

The Margate Mercury: Postcards from our Collective Memory

By Rhiannon Edwards, Spring 2021

Artist Ellen Harvey emphasises our connection with lost places in her project, showing in Margate soon.

All places have their own feel, their own energy. Whether public or private, indoor or outdoor, grand or humble, loved places are loved because people connect with them beyond just their physical features. Because of this, places can evoke strong feelings even after they no longer exist.

Ellen Harvey's project *The Disappointed Tourist* is all about our connection to loved places, and our longing for places now passed. It picks up on the idea that, while bricks and mortar can be bulldozed out of physical existence, places live on – both in individual and collective memory.

The project asks people to submit names of places that no longer exist, so that Harvey can paint pictures of them. Harvey intends to give people the experience of commissioning a work, much like the wealthy Grand Tour travellers of Europe did in the 17th and 18th centuries. Back then, those paintings were to show off where a person had been. Today Harvey's paintings are about where we can no longer go.

"I was truly surprised by the sheer variety of places that people miss. Sites submitted have ranged from those bearing the traumatic scars of war, racism and ecological catastrophe, to more mundane losses resulting from technological change or gentrification, from sites of great cultural importance to deeply personal beloved places, from recent disappearances to the great losses of antiquity," says Harvey.

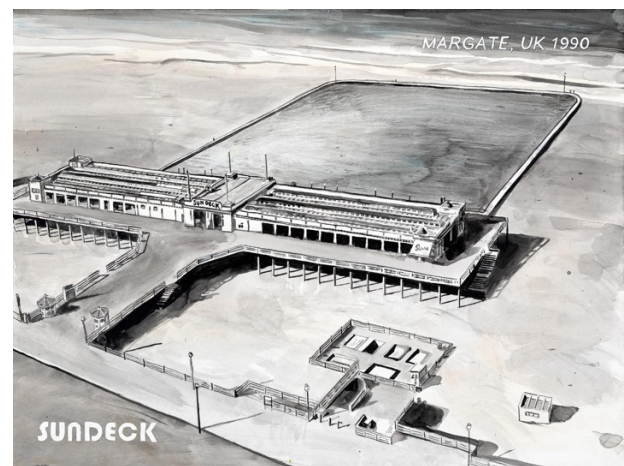


The project travels all over the world. Margate, with its multiple histories of booms and busts, has proven an interesting stop-off. Harvey has had requests to paint all kinds of places that have shaped the town, and the overall picture is of a vivid past.

"I had never been to Margate until 2009, but I had always heard stories about Margate because it was the place where my dad went on his holidays when he was growing up in Birmingham," says Harvey. "Margate is a place that has a lot of nostalgia for its past. Nostalgia is this complicated beast. On the one hand is it always good to look backwards? On the other hand, nostalgia can be a really important clue as to what we should be building or saving," says Harvey. "Margate is really transforming, and so it's a perfect place to show this project."

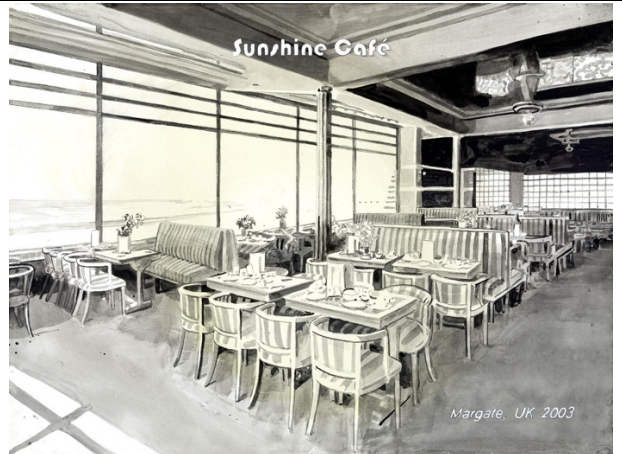
Brandybucks, a restaurant in Cliftonville that had a Lord of the Rings theme and closed in 1998, is brought back to life by Harvey after a request from a woman who wished she could have had her birthday party there as a child. There's also Sophia Booth's boarding house, where JMW Turner stayed and which is now the site of the Turner Contemporary. Harvey felt bad that she couldn't respond to a request to paint the old Pizza Hut, because she couldn't find an image of it anywhere.

Many of the requests are for the seaside pleasure places: the Lido, the Sunshine Café, the Hippodrome, Margate Pier and the former Dreamland. Coney Island, New York, where Harvey lives, is the site of the original Dreamland theme park. "I'm up to around 210 paintings, and it's interesting that the largest category by far is amusement parks, shortly followed by swimming pools and beaches. These are places where people have happy memories of their childhood," she says.



At a time when nostalgia is playing all kinds of roles in our lives: from nasty political aggravator to heartening personal comforter, The Disappointed Tourist puts the concept to work in our service. These images show us places people loved and lost, and that can help us to understand what we value.

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The Disappointed Tourist will be shown at Turner Contemporary as part of The Tourists: Ellen Harvey and JMW Turner, date to be confirmed. Anyone can submit a site for consideration at disappointedtourist.org. Visit turnercontemporary.org