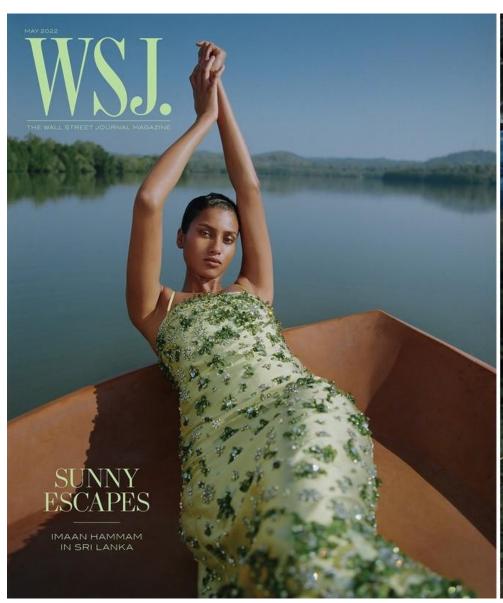








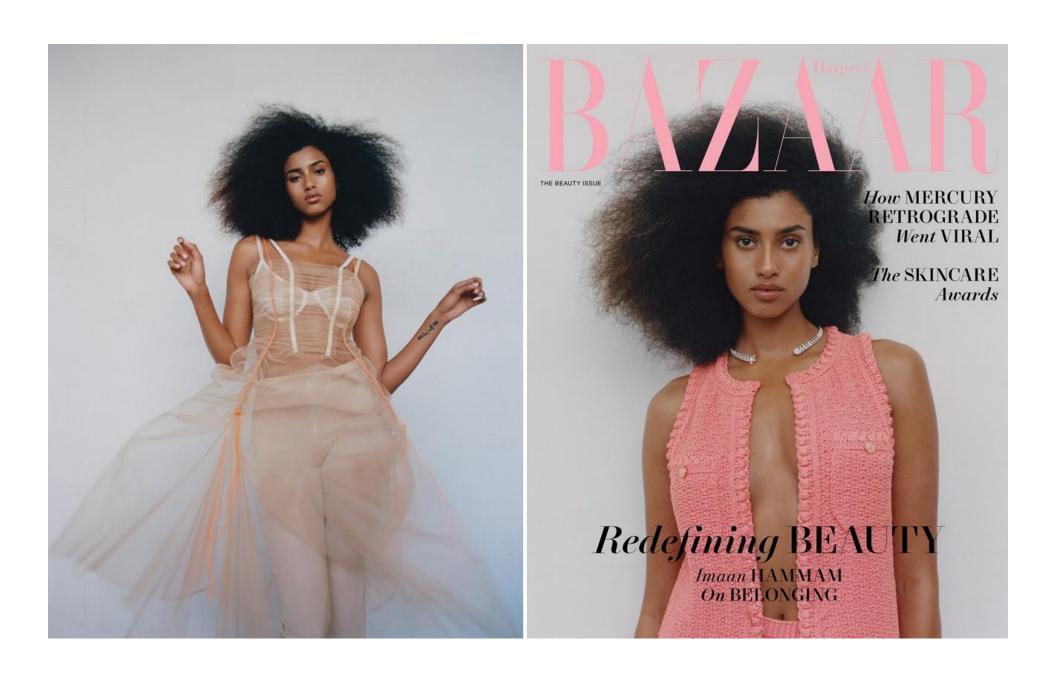
IMAAN HAMMAM



























n 2003, the filmmaker Douglas Keeve set out to capture the inaugural class of the CFDAV/ogue Fashion Fund. He spent most of a year training his cameras on thirteen energetic young designers in need of money, mentoring, and the elusive magic that comes from being anointed "the future" in an industry besotted with what's next. For any director, this assignment should have been the stuff of magic: cool kids, beautiful clothes, gorgeous models, celebrated judges, and celebrity talking heads—cinematographic proof that Warhol was right and happiness really is a lob in

New York. But the resulting documentary, Seamless, told a different story (and the footage on the cutting-room floor was even more devastating). Doo-Ri Chung, a 2006 winner, lost her studio when her parents' dry-cleaning business in New Jersey burned to the ground. Alexandre Plokhov of Cloak, 2004 runner-up, found himself in the dark—literally—with a collection to finish when his alt-folk, cello-playing business partner went on tour with a punk band without paying the electric bill. Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez of Proenza Schouler, winners in 2004, struggled to keep their personal and professional partnership intact in ways that were heartbreaking to behold. Why would anyone want to be a designer, anyway? It all seemed so insurmountably hard.

