The biggest problem with being a fashion designer these days is that it’s no longer enough to create great clothes. Today, you have to be a 360 designer, knowledgeable about design, merchandising, social media and fashion politics, and, vitally in this pandemic, talented at presenting collections virtually. This weekend’s shows in the five-day London Fashion Week, which kicked off on Friday, underlined that conundrum, as several very talented designers struggled to make powerful fashion statements in videos, and other junior names wowed with exciting electronic visions.

Stephen Jones

Six weeks after Brexit came into effect, it turned out the most inventive ideas in London this Sunday were from hatter Stephen Jones, who called his collection "French Kiss." An ode to all things Gallic, inspired by his youth, when posh punk met Les Enfants du Paradis. More about the myth of Paris than the actual scene, the hats incorporated multiple French symbols, from Longchamp racegoers and Bal des Victimes aristocrats to badass sans-culottes revolutionaries and beret-wearing existentialist 1968ers. All the way to a remarkable work of millinery sculpture featuring the intertwined lips of a man and tongue of a woman.

"Once Paris has got to you, there is no escape," smiled Jones, who said the hats were designed for after women had taken off their clothes and were about to make love. How very French.
Man Ray would have loved the 55-second clip from Bianca Saunders, another designer that referenced French culture this season in London. Inspired by Jean Cocteau's 1930 film *The Blood of a Poet*, a cult classic that featured fashion icon Lee Miller in her only film role. With shots through keyholes of a dashingy handsome male model attired in several great looks: like a scrunched-up Aran sweater, shrunken-shouldered tuxedos or Norfolk jackets in great crumpled or creased photo prints. Surrealist chic for the 21st century.

Bethany Williams
This was more like a tutorial than a fashion presentation, and why not? As Bethany Williams personally introduced her gender-neutral, patchwork-driven collection, to be retailed initially exclusively by Selfridges. Based on vintage blankets sourced across the UK, the result was a series of great mega-color organic multi-panel coats that all had fantastic kick. This Liverpudlian designer continues to create unique visions in fashion and long may that continue.

N Palmer

This two-minute series of images by Nicholas Palmer recalled a cheapo clip made for *The Old Grey Whistle Test* when the BBC had no money. Sounded like vintage Pink Floyd, looked far too retro. Fake paisley, slicing graphics, acid dreams, seen in party shirts, crisscross paisley clubbing tops and patchwork tanks. Meaning, N Palmer just about got away with it, but will have to try much harder next season...

16Arlington
There is a scene in Woody Allen’s flick *Stardust Memories*, when the actor is in a train compartment of dull individuals, and desperately desires to cross the tracks to a wagon of beautiful people. 16Arlington’s 48-second video was like that: “how can I meet these people and buy their clothes?” one wondered. Cobalt blue feather boa cocktails; sexy courtesan suits with foot-long collars and lapels; naughty abbess coats; beautiful bodycon black silk cocktails embroidered with copper thread. All inspired by the hypnotic works of artist Hubert Duprat, in whose *Caddis* collection caddisfly larvae are captured furnishing protective cocoons from gold leaf, opals, coral and diamonds. 16Arlington is created by Marco Capaldo and Kikka Cavenati and in less than one minute at LFW they established themselves as a vital new force in UK fashion.

Art School
One house that really knows how to stage a video show is Art School, who created their dark-as-night set inside a London warehouse. The clothes – practically all in black, dark red, ecru or orange glitter: bedraggled silk cocktail dresses, oversized magician’s cloaks, chopped-up trenches, faux priestly vestments and night watchmen’s uniforms. There was nothing earth shatteringly original about these clothes by Art School’s designer Eden Loweth, but the label sure knows how to shoot a video.

Preen by Thornton Bregazzi

On their day, Preen are one of the most exciting fashion labels anywhere, but where their live shows are often epic avant garde works of performance art, their videos tend to underwhelm. They did again on Sunday, with a faux indie Super 8 flick about gals at a rural estate. Inspired by that old warhorse of an inspiration, Grey Gardens, this collection of dead stock and recycled materials felt like recycled ideas. Quilted floral looks; ruffled schoolmarm on a blind date gowns; and chunky knits all added up to a less than stellar performance.

Jamie Wei Huang
This collection can only be described as derivative: aping elements of classic American sportswear and high street knitwear. But, nonetheless, Jamie Wei Huang sure shot a great video. The clip, entitled "Detour," featured a series of chiseled-jawed Asian beauties and beaus wandering around a wild rock outcrop before a stormy sea. Backed up by a kick-ass hard rock band named Fei Cheng and starring dancer Yu-Hsien Wu and actor Guan-Zhi Huang, there was little new under the sun about these clothes, but still, the fashion clip left a smile on your face.

By Godfrey Deeny

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