

# ***Landscapes of Hope***

Rachael Champion and Susie Olczak

Curated by Becca Pelly-Fry

12 July to 23 August 2025

Opening: Saturday 12 May 4 - 9pm



SCHOOL is pleased to present *Landscapes of Hope*; a two-person show of works by Rachael Champion and Susie Olczak, curated by Becca Pelly-Fry. Both artists transmit ideas of local hopefulness in the context of the widespread climate challenges we all face, through stories of adaptation. Olczak's recent research in Latin America considers local rituals and routines of life as the foundations for making engaging stories in extreme environments. Champion's work addresses the corporeality of the materials we extract, transform and consume, and how these actions affect the physical characteristics of landscapes and ecosystems.

Following a research trip to Dungeness earlier this year, considering local stories, customs and rituals, the exhibition is a visual experiment in responding to landscape, exploring community resilience and adaptability. Located in a 'borderland' territory, both a coastal location and a frontier town facing Europe, *Landscapes of Hope* offers ways of navigating the most pertinent and challenging issues of our time. Both artists are interested in

overturning ideas of human supremacy, encouraging a return to nature-led intelligence and tending to the pockets of hope that exist within hostile conditions.

Susie Olczak's installation, *The leaves fell, falling, until the only tree was the falling itself* 2025, connects the driest place on earth (Chile's Atacama Desert) with the driest place in the UK (Dungeness). In both places there are Halophyte plants; in Chile the Cachiyuyo plant extracts the salt, allowing other life to thrive nearby. In Dungeness the sea kale is adapted to cope with the harsh landscapes; there is more sea kale in Dungeness than anywhere else in the UK. The work acts as a set, for the staging of a new ritual for careful observation of the natural world. It takes inspiration from rituals Olczak experienced in the Atacama Desert, performed by the Lickan Antay people; the vessels hold driftwood and branches foraged from Dungeness.

Alongside the sculptural work is a photographic piece, *Hope* 2025, printed onto fabric and suspended like a flag or banner. The image was taken in Armila, Panama in 2022 during fieldwork in the Darién gap, a 100km stretch of jungle that forms a break in the Pan-American Highway (the route from the top of Alaska to the very tip of South America). At the time of Olczak's research visit, the Darién Gap had an influx of migrants trying to walk through the treacherous, swamp-filled jungle. Since 2022 the annual number has reached over half a million people, a significant number of whom come from Venezuela, where Olczak's mother was born and grew up. Feeling helpless and yet deeply connected to the plight of the migrants, Olczak made the sculpture from found, pre-cut natural materials, with the help of community members, as a simple act of solidarity - a flag placed in the river across from the migrant camp to offer a sense of hope and connection.

Rachael Champion's installation, *Drift Thrust Flow* 2025, features a three-metre section of covert Allied WWII infrastructure sitting amongst a bed of shingle. Above hang two pennants depicting collaged textures of wings of both birds and invertebrates observed at Dungeness. *Drift Thrust Flow* characterises aspects of this extraordinary paradoxical landscape, Europe's largest expanse of vegetative shingle, where wartime industry, energy infrastructure and a rich fragile ecology coexist on a stark elemental headland.

During World War II, Dungeness was central to Operation PLUTO (PipeLine Under The Ocean) — a top-secret Allied engineering feat that pumped fuel under the English Channel to supply the forces after the D-Day landings. The PLUTO pipelines were laid across the seabed from sites like Dungeness to France, ensuring a steady flow of petrol to advancing Allied troops. Remnants of this history — rusted pipework, concrete blocks, military infrastructure — remain embedded in the landscape, quietly monumental and half-reclaimed by nature. This particular section of pipeline is on loan from The Pilot Inn at Dungeness, where it is displayed amongst other decaying relics of local maritime history.

