Bruno Pavlovsky, elected president of the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode, reveals his plans

By Godfrey Deeny - 1 July 2022

This Friday, Bruno Pavlovsky was elected the new president of the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode (FHCM) on Friday, succeeding Ralph Toledano. We caught up with the Chanel executive to discuss his future plans for French fashion and Paris Fashion Week, the world’s greatest fashion platform.

Pavlovsky has sat on the executive committee of the FHCM for 10 years. In a sign of his authority, he was the sole
candidate to be president, and elected unanimously by the 18 members of the full board of the Fédération.

It’s an important day for a hard-charging though cerebral executive, and the latest step in an impressive career. Pavlovsky has been Chanel Fashion President since 2002, a uniquely effervescent period for the brand. During which time Karl Lagerfeld staged the most exciting fashion shows on the planet, and Chanel experienced consistent double-digit growth. After the passing of Lagerfeld, Pavlovsky has also delicately overseen the passage of creative direction to Virginie Viard, with equally dynamic results, even in the midst of the pandemic.

Moreover, this January, Pavlovsky joined Emmanuel Macron as the French president opened 19M, a remarkable center of artisanal skills and métiers d’art, grouped under the umbrella of Chanel’s Paraffection holding company. A huge space on the ring road of Paris, open to all couturiers and designers guaranteeing the future of unique French skills and savoir faire.

Little wonder, given his success in maintaining Chanel’s pre-eminent position as fashion’s single most famous luxury brand, that his colleagues have entrusted Pavlovsky to guide the future of the Fédération, which Bruno affectionately calls the Fédé, and preserve Paris Fashion Week as the world’s leading runway capital.

Pavlovsky, Chanel fashion president, is fulsome in his praise for his predecessor Toledano, and for Pascal Morand, executive president of the FHCM. Though he is already planning changes. Specifically, Pavlovsky plans to expand the size of the executive committee of the FCHM to include the three presidents of each Chambre Syndicale, which handle, respectively, haute couture, ready-to-wear and menswear. That decision was approved on Friday.

Speaking over coffee in Chanel’s central Paris headquarters, Pavlovsky outlines his vision for the future of fashion in the French capital.

FashionNetwork.com: Good day Bruno. For you, what are the most important objectives for the next few years?
Bruno Pavlovsky: It may not surprise you, but what is important is to consolidate everything that has been done in recent years, with Ralph, of course, and with Pascal. I think there were a lot of very important things which were done that made the Federation and especially Paris Fashion Week so impactful, so interesting and so creative. It is above all to continue in a changing world, one which is perhaps more difficult and less conducive to the emergence of young brands. The Fédé must constantly adapt to the context in which we find ourselves in order to be able to ensure that Paris continues to be what Paris is.
In addition to that, there is obviously another role at the Fédération that is becoming increasingly important. It is to enlighten brands and members about everything that involves social, legal and sustainability regulations. There are a lot of things happening between Paris and Brussels and so the Fédération obviously has a responsibility to enlighten brands about this.

Finally, the Fédération must continue to push, and provide the means to ensure that the IFM (fashion and management school Institut Français de la Mode), which has a key role in our system in Paris, continues to develop. The Fédération and our brands have been important players in the creation and development of the IFM. This pillar has become key in the system in Paris, so it is obviously necessary that the federation continues through members to support the development of IFM.

So already, those are three subjects which are very important and which are really the vocation of the federation here in Paris.

The Fédération also has had an international role. But since it has a limited budget, we have to choose what our priorities are.

For me, in addition to those three priorities, I think there are two other fundamental priorities: young creativity, and what additional means can we provide? I think it is one of the successes of the last three years and therefore, how do we reinforce this success? It will be all the more important as the situation may be difficult economically. So this is where the Fédération and the support of members on the visibility of young brands over time is important. There really is work to be done.

Afterwards, there is some one-off work which is super important; the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. We are working with Pascal, since it could raise a number of problems. Now that we have a relatively good understanding of this event and its impact on Paris, we have the March ready-to-wear collections, menswear in June, couture collections July, and again women’s RTW in September and October collections.

So, the Fédération must focus on finding places to present these collections. We have to offer solutions to our members considering what will will be going on in Paris. It's a real topic. This requires a lot of energy because it means that we have to work with the Olympic Committee, the city of Paris and the government to succeed in protecting places in which we can make parades.
Plus, it's in two parts, because there are the Olympics in July and the Paralympics in September. The Paralympics have a slightly less impact, but the key Parisian locations will be retained in the same way. So there is no Grand Palais; no ephemeral Grand Palais, no Tuileries, and so on. Solutions must then be found.

FNW: Historically Paris is the leader of the four major fashion cities, with London and New York. How do you guarantee this position?  
BP: Once again, I think that everything that has been done has allowed us to manage to maintain the status of Paris. I think we have to continue to be vigilant. The work of the Chambres for each of the fashion weeks is fundamental. The selection work and support criteria allowed us to get to where we are today. Paris has precisely the advantage of having existed for a very long time. But we have to be able to continue to do things correctly while taking into account the changes in the current world.
FNW: Somehow, Paris has a stricter selection than other cities. Right?
BP: Of course, it is this stricter selection that allowed us to succeed. We often discuss this position but I remain of the opinion that being strict is a just requirement for talent. It is also a way to highlight the know-how that can be found in Paris. I think that's a bit of the recipe for what has allowed Paris to continue, even in difficult times.

