BUSINESS

Altagamma Conference Explores True Sustainability

- Next Design Perspectives highlighted alternative materials and approaches, with biofacturing being a key theme.

BY LUISA ZARGANI AND MARTINO CARRERA

MILAN – "Growing" a shoe or a chair has now become a reality.

Biofacturing was a key theme of the Next Design Perspectives 2018 conference held on Tuesday and organized by Altagamma – the first of what is slated to be an annual event.

Andrea Bell, head of mind-set, strategic insight at WGSN, and Lisa White, director of lifestyle and interiors and the vision at WGSN, explained that biofacturing means evolving from the machine and the digital era to the living organism.

"Products will no longer be made but grown," White said. Algae, mycelium and bacteria will be used to produce, for example, jewels grown in laboratories. Showing a slide of a plant shaped as a chair, she said it took seven years to grow.

Bell talked about a "phy-gital" world that blends physical and digital and underscored consumers' interest in sustainability, which is an opportunity for the luxury industry. "We know people are buying less, there is potential in the luxe of less, but with more quality," Bell said. There is a backlash against fast fashion, she contended, and she also said finding space for oneself, "places to escape" and the home are all very important to Millennials, who seek peace and downtime.

Speaking of Millennials, Bell said Generation M, the Muslim Millennials will be one-fourth of the world population by 2050. "Modest fashion is an opportunity, in a longer and looser version of what is on the runway and this is a lifestyle, not a trend," she said, pointing to a slide with models wearing flowing printed dresses by La Double J. Minorities will also be key, as by 2020 more than half of 18 years old in America will be minorities. By 2040, Caucasians will be the minority. "Generation Z is about inclusivity. "Diversity is being asked to the party, while inclusivity is being asked to dance," she mused.

White and Bell also talked about "positive discomfort." In times of extreme uncertainties, the best strategy is to move beyond a reasonable comfort zone, they believe. The explanation "We have always done it this way" will no longer be viable.

Suzanne Lee, chief creative officer of Modern Meadow and an early pioneer of biotechnology in textiles for fashion, presented a number of innovative products, such as biker jackets and bombers made with the Symbiotic Culture of Bacteria and Yeast, or SCOBY, traditionally used to make kombucha tea, and Adidas' Futurecraft Biofabric shoe made using silk biopolymers.

Three-dimensional printed algae, collagen cells, pigment produced by bacteria for prints, new scents from extinct plants, shoes made by algae and foam are some of the new developments in the industry.

"With climate changes, aging population and new technologies, nothing must ever be taken for granted," said Milan's mayor Giuseppe Sala. "The contribution of design is fundamental on all aspects and creation is key." Emphasizing how design is a symbol of Milan, he said 6 percent of international students here choose a design course.

Dario Rinero, chief executive officer of Poltrona Frau, said "the sweeping changes in progress and the complexity of the global market call for international insights into the impact these developments will have, on both individuals and design itself. We must talk about the future and understand and anticipate it. We don't have to look for oil underground, we have it on the ground and it's design. "

Architect and designer Philippe Starck, who has created the interiors for the habitation module of the "world's first" commercial space station Axiom, underscored how "important it is to work on space. Never forget that in 4.2 billion years the sun will implode. We have to find a way to escape and anything that can help the democratization...of space."

Despite his successful career – and the design angle of the conference – Starck described his work as "useless."

"With all that is going on, polluted water and so much violence in the world, in the end I spent my life on making useless things and it's not the right time to talk about this small table," he said pointing to one on the stage. "Design can help better life but not create life. The urgency is to save lives."

Starck believes it's "no longer acceptable to kill for leather," and said that "in five to seven years, there will be no more oil," but wondered about alternative solutions such as bio-plastic grown on corn fields, which should actually help feed people and praised plastic as created by human intelligence. He also said recycling is costly and that there is a need to find new ideas to save energy. "To consume less is the only real solution, or de-growth," he contended. "Our reason to exist is to create, we know we have to produce less, and create less if we want to survive."

A biofacturing chair.

