Powerful Tides: 400 years of Chatham and the Sea

Private: View 22nd March

Dates: 23rd March to 17th June 2018

Chatham Historic Dockyard

Powerful Tides: 400 Years of Chatham and the Sea is not only a celebration of the artists inspired by the dockyard and the ships that were built there but also links the dockyard back the waterways and the sea which it was once such as part of.

The historical works show a transition of romanticism of ship building and the actions fought by Chatham built ships to the colder, industrial nature of the mid-twentieth century, where submarines and cranes replaced ships-of-the-line with tower masts.

The exhibition reflects how Chatham impacted on key artists between the 18th and 20th centuries – names such as **John Constable**, **J.M.W Turner**, **William Wyllie**, **Norman Wilkinson** and **Eric Ravilious** – inspired by the engineering wonders created at the dockyard and in many ways, how it impacted on British life.

The contemporary works included in the exhibition provide a link to the present – how the River Medway, Thames Estuary and the North Sea – all important route ways to the dockyard in its past, still inspire artists today. Nadav Kander’s reflections on the River Medway and the Thames Estuary, **Christiane Baumgartner’s** photogravures of the Medway’s banks and river; **Catherine Yass’** lightbox of the Thames at low tide and Nikolaj Larsen’s extended film portrait of the Thames reflect visually on the river, its banks and its constantly changing surface. Some artists such as **Langlands & Bell’s** new work commissioned especially for the exhibition, explore the play on words of names of Chatham built ships and the world’s waterways, others such **Yinka Shonibare MBE** with his Nelson’s Ship in Bottle refer both to British colonialism and its expansion in trade and Empire, made possible through the freedom of the seas and new trade routes which contrasts with J.M.W Turners The ‘Victory’ Coming up the Channel with the Body of Nelson.

**Richard Wilson’s** Ships Opera with its references to sail steam and diesel and **Layla Curtis’** maps of journey of messages in bottles refers to time and tide while **Tracey Emin’s** neon enigmatically glows in the space. Map and historic models of lightships contrast with **Chris Orr’s** contemporary engraving and **Steffi Klenz’** installation of images of the glowing refracted glass from the lighthouse lamps. **Anselm Kiefer’s** photographs of the sea over laid with drawings of mathematical formulae extends our view of the flow of the river and the sea to the realms of measurement.

Chatham dockyard is a commanding site of history: the exhibition Powerful Tides: 400 Years of Chatham and the Sea both celebrates the dockyard the sites history but also makes us think of the tidal waterways and seas that the ships and submarines moved over and under.