



DRUMMIN BOG  
PROJECT

## *An Fraughan*

An ecosocial art project involving the children of the national schools of St. Brendan's, Drummond, Scoil Moling, Glynn, and St. Michael's, Newtown and Drummin Bog, St. Mullins, Co. Carlow.


***An Fraughan*<sup>\*</sup> is an ecosocial art project between the children of the South Carlow national schools of St. Brendan's, Drummond, Scoil Moling, Glynn, and St. Michael's, Newtown**

Based on Drummin Bog (County Carlow's only raised bog and the last remaining in the South-East), instigated and led by artist Jules Michael, and funded by Creative Ireland 2018/2019, with the support of Carlow Arts Office, *An Fraughan* depended upon ecosocial art practices<sup>†</sup> because it connected a very special Carlow environment with its surrounding community through inclusive, participatory arts activities

<sup>\*</sup> an fraughan - Wild Bilberry *Vaccinum myrtillus*

<sup>†</sup> The innovative artistic framework for art projects evolving from the Drummin Bog Project uses the research of South Carlow ecosocial artist, Dr. Cathy Fitzgerald. Her term 'Ecosocial Art Practice' was presented in her PhD by creative practice The Ecological Turn: Living Well with forests to explain eco-social art practices (Fitzgerald, 2018), see [www.Hollywoodforest.com](http://www.Hollywoodforest.com)





Spring buds on the low-growing evergreen shrub Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* on Drummin Bog. Known in Irish as fraughan, it's in leaf by late April. Delicate bell-shaped pale pinky-green flowers 4 – 6mm then appear, followed by purple-black fruits in mid-summer. Traditionally, the last Sunday in July was when people headed out onto bogs and mountains to gather the small, discreetly hidden fruit. Known as "Fraughan Sunday," it was an important event in the social calendar as an opportunity for gathering and meeting amongst the community. It still happens occasionally within family groups today. The bilberry naturally lent itself as a title for this ecosocial art project; its ever-present green stems on Drummin Bog forming associations with new growth, individual characteristics, young people spending time together and regeneration.

## An Fraughan

This book has come from the *An Fraughan* ecosocial art wetlands project, which was the collaboration between South Carlow artists and the three primary schools adjacent to Drummin Bog. It is a visual snapshot of the young people's time on the project and their engagement with the bog and their creative outputs, while also illustrating Drummin Bog itself. It was not possible to show images of each child and their artworks, or to include an in-depth survey of the flora and fauna of Drummin Bog. Rather it is to hold the essence of the overall project in book form.

Drummin, or 'Red' Bog is situated close to St. Mullins and the River Barrow in South Carlow. Hidden from view by conifer trees planted by Coillte in the 1950s and no longer used for peat extraction, Drummin Bog has become a secret, nearly forgotten place. A small gem of a wild peatlands sanctuary, its beauty, combined with urgency for national and international peatlands restoration, inspired the forming of the voluntary Drummin Bog Project<sup>1</sup> in 2015, with the aim of protecting and conserving this special little raised bog.

The question arose as to how to open Drummin Bog outwards, how to bring awareness of its existence to current and future generations - to the immediate community and to the wider world - and in the context of the ecological emergency. How could its importance and care begin to be promoted, small though it is, for all to be enjoyed now and into the future?

As a socially engaged practitioner working with people in community settings and also a committee member of The Drummin Bog Project, it seemed natural to me to devise a collaboration between artists and young people living closest to Drummin Bog. I believe that creative, collaborative arts projects make an inclusive space, a neutral holding, to invite diverse interests and intergenerational ways of knowing to come together. For creative practitioners, ecosocial art practices create opportunities for collaboration, to obtain new experiences and knowledges, while advancing the creative energy of community to care for our wild places. By situating Drummin Bog as the site to dial out from - and to return to – this particular place becomes the physical location for inspiring these collective, inclusive, creative processes.

Hence *An Fraughan* emerged, with the support of funding from Creative Ireland and County Carlow Arts Office. The idea was to use creativity to engage the children with Drummin Bog, to introduce them to the habitat and biodiversity specific to raised bogs and peatlands, and to share wider ideas of wild places, and of how to live well with the natural world. This creative-led conservation project, involving people and place, was a personal, instinctive reaction to advance the wellbeing of Drummin Bog and the community. Simultaneously, through conversations with Dr. Cathy Fitzgerald, *An Fraughan* became not so much an art and science project, but more the start of an ecosocial arts practice (her essay concludes this book). The collaboration with Cathy and the integration of her theoretical frame underpinned *An Fraughan*, and provided knowledge as to how creativity can powerfully connect childrens' experiences on Drummin Bog with conservation and ecological insights.

We were delighted to collaborate with the national schools of St. Brendan's, Drummond, Scoil Moling, Glynn and St. Michael's Newtown. Developing *An Fraughan* was necessarily a layered, evolving process. I knew we needed to begin with the fundamentals of what a raised bog is, why we need our wetlands, what sort of plants and creatures live there. A visit to Drummin Bog was essential for the children, to feel it, to see it, to sense the living bog itself. We had an outline of the creative possibilities, but we also sensed that this would develop through conversations with the children themselves, in observing how they were interacting with the bog itself, and in the wider discussions with them of looking after the natural world. Being able to reflect, change, adjust, re-adjust, to enable unexpected moments with the children was fundamental to the ecosocial art process, informing how *An Fraughan* progressed and what eventual themes developed.

Thus, we began with an initial classroom science session, making small individual 'field notebooks' to hold the children's observations and learning. This was followed by visits to the bog. Well-equipped for all weathers - and a fair amount of dirt - our first visit was in early Spring 2019 with St. Brendan's, Drummond. The bare branches of the surrounding woods, last year's bracken and grasses creating a rich tapestry of browns and burnt umbers; the children were like bright starlings amongst the heather seed-heads. Returning with the other classrooms from Newtown and Glynn for further visits as the months and *An Fraughan* progressed, it was magical to see the bog unfurl itself through spring and early summer. And to see the children leaving their schools and being out on Drummin Bog, their curiosity, questions and engagement richly connecting with this special place. Most had not been on a raised bog - or any bog - with its unique soft and springy feel underfoot. The physical characteristics of Drummin Bog, the surrounding shield of trees giving way to peat and heather, and the experience of walking in onto the high bog proper reinforced the children's classroom diagrams of how a raised bog forms. Its acidic conditions, how it is a living organism, where the sphagnum moss is, what happens if this is damaged, what bogs and wetlands need for healthy conservation strategies, and why peatlands are crucial for carbon sequestration and water regulation: all became live and activated to the children through their time spent there.

