

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Caryn Franklin MBE has long been an advocate for change in the fashion industry – here she talks about the progress being made

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Following the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement and exposure, fashion and identity commentator Caryn Franklin MBE, who is one of the most trailblazing voices in British fashion, can see a window of opportunity for conversations to be had about equality and sustainability in the fashion industry. “It’s like anything, people manage to push the door open, and a few are able to slip through, before the door gets shut. Hopefully things will change, you’ve got to give it your best shot.” For 30 years Caryn, who presented *The Clothes Show* between 1986 and 1998, and was a fashion editor and co-editor of *i-D* magazine in the early 80s, has been a tireless advocate for change (“I like to call myself a disruptive fashion lover”). Some of the causes she has supported include representation of realistic body and beauty ideals, challenging lack of gender and race diversity and better conditions and pay for garment workers. And she also took an MSc in applied psychology – so she could back up her conversations with science. Here we speak to her about the future of fashion.

What will happen to the catwalk post Covid-19?

We are facing a much-needed conundrum. Especially when you consider the carbon footprint of setting up a show. Designers have been forced to jump onto digital platforms to showcase imagery; so, technology is stepping up to host big designer shows in a socially-distanced space with cameras placed within the homes of top fashion editors and influencers who can interact with it. Audiences from all over the world can jump on and see, not just the catwalk, but information about each model and garments; then also look at transparency and sustainability. People within the fashion industry are approaching this new process in various ways. I loved a film that Osman Yousefzada put out about garment workers imagining who would wear their clothes. It was called *Entitled: Her Dreams are Bigger*; it was a humbling insight into the limited prospects of low-paid garments workers. You’ve also got key names ▶



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Caryn has been working towards equality and diversity in the fashion industry for the last 30 years; Teatum Jones is an inclusive brand she champions; Christopher Raeburn is renowned for repurposing fabrics

like Christopher Raeburn, Vin + Omi and Bethany Williams leading the way in ethical clothing and sustainability.

Will people now start shopping differently?

Body-scanning is another exciting format, which can help us all receive a better service and fit, meaning we become much more contented with our clothes. You step into a booth for a very quick scan, which consists of around 200 measurements, which go to an app on your phone. The future could see us being able to use that process when planning our shopping trips. Say you need to shop for an interview suit in your lunch break, you plug in that information and, because the retailers will be engaged, the nearest store comes up, as do the prices and style options. I hope we will also be looking at buying less and loving it more – repairing, swapping and using wardrobe hire. We'll be thinking about the relationship we have with our clothes. I see mine as friends. They can be armour, a comfort blanket and stored memories that remind me of enjoyable experiences that empower me. I like to think people will start being more creative by tracking down small, local and sustainable companies. Etsy is a platform that allows small businesses to upload their product. I bought a beautiful made-to-measure skirt by Esther Kwaku at wegotnerve.com. Upon purchase, I had the option to make a contribution to a printer for the community. The feeling that my money is doing that, rather than making a dividend for a CEO to buy yet another yacht, it's really vital to me.

What will brands need to do in order to survive?

Brands are still acclimatising to the power of influencers and the way young people pass information amongst themselves. What we've had is a whole load of rainbow capitalism making a superficial statement about how much they care. It's very easy to say, 'We stand with you', on an issue and then do nothing. What brands need to realise is we are looking for transparency and we will find it. We want to see representation in front of the lens, but also in the creative teams and leadership. We don't buy woke washing – a knee-jerk reaction to what's happening, but then a complete lack of interest once a declaration has been made.

Are influencers still relevant?

Absolutely. I've learnt so much since being on Instagram. I'm privileged, white, able-bodied and cisgender – so there're many unknown-unknowns for me; and I've been helped by the conversations that people have been willing to have about how fashion impacts their lives – positively and negatively, when they don't fit fashion's standard ideal. There are people like Munroe Bergdorf, a trans woman of colour who has repeatedly spoken out about the lack of



TOP TO BOTTOM Sustainability and ethics are at the core of Bethany Williams' label; models such as Winnie Harlow have brought diversity to the catwalk; Wales Bonner was Meghan Markle's go-to for her post-maternity look

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trans rights. As she says, "Trans rights are human rights". She recently took a big brand to task when it made its Black Lives Matter comment. She'd been an ambassador, but when spoke out about racism, she was sacked. They ended up apologising and the newly-appointed female executive reached out and now they're working together. That just shows the power of social media.

Where are we now with diversity in the fashion industry?

