"Fashion has really brought me back to the table and out of myself, again [...] it is definitely my comfort zone, and I feel that I am an actor for their pieces-for a simple girl who's almost dumb, that fits the bill pretty well!"





ELISA ROUX

Special thanks to MARIE SCHNEIER at IFM Paris

INTAGE MARITHÉ & FRANÇOIS GIRBAUD



In conversation with CAROLINABENJUMEA Photographer AGATHE KARSENTI

At L'Institut Français de la Mode in Paris, we C.B. It's interesting because many people who start in a find fashion, savoir-faire, passion and talent. creative aspect, don't necessarily see themselves having a career in the academic field. It's interesting to make these We find the future leaders of today's fashion changes, especially with your background. houses, and we also find Thierry Rondenet H.Y. It's true! When we were contacted, we were finishing up at and Hervé Yvrenogeau. As co-directors of the Acne Studios, and the project of merging the Chambre Syndicale and IFM, where there were no Bachelors degrees in creative Bachelor of Arts in Fashion Design program, fields, only a Masters. This actually interested us a lot! We weren't they are dedicated to the challenging work of taking over an existing program. We were creating something new with two schools merging. One that was historically more focused continuing the tradition of shaping the future on fashion and luxury management, and the other was more leaders of the fashion industry. Their journey focused on technique. That's what interested us. This marriage, precisely, of the two aspects of this sector at once. Because, in has been marked by a constant exploration of the end, it remains an applied art as artistic as it can be. techniques, creativity, innovation, and personal C.B. So, when you designed the program for the new Bachelor of Arts in Fashion Design at IFM, what were the main passions, as well as the ongoing evolution and aspects you considered crucial for students today? challenges facing the industry. This evolution T.R. I would say there are several aspects. First, given that it is driven by a new generation of designers was a private institution, what seemed important to us was to have a strong scholarship policy to have all sorts of profiles. The and creative minds who are challenging the foundation agreed to fund about 30% of scholarships, which status quo. Their approach to fashion design allows us to have very diverse social profiles in the classes. So, when the Fédération de la Mode et de la Couture approached is not only academic, innovative, and technius, along with the Chambre Syndicale and IFM, the idea was to cal, but also political and realistic. Instead of create a new hub; a new campus for creation in Paris. We had to selling bubble-wrapped dreams, they reveal put creation at the center of the program and be very strong in everything we call the humanities. That means being very strong the harsh realities of the industry, and the chalin art history, fashion history and all courses on cultural approprialenges that upcoming designers must face to tion and inclusivity. We can no longer make fashion without these approaches-it's no longer possible! succeed. We sat down with Thierry and Hervé H.Y. We have to mention sustainability which was also at the to talk about the passion for fashion that drives core of the training. For us, it was a very different model from La Cambre, with much larger numbers. A creator today has value their students at the headquarters of the IFM only if they are connected to their time. Today, we don't create in in Paris, where all the fashion magic happens.

the same way as we did 10 years ago. For young students, what comes to mind is sustainability. It's a factor they must integrate CAROLINA BENJUMEA. You have been working together into their creations. For us, it seemed crucial to build a new since 1993 and have founded two labels: Union pour le fashion student. What was also very important for us was "hands-Vêtement and Own. Today, you are co-directors of the on" work-that was fundamental. The third very important thing Institut Français de la Mode's Bachelor of Arts in Fashion was research. We don't come from nowhere. Even the things we Design program. What made you consider entering the think are in our heads are born from another path; from exhibimore academic side of the fashion industry? tions we might have seen. Sometimes it's quite unconscious. THIERRY RONDENET. So, we had our two brands: Union for Cloth-And students are not very used to searching. Now, with phones, ing and Own. But when we stopped Own, we did a lot of consultresearch is done digitally. They are not aware of who did what ing for brands. We worked for Margiela, Balenciaga, Jean-Paul and when. We wanted to focus on these subjects from the first Gaultier, Louis Vuitton, Acne Studios, and the last one was Lanvin. year. Each major project starts with library research and bibli-But since the 2000s, we had already started teaching. We taught ographies, a rather classic way of searching because we send

