"Public Art integrated into the extensive landscaping has helped create a unique and special place to live, here at Port Marine, Portishead."

Richard Briggs, MD, Peninsular Special Projects Western

"I think the sculpture tells the history of Portishead has been set in stone. The artworks add to the atmosphere and enjoyment of the new development. They're interesting, thought-provoking."

Rick Kidby, Artist
A cultural sea-change has washed through Portishead over the past decade. More than twenty world-class visual artists have created public artworks that respond to the town’s rich history and heritage.

The resulting works are startling in their diversity yet united by a common exploration of people and place that embeds them in the local community.

This artistic renaissance has been precipitated by the creation of Port Marine, an acclaimed mixed use development, set around a new marina, that regenerates a disused brownfield industrial site. From the mid-Victorian era onwards, Portishead enjoyed a global sphere of influence as ships from across the world carried cargoes to and from its deep water dock. These glory days faded in the 1980s when the closure of the town’s coal-fired power station forced much associated activity to a halt. Port Marine has once again placed the docks at the heart of the town, a vibrant centre where people work, live and relax.

Both physically and ideologically, the public artworks link the existing and new Portishead. They celebrate many facets of the town’s history - its people, seafaring, industrial activity, and even the feral Portishead radio station - and provide a unique and potent testament to the phoenix-like character of the site. The public art trail provides a cultural legacy that will inspire, educate and entertain generations to come.

We hope you enjoy this introduction to the artworks and feel inspired to seek out the originals.

These artworks were commissioned and paid for by Persimmon Homes and Crest Nicholson in response to the planning requirements negotiated by North Somerset Council for the regeneration of this area of Portishead.

“...Port Marine public art programme always aimed to enlighten and illuminate, reflecting and referencing the past whilst irrituating and challenging our imaginations and invoking a cultural and historical legacy for future generations.” Robert Stuart Clamp

This Artwork Trail is dedicated to the community of Portishead, past, present and future.

Brochure design by Quantock.
Photographs copyright Liz Milner unless otherwise stated.
Written and edited by Robert Stuart Clamp and Fiona Matthews.
Artwork programme curated and managed by Robert Stuart Clamp.

Published in 2009.
Rick Kirby

“Architecture becomes footprints in the sands of time, marking the march of progress of a people... the hope is sculpture will work in the same way.”

Rick Kirby

‘Arc of Angels’, and three further artworks by Rick entitled ‘Arch’, ‘Crouch’ and ‘Echo’, are constructed from mild steel plate. Small pieces of metal are painstakingly welded together so that a feeling of nuance can be achieved even on large scale works. It is a testament to the artist’s skills that a seemingly implacable, industrial material morphs into something altogether sinuous and humane.

The colours too surprise, as mild steel naturally oxidises in the atmosphere, its surface conjuring an array of tones in the constantly changing light.

Rick Kirby’s stunning ‘Arc of Angels’ is without doubt one of the iconic pieces to have arisen from the programme, and a self-professed favourite of the artist himself whose extensive body of work graces public sites across the country. Standing at more than five metres high, the arc of five female figures commemorates the former radio towers used to control shipping movements across the world during and post war from Portishead.

“My pieces represent the new community, both unique and individual, yet gaining strength and support in their united formation.”

Rick Kirby

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The colours too surprise, as mild steel naturally oxidises in the atmosphere, its surface conjuring an array of tones in the constantly changing light.
Stone-carver Michael Disley spent a year on-site working from a purpose built artist’s studio. Through workshops and informal contact, he developed a strong relationship with the local community, unearthing intriguing facts from Portishead’s past that have directly informed eight sculptural works.

The stories are fascinating. Dickens himself would have relished the tale behind ‘National Nautical School’, established in 1869 to train the ‘homeless and destitute boys of the Port of Bristol’. An institution where ‘sink or swim’ rang all too true, housed as it was on the imposingly named BTS Formidable moored outside Portishead docks. “Strive upwards working out the beast and let the ape and the tiger die” declares Tennyson on the sculpture’s plinth, an aspirational if intimidating quote that formed the backbone of the Reverend Charles Kingsley’s inaugural speech for the school.

A number of works continue the waterborne theme: ‘Miss England’ names the fatal boat on which Sir Henry Seagrave and his mechanic – a Portishead man, Victor Halliwell - perished in 1930, thwarted in their attempt to exceed the world water speed record on Lake Windermere. ‘Portishead Lifeboat Trust’ depicts Ray Herbert, long-serving coxswain of the town’s beloved lifeboat team. Another sailing legend is referenced in ‘Captain Ashford’, here seen steering the Waverley paddle steamer which was constructed in 1947 and now lays claim to being the last sea-going paddle steamer in the world.

