EXHIBITION

THE WHITE SHIRT ACCORDING TO ME.
GIANFRANCO FERRE’
PRATO TEXTILE MUSEUM, 1 FEBRUARY 2014 – 15 JUNE 2014

MILAN 8 NOVEMBER 2013. The creativity and stylish sophistication of one of the leading players of the world of contemporary fashion illustrated via an iconic example of his capacity for design in a new exhibition in Prato (from 1 February 2014): THE WHITE SHIRT ACCORDING TO ME. GIANFRANCO FERRE.

Jointly conceived and organized by Prato Textile Museum Foundation – the leading Italian institution for the enhancement and promotion of the local, national and international textile heritage – and the Gianfranco Ferré Foundation – an organization established for the purpose of conveying and promoting the message of the world famous fashion designer with a view to endowing new generations of fashion designers with an awareness of the various aspects of the great master’s work – the aim of the exhibition is to pay homage to the work and talent of the “architect of fashion”.

Right from the very beginning of his career, Gianfranco Ferré was a fervent promoter of the blending of the highly difficult and complex languages of architecture and fashion in the pursuit of creative contamination.

“[…] a considerable part of my creative process is the result of my background and training in architecture. For me fashion is not only poetry, intuition and imagination, it is also method and an approach to design based on the concept of clothing as the result of a coherently determined intervention on shape.”

Displayed in a setting pervaded by subtle sensations of lightness and light, 27 of the most extraordinary white shirts created by Gianfranco Ferré in over twenty years of fashion design – together with their relative designs - will allow visitors to the exhibition a unique chance to experience the sartorial poetics of Ferré and his innovative approach to fashion design.

THE EXHIBITION

Set in the evocative spaces of Prato Textile Museum – a 3,000 square metre former textile mill which is now one of the most monumental examples of industrial architecture in Tuscany - the exhibition will occupy two major areas on the first floor of the specially converted building.
The first of these two areas will be dedicated to exploring Ferré’s technical and creative approach to the creation of his signature white shirts via a series of installations illustrating not only the complexity and imagination inherent in the creation of these highly structured garments but also the crucial steps in the development of these intensely original items of design.

On the contrary, the second exhibition area will highlight the candor, transparency and volumes of a small ‘army’ of the Italian fashion designer’s creations which, despite the rigour of their tailoring and emphasis on shape, invoke a surprising dreamlike atmosphere.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EXHIBITION

Among the many items proposed in the exhibition, some of the most salient include:

- a silk bustier which opens like the petals of a delicate lily to “frame the face” in defiance of the very laws of gravity;
- a spectacular “inside out” shirt whose underlying concept of construction makes it a real and proper object of design;
- a huge collar of lines so essential and a design so ingenious that it needs no shirt to support it;
- a sumptuous shirt of such lightness that it is more than worthy of its name: “la merveilleuse”.

However, the exhibition also includes a large collection of illustrations and technical drawings sketched by the exceptional hand of Gianfranco Ferré, images which, in just a few able strokes, not only convey the idea behind each and every project but also indicate the type of fabric and specify the details and finishes.

Finally, the contents of the exhibition are further enriched by a series of macro projections and multimedia installations of images and videos from catwalk shows. Using material from the archives of the Gianfranco Ferré Foundation, these audio-visual contributions offer a detailed overview of the stylistic development of the great Italian fashion designer vis-à-vis the white shirt.

“The white shirt according to me. Gianfranco Ferré” exhibition confirms Prato Textile Museum’s approach to the organization of exhibitions which, since 2005, has seen annual events illustrating the role of textiles in the international fashion system, a choice which perfectly counters Prato industrial district’s role as a leading player in the production of international fashion. Indeed, in Prato, the industrial district produces fashion; the textile museum produces fashion culture.

