Ganni’s star duo on building a global brand from Copenhagen

By Godfrey Deeny - 4 February 2021

Few Scandinavian brands have had as much impact of late as Ganni, which just staged a double-header in this February's edition of Copenhagen Fashion Week.
Like all the other brands Ganni’s events were online, in an essentially digital three-day season in the Danish capital that ended Thursday.

Ganni managed to stage a three-day series of livestream performance jams by a trio composed of singer-songwriter Zsela; Los Angeles grunge hip-hop artist Deb Never and Copenhagen’s very own Coco O. to celebrate the brand’s latest ideas before, on Thursday evening, each of the three musicians performed a mix of their own materials and covers of songs dear to the brand’s creative director, attired in looks from fall-winter 2021.

Deb Never looked very snazzy and self-assured in a great revamped chalk-stripe Al Capone suit, cut with an elongated jacket and long lapels. While singer-songwriter Zsela pulled off a great version of Nothing Compares 2 U, dressed in a clinging white-knit pants-and-shirt combo, with western rocker collar and Catherine de’ Medici cuffs. Coco O. then had lots of deadpan rocker cool in a Mary Quant mini cocktail in parakeet green with displaced front zip and one-patch pocket.

Throughout there was a cool use of volume, cutting knee-length Princess Diana floral print dresses forgivingly but never frumpily. While the granddad knit tanks and cardigans added a dash of Nordic whimsy. And the great baggy pants – whether in lime green or silver painted denim – all had neat panache. And looked great for cycling, essential in the Danish capital.
Ganni also introduced a rental collection of one-of-a-kind looks worn by the musicians that included rhinestone encrusted leather jackets; two-tone sequin blazers and hand-painted lead guitar boots. The looks, to be delivered in reusable packaging, can be rented from one to three weeks, starting from 105DKK (€14) to 648DKK (€87).

The rental-only concept collection is their latest twist during the Danish runway season. Not always in the nation’s capital. In February 2018, they opened a pop-up in Elizabeth Street, NYC; and in a later Danish season, debuted an outpost in Selfridges.

The overall season in Copenhagen featured a score of brands, and even more interviews or Q&As with designers and sundry Vogue editors. More talk than talent perhaps. If you cannot immediately recall the name of any Danish stand-up comic you will understand why after watching many of these interviews.

Ganni, on the other hand, is known for its savvy strategy on the web, inclusive approach and ability to harness local Copenhagen style – based on the independent and liberated intellects and aesthetics of Danish women. The concept clearly clicks internationally – as the likes of Jessica Alba, Kendall Jenner, Alexa Chung, Dree Hemingway, Ganna Bogdan, Juliette Labelle, Christine Centenera, Richie Shazam and Lykke Li are all fans.

In many ways, Ganni has become the role model for many young Scandi designers on what can be achieved internationally. While staying put in Copenhagen, their ladylike yet quirky, entry-level-priced idea of luxury has attracted huge orders from key retailers like Net-a-Porter, Browns and Selfridges. It’s a policy that has seen Ganni grow rapidly; and earned the fashion house a substantial investment in 2017, when private equity firm L Catterton, which is part owned by LVMH, acquired a 51% stake in the brand. Terms were not released, but since then annual sales have grown from €45 million to in excess of €100 million.

So, we caught up with the husband and wife team of Creative Director Ditte Reffstrup, and CEO Nicolaj Reffstrup, for their take on what makes Ganni tick.

**FashionNetwork.com: Why did you divide up into two events and start with the #ganniloveforever show?**

**Ditte Reffstrup:** Music has always been a huge inspiration. And we wanted to recognize all the things we took for granted and remember normal life. It’s maybe a little cheesy but it’s been a year of no travel and that made music more important. I grew up in a fishing town in northern Jutland. It was not a window to the outside world. There were no fashion magazines; no social network and no computers. So my window was MTV, and dancing to that music. So for me, music is an unwritten diary that takes you places. And it’s what we need right now. I work very much with my stomach and intuition and that is reflected in our clothes. Though this season we have several pieces inspired by stage clothing; like denim with a silver coating. Ganni is known for being romantic and using Victorian palette, but this season is more rock ‘n’ roll, like working with pointy sharp collars.
FNW: How was Ganni born?
DR: Well, we were married after six months after we met. I always dreamed of having my own brand and everything happened organically. I have been in fashion since I was 14 and been a buyer. When I travelled people would say you, 'oh, are you from Denmark? So your style is androgynous like Acne or all Danish boho.' And I couldn’t recognize myself in that. It was not the Copenhagen gal I knew and that’s why I wanted to have a brand. Frans Truelsen, who had a gallery, actually started Ganni in 2000, just doing cashmere sweaters and he asked me if I could help and I joined. Nicolaj wasn't in fashion but in tech.

Nicolaj Reffstrup: They are very different worlds, but it has been a fun journey. Fashion is kind of irrational compared to technology. But Ganni always been good at conceptualizing our ideas. And I discovered how powerful fashion can be, especially how great it is for telling stories.

FNW: Why do you always show in Copenhagen? Never thought of going elsewhere?
DR: Copenhagen is where our heart and home is. Ganni power is wired into this city.

FNW: What's the DNA of Ganni?
NR: It’s about the women of Copenhagen; a process of defining what is special about our city. When you get to Paris sure you see great beauty and in New York you see art and eccentricity. But Copenhagen empowers women. They cycle everywhere. There is also a great gender equality in Denmark. And that shows in the way they dress. They wear the clothes; not the brand wearing women.
FNW: What is the origin of the name?
NR: It was a Beaujolais-infused evening, and the name emerged!

FNW: How big is your business?
NR: We have reached turnover of 100 million euros. That’s not that much compared to big brands in Milan or Paris, but it’s pretty big for Denmark.

FNW: How many stores have you got now?
NR: We have about 25 of our own stores across Scandinavia and the USA. We are in about 600 doors and shop-in-shops worldwide. And in Paris, we just opened in Printemps.

FNW: Which designers do you admire?
DR: Lots, but right now I find Jacquemus is amazing. I love seeing his shows. He has such a nice approach and is so adorable.

FNW: And you, Nicolaj?
NR: I wear very basic and a little boring clothes. At Ganni, I look after Sustainability which we call Responsibility and I like to wear those clothes. To be honest, I should not say this, but I try not to buy anything.

FNW: Your last three vacations?
DR: Honestly, we love summers in Denmark, going around and seeing friends. Our last trip abroad was a break in the Four Seasons near Athens in the fall which was beautiful. And we grabbed some vacations in America.

FNW: I know everyone cycles in Copenhagen, but do you drive?
NR: We only bought our first car two years ago. It’s a Tesla.

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