Starck also commented on the fast pace of fashion, urging cycles to be slower. "Six to eight trends a year is cuckoo, it's ridiculous. Longevity, it was a word for grandfathers, but now it's the only way to save [the world], the end of ownership, the concept of sharing with everyone. Rent and lease will change things. It's just what we have to do, because when it's too late we are always obliged to find the solution."

The design duo behind Amsterdam-based architectural and design firm Studio Formafantasma agreed with Starck, noting for instance that recycling is not the only solution. Simone Farresin, one of the two designers, underscored the importance of a holistic approach to sustainability explaining that it should be addressed from legislative, sourcing and productive standpoints, whether it's electronic design – a subject they're doing a lot of research on recently – or textile and apparel or even automotive. "Design should be addressed politically," he said. "In this moment we are worried about our role because we are the ones who transform raw materials into commodities. It's a very problematic moment and we are facing new challenges as humans," added Andrea Trimarchi, the other half of the duo. Farresin contended that "as designers but also as brands, we forget that delivering a good product or service does not mean necessarily to ask citizens to be passive, to actually just be consumers," rather he believes the whole change of perspective should engage designers and producers, as much as citizens.

Paola Antonelli, the senior curator of architecture and design and director of research and development at the MoMA, took the same notion a step further introducing the highly discussed topic of circularity in design and in fashion. "The power is not only in designers' hands, it's also in citizens' hands," she noted, highlighting that the actual issue with the apparel industry is about the amount of materials, energy and footprints that gets moved into it. "By making it so that every fabric and every material can be reused in a different garment, we would maintain the workforce in action, but we would also be less heavy on the world," she suggested. Antonelli added that circularity is eventually "about common sense, which comes from thinking before acting."

The role played by designers is pivotal, according to Antonelli, as she maintained their socially impactful role could spotlight the complexity of the world. The curator believes that injecting emotions in the design process will help not only to engage customers in stores, rather it will help "bypass the Babel Tower of faiths and beliefs and partisanships that exist in the world today. Designer can use emotions to bypass all of that to really get to the point and helping find commonalities."

Talking about upcoming global retail scenarios, John C. Jay, president of global creative at Uniqlo's parent company Fast Retailing, contended that "the future's coming whether you like it or not, and so for creators, they have to embrace this idea that information is not knowledge and knowledge is not insight. Our job is to find the best insights so that we can be the best creators of the world." He added that many of them could come from AI tools and data analysis.

Global expansion in retail will be more and more about tuning in with the new potential customers' mind-sets because "when you enter a new market, be mindful that you're entering a new culture and that has to be dealt with with respect," he said. "My job is to create a great experience, the highest possible value for the greatest number of people on earth," Jay concluded underscoring that the company, often mistakenly referred to as "about fast fashion," on the contrary "refuses to make disposable clothing."

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EYEWEAR

Safilo Sales Down 9% in Q3

- Soft business in Europe and North America dented the performance of the Italian eyewear company.

which helped to counterbalance a negative operating leverage and impact from foreign exchanges.

In the first nine months of 2018, sales were down 8.7 percent to 717.7 million

compared with 13.4 million euros in the same period last year.

In the nine months, adjusted EBITDA was down 11.9 percent to 77.2 million euros, compared with 43.2 million euros last year.

"In the third quarter, we accelerated the important work on the transformation on which we aim to build our new 2020 business plan," said chief executive officer

In October, Safilo appointed Connie Lai Shi Chiap as senior commercial head of APAC & Greater China. As reported, David Abrahams joined the company as the firm's Latin America vice president in October, succeeding Andrea Russo, taking up the role on Oct. 1 and based in Mexico City.

Safilo produces and distributes eyewear under license for brands including Gucci, [illegible] and Jimmy Choo, as well as brands [illegible] Carrera, Polaroid and Safilo.

[illegible] after this week, Safilo's extraordinary shareholders' meeting approved the share [illegible] increase up to a maximum of 150 [illegible] euros.

[illegible] of Sept. 30, net debt stood at 144.2 [illegible] euros, including the third and [illegible] compensation payments of 30 million [illegible] received from Kering at the end [illegible] September, following the end of the [illegible] license. This compares with a net [illegible] of 115.9 million euros at the end of [illegible] ember 2017.