



Inside CFGNY's Fifth "Vaguely Asian" Fashion Show

The New York art collective marked its 10-year anniversary with a performance that took on fashion, art history, and identity itself

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On a recent Friday evening, I trekked deep into Bushwick to join some 200 others at Amant's "outdoor venue" (parking lot, really) for a performance disguised as a fashion show—or perhaps, the other way around. Atop the asphalt runway inside, rows of chairs curled around two structures of raw wood and translucent plastic, each housing a humming box truck outfitted with an oversized screen. On the displays: an image of a stuffed animal that read as cute at first glance, then, on closer inspection, revealed itself as a Frankensteined assembly of mismatched teddy bear parts. Mingling in and around the installation, the crowd was a who's who of Asian New York creatives, from magazine editors to curators to chefs. The humid air buzzed with the buoyant vibe of an (exceptionally stylish) family reunion.

This setup felt exactly right for the 10-year anniversary show of CFGNY, the New York art collective whose name functions as a deliberately unstable acronym—officially Concept Foreign Garments New York, but at various points also Cute Fucking Gay New York, Corporate Global Fashion New York, Cult Freaks Galore New York, and beyond. Its members—Daniel Chew, Tin Nguyen, and Ten Izu (though even the roster has a way of shifting)—work in a tightly collaborative, research-driven practice spanning fashion, painting, ceramics, photography, and installation, often all at once. But they're perhaps best known for a conceptual coinage: "vaguely Asian," the idea that Asianness in the West functions less as a fixed identity than as a constantly shifting composite of social and aesthetic projections. Beyond critiquing such racialization, CFGNY takes up those markers as its material, playing with the ways that we as Asian Americans often adopt them as subtle signals of identity ourselves.



DAVID BRANDON GEETING
CFGNY's Daniel Chew



DAVID BRANDON GEETING
CFGNY's Ten Izu

Chew and Nguyen founded the group in 2016, fed up by the art world's tokenization of Asian artists and expectation that their work represent a kind of cultural "authenticity," as if such a thing exists. Since, the collective has carried its wide-ranging interrogations into the "vaguely Asian" through museums and galleries across the United States and Europe, developing recurring motifs—like the plushie, intended to unsettle the projections of cuteness often attached to East Asian people, and the use of garments as artistic interventions into everyday life. This year has been particularly busy: In addition to a **solo show** in Amant's (indoor) gallery space, the group also appeared in the Whitney Biennial, a group show at Pioneer Works, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute exhibit.

The July 17 fashion show, titled “CFG-20260717” and co-commissioned by The Kitchen and Amant, extended the collective’s “vaguely Asian” inquiry into the digital world, drawing attention to the ways we all perform identity—both in person and online. To open, the trio took to the runway themselves, offering a history lesson: The Sony Portapak, the first video camera operable by a single person, became available in Japan in 1967, we learned. The invention meant that, for the first time, artists could make and distribute video work on their own terms—a shift that revolutionized approaches to self-imaging and, once exported, inspired a generation of experimental video artists in New York. “Individual visual aesthetics became a calling card,” Chew recited. “People are able to capture, observe, and manipulate the body in real time.”



RACHEL KEANE

CFGNY model Shaobo Han

As the artists paced around the circular runway, cameras positioned at various points behind the crowd recorded their likenesses and echoed them onto the trucks in real time, enveloping the audience in a live-streamed spectacle. Almost immediately, viewers pulled out their iPhones, including me. It seemed we all shared the instinct to capture the moment—together creating a swarm of additional digital replicas, each from its own vantage point. The takeaway was clear: To be perceived in a post-Portapak world is to be photographed, recorded, and rendered in endless digital forms as one performs for the camera.

The video treatment continued as, finally, models began bouncing down the runway. Rather than use professional models, the collective pulled in members from its broader creative community—including *Industry* actor Ken Leung, magazine editor Blake Abbie, chef Anthony Ha of Ha's *Đặc Biệt*, artists Sung Tieu and Lotus Kang, and the show's own publicist and “dramaturgist,” Cynthia Leung. Together, they presented 36 looks—designed by CFGNY and styled by Telfar fashion director Avena Gallagher—that made the “vaguely Asian” material.



