

Redefining Inclusivity: Media Representation and Art Direction in the Works of Rambaldi and Magliano

Filippo Maria Disperati^a

Denis Domenichetti^{* a}

^a Università della Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli" (IT)

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Introduction

In recent years, the debate on inclusive fashion has gained increasing importance in the fashion system, not just as a mere aesthetic trend, but as a real tool for cultural and political redefinition.¹ In Italy, a new wave of designers is breaking from luxury norms, embracing inclusive, body-celebrating narratives. Fashion today is interpreted not only as an expressive form of style or aesthetic principle, but as a complex cultural language that shapes our conceptions of body, gender and identity.² For this reason, the clothed body has become a “mobile social space”,³ steeped in norms, symbols and contrasts, where the meeting point between the individual and society occurs — that is — between personal expression and shared cultural patterns. From this perspective, fashion represents a focal point where the body is both visible and disciplined, but also a potential tool for negotiation and rebellion. In the wake of Butler’s theory,⁴ thus introducing the idea of performativity, in which gender is understood as an effect created by repeated, codified actions rooted in history — and how these actions can be reversed, opening up spaces for nonconforming identities⁵ — it is possible to develop a reflection on the spatial and affective orientation of queer bodies. In recent years, in fact, the fashion shows of brands such as Gucci, Balenciaga, Schiaparelli, and Miu Miu, have proposed stylistic elements traceable to queer — and, in particular,

* ✉ denis.domenichetti@unicampania.it

1. Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
2. Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).
3. *Ibid.*
4. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
5. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

drag culture — characterized by exaggerated volumes, theatrical make-up, and an aesthetic that plays with gender ambiguity.⁶ However, this phenomenon raises complex questions about cultural appropriation and representation of gender identity.⁷ While mainstream fashion has helped give visibility to queer culture, there is a risk of reducing inclusivity to an aesthetic strategy devoid of political meaning.⁸ In this regard, some critics point out how the fashion industry tends to capitalize on aesthetics born in marginalized contexts without fully recognizing their history and meaning, in favor of market logic, thus negating the disruptive power of the original message.⁹ Queer fashion, more than other declinations of diversity fashion, is configured as a critical practice that acts simultaneously on the aesthetic, affective, and political levels, operating through strategies of disidentification and symbolic renegotiation, and producing “cheerfully resistant” aesthetics capable of challenging the normative codes of gender and sexuality.¹⁰ Moreover, queer fashion offers a paradigmatic example of what we can call “performative inclusiveness”: not a top-down gesture of recognition, but an embodied, material, collective practice capable of functioning as a site of political agency only if it involves communities represented not only as objects, but as co-authors of meaning and aesthetics.¹¹ It is precisely in this direction that the projects of Marco Rambaldi and Luca Magliano move: their visual languages propose a radical rewriting of bodies, codes and affects the Italian fashion system. Both active in Bologna and deeply connected to the social and cultural fabric of the city, the two designers offer different styles, which, however, complement each other. On the one hand, Rambaldi gives life to a visual universe that combines the craftsmanship of knitwear, with messages of social engagement; on the other, Magliano, investigates poetics that study isolation in cities, bodies outside the box and fragmented identity, transforming into images the contradictions of being a queer man today. Building on these assumptions, this research aims to investigate how the two brands approach inclusion from political, emotional, and media perspectives.

Case studies

The research takes a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach with a theoretical-critical perspective.¹² The objective is to investigate the representation of inclusivity in the Marco Rambaldi and Magliano brands, focusing on visual identity, queer aesthetics, and the political role of bodies. Two main methods were adopted: critical analysis of fashion shows, campaigns and digital content, and semi-structured interviews with Filippo Giuliani (art director for Marco Rambaldi) and Davide Stucchi (visual artist and set designer for Magliano). The interviews, which were useful for exploring intentions and narrative choices,¹³ explored issues such as visual identity construction, model selection, relationship with the queer community, and tensions between engagement and marketplace.¹⁴ The visual analysis examined 2020–2024’s collections, considering production context, visual composition and reception modes,¹⁵

6. Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
7. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992).
8. Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (Paris: Grasset, 2008).
9. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
10. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*.
11. Jhonel Morvan and Ardavan Eizadirad, “Performative Commitments to Diversity and Inclusion in Canadian Educational Institutions: Considerations for Equity Efforts in Comparative and International Education,” *Global Comparative Education*, Vol. 6, no. 1 (2022).
12. Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*; Agnès Rocamora, and Anneke Smelik, eds. *Thinking through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016).
13. Else Skjold, “The Daily Selection: An Ethnography of Personal Fashion as a Practice of Use,” in *Thinking through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*, ed. Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 221–236.
14. Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2018); Svend Brinkmann, *Qualitative Interviewing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
15. Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (London: SAGE, 2016); Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

to identify recurring motifs and non-conforming representations of the body. Finally, digital communication was mapped, with a focus on Instagram, now a crucial tool for visibility and storytelling.¹⁶

Marco Rambaldi

Marco Rambaldi's aesthetic project stands out within the Italian fashion scene for a conscious use of queer representation. The brand's inclusive vision does not arise as a strategy, but as an expression of a lived and shared reality, an effective extension of everyday life, distinguishing itself from the forms of aestheticized or decorative inclusiveness often criticized in contemporary fashion.¹⁷ As Filippo Giuliani, the brand's art director, says, queer representation is rooted in the lived experience of those who build the brand and the community that surrounds it: "it is simply representing ourselves."¹⁸ In this sense, the queer component is not an added value or an aesthetic to be performed, but an existential condition that is naturally reflected in the visual language of the brand. The way in which Rambaldi integrates inclusivity into its imagery thus appears close to what Nicola Brajato¹⁹ defines as "queer authenticity": that is a practice in which gender fluidity and the affirmation of difference are neither explicit nor hidden, but an integral part of an entrenched cultural language. A distinctive element of Rambaldi's poetics is its strong territorial roots. Rambaldi has operated for years in the province of Bologna, in an environment that Giuliani describes as "almost totally influential" in the construction of the brand's identity. The legacy of Bologna's political and cultural scene, from the 1970s LGBTQIA+ Cassero to the collective memory evoked by figures like Lucio Dalla, constitutes an affective and symbolic horizon that informs the brand's vision. The idea of a "queer province,"²⁰ charged with memory, affections, and community ties, stands out as an alternative to the dominant narrative of Italian fashion, traditionally centered on Milan and the logic of luxury exclusivity. The challenge, as pointed out in the interview, is to balance the territorial dimension with an international vision, avoiding provincialist drift and maintaining an aesthetic coherence that allows the narrative to speak even outside its original context. The heart of Rambaldi's visual project is represented by the fashion shows, which are fundamental in the identity construction of the brand. The fashion shows, in fact, do not simply represent commercial events, but real communicative rituals, which consolidate, collection after collection, a coherent and layered narrative. According to Giuliani, each season is built on the thread of the previous one, in an evolutionary process that excludes aesthetic leaps and sudden redefinitions. This approach recalls the concept of "aesthetic continuity" in brands with a cultural vocation, in which each collection acts as a variation on the theme and not as a rupture.²¹ This consistent approach affirms a symbolic vision beyond trends, celebrating community, affection, and queer futures — like the F/W 2025/26 show set in a flower market, described by Giuliani as "a good homage to the future" and "an embrace of the queer community."²² It is an aesthetic of proximity, in which fashion space does not merely represent, but becomes a place of protection and belonging. The brand aesthetic, then, is configured as a practice of visual care, consistent with the theories of "care aesthetics" in queer fashion.²³ A further distinguishing element is the casting, which rejects forcibly "inclusive" logics to leave room for storytelling-oriented research and emotional credibility.

16. Gertrud Lehnert, "Fashion Communication and the Digital Age," in *The Routledge Companion to Fashion Studies*, ed. Eugenia Paulicelli and Veronica Manlow (London: Routledge, 2019).

17. Nicola Brajato, "Questioning Masculinity and the Gender Binary in Fashion," *Journal of Bodies, Sexualities, and Masculinities*, Vol. 4, no. 1 (2023): 100–124; Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

18. Interview with Filippo Giuliani by Google Meet on May 30, 2025.

19. Nicola Brajato, "Questioning Masculinity and the Gender Binary in Fashion," *Journal of Bodies, Sexualities, and Masculinities*, Vol. 4, no. 1 (2023): 100–124.

20. Interview with Filippo Giuliani by Google Meet on May 30, 2025.

21. Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).

