

## WATCH

## Your backs



*There was blood on the catwalk as Paris fashion week came to a close this week with a savage and potentially costly bout of recrimination that has surprised even hardened style watchers*

BY HADLEY FREEMAN  
THE GUARDIAN, PARIS

Paris fashion week ended on Sunday not in the usual welter of air kissing and champagne toasts, but with a potentially expensive bout of backstabbing that has surprised even hardened style watchers by the savagery displayed.

Less than 24 hours after the Valentino show, the company announced the departure of the label's creative director, Alessandra Facchinetti, following a "misaligned vision with the company." It added, with biting brevity: "Her creative contribution and refined artistic talent were greatly appreciated." Facchinetti had been in place for less than two seasons after the label's founder, Valentino Garavani, stepped down. What made this announcement particularly harsh was that Facchinetti was unaware she had been fired.

Two hours later, she issued her own statement, saying that she felt "deep regret" to have learned that she was fired from the press "since the company's top management has not yet seen fit to inform me. I would like to thank Valentino SPA for showing their appreciation of my 'creative contribution and sophisticated talent' although I deeply regret the fact that this talent and contribution do not seem to have been adequately acknowledged."

Valentino's longtime business partner, Giancarlo Giammetti, soon stepped into the ring, expressing his approval of the removal of Facchinetti: "To pretend to transform and revolutionize the Valentino style is a utopia which is a loss from the start."

Valentino himself then joined the fray, complaining

that Facchinetti had not sufficiently respected his legacy: "There is an existing archive with thousands of dresses where [a designer] can draw and take inspiration from to create a Valentino product that is relevant today. It is a shame that [Facchinetti] didn't feel this need."

This unusually public feud reveals the problems increasing numbers of big-name labels face when their founders reach retirement age but the business is too lucrative to close, reaping millions, even billions of US dollars annually, albeit largely through cosmetics, underwear, sunglasses and jeans.

"It's an incredibly tricky balance for a young designer, and it's particularly tricky at Valentino where so much of the label's image was about Valentino's own extraordinarily glamorous life," said *Vogue's* fashion features editor, Harriet Quick.

"It's hard not to look at all this as nature's way of saying that, after a designer goes, you should shut the door. After all, nobody took over from Picasso when he died and you don't have David Lynch directing movies in Alfred Hitchcock's name. It does raise questions about what will happen at Ralph Lauren [who is 68] and Giorgio Armani [74] when they step down," said fashion writer Tim Blanks.

Today more money is involved than ever before and few would want to kill the cash cow of an established name as Valentino. Moreover, customers already cautious about spending money in the luxury sector are drawn to labels with familiar names. "But how many people want something from a couture label that has not been shepherded by the designer

himself?" asked Blanks.

There had been rumors of Facchinetti's departure all week. It is a far cry from how things seemed just a few months ago. After Facchinetti showed her first collection in February, Giammetti expressed his delight, saying she "respected a master."

Valentino's complaints about Facchinetti's alleged lack of respect for his brand may reflect the designer's own bitterness after he was forced out in 2007 following the company's takeover by private equity firm Permira. But they also show the difficulty for young designers who try to take over at a label when the originator is still alive; Yves Saint Laurent made his displeasure known when Tom Ford stepped into his shoes in 1999, saying dismissively: "The poor guy does what he can."

What makes this latest row particularly bitter for Facchinetti is that she has been here before: in 2005 she was sacked from Gucci after just two seasons. Some suggest that part of her problem is the difficulty a young woman faces in the world of male-dominated big brands. Others say Facchinetti's sales had been disappointing. Either way, this high profile feud leaves the Valentino brand with a costly problem because magazines and department stores will be unsure how to promote Facchinetti's "lame duck" collections for the label.

"It seems a very unpleasant thing to do to a young female designer," Blanks said. "As for established labels taking on young designers, we're now looking at a chalice that is irrevocably poisoned."



Italian designer Alessandra Facchinetti, left, acknowledges applause during Milan fashion week in 2004. Facchinetti said she was bitter to be leaving the Valentino fashion house after learning from media reports that the company was replacing her.

