

**Life is an Artwork
and
Artwork is Life
Our Anthropocene Era**

**By
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Introduction

As an artist and mother, my concerns for the environment and love for the arts intertwine. The role art plays in society to affect and create change over time is a driving force in my practice. This fuels my fascination to research, explore, play and develop artistic ventures that instigate ecological and social change.

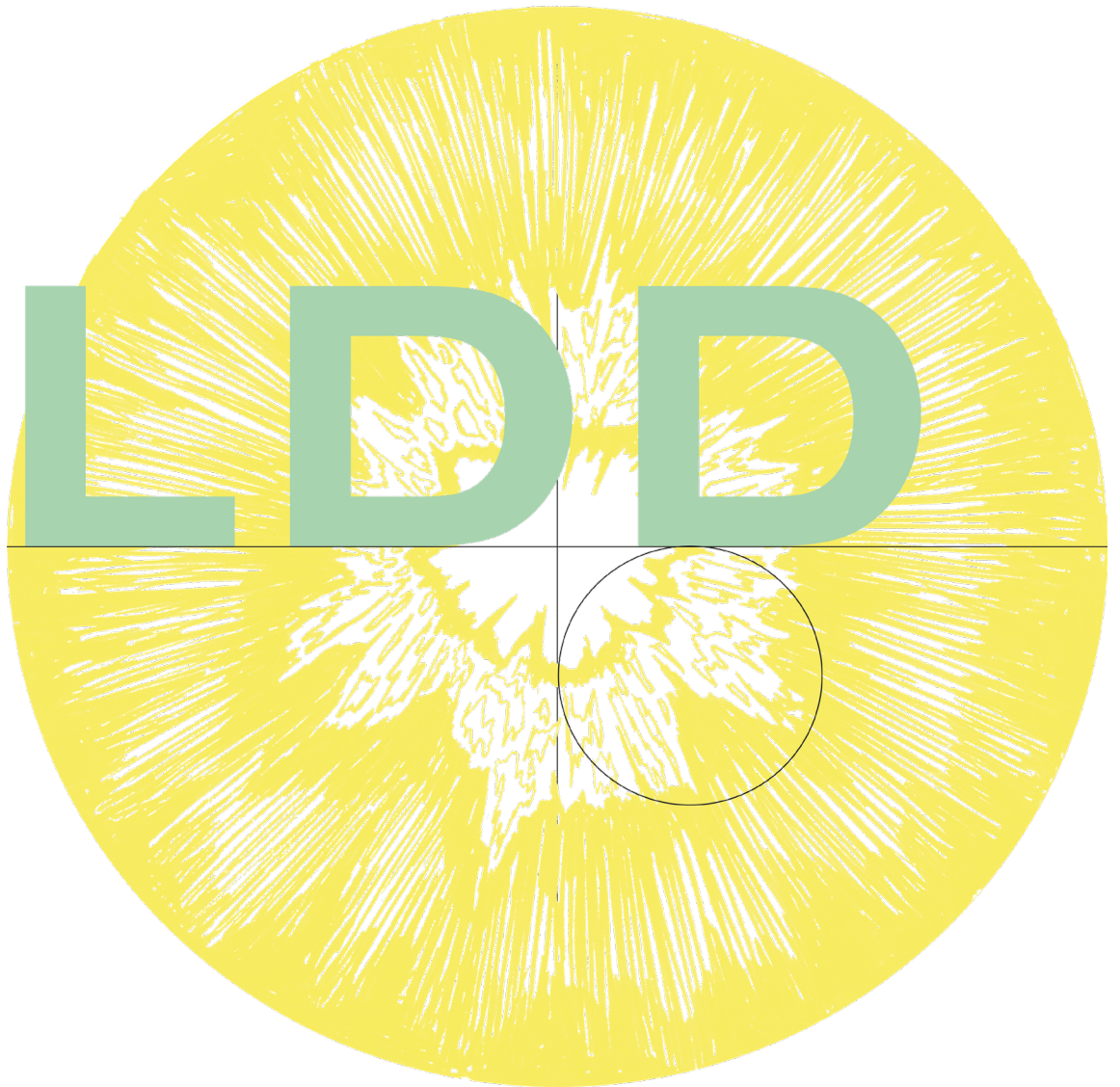
Coming from India, with a different upbringing and a background in social work, I started questioning my creative environment, the mentalities, actions and interactions. I discovered that the struggles I faced as an artist were the same as many other students - each one attempting to express things in their own way. It was then that these words from Joseph Beuys began to resonate: "The wandering artist spent his time creating sculptures out of society. Working with his fellow human-artists to remake our universe moment to moment. Reshaping thought structures through performances, lectures, and physical objects." This view point of supporting and transforming a society by creating art, awoke a playful and interdisciplinary approach in my artistic research and experimentation.

