

French fashion giants ban ultra-thin models (Update)

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A host of French-owned fashion labels spanning Christian Dior to Saint Laurent pledged Wednesday to ban ultra-thin models from their advertising and catwalk shows following repeated scandals about anorexia and mistreatment.

French holding companies LVMH and Kering, which own dozens of top brands between them, unveiled a charter "to ensure the well-being of models" which will also outlaw the hiring of girls under the age of 16 to wear adult clothes at shoots or events.

In May, a French law requiring models to present a doctor's certificate attesting to their health and was introduced to try to tackle the problem of the industry promoting thinness and unattainable beauty ideals.

Ahead of the start of New York Fashion Week, the two French groups said they would ban their designers using size 32 models under the French system—size XXS or size zero in the US or four in Britain—and only use women who are size 34 or over. Men would need to be size 44 or over.

"Respecting the dignity of all women has always been both a personal commitment for me and a priority for Kering as a group," the company's billionaire chairman Francois-Henri Pinault said in a statement.

"We hope to inspire the entire industry to follow suit, thus making a real difference in the working conditions of fashion models industry-wide,"

he added.

Building new standards

As well as the age and size stipulations, the charter includes other health and safety measures such as banning the serving of alcohol to models under 18 and ensuring they have a guardian or chaperone present at all times.

It has been spurred in part by a scandal during Paris Fashion Week in February which cast a spotlight on abuses by casting agencies which provide models for the big labels.

Two leading casting directors were accused of making at least 150 women wait for several hours in a stairway in the dark to audition for a show by the label Balenciaga, owned by Kering.

The American casting director James Scully denounced his rivals as "serial abusers" and said their treatment of the models was "sadistic and cruel".

The industry has long been accused of promoting unhealthy body images to women and ignoring well-documented health problems experienced by models.

Last year, French former supermodel Victoire Dauxerre published a tell-all book about the pressures to fit into size 32-24 clothes which led her to adopt a diet of three apples a day and laxatives.

Another French model, Isabelle Caro, fronted a shocking anti-anorexia campaign during Milan fashion week in 2007 before she died from the disease three years later at the age of 28.

"As the leader in the luxury sector, we believe it is our role to be at the forefront of this initiative," Antoine Arnault, a board member of LVMH and son of owner Bernard Arnault, said in a statement announcing the charter.

Speaking to AFP, Arnault explained that some designers had size 32 or XXS models in mind when at the drawing board.

"Many people didn't even know that size 32 existed," he said. "That's finished now, the size will be 34 and above, which is already quite small."

He said LVMH would stop hiring under-16 minors—a common practice in the industry. "A young girl of 15 doesn't have the faculties to take on the difficult world of fashion and modelling," he said.

In 2015, Israeli model Sofia Mechetner, then aged 14, featured in a catwalk show for Dior, while Karl Lagerfeld said in March that he thought girls of 15 were old enough to model.

He opened his show for Chanel with the American teenager Cara Taylor, who has also worked for other big brands including Valentino and Saint Laurent.

LVMH is a luxury goods behemoth that owns classic French brands Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior and Givenchy as well as other high-end European names including Fendi and Marc Jacobs.

Kering owns Gucci, Bottega Veneta, Alexander McQueen and Saint Laurent among others.

In 2015, Saint Laurent had to withdraw a magazine advertisement in Britain over its use of an "unhealthily thin model" and earlier this year, it

caused outrage with a poster campaign around Paris.

In those pictures, a reclining woman in a fur coat and fishnet tights was pictured opening her legs, while another extremely thin model was photographed in a leotard and roller skate stilettos bending over a stool.

The head of the French advertising authority said they were part of a disturbing trend in fashion promoting "porno-chic" and the label was ordered to remove them.

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