

# aspex portsmouth

Coastal contemporary art gallery, **Aspex Portsmouth**, presents new summer exhibition by sculptor **Jessica Wetherly**, responding to issues of water pollution and environmental damage on the South Coast.



Image: *Tele:(gram): Frequencies of the Forest* (installation view), Jessica Wetherly, 2021. Photo: Ignacio Barrios.

***Sink or Float*** opens at Aspex from **8 July to 25 September 2022** and is the latest solo exhibition by Jessica Wetherly, an alum of the Royal College of Art.

The exhibition will consider the most urgent issues affecting our waterways. Since 2009, only 14% of UK rivers met Good Ecological Status under the Water Framework Directive; and in 2020, all English rivers failed to meet standard quality tests. Vital habitats with healthy and biodiverse ecosystems are being lost by both contamination of the waters and by the extraction of resources from the habitat.

To inform her work, Wetherly has been meeting local researchers and ecologists, including Dr Gordon Watson at the University of Portsmouth's School of Biological Sciences and Richard Jones, Countryside Officer at Portsmouth City Council, to gain an insight into localised climate change. Watson and Jones will also contribute to a special publication, launching alongside the exhibition at Aspex, combining artistic and scientific research.

About the project, Wetherly says,

*"During site visits to Portsmouth I have been fascinated by the rich ecologies surrounding Portsea Island, the marshland, mudflats and seagrass meadows. These habitats are marginal spaces. We use words such as barren, disparate, waste, desolate to describe such places; a place for drifting, floating and failing. But it is anything but, the ebb and flow of this tidal territory is full of life, providing abundant resources for birds, aquatic cultures and humans. The human impact on this wild landscape has created artificial borders that stop the natural movement of coastlines, but now without them these environments would be erased. Whilst the new sea walls are built around the island to protect ourselves, the surrounding marshes are left to bear the tidal forces. This project aims to encourage connection between people and place in a regenerative exploration of the depleted wilderness and polluted waterways."*

The exhibition's title, *Sink or Float*, refers to a game in which players guess whether an object will sink or float in a jar of water, reflecting an undercurrent in the artist's work, as a critique of boom or bust capitalist economies. The exhibition addresses the hypocrisy of our desire to extract resources unsustainably, to reap financial rewards without investing in the preservation of these resources or the ecosystems they are taken from. Through storytelling and personal reflection, Wetherly aims to restore a sense of agency, to confront contemporary challenges of ecological breakdown, creating new mythologies as a radical agent of deep, lasting change.

Wetherly's practice reflects a fascination with science and symbolism, presenting creatures in curious and surreal landscapes. Following her participation in Aspex's biennial international group show *Emergency* in 2021, Wetherly was selected for the summer solo show by artist Helen Cammock; Director of Gasworks, Alessio Antonioli; Copperfield Gallery's Will Lunn; and Aspex's Joanne Bushnell. *Sink or Float* will mark the final exhibition of Aspex's *Emergency* programme.

## Ends

Please find images here: <https://bit.ly/3wLuYm9>

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## Notes

### Jessica Wetherly

[www.jessicawetherly.com](http://www.jessicawetherly.com)

Wetherly graduated from the Royal College of Art MA Sculpture in 2019. Recent solo exhibitions include *The world in your pocket*, Stone Space, London (2022); *The weight of the sky*, Arte Contemporary, La Rapita, Spain (2022); *Tele:(gram) : Frequencies of the Forest*, BilbaoArte Foundation, Spain (2021); *Song of the Siren*, Korai Project, Cyprus (2020); *If all else fails*, Fieldworks Gallery, University of Texas (2018). Awards include a-n Time & Space Award 2020; The Royal Society of Sculptors Gilbert Bayes Award 2020; BilbaoArte Beca for International Artists 2020; The Broomhill National Sculpture Prize 2019; Stanley Picker Scholarship 2017; NADFAS Scholarship, Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust 2015.

### Emergency

Read the history behind Emergency: <https://aspex.org.uk/news/week-28-emergency/>

Aspex's international biennial group exhibition ran from 2004 - 2021. Past winners were Susan Collis (2004); Tim Machin (2005); Cathy Ward & Eric Wright (2007); Kihlberg & Henry (2009); Charlie Tweed (2011); Jim Howieson (2013); Maya Ramsay (2015); Maggie Roberts (2019) and Jessica Wetherly (2021). Other participating artists of note included David Blandy, Juneau Projects, Pil & Galia Kollektiv, Blue Curry and Lindsey Mendick. Guest selectors have included Harold Offeh, Margot Heller, Suki Chan, Donna Lynas and Deborah Smith. From 2004 - 2019 artists paid to submit work for consideration by the selection panel, covering costs of installation and exhibiting artist's fees. Aspex removed the submission fee in 2019 with support for the 2021 exhibition coming from Aspex's Patrons.

### Aspex Portsmouth

[www.aspex.org.uk](http://www.aspex.org.uk)

Aspex has a 41-year track record of supporting emerging artists and engaging audiences, through the delivery of a programme of exhibitions, off-site projects and participatory opportunities. Artists such as Mona Hatoum, Richard Wilson and Cornelia Parker, all internationally acclaimed, received support from Aspex at an early point in their careers.



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