

COMME des MAR*ISTS

A project by Rainer Ganahl

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Quasi-Marxism, Sustainability Fairy Tales and ÜBER Fashion: Camilla Palestra in Conversation with Rainer Ganahl | 4 |
| Collections | 10 |
| Acknowledgements | 30 |



2

“Marx has been a major point of orientation as I strive to conceptualise the world around me through the lens of his historical materialism and his ethics. I make these artworks not only out of my inherently ludic nature, but also because of my unceasing belief in the fundamental democratic assumption that all people should be treated as equals.”

– Rainer Ganahl

3



COMMEdesMARXISTS , presented in the UK for the first time, continues Austrian-American artist Rainer Ganahl's long-term investigations into the relationships between daily life, culture, economic systems and political structures.

Creating connections between the industrial revolution, on-going class struggles, the notion of sustainability, tragedies such as the collapse of the Rana Plaza clothing factories in Bangladesh, the production and consumption of luxury goods, and both fine art and fashion, Ganahl's project challenges our understanding of the fashion system. Using a playful, humorous, yet thought-provoking approach, the artist draws inspiration from sources as diverse as artists Kazimir Malevich, Blinky Palermo, Joseph Beuys and Richard Serra; designer Karl Lagerfeld; fashion houses Comme des Garçons and Hermès; high-street brands such as Benetton and Joe Fresh, and whistle-blower Edward Snowden.

Quasi-Marxism, Sustainability Fairy Tales and ÜBER Fashion: Camilla Palestra in Conversation with Rainer Ganahl



COMME des MARXISTS,
installation view at White
Columns, New York, 2013

“If anything is certain – I, myself, am not a Marxist!” was your opening statement at your first COMME des MARXISTS fashion show at New York’s White Columns during Performa 2013. Is *Comme de Marxist*, a quasi-Marxist, a definition that better fits your work?

Correct, I am for sure not a Marxist in the common sense of the word. But Karl Marx himself stated not to be a Marxist. In a more academic sense, I am a Marxist, as I embrace historical materialism as a way of thinking: I follow the money, I follow conflicts.

Camilla Palestra

Rainer Ganahl

4

5

CP

Since the 2008 global financial crisis and the failure of the bank system, the rise of a new class consciousness through movements across the globe (We are the 99%, Los Indignados, Occupy, amongst others) for many represented a glimmer of hope for an alternative. We were believing that social media, including Facebook, Twitter and other platforms, could be hijacked to organise activist unrest. Instead, we have been hijacked. Let’s just think of the recent revelation of the major data breach, the systematic unlawful use of our personal data by companies such as Cambridge Analytica with the collusion of Facebook and other social media platforms. I see COMME des MARXISTS encompassing many of the slogans, statements and discourses arising from the global crisis: quite literally, if we think of *Marx 99 Cents*, *Marx Middle Class Squeeze*, *snowdenmarx.gov* and *Snowden Marx Security*, for examples. Ten years after, how are your projects evolving and responding?

RG

I am up and busy. Today, the Trump administration just delivered another significant contribution to my *Trumpism* series, *TRUTH ISN’T TRUTH*. This Trump truism and outright lying people are not only dominating Washington but also many parts of my personal life. Trump, therefore, might be the most honest of all presidents in recent history when it comes to expressing his radical political will, as he openly is racist, openly is obstructionist, openly Eurocentric and White Supremacist. He has “alternative truth” and plays victim of “fake news media”, while speaking for and assuming the attitudes of the disgruntled, angry, white working-class voters threatened by an opioid and suicide epidemic. They lost their jobs precisely because of people Trump lets now create havoc also in his administration. They all are from Wall Street and other corporate shark waters, which destroyed the industries of the very people the president wants to rescue and speak for now.

To short-circuit your answer, all I try to do is to stay sane and focused, and not forget that 1 and 1 is

not more or less but 2. I have to confess, hearing and reading about Trump and his macabre, shameless, burlesque, theatrical, obscene, successful acting is enlightening and serves as a reality check for the personal and professional monstrosities I am encountering frequently.

