

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Versace honors Medusa with a lesson in Greek mythology

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La Medusa handbag in true blue. Image credit: Versace

By NORA HOWE

Italian fashion house Versace is celebrating its muse and signature handbag with an exploration of the mythical figure.

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Although her story is one of tragedy, Medusa has served as the brand's inspiration representing unapologetic authority and female empowerment. With a new short film telling the abridged story of the Gorgon, Versace is aiming to remind its consumers of what a powerful woman signifies.

"Medusa serves as the baseline from which Gianni Versace built his brand identity," said Rebecca Miller, founder/CEO of [ARTful Communication](#), New York. "He found his muse in Medusa.

"She represented the ideal from which his designs, colors, patterns and styles were created and the overall attitude that the brand would become," she said. "He designed from a position of strength and undeniable focus that served as his foundational attribute."

La Medusa

Medusa, whose name is Italian for jellyfish, is the protagonist of a popular story in Greek mythology. She was born human and, at one point, considered the most beautiful woman in Athens.

In a 75-second film posted to Twitter and Instagram, Versace explains the story of Medusa using archival illustrations and images of artifacts. As the narrator relays the story and explores Medusa's influence on the Italian brand, images of Versace apparel and accessories showing the iconic Medusa emblem flash before viewers.

According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, she was one of three Gorgon sisters born to Keto and Phorkys, primordial sea gods. Medusa was mortal, while her sisters, Stheno and Euryale, were immortal.

As the story goes, Medusa was cursed by envious gods who turned her hair into snakes and made it so that anyone who made eye-contact with her would turn to stone.

In most versions of the story, she was killed by Perseus, who was sent by King Polydectes of Seriphus to retrieve her

head.

The story of Medusa

With the help of the gods and divine tools, Perseus used Athena's shield to deflect the reflection of Medusa's face and avoid her gaze while he beheaded her with a *harpe*, an unbreakable sword.

Medusa's immortal sisters pursued Perseus, but he escaped with her head using Hermes' winged boots and Hades' helmet of invisibility. However, Medusa still had such power that Perseus had to keep her decapitated head in a special sack, a *kibisis*, strong enough to contain it.

According to New York's [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#), the most common interpretation of Medusa suggests she is an apotropaic symbol used to ward off evil. She represents a threat meant to deter other dangerous threats evil repelling evil.

Medusa has appeared in artistic creations for centuries, and while her appearance has evolved dramatically, she is often recognizable for her striking silhouette. In most representations across various styles, Medusa stares straight ahead, confronting whoever looks at her.

When Donatella Versace asked Gianni Versace, her brother and founder of the brand, why he chose the head of Medusa to represent the legacy of the label, he said whoever falls in love with Medusa cannot flee from her.

An instantly recognizable symbol of the house of Versace, the legendary Medusa is featured on each La Medusa handbag. In a nod to brand heritage, the bags boast the same plaque that was discovered on the doors of Versace's first headquarters at Via Ges 12 in Milan.



The new blue color is inspired by the sea and sky. Image credit: Versace

For Versace, Medusa has served as an image of desirability, fear and power. The brand says she has come to represent the Versace woman.

Power of women

Luxury fashion houses have long since honored how women, whether fictional or living, have impacted their brands, styles, messaging and influence.

French fashion label Christian Dior spotlighted the women who inspired the house founder in an episode of its podcast series, Dior Untold.

Dior Untold provides an opportunity for consumers to immerse themselves in the world of Dior, getting to know its creator and his innermost inspirations. The second episode of the podcast series, released nearly a year after its debut, examines the personal life of Christian Dior, discovering the women who inspired him and set a path for the brand ([see story](#)).

In November 2020, Prada-owned fashion brand Miu Miu tried to define what makes an icon in its newest campaign, released ahead of the holiday season.

Women have been a source of inspiration for the Italian brand for years, from projects like Women's Tales, an ongoing short film series empowering female directors, to this new "Icons" campaign. Miu Miu explores the idea of femininity and women as icons within fashion in its most recent campaign showcasing the pre-spring 2021 collection ([see story](#)).

"Powerful women are confident, complex, have a strong sense of self-worth and heightened composure," Ms. Miller said. "Their attitudes exude grace, style, allure and precision without missing a beat about who they intend to be, not desire to be, intend to be.

"Their power comes from within, their behaviors, attitudes and appearance demonstrate these attributes."

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