Earth Day: Fashion and luxury launch initiatives on 50th anniversary

By Godfrey Deeny - 23 April 2020

Fashion and luxury brands worldwide have launched a wide ranging array of sustainable initiatives, timed to coincide with the 50th anniversary. The international day dedicated to environmental reform celebrated its half century on Wednesday, April 22.

From carbon-neutral measures by Versace in Milan and an eco-warrior video poem commissioned by Vivienne Westwood in London; to Banana Republic in the United States introducing new vintage recycling ideas and fresh approaches by Australian swimwear line Horizon Athletic taking place all the way Down Under, fashion houses near and wide are all affirming their support for the ecological movement, doubling their efforts as the current pandemic reinforces fears in the worldwide community of humankind’s mistreatment of our planet.

In London, Stella McCartney – the designer forerunner in sustainability and environmentally sensible fashion – took over Piccadilly Circus with a giant billboard. “For us, Every Day is Earth Day,” read the signage, with a video featuring supermodel Amber Valletta, daubed in blue camouflage paint.

“Certainly, the situation is sad, but there is hope. The ideas of community and compassion struggle against the pandemic, but also work to save the Earth. Nature has given us a second chance, to correct our collective impact, to learn from it and to act. There are fewer cars on the road; fewer planes in the sky; industry is immobile. Carbon emissions levels around the world could see their sharpest decrease since the 1940s. We are already seeing a 58% reduction in daily carbon emissions in the European Union, as well as a 70% reduction in road traffic in the United Kingdom and a 40% reduction in nitrogen dioxide in London,” the designer said in a release.

Capri Holdings, the owners of Versace, Michael Kors and Jimmy Choo, released its first group-wide corporate social responsibility strategy, timed to coincide with Earth Day's half-century long existence.

The group has set itself a 100% carbon-neutral goal for direct operations, and plans to source all of its energy from renewable sources by the end of 2025. Additionally, it set other goals for 2025: all plastic packaging must become fully recyclable, compostable or reusable; sourcing will be at least 95% of all leather from certified tanneries; and it will add traceability to its supply chain.
“We recognize that as our company grows, so do our responsibilities, and welcome the opportunity to do more. We believe that sound environmental and social policies are both ethically correct and fiscally responsible,” said CEO John D. Idol.

British fashion legend Vivienne Westwood’s house released a video in partnership with Canopy, a non-profit group dedicated to protecting forests and wildlife, that features Kai-Isaiah Jamal & Aidan Zamiri.

“Sometimes I put on a plain black T-Shirt, a mixed-blend over my head and forget that in this basic T lay the substances of ancient forests that no longer exist,” laments the poet-activist.

From its beginnings in California, Earth Day is now observed by 192 countries worldwide, making it the largest secular holiday in the worldwide.

Banana Republic, historically a marque founded on selling upcycled surplus product, feted Earth Day with its new campaign: Better Republic. It features eco-friendly products that will be sold online on vintage marketplace Thrilling. An environment-friendly method of supporting local small businesses – of which 95% are owned and operated by women.

In a related move, Banana Republic also reaffirmed its sustainability goals. For instance, it promised to use 100% sustainable cotton and 50% sustainable fibers by 2023, as well as create far more denim via Gap Inc.’s Washwell program, which uses less water and and far more sustainable dye processes.

While Wrangler, “in honor of the 50th anniversary of Earth Day,” announced that it had managed to save 7 billion liters of water in its denim manufacturing processes since 2008, surpassing its own goal of 5.5 billion liters. Rival Lee Jeans also announced plans to power 100 percent of all owned and operated facilities with renewable energy by 2025; and to source 100 percent sustainably-grown or recycled cotton by 2025.

Internationally, younger dynamic brands like Pangaia, Riley Studio and Horizon Athletic sum up our current obsession with creating fashion that manages to be chic yet also sustainable.

Pangaia celebrated the half-century by developing new T-shirts in peppermint seaweed fibers, and puffer jackets filled with FLWRDWN, a cruelty-free alternative to goose feathers, made out of wildflowers.
Riley Studio, by cool Chelsea influencer Riley Uggla, uses recycled materials from ethical partners, all the way to the neck labels, composed on a bio-based plastic alternative that can be placed in a compost bin and broken down within 24 weeks. As for Australian label Horizon Athletic, it has created active and swimwear ranges made of econyl, a recycled fiber made of abandoned fishing nets.

To fete Earth Day, Woolmark even teamed up with artist Timo Helgert to create a series of images of re-wildings in London, New York and Shanghai, with nature taking control again of said cities.
In effect, the impact of Covid-19, as well as our enforced distance from nature, has also served to underline our love of flora, fauna and wildlife. Perhaps Timberland best summed up the mood with a video prose poem, Dear Nature, which poses the question: does nature wonder where we have all gone, why there are no planes in the sky?

“Dear nature, we miss you. Probably more than you miss us. Take this time to breathe, to bloom, and to conquer your space. And, when we are back, we promise to treat you better than we ever did before. Because now that we are distant from you we truly understand how much you really meant to us.”

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