Here are some questions I've decided to ask a few artists we work with Šaša Spač:al, Kat Austen, Sarah Hermanutz, Margherita Pevere. The ones on Italic I'm just asking you - I'll ask Kat Q3 as she has been rather thorough the last years in forgoing air travel. We'll print out and hang the interviews plus your posting in our back room. Note that next week the Transmediale and CTM festivals are ongoing, so that will ad some relevance.

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**1. As an artist working on biological and ecological themes, how often do you take into account your own carbon footprint?**

All the time. When I purchase a product I think about the plastic use. When I travel, I think about the oil economy and how much I am using. When I ship I am concerned with how. When I use the internet I think about where the power is coming from. I try to ride my bike whenever I can to pickup things I need and I try and recycle and reuse materials in my studio, that I already have. I also will forage for living materials as well as electronic materials. I refuse plastic at stores and when I shower try and use non plastic based containers for soap and shampoo.

As a living systems artist I think about these things daily in order to reduce my carbon footprint. Since living systems inspire much of my art, it felt ironic the artwork was also damaging to the life, I was studying and celebrating.

**2. When did you decide to cut back air travel? Was there an 'aha moment' or an inspiration for the decision.**

Nine years ago, I was invited to participate in an exhibition in Sao Paulo, Brazil, at the Itau Cultural, with the six Fusiform Polyphony (Face Music) robots created originally for Nuit Blanche in Toronto. International shows were rolling in at this time, and to do the show, I needed to ship the installation of six robots and the heavy aluminum supporting structures. The crates were not built, so the museum offered to send a truck to ship the works to New York, to build the crates.

To my surprise, a massive 18 wheeler showed up to the back of my studio — belching black smoke from two decorative exhaust pipes above the cab. When they opened the truck the driver said I was in good company, as two Picasso paintings and one Matisse painting was within. Somehow I felt like my work riding next to these great artists meant, I had somehow made it.

Though, why was the truck nearly empty?

I felt so guilty with an 18 wheeler truck driving to New York, mostly empty with its nasty carbon footprint just to build crates. I knew later my flights to and from São Paulo where my studio assistant and I, were also offensive contributors to my nasty carbon feet.

I think it hit home more deeply, when seeing Gréta Thunberg speaking about our selfish consumption, robbing her and future generations of their right to inhabit a livable planet.

**3. How do you think that affects your career as an artist? Have you had any negative pushback from not wanting to travel somewhere?**

Yes, it seems some exhibitions want the presence of the artist at the show. In a recent presentation in Taiwan where the Continuous War Train was commissioned, the curator was very kind and felt it essential that I attend the opening, so I agreed and took my studio assistant as well. Still, the reason I produced the animation, besides its political anti-military-industrial-complex message, was the desire not to have to fly.

In another invitation I had received to deliver a keynote address at UC Irvine on robotic art, I offered to build a kind of avatar robot, to read my paper. However, the curator would not have it, so I withdrew from the conference.

Recently when I was invited to exhibit Borderless Bacteria / Colonialist Cash at Ars Electronica for their 40th-anniversary exhibition, I was honored. When I asked if they could produce the work at Ars they said sure; they have a bio lab. I was thrilled and said I did not need to travel. They seemed a bit surprised, though later offered a ticket and honorarium and said it was important to attend, given past winners celebrating the big 40th anniversary.

Near to the time to order the ticket, I was dis-invited as they said they had run out of funds.

At that point, given the importance of Ars Electronica as a world stage, I offered to produce the works myself, and have it delivered to Ars. They did not agree to this plan, which lead to more questions.

When I looked more closely at my text surrounding the work Borderless Bacteria / Colonialist Cash, I had made a statement about accepting bacteria and microbes as, we should accept migrants. After some investigation, I realized Austria was one of the countries with the most stringent access for migrants.

I believe perhaps the text I submitted for the catalog may have been subtly embarrassing to Ars Electronica, or possibly challenging their city, state, and corporate sponsors? This was not intended though perhaps a poor choice of my words.

Additionally, it would have been more expensive for Ars Electronica, given their large scale to have to produce the work in their labs.

Still, I was happy that at first Ars Electronica would consider doing the work in their lab, and I think this points to a distinct possible future for such exhibitions, wishing for greener alternatives.

**4. For the last 25 years or so, a lot of importance has been given to the 'artist as nomad'. Artists residencies, global exhibitions, festivals, and biennales seem to put forward the artist as a 'global figure,' but that means a lot of air travel. In a heating planet, is it possible to find alternatives to the status quo?**

I think it certainly is possible to find alternatives. Art laboratory Berlin taking the protocol as instruction set, similar to the way John Baldessari or Sol LeWitt's works were produced, where the idea is perhaps the most crucial thing was fantastic. As a neo-conceptualist artist, I feel it is perfectly fine to send instructions, and help frame both the production and presentation of the work.

That the team at Art laboratory Berlin was willing to engage this process, feels like a real evolution. Our communication has been excellent and quick and has allowed a sense of the artist's presence and mind to exist in the end product, in this exhibition. Not needing to use air travel or expensive shipping to move the work from place to place is fantastic.

When many artists do not necessarily even construct their own works, it seems logical that to build work remotely rather than shipping work, can also benefit local communities vs. supporting a dying carbon-based economy

I am also often struck with how much of a show budget is expended with international travel and shipping. Given the large-scale nature of some of my works, 90% or more of a budget can be expended with just shipping alone. This also feels very sad, as the artist tends to recieve minimal funds, and often the art funds go toward shipping companies, airlines, and customs fees.

While so many artists like the status of having an international practice, I think we all must learn alternatives to this stance. It is promoted in so many areas, such as in education. One becomes a full professor by having an international practice vs. a national or local practice, where you may only be an associate or assistant professor.

