

# Fabric of Dreams

**CLARE BLAKE** takes a look at a CCANW hosted exhibition that will open your eyes to a whole new world of fashion

**F**ashion is about beauty as everyone knows, but scratch just below the surface and ugly truths are revealed about this seemingly glamorous world. It is a shock to discover that the gorgeous bargain top you just bought was actually created by exhausted underpaid workers in sweatshop conditions. Suddenly, you look at it with new eyes.

Peeling away fashion's mask to reveal what really goes on is exactly what the groundbreaking Fashion Footprints exhibition at the Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World (CCANW) aims to do.

It takes a long, hard, and sometimes painful, overview of how the world of fashion operates all the way from the cottonfield to our very own wardrobe, and challenges our attitudes to what we wear and why.

The sad truth is that the British public is addicted as a nation to fast cheap fashion, but, like fast food, it is not good for us or the environment. As sustainable fashion consultant Dr. Kate Fletcher shrewdly observes, "Fast isn't free. Someone, somewhere, is paying."

When you begin to look at facts and figures, the true cost is staggering – exploitation of millions of workers including children (remember the Primark scandal?), and over one million tons of clothing sent to UK landfill sites each year resulting in more than three million tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

Collection 10, ReMade in Leeds. This fashion initiative brings together traditional skills in the community to upcycle waste textiles into funky clothing.  
Photo: Sally Cole





(Left): Cape by Michelle Lowe Holder & dress by Minna Hepburn from CCANW's Eco-fashion Show in the Forest. Photo: J.P.Carvalho  
 (Below): Hand-stitched in 100 per cent organic cotton, Maggie's All-Over Dress from Alabama Chanin uses localised production systems that help to counter "out of sight, out of mind" abuse in the fashion industry. Photo: Courtesy of Alabama Chanin

**"There is no doubt that you will find your perceptions shifting"**

Fortunately, many designers now believe fashion must turn its back on its shady past and rise to the challenge of ethical fashion. Lizzie Harrison of ReMade in Leeds expresses her concerns: "Fashion is such an exciting and relevant part of our everyday life, yet it often exploits others and uses up precious resources. But this does not have to be the case - fashion offers an incredible opportunity to do things differently - reusing waste, offering valuable employment, aiding community development, and celebrating heritage handicrafts. I hope in the future fashion that is not ethical and not sustainable will no longer exist."

**Far from boring**

Maybe you think sustainable fashion sounds boring, but actually the reverse is true as one of the side effects of the sheer multiplicity of garments being churned out in response to the insatiable greed of the fashion industry has been a generalised dumbing-down that results in rice pudding blandness. In contrast, the new wave of designers is exploding with fresh ideas. Their pieces fizz with energy, excitement, and belief.

Fashion Footprints' curators, four graduates from the inaugural MA in Fashion and the Environment at London College of Fashion, have chosen to build the exhibition around Dr. Kate Fletcher's Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design

Journeys, the "bible" of the sustainable fashion movement.

Carefully selected garments reflect eight core themes: Material Diversity, Visible Processes, Low Impact Laundry, Reducing Waste, Better Ways to Consume, Designing Locally, Looking to Nature and Engaged Design, principles that challenge both current trends in the fashion industry and us as consumers.

There is no doubt that you will find your



This asymmetric draped silver lycocell up-cycled eco-jersey dress from Ciel promotes diversity in materials rather than ubiquitous cotton and polyester that account for 80 per cent of fabric consumption worldwide. Photo: Ciel





Izzy Lane's luxurious cashmere cut-out waistcoat uses environmentally friendly natural fibres from Scottish cashmere goats. Photo: Izzy Lane



