

# THE VILLAGER

## East Village radicals hit the runway at MoRUS show

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Photos by Sam Spokony



Activists gathered Saturday at the East Village's Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space to celebrate individuality, sustainability and a very radical sense of style during the museum's first-ever Direct Action Fashion Show. The improvised runway show, which was held in the adjoining C-Squat basement at 155 Avenue C — a space often shared with MoRUS — featured colorful and quirky costumes that highlighted the neighborhood's grassroots history, as well as direct references to community garden activism and other environmentalism efforts.

The evening began with a characteristically raucous performance by the Rude Mechanical Orchestra — a band generally found on the front lines of social justice protests — and included dozens of catwalk participants, all of whom were worried less about “modeling” and more about expressing the vibrant spirit of antiestablishment movements.

Along with the outfits made and worn by various neighborhood eccentrics, some members of well-known direct action groups — like Earth Celebrations and the Occupy Wall Street Puppet Guild — made flashy appearances. And after it was all said and done, the activist models took one more stroll down the runway, accompanied by costumed MoRUS staff members, for a totally radical dance party.

— Sam Spokony

Random Lunacy | February 11, 2013, 11:25 AM

## The Weirdest, Wildest Outfits From the Direct Action Fashion Show

By KONSTANTIN SERGEYEV



Chloe Sevigny just [launched a clothing line](#) inspired by Occupy Wall Street, and she isn't the only East Villager taking fashion cues from the protest movement. On Saturday, as an antidote to Fashion Week, the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space held a Direct Action Fashion Show aimed at celebrating "how activists use costumes, puppets, and props to draw awareness to various environmental, social, and political issues and create positive, sustainable change." Making appearances were [Rude Mechanical Orchestra](#), [Earth Celebrations](#), [Time's Up!](#), and others. Check out Konstantin Sergeyev's photos, below, to see what went down.



## Direct Action Fashion Show Promotes Spectacle and Going Green

Written by [Alissa Fleck](#) on **February 19, 2013**. Posted in [Breaking News](#), [News Our Town](#), [News Our Town Downtown](#), [News West Side Spirit](#), [Our Town](#), [Our Town Downtown](#), [West Side Spirit](#).

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*Oyster shell dresses and green grass suits raise awareness of the city's community gardens*

Michael Leete, who works at the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space (MoRUS) in Alphabet City, showed up for last weekend's "anti-fashion" show dressed as a sparkly orange tree. Leete, 28, and fellow acts were decked out head-to-toe in all recycled and organic material.

"We're exposing a different side of fashion," Leete explained of the show's mission. "We're showing how it can be used in protest to make the act more interesting."

While high-end fashion is invading New York City for February Fashion Week, MoRUS and its partner organizations had something a little different, something a little earthier, in mind for their show, which took place at the museum's C-Squat on Avenue C.

Another volunteer, Barbara Ross, came strapped with dangling oyster shells.

"New York City once had oysters in the Hudson River that were wiped out," she said of her costume's purpose. "There's talk of bringing them back to help with storm surges." Ross's oyster shell costume was meant to shed light on the potential environmental benefits of mollusks.

"All these costumes have a green message," she said. "They show what people can do."

"Fashion can also be functional," Leete said, adding that costumes like his, a part of the Earth Celebrations series, were intended to raise awareness of the city's prolific community gardens and plans to demolish them.

Earth Celebrations is a nonprofit organization directed by activist Felicia Young that aims to preserve these gardens through art and performance.

In addition, the show had a broader mission of bringing attention to how costumes and props can be used to promote positive change in the face of social, environmental and political issues—including the use of puppets to support the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Prior to the show, Young took the stage to talk about the group's work.

"New York City has the highest concentration of community gardens in America, and Earth Celebrations helped save them," Young said. "People didn't even know these gardens existed."

Young said the gardens grew out of rubble-filled lots of the 1970s, cultivated by individuals who helped transform neighborhoods previously considered slums. Real estate developers then began targeting those very spots.

"These gardens should not be a temporary stopgap on the way to luxurious neighborhoods," Young said. "These are not vacant lots."

Over time, since the organization's founding in 1991, politicians like former Gov. Eliot Spitzer and Mayor Michael Bloomberg got involved in helping preserve the gardens by providing grants and helping raise awareness.

Volunteers Isabelle Garcia, 31, and Lauren Mittelman, 24, walked the recycled runway in suits made of grass, which was grown directly onto the costumes by Bill Di Paola, a MoRUS co-founder and staunch activist in the city with the environmental organization Time's Up!

Mittelman said the suits represented how easy it can be to grow something no matter the context. "If you can grow grass on a suit in a week, you can grow sustainable stuff anywhere," she said.

Amanda Buckley, a 30-year-old painter in the city who works a variety of odd jobs, was in the audience on Saturday. Buckley heard about the museum's show on Facebook and decided to check it out.

"I'm interested in how political activism can exist in an artistic context," Buckley said.

Another audience member, Jerry Trudell, said he used to squat nearby in the 1990s and helped start the transformation of vacant lots into gardens that brought Earth Celebrations into being. He said a garden procession went around every year to support and bring visibility to the garden coalition by uniting garden activists from different areas.

MoRUS' "anti-fashion" show also included a brassy performance by the Rude Mechanical Orchestra, a volunteer-run band, complete with dancers, which regularly shows up at a variety of protest events, rallies and benefits throughout the city. The band first formed to protest the Republican National Convention.

Hanna Kyle Moranz, 31, a dancer who's been with the band since 2008, said the orchestra, like MoRUS and its partner organizations, "strongly believes in the power of spectacle for positive change."