A text that you often brought to my attention while discussing the project for the Fashion Space Gallery in London is Friedrich Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. How do you see a text from 1845 still relevant today?

That is a very good question I tried to answer with my work done in Manchester with the same title, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. My premise was and still is that the under- or unemployed working class is penny-pinching on eBay and other online marketplaces where people try to survive economically, psychologically and socially. Engels got inside the Irish slums in Manchester only thanks to the help of the Irish textile worker Mary Burns, who was also his lover. She facilitated access for his first-hand descriptions. Engels dedicated many pages to the dressing, eating, living and sleeping conditions of the working class.

He called the trash-composed worn-out lumpen of the Irish underclass *Devil's Dust*, which inspired me to propose to Fashion Space Gallery a new series, *Angels' Dust*, whose production, unfortunately, ended up being too complex for the exhibition in London. *Angels' Dust* is conceived as a fashion trash recycling programme, which is making me now contact famous designers for their textile snippets and leftovers at the end of the day in their actual design studios. The various heaps of discardable leftovers are supposed to be indiscriminately thrown together and reassembled in tedious work to a new surface to be cut into simple shapes to become one of my *Sustainability Fairy Tales*.

To go back to your question, yes, Engels' book is relevant. The city of Manchester was for sure not

CP

RG

6

7

pleased with his depiction of misery. Engels, and in particular Marx, should therefore be seen as survivors of censorship, something that many intellectuals and artists today do not understand. I mention this because I have experienced censorship and even physical assault myself while presenting one part of the somehow on-going COMME des MAR*ISTS series *Marx a Prato/Gucci a Prato* in Italy last summer.

CP

“Two centuries on, Karl Marx feels more revolutionary than ever.”¹ Do you agree?

RG

It depends who you ask. But I can present proof of strong reactions to Marx, given the resistance and reactionary revolt I just got when I brought Marx in my carry-on luggage to Prato. The Karl Marx as a brand, for me, tries to benefit the people, the demos as in democracy versus the demos as standard promotional material in the entertainment industry, to benefit the interests of the stars.

Power and propaganda are revolving doors, and revolutions keep them turning. Currently, we witness a right-wing swinging and spinning that will not have much patience with Marx, journalism and art that touches our lives. When I purchased ten copies of the German edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, published across ten subsequent decades as an artwork, I could reflect upon the various degrees of resistance against the texts of Marx, as well as forced or tolerant acceptance of the same. There were decades and places in which you could find your death or lose your citizenship or residency papers by having this book at home, and decades and places in which you were in trouble not having such a text in your home. Hence, Marx and Engels' writings can serve as barometers of political climate change.

1. Stuart Jeffries, “Two centuries on, Karl Marx feels more revolutionary than ever”, in *The Guardian*, 5 May 2018, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/05/karl-marx-200th-birthday-communist-manifesto-revolutionary

Going back to COMME des MAR*ISTS, for the first time, the project is presented within a fashion institution, for a predominantly fashion audience. How does this different context alter the shift between entertainment and antagonism?

CP

I can't answer this question, but I very much look forward to learning more about it. But my guess is that, independently of how people are trained or conditioned to look at and read things according to their habits and context, they still can distinguish between the subtle and not-so-subtle semiotic games I offer. Also, we shouldn't ignore the quite common uniformity and limitations within the art world.

RG

Anywhere, professionals in the arts feel challenged by these artistic propositions under the pretence of fashion. The majority of people couldn't and can't see or accept my silhouettes and text-filled surfaces as art. The fashion works are perceived as props for performances and may be valued only as awkward, impractical, yet funny fashion items to wear for certain occasions, be it just Halloween. I have to say, it is brave of you and your institution to give my work a chance to be shown in a setting dedicated to fashion, when it is so obvious that I have no idea about fashion, beyond any careless consumer who occasionally overspends with the help of credit cards on sales.

