

watch  
this  
space

# Watch this Space 7 Fashion Footprints: Sustainable Approaches



Photo: Remade in Leeds

**CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART  
AND THE NATURAL WORLD**

HALDON FOREST PARK EXETER EX6 7XR

[WWW.CCANW.CO.UK](http://WWW.CCANW.CO.UK)

## **Background to the Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World (CCANW):**

At the heart of today's ecological crisis lies a failure to understand the essence of our relationship with the natural world. The Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World is an innovative educational charity which rises to the challenge by exploring new understandings of our place within Nature through the Arts. It aims to do what education through the arts does best; touching people's imagination and creativity in ways that conventional methods rarely do.

CCANW is a forward thinking leader in the arts and ecology field, taking the best of academic scholarship and professional practice regarding sustainability in the fields of art and design to curate dynamic exhibitions and programmes of activity reaching new audiences, education networks and professional bodies on local and national levels.

Our integrated artistic and educational programme – which includes exhibitions, residencies, projects, workshops, talks and other activities – provides the public with valuable insights into today's pressing ecological problems, giving them a deeper understanding of 'nature', the importance of sustainability in their lives, and developing the educational potential of woodland and the wider rural environment. We average 4-5 exhibitions, 100 events, workshops, talks and other activities a year, working with a wide range of school and community groups.

## **Background to exhibition programme during Watch This Space 7 project:**

From June 2010 – March 2011, CCANW programming focused on exploring the impact of fashion and textiles in our lives and on the environment. The generous length of time for the project enabled CCANW to develop the theme in greater depth and programme a wide and varied range of activities that gave audiences time to engage with the issues.

The programme consisted of three exhibitions commencing with a selection of work by the artist Lucy Orta who originally trained as a fashion designer. This exhibition was followed by 'Fashion Footprints: Sustainable Approaches', a CCANW produced touring exhibition which was curated by recent graduates of the MA Fashion and the Environment course at London College of Fashion. The final exhibition, 'Material Actions' showed the work of 13 artists and questioned how textiles could be used to affect and contribute to ethical, social, cultural and environmental change.

## **Participation in Watch This Space 7**

### **Gallery educator Johanna Korndorfer**

As CCANW's Learning Programmes Manager, I was confident that the length of the project, its theme and the enormous amount of material – collected from the dedicated curators who created 'Fashion Footprints' and through my own research visiting other exhibitions, conferences and seminars - would be of value and inspiration to secondary school textiles teachers and easily keep them engaged over a 3 day placement.

#### **Teachers involved in project:**

**Fiona Buss,** Tiverton High School, Tiverton  
**Gill Merrygold** The King's School, Ottery St. Mary

Number of students who participated in the gallery visits: **35**

During the exhibition of Lucy Orta's work in June 2010, I organised a well-attended talk introducing the ideas behind the content of the next exhibition, 'Fashion Footprints: Sustainable Approaches'. The talk's original aim had been to promote our 'Fashion Footprints Roadshow' – an illustrated talk with films which could be booked by communities and delivered in their own settings. The talk was advertised primarily to the extensive network of environmental, transition town and 'low-carbon groups' which have formed in the past 10 years in the local area. I was fortunate in that it also attracted the attention of two textile teachers, Fiona Buss and Gill Merrygold, who were interested both as teachers of textiles and as members of environmental groups.

Because of this initial connection, I did not have to go through the more traditional avenue of recruiting teachers through a school's management team for this project; both teachers had been given an extensive overview of the theme of the upcoming exhibition and the programme of activities we were delivering. This information enabled the teachers to persuasively pitch the CCANW/teacher placement to their respective school management teams in time for the placement to take place in Autumn 2010.

#### **Background to 'Fashion Footprints: Sustainable Journeys' exhibition**

The exhibition is based on the seminal book *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys* (2008) by Dr. Kate Fletcher, Reader at London College of Fashion and is illustrated by 8 different garments at the cutting edge of sustainable design. It identifies the underlying problems facing sustainability in the industry today whilst exploring the possible solutions enabling us, as consumers, to make more informed decisions about the clothes we choose to wear.



**Exhibition: 'Fashion Footprints: Sustainable Approaches'**



**Exhibition: 'Fashion footprints: Sustainable Approaches'**



**The exhibition's 'education corner' featuring simple hands-on activities**

## **Placement Aims**

### **For Gallery/gallery educator:**

- To develop and extend CCANW's educational programme for schools
- To engage textile teachers from schools which have not previously brought groups to the gallery
- To develop ways to use the Centre/gallery as a useful teaching and learning resource for teachers and schools
- To give teachers a chance to research and collaborate together
- To better understand the GCSE textile curriculum in order to make the exhibition relevant to students' learning
- To find out if the exhibition would influence the teachers' delivery of the GCSE textiles curriculum in relation to issues of sustainability.

