

ESTUARY 2025

estuaryfestival.com



Cockles of my Heart // sound walk by Breakwater. Photo: Tessa Halhann

Vessels

Impact Report

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SALT by Arbonauts. Photo: Nina Photography



Introduction

The Thames Estuary is a place of dynamic change. It has always been a place of inspiration for artists – undulating mudflats, ever-changing light and reflections, and so much more.

Introduction

It is this place of extraordinary contrasts that drives the work of Estuary Festival: to shine a spotlight on the Thames Estuary region through high-quality contemporary arts programmes that celebrate the stories, places and people of the Thames Estuary.

Estuary 2025 was the first edition of the quadrennial festival to be produced by Estuary Festival as an independent arts organisation. Estuary Festival CIC was established in 2023 as an independent non-profit organisation to deliver exciting, bold and ambitious arts programmes in response to the Thames Estuary, carrying forward the work established by Metal presenting the first two editions: Estuary 2016, and Estuary 2021 with Cement Fields.

The large-scale quadrennial festival is built from a foundation of deep engagement, an understanding of what is needed for the region at that point in time. This knowledge inspires and sparks our work – enabling us to build fantastic partnerships, to commission great quality work, build participation and audiences.

Estuary Festival now works across the region from our base in Castle Point, South Essex where we run workshops, exhibitions, events and activities with diverse local participants. Together we explore community needs, environmental challenges and opportunities in direct response to local feedback for joined up creative collaboration and community engagement.

In the lead up to Estuary 2025 we organised walks, exhibitions and workshops with artists, and diverse participants to shape the plans. What came back resoundingly from this engagement was the desire to forge new connections: across the water, beyond borders, to new ideas and new ways of thinking: the Estuary itself as a connecting force.

Thea Behrman

Estuary Festival
Artistic Director & CEO

“Estuary 2025 has shown, once again, the extraordinary power of culture to connect our communities, celebrate our shared histories, and imagine bold futures shaped by creativity and collaboration. I am immensely proud of what has been achieved – not only the remarkable artistic programme, but the deep partnerships, local pride and lasting connections forged across the water. Estuary Festival exists to champion this place and its people, and Estuary 2025 has carried that mission forward with ambition, care and joy.” Colette Bailey, Estuary Festival Chair

Our timeline 2016–2029

Estuary 2022–2024

Established Estuary Festival CIC, with Colette Bailey as Chair and Thea Behrman as artistic director and CEO. Built partnerships and programmes in Castle Point and across the Estuary.

Estuary 2026–2028

Commissioning new work linked to community engagement to inform next festival edition.

2016	Estuary 2016 1st edition founded by Colette Bailey while artistic director at Metal.	EST UARY 2016
2017		
2018		
2019		
2020		
2021	Estuary 2021 2nd edition led by Metal with Cement Fields created a programme across 107 miles of Estuary coastline. Funded as part of a region-wide shared Cultural Development Fund.	EST UARY 2021
2022		
2023	Established Estuary Festival as an independent non-profit arts organisation. Built partnerships and programmes in Castle Point and across the Estuary.	
2024		
2025	Estuary 2025 3rd edition, the first delivered by Estuary Festival as independent exploring the theme 'Vessels'.	EST UARY 2025
2026		
2027		
2028		
2029	Estuary 2029 Exploring contemporary ideas around 'Mutiny' inspired by Estuary heritage.	

Estuary

2025

Through the theme of 'Vessels', Estuary 2025 looked beyond the boats and ships of the Thames Estuary, to think about the festival itself as a vessel – exploring people's complex and changing relationships to this unique landscape.

Estuary 2025

An ambitious programme of imaginative collaborations took place between artists, communities and the Estuary itself with 9 days of performances, installations and events across the region in June 2025.

Taking place every four years across the South Essex and North Kent coastlines, the festival explores the rich and often overlooked stories of estuary people and places, creating extraordinary arts experiences inspired by unexpected locations.

The festival acts as a catalyst to embed long-term change in the perceptions and visibility of the region, with this third edition marking its first as an independent arts organisation.

The 'Vessels' theme for Estuary 2025 connected deeply with artists and diverse local residents, reflecting our focus of drawing inspiration from the Estuary itself: to be informed by the tidal forces in our approach.

'Vessels', in the context of the Thames Estuary might first conjure pictures of boats and ships – the vessels that transport so much in and out of this region. But the people, flora and fauna of the area are vessels too: carriers of ideas and aspirations, stories and myths, memories from the past and hopes for the future.

Estuary 2025 was planned to coincide with both 'spring' and 'neap' tides to offer unique opportunities to engage with the Thames Estuary on both land and water. Projects such as *Changing Tides*, *SALT*, *Anchored* and *Thought Forms*, took place on the water with performances on a sailing barge, light ship, tidal pool and in a nineteenth century military fort.

Up and down the coastline of the Estuary, projects allowed us to experience the Estuary from new perspectives: *Call Me Back!* reimagining a phone box to become a vessel for children's messages to their future selves; *Submarine Consciousness: Or What Have You* allowing us to experience the Estuary as a cockle, *She is a River* as the river itself and *Sleeping with the Dead* contemplating a relocated mass grave.

Estuary 2025 is a vessel too, bringing newly commissioned artworks to forge new connections and resurrect old ones: it is only relatively recently that rivers have been seen as barriers that need to be crossed by land – for much more of their history they have been waterborne thoroughfares – the primary way to meet and interact.

At the heart of the programme is a love letter both to this remarkable region that has inspired artists for centuries, and to our fantastic collaborators from the Estuary – from youth clubs and yacht clubs to musicians and dancers who have joined us in the journey to realising this incredible and epic festival.



Estuary 2025 in numbers

9 festival days

27 projects

529 creatives

92 events

Over **10** locations

923,946 live audiences

4850 participants

(477 children & young people)

151,490 digital audiences

710 million potential media reach

52 partners

29 Estuary Anthology
projects



Map

● Estuary Anthology

- 1 SALT
- 2 Call Me Back!
- 3 Forever Connected
- 4 Submarine Consciousness, Or What Have You
- 6 A Circular and Never-ending Ritual of Love to The Estuary
- 7 She is a River
- 8 Changing Tides
- 9 The People Will Possess the Wind
- 10 Anchored
- 11 Thought Forms
- 12 Sea Like a Mirror
- 13 Dreamspace: Pending Approval
- 14 Estuary 2025 Canvey Hub
- 15 Estuary 2025 Gravesend Pier Hub
- 16 The Great Canvey Island Chimney Disaster
- 17 Sleeping with the Dead
- 18 Hop Aboard!
- 19 Clubbing & Commune-ing
- 20 Common Grounds
- 21 Engaging with the Intertidal Zone
- 22 Estuary Adventure Walks

Vision

and outcomes

Estuary 2025 articulated the Thames Estuary as a confident, connected and creative cultural region, where high-quality artistic programmes enable communities to shape their own futures, strengthen local pride, and open up new opportunities — particularly for young people and those who have historically been under-represented in cultural life.

Vision and outcomes

Rooted in place, co-created with communities, and responsive to local needs, Estuary 2025 used culture as a strategic lever for change. It connected people to water, landscape and heritage, while supporting creative talent and building long-term cultural infrastructure across the Estuary.

Audiences

Estuary 2025 reached both those new to the arts and those least likely to participate, offering free, local, and highly visible experiences in public spaces — beaches, parks, high streets, fortifications, tidalpools and boats. Across 9 days, audiences encountered ambitious work in unexpected places, building pride, belonging and community connection. The festival broadened access by designing programmes that actively welcomed families, local residents, commuters, passers-by and returning audiences, while supporting meaningful long-term engagement through high quality participatory projects.

Diversity & young people

The festival expanded creative skills and progression pathways for young people and under-represented communities through workshops, co-design, volunteering, paid roles and participatory projects. Artistic and engagement work reflected the cultural diversity of the Estuary — from diaspora communities to newly arrived residents, from working-class histories to neurodiverse perspectives. Young people reported increased confidence, aspiration and creative agency, feeling recognised as contributors to the cultural life of their place.

“It made me feel like a proper artist.”

School workshop participant

Quality

Estuary 2025 delivered exceptional artistic quality across installation, performance, sound, moving image, craft and socially engaged practices. Commissions were grounded in rigorous research, community collaboration and site-responsiveness, for example *SALT* and *Submarine Consciousness, Or What Have You* resulting in work that was both imaginative and deeply embedded in local context. 96% of audience feedback rated the quality as very good/good with audience feedback consistently referencing the professionalism, ambition and inventiveness of the programme, and partners praised the thoughtful curation, sensitive community engagement and high production values.

Perceptions

The festival shifted perceptions of the Thames Estuary, reframing it not as a peripheral landscape but as a place of cultural vitality, rich histories, environmental significance and global connections. Projects revealed hidden narratives — of migration, labour, ecology, memory and resilience — allowing residents and visitors to see their everyday surroundings anew. Audience responses described experiences as *“moving,” “thought-provoking,”* and *“unlike anything seen here before,”* demonstrating the festival’s power to broaden understanding and spark imagination.

Vision and outcomes

Legacy

Estuary 2025 strengthened cultural infrastructure across the region by embedding collaborative practices, building organisational partnerships, informing strategic place-based initiatives and creating pathways into ongoing cultural activity informing future commissions and local engagement. The festival laid groundwork for long-term programmes such as Pride in Place programmes, supported future commissioning models, and demonstrated how culture can contribute to environmental awareness, community cohesion, local identity and economic regeneration. The festival established a sustainable cultural ecosystem that will continue to grow beyond the 2025 edition.

New models of partnership

Estuary 2025 pioneered new models of partnership built on trust, co-creation and long-term place-based collaboration. By connecting artists, local authorities, community groups, environmental organisations and heritage partners across South Essex and North Kent, the festival created a resilient cultural ecosystem catalysing projects that will continue such as *Dreamspace: Pending Approval*, creative walking activities and *The People Will Possess the Wind*. These partnerships enabled shared decision-making, equitable commissioning and deeper community ownership, establishing a collaborative framework that will shape future cross-Estuary cultural development for example future projects with Sailing Barge and yacht club partners.

Participation and engagement

Estuary 2025 achieved wide and inclusive engagement, attracting 924,000 live audiences and participants across nine days and more than ten locations. 60% of audiences live within the Thames Estuary region, demonstrating strong local resonance, while 37% travelled from elsewhere in the UK and 2% from abroad, reflecting national visibility.

The festival reached communities under-represented in cultural activity: 13% identified as D/deaf, disabled or living with long-term health conditions; 21% as neurodivergent; and 28% as non-White British. Projects such as *HOP ABOARD!*, *Common Grounds*, *Clubbing & Communing*, *Sleeping with the Dead*, and *Estuary Adventures* engaged young people, families, migrants, working-class communities and neurodiverse audiences through hands-on workshops, walks, installations and performances.

Invigilators and volunteers (118 volunteers in total) noted the deep conversations sparked with local residents, the value of short-term paid opportunities, and the chance to develop new skills. Feedback described the festival as welcoming, inspiring, and **“bringing the community together.”**

The combination of public-space programming, free access, and participatory approaches ensured that Estuary 2025 removed barriers and created spaces for dialogue, belonging and discovery.

