

## Revealed: Turner Contemporary Opens, Margate

Turner Contemporary is the latest purpose-built art centres that may see our time looked back on as U[fYhU]YcZgallery-building. The experience: \* \* \* \*; The art: \* \* \*



Margate makes the right connections: Turner Contemporary

By [Mark Hudson](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/mark-hudson/) (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/mark-hudson/>)

6:50PM BST 18 April 2011

### Revealed: Turner Contemporary Opens

#### Turner Contemporary, Margate

Against the dead-flat grey sea, framed by Manning's seafood stall (established 1962), stands a cluster of deceptively shed-like structures: their facades flat towards the sea, roofs sloping at the back, echoing perhaps the forms of traditional net lofts, yacht sails or the Kentish chalk cliffs.

This is Margate's Turner Contemporary, the latest in a stream of purpose-built new art centres – in Nottingham, Eastbourne, Middlesbrough, the list goes on – that may see our time looked back on as a great age of gallery-building. Capitalising on the town's connections with Turner (he painted here) and Tracey Emin (she was brought up here), with a building by architect du jour David Chipperfield, Turner Contemporary has been designed to ape the Tate St Ives effect and restore the fortunes of this moribund resort town.

Chipperfield's building doesn't look much on a dull day, but when the sun comes out its white, frosted-glass surfaces gleam jutting roofs slicing into the blue sky, the galleries flooded with northern light. But what of the art that's in them? Will it, as is often the case in such circumstances, prove a disappointing afterthought to the radiant ambitions of the building designed to house it?

If Turner Contemporary doesn't have a collection of its own, the work of JMW Turner, who stayed in a boarding house on this very spot, will always be shown here in one form or another, and all of the work commissioned for its opening responds to the great 19th-century painter's concerns – if sometimes very obliquely.

Daniel Buren's *Borrowing and Multiplying the Landscape* is so architectural in conception that it already feels an integral part of the building. Yellow stripes frame a clear circle on the gallery's central window, reflected into infinity by mirrors at either end of the room.

Relating to Turner's alleged interest in science, mathematics and philosophy, Conrad Shawcross's *Projections of the Perfect Third* displays computer-assisted visualisations of a musical chord. A tri-bladed propeller brings three lights into convergence on each rotation, while a series of computer-generated drawings spiral into ever-greater density alongside a three-dimensional realisation in bronze. It isn't clear from the tortuous wall text whether these projections have some scientific veracity, or whether they're essentially imaginative, and what we're supposed to make of them in either event.

Ellen Harvey's *Arcadia* relates directly to Turner, its title spelt out in lightbulbs along the side of a shed containing a three-quarter scale mock-up of Turner's private gallery, the pictures positioned as they were at the time of his death, but formed from reversed mirrors. Harvey has scraped away their backs to form a panorama of contemporary Margate – towerblocks, abandoned amusement arcades and all – in the style of the engravings through which Turner's works were disseminated to the masses. This is the most immediately compelling of the new works, the silvery images glowing in the darkened room, bringing Turner's world into the gallery with a fairground bravura redolent of the artist's own time.

There's an element of showmanship, too, in the one Turner painting on show, the little-known *The Eruption of the Souffrier Mountains, in the Island of St Vincent*, in which the artist brings a touch of John Martin-like brimstone to a scene he didn't himself see. It is, however, an unremarkable painting, and seems to be here to provide a link to the other artists' considerations of imagination and knowledge in a rather arid, curatorial way rather than to compel the visitor.

Finally, the works of Californian surfer, amateur astronomer and natural historian Russell Crotty emerge from walks through nature, rather as Richard Long's do, but with very different results. Working on scrolls, enormous books and spheres suspended from the ceiling, he draws in a quirkily obsessive faux naïf style, absorbing his written responses to the landscape into images that rather nonplus seen singly, but generate a peculiar dreamlike atmosphere en masse.

If Shawcross and Harvey's works, for all their intelligence, smack of a kind of official art created to explore worthy themes in just this kind of institution, Crotty's feels like a natural by-product of his life that would have come into being whether he'd been given a lucrative commission or not.