

HASTINGS CONTEMPORARY

Press release: December 2025

Leading cultural figures to judge landmark Open exhibition for Sussex

Chris Packham, Elena Crippa, Eva Langret, Fiona Banner, Isabel Rock, Kathleen Soriano and Zoe Lyons to lead selection



Hastings Contemporary and Sussex Contemporary are proud to announce the distinguished judging panel for *The Open: Odyssey*, a major new biennial open exhibition launching in 2026.

The panel brings together leading voices from the worlds of art, culture, broadcasting and environmental advocacy: Chris Packham, Elena Crippa, Eva Langret, Fiona Banner, Isabel Rock, Kathleen Soriano and Zoe Lyons.

This milestone collaboration will result in a gallery-wide exhibition at Hastings Contemporary opening on 28 March 2026, celebrating the creative force of Sussex. Welcoming submissions from both emerging and established artists, the Open aims to showcase the breadth, diversity and innovation of contemporary art being made across the region.

Submissions are now open – artists are invited to submit work responding to the theme of Odyssey – an exploration of journeys shaped by tides, time and transformation. As a town long

HASTINGS CONTEMPORARY

defined by the coast and its shifting horizons, Hastings offers a fitting setting for narratives inspired by maritime history, personal voyages, and the elemental forces that shape coastal life.

Hastings Contemporary Director Kathleen Soriano said, *"As a gallery on the beach, we are witnesses to the changes going on around us and are committed to delivering an artistic programme that is anchored in ocean futures and sustainability. Artists have always been able to communicate in ways that allow us to 'see' things differently and I am confident that our Open exhibitors will honour local stories and connect to global conversations."*

Sussex Contemporary Director Jo Myles said, *"At Sussex Contemporary, we are driven by a belief in the power of ambitious, boundary-pushing art. The panel of judges brings a depth of experience and insight that will help ensure Odyssey becomes a platform where innovative ideas and emerging talent can truly thrive. We're delighted to be working with Hastings Contemporary and this exceptional group of thinkers."*

Wildlife broadcaster and conservationist Chris Packham said, *"Sussex's coastlines and wild spaces are under immense pressure, yet they remain places of astonishing beauty and inspiration. I can't wait to see how artists respond to the challenge posed by the Open. The insatiable human desire to create can cut through noise and help us confront our environmental crisis with clarity, imagination and, critically... hope."*

Comedian Zoe Lyons said, *"I adore living in Sussex not least because this part of the world is full of the most gloriously talented people. Then there is our wonderfully iconic coastline, so I am so excited to be part of the jury for the first Hastings Contemporary Open Exhibition. I can't wait to dive in and see what this exciting odyssey of creation will produce."*

Elena Crippa, Senior Curator of Contemporary Art at the Courtauld Gallery, said, *"This open exhibition is a truly exciting opportunity to explore and give greater visibility to Sussex's distinctive art scene. The theme of 'Odyssey' and its fantastical sea journey offer ample avenues for delving into issues of ecology, hospitality, resilience, and transformation. I love Hastings and look forward to learning more about artists from the region and their work."*

Artist Fiona Banner said, *"The talent and community on this bit of the south coast is magic."*

Artist and activist 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. It can be a lonely life as an artist in the studio, so opportunities like this that bring together many artists in an amazing space like Hastings Contemporary are incredibly valuable, and an honour to be part of."*

Featuring work by over 100 Sussex artists, in a wide variety of media, *The Open: Odyssey* is also an opportunity for visitors to support and collect the work of artists from the region, with all works available to purchase.

HASTINGS CONTEMPORARY

NOTES TO EDITORS

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

FOR MEDIA ENQUIRIES

For images, interviews, and requests, please contact Celia Bailey, Arts PR & Development:
bailey_celia@hotmail.com | 07930 442 411

Hastings Contemporary is a bold, independent 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 to Sunday and bank holidays, 11am to 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

Rock-a-Nore Road, Hastings, TN34 3DW
01424 728377 | hastingscontemporary.org

Sussex Contemporary celebrates, supports, and promotes contemporary artists, makers and craftspeople providing them with innovative ways of showcasing their work. With a vibrant annual programme of national and regional exhibitions and a series of workshops and talks called 'The Business of Art' we actively support living creatives towards greater commercial success.

