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Prada

# Prada: cagoules and rucksacks get a luxury makeover

Milan catwalk show blurring the lines between mens- and womenswear was Prada at its best - ironic, playful, brilliant



Fluidity between menswear and womenswear is a huge deal in fashion at the moment. Photograph: Flavio Lo Scalzo/EPA

**Imogen Fox**
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A mirrored box outside the Prada show betrayed everything that is important to the Milanese brand right now. The box was to showcase the launch of the brand's new perfumes, the agenda not subtle. Perfumes make cash and at Prada, business is far from its best: profits released in April were down more than 26% on the previous year.

But Prada is never just about bald commercialism. Miuccia Prada, joint CEO and the creative force behind the brand, is one of the most important designers working in fashion right now.

The influence of the 67-year-old is clear to see - her ideas resonate with everyone

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in the industry from teenage fashion students to her catwalk peers running billion-pound labels. And so, whereas most brands would have been content to market a pleasing new scent with a celebrity face, the new Prada perfumes for men and for women have ambitions towards conceptualism.

The exterior of the mirrored box would not have looked out of place at the Tate Modern's Switch House. The box's black and white interlocking rooms and video graphics are apparently an attempt to investigate the fluidity of male and female archetypes. The concept itself was meant to embrace the idea of contradiction, which is pretty much the unwritten mission statement at Prada. The desire to create a social media moment and engage more with younger customers was obvious too.

The idea of fluidity between menswear and womenswear is a huge preoccupation in fashion at the moment, with many labels amalgamating their menswear and womenswear into one blockbuster catwalk show as of next season. This is a change that is putting the dedicated menswear shows into uncertain territory. But, as ever, Prada is ahead of the curve and has been blurring the lines between the two for a while. Women have appeared on its menswear catwalks and the menswear has provided clues as to the brand's womenswear direction for several seasons now.

The collection shown on the mesh metal catwalk on Sunday night was neither strictly menswear nor womenswear. This was a collection with the cagoule and the rucksack - both genderless items - at its heart.



A model presents a creation for Prada during the men's spring/summer 2017 fashion shows in Milan. Photograph: Giuseppe Cacace/AFP/Getty Images

Prada, arguably, has intellectual ownership of both those utilitarian items in catwalk terms. The first lookout featured a male model in a tailored suit, who wore a blue cagoule dangling from his rucksack and hiking socks and sandals. He marched up the sloping mesh runway towards the photographers with a pair of dress shoes attached by their laces to his rucksack and his hair held back with a Glastonbury-appropriate headband. This was a version of luxury hiking - a classic Prada contradiction.

Backstage after the show, Muiccia Prada took congratulations wearing a nylon cagoule tied around her waist. In an upbeat mood she described the collection to the assembled huddle as "about the present, a vision of what is happening now with people travelling and joining together cultures".

One cagoule had what looked like bright thermal-imaging maps printed on it, but it was in fact a riff on Google Earth images representing different parts of the world. Other highlights included bright hiking sandals and contrasting bright zips. Female models wore nylon dresses with drawstring toggle hems and luxury handbags dangling from their rucksacks. This was a cheekbone-heavy rambling club given a luxury makeover.

It was Prada at its best: ironic, playful, wearable and brilliant.

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