Hop Aboard! workshop in Gravesend Town Pier space. Photograph: Sam Wainwright



Economy

skills and place

Estuary 2025 generated meaningful economic, skills and placemaking benefits across the Thames Estuary.

The festival supported 324 creatives through commissions, paid roles, workshops, production and technical opportunities — strengthening the region’s cultural workforce. Many projects provided paid employment for early-career practitioners, young people and freelancers, offering hands-on experience in facilitation, invigilation, curation, production and digital content creation.

Skills development was embedded throughout: *HOP ABOARD!* engaged youth volunteers and FE students; *Clubbing & Commune-ing* trained participants in oral history; *SALT* enabled intergenerational performers to learn site-specific choreography; and *Dreamspace: Pending Approval* built skills in sculpture, brickmaking, woodwork and collaborative design. These opportunities contributed to increased confidence, employability and creative agency.

The festival also played a strategic role in place-based development—animating high streets, waterfronts, heritage vessels and natural landscapes, and aligning with local priorities such as town centre renewal, health and wellbeing, and community cohesion. Projects like *SALT*, *Castle Point Guide* and *The Great Canvey Island Chimney Disaster* supported the growth of cultural infrastructure in Castle Point, informing long-term programmes such as Canvey Pride in Place and strengthening new partnerships with councils, community groups and environmental organisations.

Collectively, Estuary 2025 enhanced the region’s cultural identity, supported local economies through increased footfall, and demonstrated the transformative potential of culture to foster sustainable, community-rooted change.

Programme

SALT

Call Me Back!

Forever Connected

**Submarine Consciousness,
Or What Have You**

**A Circular and Never-ending Ritual
of Love to The Estuary**

She is a River

Changing Tides

The People Will Possess the Wind

Anchored

Thought Forms

Sea Like a Mirror

Dreamspace

Estuary 2025 hub

The Great Canvey Island Chimney Disaster

Sleeping with the Dead

Hop Aboard!

Clubbing & Commune-ing

Common Grounds

Estuary 2025 film programme

Engaging with the Intertidal Zone

Estuary Adventure walks

Castle Point Guide

SALT by Arbonauts



SALT by Arbonauts. Photo: Nina Photography

Location: Canvey Island

Venue: Tidal Pool on the beach

Artwork: World premiere live art performance with 20 intergenerational performers

Free ticketed performances

SALT, a new climate-responsive site specific performance created for Estuary 2025 by Arbonauts, artist duo Helen Galliano and Dimitri Launder. Presented at dusk in a tidal pool on Canvey Island, the work brought together embodied movement and sound in response to the unique Estuary setting.

Programme

SALT by Arbonauts

Audiences

It was the first time an event like this had taken place in this location. Tickets sold out rapidly and the two events attracted a live audience of 1,200 people over 2 evening performances.

“Really incredible to have a free performance in a public, non-performance venue.”

Diversity & young people

SALT was performed by a dynamic, intergenerational group of 20 performers including local open-water swimmers who took part in SILT (Estuary 2021) and students from BA Physical Theatre course at East 15 Acting School.

Quality

The performance was shaped by professional choreographers, sound artists, and directors, with original soundscapes sourced from estuary recordings, and high-quality production across movement, design, and staging. Audience feedback highlighted exceptional hosting and organisation

“The most insanely incredible performance I’ve ever seen.”

“Organised amazingly well, offered us blankets and enough chairs for everyone.”

Perceptions

Participants described the process as transformative, confidence-building, and a powerful reminder of community and connection to the estuary’s landscape. Feedback from audiences showed how SALT shifted perceptions of the tidal landscape, becoming a living, expressive space through the power of collective movement to spark reflection on climate, community, and place.

“We’ve never seen anything like it before.”

“Absolutely amazing! Beautiful work with so many messages.”

SALT by Arbonauts.
Photo: Nina Photography



Programme

SALT by Arbonauts

Legacy

SALT leaves a lasting cultural impact on Canvey Island, strengthening local skills, confidence, and connection through its intergenerational creative process. Building on Arbonauts' earlier work, it demonstrates the value of ambitious, place-based performance and directly supports the development of the Canvey Pride in Place programme. Its collaborative model and strong local engagement create a foundation for future cultural activity rooted in community pride and environmental awareness.

"I love the Thames and this is another way to celebrate it."

"I want to be part of it next year!"



SALT by Arbonauts. Photo: Nina Photography

Programme

SALT by Arbonauts

“Absolutely amazing!
Beautiful work with
so many messages.”

Audience feedback



Audience at SALT by Arbonauts. Photo: Nina Photography

Programme

Call Me Back! By Damilola Odusote



Call Me Back! by Damilola Odusote. Photo: Sam Wainwright

Locations: Gravesend, Grays, Sheerness, Tilbury, Chatham & Canvey

Venues: High Streets, Railway Station & seafront

Artwork: Touring installation with generative sound recorded with children & young people in Tilbury, Grays & Basildon.

Free public art installation

Call Me Back! charts artist Damilola Odusote's distinct upbringing growing up in the Thames Estuary. It explores the issue of identity and uses his personal experiences to highlight the complexity of political, cultural and identity dislocation. Damilola is an internationally acclaimed artist born to Nigerian parents and fostered by a White couple of Romany heritage in Tilbury, Essex.

Programme

Call Me Back! By Damilola Odusote



Artist Damilola Odusote delivering a workshop at St Mary's R C Primary School in Tilbury. Photo: Michaela Freeman

Call Me Back! is inspired by a BT phone booth from the 1990s which was a landmark meeting point in Tilbury where the artist grew up. The installation with an oversized phone inside is a physical and metaphorical symbol of connecting to the past and emanates the sense of childlike innocence and nostalgia that everything appears larger than life from a child's view.

"Very enlightening, brilliant concept — made me feel like a child again." Audience feedback

Audiences

The Call Me Back! installation toured to 7 locations during Estuary 2025, engaging 35,574 people on high streets, on seafronts, at Tilbury Town railway station and in a public park.

"This is sick, we need more stuff like this here."
Audience feedback from ~12-year-old boy

Diversity and young people

Call Me Back! created a powerful moment of representation for young people across Thurrock and South Essex. In creating the artwork Damilola revisited the schools and colleges he attended in his youth, engaging with 136 children and young people in 5 schools & colleges to incorporate current perspectives into the artwork. Meeting a successful Black artist who once sat in their classrooms demonstrated that creative careers are possible for them too. Through workshops, storytelling and recording their voices, students saw their own experiences reflected, valued and amplified.

"It was fun to see someone who went to Palmer's be successful." "I enjoyed asking questions, it helped my career plan" Feedback from student workshop participants

Quality

Damilola's work has been shown internationally in Singapore, New York, China, US, UAE, and across Europe. The work for Estuary 2025 marked his first major public art commission.

"This isn't just an installation; it's a portal into the lived experiences of Estuary residents." Made in Shoreditch

Programme

Call Me Back! By Damilola Odusote

Perceptions

By encapsulating his past experiences with those of current young people in an iconic communication relic of the past, the work became a symbol of inspiration and hope for the future.

"Moving, touching and unexpected."

"Thought-provoking – makes you question your own life."

Audience feedback

Legacy

Call Me Back! leaves a lasting cultural and social legacy by transforming a deeply personal narrative into a shared public resource, amplifying community identity, and offering a powerful, touring public artwork that invites ongoing reflection on memory, resilience, and belonging.

"Great for the future and the context is amazing."

"I'd like to see more things like this around the country."

"Really great for the kids." Audience feedback



Call Me Back! At Tilbury Town Station. Photo: Lillith Freeman

Programme

Forever Connected by Damilola Odusote



Forever Connected by Damilola Odusote. Photo by Michaela Freeman

Location: Tilbury

Venue: Outside Tilbury
Cruise Terminal

Artwork: Mural
incorporating
perspectives of children
and young
people in Tilbury, Grays
& Basildon

**Free and accessible
to all**

Forever Connected is a newly commissioned mural and legacy artwork to *Call Me Back!* by Damilola Odusote. The artwork is a visual meditation on the invisible threads that bind us to the moments that shape us – fragments of memory, emotion, and experience suspended in time.

Programme

Forever Connected by Damilola Odusote



Estuary 2025 artist Damilola Odusote leading a workshop at USP College Palmer's Campus. Photo: Anna Lukala

Audiences

Installed outside Tilbury Cruise Terminal, the artwork is visible to hundreds of people that pass by each day.

Diversity & young people

Forever Connected offered young people in Tilbury, Grays and Basildon the chance to see their own experiences reflected in a major public artwork by Damilola Odusote. His return as a successful Black artist from their communities provided powerful representation, showing young people that their stories, backgrounds and ambitions belong in public space and cultural history.

Quality

Damilola has been awarded mural commissions from major brands including Converse, LinkedIn, UBS and Google, this commission was his first in his home town and reflecting his experience as well as the conversations during the workshops with young people growing up in the Thames Estuary today.

Perceptions

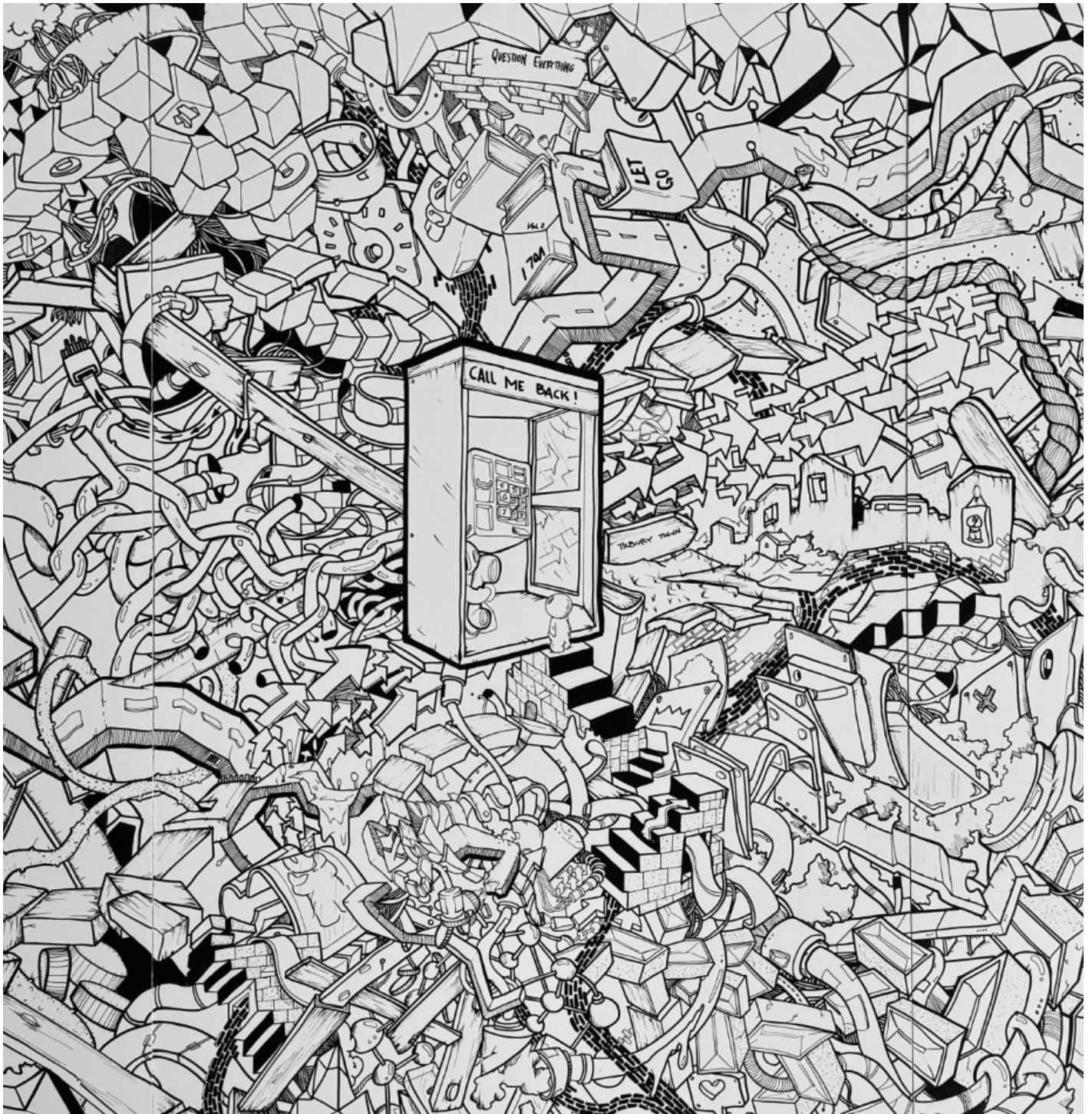
Forever Connected invites viewers to pause, reflect, and recognise the quiet, powerful links between their past, present, and becoming.

