

System



Miuccia Prada

**‘There’s
something
wrong about
big brands.’**

The inimitable Miuccia Prada.

Few, if any, designers match the mind and mindset of Miuccia Prada.

At a time when fashion houses seem increasingly judged on their financial form – like some kind of results-based sporting contest – we can sometimes lose sight of just how unique a voice she is. Intimate yet operating at scale, never afraid to contradict or backtrack, and offering a female presence that's defined only by its wonderfully unpredictable nature – formidable one moment, frivolous the next – there has always been more than one Miuccia Prada.

Which is why we drafted in a few friends to help us explore her world and her work, and listen to the designer in her own words.

In June, we invited Raf Simons to Milan to chat with her about what it means to be a fashion designer today (back then, Raf only had eyes for his own label, but his subsequent appointment as creative director at US giant Calvin Klein now adds an interesting perspective to their conversation). Then super-stylist Katie Grand interviewed Mrs. Prada about their shared favourite subject – Prada clothes – and shot her own enviable Prada and Miu Miu archives with photographer Norbert Schoerner. Next up, 20-year-old writer, actress and Prada-phile, Tavi Gevinson, quizzed Mrs. Prada about what she means to women (of all ages) and what women mean to her. And finally, we sent photographer Juergen Teller down the Carsten Höller slide in Mrs. Prada's office in Milan (and he came back with some pictures of her, too).

What comes to the fore over the following pages is simply confirmation of a long-held belief. Beyond seasonal trends or Q4's financial results, everybody loves Miuccia.

Miuccia Prada

Prada, Milano

Photographs by Juergen Teller































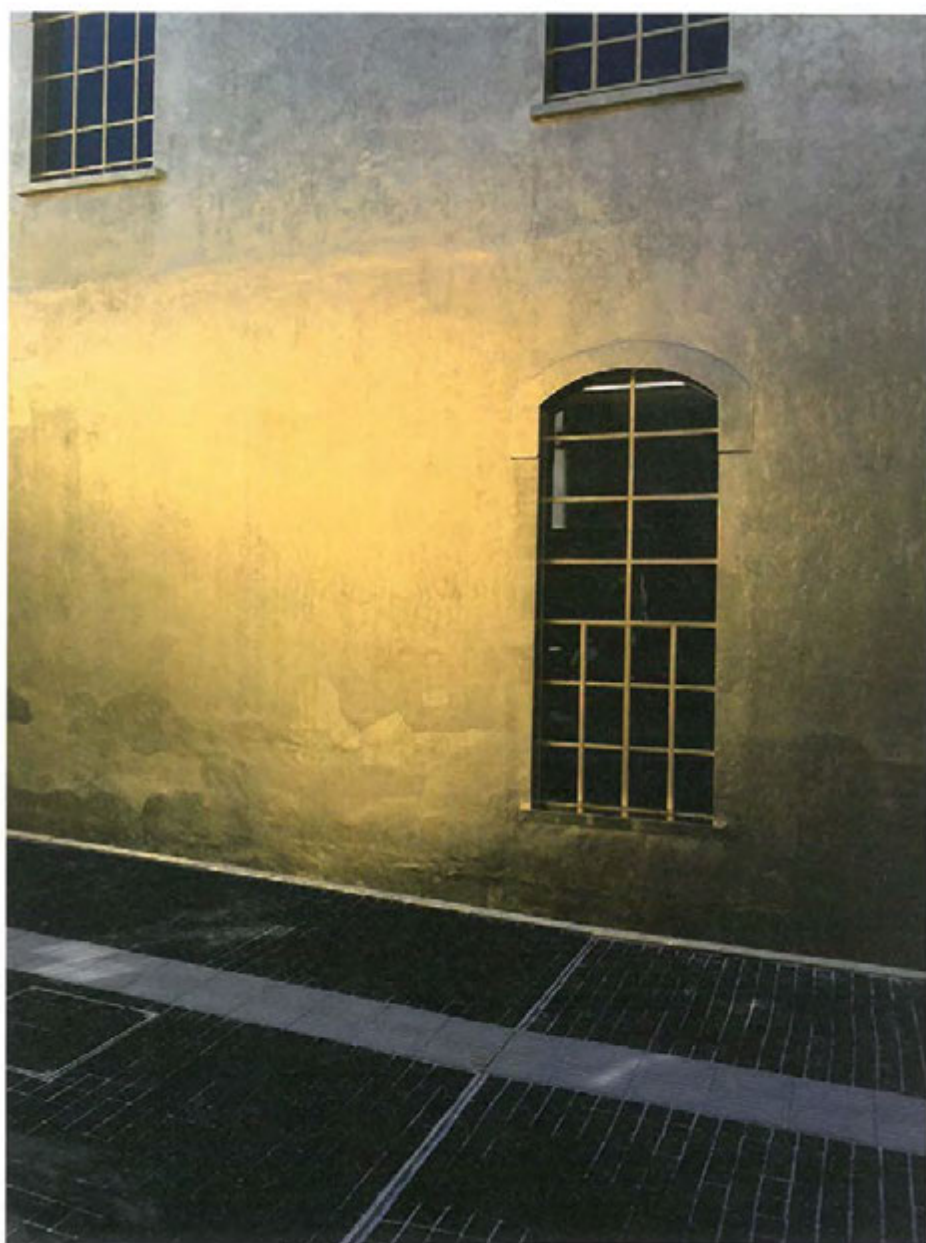














Miuccia Prada

**‘Us designers
rarely get the
chance to be
together.’**

Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons in conversation.

By Jonathan Wingfield

‘I’m never jealous of the good ones.’

Raf Simons and Miuccia Prada in conversation.

Miuccia Prada

Let's start the interview by discussing interviews. Love them? Loathe them? Necessary evil?

Miuccia Prada: I generally have a problem with doing interviews because the only way I can talk is if I say what I really think, otherwise it's impossible. But sometimes what I think – and therefore what I say in interviews – is not always deemed politically correct.

Raf Simons: That's one of the things I think we should talk about today; I think that designers should be freer to say what we really think. These days, we are no longer able to; we're supposed to always self-censor ourselves. People express such extreme opinions online about our collections, yet if we dare say one thing that is not politically acceptable...

Miuccia Prada: ...we are killed!

That doesn't bode very well for this interview!

Miuccia Prada: [Laughs] No, no, it is not the journalist's questions; it is what gets picked up *after* the interview. If in a context like this, I want to touch on a delicate subject, or express who I am, then I can articulate and discuss that and you will understand, but when a single sentence is taken out of this context – removing any irony or anything else – then it becomes another thing altogether.

Raf Simons: The more visible your position, the more you have to be careful. Having my own brand is different from when I was at Dior; people are not so focused on it. But at that time, I felt like there was all this pressure on how to behave and how not to behave, or how to speak. Not that I was given a list of

course, is fine. Personally, I don't care if somebody hates my work; I have no problem with it.

Do you feel it is important for designers to communicate through words – written or spoken?

Miuccia Prada: I think it is my job to speak through the clothes.

Raf Simons: As designers, we choose to work through clothes and fashion shows and photography and everything. But I think we also have something to say. These days, there are so many people judging the fashion world who I don't even know – beyond the people we know and respect, like Suzy Menkes or Tim Blanks – and they often have such extreme things to say that I feel they sometimes position themselves *above* people who have long-term experi-

'People express such extreme opinions online about our collections, yet if we dare say one thing that is not politically acceptable, we are totally destroyed!'

Raf Simons: And I find that very problematic.

Miuccia Prada: Me, too. I sense this so much, and I always find myself self-censoring because anything interesting that I want to express no longer seems possible. [As a designer] you don't always have the time to explain what it is you want to say; you might be thinking about a complex conceptual idea but you want to be lighter, what you say might come out like a *boutade*,¹ but that *boutade* becomes the headline – one word becomes your mantra. So you feel you don't have any control over your thoughts, and very often – sometimes in a good way, sometimes bad – there is less possibility to answer. You can't say this, you can't say that, so it is better not to talk. The last interview I did, I took out 80 percent.

rules; it just automatically happens like that. I found it very complicated, and [because of that] I started to read less and less about fashion, even though I'm usually really interested in what other people have to say.

Do you feel this is the case across the industry?

Raf Simons: I feel that everybody has become very careful – especially designers, and it is the actual designer's point of view that I like to read the most. I am far more interested in what designers have to say than people might think. I can be a big fan of other designers, though I can also really hate the work of other designers, even though I am not supposed to say that. Hate is the wrong word, of course, but there are things you just don't like, which of

ence. I am somebody who is very into young opinions, young voices, young creativity, but I don't really know who all these people are.

Miuccia Prada: It depends on who you listen to: sometimes there are very good comments on the Internet, and then there can be something stupid. When you just have these naked anonymous comments you should be able to say to yourself, 'Who cares?' The tendency should be *not* to read these anymore, but I can't resist being curious.

Raf Simons: Me neither.

Miuccia Prada: It's our job, we have to know what is happening, but it goes beyond that. I think the complexity we are facing is almost worse than for politicians; up until the 1980s and even the 1990s, there was an audience group in fashion that you basically knew. But

now you have to work with *everybody*, for better or worse.

Do you like the fact that you're now talking to a wider audience?

Miuccia Prada: I like the idea of sharing my ideas with more people; that's the interesting part, to work outside the small elite that I know. You are obliged to face the truth of different countries, of different people, but at the same time, the sheer quantity of comments – clever or stupid – that comes with a bigger audience is something that doesn't work. The whole world is talking, but there is nothing coming out.

Raf Simons: While I have no problem with negative responses towards me, I do have a problem that I cannot be negative myself.

Miuccia Prada: I completely agree.

or bloggers? Why do we have to be the only ones under inquisition? I once said to a journalist, 'Listen, you judge us, and although we never say it, we judge you, too'. [Laughs]

Raf Simons: I know that if Miuccia and I were speaking in a closed environment, we would speak in more extreme ways, and about other brands, too, because I know that they are speaking about us. It is not about being good or bad, it is about having an opinion, and I have a very specific opinion about other brands. I mean, right now I could throw two words out onto the table – two brand names – and we could have a discussion about them and if you published it, a bomb will go off! [Laughs]

Do you feel you are able to articulate your opinion about what is happening

Because without that freedom to talk, the mind does not progress; if you cannot say bad things – or things that might be considered politically incorrect – how can you even hold a discussion? Being politically correct doesn't allow you to be objective.

I presume it's the dissemination of information now that's at the root of these issues? I mean, you might have said something 20 years ago and it would have been contained in a magazine or a radio interview. But now you'll say something and 20 minutes later, it is all over the world.

Miuccia Prada: I don't know if it is just the fact it is so spread out. We probably have to be so politically correct because our business has become bigger; if you are small you can say what you like –

'I could throw two words onto the table – two brand names – and we could have a discussion about them, and if you published it, a bomb would go off!'

Who's telling you not to be negative?

Raf Simons: No one is telling us, but you get punished for it. By the public.

Miuccia Prada: It is so true that through our job we cannot talk, and yet we are the minds behind all this big industry success. Maybe we don't take our job into our own hands enough, and we should do.

Raf Simons: I have said things in the past that got me really punished. Publicly. I felt really upset afterwards and I thought, 'God, man, why do I have to be punished by some anonymous person who writes the ugliest thing about my show? And why am I not allowed to react?' I guess, because when you are a public person you have to just shut up.

Miuccia Prada: As designers I feel that we are always very strongly accused. Why does no one accuse journalists

in fashion through the collections and what it is you do as a brand?

Raf Simons: I think with my and Miuccia's shows they are clearly a reaction to specific things that we see. What I saw onstage yesterday [at Prada's Autumn/Winter 2016/17 menswear show] was a very clear reaction.

Does the self-censorship you've both mentioned impact the way you design?

