

Sky



Volunteering at tree plantings is a fun way to spend time with friends, as these Boys & Girls Club members learned at Los Angeles Harbor Regional Park. Photo by Laurie Kaufman, courtesy of TreePeople.

ART, SKY, AND ACTIVISM

Andy Lipkis

Andy Lipkis feels that memorable art can be achieved by an act as simple as putting a frame around a project or a piece of the earth and allowing people to connect with it emotionally and spiritually. More installation than artwork, his project is an example of one person's enthusiasm and energy catalyzing the power of trees, people, and technology, and thereby helping nature heal our cities. And people did connect with Urban Forests: the results were cleaner air, cooler temperatures, replenished ground water, and a safer, more beautiful city.



ART EXEMPLARS

Andy Lipkis, *Tree Planting and The First Urban Forest Tree Run*, 1990. Event. www.treepeople.org/

RESOURCES

Oakes, B. (1995). *Sculpting the Environment*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

<http://greenmuseum.org/c/aen/> (art and ecology)

www.ecomii.com/building/energy-hogs

www.eere.energy.gov/kids/index.html

www.eere.energy.gov/education/lessonplans/plans.aspx?id=294

www.treepeople.org/

www.sierraclub.org (air pollution, global warming)

THE ARTIST AS ACTIVIST

Andy Lipkis (b.1955) is an activist, community organizer, educator, author, and healer of the planet. His art is facilitating events to that end; TreePeople is his organization. As a teenager at camp in the mountains near Los Angeles, he learned that trees are air filters, taking in pollutants and producing fresh oxygen, and that many trees were dying from smog. Eighty percent of L.A.'s air pollution stems from cars. The solution? Plant trees to absorb pollution and emit oxygen.

Lipkis' first event was at age fifteen at summer camp, planting a grove of smog-tolerant seedlings in a former parking lot. Through this experience Lipkis discovered the artist in himself. Lipkis created the concept of

“Citizen Forestry”, empowering people to organize their neighbors to plant trees where they are needed, and he often speaks of trees as “acupuncture needles” to improve the health of the city. One Citizen Forester project, in 1990, resulted in trees planted along seven miles of Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard in south central Los Angeles. It is the largest living memorial to Dr. King. Today, Citizen Foresters are organized, trained, and supported by TreePeople to revitalize neighborhoods with trees.

When Andy started this work in the 1970s the concept of urban forestry was alien to most people. To familiarize people with the concept, Lipkis designed *The First Urban Forest Tree Run*, a ten-kilometer run on a closed-off freeway—a first, making a statement in a city that was designed for cars, not walkers or runners. It was a popular, healthy way to attract a crowd. Five thousand people took home T-shirts and seedlings. Lipkis' goal was to enable people to use their creative energies as a healing rather than a destructive force on the planet. The success of his work amplifies the role of an individual artist to effect environmental progress, and stands as a model for future artist activists.

To date, TreePeople has planted more than two million trees in the L.A. area and has developed one of the nation's largest environmental education programs. They have airlifted bare-root fruit trees to Africa and assisted in disaster relief efforts during flood and fire. They operate in a 45-acre city park in the center of Los Angeles, in one of the most sustainable buildings in the country.



TreePeople's work in fire-damaged areas is of particular importance, whether park woodlands or national forests. These volunteers are helping plant trees at the burned Stetson Ranch Park in Sylmar, Los Angeles. Photo by Juan Villegas, courtesy of TreePeople.



Students who come to TreePeople's headquarters in Coldwater Canyon Park learn about the cycles of nature in a mountain forest, contrasted with a city forest. They also plant tree seeds and take one home to nurture. Photo by Juan Villegas, courtesy of TreePeople.

ECO AWARENESS

Lipkis' example challenges us to change. Providing clean air, shade, and green space in cities requires a herculean effort. Problems such as global climate change, air pollution, water shortages, and erratic weather patterns of flood and drought need to be solved. Concentrations of smog exceed federal health standards in many U.S. cities. Environmental groups are campaigning against burning coal for energy, since it produces the most carbon dioxide. Removing mountaintops, a faster way to mine coal, is detrimental to both the environment and communities; toxic tailings and sludge run-off destroy streams and entire valleys. Where to start?

- Discuss the many benefits trees provide. Make a list of them. (*trees provide oxygen, food, wood, beauty, canopy, shade, and habitat; cool cities, clean the air, conserve energy, save water, heal, help prevent water pollution and soil erosion, and mark the seasons*) See www.treepeople.org/top-22-benefits-trees.
- What is your carbon footprint? (*the amount of greenhouse gases [GHG] or carbon dioxide [CO2] emissions of a person, organization, event, or product*) Calculate it. (www.nature.org/initiatives/climatechange/calculator/)
- What is the United States' footprint compared to the rest of the world? (*we are the largest consumer of energy and resources worldwide*)
- How can you decrease your carbon footprint? (*turn off lights, TV, computer when not in use; take shorter showers; use less heat and air conditioning; use your own shopping bag and water bottle; buy a battery-electric-vehicle (BEV)/ zero emissions vehicle (ZEV); install solar panels, better insulation, energy efficient appliances; get into the family habit of walking, biking, taking the bus or train; plant a tree*)
- What are other air contaminants? (*transportation: 55%; other fuel: 17%; industry: 15%; agriculture: 7%; solid waste: 4%; other: 2%; animals give off methane gas*)
- How does reducing our carbon footprint improve air quality? (*most sources of energy also produce carbon dioxide; "renewables" do not; over 80% of the nation's energy comes from fossil fuels: oil, coal, and gas; the rest comes from nuclear and renewable power.*)

- What are some forms of renewable energy? (*wind power, solar power, hydro power, geothermal, biomass*) Where are renewable energy sources being used today?)

ECO ACTIVITIES

Brainstorm an event for students your age that would combine both art and a clean-air effort. Write a paragraph about your goal, design, and how you would implement and organize this.

- How can we help get rid of carbon dioxide in the air? Lipkis' project of educating and teaching kids and families how to plant trees all over Los Angeles is a huge, successful art/environmental project to clean the air. What project can you devise?

Environmental Concerns

air pollution, carbon dioxide, drought, climate change, global warming, acid rain, extreme weather, light pollution



These students from Burbank's Emerson Elementary School learn how to plant and care for trees on their hot campus. Photo by Karen Broderick, courtesy of TreePeople.