

In Focus: Market Insights

PETA demonstrators in cat outfits celebrate a "No Fur" fashion week last fall in London.



FUR

EXCLUSIVE: Film Denouncing Fur Deemed 'Staged' by IFF Investigators

• The International Fur Federation described the 2009 video, which is used by antifur groups, as a "snuff film."

BY ARTHUR ZACZKIEWICZ

The latest salvo between the fur industry and antifur groups is an assertion by the International Fur Federation that a 2009 viral video depicting the skinning of live animals was a "staged snuff film," which "misleads the public with deceptive claims of fur industry practices."

According to a statement by the two Chinese fur skimmers who appeared in the video, two unidentified antifur investigators approached the men and offered them lunch (or money to buy lunch) if they skinned an animal alive. The skimmers complied, but later regretted the horrific act.

The IFF told WWD that the video, "China Fur Trade Exposed," was used by animal rights groups to "push for fur bans." The fur trade is a \$30 billion industry, and recent bans of the material by designers has garnered global headlines and has included designers and luxury brands such as Michael Kors, Stella McCartney, Gucci, Versace and Burberry, among others.

The bans come at a time when fur continues to see growing global demand, according to recent trade data, particularly its use in trim for outerwear brands such as Canada Goose. Simultaneously, there has been growing interest in animal-free and vegan products. During Vegan Fashion Week in January, fashion brands that showed included Dr. Martens, Matea Benedetti, Noémie Devime, Altir, Bayem, Ecopel, Enda, New Rock and Mink Shoes, among others, while beauty brands featured included Kat Von D Beauty, Giovanni Cosmetics, Belius eCosmetics, Cover FX and Ecco Bella.

For its part, the fur industry has recently focused its response to the antifur movement around the natural material's

sustainability and its use as a "freedom of choice" for designers and consumers alike. Fur industry stakeholders have also touted that many of the brands banning fur used little of it to begin with, describing the bans as "media stunts." In addition, some of the brands that have stopped using some forms of fur continue to use shearing.

But the claim that the China fur video was staged adds a more hard-line dimension to the debate. The video in question runs about one minute and is graphic in nature. It shows an Asiatic raccoon being beaten, and then skinned, while still breathing. There are several repostings of the video, but the one posted by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals on April 21, 2009, has garnered more than 3.4 million views. The video is copyrighted by the Swiss Animal Protection/EAST International.

A spokeswoman for PETA said the "footage is as authentic as the vivid pain that animals endure in the fur trade. Those who profit from torturing and killing fur-bearing animals will stop at nothing to hide how fur farmers confine animals to filthy wire cages and kill them in gruesome ways, including suffocation, electrocution, and skinning them alive. Instead of wasting resources on blatant lies, the fur industry would be better off producing vegan materials that today's kind consumers will actually want to wear."

SAP could not be reached for comment. The IFF claim followed what it said was a "decade-long investigation" by investigators hired by the organization. "The 2009 video went viral when it showed in excruciating detail an Asiatic Raccoon being skinned alive for its fur," the IFF said in a statement to WWD. "It has been presented to legislators by animal rights supporters to launch fur ban campaigns in Los Angeles and San Francisco and used repeatedly over the last decade in presentations to designers, brands and the media. The gruesome footage, captioned, 'A shocking look inside Chinese fur farms' caused widespread public revulsion and has

pushed designers to drop fur."

The IFF went on to note that the global fur industry "has proof that the barbaric and illegal act was staged in a deliberate attempt to disparage the industry. This proof includes interviews and signed affidavits from two men who appeared in the video, Ma Hong She and Su Feng Gang."

The two were working in the Shancun fur market, several hours outside Beijing, in 2009 and "confirmed that they were paid to perform the horrific act on camera," the IFF stated.

