

People & Places



N.21



Annakiki



Benetton



Gucci



Gucci

Fashion

MILAN: Gucci creative director Alessandro Michele says the blackface controversy has had a deep impact on the company and provided a learning experience for everyone.

Michele, speaking to reporters backstage after Gucci opened Milan Fashion Week on Wednesday, said the lessons were not linked to creativity but to how the company operates. Gucci announced it would hire directors for diversity and take other measures after facing a backlash for a balaclava sweater that evoked blackface.

Michele said he took full responsibility for the misstep. He said after experiencing the "displeasure" of the controversy, "I hold on to the beauty of having learned. I learned a lot. This remains. It is not just a moment of emotion. I think it deeply affected the work of the company."

Highlights from Wednesday's shows:

Gucci

Alessandro Michele's latest collection for Gucci was shown under unrelenting, even blinding, strobe lights that the designer said in some way evoked the intensity of everyday life. A religious hymn played as the models walked deliberately, almost robotically.

Michele chose a mask as the metaphor for the collection, noting that "clothing is our mask, which both shows and hides."

The show invitation was glued inside a paper-mache mask of Hermaphrodite, a homage to his exploration of genderless dressing. "The ancient world sang about the marvels of being between two sexes. Today it is one of the more difficult masks to wear, but being a hybrid is a blessing," Michele said.

Still, the combined menswear and womenswear collection had a tougher, more masculine edge, shrinking ever so slightly from the designer's gender-bending musings of past seasons. It was at its heart the exploration of the suit, with broad shoulders and unfinished edges and a stronger silhouette.

The looks also combined a sense of protection and also aggression with spiky accents on the looks and on belts worn cross body. An elaborate ruffle and lace collar peaked out of an overcoat, worn with baggy trousers. Boyish striped sweaters tucked into patterned jeans.

For women there were pretty silken shirts with pleated peplums over straight skirts. A gray jacket featured three concentric rounded collars, like shawls, worn with trouser pants.

Gold-cast ear covers gave a theatrical accent to the looks.

Lagerfeld

Michele worked at Fendi as a young designer under Karl Lagerfeld. A day after the design legend's death, Michele recalled a man with the spirit of Peter Pan.

Michele said Lagerfeld called him "DJ" for his musical choices and insisted that the music be played at full blast.

Above and below: Models present creations by Gucci, Annakiki, Benetton, N.21, Jil Sander, Emporio Armani and Alberta Ferretti during the Milan Fashion Week, in Milan, Italy on Feb. 20. (AP)

Style



Gucci



Jil Sander



Emporio Armani



N.21



Gucci



Alberta Ferretti

with bodices and worn over stretchy jersey wear. A long Loden dress flowed monastically. Jackets belted over harlequin patterned tops and pleated business skirts.

"Literally, some of the things are my stuff. I mean this is my old tuxedo jacket when I was 18, and this is my boy scout pants from when I was a teenager. We just redid them in very feminine fabrics, and all the sudden they were working," Arbesser said.

Annakiki Chinese designer Anna Yang's Annakiki says her line speaks to dorky girls, who are imperfect and socially awkward – but are able to express their personalities through their wardrobe.

Yang's fifth collection to be shown in the Milan runway features animal prints on long, soft wool skirts worn with overcoats, a sweatshirt that can be worn also sideways, or a perfectly tailored jacket with a machine embroidered hole. Edges are left deliberately frayed.

"The season is about embracing imperfection. The designs are flawed on purpose," she said.

The collection transcends geography and speaks to millennials, who like to mix technical fabrics, like an athletic legging, with more classic fashion pieces, like a red denim jacket decorated with braids of yarn. Yang puts drama in the looks with big shoulders including a bold a woolen suit jacket with kimono cut arms with a wave-inspired sleeve and a padded peplum in a soft purple plaid.

Yang said she likes to portray imperfection and seeks diversity in her runway models, not just girls who are classically beautiful. She said that by focusing on diversity, brands can avoid cultural missteps. (AP)

cultural missteps in his collections. His inspiration is from the world around him – from the architecture outside his Milan studio, to the checkerboard tiles

of his bathroom to the durable Loden fabrics of his native Austria.

"I don't even pretend to try to go too far. I just go where I am, and what I

am surrounded with, and straightforward, honest collection, basically," Arbesser said backstage.

The color palette of the collection included muted checks in mango, lime and lavender, against larger contrasts of orange against dark blue. The contrasts playing well against the color-dotted rock-climbing wall backdrops.

The collection effused an urban modernity. Handkerchief skirts were worn with print blouses inspired by an abacus. Ribbed knitwear featured ruffle-y edges down the sleeves and long the hems. T-shirt dresses were overlaid