. For example, things like slideshows are really important. Like ‘The Ten Looks from Paris Fashion Week’ or ‘The Best Red Carpet Looks from the Academy Awards’. When a brand is featured on Vogue.com, we’re not just monitoring the first photo of a slideshow, we’re looking all the way through, because a brand may be featured on the 12th slide, and they still need that data. So we’ve had to think about those types of smaller considerations – specific to our industry, and important to our customers – as we’ve been building our technology systems. And then of course we monitor social media. So we have an official API [Application Programming Interface] with most of the Western publications. Then in China, we’re also monitoring platforms like Weibo, WeChat, RedNote, BiliBili. From that, the MIV algorithm takes all of those different posts, articles and

Fashion Week Data and Insights by Launchmetrics

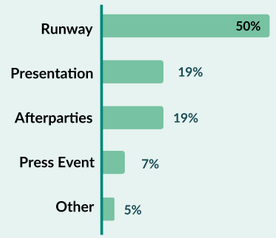
FW25 New York

$181.7M
Total MIV®

Total Events in New York



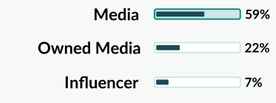
On-schedule Event Types



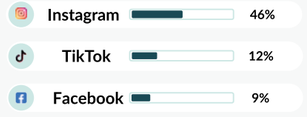
Top Post

$791K
Total MIV

Voice Split

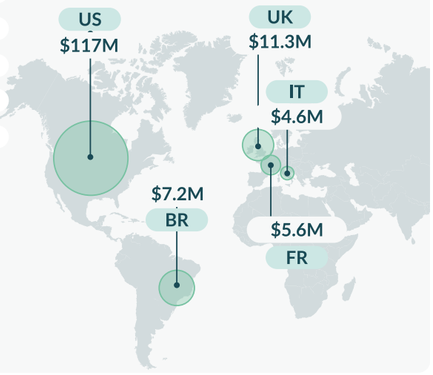


Top 3 Social Media Channels

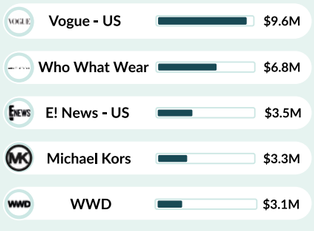


Top regions map

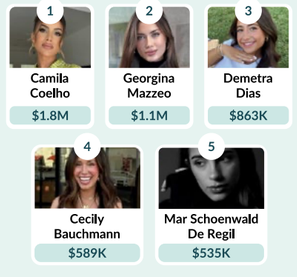
United States	$117M
United Kingdom	$11.3M
Brazil	$7.2M
France	$5.6M
Italy	$4.6M



Top 5 Voices



Top 5 Influencers



Top 5 Celebrities

LAUNCHMETRICS
a LECTRA company

By Total MIV®

Rank	Brand	MIV
1.	Calvin Klein	$17.1M
2.	MICHAEL KORS	$10.8M
3.	COACH NEW YORK	$10.5M
4.	TORY BURCH	$10M
5.	THOM BROWNE. NEW YORK	$9.3M
6.	CAROLINA HERRERA	$4.9M
7.	CHRISTIAN SIRIANO	$4.2M
8.	CJR	$3.8M
9.	KHAITE	$3.6M
10.	Sergio Hudson	$3.4M
11.	ALTUZARRA	$3.2M
12.	Collina Strada	$3M
13.	LUAR	$2.6M
14.	alice + olivia BY STACEY BENDET	$2.3M
15.	BRANDON MAXWELL	$2.26M
16.	PRABAL GURUNG	$2.1M
17.	CAMPILLO	$2M
18.	TODD SNYDER NEW YORK	$1.8M
19.	SANDY LIANG	$1.7M
20.	KIM SHUI.	$1.5M

By Owned MIV®

Rank	Brand	MIV
1.	MICHAEL KORS	$3.3M
2.	TORY BURCH	$2.8M
3.	Calvin Klein	$2M
4.	COACH NEW YORK	$706K
5.	THOM BROWNE. NEW YORK	$500K
6.	CHRISTIAN SIRIANO	$327K
7.	PRABAL GURUNG	$247K
8.	CAROLINA HERRERA	$148K
9.	ALTUZARRA	$147.6K
10.	LaQuan Smith NEW YORK	$88K
11.	HERVE LEGER PARIS	$55K
12.	TODD SNYDER NEW YORK	$52K
13.	ANNA SUI	$49K
14.	Sergio Hudson	$37K
15.	KIM SHUI.	$34K
16.	SIMKHAI	$25K
17.	ZANKOV	$24K
18.	CJR	$23K
19.	SNOW XUE GAO NEW YORK	$22K
20.	KOBI HALPERIN	$20K

LAUNCHMETRICS
a LECTRA company

interactions, and helps quantify them. So we look at both traditional metrics that you would see in AVE [Advertising Value Equivalent] or EMV [Earned Media Value] to reach engagement, audience size and so on. Then we look at more qualitative metrics that consider content quality and authority. From there, we're able to harmonize the difference of a *New York Times* article with a Vogue.com article with a video on BiliBili, and assign a dollar, yen or pound value. But to the other part of your question: what useful information and analysis can we glean from that monitored data? We have our MIV algorithm that has a lot of data and a very specific use case. I can tell you that, for example, across the four fashion weeks this season, the number of official shows decreased by -23%, and we saw a -16% decrease in the overall number of invitees.