The Drummin Bog visits also inspired the creative strands for each school in different ways. In conversation, the young people had shown their awareness of biodiversity, water conservation and care for the environment through their time on the Green Schools<sup>2</sup> program. Connecting and expanding this knowledge, we developed three themes, one for each school. Firstly, there is the notion of the beauty and fragility of Drummin Bog. Secondly, that we all live nearby: and thirdly, that our lives are all interwoven with the living world around us.

For practical reasons, each school functioned in its own orbit and worked on its own theme. It was always planned to bring the three schools' creative output together in a collective exhibition to close *An Fraughan*. Following the project's core idea of collaboration and integration, the exhibition wove the three themes together into a floor-based installation in Drummond Hall in early June 2019. This interlinked the young people's creativity in a celebration between Drummin Bog and themselves, their schools and their families, and the children's time spent together during *An Fraughan*.



Throughout the entire process, the living Drummin Bog was central. At times, when unsure of how certain elements of the project were to progress, I found I would visit the bog. By walking in and spending time there, the next necessary piece would reveal itself. I began to regard this as the bog having some kind of voice. It comes, I think, from the fact that I also have a studio practice as a painter. Here, there is the notion of spending time with a painting, in order for the painting to reveal itself. When we look at a painting, we make decisions, value judgments; introduce subjective narratives and so on. Often we need to pause, and come to the painting on its own terms. To absent our egos, and to wait for the painting to 'speak'. By listening to a painting in this way, we begin to understand unforeseen elements within the painting itself, at a deep and at times subconscious level. There is a saying that painting lies outside language – in referencing what we perceive or understand non-verbally. A painting can make perfect sense, but we may not be able to describe it in words. It seems to me our connection to places – and in this case Drummin Bog – works in a similar way.

I remember when I visited Drummin Bog first too. Although finding it lovely, admittedly I also found it a little underwhelming! Then it occurred to me, similar to spending time with a painting, it was necessary to pause, to wait, to allow the bog to reveal itself. Peatlands can be read like a book scientifically, through hydrological, geological and other data based surveys, or by quantifying the plant and animal-life that indicates stresses or benefits occurring in this particular habitat. But it's our emotional, experiential connection that bogs can provoke that is less quantifiable and more instinctive, and which, most importantly, activates our care for places. Giving the children access to Drummin Bog through an ecosocial art practice was an attempt to engender these intuitive connections.

And there were many unexpected moments. One in particular stood out, when on our last visit to the bog, towards the end of the session, the older children from Glynn National School spontaneously formed small groups and began to create miniature homes, or shelters. Gathering bits of moss, sticks, leaves, grasses, the constructions were not the children merely making 'bug-hotels' (as we see in community biodiversity habitats created in parks or school playgrounds), but more in the way children have the ability to perceive themselves in their physical constructions. It seemed to be an unconscious, embedded insertion between them and the living bog itself. Possibly, this deep-rooted connecting - and their display of the sensitive creativity needed to live well within and with the living world - is the symbolic essence of what An Fraughan was really attempting to achieve

Jules Michael 2020

*It's fascinating. There's different things to see everywhere every time you turn around - Colm (11)*

*We need to save it – Trinny (11)                      I liked going to Drummond Hall to see the art altogether - Padraig (12)*

*The bog was very interesting. I loved to learn about the animals and plants – Ciara (12)*

*One of my favourite parts was the art. I think it came out amazing and I loved the pottery that we made - Caelainn (11)*

*I enjoyed going to the bog and learning all about the animals and the circle of animals – Isabel (11)*

*It was very mucky and brown and soggy and wet – Jaimie (11)*

*If Drummin Bog wasn't there, there would be no home for the insects – Mia (10)*

*It's the last raised bog in Carlow. We need to look after it - Amy (11)                      It's very brown – Liam (10)*

*It's very peaceful - Andy (11)                      The bog was huge. It had a lot of flowers in it - Padhraig (12)*

*I really enjoyed visiting the bog with Jules, it was fun. I liked making the art and seeing it in Drummond Hall. - Drew (12)*

*I learned loads more about nature and I learned what sphagnum moss is - Aoife (11)*

*It was a really fun experience and I'd definitely do it again - Emma (12)*

*I liked learning about the wildlife and nature of the bogs, and how we should do more to protect the bogs - Aoibhinn (12)*

<sup>1</sup>The Drummin Bog Project is a not-for-profit, voluntary organization [www.drumminbogproject](http://www.drumminbogproject) for further information.

<sup>2</sup> Green Schools, run by An Taisce, is Ireland's leading environmental management and award programme, working with primary and secondary schools across the country.





**Left:** Looking across Drummin Bog towards Drummond village and the lower part of the Blackstairs mountain range

**Right:** The only deep pond on the bog







**Left:** Winter leaves on a self-seeded Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea* on the bog's perimeter. Raised bogs are often ringed with trees as the acidic peat changes to soil conditions conducive to a woodland habitat. It has been said that oaks from Drummin Bog were felled and used in the making of the lock gates when the Barrow navigation system was being built in the 1790s

**Right:** Footprints of the children from St. Brendan's National School, Drummond as they visit Drummin Bog







**Left:** Seed-heads of bog asphodel and Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix*.



**This image and following pages:** The children of St. Brendan's National School use worksheets to discover the bog's different habitats and its flora and fauna. Gathering natural materials for their creative projects, rubbing peat between fingers, jumping up and down all together (to feel the slight movement of the bog's surface); and the softness and particular feel of the peat underfoot as they explore the bog - all creates physical experiences for the children specific to this unique habitat









**Left:** The woodland encircling Drummin Bog is mainly self-seeded natives - Downy Birch *Betula pubescens*, Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, Oak *Quercus* spp. and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, along with non-native trees such as Lodgepole Pine *Pinus contorta* and Sitka Spruce *Picea sitchensis* (the latter a remnant of Coillte planting from the 1950s)

**Right:** The track out of Drummin Bog runs along the woodland habitat. Here, the children are level with the base of the tree trunks. When in on the high bog proper, visitors are at eye-level with the higher and topmost tree branches; the woodland thus becomes an indicator of the gradient and domed characteristic shape to raised bogs







**Left:** Dried leaves, ferns, bracken, grasses, seed-heads and heather are turned into foilography plates back in the classroom. Insert photos here show the inking up process and a foilography print after it was pulled

