ALMINE RECH

Francesco Vezzoli presents KARL GOES TO MEMPHIS
Tribute to a historic encounter in Monte Carlo

Mar 20 — May 24, 2025 | Monaco

Almine Rech Monaco is pleased to announce 'Francesco Vezzoli presents: KARL GOES TO MEMPHIS Tribute to a historic encounter in Monte Carlo', Francesco Vezzoli's third solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from March 20 to May 24, 2025, in collaboration with Memphis.

"It was love at first sight. When I saw the Memphis show in September '81 in Milan. I had just got a big apartment in Monte Carlo. And had no idea how to furnish it. I had never lived in a modern building. I wanted it all modern and instantly thought that Memphis would be the Art Deco of the '80s. I was right. The influence was enormous. Memphis tried to breathe fresh air into the word "design." And what I like about all the Memphis stuff is its humor."
— Karl Lagerfeld

When Karl decided to live in Roccabella, he started a new chapter of his life that he was about to illustrate with a radical change of style, the complete opposite of the Grand Siècle apartment where he lived in one of the most beautiful mansions in Faubourg Saint-Germain - one of these sudden changes he often liked to make, that took him out of his own image and undoubtedly proved anew his creative freedom.

As he faced the bright sun and the colours of the sea, Karl felt that Roccabella's Mediterranean modernity demanded a vivid response from him.

This would be the Memphis style.

He had long been attracted to this Mediterranean Sea, that of this particular Rock, that also of Saint-Tropez in those years; and, with his friend Helmut Newton, he had often organised photo shoots there. It was in his La Ponche apartment that, ten years earlier, had been taken this picture of me: I had created my first gold bracelets and had to pose with them, in a dress designed by Karl for Chloé. A very simple dress made up of three jersey parts: a black skirt to which two triangles, one black, one white, were attached to create the top. I had just attached the black part and was about to take the white one, when Helmut exclaimed: "Stop! The look is perfect!". And, faster than I, Karl grabbed a glass of whiskey that he put into my right hand to hide my breast!

On this French Riviera that he loved as much as I did, Karl was about to surround himself, for the first time, with a geometric, childlike and colourful decor. Fine, but why specifically Memphis?

Three qualities characterised Karl: an encyclopaedic culture that he constantly nurtured as he was one of those who only needed 4 to 5 hours of sleep; a love for the present that always took him forward, never looking or turning back; and last but not least, an obvious sense of humour in all his creations as well as in his vision of life and his way of expressing it. To me, Karl's trademark was his caustic, irreverent humour, which applied to everything he dealt with, and thanks to which he was able to approach the Chanel world, i.e. not as a fashion historian but as an heir who was able to extend and adapt his zeitgeist to that of a bygone era.

His way of not taking things too seriously, while still respecting them, did much for our friendship. I remember a Roman *soirée*, in a Rome that was still that of the *dolce vita*. Karl had designed for me a black crêpe de Chine strapless dress with geometric gold-lamé embroidery highlights. And I surprised him, making him burst out with laughter, as I arrived with an authentic Thai dancer's headdress brought back from Bangkok, a real wedding cake in the shape of a winged pagoda, topped by a 30-cm-high oriental Eiffel Tower! As we arrived at the party, Karl holding one of my arms and Omar Sharif the other; we met Fellini, who was leaving and who, surprised, asked me: "Stai girando?" (You're making a film?) My extravagance had exceeded his imagination!

It is this same excess, along with his creative enthusiasm, that is at the root of this "full-on Memphis" interior that Karl wanted when he arrived in Monte Carlo.

— Paloma Picasso