

Liquid Landscape

A contemporary art and archive project for the Toll House

The Toll House, built to service the Paddington Arm of the Grand Junction Canal, opened in 1801. It has seen both times of huge innovation and deprivation, and is now witnessing the popular reuse of canals and their environs supported by the Canal & River Trust. *Liquid Landscape: A contemporary art and archive project for the Toll House* has been created to reflect the energy and purpose of the charity and reconnect the building, its occupants and the canal outside.

The ebb and flow of a building like the Toll House is measured in both its history and current use. Once a point of payment and checks during the industrial age, it has seen a vibrant modern renaissance following the decline of canals for the transport of goods and materials. As the building re-launches as the Canal & River Trust's central London offices, we have sought to bring elements of the waterways' history and current purpose to life through art works and artefacts.

The ambition for the project was to interpret the Toll House as if it were a three-dimensional waterway. A small and busy office, which hosts a myriad of hot-desking minds: engineers, marketers and fundraisers are a handful of the people who tread the boards of the building, working to maintain and revive the canals and rivers. By bringing together contemporary artworks with some of the Trust's archival objects in our offices, staff and visitors gain new perspectives of the canals as well as benefit from a vibrant working environment.

Artist Tod Hanson has transformed the central staircase of the Toll House with a unique wall painting. Hanson has looked specifically at the topography of the canals and locks so that the artwork itself negotiates paths through the fixtures and fittings of the building; the artist acts as engineer of an unfolding landscape, denoted through colour, form and repeated motifs.

As we make our way through the ground floor and down to the subterranean lower floor, the industrial and engineering heritage of the Trust is revealed through wooden patterns and forms, loaned from the Canal & River Trust's [National Collection](#). Used as 'forms' for the shaping, casting and coercing of metal and wood in boat and lock building they show the high quality of craftsmanship, often hidden to the everyday canal user. Weathered and worn they are beautiful artisan objects in their own right.

Ascending to the first floor we encounter a series of contemporary photographs of canal dwellers by Katherine Green, shown alongside the wonderfully evocative and rich poems by 2013 [Canal Laureate](#), Jo Bell. Green's images are the result of a personal project she undertook charting the beguiling stories of the Hackney and Walthamstow Marshes, close to her home. Jo Bell lives on the 67ft narrowboat 'Tinker', travelling around the UK where she writes her poems and contributes to the Poetry Society's blog on [Waterlines.org](#). The images and imagery of Green and Bell's works highlight both the enduring passion that the canals and rivers evoke alongside the more domestic day-to-day routines with which we are all familiar.

The curators and artists worked closely with the Toll House staff to create this exhibition, which is part of a wider initiative by the Trust to expand its historic connections with the arts. Working in partnership with Arts Council England the Trust is attracting new supporters to the waterways through arts partnerships, which are delivering quality performances, commissions, film, new media, exhibitions and talks. By bringing together contemporary artworks with some of the Trust's archival objects in our offices, staff and visitors gain new perspectives of the canals as well as benefit from a vibrant working environment.

A contemporary art and archive project curated by Day+Gluckman
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