



## Les Rencontres Internationales de la mode à Hyères.

### Summaries of the round tables held on April 27<sup>th</sup> 2019

#### 1. Business models of emerging brands

According to Nicolas Santi-Weil of AMI Paris, which led the debates, this first discussion took the form of a sharing of experiences from entrepreneurs and designers as well as incubators and investors "who support young brands". In a context marked by the absence of a single economic model and development that would naturally be required, it was stressed that creators must find their own way by knowing how to surround themselves with the required management and marketing skills.

Stéphanie Coudert, winner of the Festival's 1999 edition, after mixing a desire for expression with classic distribution schemes, and following a setback with an industrial partner, confided that she had redirected herself towards "the more modest scale of custom-made products". It is at this level, she argued, that we can understand those who wear our clothes. For her, "it is better to avoid spending too much time on management and focus instead on the client's energy and needs.

The story of Victoria Feldman and Tomas Berzins, co-founders of Victoria/Tomas, responded to this individual journey. Working and living as a couple, they explained that they needed to help each other in the production of clothing and in the management of the various business aspects of their company. They reported that they launched their brand at a very young age, without contact or experience and without ever being guided in the implementation of what they had learned during their training.

Victoria Feldman also considered that failures were very important: "They must be analyzed, she said, to avoid repeating the same mistakes. She recounted how, after an unfortunate experience with a major producer who compromised the finalization of a collection, Victoria/Tomas had to repackage all the clothes for a season in their Parisian workshop. "We preferred to play fair with the Bon Marché, which distributes us, and our customers by warning them that there would be a delay in deliveries," she explained, stressing the need to be honest and learn from her mistakes.

Reacting to this, Geoffrey Bruyère, co-founder with Benoit Wojtenka of Bonne Gueule, considered that the demand for consumer transparency should be taken into account by designers. "You can apologize about a production failure by giving all the information to the customer. This attitude pleases, it shows a level of transparency that enhances the brand. In general, vulnerability is underrated, even though it can also refer to the direct relationship with customers," he said. Nicolas Santi-Weil supported these comments by

noting that a returning online customer is a conquered customer: "if he didn't like something, we answer him, we apologize, we rebuild something with him, and then he comes back," he added.

Emphasis was also placed on the importance of making the garment better understood by potential customers. Benoit Wojtenka, from Bonne Gueule, one of the largest digital media prescribers of men's fashion in France, explained that he created what was first and foremost a blog to go beyond a press that was too style-oriented and not enough about the product: "We want to improve understanding of what we buy with feature articles; what interests us is the workshop more than the show," he insisted. Continuing his remarks on digital, he said that the contents of Bonne Gueule, by orienting the user, had allowed the creation of real communities. "From there," added Geoffrey Bruyère, "we launched our own digital brand before moving on to store openings. "After deciphering the clothes, we wanted to create our own pieces," he said, adding that Bonne Gueule was now working with several brands and that its pragmatic business model conceived purchasing as the culmination of a broader experience where men learn the social uses of clothing and immerse themselves in the history of designers. "For us," he insisted, "only customer satisfaction is a guarantee.

Rok Hwang, founder of ROKH and winner of the Special Jury Prize of the LVMH Prize in 2018, drew attention to the need to surround himself with competent people to ensure the sustainability of a first creative and commercial success. According to him, structuring a team by finding competent people in areas that are not naturally those of the designer is essential to better engage in the subsequent stages of brand development. "Structuring your team allows you to find a market positioning that is beneficial for both buyers and buyers more quickly.

Nicolas Santi-Weil agreed with Rok Hwang's comments, noting that while the most creative people can do website and pick-and-pack, these tasks are often too time-consuming and energy-consuming, hence the need, "to grow your business, to dare to meet people, to find the right people. "In this respect, he confided that he had not given up on the wholesale format and still believed in the usefulness of meetings between fashion players at major events. He paid tribute to the approach of those who, like Stéphanie Coudert, bypass the constraints and pressures of the showroom, pre-collections and multi-brand department stores, while admitting that the wholesale model retains valuable advantages. "The new retail practices, direct and born with the digital revolution, are very interesting, especially for young creators. But in the long term, they do not seem viable. And here, the wholesale still has a say in reaching foreign customers, taking a good look at its collections and managing creative success so that it leads to commercial success," said Nicolas Santi-Weil.

