

Question 1: *What is the role of the designer/maker in the 21st Century and how might this role change in the next 10 years? Discuss your ideas with reference to two of the practitioners or thinkers discussed in your lecture strand.*

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The role of a designer in the 21st century has evolved significantly throughout the centuries, especially with the increasing focus on sustainability, innovation and social responsibility. Designers today are not only focusing on the aesthetics of their designs but also the impact that it has on the environment and society. Two practitioners who have massively influenced the 21st century and exemplified this shift are Stella McCartney, a fashion designer and Maija Isola, a surface pattern designer. Stella McCartney is known for her ongoing commitment to sustainable and eco-friendly fashion designs, utilising alternative materials instead of animal products which advocate for ethical practices in fashion design. Her use of ethical designs challenges the traditional notion of luxury branding, providing a sustainable wardrobe for consumers who are looking to follow the path of sustainable living. On the other hand, Maija Isola's work with Marimekko revolutionized the world of surface pattern with her use of bold, vibrant patterns allowing her work to be a form of personal expression and creative freedom that many designers today are driven by. Isola's designs are some of the most inspiring and impactful works in art and design today, not only did she make a cultural impact but showed how art and design broaden social values. The future for designers such as Stella McCartney and Maija Isola will likely continue to grow, with a stronger emphasis on collaboration between different industries, and using creativity to address global issues within the art and design community.

As a proud animal activist Stella McCartney's role within the fashion industry is to advocate the use of cruelty-free materials, giving the illusion of real fur and leather for the consumer who is looking to purchase the luxurious clothing without using animal products. McCartney uses the slogan *"We believe that fashion can, and should, be luxurious without animal products,"* (Stella McCartney Website, 2001) This emphasises her dedication for advocating the use of cruelty-free materials as this is a prominent feature on her website. Additionally, McCartney's fashion designs are accessible for vegans who are looking to join fashion trends of wearing animal products without having to feel guilty about wearing fur or leather. Specifically, as GenZ is brining back wearing fur in 2024, meaning that more people can participate without animals being hurt for aesthetic purposes, emphasising the importance of Stella McCartney being a cruelty-free role model.

Stella McCartney prides herself on her sustainable practices, as *"Wherever possible, she incorporates sustainable principles into her business,"* this demonstrates her knowledge and consistency of being an ethical business. Within her collections *"she uses organic cottons, and low impact dyes and embraces new techniques and materials as they emerge."* (Gwilt, Alison. *A Practical Guide to Sustainable Fashion* 2020) This shows the impact on global challenges within the fashion industry and how companies cannot be excused from their corporate social responsibility, for example SHEIN which is known for its unethical practices using *"large consumption of oil churns"* used to produce pure polyester and other synthetic materials equalling to *"the same amount of CO2 as approximately 180 coal-fired power plants"* (Times Magazine Andrew D. Johnson, January 17, 2023) All these materials that SHEIN produces end up on a landfill as half the time it is influencers who purchase clothing for one time use only. This contrast between Stella McCartney and SHEIN shows the importance of a business being sustainable and the role McCartney takes in ensuring how consumers can buy from an ethical source from as they contribute as much as the companies do.

Comparing the factories and standard practice between the two companies, Stella McCartney's factory operates with focus on ethical labour practices, sustainability and reducing environmental impact. On the other hand, SHEIN's factory focuses on speed, volume, cost-cutting materials resulting in poor labour conditions and terrible environmental sustainability. While SHEIN is low cost and budget friendly it comes at an expense of workers' rights and extra damage to our planet. Due to Stella McCartney's brand being high-end, luxury meaning only a few can support her designs and ethical working conditions due to the high cost of her items. Being based in Europe, "Italy is our biggest and most important sourcing country, with over 83% of material production and finished goods direct suppliers based in the country." (Stella McCartney Website, 2020 Summer Collection) This highlights the high standard McCartney holds her brand (Fig 1 and 2) to in comparison to other big corporations such as SHEIN (Fig 3) who use third-world countries cutting costs on materials and productions in turn not caring for their workers or the consequences of the planet.