And it’s not just nautical stories that are explored. ‘Topping Out’, taken from an old photograph, commemorates both the opening of the original power station and the commencement of the site’s regeneration. ‘The Lady Sings’ celebrates Fred Weatherly, a popular and prolific songwriter who was born in Portishead over 150 years ago and created such legendary works as ‘Danny Boy’ and ‘Roses of Picardy’. It was in Weatherly’s era that the ‘Bristol and Portishead Pier and Railway Company’ opened (1867), finally giving Portishead a rail link to Brunel’s Bristol and Exeter mainline.

“Part of the reason it leans is because everything is upright and I wanted to challenge the eye.”

Ann Christopher RA

Ann Christopher was the first artist to be commissioned through the public art programme and responded with a splendid sculpture ‘Towards the Sky’. Faithful in scale, beautifully crafted, the artwork has a strong and timeless presence. Inspired by the original lock gates, it is fabricated from corten steel which over time develops a richly-coloured protective crust, invoking the industrial origins of Port Marine.
A range of international awards and commissions has established Mark Merer’s reputation as an innovative artist. His interest in the relationship between object and environment leads Mark to work extensively with outside influences, whether landscape, materials or people.

“As a sculptor my compulsion is to create landscapes and environments that evoke a balance of spirit and matter. Sculpture and place are the same, and by the way we place an object we can express this simple desire to produce an awareness of one’s surroundings.”

Mark Merer

His piece for Port Marine - ‘Energy Artwork’ - is an imposing stainless steel sculpture that refers to the site’s origins as a power station. Coloured light of changing hue appears to emerge from below ground, energising the tower before spilling upwards into the sky from the wave-like cut outs.

Thanks to the Arts Council (South West) for supporting this project.

Mark Merer

Neither ‘thunder, lightning nor rain’ cloud this poignantly humorous artwork that references the importation of phosphorous into the docks by Albright and Wilson. Phosphorous is a key element present in all forms of life.

“The idea for the artwork came from the new forms that are made when safety matches are lit and the subsequent burning that takes place. Though initially alike, each match/life burns in a unique way, so out of fire something new and individual is created, referencing the constantly changing cycle of life.”

Robert Stuart Clamp

The site has moved on from its industrial origins, and these three spent matches have also found a new life, meeting for a chat on the corner.

Robert Stuart Clamp

Matthew Fedden is a groundbreaking metalwork designer, adept at transforming what might otherwise be utilitarian features into vibrant and original designs.

Commissioned to create landmark railings and gates for the newly sited Portishead Primary School, he responded with a bold and non-compromising design that has become a definitive feature of the building and a source of pride to students and teachers alike. Prior to creating the railings, he and printmaker Steve Hyslop spent a period of time working with students: “The first challenge was to do something meaningful with the school which would stimulate the students, allowing them to explore what artists do and what artists are.” Matthew Fedden

Car park grilles and decorative arches have been approached with similar vigour and innovation.

Matthew Fedden

From the formal to the fantastical... Jason Lane creates artworks from scrap metal and found objects, recycling items to give them an idiosyncratic new life. The large earth-moving equipment used on site is here reinvented as a gentle and incongruous grazing Ox.

The installation of this work marks the completion of the Public Art Trail, and by coincidence takes place in the Chinese zodiac’s ‘Year of the Ox’. The Ox is said to symbolise ‘prosperity through fortitude and hard work’ – an appropriate sentiment for the town of Portishead.
Jon Buck
Ship to Shore

Born in Pill, Jon Buck descends from a family of ‘Bristol Pilots’, who for generations have safely guided shipping vessels through the waters from Portishead to Bristol.

An imposing spot on the headland overlooking the Bristol Channel will be the remarkable final setting for Jon Buck’s bronze heads, four metres high and vibrantly patinated in red. They relate to those ‘who journey’ and those ‘who wait’, acting as sentinel at the entrance to the new marina.

“"The inspiration for this work came directly from the physical and historical context of the dockside in which it is placed. The form of the work reflects the shipping boorads that still exist along the old quayside. Superimposed is a male head looking out to sea and above is his female counterpart facing the opposite direction. This makes reference to the dichotomy that was always present in seafaring communities. Ship to Shore was a type of communication used to connect the two.”' Jon Buck

Marianne Forrest
Timelines

A clockmaker and jeweller by trade, and intimately acquainted with the concept of passing time, Marianne Forrest is an appropriate artist to have won this particular commission. Using sculpture and lighting to physically link the edge of the dock in Port Marine to what is now the head of the High Street, Marianne’s dazzling design has become a firm favourite of residents. ‘Timelines’ meanders along the path of the original creek, and children can frequently be seen pulling faces at their glassy reflections in Marianne’s huge polished spheres, as once they may have done in the creek’s water.

