



DIVERSITY:

The New Face of Fashion and Beauty

After the reality check on the fashion and beauty world's exclusionary nature brought diversity firmly to the fore of the conversation last year, it's time to lay out a new road map. The need for inclusion won't wane and conscious consumers won't wait around until brands back their words with real action. From examining the current level of the industry diversity, to making the conversation more inclusive, and exploring best practices to ensure an enduring future, Fairchild Media Group's Diversity Forum dug into the issues to shed some light on the next steps forward on diversity, the new face of fashion and beauty. *For coverage from the forum, see pages 10 to 21.*

Mexico's Culture Ministry Urges Respect for Its Material Culture

Alejandra Frausto Guerrero said viewing the country's cultural heritage as something from the past is a fallacy. BY MILES SOCHA

Mexico's secretary of culture believes the dangers of cultural appropriation and fashion's troubled relationship with it can be turned into "opportunities for cooperation," but only if the communities behind the creations agree and want to be part of it.

"We're talking about dignity for a living community to be part of this development," Alejandra Frausto Guerrero said. "The coming generation is much more aware about this ethical fashion, of development based on listening to the community first."

Frausto Guerrero has made international headlines for firing off letters to Carolina Herrera, Michael Kors, Louis Vuitton, Isabel Marant and others to point out unacknowledged use of Mexico's material culture.

Smiling brightly throughout a conversation with WWD's style director Alex Badia in her native Spanish, Frausto Guerrero said that while Mexico is known for its cultural heritage – the Aztecs, the Mayans, the Zapotecs – it's often viewed as something from the past, which is a fallacy.

"They're here, they're living communities, they're creative communities and they are communities that have the chance of being part of this international fashion market," she said. "There's a possibility of much deeper economic development."

Yet many people see an appealing garment and think, "because it's on the internet, it's mine."

She allowed that the fashion world may "understand the sophistication of culture, the sophistication of aesthetics, but maybe it doesn't understand the value a garment has, the cultural work, the cultural heritage behind it."



Alejandra Frausto Guerrero

For example, she cited the huipil, an embroidered tunic that can take years to realize if one accounts for growing the cotton and weaving the fabric between 3 and 6 a.m., the only hours when the fine threads will not stick on the loom.

"You can't respect what you don't know," she said. "This heritage doesn't belong only to one person, it has a community behind it."

And drawing from a culture and calling it a tribute is not enough.

"You invite people you pay tribute to

when you make a tribute," she said, lauding how Jean Paul Gaultier has paid homage to Pierre Cardin in an emotional and respectful way. "The person or community being honored must agree to it."

Mexico has 56 different ethnic groups, some living in abject poverty, and "millions" of people involved in artisanal work. During the session, Frausto Guerrero revealed plans to showcase artisans at a fashion fair called Originals to be held in Mexico later this year.

She invited brands to come discover

them, and she imagined artisans choosing the brands they wish to make business with – not the other way around.

"We're sure the fair will open new spaces for dialogue," she said, citing a phrase often used by creative communities: "Nothing from us without us." And we defend that."

The Mexican government works with the United Nations and UNESCO to "foster and protect" creative communities and, according to Frausto Guerrero, there is a law being discussed in the country's Congress that would confer "collective rights" on material culture.

Slowly, more brands are moving toward collaboration over appropriation. Frausto Guerrero acknowledged active discussions with Nike and Louis Vuitton, among brands that have knocked on her door recently. The activewear firm is "interested in a few elements of Mexican culture for a collection," while the French luxury brand has inquired about huipils.

Calling Vuitton "one of the most pirated brands in the world," she mused that perhaps that's why "they were responsive to create together with an artisan community."

Despite heightened awareness of cultural appropriation, fueled largely by social media, incidents still abound.

The same week as Frausto Guerrero's session, designer Tory Burch apologized to Portugal on Twitter for calling a spring 2021 sweater "Baja-inspired" instead of the real source: a fisherman sweater from the northern city of Póvoa de Varzim. Burch said she would correct the false attribution immediately and work with the municipality to "support local artisans" in Portugal.

Asked what the industry can do to help, Frausto Guerrero urged people to "listen and get to know" the creators of original designs, "especially these places with rich culture but vast economic marginalization," and develop work for these communities, if they want it.

"Behind a garment, there's a cultural community, and we can build a loom together," she said.

This Is How L'Oréal Is Using Think Tanks in Its Progress on Diversity

Angela Guy said she taps into the broad experiences of L'Oréal's employees to foster inclusivity. BY JAMES MANSO

Although the industry's lack of diversity has come further into the spotlight in the past year, according to Angela Guy, chief diversity and inclusion officer for North America at L'Oréal USA, success in moving forward all comes down to acknowledging employees' differences.

Speaking about her own success with diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in conversation with Sheena Butler Young, deputy editor at Footwear News, Guy said, "Diversity is our difference. I'm different from you. You're different from me. Therein lies the diversity. The real conversation is about what do you do with it. How do you engage it, and that's where the inclusion part comes from. From my perspective, when I look around, I just see the diversity of everything around us and the intersectionality of all those differences."

The events of the past year – from George Floyd's killing and the protests against police brutality to the coronavirus – have impacted how Guy views her responsibility.

"It was the year of optics for me," she



Angela Guy

said. "You can learn to look at things through a very different lens. We always talk about it in the diversity, equity and

inclusion space, that you see things from a diverse lens, but I just saw life differently. I saw hate elevated in a way that I hadn't seen in a very long time. That doesn't mean it didn't exist, but I could see it differently.

"When we're thinking about the pandemic, it's being able to see the pandemic through all of the lenses: how it impacted women, how it impacted people of color at disproportionate rates, how it impacted communities, and how it impacted...students and families," Guy continued. "Our ability to be inclusive and deliberately understand how those differences are being impacted is the work we do every day."

Guy attributes part of her success to the think tanks that have sprung up around L'Oréal USA under her tenure. "We were able to do roundtable discussions. We had members of our Jewish community come together and talk about anti-Semitism, and we have a women of color think tank at L'Oréal. They really got engaged in this dialogue from multiple dimensions because Asian hate was happening, and

we saw what was happening from a Black Lives Matter perspective," she said. "The think tanks really stepped up their level of engagement and their level of accountability, recognizing the dimension of diversity."

Reflecting L'Oréal's diverse consumer base internally at the organization is Guy's main goal, she said, noting the value of allowing consumers and employees to see themselves represented.

"We've been very intentional to ensure that we not only are bringing experienced, young Black women into our organization, or that we're building a pipeline for them to be able to grow," Guy said. "She will see herself in leadership because we have it at the highest level for the subsidiary, and we have Black women represented in our strategic committee."

Guy added that L'Oréal USA leads the beauty industry in terms of gender parity, with a workforce of nearly 70 percent women.

With consumers today on high alert, Guy said taking the temperature of a brand's diversity efforts and how they're being received in the public has only grown easier.

"Today it's not so hard because our consumers are telling us what they think about our advertising, what they think about our products, all through social media," she said. "So that's...probably the most important one because it's heartfelt and it comes authentically from our consumers."