

## SIMONETTA

### LA PRIMA DONNA DELLA MODA ITALIANA

A Fondazione Pitti Discovery Project

Curated by Vittoria C. Caratozzolo, Judith Clark, Maria Luisa Frisa

Galleria del Costume in Palazzo Pitti, Florence

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on the occasion of Pitti Immagine Uomo 73

**The Fondazione Pitti Discovery will dedicate an exhibition to Simonetta, Donna Simonetta Colonna di Cesarò, a charismatic and eccentric personality in post-World War II high fashion. She was an icon of style who made fashion: this first show ever about Simonetta will be held at the Galleria del Costume in Palazzo Pitti, Florence.**

With her distinctive glamour **Donna Simonetta**, made a fundamental contribution to the launch and growth of Italian couture on the world scene. From the late 1940s to the early seventies, from the Rome atelier in the family's palazzo on Via Gregoriana to the Haute Boutique on Rue François 1er, - that she opened with her husband, the tailor Fabiani - in Paris, the innovative lines of her daring fashion-creations that emphasized the performing nature of clothes left profound marks on the tastes of the closed circle of aristocrats and celebrities as well as on the lifestyles of consumers around the world.

Donna Simonetta, with her complex and multifaceted personality, is the first working woman in Italian fashion - the *prima donna*. In her autobiography Bettina Ballard - writer for *Vogue America* - defined her as, "the best businesswoman in the Italian couture," the new incarnation of the Renaissance Spirit. She was perfectly capable of combining creativity and business, and, in 1971 she was just as capable of leaving everything to go and live in an ashram at Rishikesh and work with a leper colony. She returned to the west in 1985 and now divides her time between Rome and Paris.

#### The exhibition

Through a series of interpretative - and not chronological - focuses, the exhibition - designed by Ruben Toledo and Naomi Filmer - will feature the colorful history of an Italian name that, in a short time earned a place on the international scene. The exhibition will reveal the complex network of influence that Simonetta developed through her work and image; it is a network that she used and that continues to impact the last generation of designers. A selection of over sixty outfits from museums around the world and from her own private archives will document her creativity and will reconstruct one of the most glorious periods of Italian couture. The exhibition will also include the legendary portraits, by Leonor Fini and René Gruau, as well as the millinery hats collection *La Prima Donna*. Stephen Jones dedicated these hats to Simonetta in 2004 after being enchanted by the portrait photo Norman Parkinson shot at the Plaza Hotel in New York and published in *Vogue America* in 1952.

#### The exhibition catalogue and the autobiography

Two books, published by Marsilio Editori and the Fondazione Pitti Discovery, will also be presented together with the exhibition. The exhibition catalogue is the seventh volume in the *Mode* series and will be in an updated format. It will include the highly personal views of the curators through texts and images as well as a group of extraordinary photographs by Regina Relang, Pasquale De Antoniis, Norman Parkinsons, Coffin Clifford and William Klein. The essays, focusing on Simonetta, her creativity and cultural world reveal what a modern personality she was and is, without nostalgia, but rather by placing the story in the context of today's issues. The other book is Simonetta Colonna di Cesarò's autobiography, *Living on the Edge*, part of the Specchi Marsilio series.

PROMOTED BY:  
PITTI IMMAGINE  
CENTRO DI FIRENZE PER LA MODA ITALIANA

The project dedicated to Simonetta is made with the valuable collaboration of ENTE CASSA DI RISPARMIO.