



In this file photo models walk the runway at the Rodarte show during New York Fashion Week: The Shows in New York City. — AFP photos



In this file photo taken on February 13, 2019, models walk the runway for the Michael Kors Collection Fall 2019 runway show at Cipriani Wall Street during New York Fashion Week in New York City.

Fashion Week returning to New York with in-person energy

After a long hiatus due to the coronavirus pandemic, New York is opening its Spring/Summer 2022 Fashion Week with the return of in-person runway shows featuring big names like Tom Ford and Altuzarra. But COVID-related curbs will deprive the series of some of its usual international flavor as it rolls out this week. The pandemic overshadowed the last two fashion weeks, in September 2020 and February 2021, as both were dominated by virtual runway shows. Steven Kolb, chief executive of the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA), says he sees room for both digital and in-person shows.

But "there is a real optimism and energy and enthusiasm about returning to live shows," he added. "There is, of course, nothing you can compare to a live show." In New York, whose fashion shows precede those of London, Milan and Paris, there is no shortage of iconic runway settings, as with Tommy Hilfiger's Apollo Theater show in 2019 or Michael Kors' Studio 54-themed event the same year. On Thursday evening, LaQuan Smith will present his collection atop the Empire State Building, capping a day including shows by Moschino, Sergio Hudson and Carolina Herrera.

On Tuesday, the founder of Collina

Strada, Hillary Taymour, will confirm her environmentally conscious approach with a show on a rooftop garden in Brooklyn. "This is an important moment for New York, and we're proud to support the city and the industry," said Michael Kors. "We're resilient," added Steven Kolb. "And we're optimistic."

The COVID factor

Fashion Week this year overlaps with the Metropolitan Museum of Art's own fashion extravaganza, a high point of the city's social calendar, set for today. This year's Met Gala has a distinctively youthful imprint, hosted by singer Billie Eilish, actor Timothee Chalamet, poet Amanda Gorman and tennis star Naomi Osaka, none of them older than 25. But in a city that has been slammed by COVID-19 — and again in recent days by historic flooding — the return to normal is coming slowly.

Fashion Week's organizers have announced a strict protocol: All guests and participants must be vaccinated, masks are recommended though not for runway models and audience sizes are limited. According to the CFDA, "a large percentage" of the 91 official events will take place outdoors, while some labels continue to rely on digital presentations. And with travel to the United States still

banned from many countries, "there will be many of our normal international guests... not getting to New York," Kolb told AFP. But he insisted that he has "no concern that the impact will not reach an international audience. It'll just reach them" virtually.

'Less routine'

Even before the pandemic, the

American fashion world faced some major defections, with onetime tentpoles like Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger dropping high-end lines or moving their shows elsewhere. New York had also lost designers like Pyer Moss, Rihanna and Victoria Beckham. This time, the CFDA has been touting the return of Thom Browne and Joseph Altuzarra, who earlier left New York for Paris.

The week gets fully underway tomorrow with Christian Siriano and Collina Strada. Also on the calendar are Liberian-American stylist Telfar Clemens, whose vegan leather shopping bag created a sensation, and Peter Do, the young designer who grew up on a small farm in Vietnam and is now taking part in his first Fashion Week. The week closes on Sunday with shows by big names Tory Burch, Oscar de la Renta and Tom Ford. Meantime, the pandemic, by at least temporarily de-emphasizing in-person shows, has left some designers with mixed feelings.

"I don't think designers necessarily feel the pressure to show every season, as some of them have maybe once felt," said Cathleen Sheehan, a professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. "It's a tremendous relief for a lot of brands, because shows are incredibly expensive. It's less of an obligation and a routine. There's more freedom." — AFP

In this file photo taken on February 10, 2020, a model walks the runway for the Proenza Schouler fashion show during February 2020 - New York Fashion Week: The Shows at the Spring Studios in New York City.

Do tourist boats stress out whales? Researchers find out

Just off the northern coast of Iceland, scientists are collecting data from whales' breath to find out if they get stressed by whale-watching boats, an industry that has boomed in recent years. Researchers from Whale Wise, a marine conservation charity, are studying the whales' stress levels in their hormones. From their small sailboat, a drone lifts off. After six hours of waiting, the scientists have finally spotted a humpback whale. Attached to the flying device are two petri dishes-transparent cylindrical containers—that will collect water droplets from the whale's spray.



This aerial picture shows a humpback whale diving in Hestfjorour (Westfjords), Iceland. — AFP

The timeframe to collect the sample is short—the duration of a whale's breath. This time, the drone flies over the whale carefully, crossing through the spray coming from the whale's blowhole... and mission accomplished. It returns to the sailboat, delivering its precious cargo to the researchers. Once wrapped in paraffin and frozen, the samples will be sent to a laboratory for analysis. The researchers aim to collect samples before a whale watching boat arrives and then afterwards, then compare the two samples to determine the direct impact of that encounter on stress levels.

