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IT Holding Foundation Honors Ferré

By Luisa Zargani

MILAN — IT Holding said Thursday that it has established the Fondazione Gianfranco Ferré.

According to the foundation's general director, Ferré's cousin and longtime collaborator Rita Airaghi, the establishment's aim is to "preserve and diffuse" the late designer's work and is an "homage to his genius." IT Holding chairman Tonino Perna and Alberto Ferré, the designer's brother, hold the position of president and vice president, respectively, of the foundation. "It is important that his message not be lost," said Ferré.

Perna said this was a "great opportunity to show and enter in contact with the beauty" of the designer's work. On the sidelines of a press conference, Perna fielded questions about the succession issue at the Ferré brand a week after the announcement that creative director Lars Nilsson was leaving the company.

While confessing he did "not know" about the future, Perna said he was more in favor of the option of hiring a new creative director to oversee the design team rather than leaving the team on its own. "We need a face, a person to represent the brand," said Perna. "The heritage left by Ferré is huge and it takes a strong person to manage it."

Perna added that he is looking for "a charismatic leader, not only a creative mind, and someone who will restore Ferré's codes and make them contemporary."

Perna continued to downplay any friction with Nilsson, saying that a trial period had always been in the cards and that the separation had not been traumatic. "Commercially, it was a difficult choice, but we respect the image of Ferré so much that we thought it was best to announce the separation now, before the show, since we were not entirely convinced," said Perna.

Asked about Liborio Capizzi, Ferré's longtime right-hand designer, Perna said he was "recovering" after a period of absence, hard hit by the death of Ferré in June.

As for the foundation, Perna and Airaghi said they will be looking at a suitable location in Milan that will be able to house "thematical exhibitions," for example. "We want this to be an active foundation that will be useful to young fashion students, not a dusty museum," said Airaghi, noting that it is a "huge task" to compile 30 years of history, texts, sketches, clothes and accessories, interviews, photos, publications and catalogues.

Airaghi said her first goal was to be ready in October for an event that will mark the 30th anniversary of the designer's first fashion show in Milan at the Principe di Savoia Hotel in 1978. A book is also in the works.

Airaghi said the foundation also aims at helping students, editing lessons and texts prepared by Ferré for his numerous lectures in schools around the world, and offering masters and awards in his name. One already has been established at Legnano's University, in the designer's hometown outside Milan. The Fondazione has an investment basis of 100,000 euros, or \$145,740 at current exchange, plus a management fund guaranteed by the Ferré firm on a yearly basis. "We like to think of it as somewhat similar to the Yves Saint Laurent Foundation in its mission," said Airaghi.