



16th INTERNATIONAL TEXTILE AND FASHION CONFERENCES

MASTER CLASS OF JULIEN DOSSENA

Friday April 22, 2016 / 17h00

With **Julien Dossena**, Artistic Director, Paco Rabanne and **Sylvia Jorif**, Journalist, French Elle

Jean-Pierre Blanc, Director of Villa Noailles

Welcome everybody to this new edition of the International Fashion and Textile Conferences that our president Didier Grumbach created 16 years ago. Last year you will remember that we started with Karl Lagerfeld in an in-depth discussion on great fashion designers. Along with Pascal Morand, Executive President of the Fédération Française de la Couture, we decided to continue these discussions by inviting Julien Dossena, Art Director of the Paco Rabanne House and President of this year's jury. Ten years ago, Julien was awarded the Festival Prize in Hyeres. And it's as President that he is back with us today. I thank him warmly for accepting this task. I'm happy that the Conferences, organised with the support of Defi and the collaboration of the French Fashion Institute (IFM), have reached such a scale and that there are so many people here this afternoon to come and listen to Julien Dossena, accompanied by Sylvia Jorif, journalist at Elle magazine.

Sylvia Jorif

I have the pleasant responsibility of interviewing Julien who I've been following for a long time and who I admire a lot. Julien, could you tell us what has happened to you over the last ten years since you were awarded the special prize of the jury and the 1,2,3 prize?

Julien Dossena

Many things! For me the Festival was an essential springboard to launch my young career and the prize got me my first job and helped finance my first project and studies. I'm very happy and proud to be back here as President of the jury. There's the same energy and relaxed atmosphere there was back then. The force of expression of the candidates has already impressed me and their passion for fashion and desire to move forward is catching.

Sylvia Jorif

In what way did winning the award help you?

Julien Dossena

I had won the “1.2.3 prize”, awarded by the Etam group and so I had to design a capsule collection for them. It was my very first job which I took on while continuing my studies. This first collection led to a second one, but this time it was produced outside the scope of the Festival. And then shortly afterwards I ended up at Balenciaga. I tend to believe that in view of the dozens of candidates for the job, the Hyeres Festival calling card was decisive in my getting taken on.

Sylvia Jorif

What are your thoughts on the candidates of this 2016 edition? Have you noted major differences? Have they, for example, integrated an economic strategy into their approach, or has the Festival remained first and foremost, a platform for pure creativity?

Julien Dossena

Hyères is firstly a venue fostering creativity and it's very important that it should remain as such so that people can express themselves while remaining detached from commercial and marketing contingencies: the candidates will soon have to face them anyway.

Yes, I found the same freedom of expression that was here 10 years ago, the same types of personality, passionate, with a compelling urgency and will to assert themselves through fashion. But then, their questions are necessarily different, things having changed so much in the world. I'm thinking for instance of the issue of ecology that we did address at the time but in a more superficial way. These considerations are more noticeable in their work; they are more committed. Some are more concerned with the digital world and narcissism or how this can be incorporated into the clothes.

The themes change but the passion remains unchanged.

Sylvia Jorif

For two and a half years you've been artistic director at Paco Rabanne. How do you revive such a brand, a name deeply rooted in a particular period? How do you take over a fashion house like that?

Julien Dossena

Paco Rabanne is unique in the Parisian fashion landscape. It has strong values – modernity, innovation – that are synonyms of truly radical concepts. This is unusual and that's what I like... to the point that between the house and myself, things immediately worked out. Since the house had ceased to exist for a long time, I had the freedom to consider it as a blank half-page. My work as artistic director consisted in bringing my personal touch to the values of the brand. Instead of bringing them back to the surface and reusing them, I chose to ask myself what Paco Rabanne would have done today. What kind of image, what materials would he have used to create today's Paco Rabanne woman? The house having had a fairly short life, there was less pressure: the past weighed less heavily on the present.

Sylvia Jorif

You rather seem to be following up an ideology with very precise codes, mesh dresses, rhodoid plastic discs, etc. How can you strike the right balance between your own style and factors that are labelled to the point that they scream their designer's name? Between loyalty and distance?

