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London street stitchers take on 'fast fashion'

Lined up on stools outside a well-known clothes store in south London, around 20 needle-wielding stitchers took the fight against "fast fashion" to the streets, showing shoppers how to revive shabby garments. Their message is "stitch not ditch" to repair clothes rather than throw them away and buy more, despite the temptations offered by low-cost fashion. The roaming street tailors on Wednesday set up camp in the London suburb of Bromley, in the shadow of a Primark shop, a symbol of "fast fashion" increasingly criticised for its impact on the environment.

Their slogan is displayed on the back of their stools and folding chairs, often stitched in brightly coloured threads. Organiser Suzi Warren wants to raise awareness of alternatives to the constant purchase of cheap, easily discarded clothes. "It's not to say don't buy it, it's to

say, if you do buy it, try and enter into some kind of contract to keep it as long as you can," she told AFP. "We cannot keep producing clothes at this pace," she added. Warren, who runs an online shop selling clothes with humorous designs, launched the street stitching movement this year after hearing about the damage of "fast fashion" and her Instagram page has developed a loyal fanbase.

'Meditative' past-time

Among the stitchers on Wednesday, Madeleine Tanato was hard at work mending a dress. "In recent years I've realized that fast fashion is having a really bad impact on the environment," she said. As intrigued passers-by stopped to ask questions, the needleworkers hoped to show that mending was a source of pleasure. "Mending is very meditative and a healthy thing for mental health," said



Warren. "It's easy, cheap, all you need is a needle and a thread." Passers-by were invited to join in by scanning a QR code giving them access to online tutorials.

The event was one of many held simultaneously in cities in Britain and across the world to mark the UK's Sustainable Fashion Week, held before

London Fashion Week on Friday. Low-cost fashion retailers are regularly criticized for generating waste and pollution and for the poor pay and working conditions of their staff. The sector's image was further tarnished by the collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory in Dhaka in April 2013, which killed more than 1,100. It was also hit by reports that some brands use cotton produced by the forced labour of Uyghur Muslims in China.

In the face of criticism, Primark promised on Wednesday to make all clothing from recycled materials or more sustainable sources by 2030 and to halve carbon emissions. Asos, another British brand, on Thursday committed to more sustainable manufacturing and carbon neutrality by 2030. — AFP



Models present creations from British designer Mark Fast during a catwalk show for the Spring/Summer 2022 collection on the first day of London Fashion Week in London. — AFP photos

BACK ON THE CATWALK: LIVE SHOWS RETURN AT LONDON FASHION WEEK

Catwalk shows resumed at London Fashion Week on Friday, after previous editions of the landmark industry event were forced online by the coronavirus pandemic. The sight of models and audiences together again was a welcome sight for a country hoping to bounce back after lifting most restrictions in July. A total of 28 shows are planned over five days, featuring 131 brands, including those from well-established designers such as Britain's Edward Crutchley and Serbia's Roksanda. Irish designer Simone Rocha's brand is celebrating its 10th anniversary. But there are two notable absentees: former Spice Girl turned fashion designer Victoria Beckham, and the luxury brand Burberry.

The designer Saul Nash, 28, opened proceedings on Friday morning with a sportswear collection exploring his adolescence in Hackney, northeast London. Nash, who is also a dancer and choreographer, made freedom of movement at the centre of his fluid creations, with removable hoods and sleeves. He revisited the staple of the British school uniform—the short-sleeved shirt-in breathable fabric with a zip for a chic, casual look. On a tracksuit he used a distorted print of a

childhood transport map. In a different style, British designer Edward Crutchley's puffy dresses in aniseed green or floral prints showcased a touch of glamour in shimmering luxury fabrics.

Emerging talent

In February, London Fashion Week-one of the big four international fashion weeks alongside Paris, New York and Milan—was held entirely online, as the country was deep into a mid-winter virus lockdown. The London Fashion Council said the September shows "mark the long-awaited cultural reopening of London and brings back the global fashion industry to the UK". Some designers this time round are preferring to present their latest creations by appointment only, or via videos on the London Fashion Week platform.

US designer Michael Halpern unveiled a flamboyant collection of sequinned, feathered and draped gowns in a short film shot at the Royal Opera House, modeled by dancers who will be back before audiences next month after a break of over a year. Canadian knitwear designer Mark Fast, who has been expanding in Asia, took over a car park in the bohemian district of Soho for a show featuring inter-



locked chains and pastel shades. Among the emerging talents this year is London-based Albanian designer Nensi Dojaka, 27, who was presenting her debut show on Friday. Like Fast, Dojaka studied at the prestigious Central Saint Martins fashion school in London, and she won the LVMH 2021 prize for young talent last week. Her black babydoll dresses with graphic details won over the jury.

Bounce back

Following on from New York and preceding Milan, London Fashion Week is dedicated to spring-summer 2022 collections and is intended to be "gender neutral". The British fashion industry, which employed around 890,000 people in 2019, is hoping to bounce back after suffering a slump during the global health crisis. According to data from Oxford Economics for the Creative Industries Federation and Creative England, the sector could recover faster than the UK economy as a whole.