**Right:** Creating clay molds and the plaster cast process



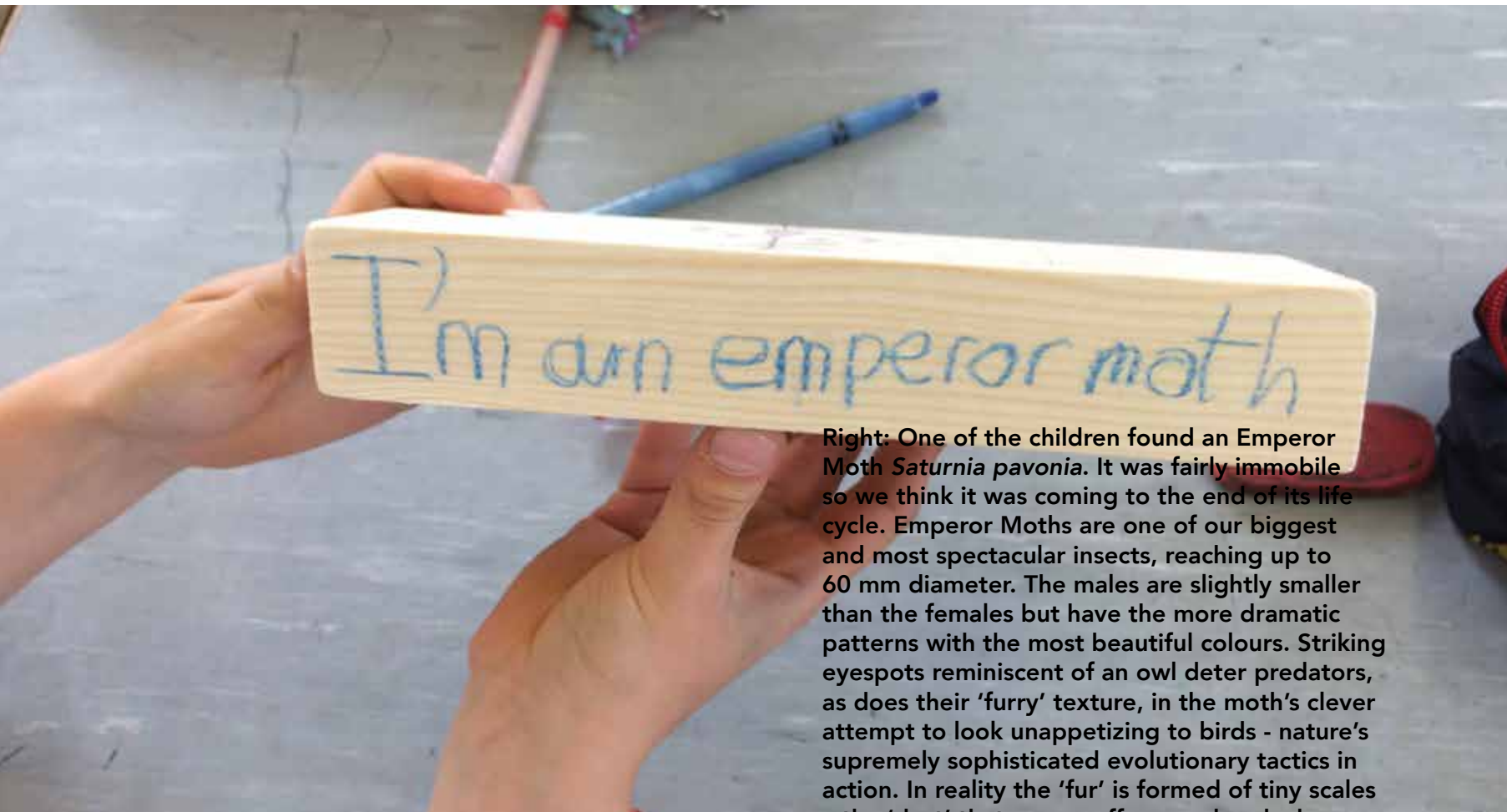




**Left:** Adding an oak leaf to a notebook. Each child made their own Drummin Bog Field Notebook to contain their scientific information and observations. **Insert:** 'Bee' Jenga block

**Right:** 'Fox moth' Jenga block. **Insert:** 'Barn owl resting on a fencing post and woodland' Jenga block





Right: One of the children found an Emperor Moth *Saturnia pavonia*. It was fairly immobile so we think it was coming to the end of its life cycle. Emperor Moths are one of our biggest and most spectacular insects, reaching up to 60 mm diameter. The males are slightly smaller than the females but have the more dramatic patterns with the most beautiful colours. Striking eyespots reminiscent of an owl deter predators, as does their 'furry' texture, in the moth's clever attempt to look unappetizing to birds - nature's supremely sophisticated evolutionary tactics in action. In reality the 'fur' is formed of tiny scales - the 'dust' that comes off on our hand when we pick a moth up. Day flying, Emperor Moths inhabit open heath, wild ground and hedgerows, the females laying their eggs on suitable food sources for the emerging caterpillars - meadowsweet, heather, bramble and hawthorn








St. Brendan's National School plays Biodiversity Jenga







A close-up photograph of Sphagnum moss, showing its intricate, feathery green structure. Some brown, dried leaves are scattered among the moss. The lighting is bright, highlighting the texture of the plant.

Left: Sphagnum moss is the most important plant on the bog. Known as the bog builder, it is the main component in how raised bogs are formed. Sphagnum depends on wet conditions, each plant acting like a sponge; its minuscule dead cells can absorb and hold up to twenty times their own weight in water. Hummocks form as each plant grows together, in a circular process of peat formation and stabilizing water conditions. Each tiny plant has a unique structure consisting of an active growing point - or head - and a long supporting stem with many branches, all of which are covered in tiny scales-like leaves. The base is dead tissue that doesn't disintegrate, as the organisms that decompose plants cannot live in the acidic conditions found in peat. The living part wants to stay out of water, the stem acting as a scaffold to support the live growing point. The acidic conditions are formed by the plant absorbing all the nutrients found in rainfall and by exchanging them for Hydrogen ions. These are mainly acidic and help to make the bog even more so. Over thousands of years the build up of moss forms the peatlands we have today. Active, healthy raised bogs are continually growing - perhaps a millimeter or two a year - and as such can be regarded as a living organism. All from one tiny plant!

