MODEM Dialogues - In conversation with Serge Carreira

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Serge Carreira, Director of the Emerging Brands Initiative at the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode and affiliated professor at the School of Management and Impact at Sciences Po.
Portrait Serge Carreira - Photo credit ® Stephane Kossmann.
Questions conceived and hosted by Florian Müller

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MODEM:
Young designers often face a range of challenges: financial constraints, creative pressure, and limited visibility. In your opinion, what kind of support is most essential for emerging talents to succeed? What support measures do you find most effective?

SERGE CARREIRA:
I just finished reading "Letters to a Young Fashion Designer" by **Gianfranco Ferré**, and already thirty years ago, he emphasized how much more complex, competitive, and saturated the industry had become compared to the 1970s.

While the barriers to entry in the industry are now much lower than in the past, the real challenge lies in building a sustainable model based on a unique voice. Talent is, of course, essential but it’s not enough. One must be able to align a coherent vision, implement a relevant development and production system, find appropriate distribution channels, and deploy a precise brand image.

As the brand grows, all of these parameters must be recalibrated simultaneously. Each

emerging label is different. Each has its strengths and weaknesses. We aim to have a support system that covers multiple areas from legal advice to logistics. The idea is to identify the moments when these young fashion houses need support and to accompany them in their development.

MODEM:
SPHERE has become a key showroom for buyers during Paris Fashion Week. What makes this format unique compared to other initiatives supporting young talents? What values and principles guide it?

SERGE CARREIRA:
SPHERE is a platform that enables emerging brands to present their collections to buyers as well as to industry professionals. The goal is to help them strengthen and grow their sales while staying connected to the broader fashion ecosystem. We are not competitors of other showrooms or trade shows, as the brands themselves handle their commercial activities. In many cases, they are supported by an agent or a freelance sales representative during SPHERE. What these emerging brands have in common is a distinctive creative vision and a strong sense of commitment.

MODEM:
What criteria are most important to you when selecting brands for SPHERE? How do you ensure both creativity and commercial potential are taken into account? What qualities do you especially value in young designers?

SERGE CARREIRA:
The selection of brands for SPHERE is made by a committee that brings together professionals, buyers, and journalists each season. It is not a personal or individual choice. Naturally, brands that are part of the official Paris Fashion Week calendar are given priority. One of the key criteria is also recognition through international awards such as the *Hyères Festival*, the *LVMH Prize*, the *Woolmark Prize*, or *ANDAM*, for example.

We do not see ourselves as talent scouts per se. Rather, we are one of the actors within this ecosystem and, through this platform, we aim to create a supportive environment that enables these brands to grow. As Paris is a global fashion stage, we have also established exchanges with organizations such as the *Camera della Moda Italiana* and *Copenhagen Fashion Week*. SPHERE strives to reflect the diversity of emerging creative voices.

MODEM:
Sustainability is a major issue in the fashion industry, both ecologically and socially. In your view, how can young designers develop innovative solutions for a more sustainable future? What role does SPHERE play in this context?

SERGE CARREIRA:
Emerging brands stand out through their societal commitment. There is a genuine desire to drive change within the industry. They explore innovative solutions in their creative, development, or production processes. Some even build their entire development model around these new practices. The brands selected for SPHERE benefit from this platform to share their approach. And the most compelling projects are those that successfully combine commitment with creativity.

MODEM:
Diversity and inclusion are essential themes for the future of fashion. How do you promote these values in your work, whether through the Federation or your other roles? Are there any projects or designers that particularly impressed you in this field?

SERGE CARREIRA:
It seems more necessary than ever to promote talents in the plural. Despite growing awareness, mindsets within our industry are sometimes still lagging behind. I've always been struck by the critical, harsh, and even hostile commentary directed at designers like **Maria Grazia Chiuri or Virginie Viard** when they were leading major fashion houses. That's why it is essential to support all forms of expression. Many organizations are working to promote the diversity of talent whether it's *Maison Mode Méditerranée*, the *CANEX program* for African designers, or *Fashion Trust Arabia*. It is crucial to celebrate women and creators from all over the world, recognizing the richness and value of their contributions to the global fashion landscape.

MODEM:
At the recent Who's Next event in Paris, you took part in a panel on the "Mental Health in Fashion" campaign. Why is it so important to raise more awareness around mental health in the fashion industry?

SERGE CARREIRA:
In our societies, which are rooted in performance and success, mental health has long been a taboo subject often associated with a form of weakness. And this goes far beyond the fashion industry. Today, we can observe a growing awareness. People are beginning to speak out more openly. This shift is essential, because only by addressing these issues head-on can we begin to put in place the necessary structures and support systems to prevent or treat them.

MODEM:
The psychological pressures in the fashion world, from creative demands to economic uncertainty, are immense. What concrete steps could be taken to build a healthier and more supportive environment for designers and other industry players?

SERGE CARREIRA:
Fashion is an industry that makes people dream. In the name of that dream, some believe that sacrifices must be made. Yet while fashion is undoubtedly a demanding discipline, effort should not mean suffering. The romantic myth of the tortured and therefore brilliant creator is still far too present. Changing this narrative requires positive role models. And it must begin in fashion education. Destroying oneself is not proof of talent. More importantly, there should be no shame in expressing vulnerability or emotional distress. Awareness campaigns are absolutely essential to foster prevention and to help build a healthier, more supportive industry.

MODEM:
Your work connects young talents to an industry in transition. If you could pass on just one piece of advice or mindset to the next generation of creators, what would it be? And what would you like them to remember about this time that you are helping shape?

SERGE CARREIRA:
First and foremost, they are the ones shaping the times. They must be able to reflect society's aspirations through their collections. Fashion that is disconnected from the world is nothing more than a stylistic exercise. I believe the real challenge is to navigate the system while

remaining true to oneself. Integrity must be understood in its double meaning: something that is both coherent and grounded in strong values.

MODEM:
Looking ahead, what changes would you like to see in the fashion industry, particularly in terms of sustainability, diversity, and mental health?

SERGE CARREIRA:
It is essential to adopt an optimistic approach. Nostalgia is a form of resignation. We must hope that the progress seen in recent years toward a more responsible industry continues to gain ground. Mindsets have evolved, but practices and habits are still struggling to catch up. Consumers claim to be aware, yet continue to buy fast fashion. Some professionals still repeat harmful patterns. I believe the industry can continue to evolve and set standards that ensure greater transparency.