



LaMilanesa at White Milano.

FASHION

Sustainability Remains Key at White Milano

- The international apparel and accessories trade show ran Sept. 19 to 22.

BY TERESA POTENZA

MILAN — The latest edition of White Milano confirmed its commitment to sustainability, endorsed by founder Massimiliano Bizzi.

This effort and research into young and contemporary brands, as well as long-established ones, was appreciated by visitors, who rose by 3 percent compared to the September edition a year ago. The number of buyers at the fair, which ran Sept. 19 to 22, increased by 2 percent, as Bizzi underlined after the closing of White. (International buyers in particular have grown by 9 percent while Italy has seen a slight slowdown, down 1 percent.) “The fashion industry is changing and one of its main issues is sustainability,” Bizzi explained. “That’s why we continue along this path, trying to make White Milano not only a moment of business but of fashion culture as well.”

Bizzi underlined the importance of teamwork, wishing for a future partnership with Camera Buyer Italia.

The “Give a FOK-us, Focus on the Unfocused” special area was one of the expressions of this path. Its third edition strengthened bonds with the Fashion Revolution movement (founded by designers Carry Somers and Orsola de Castro), to raise awareness about the fashion manufacturing processes. The ultimate goal is to convert the fashion industry to sustainable practices.

“Give a FOK-us” creative director Matteo Ward is also cofounder of the brand Wråd, which stood out at White for the use of recycled materials like graphite powder, which is used to dye fabrics. Wråd’s new collection has been developed with a wider range of colors — all dyed in sustainable ways — and a denim line that saves more than 90 percent of water.

A sustainable denim brand at White was Boyish, created by Los Angeles-born designer Jordan Nodarse just one year ago, after a career in the denim industry. Boyish stood out for its eco-friendly fabrics and its sustainable ways of washing. The effort to reduce waste could also be seen in the use of recycled plastic to produce the jeans tags and in a new collection made of recycled cotton. Brama Group is in charge of distribution of Boyish in Europe and the brand is now also available at Rinascente in Milan.

The 100 percent Made in Italy denim label Two Women Two Men featured its sustainable denim collection, too. Founded in 2006 by Alessandro Marchese, the entire manufacturing process is in Italy’s central region of Marche, a historic denim hub. “Our washing and dyeing processes aim at saving water and using chemical-free materials,” Marchese said, “and the European market has reacted with enthusiasm. We are growing in France and Germany and we are now entering the Greek market.” At White, Marchese presented a new all-natural collection made of cotton, linen and hemp.

At denim brand Closed, sustainability and social responsibility are now the main priorities for the company, which has reduced the use of water by 50 percent and of chemical processes by 70 percent, Italy sales manager Davide Selvaggio explained. Closed also includes organic and recycled cotton items and mulesing-free wool.

The sustainability efforts were embraced by international brands as well, from Belgian to Ukrainian designers. In the Portuguese area, Alexandra Oliveira presented her brand Pé de Chumbo featuring handmade clothes and coats that are sold in Italy, the U.S., Canada, Turkey and Australia, while the Russian Russo Omut stood out for its bags and belts made from the leftovers of a leather company.

Handwork was another key issue at White Milano. The launch of a Sicily Lab, organized with the Sicilian region, was seen in this context. The South of Italy has always been a pool of talents devoted to traditional craftsmanship, and 30 of the most interesting Sicilian fashion brands were represented at the trade show. Gisella Mandalà was inspired by the traditional Sicilian bag “coffa,” which was used as a feedbag for horses. Dwarf palm leaves are handwoven and hand-decorated at a later stage. A collection of bags was launched together with the cooperative Sicilia Isola dei Tesori, which has given a new life to the 18th-century Villa Adriana in Palermo: Gisella Mandalà’s bags are now a way to promote the culture of the island, as each bag is handcrafted and contains a reproduction of paintings reinterpreted in a satirical way by Sicilian artist Antonio Chiarello. “Our bags are sold all over the world, especially in Europe, the U.S. and Australia thanks to the cooperative’s e-commerce and the word-of-mouth on Instagram,” Mandalà explained. “I am now going to open my own web site and

e-commerce under the name of Sicilian Bags, which should be ready before the end of this year.”