Tourists have been increasingly flocking to the waters of the North Atlantic off Iceland to admire the majestic creatures,

though 2020 was a quiet year due to the pandemic. More than 360,000 whale watchers were registered in 2019, three times the number a decade ago. Almost a third of them began their whale watching tour in the Husavik harbor, heading for the chilly waters of Skjalfandi Bay.

Feeding disruptions

Previous studies on tourism's impact on whales, which were based on behavioral observations, concluded that tourism caused only minor disruptions to the mammals. The most recent study, from 2011, found that whale-watching excursions were disrupting minke whales in the Faxa Bay near Reykjavik, in the south of the country. "We found that the minke whales were disturbed in their feeding, but it was only a short-term disturbance," one of the authors of the study, Marianne Rasmussen, director of the University of Iceland Research Center in Husavik, told AFP. "It didn't affect their overall fitness." The method used by Whale Wise this summer has been used elsewhere by biologists but this was a first for researchers in Iceland.

"From the samples, you can look at hormones such as cortisol, which is a stress-related hormone, and then you can determine the physiological stress levels of these whales," said Tom Grove, Whale Wise co-founder and a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh. Since 2018, 59 samples have been collected. While a minimum of 50 are needed for a proper analysis, he hopes to collect around 100. This summer, some of the samples were collected together with French environmental group Unu Mondo Expedition, which travelled to Iceland for a month-long expedition to study climate change issues. "The whales are important to us, for our lives, because they are part of the ecosystem on our planet," said Sophie Simonin, 29, the organization's co-founder.

"They also absorb enormous amounts of carbon dioxide," she added. According to a December 2019 study by the International Monetary Fund, a large whale captures an average of 33 tons of carbon dioxide. While whales are a tourist attraction, they are also hunted in Iceland. The International Whaling Commission banned commercial whaling in 1986, but Iceland, which opposed the moratorium, resumed its hunt in 2003. Iceland only bans the hunt of blue whales. But while the country has established an annual quota of 209 fin whales and 217 minke whales until 2023, no whales were hunted this year for the third straight year, as whalers say it is not financially viable. — AFP

Anonymous Myanmar photographer wins major photojournalism award

A Myanmar photographer won the top award Saturday at photojournalism's biggest annual festival for his coverage of the troubled nation's pro-democracy protests and bloody military crackdown. The photographer, who remained unnamed for security reasons, scooped the Visa d'Or for News, the most prestigious award handed out at the "Visa Pour L'Image" festival in Perpignan, southwestern France. Mikko Takkunen, the Asia photo editor for The New York Times, collected the prize on behalf of the photographer.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military seized power in a February 1 coup, with near-daily protests and a huge civil disobedience movement. "He is probably the strongest photographer in the country. He is extremely happy and honored to win this prize," Takkunen said. Takkunen said the photographer dedicated the prize to his peers in his country who are working under extremely difficult conditions. His photographs portray civilian protesters armed with stones, soldiers firing live bullets and grieving families mourning their dead.

Across Myanmar, more than 1,000 civilians have been killed in the ongoing military crackdown, according to an advocacy group. The press has been squeezed as the junta tries to tighten control over the flow of information, throttling internet access and revoking the licenses of local media outlets. The anonymous photographer said in a message that he



Visitors look at photos displayed at the exhibition 'Documenting India's Greatest Healthcare Crisis' by Indian Reuters photographer Danish Siddiqui during the 33rd edition of the Visa pour l'image international photojournalism festival, in Perpignan, southern France, on September 3, 2021.

was "on the streets every day since February 1. I encountered many difficulties, working between bullet shots, tear gas and deafening grenades."

"On the ground, we stopped working with helmets marked PRESS as we realized the soldiers were targeting photographers," he said. Among the others nominated was Greek photographer Angelos Tzortzinis from AFP for his work on the last days that migrants and asylum seekers spent at the Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesbos, which was cleared

after devastating fires. Also nominated was American Erin Schaff from The New York Times for photographs depicting the storming of the US Capitol in Washington. Indian Danish Siddiqui from Reuters was nominated for his work on the health crisis following the coronavirus pandemic in his country. Siddiqui was killed in July while covering fighting between the Taliban and Afghan forces. — AFP



French photographer Jerome Gence tells the stories behind his pictures displayed at his exhibition 'Telework'.



French photographer Agnes Dherbeys of the agency MYOP for the European Commission tells the stories behind the photos at her exhibition 'Crisis Upon Crisis - Refugees and the Pandemic'. — AFP photos