

# Greta Thunberg: ethical fast fashion is ‘pure greenwashing’

The climate activist says that the last piece of new clothing she bought was three years ago



Greta Thunberg at the Environment Council at the European Council building in Brussels in June. Photograph: Virginia Mayo/AP

## **Priya Elan**

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Climate activist **Greta Thunberg** has used an interview with a top style and culture magazine to call out fast fashion companies for “greenwashing”.

In an Instagram post to accompany her appearance on the cover of the first issue of **Vogue** Scandinavia, Thunberg spoke out about the contradiction between mass produced fashion and sustainability.

“Many are making it look as if the fashion industry are starting to take responsibility, by spending fantasy amounts on campaigns where they portray themselves as ‘sustainable’, ‘ethical’, ‘green’, ‘climate neutral’ and ‘fair’,” Thunberg **wrote**. “But let’s be clear: This is almost never anything but pure greenwashing. You cannot mass produce fashion or consume ‘sustainably’ as

the world is shaped today. That is one of the many reasons why we will need a system change.”

“The fashion industry is a huge contributor to the climate-and-ecological emergency,” she continued, “not to mention its impact on the countless workers and communities who are being exploited around the world in order for some to enjoy fast fashion that many treat as disposable(s).”

In her interview for [Vogue Scandinavia](#), she said: “The last time I bought something new was three years ago and it was secondhand. I just borrow things from people I know.”

Thunberg added that there was a misconception around the attitude of activists.

“This is some kind of misconception about activists, especially about climate activists that we are just negative and pessimists and we are just complaining, and we trying to spread fear but that’s the exact opposite,” she said, “we are doing this because we are hopeful, we are hopeful that we will be able to make the changes necessary.”

The cover image of the magazine, which shows the activist in a woodland scene petting a horse, was shot by photographer Alexandrov Klum. [Vogue Scandinavia](#) is edited by [Rawdah Mohamed](#), the first hijab wearing woman of colour editor at a western fashion magazine.

The interview comes after [the release on Monday of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report](#) which showed a critical global heating threshold of 1.5C may be breached far earlier than previously expected, potentially within a decade.

# Greta Thunberg revealed as Vogue Scandinavia's inaugural cover star

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Credit: Alexandrov Klum/Vogue Scandinavia



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Written by

**Leah Dolan, CNN**

Teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg has been unveiled as the cover star of Vogue Scandinavia's first issue. Shot by Swedish photography and conservationist duo Alexandrov Klum, the whimsical cover shows Thunberg wearing a billowing upcycled trench coat while sitting with an Icelandic horse called Gandalf in a woodland outside of Stockholm.

"For this debut issue, I am so incredibly proud to feature Greta Thunberg on the cover," said the magazine's editor-in-chief, Martina Bonnier, in the issue's editor's letter. "Not only is she a singular Scandinavian figure and force of change, she also embodies the love of nature, pursuit of sustainability and unabashed fearlessness that is at the core of our vision."



Greta Thunberg on the cover of Vogue Scandinavia. Credit: Alexandrov Klum/Vogue Scandinavia

Thunberg first garnered global attention in 2018 when she skipped school at 15 years old to protest outside Swedish Parliament,

demanding the government lower its carbon emissions. She soon catalyzed a movement of youth climate strikes, and now, at 18, Thunberg is one of the world's most visible environmental activists. She has been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize three years running.

In an accompanying profile in Vogue Scandinavia, Thunberg spotlighted the role of fast fashion -- the mass production of inexpensive, on-trend clothing that maintains low pricing through labor exploitation and poor quality -- in the worsening climate crisis. "If you are buying fast fashion then you are contributing to that industry and encouraging them to expand and encouraging them to continue their harmful process," she told the magazine. "Of course I understand that for some people fashion is a big part of how they want to express themselves and their identity."

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While sharing the Vogue cover on her social media accounts, Thunberg also called out the industry for greenwashing -- or promoting an eco-conscious image without making meaningful change -- with tokenistic and ambiguous gestures regarding sustainability.

"Many make it look as if the fashion industry is starting to take responsibility, spending fantasy amounts on campaigns portraying themselves as 'sustainable,' 'ethical,' 'green,' 'climate neutral' or 'fair,'" she wrote on Twitter. "But let's be clear: This is almost never anything but pure greenwash."



Thunberg and Gandalf, the Icelandic horse. Credit: Alexandrov Klum/Vogue Scandinavia

In 2018, 2.31 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions came from the fashion industry, accounting for 4% of the global total.

The inaugural Vogue Scandinavia issue, which is available to order online and focuses on a central theme of nature, coincides with the release of a landmark new IPCC climate change report, in which the United Nations (UN) called a "code red for humanity." The report

concludes that "widespread and rapid changes" to the world's climate have already occurred, some of which are irreversible at this stage, and that it is "unequivocal" that humans are the cause.

## The voice of a generation

The message of Thunberg's first "School Strike for Climate" campaign ricocheted across the globe in 2018, inspiring tens of thousands of other young people to organize their own calls to action. The following year, she set sail over the Atlantic Ocean in a widely publicized journey to New York City to attend the UN Climate Action Summit. And she has continually castigated global power players for fostering complacency instead of urgency.

"I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is," Thunberg said at the World Economic Forum in 2019.

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But Thunberg's straight-talking approach to tackling global warming has not been welcomed by all. Elsewhere in the new Vogue interview, she addressed her critics -- most notably former US President Donald Trump, who in 2019 tweeted that Thunberg had an "anger management problem."





Thunberg's oversized trench coat is made from a variety of upcycled coats. Credit: Alexandrov Klum/Vogue Scandinavia

"You have to see it from a larger perspective," she told Vogue. "Why are they writing these kinds of things? It's because they feel that we are being too loud and they want to silence us, whether it's by scaring us or intimidating us or to spread doubt...So that's, in a way, a very positive sign we are having an impact."

She added, "They are not evil, they just don't know better. At least that's what I am trying to think."

She also reflected on the disruptive impact the climate crisis has had on her most formative years. "The ideal thing would be to just return to school and finish education and not have to worry about the climate," she said in the interview. "But as long as there is a need for activists I will probably be an activist."