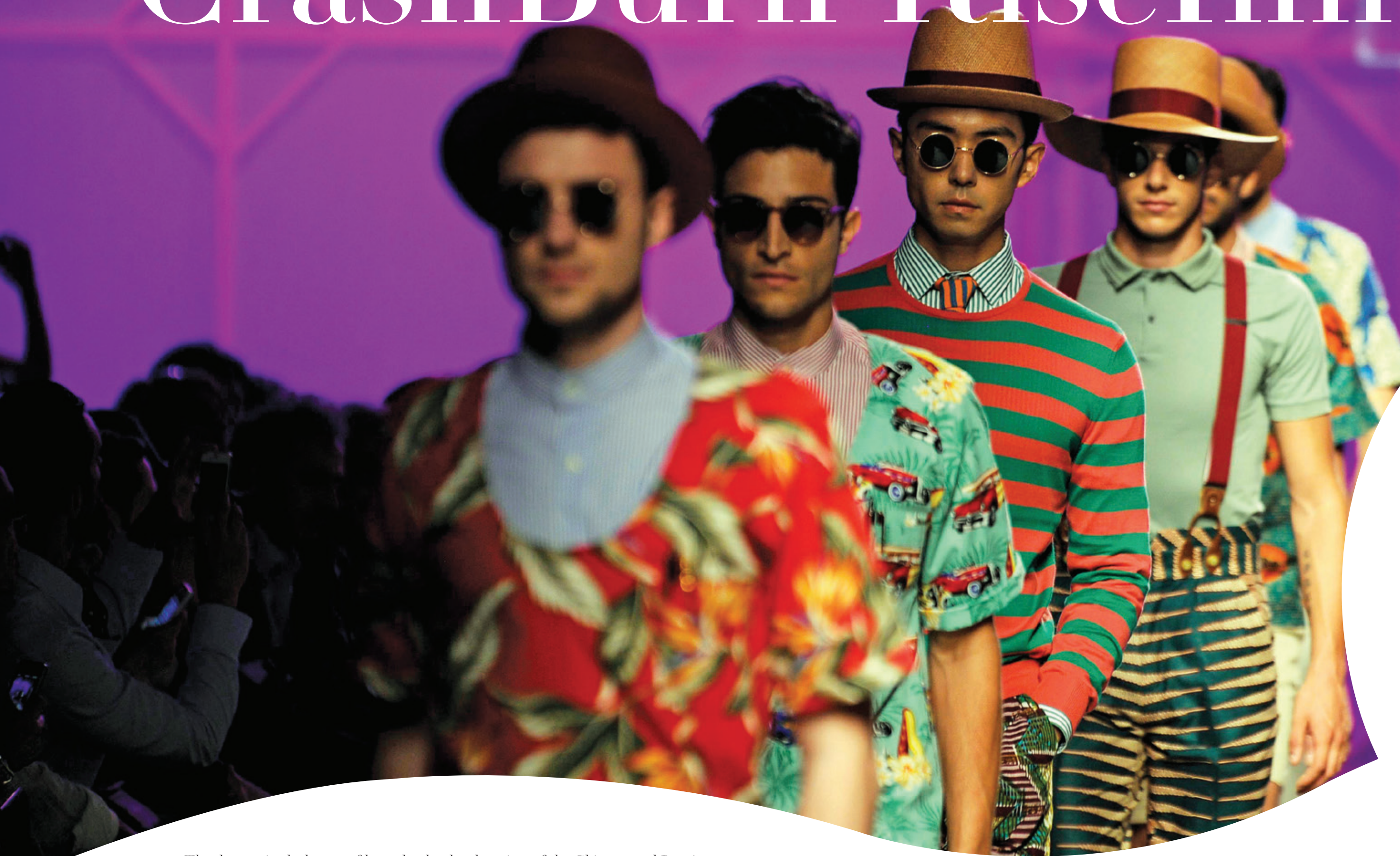


Crash Burn Rise Innovate



*The dramatic shake-up of brands, the deceleration of the Chinese and Russian fashion market (with the latter's Fashion Council being forced to cancel its 'guest nation' project at Pitti Uomo this January) and crash and burn among designers and brands in 2014 (leading well into 2015) was largely unprecedented, but it's what defined the year for the global fashion industry; recaps **NEHA GANERIWAL***

