

## FASHION SHOWS AS VECTORS OF CULTURAL PROMOTION AND HERITAGE ENHANCEMENT/

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**Abstract.** This study investigates the synergy between cultural heritage and fashion, highlighting how these two dimensions can collaborate to generate new forms of territorial, artistic, and social valorisation. The analysis of three exemplary cases – Dior Cruise collections, Chanel’s Métiers d’Art, and Dolce & Gabbana Grand Tour – highlights how major fashion houses have intertwined their sartorial aesthetics with the genius loci of sites selected for their cultural and artistic value. These projects take the form of narrative platforms of global relevance, going beyond the celebration of fashion’s creativity. They activate profound dialogues with cultural contexts, reinterpret local traditions, and bestow a dynamic and contemporary dimension upon heritage. The interdisciplinary approach illustrates how fashion can contribute to both the preservation and innovation of cultural heritage through collaborations with artisans, artists, and local institutions. Elements rooted in the culture and traditions of specific places are translated into aesthetic languages that merge the brand’s style with local cultures. This demonstrates how heritage – both tangible and intangible – can be fertile ground for creative innovation. Through the analysis of specific case studies, the research also highlights the transformative role of temporary installations, which not only enhance the visibility of the sites chosen for the collections’ presentations but often improve their accessibility and interpretation. These interventions, whether ephemeral or lasting, underscore the potential of fashion as a creative medium able to integrate past and present, to promote intercultural dialogue, and to support the social and economic revitalisation of the territories involved. The paper thus offers a reflection on the new possibilities arising from the synergy between the fashion event system, its communicative immediacy, and cultural heritage. It outlines an original model of valorisation that projects heritage towards a broader and more inclusive perspective.

**Introduction.** Fashion houses are increasingly selecting culturally significant locations to present their exclusive collections, constructing spectacular narratives that deeply engage with the hosting sites [1]. This phenomenon is often frowned upon by heritage preservation critics, who look at it as a commodification of cultural heritage [2]. It is undeniable that the communicative and commercial dynamics of such events can clash with more strictly conservative perspectives, particularly when archaeological sites or historic museums are involved. However, in the most structured and meaningful cases, the interaction between fashion and cultural heritage can foster a dialogue that enhances local culture while simultaneously enriching the language and aesthetics of fashion design [3].

Recent Dior Cruise collections are a striking example of this trend; each is inspired by a distinct geographical and cultural context, interpreting its values by weaving the creative process with heritage values, from the conception of garments to the staging of fashion shows in emblematic sites. Each event becomes a great impact show, honouring the cultural and artistic traditions of the chosen locations.

Another noteworthy case is the Métiers d’Art project by Chanel, which annually celebrates artisanal excellence and its connection to the prestigious contexts in which it is presented. These events highlight the creative aspects of fashion through deeply rooted cultural references and, above all, interpret the connection between past and present, material and immaterial, blending the most traditional elements with the contemporary characteristics of the local artistic milieu.

In a different but equally effective manner, since 2012 Dolce & Gabbana has been championing the excellence of “Made in Italy” through a Grand Tour that ties its haute couture collections to some of Italy’s most significant cultural sites. Through an aesthetic interpretation that marks the international signature of the brand, the historical traditions and complex artisanal qualities of the chosen locations are translated into garments of exceptional sartorial and artistic quality, showcased through theatrical presentations of great communicative power. Among the most iconic examples is the 2019 show held at the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento, where the archaeological site was transformed into an extraordinary stage, enhancing local heritage and offering new perspectives for its fruition.

These events are not merely aesthetic performances but take on the role of giving back to the territory. The most significant interventions often include heritage enhancement initiatives that go beyond the ephemeral scenographic image of a fashion show. Depending on the circumstances and opportunities, brands contribute to site improvement by funding restorations, promoting permanent cultural enhancements, or creating temporary installations designed to encourage alternative uses, accessibility, and interpretation. Through these initiatives, fashion proves itself a cultural medium capable of connecting past and present, tradition and contemporaneity, generating narratives that enrich both cultural heritage and the language of design.

**Dior Cruise.** The cruise (or resort) collections, proposed annually by various fashion brands especially since the early 2000s, originate as an opportunity for escapism, commercially linked to the idea of luxury holidays in faraway and fascinating places [4]. Their presentation, which takes place outside the traditional fashion weeks, is thus typically set in locations with significant media appeal. Maria Grazia Chiuri, creative director of Dior since 2016, has shifted the paradigm of this kind of event by focusing the Dior Cruise collections on a meticulously crafted communication strategy centred on the cultural richness and diversity of the selected locations. These are no longer mere aesthetic backdrops but become protagonists in an exploration that highlights both the ancient origins and contemporary features of the territories and their inhabitants. This process intertwines narratives, places, artisanal knowledge, social attitudes, and political messages.

