Elsewhere in Paris Fashion Week: Kenneth Ize; Alexandre Blanc; Mossi and Minuit

By Godfrey Deeny - 17 March 2021

Paris may be dominated by giant bold face name luxury fashion marques, but a key to keeping the City of Light at the top of the heap when it comes to fashion capitals is the ability to discover exciting new talent. We caught up with four diverse young designers that created noteworthy collection in this March’s videos and presentations, dedicated to fall/winter 2021.

Kenneth Ize: Aso oke attitudes

Kenneth Ize is the great hope of West African fashion. Of Nigerian origin, Ize grew up in Austria, became a star in Lagos Fashion Week, and went on to become a LVMH Prize finalist.

His key signature is his material of choice: aso oke, meaning top cloth, a hand-woven fabric created by the Yoruba people, with beautifully graphic grids and punchy geometry. Which Kenneth has already employed in great yachting blazers; rock-star jackets and guitar-hero overalls.

Though primarily noted as a menswear designer, Ize has plenty of design chops when it comes to womenswear too. This season in Paris Fashion Week, he displayed an assured fashion video, with two models – one guy, one girl – posing in turn before a series of hanging blankets, to a jangling guitar soundtrack.

The lady in diagonal-print aso oke sheath dresses; mannish gray cotton suits or evil-eye print party frocks. The young gent in tobacco-hued aso oke tunics; great geometric-print Eisenhowers and sensational multi-stripe, four-pocket dusters.

Directed by Joshua Woods and styled by Kyle Keese, this video felt as much like a CV as a fashion statement. Someone should really name Ize creative director of a historic European house and let this talent rip.

Alexandre Blanc: Voluptuous volumes
Several fledgling labels were part of Sphere, the incubator program for young designers supported by the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode, French fashion’s governing body.

Due to the pandemic, Sphere was entirely online, where one could witness an impressive performance by Alexandre Blanc. Whose designs are quintessentially French; with lots classy and intricate cutting, notably some great polka-dot looks and a divinely cut movie-star flared trench coat. Though Blanc’s best ideas were exotic silk cocktails dresses made in a remarkable neo-classical print, created by the designer himself.

Born in Toulouse, the resting place of the great philosopher Thomas Aquinas, Blanc is a thoughtful and highly experienced designer who did stints at Yves Saint Laurent and Balenciaga before joining Guillaume Henry in the resurrection of Carven. Since then, Blanc has collaborated with such storied and diverse brands as Jil Sander and Oscar de la Renta.

In September 2018, he founded his own brand in Paris. It has an uptown sense of style, but is never uptight. This is a designer very much on an upward trajectory.
Fashionistas often just brag about putting something back in, but designer Mossi Traoré really does. His fashion brand and association is all about connecting young people in his outside-of-Paris district with the inner city life of art, culture and fashion.

So, the designer shot the video in his own suburban city, Hautes-Noues in Villiers-sur-Marne. Where he has created a high fashion school, Les Ateliers Alix, which trains some 30 students annually in mastering the crafts of corsetry and embroidery.

This season, Mossi sent his inclusive cast strolling around a housing development courtyard in late afternoon sun, as the elders, young mums and families sat down like editors and critics to admire the clobber.

For next fall, Mossi wants his gal in white or yellow, polka-dots with blotchy black dots, seen in spruce jackets and leggings; finely drawn graphic long dresses; rouched-up blue cotton shirt dresses and, his snappiest look, technical calico blouse/capes.

The cast, their hair done up in spiky corn rows, intermingling with local skateboarders and toddlers, perched on concrete benches.

At the finale, one model in a natty black blazer did a tour on a scooter; before several hoodie guys circled the cast doing wheelies. Barely 10 models but a sharp and cool statement by Mossi, who took his bow dressed in black, and a huge smile surrounded by his dreadlocks.
One marque quietly gathering fans is Minuit, by the French duo of Laurie Arbellot and Marion Ferand who both cut their design teeth in New York working for the likes of Proenza Schouler and Calvin Klein.

They showed their second collection in a garden loft in the heart of the Marais, cleverly balancing comfortable modernist style with a soupcon of Parisian seduction.

What worked best were the velour-style mannish chalk-stripe pants suit cut with elongated legs, and made to be worn with just a saucy bra. Or their series of semi-sheer chiffon voile tops, skirts and dresses – all destined for a steaming sunset cocktail party.

Add in some great evening dresses in an organic Garden-of-Eden print and it made for yet another savvy display by this duo.