THE ART NEWSPAPER

Folkestone Triennial 2025 review: environmental catastrophe—but also hope, joy and a jolly salamander

The sixth edition of the sprawling exhibition on the English coast includes sculptures, immersive installations and films by 18 artists

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25 July 2025



Jennifer Tee's *Oceans Tree of Life*
Creative Folkestone Triennial 2025. Photo: Thierry Bal

It is a reflection of our close relationship to the landscapes we inhabit that "the lie of the land" has become a general term for taking the measure of things, for gauging a situation and assessing what needs to be done. This phrase is the starting point for the 18 artists taking part in the sixth edition of the Folkestone Triennial, spread around the seaside town in southeast England. The ancient port has long been a site of arrival and departure, but as much of the outstanding work in this triennial reveals, there is nothing fixed or static about the lie of Folkestone's terrain.



Katie Paterson's *Afterlife* installation is on show in Folkestone's Martello Tower
Creative Folkestone Triennial 2025. Photo: Thierry Bal

Small in size but perceived as powerful objects that can ward off danger, amulets have been made and used by cultures and civilisations worldwide. In *Afterlife*, one of the triennial's most profound and thought-provoking works, Katie Paterson revisits and inverts this time-honoured tradition with casts of nearly 200 amulets from a mind boggling range of periods and places. Each of the charms has been scanned and recast in materials that carry the evidence of our planetary crisis, from an Olmec corn amulet made from neoprene fibres, which will lurk in our ecosystems for millennia, to a pair of netsuke birds fashioned using regurgitated plastic from a starving baby albatross. The message is loud and clear: no part of the planet is free from human contamination, and it will only be actions, not lucky charms or wishful thinking, that will save us.