



Portrait by Branislav Jankic

NICOLA FORMICHETTI

ESCAPING THE MEDIA GAZE

It's fashion, and fashion should be fun and positive.

As creative director for Mugler, fashion director for Vogue Hommes Japan and Uniqlo, and the man responsible for the eternally unique styling of Lady Gaga, Nicola Formichetti has found himself looked upon as one of the fashion world's key players. 125 spoke to him to find out how he's coping...

'I wanna escape. I wanna escape from journalists, that's what I wanna do.' Nicola Formichetti has been at the top of his game for some time now, but it would appear that his rise to the upper echelons of fashion – due in no small part to his role as chief stylist for one Lady Gaga – has seen scrutiny of what he says and does increase considerably. 'It's such a kind of weird and exciting time in my life at the moment, but there are certain things I love and certain things I hate. It's crazy. I don't wanna bitch; I try to be really nice to everyone and I try to be cool and always friendly, but people always take things out of context and write whatever they want.'

Only a short while into our conversation, it's not difficult to accept that Formichetti's disarmingly open demeanour and playful sense of humour, coupled with a seemingly sincere disbelief at the attention he's been receiving of late, may have resulted in some of his comments being taken – as he claims – out of context. 'I say things as a joke, then people write it up and pretend I've said it seriously, so I'm going to be really, really careful with you,' he warns, semi-seriously. His caution is understandable though. 'I was shocked; I was reading all of these things on blogs saying I hate fat people and I hate old people. First of all, who cares what I think? Obviously people care because of what I'm doing now, and that's already weird because I'm thinking "Why would people care what I think?" but obviously they do. It just seems like really low, cheap journalism, you

know? It makes me feel like I can't be honest and make jokes. People can say anything and turn anything around, and there's only so much you can do about it. All my friends are like "That means people listen to what you think" and I'm like "OK, that's cool, because then I can use that in a much more positive way".'

Growing up, when he had no reason at all to worry about journalists and their occasionally underhand tactics, it was a feeling of being different that Formichetti was looking to escape from. 'I was back and forth between Rome and Tokyo; they were both my hometowns. I was a really closed, lonely child; I remember just being in my room fantasising about stuff. When I was in Japan I looked more Italian, and when I was in Italy I looked more Japanese; I wasn't ever like the other kids, so I was always trying to blend in. I was such a horrible kid, telling my parents to stop talking Japanese when we were in Italy and to stop talking Italian to me in Japan. My dad was a pilot, so we also lived in Thailand, Hawaii, Guam, always constantly travelling, and I had to adapt to wherever I went and create my own escapism. I always had my Japanese comics and computer games and dolls, those sorts of things around me, and I would create my own world wherever I was.'

Formichetti's first real chance of escape came in his late teens when he travelled to London to study architecture. At least, that's what he told his parents. 'I had to come to London. I was living in Rome, going to high school, and my parents let me come to London to study architecture. I didn't go to school, obviously, I just went partying for three years. That's where I met all my friends, through clubbing.' It was around this time that Formichetti found his way into the world of fashion, working as a sales





assistant in clothing stores, something which he strongly recommends to anyone looking to take a similar career path to his own. 'You get to meet people – so many different people come in – and you get to work with clothes, do some styling for window displays, merchandising. It's a great way of starting in the business; I didn't even know what I wanted to do at that time.'

It was from these relatively humble beginnings that Formichetti came to meet some particularly influential people, including Katy England, fashion editor for Dazed & Confused. Impressed with his style, the magazine gave Formichetti his own monthly column. "They said "We like the way you look, you seem cool", and that's how it started. They gave me the best advice ever, which I still believe in. They said "Believe in yourself, don't listen to anyone else, just do what feels good for you". It was never "Don't do this and don't do that", so I had no fear. I didn't really know anything about fashion so I just did whatever I thought was cool at that time. I was really lucky. It was hard, because everything I was doing was for the first time, so there were mistakes. Then though it was just like "Oh, fuck it, let's just move on"."

This idea of trusting his instinct and doing what he believes in is one that has stood Formichetti in good stead, and one that he still sees as vital to true creativity. 'Instinct is so important. People ask you things like "What is going to be the colour next year?" but it's impossible to know – it could be red, it could be yellow, it could be anything. There might be a trend of yellow, but that's not 100%, so instinct is the only way. That I don't think you can learn – you either have it or you don't. Also, when you rely on instinct you have less fear because you're not thinking with your brain, you're thinking with your gut feeling. That's always the one that works. I never analyse anything, or I try not to; I try to be as free as possible when I create. For me, it's about pure joy and collaboration with friends; I've always tried not to think too hard. It's fashion, and fashion should be fun and positive.'

