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NEWS

Gucci recasts itself during Milan Fashion Week

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A model wears a creation as part of the Gucci menswear Fall-Winter 2023-24 collection presented in Milan, Italy, Friday, Jan. 13, 2023.

Antonio Calanni/AP

MILAN (AP) — Gucci offered another January surprise to kick off Milan Fashion Week menswear previews on Friday, taking a new direction after Alessandro Michele's exit as creative director.

Very much like Michele's low-key debut eight years ago heading an in-house team, the Gucci runway show heralding the new post-Michele era was an understated affair, quietly recasting the codes of the brand founded in Florence more than a century ago as a luggage company.

Under Michele, fantasy took flight with ever-escalating showmanship and layers of embellishment in romantic collections that blurred gender barriers and intellectually challenged the fashion crowd with notes referencing sometimes obscure thinkers.

Those embellishments have been stripped, at least for now, with an easy-to-read collection.

Some highlights from Friday's shows:

GUCCI RECAST

Gucci launched its post-Michele era with a palette-cleansing collection that carried whiffs of his influence, but which went in a strikingly new, and spare, direction.

Stripped of eccentricity, the collection returned Gucci to a set of basics with a rock 'n' roll vibe underpinned by a live performance by U.S. guitarist Marc Ribot's Ceramic Dog in the center of the circular theater. Front-row guests included Nick Cave with

his wife Susie, Canadian actor Percy Hynes White, who appears in the Netflix hit “Wednesday,” U.K. actor Idris Elba and South Korean singer Kai.

The core look included oversized jackets with papery tops worn with trailing trousers or long-johns leggings tucked into bright cowboy boots, accented with leg warmers. The color palette was subdued, denim and khaki, gray and canary yellow, purple with ice blue.

There were still genderless references, but they were more glam rock than necessarily for the they/them demographic. A poet shirt had a deep, sexy V but no pussy bow; T-shirts and mohair sweaters were sheer and long skirts appeared deconstructed from trousers, and were paired with striped rugby shirts.

Many of these looks would have fit in on Michele’s runway, but they surely would have been layered with ideas, memories and recollections expressed through quirky motifs and elaborate accents. The new collection, with its elongated, roomy silhouette and masculine edge, seen in oversized mechanic jumpsuit and motorcycle combos, will be an easier fit for many.

The collection was designed by the in-house team, which took no bows after the show.

DSQUARED2’S RECYCLED TEENS

Dsquared2’s collection emerged from the unkempt bedroom of an infantilized teenager, the backdrop for the runway show.

Cajoled out of bed by a maternal voice, he languidly mixes and matches his own jock-wear with his girlfriend’s lacey camisole, and isn’t too proud to wear the onesie, now necessarily unbuttoned, that he outgrew in toddlerhood. Pink and emblazoned with “It’s A Boy,” the onesie purposely inverts all gender stereotypes.

The collection by the Canadian designing twins Dean and Dan Caten captures the boldness of today's youth, unafraid to push boundaries, as the designers reimagined their own teen-ager years as they would have wanted to live them, set to a late '70s and early '80s soundtrack: Grease, Michael Jackson.

"We were so stereotyped and not allowed. Now teenagers are very free," Dan Caten said backstage.

They also won't grow up. They wear fringed cowboy shirts of girly undershirts with pretty baby bows on the neckline. Trousers are doubled, jeans over khaki. Leather chaps are worn over white briefs.

The co-ed looks were unapologetically sexy, very nearly earning the XXX rating that the show invitation cheekily promised. Low-rise jeans are worn with a bra-top and oversized fur cap, as if a petulant teen is mocking parental admonishments to cover her head. The closing look for was a barely there beaded dress slung over a branded thong, tube socks as gloves.

"When we started, we were starting, we were pushing the limits all the time. Now it is kind of a moment, and we were like, 'Kids are free, kids are pushing it now, so we said, 'let's go back to having fun and not caring and just bringing it,'" Dean Caten said.

The energy from the runway spilled over into an after-party, replete with food trucks and open bar, scheduled to go into the wee hours.

MILAN HIGHLIGHTS YOUNG BRANDS

The Milan brand Family First mixed a varsity aesthetic looks with men's kilting in a tailored co-ed collection that discarded convention. The brand was founded in 2015 by creative director Giorgio Mallone with CEO Alessandro Zanchi.

Men showed off muscular legs in short-shorts worn with hoodies under plaid jackets,

or more suggestively with a suit jacket set off by a foulard and accompanied by a beret. Men's kilts were long and plaid, but also of lighter fabric in monotones, sometimes layered over trousers. Looks were layered, loose and untucked. Tartan blankets were fashioned into skirts and dresses for her.

Across town, the 1017 ALYX 9SM brand attracted a crowd of street-smart fashionistas to a standing-only show on a raised runway. Now based in Milan, the brand was originally founded in New York by Matthew Williams.

The angsty collection offered hoodies and tuxedo jackets, spikey accents and fuzzy jackets that seemed to say both stay away and comfort me. Messaging was ironic, with one sweatshirt reading Star on the front, continuing with Dum on the back, as the designer mocked celebrity.

BILLIONAIRE CELEBRATES MATURE MEN

German designer Philipp Plein invited an intimate crowd to a piano bar of the luxury Principe di Savoia hotel to show the latest collection of his Billionaire brand, aimed at the most exclusive clientele.

Plein emphasizes the craftsmanship of each piece: the double breast pocket on a suit jacket, the silk trim on a coat, the softness of the Piacenza cashmere jacket, which purposely is unlined to allow the wearer to inspect the details of its artisanal assembly

“One of these coats costs 150,000 euros,” Plein said, pulling out a garment fashioned from buttery soft leather supplied by a company owned by Hermes.

Billionaire is the niche ultra-luxury brand in his group, that includes his Philipp Plein brand and Plein Sport. “People like to put is in the corner. They say Plein is bling, Plein is loud, Plein is maximalist. But here you can see what we can do.”

Plein thinks that brands that show their collections on teen-age models are merely masking their true demographic. None of his models is under 45, his age in a couple of months.

“No one wants to get old in fashion, but the truth is, it is beautiful to get old and we celebrate it,” he said.

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TOP ^



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