

ADVERTISING

Symbiotic fashion and film relationship paves road to salvation, says Armani exec

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Still from Frames of Life short film

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

SEOUL, South Korea Fashion should not be treated as a series of products, but as the presentation of a lifestyle, according to an Armani executive.

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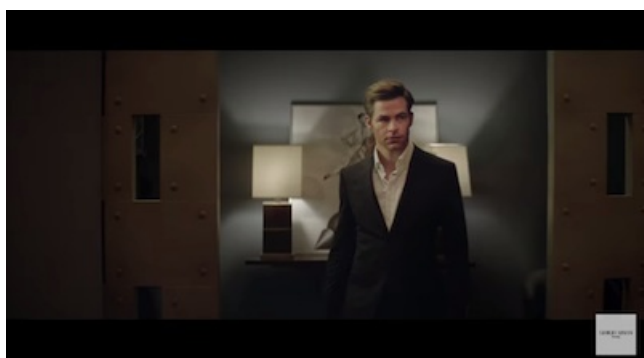
At the Cond Nast International Luxury Conference Armani global communications director Claudio Cal spoke of how the brand has leveraged the power of cinema to elevate its brand beyond products. Fashion and cinema have had a dialogic relationship for decades, and by leveraging cinematic tools, fashion brands can give themselves and their products a fuller lifestyle.

"The consumer has the ability to read and decode a very complex story," Mr. Cal said. "The choice of the brand, the selection of the product, is often the result of the story the brand tells and the customer's personal history; selection becomes identification.

"To wear something means to identify yourself with that character," he said. "Cinema, like fashion, here is not merely a trick. It is a means to show people who they can become if so they choose."

Film and fashion

In the 1930s and 1940s, films captured the imagination of brand founder and namesake Giorgio Armani. He cites the art form as having a deep influence on his aesthetics, as it "becomes a source of vitality alongside art, travel and theater."



Armani Code Profumo still

Even today, Armani clothing homages films of the era generally or other films more specifically. Mr. Cal demonstrated the influence that the 1980 Akira Kurosawa film "Kagemusha" had on the brand's 1981 Japanese collection and how Bernardo Bertolucci's "The Sheltering Sky" resurfaced in Armani's spring/summer 1994 collection.

The brand continues to foster ties with cinema, working with acclaimed directors including Martin Scorsese and Luca Guagagnino, among others. Beyond inspiration, films offer a chance to lend integrity to a character, as with Glenn Close's portrayal of the President of the United States in "Air Force One."

Similarly, Richard Gere's character in "American Gigolo" has a prominent Armani wardrobe, and the film has been credited with establishing the brand in Hollywood. Mr. Armani himself credits the product placement in the film as being more effective than any number of advertisements could have been.



Armani New Normal spring/summer 2016

Fashion and film have a symbiotic relationship: The fashion helps bring characters to life and provides a window into the character's personality, while the characters in turn bring a lifestyle to the fashion.

This lifestyle association is oftentimes influential in determining what product the consumer purchases.

These cinematic ties translate equally into Armani's ad campaigns. Each image of a product is not merely about showcasing the item being sold, but also about telling a story from the person who uses it and representing a lifestyle. Accordingly, the lighting and use of color in ads are carefully calculated.

Recently, Armani has begun its Frames of Life campaign. As a part of it, "Films of City Frames" invites young directors from the world's most prestigious film schools to create and show films at international festivals. The collaboration cements the ties between the sectors, but it does not stop there.



Armani Attribute

"Obviously the starting point is the product, the eyewear piece, but again the storytelling is what allows the spectators to dream and identify themselves with the character," Mr. Cal said.

More than a product

Other brands also return repeatedly to film to establish less tangible characteristics for the brand. In some cases, this takes on the form of an ongoing series.

For example, Prada's Miu Miu recently celebrated Asian femininity by transporting consumers to Japan through film.

"Seed," directed by Naomi Kawase, weaves an enchanting tale of Sakura Ando, a free spirited young woman who journeys from the untouched nature of Nara to bustling Tokyo. The eleventh commissioned film project in Miu Miu's Women's Tales series, the nine-minute short speaks to themes of self-discovery and a universal spirit ([see story](#)).

Across all sectors, imbuing a product with enviable characteristics and a clearly defined lifestyle is a challenge. Storytelling through films, even of a short length, is a common method.

Recently, U.S. apparel and accessories label Ralph Lauren portrayed young love with the launch campaign for its latest scent.

Tender Romance is a lighter, more playful personality in the brand's Romance fragrance collection, with a campaign featuring two fresh-faced models traipsing around a tree. The ads ran as videos on social networks before television in an attempt to court a millennial audience ([see story](#)).

"The mix of fashion and cinema and the continuous dialogue between the two gives you the exact idea of the Armani philosophy," Mr. Cal said. "Fashion is not just a series of products; it's the presentation of a lifestyle.

"It's not a symbol, but a style everyone can recognize themselves in and find their own idea of elegance," he said. "And if you were to take this reasoning to its extreme consequences, one would almost argue that there is salvation in fashion."