THIERRY RONDENET AND HERVÉ YVRENOGEAU (INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE LA MODE)

at La Cambre only four hours a week so we already had a foot in teaching. And it was something that came quite naturally to us. HERVÉ YVRENOGEAU. At that time, we were a bit younger and quite close to the students. It was also a challenge to pass on the little experience we had with Union for Clothing-because we started that brand while at school. We presented at the Hyères festival, which we won in 1994. And in fact, we immediately structured ourselves as a brand while being students. For us, it was natural to pass on our background. Even though it was still small, it was still interesting because we had already created our brand. We subsequently did a lot of consulting, as Thierry said. And then, in parallel, we also had a store in Brussels that we opened for Own, which we stopped in 2012, but we kept the store. We became buyers of brands. It was mainly men's wear. So, we had multiple facets: we were buyers, we were sellers and we did the window displays. Then there was our teaching career at La Cambre and our consulting career-we had a bit of all aspects of the fashion sector!

them to libraries rather than researching on the Internet. We don't prohibit it, but it standardizes the research a lot. They don't realize that using the same keywords generates the same images. Also, when researching, you don't always find what you want. On this research journey, sometimes, we accumulate knowledge that will resurface in the second, third year, or later in a studio. They might say, "Oh yes, I remember I found these things." It's also this path where you get a bit lost.

T.R. Yes, completely. The important thing is to work with your hands. That was also the legacy we received from the Chambre Syndicale since they had a guite strong technical approach. The idea was to figure out how to bring together creativity, experimentation, and technique. A technique that is conducted academically will produce clothing, but maybe not clothing that will be as innovative and surprising. So, the processes need to be changed at some point. That means fashion design, let's say style, will also push the technique forward.

C.B. So, the Bachelor of Arts in Fashion Design is open to students who have graduated from high school, typically around 17 to 19 years old. This is still a very young age to differentiate oneself from others, as they are just discovering who they are and what their passions are. What do you look for in these students when reviewing their applications?

H.Y. Above all, we look for a passion and a desire to work in this field in a very broad sense, because sometimes we take a chance on students with a more scientific or literary background. Knowing how to sew or having basic sewing skills is not very important to us. What interests us is their universe, their portfolio, no matter how small, because they've often created it during evening classes or with a bit of art education, so it's quite naive. But we can still detect things in there that seem interesting to us. Then, through the interview, we immediately see the taste and passion that can drive these students. We warn them right away because one can dress very well and love fashion as a shopper, but that doesn't mean they will be a good designer. So, it's also about detecting in people who are not super high fashion this desire to explore clothing, to make proposals, to question the world as it is. And it's true that in our Bachelor's program, we like this naive approach to the profession. It's not very structured and not necessarily very clear either. Some students come in already knowing they want to be... shoe designers, for instance. Our Bachelor's can open up to all fashion disciplines, including image, bags, or more technical professions. They have somewhat predefined ideas about what they are, what they think they are, or what they want to do. Often, we find that through their experiences over these three years, they shift. The one who naively wanted to be an artistic director discovers a passion for technique and is very happy working in a workshop making models, something they never considered. And the designer who wanted to make sneakers ends up wanting to make bags. The idea is that the school helps build each student's personality, that nothing is predefined, and that they can evolve within the school. The focus is really on creativity, but in an environment where they can interact with management and craftsmanship students, where they can exchange and collaborate.

T.R. The interview is super important because, for almost 20 minutes, they explain their processes, which is sometimes more interesting than the result, especially in portfolios. And sometimes it's precisely this discussion we have with them where we discover that "okay, they have something," because the way they approached such and such topic is quite different. And with their naivety, they have pursued their ideas to the end. I think we are looking for people who are truly committed and involved because this is a profession that demands passion.

C.B. It must be very interesting to see how they evolve, how

they change their way of seeing clothing and fashion by the time they finish.

H.Y. Yes, and as I mentioned earlier, some students have done preparatory courses and are very artistically mature. They may initially seem like the best candidates but they don't necessarily end up growing as much. They remain good. On the other hand, some struggle for years with technique and research but end up exploding and becoming the best. I find that the school also serves as a place of meeting and exchange. As Thierry mentioned at the very beginning, there is also a social mix due to scholarships. There's a cultural mix, with almost 17 different nationalities. A mix of languages as well. And I think we grow a lot by looking at others. Indeed, some, through their curiosity and openness, grow much more than others.

