

RUNWAY BRIDESMAID  
Wendy Pepper, right, a  
finalist on 'Project  
Runway.'



BRAND

\*STYLE\*

# Project Reality

testants are up to. Are they reveling in fame and successfully selling their collections, or are they unemployed in L.A. like so many other former reality stars before them?

In the first season, finalist Wendy Pepper faced criticism from the judges and even harsher responses from viewers, who loved

ularly correspond with, and they provide me with valuable market research." If given another opportunity to be on a reality TV show, Ms. Pepper said she would. The most important thing she walked away with, aside from that long list of contacts, was learning, "There's no such thing as bad press."

Jay McCarroll, the winner of the first season, has already said "yes" to the chance to continue his reality TV career. Bravo aired a one-hour documentary last Wednesday during which cameras followed him from his home in Pennsylvania to New York City. He searched for an apartment and workspace, went fabric shopping, and met admirers on the street. He encountered sky-high rents, and, even worse, the frustration of having "Project Runway" host Heidi Klum decline to wear a garment he custom-made for her. Reality, indeed.

Professor Leonard Bess, the chair of the fashion design department at the Fashion Institute of Technology, said shows like "Project Runway" and Tommy Hilfiger's "The Cut" don't give a fair amount of information about what students need to do to be suc-

By JULIA DINARDO  
There are only 8 more days to go until the finale of Bravo's "Project Runway," and I absolutely cannot wait. I don't have cable TV, but I have seriously considered signing up just so I can watch "Project Runway" -- and check out the new stylist-based show "Style Me With Rachel Hunter" on We, which made its premiere January 23. (In the meantime, I have asked my patient friends to TiVo for me.)

Fashion reality TV shows are a growing genre. Along with "Project Runway" and "Style Me," Tommy Hilfiger had "The Cut" last summer, and Tyra Banks's "America's Next Top Model" is a perennial top show on UPN. They are enjoyable for both the creative talent of the contestants, and, of course, for the entertainment value of seeing wannabe stylists scour the Hell's Kitchen flea market on a sweltering summer day while dragging a mannequin that keeps breaking into pieces.

The runway presentation that is the finale of "Project Runway" was shot during Fashion Week and will air Wednesday, March 8. More than 2 million people tuned in for the first season finale, making Bravo the no. 1 cable network that night. The triumphant conclusion of Season 2, however, prompts the question of what Season 1 con-

cessful in the industry. "These shows are designed to entertain, not educate," Mr. Bess said. "Reality TV fashion programs do not even come close to the reality of the marketplace. There is so much more to know: line building and projection, international sourcing, garment specing, textile science, licensing, presentation boards, working with vendors and factories, costings, product development."

That's not the only place where these programs go astray. Surviving the competition also raises ethical questions. "Reality TV can have a negative influence by sending a twisted view of what needs to be done to get ahead," Mr. Bess said.

"I don't see it as a powerful influence, but nonetheless it is a distorted view of what is the best practice," he said.

The results are in: Celebrity status and good publicity can give a small boost to a designer's career. But once the show is over, it is up to their marketing skills and talent to make them a success. Television has yet to produce a big-name designer. The programs are an indisputably successful on one front, however: They provide delicious entertainment for fashion addicts.

## ALSO IN STYLE

What the nominees should wear to the Oscars, page 20