

Off The Beaten Track – Robertson Street, Hastings

The coast has long been a muse to artists and has inspired some of the most famous works from Turner to Ravilious. The Coastal Culture Trail links the 3 award winning galleries who have exhibited pieces of these works at Towner Art Gallery, De La Warr Pavilion and Jerwood Gallery. Visit the Towner Art Gallery's archive and see the scope of work featuring the Sussex coast.

On my journey this week I am going to the routes of the present day artist community in Eastbourne, Hastings and Bexhill. Attracted by low rents and access to space, artists have been arriving in the area for many years. Estate agents now boast Artist Quarter when selling houses but the creativity in each of these three towns is very real and celebrated.

Each town has many exciting independent galleries and art festivals but on this journey I chose to visit one in each town.

I don't feel I can miss the Emma Mason Gallery in Eastbourne. At Emma Mason Gallery they specialise in original prints by British printmakers from the post-war years to the present day. They have linocuts, lithographs, etchings and more as well as a selection of books, gifts and greeting cards all related to printmaking. The gallery is a friendly, light space in one of Eastbourne's oldest terraces, Cornfield Terrace, and is a few minutes' walk from the seafront.

I visit as part of the Eastbourne Open House event and the small gallery is crammed with friends sipping wine. I've stumbled in from the rain and immediately strike up conversation with Emma about Robert Tavenor and his fishing boat prints inspired by Hastings. It feels like the Coastal Culture Trail is suddenly a well trodden path by artists seeking to be inspired by nature.

Tucked away in between two garages on Parkhurst Rd is Murmurations Gallery – an unexpected gem in Bexhill. With its modern contemporary white cube gallery feel and its diverse range of local and regional artists, the gallery is aiming high to establish itself as an ideal destination for people to come and view interesting and thought provoking art. It is a small gallery with big ambitions. There is a full programme including renown international art shows as well as local and regional artist's shows.

The gallery is run by a collective of local artists who also exhibit there. It's great to see a space like this benefiting the community and providing a space for local talent to exhibit.

Next on the trail is the Hastings Arts Forum which offers both local contemporary artists and those from further afield the opportunity to exhibit their work in a previously empty shop. The gallery space spacious and is nestled on a great strip of new enterprise underneath the Marina Pavilion. The exhibitions change every two weeks giving visitors the chance to see, and potentially buy, a variety of work in a range of mediums.

The Arts Forum is almost totally reliant on volunteers and their membership as they receive no government funding. As well as the exhibitions by established, professional artists, the Forum offers opportunities for new and emerging artists through such events as their members show and their Rising Talent initiative. Community based activities include provision of various workshops including hosting The Big Draw at The Gallery.

These three galleries give you a taste of the talent in the local area. They provide a shop front to the creativity happening behind the scenes. Where these guys lead, new talent follows and if you are in the area visiting make sure you also dip into Curious Projects in Eastbourne and Bargain Gallery in St Leonards.

Galleries

Emma Mason Gallery - <http://www.emmamason.co.uk/>

Murmurations Gallery - <http://www.murmurationsgallery.co.uk/>

Hastings Art Forum - <http://www.hastingsartsforum.co.uk/>

Curious Projects - <http://www.curious-projects.co.uk/>

Bargain Studio - <http://bargainstudio.co.uk/>

Eat

The Green Almond, Eastbourne – <http://www.thegreenalmond.com/>

Wholesome Café, Bexhill – <http://www.wholesomecafebexhill.co.uk/>

Kino Teatr, St Leonards - <http://www.kino-teatr.co.uk/kitchen/>

Stay

The Beacon, Hastings - <http://www.beaconhastings.com/b-and-b.html>

205 House, Cooden Beach – <http://www.205house.co.uk/>

Ocklynge Manor, Eastbourne - <http://www.ocklyngemanor.co.uk/>

Useful links

Coastal Currents - <http://coastalcurrents.org.uk/>

Eastbourne Artists - <http://www.eastbourneartists.co.uk/>

Blue Monkey Network - <http://www.townereastbourne.org.uk/artist-opportunities/blue-monkey-network/>

Coastal Culture Trail – www.coastalculturetrail.com