

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

## Vivienne Westwood, K11 team up with Chinese contemporary artists to get consumers thinking about climate change

December 30, 2016



Liu Zhenchen's "Ice Mountain," a green themed installation in light of the Vivienne Westwood exhibition, is on display outside K11 Art Mall. (Courtesy Photo)

By [Jessica Rapp](#)

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K11 has been one of the pioneering shopping malls in China for art and luxury crossovers, but its latest exhibition takes the concept a bold step further. The team's first direct collaboration with a luxury fashion brand - Get a Life! - is an exhibition that shows Chinese consumers how climate change is affecting their world from the perspective of longtime environmental advocate, Vivienne Westwood.

Launched on Dec. 20, just months after showcasing a history of handbags alongside Chinese contemporary art with the Bagism exhibition, K11's Get A Life! explores the British designer's various forays into the green movement throughout her career, including activism and marches, collections that adopted eco-conscious practices and campaigns, and fashion films intended to prompt discussion. The exhibit, curated by Alex Krenn, tackles issues like overconsumption through collaborations with Greenpeace and famous celebrities, and mixes in the fashion icon's bold designs with looks on display from her past collections.



*These images at K11's Get A Life! exhibition depict Vivienne Westwood's participation in the Ethical Fashion Initiative, where she worked with artisans in Kenya to produce shoulder bags. (Courtesy Photo)*

Responding to Ms. Westwood's message are seven Chinese contemporary artists, whose works were curated by Song Zhenxi of the K11 Art Foundation. They used sculpture, painting, and animation under their own title, Monument of the Peach Blossom Valley, a Chinese poem about reaching utopia. Each abstract piece of art was intended to challenge and inspire viewers to think about issues related to how humans contribute to the environment. Among the participating Chinese artists was Sun Xun, who recently also showcased his interactive work as part of a luxury collaboration with the Audemars Piguet Art Commission at Art Basel Miami.



*Curator Song Zhenxi stands in front of Sun Xun's mural, the Chinese contemporary art response to Vivienne Westwood's exhibition. (Courtesy Photo)*

Environmental issues are a recurring topic among luxury brands in China as the country struggles with pollution and the wide-ranging effects of being a manufacturing superpower. However, while some players in the industry feel that consumers have a way to go before they're making purchasing decisions that reflect eco-consciousness, K11 founder Adrian Cheng said the timing is right for an exhibition of **Vivienne Westwood's** caliber in China. "Chinese consumers and Chinese stakeholders are very into sustainability, green issues, and how to conserve the world," Mr. Cheng said. "That's a big paradigm shift, and we are using art and Vivienne's voice to create that message."

It's the environmental theme that first drew the two brands to each other back just before the Shanghai K11 opened, according to Group Commercial Director Giuseppe Aragoni. Vivienne Westwood's K11 Art Mall store, which launched when the mall opened in 2013, was the largest flagship for several years before the company opened two additional ones in Paris and London. Since then, Vivienne Westwood has opened nine additional shops across the mainland. As K11 evolved to introduce more events and gallery shows that displayed a crossover between art and luxury, Vivienne Westwood's exhibition was a project discussed from the beginning, Mr. Aragoni said.

It wasn't long before K11 also became the first site in the world for the Vivienne Westwood caf last year. The British heritage tea room is recognizable for its wallpaper, a scene of 18th-century paintings from The Wallace Collection

museum in London that Vivienne Westwood's team got permission to reproduce. Many other luxury fashion brands have also opened restaurants and cafes in China to provide shoppers a retail experience that goes beyond shopping, as well as to give consumers another way to learn what the brand is all about.

Vivienne Westwood is no doubt finding multi-pronged methods of communicating its brand culture as it plans to expand in China. Currently, the Chinese mainland makes up about 8 to 10 percent of its worldwide business, but the market is becoming "very, very important," even amid an economic slowdown and the ongoing anti-corruption campaign that's taking its toll on the success of big name luxury brands. Plans are in the works to open up another 10 to 15 stores, Mr. Aragoni said.

"We are experiencing growth," he said. "We don't want to get away from China. We just started, so we want to grow, but gradually, not exponentially. This reflects our approach with opening many shops, but quality shops."

Particular focus for Vivienne Westwood expansion lies in Beijing, Chengdu, and Hangzhou, although there are no solid plans to open stores there just yet. Mr. Aragoni said they do plan on opening another caf and flagship store in Nanning and another in Taiwan, where they've already been established for almost 25 years.

Similarly, K11 also has major expansion plans across the mainland, bringing the art, luxury, and green fashion concept to more consumers, with plans to be open in 11 cities in China, including Beijing, Tianjin, Qingdao and Wuhan.

For now, in the Shanghai store, the K11 Art Foundation is set on attracting eco-minded art lovers with exhibits and activities strewn throughout the mall. In the lifestyle shopping area, central displays showcase clothing designs by various local green fashion advocates, including Fake Natoo's Zhang Na as part of an interactive workshop and seminar series called Duo Therapy. Other exhibitions are scattered throughout the space as well, the most noticeable likely being the giant colored ice cubes in the plaza by artist Liu Zhenchen. By the time of writing, they're likely all melted they're a reflection of what's happening to the Earth's own ice caps. Unrelated to the gallery are urban gardens on the upper floors, where shoppers can see where their vegetables are grown before they enjoy them in a trendy, healthy hot pot restaurant.

Of course, K11 Art Mall is in fact, still a mall, and while consumption is an issue explored in the exhibition itself, outside the exhibit, K11 provides a palate of international luxury brands to satiate the trendy, lifestyle-minded shopper. After browsing the exhibit, consumers can peruse imported spirits, chocolates, and other gift shop trinkets, including a Vivienne Westwood x K11 exclusive handbag, to mark the occasion. The exhibition goes until Feb. 28.

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