The careful selection of the inspirational and presentation locations for recent Dior Cruise collections (from Frida Kahlo's Mexico to Olympic Greece, from Salento in Apulia to Mary Stuart's Scotland) has brought attention to a constellation of exceptionally diverse cultural heritages. In each case, a virtuous relationship has been constructed, blending traditions, storytelling, historical and contemporary craftsmanship, monuments, and artworks. This process translates the genius loci of each context into fashion, granting each event a distinctive identity deeply rooted in local cultural heritage. Chiuri investigates the cultural identity of these chosen locations not only through the design of garments but also via collaborations with local artisans, artists, and communities. Examples include embroidery inspired by Moroccan wax fabrics, Salento's light installations, Greek friezes, Mexican floral motifs, and reinterpretations of Scottish tartan. These creative processes celebrate the diversity and richness of local traditions, providing a global platform for the visibility of cultural heritage while supporting regional artisanal economies.

Chiuri's approach is distinguished by its ability to incorporate traditional elements and reinterpret them in a modern, compelling, and sophisticated manner, emphasising the relevance of ancient knowledge in the contemporary world. Through a nuanced dialogue with architecture and landscape, each runway show becomes a multisensory experience where fashion and cultural heritage interact to construct a shared collective imagination. The social and cultural dimensions of these collections further underline the role of fashion as a medium for connection and intercultural exchange. The visual narrative emerging from these events elevates the identity of the locations and the universal value of tangible and intangible heritage by delving deeply into local characteristics. These are not merely aesthetic expressions but authentic cultural operations offering contemporary reinterpretations of centuries-old stories. They demonstrate how fashion can act both as an interpreter and a custodian of cultural heritage. This approach not only promotes intercultural dialogue but also contributes to the economic and social sustainability of the territories. The Dior Cruise collections can be regarded as manifestations of an aesthetic language that embraces the complexity and beauty of cultural diversity, leaving a profound mark on the relationship between fashion and place. FIGURE 1.

**Chanel Métiers d'Art.** The initiative of Chanel's Métiers d'Art collections represents a distinct example of contemporary fashion serving as a vehicle for the appreciation of cultural and artisanal heritage, fostering a dialogue between tradition and modernity. Established in 2002, this annual project celebrates the excellence of the artisanal workshops affiliated with the maison – from the buttons and jewellery of Desrues to the refined embroidery of Lesage and Montex, the feathers of Lemarié, and the footwear of Massaro – creating a deep connection between traditional savoir-faire and contemporary aesthetic visions. Each collection is related to an iconic location, selected for its historical and symbolic significance, becoming a starting point for exploring the connections between the local cultural context and the identity of the maison.

Under the creative direction of Virginie Viard, who led the brand from 2019 to 2024, the Métiers d'Art collections have opened a new communicative and cultural chapter for Chanel. The brand looks beyond its own historical

heritage, forging new layers of meaning by exploring locations seemingly distant from its rooted image. For instance, the Métiers d'Art 2022-23 show, held at the iconic Palais de Justice in Dakar [5], delved into potential connections with Senegal's cultural heritage, focusing on local art and craftsmanship, both traditional and contemporary [6]. The collection incorporated elements of Senegalese textile culture, such as geometric embroidery and colour patterns inspired by African art, celebrating their richness and complexity. The show established a profound dialogue with the territory by involving local artists and artisans, highlighting the importance of preserving and reinterpreting traditions through a contemporary lens. Moreover, the event carried significant social impact, thanks to collaborations with local cultural institutions and the promotion of educational initiatives aimed at nurturing emerging talent.

Another iconic edition was issued in Manchester for 2023-24, a city symbol of the Industrial Revolution and Britain's textile tradition. In a location not classically associated with haute couture but nonetheless historically connected to the origins of the maison [7], Chanel spotlighted elements defining the city's contemporary identity. The event innovated the brand image by linking it to street culture, the music scene, and football. The collection paid homage to tweed – fabrics deeply rooted in the brand's identity and the cultural imagination of the United Kingdom – reinterpreting it with contemporary sensibilities and enhancing it with innovative textures, bold colours, and details inspired by local street art. The show took place on one of the most renowned streets in Manchester's historic Northern Quarter, sheltered from the rain by a structure reminiscent of industrial architecture, underscoring a connection with the city's culture rather than its monuments.[8]

The use of locations with strong symbolic value, such as Dakar and Manchester, allows Chanel to transform the Métiers d'Art shows into moments of cultural celebration, where traditional craftsmanship is both honoured and reimagined to meet the challenges of a globalised world. These events intertwine local and global narratives, emphasising authenticity, sustainability, and the valorisation of regions. The meticulous attention to detail embodies the dialogue between skilled hands and creative visions, transforming each garment into a work of art that celebrates cultural heritage as a living resource, capable of evolving and renewing itself. Through these initiatives, Chanel reaffirms the role of fashion as a creative expression that preserves, innovates, and promotes heritage, presenting it to a global audience. FIGURE 2.

