



“We like fashion again”: First reactions to Glenn Martens’s Margiela debut

Renzo Rosso, Carine Roitfeld, Suzy Menkes and more weigh in on the week’s most anticipated debut.

By Elektra Kotsoni



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“After this show, we like fashion again,” said celebrated fashion stylist and Vogue World Paris creative director Carine Roitfeld following Glenn Martens’s debut at Maison Margiela on Wednesday. She was standing in the sea of colourful balloons that filled the afterparty space, surrounded by other attendees who were laughing, dancing and playing with the balloons. This merriment came in stark contrast to the emotions we all felt just a few minutes before, during what was probably one of the most affecting shows I have ever seen. That was obviously the point.

It may have been Martens’s first show for Maison Margiela, but he is well at home at OTB — the maison’s parent company also owns Diesel, of which he has been creative director since 2020. In his five years at the helm of the Italian brand, originally founded by OTB chairman Renzo Rosso in 1978, Martens has led a turnaround. He has introduced the label, a favourite of European millennials when they were coming of age in the early noughties, to the Gen Z consumer by staging edgy shows (one famously featuring a mountain of condoms and Jennifer Coolidge) and opening them to a student audience. He launched eye-catching accessories like the bestselling 1DR bag and has always presented himself as an ebullient and media-friendly figure. As a result, Diesel sales grew 13 per cent in 2023 and 3.2 percent in 2024 (despite the wider industry slowdown) and the goodwill behind him is phenomenal.

No wonder Rosso trusted him to take over the Margiela job as well: “I needed to give Margiela a new era. The house was fantastic with Martin, fantastic with John. And now we take it to the modern world, where everything’s always replicated and [looks] the same. I think we are one of the few companies that remain focused on creativity,” the OTB founder said after the show. “In the five years I’ve worked with Glenn, I realised the hand of this guy is unbelievable. And I know it’s hard to imagine, because couture can look like costume, but these new ideas he presented will be the foundations for many new products.”

Many parallels have been drawn between Martens and the house’s founder, Martin Margiela: both graduated from Antwerp’s Royal Academy of Fine Arts, both moved to Paris after graduation, and both began their careers working for Jean Paul Gaultier (Margiela in 1984 and Martens in 2008).





Still, the stakes were high, not least because Martens's predecessor was John Galliano, who left Maison Margiela in December 2024 after 10 years at its helm. Galliano's wider impact on fashion is undeniable (and his time at Givenchy and Dior in the 1990s and 2000s legendary), and Margiela sales grew 23 per cent in 2023 and 24 per cent in the 2021-2022 period.

His couture shows for the house were "sporadic but impactful", as my colleague Lucy Maguire wrote earlier this year, while his last one, in January 2024, was possibly the most famous fashion events of the post-pandemic era. Taking place under the Pont d'Alexandre III by the Seine, it starred a series of misfit characters in corsets, padded hips, sheer lace, porcelain doll makeup and pubic merkins inspired by Brassai's portraits of the characters that roamed the nighttime streets of Paris in the 1920s and 1930s.

The spectacle Martens just delivered had its feet firmly in the world we live in today. Yes, the models wore masks, just like the models in founder Martin Margiela's Artisanal shows, the plastic covers resembled those of Martin's degree show when he was in Antwerp (Thank you, Alexandre Samson, for the tip), and the corsets were reminiscent of Galliano. But the masks this time didn't ensure the attention stayed focused on the clothes as Martin Margiela intended when he started using them in 1989. Instead, they completed the feeling of gloom and anarchy found in the thrifted fabrics, the draped metallic fabrics, the dip-dyed nails and all the feathers that I couldn't help but associate with the sexy fairy book series all millennial and elder Gen Z women have been devouring post-pandemic.

"It was explosive, and it's loud. But perhaps this is what the world needs," concluded Rosso.

Here's what some other attendees had to say about the show:

"I think it is one of the most beautiful collections I have seen from Glenn. It did make me think of the archival Margiela pieces that I used to shoot when I started in 2010, but it is a modern collection. It was a reflection of our fear, and it was very emotional. It felt vulnerable and like a move towards liberation. That's why now, after the show, we have these balloons to help us contrast fear with joy. Glenn is very much of his generation, our generation. Millennials, we all grew up in a world that was opening up, while we were still in our bubbles. We were not allowed to do anything, but we were told we could do everything."

David Martin, editor-in-chief of Odda magazine

"It's a masterpiece of balance between all the designers that came before him and himself. And perfectly in touch with everything that is going on around us, too. After this show, we like fashion again."

Carine Roitfeld, fashion stylist and Vogue World Paris creative director

"It was a spectacular and confident first expression of Martens's vision. It is not an easy thing to create genuine emotional intensity, nor to balance delicate and rebellious ideas in such an impactful way."

Judd Crane, executive director of buying and brand, Selfridges

"The first look was a clear reference to Martin Margiela with the plastic covers of Martin's degree collection in Antwerp. The corsets were totally John. And all the plastic bags you reuse from the dry cleaners, the feathers, and all the embroideries are totally Glenn."

Alexandre Samson, Palais Galliera curator

"All my life, I've been excited at seeing new talents come through. And as far as I'm concerned, the wilder and the more colourful the collection, the more extraordinary the talent. The more special something is, the more I like it. Which is to say, I've had a great time."

Suzy Menkes, journalist

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