

FERDINANDO SARMI

UNTOLD STORIES OF NEW YORK FASHION

A SHORT DOCUMENTARY

PRESS KIT

August 2026



Film at a Glance

International Title	Ferdinando Sarmi: Untold Stories of New York Fashion
Format	Short Documentary
Estimated Running Time	20-22 minutes
Language	English
Subtitles	English / Italian
Country of Production	United States
Year of Completion	2026
Genres	Fashion, Design, Cultural Heritage, Cinema, Biography
Screening Formats	H.264 screener
Premiere Status	Previously presented as an installation at Palazzo Pitti (Florence) Italy as part of the exhibition: "Sarmi New York: A Journey into Fashion. From Florence to Fifth Ave" (June 2026)
Production Status	Festival-ready working reference

Logline

The untold story of Ferdinando Sarmi, the Italian designer who established his career in NYC where he lived for two decades (1951- 1973). His vision and craftsmanship contributed to elevate American-made ready-to-wear to the level of couture. He helped shape New York and American fashion, dressing celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn, Wallis Simpson, Pat Nixon, and New York socialite such as Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney.

Short Synopsis

For the first time, "Ferdinando Sarmi: Untold Stories of New York Fashion" brings to the public eye the life and legacy of an Italian-born designer whose work moved between couture, New York society, cinema and costume. He was an ambassador of Italian style in the US. The film is the result of years of research in archives all over the world, including the Metropolitan Museum/Costume Collection, The Museum of the City of New York, the Fashion Group International at the New York Public Library, The Eleanor Lambert collection at the Fashion Institute of Technology, the Istituto Luce Archive in Rome, the Special Collection at Parsons, The New School for Design, the Fondo Sarmi at the Palazzo Pitti archive in Florence, interviews, and Italian and American magazines and periodicals. The result is a contemporary visual journey through New York, the city that made him famous. The film traces Sarmi's remarkable path from Italy to America and brings his work and memory back to life.

Long Synopsis

Ferdinando Sarmi (1912-1982) was born to an aristocratic Italian family that had imagined for him a career in law or medicine. At first, studying law at the University of Siena, he followed this path, but in Rome during the Nazi occupation of the city in WWII, he broke his family's expectations. As an antifascist, he found refuge in the Vatican, where he immersed himself in art and fashion. At the end of the war, he abandoned

his law and embraced fashion. He worked in an important atelier in Rome and was discovered by Michelangelo Antonioni who chose him as costume designer as well as an actor for his first feature film *Cronaca di un amore* (1950). Sarmi's costumes and styling for the young and inexperienced leading actress, Lucia Bosè, turned her into a diva.

1951 was a pivotal year for Sarmi. He was called to design a collection for the Rome couturier Alberto Fabiani who presented his creations at the fashion event of the year: the show organized by Giovan Battista Giorgini at the Villa Torreggiani in Florence. All the major American press outlets descended on Florence after attending the Paris shows. It was a huge success especially with the US contingent and helped to cement the diplomatic, cultural and economic relationship between Marshall-planned Italy and America. The same year Sarmi received an offer to work in New York as head designer for Elizabeth Arden's couture and sophisticated ready-to-wear collections. After working seven and a half years at Elizabeth Arden, he established his own label "Sarmi New York" and created a distinctive vocabulary of elegance, theatricality and refined craftsmanship. His career intersected with the worlds of haute couture, ready-to-wear, celebrity culture, costume and the visual culture of twentieth-century America. Sarmi became a household name among socialite and celebrities. In 1960 he received the "Coty Award," equivalent to the Oscar for fashion. The pages of *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times* and many more are populated with his iconic dresses worn by models like Verushka, Marisa Berenson, Benedetta Barzini etc.

Despite the fame he enjoyed in the US, after his return to Italy in 1973, Sarmi's name gradually faded from the public record. "Ferdinando Sarmi: Untold Stories of New York Fashion" brings his story back into focus through his own gowns and dresses worn by models, intersecting with the voices of artists, designers, scholars and performers who understand how clothing can carry memory, identity and history. Set between archival traces and present-day New York, the film reconnects Sarmi's work with the larger story of Italian creativity in America, revealing a figure whose influence reached far beyond the fashion runway.

Why Ferdinando Sarmi Matters Today

- Sarmi, his story and career provide a rich understanding of the transnational history and impact of "Made in Italy" especially in the US.
- He offers a bridge between Italian craftsmanship traditions and textile innovations during the years of economic reconstruction and the cultural energy of postwar New York. Both countries, Italy and America, were building a distinct style and industry to compete with Paris Fashion.
- The film offers a new layer and interpretation of the transatlantic relations between Italy and America and analyzes the impact of *Italianità* and Italian culture and fashion on America rather than the usually studied impact of the US on Italy.
- Sarmi's story expands the history of fashion beyond the most frequently celebrated names and sheds new light on the contribution, know-how, creativity and labor of the Italian diaspora in NYC.
- His work opens a conversation about style, the shaping of the public image and celebrity culture. He helps us to contextualize the role and history of what we call today "influencers."
- It places fashion within the broader fields of cinema, design, cultural memory and Italian American history.

- Sarmi's rediscovery speaks to a contemporary interest in archives, and how the extensive archival research has built the foundation of the film. The film brings back to life an overlooked figure and provides a deeper understanding of the past and Italian cultural heritage.
- The film connects, documents, magazines, publicity, photographs, reels, Sarmi designs and his scrapbooks in an organic whole.

