

## **LESSON 3**

### **POLLUTION AND SOLUTIONS | PART 1**

Hi, my name is Anne de Carbuccia and welcome back to my lessons for the planet. Today we are going to talk about waste and pollution. Our waste and pollution are harming us and affecting our planet. But we can transform these problems into an opportunity.

## CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCTION

I am going to start by telling you what I discovered during my expeditions.

A lot of people call me an environmental artist because I dedicate my time to documenting our planet. Recounting what we have, what we are about to lose and especially what we have already lost.

In my travels more than anything I wanted to show the beauty we are losing and remind us that it's still there. I never really intended to talk about trash and I didn't go looking for it, trash found me. The more I travelled to remote locations and the more I ran into waste and pollution that were affecting and changing those places.

More and more scientists believe that we live in a new epoch, which they call the **Anthropocene**, a geological time defined by human activity and its significant impact on the planet's climate and ecosystems. Our human footprint is transforming our planet all over the world. Even places that humans have not been able to access, like the depths of our Ocean, have already been touched and often changed by us through plastic pollution.

## CHAPTER 2 | LET'S TALK ABOUT WASTE

### BEAUTY & TRASH 1,2 RAJA AMPAT

I would end up in these very remote locations and to honour their beauty I would create one of my installations, that I call TimeShrines.

But then, even in these very remote places, I would find trash! So I decided I needed to document it and to make it a part of my project.

When I visited the coral triangle in the western Pacific Ocean I wanted to capture the exceptional beauty of the islands of Raja Ampat, they are very remote and corals there are incredibly resilient. The shells are also huge and you can find so many on the beaches I really wanted to create an installation with them. So this is the image I had in mind, with these magical shells out of a pirate story in front of my two main symbols: the hour glass, one of our most ancient ways of calculating time and a skull; but it's not a pirate skull, in the ancient times they called it a **Vanity** and artists used it in their work as a symbol of choice to remind us that as mortals we all have a choice, every day we can choose between a positive and constructive life and a superficial and vain life, thus the name Vanity.... And that choice only depends on us.

As I was collecting the shells, the tide changed and suddenly all this trash landed on the beautiful and pristine beach. It was very sudden and very shocking. Trash was just everywhere.... I just couldn't walk away from that ...I had to create another installation or rather add on to the installation I had already made. So this is the image I had to photograph to recount the whole story of that place.

In nature there is no such thing as garbage. Everything is reused or recycled. But in our societies today so many things have become disposable. We use them once or twice and then throw them away without a thought, often without even knowing the long-term effects of our action.

It is estimated that we generate more than 2 billion tons of waste every year, which means an average of 600 pounds per human being: the trash either ends up in landfills or in our ocean, lakes and rivers or in waste treatment facilities, generating 1.6 billion tons of carbon dioxide equivalent every year. That's 5% of global emissions! and from plastic consumption to our more recent e-waste it's all expected to increase!

**Instead of being recycled and reused our trash transforms into a negative force that pollutes us and every other living being on the planet.** It becomes a loss instead of an economic opportunity.

## **HIGH ALTITUDE TRASH**

### **EVEREST 17.800 feet**

My most shocking experience was in the Himalayas on what we call Mount Everest. The Sherpas call it **Chomolungma**, which means “mother goddess of the world.” It’s a very sacred mountain for them.

When we think about Mount Everest we think of extreme nature, climbing, challenge, bucket list... but do we think of trash??

I knew there was pollution up there, but it was difficult for me to imagine and that’s why I decided to go there and have a look. With a group of activist Sherpas we tracked up towards Base Camp at the end of the climbing season and we regularly ran into burning trash all the way up the mountain. Plastic, metal cans, oxygen bottles, gas stoves ...so much is left behind. When we finally reached Base Camp there were plastic bottles floating in ponds around the glacier (video). Again, I had to create a trash installation. This time I choose the items that I had encountered the most on my way up. The installation was simpler as I wanted to honour the location, the highest sacred mountain range in the world. As you can see that day the mountain gifted us with incredibly good weather. Being able to view the full mountain range like this probably happens only a few times in a year! Apparently Chomolungma felt compassion for my installation.

90% of waste in developing countries is disposed of in unregulated dumps or openly burned. Poorly managed waste serves as a breeding ground for disease vectors and contributes to global climate change through methane generation. It can also even promote urban violence. So waste is not only environmentally but also socially harmful.