On The Clothes Show we had an audience of 13 million people, so I was very aware of my responsibility to young women, who, if they were only shown thin, white models, didn't have a sense of their own individuality. I then started working with the National Eating Disorder Association [now Beat], which led to things like talking in schools. That led to me co-founding the award-winning All Walks Beyond the Catwalk, with supermodel Erin O'Connor and PR Debra Bourne. We became very vocal in our own industry by using a range of diverse models, working with top photographers like Nick Knight and Kayt Jones. And, we realised quickly we needed to take this into education to empower the next generation of young creatives and encourage them to consider age, race and size diversity in their work. They began to include bodies with disability, as well as trans and non-binary people in their work, also. I'm thrilled that we have come so far since 2009, when we started; with agencies like Models of Diversity and Zebedee, featuring models with body difference, there are more opportunities to celebrate the full spectrum of human beauty. I want to highlight the campaign by Gucci starring Ellie Goldstein, an 18-year-old model with Down's syndrome. We've had models like Winnie Harlow, who has amazing contrasted skin because of vitiligo, and Kelly Knox, who has a missing forearm – who have both walked in many fashion shows. I would also like to flag up Teatum Jones, a UK brand that has, from the off, said they want to work with 'non-models', as well as models. They've opened the floodgates for younger creatives to see it happening during London Fashion Week. Another brand is Art School, co-founded by Eden Loweth and Tom Barratt, who have prioritised a non-binary and trans presence. The entire team are accomplished designers and producers from the queer community. Eden has been

incredibly outspoken about educating the industry on where we need to be. They have huge success and are stocked by Browns and Dover Street Market. Another leader is Samanta Bullock, who is a former Paralympian and uses a wheelchair, she has collaborated with some fabulous designers to produce inclusive clothes that work for able-bodied and those with body differences.

What more needs to be done?

Right now, it's simple, if we are white we must use our privilege to dismantle racism. Fashion offers us the chance to call out brands for lack of diversity. Another thing we can do is prioritise businesses that are sustainable or run by black and brown designers. Nobody wants the level of race inequality that we currently have. This is where we white fashion lovers can empower emerging business and uncover some gems. Grace Wales Bonner, who created Meghan Markle's post-maternity look, is a key name you all know but also check out Priya

'PEOPLE WILL START BEING CREATIVE, TRACKING DOWN SMALL, LOCAL COMPANIES'

Ahluwalia, who graduated in 2018, and works with deadstock and vintage clothing. There's the elegance of Duro Olowu and the psychedelia of Mowalola. Oh, and make time for the annual Africa Fashion Week London. It is a vibrant and colourful consumer event that anyone can attend, co-produced by my mate Samson Soboye.

Fashion TV, is that changing for the better or worse?

I think there is value to programs like Project Runway, which help people understand the discipline and education needed to be a designer. I like Next in Fashion with Alexa Chung and Tan France, I like their TV charisma, it's real. But the reality show documentary series, Breaking Fashion, missed a vital chance to expose fast fashion start-up businesses. In this day and age, TV fashion must be used to educate. For that reason, The Great British Sewing Bee, which has enthused us all about the skill of making clothes from scratch, and shown us how much work goes into a garment, is important. The Clothes Show, which began in 1986 and ran until 1998, made a valuable contribution to British perception of style. When we first started, people couldn't name UK fashion designers, they would always talk about the obvious, the Italians like Valentino and Armani. Slowly, we educated our own audience about UK creativity and, of course, we were flagging up sustainability, Fairtrade and body diversity all those years ago. ■

FASHION MOMENTS

1982	1984	1986	1990	1996	1998	2009	2013	2017	2020
BodyMap made a huge impact for me, by presenting non-models and different body types on the catwalk.	The time Katharine Hamnett wore a politically-charged T-shirt to confront PM Margaret Thatcher at Downing Street.	Naomi Campbell, who was on iD's cover at 16, has been one of the few black high-profile women in our industry.	Diffusion ranges become a way for catwalk designers to reach mainstream consumers – Debenhams led the way.	As co-chair of Fashion Targets Breast Cancer for nearly 25 years, we used fashion as a vehicle for health education.	Alexander McQueen features double-amputee model Aimee Mullins striding the runway on intricate, carved wooden legs.	Mark Fast in collaboration with All Walks Beyond the Catwalk uses curvy models for his sensual knitwear.	The Rana Plaza factory collapses in Dhaka, killing 1,100 workers – revealing the true cost of fast fashion.	Edward Enninful joins British Vogue, facilitating celebration of the rightful recognition of black culture and style.	Covid-19 forces a long overdue look at fashion week as it moves to a digital and low carbon-emission format.