Julien Dossena

You have to create links between the affinities that you can naturally have with the original brand. Paco Rabanne managed to reach out to the younger generation of the 60s by saying that fashion was an art form in its own right. He had a utopian vision of aesthetics in general. He hung around Dali, Amanda Lear and the rest. He belonged to a genuine artistic gang which shared this vision.

What I'm trying to create is also this Paco Rabanne woman who is active, fast, up with and even ahead of her time. Afterwards, in design itself, more obvious visual links, notably graphic, architectural and with a certain degree of purity are imposed on us. The product, the clothing must find its place on the market but also convey values, a certain idea of this desirable and modern Paco Rabanne woman who had disappeared.

Sylvia Jorif

How is this woman? What makes her different from other women?

Julien Dossena

She is many-sided, active, accessible and capable, like Françoise Hardy and Jane Birkin used to do, of imposing her style at parties, on television, in the street. I was fascinated by this ability to look very natural in the most outrageous outfits and combinations of clothes. What's more, this type of fashion was very easy to promote in television programmes in which French singing stars could wear Paco Rabanne designs as though it were the most natural thing in the world. From her own home, my grandmother in Brittany could watch Françoise Hardy wearing a dress made of hinged plates and think it was great! Despite a few protests, this avant-garde aspect was very quickly taken on board in the world of pop. It was fashion that was both conceptual and radical, but at the end, easy to wear.

Sylvia Jorif

When you first saw them, those metal dresses seemed like straightjackets or armour. Apparently this wasn't the case at all. From what you are saying, these clothes which stressed cut-out parts, had something to say about reflected human anatomy, paradoxically by highlighting the body and movement.

Julien Dossena

Absolutely. Amid all that conceptual questioning that went on the 60s, Paco Rabanne was the only one to come up with a different kind of sensuality, a highly industrialised sensuality. The mesh got much lighter when they started making it out of aluminium rather than steel. Now you can work with it as though it were a liquid that reveals the body as much as it covers it. Paco Rabanne was the only one to express sexuality in his designs of the period.

Sylvia Jorif

I have seen this tendency in your fashion shows, in coats and dresses with highly structured appliqué work that follows the body's lines.

Julien Dossena

Absolutely, and there is movement too. Yes, how can we now reproduce the anatomical relationship Paco Rabanne had with the body in his 3D clothes? That's why I'm interested in sports clothes where the appliqué work is designed to make movements. The Paco Rabanne woman should move – in my opinion the greatest luxury should give her a certain degree of comfort, with a bit of mesh, a bit of edging under a sleeve, for example. Luxury clothes should look active, they should move rapidly.

Sylvia Jorif

What does mesh now mean in your work as a designer?

Julien Dossena

We mainly use it as the house's signature. I didn't want us to stay a niche brand only allowed to make evening or cocktail dresses. It's not for the woman who buys a single Paco Rabanne dress while the rest of her wardrobe remains standard! I really wanted Paco Rabanne to become a possible general wardrobe and therefore wanted it to grow.

Then comes the question of how to incorporate the image in a collection so that mesh is one possibility among many. I started by including a bit in a look, then superimposing them under sports dresses or incorporating them into mini-skirts with coats. The idea was to train customers to make the mesh their own by offering trousers that matched the top, etc. That was the first challenge. The second was to rework the mesh by bringing the techniques Paco Rabanne used up to date. Finding a super-hippie look using wooden beads, a more graphic sixties mesh, a printed mesh that gave a more grungy look and so on. It is interesting to take up all these techniques again, particularly because they have changed a lot.

Having said that, I really want it to be there as a signature in the collection and not dominate the entire brand.

Sylvia Jorif

You start with evening and cocktail dresses to integrate them into real life. Is sportswear now fully integrated into fashion?

Julien Dossena

It's how looks change, you just have to look around you. Women take their children to school then go on to work. After work they go to their yoga classes and in the evening, before going home, they have a drink together. They have very active lives and their looks change and adapt according to their circumstances. There are many complex pressures at work on them. One day you see a woman wearing leather boots and Nike leggings, a more masculine coat with a shirt... I'm interested in working on that sort of look at Paco Rabanne. I try in my designs to evoke this multi-function, multi-activity woman by incorporating this sportswear look in our collections.