School Gallery  
65 Tontine Street  
Folkestone CT20 1JR  
0330 122 8661  
[info@schoolgallery.co.uk](mailto:info@schoolgallery.co.uk)  
[www.schoolgallery.co.uk](http://www.schoolgallery.co.uk)

Supported by



## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Rachael Champion's work explores the physical, material and historical relationships between ecology, industry and the built environment. Coalescing at the intersection between biology, geology and architecture, her practice interrogates the corporeality of the materials we extract, transform and consume, and the effects these actions have on the physical characteristics of landscapes and ecosystems. She has exhibited widely throughout the UK and internationally in a variety of site-specific contexts. Leading contemporary art galleries where her work has been presented include the Whitechapel Gallery, Camden Arts Centre, Hales Gallery, Zabłudowicz Collection and Modern Art Oxford. She is a recipient of the Arts Foundation Future Awards and the Red Mansion Prize as well as a former artist-in-residence at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art. Rachael is a graduate from the Royal Academy of Arts.

Susie Olczak is a multidisciplinary artist with a focus on sculpture. Her work considers ideas of contingent making and adaptation in relation to climate change and asks the viewer to look again at the world, drawing parallels between contingent making processes of artworks and methods in society of human and natural adaptation, i.e. the human drive to build temporary structures, shelters and rafts, used both for adventure and survival. Her current research juxtaposes distinct landscapes facing uncertainty due to climate change and extreme scenarios of too much or too little water. Her work has been shown internationally in Berlin, Japan and the United States. She has exhibited around the United Kingdom, attended residencies in Finland, Panama and Chile. She has been commissioned to produce artworks by BBC Scotland, Charles Saatchi at the Big Chill Festival, the National Trust, The Institute of Astronomy and the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, as well as for King's, Jesus, and Peterhouse Colleges of Cambridge University. She is a recipient of the Villiers David Travel Grant and a bursary award winner at the Royal Society of Sculptors. Recent accolades include the Ingram Collection Purchase Prize, the Mark Tanner Sculpture Award residency and exhibitions at Standpoint Gallery, Hestercombe Gallery, Tremenhoe Gallery, White Conduit Projects and The Lightbox.

## ABOUT THE CURATOR

Becca Pelly-Fry is an independent curator, consultant and Reiki Master, based in Folkestone. She is Associate Curator for SCHOOL and works across the UK, collaborating with galleries, art fairs and cultural organisations. Her curatorial practice has a focus on the intersection between art and healing practices, creating space for transformative experiences that reconnect audiences with the earth, other living beings and their true selves. Between 2013 and 2019, Becca was Head Curator for art materials company Colart International where she first ran their flagship space, Griffin Gallery, before launching a warehouse-style contemporary art space, Elephant West, converted from a derelict petrol station. Recent projects include the exhibition *La Mariposa (Butterfly Woman)* at Soho Revue; the Platform section of London Art Fair 25, entitled *Today for You, Tomorrow for Me*; and the feminist provocation across time, *Body Poetics*, co-curated with Marcelle Joseph at GIANT in Bournemouth. Becca is a member of Association of Women in the Arts, British Art Network, A-N and International Futures Forum. She is also on the committee of local artist-led festival, Open Art Folke, and offers a one-to-one Reiki healing practice at her home in Folkestone.



## *Landscapes of Hope* Day of Talks

Sunday 17 August 2025

Glassworks, Mill Bay

Booking Essential - FREE, with lunch included

The *Day of Talks* draws on the expertise of a range of cultural practitioners and academics, inviting them to respond to a set of provocations emerging from Olczak and Champion's research and artistic practices. Olczak's recent residencies in Latin America consider local rituals and routines of life as the foundations for making engaging stories in extreme environments. Champions' work addresses the corporeality of the materials we extract, transform and consume, and how these actions affect the physical characteristics of landscapes and ecosystems.

Invited speakers are:

Sorcha Carey, Curator of Folkestone Triennial 2025

Professor Catherine Dormor, Head of College, University of Westminster

Daniel Keech, senior research fellow, University of Gloucestershire Countryside Community Research Institute

Alison Neighbour, Welsh Folkestone-based multi-disciplinary artist and scenographer

John Kenneth Paranada, Curator of Art and Climate Change at Sainsbury Centre

Nastja Sade-Ronkko, Finnish artist, exhibiting in Dover during the summer

Sara Trillo, Kent-based Folkestone Triennial 2025 artist

Booking details available on the SCHOOL websites events page

School Gallery

65 Tontine Street

Folkestone CT20 1JR

0330 122 8661

[info@schoolgallery.co.uk](mailto:info@schoolgallery.co.uk)

[www.schoolgallery.co.uk](http://www.schoolgallery.co.uk)

Supported by

