THE TIMES

FIRST NIGHT

Folkestone Triennial review — this is exactly what public art should do

With works inspired by seagulls, sewers, kelp and the refugee crisis — and even a bespoke ice cream flavour — this site-specific art festival is a triumph

★★★★☆

To Oct 19, creativefolkestone.org.uk

Nancy Durrant

Tuesday July 22 2025, 1.00pm,
The Times

If the artists whose work peppers the hill of Wear Bay Road in Folkestone, overlooking the Channel, didn't know that a dig was going to be taking place in their midst, it's a very serendipitous coincidence. The East Wear Bay Archaeological Project, which aims to preserve remains associated with Folkestone Roman Villa before they are lost for ever to coastal erosion (quite soon, by the looks of it) was in full swing on the sweltering first day of the Folkestone Triennial, providing an appropriate foil to the contemporary commissions that surround it.

Katie Paterson's elegant *Afterlife*, in Martello Tower 1 nearby, touches on the environmental fragility the dig just a couple of hundred yards away is racing against. More than 200 replicas of ancient amulets from across the globe, each remade in a material from endangered landscapes (sustainably, obviously) are displayed on smooth wooden tables with indentations for each talisman. A small bird figure from Japan, dating from 664-332BC, is remade in charcoal from wildfires; the head of a king made in the Sasanian Empire somewhere between AD224-642 is formed of circuit boards washed up from the ocean.