

MY SECRET LIFE **Celestina Mahovic**

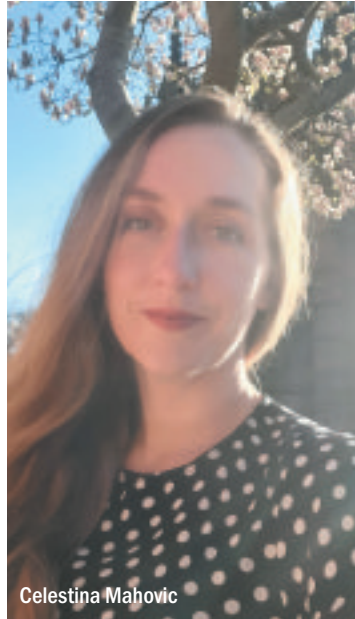
By day Celestina Mahovic works for quantity surveying practice Solomons Europe, but in her spare time she pursues her passion for embroidery and raising awareness of the impact of “fast fashion”

Celestina Mahovic, 33, is an Assistant Quantity Surveyor at Solomons Europe. Originally from Gosforth and now living in Carlisle, she juggles a busy day-job working on high profile projects and completing a master's degree in Quantity Surveying with her passion for sustainable fashion and unique clothing creations.

I became interested in sewing because my mum was always embroidering when I was younger. I suppose I've taken it a step further! I started off making clothes for amateur dramatic performances. Things spiralled after I did a friend's wedding dress. It included a light up! After that people kept asking me to do bits and bobs for them.

I decided to set up my business CM Creations. I do my own designs and also requests. Sometimes it can be embroidering a princess or a superhero on kids clothing, or something more intense and expensive, like a detailed map of Cumbria on the back of a coat! A friend wanted a shawl for her wedding that told a story about all the places they'd travelled together. The embroidery glowed in the dark, so later on during the party it lit up! I'm focused on denim jackets at the moment, which I really enjoy as you can wear them anywhere. I made, and sold, about 30 during the Covid-19 lockdown. All the jackets are second hand and the fabrics I use have had a previous life.

A big motivation for me is that it is about doing something nice for somebody – something that's special to them and they really want. And it doesn't have to cost the earth, in terms of money and the environment. There's a big



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sustainability element to what I do through CM Creations and also Clothes Swap Cumbria, which I started up with my friend Ellie around five years ago.

At first Clothes Swap Cumbria was just us and a couple of friends, but now it's become much bigger with events regularly taking place across the county, we have recently linked up with the Carlisle Repair Café and will be running swaps at the end of each month. Any money we make goes into a pot which we use to help other people set up their own clothes swaps. We love the way it brings people together to chat, connect, and enjoy themselves. And we try to get the sustainability message across in a fun and engaging way. It's much better for the environment if people just swap their clothes.

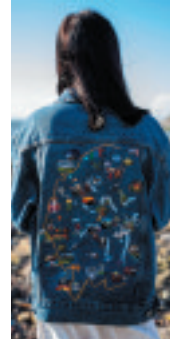
The stats on the environmental impact of clothes production are quite mind-blowing. Oxfam estimates it would take 13 years for a person to drink the water needed to produce just one t-shirt and a pair of jeans, and the emissions from new clothing bought in the

UK each month is greater than flying around the world 900 times. Everyone knows about cheap clothes being made overseas by people working in terrible conditions for little money. But it's not just happening in places like India. There have been recent cases of people being paid under the minimum wage in the UK. We want to encourage people to dig a bit deeper about where their clothes come from.

We're also keen to keep traditional skills alive. We run sewing workshops and I do sewing machine courses to help people repair their clothes for a small fee, which I donate to charity. It's something that people associate with older people, and women in particular, but it doesn't have to be. I find it quite therapeutic because I'm focusing on just one thing, and it's nothing to do with my day job. Saying that, I've been asked to embroider boiler suits for a lady who's secured money from the Arts Council for a project on the old Marchon industrial site in Whitehaven. I'll be doing something like a map of the industrial site on the back.

I'd still be doing something creative even if I wasn't doing embroidery. I suppose that's just the way my brain works! I have a degree in law and worked in legal costs before becoming a Quantity Surveyor. My only link with fashion was a short stint as a support worker in an art college's fashion department, which was I found really interesting. I've sometimes thought if I should do a qualification in it, but then I'm happy for it to just be a hobby.

For more on Clothes Swap Cumbria search for Clothes Swap Cumbria on Facebook and @clothesswapcumbria on Instagram



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