The discussion then further addressed these issues of accompanying creators on the path of commercial development. Representing the Public Investment Bank, Alexandre Guyot referred to the Accelerator scheme, which, based on a network of 200 independent consultants, provides individual assistance to SME managers with at least 10 employees and a turnover of 2 to 10 million euros per year. "The idea is, through a training effort based on co-development and sharing of experience, to create a real agora where failure is valued and experience is shared. It is in this context that we can communicate, find

solutions and gain confidence," said Alexandre Guyot. He added that, for the fashion sector, the Fashion and Luxury Accelerator programme, aimed at both brands and manufacturers, could very well follow on from other support initiatives, such as IFM Label, of which Bonne Gueule was one of the many beneficiaries at the beginning.

Stefano Martinetto, President of Tomorrow London, a business accelerator and development partner for emerging fashion talent, reminded us of the importance of taking the time to get to know the creative people before investing in their development. "We are here to encourage entrepreneurs' creativity, to help them become sustainable and responsible businesses, which has a cost that must be explained to all links in the production chain," he stressed. For Stefano Martinetto, the young people he accompanies must learn to follow the supply chain calendar to understand how fashion will develop. "You have to stay in touch with the fabric manufacturers, because that's where the production process starts," he said, for example.

Nicolas Santi-Weil supported this point by reminding us of the importance, for creators, of regularly visiting the workshops to take the pulse of manufacturing

He also invited them to take inspiration from what is being done in London or New York, "where young people exchange ideas, are not afraid to launch themselves instead of going through big houses and creating communities, which appeals to investors". On this point, he praised Stéphanie Coudert's iconoclastic attitude, which, "more artist than entrepreneur", considered that not having a "collection director behind you" allowed her to adapt her creativity to her clients: "The idea of the object, of clothing, is above all subject to the market. I prefer to work according to the niche I imagine. Today, agents receive my clients, I receive them personally. And it is also in this spirit that I work with theatre and contemporary dance. "After indicating that she now aims to create small collections from some of her creations that have become "classics", Nicolas Santi-Weil greeted Stéphanie Coudert with an inspiring blend of carelessness, conviction and determination.

During a brief exchange with the audience, it was stressed the importance of better communication between the various fashion professionals, designers, manufacturers, spinners in particular, especially in the event of close sourcing. Regular human contact is a sure way to find quick solutions to the inevitable production problems, it was said. In this regard, Thomas Berzins said he visited many factories and spent "weeks in the workshops to learn all the concrete steps of manufacturing".

David Kang, a Korean entrepreneur and designer based in Paris, where he imported the multi-brand Tom Greyhound and where he developed

## **2. Back to craft**

Nadine Bayle, an independent journalist who moderated the discussion, explained that the choice of an English title was based on the fact that the word "craft" suggests a broader concept of craftsmanship that better illustrates the diversity of crafts. As a preamble to the debate, she referred to the book by American sociologist Richard Sennett, "Ce Que Sait la

Main", stressing that skilled craftsmanship is at the crossroads of knowledge and doing. Thus understood, crafts can be a model for society, and, in the case of fashion, a model for houses, she asked. Wishing that the exchange would focus on workshops, crafts, their own grammar and the men and women who make them live, she also asked not to forget consumers, "who are more and more sensitive to these skills". "For Chinese customers, craftsmanship is what best defines luxury, more than price and statutory value, so the Chinese government has launched a major national craft sector," Bayle said, for example.

The sociologist and historian Hughes Jacquet, author of "The Intelligence of the Hand", then recalled that times of crisis often coincided with a revival of the craft. After citing the Bauhaus in Germany and the neo-artisan movement in the late 1970s, after the Glorious Thirties, he pointed out that today the crisis, particularly the broader environmental crisis, made individual craftspeople with "something to say about our world" and key contributors to finding solutions to ecological and societal problems.

Nadine Bayle followed suit by observing a historical permanence of the values of authenticity and excellence conveyed by the arts and crafts, which, in France, are defined by a law that lists them: "281 craft activities are currently listed, many of which participate in luxury and fashion," she said.

