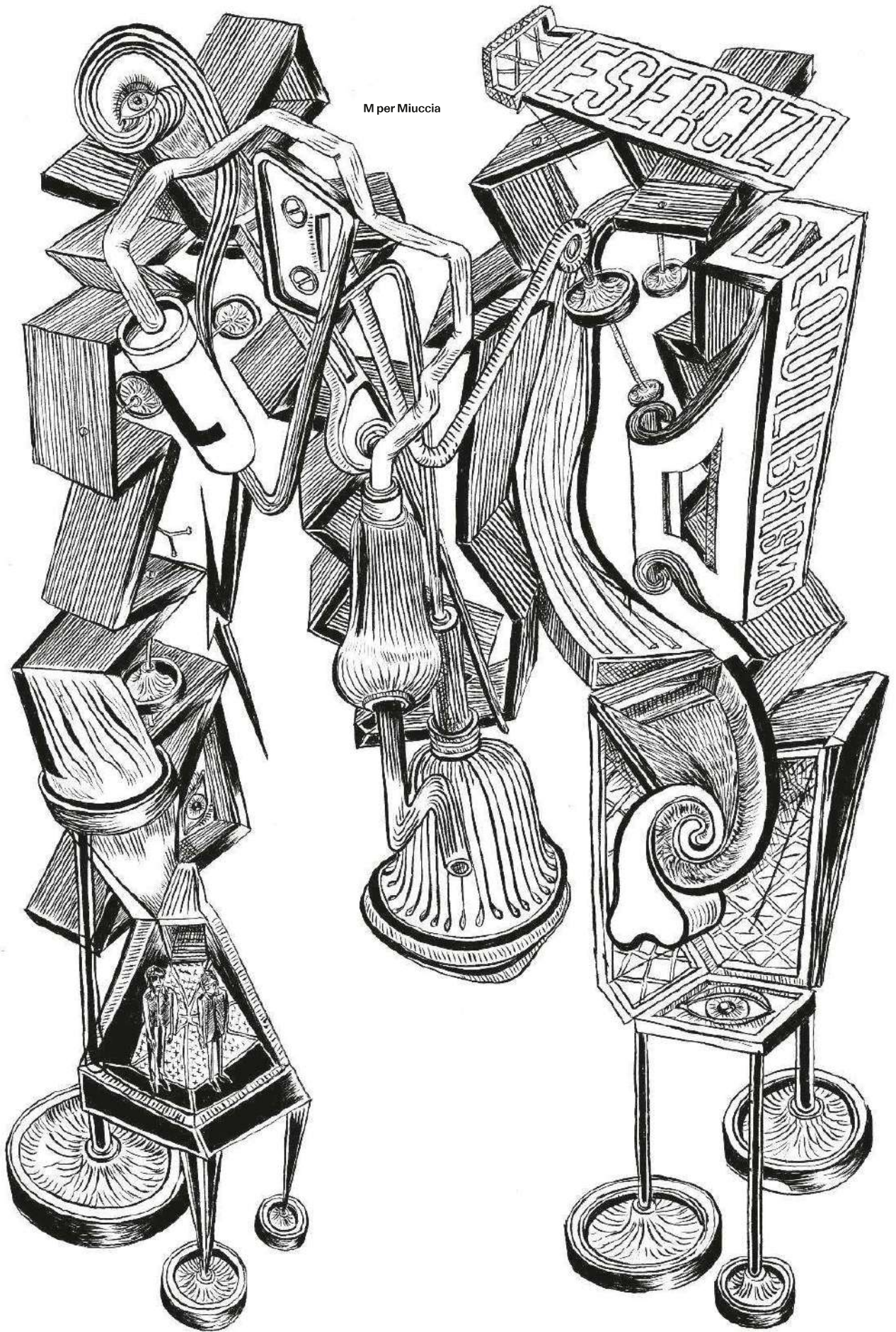


M per Miuccia



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Exclusive interview with Miuccia Prada by Harper's Bazaar Italia

If it were a solid, it would actually be more than a sphere; it would be a thousand-dimensional hypercube, complex and at times contradictory. Born from an intuition, both industrial and artisanal, a producer of

fashion and at the same time a generator of art, architecture, and cinema: it is difficult to constrain the Prada group—with its more than 15,000 employees, €5.43 billion in net revenues, and nearly €839 million in net profits in 2024—into a single definition. The same applies to those who founded it and manage it every day.

