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# White Milano Focuses on Research, Sustainability

● In its latest edition, running June 16 to 18 during Milan Fashion Week, the men's and women's trade show continued to offer a platform for new brands.

BY MARTINO CARRERA

MILAN — "The trade show industry needs to find new solutions and introduce new projects to keep growing," contended Massimo Bizzi, founder and president of White Milano, citing the new White Street Market as one such example. The space focused on streetwear brands and was accessible to consumers, who could buy fashion through a B2C platform.

Innovation is key to stave off lackluster traffic. The contemporary ready-to-wear and accessories trade show closed on Monday here, registering a 10 percent drop in the number of buyers compared with the same edition in 2017 as domestic buyers in particular lagged behind international visitors. Japan and Korea were listed by organizers among the best-performing markets.

"The difficulty of attracting local buyers compels us to sit down and discuss this issue," said Bizzi. "We were expecting a fall of the Italian market's presence since last year. This is due to overall economic uncertainties, with final customers buying less into the [fashion] category and retail being affected by a slowdown," he added, noting that women's wear keeps performing better.

Coinciding with its June edition, White Milano extended its partnership with ICE, the Italian trade agency, throughout 2019 to engage a foreign audience. This time the institution focused on the U.S., France, Australia and for the first time, on the South African market. "The U.S. internal market generally travels only when pushed

to do so," explained Bizzi mentioning the partnership with UBM Fashion, the entity that organizes the Coterie, Project, FN Platform and Magic, among others. "For too many years we've been seeing only the same big retailers coming to Europe, but I believe the U.S. should explore the contemporary segment more," he concluded.

The fair, which ran June 16 to 18, showcased 180 brands, down from 217 in January 2018, both Italian and international, replicating the formula of displaying the men's spring collections along with women's resort offering, at the Tortona 27 and 54 venues, which cover 131,320 square feet.

Despite a slowdown in terms of buyers, White Milano unveiled the first edition of its White Street Market project, which proved to be a successful initiative, registering more than 8,800 visitors across the three-day event.

"The results have overcome our expectations," said Brenda Bellei, chief executive officer of the trade show. The executive added that "the B2B and B2C formulas coexisted and matched perfectly, what's more is that buyers placing their orders had the chance to actually see what the final customers were buying."

At the B2B space, exhibitors unfurled an array of collections and themes, ranging from lineups infused with athletic and performance influences to urban streetwear and casual chic. In terms of trends, one of the most significant takeaways was how contemporary designs were reinterpreted with the use of technical materials and detailing.

London-based designer Matthew Miller, invited as the trade show's special guest, showcased its men's spring collection, which was first unveiled earlier this month, as part of London Collections: Men. The lineup was inspired by the designer's heyday as a Nineties club kid, with streetwear references and military

details infused throughout.

What stood out was the research on new materials: The designer collaborated with Barcelona-based manufacturer "In the Loop," exploiting its expertise to create upcycled fibers from garments destined for the landfill. "No one is using this technology, companies have been producing garments not to last forever, while luxury [items] should," said Miller, who believes a platform such as White Milano "opens up to a completely different audience; people can sit down and really talk about materials and sustainable technology." Plans at the brand include increasing the products' quality, relying on more established manufacturers and expanding to new markets, including the U.S.

Sustainability was in fact another strong trend at the fairgrounds; Italian brand Wrad introduced a lineup of simple, everyday, seasonless garments for men and women. The label, launched in 2015 by Matteo Ward, Silvia Giovanardi and Victor Santiago, aims to create awareness telegraphing an eco-friendly manifesto with clothes. The brand introduced its Mint fiber, which blends organic cotton with yarns coming from mint leaves, thus giving the garments a breezy touch. Along with it, Wrad repurposed its signature "graphi-T," a T-shirt dyed with recycled graphite powder, which results in a worn-out gray hue. Wrad said the brand's next goal in research and development is to "get [to produce] black T-shirts, because black is the hardest color to fix and also the most toxic one." The label's sustainable commitment attracted e-tailer Yoox in 2017, while in September the brand will unveil a capsule collection with an American partner.

A utilitarian approach was at the core of Alexander Roys' men's wear collection for spring. The designer — who is based in Germany and Milan — said he was inspired by "this idea of what future could look like, given the rise of technology is changing

our lives, the way we think."

This resulted in a lineup imbued with lean silhouettes and a futuristic feel to it. The streamlined color palette of black, white and gray was peppered with touches of red. Cargo pants and military jackets were crafted in nylon and featured a lot of see-through effects by way of PVC and mesh inserts spotlighting "the contrast between self-exposure [by way of social media] and protection in real life." The collection succeeded in capturing today's zeitgeist, both in fashion and culture, reinterpreting the men's wear staples in a contemporary way.

