

TRIAL, ERROR, UPCYCLING

Up-cycling is one of the most (if not the most), sustainable approaches that fashion designers and brands can take in their craft or processes.

I speak to artist, and model **Beslan** about his first sewn and crafted collection of one-off hats, designed solely by him out of unwanted textiles.

Beslan, is a multi-media artist, having recently collaborated with emerging CSM designer Yaku Stapleton in a capsule collection for SSENSE. Also a model, Beslan's latest feature was in Martine Rose's debut collaboration with Clarks entitled 'Coming Up Roses'

Beslan learnt sewing through upcycling his unwanted clothes and pieces that he found in a charity shop. This led to him releasing his up-cycled hat collection titled 'T.HAT'.

The 'T.HAT' project is Belsan's first collection consisting of one-off hats, each with a unique colour, material, texture, and pattern- a result of bringing new unique life to once worn-out garments.



Photography for 'T.HAT' Collection by @elliugggggggg via Instagram

WASTE & FAST FASHION

Up-cycling has recently received a lot of support and recognition, and this is because of the environmental issues that the process addresses.

As we become aware of how much there is already available to us in the world, we also realise how much of that has gone and continues to go to waste.

To put it into perspective, Clothes Aid has said that £140 million worth of used but still wearable clothing goes to landfill in the UK each year (this is roughly 350,000 tonnes). There are many reasons why landfills are so harmful to our planet.

Firstly, many of the clothes that end up in landfills are made out of synthetic fibres like polyester, nylon, and acrylic-which take hundreds of years to-

biodegrade. It is also estimated that 35% of all microplastics that are in the ocean (microplastics are tiny pieces of non-biodegradable plastic) come from these synthetic textiles.

So if there are already 350,000 tonnes of perfectly durable or recyclable garment and textile waste, whose responsibility is it to look into solutions within circular fashion? Why aren't we exploring ways to work with fabric waste more?

“That's what makes me now actually up-cycle, the fact that I can get good material from old stuff- if I buy a meter of new fabric, I might use half of that, but I will use the majority or all of the piece I up-cycle, there would be so much less waste”, says Beslan.



THE PROCESS ITSELF

The process goes beyond saving an unwanted garment and promoting circular fashion

because repurposing waste is a creative process in itself.

Learning to work with the material or garment rather than vice versa, is what generates special, one-of-a-kind, and newly purposed pieces that are environmentally friendly too.

“Up-cycling can 100% inspire more unique pieces, for the hat collection I was working on, all the hats were one-offs. I saved the design, but each material was limited. Up-cycling helped me be more creative as my mindset was more- ‘let’s see what I can make out of this’. In Up-cycling, you’re adapting to the material rather than it adapting to what you want to do, it’s a different creative process.”

Exploring different textures and how different garments are constructed together can also be beneficial particularly for new fashion designers and for anyone who wants to learn to sew.

“I think it is easier to learn sewing by up-cycling, especially to experiment with different materials. I learned sewing by just practicing by myself. I watched tutorials on how to set up the machine, and from there it was trial and error” says Beslan.

Up-cycling is extremely accessible, because of the internet, you can learn by yourself to up-cycle at home from countless YouTube video tutorials and websites, and all you need to start is an unwanted garment from your wardrobe.