Sylvia Jorif

Do you still get inspiration from what you see in the street?

Julien Dossena

Of course! Street looks change very subtly. I'm not particularly interested in the most powerfully asserted or branded looks. I am more interested in those special moments when, for example, you see 10 different women wearing Uniqlo down vests under a dinner jacket and jeans. The vest is sleeveless so you can wear it with a jacket which gives you a street look combined with something more formal that can be tweaked to wear to work or for the other activities we were talking about earlier. It's really this sort of look that is dictated by everyday life that interests me. What's more, they are easier to rework and make our own.

Sylvia Jorif

After leaving Balenciaga you launched your own brand which you later put on hold. Do you have any plans to revive it?

Julien Dossena

I launched my own brand at virtually the same time as I joined Paco Rabanne. I was therefore dealing with two different brands at the same stage of development. As I didn't want to do anything by halves, I decided to concentrate on being artistic director at Paco Rabanne. It wasn't anything to do with workload but with wanting to concentrate on just one thing.

I certainly intend to relaunch my own brand in the long term, in a year or eighteen months' time. My work of identification with Paco Rabanne is now coming to fruition with consumers and the press; the foundations have been laid so that I can envisage returning to something more personal.

Sylvia Jorif

Do you want to take it up again through a need to express yourself?

Julien Dossena

Being an artistic director is a way of expressing yourself in its own right. You create what you think is right for a modern brand in terms of aesthetic and visual offers.

My own brand offered something very different.

That said, working in several different areas means there is cross-fertilisation between the activities you undertake.

Yes, I'll relaunch my own brand when I'm ready.

Sylvia Jorif

Do you ever find it frustrating to feel you are following in somebody else's footsteps?

Julien Dossena

On the contrary, it's something I'm proud of. It can also be a driving force. As one of my problems is a tendency to be hyperactive, it helps me concentrate.

Sylvia Jorif

Concerning Paco Rabanne's strategic development, I'd like to discuss the shop you've just opened in Rue Cambon. It opened in January around a publicity campaign. Why now?

Julien Dossena

We relaunched Paco Rabanne two and a half years ago. At the beginning we needed to set up the product, a new wholesale network and, more generally, reposition the Paco Rabanne brand in the current fashion landscape. Now that the first challenge is behind us, the idea is to work on globalising the brand. Opening the shop is part of the work by creating a location where the Paco Rabanne woman can develop. The choice of Paris and this rather classic neighbourhood was obvious because we want Paco Rabanne to be seen as a Parisian luxury brand. This should also enable the shop to be successful: the location is crucial because we are at the crossroads with Rue Saint-Honoré, in other words a place where there is a lot of traffic and passing trade. A young designer would set up in le Marais for example, but when you relaunch a famous fashion house it's better to choose a classic location. In other words, we're not trying to be trendy. It's not what characterises the firm and it's not the image we want to convey. In the long term it's very important to position yourself correctly.

Sylvia Jorif

Visually, the shop with its metal grids is very typical, original...

Julien Dossena

We worked with Belgian architects – it was their first shop – with whom we wanted to express something very radical, suggesting new ways of buying clothing. It was pointless opening a 200m² store; we wanted to open a more intimate, changeable place, the appearance of which could be modified every three months. The shop is based on this modular principle. The fact of having a sudden urge to buy new clothes shouldn't change as the seasons turn round. We also set up delivery groups and exclusivities. We focused on making the place come to life by using several different selling techniques, and sell efficiently.

Sylvia Jorif

In that, you are very faithful to Paco Rabanne who was fascinated by multimedia and attracted by many forms of expression, including dance, namely hip hop.

Julien Dossena

Absolutely. He was very popular, very innovative in terms of distribution, with the discs he used to provide with a magazine to make your own Paco Rabanne dress. These ways of selling are all part of the brand's identity.