C.B. It is a very interesting, but also challenging time for the fashion industry. The cultural, social, economic, and political spheres have shaped what the industry is today, and people are realizing that being a designer is not only about making clothing. What is the most difficult part of being a designer today?

H.Y. For me, the most difficult part is being creative with quite restrictive constraints, especially regarding sustainability. Because indeed, it significantly limits their creativity. But at the same time, it challenges them creatively. Today, no designer can position themselves outside of the world. It's not possible. And for us, it is fundamental that they question this. They then integrate it in a more or less radical way. But indeed, for me, it is an extremely important factor and one that is not easy to manage in terms of creativity. We don't have the answers to provide, nor does the industry at the moment.

T.R. I even think that beyond the issue of sustainability, you can't be a designer without addressing these topics. The problem is that today, fashion doesn't pay much attention to these issues. And I'm talking beyond just the political situation. I mean, fashion lives in a sort of separate world. Just look at the fashion weeks. We were told COVID would change things. It hasn't changed anything at all. So, there's a pretty dichotomous situation. We have a generation that is interested in these issues, but luxury brands are moving forward very, very, very slowly. Today, some students don't even want to work in luxury. The way we train them, as Hervé said, is based on what's happening in the world today. We have a lot of workshops touching on these subjects. And then, when they work in luxury, sometimes there's a sort of disillusionment where they think, "actually, this doesn't match what I had imagined." At some point, fashion needs to start moving as well.

H.Y. The industry is a concern, not just luxury. It's the mass market that is really troubling in its growth, even today. We are far from reductions and virtuous practices in terms of production. It's a world that's not easy to grasp. But we must raise awareness and sensitize them. We also provide them with tools through workshops.

T.R. Yes. I remember, a little over a year ago, we did a workshop on engagement. What is political engagement in fashion? We also did one on sexualities. The focus wasn't on the sexualization of the body but on different sexualities and how fashion addresses them. They also have a challenge called the Skirt for Men; this year we invited Bilal Hassani. The previous time, we had Kiddy Smile. Each time, it's with personalities who have strong commitments, particularly on gender issues. Luxury, even though it is produced in Italy and so on, is not at all in terms of carbon footprint comparable to fast fashion. But what I mean is that it's the model. This constant desire to make more profit without questioning the model will eventually lead to questions. And we see this today. Is the price we put on a product truly reflective of the creative added value it offers? Students are asking these

questions today as well. Because now, we have access to everything. We can dismantle this or that bag and see how it's made. So, they are much more critical as well.

C.B. That's true. I think what you said is very interesting because, indeed, we learn things at university or in school. However, when we start working, we are managed by people who are from a completely different generation-our parents' generation. They think differently. And ultimately, they are the ones making the decisions. People don't have much of a choice. So, it must indeed create a bit of...

T.R. ...Yes, a disconnect. Recently, we talked about what will there was a kind of demand on herself that is noticeable. That's happen this summer with the changes in creative directors. Stuguite rare to that extent. So, if I had to remember one person, it dents' first reaction was. "Why don't they offer these positions would be her. to young creators? Why are they still moving around the same H.Y. All the others, whether it's Julien Dossena, Matthieu, Anthony, old names and houses?" And in fact, all these people have been or even Nicolas Di Felice, had quite different paths. But I don't believe in geniuses. Not at all. I don't in fashion for over 35 years! As if there were no one else. It poses a think all these students were brilliant before they arrived. On the contrary, problem, it really does. H.Y. There's also a lack of diversity;

it's mostly men.

T.R. And they say it. They say they don't understand.

