



## Why Meryll Rogge's appointment at Marni is one of fashion's most exciting

In a year teeming with designer transitions, the news that Belgian up-and-comer Rogge is heading to Marni stands out.

By Luke Leitch



The single best reason why Belgian designer Meryll Rogge makes such an awesome appointment as the new creative director of Marni is her work. To see it for yourself, simply slide into *Vogue Runway* and check out Laird Borrelli-Persson's reviews alongside nearly all of Rogge's collections.

As Borrelli-Persson put it in her first season covering Rogge: "The fun, the colour, the cleverness and the sophistication of this Belgian's work, which is speaking to women and men around the world, belie the superhuman effort it takes to get a new brand up and running." That was 2021, and four years on, Rogge is still running her brand from a renovated farm in the Belgian countryside. Already, this year has been a big one: last month, she took home the Andam Grand Prize as the only female finalist. She was a finalist last year, too.

Beyond her individual excellence, however, there are broader considerations that add to Rogge's appeal as the new force at Marni.

### Ending the streak of male hires

The notion of a woman leading a womenswear-led house should be about as groundbreaking as florals for spring. And yet in the world of non-independent, company-run fashion brands, women remain the niche choice for human resources departments looking to fill creative director roles. Of the 20-ish such appointments made in the last 18 months or so, only four were women.

To elevate a woman designer to the top job at Marni, a role previously held by Francesco Risso, is an appointment of special positive resonance because Marni is a female-founded brand. Consuelo Castiglioni created collections that often registered beyond the shallow boundaries of the male gaze thanks to her experimental approach to textile, colour and silhouette. Along with Prada, it was long the standard-bearer for inadvertently man-repelling ugly-chic.

There are a few caveats to apply to this point, of course. Marni has been offering menswear since Spring 2002. And Risso produced collections over his nine years there that reflected a sensibility which was itself intuitively inclusive. Still, Rogge feels like a progressive hire at least in part because her gender affords her insight into the wearer experience that no male designer can ever possess. As she said during the Woolmark Prize final back in April about her own business: "We're an extremely inclusive brand, in a way, because we make things for people of all sizes. And to be honest, I'm not a 'perfect size' myself: that's just part of being a woman that's not a model."





Rogge's seven years working under Marc Jacobs and Joseph Carter at Marc Jacobs from 2008, and four years as head of womenswear design at Dries Van Noten from 2015 (before launching her farm-based brand in March 2020) have given her comprehensive observational experience of what it takes to be a creative lead in an established house. Now, at Marni, she seems beautifully placed to apply that experience through her own individual filter to a house whose codes are highly compatible with her own.

## The thrill of a creative director debutante

Of the three other female designers appointed as creative directors during the most recent high-fashion reshuffle, only Veronica Leoni at Calvin Klein was a first-timer in the role — and was thus, like Rogge, a relatively unknown quantity. Increasingly, this feels like something of an advantage.

When a new creative director is already known for their work at another house, that history will inflect the perception of anyone digesting their latest chapter. Sarah Burton's recent debut at Givenchy was wonderful, and yet her association with Alexander McQueen is so profound that it created an inescapable point of comparison. There's no doubt that Louise Trotter's career thus far at Joseph, Lacoste and Carven has demonstrated her impressive creative flexibility when it comes to applying her vision to diverse house codes — and yet any longtime observer of her work might also be led to suspect that her upcoming debut for Bottega Veneta might well feature oversized masculine tailoring and conceptually complicated knits. Although, of course, maybe it won't.

Not all first-timers escape pre-judgement, either, but this is for reasons that go beyond both their own creative history and control. The reception of Seán McGirr's debut at Alexander McQueen was, in some degree, coloured by the wide-ranging industry affection for the work of Burton that preceded it. [Sabato De Sarno](#) faced a similar challenge as an unknown quantity succeeding Alessandro Michele at Gucci. Two more upcoming first-timer debuts — from Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez at Loewe, and Dario Vitale at Versace — will also, to some extent, be compared with who and what immediately preceded them.

The best possible conditions for a debut are when a first-time creative director is placed in charge of a house whose direction has changed for reasons the audience can broadly get behind without harbouring a sort of unconscious toxic nostalgia for what has gone before. These are the circumstances recently enjoyed by Michael Rider at Celine and Julian Klausner at Dries Van Noten, who both delivered strong, individual debut collections that hit the audience undiluted either by any preconceptions of their earlier work or any broader impression of narrative glitch at their respective houses. And this will be the situation enjoyed by Rogge whenever her debut occurs.

## Completing OTB's highly hopeful creative reshuffle

The appointment of Rogge at Marni means that its owner, Only The Brave Group, is now looking like one of the most excitingly overseen conglomerate clusters in fashion.

Simone Bellotti was poached from Bally, where he did brilliant and darkly sophisticated work, to bring some edge to Jil Sander. Despite the rightful widespread affection for John Galiano's brilliance at Maison Margiela, Glenn Martens's debut there this month was arguably (but just as rightfully) the most adored of any debut show in the last few years. Along with its also Martens-run Diesel commercial engine, OTB also has a minority stake in Amiri and a controlling stake in Viktor & Rolf, two founder-run brands in strong creative health.

Rogge's appointment now caps the creative refresh that OTB, led by Renzo Rosso, needs to navigate one of fashion's most transitory years.

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