

Title: Consumer trends and the increase of conscious sustainability has impacted design in the textile industry.

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In this essay I will explore how consumerism and the increase in conscious behaviour towards sustainability when investing in textiles has affected design and making in the fashion and interior design industry. This is of keen interest to me as this is my intended career path and I have lived through the decades of change. Absorbing the experiences I have witnessed, coupled with being a mature student I am now piecing together and realising the impact of changing consumer behaviours. This customer base will eventually be my market and the design constraints imposed on me as I look to develop and formulate my own small creative design business. My ambition following my study will be firstly to gain industry work experience with established design companies with the view to owning my own design business in the future and developing a series of collections that I will retail direct to the customer. I have chosen to look at both elite industry designers, small business designers and how they have navigated and broken through the introduction of sustainable conscious measures since the increase of global pollution has been recognised widely.

To look at today's design market, I think it is important to review and understand the history of the textile industry. Historical constraints imposed by the government during the second world war shaping consumer behaviour to be more conscious of waste saving. To the presentation of multiple choice by global markets landing in the UK changing those customer habits. Causing emerging conscious purchasing in the present day preventing the waste of money, boycotting some brands and over purchasing. To evidence this I will be looking at online references to artifacts from historical archives of the time and present-day news and published articles that explain the influences that instigated change and the approach to considerate design. I will review using lived epistemology of witnessing these developments and impact on design and designers. As well as looking at the meaning of value in design and how this relationship is affected by the economy fluctuations that can create exponential wealth when successful. This research will come from several published books by well-established academic authors of the design industry.

I will study design artists in the fashion industry who explored sustainable measures and how this affected their business adaptations and the consumer response in separate documented design industry films. This is relevant to the exploration as one fashion company is retailing to the industry and the other designer is following a passion as a personal project. I will continue my research into industry practice with evaluating colouring fabrics and methods used that are both natural and synthetic and the impact of this on pollution all over the world.

I will conclude how my research has shaped my practice and how I intend to move forward in a design career along with other current design businesses that have adopted drastic sustainable measures as part of their everyday normal practice.

Firstly, my research reviews the impact of the second world war on the textile industry. My first introduction to fabrics, sewing and fashion was made by my grandmother who was a seamstress in the 1980's. Personal values and ethics were instilled by my grandmother who taught me to sew as a child on a traditional hand levered mechanical sewing machine and who was from the *Make Do and Mend* era during the second world war. "The 'Make do and Mend' campaign was introduced by the government to encourage people to get as much wear as possible out of the clothes they already had", (The National Archives, 2024). This campaign set out to teach people to sew and fix reparable clothes rather than discarding by offering evening classes to attend and learn stitching techniques. The war caused a shortage in clothing availability from abroad, consequently causing pricing to increase over affordability. The National Archives (2024) state that British manufacturers were consumed by making military uniforms and parachutes with no capacity for apparel. This enabled sewers and beginners to recreate garments using printed paper drawings (Tilly and the Buttons, 2013).

The growth of the paper pattern industry in the second half of the 19th century mirrored the development of the domestic sewing machine and the increase of fashion print media. It was a time of great development, and the fashion industry - always at the forefront of technological and industrial changes - was growing in size and reaching more people than ever before. (Tilly and the Buttons, 2013)

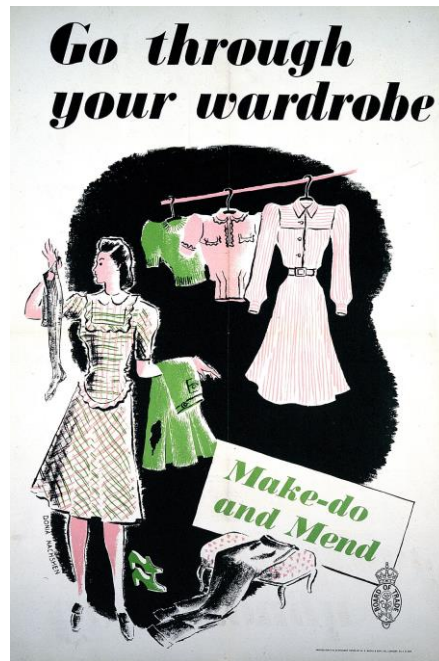


Figure 1. A Ministry of Information poster 'Go through your Wardrobe', part of the 'Make do and Mend' campaign, The National Archives (2024)

This practice of mending, embellishing and making a garment more unique became my favourite technique. Through my teenage years I would redesign garments for example cutting up jeans to make a long skirt embellished with zips, buttons, studs and badges. Having the freedom of being unique was joyous and would often gain attention. I believe this contributed to building my sentimental value attached to fabrics.

