Emanuele Coccia is an Italian philosopher and part of Azzedine Alaïa’s inner circle of intellectuals, artists, thinkers, and doers. For Vogue Arabia, Coccia interviews the inimitable Carla Sozzani: former fashion editor, fashion photography collector, and global tastemaker (in the most authentic sense). Sozzani’s fashion photography collection includes works by the likes of photographers Sarah Moon, Paolo Roversi, Helmut Newton, Irving Penn, Cecil Beaton, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, and Bruce Weber, among many others. 213 photographs by 75...
many others. 213 photographs by 75 photographers from Carla Sozzani’s personal collection go on display today, at the Galerie Azzedine Alaïa in Paris.

“Like everything else, fashion has a history. Some survive in that history; others vanish from it. Carla will survive.” (Azzedine Alaïa, *Between Art & Fashion, Photographs From the Collection of Carla Sozzani*)
Carla Sozzani is a cultural protagonist of the XX century. Since 1968, she has forged shapes and language, and has never ceased to revolutionize fashion and culture. At the head of *Elle* Italia in 1987 (its founding editor), Sozzani directed three legendary issues that changed forever—not just the visual and graphic language of fashion journalism (fashion critic Cathy Horyn defined it as, “An aesthetic break in magazine publishing that was as rare in its beauty and influence.”)—but the way that fashion was communicated. For the first time, a magazine was not a simple catalogue where clothes were slotted, rather, it became a window for contemplation of the artistic and cultural world in its largest sense; a visual atlas of beauty where things could bear witness. Fashion, ceased to be purely an affair of clothing, and became an essence unto itself, one that concerns and connects with each object we use.

In 1991, Sozzani founded 10 Corso Como, the world’s first concept store
Como, the world’s first concept store that brought together a gallery, restaurant, boutique, library, and a hotel within a unique space that erased the frontiers between museum and boutique; life and art; and culture and commerce. Via her choices, tastes, and ideas, Sozzani created the foundations for the visual and cultural language of our time. This exhibition of her collection of photographs at the Galerie Azzedine Alaïa invites us to revisit her history and aesthetic.
One of the most beautiful things about this exhibition is that it considers everything that you have done with photography.

We all have a passion—you write—and I communicate with images. Photographs are the only rapid way to communicate something. I started in ‘68—over 40 years of fashion—I was so fortunate because photography has always accompanied me, and in various ways. For me, fashion photography is a passionate affair.

That said, you didn’t start collecting until much later in your career.

No, I never thought that I would start a collection. In the ‘70s, I started to acquire images, and over the years that number of images grew. Later, when I was at Vogue [Sozzani produced all of Vogue Italia’s special issues], I worked with Bruce Weber, Herb Ritts, William Wegman, Sarah...
Herb Ritts, William Wegman, Sarah Moon, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Paolo Roversi, and through the fashion avenue, we covered many topics: fine jewelry, children, bridal, fashion. It was such an interesting experience. I quickly learned that fashion, design, art, cinema—everything—was all linked and this was what excited me.

Paula Gellibrand, Marquise de Casa Maury, 1928. Photo by Cecil Beaton. © The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby’s

With Elle Italia, you revolutionized
With Elle Italia, you revolutionized the way of editing and presenting fashion. You gave birth to the vanguard that we see today.

It was no longer enough to just see a piece of clothing in a magazine—everything is connected—and if you like something, it snowballs. Also, there was a gap to do something that—as information—was useful but was also beautiful.

I got to do what I liked. Later, I opened a small editing house, and then a gallery; in reality, my world revolved around photographs.

You had the desire to create a new culture of communication—a universal one—through images.

To me, it was a logical evolution. And, I always worked with a lot of enthusiasm. When you love something so much, there’s no limit and you’re never closed.
From an image, you explored an entire culture.

It’s wonderful to be able to use an image to transmit something. But after I opened 10 Corso Como, I didn’t want to go back to the world of publishing—even though they offered—that chapter was closed for me. I took all my experience from all those years, from everything that I liked, and I took it from the pages of a magazine and made it live.
At that time, there was no Internet, there were no blogs, Google—even the use of computers was limited. Today’s way of communicating didn’t exist. The store [10 Corso Como] became a destination, a place to meet. We held exhibitions and everyone came: parents, kids, lovers, old people, young people—everyone.

10 Corso Como revolutionized fashion and culture. You invented the concept store, which didn’t exist at the time. It’s a strange and incredibly modernist fusion of life, culture, images, commerce, and a place where nothing can be separated from anything, and one that everyone connects with. You established a global taste, which then expanded to Seoul, Shanghai, Beijing, and soon New York. Of course, the model was then copied across the world.

Inspired, inspired (smiling).

You nurtured the liberty of others, of other cultures, and even if you
have a very specific taste, it is probably one that is also connected with Italy.

It is. I was immersed in a beautiful culture and I grew to understand its beauty. Certainly, I have a desire to share that.

Your aesthetic is very strong, very clear, and it creates a foundation for...
clear, and it creates a foundation for speaking about fashion and culture. Curiously, black and white is very dominant in your collection.

Traditionally, photography was in black and white. I also think that due to my classical Italian cultural education, to me, color belongs to the art world. Nothing can compete with the light and color of a Caravaggio painting. Photography has its own language and it is one that was born in black and white, and it expresses itself better in black and white.

Taking a closer look at today’s photography culture, if you were to begin your career again, would photography still interest you the way it first did in ‘68?

I like looking at an image that makes me think of another image. Today, moving images are the future, and I think that other people are fascinated by video, too. Today, I would start with video, it is another visual language, and I’ve also seen that it is
one that *Vogue* Arabia explores.

“Between Art & Fashion, Photographs From the Collection of Carla Sozzani” at the Galerie Azzedine Alaïa, Paris, until February 26th.

Avril for Alaïa, 2006. Sarah Moon © Sarah Moon

by EMANUELE COCCIA

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