PHOTOS: REUTERS AND AP

## [ ART JOURNAL ]

## Say it in ink

*A new exhibition at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum highlights the dynamism that exists within the usually staid medium of Asian ink painting*

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW  
STAFF REPORTER

## EXHIBITIONS NOTES:

**WHAT:** Form, Ideas, Essence, Rhythm: Contemporary East Asian Ink Painting (形·意·質·韻 — 東亞當代水墨創作邀請展)

**WHERE:** Taipei Fine Arts Museum (台北市立美術館) (3A, 3B exhibition areas, 3A, 3B 展區) 181, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市中山北路3段181號)

**WHEN:** Tuesdays through Sundays from 9:30am to 5:30pm. Until Dec. 28

**ENTRY:** NT\$30 general admission

Ink painting in Asia has a venerable tradition, but within the world of contemporary art it has been largely sidelined by Western media such as oil and acrylic. *Form, Ideas, Essence, Rhythm: Contemporary East Asian Ink Painting* (形·意·質·韻 — 東亞當代水墨創作邀請展), curated by art historian Jason Wang (王嘉驊), examines the relationship between modern ink painting and traditional Chinese aesthetics, and the conceptual trends that are driving a new generation of artists.

"Within contemporary art, ink painting is often seen as something traditional, and we may even question whether it has the ability to renew itself to reflect modern aesthetic experiences," Wang said. "Ink painting is still a major tradition within Asian art, and many artists continue to work and teach within the traditional forms of Asian ink painting, but the real dynamism is being shown by individuals outside the mainstream."

Artist Pan Hsing-hua (潘信華), who teaches art in Hualien, said his students are mainly interested in studying Western art.

"They feel that ink painting is very distant from them, and being distant it is unfamiliar," Pan said. "This is very sad. They cannot see a connection between ink painting and the world they live in. An exhibition like this may show them that there is in fact great potential in ink painting."



The 96 works on display, by 25 artists from four countries — Taiwan, China, Japan and South Korea — quickly dispel any idea that ink painting is a thing of the past. These range from the hyper-kinetic manga imagery of Mise Natsunosuke's *My God — Tiananmen* (My God — 天安門) to the ultra-minimalist calm of Yan Shanchun's (嚴善錚) *Searching for West Lake in My Dreams* (西湖尋夢).

Chinese artist Xu Bing's (徐冰) works, which incorporate Chinese calligraphy and include text in characters of his own devising, deconstruct Chinese scholarly ink painting, while Yang Jiechang's (楊詰蒼) black-on-black

series explores the medium of ink in lushly textured monochrome panels.

Buddhist and Daoist iconography are reinterpreted in the works of Lin Ju (林鈺), and echoes of Japanese horror cinema pervade the superficially traditional *Nyctalopia* (夜盲症) by Fuyuko Matsui.

The work on display is almost bewildering in its range, with far too many permutations to be touched on individually here. While this makes the exhibition exhausting to encompass in a single visit, it also makes a point: ink painting is still very much alive and kicking.

"In most cases, ink painting exhibitions look to the past for their theoretic grounding," Wang said in a talk introducing the exhibition, which probes the new aesthetics being developed by practicing artists.

Wang said he had purposely rejected organizing the exhibition along national lines, choosing instead thematic categories to investigate the potentialities of ink painting in the contemporary world. "I am not saying that theory must necessarily drive creativity, but ink painting needs to go back to fundamentals and take a serious look at the ideas that contemporary ink painting (in East Asia) is trying to express."

In all the works chosen by Wang, one can find, though not always easily,

Some connection with traditional ink painting can be found in all the works chosen by Wang, though not always easily. Many of the artists on display have taken this link and traveled to a place very distant from what normally expects from Asian ink painting.

What the exhibition shows above all else is that there are powerful imaginations working within the medium of ink painting today. And it is these artists, who feel a strong sense of affinity with an ancient Asian artistic tradition, yet eagerly embrace the influences of the modern world, who might take ink painting into the next generation as an influential and dynamic art form.