President Emmanuel Macron fêted fashion creativity with a gilded dinner inside the Élysée Palace on Monday night, praising the imaginative foreign elements in the industry, even as he picked out Frenchman Jean-Paul Gaultier for special praise.
became president in May 2017. Some 200 guests enjoyed delicious French cooking – asparagus, scallops and chocolate cake washed down with white Mercurey 1er Cru 2018 from Domaine Michel Juillot, a 2009 Château Gazin from Pomerol and Jacquart Cuvée Alpha 2010 champagne.

"Brigitte and I are very happy to receive you at a moment when Paris again becomes the true capital of fashion," said Macron before thanking France’s Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode and its executive president Pascal Morand, "for the work they have done along with the family of brands and all the designers who join us."

"Even as you finish your final gestures and probably suffer from some stress (before your shows), tonight is a few instants of ease, innocence and forgetting," said Macron on the opening evening of the nine-day French runway season.

Sitting at the president’s table of 16, Macron’s wife Brigitte was on his left, Gaultier on his right, Elie Saab, on top table, joining the likes of Olivier Rousteing, Pierpaolo Piccioli, Maria Grazia Chiuri, Clare Waight Keller, Anna Wintour, Delphine Arnault, Bruno Pavlovsky, Simon Porte Jacquemus, Alexandre Mattiussi and Marie-Claire Daveu.

"There is also an extraordinary international dimension to fashion. Half of the designers here are non-French. That makes our fashion week a truly international event, even in this moment of anguish due to coronavirus," the 42-year-old president said in French.

Dotted around 20 tables sitting underneath the gilded ceiling and giant chandeliers of the Salle des Fêtes state dining room were scores of designers: Alber Elbaz, Julie de Libran, Lutz Huelle, Haider Ackermann, Craig Green, Christelle Kocher, Stéphane Rolland, Agnès Troublé of Agnès B., Glenn Martens, Arnaud Vaillant and Sébastien Meyer, Nicolas Lecourt Mansion, Ludovic de Saint Sernin, Rok Hwang, Daniel Roseberry and Thebe Magugu among others, a score or two of CEOs, including Séverine Merle of Celine and Nicolas Santi-Weil of Ami, and barely a dozen editors.

Three cabinet ministers also attended the soiree, underlining the government’s support for fashion. The Secretary of state for Economy and Finance Agnès Pannier-Runacher joined the senior LVMH executive Sidney Toledano and Naomi Campbell on another table. Close by Guillaume de Seynes of Hermes dined with Culture Minister Franck Riester along side Berluti’s Kris Van Assche. While the Secretary of State for Ecological Transition Brune Poirson was on a third table with Rick Owens and Pascal Morand.

Switching to very good English, Macron added: “Having you here today is the best evidence that Paris is still one of the main places of young design and eco-friendly design. This ability to have a permanent dialogue between different backgrounds and cultures is, I do believe, exactly what our world today needs […] That’s why it is so important to have this fashion week in Paris. You represent the ability to create. To respect each other. This tolerance, this creativity is why we are so proud to have this fashion week and to have you in this palace this evening,” he stressed.

The evening marked the high point of public support for fashion by a French government or indeed any nation in Western Europe. In London, 10 Downing Street and Buckingham Palace have organized cocktail receptions, though never such a dinner. Italian premier Matteo Renzi did stage two major lunches in Milan during its season, though no Italian president has ever hosted the fashion world in the Quirinale Palace in Rome.

"Young designers can inspire the new generation. It is such a positive message. On top of that, on a daily basis, there is the Fashion Pact, which we launched with a lot of you to reduce emissions, as your sector is a major one when it comes to that," he noted, adding that fashion had a duty to organize fashion weeks in a different way than 10 or 20 years ago in order to reduce carbon emissions.

Macron was instrumental in encouraging Kering CEO François-Henri Pinault to put together a coalition of over 30 brands, working together to stop global warming, restore biodiversity and protect the oceans.

At the finale, Macron lauded Gaultier for his brilliant career and final show during the couture season in January. “A mixture of joy and melancholy. Though I wish that like Charles Aznavour you will be having final shows for the last 15 years of your career,” joked Macron to much applause.
15 years of your career," joked Macron to much applause.

“All of the greatest actresses and singers have been dressed by you. During 50 years you have also dressed cinema. So, let’s hope this is the beginning of a series of final Jean Paul Gaultier shows. You inspired so many designers who are here today due to your sense of liberty. A French phenomenon with his ability to disrupt and create and reinvent himself,” said Macron, dressed in a classic dark blue suit and tie.

Mixing French and English as he ended his 17-minute speech, Macron’s voice became rather emotional, as he argued, “I want to believe that is what French style represents in this world and why we are so happy to be in Paris. And not just for the fashion week, but also for each time you want to be free to create. And, let me say, if I believe in one thing for our country it’s that it’s a place where people have a very special taste for freedom, creativity and innovation. And if one day you feel threatened in the ability to create that you would feel that France is still your place.”

“We are a formidably free country and to have all your talents here in France is to continue this force that is France,” he continued. “I say that to all our friends here no matter your nationality, American, Chinese or Irish, that being here and creating here makes you very special people and also French citizens," he added to much applause.