Fig 1. Stella McCartney Brunello Eco-Friendly Factory (2020)

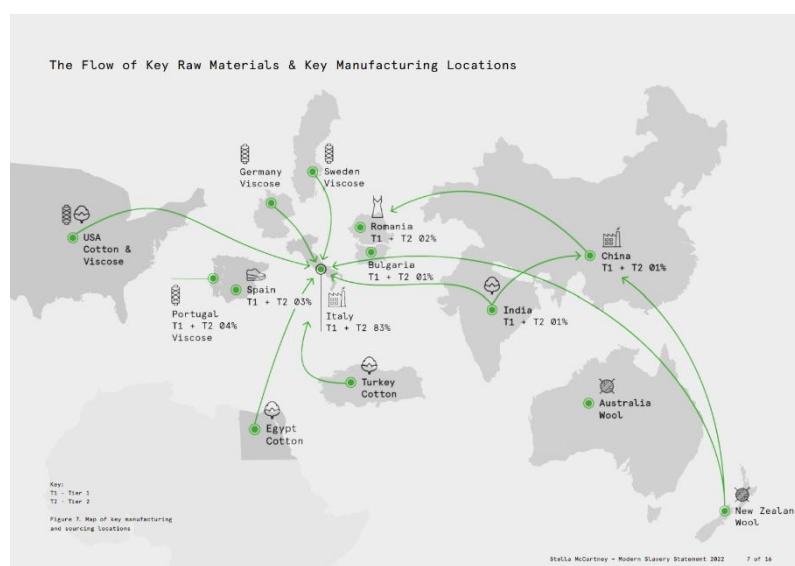


Fig 2 Stella McCartney Modern Slavery Statement 2022 Map of key manufactories and sourcing locations



Fig 3 Workers pictured in June at a factory in Guangzhou, in China's Guangdong province, which supplies Shein. Photograph: Jade Gao

In the next decade, Stella McCartney's role may be more focused on materials being changed due to new technologies being developed to help conquer the global challenges caused by unethical practices. For example, PETA talks about how even in the 21st century there is already innovations of “sustainable materials such as cork, mushrooms, pineapple leaves, apple peels, other fruit waste, or recycled plastics” (PETA, *Website wearing vegan clothing*,) being used to make materials that companies can use instead of animal products and synthetic fibres. This will most likely be more developed within the next years with McCartney's designs shifting into the use of organic matters, as already she includes and explores alternatives materials in her fashion designs. Additionally, fashion trends will change resulting in consumers being more wary of products they purchase and making sure they stay on top of trends, meaning that sustainability might be the next big thing in the fashion industry. According to Reda and Kapoor (2021), “Gen Z and Millennial consumers make more sustainable or ethical purchases than any other population segment.” This emphasises that the younger generations are self-aware of what happens within the fast fashion industry and how unethical it is to the planet, inspiring the upcoming generations to follow the path of sustainable living and making the right choices in garments they wear. Zero-waste shopping is becoming popular within the 21st century, with Gen z being the top consumer of reduce, reuse and recycle where in the next 10 years bigger brands could start reinforcing the trend of recycling their own products, following designers like Stella McCartney who already have started reusing fabrics from old collections.

Seeing how fast technology is being developed, there might be a chance that in the next 10 years Stella McCartney could be collaborating with other industries such as engineers and scientists; to come out with ways fashion garments could be more sustainable and accessible for others with lower budgets. Using 3D printing, there is a way to reuse plastic materials such as: bottles, containers, and wrapping and

converting them into printed textiles consumers could wear. Stella McCartney has started exploring this idea with her new collaboration with adidas and “introduced vegan shoes with 3D printed midsoles, reducing the carbon footprint associated with traditional footwear production.” (YES, 3D Printed Textiles: A Sustainable Fashion Revolution , Sarah Arnstein) This just shows that with just enough problem solving and creativity anything is possible to create and improve, McCartney is an example of that and how in 10 years our clothes could start being 3D printed without needing to get materials that are not ethical for the planet reducing carbon emission and improving lives for generations to come.

Surface pattern designers today are influenced by the famous Mija Isola who revolutionized patterns through the 20th century with her bold, abstract, colour designs. Isola’s most famous design being Unikko (poppy) created for the brand Marimekko “It was a flower unlike anything ever seen before at Marimekko. The giant, juicy red and pink petals filled the white base.” (Marimekko , Unikko 20th Century, Fig 4) allowing Isola to express herself through brush strokes giving the design a unique one of a kind look, as the florals were painted by Isola individually through each stroke. Being able to use a canvas is all about expressing your emotions through a design, each imperfection using paints or inks and every brush stroke symbolises the process that the artist goes through. Isola was a good example of that as even Marimekko acknowledges the beauty of the pattern as “Unikko was graphic and avant-garde, and it was included in the collections immediately”. At a time when delicate and small patterns were favoured Isola took a nontraditional approach when creating Unikko as the result designers today have carried on her legacy through expressing themselves using different medias and colours.



