



Prof. Dr. Amanda Queiroz Campos

Professor at the Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (Udesc), Florianopolis, Brazil

Amanda Queiroz Campos holds a PhD in Design, obtained through a joint supervision program between the Federal University of Santa Catarina in Brazil and Bergische Universität Wuppertal in Germany, with support from CAPES/DAAD and FAPESC scholarships. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Fashion Design from the State University of Santa Catarina (Udesc) in 2010 and in Design from the Federal University in 2012. Her Master's studies were conducted in the field of Design, where she focused on trends adoption and the fashion system.

Currently serving as a collaborating professor at Udesc/Brazil, Amanda leads Octa Fashion, the largest authorial fashion show in the state of Santa Catarina. Under her guidance, the event has seen significant innovations, with the 2021 edition recognized as the largest virtual fashion show in Latin America. In 2023, Octa Fashion was transformed into an exhibition at the Museu da Escola Catarinense.

In addition to her role with Octa Fashion, Amanda publishes the annual magazine Octa Mag and serves as an editor for the journals Modapalavra and e-Revista LOGO. She also provides consulting services on trends and consumer behavior, contributing extensively to the fields of Fashion and Design.

Threads of change: A Haute Couture Collection embroidered with Sustainability and Inclusion

Amanda Queiroz Campos, PhD

amanda.campos@udesc.br

Abstract

The creative economy plays a vital role in fashion, advancing inclusion, diversity, and job opportunities for marginalized communities while championing cultural representation through traditional textiles and digital platforms. It also promotes sustainable practices, including the use of eco-friendly fabrics. This article highlights the Ponto Firme Project, presented at Paris Haute Couture Week, led by Brazilian designer Gustavo Silvestre and French designer Kevin Germanier. Their collection garnered international acclaim for its commitment to sustainability, utilizing recycled materials and showcasing crochet techniques from Ateliê Ponto Firme, which trains vulnerable trans and cis women. The article illustrates how fashion can catalyze social change, fostering sustainability and inclusivity through collaborations between Germanier, Silvestre, and the Ponto Firme Project.

Keywords: Fashion Design, Inclusion, Creative Economy, Fashion for all, Sustainability.

Introduction

The creative economy includes industries that depend on creativity, intellectual property, and cultural expression, with fashion being a significant element. Within the realm of fashion, the creative economy promotes inclusion and diversity by generating job opportunities for marginalized communities, enhancing cultural representation through traditional textiles, and utilizing digital platforms. This approach empowers diverse talents by providing them with visibility and economic opportunities.

In this context, this article intends to present the Ponto Firme Project, which gained prominence in the last Haute Couture Week in Paris, through the partnership of Brazilian designer Gustavo Silvestre and French designer Kevin Germanier. To this end, bibliographical research was carried out on sustainability, inclusion, and representation in fashion, based on references from Berlin (2012), Mora, Rocamora & Volonté (2014), Ofori et al. (2025) and others.

The investigative stage of this study involved documentary research about the Ponto Firme Project, both designers and the SS2025 collection on official websites, reports issued by the specialized press, a video of the fashion show, and the documentary Ponto Firme Doc.

Kevin Germanier is acclaimed for his sustainable approach – using recycled fabrics, upcycling techniques, and discarded beads, but with a sophisticated and disruptive aesthetic. As the literature review on sustainable aspects of fashion, Daukantienė (2023, p.999) concludes that companies should prioritize the collection and recycling of used clothing. In line with the circular economy theory,

extending the lifespan of products is essential, which can be achieved through technical upgrades, resale, repairs, or recycling.

The SS2025 collection, in collaboration with designer Gustavo Silvestre, has garnered international recognition, marking a significant milestone as the sixth collection between the two designers. This edition, which made its debut at Haute Couture Week, showcases crochet techniques developed by Silvestre at Ateliê Ponto Firme. This atelier not only focuses on creative expression but also provides training and employment opportunities for trans and cis women in vulnerable situations.

This article aims to illustrate how fashion can serve as a powerful instrument for social change by promoting resources, platforms, and opportunities that honor social and cultural diversity. It seeks to enhance the inclusion of marginalized communities and raise awareness of environmental sustainability and cultural heritage preservation. A notable example of this successful collaboration is the partnership between Kevin Germanier, Gustavo Silvestre, and their sponsored project, Ponto Firme, which showcases the potential for sustainability and inclusivity within the global fashion industry throughout the entire product life cycle.

