

Reviving Antiques with Modern Innovations

Words by Anna Roos van Wijngaarden



In *The Art of Narrowing Down*, The Lissome delves into the sustainability stories of brands scouted at Milan’s WHITE show, seeking evidence that focus catalyses meaningful change. Part one spotlights the journey of Oyuna Tserendorj, preserving nomadic livelihoods with her namesake label. Part two tells about Kehan Yang’s humble approach to narrating slow silk stories grounded in local craft traditions for Yangkehan.

Comfortably tucked away on the lower floor of WHITE is an industrial space for some of the more avant-garde labels. There we find Diana Eugeni Le Quesne, a woman with a presence and clear idea of what it means to be sustainable. “You have to love what you do,” she says about her journey as an entrepreneur. An architect with a PhD in sustainability, she took a different turn working as an art director for apparel companies, then launching Vuscichè. Fashion was never her thing, but she loves people, so when upon her arrival in Abruzzo she found antique leftover textiles with a story, she wanted to do something for the community.

Abruzzo, nestled in Italy’s Apennine Mountains, was once a thriving wool and textile production district. Its fabrics, including the widely known brightly patterned blankets, gained prominence during the medieval period, driven by skilled artisans. Few original fabrics can still be found today. “Vuscichè exists due to my connection with the people,” says Le Quesne. “They know what I do and if they find something, they often give it to me.” The traditional cut, make, trim approach doesn’t apply. Le Quesne talks of “building” a garment. “We do have an archive of patterns and models, but each fabric is so different. So far, we’ve been able to produce 50 to 200 garments per season.”



Working with valuable antiques requires a meticulous workflow. Le Quesne prefers to do it herself. “When you wash antique silk and cotton, the shape changes. You need to be very careful and cut in a certain way that is hard to explain to a factory.” Since her fabrics are one of a kind, sizing options are limited. But the real retail challenge is the high markup, “because the regeneration process is long, slow, and purely manual labour,” Le Quesne explains. Each garment requires a designer, pattern maker, and seamstress to sketch the design, create a matching pattern, and choose the right dye. The latter is surprisingly innovative, which also comes at a price. Vuscichè pieces get their colour from ozone washes and a recycled dye powder called Recycrom. “This dress used to be red and green,” Le Quesne explains while handing over a nearly perfect piece – the slightly asymmetric drape is unavoidable. She dyed it black herself after repairing the small defects in the damask. We’re intrigued by the layers of storytelling, weaved, soaked, and knitted together. Unfortunately, there is only so little to tell from a glance at a shopping window.



Abruzzo Damask

Vuscichè’s iconic coats are fashionable reincarnations of Abruzzo’s best-kept secret: the Abruzzo Blanket. An essential part of the bridal trousseau in the 19th century, these blankets were produced with skills passed down over centuries – only one active mill remains. “My first coat was born from a blanket found at a flea market,” Le Quesne recounts. “I washed the material using ozone for hygiene [removing pathogens] and durability. When I ventured into making bags, these were equally well-received, so I got inspired to look for other discarded fabrics. I began to study, manipulate, and blend them – in the Abruzzese dialect, Vuscichè means ‘to mix with force.’”

One of these non-virgin materials is Abruzzo Damask, which has its roots in ancient China. With its smooth texture and floral or geometric designs, it found its revival in Abruzzo. Rumour has it that San Leucio had something to do with it; the village became renowned for its silk production, promoted by Bourbon monarchs. Damask bedspreads, home linens, and curtains were part of the Abruzzo bridal trousseau. “I found an overwhelming number of silk and cotton damasks,” Le Quesne marvels. “We regenerate them through colouring and patch mending, which involves overlapping parts of the pattern on small holes or stains. It’s a lengthy, costly, and challenging production process, but the finished products exude a charm of rural sumptuousness that I greatly appreciate.”



Abruzzo canvas

Another Vuscichè classic is Abruzzo canvas, a simple weave composed of cotton, linen, and hemp that served its purpose during World War II. Most households were equipped with small hand looms to create sheets, bandages, and dishcloths for a thriving local industry. Abruzzo canvas became a symbol of the region’s artisanal craftsmanship and love for tradition. With her “couturesque” garments, Le Quesne intends to pass on this historic patina: “My grandmother wove the ancient canvas at home during the war. I used to own many rolls and began to love the signs of time that make each piece unique. I thought it would be beautiful to apply the principles of restoration seen in architecture to fashion: preserving by transformation. Some garments are white and leave the canvas with its imperfections, while others are treated with ozone washes and Recycrom, overlaying the original weave with contemporary encrustation.”



Abruzzo wool

Le Quesne’s wish to capture Abruzzo’s textile heritage would be incomplete without including its sheep. “Due to the region’s harsh climate and unique environmental conditions, Abruzzo wool makes comfortably warm and durable fabrics.” Its characteristic colour doesn’t need much treatment. Le Quesne uses vinegar to open the fibres and organic hair conditioner for softening. “Abruzzo wool was long overshadowed by softer materials, but the precious fibre is making a comeback due to efforts from historic mills like Bianco Brothers.” Le Quesne regards them as custodians of Abruzzo’s legacy, suggesting that maybe the time for a local textile revival has come.

This article is the third of a three-part series, *The Art of Narrowing Down*, conducted after The Lissome was invited to attend the [WHITE](#) show in Milan in February 2024.

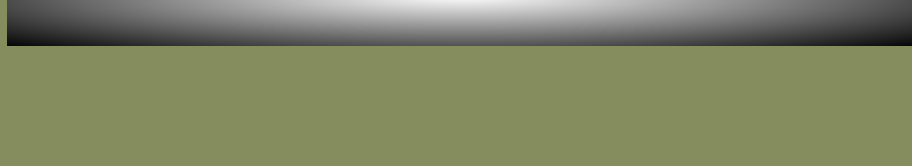
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