

# SURFACE DESIGN



**COLOR**

CREATIVE EXPLORATION OF FIBER AND FABRIC

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# BY DESIGN

## Trending Now: Earth Matters

by Monika Auch

Sustainability is a trend. To survey recent developments through the lens of contemporary textile art and design, **Lidewij Edelkoort** and **Philip Fimmano** co-curated the international group exhibition *Earth Matters*, on display this fall at the Dutch **TextielMuseum** in Tilburg, The Netherlands (through November 26, 2017).

Edelkoort is a world renowned trend forecaster who travels the globe studying “the evolution of socio-cultural trends before sharing this information with her clients in industries as diverse as fashion, textiles, interiors, cars, cosmetics, retail, and food.”<sup>1</sup> **Edelkoort Inc.** (an American corporation founded in New York in 1999) analyzes future consumer attitudes, lifestyles, and economy trends. She was director of the Dutch **Design Academy** in Eindhoven from 1999–2008, and has served as the Dean of Hybrid Studies at **Parsons The New School** in New York since 2015. Edelkoort is also the founder and visionary behind the social media platform **Trendtablet.com** and **Trend Union**, a research firm that publishes several books each year predicting color, pattern, and mood trends for upcoming seasons in the fashion and interior design industries.

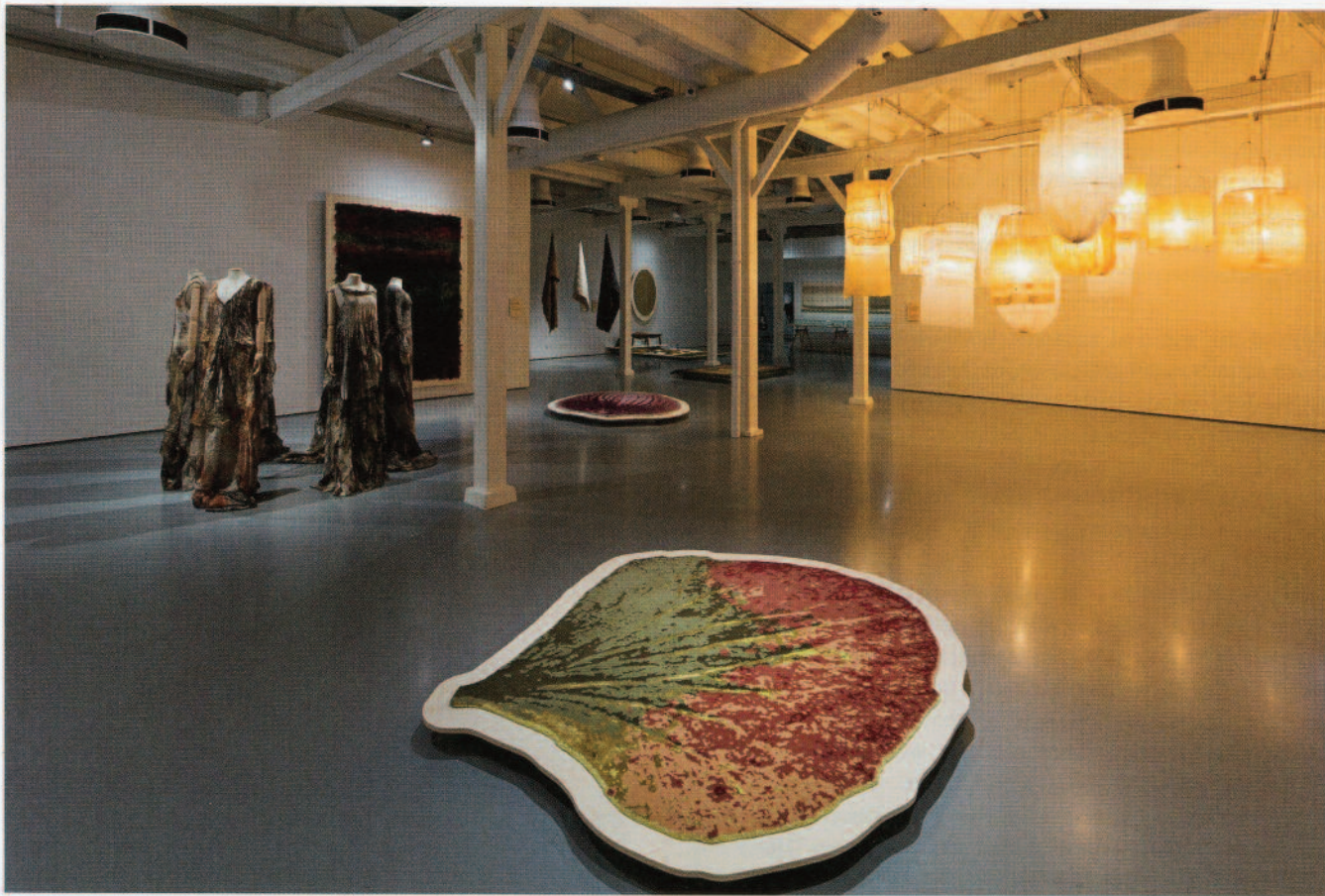
In an exclusive interview earlier this summer, Edelkoort commented on *Earth Matters* and talked about her work in Europe and the US. “We, as curators, assume that everybody knows about the seriousness of the ecological situation. We don’t want to shock with doomsday images, but strive to create cohesion between people. Many young people are reflecting on this and reached similar conclusions. You can take one of nature’s elements—a plant, a root—and, by doing research, interpret and use them in a different way. I like the curiosity and sensitive aesthetics that speak from these products. Tranquility is important for the eye. Equally important is the very much alive belief that consumerism has to change. To me there is enough proof around that sustainability is an expanding movement.”



