

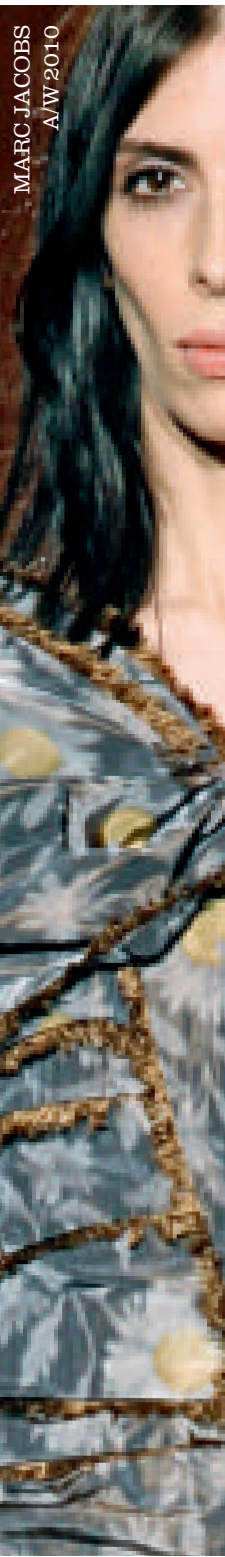


MARK FAST S/S 2010



DOLCE & GABBANA
S/S 2011

CALVIN KLEIN
A/W 2010



MARC JACOBS
A/W 2010



GIVENCHY S/S 2011

IS FASHION RACIST, AGEIST & FATTIST?

It's time to open the debate.
By Caryn Franklin

When I entered the fashion industry in the early 1980s, as fashion editor of *i-D*, things were not the same as they are now. Everyone was gorgeous, colourful and very wrapped-up in being *different*. There was no catwalk imagery to set one standard for beauty – shows were industry events for buyers and press, not web-streamed, celebrity-packed occasions covered in the gossip pages of newspapers – and being ‘on trend’ was not an aspiration; mainstream fashion advice held no sway. Photographs promoted a choice of role models: sun-kissed athletic jocks, angular androgynous types, sultry ebony-skinned divas, as well as club-land personalities. It was a few years before Linda, Naomi, Cindy and friends joined the cast.

No wonder I fell in love with fashion. And since then my job as a fashion commentator has gifted me some amazing experiences. I have met the good, the great and the extremely beautiful, interviewing everyone from Yves Saint Laurent and Giorgio Armani to garment workers in tin huts on the sites of security-patrolled free-trade zones. Creativity is still what fires me up.

These days, however, the question so often asked of myself and my fashion

sisterhood is why there is such a narrow range of women represented in the industry. Where has that glorious diversity gone? After pondering this for many years (and co-founding the All Walks Beyond the Catwalk campaign to promote broader beauty ideals) it's still tough to answer.

I do know that fashion has increased its influence and, as a result, ‘fashionability’ rates high on the scale of things to care about. Modern life is complicated but if the search for identity can be pared down to finding the right jeans/blazer/trench, then life (stylistically speaking, at least) can be made more simple. Happiness, we have come to believe, can be found by looking ‘right’. Though what ‘right’ means these days is depicted in a very limited way.

But change is in the air. When Marc Jacobs's business partner, Robert Duffy, suggested last summer that they might add a line of larger clothes sizes to their repertoire, it gave the seal of approval to a trend that had already been glimpsed a season earlier.

In February 2010, Mark Fast opened his a/w show with a curvy size-14 model. He received an overwhelming response and, in one fell swoop, became synonymous ➤



MAXMARA S/S 2011

LOUIS VUITTON A/W 2010

ELLE*debate*

with female-friendly, progressive fashion. Others could only look on in envy at the column inches devoted to praise for his stance. Ben Berry, a PhD student at Cambridge University who monitors female consumer responses to fashion, is not at all surprised. 'Body diversity works,' he says. 'When women see models of a similar age, size and ethnicity to themselves in fashion advertising, they increase purchases for the brand. Fast became the second best-selling line at Browns Focus after that show.'

The industry followed suit. Even Karl Lagerfeld, who once remarked, 'No one wants to see curvy women on the catwalk', shot burlesque dancer Miss Dirty Martini for *V* magazine and invited 'plus-size' model Crystal Renn to pose for Chanel.

Prada, meanwhile, recruited models with hips and bosoms to showcase waist-cinching dresses and skirts. Beth Ditto, previously the poster girl for UK retailer Evans, walked the runway for Jean Paul Gaultier.

