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The Cambridge Union Society
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DIANE VON FURSTENBERG SPEAKS AT THE CAMBRIDGE UNION

“The most important relationship you have in life is the one you have with yourself; because, no matter what, you will always have yourself.”

On the 21st April 2016, the Cambridge Union Society welcomed world-famous fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg. The discussion focused around the journey of her career, the origins of her world-famous wrap dress, and her voice within the world.

Matteo Violet Vianello, Speaker’s Officer, started the discussion with a question about the origins of the wrap dress. After a moment of reflection, Diane replied ‘I guess I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I wanted to be an independent woman but I didn’t know how to get there.’ After visiting New York, she began to see the printing factories where she worked in Italy ‘in a whole new light’. However, her dreams of independence faltered when she discovered she was pregnant – and had to contact her fiancé. ‘I sent a telegram... I’m sure you don’t know what a telegram is’ she joked. But despite this, she said she fought for independence and managed to start her brand.

After this, discussion moved on to the legacy of the wrap dress. When asked why she thought it had lasted for so long, she said ‘I have no idea. You know, this has never happened to a dress before.’ She told the audience that ‘the first phase of my business was the American Dream,’ and that she didn’t want to lose the spirit of her brand when she decides to step back from the company in a few years’ time. ‘What I am doing right now is trying to figure out how I can leave it behind,’ she went on, ‘I hired a new CEO, a young Italian man... and I am doing it in a way that it will be able to go without me.’

Conversation then turned to the social impact of her designs: ‘What it also interesting is that as I said my goal was to become the woman I wanted to be, and that woman was independent. And I became that woman through the dress...My mission in life, whether for my brand, my mentorship, or philanthropy, is to be able to tell women that they can be the women they want to be.’ She went on ‘My mother told me two things “You are my torch of freedom” and “Fear is not an option.” She would never, never allow me to be afraid.’

When asked how she recovered from any falls or failings, she responded, ‘When you are in a city, and in a small room, your problems are so big, but when you go into nature you are so small, and then your problems are so small. I’m very hard on myself, and I often feel like a loser, but it doesn’t last very long.’ The talk closed to rapturous applause from the audience.

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IN COLLABORATION WITH

Anna Bockmuehl and Laura Robinson
Press Officers, Easter 2016



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For footage of the event go to <https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeunionsoc>

Friday, 29 April 2016