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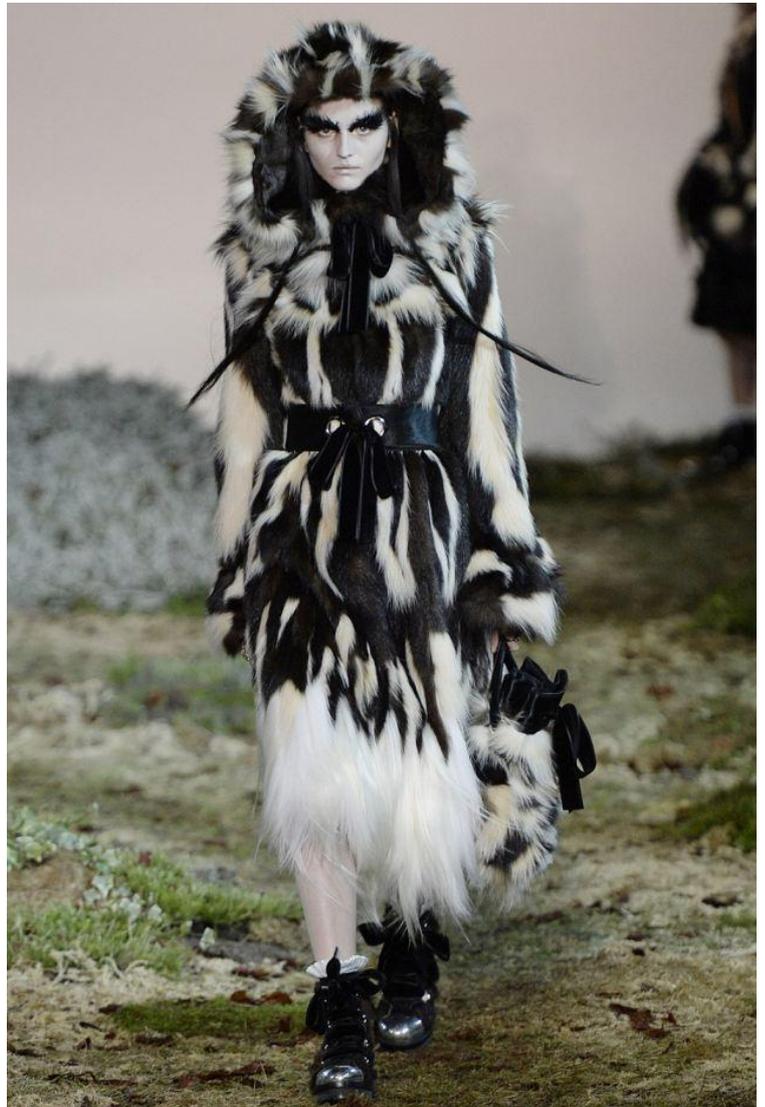
How the fur industry clawed its way back: Lavishing gifts on celebs. Targeting children in the classroom. The cynical ploys making fur 'respectable' again

Fur dominated London Fashion Week this year
Only 58 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds in a poll believed it wrong to use fur
Fur houses are seducing celebrities and budding designers with freebies

Tom Ford's was a rich purple, Roksanda Ilincic went for a garish patchwork design and Christopher Kane opted for the natural look.

As the designers sent their models down the London catwalks, nothing summed up Fashion Week quite like fur.

It was the same story in New York, where the likes of DKNY and J. Mendel proudly paraded it on the runway, while practically every piece in Alexander McQueen's Paris catwalk show — a favourite of the Duchess of Cambridge — used fur in one way or another.



Back in fashion: Designer Alexander McQueen used fur in his show, as did DKNY, Roksanda Ilincic and Tom Ford

In fact, according to furriers, 70 per cent of recent catwalk shows featured fur. Even the Cheltenham races last week were awash with the stuff, with Cossack hats and stoles galore.

Twenty years ago, it would have been unheard of. To wear fur in Britain would have risked public censure and perhaps even having paint thrown over you.

But the fur industry has fought back, rebranding itself as 'ethical' and 'luxurious' with a stealthy, sustained and, some might say, deeply cynical campaign aimed at young women. If the swing in attitudes among the new generation is anything to judge by, it's working. A 2013 YouGov poll found just 58 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds believed it wrong to use fur compared to 77 per cent of over-55s.

