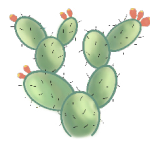


The Commissary

a community digest by prickly pear



Editor's Note

by Luisa Vargas

Howdy friends! As 2020 is coming to a close, we can't help but feel infinite gratitude towards this community of adventure seeking, wisdom hungry, international group of people who have rallied behind Prickly Pear. You've made this year worth it, allowed us to share our interests and learn from each other.

Personally (Luisa here), 2020 has been a year of creative rebirth. I've had time to return to my inner child and dabbled with paint, pens, charcoal and began learning about digital art and graphic design (thanks to *The Commissary!*). A huge part of this process is discovering inspiring artists like the ones we've featured here. I'm so happy we've gotten to share some of the many that inspire me most and hope they've impacted you just as much.

In past editions, we've kept *The Commissary* mostly local, but this month, we're excited to say that we have people contributing from around the country— New Jersey, New York, stories about dreamscapes in Colombia, and of course our hometown of ATX.

We hope each *Commissary* edition makes you rethink and reflect on



some aspect of your life this year—whether it was getting up before the sun to swim at Barton Springs, shift to a more plant-based diet, grow your own garden, or change the way you think about your morning cuppa coffee.

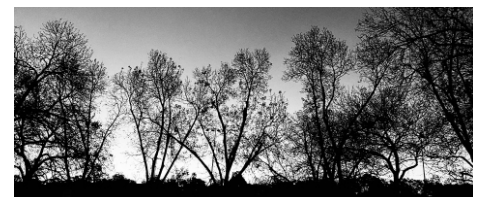
This month, we hit another crucial topic that deeply affects our planet and humanity's health— the clothes we choose to wear. Teka Nicholas walks us through how we can choose our clothes more intentionally. Just like at the store you grab an organic apple instead of a normal one, we hope after reading



this, you'll be reaching for organic cotton shirts and second hand thrift finds.

Lastly, get ready to drink up the creative juices of this month's featured artists, teachers and adventurers who are a reminder of the power you have to shape your life.

It's your world.



photos by Maria Vargas

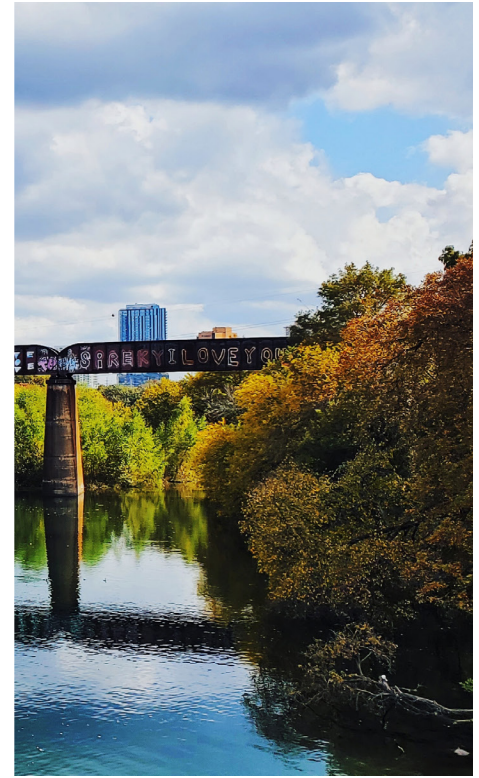


photo by John Kwaku Duah II

You Are What You Wear

by Maria and Luisa Vargas

As we all keep learning about living more sustainably, the global conversation is trending towards the food we eat, cars we drive, and wasteful packaging. But what about our clothes? What we wear matters just as much for our health and our planet's health.

This month we were thrilled to have a Zoom call with Teka Nicholas, an adjunct lecturer at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Teka is a fountain of wisdom on sustainable attire and keeps the topic down to earth.

One of the first things we asked her is describing sustainable fashion without the word, "fashion," because if you're anything like us, fashion may not be at the forefront of your mind, while things like athletic wear, adventure clothes,

stay-at-home clothes, and a nice outfit definitely are. It's your favorite white cotton t-shirt, your all-time favorite denim jeans, your seat-wicking running tank top, or go-to outdoor shorts.

Teka explains that everything we wear has a lengthy supply-chain because it's a combination of agriculture, labor, distribution, and marketing. This is a complex pipeline that strains the planet and people involved if not conducted in an environmentally sustainable and ethical way.

The most important thing when selecting clothes is being intentional. Ask yourself if you really need what you're about to buy. If you're online shopping, try letting items sit in your cart for a week. If after that, you still want to purchase, then keep two things in mind: material and labor. Are the materials good? Is it sustainably made? Are

laborers earning fair wages and are they in a safe working environment?