Did that decrease impact the MIV of the fashion industry as a whole?
Interestingly, when we did that analysis, we could see that MIV had actually *increased*. So this season could be defined by the concept 'work smarter, not harder'. Brands are paring down how many people come to their shows, but they're still trying to make every seat work for them. We feed all of this into a data lake that manages all of the data coming in and out of Launchmetrics. That allows us to slice it and dice it in many different ways so that, yes, I can tell you insights about fashion week, but then I can also have, let's say, a premium denim brand call me and ask: 'We've been doing a lot of sample send-outs – are sample send-outs still important? Do people care about them?' And I have the capability to say, 'You're actually sending out two times more samples than somebody else.' Or I can say, 'You're getting more MIV than a competitor brand that sends out two times less samples than you.' It's really important that we think, 'OK, we have all this data. Where does it go? What do we do with it?' I think data is maybe one of the most interesting things happening in our industry right now, but so many people are paralyzed by it – because they just don't know where to look. The sample send-out thing, too. Nobody cares about samples anymore, but it's such a health check on your brand to compare that with actual coverage. But I think a lot of brands don't have the time or the capacity to manage that. So yes, we provide a service to brands, but then the partnership side for me comes into it like, 'What can you tell me? How can I build out a more focused marketing strategy based on data analytics?'

Does Launchmetrics provide brand CMOs with streamlined data along with overarching narratives or analysis? Or is it more a case of delivering the data and letting the brand interpret it themselves? Do you find that clients typically want that narrative, or are they just looking for the raw insights?
Theoretically, most of our client brands look at their own data, and make their own assumptions. But many of them will ask for a post-event report after fashion week, presenting all their data along with our takeaways. On top of that, brands ask us for the same type of Paris Fashion Week general report that we send out to the press, because they obviously want to know how their competitors are faring.

What specific things are brands asking for right now?
There's the industry landscape report, which presents the trends that we see coming out season after season in the industry – not just related to fashion week, but holistically throughout the year. Then the campaign reports are pretty big, and now we've formalized the ambassador reports. Brands obviously pay significant sums to celebrities and influencers, and while they'd previously been measuring what that person directly generated for their brand, they weren't connecting it with the broader virality of the conversation. Now we're offering them the capability to measure both the direct and indirect. For example, with Dior's campaign featuring Natalie Portman, they can see not only what Natalie drives herself, but all of the conversations around the partnership. That's really valuable, because brands are trying to quantify the success or failure of these actions, whether it's a campaign, an ambassadorship, or a fashion show.

In Launchmetrics' latest Paris Fashion Week report, it states that a single front-row seat at a major fashion show now has a MIV of around $77,000. How exactly do you quantify that?
Brands now say, 'I want to see what the average MIV is for a certain celebrity or editor sat in my front row.' And theoretically, when we were looking

'Across the four fashion weeks this season, the number of shows decreased by -23%, and we saw a -16% decrease in the overall number of invitees.'

at how much MIV was driven at fashion week and what that could cost per seat, it was $77,000. Not every attendee generates that, obviously, because you generally wouldn't put an MIV dollar amount on, say, buyers – they're giving you a different type of ROI. So, in seasons where there might be time, budget or size constraints, you really need to prove the ROI of the 300 seats you have in the room – so it gives you a better perspective. It's OK that this person doesn't drive MIV because I'm getting this, or it fulfils that need. But at least it gives you more value than saying, 'Sure, you can come with your three friends to my coveted fashion show.'

What are some specific ways that Launchmetrics' data insights have helped brands evolve how they operate?
Lacoste is a good example. I think the MIV has brought so much clarity to their team. Being able to benchmark and measure all of the impact of their various media placements was quite critical for them to ascertain in what direction they should be taking their media strategy. Understanding which publications are delivering what, so they can be more precise with how they're planning and deciding on those different partnerships – from both a commercial and PR perspective. Valentino is another example: I think what's interesting for them is that it's not just about Media Impact Value, it's the ability to take that MIV and see it regionalized. It's not enough to simply quantify reach and media impact, it's also vital for a company of that scale to see *where*, granularly, things are working. Our brands can see what specific channels their communications are working best on; they can see which regions they're cutting through in, which influencers or media publications are working well for them, and at what specific time of year. So they can really pinpoint: was it my fashion show that drove audience acquisition, awareness or conversion? Was it the seasonal campaign? A one-off PR story? The announcement revealing our new creative director? In the beauty space one of our customers is Pai Skincare, an up-and-coming clean beauty brand in the UK. They're always thinking about the efficacy of their influencer partnerships because, of course, in beauty, influencers are so important. They have a strong 'clean beauty' message they need to communicate via influencers, and they've been able to refine their strategy based on which influencers can drive the best ROI. So, these three examples show different ways in which the brands can now reevaluate their marketing strategies.

Do the platforms themselves – Instagram, X, TikTok and so on – come to you to better understand how the fashion and beauty industries are using their platforms?
They've all approached us, to be an advocate for them because they're all fighting for market share. Over the years we've done projects with YouTube, TikTok and Meta. It's our role, I think, to communicate to our customers the differences between these platforms. The platforms themselves don't always agree that there *is* that much difference – they're just competing for everybody's voice – whereas we really see that they're all different, and there's a different goal for each one. We've done reports with them where we've said, we're happy to partner and tell your story, but *this* is the story we believe our customers should be picking up. The YouTube story is about long-tail value. We know YouTube videos don't really start generating their peak value until 30 days post-show. That makes sense to me too – I'm not sitting on YouTube waiting to watch a fashion show that just happened 10 minutes ago, right? But this conversation we're currently having might trigger me to go to YouTube and rewatch the Kate Moss hologram that McQueen did 20 years ago. It's a repository. So, one thing we've pushed back to the social-media platforms is: you can *all* coexist. It's our job to educate our customers about what type of content works best on your platform, when they should be looking at those metrics, and how to improve them.