**Dolce & Gabbana Grand Tour.** Since 2012, Dolce & Gabbana has embarked on a unique initiative: a Grand Tour inspired by the 18th- and 19th-century tradition of educational travel. This project connects annual Alta Moda collections with the wonders of Italian cultural heritage. Each year, the duo selects an emblematic location, rich in history and evocative charm, as a starting point for developing their collections. The fashion shows presenting these collections become performative moments that involve transformative interventions on the sites, through temporary installations or longer-term initiatives for their enhancement and preservation. These events combine architecture, fashion, and tradition into an aesthetic and symbolic dialogue, where the garments—unique pieces of extraordi-

nary craftsmanship—take centre stage alongside the locations, which are transformed into active components of the visual narrative. Each episode of the Grand Tour is characterised by a scenographic approach that, while staying true to the brand’s maximalist aesthetic, adapts to local peculiarities. In Florence, the perspective of the Italian-style garden at Villa Bardini was accentuated by floral compositions, whereas in Syracuse, Piazza del Duomo was reimagined as a temporary architectural stage, respectful of the monochromatic palette and monumental nature of the Baroque stone.

The dialogue between fashion and cultural heritage is further enriched by Dolce & Gabbana’s privileged relationship with FAI (Fondo Ambiente Italiano), demonstrating a strong commitment to the preservation of local landscapes. Since 2022, their support for the restoration of the Case Montana in the Kolymbethra garden in Agrigento has started a three-year collaboration, recently extended until 2026. This partnership also encompasses initiatives aimed at the social and cultural promotion of heritage. It consolidates the company’s commitment to shared values such as Italian identity, tradition, culture, education, and beauty, actively involving local communities and fostering a renewed collective awareness.

The Dolce & Gabbana Grand Tour thus emerges as a veritable atlas of beauty and savoir-faire, constructing a complex, multidisciplinary narrative to promote local heritage. Through this project, the brand acknowledges and elevates the excellence of Italian craftsmanship and the diverse traditions across the country, immersing itself in the depth of their histories and translating them into a contemporary language. This initiative is not only a tribute to beauty and culture but also a responsibility towards future generations, underscoring fashion’s role not merely as a vehicle for creativity but as an instrument for the protection, enhancement, and transmission of Italy’s cultural heritage.

The two case studies examined in further detail exemplify how such initiatives can also influence the physical reality of the sites, temporarily transforming their perception and usability through artistic and architectural installations, executed in collaboration with heritage conservation authorities.

**Dolce & Gabbana Alta Moda show – Nora 2024.** The Alta Moda fashion show by Dolce & Gabbana, held on 2 July 2024 at the Parco Archeologico di Nora, serves as a quintessential example of the synergy between heritage sites, art, and fashion. This event stands out for its ability to merge the artisanal traditions of Sardinia, the historical allure of the archaeological site, and an innovative scenographic approach, crafting a multi-layered narrative that bridges the past and the contemporary.

The archaeological area of Nora is distinguished by its stratified history—Phoenician, Punic, and Roman—and its evocative landscape, suspended between sea and sky. For the presentation of the Alta Moda collection, a section of the site was enriched with an additional narrative layer that fused past and present. Central to this was the Nora Mirage installation by American artist Phillip K. Smith III: a site-specific work commissioned by the brand, comprising mirrored monoliths that evoke ancient columns while reflecting the sky, sea, and details of the collection, creating an immersive visual experience. The runway, designed to harmonise with the

site’s existing pathways, established a temporary landscape that balanced aesthetic appeal with respect for heritage. The collection itself, featuring predominantly black-and-white garments adorned with jewellery inspired by Sardinia’s refined filigree techniques and traditional decorations, highlighted local craftsmanship, interpreted through the lens of haute couture. At the conclusion of the event, all temporary structures were removed, leaving the artistic installation to “inhabit” the archaeological site throughout the summer season. This addition enhanced the experience of both seasonal tourists and local visitors, without compromising the site’s archaeological integrity.

This initiative not only demonstrated a balance between conservation and scenographic requirements but also underscored how cultural heritage can act as a catalyst for new forms of engagement and interpretation. It generated syncretic imagery capable of conveying complexity and evocation, positioning heritage as a platform for both preservation and innovation. FIGURE 3, FIGURE 4.