Let's begin this journey with history, which starts in early 20th-century Italy, when a new urban and middle class wanted to imitate the lifestyles and behaviors of their more advanced European neighbors. The center of this social revolution was Milan, where in 1913 Mario Prada, Miuccia's grandfather, and his brother Martino opened their first store in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, where customers could purchase the finest leather goods and luggage, becoming the official supplier to the Royal House in 1919. Prada is one of many brands that prospered during the twenty years of Fascism and which, after the war, they survived thanks to funding from the Marshall Plan. Italy's leather goods, design, precious fabrics, craftsmanship, and myriad applied arts did not disappear; on the contrary, they developed and spread throughout the country, paving the way for what would become—from the 1960s and 1970s onwards—the miracle of Made in Italy luxury, of which Prada would be one of the protagonists.

The Prada phenomenon arose from a business meeting in 1978—which later became a union for life with their marriage in 1987—between Miuccia Prada, heir to the company and the family's intellectual heritage, and Patrizio Bertelli, a Tuscan entrepreneur obsessed with quality and with a thorough knowledge of product manufacturing. Part miracle, part destiny. Together, Miuccia and Bertelli, as they call each other, have gone through almost 50 years of successes and crises, moving from handbags to shoes (1979), from women's clothing (1988) to men's clothing (1993), from the Miu Miu line (1993) to Luna Rossa sportswear (1997) with the first sneakers produced by a luxury brand. And then perfumes, beauty, jewelry, and even Marchesi 1894 pastries. Season after season, Miuccia—a 1970s feminist with a unique sensitivity for fashion—has defined the aesthetics of an era with her collections. Suffice it to recall the “nylon couture” of S/S 1988, the “ugly chic” of S/S 1996, the “postcards from Italy” of S/S 2004, the Art Nouveau inspiration of S/S 2008, the tropical baroque of Carmen Miranda in S/S 2011, right up to the fashion shows of recent years in collaboration with Raf Simons. An ever-precise, unique, and recognizable vision, in which minimalism and decoration, uniformity and individuality, vintage and innovation coexist. Prada has created a school of thought and taste for an entire generation of creatives, offering a platform for talents such as Manuela Pavesi and Fabio Zambonardi to express themselves and inspiring designers such as Alessandro Michele and JW Anderson. At the same time, after a difficult period for the group prior to its listing on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, Bertelli and Miuccia have expanded the brand with stores around the world, acquired other fashion brands, most recently Versace, and cultivated a deep passion for architecture, cinema, and above all contemporary art with the launch of the Fondazione in Milan in 1993 and the opening of its headquarters in Venice in 2011. Today still together, they are committed to shaping the future of what they have created, working diligently and lucidly to hand over the

reins to a new generation. In 2020, Raf Simons became co-creative director of Prada collections alongside Miuccia Prada; in 2023, Andrea Guerra took over as CEO of the group from Patrizio Bertelli, while his son Lorenzo, destined to take the reins of the company, assumed the role of director of communications and marketing and head of corporate social responsibility. In the weeks leading up to my meeting with these key figures in Prada's history, news of war and bombings, tariffs and nationalism, as well as changes in designers and CEOs in the fashion and beauty industry, dominated newspaper pages and phone screens. Talking about Prada at times like these can be difficult, because the group produces clothing and accessories for an economic and cultural elite, representing the luxury industry at its best (a term that, as you will read in her interview, Miuccia does not like). But it can also be very easy, because she has never refused to confront reality and take a stand, whether using the theme of a collection

or a contemporary art exhibition. In these long conversations, no one avoided current events, as many do with a 'no comment'. It was our responsibility to separate what we considered personal commentary from what is part of the group's philosophy.

