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# French Vogue marks 100 years but still in fashion?

French Vogue has been setting trends for a century, from the post-war 'New Look' of Christian Dior through the sexual liberation of the 1960s to the dangling-cigarette waifs of the 2000s. But as a new exhibition in Paris marks the magazine's 100th birthday, times are troubled at the fabled magazine. Just last month, it was confirmed that its editor of 10 years, Emmanuelle Alt, was out and wouldn't be replaced.

She was not alone. Looking to cut costs, owner Conde Nast International has axed editors across Europe over the past year, and put international Vogue editions under the direct control of global editorial director, Anna Wintour, in New York. Like much of the media industry, Vogue is struggling with tumbling sales and ad revenue in the digital era. But the latest twist is also part of the endless push and pull between New York and Paris going back to its early days.

"The whole history of French Vogue is one of back-and-forth with Conde Nast in New York—growing more independent for a while, then being reined back in," said Sylvie Lecallier, curator of the new exhibition, "Vogue Paris 1920-2020", which opened this weekend after a year's delay due to the pandemic. The Paris edition was often the loftier, more bohemian sibling to its more hard-nosed New York version. But it was also the hotbed in which much of 20th century style and womanhood came to be defined. "Paris was the place to hunt out talent and content and bring it to New York," said Lecallier.

The exhibition charts the evolution from art deco drawings of the 1920s through the erotic image-making of photographers like Helmut Newton in the 1960s and 1970s. Its last peak was under editor Carine Roitfeld in the 2000s, who brought back a provocative Gallic identity by ridding the newsroom of foreign staff and

becoming a fashion icon in her own right. Her successor, Alt, was a quieter presence, though she still oversaw key moments including its first transgender cover star, Brazilian Valentina Sampaio, in 2017.

### 'Everyone's a threat'

But internet culture has created "a perfect storm" for Vogue, says media expert Douglas McCabe of Enders Analysis. "The first 80 years of Vogue's life, it had the market to itself, it was the bible for fashion," McCabe told AFP. "But online today, there are so many other ways to get your information. Influencers, Instagram, YouTube—everyone's a threat."

In a world where new fashion trends can blow up around the world in seconds, it has become much harder for a monthly magazine to set the pace. "It's not that they can't survive for another 100 years—but they will be differently sized," McCabe said. Vogue has tried to branch out into different areas, including events. "I used to work for a magazine, and today I work for a brand," Alt said on the eve of French Vogue's 1,000th issue in 2019. But the big money was always in print, and Vogue Paris sales are dropping steadily from 98,345 in 2017 to 81,962 to 2020, according to data site ACPM.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the new top job in Paris, redefined as "head of editorial content", went to Eugenie Trochu, who was key to building the magazine's online presence. She declared herself "thrilled to be part of Vogue's international transformation". For the curator of the exhibition, it is ironic timing. "We had no idea it would end like this when we started work on the exhibition," said Lecallier. "Who knows where it will go from here."—AFP



American producer Shawn Carter, known professionally as Jay-Z, (left) speaks to media on arrival to attend the world premiere of the film 'The Harder They Fall' on the opening day of the 2021 BFI London Film Festival in London on October 6, 2021. — AFP

## Jay-Z western 'The Harder They Fall' fires up London Film Festival

With Idris Elba leading an impressive all-black cast and Jay-Z among the producers, the premiere of Netflix's reimagined western "The Harder They Fall" opened the London Film Festival with a bang on Wednesday. The movie, a directorial debut for Londoner Jeymes Samuel, showcases an array of black talent portraying real-life historical characters from the Old West in a fictional plot, set to a reggae and beats-laden soundtrack.

Samuel, who co-produced and co-wrote the original screenplay, left longtime friend Elba with little choice but to play Rufus Buck, a violent and feared outlaw of the era. "(It was) 'you're doing it'... we grew up together... and here we are making a Western," Elba joked, as the pair discussed the film at a news conference with other cast and crew ahead of the premiere.

Samuel, also a singer-songwriter and music producer who worked with Jay-Z on tracks for "The Great Gatsby" in 2013, said collaborating again reaffirmed the rap star's talents go well beyond music. "The interesting thing is he's super cine-literate," the 42-year-old film-maker said. "People think (of) the name Jay-Z and they automatically assume... music," he added, noting he was vastly knowledgeable about both Westerns and "film in general".

### 'Alluring' genre

Samuel said he landed a "dream cast" for "The Harder They Fall" which also includes actor-director Regina King as Buck's sidekick "Traacherous" Trudy Smith, and Jonathan Majors as his rival outlaw Nat Love. LaKeith Stanfield, Zazie Beetz and Edi Gathegi also star in a story of revenge on the plains of Texas scored with pulsing music that features Nigerian icon Fela Kuti, among others. The novice director, who grew up watching Westerns on British

television, explained "the genre of the Old West was always alluring" but that he wanted to "do more with it".

"The scope that they showed those stories through was very narrow... women of all colors were always subservient. If you were a person of color, you were less than human," Samuel said. Apart from three screenings at the London Film Festival and some showings in select US theatres, "The Harder They Fall" will get its global release on Netflix on November 3.

The streaming platform is "the right place" for the highly cinematic film, according to co-producer James Lassiter, who persuaded Samuel of its virtues. "The goal if we're going to tell a story like this, with this cast, is to have as many people around the world (with) access to it," Lassiter said. "Sometimes when you do a theatrical release, there's these built-in biases, like no one wants to see an all-black cast," he added, noting "in certain territories they will tell the studios 'this movie's not for us'."

### 'Life-changing'

Meanwhile for Elba, who contracted Covid-19 last year, the global health crisis had a profound impact on him and his mindset during filming. "The pandemic has shown that we're all human and the race thing is pretty stupid," he said. "Obviously, there's systematic racism that sits in our system which is going to take time to get out, but in terms of story-telling, it's a great day for us. "It's a great day for everyone." The 49-year-old actor noted his own personal battle with the virus helped him harness "compassion" in his portrayal of the dislikeable and brutal Buck. "It really gave me a life-changing perspective. So I think I ended up injecting some of that maturity... into that character," Elba said.

"We encouraged each other to get deeper, under the skin with these characters." Before hitting the small screen, "The Harder They Fall" got its cinematic unveiling at London's Southbank Centre on Wednesday evening, with Jay-Z making an appearance on the red carpet to kickstart the 12-day film festival. Now in its 65th year, it will close with "The Tragedy Of Macbeth", starring the Oscar-winning Frances McDormand, whose husband Joel Coen directs, and fellow Academy Award winner Denzel Washington.— AFP



Editor in Chief of Vogue and Global Chief Content Officer for Conde Nast Anna Wintour and British journalist Hamish Bowles pose for photographs as they present creations for Balenciaga during the Women's Spring-Summer 2022 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP