Milan prepares for intense fashion week spread around four corners of the city

By Dominique Muret - September 21, 2021

Fashion is back where it belongs in Milan, after two seasons in digital mode. As the city centre is again brimming with tourists, and its usual, ceaseless traffic, on September 21-27 Milan is set to host a fashion week that makes an unambiguous return to physical events, unveiling the women's ready-to-wear collections for Spring/Summer 2022. The programme is extremely intense, with a schedule of no fewer than 173 events, including a small number of digital presentations.

More than ever, this season's fashion week will be spread throughout the city, from its historic centre all the way out to the suburbs. Covid-19-related restrictions have driven houses to organise their shows in new, more spacious venues on the outskirts of the Lombard capital, many of which have not previously been explored by brands. On offer: 63 runway shows – 42 of which are physical, 75 presentations, and 33 events, including special projects, anniversaries, store openings, parties and other happenings.

Suffice to say, the fashionistas will be racking up the kilometres in Milan this season. Jil Sander, which was purchased by OTB earlier this year, and which will be making its return to the Milanese runway on Wednesday, September 22, following a stint showing in Paris, is taking over an "exclusive location" in the heart of a new neighbourhood on the eastern edge of Milan. Etro, on the other hand, is moving south, where it will show in a converted industrial space. Missoni has opted for a similar venue, but up in the north of the city, in the Bovisa neighbourhood. Down in the south of the city again, Sunnei is promising "an extreme experience." MSGM has chosen the new park next to Garibaldi station, while Francesca Libertore has rented a historic Milanese cinema.

Milan Fashion Week kicks off on Tuesday, September 21, with a slew of events, including two conferences dedicated to sustainable fashion, the inauguration of the Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana's Fashion Hub, which will house the collections of young Italian designers, and the party organised by Benetton to present the collection made in collaboration with its new ambassador, Tunisian-Italian rapper Ghali.
On the following day, Wednesday, September 22, the marathon of runways hits its stride, with the collective, digital show, "Black Lives Matter in Italian Fashion," which brings together five design talents from minority communities. Up next is Fendi, followed by N°21, Jil Sander and Roberto Cavalli, which is making its big comeback to the Milanese catwalk under the creative direction of Fausto Puglisi, having last shown in the city in February 2019. The other major Italian brands will participate in the week with either physical shows – as is the case with Max Mara, Armani, Prada, Tod’s, Marni, and Dolce & Gabbana – or videos broadcast via the CNMI’s website, which is the format chosen by Dsquared2, Antonio Marras, GCDS, Emilio Pucci, and Philipp Plein, among others.

Other important comebacks on the calendar, beyond Cavalli and Jil Sander, include the return of Moncler, on September 25, when the brand will transform its Genius project into "Mondogenius" with a hybrid live and digital event presented by singer Alicia Keys from Milan, but also linked up with Shanghai, Tokyo, Seoul and New York.
The last time that the brand presented the collections from its collective of designers in Milan was in February 2020. Prada is also promising a unique experience with a double runway show, set to be held simultaneously in Milan and Shanghai. Versace, which showed off-calendar via a video in March, is also returning to the Milanese programme with a physical show scheduled for the evening of September 24.

It's the same story for Boss, which took a break from fashion week in February, as well as for Shi.rt, the new label from Tommaso Aquilano and Roberto Rimondi, and talented South African designer Sindiso Khumalo, a finalist of the 2020 LVMH Prize. Both brands skipped this year's winter session after making their respective debuts in Milan in September 2020.

The week is further enriched by some interesting new names, including a trio of young African designers. Joy Ijeoma Meribe, a Nigerian designer now living in Parma, Italy, where she founded her brand, Joy Meribe, in 2017, will make her runway debut on September 22. Maison Alvine Demanou, which is led by its eponymous Cameroonian-born, Venice-based designer, will present its collection on Monday, September 27. Finally, Lagos Space Programme will show on the same day, having made its Milan debut, albeit in digital format, during January's menswear calendar, before shifting onto the womenswear schedule.

In addition to these new names, there's also Italian label Vitelli, founded by Mauro Simionato in 2016, which, inspired by subcultures and supported by Giulia Bortoli, reimagines all-Italian knitwear with a contemporary twist, as well as Hui, the brand founded by China's Zhao Huizhou. Having already shown several times in Milan, the designer, who fights to protect Chinese heritage and ancestral craftsmanship through her Hui foundation, is debuting on the official calendar. Here she will also be joined by historic Italian fashion house Luisa Spagnoli, which organised a first grand show-event in Milan in September 2018, in celebration of its 90th anniversary.
Notable absences include Moschino, which showed in New York on September 9; Valentino, which has returned to the Parisian calendar; and Gucci, which has chosen to present its collection in Los Angeles in November. The Italian brand has, however, promised a special event at Milan's Arco della Pace on September 25, explaining that it will focus on the mysterious theme, "Vault." The label has even created a dedicated site for this top secret project, which has been generating buzz since this summer.

Some fifteen brands have also disappeared from the rich programme of digital shows that graced February's calendar, including promising young talents that many would have liked to see more from this season, such as Alessandro Vigilante, Christian Boaro and his label CHB, and Giuseppe Buccinnà. Some will nonetheless be present via presentations. Also worthy of note is the arrival on the official calendar of no fewer than 12 new names: Cormio, Quira, Andreadamo, Defaine by Nicola Bacchilega, Roberto Di Stefano, Aniye By, Iuri, Traffico, Radica Studio, Airin Tribal and ATXV.

Elsewhere, the calendar will be complemented by a number of parallel events bringing the usual effervescence of Milan Fashion Week to the city centre, including runway shows from the likes of Maryling, John Richmond, Mario Dice and Ramzen; performances from artists like Bikkembergs, who will be playing alongside street performers; the launch of the Bruno Cucinelli eyewear line; and store openings, including the much-anticipated inauguration of the new Ferrari location.

All this without counting the parties and dinners organised by certain houses, or the celebrations for the 20th anniversary of Pomellato's Nudo collection, the 40th anniversary of Emporio Armani, the 60th anniversary of eyewear brand Marcolin and the 50th anniversary of Chiara Boni's career, as well as the numerous projects organised by the CNMI promoting sustainability or young design talent.