During the *Make Do and Mend* period, rationing and the shortage of new materials and clothing encouraged sewers to make garments last and where quality and durability was important. During the second world war, in particular uniforms were made from woollen fabric for it is naturally flame resistance, failure to melt, breathable functionality and ability to keep soldiers comfortable and warm. "Another reason wool was used for uniforms for the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, is that wool is durable and hardwearing" (Simon Lucas Bridge Supplies Ltd. 2021). Later in this essay a fashion designer I have researched returns to these natural fibres for the same reasons, longevity and fitness for purpose as an introduction to a sustainable strategy and practice. Whereas the multitude of complex and mixed synthetics may not have been as readily available in the Second World War and not be an accessible alternative choice to use it is those teachings that the natural fabrics have all the premium qualities whilst being the least harmful to the environment. I do understand how

overwearing rehashed garments for a long period it would easily become tempting, desirable to purchase new clothing and household furnishings when new became available again. This has become easy to understand what happened the next phase of consumerism.

My grandmother taught me to value fabric and a finished presentable garment. When shopping for clothes in the 1990's she would teach me to find the item label and to search for the quoted fabric mix and understand it, to touch and feel the materiality as to how it folded, creased and stretched. Always checking the label advice on how the garment should be maintained through washing and drying and to inspect in what way the garment was finished. Checking inside seams, hems and top stitching to see if the garment was completed without shortcuts and worth its asking price. She taught me to double knot and trim cottons strings on the inside of the garment even though they were not visible only when inspecting. A technique that has been automated in today's new electronic sewing machines. My grandmother had so much pride in her work she would ultimately be disappointed to see apparel for sale at a lesser quality than what consumers deserved. She made my comprehensive school uniform that was a woollen pinafore dress (which unfortunately I'm



Figure 2 (left): Wedding photograph, (Author's own, 1978)

Figure 3 (above): Family wedding photograph, (Author's own, 1978)

unable to locate a photograph of) and my mother's wedding dress amongst other event-based clothing which have now become heirlooms (Figures 2 and 3).

These dresses have great sentimental value to our family which reminded me of the *Threads* exhibition held at the Arnolfini where 21 international artists and makers showcasing their work and how memories are embedded into the threads of making, "breathing stories into materials". I was particularly drawn to *Ground* as it had so much detail and storytelling in a large piece of work. It was captivating with the choice of matt and metallic threads as well as the interaction between the characters. A piece of work you could study endlessly and find something new. "Each stitch becomes a marker of lived time and embodiment of thought and patience and record of human presence", (*Threads*, 2023).



Figure4. Alice Kettle, *Ground* (2018) *Threads* (2023)

The family wedding photographs (figures 2 and 3) date 1978 and therefore quite difficult to see the detail in the wedding dress. My grandmother "Mamgu" as known in Welsh is wearing the green outfit and again the detail not easy to see but the image demonstrates the greens in the hat and dress matched perfectly. "A thread is a line that links the past with the present, knotting personal and shared experiences together...." (*Threads*, 2023). Although I was not present at my mother's wedding, and now that I have lost both my mother and grandmother, these heirlooms bring me close to them again and the pride that would have been felt that day.

Just like *Ground* shown in figure 4, these threads hold sentimental stories increasing their value. But this is a standalone contemporary piece, as is *The Nettle Dress*, a documentary about a textile artist who sourced organic and innovative sustainable material to create a dress in memory of his late wife that would become an heirloom. Allan Brown spent seven years making a dress from fibres he found inside foraged stingy nettles. He liked the contradiction of how something so delicate could be found inside the plant that could be so strong. The fibres needed to be twisted like spun wool and claimed he twisted into the thread how he was feeling that day. Dealing with grief, making memories and storytelling, all being recorded into the thread. Brown wanted to “shape it to one of the children so that it comes full circle” (*The Nettle Dress*, 2023) and claimed that that’s what happens when you make for family. This is an example of extreme slow fashion, almost where the commercial value is insignificant. The power in the project comes from the story. It wouldn’t be commercially viable to mass create a collection given that one dress took 7 years to complete.

