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ThursdayStyles

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BEHOLD THE NEW NAKED

Designers put forth more flesh than usual on the spring runways. BY VANESSA FRIEDMAN PAGE 5

A dress from Eckhaus Latta's spring 2023 collection. For the past four weeks, bare flesh has been on view for all to see on runways in New York, London, Milan and Paris.

UNBUTTONED | VANESSA FRIEDMAN



LEFT: ALEXANDER MCGEE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; RIGHT: ALEXANDER MCGEE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; FRANK PERRY — GETTY IMAGES

The Brand and the Firebrand

Ye's recent comments threaten his partnership with the luxury fashion house Balenciaga.

IN ALL THE NOISE that has been generated by and about Kanye West, or Ye, as he is now known, over the past two weeks — ever since he disrupted Paris Fashion Week with a new YZY show, then disrupted his show with a “White Lives Matter” T-shirt, then embarked on a public flood of attacks

against anyone who dared to criticize his message that then escalated to antisemitic screeds on social media and Fox News — one voice has been particularly deafening. In its silence.

Balenciaga, the brand whose show Ye opened on Oct. 2 with a surprise modeling appearance; the brand he collaborated with during his ill-fated Gap adventure and whose Yeezy Gap Engineered by Balenciaga products can still be found on store shelves; the brand whose designer, Demna,

has described texting with Ye several times a day and who attended the YZY show with Cédric Charbit, Balenciaga's chief executive, has not said a word about his statements. Even as Ye's posts and avowals have become ever more incendiary.

As Serge Carreira, a lecturer on the luxury industry at Sciences Po university in Paris, said, “The whole industry is, in a way, guilty of complacency.” But when it comes to Ye, in thrall to his celebrity and codependent — CONTINUED ON PAGE D3

PHOTOGRAPH BY ADAM KATZ/SRENG
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FRANK PERRY: GETTY IMAGES
YE: GUY AROCH/REUTERS
pressreader

Always in Style, and Never in a Hurry

Linda Rodin has returned to her first love with a quirky, age-defying denim collection.

By RUTH LA FERLA

Over tea and toast at the Cafe Cluny in the West Village of Manhattan, Linda Rodin lifted her palms to her face and pulled her features taut. The gesture, one likely to be recognized by any number of Ms. Rodin's contemporaries whose 30s are long behind them, seemed a wistful acknowledgment that the past is irrevocable.

So what. Ms. Rodin is aiming neither to recover her youth nor to live her life according to some outmoded precept of what is age appropriate. "That just never occurred to me," she said.

A maverick to the core, she has traveled in style spheres for more than four decades, first as a photographer's assistant and later as a retail pioneer, venturing to SoHo in 1979 to found Linda Hopp, one of the area's first fashion boutiques.

As a stylist, she lent zhooz to the wardrobes of Madonna, Halle Berry, Bob Dylan and Gisele Bündchen. She eventually moved to the front of the camera, becoming a familiar figure in the ad campaigns of J. Crew and the Row by the mid-2000s, she had sealed her reputation as an innovator with the introduction of Rodin Olio Lusso, a "clean," jasmine-scented confection of essential oils that grew out of a mixture she brewed in her bathroom. She was 59.

Now, at 74, she is once again confounding expectations with the introduction of a small, concisely edited Linda Hopp denim collection, her first foray into fashion in more than 40 years. The moment seemed right, Ms. Rodin said. "I'm not thinking: 'I'm 74. Why am I making jeans?'"

Among the collection's highlights are a laced-at-the-bosom denim tunic worn over jeans, gingham-cuffed jeans and a mid-rise variation she wears on her website with a Western eyelet shirt. There is a slender maxi-skirt with a flamboyant fishtail hem and a pleated mini that Ms. Rodin wears in photographs over skinny pants slit at the ankle. The items, made in New York City, are offered in extra-small to large sizes; prices will range from about \$450 to \$1,200.

Ms. Rodin, far from an imposing figure in person — she is 5-foot-5 — towers in the imagination of her fans, a snowy-haired beacon to many who like to believe that one can bend or toss the rules at any age.

