

A malign practice or a sustainable future?

[Robyn Ball](#) ponders the tenability of the fur industry

Wednesday 1 November 2017

To wear or not to wear fur? This very question has seemingly sent the fashion industry into a civil war, one that has lasted for decades. The practice is seen by some as brutish and immoral while others maintain that it is a sustainable measure of fashion; a natural material that is vital in the industry's progression. With the trade worth circa \$40b in 2014 it is undoubtedly a lucrative enterprise. However profitable, it does not eliminate ever-increasing cries for justice. With over 50 million animals killed on a yearly basis for their pelts, many of which are farmed, fur is undoubtedly an influential factor within the fashion industry as well as a source of outcry.

Let us consider why fur came to prominence. Originally the role of fur was to shelter from the cold and to provide warmth: this was the basis of the Russian and Siberian fur trades. However, with the rise of smart and thermal technologies the practical need for fur is to many considered obsolete and its use purely aesthetic. Therefore if we now use it merely for appearances, whether that be a fur lining or a trim to a coat, surely it is excessive to continue exploiting animals purely for fur. While fur farms were banned in England and Wales in 2000 with the Fur Farming Act, it wasn't until 2002 that this Act extended to Scotland. Moreover, fur farms remain rife in countries such as China. However, while the practice is ongoing that is not to say steps aren't being made against it. The rising credibility of animal rights groups and unbroken lobbying opposing the prevalence of farming has forced the consumer to think. Many now choose to buy second-hand or synthetic fur, thereby not contributing directly to the fur industry. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there are some in the fashion industry that still use fur. Animal testing has long been frowned upon — one of the first recorded protests on the subject was in the 19th century — so why do we use fur in our clothes?

Maybe there is no definitive answer. However, searching for those in the fashion industry who are committed to opposing the use of fur in garments when writing this article was akin to panning for gold. There is no doubt that there are those in the industry committed to creating sustainable, ethical clothing. For instance, Stella McCartney has made it her edict to create high fashion that does not submit animals to cruelty. Notably, the recent announcement made by Gucci CEO Marco Bizzarri, that the fashion house is going fur free as of 2018 — following a similar choice made by Armani back in 2016 — sent shockwaves. However, is too little being done? For each one of these decisions others opt to distance themselves from the matter: this failure to make a public decision is itself a comment on the matter. On the other hand, fur supporters argue that fur is a sustainable material and that it naturally decomposes in comparison to synthetic alternatives. Be that as it may, wildlife organisations urge against the usage of animals for pelts. While fur remains in demand, it perpetuates a growing and unregulated black market for such goods, the illegal trading in wildlife not only endangering species but also multiplying the probability of extinction.

The fact is that fur has long been the symbol of glamour, wealth and decadence, and perhaps this contributes to a reluctance to let it go. While fashion thinks ahead it simultaneously references the past;

the appeal of fur can be connected to old Hollywood glamour. However, this hasn't come without consequences. Not only does it contribute to the impression of superficiality that the industry as a whole maintains, more importantly it is instrumental in a growing ethical debate. From scandals such as the Rana Plaza travesty to the fact that the industry is one of the biggest pollutants on the planet, it would be negligent to not consider change.

When making the announcement, Bizzarri gave the reason that "it is not modern". Fashion is about making statements and breaking the norm, thus perhaps a decision to renounce fur is the ultimate fashion statement. For it is a decision to relinquish a dominant part of the industry and to carve out a new future.

In this age of excess and fast fashion maybe it is time to start thinking about the wider picture; a picture that contains both an ecological and ethical outlook. Maybe it is time to be 'modern' and begin looking to the future.



2 comments

Simon Ward

3 Nov '17 at 4:25 am

You make some peculiar claims here, of which I'll choose two. (1) You say, "wildlife organisations urge against the usage of animals for pelts." What is a wildlife organisation? In general, wildlife management and conservation groups recognise an important role that can be played by trapping for fur, since trappers provide valuable data on populations and help keep them in check when those populations are too large or diseased. Selling the fur gives trappers an incentive to participate, and indeed, most North American trappers are keen conservationists. It is animal rights groups that oppose fur. (2) You say that the fashion industry is "one of the biggest pollutants on the planet." If, indeed, this is true, the fake fur now endorsed by Gucci, and made from petroleum-based non-biodegradable synthetics, is far more polluting than real fur.

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alan herscovici

5 Nov '17 at 4:27 pm

The author of this article is completely confused about the real meaning of "ecological" and "sustainable". The fact is that the modern, well-regulated fur trade is an excellent example of "the sustainable use of renewable natural resources", the keystone of environmental conservation as promoted by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), World Wildlife Fund, and the UN Environment Program. The "animal-rights" groups that oppose the fur trade also oppose ANY use of animals, even for food. Check out TruthAboutFur for some facts about the modern fur trade before making judgements that hurt aboriginal and other people living in close harmony with the land.

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