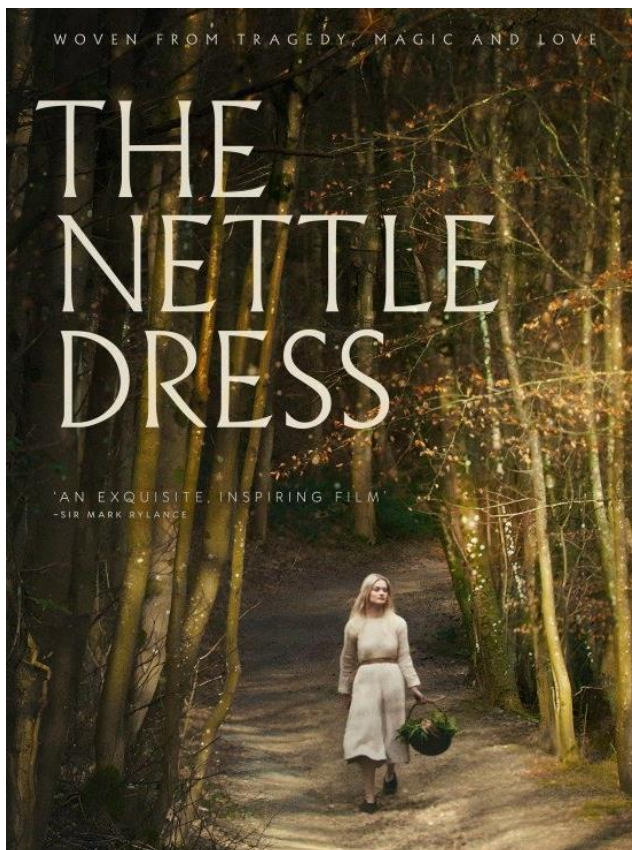


Figure 5: Cover poster of “*The Nettle Dress*”, (IMDB, 023)



Figure 6: Oonagh Brown wearing *The Nettle Dress*, 2023 (Dark Mountain Project, 2024)

Recognising the change in design influences and consumer response, Julier (2008, p25) discusses how the different economic eras from the 1980's to more present times has impacted design components of budget, audience and creativity. How do we understand the value of an item that has been designed? Julier (2008, p14) states we should consider the three elements of the process of value which is designers, production and consumption. He explains it is not the commercial value but also the "social, cultural, environmental, political and symbolic values" (Julier, 2008 p14) we should deliberate. This branding aspect has a big impact on corporate promotion which then fuelled growth in these industries. In the 1980's there was a keenness to measure the size and impact design of the creative and design professions on the wider economy.

Julier (2008, p26) continues with the importance of creating value in design and that it's the main duty of the Designer. He references a quote from an article written by Margaret Thatcher (quoted in Whitley 1991; 196) for "Design" which stated "The profit potential for product design and development is considerable. Designers themselves should be more aggressive in selling themselves to industry and wealth creators" (Julier, 2008, p26). Thus, meaning clothing can truly represent a society and the power of branding can get consumers to become part of that cult of clothing and generate wealth to a country that needed to recover from a financial depression and produce opportunities.

The definition of design is "a plan or drawing produced to show the look and function or workings of a building, garment, or other object before it is made" (Stevenson, 2010 page no?). The value can be seen in its potential to become a product or object that is creative and communicates a visual message on behalf of the designer or the contract. Clearly the economic fluctuations have impacted the production and consumption but the value on design is consistent, or is it?

The 1990s saw the innovation and accessibility to the internet which drove industries to develop and deliver at a much faster pace with much more availability to the global markets through better communication channels. "By the late 1990's, design was increasingly imbricated into the pressures of the New Economy, becoming instrumental in delivering "fast, better, cheaper"" (Julier, 2008 p37). With the likes of the leading retail websites such as Amazon and eBay, the digital age has brought the market and consumer closer, "consumer culture is founded on the constant expansion of demand" (Julier 2008 p57). With growing

intelligence around consumer behaviour through tracking online shopping trends and loyalty cards, branding and advertising feeds the consumer more of the same developing a culture of wanting and needing more “that gives the rise to advertising promoting “false needs”” (Julier, 2008 p59). Creating products in this way has “limited life designed into them, either through their lack of physical durability or their quickly becoming unfashionable” (Julier, 2008 p59). This is fast fashion. I too have fallen foul of this unconscious buying, purchasing cheap single use items, unfinished to a presentable standard and no ambition to last beyond the first wash, because coming home with shopping bags has been more cathartic with total ignorance to the associated landfill implications and waste of money.

