

Environmental Sustainability Through Love
lorigordon.com/earthday

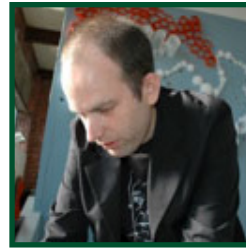


Environmental Sustainability Through Love

This project was created in collaboration with artist Melissa Chevalier, who interviewed Lori Gordon, conceptual artist, and her husband Max Auffhammer—an environmental economist, teaching at UC Berkeley. It is a discussion about the intersection between their work, and their dynamic collaboration in marriage as it relates to environmental sustainability through ideas about environmental concerns, art and love.



Please provide a bio about yourself and a bio about your spouse?



MAX: My name is Maximilian Auffhammer. I was born in the Siberia of Bavaria and spent almost 20 years there. I came to the US to study “something about the environment”, although I was not quite sure what that entailed at the time. I just knew I wanted to make a difference. I studied Environmental Science and liked it. I then heard John K. Galbraith speak about how social scientists think about human behavior and market failures. I found him fascinating and decided to be an economist—which is what I do today. I teach economics at UC Berkeley and love my job. I teach, write about climate change and attempt to master the art of cooking. I am married to Lori Gordon, whom I met on her first day in college over 13 years ago. We live in San Francisco.

Lori Gordon has always taken on the role of the viewer. In her professional life as an artist and her personal life she exploits her innate skill of observation to make her subjects realize their place in society from an angle they may not have realized before existed. She was born into a family of short people in Johannesburg South Africa. She cooks according to colors and has no sense of direction whatsoever. She is the most deeply caring person I have ever met. She cares to a degree that is sometimes almost a bit self destructive. Although we work in almost opposite fields, we both use the art of observation to create a finished product. I observe people’s behavior indirectly through data, which I then use to test hypotheses related to human interactions in markets. Lori observes individuals directly, without imposing a rigorous framework or structure to the interaction.

LORI: Lori Gordon is an artist, creating cross-disciplinary projects that attempt to decipher both humanity’s and her own connection with the universe. Through collaborative endeavors, Lori explores the distance between coincidence and intention, with an emphasis on setting up moments that deviate from the expected. In some cases, she is more interested in providing the organized framework around which potential interactions may occur. Lori’s art practice keeps her sane, and enables her to make something out of nothing. With all her work, she is more interested in the journey than the destination. She loves talking at length to people in person, but hates having to do so over the phone. She enjoys going to the movies at least twice a week, and reading as often as possible, even though she does it very slowly. Lori often dreams in color and talks in her sleep. She’s particular about wearing her socks inside out, and will often change outfits during the day. She likes to eat tofu, almonds, dates, Indian food and nectarines. Things she treasures most are her family and friends. She is married to her husband Max, who loves to cook her delicious meals. They live happily in San Francisco.

Max Auffhammer is an Environmental Economist, with a particular interest in climate change. He is currently teaching at the University of California, Berkeley. Max was recently awarded the Cozzarelli Prize by the National Academy of Sciences for a paper he published on the atmospheric brown clouds and greenhouse gases that have reduced rice harvests in India. This was published by PNAS, known as one of the world’s most cited multidisciplinary scientific serials “publishing cutting-edge research reports”. In addition to his professional success, Max is profoundly impressive in the kitchen. He has mastered recipes from cookbooks including Thomas Keller’s *French Laundry*, *Buchon* and Judy Rogers’ *Zuni Café*. He has a website that he only shares with his wife, which includes photographs he shoots from the hip. Max loves breakfast, Formula-1 racing and tech gadgets. He grew up in Germany, and has also lived in France, New Mexico, Massachusetts and California. Despite being a chocoholic, he shares his candy generously.

What does a typical day of work/practice look like for you?