Within Marianne’s linear artwork are two key elements – ‘The Mariner’ and ‘The Wedding Guest’. The former displays huge silhouettes backed by illuminated glass sails like the giant wings of an albatross stretching to the sky. The latter is a solitary sail with a moon-like orb at its base. The inscription on both sculptures is from the ‘Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a poet who drew much of his inspiration from the local area.

“A key feature of Portishead is its expansive sky. The spheres are designed to reflect the sky, bringing it down to ground level. Essentially a piece about regeneration and hope, the sculptures both celebrate and link the town with the sea.” Marianne Forrest
The columns vary in height from 1 to 3 metres and are arranged in serpentine aisles leading to the crest of the mound. Here a stone is laid where one can sit and contemplate the sea, creating a space for memories and remembrance. From land or water, the view reveals that the columns form the profile of a wave.

The sculpture has been designed to evoke the atmosphere of the sea and to relate to historical and contemporary seafaring. It also reflects Archer’s preoccupation with the enigmatic architectural forms of ancient cultures.

Text is carved on many of the columns, commemorating seafarers and Portishead’s specific links with the sea. Many of the ideas were sourced during a period of community consultation on the work, in partnership with the Royal British Legion and the Gordano Historical Society. Also inscribed are lines from a specially written poem paralleling man’s inter-dependence with the sea and the journey through life.

One of the largest sculptures recently installed in the United Kingdom, Michael Dan Archer’s seafarers’ sculpture ‘Full Fathom Five’ consists of a forest of 108 granite columns running across a large earthwork overlooking the Bristol Channel.

“Sitting by the singing sea, alone, left behind
Feeling your breath on the wind
Reaching out to touch beyond the horizon
Waiting for the tide to turn
Past and future connect, only a memory away
Crossing was never easy...
...
... Sitting amongst these grief cold stones, alone too long
Hearing the ocean’s whisper, silent on the wind
Time eludes us yet, devouring our anger
Laying waste to all our dreams
We have to go now, make us ready
Crossing will not be easy, sailing to be free.”

Extract from ‘Crossing Is Not Easy’ by Robert Stuart Clamp

The poem has been written so that individual lines stand alone as a prompt to memories, thoughts and feelings. In this way a different poem can be created according to the sequence in which the visitor encounters the lines.

The full version of the poem can be found on the website www.publicartportishead.co.uk.

Thanks to Arts and Business New Partners for their generosity of spirit in recognizing the potential wider significance of this artwork. Complimentary community arts projects on a nautical theme took place in all of Portishead’s primary schools. Over 500 children explored aspects of seafaring with a range of visual artists, musicians and actors.
Forged Projects
Interactive Sculpture Garden

“In finding fragments and traces belonging to the regenerated site, it is hoped a pride, and sense of the site’s special interest will be celebrated, and not forgotten.”
Angélica Cockayne and Robert Fearns (Forge Projects)

This sculptural garden is intended to be a place of leisure and reflection, with interactive elements for young people that encourage further engagement with the history of the site.

Forge Projects have used bronze pictograms to create a simple visual narrative referencing key aspects of Portishead’s history and culture. Set in reclaimed granite blocks (from the site’s old quayside), the pictograms are linked with interweaving paths that make up a nautical figure of eight knot.

Teän Kirby has created an innovative on-line storybook and puzzle based on the tale of Ned Teach who became the notorious pirate Blackbeard. The on-line material links to a quirky sculptural trail and tale of ships, pirates and rats that weaves through Port Marine. Follow the stories, gather the clues and solve the riddles by visiting the website at www.riddleofthestones.co.uk.

Teän Kirby
Riddle of the Stones

Lucy Glendinning
Flying

Lucy Glendinning’s elegant figure soars upwards from Waterside Square, a dynamic symbol of possibility.

The philosophy behind ‘Flying’ is best expressed in the artist’s own words:

“I wanted this sculpture to reflect the feel of the site, to give the sense of scale that being by the sea gives us, the feel of the wind and its effect. The impression of freedom and power the sea lends through its elemental force, as well as being a point of travel and adventure.

The flying figure gives the sculpture a gravity-defying energy, an uplifting and celebratory sense which communicates a conscious or subconscious confirmation of human achievement.”

