London Fashion Week opens with storm warnings, Edward Crutchley and Conner Ives

By Godfrey Deeny - 19 February 2022

Storm Eunice hit England this Friday, in a red warning opening day of London Fashion Week, where the first important show was by Edward Crutchley.
A gale of gothic imagery and a downpour of dandy decadence on the runway from Crutchley, one of important voices on the London fashion scene.

Gender-bending throughout in a collection presented in a battered old attic in the Bargehouse on the banks of the Thames. Over the next five days, LFW will witness almost 40 live runway shows, and even more presentations spread across the UK capital, as editors and buyers finally return in large numbers to physical shows.

In a great opening salvo from Crutchley, one witnessed a blend of perforated body-con, Tudor magnificence and artful androgyny.

Few designers anywhere know their fashion history better than Edward, who has an uncanny ability to mash-up disparate eras into cool and often beautiful clothes.

Combining a perfectly cut boyfriend’s modernist white double-breasted coat in duffle weave wool with a black Edwardian doeskin coat worn as a skirt for a wonderfully mysterious image. Or a flawless duffle weave wool blazer worn with a velvet and viscose tube skirt – the ideal blend of edge and elegance. Everything in interesting textiles, not so surprisingly as Crutchley’s other job is developing fabrics for Dior Men with Kim Jones.
Crutchley tried a little of everything, showing off his range – from a great moth-wing broken-pattern mohair elongated cardigan to recycled polyester gigot-sleeved bodice worn with a va-va-voom warp skirt – talk about a pulse quickener – to a glamorous long-lapel menswear suit and voluminous pants in the softest lilac. The sort of look Saint Laurent might have dreamed up had he attended Central Saint Martin’s.

And, just when the action got a little too polite, too bourgeois, Edward sent out a bearded, dyed blonde dude with a body to rival Thor in a chopped-up knit leotard, knickers, knee socks and matching purple boots.

“The queerness of Gothic is such that its main function is to demonstrate the relationship between the marginal and the mainstream,” read a quote in the show’s online program Queering the Gothic, a philosophical work about reading texts through queer theories.

And not a bad comment on this collection, worn on coal-eyed, waxy-haired models, wearing palladium-coated triple-logo chokers, most of them accessorized with nipple clamp earrings. Over the powder-dusted wooden floor, the cast marching in distressed leather platforms finished with studs, rings and metal laces.

And somehow ideal for this wild and windy Friday where Storm Eunice started ripping the roof of the shopping and entertainment O2 Center on Finchley Road.

Conner Ives: Hudson Valley Hot
Good to see some unabashed merchandise on a London catwalk, courtesy of Conner Ives, an American who has been a LVMH Prize semi-finalist.

Ives was inspired this season by the Hudson Valley School, a 19th-century art movement that glorified the lush and dramatic landscapes of upstate New York.

“Having grown up in the Hudson Valley I see myself as drawing from the same source of inspiration as those artists hundreds of years before me,” explained Ives.

And, even if what hit the runway often seemed far from the earthy mannerist hues and bold panoramas of the art movement, the results were often extremely good.

As is his wont, Ives likes to create for archetypes – and gave every one of the 26 passages a name – from the 'Stay at Home Mum' to the 'Madam Vice President'.

Or the VSCO Girl who opened the show, interpreted by the ineffable Edie Campbell, in a matching yellow and white oversized caban and flat-cap paired with patent leather boots in bright red, like one of Frederic Edwin Church’s sunset vistas.

“Hot, cunning and toned. Plays dumb for the boys, scored 2300 in her first attempt at the SAT,” commented the designer on his VSCO Girl.

Otherwise, the Diana Ross-inspired burning red forest-print sweater; or the Laurel Canyon wild gal with a barely-there scarf dress and crisscross top; and a fantastic gap-year-in-Bali beauty in a perfectly draped sleeveless golden yellow dress were, well, all very youthful glamour.

Ives’s Big Idea is melding elements of American graphic iconography and street style with classy draping and ladylike silhouettes. It makes for a cool distinctive style, even if it the stylistic soufflé doesn’t always work. A crass red cotton dress featuring a basketball logo reading Buckeye Champions was practically a human rights offence.

Still, this was a punchy and sexy statement by Ives, one designer sure to make the grade in his career. Matter of fact, he already has.

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