





one
PIECE
at a
time

Surf your way along Olmsted Walk and encounter colorful creatures sending out an SOS from the oceans that sustain all life on Earth.

BY LISA DUCHENE

PHOTOS FROM THE WASHED ASHORE PROJECT

At first glance, Zora Belle the rockhopper penguin is just a fun, welcoming, larger-than-life character. Her eyes are a warm, fiery red. Her bright-orange beak turns upward in a friendly greeting. Funky yellow spikes pop up from her head like an edgy hairdo.

A closer look reveals far more to her story. Zora Belle is made of discarded plastic objects found upon beaches: toilet seats and fake logs, black pipes and yellow scrub brushes. Her orange beak includes safety cones and a toy dinosaur.

Then there's Flash: a brilliant, blue marlin fiercely rising from the surf of his sculpted base. Flash was formed of all sorts of plastic trash: slices of big blue barrels, blue and white grates and grids, an umbrella handle, and clear bottles—bottles upon bottles upon bottles.

Zora Belle and Flash are just two of 17 vibrant, larger-than-life marine creatures, all sculpted of plastic trash found on beaches. They're part of the "Washed Ashore: Art to Save the Sea" traveling exhibition, which will grace Olmsted Walk and some of the buildings along it from May 27 through September 5. (See "Dive Into the Exhibit" on page 33 for a guide to sculpture-spotting.)

Unhappy Meals

Though modern pieces of art, Zora Belle and Flash are not abstract. Neither is the problem they embody. Each animal character in "Washed Ashore" testifies to the enormity of pollution in Earth's oceans. Millions of tons of plastic wash into the sea each year—or are dumped there. That deadly tide could increase tenfold by 2025.

For a firsthand glimpse of how marine debris affects wildlife, swing by American



Trail to see Tinkerbelle, the Zoo's brown pelican. She was rescued off the Florida coast in 2001 after being ensnared in plastic fishing line. The superstrong filament had sliced into her wings, destroying crucial ligaments. Tinkerbelle never flew again. Had she not been rescued, she would have perished, probably from starvation.

Nearby on American Trail frolic the Zoo's endlessly engaging seals and sea lions. They

feast three or four times a day on fish, but many of their wild cousins are less fortunate. Marine mammals and sea turtles often mistake plastic bags for food. The bag can then wreak havoc on the animal's internal organs. It can also create a false sense of fullness—dissuading the creature from finding more food, leading in turn to malnutrition.

Even the Zoo's smallest creatures—coral polyps on exhibit in Amazonia—



“What Can I Do?”

SPREAD THE WORD!
Bring family and friends to see Washed Ashore (May 27-Sept. 5), then show us on social media how you're making a difference by reducing, reusing, and recycling discarded plastics. Use #ScienceSavesSeas to share your wildlife-saving actions.

BAG THE BAGS
Pack your purchases in reusable bags rather than the familiar plastic ones. If you're caught unprepared, seek ways to repurpose or recycle the plastic. You can also buy reusable sandwich bags in Zoo shops.

SCORE A BASKET
Have a single-serving coffee maker? Buying a reusable basket means an end to those piles of used plastic cups.

SKIP THE STRAW
Sip straight from the glass, preventing huge amounts of wasted plastic. For both environmental and animal-safety reasons, Zoo concessions do not offer straws.

RESET THE TABLE
Planning takeout or delivery for dinner? Use your own silverware and tell the restaurant to hold the plastic utensils.

THINK DRINK
Get a metal, ceramic, or other reusable container for your water and other beverages rather than buying plastic bottle after bottle.

KEEP EXPLORING OPTIONS
Think of something plastic that you use, particularly just once. Is there an alternative material you could use instead?

are imperiled by plastic pollution in the ocean. Coral conservationist Mike Henley, a former Zoo keeper, has found polyps shrouded in plastic during his reef dives. It can prevent the polyp from opening and catching food, and even wear away the animal's tissue. Henley and Smithsonian scientist Mary Hagedorn are pioneering ways to collect and deep-freeze coral polyps in the hope of repopulating reefs destroyed by pollution and global warming.

Henley gently removes any reef-smothering plastic he finds, but that's only, well, a drop in the ocean. Confronting this global eco-crisis will take massive determination and a willingness to make lifestyle changes. (See "What Can I Do?" on page 31 to learn how you can help.)

Forging such determination requires awareness of the issue. That's where artist Angela Haseltine Pozzi comes in.

From Sorrow to Shoreline

"Everything in my life led here," says Haseltine Pozzi. "I feel this is my calling." She grew up on the coast of Oregon, where she loved exploring tide pools and learned the name of every creature she found.

Haseltine Pozzi also grew up understanding the power of the arts. Her dad was a museum director, her mother a professional artist. Haseltine Pozzi studied to be a dancer and loved the collaboration that went into performances. For 30 years, she taught art in public and private schools as well as at universities and museums.

Life changed in 2004, when Haseltine Pozzi lost her husband and best friend of 25 years, a fellow artist, to complications from a brain tumor. She returned to the Oregon coast in 2007, grieving and broken. "I decided the only thing to do was go to the ocean and start a new life," she says. "I felt the ocean would always be there for me—reliable and unchanging."