22. Interview with Filippo Giuliani by Google Meet on May 30, 2025.

23. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Agnès Rocamora, *Fashioning the City: Paris, Fashion and the Media* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

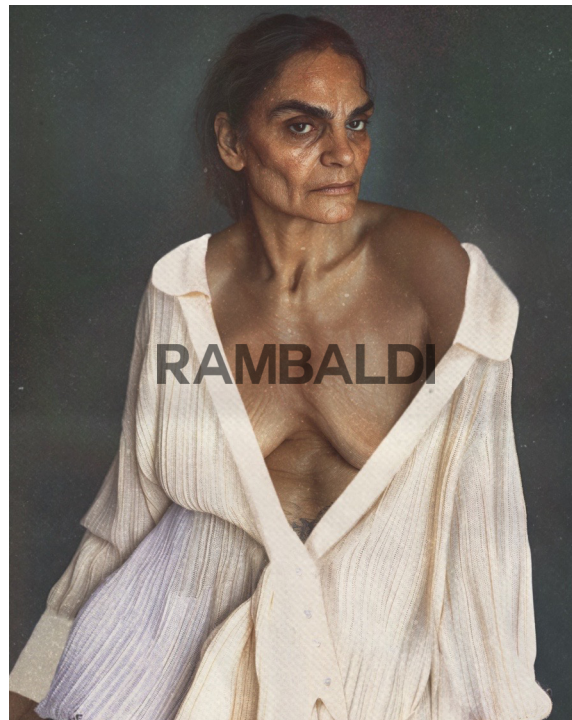


Figure 1: EMBOD(AI) - AI concept and images by Ludovica Palazzo, 2025. Photo: Courtesy Rambaldi

Magliano

The Magliano brand, founded in 2017 by designer Luca Magliano, would seem to respond to a desire to represent gender diversity geared toward more inclusive thinking through a series of connections to the city of Bologna, where the brand was born, such as references to poet Sandro Penna, and writer Pier Vittorio Tondelli. The brand's grammar is built around the landscape of those living on the edges of society. As Davide Stucchi, a visual artist and set designer who has been part of the creative team behind the brand, says:

Let's say that the idea of inclusivity has always been in my opinion a subtext for a language to be refined too; that is, if the walk in Magliano's shows was a walk that was not peremptory, not incisive, not frontal, but a cross, sketchy, hesitant, unevenly-paced walk, it goes without saying that then the image connecting to this cannot be glossy and perfect either, but somehow echoes the characters of marginality.²⁴

Stucchi's work for the brand focuses on the idea of figuring bodies within objects; it is a need for sublimation and thus negation, in a way, because it leaves room for so many hypotheses of interpretation and thus expresses an inclusiveness that is perhaps more ambiguous, certainly not defined and certainly not shouted. For Stucchi, in the way one chooses to represent bodies and identities there is definitely being part of a political project, because fundamentally this means asking more questions than others, creating doubts for oneself and trying to find a dialogue with what has been there and what could be there.

I like to play between what a pose is and what a position is. A pose is readable without a projectuality. A pose has an internal projectuality that can't change it, attack it. A pose changes quickly, even a body's, however a pose is something that is a posture — yes, maybe projectually also political — and I think that queer identity, and anyway queer culture, is

24. Interview with Davide Stucchi by Google Meet on June 6, 2025.

the right pairing or the right movement, the right ballet, to transition between a pose and a position.²⁵

All the dynamics that Luca Magliano feels the urgency of wanting to talk about were transformed from an extremely abstract thing to elements that allow the construction of an alphabet and a symbology. A key example is the construction site — the staircase made by moving the seating in the stands of the Nelson Mandela Forum in Florence — of the set design for one of the brand's fashion shows. All of these elements are then also the result of a thought process that slowly became more enriched in order to give more unity to the language of the brand. For example, the element of the bed, which was used precisely by Stucchi in the first experience he had with the brand, for the presentation of the fall/winter 2022 collection entitled *The Ring*, represented the idea of a fight. But for Magliano, it was not a fight with Everlast gloves, it was not Muhammad Ali, but Visconti's "Rocco and His Brothers", and also the identity battle to find oneself, which takes place between the sheets, inside the bed. The brand implements a storytelling strategy that does not follow mere market needs, because as Stucchi further states:

If one doesn't feel it deeply, a theme is not autonomous when conveyed. If you do pinkwash-ing, people notice it right away, and so then you also lose a little bit of autonomy of language: you lose authorship, you are no longer an author.²⁶

Analyzing the aesthetic through the brand's accessories and garments, for example, the bow is an identity element (i.e., not a mere embellishment), one becomes aware that it represents a weave, thus a bond. Reading it on a bomber jacket label and still seeing it parading, condenses meanings that then become part of a common language, and actually promote the interlocutor — the designer, with his brand — who may be able to convey a language of inclusion and equality.