And sales are shooting up: in 2011, the industry was worth £9 billion, a rise of more than 70 per cent in a decade.

This means an estimated 50 million animals are killed on fur farms — which account for 85 per cent of all pelts — each year.

The main victims are mink, 24 million of which were killed, up from 14 million in 2000. If rabbits (which are also used for meat) are included, the total number of animals slaughtered every year for fur may exceed a billion.



Trend-setter: Lily Allen steps out in a Roksanda Ilincic fur jacket

It seems those campaigns with emotive photos of baby seals being clubbed to death and supermodels such as Naomi Campbell pledging to 'go naked' rather than wear fur have come to naught.

So, how has the fur industry clawed its way back into fashion? To understand, we must go back more than 20 years to the nadir of the industry.

While some furriers deny animal rights campaigns had any impact on sales, all agree fur had a major image problem, being increasingly seen as the preserve of elderly dowagers. 'You might call it a crisis,' says Sander Jacobsen of Kopenhagen Furs, the world's largest fur auction house.

'For a long time, there was no creativity in the designs. Fashions changed, but the fur business wasn't ready for it and business dropped.

'By the late Eighties, people realised something had to be done. Companies decided to change and use the material in a more fashionable way.'



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Furriers began looking at new ways to work with fur and came up with methods of dyeing it different colours so that whatever shades were in fashion could be replicated.

They also invented methods of thinning the fur to make it lighter. This made it more suitable for warmer climates, such as cash-rich Dubai and China. Such techniques instantly expanded their reach, helped by marketing campaigns.

Celebrities were drafted in to help. U.S. fur company Blackglama had Janet Jackson and Elle Macpherson modelling its clothes, while other companies 'gifted' coats to the famous.

Even Campbell, who vowed not to wear fur in an advert for animal rights group Peta, promoted New York furrier Dennis Basso — whose coats sell for up to £126,750 — in 2009.

The gifting of fur to celebrities has been a key weapon in the fight to make it seem morally acceptable. Last month, London-based Hockley gave Lily Allen a green fox jacket to wear to the NME Awards.

'Her stylist got in contact with us and we provided it,' says Frank Zilberkweit, the company's director.

DID YOU KNOW?

A fashion editor wore a vintage gorilla fur coat to Paris Fashion week this year

He declined to say how much Allen paid for the jacket, saying only: 'Obviously she doesn't pay as much as normal customers.'

Stars such as Rihanna, Cara Delevingne and Kate Moss — all role models for young girls — are also regularly seen wearing fur.

Indeed, the industry has been even more explicit at trying to 'educate' the young about the merits of its product.

The British Fur Trade Association (BFTA) launched a web-based educational initiative named Fur Trails in 2008. The BFTA claims its material 'meets UK curriculum targets and is ideal for children aged 12 to 14', and contains study packs, videos and teachers' notes.

One of the packs states: 'In the past 20 years, fur has been put back into fashion. Young designers are designing fur garments for young people. Fur can be light and playful.'

Others suggest that teachers show children how to 'combine materials to create particular aesthetic effects' and invites pupils to design a poster to market fur.

Thomas Pietsch, of animal rights group Four Paws, is appalled. 'I don't see any educational benefit from this. It serves no purpose other than to make children think fur is good, fashionable and not cruel. The information children will receive about fur is the view of the fur industry and the views of critics and animal welfare people will not be heard.'



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Fur sales are shooting up: In 2011, the industry was worth £9 billion, a rise of more than 70 per cent in a decade

But the fur houses aren't only seeking to influence children: they've also been targeting the designers of the future.

Saga Furs runs an annual competition for students at the London College of Fashion to design a garment with their wares.

'They provide free fur and the winners get a month-long internship,' says Shelly Asquith, president of the university's students' union.

'The way they do it is so wrong. A lot of students struggle to pay for material, so this offer is tempting. Saga also sponsors some of the students' first catwalk collections.

'This is their way of getting their foot in the door. It normalises the use of fur with students who will be showing at London Fashion Week in the years to come.'

The college refused to talk to the Mail about Saga's involvement with its students.

But it's not the only firm doing it. A similar project called Remix is run by the International Fur Trade Federation (IFTF).

