

Thinking & Feeling about Public Art in Folkestone

By Paul Rennie



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Paul was invited by the Creative Foundation to present a local perspective on the Folkestone Artworks...

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Introduction

This is an alternative guide to Folkestone Artworks – these are the artworks, placed around the town and previously displayed as elements of Folkestone Triennial 2008 and 2011.

For most of its history, Folkestone has been a town with only two pieces of public sculpture – the war memorial, and the statue of William Harvey. The installation of sixteen contemporary artworks in the town has changed this.

The other maps and guides, will help you navigate around the town and find the artworks. This document is designed to help you interact with the artworks and to orientate yourself in relation to the ideas and feelings that they provoke. We've decided to do this, in the first instance, through words and a diagram. Hopefully, this will help start up a conversation about all sorts of things.

Folkestone - Freedom and Sublime

Until recently, most of the British coast was deserted. The history of seaside development begins during the 18C, when the benefits of the salt-water cure were recommended as an alternative to the overcrowded spa resorts. The curative therapies of the seaside were quickly extended, beyond the strictly medicinal, to affect more general issues of wellbeing through leisure, relaxation and fun.

Released from the usual conventions of society, visitors to the seaside embraced the pleasures of the convivial and exotic. The spaces associated with "holiday" leisure were periodically taken over by carnival. By the 1930s, the leisure resorts and holiday environments of the British seaside were recognised, by visiting Bauhaus architects, as exemplars of democratic modernity.

Folkestone is positioned on the East Kent coast, between the downland and the sea. On a clear day you can see across the Channel to France, and around from Dover to Dungeness. The town comprises several distinct parts: the east cliff, the harbour, the town centre and the cliff-top west-end, or resort, area. In addition to all this,

there is a long strip of under-cliff by the sea. The town is constrained by the sea to one side and by the downs on the other. Accordingly, the town is long and narrow and with many green spaces. The resort is laid out, after the original plan, as a garden-city by the sea – ideal for leisurely exploring on foot or by bicycle.

The sunshine and sharp light of the seaside always reminds us of childhood holidays. But, in addition to these happy feelings of nostalgia, the seaside also reminds us of something bigger and more primeval. The scale and scope of the coastal topography combine the classical elements of earth, fire, air and water. Our sense of the sea as ancient, beautiful, powerful and huge provokes feelings that are both exciting and anxious-making. The sweeping skies and stretched-out seas combine to evoke both the elemental and sublime. Correspondingly, the land anchors us amidst the feelings of vertigo induced by the exaggerated space afforded by sea and sky.

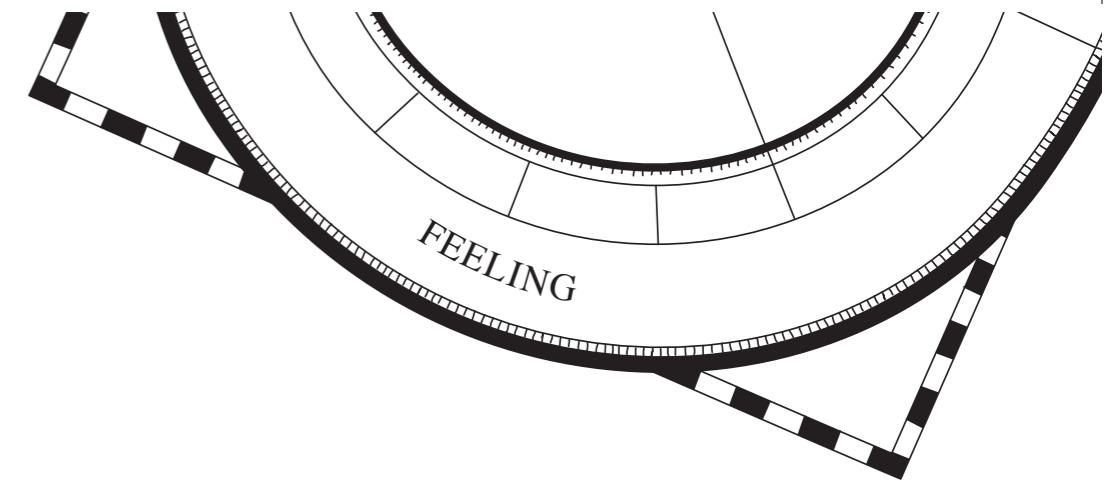
Art Without Walls

The idea of an especially refined sensibility, associated with the established social elite, has been generally debunked. Accordingly, the benefits of art should be made available to everyone.

