NYFW: To the outer limits

By Roxanne Robinson - 16 February 2022

A pattern of locations is evolving in New York, where the biggest and most dynamic shows are happening at locations either far east on the edge of the East River, or far west at the tip of the Hudson.

Three designers, two well-established and a rising star, took their shows to locales on Manhattan’s outer brink to push their Fall 2022 further to the edge.

Michael Kors

When asked recently what he would do for a living if he weren’t a designer, Michael Kors told this reporter that he would be a producer of Broadway shows without missing a beat. He wears that hat for his runway collection shows.
Fall 2022 featured his name in lights on the marquee and musical guest Miguel, the American singer, songwriter, and actor. Making the show an event played into the overarching theme of the Michael Kors show—as described by the designer in a taped press conference for the foreign press—was going out for a night (or day) on the town.

“I was thinking about resilience, confidence, strength and stepping out and strutting your stuff,” Kors said of the collection, recalling tough times New York has faced: the AIDS crisis; 9/11; and most recently, the pandemic like the rest of the world.

“I was thinking about those models of the early 90s that we fell in love with who had such confidence and such strength,” he said, continuing, “After 9/11, they said no one would ever live downtown again, but then we saw this incredible explosion of glamour return, and I thought of those models.”

Fast-forward today, and Kors said he had witnessed the boon to people dressing up and going out again in the Big Apple.

“This show is a love letter to that kind of energy and strutting yourself on the streets looking great wherever you go,” noting that people are more confident about themselves than ever. “You don’t have to be a size zero or 22 years old.

This being a winter collection, the focus was loud, dramatic statement-making outerwear with a coordinated dress or pants look underneath.

“Strutting works with a soundtrack either live or in your head. To that end, Miguel serenaded the models and guests with a series of Prince cover tunes and original material.

Outerwear was cocoon-like and cozy; an oversized chesterfield or belted with a dramatic waist, all fresh merch yet in keeping with Kors greatest hits. The designer favors monochromatic looks and admits an ‘addiction to the color camel’. The designer is big on a gesture, so he had many coats styled off the shoulder with the models clutching them tight à la an old Hollywood starlet.

He didn’t want to relegate strutting to just the nighttime so tailored looks such as a mini-suit in tweed with a faux-fur collar (the designer has taken the fake stuff next level to where it’s almost hard to tell the difference.) Color exploded and drove home the confidence factor with hues of hot pink, tangerine, and bright yellow, also shown on a handful of men’s looks.

Kors intends his women to strut their best on the dance floor. His crystal beaded eveningwear was heavy on the asymmetrical shoulders, which played heavily throughout the show, and strategic cutouts and high slits were made for doing the dancefloor sexy.

Paying homage to that era, he plucked a few superstars from the aughts, such as Carmen Kass, Isabelli Fontana, Malgosia Bela, and more. Kors scored a rare show guest appearance by New York City’s head strutter, mayor Eric Adams. Asked post-show what he thought, the politician known for and often teased for his swagger said, “It was really good, and I saw a coat that I want to order for fall.”

With Adams and Kors leading the charge, come September, the city that never sleeps will be strutting high speed
Gabriela Hearst

Guests making their way to and from Gabriela Hearst’s show in the Brooklyn Navy Yard wondered what the thinking was behind the remote show location—essentially a massive rusted-out warehouse that presumably once harbored navy craft, sea and otherwise. Manhattan is full of empty spaces these days, many of which became show venues this week.

Was it all about social distancing? Maybe. But once seated, guests were still shoulder-to-shoulder in the vast, chilly space warmed by massive heat lamps. (In typical Hearst style, she offered sustenance to her guests with mezze plates, warm beverages, and stiff alcohol).
Another thought was the raw space, devoid of a set point of view, may have alluded to the concept of androgyny that inspired the designer this season. To reference, Professor Emanuele Lugli of Stanford University quoted on the liner notes, androgyny was usually the privilege of deities, angels, and holy rulers who defied being chained to a form. The nothingness of the space allowed guests to interpret the collection as they saw fit, without preconception.

The handicraft and detailed workmanship Hearst is known for was still omnipresent. The show opened with a series of crochet dresses marked with a pop of yellow and leather trench coats with exquisite armor-like embroidery and laser cuts that gave the coats a lace-like detail. (Ditto on a leather camisole dress). Amber Valletta closed the show in a sharply tailored suit, wearing men's style shoes and devoid of any apparent make-up to emphasize the tailored gender-fluid vibe. Non-binary models joined the runway in traditional suiting looks. The designer announced in the show notes that she was donating to the Ali Forney Center, which is a direct aid group for homeless LGBTQ+ youth.

Pops of yellow and terracotta, essential hues for the season manifested as monochromatic knitwear looks. Hearst got her art fix through a poncho made in a print based on an artwork created by Ana Martinez Orizondo. A group of street drummers called OmgCornello provided the soundtrack for the show, beating on upside-down white utility buckets.

Hearst is one of the most vital designers left on the weakened NYFW calendar. So, she can march to her own beat, show where she wants, and encourage others to follow their own inner drum.

Peter Do

The usually reserved Peter Do was feeling exuberant backstage post-show at his Fall 2022 show. And with good reason. The buzzy designer had just shown a slick and elevated collection, complex in its simplicity.

Showing at the Genesis Center, a multi-use space dedicated to the lifestyle of the Hyundai luxury car model, was apropos to the designer who said he wanted to strip away and “clear the rubble to remember why I began the journey.”
To that end, Do said in show notes he “revisited signature silhouettes from his inaugural collections, updated and refined with the knowledge we’ve learned over the past four years."

“I was being a bit selfish with this collection,” he said backstage, adding, “I wanted to create one world and not try to please everyone,” he said of the tightly edited 36-look collection.

The color palette was also tight, consisting of black, white, grey, and the occasional camel and denim combo. A series of sequin numbers suggested Do’s nighttime woman.

“I want to lay the groundwork for the Peter Do house and build the foundation. I’m not sure how long it will take; maybe I’ll get the basement in my lifetime, but I’m hopeful for an actual house where people can come and learn and be proud to be a patternmaker, seamstress, or a technician."

Equally important is the Peter Do woman, who is encouraged to buy pieces to build her own Peter Do house; components to mix-and-match can be worn several ways and broken apart to wear with other pieces. Transformation is witnessed on sweaters and outerwear where sleeves open via snaps or zippers and collars detach. A topper coat is reversible.

Do said he tries on most of the garments, including the shoes, to road test them to work out their functionality and style. To that end, he points out a long scarf cape silhouette that, as a knit is worn over other knits or a wool halter scarf top that rests under a wool topper, giving the illusion of one piece of outerwear.

The designer, who styles his shows, focused heavily on the long scarf, which also manifested as a long flap overlay on pants giving the clothes extra dimensions. Skirts with multiple belts and boxy jackets factored heavily into the line-up. Harness bags that Do calls ‘jacket bags’, because they don’t mess up your jacket as a backpack would, are detachable to be worn one at a time or together. Reiterating the personal side, the designer said the double bags were inspired by his problem-solving when carrying his dog and his belongings at once.

Starting from scratch also meant moving his sample-making to Italy, which appears to elevate the work further.

“We were forced because we lost a lot of factories to the pandemic in New York City,” he explained. It appears to have elevated the collection even further, also giving it a futuristic vibe. Perhaps the kind being born into the digital world as we speak. Do will hear nothing of that strange new world.

“What do I think of the metaverse? I am still in this world and still trying to understand. I am still trying to understand who I am in this world,” he noted, adding, “It’s one Peter Do world. I’m not trying to please everyone.”