There were veterans, too, as teenagers lost their catwalk monopoly: Elle Macpherson closed the a/w presentation at Louis Vuitton and Francisco Costa employed older models for Calvin Klein. In London, the 71-year-old Veruschka made a splash at Giles's s/s 2011 show. Even Government ministers got in on the act, with Lynne Featherstone, minister for equalities, calling for greater diversity in images of women.

'This season alone, we've seen a huge shift,' says top make-up artist Kay Montano. 'Tom Ford is using women who don't fit the fashion mould. By using Beyoncé and Julianne Moore, as well as Lauren Hutton, Stella Tennant and Daphne Guinness, he can make a vital statement about women's body shapes and maturity, as well as design.'

This isn't a move against young, white women: it's only right that they, together with curvaceous women, racially diverse women and older women with wrinkles, are acknowledged as beautiful and real, worthy of celebration, and – most importantly – that we see them all in high-profile fashion imagery. Although the advancements are small so far, there are many of us who hope this marks the start of something better.

'Wouldn't it be great if young girls had a variety of physical shapes with which to identify?' says Susie Orbach, author and the

force behind the website any-body.org and the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. 'Fashion industries could reformulate their stance, so that they became part of what makes living in our bodies enjoyable.'

When All Walks Beyond the Catwalk was established in May 2009, our aim was to do just that. In acknowledging that designer brands have a powerful currency, and the ability to speak to women and girls about so much more than clothes, our industry could and should choose to take a celebratory stance on a wider range of bodies. Influential designers – from Giles Deacon, Vivienne Westwood, Hussein Chalayan and Antonio Berardi to William Tempest, David Koma and Hannah Marshall – agreed to work with us to clothe a variety of beautiful women for our London Fashion Week campaigns. Our models ranged from 18 to 80 in sizes 8 to 14. Everyone we have ever contacted in the industry has supported the initiative. 'All Walks... is a fantastic project,' says designer Alice Temperley. 'Women come in all shapes and sizes, colours and heights; it's people's uniqueness that makes them beautiful.'

'It's steering the way for diversity and is *exactly* what the industry needs,' says Marshall. 'It challenges the ideals of what beauty is and I'm proud to be a part of it.' Designer Betty Jackson sums it up: 'Hopefully, it will allow people to be confident about their image.'

It may surprise you to see a positive response from insiders. After all, isn't it 'them' who would like 'us' to be thin, white, forever young? But many in the industry welcome a change. The status quo can be as much to do with the demands of a business: it's easier to book models who will fit sample sizes; agencies recruit models for whom there is demand; sample sizes get cut to those shapes. Also, many colleges teach on a size-8 mannequin, so new designers graduate with no understanding of how to design for a range of shapes.

All Walks... co-founder Erin O'Connor says, 'Designers have to be better equipped to make clothes for the multitude of

women's bodies they work with. It's about giving people the opportunity to celebrate the beauty of diversity.' All Walks... is already championing changes at university level. 'It's about educating designers,' says O'Connor. 'This is the breakthrough stage to influence how the next generation of women view themselves through garments.'

But there's something you can do, too. 'It's an insidious judgemental thing that is so entrenched, women don't even realise they are doing it,' says Kay Montano, of the low-level bullying and media assault we are all exposed to and engage in. 'Women putting other women down,' she says.

'Today's commentary on women written by women is cruel at times,' observes Debra Bourne, creative director and another co-founder of All Walks... 'We're so familiar with how a celebrity's appearance is used to dethrone her, we don't bat an eyelid.'

Loving acceptance of the female body is hard to find in the media or even around the dinner table. But maybe, starting now, fashion can be the solution. Judgements

on a woman's appearance won't just disappear – but encouraging retailers, designers and magazines that are bold enough to step away from the cookie-cutter thinking is the first step – and something you can do now. And perhaps you will also join us in acknowledging the contribution you have to

make to this debate – by celebrating your beauty and individuality, whatever your shape, colour or age. ■

Caryn Franklin is a fashion commentator and co-founder of All Walks Beyond the Catwalk. The All Walks... exhibition Snapped is at London's National Portrait Gallery on 11 February. Enq allwalks.org. See page 213 for more details. How do you think ELLE could support the debate and what will you be doing to help? Email elledebate@hjf-uk.com and let us know

the ELLE list

Caryn recommends...

1. any-body.org
2. bodygossip.org
3. *Bodies* by Susie Orbach (Profile Books)
4. *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf (Vintage)