“Our whole fashion industry is at a point of radical change,” says Karl-Heinz Müller, managing director of the trade fair Bread & Butter in his letter informing exhibitors that he was forced to cancel the January edition as they had “not been able to gather the number of exhibitors necessary to realise a significant event.” Radical or not, the dramatic shake-up of brands, the deceleration of the Chinese and Russian fashion market (with the latter's Fashion Council being forced to cancel its 'guest nation' project at Pitti Uomo this January, in wake of the country's economic crisis) and crash and burn among designers and brands in 2014 (leading well into 2015) was largely unprecedented, but it's what defined the year for the global fashion industry.

Our insatiable appetite for newness was partly to blame, as was the growing popularity of online retail that whipped up the need for speed. As Nicolas Ghesquière replaced Marc Jacobs after almost 17 years at the helm of Louis Vuitton and Gucci announced their plan to replace their creative director of over 12 years -- Frida Giannini -- what became evident more than ever before was the supreme institutionalisation of the fashion system wherein design individuals are hired to merely turn the boat in a different direction instead of expecting to rock it or steer it permanently. There was no evident desire on the part of brands to display any pulsating sense of change in their ideologies and yet continue to retain 'desire,' and that was a sentiment well reflected in the textiles and apparel trends through the year.



Perhaps now one can understand better why there was emphasis on comfortable, practical dressing within brands across pin-codes throughout 2014. Womenswear revolved seamlessly around finding an elegant, feminine yet practical and masterly tailored wardrobe for the working woman, with flat shoes (sandals or even sneakers) making a boardroom entry, while menswear got tougher (or more 'male' if you please), discarding the mushy metrosexuality and sharpening it with a strut of masculinity and bold swagger. Lilac pullovers and salmon pink shirts made way for sporty, square sweaters and slim tailoring, all the while retaining the fun element with artsy drawings and covetable sneakers.

Textiles continued to transform with their love of history and consistent desire to be unique. Driven by an unfailing interest in art, culture and heritage, and combining that with the fun factor of technology, the brands took to the challenge of the loom and delivered promising results.

Here's a look at the moods that dominated the past year:

Colour

Pushing the 2013 favourite emerald green to the periphery, a zippy and energised radiant orchid (Pantone 18-3224) was the colour of the year 2014. "An enchanting harmony of fuchsia, purple and pink undertones, Radiant Orchid inspires confidence and emanates great joy, love and health," explained Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute. A cross between violet and cyclamen, it was used as the primary colour or complemented/contrasted with various shades from the lilac-to-purple palette across global runways and high street fashion. Violet Tulip (Pantone 16-3823) and Hemlock (Patone 15-6114) were among the favourite pastels for international designers and brands, with variations used by the high street labels closer home.





The so-called Turkish red, a particularly vibrant tone of red sourced from madder roots, and one of the most researched colours in the history of textile, remained popular, especially in head-to-toe looks as seen at Dolce and Gabbana and Prada, quickly aped by Zara and H&M. First developed in India and later expanded till Greece and Turkey, its bright tones have intrigued different cultures, becoming one of the first examples of globalization and it remained predominant in collections last year with orange variations Cayenne (Pantone 18-1651) and Celosia Orange (Pantone 17-1360) emerging to be equally popular, making their way to the season's It bags, clothes, shoes and range of cosmetics.

Blue continued to be the new black through the year, with dazzling blue (Pantone 18-3949) and placid blue (Pantone 15-3920) emerging as the preferred shades together with other cobalt, sky blue, turquoise and indigo versions.

