Loewe's "Show-in-a-Box" thinks way outside the box

By Godfrey Deeny - 13 July 2020

Now that's how a brand should use digital to great effect in fashion. After a week of grumbling by pretty much everyone in the fashion industry about the predictability of the online season for couture and menswear, along comes Loewe to rip up the internet rules and create a 24-hour web happening.

Described as a "show-in-a-box," the Spanish marque's creative director Jonathan Anderson delivered a substantial series of elaborate files in a fancy box to editors and VIPs pre-show to set the agenda.

All unveiled over 24 hours via film, video clips, musical interludes, piano and harp performances, basket weaving tutorials, celebrity interviews, and even breakfast, lunch – with five textile artists – and dinner, all under the rubric, #loewess21. Hourly for 24 hours.

It opened with "The Front Row," portraits in motion by Aidan Zamiri, a group of cool kids wearing the actual Spring/Summer 2001 menswear collection everywhere – from riding what looked like a Vespa in Ibiza or visiting the Palais de Tokyo, to snorkeling in the deep blue, or strolling through a bamboo park with a basketball in hand. Ragged trimmed denim jackets, pink dandy cotton suits and Anderson’s signature patchwork tartan shirts all looked great.

The whole concept was even charming at its most wantonly self-indulgent – like a rambling description of the soundtrack by Adam Bainbridge standing in a garden, who then wanders off underneath a tree. That segued into a performance by Korean composer Park Jiha, on some sort of Asian vibes and a saenghwang multi-tube wind instrument. Doleful rather than dulcet in lockdown.
Next we had the art or shibori, or Japanese cotton dyeing, explained by a master practitioner Kayo Ando, who divulged – in Japanese – that it actually began in India 1,300 years ago.

All the way to a Paper Engineering class by Shina Tanaka. Miniature Pop Art structures which he cut into their final shape with extreme dexterity. Notably a series of pineapples, which again referenced one of Loewe’s new creations: a pineapple bag in woven leather, in yellow and green, "classicism with humor."

Conversations too, in Spanish without subtitles, with basket weaving artist Idoia Cuesta, whose ideas were incorporated into a brilliant new creation in stiff leather; a lobster pot-meets-medieval bodice.

All that even before breakfast, when Jonathan met actor Josh O’Connor, best know for the The Durrels and playing Prince Charles in The Crown.

"I’ve been doing shows for 10 years and I found it way more therapeutic to do it in a box," conceded Anderson, who asked French art directors M&M to create the portable dossier.

We finally got to the designer’s introduction of the actual collection at noon. In Anderson’s words it was all about working sculpturally during lockdown, when he wanted everyone to work with their hands, in his case even baking bread.

"The key silhouettes this season have been about volume," he said, showing a striking trench coat ballooned up by a giant pod-shaped back; or a smooth grand ecru gent’s coat fronted by a massive black circle. All the way to a bravura needle-point jacket inspired by Paul Cadmus, whose painting had been translated into a tapestry.

Many of the ideas were also presented in his Loewe box of files, where reviewers and friends could work with their hands building mini copies of these looks in stiff paper cutouts.

A different take on the approach that he used at his own brand, JW Anderson, where 10 days before, he also sent a dossier of ideas – from sketches to dried flowers – before talking his fans through that collection in a web presentation.

In a word, a 360 designer operating on multiple levels – engaging his audience in his collection as much as possible in the midst of a pandemic. And doing so on his own terms.