H.Y. We are in an era full of paradoxes. Fashion itself is paradoxisupports its students. So, I think cal because it needs to generate that's also what has shaped them. beauty and appeal. It's difficult to And I believe that in a career, the integrate all these notions that environment is also crucial. Someare not particularly pleasant, such times, life is shaped by encounters, as pollution or sustainability. So, it internships... is indeed a bit contradictory. And T.R. Julien Dossena and Matthieu Blazy, for example, were in the same that's the challenge. But I believe we can't ignore it. We can't train people class and they got along well, but without addressing these issues. there was also a challenge and a We're not going to save the planet, sense of competition... but we must make them aware of it H.Y. ... Yes, but not in a negative and ensure that they integrate these sense. Even today, we treat all stunotions into their work as much as dents equally. There are no "good" or "bad" students. Some learn a possible, in one way or another. But today, you can't just create beautibit more slowly and those who. ful things. That's not enough. I also as I mentioned earlier, have more think that this younger generation artistic maturity because they did needs purpose. They're not willing preparatory courses. But ultimately, to suffer in a studio that operates it's not always the ones with the in an old-fashioned, pyramid-like most artistic maturity who end up structure with the creative director creating the most innovative or inat the top and everyone else below. teresting collections. We always put They don't want to suffer. They want everyone on the same level. I think to have a life. They also want to exist there wasn't competition, but there through projects, sometimes more was a kind of mutual stimulation. personal parallel or alternative ones. And we encourage that. T.R. As Hervé mentioned, Julien Dossena and Nicolas Di Felice T.R. I've noticed that some students, for example, who work for also honed their skills with internships. For instance, Matthieu certain fashion houses, really enjoy their work because of the started his career with Raf Simons and then went to Margiela, so quality level, the choice of fabrics, and the craftsmanship inthey also built themselves up. I mean, Matthieu was extremely volved. For me, that's the true definition of luxury: working with curious and already had a significant cultural background. So, materials and methods that are exceptional. The challenge lies in yes, there's the school, but there's also everything we do around it. how far we push this, how many prototypes we create to perfect C.B. And, many creatives in the industry, especially deone design and the resources involved. There's a point where signers and creative directors, claim they left their studies because they were not learning what they needed. Why do it can lose its meaning. When you're just starting in fashion, you don't have high salaries, yet you find yourself in a sector where you think it is important to receive an academic formation vast sums are spent on production, and you're told you can't get in fashion design? a significant raise. This creates an inconsistency. When entire col-T.R. Actually, what Hervé mentioned is true. There is indeed what lections are redone several times to achieve perfection, it raises we offer, but if you are creative enough, you can manage to reinquestions about excess. How far should we go? I believe these terpret this content to make it your own. This means that through are issues that many fashion CEOs should be considering today. your creativity, you can turn an exercise that initially seems like C.B. Over the years, you have trained many talents such as something dull, into something exciting. You also learn a lot by



Anthony Vaccarello, Julien Dossena, Marine Serre, Matthieu Blazy, and Nicolas Di Felice, who are now trailblazers and innovators within the industry. What do you think sets them apart?

T.R. For me, the one person I single out is Marine Serre because she has developed her line. So, for me, that's already a step above, she could develop her universe in a very short time. She's been around for maybe seven years. Marine had a very different creative approach. She had a kind of passion. And given that she had competed in tennis, she had an incredible will. I mean,

> I think they learned a lot from the school. And not just from their professors, but also from the school itself, their peers, the encounters, and the dynamic of a school that

observing others. We hear English designers say, "Oh, Central Saint Martins didn't do much for me," but I think it's a bit easy to say that. Obviously, we always feel like we made it on our own, there's a part of truth in that, but we also make it with others. That's also the problem with many in fashion; we only highlight the artistic director, but without their teams, it wouldn't exist. Maybe we need to highlight the teams more. Because, yes, there is a vision, but if you are poorly surrounded, the vision doesn't exist. However, there are indeed personalities who are not made for school. They do one or two years, and that's enough for them. I think of Olivier Theyskens, who only did a year-and-a-half or two years. He was very different at the time, he had a kind of rapid rise. Olivier Theyskens was very well-known in the 2000s, artistic

director for Nina Ricci. Rochas. and so on. He progressed very quickly. He dressed Madonna, and at that time, it was significant.

H.Y. But, well, it's one case among many. To return to the Bachelor's program, for us, it's really about creation, for sure. But maybe the difference is also the link with the industry, which the school naturally provides through this management training. We do give them some keys because we see feedback from these young people who want to create their brand. These brands can be very niche or might not necessarily grow significantly, but they want to have control over the creation, to do it as they wish. Because we always tend to link management to making money, to growth. But what they want is to exist through their artistic practices. Sometimes they are willing to do secondary jobs or freelance work to support themselves. And we find that extremely interesting. We produce nearly 75 graduates per year. It would be misleading to make them believe that they will all become artistic directors. That's not true. There aren't enough positions for every house, and currently, there are as many positions as houses. Everyone