White was popular too, but last year white-on-white was layered with a design palette of painted brick, wood, and patterns, making it richer with a sense of history and place.

Pastels were the major story throughout 2014, in keeping with the 'art' influence that ran as an undercurrent through the fashion year. Usually popular in the spring-summer collections, last year they pushed aside the digital and synthetic-pigment textile dyes that produced strong, harsh colours and remained just as prominent through fall/winter.

Looking back at the end of the year, though, it became clear that it wasn't as much about one particular colour as it was about wearing one particular colour — from head-to-toe. Monochrome was a minimalist look that was prominent, whether done in a bold bright or a soothing neutral.



The eccentric historian

This extremely decorative 'folkloric mix' trend featured strong design mixed with history and culture to create a new look that was instantly recognisable and yet a little edgy, making it relevant to contemporary fashion. Involving Rococo styles, baroque imagery, unfinished work and sketching, decorative work and Victoriana influences, the trend made the unusual desirable with a very hands on approach to design. In other words, it's a trend that brought *Game of Thrones* aesthetic to high street.

There were several collections that drew richly on fantasy, folk and fairy tale. Dolce & Gabbana took a walk in the forest with a collection that blended historical influences with folk and fantasy, with Little Red Riding Hood, Joan of Arc and Maid Marian as reference points. Meanwhile, at McQueen, their dramatic collection seemed to be heavily influenced by the chilly bits in *Game of Thrones*. Embroidery was a huge part of this look.



A blend of cultures was evident through heavy jacquards, flocking, tassels, old crockery and tapestries in a riot of patchwork, haberdashery, embroidery and crochet, thereby assembling flamboyant concepts with daring eclecticism as the fashion world went rug-crazy. With Burberry making a strong pitch for craft with their carpet bags, woven Oriental rugs soon became the buzzword and Valentino, Paul Smith and Topshop further promoted them in a manner they haven't been used in since the hippie years.

Never one to completely disappear on the fall runways, velvet, in solid hues and at Elie Saab, in ombre - was seen in ankle-skimming dresses and coats at Tom Ford and Sportmax among other brands, while leather officially gained a place as an everyday wardrobe essential with pieces that weren't necessarily overtly sexy or tough (baggy shorts and shapeless dresses). These millennial silhouettes were colourful and complex compositions that ignited the kind of dynamism that could establish our contemporary folklore. With details like heavy fringing, a twist on familiar classic, graphic renewal of tapestries and lace, a contrasting mix of fabrics, fusing vintage and new, crochet pieces and old paintings, handwoven structures interpreting exotic foliage and animals, the textile and apparels from this trend reflected today's multi-faceted culture.

The colour palette attached with this kooky style was made up of sumptuous hues of yellow, gold and a cool palette of evening sand and sprout green, soft rippling metallics, legion blue and tango red.



The geologist

At a time when the world of fashion is oriented towards chasing the trendy and temporary, losing touch with nature, this trend decided to take a pause, leave the busy urban artist to wander in the Italian countryside, and dedicate time and space to observing the flow of the natural cycle, and the basic ways in which people use the materials they find in the environment. As crop shortages and natural disasters continue to dominate the news, a new appreciation of natural resources influenced design. A pious approach to nature this trend was about keeping things simple, functional and sustainable and creating stunning patterns and irregular textures. It was about making the very most of what our earth and nature has to offer and interpreting this into textiles to create a range of surreal and innovative fabrics.

With a mysterious colour palette including wood tones, greys, neutrals and sparks of purple, turquoise and potent purple, animals and birds of all kinds were rendered, embroidered, printed, and collaged onto every type of garments including outerwear. Even the usually restraint Hermès embroidered a spider onto a cashmere sweater.

Fabrics and textures were of supreme importance, with rock textures, formations and natural forms of pattern very evident throughout the range of fabrics in this collection. Textures taken from nature expressed a raw style and gems, metallics and crystal patterns adding a sense of beauty by appreciating the precious imperfections of geological textures, and the science of natural. Other elements included furs with the hugely popular eye-catching Astrakhan fur in neutral colours and the chic shearling which was Winter '14s most

used fabric and animal prints, especially the flirty feline leopard print that appeared at Céline as a sumptuous coat, a cute dress at Chloé, a rockier version at Saint Laurent and Givenchy. The trend aimed to create an intentional blurring between the natural and the artificial and to uproot the dichotomies of man-made/natural, art/fashion, particular/universal.

Over the year, many developments in the field of textiles tried to capture this trend. Studio Ilana Efrati for example, tried to track down the most primordial processes of nature: the cycle of seasons, germination and decay, light and shade. The fabrics try to 'freeze' a moment in the garden's seasonal cycle. Silk, linen, wool and cotton cloths were handprinted with plants, flowers, leaves and



take environmental and ethical problems seriously, with major luxury conglomerates and mass retailers alike taking significant steps. Kering the conglomerate that owns Gucci, Saint Laurent, Balenciaga and Stella McCartney created a 'Smart Assessment of Materials' tool to evaluate the environmental performance of its plastics; rolled out its 'Smart Supplier Programme' to reduce emissions, water consumption and waste from suppliers and implemented the Natural Resources Defense Council's 'Clean by Design' programme for textile mills. Positive steps were also taken by high street behemoth H&M, even though the company's fast-fashion business model is fundamentally unsustainable. They pledged to use only sustainable cotton by 2020, reduce its operations' total greenhouse gas emissions by 2015, and improve pay structures for fair living wages in its key suppliers by 2018. Other significant victories in 2014 came as key companies took steps to improve the ethics of their supply chains, where working conditions remain the biggest stain on the industry's global garment.

buds, all found in the vegetable garden's immediate environment, making them a unique and unrepeatable aesthetic memory of a moment in the infinite natural cycle of seasonal change. Efrati, who for many years perfected the functional and aesthetic harmony of fabric and cut in fashion design, turned with these textiles to artistic practice. In a rough and intuitive manner she observed and narrated the beauty hidden in the process of creation, growth, decay and disappearance of raw materials in nature.

It was also a year when the global fashion industry finally began to



The romantic artist

A romantic vision of nature and flowers in an English country garden symbolised this artsy trend. While floral prints are nothing new, they were mostly highlighted in spring/summer collections, but such was their popularity in 2014 that they were scattered through fall/winter collections too. The little bunches of lily-of-the-valley on each seat at the *Dior Homme* show confirmed the mood, as did the whimsical flowers traced as flat patterns on regular clothes, a big flower on the front of jackets, or a sparkly flower pin at the pocket replacing the traditional handkerchief, not to mention in every separate of womenswear. These out-of-season blooms, more often than not, came in pretty pastels. The sugary pastels are typically associated with spring collections, but like florals, they gained traction from the fall/winter shows.

It was different from previous seasons, however. While pastels like powder pink, pale blue and boudoir shades are traditionally associated with the fluttery chiffon or slithering silks and satins of evening clothes, last year the designers stirred sport into the pastels. At Miu Miu pastels were used for tailored coats, Burberry's slimline outfits in baby blue or coral lace, an ice blue suit and pink sportswear from Alexander Wang for Balenciaga and Lacoste's coral coat and minidress. There was definitely a swinging Twiggy-ish '60s vibe through the year that extended beyond the Milanese brands, thanks to these revived silhouettes of the shift dress, the mock turtleneck, and boxier, androgynous cuts.



The collections were at times reminiscent of an artist's palette with prints, outline, sketches and brush strokes aplenty. Designers pursued the world of fine art, none more emphatically than Christopher Bailey at Burberry, where every item was in some way handpainted, from the shawls to shaved coats and the slithering slightly 1970s dresses. Lanvin, in their Menswear Autumn '14 collection displayed intriguing outlines of heads, roughly drawn as if by hand, on tops and shirts.

