

Miuccia Prada bags one for womanhood

FASHION

Jo
Ellison



Rich in ideas and grabby accessories, Miuccia Prada's 'Vagabond' collection puts her back at the heart of Milan Fashion Week

Hallelujah for a fantastic Prada show. Things have been bleak at Prada headquarters these past few seasons; even the playful Carsten Höller slide that shoots from its second-floor offices has the metaphor of a downward spiral about it. Results announced last week reported a decline in annual revenues at the group for 2015, as it struggled to negotiate global currency fluctuations, tourist traffic variations and the collapse of the Asian market (the company is listed on the Hong Kong stock exchange). Group revenue at Prada, which also includes brands Miu Miu and Church's footwear, fell to €3.545bn, from €3.552bn in 2014. After so many years of surging gains, these have been

darker days.

Where Prada has traditionally been the fire at the heart of Milan Fashion Week, its potency had seemed to pall. On Thursday night, however, Miuccia Prada launched one of the most wholly satisfying womenswear collections in seasons, and a terrific riposte to critics. Her AW16 collection was rich in ideas, favourite motifs, pieces refashioned from her menswear collection last month and, essentially, lots of grabby bags: two of which, a utilitarian "Pionnière" and a more sensible "Cahier", were available in select stores within hours of their debut.

The collection was a medley on the themes of femininity. "It's mainly the history of women," she said backstage. "The different dramas of women at different moments: when she's happy, when she's in pain, when she's beautiful, when she's horrible. I think we need to understand who we are now, and maybe it's useful to look back at characteristics like love, pain and happiness in different genres of women."

A statement corset belt laced together her "vagabond" meditation; it was cinched around Mitford-esque tweeds, Bavarian-style hunting coats, brightly printed zipper jackets and molten golden gowns, and it was often strung with smaller bag accessories and silver charms and brooches.

"The corset is the symbol of femininity, of empowerment and objectifica-

tion," she said of its connective threads. "She can be a peasant, she can be sexy, she can be nobility." Sometimes the corsets were hung like tool belts, to add a workmanlike kick to her sailor hats, argyle stockings and sturdy mountain boots. Worn with panne velvet gowns or golden brocades and lace-up wedge-heeled boots, they lent an air of Louis Quatorze loucheness and seduction.

Mrs Prada had worked with the French artist and illustrator Christophe Chemin, who produced a capsule of prints first seen at menswear, to create a "collage of women through history"; prints included a pair of lovers in a passionate clinch; a hieroglyph-style Egyptian servant; a German Modernist student of the Lichtspiele school. There were printed words, too: including "Germinal" and "Thermidor", the months of the French Revolutionary Calendar when it was recast in the "era of freedom" under the Republican government in 1793.

Was there a hidden message in the fact that words once used to describe the springtime, and the heat of summer, were emblazoned on a winter collection? Was Mrs Prada passing comment on the transparency of the seasons in this new global fashion climate?

She smiled that inscrutable smile (which is quite scrutable really, because it means she is not going to tell you). "It's embracing life," she replied. "The good — and the bad."





Prada

MILAN, FEBRUARY 25, 2016

by SARAH MOWER



She is “a vagabond”—a woman who might be out traveling the world, or may be going on a trip somewhere deep within herself, or is perhaps making an even deeper pilgrimage into the labyrinth of women’s history. Anyway: Take it as read that the intent of Miuccia Prada’s Fall collection is as layered as the clothes she showed, in a purpose-built, almost medieval marketplace of a wooden set. “We need to understand who we are today,” Prada declared afterward, surrounded by a three-deep crowd of female journalists. “Everything is symbolic. It is like a collage of what is happy or painful, of whether you are feeling beautiful or horrible, when you have love or no love. I thought of it as like someone who has all the clothes she’s ever had on the floor in front of her in the morning, and she must choose how she’s going to assemble herself.” In show notes, Prada put it succinctly: “The nature of women is complex and ineffable . . . Like a Russian doll placed inside one another.”

And then, as she broke away, she made another telling remark: “I feel more and more, as I get older, that it is my responsibility to teach.” Looking closely, there were leather-bound books, studded with gold stars and moons, hanging from necklaces and bags. What were they? Recipes for spells, secret notes containing the age-old folk wisdom of women?

Prada has often said that fashion’s ability to contain and refract multiple meanings beats many other cultural endeavors for its intelligence. But what is she teaching us on the primary level of what to wear or how to dress this season? Oh, lots! That a big tailored jacket with dropped shoulders and sleeves covered in fur is something you might feel like wearing with argyle tights and high heels—if you have the legs. That full ’50s-style skirts and dresses in rich gilded cloque silk look just as good—and that you could wear multiple belts buckled on top. That utility outdoorwear—something like nylon and quilted jacket liners—and trekking boots should be part of the everywoman picture, just as much as midnight blue or dark brown velvet ’40s-style cocktail dresses, with draped Hollywood sleeves and gold embroidery. That you might want a distressed leather pencil skirt. That bottle green ankle-strap velvet wedges are a definite. And that when the fleet comes in, you might want to pinch that sailor’s cap . . .

