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HED: A Revolution That Wasn't

SUBHED: Coperni's spring/summer 2023 spray-on finale captivated the internet. Beneath the spectacle, however, the collection tells a more familiar story.

Tall, lean, and nearly motionless, Bella Hadid stands on a lit platform at the Salle des Textiles at the Musée des Arts et Métiers, arms extended, body bare except for a nude thong. Technicians circle her with spray guns, misting a liquid that slowly solidifies into fabric. What begins as a spectacle of science quickly becomes something stranger: fibers web together like cobwebs, forming a second skin in real time. Minutes later, the material is cut into a minimalist slip dress, and Hadid steps off the platform to applause.

Within 48 hours, the moment generated $26.3 million in media impact value, according to WWD. But the more pressing question isn't how viral it became—it's what, exactly, we watched. Was this a glimpse of fashion's future, or simply its most effective illusion yet?

Coperni's spring/summer 2023 show positioned itself as innovation. Staged inside a 19th-century textile museum—once home to early weaving machines—the venue signaled industrial

transformation, aligning the brand with moments in history when technology reshaped production. Bella Hadid, fresh off her own digital ventures with NFTs, was a calculated choice: less a model than a cultural amplifier. And at the center of it all was Fabrican, a spray-on textile technology developed in 2003 that forms nonwoven fabric directly on the body.

The message seemed clear: fashion, reimagined through science. But the rest of the collection told a different story.

The 37 looks that preceded the finale leaned heavily into Coperni's familiar vocabulary: cropped bomber jackets over tailored trousers (Looks 7, 18), slip dresses pulled diagonally over one shoulder (Looks 8, 9, 23), see-through mesh tops with pinstripe trousers (Look 24). The clothes were polished, commercially viable, recognizably contemporary — the tight, tactile precision Coperni has built its identity on.

A handful of looks gestured toward the finale's technological premise without extending it. Glossy minidresses came printed in glitchy floral patterns on lenticular hologram fabric (Looks 14, 15) — the same material Kylie Jenner wore in the front row. Silk mousseline dresses were embroidered with 1,000 pieces of broken glass (Look 34), echoing the brand's handblown glass Swipe Bag from the prior season. These were genuine experiments in material, but also surface treatments. The lenticular print is a visual effect; the broken glass an embellishment. Neither rethinks how a garment is made — only how it looks. The spray-on dress, by contrast, claimed to remake construction itself. That is the show's central tension: the finale promised a paradigm shift while everything before it operated within decoration. The spray-on dress stood apart, disconnected from the garments consumers were actually meant to buy.

The comparison to Alexander McQueen's spring/summer 1999 finale was unavoidable. McQueen ended that show with model Shalom Harlow spinning on a rotating platform as two industrial robots spray-painted her white dress yellow and black. The moment, known as “No. 13,” was understood at the time as art — a meditation on industry, beauty and the body as canvas. Coperni's restaging of that gesture, more than two decades later, replaced the painted dress with an actual spray-on garment, swapping conceptual provocation for what was framed as a literal proof-of-concept. That shift is telling. Where McQueen used technology to ask questions, Coperni used it to answer them — or, more precisely, to appear to.

The disconnect deepens around sustainability. Coperni framed the spray-on technology as waste-reducing and infinitely reusable — a material innovation aligned with growing consumer demand for environmentally responsible fashion. Yet that framing applied only to the single dress no one could purchase. The rest of the collection operated within the same production and consumption cycles as any other luxury brand on the Paris schedule.

Even more telling was the inclusion of an 18-karat gold Swipe Bag (Look 4) designed to be melted down after the show — luxury waste reframed as conceptual art. The gesture underscored the contradiction at the heart of the collection: a brand gesturing toward sustainability while simultaneously reinforcing excess.

This is where Coperni’s show shifts from spectacle to critique. Whether intentional or not, it exposes a broader stress within luxury fashion: the industry’s desire to align itself with sustainability without fundamentally altering its business model. The spray-on dress functioned as a powerful image of possibility, but not as a viable shift in practice. It suggested a future

where clothing could be made without waste, while existing comfortably within a system that depends on it.

Still, dismissing the moment as pure greenwashing feels too simple. Runways have always been spaces for ideas that don't immediately translate to retail. The spray-on dress may not be scalable — or even practical — but it does something fashion rarely does: it captures attention and redirects it toward material innovation.

The question, then, is not whether the technology works, but whether the industry intends to use it. Coperni proved that audiences will engage with sustainability when it is presented as spectacle. What remains unclear is whether that spectacle will ever move beyond the runway.

In the end, the show was both forward-looking and fundamentally unchanged. It imagined a different future for fashion, while continuing to produce the same present. The spray-on dress was historic. It was visually striking. And it changed absolutely nothing about how Coperni makes or sells clothes.