



Museum of London Docklands mark 10th anniversary with the opening of *Estuary*

The outer limits of the River Thames is explored in *Estuary*, a new exhibition opening at the Museum of London Docklands on Friday 17 May 2013, as part of the museum's 10th anniversary.

In the largest contemporary art exhibition to be held in the grade-one listed Georgian warehouse, *Estuary* will contain the work of twelve London-based artists, each of whom have used the Thames Estuary region as their source of inspiration.

The free exhibition brings together new and existing pieces of photography, paintings, printmaking and film from the last thirty years and will be on display in the Chris Ellmers gallery until 27 October 2013. *Estuary* is supported by public funding from Arts Council England.

A new film by **Nikolaj Bendix Skyum Larsen** entitled *Portrait of a River* has been commissioned in collaboration with the Film & Video Umbrella, which proceeds downriver, weaving together fragments and traces of the people and the places that define the character of the Estuary. Conceived as a work in several parts, it will add new 'chapters' over the course of the exhibition. **Christiane Baumgartner's *Medway* (2013)** has also been especially commissioned for *Estuary*, combining traditional printmaking techniques with her own photographs.

Francis Marshall, Senior Curator for *Estuary* said, "By bringing together these contemporary pieces we hope to give a sense of just what an extraordinary landscape London has on its doorstep, and to explore some of the issues which characterise the city's relationship with the estuary today."

Whilst each piece is independently displayed, there are common themes which resonate throughout. Giving the estuary a sense of place is explored in film, for example by **John Smith in *Horizon (Five Pounds a Belgian)* (2012)** (commissioned by Turner Contemporary, Margate) in **Andrew Kötting's *Jaunt* (1995)** and in **William Raban's *Thames Film* (1986)**, which retraces Thomas Pennant's 1787 *Journey from London to Dover*.

William Raban added, "I am delighted that a version of *Thames Film* will be shown in the Museum of Docklands *Estuary* Exhibition. The appearance of the river has changed dramatically in the intervening 27 years but essentially the power of the river remains timeless and will always be a rich source of inspiration for artists."

Other artists also use the river to meditate on London's history. **Stephen Turner's remarkable *Seafort Project* (2005)** is the result of his thirty six day residence alone on the derelict searchlight tower of the Shivering Sands Seafort. This Maunsell fort was one in a series of military platforms



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built in the estuary to provide defence against Luftwaffe squadrons during World War Two. Historically, the estuary also served as a playground for Londoners escaping the city, and **Simon Robert** reflects a contemporary view of pleasure-seeking with his **Southend (2010)** photograph of the popular seaside resort from his *Pierdom* series. **Michael Andrews'** two images **Thames Painting: The Estuary (1994-95)** and **Study for The Estuary (1994)** also capture the mood of the river, based on material gathered during trips to Canvey Island, combined with 19th century photographs of the river.

Estuary opens against the backdrop of an ambivalent relationship between London and the wilderness on its doorstep. The estuary threatens to swamp the city with powerful tidal surges and rising sea levels but is itself threatened ecologically by the capital's transport and energy generating proposals. Recent debates regarding a new estuary airport have prompted a renewed focus on this region of England. This ecological theme appears in **Gayle Chong Kwan's The Golden Tide (2013)**, a photo series of refuse found in the estuary and in the paintings by **Jock McFadyen - Purfleet: from Dracula's Garden (2001)** and **Dagenham (2006)**. **Peter Marshall's Thames Gateway (2000-04)** also presents the urban landscape surrounding the Estuary.

51° 29'.9" North - 0°11' East, Rainham Barges (1985), a film by the **Bow Gamelan Ensemble**, will also be screened, which includes the percussion group performing a bold experimental composition in the midst of rising tide waters at Rainham marshes.

Meanwhile as artists explore the relationship between London and the estuary, a mini exhibition will consider the current debates surrounding the controversial estuary airport proposal.

About the Thames estuary

The Thames Estuary is a place both specific and vague. A liminal zone, it is where the river meets the sea, as fresh water becomes brackish then saline. Its shoreline and surrounding hinterland is characterised by low-lying land, stretches of mudflats, saltmarshes, sandy beaches, nature reserves, industrial units, container ports, power stations, ferry terminals, and seaside resorts.

It is a delicate ecosystem, home to many rare or threatened species. But the power of the tidal Thames represents a significant threat to the city of London. We tap its resources and rely on it for trade, yet keep it at bay with a flood barrier. Historically, the Estuary was London's playground. Sandy beaches and fresh sea air lured Londoners to Estuary towns as early as the Georgian period. Traditional holiday destinations such as Ramsgate, Margate and Southend-on-Sea (still home to the world's longest pier) thrived throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

The strategic significance of the Estuary cannot be understated. In the 20th century a series of military platforms, Maunsell Forts, were built in the Estuary to provide defence against Luftwaffe squadrons using the river as a navigation aid on their way to bomb London. After the war, they were used as bases for pirate radio stations such as Radio City and Radio Essex. These structures still stand, though now rotting.

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Notes to Editors



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1. For more information or images, please contact Andrew Scott ascott@museumoflondon.org.uk / 020 7814 5511 or on Twitter [@MOLpressoffice](https://twitter.com/MOLpressoffice)
2. [Museum of London](#), [Museum of London Docklands](#) and [Museum of London Archaeology](#) seek to inspire a passion for London. The Museums are open daily 10am – 6pm and are FREE to all.
3. Explore the Museum of London with [Collections online](#) - home to over 12,000 objects with more being added.
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