Many wealthy countries still send their waste to developing countries because it's cheap, helps meet recycling targets and reduces domestic landfill. In the US we generate about 5 pounds of waste per person per day. The European Union is the largest exporter of plastic waste, with the US leading as the top exporter for a single country creating 36 million tons of plastic waste each year and believe it or not global waste is expected to increase by 70% by 2050.

This problem is not cultural, it's a question of organisation and international political will and as we just discovered it will not go away!

But we have a viable solution. We know that recycling and upcycling can lead in the medium term to substantial resource saving: From creating jobs for millions of people to saving thousands of trees. For example recycling aluminium, consumes 95 % less energy than producing it from its virgin source.

And **upcycling** solutions, where the product being recycled is turned into a product of higher environmental value or of greater quality, are being invented every day.

It's really now up to us to innovate and transform our waste into a precious resource! We already know it is possible!

## **DISPOSABLE SUNSET**

### **MALDIVES**

Of course, if I had found trash and pollution on our highest mountain I wondered if I would find the same problem in our lowest nature sanctuaries.

I created this installation in the Maldives in the Indian Ocean, a place people usually consider as a holiday paradise.

This is the amount of plastic water bottles that arrived on the beach over the course of the 5 days of my stay. We counted over 150. Some people find that the water bottles in this image are almost too beautiful. It's basically impossible not to photograph a beautiful sunset and in the Maldives every dusk is magical....with or without water bottles. This image is more of a question than a statement: What do we want our future sunsets to look like? Because these could very soon become the sunsets that we deserve.

We consume 1 million plastic water bottles per minute and only 9% gets recycled.. The amount of plastic trash that flows into the Ocean every year is now about 14 million tons that's basically one truck load every minute and it's expected to nearly triple by 2040.

Plastic is a material that lasts forever. All the plastic ever created still exists! Imagine that every single toothbrush you have ever used is still around! It just disintegrates into smaller particles called micro and nano plastic; but these last forever and are so small that we end up eating and breathing them. There are so many micro plastic particles today in the air and in the water that we are all consuming and breathing the equivalent of a credit card of plastic every week. That cannot be healthy. Recently

researchers have even found plastic in the placenta of unborn babies. Which I find very scary. Is the Anthropocene going to create Cyborg babies?

All our plastic is also being ingested by millions of land and marine based animals and it is killing them. Our Oceans are haunted by ghost nets and our forests and fields by plastic bags. All this is putting at risk the animals' future as species.

We have a term for this: it's called **Ecocide**. It means the destruction of the natural environment by deliberate or negligent human action. Several countries are working on passing new laws to recognize Ecocide and treat it as a crime against humanity.

But let's be clear, Plastic is not the bad guy here. It's an incredible invention. which has facilitated our lifestyles in so many ways. The problem is how we have chosen to use it and to dispose of it. Imagine that plastic production is meant to increase by 40% in the next decade though up to 80% of plastic already produced could soon be recycled to almost infinity.

The growing opportunities of **circular economy** are already providing the solution. What we need to do now is change our approach and perspective towards such an incredible invention.

## CHAPTER 3 | CONCLUSION

We are once again put in front of a choice both as individuals and as citizens. Is our biggest legacy going to be waste and pollution? **We have a choice and we need to decide now. Do we want our archaeology to be trash???**

## CHAPTER 4 | IMPORTANT POINTS

1. Our waste and pollution is harming us and affecting our planet but we could transform this problem into an opportunity!
2. Anthropocene is a geological time defined by human activity and its significant impact on the planet's climate and ecosystems.
3. Even places on the planet that humans have not been able to access have already been touched by our waste and pollution.
4. Instead of being recycled and reused our trash transforms into a negative force that pollutes us and every other living being on the planet.
5. Many wealthy countries send their waste to developing countries because it's cheap.
6. We consume 1 million plastic water bottles per minute and only 9% gets recycled..
7. All the plastic ever created still exists!
8. **Ecocide** is a crime against humanity.
9. The growing opportunities of circular economy are already providing the solution we need.
10. We have a choice and we need to decide now. Do we want our archaeology to be trash???

I hope you enjoyed our lesson. You can find more information on our project on our website or write to us at this address.

If you want to stay connected, we would love to know more about your views and ideas. You can follow us at One Planet One Future which is both on FB and IG.

Until next time