It estimated growth of more than 25 percent by 2025, which would contribute some £132.1 billion (\$180 billion, 153 billion euros) to the UK economy—over £28 billion more than in 2020. In July, Burberry announced that its first-quarter sales had returned to pre-pandemic levels. However, sales in Europe continued to suffer from the lack of tourists. Last week, the London-based French designer Roland Mouret told the Financial Times it could take his brand five years to fully recover from the impact of the pandemic. — AFP

Surprise may be key to 'Mozart effect' on epilepsy

A Mozart sonata that can calm epileptic brain activity may get its therapeutic power thanks to melodies that create a sense of surprise, according to a study published Thursday. The research on 16 patients hospitalized with epilepsy that did not respond to medication has bolstered hopes that music could be used for new non-invasive treatments. "Our ultimate dream is to define an 'anti-epileptic' music genre and use music to improve the lives of those with epilepsy," said Robert Quon of Dartmouth College who co-authored the study published in Scientific reports.



Mozart's Sonata for Two Pianos in D Major K448 is known for its effects on cognition and other brain activity, but researchers are still seeking to understand why. In this study, scientists played the piece for patients equipped with brain implant sensors to monitor the occurrence of IEDs—brief but harmful brain events suffered by epileptics between seizures. They found IEDs decreased after 30 seconds of listening, with significant effects in parts of the brain associated with emotion. When they compared the response to the structure of the work, they found the effects increased during transitions between longer musical phrases—ones that lasted ten seconds or more. Quon says the findings suggest that longer phrases may create a sense of anticipation—and then answer it in an unexpected way "creating a positive emotional response". —AFP

US firefighters optimistic over world's biggest tree

Firefighters battling to protect the world's biggest tree from wildfires ravaging the parched United States said Friday they are optimistic it can be saved. Flames are creeping closer to the majestic General Sherman and other giant sequoias, as man-made climate change worsens California's fearsome fire season. "We have hundreds of firefighters there giving it their all, giving extra care," Mark Garrett, communications officer for the region's fire department, told AFP, of the operation in Sequoia National Park. Crews

are battling the spreading Paradise and Colony fires, which have so far consumed 4,600 hectares (11,400 acres) of forest since they were sparked by lightning a week ago.

The blazes are threatening Giant Forest, a grove of around 2,000 sequoias that includes five of the largest trees on the planet—some up to 3,000 years old. The biggest of them all, the General Sherman stands 83 meters (275 feet) tall. On Thursday, General Sherman was wrapped in fire-proof blankets—aluminum foil intended to protect its giant trunk from the worst of the flames. By Friday, managers felt they had the upper hand, thanks in part to clearing of undergrowth and controlled burns that starve the fire of fuel. "I think the most challenging part is the terrain here," said Garrett. But "we haven't seen explosive fire behavior; it really

slowed down and gave us a chance to get ahead of it."

Around 600 personnel are involved in the fight. "We have folks up in the Giant Forest protecting structures and preparing everything. The fact is that they've been prescribed burning for the past 25 or 30 years so it is really prepared." Millions of acres of California's forests have burned in this year's ferocious fire season. Scientists say global warming, stoked by the unchecked use of fossil fuels is making the area ever-more vulnerable to bigger and more destructive wildfires. The enormous trees of the Giant Forest are a huge tourist draw, with visitors traveling from all over the world to marvel at their imposing height and extraordinary girth. —AFP



Firefighters pose with the historic General Sherman Tree, estimated to be around 2,300 to 2,700 years old, after wrapping it with structural wrap in the Sequoia National Park near Three Rivers California.



Wildland firefighters apply structure wrap to giant sequoias on the KNP Complex fire in the Sequoia National Park, California. — AFP photos



A man gives explanations in front of a newly discovered work by Vincent van Gogh "Study for 'Worm out'" from 1882, displayed at the Van Gogh Museum's in Amsterdam. — AFP

Unseen Van Gogh drawing of old man goes on display

A never-before-seen Vincent van Gogh drawing of an exhausted old man went on display at an Amsterdam museum on Thursday for the first time. "Study for 'Worm Out'", which van Gogh drew early in his career in 1882, has been hidden away in a Dutch family's private collection for more than a century. The small pencil drawing depicts an elderly laborer dressed in a waistcoat, trousers and boots, sitting on a wooden chair with

his head in his hands. "This one has never been seen before anywhere. It's the first time that this drawing is out in the open," Tejo Meedendorp, senior researcher at the Van Gogh Museum, told AFP.

"It comes from a Dutch private collection where it has been for a very long time. And this is the first time and occasion that the world is able to see it." Van Gogh made a similar drawing shortly afterwards which he preferred, and which is currently in the Van Gogh museum's collection under the title "Worm Out". A lithograph of a similar theme is also in its collection called "At Eternity's Gate". The new drawing will be on temporary display at the museum until January 2 before returning to the private collection. — AFP