

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Luxury is about time and people: Valentino creative director

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Valentino creative director Pierpaolo Piccioli. Image credit: Valentino

By NORA HOWE

Since becoming co-creative director of Italian fashion house Valentino in 2008 and sole creative director in 2016, Pierpaolo Piccioli has pushed the brand into commercial and cultural success.

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When it was purchased in 2012 by investment vehicle [Mayhoola](#), Valentino's annual turnover stood at \$446.8 million, and by 2015, it surpassed \$1 billion. During the keynote session at [FT Business of Luxury Summit](#) on May 20, in conversation with *Financial Times* menswear critic Alexander Fury, Mr. Piccioli discussed how the brand has evolved over the years, the importance of using fashion as a platform for change and what couture means to him.

"Now, everything is more human, more emotional, more unfiltered because I am able to be my authentic self with the company I work for," Mr. Piccioli said. "With fashion, you have to use images to express your values."

Values of Valentino

The creative director admitted that his latest chapter with Valentino has been the best, as it has been his most personal chapter yet. As his values are distinctly aligned with those of the brand, he explained how he finds it difficult to separate who he is from what he does.

In 2017, Valentino unveiled its spring advertising campaign, the first collection under the solo creative direction of Mr. Piccioli, which aimed to highlight the values of the brand more than the collection itself.

After the collection debuted, the creative director stated he wanted the campaign to reflect the spirit, the feelings and the moment ([see story](#)).

"Without values, our work is empty," Mr. Piccioli said. "You cannot waste your time being generic you have to say what you stand for, and be proud of it."

"Gentle designers who do nice things are fine, but they are never really involved in society," he said. "If I just deliver a vision of beauty and neglect to reflect the times we are living in, I am only doing half of my job."



Zendaya stars in a series of short films for the Valentino Roman Palazzo campaign. Image credit: Valentino

In the last six months, Valentino has further incorporated themes of diversity, inclusion and self-expression through various creative campaigns.

Looking to entice a younger audience with a new version of a card game, Valentino joined forces with Koreen Odiney, founder of "We're Not Really Strangers," unveiling a 25-card game featuring questions that pertain to empathy, individuality and positivity.

Game questions include "Who in your life can you have more empathy toward?" and "When was the last time you felt truly understood by somebody?"

As a promotion, Ms. Odiney arranged to play the game with Mr. Piccioli, and their exchange was warm and amusing ([see story](#)).

In January, Valentino presented a new journey of its "Inspired By" project, an effort dedicated to visionary leaders who embody the values of the brand.

The project highlighted Italian long-jump athlete and student Larissa Iapichino, who embraces the brand's celebration of authenticity, talent, uniqueness and femininity. "Inspired by REDValentino" is dedicated to the free and independent individuals who challenge life and create new meanings and perspectives ([see story](#)).

"Valentino aims to be relevant, but as a brand that does fashion within the context of society and culture," Mr. Piccioli said. "When you buy something from Valentino, you belong to a community that shares the same values as you."

"Years ago, Valentino was about lifestyle," he said. "I want to keep the values of the house, a sense of couture, but couture is a philosophy, a culture it's not about expense or exclusivity."



An illustration of Valentino's 2020 fall/winter collection. Image credit: Valentino

He shared that, in his opinion, luxury and couture are not defined by physical materials, but rather the people behind the materials.

"Humans are the difference," Mr. Piccioli said. "Fashion needs the human element to give it any meaning."

Diversity in beauty

Valentino recently announced it will be entering the beauty space with a collection of cosmetics available next month, available in a large selection of shades. During the FT discussion, Mr. Piccioli made a point to say that this

project is an important step for the brand towards diversity and inclusion.

"The project reflects our values of diversity, individuality and freedom to be whoever you want to be," he said. "In terms of messaging, I did not want to use just one muse as our beauty icon, so I used 16 real' personalities to convey a sense of humanity and boundless self expression."

At a time when luxury brands are becoming more forthcoming about their inclusivity and diversity efforts, consumers more values-oriented and public discussions around social justice less taboo, beauty brand Este Lauder gave a platform to Black women in a special series to commemorate Black History Month this year, inviting them to share their perspectives on the beauty industry ([see story](#)).

In April, LVMH-owned beauty retailer Sephora promoted Transgender Day of Visibility with a short film highlighting how the retailer's products have fostered a transgender woman's life and journey. The vignette which is part of a series entitled "Stories of Belonging" that celebrates Sephora team members follows Chrissie Vee, a makeup artist at the retailer.

Ms. Vee discusses her childhood, her early manifestation of femininity and the role Sephora products have in assisting her to live her most genuine life ([see story](#)).

"Beauty is about self expression," Mr. Pierpaolo said. "Be who you want to be."

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