Miuccia Prada: No, not at all. I feel that in my job as a designer I have complete freedom.

Raf Simons: Yes, me too. I feel free with the collections. More and more. You just let it all out there, in the collection...

Miuccia Prada: On the subject of self-censorship, I feel like we should create a small group in which we can be free to talk, because I cannot stand it anymore.

whether that's something super smart or avant-garde or just stupid – and nothing will happen. But if you are a big brand or part of a big group, it automatically becomes more moralistic. And in general, people are becoming increasingly conservative; and so the more superficial and the more generic that you come across as, the less you are criticized. This censorship has a negative effect and is a very serious thing.

Raf Simons: I think Miuccia's suggestion of discussing these things in a kind of closed group is very interesting. It is important to know that there are other people who are of the same mindset as me, and share the same opinions; to know that I could talk to them about these things is very satisfying. The simple fact that I know Miuccia and a few others are out there is almost enough.

Miuccia Prada

Miuccia Prada: I would love to create that group of people – the ones who respect each other – where we can say what we want. And the group should make a designers' declaration; that would be so fun and so interesting and so honest! But the difficult part would be how to share those ideas and thoughts with others afterwards.

Raf Simons: Just doing that would already make us appear pretentious.

Miuccia Prada: Can you imagine? [Laughs] It would be impossible!

Raf, you've mentioned your interest in other designers, interacting with them, exchanging thoughts, and so on. Why did you want to do this conversation with Mrs. Prada?

Raf Simons: Beyond the small group of people around me – my assistants, my

something that you can do with everyone; you need to have mutual respect.

How do you regard the sense of competition among designers?

Raf Simons: There is obviously competition, but there is also respect. I think we are all competitive, and that is a good thing. I mean, I feel competitive towards Miuccia, and she with me...

Miuccia Prada: Of course.

Raf Simons: But that is a healthy competition, which I think we should always maintain, but then I am also really curious to share experiences, emotions...

Miuccia Prada: Yes, if you have mutual respect. I'm always saying, 'I'm never jealous of the good ones'. What drives me crazy is when people are successful and I don't respect them. Or when they are tricky and pretend not to be.

I really want Prada to stay in a context that I like. Because we grow, grow, grow and suddenly you start to lose control, and there's something wrong with that, now I think we stopped that.

Is there a moment in fashion when you think structurally a big house becomes too big?

Raf Simons: I think the problem right now is that there is all this freedom in the actual garments and the performance on stage and whatever, but there is no more freedom in the structure [of a house]. Most of us Belgians have remained small and independent, but for many, structure has evolved into this kind of massive octopus where there is no more freedom; the structure itself has become too dominant and too defining.

'Prada is my own company, so it's my own fault that it's the size it is. But I don't have to care if we don't grow enough for the market. Whatever, who cares.'

friends, my family – I really feel a lack of dialogue with people I have something seriously in common with. I mean, I don't think I can relate to absolutely everybody, but I was starting to feel very isolated in this world. When he had this LVMH Prize² about two years ago, everybody came to Paris the night before it started, so Marc, Phoebe and I had dinner together at Marc's house, which was such an eye-opener for me. And for them as well, I think.

Miuccia Prada: Because you were free to talk?

Raf Simons: Yes. It really set my mind in a different way. The three of us reflecting on things 20 years ago, 10 years ago, and how we feel about the future; it wasn't the kind of conversation I was expecting to have, but everyone felt free. That is, of course, not

Raf Simons: There's lots of them.

Miuccia Prada: Many.

I get the feeling you're both wary of the fact that this industry has become just that – an industry. And with that comes so many more brands, more consumers, more magazines, more opinions, and a greater scale of operations...

Miuccia Prada: I think there's something slightly wrong about this idea of big brands. Raf did the biggest thing by leaving [Dior] – *chapeau*, respect – because he probably didn't feel comfortable anymore. Of course, Prada is my own company, so it's my own fault that it is the size it is, but now I'm at a moment where I really want to focus on what I like, what I care about. I don't have to care if we don't grow enough for the market. Whatever, who cares,

Can you give me an example of how that manifests itself?

Raf Simons: Part of it is this idea of keeping the audience happy, with the events and the dinners and the presents and the advertising systems. Sometimes I think I would like to make it simpler, but more exciting...

Miuccia Prada: ...and also more fun. I totally agree with him. One thing that I would really love to do is to work with Raf, and maybe with other people – it would be so much fun. If I could do a show with him, imagine how much fun we would have.

What is stopping you?

Miuccia Prada: Nothing, I think it is an experiment that could really be done.

Raf Simons: Maybe structure might be stopping that. Even my own Raf Simons

brand – compared to a big power brand like Dior – is still structured. That gives possibilities, but it also gives a lot of non-possibilities. For me, I would be excited if Miuccia would do the Raf Simons brand for a season, and then I would do a season for Marc Jacobs in New York, and Marc would do Prada; I think the audience would be totally excited by that.

Miuccia Prada: Ah, completely!

Raf Simons: Maybe fashion should operate more like a museum, where you have a museum curator, but you have *guest* curators come in, too. I think that the fashion business has recently stopped exploring its own possibilities; it should become much more liberated once again.

Miuccia Prada: I totally agree. I really think that's true.

know, typically within the creative structure there is the creative director, then the right-hand, and the other internal designers. Other structures might not be compatible. A couple of years ago I did a collection together with the American artist Sterling Ruby³ – he is a close friend who I trust very much, which is why I said, 'Let's do a collection together, but let's do it all the way'. His voice was as present as mine, which is not usually the case. When you are in your own structure – even if you have a right hand – my voice or Miuccia's voice remains the biggest. But when I invited Sterling, our voices were equal, the label had the two names on it, and it was a real eye opener, because I had to step back.

Miuccia Prada: Did that make you feel uncomfortable?

Raf Simons: For a moment, but not per-

too strange, and sometimes I think to myself, 'Is this the right thing to do?' – because there is that fine line between pure art and fashion. I've always wanted to make clothes that people wear, otherwise I'd change my job and become an artist. I am a fashion designer and I do a commercial job, but at the same time we want to be creative and we always want to push limits. Also there is this entertainment aspect: people just want to be excited. For instance, if Raf did the next Prada show instead of me, the whole world would be going 'Wow!' But maybe that's *all* they would talk about. So you have to be careful that the choices you make are not influenced by this increasing need for entertainment.

Do you feel that fearlessness becomes harder to exercise the bigger you get?

'Could you imagine if, one season, Miuccia did the Raf Simons brand, then I'd go do Marc Jacobs, and Marc would come and do Prada? It'd be so exciting!'

Raf Simons: But it is up to the big voices to make that kind of decision themselves, because fashion is not a system that sits around wanting that. If Miuccia or Marc Jacobs say, 'I am going to let this person do my brand for a season, and then I am going there for a season', *then* others will follow. But it won't happen until then.

Miuccia Prada: Yes, and I am thinking more and more about exactly this kind of idea, because it feels like it is *needed* – not just to get the world talking, but to broaden the horizons of what fashion can be, and also to have fun. What I mainly think is that you have fun when you really do good stuff, and that fun comes with other people.

Raf Simons: But the structure itself within today's fashion business doesn't always allow for that kind of idea. You

sonally, because I love him and collaborating together was easy. But in terms of what Sterling brought, it was something that I would not have come up with alone. I kept thinking the collection had to be more special and he kept saying, 'No, it has to be a normal shirt, and a normal pair of jeans, nothing more, not a special cut or design'. And at the end, when it all came together, I was like, 'Man, you were right'. Sometimes you just need this different eye and different mindset to break out from your own systematic behaviour.

Do you think that fashion is losing its sense of fearlessness?

Miuccia Prada: No, I think that still exists in our work, because many designers are quite risky in what they do now. Perhaps we do things that are

Miuccia Prada: I decided to become bigger, and I like the idea of sharing my ideas with more people, but at some point you lose control of what happens after your show. It's a very interesting moment right now in fashion, because Raf is right, maybe we should have more courage. He certainly did.

Raf Simons: It does feel like that to me. The whole thing about leaving Dior was not that easy, but I found there was a difference between being a creative director and having your own brand. I am one of the few people who has done both. You have people who are creative directors – they are born creative directors, like Ghesquière, Slimane – who do not know what it is to have their own brand. And then there are the others who only have their own brands, and then there are people who do both.

Miuccia Prada

And it is really day and night, I think. The responsibility, the emotion...

Miuccia Prada: Do you have any preference between the two?

Raf Simons: No, I like both. When you have your own brand it is something that you build, it is like your own baby. And when you are a creative director, you also treat it like a baby, but it is not *your* baby.

Ironically, it was Mrs. Prada and Mr. Bertelli who first gave you that opportunity to work for another brand, Jil Sander.⁴

Raf Simons: Yes, that was a big thing for me; I hadn't even done womenswear at that point, so I was scared. I was also thinking it would be a long-term thing – in the end it was seven years. Dior was short in comparison, only three-and-

because we can be very demanding. I think, regarding what we want and how we see things in terms of our creative input – but I didn't want to force my thing onto Dior either. I just came to the conclusion that this is where I stand, and this is what I will have to deal with if I sign up for the long term; and it is not how I want it, it's not how I see things. I have my thoughts about what I think Dior could become over time, and they have their ideas of what it *will* become. I wish them the best with it, but it just wasn't my thing in the long run.

Mrs. Prada, what was your feeling when you first heard that Raf was going to leave?

Miuccia Prada: I thought he did something very honest and brave. But I agree, I am sure he sees it as something

in the days when everything was quite calm. When I started my brand it took years before people took any serious notice.

Miuccia Prada: Now everything is so public, everything becomes a big deal, and that is wrong and not necessary.

Raf Simons: It creates unnecessary pressure.

Since leaving Dior, do you feel now that you have regained a sense of ownership because the work you're currently doing has your name on it? And is that ownership and responsibility important to you?

Raf Simons: It is important to me, absolutely. But my own brand structure has always been pretty small, and I think that's why subconsciously I also took on these big structure jobs – to kind of

'People like Ghesquière and Slimane are born creative directors, but they don't know what it is to have their own brand. It is day and night, I think.'

a-half years. Going in to these brands, I realized you cannot possibly know what it is like until you are there, being creative director – you just don't know. And as much as there was incredible beauty in that house [Dior], and incredible people and ateliers and everything, I just felt like, 'This isn't for me, I am not the right person for them'. That was very, very complicated.

Miuccia Prada: Do you feel stronger now than you did a year ago?

Raf Simons: No, not necessarily; just the same. It is not something that I see as such a big thing, this whole idea of leaving Dior. I know lots of people were like, 'Oh my God, you left Dior', but I don't see it like that. There was no fight, there was no conflict; it was just a conclusion that I made quite quickly. I don't know if it is because I am Belgian –

much less dramatic than how it was viewed from the outside.

Raf Simons: The whole of the fashion world sees these things as like [feigning shock], 'You cannot leave LVMH; you cannot leave Dior'. But when it comes to things like that I feel that you have to put each other on the same team, on the same level, and I am sure it wasn't easy for them. Sometimes I hate the whole spectacle that surrounds the fashion world.

Miuccia Prada: Yes, too much attention.

You mean the hysteria?

Raf Simons: Yes, when people go into a new position or leave a position there is so much spectacle; the system pumps it up, and very often the brand pumps it up, too. I've always thought, 'Just give me a little bit of time'. I started back

feel that distinction in scale. Now, after two decades, I've started to realize that I am not so unhappy with my own thing being small in scale. Of course, there is very little economic possibility, but with very little you can still do things that are crucial to a certain number of people, and those people react in ways that is really satisfying.

Miuccia Prada: It is absolutely time to rethink these systems and structures that have come to define us.

Raf Simons: Yes, I do think that there is something that we have to rethink. You know, there are a lot of people in charge right now who are not creative, and that is new.