Over the years and especially lately many artists have voiced and expressed the current environmental issues and its endangerment for our future. They have successfully highlighted the importance and urgency of these issues loud and clear. But the practice of the circular economy and design thinking have not been explored enough within the arts. This should be brought to the forefront of art and education, if we are to contribute towards an ecologically sustainable environment.

Re-Looping

When taking a closer look at the constant number of mediums and materials used in exhibitions and experimentation within my direct society, the arts, something very clear stood out. With each of these creative ventures came truck-loads of waste. Simultaneously there was an ever present need to access more creative materials. The immense amount of surplus materials wasted by art academies and art institutions was astounding. There were so many items that still had potential use, being tossed out regularly.





It became clear that this was a habitual issue in the artistic community. It was these observations that kickstarted the project LDD – “Lucrative Dumpster Dives”. A customised platform designed to instigate ecological sustainability within the arts.

The LDD project functions inside the art academy and by visually displaying all the items that were once discarded, in a clean and accessible manner, a dialog around the waste issue is stimulated amongst the artists. An experimentation pattern of what is considered waste and the possibilities for what to do with it is instigated. It displays the spectacle, a term used by the Situationist, showing the of the kind of consumers we as artist have allowed ourselves to become. To the Situationist the spectacle is the inverted image of society in which relations between commodities have supplanted relations between people, in which “passive identification with the spectacle supplants genuine activity”. “The spectacle is not a collection of images,” Guy Debord writes, “rather, it is a social relation among people, mediated by images.” Debord’s aim and proposal was “to wake up the spectator who has been drugged by spectacular images...through radical action in the form of the construction of situations...situations that bring a revolutionary reordering of life, politics, and art”.



By building a series of art swap shops, LDD constructs everyday situations where artists can develop their practice by experiment and explore in an ecological manner. These art swap shops function as a place where students can exchange their extra materials to gain reusable supplies for their creative practices. By inviting everyone to participate in this circular action, LDD engages the community at large. Artist, teachers, staff members, the local neighbourhood, art intuitions and festivals such as Impakt, IFFR, BAK and the Central Museum joined into this playful pattern by contributing their excess materials. Various contributing parties showed surprise, how items they were going to discard could easily boost a student's creative process.



LDD as a work of art, with the act of re-looping these “surplus materials” becomes a life time based performative piece set on repeat as an ever-changing social sculpture.



