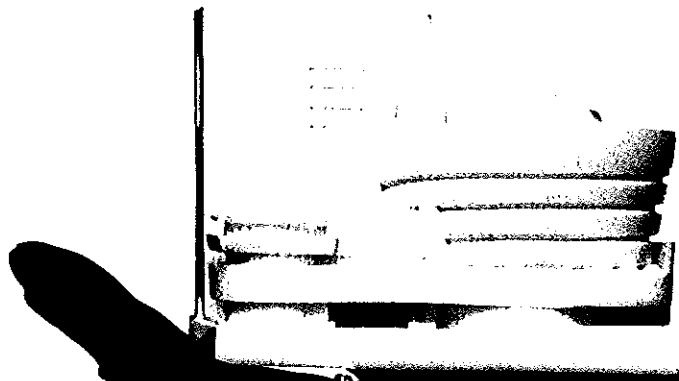


THE
AMERICAN

Benefactor

FALL 1998

FASHION'S
NEW LINE
ENRICHING
THE ARTS



THE SECOND ANNUAL
BENEFACTOR

100

AMERICA'S MOST GENEROUS

H A U T E

The French have taste in all they do,

Which we are quite without,

For nature, which to them gave *gout*,

To us gave only *gout*.

VISITORS MIGHT RECALL this anonymous English rhyme as they walk by the refurbished French 17th-century-painting rooms at the National Gallery in London, and observe the name Yves Saint Laurent as sponsor to the tune of one million pounds. Indeed, gallery-goers might have begun to feel the stylish influence from across the channel while sipping champagne at a museum reception, with bubbly provided by another French donor: LVMH-Moët Hennessy, the holding company that now owns the houses of Givenchy, Kenzo and Christian Lacroix.

As if to prove "the French have taste in all they do," French designers, along with fashion giants in Italy and Germany, have become some of the greatest museum supporters and arts patrons of the day. YSL funds music in Brooklyn and films in Cape Town; LVMH is behind blockbuster shows at the Grand Palais; Hugo Boss has entered the lifeblood of the Guggenheim Museum in four different countries; Prada mounts pioneering projects in the marvelous public space it has created for contemporary art in Milan. In some cases, the philanthropy of the people who dress our increasingly clothes-conscious society extends well beyond their own milieu. Agnès B. sends food to Sarajevo and, with YSL, battles AIDS in Africa. Such efforts parallel the giving of American designers—among them Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Bill Blass, Donna Karan and Ralph Lauren—for whom the causes of choice include education, breast cancer research, children's welfare and inner city outreach.

But for the top European houses, most of the giving is in the visual arena first. The industry relishes its ties with the purity and independence that abide in the elevated sphere of art. As the French novelist J. K. Huysmans declared, "Art is the only clean thing on earth, except holiness." Corporations have long wanted to associate themselves with a side of life thought to be whistle-clean. Designers are particularly concerned with visual beauty, with the human body and with the working of materials, which are also the domain of the arts. However, their philanthropic motives vary, from an unabashed interest in associating a brand name with the cause of high art to a designer's selfless desire to give the public a chance to look and learn.

Obsessed with visual beauty, Europe's leading designers are setting trends and spurring creativity in an aesthetic world beyond their own: the realm of high art.

by **Nicholas Fox Weber**

G I V I N G



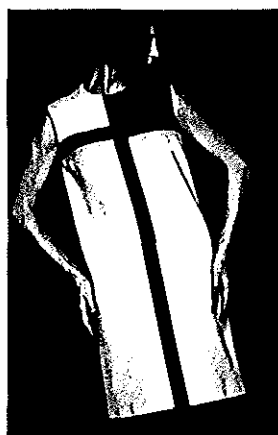
THE QUEEN MOTHER ASKED A FRIEND of ours to help find French support," explains Pierre Bergé, referring to the National Gallery gift. It is last winter in Paris, and Yves Saint Laurent's partner and chairman of the company is in his large office in the corporate headquarters on the Avenue Marceau in the elegant 8th arrondissement. Behind him are Warhol's portrait of Yves, a rare early painting by the Italian Futurist Balla and an electronically operated Calder. A mutual friend of Bergé and The Queen Mother introduced him to Neil MacGregor, the museum's director, whom he liked immediately. When the 17th-century rooms opened in London last May, Bergé says, the million pounds came from his own personal donations, from Saint Laurent himself and "...from the companies who sell YSL's name. But it is not under the corporate name; we don't want that."