Portrait of **Lidewij Edelkoort**. Photo: Thirza Schaap.

*Earth Matters* celebrates the wealth of our planet linked to a very stern warning about a threatening ecological apocalypse. Yet serenity dominates the four aesthetically set up spaces, which serve as inspiring moodboards for interior designers. Arranged by themes of Honouring Origins, Collecting Ingredients, Reinventing Materials, and Sustaining Production, “It is almost a spiritual experience,” said a visitor. More than 40 selected designers, artists, and manufacturers present research projects and built prototypes, opening up new ways of using sparse natural resources and repairing damage done. The products—half fabrications and half lab presentations—feature soft muted natural colors and beautiful textures, some of them nearly filling an entire room. Short texts and a few videos offer explanations. Many exhibits refer to traditional skills and craftsmanship. The show offers a good international mixture, with Dutch participants mainly from the famous Design Academy in Eindhoven. Other participants were discovered on Edelkoort’s reconnaissance voyages around the globe.





Top: Partial installation view of the *Earth Matters* exhibition in June of 2017. Shown: natural-dyed and eco-printed dresses by Australian artist **India Flint**; *Hydrangea* carpet (2017, wool and viscose, hand-knotted in India, 74" x 79") by Dutch designer **Kiki van Eijk**; *Untitled (lamps)* by American design house **DOSA** (collaboration between founder **Christina Kim** and **Mark Eden Schooley**). Photo: Josefina Eikenaar/TextielMuseum.

Will these energetic innovative future alternatives in materials and making be our saviors from Earth's destruction? How many of these brilliant concepts will be produced? According to Edelkoort, there will be more small-scale production and working cooperatives. "This will not work in our economical system dominated by greed. As for the United States, I am scandalized that the Paris treaty on climate change has been abolished. The underlying cause and aim for industrial growth will disappear. New systems will evolve—not by annihilation of the old system, but through a search for alternatives. I wrote an anti-fashion manifesto which serves as a blue-print for change. We host a biannual conference in Marseille, France, where companies meet and show that, already, the production of sustainable products makes a profit. It is possible!"

The elephant in this discussion is the huge CO2 footprint of the textile industry. Conflicting problems include water pollution and inhuman labor conditions, while at the same time maintaining an industry that supports millions of workers.

How can consumers be informed about the ecological impact of a textile product? "I am against certificates because it keeps people from taking action or changing their behavior," Edelkoort explains. "Even well-informed and willing consumers cannot pay for biologically cured leather sneakers. That is too expensive. Low-price consumer goods are very attractive. As an alternative, I suggest there could be a minimum price for T-shirts. Like we have a minimum price for tomatoes in the agricultural industry on the European market. As for control of working situations, I believe in social control and the transparency in production processes provided by the Internet. However, to stimulate different behavior and appreciation for products, it is important to show the face and personality of the artisan. In Finland, for example, everybody learns from kindergarten how we are dependant on each other. A shared holistic vision on the world creates a new society."