'We go into arts colleges and schools and give students the chance to come up with a fur design that gets made into a garment,' says CEO Mark Oaten.



DID YOU KNOW?

The Victorians were the first to have fur on the outside rather than the

'It gives young designers a lot of experience. They get sponsorship and some free fur. We also run a bursary scheme. The project and bursaries costs us around £210,000 a year.' The IFTF has doubled its advertising in the past year, spending around £1 million.

'It's not so much about trying to improve our image, but wanting to move into new areas,' says Mr Oaten. 'We did advertise in GQ for the men's market and in House & Garden magazine for rugs and cushions. We also advertise in Vogue and in the Economist.'

While British Vogue has a 'no fur' policy for its editorial content, it's happy to accept adverts from the fur industry. Vogue editor Alexandra Shulman says: 'The advertising side, which is under separate jurisdiction, does carry fur, particularly since some of it is placed across a number of Vogues around the world, many of whom have a different policy.'

Mr Pietsch concedes: 'The industry has done a good job in bringing back fur as a trendy product. When we talk to fashion companies, they say there's quite a lot of pressure on them to use real fur.'

These companies must bow to consumer demands — and Mr Zilberkweit says this is because of changes in economic power.

Animal-loving Europe and America have been hit by recession while Asia, which has little concept of animal welfare, has boomed.

'The reason why the vast majority of designers have accepted fur into their collections is to expand their market,' says Mr Zilberkweit. 'Emerging markets like China and Russia have a huge appetite for fur.'

Furriers have also begun inviting established designers to work with free fur. And under public pressure, the industry brought in the 'origin assured' label in 2007 to reassure customers that the fur they were buying came from a country with rules governing its production. This allowed them to sell fur as 'ethical'.



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London nightclub Mahiki - where Prince Harry goes to party - won't let in anyone wearing fur which proves not everyone has accepted the material as the norm. Pictured: Roksanda Illincic model at London Fashion Week

But animal rights campaigners believe this label is meaningless because it only requires farms to keep the basic standards laid down by their own country's laws.

Thus, in Finland, arctic foxes are kept in a 31 in square cage — barely bigger than the creature itself.

'Animals suffer months of confinement in crowded, filthy cages,' says Yvonne Taylor of Peta.

'These conditions often lead to fights breaking out among animals, resulting in injuries such as blindness and open, infected bite wounds, which almost always go untreated.

'Animals are often driven insane by the confinement and resort to self-mutilation and cannibalism.'

Last month, Four Paws released a video of a Saga-approved fur farm in Finland, whose customers include Burberry, Marc Jacobs, Fendi and Gucci. 'You could see the foxes couldn't move,' says Mr Pietsch.

'The cage was made of wire, even the floor, which means the animals have problems with their feet. They have eye infections and some don't have tails.'

The foxes spend seven months in cages before being electrocuted. Animals killed for fur are slaughtered in ways that don't spoil any of the pelt. Mink are gassed.

Furriers dismiss the findings as happening only on a minority of farms. But the real problem is that young people, who suddenly see fur as trendy, have limited spending power and may demand their fur is cheap, rather than ethical.

'This worries us a lot,' says Mr Pietsch. 'Cheap fur comes from other regions where there are fewer welfare standards than in Europe.

'There are so many fashion imports from Asia, it's impossible to control what is entering the EU and it's expensive to test fur to find out what species it's from.'

For it might not be the chinchilla, polar fox or rabbit fur you expect. Earlier this year, a retailer in Germany was found selling hats made from Chinese cat fur.



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There are no animal welfare laws in China, and activists have found evidence of creatures being bludgeoned to death and skinned alive. In one powerful piece of footage, a skinned raccoon lifts its head and blinks at the camera.

Because of the welfare issues, many High Street stores believe the solution is to ban fur. Sir Philip Green's Arcadia Group as well as All Saints, H&M and Selfridges still decline to stock it.

And the recent announcement from London nightclub Mahiki — where Prince Harry goes to party — that it won't let in anyone wearing the stuff proves not everyone has accepted it as the norm.

But is it far too little, too late against a concerted effort by a powerful industry to put fur back into our wardrobes?

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2582226/How-fur-industry-clawed-way-Lavishing-gifts-celebs-Targeting-children-classroom-The-cynical-ploys-making-fur-respectable-again.html>