A complete press kit with all the available images may be downloaded from www.museodeltessuto.it/news; videos on Ferré white shirts and sketches may be downloaded from www.4friendsfilm.com/download/FERRE_DISEGNI_TV.zip www.4friendsfilm.com/download/FERRE’_CAMICIE_TV.zip
THE WHITE SHIRT ACCORDING TO ME. GIANFRANCO FERRE’

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Museo del Tessuto via Puccetti 3 Prato ph 0574 611503
Opening hours: Tuesday – Thursday 10 am – 3 pm; Friday – Sunday 10 am – 6 pm. Closed on Mondays
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The exhibition which the Gianfranco Ferré Foundation is creating and curating in cooperation with the Prato Textile Museum represents a highlight moment within the context of the Foundation’s activities on the basis of its statutory objectives.

Our goal consists first of all in communicating and disseminating the designer’s message (surely no task solely for professionals, insiders and experts) in the conviction that this message and all the meaning it holds in the history of contemporary fashion can and must belong to everyone, for it is an expression of absolute, boundaryless values: beauty, elegance, culture, a fondness for tradition, keen attention to novelty, to the dynamics of living and how they keep evolving.

Also, we need to remember that Gianfranco Ferré always loved sharing his knowledge, with young people most of all. Likewise, he always loved discussing and explaining it. He never designed clothes to last the mere span of a season or, worse still, to end up permanently in some archive. He thought of his creations invariably as textile expressions of architecture that only the body can make come to life. Clothes effectively worn, present on city streets worldwide, otherwise objects on display in some show or exhibit.

Envisioning “his” white shirt as the protagonist of this first museum exhibition of ours took no great thought or effort. We may even speak in terms of an ordinary choice, simply par for the course. Certainly no one can forget or ignore the fact that the airy white blouse is the emblem par excellence – universally recognized, now as before – of the Gianfranco Ferré style.

Without hesitation we accepted the Prato Textile Museum’s invitation. The museum is a most prestigious institution deeply rooted in the culture and work ethic of a city that lives and thrives very much in the intriguing and intricate world of fabrics and yarns. The important role the museum plays is tangible and visible both in its extraordinary textile collections and in the historic building that will host the exhibition, an outstanding example of industrial architecture.

Rita Airaghi
Fondazione Gianfranco Ferré Director
It is a great honour for Prato Textile Museum Foundation to work together with Gianfranco Ferré Foundation in the organization of an exhibition celebrating the talents of Gianfranco Ferré, a unique figure in the history of Italian fashion.

Indeed, *The white shirt according to me. Gianfranco Ferré* exhibition offers a perfect occasion for both foundations to reconfirm their commitment to enhancing the culture of fashion and promoting and safeguarding the Made in Italy movement, undertakings that Prato Textile Museum has actively pursued since 2005 with the organization of annual temporary exhibitions, the latest of which focused on the vintage phenomenon.

Support of the Made in Italy movement is also one of the primary objectives of the companies operating in Prato textile district, protagonists of a contemporary fashion manufacturing sector which sees the safeguarding of Italian excellence as a vital resource for economic recovery.

As the cultural expression of this industrial collective, Prato Textile Museum is a well-loved point of reference for all those operating in the local area, an institution which is sensitive to both the needs of the international fashion system and the need to preserve the history of textile manufacturing in Prato. Prato Textile Museum has recently been included in the list of cultural institutions supported directly by the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities.

Andrea Cavicchi  
Chairman of Fondazione Museo del Tessuto di Prato
The research behind the exhibition

The benchmark by which the “architect of fashion” measured his creative capacity and the sounding board upon which he tested all his new ideas, the white shirt has become an iconic symbol of Gianfranco Ferré’s approach to fashion design. Thus The white shirt according to me. Gianfranco Ferré exhibition intends to examine the aims and methods adopted by the famous Italian fashion designer by focusing on the garment which not only brought him to the attention of the world but also served as a unstinting companion in his exploration of new creative ideas. The white shirt was a garment to which Ferré turned throughout his career, not only as an element of continuity, but also as a point of reference, a familiar friend with whom he could examine the deepest folds of his imagination and sensitivity.

