

[Intro]

NATURE'S CLOTHESLINE

A clothesline is at once extremely private, and unavoidably public. Textiles reflect our similarities and differences as people. A clothesline was once a uniting theme of home life. It held the common yet personal items that touched each family member: blankets, sheets, shirts, pants, baby clothes, socks, and even the most intimate garments. Hanging the wash kept people in contact with each item of clothing and its value. Our connection to the clothes we wear has faded.

The world is airing its dirty laundry, not on a clothesline, but in the landfills and oceans. We can no longer go along ignoring the repercussions of fast fashion and mass production. Textiles that were once a precious handmade item are now a mass-produced disposable commodity. How people use and discard textiles matters to the world we live in. Our clothing choices have real consequences to the health of the planet. From hand made to machine trade, and cotton to couture, today most textiles are abundant and transient.

Nature's Clothesline unites a group of textile artists to share ideas of sustainability along a symbolic clothesline. Nature's Clothesline invites us to...

Re-think, Re-create, Respond, Recycle and Rejoice

RETHINK

In a world of excess, innovation comes from designing new solutions, and from revising old ideas. Rethinking how we produce and consume is essential to reduce the rise in textile waste. In just 20 years global textile waste has doubled.

The clothing industry is the second largest polluter in the world, second only to oil. Textile manufacturing burdens the environment with vast energy needs, water use, significant greenhouse gas emissions, and water pollution.

There is no single magic solution to textile waste, but mindfulness is one powerful tool. We can ask ourselves, who made this, where did it come from, what is it made of?

For thousands of years many local plants such as cedar, milkweed, stinging nettle, and dog bane have been used to make textiles. Early settlers across British Columbia routinely grew a small patch of flax that could be woven into linen to make bedsheets and undergarments. Today, Vancouver artists Sharon Kallis and Amy Walker have reclaimed many of these local materials and are teaching others how to use them. In Stanley Park, invasive English Ivy was harvested and stitch-knit into nets used for landscape restoration. Such creative ideas helped instigate EarthHand Gleaners Society. This community-engaged group models how to be a producer without first being a consumer.

If you love fashion you can still “rethink” how to consume the latest trends. Dozens of fashion companies have entered the sharing economy to offer rentable fashion. Rental services like *Rent the Runway* and *Le Tote* allow consumers to constantly update their wardrobes.

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RECREATE

There are many names for it: upcycling, redesigned fashion, refashioned fashion, repurposed clothing, or recreation. Whatever you choose to call it, this fashion genre is creeping into the mainstream.

In many ways the “make do and mend’ idea has been around for decades. During the Second World War people carefully mended and repurposed hand-me-down clothing and linens. Today wardrobe refashioning has made a comeback because of a renewed consciousness that people are buying and discarding clothing much too quickly.

There are dozens of online resources and DIY books on redesigning clothing. American clothing company *Anthropologie* has hosted a series of “reinvention workshops” teaching customers how to refashion blouses, rework cardigan sweaters, and revamp gloves, hats and scarves. Vancouver artist Sola Fiedler has been upcycling for many years. Her artworks remind us that clothing can also be upcycled as art. Sola’s landscape tapestries are woven from hundreds of unraveled thrift store sweaters.

Fix-it Collectives have emerged all over the world to share textile renovation skills. These groups help fix broken items, reduce consumption, and build community. One such non-profit organization in Metro Vancouver is *Frameworq*. The group has been working since 2015 to overturn a throwaway culture, bring back repair skills, build resilient communities, and divert textile waste from the landfill. *Frameworq* facilitates clothing swaps and free clothing “fix-it” events.

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RESPOND

Artists provide their communities with joy, interaction, and inspiration. They also give thoughtful critique to political, economic, and social systems. Artists are aware of their surroundings and are constantly engaged with the external. Textile artists are no different than other artists in their need to make sense of the world they see around them. Their perspectives and unique medium of creation offers new ways to envision environmental challenges.

There is a powerful contrast between the soft approachable medium of textile, and the stark woven images of global disaster. Barbara Heller's tapestries take on a photojournalistic quality. Her close-up image of a bird's bones amid beach plastic in the tapestry *Detritus*, is a clear reminder of the consequences of human impact. Likewise, Ruth Scheuing's Jacquard woven satellite images, sweep across the globe and allow us to witness natural events and weather disasters. These images remind us that we are all witnesses to a changing world.

From COVID-19 face masks, to ceremonial shawls, textile makers respond to the world. Their depictions and explorations remind us of the fragility of our planet.

The world is airing its dirty laundry, not on a clothesline, but in the landfills and oceans. Art offers an emotionally compelling stimulus to inspire others to witness and to react.

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RECYCLE

Canadians send more than 12 million tonnes of clothing and textiles to the landfill every year, 95% of which could have been reused or recycled. Metro Vancouver residents collectively throw out an average of 20 million kilograms of textiles each year.

One of consumers' biggest misconceptions is that only gently used clothes can be donated. Any textile item, even if it is worn, torn, or stained, can be recycled. You can even recycle a single shoe! Items simply need to be clean and dry.

Globally, textile recyclers reuse and recycle 250 billion kilograms of textiles each year. Surrey's *Trans-Continental Textiles* recycles up to 27,000 kilograms of textiles a day. Useable clothing is shipped to developing countries to be resold or turned into wiping cloths. Wool is processed back into fibers and remade into thread to make new textiles. The company can recycle 99% of the items it receives.

Some day textiles may be collected with other household recyclables. In Vancouver, a non-profit start-up called *Revivify* has introduced this idea to high-rise buildings. *Revivify* works with strata councils, property management companies, and property developers to provide a textile recycling program that allows residents to easily recycle clothing, linen, and shoes without leaving the building.

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REJOICE!

In material or imagery, textile works are often closely connected to nature and to the earth. Being perishable themselves, textiles remind us of the preciousness of all things natural. This tactile art form often requires processing and preparation before the creation of a piece can even begin. It is a mindful practice that requires patience.

Peace Arch Weavers and Spinners Guild make a variety of textiles. Each item starts with fibre, yarn, or other raw materials. Crafted items move through the makers hands to become beautiful garments, accessories, and household items.

Textile art that depicts nature celebrates the world we are trying to protect. From natural materials to natural scenes, textile works invite us to revel and rejoice in nature. Textile artists demonstrate that individual engagement in the world matters.

From mountain landscapes, to spun dog hair, textiles offer a place where the familiar is made welcome. Most of all, fibre arts remind us to celebrate the maker!

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