


A plea
for
inclusive
ecological
art

greenArtists.

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intro

Anthropocene art has an ecological vocation: it is militant art that aims to raise public awareness of the state of our planet. It uses artistic practices for ecological, political and social ends.

This artistic trend has led us to develop the *Green Art* concept, which is characterised by its inclusive approach (i.e. an artistic practice that is open to all), its resolutely positive scope and its anchorage in its creative environment, including the diversity of potential materials.

It should be noted that the implementation and accessibility of such an approach requires a strong political will and a large number of human resources (artists, facilitators, mediators, educators, etc.).

This plea is in two parts:

- A theoretical section, illustrated with works of art providing keys to understanding ecological art and the *Green Art* approach, and
- A second part, based on the work of Paul Ardenne¹, looks at its specific features in practice.

¹ Paul Ardenne,
Un art écologique.
Créations Plasticienne et Anthropocène,
Éditions Le Bord de l'Eau,
"La Muette" collection,
Lormont, 2019,
277 pages

1 Ecological art as political commitment

Art is a political tool that helps to convey a certain vision of the world. There are many historical examples of this, including Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), which denounced Franco's dictatorship in Spain, and more recently Duane Hanson's installations, which take a critical look at consumer society.



Duane Hanson,
Supermarket lady,
1969

Art is now seizing on social, economic and environmental issues to develop new ways of raising awareness:

Ai Weiwei, Chinese artist, activist and resistance fighter, is a defender of human rights. He confronts European states with their responsibilities in the face of the arrival of millions of climatic, economic and political refugees on the shores of the Mediterranean.

In 2016, at a time when the debate on the migrant crisis was dividing European countries, the artist “dressed” the facade of a historic building in Berlin with 14,000 life jackets picked up on the beaches of Lesbos in Greece, where a large number of refugees transit. This work is intended to draw attention to the **consequences** of this crisis.



Safe Passage installation,
Berlin Konzerthaus, 2016

Chinese artist **Cai Guo-Qiang** has designed a revisited Noah's Ark (*The Ninth Wave*, Shanghai, 2014), housing 99 animals made from **recycled materials** for the occasion. The animals are, of course, endangered species, to alert the public to the threats to biodiversity. This work, installed in the port of Shanghai, focuses on the means of transport used to transport used in international trade and **the energy transition**. The artist asks us about the impact of human activities on sensitive environments. It's a tribute to a precious natural world, and a way of reaffirming that our survival depends on us taking a **responsible stance natural resources**.



The Ninth Wave,
Shanghai, 2014



In an even more concrete and humanistic way, **Vik Muniz** shows us how **ecological art can be eminently inclusive**. The Brazilian artist co-constructs his works with residents living near one of the world's largest landfill sites. He organises rubbish collections to create collaborative works of art. The sale of these works has enabled the funds to be redistributed to the Brazilian community in question. This approach is documented in Lucy Walker's film *Waste Land*.



Portrait of Irma, the cook at Gramacho,
Rio de Janeiro in the 2000s



These examples show us not only the social significance of such an approach, but also its **inclusive and positive dimensions**.

Indeed, the recovery of objects speaks to us of a society of over-consumption and waste, and allows us to question the act of throwing things away. It's the flip side of a predatory attitude, highlighting through the materials used the fact that resources are definitely finite. These artistic approaches seek to propose a new relationship with the world, a form of repair and care, and to convey, through this responsible and conscious attitude, **a positive vision** for a better future.

Green art is part of this new direction, driven by concerns about the urgency of climate change, and its selfish aim is to help preserve our environment. It is a front of struggle that follows a logic of creation and interpellation or denunciation that pushes us to react and forces us to question. As part of an **assertive political commitment**, the approach is to urge people to share these resources and encourage better redistribution, to move towards an **ethic of social justice** in terms of content, form and materials.