Fig 4 Maija Isola’s Pattern Unikko (Poppy) designed while at Marimekko

In the 21st century, identity has become a central theme in design particularly as Gen Z takes a leading role in shaping cultural narratives. Maija Isola is a famous 20th century icon who revolutionized the 21st century, allowing artists and designers to create a bolder, more colourful approach in their artworks. For this generation identity is fluid often expressed through personalised choices, each individual presents their identity whether this be through fashion, graphics, illustration and art. This is why Maija Isola's work is so influential as she demonstrates how to freely express yourself despite certain cultural norms believing otherwise. Maija Isola's work with Marimekko is one of the most famous examples of how design can contribute to a broader sense of identity, as her bold, nature-inspired pattern designs inspired designers such as Maija Louekari. She created the piece "*Siirtolapuutarha*" (Fig 5) which reflects Isola's legacy through her use of similar themes such as: Organic shapes, country life in urban environment and bold use of colour.



Fig 5 Maija Louekari, Siirtolapuutarha

In the next decade, art will significantly be involved around being sustainable and using the theme of zero-waste. As a society, "*the obsession for consuming fashion goods has seen an enormous growth in mass-produced fashion, in particular 'fast fashion'*" (Gwilt, Alison. *A Practical Guide to Sustainable Fashion*, Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2020.) having this wide range of constant trends changing each season, not only do we have to worry about fitting in but designers constant pressure to put out 'trend worthy' designs for consumers has an overwhelming mass production of clothes where many of these consumers will end up wearing it as a onetime event piece and

throwing it into the landfill where many other materials end up ruining eco-systems. This is why having the zero-waste project implemented into schools and exhibitions allows others to have a sense of awareness to what happens to their garments when they contribute to over consumption. Whilst Maija Isola was not directly involved with the zero-waste project it is foreseeable that her work would inspire those in the future to follow and implement the zero-waste project. Similarly, to how she implemented features of nature into her work. Artists in the 21st century will likely move forward along side the other generations and in the next 10 years could be reusing old materials and creating them into something so much more. This what we call reduce, reuse recycle. Noticing how, *"Fibres and fabrics can be manipulated to achieve different effects using techniques such as knitting, embroidery, digital and screen-printing methods,"* (Gwilt, Alison. *A Practical Guide to Sustainable Fashion*, 2020) Due to this wide range of techniques, designers are presented with ways to reuse previous garments and materials from old collections, allowing the zero-waste project to develop throughout generations. Despite the limitations that designers may face because of reusing materials they are still able to project themselves into their work and implement a new form of creativity that will inspire generations to come. Such as the influence that Maija Isola had on the 20th and 21st century through her bold use of design and it is highly likely this will continue in the next decade.

In conclusion, designers such as Maija Isola and Stella McCartney have played an important role in the 21st century, not only are they creators who have pushed their creativity to change generations, addressing global issues like animal-abuse in fashion and showing that sustainability is possible, but have also changed the ways patterns and designs can influence others to push boundaries outside their generational norms. Isola's legacy highlights the role of the designer as a boundary-pusher, merging art with organic formats creating the fluidity that artists in their work have just by simply using their free-hand and a few brushes with inks and paints. This technique influenced the 21st century, where more colours and bold shapes are seen across fashion, interior and art. In contrast, Stella McCartney represents a shift towards environmental consciousness in design. McCartney's commitment towards being an animal activist swearing that she will never use leather in her collections, showed designers that even though, many global issues are being done unethically such as animals being used for fur, Stella McCartney found ways in this generation, to use organic matters to eliminate these unethical killings so that more designers can be influenced to follow her path and use materials that are healthier for earth and the animals. Both of these roles are beneficial for the 21st century society and have produced a significant impact on design, and they will continue to do so in the next decade.

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Figures

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Fig 3. Butler, S. (2024). *Fashion retailer Shein finds child labour in its supply chain*. [online] The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/article/2024/aug/23/shein-fashion-retailer-child-labour-supply-chain>.

Fig 4 Unikko (Poppy) Maija Isola (2024). *Marimekko*. [online] Available at: https://www.marimekko.com/gb_en/journal/how-the-unikko-pattern-was-born.

Fig 5 Maija Louekari, Siirtolapuutarha (2024). *Siirtolapuutarha oilcloth, blue-green*. [online] Available at: <https://www.nordicnest.com/brands/marimekko/siirtolapuutarha-oilcloth/>