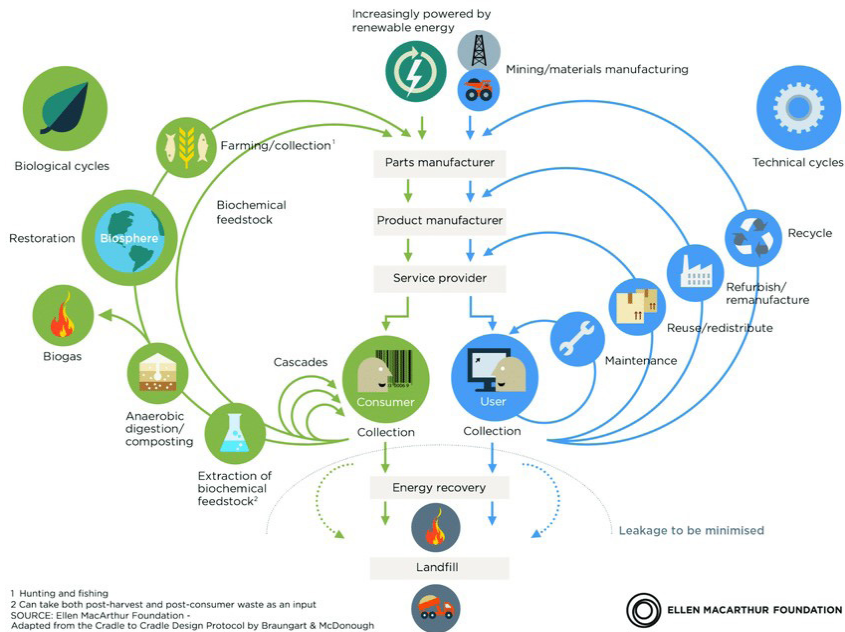
Longevity

As a student in an art academy creating and experimenting every day, it was not part of the education program to consider the effects of my actions on the environment around me. Sure, I know about recycling but the practical action of throwing out materials every semester becomes easier on the conscious and habitual throughout the study. It became clear that this is a grassroots problem which requires long-term actions that foster metamorphosis over activism, turning LDD into a durational art project.

It's not the first time that methods for art and education have been re-defining by artist. FIU – Free International University Amsterdam and The Steiner Education programs, built by Joseph Beuys & Rudolf Steiner represented ideologies to use art and interdisciplinary education as a tool for social transformation and growth. Exploring approach's and methods for social projects and activates in the field of art and science and the ecology of the future. So, it seems pertinent for art education today to re-evaluate some of its methods, adding to or tweaking things in order to educate and encourage artist to develop their practice with ecological and sustainable actions.

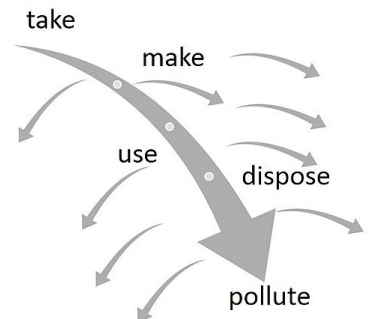


During a visit to the Dutch Design week in Eindhoven, it was clear that the current trend for other creative studies is to embrace the circular design thinking method, contributing towards circular economies. The core of this way of thinking is drawn from nature and the cycles that keep flowing from one into the other, fostering growth, life and sustainability.

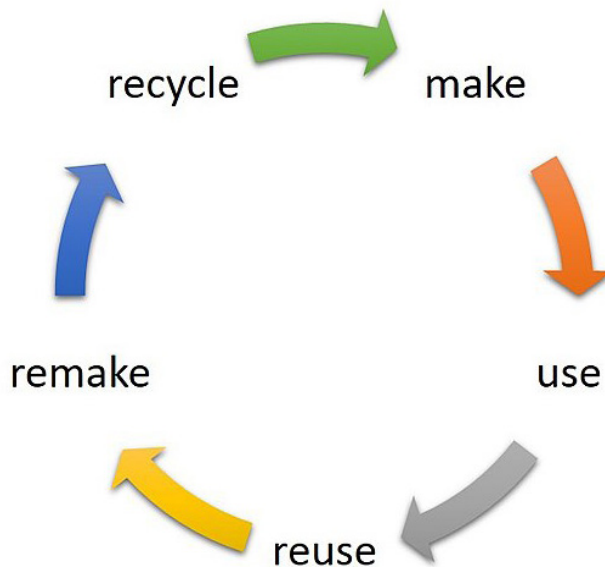


Tim Brown describes evolution of design thinking in his video – “Circular Design Guide”. “Design thinking in the linear world, lives in that linear process. So, the design tends to be front loaded and it comes at the beginning where you design the thing and you send it off into the world and you’re done.”

For example, materials used to create an exhibition are used and built only for that single purpose, after which the materials are discarded, and new ones are created all over again for another exhibition. This way of working creates perpetual amounts of waste.



“But in the circular world design is kind of never done, you’re always thinking, how do we take these resources, maybe it’s products that already exist maybe it’s the materials you bring back, maybe in a sort of digital service world, it’s the fact that the services constantly evolve. But the roll of design (art) throughout the cycle of these products and services remains relevant. And so, the roll of the designer (artist) can almost come in at any point in the cycle. The idea that design (art) is never done is going to be an important concept of design thinking for the circular economy.” To draw the relevance, I’ve added art and artist to the quotation above.



