

Profile

Liane Rossler and Sarah K,
the Supercyclers.



Supercyclers

text: Amber Creswell Bell photography: Brigid Arnott



Design has long been informed by the dual principles of form and function, but a new wave is requiring that equal standing be given to considerations of sustainability. And it was this movement that impelled Liane Rossler and Sarah K to launch Supercyclers in April 2011 as a banner for their investigations into reuse of waste materials – and as a platform to profile other designers that they felt were approaching issues of sustainability in worthwhile ways.

An industry veteran, Liane Rossler studied as an artist and spent 25 years as designer and director of Dinosaur Designs. Since then, she has been working across creative industries as a curator, designer, artist and creative advisor. Liane first met Sarah five years ago, when Sarah owned a design and book store in Hobart. They found that they shared a strong aesthetic and appreciation of art and design, not to mention a common birth year, fashion sense and Jewish heredity – it was creative love at first sight. “It felt like we were soul sisters. We are both concerned with beauty in design, but also the environmental issues we are facing in the world. We came together to create beautiful and useful works that have a strong sustainable focus, and make you look at things in a different way,” says Liane.

Unlike the well-accepted practice of recycling, the Supercyclers instead seek to create beautiful objects from materials that are commonly considered waste, to draw attention to the beauty and potential in the everyday. Expanding the vernacular, “supercycling” addresses the hole they identified in the world of sustainable solutions to living. →

top Liane and Sarah's Plastic Fantastic project turned plastic bags into beautiful tableware. **bottom left** Rubberweight Light, a collaboration between designers Henry Wilson, Sarah K and Dale Hardiman, made from solid bronze and waste rubber. **right** Superblown by Liane Rossler, delicate vessels blown directly from recycled bottles.



"Designers, for the most part, were not thinking about addressing these big problems in the lateral way that we should be capable of. Trained in the art of problem solving we should be able to give sustainability an aesthetic that was neither the obvious recycled one, or something that was visually the same as the non-sustainable solution," Sarah poses. "We are interested in something new and inspiring – the story, process and interest behind the product, the idea of pushing the boundaries to come up with unexpected solutions."

With a mission to create small solutions using big ideas it is their hope that by spreading the word they might well make an impact on popular thinking, and by highlighting like-minded others under the banner of Supercyclers indeed gives the project strength through numbers. Fellow Supercyclers include Andrew Simpson, a Sydney designer making solar panel glass vases, and a press to turn junk mail into bowls. Celebrated designers Henry Wilson from Sydney and Dale Hardiman from Melbourne both create works transforming and adapting existing objects in elegant and innovative ways, with a progressive approach to materials, local suppliers and design. Indeed Ben Blakebrough's Cutting Saw Knives, for Blakebrough+King, are exemplaries of design which is primarily beautiful, and sustainable secondarily.

Referencing a discernable paradigm shift in recent years, Liane expresses that as the world becomes more flooded with mass-produced "stuff", people are certainly becoming drawn to more handmade limited edition works, and are interested in process. Sarah adds: "In general a more hand-built aesthetic has emerged – and with it experimental sustainable works can be more raw or let the material concern take precedence in the object".

So, is this shift a harbinger for what will one day be considered the design norm? With sustainability now included in design education, and indeed many design industry awards including a sustainable component, there appear to be strong movements in the right direction. But as Sarah points out, while our awareness and understanding as a population of humans have generally increased, and educating children has meant that we are growing them up to solve the mess of the previous couple of generations, there is still a definite "someone else will fix this" mentality.

The Supercyclers' passion for reconciling a contemporary life with the natural world is admirable, and the positive responses they have received worldwide most justified. With many exciting projects and collaborations coming up over the next two years, their core values pervade all the work that they do. At the very least they are keeping this important conversation alive, and this can only be considered a great thing for industry and environment alike.

