

Portals to the World Exhibition Guide



BREAKING POINT

fragility in clay and nature



Use this guide to tour the Breaking Point exhibition

The Breaking Point exhibition brings the work of three artists into the Museum of Zoology. It challenges us to look differently at the impact of humans on the natural world. Explore how the artists used the museum's collections and conservation stories to inspire their work.

HARVEST, Mella Shaw

“By 2050 [in 30 years] there is predicted to be a greater weight of plastic in the oceans than fish”



HARVEST is displayed in the whale hall, near the reception desk.

This display case is filled with a pile of fish and every day plastic containers, both made of ceramic clay. It represents the statistic that in 30 years time the weight of plastic in the ocean will be greater than the weight of fish.

Image: Mella Shaw HARVEST (C) Sophie Mutevelian



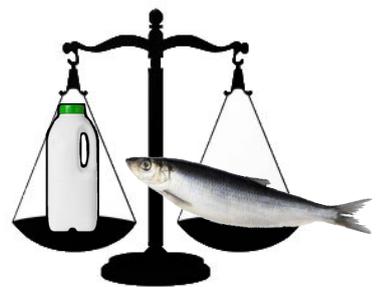
Clay cup, Cyprus, 1100-700BC
Fitzwilliam Museum

Why clay?

Clay has historically been a cheap material from which to create vessels. Pots made from clay have been used by humans throughout history in much of the world.

The new material of plastic has largely replaced clay as one in which we transport items cheaply.

Plastics have been both beneficial and harmful. They are lightweight and can transport items like milk cheaply. They also last a long time and release harmful chemicals into our water, earth and air.



Weight is significant to this statistic, as one herring (1.5lbs, 680g) would weigh the same as 30 empty plastic milk bottles.



Mella Shaw

Mella uses her background in anthropology and a former career in museums and galleries, to inspire her work. Mella has made clay objects and installations that address reoccurring environmental themes of balance, tipping-points, fragility and loss.

Image: Mella Shaw installing 'HARVEST' © Mella Shaw

Red List of Endangered British Birds, Jayne Ivimey

When you arrive into the gallery, walk towards the long case to the left of the stairs. Here you will see a row of white ceramic forms. This collection represents all of the species on the Red List of Endangered British Birds. Each bird form is shaped to represent a bird in the museum collections. They lay flat with labels around their leg.



Image: Red List II (C) Jayne Ivimey

Four ceramic birds; from left to right: house sparrow, ringed plover, starling, yellowhammer.



Many bird specimens, like these woodpeckers, are unmounted. Making them easier to store and use as research specimens.



Ceramic model of white-tailed eagle

White-tailed eagle

Each bird represents a species on the Red List of Endangered British Birds.

One of these birds is the white-tailed eagle, recently successfully reintroduced to Scotland (1970s), Isle of Wight (2019) and soon Norfolk next year.



Mounted specimen of white-tailed eagle



Jayne Ivimey

Jayne creates a range of works that depict the natural world from her home in Norfolk. Having spent seven years working on bird conservation in New Zealand, much of her recent work includes references to birds and the challenges they face.

Image: Jayne Ivimey installing 'Red List' © University of Cambridge + Jacqueline Garget

Making-Do, Elspeth Owen

Elspeth's ceramic egg can be found downstairs in the lower gallery, alongside the rhino skeleton.



Elspeth's clay egg sits next to an elephant bird egg, pieced together by Sir David Attenborough with the help of local knowledge in Madagascar 60 years ago.



Sir David Attenborough is photographed using adhesive tape to hold together fragments of the large elephant bird egg.

He is recorded saying "With a jigsaw, you at least know that all of the pieces belong to the same puzzle and that they do go together somehow... this was different, much more exciting"

Image: Zoo Quest 1961 © BBC

Another clay egg has been broken and scattered around the gallery, such as in front of the hippo skeleton.

The Museum of Zoology and Cambridge Conservation Initiative work together to share stories of wildlife conservation.

Elspeth hopes that the two eggs will share a message of positivity. How there is a chance to gather up, to mend, to re-create, even in the most extreme of crisis'.



Image: Hippo with 'Making Do' © University of Cambridge + Jacqueline Garget



Elspeth Owen

Elspeth has a long established studio in Grantchester, near Cambridge. Elspeth's work has been shown worldwide, and is held in the permanent collections of the Fitzwilliam Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Image: Elspeth Owen installing 'Making Do' © University of Cambridge + Jacqueline Garget