Your clothing is a crop

If we look at clothes as raw materials, then clothing is agriculture. Cotton, linen, kapoc, and flax just to name a few. How they're grown is important because of pesticide use that's harmful to farmers and the surrounding waterways, water intensity, and soil depletion as a result of monocropping.

Teka says hemp is a great crop that makes a great durable material and is beneficial for the soil because it regenerates the soil naturally. Hemp and cotton will also eventually biodegrade into the system, whereas synthetic materials like polyester end up as microplastics that get fed into waterways, soil, and animals.

Opt for organic materials when possible to ensure no harmful

pesticides are hurting people who grow the crops and the ecosystem where it's planted. Cotton, for example, is also extremely water intensive so selecting a material like hemp when possible, is progress.

But this doesn't mean you shouldn't purchase synthetic clothing, some of the best waterproof or athletic material is synthetic. In this case, purchase from a brand that's transparent with their sustainability and ethical practices or purchase second hand. The most important thing with buying clothes made of these materials is to ask yourself if you really need it. If you do, make sure it's a piece that will last you a lifetime, if it breaks, fix it. Some companies, like Patagonia, offer repair services that ensure their clothes stay out of landfills and out exploring the wild. Or check out your neighborhood tailor to get clothes patched up and ready to continue their life.

Is the labor fair?

Take a second to look at the shirt you're wearing and try to comprehend the entire journey it's been on. It's passed through so many humans along the way. Back when it was tended by farmers on the cotton field, to its transformation into cloth in a mill, to those sewing and assembling the products, and many more along the way.

Just as tangible materials have a price, labor does too. But labor is also what often gets cut to draw down prices. So when you see a \$5 t-shirt and get excited it's cheap, remember that to bring it down to that price (from what would likely be at least a \$25-30 shirt) is cut largely is cut largely from labor. This means laborers might be at best getting minimum wage, but most likely not earning a liveable wage.

Research the brand or company

It's time to put your detective skills to work. Teka says it's a big switch for companies to ensure all layers of the supply chain are sustainable and ethical. But one thing you can do is look for progress over perfection. Learn about the brand, their messaging, their values, and what they're committed to. Look for diversity in leadership positions, support women-owned brands and black, indigineous, people of color brands. People who are doing work in these spaces and don't necessarily get as highlighted as larger brands do.

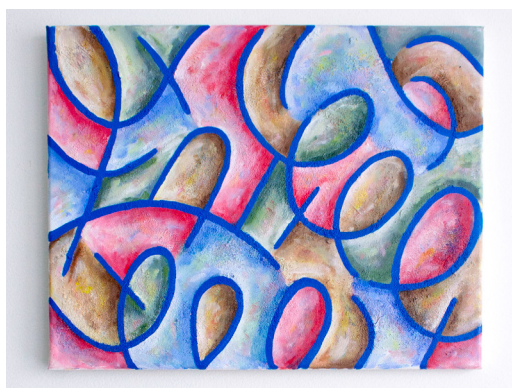
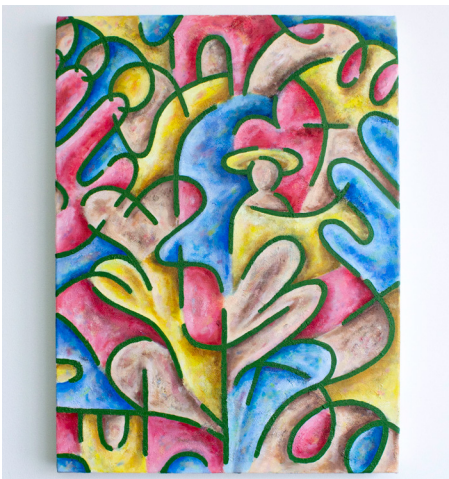
If it's not sustainable for your wallet, then it won't work

At first glance, shopping in this mindset can appear very expensive. But look at it this way: if brands are actually paying workers liveable wages, it's going to show up in the price. If it's high quality materials, it will show up in the price.

Start with the items you wear regularly, like t-shirts and jeans. Invest in higher quality ones where you can feel good about the people involved with the brand and the planet. In the end, those will last you a lot longer.

"For anyone starting their sustainable wardrobe journey, it doesn't have to happen all at once. At the end of the day your carbon footprint versus the company you're buying from, is so small. So as a consumer pushing for brands to make those big systemic changes is just as important as buying sustainable denim. It has to be sustainable for your wallet or it won't work."

– Teka Nicholas



art by Adolfo Gutierrez

Teka's Recommendations for creating a sustainable wardrobe:

Next time you shop, remember these 3 things:

- Try not to buy things you don't need.
- Do research on the brands.
- It can be expensive, so save up for it, or supplement with second hand shopping.

