

FASHION

Istituto Marangoni Taps Katie Grand, Massimo Giorgetti, Paul Andrew as Mentors

● The mentorship program is expected to further enhance the appeal of the school, which registered a 25 percent growth in enrollment for its latest intake.

BY SANDRA SALIBIAN

MILAN – For her second anniversary at the helm of Istituto Marangoni, Stefania Valenti conceded herself a little treat, one she had set her eyes on since she was appointed managing director of the fashion and design school.

Valenti brought on board a range of high-profile mentors at the international campuses, in a move that intends to fulfill one of her main goals: to inject new stimuli in the school and strengthen the synergy and integration between the educational front and the professional world.

British stylist and fashion editor Katie Grand, MSGM's founder and creative director Massimo Giorgetti and designer Paul Andrew are among the new mentors joining Istituto Marangoni starting this month, or in some cases, from the next intake in February.

Grand will be involved in a mentorship program at the school's London campus, where she will host lectures that will also see the involvement of people from her circle of stylists, fashion photographers and publishers. In addition, workshops dedicated to students majoring in fashion, styling and media will be hosted with the goal to select projects that will appear on Grand's *The Perfect Magazine*.

Giorgetti will share his knowledge and experience at Istituto Marangoni's fashion school in Milan, holding masterclasses and workshops for students enrolled in the master courses of men's wear and women's wear fashion design.

Also in Milan, Riccardo Grassi – owner of the showroom that bears his name – will offer guidance to those studying for masters in fashion buying and merchandising, fashion product management, omnichannel and e-commerce.

After his stint at the creative direction of Salvatore Ferragamo, Andrew will return to Florence to oversee the mentorship program at the local Istituto Marangoni fashion and art school. He will host workshops for students enrolled in luxury accessories design and management courses as well as launch a contest in tandem with his namesake brand.

The Florentine campus will also welcome artists Andy Picci and Sarah Coleman, who will be mentors for those enrolled in multimedia arts and fashion design courses, respectively.

Other international names involved in the project include fashion designers Riko Mançhit Au of Ricostru and Dhruv Kapoor, who will lead programs in Shanghai and Mumbai, respectively. While the school is finalizing the name for the mentor in its Paris campus, on the product and interior design front it will rely on key talents in the industry, including Giulio Cappellini, Carlo Colombo, Luca Nichetto, Elena Salmistraro and Indian architect Ashiesh Shah, among others.

The school has a long tradition of collaborating with some of its notable alumni, but Valenti explained that these new mentors were selected after a survey was conducted among students to ask them who they take as reference and consider innovative in their field. Then answers were

cross-checked with the availability of some of the names and the nature of the courses.

"We did a first experiment earlier this year with Gilda Ambrosio," recalled Valenti about the pilot program launched with The Attico's cofounder, who is an Istituto Marangoni alumnus. "Students were excited to have the possibility to work with her throughout the courses and not just for a final project."

The executive underscored the mentorship initiative is in sync with the overall strategy of tweaking the different educational programs according to the specific features of each market.

"We want to be increasingly closer to the professional world of fashion and luxury," said Valenti underscoring that such synergy is a win-win for both parties. "Especially because many things have changed since COVID-19, including the sensibility of consumers and their approach to shopping, I believe our students can also be great contributors to companies, suggesting them new paths," she noted, specifically referencing sustainability to underscore that "new generations have already found some solutions" for the fashion system to move in a greener direction.

"So we are extremely open to this collaborative approach and also this step we have made in involving managers and designers – a strategy we will continue to develop – is moving toward the direction of creating an ecosystem as integrated as possible and with an international mind-set, considering that 85 percent of our students are from abroad," she added.

The bond with the professional world, which is further cemented through scholarships developed in partnership with fashion houses and design companies, is one of the key aspects marking the attractiveness of the school.

To enhance its appeal, over the last 18 months Istituto Marangoni has invested heavily in content and branding strategy, with a significant digital push to its communication. Once again, it relied on a series of alumni to deliver authentic storytelling and engage with the audience with a peer-to-peer approach.

The strategy has proven to be fruitful, since the school registered 25 percent growth in enrollment for the October intake compared to the same period last year. In particular, attendance in the European campuses increased 28 percent.

"This growth exceeded our expectations," said Valenti, specifically highlighting the double-digit increase in the enrollment rate of the Milanese schools, which suffered the most last year. "Behind this result there's a lot of work but also an overall trend of a city and a local fashion system that is recovering and thriving."

As previously reported, while enrollments in London, Florence and Paris were up 8, 9 and 10 percent, respectively, those in the two Milan outposts – dedicated to fashion and design – decreased from 15 percent to 20 percent last year.

The relaunch was boosted by the return of study-abroad experiences, with students hailing from all parts of Europe back at the Italian campuses. In terms of geographies, many arrivals from the U.S. and Latin America were also registered here, while Indian students showed a preference for the London outpost. As for Asian students, Valenti said that they mainly enrolled locally or opted for online classes at the moment.

Istituto Marangoni still offers phygital learning formats, providing online courses in addition to in-person classes. Yet the prospect of returning to an IRL experience



significantly influenced the enrollment rate, according to the executive, as "students are showing a great energy and proactive spirit due to being finally able to take back this aspect of sociability, community and of sharing."

As for the courses, fashion design remains at the core of the school's offer and it's still its main driver. But Valenti noted there's an increasing interest in hybrid educational programs. "There's more and more fluidity between different areas. For instance, in our Florence school courses blurring the lines between creative arts and fashion are giving us great results. The same goes for the design schools and courses combining creative aspects with management ones," she said.

To this end, Istituto Marangoni continues to tweak its assortment of courses, adjusting them to better answer the industry's needs. Digitalization, new communication formats and sustainability got increasing attention in the offer, now informing traditional classes such as fashion styling and visual merchandising. New software and tech tools have also been introduced to update the educational program.

Given the encouraging feedback so far, Valenti expects the next intake in February 2022 to confirm the positive trend and foresees this "to possibly be the best year for Istituto Marangoni ever."

In the fiscal year ended in June 2021, the school generated 78 million euros in revenues. Despite the pandemic and the restrictions, the total population across the nine campuses – Milan, Florence, Paris, London, Mumbai, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Miami – was up 4 percent to 4,177 students compared to the previous year.

"Our goal was to restore our rhythm and these data are reassuring," said Valenti, who is also focused on consolidating the schools' existing presence before thinking about further expansion.

In particular, she's planning future developments through partnerships with local partners in India and China, where the school has just launched a dedicated website in Chinese to better engage with the audience.

Overall, the Istituto Marangoni platform was enhanced and made more interactive, enabling users to take virtual tours of the campuses as well as to apply online. Versions in Arabic and German were added to the existing five languages, since Valenti is betting big on the Middle East as well as on the unexplored potential of North European countries.

To further promote the school, Valenti said she's planning to replicate on a global scale the format of *I'M Firenze Digest*, a digital creative hub and editorial project designed to group different content from the school, such as interviews, news, reviews, articles and multimedia assets.

Founded in 1935, Istituto Marangoni is controlled by Galileo Global Education Italia, the Italian branch of the international private higher education company GGE. Well-known alumni of the school include Franco Moschino, Alessandro Sartori, Domenico Dolce, Paula Cademartori and Andrea Pompilio, among others.

Private schools operating in the fashion, art and design fields under GGE Italia's umbrella include Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti – better known as NABA – and Domus Academy.