

WOMEN'S FASHION WEEK



The show struck the right theme to attract independent retailers. The focus shifted to responsible fashion throughout the fair. As retailers and brands alter their approaches, the word now needs to spread to retail customers

BY ELISABETTA FABBRI AND CARLA MERCURIO

Well-known brands, artisan realities, emerging designers and sustainability were all in focus at the White trade show last month, during Milan's ready-to-wear fashion week. White Milano organizers said the number of visitors was up 3%, while the number of foreign buyers at the fair rose 9%. Responsible fashion was the leitmotif of the fair and was the main theme of the opening talk moderated by Fashion's editor in chief Marc Sondermann. The awareness-raising programme Give a fok-us curated by Matteo Ward, the designer of Wråd, was in its third edition (see box) and was a must-see stop at White's vast Via Tortona location. "Sustainability is just not a question up for discussion today. I think it is exceptional that we talk about it in this sort of environment. At first, it was an uncomfortable topic, now we talk openly about solutions," says at opening talk Orsola de Castro, co-founder of Fashion Revolution (the movement for more responsible fashion), speaking on the opening talk. "We need to treat clothes with passion and ask ourselves why we are buying something. We need to ask where the clothes come from and how they are made," she adds. Since we buy them, we are responsible for the lifespan of every single item. Education is important. "Education about what sustainability means needs to start in high school, or even before,"

says Marina Spadafora, who leads Italy's branch of Fashion Revolution. "If I am paying too little, then certainly someone has not been paid enough or been treated unfairly," she explains. Ines Aronadio, manager at Italian Trade & Investment Agency ICE, which promotes Made in Italy abroad, points to the food industry as a model for how fashion needs to educate buyers, as well as consumers. At White, brands and industrialists spread the word-themselves. "We do everything in linen or cotton, using eco-compatible dyes. Linen comes mainly from Normandy, the rest is all produced by us locally," said Luca Pagliani of LFDL-La Fabbrica del Lino. LFDL is a EUR1 (a certificate of origin that enables exporters in certain countries to export goods at reduced or nil duty) and Masters of linen (brand that guarantees excellence of European linen quality) certified company. In addition, 19 out of 20 LFDL employees are women. Now the company is waiting for organic linen to be suitable for the clothing industry as bio-linen is available only in the form of gauzes used by the dairy industry. Founded in 2014, Poetica Jeans is a denim brand made in Italy's Marche region by Confezioni Elegant. At the fair, Poetica Jeans proposed a capsule collection of jeans in Italian organic cotton. Provided by a company called Imatex, the cotton fabric is produ-



ced with lower energy and water than required by normal cotton denim and has a low carbon footprint through so-called Je-anologia technology. "The washing is done with ecological products that have a low environmental impact. We are recognized by the FairWays Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the environment. We offer a sustainable product because we care, and also because it's trendy, but the demand is still low. For a ten-euro difference in price, buyers will pick their usual jeans instead of a 'green' one," says Genny Manieri, who oversees the project. Roberto Collina, on the other hand, whose core business is Made in Italy knitwear, has started infusing eco-sustainable principles into his collections by crafting his upscale collections with eco yarns and fabrics, Gots-certified cotton and recycled cashmere. Last year he also used a special cashmere tinted by pigment derived from flower petals. "The will is there, but it's been a gradual change. We've also made some radical choices at the company. We abolished plastic bottles and we only use biodegradable plastic packaging," Collina says. "I think White organisers could give more visibility to the brands investing in research and development, even if retailers tend to risk less and less," Collina suggests. He adds that the fair falls short in attracting international buyers, especially from the US and Asia. Daria and Franco Briguglio, the couple behind the Ibrigu brand, use innovative recycling methods to craft their collections. "We fell in love with vintage materials that are superior to many fabrics we see today. For our zero-impact creations, we take apart kimonos and transform them into other garments using creative tailoring techniques. Scarves become shirts, trousers or special finishes for jackets. For the winter, we reuse the furs and we employ artisans in small bottegas," explain the Briguglios, who added that they produce in Salsomaggiore, except for the sewing, which takes place in the Veneto Region. They have noticed a revival of artisan workshops, as buyers return to Made in Italy. Mou enhanced their existing "Eskimo" boot with an upper made of palm leaf material. Sequined sneakers also amped up their Spring Summer 2020 collection. Italy has always been Mou's main market, but at White they also met Russian, Cypriot, French and Spanish buyers. At Canadian, the highlight was a duvet made with eco-feathers in a long and



