

Isabel Rock:
Things Fall Apart, The Centre Cannot Hold

27 September 2025 – 15 March 2026



This autumn, Hastings Contemporary presents *Things Fall Apart, The Centre Cannot Hold*, a bold new exhibition by Isabel Rock, portraying a surreal post-human future shaped by the forces of climate collapse.

Through large-scale, colourful drawings, printmaking, sculpture, and short stories, artist and climate activist Isabel Rock imagines a new world order populated by mutant hybrid species – giant slugs, feral rats, colossal pigs, and multi-limbed crocodiles – who have inherited the ruins of human civilisation.

Confronting pressing geopolitical questions – of capitalism, climate change, and repressive power structures – Isabel’s mischievous language of humour, drama and fanciful characters brings a lightness of touch that in no way belies the seriousness of her concerns.

From 27 September 2025, visitors to Hastings Contemporary will be invited to step into Isabel’s world. Pushing the boundaries of what constitutes ‘drawing’, the gallery will be transformed into a series of theatrical spaces that will explore the fantastical lives of these tough, dystopian creatures. In one, a life-

sized papier-mâché rat sits in a rusting sports car, while in another a giant slug is ensconced in a replica prison cell. Are the new mutant creatures doomed to repeat the same mistakes as human civilisation?

“I had mixed feelings about the end of the world. I hadn’t been doing so great in the normal world, I’d sort of fallen behind, was hanging round the edges of what was considered a good and normal life... But there were no guarantees that the new world would be any better. In fact, I suspected that things would be even more difficult for someone like me.” – extract from Isabel Rock’s story *The End of the World*

Isabel’s recent experience in prison, after participating in Just Stop Oil protests, informs key aspects of the exhibition. During a month-long stay at HMP Bronzefield, Rock used drawing as a vital outlet, sketching her surroundings with salvaged materials, including opened-out envelopes and precious biros. This act of creative defiance underpins the exhibition’s recurring themes of survival, adaptation and connection.

Things Fall Apart, The Centre Cannot Hold is the outcome of the £10,000 Evelyn Williams Drawing Award 2023, in association with the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize. The Evelyn Williams Trust supports the biennial award, which is delivered in collaboration between Drawing Projects UK, the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize, and Hastings Contemporary. Isabel was the recipient of this award for her drawing *Our Cell*, a biro drawing on paper, and her accompanying exhibition proposal.



Isabel Rock said, “It is very easy to feel powerless and anxious with everything going on in the world. For me, drawing and creativity gives me a chance to take back control and spend a peaceful moment using my hands. There is so much power in creativity, power in community, power in collective action, power in love and compassion. I would like people to leave the show feeling thoughtful about the world, and inspired by creativity.”

Kathleen Soriano, Director at Hastings Contemporary, said “Things Fall Apart continues Hastings Contemporary’s valued partnership with Drawing Projects UK and the Evelyn Williams Drawing Award where we are able to champion the inventive ways in which artists are centring drawing within their work. Isabel’s exhibition, her first solo show in a major national institution, promises a poignant, darkly imaginative journey into the possible futures that we may yet create, or inherit.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

[IMAGES FOR MEDIA USE CAN BE DOWNLOADED HERE](#)

Images above

- Isabel Rock, *End of Everything*, 2024, 250 x 150cm, woodblock collage, acrylic ink, acrylic paint. © Isabel Rock. Photography Paul Plews
- Isabel Rock. Image credit: Nicola Tree

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Title: *Things Fall Apart, The Centre Cannot Hold* refers to the poem, 'The Second Coming' by W. B. Yeats.

[Hastings Contemporary](#) is a pioneering arts charity in the heart of Hastings Old Town. Through bold exhibitions, partnerships and events, the gallery brings world-class art to Hastings for the benefit of everyone. With a programme anchored in marine ecology, ocean futures and sustainable cultures, Hastings Contemporary brings together artists, scientists, fishing communities, and the public to explore new creative frontiers – all within an award-winning building on the town's historic fishing beach.