But here we are plunged back into the realms of symbolism. The sexual and historical portents carried by that one little white cap, on a woman, strongly evoke World War II and sweethearts at home, and tarts on the dock—just at a glance. On men—these were first shown on boys in the Prada menswear show in January—they again bring up the imagery of war, and the stock symbolism of homoeroticism. Sailor caps: They were sweet little nothings thrown on the backs of girls’ heads, but they also reminded us that there *is* a war going on.

To add to all that, this season Prada brought in the artist Christophe Chemin to make prints. His work is loaded with surreal narrative and allusion, and he writes too. The show notes described a cycle of prints based on the French Revolutionary reordering of the calendar, with every month given a feminine name. End of day: One-season souvenir artworks are always a great attraction for collectors, and the Fondazione Prada in Milan is international proof of Miuccia’s weight in that arena. Like the “vagabond” woman she spoke about at the beginning, Miuccia Prada has traveled, and continues to travel, across many intersections in life. Maybe she was talking about herself?

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Edward Lampert dismisses Sears naysayers and talks the transformation of retail.

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Agnona creative director Simon Holloway gets set to unveil his first collection for the brand.

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The retailer admits it had fashion missteps at Old Navy and Banana Republic as it reports a steep drop in profits.

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"The corset is the symbol of femininity," **Miuccia Prada** said after her show. But in Prada's world, read into symbolism at your own risk. In the collection she showed on Thursday, Prada brought the corset into the open over precision-cut coats in mannish fabrics. As a woman, she noted, "You want to be an object and you want to be in command." Why not say it with an outfit?

For more on Prada and the Milan collections, see pages 8 to 15.

Of Corset

Photograph by GIOVANNI GIANNONI

BUSINESS

G-III Takes 19 Percent Stake In Karl Lagerfeld

- The American firm sees a potential \$300 million business within five years.

BY MILES SOCHA

Karl Lagerfeld, who showed his latest ready-to-wear collection for Fendi in Milan on Thursday, also welcomed a new investor in his signature fashion house, WWD has learned.

G-III Apparel Group Ltd., the designer's joint-venture partner for his push into North America, has taken a 19 percent stake in Karl Lagerfeld Group BV via a capital increase that will help the German designer speed his global development. Financial terms were not disclosed.

"We believe it is one of the most iconic designer brands in the world," said Morris Goldfarb, chairman, president and chief executive officer of G-III, who did not rule out increasing its stake in the future. "We

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BUSINESS

Hugo Boss CEO Steps Down as Struggle Looms

- The company will begin the search for Claus-Dietrich Lahrs' replacement.

BY MELISSA DRIER

Hugo Boss has had a tough week – reaching its height with the surprise resignation of longtime chief executive officer Claus-Dietrich Lahrs.

The Metzingen-based group said Lahrs, who has led the German megabrand for the last eight years, was leaving "upon his request as part of a mutual agreement." His resignation is effective Monday.

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WWD

The Reviews

Prada

Miuccia Prada is a deep thinker who translates those thoughts into the stuff of sartorial splendor on her runway. She is also a savvy practitioner of fashion in the clinical sense. The collection she showed on Thursday reflected both sides of this complex woman. It proved spectacular and provocative on dual levels.

For fall, Prada looked at “pieces” of the real woman, she said backstage. “We need to understand who we are now....Maybe it’s useful to look back to the different characteristic moments, difficulties, love, no love, pain, happiness, different kinds of women: sexy, boring, traveler. So this was the main concept.”

The clothes were exquisite, and no less compelling for being the obvious full-flower results of seeds planted during Prada’s men’s show in January, when she put a number of women’s looks on the runway. Then as now, she worked with artist Christophe Chemin on a series of prints, here linked to the changing seasons – thus the seamless interplay of outerwear weights, airy transparencies and everything in between. Prada started with tailoring in impeccable coats cut with military precision and fastened with external corsets – bright white to match the sailor caps repeated from the men’s show, their stark white vibrance in high contrast to the mannish fare beneath. The lacings reflected the argyle patterns of heavy tights, updates on legwear Prada introduced years ago. Other such juxtapositions – a corset in men’s wear plaid strapped over a delicate floral blouse and skirt; a rugged leather coat with a thick fur border over a corseted, printed shirt and openwork cashmere hose, sans skirt – spoke to the complicated sexuality that features prominently in Prada’s work.

In Prada’s world, nothing is linear. She went through a range of looks and moods, various personifications of womanhood – elegant in golden brocade jacquards; ready for the storm, whether literally or figuratively, in foul-weather gear with huge caution pockets in red and yellow. Chemin’s prints were integrated as part of the textured whole: a bold black-and-white floral skirt under gold jacquard coat; a graphic mythical creature in black and white spliced into the skirt of an otherwise mundane pink and white floral dress. It mesmerized.

That was Prada the creator. Prada the fashion practitioner made a different kind of statement by picking up so directly from her men’s runway, both Chemin’s repeat engagement and the very specific and memorable styling tropes – the sailor caps and argyle accessories. Consciously or otherwise (one can’t help but think it’s the former), Prada telegraphed that perhaps fashion should slow down a bit, and that what’s fabulous in January should be more than February’s old news.

– Bridget Foley


 Fall
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 2016