

'Leave no visible trace' exhibition highlights ocean plastics



Sherkin Island Photographer Nuala Mahon held workshops with Sherkin Island children to highlight ocean plastics. From left to right: Oran Buggy, Isla Buggy, Anna O'Neill, Nuala Mahon, Albie Jacob, Christopher O'Neill and Maria O'Driscoll with Shauna O'Neill on her knee.

Nuala Mahon, a Sherkin Island-based fine art photographer, will hold a multi-media exhibition in the Community Hall on Sherkin Island from 3rd to 8th September.

'Leave no visible trace' captures Nuala's interest in environmental issues, and particularly, in the detrimental impact of ocean plastic pollution. Her project started during lockdown in 2020 on her daily walks on Sherkin Island when she became acutely aware of and concerned about the quantity of plastic debris being washed up on the island's beaches. Determined to highlight the increasing danger of ocean plastics, she set about recording what she was finding.

Rather than taking traditional photographs of the plastic debris, she fabricated fragile and short-lived pinhole cameras out of cardboard and tin to capture the images and used her scientific background to make the developer from bladderwrack seaweed instead of photographic processing chemicals.

The resulting images have an ethereal quality, a counterpoint to the indestructible nature of plastic debris found in the environment which can last for hundreds if not thousands of years in the sea, to the detriment of sea life and humans.

"I wanted every step of this process to be sustainable; to work hand-in-hand with nature to capture and develop the images," she said.

Nuala's haunting images will be displayed in the Community Hall using sustainable materials such as hemp paper and recyclable metals and board. She also plans to have an installation on Trá Eoghán Mór beach (Cow Strand) on Sherkin Island as part of the exhibition, showing a series of her images printed on linen.

"My hope is that this exhibition will highlight that we are all part of the chain that perpetuates our collective over-dependence on plastic and the steps we can all take to help break that chain to minimise plastic pollution in our environment."

As part of that awareness raising process, Nuala also worked with Sherkin Island children over the last twelve months to run a series of workshops creating artwork from domestic plastic waste.

Nuala's work has already been exhibited as part of a collaboration in the Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool at the LOOK Climate Lab2022 Exhibition, at The Aisling Gallery in Ballydehob in June 2022 and was shortlisted for the Belfast Photo Festival 2022.

For further information on Nuala's work see www.mahons.org or follow her on Instagram: @nualamahonphotography and Twitter: @Nualalula



One of Nuala Mahon's ethereal pinhole camera images of found plastic toys on the beach