Bergé is emphatic that PR isn't the goal. "A donation is not an investment; a museum is not a bank. It's ridiculous when you give money to get a return. Don't, please, confuse Hugo Boss and YSL, or LVMH and YSL." He makes an exception for Agnès B. "We work together—about AIDS, for instance." Bergé is chairman of the Ensemble Contre le SIDA, a parent organization of more than 20 AIDS organizations, and works with Agnès B. on African AIDS programs.

Y V E S S A I N T L A U R E N T

Andy Warhol's portrait of Yves Saint Laurent (above), who, together with his partner, Pierre Bergé, supports a variety of innovative arts projects all over the world.

With a 1965 dress, YSL nods to Mondrian (right).



With personal and corporate funds, Bergé supports the theater director Robert Wilson and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. "Everywhere—not only in America—we [offer] this combination of personal contributions and the company's contributions," he explains. Such an approach may make it easier to respond quickly to a museum's needs. "We helped the Beaubourg with a Miró, *Le Grand Bleu*; the Louvre with a Georges de la Tour." The Miró, Bergé adds with a chuckle, belonged to Hubert de Givenchy, so he took pleasure both in paying its seller and buying it for a worthy institution.

Christopher Girard, YSL's executive vice president in charge of corporate giving, explains, "What Pierre Bergé has taught me is always to leave the door open for anything. Yesterday we paid the airline ticket for a student who specializes in gay studies in China." In 1998 and '99 YSL will help sponsor the first short-film festival in Africa, in Cape Town, "to help South African directors. South Africa represents the ideals of this house: human rights, antiapartheid... We're antibourgeois here, in the real sense. We have no wish to collect any publicity from this; it's a moral thing, a duty."

AGNÈS B.'S HEADQUARTERS in the 10th arrondissement evoke a very different Paris. In a former leather factory in a semi-industrial, working-class neighborhood, the offices and workrooms overlook a vast interior courtyard, four stories high. The décor and the clothes people were wearing made me feel I had stepped into a black and white movie. I might have anticipated this palette from the visual panache of this popular designer. Her strong, straightforward clothing (more expensive than Banana Republic, but less than most designers with name recognition), greatly admired by my teenage daughters and their friends, is now attracting hordes of customers. It's so popular in Japan that 50 Agnès B. shops have recently opened there. When I reached the large office where Agnès sketches and cuts, I was pleasantly surprised to find a modest, friendly and comfortably dressed designer directing it all.

Agnès's method of supporting art is as original and inde-

A G N È S B .

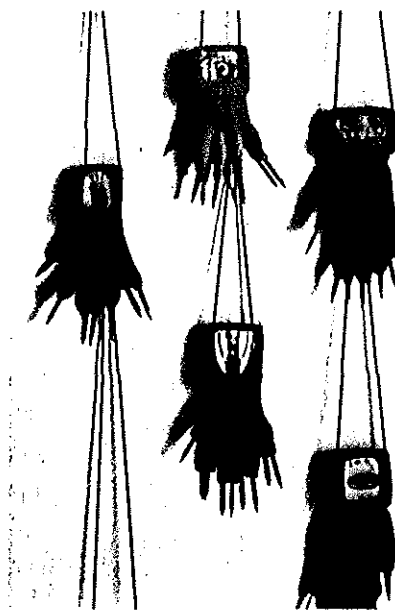
pendent as her clothing. Every six weeks, she produces large-format newsprint publications to be given away in museum shops and Agnès B. boutiques. This comes from "an idea of dispersion of art," she says. "Art comes to [people] in places where they go for other reasons." So a 16-year-old who has gone to buy a sweater finds herself leaving with material introducing her to, in colorful reproduction, the work of Gilbert and George or Jonas Mekas. "I used to put postcards, anything, on the wall," Agnès explains. "I want to give [people the chance] to see."

