

VOGUE

SPRING 2017 MENSWEAR

Prada

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Miuccia Prada has often been fascinated with otherness, with the idea of the different, the alien, the unfamiliar. A curiosity informs her work—a curiosity about people. How they live, what they like, what they may want to wear. It's not always the foundation of her collections, but it is telling that after a Fall show obsessed with the vagabond and the voyager, Prada returned to travel as her theme for Spring 2017.

That in itself is worth remarking upon. Prada is the queen of the volte-face, after all, wiping the slate clean and reinventing herself, her clothes, sometimes even her label, season after season. For Prada to riff on an

idea for two consecutive exits means there's something deep and meaningful going on. And of course, there is: Migrants are still fleeing war-torn Syria for the European Union, with governments and countries showing deep rifts in their varying responses to a crisis that shows no signs of abating. It was happening in January; it's continuing today. Prada is reacting to the time in which she is living. "The past is over," she said backstage—perhaps alluding to the poignant, poetic, and period response of that Fall collection. "I only want to think about the present."

It's tough, sometimes, to ally fashion with themes like these without falling into the trap of a patronizing high fashion rehash—Zoolander without the punchline. Nevertheless, fashion has a duty to be a testament to the time in which it is created. And these are troubled, uncertain times—even for Prada, whose turnover has been buffeted by the uncertain global economic situation. This season, Prada's travelers were marching along a slanted incline—an uphill struggle—to their ultimate goal. And they seemed to be carrying the world on their shoulders, via backpacks bulging with clothes and dangling a pristine pair of brogues. That was a template for every look, a silhouette of skinny trousers—occasionally supplanted by leggings—and slender torso, with a hulking bulk in back.

The Prada nylon backpack is the foundation of the label's success. Its launch in 1984 catapulted the Prada label from staid Italian luggage manufacturer to the name that set the fashion pulse, resetting the notion of luxury, subverting the idea of status. It was, above all else, utilitarian. And that's emerging as an underlying theme of the Spring 2017 season. Miuccia Prada not only staked her claim, but underlined her role in inventing it as a postmodern fashion concept.

However, this collection looked far wider than Prada and its storied past. "The goal is to share with other people, other cultures," said the designer, surrounded by models sporting clothes jokingly printed with Buddhas, elephants, sombreros, or watermelons. She even threw out a mention of Google, as if underlining the simplistic nature of these representations of disparate corners of the world. They were printed onto nylon and zipped up into pac-a-macs.

As befits a collection obsessed with otherness, there was lots here that didn't feel the same. How to connect a color-pumped gilet and knitted cycle pants with a chunky ribbed sweater and printed shirt, or the fluttering nylon blousons with the slimline suits? You couldn't. The disparity of this collection was a reflection of its overall theme, as Mrs. Prada traveled constantly from idea to idea, garment to garment. It sometimes even seemed frenzied, so fast was the ideological scramble. The utility notion was evident throughout, though—a lynchpin to hold the whole thing together: The suit, after all, is a utilitarian garment of sorts, as suited for its purpose as a hiking sandal or a windcheater.

When Prada mentioned activewear, I wound up thinking not of the active body, but rather the active mind—hers—darting between themes, constantly exercised, churning through thoughts. Moving Prada on, moving fashion on. Even though these clothes were undoubtedly founded in everyday attire, Miuccia Prada sought to push them onwards, upwards. Her personal travel—her relentless search for the fresh, the new, for exciting territories—is what makes her a great designer.