Legacy

Forever Connected leaves a lasting legacy as a permanent public artwork in Tilbury, embedding local stories and lived experience into the everyday landscape. By honouring memory, identity and the complexity of growing up in the Estuary, it creates a long-term cultural marker that continues to inspire pride, reflection and community connection.

Programme

Forever Connected by Damilola Odusote



Forever Connected artwork detail. Photo by Damilola Odusote

“When you only have 10p in your pocket during a time of crisis, who would you call? More importantly, who would call you back?” Damilola Odusote

Programme

Submarine Consciousness, Or What Have You by Breakwater



Cockles of my Heart II, part of *Submarine Consciousness, Or What Have You* by Breakwater. Photo: Tessa Hallmann

Location: Castle Point
Venue: Hadleigh Farm
Estate

Artworks: *Cockles of My Heart 2* soundwalk; *Whiskey to the Cockles* flag installation; *There Are Landslips Eating the Fields* publication, and public workshops

Free entry, ticketed events & publication available throughout the festival, online & in local libraries

Breakwater, the artist duo of Youngsook Choi and Taey lohe, presented a new project exploring historical and contemporary ideas of rewilding in and around Hadleigh Farm in the Thames Estuary. It unpacks complex narratives of flood-altered landscapes, local submarine psyche, and interspecies resilience.

Engaging the audience through an immersive experience of the hydrosphere.

Programme

Submarine Consciousness, Or What Have You by Breakwater

Audiences

The installation and participatory sound walks resonated with each other, focusing on the entanglement of cockle habitats with the landscape of extraction, shaped by toxic waste disposal, industrial fisheries, military operations, and the global trade gateway. Two creative workshops engaged participants in activities including producing dyes from gorse and considering belonging in landscapes.

“Wonderful experience. Excellent balance of sound, information, landscape.” Audience feedback

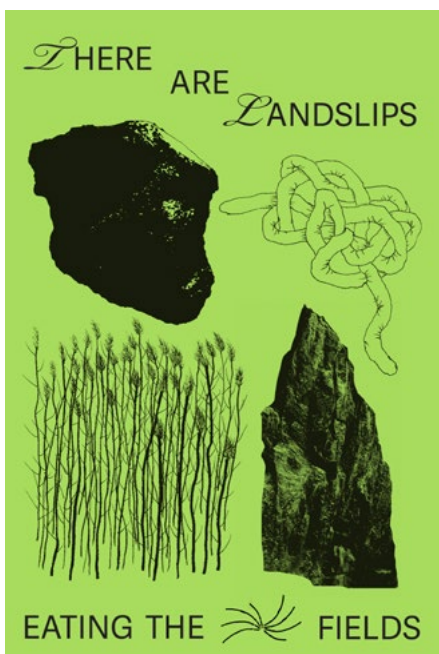
Diversity & young people

Breakwater collaborated with the Decolonising Botany Working Group (Laura Burns, Ayesha Keshani, Cian Dayrit, Tuan Mami, Helen Pritchard) international artists, writers, and researchers to explore land, ecology, and climate change through displaced people’s experiences. Centering experiences of migration and colonial histories, they drew on collaborations across the Thames Estuary (with community groups, sailors, artists, mental health practitioners) to highlight intertwined environmental and social struggles while showing how artistic practice fosters solidarity and imagines more equitable futures.

“It was good to have a new perspective on a familiar landscape” Audience feedback

Quality

Commissioning Taey lohe and Youngsook Choi brought exceptional artistic depth to the programme, uniting Taey’s transdisciplinary, ‘eco-crip’ approach with Youngsook’s socially engaged, site-specific approach rooted in ecological grief, climate justice, and the lived experiences of migrants and working-class women. This ensured the creation of new artworks that were both conceptually rigorous and socially meaningful.



There are Landslips Eating the Fields publication cover. Part of *Submarine Consciousness: Or What Have You* by Breakwater with Decolonising Botany collective.

Programme

Submarine Consciousness, Or What Have You by Breakwater



Whiskey to the Cockles, part of Submarine Consciousness, Or What Have You by Breakwater. Photo: Tessa Hallmann

Perceptions

The project considers how the Estuary, often treated like London's backyard, has been affected by harmful environmental practices, yet highlights the remarkable survival and resilience of its people and places.

"Really highlighted local history for me."

Audience feedback

Legacy

This artwork leaves a lasting legacy of publication and sound artwork, deepening public understanding of the Estuary's landscapes by creating an enduring resource for reflection on the region's ecological challenges and the complex histories that continue to shape it.

"It's been wonderful to be part of the new formation of the Estuary Festival. I feel extremely grateful for your long-term vision and determined nurturing of the communities and artists. Site-specific learning about the Estuary was a deeply grounding process, especially with generous support and the ever-so-inspiring landscape of the Estuary, along with all the dots and pathways you have woven carefully to guide the project." Youngsook Choi

Programme

A Circular and Never-ending Ritual of Love to The Estuary (including Hope for the Future, Recipes for Action and a Call to the Blood) by Nwando Ebizie



Docklands Sinfonia and Guildhall Young Artists recording soundtrack at Milton Court Concert Hall. Photo: Thea Behrman

Location: Tilbury, Gravesend and Canvey

Venue: Soundwalks leading to water's edge

Artwork: 3 brass artworks and 3 sound artworks produced with emerging and professional artists

Free entry and open to all

A Circular and Never-ending Ritual of Love to the Estuary is a self-guided immersive sound walk in three parts and in three different locations (Tilbury, Gravesend and Canvey) devised by multidisciplinary artist Nwando Ebizie.

Programme

***A Circular and Never-ending Ritual of Love to The Estuary (including Hope for the Future, Recipes for Action and a Call to the Blood)* by Nwando Ebizie**

Audiences

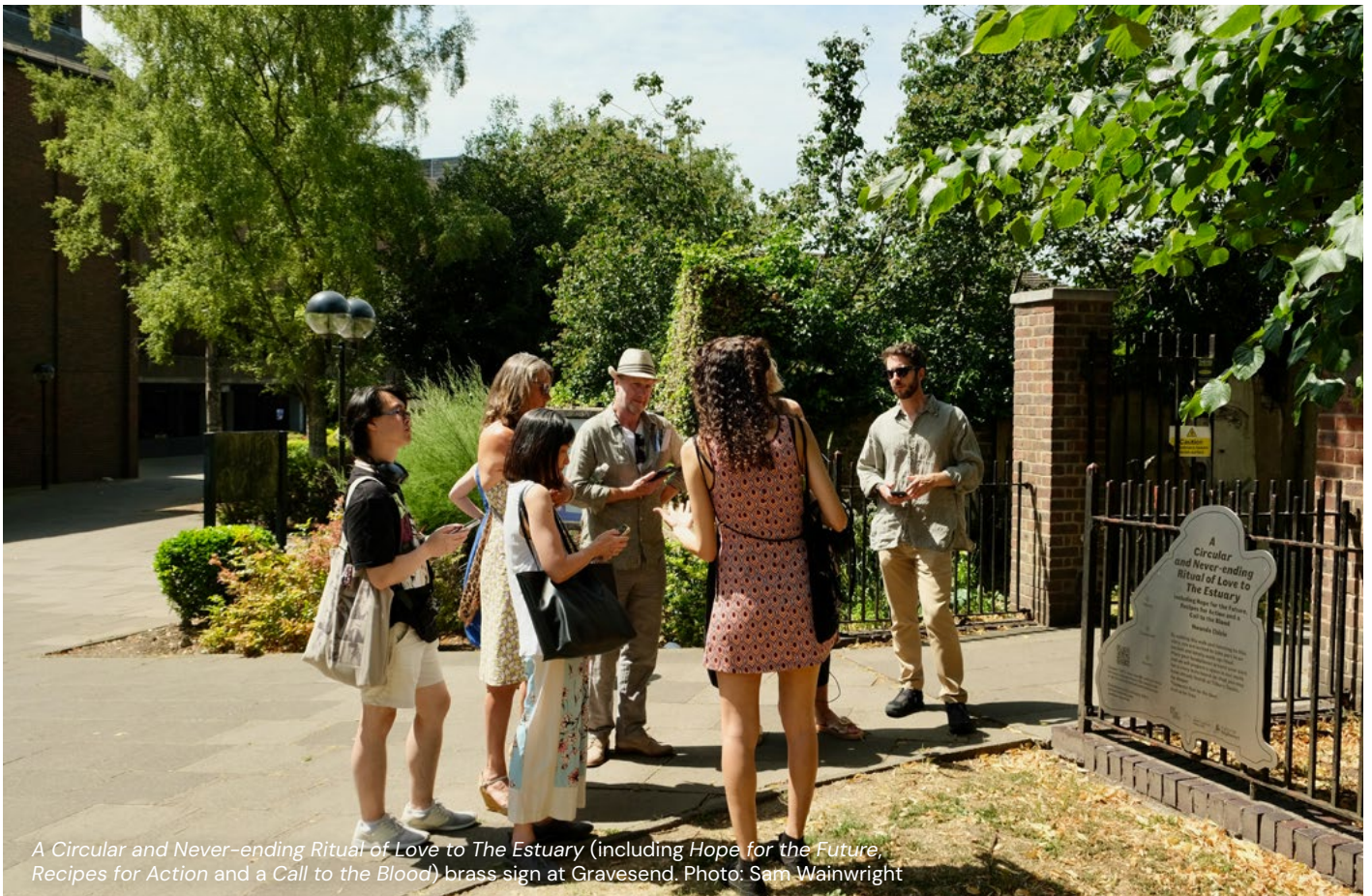
An undulating artwork fixed on the ground marks the starting point of the audio walking experience. Using headphones, the audience are guided by listening, walking and visioning in a ritual preparation towards action.