### **For teachers:**

- To create opportunities for students to engage with their subject through a gallery based exhibition.
- To broaden students awareness of the local availability of primary source resources.
- To work in partnership with a local gallery and school and build lasting relationships
- To inform teaching practice and create new teaching resources through research and content from exhibitions

## Summary of 3 days in gallery

Given the informative nature of the exhibition and the interesting range of resources I had collected over the previous 6 months, I saw the gallery for this teachers' placement very much as a laboratory space.

The first day included an introduction to the gallery and CCANW's remit within the visual arts. Both the teachers and I discussed our aims for the project. The teachers spent the rest of the day studying the exhibition in greater detail.

Initially, there seemed to be some nervousness on the part of the teachers about what was expected of them within a gallery context: I tried to allay these concerns by stating that this was a two-way process of working towards making the exhibition relevant to their practice and the textile curriculum and to ensure we could create an interesting visit for their students which supported their GCSE project work.

Fiona showed me the menu of projects students could choose from for their GCSE exam projects as used by the AQA exam board. I found this useful for finding ways to link the exhibition to the students' course work. I also was able to study the current textbook provided by AQA, to see how the sustainability agenda was interpreted.

Both teachers were interested in the hands on 'education corner' of the exhibition and decided to reproduce some of the activities for their own classrooms. They also spent considerable time studying the resources I provided. One was an educational pack produced by TRAIID (Textile Recycling Aiding International Development) which included ways to engage students with the ethical and social issues surrounding the textile trade. The teachers also enjoyed a booklet created by a MA Fashion and the Environment student called 'The travels of an unhappy t-shirt' and an item in the exhibition which focused on the environmental impact of washing garments. In addition to all the stimulation in the gallery, the teachers also enjoyed talking to each and discovering the ways each of them worked in the classroom.

On day two, CCANW's Project Space was very busy with a scheduled visit by students from Plymouth College of Art (PCA) and 3 students on work experience placements from a local secondary school. Clive Adams, Director of CCANW, led a talk that included everyone – the PCA students, secondary students and Watch This Space teachers - detailing CCANW's current programme as well as describing the programme for the following year. The talk also gave everyone an opportunity to share why they were there and where their interest in fashion, textiles and the environment lay. The teachers found this an interesting experience which they were also keen to relay back to their departments at school; Gill, in particular, felt that the forthcoming exhibition on the work of David Nash in April 2011 would be of interest to resistant material teachers working in wood. The teachers spent the rest of the day continuing their research.

Day three was spent on planning their visits with the students. We discussed what activities could be done and the quiz sheets which the teachers developed for their students.

## Gallery visits:

For the gallery visits, each group of students was given a short talk on some of the themes running through the exhibition, an opportunity to explore the exhibition with prompts from a quiz sheet and a workshop using activities which referenced different parts of the exhibition.

Gill wanted to explore the issues of waste and DIY design with her students. To underscore these themes, she thought that her students would enjoy the 'upcycling Barbie's outfit' activity using a simple template pattern as a starting point. I had originally seen this activity organised by a representative from TRAIID at a conference targeting fashion students. The activity was very popular with the fashion students and was an effective way of engaging them with the issues addressed by the charity's work. During the session, Gill's students also had the option of an 'Old is the new Black' session, whereby they could experiment with altering second-hand clothing with black textile paint. This workshop was conceived by Otto von Busch, self-styled 'Fashion Hacktivist' and theorist, as part of CCANW's summer 'Eco-fashion Show Experience' in the forest.

For the talk I gave to Fiona's group, I discussed the economic, environmental and social importance of wool in the history of Devon farming and textile manufacture, its steady decline since the 1950s and usefulness as a renewable and sustainable fibre resource. I then led a simple felting workshop whereby the students experimented with both wet and dry felting. One of the students, who had a history of lacking motivation in class, was very enthusiastic about the felting – it had clearly captured her imagination. I explained to the student how wool is valued in the tradition of Steiner/Waldorf early years' education as it is a warm and natural material for toy and craft making. Since the visit, Fiona has reported that the student has decided to do a felt toy making project as set by the AQA and is using locally produced wool.





