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England's
**CREATIVE
COAST**

PRESS RELEASE

ENGLAND'S CREATIVE COAST OPENS TO THE PUBLIC IN MARGATE



Michael Rakowitz: 'April is the cruellest month'. A *Waterfronts* commission with Turner Contemporary for England's Creative Coast.
Photo © Thierry Bal

England's Creative Coast
1 May - 12 November 2021
www.englishcreativecoast.com

England's Creative Coast launched today with a digital launch event hosted by lead partner Turner Contemporary. This ambitious project spans the dramatic Essex, Kent and East Sussex coastlines, offering visitors a new outdoor cultural experience that innovatively connects art with landscape, local stories with international perspectives, and crosses between physical and digital realms.

From May to November this year, visitors to the region can encounter **Waterfronts**, a series of seven site-specific artworks by leading contemporary artists **Andreas Angelidakis, Mariana Castillo-Deball, Holly Hendry, Jasleen Kaur, Katrina Palmer, Pilar Quinteros** and **Michael Rakowitz** that take the **border between land and sea as their inspiration**. Curated by **Tamsin Dillon**, the commissions each reflect on their partner's coastal locations, exploring each town's layered histories and complexities and its relationship to the rest of the world. These extraordinarily diverse works are the starting points for the **world's first art Geotour — a digital treasure trail of art caches made by local communities** that will take people off the beaten track to reveal the creative spirit of each place.

Stretching 1400km from the Thames Estuary to the East Sussex Downs via the fabled White Cliffs of Dover, this section of Britain's coast has long been a magnet for tourists and for artists, including JMW Turner who believed Margate's skies to be "the loveliest in all Europe". It is now home to some of the UK's most distinctive galleries and arts organisations joining forces for the first time for England's Creative Coast: [Cement Fields](#) in Gravesend, which together with [Metal](#) in Southend-on-Sea this year presents [Estuary 21](#); [Creative Folkestone](#), which this summer presents the fifth edition of the Folkestone Triennial, [The Plot](#); the [De La Warr Pavilion](#) in Bexhill-on-Sea, an iconic modernist masterpiece created in 1935 to be a 'People's Palace'; [Hastings Contemporary](#), built among Hasting's famous net huts where it overlooks the largest beach-launched fishing fleet in Europe; [Towner Eastbourne](#), which has collected and exhibited contemporary art for almost 100 years and an Art Fund Museum of the Year in 2020; and [Turner Contemporary](#) in Margate, which this year celebrates its tenth anniversary and has welcomed more than 3.5 million visits since opening.

England's Creative Coast opens to the public on Saturday 1 May with Turner Contemporary presenting the Nasher Prize-winning artist Michael Rakowitz's *Waterfronts* commission for Margate, 'April is the cruellest month', and six geocaches to be discovered in sites across the town.

The project then opens with of each of the partner organisations sequentially:

From Saturday 22 May (co-commissions with Estuary 2021):

- Cement Fields in Gravesend presents Jasleen Kaur: 'The first thing I did was to kiss the ground'
- Metal in Southend-on-sea presents Katrina Palmer: 'Hello' and 'Retreat'

From Saturday 29 May:

- De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea presents Holly Hendry: 'Invertebrate'
- Hastings Contemporary presents Andreas Angelidakis: 'Seawall'
- Towner Eastbourne presents Mariana Castillo Deball: 'Walking through the town I followed a pattern on the pavement that became the magnified silhouette of a woman's profile'
- Creative Folkestone presents Pilar Quinteros: 'Janus Fortress Folkestone' (a co-commission with the 2021 Folkestone Triennial, 'The Plot')

For full information about each of the partner's **Waterfronts** commission, accompanying GeoTour and wider programme, please visit the [media centre](#).

Introducing *England's Creative Coast* at today's launch event, **Oliver Dowden MP, UK Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport**, said:

"This isn't your average cultural project. It ties together the best of creativity, tourism and innovation in the world's first ever art digital Geotour. It will be an immersive experience, spurring residents and visitors to

get out and explore their coast while enjoying great art. And what better time than when people are prevented from taking their usual holidays abroad to remind people of the jewels right on their doorstep? Art and culture is so important for our physical and mental wellbeing. It enriches our days and makes our lives worth living.”