Right: Looking north-west across Drummin Bog towards Mount Brandon, ling heather, self-seeded birch and bracken in the foreground







**Left:** Bilberry seedling coming into leaf

**Right:** Pupils from St. Michael's National School, Newtown prepare to visit Drummin Bog







**Left:** Walking in on the woodland track



**Right:** The first flush of spring growth and scented gorse









**Right (top):** Lying listening to the birdsong - it seems to be amplified on Drummin Bog, perhaps it's to do with the ring of trees creating a natural amphitheatre around the bog  
**Insert left:** *Cladonia* 'pixie cups' approximateliy 8 - 10 mm high  
**Insert Right:** Gathering dried bracken

**This page and following pages:** Bog time







Common Haircap moss *Polytrichum commune*







Bog cotton and its iconic dancing heads are a regular sight in June and July across our blanket and raised bogs. A creeping, rhizomatous perennial sedge common to wetland and peat habitats, there are two forms found on Drummin Bog, single and many headed, *Eriophorum vaginatum* and *E. angustifolium*. The latter (seen here on Drummin Bog's pond) grows in or on margins of bog pools. It has adapted to the saturated conditions by using a system of 'snorkeling,' whereby it has air canals in its roots. This allows air to pass through from the parts of the plant sticking out of the water back down to the roots - which may be submerged up to 60 cm in the peat at the base of the pool. Beginning to flower in early May, the inconspicuous small green flowers are fertilised by passing moths before developing in June and July into the much beloved fluffy white tufts of our mid-summer peatlands







**Left:** Building little bog bowls and making individual collaged jigsaw pieces

**Right:** Each child had an abstract cardboard shape to collage. There was an element of trust in that the children didn't know what each shape represented or what it was meant for, until all the completed pieces were brought together at the end and the jigsaw was assembled





Biodiversity Jenga in the playground of  
St. Michael's National School, Newtown





**Left:** Bog Rosemary *Andromeda polifolia* is predominantly a plant of lowland raised bogs, found mainly in the centre of Ireland. Within Carlow, it had previously been recorded in bogs above Old Leighlin, but those habitats have long been converted to forestry. It is therefore a nice 'find' on Drummin Bog, it being the most southerly known extent for the plant in Ireland. A low-growing sub-shrub, easily hidden by surrounding mosses and heathers, its common name references its long narrow leaves looking similar to the culinary herb rosemary *Rosmarinus officinalis*, but it is no relation. Its pretty mid-pink bell flowers 8 – 10 mm appear in May fading to a paler pink by June.

