Deeny’s Dozen: Europe's 12 best women's collections so far in 2022

By Godfrey Deeny - 16 March 2022

It was a season that began optimistically. But ended questioning the point of shows given the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Nonetheless, with almost 100 live runway shows in London, Milan and Paris, there was no shortage of ideas as fashion emerged from the pandemic.

Ideas and collections that seemed prescient were suddenly faintly absurd, given the obscenity of this abhorrent war by a cruel dictator. Nonetheless, the most influential show and collection was by a designer who had fled a Russian-sponsored separatist war in his own country, Georgian-born Demna for Balenciaga.

Finally, after a dozen seasons between womenswear, menswear and couture with barely any catwalks shows, there were almost 100 live runways in Europe, between London, Milan and Paris. We select the dozen most important collections in Europe from a season unlike any other.

Balenciaga: Refugees on the Steppes
Every so often a great fashion show becomes a comment on our times. That was the case at Balenciaga, an exile-in-flight collection, created by Demna, a Georgian who had to flee his own country in a Russian-backed separatist war two decades ago. A designer who terms himself a “forever-refugee.”

A remarkable glass-walled snow-space, 60 meters in diameter built inside an airport hangar – where his cast trudged in high winds, dressed in a cloak/dresses billowing furiously, carrying shoulder bags that looked like refuse sacks.

“This week, I saw myself in the past. from 30 years ago, in a shelter like some Ukrainian boys and girls today. Not knowing if the ceiling was about to fall. So, these half-naked people marching through the wind are very personal,” said an emotional Demna.

**Bottega Veneta: Luxury in Motion**
Probably the best debut in the past half-decade, a Luxury in Motion collection by new boy Matthieu Blazy of sculptural, very wearable chic with voluminous clothes that never overwhelmed guy or girl in a co-ed show.

Cool cocoon-shaped coats, their backs almost inflated; second-skin feather-light leather dresses; leather flamenco skirts; or great gestural abstract cocktails worn with intreccio thigh boots. Inspired by Futurist artist Umberto Boccioni, and his motion-driven sculpture. Talk about a home run the first time at bat.

**Burberry: Majestic moda at Methodist Hall**
In an impressive return to form, Riccardo Tisci managed to skillfully blend his own DNA with Burberry’s classic codes. The result: Riccardo’s best collection for the house in a mélange of hipster gothic, British gentility and Burberry iconography.

Tisci’s Italian roots sprouting with fantastic all-black goth-rock leather and chiffon cocktails; thigh boots laced at the back. While his semi-shear tops and matching bras; and kicky tartan cocktails looked sexy yet natty and unpredictable.

**Christian Dior: Techno classicism in a Renaissance setting**
Hi-tech bodysuits met classy bar jackets; and air bags accentuated Monsieur’s signature garment, when Dior’s creative director Maria Grazia Chiuri unveiled her latest collection inside a giant artwork entitled *Era Successiva* by Mariella Bettineschi – boasting 200 faux versions of famed oil paintings of women. A novel reconsideration of women and their style, in a collection that did the same thing. Chiuri’s direct style might not be to everyone’s taste, but her feminist fashion has turned Dior into the best-performing luxury fashion brand anywhere. That’s what we call female fashion empowerment.

**Erdem: Contemporary Cabaret**
The whiff of Thirties Berlin - revamped flapper dresses made with glistening sequins, a myriad of fringes and elongated waistlines. Though nothing remotely retro. Pearl-beaded nylon brassieres over bugle-beaded dresses and great micro plissé cocktails; cascading lace layer frocks paired with metallic mesh aviator helmets. All finished with sequin scarves; pearl-crusted brogues and long silver studded gloves. “I love the swoosh of a sequin on a cocktail dress, since childhood,” twinkled Erdem post-show after an outstanding display.

Loewe: Latex Love
Contrasts and contradictions; incongruities and juxtapositions in a brilliant show and riveting collection for the house of Loewe by Jonathan Anderson. A collection where eras, ideas and above all materials - like latex, shearling and 3D printing - clashed and coalesced. Including the show invitation, an 80-square-centimeter latex square, which some editors even wore as scarves into the show.

**Louis Vuitton: Teen Quake in the Musée d'Orsay**
adolescents. Skinny kids danced over pixelated carpet-print pullovers or glowered on sequined trenches. Over-the-top proportions; mashed-up eras and cultures – who else but Nicolas Ghesquière would combine active sportswear with athletic haute couture and wackily printed dhotis? All adding up to the funkies take on fashion in Paris.

Miu Miu: Tennis-champ chic
evening, motor-bike jackets. But without a sneaker in sight, only dozens of ballet slippers; or bold quadrupled-strap mechanic boots. Racy, saucy chic has returned.

Nensi Dojaka: Lingerie life

The latest winner of the LVMH Prize, Nensi Dojaka, wowed with her smart take on innerwear-as-outerwear that was both concise and cool. Her aesthetic looked ideal coming out of the pandemic. Holed stretch-Lycra cocktails interspersed with mesh and finished with thin straps; or tough-chic zippered tunics and a perfectly cut mini puffers for clubbing. While her signature lingerie dresses manage to be sexy and suggestive, without ever being cheap. A tricky balancing act, which Nensi delicately pulls off.
Most of the component parts were classical Prada: felt wool; burnished leather; strass and just-below-the-knee lengths, but with a fresh naughty new transparency. Sexy yet stern, in the finest collection so far from the duo of Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons. Kaia Gerber opened in a white ribbed canoe-shirt, over a skirt made of a triple band of black nylon, anthracite silk and transparent lurex, over which was sprinkled abstract flowers. The duo showed a dozen variations on this theme in a show that featured a gang of veteran supes - Liya Kebede, Elise Crombez, and Hannelore Knut. Raf’s influence apparent in leather spy-coats — cut two sizes too large, with ’80s power shoulders — and made in hues of tobacco, royal blue and pink. Though the cover shot looks were the felt power coats, finished at the biceps with feathers. In a word, transparent power.
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Rick Owens: Fashion Amid Darkening Clouds

With war clouds darkening all of Europe, a moment of grace and grandeur at Rick Owens, as an ethereal cast emerged out of giant engulfing clouds - statuesque, solitary and sensational.

Many models carried portable fog machines spouting plumes that engulfed the entire show space inside the Palais de Tokyo. Like a medieval gathering of believers carrying fashionable thuribles. A collection imagined before the very idea that Putin’s Russia might invade Ukraine, yet somehow a prescient vision of society and fashion.
Wrapped in huge cloaks; substantial tunics and cowls in combinations of recycled nylon, velvet, washed denim and alpaca felt, in a reference to Rick’s great muse Joseph Beuys. Coats finished with elusive materials at collar and shoulder – like snakeskin or pirarucu, a Brazilian fish-skin sourced from a tannery that uses the fish as food.

Trussardi: Street Regal

Expressionism is alive and well in fashion and it has found its best contemporary interpretation at Trussardi with new designers, Serhat Isik and Benjamin Alexander Huseby. In an overwhelmingly dark palette of black, black and tiny doses of silver and white, the duo whipped up a bold debut series of great flowing dalmatikons in serge wool; puffer jackets cut like archer’s tunics; or anthracite surcoats made of shaggy matelassé.
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The gents, known for their Berlin-based brand GmbH, also paired military punk pants with streamlined bodices; and sent out Maid-Marion-in-Berghain mini coat-dresses worn with buccaneer’s thigh boots.

Serhat and Benjamin call it Techno Feudalism, and we do too.