What surprising insights can you share about YouTube, Instagram or TikTok when it comes to how the fashion industry uses them?
Everyone in fashion is talking about TikTok because it feels new and fresh and big and *everywhere*… But it's not. Sixty per cent of the value that fashion brands are generating on social media today is through Instagram. Why is that? Because it's an established platform with huge audiences that have been around for a long time. Every recent season people have been obsessed with this idea that 'TikTok's

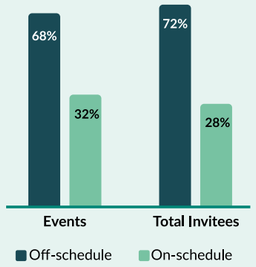
'Even though New York's industry reputation doesn't match Paris, it still delivers strong Media Impact Value. It punches way above its weight for visibility.'

Fashion Week Data and Insights by Launchmetrics

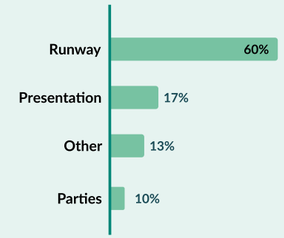
FW25 London

$70.1M
Total MIV®

Total Events in New York

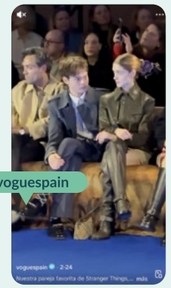


On-schedule Event Types

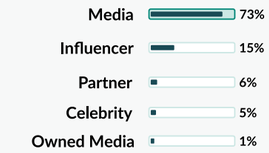


Top Post

$558K
Total MIV

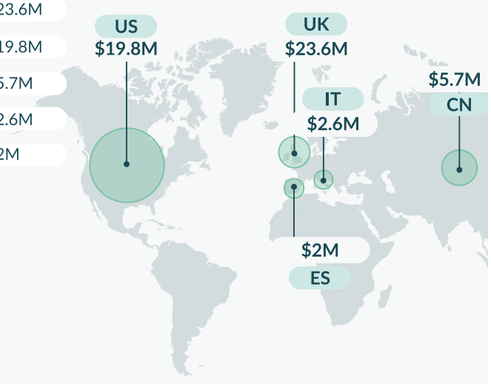


Voice Split

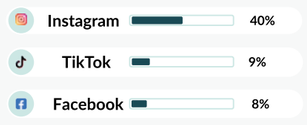


Top regions map

United Kingdom	$23.6M
United States	$19.8M
China	$5.7M
Italy	$2.6M
Spain	$2M

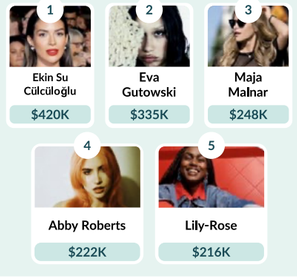


Top 3 Social Media Channels

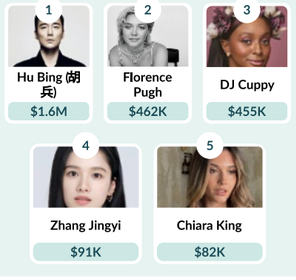


Top 5 Voices

Top 5 Influencers



Top 5 Celebrities



LAUNCHMETRICS a LECTRA company

By Total MIV®

Rank	Brand	MIV
1.	BURBERRY	$16.6M
2.	HARRIS REED	$4.8M
3.	Simone Rocha	$4.76M
4.	Richard Quinn	$3.4M
5.	DI PETSA	$2.4M
6.	Dilara Findikoglu	$2.35M
7.	Erdem	$1.9M
8.	ROKSANDA	$1.4M
9.	CHET LO	$1.38M
10.	PAUL COSTELLOE	$1.37M
11.	CONNER IVES	$958K
12.	EMILIA WICKSTEAD	$951K
13.	MITHRIDATE	$914K
14.	ual: university of the arts london central saint martins	$772K
15.	ASHISH	$741K
16.	Jawara Alleyne	$724K
17.	KENT & CURWEN ENGLAND	$683K
18.	SINÉAD O'DWYER	$611K
19.	BORA AKSU	$606K
20.	PAOLO CARZANA	$599K

By Owned MIV®

Rank	Brand	MIV
1.	BURBERRY	$433K
2.	CHET LO	$29K
3.	CONNER IVES	$23K
4.	LABRUM.	$18K
5.	EMILIA WICKSTEAD	$17.8K
6.	MASHA POPOVA	$14K
7.	CHARLIE CONSTANTINOU	$13.7K
8.	TOGA TOGA ARCHIVES	$11K
9.	BORA AKSU	$10.8K
10.	KENT & CURWEN ENGLAND	$10.3K
11.	STEVE O SMITH	$10K
12.	SANYUKTA SHRESTHA	$9.9K
13.	MALONE SOULIERS	$8.7K
14.	DREAMING ELI	$8.2K
15.	HUISHAN ZHANG	$7.3K
16.	SINÉAD O'DWYER	$7.2K
17.	ROKSANDA	$6.9K
18.	DI PETSA	$6.5K
19.	ual: london college of fashion	$6.4K
20.	MITHRIDATE	$4.6K

LAUNCHMETRICS a LECTRA company

so big,' 'it's the fastest-growing platform' – well, it's the fastest-growing platform because it wasn't here before. If you had zero followers yesterday, of course you're going to have more today. And we keep on having to remind people of that. In fact, last year, we published a report about the value Instagram delivers – that's where that 60 per cent stat comes from. The other big platforms were Reddit and YouTube before we even saw TikTok. Fashion people can get so caught up with a statistic, but sometimes it's just vanity metrics. So I think it's important for people to remember: what is that slice of the pie? And Instagram certainly remains the biggest slice for the time being.

In an era where misinformation and manipulation on social platforms are big concerns, what kind of scrutiny is the data that Launchmetrics provides subject to?

