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Fashion in Washington Square Park

What defines New York City? Is it the culture, the food, the people, the fashion? Is it Washington Square Park, a place where community and art thrive? New York City is Henry, who reads in Washington Square Park. New York is Maddie and Maurice, a couple who just moved to the city. New York is Eden, who sells her art and designs in Washington Square Park. New York City is a place for opportunity. Many times, New York City is the birthplace of movements, such as the Harlem Renaissance and the Gay Liberation March in the 70s. Fashion especially plays such a predominant role in the city and the lives of its residents. Trends are born in New York. Fashion is born in New York.

In the middle of a New York heatwave, four patrons of Washington Square Park discussed their style and how it shaped them. All New York residents, Henry, Maddie, Maurice, and Eden shared a common idea that personal style is subjective. It was easy to just walk up to people nowadays— especially now, with every other TikTok being an interview with strangers in Washington Square Park. While everyone was different, in their style and answers, everyone had a story. A fashion story, what it means to them, and what it means for them. Eden is an artist. While her specialty is in art, she puts her designs on tote bags and t-shirts. Isn't fashion art? Henry gets inspiration from his mom. Maddie and Maurice just moved to the city. Four different

stories. Four different people. New York City isn't defined by one thing, but it's the city of change and acceptance. What is better than fashion, to represent that?

Henry

Henry is a patron of Washington Square Park— simply reading and listening to music on a bench. Henry noted his style has been influenced by the early 2000s. “Ever since I was a kid I was always obsessed with like models...models of the early 2000s: Naomi and Linda and all of that style,” he says. Henry, a full-time NYU student, also credits his mother as a fashion influence. As a 2021 high school graduate, Henry started branching out and experimenting with fashion at the end of his high school career. “My style was really terrible up until the end of high school. I was like baggy jeans and sweatpants. I didn’t know what I was doing” explained Henry. Terrible fashion was the case for most people out of the pandemic, but Henry wanted to toy with his feminine side and explore what fashion can do. “Exploring style and fashion helped me to accept myself and my body more.” When asked about trends, Henry was worried about being controversial. Henry views trends as a pattern and sees them as a way to follow others when you can just be yourself. “Wear what you want” he said. He tells people to not worry about being in style. Although, Henry has one rule: don’t wear crocs. While Henry is an advocate for being who you are regardless of trendiness, he loves knitwear. Just like his early 2000s influences, he loves how platforms and ballet flats are back “in style.” Henry says fashion is an extension of himself, of his personality. He uses fashion as a “presentation to the world.” “Whatever you wear, you should just be authentically and undeniably, yourself.”

Maddie & Maurice

Maddie and Maurice are a match made in heaven. They both just moved to New York City a few months ago, and have impeccable style. As a young couple, is there truly a better place to be besides New York City? Maddie frequents thrift stores quite often. The twist is, that her boyfriend, Maurice adds different patchwork to her pants to make them uniquely hers. Maddie discussed her friend group and how everyone has their style. She also credits her job at Nordstrom with helping her find different clothes to help herself find what she wanted to say through fashion. “What is something that makes me feel me and comfortable and happy and free.” New York City is the birthplace for many things, including Maddie’s experiments in fashion and personal style into becoming herself. Maddie and Maurice are both advocates for sustainability in fashion and staying clear of fast fashion, which is a big trend today. As the name suggests, fast fashion She is not a fan of blouses and jeans. Maddie describes herself and trends as “random.” She doesn't fit an exact trend and doesn’t need to. While she is a fan of 90s fashion, she enjoys a variety of clothes. “I feel like my [personal style] has influenced me to be myself and be creative.” Thrifting is an outlet for Maddie to discover new clothes and fashion that she never even would have explored before outside of finding it at a thrift store. Personal style means expression and creativeness to Maddie. No one can tell her what to wear, what to like, or dislike. “It [personal style] doesn’t go with anyone else’s clothing, with what they’re wearing. It’s just my own aspect of myself. Just being creative on my own.”

Maurice, on the other hand, is loosely inspired by the weather. He dresses practically– if it's hot out, wear shorts. He doesn’t dress to impress, as he was wearing his pajama shirt, with shorts he cut earlier in the day. Cracking a joke, Maurice commented that his style stemmed from

the fact his mom didn't dress him anymore. "When I graduated elementary school, I was finally able to dress myself. My mom stopped picking my outfits." Maurice rejects the trend patterns. He doesn't want to dress like other people. Maurice is a skateboarder, so the influence of his clothes is comfortability and flexibility based on his board. Clothes to Maurice is however he feels when he wakes up. They reflect how he feels and his emotions day by day. He wants his style to reflect his values. Maurice wants the world to know who he is and what his morals are based on his clothes. "I like wearing a lot of peace signs cause I'm a peaceful person...I just want peace in this crazy world."

Eden

Eden is an artist in Washington Square Park. She designs her own stamps, to press her designs onto tote bags and t-shirts. Fashion is art and art is fashion. Eden's art on tote bags and shirts is just as important as any outfit someone is wearing. "I'm an artist but I wanted to make something that could be wearable art, so that's why I make shirts and tote bags, so that way you can show art," Eden explained when talking about her inspiration behind her art. Her designs are cute fruits with faces. One tote bag featured three identical strawberries lined up horizontally, all smiling. Eden makes mundane things like fruit, have new life. As a freshman in college in 2016, Eden took a ceramics class where she soon found her style as an artist. Even as an artist, her biggest fashion no-no is fast fashion. "How can I make my art sustainable?" She says her tote bags are an important step, in her journey, toward a more ethical, and sustainable fashion and art industry. A trend in her art is pastel colors, which fit the cute vibe she strives for. Eden just wants to spread happiness through her art. She talks about her personality and how she interacts with people every day, inspiring her art. "It makes me so happy when I see people look at my art and

my style, and it makes them smile.” Eden’s art is a way to make her presence known. She expresses herself through her art. She wants to make people happy.

A common theme expressed by the many people in the park is to be authentic. New York is about expressing character and emotions, whether it’s accomplished through fashion, art, or both. Washington Square Park is a place where many people get to live their most authentic selves and be exactly who they have always wanted to be. Artistic freedom creates community and unity within the park and people. Fashion culture in New York isn’t about the latest trends or what a model was seen wearing on the street. New York fashion is about individuality and uniqueness. It’s about loving clothes. It’s about wanting to make people happy. New York fashion is influenced by no one and everyone, all at once. Trends may be born in the city, but they aren't used. What are trends? What defines fashion if it’s all the same? In New York City, everyone is different. Everyone has a different story about the clothes on their body. Fashion is influenced by art, sustainability, mothers, and the need to be individual. To show the city and the world, that there is no one like the other.