Prada is a brand that is both highly visible and incredibly private. It is still a family in the truest and most intimate sense of the word, with children and parents working together and discussing art and politics freely. Compared to other multinationals in the sector, it offers a diversity and sense of belonging shared by those who work there. But it is also a global economic powerhouse.

How can this multifaceted image, a reality that is as creative as it is industrial, be held together? Where contradictions, confrontation, and clashing opinions are the method for reaching decisions? This is the secret ingredient of a unique recipe that we have tried to investigate through the voices of the protagonists. We decided to conduct separate interviews, like a series of interrogations in which each suspect is asked to reconstruct their version of events, in their own words and with their own voice.

The result is not a formal group portrait—they didn't even want to be photographed together—but rather a collage that takes shape through the performance of four actors, an extended family that also includes the co-directors. The result is not a formal group portrait—they didn't even want to be photographed together—but rather a collage that takes shape through the performance of four actors, an extended family that also includes co-creative director Raf Simons, who has been with the company for more than five years. Each one composes their own self-portrait, answering questions in a very personal way. Each works in a different but complementary way, because they all share the same ethics, moral responsibility, passion for their work, and taste for competition.

They share a sense of cultural mission that extends beyond fashion into the world, into everyday life, and projects itself into the future, seeking to shape its contours and help it define itself in harmony with the past. With the presumption, as Miuccia pointed out, "that everyone contributes to trying to steer things in the right direction." We started with the idea of asking the same questions to the four protagonists—we tried repeatedly—and then organizing the content by theme rather than by subject. But it was impossible to reduce such strong individualities in their convictions to a single denominator. So here are four stories, each set in different buildings and rooms with a similar aesthetic: white walls, a few well-designed pieces of furniture, recognizable but not predictable.

A few works of art punctuate the sets: a painting by Arturo Bonfanti in Patrizio Bertelli's office in the Terranuova factory; the mouth of Carsten Holler's famous metal and plexiglass slide (which leads to the inner courtyard) in Miuccia's office, austere as a monastic cell where the only color was the blue of her summer dress, and a series of large works by TK in Simons' studio at the headquarters in Via Bergamo.

Here, then, are four conversations that differ in tone and volume, voices that are in tune and knowledgeable, but never a chorus. Patrizio Bertelli's Tuscan patriarchal empathy dialogues with Miuccia Prada's bourgeois snobbery and constant provocation, first and foremost of herself; Raf Simons' creative emotionality reinforces Lorenzo Bertelli's analytical rationality. Like musicians in a jazz band, four highly talented soloists who never form a classical orchestra.

The first.

Has always wanted to be ahead of the others, breaking the mold. Miuccia's innate sense of fashion is nourished by real life, relationships and stories, art and cinema.

Her work is her absolute language, her moral legacy.

Could you give us a definition of Raf Simons, Patrizio, and Lorenzo Bertelli?

I never give definitions, I never have definitive answers. I only have doubts and questions, so I almost never answer specific questions. I answer complex ones. But I would never reduce a person to a single sentence.

How did your involvement and identification with the brand come about?

When I started, I didn't want to do fashion, I was almost dragged into it. Obviously, I liked it. But I was a feminist in the 1970s, part of a circle of intellectuals, and I was ashamed to think about fashion. However, I continued. Then I met Bertelli. Since then, I haven't looked back. The journey began, and that was that. If I hadn't met him, I probably wouldn't be doing this job.

There are endless anecdotes about this meeting. According to some, it took place at the Milan Fair, where she went to protest that he was copying her designs.

Oh, you already know too many stories. Anyway, we immediately found ourselves sharing, working together, without thinking too much about it. We just started, we were automatically involved, without needing to make any particular decisions.

Is the process so instinctive? Is there more thought, more responsibility?

There is thought, of course. But I didn't study how to create the Prada brand at a desk. I never made a real decision, I just found myself doing it.