I think it's definitely been a learning evolution for us. When we launched MIV [in September 2018], the first reaction was everyone thought it was really interesting. After that initial report, when we started sharing data with the press, there were so many questions because nobody else was doing it. No one understood. Like, is this even right? How can I state that Kim Kardashian was the biggest celebrity at the Met Ball? I think we did a good job of defending our methodology and how we construct our data. Because of that, I think we've garnered the respect of the industry. Because we have such strict methodology – for example, if you post something on social media and then three days later you edit that post, we won't give you credit for the edited post. Because we know your post is now old news – it's three days later. In fact, there are people who might criticize us for being *too* strict. Or some brands will say, 'I need the data sooner, so I'm going to use this other data source because it's available quicker.' And we're also OK to say, 'Great – but we don't think that's 'complete' data. You're not getting the full picture.'

One of social media's great unknowns is algorithm changes. Do you have an inside track from the platforms themselves on when or how those changes might happen, and how they could impact user experience?

Luckily, we haven't had a huge shift in a long time. Typically, as an API partner, you get a heads-up that these things are coming, and the platform explains to you why, so you can adjust. And we'll do the same with our customers – we make announcements ahead of time. It's really about helping them understand the before-and-after benchmark of Media Impact Value – 'What was my MIV before the change, and what is it now?' – so they can see the percentage of growth or decline. The final number is less important; it's the benchmark itself that validates the data. I'd say the biggest change has probably been after the whole scandal about public data being used – not by us – but that whole social media thing. Since then, of course, there's been a restriction on consumer data. I'd say that happened at a good moment, when brands weren't looking at this type of data as much. If we still had access to consumer data in that very free-spirited way, and someone came to the luxury brands at, say, Paris Fashion Week and said, 'All monitoring needs to stop,' that would be more detrimental – because it was such amazing data to see how consumers were engaging. But I think in the world we live in now, these changes are so small that you can easily understand and digest them.

As more brands seek to become data-driven without losing creative intuition, how does Launchmetrics support that balance between strategy, creativity and storytelling?

Brands need people at the helm who are creative, innovative, big thinkers. But those people also need to have some data insights to get a feeling for where the industry is going – not just creatively. You can be the most creative designer, but if there's a recession happening or if consumers are leaning towards a more conscious or conservative perspective, you also need to have that awareness. You can't let it prohibit or limit your creativity, but it's almost like dancing with no music. So I think the brands that are most successful are the ones that can balance the two. Dior, for example, has done an amazing job over the years of building a global network through localized social media. Being able to see the value of something like that is a really operational data point. But knowing that at a senior level means you can build great campaigns to target niche, individual markets through a channel that has now become the most important one to reach the consumer. It allows us to marry the creativity and voice of Dior in a hyperlocal way and know it's going to be successful, because we have the right vehicle to amplify that amazing message. It's almost like data can be the vehicle of your voice – you just have to figure out what that vehicle is looking to deliver.

We've touched on this already, but I'd love to go deeper. How do you think assigning a monetary value through MIV to culturally relevant moments is influencing how brands approach creative risk and storytelling during fashion week? Does this kind of valuation encourage more experimental, outside-the-box shows, or does it create pressure to only invest in what's guaranteed to make headlines?

I remember when we launched MIV, we looked at a number of shows that season – that was when we still had consumer data. It was fascinating to see how many consumers were engaging with fashion show content. We've been working in this industry for so long and we sometimes get wrapped up in this bubble of fashion month. We're going to go see our fashion family, travel to different markets… But this event that used to be just focused on B2B [business-to-business] has really become a vehicle for reaching B2C [business-to-consumer] at the exact same time. More than ever, fashion month is now a month-long marketing campaign for brands to speak directly to their customers. Do I think brands always need to go big or go home? No. But I do think it's a really interesting moment to leverage the consumer. It could be anything – like when Ralph Lauren did his anniversary show. He did something very specific to the industry, but then also did something that paralleled the show in the store. So you could walk into the store and experience some of the fashion week elements. They had influencers activating at both the show *and* the store, driving people in and creating that connection with the B2C consumer. This season, if we look at Milan Fashion Week and how DSquared2 brought in Doechii to perform – it was amazing, and they saw their MIV increase 60 times year-on-year.

Do brands need to do this every season?

No, I don't think so. But I do think brands need to think about their goal each season. I don't think every season is about being this breakout consumer star. Brands are trying to have different types of relevance at different times. Sometimes it's about having a strong collection that really speaks to the buyers you're targeting, because you need to strengthen those relationships. Sometimes it's about driving people into the stores, so you think about how to use the show as a vehicle to do that in the moment. Because of that, brands think about how they're speaking to their audience, whoever that is, through the show. So, back to your other question, how is MIV influencing how brands approach storytelling during fashion week? In a sense, it's all linked: Who am I casting? Who am I inviting? What does the show format look like? Sometimes we see brands doing parallel shows – one in Asia, one in the West – because they know their audience in China is particularly active at a particular moment, and they're trying to reach them. That show will often be very consumer- or social-heavy, versus press-heavy. So again, brands always need to think: what's the goal, and what's the vehicle they're leveraging to reach it?

Just going back to TikTok. Paris saw the biggest year-on-year growth on TikTok this season, ahead of Milan and London. Does this say more about how different cities are leveraging the platform, or how media outlets are adapting their strategies?

We were asked by TikTok to do a report looking across all fashion, luxury, and beauty content. What's most interesting about the TikTok value for fashion right now is that it's the media voice leading the charge. In this moment where video has become king, the media is doing two great things. Unrelated to video, they've done a great job adapting to the changing landscape by using social media as the entry point to their publications. Today of course, people wake up and go straight on social media rather than read a newspaper, so social becomes your entry point to the reader. The media around fashion week has done a great job of saying, 'OK, if TikTok is an emerging platform and video is key, we're going to invest in our fashion week strategy on TikTok to drive those eyeballs to our website.' And because of that, we've seen the media voice be really key on TikTok this season.

