

**EXHIBITORS AT THEONEMILANO FUR FAIR UP CREATIVE CONTENT**

By Emily Backus on March 5, 2018

MILAN Chinese buyers and exhibitors took the TheOneMilano haute-a-porter trade fair in Milan by storm. Out of nearly 11,000 visitors to the four-day show featuring fur and high-quality ready-to-wear in Milan that closed on Feb. 26, 1,200 buyers came from China, more than any other country at an event where buyers from Russia and the ex-Soviet block traditionally hold sway. More than 40 Chinese furriers also flocked in, showing their collections courtesy of the China Chamber of Commerce of Foodstuff and Native Produce. Industry operators confirmed that Chinese customers are veering away from the bland and the big brands. "By now, the [Chinese] people are pulling away from well-known luxury brands and developing a general attitude that favors Made in Italy. They are becoming more attuned to buying high-quality materials, craftsmanship, and design even when it is not a major label," said Elena Salvaneschi, general secretary of TheOneMilano. The fair showcased the winter 2018 collections of 342 brands, two-thirds of which were fur, due to the season and the show's roots uniting the fur show, MiFur, with the prêt-à-porter show, MIPAP. Jesper Lauge Christensen, executive vice president of Copenhagen Fur, also reported that Chinese customers are shifting toward unique garments and eye-catching designs, and Chinese furriers found more inspiration for change than actual demand for their conservative collections at economical prices they showed at TheOneMilano. Christensen reported that fur prices have stabilized over the last four years, recovering from dramatic price swings caused by Chinese buyers who first crowded and then abandoned auctions. "Prices were up an average of 5 percent in the February auction," reported Christensen but, he said, "Total production volume declined 10 percent." He explained that the bottom is falling away from the market: farmers and manufacturers of lower-quality pelts are struggling due to an oversupply, while top-grade pelts produced by the strictly regulated 1,500 Danish farmers in the cooperative that owns Copenhagen Fur garnered prices 30 percent above the rest. "Their costs are higher but so are their returns." A sales manager for Xinji City Penghao Garments, who said the company produces about 100,000 garments a year and goes by the single name Bryan, pointed out the company's leading product a rack of nearly identical, sober men's sheepskin jackets. He said, "An Italian designer came by the stand and told me, 'This jacket is for my Papa.'" Bryan said their products, including women's mink-lined coats in mute-colored nylon shells, lacked design interest for the European market, although they were still popular in northern China. Nevertheless, he saw the outcome of the fair as positive. The company would now look to collaborate with an Italian designer to innovate their styles in an uncertain Chinese market. Chinese interest in Italian furs also appeared in export data. In 2017, Italian fur exports to China rose 19 percent over the previous year, according to a study carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers for the Italian national fur association, Associazione Italiana Pellicceria. The same study found that exports to the U.S. tumbled 34 percent, citing a new tendency of American stores to stock cheaper, more commercial pieces. Meanwhile, exports to France and Russia grew 13 percent and 12 percent, respectively. The study did not release export numbers but did state that the total retail value of Italian fur production was 1.37 billion euros last years, a 3.5 percent rise over 2016. "Performance in France and Russia was good. By now we have returned to precrisis times. And there was sales movement to Russia despite the introduction of a microchip in each garment for customs control," said Norberto Albertalli, chairman of TheOneMilano. Trends at the runway show kicking off the fair, Italian Fashion Night, ranged from reprisals of vintage classics to eye-popping colors, whimsical intarsia patterns, and Pop-Art-inspired cartoons and motifs. Collections sported multifunctional and modular designs with removable parts, hybrid

