

At the Movies with Hariette: Valentino the Last Emperor

Contributed by Hariette Surovell

This statement so alienated me that when a cutting-edge journo correctly predicted that Valentino would soon suffer the fate of another fashion "emperor", Pierre Cardin, "whose name now only sells belt buckles", I cheered. The Valentino Fashion Group was indeed bought out in 2002, then the buyer sold-out or was bought-out, whatever, and then the new designated chief designers quit or were fired. Does any of this matter in a documentary devoid of facts? Valentino's lover, Giancarlo Giammetti, stated on the record that despite their constant mutual hissy-fittings ("Your belly is showing!", "Look who is talking! You and your three layers!"), they have only been separated for 60 days in 45 years. Could the testy Napoleon and his collagen-lipped acolyte have even spent hours excessively self-tanning together (<http://www.awfulplasticsurgery.com/category/valentino/>)? I attempted to do the math in my head when Valentino commanded his main seamstress to oversee the hand-sewing of "millions" of sequins on a dress (an outfit so amateurish that the kvelling it received from his many slaves and sycophants was a clear-cut example of "the emperor's new clothes.") The movie's piece-de-resistance, Valentino's "45 Years of Style Celebration" in the Roman Forum was an aesthetic catastrophe, an exercise in garish ghoulishness, an event so tacky that the ghosts of Nero and Caligula were heard screaming. Zillions of air-kisses were exchanged by the guests, mostly scary-looking celebs, each one sporting new facial features: blubbery lips, snipped-off noses, the popularity-expanding "chipmunk cheeks." Wig-less mannequins clothed in lengthy Valentino classics ("Never in my life have I designed an evening gown that exposed a woman's ankles!") were mounted vertically on crypt-like walls. Karl Lagerfeld (in signature shades, natch), perused these vaults as if scouting out a bank job, half-heartedly pretending to be Valentino's vrai industry copain--not what he has always been, a cut-throat competitor. The most important stars of the movie were Valentino's "beautiful dogs." Call it my pet peeve, but it was clear that their lives had more value to Valentino than any and all of the women who have funded his livelihood and lifestyle for half a century. They were five or six identical pugs, their tails permanently twirled up like corkscrews, thus perpetually revealing their huge grey-black anuses. Such access surely allows fellow canines to greet them more easily, but wouldn't constant exposure to wind, rain, snow, hail and falling icicles ultimately erode this delicate fabric? What happens to pugs who escape their cosseted lives? And don't they ever just want to straighten their tails?