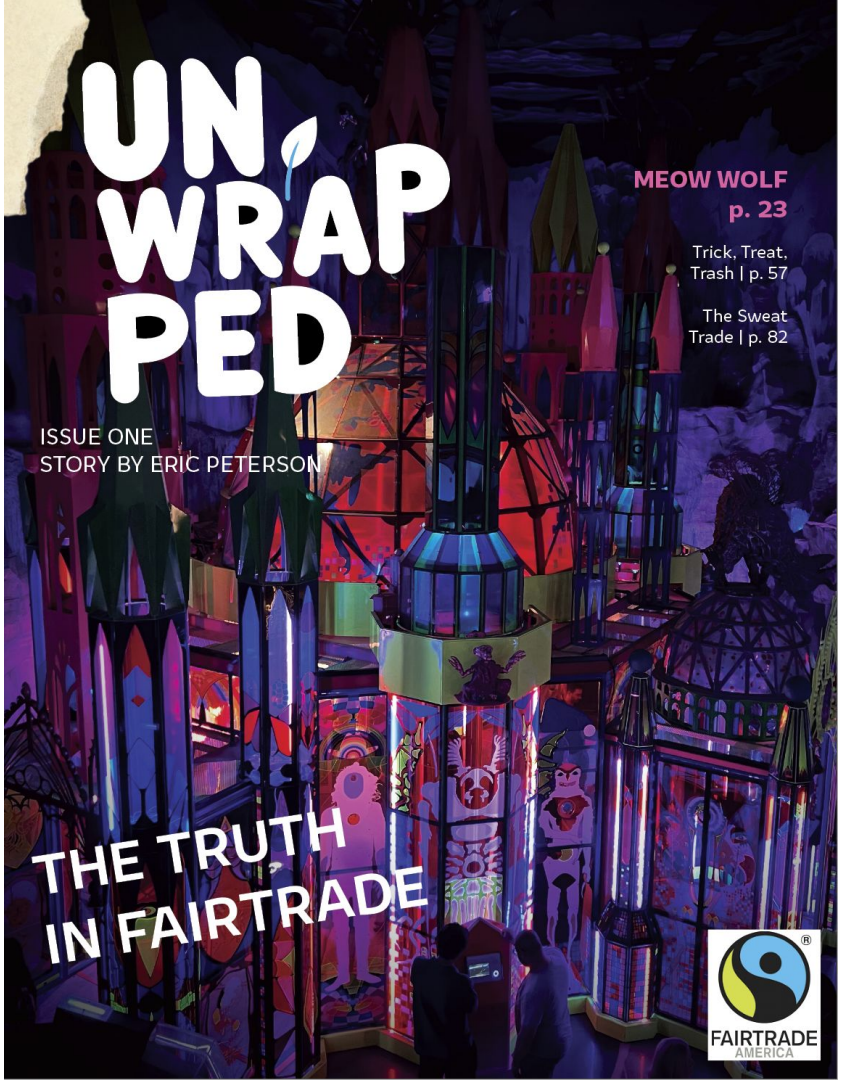
‘Fairtrade America’

Neleh Geiger



The Truth In Fairtrade


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THE TRUTH IN FAIRTRADE
FAIRTRADE AMERICA



Not just an exhibit - a whole other world.

At Meow Wolf Denver's Convergence Station, art materials are in the eye of the beholder. The dizzyingly trippy immersive art installation is full of exhibits crafted from items that might have otherwise ended up in a landfill.

But Meow Wolf's mile-high interdimensional crossroads treasures what others might dismiss as trash.



"Trash has always been a central motif," says Joann Asakawa Huntz, former impact manager at Convergence Station. "We incorporate trash and reuse and recycle a lot of materials all the time, since our founding and inception."

Asakawa Huntz points to Gremlin Symphony, a group of cacophonous robots in C Street, one of the four "anchor spaces" within Convergence Station.

"That whole entire area is just made up of recycled trash, which I think is just really exciting," she says. "We've also been able to launch programming based off of that ethos, especially with Kate Major, who formerly led our Absolute Rubbish fashion shows."
As wardrobe designer and creative designer at Convergence Station, Major came up with the idea for the first Absolute Rubbish show after participating in Denver Fashion Week in November 2022.

"I put a full collection into Denver Fashion Week, all made from upcycled materials," says Major. "It was so much fun. Then we decided we wanted to figure out how to do fashion shows ourselves."

For the inaugural edition of Absolute Rubbish in 2023, Major picked 20 designers who crafted upcycled "trashions," including Adobe Darko's strapless gown made from discarded IKEA frisbees.

