



Undersea

29 March – 14 September 2025

Exploring the mysteries, myths and life that lurk beneath the waves, *Undersea* at Hastings Contemporary brings together paintings, prints, drawings and objects from across different cultures and artistic movements.

Undersea follows *Seaside Modern* (2021) and *Seafaring* (2022) to complete a trilogy of exhibitions curated by renowned art historian James Russell.

Featuring over 75 artworks that span four centuries and a range of cultures, *Undersea* is an exciting exhibition that invites visitors of all ages to take a dip into the briny.

One section is based on artists' study of the marine environment and the creatures that inhabit it. While contemporary British artist Nicola Bealing (b. 1963) offers imaginary visions of the undersea world in works such as *Dead Man's Fingers II* (2020), the Greek painter Yiannis Maniatakos (1935-2017) donned diving gear to paint haunting views of the seabed – underwater. Meanwhile there is a rare chance to view a work created by marine organisms: *Sea Sculpture* (c. 1725) incorporates ceramicware lost at sea and colonised by corals.

Lobsters, crabs and fish appear in different guises throughout the exhibition, sometimes portrayed as beautiful, strange objects, as in Charles Collins (c. 1680-1744) 1738 painting *Lobster on a Delft Dish*, and sometimes in a humorous way. George Cruikshank's (1792-1878) *Fish in Human Situations* (1832) is a tiny work packed with absurdities, which will hang alongside Edward Bawden's (1903-1989) *An Old Crab and a Young* (c. 1956).

Intricate representations of the sea and its inhabitants are offered by a group of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, including David Bosun (b. 1973) Doris Gingingara (b. 1946), Victor Motlop (b. 1961) and Alan Palm (b. 1961).

Another group of works is inspired by mythology and imaginary aquatic realms, with an impressive display of international artworks depicting mermaids. This includes the celebrated Surrealist painting from 1940, *A Siren in Full Moonlight* by Paul Delvaux (1897-1994) (1940, Southampton Art Gallery) and the startlingly inventive *Mermaids* series by contemporary Swiss painter Klodin Erb (b. 1963). Different perspectives on the same subject are offered by Nigerian painter Kelechi Nwaneri (b. 1994), in his depiction of the powerful African goddess and water spirit *Mami Wata* (2021), and in Thomas Lowinsky's (1892-1947) *The Dawn of Venus* (1922). The mermaid-like creatures in Chioma Ebinama's (b. 1988) *Piscean Dream IV* (2024) are delicate, graceful – and ferocious.

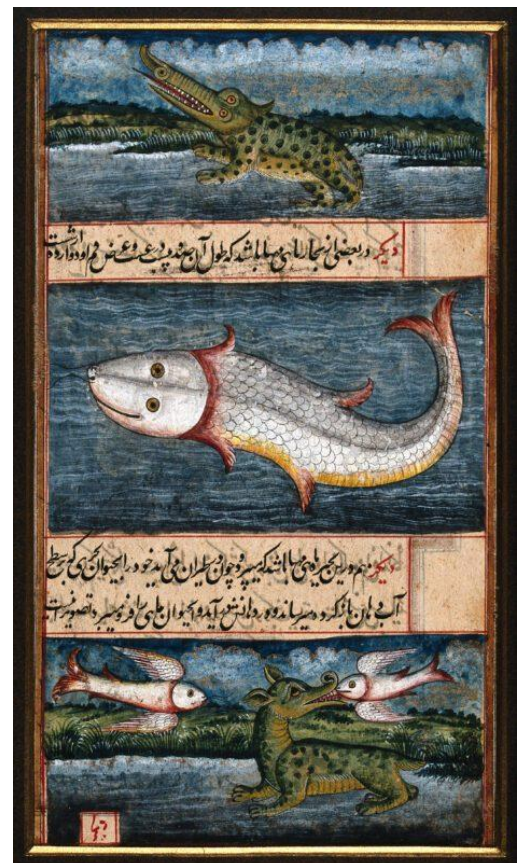
Undersea charts depictions of the sea through the ages. One of the oldest works is the beguiling *A crocodile, a gigantic fish and an animal that eats flying fish* (1750) by an unknown maker, the full meaning of which remains a mystery. Historical works by artists such as Edwardian illustrator Arthur Rackham (1867-1939), 19th century Japanese printmaker Taiso Yoshitoshi (1839-1892) and Austrian Expressionist master Oskar Kokoschka (1880-1980), appear alongside a rich variety of contemporary works. Highlights include the mysterious *Deep Dive* (2022) by Tom Anholt (b. 1987), *Forms Without Life* (1992) by Damien Hirst (b. 1965) and *Octopus's Veil* (2016) by Michael Armitage (b. 1984).