The limiting systems of traditional fashion

Fashion as a structured system was institutionalized by Charles Frederick Worth, an Englishman who postulated a distinctly different *modus operandi* for garment creation. In the latter half of the 19th century, artisan couturiers changed their practices: rather than visiting their clients and catering to their preferences, clients started visiting the designers' *maisons*. During this period, authorship in

fashion creation became evident, with designers signing their pieces with labels affixed to them, thereby granting them copyright protection (Campos, 2021).

The dynamics of previously created collections reverberated in industrialization and mass production processes, which altered the direct relationship between fashion designers and consumers. Great *magasins* and commercial brands further institutionalized the creative figure of the couturier (Sant'Anna, 2011). By the end of the 19th century, the rise of ready-to-wear and prêt-à-porter fashion dissociated luxury fashion from the ideals of artisanal craftsmanship and small-scale, refined production, aligning it with mass production practices (Corrêa; Guerra, 2023).

Starting in the 1980s, the fashion industry witnessed a fast production and consumption transformation, characterized by mechanisms and practices that reduced the costs and prices of products. This shift was driven by reproducing low-cost, trendy items perceived as discardable (Berlim, 2012). Fast fashion epitomizes the peak of fashion's acceleration and massification. Enabled by the sophistication of production and transportation technologies, as well as the internet, fast fashion introduced the launch of several collections within a single year. Allowing brands to respond quickly to sales data and align supply with demand (Campos, Gomez, 2016). However, this approach has raised concerns regarding environmental sustainability, ongoing issues of plagiarism, and inhumane working conditions, highlighting the limitations of the fast fashion model.

As a reaction, the slow fashion phenomenon proposes a reimagined outcome for the fashion system. This paradigm shift has prompted various transformative trends within the industry that

emphasize environmental, social, and cultural sustainability. Thus, the prevailing tendencies of speed, reproduction, homogenization, and deterritorialization announce counterpoints and constraints that lead to a redefinition of fashion's creation, production, and distribution processes.

Fashion, sustainability and inclusion

For several decades, the concept of sustainability has been framed as a solution to an urgent issue. It advocates for reducing the consumption of environmental resources, emphasizes minimizing the use of raw materials, and seeks to avoid product obsolescence or, at the very least, ensure proper disposal practices. In their editorial "On the Issue of Sustainability in Fashion Studies," Mora, Rocamora, and Volonté (2014, p. 140) note that implementing sustainable practices in the fashion industry is challenging due to the complexity of its production chain, which encompasses not only material goods and high levels of labor but also intangible factors related to brand values.

Among the challenges associated with the materiality of fashion items is the notable issue of overproduction and the premature and improper disposing of clothing. This predicament is largely attributed to fast fashion production and consumption methods, amongst rampant consumerism.

Some solutions such as the development of biodegradable and recycled fibers aim to alleviate the effects of production in the environment. More drawn to a change in consumer behavior, the slow fashion - the slow moment as a whole - intends to educate the consumer about the origin and destination of products, promoting a conscious attitude towards consumption (dos Reis & Wolf, 2010). A

growing practice that aims to reduce the environmental impact of fashion is upcycling.

Ofori (et al., 2025) consider upcycling to be a more promising method of ensuring a circular business model than recycling, which often derives a loss in value or downcycling. The German engineer Reiner Pilz created the term upcycling in 1994 precisely to indicate an enhancement of a product's value and longevity. "The goal of this procedure is to increase the aesthetic and functional value of the product by using designers' understanding of material handling and manipulation to give the product a distinctive appearance" (op. cit., p.6). In addition to a new fit, many techniques can be applied to the surface intervention, valuing the aesthetic appearance, such as mending, dyeing, layering, deconstruction, collage, weaving, knitting, crocheting, and others (Rissanen and McQuillan, 2023 apud Ofori et. al., p.6)

Upcycling addresses also immaterial aspects of sustainability, such as *sociocultural and psychological advantages, including a sense of community, a revitalized sense of pride and fulfilment, new knowledge and skills and a sense of empowerment. It makes it possible for people, organizations and communities to trade waste and share resources and expertise.* (Ofori et. al., op. cit, p.8)

In many aspects, social sustainability is put into practice by offering opportunities for education and training, creating job opportunities notably for those underprivileged (Sung et al., 2019). Social sustainability aligns with the design goals for social change by considering the social context crucial for sustainability. It promotes cultural transformation through sustainable fabrics in traditional collections, simplified care processes, extended product lifespans,

and broader definitions of beauty and fashion. “The pervasive endurance of the many homogenizing and stereotyping visions of beauty, health, and success that are typical of mainstream models of Western fashion” (Mora; Rocamora & Volonté, 2014, p.140) must be questioned.

