



Carla Sozzani x Byronesque

Exploring archive, imagination and purpose with Gill Linton

Carla Sozzani is a fashion icon, an unmistakable figure in the fashion industry for her unwavering support of artistic creation. Together with Gill Linton, co-founder of Byronesque, they have decided to create a partnership celebrating her personal style, her contribution to the arts, and the designers and pieces that have shaped generations. Through 30 archival pieces that belonged to Carla's personal collection, collectors and passionate buyers will delve into fashion history. From Comme des Garçons to Alaïa, Balenciaga and Martin Margiela, this selection is proof of the design prowess of some of this era's most talented and influential designers—as well as the incredible love and respect Sozzani has for clothing. Once again, we witness how creativity can withstand the test of time.



CAROLINA BENJUMEA. How was the idea of creating this partnership born?

GILL LINTON. I've known Carla for a few years now and we've been talking about doing something for a while. We [at Byronesque] believe a lot in what she does at the Fondazione

Sozzani, which is, essentially, to maintain an elevated level of creative integrity in the world. For 30 years, [Carla] has been exhibiting some of the most famous photographs, artists, and fashion in the world. The things that we all look at and take for granted *and* continue to be inspired by. And because we are in a creative era where there is a bit less creative integrity than there used to be, it is still really important that these works of art are presented and shared with the world. We're big fans of what Carla does, and we think it's culturally very important. Almost as important as her private collection. This is just a small selection! She has a lot in her private archive, many pieces from when she was buying at Corso Como—she was also very close friends with Azzedine [Alaïa]. We're very privileged to have some very special Alaïa pieces, Comme des Garçons, all the things that you would expect from Corso Como when she was buying from there. We've selected around 30 pieces, and we created this campaign idea to promote the foundation and the sales that we're doing. All the profits go to the [Fondazione Sozzani] to support all the work that she does, because it's not just about photography and arts. She does a lot around circular fashion and encourages people to reuse, repair and buy archival pieces. We're very much aligned in that sense.



The campaign that we created was based on the idea of imagining [that] the foundation didn't exist. Imagine if Carla wasn't doing what she did? We wouldn't have the opportunity to see all of these great works of art in impressive environments that she puts on around the world. We'd be relying on an algorithm on Instagram of somebody posting it. So, we removed the imagery and described some of the photos that we've been particularly inspired by over the years; it became a bit like a "high-fashion-art-guessing game." Each text is the description of a photograph that Carla has exhibited over the 30+ years of Fondazione. We like people to have a look and try and guess for themselves; it's quite rewarding. Paul Hetherington did the text. He works with Peter Saville and does a lot with the major famous fashion houses [and he] works with *Show Studio* a lot. And a writer called Andrea Mason who's sort of very pithy and poetic.

C.B. Can you explain the process of choosing these pieces? What criteria were used to determine which pieces would be available?

G.L. We get a lot of requests from people—so we have quite a lot of information about what people are looking for, what people like, and what people who follow us and our clients are interested in. The clothes that we select can't look old...just because it's old doesn't mean it's *good*. So, you know, not even all Comme des Garçons was created equal. Not all the Alaïa were created equal in our eyes. It has to carry an important story or have something particularly unique about it. And then it just has to look great when styling it. Can we imagine these things living with a different brand like we've done here, putting things together so they don't necessarily look the same as the runway? Some pieces deserve to be *exactly* what they are on the runway because they're so great. But, otherwise, we like to feel like you're seeing things for the first time, you know? Representing the past, making it feel like it's new.





C.B. We have seen new laws being introduced, for example in France, to curb the growth of fast-fashion brands. How important are archive pieces for the fashion industry today?

G.L. I'm going to answer the question like a politician, [laughs] and not answer the question but talk about something else... It's not just the fast fashion brands, it's *all* of the production. The myth, and the underlying *bullshit*, of this whole debate around sustainability, is that resale is increasing more than fast fashion in terms of growth. And everyone's patting themselves on the back because they think that that's a good thing! But *nothing* is slowing down. All we're doing is creating more products. We have to slow down production. So that's where we encourage people to buy things and keep them for a long time, which is very much our approach [and] very different from most resales. We *hate* the word "resale," but everyone understands what it means. We live in this flip culture; I was in a store the other day and I heard some kids say: "If I get that brand, I can always resell it 'cause everyone wants that." People's motivations for buying have changed dramatically. Also, *no one* needs a lot of clothes! Imagine only having those 30 pieces. You don't need anything else. You need to know how to put stuff together and you need to make some smart choices. So, that, in our opinion, is where archival is important.