Tips and Tricks:

- Ask yourself: Do I really need to buy this? If so, is it sustainability made? Are the materials good? Is the labor fair?
- Shop locally when you can.
- If online shopping, buy a few things at a time instead of one at a time. This helps put less strain on the environment because of returns, exchanges, shipping, and plastic packaging.
- Look for eco-certified denim because it's extremely water intensive and dyes can be very harmful to the environment and people.
- Opt for items made of deadstock fabric (surplus from a fabric mill production.)
- Mend your clothes. It's okay for them not to be perfect. New stitching or patches add character.

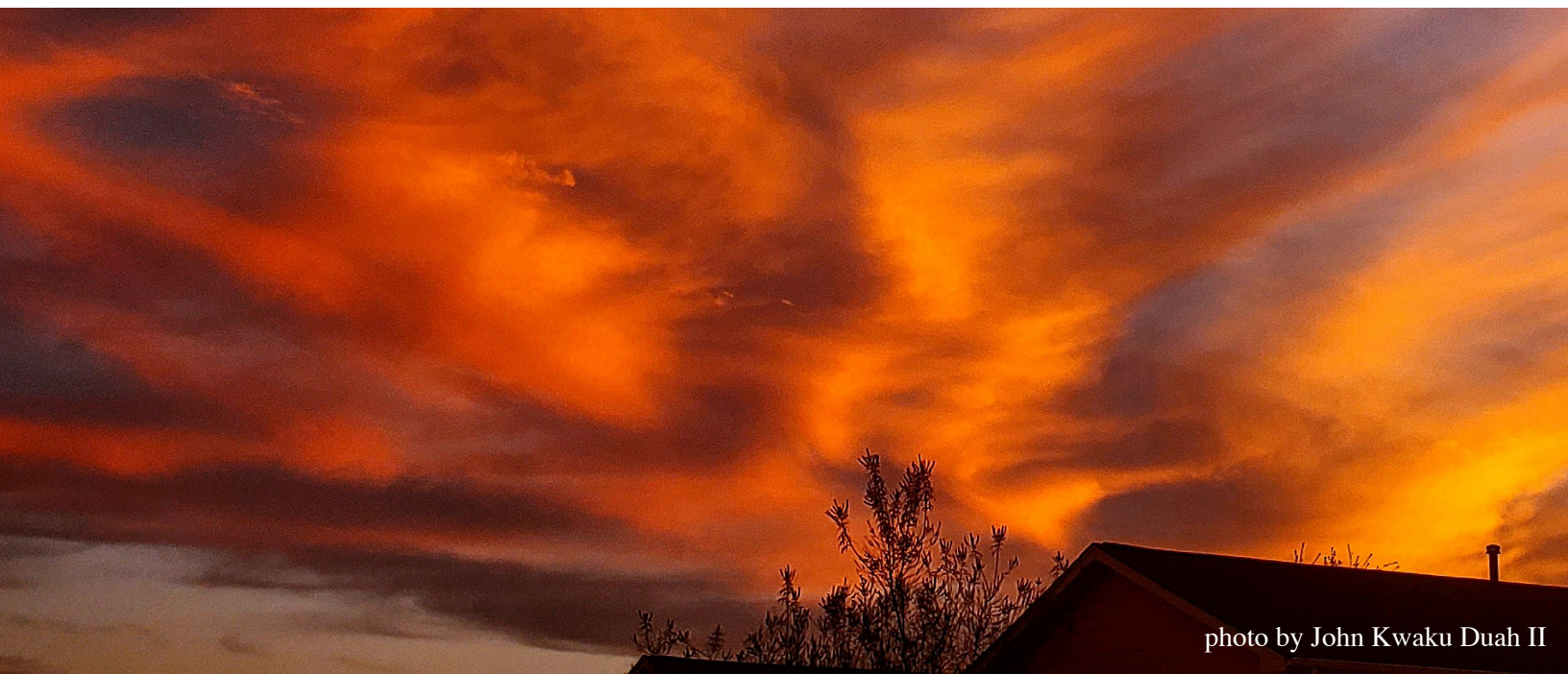
Teka's favorites:

- Shoes: [Nisolo](#)
- Athletic: [Outdoor Voices](#)
- Second hand: [PoshMark](#)



Teka Nicholas

Teka received her BS in Fashion Management from The Art Institute of San Antonio and her MA in Sustainable Futures from New York University. Her academic focus explores the sociocultural influences behind the sustainability movement, with a particular interest in how race, class, and culture shape the way we view and practice sustainability. When she isn't teaching students at Rutgers University, she enjoys hanging out with her Chug and her partner in their patio garden, ideally with a good book.