As Isidro and Mesquita defend (2023, p.94), “a socially oriented design must be willing to recognize the knowledge and ways of being and producing of invisible, silenced or socially devalued groups.” Likewise, sustainability regards the cultural dimensions of products, as well as their symbolic and immaterial content. It is noticeable on the part of different fashion brands how aesthetic standards are being placed in the spotlight, expanding traditional and Eurocentric fashion references. Many of those interventions occurred due to the collaboration between designers from different countries and between designers, artisans and crafters (Mora; Rocamora & Volonté, op.cit.).

Collaborative efforts between designers and craftsmen often result in exceptional products that stand out for their exclusivity, superior quality, artisanal craftsmanship, and aesthetic appeal. Such attributes enable these items to be valued and appreciated over extended periods. The exclusive and responsible approach of upcycling strongly reverberates with consumers who prioritize individuality, authenticity, and social responsibility. Thus, authorial fashion gains strength in select markets, where artisanal production, the cultural and artistic base of the places, the sustainability and material quality of the pieces, the relationship with the creator and the proximity to their creative process and the inspiration for their creation are valued (Campos, 2021). Authorial fashion enables the experience of space and time adherent to the conception and

production of the pieces. Therefore, the created pieces absorb the "soul" of the creator, attributing to them affective value and the sensitive symbolic experimentation of pieces (works) of clothing.

The creators

Kevin Germanier

Kevin Germanier is a young and accomplished fashion designer born in 1992 in Granges, Switzerland. He is the founder of the eponymous brand, renowned for its sophistication, as well as its commitment to environmental and social responsibility. The Germanier brand was established in 2018 after Kevin, a graduate of Central Saint Martins, received recognition for his talent. His signature style consists of statement pieces that serve as uniforms for ultra-feminine and glamorous women, embodying a futuristic warrior aesthetic characterized by striking color combinations and adorned with an array of crystals, pearls, glass beads, and sequins—each creation destined for a noble purpose beyond mere disposal (Kevin Germanier, 2025).

Dedicated to sustainable development, Germanier redefines luxury as a captivating blend of visual allure and environmental consciousness, garnering him significant acclaim in the fashion industry. However, the designer is keen to avoid being labeled solely as a proponent of sustainability; his upcycling practices emerged out of necessity during his years as a fashion student at Central Saint Martins. This experience shaped his creative process, which focuses on repurposing garments and materials, utilizing textile waste from other fashion houses to prevent overproduction (Les Echos, 2021). The outcome is a collection of colorful and eccentric outfits crafted from recycled materials, exemplifying high-quality artistry (RTS, 2021).

Germanier is also known for employing elderly knitters from his hometown in Valais, including his 82-year-old grandmother. In an interview

with David Berger, he stated, "I don't want to talk about ethical fashion anymore; sustainable development isn't a trend; it's a necessity" (Ibid.). The designer showcases in the official Paris Fashion Week from 2020, highlighting his substantial influence and recognition within the fashion industry.

Gustavo Silvestre

Born in 1980 in Recife, Gustavo Silvestre is a Brazilian designer, artist, craftsman, and educator in manual arts (Gustavo Silvestre, 2025a). He is recognized for integrating crochet into art, fashion, and sustainability. His connection to crochet began in childhood, watching the women in his family. (Ibid.) Despite being told it was a craft for women, he became a master of the technique and challenged this perception by teaching crochet in prisons, one of society's most rigidly gendered spaces.

In 2015, Silvestre was invited to teach crochet to inmates already familiar with manual work at a Penitentiary in the metropolitan region of São Paulo. The project has evolved into a continuous initiative aimed at training inmates and ex-inmates of the prison system while generating income for them. Since its creation, the course has successfully trained over a hundred students. Some of these individuals have reintegrated into society and continue collaborating with Gustavo Silvestre in his studio. (Isidoro & Mesquita, 2023).

Through his Ponto Firme project, Gustavo Silvestre introduces art and compassion into prisons, using crochet as a means of social transformation. He believes that fashion should be engaged with the realities of the world (Artigas, 2018). The designer acts, as MIsidoro & Mesquita (op.cit.) defend, as a facilitator, in the search for collective

solutions that prioritize the needs of a specific group, above individual professional expectations, when developing projects with the participation of socially vulnerable groups or communities.

