

Episode 1: Fashion Design

Transcript of the first episode of the podcast The Gianfranco Ferré Lesson titled “Fashion Design”. MOOC “Unfolding Gianfranco Ferré”, Polimi Open Knowledge, Politecnico di Milano.

This is “The Gianfranco Ferré Lesson”, a podcast curated by the Gianfranco Ferré Research Center, dedicated to revisiting notes, lectures, and conference texts delivered by the designer throughout his career. Each episode explores a different theme through the words of Gianfranco Ferré himself, enriched by references to books and writings that expand on his vision, along with a rich visual archive that transforms words into images and visual concepts.

In the first episode, Fashion Design, Gianfranco Ferré reflects on the role of the fashion designer, the need for discipline within creative work, and the deep connection between fashion, art, architecture, history, and culture.

There are several distinctive characteristics that make fashion design different from other sectors of design. Alongside factory-made fashion – the so-called ready-to-wear – there is the sector of haute couture, high fashion with its exceptional expressive possibilities. For the Gianfranco Ferré Haute Couture collections and in Christian Dior’s atelier I had the unique opportunity to operate in an authentic and extraordinary artisan workshop, in which I could try out structural and material ideas that were sometimes then transferred into ready-to-wear.

So, what are the distinctive features of industrial design in fashion? First and foremost, it can be described as continuous design, meaning that the creative process unfolds seamlessly, garment after garment, collection after collection. Continuous design in fashion somewhat mirrors artistic research, much like a painter who progresses through their journey, work after work, achieving ever-new results while maintaining the coherence of a unique and individual style. The goal of design is not simply the object itself, the garment as such, but rather, through the garment, it aims to influence individual behavior and taste.

The designer, like the conductor of an orchestra, must propose and oversee the “interpretation of the style score”, encompassing, among other things, the essential aspects of distribution and image diffusion. Hence, the style project develops as a truly global message, distinguished by a strong coherence of sensibility. One can speak of “styles” in fashion. The most significant interpreters of style – those who drive its evolution – offer men and women a range, a choice of “parallel styles”, all “in fashion”, yet all distinct from one another. At certain times, I found myself working on two different styles, following two distinct identity paths: that of Gianfranco Ferré and that of Christian Dior.

Drawing from this experience – sometimes exhausting – I allow myself to offer an important piece of advice: maintain a disciplined approach to work. When designing, and bringing a dream to life

on paper, we must never forget that our sketch is meant for production. One must have an inner formula, a personal way of expressing and analyzing ideas. And above all, one must never stop.

Thinking about a garment means taking an interest in the history of the man or woman who will wear it – in their past and their future. To create means, above all, to be in harmony with oneself. And when success comes, one must learn to keep it at a distance, or risk being overwhelmed by it. The moment you become aware of success, you are already a victim. Success, therefore, must remain at the door. As for me, I have managed to find balance because I have always fiercely protected my private life. The fashion world creates stars that fade if they do not shine with their own light.

I have never betrayed my “origins” as an architect, nor have I ever stopped being a designer of objects throughout these years, and I have lived extraordinary experiences in haute couture: I know that this journey will help me understand the future and interpret it with fantasy. The need to “capture” a first impression leads me to sketch quickly – a few strokes, precise and essential, a silhouette defined by its key points – the shoulders, the waist, the legs extending across the page – enclosed within diagonals and parallels. Just a few lines, yet already a figure: not a motionless dress hanging on a rack, but a living garment, brought to life by movement and stride.

I hope to have conveyed the fundamental principle of how important it is to “live fashion” as a sum of experiences and skills – as passion and attentiveness to reality, as a capacity for application and inventiveness, as love and a desire to understand the past and tradition, without feeling bound to uncritically reproduce styles and forms that no longer belong to our time. Fashion also draws nourishment from diverse experiences – from knowledge gained in other fields of human creativity, primarily art, but also from different moments in history, other parts of the world, and various cultural contexts. Without indulging in nostalgia, my style embraces broad and far-reaching influences. These influences evoke the visual arts – from the grandeur of classical painting to the raw intensity of modern sensibilities; from the worlds and cultures I have encountered and cherish – first and foremost, the East, with India, China, and Japan – to the great cultural movements of our past – Baroque, Neoclassicism, and Romanticism. And finally, my work is enriched by the great lessons in elegance, encompassing legendary names such as Dior, Balenciaga, and Worth, as well as the shared heritage of craftsmanship and refinement that defines European style.

As an architect, I argue that fashion is design – since it is the act of transformation that moves from the idea to the object – and that the relationship between architecture and fashion is very close. At first glance, architecture is hard and garments are soft, but even when garments are soft, I design for something hard and definitive: the human body.

Sources

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