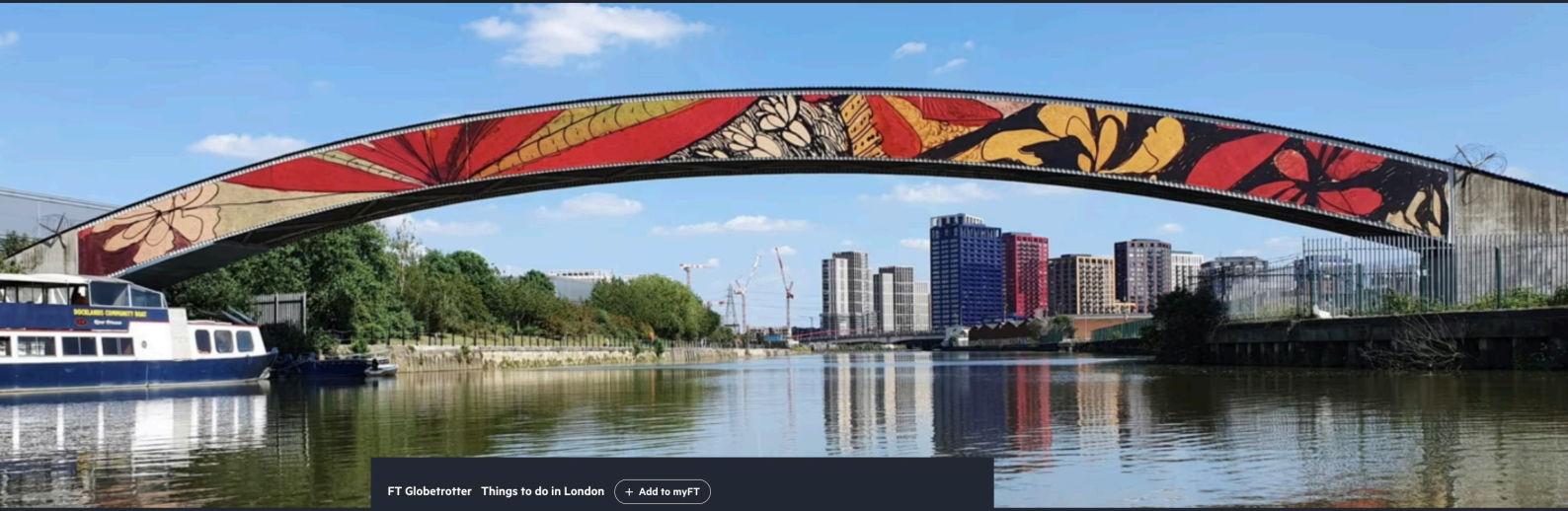


Keep reading the FT for free
Register now and enjoy any 3 articles for free every month.

REGISTER FOR FREE



FT Globetrotter Things to do in London + Add to myFT

Time to walk The Line, London's groundbreaking art trail

The Line includes illustrations by the artist Madge Gill (1882-1965) reproduced on the side of a bridge crossing the River Lea in east London © Simon Myers

Tracing the Greenwich Meridian is an 8km waterside route that takes in an Antony Gormley 'cloud', Tracey Emin birds and an upside-down pylon

Andrew Jones JUNE 4 2024



Unlock the Editor's Digest for free

Roula Khalaf, Editor of the FT, selects her favourite stories in this weekly newsletter.

Enter your email address

Sign up

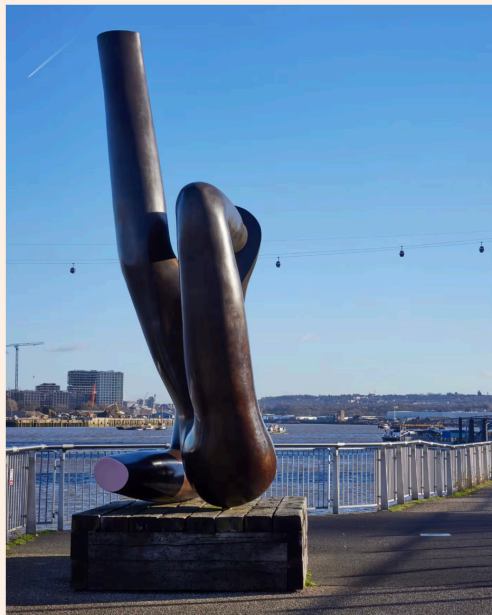
This article is part of FT Globetrotter's [guide to London](#)

To walk The Line, a public sculpture trail in east London, is to experience contemporary art, but also to explore areas of the city that had, until recently, been largely abandoned and closed. Here you will witness new neighbourhoods springing up in historic settings, observe wildlife you may not have expected to see in the capital and spot Londoners slow down and connect with each other.