They follow her on Instagram, where she models her designs, including a denim jacket, unconventionally paired with a wide tulle skirt, and a pearl-seeded top with extravagantly flared denim trousers. Her image routinely crops up on Pinterest as well, as a distinctive figure in her signature updo and large black-rimmed shades. She is often called an icon but shrugs off the label.

"When I think of icons, I think of Audrey Hepburn or Brigitte Bardot, or somebody really extraordinary," Ms. Rodin said. "I am not that person."

She does, however, tend to follow her own lead, inclined to regard every challenge as a fresh opportunity. Consider her fabled SoHo boutique: a Bauhaus-inspired, gray-walled gallery-like space that she opened, she said, on a wing and a prayer. An aspiring photographer, she had tracked down props and styled models for the photographer Gösta Peterson, who playfully rechristened her Linda Hopp, after the swing-era Lindy Hop.

Soon enough, Ms. Rodin recalled, "I realized that I liked producing pictures, not shooting them."

A friend suggested that she open a store, and when a space became available on West Broadway, then a mostly barren street, Ms. Rodin set up shop. Her new vocation suited her. "It lets me put all my instincts together



'Now I don't want to lose sight of what really makes me happy.'

Above, Linda Rodin. Clockwise from near right, pieces from her new collection: a denim maxi-skirt; midrise jeans; a laced-at-the-bosom tunic; and jeans with gingham cuffs.

in a good way," she said at the time. "It's like one long styling job."

She showcased designers who were just beginning to build followings. They included Diane Pernet, now a celebrated fashion writer, who created a Bauhaus dress, red on one side, black on the other. And she stocked minimalist creations by Calvin Klein and avant-grade looks by Norma Kamali, pieces that defied easy categorization.

"I wanted to have nothing trendy," Ms. Rodin said. "If you're spending \$500 or \$600, you don't want to be out of style the next year."

Those designer labels hung alongside her own designs. Some, including a red wool bomber with dolman sleeves, had a gender-free appeal as relevant now as they were in 1980, when Bergdorf Goodman featured Linda Hopp designs in her own in-store boutique.

Ms. Rodin's audience expanded significantly in 2007, when she began marketing her widely imitated facial oil (now discontinued). "People found it interesting that I was older," Ms. Rodin said. "I never had a face-lift. I never dyed my hair. And I wasn't a face of beauty. I always thought, 'Well, this is what I look like.'"

Her remark suggests that she is without vanity. "I'm so vain that I don't even look at myself in the mirror anymore," she coun-

tered wryly. "So vain that I don't even want Winky to see me naked." Winky, her steel-colored poodle and constant companion, lay in her lap.

Her what-you-see-is-what-you-get approach has a multigenerational appeal, one duly noted a half-dozen years ago by Good Housekeeping, when the magazine conferred on Ms. Rodin its Awesome Women award. She was listed alongside the former Facebook executive Randi Zuckerberg; Amy Robach, then a news anchor on "Good Morning America"; and the actress and activist Geena Davis and their high-profile ilk.

"Ask young fashion editors to name their idols, and a certain gray-haired, near-sighted, makeup-shunning 68-year-old makes everyone's list," the editors gushed. "Maybe these people were thinking, 'How can I be like you when I grow up?'" Ms. Rodin said recently. "They find it, I guess, inspiring to think that as an older person you can still wear jeans and miniskirts."

Within bounds. "If I wear a miniskirt, I cover up with tights," she said. "But I don't feel otherwise limited about the way I like to dress." She would argue that she is her own best model.

"People have asked, 'Do you feel bad that most women your age wouldn't or aren't able wear these clothes?'" she said. "I tell them: 'I'm just making clothes for me. If people like them, great. If they don't, that's fine, too.'"

"I'm not Ellen Fisher," she added. There are brakes on Ms. Rodin's ambition. "I want to be slow fashion," she said. She plans to offer limited runs through lindahopp.com. "I'm not going to have a stockroom with 100 pairs of jeans."

