



MARC JACOBS

From left: A wool jacket and denim-finished crepe trousers. A cashmere-Lurex sweatshirt and felt skirt bonded with dots with rubberized leather snow boots. A lace dress with a contrasting cellophane jabot.

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It's Good to Know It's Not

All About Posing

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DONNA KARAN
A draped wool jersey dress, trimmed with fur.

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HIROKO MASUKE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Fashion is perversely and infinitely unfair. Both Marc Jacobs and Ralph Rucci possess know-how, no small thing in an era of disappearing hand arts and factories. Yet Mr. Jacobs is considered cool, and Mr. Rucci is not. And by offering his shows as conceptual and social experiences, Mr. Jacobs in a way acknowledges the breakup of traditional fashion over the last 20 years. Mr. Rucci continues to make elegant clothes.

CATHY HORYN

Despite a burgeoning interest among young people in traditional dressmaking (the Paris-based designer Bouchra Jarrar is but one example), it's no secret that you don't need special qualifications to be a designer. What's more, consumers don't seem to care. For now, and possibly many years to come, what draws people to fashion are its celebrity and communal properties, and not how clothes are made or whether they are innovative.



RODARTE
A lace dress with a wide waistband and a pleated neckline.

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ELIZABETH LIPPMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Since Mr. Jacobs has been on the fashion and club scene since the 1960s, said Monday night outside Mr. Jacobs's show.

Since Mr. Jacobs has just presented a collection full of hourglass shapes, as well as some inventive garments in rubber and bonded fabrics — pencil skirts and sheaths in rubber sequins, heavy crepe trousers spray-painted to look like denim

lamé — I wondered how he fit into this analysis. Mr. Krell laughed. "He's the doorman. He's the one everybody has to get past."

That may be, but the self-defeating ironies in this collection are inescapable. Shown on a mirrored runway, with columns covered in tufted ice-blue vinyl, the clothes evoked an obsessive interest in style, one associated with haute couture and Hollywood glamour of the '30s, but also dominatrix fantasies.

Despite the campy bits (mainly chin-strapped hats and all-over polka-dot outfits), Mr. Jacobs never allowed one element to take over. And it was easy to pick out wearable looks: creamy blouses in a heavy polyester; shapely jackets in stiff navy wool, many of the fake fur and crocodile pieces; board-

stiff sailor pants; and long-sleeve dresses in navy or maroon guipure lace with contrasting jabots in cellophane.

Afterward, Mr. Jacobs said that he was tired of all the "easy stuff out there," and that he liked the idea of something that looked strict and disciplined. But, of course, given his track record, he was looking at this disciplined style ironically, and in time, he will swing around to the opposite view.

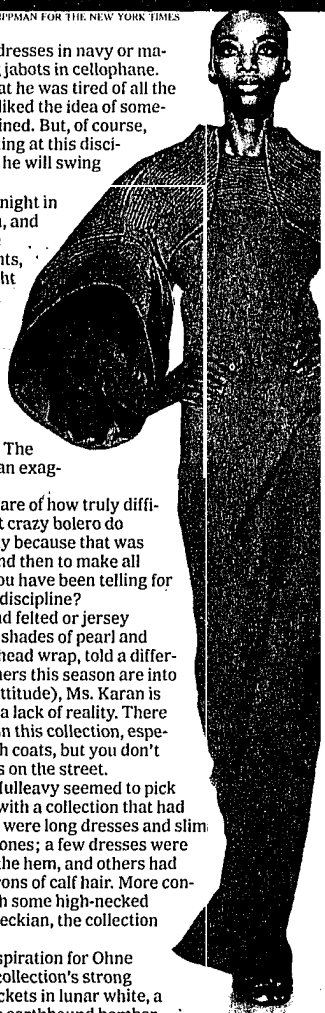
Mr. Rucci's show, on Monday night in his studio, was a pleasure to watch, and partly for its pacing. It was as if he were talking directly to all his clients, a far more eclectic group than might be imagined. He started with a hot coat in red Mongolian lamb, then moved quietly to beige-to-gray store clothes (nice, pretty, mmm ... do I have time to step out for a quick manicure?), then sent out very beautiful and subtle variations on the black cocktail dress, and then ended with a blast of red. The final dress was column topped by an exaggerated bolero in quilted satin.

And all the while you were aware of how truly difficult it is to make the sleeves of that crazy bolero do what you want them to do — simply because that was the idea you had in your mind — and then to make all those parts conform to the story you have been telling for more than 20 years. Isn't that real discipline?

Donna Karan's power suits and felted or jersey dresses, shown in monochromatic shades of pearl and with the odd fur stole or spangled head wrap, told a different tale for fall. While many designers this season are into parkas (or at least a more casual attitude), Ms. Karan is pushing seduction — and, frankly, a lack of reality. There is plenty for her customers to like in this collection, especially liquid jersey dresses and lush coats, but you don't really see women dressing like this on the street.

At Rodarte, Laura and Kate Mulleavy seemed to pick up where they left off last season, with a collection that had overtones of the rural West. There were long dresses and slim wool coats in wheat and blue-sky tones; a few dresses were printed with wheat stems around the hem, and others had decorative wide waistbands or aprons of calf hair. More contemplative than experimental, with some high-necked dresses that looked soberly Steinbeckian, the collection was a solid step forward.

Apollo spacesuits were the inspiration for Ohne Titel's fall line. Far out or not, the collection's strong points included circular-shaped jackets in lunar white, a chunky shearling coat and a lovely earthbound bomber in black fur and shearling with a ribbed knit collar.



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New York Collections
Donna Karan, Marc Jacobs, Ohne Titel, Ralph Rucci, Rodarte

RALPH RUCCI
A quilted satin gown and pagoda jacket.

JENNIFER ALTMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



OHNE TITEL
A fur and shearling bomber with a ribbed knit collar.

MARILYN K. YEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES