



EMANUEL UNGARO

Photographs by Christopher Moore/Karl Prouse

Ungaro's disco queens

In a glitter gulch of references to having fun at night, the Emanuel Ungaro collection Thursday focused on a star whose light never seems to dim: the disco diva.

She is the one who shimmers in the spotlight in neon-bright dresses as long on sequins as their hemlines are short. In fact there is never a moment when she is not seeking the limelight, whether rocking away in black leather or wearing a butter-scotch fur chubbe or a fur coat in black and white with a pattern of a face down the back of the pelt.

Who is she? Ask the designer Peter Dundas and he will see her as the Ungaro woman — perhaps the granddaughter of the august couture house's original clients. (Although actually she looks at her most stylish in the artfully draped silk jersey dresses that Emanuel Ungaro once made.)

For flash, pizzazz and razzmatazz, Dundas is doing something to breathe life into Ungaro, which has not suffered the fate of famous Paris houses that just seem to wither away. But there is not much sign of a heady renaissance à la Balenciaga in the tough chic daywear, mixing cobalt-blue woolen coats, fancied up in the sleeves, or black padded techno coats, perfect for waiting on line behind the red velvet ropes.

Dundas showed his cutting skills with high-waisted pants creating a lean silhouette. But his glitter dresses baring the back or a scarlet calf-length cardigan, like a caricature of bordello wear in the red light district, were only just this side of vulgar. And how many glampuss luxury customers are there out there for these kind of dresses for dancing queens?

Sophia Kokosalaki's great strength is the dresses she makes from compressing the pleats and tucks of her Greek heritage into fresh young party dresses. Saving the best until last, those succinct dresses came out near the end of her show, with rouleaux of fabric applied across the torso as if it had been done with a cake decorating tube.

This was the London-based designer's first collection since her company was bought by Renzo Rosso, the chief executive at Diesel, who is assembling a portfolio of young and offbeat talents.

The snug jackets, short skirts and thick hose that opened the collection could have been shown by any designer, although the cape tops and short rounded skirts had a lot of charm. The knits, taking the same technical approach of a twisted tracery as in the silken dresses, looked lumpen. But considering that, as Rosso said, this is only the start of putting the house of Kokosalaki together, there is plenty of time to develop a more complete collection, with accessories, and to ready the line for its own store.

The heroine from Françoise Sagan's novel "The Unmade Bed" was the heroine of the designer Ivana Omazic's collection for Celine. Anyone hoping to spot the author's "sensual, violent and libertine" woman under caps tied firmly under the chin, waists cinched with buckled obi belts and thick mohair knits would have been disappointed. But maybe all the secrets of her love life were kept in the big bag, with the usual metal hardware, that she toted



SOPHIA KOKOSALAKI



CELINE



Roger Vivier

Buckle up!

It's done by the restorers at Versailles," the designer Bruno Frisoni said about the most glamorous of his Roger Vivier clutch purses — in tooled leather like a royal throne, laminated in pure gold.

At its center was a buckle, the symbol-turned-logo of the Vivier collection ever since the 1960s when Catherine Deneuve wore its iconic shoes in "Belle de Jour."

The Buckle Bag collection ran the gamut from scarlet plastic with studs for daytime to the most luxe of evening purses: a diamante buckle buried in Folies Bergère feathers; with patent patches like a dismembered crocodile; in squares to resemble a bar of rich chocolate. Or the gilded bag appropriately named "Louis Louis." For those who prefer buckles at the feet there were many options in the Roger Vivier collection, from side-buckled boots to high-rise sandals.

For a different take on elegance, there were roses, not just whorled on the front of the shoe, but as a thorn molded into the high heel — well-suited to the upscale store that Roger Vivier opened last month on Madison Avenue in New York.

— Suzy Menkes



COSTUME NATIONAL

Combat couture

The tortured angst of Nirvana's percussive ballad "Lithium" was on the soundtrack. And it was a good fit for the military beat that reverberated through Ennio Capasa's collection for Costume National.

Tough chicks marched down the runway in drab khaki coats of alpaca or flannel, relaxed jodhpurs and suits with shoulders like rounded epaulets: It was combat couture.

If black was Costume National's uniform last year, a plain old uniform will do this year, since this woman is on her way to lead a war — or at least a nasty board meeting.

The gray flannel menswear suits with 1980s power-suit shoulders were only slightly out of place in an army of domineering looks, including stiff, high-necked collars in fur or on short tapered satin dresses, dark green alpaca trim on streamlined skirts and no-fuss trenches in a techno vinyl or green felt.

Long knit gloves buckled around the upper arm and bags cut across the body like rounds of ammo.

Capasa did show a softer side, giving way to duchesse satin dresses (still with stiff necks) in authoritative tailoring; a balletic scoop at the back of a leotard; delicate black-on-black embellishments; and the new, bright color palette of dresses in crimson, navy and saffron.

— Maisie Wilhelm

Taking the temperature

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warmth to jackets and vests.

Almost everything in the collection was over-size, make dressing into "the big easy." That meant big boyfriend sweaters, jumper dresses bloused at the hips with deep sleeves and even a polar bear jumpsuit, which looked like it would better suit a 2-year-old.

Just as the music flipped from the rapper Snoop Dog to McCartney's friend, the British singer Lily Allen, who sat front row, the show hit a lot of themes rather than a single focus. But McCartney has learned to bring a sophistication to her woman-friendly wardrobe.

At Veronique Branquinho's show, branches stretched like bony fingers on the forest projected as the backdrop. As the models walked out in diamond-patterned capes, wide cuffed pants and soft dresses with full, rounded

sleeves, it was a reminder of how few clothes we have seen this season that could take a walk in the countryside.

Like other female designers, Branquinho is loosening the silhouette, gathering dresses from above the bust and making easy shapes out of checked tweeds and jersey. Her loden green and earth brown shades or dark knitwear mixes of navy green and brown stripes were the antithesis of the shiny, synthetic fabrics seen elsewhere this season.

But in her quiet way, Branquinho is a revolutionary, offering a feminist view of dressing where everything from the models' hair, rolled to frame the face, through knee boots and round-toed shoes, speak of a self-possessed woman simply presented as nature intended.

Suzy Menkes is the fashion editor at the International Herald Tribune.



VERONIQUE BRANQUINHO

GUCCI