The pioneers of the 19C cultural avant-garde quickly identified the institutional constructs of salon, gallery, and museum, as obstacles in promoting art to a wider public. It wasn't just the buildings though; the people in art tended to see themselves as gatekeepers. The buildings were designed to put people in their place and the critics tended to tell people what to think. It turned out that the meanings of art were very carefully controlled.

The demystification of art began, for the avant-garde at least, by breaking free from these buildings and institutions. Artists took over the streets and aligned themselves with the dynamic energy of fashion, music and popular culture.

The French artist, Marcel Duchamp, famously pioneered this idea with his "readymade" industrial sculptures



from 1915. A bit later, English artists of the 1930s were discovering the seaside. John Piper and John Betjeman visited Dungeness and Littlestone, whilst Paul Nash lived briefly at Dymchurch and Rye. For Piper and Betjeman the traditions of seaside and industry combined to define a nautical style in architecture and design. For Nash, similar elements conjured up something altogether more mysterious and strange. Nash identified the otherworldliness of coastal parts and their structures as seaside surrealism. Either way, these coastal parts were understood as providing a special context for work. What these artists were discovering was a cultural space somewhere between the ancient landscapes of the rural tradition and the sprawling urbanisation of industrial society. The English seaside offered up an environment that, conveniently, combined comfort and modernity to suit all tastes.

At the Festival of Britain (1951), a new template for the post-war reconstruction was proposed in which art, architecture and design were integrated into a single environment.

Back in the 1970s, there was a terrific argument about a pile of bricks by the artist, Carl Andre, purchased and displayed at Tate Britain. The newspapers made a terrible fuss about whether this was art, and plenty of people voiced an opinion. Today, this outrage has almost disappeared.

In Folkestone, the argument about modern art has been decisively won. When these artworks first appeared, it wasn't clear what the local response would be. Now, the artworks are part of our town.

This isn't just about the art though; it's about the people and the town...

This is the backdrop and context to the displays around the town.

How This Works (In Other Words)

Instead of the usual map or diagram to locate the artworks, we've made a kind of open-space in which you can position the artworks. It's not the same as the geographical space of Folkestone or the seaside. We've shaped the space by modelling a sort of ancient scientific instrument...the various orbs and dials are marked with words to help get you started.

Step One: Position the artwork into the diagram. You can mark the artwork onto the central ring with sixteen spaces. Choose the space that is nearest to the words that describe how you think and feel about the work. **Step Two:** Add more words as you think of them.

You can visit the artworks in any order. Many other words can be used to describe your experience of the artworks. Remember, there's no single "correct" answer.

1. Tónico Lemos Auad (1968, Brazil): 'Carrancas', Folkestone Harbour, CT20 2XL
2. Adam Chodzko (1965, UK): 'Pyramid' Sign sited in Coastal Park below the Leas Cliff Hall.
3. Nathan Coley (1967, UK): 'Heaven is a Place Where Nothing Ever Happens' 48 Tontine Street, CT20 1JT
4. A K Dolven (1953, Norway): 'Out of Tune' Folkestone Seafront, opposite the Leas Lift, CT20 1PX
5. Tracey Emin (1963, UK): 'Baby Things' 7 different sites around the town.
6. Ruth Ewan (1980, UK): 'We Could Have Been Anything That We Wanted To Be', top of the Zig Zag Path, The Leas, CT20 2EF
7. Spencer Finch (1962, USA): 'The Colour of Water', Leas Promenade lower path, in front of the Grand Hotel. Approx CT20 2XL
8. Hamish Fulton (1946, UK): '31 Walks From Water to Water 1971-2010', wall beside Pay and Display Carpark, Harbour Approach Road, CT20 1QL
9. Cristina Iglesias (1956, Spain): 'Towards the Sound of Wilderness' Martello 4, The Leas, CT20 2JD
10. Cornelia Parker (1956, UK): 'The Folkestone Mermaid', overlooking Sunny Sands, The Stade.
11. Patrick Tuttofuoco (1974, Italy): 'Folkestone Harbour arm.
12. Mark Wallinger (1959, UK): 'Folk Stones' West End of The Leas approx CT20 2EF.
13. Paloma Varga Weisz (1966, Germany): 'Rug People' Former Harbour Railway Station, approx CT20 1TX
14. Richard Wentworth (1947, Samoa) 'Racinated' 10 different sites around the town.
15. Pae White (1963, USA): 'Barking Rocks' Pleydell Gardens, approx. CT20 2DY.
16. Richard Wilson (1953, UK): '18 Holes' Coastal Promenade, below the Leas Cliff Hall at sea level..

