

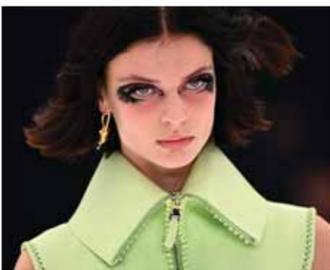
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Fashion designer Virginie Viard acknowledges the audience at the end of Chanel show as part of Paris Fashion Week in Paris yesterday. — AFP photos



(From left) Danish actor Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, French model Cindy Bruna, Australian actress Katherine Langford, US-Cuban singer-songwriter Camilla Cabello, Indian actress Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, British actress Helen Mirren, US actress Aja Naomi King, US actress Amber Heard, South Korean-US model Soo Joo Park, French singer Yseult, a model, Indian model Nidhi Sunil, French actress Leila Behkti, Ethiopian model Liya Kebede and German model Luma Grothe pose during the L'Oréal shows held on the sidelines of the Paris Fashion Week at the Trocadero in Paris on Oct 3, 2021.



A model presents a creation for Givenchy.



A model presents a creation for Lanvin.

Paris Fashion Week wrapped up yesterday after nine days of innovative experiments that showed how the industry is embracing technology and new approaches for a post-pandemic future. While many fashion houses stuck to online presentations, the biggest names such as Dior, Balenciaga and Stella McCartney - even Yves Saint Laurent, which had been first to quit live shows when the pandemic hit - got back to the catwalk. But new twists often reflected the lessons learned during lockdowns, and increasing environmental concerns.

What is real?

Among the most inventive runway shows in years came from Balenciaga, who fooled their own guests into becoming part of the spectacle. Arriving via a red carpet, they were unaware that the official models were walking among them until a big screen relayed their entrance and highlighted which outfits were part of the show. The line between guest and model disappeared as it emerged that some of the celebrities had been on secret modelling duty, including racing driver Lewis Hamilton and actress Isabelle Huppert. The New York Times called it a "knife-sharp belly laugh of an experiment on... our digital lives, where posing has become the norm (and voyeurism is a constant.)"

Immersive shows

One advantage of pandemic-era



Post-pandemic experimentation at Paris Fashion Week

Mercedes' British Formula 1 driver Lewis Hamilton presents a creation for Balenciaga.

online presentations is that they have given viewers time to really appreciate the clothes. Dior embraced that idea, using an elaborate gameshow-style rotating stage which allowed the models and their outfits to be seen from multiple angles. Christian Louboutin, creator of the famous red-soled pumps, offered a fully immersive experience, plunging the audience into digital landscapes before presenting the shoes on podiums, jazzed up with digital effects, while dancers put them through their paces.

Face-to-face

Young French star Marine Serre, who has put on spectacular shows in the past,

opted to stick with an online presentation this time. But she also screened the film for several hundred guests at a special evening in Paris "to give it some warmth and appreciation," she said. The clothes were on display to see and touch, while Serre herself was on hand to discuss directly with guests. British veteran Paul Smith also took an intimate approach, inviting guests to his headquarters. He offered commentary on each outfit, saying: "I think the way we've done it today is correct for the house. It's nice to have a one-to-one."

Ethical concerns

Though the fashion industry is often

accused of empty posturing on the environment, some designers insist they are determined to really make a difference. Stella McCartney displayed the first-ever bag made from "Mylo" mushroom leather. It was part of a collection that went heavy on natural vibes, with even the music being inspired by fungi. Gabriella Hearst also highlighted her green credentials, saying 58 percent of her designs for Chloe were from low-impact materials. And Dutch label Botter used recovered plastic waste from the sea for its aquatic-inspired collection. — AFP

100 musicians flee Afghanistan, fearing Taliban crackdown

More than 100 music students and teachers have fled Afghanistan in a nail-biting flight from Kabul following the Taliban's takeover of the country, their institute's founder and principal said. Fearing a crackdown on music by the country's new leaders, a total 101 members of Afghanistan's top musical institute landed in Doha on Sunday evening, Ahmad Sarmast said. The group, about half of them women and girls, plan to fly to Portugal with the support of the government there, said Sarmast, founder of the Afghanistan National Institute of Music, who now lives in Melbourne.



Handout photo taken on Oct 3, 2021 and received yesterday shows some of the more than 100 music students and teachers on a flight from Kabul to Doha.

But the success of the operation was in doubt until the last moment, he said. With help from the Qatari embassy in Kabul, the musicians had been ferried in small groups to the city's airport, Sarmast said. In a first hurdle, Taliban militants manning Kabul airport questioned their visas. But Qatari embassy officials managed to resolve the problem. Then the girls and women were told that they could not leave

the country with their temporary "service passports", which are usually issued to officials.

'Time of many tears'

"My understanding is that it was not so much of the type of the passports but that the girls were fleeing the country," Sarmast said. Once again, Qatari officials managed to negotiate their passage. When the flight finally took off hours later with the musicians, including many from the all-female Zohra orchestra, Sarmast said he was overcome with emotion. "It was a time of many tears. I was crying endlessly. My family were crying together with me. That was the happiest moment in my entire life," he said.

