



TISHMAN CENTER · MARCH 12, 2019

# "There is Energy in Waste"

Yu Nong Khew is a trained architect and interior design professor at Parsons. She is currently developing a composting machine which breaks down food waste to compost on site. The project began because her team was concerned about spatial issues in urban areas. In New York City and other urban places the reason people don't compost has most to do with a lack of space and time. Yu herself is a composter and recognizes how hard it is to freeze your compost and drop it off somewhere. So Yu Nong and her team were looking at how to move around this. Through a lot of conversations, Yu Nong connected with a scientist in Singapore who used microorganisms extracted and validated using DNA sequencing of natural living things in the soil to

break down chicken manure in chicken farms. While it was originally created to solve agricultural pollution on chicken farms, Yu Nong and Dr. Ken Lee partnered up to extract these microorganisms and use it for composting. Together they are trying to develop a prototype for a composting system which would be installed in commercial spaces and reduce food waste volume by 80% in 24 hours. These could be used in supermarkets, office buildings, and residential collective waste collecting spaces to convert as much food waste to compost in a small amount of time. As an interior designer and architect Yu Nong was interested in the temporality of material and space. This project seems to be a nice bridge between her personal interests and a real practical innovative design which could benefit entire urban areas. While there may be an infrastructure for compost collection in NYC and other cities, the fact remains that this organic waste is currently being collected and transferred via fuel heavy trucks and taken to waste transfer stations which disproportionately hurt low-income communities. Further, the economy which supports this current infrastructure is decentralized and often benefits a top-down economy. Yu and her team are thinking of innovative ways to keep the process

of waste collection and regeneration on site and in sight. The compost generated by this machine is 40% cheaper than market rate compost and would benefit a local agriculture economy thereby chipping away at a invisibilized, extractive, pollutive system and moving towards zero waste and a circular economy. Yu and her team have a growing partnerships with GrowNYC, A/D/O, Restaurant Norman and The Trust for Governor's Island. GrowNYC, part of the mayor's office in NYC seems hopeful and supportive, but before anything can happen the machines must be produced on a larger scale. They must produce enough machines in such a way which stays true to their values. Hopefully The New School itself would be able to utilize this composting machine. People seem confident and energized by the future of zero waste and circular economy. In Yu Nong's words, "Waste is not gross, it can be beautiful, it can be harvested, there is energy in waste."



## Comments (0)

Newest First