

# The Line: east London's new art trail

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## Works by artists including Eduardo Paolozzi and Damien Hirst are on show along public paths



In the past few weeks, birdwatchers, cyclists and dog-walkers in London's East End have been finding themselves face to face with the Roman god of fire. "Vulcan" (1999), a 30ft-high bronze figure by the late Scottish artist Eduardo Paolozzi, towers over passers-by strolling along The Line, a recently opened public art trail linking the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and the O2 Arena.

Twelve other works by artists such as Damien Hirst ("Sensation", 2003), Martin Creed ("Work no. 700", 2007) and Thomas J. Price ("Network", 2013) are dotted along the waterways of east London, punctuating the paths along the river Lea and the Royal Docks. A panel including the Turner Prize winner Mark Wallinger selected the first round of works from 70 submissions (other artists chosen for the art walk include Abigail Fallis, Gary Hume and Piotr Ukleński).



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graveyard of deep storage."

The initiative is bringing contemporary works to a part of London that has a low participation rate in the arts, argues Piper. "Exhibiting artwork outdoors democratises its presentation and increases accessibility," she says.

The Line has four charity partners, including the Canal & River Trust and Gasworks Dock Partnership, which are establishing education and outreach programmes. It is hoped that such plans may fire the interest of residents from some of the most socially deprived areas in the country.

But public art is very much hit and miss, with its impact on local communities an inflammatory issue among culture commentators. "Public art is usually not of much interest to the public and rarely does it qualify as 'art'," says design critic Stephen Bayley. "The mechanisms of public art are institutionalised and bureaucratic: that's not usually the way great art is created. That's not to say it can't be done well, though."

Much public art in the UK fails to deliver but The Line may buck the trend. Those behind the scheme will be hoping to emulate the success of New York's High Line, which has transformed Manhattan not only culturally but economically (the elevated art park, which winds round a disused freight rail track, attracts almost 5m visitors a year). "The project can be compared to the High Line in the sense that it's about new perspectives: in this case, shining a light on east London's waterways," Piper says.

The fundraising aspect of the project is intriguing as the project is, for now, not dependent on public money (Boris Johnson, London mayor, the London borough of Newham and Royal Borough of Greenwich recognise a regeneration catalyst when they see one, and have all endorsed the venture).

"Clive Dutton and I established a Community Interest Company for The Line," says Piper. Dutton, the other project co-founder, was the executive director for Regeneration and Inward Investment for the London Borough of Newham in the years running up to the 2012 Olympics; tragically, he passed away on June 6. Carolyn Miner, previously a curator of sculpture at the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, recently joined the team as curator and will oversee further installations.

A crowdfunding campaign launched last year raised more than £141,000, and The Garfield Weston Foundation and Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners Charitable Foundation "contributed generously" to the project. But the largest individual pledge came from R. Todd Ruppert, founder and chief executive of holding company Ruppert International. Other backers include UK hedge fund manager Christian Levett.

The total cost is less than the £3m initially envisaged, Piper adds. Key considerations include project management, planning applications, legal agreements with landowners and lenders, transportation and installation, security, and maintenance costs. Liberty Specialty Markets is The Line's official insurance partner.

The initiative is a very visible platform for a range of high-profile artists, some of them art market darlings, but Piper is keen to emphasise its public-facing credentials: "It is not intended as a commercial platform, as such The Line requires ongoing funding and the monies raised will determine the scope and scale of what we can do."

[the-line.org](http://the-line.org)

The pieces are on loan for two years from big galleries including Hauser & Wirth, Gagosian, Pangolin London and White Cube. "New works will be continually introduced," the organisers say. A private collector, and the artists Sterling Ruby, James Balmforth and Bill Viola have also lent pieces for The Line. Works from Viola's 2007-08 "Transfiguration" series are on display at the House Mill in Bromley-by-Bow alongside a new sculpture, "Inhibition Point", by Balmforth.

Project co-founder Megan Piper, a London-based art dealer, explains how the scheme reveals new facets of east London's landscape, history and beauty. "The energy of an area changes when you're next to water and these pathways are a contemplative place in an area that is changing rapidly," she says.

"The Line is embedded into an urban and recreational area that is already widely used and loved by local residents," says Dr. Nina Pearlman, a public art specialist who heads UCL Art Museum at University College London. "The curation of sculpture on The Line is through loans. In this sense it is widening access to works of art that have had another life elsewhere, or are being rescued from what I call the