



Suffolk for his art:
'Cheap Magic Is Anticipated' (2011)
by Saxmundham-based Ryan Gander

The new wave

By Sophie Hastings

How coastal Suffolk became Britain's coolest cultural hub

ART

WHAT IS IT ABOUT

a place that makes artists want to colonise it? Certainly the quality of light, the drama of the

landscapes and proximity to the sea all play their part. In the first half of the 20th century, artists such as Picasso and Matisse descended on the Côte d'Azur, while the likes of Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth moved to the Cornish coast. Since then, Mexico, Miami and Brazil have all beckoned but no new European artists' hub-on-sea has emerged – until now.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that they're flocking to Aldeburgh and the surrounding Suffolk coast. As painter Paul Benney, who has a rambling farmhouse in the village of Laxfield, points out, "The horizon is so low it almost drops below you, like being on a boat... All you see is sky. It's like a blank canvas that gets me to that dreamy, meditative state I need." Suffolk-born painter and sculptor Maggi Hambling can also be spotted on Aldeburgh beach in the mornings, staring out to sea. "You have to love horizontals," says Benney,

"subtleties of grey. There are five levels: shingle, surf, sea, horizon and sky. It's very conducive to thought."

Yet it is not simply the physical beauty of a place that draws artists together, and for a long time there has been no such thing in Suffolk, despite the fact that the other arts have thrived. The world-renowned Aldeburgh Festival of Music and the Arts, founded by composer Benjamin Britten, singer Peter Pears and writer Eric Crozier in 1948, is housed five miles from Aldeburgh at Snape Maltings. The town has recently established highly successful festivals of poetry and literature, and theatre companies such as the Jill Freud Company and the edgier Wonderful Beast perform at the Jubilee Hall. But contemporary art makes provincial England suspicious. Why else was there such an uproar when Hambling's monumental sculpture, "Scallop", with lyrics from Britten's opera *Peter Grimes* punched into its shell, was placed on the beach? The

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Your guide to this month's art picks

AI WEIWEI

Sculpture and video.
Lisson Gallery.
13 May – 16 July.
lissongallery.com
Outdoor sculptures.
Somerset House.
Until 26 June.
somersethouse.org.uk

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Group sculpture show including young stars Rebecca Warren and David Altmejd.
Saatchi Gallery.
Until 16 October.
saatchi-gallery.co.uk

ALICE NEEL'S MEN ONLY

Victoria Miro.
9 June – 29 July.
victoria-miro.com

UNDERGRADUATE SHOW

Goldsmiths.
23–27 June.
gold.ac.uk

CONTEMPORARY ART EVENING SALE

Phillips de Pury & Company. 27 June.
phillipsdepur.com

CONTEMPORARY ART DAY SALE

Phillips de Pury & Company. 28 June.
phillipsdepur.com

POST-WAR AND CONTEMPORARY EVENING SALE

Christie's. 30 June.
christies.com

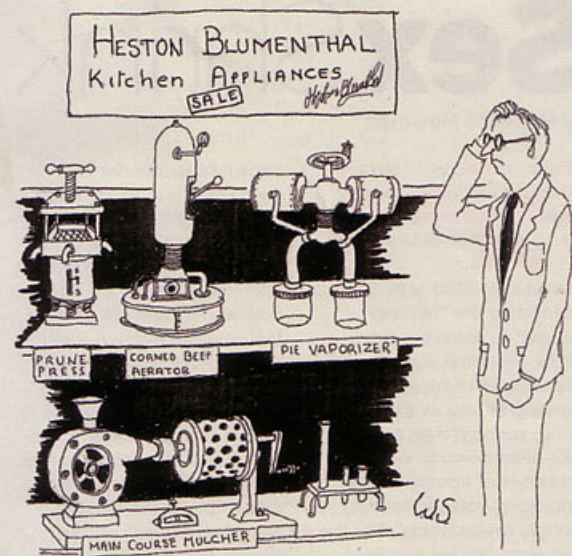
persistent vandalism was depressingly predictable, but architects, BBC pundits, authors, musicians and others who should have known better were virulent in their opposition to this "obstruction" of their view. But when YBA Sarah Lucas bought Britten's old bolthole near Eye, with gallerist Sadie Coles, things began to change.