Prada seems to remain an exception. Can I ask you Raf, what is it you admire about Prada?

Miuccia Prada: No, no, no, I don't want to hear this. I am sure we respect each other, *punto!*

Raf Simons: That is easy for me to explain: on all levels, I can sense Miuccia's very clear vision, her mindset, her view of the world, her view of art, her political opinions. And as one person she is able to construct and share that on such a huge scale. I find that mind-blowing.

How important is that when it comes to appreciating fashion design—actual garments?

Raf Simons: The reason I wear Prada is not just because I like the clothes; it's also because Miuccia has a mindset that I can relate to. You know, there are all these brands in the world today making so many beautiful things—because

there was this idea of the Margiela woman, or the Dries Van Noten woman, or the Yohji Yamamoto woman or the Helmut Lang woman, or the Prada woman, or Prada man. It was based on mindset and culture. And because I think that the mindset that Prada has is extreme, I am very impressed that it could be scaled up to become this kind of institution. I am a big mess of course, because I have a similarly extreme mindset and yet I am still sitting here with a small brand!

Miuccia Prada: It doesn't matter. You can have a small brand or a big brand, but the influence you have can be huge, in either case.

Do you recognize what Raf is saying about the clothes needing a mindset?

Miuccia Prada: Yes, I agree. You look

it. Memory in fashion doesn't even last six months.

Why do you think that is?

Miuccia Prada: People get too much information, too much of everything.

Raf Simons: When you are a more-established fashion brand, you are not supposed to say things about new people coming through, because then you are thought to be complaining. But I think it is clear enough to everyone what is new and what is not new, what is a copy; what makes sense and what doesn't make sense.

How hard is it to continue finding original ideas? Is originality absolutely fundamental to what you do?

Miuccia Prada: I like the idea of doing something that is new, that is for sure.

'I think that Prada's mindset is quite extreme, so I am very impressed that it could be scaled up to become this kind of institution.'

everybody knows how to make clothes and design patterns and make things look beautiful—but I don't want all that shit if the mindset is not what I can relate to. So even if a brand has a beautiful coat, if the person who designed it is not the kind of person I can relate to in terms of vision or opinion or culture, then I just don't want to wear it. And I think that is different from lots of people.

You think for most people garments eclipse meaning?

Raf Simons: I think lots of people just *grab* whatever they can, simply because it is beautiful. And I think that is where fashion became a very different thing in the last decade. You take a bag from this brand, shoes from that one, a coat from another. When I was growing up, I always liked the fact that in fashion

at something and think it is a beautiful, but who cares about clothes if the mindset doesn't correspond to you. Also, without sounding pretentious, I think that while people like us are very demanding, or sophisticated, or whatever you want to say, I think this sense of criticism is quite rare. Most people tend to have such a superficial opinion of things.

Raf Simons: The other outstanding thing about Miuccia is that she is a true pioneer, and there are very few pioneers in the fashion world. There are a *lot* of followers in fashion, as there always has been. In the 1950s and 1960s it was the same. Now I sometimes think that fashion no longer has a memory.

Miuccia Prada: Oh, yes, yes, completely! These days, the last person to have done something, is the one who owns

At least I tend towards that. But it sometimes feels like everything has been done, so today it is sometimes more about context and how you choose to put things together. For instance, you can work on something that is pop, and why women like bows, hearts, pink, and so on, and so the collection plays on that sense of obviousness.

Do you like the idea that you are sometimes referencing yourself in your own archives?

Miuccia Prada: I prefer not to, although I sometimes decide to do it. And anyway I have to say one thing about Raf: sometimes I think I've had a fantastic idea, and Olivier,⁵ who works with me and Fabio⁶ on shows and knows Raf's work so well, says to me, 'Miuccia, Raf already did that before'. [Laughs]

Miuccia Prada

Raf, earlier you made reference to your Belgian-ness, and I was interested to know how relevant or important you think your respective origins are in the context of fashion design?

Raf Simons: Belgians have no real history when it comes to clothing or designing or manufacturing, so in that sense I think it was quite weird that suddenly there was Belgian fashion, with Martin Margiela, Dries Van Noten, Ann Demeulemeester...⁷ And I think it was important not to compare Belgian fashion to Paris or Italy – with no production possibilities, no factories in its history.

Miuccia Prada: Maybe that is why it is interesting.

Raf Simons: I think so, yes. And since there was no history, everybody was feeling the desire to do their thing,

from. And I think that a designer like Martin Margiela had a problem thinking about structure during his whole career. He was not structured, he was a creative person, and had he not had his business partner, Jenny Meirens,⁸ maybe we would never have even heard about him. I think that's the case for quite a few of us.

Mrs. Prada, as time goes by, do you feel you have a greater ambivalence or a greater fondness for your Italian-ness?

Miuccia Prada: The way I was brought up was never really Italian. I mean, I'm deeply rooted in Italy, but that was never at the top of my thinking. I just wanted to be in the world, so I never felt this Italian-ness, even though I maybe am so Italian. But last year I kind of decided to be more patriotic....

Raf Simons: I think the opposite.

Miuccia Prada: Me, too. More and more. I have to say, when I was starting this job, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it felt like it was the worst possible moment to be a fashion designer. This was the feminist revolution and I was leftist,⁹ working for the [Communist] Party, yet I loved fashion and that prevailed. But there was a real sense of shame for me to be working in fashion because it felt too superficial. And then, maybe 10 years ago, I noticed so much appreciation from intellectuals, artists, architects and so on. They really respect fashion now, they enjoy my position, and seeing what I can do for them with my Fondazione. I think it is curious how what I learned through fashion has had so much influence on the Fondazione, because fashion is very free – at least in

‘Sometimes, I’ll think I’ve had a fantastic idea, but Olivier Rizzo, who works with me and knows Raf’s work, says, ‘Miuccia, Raf’s already done that.’

but were shy about the exposure they might get. We feel small because we are a small country, but then deep inside a lot can happen when you feel small. That is a psychological thing, so I could feel from that generation that there was so much they wanted to let out, but they were shy and reluctant. I find that in fashion the people who scream the loudest very often have the least to say. Anyway, I think that my generation, which is the following generation, definitely carried the same weight of not really being supported by the country, because there is no system.

Miuccia Prada: It was very relevant for fashion, that different approach, fashion changed after that.

Raf Simons: With the other countries, Italy, America, France, there was a ground and a fashion structure to build

Raf Simons: Could you see yourself working in another country?

Miuccia Prada: No, I live here. I am very happy and proud of the fact that I live in the home where I was born, and the place where I started to become political is right next door – all my history is here. That grounds me and gives me strength, as do my friends.

Raf Simons: But do you think that your work would look different if you were to design it on a completely different continent?

Miuccia Prada: I have no idea... I don't think so. But who knows?

Another question for you both: an auctioneer in Paris recently told me, ‘Fashion no longer has prestige’. It was a comment that’s really stuck with me. I wanted to get your thoughts on this.

our minds – and I think that one of my challenges now is to demonstrate how my job as a fashion designer can help improve my work in the Fondazione. So I totally disagree that fashion has lost its prestige.

Raf Simons: I agree completely with Miuccia; I think it is extremely prestigious. In my opinion, the only problem with fashion is that it's become pop.

Miuccia Prada: Completely, like music.

Raf Simons: I didn't study fashion,¹⁰ but for the kids from my generation who studied fashion in the 1980s, there was a slight feeling of shame about it. Parents would say, ‘Oh God, our kid's into fashion, why can't he be a painter or something?’ Whereas these days, I get the impression that all parents want their kids to be in fashion! Because it's become very popular and mainstream

and there is big prestige and there are big-money jobs, and everybody wants to be in that world. So I think it is very wrong what he says. It is not elitist anymore, maybe, but that is something different. I've said this before: I don't think we should feel ashamed that fashion was once elitist, and not for everyone. I don't think it was wrong. But I also don't think it is wrong that now it is supposed to be for everybody.

We are clearly in a period of huge democratization in fashion and many other fields. Do you think that elitism has value within that?

Miuccia Prada: It is a difficult question to answer. Elitism is already by definition not such a great word. Elitism is like the word luxury; they are really bad words. But if elitism means study-

Raf Simons: There is definitely a fashion hierarchy and that is connected to the idea of elite. Everybody can buy a ticket to go to a rock concert, but in fashion it is still the fashion people – the designers, the houses – who decide who can and cannot come and see their show. If it is right or wrong, I don't really know, but I would like to explore how it could function in a different way. I mean, I did my last show without *any* seating; people just stood and watched.

Miuccia Prada: Yes, everybody wants to be first row. I say, 'Listen, the world is not democratic! Designers are judged every single season – that one's the best, that's the worst, that's second best, third, fourth – so don't pretend this is a democracy'. To do a show, like Raf has, without seating seems like a much better idea.

Prada fashion and how you are able to bring that into your art foundation. But I was wondering, what are the other metrics of success for you? How do you equate success personally?

Miuccia Prada: Let's just say I am happy that a collection is successful when I feel it from the audience, or when I read comments. But after that I am very sad sometimes because I really don't enjoy the idea of success, I never have done. I am happy if it is not a disaster, but the idea of success has never really given me happiness. I don't know what would happen if my career was a disaster...

Is the day after the show – like we are today – a big comedown, a kind of hangover?

Miuccia Prada: I don't have the time to think about that. Today I have this

'Everybody wants to be on the front row, but listen, designers are judged every season – he's best, she's worst – so don't pretend this is a democracy.'

ing, searching, reading, discussing, then it is a good word.

Are the words elitism and luxury bad because you find them inherently contentious?

Miuccia Prada: When people ask me about the word luxury, I refuse to answer them because I hate that word and anyone who talks about it, whether it's a person saying luxury is a big diamond or someone else saying luxury is walking in the countryside. Personally, I think any answer is wrong when you're talking about luxury. Elite is an equally bad word if it just represents somebody who thinks they are better than another person. Then, it is obviously wrong. But if it represents something of actual worth, then it can be something good. So I don't know how to answer.

Raf Simons: Although I was scared that people would complain, 'Ah, we have to stand so long'. Because, you know, people are often complaining.

Miuccia Prada: With yesterday's show, the first row actually had the worst view; the view from the higher up rows was better! But try explaining that the fourth row is better than the first row; of course, they would prefer to sit in the front row and see less. But you see how every little thing that you say could offend somebody.

Raf Simons: We keep on coming back to what we dare and don't dare say! I mean, I think that I am quite a daring person but...

Miuccia Prada: ...not suicidal!

Mrs. Prada, you mentioned before the importance of the work you do for

interview, and then over the next 10 days, I have to work on the new Miu Miu collection, to invent a whole new world! Maybe we'll get Raf to do it!

Does that pressure to invent new worlds motivate you or make you anxious?

Miuccia Prada: Well, right now, we're in a very anxious and intense moment in general about what is happening around us, with Brexit and the Trump vote coming up. It is a very difficult and daring moment and so I am always thinking, thinking, thinking about everything in relation to my job. In that sense, it is good. But that doesn't leave a lot of time for relaxation.

It is rare that writers or musicians or architects exist within systems that

Miuccia Prada

require them to create something entirely new every six months, or less.

Raf Simons: They have their own systems. And, as fashion designers, we still have a choice. Miuccia could say tomorrow, 'I will do one collection a year and show it whenever I want', and *everyone* would be there. But while that might please Miuccia, does that please the turnover of her company? It is as simple as that. With my personal brand I am doing two shows a year, but I could also decide to only do a single show every three years. To please myself I could do that, but I also know what that would mean economically. In the art world, though, there are people who actually do that: Robert Gober¹¹ doesn't really produce much work; when he is ready he'll just call [his gallerist] Matthew Marks.¹² But there are now a lot of

is just a normal working day, in-house.