Visiting the gallery: Open Wednesday–Sunday and bank holidays, 11am–5pm. Under 18s visit for free. Hastings and Rother residents can visit for half price, from just £5. Become a Member for unlimited free visits, special invitations, discounts, and more, from just £32 a year.

Hastings Contemporary

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Isabel Rock (b. 1981, London) is an artist and creator of contemporary fairy tales, crafting surreal narratives that blend humour, drama, hidden morals, and fantastical beings. Drawing on influences such as Japanese woodblock prints and Indian miniature painting, Rock has developed a distinctive collage technique combining bold structures, intricate details, and large-scale printmaking.

She studied Fine Art Printmaking at the University of Brighton and completed an MA at the Royal College of Art in 2008. Her work has been exhibited internationally, following her sold-out debut solo show at Bearspace Gallery, London (2009), and participation in the inaugural India Art Summit. In 2013, she won the Arts Foundation Printmaking Fellowship, funding a move to Berlin, before returning to the UK in 2017.

Taking part in actions by Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil, she has been arrested multiple times and spent a month in prison after climbing up a gantry on the M25. Her drawing from HMP Bronzefield won the prestigious Evelyn Williams Drawing Award in association with the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize in 2023. Her first major solo exhibition, *Things Fall Apart, The Centre Cannot Hold*, will open at Hastings Contemporary in September 2025. Rock is based in London with a studio in Brixton.

The Evelyn Williams Drawing Award of £10,000 is supported by the Evelyn Williams Trust and is awarded biennially to an artist with an existing track record. Once selected for the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize, eligible artists are invited to submit an exhibition proposal for review by an Evelyn Williams Trustee, the Director of Drawing Projects UK, and the gallery partner, Hastings Contemporary. The award winner is then invited to research and deliver a solo exhibition. Past winners include Barbara Walker MBE in 2017, Penny McCarthy in 2019 and Roland Hicks in 2021.

The Evelyn Williams Trust was set up in 1991 by artist Evelyn Williams and her husband, to support the cause of drawing among artists at all stages of their careers. Its initial emphasis was on women artists and the particular challenges they face. It has also supported drawing practice through fellowships in art colleges and over recent years, the Evelyn Williams Drawing Award. “[In the late 1980s] there was, as far as I could see, no drawing going on in art schools,” said Evelyn. “By drawing, I don’t mean just drawing from the model, I mean making plans for what you’re going to do. It’s a process of thinking; it starts in your head and it comes out in your hands, in whatever medium you happen to be using. It is fundamental to all good art.” **Evelyn Williams** (1929-2012) was a figurative artist whose intense and quietly authoritative paintings, sculptures, reliefs and drawings were produced over a period of seven decades.

Drawing Projects UK was formed in 2009 by Professor Anita Taylor to deliver research initiatives in drawing, including the annual Jerwood (now Trinity Buoy Wharf) Drawing Prize exhibitions. In 2015, Drawing Projects UK opened a Centre for Drawing and Contemporary Art in Wiltshire, which aims to promote and develop research and public engagement in and through drawing in local, regional, national and international contexts by delivering on-site and off-site projects, exhibitions, events, and publications, dedicated to drawing. A second centre is in development in Dundee, Scotland. drawingprojects.uk

The Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize is an annual exhibition project led by its founding Director, Professor Anita Taylor, artist, founder of Drawing Projects UK and, currently, Dean of Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design at the University of Dundee. The Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize has been supported by the Trinity Buoy Wharf Trust since 2018, and is delivered in partnership with Trinity Buoy Wharf, University of Dundee, and Drawing Projects UK, and is project managed by Parker Harris.

The Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize 2025 exhibition launches on Wednesday 8 October 2025 at Trinity Buoy Wharf in London, when the Awards with a total value of £27,000 will be announced, including the 2025 recipient of the Evelyn Williams Drawing Award. trinitybuoywharfdrawingprize.drawingprojects.uk