MUNÈ: JAPANESE FLAIR MEETS ITALIAN EXCELLENCE

White's Special Guest Munenori Uemuro of Munè says that Japanese culture is very much at the heart of all of his designs. "Everything I do is influenced by Japanese culture,"

affirms the designer, who studied at Milan's IED design institute and cut his teeth at Jil Sander. "I appeal to a refined woman, who leads an active life and who looks for clothes with that extra something — in the form of unique details and volumes." Uemuro says that all the cotton for his shirts were supplied by Thomas Mason, which is owned by Italian textile maker Albini Group. Cotton was also mixed with viscose and technical materials that added a touch of "femininity," the designer explained, adding that showcasing at White was positive. "Many buyers and journalists have come. At the moment, my brand is distributed in the USA, China and Japan, but I want to broaden my horizons and expand in Europe, especially in Italy." (c.me.)



short version with a nylon exterior. "We don't use recycled nylon yet, but I think we will get there. For now, it's a necessary step," the brand representative says, noting buyers from Japan, Canada, USA, Europe and Russia passed by their stand. "The use of eco-sustainable materials like adhesives and mastics and naturally dyed leather have become extremely important to production. As for the market, there is more demand for certifications," asserts Matteo Malatini, Baracuda and Fabi sales manager. At White, sneakers and cowboy boots were the models that most impressed buyers (among them Russians, Japanese and Northern Europeans). "Sustainability

is very important to us, starting from raw materials, 90% of whom come from natural fibers," say the managers of Hanami d'Or, a womenswear brand from Mirano (Ve), who noticed specific questions coming from buyers about the origin and materials each garment is made with. As for the consumers, they are curious about the raw materials and the processes that are employed in making the product. Hanami d'Or booked orders with retailers from the EU, while the demand from Russia, Csi and Asia was low. Tonet also is a proximity manufacturing player. The Treviso-based brand was launched in 2010 by Carella and now exports count for about 90% of the

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business. Most of them are shipped to other European countries, the former USSR, Asia and the America. Tonet participates in other foreign fashion fairs to boost international business. "In general it seems a slack period for fashion fairs. Perhaps visitors prefer direct contact in showrooms," its owners say. Calicanto, a bag company, sprouted up three years ago in Italy's Riviera del Brenta district, which is known for its high quality workmanship and its integrated supply chain. Venice, where its parent company Idna Italia is based, is a creative inspiration for the collections, which includes Biennale-themed geometric bags or the Lido line, with wooden inserts echoing a beach's deckchairs. After the success of the Ynot? bags, designed in Italy but produced abroad, owner Gioshi decided to launch a new line, N75, produced in the Vicenza area, using leather from the best national tanners. "The foreign market is very interested in Made in Italy. The best markets are the rest of Europe, Russia and Asia," a spokeswoman for the company notes. The idea is to conquer new multibrand stores but also to benefit from Ynot?'s existing network. The company hopes to launch its own e-store too. Finally, the Myths label is constantly researching recycled yarn fabrics and other low-impact materials. Myths' sales manager Simone Bernardi said buyers are moderately interested in sustainability. "Buyers from Northern Europe are the most attentive and consumers are more

GREEN BODY CHAINS FROM RUSSIA

Crafted with recycled materials and green metal: Omut's body chains infused the fair with a unique twist. The Russian brand, designed by Nastya Klimova, was among designers selected to showcase at White from the Dear Progress showroom.



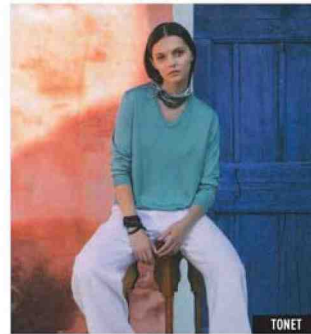
BRAZILIAN FASHION MAKES A SPLASH IN MILAN

Thanks to an agreement with Milan's Senato 13 showroom and the Brazilian Consulate, White was able to boost the exposure of seven Brazilian brands, including companies that produce in Italy (Picture: Amanda Medrado bags).



GIVE A FOK-US HIGHLIGHTS SUSTAINABILITY

White's Give a fok-us project shone a spotlight on sustainable fashion by highlighting five main themes. Situated at the fair's Opificio 31 location in Milan's Tortona design district, organisers also showcased solutions. The California denim brand Boyish was present at the *Water* section, while Analytical Group shifted the focus to testing and certifications at the *Chemicals* section. The *Waste* theme hosted Econyl, which unveiled its regenerated nylon thread, while the Albini fabric and Supima cotton makers were at *Traceability* with a project developed with Oritain. Finally, *People* tackled the issue of communication and how to raise awareness about production practices, purchasing and transparency. This section was supported by the Fashion Revolution movement and the Pistoletto-Cittadellarte foundation, which brought designers from the Fashion B.E.S.T. platform. (e.f.)



