

# Exhibition / Education Guide



This guide is designed as a resource for teachers involved in our [Primary and Second Level Schools programmes](#) , however it may also be a useful resource for any other schools, teachers or educational groups, who may or may not be visiting the gallery.

Using the images shown here and the links to other websites you can explore the exhibitions, the artist's other work, and related themes and topics from the classroom and develop your own project based on the themes raised and artistic approaches used.

# Ellen Driscoll

## *Fastforwardfossil (Part 3)*

1 October - 27 November



This exhibition is the third in a series of exhibitions named *Fastforwardfossil*, you can find out more about the previous two exhibitions at

[www.fastforwardfossil.net](http://www.fastforwardfossil.net) and more about Ellen's work as a whole at [www.ellendriscoll.net](http://www.ellendriscoll.net)

The exhibition includes sculptures, drawings and photographs that explore the architecture and landscapes that result from natural resource harvesting.

'Natural resource harvesting' is an activity that humans have relied on throughout history, meeting our changing needs through gathering and using resources found in nature. In the 21st century we have become dependent on oil.

Ellen's work explores the way the oil industry reaches into every corner of the world and every area of our lives.

## In the gallery

### Gallery 1

The sculpture in Gallery 1 is made from recycled plastic milk and water containers. Ellen collects this plastic herself on the streets of New York, going out in the mornings and evenings to rifle through rubbish bags, looking for the right kind of plastic (known as #2 plastic). Back in her studio she sorts through what she's found, records her day's harvest, and cuts it up into useable parts.

These salvaged plastic pieces are then turned into landscapes full of miniature buildings, oil rigs, bridges, hydro electric dams, hotels and shanty towns. These imagined landscapes connect places from all over the world, rich and poor, past, present and possible futures, linked by the oil industry, which spreads across the planet from North America, to the Middle East, the Niger Delta, Africa and even County Cork.

"Mind-boggling statistics about the dangers of climate change engulf me from every side. Any apparently innocent action, it seems, can contribute to the impending disaster. Thirsty? Hungry?

Buy a drink or snack that comes in a plastic container. The industry tries to convince us it can be 'recycled'. Where did this plastic come from? Where does it really go?" Ellen Driscoll



Look for all the different types of buildings and landscapes you can see in the plastic sculptures, can you name what you see? What do they suggest to you? Imagine yourself to be really small walking through the landscape of the sculpture? How would it feel?

Can you do drawings of some parts of the sculptures?

How long do you think it would take to collect all the plastic you can see?

click [here](#) to see Ellen's records of her plastic collections each day

## **Gallery 2**

In Gallery 2 are large drawings made while Ellen was on an artist's residency at the Sirius Arts Centre in Cobh in 2009. She was given access to the Whitegate oil refinery near Cork, where she took lots of photographs and collaged them together.

To make these drawings Ellen took the large sheets of paper outside and poured ink down them and let the rain fall on them. When they were dry, she drew on top of these splotches and drips, using her photos of the buildings and architecture of the oil refinery as a guide, adding details suggested to her by the

ink spills or from her own imagination. Then she spilled and poured more ink, “forming oil spills, rainstorms, floods and other scary things beyond my artistic control”.



Look at the drawings and sculptures, are there similarities between them?

Look at the drawings, can you see which marks are accidental, and which are deliberate?

Why would Ellen want to allow “scary things beyond my artistic control” to happen to her drawings?

Why do you think some of the drawings appear to be upside down?

These are very large drawings, why is that important to how they appear? How would they be different if they were small.

### **Gallery 3**

Gallery 3 contains photographs of details of the plastic sculptures. These photographs are not a record of the sculptures but artworks in their own right. They explore details of the sculptures, carefully lit to create dramatic black and white images.



Ellen is interested in the idea of everything being connected. Her sculptures explore how the milk you had for breakfast this morning can be linked both backwards, through the production of the bottle it comes in, and the process it takes to get that milk to your breakfast table, and forwards, through the life of that plastic milk bottle after you have finished with it. The drawings combine real buildings with imagined ones, and random splashes and spills, bringing all

these things together to create a world of its own. The drawings, sculptures and photographs are all also connected.

"The effect is one of continuous interconnectivity between rich nations and poor, between oil and water, between things far away in time and space and things that are right here, right now" - Ellen Driscoll

How are the photographs different from the sculptures?

