



The world's biggest fashion brand is shaking it all up. So what?

LVMH, the biggest and most powerful fashion conglomerate in the world, said early Monday morning that Jonathan Anderson will be the next creative director of women's, men's and couture at Dior, one of its crown jewels. The house's press release touted that this is the first time that a designer has taken on the men's and women's roles at once "since Monsieur Dior." Between Anderson's role at Dior, his work at his own brand JW Anderson and an ongoing collaboration with Uniqlo, the designer will likely churn out a whopping 18 collections a year — a prolific output rivaling that of the late Karl Lagerfeld, who oversaw Chanel, Fendi, his eponymous brand and various other projects as if he were doing nothing more complicated than folding laundry.

Legendary stuff, perhaps. Anderson, at 40, is the most celebrated designer of his generation, transforming Loewe (also under the LVMH umbrella) into a powerhouse of viral creativity over the past decade. And Dior, best known for the 1940s concoction of a conservative bar jacket and full skirt deemed the "New Look," is deliciously corruptible material for the puckish Anderson.

But the news also emphasizes fashion, and especially LVMH, as a machine that treats its talent as disposable. And it arrives in a landscape that is, if not inhospitable to big corporate fashion, then skeptical or tired of it. Luxury, right now, is probably the least cool thing on the planet; every brand, from Chanel to Louis Vuitton and Dior itself, is undergoing a sales slump. Some, such as Gucci and Valentino, are in the midst of an existential crisis, as their designers and executives struggle to define them. (The bright spot is Hermès. Rah-rah-sis-boom-Birkin to them.)

The announcement was all but botched. Typically these transitions — and God, there have been countless ones lately — see one designer depart with a flurry of appreciative words and stories, a careful amount of time (sometimes months, sometimes weeks) go by as executives give polite comments about looking for the right talent to carry forward the savoir faire of the house, followed by an announcement with a fresh portrait by the designer's photographer of choice and a polite CEO interview with Vogue. The routine is respectful of all parties involved, and it gives the public and media (which in fashion, includes countless social media accounts that play a role between influencer and press prop) time to drum up excitement around the debut show.

Anderson's Dior appointment began with rumors last fall. Not uncommon (no one blends fantasy and fact like a garment), but LVMH did little to dispel control the rumblings, rolling out the news herky-jerky. Kim Jones, the mildly received menswear designer, stepped down after his January show with little fanfare, and there was no Loewe runway show in March despite the fact that Anderson had not said he was leaving his post. LVMH founder and CEO Bernard Arnault then disclosed part of Anderson's new role as the menswear lead almost flippantly during the annual shareholders meeting in April, in response to a question. The other half of Anderson's job, designing couture and women's ready-to-wear, was not shared at that time, and Maria Grazia Chiuri, who had led Dior womenswear since 2016, showed two collections: one during the March shows in Paris and another, a sort of couture-resort show combo in Rome last week. The brand touted the shows as business as usual but all in attendance and watching online viewed them as awkward swan songs. Chiuri officially said she was leaving last Thursday, two days after the show in Rome.

Rather than creating a sense of airtight control, the awkward communication has made it seem as though LVMH was ruthlessly cycling through designers — that Chiuri and



Jones's tenure was forgettable and Anderson's appointment less epic than they probably want it to feel. Of course, LVMH and all designers involved will get over it; Dior CEO Delphine Arnault spoke elegantly about Chiuri's tenure in an interview with Business of Fashion, saying that the strange news rollout was in part Chiuri's suggestion. And Delphine Arnault is already painting Anderson as the natural heir to Christian Dior ("He also loves gardening and flowers, like Monsieur Dior," she said — which, what? When does Anderson have time to plant anything?).

In fact, even the historic nature of Anderson's role is cloudy. Marc Bohan oversaw the launch of Dior's men's line, Christian Dior Monsieur, in 1970, as he was also designing women's. A Dior spokesperson confirmed that those first men's collections were signed by Bohan, though they did not respond to a request further clarification over whether press release language that this is the first time at Dior "since Monsieur Dior" that a creative director will work on men's, women's and couture was meant to refer to the men's line Monsieur, or the late designer, who is often referred to by Dior employees as Monsieur Dior.