Miuccia Prada: That is the moment I enjoy the most, too: when I can finally work without distraction, because there is almost always something that is involving other people. But the day when there is nothing to do except just work is like, 'Ahhhhh'. It's so relaxing.

How often is that?

Miuccia Prada: Not so often, but the pleasure of working without other distractions, those are beautiful days for me.

When and where are you able to be most creative and productive?

Miuccia Prada: I've discovered that when I am in bed—in the early morning when I am still a little bit asleep—is when I can concentrate on what really matters for me. And that helps, because

because they often finish so late, I feel *coupable* because I shouldn't take such advantage of their skills, but the quality of the people and the production is amazing.

Does this quality of production allow you the freedom to spend more time experimenting on the designs?

Miuccia Prada: Yes, and that is my fault. When I start working on a collection, I will say, 'Ah, this is nice, that is nice, this is nice', I like everything. But once the models come to the fittings, I'm more like, 'This is shit, this is shit, this is shit', and so it is only at the last moment that I really know what I want. Sometimes, I just find myself pretending to like something...

Raf Simons: We are very different, I think. Once I have the idea, usually

'Miuccia could say tomorrow, 'I'm only going to do one collection a year and show it whenever I want.' But does that please the turnover of her company?'

young artists following a system: they produce work for every art fair, every event, and there is an agenda for each show. But by doing that, then everything becomes too similar. The weird thing is that as a designer or an artist, you are always confronted with your own sense of will; it is about what *you* want and what *you don't* want, whether you allow yourself or not to do these things. And that is the most difficult thing, I think. When Miuccia speaks about her dissatisfaction, that is something I recognize very much. While sometimes I might pretend to be very satisfied, in a way, I always feel restless.

Creatively speaking, when are you happiest?

Raf Simons: In the creative environment I think I am most at peace when it

I'll arrive at work with a clearer idea. I should say that with my small group of people here, we work *really* last minute, increasingly so. And I accept that it is my fault.

Really, why?

Miuccia Prada: I don't know. There is so much to do: collections, campaigns, there is never a quiet moment. This last men's show we did in less than 15 days.

Raf Simons: You see that everywhere now, within the big structures. For my own brand, we start the collection three months before the show; otherwise it wouldn't be possible, because our structure is too small. Even at Dior, with the couture, we had to start on time.

Miuccia Prada: We have the most fantastic people here, who work miracles and are very generous with their time,

three months before the show, it won't change: the way I see it then stays exactly the same until the end. Nothing changes. I think this is because I am always used to working by myself. I don't work in the evolved fashion system, with consultants and stylists and all those people together on the creative side, except for my own creative right-hand, who is in the company permanently with me. Sometimes I think maybe I should work with more people because putting the whole show together by myself is really stressful.

Is that stress useful though, required even?

Raf Simons: Well, going back to what Miuccia said about dissatisfaction, these days I've started to hate the actual day of the show—no, not actually *hate*,

I should avoid using that word [laughs] – but I no longer find it in any way pleasant. I don't know why, but I see myself becoming an idiot that day. I see mistakes and then I am not gentle enough about expressing them to people. Then there is all the press afterwards, and everyone wants the same thing at the same time. I just feel very helpless and I sometimes wish we could skip the show day entirely, but, you know, it's the moment that many people have been waiting for. The following day can be very difficult for me, too. This season, I slept until five o'clock in the afternoon.

Miuccia Prada: You know when I am happy? When, in my head, I know that I've got a clear concept of the show. After that, I can leave it to others, because for me that is when it is done and I am finished. The reality, of course,

maybe use those another time'. Working in a hurry you have to produce more, but there have also been some shows where the refining of the idea was so precise that at the end you have more or less what you need. I know people who do, for instance, 2,000 pieces; they mount earlier and then they select, do the styling, and so on. I don't work like that, I work out of precision and reducing, reducing, reducing.

Do you prefer chaos or calm? Or do you need a little bit of both? Because Raf, you said that the chaos stresses you out...

Raf Simons: I am not a chaotic person. I just can't do that. I can be a mess, but you know what I mean, I am not that kind of person. I am organized, which I think is very Belgian.

smiling, laughing. Until then, if I am not smiling it means I haven't done anything good.

Do you think the people who work closely with you sense that, too?

Miuccia Prada: I think so. It is a communal work, and we all know when there is something good going on.

Raf Simons: I demand from the people around me that they tell me if it is good or bad. I'd hate to be with people who say it is good all the time.

Miuccia Prada: That is one of the reasons why I like to work with Fabio so much, because most of the time he tells me what is wrong, and that is so necessary.

You've talked today about self-censorship of your words. How acute is your

'I am deeply human, even if sometimes I'm nasty with the people around me. You have to be nasty at some point in order to achieve things for everybody.'

is that I work after that moment, and I also realize that the translation of this idea into reality – from a concept into producing garments – is what is difficult, and where you learn a lot about your actual working process. Even if I might pretend that the production part is less necessary, it is of course very necessary, in order to improve my overall thinking.

Are you articulating the concept in your mind right up to the last minute?

Miuccia Prada: Yes, and I don't know if that is because I like to work under stress or because I become more difficult the nearer we get to the show. So I'll typically start with maybe four or five ideas and then one will prevail; we don't always have the time to make the other ideas into toiles, so you think, 'OK, we'll

Is organization one of your attributes, Mrs. Prada?

Miuccia Prada: I don't know. I really don't know! The result is what counts.

Raf Simons: I am only interested if what you make is sublime. If that comes out of chaos or organization, who cares? I was fascinated by the question you asked Miuccia about when you're at your most creative. For me, this comes late at night, when I should be falling asleep, when I don't really want it to, when I don't have a notebook or anything to draw with. Like you say, Miuccia, it comes like an automatism, and you immediately react. I definitely couldn't just sit down at a desk each day for three weeks and start thinking about it.

Miuccia Prada: I know when we are getting good ideas because I find myself

own sense of self-editing, of quality control in your designs or ideas?

Miuccia Prada: Ideas can be so pure when you do the fashion show, but my job forces me to see the bad things – 'This doesn't work; this isn't selling'. It forces you to see the reality, and to understand what people like, even when that isn't always what you like yourself. That is the most relevant point in my work: always to face reality. When it is good that is fine – it doesn't make my life better – but I only care about what doesn't work. Because you have so much to do that you don't have time to enjoy what is working. You have to take care of what doesn't.

Are you able in your own mind to think, 'I'm sure this is what I should be doing?' And then are you confident

Miuccia Prada

that the people you are working with will absolutely see that?

Raf Simons: Yes. And I think if I didn't feel that coming naturally anymore then I would step out [of fashion] in a split second.

Miuccia Prada: I agree.

Raf Simons: I could not live with the self-realization of experiencing that. I am too proud for that. I see what is happening in fashion, and you have to be honest with yourself, it is a matter of your own decisions. You see people who used to be *the* most relevant, but who are no longer relevant, and they still go on...

Miuccia Prada: It depends how you see it. Maybe the actual working is more relevant than the being on top. Armani, he likes to work – it is his company, his job – so why should he stop? As a wom-

Do you find escapism in the work?

Miuccia Prada: A bit, yes. The fact that you have to go to work is distracting.

Do you see it as going to work?

Raf Simons: Even if it is demanding, it is a nest that you have created for yourself, a very safe environment. You can always go there and be with people you have a nice time with, and that you like...

Miuccia Prada: ...and that those people like you.

What are your feelings about the tension between isolation and unity? Do you feel it is important, as the industry grows ever bigger, that you don't retreat into isolation?

Raf Simons: Yes, definitely. I had been in the game for about a decade

a good relationship, with nearly everyone, and it is very nice. And we don't have the occasion to be so near, because in the art world they go to the same openings, maybe they do group shows; they are forced to be together because they have the occasions. Us designers don't really have the occasion to be together...

Raf Simons: The need to have this dialogue has increased over the past couple of years, as our system has become more fucked up, and I see everybody in a situation where they seem to be more isolated.

In what ways do you feel the system has become fucked up?

Raf Simons: I might get punished for saying this, but when you are creative director in a big group I feel you get

'Sometimes my husband comes home and says, 'Let's not speak about work.' But friends, family, love, work, problems, traumas, death – it's all one.'

an I want to work until late in life. But who knows? Maybe one day I will get fed up, I'll step down, and then it will stop. I don't know exactly. But for sure I like to work.

What percentage of your life would you say you give to fashion?

Miuccia Prada: A lot.

Raf Simons: Personally, I could step out from this now.

Miuccia Prada: Because you are a man, maybe. Being a woman, perhaps if you don't work you start thinking about aging and all that stuff. Maybe you become a mother and are happy to stop, I don't know. But between the job and the Fondazione, it is such a big deal for me; I think that sometimes they are a relief from life, because sometimes life can be so tough.

or so when I realized that designers do not talk with each other. Maybe it is because I come from such a small-scale design environment. Antwerp is like a village, so you would bump into Ann Demeulemeester or Dries or Walter [Van Beirendonck] at the bakery or in a nightclub, and you would just have a dialogue.

Miuccia Prada: You know what, maybe artists and architects are forced to stay away more from one another, because they are always taking part in the same competitions or shows. I am sure they are jealous of each other.

Raf Simons: Every field has its own rules of competition.

Miuccia Prada: But any time I am with other designers – mainly the ones that I respect, but also others to whom I am maybe indifferent – I always have

pampered to the extent of becoming isolated. We've talked a bit about hierarchy today. Sure, there should be structure, but not hierarchy, and definitely not a human hierarchy. There were people at Dior who didn't dare talk to me! That is not normal. That is something I find unhealthy. It is like the king-on-the-throne kind of situation.

It feels, Mrs. Prada, that although the scale of your company has grown, there remains a distinct feeling of humanity. I think that is what defines it.

Miuccia Prada: This is really what I care about most, about human feeling and existence. I am more and more interested in people's lives: moments, fears, passions. Someone once told me, 'I don't want to make interesting things, I want my life to be interesting', and I've

kept that in mind, as it was a very clever person who told me.

That's quite post-materialistic.

Miuccia Prada: It's really what I'm interested in and clothes are at the service of your life. Ultimately, it's your life, and the lives of others, that counts. Even if people don't know it, I am deeply human, even if sometimes I'm nasty to people around me. You have to become nasty at some point because you have to achieve things for everybody, but really I'm not nasty at all. If I could spend my days being more generous with people, listening to their problems and so on, I would love that much more. But at some point you have to lead, you know.

It's that corporate world cliché where it's lonely at the top, and you can't

share your time with that many people.

Miuccia Prada: The thing that I would love most would be to be seated in a bar with friends, from morning to night! That is what I love: to be with people. It probably doesn't look like that, but even last night I was with my friends and the people who were working at the bar and so on, having finally finished the show. It was a moment with people. I was like that when I was young and in politics. That is what I liked; I like to be with people and to talk.

Raf has spoken before about compartmentalizing his life – there's the work, and then there's the life and the family, and love – is that something that you do too, or do you think that the two merge?

Miuccia Prada: [Pauses] I think that

at the end they merge... they merge. When I started to work with artists and the Fondazione, I didn't want people thinking I was taking advantage of art, so I kept them separate, even if in my mind it is not separate at all. As much as you might want to keep separation, your life and your thoughts are one. Sometimes my husband comes home and says, 'Let's not speak about work, OK?' But your life is one: friends, family, love, work, problems, traumas, death, it is all one. And that is life, basically.

Thank you both very much for your time.

Miuccia Prada: I am tired; this was really intense. Thank you, Raf, for coming.

Raf Simons: No, I thank you.

Miuccia Prada: OK, now I need to go to the bar!

1. Originally a French word meaning to 'burst forth', *boutade* is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as 'an outbreak or burst especially of temper' and 'an 18th century French dance of impromptu character'. The *Nouveau Dictionnaire François* [sic], written by Pierre Richelet in 1710, is more expansive: 'It is a figurative dance, that was invented by the famous Bocan, master dancer, under the reign of Louis XIII, which was called *boutade*, because it begins in a manner that has something of the brusque, gay and alert.'

