Alexander McQueen and Sarah Burton returned to London with a rooftop runway show at lunchtime on Tuesday, a visual fashion storm after the eerie calm of the lockdown.
Presented within a giant custom-made transparent dome, built on the top floor of a Yellow Park parking garage in Wapping. And beneath a cumulus-blotted London sky, which was itself the initial inspiration for this Spring-Summer 2022 collection.

The show marked the first by the label since March 2020 in Paris, when Burton presented a series of modern-day heroines from a modish Mary Queen of Scots to Calypso in shards of faille and crystals.

Since then, the house has released several quirky videos – a mudlark-mode Spring-Summer 2021 women’s collection shot on the muddiest banks of the Thames, and its Spring-Summer 2021 Escher-worthy menswear collection, filmed below the white cliffs of New Haven.
“We work in a studio in Clerkenwell, and outside there is a balcony where we constantly see the sky, either rain, storm or sun. Recently we went into the mud of the Thames and this time I looked to the sky, where the girls were storm chasers. I like the idea that you don’t know what the day is going to bring so you have to be brave and deal with it,” explained Burton post-show.

The impact heightened by what the French call *un casting sauvage*, a series of artsy and punky indie gals that marched along with Naomi Campbell who appeared in a strapless corset dress under a strict jacket dripping with crystals for the final look.

All appearing out of a hidden staircase, the first model touring the circular pine-wood catwalk in a double-breasted wool coat with ballooned-up mutton-chop sleeves. Cut with a deep gorge, the better to display a huge black thistle tattoo that marched up her neck.
Setting the scene after a 30-minute roaring seaside storm soundtrack as guests took their seats.

Burton loosened up her silhouette this season, showing zippered dresses, with multiple gathers in daybreak cloud, blue sky or nightfall cloud prints.

She jumped back and forth between her power-shouldered jackets paired with peg-leg pants. And employed one of her favorite visual puns – the Janus coat – a two-faced garment in double-breasted Prince of Wales at the front, stone poly faille with a bustle at the back.

Though her single most beautiful silhouette was probably a giant shirt dress like a vertical parachute that billowed in front of the giant urban view. A vista that seem to capture all the energy and construction of the UK capital – east towards Tobacco Docks and Greenwich, west to St Paul’s Cathedral and all the soaring new skyscrapers; The Shard, the Cheesegrater and the Gherkin.

“I loved the collection, and kept on ticking off in my head all the looks I wanted. That one, this one too, and that one as well!” laughed Game of Thrones star Emilia Clark, as she and Vanessa Kirby of The Crown formed a huddle with Burton backstage. Elsewhere in the front row, Kosar Ali of The Rocks fame looked stunning in a curly leather McQueen bomber, while Daphne Guinness dished endlessly with Irish hatter Philip Treacy.

A show in a giant bubble, though not a Covid support bubble, as the collection looked forward optimistically past the darkest days of the pandemic.
All building to a great finale of sequined shard rain embroidered pencil dresses – glamour-punk couture created with extreme dexterity; and several black jackets with tulle trim, finished in crystal raindrop patterns.

Before the designer took her bow, amid intense applause, the sun staying just enough behind the clouds to prevent the giant dome overheating.

“Look at Sarah, no one tells her what to do. She decides everything, and even controls the weather!” enthused Francois-Henri Pinault, CEO of Kering, which controls the house of McQueen along with Gucci, Balenciaga, Bottega Veneta and Saint Laurent.

Pinault stressed that Kering left any decisions on where and when brands show to each and every marque. Several Kering houses began skipping established running seasons in recent years, causing more than a little polemic within the industry.
“Yes, we are returning to the runway, but each brand in its own way. So Bottega will next go to Detroit, and Saint Laurent is off to Los Angeles. This is never decided on the corporate level,” explained Pinault.

How was business, one enquired, with Kering due to announce figures next week?

“We have been doing well thanks to China and North America. China where we knew they had come out of the lockdown much sooner than everyone. And, what has surprised us, America, where the recovery has been much quicker than expected. In Europe things are much different, but as there are no tourists that is only to be expected,” said Pinault, who for once didn’t have far to come for a Kering runway show. A resident of London, he lives half an hour north in Hampstead.

By Godfrey Deeny

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