

New iconic painting to support global climate justice campaign

Panos Caribbean, 31 August 2021. Renowned Saint Lucian – American visual artist Jonathan Gladding has released another powerful painting to convey the urgency of the climate crisis and the need for action. Gladding, who lives in the village of Laborie in the South of Saint Lucia, is known for his vivid portraits and his realistic renderings of rural life and people. Since the launch of the Caribbean campaign “1.5 To Stay Alive” in 2015, Gladding has put his talent at the service of a social and environmental cause he strongly believes in. As world leaders prepare for the latest round of climate negotiations at the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (COP 26) in Glasgow, Scotland this November, Gladding’s newest painting calls attention to what is at stake for the global community.

“Jonathan Gladding's first 1.5 To Stay Alive painting became the iconic poster that symbolised our fight in Paris in December 2015 to negotiate a strong, ambitious Paris Agreement,” says Dr James Fletcher of Saint Lucia, one of the key figures in the negotiation of that Agreement 6 years ago. “This recent painting,” he says, “lets us know that our situation is grim - our sea levels are continuing to rise, while on land we are burning up. However, amidst the dark clouds of forest fires and severe hurricanes, there is still a promise of blue skies, brighter days, if we take urgent action. Thank you, Jonathan, for another priceless contribution to our fight against the existential threat of climate change.”

The “1.5 To Stay Alive” campaign that was launched in July 2015 at the initiative of the regional organisation Panos Caribbean has been supported by a number of prominent Caribbean artists. “Musicians, painters, poets, all artists play a lead role in the fight for social justice,” says Yves Renard, Regional Coordinator of Panos Caribbean, “because people trust them and because they speak in a language that everyone understands.” Indeed, over the past few years, in addition to its collaboration with Jonathan Gladding, Panos Caribbean has worked with several other artists, notably poet and playwright Kendel Hippolyte who wrote the lyrics of two powerful songs, which were produced and performed with prominent Caribbean musicians, including David Rudder, Ronald Boo Hinkson, Taj Weekes, E.sy Kennega, Belo, Zara McFarlane, Banky Banx and Bushman.

When asked about his inspiration for this new painting, Gladding said, “Well, I was inspired by the increasing number of catastrophes already bearing down on us on all fronts. Everyone is being affected. Glacial melting and sea level rise, the severity and frequency of weather events, and the relentless droughts and wildfires going on all over the planet. The Australian bushfires and the Brazilian Amazon rainforest wildfires of 2020 were especially shocking and heart-breaking, and this year we have seen the terrible fires in California as well as Greece and other parts of Europe.”

“So, the girl in the painting represents earth and humanity in peril,” Gladding explains. “Slowly being submerged by rising sea levels, while at the same time she is surrounded by the wildfires of a burning planet. Her (our) only hope is that we do all we can to keep the increase in average global temperature to no more than 1.5°C above preindustrial levels. Reducing our use of fossil fuels and investing in clean energy, consuming less, wasting less,

eating less meat, growing our own foods and buying locally when possible, adopting greener methods of commuting, and pressuring our governments to take bold action on climate change. That's what she's asking us to do."

The first goal of COP 26 is straightforward: it is to "Secure global net zero by mid-century and keep 1.5 degrees within reach." If the global summit fails to achieve that goal, it will betray the hopes of the girl on Jonathan Gladding's inspiring image, and the hopes and rights of all future generations, especially in the regions, countries and communities most directly affected by climate change.

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