For brands like Magliano, the element of dress and identity combine together, lead its end customer to interpret and study and feel part of something, to participate with an attitude, this is because the brand itself becomes the "Zeitgeist" of a time, the voice of a generation.

Magliano's project takes the form of an authentic and layered narrative of contemporary identity, in which clothing becomes a vehicle for political and poetic representation. Far from façade operations, the brand constructs a visual and symbolic language capable of accommodating the complexity of reality, giving voice to marginal subjectivities and non-normal forms of existence. In this way, Magliano not only dresses bodies, but accompanies them in a process of affirmation, dialogue and transformation.

25. Interview with Davide Stucchi.

26. Interview with Davide Stucchi by Google Meet on June 6, 2025.



Figure 2: Magliano F/W23 Look 16. Photo: Courtesy Magliano

Conclusions

The two case studies reveal complementary approaches to body inclusivity in Italian fashion. Rambaldi emphasizes care and intimacy, while Magliano embraces marginality and ambiguity. Both reject superficial diversity, favoring aesthetics rooted in complex emotions, places, and narratives, each with distinct storytelling and emotional tones.

Indeed, Rambaldi creates a visual language designed to celebrate the queer community through real bodies, local references, and affective symbols, in a process that is “not strategic but natural”.²⁷ Rambaldi’s aesthetic evokes gentle belonging, while Magliano’s expresses queer fragility and tension through dark tones, subtle gestures, and disarray.

Despite the differences, related in part to the fact that Marco Rambaldi works in womenswear and Magliano in menswear, both brands carry out a revision of masculine aesthetics, subverting the tenets of traditional masculinity through the use of unconventional materials, slowed-down movements, non-standardized bodies, and oversized clothing. The analysis of the two case studies revealed how queer fashion can represent an act of dissent because it processes visual language in complex and ambiguous ways. However, it is precisely this ambivalence that raises questions about the political sustainability of such aesthetics.²⁸ To what extent do brands manage to retain transformative capacity, and when do they risk being assimilated into the Instagrammable language of fashion marketing? The main issue that emerges from the comparison between the two brands concerns the political sustainability of queer aesthetics in the context of the fashion system. The danger, in fact, is that of symbolic co-optation,²⁹ — constantly present in contemporary visual media — which exalts progressive languages and then neutralizes them through aesthetic repetition and commercialization of diversity.³⁰ Rambaldi, for his part, advocates an ethical rather than a political approach, asserting how the brand operates out of conviction and bonding, in which one prefers to exist, rather than compensating for lack of representation. Magliano, on the other hand, develops a less explicit, more indirect and introspective type of inclusiveness, which takes the form of liminal scenes and unclear codes capable of stimulating reflection. Thus, the two philosophies demonstrate an intent to reconsider the concept of authorship in fashion in which the designer does not merely create clothes, but develops languages, settings, and ideas. In this context, queer aesthetics represents an arena for an exercise of visual power, capable of both affirming and confounding, both including and aestheticizing.³¹ The real challenge is not only to produce inclusive images, but to ensure that these images can influence the prevailing system and perceptions and avoid being immediately assimilated into the logic of the commodification of visibility. “Queerness” in fashion, in order not to become just a trend, requires defined positionings, coherent practices, and a continuous tension between the desire for expression and the risk of assimilation.³² Rambaldi and Magliano present two responses to this tension, and what emerges is knowledge of risk and determination to deal with it.

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27. Interview with Filippo Giuliani by Google Meet on May 30, 2025.

28. Brajato, “Questioning Masculinity and the Gender Binary in Fashion.”

29. Gill, *Gender and the Media*.

30. Brajato, “Questioning Masculinity and the Gender Binary in Fashion.”

31. Agnès Rocamora, *Fashioning the City: Paris, Fashion and the Media* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

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