When Agnès was growing up in the town of Versailles, her parents fought a lot. "The atmosphere was not soft at home. I had to get strength from outside. My father taught me to love art very young." She was married at 17 to the editor Christian Bourgois (the reason for the "b"), gave birth to twins at 19 and left her husband at 20. During her first job at the Jean Fournier Gallery (an early defender of abstract art) she took free evening classes at the École du Louvre. Her life soon took off in other directions—designing clothes, starting her own business, marrying two more times and giving birth to three more children—but her priorities remained the same. "Clothing is not an end; it's a means," she says. She never goes to fashion shows; never shops except for visits once a year to the large Paris department store Galeries Lafayette. "When I go out I go

to galleries, cinema. To see my friends."

She tells me that she and Pierre Bergé work with the anti-AIDS activist organization Act Up, and suddenly I understand why, when taking what I thought was a give-away book of matches at an Agnès B. shop in Paris with my 13-year-old, I discovered I was holding a colorfully packaged condom. In Paris, she owns a gallery—the Galerie du Jour—which is extremely important to her. She contributes to the Musée des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie in Paris, and to the arts center P.S. 1 in New York. And this is all without financial incentive. "The money I give to museums is the same money I have already paid 60 percent taxes on," she says. Her primary residence is in France, where only slightly more than 1 percent of one's income can generally garner a charitable deduction.

One of Agnès's strongest interests is Sarajevo, where she is considered "the godmother" of the Centre André Malraux, a medical facility. She has been there twice since the hardships



Les Gants (The Gloves) by Annette Messenger (left). Every six weeks, Agnès (right) produces and distributes a large-format newsprint publication devoted to the work of an artist such as Messenger. The idea, she says, is to promote the "dispersion of art."

began. "I designed a heart and put them into all the shops. All the money from the sale of the heart [in France] went to the Première Urgence, which took trucks on dangerous roads to distribute food to people in Sarajevo."

This powerful businesswoman has an ethereal, seemingly fragile persona, yet she knows how to give money effectively. "I am in a position to be able to do that," she says of her efforts toward AIDS sufferers and the citizens of Sarajevo. "I think my work is so well paid, it's good to share."



BACK IN THE BASTION OF CHIC near the Arc de Triomphe, in posh offices decorated with leather and brass, LVMH has its corporate command post near boutiques for Givenchy, Vuitton, Kenzo and other of its holdings. The person in charge of the company's cultural funding, Jean-Paul Claverie, initially seems as formal and serious as the setting.

A medical doctor and an international lawyer, Claverie traveled in the upper echelon of the French power structure before coming to LVMH, working for five years in the cabinet of culture minister Jack Lang. "When I entered the company seven years ago, it had only a financial image. It was a holding company, [focused on] the budget, stock options and so on. I proposed to the chairman, Bernard Arnault, to reveal the true image of the company, the values that were the success of the subsidiaries. We chose to support culture."