Reflection: Delicious Moments at EcoHostel Medellin

by Briana Cohen

I am grateful to have spent time at Paola's Permaculture EcoHostel. After I spent months backpacking in Colombia, I found a way to dig an onion deeper into the land and soul. Paola offered her space in exchange for extra help tending to the land, goats, and chickens.

When I reflect on being there, I brisk back to a place of natural beauty, serenity, leisure, and connection. I would wake up with the sun to let the goats out to graze and scoop feed for them. The munch and nuzzle of Beethoven's cheek was a playful caress of the day to come. Then I fed the chickens, collected their eggs, and sat outside as the clouds passed over the mountains and the beautiful sky changed from smokey grey to bright blue.



photos by Briana Cohen



The ritual of these mornings gave me calmness for the day and smooth transitions. I'd do yoga or meditation with Sarah and Sam, other kind beings staying at the ecohostel. Then, we'd smell the aroma of arepas twirling out of the kitchen, courtesy of Paola's mother Margharita. We ate breakfast together, as meals were a time for togetherness, whether in conversation or silence.

The daily doings brought excitement. I'd work with the soil, mulching and mixing, and in the plant beds, harvesting and herbing (something you could also call, smelling all the herbs). Plentiful bundles of beans, peppers, cabbages, pump satisfaction in our toil. Further-so-more, Paola shared stories in spanish about the town, people, and history of Guatape

(where the ecohostel resides) and I'd read along, pausing after each passage to discuss and comprehend. Some days included ventures to the Centro Educativo to engage in conversation and language exchanges with local residents. Other days led to exploring waterfalls and rivers, hiking and scaling rocks with loose dirt but firm grips. And some afternoons were simply times to laugh and lay on hammocks, nap, and drink tea.

Dinner time offered space for sharing stories and synchronicity. We all took turns cooking meals, producing and consuming with no waste, composting, recycling, handwashing, and eating. I remember a moment of taking a bite of sweet plantains and spaghetti made with blended beets and the overwhelm of deliciousness!



And also the beautiful colors of rosy purple and golden yellow approaching my mouth. The ecohostel brought us together through savoring vegetarian food, tending to the animals, shoveling the goat shit and compost to nurture the soil, prepping the food while dancing and singing, having deep conversations, and goofing around.

The motions and moments at the ecohostel, the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch, energized my soul. I felt happy everyday, as I often do when I am absorbing the sun, laughing, and grooving with others and myself. Much of Colombia felt like this - natural and real. And the people I met in Colombia were consistently authentic, resilient, and humorous.

Paola created a rapturous space with her welcoming energy and sustainable way of living. She lives in rhythm with the land, animals, humans, and all that surrounds. I am inspired by her and feel grateful to have shared in the time. I learn from experiencing, and found this definition to be true after my time at the ecohostel: "Permaculture is a philosophy that goes beyond organic farming. It advocates harmony of all that surrounds us. It is an ethical system which offers cooperation versus competition, encouraging coexistence and relations within communities and their environments."



Contributors



Adolfo Gutierrez

Salvadoran-American artist, Adolfo Gutierrez (b.1992), creates art that forces its audience to look beyond the lines and colors, in order to break apart the stories told in a language reminiscent of hieroglyphics. These symbols serve as visual metaphors, describing the conflicts occurring in Latin American countries that have caused their citizens to leave their homes, the hardships of departure, the process of migration, and arrival in a new country with different customs and conflicts. It explores the notion of finding a home away from home, and the unknown stories of those who have come to the US. His color palette draws on the exteriors of homes found across Latin America, and is a reminder of his roots.

Website:
adolfogutierrez.net

Instagram:
[@adolfogutierrez1](https://www.instagram.com/adolfogutierrez1)



Briana Cohen

A joyful spirit living in Austin.

Most Often: sharing in the pleasures of cycling and exploring the natural world with kind souls.

Usually: bouncing around potlucks and community gatherings because they bring a great fusion of people, perspectives, and presence (plus music, food, dance, and other delights).

Currently: Austin Lead at Ghisallo, Events Chair of Team Snacks, Curator of the Fearless Tandem, and recently elected BAC Chair.

Absolutely: electrified by New Orleans & Colombia.

Frequently: giggling.



John Kwaku
Duah II

I'm a photojournalist from Southern California now residing in Austin - origins in concert photography in 2009 as a necessity while writing for a music blog after my hired guns kept flaking last minute.

I fell in love with the art since then and have travelled the world to tell stories with words and photos, and added several forms of photography to my catalog including aerial, portrait, landscape, nature, fine art, commercial and underwater photography.

Professionally I'm a technologist, so the ability to use techniques both modern and classic to create art make for quite the hobby.

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