Milan menswear Sunday: Prada, Etro and J.W. Anderson

By Godfrey Deeny - 20 June 2022

Good to see a few properly cut suits in Milan, opening and more or less closing the Prada show, in a tour de force of tailoring leavened by some conceptual gingham on Sunday, as Etro and J.W. Anderson also staged shows.

Prada: Conceptual and commercial

Just like the invitation – a life-sized mock-up of a red gingham shirt made of waxy paper. Gingham appearing in some dozen of looks in this Spring/Summer 2023 collection from Prada.
All unveiled in Prada Torre, the brand’s cathedral-like show space, redecorated with enormous rolls of eco-friendly white paper, with cut-out De Chirico-worthy windows and enclaves.

But first came the razor sharp, super 100 suits, neat and natty meetings of classic Prada materials and Raf Simons generous Belgium silhouette. All anchored with a marvelous new range of mock cowboy boot with up-turned toes, which will be hugely influential.

Immediately followed by scrunched up leather looks and a quintet of faded denim, whether shorts, surgeons’ shirts, tops or vests. But the overriding material was gingham, seen in spruce shirts; trenches or raincoats.

There was a time, 40 years ago, before Italian cuisine became fashionable when gingham was associated with cheap restaurants serving spaghetti Bolognese. So, it all felt rather brainy for a luxury brand like Prada, to ironically decontextualize the fabric and turn it into something smart.

Yet despite all the witty irony this was far from a flawless show. The raging soundtrack mix of Sonic Youth felt bombastic rather than dramatic. And, in a newly influencer obsessed Prada, quite why the house decided to dress them in winter clothes was willfully eccentric. Seeing self-absorbed young men wandering around in the sweltering heat in heavy leather spy coats; cable wool sweaters and blazers with fur-encrusted leathers was pretty absurd.

Post-show, the stars all surged into the backstage – Jake Gyllenhaal, Jeff Goldblum and Rami Malek - wide eyed and wowing as they embraced Miuccia Prada.

They at least were in summer clothes.

Etro: Utopia amid a changing of the guard

An end of an era at Etro, and an elegant changing of the guard as Kean Etro presented his final collection, entitled ‘Utopia’, for the fashion house his father founded with an optimistic and stylish collection.
Staged in the garden of Italy’s greatest business college, Nuovo Bocconi, with the cast strolling underneath a modernist colonnaded walkway, the collections included everything that was great about Kean’s sense of design: extraordinary fabrics; beautifully printed silks; haute bohemian attitude and classy tailoring.

What worked best this weekend, were the floating Art Liberté print silk shirts and djellabas; slim, light knits trimmed in satin; floaty silk paisley dressing gowns with matching swimming trucks and some divine silk pajama suits with Chinoiserie detailing.

Though Kean’s finest moments were the silver floral embroidered blazers; fantasy dress shirts and a magnificent bitter orange silk pajama cut suit, worn by a bare foot model. It cried out for a rock star to buy it.

Pre-show, Kean had a poet call many editors to recite a personally chosen poem. In this editor’s case, the choice was Victor Hugo.

“As Oscar Wilde would say, utopia is essential for any progress in society, and any creative endeavor. That’s what I have tried to show here these past decades. And in a sense, Utopia is the absence of ego. Which I know is tough, especially in fashion,” explained Kean in a pre-show discussion.

Asked how he felt going into the show, he responded: “I’m quite relaxed. The other side of the coin is I am happy for a new life. Let’s see how I react in the next six months. You never know. But my feeling is ‘wow, after 25 years I am finally free!’” Kean laughed.

In the past quarter-century, Kean cut a swathe through Milanese mode with his brilliant designs and shows. Once building a car wash into one show; and in another season leading oxen and carts piled with models down the main streets of Milan. Now he and his sister Veronica will remain on as a consultants to the brand, maintaining a close link, essential in Italy, where la famiglia remains essential.

The change comes one year after the giant French conglomerate LVMH – via L Catterton - acquired a majority stake Etro, in an operation that valued the brand at 500 million euros.

Etro recently announced that it had named Marco de Vincenzo creative director of the brand. He will make his debut in the next Milan women’s wear season in September. An acclaimed independent designer, and an important collaborator of Fendi for over a decade, de Vincenzo has long been tipped to helm a major house.
J.W. Anderson: Groovy but gimmicky

Sunday’s most anticipated show was the Italian debut of London’s hottest designer Jonathan Anderson and his brand J.W. Anderson, and the result was a show and great collection that managed to be groovy yet gimmicky.

Guests were greeted at the ruined factory in east Milan by a half dozen live statues, scrawny models dressed in wooly underwear, tops and even jockstraps and masks. All perched on pale gray cubes and pointedly refusing to look at anyone.

Anderson’s big idea this season, and not for the first time, was adding objects to garments: placing hinges of the back of blazers or adding metallic can openings, small disks and enlarged bar codes to hoodies, tops, pants and T-shirts.
Inspired by re-reading *The Pitchfork Disney*, Philip Ridley’s early 90s violent surrealist melodrama, written when he was a student in St Martin’s.

“I was struck by the idea of the shock of theater at that time. And taking norms of clothing and mechanically putting them back together, like hinges or industrial gloves. Rebuilding garments and becoming shrunken or oversized, or finished with bar codes and disks. And going back to deconstruction,” explained Anderson post show.

His other big idea was incorporating Rembrandt; using a noted 1630 self-portrait as his invitation - reproduced to its exact original size - and placing it on oversized wool sweaters. Rembrandt’s signature gorget even got a turn in the ruffled neckline of a dark grey sweater.

“During the pandemic I became obsessed by classicism. And I felt that this self-portrait was one of the most important in the last 500 years of western art. As it shows a cheekiness to Rembrandt. We always think we are so modern today, but he had turned the selfie into a great art. Rembrandt did this many, many years ago. So, as much as we want to reinvent ourselves, these things already existed,” opined the Northern Irish designer.

Albeit uttering an opinion that necessarily widely shared by most fans of Rembrandt van Rijn. What about the self-assured young emerging artist of 1929 seen in the Mauritshuis; or his worldly and wise artist with an easel in Kenwood House from 1665?

Whatever – *de gustibus non disputandum est.*

Jonathan’s choice even made into a nightclub, benignly smiling on scores of big balloons, as hundreds scrambled to find a drink at the designer’s post-show fete.

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