Ponto Firme Project

The Ponto Firme Project was established in 2015, initially offering crochet classes to inmates at the Adriano Marrey men's prison in Guarulhos. The initial focus was on creating household items like rugs and towels (Gustavo Silvestre, 2025b). However, as the project developed, it transitioned to fashion, resulting in collections. The company Círculo, based in Santa Catarina, has been instrumental in this endeavor by supplying the materials needed for the crochet course.

This initiative provides inmates with an alternative path to professional reintegration upon release, particularly for those serving sentences for robbery, drug trafficking, and assault. Since 2022, the Ponto Firme Project has showcased its work five times at São Paulo Fashion Week, allowing inmates to display their craftsmanship, instilling pride, and serving as a deterrent to recidivism.

The project first appeared at São Paulo Fashion Week (SPFW) in 2018. In October 2022 it made its debut at Paris Fashion Week thanks to a collaboration with designer Kevin Germanier. In 2021, the initiative grew with the launch of Escola Ponto Firme, which provides crochet courses to individuals facing vulnerabilities.

The project brings affection, design, and aesthetics into a penitentiary, promoting social transformation through fashion and crochet for inmates and ex-prisoners. According to Silvestre, "Crochet establishes identity. Each crochet stitch is legitimate, and each person puts their identity into their craft work" (Bezerra, 2023, p.8). Thus,

every stitch and tie embraces and empowers its creators, aiding their recovery, resocialization, and the reconstruction of their self-esteem and autonomy.



Image 1: Gustavo Silvestre, models and artisans from Ponto Firme in SPFW 58, Foto: Felipe Rufino for L'Oficiell Brasil (Holzmeister & Viveiros, 2014)

The creature: the SS2025 Collection

This paper focuses on the Spring/Summer 2025 collection designed by Kevin Germanier, which was presented as the final show at Paris Fashion Week. On January 30th, the Swiss designer made his haute

couture debut at this prestigious event. This collection marked the sixth collaboration between Brazilian designer Gustavo Silvestre and Germanier, in partnership with the Ponto Firme Project. Their previous collaborations included four prêt-à-porter collections showcased at Paris Fashion Week and one at São Paulo Fashion Week in December 2023. For his haute couture debut, Germanier developed a collection by upcycling vintage pieces from luxury fashion brands. He emphasized that the process involved outright creation rather than simple customization. He explained, "We retouch, exchange the lining and embroider. It is not a customization, It's really this idea of having a piece that you love and want to adapt it to continue using it" (Mesquita, 2025). This approach extends the product's life cycle while reinterpreting its value.



Image 2: View of the line up of PFW SS2025 collection

Source:Launchmetrics Spotlight apud Coy (2025)

From the social and cultural sustainability perspective, Silvestre celebrates the appreciation for ancient techniques, commonly related to crafts, considered lesser arts and achieving questionable aesthetic

quality. “It is gratifying to see how an ancestral technique can be reinterpreted in haute couture, showing the unlimited potential of manual work”, affirms the designer in a PR interview retrieved by Elle Magazine (Mesquita, 2025). Another impact of this social oriented practice is the context of production, as mentioned in the Ponto Firme subsection, since the project capacitates trans e cis women in vulnerable situations. For this particular collaboration, 15 participants dedicated 140 hours of manual work to execute seven full looks (Coy, 2025, s.p.).

The complete collection showcased sculptural pieces featuring a variety of surface treatments. It included flatter textures like crochet, knitting, and embroidered rhinestones, as well as three-dimensional textures that transformed silhouettes using sharp sticks, resulting in ample, explosive, and irreverent volumes. The collection presented a total of 27 looks for both men and women, many of which comprised mini and midi skirts, blazers, and suits.

The female models sported hairstyles with volume at the crown, reminiscent of 1950s-style quiffs. Many outfits featured thick, voluminous fringes at their hems and collars. The pants also showcased embroidery and material applications in various shapes and textures, contributing to the pieces' richness and rhythm. The coats were densely embellishing, either fully or partially embroidered, with figures or continuous prints that spanned the entire garment.

The outfits are entirely made of colored beads, assembled in blocks of color arranged in contrasting harmonies of saturated colors. These beads also make up headpieces, earrings, and necklaces. In some cases, these beads reach the feet, making up high and knee-high boots. Some beaded looks adopt elongated embellishments that

project from the body and generate geometric and atomic shapes, following dispersed directions.

