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Art and New Materials Design for a Better Future

Plastic is sometimes used as a symbol for everything that is wrong with our society built on (hyper-)consumption. But artists are also increasingly showing us that plastic should not be discarded as useless trash. They show us plastic is something to treasure, to re-use, and from which to build object of great beauty. At the same time, creative designers are researching sustainable alternatives to plastic, like materials based on organic matter such as plants or micro-organisms.

The exhibition Art and New Materials invites us to see plastic—which runs in the veins of Zuid Limburg in general, and Sittard-Geleen specifically—afresh. On view in Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst De Domijnen in Sittard from February 13th–May 30th 2021.

Tranquil and timeless. Suzanne Jongmans's portraits seem to bring the Old Masters such as Van Eyk and Vermeer to life. But wait—is that plastic and wrapping materials instead of silk and cotton? Jongmans works in many media: she is a seamstress, sculptor, costume designer, and photographer. She uses all sorts of objects from her daily life, with surprising results. Throughout the course of the exhibit, Jongmans will give several tours, explaining her work and methods in person.

In addition to Jongmans's portraits, Art and New Materials features work of several designers who re-use plastic in ways that both practical and pretty: from gorgeous, colorful baskets made out of old fishing nets to vases made out of ... cigarette filters. The work of Shahr Livne takes a philosophical approach to the eternal life of plastic with her clock that does not tell time ("Deep Time") and a striking visualization of the accumulated plastic trash in the Pacific Ocean ("Landscapes of the Plastisphere"). And did you know that the mealworms that eat polystyrene can themselves be ground up to form edible products? Such as artist Studio Marc's Guilt Burger? You can see the relentlessly chewing worms for yourself in the exhibit.

New Materials are a focus for many of the young designers in the exhibit: Polina Baikina has developed a range of household products from nettles, while Sarah Harbarth made a biologically-degradable materials from banana peels. Mona Abusmra, a student of industrial design in Vienna and Belgrade, distilled her (plastic-Like) material New Culture using bacteria and fermentation. The Dutch Emma van der Leest is also investigating a kind of bio-leather made by bacteria. Together with the

Radboud Medical Center in Nijmegen, she developed a coating based on fungi in order made the bio-leather waterproof, fragrant, and colorful. She calls her product: Fungkee. Many of these products are displayed so that they can in such a way that they can handled by the public.

Aside from these experiments, Art and New Materials showcases sustainable industrial products marketing by Dutch producers. Jessica den Hartog will be furnishing a working laboratory to show how a designed handles plastic. She will also be giving workshops about her methods. A large room houses the Cill LAB: the study-, work-, and research space of the Brightlands Chemelot Campus in Geleen, where companies and researched collaborate. Such as these presentations are interactive, and the Chill LAB will also be giving workshops.

Art and New Materials is curated by Leonne Cuppen (Yksi Connect) in collaboration with Marcel Sloots, Marlon van Schellebeek and Walter van Hulst.

Note for the editor (not for publication): For more information about the exhibition and / or marketing material please contact:

Yksi Connect / +31-(0)40-7805034 / +31-(0)6-10573108- connect@yksi.nl - www.yksiexpo.nl

Yksi Connect connects designers with the industry, provides inspiration, gives directions and resolves issues. They draw their strength from collaborations and cross-fertilizations.