8

9

Quoting from you: "The future of fashion is gonna be like the present and past of fashion. There will be clothing for the rich, there will be clothing for the poor [...] I'd love to come up with a fashion line that anticipates flooded cities, in which the lower parts of our outfits need to protect us from poisoned waters and the upper parts need to protect from lethal boiling radiation." Is this your prediction for the future – and not only of fashion?

CP

Yes, correct. This is and stays my prediction of the future, but we will still also have lots of fun, even if we

RG

don't belong to the class of the crazy rich. As long as people need to be made, formed, educated, civilised, as well as deformed, deconstructed, dehumanised and worse, there will be a need for clothing, hence fashion. We also have the fairytale of the child describing the king's attire, and going naked, which is my most preferred outfit at home alone and, in all likelihood, the cheapest and the healthiest in our ever-warming climate.

But, yes, technology will carry fashion forward, and eventually we will develop fabrics that don't get dirty, don't get folds, don't get tired, and last forever. They also will adapt to outside temperatures and react to pulse and other body clues for adjustments like warming and cooling, and also, for extra support, allow stiffening and opening for airy relaxation. We will fabricate these new fabrics out of thin, clean air, brains and love, and will see them inflate and deflate, enlarge, and miniaturise when not needed anymore. The special texture of future garments can change its consistency and turn from leather or hard rubber to cashmere or silk through simple audio commands. It also will lighten up or thicken depending on whether you flip your dog at a yoga studio, or engage in a downhill race on skis or on a mountain bike and need extra strength.

These ÜBER garments are intelligent interfaces, bullet- and accident-proof, transforming into wings when in a burning skyscraper – think 9/11 and that tragic Grenfell Tower fire, killing British and non-British working class, which could have been prevented with proper fire prevention – or saving you from drowning. Should your airbag malfunction in a car accident, our future ÜBER wardrobe would not. Thus, fashion will take care of us.

Disclosure: ÜBER Fabrics is part of my growing number of *Sustainability Fairy Tales* still awaiting venture capital.

Collections

Edited excerpts from R. Corbett and R. Ganahl (eds), *Manhattan Marxism*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2018. This list includes collections on show at Fashion Space Gallery. For a full list, visit commedesmarxists.com.



Marx 4 Kids

Having kids taught me very quickly how society reproduces socially and economically. I, myself, grew up in a schooling environment that offered few options, and those that existed were purely merit based. Today, making decisions on pre-schooling and schooling kids is like selecting from a large menu with massive price differentials and very narrow admission policies. My outfits for the little ones were adorned with basic imagery and age-adjusted sentences, reading phrases like, “I get a TV, you get a nanny”, “I get 3, you get 0” or “I live here, you don’t”. The series, produced exclusively from 100% woolen felt from Germany, also included outfits that carry lines reminding us of the fairytale heroes who fought for justice: “Marx♥s Robin Hood” or “Marx♥s Cinderella”.

10

Left

Fashion show, *Marx 4 Kids*, 2013, felt. Models: Luisa, Antonia, Isadora.

Right

Karl Marx Said ..., 2013, dress in felt, *Marx Asks About This Hacking: Is It the P.L.A. or the N.S.A.*, 2011, jewellery in porcelain (P.L.A. – Chinese’ People’s Liberation Army; N.S.A. – US National Security Agency).

Marx 99 Cents, 2013, numerous acrylic scarves. Model: Alexandra Clark, in Spanish Harlem.

Karl Marx Said ...

This title marks a series of accessories, presented on monochrome dresses in white, black and Yves Klein blue. Felt necklaces feature Marx quotations silkscreened in white on black fabric that has been cut into the shape of the philosopher’s bust, including “Sell a man a fish, he eats for a day; teach a man how to fish, you ruin a wonderful business opportunity”. The final silhouettes were made with the help of a professional Antwerp-trained fashion designer, Cem Cako, using a thin, 100% woolen felt that its German manufacturer had not yet officially released. I fell in love with this fabric as well as the production process and the sheer excitement of seeing a few simple scratch drawings become tangible products.