I experienced the change and accessibility to global design and manufacture. In the 1980’s big outdoor markets thrived on a Saturday and were prevalent amongst the working class and most shops would close on a Sunday. This was exposure to global products although some products on sale had questionable integrity selling counterfeit brands and products without British standards approval. These were my memories. In the 1990’s the rise in power of the supermarkets became evident expanding their offering beyond groceries to now clothing and homeware. The supermarkets became the one shop for all and in the 2000’s they capitalised on this strategy by inviting guest designers to offer an affordable range such as Coleen Rooney for Asda George and Matthew Williamson for John Lewis. The once high street prestigious boutiques and shops were now developing ranges for multipurpose stores at affordable prices confusing emerging elite Designers where now to pitch their product?

In hindsight we were now on the rising trajectory of creating volume sales at cheaper prices. In contrary to this, London based fashion designer Bethany Williams teamed up with the supermarket group Tesco and Vauxhall Foodbank in 2016 to produce her collection Breadline to break through with awareness. “She devised a program that allowed foodbank visitors to exchange household waste items for fresh fruit and vegetables” (Solanki, 2018, p74). According to Solanki (2008) the Designer challenged the existing material processes and sources to create a more conscious and responsible framework for fashion designing taking into consideration influential social and environmental issues from today and tomorrow. Breadline, a collection of woven, knitted, printed and embroidered recycled cardboard and donated prints collection of streetwear was made with the assistance and collaboration of the



Figure 7. Image from the *Breadline* collection, (Not Just a Label, 2024)



Figure 8. Image from the *Breadline* collection, (Not Just a Label, 2024)

local craftspeople. “30 percent of Williams’ profits from the project went to the foodbank” (Solanki, 2018, p74) supporting and giving back to the local community.

As much as this is refreshing, to be reusing and utilising fabrics and sources normally discarded by supermarkets, how saleable is this streetwear? Is it just a concept or a real solution? How many of us would choose to invest on sustainable measures alone and be branded with the Tesco logo whilst doing so? Although I note that Williams didn’t get the same publicity and shelf space for her campaign as the other Designers launching a collection within a superstore.

There was a global financial crisis in 2009/2010 and since then the high street shops are dying being overcome by numbers of charity shops, takeaways and discount stores or fully replaced by out-of-town shopping destinations which are now prevalent. Consumers with less disposable income finding they could still purchase in volume for items that were made cheaply, without integrity or intended longevity like during the second world war. Consumer habits and attitudes were changing to devalue expensive bespoke products opting for bargain replicas. I believe this developed a consumer attitude that disregarded the value placed on

design and making such as my unconscious purchasing previously stated. Being reminded of your contribution to the global warming crisis is key.

It was Amy Powney, Creative Director of *Mother of Pearl* who really tried to challenge the fashion industry for sustainable practice as the *Fashion Reimagined* documentary explored. Amy Powney, Mother of Pearl won a £100k prize for emerging Designer, awarded by Vogue and the British Fashion Council (Fashion Reimagined, 2013). “This is what I was always supposed to do” Powney claims although facing this challenge would be something else (Fashion Reimagined, 2013). It was this budget that helped her create a sustainable collection that transformed her brand. Powney’s ambition was “to create a sustainable collection from field to finished garment and transform the way we engage with fashion” (Fashionreimaginedfilm.com, 2023). The documentary covers the many challenges the Designer must overcome to produce a sustainably conscious collection and to then convince the fashion industry buyers to invest in her brand and take it to consumers. The documentary explains that at that time a typical garment travels 5 countries before reaching the customer and that 62% of all clothing is made from synthetic fibres. This led to the Designer wanting to track a garment’s journey as with the current supply chain and industry that was described as a rat race by a Dior Designer during the film (Fashion Reimagined, 2023). I questioned throughout the documentary the cost of Powney’s research and actual carbon calculation of flying to different destinations to find the right animal wool and leather and if indeed it did offset the cost of producing this particular collection. The documentary focussed on the real search for sourcing the right materials which led to several farm visits across numerous countries. On balance, I suppose once the learning and supply contacts have been established, they are in place for future collections providing this one be successful and this might be where the carbon saving is further realised. The documentary eluded to address this.