Six months ago we discussed the way in which we could offer four different looks for sale at the show. Now we can do it with the shop. With this in mind, we have also created a partnership with Barneys. Rapidity, efficiency and innovation must also be expressed in merchandising and marketing. A year ago we thought about the "see now, buy now" proposal, thinking that women

who come to the fashion show may want to buy the coat they see immediately. Today several major brands are interested in this approach.

Sylvia Jorif

Could you tell us about the publicity campaign to promote the shop? The photos are really beautiful and daring with a dress positioned there...

Julien Dossena

We wanted to evoke a Paco Rabanne lifestyle by recreating a place where women could live. We worked with Dutch photographers on a slightly modified version of still life where the product is not displayed classically, i.e. in the foreground. We needed to get away from the standard fashion images that we're bombarded with day in and day out in magazines, bus shelters, Internet, etc. The idea was to stand out from the mass of images in order to draw attention in a different way by offering genuine graphic compositions. We're pleased because it worked well.

Sylvia Jorif

As President of the Jury, you chose close friends, people you work with or admire. Why did you choose these particular people?

Julien Dossena

Nothing happens in a vacuum. It is therefore very important for me to be in a sort of community of taste, opinions and desires and to be able to compare my visions with theirs. Also to begin working with some of them, to make progress on various fronts.

Sylvia Jorif

The jury you've got together is very multimedia: photographers, a shoemaker, musicians like Surkin, etc.

Julien Dossena

I wanted the composition of the jury to be as eclectic as the selection of candidates. It gave me an overview of the challenges facing young designers today. The members of the jury have a specific point of view of their discipline, and also opinions that may be very radical and cultivated on others such as fashion. Objectively, it could help me understand the impact a fashion collection has on the representatives of the different forms of artistic expression. It was more interesting than discussing solely with insiders. Even though the members of the jury come from different walks of life, they know what you need in order to progress in this industry.

From the floor, Stéphane Wagnier, Director of the 4th year of studies, Ecole de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne

You've mentioned branding but not the importance of the image of perfume, which does, however, have a greater capacity communicating. What role does it play? How does it work internally?

Julien Dossena

At the beginning we did of course ask those questions. The re-creation of the fashion house was based on the stimulus of perfume. It no longer existed whereas perfumes continued to be sold and sold well. Our first customers were slightly disconnected from the image of perfume because we have relaunched the fashion brand positioning ourselves henceforth at the top of the pyramid. They didn't see the link, for example, between the coat on sale at Barneys and "One Million", for example, that you can find at Sephora. Today perfume contributes to this effort to globalise the brand in order to create a complete, strong entity. We are working on it but the fashion and perfume industries evolve at different rhythms; perfume takes longer. It can therefore take several years to link communications between the two worlds. I've already reviewed the graphic charter in order to harmonise the posters for perfume and clothing. Visually they are gradually becoming linked. It will take a few years.

The image of our perfume continued to change even when the fashion-house no longer existed. And at present, the clienteles are still very different. One of the main challenges Paco Rabanne will face in coming years will be to bring them together.

From the floor, Lyne Cohen-Solal, in charge of the Fashion Mission by the French Minister of Culture

Opening the shop in Rue Cambon may be a great opportunity but it's also risky. Even though it may be a bit early, I'd like to know what your initial evaluations of the spinoffs are.

Julien Dossena

Before we even discussed sales or commercial spinoffs we wanted to identify our panel of customers directly. The sales flow for wholesale was very acceptable, to the extent that the shop is less a mere way of selling than a means for measuring who's coming to buy what: why? How old they are? Are the customers at the Rue Cambon shop relatively international, tourists, or those we would like to reach, namely young Parisian women coming to buy earrings or a € 2,000 coat? The feedback from shops is quick and accurate. I'll be able to tell you more in six months' time.

Customers who usually buy luxury clothes are understandably in the 30 to 40 age bracket. Those of an earlier generation will be more tempted by a scarf or another initial entry level purchase.

What is perhaps surprising is that a lot of men come to buy parkas and coats – we have a good throughput of stock – and scarves. Men who are clearly fashion-conscious, who buy for themselves. This will perhaps encourage us to produce collections for men.

The shop is a very interesting tool for developing the brand.