She is cautious, with cause. In 2014, the Estée Lauder Companies bought Rodin Olio Lusso for an undisclosed sum. It was one of the smallest labels the beauty conglomerate had acquired. Two and a half years later, she left, disenchanted with Lauder's handling of the line. In 2021, Lauder announced that its Olio Lusso e-commerce business would close.

"Now I don't want to lose sight of what really makes me happy," Ms. Rodin said. She likes working on a small scale, with meticulous attention to detail. But she is not about to fixate on every stitch and seam.

"You know, I can't sew on a button," she confided with a hoot. Long ago she tried. "I ended up attaching a button to the shirt I was sewing and the nightgown I was wearing."

Still, for Ms. Rodin, the return to fashion represents a homecoming of sorts. From an early age, her style sense was whimsical. "I might have been 7 or 8, and I dreamed a pair of white majorette boots and outfits that matched," she said.

"Now I have 100 pairs of snow white shoes," she said, joking.

While that playfulness is reflected in her line, she has become more practical. She recalled her SoHo boutique as "a small, curated business that I started from scratch." She has no problem building on that model. "There is no race to the top," she said. "Slow and steady is my credo."

CORRECTIONS

An article last Thursday about the office attire of male finance workers at Brookfield Place misstated the origin of the label Allen Edmonds. It was founded in 1922 and later became known as a shoe supplier to the Army during World War II; it was not founded in order to supply the Army.

An article last Thursday about the charm and popularity of Brooklyn Heights used an outdated title for Erika Belsey Worth. She is a former president of the Brooklyn Heights Association, not its current one.

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FIFTH AVENUE & 54TH STREET

pressreader

UNBUTTONED

The Brand and the Firebrand at a Crossroad

CONTINUED FROM PAGE D1
 dent relationship with fashion, it is Balenciaga with which Ye has conducted the most enduring affair.

Up until now, that has worked to both of their advantages. Ye gave Balenciaga the aura of relevance and a new audience; Balenciaga provided the high-fashion embrace Ye craved. Together, they became a viral sensation. For Balenciaga, however, it could turn out to be a very dangerous liaison indeed. Not to mention a case study on the problems of mixing business and friendship as disparate creative worlds meld into one.

The issue is that for Balenciaga, “blaming him could be considered as a betrayal,” Mr. Carreira said, not just personally but because Ye has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. At the same time, he said, “silence could be perceived as a support of the indefensible ideas he is promoting.”

Those ideas are most likely why Adidas, whose almost 10-year partnership with Yezezy has been extraordinarily lucrative for both sides (even though he has publicly criticized the company and its executives), has issued a statement acknowledging their past work together but noting the partnership is “under review.” They are probably why Instagram and Twitter have locked Ye’s accounts, why JP Morgan has apparently stepped down as the Yezezy company’s banker and why Balenciaga’s future to respond is particularly striking.

This is especially so in the context of social and cultural changes over the past five years, in which luxury brands have issued apology after apology for repeated missteps, lest they be seen as condoning prejudice or perpetrating a history of racism and sexism. (Balenciaga is owned by Kering, the French luxury group, which is a public entity.)

“I can only assume many people are wrong-footed, confused and possibly waiting — hoping? — for an apology of sorts,” said Luca Solca, a luxury analyst at the research firm Sanford C. Bernstein. But, he continued: “This reminds me of John Galliano. I see a one-way street implication.”

Mr. Galliano is the former Dior designer who was fired after a drunken antisemitic rant in a Paris bar, and who was later subject to a court trial (in France, inciting racial hatred is a crime), fined and forced out of fashion until he had gone through rehabilitation and made years of amends.

But therein lies the rub. In a typical ambassadorial arrangement between brand and celebrity, a famous person is under contract to be the “face” of a label, which could mean appearing in company advertisements or simply wearing its products on the red carpet. But the relationship between Ye and Balenciaga — which is really the relationship between Ye and Demna — is a complex mix of muse, collaborator, customer, fan, friend and celebrity that has been stewing for over seven years. It is more akin to a creative romance than any sort of professional agreement.