Figure 9. Amy Powney, (fashionreimaginedfilm.com, 2024)



Figure 10. Fashion Reimagined, 2023 (fashionreimaginedfilm.com, 2024)

Powney (Fashion Reimagined, 2023) has a family history within the Textile industry with her mother having worked in a fabric mill and used cast off fabrics to cut into triangles for quilting. This inspired her childhood dream to become a Fashion Designer which she describes as a “complete privilege”. Powney began her own research into the impact of fashion on the environment, chemical treatment methods, quantities and how animals are treated. Realising that we “buy three times as many clothes than in 1980” reflecting the consumerism and fast fashion influence of volume sales at cheaper prices. She continues “Fashion is one of the most destructive industries on our planet” (Fashion Reimagined, 2023). This is confirmed by Gwilt *et al*, 2019 “Fashion is also one of the most polluting and socially exploitative industries in the world; we are producing over 100 billion garments per year”. This mass production is unsustainable with a large percentage of clothing being unworn.

Every year across the world we produce 92 million tonnes of textile waste. Unless big changes happen and improve how we make, use, and dispose of clothes, it’s estimated that by 2030 we’ll create 134 million tonnes of textile waste globally. And the global fashion industry is responsible for 10% of all greenhouse gas emissions (Fashion Waste Facts and Statistics, 2024).

It was a real challenge at the time of presentation of Powney’s new collection for buyers who at this early on set time of change were unconvinced that the higher price, better quality, natural fabrics was worth the risk of investment. Could they convince their customer base to buy into this ethos and convert their current consumer attitude? “It hurts a bit, when you design, it’s a bit of you” they are rejecting Powney claims (Fashion Reimagined 2023). Powney had changed consciously to the use of leather, cotton and wool concentrating on being able

to define the source of the garment, having confidence and integrity with this and knowing the durability and strength of the fabrics. Choosing these materials doesn't come without its challenges. Widely recognised for supplying the "most basic of human needs, providing clothing, footwear and shelter and even serving as protective clothing during battles" (Solanki, 2018, p13) as we have established also from the National Archives, we now face a more commercial problem. Solanki states a steady increase since 2012 of the sales of leather shoes, fashion accessories and cars with leather seats, the main repercussion is the amount of waste generated due to increased production. "Between 35 and 40 per cent of leather is discarded during manufacturing because of naturally occurring imperfections" (Solanki, 2018, p13). Therefore, is this really a solution to the avoidance of using synthetic fabrics? This magnitude of waste and current level of pollution presents a real consequence of "threatening the life of your child" (Fashion Reimagined, 2013).

Grappi *et al* (2017) introduces us to a movement by NGO's. An NGO is a "non-profit organisation that operates independently of any government" (Stevenson, 2010). The movement in 2011 that began the change of attitudes and in this case to put pressure on the fashion industry to reduce its use of chemicals and "take responsibility for their actions" (Grappi *et al*, 2017). The campaign was called Greenpeace 2011 Detox campaign with a clear aim of "reducing toxic chemicals in the manufacturing processes and final products of fashion brands, (Grappi *et al*, 2017). "Recent research shows that an increasing number of consumers take the "politics behind the products" (Micheletti, 2003) into account when they make purchase decisions (Grappi *et al*, 2017) recognising the adaptation in consumer response and attitude before investing in purchases. The article continues to address celebrity engagement and endorsement in awareness campaigns (just as before when promoting supermarket designer collections) and highlights customers choosing to boycott certain brands for not paying tax in the UK and deemed unfair practices. There have since been a number of campaigns such as "Cleaning up the Fashion Industry and "Dirty Laundry" which exposed a number of brands for their use of textile manufacturing facilities in China which discharged hazardous chemicals into the water, (Grappi *et al*, 2017).

