



# Virtual catwalk

In a year like no other, here's how the global fashion community responded to COVID-19

There's no denying the impact that COVID-19 has had on every part of our lives. For the sartorially minded, style has taken something of a backseat over the last 12 months, with sweatpants trumping sequins, and socialising taking place via a brisk walk or video conferencing software. The result is that no one can see (or appreciate) your silk print Etro skirt, and face masks – Fendi, D&G or Helmut Lang for the fashion-forward – have become the most impactful way to make a fashion statement. AW20 shows and Fashion Weeks in New York,

London and Paris managed to take place largely before the pandemic hit last year, but many other cities were forced to cancel, with the majority of in-person, resort and pre-fall shows being nixed entirely. It's said that constraints can become a breeding ground for creativity, and the fashion industry was quick to put this into practice, pivoting to staging virtual shows and adapting to social distancing regulations.

**Above:** Life before lockdown at the Fendi show in Milan in February 2019

Prior to Zoom fatigue setting in on a global scale, virtual productions were the natural direction many brands went in. Balmain hosted a traditional show, streamed across their website and social media channels, recreating the first three rows of guests via 58 digital screens. Balenciaga went one step further, utilising virtual reality and sending more than 300 pairs of Oculus headsets to guests, allowing them to experience the AW21 collection in incredible detail. The brand also produced an accompanying a multi-level, dystopian video

game – 'Afterworld: The Age of Tomorrow' – the first of its kind to be created by a fashion house.

Other designers pivoted to smaller collections photographed on a single model, invited frontline workers to model, or created short films produced in collaboration with traditional runway shows, albeit without any guests in attendance. Schiaparelli's designer, Daniel Rosenberry, unable to get back to Paris when the pandemic first hit, used the logistical challenge to instead present a series of sketches for the house's AW20 couture collection, evoking historical images from classic fashion magazines. For his SS21 collection, Jeremy Scott brought puppetry to Moschino, teaming up with Jim Henson's Creature Shop to showcase designs, with the traditional front row elite – think Anna Wintour and Co. – as 75cm marionettes. ➤



Unsurprisingly, the economic impact of the pandemic has hit fashion hard, with younger brands not necessarily having the capital to host elaborate runway alternatives. Thankfully some are thriving, including Charles de Vilmorin, who debuted his first couture collection in 2020 and, at the age of 24, has become a hit with the likes of Alessandro Michele and Jean Paul Gaultier for his hand painted, eye-poppingly colourful designs.

UK designer Molly Goddard continued to expand her romantic, ruffle-led collections by introducing tailoring and Fair Isle knitwear for 2021, and American Black-owned mother-daughter line, Dur Doux, weathered a 2020 NYFW debut with joyful levels of volume and digital print illustrations.

Our shared experience of the pandemic has already begun showing up on AW 21 runways (virtual and physical) with designers either embracing relaxed styles and athleisure, or rejecting it internally in favour of maximalist looks. The former, as seen at Altuzarra and Yigal Azrouël, leans into minimalism, cocooning and comfort; accepting that life, for now, is still largely playing out at home. Outerwear has also taken center stage at many fashion presentations: as COVID-19 has limited how we socialise and exist in the world, a chic coat and practical footwear have become

**Above:** Anna Wintour **Right:**  
Masks as fashion accessories  
in 2020 **Below:** Paris 2018



almost as essential as a face mask. Look to Loewe and Rick Owens for statement-making oversized blazers and exaggerated puffy jackets this autumn/winter.

It's no surprise that fashion houses such as Gucci and Ashish are in favour of a more celebratory approach – clashing textures, prints and colours – but even traditionally refined and pragmatic designers are bringing more colour and

experimental shapes to their work. No one's suggesting you get rid of your velvet Balmain sweatpants just yet, but doesn't the thought of getting dressed to the nines sound divine? After more than a year of restrictions to travel, gatherings and galas, I for one welcome an approach of excess and decadence to dressing – whatever that means to you. ■

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#### KEY EVENTS

24 April	United Together Fashion Show (online) <a href="http://londonfashionweek.co.uk">londonfashionweek.co.uk</a>
24 May	Great British Garden Fashion Show (online) <a href="http://londonfashionweek.co.uk">londonfashionweek.co.uk</a>
9 July	Miami Swimwear Fashion Week (Online) <a href="http://miamifashionweek.com">miamifashionweek.com</a>
18 July	Milano Fashion Week (Online) <a href="http://cameramoda.it/en">cameramoda.it/en</a>