

Dsquared2 SS24: Preppy, Depraved Absurdity

“It’s steamy. Sexual versus proper. WASP-y country club versus raunchy. Privileged upper crust trying out adult entertainment... Snob meets knob.” So said the Caten twins of their most recent Dsquared2 Spring-Summer 2024 Milan show. What a raunchy little spectacle it was! But it was because of, not in spite of all the silliness, the horniness, the tongue-in-cheek-ness or just plain tongue-lolling-about-ness that made this show a stand-out of the Italian men’s season. Utterly absurd, and completely fizzling with electricity and glistening skin, the show created a highly specific world and perspective that brands are often so scared of having now, for fear of press backlash or bad business through alienating consumers. Here, the Dsquared2 twins have presented a masterclass in doing whatever you like and expecting other’s will want to come along for the ride.

Running throughout was a surreal hyper-machismo in the way the pretty-boy models were styled. The kind of faux-hetero masculinity displayed by Tony Ward in *Hustler White* (1996) — after all these boys are being dressed by the fantastic stylist Haley Wollens and in clothes designed by two gay men. Nothing said here about being man was ever going to be obvious. Jeans were so low-slung that boxers were revealed (and literal arses revealed too, with jockstraps appearing). Slogan t-shirts read “Sexy, Preppy”, “Cherry Boy”, “PAY GUY... Tag Team BJ... Leather Men’s Dream.” One model’s prompt was to behave in the most jock-like (or perhaps hustler-like) fashion possible — obnoxiously flexing his arms at the end of the runway and kissing his biceps, like a coming-of-age young man realising he has sex appeal and he can get girls (or boys) at last, but still doesn’t quite know how to go about it. Something that would ordinarily conjure a violent eye-roll was somehow charming in this context of easy-going, boisterous but ultimately unserious sexuality. Skin-tight bedazzled budgie-smugglers worn with jumpers and flip-flops or loafers evoked the odd outfits that are concocted on days at the beach, where some kind of decency is nodded to when having to run off to the shop for more supplies. But why bother to put on your whole outfit? You don’t want to put trousers on over your wet behind. And why not luxuriate in the sauciness of running through the street half-clothed (and it’s so much naughtier when it’s the bottom half exposed).

The carnality was not reserved for the boys however, with one female model’s diamanté belt spelling out “pussy.” And the day-at-the-beach theme appeared in the female looks also, with

items such as seashell bras and jewellery. It was all about *un*-dressing rather dressing. One female model had on a nautical striped jumper, but it was tied around her bare chest rather than worn standardly — she's carefree, laissez-faire, yet somehow still manages to have a blow-out, get on her stilettos and choose a handbag before heading off.

Throughout the show, Rocco Siffredi (the "Italian Stallion" who has starred in more than 1,300 pornographic films) was using a hand-held camera to film a couple (one half being Julia Fox, who later walked the runway) canoodling on a bed. Siffredi's movements and turned-on facial expressions was every bit 80s porno director pastiche. Towards the end of the show Siffredi gave up his filming duties and walked the runway, showing a t-shirt printed with the acronym "V.I.P. – Very Important Penis" before he unzipped his jeans and more than suggestively showed the crowd his gaudily coloured and patterned briefs. All the while, Donna Summer's "Love To Love You Baby" played in the background. In writing this all sounds far too much, but it curiously, it all somehow just *worked*.

This SS24 collection seemed to smirkingly reference an era not all that long ago in terms of years (late 90s/early 00s), but certainly long ago in terms of developing attitudes towards bodies and how clothes are sold to us — an era embodied by the now infamous (and reviled) Abercrombie & Fitch heyday. Sleazy, overtly sexy, yet somehow wholesome. Incredibly hot boys and girls almost completely naked and in provocative homo-erotic situations, yet somehow innocent. The brand's catalog, the *A&F Quarterly*, shot by Bruce Webber, was a truly astounding piece of marketing that with hindsight borders on art. One *Quarterly* (2003 - *Back to School*) featured alongside the soft-porn photography a collection of quotes written by the critical theorist Slavoj Žižek mulling over the nature of human desire and sexuality. Such Žižek corks include: "The only successful sexual relationship occurs when the fantasies of the two partners overlap. If the man fantasises that making love is like riding a bike and the woman wants to be penetrated by a stud, then what truly goes on while they make love is that a horse is riding a bike... with a fantasy like that, who needs a personality?" It's a truly astounding piece of fashion history. An absurdist masterpiece. Utterly ridiculous, yet somehow, oddly profound. It is just such fantasy that Dsquared2 taps into with their clothes, though in much more fruitful, exciting (and modern) ways.

The demographic Abercrombie & Fitch aimed at was simple, it was very surface-level: "the attractive all-American kid with a great attitude and a lot of friends" (or, more likely, those who wanted to buy into the idea of being such a person). But the world the Caten twins have created in their SS24 show is far more warped than what the surface may tell us. Perhaps it is the European influence on these Canadians that has made the preppy so loopy and unhinged? The models in this show do not have a great attitude, and in fact they probably have pretty strained relationships with their friends. For all the simple nods to prep and Americana, it is prep twisted and worn by someone who wouldn't be seen dead at a country club — prep worn in a way that signals their family has absolutely no money but they can still take these elite signifiers and do whatever they want with them. The soft-porn aesthetic of the 90s/00s has been transformed into the abrasive but far more honest hardcore — not in reference to sex, but a hardcore way of life. A day at the beach Dsquared2 style is raucous. Eyeliner is smudged with tears. It's a day you might feel ashamed of the morning after, but it will quickly become one of your best anecdotes.