In my practice I have explored natural dye colouring using mainly vegetables and fruits with some herbs and spices on natural fibres. I have achieved strong bright yellows from turmeric but on the whole I would say the natural non-toxic dyes produce a mild and subtle colour

palette. Where this can be appropriate for many design considerations the constraints are that they cannot deliver a full spectrum of powerful pigment. I have also found that the dyeing process could often leave uneven results across the fabric where a synthetic dye would penetrate a whole fabric piece unapologetically. Synthetic colouring could also achieve subtle and vibrant results and be controlled a lot better when it came to mass producing the same design but washes the chemical toxins down the drain.

The government is now stepping in again as it did during the second world war, to improve industry good practice and place sanctions on businesses that don't conform. The Welsh government are encouraging businesses to have strong sustainable values and actions if they want to access grant funding to support their growth. Not only do they have a dedicated department that now advise on carbon footprint calculation and sustainable best practice they are now introducing financial support to those small businesses that sign up to their sustainable and equality pledges. There are different levels of funding to cater for size and start up stage. Small startup businesses are being asked to commit up to 3 actions to support their sustainable methods to achieve a marketing logo they can then demonstrate on their business promotions to showcase good ethical values. Larger businesses who employ staff are encouraged to get involved to improve their suitability when applying for tenders for contracts (Business Wales, 2024). Local Authorities who have grant funding available as well as sports funding also demand a sustainable practice be in place before committing to investment. These are important considerations for a Designer looking to freelance or start up their own business.



Figure 11. Business Wales Equality Pledge Logo



Figure 12. Business Wales Green Growth Pledge Logo

To reflect what I have learned through this study, my practical work, values influenced by my grandmother at a young age, I often prefer to reuse and repurpose materials where possible. Whereas I have enjoyed and explored digital processed and used synthetic dyes I am still drawn to reusing than creating new fabrics. My grandmother would store fabrics (hoard) and I developed the same habit preferring to reuse than purchase new. I am particularly drawn to embroidered pieces where so much work has gone into this that landfill would be such an insult. There is a fair argument that these hoarded fabrics and garments might be better donated to families who could make use of them than sit in storage for the right time to be utilised. One thing following experiencing loss of family members is knowing that materialistic things cannot be taken with you into the next life. Nevertheless, it is these materialistic objects that hold such sentimental value and meaning to the owner. Maybe it is experiencing that loss that has led to me developing habits of saving objects that I build a sentimental value with. Hence, the value of the designed object is not just its commercial cost or market price but unscalable worth of attached feelings. I suppose these feelings provide part of my identity, of what is important to me and my design consideration. I collect fabrics and layering is a technique I enjoy. I often use layers in my designs with some transparent element that lets the light draw in. Having a piece of work that you can observe for some time and find something new is interesting to me like Ground (Figure 4).

A live practical brief that I was tasked with as part of this degree was in collaboration with HACER Developments and the Urban Foundry in Swansea to design and create a textile product that was appropriate for one of many spaces in the new residential building. The development was heavily designed to focus on sustainable living encompassing part of the existing building, new vegetable patches, greenhouse and an aquaponics system to name a few. Deciding to use the indoor walkthrough where it was exposed to natural light, I chose to use natural fabrics where I could disrupt the surface through a devoree technique that would create a transparency letting the light shine through like a sale. My design, to draw attention

to the beautiful flowers that grow from vegetable plants which I named “The Unsung Heroes” (Figure 13 & 24, Authors own, 2024).



Figure 13. The Unsung Heroes, (Author's Own, 2024)

