Vortex – Microplastics all around us

Plastic is a word that originally meant “pliable and easily shaped.” It became a name for a category of materials called polymers.

Over the last century and a half, humans have learned how to make synthetic polymers, sometimes using natural substances like cellulose, but more often using the plentiful carbon atoms provided by petroleum and other fossil fuels. Synthetic polymers are made up of long chains of atoms, arranged in repeating units, often much longer than those found in nature. It is the length of these chains, and the patterns in which they are arrayed, that make polymers strong, lightweight, and flexible.

These properties make synthetic polymers exceptionally useful, and since we learned how to create and manipulate them, polymers have become an essential part of our lives. Especially over the last 50 years plastics have saturated our world and changed the way that we live.

Plastic materials are not biodegradable, which means they never decompose. Instead, they exist in landfills, oceans and ecosystems for centuries, slowly breaking down into smaller pieces through erosion and weatherization. Eventually, the particles become so small they are difficult to detect but can easily be ingested and inhaled by animals like birds, turtles, fish and apparently also humans.

We assess ROW conditions through our work and provide assessments and prescriptions. Is there an opportunity for us to consider not only our prescriptions but the tools and the methodology to minimize contamination? We regularly operate at the intersection of industry and the environment. Cultural pressure is building all around the globe to change how humanity uses plastics. The UAA has a responsibility to truly lead the way on this shift. We have access to a pool of brilliant people with diverse backgrounds, experience and an opportunity to foster true and meaningful change.

Links:

Finding Vortex – Douglas Coupland’s New Art Installation

Conflicts in Chemistry: The Case of Plastics