As in all areas, wind blows towards sustainability in art also. Thus a new concept was born: Sustainable Art. This concept consists of social justice, direct democracy and antiviolence in addition to environmental issues. We discussed the history, present and tomorrow of Sustainable Art with contemporary art historian and curator couple: Maja-Reuben Fowkes.

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You can be defined as the pioneers of sustainable art debates and approach. According to your opinion, what are the historical sources of this approach?

When we think about the historical roots of a broad understanding of sustainability in contemporary art – one that is not limited to strictly environmental issues but also
considers the wider social and, as theorist Felix Guattari put it in *The Three Ecologies*, mental dimensions of ecology – then we look to the period of artistic experimentation of the late 1960s and early 70s. We argue that the precursors of a contemporary engagement with sustainability are to be found primarily in the dematerialised practices of conceptual and neo-avant-garde art rather than in the Land Art movement, which although instrumental in bringing art out of the gallery and placing it in a natural setting tended to see the natural world as a giant canvas for individual artistic expression and rarely showed any concern for the environmental impact of grand gestures in the desert. Also, while some artists combined conceptual practice with a direct interest in environmental issues, the work of others had a more indirect but equally important impact on thinking about sustainability and art through, for example, a disavowal of the production and stockpiling of art objects, a shift in priorities that is associated with conceptual art. This is perhaps especially the case if we consider artists working in non-market conditions, such as the East European neo-avant-garde, artists such as the Zagreb-based group TOK or the Slovenian group OHO.

We know that you prefer to say sustainability of art rather than Sustainable Art. Why?

Sustainable Art with capital letters implies the existence of a specific art movement, restricting the relevance of the term to artists that deal with a programme of sustainability in their work. What we are more interested in is looking at how sustainability impacts on and is relevant to contemporary art practice as a whole, such as how a new sensitivity to issues of sustainability can be felt and perhaps encouraged in all spheres of contemporary art, from the niche of self-declared ecological art to the circuits of the mainstream international art world, including questions raised by the responsible use of materials or the ethics of including people and animals in art projects. Sustainability has implications for practically all spheres of human activity, and therefore is also relevant for the working of art institutions, from issues of energy conservation in museums to considering the role of art in either maintaining or criticising unsustainable social and economic models.

Could you say us a few forceful name and works, addressing sustainability and environmental concerns in contemporary art world recently?

There are many artists who deal today with sustainability, some stressing more the environmental aspect, others the social. Swiss artist Ursula Biemann has a ten-part video work called the *Black Sea Files* that tells the story of the giant pipeline that connects the oilfields of Azerbaijan to the global oil market, passing through the mountainous Caucasus before ending up at a Turkish seaport. The work of Polish artist Janek Simon is another interesting example of sustainability in contemporary art, in works such as *Make Your Own Digital Watch* that is about understanding and taking responsibility for the technological world that surrounds our everyday lives. Our last symposium on Sustainability and Contemporary Art: Atmospheres of Protest at Central European University Budapest in May 2012 also featured the work of artists that deal with the phenomenon of new protest movements, such as Gabriella Csoszó from Hungary and Tomas Rafa from Slovakia, as well as representatives of the collective Occupy Museums, that is directly contesting the domination of social and economic hierarchies in the New York art world.
What do you think about the future of environmental and sustainable art?

Although the level of public and institutional interest in issues of art and ecology has fluctuated over the years, peaking recently in 2009 with the large scale cultural and political mobilisations around the Copenhagen Climate Summit and to some extent declining since then, the underlying interest amongst artists and audiences may in fact be constant or growing, since the issues at the heart of sustainability – despite the crisis over austerity and the demand for renewed economic growth – have not gone away. We would expect artistic interest in issues of sustainability to take new forms and be expressed in innovative ways, rather than solidifying into specific practices and contents associated with a particular brand of environmental art.

In an interview, you told a project about Ecological Footprint of Contemporary Art. Could you give us some information about this subject?

This was a year-long research project we undertook in 2009 into the ecological footprint of contemporary art that resulted in a number of workshops, lectures and events. One aspect of the project was to look at the ecological impact in its widest sense of a particular artwork, Olafur Eliasson’s *The Weather Project* at Tate Modern, and we came to quite surprising conclusions about what exactly made the project unsustainable – it turned out the greatest environmental impact was not from the use of materials in creating the work, but in the ‘afterlife’ of the work in pushing the artist towards ever bigger and more extravagant projects. We also looked at biennial culture within the wider context of contemporary art’s place in a bubble economy of economic globalisation in the 1990s and 2000s, and asked – at the time quite provocatively – whether biennial hopping has had its day.

Do you have any information about the contemporary art in Turkey?

We are of course aware of the importance of Turkish contemporary art, both through the influential (and usually cutting-edge) Istanbul Biennial, and through the work of Turkish artists that we encounter in international exhibitions, such as the work of Ahmet Ögüt and the videos of Ferhat Özgür.