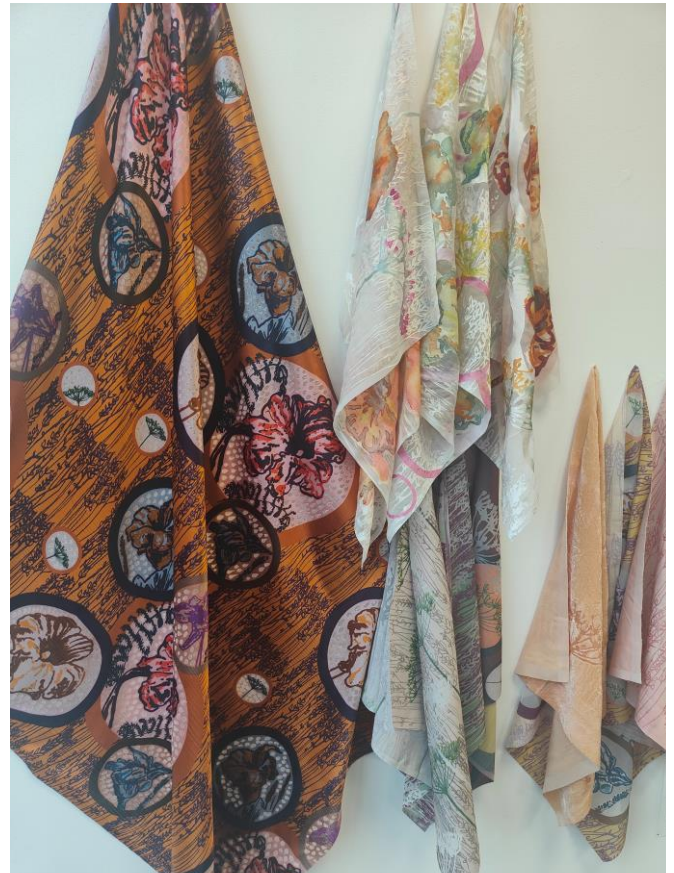


Figure 14. The Unsung Heroes, (Author's Own, 2024)

In previous briefs I have made new lampshades from old bedsheets, bridesmaid dresses and empty glass bottles where I have screen printed my design on the fabric. Understanding the journey of this fabric has created sentimental value but also a new life for the item. I love that it has a history as well as a future. It has been a challenge to completely use sustainable methods as sometimes the results can be limiting.

I agree with Powney in the approach to her craft and design and the “enjoyment of fashion but thinking of the planet at the same time” (Powney 2023). Focussing more on homewares and interiors, I enjoy adapting and reusing items and repurposing. It is up to us as emerging Designers of the future to educate, adopt best practice sustainable methods in our designs to communicate that design value can be achieved without harming the environment. It might be that it is my taught habit to keep things “in case they become handy” is what my grandmother would say and avoids me from contributing to landfill unnecessarily. It is

important to me look after the planet and enjoy what nature so freely gives to us. I don't want my children to be detrimentally affected by my decisions and to do things properly and do them once as taught by my grandmother. The Well-being of future generations Act (Wales) 2015 has made it law to prepare and protect our future generations. "For people, for our planet. For now, and for our future" (Gov.Wales, 2024) concentrates on seven goals to ensure our future generations have the same quality of life as we do now. Being more responsible is one of the key goals to "improve our environment, our economy, our society and our culture" (Gov.Wales 2024). As we move forward more and more into this space, my lessons have been to communicate the waste saving that I have achieved and the sustainable measures I work with to produce beautiful designs sustainably for the client.

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Figures

Figure 1; A Ministry of Information poster entitled 'Go through your Wardrobe' and part of the 'Make do and Mend' campaign, 1929-1945, Catalogue ref: INF 13/144/1. Available at: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/home-front-1939-1945-part-two/make-do-and-mend/#:~:text=The%20'Make%20do%20and%20Mend'%20campaign%20was%20introduced%20by%20the,about%20how%20to%20do%20this.>

Figure 2. Wedding photograph, (Author's own, 1978)

Figure 3. Family wedding photograph, (Author's own, 1978)

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Figure 5. Cover poster for "*The Nettle Dress*", (IMDB, 2023) Available at: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt27374831/> Accessed: 22 April 2024

Figure 6. Oonagh Brown wearing *The Nettle Dress* (2023) The Dark Mountain Project (2024) Available at: <https://dark-mountain.net/the-nettle-dress/> Accessed: 22 April 2024

Figures 7 & 8. Images from the *Breadline* collection (2016), Not Just a Label (2024) Available at: <https://www.notjustalabel.com/collection/roofless/breadline> Accessed: 22 April 2024

Figure 9. Amy Powney, *Fashion Reimagined* (2023) Available at: <https://www.fashionreimaginedfilm.com/> Accessed: 22 April 2024

Figure 10. *Fashion Reimagined* (2023) Available at: <https://www.fashionreimaginedfilm.com/> Accessed: 22 April 2024

Figure 11. Business Wales Equality Pledge Marketing Logo (2024), *Business Wales* (2024) Available at: <https://businesswales.gov.wales/topics-and-guidance/sustainability-and-social-responsibility/equality-pledge> Accessed :24 April 2024

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Figure 13. *The Unsung Heroes*, (Author's Own, 2024)

Figure 14. *The Unsung Heroes*, (Author's Own, 2024)