Diversity & young people

Nwando's commission for Estuary 2025 introduced a vital Afrofuturist and neurodiverse lens to the programme, reflected in the audience profile, with 21% identifying as neurodiverse and 29% coming from non-White British ethnic backgrounds.

Quality

Nwando created a new orchestral score for the work recorded by musicians from Thames-based Docklands Sinfonia working alongside Guildhall Young Artists enabling young musicians to work alongside professional musicians for the first time.



A Circular and Never-ending Ritual of Love to The Estuary (including Hope for the Future, Recipes for Action and a Call to the Blood) brass sign at Gravesend. Photo: Sam Wainwright

Programme

A Circular and Never-ending Ritual of Love to The Estuary (including Hope for the Future, Recipes for Action and a Call to the Blood) by Nwando Ebizie

Perceptions

The work invited audiences to see the Estuary from different perspectives, guiding you to the water's edge through storytelling and sound designed to create a multisensory experience for the listener.

Legacy

The artwork remains as a lasting legacy in the 3 locations. It deepens connection to the Estuary through its immersive, mythic storytelling to foster collective stewardship, renewing appreciation for the landscape's beauty and resilience as well as empowering communities to see themselves as active custodians of its future.

"Great that it was interactive"

Audience feedback

"It has been an absolute pleasure working with all of you and being part of this festival, especially in an area that holds so many childhood memories for me. Nwando's composition is absolutely stunning – evocative, and beautifully crafted. Thank you once again for this opportunity for Docklands Sinfonia, Guildhall Young Artists and myself to be involved in such a rewarding collaboration."

Spencer Down, Musical Director of Docklands Sinfonia



*'A guided visualisation
to draw people to the water
You are the vessel, the work will fill you and sustain you,
hold you to help guide
Spoken, sung, played by the mythic creatures of this land
The stories returning
Rising up out of the mud
A magical place – feel the magic and the beauty
So much has been dumped
But it has endured and renewed
Now join in this renewal
You are an adventurer in a magical land
Folk Horror – so you're seeing the things around us that we
normalise and accept – for the horror that they are.'*

Nwando Ebizie

Estuary 2025 commissioned artist Nwando Ebizie during recording session with Docklands Sinfonia and Guildhall Young Artists at Milton Court Concert Hall

Programme

She is a river by Nwando Ebizie



She is a river performance on the historic Tilbury Landing Platform. Photo: Michaela Freeman

Location: Tilbury

Venue: Tilbury Cruise Terminal

Artwork: World premiere live performance on Windrush Day, produced with physical theatre performers from East 15 Acting School

Free ticketed performance

This live performance included specially devised music, sound and movement by artist Nwando Ebizie, presented in the historic Tilbury Cruise Terminal on Windrush Day.

Programme

She is a river by Nwando Ebizie

Audiences

In the immersive and interactive show, audiences were invited to inhabit the historic space to experience past and future visions crafted by the artist through collective actions. In a dreamlike atmosphere, the story of the river goddess Thamesis unfolded, and invited us to become part of a ritual of collective emotions

"The performance was mesmerising, all senses encompassing, a dreamlike and hopeful experience."

Audience feedback

Diversity & young people

The new work was produced in collaboration with physical theatre performers from East 15 Acting School. The music includes a new orchestral score recorded by professional musicians from Docklands Sinfonia working alongside Guildhall Young Artists. The performance took place on Windrush Day and included a commemorative moment on the landing platform where passengers disembarked.

"Amazing time, my grandmother was Jamaican and came to Manchester. Very touching." Audience feedback



She is a river performance. Photo: Michaela Freeman

Programme

She is a river by Nwando Ebizie

Quality

This world premiere performance transformed the historic venue into a powerful space of Afrofuturist ritual fusing music, sound, movement and immersive storytelling.

“Event was brilliantly staged and the performers showed such depth of emotion.” Audience feedback

Perceptions

Audiences encountered mythic narratives, and Afrofuturist visions to reveal the estuary as a site of imagination.

“For my parents, this was a completely new kind of event, and it was heartwarming to see them so engaged and connecting with their community.” Audience feedback

Legacy

Estuary Festival worked in partnership with Tilbury on Thames Trust to present the work just before the venue undergoes capital redevelopment, this work will inform future activities exploring cultural representation and storytelling

“I’d love to attend more culturally diverse events here.”
Audience feedback



Programme

Changing Tides by Raybel Charters



Changing Tides at Benfleet Yacht Club. Photo: Sam Wainwright

Locations: Isle of Sheppey & Canvey Island

Venue: Newly restored historic Thames Barge Raybel

Artwork: Curated programme of performances, discussions and exhibition

Free ticketed events on board the Barge

Changing Tides was a multi arts series presented aboard Thames Sailing Barge Raybel, celebrating the cultural diversity of the Estuary and local initiatives geared towards sustainability, heritage and public engagement, marking the first project post-restoration.

Programme

Changing Tides by Raybel Charters



Changing Tides at Benfleet Yacht Club.
Photo: Sam Wainwright

Audiences

The programme connected audiences to the Estuary with a series of events performed whilst under sail on a traditional Sailing Barge between Isle of Sheppey and Canvey Island, as well as live music events aboard the barge.

"A wonderful experience. The performances were entertaining. The atmosphere felt very special and you could feel the enthusiasm of all." Audience feedback

Diversity & young people

Changing Tides foregrounded cultural diversity, showcasing artists whose work explores decolonial perspectives, mixed heritage histories, and the varied cultural identities connected to the Thames Estuary, including performances informed by the African origins of sea shanties, multiracial storytelling, class solidarity and European klezma. Contemporary folk music and storytelling offered accessible entry points, with younger audiences in their twenties clearly represented alongside older visitors.

Quality

High artistic quality was ensured through a thoughtfully curated programme from accomplished and acclaimed artists drawing on deep research, authentic local histories, and diverse creative practices.

"Inspiring. Very good and so much effort put in."

Audience feedback

Perceptions

It revealed complex cultural histories of the Thames Estuary. Overlooked stories were shared through performances and discussions to reframe the estuary as a site of rich, multifaceted identity.

Legacy

This project successfully demonstrated a new approach for presenting high-quality programme under sail. Strong collaborative practices with diverse partners (e.g. boat clubs and marine organisations) has created a transferable model to inform future community-embedded arts programmes in the dynamic conditions of the Thames Estuary.

"We are hugely grateful to Estuary Festival for this opportunity, hope we were able to fulfil your expectations for the events, and look forward to more partnership work in the future." Gareth Maer, Raybel

Programme

The People Will Possess The Wind by Platform



The People Will Possess The Wind performance on Canvey Island. Photo: Ann Lee

Locations: Canvey Island, Southend, Herne Bay and Gravesend

Venue: beaches, piers and at sail

Artworks: Choral performances, publication, film & discussion event

Free events in public spaces open to all

The People Will Possess The Wind was produced in partnership with arts organisation Platform, engaging citizens of North Kent and South Essex in reimagining our relationship with wind energy.

Programme

The People Will Possess The Wind by Platform

Audiences

Through sailing on the Estuary, live choir performances, film, publication, and online materials, the project engaged 920 live audiences, questioning the nature of our relationship to The Wind.

“When the boat passed by, it was quite surreal and moving to hear the singing while watching the sail ‘waving’ and reading the text flowing with the wind... strong moments of ecopoetry!” Audience feedback

Diversity & young people

The project revealed the deep, often overlooked global connections that shape the Thames Estuary, linking local communities with histories and contemporary realities from places such as the Caribbean, West Africa, Denmark, France and Sweden, and highlighting how wind, migration, labour and energy systems bind these regions together.

Quality

Combining rigorous artistic research with skilful creative delivery, the project combined expert collaborators: from artists and sailors to designers, choirs and filmmakers. A complex, multifaceted and site-responsive project was presented as a coherent and compelling audience experience for Estuary 2025.

“The voices were exquisite” Audience feedback

“First of all let me say how overwhelmed I was by Saturday’s event. It was so much more than I expected. The woman with whom I shared a bench was there because, ‘We only live over the road and I thought I’d come across’, was equally enthralled. Equally impressive was the coordination of the perfectly timed arrival of the boat. Heartbreakingly poignant.” Audience feedback

Programme

The People Will Possess The Wind by Platform

Perceptions

By framing the Estuary as part of a shared international story shaped by colonisation, climate, trade and cultural exchange, the artwork broadens understanding of who “belongs” to this landscape and invites a more inclusive, globally aware perspective on its people, histories and future.

Legacy

The multifaceted project presented as part of Estuary 2025 marks the beginning of an ongoing project for Platform, with a tour of the film planned for 2026.

“It was such a wonderful wonderful opportunity that you gave us to work in Estuary 2025. It was intense but I’m extremely happy with the way it turned out and so grateful for all your incredible support and patience, flexibility and creativity.” James Marriott, Platform

The People Will Possess The Wind publication cover



Programme

ANCHORED by LV21 and Scarabeus Aerial Theatre



ANCHORED performance. Photo: Raymond Forthergill

Location: Medway

Venue: LV21 at The Historic Dockyard Chatham

Artwork: World premiere site-specific outdoor performance produced by an all-female creative crew

Free ticketed performance

A collaboration between Light Vessel LV21, and Scarabeus Aerial Theatre, *ANCHORED* was a world premiere site responsive outdoor performance with choreography responding to the surroundings and infrastructure elements of the ship.

Programme

ANCHORED by LV21 and Scarabeus Aerial Theatre

Audiences

Performed at dusk at the height of midsummer, 4567 people experienced a visually striking, emotionally immersive performance to form a deep sense of connection between the vessel, its stories and the surrounding estuary landscape.

“Huge thank you for the most beautiful, thought-provoking and awe-inspiring evening last night. I came with my husband and three children.” Audience feedback

Diversity & young people

Coinciding with Refugee Week, the performance incorporated reference to the ship’s history as a focal point of refuge for people at sea. Subverting stereotypes, the performance showed a female captain rescuing two refugee women, who then became her crew. The performance itself connected with family audiences.

“My daughter was captivated by the visual impact; my pre-teen had a hundred questions about refugees and the political story.” Audience feedback

Quality

The artistic quality was exceptionally high, demonstrated through its expertly crafted aerial choreography, evocative sound and lighting design, and the seamless integration of performance with the unique architecture and emotional resonance of the historic lightship.

“This was a truly wonderful and talented performance. So grateful to have been able to witness it.” Audience feedback

Perceptions

The work reimagines maritime vessels by creating an emotionally resonant space where stories of care, refuge and human connection unfold.

Legacy

The event expanded capacity to commission high-impact, immersive work on and around the water, at Chatham Historic Dockyard that had never hosted an event of this nature, marking the return of LV21 to Medway and informing future programmes.

“Cracking audience, a zinger of a night, extraordinary venue. One for annals that one” Audience feedback

Programme

ANCHORED by LV21 and Scarabeus Aerial Theatre

ANCHORED performance. Photo: Raymond Fortherrgill

"I was impressed by what a lovely peaceful unspoilt historic location it is. Absolute calm across the river while the performances were going on – perfect night for it too."