This constantly evolving 7.7km public art trail, now in its ninth year, now comprises around 25 works by a mix of established and emerging artists, including Gary Hume, Yinka Ilori, Eva Rothschild and Madge Gill. With a major new installation by Helen Cammock just unveiled, and the vegetation of the remarkable urban wilderness of the River Lea erupting into summer, now is the time to visit or revisit The Line.



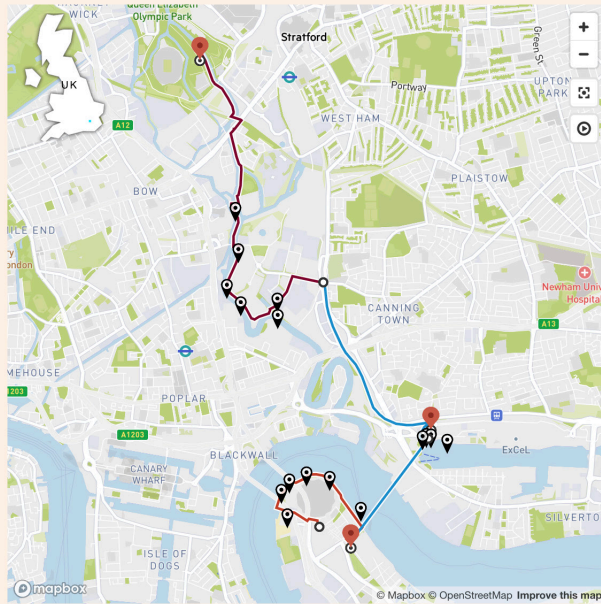
The Line's artworks include 'Living Spring', 2011, by Eva Rothschild ... © Lorna Powell



... and Gary Hume's 'Liberty Grip', 2008 © Laura Hodgson

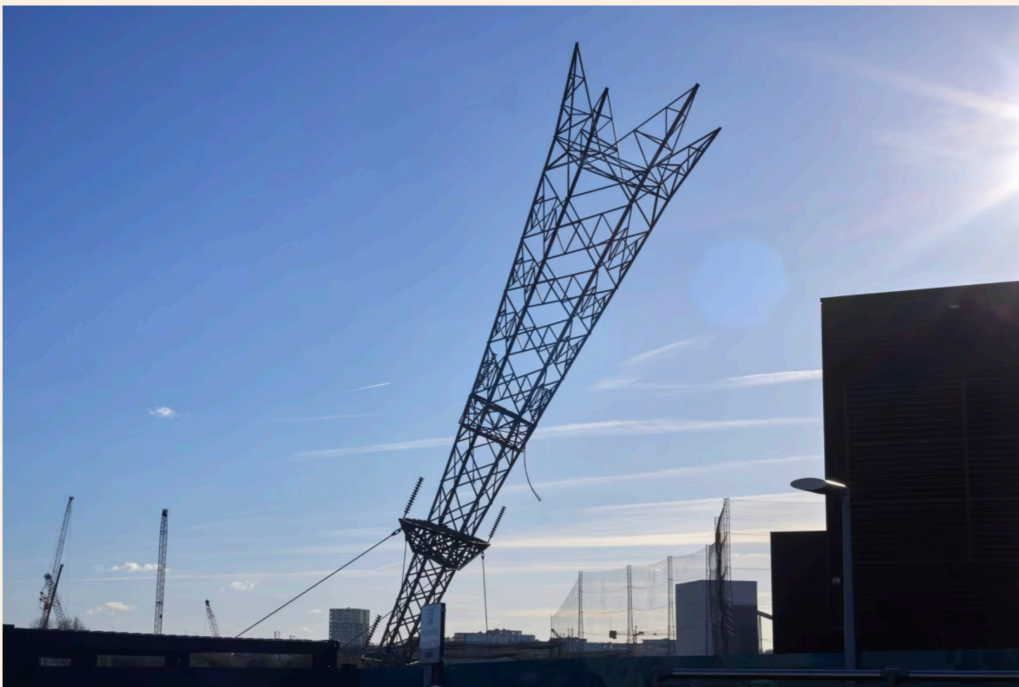
The trail follows the Thames and local waterways along the Greenwich Meridian line from the O2 to the Olympic Park at Stratford. Its three sections are always open and can be visited individually (as below) or in totality, which takes around three to four hours on foot, and involves crossing the Thames and briefly hopping in a taxi or on a train (it's possible to cycle the route too). There is clear signposting all the way.