FNW: One thing has always struck me and that even if in France we have the biggest brands (Dior, Chanel, Louis Vuitton), the budget of the Fédération is lower than that of London and New York. Is there a solution for this or is it unavoidable?
BP: It's a job! I think we did the best we could with this budget given the evolution of a number of topics. I was talking about young creation, the need to be present on all new legislative issues, whether from Europe or France, I think that the Fédé must think about finding additional resources to be able to address these topics there. For issues around sustainability, tomorrow we must be able to measure it. For example, we need to support our members in measuring carbon footprint of shows; and the carbon performance of products (Product Environmental footprint). This is something that is very important. If tomorrow morning these subjects are mandatory by law, whether in Europe or in France, we must support and defend our members.

The interest of our members today is the footprint between luxury and fast fashion. On subjects like that, the federation must be invested. Today, the federation does not necessarily have the means to work on these subjects. So there are certain subjects that are covered by the Comité Colbert, but it does not necessarily cover the same needs as those of fashion. We must therefore be allied with all those who can defend these interests to succeed in making our needs heard. So beyond making people dream with Fashion Week in Paris, the federation needs to be more committed.

FNW: How do you imagine working with your colleagues in Milan, London and New York?
BP: So I thought you were asking me about my Parisian colleagues and I was going to tell you that I already work quite a bit with them through the Fédé. For the Fédé to work, everyone forgets any quarrels between the brands in order to work together on a common vision and interests. Obviously that must be preserved. I think the Fédération has managed to do everything we have done, especially IFM, thanks to a real common vision. As for the other three big cities, I know them but I have never met them. With Pascal, who knows them, we would like to meet them and see what we can do. Today, I think there is room for everyone. I think it's important that each major capital and its Fashion Week collaborates to see how all this can fit together and work together. This is one of the things we need to work on today.
FNW: Ralph has always talked about the importance of teamwork in the Federation, especially in the executive committee, so for you who will be your next colleagues and how will you work with them?

BP: I think that to succeed in building what the federation has built, it was important to have an executive committee built around the large groups – like LVMH, Kering, Chanel and Hermès. From now on, the executive committee is strong enough to be able to open up. So what I will propose is to open the executive committee to the presidents of the chambres syndicales. I think we can add their three presidents to the executive committee, to expand to other brands and other members.

In any case, I would find it very interesting if Anouck Duranteau-Loeper (Isabel Marant managing director) as president of the women’s chambre syndicale and Elsa Lanzo (Rick Owens CEO), president of the menswear chambre syndicale, could participate in the work of the executive committee.

FNW: Who is the president of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture?

Ralph is, and in September there will be the vote to replace him. Traditionally, don't ask me why, it is generally the president of the Federation who is president of the haute couture chambre syndicale. However, I wish myself, as president of the Federation, not to be president of the haute couture. I think that the work done by Anouck on the feminine side and Elsa on the masculine allowed us to see results that were reflected in the last Fashion Weeks.

FNW: Who will be the new person in this position?

BP: There will be someone, but it won't be me.

FNW: Internationally, financial support for new creators is more impressive in London and New York. How are you going to catch up?

BP: There is a job to do. That's what Ralph said. We have created the foundations and really in an admirable way but we can always go a little further. With the executive committee, it is to see how and what are the ways to increase the budget of the Federation to be able to support the brands. Now I'll talk about it tomorrow and maybe we can talk about it better the day after tomorrow. But, I don't want to compare myself to what is happening in New York, London or elsewhere, that's not the goal. The objective is to know how we can better support these young brands over the long term so that they have a real footing.

Besides, this afternoon we are all going to the ANDAM awards. All of this is part of this Parisian ecosystem and this is also what makes Paris strong. This is why it is important that we are also involved in the IFM, in the ANDAM in the Fédé. Everyone has their job. ANDAM must identify talent. La Fédé must think about what are the...
ANDAM must identify talent, La Fédé must think about what are the criteria to better support brands and new brands not from ANDAM. I think we've managed to have a powerful ecosystem.

**FNW: Has Chanel hired many IFM graduates?**
BP: Yes, every year. I do not have the figures in front of me but we have a precise analysis on the subject. There are also many in many Paris houses.

**FNW: Inclusivity is a very important idea now in fashion and in society so how are you going to address that?**
BP: Once again, this is the openness shown by the federation and it must continue. It must be open to new talents and by giving the means to everyone. It is a balance that must be developed and maintained.

**FNW: In France many brands are creative directors who are not French. Does that worry you for the future?**
BP: Not at all, the main thing is to have talents. I believe that the subject is to find intelligent people, talents who have this ability to understand what brands are and to have the ability to develop their brands and give them meaning. The federation is not there to decide in place of the brands. The most important thing is to find the right talent to express the brand. What characterizes Paris is above all this extraordinary network of know-how known as crafts. But it's broader than crafts and that's also what you need to succeed. This is what sets Paris apart from other major capitals where the imprint, let's say, around the product is less strong.

**FNW: Ralph served two consecutive terms of four years. Do you want to as well?**
BP: I do not know. In any case for now I'm going to do four years and then we'll see.

**FNW: Beginning your first day, facing all these challenges, how do you feel?**
BP: First of all, I'm obviously honored to have the trust of all the other brands. It is a great honor in a professional life to be able to embody a profession as prestigious as fashion. Afterwards, I feel ready, because, first of all, there is a team in place that does the job really well. If we had to start everything and start from scratch, I don't think it would be the same thing. I've worked eight years with Ralph, I know most of the subjects. And we need to move forward on a number of them. So I think it's an amazing opportunity. I think Ralph and Pascal made a great team. Each new member brought new energy. The line is drawn and we will have to move forward on several subjects mentioned. I'm not going to revolutionize the federation. It's teamwork. The objective is to provide the means to be able to go a little further on subjects that seem to us to be key and fundamental for the profession. But also to continue to make Paris shine.