Audience feedback

Programme

Thought Forms by Ben Judd



Thought Forms. Photo: Ben Judd

Location: Medway

Venue: Fort Darnet

Artwork: Series of Site specific performances

Free ticketed performances

Thought Forms is a brand new site-specific participatory work by Ben Judd, located on the River Medway and Fort Darnet, a nineteenth-century military installation on a small island.

Programme

Thought Forms by Ben Judd

Audiences

Thought Forms had at its heart an ambitious participatory structure, transporting audiences by boat to an abandoned island fort for an immersive and thoughtfully crafted experience exploring ideas around community and islands, both real and imaginary.

“Great location – wonderful to visit somewhere of historical interest and experience art performance in that space.” Audience feedback

Diversity & young people

The project took inspiration from folklore associated with the nearby Isle of Sheppey, suggesting that until 653 CE the residents of the island thought they were alone in the wilderness, even though they could see mainland Britain from their own shoreline. They believed the nearby coastline to be a reflection, and that Sheppey was situated in a large mirror box. The folk tale concludes when a member of the community built a canoe and made the journey to the mainland at which point they realised they were not alone.

“The connection between art and space was thoughtful and articulated beautifully.” Audience feedback

Quality

Deeply researched, and site-specific the work contained a sophisticated exploration of themes such as belonging, borders and community.

“An impressive experience that inspired a new appreciation for the performing arts.” Audience feedback



Programme

Thought Forms by Ben Judd

Perceptions

Thought Forms reframed the estuary as a place where borders, sovereignty and nationalism are felt, contested and re-imagined. Through its exploration of real and imagined islands, the work invites audiences to reconsider how national identity is constructed, how borders shape belonging, and how communities negotiate the shifting thresholds between land and water. It prompts reflection on who is included, who is excluded, and how the estuary's liminal spaces complicate conventional ideas of nationhood and territory.

"Well organised, very atmospheric, and thought provoking"
Audience feedback

Legacy

This artwork demonstrates how ambitious, participatory work can be delivered in collaboration with yacht clubs, sailing partners and land owners proving that the estuary's challenging, water-bound locations can host high-quality, transformative cultural experiences. The artist is planning new work building on the partnerships established through Estuary 2025.

"Awe inspiring. Amazing location for a performance. The choreography was brilliant. The art direction/ wardrobe was very clever. Would love to see more work like this." Audience feedback



Programme

Sea Like a Mirror led by Cement Fields



Sea Like a Mirror. Photo: Sam Wainwright

Location: Gravesend

Venue: Sculptural tent overlooking the estuary

Artwork: New moving image works, performance and events produced with local young people and Punjabi-Sikh community

Free ticketed events

Sea Like a Mirror, an ambitious national programme marked the 200th anniversary of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), inspired by the profound legacy of their life-saving work and presented at Estuary 2025 in partnership with Cement Fields.

Programme

Sea Like a Mirror led by Cement Fields

Audiences

At the heart of the programme was a newly commissioned artwork, *White Horses*, by Ivan Morison. The work was housed within a unique, custom-made sculptural tent installed on the seafront, immersing audiences in the stories of RNLI crew and local people from around our coastline.

“It was perfect – this was my first time to Gravesend and I felt it opened up the area” Audience feedback

Diversity & young people

New work presented alongside *White Horses* included *Still Waters* an immersive new sound work co-created with young people at Northfleet Technology College in North Kent, and *Words on the Wind* by Jas Dhillon co-created with the local Punjabi-Sikh community to honour multiple cultural relationships with water and collective expression.

Quality

Ivan Morison’s ambitious practice seamlessly bridges art, architecture, theatre and social practice. For *Sea Like a Mirror* this resulted in an exquisitely crafted, immersive sculptural experience to evoke the emotional, cultural and environmental complexity of Britain’s coastline.

Perceptions

Produced through a series of visits to lifeboat stations and seaside towns around the coastline, and in close collaboration with those who hold a deep connection to the water, including oyster fishers, windfarm technicians, and wild swimmers, *White Horses* explores the sea’s innate duality as a place of wonder and peril, and a different perspective to the lives of those who protect life at sea.

Legacy

This marked the first collaboration between Estuary Festival as an independent organisation with Cement Fields and will inform future partnership working.

Programme

Dreamspace: Pending Approval by Emma Edmondson and Shaun C. Badham

Dreamspace: Pending Approval workshop. Photo: Tessa Hallmann

Location: Castle Point

Venue: Hadleigh Farm Estate

Artwork: Hands-on workshops to inform a new permanent sculptural pavilion

Free workshops for public & invited groups

Dreamspace: Pending Approval is a site-responsive collaborative project by artists Emma Edmondson and Shaun C. Badham to design a new sculptural pavilion for Hadleigh Farm Estate. The artists created a pop-up outdoor studio on site during Estuary 2025 to explore the site and its materials, making sculptural works alongside running public workshops with the community.

Programme

***Dreamspace: Pending Approval* by Emma Edmondson and Shaun C. Badham**

Audiences

The artists hosted a programme of workshops bringing 200 participants together for imaginative workshops to inform the construction of a versatile outdoor pavilion for learning, making and other creative uses.

Diversity & young people

200 multi-generational people attended the workshops including maquette making, brickmaking and woodworking. During activities insights were gathered into how people used the site now as well as what is needed for the future.

Quality

The work is deeply participatory with a site-responsive approach integrated into workshops and collaborative making. The carefully crafted process has turned community dialogue and the sourcing of local materials into a meaningful concept for the pavilion shaped by many voices.

Perceptions

Public engagement has been central to the development of work, with a key objective to widen engagement so that the pavilion is directly informed by a diverse range of perspectives.



Programme

***Dreamspace: Pending Approval* by Emma Edmondson and Shaun C. Badham**

Legacy

This project is part of a long-term partnership with Salvation Army to co-design a new, permanent cultural hub on the site inspired by biodiversity, permaculture and climate, coinciding with a major rewilding programme.

“It has been a privilege to witness the community engagement shaping what might be achieved. Though the simple aspiration of the project has been to create a multifunctional outdoor shelter that remains on our site as a lasting legacy, it is striking to see that other equally important outcomes have been realised such as relationship formation and deep community dialogue. We hope this work can be the start of a partnership that positions Hadleigh Farm Estate as a central hub for creativity, collaboration, and community far beyond what was achieved during Estuary 2025.”

Salvation Army Hadleigh Farm Estate

Programme
Estuary 2025 hub



Installation by Selena Chandler. Photo: Sam Wainwright

Location: Canvey Island

Venue: Knightswick Shopping Centre

Artwork: Exhibition, installation & evolving lab

Free entry and open to all

Throughout Estuary 2025, the Hub foregrounded making, recycling and craft as powerful vessels for storytelling, with artist-in-residence Selena Chandler leading hands-on explorations into how materials can be reshaped to carry memory, heritage and place. Her tactile, process-driven residency drew on the Estuary's rich craft traditions while inviting audiences to consider the environmental and cultural value of reuse.

Programme

Estuary 2025 hub

Complementing this, the Hub also presented *Threads for Tomorrow*, part of Kinetika’s Beach of Dreams project — a series of intricately sewn silk sails created with sewing groups across the Thames Estuary with artist Rahemur Rahman.

Audiences

The Estuary 2025 Canvey Hub served as a vibrant focal point for 1125 people, offering an engaging space for families and the broader community to celebrate the resilience of materials and communities alike, offering a space to contemplate the beauty that can emerge through reinvention, collaboration, and shared creativity.

Diversity & young people

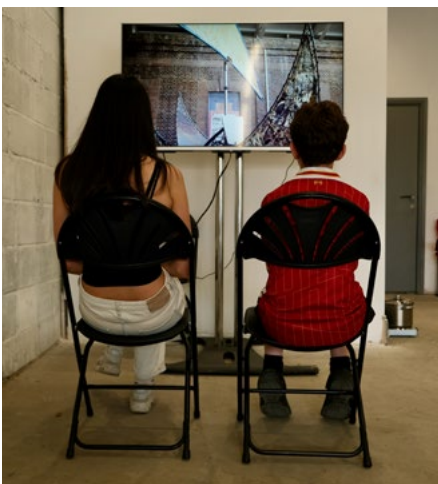
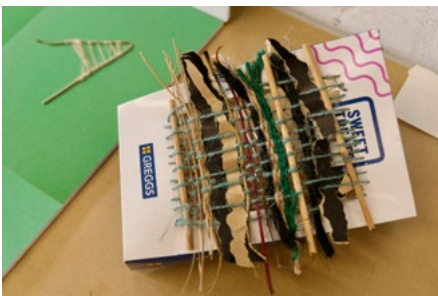
The Estuary 2025 Canvey Hub became an evolving lab of creative practice, providing a collaborative and hands-on environment for intergenerational engagement.

“The invigilator that I spoke with was very informative, gave time for conversation. It is an important event to have young people included and interested.”

Audience feedback

Top: Installation by Selena Chandler.
Photo: Sam Wainwright

Bottom: *Threads for Tomorrow* film.
Photo: Sam Wainwright



Quality

Visitors could try out Selena’s artistic processes, and explore the connections between traditional crafts and contemporary artistic techniques creating a unique space to engage with making.

Perceptions

By centering sustainability, collective making and the cultural significance of textiles, the Hub challenged conventional ideas about craft, revealing its capacity to connect global stories, ecological care and local identity.

Legacy

The high quality of the installation and engagement has informed future pop-ups in the shopping centre as part of a community engagement programme for Canvey Pride In Place.

Programme

The Great Canvey Island Chimney Disaster by Library of Lost Sounds



The Great Canvey Island Chimney Disaster. Photo: Sam Wainwright

Location: Canvey Island

Venue: Canvey Wick
Nature Reserve

Artwork: Site-specific
performances in
collaboration with RSPB
& Buglife

Free tickets events

The Great Canvey Island Chimney Disaster was produced by Library of Lost Sounds in collaboration with Buglife and the RSPB at Canvey Wick nature reserve, a former brown field oil refinery site and now as one of the most important British sites for endangered invertebrates.

On 17 September 1997, a 450 feet high concrete chimney stack on Canvey Island was accidentally demolished a day early. TV personality Fred Dibnah, who was in charge of the demolition, jokingly labelled it 'The Canvey Island Chimney Disaster'.

