

Architects and Designers Reinterpret a Prada Classic: Nylon



Image

CreditKevin Tachman

By Laura Rysman

Jan. 18, 2018

“The world will be saved by intelligence and the humanity of generous people, and possibly love,” Miuccia Prada told reporters after her men’s fall/winter 2018 show, held in a Milan warehouse on Sunday. “But of course the aesthetic helps.” As ever, the designer remained focused on the state of society in her collection. She sent models down the runway in workers’ uniforms and armloads of bags, all in the key of Prada: padded, artfully cut and in the shiny black pocone nylon that first established the designer’s reputation as a contrarian oracle of fashion.

In the years after Prada took over the luggage-making company her grandfather had founded in 1913, she introduced radical new offerings: a line of clothing, a collection of shoes and then bags recast in the unlikely anti-luxury material of nylon. Eventually her Vela nylon backpack came to define the cerebral, minimalist style of the ’90s. “I am in love with black nylon,” Prada announced backstage, expressing passion for its “utilitarian tone and industrial aspect.”

In her latest interpretation of the material, Prada asked the architects Rem Koolhaas and Herzog & de Meuron — with whom she collaborates regularly — to design something in nylon for the show, and to select another talent from their

field to do the same. They chose, respectively, the German designer Konstantin Grcic and the French designers Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec. T spoke to each of them about their designs.



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Herzog & de Meuron: A Printed Shirt

“Printing is transformative,” Jacques Herzog told T backstage post-show. After all, his buildings are often clad in printed, ornamental facades. The architect interpreted Prada’s nylon with a dense barrage of black text on a white background — which he explained was inspired by the age of fake news. He said the piece reflected “the increasing disappearance of text as a reliable medium of communication,” but also echoed the architectural ornamentation associated with the firm’s structures. “Miuccia is such an intellectually daring person,” he added, alluding to their 17-year working relationship, which includes Prada’s Tokyo tower and New York headquarters. “Her designs really are *fashion*, but they somehow also reflect the life we’re surrounded with of politics, culture and radical transformations in the world. We work in a similar way in our own field, and now, we’re trying out her field of fashion.”

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Rem Koolhaas: A Frontpack

“In a long-term collaboration, it’s not the profession that counts, but the sensibility, and we share a sensibility,” Koolhaas said over the phone from New York. With his firm OMA, Koolhaas has created everything from buildings to runway sets to fabric for the brand in the past. Citing the “inconvenience and slowness” of conventional backpacks, which must be removed to locate possessions, Koolhaas solved the problem with a frontpack — a provocatively strange yet stunningly sensible solution imbued with the dual concepts of civility and liberty he explores in his architecture. But creating the project alone with just scissors, tape and cardboard was a joyous escape from architecture and its teams of associates, Koolhaas said. “Architecture takes five years. In fashion something amazing can be ready in just 24 hours. I’ve always had a slight fashion envy because of that speed.”

Image



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Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec: A Portfolio Case

“I didn’t want to do a fashion project, but this is more of an object,” Ronan Bouroullec said after the show. Along with his brother Erwan, he imagined a nylon portfolio for their first collaboration with Prada. “It’s linked to my memory of carrying a portfolio as a student.” Purified but playfully poetic like all of the duo’s design work, the sleek case came in multiple sizes — from a small envelope to a large blueprint-sized format, the latter of which appeared in the show. It’s accented with pops of color in the form of functional elastic bands, eyelets and bindings of crosshatched Saffiano leather that Mario Prada invented a century ago — a chromatic and softly padded update to the plain cardboard one from Bouroullec’s school days.

Image



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Konstantin Grcic: A Fisherman's Apron

Absorbed by the concept of functionality, Konstantin Grcic imagined pockets, lots of pockets, for his first-ever project with Prada. “I wanted a fishing vest in nylon based on the one [Joseph Beuys](#) always wore that his wife custom-made for him — but more abstract,” he explained backstage. The result was an unusual side-slung apron piece, tied at the waist and plotted with pockets of all sizes. A version not shown on the runway turns the concept into a frontal vest attached to the body by a hood. “It’s fun to put your mind to creating something in a new category,” Grcic said, then clarified: “Not fun — it’s enjoyable and it’s satisfactory, and it works well with a partner as meticulous as Prada.”