How Gianfranco Ferré turned a classic garment into a masterpiece of artistry, style, simplicity and design

Pick up any how-to guide to fashion or peruse any top ten list in issues of Vogue, and one garment will always make an appearance in the annals of good style: the white shirt. From clean, structured lines to softer, relaxed styles, the white shirt is the hallmark of timelessness, a canvas upon which every woman can build her own unique style. >>
Libellula shirt, F/W 1995, prêt à porter, look 53. silk organza, stretch tulle. Photo by Luca Stoppini.
"In the lexicon of contemporary elegance, I like to think that the white shirt is a universal term that each woman may ‘pronounce’ as she prefers..."

– Gianfranco Ferré

Few designers have understood and explored this simple but sophisticated garment like Italian master designer Gianfranco Ferré. Initially trained as an architect, Ferré’s work is rooted in his philosophy of providing his clients with functional, classic, yet powerful clothing constructed from high quality materials. One of the most celebrated designers of Italian fashion, Ferré’s innovative and insightful interpretations of this classic garment have had a profound influence on international fashion for decades.

His approach to this deceptively simple, basic garment comes to life in the upcoming fashion exhibition The White Shirt According to Me. Gianfranco Ferré. The first fashion design exhibition hosted in the Museum’s Steel Gallery in more than three years, White Shirt is an innovative, dramatic installation that includes drawings, sketches, photographs and video along with more than 30 examples of the designer’s virtuoso interpretations of this classic design. >>
“Ferré was an artist who thought intently about form, craftsmanship and the creative process,” says Dennita Sewell, curator of fashion design, who will organize the Phoenix premiere of *White Shirt*. “This is not someone who didn’t have another idea, but someone who took a single idea—the white shirt—and thought deeply about it, deconstructing, perfecting each element, until he had crafted a garment of the highest quality and design.” His career was diverse, and illustrates his intrinsic desire to investigate and understand every element of dressing, from his time spent in haute couture as the head designer at Christian Dior to his work with ready-to-wear fashions, including establishing his own line of jeans.

In an era of disposable fashions where quality clothes are often passed over for cheaper, up-to-the-minute trends, Ferré’s work offers a new perspective on how we dress, something Sewell hopes each visitor, including the city’s growing fashion design community of students and practitioners, will be inspired by: “Ferré’s artistry and design shows us that fashion doesn’t have to be transient. It teaches us to value things that are timeless, high quality and well-conceived.”

*The White Shirt According to Me: Gianfranco Ferré* was designed, produced and curated by the Gianfranco Ferré Foundation in Milan and the Prato Textile Museum Foundation. Its Phoenix premiere is made possible by the generous support of APS and Arizona Costume Institute. ::

*The White Shirt According to Me: Gianfranco Ferré*
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