2. In 2015, Simons was a jury member of the annual LVMH Prize for young designers. The winners were Marques Almeida. Other jury members were JW Anderson, Nicolas Ghesquière, Marc Jacobs, Karl Lagerfeld, Humberto Leon and Carol Lim.

Phoebe Philo, Riccardo Tisci, Delphine Arnault, Jean-Paul Claverie, and Pierre-Yves Roussel.

3. Raf Simons invited Sterling Ruby to work together on his Autumn/Winter 2014 menswear collection.

4. Raf Simons was creative director at Jil Sander from 2005 to 2012. Prada bought a 75-percent stake in the German brand in 1999 before selling it to private-equity firm Change Capital Partners in 2006.

5. Olivier Rizzo is a renowned Belgian stylist. He studied at Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts, alongside his frequent collaborator, photographer Willy Vanderperre.

6. Fabio Zamboni first started working with Prada in 1981, and has

been design director for Prada and Miu Miu since November 2002.

7. After graduating from Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts in 1980, Marina Yee, Dries Van Noten, Ann Demeulemeester, Dirk Bikkembergs, Walter Van Beirendonck and Dirk Van Saene – or the Antwerp Six – put their designs in a van and drove to London. As the *New York Times* wrote in 2013, the trip 'ended up putting Belgian fashion on the international map'. Martin Margiela is often mistakenly included in the group, but had actually graduated from the Academy the previous year.

8. When Jenny Meirens co-founded Maison Martin Margiela with the designer in 1988 she was running a designer-clothing shop in Brussels, decorated with furniture found in Paris.

9. 'I was a Communist but being left wing was fashionable then. I was no different from thousands of middle-class kids,' Miuccia Prada told the *Independent* in February 2004.

10. Raf Simons studied industrial and furniture design in Genk, the city that, incidentally, is the birthplace of Martin Margiela.

11. Robert Gober is an American sculptor. Best known for his room-size installations often featuring realistic wax body parts, his work has been shown at the Fondazione Prada.

12. Matthew Marks opened his first gallery in 1989 on Madison Avenue, New York. He later became one of the first art dealers to move to Chelsea. He represents artists including Gober, Nan Goldin and Jasper Johns.

**‘I love
uniforms.
They require
no thought.’**

Miuccia Prada on nuns, nurses and sexy firemen.