Colori del Sole was another Sicilian company, based in Palermo and founded 20 years ago by Giovanni Rizzuto Ferruzza. Linen, cotton and viscose were peppered with screen printing designed by artists who were born in Sicily or are deeply linked with the island. Towels, bags and tablecloths were created by artisans on the loom. “We sell through 10 shops in Sicily and other 200 multibrand stores from the Seychelles to the Maldives, from the Canary Islands to the Cote d’Azur,” Rizzuto Ferruzza said. “We are told people love the handmade work and the use of colors, which remind of the South of Italy traditions.”

Cinzia Macchi is the woman behind the new brand LaMilanesa, a bag collection handmade in Milan. The idea came from Macchi’s effort to contribute to her home city, Milan, and those less fortunate than herself. The first project she was involved in was the editing of the book “Che barba!,” proceeds from which were donated to the pediatric oncology units in Milan. The new partnership is with “Fare per bene Onlus” that supports abused women; they will be working on LaMilanesa and the proceeds will go back to them.

At White, LaMilanesa presented handmade bags made with recycled jute sacks but also the limited-edition “Quadri da passeggio” (“Walking paintings”) featuring Piero Figura’s artworks. Slabs of Plexiglass show beautifully designed women’s faces. “We have received great feedback from buyers at this trade show, with sales orders from Spain, Portugal, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands but also Italy and Japan,” said general manager Francesco Salvi.

White Beach was the area dedicated to beachwear, where colors and eco-friendly production were the main features. Ibiza-based Mahonitas was created by the Italian Chiara Polacchini, who now lives in Spain. “I fell in love with a patented kind of rubber used to make the famous Spanish Menorca slides” called menorquine, Polacchini explained. This is a nontoxic rubber with antibacterial and antifungal properties, which can be used in the water and may be washed in the washing machine. “As rubber cannot be a natural material, we offset it by recycling production scraps, by using vegan fabrics instead of leather and by offering our clients the opportunity of giving their sandals back so that we can reuse them,” Polacchini added. “Each season we also devolve part of our proceeds to a social cause: We now cooperate with One Tree Planted, which plants a tree for every sandal we sell.”

Architect Linda Raff, born in Argentina but Italian by adoption, four years ago founded the beachwear label that bears her name and is dedicated to ethical fashion. At White Beach, she presented her collection created with Econyl, a brand new nylon which is regenerated using waste from landfills and oceans. When reused, Econyl emits fewer greenhouse gases as well and it needs less water and energy. Recycled materials are used to produce swimsuit clips, while

another collection is made of reused fabrics like cotton.

Govou fabrics is a Costa Brava-made label founded by Emese Merész and Cinta Fernandez. The two designers were inspired by the work in European farms. “The fabrics we use today for our bags and home decor collections come from grain sacks produced over 100 years ago,” Merész explained. “We reinterpret those linen, hemp and cotton fabrics keeping their own individuality and the distinctive pattern of stripes, showing which farm they come from.”

White has also pursued scouting activity among Chinese talents. China Cascade was a special area at White’s Tortona 54, while a partnership with White and Camera della Moda brought to Milan the Semir fashion group, listed on the Chinese Stock Exchange. With the special collection Semir x Dumpty, Semir featured the creative collection of Dumpty, a group of designers in their 20s — Linbing Zhu, Xiaoru Liu and Yufeng Li — who have given life to a high-tech line, which responds to the younger Chinese generation’s needs: fashion and functionality.

As they are closely connected to the outside world on the web, tablets and cell phones are part of their bodies: hats with credit card pockets, gloves with waterproof phone cases, coats and clothes with multiple pockets were the main features of the Semir x Dumpty collection, peppered with fluo pink and green hues.

The Milan show confirmed Semir as a new supporter of talents: “Not only Chinese talents, though, as we are eager to give space to designers from all over the world,” said Semir e-commerce marketing director Yang Zhu. The Chinese company is also expanding its business in the Western market “by buying international brands and, most of all, by widening our own products thanks to the partnership with global talents,” Zhu added. “I believe in the near future Semir may be able to explore new markets better, though not in a traditional way but mainly through social media and e-commerce.”



A look from the Semir collection.

“Our washing and dyeing processes aim at saving water and using chemical-free materials.”

ALESSANDRO MARCHESE,
TWO WOMEN TWO MEN