# New exhibition at Sainsbury Centre examines humanity's impact on seas and their future



The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in Norwich has launched a groundbreaking exhibition entitled "Can the Seas Survive Us," which explores humanity's impact on marine environments and the evolving narratives around oceans, water, and the future of the planet. The exhibition runs until 26th October and is situated across the vast gallery space located on the campus of the University of East Anglia.

The Sainsbury Centre, designed by Norman Foster + Partners and renowned for its innovative approach to displaying art, encourages visitors to engage with artworks in a non-linear, open manner. Its recent publication, A Handbook for Living Art, promotes the idea of forming personal relationships with the pieces on display rather than merely observing them. Jago Cooper, the centre’s director, shared insights via video call following the opening. Speaking about the concept behind the exhibition, he said: “The idea was let’s look at this but try and reverse the agency, and think of the planet like a living entity. Which it is. So now it becomes a question about whether it can survive us. This way, it gets us, as humans, to think as though we are residents in this other space which isn’t just ours.”

"Can the Seas Survive Us" is a collection of interlinked exhibitions that collectively invite reflection on humanity’s relationship with the ocean. One key component, A World of Water, prompts visitors to imagine a world without water and highlights the potential for future conflicts driven by competition over this vital resource. The exhibition traces historic maritime connections, such as those between Norfolk and the Netherlands over the North Sea, showcased through 250 years of art, including contemporary works from Dutch artists. This historical context underscores the enduring impact of human activity on the marine environment.

Among the featured works is the UK premiere of Samoan artist Yuki Kihara’s "Darwin In Paradise Camp," a vibrant, upcycled artwork inspired by the painter Paul Gauguin. The piece emphasises both the damage wrought by human contact with oceans and the possibility of fostering closer, more respectful relationships with marine ecosystems to aid in their preservation.

Another element, titled Sea Inside, explores underwater spaces from physical, psychological, and cultural perspectives. It addresses themes of shared human origins, Indigenous marine knowledge, and the objects retrieved from the sea that hold cultural significance on land.

Adding a community dimension, the project includes a residency by ecosystem futurists De Onkruidenier, who will engage with Norfolk communities to facilitate discussions and activities aimed at deepening public understanding of the environmental challenges facing the seas. These efforts aim to convey the urgency of the situation, warning that without timely action, once-thriving marine habitats risk becoming lifeless deserts.

Cooper reflected on the diverse cultural and temporal perspectives presented in the exhibition: “They’re all exploring this question from completely different cultural perspectives and different time periods. The oceans cover more than 70% of the planet; it is the life source of the natural world, an eternal expanse of more than a billion cubic kilometres of marine habitat. Yet what do these seas say about the state of nature today and our relationship with it?”

He continued: “From wind farms populating the North Sea and plastics filling the Pacific, to toxic algal blooms appearing and beautiful creatures disappearing, what really lies below the surface of these stories and ultimately: Can the Seas Survive Us?”

The exhibition brings attention not only to the artistic and cultural significance of the seas but also to urgent environmental issues threatening marine ecosystems today. It offers visitors a multifaceted exploration of humanity's past, present, and potential future engagements with the ocean.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.sainsburycentre.ac.uk/whats-on/can-the-seas-survive-us/> - Corroborates the exhibition title, dates (until 26 October 2025), and overarching themes about humanity's relationship with oceans and environmental threats.
* <https://environmentjournal.online/climate-change/drowned-world-can-the-seas-survive-us-opens-at-sainsbury-centre/> - Confirms the exhibition's opening, director Jago Cooper's involvement, and the focus on climate change's impact on marine ecosystems.
* <https://www.accartbooks.com/uk/event/can-the-seas-survive-us-sainsbury-centre-uk/> - Details the three concurrent exhibitions (including 'A World of Water'), historical artworks, and Yuki Kihara's UK premiere of 'Paradise Camp'.
* <https://www.netherlandsandyou.nl/web/united-kingdom/w/opening-exhibition-can-the-seas-survive-us-> - Supports claims about Dutch artistic contributions, North Sea connections, and the exhibition's collaborative international scope.