Programme

The Great Canvey Island Chimney Disaster by Library of Lost Sounds

Audiences

Visitors could hear the sound and feel both the vibrations and shockwaves of the chimney stack being destroyed on its original site (now within Canvey Wick nature reserve), which has remained lost and without an audience for all these years. The multisensory experience was designed to be sensitive to the site's status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

"It was very special to experience." Audience feedback

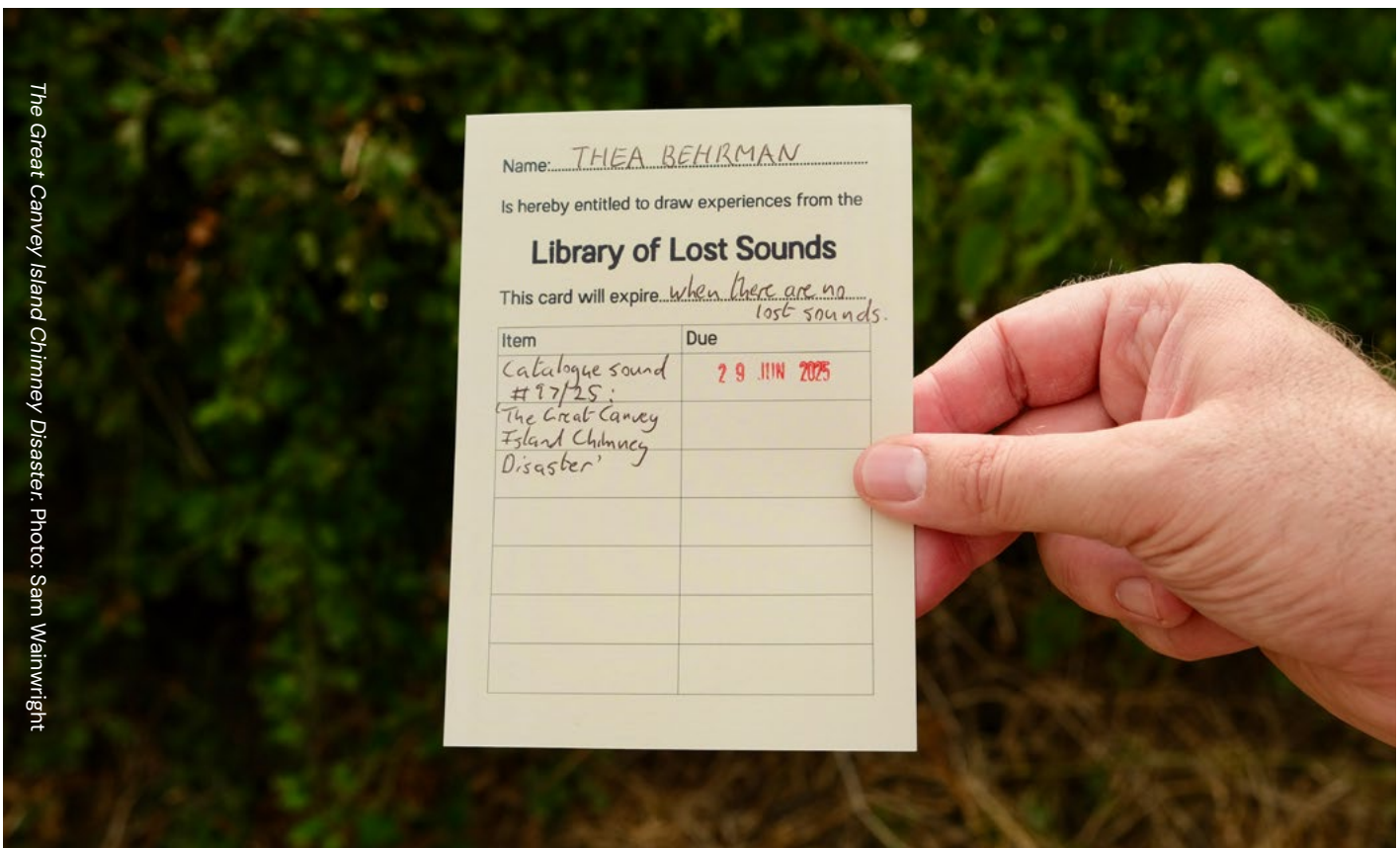
Diversity & young people

Diverse young volunteers were recruited to support the engagement and participation, including local students and people that had no prior experience of working in the arts.

"Informative and educational. Appreciated the enthusiasm about the art" Audience feedback

Quality

The Library of Lost Sounds is a collaboration between artists, researchers and scientists who aim to recreate sounds of importance as they were felt through the whole body, not just how they might have been heard.



Programme

The Great Canvey Island Chimney Disaster **by Library of Lost Sounds**

Perceptions

The artwork challenged perceptions by reframing the landscape as a site of imagination inspired by its industrial heritage.

“The remote location gave a good chance to explore the area” Audience feedback

Legacy

The artwork has opened up new avenues for exploring how place-based sound artworks can be experienced beyond just hearing. The artwork created new ways for people to experience a site that had not previously hosted contemporary arts activities, and is informing future programmes between Estuary Festival, Buglife and Library of Lost Sounds as well as walking programmes with Active Essex.

“Grateful that Canvey has a cultural festival to enjoy and bring the community together.” Audience feedback



The Great Canvey Island Chimney Disaster. Photo: Sam Wainwright

Sleeping with the Dead by YoHa



Sleeping with the Dead. Photo: Sam Wainwright

Location: Canvey Island

Venue: Willow Lane Cemetery

Artwork: generative artwork, events and workshops

Free entry and open to all

Sleeping with the Dead was conceived as an act of remembrance for the bodies reinterred from London's Bedlam Burial Ground (1569–1738) to Willow Cemetery on Canvey Island. During construction of the Elizabeth Line, part of this burial ground was uncovered. Funeral directors T Cribb & Sons respectfully disinterred 3,000 remains, many of whom are likely ancestors of people living in Essex today.

Programme

Sleeping with the Dead by YoHa

Audiences

There were 305 participants across 2 days and 8 events with speakers including nationally recognised writers, archaeologists, artists and researchers, providing opportunities for discussion and reflection alongside a space for audiences to listen to donated heartbeats alongside under-grave sounds. The project invited audiences to search a database of surnames from those buried there.

"I went there never thinking I'd find a surname as unusual as mine but I actually did!" Audience feedback

Diversity & young people

Pop-ups in the shopping centre engaged with diverse Canvey residents who were invited to donate their heartbeats in memory of the 'poor bones of Canvey', Local young people and students joined the project supporting with heartbeat recording and event facilitation.

"The workshop was with people from a variety of backgrounds, especially people from local communities. Very interesting to hear personal stories."

Audience feedback



Sleeping with the Dead. Photo: Sam Wainwright

Programme

Sleeping with the Dead by YoHa

Quality

YoHa are a local artist group with an international reputation for pioneering arts projects. This project embodied their community-based participatory principles, giving a platform to a broad range of voices – arts organisations, funeral directors, archaeologists, writers, and community groups – to discuss and reimagine how this history is remembered.

“Excellent curation of the event. The pieces fit together to create an impactful and rewarding day.”

Audience feedback



Perceptions

By revealing the unexpected connections of Canvey Island to this important heritage, the project prompted a new understanding for a place entwined with wider histories of marginalisation and memory.

Legacy

Strengthened partnerships, creating lasting networks for future cultural activity in Castle Point. *Sleeping with the Dead* was additionally supported as a Creative Estuary Co-Commission and by Castle Point Borough Council.

Top + Bottom
Sleeping with the Dead.
Photo: Sam Wainwright

Programme

HOP ABOARD! by Maraid McEwan



Hop Aboard! installation in Gravesend Town Pier space. Photo: Sam Wainwright

Location: North Kent & estuary wide schools & colleges

Venue: Historic Dockyard Chatham & Gravesend Town Pier

Artwork: workshops, education resource, posters & exhibitions

Free entry and open to all

HOP ABOARD! was Estuary 2025's schools and colleges engagement programme, delivered across North Kent as part of national Railway 200 celebrations and supported by Southeastern. Led by artist-educator Maraid McEwan, the project used the idea of the vessel to explore movement, memory, and place.

Programme

HOP ABOARD! by Maraid McEwan

Through workshops, a live brief, a resource pack, public activities, and exhibitions at Chatham Historic Dockyard and Gravesend Town Pier, young people's work was featured alongside commissioned artists. The programme reached 5 schools along 35 miles of the Kent trainline and introduced thousands of people to Estuary-inspired creative learning.

Audiences

The project engaged 162 students, 9 educators, 170 public workshop participants, and 10,807 exhibition visitors. A Kent-wide poster campaign reached an estimated 1.65 million travellers. Activity drew in new audiences including families, commuters, and young people new to cultural events.

"Great that it was interactive ... very engaging, for children too." Audience feedback

Diversity & young people

Delivered across primary, secondary, and FE settings, the programme engaged young people aged 10-18 across a broad socioeconomic reach. Participants gained confidence, new skills, and professional experience. Youth volunteers and a paid early-career placement created inclusive pathways into creative industries.

Quality

Artist-led workshops offered high-quality, curriculum-linked learning combining art, geography, history and sustainability. Teachers reported strong engagement and valued the project's interdisciplinary approach. The exhibitions elevated the young people's experience, while public workshops and large-scale displays demonstrated professional standards in production and engagement.

"There was such a great atmosphere — students and staff were fully engaged." Teacher feedback

Perceptions

The project shifted how young people and audiences understand the Estuary, the railway, and interconnected histories. Students developed pride and a deeper sense of place e.g. *"I'm excited for my work to be in an exhibition."* while the exhibitions allowed the public to encounter young people's perspectives, strengthening cultural visibility and fostered positive associations between transport, heritage, and creativity.

Programme

HOP ABOARD! by Maraid McEwan

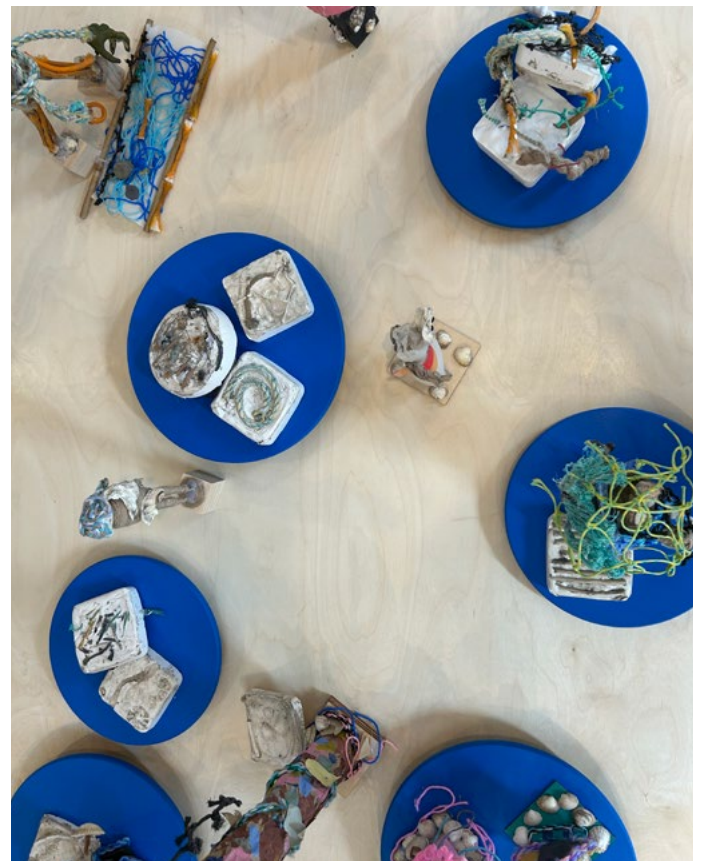
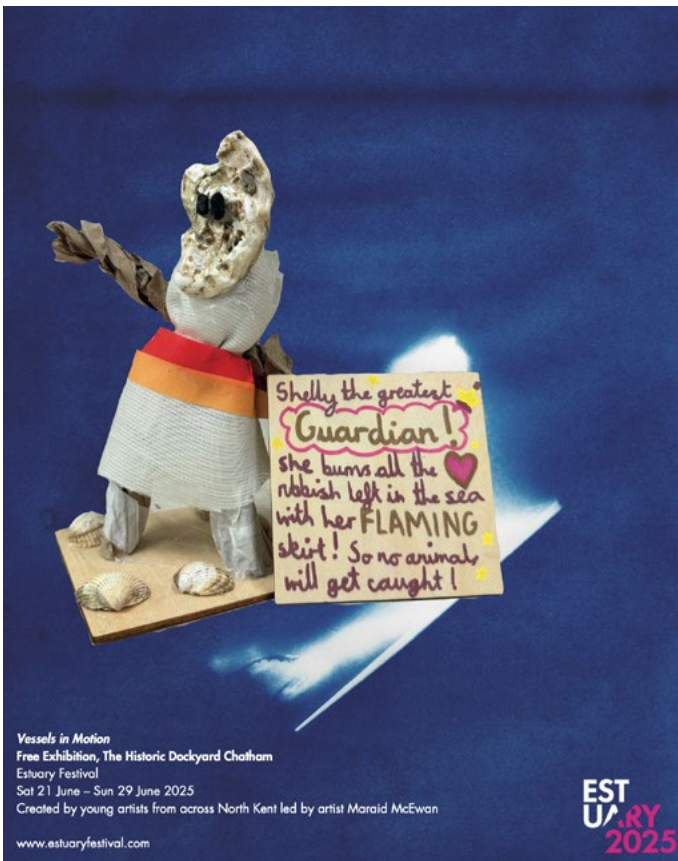
Legacy