DAVID BRANDON GEETING

CFGNY's Tin Nguyen



DAVID BRANDON GEETING

CFGNY model Cynthia Leung; writer, performer, publicist

Cynthia Leung's look was a personal favorite: A '90s-inflected halter top, microshorts, and wrap skirt, all pieced together from mismatched fabrics: one mesh printed with eyes, another satin patterned with Chinese flowers, yet another sheer and scattered with embroidered silver feathers. Several models sported shrugs that, at their ends, unfurled into elongated stuffed animals. A few carried backpacks that took the shape of the character Pochacco, but with features slightly askew, more like a Sanrio knockoff than the original thing.

Rather than a straightforward catwalk, some models glitched and convulsed while others broke into dance. The choreography was meant to reference both early video artworks and viral social media dance challenges, drawing a dotted line between the two. “[We were] thinking about how all of these methods of image depiction are so present in TikTok today or video editing effects, and how people make images of the self or depict the self through social media,” Izu says in an interview after the show. “So, a lot of the movements, we're thinking about that type of self-imaging lineage.”



PABLO GONZALEZ

CFGNY model Blake Abbie

But the most effective choreography came about halfway through the show, when some models stood up from seats in the audience, revealing they'd been plants all along. Suddenly, we were all implicated as potential performers. The outfits we had shown up in were clearly “vaguely Asian” enough to serve as cover for the covert models, after all. (I wore Margiela tabis myself, not unlike some of the shoes styled into the show.) Nguyen later tells me: “I think the goal is always to have our friends wanting to wear the clothes as this outer skin.”

To produce the clothes, the collective works with garment workers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, chatting back and forth on messaging apps. Guided by gut, they pull deadstock fabrics that strike them as “vaguely Asian,” often maximalist patterns and shiny polyesters. “We often pick things that are kind of ugly and clashing,” Chew says. “It's very inspired by an auntie in Chinatown—a fab outfit that shouldn't work, but works in the end.” The clothes invoke bootlegs, secondhand finds, and instances where Western aesthetics are copied, adapted, added to, and spit back out until they become something entirely their own. (One gray suit look was striped with jumbled ribbons that, in a mix of fonts, simply repeated the word “fashion.”)



DAVID BRANDON GEETING

CFGNY model CiCi Wu; artist



DAVID BRANDON GEETING

CFGNY model Nick Andersen; artist, co-founder Bubble T

While installation is core to CFGNY's practice, the fashion shows—which the group considers a form of "social sculpture"—are just as fundamental, a refusal to let the work be contained by the gallery. "Making actual clothes that people actually wear is our answer to that, because it's mediating people's relationships in their everyday lives," Chew says. "So, even though it is a conceptual gesture, they also operate as clothes and as this relation that we have to each other."

Throughout their decade of work, the collective has continually butted up against a desire to categorize them: Are they fashion designers or artists? Are their garments art objects or clothes? In fact, the conflation is the point. "In the beginning, everyone was always like, it's a performance. And I always felt a little weird about that," says Izu of the group's fashion shows. "But I actually think, with this show, I really stand by that. I feel like we finally merged the language of fashion and performance and social sculpture. ... I think it's the first time we were really able to do that."



RACHEL KEANE

Cynthia Leung and Angelique Rosales Salgado; Assistant Curator, The Kitchen.

At one point during the show, a model holding an iPhone as an accessory turned the camera to one of the live feeds, creating an endless tunnel of perception. As with all of CFGNY's densely referential work, there are layers upon layers of meaning here for us to probe: racialization, self-fashioning, online performance, global supply chains, and all of the intersections therein. Even the iPhone itself, they point out, is a "vaguely Asian" object—an import from Chinese factories that Americans use in their everyday lives. It's these collisions, in which cultures rub up against each other and leave imprints that may later get remixed or misread, that CFGNY invites us to consider—or simply, to pick up and wear.

All portraits courtesy of CFGNY and Amant, Brooklyn, NY. Performance images courtesy of CFGNY; Amant, Brooklyn, NY; and The Kitchen, New York, NY.