Of course, this was exactly why the CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund was created fifteen years ago: to make the American fashion community more caring, more creative, more conscionable. At Vogue, we had seen how 9/11 toppled the businesses of an entire generation of new creators and had tried to help by funding group shows and solo efforts under the rubric An American View. We had forgone the opportunity to participate in reality-television shows where, by design, entertainment would trump talent. We wanted to face the hard truths of our industry: that the so-called young designers were then in their 40s; that diversity was nonexistent and not discussed; that the gap between the haves and the have-nothings was not only wrong but also fundamentally deadening to a community based on vibrancy. Plokhov was not the only one shrouded in gloom: The lights were going out on American fashion.

And what a difference a competition makes Fifteen years and 150 finalists later, the CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund prize has created global stars, local heroes, a must-watch New York Fashion Week, and, most important, a true sense of community among designers of all ages and backgrounds—all with differing aesthetic and commercial aspirations—who communicate, collaborate, and essentially care for one another through the fun and not-so-fun times. (As Keeve saw in his lens, creativity is never easy, business is always going to be challenging, and life will whack you sideways.) The small comfort of knowing they are not alone has given American designers the freedom to think bigger, bolder, and more beautifully for the world they dress—for all of us, basically. Fifteen years later, we are all winners.—Sally SINGER

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MIKAELJANSSON

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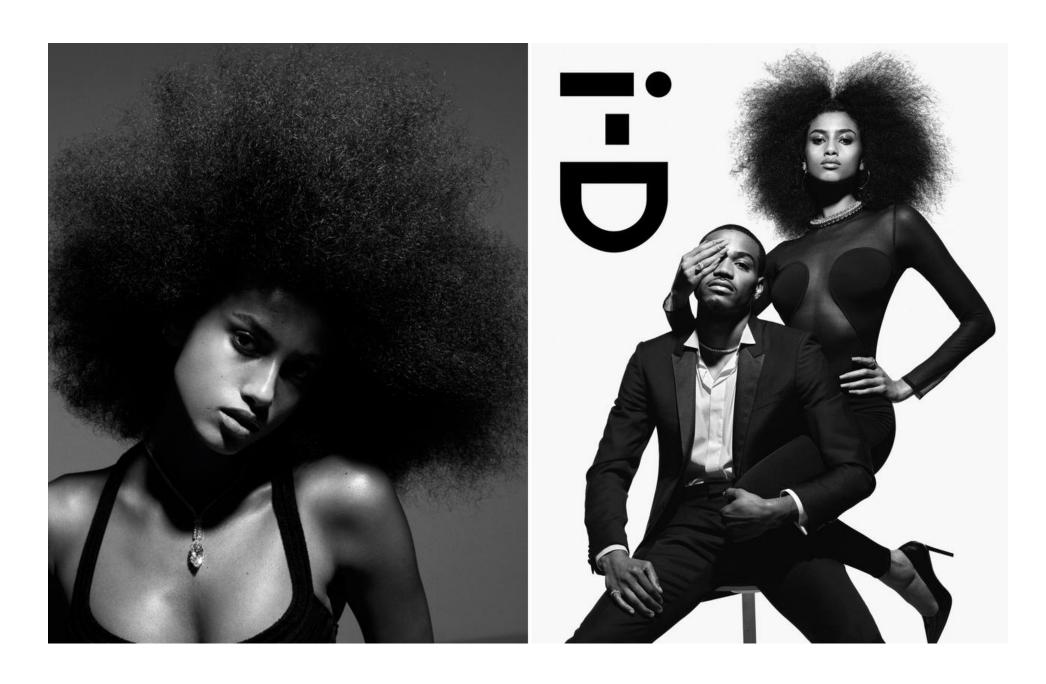
Going incognito has never looked quite this sharp. Hammam wears a Balenciaga distressed coat. turtleneck (\$1,090), and earnings; balenciaga.com.

WINGS OF DESIRE

A dramatic Schiaparelli dress (styled with an earring and boots, also from Schiaparelli; schiapar

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