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Philadelphia Fashion Week: Our Observations Of How A Smaller Fashion Week Operates



BY LIBERTY IMHOFF · SEPTEMBER 29, 2021



A model walks for Philadelphia fashion brand Lobo Mau; photo © Manic Metallic 2021

We recently had the chance to attend [Philadelphia Fashion Week](#) via press credentials, and we decided that this would be a great opportunity to show our audience the manner in which a smaller fashion week operates. We're going to give you our observations within seven different categories.



A model walks for Primark during the opening show on 9/22; photo © Manic Metallic 2021

Location

Philadelphia Fashion Week, officially slated for September 21-25, held its Fall/Winter 2021 collection showings at two different locations. The opening night show was held on September 22 in front of Fashion District, a mall in the city's Center City area. It was held in partnership with Irish fast-fashion retailer Primark, a brand that says it is making efforts to be more sustainable. Despite this claim, they are still falling short in many ways. More on that [here](#).

Runway I and II were both held at 2300 Arena, located in the city's southern section, and stretched from Friday, September 24 – Saturday, September 25. [2300 Arena](#) frequently hosts events such as concerts, wrestling matches, and festivals.

We thought that 2300 Arena – the location chosen for Runway I & II – was a solid choice for a venue; it worked out well. Having fashion week events at the mall, as was done for the opening night event, was a weak choice and does not exactly scream high fashion. If the city wants to have a fashion scene that is taken seriously, it'd be wise to steer clear of any mall spaces. Another suggestion: Philadelphia has so many beautiful outdoor and architectural spaces, and it'd be great to see the team at Philadelphia Fashion Week use those to its advantage in the future.



Press and VIP check-in; photo © Manic Metallic 2021

Logistics

Opening Show, 9/22:

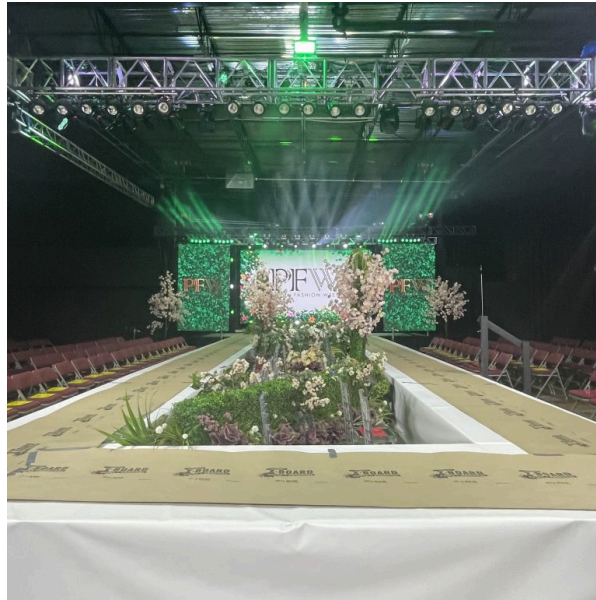
No press pass was needed, because the event was free to attend and open to the public. Many attendees did not wear masks, as it was an outside event. Being centrally located was an advantage.

Runway I & II, 9/24 & 9/25:

Members of the press picked up press passes each day around 6:30, about 1 1/2 hours before the start of both Runway I & II. The press was stationed in the section at the front of the runway in order to be able to gather visual media for their respective outlets (photos, videos, etc.). There was a start time each night of 8pm, and each night's runway event generally lasted around 2-2 1/2 hours. Both nights had a 10-minute intermission, as designer showings came one directly after the other.

Masks were worn at all times in addition to having to provide proof of vaccines. The City of Philadelphia reinstated the mask mandate, with the option for businesses and organizations to alternately require vaccines in order to do business.

Logistics for the show went off without a hitch, for the most part. One wonders, however, why the show started at 8pm each night when there were so many designers that needed to show in one night. An earlier start time would be very useful; if fashion shows are industry events, then it is fine – and expected – that one would attend a show during daylight hours. It would not be a burden on our time as members of the fashion industry. Also, members of the press would appreciate bottles of water, if possible.



The Philadelphia Fashion Week runway, before the show's start. The cardboard was obviously not included during the actual show; photo © Manic Metallic 2021

Setup & Surroundings

Opening Show, 9/22:

There wasn't a runway, per se; rather, there was an aisle that had six large white blocks stationed along the edges of it. Seats were stationed at the front of the runway space, along with being placed on either side. The models emerged from behind a plant backdrop bearing the logo of the Fashion District mall complex.

Runway I & II, 9/24 & 9/25:

The runway design was well-done; it contained two separate legs – one for emerging models and one for exiting models – connected by a smaller section at the edge connecting the two. The wide backdrop was a screen designed with green foliage along the edges and leaving room in the middle for each brand's name to appear when it was their turn to show.

Flowers and other plants in the middle portion of the runway and along both edges of the backdrop lent a touch of nature to the space, while a couple of moderately-sized screens suspended from the ceiling helped everyone in the audience to properly see the show. The space was also well-lit, though the strobe lights became a bit much after a spell.

Multiple rows of seats were placed on both sides (and in front) of the runway for the crowd, with VIP seating in the front couple of rows of each section being furnished with a copy of Philadelphia Style Magazine. Seating was also present inside of the middle portion of the runway where there was a gap in between both runway legs.

Also worth mentioning is that there was a VIP section for those that purchased VIP-level tickets; as we were not allowed into that section, we cannot comment on its attributes. Additionally, there was a bar with beverages and snacks available to purchase for non-VIP guests.

The setup and surroundings were some of the high points of each night.



A model walks for fashion brand Ahmad Essa Haute Couture; photo © Manic Metallic 2021

Soundtrack

The soundtrack was upbeat and energizing, featuring everything from Halsey and Lana Del Rey to Kanye West and David Guetta.

Opening night saw “Empire State of Mind” being played at one point, and the crowd really enjoyed it. This was both shocking and amusing, considering the city of Philadelphia’s overall loathing of most things New York.

The soundtrack was energizing; we have no criticism here.



A model walks for fashion brand J. Pratt; photo © Manic Metallic 2021

Models

What stood out with regards to the models participating in Philadelphia Fashion Week was how well-rounded and diverse that the casting lineup turned out to be. Kudos to the casting director(s), because we saw all ethnicities, sizes, and genders along with a few examples of genderless design. The diversity on display was many steps ahead of that in major fashion cities.

Many of the models had strong walks, which was not expected but is always wonderful to see. There were a few timid models that did not rise to the level of their peers' powerful presence, unfortunately, but it is not unusual in any setting to have those that rise to the top and those that could use more practice.

Again, Philadelphia's model casting should be commended for its diversity in size, ethnicity, and gender. Other larger fashion weeks have much to learn from this one.



The Philadelphia Fashion Week Crowd waits for the event to begin; photo © Manic Metallic 2021

Audience/Guests

Members of the general public were allowed to purchase tickets for \$40 each for both Runway I & II; the opening event on 9/22 was free.

Opening Show, 9/22:

A fair amount of attendees showed up, with many onlookers passing by to gaze at the spectacle. With the exception of a few people, this crowd was not as polished – with respect to manner of dress – as was the crowd that showed up at 2300 Arena on September 24 and 25. Perhaps it was seen as being a more casual event because it was held on the grounds of a mall, but more effort would have been nice.

Runway I & II, 9/24 & 9/25:

While many were stylishly dressed, there were few members of the audience whose outfits were distinctive. There was effort, however, and that was nice to see.

At one point, there was an announcement over the loudspeaker reminding guests to not place food and drink on the runway. It is perplexing that this had to be said to a crowd attending a fashion show.

Audience members should be made aware that it is not acceptable to move around during a designer's show, especially if the guest is located closer to the runway. Also, they should be made aware that nothing is to obstruct the runway at any point in time. It is terrible that this needs to be said, and perhaps those guests that did either of the aforementioned things are not used to being in a fashion environment, but if the general public is going to be invited to your event then they must know how to treat the situation. ***(We will note that this is not a critique of Philadelphia Fashion Week organizers, but we wanted to place it in our observations nonetheless).***



A model walks for fashion brand Khangle; photo © Manic Metallic 2021

Design Talent

Philadelphia Fashion Week had around 20 brands showing collections (excluding Primark's opening show on 9/22), with two brands – [Philadelphia Fashion Incubator](#) and [Made Institute](#) – displaying the work of multiple designers. We were impressed with the quality of work that we saw on the runway, with there being a few brands of which we took particular note:

- Dope Tavio: [Website](#) | [Instagram](#)
- Zipporaa: [Instagram](#)
- Caycee Black: [Website](#) | [Instagram](#)
- Khangle: [Website](#) | [Instagram](#)
- Fite Fashion: [Website](#) | [Instagram](#)

The design talent showcased a wide variety of pieces within each collection, and we realized that Philadelphia is home to lots of design talent that should have successful careers provided that they are able to get the exposure for their work. Some have had national attention on shows such as Project Runway or otherwise being featured in well-known publications. We'd like to see them continue being successful.