



1. L.A.M.B.

Gwen Stefani is headmistress of the sexiest schoolgirls around. Flirty knee-high tights, stilettos, sky-high miniskirts and skinny ties reworked Vivienne Westwood's punk and harked back to Stefani's own ska roots. Sassy blazers, black and white graphics, gingham, plaids and skin-tight skirts that Rizzo might shimmy down a drainpipe in amped up the sex factor in this collection that increases Stefani's cred as a designer.

MAISIE WILHELM

2. JEREMY LAING

Canadian wunder-designer Jeremy Laing's work evolved into a more polychromatic version of his masterful subtle complexity. The color was courtesy of artist friend Karen Azoulay, whose firework explosion print and watercolor of a lens flare shone. But the stars of the show were Laing's ingenious tucks, seams and draping, which transformed simple garments into intellectualized pieces made for the thinking woman.

MAISIE WILHELM

3. CYNTHIA STEFFE

Easy, breezy clothes from Cynthia Steffe played with weightlessness and fluidity, as seen in fabrics like a semi-sheer "watermark" skirt or loose-fitting, short-sleeve silk tops and tunics. Pretty prints like striated pastel floral, cobalt pointillist and a white-and-blue print inspired by Istanbul's Topkapi Palace mosaics added dimension to the non-challenging collection.

MAISIE WILHELM

4. BILL BLASS

While Blass' fall collection seemed to target the working woman, spring has Manhattan's society set in mind with a series of dresses in nude, pale amaranth pink, ivory and black that hugged the torso and moved away from the body below the hip. Several frocks in varying lengths (a nude-colored dress with ivory and silver rosettes especially) had the words Tinsley Mortimer written all over them. And once again, as we've seen during the past two days, the waist is a focal point. Here, razor-thin and wide belts and bands of fabric created the illusion of curves.

KENYA HUNT

Shiny, happy people

ThreeasFour loves the pressure of expectation

"We're doing our best work ever. We're like fine wine, getting better and better." Adi

Something is on fire on the street outside of the ThreeasFour studio in Chinatown. "Sorry, I smell smoke. Is something burning out there?" Ange asks her partners Adi and Gabi, interrupting our chat. And suddenly the sounds of sirens begin to wail in the background. "Yes, something is definitely on fire," Gabi says.

The same could be said for the collective's work. After receiving a CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund nomination for their effortlessly cool, trend-defying fashion, the trio who counts Björk as a fan is producing their best work yet.

"We see ourselves in the right path, going in the right direction," says Ange. "We're doing our best work ever. We're like fine wine, getting better and better," Adi reiterates. Their work is also becoming increasingly appealing to everyday women, having struck a nice balance between the idea of art as fashion and wearability.

Not that they're abandoning their arty roots. Having just participated in the Dark Victory Illeana Tounta Contemporary Art Center Group show and completed a project with artist Matthew Barney, they plan to exhibit their work in a gallery in northern Spain this November.

"The museums keep inviting us, and it makes our lives varied and exciting. We're not a one-way track," Gabi says.



But before they trek to Europe, an audience of editors and CFDA members awaits their collection, which shows on Saturday. Instead of finding the fashion powers-that-be scrutinizing their work intimidating, they relish the challenge.

"Having more people watching us does something," Ange says. "It pushes us a little bit. It's nice to perform." The clothes will reflect their new rosy outlook with a vibrant, shimmery, colorful palette of pinks and gray.

"We're in a happy place so everything will look airy and bright," Gabi says.

KENYA HUNT