

The Art of Solving Wicked Problems

Interview with Yu-Lan van Alphen, Programme Manager Culture and Cohesion at DOEN Foundation
Text: Jeanne Tan

What is the DOEN Foundation?

The DOEN Foundation is a fund. We believe that a green, socially-inclusive and creative society is possible, because the world is full of committed entrepreneurs eager to develop sustainable, cultural and socially-engaged initiatives; people who aren't afraid to take risks while inspiring others. With our funds we can support these innovators and help put their pioneering ideas into practice. DOEN is supported by contributions from the three Dutch charity lotteries: the Nationale Postcode Loterij, the VriendenLoterij and the BankGiro Loterij.

What does DOEN do for social designers?

There is a growing interest from designers and artists in strengthening their connection with society. Not only from a critical perspective but also an interest in making an impact and giving social meaning to their artistic talents. An important part of the creative process is the research phase that maps all aspects of a project. In this phase, the project is still open to unexpected developments, often without a clear end result in sight. It is precisely this artistic research that's needed to generate new insights. But often, it is difficult to apply for financing when there is no concrete product or result.

For these reasons, DOEN wanted to help facilitate the work of artists and designers by initiating

In Dutch, DOEN means 'to do'. And that's exactly what motivates the DOEN Foundation in its support of artists and designers engaged in environmental, social and cultural initiatives. We discuss sustainable materials, social design and wicked problems with Programme Manager (Culture and Cohesion) Yu-Lan van Alphen, who inspires us to get out there and do good!

the Social Design program. With its Social Design program the DOEN Foundation supports initiatives that contribute to creating new perspectives on social issues. The focus is on sustainability, aiming for a better balance between economy, society and environment and highlighting the following themes: Better Less and Well-Being.

With the Social Design program, DOEN supports an average of 45 initiatives every year, within a total annual budget of EUR 1,500,000.

One of the projects you are currently financing is called *Social Design for Wicked Problems*.

Social Design for Wicked Problems (SDFWP) is a public research project about Social Design. Today, we are facing more complex problems of a new kind. Problems that are persistent, interconnected and involve behavioural change. Problems that existing rational solutions and strategies cannot handle. Consider, for example, issues such as obesity, population shrinkage or school dropouts. SDFWP connects designers with problem owners to address pressing current issues in today's society. SDFWP is important for DOEN because it provides understanding into the social design practice – to help both designers and clients – and contributes to further development of the social role of designers.



Photo: Adam van Sinteren



'6:1' en 'Ceramic Paint' / Collection Cornwall' by Kirstie van Noort, winner incentive prize of the DOEN | Materiaalprijs 2012

The project is a collaboration between The New Institute, Geen Kunst // Twynstra Gudde, social designer Tabo Goudswaard, and the DOEN Foundation.

How will the project take form?

In the coming weeks, three design teams will each tackle one problem: obesity; juvenile misbehaviour in neighbourhoods; and our (lack of) financial awareness. Since the teams will consist of both designers and problem owners, developing a common language will be vital for a good collaboration. Progress will be shared and discussed at public meetings and on the blog. The second meeting, at which the teams will present their findings, will take place during Dutch Design Week. The last meeting, planned for January 2014, will unveil the final design proposals to the public.

What is the benefit of involving designers with social issues?

Designers have an ability to look at existing situations in different ways, often with an interdisciplinary approach. This allows them to look at an issue from different perspectives, which leads to uncovering aspects that might have otherwise been ignored. It could be that a problem likely has a different cause or that more stakeholders are

involved in the problem than initially thought. Understanding and formulating the problem are equally as important as – or even a prerequisite for – finding a good solution. What's integral is to have openness for exploring different paths.

Speaking of finance, the crisis and budget cuts by the government have greatly impacted the creative industries in the Netherlands. Does DOEN have a role in financially stimulating designers and artists in these tough times?

As a private independent fund, DOEN makes its own agenda. Therefore, DOEN cannot take on the responsibilities of the government. That would not really offer a structural solution. What we can do is to support pioneering initiatives that show the added value of art and design for society and the well-being of people; initiatives that offer alternative models and systems. In this way, support for and interest in art and design can be increased, hopefully ensuring a translation into financial opportunities. We support these initiatives with our programs: Social Design and the Social Role of Culture.

One of your most renowned initiatives is the DOEN | Materiaalprijs. Can you tell us about this?



Bottles Collection, Klaas Kuiken
Nominated for the DOEN | Materiaalprijs 2010

The DOEN | Materiaalprijs is a joint venture between the Materiaalfonds and DOEN. It introduces the designs of the future. We challenge artists, designers, fashion designers and architects to find new, sustainable materials and innovative techniques to apply in their work. New materials are constantly being introduced on the market. How can we apply these in order to develop sustainable and meaningful designs? The DOEN | Materiaalprijs was created to stimulate design practices to further incorporate innovation and sustainability with aesthetics and functionality into their work.

How do you think last year's winning design contributes to a more sustainable use of materials?