**Interview and styling by Katie Grand
Photographs by Norbert Schoerner**

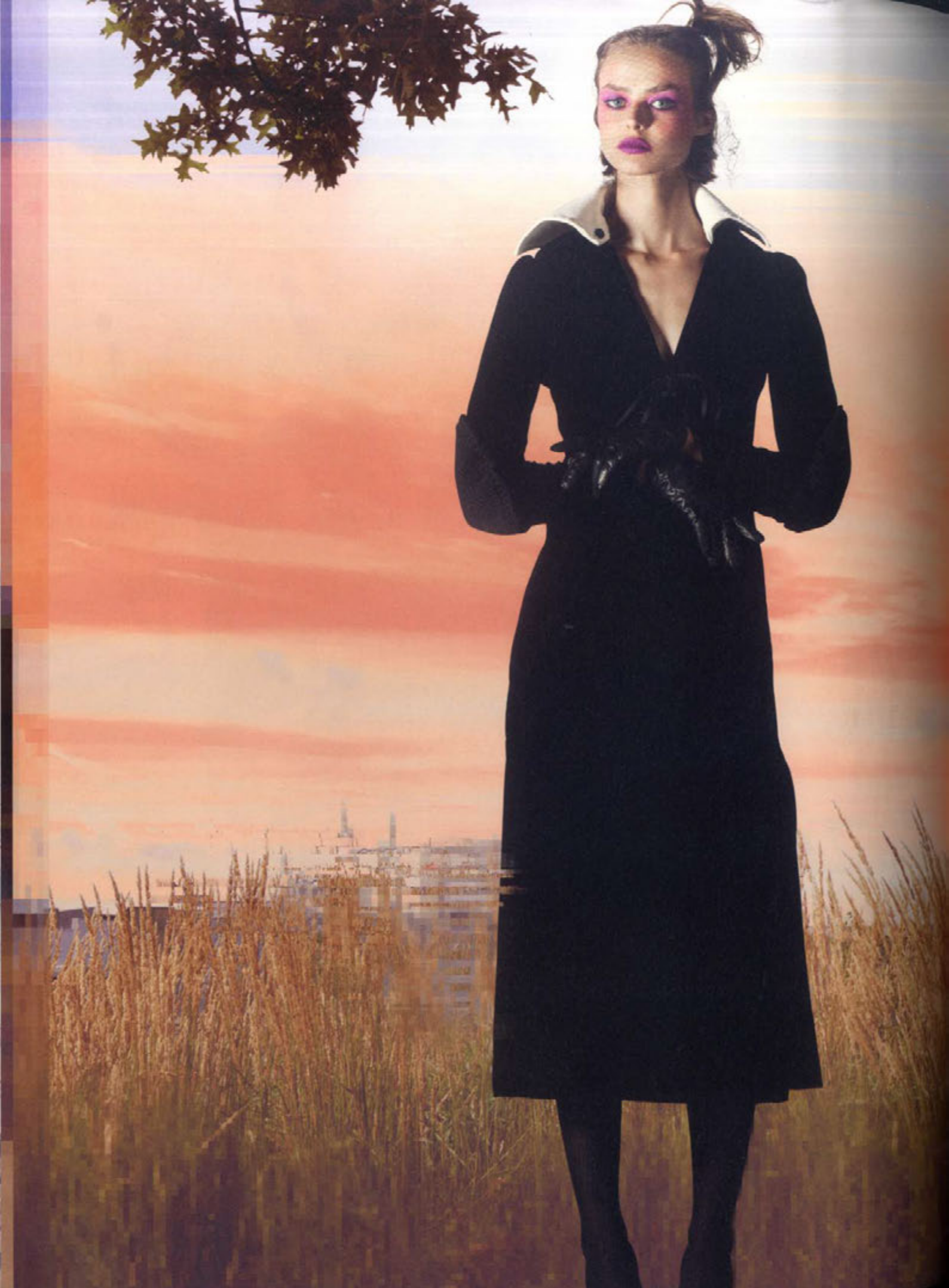
















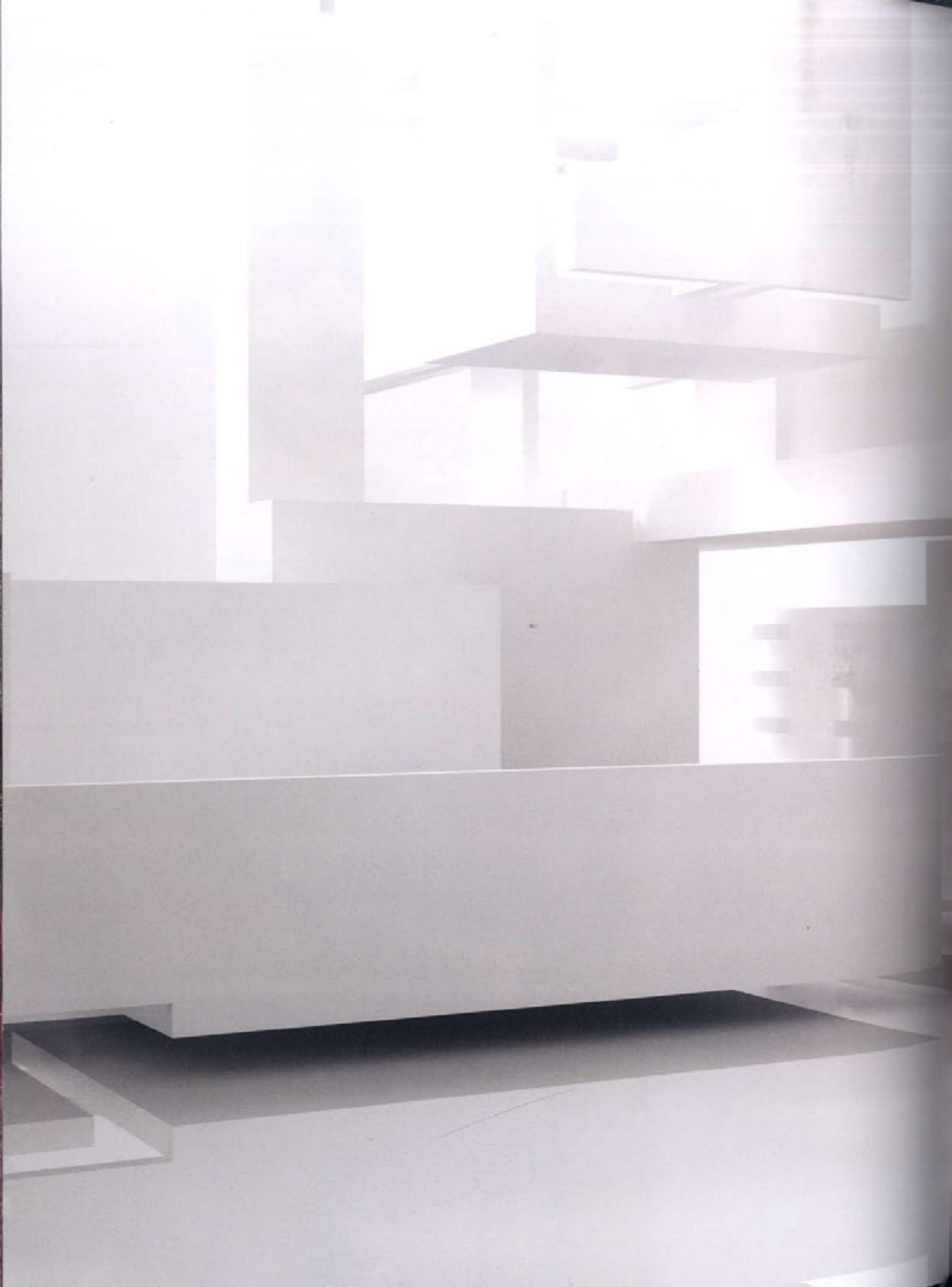










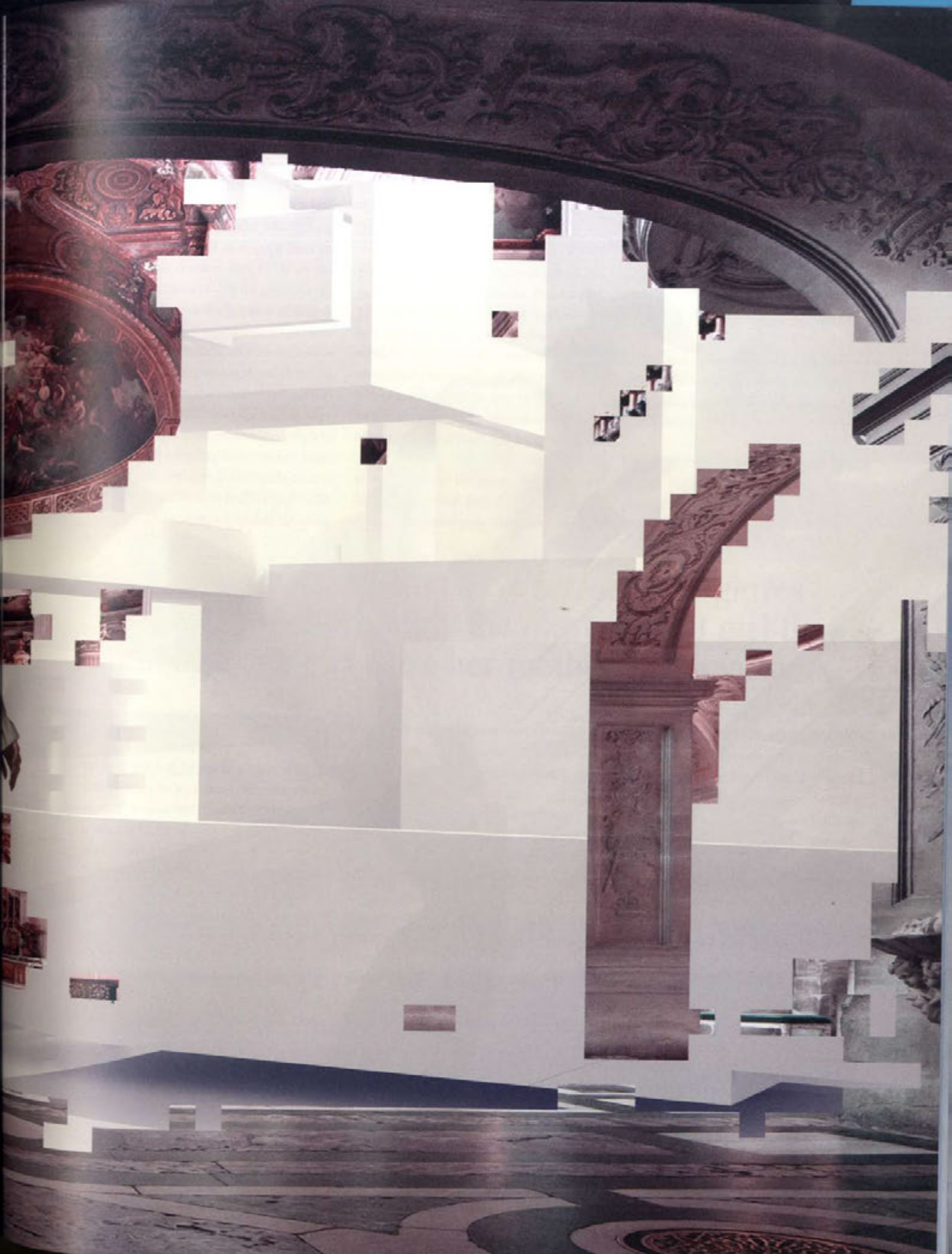














Quite frankly I love Miuccia – always have, always will. And if I could have anything in the world it would be her clothing and jewellery archive. She's the best-dressed woman on the planet; no one else comes close. There's already a lot of Prada and Miu Miu in my own archive, of course, which we used for this *System* shoot. Of all the pieces exhibited in *Pradasphere* – the 2014 travelling retrospective of definitive Prada looks from Miuccia's personal collection – I have about 90 percent in my own. On the opening night of *Schiaparelli and Prada: Impossible Conversations*, an exhibition at the Met in New York in 2012, I was fortunate enough to wear one of Miuccia's own skirts from the Autumn/Winter 2000 Prada collection, which went on to feature in *Pradasphere*. For *System*, we ended up using

Spring/Summer 2017 Miu Miu show. Miuccia was wearing hers with trousers (because, as she tells me, 'This is a period when I like trousers') and we sat in her office – the famous one with the Carsten Höller escape chute – drinking sparkling water with lemon juice.

Katie Grand: When *System* asked me to do something with the Prada and Miu Miu archives, which I obviously know well after having already shot with them, I thought it would be good to explore the specific idea of uniforms. It's crazy how much you refer back to uniforms over and over and over.

Miuccia Prada: Well, this is my fixation!

It was funny, because Edie Campbell said she felt this shoot was about female stereotypes, but that wasn't

working, and the declaration of liking what you do at work.

What was your school uniform like?

Black cotton, with a white collar, and open in the back. I've never really thought about it before, but that is actually something I use all the time [in the collections].

And what shoes would you wear at school?

Shoes were free to choose; there was never really a strict rule about uniform, even in high school, like I think you have in England. You just had to cover up.

I had a green school uniform. That wasn't very sexy. Did you wear higher shoes as you got older?

No, because by the time I'd grown up,

'I'd wear short skirts, *calzettoni* and gloves to school; I was probably the most elegant girl there, although one girl wore her mother's Chanel suits.'

the shoes from my archive – a model-friendly size 40/41 – as those in the Prada archive are Miuccia's own, and at size 37 they're too small. For the same reason, it was my Prada footwear that featured in the shoots for the *Impossible Conversations* exhibition catalogue. We tend to like the same pieces, and there's definitely a mutual influence in what we wear. When I go to see her I'll turn up in Prada, and sometimes Miuccia will ring the store to try on the same piece herself. It works the other way round, too: I'm often inspired to buy something she's wearing. We've both been wearing the Miu Miu Autumn/Winter 2016 pearl shearling slippers all summer (I have six pairs of them). We were wearing them when the following conversation took place at Prada HQ in Milan during preparations for the

how I saw it at all. I just wanted to play with the recurring themes of uniforms in your work: the nun, the maid, the nurse, the school uniform.

In the past, people have asked me if I like working with a theme of uniforms, but I've never actually analysed the reason why I like them. There are a few things I want to say about this: I want firstly to say the serious stuff, then the fun stuff. Firstly, you can hide beneath a uniform, so it's something official that you present, and you don't have to tell anyone anything about yourself. That's probably the most 'serious' reason why I like them. Secondly, because I personally like and respect work and working, when you have a uniform you're generally devoted to a working activity, like all school uniforms, or those of nuns or nurses. For me it's all associated with

there were no rules about the height of your shoes. I was only expected to do that in primary school, from the age of four to eight. Actually, maybe I had tiny heels. [Laughs] I wanted to be fashionable, starting from secondary school.

When you didn't have to wear a uniform, did you dress really sexily?

No, but by the time I got to secondary school – when I was about 13 or 14 – I started *really* dressing up for school.²

Short skirts?

Yes, this was in the 1960s, so short skirts, but I remember I also liked wearing *calzettoni* [high socks] to school. And even gloves! I was probably the most elegant girl there, although there was one girl who would steal her mother's Chanel suits to wear to school.

Did you steal your mother's clothes?

Not really, because my mother was too serious. Actually, I maybe did that later. For mini-skirts, I'd just slip out the door and then shorten the skirt, the typical story. But that's not about uniforms!

Well, it's about your uniform.

That was more about fashion. And freedom. In Milan, I was probably the first person to be a hippy, the first one to wear mini-skirts; I really loved fashion for myself. But going back to uniforms, I was also impressed when I first went to China – when there was still Maoism – with everyone dressed the same. I thought the uniform was fantastic.

Were you religious as a kid? Is that where the nun uniform comes from?

I was raised Catholic, but was never real-

look put-together. Also, it's about not wanting to think about fashion.

What about your own sense of personal uniform?

I have a kind of personal uniform when I go to work. It's usually a pleated skirt, a T-shirt, and a sweater. Because for me, you have to *want* to dress up; it shouldn't be an obligation. So when you have no time, or you're thinking about something else, you must have something easy to wear, that makes you feel comfortable. That's another reason I like uniforms – they require no thought.

When you're really tired, do you ever just pick up what's on the floor and throw it on because you don't want to think about it?

No, but I know that sometimes a white

Christmas with the idea of really dressing up, but I usually end up reducing it a bit. Every season, it'll just be the newest thing that I like at the moment. Now, I've decided for eveningwear, I'll wear trousers. I've worn them twice already to the Met Gala.⁴

And for the *Vogue* dinner,⁵ you wore trousers.

Yes, it's the only thing that feels different. And it's long. I don't like long skirts, so I think trousers are a good idea.

Why didn't you wear trousers for so long?

I like trousers for particular periods of time; this is a period when I like trousers.

I don't know if funereal is necessarily a uniform, but you make references to

'Wedding clothes can be so tacky! Funerals are much more elegant. For me, lace is only beautiful if it's black, and funereal, and super chic.'

ly drawn to religion. The nuns... maybe it's because of Buñuel's movies...³

What do you find sexy about nuns?

Well, I'm not talking specifically about nuns, but when you're covered up, there's all this mystery. I also like uniforms because of the idea of liking and respecting your rules. Actually – and this is probably why I like uniforms in general – very often people are so badly dressed, whereas in a uniform, they are always correct. That's why men always look more elegant, because it's so much easier to be elegant for a man. I would say they look 'proper', whereas for women there are so many choices available that it is much more difficult.

Men in bad, cheap suits aren't 'proper'.

No, but it's generally easier for a man to

T-shirt, a pleated skirt, and a sweater is just so easy – that's usually my favourite uniform! But the blue sweater should be the right one, and the pleated skirt should be the right one. One season, it's the plastic skirt; another season it's another one. It does depend though, because sometimes I will be more interested in dressing up, or I'll particularly like something. Sometimes there are things that I love so much that they become my uniform. So a uniform can also mean something that you feel comfortable in without thinking.

Do you have a Christmas uniform?

No. Christmas is a day when I try to dress up.

What, so mean like a fancy dress?

I actually have to say that I start each

funereal clothes much more than you do to wedding clothes...

[Laughs] Wedding clothes can be so tacky! Funerals are much more elegant. Also, when I wanted to do a show about black lace, I thought it was the only way I could possibly like lace. For me, lace is only beautiful if it's black, and funereal, and super chic. Or white, for a baptism. I never thought about white for marriage, because I don't like it.

The other uniform worth discussing is maids.

Oh yes, maids. I think that uniforms are also a symbol of life and existence. They punctuate moments in life, whether in the hospital with nurses when you're born, or the church for a baptism, and school when you're young. Wedding dresses are also in a sense uniforms.

So many jobs have uniforms, so they do punctuate periods in your life. They're always the most beautiful and elegant clothes, and you appear well dressed. To see someone well dressed is really a pleasure and for sure, all of this fascination was enhanced by movies.

Does it bother you when you see someone you think isn't well dressed, and they're wearing Miu Miu or Prada?

No. No. I would say that I never typically look too much at how people are dressed. I actually really don't care, because I'm much more interested in what they have to say or what they do – and I don't say that just to sound intellectual. But I will say that I am touched when people appear elegant. I don't really notice when people are not elegant, but I do when they are, when what they wear works. I also think that to be elegant or chic or trendy isn't a value for many people, and maybe shouldn't be a value, but I appreciate it very much. Elegance, and the ability to dress well, is really precious and somehow a mark of intelligence and culture, and huge sensibility and knowledge. I remember people asking me, 'How can I be elegant?' And I said, 'Study. Read books. Watch films'. If you are sensitive, cultivated, and intelligent, you can't dress so badly. Probably. Or maybe you don't care. But I don't believe saying that you don't care about clothes really exists, because even the decision *not* to dress is based on a choice, like only wearing black, or only wearing jeans and a T-shirt. So,

dressing is really important, because it's the way you choose to present yourself to other people. But I do refuse to judge other people's choices. However, very often the people I like are well dressed! Does that sound terrible?

Not at all.

With culture goes knowledge, and a person can be neutral, but, in my opinion, somebody who is really well dressed cannot be stupid.

Is sportswear a uniform?

I've never really thought about it, but yes. Although it's not so much the uniform in sportswear that fascinates me.

Just watching the Olympics though, everyone looks so great.

Yes. And yes, it is a uniform. I watched the Olympics, too.

What was your favourite sport?

Well, more than the Olympics, I'm a fan of football now. I've *learned* to be a football fan, because I've always envied how men have so much fun. Every Sunday would be a disaster when I was a little girl, because all the men would only be interested in football. So I've learned about football and I've succeeded in becoming a fan.

Do you like football because it's such a masculine sport, and there aren't many women around, and you're kind of taken care of?

[Laughs] No, actually, if you really

become a fan, you have *so* much fun watching football. I certainly do now.

Who do you go to the football with?

