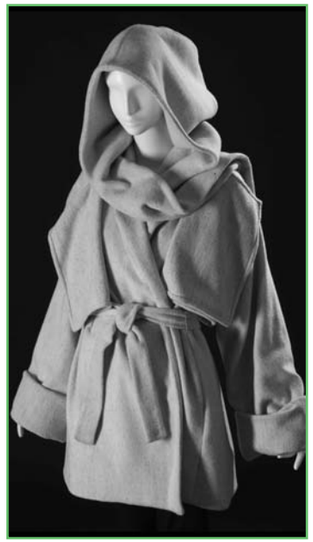


Bodkin, *Quasar* coat, unbleached organic wool, fall 2010, USA, gift of Bodkin.

The fashion industry employs more than 30 million people worldwide, and many of them do not receive living wages.

The United States consumes approximately 84 pounds of textiles per person per year, a figure that continues to increase.

About 8,000 chemicals are used to turn raw materials into textiles. Many of them are irreversibly damaging to people and the environment.

More than 11 million tons of polyester are produced each year. The manufacture of polyester uses very little water, but requires a great deal of energy. Polyester fibers are non-biodegradable.

Organic cotton still accounts for only a small fraction of the world's cotton supply, but demand for it increases significantly each year.

Eco-Fashion: Going Green identifies six themes within the eco-fashion movement. Each object in the exhibition is associated with at least one of those themes. This is indicated by means of icons that appear on the object labels. The six themes and their designated icons are:

repurposing and recycling of materials: the use of old fabrics to make new garments; the recycling of fibers to make new textiles

material origins: the processes surrounding the growth of natural fibers, including but not limited to the use of pesticides and other chemicals; the manufacturing of synthetics

textile dyeing and production: the methods applied to fabric dyeing; developments in technologies and machinery

quality of craftsmanship: the creation of clothing with lasting value, encompassing the benefits of local production

labor practices: the health and ethical well-being of fashion industry workers

treatment of animals: the responsible and humane use of animal products; the use of cruelty-free alternatives

SUPPORT THE MUSEUM

COUTURE COUNCIL
An elite membership group, the Couture Council helps to support the exhibitions and programs of The Museum at FIT. Members receive invitations to exclusive events and private viewings. Annual membership is $1,000 for an individual or couple and $350 for a young associate (under the age of 35). For more information, write to couturecouncil@fitnyc.edu, or call 212 217.4532.

DESIGN MEMBERSHIP
Through the Design Membership program, designers and other industry professionals gain unique access to the museum's holdings for the purposes of research and inspiration. Current members include fashion and home furnishing designers, manufacturers, merchandisers, and forecasters. The benefits of Design Membership include: assisted appointments to view objects from the costume, textile, and accessory collections; access to view and photograph approximately 100,000 textile swatches; and access to the Françoise de la Renta Color Room. Individual and corporate memberships are available at $425 and $1,250, respectively. For more information, call 212 217.4578.

TOURS AND DONATIONS
The museum has a permanent collection of more than 50,000 garments and accessories and 30,000 textiles. A changing selection is exhibited every six months in the Fashion and Textile History Gallery, on the museum's ground floor. Tours of the Fashion and Textile History Gallery, as well as the Special Exhibitions Gallery, may be arranged for a sliding fee of approximately $350. Donations of museum-quality fashions, accessories, and textiles are welcomed. For more information about tours or donations, call 212 217.4551.

The Museum at FIT

Seventh Avenue at 27th Street
New York City 10001–5992

Eco-Fashion: Going Green
May 26–November 13, 2010

Hours:
Tuesday–Friday, noon–8 pm
Saturday, 10 am–5 pm
Closed Sunday, Monday, and holidays

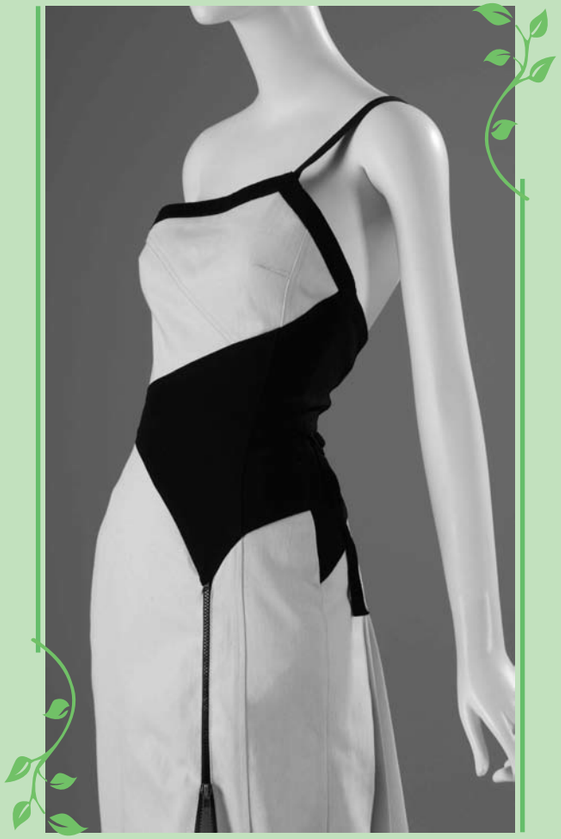
For more information, visit www.fitnyc.edu/museum or call the exhibition information line at 212 217.4558.

