

MARKETING

## Brands roll out big events to make up for lost time in China

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*Gucci and Miu Miu were first off the block following the easing of travel restrictions. Image credit: Miu Miu*

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Following the easing of the pandemic and travel restrictions, brand activities in China have been gaining momentum, returning at a pace and scale unseen since 2019.

As global leadership teams **flocked** to China throughout March and April, a series of events held by the likes of Chanel, L'Oral, Tiffany & Co., Cartier and Bulgari culminated in successive large-scale activations by Miu Miu and **Gucci**, the latter of which saw the return of many international guests for the first time since the pandemic's outbreak. We zoom in on some standouts of the past month.

### Cultural odyssey with Miu Miu

Miu Miu whisked guests away to the scenic water town of Wuzhen, located 90 minutes outside of Shanghai, for a two-day affair held in celebration of Lila Avilís *'Eye Two Times Mouth*, the 25th film in the Miu Miu **Women's Tales** series.

The event focused on communicating the culture of the brand by rooting it in the history of this unique town chosen to mirror the waterways of Venice, where the region's traditions have been painstakingly preserved.

The Water Theater where the film-screening and dinner party took place is the central venue for Wuzhen's annual Theater Festival, a suitable stage for the brand to reinforce its ties with the performing arts.

With time to explore the 1,300-year-old town during the day, more than 100 guests from the worlds of fashion and cinema came together at night for the screening, which was followed by a special live performance by singer Zhu Jingxi.

"The experience was rather different because Miu Miu chose Wuzhen over large cities like Beijing, Guangzhou or Hangzhou; the key is that you understand what the brand is trying to say and can also experience local cultural traditions," said Shanghai-based stylist Jeff Lee.

"It's great to see events gradually returning to China," he said. "Since the pandemic, we haven't really been going to

the cinema, and watching the film at night sitting outside in the spring weather was a very meaningful experience for many."

The following day, Miu Miu further showcased its dedication to celebrating female perspectives by hosting a panel discussion entitled "A Woman's Whole Universe" that was live-streamed. Panelists comprised independent film director Han Shuai, award-winning actress Ma Sichun and artist Peng Wei.

"Everyone is happy and grateful to be back and doing the things they love," said French-Chinese model Estelle Chen. "My favorite part was the discussion between the women and hearing them talk about their careers in a relatable and sincere way."

Throughout the day, all the films in the Miu Miu Women's Tales series were shown on loop in a neighboring theater, with students from neighboring universities invited to attend.

"The entire two days left me with an impression of powerful simplicity," said 85-year-old actress and industry veteran Wu Yanshu. "The event wasn't fussy, and it communicated the power of female stories with directness and authenticity."

Gucci archives

As the Miu Miu event drew to a close, guests made their way back to Shanghai the same evening for the opening of Gucci Cosmos, the first stop of a worldwide exhibition designed to highlight the house's archival collections.

"When we opened the Gucci archive in Florence in 2021 to celebrate our centennial, we immediately decided China would be the first global destination to bring this historic exhibit about the House and its heritage to life," said Marco Bizzarri, president/CEO of Gucci, in a statement.

Mr. Bizzarri was present at the exhibition's opening, along with other international attendees such as Thai actor/singer Billkin, Japanese supermodel Ai Tominaga, and guests including Bryanboy, Yoyo Cao and Susie Bubble (Susanna Lau) who all flew in for the event. They joined a long list of Chinese celebrities, including Gucci's global brand ambassadors Chris Lee, Xiao Zhan, Lu Han and Ni Ni.

Located in Shanghai's West Bund Art Museum, Gucci Cosmos conceptualizes the history of the house through eight thematic worlds. The immersive experience was curated by Italian fashion critic Maria Luisa Frisa and designed by British contemporary artist Es Devlin.

At a time when the brand is in-between creative directors, it was an important move for Gucci to reinforce its heritage in a market **where its growth has slowed**.

With more than 100 works on display, the exhibition traces back the brand's 102-year-old history, bringing to life the experience of founder Guccio Gucci working as a porter at The Savoy Hotel in the late 19th century, an archive display of Gucci's most iconic bags, and the ready-to-wear collections by Tom Ford, Frida Giannini and Alessandro Michele.

"I was thinking it was going to feel a little bit pared down, but the scope of the exhibition was so big, and the scenography was so ambitious and immersive, it was fitting that the party also had so many people in a big space," Ms. Lau said.

The opening was celebrated with a party in the venue featuring live performances from members of boy band Into1 and singer Lu Han.

"It was good to get a feel of how brands are doing events in China right now," Ms. Lau said. "Shanghai remains a super vibrant place to do activations in Asia and to get a temperature of what the market is like. I look forward to coming back soon."

More to come

The calendar for upcoming months shows no signs of slowing down as Fendi prepares to mount an exhibition in June and Bottega Veneta is set to stage a repeat show in July.

Yet, as activations return to China in full force, it is more important than ever for brands to consider how to tailor-make and differentiate their event for this market.

"The communication between brands and local culture is necessary," Mr. Lee said. "Miu Miu's Women's Tales merged local cultural customs with the brand's own identity in a seamless way. I would like to see more of these types of events happening in China."

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