



## The Sustainability Scene



# 'The Root' Podcast Launches Ahead of NYFW

The five-part series aims to decolonize the sustainable fashion agenda. BY KALEY ROSHITSH

"The Root" podcast is decolonizing the sustainable fashion agenda, one listener at a time.

With New York Fashion Week officially kicking off this weekend, the show aims to equitably spotlight "the voices, knowledge and labor of Black and Brown Indigenous People of Color," in a moment when fashion once again is occupying the cultural spotlight.

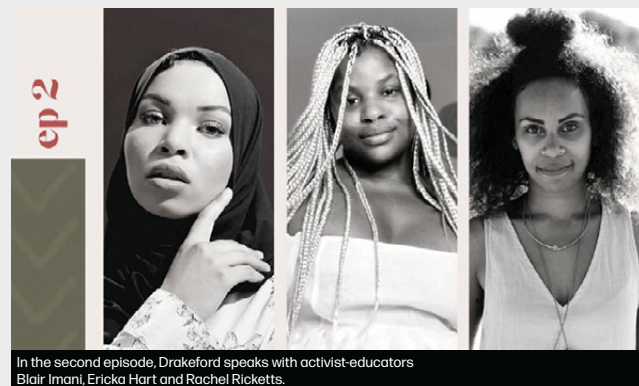
The five-part series is co-produced by Dominique Drakeford, founder of Melanin and Sustainable Style blog and cofounder of Sustainable Brooklyn, and Kestrel Jenkins, host of Conscious Chatter, an audio platform centered on clothing and inclusivity.

Drakeford describes the podcast as "not your typical toxic sustainability

conversation," going further to explain that: "This project is called 'The Root' because for the first time we're not only getting to the root of the fashion system but un-earthing how the so-called sustainable fashion movement has been a poisonous derivative of that [white patriarchal] infrastructure."

As host of the series, Drakeford will unpack the interconnections of race relations and cultural context within the fashion industry with over a dozen BIPOC experts and thought leaders like Blair Imani, Rachel Ricketts, Ericka Hart, Remake founder Ayesha Barenblat and Miko Underwood, founder of Harlem's first sustainable denim brand Oak & Acorn, among many others.

The racial reckoning Drakeford alludes



In the second episode, Drakeford speaks with activist-educators Blair Imani, Ericka Hart and Rachel Ricketts.

to is needfully proliferating across sustainability spaces, marked by the recent emergence of platforms like Intersectional Environmentalist, founded by activist Leah Thomas, of which upcoming "The Root" guest Aditi Mayer is also a council member.

Conscious Chatter's Jenkins echoed Drakeford: "The sustainable fashion conversation is notorious for being dominated by white women, who have stolen the philosophies of indigenous thought and action, repackaged them for white consumption, and left out the voices of BIPOC – and I am part of this problem," adding how with her platform she is dedicated to passing the mic to such leaders.

The first episode, "Racism as a System," which aired last week, featured guests Nikki Sanchez and Lisa Betty, both

scholars and academic activists, who spoke on the importance of dismantling colonial systems and reclaiming the fullness of Native American and Afro-Indigenous history, at large.

Upcoming episodes will explore privilege, racism within fashion and the future of fashion, including a "framework for solutions within the movement," as Drakeford said.

Corporate partners of the series include Fibershed, Levi's, Nisolo, Mate and Red Carpet Green Dress, which allows compensation for guests and musical performer Mel Chanté, who wrote and performed the music for the episodes.

Episodes are available on Conscious Chatter, Spotify and iTunes.

## FASHION

# In Berlin, Fashion Designers Are Aligning With the Art World

● The trade fairs that formed the backbone of Berlin's biannual fashion week will migrate to Frankfurt next year. The brands left behind are looking to the city's art scene for inspiration.

BY CATHRIN SCHAER

Wednesday marks the start of Berlin's Art Week, an event that usually draws around 120,000 visitors to private galleries, public institutions and art fairs around the city. This year, despite restrictions around COVID-19, local fashion designers are joining in, too.

For the first time, 20 Berlin-based designers will take part in the Positions art fair, starting Thursday, which boasts 130 exhibitors and last year attracted an estimated 10,000 visitors. Participating art galleries curate their own booths inside the city's defunct airport, Tempelhof, and this year the local designers will mount a display called Fashion Positions.

"The designers take 20 very different positions in fashion, but all have an atelier in Berlin," one of the project's initiators, Mira von der Osten, who also has her own label, Cruba, told WWD. "Some will collaborate with artists or galleries, others will have their own space to display their

works." The whole event will also be accessible online.

"We want the same things from this that the galleries want," von der Osten explained. "The designers want to sell their work and raise their profiles."

Several of the labels involved, including Michael Sontag and Lou de Bètoly, have previously shown at Berlin's biannual fashion week. Earlier this year, it was announced that a key element of the event – the seasonal trade fairs – would depart for Frankfurt in 2021. There was some doubt about whether Berlin Fashion Week could continue without them.

Yet this art fair collaboration does not replace that event, von der Osten insisted: "That was B2B, this is very much a B2C event. But I do think there was a shift away from how fashion week was happening here anyway. Berlin Fashion Week had been running on empty for a while now. This is more of a collective designer effort," she said.

"By designers, for designers," added co-initiator Olaf Brachmann of the Berlin-based label Brachmann. "Putting up tents in front of Brandenburger Tor always felt like a bit of a knock-off anyway," he noted, referring to some of the first fashion weeks in the city.

Now that the more commercial trade fairs are leaving for Frankfurt,

independent designers in Berlin have more freedom to arrange things the way they want them. And that includes collaborating with the German capital's vibrant art scene.

"There was scepticism from the art world at the beginning," Johann König, founder of König Gallery, which also has premises in London and Tokyo, said when asked whether "serious" artists were offended by fashion's incursion. "But today this kind of cross-genre collaboration is more and more common. Looking at what Louis Vuitton did [with their art world collaborations], that had real impact on artists' global reach."

For several years now, König's gallery has been producing König Souvenir, a range of clever products, including clothing, that sees well-known artists such as Elmgreen & Dragset, Isa Genzken and Monica Bonvicini leave their mark on T-shirts, scarves, yoga mats, face masks and other items. During Fashion Positions, König will exhibit a new work by photographer Juergen Teller, as well as those products.

"Berlin is known for its interdisciplinary connections between creative disciplines. The city lives from its local creative activities," Ramona Pop, Berlin's senator for economics, energy and public enterprises, told WWD.

Pop has been a staunch supporter of Fashion Positions, and while the designers are paying a fee to participate, the city's government has also provided financial support with a budget of "five figures," Pop said. This included hiring the space and providing media support. "Many Berlin-based fashion labels like Esther Perbandt or Dawid Tomaszewski have loved to play with various creative genres for years. Cross-genre collaboration is part of Berlin's DNA. This is our big advantage," she argued.

Another example of cross-genre collaboration during the week is Studio Berlin, which, Pop said, "arose from an art collector's request for cooperation with one of the city's most famous music clubs, Berghain."

According to organizer von der Osten, there are also other compelling reasons as to why fashion should get closer to art.

"This is also about designers trying to solve the structural problems that the fashion industry currently faces," she said. "We feel a new approach is needed, something that makes fashion valuable again. If you approach clothing the way you approach a painting, where you look at the detailing, you find out who made it and where it comes from and the story behind it, and you view it as something that goes beyond seasons – that is our approach."

"There is a structural change in fashion and that's directly reflected in our [potential] customer base," Brachmann agreed. "This will be an experiment, but we hope that an art-interested crowd are the same clientele who will be interested in independent and sustainable design."