Alessandro Sartori of Ermenegildo Zegna's plans for digital format show this July

By Godfrey Deeny - 25 April 2020

This summer’s Milan menswear season may have been cancelled due to the pandemic, but Ermenegildo Zegna is still planning a show – though with a radically new digital format show.

The house’s creative director Alessandro Sartori confirmed to FashionNetwork.com that Zegna will stage its Ermenegildo Zegna XXX Summer 2021 collection in the opening half of July; and promises what he calls a “phygital experience”, or a meeting of a like-show and digital technology.
“It will almost be a digital movie. A blend of live performance with a pre-recorded environment. Using CGI technology where you really layer frames one over the other. There will be live models wearing the collection. But instead of just the normal runway, with just me in an empty space with the models, we are working towards a live experience in a really special environment,” explained the designer.

Ermenegildo Zegna XXX is the Italian menswear house’s top couture collection, which in recent years has opened the Italian men’s runway season on Friday nights with mammoth shows.

“There’s a time for everything. This is the time to think differently about the next future”, says Gildo Zegna, CEO of the Ermenegildo Zegna Group.

Sartori has built elongated catwalks everywhere from the top of the lake outside Oscar Niemeyer’s legendary wave-like 1975 headquarters (for publisher Mondadori) at Segrate, to a gigantic disused steel mill north of Milan. Always with a grand evening show, which opens the entire Milan season. Though this July event will almost certainly be early afternoon, so it can reach a global audience in Asia, Europe and North America.

“I love evening shows, but live at night does not work for our Asian followers. With this format we can enter into people’s room and have a unique experience – so early afternoon makes a point of contact from east to west,” explained the designer.

He is planning about 45 to 50 looks – as is his habit – and suspects future shows will become a blend of digital and physical as well. After all, the designer is known as an innovator in show production. For instance, a decade ago, Zegna used early CGI technology to stage a show in its headquarters, with giant imagery of the Bund in Shanghai, which made it look as if a cast of Asian models were walking in China.

“When we understood the situation was different because of the pandemic, we debriefed about how we wanted to express the collection to how tell its story. Instead of a normal show and then building the digital proposition after, we decided to work together from the beginning with our digital team,” added Sartori, noting this was an anniversary year for the brand.

Zegna, which this year celebrates its 110 years of history, has been been active in the fight against Covid-19. The group made donations to the Civil Protection in Italy, totaling 3 million Euros, to support nurses, doctors, scientists and volunteers across Italy who have been working tirelessly to fight this epidemic.

Moreover, Zegna has also been actively developing its own virtual showroom. And working on new virtual concepts for made to measure, where a client sees himself projected in 3D. “We needed a different approach. Right now, it’s impossible to know for certain what percentage of buyers will be travelling. So, we have to develop a new idea of selling collections with digital tools; with 3D pictures and order format. Giving them the possibility to place orders even if they don’t travel.”

As noted, the Camera della Moda, Italian fashion’s governing body, called off the Italian menswear season, originally scheduled for June 19 to 23 in Milan. And announced plans to amalgamate menswear and women’s fashion into a co-ed season in September. The British Fashion Council, on the other hand, maintained its June 12 season dates with a new format for London Fashion Week, adding women’s and menswear together in an experimental digital season.
Sartori applauded London Fashion Week's decision, but cautioned that he regarded its dates as far too early. “I think London’s ideas are brave. It’s very interesting to take this decision and go into a different format. But it’s a little too early, especially to order fabric, do production and style everything. June, in my view, is too early. So that’s why we moved back one month later. While September is not a realistic time for us. It’s far too late to take orders then,” he argued.

After sanitizing its workspaces and respecting new Italian regulations, Zegna plans to open its workshops and plants on May 4. After that, hopefully, everything will return to a normal production process. Zegna produces apparel in Novara, outerwear near Milan, shoes and leather in Parma and uses resources from Switzerland all the way to Naples.

For the past month and a half, Sartori has been working from his apartment in South Milan. “Yes. today is day 46 of working from home. I can no longer walk in my apartment between all the clothes and
Yes, today is day 46 of working from home. I can no longer walk in my apartment between all the clothes and samples and shoes; and in between screens for so many Skypes and Zooms and online fittings. But at least it meant a quiet moment design,” he chuckles.

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