

SPECIAL REPORT: FASHION

# Presentations Reflect Berlin's Artistic Mode



Marcel Kamps

A "live installation" by the Augustin Teboul label in Berlin. The autumn/winter 2011 event told the story of Little Red Riding Hood.

By CATHRIN SCHAEER  
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BERLIN — The fashion installation was a strong trend of the recent season, with increasing numbers of young designers here embracing artistic presentations as edgier, more personal and just a lot hipper than traditional catwalk shows.

At the debut of the label Augustin Teboul, 12 redheaded women lined up in an inner-city hotel ballroom and, one by one, made their way through the audience modeling dresses with trailing crystals, crocheted details or beautifully constructed leather patchwork. On the soundtrack, a disembodied voice told the story of Little Red Riding Hood — but as a contemporary tale of beauty, lust and dark romance.

"It was a way of presenting that fairy tale that would not have worked on the runway," explained Annelie Augustin, designer of the 18-month-old label, which staged the show in January. "Also we think that with the kinds of clothes we do, you need a closer look. We liked the idea that you can look at the clothes for longer than 20 seconds."

"The aim was to make the scene theatrical so that people had to enter into the story," added her French design partner, Odély Teboul.

While presentations are not new to the fashion world, the artistic element is one of the distinguishing factors in a city that prides itself as among the world's most artsy.

Some of the recent fashion-meets-art events have included an installation by the London-based designer Maria Francesca Pepe, who has had a hand in dressing the likes of [Lady Gaga](#) and [Jennifer Lopez](#); a Mercedes Benz-commissioned event where the prestige automaker asked well-known designers — including Henrik Vibskov and Bernhard Willhelm — to create tableaux featuring vintage vehicles; and a Calvin Klein-

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commissioned architectural installation.

But it has been smaller brands that have really taken to the idea. "It was amazing how many people did installations and presentations this year," said Clara Leskovar, who, along with Doreen Schulz, runs the six-year-old C.Neon label.

The design duo organized their own installation at their new store during Berlin Fashion Week, featuring a collage and various props they had made themselves. "I guess it is a good way to distinguish yourself from the bigger shows. You can't compete with them, but you need to do something interesting," Ms. Leskovar said. The display also meant buyers and media people could drop in at their leisure, with Ms. Leskovar and Ms. Schulz there to greet them.

The designer Michael Sontag also chose an installation over a runway show for his eponymous label this season. His garments for autumn 2011 were shown on models who milled about inside the peaceful, whitewashed atrium of the Römischer Hof, a historic building on Berlin's prestigious Unter den Linden thoroughfare.

As Mr. Sontag said, "My garments involve a lot of intricate construction, and I wanted to give people the chance to have a closer look." For him, he explained, an installation also was about making the presentation of fashion "less superficial."

Sven Krueger runs the ProjektGalerie showroom, where he organizes exhibitions of fashion in central Berlin galleries — rather than, as his Web site puts it, "in anonymous exhibition halls." He believes that the German capital is well suited to the installation style.

"Because of its history of lively, wild urbane living, there's more acceptance of a diversity of projects in Berlin," Mr. Krueger said. "It's also a lot easier to achieve these things.

"In inner-city Berlin, there are premises that allow those with small budgets and big imaginations to generate publicity. That's hardly possible in a lot of other big European cities," he said, referring to the fact that Berlin's real estate rental costs still remain lower than those in many other European cities.

None of the designers wanted to call their presentations works of art — As Mr. Sontag noted, "I wouldn't compare it with art, but it can be artistic" — there is no doubt that the thriving art scene in Berlin also influences fashion here.

Of course, there are also disadvantages to turning your runway show into an installation. Mr. Sontag complained that it was not possible to see the garments move at his exhibit; Ms. Leskovar bemoaned the fact that a weeklong installation did not have quite the same atmospheric impact as a runway show with flashing lights and thundering music; and Ms. Teboul worried that their installation's location, a little distance from fashion week's runways, might have discouraged some invitees.

None of the designers felt that choosing an installation over a runway show was a purely financial decision either, some noting that costs often almost equaled that of a runway show.

Nonetheless, all of the designers say they would consider doing an installation again.

"For me, it's important not to see these things as a given," Mr. Sontag concluded. "I don't just want to produce yet another runway show, every season, season after season. I need the freedom to find other ways to present my collection; it's a tool I want to be able to play with."

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