The Estuary 2025 Vessels Education Pack provides a lasting resource. The project established new relationships with schools, volunteers, and regional networks, laying groundwork for future cross-Estuary learning programmes. The model offers a scalable approach that can be extended across both North Kent and South Essex, strengthening long-term cultural participation and partnership development across the Thames Estuary.

“It was a fantastic experience and the children thoroughly enjoyed the activity... We can't wait to see the final installation, which will be a huge celebration of creativity and our local environment”

Teacher feedback

Left: *Hop Aboard!* artwork displayed across Southeastern network
Right: *Hop Aboard!* installation at The Historic Dockyard Chatham



Programme

Clubbing & Commune-ing by Emma Edmondson and Tim Burrows



Clubbing & Commune-ing by Emma Edmondson. Photo: Anna Lukala

Location: Basildon

Venue: Westgate Shopping Centre

Artwork: Video installation, sculptures, publication book, talks & community events

Free entry, ticketed events & book available to purchase throughout the festival & online

Clubbing & Commune-ing by artist Emma Edmondson and writer Tim Burrows explored the cultural history and contemporary relevance of Essex nightclub culture through the lens of Raquels nightclub in Basildon. The project combined oral history, community engagement, creative workshops, and a major sculptural installation. Artworks included a video installation housed inside a modified Ford Fiesta alongside concrete relief sculptures drawn from demolished Basildon sites. A publication featured essays and commissioned artworks.

Programme

Clubbing & Commune-ing by Emma Edmondson and Tim Burrows

Audiences

The project engaged 600 exhibition visitors, plus thousands of passers-by at Westgate Shopping Centre, alongside 120 attendees across two public talks. Workshops involved 21 South Essex College students, while interviews captured stories from six Basildon residents.

Diversity & young people

Three full-day workshops with South Essex College students in animation and games design enabled young people to explore nightlife histories and contemporary forms of communing. The project successfully reached working-class communities by conducting activity in markets, pubs, and cafés rather than formal settings.

Quality

High-quality research underpinned the project, including training, archive work, and careful oral-history methods. The sculptural installation and publication involved significant artistic collaboration, including commissioned essays and visual works from established practitioners. Public events featured respected speakers and DJs linked to Raquels.

Perceptions

The project reshaped local narratives around Basildon's nightlife, validating club culture as an important site of working-class identity and collective memory. Audiences responded positively, recognising the value of preserving these histories.

Clubbing & Commune-ing publication.
Photo: Anna Lukala



Legacy

A major legacy is the formal deposit of Raquels' archival material into the Essex Record Office, ensuring permanent public access. The project also seeded future collaborations, strengthened community relationships, and initiated new research and creative partnerships for the artists.

Programme

Clubbing & Commune-ing by Emma Edmondson and Tim Burrows

“I remember sitting in car parks, post-club, in Herne Bay where I grew up, looking out across the sea to Southend. You didn’t need tickets to this space, the car – you were the DJ. Looking back, I have wondered if the car in the car park was the one last autonomous space – directed by the ravers, owned by the ravers, after all the club venues have gone.” Emma Edmondson



Clubbing & Commune-ing panel discussion. Photo: Anna Lukala

Programme

Common Grounds by We Live Here and Allie Crewe



Common Grounds. Photo: Allie Crewe

Location: Medway & Basildon

Venue: Riverside Country Park & Wat Tyler Country Park

Artwork: Outdoor exhibition produced with women migrants

Free entry and open to all

A collaboration between We Live Here, photographer Allie Crewe and LV21, exploring landscape, migration, belonging and women’s lived experience across Medway and Essex. Developed through intimate one-to-one collaborations, the project produced a powerful outdoor photo exhibition presented for 72 days across Riverside Country Park and Wat Tyler Country Park, alongside walks, workshops, a video installation, and an online platform sharing participant-created content.

Programme

Common Grounds by We Live Here and Allie Crewe

Audiences

The project reached over 7,900 audience members, supported by 10 participatory sessions, 3 exhibitions, and 2 discussion events. Participants and visitors responded with deep emotional engagement and repeated visits.

Diversity & Young People

The project centred women who had migrated from across the UK and Europe, including Ukrainian participants navigating displacement. Activities were inclusive, trauma-informed and grounded in wellbeing.

Quality

High-quality artistic delivery was praised by partners and audiences, highlighting the strength of Allie's photography, the sensitive collaborations, and the professional outdoor installations.



Common Grounds. Photo: Allie Crewe

Programme

Common Grounds by We Live Here and Allie Crewe

Perceptions

The work revealed nature as both solace and site of vulnerability, shifting perceptions of local landscapes while validating participants' stories of transition and resilience. Public feedback described the exhibition as powerful, inspiring and transformative.

“They are really stunning. So powerful. I’ll come back with my friends”

Audience feedback

Legacy

The project strengthened cross-Estuary partnerships, produced 10 new artworks, and seeded future co-commissioning discussions with 18 coastal-city representatives, supporting long-term cultural exchange.



Programme

Estuary 2025 film programme



Estuary 2025 film programme at Gravesend Town Pier

Locations: Basildon & Gravesend

Venues: Wat Tyler Country Park & Gravesend Town Pier

Artworks: *In Plain Sight Unseen* by Jane Woollatt and Beverley Carruthers, *Flood Barrier* by Catherine Yass, *The Sensory Attunement Coracle* by Ryan Powell, *Cider to the Sea* by Jonathan Goldberg, *Delivering Coffins* by Michael Upton, *RiverView* by Simon Rattigan, *Concrete Barges* by Aislinn Evans, *Awojoh* by George Morgan.

Free entry and open to all

The Estuary 2025 film programme presented a curated selection of artist moving-image works selected following a call out for existing works exploring the festival theme of 'Vessels'. The works considered water, bodies, cameras and rivers as containers for memory, care and transformation, offering audiences a range of poetic perspectives on the Thames Estuary.

Programme

Estuary 2025 film programme

Audiences

Free screenings created accessible entry points for festival visitors and local residents, drawing audiences into quiet, reflective encounters with work rooted in the surrounding landscape.

Diversity & Young People

The programme's inclusive, drop-in format supported broad participation, with diverse families, young people and community groups engaging with the films, for example as part of wider activity in the park, or following participation in family workshops in Gravesend.

Quality

Featuring acclaimed artists such as Catherine Yass, Sam Williams, Ryan Powell and Beverley Carruthers, the programme showcased high-quality, research-rich moving-image practice, foregrounding ecological, social and historical storytelling.

Perceptions

The films revealed new perspectives on the Estuary, its rivers, infrastructures and intertidal zones as emotionally charged, politically entangled spaces shaped by resilience, memory and fragile ecologies.

Legacy

By situating moving-image works in a public green space and on a town pier, the programme expanded how and where contemporary film can be encountered, strengthening cultural engagement in Basildon and Gravesend, contributing to long-term place-based creative activity in the boroughs.

Estuary 2025 film programme at Wat Tyler Country Park



Engaging with the Intertidal Zone



Engaging with the Intertidal Zone. Photo: Walking Trees

Location: Castle Point

Venue: Benfleet Creek,
Leigh Creek & Two Tree
Island

Artwork: Guided
mudwalks

Free ticketed events

Participants explored the intertidal landscape through guided artistic ecological walks, offering a direct sensory experience of the estuary's material environment. The project connected artmaking, environmental awareness, and embodied learning. Supported by Castle Point Borough Council UKSPF Community Grant.

Programme

Engaging with the Intertidal Zone

Audiences

There was strong demand and community interest in the events. Feedback before, during, and after the walks reflected deep enthusiasm, with many participants returning for subsequent sessions.

Diversity & Young People

The accessible, outdoor format welcomed a broad mix of ages and backgrounds for 22 participants. The informal, collaborative atmosphere supported intergenerational participation lowering barriers to engagement.

Quality

The walks combined artistic guidance with ecological knowledge, offering high-quality experiential learning that participants described as enriching and memorable.

Perceptions

The project revealed the locations as dynamic ecological sites shaped by politics, pollution, and human interaction.

Legacy

Participant demand led to the formation of the Creek Crawling Collective, a new group dedicated to ongoing dialogue on estuary ecology, water justice, and collective engagement with the intertidal environment.



Engaging with the Intertidal Zone. Photo: Gerio Gneechi

Estuary Adventure walks



Estuary Adventure Canvey Lake walk. Photo: Michaela Freeman

Location: Canvey Island

Venue: Canvey Lake & Seafront

Artwork: 2 guided walks with creative prompts created with local youth club attendees

Free ticketed events & available the Adventure Labs app

A creative walking project developed with young people from Yellow Door youth club on Canvey Island. Working with artists Priya Sundram, Emma Mills, and theatre practitioners Hannah Brailsford and Lauren Bolter, participants co-designed two themed public walks featuring reflective, performative, and nature-based prompts. Both walks were published on the Adventure Labs app, creating a lasting legacy that allows anyone to access and enjoy them at any time. Supported by Active Essex.

Programme

Estuary Adventure walks

Audiences

Six youth workshops and two public walks for local families took place. Participants expressed enjoyment, curiosity and pride in discovering new aspects of their island. *"I enjoyed the walks, because you get fresh air."* Feedback from participant

"I learned that there is a lot more to Canvey than I thought." Audience feedback

Diversity & Young People

The project engaged diverse young people through accessible, place-based activity, encouraging creativity outdoors and supporting wellbeing through movement, reflection, and collaborative exploration.

