Ellen Driscoll, the recipient of the ICA’s 2018 Outstanding Educator Award, applies a unique approach to storytelling and an inventive use of materials to her public artworks and smaller studio sculptures. In her practice, drawing and sculpture are interconnected and cross-pollinate to open up new ideas and forms. Whether working in ghostly white plastic, mosaic, or walnut and sumi inks, her projects fluidly map place and time while mining historical, environmental, and cultural themes. Over a decade ago, she began to take on issues of consumption, excess, and the effects of the petrochemical industry. More recently, she has introduced the resilience displayed by the natural world in the face of sociopolitical threats.

In January 2007, while in residence at the MacDowell Colony, Driscoll pledged to work exclusively with repurposed or found materials. This promise led her to the Peterborough Town Recycling Center, where she began collecting gallon milk and water jugs. Back in New York, she continued harvesting #2 plastic in the early morning before sanitation department recycling trucks swept it away. These petroleum-based containers associated with essential drinks would become her material of choice over the next few years. Around the same time, she was creating a new installation for “Thoreau Reconsidered” at Wave Hill. Phantom Limb, made in collaboration with Golnar Adel and Ameen Boura, who were instrumental in developing the fabrication methods, introduced the vocabulary of undulations in Driscoll’s subsequent works. These sculptures are all grounded in Henry David Thoreau’s ideas about self-reliance and egalitarian relationships based on trust and mutual respect. Collecting, cleaning, and meticulously fabricating these sculptures from material removed from the waste stream are self-reliant acts. They are also collective, in the sense that each piece has absorbed the activities that span centuries and locations, which he divided to mark 52 equal plots and connected these elements in a space that would be flooded by Hurricane Sandy in 2012. Installed in a former boiler building with soaring ceilings, FastForwardFossil Part 1 resonated with views of Lower Manhattan, the East River, and Brooklyn Bridge Park. It also underscored the massive changes altering the social, cultural, architectural, and natural landscape of the DUMBO neighborhood.

The installation brought the sculpture together with a series of large-scale drawings that critique the off-l Garner dependence on oil and warn against rampant consumption. Ocean fires, a floating glacier, anachronistic towers, garbage scows, abandoned shopping malls, conglomerated slums, and refugee camps convey cautionary scenarios. Foreboding shifts of scale and perspective in the drawings echo the sculpture’s ghostly apocalyptic sensibility. Blue and black ink washes allude to atmosphere and water, disturbed by carefully rendered details of impending disaster.

While the FastForwardFossil drawings suggest water, Still Life (2010) actually floated on the surface of a pond at Allan- dale Farm in Brookline, Massachusetts. The reflectivity of the water immediately altered the reading, amplifying the significance of oil transport and distribution via waterways. The North and South American continental, with an adjacent Tower of Babel, became a platform for addressing global interconnections of oil production and consumption. The floating plastic formation created an unavoidable association with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, which occurred in April 2010. This waterborne installation at a garden center, CSA, and summer camp signaled a sense of hopefulness in community and a spirit of “getting off the shoulders of others” that Thoreau would have appreciated.

In 2011, Driscoll created Distant Mirrors for the Providence River, a truly site-specific project that connected global consumption with European settlement of the area that is now Providence. Rather than harvesting her materials from the streets, this time she received them from the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation, which donated a 200-pound section of a plastic bale for the sculpture. Driscoll and her team documented the collected debris and scum, which established the same reflective qualities as Still Life, being used in a flowing river, it immediately collected debris and scum, which established a dialogue with trash and other floating detritus. Here, the place of Driscoll’s sculptures in the waste stream became visibly apparent. Over the past few years, residencies and exhibitions have extended Driscoll’s reach. In 2015, she created a new body of site-specific work for “Soundings,” an exhibition at Kentler International Drawing Space in the Red Hook neighborhood of Brooklyn. The project was conceived and developed in dialogue with Margaret Cogswell, a long-time friend, whose fugue-based video installations address post-industrial rivers. For “Soundings,” Cogswell’s drawings focused on the surfacing of choice over the next few years.
which flourish in adverse conditions, is a
50
appear in silhouette and add a sense of
notes that the presence of these plants,
direct you around the draw ings. Tw o hori-
zontal draw ings in the series em phasize
the role of trade through diagram m atic
prevailed in Red H ook. 4
Driscoll calls them  vectors that
made the plant life m ore pronounced and
hopeful. Considered w eeds, m any of these
neighborhood three years earlier, w hich
charcoal is used in biorem ediation) and
rem ove lead and other contam inants from
nut and sum i inks poured onto and
ate professor in the departm ent of architec-
ture at the U niversity at Buffalo, directs
A nts of the Prairie, an architectural practice
that focuses on confronting ecological prob-
cmp lems with creative solutions, such as incor-
porating wildlife habitats into constructed
environments. Hume, an architect who also
teaches at the University at Buffalo, super-
vised the project’s construction with SUNY
Charleston student. Mary Miss
and Olivia Georgia introduced Driscoll and
Huang for City as Living Laboratory (CALL). When
that project did not transpose, they created
Bower for Artpark in Lewiston, New York, as a
CALL project, drawing on their related
expertise and interests. The installation fea-
tures framed sections of a house contain-
ing birdhouses and glass window panels
that draw attention to local species as well
as to the rising rate of bird-strike deaths.
These panels give a new  form  and function
to elem ents developed in Driscoll’s draw-
ings. Located on the migration path
for the purple martin between Canada and Latin America, Bower raises awareness
about potential disruptions to flight pat-
tways. Accom panying information allows
park visitors to learn how human develop-
ment is threatening birds.
The use of maps has been a consistent
element throughout Driscoll’s sculpture,
drawings, and public art. She often shifts
color and orientation to underscore the
subjectivity of a map, highlighting its spe-
cific context and inability to convey the
entirety of experience. Maps are the focus of
CartOLyography (2016), two mosaic murals commissioned by Public Art for Pub-
lic Schools for Middle College High School and the International High School located on the LaGuardia Community College
ampus in Long Island City, New York, where
students are recent arrivals to the U.S. and
speak more than 40 different languages.
Driscoll conducted six mapping and geogra-
phy workshops during the process as a way
to orient students to the project.
To create the design, she made water-
color drawings of “upside-down” and “right-
side-up” maps of the world, which she then
cut into strips and wove together. This
method shifts how color typically delineates
countries and continents, mixing up the
orientation and understanding of land and
water. Descerching the finished product
requires familiarity with geography. A simi-
lar weaving technique characterizes a m ural
map of the five boroughs. Punctuating a
horizon line, the boroughs read as islands
floating on a ground of reflective silver
mosaic tiles, an effect that underscores the
city’s global nature. The firm Mossaka fabri-
cated the work, and Driscoll hand-painted
areas on site to create a shimmering sur-
face.
Together, these recent projects demon-
strate how Driscoll’s practice intertwaves
the studio and the public realm. In the
model of teaching and mentoring students,
first at RISD and now at Bard College,
problem-solving public commissions, and
immersing herself in the studio, she rumi-
nates on the postcolonial climate. She
reaches widely for sources in nature, his-
tory, art, and politics, synthesizing the
results of her explorations in provocative
sculpture and drawings.

Jennifer McGregor is the senior director of
Arts, Education, and Programs at Wave Hill.
Ellen Driscoll and Joyce Huang in collaboration
with Matt Hume, Bower, 2016. 3 architectural frag-
ments in the landscape with 40 birdhouses and 4
glass windows with bird-strike pattern, wood, and
glass, $15 x 10 x 18 ft; each. 2 views of work as
installed at Artpark, Lewiston, N.Y.

1 These became the basis of Faster Than You (2018), an installation at the Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles, California.
2 Huang also prepared the Cupola (2015), a decorative glass cupola, in collaboration with Joyce Huang and Matt Hume.
3 For more on Ellen Driscoll and Joyce Huang, see Jennifer Purtle’s essay in this issue. Driscoll was recently named the 2018
    recipient of the American Academy of Arts and Letters’s Architecture Award. For more on recent exhibitions, see www.ellen-
    driscoll.com.
4 Artists’ talk with M argaret Cogswell and Ellen Driscoll, Septem ber 19, 2015, <https:/ /vimeo.com/139871961>.
5 Part of the waveولات و الموجات أو الموجات (2002), an installation at Al-Sadd Country Club, in Doha, Qatar, and Sunflower (2006),
    an installation at the Morton Antiquities Centre, Malta. This work is also included in Distant Mirrors: 2002–2011. Courtesy The Artist.
6 Recent works include a 2017 residency at the Dora M aar H ouse in France, Driscoll spent the fall of 2015 as a resi-
dency at the University of Buffalo, directs the ArtPark project in New York’s Chinatown as part of the
    Humanitas G allery of Long Island U niversity, Brooklyn, New York.
7 Part of this project was completed during a 2015 residency at the Dora M aar H ouse in France. Toward M aximum
    (2016), a collaborative project w ith Joyce Huang and Matt H um e. H w ang, an associ-
    ate professor in the departm ent of architec-

7.9  Ellen Driscoll and Joyce Huang in collaboration with Matt Hume, Bower, 2016. 3 architectural frag-
ments in the landscape with 40 birdhouses and 4 glass windows with bird-strike pattern, wood, and
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8.14  Ellen Driscoll and Joyce Huang in collaboration with Matt Hume, Bower, 2016. 3 architectural frag-
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13.17  Ellen Driscoll and Joyce Huang in collaboration with Matt Hume, Bower, 2016. 3 architectural frag-
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18.20  Ellen Driscoll and Joyce Huang in collaboration with Matt Hume, Bower, 2016. 3 architectural frag-
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23.23  Ellen Driscoll and Joyce Huang in collaboration with Matt Hume, Bower, 2016. 3 architectural frag-
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28.26  Ellen Driscoll and Joyce Huang in collaboration with Matt Hume, Bower, 2016. 3 architectural frag-
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33.29  Ellen Driscoll and Joyce Huang in collaboration with Matt Hume, Bower, 2016. 3 architectural frag-
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38.32  Ellen Driscoll and Joyce Huang in collaboration with Matt Hume, Bower, 2016. 3 architectural frag-
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