Addressing Priscilla Royer, artistic director at Maison Michel, a historical hat specialist, Nadine Bayle asked how the modernization of the brand's very old know-how had gone. Ms. Royer explained that she had first had to reinterview the relationship to the body by looking at everything that happens around the face. The idea, she said, was to break the social codes related to the history of the hat, which was a social sign of recognition; it was necessary to remove this to start a new history and uses marked by less a priori, which is what young people do more naturally. She indicated that Maison Michel's craftsmen had been surprised by the new treatment "inflicted" on the creations - redefining the felt grammages and the doses of primers, chiffonnages, cut-outs and patching in particular. "But they understood that these technical manipulations were necessary to manufacture objects in line with current uses. Priscilla Royer also underlined the interest for Maison Michel to share techniques with other workshops concerned with Chanel's crafts. "Recently, for a 'simple' leather buckle on a hat, we turned to Massaro House, which did a good job of getting us out of the situation," she said.

As for the relationship between craftspeople and major houses, Sylvie Chailloux, founder of the Textile du Maine clothing company, explained that her workshop worked mainly on ready-to-wear collections: "We produce fairly large series, which can include 700 pieces, but to which we have to add a neat, very couture look. We have inherited a special know-how, the operations of preparation of the pieces, by which we try to faithfully translate the designer's imagination on these series. Stabilizing the pieces to obtain a perfect fall, ironing techniques are other of our specialties," she observed.

Aymeric Le Deun, founder of the buttonhole brand of the same name, drew attention to the fact that craftsmanship was not necessarily synonymous with slowness, and that accelerating the pace of fashion production, presentation and delivery was "not a bad thing". "We work on a contract basis to cover the buttons with our customers' fabric, and we have to follow the frenetic pace of the collections, knowing that we receive the fabrics

at the last minute, at the same time as the manufacturers," he said. "That's the ambiguity of our craft: we have to find processes to deliver an industry, which is the fashion industry," added Mr. Le Deun, who pointed out that, for Dior, Aymeric Le Deun could manufacture, for each season, between 100 and 150,000 embroidered buttons.

Nadia Bayle then turned to Alexia Tronel, founder of Atelier Bartavelle and co-founder of the ITINERANCE project. This one put before its approach: to call upon an artisanal sourcing scattered in several countries of the Mediterranean basin in order to give a place to each actor of a sector in difficulty "which hides behind the clothing". "We are defending a new paradigm of production and consumption by co-producing and co-creating directly with artisans in Greece, Turkey, Tunisia, Lebanon and Morocco," she said. She stressed that this artistic project also had a positive social impact on a community of craftsmen in the southern Mediterranean whose activities were in danger of declining. Alexia Tronel added that the clothes produced as part of ITINERANCE were exhibited in local museums and distributed for commercial purposes, in particular to link the brands and these craftsmen.

Pascal Gautrand, founder of Made in Town and Consultant at Première Vision, advocated the development of storytelling around the current revival of craft skills. According to him, it is necessary to explain where objects are designed, how they are designed, and, above all, in what specific cultural contexts they appear. "You have to tell these languages with your hands, say that they reflect this or that local culture; this story is a real added value but it is difficult to take an entire industry through," he said. Mr. Gautrand mentioned the revival of the wool sector as part of the Tricolor project, pointing out that in France today there was no longer any combing unit "and only one washing unit". He said that Tricolor had made it possible to obtain a commitment to participate in this relaunch of 68 brands and designers. "130 prototypes have been created, some of which have been put into collection," he said, stressing that the challenge of the project was to meet the desires of transparency and traceability of citizen consumers, and to relaunch trades specific to the sector.

The panelists also acknowledged that they are shadow workers. In this regard, they explained that they could only communicate on their activity within the limits of the confidentiality clauses binding them with their customers, primarily large companies. "Are we insufficiently valued?" asked Sylvie Chailloux. Certainly our visibility is lower, but the recognition and admiration we get during visits to our workshops is a real sign of trust.

Concerning the transmission of know-how, Ms Chailloux deplored that for her company, which is recognised as an EPV (Entreprise du Patrimoine Vivant), "almost nothing is allocated in terms of training aid". However, she stressed, as our know-how is scarce, they require long and difficult training of at least 3 years. It acknowledged that this cost of training new entrants was not recognised and therefore had an impact on the prices charged at the end of the chain by manufacturers.

Aymeric Le Deun considered that the craftsman "is there to transmit, hence the terms master craftsmen and apprentices". He also highlighted the difficulties encountered in Paris in finding space and premises at affordable prices.

