



WHAT ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY?

BY DOMINIQUE DRAKEFORD

The future of fashion will, without question, lean towards progressive sustainability advancements, focusing on technological innovations and cradle-to-cradle novelties. Savvy digital programming solutions that curtail negative environmental impact will monopolise the state of production. The Business of Fashion just released an article talking about the Fourth Industrial Revolution in fashion, which will transform the way we "create, communicate and consume fashion". A new age of material science is and will continue to gain investor and consumer interest in the marketplace. The marriage between fashion and technology (which of course includes garments made out of pineapple or mushroom leather) will undoubtedly be key for our future, but what about the skin of fashion - the visual layer whose DNA is made up of culture and heritage? Yes, I'm talking about diversity.

It is time that we stimulate discussions about 'cultural' sustainability, which is an important aspect of the entire ideology of sustainable development. What does that mean for the substance of brands and the longevity of the industry? We first have to understand that fashion and style is inherently rooted from indigenous communities of colour. But unfortunately today, a widely accepted and modern day form of exploitation called "appropriation" continues to disempower groups who are already marginalised. There are countless examples such as Isabel Marant stealing from the Oaxaca Mexican community, to Valentino's disgusting SS16 display of indigenous insensitivity. Just as sustainable designer Tereneh Mosely of Idia'Dega said, "The problem is when people don't give creative credit and economic benefit to cultures who created it." We are infatuated with an industry that is programmed to spew out luxury collections without understanding people's traditions. The industry proceeds to promote brands with faces that don't reflect their roots of engagement and inspiration. Simply put, there's not enough diversity.

It was just last year that Victoria's Secret was applauded for having its most ethnically diverse lineup. In 2015, Chinese model Sui He was one of only four East Asian models who have EVER walked the Victoria's Secret Show. And Angolan model Maria Borges made history as being the FIRST model to rock her natural afro on a runway. The future of fashion unequivocally needs to make diversity the norm and milestones of ethnic inclusion have to be a thing of the past. Model Ashley B. Chew and designer Zac Posen should not have to protest that #BlackModelsMatter in an industry that is constantly inspired by black culture.

At the end of the day, everyone will have a different walk towards sustainability and as traditional approaches become increasingly obsolete, there's more room for creativity. However, the value of authenticity will impact culture, whether it's through the artisans crafting (fair trade), the ecosystem of collaboration, or the models who are advertising a brand. Fashion and style are non-verbal forms of communication, which means that a brand's cultural commitment for sustainability has to speak volumes. And now more than ever, people of colour want to, of course, see sophisticated techniques, but they also want and need to see themselves positively represented and acknowledged.

Note from the author:

I have undertaken sustainable fashion PR for two years (Drakeford PR) but my passion project, and where I hope to leave a legacy, is in the area of cultural inclusion within the realm of sustainability. I have a blog called "Melanin & Sustainable Style" (MelaninASS.com) and it's a space that is creating narratives that recognizes the entire added value of communities of colour.

"Melanin" is the darker pigmentation in skin present in people of colour around the world. These people have contributed, and are still contributing immensely, to fashion and efforts of sustainability. As an underrepresented group of influencers, it's important to uplift these communities and share with the world the ineffective occurrences of cultural appropriation, so that collectively we can grow the industry. I want to be clear that it's not only a space for black people. Our discussions span the globe and as we grow, I intend to include widespread perspectives. Overall, it's a platform of awareness that literally everyone can benefit and learn from.

Photography: Josiah Hayton // Stylist and Makeup: The Undress Team // Models: Nyamuoch Bol Yakuac and Chris Bassett. Garments: Model's Own // Hair: Urban Tribe