Outfits made in crochet by Ponto Firme also configured twin sets either of blouses or suits, and skirts. The projected textures of the hems or collars had an organic morphology, like coral ruffles, and ruffles like grand and dense anemones. Some were shiny, as initially presented, and were made with metalloid ribbons, and others were matte, apparently using materials such as cotton or wool. In these ruffles, the outer edge has a lighter tone, projecting its outer face even further forward.



Image 3: Upcycled look by Gemanier, Silvestre and Ponto Firme SS2025

Source:Launchmetrics Spotlight apud Coy (2025)

Other costumes are composed of the accumulation of beads and crocheted threads, draped and overlapped, forming layers of materiality that transform the limits and movements of the body. The

profusion of textures and surface treatments, combined with the unusual choice of colors, invigorates the overabundance of stimuli, achieving a collection with a unique and fashion-forward look that three-dimensionally and visually intervenes in space and achieves a distinguishing result that draws attention to the Ponto Firme project, to the practices coming from culturally and socially undervalued groups: to the values of social design.

The confluence of timeless: weaving sustainability into long lasting apparel

Carvalho (2010) proposed that the dressed body enhances the interaction with various fabrics and textures that come into contact with the skin. In this state, the body is dynamic, expressing individual characteristics and its relationship with space. Designers Gustavo Silvestre and Kevin Germanier emphasize new ethical and aesthetic values through techniques such as stitching, finishing touches, three-dimensional printing, and diverse applications.

They creatively use ready-made clothing and other discarded materials as their raw materials, positioning their work within sustainable practices. This approach is known as upcycling, which transforms textile waste—usually destined for disposal or incineration—into new products that exceed the value of the original items.

As Ofori et al. (2025) attest, each upcycling creation narrates a transformation, emphasizing the creative and technical skills applied in transforming discarded materials into innovative and contemporary fashion pieces. According to the substantial literature review

conducted by the aforementioned authors, in addition to the collection analyzed, an upcycling clothing item that applies ancestral knowledge reinforces a silenced cultural base and presents an iconic and distinctive aspect. This type of valorization not only addresses visual and design aspects, achieving a singular appearance and one-of-a-kind products. Moreover, it drives the rapprochement between producers, consumers, and ancestral practices.

Our approach to sustainability surpasses technological considerations, such as the limited availability of materials and environmental preservation. It also encompasses social and cultural inclusion, a relatively new aspect of sustainability (Mora, Rocamora & Volontè, 2014). In this example, the action of design for inclusion especially involves the project of Brazilian Gustavo Silvestre, who faces challenges when personally coordinating the Ponto Firme project, working with vulnerable populations without support and resources. In addition to teaching crafts and providing social reintegration by employing people who have left prison systems, the designer rescues crochet as an artisanal practice, redefining it based on the designers' understanding and knowledge of material handling, manipulation, and techniques.

Likewise, Germanier sees in the transformations of second-hand clothes, manual knitting, and even kitsch aesthetics considered outdated or distasteful, a return to the stories of her grandmothers, his life story, and the need for reuse for economic and environmental reasons. By reintegrating and valuing this aesthetic, Germanier and Silvestre challenge the current structure of fashion, opening up to a counter-hegemonic performance of fashion design.

Traditionally, Isidoro & Mesquita (2023) argue that by neglecting non-institutionalized and dominant forms of knowledge, Brazilian design adopts a technical-scientific approach that marginalizes the capabilities and practices of culturally and socially undervalued groups. They suggest transgressing rigid horizontal and vertical structures to assert unique characteristics and dissolve hierarchies, creating a dynamic and continually evolving rhizome (op. cit., p. 94). The successful coverage of the collection and its impact on international media reflect a time that values cultural, social, political, and economic diversity. This collection, in particular, celebrates the potential and autonomy of varied perspectives, promoting a creative model that emphasizes inclusion and the appreciation of marginalized knowledge.

They offer a diverse range of apparel that is interconnected with the environment, various cultures, and minority groups. Their approach presents a poetic and practical experience in the act of dressing.

The artistic creations of Gemanier, Silvestre, and Ponto Fime serve as "rhizomes," intricately connecting diverse stories, worldviews, and strategies for environmental, social, and cultural sustainability across different continents. Through their work, they seek to reconstruct and redefine meanings, skillfully intertwining knowledge, cultural practices, collective memories, and the multifaceted nature of time. Their collection presents a rich intertwine of apparel, each piece thoughtfully designed to engage with the environment, celebrate diverse cultures, and honor minority groups. This innovative approach transforms the act of dressing into a poetic and practical experience, inviting wearers to connect deeply with the narratives and histories embodied in each garment.

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