

Paris Day One: Subversive Saint Laurent

Anthony Vaccarello guarantees that what you see is not the whole truth, writes Tim Blanks.

By Tim Blanks



The grandiosity of the formula Anthony Vaccarello has developed for Saint Laurent was in full effect on Monday night. The scale of the presentation spanned everything from the set that spelled out YSL in thousands of white hydrangeas (visible only from above, via passing drones or UAPs) to the linebacker shoulders of the black leather jackets and nylon trench coats sported by Vaccarello's Amazonian models. As usual, Vaccarello took no prisoners in his spare but extravagant (yes, the paradox is deliberate) vision. As he said before the show, he's not about making clothes that everyone can wear. He told three stories: black leather, nylon, historical shapes. And, also as usual, he seeded that vision with nuggets mined from Yves' own legacy: the decadent colours, the graphic silhouettes.

But there was a subtext this season that twisted the narrative more than usual. Set in a nightmarishly challenging global context, fashion's dogged apoliticism has begun to seem like a perverse swerve of its traditional role in the aesthetic continuum: It's supposed to be a mirror, remember? Vaccarello's shownotes came close to addressing this issue. "In a time when dialogue is fading, style becomes a form of discourse," they proclaimed. "A language of resistance, respect and inclusion."

Quite how you apply this language to the collection Vaccarello showed depends on your own generosity of spirit. I thought there was something of the Trojan horse in the presentation, a subversive undercurrent humming along below the surface. A platoon of young women zipped, snapped and capped in black leather looked like a Helmut Newton dominatrix fantasy, but Vaccarello claimed the garb of gay men cruising in the Tuileries during the '70s was their inspiration. White cotton blouses with huge white bows underscored that libertine subtext. The gloriously oversized gowns with their ruffles, puffed sleeves and floating trains that made up the show's last segment were silk and satin Scarlett O'Hara, except they were cut from nylon. They could be rolled in a ball and stuffed in a backpack, which exploded the illusion of couture preciousness. Between the leather and the nylon came trench coats, no item more emblematic of patrician tradition, but here unhinged by the fact that they were made from more of that sheer nylon.

Before the show, Vaccarello mentioned he'd been watching his favourite movie "La Reine Margot" to get in design mode. That film's extravagant nihilism somehow fits the excesses of this particular historical moment. I wouldn't go so far as to say it also defined this Saint Laurent collection, but I'm rather in love with the idea that it *might* have. And, after all, Vaccarello *did* admit that he wanted to provoke a discussion.

