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# Trio of Milan Trade Shows Facing Transitions

By Emily Backus

**MILAN** — Change is afoot at the trio of Milan women's wear and accessories trade fairs White, Super and Milano Prêt-à-Porter (MIPAP).

Organizers for Super and MIPAP said they are working to revamp their formulas to gain ground as an international fashion hub.

"The market is undergoing great change," said Raffaello Napoleone, chief executive officer of Pitti Immagine, organizer of the Super scouting fair for women's accessories and ready-to-wear. Napoleone said increasing sales for women's pre-collections eroded the weight of business conducted during regular collections. He floated the hypothesis of scheduling women's trade fairs weeks earlier as a result.

The shows took place at the end of February in Milan.

As for MIPAP, Fiera Milano ceo Corrado Peraboni said this edition of the show will likely be "the last edition of MIPAP as we know it. We are, in fact, studying a project, open to all operators who care about the Milanese fashion system, aimed at giving international buyers a more substantial reason for visiting."

A long-standing complaint among exhibitors and buyers is that the Italian fairs are too fragmented, dividing foot traffic and consuming time. MIPAP show manager Elena Colonna said one suggestion — still years from realization — would be to integrate several fairs under one roof, including leather fair MIPEL and fur fair MIFUR, along with ready-to-wear and accessories fairs.

For now, however, she was in talks with the Italian fashion agent and distribution association Assomoda to bring showrooms to MIPAP in addition to individual clothing brands.

"It will make things easier for buyers," said Colonna, who spoke of a pilot project next season, and an eventual exhibitor mix with 40 percent showrooms.

But organizers at White, a scouting trade show for contemporary women's fashion, focused on the present. They saw a robust participation of 21,150 visitors and 500 brands this edition, as well as a 15 percent increase in foreign buyers.

"[White] is growing conceptually, in its relevance for the city and on an international level," said president Massimiliano Bizzi.

White's special guest, Korean designer Yohanix, played with unexpected combinations of fabrics, layers and precious materials, like hammered leather and gold embroidery, and held a runway show in the main square of the city, the Piazza Duomo.

"White is dedicated to the people, so we committed ourselves to bringing fashion into the city," said Bizzi.

China Calling showed collections from edgy, high-end Chinese designers scouted by Sonja Long Xiao, founder

of the Shanghai showroom and concept store Alter.

“Over the past six years, I have done international research to bring brands to China. This time, we are doing the opposite, bringing Chinese brands to international buyers,” said Long Xiao. “The designers represented all have very international backgrounds and have worked at places like Alexander McQueen and Simone Rocha.”

Long Xiao’s own brand, Rolling Acid, combined the work of Chinese designers under the art direction of Dutch abstract street artist Merijn Kavelaars. Pieces recalled the graphics, graffiti and experimentation of the Sixties and Seventies. Fluffy pink, artificial shearling coats sported graphic black and emerald green goat inserts with chunky jewel appliqués, wholesaling at roughly 200 to 300 euros, or about \$225 to \$340 at current exchange.

Crisouyang, the designer behind the brand Crisou by Dan, showed white, long-sleeve, button-down blouses with prim, pointed collar and puckered, drawstring cutout holes on each side, at 75 euros, or \$83. Additional brands included Nicole Zhang, Shushu/Tong and Chen Yiyuan.

At White, emerging market talent was sought out at home, too, through the project Time to South, which featured designers from southern Italy.

After working for years at Etro men’s wear, Dolce & Gabbana, Versus and Versace, Sicilian designer Sergio Daricello struck out on his own in 2013.

“The muse is always Palermo,” Daricello said of his collection, which draws on the melting pot of cultural influences in the city’s art and architecture, thanks to its long history of invasion, migration and occupation, spanning Arab, Norman, Greek, Roman, Catholic and Spanish cultures. “Layering is the concept.”