Will that just get bigger, or do you think it will plateau at some point?

'YouTube videos don't start generating their peak value until 30 days post-show. People aren't sitting on YouTube waiting to watch a fashion show live.'

'The industry's obsessed with TikTok because it feels new and young. But 60% of the value that fashion brands generate on social is still on Instagram.'

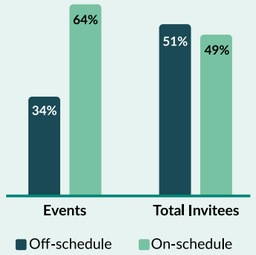
Fashion Week Data and Insights by Launchmetrics

FW25 Milan

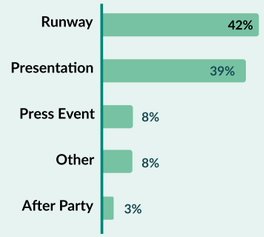
$378.9M Total MIV®

up by 39% YoY

Total Events in New York

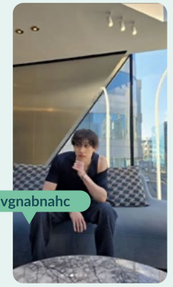


On-schedule Event Types

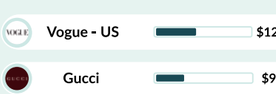


Top Post

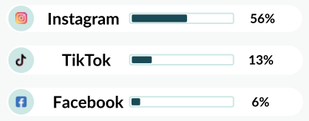
$1.4M Total MIV



Voice Split

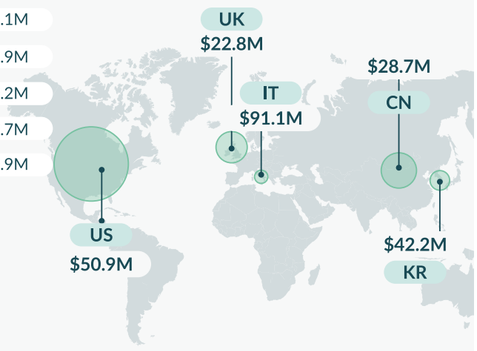


Top 3 Social Media Channels

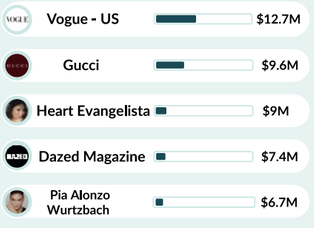


Top regions map

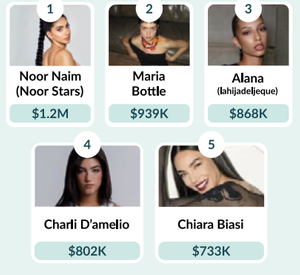
Italy	$91.1M
United States	$50.9M
South Korea	$42.2M
China	$28.7M
United Kingdom	$22.9M



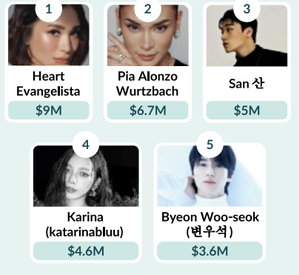
Top 5 Voices



Top 5 Influencers



Top 5 Celebrities



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By Total MIV®

Rank	Brand	MIV
1.	GUCCI	$56.9M
2.	PRADA	$45.7M
3.	FENDI	$44.5M
4.	DSQUARED2	$27.4M
5.	VERSACE	$26.3M
6.	DOLCE & GABBANA	$24.7M
7.	TOD'S	$14.2M
8.	Onitsuka Tiger	$12.8M
9.	DIESEL	$11.8M
10.	ARMANI	$9.8M
11.	MaxMara	$8.8M
12.	MOSCHINO	$6.9M
13.	Salvatore Ferragamo	$6.3M
14.	ETRO	$5.6M
15.	JIL SANDER	$5.1M
16.	roberto cavalli	$4.8M
17.	EMPORIO ARMANI	$4.4M
18.	MARNI	$3M
19.	Blumarine	$2.9M
20.	Ferrari	$2.8M

By Owned MIV®

Rank	Brand	MIV
1.	GUCCI	$9.9M
2.	FENDI	$6.6M
3.	PRADA	$5.7M
4.	VERSACE	$4.4M
5.	TOD'S	$2.8M
6.	DSQUARED2	$2.7M
7.	MOSCHINO	$2.1M
8.	DOLCE & GABBANA	$2M
9.	DIESEL	$1.5M
10.	MaxMara	$1.1M
11.	ELISABETTA FRANCH	$948K
12.	Salvatore Ferragamo	$891K
13.	ARMANI	$886K
14.	ETRO	$874K
15.	roberto cavalli	$753K
16.	EMPORIO ARMANI	$714K
17.	Loro Piana	$602K
18.	J.SALINAS	$392K
19.	Onitsuka Tiger	$381K
20.	SUSAN FANG	$325K

LAUNCHMETRICS a LECTRA company

TikTok continues to grow, so theoretically the Media Impact Value will too – it just means more eyeballs on that content. I guess we'll see. Video is one of the most expensive things for publications to produce. If I think back to when many of the New York shows were held in Bryant Park, and how many media outlets had videographers and photographers on the riser, that number has really depleted over the years. I think the brands or media that can be more agile, raw and independent with the content they create – who don't need expensive productions – will continue to be successful. Right now, it's about how brands balance their need for perfection with raw, BTS kind of content.

