ETHICS + AESTHETICS = SUSTAINABLE FASHION

Francesca Granata + Sarah Scaturro, guest curators
November 20, 2009–February 20, 2010

ALABAMA CHANIN
BODKIN
SUSAN CIANCIOLLO
KELLY COBB
LOOMSTATE
SUNO
ZOÉ SHEEHAN SALDAÑA
SANS
SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE
ULURU
ANDREA ZITTEL + TIPRIN FOLLETT/SMOCKSHOP

Pratt Manhattan Gallery
144 West 14th Street
New York, NY 10011
www.pratt.edu/exhibitions

Nick Battis, Director of Exhibitions + Jen Osborne, Assistant Director of Exhibitions
This catalog is made possible by a generous grant from The Coby Foundation, Ltd.
FOREWORD

It may seem like an ambitious goal to seek a major shift in fashion consciousness by merging great style and quality with ethical and environmental responsibilities, yet as the groundbreaking exhibition “Ethics + Aesthetics” shows, it is a goal that is within our reach. It is not a new idea, after all. For some years, Barneys New York has been doing just that, by emphasizing high-quality luxury clothing and by seeking out product that has a high standard of consciousness. Barneys embarked on a campaign to inspire existing designers to create product that was based on ethical principles. However, the reach of Barneys is somewhat defined by its high-salaried customer base with impeccable taste. “Ethics + Aesthetics” effectively broadens the reach of sustainable fashion, showing the visitor that there is a new movement underway in fashion consciousness that anyone can participate in.

Although the movement for a more responsible fashion system has been slowly gaining momentum over the past decade, this exhibition marks a turning point: Both independent and mainstream designers and artists are shown using their creative powers and concerns for social responsibility as a spring board to affect change in the fashion industry. All players in fashion—designers, advertisers, manufacturers, sellers, and most importantly, consumers—must accept the importance of forging an intentionally sustainable, responsible, and dynamic fashion industry. As the exhibition shows, there are many ways this can be achieved: innovative production methods, the use of organic and renewable fabrics, thoughtful and modular patternmaking, and the development of meaningful personal attachments to one’s garments. Ultimately, it is about educating and empowering consumers to make the right choices, to buy the quality clothing that speaks to their life, their taste, and more importantly, their values.

This exhibition portends an exciting new decade ahead of us. For some time, I have sensed that the moment was coming when designers and consumers would equate style with social and environmental consciousness and embrace ethical sustainability and organic principles, and that moment seems finally to be closer than ever before.

Julie Gilhart
Senior Vice President, Fashion Director
Barneys New York
January 2010
Fashion presents a particular environmental challenge due to its emphasis on constant change and planned obsolescence. According to a recent Cambridge University study, garment production and care represent a major pollutant as a result of great energy expenditure and the use of toxic chemicals. Meanwhile, the number of clothes manufactured and consumed has been steadily increasing as prices have declined due to lower manufacturing standards and labor conditions. This phenomenon is in part related to the rise of fast fashion, which changes much more quickly than seasonally-based designer fashion.

It is in response to the increasingly unsustainable nature of the fashion system that we started developing the ideas behind the exhibition “Ethics + Aesthetics.” Our main intent was to investigate how U.S.-based artists and designers were exploring practical and symbolic solutions to the question of integrating sustainable practices into the fashion system.

The choice to limit the exhibition to U.S.-based practitioners also underlines the importance of the local in discussions of sustainability, starting from the very practical solution of limiting the energy expenditure involved in the shipping of the pieces. This limitation also allows for an exploration of the way designers and artists address the interaction between the global and the local within an inherently interdependent system, where the U.S. constitutes the biggest garment consumer even though the majority of the clothes consumed are produced outside its borders.

The design of the exhibition itself, which was completed by Pratt interior design graduate students, was in line with the work shown. Like many of the clothes on view, it is modular. A series of Calder-inspired mobile structures made of interconnected wooden poles hanging from the ceiling allow for flexibility and reuse, as any number of garments can be hung in a variety of positions from them. Its interconnectedness also symbolizes the infinite number of networks created through garment production, consumption, and wear.