Concluding the discussion, Hugues Jacquet stressed that craft values are of interest to both brands and end markets. "The craftsman's hand is in touch with a unique and high-quality

territory and raw materials that attract many consumers," he pointed out. "The defence of essential values such as product quality, honesty with regard to price and origin as well as actions in favour of a more selective, civic and respectful consumption are part of a territorial network on small scales that generates social life", he declared.

### 3. Fashion at Night today

Olivier Nicklaus, journalist, director and scriptwriter who moderated the round table, said at the outset that the discussion would aim to question the link between night and fashion, a link marked "by the historical and strong images of the Palace in the 1980s". "Fabrice Emaer had a vision of the night, just as Jean Pierre Blanc had a vision of fashion," he slipped, recalling that the Palace's waiters were dressed as Thierry Mugler and that the greatest couturiers not only frequented the famous Parisian nightclub but organised their own parties there. "Does this interaction between fashion and night still exist? Do these two fields always inspire each other?" he asked.

Among the panelists, Ludovic de Saint Sernin, Artistic Director and founder of the Maison Ludovic de Saint Sernin, confided to us that he would go out especially during fashion weeks, "which are a place where other designers meet. Then my last collection, Super Models, was inspired by the night. "He specified that his creations inspired by the night were underwear that could be worn in both private and public places. "What I realized of glamour was perhaps also to inspire the evening...", he finally suggested. Mr. de Saint Sernin also spoke of unisex, considering that the clothes of this kind that he had been able to create had been designed with the idea "that they become masculine once worn by men, and feminine once worn by women. »

Reacting to these comments, Alice Pfeiffer, a journalist for various publications including Les Inrockuptibles and Dazed & Confused, felt that unisex was limited to androgyny and that young people at night had a tribal relationship to clothing rather than gender. At the moment, she continued, we are witnessing an intellectualization of the night, but the important thing is to note that the young Erasmus and Ryanair, who have travelled, do not feel particularly French. Then, because the lack of money kills the bars, she goes to the club directly, clubs very marked by German industrial culture and aesthetics. On the trends of the Parisian night, Alice Pfeiffer evoked the Cicciolina evenings, conceived and organized by Allegria Torassa, Franco-English by Balenciaga, and Niki Pauls, Polish designer based in Berlin. These evenings give pride of place to the most crazy fashion, she said, associating a squat culture with it: no phone, no pictures. For me, the podium and the track are places where girls can completely transform themselves before the next day they go to work as if nothing had happened," she said.

Representing the squat culture, Alladin Charni, founder of PériPate, explained how little he went out in Paris, except to observe how people exchange and evolve. He then described the spirit of the parties he is illegally organizing in a 900 m<sup>2</sup> hangar located under the ring road. "We come to our homes to let go, to put on another mask, not to be judged and judge others. Moreover, some people, who feel the garment as a burden, do not hesitate to strip themselves," he said.

Representing the City of Paris, Frédéric Hocquart, Deputy Councillor at Night and Deputy Mayor of Paris, said that PériPate and the City were now bound by an agreement. He wanted to see Alladin Charni's place as an example of what can be found in Paris, a city of social exchanges where fashion is fully an element of diversity. "The challenge for us is to make this happen, this diversity that cannot be decreed with a policy but thanks to a shared recognition," he said.

On the "alleged" death of the Parisian night, Mr. Hocquart replied that for 3 or 4 years a real dynamic had been at work in the capital. Citing the Concrete evenings and the Weather Festival, two current emblems of the vitality of the Parisian electro scene, he felt that what was missing was the absence of night stories. "When there were fewer offers, fewer establishments, Alain Pacadis and Éric Dahan told the story at night. Today, no one tells stories at night anymore. Taddéi did it on Paris Dernière and Jacob Khrist does it with his photos. But there are words missing," he said.

On the strength of the Parisian nights, Frédéric Hocquart reminded us that the opening of public spaces dedicated to the celebration offered new possibilities for Parisians to go out. Aladdin Charni reacted by regretting that, unlike Lyon and Marseille, Paris remained a city with too "normalized" evenings, with little openness in terms of social mix.

Frédéric Hocquart, responding to the audience, pleaded that the night should not become a time of organized business and professional meetings for fashion actors. "Night, a particular moment of sociability, must open up to other social and human relationships," he insisted, "Networking events cannot be moments of abandonment," Alice Pfeiffer added.