According to one insider, Ye has been known to refer to himself as Demna’s straight husband. And, as with any marriage, it is possible the Demna-Balenciaga-Ye connection is so intertwined and interdependent that they are not sure how to disentangle it.

(Multiple calls and emails to the brand were not returned.)

Ye and Demna met not long after Vetements, the upstart fashion label led by Demna and his younger brother, Guram Gvasalia, began to make waves in Paris in 2014. The label shared an ethos of beauty and couture with a job of furious energy that caught the eye and imagination of Ye, who began talking up Vetements, and



In a wait-and-see mode in the wake of antisemitic remarks.

NINA WESTERVELL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Clockwise, from above left: Kanye West, or Ye, in the Balenciaga “Mud” show this month in Paris; Demna, left, escorted Kim Kardashian to the Met Gala, clad head to toe in all-black Balenciaga; Ms. Kardashian and Ye attended a Balenciaga show in Paris in 2020.

especially Demna, to anyone who would listen — including editors at Vogue.

Ye then enlisted both brothers to consult on Season 1 of his Yezezy brand, which made its debut at New York Fashion Week in February 2015. Only a few weeks later, he sat in the front row at a variety of Paris Fashion Week shows, including Dior, in a hoodie bearing the Vetements logo.

Ye and Demna shared a semi-apocalyptic aesthetic made to challenge the sacred cows of luxury and a sense of themselves as outsiders come to rewrite the power structure of an antiquated industry for the era of the street. Not long after Demna was named the creative director of Balenciaga in late 2015, Ye, in the ultimate fox-in-the-henhouse move, tweeted “I’m going to steal Demna from Balenciaga.”

He didn’t, but around 2019, the relationship began to deepen into what Demna described to The New York Times in 2021 as

“a very intense creative exchange” that took place mostly over WhatsApp and text messages. “For me, talking with him is like going back in time to the 8-year-old me who doesn’t have all these barriers and filters,” Demna told The Times. “And those kinds of conversations help me to evolve as a designer.”

Ye became a regular front-row presence at Balenciaga shows, and rumor had it he was the brand’s biggest customer. He had the Balenciaga/Cross boots. He had the face mask. He had the destroyed denim jacket. He was there at Demna’s couture debut. This year, he put his customer profile on an Instagram story showing that he had, at that point, spent more than \$4 million at Balenciaga in 2022 (in the years before that, not so much).

In turn, Demna is one of the only people whose opinions Ye trusts. As Demna told The Times, he was brought into the Gap

deal in early 2021 in part to provide “reassurance” to Ye — he had released only two garments in 18 months — “so there could be a moment of letting go” and a full collection could actually appear.

In July 2021, Demna agreed to art direct Ye’s “Donda” stadium experiences, first in Atlanta and then in Chicago, using his vacation time to do so. In between, he escorted Ye’s estranged wife, Kim Kardashian, to the Met Gala. (She wore a Balenciaga wedding gown to the first “Donda” event and has appeared in various Balenciaga ads.) When Ye started dating Julia Fox this year after he and Ms. Kardashian split, he posted videos of himself shopping perhaps for her in a Balenciaga store. The two men went mononymous around the same time.

It all culminated in Ye’s runway appearance as the opening model of the Balenciaga “Mud” show this month, which was seen as a viral triumph, according to Mr. Carreira. At least until Ye “turned abruptly into an outcast, putting his former blind disciples in an uncomfortable situation,” Mr. Carreira said.

It may be that Balenciaga is simply hoping that, in the current climate of short attention spans and regular social media scandals, the Ye controversy will soon be drowned out by someone else’s transgression, and the spotlight will pass them by.

It could be they fear Ye’s wrath, which often involves attacks and reposting private conversations in public, more than they fear social reprisals. His general position is that you are either on his team or not. It could be that Demna is unwilling to abandon a man who has both inspired and supported him.

But an individual standing by a friend in private is not the same thing as an executive at a public company incurring serious reputational risk by standing by a flame-thrower in public. There are actually three entities in this particular dalliance: Ye, Demna and Balenciaga the brand. Their interests may not align. Someone may have to break up with someone.