11



Marx 99 Cents

For this series, I exclusively used foulards sold at 99-cent stores in Spanish Harlem to create garments that could be worn as fashion apparel. The loosely hanging and quilted fake-silk scarves with elaborate, colourful patterns garnered many approving comments from ordinary passers-by while we paraded them along Third Avenue and 106th Street, where I purchased them out of shipping boxes. The scarves are quilted into the giant number 99, reflecting not only the typical price tag on the cheapest available items for purchase, but also the Occupy Wall Street movement, which spoke out for the 99%, in opposition to the 1%.

Karl Marx Speaks Chinese

These designs are based on the cheapest bags used around the world by people who have lots to carry with little means to do so – street vendors, homeless people, refugees or even students on tight budgets. I refer to them as “Chinese bags” because of their origin, but I imagine that there are many ways to refer to these bags, depending on where they are sold.

The use of the three-colour plaid appears to be not only a convenient design for these recycled plastic bags, but they also cater to popular middle-class tastes, thanks to the phenomenal success of Burberry and its signature plaid. In the US, there’s a traditional working-class jacket made of checker-printed wool, assumingly brought by British immigrants and subsequently simplified by the Americans – and picked up by Ralph Lauren. For *Karl Marx Speaks Chinese*, I purchased checkered jackets from second-hand shops like The Salvation Army, and then integrated my plastic Chinese fabrics to create a new, organic design.



12

There Is Only ONE KARL/FELT Belongs To Everybody™ 1867/1970/2013

Karl Holmsqvist is a magnificent Berlin- based poet, artist and friend. During a dinner one evening in Berlin, I suddenly realised that I’d been having three Karls on my mind lately: Karl Marx, Karl Lagerfeld and the Karl sitting next to me at the table. The claim that “There is only ONE KARL” inspired me that very night to make a set of works that brought yet another German hero to my mind: Joseph Beuys and his felt suit. In Germany, the art world seems to share the opinion that only Beuys was entitled to use felt in his works. Therefore, I wanted to dress Karl in a Beuys’ suit and label the outfit “There is only ONE KARL”. In a quasi-socialist gesture, I added a second label, “FELT belongs to everybody™”, to break the proprietary intellectual association of this quintessential German material.

Marx Toxic

Today, manufacturing anything causes some kind of environmental pollution, directly or indirectly, and a depletion of resources, although in many cases we don’t see it. Even an email account, something we consider entirely clean and sustainable, requires a surprising amount of energy to maintain. The fashion industry is another terrible culprit, and globalisation has accelerated its pollution, toxicity, waste and trash, and circulated it worldwide. Fast fashion has reduced many articles of clothing to one-time excitements that are scarcely worn before being written off or thrown away. Few people are aware of how bad fashion’s carbon footprint is, given the synthetic dimension of the materials involved, the dyes, the complicated chain of production, and the global distribution.



Left

Karl Marx Speaks Chinese, 2013, cotton, plastic bags with silkscreen text.

Fashion show, *There Is Only ONE KARL/FELT Belongs To Everybody™* 1867/1970/2013, felt, cotton. Models: Karl Holmsqvist, Kenneth Goldsmith.

Right

Marx Toxic, Marx Dyes With Poison, 2013, wool. Model: Adrian Saich. Fashion show, *Marx Toxic, Marx Walks with a Big Carbon Footprint*, 2013, wool. Model: Constance Walsh.



Devil's Dust – Engels, The Condition of the Working Class

In 1845, Friedrich Engels, the son of an industrial mill owner, published the book *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

It is one of the most comprehensive first-hand accounts of the terrible, inhuman misery these early industrial workers had to endure in order to survive an inescapable ordeal. He devoted some sections to matters of clothing, describing how in “cheap shops” the worker “finds bad, so-called ‘Devil’s dust’ cloth, manufactured for sale and not for use, and liable to tear or grow threadbare in a fortnight”. It was not Engels but the deprived workers who called their “lumpen”, or rags, “Devil’s dust”. I adapted this inspiring title for my knitwear and recycled fabrics geared toward an aesthetic of the “lumpenproletariat”.



