

The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL EDITION | THURSDAY, JANUARY 11, 2018

David gets dressed

BY GUY TREBAY

Symbol of Florence, most celebrated of Michelangelo's works and a feature of every souvenir shop in this ancient city, the statue of David was briefly clad for an evening this week, after a full five centuries of nudity.

The occasion was a video installation created by Felice Limosani, an artist and former D.J., and sponsored by a prominent local milling family to celebrate the somewhat shaky proposition that fabric is art.

Purists might view it as impious to cloak David in patterns drawn from the commercial archives of Lanificio Luigi Ricceri and then projected onto the statue. Yet Florence stands at the forefront of a movement to disrupt what some consider the stasis of Italy's rich artistic heritage.

In recent seasons, the artist Ai Weiwei was invited to stage an intervention on the subject of migration in the courtyard of the 15th-century Palazzo Strozzi; Jenny Holzer was asked by the organizers of the Pitti Uomo trade fair to project scraps of political poetry onto the facade of the Palazzo Pitti; and, in connection with an international antiques biennial being held here, the Swiss artist Urs Fischer was enjoined to park his monumental sculptural blob, "Big Clay #4," in the middle of the storied Renaissance Piazza della Signoria.

"Art is not only art inside a museum or gallery," Mr. Limosani said Tuesday evening, as a crowd of enraptured locals held their phones up inside the Galleria dell'Accademia to capture the sight of the 17-foot marble figure washed in a sequence of patterns that each began as shreds of color staining calves or biceps and then slowly enveloped the biblical hero in yellow pin dots or blue jacquard. "You can also think of art as being created in the factories where artistic inspiration and craft both meet."

The apparent ease with which the Ricceri family gained permission to interact with one of the world's most celebrated works of art can be co-incidentally chalked up to the former Kate Middleton, according to Francesco Ricceri, a proprietor of his family-owned company.

The \$3,600 double-breasted coat worn by the pregnant Duchess of Cambridge to the recent Christmas service at Queen Elizabeth's Sandringham estate was designed and made by Miu Miu. The blue-green tartan fabric for the coat was designed and milled in Tuscany by the Ricceri company. "We got so much attention from that it was a little crazy," Mr. Ricceri said, adding that the boost from the unexpected celebrity helped smooth the permissions process. "That was great for us," he said. So, too, he went on to note, was the fact that apparently no one had ever before asked to dress Michelangelo's David in a set of virtual clothes.

Florence being in certain ways a small town, it is perhaps unsurprising that the other gala event Tuesday was held in a building the Ricceri family happens to own. That is, the much-anticipated opening of Gucci Garden at the Palazzo della Mercanzia, a 14th-century guild hall just steps from the Uffizi Gallery. Gucci's origins, of course, are in Florence; the company was founded here in 1921. And for the past six years, it has operated a modest museum here devoted to its corporate history.

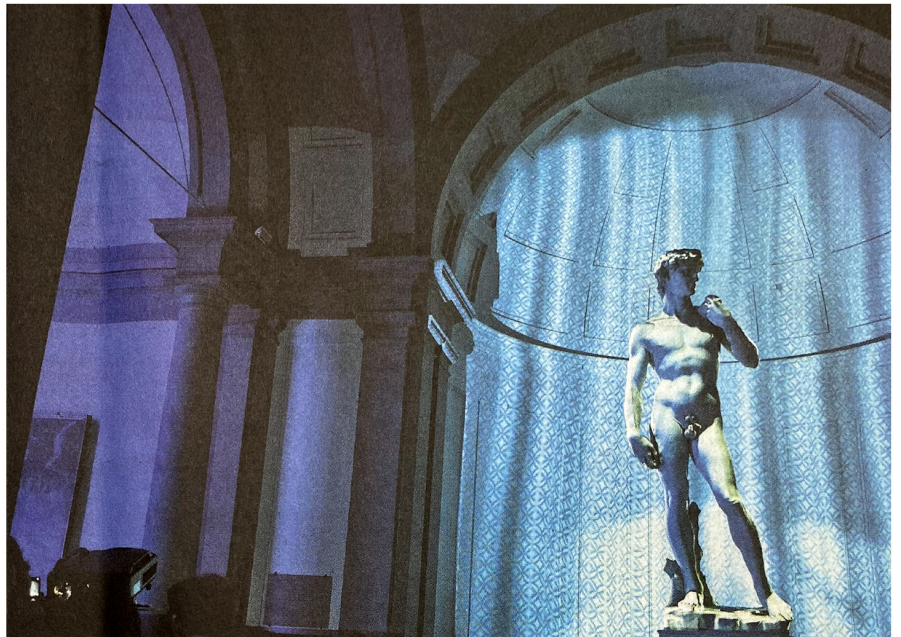
The multifloor Gucci Garden retains elements of the museum, primarily in a series of fantastical galleries displaying clothing, accessories and objects from the company's extensive archive — and also in its \$9.50 admission fee. Yet Gucci Garden is perhaps best understood as a museum in the Banksy sense — exit through the gift shop — since the greatest proportion of the building is given over to sales floors arranged according to the lively and catholic tastes of Gucci's current creative director, Alessandro Michele.

What Mr. Michele has devised for the Gucci Garden is a form of wildly and intensely personal bazaar, a grown-up toy store stocked with his favorite periodicals; with books assembled in collaboration with Antica Libreria Casciari, one of Rome's more venerable antiquarian booksellers (one standout is Charles Addams's Addams family album, "Dear Dead Days"); with nearly 500 articles of clothing — shoes, bags, coats, skirts, bomber jackets, many embroidered with the designer's trademark naturalistic motifs — not available at any other Gucci location; with goods created in collaboration with artists like Jayde Fish, Trevor Andrew (on Instagram as #guccighost) and Coco Capitán; with stationery, postcards, canvas bags, maps, custom-printed boxes; and with a restaurant operated by the chef Massimo Bottura, whose Osteria Francescana in Modena is one of just nine restaurants in the country to have attained three Michelin stars.

"It's a poetic reactivation" of Gucci, said Maria Luisa Frisa, the Venetian fashion scholar brought in by Mr. Michele to mine the archive for both pre-

dictable — the double-G logo, the 1966 Flora print, the ubiquitous snaffle bit — and unexpected design elements from the brand's nearly century-long history.

Shouldering through the mobs that turned out for opening night, Ms. Frisa conducted a visitor through the galleries, past cases displaying custom travel trunks covered in zebra hide, past a severely beautiful Tom Ford dress, past an elaborate fitted picnic set from the 1960s replete with plates, cups and utensils (though only for two), and then



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLARA VANNUCCI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



stopped beneath a large equestrian oil portrait by Domenico Induno chosen by Mr. Michele.

"This is a favorite of Alessandro's," Ms. Frisa said of an image depicting a fox hunter wearing a scarlet swallowtail coat and riding boots and with a slightly batty-looking child perched on his saddle.

"Look here," Ms. Frisa said, pointing to the child's doll flung ominously to the ground. "It's a little bit pornographic, no?"

Top, Michelangelo's David as part of a video installation by Felice Limosani in Florence, Italy. Above, displays at the Gucci Garden, the luxury brand's new attraction in the Palazzo della Mercanzia.