Other categories within this trend included lace and sheer fabrics, floaty, light, sheer inserts, skirts and sleeve. It added a dose of sex appeal to an otherwise demure look or simply lent some lightness to the overall feel. Ruffles became more than just girly accents. Ruffled hemlines, necklines, and in some cases, full-bodied ruffles took focus as a new way to add texture and volume. In keeping with the ladylike and romantic look, voluminous, full skirts were a big trend. The silhouette feels innately formal but is simple to style down. The midi can be a challenging length for your average woman, but that didn't stop designers last year. Max Mara, for example, showed the full length, and only that length. Many of the midi skirts were sheer, often paired with either big sweaters or snug belted jackets at Donna Karan and Fendi.



The innovator

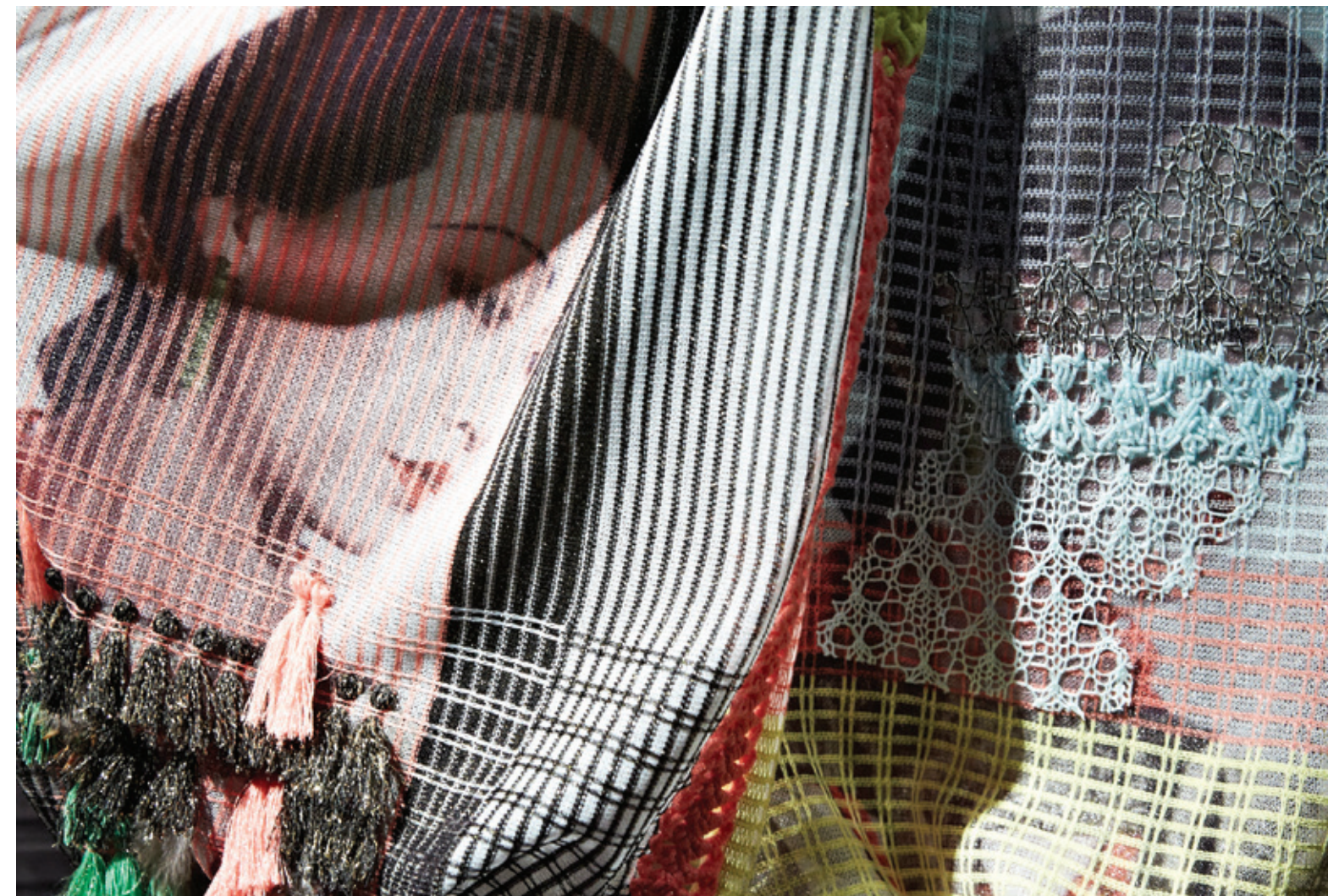
Accepting the modifications brought about by globalisation and moving forward with it to improve and create unique and exciting new fashion, was what this trend was all about. 'An intelligent free thinker, experimenting and researching solutions to make life fulfilling, fun and exciting. Fond of concepts in which function meets fun, wellness and entertainment. Eager to leave a personal trace on designs,' is how an international fashion critic depicted the trend. Ignoring the negative challenges of the economy on one hand and bringing out the positives in textile and fashion design, this trend brought a breath of fresh air to the collections in 2014.