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14

Marx Middle Class Squeeze

This series addresses the economic realities that most Western middle-class citizens are concerned with: access to good schools, jobs, healthcare and retirement. One-time guarantees now becoming luxuries. To make this ensemble, I was given access to computer-controlled knitting machines, to produce simple, easy-to-wear poncho-style garments. They were marked with speech bubbles expressing such sentiments as, “Can’t pay for school” or “Just lost my job”, and my over-dimensional logo of a fist and the series title *Marx Middle Class Squeeze*. Ironically, the production of these items was amongst the most expensive, hinting at the economic realities of clothing consumption in earlier eras, when people would purchase only a few garments over the course of their lifetimes.



*

15

Left

Devil's Dust, 2013,
cotton, wool and
synthetics. Model:
Bree Zucker.

Right

*Marx Middle
Class Squeeze,
Just Lost My Job*,
2013, wool. Model:
Rainer Ganahl.

Karl Marx Wears Prada, Karl Marx Dressing Up

The first piece of clothing I ever produced for an art exhibition was at the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein in 2012. The works consisted primarily of safety jackets and skirts that could double as banners. Safety jackets are part of my daily protective wardrobe as a bicyclist – and I love their fluorescent colours, reflective stripes and working-class look. People usually talk down to me when I wear them. Today, this often-dirtied work apparel is also worn by authorities, such as traffic police, which can produce a contradictory visual effect. Adding the words “class struggle”, “surplus value” and “Karl Marx”, as well as representations of a hammer and sickle or a fist, causes even more confusion.



16

Marx Sex Work

Sex work's everywhere. Sex work is a gigantic industry, with tremendous consequences for its workers. It is linked to the drug trade, human trafficking, organised crime and money laundering, as well as vast systems of poverty, abuse, addiction and mental illness. It is the most intense form of human interaction, resulting in both procreation and the spread of diseases, and it is not easy to control. For this series, I worked with silicon, felt and PVC lettering – materials that oscillate between fetish and meaning. These accessories could adorn simple outfits or even be placed directly on the skin. The larger PVC letters, spelling out such words as “drugs”, “money” and “traffic”, were hastily applied to colourful knitted garments.

17



Left

Karl Marx Dressing Up, Safety Jackets, 2011, acrylic. Models: Rainer Ganahl and the friends of Laura Büchele.

Karl Marx Dressing Up, Karl Marx – Das Kapital, 2012, satin and book pages with ballpoint markings of the German edition of Karl Marx – Das Kapital. Model: Laura Büchele.

Right

Installation view, White Columns, 2013, works on paper and letterings in various materials.

Marx Cover Up – Opium

These garments, masks and their title were chosen to allude to Karl Marx's iconic phrase, "religion is the opium of the people". Despite decades of twentieth-century secularisation, we are now observing a resurrection of religion as the driving political force in many parts of the world, even in communities that were recently entirely politically secular. Today, religion is one of the primary justifications for why wars are fought, people are killed and properties destroyed. Interested in religion's inherent contradictions and dialectical propositions, I opted for a transparent garment that covers the body entirely, yet caresses it in a veiled transparency.



18

Left

Fashion show,
Marx Cover Up,
Opium, 2013, wool.
Mask, 2013, wool.

Right

Fashion show,
snowdenmarx.gov/
PRISM, 2013, cotton.

Joe Fresh Benetton,
Bangladesh, Rana
Plaza Building
Collapse, More Than
Eleven Hundred
People Died, 2013,
silkscreen on cotton.

snowdenmarx.gov

This is a play on a website I could never acquire since it ends in .gov. I conceived this series just as the American whistleblower leaked his first secrets. The first large-scale spying programme on everyday Americans that we heard about was called "PRISM". For these pieces, I oriented myself with the idea of a prism, which I associate with the style and period of art deco, and the elegant, pre-electronic age of letter writing, whispering and black-and-white photography. The dress's double layers, and the openings on the front and back, reminded me of stories I was once told by those who escaped Nazi occupation with their money, documents and jewellery sewn into coats and between layers of garments.