“They need to make up their mind quickly, I would say,” said Mr. Solca, the luxury analyst.

UP NEXT
 QUINTESSA SWINDELL

She’s Smashing Barriers in DC’s ‘Black Adam’

Age 25
Hometown Virginia Beach
Now Lives In a loft in Downtown Los Angeles and a one-bedroom apartment in the East Village of Manhattan.

Claim to Fame Quintessa Swindell is a nonbinary trans actor who stars in DC’s “Black Adam,” a big-budget film; Mx. Swindell plays Cyclone, a superhero who has the power to manipulate the wind. The film, which opens Friday and also stars Dwayne Johnson, is one of the few times that a transgender actor has been cast in a main role in a DC production. “My trans and nonbinary identity is the thing that I’m the most confident about in my life,” Mx. Swindell said. “Having that understanding and comfort has enabled me to progress through my life with way more ease than I ever had in the past.”

Big Break Raised by a single father in Virginia Beach, Mx. Swindell took theater classes at the Governor’s School for the Arts during high school as an outlet of personal growth. “Acting became therapy sessions because I was forced to translate bottled-up feelings into whatever scenes I was studying,” Mx. Swindell said.

In 2015, Mx. Swindell moved to New York City to study theater at Marymount Manhattan, before dropping out two years later to pursue acting in Los Angeles. A former acting coach put Mx. Swindell in touch with Robert Myerow, a talent agent at the Greenb Agency, which led to roles in the 2018 film “Granada Nights” and, later, as a high school senior grappling with family issues on HBO’s “In Treatment.” “I’m always



ANJULYN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



Quintessa Swindell is one of the few transgender actors to star in a big-budget DC film.

FRANK MANK/WARNER BROS.

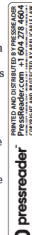
superfocused on how every performance or piece of work can be better than the last,” Mx. Swindell said.

Latest Project Balancing comic-book blockbusters with independent films, Mx. Swindell also stars in “Master Gardener,” a philosophical thriller with Sigourney Weaver that premiered last month at the Venice Film Festival. (The New York Times critic Manohla Dargis called the film “an austere, beautiful, romantic, worthy, implausible and touchingly Utopian story of love, loneliness, violence and redemption.”) “When I met Sigourney, the first thing I thought was, ‘How am I possibly going to thank her for everything she has done?’” Mx. Swindell said.

Next Thing Mx. Swindell is in the early stages of producing two films that “say something about the world we live in today.” One is “a movie about female dispatch riders during World War II.” The other is “about two female D.J. pioneers in London’s ‘second summer of love.’”

Gender Performances Mx. Swindell found New York City to be a wellspring for identity studies — not only in college classrooms, but at after-hours parties like Rattle Hymn, where gender fluidity was flaunted and celebrated. “I was learning things in my gender-studies classes, and at the same time I was going out at night and seeing the very things I was learning about in the wild.”

ALEX HAWOOD





At the Ralph Lauren 2023 spring show: top left, Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck; center right, John Legend; and above from left, Cole Sprouse, Jessica Chastain and Diane Keaton. The three photographs in the center column show models.

Out West, Ralph Lauren Outfits Urban Cowboys

By JESSICA TESTA

SAN MARINO, CALIF. — Ralph Lauren's strength — the thing that has kept the all-American company going for 55 years — is world building. Or, rather, worlds building.

Each brand under the company's umbrella represents a different aesthetic universe: a Western saloon (Double RL), the Hamptons social circuit (Purple Label), an old collegiate quad buzzing with freshmen (Polo Ralph Lauren).

Maybe it's because Ralph Lauren, the man, just hosted his first-ever fashion show in Southern California — or because the event was dedicated to showcasing each one of these specific worlds — but it was easy, last Thursday night, to imagine the 83-year-old Bronx-born designer as a Walt Disney-like figure, building a theme park of the fantasies that have lived in his head since he began selling Polo ties to department stores in 1967. His customers can visit each land, inhabiting each story (Old Hollywood goes on a safari; gunslingers go to a gala) without ever committing to just one.