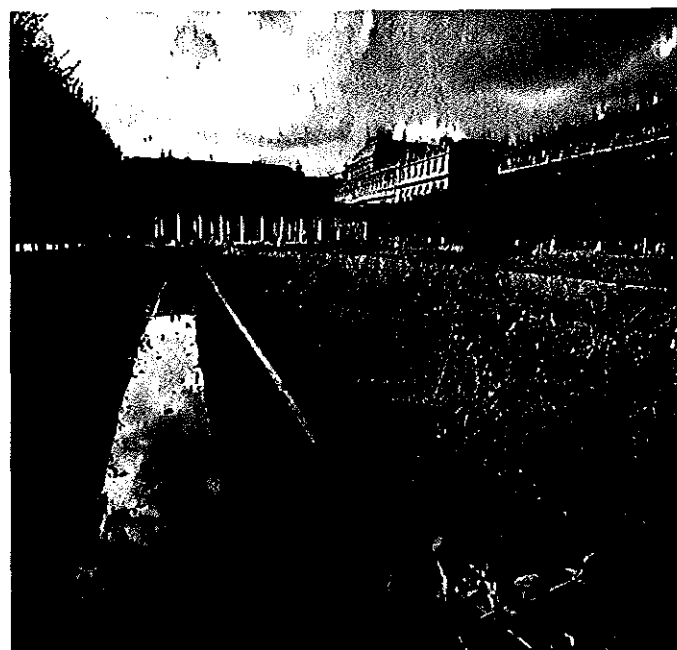
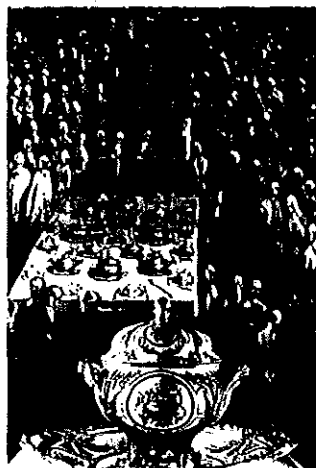
They settled on two main directions. "The first is the patri-

L V M H

mony, the heritage. We have chosen to restore monuments important to our culture: the garden of the Palais Royal, and a large part of the north wing of the Chateau at Versailles."

The other direction involves [projects that] permit our culture to shine. We support artists who have changed the way of seeing the world." Thus LVMH provided much of the initial funding for many of Paris's blockbuster exhibitions of the past few years: Poussin, Cézanne and, concurrently with our conversation, the highly successful Georges de la Tour. Indeed, by the time the crowds at this Grand Palais exhibition were standing six deep in front of the remarkable 17th-century paintings and absorbing de la Tour's unique crystalline light, the corporation's and couturier's names were imprinted in their minds almost as clearly as the artist's.

LVMH has also helped shows that opened abroad to come to France. "If we were not involved in Picasso and Portraiture, it's not sure that the exhibition would have been shown in



Restored garden of the Palais Royal (above).

With an eye on France's past, LVMH sponsored a show of "tables royales" (left)—settings from royal European houses when Versailles was a seat of power—to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Moët & Chandon.

Paris." Sometimes, Claverie points out, initiators of a major museum exhibition will proceed only when promised the company's backing.

Recently, LVMH has begun to think more internationally. They acquired the Spanish leather-goods company Loewe, and DFS, the owner of Duty Free Shops worldwide. Their sponsorship has expanded accordingly; last year they helped pay for the popular Christian Dior show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Claverie is candid about the goals of LVMH's giving. While declaring "I prefer the word 'philanthropy' to 'sponsoring,'" he admits that everything they do helps to further corporate goals. LVMH's well-being is rooted in French artistry and design, which they support in their arts funding. Donations must be "related to the profitability of the company—not the financial profitability, but the shining. A good feeling inside and outside the company." With that in mind, Claverie declares himself "completely open to everybody." LVMH's next big project will be an exhibition devoted to showing the influence of Millet on Van Gogh—a feather in the cap for France, to be sure—at the Musée d'Orsay. ▶



W

HEREAS AGNÈS B. PLACES her fashion work in a lower realm than fine art, the designer Jil Sander—admired for the timeless architectural quality of her impeccably cut clothes and for her reverence for fine materials—views fashion and art in tandem.

