Lanvin has held initial talks with Haider Ackermann in recent weeks as its new Chinese owners search for a creative director for the loss-making fashion brand. However, it remains unclear whether Fosun International will hire the Franco-Colombian designer to revamp France’s oldest fashion maison, industry sources have said.

Lanvin said in an e-mailed statement to FashionNetwork.com that it was “still in the process of recruiting someone for the creative director position and meeting different candidates.” It added that the process would last a few more weeks.
Several sources internal and external to Lanvin insisted Ackermann had been interviewed by the brand but separate industry sources suggested he could no longer be in the race. "He was a name that was mentioned in April and May but Lanvin is also considering other candidates," one of the sources said.

Along with his talent, Ackermann has the benefit of being available, having left LVMH’s luxury shoe brand Berluti at the end of March after three seasons. A respected figure known for his super-imposed layers, draping and striking colors at times, Ackermann created his eponymous brand in 2003, now distributed through wholesalers and online retailers.

Lanvin is in desperate need of a successful creative impulse. Having seen annual sales more than halve in the past three years, from more than 200 million euros at the end of 2014, the maison has been struggling to find the right creative voice after ousting start designer Alber Elbaz in October 2015.

Fosun International is a group controlled by Shanghai billionaire Guo Guangchang, that recently acquired control of Austrian knitwear maker Wolford. It has interests in insurance, trading and many other businesses including French holiday operator Club Med and knitwear band St. John in the United States.

Ackermann is the most prominent name in a raft of talented designers who have met Fosun executives, which includes Christelle Kocher and Simon Porte Jacquemus.

All three designers have their own critically acclaimed independent fashion houses. By coincidence both Kocher and Jacquemus are preparing runway shows this month in Marseille; Kocher a cruise show for her label Koché, and Jacquemus his debut menswear collection.

While in Paris, Lanvin will stage its latest menswear runway show on Sunday, June 24th, designed by its longstanding menswear designer Lucas Ossendrijver.

Asked about the link to Lanvin, a spokeswoman for Ackermann responded: “Lanvin? Haider hasn’t told me about that. His goal now is to put his full energy into his next show in September in Paris, when he will show men and women's together.”

While a spokesman for Kocher and Jacquemus claimed "not to have heard about any meetings with Lanvin. There have been lots of false rumors about Jacquemus, even last week concerning Bottega Veneta.” Last Friday, Bottega Veneta appointed Daniel Lee, ready-to-wear designer at Celine, to replace Tomas Maier. “Jacquemus has always been pretty clear – he wants to create his own house, and the next step is menswear," his spokesman added.

Sources also indicated that Fosun might still consider an internal candidate. One name mentioned is Estrella Archs, listed on her LinkedIn page as head designer at Lanvin since Nov. 2017. A graduate of Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, Archs has worked for Ungaro and Pucci among other brands.
Fosun has retained the services of Paris headhunting firm Jouve & Associés to help Lanvin recruit a creative director and a chief executive, several Paris-based headhunting sources have said. Jouve & Associés helped Chloé hire Natacha Ramsay-Levi in 2017 after the departure of Clare Waight Keller who joined LVMH’s Givenchy. Jouve & Associés did not respond to requests for comment.

Industry sources said Fosun has approached several executives about the CEO job at Lanvin, including at LVMH in Asia and at Paris-listed SMCP (Sandro, Maje and Claudie Pierlot), which is controlled by Chinese textile group Shandong Ruyi alongside Bally.

Lossmaking Lanvin has been through three designers in as many years since parting ways with Elbaz in 2015. The following year, the French brand appointed Bouchra Jarrar, who stayed the standard trial period of two seasons. In 2017, Lanvin took on the relatively unknown Olivier Lapidus (son of designer Ted Lapidus), a surprising appointment, which combined with Lanvin’s poor performance prompted the resignations from Lanvin’s board of Pierre Mallevays of London M&A boutique Savigny Partners and minority investor Ralph Bartel, a German entrepreneur based in Switzerland.

In March, Lanvin announced the departure of Olivier Lapidus and the appointment of Joann Cheng as interim president. Cheng, a young graduate of the China Europe International Business School, previously worked as finance director of drones maker DJI until early 2016.

China’s Fosun International, which has no experience running or turning around a luxury brand of the size and historical importance of Lanvin, bought a controlling stake in February from Chinese-born media magnate Shaw-Lan Wang. It beat competition from Qatar’s Mayhoola, owner of Valentino and Balmain, which had been courting Lanvin for many years. Wang remained a minority shareholder after the deal was signed and so did Ralph Bartel but with a significantly smaller stake.