I don't go to matches. I watch it at home with a lot of people... Mainly men. [Laughs]. We play cards, discuss politics, and watch football.

Just going back to the subject of uniform. It's always a shame when you see people out of their uniforms. Often, you see people participating in sports and get so excited about them, then see them afterwards, and they seem dressed so strangely.

And, as you say, it is more 'strange' than 'bad'. It's because the uniform enhances them somehow. Because you think there is a whole world under that uniform that you don't know about. All the girls in love with uniforms, and the power of uniforms – not so much now, but certainly after the war – that was because the uniform was always considered mysterious and fascinating, and could hide secrets and a forbidden life, which made it sexy. Under the neutrality, you can imagine anything.

So many uniforms are black, and black is always sexy.

Doctors are considered very sexy.

And firemen.

Firemen are sexy.

The police?

Mmm...

1. The *grembiule* or smock is still worn by Italian children at nursery and primary school. The traditional girls' version features a white Peter Pan collar.

2. Miuccia Prada attended the Liceo Classico Giovanni Berchet in Milan. The high school's alumni include publisher Alberto Mondadori and film director Luchino Visconti.

3. A number of Luis Buñuel's films featured nuns, most famously, his Palme d'Or-winning *Viridiana* (1961), about a young novice and the tragic consequences of her widowed uncle's attempts to seduce her.

4. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute Benefit – or Met Gala, as it is better known – has been

held almost annually since 1948 to raise money for the New York museum's fashion department. In 2016, the *New York Times* reported that tickets for those people unlucky enough not to be on the guest list were priced at \$30,000.

5. The *Vogue* 100 Gala Dinner was held on May 23, 2016, in Kensington Gardens, London, to celebrate the centenary of the magazine's British edition.

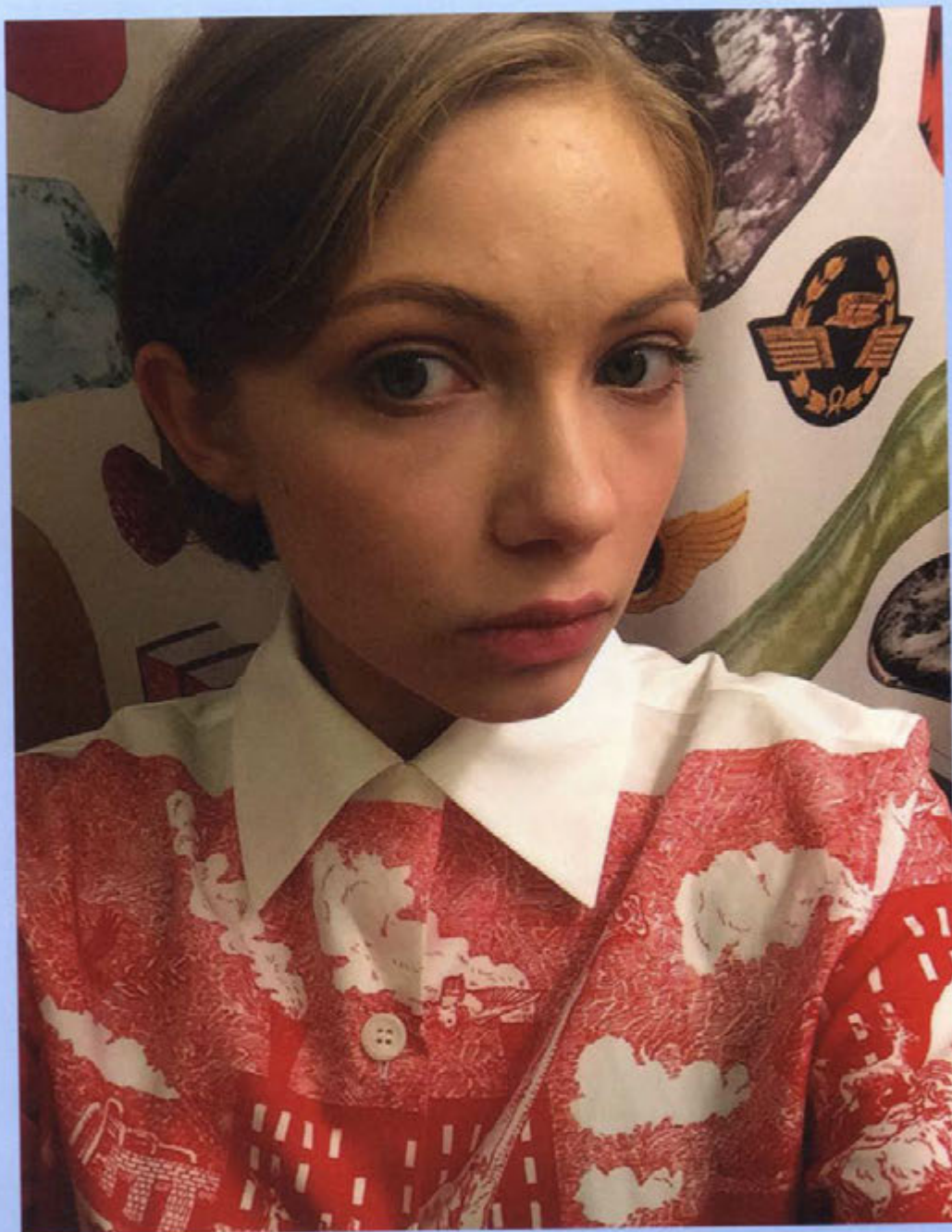
**‘Women
still don’t rule
the world,
but we’re more
articulate.’**

**Miuccia Prada tells Tavi why femininity means
more than just girly motifs or womanly silhouettes.**

By Tavi Gevinson



Wandering around a hotel in my Miu Miu pyjamas with my friend.



Prada Noah's Ark top against my shower curtain.

Miuccia Prada's appetite for the irreverent is as present in conversation as it is in her work. When we spoke over Skype this past July, every other sentence contradicted the last: 'I shouldn't say that!' became a form of punctuation. Watching her play devil's advocate with herself, it became obvious how she generates so many new ideas every season. As she discovered different rabbit holes to go down and opinions to try on, I was reminded of my favourite unexpected Prada and Miu Miu moments from over the years: the sailor hats, the clip-on journals, the naked-lady collars, the Mohawk shoes, the fairy-tale pyjamas.¹ This regard for nuance is how I know, when I wear her clothes, that a woman designed them. Prada's concept of femininity isn't restricted to girlish motifs or womanly silhouettes, unlike

Tavi Gevinson: How has your concept of your job to dress women changed over time?

Miuccia Prada: Personally, I grew up in a moment that was much freer, much simpler and more fun and exaggerated – more interesting. Recently, the pressure has become a little bit heavier. Fashion reaches so many more cultures, which is good in a way – you have to deal with different cultures, different races, different stories. That is what makes my work more exciting. At the same time, there was a freedom that we had back then, probably because it was more for an elite; until the 1980s, the people who wore these clothes were white, rich, sophisticated. It was a small world, so you knew exactly who your audience was, who you were talking to. You didn't even ask why because

Right. On one hand, you have consumers to cater to, but on the other, they're there for your point of view, not for you to do what you think they want to see. No, but I never work thinking what other people want, because I'm not able to. Because I never had a muse; I've never thought about my customers. I've always done what I thought made sense. And placed myself as the opposite gender: *If I were a man, what would I wear?* That's always very personal. For example, this last show was very odd. It was about memories that only happen to women, and I had this sense of what women have had on their shoulders, like political issues. I tried to depict the difficulties and complexities, but also the beauty of women. But since then, because I went through all this analysis, I've wanted to go back to something more real,

'I've never had a muse; I've never thought about my customers. I've always done what I thought made sense. Like, 'If I were a man, what would I wear?'

so many 'feminine' markers historically defined by men. She often examines and embraces such elements, and I absolutely identify with the concept of womanhood expressed in her subtly off-kilter details. Those possibilities so often left behind when design conventions are taken for granted; the clothing equivalent of 'on the other hand', another prominent feature of our conversation.

In the age of the personal brand, style has become a way to simplify, and then advertise, who we are. Miuccia Prada would prefer that it make room for all the selves we *forget* to be. To explore the facets one is accustomed to muting because they pose the threat of paradox. Revisiting our interview, I'm struck by one of her only consistencies: a repeated emphasis on what's 'more real, more personal, more human'.

it was just for you, and the people sitting next to you.

In a way, that was much easier, but the world became more globalized. It became more interesting, but somehow more political, because you had to do what you thought was *right* and be general about it. I think that I want to go back to the way I used to get an idea: more human, more yourself, more real. So this idea of the brand covering the whole world is good and bad. It's bad because the work becomes more abstract, but at the same time, more interesting.

For me, it's kind of a changing moment, because I want to become more personal. I don't know, but that's what I'm feeling. Even though the whole world together is more interesting, my work can become too abstract.

more human, more today. I think I've finished this work of analysing women's situations and histories, but I'm reacting now, and at some point you need a period of things that come from your *mind*: the human, private, real.

There are all these different archetypes of the roles women have been expected to play or have played throughout history in your work. It reminds me of Carl Jung and the idea that all people already contain all these different archetypes inside of them¹ – Absolutely.

– and in the psyche. Does fashion allow you to try out those different roles?

Completely. What interests me, 100 percent, is women's lives. The lives of different people. I love even my real life,



Toilet selfie of Prada Lips skirt (iconic!) and shoes.

too; I have so many different ways to behave. I like to play with all the different possible ideas of a woman and to use them, so the clothes are what help you in this kind of expression. Fashion is to help you express your different selves. That, I think, is the interesting part of fashion basically. It should *help* your life.

I like too the idea that one doesn't cancel out the other. You can be all of them, and every day, you can choose a different one.

I couldn't agree more. It's the pleasure that women can find in possibilities. Sometimes it's preferable to do 10 different things badly than only one well. I have women friends who decided no family, no men, no this or that. And I prefer to be a bit of everything!

more like, 'Yes, black! But'.

Do you prefer when someone says 'black-black' or 'black, but'?

I prefer 'black, but'!

Me too! But this is why we look less strong, because we are more 'but'; we are more complex, but also more articulate.

To me it's a strength to say 'but', to find all the different angles! But that's not how so much of the world functions. I was talking about this with an actress in a play that I'm in. American directors and casting directors are like, 'Who are you, what's your deal, give us your story, tell us who are you, just summarize it'. But Europeans want to have a conversation; you say something and they think about it, and then they respond.

Completely. Completely. That's why I brought it up in our discussion – sometimes I am criticized because I am changing too much, and that's too complicated. I really believe simplification, in this moment, is a very, very bad thing. It's a problem, but I'm deeply interested in it. People have too many messages, too much to look at, too much to see. I'm not just talking about fashion, I'm talking generally. We are so bombarded. At some point you need some clarity, so you need to reduce. Because it's like constant information. So I understand the need, but I think simplification is only good until a certain point. It can become banality.

For instance, we did a show at the Fondazione³ with an artist called Nástio Mosquito.⁴ And I was very surprised because he said, 'Why are clichés con-

'It's better to do 10 things badly than only one well. I have women friends who decided no family, no men, no this or that. I prefer a bit of everything!'

But many different things. That variety is also really linked to me as a person. The moment I say red, I mean black, and the moment I say black, I also want pink. I notice there is not an opposition. I see the possibilities women can assess, because the female mind is more complex. Perhaps women still don't rule the world, are still in an inferior position – it's a complicated situation, but I'm being simplistic – because they are more complex. And command is easy. If you want to command directly an idea, it's, 'Yes, no, white, black'. Women say, 'Yes, black! But'!

And I think that's valued more in most professions, to have straightforward answers rather than ambiguity. It's almost like there isn't time to celebrate the benefits of having an answer that's

Yes. So much. To describe another person with a few words is impossible. It's reductive. It is offensive for a human being. So sometimes maybe they criticize me because I change so much, but changing is what I am, and if you are going to explore different possibilities, it's always within yourself. I still want to go to the new and what's next and what's more interesting. So I don't know if the constant change is an advantage or disadvantage, but I am only me, so...

