

Vogue Italia Takes on Racism in Fashion Industry with 'All-Black' Issue

Marisa Iallouardo (July 11, 2008)



Vogue Italia has been making headlines recently: the most recent issue of the quarterly, from cover to coverage, features only black models. Vogue Italia editor-in-chief Franca Sozzani: "the idea came to me six months ago. We were trying to think of something new..."

Vogue Italia has been making headlines recently, and it's not just for their coverage of the latest couture shows. For months, the fashion industry has been buzzing about—and eagerly awaiting—the [mega fashion mag's](#) [2] July issue. Why? Because in an industry that has long been accused of not employing minority models, the most recent issue of the quarterly, from cover to coverage, features only black models.

For years the industry has been called out for not using minorities on the runways, in magazine editorials and for ad campaigns. Reasons cited have included that issues and products don't sell as well and that there aren't enough minority models to go around. "Racial prejudice in the fashion industry has long persisted because of tokenism and lookism," speculates [Cathy Horyn](#) [3] in The



New York Times column Critic's Notebook, 'We already have our black girl,' says a designer to a fashion-show casting agent, declining to see others. Or: 'She doesn't have the right look.' Laziness, paranoia and pedantry may also have something to do with the failure to hire black models for shows and magazine features in any meaningful number, but, hey, that's just a guess."

Vogue Italia editor-in-chief Franca Sozzani, who has helped the magazine gain the reputation for being more cutting-edge than others, says the election here in the U.S. was one of her inspirations for the issue. She [tells](#) [4] the UK newspaper, The Telegraph, "Obama was fighting Hillary, and I began to notice that all these girls at fashion shows looked alike. It occurred to me that it would be interesting to see some different girls, black girls, and that was the beginning of the story."

The story consists of about 100 pages of photographs, with accompanying feature articles highlighting black women in entertainment and the arts. Renowned fashion photographer Steven Meisel, who regularly shoots for the title, took the stunning photos.

"I thought, it's ridiculous, this discrimination. It's so crazy to live in such a narrow, narrow place. Age, weight, sexuality, race — every kind of prejudice," Meisel told Horyn.

To combat it—and prove that there are enough black models to go around—he shot the fabulous faces of Naomi Campbell, Iman and Liya Kebede—who scored the front page of the pull-out cover—as well as newcomers like Jourdan Dunn, Sessilee Lopez and plus-size America's Next Top Model contestant Toccara Jones, among others.

Out in Italy since last Thursday, the issue is due here in the States shortly. Until then, check out some of the photos in this New York Times [slideshow](#) [5].

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