

Artisan Culture

Rethinking Sustainability through Collaborative Exchange
between Emerging Australian Designers and Indian Artisans
in Fashion and Textiles

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Keywords

Sustainability, Fashion Design, Heritage textiles, Artisan, Collaboration, Textiles, Education, Artisanal

Certificate of Original Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Acknowledgements

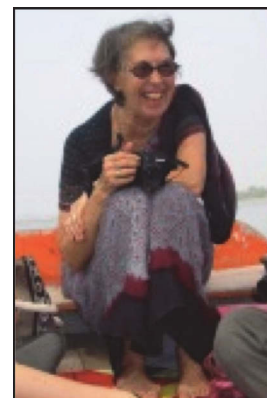
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Robyn Beeche (1945- 2015)

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Abstract

Attentiveness to ethical and ecological sustainable practice is building in the garment industry. However, many researchers still consider the garment-making manufacturing system to be ethically and ecologically unsustainable. There are multiple factors contributing to this view, including overconsumption, waste accumulation, poor working conditions, low wages, and health-and safety issues.

This thesis explores how industry connections between emerging Australian designers and traditional artisans in India can foster new possibilities for ethically sustainable collaborations between Australia and India. Much of the research emanates from a series of curated tours, where Sydney-based tertiary students undertaking undergraduate degrees in fashion and textile design were encouraged to collaborate with individual artisans, ethical manufacturers, and environmentally sustainable producers in Northern India. Simultaneously, Indian textile artisans were encouraged to apply their traditional technical skills to contemporary design, thus enabling new opportunities for these processes to enter the global market.

Using a combination of participant observation strategies and semi-structured interviews, this research draws on data collected from students and industry professionals between July 2012 and September 2013. This data was supported by my own experiences as a fashion practitioner working with Indian manufacturers.

In this thesis I argue that firsthand experience for students working with artisans, suppliers and ethical manufacturing practices will increase awareness of the complexities of a sustainable fashion future. This research offers a sustainable model of collaborative practice for future generations of emerging designers, which will build a deeper understanding for better ways to source and design. For artisans, the significance of this thesis could be to build an economically sustainable practice considering contemporary design. It suggests ways to engage in ethical and sustainable practices working with Indian artisans. The outcome of this research aims to contribute to a growing field of ethical practice in fashion and textiles.

Terms and Definitions

- aari:*** Form of embroidery practiced in various regions such as in Kashmir, Vrindavan, and Kokata.
- ajrak:*** Unique form of block printed shawls and tiles found in Sindh, Pakistan; Kutch, Gujarat; and Barmer, Rajasthan in India. These shawls display special designs and patterns made using block printing by stamps.
- bandhani:*** Type of tie-dye textile decorated primarily by plucking the cloth with the fingernails into many tiny bindings to form a figurative design. Bandhani making centres are situated in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Sindh, Punjab region and in Tamil Nadu.
- Bespoke:** Clothing made to an individual buyer's specification by a tailor. The distinguishing points of bespoke clothing are the buyer's total control over the fabric used, the features and fit, and the way the garment should be made.
- Carbon footprint:** The amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere as a result of the activities of a particular individual, organization, or community.
- chikankari:*** Traditional embroidery style from Lucknow, India. It is one of Lucknow's best-known textile decoration styles.
- Closed-loop system:** system of production that embraces the circularity of materials; the notion that all component parts of a product can and should be broken down at the end of its useful life to be reconstituted into new products.
- Couture:** Design and manufacture of fashionable clothes to a client's specific requirements and measurements.

- Ethical fashion:** An approach to the design, sourcing and manufacture of clothing which maximises benefits to people and communities while minimising impact on the environment.
- Fair trade:** Trade between companies in developed countries and producers in developing countries in which fair prices are paid to the producers.
- Fashion miles:** Distance a garment is tracked during its manufacturing process.
- Fast fashion:** System of production whereby designs quickly move from catwalk to consumer in order to capture current fashion trends. Fast fashion clothing collections are based on the most recent fashion trends presented at Fashion Week in the spring and the autumn of every year.
- GOTS:** Global Organic Textile Standard. An organic certification organisation.
- Greenwash:** Disinformation disseminated by an organisation so as to present an environmentally responsible public image.
- khādi:** Indian homespun cotton cloth.
- Low impact dye:** Dye that has been classified by the Oeko-Tex Standard 100 (an international certification process) as eco-friendly. Generally, low impact dyes do not contain toxic chemicals or mordents (which fix the dye to the fabric), require less rinsing, and have a high absorption rate in the fabric (~70 percent).
- Natural dyes:** Colourants derived from plants, invertebrates, or minerals. The majority of natural dyes are vegetable dyes derived from plant sources—roots, berries, bark, leaves, and wood—and other organic sources such as fungi and lichens.
- Offshore:** Made, situated, or registered abroad, especially in order to take advantage of lower taxes or costs or less stringent regulation.

Organic cotton: Cotton grown from non-genetically modified plants without the use of any synthetic agricultural chemicals such as fertilizers or pesticides.

Outsourcing: To obtain (goods or a service) by contract from an outside supplier.

Peace silk: Form of silk manufacture that allows silkworms to emerge from their cocoons to live out their full life cycle. The silk is degummed and spun like other fibre instead of being reeled. The resulting yarn is soft, fluffy, and light.

Slow fashion: Movement that embraces a slower pace of trend and production.

SME: Small-to-Medium Enterprise.

sujani: Form of embroidery originating from Bhusura village in Bihar, India.

Supply chain: Sequence of processes involved in the production and distribution of a commodity.

Sustainable fashion: Design philosophy which seeks to create a system of fashion production that can be supported indefinitely in terms of environmental and social responsibility.

Transparent supply chain: Information for end users given by companies about their suppliers and sourcing locations.

zari: Type of gold thread used decoratively on Indian clothing.

Zero waste: Practice of pattern making that creates little or no wasted fabric when cutting.