I think we're moving more and more towards everything needing to be reduced and simplified and easily described. I think that's the way of the news cycle and media, and how people receive information. Do you find any pressure to simplify the Prada brand or say, 'The Prada woman is...?'

considered dumb? Clichés are fantastic! It means that it's something that everyone feels'. He's a young artist, a black artist, very, very good, and all his show is based on clichés and proverbs. Because if something is so repeated and so common... This is why I think restriction and simplification is really something to be analysed.

There's something great about the way clichés or proverbs create a common language. I wonder what you feel you've learned about women and how they want to see themselves by what's been most popular at Prada over the years.

I would have to say they love simplification. In my past, many years ago, there was more subtlety. Now this problem of simplification started to really, not



Miu Miu choker in the middle of the desert.

bother me, but *engage* my deep interest. Is it good or is it bad? How can I *use* it? Sometimes I start using it, but then I go in the complete opposite direction. I couldn't care less about this problem; I just do what's more personal. This last show was this history of women, but even that, it was a *concept*. It was the rose; it was all a symbol of that, let's say, banality or cliché. So I don't know if I want to go on exploring that or just start something from scratch because it's more real, more personal. Who cares what women like or not? I could just do what I feel!

When there's more diffusion of culture, there's less space for niche. One of the reasons why I've decided I really like to grow is because it poses different questions. The niche I know so well, so much, it is not that inter-

I don't know. It's funny, actually, it's the first time that I think about that. That I talk about this theory, but when I work, I do the opposite.

I'm sure it finds its way in somehow. It's informing something.

Yes! Completely. Somehow it will inform the instinct, I'm sure, because it's something I'm really curious about.

I'm always surprised by what ends up resonating with people emotionally, and you can't really predict it or control it. You can't decide that you're going to get through to a group of people, and then do it for them, and get the result you want.

I agree. I always say that I don't have a muse. In the end, I'm not able to reason in terms of... *really* thinking about the

What's a good present for you?

Anything. Anything. Because I like so many different things, in so many different fields. But you know, you can feel when something is not for you. I have to say that, now that I talk about it, the presents that I receive are usually always good.

Presents are hard for people with impeccable taste. I run into that problem with my friends I really admire.

I know, but I can give you the solution: give what you like. Don't think what they like. That's easy. Then it can't be wrong. Because it's a piece of yourself.

You talk about women's roles throughout history, and many of the collections have modernized some of those archetypes we were talking about before.

'Sometimes people think, 'What can I do to be more elegant?' Be yourself, and afterwards, the problem doesn't exist. Because there are no rules.'

esting. It would be very easy for me to cater to a niche, but I like to challenge myself with a wider audience, a wider group of people, different from me. Because I think that from them, I learn so much more.

What do you feel you've learned about designing for women from that experience of trying to reach people outside of the niche?

To be honest, when I do shows, I just do what I like and think is right for that moment! Even if a wider audience is in the back of my mind. So your question is very relevant, because probably it is a very political proposition or concept. But actually, I rather like it that when I do the real fashion or the show and I go by instinct. How much these theoretical thoughts have influenced my work,

result. Sometimes people think, 'What could I do to be elegant?' Sometimes I say, 'Study, study'.⁵ OK, what does that mean, study? Study fashion, study movies, study literature, psychoanalysis. Be yourself, and afterwards, the problem doesn't exist. Because there are no rules. So one should do what one feels. So, of course, I tell myself if I do a thing that has to do with people, like a collection, it's impossible for me to do things that I don't like. I am not able to give someone a present if I don't like it. Say a friend of mine likes roses, but let's say that I don't like roses – I can't give her something that I don't like. I struggle with it myself. I see that mainly when I do presents; I can't buy anything, even if I know they'll want it more than anything, if I don't like it. It is a weakness and it is a strength.

More and more recently, people – and people in fashion – have been talking more about gender fluidity, and having more freedom in gender identity. It's modern in a different way. Is that something you're ever compelled to engage with through design or feel Prada is a part of?

I have this problem much more when I do the men than when I do women's. I always thought that they had less freedom than us. I was trying in a subtler way to change the rules, if not in a violent way. Maybe now it's changing, but for years, if you experimented with men's, you were not 'believable'. So I wanted to do small things, make small progress. The *size* of that – for sure, it's much more your subject – but looking at clothes, it's still not that much freedom. Last night I watched the movie



In a Miu Miu sweater, in the bathroom, on a date going very badly.

Alexander the Great, with Richard Burton.⁶ And the way men were decorated! Even 100 years ago, in the late 19th century, the way men dressed – *jewels*! It's just curious to think about, that it feels like a new revolution, but in the past men were dressed up so much more than women.

And pink was originally for boys!

Pink and lilac! But I am more interested in the limits. Whatever the gender, I feel so much that everyone *knows* what they want, so with dress they should have that total freedom. As a designer, I am more interested in the limitations of the way men dress. There are so many limitations. Because the edge of the ridiculous is still very... The more of a snob they are, the less they dress up in what they like. It's true! They want

It's a big belt!' Mainly at the beginning of my career, but probably also now, I would wonder what about a classic look is also profoundly disturbing. For the so-called avant-garde, it was obviously not avant-garde enough. Because I like going to that kind of subtle part.

Sometimes I analyse things and think, 'Why would they make a scandal about that kind of little belt?' But the show has the most incredible stuff, because I am serious about really trying to break some rules. These choices are small, but probably more relevant than bigger ones. I like to do something that doesn't *look* like change, but is.

Right. And part of why men have more limitations is because they're not allowed to look at all feminine.

Yes, for sure. So in the design I think

fashion world is the most magnificent, the most exciting, the most open place, where you get to meet all the best people from movies, art, and so on. And so they would love to do it, but they still don't do it because it's a woman's job. We still have a long way to go. You and me are privileged, but out there, women are facing social and economic problems...

I find that fashion designers' ideas of beauty are actually so different from the standard of beauty in mainstream America. Like when it's the Oscars and all the girls wear these really beautiful dresses, all the fashion people I know are like, 'Ugh, boring'.

Absolutely. That is an example of how a cliché can be bad, when it only means being super normal.

'The most fun I have is when I debate with myself: Why is Prada sophisticated? Let's make it stupid! Why is Miu Miu playful? Let's make it smarter!'

to be sophisticated; they want to hate fashion. For my real taste, I like not too much dressing up. But more for men than for women. For women, I always love dressing up. But it's difficult to find men where there's much that's interesting. I shouldn't say that!

So it's more about working within the confines of what's been established as acceptable for men?

They have too many limits, but I think that it's a process. It's funny because for many years, I was criticized, I remember, for putting men in stuff that was not for men. One show, it was kind of a skirt on top of trousers. And the trousers had no opening. And I said, OK, let's call this a big belt! Because I like to play with rules, but look like I'm not breaking them. 'No, it's not a little skirt!

about eccentricity and colour, because it's about freedom. You should be able to have whatever you want because you are free, not because you are worried about gender. You're a person, you have to be free. Those who oppress you – you have to do what you want.

Right! Sometimes it's not even about looking feminine, just being clear that a garment had a little extra care put in. Then it's like they care too much, and that's feminine, to care about fashion or appearances..

Yes, but why? This is another big, big subject. I know many people who would love to work in the fashion world, but in the end, they think it's a job for women. So many young people, the ones that really tell the truth to me sometimes, deep down, they think the

It's very limiting. You have to be very normal.

All my career I've struggled against that. I never did a bias dress because what I did more is about the cliché of it. Women want to see that kind of beauty that is so imposed, so impersonal, that I don't find it beautiful. But I was very much criticized because I wanted to introduce in the clothes what was happening everywhere. In the art world, design, movies. But fashion said no. Still those rules were everywhere. Beauty rules are still very old-fashioned. We progressed a little bit, I think, in the 1990s. Now, since the beginning of the 2000s, we're really going backwards. The cliché of beauty is now getting stronger and stronger. Something that was normal in those years – I wouldn't even call it avant-garde, just challenging



In my Miu Miu collar, before going out.

a different way of being, much more complex, much more interesting, much more real, much more fun – now, it's not the best. But I hope that there will be a new change. Maybe we went too far and now we will go back.

You've toyed with these clichés of beauty, but then there are occasional collections where you have said that you're trying to go back to this pure idea of beauty, that exists in the psyche. The kind that you would recognize in nature, or the same kind that people might have recognized years ago before being influenced so much by external ideals. From the time I grew up in, and how many images I've been surrounded by, I think today it would be harder for someone my age to be able to make that distinction between contemporary ideas of beauty that have been perpetuated by media and clichés, and then some type of 'pure' authentic beauty. Where did it come from for you? Does that make sense?

Yes, that is very, very interesting. I never thought about why – probably my education – I had an idea of what beauty

was and how to break the rules, and now what is classic beauty? Maybe it is the Hollywood, Oscars kind... But I'm really interested in what you're saying because it's true. To a younger generation with so much information, which is the one that fits beauty?

But you can only think about your own ideas of it?

Yes, I think I feel the pressure, but in the end, it doesn't make any sense to me because there's nothing I can do with it.

Does Miu Miu function as a way to present a different idea of womanhood from Prada?

When I started Miu Miu,⁷ I always said the distinction was – because Prada somehow was more serious, more thoughtful, more intellectual, let's say – Miu Miu was another part of myself, more fun. So it's another way to express the differences I have with myself. Sometimes no one knows which one is which, because I do Prada like I should do Miu Miu, and I do Miu Miu like I should do Prada. But if I do that, they tell me, 'See? You confuse people!'

[Laughs] So probably this is the first time that I say it in public. But it's a part of me. Miu Miu is more improvised, more special, lighter, more instinctual.

I think part of being playful is trying to see what it's like to feel serious. And part of being intellectual is to see what it's like to be more playful. So those tendencies make sense for both sides of being a woman.

Thank you for analysing it because I am so happy you say that. That consoles me!

Good! The smartest people I know, the most Prada people I know, know that you need time to play and to feel like a child and to not think! They know you need Miu Miu in your life, too!

[Laughs] Completely, yes. It's nice to have both. Otherwise, my constant complex is the end of curiosity, so at least now there are different places to go. The most fun I have is when I debate with myself: 'Why is Prada sophisticated? Let's make it stupid! Why is Miu Miu so playful? Let's make it more smart!' That's a game I play with myself!

1. Spring-Summer 2008 ready-to-wear collection.

2. Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1875-1961) believed that all humans share a collective unconscious. This includes archetypes, figures such as the mother or the wise old man universally recognized by people regardless of the culture into which they were born.

3. The Fondazione Prada, originally founded in 1993 by Miuccia Prada and her husband Patrizio Bertelli, promotes contemporary art and culture.

Since then it has created, according to its website, "Utopian" monographic artist commissions, contemporary philosophy conferences, research exhibitions and initiatives related to the field of cinema. In May 2015, the Fondazione opened a permanent space in southeast Milan designed by architect Rem Koolhaas and OMA.

4. Nástio Mosquito was born in Luanda, Angola, in 1981. The artist, currently based in Ghent, Belgium, works in

performance, music, video, installation, sound and poetry.

5. Miuccia Prada received a PhD in political science from the University of Milan.

6. *Alexander the Great*, directed by Robert Rossen, starred Burton as Alexander and Peter Cushing as his enemy Memnon of Rhodes. The *New York Times* review of March 29, 1956, called it 'an overlong but thoughtful and spectacular entertainment'.

7. Miu Miu was founded in 1993 as, according to the Prada Group's website, 'a private territory of expression and a creative playground, fittingly christened with Miuccia Prada's family nickname'.