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October 24, 2018

Fashion + Design

Future

Manufacturing

Master Craft Can Go The Way of the Dodo If We're Not Careful

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Have many [heritage traditions](#) become contemporary takes on luxury? If luxury is preserving the history of us as humans through fashion then yes.

[Patagonia Founder Yvon Chouinard](#) once said, “the solution for a lot of the world’s problems may be to turn around and take a forward step.”

He’s right.

In our global quest for modernization, efficiency and productivity, we have often looked to the future for our answers, forgetting the value of the lessons of the past. But while we may be experiencing a resurgence in all of these things, there’s a pressing question: who is taking advantage of them and why is it important to pass on the tradition of making?

Fendi recently made a big push to address the Italian national youth unemployment crisis by luring a new generation of teens into becoming traditional artisans.

In a New York Times article “Teenagers, Forget Engineering. Your Future Is Craft,” a report by Altagamma, the Italian luxury goods association, “estimated that some 50,000 people working in the luxury goods industry in Italy are close to retirement and that it will be a struggle to find qualified personnel to fill those jobs. The problem is, recent generations of Italian youth have increasingly shied away from traditional handwork, opting instead for seemingly more contemporary sectors like engineering, and cooking.”

If Italy or any country’s luxury goods sector wants to continue to prosper, the supply of highly skilled craftspeople to satisfy demand won’t be enough. Consider these valuable trades a growing extinction kin to the route of the Passenger Pigeon or the Dodo. Once the knowledge is gone, all we have are books, images and maybe some flimsy YouTube videos to support master work that dates back to our humble beginnings.

Hardly the legacy we want master craft and [artisanship](#) to go.

In the above mentioned *New York Times* article, author Elisabetta Povoledo writes, “One unseasonably warm recent October morning, a steady stream of Roman high school students clad in the uniform of teenagers around the world – T-shirts over leggings or jeans – moseyed through the ground floor of the grand Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, the onetime monument to Mussolini’s dreams and now the Fendi headquarters. They were there for an accelerated lesson in the newfangled employment potential of old-fashioned craftsmanship. Moving from workstation to workstation, the teenagers watched as Fendi artisans painstakingly made leather bags, shoes, couture gowns, furs, furniture and watches.

“It’s a gap that is our responsibility to fill, and I feel it very strongly,” Fendi CEO Serge Brunschwig says.

Carmen Malvar is a Ph.D candidate and the founder of [CADA project](#). Her experience comes from working with many European global brands designing

and consulting for them. Since her early years after graduating from Architecture at Pratt Institute, she worked as designer on many large scale projects. Her vision on the global design is broad and conscious.

Carmen, a [BF+DA Research Fellow](#), pushes her research initiative CADA to promote design and local craftsmanship on a global level, while working hand in hand with artisans in Oaxaca, Mexico. The project uses design and crafts from a local perspective to achieve global impact, implementing the use of technology and social media as an essential part of research development.



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We caught up with Carmen to see what she thinks about the future of craft and new models that she can see working to uphold the textile history of us.

“In a voracious capitalist economy where consumerism has set the standards of well being, it is necessary to revindicate a reflection within our processes and us. In the tradition of making and without the need to be associated with the

past, the process is a transformative one in itself, it adds another layer of time, another way of measuring, allowing reflection and dialogue within ourselves and with the world surrounding us.

We are leaving behind to the new generations, societies based on immediacy with no meaning for memory. It should be essential to foster critical and analytical visions so new generations can assume roles and leadership.

Through making, individual attributes and agencies can be promoted, communities can be strengthened, and changes can be proposed based on mutual compromise and correspondence. I believe this process opens new research venues and a new generation of correspondences and exchanges that will also expand to market opportunities. The presence of elaborate processes in an artisanal way not only reminds us of where we come from but towards where we could go. It has the potential for transformation from social to economical levels, eliciting cooperation and enhancing democratic values while triggering the artisan's communities and their creative contribution to our society."

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