Vivienne Westwood And Iris Van Herpen On Sustainability

Vivienne Westwood and Iris Van Herpen are two current western designers. Having inadvertently pioneered the mainstreaming of punk fashion in the 1980’s and becoming disillusioned with the fashion industry’s ability to subsume and celebrate her anti-establishment agenda, Westwood took on sustainability as her cause in a long-term political act of challenge. Iris Van Herpen has slowly but surely dominated the haute couture runways since 2011. Van Herpen is not overtly political, although the nature of her work addresses the factors of sustainability. Through collaboration with scientists, architects and university students she achieves technologically advanced and sustainable approaches as each Van Herpen show up-stages her last.

A product of the 1970’s UK punk scene, Vivienne Westwood has always had sustainability on her agenda. “Westwood has long championed anti-consumerism and climate change causes” (Augusta Pownall 2019). Westwood came from a family embedded in textiles. Her father was a cobbler and her mother worked in a cotton mill (Biography.com editors, 2014). Vivienne was not interested in the mainstream hippy movement of the 1970s, rather she was more interested in challenging the status quo, rebellion and the rock and roll esthetic of the 1950’s youth culture, which by the early 1970’s had changed to a zipper, buckle and leather motorcycle aesthetic. Her anti-establishment designs caused an uproar resulting in her prosecution under obscenity laws. Westwood’s rebellious outlook motivated her to challenge mainstream ideas of acceptability even further. Westwood was the pioneer of the punk rock culture. The gradual acceptance of the punk rock aesthetic into the mainstream culture deflated Westwood and was the catalyst that inspired her journey towards environmentally responsible fashion. In fact, her store was renamed and re-branded World’s End in 1980 and has retained this name to this day (Vivienne Westwood, 2018). The name change reflects Westwood’s change from challenging specific and always changing fashion trends to a more global rebellion, challenging how humans exist within their environment.

The name ‘World’s End’ references Westwood’s discomfort with her social, environmental and political milieu. Westwood first challenged the class system with her “Tatler Girl” collection of 1987 but her objective has widened in the decades since (Vivienne Westwood, 2018). Westwood’s drive to attain sustainability and combat today’s environmental crisis consists of an anti consumerism mind set: quality over quantity. In recent years Westwood has unapologetically showcased her political stance on the current environmental crisis by turning her seasonal catwalks into what could easily be mistaken as a protest. “Westwood sent models down the catwalk wearing aprons and tabards with anti-consumerist and climate change slogans. Other models also sent a strong message, with one wearing a sandwich-board-style tabard over a blue shirt that had the slogan, “Politicians are criminal” and “Bankers are evil” across the front (Augusta Pownall 2019). This approach to her AW19 runway concept takes direct inspiration from 2019’s soaring popularity of environmental activism and global protests (note Greta Thunberg’s infamous Ted Talk and school striking protests).

Over the years Westwood has been devoted making her brand more sustainable. From carefully sourcing her materials from local companies with a shared belief system to using materials previously sent to landfill. “We apply a waste hierarchical approach to unused

resources; reducing, reusing, recycling and recovering waste products, diverting as much as possible from landfill" (Carlo D'Amario 2018). "Fashion's non-conformist queen, Dame Vivienne Westwood, is to hold back on business expansion to reconcile her fashion empire with her strong ecological beliefs and her concerns about mass production. She will concentrate instead on producing quality not quantity and continue to use her high-profile brand to put forward her political beliefs." (Vanessa Thorpe 2014).

Since studying fashion design at ArtEZ in the Netherlands, Iris Van Herpen has become a modern day pioneer of technology driven fashion, showcasing possibilities inherent in collaboration. Van Herpen's avant-garde approach to design was first influenced during her internship in London with Alexander McQueen. His reputation for thinking and working outside of the box supported Van Herpen's future style of working. Just one year after graduating in 2007, Van Herpen launched her own women's wear brand, not knowing that she was about to change the way we perceive the face of haute couture forever.

"Since her first show in 2007, Van Herpen has been preoccupied with inventing new forms and methods of sartorial expression by combining the most traditional and the most radical materials and garment construction methods into her unique aesthetic vision" (Mark Holgate 2019).

Van Herpen's inspiration comes from various artists (such as Anthony Howe and Philip Beesley) and from nature, an ever-changing entity. Designing her garments in 4D rather than limiting it to 3D, considers and prioritizes movement, a concept Van Herpen has incorporated into her work for a number of years. Her garments are physically unique. Her work consists of couture one-offs that hold value not just because of their lineage but because they are technologically unique. Despite their futuristic appearance and function, Van Herpen strives to create garments that are environmentally friendly, leaving no mark on the Earth except for their conceptual impact.