Explaining the reasons for his focus on the white shirt, Ferré referred to it as a “symbol of my style”, a point of departure for “re-interpretation of the rules of elegance” and the perfect medium for exploring the way in which decomposition and re-composition can release the “thousands of identities” inherent in an item of clothing. With regard to this versatility, he spoke in terms of a “contemporary lexicon of elegance” in which each lemma could be “pronounced as preferred”. However, despite the apparent scope for interpretation provided by the white shirt, Ferré’s designs were always the result of rigourous artistic and technical study. Only when skimmed, filtered, purified and purged of all references to tradition is it possible to raise the white shirt to a higher abstract level at which all rules are simultaneously loved, destroyed and recomposed: this was the level of the creative motivation of Gianfranco Ferré.

Jointly conceived and organized by Prato Textile Museum Foundation and Gianfranco Ferré Foundation, the aim of The white shirt according to me. Gianfranco Ferré exhibition is to highlight and enhance both the theoretical premises and the tangible results of the work of the great Italian fashion designer. The exhibition thus offers examples of the many different media used by Gianfranco Ferré to present his work - sketches, drawings, technical notes, videos and installations – before culminating in an ‘army’ of thirty or so white shirts, each a masterpiece in its own right, created over a period of approximately twenty years (1982-2006) and an extraordinary set of materials from the archives of the Gianfranco Ferré Foundation. The first exhibition area is divided into a series of audio-visual installations offering various keys to interpretation of the white shirts of Gianfranco Ferré - videos offering glorious images of graphic designs produced by Ferré at various stages of his career and dreamlike macro images exploring the invisible skeleton, the chassis, upon which each shirt is built – which then leads to a series of technical designs, catwalk shots, photographs and editorial materials highlighting the way in which the sculptural elegance of the white shirt can be even further enhanced by carefully crafted dualisms of light and shade.

Obviously, the most absolute and effective syntheses of Ferré’s creative ideas are to be found in his original designs; sketches which already contain all the elements necessary to precede with the cutting of the patterns and the creation of the garment itself. Just a few impeccable lines and the
definitive image of the shirt is confirmed, the volumes, details and weight of fabric already clearly described by the line of his pencil. Ferré’s silhouettes are fluid, sinuous and ephemeral figures whose function is to highlight the salient features of the garment in relation to the female body. Many sketches are annotated with technical details regarding seams, finishes, special features, proportions and the types of fabric necessary to incarnate the idea (taffeta, crêpe de chine, organza, satin, tulle, gauze, piqué, silk and cotton of the highest quality) as well as explanations of the various micro and macro features (lace, mechanical embroidery, hand sewn top stitching, silk pleats) of the elegant contemporary lexicon of the white shirt.

The various languages used by Gianfranco Ferré to convey his ideas include de- and re-composition of the garment, the exploitation of a single element, the mere evocation of form and the elimination of tradition. Thus, although the “Painter’s Shirt” and “Decomposed Shirt” may at first seem to be the antithesis of one another, their genesis is nevertheless based on the same methodological approach.

In the “Painter’s Shirt” Ferré focuses on the volumes of historical tailoring but recreates them using inventions, structures and materials which give them a totally new sense and purpose, while in the “De-composed Shirt” he flouts the “rules of shirt-making” by endowing the sleeves and collar with a primary role and replacing the front and back of the shirt with a bustier, voluntarily eliminating various parts of the shirt but, as in the “Painter’s Shirt”, giving new sense and purpose to others.

Ferré’s use of non-colour in the creation of his shirts was also a deliberate choice, an expedient which enabled him to explore the effects of light by illuminating the whites of his fabrics to various degrees of intensity or surrounding them in darkness to make them stand out. In the belief that only by respecting this attention to detail is it possible to achieve an insight into Ferré’s “desire”, thanks to the creative intervention of a highly respected artist, light and darkness are also protagonists of The white shirt according to me. Gianfranco Ferré exhibition. Indeed, the alternation of light and darkness inevitably creates an intermediate phase, a moment of translucency, as invisible but unavoidable as the structure of a shirt.

