

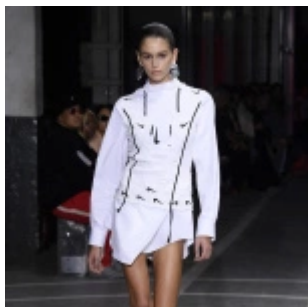
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# Off-White RTW Spring 2019

Virgil Abloh teamed with Nike again, this time for spring, turning his attention to track and field.

By [Joelle Diderich](#) on September 27, 2018





GALLERIES

Beauty

Collection

“Dress good to look good. Look good to feel good. And feel good to run fast!”

Details

Street Style

That quote from Olympic champion Florence Griffith Joyner holds particular resonance for Virgil Abloh, who after his collaboration with Nike and Serena Williams

teamed up again with the sportswear giant for his spring Off-White ready-to-wear show. This time, he turned his attention to track and field, a theme that ran through his seasonal statement, from the racing bibs sent out as invitations to the stadium-themed set and the models themselves. The designer tapped eight female star athletes to walk in his show at the Garage Amelot in Paris.

Bella Hadid and Kendall Jenner opened the show in crisp white shirts and short skirts. Kaia Gerber was close behind, in a shirtdress with a tank top pieced together from Nike socks. With their metronomic clips, the models easily outpaced the athletes, overtaking some as they wound their way around the track, while a jumbotron flashed their names and countries of origin.

OFF-WHITE RTW SPRING 2019

 50 PHOTOS



Some of the sports stars blended in effortlessly. Vashti Cunningham, a U.S. high jumper and the daughter of former NFL quarterback Randall Cunningham, flexed her 6-foot, 1-inch frame in a tiered cream tent dress, paired with white patchwork leggings and purple sneakers.

For Abloh, it harked back to his childhood heroes — athletes that looked as good off-duty as when they were competing. “Michael Jordan and Deion Sanders were my idols,” he told WWD in an interview the day before the show. “I was a fashion kid. Michael Jordan wearing a gold necklace his rookie year — and that’s, like, superillegal by any term — made me idolize him for his skill set, but he also had style and grace.”

That combination of style and strength felt relevant to Abloh in the #MeToo era, as a metaphor not only for the women’s rights movement, but also the growing relevance of sportswear. “Fashion shows are six months apart. Usually in that space, there’s something happening in the world, and that’s what I respond to,” he said.

“Off-White makes ‘streetwear’ in quotes, not streetwear without quotes, and that means it’s my own definition of what people are wearing in everyday life. My goal is to make that look similar to what I’m presenting on the runway, so we’re having a dialogue with naturally occurring fashion,” he added.

The designer was holding court in a nondescript building in the 11th arrondissement of Paris, where a hive of staffers were making last-minute adjustments to the collection, which blended elements of performance wear with feminine staples like ballgowns and high heels. Four of the athletes signed to Nike were getting fitted for their runway turn: Caterine Ibargüen, a Colombian athlete competing in high jump, long jump and triple jump; Cunningham; British sprinter Dina Asher-Smith, and British heptathlete Katarina Johnson-Thompson.

Abloh said casting the sports stars came naturally. “Because I’m new to fashion, you know, I didn’t come through traditional means or a traditional system, it’s actually less natural for me to think, hey, let me just get professional models to put on this idea, than get real people who embody that. It’s an authenticity thing,” he explained. “When I walk down the street and I see people with a cool style, a jacket or a bag, I might take a photo of what they’re wearing because I like the proportion or something. They’re not a model,” he reasoned.

Likewise, the focus on sportswear was an organic evolution of the “Queen” collection he designed for Williams to wear at the U.S. Open, including a one-shouldered tutu dress. “She obviously has a stature that’s commanding and she’s a champion, but what people don’t realize: she’s equally superfeminine, loves ballet, loves to dance,” he said. “That femininity came through here.”

Hence the hybrid creations, like a black stiletto spliced with a vintage running shoe, or another pair of heels with a stretchy upper inspired by the Nike Studio Wrap. “These aren’t heels to run in, but there’s innovation that happens in a performance brand that I, as a fashion designer, should be able to flow,” he noted.

“The idea of living an active lifestyle, going to and from the gym, this term ‘ath-leisure,’ it’s culturally relevant. I see it when I’m at Whole Foods. So I was always intrigued by it and I wanted to twist it and bend it more toward ‘fashion’ fashion. Workout apparel is function. Fashion is fashion,” he said.

