

## Versace's New Designer Knows Good Sex

Dario Vitale resurfaced long-lost depth and eroticism at the iconic Italian brand, triumphing over expectations for a muted show in the lead-up to a planned takeover by Prada Group, writes Robert Williams.

By Robert Williams



MILAN — Versace's invitation came in the form of an urgent love letter quoting Keats — an intriguing signal that the brand and its new creative director might defy expectations for a low-key, transitional debut. Soon, a presentation that had been downgraded over the summer from a full-on runway show to an “intimate event” became one of the season's hottest tickets as Dario Vitale prepared to reveal his first collection for the iconic Italian brand.

The address on Via Cardinal Federico meant nothing to most, but turned out to be a back entrance of the spectacular Pinacoteca Ambrosiana museum, where masterpieces by Caravaggio, Raphael and Titian hang in a 17th-century palazzo.

Old and new mixed; the sacred clashed with the profane. VIP guests were seated in deep leather sofas, flanked by Renaissance art and dressed in archival pieces from the brand's 47-year history. Their pedigrees ranged from rock-and-roll royalty (Bianca Jagger) to actors (Jon Hamm, Laysla De Oliveira) to fitness influencers, ballet dancers and adult film stars.

Louche installations including a bed made up with messy sheets, a slip-dress draped over a post-modern glass lamp and an unfinished game of computer solitaire were backdropped by the collection of religious paintings — harkening back to founder Gianni Versace's libertine sensibility and fascination with Catholic and baroque aesthetics.

“In this house, just like if you go to Gianni's apartment in Via Gesu, it's hard to tell what's really ancient and what's not. This idea of *falso storico* [faux historical] is such a topic to me because at a certain point you don't really know: Is this new? Does it still look good?” Vitale said, explaining his concept to an eager throng of reporters following the show.

“Sexuality, to me, it's not even the sex itself. It's more the experience of it,” he said. “When you have good sex, it's about the smell. It's about the tactile aspect of it. It's about the souvenir the day after. It's the idea of something more than the thing itself.”

His show displayed a richer, more diverse take on eroticism, with womenswear looks running the gamut from bare stomachs and ultra-narrow, body-conscious tank tops (hello, side-boob) to covered-up, androgynous three-piece suits and boxy, broad-shouldered dresses with thick belts.





The collection spanned crumpled cocktail dresses to skin-tight onesies to university-inflected sportswear — broadening its scope from the skimpy mermaid dresses of recent seasons to something more varied and more grounded in everyday life (and in the archive of the brand, which used to offer a head-to-toe wardrobe at each of its sub-brands ranging from couture to premium denim back in its '80s and '90s heyday).

With 60-plus looks — sported by models ranging from street-cast hunks and TikTokers to viral supermodel Alex Consani to go-to faces like Chu Wong and Binx Walton — the only thing intimate about the presentation's scale was its headcount, with less than 200 guests spread around the baroque palazzo.

Notably, they did not include Donatella Versace — its former owner and longtime creative director, now “chief brand ambassador.” Apparently she wanted to give her successor space. Nor was there any sign of the Prada-Bertelli clan, who announced a deal to buy the label from Capri Holdings in April but have been slow to voice support for Vitale, who previously worked for Prada Group as design director of Miu Miu.

Some of the silhouettes were a bit messy: The marriage between Vitale's twisted sensibility and the brand's already baroque codes remains unruly. Translating his off-beat take on sexiness to the brand's current client base will be no easy feat for marketing and commercial teams, either.

And yet Vitale's generous palette of clothes, characters and ideas suggest hope for Versace's revival in a fashion industry that's struggled to spark renewed excitement (and sales).

Vitale said he “felt the responsibility” to shine a light on forgotten aspects of the brand. “I really needed to do that for Gianni, because there are so many layers,” he said.

