

## FASHION MILAN SPECIAL REPORT



MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO

## Trying to give fashion an 'eco-boost'

BIELLA, ITALY

BY J.J. MARTIN

When 11 barefoot models began a slow dance under a giant spider installation created by the famed Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto, it was an unusual fashion moment.

The models' clothing, crafted entirely from sustainable materials, had been created by 11 emerging designers selected by Franca Sozzani of Italian Vogue.

And the guest star of the event Tuesday, which fused fashion spectacle and a panel discussion about the future of ethically created clothing, was Princess Charlotte Casiraghi, 23, daughter of Princess Caroline of Monaco. She, along with her partners, Elizabeth von Guttman and Alexia Niedzielski, used the occasion to introduce their "EVER Manifesto," a new editorial project.

"It's more like a communications think tank," Ms. Casiraghi said of the publication, which will be distributed free at the Corso Como 10 boutique during Milan Fashion Week and, later, at Colette in Paris. "We put together experts, artists and designers to focus on this idea of sustainability and the ability to transform how we live."

The oversize 20-page manifesto, guest edited by Ms. Sozzani and sponsored by Loro Piana, has fashion as its first theme, using the event in Biella on Tuesday as a linchpin.

Called "Cittadellarte Fashion: Bio Ethical Sustainable Trend," the event was intended to bring the worlds of fashion design, manufacturing, publishing and new media together to make a statement about sustainability. More than 25 local textile manufacturers, for example, produced ecologically friendly fabrics, yarns and dyes that were donated for the show creations and for displays.

Mr. Pistoletto, a leading member of Italy's Arte Povera movement, both conceived and financed the project, using his own resources to transport the designers from seven different countries to his Cittadellarte, a renovated 19th-century industrial space that has functioned since 1998 as an artistic compound with a social and ethical slant. In June, the designers attended a three-day crash course there in eco-textiles.

The artist, 76, whose compound has labs dedicated to art, education, politics and ecology, said he organized the project because fashion needed an "eco boost." "It's about unifying aesthetics with ethics," he said. "The mission here is what I call 'The Third Paradise' — the unification of technology with nature so that both can coexist in harmony."

Mr. Pistoletto said sustainability had been a guiding principle for activities at Cittadellarte since its founding. But the



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Michaelangelo Pistoletto and Franca Sozzani, above center, with the 11 designers who participated in the Cittadellarte fashion project. Left, the dance performance that started the event. And, below center, Charlotte Casiraghi, daughter of Princess Caroline of Monaco, who attended the program.



topic is still relatively unexplored within Italy's fashion industry.

Ms. Sozzani agreed. "No one really talks about it because it's a movement that creates problems for you," she said. "You have to stop and think of how to change or act."

Paolo Zegna, chairman of the Ermenegildo Zegna Group, one of the companies that donated fabrics and yarns for the project, said Zegna already had experimented with organically dyed yarns in its ecological "Oasis" line, introduced two years ago.

"It's good to have this in our collection, but it's a reduced number for us," he said, referring to production quantities. "It costs more to produce, so there are limits."

There also can be roadblocks in the design process, as the Italian designer Roberta Furlanetto, one of the young designers invited to participate, discovered while using licorice to dye a natural silk fabric. "It was very hard to do right," she admitted. "It took me several tries to get it homogenous and looking good."

But the final effect of the dress, with layers of soft gray silk, was both beautiful and ethereal, and Ms. Furlanetto said she enjoyed the experience. "I learned that this way of working is already part of my DNA — being individual and making clothes carefully and with quality," she said.

Other participating designers, each creating a single design, included Marco de Vincenzo, Silvio Betterelli, and Marta Forghieri, all from Italy; Osman Youssef

fzada and Mark Fast, Britain; Siri Johansen, Norway; Mary Katrantzou, Greece; José M. Nunes da Silva Giralt, Spain; Matthew Ames, United States; and Sandra Backlund, Sweden.

Despite the enthusiasm, no one at the event said they were deluded about the realistic role of sustainability in fashion's future. "We're not pretending that fashion should only be created in ecological materials," Ms. Sozzani said. "That's absurd and unthinkable."

And for designers who are often inspired creatively by the look and feel of a fabric, excluding certain resources would be like cutting off a design limb. So at the event Tuesday, the discussion focused on expanding ideas and experimentation.

"As a fashion editor, I am asking myself what I have done," Ms. Sozzani said. "Yes, I've done an eco-living issue and some fashion layouts with models in masks, but that's not really entering deeply into the issue. It's been a visual approach, not a real approach."

"It's only recently that I've questioned the way that I've been consuming," said Ms. Casiraghi, who mentioned as her personal inspirations the environmental activism of her uncle, Prince Albert II, as well as her own stint as guest editor at the eco-slanted Above Magazine. But, she added, "I haven't been as conscious as I should have been."

The EVER Manifesto, then, is this young royal's way of doing her part. "We want to publish when we have something to say or have people to support," Ms. Casiraghi said, explaining that the publication would expand beyond fashion and will not have a pre-determined publication schedule. "It will be short and meaningful so that people will read it."

Her comments echoed Mr. Pistoletto's broad philosophy of ethical consumption. "This isn't just a one-off event," he said. "I'm committed to joining fashion designers and producers together in the future."