



Secrets and longing surface as Saint Laurent menswear parades at Pinault's art palace

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Thomas Adamson | AP

PARIS — It-designer Anthony Vaccarello on Tuesday sent out a Saint Laurent men's collection that felt both sun-drenched and haunted, set not just in the heart of Paris, but drifting somewhere between the city and the legendary queer enclave of Fire Island in New York.

Staged at the Bourse de Commerce, the grand art palace and crown jewel of Kering's Pinault family in the French capital, the show paid tribute to Yves Saint Laurent's own history of escape and reinvention.

Star power in the front row, including Francis Ford Coppola, Rami Malek, Aaron and Sam Taylor-Johnson, and house icon Betty Catroux, underscored the label's magnetic pull.

Oversized shorts, boxy trenches, and blazers with extended shoulders riffed on an iconic 1950s photo of Saint Laurent in Oran, but they were reframed for a new era of subtle, coded sensuality. Flashes of mustard and pool blue popped against an otherwise muted, sandy palette — little jolts of longing beneath the surface calm.

Yet what truly set this collection apart was its emotional honesty. Vaccarello, often praised for his control and polish, confronted the idea of emptiness head-on.

The show notes spoke of a time “when beauty served as a shield against emptiness,” a phrase that cut deep, recalling not only Saint Laurent's own battles with loneliness and addiction, but also the secret codes and guarded longing that marked the lives of many gay men of his generation.

That sense of secrecy was everywhere in the clothes: ties tucked away beneath the second shirt button, as if hiding something private; sunglasses shielding the eyes, keeping the world at a careful distance. These weren't just styling tricks, they were acts of self-preservation and subtle rebellion, evoking the rituals of concealment and coded desire that defined both Fire Island and of closet-era Paris. For generations, Fire Island meant freedom for gay men, but also the risks of exposure, discrimination, and the heartbreak of the AIDS crisis.

Fashion rivalry and a famous venue

If the installation of artist Céleste Boursier-Mougenot's pool of drifting porcelain bowls spoke to the idea of beautiful objects colliding and drifting apart, so too did the models: together on the runway, yet worlds apart, longing and loneliness held just beneath the surface.

This season's blockbuster staging felt all the more pointed as Kering faces tough quarters and slowing luxury demand. The group leveraged one of its artistic crown jewels, Saint Laurent, and a dramatic museum setting to showcase creative clout, generate buzz and reassure investors of its cultural muscle.

The venue itself — home to the Pinault Collection — embodies that rivalry at the very top



of French luxury. The Pinault family controls Kering, which owns Saint Laurent, while their archrival Bernard Arnault helms LVMH and its Louis Vuitton Foundation across town. This season, the stakes felt especially high as the Saint Laurent show came just hours before Louis Vuitton's own, throwing the spotlight on a Paris fashion power struggle where every show doubles as a declaration of taste, power and corporate pride.

If the collection offered few surprises and leaned heavily on crowd-pleasing shapes, it was undeniably salable, proving that when a house this powerful plays to its strengths, few in Paris will complain. A collection for those who have ever wanted more, and learned to shield their hearts in style.

