



# ART OF ECO

**Julie Langston**  
Art of Eco



**Prifysgol Cymru**  
Y Drindod Dewi Sant  
**University of Wales**  
Trinity Saint David



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MADE

Art of Eco make and manufacture handmade Eco Slabstone tiles for walls, floors, and surfaces. They design and create products for many interior areas and have mastered their craft over years of product development with their unique Slabstone material. The in-house Art & Design team produce bespoke wall, floor, and surface decoration for interiors. From kitchen splashbacks to wall and floor tiles, to a swimming pool mural in a home or a large-scale commercial interior. They work directly with customers, interior designers and architects, for all their domestic and commercial space requirements.



Julie Langston is Creative Director at Art of Eco and studied the MADE Cymru Continuous Improvement with Industry 4.0 course.



## What's does your role involve at Art of Eco?

I am essentially the Creative Director. My role is to envisage and coordinate the design of our products and decoration, the customers' requirements, and the design direction that the business will take on a global basis.

With Art of Eco entering an exciting phase in its manufacturing development program, with new raw material, and new ways of producing our finished product, my role is constantly about updating our production methods to embrace our new findings – hopefully for the better. It's a continual balance between time, effort, and results. As our manufacturing changes due to both materials and equipment, we can improve our efficiency, and our eco credentials, and through scale up maintain our look through 'tweaks' to our product appearance and design.

## What made you sign up to MADE Cymru's Continuous Improvement with Industry 4.0 course?

If I am being honest, it was all about increasing my knowledge base, especially the terminology for our growth and increased production plans - all during the time we had from 'lockdowns' brought about by the pandemic. As it was all online it gave me the opportunity to take a breath and learn!

I studied the course throughout 2020, the year of the pandemic – in the past we had all marched off to Uni or college with the view to creating our future and beginning our lives, unlike 2020 which was all about survival and the challenge that period created.

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## Prior to the course, when was the last time you studied?

I studied Studio Ceramics at Camberwell School of Art & Crafts, and Industrial Ceramics at Middlesex Polytechnic. This was way back in the 80s. Oh, how education has changed, the online learning via UWTSU was a revelation!

## What challenges did you/the organisation have that you hoped the course would address?

I think that from my viewpoint we had achieved a level prior to the pandemic where we could see the future, orders were good, and our plans for increasing our manufacturing output and scale up were evolving. Our product and design portfolio had caught on with various targeted customers. However, the pandemic shattered that. So, we had to re-evaluate and look at what we were doing,

and perhaps what we needed to do, and ask whether we had the chance to 'tweak' what we had created.

Having the 'downtime' to re-focus our thoughts gave rise to many re-workings of original ideas, and a more focused look at areas where we felt we could utilise our designs better and integrate them better with our increasing knowledge about our products' manufacturing processes, and our control over it, especially embracing digital technology to complete all processes.

### How was your business affected by the challenges of the last few years?

Very much so from the pandemic perspective, and perhaps more so with Brexit, we were on the cusp of receiving some much-needed European investment, to grow the business, when the Brexit result caused that to fall apart. It's taken us until now to reconstruct that deal again, glad to say -better than it was at that time – but now the world is noticing what we do, and perhaps its ability to help control the global warming caused by the ceramic tile industries endless production of CO2, if ever there was a need for Art of Eco's products – it's now.

### What have you taken onboard from the course that you think will help address some of the challenges you face?

I think that it's the relationship between design, and manufacture which remains the most exciting thing for me. The ability to blend 'hand finishing skills' with modern production line-based work practices, via the digital era, is so exciting – and we simply were not aware of this potential way back in the late 1970's. There have been massive changes and a proverbial Aladdin's cave of opportunity, bringing quality design into the market at a lower level through the hybridisation of design, material, and technology.

### Has the course had an impact on your business?

Yes, it certainly has, we are now looking to increase our production capacity, by bringing a range of 98% recycled content, with no heat used in the process, wall, and floor tiles to market in the next 12-18 months and put Wales on the world map with our innovation.

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I think the course gave us self-belief in our abilities and the acknowledgment by our tutors from the course and UWTSO, that indeed we did have something special and worth pursuing allowed us to reach out to others, and work on various collaborative deals that exposed the product and its abilities to so many other people.

Coming from a background of look, feel and touch it makes one realise with technology our methods can be transferred digitally – it's so exciting.



## What have you enjoyed about the course?

I think it was all about relearning the learning process, we sort of forget how and why we went to study, and going back into it, some years on, gave me a completely new insight into the ability to learn. Was it fun? I would have to say it was stressful at first but became more and more enjoyable as the time went on. Learning online was a fantastic introduction to this brave new world we find ourselves in! For me, I am not a book person, but a visual learner and the course was enjoyable.

## What about how it was delivered?

My work is my passion, it consumes me, time is my most precious commodity, so to just crack on in front of my computer for an afternoon was great, no travelling, no dressing up – wonderful.

The MADE Cymru team are great educators.....conveying much information in a very (almost) easy going way – now I know what algebra was all about, and the successful application of Maths in industry! It made learning easy, as you had no distractions.

They are incredible people willing to share and explain so much, and work with you to show just how it can apply to your business – even the arty bit! I enjoyed the introduction of other industries and the comparison of the same manufacturing methods and how essential measuring data is. Also, perhaps the realisation that no matter how big a business you are, we all have similar problems to deal with.



## What's next for you and the business? And will your new knowledge help in these plans?

Yes, it will. In our hopeful expansion plans the development of and the embracing of these philosophies is all about a successful conclusion to our hopes and ambitions. The development and use of a universal language that we can use between various, sometimes extremely diverse parties, to help better our industry will be of huge benefit. Though we still have a lot more to learn, it has given me more confidence to move forward with our growth plan.

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~ Julie Langston



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To find out more about the MADE Cymru Innovation Management and Upskilling for Industry 4.0 courses, please visit [www.madecymru.co.uk](http://www.madecymru.co.uk)

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