FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

I hate fashion and I love fashion.

by MURIEL FOERSTER



TIME INTENSE
fine lace crochet top,
hand-crafted

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"Hey, what are you knitting? Socks? Could you make a pair for me, too?"

The guy sitting across from me on the metro grins. Reluctantly, I look up from my needlework already rehearsing the answers I won't give. It's not knitting, it's crochet. Or: Do you have any idea how long that would take me?

Instead, I smile back and say: "Yes. A pair of socks." Not because it's true, but because explaining the difference between knitting and crocheting right now—and the art I see in crafting wearable pieces - is far away from the idea of a stupid pair of socks. I have, in fact, never knitted a pair of socks in my entire life. So, I keep working and think: That's not worth my time.

Crocheting has always fascinated me. When I think back to my first project - a bikini in shades of blue, white, turquoise. My mom had to finish it for me as I lost interest halfway through, as any twelve year old probably would have.

What I lacked was endurance. What stayed was the fascination. That fascination leads me to where I am today: an aspiring fashion designer with a focus on slow and sustainable fashion and a foible for crochet and knitwear.

With a background in Sustainable Management and Technology, I have become increasingly interested in one important factor the fashion industry is missing today: the value of time. Most people never see it. They don't see the hours of work embedded in one garment.

To make time visible, I created a small design study. I made three variations of basically the same top:

1) A fine lace crochet top, worked with a 2.5 mm hook

2)A chunky crochet top, worked with a 15 mm hook

3) A sewn lace top, constructed from pre-made lace fabric.

Do I need to state the obvious? Once I began tracking the time spent on each piece, the hierarchy revealed itself quickly. The fine lace crochet top - the most delicate version, and the one closest to my usual design language - took me the longest: 21 hours in total. The chunky crochet top followed, requiring 4 hours of work. The sewn lace top was completed fastest, with only 30 minutes spent in the making process.

At the German minimum wage of 13.90 euros per hour[1], the fine lace crochet top would need to be priced at 291.90 euros. The chunky crochet version amounts to 55.60 euros. The sewn lace top, by comparison, comes to 6.95 euros.

Calculated with the minimum wage in Bangladesh—approximately 0.26 euros per hour[2]—the same garments tell a very different story. The fine lace crochet top drops to 5.46 euros. The chunky version to 1.04 euros. The sewn lace top to 0.13 euros.

The hours do not change.

[1] German minimum wage data based on publicly available information from the German Federal Government (Bundesregierung), 2026.
[2] Estimated hourly wage for garment workers in Bangladesh based on wage data discussed in Gupta, V.; Gupta, N.; Chopra, M. (2015). Fashion Industry: Labour Behind the Label. International Journal of Applied Home Science.



LESS DELICATE,
STILL HANDMADE
oversized crochet top



CRAFT AS LUXURY
fine lace crochet top



OFF THE RACK
lace top,
machine sewn





SIZING VARIATION
One self-developed lace motif, translated into two scales.
2.5 mm precision versus 15 mm volume.

Only their worth does.

For clarity: these prices reflect time alone. No yarn, no fabric, no logistics, no pattern development, and certainly no profit. Just labour - minimum-wage labour. Apparently, even that is already asking a lot.

The sewn lace top could easily sit on a shelf at Zara or Bershka: low-quality fabric and underpaid labor resulting in a garment designed for disposability—worn a few times, then replaced. Fast fashion, with a lifespan short enough to make throwing it away feel “reasonable”.

On the other end sits the fine lace crochet top, meticulously crafted by hand. Twenty-one hours condensed into hundreds of repeated knots— almost meditative for the fingers. Time is not hidden here; it is stitched into every single loop.

The chunky crochet top hovers somewhere in between. Fewer stitches, faster progress, a different design language altogether. Less delicate, more direct. Communicating something else. Not rushed, but undeniably quicker.

And this is where my discomfort begins. Because when time becomes visible, it becomes expensive. And when it becomes expensive, it becomes difficult to sell.

I hate fashion for how rushed it has become. Trend after trend. Season for season. Faster, always faster. There is little appreciation left for the making, for tailoring, for high-quality fabrics, for a well-made garment itself. Repair feels unreasonable, replacement feels easier, more accessible. I think of earlier generations—my grandmother’s, my mother’s—when materials were scarce, garments repaired until they softened with time, and clothing was chosen carefully because it had to last.

Clothes nowadays lose their sentimental value, then their time value, until they become nothing more than excess. Unloved garments, shipped away, left to fade and rot in the deserts of Chile.

And yet, I once loved fashion. And I still probably always will. I love the confidence a good outfit can give. The compliments. The endless possibilities of styling - different moods, different days, different versions of myself. I love clothes that carry memory. Pieces passed down from my grandmother or my mother. Right now, I am wearing a hand-knitted sweater with a teddy bear - made by my mother when she was my age. Wearing it gives me something a SHEIN knit pullover never could.

But carrying memory is one thing. Asking others to pay for it is another. Once time is named, it demands to be paid for. And not everyone wants to hear that.

I think again of the socks. How easy it was to say yes to something familiar. Socks have a price. Socks make sense. Crochet, apparently, does not.

So the next time you pick up a crocheted garment and look at the price tag, ask yourself:

”What exactly are you paying for—and how much time do you expect it to be worth?”



FIRST AND THIRD VARIATION
The same pattern at opposite speeds: one shaped by hours of handwork, the other by industrial efficiency.