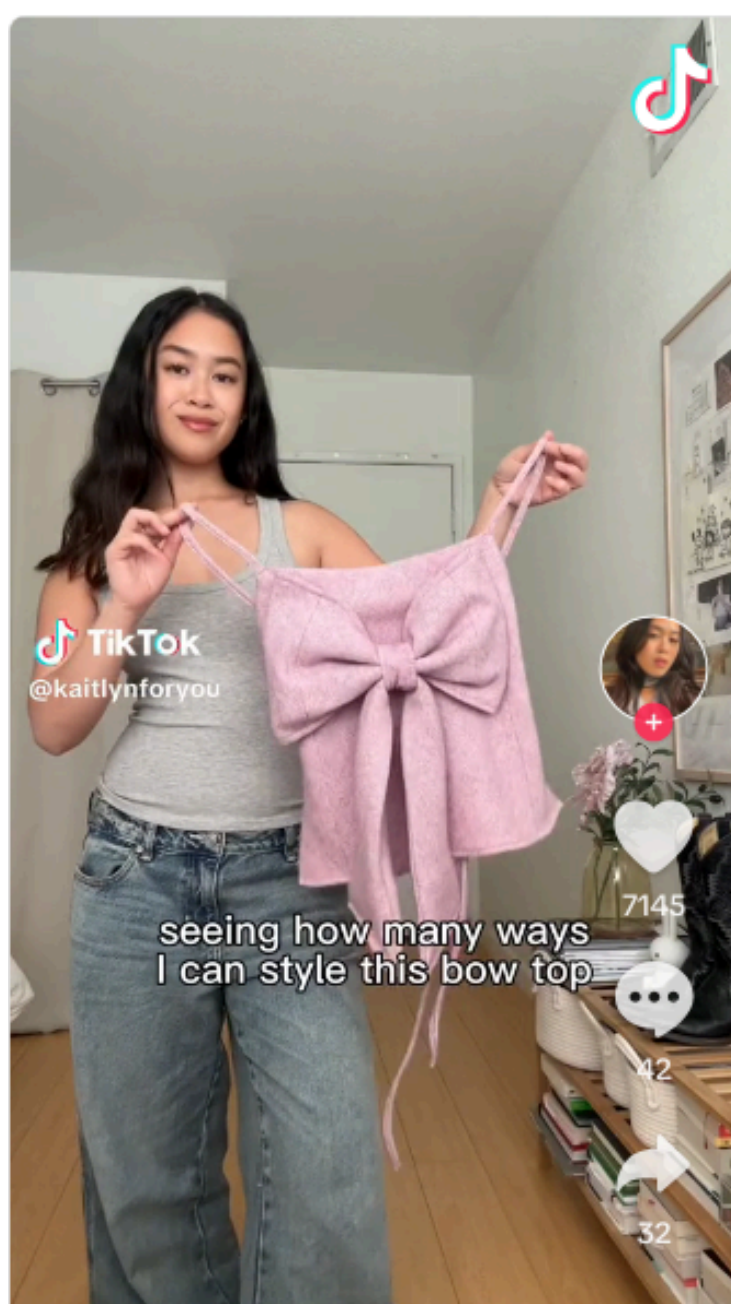
“I didn’t have much experience with sewing, I didn’t really know where to buy fabric, and I also wanted to practice, I thought I would use whatever I have now or whatever I find in a charity shop. I realized that you can get really good material from an old t-shirt, skirt, jacket, trousers, or curtain” says Beslan.



@elliiegggggggg

For more inspiration and techniques, we can also look at the fashion content creators of Tik- Tok who have been taking part in the ‘thrift flip’ trend, transforming their old garments into almost unrecognisable brand-new pieces.

Kaitlyn Forque recreates thrift finds into sexy, feminine, and multifunctional garments.