It was central to the project not simply to focus on the use of organic and recycled textiles, which, however important, has often led to the equation of sustainable fashion with a certain natural look. We wanted instead to highlight new ways of conceptualizing fashion and its consumption and production models, while showing its aesthetic diversity. Building on the already established practices of using recycled, renewable, and organic fibers and the employment of fair labor, “Ethics + Aesthetics” deepens our understanding of what constitutes sustainable fashion. It is organized around three main themes, “Reduce, Revalue, and Rethink,” which expand on the traditional ecological mantra “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” by acknowledging the importance of aesthetics within fashion design.

“Reduce” investigates how designers employ minimalist design, as well as innovative materials and pattern making, to promote clothes’ versatility and longevity. Garments in this section are constructed to be modular and multifunctional, using fabrics from renewable, recycled, and organic sources that lower the negative ecological impact of fashion. This is evident in ULURU’s pieces, which, through ingenious pattern making, are often reversible, use minimal amounts of fabric, and contain no superfluous details. Loomstate—run by Scott Mackinlay Hahn and Rogan Gregory, both pioneers in the sustainable fashion movement—uses organic fabrics for its long-lasting, multifunctional garments. The Brooklyn-based designer Eviana Hartman of Bodkin produces modern designs that combine wearability with innovative materials made from recycled, renewable, and organic fabrics.
This section also highlights the participatory nature evident in much of sustainable fashion, which is best exemplified by SANS’ modular garments. Alessandro DiVito and Lika Volkova of SANS encourage the wearer to “customise” their clothes in the belief that fashion is inherently more sustainable when one is more invested in his or her own clothing. Going a step further, they offer patterns for sale on their website so that the wearer can ultimately become the producer of SANS garments and make them locally, thus minimizing the waste involved in shipping and overproduction. This direct involvement in design hopefully suggests new and more intimate ways of relating to one’s clothing.1

“Re-rove” emphasizes the importance of thoughtfully designed, well-crafted clothing, which fosters an engagement with the wearer. This section highlights a counter-tendency in contemporary fashion that reinstates the importance of materiality and emotional connections to our garments in the hope of slowing down the accelerated cycles of consumption and discard promoted by current fashion models. As the cultural critic Peter Stallybrass points out, moments of emotional connections with clothes and cloth become, in fact, rare in the accelerated-rhythms of contemporary societies. “I think this is because, for all our talk of the ‘materialism’ of modern life, attention to material is precisely what is absent. Surrounded by an extraordinary abundance of materials, their value is to be endlessly devalued and replaced.”2

In response to this devaluing, Abalum Chaising uses a variety of new and vintage fabrics for her garments, which are hand-made by skilled artisans based in the community she sources from textile archives. SUNO is about changing the making of one’s clothes.3 Slow and Steady Wins the Race promote a slower fashion tempo by suggesting novel ways to produce and consume fashion. Their practices foster the creation of meaningful networks and relations through clothing as well as challenging the seasonality of the fashion trade. They remind us that fashion “is about a richer interaction between designer and maker, maker and garment; garment and user. A strong bond of relationship is formed which permeates far beyond the garment manufacturing chain and influences the way our clothes are designed and used.”4

Slow and Steady Wins the Race makes non-seasonal quality designs that, in line with a product design model, are available year-round for a number of years. Inspired by the local food movement, Kelly Cobb’s collaborative project underscores the labor-intensive nature of making clothes by producing a suit with material and craftspersons located within 100 miles of her home. Zoi Sheehan Saldaña also emphasizes the labor involved in producing a garment by recreating Wal-Mart garments by hand. She later returns her handmade version to the store for resale in lieu of the one she originally purchased.5