**Workshop activities during King's School students' visit to 'Fashion Footprints: Sustainable Approaches'.**



**'Old is the New Black' workshop; for more info see [www.oldisthenewblack.org](http://www.oldisthenewblack.org)**



## **Dry and wet felting with students from Tiverton High School**

### **Comments from students**

I really enjoyed the trip to Haldon Hill and I learnt a lot of things. I really liked the activities we did and the speech was really interesting. But I thought we should have had more time up there because then we could of finished the activities. But apart from that it was really good and now I know where it is I will try to go up there during the holidays and have a look at the clothes.

I thought that this was a worthwhile trip because it helped me develop my ideas and understand more about fabrics and textiles.

The only downside was we were short of time!

I understand more about sustainability.

I enjoyed it. It made Textiles more interesting and it's nice to leave the classroom sometimes. I feel like I'm more aware of my fashion footprint and I may enquire further about the sources of the clothes that I buy.

All in all I really enjoyed it, and would love to do things like that more often because it really opened my eyes to some issues."



### **'Upcycled Barbies' – following visit to 'Fashion Footprints: Sustainable Approaches'**

#### **Unexpected outcomes**

The placement in the gallery had a major effect on the teachers and their teaching practices. Gill reflected that 'the placement has re-energised my practice. I feel more empowered to deliver the new D & T Textiles GCSE curriculum, which heavily focuses on sustainability. I have completely changed the delivery of the syllabus by taking inspiration from the exhibition and planning the entire course around the theme of sustainability.'

Fiona also concurred stating that 'The project has definitely affected my practice and has given me the opportunity and confidence to arrange visits and produce exciting resources that will be used by all textile students in the school. It has extended my understanding of the subject. The extra enthusiasm shown by the students after the visit as well as their improved understanding and knowledge of sustainable textile issues has made me want to plan further relevant visits.'

The teachers have utilised many ideas from the exhibition, workshop activities and resources to make changes in the delivery of their subject teaching and school project work. This has included:

- The implementation of dry felting, knitting and weaving activities - based on the self-directed activities offered in the gallery – which are now available for students to try during free time in school hours and have been incorporated into KS3 Schemes of Learning.
- Year 7 students, who are making reusable shopping bags are now considering the origins of fabrics and garments and mapping where they come from for a class display.
- KS4 students are creating new class displays investigating the issues around washing and the amount of water required to produce fibres and garments.
- For the first time, the King's School annual fashion show is featuring garments exclusively designed and made by students rather than showcasing clothing from high street stores. This is an opportunity for the

- school to celebrate the creativity of students as well as being an important fundraiser.
- Work completed during this placement will be disseminated to the “Green Team”, the school’s environmental group.
  - Arrangements for some of the GCSE students to visit a local primary school to share what they have learnt

During the placement, Fiona and Gill discussed visiting each other’s schools in order to exchange ideas around teaching practice and to develop additional teaching aids. They felt there was a lack of networking opportunities for teachers of textiles. To address this issue, we decided to host a networking event during ‘Material Actions’, the final exhibition in CCANW’s programme focusing on fashion, textiles and the environment. With recent drastic cuts in the Local Education Authority’s specialist curriculum services, it was an ideal opportunity to initiate such an event which we called ‘Sewing Connections’. The event was also open to trainee teachers and attracted 24 teachers county-wide.

During the evening event, Fiona and Gill shared their experience of the gallery placement and its value to their teaching practice. In addition to time for networking, the teachers also participated in a workshop called ‘Connecting with Clothes’ which was developed and led by Ines Vicente, another recent graduate of the London College of Fashion’s MA Fashion and the Environment.

Discussion during the event included concerns over the potential marginalization of textiles education in schools in the coming years. The event has created considerable enthusiasm for the establishment of a Devon-based, teacher-led network.

## **Conclusion**

With the uncertainty which has come from the cuts to public services and to policies and pilots such as the ‘Cultural Offer’, galleries and other cultural providers must find new ways of engaging with schools in order to demonstrate the value they can offer as a place of inspiration, ideas and continuing professional development.

Funding which the WTS programmes provide, have demonstrated the far reaching effects that teacher placements in galleries can give to teachers, students and the wider school community. In particular, this project has made a positive impact on the teachers’ practices, given them a source of new ideas to take back into the classroom particularly with regard to issues around sustainability, given students new perspectives on their work and created a vibrant event and space for the establishment of a new professional network in Devon for teachers of textiles.