

Karen Artz Ash Interviewed by *WTiN* on the US Fashion Industry's Concerns Amid Global Tariff War

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Intellectual Property Partner and National Co-Chair of Katten's Trademark/Copyright/Privacy Group Karen Artz Ash was interviewed by the *World Textile Information Network* (*WTiN*) about President Donald Trump's imposed tariffs and how they are impacting the US fashion industry, as well as concerns from brands, manufacturers and supply chain bodies.

"Without a doubt, there is greater caution in committing to large orders, or to placing orders with a single manufacturer that has factories in only one region," Karen said. "While, typically, there are economies of scale in volume and using factories where their production runs can save money by being large, there is a natural reluctance to commit to anything in large quantities and without backup." She added that companies are trying to give themselves as much cushion as possible by "diversifying their reliance on different factories in different locations," and that planning with retailers has also become more complicated as both retailers and brand owners navigate how to minimize passing along tariff-related price increases to consumers.

Additionally, Karen commented on how the tariffs have directly affected the US fashion supply chain through levels of unpredictability, changing costs and price-oriented production, which typically are for "products that have lower margins and rely on immediate and inexpensive production and delivery," and are therefore quickly affected.

Regarding protectionism, or the practice of shielding a country's domestic industries from foreign competition by heavily taxing imports, Karen commended the goal "namely in that it supports local jobs and resources," but warned that it is not an overnight process. "Over the years, the [United States] pivoted from being a manufacturing country to a more service-oriented economy," she said. "The pivot back to a manufacturing-driven economy cannot happen overnight, even if it is ultimately possible." She also noted that it will take years to "locate, build and set up a domestic manufacturing facility that can support a substantial business," and that it would take “just as long to hire and train workers."

Karen emphasized that it is far too early to tell what the tariffs' overall industry effects are, but remains confident that the fashion industry will stay "amazingly resilient" despite current geopolitical uncertainties. "It has survived and even thrived through problems of every type, including world uncertainty, economic turmoil, terrorism, war, regime changes, strikes and [a global] pandemic," she said. "In the end, industry leaders and other participants learn and change, adapting so they succeed."

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CONTACTS

For more information, contact your Katten attorney or any of the following attorneys.



Karen Artz Ash
+1.212.940.8554
karen.ash@katten.com

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