The smockshop offers a unique model for a collaborative clothing workshop that encourages the adaptation of a basic “uniform” to be worn for long stretches of time. A simple double-wrap-around garment, the smock, as designed by the artist Andrea Zittel, is a versatile and utilitarian garment. For the smockshop project, it is reworked by a number of artists who reinterpret the original design based on their individual skill sets, tastes, and interests. To further the reach of the project, a smock pattern is included in the catalog to encourage the making of one’s smock and “to inspire—in line with Zittel’s intentions—a more frugal approach to design.”6

Ultimately, rather than one single solution to the issue of sustainability in fashion, the designers and artists included in the exhibition provide a variety of approaches to the oyster-mass of aligning fashion—a discipline based on constant change—with the precepts of sustainability. In line with “slow fashion”—a concept modeled after the Slow Food movement—they advocate for a slower fashion tempo, which fosters more meaningful interactions through design. A quantity versus quality model, “slow fashion” is about changing fashion temporariness and recasting rapid imaginary change and symbolic expression such as fashion with “material durability, quality making, and long-term engaging product.”7 “Ethics + Aesthetics” examines how these two palls are being reconciled through the vision of U.S.-based designers and artists today.

6 Andrea Zittel as quoted in Naomi Nevitt, “Smock Therapy,” ArtNews (September 2007), 44.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the dedication of the Department of Exhibitions staff, Jen Osborne, assistant director, and Katherine Davis, exhibition designer, together with our student assistants, this exhibition and its programming would not be possible.

Many thanks to the designers, artists, lenders, and their staff for making work available for this exhibition:

Natalie Chanin, Alabama Chanin
Susan Cianciolo
Kelly Cobb
Alexandra Delitto and Luka Volkan, SMS
Tatijn Follett, Karen Gelardi and Andrea Zittel, smockshop
Julie Gilhart, fashion director, Barneys New York
Tenneile Margand and Laurel Jenmen, Andrea Rosen Gallery, Inc.
Estera Hartman, Bodkin
Sean Knibb, SUND
Christian Langbein, Barneys New York
Jaron Noorata, Loomstate/Rogan
Max Osterweis, SUND
Mary Ping, Slow and Steady Wins the Race
Caroline Priebe, EMARU
Zoe Sheehan Saldaña

Congratulations to Francesca Granata and Sarah Scaturro, guest curators, and much appreciation for their commitment to bringing this important exhibition to the Pratt Manhattan Gallery.

We are grateful to the students in the Exhibition Design Intensive program led by Professor Jon Otis for their thoughtful design concepts for the exhibition.

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The assistance of the following individuals is greatly appreciated:

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We gratefully acknowledge The Coby Foundation, Ltd. for their generous support of the exhibition catalog.

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Pratt Manhattan Gallery
144 West 14th Street
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www.pratt.edu/exhibitions
ISBN No. 0-9740381-6-4

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Jordan Vogtmueller
Bodkin

Brooklyn-based, with production in Manhattan’s garment district and Los Angeles, Eviana Hartman’s Bodkin is an ongoing exploration into sustainable fashion that focuses on smart sourcing of ecological fabrics and ethical production methods. On her website, Hartman documents many of the difficulties an independent designer faces when addressing sustainability, including sourcing local organic or recycled fabrics and funding small-batch production runs. Yet her stylishly wearable garments serve as a reminder that, even with a more thoughtful design process, successful sustainable fashion relies on inherently good design that does not compromise aesthetics.

Fracture Dress
Winter/Fall 2009
Organic cotton

Cirrus Top and Lake Effect Shorts
Spring/Summer 2010
Top: Recycled polyester
Shorts: Undyed tencel

The Incredible Shrinking Parka
Winter/Fall 2009
Post-consumer recycled polyester

Photos: Tina Tyrell
After launching the design company Rogan in 2001, Rogan Gregory and Scott Mackinlay Hahn partnered again in 2004 to create Loomstate, a unique company devoted to the ideas of sustainable development. Loomstate’s casual clothing epitomizes American design at its best, offering wardrobe essentials with a worn-in, softly washed appeal. The design process starts in New York City, then branches globally—all suppliers and manufacturers are held to stringent ethical and ecological requirements, while all cotton sourced from countries such as Peru, Turkey, and the U.S.A. is organic. Gregory and Hahn encourage their consumer to re-wear, repair, and recycle their clothing as a way to further reduce their ecological impact.

