All the world’s a red carpet, and nowhere more so than at Paris Fashion Week on Saturday night, where Balenciaga staged a runway show that took place, well, on a red carpet.
A contrived, but not virtual one, seeing as this was also a premiere: that of a *The Simpsons* fashion short starring Homer and Marge. A tale of him making her birthday by taking her to Paris to buy a Balenciaga gown. The cartoon even featured Anna Wintour looking rather bored in the front row of a Balenciaga x Homer haute couture show.

Not only the models walked in this show, but also many of the audience, who all appeared on a giant screen inside the Théâtre du Châtelet, where the show/soirée/happening/hoax was staged.

A bundle of fashion victims, editors, influencers, a couple of normal civilians and Madame Wintour all posed before a battery of some 40 photographers. Before what the French call a "savage casting," of quirky beauties and dashing dudes, in among a few veterans, like Naomi and Amber, gradually took over the red wall.

In a sense the actual clothes were very much secondary to this work of performance art. Though what you could see, via odd camera angles and hopping editing looked pretty darned good. Testifying to the power of fashion and this brand, for an hour before and after the event several thousand fans stood in pouring rain cheering arrivals and departures. The latest show, after Balmain and Valentino, that has taken the action out on the streets, in the most recent democratization of Paris Fashion Week.

Though this was not the first show to use this technique. Two decades ago, Imitation of Christ staged a show in an Upper East Side cinema, where each guest was required to make a $10 contribution to a Central American garment workers union to gain entry. Some paid, some baulked, others angrily refused. All recorded and then shown – on a two-minute time lapse – inside the cinema, much to the delight of the audience.

Back in Paris, the Spring/Summer 2022 collection itself contained multiple examples of the evocative and voluminous fashion of Demna Gvasalia, the creative director of Balenciaga.

Freakish, but never farcical proportions were used in grand gangster suits in serge, with chalk and grandad stripes. In effect, Demna has reconquered fashion for the color black. Pre-Instagram you could always spot where a fashion show was about to take place by the number of people dressed in black outside a doorway.

Now, Balenciaga has made black hip and vital again. With the exception of a great show by Yohji Yamamoto, Demna’s was more or less the only majorly black-paletted show in Paris.

Gvasalia’s other great talent is in terms of proportion, which in part stems from his youth as a refugee in Mitteleuropa, where underground youth style in cities like Berlin and Vienna are based on skinny youngsters buying discarded tailored clothing and wearing them oversized.
Fans and guests inside cheered throughout the show, and during the film, before Gvasalia took a brief bow to prolonged applause from the first floor, sitting beside Balenciaga’s owner, Kering CEO François-Henri Pinault, and Balenciaga CEO Cédric Charbit.

"What can I tell you? I work for a genius, and I have a great team. Demna comes up these ideas like working with The Simpsons and we just do out best to make it happened," said the skinny Charbit, in a black double-breasted tuxedo, the silhouette of which reached four inches past either shoulder.

By Godfrey Deeny