

Breaking News

8:50 - Bomb 'planted under vehicle' caused Marsa blast

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Art goes green



Can environmental activism and contemporary art work together? **Naima Morelli** discovers Green Root Lab and discovers that they, indeed, can.

When we talk about love, the first image that comes to mind is our love for a partner, our parents or a daughter. Love, as we primarily intend it in our culture, is directed toward a person.

But then, for some individuals, love can be transferred into things or ideas, whether it be religion, bags or movies. Then, when love meets skill, it becomes part of our identity.

Depending on his inclinations, a shoe lover can open a retail shop, start a shoe-focused fashion blog or become Salvatore Ferragamo. But it doesn't end there. When love and skill meet a call, then real change in the world can happen.

This path is precisely the one that Hungarian visual artist Eva Bubla followed... except for the shoes of course. Eva is one half of the contemporary art collective Green Root Lab, together with Estonian new media and performance artist Lilli Tölp, both based in Asia.

Green Root Lab deals with green art activities and aims to raise environmental awareness through the language of art and activism. The organisation's primary focus is on community art projects and the intersection of art and technology.

Eva's and Lilli's work is a direct answer to those thinking that art should be only about aesthetics, conveying a multitude of view points without ever

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taking sides. This is the problem that the late Umberto Eco called "the open work". You can read everything in a contemporary work of art, so there is no use in trying to actually say something outside self-expression. However, that is not what the Green Root Lab duo believes.

For them, it is possible for contemporary art to convey an ethic. Not with the straightforwardness of a magazine article, but rather by connecting people with their deeper sense of what is right or wrong. In other words, we must preserve what needs to be done for the common good. For this very reason, in most of their works, together with the art installations or performances, there is always a community element. Here, the ideas expressed abstractedly through art are explored and discussed, not only with art lovers, but with everyone joining in.

The motivation for Eva and Lilli came from the observation of the careless towards the natural environment in Asian developing countries, where fast-paced progress is paramount. Driven by the same visions and interests, in 2015 the two artists founded Green Root Lab.



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Lilli Tölp and Eva Bubla.



common mistake for environmental activists is to see nature as perfect and humans as a simple inconvenience. There is nothing farther than this from the Green Root Lab’s approach. In their looking for solutions and engaging with different issues, they don’t shut out the voice of the local people, as some ideology-blinded artist activists do. On the contrary, Eva and Lilli know that men and nature must live side by side in harmony.

Their vision is hopeful and proactive. In work like the Gram Art Project in Paradsinga, India, they went on investigating the problems of the local community and realised how much of an inharmonious mechanism was making the life of local famers harder and the relationship with the ground they cultivated problematic.

Eva was interested in art since she was a child. In the beginning her paintings were introspective and personal, but everything changed when she moved to Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in 2011. There she started cultivating more of a relationship with what she called “the energy of the environment” and the possibilities within it.

But, from turning her stare from the canvas to the surrounding space came as a sad realisation. “Living in Indonesia I saw what a lot of pollution there is around. There is a lot of waste everywhere. The beaches, the villages, were full of rubbish. I couldn’t ignore it. In the beginning I started collecting the plastic waste and build-ing installations with it. Then, I decided to treat the issue through my work.” Slowly, she abandoned painting and went all the way into installation and community art projects. Here is what she has to say:

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How did your collaboration with Lilli start?

Lilli and I became very good friends after meeting in Indonesia. We were both interested in environmental issues and we had the same vision, so our collaboration came about in a very natural way.

There are advantages to working together... having different backgrounds and skills, it’s like having two brains and two pairs of hands. Plus, on a conceptual level, we might start from very different points and ending up meeting halfway, so the final work ends up including more perspectives in that sense.



What is your approach to projects?

Our projects always start with a discussion. For the more planned projects, like in the case of a gallery show, Lilli and I sit down and bounce ideas around, whether in person or over Skype.

We explore our topic of choice and we see how to work with the space. The reality is of course always different from the theory, so we often need to readjust and go with the flow.

Of course, some other projects are more about improvisation. We might do trekking together in order to establish a contact with nature, and then some ideas for a performance may suddenly struck us.

You define yourself as artists-activists. In this sense, how do you navigate the need to convey information about some specific problem with preserving an emotional quality and impact to the work?

Even if our works are based on research, data and information, the work itself is always abstract. It's not didactic. That is why in our exhibitions we usually have two parts, the aesthetic part and the other, more community-oriented part. But the two aspects are not disjointed. We want our art to make people think and, if they don't find answers, they can share their perplexities and ideas with us.

For many of your projects you worked with local farmers. Did you encounter any scepticism at all when they visited the show?

Not so much scepticism, but as a different understanding for sure. In our project Bearth, for example, we were in India for an artistic residency. Some of the farmers we worked with had never visited an exhibition before and they confessed to not knowing much about art. Nonetheless, they were excited about the project.

They might have not understood all the installations, but they were really touched by the fact that we were talking of issues that are so important for them. And they are also important for us. As artists, we don't want to just show beauty, but also to serve the needs of the communities.





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