

Textilmuseum St.Gallen

Circle of Water. Textiles in Flux 08 November 2024 – 21 April 2025

From 8 November 2024 up to and including 21 April 2025, the Textile Museum St.Gallen is showing the exhibition "Circle of Water. Textiles in Flux". The show provides an insight into the multi-faceted world of swimwear and outdoor fashion from a sustainability perspective.

CIRCLE OF WATER

"You should never take more than you give" – a line from the song "Circle of Life", composed by Elton John for the film "Lion King" is the main theme of the exhibition. Echoing the song lyrics, whose title serves as inspiration for the exhibition, the Textile Museum's new exhibition focuses on the problems and solutions for tackling water pollution and scarcity caused by the textile industry.

Sustainable fashion means producing clothing in an ecologically, socially, culturally and economically fair way. Ecological discussions are often held in relation to global warming and emissions, but water resources are also finite. The global textile industry causes water pollution and water scarcity. Water is polluted during the processing of raw materials and the dyeing of fibres. Microplastics are released from the synthetic fibres during washing and dirty the oceans. Overproduction of textiles leads to landfill in the Global South, which contaminate the groundwater.

While our ancestors sought shelter indoors when it rained, protected themselves with oilskin coats and jumped into the water naked or not at all, today we have outdoor clothes and bathing suits. Paradoxically, the very fashion that protects us from water or enables us to enjoy water is particularly harmful to water. The reason for this are the high functional requirements: Swimwear should be elasticated and not soak up water so that it retains its shape and dries quickly. Outdoor fashion should be waterproof and ideally breathable at the same time.

In recent decades, water-repellent finishes have contained the harmful polyfluorocarbon (PFC). For half a century, the industry has also relied on synthetic fibres because they seem optimal for functional clothing. Their properties may be an advantage for a bikini or a climbing jacket, but unfortunately, they also favour "microfibre shedding". This is when plastic particles are released from synthetic clothing, and thus enter the water cycle and pollute the environment.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

In light of water pollution and water scarcity, it is necessary to break up the structures of the linear economy, which functions according to the “produce – buy – throw away” scheme and to orientate ourselves towards a “grandchildren-friendly” economy. The aim would be a circular economy: in this closed system everything that is produced is used for as long as possible so that it can then be reused and recycled entirely. The aim is to extend the life cycle of clothing and produce textiles from recycled or regenerative materials so that it can be returned to the cycle.

To this end, the Textile Museum is returning to its founding idea as a place of inspiration and exchange between industry, education and society. “Circle of Water” wants to connect all those who are working towards the realisation of a circular textile economy. The exhibition identifies urgent fields of action, offers an insight into sustainable swimwear and outdoor fashion from Swiss labels and presents scientific approaches to what a sustainable textile industry could look like in the future.

Industry: There are numerous endeavours in the Swiss textile industry to offer ecological fashion and become circular. Making fabrics more environmentally friendly is one possibility, but there are also other solutions: from locally produced and pollutant-free manufacturing to biodegradable textiles or recycled polyester to repair and rental services, optimised patterns and sales strategies, there is a broad spectrum of methods to get closer to producing circular fashion. Swimwear by Beldona, Lahco, Round Rivers, Sanikai and Volans, outdoor items by Mammüt, Rotauf, Radys and casual water-friendly fashion by Neumühle, Nikin, Qwstion, Akris and Yannik Zamboni with Maison Blanche will be exhibited as representatives of a positive development.

Education: The Textile Museum has entered a cooperation with the Circular Lab, which is based at the University of St.Gallen, and conducts research in the field of resource-conserving recycling management. The results of their research form the base of the exhibition. The so-called R-strategies (ReCycle, RePurpose, RePair, ReUse, ReDuce, ReThink, ReFuse) are one way to reduce the waste of resources in the future. The swim suits, winter jackets and swimming aids that are on display refer to the R-strategies so that visitors can see the practical application of theoretical approaches and make a connection to their everyday lives.

Society: Sustainability must become the norm so that we do not live at the expense of the planet and beyond our natural resources. Consumers must also contribute to this. As British fashion designer Vivienne Westwood summarised: “Buy less, choose well, make it last”. Or in reference to the “Circle of Life”: You should never take more than you give. With the help of a survey developed by the Zurich University of Applied Sciences that is also a partner of the Circular Lab, visitors can check the extent to which their consumption behaviour is circular.

A show on sustainable fashion requires new approaches in terms of scenography. In collaboration with the Langenthal-based textile and curtain manufacturer CRÉATION BAUMANN, that gives fabrics that

are no longer for sale a new use, a resource-saving exhibition setting was created. The textile workshop of the Kompass Arbeitsintegration association in Bischofszell hemmed fabrics, while. Off Cut St.Gallen supplied selected materials and accessories.

WATER CYCLE

The water cycle spans the globe. Water from the global south will sooner or later end up in our freshwater reserves - and vice versa. This abstract interdependency is emphasised by three artistic positions.

The exhibition begins with "End of Poetry" by Herbert Weber, a St.Gallen-based artist, and his views of the sea, which evaporate into drops, drift across the seas as clouds and eventually flow into the Sitter. The sea is a place of longing; it radiates tranquillity, sublimity and beauty. At the same time, the sea is polluted; the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch" is three times the size of France. In his video and photo installation, Herbert Weber impressively shows how the drop of water in its various forms brings the world together as the carrier of a story.

In her textile installation "Glitter and Tears", which adorns the stairwell and the first floor, German artist Miriam Ferstl takes a photographic look at flowing water. On the way from her home in the Bavarian Forest to St.Gallen, she photographed water through hand-blown glass objects modelled on water droplets and formed water creatures from them. The work demonstrates the quality and beauty of the natural element and the essence of the exhibition: the flowing, changing and ever-evolving nature of water.

The work of Claudia Vogel, a Swiss artist from Lucerne, hangs at the centre of the exhibition. Like a drop that falls into the water and spreads out concentrically, Petrichor's rain scent expands in the room. "Stilla odorata" springs from an inexhaustible source, showing us the infinity of ideas.

TEXTILES IN FLUX

Similar to the spreading drop that draws its circles, the exhibition aims to initiate a thought process and to encourage action. This requires everyone to work together: The textile industry needs to invest into clean technologies and fashion companies must develop new business models. As consumers, we have to rethink our awareness and our purchasing behaviour.

Visitors of "Circle of Water" experience the world of water with all their senses and are invited to engage with pressing questions about sustainability.

Duration: 08 November 2024 - 21 April 2025

Location: Textile Museum St.Gallen, Vadianstrasse 2,
9000 St.Gallen, Switzerland

Curation: Juliane Christine Sauer

Scenography: Atelier Herzog, Solothurn

Lighting design: Matí Lichtgestaltung

Scientific co-operation: Dr. Fabian Takacs & Anna Sophia Burch,
University of St.Gallen
Prof. Dr. Pia Furchheim,
Zurich University of Applied Sciences

Scenographic co-operation: Création Baumann, Langenthal

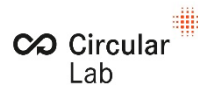
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