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A NIGHT OUT WITH JUERGEN TELLER; Portrait of a Dirty Look
By BOB MORRIS

By now, many fashion photographers have had an exhibition mounted or a book published to inform the world of their artistic intentions. On Thursday, it was Juergen Teller's turn to be an artist in New York. The German-born Londoner was in town for his show at the Lehmann Maupin Gallery in SoHo.

Mr. Teller is best known for discovering Kate Moss, and his images of strung-out-looking models in unappealing settings (described as everything from dirty realism to heroin chic) have helped to lower the traditional standards of beauty.

He hasn't done much for the dress code at parties, either. For his big night, the laid-back Mr. Teller, 36, was wearing ripped Levi's with one button of his fly undone, a washed-out beige T-shirt and canvas sneakers. He had a camera and a pack of Marlboros stuffed in his pockets. Never mind that the T-shirt was given to him by Marc Jacobs and the camera was a limited-edition Olympus. The effect was a casual nonchalance that makes fashionable people doubt themselves for dressing up.

"I don't care about fashion at all," the unshaven Mr. Teller said in his German accent, as he walked from the Mercer Hotel to his opening. "And I know it's kind of a dodgy thing to be a fashion photographer, a kind of pathetic occupation, but I like it, even though I question it."

SoHo's streets were glamour glutted with fashion statements, from dirty denim to Sabrina heels. "You can't get away from fashion," said Mr. Teller, who had a hangover and whose hangdog hair was greasy, not wet and squeaky-clean, he pointed out. "The whole beauty thing is everywhere. It's just really weird."

Inside the gallery, fashion followers were flocking to celebrate the pleasant and approachable Mr. Teller, and every one of them was far better dressed than he was. Sofia Coppola, the director, for instance, was in a flouncy denim skirt, and Dan Peres, the new young editor of Details, wore a crisp white shirt and grown-up slacks. The model Stephanie Seymour was in a pretty sundress, and nearby, 5-year-old Troy Baker was drinking a Snapple in a super-dapper little blue suit.

Even the usually low-key and pared-down Helmut Lang wore a natty blazer, despite the oppressive heat. "I wanted to make an effort out of respect for the artist," he said, adding that he and Mr. Teller share an interest in restraint. "It's important to know when not to do things." Like not dressing up for a fashionable, high-profile party given in your honor? "Juergen has to stay with his trademark look," Mr. Lang said.

As the opening continued to open, questions rose in the air with the heat. Were Mr. Teller's Polaroid shots of aspiring supermodels in one room and giant portraits of smiling Miss Universe contestants in another raw or facile? Did Jackson Pollock permanently alter the dress code for all artistic geniuses? Do Marc Jacobs (who designs beautiful clothes but never dresses in them) and Mr. Teller trade T-shirts sometimes?

As the evening wound down, so did Mr. Teller's pants, which had dropped just low enough to reveal a bit of his behind and his boxer shorts. "He's got a timeless grunge look," observed Stefano Tonchi, the creative fashion director of Esquire, who was wearing a Jil Sander suit.

"He's all about unfashion," said Cary Leitzes, the photography director of Harper's Bazaar. "These days, the more powerful you are, the schlumpier you are."

"Unless," added Stefan Campbell, a stylist, "you're Anna Wintour."

On his way out, someone asked the chain-smoking Mr. Teller how he felt after his big evening. He shrugged. "Not horrible," he said.