That seems to align with the broader democratization of video content.

'The top-performing post authored by Gucci was one that featured one of their ambassador talents, Jin from BTS, simply arriving at the show.'

These days, anyone at a fashion show can capture high-quality footage straight from their phone.

Absolutely. The technology has advanced so much that, in theory, everyone's a potential content creator. Whether someone like Anna Wintour actually chooses to film is a personal or platform-driven decision, but it really reflects how much things have shifted over the last 10 to 15 years.

Let's talk about the Chinese platforms. The increase in activity is 30 times year-on-year growth in Milan alone. What does this reawakening of interest from the Chinese digital ecosystem mean for global brands and how they organize their strategies?

I think it's really a reflection of how brands are trying to cope with the Chinese slowdown. What sticks out in my head is the Dior example. When we first started looking at the value luxury brands were generating, Dior was one of the few that was present on every single channel and had local media channels. Nowadays, that's much more common which, of course, means MIV is growing. I think brands are just being smarter about how they approach local markets, because they know they're important and they know it's not a one-size-fits-all approach. I think Covid helped expedite that too. If you remember when we were doing virtual shows, we had so many people calling in from China, and because of that, brands needed local channels to amplify that content. I think we're finally at a place where there's real ROI from those activities and I think we're going to keep seeing growth.

In Milan, brands seem to be leading the way on TikTok through their own channels, whereas in New York, influencers have taken the front seat. What does this contrast reveal about how brands are balancing control versus community when it comes to storytelling and social media strategy?

I think 'control' is the key word here, because you could go either way with the answer. The US is the hub of influencer marketing – it's where it was born and where it's done best. You could argue that China does really well with KOL marketing, but the professionalized version of influencer marketing really started in the US. Because of that, there's more value there than in Europe – US influencers have more subscribers, bigger fan bases, wider reach. The US is just a bigger country, than, say, Italy or France or Europe in general, so that scales naturally. But again, control is the key word. For American brands, it's easier to pass the baton – they're much more open about how the brand is being communicated. That openness comes from the fact that influencer marketing has been around for so long there. In Europe, though, it's still much more brand-led. Brands often have bigger budgets to invest in their own strategies, whereas American brands are more likely to pay someone else to create and deliver the message for them.

The Row bans smartphone use at their shows – presumably to convey a vision of luxury as privacy and exclusivity. Do you think we'll ever move towards a post-content industry, where luxury brands start closing off channels and limiting visibility? Or is that approach more of an outlier, unlikely to become a wider trend?

People have tried it. Or they've taken that approach for a season. Back in 2010, Tom Ford had a ton of celebrities walking his Spring/Summer 2011 show, and nobody attending was allowed their phone. I don't know if that's going to work these days. It's a bit like going to a wedding where they say, 'No phones, please,' and everyone's just kind of frustrated. Because the phone isn't just about you – it's about the experience that person wants to capture. So it feels increasingly like a personal restriction, and in general, I think we're in a moment where people don't want to be told what they can or can't do.

In a digital landscape that's supposedly more democratized than ever, why do you think legacy titles like American *Vogue* still command such a disproportionate share of the MIV? What does that say about the enduring power of institutional media?

It's a first-mover advantage – kind of like the comparison I gave you between Instagram and TikTok. It's just that they've been around for so long. People aren't saying, 'Now that I have other options, I'm not going to read *Vogue* anymore.' Everyone's still reading both. Last year we did a study with Puck where we looked at all these brilliant collabs and partnerships – whether it was brands with influencers or brands with other brands. And the thing that resonated most was that even when, for example, it was announced that Pharrell was going to be the new men's creative director for Louis Vuitton, they did that through their own channels – Pharrell to his 15 million followers and Louis Vuitton to its 55 million followers – but the most value still came from the media reporting on it. Not because there was any exclusive or even a press release sent out. It's because the media is still key to amplifying every other voice. *Vogue*, as you said, is a legacy media brand that's been around for a long time. So I think it's the combination of both: the media being the most important voice across all voices, and *Vogue* being so powerful, notably with its US edition which has a bigger reach, wider circulation and readership, plus all that heritage and legacy.

Launchmetrics has shed light on 'content efficiency by platform'. How are brands rethinking their strategies to drive maximum impact per post instead of merely flooding social feeds? This taps into the classic debate of quality versus quantity.

One recent example we liked from Gucci at Milan Fashion Week was how a brand can approach fashion week in different ways – they might get an A-lister to do a bunch of posts, or post loads of their own content on every element of the show. But the top-performing post authored by Gucci was actually one that featured one of the talents, Jin from BTS, arriving at the show. We used to be in this place where brands would ask influencers and celebrities to post about them. But now, brands are thinking more strategically about what works on their own channels. Instead of asking influencers to post on their feeds, sometimes they'll keep that content and post it themselves and we're seeing that perform way better than just flooding their feed with lots of small posts. So it helps brands balance their strategy: 'Do I need multiple posts to reach my MIV goal, or could I just do two really effective ones?' I think you could also think about it as creating momentum. So if someone's launching a new campaign, they might tease it out. Another thing that's worked really well over the years is that slow drip of behind-the-scenes content leading up to a collection launch. It might take more posts to hit the same total MIV, but it's about storytelling, too. So again, it comes back to asking: what's the goal?

How does a metric like MIV capture the more ephemeral elements of a show – the mood, the energy of the room, those one-off viral moments like a celebrity entrance or a surprise protest? Can data really quantify the essence of a fashion moment?

Momentum is definitely measured by MIV. Just like how we can track a trend from when no one was talking about it to seeing it everywhere. MIV lets us see how that grew, and whether it's regionalized – just in the US, say – or global. So I'd say yes to that. But can MIV tell you it was a bleak, sombre setting? No. What it *can* tell you is whether it worked. If nobody talked about it, that's a pretty clear indicator of audience engagement.

