A collective display by Christian Dior on Monday, with a sober and somber collection of international couture, where the key message was less a singular designer’s vision than a collective team effort.

Hence the key to this collection was the fashion symphony that is a great couture atelier, and the clothes were all about harmonious proportion and subtle experimentation.

“I think too many people think that fashion and even couture is all about a single couturier and the premier of the atelier realizing their vision and that is it. Especially right now, during this pandemic. But couture is an enormous collective endeavor, of hundreds of skilled people working very hard to realize something new and unique,” insisted Chiuri, in a preview Sunday in her atelier on the Seine.

From the opening, the purity of the line was preeminent in this spring-summer 2022 couture collection: from the brilliantly jet-patterned fishnet organza top and expansive skirt and sweeping black wool twill highwayman coat. Though this was also a sporty Dior, with patchwork bodysuits in shades of black and silver, again finished with perfect hand-stitched embroidery. The sort one only really ever sees on a Paris catwalk.

Chiuri’s ecru wool mid-thigh, A-line coat finished in a silver tapestry of braids, shards and mini ropes was perfection, and smartly finished with pearl encrusted fishnet tights and a very smart new couture shoe: a court shoe covered with deftly sewn pearls, bugle beads, jet lozenges or gray strands.

Throughout, the couturier worked with a very tight and focused palette of ecru, silver lame, faded gold and, of course, Dior dove gray.

Rising to a crescendo for evening, with A-L-line gowns in spongy crepe, cut with open backs; cascading pleated tulle dresses in many shiny hues of gray and a voluminous white reverend mother’s gown with side pockets. Classy and ladylike, all of them.

In a striking juxtaposition, Chiuri commissioned two brilliant Indian artists, Manu Parekh and Madhvi Parekh to create bold graphic works of art referencing Indian culture, focusing on the country’s many gods; village life; mysticism; and above all the goddess Kali.
These paintings were in turn made into massive three-by-five-meter tapestries, embroidered on organic cotton, and produced by the students and graduates of the Chanakya School of Craft in Mumbai. Making for a beautiful backdrop to the show.

“It’s a true honor for our team to work with a house as prestigious as Dior. Especially, as this great Paris house has chosen a pair of great modern Indian artists. The whole country is proud,” explained Karishma Swali, creative director of Chanakya, and an old friend of Chiuri.

Karishma first encountered Maria Grazia back in the mid-nineties, when Chiuri designed for Fendi, and wanted to embroider fabric flowers onto the Roman brand’s baguette bag.

Collectively their latest linkup made for a beautiful installation inside Dior’s show tent in the garden of the Rodin Museum. It will also become an exhibition open to the public for the next six days, continuing a novel idea began with Dior when American artist Judy Chicago created a giant installation of the female body in another Rodin Museum show for the house.

Dior has been working with the school in Mumbai since 2016, helping to finance a women’s craft college in the city, a vital change in a culture where these skills were historically dominated by men.

“I think of these sort of collaborations are essential, doubly so during Covid, where life has become an endless series of Zooms. I also believe that these special skills done by hand are undervalued by many cultures, precisely because they often were done by women,” shrugged Maria Grazia.

“If you think about it, it’s incredible that in my country Italy there is no museum of fashion. That you have to go to the V&A in London or the Louvre in Paris to see an exhibition of my work for Dior. And I felt so honored. They have fashion museums in London, New York and Paris but not in Rome. Incredible!” lamented the Roman-born couturier.

By Godfrey Deeny