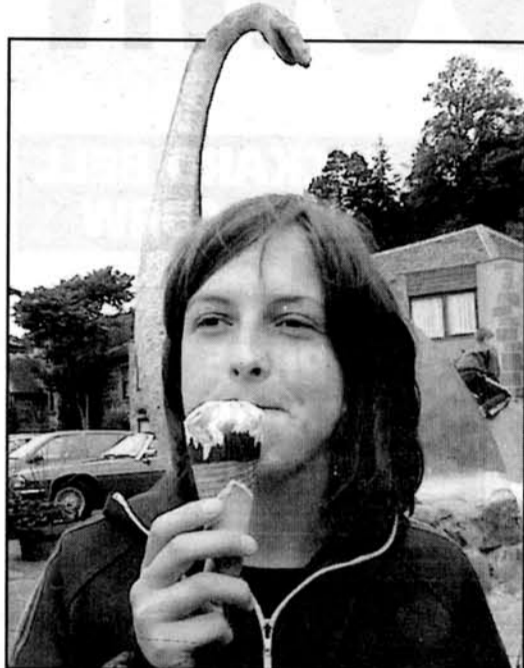
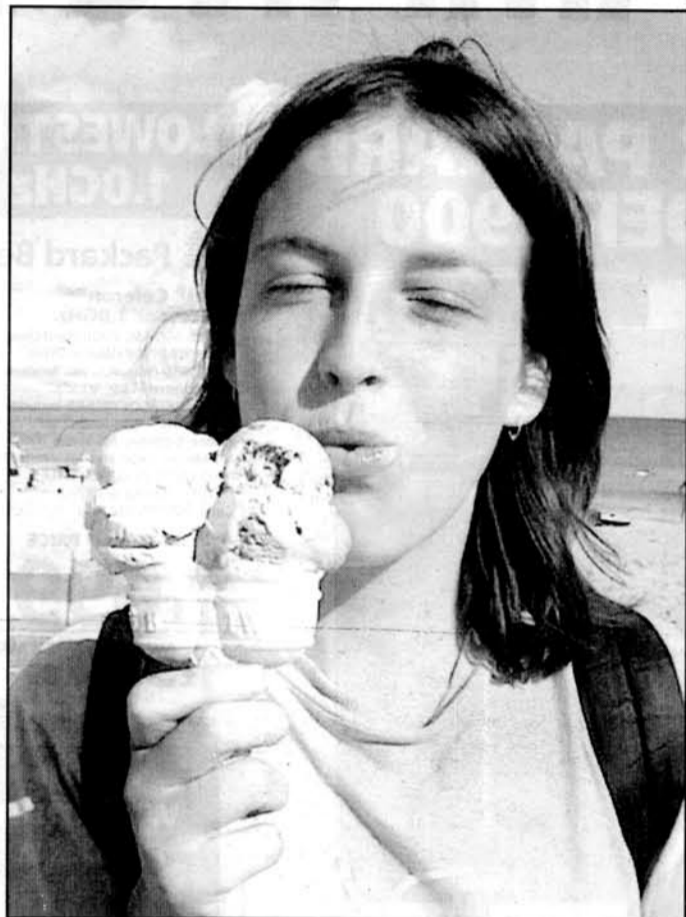


Hard act to swallow



You are what you eat, or so the old adage would have us believe. Artist Ellie Harrison decided to take the maxim to heart, photographing and logging everything she ate from one birthday to the next. STEVE MORGAN chewed the fat with her



ELLIE HARRISON says she has “always been obsessed with food – I love eating”. But the last year of her life has seen the Ealing artist up the ante to extraordinary levels.

During the past 12 months – starting on the morning of her 22nd birthday with half a slice of toast and Snickers spread, Harrison has photographed *everything* – bar liquids – she has consumed.

Whether at home, at college in Nottingham, on holiday in Scotland, anything she has eaten, from full meals to party snacks, has been snapped with her trusty digital camera.

The resulting pictures, painstakingly logged with times and venues, form the basis of a truly unique diary *Eat 22* – living proof in this instance that you really are what you eat.

“I can’t believe I’ve got through a whole year and haven’t missed a single photo yet,” she said four days before the project comes to an end on Monday – her 23rd birthday.

“Funnily, it’s probably got easier to do as it’s gone on – and I’ve never forgotten.

“In fact, I probably think about my camera before I think about food. It’ll be weird waking up on Tuesday morning and not having to photograph anything.”

To celebrate, Harrison is collating her photos – 1,640 in all – in an animated film running just short of three minutes. It will be screened at the 291 Gallery in Hackney on Tuesday night. She is also baking a job lot of cakes for any visitors.

For those unable to get across to

east London, her website, updated every week, contains all the photos and details.

Unlike a lot of today’s rather pofaced modern artists, she thankfully isn’t given to taking her work too seriously.

She laughs regularly during our chat as I pore, fascinated, over her diary entries. Her parents – she recently moved back to Ealing after graduating with a first-class degree in fine art – have backed her all the way. “My dad quite likes taking the pictures.”

Harrison is a former pupil of Drayton Manor High School – alma mater of Turner Prize winner Steve McQueen. Her project has resulted in some publicity. But she hasn’t really pursued that angle because “doing the project takes up so much time – and this week I’ll be busy baking cakes”.

She was selected for a recent festival of emerging artists in Nottingham and also appeared in this month’s *Face* magazine.

But how does she think outsiders interpret the project – does it bother her if anyone thinks she’s crazy?

“It’s serious in the fact that I’ve done it for 12 months, but I don’t like to take anything too seriously – I don’t like art that’s really serious or morbid.

“It’s meant to be a quirky and a bit of fun.”

I bite the bullet and confess my initial thoughts on hearing about her idea led me to envisage someone either overweight or stick-thin – certainly not someone whose weight seems so average.

“But if you think about it, I suppose it is an eating disorder of sorts to take pictures of your food!” she chortles.

“It is a bit odd – and is quite embarrassing when I’m on my own. I tend not to eat that much when I’m on my own anymore – on trains is the worst.”

“It has completely changed the way I eat, too. Instead of eating lots of little things, I tend to eat less frequently but really pile it up. New Year’s Day was such a binge.”

Would she tackle anything like this again?

“I don’t know – it’s hard to know what to do next. For quite a long time, maybe half a year, I thought I might keep going, but it tends to rule your life.

“Maybe I should get on with other things instead – it might wear a bit thin eventually.”

If there’s a better definition of food for thought, then I’ve yet to find it.

● *Eat 22* is at the 291 Gallery, 291 Hackney Road, on Tuesday between 7pm-midnight. For further edible details visit www.ellieharrison.com/eat22.htm

Sticky moments: Ellie Harrison gets her just desserts in Scotland (strawberry Cornetto) and Wales (double scoop cone) and has her chips – and mayonnaise – below