Finally, the transparency, lightness, radiance, emphasis, volume and rigour which pervade the whole of Gianfranco Ferré’s oeuvre are clearly defined in the catwalk collections documented in the extraordinary archive footage of the Gianfranco Ferré Foundation.

Method, rigour, perfection, creativity, energy and talent are the elements which defined the mission of Gianfranco Ferré, a fashion designer whose ethics and values offer an example to all those approaching the world of fashion and design.

Daniela Degl’Innocenti
Exhibition Curator
Curator of Prato Textile Museum
from the notes of Gianfranco Ferré

“Talking about my white blouse is all too easy. It’s all too easy to declare a love that covers the span of my creative path. A hallmark – perhaps the ultimate signature – of my style, which enfolds a constant pursuit of innovation and a no less unfailing love of tradition.

A combination of tradition and innovation is what originally triggered the Ferré white shirt, set the story in motion. Tradition in the form of the men’s shirt, ever-present and encoded element of the wardrobe. Which tickled my fancy for invention, incited my propensity for rethinking the tenets of elegance and style in an interplay of pure fantasy and contemporary design. Read with sense of glamour and poetry, freedom and energy, the formal and quasi-immutable white shirt took on an infinity of identities, a multiplicity of inflections. To the point of becoming, I believe, a must of modern-day femininity…

In the lexicon of contemporary elegance, I like to think that the white blouse is a universal term every woman can ‘pronounce’ the way she prefers…”

This process always entails a keen rethinking of shapes. The white blouse is never the same yet always unmistakable. It may be light and floaty, flawlessly severe (if the mannish cut remains), as sumptuously enveloping as a cloud, as skinny and snug as a bodysuit. Some parts, primarily collar and cuffs, can become emphatic; others expressly lose ‘force’ and may even disappear (back, shoulders, sleeves). The blouse comes with precious lace and embroidery; turns sexy thanks to the use of sheer fabrics; acquires ultra importance with gorgeous ruffles and ruches. It billows delicately with every motion, almost free of gravity. It frames the face like a fabulous corolla. It sculpts the body in a slick second-skin mode. It is the eclectic interpreter of all types of materials: sheer organza, crisp taffeta, glossy satin. Duchesse, poplin, chiffon, georgette, too…”
Gianfranco Ferré was born in Legnano (Milan) on August 15, 1944.

After earning his high school diploma specializing in sciences, he enrolled in the School of Architecture at the Milan Polytechnic Institute. In 1969 he graduated, presenting a thesis on the “Methodology of the Approach to Composition” with Franco Albini, an architect, as his major professor.

His very first, quite off-hand entry into the world of fashion took place in the same years. Ferré designed jewelry and accessories that he would then give to friends and classmates. Rosy Biffi, a true talent scout as well as the owner of one of Milan’s edgiest boutiques, had occasion to notice the creations. She mentioned them to Ileana Pareto Spinola and Anne Sophie Benazzo, two women who were so impressed by these handcrafted items that they suggested buyers might take an interest in them. At that point prominent Italian fashion editors (initially, Anna Piaggi and Anna Riva) happened to spy the creations. This led to coverage in major specialty mags and in 1971 one of the accessories appeared on the cover of the Italian monthly “Arianna”.

Ferré’s early debut on the scene proved very successful. It even attracted the attention of leading Italian journalist Camilla Cederna, who talked about Ferré in her weekly column for the newsmagazine “L’Espresso”.

In 1973, the young architect-designer made the first of his many trips to India, where up until 1977 he spent long periods working for the Genoa-based San Giorgio Impermeabili clothing company owned by the Borelli family. In India he designed and had manufactured the company’s “Ketch” collection.