The Open: Odyssey

At Hastings Contemporary

Exhibition dates: 28 March 2026 – 31 May 2026

Artwork submissions are now open. Deadline: 18 January 2026

Eligibility: The opportunity is open to any artist who is connected to Sussex through residence, birthplace, education, or work.

Apply at:

www.hastingscontemporary.org/events/odyssey

www.thesussexcontemporary.co.uk/odyssey-hastings-contemporary

Chris Packham is a conservationist and broadcaster known for his environmental and animal welfare activism. His TV credits include Springwatch and Earth for the BBC and Is it Time to Break the Law for Channel 4. Alongside his ambassadorial roles for numerous NGOs, he runs independent campaigns aimed at nature recovery and ending animal cruelty. Chris is also a vocal advocate for neurodiversity with a special focus on autism.

HASTINGS CONTEMPORARY

Elena Crippa is Senior Curator of Contemporary Art at the Courtauld Gallery, where she recently launched a new commission with the artist Rachel Jones and is curating a forthcoming exhibition of drawings and paintings by Salman Toor, opening in the autumn of 2026. She was previously Head of Exhibitions at the Whitechapel Gallery and Senior Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at Tate Britain, where her projects included retrospective exhibitions of Frank Bowling (2019) and Paula Rego (2021) and the 2022 commission *Hew Locke: The Procession*. She was a judge of the 60th Venice Biennale (2024). Recent publications include a monograph on Sonia Boyce for Tate Publishing's Artists Series (2024).

Eva Langret is Director, EMEA for Frieze, where she leads on Frieze London and oversees all Frieze initiatives in the region. Passionate about championing emerging artistic talent, she is the Vice Chair of the board of the Camden Art Centre, a place for world-class contemporary art exhibitions and education, a trustee of Fluxus Arts Project, a not-for-profit organisation created by the Institut français du Royaume-Uni, and a trustee of Forma, a London-based non-profit organisation supporting emerging and mid-career British and international artists.

Artist **Fiona Banner** often works under the moniker of The Vanity Press. She established the imprint in 1997, with her seminal book *The Nam*. Since then she has published many works, some in the form of books, some sculptural, some performance based. In 2009 she issued herself an ISBN number and registered herself as a publication under her own name. Humour, conflict and language are at the core of her work. Banner works in London and on the south coast, she exhibits internationally.

Isabel Rock is an artist and activist. Working in all mediums, she crafts surreal narratives with fantastical beings and hidden morals that blend humour with the darker side of human nature. She has exhibited internationally, including at the inaugural India Art Summit and the Royal Academy. Active in non-violent civil disobedience groups, most recently Citizens Arrest Network, Rock's activism and art examine and rebel against the systems we live in. Her drawing made during a month in HMP Bronzefield after a Just Stop Oil protest won the Evelyn Williams Drawing Award (2023) resulting in a solo exhibition, *Things Fall Apart, The Centre Cannot Hold*, at Hastings Contemporary in 2025-26.

Jo Myles is the Director of Sussex Contemporary, and Chair of the Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft. Under her leadership, SC runs high-profile open-call exhibitions, public shows, and paid opportunities that connect emerging and established makers with collectors, venues, and the public, all with an emphasis on accessibility, fair artist pay, and practical career support. Jo built a substantive career in the creative and fashion industries, working for Alexander McQueen, Laura Ashley, and Warehouse, and then founded an award-winning design-led gifting business, repeatedly praised for innovative leadership and commercial strategy.

Kathleen Soriano is an independent curator, art historian, and broadcaster. With over 35 years' experience in the art world she has been responsible for collections, contemporary and historical exhibitions at the National Portrait Gallery, London, and the Royal Academy of Arts, where she was Artistic Director (2009–2014), as well as at Compton Verney Art Gallery, where she was Director (2005–2009). Her book *Madam and Eve*, on women artists, was published in April 2018. Her broadcast activities include twelve series of *Portrait* and *Landscape Artist of the Year* for Sky Arts. Kathleen is currently Director at Hastings Contemporary.

HASTINGS CONTEMPORARY

Zoe Lyons has worked as a stand up comic for over 20 years. She has appeared on many TV shows including QI, Have I Got News For You and hosted the quiz show Lightning. She is one of the most recognisable voices on BBC Radio 4 and is regularly heard on Just a Minute, News Quiz and The Unbelievable Truth. She lives in Hove with her partner and terrier. She is a keen scuba diver and is an Ocean Ambassador for the Marine Conservation Society.

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