C.B. When we talk about archival pieces, we refer to very iconic items that represent important moments in fashion history, serving as staples of a brand or individual. Should we view these pieces solely as garments to be worn, or is it important to regard them as artistic creations to be admired?

G.L. I think it's both. I find nothing more satisfying than walking down the street and seeing somebody wearing clothes and looking artistic. I'm someone who just wears a uniform—the equivalent of a great hairdresser who doesn't bother with their hair. I don't subscribe to it. So I find all of this very fulfilling. That's the beauty of archival pieces and some new pieces. We talk a lot about future vintage. It is important to make wise choices and still buy certain things because otherwise, what is vintage going to look like in 20 years? No, it's not going to be H&M because that shit's not going to last!



AZZEDINE ALAÏA

Leather military coat, F/W 2016

AZZEDINE ALAÏA

Long double breasted coat, F/W 2012

C.B. It's interesting what you say. With the latest Margiela couture show, a lot of people claimed the return of real artistic fashion instead of just commercial pieces. When you think about future vintage, do you feel like we will have enough archival pieces a few years from now?

G.L. I don't hold that much hope for the next 20 years. Not currently. The Margiela show was an anomaly. It's couture... that's not accessible. Those pieces will have already been purchased by couture buyers and museums. That stuff's gone already; I *guarantee* it. So, we, the people, are left to dream about that stuff. Let's see if any of that spills down into the main

collection, wouldn't that be great? But currently, fashion's kind of bifurcated into sort of a spectacle for the sake of spectacle, because everyone's just trying to outdo the runway show with gimmicks. I mean, God! Dries is gone, Valentino [is changing]. Who the fuck is left? I do say this openly all the time: "If I was Kering or LVMH, I would be putting all my money into some incredible young designers." Some kids are coming out of Central Saint Martins who are great, and they know how to make things. Go to the makers and support them! They took risks with John [Galliano] and Lee [McQueen] and now they're taking different kinds of risks. They're taking a risk on people who don't know how to make clothes and who are just stylists and have an Instagram following. I'm not saying anything that everybody else isn't already talking about. I'm not giving you anything new that we're not all frustrated by. But people are just taking the wrong kind of risk.

C.B. One of the most interesting aspects of circular fashion, second-hand products, or archival pieces is that you can discern certain personality traits of the owner just by looking at their clothes. With the selection of pieces that you made, what can people discover about Carla Sozzani?

G.L. Well, that's a good question, I don't often get a hard question thrown here. [Pauses] I think, perhaps, what people don't see here about Carla is her respect for talented creative people, and how important she genuinely believes it is to have a platform for this. And the slowing down of life. I think that's why she quite appreciated this text idea, because it was about slowing down, absorbing the words, thinking about what that image might be. How fulfilling is that versus the spoon-feed culture that we live in?



C.B. It's also about taking the time to understand because the first time reading it, you don't understand. If you read it several times and think about it you will be able to figure it out. Now it's really easy because everything is given to us, we don't need to think.

G.L. Yes! And hopefully, someone might go, "Wow! I didn't know about that photographer. I want to explore that more." What people can't underestimate about Carla is her influence on presenting the right kind of creative influence in the world... and it's the *same* with the clothes. She cares about genuine creativity—not *just* creativity, but [the] actual craftsmanship that goes into things... If we could all just be a bit more Carla, we may solve a lot of problems!

C.B. Is there a particular piece that you consider the most special and unique?

G.L. There are two pieces. The Alaïa long dress: I have tried that on and I felt special. I don't say that easily or very often... I mean, I'm [currently] wearing archival pieces; I have 80's Gaultier, 2012 Comme des Garçons and 2007 Comme des Garçons shoes—but these are just my basics. But when I put that dress on, I'm like "Fucking hell! I feel like I can take over the world." So, this idea of him making these Amazonian-empowered women is stuff that we read about in books, but when you put it on, you're like, "Bloody hell, he wasn't joking!" So that's why that means a lot to me. And then, I don't wear color. But if I was going to get married and those two things were there, I would get married in that [indicating to the Comme des Garçons white ensemble]!

Gill Linton, Co-Founder of Byronesque
In conversation with Carolina Benjumea
Photographs by Justin Westover
Special thanks to Luca at Byronesque