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AN ART MOVEMENT TURNING THE TIDE ON PLASTIC POLLUTION

AT the 1862 London International Exhibition a remarkable invention was revealed for the first time. Alexander Parkes, the son of a brass lock maker, revealed to the world what happens when you dissolve cellulose nitrate in alcohol and camphor.

It produces a material which is transparent and easily mouldable when it is hot, but which grows hard when it cools. Mr Parkes had invented plastic, a material which would go on to change the world in a million ways no-one at the time could ever have imagined.

Now, 156 years on, modern life depends on plastic. It is a vital part of consumer society, from cheap shopping bags to microchips. However, the immense benefit of plastic - its strength and durability - is also its curse.

The world has finally woken up to a crisis that is blighting our planet and destroying the ecosystem of our oceans. Plastic waste is everywhere, from massive islands of discarded junk floating across our seas, to microplastics - tiny particles of plastic which now infest the water we drink and air we breathe.

Action is being called for and the art world is one of the driving forces bringing attention to this modern affliction.

'Addressing our biggest challenges regularly involves shifting human behaviour and culture. This is where art can play a pivotal role of instigating new thinking and inspiring people to foster change.' says Contemporary Art curator Magdalena Gabriel.

Vasily Klyukin whose life story also reads like an extraordinary tale from the history books, is one of the artists at the forefront of this movement. In 1996, aged 20, he began working as a cashier in a Russian bank. Seven years later he co-founded one - Sovcombank - which went onto become one of the country's largest financial institutions.

The entrepreneur then turned his talents to real estate and property development and his architectural visions, for everything from skyscrapers to luxury yachts have attracted worldwide attention.

As have his sculptures which have gained a reputation for combining social comment with aesthetic beauty. On the rare occasions when Klyukin does not give his work away for charitable causes, his pieces sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars.

His latest piece, *Why People Can't Fly*, will benefit sustainable ocean environmental projects, and will be auctioned at the Prince Albert II's Monte Carlo Gala for the Oceans on September 26.

"The ocean is our lifeblood. Our living standards, our economy and even our health depends on it. However, pressures from climate change and marine pollution are putting our ocean under severe stress. I believe that there is hope, if we work hand-in-hand. Fundraising opportunities like the Monte-Carlo Gala for the Global Ocean are thus critical to pursue this long-term action for ocean conservation" says HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco, who is often referred to as 'the green prince' for his relentless efforts to tackle climate change, ocean acidification and pollution.

The sculpture, which will be sold in front of a guest list including Madonna, Orlando Bloom and Hugh Grant, is a truly international piece, entirely created of slices of plastic waste from every country on the globe.

Klyukin's voice is one of passion, with a truly heartfelt urge and desire to inspire people with his art. "As a father of four my thoughts increasingly look ahead to the sort of world our children will inherit from my generation. These issues are often reflected in my art and the plastic pollution crisis is at the forefront of the environmental issues we currently face. The inclusion of plastic segments from every country on the planet not only signifies how widespread the problem is, but also how this is an issue for all of us, regardless of nationality, race, colour or creed."

Art has an important role in all social movements as it has the power not just to please us aesthetically, but also to make us consider issues on a deeper level. We are constantly bombarded by a 24-hour news cycle, warning us of one emerging crisis to the next, but when confronted with an art piece it pleases or intrigues us, it makes us consider its social message on a deeply emotional level. Often prompting us to reflect on our actions and consider the detrimental impact our choices have on Earth - our only home.

“The art movement has a proud history of being an instigator of social change,” says Magdalena Gabriel who is a curator working with artists who have a message to inspire the world.

“From the Mexican Muralists of the 1920s who spoke out against industrialisation, to the works of Jacob Lawrence about racial inequality in the USA - artists have used their creativity not just to create beauty, but also to create change. One of the central themes of contemporary art is it requires interpretation by the viewer. It generates thought. That is why it is the perfect genre for raising social and environmental awareness and Vasily Klyukin is at the forefront of this campaign.”

“I am fortunate enough to have travelled everywhere from the slopes of Everest to Central American jungles. What binds environments together is the plastic waste endangering them.” Says Vasily Klyukin. “The chimera has been released and the world will always rely on plastics in one form or another. Plastic itself is not the problem. It is an inert material. The problem is the overuse of it and the way we dispose of it. While global corporations must change their ways, each of us can also take small easy steps which will help with the problem.”

The aim of Klyukin's [#whypeoplecantfly](#) is to motivate people to reduce the consumption of plastic in three simple ways:

- Do not buy drinks in small plastic bottles; use larger ones or glass bottles.
- Do not buy plastic bags every time you go shopping; reuse old ones.
- Do not throw plastic, however small, on the street – much of the ocean's plastic pollution is from small pieces which make their way to the sea through drainage systems.

“These are small measures we can all take which will ultimately make a difference. If my sculpture can raise money for environmental causes and highlight this issue, it will have fulfilled its function.”

Vasily Klyukin still requires plastic from a number of countries to complete the project, and a map can be seen at the website www.whypeoplecantfly.com

For further details about the artist please see <http://www.vklyukin.com>

For details on the Monte Carlo Gala for the Oceans visit
<http://montecarlogala.fpa2.org/>