The show also explores the diverse experiences and rich lore of those who live by, work on, or depend upon the sea. Taiso Yoshitoshi's *A woman abalone diver wrestling with an octopus* (c. 1870) is a dramatic almost cartoon-like image of a woman with a knife becoming enveloped in the tentacles of a giant octopus, while Christopher Wood's (1901-1930) *Ulysses and the Sirens* (1929) is an action-packed re-telling of a Greek myth, albeit in a 20th century setting.

Hastings Contemporary is situated on the dramatic seafront in Hastings Old Town, alongside one of Europe's oldest and largest beach-launched fishing fleets. The show is part of a season of exhibitions about life above and below the waves. It appears alongside an immersive site-specific installation, *The Sea Feeds the Wind*, created in collaboration with artist Mary Hooper and the Hastings Fishermen's Protection Society, which documents and celebrates the cultural and industrial heritage of the Hastings fishing community. A full programme of events will showcase and share the town's fishing heritage and the threats that the fishing fleet now faces.

Leah Cross, Director of Programmes at Hastings Contemporary says: "This season we are taking visitors on a thrilling adventure above and below the waterline. This exhibition explores the undersea world and its denizens, both real and imaginary, through artists' eyes. The sea is a cultural space shared by many nations and peoples, and to reflect this, the works on display cross borders, traditions and histories, and celebrate the pleasures of difference."

Speaking about *Undersea*, James Russell says: "I'm excited about the internationalism of the show, as we have works from the UK, USA, Japan, China, India, Australasia, Europe and Africa." He adds: "There are themes which I think will appeal widely, particularly the mermaid's section, among which Delvaux's *A Siren in Full Moonlight* and a set of 27 strange and wonderful mermaid paintings by Klodin Erb are fabulous. Another striking work is Mia Weiner's contemporary textile piece *Sirens*. Visitors are in for a treat!"



NOTES FOR EDITORS

[HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGES CAN BE DOWNLOADED HERE](#)

- Christopher Wood, *Ulysses and the Sirens*, 1929. Photo © Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge
- Tom Anholt, *Deep Dive*, 2022. Courtesy Josh Lilley, London© Tom Anholt and Josh Lilley. Photo credit: Gunter Lepkowski
- Taiso Yoshitoshi, *A woman abalone diver wrestling with an octopus*, c. 1870. Courtesy Wellcome Collection
- Unknown maker, *A crocodile, a gigantic fish and an animal that eats flying fish*, 1750. Courtesy Wellcome Collection
- Further images in the [dropbox folder](#)

Hastings Contemporary brings world-class modern and contemporary art to a spectacular coastal setting. With an ambitious programme of exhibitions, events and activities, the gallery aims to enrich lives, support creativity and help Hastings to thrive.

Showcasing internationally celebrated artists and emerging practitioners, the gallery has developed a reputation for its focus on painting and drawing, supported by Artist Patron Sir Quentin Blake. The award-winning building is located on the town's historic fishing beach among the net huts and working structures of the fishing fleet.

Hastings Contemporary is a registered charity. Under 18s can visit for free. Hastings and Rother residents can visit for half price, from just £5. For unlimited free visits, discounts, and more, annual membership starts at £32.

www.hastingscontemporary.org / Instagram @hastings.contemporary

FOR MORE INFORMATION, INTERVIEWS, AND IMAGES

Tracy Jones, Brera PR – tracy@brera-london.com / 01702 216658 / 07887 514984

Nicola Jeffs – nj@nicolajeffs.com / 07794 694 754