Your relationship with Bertelli. Big disagreements, but also great affinity. Perhaps there are more things that bring you closer together.

We continue to argue as always, but there is an incredible understanding that has grown over time. Precisely because we have had so many experiences together. And we also have many interests in common.

Work, art, life: it is always very difficult, especially in your case, to separate the brand from the person.

I've never thought about these things. Of course, I wanted to keep art and work separate. As for my life, I don't talk about it, but it's clear that for me it's all one. I live it all together.

There aren't many groups of this size where the private lives of the founders have remained so private.

My children discovered that I was a famous fashion designer when they were around 12 years old. They didn't know because I lead a normal life. My friends are the ones I've known since high school. I have my private life, I have my work, and then I have a series of acquaintances, people, perhaps even famous, important people, who are artists, architects,

directors. I don't want my homes to be photographed. I think that living in the same house where I was born in Milan has kept me very grounded in reality, which is the most important thing for me. I always say that what interests me is people's lives.

Would you describe yourself as curious?

No, it's not curiosity, I think that people's lives tell your story, they tell the theory, the politics, the philosophy, the morals, the passions. They tell the good and the bad. It's people that interest me, more than abstract concepts of politics or family.

In Italy, fashion has largely been a matter of families who have found themselves catapulted into the world of international groups. Problems arise when it comes to passing the baton to the next generation. You have been working on this process for some time.

Both my husband and I are convinced that we must think about the future in absolute terms, as well as our own. We have no problem thinking about when we will die, so we have been working on the aftermath for years. I am committed to leaving the company as organized as possible, with a vision projected into tomorrow. As long as I am here, fine, when I am gone, someone else will be here. This is a very precise intention.

Is it difficult?

Yes, but we have created many points of view, many conceptual foundations based on our company's values. Then there is my son, who is following them perfectly, adding his own. I deal with many more issues than before precisely because I want to teach people to work well. It is important, especially in small things.

The details.

No, not the details, they are never details. It's more of a work philosophy. I discovered this desire to teach.

How do you balance your passion for the product with the economic needs of the company?

Every now and then they coincide, and when that happens, it brings a smile. If no one smiles, it means we haven't said or thought anything good.

The creative process and working with Raf Simons. How does a collection come about?

I think it comes about as a logical consequence of the work. You've dealt with a topic, how does that evolve? Into its opposite, into a continuation or into a variation. I would say that the important thing is to understand which theme makes sense at that moment.

Does your inspiration come from observing life?

Yes, it comes from what you see, what you hear, what you read, and then I always think about the meaning of fashion, which if you have it, fine, if you don't, you can change jobs. Because it's an instinct.

Is that the common thread that defines Prada's DNA from the first fashion show to today?

I think so, the meaning of fashion.

It's not just about clothes, it's almost an attitude, an idea of values.

Of course, I'm lucky because I have a wide range of activities. But when it comes to fashion, the fact is that I'm a fashionista, to put it mildly [laughs]. And I've been like that since I was a girl: if everyone wore long skirts, I wanted to wear short ones, I always wanted to be the first to do something different from the others, the first. And that sets me apart. Maybe no one believes it, but it's true. And in a competitive way, I would say. Competitive too, yes.

Let's try to define the meaning of 'new'.

New is something that gives you a vision of an object, of a subject you haven't thought about, seeing something you don't know or seeing the same thing from a different angle.

Is there a method or is it simply a spark?

I don't think about these things, I just think, then if I think about the past, the present, the future, I don't know. I think, I think a lot, but I don't know. I don't know how I think.

And how is this conceptual architecture then transferred into clothes? Because in the end it becomes an object.

That's the difficult part. You start with an idea, I don't know, to make a frivolous collection. What are the elements?

That's already a path. Then you bring a lot of other things with you: for example, that shorts are no longer in fashion, maybe miniskirts are. Then you add the concept you want to convey. With your sense of fashion, which is the most important aspect of all. So even thinking frivolously is a fashion thing, in the good sense of the word.

The presence of contradictory elements is a constant in your collections.

