Maria Grazia Chiuri on marrying La Madonna with Flamenco in her Iberian Cruise collection for Dior

By Godfrey Deeny - 17 June 2022

Fashion’s cruise collection season continued this week in Seville with an Iberian-inspired collection for Christian Dior by Maria Grazia Chiuri. We met with the designer to hear her vision for Dior.

In her six years at Dior, Chiuri has grown to be the most risk-taking and audacious designer when it comes to cruise collections. Linking up with local artists, performers, musicians and textile makers and referencing multiple periods of local art and architecture in cruise collections – in Athens, Marrakech and now Seville. Marrying visions of La Madonna – who boasts scores of statues and shrines in Seville – with Flamenco style and Andalusian
equestrian chic in the latest cruise show by Chiuri.

This season, the designer telegraphed some of her concepts on her own Instagram account, with scores of images of the Virgin Mary and guided tour videos of historic basilicas.

Which was our first question when Fashion Network went for a pre-show preview with Maria Grazia in Seville. Why the obsession with La Madonna?

“I received a Catholic education, but I never thought of this education as linked to fashion. That is a recent thought - seeing how dressing the Madonna has many references in fashion, And how, at least for European women, this has great influence on how women dressed – and how they used embroidery or lace.

“Nowhere is that more apparent than here in Seville. Each neighborhood has its own Madonna! A queen of each quarter, where each local recognizes themselves in their own Madonna. Like a member of their family practically. There are even small specialists of each local church who have the right to enter a chapel and actually dress their Madonna. And each Madonna has her own special wardrobe. With special clothes for certain saint’s days or seasons or religious feasts!

“I have never seen in an exhibition that expresses this idea of the influences of La Madonna. Yes, there was Met’s Heavenly Bodies, but it was more on the liturgical influence and not on the figure of women.

“There is also a great book Ave Mary. E la chiesa inventò la donna by Michaela Murgia, which covers the idea of how the way we have dressed La Madonna led to how we dressed women.”
And why did your first recent Instagram video begin with a visit to Santa Maggiore in Rome, the largest church devoted to the Virgin Mary in Rome?

“Sure, I began with my own local Madonna!” she laughs. “She is an expression of the Great Mother, and the symbol of fertility. One thing I love about cruise is that it gives you the pleasure of reflecting on fashion from a different point of view. And allows us to consider ideas that never appeared in fashion, like say cultural appropriation.”

Give us some examples?

“Like, what does it mean when you say original? For instance the mantila. It's in fact a shawl that began in Manila in the Philippines was made in China and being taken up in Mexico, before making it to Spain, where it became a Spanish cliché. Or consider the fan, which is born in China, but became famous in Spain and Venice.

Who were the modern Icons of this collection?

“Clearly the first emblem is Carmen Maya, who used flamenco male moves and gestures that had never been tried before by a woman, and dressed like a man. And that idea comes through with Blanca Li and her 40 ballerinas, who perform live in show. That was the toughest fitting of my life. Forty women who we could not keep still! They don’t just dance, since their actions create music with their very actions and the pounding of their feet. They become musical instruments themselves.”

Chiuri rode horses as a child, and later on vacation in Argentina, but always “non-professionally,” she cautions. And she also included references to classy horsewomen like the Duchess of Alba and Jackie Kennedy. Why?

“Each were style icons connected to Seville, so one couldn’t not have them on board, given the equestrian traditions here. The Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art is based here. What is interesting about dressage teams in Andalusia is that they each choose together their style of dress. Their look is vital to them. And it’s very democratic – you can see that in the equestrian museum. The cut is very different from an English hacking jacket, though there is a surprising difference in cut between different teams.
What do you want people to think after witnessing this show?

“I hope they have beautiful emotions and positive energy. The thing about cruise is that it is not just a show, but a giant team effort. Probably the biggest show we make, when you add in the orchestra, ballerinas, show production, artisans. And that’s before you include the backstage beauty, models and dresses. It’s a project of a huge number of people, so vast I lose count when I try to add them all up.”

Why did you show so late in the season?

"In reality this type of project demands its own time. And thanks be to God Dior allows us to do this when we are really ready! Objectively, logistically to make these sort of shows all the way down here in southern Spain working locally brings a unique beauty. The exchange of ideas, ateliers, crafts and skills makes for something very rare."
Now, after a half dozen cruise collections from the likes of Chanel and soon Max Mara, are we back to normal in fashion?

“No, to speak of normality right now seems to me very premature. Far too soon. Humanity is facing a difficult moment, especially with this terrible war. Even our last show, pre-fall in Korea in May. Due to the airspace above Russia being closed, you have no idea what a journey and how many hours we had to make to simply make it to Seoul!”

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