Along white dining table stretched out like a runway through the center of Eileen Fisher’s latest hybrid retail space in Brooklyn. The dinner party invite asked that we bring an old item of clothing, to be made into art while we dined. Enticing and mysterious? Check and check. These are words not often associated with sustainability, which has become a love-hate topic amongst many fashion retailers – especially those who haven’t even begun to tackle this massive issue. Eileen Fisher is not one of those retailers. Long synonymous with responsible retail, Eileen Fisher has often been my answer when asked: ‘Who does it best?’ Their commitment to sustainable solutions has been a hallmark of the brand since they first introduced their take-back system 10 years ago. Having compiled over four warehouses of second-hand textiles in that time, they’ve been at the forefront of seeking new solutions on how to tackle textile waste. And this latest venture may be the most creative yet.
'Waste No More' is an installation and thought-piece, turning pre-loved clothing into works of art. Eileen's first employee and long-time collaborator Sigi Ahl is at the helm of this project, using a felting machine to needle-punch discarded textiles into intricate tapestries. This low-waste solution uses no water or dying, and results in a tactile journey for these clothing, akin to a rich tonal quilt. Although many colors and materials can be felted by the machine, Ahl chose shades of white to convey a sense of ‘essentialism’ in her art works. These soothing tones were echoed throughout the launch dinner, from the white-washed wood beams of the building, to the white orchids adorning the tables. (Which of course were carefully wrapped and accompanied each guest home after the event, so as not to waste these living things.) A dinner of thoughtfully prepared local foods by wunderkind chef Flynn McGarry tapped into this sense of responsibility as well – with dishes like grilled lettuce dressed in vinaigrette that had been derived from the usually discarded bitter pieces of the lettuce. Waste No More, indeed.

The Bergen Street Store in Brooklyn will have the installation on display through Sunday April 7th, previewing before the big reveal at Milan's Salone del Mobile April 9-14th. In collaboration with legendary trend forecaster Lidewij Edelkoort, the Milan exhibition asks us to reflect on the waste we are creating, and to be inspired by a "less is more" philosophy. This ethos of slow-living is what makes Eileen Fisher an authentic authority on sustainability within the industry, moving beyond the branding and really living the process. And perhaps my my most unexpected takeaway for the evening's event, was how this focus on slow living seemed to permeate throughout the guests. Not a soul was on their cell phone during the dinner, not even to Instagram the incredibly beautiful, photo-friendly food, instead there was a room of enthusiastic and engaged humans living in the moment and delving deep into the topic of circular living – a welcome sight and a hopeful sign of things to come.