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The English reaction to the

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LOVE CONQUERS ALL

Virgil's words have never seemed more fitting in the face of the Italian government's stance on immigration and the Tuscan Region's ever-embracing approach to peoples and cultures.

Farah Liz Parallo

EXPATS IN FLORENCE / Phoebe Owston

On a dreary January afternoon, Farah Liz Parallo and her infectious positivity fill the office like a ray of winter sunshine. Passion, determination and an undefeatable belief in the fashion industry are my first impressions of this designer-turned-consultant-turned-author.

In a country where disdain towards the machinations of everyday life is sometimes as prevalent as pizza, it's refreshing to meet someone who is genuinely supportive of the city's fashion sector, the people that work within it and what they can bring to Florence. This belief is manifested in Farah's recent professional timeline as well in as her attitude. A professor at Polimoda, a fashion consultant and now a best-selling author, she wrote her book *Fashion. Business. Spirituality: A Call to the Light Workers of the Fashion Industry* because of Florence, she tells me. Unlike its fast-paced cousin Milan, the Tuscan metropolis gave the writer the time and space to harvest her ideas into the part-memoir, part-guide that was published in May 2018. The book has enjoyed success and has helped to spread awareness about what, Farah says, is the problem in the industry: that basic human needs are not being looked after.

In addition to the slower pace of life the city generally offers, the general about-turn in consumer thinking is fuelling the fight against mistreatment in the fashion industry. But, as Farah points out, most of this attention spotlights the conditions of workers overseas, in sweatshops and factories, which while important means that we don't see when it is actually occurring under our noses. Eighteen-hour days for an unpaid fashion intern is the norm, but it's ultimately "unsustainable," she maintains. It sounds like a potentially unmanageable task, to turn around a systematic industry-wide attitude, but Farah remains optimistic, saying that small brands and individuals are already doing the work by opening up a dialogue. She believes that the big names will follow suit.

Like many of us in Florence, Farah arrived by accident. After living in Milan for 11 years and working with some of the biggest designers in product development, she started coming here more and more when Polimoda asked her help in structuring courses. "What I love about the city is that it's objectively beautiful, but it's of just the right dimension for me to grow professionally and at the same time have a life," which, she claims, is difficult in Milan where you don't live your life, you live the city.

"Florence is not a fashion city," she asserts confidently, "but it has a concrete fashion system because the product is at the centre of everything." Citing the Dior and Prada factories in Scandicci, she speaks adoringly about Florence's product-based artisanal history and how the city has grown so much in fashion terms, becoming one of the best suppliers in Europe for accessories.

A frequent attendee of Pitti Uomo, Farah cites them as one of the most "smart and visionary" players in the sector. "Pitti chose an unlikely city to have their trade show and they were visionaries, giving space to showcase menswear when the industry was this big," gesturing about an inch with her thumb and forefinger. She underlines to me how Pitti Uomo is a melting pot of productive business; it sees many business agreements finalised and connections made in its hallowed halls.

But has mental health in fashion, a principal theme in her book, been increasingly present at large international events like Pitti Uomo? "The awareness is there in the industry," Farah explains, "but often tradeshows focus more on the business side of fashion



rather than communication. However, inside educational institutions there is a real emphasis on supporting young talent and being ethical in how you produce and how you treat your employees. To discuss these delicate things, you need to be respectful of the platform."

She goes on to highlight some of the intricacies that Italy faces as a country; there are certain taboos that must be considered and worked around. "Having a therapist here can be an awkward topic, whereas in New York if you don't have a psychoanalyst you're a nobody," she laughs. That said, delighted with the response to her book in Italy, Farah approaches the matter with a confident and constructive attitude, saying that there's a lot being done to tackle destructive behaviours in the country's fashion industry, internally, behind the scenes.

Saving the fashion world is not an overnight job and Farah is far from completing her mission. With more plans in the pipeline, such as a bible for style entrepreneurs and upcoming events in Florence, we can expect to hear more from this bright beacon of hope for the future of fashion.

When she's not strolling down via Gioberti in her new neighbourhood, Farah loves eating at vegan-friendly places like Carduccio (sdrucchiolo de' Pitti 10R) and stopping in at many of the small art galleries dotted around the city.

First kiss to heartbreak

THE VIBE / Michelle Davis

February, the month of love and romance. This sentimental jukebox takes a dip into the past tracking the ups and downs of lurve and couplehood across Italy's glorious repertoire of oldies but goldies.



Adriano Celentano, *Il tuo bacio è come un rock*

Mr. Celentano doesn't mince words in this 1960s hit. The song proved quite a challenge for the singer and his songwriting team, which still puts musicians to the test: how can you credibly combine the Italian language, melodic and decadent, with the straightforward stepped-up tempos of R'n'R? The result is a crunchy swing-tinged statement wrapped in Mediterranean flirtiness.

Mia Martini, *Almeno tu nell'universo*

Mia Martini had been retired from music for six years before she released this much-loved tune in 1989; her name and reputation had been marred by a small-town rumor that she brought bad luck. She never regained her confidence, was ostracized by the music business, and even her death is shrouded in mystery, but the lyrics continue to bring light and love.

Gino Paoli/Ornella Vanoni, *Senza Fine*

Voluptuous and mesmerizing like a French waltz, in the folds of this song lies a tangled love story with a happy ending. Written in 1961 by Gino Paoli for actress and singer Ornella Vanoni, his secret lover at the time, *Senza Fine* was a B-side that became a Top 10 hit. The two musicians recorded separate renditions, both praised nationwide.



Mina, *Se Telefonando*

Released in 1966, *Se Telefonando* was composed for Mina by the one and only Ennio Morricone and is regarded as one of her best songs. The sophisticated arrangement captures the nuances of heartbreak from the guilty party's perspective, who can't bring herself to pick up the phone and face the consequences. One could even say that Mina was an early pioneer of today's ghosting phenomenon.

Lucio Battisti, *Amarsi un po'*

Singer-songwriter Lucio Battisti and wordsmith/producer Mogol are considered the dream team of the 1960s and '70s. Serenading the pain and bliss of budding love, *Amarsi un po'* was such a success in Italy that an English version was recorded for the international market. Renamed *To Feel in Love*, it featured lyrics by BBC DJ Peter Powell and was a huge flop. In 2017, the song was included in an Emmy-nominated episode of *Master of None*.