Aside from the video appearing on the PETA YouTube channel, the organization has a microsite, which can be found here, that is dedicated to the Chinese fur trade. At press time, it included a link to the video as well as content describing the video and the Chinese fur trade. Under the heading of "Skinned Alive," PETA noted that when "undercover investigators made their way onto Chinese fur farms, they found that many animals are still alive and struggling desperately when workers flip them onto their backs or hang them up by their legs or tails to skin them. When workers on these farms begin to cut the skin and fur from an animal's leg, the free limbs kick and writhe. Workers stomp on the necks and heads of animals who struggle too hard to allow a clean cut."

In an affidavit, Ma told investigators that both men were working that day "and a man, and a woman approached us. They had a camera and were filming. We asked what 'are you doing?' and the woman said her grandfather had never seen a raccoon skinned alive. So, she asked if I would do it, and she'd like to film me doing so. I told her we can't do that because the animal might bite us. She said she'd buy us a good lunch, or she'd give us a few hundred yuan to buy our own lunch."

After the skinning, Ma said "we felt uncomfortable. It was cruel for the animal. Even now, after so many years, every time I think about what we did it makes me

uncomfortable. It is something we regret." Ma said he worked as a skinner for years, and no one ever would "skin animals alive, and I've never seen anyone skin an animal alive."

In his statement, Su said Ma was his boss, "and he wanted me to skin the animal alive, but I said it was too cruel, and how much pain would the raccoon feel. Ma said they'd give us a lot of money – so I did it. While I was skinning the raccoon, the woman was filming. The man went to another stall and was also filming." The man and woman described by Ma and Su were not identified.

Nancy Daigneault, vice president of the Americas for the International Fur Federation, said the fur trade "uses third-party approved methods for euthanizing animals."

"All methods are reviewed and approved by veterinary groups," Daigneault explained. "One only has to apply logic to understand the risk it would pose of bites and scratches, not to mention disease to the person performing the act. And the fur, ripped and cut from the movement of the animal, would be worthless. This is not the practice within the fur industry and animal rights activists are aware of this. This is why they have had to stoop to encouraging the horrific treatment of animals and pay-offs to try to damage our industry. Now we have proof of the deceptive tactics of these groups that have misled legislators and designers."

The antifur movement is decades old, and the IFF said it has relied on "factual misrepresentations, doctored or staged video footage and outright lies or inaccuracies."

Daigneault and the IFF described antifur campaigns as "loud and graphic and in-your-face. But the IFF said the antifur groups "are not winning in the court of public opinion. Consumers are buying fur."

"Whatever consumer research animal activists present, the cash register tells the truest story," Daigneault said. "If nobody was buying, fur retailers wouldn't be selling it and manufacturers wouldn't be producing it...and a ban would be a moot point."

According to data from the United Nations, the total European export value for finished fur products increased 22 percent to 750.7 million euros in 2018, which is up from 614.7 million euros the previous year. According to a report from Fur Europe, a fur "value chain" organization, trade data has shown year-over-year gains for 20 years running (in regard to the export value of processed pelts from European countries to various markets worldwide). "The figures suggest that customers' demand for fur is increasing despite some high-end fashion brands adopting a fur-free policy and the enduring price crisis," the organization said in its report.

Meanwhile, the Associated Press reported last week that participants of North American fur auctions have seen pelt prices rise, especially for coyote, which is used in Canada Goose parkas. In its most recent quarterly report, Canada Goose's net income rose 72 percent to 105.3 million Canadian dollars while sales gained 50.2 percent to 399.3 million Canadian dollars.

Raul Lopez, creative director of Luar, told WWD that he chooses fur because of environmental reasons. "When you look to buy sustainably, you're not just buying the clothes, you're buying into a culture," the celebrity streetwear designer said. "Fur is an investment that lasts for generations, and you see this especially in urban communities. Fast fashion, including faux fur, is not a sustainable pathway for me as a designer. I don't want to make pieces that will be discarded into a landfill after a few seasons. I want to create items that create a legacy and are passed down to future generations."

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