Eco-Fashion: Going Green was organized by Jennifer Farley and Colleen Hill, with support from Tiffany Webber and Lynn Weidner, as well as Fred Dennis and Ann Coppinger. Special thanks to Julian Clark and Valerie Steele. The exhibition has been made possible thanks to the generosity of members of the Couture Council.

Brochure design by Angela Middleton
Brochure printed on recycled paper
Photography, MFIT

Cover:
EDUN, evening gown, black and off-white organic Tunisian denim, 2007, USA, gift of EDUN.

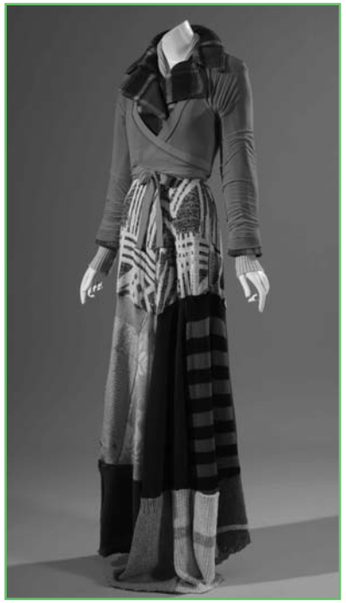
Eco-Fashion: Going Green



THE FASHION AND TEXTILE HISTORY GALLERY

The Museum at FIT

MAY 26–NOVEMBER 13, 2010



XULY.Bët, recycled dress and jacket ensemble, multicolor sweaters, brown wool plaid, red nylon, fall 1994, France, gift of XULY.Bët.

Human impact on the environment has been a source of intense emotion and debate for nearly five decades. As pollution spreads and natural resources diminish, people are becoming increasingly conscious of the adverse effects that an ecological imbalance can have on their health and well-being. Current initiatives by various industries to stop, to lessen, and to repair the damage being done to the environment are not merely conscientious—they are crucial.

The fashion industry has received no small measure of criticism for the environmentally destructive consequences of its practices. Each stage of the clothing production cycle can do harm—from the cultivation of raw fibers to the shipment of the finished garment—and the rapid pace of the fashion cycle compounds the problem. Also, the value of clothing has changed—and not, as exponents of eco-fashion would argue, for the better. Once a revered commodity, fashion is now all too often considered disposable.

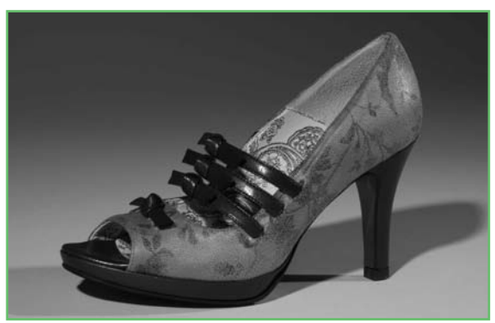
Increasing awareness of the fashion industry's environmental impact has led to several exhibitions and publications concerned with eco-fashion. Usually omitted from the discussion, however, has been the industry's environmental and social impact prior to the mid-twentieth century. Yet an understanding of the past is critical to our grasp of the present. By examining the past two centuries of fashion's bad (and occasionally good) environmental and ethical practices, ***Eco-Fashion: Going Green*** provides a historical context for today's eco-fashion movement. Presented chronologically, contemporary methods of "going green" are used in this exhibition as a framework for studying the past.

Eco-Fashion: Going Green defines "eco-fashion" as the work of environmentally-conscious designers who use, produce, and/or promote sustainable and ethical products. Eco-fashion can also be understood as the fashion industry's response to the global environmental crisis. However, despite its increasingly common usage, the term remains without standard definition. It is used—often interchangeably—with terms such as "green" and "organic," and a general absence of environmental standards within the fashion industry adds to the confusion over precisely what "eco-fashion" means. Conscientious consumers must carefully research the practices of fashion labels in order to differentiate those that observe environmentally and socially responsible principles from those that do not.

A number of obstacles face designers and manufacturers who seek to implement environmentally friendly practices. As Sandy Black, author of *Eco-Chic: The Fashion Paradox*, notes, "At all stages of design and production decision-making there are trade-offs to be made, reconciling fashion and style with available materials, costs and time constraints." For example, there are fewer suppliers of "eco-friendly" materials, and only a small fraction of all cotton is grown and produced organically. Even local production—often touted as a model solution—is often perceived as too inefficient to turn a profit.

Although eco-fashion has become an integral part of industry vernacular, some, like Black, insist that it is inherently paradoxical. Fashion is guided by a cycle of style change, in which the old is rapidly replaced by the new. The latest fashion trend often holds substantial appeal for a shopper. The desire to be current may eclipse any real consideration of the conditions under which a garment was produced.