is sitting in their seat, and it's often the same people rotating through the same positions. So, we can't let these young people believe that. We hope to have some artistic directors eventually, but the program is still too young to know. Through all the options available to them, some might find that, after three years, making clothes isn't their interest. They might want to move into image, press, and so on. We've opened the Bachelor program to all these fields. So, indeed, some are now fashion magazine stylists, and others have pursued Master's degrees in image management, performing arts at CSM, or sustainability at Orwell College of Arts. Our goal is also to open up as many opportunities as possible for these young people because they can thrive in various roles. Some might not want to be artistic directors, but instead, prefer FALL/WINTER 2024-25, RESORT 2025 AND PREVIEW SPRING/SUMMER 2025

to be excellent assistants or find another niche for themselves. T.R. The IFM network is quite powerful, so most students find an internship. They start as assistants and then move up to junior designers. For some, I think it will happen guite guickly, because, as I always tell students, when you do an internship, there are things you're asked to do, but there's also a way of being in the studio that makes people think, "I want to keep this person because they have something extra." It's like in any profession; at some point, you become indispensable for other reasons. H.Y. And also being realistic, not selling them a training that would

lead them nowhere. It's the diversity of possible paths, and that's a real asset. Especially since we have a career service at the school that helps them find internships. They have a mandatory

> internship in their second year and a non-mandatory one at the end of their third year. And there's a career service that is connected with all the luxury brands, but also with smaller houses, whether in London, Paris, or elsewhere. So, there's a whole network that also helps them take their first steps.

T.R. This morning, I received two responses. One is going to start an internship at Hermès Lifestyle, and the other at Saint Laurent. Before that, there were internships at Kiko Kostadinov, and at Celine as well... That's the huge advantage of being in Paris.

C.B. Yes, I think students have a lot of advantages in learning this profession in Paris. Because, as you mentioned, the possibilities are endless. Paris is indeed the city of luxury so, there are many benefits. But one thing I find complicated when learning in a big city where everything is available is that sometimes we tend to forget that fashion also exists elsewhere. And I think it's very important to learn about the fashion industry as a global industry. So, how do you ensure that your students have contact with everything happening in fashion around the world?

T.R. We have developed a partnership with Alto in Helsinki

and Central Saint Martins in London. This is a student exchange where they discuss their projects and see what's happening at other universities. Another thing is that in their second year, when they do their internship, we encourage them to go to smaller organizations. For example, this year, there are many in Berlin. I told them it might be a good opportunity to try going to another city, to embark on an adventure that's not in Paris. They'll see a different way of doing fashion. Often, fashion programs, especially in Berlin at UDK, are very tied to the context and societal issues. The city is perhaps more connected to topics related to gender, different communities, and alternative cultures. Some have also gone to London. For instance, they look at the labels selected for the LVMH Prize and contact those emerging brands for internships. It depends a bit on their personality. Some others who fashion school! In my career, I hadn't seen such political engagecame to study in Paris, who are international students, consider it ment emerge. Also, paradoxically, they are very digital, but this important to do their internship in Paris. Because when you come year, many students had novels. They were reading in class. It from Asia or even from Central Europe or the United States, it's surprised me a bit because I hadn't seen books on their tables in a major opportunity to be at IFM. a long time. I think it's really important too. Fashion is a reflection H.Y. This openness to the world also comes through the students of society, so, if you're not connected to that society politically, themselves. I said earlier there are 17 nationalities, but I think culturally, and in many other ways, you're creating in a bubble. there are even more. It also creates opportunities because when T.R. Perhaps for the moment, social media remains very, very a Korean student works with a French student from, let's say Clstrong in this generation. But for how long? I don't know...many ermont-Ferrand, it's a different dynamic. We mix them in classes, are disconnecting. They are starting to disconnect and question so you have English-speaking students and French-speaking the algorithms. The fact that Instagram censors a lot and that students. The student from Clermont-Ferrand, or another small when we search for something, it always suggests the same town can very well be alongside a Korean in an international things also contributes to this. I think this has created a kind of class. This helps you understand the world. It doesn't mean you'll weariness and a lack of meaning. When Instagram first emerged, travel the world, but you do get to understand it through their what interested us was discovering new things. The problem is research, which often brings a lot of their own culture into the mix. that the new algorithms always suggest the same things. So, at This exposure to different universes encourages this openness. some point, we end up feeling like we're wasting our time. For us, it's also important to remain open and curious. We don't H.Y. And Instagram is no longer a space for discovery. It's a foster ego at all. As I mentioned earlier, there's no cult of genius or showcase for people who only display themselves. The majority ego here. We provide the same tools to everyone. Also, we never are people who just show off. This is the case with YouTubers engage in art direction, for example. That's something we refuse who don't do much in their lives, apart from perhaps showing to do with students. It's not a pedagogical approach we use. what they like, who they are, or what they do. For a student, it's T.R. Exactly. We suggest, we provide options. almost useless to watch these people now. So again, we're in a H.Y. We open doors, we provide keys. paradox. It's a fascination that is starting to wane. Even compared T.R. When you're working for the first time on your collection, you to two years ago, when it was much stronger, there was still a big often have too many ideas. We know that the message is better fascination for these megastars, Instagram gueens, influencers, understood if everything is a bit more focused and cohesive. and so on. Today, it's much less present, I find. H.Y. I usually don't like imposing artistic direction on students. C.B. And now, looking back at your students, their skills, and For me, it's inconceivable. It would mean imposing our style on their thirst for knowledge, what do you think is the future the students. No, no, they are here to discover themselves. Not of the fashion industry? all the big names were necessarily the strongest, especially in H.Y. I feel hopeful. It's a generation that has a huge desire to

