Paris haute couture starts Monday, with over a dozen live shows, pandemic or not

By Godfrey Deeny - 23 January 2022

Paris haute couture, the pinnacle of fashion, begins its next four-day runway season on Monday morning, and despite the pandemic, there will be no shortage of live shows.

All told, at the time of writing, there will be 16 live runway shows. Another seven houses will stage physical and video presentations with rendezvous on an appointment basis for editors and clients; and a further six will be purely digital displays.
“Everyone loves to show. That’s never been clearer. There is nothing to compare between a physical show and a digital event. That is crystal clear to everyone, especially to couturiers,” explained Ralph Toledano, president of the Federation of Haute Couture et de la Mode, which controls all runway seasons in Paris.

“You know, this season plenty of young designers are approaching the Federation. We have a lot of demands for places on our calendar. We are in a period where a lot of people want to innovate and try new ways of working, and haute couture is the ideal field. So there is a long-term movement into couture. Couture is first of all a laboratory, so the ideal discipline,” explains Toledano.

That said, entrance onto the couture calendar is up there with passing through the eye of the needle. This season, the Federation only accepted one new entrance on the official schedule - Yanina, which will round off the season with a show on Thursday evening in the Russia embassy.

“Being on the calendar of Paris haute couture is meaningful, so we take responsibility in not listing just anyone. So, the houses accepted have a duty as well, to produce great fashion,” stressed Toledano.

Due to the pandemic, recent ready-to-wear seasons have seen shows radically reduced in size, with social distancing strictly enforced; buyer numbers limited and Asian editors and retailers largely absent. However, couture’s clientele is a rarefied strata of billionaire’s wives and rich princesses, so expect to see a flotilla of limousines outside major shows this coming week.

And even if fewer clients travel to Paris, major houses travel their collections and thanks to the internet, all clients see the product. Moreover, Hollywood stars are traditionally absent in January – too busy with award season in America.

The two single most prestigious French couture houses, Christian Dior and Chanel, will both stage two shows: Dior in the Rodin Museum and Chanel in its preferred location, the Grand Palais.
Moreover, the season will include a series of stellar brands that include Schiaparelli, currently enjoying a sturdy surrealist revival under American couturier Daniel Roseberry with a tight show inside its Place Vendôme headquarters. Other key catwalks to watch are rocker couturier Alexandre Vauthier; conceptualists Viktor & Rolf; the Levant’s master couturier Elie Saab; the two Roman-based houses Valentino and Fendi; and Stéphane Rolland, who stages his show in the Theatre National de Chaillot.

Attention will also focus on Jean Paul Gaultier, where Glenn Martens of Y/Project will become the second designer to be invited by the French couturier to create a Gaultier couture collection. Last season, this new collab’ concept began with Chitose Abe of Sacai.

“The key goal is to have wonderful shows. And we have a significant number of important physical catwalk shows,” noted the Federation president.

Paris has also introduced strict sanitary rules – from compulsory vaccinations to enter any show, obligatory PPF8 masks and social distancing, all the way to how brands shoot their videos.

Toledano was also careful to underline that the Federation expects couture houses to create high quality collection videos. After some early guffaws in show videos at the beginning of the pandemic, and some 30-second, single look mini fashion films, the Federation introduced stricter rules. With very specific instructions on video length and number of styles. At least four to seven-minute videos, and a minimum of 25 looks.

The Federation has apparently turned down show videos in the current menswear season, preventing them from being shown on its much-followed international website, but Toledano declined to say whom.

“The point of fashion week is to be better every season. That we insist on,” he concluded.

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