

Excerpt from -- *My Endless Search for American Fashion & How It Lost Touch with What Matters.*  
by Cathy Horyn, September 1, 2020

Still, it raises an interesting question, says Justin Kern, who, with his partner, Stephanie Danan, owns the Los Angeles label CO. “What is American fashion if you actually don’t have to do any of the stuff you’re supposed to do?”

I think the answer is clear: It is the small, independent labels with an autonomous drive, which, if you look carefully, are expanding the notion of vernacular to include other cultures and sensibilities. This is true of Rio Uribe, the designer behind Gypsy Sport, who has collapsed many assumptions about sexuality and gender, resulting in an ornery, stripped-down aesthetic. He has also been innovative with salvaged objects, including his grandmother’s crocheted doilies. And it’s true of the designers Zoe Latta and Mike Eckhaus of Eckhaus Latta. From the start, their clothes have been insistently anti-luxury, grounded in plain, democratic sportswear. Their knits and denim are often praised as “homespun” and “hand-crafted,” but maybe a truer term for the effect is *unworked*.

Others are literally taking their cues from the land. Eighteen months ago, Kern and Danan of CO decided to start a line of climate-beneficial clothing, an addition to their main label, which is now ten years old. “We’re this California label. We’ve done a lot with architecture and things that are specific to the West Coast,” said Kern. “A resource we have here is agriculture. Is there a way to tap into that?” The result of that thinking is Natural World: a small-batch collection primarily grown and made within the state. The wool, which feels like cashmere, comes from sheep in Solano County; it was woven at Huston Textiles, near Sacramento, on vintage industrial looms. Next season, Kern and Danan plan to work with a cotton grower who is breeding seeds that naturally produce color, no dyes needed.

“The CFDA doesn’t call us,” Kern said. “We’ve never met them. It’s still so geared toward New York and Europe, and I feel they are missing out on what’s happening in the west, from ag to tech, that are really going to be the future of this industry.”



**From left: 2020:** A costume by Gypsy Sport. Rio Uribe, the designer behind Gypsy Sport, is known for exploring gender, often with directness and humor. Photo: Elon Schoenholz / Gypsy Sport; **2020:** A dress by CO. CO, a label by Los Angeles designers Justin Kern and Stephanie Danan, is known for capturing a minimalist American purity. Photo: CO.