

China to make couture catwalk bow

China, already a formidable powerhouse in ready-to-wear fashion, has broken into the elite circle of French haute couture, with the first Chinese designer due to unveil her collection for next autumn-winter in the shows which took to the catwalks on Monday, 30 June 2008.

Ma Ke already caused a sensation in February last year with her debut during the Paris ready-to-wear season.

More performance art than fashion show, her models appeared on the runway with their clothes and skin caked in mud like warriors from the terracotta army of Emperor Qin Shi Huang.

Buoyed by the success of her "Exception" label, which is sold in around 50 boutiques across China, she has launched her couture line "Wuyong" (which means "useless" in Chinese.)

Her invitation to show on the sidelines of the collections presented by the grand couture houses is a first for China, which has already been present in ready-to-wear in Paris since 2006.

The Chinese designer is the only newcomer this season among the 20 or so would-be couturiers invited to show their collections alongside the houses officially deemed worthy of the "haute couture" designation.

The new creative director at Valentino, Alessandra Fachinetti, whose first ready-to-wear collection for the house in March was well received, faces the more difficult task of convincing fashion editors that she can take on his mantle with her debut in couture, at which the Italian veteran designer excelled.

A major retrospective of his contribution to the art, including many models from his valedictory show last January, is currently on show in the Musee des Arts Decoratifs.

The couture collection will be unveiled not far away in the house's beautifully appointed salons in the Place Vendome, across the road from the Ritz.

The couture round kicked off on Monday with French designer Stephane Rolland, who opened his own couture house last year after many years as the artistic director at Jean-Louis Scherrer.

Maverick British designer John Galliano at Christian Dior, who chooses a different venue every season, is showing this time at the Musee Rodin, with its famously beautiful garden full of bronzes of the sculptor's statues like "The Kiss" and "The Thinker".

Karl Lagerfeld, who last time unveiled a giant merry-go-round with Chanel icons in the recently renovated Grand Palais, is sticking with the same location for the show, one of the only ones in town big enough to accommodate the vast hordes of fashionistas desperate to be at what is always one of the events of fashion week in Paris.

The fashion house founded by Thierry Mugler, these days better known for its perfumes, has chosen this week to launch a new luxury ready-to-wear line for women signed by Rosemary Rodriguez. The loss-making couture part of the business closed back in 2003.

"Thierry Mugler edition" will be an update on Mugler's distinctive brand of structured elegance in his heyday in the 1980s and 1990s.

For more information, visit: <http://www.modeaparis.com/va/index.html>

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