The 'Energy Collection' by Marjan van Aubel brings nature, technology and design together. Through the use of light-sensitive pigments, the solar glassware works as a collector. Once the glassware is stored away, the specially-designed cabinet harvests and stores the collected energy to become a battery. The technology behind this design, which was invented by Swiss professor Michael Graetzel, is based on photosynthetic processes in plants. Marjan's design proposes to apply this knowledge to everyday objects thereby creating a different relationship between object and energy.

What are the plans for DOEN | Materiaalprijs this year?

In 2013, no prize will be awarded. We felt that after four successful years, it was time to pause, to reflect on past editions and to develop plans for the future. As a moment of reflection, we will be organising an exhibition at Dutch Design Week featuring a selection of the nominees and winners of the past four years. The exhibition will be on show at the Klokgebouw at Strijp-S during Dutch Design Week. Furthermore, several of these designers are featured in BioDesign, an exhibition highlighting the cross-pollination between nature, science and creativity, which is on view until 5 January 2014 in The New Institute.

The good news is that the DOEN | Materiaalprijs will be back in 2014! We will share details at an upcoming event at BioDesign, so stay tuned for more details on the DOEN | Materiaalprijs website and Facebook page.

Lastly, what do you personally find most inspiring about the work of DOEN?

DOEN supports not only art and design but also projects in the field of sustainable energy, social cohesion and sustainable/social entrepreneurship. What binds these initiatives together is that they are realized by immensely enthusiastic and dedicated people who are committed to making the world a better place. It is a privilege to be part of this movement and to contribute to help making these projects happen.

More information about the Social Design programme of DOEN can be found on www.doen.nl/socialdesign

Social Design For Wicked Problems blog: www.socialdesignforwickedproblems.hetnieuweinstituut.nl

The designers participating in Social Design for Wicked Problems are: Sjaak Langenberg and Rosé de Beer, MUZUS (Neele Kistemaker, Sanne Kistemaker & Aafke Kauffman), Jorge Mañes Rubio, Lino Hellings, and Waarmakers (Simon Akkaya & Maarten Heijltjes). Stadsdeel Amsterdam West and ING Insurance / Investment Management are the two problem owners.

The presentation of SDFWP will take place on 24 October 2013 from 13.30 to 16.30 at the Designhuis.

The DOEN | Materiaalprijs exhibition will run from 19 - 27 October 2013 in the Klokgebouw, Strijp-S. Participating designers are Marjan van Aubel, Michelle Baggerman, MKGK, Daniel Hulsbergen, Heleen Klopper, Klaas Kuiken, Lenneke Langenhuijsen, Kirstie van Noort, Ontwerplabel Vij5, and Tjeerd Veenhoven.

www.doen-materiaalprijs.nl

TENTOONSTELLING

10 GENOMINEERDE EN
WINNENDE ONTWERPEN UIT

4 JAAR

DOEN | MATERIAALPRIJS

Overzichtstentoonstelling van 10 genomineerde en winnende ontwerpen uit vier jaar DOEN | Materiaalprijs. Te zien in het Klokgebouw op Strijp-S tijdens DDW '13 van 19 t/m 27 oktober tussen 11:00 en 18:00. Een initiatief van Stichting DOEN en het Materiaalfonds.

DOEN | MATERIAALPRIJS DOEN-MATERIAALPRIJS.NL

Redefining Value

Wendy Plomp
Founder & Curator Dutch Invertuals

Eindhoven is special. It is not a beautiful city at first glance. But if you take the trouble, you will discover that Eindhoven has a lot to offer. Like space – to grow, to discover, to build, to run a business. Therein lies the strength and beauty of Eindhoven. It still has many hidden spots where things can arise. It has 'soil to grow in'. To an outsider it may seem dull. It's true: on Sunday and after nine at night, the streets are quiet. But on the other hand, the people here are very open minded. In this city, you are on a mission to do the best you can. And that is exactly what we are good at. There is a strong work mentality.

Eindhoven is full of contradictions that keep it in motion. It is a young city, in puberty as it were. Contradictions force us to make choices, distance ourselves from the old and make way for the new. The energy this releases is palpable in this city.

A recognizable process for people in creative professions. Like a designer looking for a new optimal form or innovative concept. Open collaboration is vital. By bringing together qualities and supporting each other, you can take up new challenges, broadening your vision.

We are currently occupied by the pressure put on our definition of value. Disappearing borders make way for a new identity, culture, tradition and currency. For the first time in a long time, we have to reconsider thoroughly who and what we are, start looking for value, or reformulate our definition of value.

From well-organized networks of hackers that attack our digital property. Or the shifting of physical products to virtual environments. But our confidence in what we eat is also being put to the test. Horse meat was sold as beef. The result is that we are slowly becoming alienated from the things that are familiar to us, like our knowledge and expertise.

To me, it feels as if we are in the middle of a gigantic revolution, the scale and effects of which we cannot yet foresee. It is what we leave behind for future generations.

That is what fascinates me.

www.dutchinvertuals.nl