LVMH has always been this way: Its ruthless nature is how it built some of the most powerful brand names in the world. It created the fashion ecosystem of today — emphatically mass, bold, corporatized. But thus, when the luxury world is in a slump, one can't help but see how the LVMH way has contributed to that attitude. Two days before the shareholder meeting in which Arnault began to announce Anderson's new job, Hermès officially overtook LVMH as Europe's most valuable luxury company amid shrinking sales at the latter business. Hermès is a huge brand that acts like a small, and very human, one. And it is still, despite that valuation, much smaller than LVMH — 84.7 billion euros in sales in 2024 versus Hermès's 15.2 billion, according to Bloomberg. Its limited scale, abetted by an emphasis on exclusivity, have no doubt contributed to its success. That puts Anderson's copious collections in a dubious light.

Consumers are in a state of luxury anhedonia, and Bernard Arnault (or BA, as his soldiers, including his children, call him), who is the richest man in France and owns almost all the most powerful fashion brands except Hermès and Chanel, is shouldering much of that pain. Prices are too high, products are underwhelming, and conglomerates are cycling the same designers in and out of creative director jobs with such speed and indignity that announcements like Pierpaolo Piccioli's move to Kering's Balenciaga amount to little more than a shrug.

Remember more than two years ago, when Sarah Burton left Kering's McQueen and was replaced by a man and the conglomerate was then without any women designers, and LVMH had just two, at Dior and Pucci? Now, Kering has one — Louise Trotter, whose Bottega Veneta will debut in Milan in September — and LVMH has only its Pucci head Camille Miceli and Burton, whom Arnault lured to Givenchy late last year. The names have changed but the numbers have not. In other words, while so much seems to have shifted with new designers at Dior, Loewe, Balenciaga, Gucci, Bottega Veneta and Chanel, it also feels as if nothing is different. That's not a great message for middle-market consumers who are supposed to prop up the industry by lusting after pricey handbags, mascaras and shoes.

And on top of that, to quote one of our era's great memes — "girl, the tariffs." Arnault is fashion's master chess player; he plays a long game yet moves quickly and his losses are few. His alignment with Trump seemed wise. During the first administration, he made opened a factory in Texas, appearing at a ribbon cutting to pump fists with the president. In January, Arnault attended the inauguration, his face — and the faces of his children, Dior CEO Delphine and Moët Hennessey deputy CEO Alexandre — among the tech and business titans who also came to kiss the ring. Now that factory is one of the company's worst performing, and Bernard Arnault said in his April shareholders meeting that it is the



European Commission's responsibility to negotiate a reasonable trade deal, not Trump's duty to shift his unpopular tariff strategy — seeming to give Trump a pass, or perhaps admitting that his friendship with the president has not borne the fruit he expected. (Still, Arnault visited Washington in May to meet with the president the week of the Met Gala, which Louis Vuitton sponsored but which Arnault has not attended in years, to talk tariffs.) All that adds to consumer ambivalence. Who can get excited about luxury goods getting needlessly more expensive?

Maybe unwittingly, the puppeteers of big-brand fashion have set up a showdown to define what this strange world of designer goods means today. While Anderson will debut his first Dior collection at the Paris men's shows later this month, it is his big September women's show that will be the talker. His Loewe was successful because it was mischievous, funny and extraordinarily weird. (Look at its TikTok! The most creative thing you can "consume" in "luxury" today.) Loewe was, in his last four years, an unceasing animal of almost primal creativity. At JW Anderson, his primary muse is the trans cabaret singer Justin Vivian Bond. Can Dior be funny? Subversive? Will the first lady, who has adopted Dior skirt suits practically as a uniform, wear the same jacket as Bond? Can you bake all that into a stodgy, conservative fashion brand? At Chanel, Matthieu Blazy (also 40!) faces a similar quagmire: He is a man of heart and integrity. Can the most recognizable brand in fashion, whose handbags and tweed skirt suits are as evocative as McDonald's golden arches, project tenderness, humanity?

Whether the future of luxury — of desire, of aspiration — is naughty but enormous, or genuine but pop, will be the great question of the fall shows.