Mr. Lauren's fantasies unfold every time you visit his store-in-a-mansion on Madison Avenue or get a reservation at his celebrity-filled restaurants. (And celebrities play an essential role in his world building.)

Here is how those fantasies manifested here, near Pasadena:

5:57 P.M. A train of golf carts carries guests from a parking lot to the Huntington Art Gallery, a Guided Age building commissioned in 1965 by a railroad tycoon who once lived there with his wife (who was previously his aunt by marriage until his uncle, another railroad tycoon, died — a classic California love story).

As the attendees arrived, the singer John Legend could be seen posing for photos in front of the Beaux-Arts mansion, wearing a long black polka-dot robe-style jacket. On a nearby veranda, Sylvester Stallone is spinning around at the bar while taking a selfie video, which amuses his two daughters (they are the hosts of podcast called "Unwaxed" about single 20-somethings), before saying hello to Milla Kunis and Ashton Kutcher.

6:16 P.M. Fashion brands have spent the past few years embracing TikTok stars, but it still seems as if their role at shows is confusing. They're V.I.P. guests — lent or given clothes for the evening, with paid hair-and-makeup services — but also content machines, expected, ideally, to produce.

For one of them, Emily Mariko, it's only her second runway show, and she's eager to attend more, she says. Her first was Mirror Palais, a Gen Z-favored brand known for its

extreme crop tops, in New York a few weeks ago. Ms. Mariko, 30, who first went viral on TikTok for reheating salmon and rice, declines the pigs-in-a-blanket hors d'oeuvres offered to her by several male models cast as waiters. "I have all this lip gloss," she explains.

6:35 P.M. Guests are being gently corralled to their terrace seats, which are covered in Ralph Lauren Home linens and pillows, crisp and white with black trimmings. The show was scheduled for 6:30 p.m., which in fashion-world time usually means about 7, although promptness tends to matter more when there's sunset lighting involved.

For a brief moment, I mistake the former tween heartthrob Cole Sprouse, who is wearing head-to-toe black with a large camera around his neck, for one of the official show photographers (who usually wear head-to-toe black with large cameras around their necks). Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez sweep in and take their seats, also wearing all black — yet impossible to mistake as anyone except Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez.

6:45 P.M. The show starts with a his-and-hers sequence of age-diverse models, embodying dapper cowboys (him) and Santa Fe vintage dealers (her). They are wearing Mr. Lauren's workwear-inspired line Double RL, with bandannas as ties, button-up vests and belted knits inspired by Native American blankets. They lock eyes with guests, either sexy-smoldering or sweetly smiling. They look like the wealthiest guests of HBO's

"Westworld" park — a thought that perhaps came to mind because James Marsden, a "Westworld" actor, is seated one row away.

6:52 P.M. A procession of refined neutrals — slouchy white shorts cinched with a brown belt, worn with a fitted sand-colored turtle-neck — is set to Sia's cover of "California Dreamin'," which is what Mr. Lauren has, obviously, titled this show.

Afterward, though, there's a bit of a Parisian interlude, choreographed to a French cover of Harry Nilsson's "Everybody's Talkin'." Models wear bra tops with long skirts and berets in navy and red. It's very "Emily in Paris," whose star, Lily Collins, is sitting next to Mr. Marsden.

7:01 P.M. The climax arrives with models walking the runway in groups of two or three, holding hands with kids dressed in Mr. Lauren's children's line. (He has mixed children and adults on the runway before, including during his extravagant 50th anniversary show in Central Park.)

These look more like clothes for living, layering, lunching and chic school drop-offs, not just dressing up to play a part. There are clashing plaids and striped sweaters, color-blocked sneakers, striped oxfords and dis-

tressed jeans, ruffled white eyes-dresses worn with patchwork blazers and Western boots. One rogue child model gives out high fives, hamming it up for the crowd.

The actor Angus Cloud of "Euphoria" shouts "yeah" (like "yeh") when there's a second of applause before the final round of silence. Later he'll rise from his seat, slide an unlit cigarette into his mouth and use one hand to clutch a can of Red Bull and the other to greet the GQ editor Will Welch.