She and her dog walked the shoreline day after day—stepping over the plastic trash on the beach, trying not to see it.

"Every time we go to buy something, we need to think about what will happen to it. Where is it going to end up?"

ARTIST ANGELA HASELTINE POZZI



Freshly collected seashore debris awaits sorting by size and color.

She began making and selling artwork fashioned from thrift store finds.

Then the debris really started to nag at her. One day, the line of plastic stretched as far down the beach as she could see. She watched as other people ignored it to focus on beautiful things like shells and agate.

Haseltine Pozzi started to wonder. What would make people pay attention to that plastic trash? What would be beautiful and catch the eye? What if she created something so big, so global that it could reach the whole world and save the sea?

Putting It Together

The result is the Washed Ashore Project. "I thought it through and just got started," says Haseltine Pozzi. "I basically believe people are good. Everybody loves the ocean. Nobody wants to hurt it. I needed

to bring ocean debris to them in a way that they'd want to see the sculptures and get their pictures taken next to them and tell everybody about them. This is about reaching everybody."

Haseltine Pozzi inspired a dedicated staff and volunteers to help with her ocean-size undertaking. Since 2010, they've removed 18 tons of plastic trash from the seashore and transformed it into 68 sculptures. A sculpture takes six to eight months to create.

Each plastic piece in a sculpture represents the handiwork of many people. One person picked up that piece on a beach,

someone else washed it, and another put it in the right bucket. Someone cut it to the right size, someone else drilled a hole, another set of hands wired it in place, and yet another screwed it solidly into the sculpture.

"Every little piece of these sculptures shows that every little action does add up," says Haseltine Pozzi. "It does matter. It takes hundreds of people to make the sculptures. Just as in life, working together can make big things happen."

The Washed Ashore Project is designed so that anyone can work on a sculpture. People

drop in for a few minutes or a whole day and contribute to the artwork in progress. The organization matches the skill level of staff and volunteers to the steps of the process—reflecting Haseltine Pozzi's years of experience teaching art to people of all ages and skill levels.

Haseltine Pozzi does the heads and finishing work. "I really feel like I'm creating the voices of the animals," she says.

The Power of One

Helping those animal voices be heard is the Zoo's goal in hosting the "Washed Ashore" exhibit. Every animal in the park—indeed, every animal on the globe—depends in some form or fashion on the oceans that blanket 70 percent of the planet's surface.

The majority of Earth's animals—from microscopic organisms to the blue whale,



When it comes to saving the sea, your two arms can do more than an octopus's eight.

largest of all creatures—dwell in the sea. Coral reefs alone provide habitats for some 4,000 fish species, and many others depend on reef dwellers. Millions of people rely on coral reefs for their livelihoods.

That's not all. Tiny marine plants produce at least half the oxygen in our atmosphere. The vast expanses of saltwater absorb heat from the sun, and ocean currents distribute it around the world, making habitats more life-friendly. Sea creatures feed a host of species, including ours.

Given the vastness of the plastic pollution problem and the incredibly high stakes for life on Earth, it's all too easy to feel overwhelmed, even defeated, by this ecological emergency. Reducing the amount of plastic invading the ocean will take "substantial resources and time," warns a recent article in *Science*. A particular challenge will be improving waste management in developing countries, where populations and economies are rapidly growing.

So what do we do? The Washed Ashore Project team suggests focusing on a single

number—one. What is one thing that one person can do to reduce the amount of plastic that goes into the trash?

"Simply changing one thing," says Patrick Chandler, the project's education director, "makes you think about it in a different way." Just as adding a piece of plastic to the trash compounds the problem, subtracting one is a step toward a solution.

"Success looks like a few million people making a different choice of the materials they use," says Chandler. That's particularly true if changes in consumer behavior spur industry to create new, more ocean-friendly products.

Both Chandler and Haseltine Pozzi see the disturbingly beautiful "Washed Ashore" sculptures as more than environmental alarms. They want the exhibit to be a wave of hope that inspires everyone who sees it to end plastic pollution the way it began—one piece at a time. **SZ**

— LISA DUCHENE *is an independent writer-editor with more than two decades' experience writing about marine issues.*

Dive Into the Exhibit

Here are the cool, colorful creatures you'll meet as you walk downhill from the Connecticut Avenue gates.

PARROT FISH
Just inside the gates

BLUE MARLIN
Outside Visitor Center

YELLOW JELLY & ORANGE ANEMONE
Visitor Center lobby

WHALE RIB CAGE & FLIP-FLOP FISH
Zoo in Your Backyard

TUFTED PUFFIN
Panda Plaza

SHARK & ROCKHOPPER PENGUIN
Outside Elephant House

SEA STAR
Opposite Przewalski's horses

SEA LION PUP
Opposite Small Mammal House

GIANT PACIFIC OCTOPUS
In front of Great Ape House

FISH BITE FISH
Think Tank

NORTHERN FUR SEAL
Lemur Island

SUNSET BEACH MURAL
Mane Grill

GIANT SEA JELLY
Lower Zoo entrance

CORAL REEF
Amazonia