Victoria Pomery OBE, Director of lead partner Turner Contemporary, stated:

“Turner Contemporary is delighted to be leading this brilliant initiative alongside VisitKent, bringing the South East coast’s arts organisations together in a powerful partnership. While the partners are very different from one another, we all share a belief in the power of art to have a transformational impact on people and places. After the challenges of the last year, it is by working in collaboration that we can collectively bring about change that extends far beyond the gallery walls. England’s Creative Coast is a remarkably ambitious and innovative project which aims to connect the area’s natural landscape, local stories and world class art.”

Sarah Dance, Project Director of England’s Creative Coast, explained her vision:

“The inspiration for our project are coastal towns: places that have always been sites of encounter and inspiration, places of destination, departure and arrival where local and international perspectives meet. At its heart England’s Creative Coast is about connections — connecting people to places, artists with the coast, creative organisations with landscape and with each other, and about connecting visitors to the history of the people and places on the coast. Ultimately it is about using the power of partnership to forge human connections: allowing people to explore a place, an artwork, and its community, together — something that is needed now more than ever”

Visit Kent Chief Executive, Deirdre Wells OBE, said:

“We’re really excited for the launch of England’s Creative Coast. Our county’s coastline has been inspiring artists for centuries, and this compelling new addition gives yet another reason for visitors to come and explore our breath-taking landscapes and be inspired by the creativity of our seaside towns first-hand. What’s more, with these commissions being embedded within the natural landscape, they provide a naturally safe way for visitors to start rediscovering just what the region has to offer in-line with the Government’s road to recovery post-lockdown.”

England’s Creative Coast Curator Tamsin Dillon introduced the ***Waterfronts*** commissions, seven temporary site-specific artworks:

“The artists were invited to consider this unique coastline and its role as the border defining the natural and political edge of the country. They have each made a new work in response to one particular place on the coast; taking the natural and human histories they have encountered and discovered there, as well as the most urgent contemporary issues affecting them, as starting points for their works. The *Waterfronts* series of works offer audiences many ways of thinking about and reconsidering this landscape.

“The human figure, or elements of it, is central to several works including Michael Rakowitz’s statue in Margate, Mariana Castillo Deball’s silhouette of a woman’s head and shoulders drawn out of the streets of Eastbourne, Jasleen Kaur’s top knot in Gravesend and Pilar Quinteros’ double-faced head of the mythical Janus in Folkestone. Other works take forms inspired by ‘ready-made’ concrete structures found in coastal areas. Andreas Angelidakis’ group of soft sculptures in Hastings, are based on concrete sea defence structures and Katrina Palmer has reinvented the sound-mirror in her concrete structure in Shoeburyness. In Bexhill Holly Hendry’s huge worm-like sculpture has consumed materials of all kinds from across the town to construct itself in and around the De La Warr Pavilion.”

Today sees the unveiling of the first of seven new works that form part of the *Waterfronts* series: 'April is the cruellest month', a commission by artist Michael Rakowitz for Turner Contemporary in Margate:

'April is the cruellest month' introduces a new life-sized statue on the Margate seafront, in dialogue with the Surfboat memorial figure of a lifeguard who gazes out to sea to rescue people and overlooked by the shelter where T.S. Eliot wrote part of 'The Waste Land' while recovering from a nervous breakdown a hundred years ago — and from which Rakowitz takes his work's title. 'On Margate Sands. I can connect nothing with nothing,' Eliot wrote and its theme of connection reverberates through the Iraqi-American's sculpture and practice as a whole.

Rakowitz's sculpture is modelled after Daniel Taylor, a young soldier who served with the Royal Artillery in Basra, Iraq, during the Iraq War and whom Rakowitz counts as a friend. His figure is cast out of an aggregate the artist has made from concrete, calcite, sand and earth from Basra with chalk from Margate in which is embedded fossil-like items that embody trauma: military medals and other votive offerings that have been personally donated by Taylor and members of Veterans for Peace UK and by residents of Kent. This gesture of giving up the medals of war follows in the example of the First World War poet-officer and pacifist Siegfried Sassoon, whom Rakowitz discovered during his research to be his direct ancestor, sharing an Iraqi Jewish heritage, and whose words against war are reiterated in a plaque at the sculpture's base: 'I am a soldier, convinced that I am acting on behalf of soldiers. I believe that this war, on which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest.'

