



G8. First Ladies Get Ecological and Chic with Carmina Campus

Cristina Fei (July 12, 2009)

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What’s so special? They’re made of recycled materials, such as scrap material from industrial waste, tarps, end-of-line stocks, vintage and discarded textiles, on which a group of disadvantaged women in Cameroon freely embroider sentences, words and scenes from their everyday life. Or they crochet hats that can be used as decoration. The bags themselves are entirely made in Italy by Italian highly skilled craftsmen.

Carmina Campus, the project created in 2006 by the Italian designer Ilaria Venturini Fendi, deals with a new concept of fashion: it does not refuse goods consumption, it rather consumes refused goods. That is why even waste can be treated as a precious and high quality product.

It’s unknown if the special gift donated to the first ladies drew on the items of “fight against climate change and support for Africa”, discussed at the G8 summit in Aquila. But it’s sure they were very impressed, especially Michelle Obama who returned to the White House two days ago with a bag saying “Femmes relevantes les defies” (Women face the challenges), a positive message that obviously suits the new President of the United States’ wife. And for her next trip to Italy, Maria Margarida Barroso, the wife of the European Commission President has already booked a visit to Re(fu)use, the atelier of Carmina Campus in Rome.

The peculiar bags definitely caught the Ladies’ attention: they’re bright, colourful and refined. When the elegant Italian style meets the universal language of solidarity, the bags become much more than a simple souvenir from the “Eternal City”.

They’re all one-of-kind, numbered and catalogued, including a tag that indicates the hours required to make them and the list of materials used to create each different piece.

They usually cost between 600 and 1.400 euro (about 1.148 for the Message Bags in particular), but their real value lies in their aim of social development: a percentage of the sale will be used to build a center in Dschang, in Cameroon, where the women can improve their designing and technical skills in handicraft workshops.

Nowadays fashion is not necessarily synonymous of luxury. It can be ethical and Carmina Campus cooperates with the [International Trade Center](#) [1], an agency owned by the UN and the [World Trade Organization](#) [2], to promote fashion programs and to spread an alternative idea of reusing, intended also as an instrument of market access to help people in Third world countries.



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