Since these realizations, I have been trying as much as possible, given the nature of my practice, to find ways of exhibiting my work internationally without needing to fly. This is challenging, as my work is generally large interactive robotic exhibitions.

 I have had some luck with this, especially with works that are animation based, or digitally based. Recently I did an exhibition in Toronto called the Digital Animalities, where the curators invited my Seed Series Prints. Fortunately, the exhibition curators were willing to print the works in Toronto to my specifications. They then received the works into the University collection, which made me happy.

For me, perhaps doing so much international travel, I started to think of new ways of redesigning my practice that would allow the work to travel virtually. At this point, when I receive an international exhibition invitation, my first thought is how I can do the exhibition and still participate, and reduce my carbon footprint?

**5. What would be your ideal balance as an artist living in the third decade of the 20th century?**

Well, most art seems to now be viewed online in some way. At first, my mind goes to virtual reality. Still, recently I have read that the most massive coal-fired machine on the planet is, in fact, the World Wide Web. This makes me sad, given I also keep and maintain a significant web presence.

In the ideal world, we would find alternative ways of powering the web, Solar, or microbial-based. The energy is there, though the infrastructure is not there, yet. I find great hope in electric planes and believe this will happen eventually. Still, so much of capitalistic practice is based on extratavist philosophies, where we just decimate natural environments for metal and minerals.

I believe there have also been some early models of art that heals the planet, and thinking of the artwork as a living system, that helps to improve local sites such as the works of Wolfgang Laib, Agnes Dennis, Mel Chin, or Helen and Newton Harrison.

I think the perfect balance would be artworks that, in some way, instantiated action and offered a kind of healing moment for the planet. This may have to happen locally, spread ideational, and in other ways, act as a seed to future generations.

I can imagine artists having living avatars and find great humor in artists such as Maurizio Cattelan that, for years had a stand-in for him, since he did not want to go to all his openings. Perhaps every city should have artist avatar businesses, where avatars show up on behalf of the artist. Artists like Banksy have also managed to create tremendous excitement and mystery surrounding not knowing who they are.

As I study and research living systems theory, the interconnection of our brains, also require proper cooling. Still, when the body dies, the brain only partially dies, as we leave behind ideas and information, or works of art we hope to persist in some way. If these ideas could be stored and in low carbon ways, then they could allow us as humans, to pass on what we have learned to future generations, without the massive carbon footprint.

I know there are experiments, for example, to store information in DNA, or in inert quartz crystals. In the end, perhaps the art I am most interested in, is living, and does not last forever. Like life it may have a cycle of birth, life, death, and degradation.

I am now obsessed with Fungi as an art material, after seeing the Fantastic Fungi film featuring Paul Stamets a few weeks ago.

**6. Festivals implicitly combine the global with the local, which usually means flying a lot of people into a location. How could that be done differently? What would a low carbon or carbon-free festival be like?**

 A low-carbon festival for me would exist in a city where there is lots of bicycle infrastructure. It would not necessarily allow flights or massive crates to be shipped. While the spectacle is important, I think works that amplify the subtelty of life and instead try to slow the experience down, and help people to see the beauty inherent in the local would be preferable.  Projection mapping has tremendous theatrics, if that is necessary, and can also amplify the small and slow moving.

I have been much more excited about local exhibitions in my City within short 2 to 3-hour distances. Even these require cars, and at times I have delivered my artworks on my bicycle. I am also excited by cargo bikes, where human power can be used to produce works of art.

I think transmitting video and film digitally is another excellent example of art that can be experienced at a distance or sent at a distance, and have a local influence on ideas.

**7. Could you imagine any of these ideas affecting how you produce your artworks?**

Yes, it has already impacted my ideas and affected how I produce my artworks. My most recent piece called **Scatter Surge; Holobiome** is one such example. Because it uses Maple wood from a falling tree next door to my studio, I was able to create mobiles of this tree with natural rocks and recycled plastiic. By reusing material, honoring this ancient tree that was twice my age, was part of the intent and thinking about the cycles of life and death.

 It's primarily constructed of materials which WILL degrade, I see future artworks that will be much more based on fungi growth and degradation as the main focus of future works of a life afirming art.

Still, I am obsessed with machines and their emergent properties. I feel they are part of our evolution as a species. As the hammer and drill are an amplification of a muscle, the algorithm is an amplification of our minds. They will not go away. We must find better ways of powering them. I think this is a critical moment for our human species, and if we can get it right, we may become an emergent being.

Though as a human on dying planet, I also feel I must take responsibility, as much as I possibly can, by using less carbon in the process of creating, making, and distributing my ideas and artworks.

**8. What would you wish or hope for the next generation of artists in dealing with these questions?**

 I feel the next generation already can see the challenges of our environment. It is often young people who seem to recognize we have been a part of a long trajectory of these damaging consumption and consumerist waste cycles. All are dark behaviors spurred on by capitalistic practices, and the recent fires in Australia are just one example of these environmental calamities. If one billion humans had died as a result of an international weather related calamity, we would be far more concerned, than the one billion animals that died in those fires.

I think many are realizing that we don't all need 3000 square foot homes, and micro homes are all the rage now.

This is part of the realization that material wealth is not as satisfying, as the time we have to develop our beings and individual voices, hopefully through art and free expression, allowing us to connect with others.

Stuff does not define us, though ideas have wings allowing them to spread in myriad ways globally. Great musicians and composers are an exquisite example of that.

They have sent their music through time, as a structure for future orchestras to play. I wish to send my ideas through to the future, as visual, aurel and organizational artworks, that others may enjoy. Information Arts can be poetic when we have galleries and museums willing to engage in these greener practices.