

A question of style

Maria C. Havstam and Franz P. Schmidt set the scene for a challenging new exhibition

Most of us know that the fashion industry, and especially fast fashion, increases consumption despite inhumane production conditions and serious negative impacts on the environment and climate. The climate crisis is acute, but when it comes to the consumption of fashion we are heading in the wrong direction. We close our eyes and keep buying cheaper and in greater quantities.

Ethically speaking, the industry is very problematic concerning overproduction, natural resources and labour. From the development of raw materials to the sale of the finished product, it employs more than 300 million people. The distance between market and producer is often enormous, and awareness and knowledge among producers and consumers is generally low. For several decades, fashion chains have embraced corporate social responsibility, following self-imposed ethical guidelines that, however, constitute only minimal steps towards a more responsible textile industry, when what is needed is a quantum leap.

How do we address this? Who is responsible? Is the industry neither willing nor able to limit volume, increase quality and radically improve



Cutting up western clothing for shoddy processing, Panipat, India 2004. Photograph: Tim Mitchell. Courtesy of the artist © Tim Mitchell