Sander's corporate showroom is in a 19th-century mansion overlooking the Alster in Hamburg. Milk glass and nickel silver set the tone against bare white walls. The only suggestion of decoration comes from a large, clear cylindrical vase on Sander's desk holding a bunch of oversize calla lilies, their thick stems carefully twisted around one another.

Sander, along with almost everyone else in the building, is dressed in perfectly fitted charcoal gray. A natural and healthy-

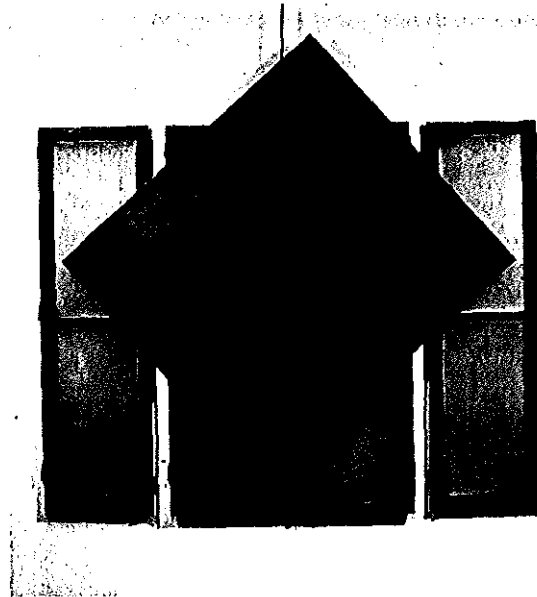
room across the hall, where their solitude in the clean space and strong light maximizes their force.

Sander uses the same space in Milan, the Palazzo delle Stelline, alternately for shows of her latest designs and for art exhibitions. It occupies, she says, "a fifteenth-century palazzo that Leonardo Da Vinci was living in when he painted *The Last Supper*. It was a hospital. Like a church space, very grand and high. We did exhibitions of Beuys, Kounellis, Baselitz, Max Ernst." (In November they will show Meret Oppenheim.) Sander admits, however, that not all of these conform equally to her artistic credo of taut restraint. She is determined to change this, however: "We want to have exhibitions where we can say we are proud."

J I L S A N D E R

looking woman with lively blue eyes and a perpetual half-smile, she resembles an Alpine skier as much as a fashion star. Yet her robustness is countered by noticeable fatigue brought on by the recent showing of her new men's wear line in Milan. "We are living now in a time when we can respect that fashion is very artistic," she says. "In a certain way, you can see fashion and art both reflecting the times."

While the company has in recent years made donations to causes having to do with children's welfare and women fighting cancer, Sander sponsors several important art exhibitions annually in Milan, and she supported the 1996 Florence Biennale, called Art/Fashion. "I was very early interested in watching contemporary art. First the Pop Art: Warhol, Lichtenstein, Rauschenberg. I just hung up my own Marilyns I bought twenty-five years ago." These images by Andy Warhol are now in a



Untitled, by Jannis Kounellis, 1994 (above). Jil Sander (left) sponsored a Kounellis exhibit in a 15th-century palazzo in Milan.

As Sander points out, her philanthropy has had certain limits. Because her company does not produce a less expensive line of goods, its business volume is smaller than that of some other fashion houses. And as the first designer in Germany to have her company go public, she must show her stockholders that anything she does contributes to the company's profitability.

"I'm on a new trip; I'm discovering something else," says Sander, who trimmed her first name from Heidi-Marie Jiline to the "Jil" that is as lean and elegantly spare as her clothing. "I would love to collaborate with artists. I would love with the next exhibition to be very involved and really feel that it's a great step. I will try to be faithful to what I believe, and to keep my integrity."

PERHAPS THE MOST SYSTEMATIC COLLABORATION between fashion and art is the partnership of the German firm of Hugo Boss with the Guggenheim Museum. This businesslike arrangement is explained by Isabella Heudorf, who oversees the art sponsorship out of the corporate headquarters in Metzingen. "If you compare it with other companies that do sponsorship," Heudorf says, "they might do one project here and another there, whereas all our activities fit into our partnership with the Guggenheim."

