



Wind Knitting Factory

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GLOBAL FASHION FOOTPRINTS

Towards sustainability in the clothing industry

In his new book *How to Live a Low-Carbon Life*, Chris Goodall states that one of the easiest ways to reduce your carbon footprint is to buy only second-hand clothing (and to wear your clothes far more times before laundering), because the environmental impact of new clothes in terms of CO₂ emissions, soil and water degradation and human rights issues is immense. You only have to look at the decimation of the Aral Sea in Uzbekistan caused by the diversion of fresh water from its tributaries, largely for the irrigation of cotton fields, to see how this monoculture has destroyed an entire ecosystem upon which millions of people depended and forced them to work in the pesticide-laced cotton fields that produce more than a third of the raw material for European markets. Not only are children compulsorily taken out of schools to harvest the crop, but farmers are forced to grow cotton for state-owned

companies that set a price per kilo so low that farmers become burdened in a cycle of debt. And all to fulfil our penchant for cheap clothes that get worn once and discarded into landfill to continue the cycle of pollution and degradation. "Pick Your Cotton Carefully," urges the Environmental Justice Foundation, and buy only fairly traded, organic cotton if possible. (www.ejfoundation.org)

All is not lost, though, and in the inspiring Fashion Footprints exhibition curated by the Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World (CCANW) in association with Forum for the Future, a new paradigm for the clothing industry unfolds: one that looks at the problems inherent in the current systems of production, manufacture and distribution, and resolves them in creative ways through the process of 'engaged design' which advocates interdisciplinary dialogue in the entire production process. The results are

nothing short of astounding.

From the no-wash top that is designed to resist and repel dirt and uses wipe-clean technology and breathable venting systems to eliminate the conditions where odorous bacteria prevail, to the storm jacket made out of recycled plastic bottles with a lining designed to mimic the qualities of otter fur, enabling the wearer to stay completely dry, it is clear that intelligent fabrics, biomimicry and cradle-to-cradle designs are beginning to address the ecological impact of what we wear.

Visionary companies such as Patagonia are looking at ways to reuse fabrics once discarded, such as their Common Threads programme whereby customers can return specific items of worn-out clothing for upcycling into newly made garments; and designer Issey Miyake's A-POC manufacturing system which weaves bespoke garments using a single thread, thereby eliminating waste from the cutting and sewing processes.

ReMade In Leeds is a 'replicable' community initiative that encourages people to cooperate in the creation of new clothes, reviving dyeing, mending and sewing skills and upcycling old materials into completely new ones, again through the process of engaged design. The aim is to bridge the gap between user and maker and encourage debate on the end-use and environmental impact of clothing choices. The initiative has launched its own brand of unique remade clothes called Antiform, providing skilled employment in the area.

But my favourite part of the exhibition was the Wind Knitting Factory. A mechanised knitting machine with a micro wind-turbine attached to it was installed on a roof in South Kensington, London. It automatically knits scarves using the wind and UK-sourced wools. Each scarf has a label stitched to it that shows when the scarf was knitted and how long it took. On 25 October 2009, two metres of scarf was knitted by the wind in just 210 minutes! **R**

Fashion Footprints is at CCANW, Haldon Forest Park, Exeter, UK until 21 November 2010, then touring the UK. Visit www.ccanw.co.uk for more details. The Ethical Fashion Insights Conference will be held at Somerset College of Arts and Technology on 4 November 2010. Email info@ccanw.co.uk for more information. See also www.localwisdom.info

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