Loomstate

Photography courtesy of Loomstate
SANS

Alessandro DeRite and Lika Volkova of SANS believe that fashion is inherently more sustainable when the wearer is more invested in his or her own clothing. While SANS carefully chooses each of their fabrics with an eye towards ecological impact, it is their invitation to customize and individualize the garments that best exemplifies their sustainable impact. SANS’ designs—modular, playful, adaptable—encourage wearers to create their own individual look. Highlighting this participatory design sensibility are do-it-yourself patterns available for purchase on their website. The patterns can be downloaded and sewn into a unique garment.

Jumpsuit and Dress
Look 2407 with 2402 from Spring/Summer 2008
Jumpsuit—Silk and bamboo
Dress—Silk and organic cotton
Coat
Look 2306 from Fall/Winter 2008
Tussah silk with polyurethane coating

Photos: Uli Holz
Whether demonstrated through fabrication or construction, the garments of ULURU’s Caroline Priebe reveal a creator who realizes the complexities of sustainable design. All of her pieces are tightly focused for maximum ecological impact—seams are finished to facilitate wearing a garment both inside and out while stretchy bias panels make redundant the need for zippers or closures. Priebe’s Westlake dress has merely two seams, creating a sophisticated, simple look which not only boasts pockets, but is reversible. Emphasizing the collaborative spirit found in much of sustainable fashion, ULURU also has partnered with the design workshop Alabama Chanin for some of her designs.

ULURU stitched by Alabama Chanin
Recycled Appliquéd Sweater
Winter/Fall 2008/2009
Cashmere and organic cotton jersey

Westlake Reversible Dress
Winter/Fall 2008/2009
Silk/hemp charmeuse
Front and back
Photos: Kate & Camilla
Alabama Chanin
A major force behind the “slow fashion” movement, Natalie Chanin started handcrafting T-shirts in her home state of Alabama in 2000 as a way of bringing recognition to the area’s skilled artisans and crafting legacy. In 2006, she founded her company Alabama Chanin, which furthers this mission by creating exquisite-ly handcrafted garments and textiles for the home. Each item reveals not only evidence of the maker’s hand, but the thoughtful, deliberate decisions behind its creation. For example, the Flare dress engages its wearer through its weighty couture-like surface treatments, while the soft indigo hue, hand-dyed by Father Andrew in the Bronx, evokes the memory of a time gone by.

Embroidered Dress with fringe
Ceremony collection, 2009
Organic cotton with silk floss

Appliquéd Swing Coat
Songbirds collection, 2009
Organic cotton

Flare Dress
Songbirds collection, 2009
Natural indigo-dyed organic cotton denim

Photos: Russ Harrington
Susan Cianciolo

Susan Cianciolo was an unwitting early adapter of the “slow fashion” movement, as she became known for making handcrafted modular garments sold with a sewing kit to encourage the wearer to finish or alter the clothes themselves. The Do-it-Yourself Denim Skirt from her 1997 Run 6 collection, which was accompanied by a lyrical version of an instructional video, illustrates the interest in process over the finished product and the participatory nature of her work. The designer has since started producing collections entirely made of organic and recycled textiles and non-toxic dyes alongside custom-made pieces that underline the longevity of the design, as her clients often ask her to re-work pieces after years of wearing them.
In response to recent political instabilities, Max Osterweis started SUNO as a way to benefit the local Kenyan community where his mother has a home. He incorporates vintage kanga (traditional Kenyan textiles) that he has been collecting for over 10 years into his designs. Osterweis believes that by building a successful and visible company that employs and trains local talent and treats workers fairly he might affect positive and lasting social and economic change. His hybrid designs made partially in the garment district and partially in workshops in Kenya complicate simplistic understandings of what constitutes fashion made in Africa, as evidenced in his precisely tailored jackets.

