

So Ethic, So Endangered

Written by Veronica Crespi - Thursday, 29 September 2011



Olsen Haus

Aside from the official Fashion Weeks, new collections and brands are presented seasonally at trade shows. In September, Paris was home to major collaborative happenings: Who's Next, Premiere Classe and Prêt-à-Porter Paris (PAPP) as well as others taking place simultaneously at the Porte de Versailles exhibition halls. Nested in the cradle of PAPP was **So Ethic**, an area dedicated to sustainable fashion brands for what it seemed like its last edition.

Following a reorganization of the show's offerings and scheduling, So Ethic is to be scrapped from the program of the new shows which will now be housed under the umbrella of the **Who's Next** brand. From 2012 on, they will be held in January and June, rather than March and September.

If last September's edition was anything to go by, it didn't seem like So Ethic was getting the attention it deserved. Aside from a single-page mention on the official **PPAP** website, the sustainable fashion special area was not strongly advertised as part of the PPAP event.



MYL Prints

The selection of brands, however, were quite diverse. From the intricate digital prints of **MLY**, to the clever multifunctional design of **Elementum**, to the innovative knits and classic tailoring of **Rianne de Witte**. From the biodegradable leather of **KYMM** bags, to the vegan shoes by **Olsen Haus**, to two classic French brands like **Ethos Paris** and **Ideo**.



Elementum

There have been mixed reactions to the news that sustainable fashion brands are no longer to be granted a dedicated space during the major Parisian dates. Some designers are strongly committed to the use of eco fabrics and ethical production but do not choose to promote their labels in specialized 'ethical' shows. They fear they may be bypassed by buyers and press who wouldn't expect to find a sellable and on-trend product where there is an openly-defined sustainable one. It is true, admittedly, that exhibiting at Who's Next, or Premiere Classe for accessories, brings a more recognized status for fashion brands than the ones in other areas of the trade shows. Yet, it is also true that the cost of taking part in the higher-profile events can sometimes make or break a small brand. So Ethic, on the other hand, has the advantage of being approachable. Many of the stands were assigned, during this latest edition, to Dutch or Brazilian brands. These brands came to show in a bid to promote ethical fashion as a collective, having received funding from their countries to do so.

The disappearance of So Ethic would not put an end to the 'ghettoization' of fashion brands, based on the assumption that their sustainability credentials make them less sexy. But it would put an end to an opportunity for sexy fashion brands to be granted a chance to show at major events thanks to their sustainability credentials.

It is the general consensus among sustainable fashion professionals that the ultimate aim for any ethical brand is to be recognized for the quality and design of their product and not essentially for their ethical philosophy. It is also recognized that this is still an aim for the future and that there is still much more to be done for the promotion of a sector of fashion that is not just about mirroring every trend and measuring success on profit alone.



KYMM