19

Joe Fresh Benetton, Bangladesh, Rana Plaza Building Collapse, More Than Eleven Hundred People Died, 2013

In the spring of 2013, a factory collapse in Bangladesh shook local and global political landscapes. Under incredibly negligent circumstances, the Rana Plaza collapse killed more than 1,100 people. In that factory complex, large-scale European and American fashion companies produced garments that account for much of the market for cheap and fast fashion. Since then, certain segments of industry leaders and consumers have become more sensitive to the situation and have begun demanding change. To address this catastrophic event, I purchased clothing from Joe Fresh and Benetton right after the tragedy, with the knowledge that they had been made in this tragic garment district, and I silkscreened phrases about the collapse taken from Google, the *New York Times*, labels and logos.

Snowden Marx Security

The NSA uses computer programs to generate large numbers of codewords, usually written together in capital letters. This series recognises these highly inspiring terms, such as MAINWAY, the total amount of captured gross data by the US Government, and TEMPORA, the same secret dragnet operation that's carried out by the British. I cut the letters out in white Velcro®, a material that grabs and captures everything it touches. The Velcro® letters were applied to the black safety jackets with reflective stripes, worn by security-firm labourers. Apart from the secret NSA codewords that Edward Snowden leaked to the media, I also included the names of two information-gathering agencies, the NSA and GCHQ, on the jackets.



20

Lottery Economics

Since being confronted with Manhattan-based child education, I have learned that the educational system uses the lottery principle to help counter society's drastic economic injustices, by allowing a handful of students to enter decent institutions while leaving the rest in disarray. *Lottery Economics* also alludes to the stock market and to the US's investment culture, where people often recklessly put their money into any kind of asset class, no matter the consequences. This logic took a special turn after the 2008 financial crisis, when the state socialised and salvaged the losses for those "too-big-to-fail" actors. Meanwhile, their gains remained individualised and sheltered in private corporate hands. *My Lottery Economics* designs were the result of all the leftover materials from this project, appreciating a random process and aleatoric beauty of recycled products.



21

Left

Fashion show,
Snowden Marx Security, 2013,
acrylic lettering on
acrylic security vests.
Models: Brandon
Johnson, Matthew
Higgs, Paco Marcial,
Yvonne Kruger, et al.

Right

Lottery Economics,
2013, felt, silk. Model:
Alissa McKendrick.

HERMÈS – MARX

I am fascinated by Hermès' colours and exotic and orientalisising designs, mostly drawn from France's colonial past. To my surprise, I discovered that its foulard line was only introduced in 1937 – at the beginning of the end of colonial France. In that sense, one could even ask whether the desire to visualise the French Empire was anticipated by Hermès at the very moment when France came under the control of the brutal Nazi regime, which brought the dark reality of the colonial territories into the heart of Europe. In his book *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Vladimir Lenin continued the tradition of Marx and established the link between colonial wars and the fostering of nationalism. Hence, putting the words "Hermès" and "Marx" in the same sentence is not an obvious contradiction.



22

Left

HERMÈS – MARX, Ispahan, 1966/2013, silkscreen print on original Hermès foulard

Right

Fashion show, Karl Marx Visits David Zwirner on 20th Street, New York, Blinky Palermo, Late Works, Palermo, Manhattan Marxism, 1976/2013, skirt, silkscreen on Japanese cotton. Model: Isabel Lodge.

Fashion show, Karl Marx Visits David Zwirner on 20th Street, New York, Palermo, Who Knows the Beginning of the Revolution and Who Knows the End, II, 1976/2013, dress, silkscreen on cotton. Untitled (For Rosa Luxembourg), 1976/2013, foulard, silkscreen on silk. Model: Thea Westreich Wagner.