Charismatic and sociable, Lucas created a centre of gravity that drew local contemporary artists out of obscurity and encouraged London-based friends to visit East Anglia. Some of them stayed, and young assistants arrived, creating a cross-generational hive of activity.

"She's gregarious," says Norfolk-born artist Simon Liddiment of Lucas. "She pulled together a lot of loose threads and was a catalyst in creating a scene." Jonathan Reekie, chief executive of Aldeburgh Music (the festival organiser), contacted them immediately: "Peter Pears was a serious art collector and always intended the festival to have a wider remit – he wanted to call it a festival of music and painting. Sarah and Sadie were interested in the house's legacy, we became friends and talked about how to create a visual arts programme that mirrors the level of the music."

Coles helped organise a sculpture exhibition at Snape Maltings of Angus Fairhurst, Damien Hirst and Lucas, and Lucas has since placed "Perceval", her sculpture of a Suffolk punch horse and cart, on site. The latest project to emerge is a contemporary art show, Snap, which runs alongside the festival in June. Lucas' friend and fellow YBA Abigail Lane, who moved from London's Hackney to a village on the Norfolk/Suffolk border, agreed to run it, presenting two pieces of her own and the work of eleven other artists.

"It can't be like a London show, it has to be specific to the place," says Lane. "Some of these artists could show anywhere, so why here? They all have a link with East Anglia: Mark Fuller, Simon Liddiment and Don Brown were born and bred here, Johnnie Shand Kydd's mother lives here and he's been coming for years, Cerith Wyn Evans has a place in Norfolk..." Other artists include Gary Hume, Juergen Teller, Darren Almond and Lucas. "We've started with big names to make an impression so we can get guest curators in the future," says Lane. "But we have a small budget and it reminds me of the Frieze shows, very rough and brave."



Meanwhile, on the Aldeburgh seafront, another project is taking off. London and Suffolk-based art dealer Caroline Wiseman has leased South Lookout, a small tower on the beach, and invites artists to come, stay and be inspired. "Over the summer, there'll be different things on every day: performances, book launches, plays and installations," she says. Artist Ryan Gander, who lives in nearby Saxmundham, created a flag for the tower; his wife's London gallery, Limoncello, will take up residence there later this year; and London-based Son Gallery will curate a show this month. Turner Prize-nominated Cathy de Monchaux intends to leave the capital for South Lookout for a few days every season.

"It'll lead to something but I'm not sure what. It's quite radical, within the art market, to provide a space simply for contemplation," she says. Paul Benney is also planning something for the tower. "I'll go and camp in it for a while," he says.

Anyone who thinks Aldeburgh is all fish'n'chips, gift shops, Boden-clad families with yachts at the club and second homes on the front, and legions of day-trippers... would be right. But at the same time it looks much the same now (I'm told) as it did when Britten, Pears and Crozier had the idea of converting some old maltings into a music and arts centre. Aldeburgh was at the forefront of contemporary thinking in 1948 and this burgeoning art scene will breathe new life into something that was always there, just dormant for a while. 
The Aldeburgh festival runs from 10-26 June. aldeburgh.co.uk



Released this month

Green Lantern

Warner's would-be blockbuster has Ryan Reynolds (*below, right*) as the superhero with another ring to rule them all.

The Beaver

Mel Gibson's comeback? Depends if audiences warm to Jodie Foster's offbeat tale of mental breakdown and Cockney-accented glove-puppet redemption...

Screwed

James D'Arcy is the squaddie-turned-prison officer in this gritty, "semi-autobiographical" British drama.

Akira

Ahead of 2013's live-action version, the seminal manga classic gets a welcome re-release.