**Right:** Birch coming into full leaf behind the high bog







Left: The children from Scoil Moling National School, Glynn, visit Drummin Bog

Right and following pages: The building of the children's habitats





















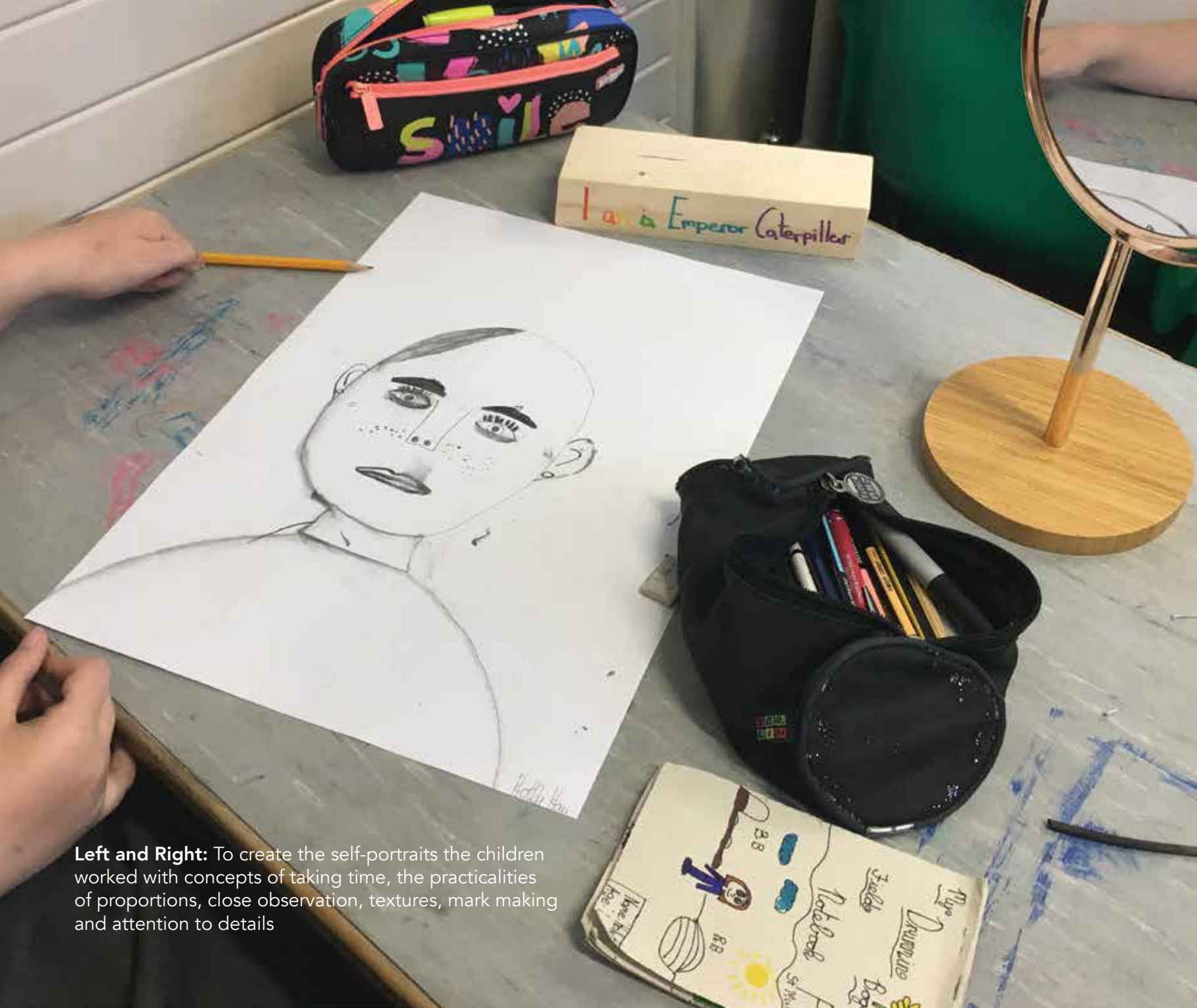


**Left:** Self-seeded oak with fresh growth as the *An Fraughan* project moves into early summer

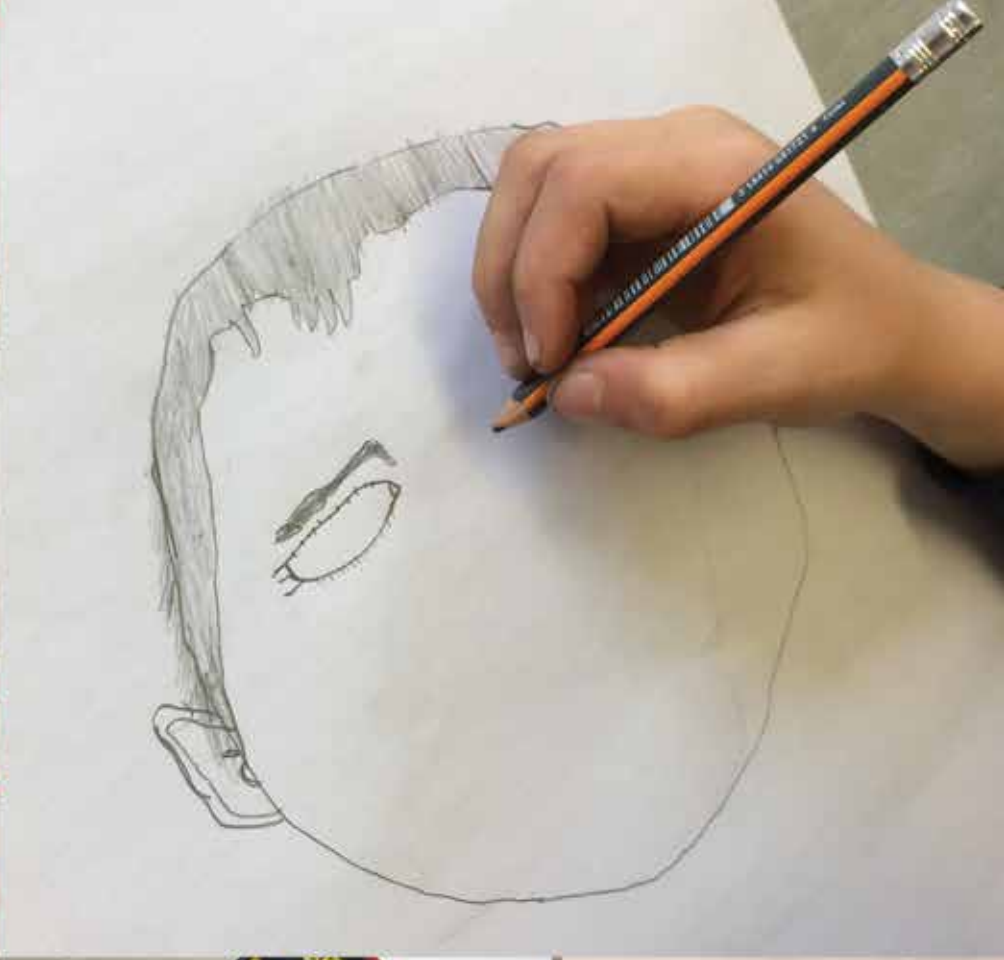
**Right:** Playing a game on the bog about the balance between communities of plants, invertebrates, birds and humans







**Left and Right:** To create the self-portraits the children worked with concepts of taking time, the practicalities of proportions, close observation, textures, mark making and attention to details

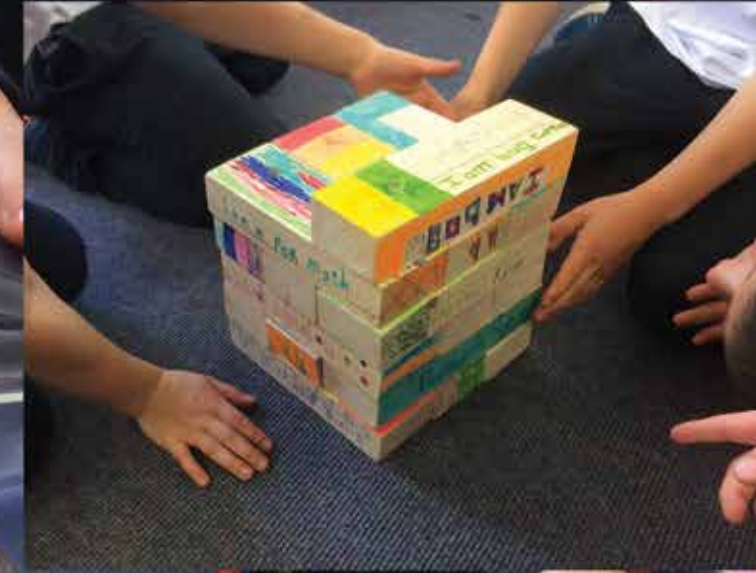






Left and Right: Clay modeling for Scoil Moling's theme "We Are All Inter-linked"





The middle classroom of Scoil Moling's National School  
build their Biodiversity Jenga








Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* is a low-growing plant found near wetter parts of Drummin Bog. When the plant is happy it forms carpets of greeny-grey strap-shaped leaves which appear in spring, followed by tall flower spikes with well-shaped buds, which produce the cadmium yellow, 6-pointed star shaped flowers with orange tips. Seed heads remain for the rest of the year, a ghostly peatlands sight in winter months. On a still mid-summer's day it's exquisite scent sits on the air long before the plant comes into sight. It's Latin name *ossifragum* means 'bone-breaking' and is said to refer to the fact that animals grazing where the bog asphodel thrives acquired brittle bones. In reality, this was more likely due to the nutrient deficient properties of plants found in wetlands habitats.



March cinquefoil *Comarum palustre* thrives in the wet conditions found at the shallower edges of the pond on Drummin Bog. Happy to have its roots grow underwater its toothed 3 or 5 pointed leaves form a carpet over the water's surface. The handsome, deep magenta flowers are a good source of food for nectar-loving bees and hoverflies from early June to mid-August. The plant forms part of the transition process from pond proper to the beginnings of the formation of sphagnum pools. It is an exciting and positive sight as an indicator of Drummin Bog's regeneration.



A close-up photograph of Erica tetralix flowers. The image shows several clusters of small, bell-shaped pink flowers hanging from thin, woody stems. The leaves are small, narrow, and green. The background is a soft-focus mix of green foliage and brown branches.