At the same time, he had the chance to visit every part of the country and to study local craftsmanship and production potential, also on behalf of the Indian government.

Ferré fell literally under the spell of India, a land where he consolidated his professional training and embarked on his creative path. From India he learned a fundamental lesson of life, all about the colors, scents and shapes forming a whole with feelings, sensations and emotions. It’s a lesson that he would later transfer to and instill inextricably in his collections, through his own remarkable way of reminiscing and remembering.

In the same years, during his stays in Italy, he did free-lance work designing accessories for prominent fashion names such as Walter Albini and Christiane Bailly, as well as knitwear and swimwear for other companies in the sector. His swimsuits debuted on the catwalk at the “MareModa Capri” event, winning a prize that marked the first of many the designer would earn throughout the course of his career.

In 1974, Gianfranco Ferré began designing his first collections, hosting his first fashion shows, in particular for the “Courlande” and the “Baila” labels, the latter which belonged to Franco Mattioli, a Bolognese industrialist who in 1978 would become his business partner.

In May of 1978, in fact, the Gianfranco Ferré company was set up on Via San Damiano in Milan (later the headquarters would move to Via della Spiga).

In October of the same year, Ferré presented his debut signature women’s ready-to-wear collection with a show at the Principe di Savoia Hotel in Milan, truly a thrilling moment.

In addition to the launch of the men’s clothing line in 1982, and to the introduction of a wide range
of accessories and other products on license in partnership with leading companies in the various respective sectors, Ferré made a mark with two other key experiences: the creation of his own Alta Moda collection (1986-1989) and his extraordinary adventure at the finest and most storied of French fashion houses.

In 1983, he helped to develop the curriculum for Domus Academy, the new Milan-based Design, Design Management and Fashion Design Post-graduate School where up until 1989 he taught the course in Dress Design: analysis of dress design and relation to changing fashion, analysis of the design project from start to finish.

In May of 1989, Gianfranco Ferré was appointed Artistic Director of Christian Dior for the women’s Haute Couture, Prêt à Porter and Fourrure lines. Confirmation of the Dior appointment up to 1996 came in 1993.

In the fall of 1998, on the occasion of the brand’s twentieth anniversary a series of events important for the company’s future culminated with the grand opening in Milan of the new headquarters on Via Pontaccio: in the former Gondrand building, after a total renewal based on the initial project by Marco Zanuso, then completed by Franco Raggi both on the level of the executive project and interior architecture.

In 2002, the Gianfranco Ferré Company was acquired by Tonino Perna’s IT Holding Group. Gianfranco Ferré became Artistic Director of the house.

In March of 2007, Gianfranco Ferré was appointed President of the Brera Fine Arts Academy in Milan.

After suffering a brain hemorrhage, Gianfranco Ferré died in Milan on June 17, 2007.
The Gianfranco Ferré Foundation was established in February 2008, primarily with the aim of preserving, organizing and making available to the public – first and foremost in digital archive form - the patrimony of materials that document the designer’s professional activity. It also has the goal of promoting, pursuing and carrying out projects that relate to the Gianfranco Ferré philosophy and culture of design, to the maestro’s unique idea of fashion and exquisite aesthetic sensitivity.

The Foundation’s first objective is the creation of an archive/museum that houses everything saved and kept during the span of Gianfranco Ferré’s career. This task entails making an inventory of many different types of materials: photographs, sketches and drawings, film and video footage, press reviews, magazines, press releases, as well as the architect-designer’s own writings (talks, lectures, notes). All then go into the databank for easy access both on site and via web.

The database, which is continually being updated and added to, presently contains more than 55,000 items. They are organized on the basis of a straightforward and capillary system, specifically in terms of both subject matter and chronological.

The creation of an archive of this nature offers people from various domains of life the chance to examine and experience Gianfranco Ferré’s fashion work in an effective and hands-on way. Students, scholars, professionals – anyone with a concrete connection to and/or interest in the fields of modern fashion and pure design – may want to take advantage of this valuable opportunity.

