

PRADA E GALLIANO

A fianco, Miuccia Prada,
sotto lo stilista John Galliano

Miuccia Prada
and John Galliano, below.



ANDREAS SOLARO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

ineccepibile del mondo, ma non è più egemone culturale e non ne è nemmeno più la destinataria d'elezione. Perfino negli Stati Uniti, a cui un tempo si rivolgeva la couture nata in Europa, adesso è l'immensa comunità afro-americana, insieme con quella latina, a orientare gusti e acquisti, come hanno scoperto a loro spese nomi mass market come Gap, ma anche brand che investono in cultura e che affrontano temi sociali importanti. Tutti, negli ultimi mesi, hanno dovuto affrontare un attacco per presunta lesa "correttezza", cioè per violazione dei canoni della multiculturalità e della diversità che oggi guidano il mercato e le reazioni dei social. La questione si è fatta così sensibile che qualche settimana fa il direttore creativo di Trigère, Franklin Elman, ha ricordato come fosse stata la fondatrice, Pauline Trigère, a introdurre le modelle afro-americane nelle sfilate nei primi anni Cinquanta. Sta cambiando l'estetica e anche l'etica va cercando nuovi mo-

delli, più adeguati alle diverse sensibilità e alla massa montante di una rabbia contro il "vecchio mondo" e, in generale, dell'élite, che l'universo social identifica non di rado con la moda. "Le persone vogliono rispetto perché ora si sta parlando di cultural appropriation, ma questa è la base fondante della moda, è sempre stata la base dell'arte, e di tutto", diceva Miuccia Prada, finita nel tritacarne mediatico per via di un gadget accusato di imitare il "blackface", cioè la pratica offensiva dei bianchi di dipingersi la faccia di nero. "Se non sei libero di dire cose che possono anche non essere corrette e devi fare attenzione quando apri la bocca, come puoi parlare di libertà di pensiero? È un punto cruciale", osservava stupefatta, lei ex-sessantottina, di veder ribaltato il suo pensiero. Non succede solo nella moda: a intervalli regolari qualcuno parla di epurare i testi di Shakespeare dal sessismo e dal razzismo che conterebbero, azzerando dunque secoli di sviluppo culturale che invece sono un bene prezioso da preservare e tramandare, a testimonianza dello sviluppo positivo delle sensibilità. Dividere il mondo in buoni e cattivi assoluti è il gioco di questi ultimi anni, ma il pregiudizio vale solo nei confronti dei dominatori di un tempo. Volendo prendere il numero di incidenti mediatici che, nell'ultimo anno, hanno riguardato la moda di alta gamma, il cinema e la musica, per incrociarlo con il tasso di aggressività che i social media hanno moltiplicato a dismisura e che rendono possibile a chiunque infliggere un danno di milioni di dollari con un semplice post, risulta facile capire perché la moda abbia subito promosso sponsorship accademiche intercontinentali e osservatori a favore dell'inclusione. Facendo, insomma, un autodafé, ma promuovendo al tempo stesso un'apertura di cui ignorare i risvolti positivi e il potere di influenza su altri settori sarebbe sbagliato: non si può riscrivere il passato in nome della parità dei diritti, ma si possono identificare storie che sono state distorte e ignorate e, naturalmente, scrivere il futuro.



THE NEW LATITUDES OF STYLE

Europe is still creating the most sophisticated fashion products ever, but it no longer has a cultural hegemony overcome by new standards of multiculturalism and diversity given by the influence of social media



BY BOB BECCHI/THE DENVER POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

ICONA

Pauline Trigère prima di una sfilata nel 1960.

Pauline Trigère before a fashion show in 1960.

"If he were still with Christian Dior, do you think that John Galliano would do the Egyptian parade again today?" This was a question that a Brazilian student doing a master's degree in the Science of Fashion recently asked me at the *Sapienza* University of Rome. The discussion had been about inclusion and diversity, the two dominant themes of fashion nowadays, and young people from the United States, France, Ghana, Turkey, Iran and China were attending. All of them were in agreement that cultural appropriation and lack of respect for different ethnic groups and ethical sensitivities is the worst crime an international brand can commit at present.

I well remember seeing that show by Dior and at the time the collection seemed to me intelligent, ironic, and absolutely appropriate to that affluent period (it was 2004). But then, as now, it was rather difficult for fashion to find its role, as it was trapped between the funding by multinationals that supported it, the cultural ascendancy of street-wear and, above all, its own fearful anxieties. After six hundred years of paying homage to (or plundering from) the ethos and the aesthetics of peoples and cultures that it considered as "barbarians", "slaves" or in any case "other", now the fashion industry, and the West itself, has to deal with the reversal of roles and of the economic axis of the world, and it lacks the cultural tools to do so. It proceeds by trial and error, and so it inevitably makes mistakes.

Europe still creates some of the most sophisticated and sartorially impeccable fashion products in the world, but it no longer has a cultural hegemony and is no longer even the first choice. Even in the United States, to which made-in-Europe *couture* once appealed, it is now the immense African-American and Latino communities that influence taste and purchasing, as mass market brands like *Gap* have discovered to their cost, as indeed have several brands that invest in culture and that address important social issues. Everyone has recently had to face attacks for alleged offences to "political correctness", and for violations of the canons of multiculturalism and diversity that guide today's markets and that influence comments on social media.

The issue has become so sensitive that a few weeks ago Franklin Elman, the creative director of *Trigère*, felt compelled to remind us that the company's founder, Pauline Trigère, was the first well-known designer to employ African-American models

in fashion shows in the early 1950s. Aesthetic values and ethical viewpoints are constantly changing, and people are now searching for new ideals that are more suited to their different sensitivities and to growing resentment against the "old world" and its "elite", which social networks often associate with the sector of fashion. "People want respect because now there is talk of cultural appropriation, but this is the foundation of fashion, as it has always been the basis of art, and of everything", said Miuccia Prada, who had been caught up in the media meat grinder because of a gadget that seemed to ape the offensive "blackface" Caucasian practice of blackening one's face to imitate dark-skinned people. "If you are not free to say things that may also not be correct and you have to be careful every time you open your mouth, how can you talk with freedom of thought? This really is a turning point", she stated in amazement at seeing her opinions turned back to front, she herself having been an activist and protester in the sixties.

Of course all this doesn't only apply to the context of fashion. People regularly propose purging Shakespeare's texts of the sexism and racism that they supposedly endorse, a move that would instantly do away with centuries of cultural development, which is a precious asset to be preserved and passed down, also because it testifies to the progressive refinement of our sensibilities. Dividing the world into the extreme polarities of "good" and "bad" is an increasingly popular trend, but such prejudices are perhaps even more inappropriate when applied to attitudes that used to be predominant.

If we consider the number of media incidents over the last year, involving high-end fashion, cinema and music, and the aggressiveness that is multiplied out of all proportion by social media, so that a single post can have the power to inflict damage amounting to millions of dollars, it is easy to see why many companies have promoted intercontinental academic observers and sponsors in favour of inclusion. However, it would be wrong for brands to simply perform an *auto-da-fé*, or ritual act of public penance, while ignoring or neglecting the positive influence that a more open attitude towards diversity could have upon other sectors. The past certainly should not be censored or rewritten in the name of respect for equal rights, but cases of insensitivity and prejudice in the present can be identified and rectified, so as to change the future.