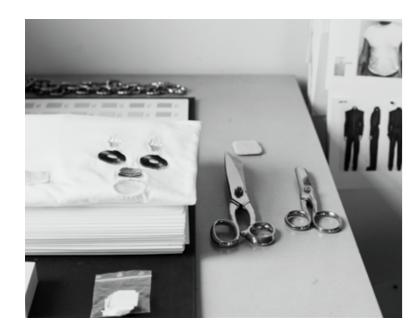# STEFANO PILATI

RANDOM IDENTITIES
YVES SAINT LAURENT

As former creative director at Yves Saint Laurent, Stefano Pilati is finally lying low, and loving it. "My experience gave me a lot, but it also took a lot away from me," he says. "And that's why I'm excited now. I don't need those filters anymore." Pilati's passion for fashion design is undeniable, and he relishes the labor that goes into it. "When you work for a big company, you have less and less time to do your job effectively," he explains. "Now I find myself doing more within the day-to-day design process." Pilati exudes enthusiasm while discussing his current project, Random Identities, which he describes as "a combination of technical advancements for a new and personal way to approach fashion."

Pilati is revered not only for his designs (like the highly sensational tulip skirt) but also for his unconventional yet elegant personal style. "People who don't know me think that my style is a big effort, but it's not an effort at all," he muses. It is, he adds, always evolving based on his environment. His home and office share the same space, the two upper floors of a historical building in Berlin. (Pilati notes that the adjacency of his studio and living space is a conscious choice. "It allows me to isolate myself in my own creativity," he says.) Having moved to the German capital several

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Though he no longer lives in his hometown, Pilati thinks fondly of the city. "Milan is beautiful," he says. "I recognize myself in its architecture, in its colors."

Pilati met Yves Saint
Laurent only once, but
treasures the letters he
sent, signed with the word
"amitié" ("friendship").
The designer passed away
in 2008.

years ago, he has had to adjust his style to the "temperature of the climate, both literally and figuratively."

Pilati's fashion sense came to him early. "Immediately," he clarifies. "When I was maybe four or five." And from the start, he discovered that clothes were a means of communication. The designer, who was raised in Milan, acknowledges the importance of his roots. In the Italian city, he says, people were very stylish. "My own style was monitored and maybe, to a certain extent, even taught by those in the fashion environment I was drawn to," he reflects.

Pilati entered the industry at 17, working as an intern for designer Nino Cerruti. "It wasn't easy," he recalls. "When you're both young and talented, people become very jealous. The adult world isn't very nice." It also was difficult being gay in the '80s, he remembers. "We were trying to shape honest spaces around ourselves—everybody was fighting for that."

Following the internship, he received his first job, with a velvet manufacturer, before being hired as menswear assistant to Giorgio Armani in 1993. After a couple of years, he joined Prada as part of the senior design team. Then, in 2000, he moved to Paris to work for Yves Saint Laurent and was named the house's creative director in 2004.

> *Art chooses you, not the other way around. I think fashion, in all of its forms, chose me.*

Reflecting on his career to date, Pilati expresses few regrets, save one: "I think that I could have been a good artist," he says. When considering the life of an artist and fashion designer, Pilati makes a singular comparison. "Possession," he reveals. "Think of the masters. You can't produce any powerful art unless you're possessed by it. Art chooses you, not the other way around. I think fashion, in all of its forms, chose me."

Yet art is still a major influence, and he counts himself lucky to have had mentors who were collectors, offering him access to the "masters of the past and present." In his spare time, Pilati prefers to "write or create," but when he reads, he is particular about the books he chooses. "I need to learn something, be inspired," he says. "Currently, I'm reading a book about how trees communicate."

The designer has long looked to nature for inspiration. His former Paris apartment opened up into a large garden landscaped by renowned designer Louis Benech, and his home in Berlin borders the city's largest park. "Nature reminds me that no matter how creative and successful I am, I can never achieve that certain level of beauty.

"Nature makes you feel very small," he continues. "It's a good way to get back in touch with your real inner self." It is evident that Pilati is enormously self-aware, but he's also

constantly tuned in to the world around him. Such heightened perception has been a major factor in his decision to stay in Berlin. "Milan, Paris and London are cities where it is very difficult, in my opinion, to not be nostalgic," he explains. "I believe we are in an era where we all need to look forward, and Berlin is a place that moves me to do so."

When it comes to his biggest source of inspiration, the designer has no doubts: "It is the people around me," he says. For much of his life, he worked with older people, but now, in his 50s, Pilati increasingly finds satisfaction in connecting with those who are younger than him. "I draw inspiration from being around people not of my generation," he says. Though he moved to Berlin explicitly "not to be social," Pilati discovered the city's club culture, something he missed earlier in life. While exploring and talking with its regulars, he gained perspective "on the world, outside institutions, convention, genders and a new kind of relationship with sexuality that inspires style."

Pilati's enthusiasm for youth also translates to designers. "I moved to Paris in 2000," he says. "And for more than a decade, the industry was about revamping big brands. I love seeing young kids putting something out there and believing in it." In 2016, he made waves by sitting front row and showing support for designer Telfar Clemens. The following year, he walked the catwalk for emerging Berlin label GmbH.

Working on his own projects, like Random Identities, Pilati aims to "incubate and exchange, to create conversation with young designers, as well as musicians, DJs and other creatives." He teases new designs with Instagram's Stories feature. First testing the platform during Paris Fashion Week in 2017, he shared several looks—all black, genderless and seasonless—inspired by his friends and their aforementioned conversations.

"I do still believe in this job," he says adamantly. "But the system, in my opinion, is in a crisis. I don't want young designers to lose hope because in a sense, I did lose it. I'm pushing myself to create hope right now, and to tell you the truth, I don't care about any other form of success." *

In 2017, Pilati told *Vogue Italia* that he sees his home country as one of "creative dreamers," naming the likes of Gianni Versace and Giorgio Armani.