'When DSquared2 brought in Doechii to perform at their show this season, they saw their Media Impact Value increase 60 times year-on-year.'

Veronica Leoni's Calvin Klein debut drove enormous media traction, with 39% of the brand's total MIV linked directly to her name. Conversely, Gucci's interim post-Sabato De Sarno show nearly doubled its MIV from the previous year. Are these creative leadership changes acting as a narrative strategy – where the designer's story, their arrival, their exit, or even their absence becomes a primary drive of MIV?

I think we're just in a moment where there's a lot of change happening at once, so it's part of the conversation right now. But potentially in a year's time – once all those new designers have arrived at those houses – we'll have this same conversation, and it'll be zero per cent of the MIV. I don't think we're going to see a constant revolving door, but this does happen every few years, like when Daniel Lee moved from Bottega to Burberry, or with the Pharrell announcement. It happens here and there and then people move on.

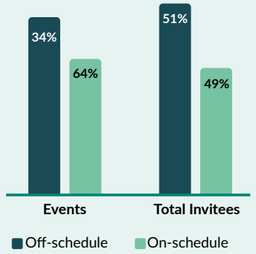
Fashion Week Data and Insights by Launchmetrics

FW25 Paris

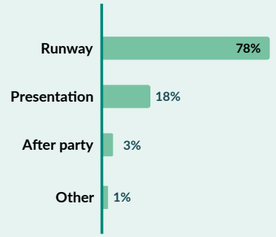
$727M Total MIV®

up by **71% YoY**

Total Events in New York



On-schedule Event Types



Top Post

$1.9M

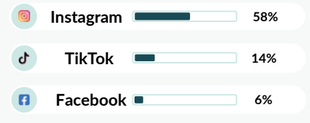
Total MIV

Voice Split

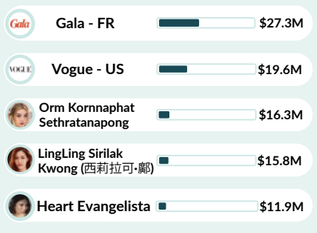
Top regions map

United States	$122.6M
France	$116.1M
Thailand	$105.8M
South Korea	$59.9M
China	$53.8M

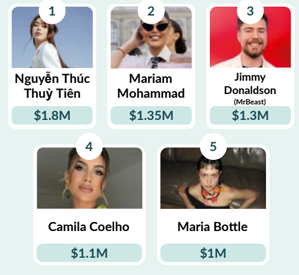
Top 3 Social Media Channels



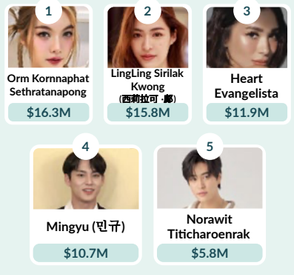
Top 5 Voices



Top 5 Influencers



Top 5 Celebrities



LAUNCHMETRICS a LECTRA company

By Total MIV®

Rank	Brand	MIV
1.	DIOR	$118.6M
2.	CHANEL	$78.2M
3.	VALENTINO	$54.1M
4.	LOUIS VUITTON	$53.9M
5.	MIU MIU	$48.1M
6.	SAINT LAURENT PARIS	$27.1M
7.	LACOSTE	$17.9M
8.	courrèges	$16.9M
9.	BALENCIAGA	$15.1M
10.	Schiaparelli	$14.7M
11.	LOEWE	$13.4M
12.	ISABEL MARANT	$13.14M
13.	TOM FORD	$13.09M
14.	STELLA McCARTNEY	$12M
15.	GIVENCHY	$11.5M
16.	Chloé	$10.8M
17.	rabanne	$10.4M
18.	coperni	$10.4M
19.	Alexander McQUEEN	$10.3M
20.	BALMAIN	$9.9M

By Owned MIV®

Rank	Brand	MIV
1.	LOUIS VUITTON	$11M
2.	DIOR	$9.5M
3.	MIU MIU	$7.6M
4.	VICTORIA BECKHAM	$3.9M
5.	CHANEL	$3.8M
6.	TOM FORD	$2.8M
7.	Alexander McQUEEN	$2.7M
8.	VALENTINO	$2.39M
9.	Chloé	$2.38M
10.	LACOSTE	$2.2M
11.	ELIE SAAB	$1.4M
12.	courrèges	$1.23M
13.	HERMÈS	$1.19K
14.	Off-White™	$975K
15.	STELLA McCARTNEY	$933K
16.	ZIMMERMANN	$733K
17.	rabanne	$708K
18.	ISABEL MARANT	$652K
19.	KENZO	$607K
20.	LOEWE	$506K

LAUNCHMETRICS a LECTRA company

Presumably, by the next fashion month, in September, we'll see a significant spike in activity, given the unprecedented number of creative director changes happening across so many brands. Whether it's coincidence or part of a bigger shift, there's clearly a lot in motion right now.
Yes, and I do think people will want that headline: 'So-and-so's first collection, how was it?' But eventually, I think people are going to talk more about the clothes. Even those 'first collection' stories will start focusing more on the collection –and the brand – itself.

In Paris, celebrities had a massive impact this season, with a 164% spike in MIV – with most of that coming from visiting Asia-Pacific stars. Is this something we're seeing across all the fashion weeks, or is Paris where APAC celebrity power really peaks?
It's been Paris for a while. Obviously, that's where the biggest luxury power players are and they have the biggest budgets to invest in APAC. And I think it's always been that way. I remember a Chanel show – about 10 years ago – when we first did the data and saw that name come up: G-Dragon. Chanel was already bringing him to shows. That was before anyone was really talking about APAC celebrities in this way. So I think Paris has always been ahead of the curve on this and now it's just more amplified because of digital prowess and because we can actually quantify it more clearly.