After 10 years in fashion working for international companies, Antonio Dominguez launched his Mexico-based brand Aych (pronounced I) only three seasons ago. For spring, the designer took inspirations from clothing seen on the workers of Mexico City while referencing his passion for interior design and Nineties aesthetics.

Urban pieces such as boiler suits, boxy shirts and cuffed pants crafted from gabardine and nylon featured loose silhouettes and an edgy combination of contrasting hues. A standout was a leather tracksuit, which highlighted the brand's commitment toward sustainability; leather pieces were produced using vegetable dyes, recycled water and ethical processes. Retailing at between 150 euros and 850 euros, the Aych brand is stocked at several retailers in Mexico, as well as at Harvey Nichols Hong Kong, with Asia being a rising market for the label.

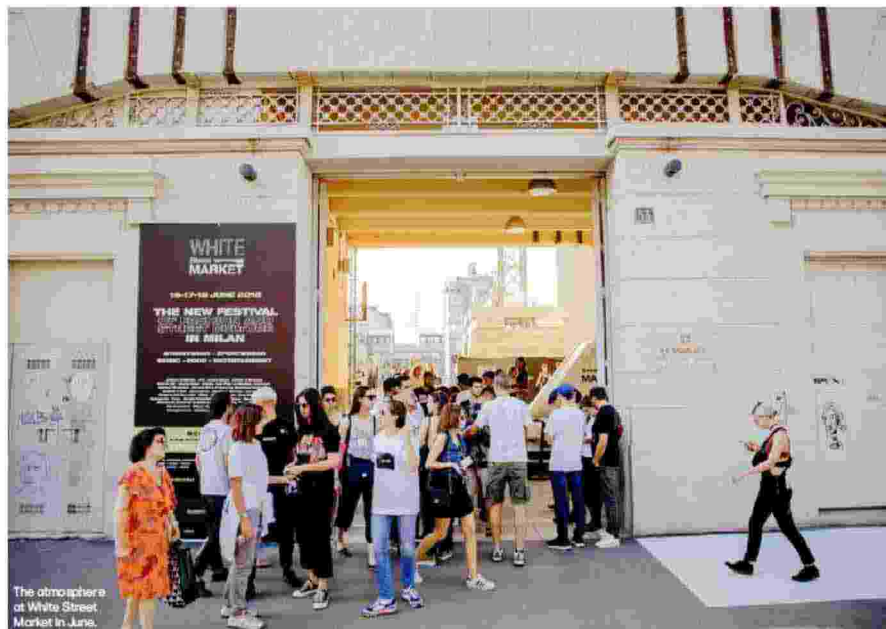
Across the street, inside the Ex Ansaldo industrial venue, the White Street Market was fueled with a lively vibe; it featured street food kiosks, an exhibition space showcasing the "Within the Subcultures" photo exhibit in partnership with Getty Images, as well as live music events and fashion-related talks.

On the first floor, a range of brands and retailers presented their buy-now-wear-now collections. Among the exhibitors, Milan-based sneakers' store One Block Down organized a workshop to customize white sneakers with personalized dyes, while Sneakerness, the Zurich-based firm which organizes sneaker-related, collector-oriented marketplaces, offered highly covetable streetwear pieces from seasons past, including a hooded sweater from the Supreme x Louis Vuitton collection.

The Exkite fashion brand — established by Sardinian kite surf champion Renzo Mancini — presented new iterations of its one-of-a-kind outerwear pieces. Bomber jackets, parka and hooded styles were crafted from 100 percent upcycled, pre-flown kite scraps. Inside each garment a label traces and identifies the origin of the material. The brand will be available at Barneys New York, beginning in November.

Back at the fair's B2B space, in the Basement area, Milan-based label M140 offered a refreshing take on contemporary pieces where utilitarian details were introduced via detachable straps, hand-painted detailing and nylon inserts on hoodies, oversized coats and anoraks. "Our style is more fanciful, technical details are just ornaments," explained Michele Canziani, who founded the brand with Stefano Ghidotti in 2017. The duo developed the concept of "disorder, which is our idea of order," said Canziani, introducing pajama-style stripes on a range of frisky designs, including camp shirts, cuffed pants with contrasting patches and reversible bucket hats. Citing Asia and Italy as the brand's most relevant markets, Canziani contended that enhancing the business in Italy is his first priority now.

Among the special initiatives, New York-made brand Abasi Rosborough and Chinese-Parisian collective Sagittaire A, named White's special designer and special project, respectively, showcased their collections at the fair.



The atmosphere at White Street Market in June.