Edge: Where the Land Meets the Sea

An exhibition at Hastings Contemporary invites us to see the coastline not as boundary, but as a place of exchange



Passage, 2025, by Frances Kearney
Photograph © the Artist

There is a version of the coastline most of us carry in our heads: a hard boundary, a line on a map where solid ground gives way to water. *Edge: Where the Land Meets the Sea*, a new exhibition at Hastings Contemporary in the UK, asks visitors to unlearn that line. The soil beneath our feet does not stop at the shoreline but continues beneath the sea, while much of what we do inland or out at sea eventually arrives at the shore – transformed.

Rivers are conduits, carrying silt and nutrients, as well as chemical run-off and plastic, from farms, cities and industry towards open water. What is sprayed on a field or flushed from a factory outfall does not stay put. It travels, settles, and reshapes marine life hundreds of miles downstream. David Nash's 'Wooden Boulder' series, which follows a carved wooden sphere on its decades-long journey down the River Dwyryd, becomes a slow-moving parable for this movement. The work of Lewis Brander, meanwhile, captures London canals, connecting the life of the city to this wider continuum.

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Canalside, 2026 by Lewis Brander
© Lewis Brander. Courtesy the artist and Vardaxoglou Gallery, London

The exhibition shows that this relationship is anything but fixed. Coastal communities the world over are watching this boundary move – cliffs retreating, farmland vanishing, fishing grounds shifting – and *Edge* treats that instability not as a distant crisis but as visible, physical evidence of how intimately land and sea are bound together.

The connections run further than geology. The sea has always been a source of food and a route for people – a passage as much as a larder. Migration, trade and subsistence have moved along coastlines for as long as people have lived near them. Otobong Nkanga's tapestry 'Tied to the Other Side' (2021) draws out these connections, weaving together bodies, plants and coral while raising questions about ownership, marine resources and what has been lost through colonisation, extraction and displacement.

Underneath all of it, quite literally, is life most visitors will never see. Fungi, microbes and bacteria thread through soil and seabed alike, regulating nutrient cycles, carbon storage and – ultimately – planetary weather. Anya Gallaccio's reimagined installation 'Days That Cannot Bring You Near' (2005) brings this material into the gallery itself: a grid of drying clods of soil whose smell, cracking surfaces and evident fragility are a reminder that the 'edge' isn't really a boundary at all, but a membrane: porous, active, and teeming with the organisms that quietly keep both land and sea, and the climate they share, in balance. R



Intertidal, 2026 by Jo Pearl
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Elsa Pearl

Edge: Where the Land Meets the Sea, co-curated by The Land Gardeners and Hastings Contemporary, runs until 3 January 2027. www.hastingscontemporary.org
The Land Gardeners have set up a new not-for-profit, LoveSoil, to raise awareness of the importance of soil health through research, art and education.
To learn more go to www.lovesoil.life