



# CONCEPT OF REFINEMENT

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Australian brand Strateas Carlucci was this season's special guest at WHITE.

# The Future Is Green

Sustainability charges forward in Italy's fashion capital.

By Debrina Aliyah

THE EXHIBITION OPENS with a walkthrough a forest of greens, where one's senses are transported to the calm of nature complete with dewy aromas. A stark contrast awaits in the next room, where Matteo Ward begins a narration on the lives of the hundreds of thousands of workers in the clothes manufacturing industry. A screen separates the audience from projected human figures who remain faceless, representing the anonymity of these workers, many found in less than desirable work conditions around the world. The narrative continues with a sensory display, provoking the audience to dig deeper into the concept of sustainability.

The opening gambit of GIVE A FOKus may have been a little dramatic, but just like the name of the exhibition, it was targeted at bringing attention to an issue within the fashion industry that has for years been considered an afterthought. Tackling the weighty issue of sustainability and introducing the notion of traceability, which is still very much in its infancy, were not easy tasks, but Italy's vanguard fashion tradeshow WHITE Milano

has succinctly given life to the idea in the immersive exhibition. Under the creative direction of Ward, a sustainable fashion activist whose brand WRAD won this year's Italian National Fashion Association (Camera Moda) Green Carpet Award, the exhibition takes visitors through hard-hitting facts and shows how affirmative actions, big or small, can make a difference in the future of fashion manufacturing.

"The fashion system is undergoing a revolution and it has become necessary to re-access our activities to cater to the real needs of a worn-out planet and of an exploited society," Ward explains. "We are stuffed with things that do not mirror our real identity." The battle against mind-numbing consumption and a return to sustainable production has been an essential priority for the Italian industry in recent years. The previous fashion seasons have seen green initiatives and agendas included as part of Milan Fashion Week's official calendar, where young designers are encouraged to pursue a green approach in developing their work. Last year, the Camera Moda officially launched the



Green Carpet Awards Italia with celebrities including Colin Firth and his wife Livia at the forefront to promote the event.

GIVE A FOKus shines the spotlight on traceability and blockchain technology, the new buzzword that is promising to guarantee worldwide relevance to both the Italian fashion system and the world of retail. “We are extremely glad that the Italians themselves have asked for this sort of development, as recent surveys have revealed. While most of the population expect the labels to be transparent in terms of their production chain and environmental or social footprint, only two Italians out of 10 think that the fashion industry satisfactorily informs the consumers on the impact of their production on the environment and on the world’s population,” Ward explains.

The exhibition is an extension of innovative efforts by Brenda Bellei and Massimiliano Bizzi, co-founders of WHITE, that has roots going back to 2016. “The issue of sustainability is part of our DNA and we have always been promoting this as part of our talent scouting vision to buyers from across the globe,” Bellei says. “I believe that organizing an eco-sustainable society is becoming an essential requirement, at all levels and particularly in the fashion world.” The tradeshow’s visibility and size have made it an influential scouting ground for some of this decade’s most interesting designers and a platform of support for brands focused on sustainable production. This year’s highlight in spring was Australian brand Strateas Carlucci, an International Woolmark Prize winner, that uses only 100% traceable materials for its collections. “It’s not always easy to justify our price

points and we currently cater to a niche market that truly understands what they are buying and why it is so important that we are transparent in our works,” explains Peter Strateas, who founded the brand with Mario-Luca Carlucci.

Finding the balance between commerciality and sustainability is something that many emerging brands juggle, but Bellei believes that it is a small struggle that will pay off. “For most of the emerging brands, it is an obligatory choice to face the demands of the market even if it is not easy to generate fashion products that are also sustainable and trendy. This is the challenge of the future.” And though sustainability seems to be the word on everyone’s lips, it is also evidently in contrast with the rise of consumerism and conscientious marketing of replaceable trends towards consumers every season. Are we looking at a rhetoric where major brands are just riding on the wave to sell even more products, cleverly conceived as “conscious” collections? “I think that if the big names in fashion could start the virtuous circle, establishing a production of eco-friendly garments and accessories, and pushing through marketing the eco-sustainable trend, consumers would also opt for a more informed and less consumerist and targeted purchase,” Bellei thinks.

For its September edition, Ward leads the next chapter of the GIVE A FOKus with a narrative that spans five thematic areas—Water, Chemicals, Climate Change, Waste and People. Delving deeper into the issues of sustainable production, each thematic area is presented together with Italian companies that play integral roles in the fashion production system including Analytical

Clockwise from top: WHITE’s co-founders Bellei and Bizzi have been flying the sustainability flag for over a decade; Ward taking visitors through the exhibition.







Group, Econyl and Albin Group. Sustainable denimwear brand Boyish features as a highlight of this autumn edition with its breakthrough development of denim fabrication that is both eco-friendly and cruelty-free.

WHITE will be presenting some 200 new brands where sustainability drove research and scouting initiatives. “All our project and collaborations are curated with clear intentions, business of course and the cultivating of fashion creativity, but more importantly a reflection of the times where we now more than ever must persevere on sustainability,” Bizzi affirms. Names to look out for include Munenori Uemuro, nana-nana, as well as Arabian designers Arwa Al Banawi and Nora Aytch, while a special section inside WHITE will serve to foster the dialogue between the emerging talents and international buyers. The upcoming edition will also see a special installation designed by art director Lucia Emanuela Curzi that embodies the different identities of the modern woman. ▣



From top: Spotlight on traceability and blockchain technology in raw materials; new sustainable materials include fabrics from orange fibers.