**SUNO**

**Skirts and Tops**
Spring/Summer 2009
Vintage cotton kanga

**Bikinis**
Spring/Summer 2009
Vintage cotton kanga

Photos: Tina Tyrel
KELLY COBB
ZOË SHEEHAN SALDAÑA
SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE
ANDREA ZITTEL +
TIPRIN FOLLETT/SMOCKSHOP
Kelly Cobb

At the crossroads of performance art, costume design, and social sculpture, Kelly Cobb’s work coalesces around the creation of garments and textiles. Inspired by the local food movement, Cobb set out to produce a men’s suit made entirely within 100 miles of her home. Involving 21 regional crafters “working with all locally raised and processed materials” and 500 hours of work, the 100-Mile Suit revived arcane processes that ranged from hand-manufacturing buttons to making shoes out of local hide. The project rescues from anonymity the relation between garment and wearer and makes manifest the labor-intensive nature of clothes-making, which has largely become overlooked as a result of the ever-increasing spread of fast and inexpensive fashion.
Zoë Sheehan Saldaña

Zoë Sheehan Saldaña’s works constitute a subtle comment on mass-production versus handmade and their relation to authenticity. As part of her Shopdropping series, Saldaña bought a number of Wal-Mart pieces and reproduced them by hand using matching fabric, thread, and trimmings. Attaching Wal-Mart to be purchased by unwitting shoppers. The photographs of the blouse and hat are of Saldaña’s “handmade” copy; to the left are the Wal-Mart “originals.”

Jordache Sheer Camp Shirt (Lucky Lime)
2005
Clothing, hanger, photographic print
Originally purchased on May 26, 2005, for $9.87 from the Wal-Mart store in Hartford, Conn. The clothing was duplicated by hand, matching pattern, fabric, and embellishments. The tags from the original item were transferred to the duplicate. The duplicate was returned to the rack in Wal-Mart for potential sale at $9.87.
Photos: Courtesy of Zoë Sheehan Saldaña

Faded Glory Mix & Match Reversible Hat (Red)
2005
Clothing, mannequin head, shelf, photographic print
Originally purchased on May 26, 2006, for $3.23 from the Wal-Mart store in Hartford, Conn. The clothing was duplicated by hand, matching pattern, fabric, and embellishments. The tags from the original item were transferred to the duplicate. The duplicate was returned to the rack in Wal-Mart for potential sale at $3.23.
Photos: Courtesy of Zoë Sheehan Saldaña
Slow and Steady Wins the Race

Slow and Steady Wins the Race is an experimental “laboratory” line which started from a desire to dissect the fashion vocabulary, and led to an exploration of patterns of consumption and brand identities. The mission of the label is to promote and produce interesting and significant pieces from the simplest fabrics and materials. Following a product design model, the company is intent on slowing down the fashion cycle to “counter fashion’s in-built obsolescence” through the simple act of creating non-seasonal pieces focused on specific and fundamental characteristics of clothing design. These are produced in limited numbers, yet sold at a contained price.

Quilted Cotton Bag
Nº1 Bag 2005
Quilted cotton muslin
Ultramarine Bag
Nº11 New Bag 2006
Cotton muslin
Bamboo Handle Bag
Nº3 Bag 2005
Cotton muslin
Photograph: Mari Maeda
Photo: Courtesy of Fashion Projects
Andrea Zittel + Tiprin Follett / smockshop