MAX: I get up, shave in front of the computer in the walk-in closet while checking email and reading the news. I then go brush my teeth and take a shower. After putting on clothes I walk out of the apartment. This all takes 30 minutes. I then take BART from Powell to Berkeley, where I get a grande soy latte and an apple cranberry muffin (sometimes two vanilla scones). I then go to my office, where I write, run models and talk to coauthors. I have lunch with colleagues and then go back to my office to write more or sometimes go to teach. I then go home by BART, trade my work clothes in for my cargo pants and a t-shirt. I will have a glass of wine while I make dinner. Then I eat with my lovely wife and we hang out for the rest of the evening. I used to work from 9–midnight, but I have stopped doing that, since it negatively affected my health.

LORI: Wake up slowly, shower, eat some oatmeal. Drink my stinky Chinese herbs, take my vitamins. Catch the bus or drive my car to the studio. Spend an hour reading and answering emails. Put on the record player or iPod. Make something: website, painting, drawing, object, book. Take a break—read something, sit quietly in the armchair. Check email. Go for lunch. Come back to the studio and repeat making something. Write in sketchbook, sketch out ideas. Eat a snack. Construct ideas around new projects. Go home. Take a walk or workout. Eat a delicious dinner made by Max. Watch a movie or a few hours of tv, or read a book. Climb into bed and fall asleep.



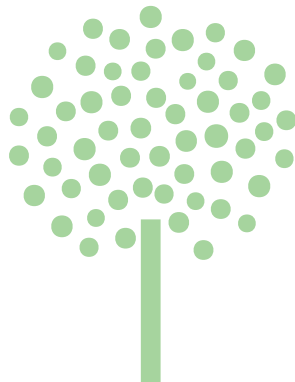
Create a list of similarities about what you do?

LORI:

1. Think about the world at large, as well as our local community.
2. Speculate a great deal about 'what-if' and 'maybe'.
3. Interested in affecting others, and making people's lives better.
4. Communicate with people a lot.
5. Spend plenty of time writing about our work.
6. Present our work to the world publicly.
7. Our research never ends—we don't live a 9-5 lifestyle.

MAX:

1. We both spend time observing others' behavior.
2. We both require creativity in asking questions.
3. We both use very specific tools.
4. We both hope to communicate our product to the interested public.



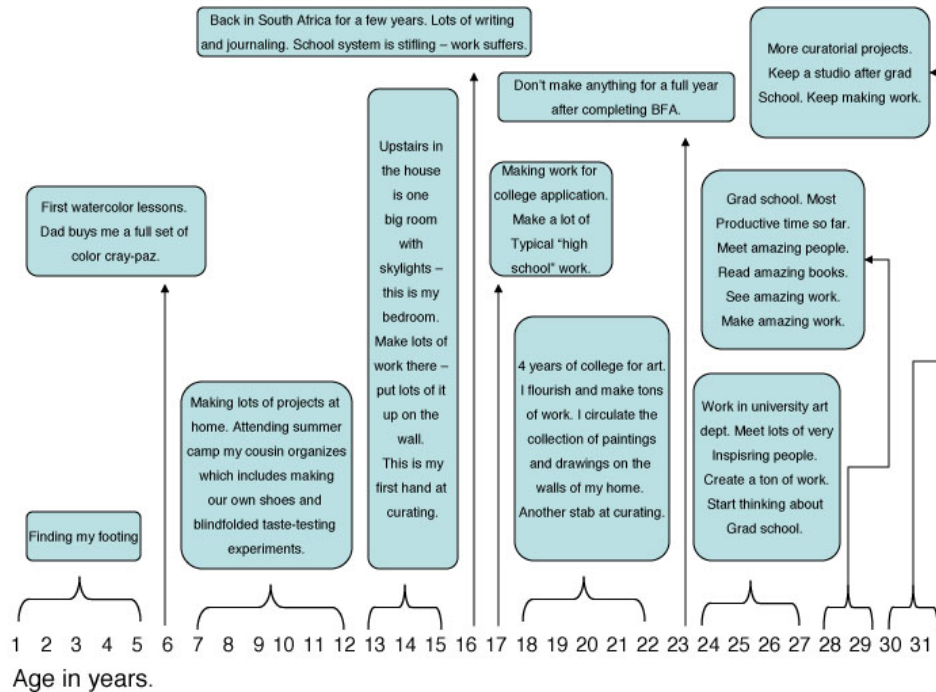
What are some challenges you face with your particular work or practice?