styles, graphics, writing and mixed materials, like fur with textiles or fur with quilted down coat elements. Designer Fabio Gavazzi drew on the intense candy colors and Pop art influence of American contemporary artist Jeff Koons for a hybrid collection he dubbed "sport couture." Visible zippers, bold sports stripes and high contrasts strutted across bumble bee yellow mink with black stripes, fire engine red astrakhan with silver astrakhan stripes, down quilted collars and cuffs and pockets. An intarsia portrait of Wonder Woman was splayed across the back of a powder blue full-length mink cape. Stripes and intarsia patterns played across Vinicio Pajaro's collection, too, but in sophisticated mixed hues like wine, dark green, silver and natural fur. Pajaro mixed materials and pelts, like embroidered textiles or colorful stripes in a fusion of elegance and function. He offered modular designs that can be worn in parts or together as a glamorous whole, and reversible garments with casual looks on one side and evening opulence on the other. His long cape cascaded black fringe and chestnut-colored fur shimmering with light and movement. "Classic furs have disappeared [from the market] by now," Pajaro said. Yet renewed classics in a riot of natural colors were the beacon offered by Copenhagen Fur Studio, the design office of Europe's leading pelt supplier and the main sponsor of the fashion show. Curvy lines of black mink marbled white mink in a nip-waisted hip-length coat with fluted sleeves and removable stole. Brown and black minks were stitched into a white herringbone pattern on a minimalist knee-length mink coat. Luxurious, understated men's fur-lined overcoats in traditional neutral colors stood out for wearability. "We are showing a lot of new techniques that offer a new, more sustainable strategy for fur design," said Julie Maria Iversen, vice president of design and creativity. She pointed out that furs are biodegradable, can last 30 years or more, and can be recycled through vintage shops or into new garments. On the trade fair floor, fur designer Vlasta Kopylova saw no return to classics. The Russian creative, who heads a Turkish furrier with her Turkish husband Gokhan Kocak, turned out a tropical profusion of brightly colored, whimsically patterned designs. Broad leaves, zebra stripes, geometric patterns, and lettering bloomed across a fur collection that favored chartreuse, black, blue and pastels. Prêt-à-porter collections blended better with fur than the last edition of The One Milano, where fur all but vanished from a boutique-like show of spring clothing in September. For the first time, clothing showrooms took up the invitation to display brands they represent alongside the clothing makers. "The results have been positive. We've taken a lot of foreign contacts and agents from places like China and Japan. There has been a lot of traffic of foreign buyers," said Raffaella Giffuni, customer service manager for the Italian clothing distributor I.F.B., which showed six of its 10 brands. "If you ask me, putting the fur and the prêt-à-porter together in a single fair is better. We have a bit more [drawing] power with this combination." Trends, Giffuni said, pointed to playful eco-furs, velvet, paillettes and glitter in a palette that favored purple, burgundy, green and mustard. I.F.B. showed London-based Jakke's vintage silhouettes for rock-style faux furs in a black skull print, leopard, bright green, scarlet and purple. The Mon Lalou label, meanwhile, reinterpreted vintage lace blouses and dresses along with ruffled, oversized cuffs, pearl embellishments, and troubadour sleeves. "It is a proper fair," said Elena Vitali Fitz, sales manager for the M.D.M.7 showroom. Vitali Fitz said her experience working with major labels, like MaxMara and Les Copains, meant she understood this fair was about actually doing business. "It's going well. We have taken contacts from Asia, Russia, Switzerland, Italy. We've had orders," said Vitali Fitz. She said the bestseller of the season was a voluminous, street-chic sheepskin overcoat with a gold painted collar and shoulder stripes, zippers running up the sleeves and the sides, and leather lettering scrawled on the back with "Peace," "Love" and the peace symbol. Gold also appeared on architectural street fashions for men and women displayed by debut brand Au197Sm, named after a gold isotope and granted a patent for fusing gold to fabrics. Gold graphics riffed on chemical symbols and scripts on casually elegant pieces that played

with transparencies, textures, and touches of fur in a disciplined, minimalist palette. [caption id="attachment\_1202617839" align="aligncenter" width="724"] Au197Sm[/caption] Natalia Sysoeva at Guffanti Concepts Showroom reported a return to Nineties-style oversized quilted coats, but with narrow shoulders, and a general trend toward casual styles, like colorful, reversible, fur-lined parkas from Nicole Benisti. "It's been very good," said a buyer from Denmark, Margit Pels, who owns a showroom in Lyngby, north of Copenhagen, and produces economic furs. "Something new is happening. Fur is not only for the rich anymore. It's fresher and younger." To continue reading this article...