Directors' Statement

We approached Ferdinando Sarmi not only as a designer to be rediscovered, but as a key to understanding a larger cultural geography: the movement of Italian talent into postwar America, the dialogue between fashion and cinema, and the ways in which an image can outlive the name of its author. Sarmi's work belongs to a world of ateliers, stages, social rituals and visual invention. Despite this, his story has remained unexpectedly fragmented and then largely forgotten.

Our film brings together testimony, research and a visual language that moves between archive materials and the present. New York is not merely the setting of Sarmi's success; it is a living archive of the ambition, transformation and imagination that shaped his career. We wanted to make a compact film with the precision of a portrait: one that honors the textures of fabric, the force of silhouette and the human stories behind cultural memory.

Featured Voice

Name	
John Turturro	Award-winning Actor, Director and Screenwriter
Donna Zakowska	Award-winning Costume Designer
Massimo Cantini Parrini	Award-winning Costume Designer
Eugenia Paulicelli	Sarmi Project originator, author of several acclaimed books and writer Professor Emerita, Queens College and Graduate Center City University of New York
Jacopo Rampini	Actor and Narrator

Credits

Main Documentary Credits

Directed by	Claudio Napoli, Eugenia Paulicelli and June Seo
Featuring	Donna Zakowska, Eugenia Paulicelli, Massimo Cantini Parrini, John Turturro and the models Kelsey Butler, Michelle Amelia, Casidy Chan, Alyssa Bacon, Lianna Joan
Written by	Eugenia Paulicelli
Edited by	Claudio Napoli
Cinematography	Claudio Napoli, Kathryn Elizabeth Kharney and Pina Mastropietro

Graphic and Visual Design	Claudio Napoli
AI Music Design	Claudio Napoli
Color Grading	Crescenzo Mazza
Post-Production	OKOZOKO
Narrator	Jacopo Rampini
Thanks To	David Ward and Massimo Mascolo

Directors' Bios

Claudio Napoli is an Italian filmmaker, visual artist and VFX supervisor working across cinema, documentary, photography and visual storytelling. He began his career in cinematic visual effects, collaborating with acclaimed directors including Giuseppe Tornatore, Theo Angelopoulos, Franco Zeffirelli and Mario Monicelli. He received six David di Donatello nominations (*Italy's equivalent of the Oscars*) for Best Visual Effects and won the award in 2006 for *Romanzo Criminale*. He is also the Artistic Director of the Cinema Section of Cinesorriso Imperia – Comedy Film Festival, and the founder and Editor-in-Chief of ONOFFMAG, a magazine dedicated to cinema, art and innovation.

Eugenia Paulicelli is an international scholar of fashion, film and media cultures. Author of several acclaimed books exploring the intersections of fashion, film and costume design in larger cultural, aesthetic and geopolitical contexts. She has curated several exhibitions in Italy and in New York as part of the Fabric of Cultures project that she founded and directs. She is the originator of the project on Ferdinando Sarmi for which she carried out extensive archival research, which has resulted in the exhibition she co-curated with Vanessa Gavioli, “Sarmi New York: Un Viaggio nella Moda da Firenze alla Fifth Ave” at the Museum of Fashion and Costume at Palazzo Pitti – Gallerie degli Uffizi (June 18-December 31, 2026). She is the creator with Claudio Napoli and Massimo Mascolo of a series of short films on “The New Made in Italy.”

June Seo is the founder and director of Project.A.Artgroup, a multidisciplinary collective centered on "Unbounded Creativity." Fascinated by shifting perspectives and the idea of escape, in his art and film, he engages with unconventional materials to give form to the weight of these complex themes. In film, his work has been featured at the FASHIONCLASH Festival and recognized with awards at the 2025 New York City International Fashion Film Festival and the Sarajevo Fashion Film Festival. As a performance director, he directed *Così fan tutte* at the Seoul Arts Center Opera House, and an immersive performance for Hermès at Dongdaemun Design Plaza (Seoul, Korea), and the opening ceremony for the UNESCO World Heritage Committee at BEXCO (Busan, Korea).

Production Notes

- The project emerged from research into Ferdinando Sarmi and his neglected place in the history of American fashion.
- The film connects archival inquiry with contemporary testimony from cinema, costume design and fashion scholarship.
- Its visual approach combines his original designs, interviews, archival imagery and documents including original scrapbooks compiled by Sarmi himself, New York locations and graphic design to create a concise cultural portrait.
- The documentary is narrated by Jacopo Rampini and anchored in the voices of experts qualified to comment on the relationship between clothing, character and performance and the history of fashion and film in Italy and America.
- The project can be positioned for fashion, documentary, design, architecture, arts-and-culture and Italian, and Italian American heritage audiences across the world.

Press Assets Checklist

- Official poster: vertical, horizontal 16:9 and square social versions.
- 8-12 high-resolution stills, with captions and photo credits.
- Official trailer, 60-90 second
- Private screener link with password and English subtitles.
- One-page technical sheet; director bios; featured contributor bios.
- Logo PNG with transparency; title treatment; downloadable press folder.
- Festival laurels and press quotes to be added after first selections

Festival Description

A short documentary about the forgotten Italian designer Ferdinando Sarmi, whose career linked New York fashion and Italy, Hollywood/Film costume and the visual culture of the twentieth century. Through in-depth archival research and contemporary voices, the film restores Sarmi to the story of Italian creativity in America.



For information about the documentary
Ferdinando Sarmi: Untold Stories of New York Fashion, please:

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