I've never fully understood why either. It's just an instinct that has perhaps even tired me. There must be one thing and its opposite. It's something deeply rooted in me. I have to wear men's shoes with a starlet's outfit, ugly golf shirts, and so on. Perhaps it serves to convey complexity. It's my fundamental characteristic, and it's also part of Prada's DNA. If there is red, there must also be black. If something is beautiful, it must also be ugly. It's not for the sake of simply contesting, but to disrupt in order to move forward.

The conflict between two different instances, then there is a synthesis.

Yes, and it's a very, very important thing. I don't even know if I like it completely.

Why?

Because I'm tired of that too. Maybe I should do everything sweet and cute. It would be very difficult for me, but actually it could be an idea. Everything coordinated and without mistakes, without bad taste. Exactly. Surprising.

Surprising was one of the words used to describe you. Do you like it?

Unexpected. Unpredictable. Of course I like it. The contradiction: nylon used for couture dresses, let's say. I started out making luxury nylon bags together with crocodile skin, and that's what perhaps explains my mindset.

And then there's falling in love with everything related to technology, future.

But at the same time, I love the past. I think it's absolutely fundamental in all fields. I find myself reading about history or looking at history more and more.

Recent or ancient?

Generally from the 18th century onwards, so relatively recent. It's a difficult time to understand the world. You have to be very open about everything, whatever the subject, try things out, test. I see this a lot in the activities I do at Fondazione Prada. Continuous openness is the only

way. I don't know if it's a thirst for knowledge, curiosity, but it's the only way to try to understand what's going on.

Whereas the spirit of the times is one of closure, of walls.

No, it's time to understand, and to understand you have to be open.

And is it also a moment of social regression, in your opinion?

Let's say it's a difficult moment, with momentous changes taking place. With the internet, total communication. It's a revolution much more profound than that of electricity, the telephone, and the wheel. This world that is together, but at the same time is not. It's complicated for young people too. It's

important that everyone does their part to try to steer things in the good direction and not the bad one.

You often talk about the importance of being moral, of being responsible.

Yes, that's my view of the world.

Do you think it's harder to assert your identity today than it was in the 1960s and 1970s?

I think it was difficult before and it's difficult now. Before, you referred to a circle of friends or a political circle, but on a smaller scale; now, even through the web, you have the whole world. The proportions are totally different. But a young person living in this world is used to it, so what may seem difficult to me may not be difficult for them.

There are many more personalities that each person can assume.

Yes, the problem is not getting lost. Let's say that until the 1990s, our world was Europe and North America, then there were others, but they were far away. Now everything is together, religions, ethnicities, politics, and so it's complicated to navigate and understand who you are. That's why I think education is fundamental.

At the Fondazione, as an instinctive decision, I try to put on complex, difficult, sophisticated exhibitions, not ones that immediately catch the eye. Quite the opposite. Another thing is education. Because we all say we want to take care of young people, give them a voice, but no one does. I'm putting together a group of people to understand if and how the Fondazione can educate, but not in a superficial or sanctimonious way.

Is there a relationship between aesthetics and morality?

Of course, in fact morality is fundamental to making clothes, because instead of creating things that make no sense, you try to produce something that is in people's interests. In a commercial sense, a term that is not an insult, but the honesty of our work. It is moral to make things

that sell, because I am not an artist. I design clothes and objects for a brand, for a company that produces and has to sell. Morality is being serious about what you sell. If you make a jacket, it must contain your vision, your thoughts. People like us because they understand that we care. My husband and I first think about doing what we like and what seems right to us. Then, eventually, they are successful.

Not the other way around.

Never do things for money. Intellectual honesty is the most important thing, even in small things. People trust you because they know you try to do your best. When there are so many products on the market, it's the thought behind them that makes you choose them. That's why you wear Prada. It's not just because it has a foundation, or because a model or actress wore it. It's because you recognize the seriousness of the work in that item. A thought.

Let's go back to the way you express yourself through fashion.

