



Paris Fashion Week Begins With a Smart Saint Laurent Show

Anthony Vaccarello struck a balance between visually enchanting and commercially sound.

By Cathy Horyn



lthough we were far away from the gay cruising scene of the '80s in the Tuileries, the park in the heart of Paris, there was a moment in Anthony Vaccarello's Saint Laurent show on Monday night when a whiff of illicit activity came through. It was when the models strode out in trench coats and chic summer dresses — classic Saint Laurent stuff — that were made of nylon. The soft shades of blue, tan, and orange were a delight. The filmy texture and sheerness of the nylon, however, knocked the mood into a different territory.

"I don't know how to say in English ... *louche*?" the designer said. Don't worry, Mr. Vaccarello, we got it.

The great thing about Saint Laurent is that from its first collection, in 1962, it spoke a language of allure that anyone could understand, and which Yves Saint Laurent sharpened as the decade's freedoms expanded and he let his own hair down. How many times, and by how many different designers, has a trench been shown in Paris on a marvelously confident-looking model? I spied Jean Paul Gaultier at last night's show, sitting next to Catherine Deneuve, who was vaping away. He made his own story of the trench and a trouser suit that owed a lot to Saint Laurent.

The show was presented on spectacular ground: the Trocadero fountain, now covered with a platform and decked with thousands of fat white hydrangea at peak bloom. A drone's view of the curving floral banks was of the YSL logo, famously designed by Cassandre at the request of the house's co-founder, Pierre Bergé, when they didn't have money to spend on such things. At closer range, it felt like an aristocrat's — or an oligarch's — decadent garden. In the background, the Eiffel Tower glowed.

Vaccarello struck a balance between the visually enchanting and the commercially sound. Those slightly oversized leather motorcycle jackets — a nod to the imagery of Robert Mapplethorpe — will sell, as will the baroque earrings. Their proportions look fresh. And Vaccarello's idea of dressing up the leather with blouses in crispy white cotton with stock ties ample enough to smother an aristocrat was a nice gesture — and inspiring, too.





I wonder how women will feel about the nylon trenches when they see them in stores, on hangers. Repulsed by their slithery quality? On the other hand, repulsion has its own appeal. And this is one fashion that must be seen on the body. All of Vaccarello's opulent evening dresses were also in nylon. He said he wanted to bring back a historical Saint Laurent shape, except without the linings and embroidery — "a dress you can smash and put in your bag." They also just looked fun to wear, an air-catching parachute with frills.

Ellen Hodakova Larsson put on a terrific show on Monday, the opening day of Paris, at a sculpture museum known as the Bourdelle. This was quite a step up from her last collection — more thoughtful in its use of repurposed materials, more refined and resolved. Antique household linen found in a Swedish barn was turned into a pleated dress the size of a small hut. The ends of black leather belts became layers of petals on a cool tunic. Shiny leather pocketbooks were collaged into a skirt.

Transformed, really. Larsson, who won the LVMH Prize a few years ago, delivers on her concept of taking everyday things and reimagining them in a sophisticated way. Some of my favorite styles were the simplest — men's black suit trousers flipped, stitched, and pressed into a chic dress with a pair of black belts, giving the look a harder edge. Thin metal rods — in silver or black and hinged together — formed a 3-D stole, or the intriguing splintered surface of a white minidress, or a kind of metal grass skirt.

Some designs seemed more for experimental play, like an off-white dress neatly and precisely finished at the hem with book pages. For the two sculptural pieces that closed the show, Larsson worked with a school in Sweden that teaches traditional thatching. She's clever and apparently successful in her small business. She says sales have increased fivefold, and the Hodakova brand is now sold in 24 countries.

Vaquera also widened its view further without losing the plot. The designers, Patric DiCaprio and Bryn Taubensee, have settled in Paris, and their collection, on Monday, displayed an impudent but considered take on couture with some great, overscaled jackets in python and worn-looking leather with wide matching belts; a side-slashed miniskirt; jeans cut back to front; and many cut-up summery logo T-shirt dresses with their attitude.

