

Institutional Greetings

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The birth of Italian Fashion and its vocations

Italian fashion — in the most modern sense of industry for clothing/elegance and more in general of industry for beauty and lifestyle culture — first came to life in Florence in the 1950's with Giovanni Battista Giorgini.

Retracing the work of “Bista” Giorgini, at least three features of Italian fashion from its origins to present-day times clearly emerge; one might even say three “vocations”:

1. An international vocation that immediately made Italian fashion stand out. At the time of Giorgini, the reference was mainly the rich, dynamic, and modern market of North America. This vocation however needed the support of a specific place that could provide concrete results: that place became Florence.

Why Florence?

Because Florence, along with Rome and Venice, has always been a city symbolic of Italy, culture, and Italian beauty around the world.

Because Florence has always had a network of artisanal workshops and small businesses that work in this kind of industry.

Because, for these two reasons and even before the war, Florence was headquarters to important international buying offices (with Giorgini's professional experience beginning in one of these offices).

2. A vocation for innovation: innovation of style, products, processes, social references, etc... It's no coincidence that this vocation emerged in this exact historical moment: post-war.

Why in the 50's?

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Because post-war recovery encouraged a powerful and widespread desire to innovate in terms of economy, culture, and daily life.

Because the idea of fashion itself began to change starting at that time: it was no longer a possibility for just a privileged few but could increasingly be accessed by many; it was no longer a traditional artisanal business, but an increasingly modern industrial activity; and it was no longer only a functional expression of the individual, but increasingly a cultural and communicative one.

Between the 50's and 60's, there was a gradual transition from the world of Haute Couture to that of Prêt-à-Porter, from the culture of the "tailor" to that of "stylist", from the individual artisanal workshop to the creation of different territorial districts and a complete industrial supply chain.

3. A vocation for the cultural and lifestyle dimension: culture just like style and the overall life experience of which fashion is one of the most efficient, creative, and popular languages. Giorgini, strong from his comprehensive experience as a buyer for the USA market (already starting in the 30's) manages to have a key role.

Why with Giorgini?

Giorgini is the person who is knowledgeable or at least has an intuitive understanding of these important combined processes of change. Giorgini is a man who straddles the transition from one period to the next.

Giorgini is familiar with the North American market, understands the psychology of its buyers, and knows what marketing and communication are: he knows he is selling not only clothing, improved wearability, functionality, and technical and creative quality at lower prices, but also a new idea of fashion and the highest expressions of culture, beauty, and quality life that a city like Florence and all of Italy can transmit.

Additionally, Giorgini was the first to intercept the sociological changes underway in North American post-war society: women involved in wartime efforts, who undertook an active role in factories, offices, and volunteer work, did their best to maintain this active profile even once the war was over and their wardrobes needed to adapt to a new social life, with new hours and ways from those of the past. In this sense, the true competitiveness of Italian fashion, when compared to French fashion which had dominated the scene up until then, is underlined.

France — which up until that point had been synonymous with international quality fashion — is less ready than we are to intercept these transformations (maybe because its fashion had always been strictly defined in terms of Haute Couture). Plus, its fashion's public of reference is more limited with higher costs for the North American market.

The founding of CFMI

The great work done by Giorgini serves as the basis for the founding of CFMI in 1954, with the City of Florence and other territorial institutions among its founding partners. It is precisely in Florence during those years (from 1951 to 1957 and then again from 1961 to 1965) that Giorgio la Pira is mayor, a "Saint Mayor", but also a pragmatic man with an eye to renewal (he brings Enrico Mattei's ENI to "Nuovo Pignone") and a strong international vision, who will look favorably upon the initiative of Giorgini. CFMI's activities in the early 80's give birth to "Pitti Immagine", launching a trade fair format dedicated to Fashion and Lifestyle that is one-of-a-kind worldwide, which has faithfully kept alive the sparks first set off by Giorgini 30 years ago.

The legacy of Giorgini today

The international, innovative, cultural, and lifestyle vocation of Italian fashion remains. Today, it will have to be reformulated to become even stronger, in a completely different context from that of Giorgini in the 1950's and 60's:

- in a “world/market” that is no longer limited to North America, but which is now global and multipolar;
- with an innovation that branches out into many interconnected trends and with an extremely diversified public of end consumers; which sees the digitalization of fundamental processes along its long and complex supply chain; and which considers ecological and social sustainability to be its main challenge.

From Giorgini — especially in a period as difficult as this one — we must rediscover the lively intelligence of change, dynamism, perseverance, and optimism, as well as the perpetual idea of international fashion's ever-evolving connection with culture, art, and all the other creative languages and industrial sectors.

As for those of us in Florence, standing strong is the idea that our city always keep pace with the spirit of modernity of which fashion is a herald.