Be it neon winks playing peek-a-boo through black, white, grey and other neutrals through collections, thereby lifting their otherwise low-key looks with bold slashes (or vividly coloured sneakers in case of menswear), or the predominance of techno fabrics throughout the year with shiny metallics becoming increasingly difficult to discern, textiles and designs were treated with attention and meaningful innovation.

Even the usually conservative players like Hermès opted for techno fabrics, used subtly in quilted jackets with technical weaves, extending their range of "hydro-rubberised" lambskin, technical cashmere broadcloth and a long list of tech materials from gabardine to cotton – with a noticeable change in fabric performance, but not necessarily in its appearance.

Similarly at Berluti menswear, the collection was functional and textural, meaning that while coats might have been classic in cut, they were hyper-modern in materials. The result was both ergonomic — clothes thought out with care and intelligence — and poetic.

Silhouettes in this trend were the opposite of body-con, formfitting trousers and shorts, with the slouchy silhouette being relaxed and, most importantly, comfortable looking. The pajama-like pant was omnipresent and knee-length shorts with a built-in casual vibe were spotted frequently. Athletic influences manifested in hooded pullovers, zippers, mesh, ponchos, and shorts reminiscent of one's days in phys ed. That being said, brands crafted sportier wear with a modern eye and sometimes a sexier feel. The result was a sporty look that wasn't made for playing sports at all.



Innovation

With innovation as the undercurrent of this trend, the year saw multiple ground-breaking innovations in textiles, none more noteworthy than Anke Domaske — a German born, biochemist and fashion designer — the inventor of an award-winning new textile made entirely from milk, which was recognised in Germany as a new, sustainable fibre that could revolutionise the clothing industry. Called "Qmilch," it drapes and folds like silk, but can be washed and dried like cotton. The fabric is also eco-friendly and a wonderful solution for people with skin allergies. After two years of trial and error in a research lab, Domaske and her team of six finally created a process of reducing milk to a protein powder that is then boiled and pressed into strands that can be woven into a fabric. The strands can further be spun rougher for a heavier texture, or shiny smooth, to create a soft jersey feel. It is, undoubtedly, an innovation we're likely to see more of in the coming years.

These are examples that the textile and fashion industry's vehement proclamation of practicality resounded over all else in 2014. Not just trendy practicality; but practicality unburdened from whimsicality, narrow mindedness and shallow aesthetic constraints. Innate passion for the modern was adhered to without straying from the classic path, which is why for the first time in a while, extremes, far from opposing one another, attracted each other. Yesterday's paradoxes were reconciled with fantasy and fused in symbiosis with optimism, knowledge and respect, no longer making it a question of mindless hybridisation or collision, but fusion for a consumer requesting harmony in his aesthetics. Here's hoping that this bridge of optimism, aided by the industry's indisputable creativity is strong enough to survive the onslaught of the shaky economy. ■