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FRIEND OR FAUX

ON THE CATWALKS THIS SEASON THERE WAS AN ABUNDANCE OF ANIMAL SKIN REFERENCING FUR COATS, REAL OR FAUX, STOLES, TRIMMINGS AND ACCESSORIES. THE SPRING AND PRE-FALL COLLECTIONS WERE RIDDLED WITH IT. **ALEXANDRA KOHUT-COLE** SAYS FUR IS FASHIONABLE AGAIN AND — WHETHER YOU’RE PRO OR ANTI — IT IS A TREND THAT INCITES FIERCE DEBATE.



US SINGER AND ACTRESS JENNIFER LOPEZ ARRIVES FOR THE FILM PREMIERE OF HER MOVIE "MAID IN MANHATTAN" AT THE ODEON CINEMA IN LEICESTER SQUARE CENTRAL LONDON 26 FEBRUARY 2003.



A MODEL DISPLAYS A CREATION AS PART OF MAX MARA SPRING-SUMMER 2013 COLLECTION ON SEPTEMBER 20, 2012 DURING THE WOMEN'S FASHION WEEK IN MILAN.



A MODEL PRESENTS A CREATION BY MIU MIU DURING THE SPRING/SUMMER 2013 READY-TO-WEAR COLLECTION SHOW ON OCTOBER 3, 2012 IN PARIS.



A PROTESTOR DISPLAYS A BANNER DURING AN ANTI-FUR PROTEST BY MEMBERS OF PEOPLE FOR ETHICAL TREATMENT OF ANIMALS (PETA) DURING A DISPLAY OF FASHION BY HONG KONG DESIGNER EMILY CHEONG AT THE "INTERNATIONAL FASHION DESIGNERS SHOW" IN HONG KONG, IN JANUARY 2007.

Proving

that animal skin use in fashion is alive and kicking, this season, the collections offered plenty of fur and animal print. MaxMara featured animal print shoes, sunglasses and bags; Miu Miu accessorised exquisitely cut duchess satin-lined denim with huge tie-died fur stoles slung over the shoulder. Prada sent out a massive white fur coat adorned with statement Courreges daisies; Saint Laurent paid tribute to the animal prints of Yves - and Phoebe Philo got everyone talking with her statement acid bright fur slippers, stilettos and humorously flat Birkenstock-style sandals lined with, you guessed it, mink, for Celine. Then there are the brands for which fur is their stock in trade, the statement furs of multinational luxury couture fur brand Dennis Basso, for example. And furrier since 1723, Revillon, who sent out puffa coats lined with Mongolian lamb and pure white fox fur jackets under the artistic direction of Andrew Heather, having freshly joined the brand from Givenchy. The furrier is doing so well that it will open a store on Paris' Avenue Montaigne soon.

No-animal policy

While plenty of designers worship at the altar of fur and skins, many swear off animals all together. Stella McCartney, perhaps the most famous fashion animal rights activist and PETA spokesperson, has always committed herself to a no-animal policy in her designs, "I totally disagree with any electrocuted animals on people's backs," she said backstage in 2007. OlsenHaus Pure Vegan design group promotes 100%cruelty-free alternative fashion materials and UK-based People Tree, recently created the animal-friendly "Youth Collection" endorsed by actress Emma Watson.

There is no getting away from the fact that the fur debate is an emotive one. Could the rise of the love of fur be down to celebrities seen wearing it? Hugely influential in the style stakes Jennifer Lopez, Beyonce, Madonna, have all been spotted sporting fur, as have fashion A-list Carine Roitfeld and Anna Wintour. Yet in the celebrity anti-fur camp, prominent anti-skin activist, former French actress Brigitte Bardot runs the Brigitte Bardot Foundation for the Welfare and Protection of Animals; supermodel Christy Turlington is active in the PETA anti-fur campaign; Victoria Beckham has advocated against the use of fur in fashion.

And who could forget the shockingly graphic 1984 Lynx poster shot by David Bailey, of a catwalk model trailing a blood-drenched fur coat with the slogan "It takes up to 40 dumb animals to make a fur coat but only one to wear it." Lynx co-founder, Lynne Kentish, said "We tried to professionalise the animal rights movement. It was all a bit shabby up to then. No-one was putting professional-looking campaign stuff out." Linda McCartney consequently shot its "rich bitch; poor bitch" poster, depicting a fur-clad model alongside a dead fox.

This chasm between anti and pro continues to create a colossal media commotion. Not least this January when Karl Lagerfeld said in a BBC Radio 4 interview, "In a meat-eating world, wearing leather for shoes and clothes and even handbags, the discussion of fur is childish." In response, PETA described Lagerfeld as "a fashion dinosaur who is as out of step as his furs are out of style."

The PETA campaign style can be graphic, personal and no holds barred. It operates a name and shame hall of fame. The actress-designer Olsen twins have been inducted into this; "since fur adds 20 years and 20 pounds, maybe Mary-Kate and Ashley think their matronly wardrobe will deflect the gossip about bulimia," It says. Model and actress Elizabeth Hurley has been similarly honoured; "instead of flaunting the remains of animals, this faded siren might focus on the remains of her career."

But the lines are often blurred. Some have no problem with leather but are staunchly against fur. Others change allegiance to the cause on a whim. In 1997, supermodels Naomi Campbell and Cindy Crawford featured in the famous PETA campaign of the tag line, "I'd rather go naked than wear fur", only for them to do a volte-face by signing up to model Blackglama minks in 2004 and 2007 respectively.

Fashion wars

The pro-fur lobby promotes real fur as ecologically sustainable and biodegradable. The International Fur Trade Federation (IFTF) states that "sales are at an all-time high. In 2010, sales were over QR50 billion (\$14 billion) worldwide, up 70% from 2000." The British Fur Trade Association (BFTA), member of IFTF, informs us "in the UK, there has been a significant growth in fur sales over the same period and UK sales this year have increased by over 40% compared to the previous year."

Citing real over fake fur as the environment friendly option, the BFTA states "real fur is a natural sustainable product, delivering rare benefits in sustaining fragile habitats and communities. This contrasts with most

'fake' fur which is manufactured from non-renewable petroleum based products." The message is that real fur is a durable material - quite the opposite of disposable fashion. The association found fake fur was responsible for 50%of toxic nitrous oxide emissions and that "it takes a gallon of oil to produce three fake fur coats."

Back on the catwalk, Russian haute couturier Ulyenka Sergeenka's military inspired great coats were offset with crazy fur helmet-style hats. And pre-fall 2013 animal power was even more prevalent with Tracy Reese's leopard and python, Alberta Ferretti's fox fur shrugs and Giambattista Valli deciding to go the whole hog by showing one animal look head-to-toe.

Although Lynx was sued and bankrupted in the 90s, anti-fur movements are thriving - and fur sales are booming. Fur is still a symbol of unimagined luxury, a statement maker. The fur trade will have us believe that the use of fur in fashion is a natural, bio-degradable alternative to faux; while the anti-fur lobby would turn our backs on the real thing to make us believe that all fur farms are unethical. No longer a necessity for human survival, animal skin is totally divisive. Is vintage the only viable option?

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