"It was just so much fun," says Major. "I can't wait to do it again."
The sequel, Absolute Rubbish: Bloom, happened in April 2024 where Adobe Darko's entry roamed the runway in an outfit made from cast-off Home Depot buckets. Along with 20 local designers, Major and other Meow Wolf artists also participated.

Major says she hopes the shows will "inspire people to look at what they think of as trash or garbage differently and try to upcycle where they can. It's not as hard as you would think. And once they get inspired by what these artists can do, I really think people are going to run with it."
Meow Wolf teamed up with Southwest Airlines' "Repurpose With Purpose" campaign, which focuses on sustainability through creative partnerships. For Absolute Rubbish, Southwest donates seat leather that is then turned into high trashion on the fashion runway.



Accessible Carousel
Beyond her work with costumes and trashion, Major also leads makers workshops on how to use upcycled materials in art.
"At Meow Wolf Denver, we have a really special relationship to trash," she says. "I think this is a common occurrence for artists in general, because unless you're especially lucky, you tend to be broke. So upcycling and recycling and the use of trash or anything like that as materials has, I think, always been a necessity for artists to keep things inexpensive and to still be able to do their craft."

The aforementioned C Street "is a trash planet," says Major. "It's the trash dump for the entire universe. It's decorated with all sorts of refuse, recycled and built into new things. The costumes in that area are also all thrifted."



For all costumes, she adds, “We try to utilize a lot of the refuse in trash and scraps that we get from all departments of the exhibit. I have people saving all sorts of stuff for me — I have a room just full of trash bags with stuff. I feel like it has turned into less of a quote-unquote money-saving option and more like a superpower that I have, where I can see the possibilities in a pile of what would end up in the landfill traditionally.”

One of Major’s wardrobe creations, Sleevie Nicks, is an example of her superpower in action.

“We had to cut about 300 long-sleeved, button-up shirts into short sleeves, so we had all these extra sleeves,” she says. “It was like, I simply cannot watch these go into the garbage. I have to do something.’” Meow Wolf has also produced outside events like Vortex, a music festival that diverted 87 percent of its waste in 2023, and the team reaches beyond the walls of Convergence Station to work with the denizens of Denver.

“Sun Valley is our big focus in terms of a lot of the impact work that we do because it is our neighborhood,” says Asakawa Huntz. “We are trying to support them as much as we can, not only with the makers workshops, but we’ve also been doing several cleanups with the neighborhood. We work really closely with the Sun Valley Community Coalition to get those scheduled and partner with all the local organizations there.”

Reilly Strong, sustainability manager for all of Meow Wolf’s locations, says she is rethinking Convergence Station’s waste strategy in the wake of A1 Organics’ ban on compostable paper products.
“We’re kind of starting from scratch,” says Strong. “We launched a sustainability council this year. We have three members on the council from our Denver exhibition, as well as others from across the whole company. The focus of this council right now is working on our zero-waste program.”

After completing an audit at Convergence Station, the council will retool operations to divert as much waste from the landfill as possible. “We’re very much in the beginning of the process right now,” says Strong.

At first glance, Meow Wolf’s fantastical realms may appear to be disconnected from the natural world. Guests are invited to explore our exhibitions within the climate-controlled comfort of the indoors. Rain or shine, winter or summer, night or day, the immersive experiences we create go seemingly unchanged by the realities of Earth.

And yet, nature has long been a foundational muse for Meow Wolf artists. From the strange swamplands of Numina at Convergence Station, to Omega Mart’s surreal Projected Desert, our creations are infused with earthly enchantment–sparking soulful ease and child-like awe.

Our relationship to nature goes far beyond that of artist and muse. In order to protect this source of so much inspiration, Meow Wolf has embarked on a forever journey to embed environmental consciousness into everything we do.

One could say our sustainability journey is as old as Meow Wolf itself - dumpster-diving, recycling, and upcycling has been an integral element of our art-making since our earliest days.

As Meow Wolf evolves, we continue to meet new challenges on our journey to grow sustainably, reduce our carbon footprint, and operate more efficiently. In response, we have created comprehensive, company-wide initiatives dedicated to measuring and reducing our environmental impact.

Sustainable Creation
Each time we expand the Meow Wolf universe, we are confronted with the difficult realities of creating sustainably. Avoiding environmentally harmful materials in modern day artmaking can often feel like a balancing act–prioritizing our desire to build responsibly alongside safety, cost, and durability.

Meow Wolf creators look beyond materials traditionally used in largescale art installations to envision a more sustainable future. Artists like Emmanuelle John have begun the daunting but exciting challenge of finding plastic alternatives for future exhibitions. While we still have a long way to go, we have discovered some promising materials for use in future exhibitions.

Mycelium is a root-like network of fungus that has gained popularity as a sustainable building material. While fungus might seem like an unlikely alternative, it actually holds huge promise.



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