Now I have two, there is also the Fondazione. My work is definitely the tool I use to express my ideas. I put everything I know, everything I think, my political and intellectual life, my entertainment into my clothes. All the roles a person can have. Because this is also a story of lives.

Yours is a woman with many faces.

Because I don't have a preference for one woman, they're all fine with me. Each one has her own life, each one takes from me, from what I do, the part that interests her, that she finds similar, but I don't have a point of view on how a woman should be, it's up to her to be how she wants to be. I don't care how she dresses, I care that she thinks even vaguely—when she puts on her clothes—about following her own goals, about being what she wants to be.

Have you ever identified more with the woman on the catwalk than with the woman in your everyday life?

I don't recognize myself in anyone. I know myself and others have to know themselves, so I don't even put myself at their service, I express what I think. I always say that as long as I'm in tune with the world, I'll probably sell. There's no way to know if people want this or that right now. If you're in the world, maybe what you think, live, feel, and put into your clothes interests someone.

A term you don't like is “luxury industry.”

I've never answered the question of what luxury means to me because it goes from one banality to another. I'm not interested in defining it. And then the word is a bit vulgar, let's be honest. Better intelligent, beautiful, desirable. If I had to choose a term, I prefer “useful.” If in a year I manage to make three houses that I'm really satisfied with, that I really like and make me smile, that's fine. I put the same good will into the rest, but not with the same result.

Try to choose one or more creations that you think have influenced the collective imagination of Prada in recent years.

Don't make me say it. I don't know and I don't want to know. And even if I did know, I wouldn't want to say.

Is that why you don't like retrospectives?

If someone else does them, fine, but how can I choose a piece of my life? Some are more important, some less, but it's all part of the story. And in that story there are beautiful houses, ugly houses, more or less important houses, but you can't select some without the others. It wouldn't be a journey.

Is there a moment in this story that you like to remember more than others?

No, no, let the critics say it. I have many favorites. It embarrasses me to say what I like about myself.

Are you the woman you dreamed of being as a child?

No, in the sense that I never imagined anything. It never even crossed my mind to say, "I want to be like that." I never had a vision of myself. Houses just happened to me, that's one of my characteristics, I built them, I lived in them. Well, yes, I dreamed of love, that for sure.

Did you find it?

Yes. I had my mom and dad's love story as a reference point, which seemed so legendary that mine never measured up. The bar was set high. But you always discover new things about what love is.

Let's talk about cinema. We have an idea: that Prada, consciously or not, has set up a propaganda ministry system. In the Minculpop of the fascist era, there were three cornerstones for instilling ideology in the younger generations. Fashion, starting with uniforms, cinema, and architecture. These are also the three pillars of Prada's communication. So, can you tell us if there was ever a plan?

Cinema was fundamental in my education. I studied political science because it was the easiest faculty. As soon as I finished university, I started reading. Cinema is my true passion, along with literature, but that lasted about ten years. Because it tells stories about lives, if we want to come full circle. Whatever nationality or period it was, it told stories about places and people.

I tried in every way to work with directors. That's why Fondazione Prada launched

a fund for independent films in May, with which we want to deepen and broaden the dialogue with contemporary creation and experimentation. I want to devote time to reading and analyzing projects. I'm happy that the Foundation's theater is doing so well.

Do you get excited when you like a movie?

Very much so.

More than when you like a dress?

Much more. I wish I had time to dress up. When I go on vacation, I pack big suitcases to devote myself to it, but then I don't do it. Fashion works when people are in a good mood, when things are going well. But if you have to deal with problems, tragedies, illnesses, you don't feel like fashion. It's something for happy times, I'd say. For example, right now is a period when I'm feeling good and I dress up more.

What about architecture?

At first, we had to set up spaces for the stores based on the product. Architecture came later. When we really needed to build, it was natural to turn to important architects. Stores that Rem Koolhaas then called Epicenters. It was my husband's idea. It was an intuition, a great intuition.

Let's go back to the story of Prada. There were also difficult moments.

S1. They told me, "Look, there are problems." But I wasn't worried. For me, life has always taken precedence over finances.