When it comes to total global MIV, is there one person who consistently comes out on top? Someone who engages with fashion, attends shows, and is clearly, quantifiably the highest-performing celebrity in terms of ROI?
You could argue it's someone like Jennie from Blackpink. She's one of the top MIV generators – she has so many brand partnerships and a huge following. And then someone like Kim Kardashian obviously generates a lot of MIV, because she's got a massive digital following too – and her family does a great job of amplifying that even more. So it's hard to identify just *one*. The thing that's always surprising for us is when you compare someone like that to a real Hollywood celebrity who has no digital following – you have to factor that in too. Like I was saying before, it's about direct and indirect impact. There are a lot of ways you could analyse your question. I guess that goes back to the other question you had about whether people question the data. I think people often don't realize that data isn't actually black and white – it's more about what you're trying to understand.

When it comes to celebrities, what do you think most brands are actually aiming for? Is it about audience acquisition, conversion, a mix of both?
I think there are a few things. One thing we've already started testing with our customers – because this is such a big conversation – is how different voices influence different markets. I think brands want to understand how voices influence different places. Interestingly, the whole K-pop phenomenon has become a *globalized* phenomenon; these local stars are now generating value everywhere. So brands want to figure out how they can make their dollars work harder and push those boundaries. If you think about how Tommy Hilfiger brought all those K-pop stars to the Met Ball last year, that's something you'd never have seen 10 or even five years ago. So it really shows how much the conversation has changed. The other question we've been getting a lot lately is tied to how brands measure 'sentiment'. A few years ago, sentiment analysis became really popular because people thought it would help answer some of these data questions. Like, 'OK, my MIV was 10 million, but was it positive or negative?' So everyone wanted sentiment analysis. We started doing it, but quickly realized that it doesn't actually tell you much. It just says, 'This article was positive.' But *what* was positive about it? Was it the product? The article itself? Your brand's role in that article? It's not detailed enough to move you from 'so what?' to 'what now?' So one thing we've started working on is a qualitative analysis service for brands. We have a few different ways of doing it. One of them is brand perception analysis, where we look across a brand – or a group of 10 or even 100 brands – and map them against key industry pillars. These are a mix of geopolitical issues and style-driven characteristics and pillars we've defined internally at Launchmetrics: it could be innovation, heritage, diversity, sustainability, elegance. We now have the ability, through LLMs [Large Language Models], to process all that MIV data and provide deeper insights. The LLM is basically an AI tool that allows you to process huge amounts of data to give you more qualitative analysis. Think of it as a generative AI that helps you break down and interpret what that data actually *means*. So while MIV allows you to quantify impact, this kind of qualitative layer helps you understand the substance behind it. For example, in all your fashion media coverage, were people describing your brand as 'innovative'? Or 'elegant'? Or 'sexy'? Compared to the industry at large, were you 10% higher – or maybe 3% lower – than a direct competitor? So if your brand positioning is meant to be 'young, fresh, cheeky,' but the conversation is skewing toward 'heritage' – that tells you something. You might have had the highest MIV, but if the narrative doesn't match your intent, that's a brand alignment issue. We're moving beyond quantitative metrics and starting to slice the data down to reveal what people are actually saying. Again, going beyond sentiment analysis, which is just 'positive' or 'negative', to something that can really guide action.

Presumably, that's something you could apply to a celebrity – to an individual as well as a brand?
Absolutely. The qualitative metrics will look at four levels. First, the industry – for example, how is something like 'sustainability' perceived across the industry? Are we as an industry trending above or below average in how that value shows up? Then, brand perception – how your specific brand is seen. Third is campaign analysis – especially useful for brands running repositioning campaigns. It helps determine whether those campaigns actually landed the way they were intended. And finally, ambassador analysis – so yes, we can apply this to individuals, like celebrities or influencers, to understand what kind of brand attributes are being associated with them too.

Tom Ford tripled its MIV in Paris this season, largely due to its own social channels, which is interesting considering there was minimal media presence at the show. Are brands in Paris better at leveraging their owned media compared to other cities? Or are we seeing similar strategies being used across all the fashion capitals?
This was interesting, because you had the percentage of owned media, and then I asked our comms team to also pull the average value per post – and it's true, Paris is quite high. So yes, Paris in general has a high Media Impact Value. Paris Fashion Week as an event itself just gets a lot of attention – more eyeballs. So those brands are benefitting from the fact that there's simply more attention on Paris than in other markets.

Brands like Vaquera and The Row have seen a significant boost in global awareness since showing at Paris Fashion Week. Paris feels like it's operating on another level.
What's interesting, though, is that New York still delivers strong MIV – even if its industry reputation doesn't match Paris. It's punching above its weight in terms of visibility. I've spoken to some of the federation partners across the different fashion weeks, and they're seeing it too: more people are choosing Paris. I think, unfortunately, it's partly that people don't want to come to the US right now – whether that's political, economic, or both. People are having to choose which fashion weeks they travel to, and Paris is the one you *can't* miss. Even some of the brands we usually see showing or being covered in other markets – as you said, Vaquera, and there are certainly others – we're seeing them in Paris now. So I think that shift is real. I do hope, as things improve economically, we'll see the balance start to return. But this season in Paris, it felt like *everything* was happening at the same time. I don't necessarily think that's sustainable – for the people attending or for the city itself. It's just too much. But again, if people are forced to choose, they're never going to say, 'I'm skipping Paris.' Because Paris is fashion, and fashion is Paris.

'Can Media Impact Value tell you a show had a bleak and sombre vibe? No. But what it *can* tell you is whether that vibe worked, if it was talked about.'

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