





FASHION

How Sage Paul Is Bringing Indigenous Talent to Milan Fashion Week

BY CHRISTIAN ALLAIRE

February 22, 2023

It's the first day of Milan Fashion Week, and top runway shows like Fendi and Diesel are already in full swing. It's a week meant to spotlight the best of what Italian fashion labels have to offer—but over the next few days, there will be a different kind of cultural takeover on the scene. Organized by Indigenous Fashion Arts founder Sage Paul, seven Indigenous designers from Canada showcasing during MFW: Lesley Hampton; Erica Donovan (She Was a Free Spirit); Evan Ducharme; Justin Louis (Section 35); Robyn McLeod; and Niio Perkins.

Paul launched Indigenous Fashion Arts in 2018, a biennial Fashion Week in Toronto that provides Indigenous designers with a much-needed platform to showcase their work. She is responsible for organizing the group of designers together, with added support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Canadian Embassy. In Italy, the group will showcase their work as part of White Milano—a luxury trade show running from February 24 to February 27. It's a prime opportunity for the artists to meet with international press and buyers. "It's a trade show centered around luxury—items that are more about craftsmanship and creativity," says Paul. "Of course, that aligns with what we do."







“We really wanted to make sure that there was representation of the three umbrellas of Indigenous people [in Canada]: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis,” says Paul. “It’s a strong representation of what it means to be Indigenous.” Labels like Evan Ducharme (Métis) and Section 35’s Justin Louis (Cree) are offering contemporary takes on traditional Indigenous motifs, whether it be woven dresses or bomber jackets. Robyn McLeod (Dene/Métis) and Niio Perkins (Mohawk) specialize in more traditional styles of beadwork and jewelry.

While they range in aesthetics, Paul says they’re unified by a strong sense of identity. “Everyone feels very strongly in how they express their Indigeneity,” says Paul. “We get to show a big scope of what it is to be Indigenous, and what people are making and wearing.”

Compared to showcasing their new collections on the Milanese runways, Paul says there’s a certain power in going the trade show route. “There’s more time to build relationships,” says Paul. “Doing a show is a huge amount of work and it’s a huge expense; At trade shows, people are there specifically to buy.” Paul hopes to foster the designers in more of a business sense, giving them an opportunity to network and sell their work to prospective new clients.



Niio Perkins earrings Photo: Artsy Lens

Earrings by She Was A Free Spirit (Erica Donovan) Photo: Robby Dick

“I hope this is a market that will give them that space to make the money that they want to—and should—make for their [work],” says Paul. “A lot of designers have bread and butter pieces that keep them going, but their couture or one-of-a-kind pieces are so important.” To support the group, Paul is also bringing designer Dorathy Wright as a mentor—an artist based out of the Northwest Territories known for her quilts and fur work. “[She has] basic industry knowledge that’s important to bring back to the community.”

In tandem with the White Milano showcase, Paul and the designers will also be engaging in a special panel discussion at the event. They hope to educate buyers and attendees about Indigenous fashion, and to introduce them to some of the core design values within the community (sustainability, and designs rooted in heritage, come to mind). “They don’t know much about our communities [in Europe],” says Paul, “so there’s a lot of education to be done around understanding what fashion is from Indigenous communities, and how to work with Indigenous people.”







WATCH



On the Latest Episode of Good Morning Vogue, A New Allure: How Virginie Viard Is Making Chanel Her Own

GOOD MORNING VOGUE SEASON 3

1 / 9



On the Latest Episode of Good Morning Vogue

Good Morning Vogue Goes Behind the Scenes o

Good Morning Vogue Takes You Inside the Wor

Good Morning Vogue Reveals the Secrets of V

Good Morning Vogue Episode 4: Watch Exclusi

Good M Happy

Sign up for our weekly shopping newsletter, The Get!

The insider's guide to what to shop and how to wear it.

By signing up you agree to our [User Agreement](#) and [Privacy Policy & Cookie Statement](#).

READ MORE

SHOPPING

The Knitwear Ins and Outs to Know Before Spring—Shop Them Here

BY MADELINE FASS

RUNWAY

Mugler Is H&M's Latest Designer Collaboration

BY ALICE CARY

TRENDS

Men, Skirts Aren't That Scary—Promise!

BY CHRISTIAN ALLAIRE

RUNWAY

The Best Womenswear Is at the Menswear Shows

BY LAIA GARCIA-FURTADO

RUNWAY

Your One-Stop Guide to the Milan Fall 2023 Fashion Week
Calendar

BY IRENE KIM

RUNWAY

Your One Stop Guide to the London Fashion Week Fall
2023 Calendar

BY IRENE KIM