Who will take over creative direction at Louis Vuitton men's and Nina Ricci?

By Dominique Muret  -  July 11, 2022

While Haute Couture Week and the marathon of fashion shows has come to an end, decisions are being made about the future of two major Parisian fashion houses behind closed doors: Nina Ricci, which parted ways with its artistic directors Lisi Herrebrugh and Rushemy Botter earlier this year, and Louis Vuitton, which is looking for a successor to Virgil Abloh for its menswear collections following his untimely death on November 28, 2021. According to our sources, after numerous exploratory leads, both have drawn up a shortlist of candidates and are close to making a final decision.
In early May, luxury streetwear brand Off-White, founded in 2013 by Virgil Abloh and owned by LVMH, announced the appointment of Ibrahim, known as 'Ib', Kamara as art and image director. The Sierra Leonean-born Kamara, who has lived in London since the age of 16, is also the editor-in-chief of the British fashion magazine Dazed and was one of Abloh's longtime collaborators. It was therefore a choice focused on continuity that was favored. However, Virgil Abloh’s successor as head of Louis Vuitton's menswear department seems to follow a different logic.

Given the importance of the luxury house, which along with Dior is one of the crown jewels of Bernard Arnault's empire, but also and above all due to the greatness of the iconic designer and the legacy he left behind, the new artistic direction chosen will inevitably have a symbolic impact.

With Virgil Abloh, the only black designer at the helm of a major luxury label - along with Olivier Rousteing at Balmain - LVMH has set new standards. Since 2018, its flagship brand has expanded its appeal and audience to new generations and target groups, reshaping its universe around fashion, multiculturalism and social movements.

Seven months have passed since the death of its creative director, during which Louis Vuitton has presented two menswear collections riding on the legacy left by Virgil Abloh. Some believe that the house may take some time before making a decision. After all, LVMH did let a year go by before appointing Maria Grazia Chiuri as head of Christian Dior after the departure of Raf Simons.

"They are not in a big hurry, especially since sales are going very well and the team in place is performing well," revealed a group executive.

On the other hand, expectations are high and, according to our sources, the group has looked at a dozen candidates. As CEO Michael Burke himself admitted to the press in early June, after Louis Vuitton's last Spring/Summer 2023 show, the house should "take the next step."

According to various sources, a handful of potential names have remained in the running, with Martine Rose leading the pack. The English designer of Jamaican descent has been at the top of the list ever since the Paris label's CEO was spotted in the front row at her fashion show in London in June, Vogue Business revealed.

The 41-year-old has considerable experience. She has been running her own menswear brand since 2007. With her penchant for oversized volumes long before they became fashionable, and her sporty, street and workwear style that draws from subcultures and the nineties, her style does not differ greatly from Abloh’s. Like the American designer, she is popular with rappers and celebrities and has collaborated with Nike on several occasions. Her resume also includes a three-year stint between 2015 and 2017 at Balenciaga, where she worked as a menswear consultant alongside creative director Demna Gvasalia.
"Martine Rose is an unparalleled menswear professional, one of the best creatives in the segment today. She has reached a true stylistic level of maturity. Not to mention the fact that she has worked with a major luxury house while running her own business," stressed a key player in the market who knows her well. If appointed, it would allow Louis Vuitton to ensure a smooth transition while innovating thanks to the designer's disruptive touch. It would also be the first time in the company's history that a woman has taken charge of the men's collections.

In addition to Martine Rose, the names of Samuel Ross and Grace Wales Bonner, two other highly regarded talents on the London scene, are also circulating. The 31-year-old Ross began his career in fashion with Virgil Abloh, with whom he was close friends and for whom he worked as a creative assistant at Off-White and Kanye West's Yeezy in the early 2010s. He subsequently launched his own brand, A-Cold-Wall*, in 2015, offering avant-garde couture streetwear. He has been a finalist in prestigious competitions such as Andam and the LVMH Prize, and is known for his sophisticated and conceptual approach to celebrating London street culture inspired by the British middle and working classes, their environment and their clothing habits. The multi-faceted designer has also worked with Nike and Louis Vuitton, collaborating with other artists to redesign the brand's famous trunk to mark the bicentennial of its founder.

Jamaican on her father's side and English on her mother's, the 31-year-old Grace Wales Bonner founded her brand in 2014 and from the beginning emphasized in her designs her black identity and African inspirations. She quickly made a name for herself when she won the 2016 LVMH Prize for emerging designers. Known for her cultural sensitivity and multidisciplinary approach, she recently designed a collection for Adidas and collaborated with Maria Grazia Chiuri on Dior's Cruise Collection 2020.

Californian Mike Amiri, who can be seen on the runway in Paris with his glamorous and rocking luxury sportswear brand Amiri, is also said to be one of the contenders.

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The group also has another candidate in mind. Jonathan Anderson has been traded as an obvious candidate for months. The 37-year-old Irish designer is more popular than ever, whether with his brand J.W. Anderson, founded in 2008, or with Loewe, the Spanish luxury house owned by LVMH, whose style he has been leading since 2013. His innovative approach, his freshness, his ability to manage several projects at once (he has collaborated with Moncler, among others) as well as his passion for craftsmanship and accessories are all assets for the position to be filled. Not to mention his familiarity with the Parisian group, which could benefit from a very innovative and solid profile.

Nina Ricci in search of a new creative talent

Major changes are afoot at Nina Ricci. The Parisian fashion house, owned by the Spanish Puig Group, has been undergoing an organizational restructuring process for several months. After the resignation of its CEO Charlotte Tasset, it also had to cope with the departure of its artistic directors Rushemy Botter and Lisi Herrebrugh earlier this year. The Dutch duo, hired in 2018, were virtually unknown at the time and had just won the Grand Prix at the Festival de Hyères. Within four years, the pair had breathed new life into the brand, bringing freshness and modernity, but they seemed to have failed to boost sales sufficiently. According to our sources, the selection process for a new artistic direction is also well underway.
Initially, the label considered changing its format and focusing on collaborations with different creative talents. In May, Edwin Bodson was named general manager and Nina Ricci returned to the idea of a more traditional artistic direction.

"Discussions are currently taking place with various candidates. The decision should be made shortly," revealed an executive within the Puig Group.

The house is extremely discreet about this information. However, as FashionNetwork.com has learned, the choice is said to have initially fallen on Bianca Saunders. The British woman of Jamaican descent has managed to establish herself as one of the most interesting designers of the moment, reinterpreting menswear codes into a wardrobe adapted for both men and women. The 2021 Andam Prize winner was mentored for a year by Balenciaga CEO Cédric Charbit and has been parading on the Paris catwalks since January.

However, Nina Ricci is said not to have made up its mind and decided to resume the search. Various sources mention as candidates in the running, among others, EgonLab, the label of Frenchmen Florentin Glémarec and Kévin Nompeix. The two designers, who also specialize in ready-to-wear, reinterpreting tailoring with sportswear and a dash of punk, were honored last year in the Andam competition, winning the Pierre Bergé prize. They have already entered into collaborations with brands such as Sergio Tacchini or, more recently, Crocs, but are especially proactive in the metaverse and in NFTs. This could be a tipping point, as it is said that digitalization will be at the forefront of future development projects carried out by the Spanish Puig Group.

The wait should not last much longer: According to one of our sources, the next artistic director of the house should be announced in September.

*With OG and GD*

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