7:12 P.M. At the end of the show, the models assemble on the steps of the art gallery. Mr. Lauren emerges, too, in an outfit of beige and white, taking his bow to "I Am... I Said," by Neil Diamond, which is a song about feeling torn between living in Los Angeles and New York — about staying and leaving.

A year ago, Mr. Lauren dismissed questions about whether he would leave his brand anytime soon. "I'm working, I'm strong. I love what I'm doing," he said at the time.

A few hours later, Mr. Lauren makes the rounds at a dinner held in the museum's gardens, leaving his seat beside Diane Keaton in her bowler hat. He is amused by my fixation on the number of looks he presented. The largest fashion shows typically have 60 to 70. I'd been told this show had more than 120 models.

"Well, I wanted to blow people away," he says.

PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARRIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; CENTER COLUMN: PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARRIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Wearing Less and Expressing More



The new 'nudity' provides a form of self-pleasure and power for all body types.

By VANESSA FRIEDMAN

Ah, the flesh. For the past four weeks, it has been everywhere in fashionland: sideboob, underboob, butt cheek, butt cleft, belly button, nipples, hip bones, upper ribs, the whole sweep of the back from skull through spine — a veritable bounty of body parts, unclad, cut out and otherwise on view for all to see on runways in New York, London, Milan and Paris. Barely covered by straps and wisps of lace, flying free beneath scrimms of mesh and shredded denim; the deconstructed memory of undergarments gone rogue, coming this spring to a sidewalk near you.

When garments began to disappear a year ago, there was a lot of theorizing about post-pandemic freedom and how the spate of public nakedness was simply an expression of pent-up desire for social contact and the breeze on our skin. It seems increasingly clear, however, that this kind of physical reveal — the let-it-all-hang-out, uncontained, sheer corporeality of it all — is the rawest expression of a new conversation taking place around dress and the body.

There were 333 percent more low-waist skirts and 78 percent more low-waist pants on the spring 2023 runways than there were during the same season a year ago (which was itself heralded as the barest in recent memory), with 15 percent more visible lingerie and 10 percent more transparent clothing, according to Alexandra Van Houtte, the founder of Tagwalk, a search engine for fashion.

Even in an industry that has long fetishized provocation, where undressing is part of the historical cycle of all dressing, those are striking numbers.

Some of it was familiar: corsetry and peekaboo handage wraps. Some of it was related to the Y2K revival sweeping through TikTok, with its cropped tops and low-slung jeans. Some of it was — hey, it's summer. But most of it seemed a phenomenon all its own.

More than an aesthetic, said Valerie Steele, the director of the museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, it may be "ideological."

Five years after the explosive #MeToo moment, in the twilight of Roe, the subject of women's bodies, how they are seen — and who gets to decide exactly how much of them is seen — has ever more political potency.

The Right to Self-Exposure

"There is a long history of women reclaiming their own sexuality through sexy clothes," said Elinor Rabinovitch-Fox, the author of "Dressed for Freedom: The Fashionable Politics of American Feminism" and a history professor at Case Western Reserve University. "Going back to the 1920s, when flappers exposed their legs. This is somewhat different, though."

It's not an invitation. Old adjectives like "sensual" and "seductive" and "romantic" do not apply. It is not, as Sarah Burton said before her Alexander McQueen show in London this month, about "a male gaze."

Not, said Ms. Rabinovitch-Fox, is it "about the feminine body necessarily. It's just about the body. It's about, 'I have the right to expose myself the way I want to.'" Indeed, the idea of bodily "rights" comes up again and again when designers talk about the new naked.

At Prabal Gurung, Ella Emhoff, the stepdaughter of Vice President Kamala Harris, walked the runway in a black miniskirt that looked more like a hip-wraper and what looked like a mint green chiffon scarf knotted into a rosette at the neck, the two ends dangling down to veil each breast and then billow out behind — at least in theory. In practice, one breast was left in plain air. Ms. Emhoff didn't blink. Nor did she adjust her "shirt."

