



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

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Innovative student trio create giant fabric ‘intestine’ to promote recycling culture



Danielle du Plooy, Shahir Singh and Kayleigh Cornish

Photo: Lerato Maduna

A group of environmentally conscious University of Cape Town (UCT) students have created a giant 90 m sculpture on UCT's upper campus plaza in a unique effort to increase awareness on the benefits of recycling and to inspire positive change among the campus community.

Constructed out of mutton cloth, the large sculpture referred to as "the intestine" has been stuffed with three weeks' worth of UCT's contaminated waste bags and one month's worth of cleaned recyclable waste. The intestine also contains splashes of colour to

indicate the location of the clean recycled waste in green and the contaminated waste in yellow and purple.

The project forms part of the Khusela Ikamva Sustainable Campus Project – a transdisciplinary collaborative effort initiated to set the university as a “Living Lab” and to maximise its reach and impact. The project is also a key enabler in transforming UCT’s institutional fabric to reduce its ecological footprint, support the university’s environmental sustainability strategy and achieve a more sustainable campus.

“Our project intends to comment on UCT staff and students’ recycling consciousness and to challenge the university to find ways to improve its recycling system,” said group member Kayleigh Cornish.

A unique project

The project, Cornish said, is inspired by a series of photographs by photographer Chris Jordon, which sadly captured how birds consumed plastic. “From Chris’s photographs we were inspired to create this intestine filled with waste and bursting at different points to illustrate and capture the violent effect pollution has on wildlife,” she said.

The project aimed to pique students and staff interest as they entered the plaza and provide them with a surreal and enlightening experience on pollution. Cornish said the sculpture generated questions and debate – especially during the setup phase on Tuesday, 10 May. And students were fascinated and reacted positively when the group explained their reasons for creating it.

Promoting a recycling culture

Cornish created the sculpture in partnership with fellow students Danielle du Plooy and Shahir Singh. The trio are students at the Michaelis School of Fine Art and hope the project will promote a culture of recycling and inspire change across campus.

“As a university, we need to ensure that there are enough bins around campus and that the general waste and recycling waste bins are coupled up. We also need to educate students and staff on recycling,” she said.

More than that, it’s important that bins are clearly marked and that waste collection companies always use the right bags. These suggestions, she added, will improve the recycling culture and reduce the amount of waste in and around campus and the city.

Next steps

Manfred Braune, the director of environmental suitability at UCT, said he is impressed by the project. “Art is an important and effective way to create awareness about our many environmental challenges. Well done to these students for their creativity and passion that is so evident in this excellent art installation,” he said.

Currently, the students are in conversation with Braune on how to use the project on other parts of campus, to extend its life and raise further awareness on the importance of recycling. Once the work has run its course, Cornish said the contaminated waste will be returned to UCT, and the recyclable waste will be recycled. The mutton cloth will be washed and donated to UCT’s Art Department to be used as scrap fabric for cleaning.

Story by Niémah Davids, UCT News.

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Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Thami Nkwanyane

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: (021) 650 5672
Cell: (072) 563 9500
Email: thami.nkwanyane@uct.ac.za
Website: www.uct.ac.za