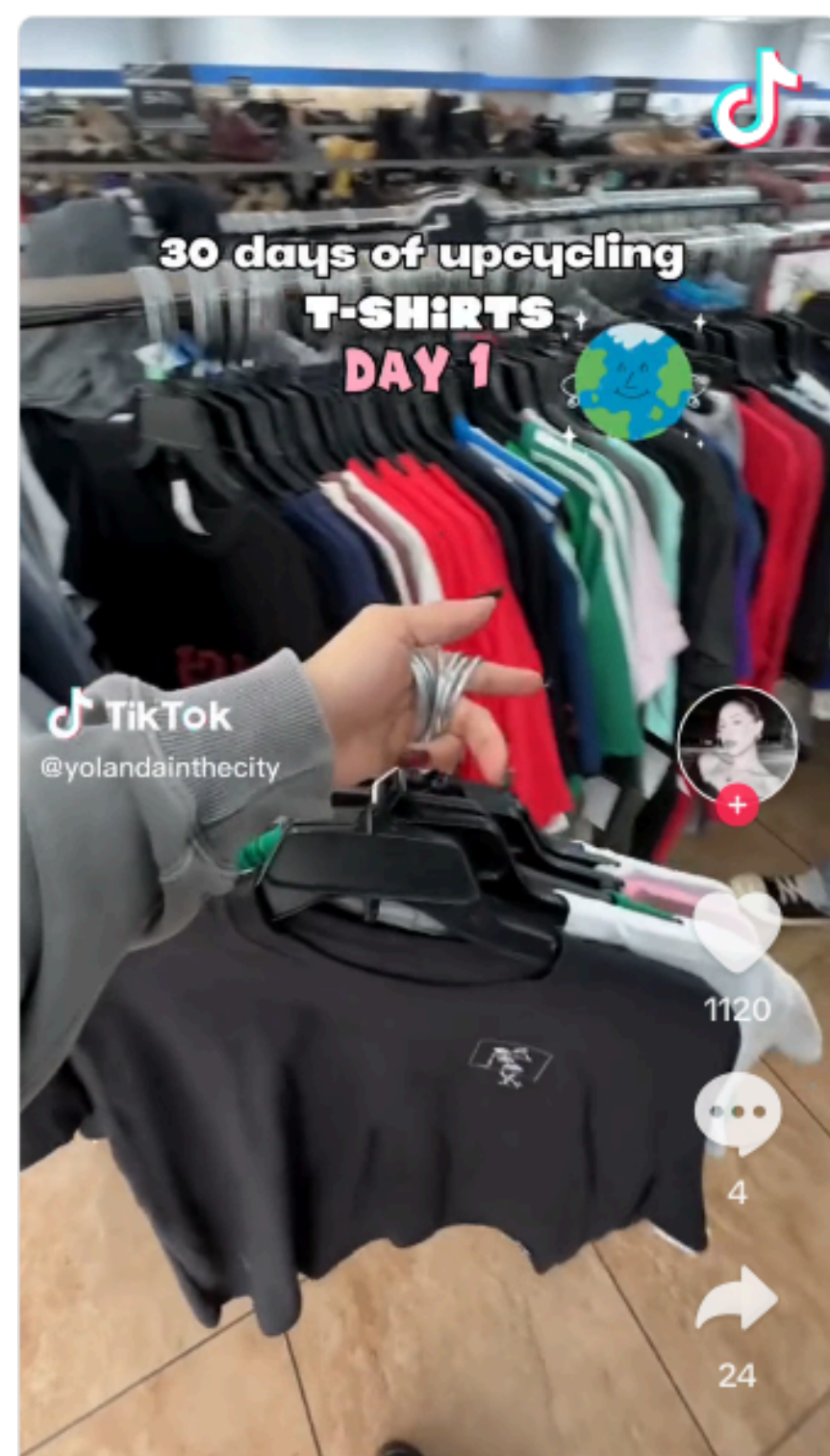


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multifunctional garments >>> #styling

Yolanda Espericueta has her own up-cycling series: ‘30 days of Up-cycling T-shirts’ where every day in the month of April, Yolanda shares new ways to transform old t-shirts rather than donating or throwing them away.



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@yolandainthecity

Day 1/30 days of upcycling t-shirts in honor of earth month im curre ...See more

DISADVANTAGES OF UP-CYCLING AND SOLUTIONS

It is important to remember that due to the amount of environmental damage that the fashion industry has and continues to create, there is no process that is actually more sustainable than repurposing what we already have.

This is why it is important to explore strategies and solutions around the problems that designers and brands can encounter in Up-cycling, and these are mostly from a business perspective.

There are reasons why up-cycling is not present in fast fashion brands. Firstly, low-quality and environmentally harmful fabric is a lot cheaper than more sustainable fabrics such as recycled fabric, or fabrics that have been sustainably designed, and less time-consuming than creating one-off pieces from unwanted clothes.

Fashion businesses that are solely economically driven, will prioritize profit over eco-friendly solutions. This is where huge social issues come into the picture, which have to also be addressed alongside the-



[@Beslandwrlld](#)

environmental damage, and both are extremely important in creating a sustainable future or change.

When a large brand is solely economically driven, the people who are making the clothes in mass production have also become a part of that intention. The Global Slavery Index (2014) estimates that 36 million people are living in modern slavery today, many of whom are working in the supply chains of brands and retailers.

Emerging sustainable designers or ones who solely up-cycle may find it harder than fast fashion brands for their business to grow as the craft is so personal and can be time-consuming. “You can’t sew pieces in massive amounts, and production is not as quick because of resources and time” says Beslan.

You are not selling one product in the same fabric and in mass production, but different products in different fabrics which you would have to shoot and promote individually.

There are many solutions that brands can be exploring. Brands firstly have a responsibility to pay their workers a good wage, especially fast fashion brands.

Larger brands with more resources could research and invest in up-cycling waste from landfills, understanding processes to recycle textiles/clothes, or even do something as simple as doing sample sales or giving away excess fabric/materials to design students to ensure that it doesn’t go to waste.



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