On her role as public artist, Glendinning adds: “To look up once in a day changes the way we see our feet. A sculpture becomes integral to a place not by going unnoticed, but by making a strong statement, standing out and challenging the viewer. A piece should bring freshness and enliven the space in which it sits, whilst having an element of inevitability about it, as if its destiny is intimately linked with its destination.”

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Every effort has been made to involve the people of Portishead in the public art programme in order to encourage a sense of ownership of the artworks, to develop a general interest in and understanding of the creative process, and to create enjoyable and memorable opportunities for new and different communities to work together.

‘Fragments and Traces’ is an extensive and ongoing project, partly supported by the Arts Council (South West) that has enabled a number of community groups to work directly with professional artists. These have included visual artists, poets, musicians and film-makers leading creative explorations of different fragments of Portishead’s history.

Fun and games with... Knightstone Housing

The most sustained of the ‘Fragments and Traces’ projects has been a partnership with Knightstone Housing Association, led by artist Sue Pearce. In its first stage, families from the new Knightstone houses took part in three days of creative activities in and around their streets. A striking artwork reproducing one of their games was subsequently inlaid into a stretch of cobbled pavement alongside their houses.

Through the second stage of the project, residents were invited to explore clay brick as a medium for carving and sculpture, and to build a cob pizza oven.

This project parallels the journey that people take to arrive at their new homes with that taken by the packs of clay bricks during the process of creating these new homes.

The resulting sculpture entitled ‘Moving Stories’ is a permanent installation reflecting the building of this new community in Portishead.

Enamelling with... Mencap

Renowned enamellist Elizabeth Turrell has been working with members of North Somerset’s Mencap Group. The project launched in explosive style with a day of music, dance, photography and new digital media - bringing new experiences, building confidence and providing creative fuel for the young people’s resulting enamel work. The designs of one boy have been reproduced on a large scale and a shoal of ‘Henry’s Sharks’ are to be installed in a key public space.
Matt Stein's current body of work explores an ancient belief in the way the world began. These sculptural shapes respond to this concept with bold, tight curves that are both positive and negative, exuding holistic energy. They represent the “Birth of New Possibilities.”

The four elements comprising this sculpture are grouped to reflect an aesthetic balance and harmony within the space. ‘Flare’ stands alone as an entranceway beacon, whereas the grouping of ‘Axis’, ‘Cascade’ and ‘Air’ presents a more interactive engagement for the viewer.

Carol Peace and Giles Penny were commissioned to create artworks for the Ashlands phase of Port Marine’s development on the East Dock. This primarily residential area has a greener, calmer feel than the bustling harbourside development. Sitting serenely in their surroundings, the resulting two artworks have timeless appeal.

The work of Bristol-based Carol Peace is increasingly sought after, not surprisingly given the gentle understated beauty of the sculpture ‘Precious’.

“I wanted the commission to be peacefully content; to emulate a feeling of intimacy, agreement, comfort and calm between the couple. A very precious state.”

Carol Peace

Giles Penny’s formal training as a painter and the two-dimensional techniques employed in this art-form, have influenced his subsequent work as a sculptor. He specialises in creating abstracted versions of the human form which are innocently humorous yet convey a depth of emotion and feeling. ‘Man and Animal’ offers an aspirational view of the harmony that can exist between man, his fellow beasts and the environment.

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Carol Peace

Giles Penny

Viaggio

“Viaggio” by Louise Plant is an elegant interlocking artwork in corten steel. Its form reflects the electrical switching station which originally occupied part of the site, a sublime encounter between heavy industry and visual art.

“Two boldly curving arcs move across each other in space, simultaneously containing and exuding energy.”

Louise Plant

Man and Animal

Giles Penny

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Bristol-based designers Cod Steaks (well known for creating the Wallace and Grommit sets) bring their trademark sense of fun and magical illusion to the trail.

The giant ‘Fallen Nails’ wittily references Mustads Horse Nail factory, one of the town’s founding industries, its playfulness appealing to adults and children alike.

Cod Steaks’ second artwork ‘Splash’ is a wacky sculptural intervention which floats on the water in the area’s newly developed Nature Reserve.
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This artistic renaissance has been precipitated by the creation of Port Marine, an acclaimed mixed use development, set around a new marina, that regenerates a disused brown field industrial site. From the mid-Victorian era onwards, Portishead enjoyed a global sphere of influence as ships from across the world carried cargoes to and from its deep water dock. These glory days faded in the 1980s when the closure of the town’s点缀 power station forced much associated activity to a halt. Port Marine has once again placed the docks at the heart of the town, a vibrant centre where people work, live and relax.

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