

## PRESS RELEASE

DELLASPOSA FINE ART

VERSION 1 - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

09.04.18

Siobhan Stirling  
Content Strategist  
01424 777444 ext 100  
07990 543829  
siobhan@arttech.technology

## ARTIST'S CAMPAIGN TO TACKLE PLASTIC POLLUTION

International artist Alexander James is highlighting the global problem of plastic pollution with a new series of unique photograms to fund the first recycling facility on the remote islands of the Maldives. The twenty works, which are being exhibited by Dellasposa Fine Art, were created from plastic waste collected from the sea last year by James, as he lived and worked in a plein-air studio in the region. His one-man campaign has already prompted a positive response.

### The works

The photograms, produced alongside a series of polaroids and letters collectively entitled 'Textures & texts from the shoreline', celebrate James' longstanding medium of water, exploring its interaction with light, while revealing both its infiltration with man-made detritus and the tension between the beauty and danger of nature. *The Telegraph* has commented: 'This method of exploring the subtle distortions that water makes on light is painstakingly exact and the results are simply extraordinary.'

The illuminated photograms, created using photography techniques without a camera, exposing plates - creating images using found objects retrieved from the reefs while free diving, overlaid with the plastic detritus - by moonlight and the light of the setting sun, encapsulate the tensions between man and nature behind the project. 'There is a macabre dichotomy that the destructive pollution I collected by free diving the waters can create images so hauntingly beautiful,' commented James. 'Contemporary art often tries to shock us; it seems to forget that the greatest art has to be beautiful and convey a message after it has been hung on the wall. Nature is danger and beauty intertwined in a never-ending dance, but humanity's survival at this dance hall is unsure as we pollute our environment and threaten every wild species on the planet, through careless behaviour and reckless growth.'

### The inspiration

James' has visited and free dived in the Maldives for over 30 years; witnessing its transformation over this time provided his inspiration: 'I have been diving these coral reefs since I was 18. The once-clear waters are now strewn with plastic. It's utterly devastating seeing the changes.'

The problem of plastic pollution arriving on the islands is compounded by the lack of infrastructure: 'Currently there are no tangible facilities for recycling plastic on the remote islands in the Maldives, or indeed creating fresh water on the local islands; everything is brought across by sea in plastic bottles. It's well-known that we have fights over access to oil; I have always been very aware that many communities have the same battles over access to clean water. This creates a double-edged sword for them - having to bring the product in and having no way of dealing with the packaging once there.'



It's estimated that more than 330 tonnes of rubbish a day is brought to Thilafushi island alone - most of it from the capital, Malé - where it is dumped and eventually used to reclaim land to increase the size of the island. So much is being deposited that the island is growing at a rate of a square metre a day.

## The solution

James has donated twenty illuminated photograms to a charitable foundation to fund the building of a community recycling facility on one of the islands in Baa Atol, Maldives, primarily to recycle PET clear plastics and HDPE plastic used in the drinks industry: 'Unless we take our technology to these islands, the islanders will continue to throw their empty bottles into the sea.'

In tackling the problem of pollution, the facility will also help fill the dearth of local materials and the additional environmental complications this creates. Currently, everything has to be shipped in. For example, if someone wants to build a house, they pay a ship owner to dig up sand on uninhabited islands to make the concrete; this is happening at such a rate that many of them have disappeared. The plastic recycled at the community facility can be turned into materials such as planks and bricks, providing a second level of environmental benefits.

## Personal commitment

James has already achieved his ultimate goal through the project, but that doesn't mean he has given himself permission to slack. But even with this promise, I still intend to see this project through and finance the first one myself; I am a man of principle. If I say I am going to do something I see it through.'

Not only does he intend to see it through, he has no intention of taking - arguably -easier routes to achieving his vision of the recycling facility. 'I don't want to have my hand out. I am a lone artist. If I was banging my drum and asking for money, nothing would get done. I could go to the corporates: to the Coca Colas and Diageos and try to get through to them, but it would take a year to get the right door open. This way I can have the facility built in a year.'

There is growing political and cultural awareness of the scale of plastic pollution, but James is not convinced we are at a tipping point: 'We're all talking about it, but no-one is willing to make a one-minute change in their life and how they do things to have an impact. We seem to be in a world of talkers not doers. I am doing my damndest not to be part of that - to be a doer.

'People's habits have to change. It's more convenient to buy a bottle of water than to carry your own. I have used the same life can for years; it's made of metal, it doesn't corrode, it's safe. When I travel I take my own water filter, I do not leave a swathe of plastic behind me.'

Suffering hunger and living exposed to the elements is still an extreme commitment to undertake. Why? 'It's a very important subject. Water has always been very alchemic in my mind, from a young age. I am going to keep doing everything I can to be part of the solution.'

## Alchemic insights

Photograms are images produced with photographic paper or film without using a camera. The most famous proponent of the technique was Man Ray; the *New York Times* described James' work as 'Like Man Ray meeting Jet Lee'. James uses photographic film plates, rather than the paper favoured by Man Ray, which exposes about 1,000 times quicker: 'You just need a small amount of light, which is why I manually expose with nothing more than the setting sun or moonlit by night - it's so alchemic in the pitch darkness. The images are pieces of plastic and metal that I collected laid across the plates, but the exposures are a very complex process.'



Working within the landscape of the Maldives as he explored the polarity within the disappearing landscape is central to the works: 'It allows the environment itself to provide the materials and enable the process, resulting in unique environmental collaborations with water as a recurring exploratory medium.'

Alongside the photograms, James produced a series of polaroids and letters, which he sent to people he believed can help: journalists, publishers, environmental groups and collectors of his work: 'I was living and working in a plein-air studio - I didn't have a desk so some of the letters looked like the scrawlings of a rambling madman. I was also very hungry some of the time, and that's probably evident in my writings; they were very heartfelt, going through different stages and mantras - even repeating 'What's the point?' But half of the people I wrote to have engaged, asking to know more and offering support.'

Although the polaroids gave James an indication of what might be on the plates, he was unsure whether he had captured anything more than a blur until he got back to his Distil Ennui studio. 'Processing the films in the studio is a magical thing. I didn't move out of the studio for three days. My developer only takes five plates at a time and it takes 90 minutes to develop each set, and I had about 140 plates. There's a lot of red in the photograms - it's the moonlight. They are very alchemic.'

**PLEASE FIND A PDF ATTACHED WITH IMAGES OF THE WORKS AND MORE INFORMATION FROM ALEXANDER JAMES**

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

'Visions from the Shoreline', curated by Dellasposa Fine Art  
4 May to 10 June 2018  
35-37 Church St, Marylebone, London NW8 8ES  
Events: Private View Wednesday 16 May / Closing Reception Thursday 7 June

**FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO ARRANGE INTERVIEWS, VIEWINGS AND EXCLUSIVE IMAGE ACCESS**

Siobhan Stirling: 01892 278417, 07990 543829, siobhan@sharpminds.agency  
Nick Humphrey: 01892 570863, 07428 126601, nick@sharpminds.agency  
Lucy Forbes: 07576 994955, lucy@distilennui.com