MODEM Dialogues - In conversation with Raffaello Napoleone

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Raffaello Napoleone - Pitti Immagine Board member in charge of International and Institutional Relations

Portrait Raffaello Napoleone - Photo credit ® Pitti Immagine
Questions conceived and hosted by Florian Müller

MODEM:
Before titles, roles, or institutions became part of your identity, which early impression of fashion first stayed with you in a lasting way?

RAFFAELLO NAPOLEONE:
What struck me from the very beginning is the incredible speed of fashion in interpreting the reality in which we live. Fashion is the industry that reads in the quickest way what is happening in every historical time, in society, economy and culture. It was like this in the past, it is happening nowadays and it will be the same in the future. All of this, of course considering the precise framework of contemporary habits and lifestyle. Using a metaphor to describe my personal view on fashion, it is the same experience you have listening a masterpiece like the Strauss Radetzky March or the Beethoven Symphony No. 9: they remain always the same music, something you can experience inside yourself, but at the same time they have this unique power of changing every time, transmitting an overwhelming energy each time they are in the air.

MODEM:

Throughout the evolution of the Pitti universe, the fairs have managed to balance heritage with constant reinvention and openness to new creative languages. What instinct tells you when a change is truly worth embracing?

RAFFAELLO NAPOLEONE:
First thing I would answer is curiosity. When a change attracts your curiosity it is immediately something to consider. And then you have to evaluate if it is an achievable change and its social coherence. The overall sustainability of each change is very important.

MODEM:
Few platforms bring together established houses, emerging designers, buyers, journalists, and cultural figures within the same atmosphere quite like Pitti. At its best, what kind of energy does this encounter create for the industry?

RAFFAELLO NAPOLEONE:
Pitti Uomo has always been generating great attention: the empathy and curiosity created by an experience of Italian, European, and international networking happening under a select and coherent umbrella, implemented throughout global research. It is a common “fil rouge” made of quality and selection of the best players, brands, proposals on the market in that precise historical time.

MODEM:
In times when fashion risks becoming more performance than substance, where do you personally still find authenticity in the way people create, present, or communicate style?

RAFFAELLO NAPOLEONE:
Fashion is in principle made of great substance and knowledge, and it remains a matter of substance and savoir faire. Authenticity is inherent in the creative process - from the sketches to pattern making, sampling, production, and the rest of the supply chain... These are the elements that ensure fashion remains genuine. Then, clearly, it has to be presented and at the current moment fashion manages to present itself monthly, with new collections backed by the entire production system. But when a brand carries real values, it is anything but a show for its own sake.

MODEM:
Amid growing conversations around conscious production, digital transformation, and changing consumer behavior, which development currently feels most underestimated despite having the potential to reshape the future of fashion culture?

RAFFAELLO NAPOLEONE:
The strength of changes lies in the interpretation of the contemporary world, which fashion achieves more than any other industry. Among marketing and retail strategies, recently the role of the experience has strongly emerged as a trend: living special feelings and emotions even at the moment of purchase - a new approach that was not dictated by the industry but by the social evolution itself. In my opinion also second hand and circular economy are giving a strong contribution in reshaping today’s fashion, as topics to which new generations are highly sensitive, as they are connected to a higher level of awareness towards the world we live in and the future we want to build.

MODEM:

?Fashion constantly rewards novelty and moves at a pace that often leaves little time for reflection. Having witnessed decades of cycles, shifts, and changing definitions of relevance, what have you seen endure despite all the acceleration, and what qualities do people often overlook when thinking about what truly lasts in fashion?

RAFFAELLO NAPOLEONE:
While times are accelerating, thinking remains a fundamental value, because we live on both ideas and emotions. I believe that quality in production and truth are the crucial factors that must be safeguarded. Preserving brand identity and the role of the brand in the market are the elements upon which fashion is able to establish itself. In this sense, a brand like Prada is a fine example of this identity-driven strength, in establishing itself as a brand that thrives on quality and manufacturing tradition, and at the same time pushing on aesthetic and design innovation. Luckily, there are many other examples among fashion players, like many of the brands we have as exhibitors at the Pitti Immagine trade shows.

MODEM:
Between public expectations, constant networking, and the emotional intensity surrounding fashion weeks, silence and recovery often disappear from daily routines. Which forms of balance have become essential for maintaining clarity and long term perspective in your own life?

RAFFAELLO NAPOLEONE:
Curiosity and information have always been pillars in my personal life, paired with networking - not just in fashion - culture, sports, art exhibitions, reading, travels, and food. Fashion has never dictated my choices; instead, it has been an integral part of a lifestyle fueled by all these passions. I suppose it is deeply tied to my personality and in general to a genuine zest for life.

MODEM:
Compared with previous generations, younger creatives speak far more openly about balance, vulnerability, and psychological strain. Has this openness already begun to change professional culture in meaningful ways?

RAFFAELLO NAPOLEONE:
A right balance between work and personal life is crucial in times where social pressure is increasing considerably, taking space and time away from individual lives. Creativity in general, but in fashion especially, requires a high level of attention to everyday phenomena: cultivating passions that nourish it and allow for spaces of energetic recovery - this is what I find essential!

MODEM:
Beyond numbers, partnerships, and international growth, there is also a human dimension attached to leading such an influential platform. Where does that sense of responsibility feel most personal to you today?

RAFFAELLO NAPOLEONE:
The human side has been in fact the most rewarding part of my entire career. I have been HR manager for many years, and the bond built over the decades with the roughly 60 collaborators and employees at Pitti Immagine, this was absolutely vital in sharing challenges, in times of hardships, and for building successes and new beginnings.

MODEM:

If one quiet shift in mindset could influence how fashion operates in the years ahead, which perspective would you hope becomes second nature across the entire field?

RAFFAELLO NAPOLEONE:
True fashion, with a capital F, is fundamentally ethical. What I would hope is an ending of the dark side of the industry, where people - whether adults or children - are disrespected.