

Elena Velez's Sample Sale Is The First Of Many

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The sun has just been covered by thick, gray clouds as Elena Velez opens the doors to her Brooklyn studio. It is a chilly Saturday in the city, the perfect backdrop for Velez's sample sale and studio clearance, held in her equally neutral and minimal workspace. Located in Greenpoint, the gallery is not immediately obvious to the passerby. Nestled between exposed brick apartment buildings, in an area filled with graffiti and an ominous lack of shops, is a single set of stairs leading up to the gallery space, whose double doors were flung wide open for this particular occasion.

Velez, a Milwaukee-born fashion designer based out of New York City, is holding an open sale complete with a variety of design supplies, knick-knacks, and pieces from Year 0 - Rinascita, the collection that defined her eponymous label's New York Fashion Week runway debut last fall. The daughter of a ship captain on the Great Lakes, Velez regularly draws upon her Midwestern roots, bringing an industrial sense of craftsmanship to high fashion. Her clothes are defined by elements of purposeful deconstruction—raw edges, thread-bare materiality, ripped seams—and build upon recurring themes of mankind, womanhood, and rebirth.

Today's sale is born out of Velez' need to declutter following two seasons of runway collections. "I'm just trying to offload a bunch of textiles and styling accessories, get rid of some of the ready-to-wear that we developed this season," said Velez. "We accumulate so many things throughout the [show] process." Gray marley floors are almost entirely covered with cream fabric clearly intended to protect the surface, as sale items were sprawled throughout the large studio space. Tall, white walls meet a wood paneled ceiling with hanging strip lights, adding to the industrial feel of the gallery, which Velez shares with Swedish painter Andreas Emenius. "It almost felt futuristic," reflected Amanda Botelho, a law student who found the sample sale through Velez' Instagram.

A clothing rack in the back corner holds the last pieces from Year 0: a cream corset-style top with raw edges, thin straps and string detailing, a stiff, brown wool pencil skirt and cropped blazer set, and a fluid black sheer skirt, its hem long enough to graze the fabric-covered floor. "I like that she uses organic materials like linen, but combines them with really structured silhouettes," Botelho said about the garments on display. Also from Velez' fall 2021 collection are shoes that her models wore on set, sprawled against the back wall. Messily spray painted boots are perched alongside sharpie-scribbled heels, all heavily discounted and in a variety of sizes. Five rows of tan and oiled brown clog sandals collect in the middle of the gallery floor, their platform soles and thick criss-crossed straps untouched and ready to be taken home by one of the many fashion moguls walking through the open doors.

The event, though filled with people, is a silent endeavor, accompanied only by the quiet thumping of background music and the sound of Velez greeting her visitors in the back corner. Three Parsons design students take turns snapping photos of each other feeling fabrics, testing shoes and thumbing through the clothing rack. A young couple walks in,

the man sporting blue and green tie-dye Gucci socks and holding hands with a woman whose baby is fast-asleep in a carrier strapped across her chest. Velez abandons her post to run and embrace the couple—married fashion entrepreneurs who run a small startup production studio in Brooklyn. “I can’t believe you made this,” she exclaims, holding the baby’s pudgy fingers, her rush of excitement not quite enough to wake him from his slumber.

Pregnant herself, Velez wears an oversized camel button up atop black pants and sneakers, her brown hair falling over her shoulders and her face, clean of makeup, lit with excitement and appreciation for the browsers and buyers. Perched behind a table filled with various, small items including spoolies, unfinished silver welded rings and a blue dotted makeup bag, Velez greets each customer with a grin and light conversation. She recognizes one man from a show she did the week prior, another from Instagram.

There is a world of art, culture and fashion inside the Greenpoint gallery this afternoon. Faded paint splatters adorn the white walls, and colorful canvases in varied sizes lean up against a corner, adorned with strikingly abstract images in eclectic colors. The open space, with its eerie sense of minimalism, provides minor hints of every day mundanities; a microwave sits atop a white countertop, two bananas and an orange offer the only decoration adorning a foldout table. Only if you make your way to the very back of the gallery will you find a frosted door which reads, in all caps, ELENA VELEZ.

Behind the door lies the atelier space, composed of a single room where everything from design conceptualization to research to construction takes place. A brown leather couch hugs the wall, facing a coffee table with stacks of books, sketches, and a black folder marked for NYFW 2022. A shelving unit houses four stacks of various shoes, while tall lamps shine down on tables filled with fabric, sewing machines and tools, surrounded by ironing boards and cream-colored torso mannequins. “It’s a great space to work, especially with how big it is,” Velez said of the gallery as a whole. “We have a ton of interns and seamstresses and tailors around fashion week, so it really fills up.”

Judging by the intricacy of her clothing designs, abundance of products and welcoming nature of Velez, it’s no surprise that the sample sale was effective in reaching its goal. Just before two o’clock, only two hours after opening her doors, Velez took to Instagram to announce that “Y’all cleared me out!!!”

Reflecting upon the experience, Velez pronounced it “heartwarming and unexpected” to finally be able to connect with her buyers in person. “I live in a really detached world from the end consumer at the moment, since most of our brand experiences are with retailers, editors and influencers, so it was super cool to get to learn more about the people who love the brand.”