CFDA looks back on its efforts during a uniquely challenging year for fashion

By Robin Driver - August 29, 2021

The Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) has published its annual report for 2020, highlighting initiatives implemented to support the U.S. fashion industry in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In particular, the organization called attention to its decision to repurpose the 2020 CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund as fundraising initiative A Common Thread, which was launched in March of last year. Aiming to raise both awareness and funds for members of the American fashion community, the campaign included a video series telling the stories of those affected by the health crisis.
Donors to the cause included Ralph Lauren, which made the inaugural $1 million gift to the project, and the Elaine Gold Launch Pad program – a collaboration between the Accessories Council and the CFDA – which gave $250,000 and pledged an additional match in donations up to the same value, making for a total contribution of $500,000.

Elsewhere, the CFDA’s Fashion Manufacturing Initiative (FMI) partnered with the New York City Economic Development Corporation to donate $500,000 to A Common Thread, to be set aside exclusively for NYC-based fashion manufacturers and their workforce. A further $500,000 came from Amazon Fashion, which also teamed up with Vogue and the CFDA to create Common Threads: Vogue x Amazon Fashion, a dedicated digital storefront for the current collections of American designers.


Ultimately, A Common Thread raised $5.1 million in funding, which was distributed to more than 160 designers, brands, retailers, manufacturers and organizations. Among the recipients, $1 million went to Icon360, the non-profit founded by Brandice Daniel of Harlem’s Fashion Row to offer forgivable relief to designers of color during the pandemic.

Indeed, social impact and diversity was another key focus of the CFDA’s efforts in 2020, when racial inequalities in American society were thrown into sharp relief by the shocking death of George Floyd and the events that followed.

In June, CFDA chairman Tom Ford and CFDA CEO Steven Kolb outlined new initiatives aiming to promote diversity within the national fashion industry. These included the creation of an employment program seeking to place Black talent in all areas of the fashion sector, as well as of mentorship and internship programs focused on Black students and recent graduates. CFDA members were also given diversity and inclusion training, while donations were made to NAACP and Campaign Zero.

This initial action led to the launch of the CFDA Impact initiative, which has the mission “to identify, connect, support, and nurture Black and Brown creatives and professionals in fashion.”

In addition, The Designers Hub, a non-profit aiming to help Black designers and Black-owned fashion brands, which was established by model and activist Bethann Hardison with the support of the CFDA, received funding from A Common Thread and Tom Ford International in order to award 10 designers with grants.
As the organizer of New York Fashion Week, the CFDA was also faced with the question of how to host the important industry event when Covid-related restrictions made in-person shows an impossibility. The organization’s response came in the form of Runway360, a digital platform built in less than four months in collaboration with creative agency De-Yan.

Launched in time for the September 2020 season, Runway360 featured 82 participating brands for its debut, a figure which expanded to 133 designers during market week. The platform aims to offer a one-stop environment for brands and designers to carry out a complete collection launch, while also providing a digital space through which different fashion industry stakeholders can engage with each other and discover the latest collections year-round.

“When I became Chairman of CFDA’s board in 2019, no one could have predicted that we were on the verge of a global pandemic. Covid-19 upended our lives and businesses and hit fashion from all angles,” said Tom Ford in the annual report’s opening letter.

“I am proud at how the CFDA supports American fashion at every level,” he added. “We have an opportunity to rebuild American fashion into the leading industry of the future. This is the beginning.”

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