A simple double wrap-around garment, the smock, as designed by the artist Andrea Zittel, is a versatile and utilitarian garment. For the smockshop project, it is reworked by a number of artists who reinterpret the original pattern based on their individual skill sets and tastes. In line with Zittel’s motto “Liberation through Limitations,” the smocks are intended to be worn exclusively for six months, but in an understanding of the idealistic nature of such a practice, the artist is at least hoping “to inspire a more frugal approach to design.” The examples in the exhibition are by the artist Tiprin Follett, who wore her smocks continuously and documented her performance in an interview with Zittel as well as through snapshots.
Exhibition Checklist

Alabama Chanin
Apparel Swag Coat, Songbirdi collection 2009
Organic cotton
Embroidered Dress with Fringe, Ceremony collection 2008
Organic cotton with silk Ross
Flare Dress, Songbirdi collection 2009
Natural indigo-dyed organic cotton denim

Bodkin
Cima Top, Spring/Summer 2010, Unlined tencel
Fracture Dress, Winter/Fall 2009, Organic cotton
Lake Effect Shorts, Spring/Summer 2010, Post-consumer recycled polyester
Laguna Dress, Spring/Summer 2010, Unlined tencel
The Incredible Shrinking Parka, Winter/Fall 2009

Susan Cianni
Sudal, 1997, Run 6 collection, Film, sketchbook with drawings of film screenplay, photo book of film stills, and collection images
Jean Skirt, 1997, Run 6 collection, Do-it-yourself denim skirt kit Cotton
Jean Skirt, Closed Packet, 1997, Run 6 collection, Do-it-yourself denim skirt kit Cotton
Patchwork Dress, Fall 2009, Trees at Night collection

Kelly Cobb
100-MiW Suit, 2008, Locally sourced and produced materials
Strands of production (100-MiW Suit), 2008, DVD

Loosestrife
Worker Campus Khaki, Fall 2009, Organic cotton
Kharma Jean, Medium low waist, bootcut leg, Fall 2009
Organic cotton and elastane
Prophecy Jean, Medium waist, classic straight leg, Fall 2009
Organic cotton
Dad T-shirt, Fall 2009, Organic cotton
Sucker T-shirt, Fall 2009, Organic cotton
Steve Shirt, Fall 2009, Organic cotton
Women’s V-neck Tie-Dye Bottom Dress, Spring 2009
Organic cotton, silk detailing

Rogan
Patchwork Dress, 2008, Recycled denim, Courtesy of Barney’s New York

Zsu Sheehan Saldá
Faded Glory Mix & Match Reversible Hat (Red), 2005
Clothing, mannequin head, Undyed photographic print
Jordache Sheer Camp Shirt (Lucky Lime), 2005
Clothing, hangar, photographic print

SANS
Coat and Dress, Look 2306 and 3304 from Fall/Winter 2008
Coat—tussah silk with polyurethane coating, Dress—tussah silk
Dress, Look 17 from Spring/Summer 2009, Top/pants—tussah silk, Shorts—organic cotton
Jumpsuit and Dress, Look 1704 from Fall/Winter 2008
Jumpsuit—silk/Bamboo, Dress—silk/organic cotton

Smile Shirt, 2009, Repurposed organic cotton, Sewn by Kristina Angelozzi

Andrea Zittel’s Smockshop
Andrea Zittel/smockshop
Nº1-4 Smocks courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, Inc.
Photographic documentation of the smockshop project

Tina Tyrell for SUNO
Slideshow, Spring/Summer 2009, 30 digital photographs
Various designers, some unknown

ULURU
Kathleen Coat, Fall/Winter 2008, Organic merino wool, silk charmeuse
Westlake Reversible Dress, Fall/Winter 2008
Slate grey hemp charmeuse

ULURU stitched by Alabama Chanin
Recycled Appliquéd Sweater, Fall/Winter 2008
Cashmere and organic cotton jersey

Caroline Pribe and Gabriela Galvan for ULURU
Patterns for Westlake Reversible Dress, Fall 2007
Pattern paper

SUNO
Riko, Spring/Summer 2009, Vintage cotton kanga
Dress, Spring/Summer 2009, Vintage cotton kanga and silk charmeuse

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