**Left:** Cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* is occasionally dotted amongst the ling heather on the bog, its little pink bells, tightly grouped at the top of the stems, appear like small jewels under the taller plants. Also found hidden amongst the more open patches of grasses and bog asphodel, it has narrow, needle-like leaves in whorls of 4 along the wiry stem, hence its name

**Right:** Drummond Church and Drummond Hall on the day of the *An Fraughan* exhibition, June 2019







**Left:** Left: Field scabious *Succisa pratensis*, with its preference for damp meadows, wood and peatlands edges, appears on the margins of Drummin Bog. Flowering from early summer to October its pincushion heads are another crucial late nectar source for late-flying butterflies, bees and hoverflies. More critically, Ireland's only protected insect, the Marsh Fritillary butterfly depends utterly on this little plant, it being the sole suitable food source for its caterpillars.

**Right:** Waiting for the exhibition to begin outside Drummond Hall







**Left:** View of the *An Fraughan* installation, Drummond Hall



**Right:** Plaster casts by the pupils of St. Brendan's National School, Drummond



ST. BRENDAN'S N.S.  
"BIO-DIVERSITY"  
The beauty  
and bio-diversity  
of Drummin Bog



Left and right: The creative projects of St. Brendan's National School drew inspiration from the specific biodiversity of Drummin Bog, the richness of its flora and fauna and the natural beauty of its plant life







**Left:** Visitors to the exhibition



**Right:** The pupils of Scoil Moling, Glynn, worked with the idea of humans and non-humans, and how we are all linked together as part of the ecosystem that is Drummin Bog





A single continuous length of thread links the self-portraits and clay reliefs throughout









The children of St. Michael's National School, Newtown, created a large jigsaw map of the area, marking in the three schools participating in the project, the roads between and the routes to the neighboring communities of Borris, Graiguenamanagh and New Ross. Bordered with the Blackstairs above and the River Barrow below, the map anchored the concept that we all live in this place, with Drummin Bog at its centre









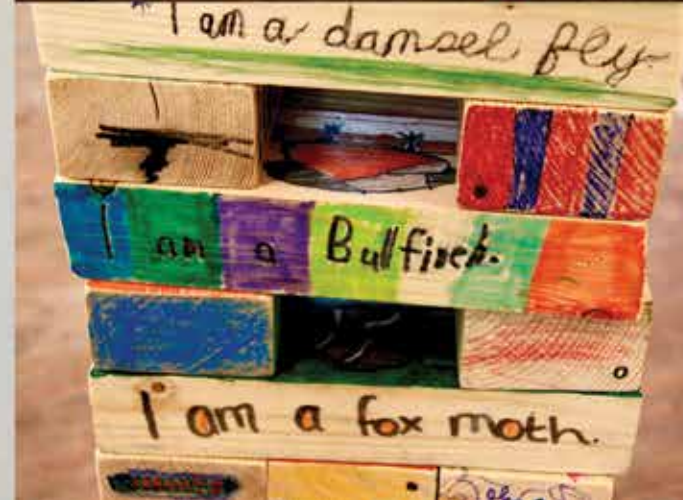
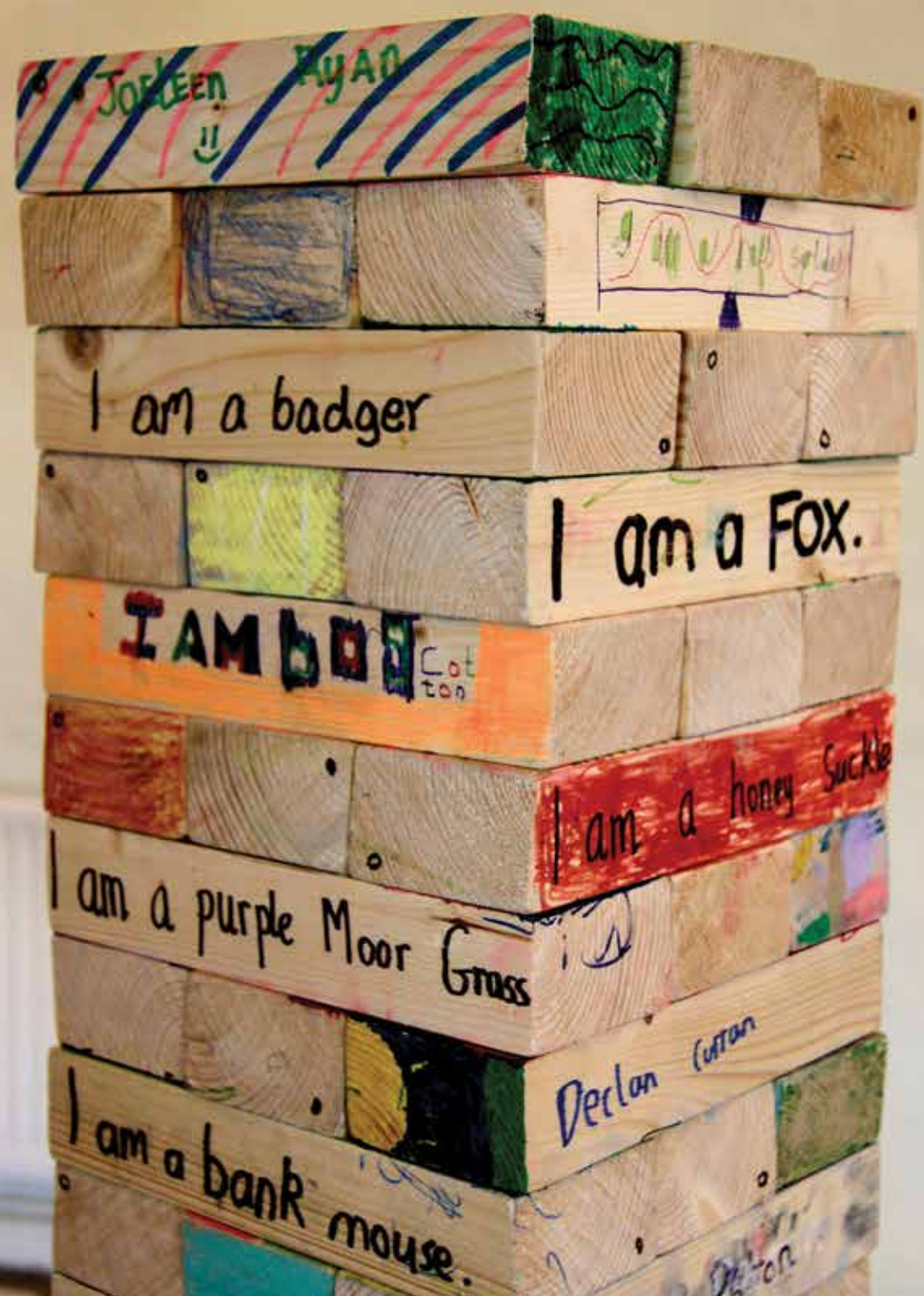




All 122 Biodiversity Jenga blocks from each child in each school were combined into two stacks (the original idea of one tower reached the ceiling and too dangerous!)