**Dolce & Gabbana Alta Moda show - Agrigento 2019.** The 2019 Dolce & Gabbana Alta Moda show, held in the evocative setting of the Valle dei Templi in Agrigento, represents a significant instance of collaboration between heritage management and conservation and the creative fashion industry, aimed at a process of enhancement tied both to the image and the experiential dimension of the location. The collection showcased, distinguished by draping and embroidery inspired by the classical motifs of the temples and Sicilian folk culture, established a visual and symbolic dialogue between contemporary aesthetics and historical memory, celebrating Sicily as a cultural crossroads. The scenography, illuminated to emphasise the monumentality of the temple, and the artistic performances transformed the event into an immersive experience. Sponsored free of charge by the Parco Archeologico della Valle dei Templi due to its cultural and touristic relevance, the event turned the Tempio della Concordia into an unprecedented scenographic space. To respect the sacredness of the site, which is generally inaccessible to the public, an elevated wooden catwalk was designed to enable models to move through the temple and between its columns without disturbing the sacred ground.

The temporary installation, which took a year to design, was supported by 3D surveys using laser scanning technology and protective materials such as non-woven fabric and sandbags to ensure the preservation of the site’s archaeological elements. This setup not only provided an exceptional scenographic context for the presentation of the collection but also allowed public access for the summer to an otherwise restricted part of the site [9].

This intervention, attentive both to aesthetic enhancement and heritage preservation, demonstrates how design and innovation can harmoniously integrate with historical sites, reaffirming the centrality of dialogue between tradition and contemporaneity. FIGURE 5, FIGURE 6.

**Conclusions.** The cases presented in this study highlight the potential of fostering collaboration between the fashion industry and cultural heritage. When implemented thoughtfully, these interactions can lead to innovative experiences that interweave historical narratives with contemporary contexts, material values with intangible ones, and local craftsmanship

with international excellence. In such instances, the initiatives undertaken by fashion brands go beyond offering evocative settings for prestigious collections; they act as processes of cultural restitution and regeneration, promoting local identities and artisanal traditions within a global perspective.

Through ephemeral projects, particularly linked to fashion shows, maisons can directly intervene in spaces often deemed “untouchable,” demonstrating their capacity to harmoniously integrate with the genius loci while respecting the unique historical and cultural features of these places. Temporary installations and displays, often marked by grand scenography, do not merely function as spectacular events but serve as tools to raise public awareness about the value of cultural heritage, while expanding the ways in which such sites are experienced and interpreted. In this sense, fashion emerges as a cultural medium capable of initiating a dialogue that not only enhances heritage but enriches it with new interpretations and meanings [10].

In an era characterised by globalisation and rapid technological transformation, where traditional crafts face the risk of being overshadowed, fashion positions itself as an ally of culture, safeguarding and promoting local authenticity within a framework of international visibility. The initiatives examined reveal how an emphasis on cultural heritage can translate into concrete actions aimed not only at preservation but also at the economic and social revitalisation of the regions involved. Integration with local communities, through collaborations with artisans, artists, and cultural institutions, further strengthens the connection between fashion and sustainability, proposing innovative models of cultural and creative development [11].

Furthermore, it becomes evident that fashion can play a pivotal role in building a shared legacy, one that values cultural heritage not merely as a testimony of the past but as a dynamic resource projected towards the future. Through the interplay of contemporary creativity and historical traditions, maisons enrich their aesthetic language while simultaneously reinforcing collective identity and fostering intercultural dialogue of significant symbolic value. This serves as a powerful catalyst for interconnectedness, leaving a lasting impact on the relationship between aesthetics, culture, and territory.

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#### Figures.

FIGURE 1 – The Courtyard of San Ildefonso College in Mexico City, set for Dior Cruise 2024 show (© José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro / CC BY-SA 4.0).

FIGURE 2 – Interiors of Dakar Justice Palace (built 1958), abandoned until Chanel funded its restoration and used it for the presentation of the Métiers d’Art collection in 2022, and since then used for Dakar Art Biennale (© Jeff Attaway / CC 2.0).

FIGURE 3 – Nora Mirage installation in the archaeological park of Nora during the summer of 2024 (© Diego Burgarella).

FIGURE 4 – Scheme plan of the Dolce & Gabbana Alta Moda 2024 fashion show setup in the Archaeological Park of Nora (© Sara Ghirardini).

FIGURE 5 – Tempio della Concordia in Agrigento Valley of the Temples, as it usually appears to visitors, who cannot enter the sacred space (© Sara Ghirardini).

FIGURE 6 – Scheme plan of Dolce & Gabbana Alta Moda fashion show at Tempio della Concordia. The lighter area indicates the temporary platform that was kept in place for the whole summer, allowing the visit to inner temple parts. (© Sara Ghirardini).