Polished promotional literature documents each activity. Some are quite novel, like the ArtPass, which permits all of Hugo Boss's employees to visit, free of charge, any of the Guggenheim branches (Bilbao, Venice, Berlin, New York

H U G O B O S S

uptown and downtown) as well as the Tate in London, the Stedelijk in Amsterdam, and museums in Stuttgart and Sydney. The company has also had great success with the \$50,000 Hugo Boss Prize, now the most prestigious and lucrative award given to a contemporary artist in the United States.

Boss is a thriving company with three lines of clothing: Hugo (for the younger crowd, and at the lowest prices); Boss (their main label); and Baldessarini (named for its designer, featuring fine Egyptian cottons and other luxury materials). There is also a new women's line. The Guggenheim partnership is part of an overall effort "to build bridges" with clients. "More people, we discovered, visit museums than sports events," says Heudorf.

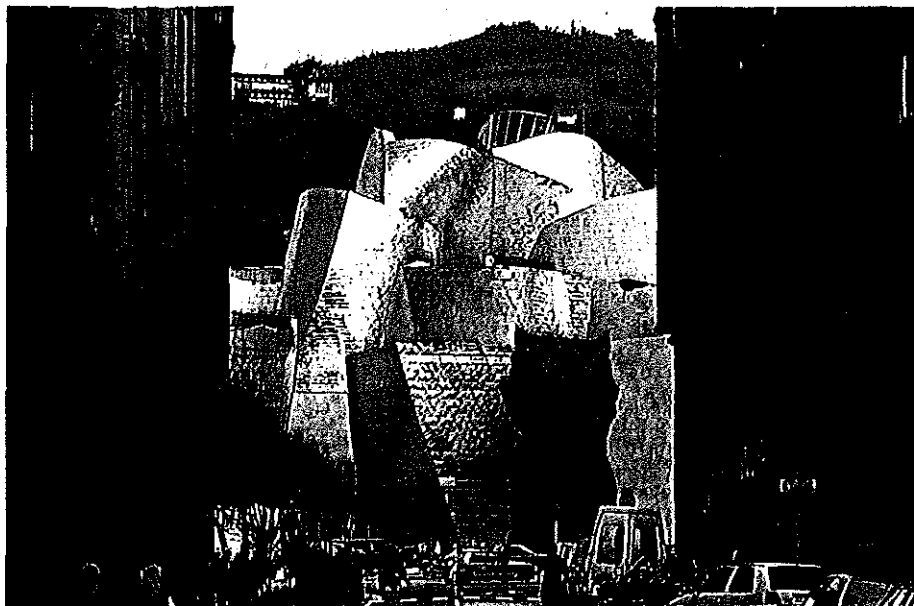
Now that Hugo Boss has nearly 250 shops worldwide, as well as departments within larger stores, they want the connection felt in many locations, and, under the directorship of Thomas Krens, the Guggenheim has begun to develop a network with some of that reach. "We really consider sponsorship where you give and are involved but also get something back," says Heudorf. "Hugo Boss is a shareholder company." Like Jil Sander, Boss needs to validate its giving on the balance sheet. Yet the

reasons for Boss's activities are in part philanthropic as well. "In Europe, the state can't support the arts as much as before. We feel a social responsibility."