Something else Formichetti sees as important is the idea that fashion should be made accessible to all, not just the chosen few. 'I've always said that I'm not an elitist and I don't think too much about it when I create; it's very spontaneous. I want that to show in my work, and I'm still trying to make it perfect. I love being able to show that to the world and not just to a hundred people. Even for the Mugler show, I knew how I could make it look elitist, very severe, minimal styling, girls with no soul and very studied looks, blah blah blah, but I'm not really interested in that. For me, it's more about the whole experience and having fun. I did the same for Gaga; we love fashion so much that we wanna have fun, and we want to kill it at the same time, to destroy it and create it again, always on the edge, pushing more and more to make it better and better.'

It is this shared love of fashion and the desire to 'destroy it and create it again' that has seen a strong collaborative bond develop between Formichetti and Lady Gaga. Having first encountered each other during a photo shoot for V Magazine, the two have since been creatively inseparable, with Formichetti styling Gaga for numerous public appearances and photo shoots, as well as several of her best known music videos including the hugely successful video for Bad Romance, which received the much-coveted Video of the Year award at last year's MTV Video Music Awards. Formichetti describes their relationship as a partnership, a way of working he seems to revel in. "There are no roles. Yes, I'm her fashion director and she's a singer, and there's hair and makeup and so on, but when we come up with stuff we do it together. That's the beauty of collaboration. I don't come up with everything, which would make me the consummate elitist, and I'm not protective of my ideas, like "I came up with this so no-one else must be credited". That is why I started my blogs and my Tumblr and Twitter, so I could credit all of the designers who are involved in everything I do. For me, it's always about giving back the process to the world. It feels good to do that. When creative people come together, that's when it becomes even more creative and free; that's when the magic happens.' As part of this inclusivity,





Formichetti also prides himself on giving opportunities to young unknowns looking to make a name for themselves. 'All the projects that I do, I always try to work with younger people - on music videos with Gaga, on all of my editorials - because that really helps them and pushes them into the limelight. After that, it's up to them.'

The latest chapter in Formichetti's illustrious career began in September last year when he was confirmed as the new creative director for Parisian fashion house Thierry Mugler (renamed as simply Mugler by Formichetti), a fashion house he was already passionate about. Whilst he sees taking on the role as a natural progression from what he had done previously, he is conscious of the expectation and responsibility that comes with it. 'It's not that different from what I've been doing, because I've always worked with designers, with design houses, worked on collections, but this is more about me being put in the spotlight. Before, I would be hiding behind people, even though I was involved in all of these things, but this time I couldn't. I had to step out and be more in charge, and that's the one big difference from what I've done before. Also, Mugler has always been one of my favourite brands of all time - for me, Thierry was always a legend.' This high regard for Mugler made the prospect of taking charge of the fashion house all the more daunting, and his first reaction was to decline the opportunity. 'It was really scary. I said "No way am I going to make it better than what he's done; I'd just ruin the image". I spoke to my friends though and they told me to not worry about what other people think, to just do my own thing, and if it works it works, and if it doesn't then move on. So I made my decision and I haven't looked back.' With his first season in charge having proved extremely successful, Formichetti clearly has high hopes for Mugler. 'We have so many ideas for next season; it's going to be great. I love it. I'm really excited to be working with all those people in Paris, which has become like my second home now; there's a perfume range as well, and I really want to make it into a global brand.'

As if his schedule wasn't already full enough, Formichetti also has plans to launch his own line, something he is working on at the moment. 'It'll be completely different, something that's more about me, more street. I'm a bit of a schizo; for me, Mugler is the ultimate high fashion fantasy, but I also need to do something that's more streetwear, so that's what I'm working on. I'm planning to launch that next year. I'm going to start having little previews in my pop-up store in New York during fashion week, just little things to see people's reactions, then it will launch properly next year. I don't know how I'm going to find the time though.'

So, having set out with the intention of being careful during our interview, does Formichetti have any parting words for any journalists out there? 'Fuck them!' he snaps, joking. 'No, they're just doing their job, and I wasn't doing mine properly. I should just be a bit more careful; I should be an adult now. I want people around the world to know what I'm doing, and with Twitter and Tumblr I get to really talk to and exchange ideas with my fans, and it's not always positive what they say. Sometimes if I do something rubbish, they'll be like "That was shit!", but it's like friends telling you it was shit. In the Internet world though, it's a free for all, quite harsh. I know you shouldn't take every comment personally, but sometimes it's like "Wow, is that what people think of me?". Every time that happens though, I just try to escape into myself because that seems to be the thing that I do.'

And how does a permanently busy, highly sought after figure such as Formichetti go about escaping the harsher aspects of life as one of fashion's leading lights? 'I started meditation several years ago, and it really helps me relax; I really come up with great stuff after meditation. At first, I couldn't do it for a long time; I couldn't even sit still for a minute. But then I started to do five minutes, then ten minutes, and now I can do half an hour, forty five minutes. I try to do it every morning, and for me that's the best escape. It helps when you're going crazy.'

Philip Goodfellow



"ART IS MY WHOLE LIFE. THE MONSTERS ARE MY MEDICINE. THEY HEAL ME, PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY. EVERY NIGHT AT THE SHOW."
—LADY GAGA