Did you ever think, "This time we won't make it"?

I never worried, partly because things always went well, more or less. The period when we went public was difficult, but it didn't upset me. I never panicked about work.

Does success make you more cautious?

The scale of it does. You feel a greater sense of responsibility.

How would you describe the acquisition of Versace?

It could be seen as a risk, but it isn't. However, I don't want to talk about it too much. It's a joint initiative, strongly desired by Lorenzo. It is a historic brand that invented the idea of the fashion system as we perceive it: fashion shows, fashion as part of popular culture. All with incredible quality of work. It also understood the value of music before many others.

Is fashion still steeped in bourgeois clichés, or did they die with the 20th century?

Certainly fashion comes from the bourgeoisie, and before that from the nobility. It has not yet definitively left that world. It has not yet completely freed itself from stereotypes, from a codified vision of women. In fact, we are in a period of regression in this sense.

And what about the fashion system? It does not seem to be in great health, apart from yours.

I don't know, I think about what we have to do. There are so many companies, 6,000 brands, a new one every day, and there is a need for many talented designers. But there aren't many around. Anyway, this association between brand and designer doesn't always work. It worked well for 50 years, but perhaps, I'm not sure, it's no longer a viable combination.

Prada's relationship with artists is direct. The impression is that she is more interested in dialogue with artists than in the idea of collecting.

Much more. I don't like the word collector and I don't feel like one. I bought works to study the subject. When I met an artist and liked some of their work, I wanted to own it. Maybe it's not very noble, but it's human.

For every work you bought, you also created a relationship with the artist.

Of course, Fondazione Prada was created because Bertelli and I are interested in lives and thoughts. When I want to get to know people, I ask to work with them, because that's the only way to do it; otherwise, you just talk about this and that.

On the other hand, you have always kept the Fondazione separate from your fashion business.

Like Epicenters, the Fondazione was also Bertelli's idea. We were with a sculptor friend and we were thinking, "These industrial spaces would be perfect for sculpture exhibitions." I said,

"That would be a nice idea." And Bertelli said, "Let's do it." And we started studying books and getting to know artists. It started with him. I'm carrying it on. For me, it was important to respect the artists, to make them understand the seriousness of our intentions. That's where the complete separation came from. Then, three years ago, I

began to think that maybe at this point I could turn things around: use Prada to spread culture. Lorenzo is also interested in this.

Girls who buy Miu Miu make no distinction between the performance of an artist, the performance of a musician, and the performance of fashion.

onestly, I don't know if that's a good thing. Because art is more serious than fashion. It has the freedom to freely explore thought and human existence. Fashion is a business that has to sell. An artist's thought is free, in theory.

Artists have an agenda too.

Yes, of course, but art should absolutely be free to express thought. The purpose of a fashion company is to sell clothes. It can be as creative as you like, as committed as you like, but it's different. I've never thought of myself as an artist. My work is creative, cultured, but it's different.

It works in the present.

Yes, trying to do something good and right in the life I'm living.

Thinking about the future is vital.

You have to imagine the future, whether you are part of it or not.

Born in Milan, Miuccia Prada (76) joined the leather goods company founded in 1913 by her grandfather Mario, with its famous boutique in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, working on accessory design. Together with her husband Patrizio Bertelli, she transformed it into a global brand combining fashion, culture, and sport. Executive director of the group, co-creative director of Prada alongside Raf Simons, creative director of Miu Miu, president and director of Fondazione Prada, she has collected many awards and honors during her career, as well as a cult following around her image as an intellectual and elusive pioneer. Her willingness to experiment in all her endeavors has led her to collaborate with some of the most interesting figures on the contemporary scene, including Germano Celant, Rem Koolhaas, and a plethora of scientific researchers and artists. The little that is known about her private life—a degree in political science, her proximity to the Communist Party, her studies in mime at the Piccolo Teatro—has been embellished with legends, fueled by her proverbial reserve. She has two sons, Lorenzo and Giulio Bertelli.