TONET

savvy than ever," he says. Myths fresco wool pants with vintage effects caught the eye of a good number of buyers at White, especially Italian ones. While Bernardi was satisfied with the quality of the buyers met in the Tortona district, mostly Italians, he voiced a proposal: "Why not concentrate the fair in just three days?". ■

BUYERS SPEAK

✦ **Ginevra Gozzoli**

Bernardelli Group - Mantova

White always provides interesting insights. Among the brands that I prefer are Sofie d'Hoore and Wråd. I also appreciated the Give a fok-us project curated by Wråd's founder, Matteo Ward. We are very attentive to sustainability, as well as our Z Generation customers. At the same time, they are not our main customers, yet we have a responsibility to educate them ourselves. Responsible fashion is a hot topic among buyers and I believe that in a few seasons, all buyers will dedicate a part of their store to it. At the very least top buyers could really pave the way for other independent retailers. Brands, however, must be more transparent and work on style and prices. Some items are priced too high.

✦ **Federico Giglio**

Giglio Group - Palermo

It was an edition enriched by a wide selection of new brands and young designers. I think sustainability will be an important topic in the future, but for now, our customers really aren't attentive to sustainability - at least, not as much as they should



be. At the moment they are still making choices based on the brand name and style. Raising awareness isn't our job. I think brands should be responsible for that.

✦ **Elisabetta Giannini**
 Cose - Cremona

I found White very rich in terms of its selection, the energy was positive throughout the fair. The Basement is still my favourite area. Brands that really impressed me were Bouboutic, Boysh, Nana Bags and Made for a Woman, the non-profit project from Madagascar. Give a Fok-us is a really good project and I really feel that it is linked to the energy that permeates the fair these days. At the moment, we are not receiving any specific requests regarding responsible fashion from end customers, though certain customers are moving away from furs and leather, preferring eco-versions of those materials. As for the brands, I think that only Stella McCartney has really managed to convince the public that she's serious, probably because she was basically born with a green spirit.

✦ **Umberto Cantarelli**
 Umberto Cantarelli - Perugia

When we come to this trade show, we always find interesting little brands that enrich what we offer in our store. We also visited the showrooms in Milan and Paris. I advise White organizers to make the layout more readable.

✦ **Jakelline Baca**
 Jakelline Baca - Ibiza

The fair is very interesting. It has a wide array of brands. It's also the place to find new talents, who helpfully are given the chance to showcase their brands on a global stage.

**CHAMPIONING ARTISAN BUSINESSES
 PRESERVING HERITAGE**

Season after season, White Milano strengthens its partnership with the fashion arm of Conartigianato, the Italian trade association that supports the nation's artisans and small business owners. Based on recent data, the organisation brings together over 55,000 companies in the textile, clothing and leather sectors. The jewellery and eyewear sectors drive that number up to 79,000. In 2018, these companies generated 43.5 billion euro in global revenues and employed approximately 372,000 workers. Despite their small dimensions, Italy's micro and small-sized textile, clothing and leather companies posted 10.3 billion euro in exports in 2018: more than double the export sales generated by counterparts in Germany, France, Spain and the UK. "We are in pole position to benefit from an uptick in foreign markets, as we have the support of regional associations, as well as Confexport, a unit of the confederation specialised in offering promotional services to companies," says Conartigianato president Giorgio Merletti (pictured). There were many programs started in 2018

in collaboration with ICE (Italy's trade agency) like a participation in Italian fairs (such as White Milano, Micam, Origin Passion & Beliefs and Homi) and abroad, but also concerned with bringing foreign buyers to Italy and organizing B2B meetings, training and tutoring sessions. The calendar of official events for the rest of 2019 includes promotional sessions in Russia, the EU and the USA, as well as training sessions in Southern Italy, with a focus on digital marketing, storytelling and export techniques. "We have just forged a collaboration with ICE and Amazon to promote and sell in a "Made in Italy" showcase on some Amazon foreign versions," Merletti adds. The association focuses on sustainability as a distinctive mark to highlight product quality and artisan craftsmanship, a mix of tradition, design, research and innovation. "Our entrepreneurs are champions of creativity and are the custodians of our ancient traditions. They are also protagonists of custom-made creativity, interpreters of uniqueness and personalisation, and they also boast an unbeatable attention



to detail. Growth in fashion, like many other industries, is being inhibited by a slew of factors: limited access to financing, exorbitant taxes, oppressive bureaucracy, scarce public investments, infrastructural delays and high energy costs," Merletti says, adding that all of these factors only hamper production. There is also a shortage of talent, as it is difficult to find skilled and well-trained workers. Merletti says this shortage represents a 43% gap within the entire workforce. In response to the slowdown in internal demand, Merletti affirms that it all boils down to educating the public. "We aim to educate consumers to recognise the quality of Italian products. We are currently fighting to obtain the necessary regulations to safeguard the 100% Made in Italy label. Also, we are engaged in anti-counterfeiting campaigns, to inform the public about the risks associated with purchasing fake goods." (e.f.)