Fluted Baroque curves of a ruffle swept across a cotton and gold Lurex jacquard ball gown, whose subtle black and white Arab mosaic pattern gave sophistication to a dramatic, romantic silhouette. It wholesales for 600 to 700 euros, or \$660 to \$770.

Palermo-based bag brand Price Eco Design transformed unusual hides and vintage frocks into environmentally responsible ladies and men’s bags.

“I am a vintage dealer,” said owner and designer Federico Price Bruno. “We made beauty out of beauty.” His bestseller is a series of structured handbags styled like the Hermès Kelly bag, but made with leather covered in fabrics like Japanese kimonos or African prints, with flaps of African antelope, ostrich, Italian cowhide or Scottish venison. They retail for \$500 to \$600.

Accessories accounted for 60 percent of the Super trade show, which also carried capsule collections and ready-to-wear. Like White, Super drew on the Far East for talent, showcasing six finalists of the 2015 Vogue Talents for Asia contest.

Finalist Abscense for Le Saunda, designed by Yoyo Pan of Taiwan, presented swoosh-shaped platform mules with chunky, angular, geometric heels as well as ankle boots with heels resembling the pyramidal steel struts of a bridge.

“The collection was inspired by Rotterdam,” said Pan. “I fell in love with the innovative architecture and played with industrial components.” She pointed to leather flaps that mirrored each other on the ankle boots, a symmetry inspired by water reflection. Abscense shoes retail for 357 to 850 euros, or about \$390 to \$930. Her business manager, Darrell James, said the three-year-old brand sold about 1,000 pairs last year, mostly through online retailers in Asia, including Galleries Lafayette Beijing. Their efforts now are directed at building a greater presence at brick-and-mortar stores.

“It is about access to the touch and feel of the shoes,” said James, noting “the return rate with online sales is very high.”

Dutch designer Hellen Van Rees launched a jewelry collection in the Super Talents area of the fair, a section showcasing rising designers selected by Sara Maino of Vogue Talents. A 2012 Central Saint Martins graduate, Van Rees hand-layers discarded yarns from knitting factories, and bonds them to fabrics with silicon coatings, intentional creases, irregularities and rough edges. Her tops are priced 100 to 150 euros wholesale, or \$110 to \$164, and are sold in London, Lebanon, Dubai, Shanghai and Paris. "I took mistakes and made them into design elements," she said.

Among Super's more commercial offerings, Save My Bag showed waterproof bags in a blend of polyester and Lycra spandex. Begun in 2013 as a luxury protective covering in a vivid array of colors, the Italian-made bags have a texture similar to Neoprene.

"We sell 30,000 pieces a month," said general manager Alessandro Matteuzzi, noting Bloomingdale's is among its clients.

New models included iPad and computer sleeves, work bags, shell-shaped swimsuit bags and weekend gym bags. New prints came in geometric patterns, oversize houndstooth or Roy Lichtenstein-style cartoon prints, while metallic fuchsia was a new color for the brand.

Next door at the adjacent MIPAP show, some exhibitors felt traffic was off but organizers reported 4,030 visitors at this edition, compared to 4,065 in February 2015, with a slight decrease in Italian attendees offset by an increase in foreign visitors, who made up 23 percent of the total.

Antonella Parronchi, a clothing designer who runs the Italian brand Parronchi Cashmere with her sister Annalisa, said on the last day of the fair that traffic was "so-so."

Her collection, aimed at refined, feminine women aged 30 to 50, focuses on knitwear. She was thinking of the Eighties with cowl-neck mohair and silk sweaters, fox-fur collared cashmere capes, and long-sleeve sweaters with suede front panels. Pieces average 170 euros wholesale, or \$186.

Enrico Gallo, head of sales for the total look women's wear brand Sfizio, concurred the fair hadn't seen as robust traffic as he'd hoped for. Sfizio offers sexy, feminine, tailored dressing that met particular success in Russia, Gallo said. The collection was based on delicate earth colors and neutrals, but also featured signature black and white combinations and colorful 1970s style prints. Gallo said orders were up 20 percent at the last CPM trade show.