The institute's founder said he had lived many memorable moments with his students, who won standing ovations on international concert tours. "But the feeling and the happiness when I heard that their plane took off the ground is very hard to describe." The flight was the result of long planning since the Taliban takeover, Sarmast said. "From the moment the Taliban took power in Kabul the discrimination against music and musicians began. The people of Afghanistan were silenced once again," he said.

The Taliban, who banned music outright during their brutal and oppressive rule from 1996 to 2001, swept back into power on August 15. They have promised a more moderate brand of rule this time - though they have made clear that they will run Afghanistan within the restrictive limits of their interpretation of sharia law. The movement's position on music is inconsistent and no clear order has yet been issued. At a Taliban rally outside Kabul this weekend, for example, religious music was played ahead of speeches by ministers and senior Taliban figures.

Told to stay at home

According to Sarmast, the Taliban have told the musical institute's members to stay at home until further notice. Nearly two months later, they have not been given any further information. The escape from Kabul was just the first phase, Sarmast said, vowing to work until all 184 remaining faculty and students, past and present, were evacuated and "reunited with the rest of the school". During a visit by AFP to the college in Kabul last month, there was no sound of music. Instead, Taliban soldiers chatted and armed guards cradled Kalashnikovs in the courtyard, shaded by trees with swirling treble clefs spray-painted on to their trunks. —AFP

'The Rescue' unearths rare footage of Thai cave saga

After their Oscar-winning movie "Free Solo," about a daredevil rock climber, Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi and Jimmy Chin found an even more remarkable true story for their next film: the rescue of a boys' soccer team from a Thai cave in 2018. The husband-and-wife team had watched transfixed with the rest of the world as amateur divers, Navy SEALs and hundreds of volunteers pulled off a seemingly impossible rescue through miles of dark, perilous, flooded caves.

Once the 12 boys and their coach had been plucked miraculously from their subterranean prison, the documentary makers teamed with National Geographic to tell the inside story in "The Rescue," out in theaters October 8. "It moved us as humans, as Asian parents and as storytellers. I think that this really is one of the great stories of the last 10 years," Vasarhelyi told AFP.

The directors sifted through 87 hours of never-before-seen footage-obtained from the Thai Navy SEALs after two years' of negotiations during which military chiefs "said no in every possible form of 'no,'" Chin recalled. "For me it wasn't fair-if it existed the world needed to see it," said Vasarhelyi. The behind-the-scenes footage shows the euphoric moment two British divers returned to the cave's entrance with news they had located the children, and the precarious pulley con-



In this file photo taken on July 18, 2018, 12 boys and their football coach Ekkapol Chantawong (left), dramatically rescued from deep inside a Thai cave after being trapped for more than a fortnight, wave as they arrive for a press conference in Chiang Rai following their discharge from hospital.

traption used to transfer them on stretchers out of the final cavern.

But the film focuses mainly on the personalities and back stories of the rescue's unlikely heroes. The rag-tag group of middle-aged hobbyists' unique skillsets and homemade equipment enabled them to reach sections of the cave that military divers could not begin to fathom. "Here are these weekend warriors-one's a retired fireman, one's a meteorologist, an IT consultant, an electrician," said Vasarhelyi.

"They're kind of misfits, they feel awkward, they have found purpose in this very strange subculture of cave diving on the weekends, which has allowed them to become the best in the world." The divers not only appear in interviews, but re-enacted key moments of the rescue on camera for the movie. "This is the first film that we've made that we weren't present for the principal action," Vasarhelyi. "The only way to really understand the gravity of tying a kid's arms together behind their back and putting their head underwater is when you see it."

'Risk everything'

The interviews reveal hair-raising details about the rescue, for which the children were injected with a cocktail of drugs to sedate them. One diver bringing out a child became disoriented and ended up swimming backwards to the previous cave-following an electrical cable-after losing his dive rope.

Another accidentally stabbed himself with a ketamine syringe while underwater with a child who was recovering consciousness. Thankfully, it was empty at the time. For Vasarhelyi, one of the rescue's most compelling features was the personal risk shouldered by the amateur divers, who were warned by embassies they could land in Thai jail if any of the children died, and given extraction plans in case it failed.

"If you're the only person in the world who can save these kids, are you going to risk everything to try to do it? And can we be our best selves? And what is the consequence of that?" she said. "I think that even going to Thai prison would probably pale to what it would have been like to live with yourself, knowing that you participated in the death of 13 people," she added. "And I don't think we can really ever overstate-they really considered that saving one child would be a success."

Notably absent from the film is Elon Musk, who infamously traveled to Thailand with a prototype mini-submarine which was rejected as unusable by the divers-triggering a bizarre spat. "This is such a rich story, and that particular incident really had no impact on the rescue itself," said Vasarhelyi. "It felt like a diversion-it just took away from the principal action. So we thought as it wasn't a big deal to the rescue itself, it shouldn't be a big deal in our film." — AFP



Filmmakers Chai Vasarhelyi and Jimmy Chin pose during the press day for their new documentary "The Rescue" in Beverly Hills, California, on Sept 20, 2021. — AFP photos