



FIVE MINUTES WITH ANN WIZER

When artist and activist Ann Wizer was living in the Philippines in the 1990s, she was horrified by the impact of rampant consumerism on the environment. In response, Wizer started using garbage as the primary material in her artworks. In 2002, Wizer created XSProject in Indonesia's capital, Jakarta. The program involves buying plastic consumer waste from Jakarta's trash-pickers at well above the market price. It's estimated there are 450,000 trash-pickers in Jakarta; they tend to live an undocumented life on a monthly income of about NZ\$40 per family. Working with other foundations and small cottage industries, XSProject transforms the waste into functional accessories that make a strong environmental and social statement. www.xsprojectgroup.com

MiNDFOOD: For how long have you been interested in the environment?

All of my working life. When I finished college in the US, I moved to Japan for seven years. While I was there I constantly picked up things from my environment to use in my artworks.

At that time I focused on my natural environment, picking up various debris such as leaves and twigs.

Then I started to pick up man-made debris – things like chopsticks from restaurants. It really bothered me that they were used only once.

One of my favourite works at the time was a sculpture made from a broken bamboo window shade. I found it lying by the side of the road. I washed it and transformed it into a great piece of art.

How did you move from using natural objects to garbage?

Around the early 1990s, I was working in Manila and I was using food products, such as rice and spices, in my artworks. One day it occurred to me that I was using these beautiful natural ingredients in my studio, yet when I went outside I was breathing toxic air and I couldn't drink the water. I decided it was time to make a statement about my environment. I created an exhibition called "Roads to Nowhere" that used debris from construction sites.

How did the XSProject evolve?

In 2001 I reached another turning point when I was exhibiting an installation made from garbage in Jakarta. I was talking about my work, which represented

the degradation of the natural environment, at the gallery when I realised I needed to be talking to a much wider audience. I spent the next year talking to the greater community about waste. I learned that 30 tonnes of waste is produced for every one tonne of products sold; 98 per cent of all products are thrown away within six months of purchase; and just one in 10,000 products is designed with environmental care in mind.

The XSProject just evolved. It wasn't going to be the most profitable project in the world, but it was a dream. I never thought it would get to where it is now. We use local people to collect anything that can't be recycled before it reaches landfill and we pay them a rate well above the market price. Then we transform the waste into practical, attractive and durable products such as totes, passport cases and wallets. Each product is handmade and no two items are the same. We're now exporting these products throughout the world. Since 2002, XSProject has reused 18 metric tonnes of garbage.

What are your plans for the XSProject?

I have so many plans! I want to grow the foundation, I want to enlist the help of design and architecture students to create new products and I want to introduce some other environmental programs.

To find out more about XSProject, including watching TV footage, or to purchase products, go to www.mindfood.com.



Above: Super-strong carry bags come in four sizes. Prices range from RRP AU\$23 to \$38.



Above: The funky "Kitchen Sink" shoulder bag is a one-of-a-kind item, RRP \$AU77. Below: The "Late Homework" document wallet is great for carrying books and papers, RRP \$AU28.

