

Meet Alice Audouin, the Art World's Go-To Sustainability Specialist

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Alice Audouin. Photo Jerome Mizar for Art Paris

Over the past two decades, [Alice Audouin](#) has become the go-to liaison in Europe between the art world and all things sustainable and ecological. With the art world pedigree of a grandfather who was a collector and an uncle who one of the first dealers to show Nouvelle Figuration artist Alain Jacquet, her initial plan was to open her own gallery, but an internship at an important Paris gallery convinced her otherwise. Even still, she recently told ARTnews in an interview, “I knew I wanted to stay in contact with artists one way or another.”

In the early 2000s, while working at Caisse des dépôts et consignations, the French state bank, Audouin got the idea of just how to do that. She kept reading the word “stakeholders” as part of her research into how to implement sustainable development. But one thing stood out to her: “I did not understand why the notion applied to NGOs and unions only, and not to artists though they are, to me, the best representatives of civil society,” said Audouin, who graduated from La Sorbonne with degrees in environmental economics and art history.

Audouin wanted to amplify artists’ voices in these ecological conversation, which led to the creation of the international symposium “The Artist as Stakeholder” that Audouin initiated at UNESCO in 2004. Artists like Amy Balkin, Stéphan Barron, Peter Fend, Alexis Rockman, Dan Peterman, and Daniel Pflumm presented alongside representatives from NGOs and business experts.

A few years later, she co-created COAL (Coalition Art et Développement durable, or Art and Sustainability Coalition), which she chaired for six years, to support eco-friendly emerging artists. In 2014, she took another step forward in this cause by founding Art of Change 21, which gathered 21 artists and eco-activists ahead of the U.N.’s COP21 conference in Paris in 2015.

Art of Change 21, which has continued its work for the eight years after that conference , has two main goals: to “turn people into a catalyst for change” against global warming and to involve artists at the forefront of sustainability both in and out of the art world, Audouin said.

One of the nonprofit’s initiatives that has had the strongest impact so far is MaskBook, which started with Chinese artist Wen Fang in 2015. Over the course of more than 200 workshops in some 30 countries—from South Korea to Ecuador, Ghana to India—nearly 7,000 people have created their own protective masks from found materials, as a way to reuse waste materials and direct focus on air pollution. “I see it both as a civic campaign for the environment and a collective artwork,” Audouin said.



Actor Ryu Jun-yeol wears a mask created by artist JeeYoung Lee as part of the fifth anniversary of “Maskbook” in 2020.

Since 2021, the champagne house Ruinart has been one of Art of Change 21’s biggest allies, supporting two artist prizes. The first one awarded 21 eco-conscious artists €2,000 each to get back on their feet after Covid, and the second, launched at Palais de Tokyo in January, aims to encourage eco-design in the art world. Twelve artists, including Théo Mercier, Eva Jospin, Pierre Clément, Agata Ingarden, and Thomas Lévy-Lasne, were awarded a three-day training program (valued at €40,000) with leading experts like sustainability consulting firms Karbone Prod and Solinnen.



Installation view of “Novacène,” 2022, curated by Alice Audouin and Jean-Max Colard, at Gare Saint Sauveur, as part of lille3000. *Photo Jérôme Mizar*

Her other clients include luxury brands like Guerlain and Hermès, always with the emphasis on highlighting how artists have been leading the way in implementing solutions to make our world a greener place.

One other cap that Audouin wears is as an art advisor; among her handful of clients is Frédéric Rodriguez, whose focus is “100 percent on artists committed to the environment,” she said. Since working with Audouin, he has acquired works by Tomás Saraceno, Haroon Mirza, Otobong Nkanga, Minerva Cuevas, Mark Dion, John Gerrard, and Jérémy Gobé.

Making the art world more eco-responsible is, of course, a daunting task, one that Audouin can’t achieve alone. “The art world has to think collectively,” she said. “The sector is not quite up to speed yet. I am positive that the more discussions we have together the more we will be able to forge a common culture, one that will enable us to move forward in the same direction.” Audouin is, of course, a realist—it’ll be next to impossible to quit art travel altogether overnight, but her conversations with Rodriguez and experience with Art Paris has got her thinking about the one missing link in these conversations that have evolved over the past 20 years. One way that might manifest is through her latest client, UBS, the Swiss financial institution that is Art Basel’s lead partner. (Because of UBS’s acquisition of Credit Suisse, Audouin can’t discuss further details about her work with UBS, but she said the first results of their collaboration will begin to show next year.)

“Everything has changed,” she said. “My network has grown from 200 to 2,500 eco-conscious artists, which now include a majority of women. Artists, galleries, museums are on the right track. However, I cannot say the same for collectors.” She added, “Sustainability is not a theme or a cause. It is a generational phenomenon, a fact.”