

Rome on the Runway: Performing Fashion in the City of Rome

Fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld set his Cruise 2018 show for Chanel in the ruins of Ancient Greece with replicas of ancient temples recreated in the Grand Palais in Paris. Designs for the show included dresses that looked like vases worthy of space in a museum and models wore high heels that resembled ancient columns. Although this show is one of the clearest recent examples of the intersection of the ancient world and modern fashion design, it is not the only one. Ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt have long served as inspiration for fashion designers and in recent years labels have showcased more and more pieces with references to antiquity. Likewise, seasonal fashion shows situated in ancient sites have become somewhat regular events. The year 2019 alone saw the following examples: a Chanel show held at the Temple of Dendur at the Metropolitan Museum of Art with Egyptian-inspired clothing, jewelry, and makeup; Dolce and Gabbana at Agrigento; Fendi at the Temple of Venus and Rome; Gucci in the Capitoline Museum; Gucci's advertising campaign in Selinunte; a Gucci lookbook photographed at Pompeii and Herculaneum. The list above from this year alone is not exhaustive.

As this trend has started to increase in the world of fashion, recent scholarship in Classics has started to engage more fully with this area of classical reception studies (on individual fashion shows and/or designers, see Bièvre-Perrin and Besnard (2017); Blouin (2019); Platt (2016); Renault (2018); Ronnick (2005); on fashion and Classics more broadly, see Raucci (2020)). While much work remains to be done on the designs themselves, this aspect will not be the focus of this paper. Rather, it proposes to consider one small piece of the connection between Classics and fashion: how the ancient city of Rome has been used as the site of fashion performance. In recent years, a number of well-known designers have utilized multiple spaces in

the city to hold fashion shows, fashion retrospectives, celebratory events, and other exhibitions. This presentation will examine how these spaces and monuments of ancient Rome have been turned into artistic venues for modern audiences to participate in multi-temporal immersive experiences. The paper will consider issues of space and memory and the use of cultural sites by fashion labels for purposes of marketing.

The sites to be discussed include the Roman Forum, in particular the Temple of Venus and Rome, the Ara Pacis, a mithraeum, and the Capitoline Museum. Recordings of fashion shows and museum openings, published interviews with the designers themselves (including Alessandro Michele, Maria Grazia Chiuri, and Pierpaolo Piccioli) and images and videos from advertising campaigns, will be studied.

Bibliography

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