To support the argument for a shared ambition, let's draw a rhetorical parallel between artistic creation and political action, around the notion of time. These two temporalities can be *de facto* compared: artistic creation has an **ephemeral duration** while giving its action a **long-term scope**, which is the purpose and objective of *Green artist*, one of the intrinsic meanings attached to the project.

Political mandates, for their part, are also of short duration in view of the various electoral deadlines. However, it is the duty of our representatives to have the vision to make long-term decisions and commitments. They have to make choices and acquire the determination to steer society as a whole towards new models of development and new organisations.

So we're all looking for **the same levers of action** to implement in **an attempt to remedy the environmental crisis**.

2 — From concept to practice: Green Art, a lever for action!

Green art is a militant art form designed to raise awareness of the ecological cause and encourage people to take action. Awareness is raised in a positive way to change the way we look at the ecological emergency. Action becomes possible, salutary and necessary. The aim is to support groups in their **artistic activities in the field**, to raise awareness of art and nature at the same time. The limits of creation are those of our imagination and the means we can make available (space, materials, time).

Our argument is in line with the work of Paul Ardennes, who conceptualises anthropocene art on the basis of **6 essential characteristics**:

— a process in the natural environment

It is important to **start from one's own environment** in order to develop an artistic approach that is in phase with the ecological approach, but also to have a dedicated creative space. The **legitimacy of the site**, whether urban or rural, avoids the pitfall of a deviation that could make the approach artificial and at the same time impoverish it. The deeper meaning can only come from symbiosis, from the close link between the artist and his environment.

— a way of documenting and warning about a state of ecological crisis/emergency

It is up to the supervisors **to raise awareness** of these issues through the discovery of works by other artists and proven informative documents (documentaries, articles, books, images, etc.) that help to decipher the state of the world.

— contextualise the responsibility of human activity towards the environmental crisis

In this context, it is up to the supervisors to **participate in the search for local mediums** and to manage the nature and quantity of the materials to be made available to the participants. This can be adapted to **different contexts**: recycling waste can range from small household appliances to pruning branches or various landscaping waste...

— taking care of relationships with others and the environment (care)

The aim is to achieve a neutral impact in the production of the works by recovering abandoned materials. The aim is to establish a new relationship with the world, and to take part in a form of repair, preservation and care by seeking to adopt a responsible attitude that banishes predation.

— campaigning for respect for nature

This aspect will be developed through the **exhibition space** and the **media adapted** for the general public. Mediators can offer guided tours. They can also provide labels that explain the meaning and significance of the works, so that visitors can explore the exhibition on their own.

— creating works with nature

The challenge of creation is to succeed in inventing a **relationship of reciprocal belonging** to a particular site and all that inhabits it, and this must become an essential condition for working. This gives credibility and authenticity to the work, making it intelligible, a ground of sincerity and **accuracy that guarantees the value of the creation**.

— Green Art: multiple artistic practices

Green Art focuses on the plastic arts, opening the door to all possibilities: from the miniature to the monumental. Individual and/or collective productions can generate large-scale, unifying works. Above all, it's a political will that's enthusiastically embraced and doesn't necessarily require a lot of resources or a specific area of expertise.

Like the hummingbird in the legend who does his bit to extinguish a forest fire by contributing small drops of water, Green Art, on its own scale, is also doing its bit and wants to help generate a collective dynamic committed to ecology. In this paradoxical moment of absolute domination and apparent powerlessness that is the *Anthropocène*, Green Art aims to be a lever for regaining our power to act.

The aim of this approach is to encourage a close and harmonious relationship with the land, one that is likely to lead us to question our relationship with it and to adopt a **respectful and responsible stance** towards the natural environment on which our survival depends.

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Green Artist is a European project run by 3 partner associations (AAPEI Épanou, VTC Margarita and Patrimoine à roulettes) that is part of the eco-art movement. The project combines environmental issues, the visual arts and social inclusion. Its aim is to test, theorise and model reproducible ecological art practices for so-called vulnerable groups.

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