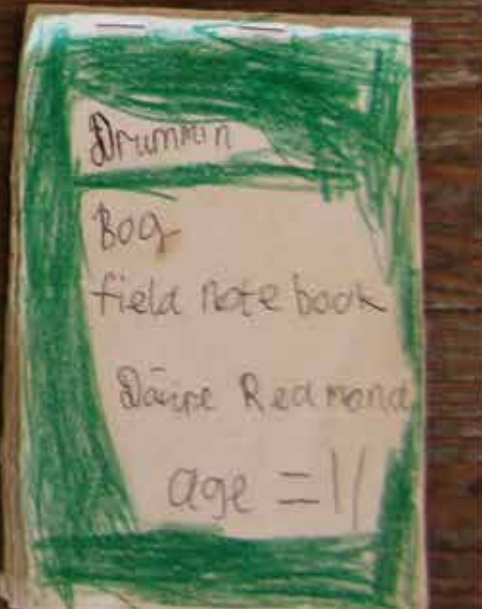




An A3 fold-out as a permanent memento of An Fraughan was given to all on the day of the exhibition







**Left:** "My Drummin Bog Field Note-Book." all 122 individual notebooks on display

**Right:** New growth on black Spleenwort fern *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*





The Royal fern *Osmunda regalis* with the pond behind. Living up to its regal name, this striking plant grows up to 5 feet in one season, dying back in winter. Our largest native fern, common in the West of Ireland, less so in the East, it grows happily on Drummin Bog, unfurling its lime-green statuesque fronds in early summer



## ***Competent wisdom for wetlands in uncertain times***

Cathy Fitzgerald, PhD

(for the Carlow An *Fraughan* Drummin Bog Schools Project. Presented at the Irish Research Council seminar ‘A Revolution in How We Live’; 17 October 2019, Co-hosted by Dr. Maureen O’Connor, UCC and the Glucksman Gallery, UCC)

*“We’re all going to have to do something to help our land, our country itself,” Wendell Berry tells me.*

*“We have to find a way to pay it what we owe it.*

*And what we owe it, of course, is our love.*

*“We owe it our competent love.”*

*Interview with author, poet, farm-philosopher Wendell Berry<sup>1</sup>*

Our current way of knowing life is creating a catastrophe! To protect our precious wetlands, we may rush to teach practical things about why such critical ecosystems: that store more carbon than forests, that are a valuable habitat for wildlife, and which improve water quality and limit flooding, should be restored. Such practical knowledge is crucial for communities across Ireland and elsewhere. Yet other competencies to care for our environments, other species and ourselves, are needed for these uncertain times.

### ***The Ecological Emergency demands a revolution in Western culture***

If we have been listening to children chant in recent marches, we often hear the slogan shouted: “System change, not climate change!” There is perhaps growing awareness that the eco-social emergency is the result of a profound crisis in Western modern culture.



Yet, too often we engage narrowly with the symptoms of the unfolding catastrophe: climate breakdown, pollution, degraded land, ravaged wetlands, water and air, wildlife collapse, ocean heating and acidification, disruption of geo-chemical cycles, the increasing numbers of climate refugees. These realities all need urgent attention but we are little informed of the monumental task ahead to regenerate our culture entirely so our living enhances life.

As environmental writer, social justice advocate, Naomi Klein argues brilliantly in *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2015) everything HAS to change!<sup>2</sup> Since our culture educates to prioritise economic production that grossly outstrips the well-being of the living world and other peoples, along with diminishing our personal potential, our modern education system must also radically change. We must revolutionise our ideas of education for the urgent ecological challenges we face.

***Arts-based environmental education fosters ecoliteracy and agency amidst radical uncertainty***

We urgently need to re-weave caring for the living world, others and ourselves into every area of our learning. To reimagine how to live well with the world, will require Earth-aligned creativity as never before. Our education, therefore, must impart an ecological worldview. All students need a fundamental understanding of ecological wellbeing as the basis for their futures and for a just, vibrant and more beautiful world for all beings.

What do I mean by this? The ecological imperative asks us to expand our care beyond human issues and the possessive individualism that has been celebrated in our societies and the artworld<sup>3</sup> for too long. Put simply, teaching and creating for an ecological way of being in the world asks us to consider more: is this activity good for me, for others, for the environment?<sup>4</sup>

Arts-based environmental learning, well advanced in Finland<sup>5</sup> and developing here in Ireland, as in the small Carlow Drummin Bog *An Fraughan* three schools project (Michael, 2019),<sup>6</sup> will help our young people to translate - in this particular instance - what is special about their wetland experience to themselves and the wider community. For times of increasing ecological anxiety, arts-based environmental learning that holds space for sharing can also provide a supportive means to process the destructiveness of this age, to counter the overwhelming despair and apathy that affects our young people and ourselves.<sup>7</sup>

Most importantly, arts-based environmental learning, through ecosocial art practices<sup>8</sup> affords many ways of knowing the world beyond the scientific and can equip young people with much-needed open-mindedness and open-ended-ness

to develop the skillful, inclusive agency for living well with others, in a rapidly changing world.<sup>9</sup> Prof. Jan van Boeckel describes this type of education as ‘the pedagogy of the light in their eyes’.<sup>10</sup> It opens young people’s attention to interact with passion, and compassion, for others and the world around them. Artist Jules Michael, who led the *An Fraughan* project, and myself, saw the newfound delight, pride and community goodwill for little Drummin Bog, following the three school art projects.<sup>11</sup> The connections established are already leading in to a new ecosocial arts collaboration with the same three schools and Carlow based musician and composer Carole Nelson for 2020/21.

Still, in teaching creative practices to impart an ecological worldview, how do we manage all the various lived experiences, creative activities and expertise needed for understanding and acting well in the world for ourselves, other species and their habitats? How do we understand how arts-based environmental learning works?

