

In Milan A Fine Line Between Innovation and In Vain

By Elisa Carassai

The Milanese have always been lauded for their effortless elegance - having a way with materials and the layering of silhouettes, that is still timelessly chic. However, when it comes to innovating, they are lagging behind Londoners, New Yorkers and the Parisians.

Still, there seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel: it is the designers who have been focusing on their heritage and delving into the roots of their origins that have found exciting ways to innovate. This was evident on the first day of Milan Fashion Week, as a younger set of creatives officially opened the Fall-Winter 2020/21 fashion games.

Successful in their intent were the first few names of the day. **First up was Gilberto Calzolari. The designer, a former winner of the Green Carpet award, inaugurated the Spazio Volvo with his collection called ‘Tilt System’.** “The collection aims at denouncing the difficulties we are living on multiple fronts - from seasons turning shorter, designers having to churn out collections faster and social media becoming the number one obsession of the new generations,” he said during the press preview of his collection.

Given Calzolari has been previously lauded for his inventive approach in reutilizing scraps of materials – as well as giving new life to plastic bottles by turning them into fabrics for his collections – he has made sustainability his mission by trying to be as transparent as possible about his methods. This time, he experimented with multicoloured pink and yellow neoprene, juxtaposing it with the hardness of pied de poule on midi dresses layered over silk shirts; he played with vinyl PVC using it to create pencil skirts and tailored jackets; added brightly coloured faux fur to oversized overcoats. **All and all, what made his collection enjoyable was what he defined ‘aesthetic short circuits’, the pieces made in regenerated yarns and stock fabrics.**

At **Marco Rambaldi**, the designer went back to his roots by exploring what he loves talking about the most: his Bolognese heritage and the sociopolitical situation of the late 70s and early 80s. **“Our starting point was Vittorio Tondelli’s book ‘Altri Libertini,’ which talks about the kids in the late 70s and 80s who felt displaced by their time,”** he explained backstage. **“We feminized the name to Altre Libertine, as we’re dedicating this collection to all of the women who don’t want to be labelled in any way.”**

This season, his message was stronger than last time. It was evidently shown in every aspect of the collection, **from the invites in the form of books by Italian women authors to the colourful garments he sent down the runway, the casting choices (Eva Robins, the first trans woman to appear on Italian Television closed the show) and the musical number that opened the show by Italian band Cult of Magic.** As always, knitwear was very present and, much like Calzolari, Rambaldi sourced it from deadstock. Yet this time, the silhouette that stood out came in the form of constructions that highlighted the breasts. **“Women’s bodies should be exalted not hidden,”** he stated. **Crocheted hearts decorated most of his knitwear and were also used as a pattern to decorate standout quilted jackets in black and a pink one with cow print lining.**

At **Calcaterra**, designer Daniele Calcaterra explored the purity of form and created an extremely minimal collection, exquisitely elegant in its simplicity. **“I was inspired by pianist David Tudor’s 4’33 performance at New York’s Maverick Concert Hall,”** stated the designer backstage. **“The purity of silence and its forms led me to create something that would become a form of defence against the superfluous.”** In point of fact, the designer chose to use a neutral palette of black, white, beige and greige. **Focusing on form over function, Calcaterra also experimented with a few pieces creating unseen linings, that made sure some of the pieces were light and soft as covers.** Overall, Calcaterra did a great job at creating the wardrobe for the modern Milanese woman – although it must be said that some of his pieces (especially the feathered tops and dresses) had whiffs of Valentino.

Less successful at communicating its intent was the brand founded by Diego Dossola and Viola Baragiola, **UltraChic. This season, the brand, was inspired by the concept of home, using prints that supposedly come from the world of interiors.** There seemed to be a definite 80s London vibe going on, as colourful variations of checks and tartans à la Cher from Clueless mixed with zebra prints stood out. Although the colour palette was fun and bold - and contrasting lilacs, bright yellows, cherry reds and electric blues - it felt like something that had already been done and, not in Milan, but rather by the youthful kids of the London crowd. Knits, in particular, with their graphic prints were reminiscent of Ashley William’s infamous printed knitwear collection.

Last but not least **Arthur Arbesser** who, over his years as an ex-pat in Milan, has developed his very own genderless language, delivered a collection which was inspired by the city’s architecture and its design, as well as its inhabitants. **“You’ll find a lot of colours which come from the Milanese metro station, in particular, the blues and greens and in terms of prints, a significant monument which can be seen all over the collection is the Arc of the Triennale,”** the designer stated backstage. Arbesser has previously demonstrated that he certainly knows his way around using prints and clashing them and, in this collection, the mixing and matching of the prints inspired by the Milanese landscape was his strongest suit. **Arbesser also collaborated with Marco Guazzini, a designer who created ‘Marwoolus’ a unique material made from a combination of Pietrasanta marble dust and wool from Prato, which was used to create belts, buttons and jewellery, as well as plates which were screen printed on clothing.** Although the collection was fun and definitely colourful and Arbesser’s usual slinky sets were well-constructed and funky, it felt more of an ode to a Swedish aesthetic rather than a love letter to the paired back elegance of the design mavens of Milan, with its oversized midi dresses paired with silk clogs.

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