What does the word 'scale' mean? How has she made things small and then large again?

# In the classroom - discussion and research



(Please note the suggestions below are aimed at a wide age range, you will be able to decide what is or isn't suitable for your own group's level of understanding)

Find out how oil and petroleum based products are connected to the production of a plastic milk bottle or other common everyday items.

What connections do places like the Middle East and the Niger Delta have to oil production?

What can you find out about the Whitegate oil refinery?

What is #2 plastic? Why is plastic classified like this? Look for classification on your own plastic rubbish.

Can you find out what happens to your plastic milk bottles, and other rubbish or recycling?

What sort of things could plastic bottles, and other recycling be used for once they are recycled?

Explore the origin of the foodstuffs (and/or their packaging) that you eat and drink every day

Look at how other parts of the world are affected by industries such as the oil industry. Is what is happening in that part of the world connected in any way to what we use and do here?

Look at the "natural resource harvesting" that goes on in your own locality, be it large or small scale. Fishing, farming and windmills would be three examples of industries you could explore that utilise the natural resources of West Cork, as well as our most local link to the oil industry, the oil terminal on Whiddy Island.

Focus on the architecture of these industries and their effects on the landscape. Talk about the connections these industries have to many different places, and different parts of our lives.

Think about the title of the exhibition- *Fastforwardfossil* what does that mean? Why did the artist choose that title?



"I draw from morning to night. I make Piranesi-like collages of the oil architecture, using the hundreds of photograph I have taken. I begin each drawing the same way, laying down squares of paper on the floor in a grid and gluing them with strips of rice paper to form a 'page' six feet wide by seven feet high. I then take the huge sheet of paper outside and pour volumes of ink over it." - Ellen Driscoll explains part of the process of making her drawings

Giovanni Piranesi was an Italian artist from the 18th Century. Can you find out more about him, why would Ellen compare her drawings to his?

Can you find out about other artists who might make their work from recycled materials?

Some related links to explore::

[A boat made of plastic bottles.](#)

[Building with rubbish in Africa.](#)

[Food miles](#)

[Plastic bottles banned in Italian town](#)

[The Niger Delta](#)

[Gulf of Mexico oil spill - maps and graphics](#)

[The great Pacific garbage patch](#)

[What happens to our recycling?](#)

[Artists working with recycled materials](#)

## In the classroom - practical ideas

Practical projects exploring the themes that Ellen's exhibition raises could take many forms.

The key curriculum strands that relate to her own approach are drawing and construction, however you could explore her ideas through any of the six strands.

Think about using recycled materials for making artwork. These could include plastic bottles, cardboard and newspaper, aluminium foil containers, bottle tops, waste from local industries eg. old fishing net, black farm plastic, fertilizer sacks. All of these would need to be washed and dried thoroughly before bringing them into the classroom.

If you are working with young children plastic can be cut into shapes beforehand and they can use these shapes to arrange them into mosaic pictures or mobiles. Normal glue will not stick the plastic, Ellen uses a hot glue gun but this is not practical in the classroom. Clear sellotape will hold small structures together, or make holes with a normal hole punch and tie the pieces together, with string, fishing line or cable ties.

You could try drawing or painting onto recycled materials, cardboard boxes, old envelopes, plastic wrapping. Tape these together like Ellen did to make bigger sheets.

Weave plastic bags together to make a recycled plastic quilt.

Consider scale - make small things large, or large things small and see how it changes the way they appear.

Think about connections, make drawings that connect together lots of ideas around a subject. Brainstorm all the things you can think of to do with an object (like a plastic milk bottle), where it comes from, how it's made, what you do with it, where it goes, the whole journey. Think about all the people and places involved. A brainstorm drawing could be like a map, or try drawing all the things as you think of them without taking your pencil off the paper. You can use this drawing to generate ideas for more artwork.

Try bringing an element of the accidental into your drawing or painting project, working with spilling and dripping paint, and then drawing over these spills to add structure to the chaos. What can you see in the shapes the spills make?



Draw or photograph local buildings, architecture or landscapes connected to natural resource harvesting, or collect pictures from newspapers and magazines if you can't get out of the classroom. Try cutting up and collaging the drawings or photographs back together in different ways. Change the scale by using a photocopier to shrink or enlarge the images. Make new drawings from the collages.