LORI: I struggle to convey how much I care, how much I feel, and how much I want to connect with the word. I get bored very easily, and do lots of different things—often at the same time. There’s always a stack of 5-6 books on my nightstand. This could be seen as scattered, but it’s very difficult to hold my interest.

MAX: Self motivation. I have no one who asks me to do specific task. I ask the questions, figure out the tools to answer them and do the writing.



Draw a timeline of how your work/practice has changed over the years?



LORI:

MAX:

There really is no time line. My practice has always involved using the computer to run econometric models and then use the computer some more to produce finished journal articles. Sometimes I am asked to get up in front of people to speak about my work, which is happening with increasing frequency.

How have you influenced each other?

MAX:

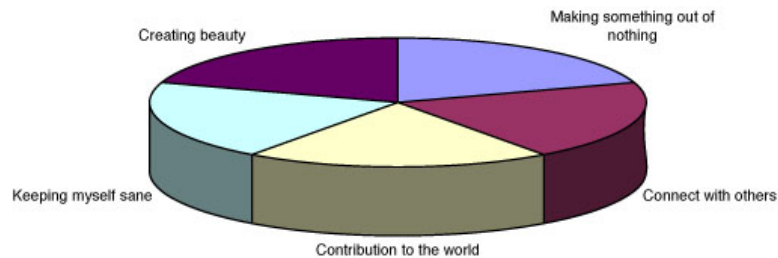
Lori has given me faith to ask big questions and always supported my occasionally crazy hours. She is the number one cure for my continual self doubts.

LORI:

Throughout the last thirteen years together, I have witnessed Max's support as he found ways for us to cultivate a life of extraordinary potential. There is no one else who has supported my artistic endeavors as much. In details as small as pinning some drawings to the wall, and gestures as big as taking us to see Documenta, I have always been assured that my chosen path has value. I have observed his success in bringing about positive social change through his research and teaching. He has been an excellent source of intellectual challenge, as well as my toughest critic. But as an artist working within the realm of relational aesthetics, it has been imperative to exist in a home environment that appreciates social exchange as well as representational work. Max is unquestionably the individual who has been most important to my development.



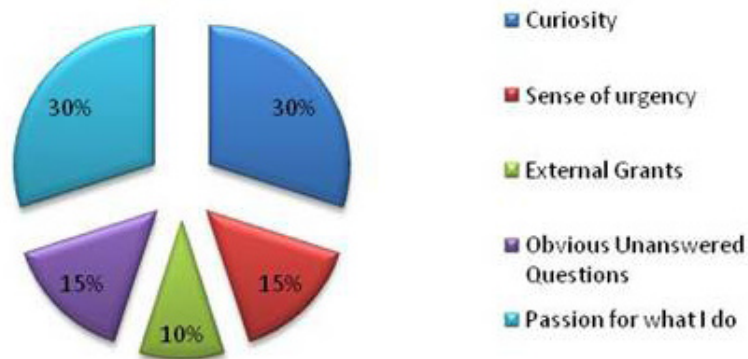
Use a pie chart to show what currently inspires you to do your work/practice?



