

More Than a Trend: Sustainability as a Creative Foundation

By Nadia Schoenauer

Corporate promises of a sustainable future are unavoidable. In compelling campaigns and strategic messaging, companies showcase their dedication to the cause while simultaneously contributing to the crisis at hand.

Yet, in an era where consumers are hyper-aware of fast fashion's negative environmental impact, emerging designers are proving sustainability is not just a gimmicky marketing ploy, but an exciting opportunity for progress.

At fashion schools across the country, students are rethinking traditional approaches to the design process through the integration of sustainable production techniques and innovative approaches to garment construction.

For a handful of Marist University's senior fashion design students, sustainability serves as the foundation for their senior collection. In response to the growing environmental toll of the fashion industry, many are adopting sustainable measures throughout their creative process.

"I feel like sustainability is so integrated into our framework [at Marist]" says senior fashion design student Victoria Corrente. "At this point, if you're not designing sustainably, what are you doing?"

Janessa Cajudoy, another senior fashion design student, takes a similar perspective, stating "sustainability...from a designer point of view, should be the foundation of everything." Her collection takes a holistic approach to sustainability, focusing on small changes to decrease the environmental impact of her work. Using zero-waste pattern making and repurposing of fabric scraps, Cajudoy focuses on "how to reduce waste and carbon emissions through the [entire] design process," from garment design through garment production.

Beyond this, Marist's Fashion Department is in the process of adding a required *Sustainability in Fashion* course to its curriculum. Jennifer Finn, the chair of the Fashion Department said "[i]t's important for students to have a comprehensive understanding of sustainability and circularity, and its impact on the fashion industry, through integrating sustainable concepts."

Despite this progress, scaling sustainable measures remains a challenge. Eco-friendly fabrics, materials, and production processes are costly; limiting their accessibility for designers *and* consumers. Additionally, consumer demand for fast, trendy, and cheap garments often conflicts with the slow and deliberate processes demanded by sustainable fashion.

“[T]he issue with the lack of sustainability...in general, is because of...capitalism and consumerism, so I feel like at some point we need to take a step back and say ‘how do we make a consumer not want to over-consume,’” says Victoria Corrente, senior design student.

This intentional approach to design, fashion, and consumer behavior requires immense forethought. Rather than accepting industry norms, designers are exploring innovative techniques for material repurposing. Using a technique called leather splitting, senior designer Aaminah Syed is repurposing material in order to create belts and other accessories for her collection. Syed states “it was challenging...it took a lot of experimenting and thinking” to figure out how to repurpose this material.

Looking to the future, students overwhelmingly hope the industry becomes slower, focusing on creating garments that excite and innovate consumers through means that prioritise sustainability.

Victoria Corrente says “I hope fashion gets slower, we don't need a new microtrend every two days.” By focusing on sustainability, she states “I feel like it allows designers to be more creative,” rather than design garments that appeal to the latest microtrend.

It is clear a new generation of designers are distinctly motivated by their commitment to sustainability. Sustainable materials, garments, and collections are no longer niche movements, but the future of fashion. Driven by personal conviction and commitment, these individuals are challenging the industry's practices by opting for sustainable practices in their work.

Looking to the future, the fashion industry has the chance to transform from a global polluter to a leader in environmental responsibility by shifting to sustainable practices. In order to create large scale change, sustainability must integrate into the very fabric of the industry.