Edelkoort started the MFA Textiles program at **Parsons School of Fashion** in New York. She says, "The course is a



hybrid of many disciplines: visual art, interior design, fashion, architecture, and theater. Ideally, I want to link Silicon Valley to Hudson Valley where, for example, the cooperative **Friends of light** is based.<sup>2</sup> High tech and slow craft need each other. Interdisciplinary projects are on the rise. For example, Dutch designer **Petra Blaisse** combines futuristic high tech with old-fashioned craft in her woven curtains with embedded solar cells. Both disciplines are interested in a utopian society with new production methods.”

Beyond the soft and aesthetic TextielMuseum presentations, *Earth Matters* raises critical issues. Are textiles being exploited to produce trendy sustainable lifestyle products or will the trend support a more critical awareness about the production of textile goods? Will many of the presented concepts in *Earth Matters* survive the “valley of death” funding gap phenomenon well-known to innovative startups in the design industry?

Edelkoort is optimistic. “In collaboration with Parsons The New School and the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, I started the **New York Textile Month**, which takes place during September. This was initiated as a celebration of textiles all over the city and its boroughs to promote the survival of the different textile expressions. This year, we will have 90 events involving museums and design studios. It will embed the [Parsons] hybrid masters education in practice-based work. Students will visit studios to learn the profession. The event has brought the textile community together.” She adds, “There is a visible appreciation for textiles in the United States, for example, there will be a new expanded full-color edition of Anni Albers’ book *On Weaving* (1965) this year.”<sup>3</sup>

Taking an idea from concept to commercially available product is rewarding, but it can be a long, complex process to take an ingenious idea to reality. This is the point from which many new ideas going through the innovation process fail to progress, and even those ideas that do make it out of the valley can spend five to ten years trying to escape from it. Will there be time enough for Earth?

<sup>1</sup> Quote from: [edelkoort.com/lidewij-edelkoort/](http://edelkoort.com/lidewij-edelkoort/)

<sup>2</sup> Friends of light is a design collective founded by Dutch designer Pascale Gatzen (Associate Professor of fashion design, Parsons the New School of Fashion).

<sup>3</sup> Albers, Anni. *On Weaving* [New Expanded Edition]. September 2017: Princeton University Press, USA. [press.princeton.edu](http://press.princeton.edu)

*Earth Matters* is on display at the TextielMuseum in Tilburg, the Netherlands, through November 26, 2017. A 136-page color exhibition catalog is available. [textielmuseum.nl](http://textielmuseum.nl)



**Friends of light Second prototype for with light series** 2015, (*Earth Matters* exhibition view) wool locally sourced in Hudson Valley, NY, handspinning, back strap weaving, garment construction. Each jacket represents 150 working hours of specialized skilled and collective know-how. Photo: Josefina Eikenaar/TextielMuseum.



**Nienke Hoogvliet Sea Me** (detail) 2014, rug made from sea algae yarn, old fishing net, hand knotting, 55" x 24". Photo: Femke Poort.