So how does sustainability fit within such a system of planned obsolescence? The "fast fashion" cycle has become so established that many wonder whether it is fundamentally possible to change patterns of consumption. In contrast, "slow fashion" could provide considerable benefit to the environment. However, altering the way we consume fashion may not be without negative ramifications: across the globe, millions of livelihoods depend upon the constancy of change in fashion. These challenges, and many more that confront the fashion industry, will not be easily or quickly overcome.



Charmoné, *Cézanne* pump, tan and red microfiber faux leather, 2010, USA, gift of Lauren Carroll and Jodi Koskella of Charmoné.

Designers today face problems that date back to the nineteenth century, when technological developments resulted in fast, inexpensive textile production that sometimes yielded inferior products. By the end of the 1800s, mass-produced clothing had become more prevalent. This escalated into the manufacture of cheap, disposable garments—a practice that has now become something of an industry standard. Many such garments—which sustainability experts estimate are worn an average of just six times—end up in landfills.

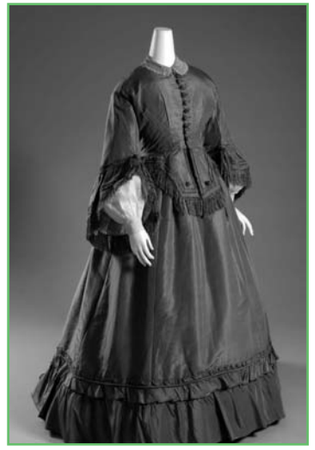
Problems related to fashion production increased throughout the twentieth century. By the 1940s, numerous designers were experimenting with synthetic fibers, many of which will take hundreds of years to biodegrade. "Natural" fibers, especially cotton, were grown with large amounts of chemical fertilizer and pesticides, polluting both soil and water supplies. Despite ethical concerns, animal products, especially furs, became increasingly fashionable luxury commodities, and throughout the United States, garment workers' unions formed to promote fair wages and healthy work environments. This has prompted an outsourcing of production to third-world countries, where workers are paid very little and labor conditions are often dangerous.

The need for significant change in fashion production became more widely recognized in the 1960s. Often viewed as the foundation of the environmentalist movement, Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring* (1962), specifically referenced the use of pesticides in fiber growth, as well as the damage caused by fabric finishes. By the end of the decade, the "natural" look of the hippies was associated with environmentalism. Several elements of the hippies' clothing choices—earth tones, hemp fabric, and patchwork, for example—are considered prototypes for some of today's eco-fashion. Many of today's chic styles, however, are a far cry from their earthy 1970s counterparts.

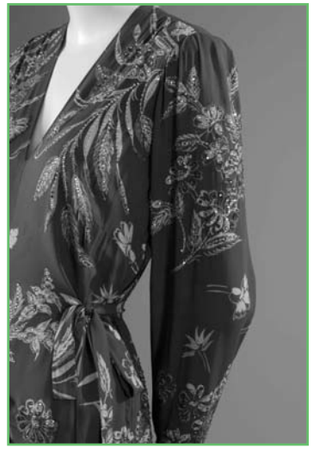
As environmental problems (and their possible solutions) have evolved, so has eco-fashion. Today, there are a number of ways to "go green." While the choice of organic fabrics seems an obvious method, others, including "investment" purchases of high-quality, long-lasting goods, are perceived as a way to slow consumerism. No matter the approach, the challenge for designers is to provide sustainable fashions that are affordable, diverse, and accessible—and to do so without compromising aesthetic value. However difficult that may be, eco-fashion provides opportunities for new, creative approaches to design, and industry experts feel optimistic about its future.

In October 2009, *Women's Wear Daily* reported that consumers are "ready to go eco." Increasingly, designers and fashion executives have implemented "green" initiatives, helping to broaden the reach of eco-designs. Once viewed as a trend, eco-fashion today is widely considered an influential part of the environmentalist movement. ***Eco-Fashion: Going Green*** intends to further the examination and discussion of fashion's relationship with the environment—past, present, and future.

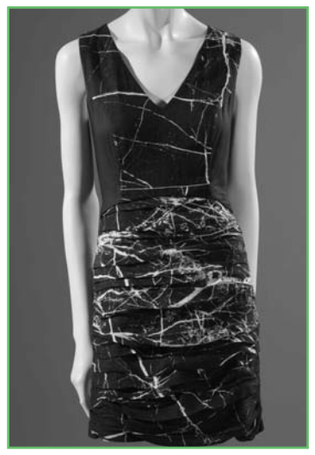
Jennifer Farley and Colleen Hill
Curators, The Museum at FIT



Day dress, poisonous green silk faille and green chenille, circa 1865, USA, museum purchase.



New York Dress Institute, evening dress, red rayon with rhinestones and beads, circa 1941, USA, gift of Mrs. Harold E. Thompson.



FIN, marble print dress, organic bamboo satin, fall 2010, Norway, gift of Per Sivertsen of FIN.