

# Lifestyle

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A model presents a creation during the fourth outdoor fashion show at Nea Paralia organized by the 'Friends of the New Waterfront' in Thessaloniki. — AFP

## VIRTUAL OR REAL? FASHION WORLD SPLIT OVER DIGITAL SUPERMODELS

The three women gazing into the camera in an advert for French luxury label Balmain look like they could fit in at any high-end shoot, but Shudu, Margot and Zhi are "digital models" whose rise is dividing the fashion world. The computer-generated trio at the centre of Balmain's new campaign is the latest example of fashion brands embracing technology to lure digital-savvy younger clients.

Best known of the three is Shudu, a black digital model created by visual artist Cameron-James Wilson last year. She has her own Instagram account with 145,000 followers which describes her as "the world's first digital supermodel". Modeling shots include her wearing Tiffany jewelry for Vogue Australia. Responses from the industry during New York and London fashion weeks were mixed, with designer Michael Kors among those critical of computer-generated imagery (CGI) being used in this way.



Designer Alice Temperley poses backstage following her show at London Fashion Week in London. — Reuters photos

"I am not into a digital model. I am into real people with personalities and opinions," Kors said at his show in New York. "The idea of digital models is something that I hope does not gain popularity." But British designer Alice Temperley believes using CGI could help cut costs. "I quite like the idea of doing some of that for the commercial and then spending the money on doing events," Temperley said at London Fashion Week.

"I think CGI for computer, for website, for selling purposes, for walking backwards and forwards and showing a product on a website is genius, but not necessarily to bring life and flavor into a brand, because that's much more personal." Shudu's creator said the rise of CGI in fashion was inevitable. "After all we see CGI being used in almost every other industry," Wilson said in an emailed statement. "3D and fashion were two worlds destined to collide."

### "I don't want to lose my job"

#### Replacing models?

Virtual "influencer" Miquela has gained 1.4 million Instagram followers since she was created in 2016. Pictures show her in everyday scenarios wearing designer labels and she promoted Prada clothes on the social media platform during February's Milan Fashion Week. "I think it's good that things change once in a while," model Gisele Alicea during New York Fashion Week. "But I don't think they're ever going to replace models. But then again, the world changes all the time. But I would wish that they would use real models, I don't want to lose my job."

Model Ashanti Hildreth said she did not feel threatened. "Virtual reality is going to cost way more than using a real model ... you have to have to pay for someone to edit," she said. "With real people, the clothes just look better." In London, model Aweng Choul said the use of digital models took "the humanity" away from modeling. "Paying a digital model when you should be paying a real model takes away from reality and what human is," she said.

Shudu, Zhi and Margot - who are black, Asian and white respectively - have also reignited a debate about diversity in the fashion world, which is frequently criticized for the



Designer Michael Kors waves after the showing of his Spring/Summer 2019 collection during New York Fashion Week in New York.

lack of racially-diverse models on the catwalks. "Where we are at in society right now, I think we need to be uplifting real people and people who deserve the representation that modeling can provide," model Hunter Schafer said. Shudu creator Wilson said CGI could address the issue.

"I think it's important to explore diversity across as many media as possible, and the (Balmain) campaign was the start of really embracing that," he said. This season, several designers have used a wider range of women for shows. Rihanna's Savage X Fenty lingerie line show featured models of different sizes and races while Temperley had women of various ages.

"It's cool and interesting, but we feel like ... it's sort of a form of animation," David Blond, creative director of The Blonds, said of CGI models. "I'm sure it can be amazing to utilize at some point but for now we prefer humans." — Reuters

## Italy's fashion industry says it is tackling low pay problem

Italy's fashion industry responded Friday to accusations of widespread underpaid and undeclared subcontracted work in a New York Times article, saying that the problem is limited and already being dealt with. "The problem of irregular employment exists in the world and luxury businesses are the most active in the fight against the phenomenon," said Carlo Capasa, head of the Italian chamber of fashion commerce.

"Taking a few units that go underneath the radar seems a little pretentious," he said at Milan Fashion Week after the NYT front-page investigation headlined "Inside Italy's Shadow Economy". The article says "thousands of low-paid home workers create luxury garments without contracts or insurance" and quotes one unnamed woman who is paid around one euro an hour to sew at home. Two other unnamed workers are quoted, one of whom only talks about conditions 10 years ago and the other who does not say how much she is paid.

The Italian fashion chamber of commerce put out a statement late Friday in response to the article, saying that the only information about the scale of the problem in the article quoted Tania Toffanin, author of the 2016 book "Fabbriche Invisibili" (Invisible Factories). She "estimated that there are 2,000 to 4,000 irregular home workers in apparel production" in Italy, the NYT wrote. "In the context of an big industry which employs 620,000 people in 67,000 companies, it is clear that irregular workers represent an anomaly," the chamber said. Capasa said that the aim was to have zero irregular workers in the industry. "It will take time but we are doing it."

Roberto Manzonni, head of the Italian fashion federation Fismo, meanwhile blamed low wages on the constant drive for consumers to be able to buy more for less. "It's the tyranny of consumers' choice that pushes businesses in the sector to find the least expensive solutions to remain competitive, notably with Asia which manufactures at a low cost," he said.—AFP



This file photo shows Head of the Italian chamber of fashion commerce Carlo Capasa with his wife, actress Stefania Rocca, at the Venice Film Festival.—AFP