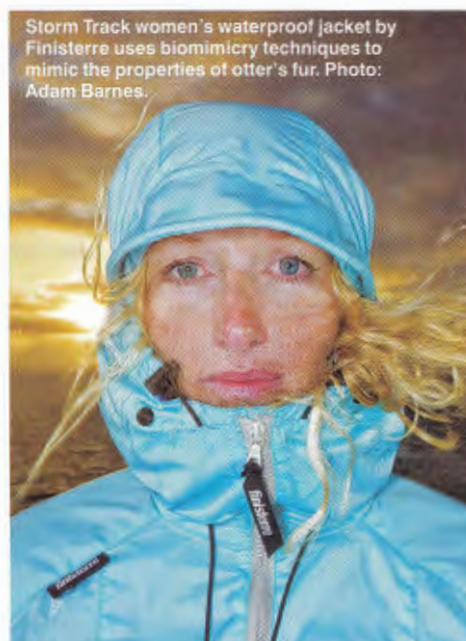
perceptions of the fashion industry shifting as you walk around the exhibition. It is incredibly moving to view the key garment for Better Ways to Consume, a beautiful c.1910 hand-embroidered silk kimono, and realise that cherished heirloom or hand-me-down pieces have an emotional history completely lacking from quick fashion fixes that rarely see the year out. It encourages us to choose our clothes in a different way, with love, in the belief that they will be with us for a long time.

This connection with the heart is also very much apparent in the ReMade in Leeds community-based fashion initiative responsible for the striking coats from Collection 10. Here local people including beaders, knitters, artists, and seamstresses have joined forces to use traditional sewing, repair, and embellishment skills to revitalise waste textiles and create funky innovative clothing. The knock-on benefits have been huge and include the creation of local jobs, recycling of waste, and building community spirit.

As well as the ongoing exhibition there is an interesting programme of linked workshops and events ranging from sustainable washing practices to learning

how to use natural dyes. However, the pièce de résistance must surely be the Eco-Fashion Show held in the wonderful natural setting of Haldon Forest where some of the most exciting sustainable fashion designers will show off a stunning range of innovative garments guaranteed to turn heads.

Tara Baoth Mooney's Portable Pelt is just one item that will be showcased on the forest 'catwalk', a dreamlike piece that has an ethereal spiritual quality.



Storm Track women's waterproof jacket by Finisterre uses biomimicry techniques to mimic the properties of otter's fur. Photo: Adam Barnes.

## Exhibition: Fashion Footprints: Sustainable Approaches

**Sun 1 August-Sun 21 November. Free.**

Exciting designers show that sustainable fashion is the way ahead.

**The Big Wash: Sun 1 August, 12.30-4pm. Free.**

Find out how current washing practices can damage the environment and rediscover the fine art of washing wool and other delicates with wool expert Yvonne Somme. Live music.

**FAIR FASHION FESTIVAL WEEKEND**

Art in the Park goes Slow Fashion: Sat 14 August, 11am-6pm Free.

Lively mix of stalls, free drop-in workshops, demonstrations and music. Meet local and UK-wide producers and makers working sustainably in producing fibres and fashion.

**Eco-fashion Show in the Forest**

**Sun 15 August, 3-5pm. Admission £12**

(£10 conc.). Booking essential. Includes complimentary glass of wine and slow goodie bag. Innovative garments from leading designers in sustainable fashion take to the catwalk. With special guest Otto von Busch, Fashion Hacktivist and live music by Duskk.

**Summertime Blues: Wed 18 August and Thurs 19 August, 10am-12noon or 1-4pm. Admission £4**

(including cloth bag to print on). Drop-in natural dyes workshop led by Jane Deane, co-author of Creative Spinning. Suitable for children and adults.

Sept-Dec: The Fashion Footprints Road Show

CCANW takes to the road with a fun hands-on workshop exploring sustainability in fashion and textiles for young people.

CCANW, Haldon Forest Park, Exeter, EX6 7XR. Tel: 01392 832277 Website: [www.doubleelephant.org.uk](http://www.doubleelephant.org.uk) [www.ccanw.co.uk](http://www.ccanw.co.uk)

Tara's living moss collar is inspired by biomimicry processes which emulate nature's patterns and models, in this case photosynthesis, and the exciting thought of what would happen if everyone wore something that could convert carbon dioxide in the air into oxygen.

However, Tara explains, "Portable Pelt is more of a symbolic provocation. I'm borrowing from nature to make the point that clothing extends beyond a necessary protective covering. It is an expression of our inner spirit."

This is what the new fashion seems to be truly about. A fashion that is far less about what you wear than why, a choice of clothing that is not just decorative but represents a connection to the wider world of which we are all a part. Isn't it time you changed your wardrobe? **EL**