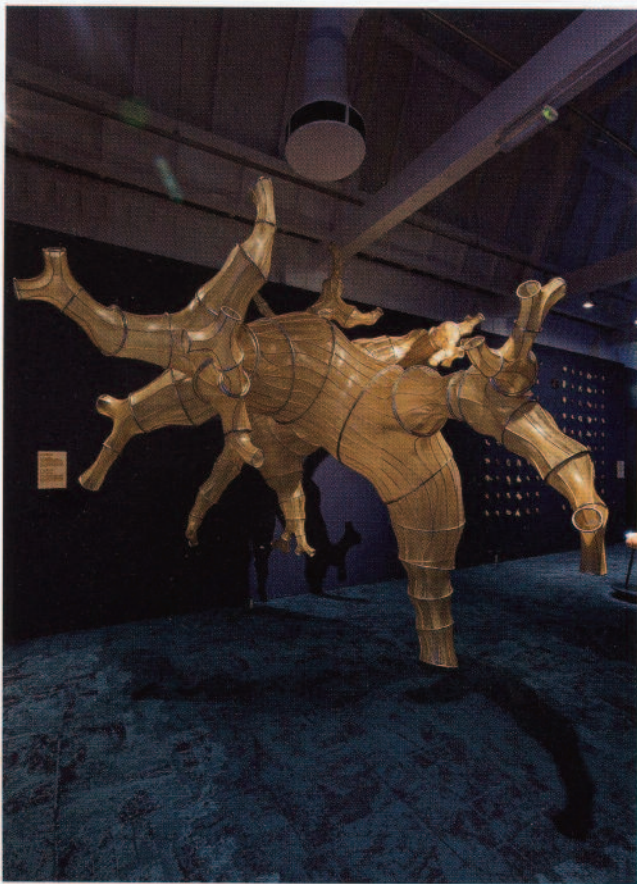
Lidewij Edelkoort [edelkoort.com](http://edelkoort.com) | [trendtablet.com](http://trendtablet.com)

Parsons School of Fashion MFA Textiles program  
[newschool.edu/parsons/mfa-textiles/](http://newschool.edu/parsons/mfa-textiles/)

New York Textile Month [textilemonth.nyc](http://textilemonth.nyc)

—Monika Auch is a visual artist, weaver, writer, and editor. Working as a medical doctor, she studied textile design and printmaking at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy. A true hybrid of science and art, she investigates “the intelligence of the hand.”  
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**Julia Lohmann Oki Naganode** 2013, (*Earth Matters* exhibition view) treated Japanese Naga seaweed, stretched over a modular framework made of cane and aluminium. Photo: Josefina Eikenaar/TextielMuseum.

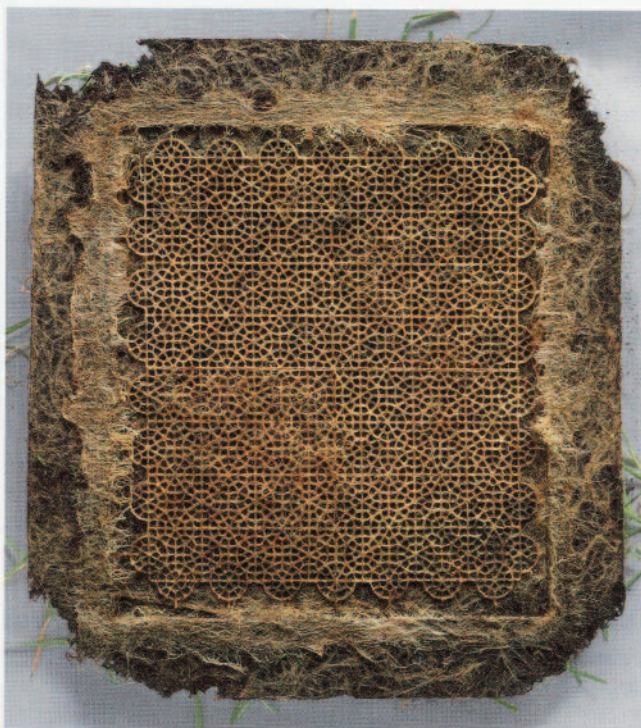


**Tamara Orjola Forest Wool** 2016, (*Earth Matters* exhibition view) stools, carpets, and material exploration samples made from processed pine needles left over from the timber industry. Photo: Josefina Eikenaar/TextielMuseum. Detail right. Photo: Design Academy Eindhoven / Ronald Smits.



Left: **Jólan van der Wiel** (in cooperation with **Iris van Herpen**) **Magnetic shoe** 2014, before a mixture of iron filings and resin sets around the base of the shoe, spiky textures are "grown" by pulling powerful magnets across the surface. Every plastic shoe is unique, soft, and comfortable to wear. Photo: Yannis Vlamos.

Right: **Alix Bizet Hair Matters** 2015, variety of human hair, wet felting, garment construction, one of three jackets and hairpieces. Photo: Juliette Delforge.



**Diana Scherer Interwoven** 2017, lattice-like tapestry and floor works composed of wheat roots trained to grow on a subterranean template, organically weaving.