

Episode 2: Ferré's Lexicon

Transcript of the second episode of the podcast The Gianfranco Ferré Lesson titled “Ferre’s Lexicon”. 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 second episode, “Ferré’s Lexicon”, Gianfranco Ferré explores the stylistic codes and technical constructions that define his design methodology – one that, through shapes, materials, and colors, evolves into an expressive and identity-defining language.

How does a collection come to life? Naturally, many factors must be taken into consideration. A collection is born from desire, from my desire in that moment. When I take a pencil and a piece of paper, I don’t have a precise idea of what I want, there is only a pressing need for something. I’m not thinking of a specific garment, but rather of attitudes, ways of moving, ideas of movement.

Creating fashion is certainly an act of imagination, a display of sensitivity and intuition, but it also requires a solid method, an approach to design rooted in the idea of the garment as the result of a conscious and deliberate intervention on forms. It’s a construction process that begins in two dimensions – the project as drawn on paper – but with the human body always as the absolute reference point from the very start.

Every day, my work leads me to engage with forms, those of the human body and those of the materials I use to “build” the garment-object, forms that I align and make compatible with each other. Designing clothes means composing and decomposing forms, analyzing and understanding them, and using and selecting them to achieve a desired effect. Like an architect, I must think and act within the spatial dimension. Composing means expressing a unique and original expression that connects content to form. The research that drives me to conceive garments in their individuality and collections in their overall articulation involves processing inspirations and ideas from various origins and natures. These inspirations stem first and foremost from a precise awareness of the reality of our time: creating fashion does not mean detaching oneself or retreating into an ivory tower to indulge in a sterile and elitist sense of beauty. Fashion exists in the real world – it expresses it and draws content from it.

I consider the search for an effect to be crucial, as the origin and initial spark of inspiration for the garment itself. This search can lead, for example, to imagining the garment as a splash of color, a glimmer of light that shifts with the body’s movement, an illusory and alchemical play of materials,

an elusive silhouette defined only by its symbiotic overlap with the figure and its natural forms, or an emphasized detail intended to lend a sense of uniqueness to the garment's overall linearity. It's the pursuit of an effect as a creative stimulus, as the expression of an illusionary game that never loses touch with reality.

It would be naïve to think that a collection can be based solely on inspiration or even a brilliant idea. The material, the grain of the fabric, the weave, all impose a form. If we consider the usual steps of the design process, it begins with selecting fabrics a few months ahead of the collection. These fabrics were created about a year earlier either in Italy, Switzerland, Lyon, or Scotland... based on our guidelines, the research is oriented around suggested themes. Occasionally, a fabric comes directly from the manufacturer, and we simply select it. But in general, it is I who communicate my desires to the producers.

Even the word "inspiration" is somewhat misplaced in fashion. Creating clothing is, above all, a reflection. After all, Monsieur Dior once said that fabric is the only vehicle for our dreams. It can spark ideas. And I admit that some designs originate entirely from fabric. Still, one must resist overly seductive fabrics that may trap a design and prove unusable. I can't stress enough that the designer's imagination and creativity are the true engines of creation. But we mustn't forget that it is the public who ultimately decides fashion's fate, in harmony with the spirit of the times.

I believe it's essential to absorb certain stimuli, to feed on suggestions and impressions, to treasure varied and multifaceted influences in order to shape a personal expressive code. A personal lexicon, an alphabet, a coherent and organized stylistic code that can manifest in countless variations, evolve over time, absorb new influences, and yet remain true to itself. This is the Ferré lexicon: the constant presence of tailoring in both women's and men's collections, a passion for pure and absolute colors, a love for noble and important materials enriched by ongoing experimentation and innovation, and the intelligent play between masculine and feminine. It's the joy of rediscovering timeless elements in each collection that convey a strong sense of continuity, linearity, and fidelity to a certain idea of beauty: white shirts, slim trousers, transparency, "masculine" jackets and suits, bold yet soft leather, body-enhancing dresses, and the pleasures of red and gold.

Colors are a natural and essential part of this lexicon. Purposeful and necessary, Ferré colors have a consistent character over time, though capable of endless variations season after season. On clearly defined foundations, one sees new shades and reflections, surprising tones and nuances that form a richly layered lexicon of their own, one that expresses energy, poetry, magic, seduction, and purity. Against those clear foundations move absolute colors and non-colors alike. My timeless colors – white, black, red, blue, natural tones, and gold – are accompanied from season to season by metallic flashes, the deep reflections of gemstones, bursts of energetic hues, and the delicate gradients of dawn and flowers. Because composing also means having the ability to constantly surprise.

Sources

Transcription of the lecture "Composition and fashion". Milan, 14th March 1997, Politecnico di Milano. Seminar of the course in Theories and Techniques of Architecture titled "Composition in the Practice of Art".

Gianfranco Ferré, *Lettres à un jeune couturier*, Editions Balland, Paris, 1995.