Heudorf explains that Boss becomes deeply involved in any project it supports. The company has included Jeff Koons's work in its advertising and on its ArtPass, for which a limited edition collector's item is produced each year. And when the Guggenheim opened in Bilbao this past fall, Koons's gigantic *Puppy*—a vastly overgrown toy dog made out of flowering plants, the blossoms of petunias, impatiens, chrysanthemums and marigolds adorning its surface—stood in front of the building. "A symbol, according to Koons, of 'love, warmth and happiness,' the 12.4-meter-high sculpture

When, with Hugo Boss's support, the Guggenheim opened in Bilbao this past fall, Jeff Koons's gigantic *Puppy*—a vastly overgrown toy dog made out of flowering plants—stood in front of the building (below).

sits in all its glory at the entrance to Frank Gehry's remarkable edifice." The words are Thomas Krens's, from the lavish folder Boss published about the piece: "with the visionary support of Hugo Boss, whose ongoing collaborative relationship with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation has enabled the institution to realize many significant cultural events." ▶



THE COOL, white headquarters of Prada in Milan, like Jil Sander's in Hamburg, are strikingly austere and elegant. But, like the shoes and clothing that emanate from this setting, it is lighter and more playful; the minimalist aesthetic is more airy than somber. The high spirits are most apparent when the earthy, animated Miuccia Prada walks in, the soft black of her clothing offset by the glitter embroidered into her neckline.

Miuccia Prada is immediately clear about the intention behind her company's philanthropy. There is, she says, a "complete separation between our business and the foundation. We want to do something significant for art in Milan, not for Prada. Not for promoting Prada."

Under the guidance of artistic advisor Pandora Tabatabai Asbaghi, the Fondazione Prada in Milan has become an important and unique showcase of contemporary art. The foundation has brought to Italy the work of modernists as significant as Michael Heizer, Louise Bourgeois and Dan

Buono and other art world notables. But this is an error, because from the start she made it clear to the event organizers that she doesn't like public speaking. Nor will she stay for the concert afterward; after putting in a gracious appearance, her goal is to get home to her children, ages eight and ten.

The church contains the last project of Dan Flavin's lifetime (he died two days after it was completed). Flavin's colored lights turn the spartan, rather fascistic architecture of the 1930's building into an enormously poetic space. The stark white caverns have become richly luminous. To some of us, it is more effective than the Rothko Chapel in Houston—more connected to reality because of its use of a previously existing space in a working-class neighborhood, less contrived, visually simpler and stronger.

In her office a few hours earlier, Prada had spoken of what convinced her to have the Prada Foundation join with New York's Dia Center for the Arts to fund this exciting venture,

P R A D A

Flavin. And, because of the exceptional gallery space and Asbaghi's visual acuity, it has earned international acclaim for its pristine but lively presentation of the shows.

Prada, along with her husband and business partner, Patrizio Bertelli, is extremely serious and diligent about the artists (three or four a year) with whom the foundation will become involved. And it is only the artists—not the museums, not shows at other locations, certainly not PR-minded social events—that concern them. "The most difficult thing is to decide which artists we want to choose," says Prada.

At 7 p.m. the same day as our meeting, Miuccia Prada is in the front pew of the Church of Santa Maria Annunciata, for a special event organized by FAI—the Fondo per L'Ambiente Italiano, an organization that preserves Italian culture. While she has refreshed herself for the occasion, she has not changed her outfit. Prada is listed on the program as a speaker, along with renowned Minimalist-art collector Count Giuseppe Panza di



Miuccia Prada (right) sponsored Dan Flavin's installation in the Church of Santa Maria Annunciata, a.k.a. the Chiesa Rossa (above).

which will remain in place indefinitely. The project seems to reflect aspects of her aesthetic interests and her sociopolitical ideals. At first the idea of a church didn't move her, but then, she says, "We realized that the problem of religion is a very contemporary problem."

With her sparkling intelligence and lively imagination, it's not surprising that Prada would want to help bring modern light into a previously barren neighborhood church. Miuccia Prada, like her fellow fashion luminaries, is advancing and enriching culture in leaps and bounds.

Prada acts as a designer and an idealist. Financially, there are no benefits; the Prada family does this because they believe in it. As in France, Italian firms enjoy no charitable deductions through their philanthropy. "You just spend money," says Prada with her earthy laugh. "But you have to do it because you care." ■