The existence of a similar archive facilitates a wide range of initiatives: publication of books on specific subjects, organization of exhibitions, educational activities for young people, promotion of in-depth study programs in cooperation with universities and other educational institutions, hosting of talks, on-site visits, as well as participation in conferences or events and meetings focused on topics connected to Gianfranco Ferré’s work and/or, more in general, to contemporary fashion and aesthetics.
Entrenched in the territorial and social economic milieu of Prato industrial district, Prato Textile Museum is managed by Prato Textile Museum Foundation, an organization established in November 2003 and recognized at regional government level whose members include the Municipality of Prato, the Province of Prato and Prato Chamber of Commerce for Agriculture, Industry and Craft and which avails itself of the financial support of Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Prato and Prato Industrial Union via its subsidiary Saperi srl.

The aim of Prato Textile Museum Foundation is thus the management, enhancement and promotion of the local textile heritage with the participatory support of public and private entities, a remit which has enabled the organization to establish an excellent relationship of collaboration with local (textile) companies, institutions, organizations, cultural associations, trade unions, professional rolls and clubs. The combination of this special relationship with the intense programme of cultural activities promoted by the Foundation makes Prato Textile Museum a much-loved point of reference.

Founded in 1975 as a cultural institution with dual aims - to keep alive the history of the local manufacturing industry and to support training in the sector of textile design - Prato Textile Museum was initially housed in the premises of Tullio Buzzi Technical Institute before moving to Palazzo Comunale in 1997 and finally finding its definitive location in the former Campolmi textile mill in May 2003.

Campolmi textile mill is a symbol of the vocation of the local area and one of the finest examples of monumental industrial architecture in the Province of Prato, and even the whole of Tuscany, whose specifically restored exhibition spaces offer a surface area of almost 3,000 square metres. Divided into six different areas of interest, each leading off from the central Boiler Room, the heart of the old textile mill, four of the exhibition areas house permanent collections - Antique Textiles, Materials and Processes, Prato Textiles (12th century - 1950) and Prato Fashions (1960-2000) – while the remaining two areas are set aside for temporary exhibitions, events which since 2003 have been organized on a six-monthly basis with a view to exploring issues of excellence in the sectors of contemporary textiles, fashion and design.

One of the most important features of Prato Textile Museum is its collection of historic textiles which was established in 1975 thanks to the donation of a number of 14th – 19th century textiles by local textile manufacturer and collector Loriano Bertini and has since increased in size and quality to such an extent that it is now considered one of the world’s most important collections.
The museum’s collections document the history of the art of textile manufacturing with over 6,000 exhibits dating from the paleo-Christian age to the modern day, while regular donations from local textile companies and Prato Industrial Union (Pratotrade) enable the existence of a state-of-the-art contemporary section. Indeed, the relationship of collaboration enjoyed by the Museum and local textile companies is unique at European level and offers a tangible example of the benefits of setting up synergies between cultural organizations and the world of enterprise.

Since 2007, Prato Textile Museum has been responsible for coordinating the European Textile Collectivities Association (ACTE - www.acte.net) platform of collaboration between Italian and European textile museums (Prato, Como and Schio in Italy, Terrassa in Spain, Roubaix in France, Guimaraes in Portugal and Lodz in Poland) and has also participated in such important European projects as Twintex (2007), Eurotex ID (2008-10), Texmedin (2008-11) and PLUSTEX (2012 - to date).

In 2005 the Museum was nominated for the European Museum Award, a prestigious prize presented on an annual basis by the European Council’s European Museum Forum, and between 2010 and 2013 it was the headquarters of the Tuscan branch of the International Council of Museums (www.icom.org), the most important professional organization for museums and museum workers with offices in over 100 countries.

In 2011 Prato Textile Museum was included in the list of cultural institutions supported directly by the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and to date is the only textile museum to be awarded such important national recognition.