I suggest visiting from south to north, starting with majestic Thames vistas before travelling upstream into green and intimate parts of the River Lea, ending up in the post-Olympic bustle of Stratford.



FINANCIAL TIMES

1. Greenwich Peninsula (45-60 minutes)



'A Bullet from a Shooting Star', 2015, by Alex Chinneck © Laura Hodgson. Courtesy of the artist and Greenwich Peninsula

From Greenwich North station, head to the left of the O2 Arena and follow the signposts for The Line. Minutes after leaving the grandiose station esplanade, you find yourself in less ordered surroundings: a warehouse, the back of a golf-driving range and some building sites. Then, rising in the middle of it all, Alex Chinneck's "A Bullet from a Shooting Star", an upturned electricity pylon that seems to have crashed into the ground, the familiarity of a ready-made combined with the drama of an accident. This is where our route begins.

Continue to the Thames Path. Although surrounded by immense structures (Canary Wharf, the O2 and the InterContinental hotel) with flight paths overhead, this is a strangely peaceful place — free of cars, rich in waterfowl and, if you are lucky, you may see the odd seal in the Thames. It is the setting for three diverse but site-specific sculptures: the wittily contemplative "Here" by Thomson & Craighead (a signpost showing the long way round the world to itself, following the Greenwich Meridian line); the spectacular "A Slice of Reality" by Richard Wilson, a perfectly dissected slice of an old sand dredger resting on the foreshore, its appearance constantly changing with the tides; and the totem of Serge Attukwei Clottey's "Tribe and Tribulation", which echoes the cluster of buildings at Canary Wharf, its colourful timbers (reclaimed from fishing boats from Ghana, through which the Greenwich Meridian passes) talking to the polychrome barges as they sail past.



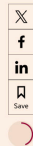
Positioned on the Greenwich Meridian line, Thomson & Craighead's "Here", 2013, points north and shows the distance of the work from itself in miles around the top and bottom of the world and back © Laura Hodgson. Courtesy of the artists



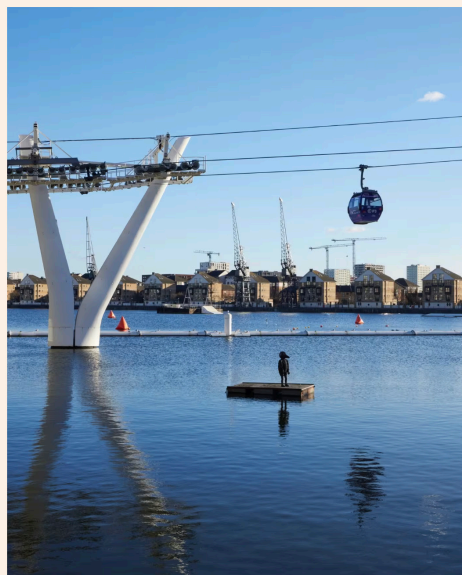
"Tribe and Tribulation", 2022, by Serge Attukwei Clottey is made from timbers from old Ghanaian fishing boats © Laura Hodgson. Courtesy of the artist and Simchowit Gallery

Coming around the corner, Gary Hume's "Liberty Grip" appears abstract at first until you see that it is a construction modelled on three human arms, reassuringly organic forms in a very man-made landscape. A little further along, you are reminded of the industrial history of this part of London: Antony Gormley's shimmering "Quantum Cloud" sits on cast-iron caissons that once received shipments of coal for local industries.

To continue to the next section across the Thames, walk to the [IFS Cloud Cable Car](#).



2. Royal Victoria Dock (30-45 minutes)



Laura Pond's bronze sculpture 'Bird Boy (without a tail)', 2011, stands on a raft almost beneath the flight path of the IFS Cloud Cable Car © Courtesy of the artist

Start at the base station of the IFS Cloud Cable Car at Royal Docks, or, if coming from the first section above, take the cable car from Greenwich Peninsula. The short flight across the river offers exhilarating views of the sculptures on the peninsula (see above), and of the dramatic topography of this part of London: the hairpin bend of the Thames behind you and the picturesque stretch of water flowing east with its moored sailing boats.



