LADIES WITH AN ATTITUDE

EGGHEADS SET THE TRENDS FOR A LONG TIME–NOW INDIVIDUALITY AND REALISM ARE IN DEMAND. WE ARE TALKING ABOUT MANNEQUINS.

BY REGINA HENKEL

There is hardly any area of the fashion business not influenced by e-commerce in some way and therefore it must respond. This is also true for store mannequins. They present the very newest products in physical retail stores and have a task that is hard to overestimate in its importance: enticing potential new customers into the store. "In our internet age, more and more retailers are realizing how necessary it is to do more in visual merchandising," says Thomas Jakobs of mannequin supplier Jakobs. "If you want to appeal to customers, there has to be more emotion in the shop display windows." And adding more emotion to the presentation of products in retail specifically means: The mannequins need to look more natural.

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"In connection with a more and more vivid design at the POS we see an orientation towards movement, compositions of figures and partially realistic looks. Brands distinguish their collections from those of competitors by using different finishings and surface designs," says Tristan Arbter, key account manager at mannequin producer IDW. The abstract egghead without facial features has not disappeared because of it, but must compete with figures which look more realistic than ever before, are of incredible quality and which shoppers feel are more approachable than neutral abstract figures. "White, semi-abstract figures with their facial features only hinted at and a semi-matte surface finish are mainstream and can be seen almost everywhere in retail," says Andreas Geczusin, CEO of Genesis Mannequins. "If you want to set yourself apart, by now many top labels are opting for mannequins having a natural appearance with make-up and a wig, among other things, also because these are far more difficult to imitate." The days are over when everyone was able to work with the same anonymous mannequins, where it wasn't the mannequin but the clothing it wore that counted. As is also generally true for store design, companies are viewing mannequins as part of their corporate image. "You can't present or perceive the brand using standard mannequins," say Sabrina Ciofi and Andrea Batilla, creative directors for the Italian ↗

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A natural appearance
The latest mannequins look deceptively human. Figures with a natural dynamic and relaxed, casual poses are in demand. The pose can be attention-getting. White is still the most popular standard color, but more as a composite subdued shade.

Flexibility
So that customers don't need to buy new mannequins every season while still giving stores maximum flexibility, many manufacturers offer new options for changing or transforming the figures. An innovation offered by Window Mannequins: figures with replaceable eyes, mouths and faces.

The material mix
There is a corresponding mixture of materials used in fashion and interior design which is also found in mannequins. A cloth-covered body and wooden arms and heads have been back to mannequins from the past but are still up-to-date.

Abstract mannequins
Standard egghead models are giving way to more individual solutions. However, this doesn't mean they will completely disappear. Abstraction continues to be an important tool for giving emphasis to the clothing—but hopefully not with look-alike models.

New finishes
There is no need to change anything on a mannequin, the finish alone can produce a new look. Metals such as copper are integrated into the models or transparent surfaces chosen or a completely new style created with papier-mâché.

mannequin specialist La Rosa. "We are experiencing a major sea-change in visual communication," adds Ciofi. At La Rosa, major luxury brands are asking much more frequently about customized handmade models. Other suppliers have developed very flexible figures such as the French manufacturer Windows Mannequins. The Nizza-based company created a Cameleon mannequin which allows its eyes, mouth and front of its face to be exchanged at any time—without seeing a visible seam. This makes it easy to change make-up and facial expressions or—if necessary—to transform a natural face into an egg face. This allows various materials and colors to be combined as well. "There are a total of 70,000 different versions possible," says Thomas Jakobs, who markets Window Mannequins in Germany. Jakobs also says that two years ago the Cameleon Mannequin was launched at Dior and in the meantime demand for the mannequins has increased. The Dutch mannequin maker Hans Boodt also offers figures whose faces can be exchanged. There is quite a lot of creative liberty possible, especially with finishes. Cor Montehan of Hans Boodt says: "We have noticed that retailers looking for more compelling mannequin solutions have therefore started to experiment with varying types of finishes." The result was transparent figures, papier-mâché or copper, materials which are the most popular for store interiors just now.
More naturalness can be seen not only in the level of abstraction, but in poses being made more natural, dynamic and casual. These body positions are playing an important role, especially in denim and sportswear. Demand for figures that are jumping or in a catwalk ↗

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pose is not as strong. Even if natural-looking mannequins are becoming more popular, there is still a need for their opposite type, especially as dressmaker's dummies. Cloth-covered wooden figures with moveable arms and heads are still frequently used to visualize vintage fashion themes. This shows that anything is possible today – as long as the overall scene is convincing and goes well with the brand. "Strict market segmentation is a thing of the past," says Batilla of La Rosa. The only thing that counts is brand identity because customers and their needs are even harder to put into easy categories today. Hard and fast rules are also no longer important because mannequins are being replaced more frequently than ever now and new visuals are constantly being created. On average, the store window figures are being replaced every five years, even more frequently in prime locations and at flagship store locations. As Jakobs confides: "Smaller stores who don't have their mannequins replaced every three years tend to choose a natural mannequin appearance. They are more versatile because changing the wig or putting on new make-up can change quite a lot."

Mannequin specialists are responding to the desire for more individuality by increasingly offering different figures and poses for various fashion areas. For example, Jakobs has just increased its stock of plus-size mannequins and is now offering ten different body poses. Eurodisplay has responded to stronger demand for accessory presentations and developed its Prêt-à-Porter mannequin series which can be used to present bags and travel gear in style. The only thing which is common across this industry is the handling: lightweight models which are easy to use, even for store personnel, are in demand. "Our mannequins are especially lightweight and equipped with special arm and leg fittings so that handling them goes quickly," explains Christian Bruckner of Eurodisplay. Also sustainable production is expected by more retailers, and manufacturers are listening. In their current catalogue Penther Formes claims: "The code of conduct guides our way of thinking and acting in terms of sustainability and 'clean' production. With our own production being located in Europe we already optimize our LCA through short delivery distances."

As varied as the requirements and preferences may be, the market is still universal at the most. Asia generally needs smaller mannequins. Today, the styling, gesture and facial expression all speak the same language and are understood the same way everywhere. K