Quality

High-quality interdisciplinary workshops combined drawing, drama, ecological learning, and storytelling. Professional facilitation ensured meaningful engagement and well-crafted prompts.

Perceptions

Young people reported discovering *"more to Canvey than I thought,"* shifting perceptions of familiar places and building pride in local heritage and ecology.

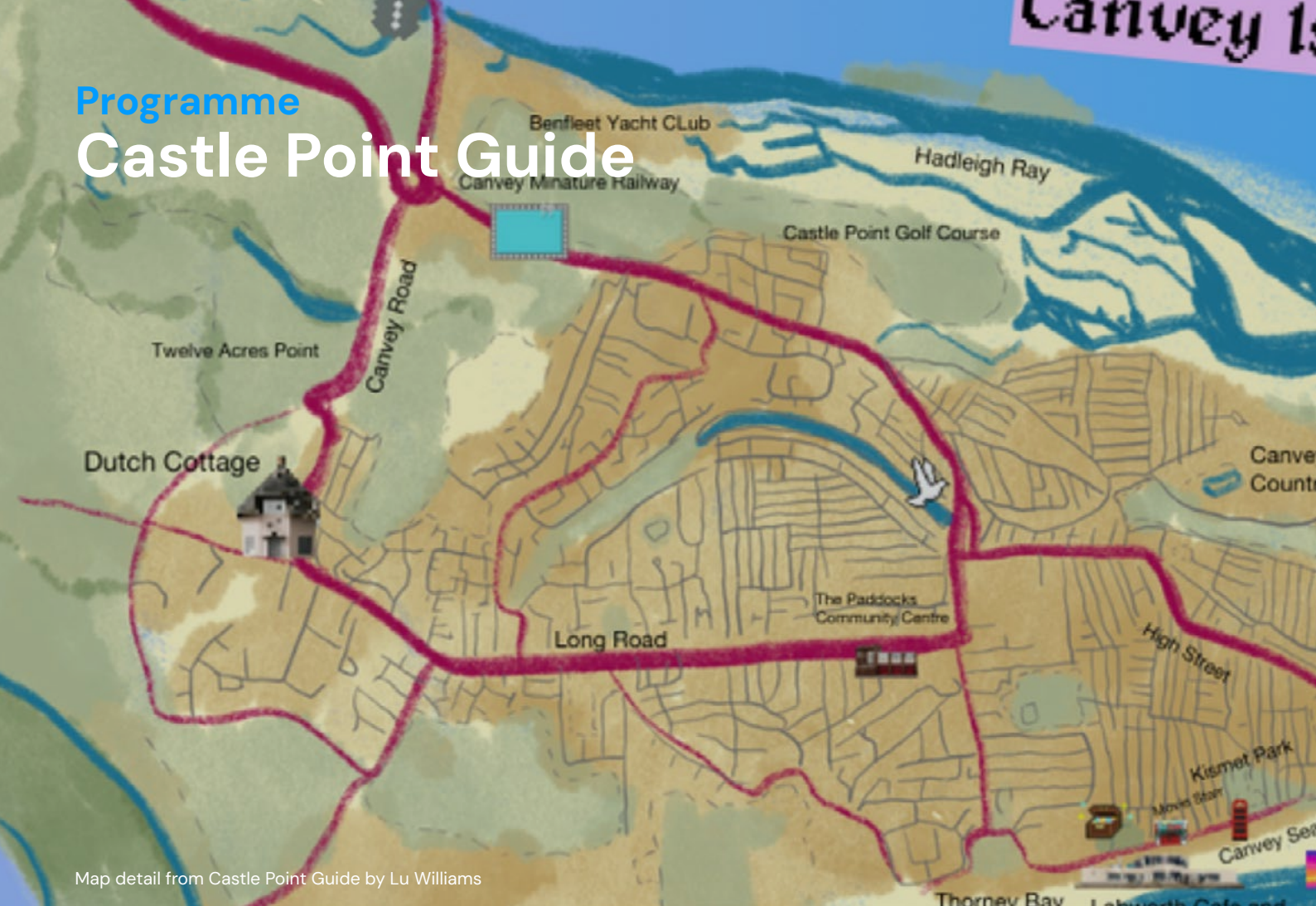
Legacy

The published Adventure Labs routes and Castle Point Guide (5,000 copies) ensure lasting access, while youth involvement in public walks strengthens long-term community connection to place informing longer term work with Active Essex.

Left + Right: Estuary Adventure walks planning with Yellow Door.
Photos: Michaela Freeman



Castle Point Guide



Map detail from Castle Point Guide by Lu Williams

Community: Castle Point

Venue: HOFS & outdoor spaces across the borough

Artwork: Artist designed printed publication
5000 print run
distributed across the borough

Created to help residents and visitors explore local heritage, nature, and cultural activities through artist-designed walks and creative prompts. Commissioned artist Lu Williams worked with community members and young people to develop routes across Canvey Island, Hadleigh, and Thundersley, supported by a new festival website and an extensive print and digital campaign. Supported by Castle Point Borough Council UKSPF Community Grant.

Programme

Castle Point Guide

Audiences

The project produced 5,000 printed guides distributed to local schools, groups, and festival audiences, alongside an online version integrated into the Estuary 2025 map. Public walks during the festival further extended reach.

Diversity & Young People

Linking to workshops engaging young people in co-designing two walks focused on biodiversity and the seafront, ensuring youth voices shaped the final guide.

Quality

The guide combined high-quality design, local research, and artist-led workshops, including collaboration with Thundersley History Society to develop historically informed routes.

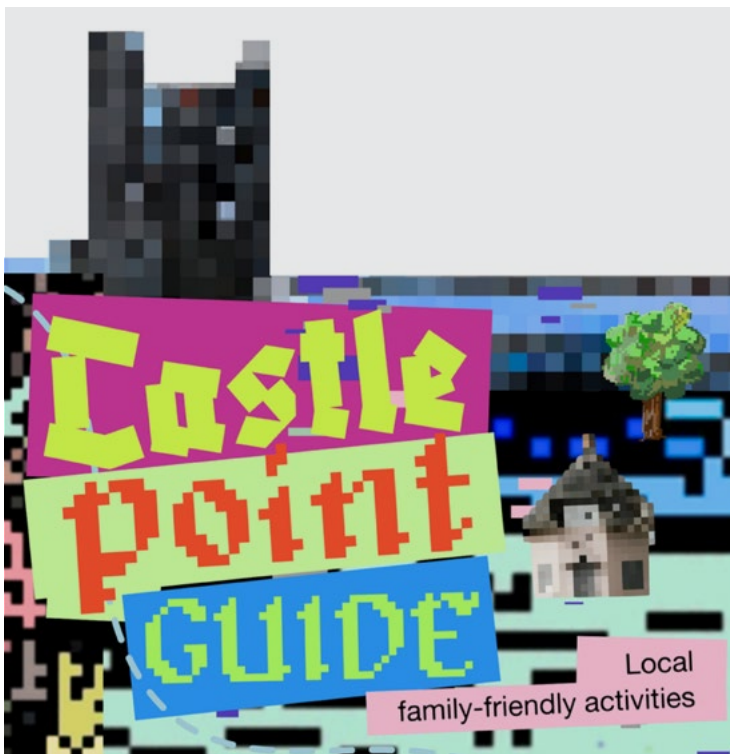
Perceptions

Nomination of landmarks by residents and the creative framing of routes encouraged people to rediscover familiar places and recognise Castle Point's cultural and ecological richness.

Legacy

The guide provides a lasting resource for families, with routes remaining accessible online, supporting ongoing exploration, wellbeing, and local pride beyond Estuary 2025.

Castle Point Guide cover by Lu Williams



ESTUARY ANTHOLOGY

The Thames Estuary is overflowing with wild and surprising creativity. The Estuary Anthology was designed to be the festival's showcase for independently-produced activities for audiences to enjoy alongside the main Estuary2025 programme.

29 projects were listed on the website with artists across the region taking part in workshops, events and seminars held in the lead up to support the development of ideas, projects as well as a much valued opportunity for peer-exchange.

Resource packs, project planning and fundraising support as well as a marketing toolkit were provided for creatives that took part enabling them to promote their involvement in the Estuary Anthology programme.

As Castle Point has historically had a low participation rate in previous Estuary festivals, creatives in Castle Point were supported to develop their own activities for Estuary 2025. A series of creative workshops and events successfully generated excitement for the Estuary 2025 programme and plans.

"How exciting to hear about Estuary 2025. I just love the focus, the Vessels frame and name, and the three themes. Plus, six fantastic milestone events."

"Thank you so much for a really enjoyable evening with some very familiar artists and some new to me! Lots of talent in the same room!"

Estuary Anthology workshop participant feedback

Highlights include:

- *Words from the Sphere* unveiling a new poetry bench with writers Lucia Dove, Jessica Taggart Rose, Gareth Evans, Daniel Kramb.
- *To Have and to Hold* centred around the UK's largest concrete garden ornament manufacturer, Whelans Garden Ornaments on the Isle of Sheppey.
- *Estuary Dreams* a community experimental storytelling project led by neurodivergent Basildon filmmaker and artist Aaron Shrimpton with screening events in multiple locations
- *Without Boundaries* exhibition of contemporary mixed media art, with evocative and strong links to themes of memory, nature and the Estuary presented at HOFs
- *Routes to Protest: the River, Vessels and People of 1381* an artist-led, one-day workshop to discover this innovative research project including sound installation and banner-making workshop led by Sadie Hennessey and Songs of Rebellion & Protest with punk legend Gina Birch.
- *Pocket Worlds* artist Sylak Ravenspine presented sphere-making workshops culminating in a collection of handmade spheres exploring geology, human impact, and changing coastal landscapes.

" I really enjoyed the initial anthology workshops at HOFs, which sparked the idea that my project could be an open workshop and the basic idea of being in a room full of people being creative and having conversations about positive things was quite a nice thing to do"
"I have benefited from being part of the festival of events in collaborative ways, by meeting other creatives and forging long-lasting friendships, sharing ideas and planning future works. I connected deeply with the theme of 'Vessels' and took up the challenge to look beyond the maritime connection towards a more abstract interpretation of the subject matter. I would credit 'Vessels' with providing me with a thought exercise which became a prime catalyst for enabling me to stretch my existing art practice beyond ink fluids and explore how I might use mud as a sculptural medium in order to encapsulate the essence of place."
Estuary Anthology Artist feedback

Partners & supporters

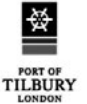
Estuary 2025 Principal Partners:



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Estuary 2025 Major Partners:



Estuary 2025 Commissioning Partners:



Estuary 2025 Festival Partners:



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Thanks to:

Thank you to our fantastic commissioned artists, our funders and partners. Estuary 2025 would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of the Estuary Festival team: Michaela Freeman, Hannah Barnes, Lorenza Peragine, Steph Stephenson and Gero Gnecci. Huge thanks to our volunteers, invigilators, Estuary Festival Chair Colette Bailey and our Advisory Board. Thanks to Pryle Behrman for curatorial support and for initiating the 'Vessels' concept. Final thanks of course to the Estuary itself for providing our ongoing inspiration.



Estuary 2025 team and volunteers. Photo: Sam Mainwright

**EST
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2025**