

WWD

White Expands Despite Uncertainty

White had more than double the number of brands that attended the trade show in January.

By [Sofia Celeste](#) on March 2, 2017



MILAN — Contemporary women’s fashion and accessories trade show White recorded a 4 percent increase in international buyers and a 14 percent rise in visitors overall, despite an uncertain economic outlook for the year.

White, which closed its three-day run on Feb. 27, hosted 511 companies in total, more than double the brands that showcased men’s and women’s collections in January. Of the 511 brands on show, 145 were from abroad.

“We are trying to make White ever more international and contemporary. To do that, we scout brands like these all over the world,” said founder and organizer Massimiliano Bizzi.

The special areas at the show highlighted White’s focus on turning the fair into a more international event. The show hosted talents from Kazakhstan, Portugal and Belgium. White’s guest label the Situationist was from the country of Georgia.

Irakli Rusadze, the 25-year-old founder of the Situationist label, unfurled a collection marked by a sophisticated sartorial flair and a distinct Eastern European underground feel. A self-taught creative, Rusadze learned to make his own patterns at age 13. Most of the collection that was on show was crafted inside his home. Rusadze was discovered by White organizers at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week in Tbilisi in 2016.

Ensembles included tight-fitting leather jumpsuits and long, wool dresses and suits that showed off a woman's décolletage with either a key-hole opening or a plunging V-neck. Roomy pants and pleated shorts made of wool or leather were paired with lazy sweaters. The array afforded the crowd a glimpse of what Georgian women are wearing today. "It's all about the reality on the Georgian streets," Rusadze said.

More established names in the European circuit, such as Portugal's Hugo Costa, also showed at White. The February edition was the third time the designer presented at the Milan showcase in order to attract a different set of buyers.

"I believe that buyers from White aren't usually looking for common fashions. I meet experienced buyers who really want to get to know the brand," Costa said, noting that he has usually encountered European and Asian buyers at White Milano.

Overall, there was a contemporary artisanal focus at the fair.

White teamed up with Moda Italiana Artigiani Contemporary's project, It's Time to Contemporary Artisan, to shine a light on Made in Italy craftsmanship.

"This White showcase was a great opportunity for young designers and artisans to meet international buyers and the press during Milan Fashion Week," said MIAC organizer Alessio de' Navasques, who is also the cofounder of Artisanal Intelligence, a project within the Altaroma eco-system that works with public and private institutions to support young designers, craftsmen and artists.

"It is important to have a space dedicated to sell in which the creatives can absorb the vibes from the market. At the same time, it is also an indicator as to how their products' prices reflect the rest of the market and whether or not they have reached the right position in the market," de' Navasques added.

Sustainable knitwear brand Cangiari, handbag maker Magri, newbie shoe brand Aletheia, linenwear Nanga Mai and streetwear brand Apnoea were standouts in the curated space, where designers exhibited their fall collections in dormitory rooms decorated in the individual label's style and furnished with beds and even curtains, punctuated with personal photos.

Isabella Pia Ayoub, the creative director and founder of Magri handbags, presented a range of leather goods at a premium price point. Made in Florence, her luxury leather goods are recognizable for their logo, a two-headed serpent, and their upscale raw materials and designs.

"I am from New York, but it is very important to our customers that the bags are made in Italy and that they bear an Italian soul," Ayoub said.

Manuela Sfondrini, director of Cangiari, a sustainable knitwear brand founded in 2010, said that raw material prices are rising and to uphold the label's sustainable mantra, the company needs to keep prices high. Cangiari's casual robes are made of wool, alpaca and mohair and their larger items are priced at about \$800 to \$2,200 retail.

The brand's easy ethnic wares are made in the southern Italy region of Calabria, and crafted by artisans on antique looms.

"We wanted to recover the hand sewing tradition and we also wanted to use only certified biological origin yarns, meaning organic," said Sfondrini, who added that keeping prices down is a challenge in a volatile market. "Since we are global organic textile standard certified, we choose suppliers within this group...and so the cost of biological material is higher than that of non-organic raw material, it's not double but it's very expensive and clearly rising constantly."