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Underground New York Fashion Gets the Spotlight at a New Show at Pratt Manhattan Gallery

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A few nights ago, the Pratt Manhattan Gallery on 14th Street was the epicenter for a very New York scene: a reception to celebrate "The New Village: Ten Years of New York Fashion." The show gathers a diverse group of designers whose unifying quality is the fact that at some point they have likely been described as having a slight anarchic approach to fashion. "A few years ago I was talking to my creative partner, Beverly Semmes, and I said, 'I just feel this community brewing again,'" said Jennifer Minniti, the chair of the Fashion Department at the Pratt Institute. She eventually brought on Matthew Linde and they got to work.



The show borrows its name from a seminal 1986 show at the Museum at FIT titled "[The East Village](#)," which was curated by Harold Koda, Richard Martin, and Laura Sinderbrand and featured the work of a wide-ranging group of artists and designers including Amy Arbus, Kiki Smith, and David Wojnarowicz. "A lot of these people were in their early 20s, so you can think what a radical gesture that [was]," explained Linde. "In the press notes [for that show], they say it's not a designed survey and it's not a historical, complete picture, but it's an affirmation on the artistic qualities and possibilities of what a fashion design can be."

If anxiety over independent labels' ability to survive in 2024 New York was reaching a fever pitch outside the gallery, inside there was a feeling of an alternate New York Fashion Week. A group of looks from Chris Peters's [CDLM](#) project greeted people as they walked in, including a printed cotton dress "accessorized" with a vintage black tulle evening gown, reworked to hang from one shoulder as one would carry a bag. Further along, there was a dress from Amanda McGowan and Mattie Barringer's [Women's History Museum](#), with a back panel and train that listed the names of the show's designers in alphabetical order, as well as some of [Vaquera's](#) "greatest hits," including the bulbous plaid ruffled dress with a car commercial-size white bow from fall 2019 and the credit card slip dress from spring 2018.

And there were also more conceptual works, such as chairs from [Martine Syms](#) and an installation/performance by [Camilla Carper](#) in which the artist moved the contents of their closet to the gallery. (Carper also embarked on an interesting project during NYFW where they attempted to follow the schedule of a different season, showing up to each venue at the allotted time and recording their observations.) The work of designers Claire McKinney and Sophie Andes-Gascon, who design as [SC103](#), was hung on a wall, which highlighted the importance of color and texture in their work.

"These are artists who paradoxically don't have any shared aesthetic coherence, but rather share more structural, artistic behaviors between them," said Linde. "We're trying to pull together these designers who have kind of reshaped New York Fashion Week from the fringes."

One of the main pieces in the show is by [Susan Cianciolo](#), a legendary New York designer who has been a major influence on many of the designers in the exhibition (not least of all because she is also a professor at the school). Titled *Prayer Circle*, it includes plastic chairs, a quilted fabric piece in the middle, and a bunch of other fabric remnants and paper on the chairs or hanging from the ceiling.

Because community is an important aspect of the work of these designers, the people who attended the reception were an important part of the goings-on. "Since these designers have been working, they've gained industry recognition, so it's nice to see that they are now part of the New York Fashion Week culture," added Linde. "This exhibition is fighting against the sort of 'stay commercially viable' [directive] that has become entrenched in our idea of New York Fashion Week; we really wanted to formalize it."

A few days later, the exhibition hosted a runway show for [Giovanna Flores's](#) fall collection (her work was also included in the show). Flores's style is instinctual. She plays with the concept of draping on the body and employs a process she calls "blind fitting," in which she creates clothes with darts and pin tucks as decorative or textural elements as opposed to their traditional use as techniques to make a garment fit. The designer sometimes seemed to work around the body, as with a fitted sheer mesh shirt with squares of color that exploded from the seams, or dresses made from squares of fabric overlaid on top of each other. Subtraction versus addition. With it, there was a sense that the show is not only capturing a certain history of New York but also setting up the stage for its continuing future.