Abloh toyed with logos, plastering the word “Offf” across the front of a sleeveless black tailored pantsuit that made the most of Johnson-Thompson’s perfectly toned arms. Conversely, he buried the signature Off-White cross in tone-on-tone embroidery on a white cotton openwork jumpsuit.

Flo-Jo's asymmetric running suits were the inspiration behind the red-carpet portion of the show, which included a gown made of 200 meters of ruffled organza dipped in fluorescent yellow dye worn by Adut Akech. "We had to use a forklift to hold it up, to then spray paint the bottom this gradient neon," Abloh said.

The running tops and cycling shorts, made from ribbed socks that were unpicked and woven back together, echoed Martin Margiela's deconstructed sock sweaters from the early Nineties. It's the kind of concept that resonates for Cunningham, who has a habit of chopping up her own clothes.

"I'm really into designing myself. I always buy clothes and then completely change them from what they were," said the 20-year-old. "The majority of my clothes are from Goodwill or Buffalo Exchanges, and then I will just cut something and sew something else on it, or cut something and close it together with pins."

She first heard Abloh speak at the ComplexCon conference last year and recalled bursting into tears when she learned she would be walking in his show. "It's really important to me because fashion and style is such a big part of who I am and what I put my time into, but not everybody gets to see that," she explained. "It means a lot to me to come out here and just get seen for once doing something that I really have a true passion for."

The athlete believes that looking different also helps her perform better. "I do think that if you look good, you play better," she said. "It's always a plus to stand out from anybody that's surrounding you, especially in the track-and-field world, because you can just fall into not really being noticed or people not really recognizing your event, but if you have something that grabs people's attention and their eye, then it gives your event more exposure and it gives you more exposure."

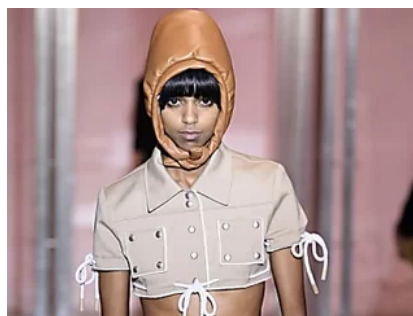
Asher Smith agreed. “The idea of looking good and feeling good does resonate with me. Obviously, the most important thing is our training, the fact that we work hard six days a week to put our best foot forward with our performances, but when you want that little bit of extra confidence, that’s when that comes into play,” she said.

Having worked with Nike for several years on a range of best-selling sneakers, Abloh is ready to take the collaboration to the next level. “What I want to impose on Nike is that portion to make them look like and feel like they’re their best. Nike can take care of the performance part, but the part that I can add to the equation is to make them feel like they have the coolest sneakers, that they have the coolest fit. You add a revolutionary new proportion to the way that they look, and then that little competitive edge, or little bit of confidence when they have to trigger their body to act, is going to be the difference [that leads to] success,” he concluded.

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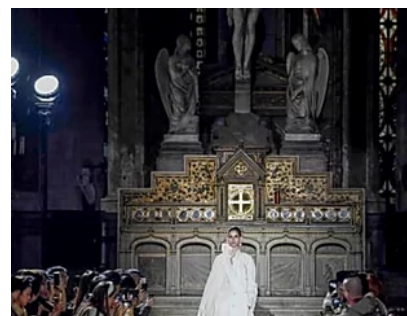
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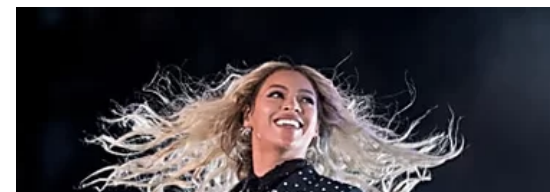
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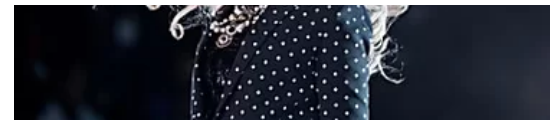
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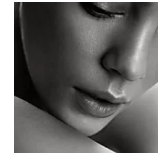
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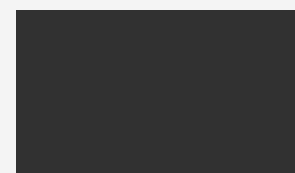
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