Upon a brief chat with Mr. Mantijn van Leeuwen, owner of Nibe experts in sustainability, I learned that larger art institutions and academies seem slower to investigate and implement such methods of working and thinking, which is a shame. Not only is it a forward-thinking method it is actually more economically beneficial in the long run. We should educate ourselves about this method, adapt it and incorporate it into the arts. By viewing the art world as a potential circular economy it’s clear that there are new elements that needed to be added to the art educational program, the starting point towards circular change.

It is through playful engagements that the subconscious mind is triggered on different levels, ideas are explored, new things are discovered and developed. It was with this mentality that I created a series of assignments for the first-year fine art students. The assignments were designed in a playful manner, encouraging the students to question the types of materials they use or could use, where they source the materials, how they use it and what happens when it's done?



Along with these assignments the students had access to the LDD swap shop where they could practice the basic concepts of the circular economy on a practical level. The overall goal of these activities was to prompt the students, in the nascent stages of their practice, to discover their own way to subconsciously and habitually work in a circular manner throughout their practice. Reversing the current cycle mentioned above, making ecological sustainability second nature in the artist's practice.





Maarten Bel is a good example of an artist that blurs the lines between play, art and discovery. His interaction with children and public audiences, is open, playful and with a different twist to the normal approach of discovering and learning. The outlines he creates allow previous restrictions to vanish and new ideas are toyed with. A similar affect occurs to students engaging with and using materials from the LDD stores. They have expressed that their levels of playfulness and creativity have been boosted throughout their process of experimentation. They feel free to try new things, playing with concepts and ideas in a less restricted manner, pushing through traditional methods into unparalleled alternatives. Allowing the materials to work for them instead of working for the materials to get a specific outcome. This way of working is essential to an artistic practice.

With the LDD project up and running it's easy to see that this snowball can and should continue to roll. Customising an education program suited for the various art studies, incorporating the circular design thinking concept, is key. This is something I plan on researching and exploring in the near future.

Enclosing

My intention is to collaborate with like-minded artists, art institutions and artistic ventures, to create interactive and engaging artworks that playfully explore alternatives for various ecological and social issues.

Art in its many, stages, shapes and forms has always played an important role in society; it has bucked the tides and kickstarted momentums for change. Today it is our duty as artists to uphold our credibility, through our actions, setting the standard for the current and future modus operandi of art in correlation to the environment. If we are willing to playfully explore new circular interactions and actions, collaborating together as a larger community, we could fuel our lives as artists and the life of art in society simultaneously.

As artists, artwork is our life and life is our artwork. Let our actions today catapult us into the creative future we desire for tomorrow.

Source materials & Further reading:

1. Fluxus – blurring and merging the lines between art and everyday life. <https://www.theartstory.org/movement-fluxus.htm>
2. Guy Debord - “The Society of The Spectacle” An Illustrated guide to his book and a film. <https://hyperallergic.com/313435/an-illustrated-guide-to-guy-debords-the-society-of-the-spectacle/> : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2YeJpkrTOQ>
3. FIU – Free International University and The Steiner Education programs were built by Joseph Beuys & Rudolf Steiner. <http://www.fiuamsterdam.com/index.html> : <http://www.social-sculpture.org/category/territory/> : https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waldorf_education
4. (Extra) Mierle Laderman Ukeles – her approach of considering, researching, performing and exhibiting the literal and the every-day actions of her life and the lives of others to highlight social ecological issues. <http://www.mildredslane.com>
5. The Circular Design Thinking Method. <https://www.circulardesignguide.com>
6. The circular economy, design thinking and education for sustainability. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276176634_The_circular_economy_design_thinking_and_education_for_sustainability
7. Nibe experts in sustainability. www.nibe.org
8. Maarten Bel <http://www.maartenbel.nl>
9. (Extra) Creativity as an upcycling process – Austin Kleon TED Talk. <https://www.tedxvienna.at/blog/what-is-the-link-between-garbage-and-creativity/>