their first year. pursue this profession despite all the constraints, despite a world T.R. Given that Hervé and I had another brand, but we have also at war, despite the perceived frivolity of fashion. They want to do worked a lot for very different brands, we know how it works. this job and also want to share it with others. They support each Even though we have a creative identity, working at Margiela other enormously. There is no competition. And I still have hope and then moving to Nicolas Ghesquière at Balenciaga, we need for society, for a different approach to the world through fashion to have a sense of adaptation, otherwise it's impossible to work creation and this quest for meaning. They give me hope. Of in the industry. But, of course, we all have something, and that's course, they indeed face many questions. And, indeed, we don't what's interesting, especially when working for other brands, is have any answers at all. But at the same time, what's important the ability to bring your ideas into the brand. is to stay awake to the world, curious, and with the desire to C.B. Fashion design and the fashion industry have changed do things. The worst thing is when one gets mired in a corner a lot in recent years. What do you think this generation saying that it's all hopeless. I find that I have a lot of hope in this does better than the previous one in terms of understandgeneration. In any case, they have a lot of desire. And success for ing the industry and clothing? them doesn't necessarily mean making money or having a brand with double-digit growth. It's not that; it's also about personal fulfillment in their lives.

T.R. The first thing is the images. They have a way of creating images that are completely different from before. They have an ability with all the tools. Today, they know how to communicate very quickly. They're also very agile with everything digital. If they don't know how to do something, they watch a tutorial all night. The next day, they can do it. H.Y. It can be very low-tech tutorials. It could be knitting. It could also be artificial intelligence or 3D software. brief. Some students, in their third year, create incredible things. the images.

H.Y. Because, in any case, these big corporations have created T.R. Exactly. We have a lab, but the training for 3D is still quite their monsters, and it's true that when these young people arrive in companies, the companies look at them badly because they They teach themselves everything. This ability to do that is a huge have personal demands. The work is not the issue because they difference from the previous generation. I find it remarkable with work a lot. It's more about working until midnight for nothing or having everything canceled afterward. They don't like that. H.Y. And there's less of a superficial fascination with fashion. It's They don't like it because we waste things. First, they work for not just about haute couture being pretty. They want to infuse nothing, then we throw away things they worked on, fabrics, and meaning into their lives. And I think that's a big difference. I saw it with my first-year class. With the political climate in France, so on. They are slowly questioning a system that also needs to they were very engaged. I was quite surprised. They talked about be shaken up. It's still somewhat, I said, pyramidal, but I always it a lot. They even lobbied to encourage their peers to vote. It say it is also a bit medieval. It's the lord in his castle and then had been a long time since I'd seen such an engagement in a the serfs and people all around. I think that needs to change.



C.B. I like the new generation. People often criticize them, saying that they can't work with them, and so on. But it's precisely the system society puts them in that they don't want to be part of at all. As you said, they want more meaning, other things, and a different way of living.