

WWD

**LOGOMANIA
IS NOT
NEW, BUT
IT IS
BACK AND
A LITTLE
DIFFERENT.**

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**LOGOS A-GO-GO —
AGAIN**

Balenciaga

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TO SAY THAT logomania is back is a bit like declaring that shirts with two sleeves are having a moment.

Since blatant branding as fashion statement swept into style in the Eighties, and then again in the Nineties and early Aughts, it's ebbed and flowed as trends do without ever really disappearing.

"Oh, those things come and go," says Tom Ford, who knows a thing or two about searing — or shaving — a logo into the public consciousness when he was the creative director of Gucci. "I mean, don't you remember the season when everything was G-G-G-G and I shaved the G in the G-spot because logomania had hit a point where it was ridiculous?" Indeed, it's difficult to forget the famous 2003 Gucci campaign for which he shaved Carmen Kass' pubic hair into the shape of a Gucci G.

Two years into his tenure at Gucci, Alessandro Michele has yet to revive branded loins (one imagines his maximalist magpies might prefer a more au naturel grooming regimen), but he has certainly resuscitated the house logo in a phenomenal way. As have Michele's fellow European luxury house creative heads including Maria Grazia Chiuri at Dior, Demna Gvasalia at Balenciaga and Jeremy Scott at Moschino. In the U.S., one of Raf Simons' first orders of business was redesigning the iconic Calvin Klein logo with Peter Saville, and proposing an entirely new one — Calvin Klein 205W39NYC — during his first runway show.

And houses from Fendi to Mugler and No. 21 were seen reviving and leveraging their logos in powerful ways during fall and resort. Then there are newer players like Off-White's Virgil Abloh, who has established a legitimate business-driving logo in a very short amount of time.

The core tenet of logo dressing will always be the same — status. It's about being part of a club. "Just like ancient tribes using certain markings to identify themselves as being part of that very tribe, logos identify us as being part of our modern-day tribe," says Scott, who's made a kitsch playground out of the Moschino logo since taking over the brand in 2013. His just-released

fall 2017 ad campaign features model Slick Woods wearing a dress and boots that look like Moschino shopping bags.

But there are interesting new factors driving and distinguishing the most recent branding resurgence: the casual-street-wear-as-luxury fascination; two new generations – Millennials and Gen Z – who are the target of marketing budgets everywhere; the thriving, click-away resale market, and social media. None of these were around for the first few iterations of logomania.

"I suppose you could say that we're living in the moment of people's followers and selfies," Ford says. "Every high school kid is working on their brand. It kills me when I hear them say it. 'What are you doing?' 'Working on my brand.'"

Asked where Off-White's diagonal black-and-white striped logo fell on his priority list when developing the line for its 2013 launch, Abloh says, "Oh, it was first." Growing up in the Eighties and Nineties, his first intro to fashion was through skate brands and their ethos-defining graphic T-shirts. For Off-White, "I was very much wanting to own the space of branded clothing but in a clever way, a little bit beyond typing the word of brand name on a garment."

He's expanded his branding vocabulary beyond the stripes to ironically putting words in quotes, such as "For Walking" on boots and Off-White on the women's clothes. To a great extent, Off-White's entire aesthetic is branding. Abloh has upped his execution and is evolving away from cool streetwear label to luxury ready-to-wear house, but there's still no signature silhouette. The most compelling items on his runways remain the branded ones, such a fur coat bearing the black-and-white stripes from fall. Does that make him more of a savvy marketer than a designer? Perhaps, but it's working. The branded stuff "is definitely my best-selling category," he says. "I see a large benefit of having that because it responds to that place where people are purchasing things in order for others to know what brand they're wearing."

Abloh is not alone in his approach to branded design, seeking to infuse it with a certain aloof humor. "Right now, the focus feels less about getting the brand name on the article and more about an interesting twist to an existing logo/design," says Marina Larroude, Barneys New

Off-White



Fendi

Mugler



Gucci

York's fashion director, who notes that logo gear accounts for a major piece of the store's business.

"Take Balenciaga for example – they've integrated their name/logo into other existing design 'formulas' – Bernie Sanders, rock concerts merch, etc. – which resulted in a playful fashion piece."

This creative, kind-of-cockeyed take on traditional branding isn't just a matter of keeping up with the fashion zeitgeist. It's a big business strategy. Farla Efros, president of HRC Retail Advisory, notes that research shows that Millennials prefer unbranded, customizable merchandise to logos. She sees the new wave of masking traditional branding in colorful design, humor and even political messaging as the traditional luxury brands' way of engaging with a new customer kind of on the sly. Or try to.

"Looking at the high-end brands, they're current consumer base is getting smaller and smaller," Efros says. "This is a great way to resurge the brand, get more interest in it and get more younger consumers into the brand. They have to do that to stay alive."

For example, Chiuri's We Should All Be Feminists T-shirt has become a de-facto logo for Dior. On his quest to keep the Gucci logo fresh and unexpected, Michele has spoofed knockoff culture, most recently in his resort collection, which featured garments bearing the word "Guccy" and a much-discussed Dapper Dan "homage." Also in the collection, a white T-shirt emblazoned with a graphic of a snake and the words "Guccify yourself," and a tote bag featuring a graphic of a roaring panther on a rock and "Guccification," which have stirred copy-cat claims from two artists.

Perhaps a little legal trouble is a small price to pay for a booming business. Gucci declined to disclose sales information or make Michele or chief executive officer Marco Bizzari available for comment, but Sasha Skoda, women's category director at luxury consignment site The Real Real, had data at the ready. "Gucci is the number-one brand on the site," she says, noting that the Dionysus bags can be priced at 90 percent of retail. "It sells fastest out of any brand."

Skoda says logos have always been popular on the site, and search for monograms is up 85 percent year over year. Gucci, Chanel and Louis Vuitton are the site's top brands, but she added

No. 21



Versus



that searches for Off-White were up 750 percent and, on the heels of its collaboration with Louis Vuitton, Supreme searches had gone up 1,500 percent.

The online resale market is a new prong in the logo business. The Real Real prices monogrammed merch 20 percent higher than non-monogrammed merch. The purchase of a four-figure Dionysus handbag purchase might be more justifiable when one knows it can be resold for up to 90 percent of its original price tag.

Everything that's hot eventually cools. The Real Real's data is a great barometer of when an item or brand reaches its tipping point. "This time last year, Céline was the number-one handbag," Skoda says. "We couldn't keep it in stock and then we saw it plateau."

So? Any predictions? "Gucci has been a little oversaturated in the market," she says. "We're watching to see if it drops off, but we haven't seen it quite yet."



Dior

Hair by:
YOICHI TOMIZAWA
AT ART DEPARTMENT
USING RENE
FURTERER

Makeup by:
MARYGENE
AT SEE
MANAGEMENT

Model:
MAREN BEHRINGER
AT HEROES MODELS

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