'Nature in Mind' is an exhibition across five sites on The Line of works by the self-taught local artist Madge Gill (1882-1965) © Angus Mill

In Royal Victoria Dock, this section of The Line begins with the touchingly vulnerable “Bird Boy (without a tail)” by Laura Ford, stranded on a raft in the waters of the dock. From there, follow the trail and take in the cluster of pieces mounted on billboards by “outsider” artist [Madge Gill](#) (part of *Nature in Mind*, a series of her works on The Line), [Yinka Ilori](#) (two giant polychrome chairs called “Types of Happiness”) and Larry Achiampong (*Sanko-time*, an audio installation, and *What I Hear I Keep*, a colourful flag flying in these windswept docks).

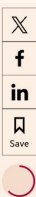
To carry on to the third section of The Line (see below), head to the Royal Victoria DLR station and take the train to Star Lane.

3. River Lea to Olympic Park (75-135 minutes)



'Red Women', 1949, a 9m-long work by Madge Gill, is part of The Line's 'Nature in Mind' series dedicated to the artist © Agnieszka Zimnicka

Beginning at the Star Lane DLR station, follow the signposts for The Line, crossing Stephenson Street and admiring the mural by Madge Gill (“Red Women”, part of the above-mentioned *Nature in Mind* series), which embellishes the fence of a builders’ merchant. Continue until Cody Dock —you may wish to stop at the delightful Riverside Café, where the genial Nadia serves a good *plat du jour* along with coffee and cakes.



Fifteen years ago, this section of the River Lea where The Line now runs was inaccessible, and Cody Dock, today a thriving community hub, was a 20-foot-deep landfill. The area has been cleaned up without losing its sense of wilderness: you may well see herons, egrets, sandpipers and even the odd kingfisher around the reed beds. There are said to be hundreds of species of birds, mammals, plants and invertebrates in and around the Lea. These are landscapes that change with the tides, the light, the weather, the seasons: Madge Gill's painting across the bridge (left as you leave Cody Dock) frames this evolving spectacle.

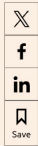


Connecting the London boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets, Helen Cammock's text-based 'On WindTides' is the latest addition to The Line

Helen Cammock's new text-based piece "On WindTides", specifically designed for the next bridge and linking the boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets, is a metaphor for the connections between natural and urban landscapes and between the communities in this part of London. This is a complicated mix of neighbourhoods in previously industrial settings, a range of cultures and ethnicities (more than 100 languages are spoken in Newham alone) and a transient population. Cammock spent time with different local groups to co-create pieces to show alongside her own. (On a recent visit, we met her on her way to a "Knit and Natter" session with Somali families.) Her work encapsulates how The Line brings a sense of place to the areas it crosses, of belonging and cohesion to its populations.



Shopping trolleys are stacked in the shape of a double helix in 'DNA DL90', 2003, by Abigail Fallis © Laura Hodgson

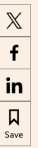


At the next bend in the river stands Abigail Fallis's clever "DNA DL90", a stack of shopping trolleys arranged in a double helix, cheekily peering over the wall of an Amazon consignment centre and winking at the discarded carts lodged in the silt of the river below.

Further along the river, Eva Rothschild's "Living Spring" stands like a sapling at the end of a row of trees, the reds on its stem in dialogue with the buses crossing the bridge behind. Close to the stately 18th-century Three Mills (tidal mills used in the production of gin), rises Tracey Emin's "A Moment Without You", its delicate birds referencing the cormorants behind.



'A Moment Without You', 2017, by Tracey Emin: five bronze birds sitting atop tall poles © Laura Hodgson. Courtesy of the artist and White Cube



If, at this point, an excellent lunch is needed, a 10-minute walk across the bridge at Twelvetees Crescent will take you to [Polentina](#), a charming and intimate restaurant inside a sustainable garment factory on an industrial estate. Here chef Sophia prepares delicious northern Italian cooking for the workers and a few fortunate outsiders (during recent visits we most enjoyed the beetroot-filled ravioli called *casunziei*, as well as veal sweetbreads with fava beans).

At Stratford High Street, the landscape abruptly changes, as low-rise suburban housing abuts brand new glossy towers. This is the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, thriving in its post-Olympic phase, and bustling Stratford City with its teeming shopping mall. Take in the last works of the walk and, after an optional swim at Zaha Hadid's London Aquatics Centre, head home from Stratford station.

the-line.org

What's your favourite public artwork in London? Tell us in the comments below. And follow FT Globetrotter on Instagram at [@FTGlobetrotter](#)