According to Zoe Latta, a founder of Eckhaus Latta, when a model tried on an entirely transparent mesh dress she was scheduled to wear in the show, it was her idea not to wear any underwear beneath. Maybe, said Mike Eckhaus, a co-founder of the label, that was because "the way we play with sex appeal is not trying to be body-enhancing, it's about being in control of your identity."

The designers leading the charge are generally young and independent and do not subscribe to old orthodoxies about the system. (They are also largely American.) They talk about community and eschew traditional runway models for their friend groups, whose bodies do not conform to any particular standard of age or measurement or even gender. Their corporeality is more in the mode of Lucien Freud than Jessica Rabbit.

Fashion is often pitched as a tool for transformation, for molding and reshaping flesh into a new form that implies the original is not quite up to par. And, at the same time, it is offered as a kind of armor, to convey strength and confidence through protective cover: giant shoulders, oversized jackets, trousers, maxi-skirts and sometimes even metallic breast-plates.

The new naked dressing subverts both shibboleths, suggesting that exposure equates not to vulnerability but to strength, and that the body just as it is is just fine. By revealing what Ms. Steele calls "unfamiliar skin" or "moving skin" — folds and pooches and body parts not traditionally considered offered for public consumption — these clothes startle viewers out of their comfort zones and challenge received convention. They are entirely unabashed.

Last summer, the New York designer Maryam Nassir Zadeh was on vacation in Greece and started playing around with wearing sheer sarongs not just on the beach but in town so that they revealed not her bathing suits but her actual underpants.

"I would never show my nipples in the past," she said. "I used to be much more insecure about myself, even the shape of my legs. But now I feel very chill wearing panties and something sheer." So she put that idea into her collection, which featured old textiles used in lieu of formal garments, including a bra made from two dollies.

Whose Pleasure Is It Anyway?

"There have been a lot of designers throughout history interested in alteration and dressing up the blank person," Ms. Latta said. "Using clothes to make the body look a certain way for the pleasure of others."

The point of the new nakedness, she said, is not to provide that sort of viewing pleasure but rather a form of self-pleasure.

That's what Hillary Taimour of Collina Strada said when she talked about a ball gown in her collection with a sweeping Cinderella skirt — and a top that appeared to be suspended not from spaghetti straps but from the model's nipples so it began at the breasts rather than hiding them — and which she created with the red carpet in mind.

"These are clothes for someone who is happy to give the middle finger to the viewing world," she said; "for making a moment that says, 'This is about me.'"

It reminded her, Ms. Taimour said, of Rose McGowan's "naked dress," the backless crystal mesh gown with only strings covering her behind that she wore to the 1998 MTV Video Music Awards with only a leopard print thong beneath. She later revealed that her attire was meant as a political statement, a



Rose McGowan in a backless crystal mesh gown at the 1998 MTV Video Music Awards.

"It's about, 'I have the right to expose myself the way I want to.'"

way of reclaiming her body. Ms. McGowan has accused Harvey Weinstein of raping her in 1997, and the V.M.A.s were the first public appearance she made after the alleged assault, which ultimately formed part of the nexus of #MeToo. And thus did that dress become a part of how we got to here: self-determination writ in skin.

"Owning up to who you are and 'not caring' has really been a predominant theme and trend," said Ms. Van Houtte of Tagwalk.

That sounds like a moment of true liberation, both physical and psychological, except that, as Ms. Steele of F.I.T. points out, everyone is always "both subject and object, and part of being an embodied person is you can never control how people think about you."

She, for one, is not entirely convinced that the move to take back the body will last. Historically, as with most things fashion, there is for every action an equal and opposite reaction. The 1920s led to the structure and shoulder pads of World War II; the 1960s to the power dressing of the 1980s.

"Throughout history," Ms. Steele said, "there is no culture that is 100 percent undressed or unfashioned. Even on a nudist beach, people wear sunglasses and sunscreen. The anthropological literature is full of tribes that wear beads and face paint even if they wear no clothes."

Even now, she said, "we're nowhere near as naked as we could be." In its own way, statement (un)dressing has you covered.

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