***Action Research provides a roadmap for arts-based environmental learning***

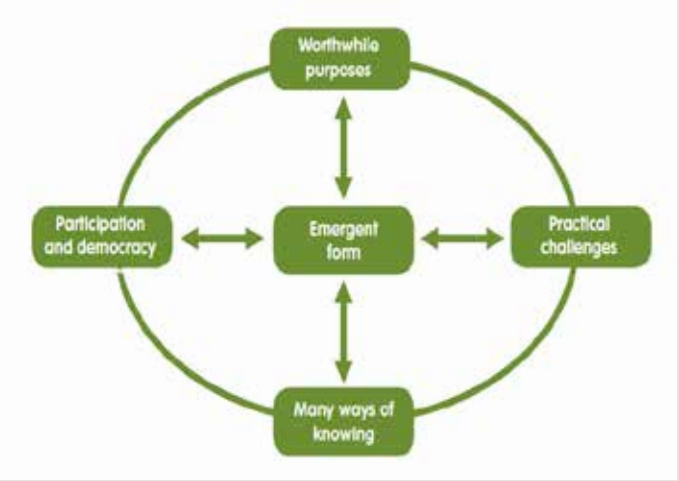


Fig. 1 Action research identifies the main aim, the practical challenges, the many ways of knowing (experiential, creative, theoretical and practical), the participatory, democratic collective form of arts-based environmental learning for community change.<sup>12</sup>



Recent studies advance that action research (well known in the health and education sectors and applied to explain social art practice, and ecosocial art practice<sup>13</sup>) provides an accessible framework to show how ecoliteracy – the ecological literacy – that comprises the expansive integrated concepts, words and practices from ecological philosophy and ethics, as well as environmental knowledge, are crucial to overcome the ecocidal misperception that humanity is separate from the wellbeing of the wider community of life. Ecoliteracy advances our agency for change arising from collective, creative learning gathered from many ways of knowing our places. Studies also explain the value of creative practices in action research, how artful activity can engagingly translate, collate and present, the experiential qualities of a special place, like a small overlooked and degraded wetland – like Drummin Bog – to others (Reason and Seeley cited in<sup>14</sup>). Action research confirms why art, with science and other ways of knowing, can move people to change, that science’s facts and figures can’t achieve alone.<sup>15</sup>

Most importantly, studies confirm action research ‘helps to move people away from linear cause-and-effect thinking into a cyclical, ecological mode’,<sup>16</sup> toward dialogue and broader values to live by, that are more capable for uncertain futures. Action research, as demonstrated for Drummin Bog, explains how to do arts-based environmental learning well. As a guiding framework action research isn’t prescriptive, but it explains why arts-based environmental learning, through eco-social art practices, can foster the magical, creative and caring competencies that the world so crucially needs.<sup>17</sup> I started with Wendell Berry’s urgent call for ‘competent love’ – I’ll end with Carole Nelson’s words from her *Bog Rosemary Song*<sup>18</sup> that reminds us:

“If you go down to Drummin Bog  
...open your ears, open your eyes  
look up to the sky and down to the ground  
[...]  
And we are all kinds of beings –  
In all kinds of weather  
We are Drummin Bog  
And we all live together.”

Cathy Fitzgerald

References:

<sup>1</sup> Hope Reese, ‘A champion of the unplugged, earth-conscious life, Wendell Berry is still ahead of us’, Vox, October 9, 2019, [online] <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/10/2/20862854/wendell-berry-climate-change-port-royal-michael-pollan?fbclid=IwAR0TbTz9FvneGO43ypQZmPw3cAfxWWyuh8BwA7fXfkBnn4EWu34W3heldz8> [Accessed 15 October 2019].

<sup>2</sup> Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, 2014, Kindle edition.

<sup>3</sup> Iain Biggs, ‘Five Notes on Thinking Through ‘Ensemble Practices’’, *ClimateCultures – creative conversations for the Anthropocene*, 2019, [online] [accessed 15 September, 2019]

<sup>4</sup> M.P. Tinajero, “Ethical Grounds: The Aesthetic Actions of Soil,” in *Art, Theory and Practice in the Anthropocene*, ed. Julie Reiss (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2019), 97.

<sup>5</sup> Jan van Boeckel, ‘The world is breathing me’: Introduction to Artizein. *Artizein: Arts & Teaching Journal*, 2017, 2(2),Article 2.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Van Boeckel, January: CEMUS Opening Lecture: “A pedagogy of the light in the eyes” Being present in the present to what presents itself. An address on fostering attention through arts-based open-ended approaches in an age of ecological emergency, social unravelling and radical uncertainty. Hambergsalen, Geocentrum, Uppsala, Sweden. Viewable online [accessed 15 October 2019]/ [7, 8, 9, 10] Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Jules Michael, *An Fraughan* – ecosocial art practices involving the children of the national schools of St. Brendan’s, Drummond, Scoil Moling, Glynn, and St. Michaels, Newtown and Drummin Bog, St. Mullins, Co. Carlow, March - May 2019’, [project an exhibition poster] [see <https://drumminbog.com/2019/06/12/an-fraughan-school-exhibition-drummin-bog-carlow/>]

<sup>12</sup> Peter Reason et al., 2009, In: *Insider Voices: Human dimensions of low carbon technology*. Note: Prof. Peter Reason was co-editor of key SAGE Handbooks on action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, 2006, 2008), former director of the UK Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP) and co-founder of the MSc in Responsibility and Business Practice. I was particularly fortunate that his colleague, the late Dr Chris Seeley saw me present my developing transversal practice and research at the 2012 ‘The Home and the World’ art & ecology creative summit in Devon, see <http://artdotearth.org/the-home-theworld/>. Much of her research is available at <http://www.wildmargins.com/Home.html>

<sup>13</sup> Cathy Fitzgerald, *The Hollywood Forest Story – Living Well with a Forest to explain eco-social art practices using a Guattari Ecosophy – Action Research Framework*, 2018, [ebook, print-on-demand book]; available from <https://hollywoodforest.com/about/the-hollywood-forest-story-ebook-itunes/>

<sup>14</sup> Cathy Fitzgerald, *The Hollywood Forest Story – Living Well with a Forest to explain eco-social art practices using a Guattari Ecosophy – Action Research Framework*, 2018, [PhD thesis], available from <https://hollywoodforest.com/about/the-hollywood-forest-story-ebook-itunes/>

<sup>15</sup> George Lakoff, ‘Why it Matters How We Frame the Environment’, *Environmental Communication*, 4:1, 70-81, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17524030903529749> [accessed 17 October, 2019].

<sup>16</sup> 12.

<sup>17</sup> 14.

<sup>18</sup> *The Bog Rosemary Song* by Carole Nelson is her original composition for Drummin Bog and the three schools who participated in *An Fraughan*. Funded by Creative Ireland, the song is being sung with Carole in the three schools, before being performed by all on Drummin Bog in a finale.







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For further information related to Drummin Bog please see: [www.drumminbogproject.com](http://www.drumminbogproject.com)

Cover image (courtesy Cathy Fitzgerald): Newtown School visits Drummin Bog, 2019





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