Unlike the statue of the Surfboat memorial, Rakowitz's soldier turns his back on the shore and instead points inland towards London and parliament where the decision to go to war with Iraq was made. Its formal inspiration relates to a Basra memorial of 80 larger-than-life bronze statues of Iraqi soldiers, a memorial to the Iraqi soldiers killed in the Iran-Iraq war, whose fingers pointed accusingly across the Shatt Al Arab towards Iran where they were felled, and which were removed in April 2003 during the British occupation of Basra.

These sculptures have long held a fascination for Rakowitz and he has explained in conversation with *Waterfronts* curator Tamsin Dillon how the questions prompted by these lost Iraqi monuments evolved into 'April is the cruellest month': "I thought about what happens to the British soldier that sees these authoritarian sculptures being taken off pedestals and thrown into the Shatt Al-Arab by the local population. Do they see themselves in that Iraqi soldier? Do they see themselves in this continuous vector of invaders and occupiers, who will themselves be removed? And so it became something where I began to imagine that sculpture underwater, more or less accumulating all the sea life that attaches to it and then ... eventually emerging on the coast of Margate and carrying with it all of the traumatic items in between. And so it became a British soldier, pointing not at some imagined enemy across the sea, but inland, toward Parliament, where the decision to invade Iraq was made. A sculpture that changes its position for a soldier who changed his."

During the launch Rakowitz also spoke with his subject and collaborator Daniel Taylor who has movingly described his reasons for giving his military medal to become part of the fossilised trauma that forms this powerful anti-war monument and symbol of peace: "When truthful things are said it resonates with people. I've seen a lot of statues, I've been watching the news of statues torn down and I think the whole nation will be wondering what statues really mean and what our identity is. I just wanted to make a small gesture to make people think what it really means."

The world's first art GeoTour

To participate download the GeoCaching app via the App store, GeoTour code: [GT4A5](#)

England's Creative Coast GeoTour begins in Margate on Saturday 1 May and then unrolls with each of the partner organisations as their section of the project opens.

Using geocaching, the GPS-enabled digital treasure hunt technology, communities from each of the seven locations were invited to share their personal stories of what it's like to live in that particular coastal place, respond to the new artwork in their town and give visitors a new way to interact with the landscape. Participants have been guided by artists and include school children, scout groups, communities such as the Kent Saheli Group and charities such as the Hastings-based Refugee Buddy Project and Rough Sleeper Initiative.

The resulting 'caches' are uniquely hand-crafted, all taking on different shapes and forms: some blending into their environment, others dictated by the stories they tell, and others referencing the materiality of their *Waterfronts* commission. Each reveals a QR code through which to discover audio and text pieces. Hidden around the seaside towns, they take geocachers to a variety of sites, introducing visitors to scenic spots and places off the beaten track, and giving locals the chance to be tourists in their own towns.

The **Margate geocaches** were developed in collaboration with a group of local people who have taken part in a series of workshops exploring Rakowitz's work, some of whom have donated objects to become part of his *Waterfronts* commission. Using Rakowitz's description of coastal towns as places where hospitality and hostility mix as a starting point, the group uncovered Margate's remarkable history and selected six locations across the town to make up the tour.



One of the six Margate geocaches. Photo © Thierry Bal

Self-build itineraries

England's Creative Coast offers a new website affiliated to local businesses as well as key travel operators across the region. Developed by Visit Kent, the website, www.englishcreativecoast.com, enables visitors to curate their own journeys, in a pick and mix style, offering a variety of cultural experiences across England's Creative Coast, as well as recommendations for the best food, drink and accommodation for a complete cultural travel experience.

Funding

England's Creative Coast is led by Turner Contemporary and Visit Kent. It is principally funded by Arts Council England's Cultural Destinations programme and Visit England / Visit Britain through the Discover England Fund, supported by South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), East Sussex County Council, Kent County Council, Essex County Council, Visit Essex, Southend Borough Council, Historic Dockyard Chatham and Southeastern and in partnership with Cement Fields, Creative Folkestone, De La Warr Pavilion, Hastings Contemporary, Metal and Towner Eastbourne.

PRESS ENQUIRIES

For images, biographies and full information about each of the partner's Waterfronts commission and accompanying GeoTour please visit the [media kit](#).

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