LORI:

MAX:

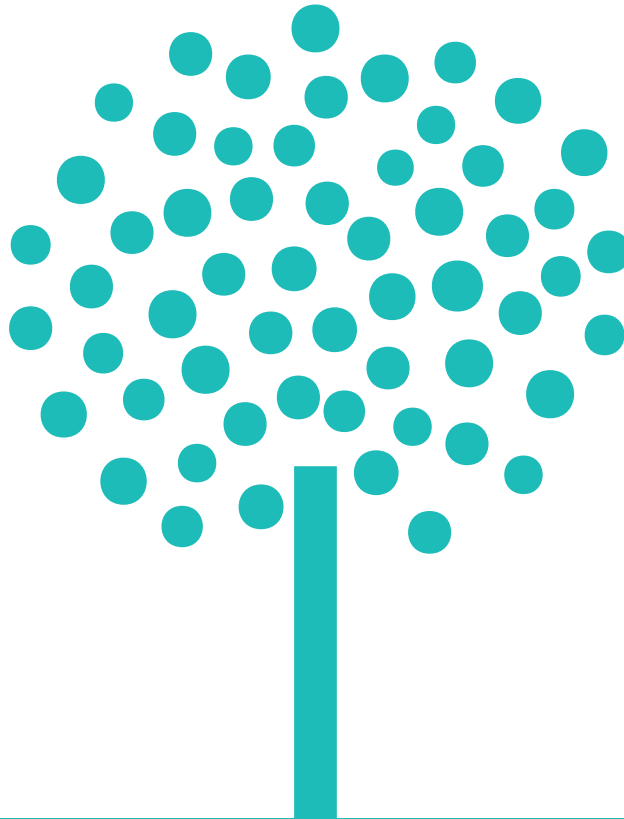
My Motivation



What is your biggest environmental concern?

LORI: Climate change, ethical treatment of animals, pollution, genetic modification of food.

MAX: Climate Change.



What do you feel most grateful for in your work/practice?

MAX:

Teaching undergraduate students. There is nothing quite like the feeling you get after a good and engaging lecture. A student's comment like "That was really interesting today!" or "Wow. What a lecture!" can make a whole month.

LORI:

- Having a studio
- Having excellent tools and materials to work with
- Having a great network of people to bounce ideas around
- Having a continuous source of inspiration that results in ideas
- Having a creative outlet



What's something you'd like to know about each other's field, that you don't know already?

LORI:

What do you hope people will think of your discipline in twenty years?

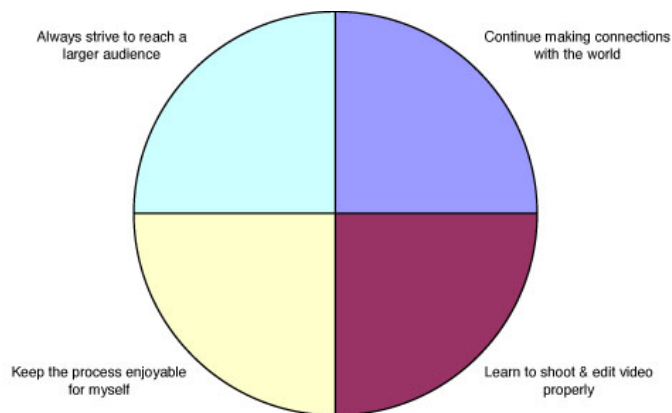
MAX:

I would like to understand social practice to a degree, that I can explain to people what my wife does in a less pedantic fashion.



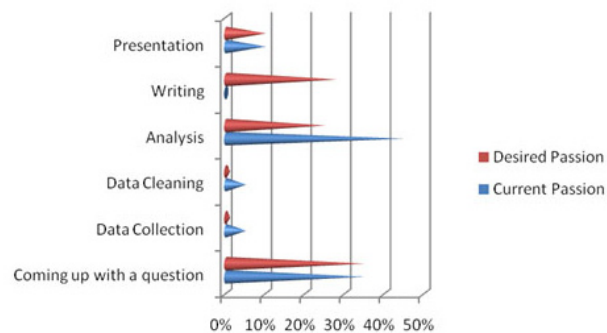
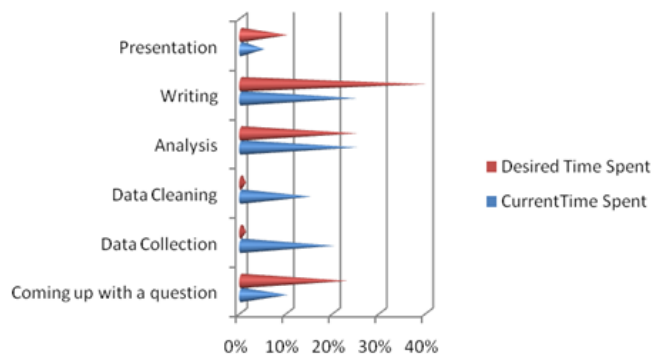
How would you like to see your work/practice evolve?