Unlike Westwood, Van Herpen has no intention of using her work to make political statements. Instead, she strives to use modern day technology to improve production methods and the environmental impact of her brand. Van Herpen, never being one to shy away from pushing boundaries when it comes to what is and what isn't possible in terms of creating garments, has collaborated with architects and scientists and experimented with technologies like 3D printing in order to challenge the rapidly damaging engine we know today as Fast Fashion. "Van Herpen- A big advantage of biotechnology, for example 'growing' fabric, is that the material can become part of our natural ecosystem and therefore be non-harmful. When a dress is not wanted anymore, it could become food for new life when put into the ground. I really believe, in time, when synthetic biology evolves, that these new materials will become as beautiful and soft as the gentle silks we know today" (Par Emily Chan 2019).

Van Herpen's approach to collaborating with scientists in order to create alternative fabrics will drastically lower her carbon footprint resulting in Van Herpen's brand taking even greater strides towards a more sustainable future. "Van Herpen: I care about the footprint I leave with my designs, so I do a lot of research in this area. Synthetic biology is maybe the most important field of development for fashion. It can bring health, fashion and sustainability to the next level" (Par Emily Chan 2019).

Like Westwood, Van Herpen's core values lie in quality over quantity. She produces her garments as an example to the fashion industry of the possibilities for materials and production

that technology can provide and to the consumer of the inherent value of uniqueness and individuality over mass production. Westwood, being an icon in her own right, continues to this day to unapologetically uphold her beliefs about the inherent value of quality. Though Westwood and Van Herpen come from two completely different backgrounds and eras, the two designers have made a universal cultural impact through their designs, both continuously working towards a more sustainable future.

Bibliography

1. Augusta Pownall 2019, Vivienne Westwod protests climate change as environmental demonstrations hit ondon fashion week, viewed 3 October 2019, https://www.dezeen.com/2019/02/18/homo-loquax-vivienne-westwood-climate-change-london-fashion-week/
2. Biography.com editors 2014, Who is Vivienne Westwood? Viewed 4 October 2019, https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/.www.biography.com/.amp/fashion-designer/vivienne-westwood
3. Blog.viviennewestwood.com 2018, 430 Kings Road 1971-1980, viewed 4 October 2019, https://blog.viviennewestwood.com/.history/1971-1980/
4. Carlo D'Amario 2018, Our Approach, Vivienne Westwood Group, viewed 2 October 2019, https://www.viviennewestwood.com/en/our-approach/
5. Mark Holgate 2019, Iris Van Herpen, viewed September 29 2019
6. HTTPS://WWW.VOGUE.COM/ARTICLE/IRIS-VAN-HERPEN-DUTCH-DESIGNER-INTERVIEW-3D-PRINTING
7. Par Emily Chan 2019, Experimenting with bio-fabrication and other forms of synthetic biology, viewed October 5 2019, https://www.vogue.fr/fashion/article/is-couture-the-most-sustainable-fashion-week-of-all
8. Vanessa Thorpe 2014, Vivienne Westwood: climate change, not fashion, is now my priority, viewed 5 October 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/feb/08/vivienne-westwood-arctic-campaign
9. Westwood, VW. 1971. Punk the ultimate fashion statement. [Online] . [October 3 2019]. Available from: https://blog.viviennewestwood.com/history/1971-1980/
10. Westwood, VW. 1981. Rebel with a cause. [Online] . [October 3 2019]. Available from: https://therake.com/stories/icons/vivienne-westwood-rebel-with-a-cause/
11. Rose McGowan, RM. 2019. Rose McGowan walks the Vivienne Westwood LFW runway. [Online] . Available from: https://uk.style.yahoo.com/vivienne-westwood-uses-catwalk-protest-brexit-173258749.html?guccounter=1&guce_referreru
12. Rose McGowan, RM. 2019. Rose McGowan walks the Vivienne Westwood LFW runway. [Online] . Available from: https://uk.style.yahoo.com/vivienne-westwood-uses-catwalk-protest-brexit-173258749.html?guccounter=1&guce_referreru
13. Iris Van Herpen, IVH. 2019. Hypnosis process film. [online] . [October 5 2019]. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xp5h3y0LE-M
14. Iris Van Herpen, (IVH). 2017 Iris Van Herpen couture fall 2017 WWD.[Online]. [October 6 2019] Available from: https://wwd.com/runway/fall-couture-2017/paris/iris-van-herpen/review/
15. Iris Van Herpen, (IVH). 2017 Iris Van Herpen couture fall 2017 WWD. [Online].[October 6 2019] Available from: https://wwd.com/runway/fall-couture-2017/paris/iris-van-herpen/review/