Karl Marx Visits David Zwirner on 20th Street

Capitalism today takes on many forms and goes through many transformations. Art is a perfect vehicle for moving large sums of money with minimal formality and regulation, and maximal opacity and secrecy. For many, art has become an investment vehicle like real estate. David Zwirner has entered this game as well, expanding several years ago into a new museum-style building on 20th Street in New York. On my first visit to this new location, there were two separate shows, Blinky Palermo's late works and Richard Serra's early works. These shows informed two segments of my project.



23

Karl Marx Visits David Zwirner on 20th Street, Blinky Palermo, Late Works ...

For my works on Palermo, a German painter who died young in the 1970s and left only a small body of work, I silkscreened some of the colour combinations and designs I saw at the gallery onto fine Japanese cotton and silk. I reworked some of the fabrics as simple drapery, to give the impression of canvases. The title of the work plays with the original title of Palermo's artworks: *The Enigma of Karl*, 1976/2013, and *Who Knows the Beginning of the Revolution and Who Knows the End*, 1976/2013, and draws on Palermo's paintings and palette. I only asked ladies from the art world to present the work in a runway show at White Columns.

Karl Marx Visits David Zwirner on 20th Street, Richard Serra, Early Works ...

This series functions just like my works with Palermo but reference instead the Richard Serra works, as they were presented at David Zwirner. His *Template*, 1967, made me think of an upside-down leather apron, while I turned Serra's *To Lift*, 1967, consisting of vulcanised rubber, into a rubber wearable, with the white inscription "WORKING CLASS".

For the presentation of this work, I asked only artists and poets David Coleman, Peter Fend, Leigh Ledare, Wolfgang Maier and Ingo Niermann.

COMME des MAR*ISTS

I got the idea to call my works COMME des MAR*ISTS after a visit to the Comme des Garçons store in New York, where I saw a felt collection that borrowed heavily from the Constructivist designs of the Russian artist Varvara Stepanova. I played with the brand's logo and started to make drawings for a collection that also employed felt.

Soon, I became interested in proposing my own designs, playing extensively with Soviet symbols of stars, hammer and sickle, as well as words like "class struggle" and "profit". Here, too, contradictions became readily apparent, including the insanely expensive materials required to convey these concepts in this way.



24

Left

Fashion show, *Karl Marx Visits David Zwirner on 20th Street, New York, Serra Working Class, Lifting Up the Working Class*, 1967/2013, rubber. Model: Peter Fend.

Karl Marx Visits David Zwirner on 20th Street, New York, Serra Working Class, Lifting Up the Working Class, 1967/2013, rubber. Model: Isaac Julien.

Right

COMME des MARXISTS, 2013, leather shoes.

COMME des MARXISTS, Class Struggle, 2013, felt. Model: Adrian Saich.

COMME des MARXISTS, 2013, felt. Models: Adrian Saich, Isabel Lodge.

25



Karl Marx
SUPERSTRUCTURE

The title and dresses for this series are inspired by Kazimir Malevich, the artist known for a style of abstract paintings that he called Suprematism. Before turning to geometric abstraction, he painted the lives of farmers, viewed through the lens of Russian folk art. Those colourful, quasi-naïve renderings of rural workers became the blueprint for my felt creations. As Malevich's Suprematist paintings chased the sublime and the transcendence of abstraction, Karl Marx used his category of the "superstructure" to capture everything that exceeded the economic spheres of production, referring more commonly to law, education, culture, religion and art.



26



Left

Karl Marx
SUPERSTRUCTURE,
2013, felt. Model:
Adrian Saich.