LORI:



MAX:

I would like to be a better and more passionate writer.



If you were to collaborate on an art project together what would you want to do?

MAX:

I want to ask people about their stuffed animals. Then I want to make a suit that will fit the significant other of the person. Then I want that person to put on the suit. The output would be portraits taken from above of people holding their significant other wearing that suit.

I am really intrigued by what makes people feel safe.

LORI:

Something about love and brainpower.



If you were asked to create an online monthly newsletter together—combining art and ecology—what subjects or articles would your first newsletter have? And who would you ask to be your guest contributors?

LORI:

The first issue of the newsletter would focus on 'Neighborly Behavior'. This would hone in on making changes at the local level, with fellow San Franciscan residents, in order to make one's local community a better place. There would be Top 10 lists on how to take better care of your home and neighborhood—written by prominent celebrities in the Environmental Sciences (from the public and private sectors) and the Arts. There would also be a contest for younger science and art enthusiasts to devise new solutions for bettering their community. Guest contributors would include Gavin Newsome, representatives from Rainbow Grocery and Stephen Goldstone.

MAX:

- I would want an article about Inuit childrens' perception of their changing environment through art.
- I would want Damien Hirst interviewing Andy Goldsworthy about why he thinks what he does matters.
- I would want an article about the environmental impacts of the "art supply" industry.
- I would want the *Readymade* people to do a piece on a do-it-yourself ventilated studio for inner urban dwellers (how to convert your walk-in into a studio.)

What will your next project or writing be focused on?

LORI:

I'm organizing a panel, 'The luckiest dreamers who never quit dreaming'. This is for a conference in Canada this October, featuring relational aesthetics artists from the east and west coast.

MAX:

I am going to work on the impacts of climate change on rice yields. I am also going to work on benefits from better weather forecast.



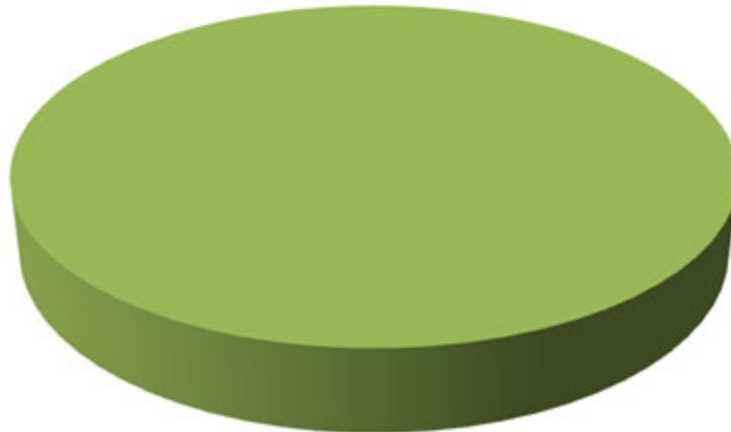
If you could learn one thing that seemed impossible—but would help you with your current work—what would it be?

LORI:

The ability to time travel and do projects in other dimensions would be awesome. And taking others—giving tours—would be an excellent way of sharing it with the world. We would be invisible to those around us, so that no harm would come to anyone. We would travel around in a bubble together.

MAX:

How to enjoy writing.



What's your secret at being so spectacular?

LORI:

We have had great success with the following: High fiber diet. Love and respect. An appreciation of the everyday. Making each other laugh.

MAX:

