

OBITUARY

Dutch Designer Josephus Thimister, 57

- He designed for Balenciaga, Genny, Charles Jourdan and also had his eponymous brand of rtw and couture.

BY MILES SOCHA

Josephus Thimister, an edgy Dutch designer and couturier perhaps best known for his stint at Balenciaga in the Nineties, has died, multiple sources told WWD late Wednesday.

"It is with sadness that The Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode has learned the passing away of Josephus Thimister [1962-2019], whose avant-garde style, elegance and skills in cutting have, for many years, contributed to the creative momentum in Paris," the French fashion's governing body said in a statement.

Federation president Ralph Toledano recounted how Thimister caught the attention of Karl Lagerfeld via a young designer competition in Belgium, and he would visit the studio often, always bearing a gift: a box of Belgian chocolates.

"We became great friends. He was an adorable person with a great sense of humor, always self-deprecating," Toledano, then president of Lagerfeld, recalled.

Fashion publicist Marion Greenberg recalled Wednesday meeting Thimister through their mutual friend Andre Leon Talley, who was working at Vogue at that time. The designer was in search of PR representation, since he wanted to build his business in the U.S. Greenberg first met Thimister at his Paris apartment on the Rue Fabert.



Josephus Thimister

"I did not know what to expect, when I walked into his stunning space and was faced by his collection of taxidermy; I believe he had a polar bear and a tiger!" she said. "I was so startled. But it left me with a strong

impression of someone, who was a true non-conformist, as well as a unique individual, who was also a bit mischievous in the best way. We clicked immediately. He was one of the most talented and visionary designers of his time."

Greenberg added, "I felt so fortunate to have worked with him and I wished he would have been able to continue with his company. He had a sparkle in his eye and had a truly generous soul. I adored him. He will always be remembered and deeply missed."

No further details were immediately available.

Most recently, Thimister acted as a consultant on Emilio Pucci's spring 2018 collection, designed by an in-house team.

A graduate of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, he designed for Balenciaga from 1992 to 1997, passing the baton to then unknown Nicolas Ghesquière.

Known for his cutting skill, and penchant for the severe and eerie, Thimister proceeded in 1997 to launch his own couture and ready-to-wear brand. He did fashion shows off and on until about 2011, and had a flair for theatrical flourishes and peerless constructions.

According to the thumbnail biography composed by his longtime public relations firm 2ème Bureau in Paris, Thimister worked briefly in Lagerfeld's studio and also alongside Jean Patou before joining Balenciaga. He also acted as an art director for the Italian label Genny, and from 2005 to 2007 for Charles Jourdan.

"The creations of Thimister possess a certain lightness and poetry, which creates an elegance devoid of any vanity," the biography reads. It also cites his use of unconventional materials.

Critics described his clothes variously as raw, bleak, austere and fiercely individual.

BUSINESS

Mulberry Losses Nearly Double in First Half

- Revenues saw a slight uptick, driven by the company's international and online businesses.

BY NATALIE THEODOSI

LONDON — Losses at Mulberry nearly doubled to 9.8 million pounds from 5.3 million pounds in the first half ended Sept. 28 as the company continues to suffer from one of its top U.K. accounts,

House of Fraser, going into administration last year. It also pointed to a challenging and "increasingly promotion-led" U.K. retail environment.

Revenues grew slightly to 68.9 million pounds from 68.3 million pounds in 2018. Growth was mostly driven by international sales, which were up 12 percent, as well as digital sales, which rose 23 percent. The U.K., Mulberry's home market and most significant one, was down 4 percent.

Asia continues to be a growth driver

for the British label, which now has 32 retail stores in the region. As reported, Mulberry took back full control of its Korean subsidiary.

"We have made further progress with our strategy through continued investment in a direct-to-customer, international, digital and omnichannel model," said Mulberry chief executive officer Thierry Andretta, who has been working on re-shaping Mulberry's business model, with 90 percent of sales now direct-to-consumer.

"We are seeing the benefit of recent initiatives in Asia, which remains a significant growth opportunity. This will support our ambition for international to become a greater proportion of group revenue."

Andretta also pointed to the importance of the company's bag business and its efforts to use recycled materials, leather from environmentally certified tanneries and accessible price points.

New bag styles accounted for 80 percent of full-price bag sales, and to ensure the company keeps up with the need for newness, Mulberry has also forged a partnership with the Swedish label Acne, debuting a collaborative handbag line earlier this month.

As part of the collaboration, Mulberry has made an updated version of its signature Bayswater and Scotchgrain styles with multiple buckles.

"Collaborations are an interesting way of creating something new that also allow us to speak to new customers at the same time as offering something innovative to our existing audiences," Andretta said. "We are always looking at ways to speak to a new generation of customers through product innovation."

BUSINESS

CareerFlex Seeks to Ease Store Closings for Workers

- The Hilco-owned company provides a suite of services for associates as stores wind down.

BY EVAN CLARK

When retail goes wrong and stores close or whole chains liquidate, sales associates can get lost in the shuffle, tending to cash registers and stocking shelves as inventory is sold off at steeper and steeper discounts.

Now Hilco Global — one of the industry's biggest liquidators — is helping to ease a difficult phase for both employees and retailers with CareerFlex, an outplacement service built with store associates in mind.

The cloud-based CareerFlex helps retail's front line workers find new jobs by providing tools to help them write a résumé, prepare for an interview and more. The company, which was founded in 2017 and quietly bought by Hilco last year, also keeps a database of workers that is shared with hiring services and companies to help find them work home once the store goes dark.

Nick Keefe, cofounder and president of CareerFlex, said: "None of them have been fired. These are all qualified workers who are losing their jobs due to factors beyond their control, that makes them very desirable from a hiring standpoint."

CareerFlex has worked with Topshop, Avenue, Gymboree, Charming Charlie and others as they closed down stores. Keefe said companies operating in the gig economy have been reaching out and looking to pick up workers transitioning out of retail.

"On demand labor, that's becoming increasingly more important," he said.

It's a service that's built for store associates, but is also intended to help retailers. And plenty more help might be needed. According to Coresight Research, the industry is on track to shutter a total of 12,000 doors this year — a trend hitting banners across the spectrum, from Barneys New York to Forever 21, both of which filed for bankruptcy.

Typically, liquidators bring in "supervisors" to lead the wind down process at a store — a task complicated as associates start to look more toward the horizon.

"We leverage that network that already exists in a traditional bankruptcy, store closing process and we use those supervisors as our advocates to get as many touch points as possible with the employee," Keefe said. "Part of it is to create an environment that is much healthier. The supervisors are able to talk about something that is very positive, able to give employees a service that they didn't have. Now these employees have access to an outplacement service, they have an outlet."

CareerFlex also helps retailers keep employees on task in a difficult time by offering them a customized letter of recommendation for staying on as the store closes, which can then be attached to their resumes or otherwise used to help them secure a new job.

"This letter of recommendation has been a great thing for the employees; it's probably the number one thing we get questions about from our employees," Keefe said.



Acne Studios x Mulberry