

'Folkestone Triennial', This is tomorrow, 2 October 2017.

# this is tomorrow

Contemporary Art Magazine

Folkestone Triennial, various locations

## Folkestone Triennial



Folkestone Triennial is a story within a story. It beckons the visitor to open the book of Folkestone with its historical tales of Roman Villas, bustling ports, French connections and abandoned trade routes. Beyond chapters of the past, it's also a place actively grappling with its identity and future.

This year's Triennial is titled 'Double Edge'. The plot thickens! Built between two cliffs, Folkestone sprawls across a valley with the ancient Pent Stream carving a geological divide between east and west. The other edge is the coastal frontier facing France, where harbour development plans aim to lessen the cultural divide between people on one side of the valley and the other. In its best moments the Triennial draws on these sharp edges of division and potential unification.

Outsiders are welcomed at Folkestone Central rail station with an unmissable banner by Bob and Roberta Smith emphatically stating in bold capitals: 'Folkestone Is An Art School'. It's a big, loud claim reiterated through the urban centre. With one massive banner splashed across a martello tower, Smith's work elucidates there's something important here worth defending.

The backstreet walk from station to seafront, uncovers a plethora of works from the tender, little shell compositions of Amalia Pica to Marc Schmitz and Dolgor Ser-Od's ludicrously large megaphone. Several artists have splashed tired exteriors with colour. Michael Craig-Martin has painted the town red, yellow, blue along with a selection of his usual brights. While Sinta Tantra borrowed from Sonia Delauney for The Cube building's makeover. Other featured artists commissioned by the Creative Foundation are Alex Hartley, Antony Gormley, Bill Woodrow, David Shrigley, Diane Dever and the Decorators, Emily Peasgood, Gary Woodley, HoyCheong Wong, Jonathan Wright, Lubaina Himid, Nomedada and Gediminas Urbonas, Richard Woods, Rigo 23, Sol Calero and Studio Ben Allen.

Emily Peasgood's standout piece 'Halfway to Heaven', is an acoustic treat at the top of a narrow staircase. Located in a raised Baptist burial ground, visitors trigger the hymn-styled recordings of several narratives, inspired by the people buried there until around 150 years ago. This was a small community of Baptists permanently segregated in death, forbidden to be buried in the local Anglican cemetery. As geography and development would have it, the grounds were originally located on a steep cliff, gauged over time for housing development. So the burial ground has ended up as a little island perched about 20 feet above street level. Bringing this 'lost' community of the dead into the present is a poignant reminder of the shame of religious segregation.

HoyCheong Wong has used simple scaffolding structures and netting to create a stunning, light enhanced facade for the Islamic Community Centre. It is an otherwise modest, almost hidden building. Yet, for almost 30 years Muslims from as far as 40 miles away have travelled there for worship. While not religious himself, Wong's proud embrace of another's faith seems a timely gesture of tolerance going forward.

A vigorous advocate of inclusivity Diane Dever, co-founder of Folkestone Fringe, has created the Urban Room. Teaming up with community-minded designers The Decorators, Dever transformed the old Customs House into an information source of place and an ideas generator for the future. Outdoor, mobile furniture is a particularly easygoing way to introduce the public to the scheme and is shared by lunching builders, gossiping teens and anyone enjoying their spoils from the nearby La Casa del Gelato van. Dever's intention is to gather suggestions from residents themselves who live amongst rapid regeneration and social change.

Dotted in the most unexpected places throughout Folkestone is Richard Woods' 'Holiday Home'. His vividly coloured, cartoonish collection of six cottages personifies the desperate grapple for land development spaces and knocked together public housing in conjunction with giddy swooning over the ideal holiday home. Woods' work becomes a Triennial 'Where's Wally' in its comedic placements including treading water in the harbour shallows.

Marking the eastern most site, Alex Hartley's 'Wall' teeters on the vulnerable, crumbling cliff edge. He furnishes the landscape with collapse at any minute. The cage walls made of the same materials which run alongside the Eurotunnel's rail track to prevent illegal immigration into the UK, deliver a sombre punchline to the Double Edge concept. 'Wall' is weighted with discarded quern stones which date back to pre-Roman times. Those broken during production were simply tossed away. Hartley's use of these once dispensable and now valuable artifacts, amplifies a collective concern about people whose value to the community is largely only recognised in retrospect.

While many visitors will be locals and daytrippers, it's worth taking the weekend for the Folkestone Triennial. There's a whole lot more than this year's artworks to experience. For instance, reaching one of Antony Gormley's sculptures is impossible without waiting for low tide then walking through Coronation Parade's hallway of arches. Carpeted in algae, each arch provides a stunning view out to sea and a sense of walking through a filmset, like Asghar Farhadi's 'About Elly'. Or from Lubaina Himid's 'Jelly Mould Pavilion', it's a short walk along the seafront to the Zig Zag Path embedded with a concrete rat if you can find it. Built in Victorian times, every level offers a new and glorious vista. The demanding ascent is rewarded with war letter recordings from previous Triennial artist Christian Boltanski. Descend the Road of Remembrance and traipse past hundreds of crocheted poppies acknowledging the thousands who left for war by this shoreline. For many, a final view of their homeland. Sent by individuals throughout the country, the poppies are carefully removed, washed and replaced by Academy FM's broadcaster Kay McLoughlin and her friends. The sense of involvement, history and creativity in this town is palpable and the Triennial offers a fruitful book opener to a much broader story.