Right

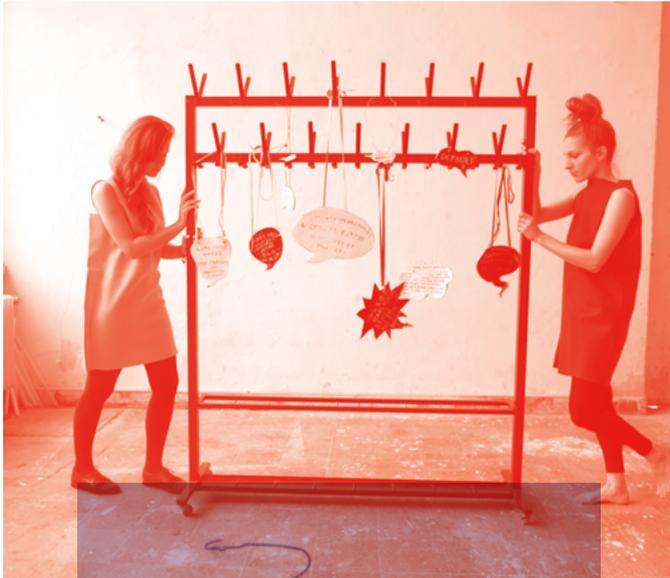
Karl Marx
SUPERSTRUCTURE,
2013, felt. Model:
Audrey Rose Smith.

27



Karl Marx Jewellery

As with most of my art, the jewellery served as a surface on which to write and play with contexts and meanings. I became very fond of the speech-bubble format, which allowed me to express statements such as, “Britney Spears admits ‘Work, Bitch’ is inspired by Karl Marx”, “Wow ... Dow Plummets over 1200 points”, and “I hate Karl Marx”.



28

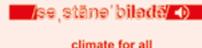
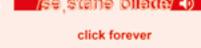
Sustainability

Sustainability is such a beautiful ideological spin that it can absorb all the paradoxes and contradictions of the world. It's often used as the new good-conscience fix for dirty industries, dirty commerce, dirty transportation, dirty desires and dirty everything else. Sustainability has fabulous PR agents and stands now for the new chic, the new glamour, and it is already available for the elites who drive Teslas, eat organic and local, and fancy handmade local design that is supposed to last forever and is soon exported around the world. When it comes to fashion, many fast- and high-fashion houses have their warehouses full of unsold fashion they could easily offer again without anybody going naked for a season or two. Or did somebody just trash them?

29

/sə, stānə 'bilədē/ 

COMME des MAR*ISTS

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| fair trade unfair | chain solution garment | plastic recovery symptom |
| eco-toxic friendliness | fashion sink stopper | ocean gazing garment dying |
| natural melt down | /sə, stānə 'bilədē/  | uber runway fit |
| hot climate clothing | shillouette responsibility | community sewage app |
| product end of life twist | free design clean up | emission billionaire centrlicity |
| sweat shopping | partnership supply chain | /sə, stānə 'bilədē/  |
| dying liberates | micro plastic lab fish | vintage misogyny spoiler |
| rayon tree savers | rayon cycling drop | toxicology green blender |
| endangered apparel | brand protection ships | shopping substitute drill |
| spider-less silk road | skinless leather dots | bio-care probiotics wear |
| /sə, stānə 'bilədē/  | animal safe sewing | guccinese rotation enhancer |
| climate for all | waste belt extraction | seasonless basics enforcement |
| rain-forestry try harder | gentry-garmenting labs | gap filler fiber districting |
| cotten-defensiveness | /sə, stānə 'bilədē/  | ethical ethanol line |
| precarious taste hugging | slow waste ties | check out moda |
| sustainable emission catcher | fiber abstinence color coding | wire venmo wear |
| upper dog suede | spider inspired workmanship | /sə, stānə 'bilədē/  |
| slow spit supply | induced cotton birthing | click forever |
| eco bubble luster | plastic recovery symptom | |

/sə, stānə 'bilədē/ 

Left

Karl Marx Jewellery, 2013, porcelain.

Karl Marx Jewellery, No! Property is Theft, 2011, porcelain.

Right

Sustainability – Manifesto for a Contemporary Corporate Fairy Tale, 2018.

This exhibition is part of the year-long celebration of the Centre for Sustainable Fashion's 10-year anniversary and LCF Arts Programme 2018 around sustainability held at Arcade East.

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30

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