

# Graduating Seniors Celebrated at Annual VPA Fashion Show



Habituals of the Nancy Cantor Warehouse spent their final Thursday of the spring semester sweeping loose threads and lugging 100 pound tables instead of going to class. A requirement for underclassmen fashion design students, they transformed the 7th floor where they spent the past year learning to construct a single suit jacket into a replica of a NYFW venue.

On April 26th, the School of Visual and Performing Arts hosted the annual Senior Fashion Show, celebrating the collections of 25 graduating students. One of the largest groups of designers in the past few years, hundreds of family members and the campus community flocked to a single 7 PM showing after an earlier time slot was canceled due to President Biden's arrival downtown.

Each senior had six models show off their garments, accompanied by a song they selected themselves. Senior Mya Latimer set her 90s-esque "Grunge Fairy" collection to Lovesong by The Cure as her models stomped down the runway in Doc Marten boots and moody lace fabrics.

Each senior spends the entire year designing their collection and has almost total control over the final result. Jeffrey Mayer, chair of the fashion design department, noted that when he first started at Syracuse over 30 years ago, seniors had to follow specific genres for their looks, such as evening wear and swimwear. Underclassmen were even able to submit their own designs.

This year, each student selected their own specific theme to go by, some inspired by their own personal experiences, locations, or people they admire. Senior Ally Gustave chose to center her collection around a modernized Marie Antoinette, who she considers "the original influencer." Gustave sent out her models to a classical violin rendition of Taylor Swift's "Wildest Dreams", wearing bubblegum pink minidresses draped with pearls and large bows.

The secret ingredient that kept the show running was the students. Not just the seniors working backstage safety pinning unfinished seams, but the underclassmen students fresh off an all-nighter at the Warehouse finishing up their final assignments.

Freshman and sophomores enrolled in FAS 104: Fundamentals of Fashion Design, one of their major requirements, spent their final day in class at setting up the layout for the fashion show. The sewing machines they used all year to learn garment construction were replaced with a runway and rows of folding chairs.

Some students spent the entire day on the Warehouse's seventh floor, something not totally out of the ordinary for fashion students. Freshman Claire McConnell hadn't left the Warehouse since before dinner the day before the show, and came back early to help dress the models.

"I don't think anyone in this class has seen me in sweats before!" she said.

Underclassmen that came to volunteer as dressers backstage were each assigned to a senior, taking on the menial tasks of ironing, pinning, lacing up corsets and zipping up tight dresses. Fashion professor Kirsten Schoonmaker gave a pep talk to the underclassmen as they arrived, warning them of the chaos that was likely to ensue.



Design by Shelstie Dastinot. Courtesy of Syracuse Fashion Design

Some seniors were still working on their collections the day of the show, delaying the start of the event and equally stressing students backstage. Most of the models were also part of multiple collections featured in the show, and the dressers were tasked with assisting in quick changes between collections, meaning garments, shoes and accessories were to be shoved onto a model successfully under a minute. Schoonmaker made sure to tell her young students not to take anything said too seriously amidst the chaotic atmosphere.

“If a designer starts yelling at you, don’t worry about it,” she said.

Even with the first time slot being canceled, the show starting late and some designers showing up with unfinished collections, students and faculty were key to helping the fashion show run as smoothly as possible. As the 25 seniors closed out the show with their proudest looks, roaring applause from spectators filled each corner of the seventh floor.



Design by Nina Chen. Courtesy of Syracuse Fashion Design

The night ended with several awards for notable sustainability, construction and experimental efforts. Senior Nina Chen won the Sustainability in Fashion Design award for completely reworking thrifted and vintage denim pieces, using strips of different denim washes to create a three-dimensional gown with sculptural sleeves.

The fashion design department will host one more fashion show for a select number of the graduating seniors voted on by a group of judges that attended the Thursday show, such as plus-size fit model Yve Edmond. The show will be held in New York City at Syracuse's Lubin House on May 8th.