

Inside the Inaugural Franca Fund Gala in Doha

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The late [Franca Sozzani](#) was one astonishing woman. As the longtime editor of *Italian Vogue*—among the numerous strings to her bow—she combined her exquisite taste with a sense of political engagement, an instinct for the truth, and a sparkling dash of dry wit. Her inimitable spirit could certainly be felt in the air at the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha on Sunday evening as her memory was celebrated.

As for the setting, she would have approved too. The first-ever [Franca Fund Gala](#) took place at the breathtaking Qatari museum. Designed by architect I.M. Pei and completed in 2008, the sand-hued museum rests on a peninsula that juts out into the Doha Bay. Hosted by Anna Wintour, Sozzani's son Francesco Carrozzini, and H.E. Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the evening was filled with those near and dear to the influential editor.

On the red carpet, the plentiful tributes were heartfelt. "Franca used fashion to say something different, making it something more profound," Pierpaolo Piccioli said. "Everything she did—from the Black issue to the ecological issue—said something important. She talked about inclusivity, shape, and culture: it was always necessary and relevant." Daniel Roseberry of Schiaparelli recalled his first time meeting her. "When I was about 23 years old, I went to a dinner that she co-hosted. She is among the women who have shifted the conversation; the women who have seismically changed the course of fashion." Carla Sozzani, her sister, was also feeling proud. "The fact that we are having a big celebration for her and her memory and for what she's done for these young designers, it's very joyful," she told me.

A strong cohort of supermodels had flown across the world to attend the black-tie affair. Natalia Vodianova wore a sensational vintage Dolce & Gabbana wasp-waist ballgown with a ballooning skirt of ostrich feathers. Paloma Elsesser also went the vintage route in a beige *Comme des Garçons* number; prim from the front, but with unexpected puffed-up detailing when she turned around. Mariacarla Boscono donned a slinky Art Deco-leaning Giorgio Armani dress, while Gisele Bündchen strode down the red carpet in glittering ebony sequins as

only she could. They were flanked by designers including Christian Louboutin, Francesco Risso, Giambattista Valli, and Miuccia Prada dressed in shimmering pink.

"Franca was a huge inspiration to me," milliner Stephen Jones said. "I remember when I was first starting out and I would do fashion shows with Princess Julia in my showroom, and Franca and Carla would come down and pass around cups of coffee, helping me with my show." Jones recalled Sozzani bringing her young son with her, allowing him to try on fantastical hats in the studio. "Anybody who is into fashion hunts out all those Italian *Vogues* that she did with the incredible Steven Meisel pictures. I am just so pleased that she was part of my life," he continued.

Inside the museum, throngs of guests gathered among the majestic art before finding their seats for an al fresco dinner. Set designer Stefan Beckman had created a ravishing mise en scène, with rattan furniture, pink and orange-toned tablescapes cascading with flowers, and layered Arabic rugs underfoot. During the program, Iranian-French entertainer Golshifteh Farahani regaled the crowd with a performance on the hang drum, accompanied by her hauntingly beautiful voice. After a relaxed and unhurried Italian meal that stretched into the night, Palestinian-Chilean pop star Elyanna took to the stage, joined by a choir of 10 girls from Siwar. Finishing her fiery and upbeat set, she opted for a soulful Egyptian song from the 1970s.

An auction began with a swirling Damien Hirst painting of Sozzani on the ballot. Proceeds from the event, which raised over \$4 million, will support The Franca Fund, which was inaugurated in 2018 to support pioneering preventative genomics research—overseen by oncologist Dr. Robert Green—and help establish a permanent Endowed Professorship in Preventive Genomics at Harvard. "Our work is looking at the DNA of newborn babies in order to predict some of the diseases that they might be vulnerable to," Dr. Green told me earlier in the evening. "That work, believe it or not, has been very controversial. The Franca Fund has helped us overcome some of those obstacles in order to get to a point where we have led the world in scientific inquiry around this."

Carrozzini also told me passionately that the foundation aims to shift how the world looks at medicine and prevention. "We carry information within ourselves that we can do a lot about, but genetic testing is limited to certain diseases," he said. "While there are a lot of moral and ethical issues, there are still things that are actionable. Knowledge is power."

"Franca would be so proud of Francesco and his commitment and dedication," H.E. Sheikha Al Mayassa concluded. "She was very fond of her son and always spoke about him. The Fund will support so many people [and work towards] finding cures. What I was very proud to do was to support a friend who we lost. Franca was one of those rare jewels, and her legacy lives on."