MEET FOUR WOMEN WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO CREATE A GREENER WORLD IN PERSONAL AND UNCONVENTIONAL WAYS. BY ANGELINE TSE

LUCY DAVIS, 40, visual artist and lecturer

SHE MAKES ART FROM DISCARDED WOOD

Her activism started in her teenage years. While Singaporean teenagers these days typically spend their youth soaking up mall culture, Lucy, a Singaporean of British descent, had it rather different. Influenced by her parents' progressive politics – her father is a member of the Green Party in New Zealand – Lucy was the kind of student who wasn't afraid to fly the flag for a cause. She recalls walking barefoot on the grounds of United World College, carrying anti-nuclear and antivivisection posters just to make a point. She later went on to read politics and history at Durham University before heading to Denmark to continue her studies in communication and development. "I always knew I wanted to explore issues without sacrificing aesthetics," Lucy says. Today, she also writes and lectures on art and design at Nanyang Technological University.
Her love for trees and wood inspires her art. Lucy attributes her reverence to the mid-20th century wood-cut movement in Singapore, where Chinese artists with leftist connections engraved their visions of Malaya on wood. “The darkness of the wood cut is so rich, you get lost in the ink, as if it’s a big forest in there.” This strong emotional resonance led her to start Together Again (Wood: Cut), a series of visual art projects which uses ink prints made from discarded wooden objects to explore the relationships between people and nature. She is the artist-in-residence at Double Helix Tracking Technologies, a local company that tests the DNA of wood to identify if the tree was cut down illegally. Their aim is to stop people from buying wood from endangered tree species.

It’s not about mobilising the world. An “imperfect vegetarian” since her high school days, Lucy stays away from meat, but not fish and dairy. She rides a bicycle to the supermarket from her home in Portsdown Road, and she hopes her art can spur people to think about green issues. But she knows she’s no saint, and steers clear of moralising to her audience. So what can be done to save the earth? She contemplates the question, then replies: “I think palm oil production needs to be controlled. But in poor countries where it is a money-making business, do we deny people the right to increase their standard of living, just because it’s destroying the rainforest?”

Lucy is working on the third instalment of Together Again (Wood: Cut) and planning an exhibition for next year.