Burberry: Majestic moda in Methodist Central Hall

By Godfrey Deeny - 12 March 2022

Burberry staged its first show in over two years on Friday, and the result was Riccardo Tisci’s best collection for the house, where he properly embraced the brand’s codes, even as he injected in a full wallop of his own DNA.

In a co-ed show, Tisci whipped up a blend of deconstruction, streetwear and artful tailoring; while for women his cocktail hour sizzled, and his eveningwear had all the quirky grand-dame glamour one associates with London.

Tisci’s designs for the signature collections, and his mature years at Givenchy, always referenced religion, so his choice of location this season was striking. Inside the majestic Methodist Central Hall in Westminster, which given the current grotesque invasion of Ukraine seemed fitting.

With the audience standing around tables laid out with Burberry dinner sets and glassware, the cast descended custom-built steps from above the altar.

A choir of 100 singers backed up the show, while above them the London Contemporary Orchestra performed solemn works by Max Richter and Michael Nyman.

After being kept under wraps in his London sojourn so far, Tisci’s Italian gothic roots immediately sprouted with a fantastic all-black goth rock leather and chiffon cocktail, anchored with thigh boots laced at the back, and topped with matching jockey cap. His semi-sheer tops, and matching bras; and kicky tartan cocktails looked sexy yet natty and unpredictable.
“The collection is pretty much me. It’s taken me three years to really digest what is Burberry. And what I find in England, and I’m Italian, and I used to live here as a kid, and then to come back here, is that they celebrate the construction and deconstruction of a collection,” said Tisci, in a post-show backstage chat.

Presented outside of London Fashion Week, the show comes at a pivotal moment for Burberry, which has lagged behind comparable major league brands in bouncing back from the pandemic. However, the first shoots of spring were evident a day before, when hundreds of young shoppers camped outside Burberry’s main London flagship to nab the first looks from its collaboration with New York skate brand Supreme.

The show happened just ahead of the arrival of new British CEO Jonathan Akeroyd, the former CEO of Versace who succeeds Italian-born Marco Gobbetti, who left to manage Salvatore Ferragamo.
Tisci’s own Italian love of strass was apparent as he sprinkled effervescent crystals all over country-house classic – twin sets; cardigans; pleated to the knee skirts and prim dresses, ideal to wear while sipping sherry.

Before he went into overdrive with deconstructed trench-coat gowns; and several scarf dresses, one of which on Bella Hadid was nothing short of sensational. Tisci has never attempted so much evening wear for Burberry, and the show was all the better for it. Reaching a finale where the even the models' faces were swathed in crystal.

“Britishness is an attitude and a collection of emotional images in a very daring way. It's something very polite, like the way they say, ‘Thank you very much’,” chuckled Tisci, imitating an English cut-glass accent.

“The strongest aristocratic women in the world were English, whose wardrobes play with ideas. Same for the men, like David Bowie, or Leigh Bowery. They changed the wardrobe of menswear,” added Tisci, who wore a black jousting-knight-print top, black pants and sneakers.
In conversation, the designer revealed he had got Covid “three to four times. And we have a lot of cases of Covid in the company. So I believe people should be showing when they are ready to show,” he insisted.

He had begun the show with men, for whom Riccardo devised a new classic trench-coat, adding a sweatshirt hood; even making this new version in sleek black leather. He added hoodies to funky tartan shirts; played with the jousting knight Prorsum label in athletic tops and branded a big single gold ‘B’ on multiple puffers.

Considering androgyny, he created country-weekend matelassé jackets, with skirts for guys, or paired ankle-length skirts in cotton or leather with waxed hunting jackets. Though his coolest bit of tailoring was the new duffle coat, with four toggles displaced to one side. Climaxing the menswear section with knit, shearling and faux fur coats and donkey jackets flipped over at the top into huge shoulder wraps. All the way to the final guy, in a classic Burberry plaid trench and matching deer-stalker hat; and shoulder wrap.

But the finale was the ladies, marching down from the altar, and over a half-dozen white linen-clothed tables, before Tisci took one of his considered bows. His family might be a clan of Sicilians who migrated north to Como, but Ricki Tisci takes an ovation like a Lombard duke.

Earning hearty applause inside this majestic building, once the site of the first general assembly of the United Nations in 1946. Recalled by a commemorative plaque that reads: “To the glory of God and in prayer for peace on
Nations in 1946. Recalled by a commemorative plaque that reads: “To the glory of God and in prayer for peace on earth.”

Devout Methodists – a church that traditionally promoted abstinence – might be shocked to discover the event began with a cocktail party inside Central Hall, where suffragettes held rallies back in 1914. A show enjoyed by the celebrity likes of Adam Driver, Adekunle Gold, Anne Imhof, Blondey McCoy, Carla Bruni, Davido, Dixie D’Amelio, Eiza Gonzalez, Eliza Douglas, Headie One, Honey Dijon, Jacob Elordi, Jaime Xie, Kate Moss, Kelvin Harrison Jr., Marina Ruy Barbosa, Meridian Dan, Naomi Campbell, Rebecca Hall, Role Model, Slim Soledad and Simone Ashley.

“To me, there is a duality to English women and Englishmen that you can be very elegant and also be influenced by punk. This is the land of the skinheads, remember. So, my tables were for a very rebellious girl, a mysterious girl who breaks down boundaries but stays elegant,” smiled the designer.

Given the historical link to the UN, an organization dedicated to international peace and friendly relations among nations, what were Tisci’s views on the Invasion by Russia of Ukraine?

“It’s very sad. I didn’t grow up in a country at war. But my mum did. She could remember when they were bombed by the British. We had so many planes flying over and the bombs were falling. It’s very sad to see this happen again.”
during the war. Why they joined the communists to fight the fascist government. There is a lot of history in Italy. But being here came about as an accident. Yet, for that reason we wanted real classical music. It had to be more respectful.”

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