

# Art for east's sake

The eastern stretches of London are home to some of the capital's largest and most accessible art collections, including sculptures by Damien Hirst and Antony Gormley. Carla Passino takes a look at what you can visit on foot

Illustrated by Fred van Deelen

**S**CATTERED along a curve of the Thames, the Canary Wharf skyscrapers pierce the sky, marvels of glass and metal vying for the palm of tallest, slenderest, most daring. But the real wonder hides in their shadow: more than 100 art installations pepper the estate's stylish squares, fringe its spraying fountains and stretch among the trees of a Jubilee Park remarkably busy with people. This is the UK's largest free collection of public art and a sizeable part of an informal south-east London 'museum' so thick with works that it takes plenty of stamina, a day to spare and more than a little cheating with public transport to view (almost) all of it.

The pieces at Canary Wharf are a cavalcade of contrasts: the small (Victor Seaward's 3D printed fruit, which double up as RSPB-standard bird nests, on South Colonnade) and the monumental (Igor Mitoraj's massive heads at Bank Street and Columbus Courtyard); the abstract (Otto's 100 red-light circles, which hug the Cubitt Bridge) and the figurative (Sean Henry's *Standing Figures* at Park Drive, easily mistaken for real people); the amusing (Stephanie Quayle's terracotta *Snub Nose Monkey II* at One Canada Square) and the bemusing (Fernando Brizio's *Pé de Porco*, a huge trotter made of cork sitting on Crossrail Place's roof garden).

On a sunny summer morning, the light plays on Canary Wharf's latest display, a group of 11 pieces that build on six permanent installations to form the 'Summer Lights' exhibition, open until August 20. The show is a triumph of creativity, colour and movement—particularly Yoni Alter's 98 giant, translucent dots, which hang from wires to form a giant bird, and another avian installation, Atelier Sisu's flight of

multi-coloured birds, which sway in the breeze above Jubilee Park's gurgling water channel.

But perhaps the most significant sculpture on the estate is Henry Moore's *Draped Seated Woman*—for its history as much as for its artistic value. Nicknamed 'Old Flo' and inspired by the artist's experience of The Blitz, the sculpture was originally bought by the London County Council for Stepney's Stifford Estate in 1962. After the estate was demolished, however, Tower Hamlets Council considered auctioning off Old Flo, by then lodged at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Luckily, a new Tower Hamlets mayor, John Biggs, was elected in 2015: pledging the sculpture would be 'made available for public enjoyment', he brought it back to the area in 2017, initially as a five-year placement in Canary Wharf's Cabot Square, with a view to returning it to Stepney at a later stage.

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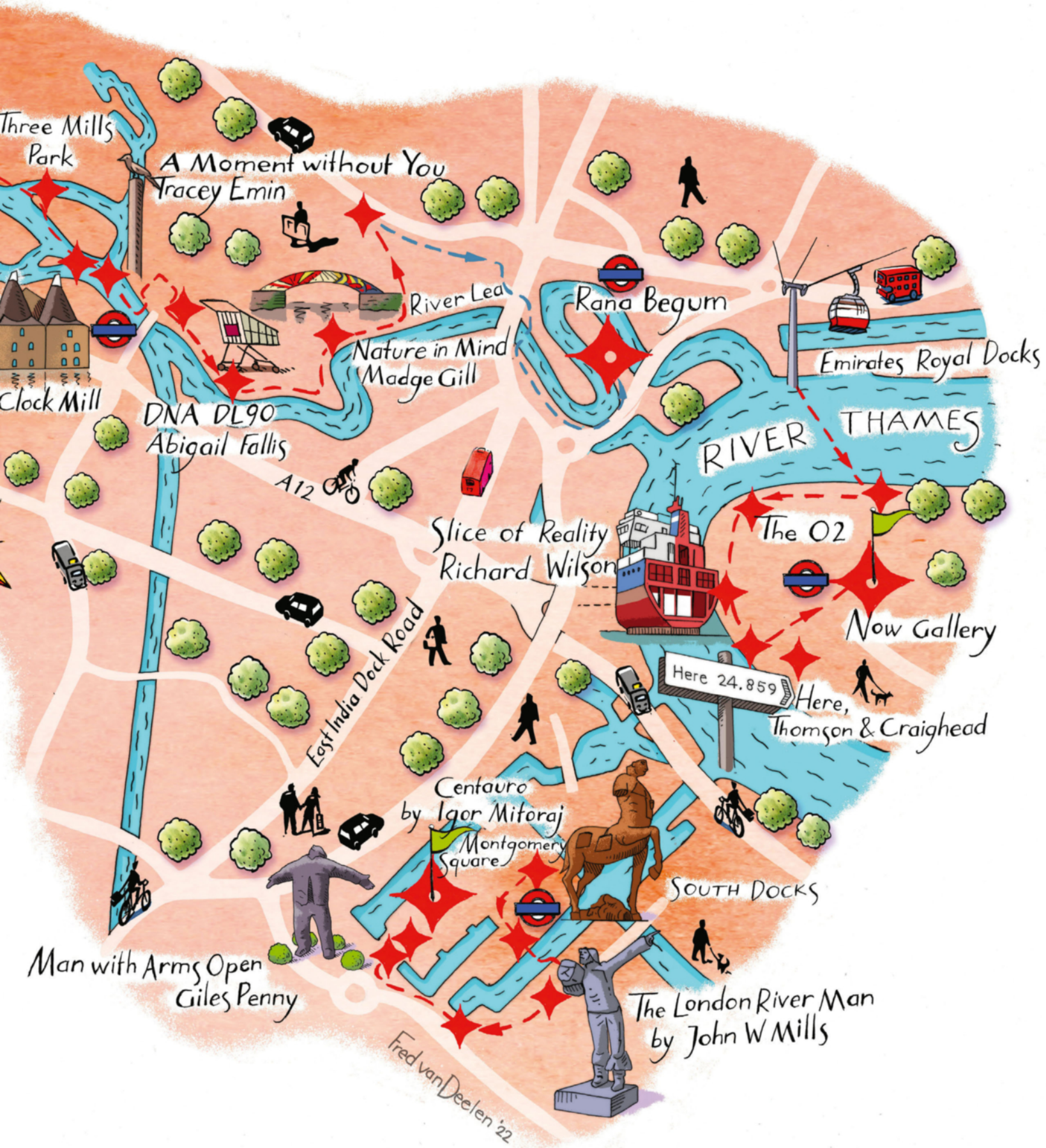
A Tube stop away, on the Greenwich Peninsula, is the start (or the end) of The Line, London's first dedicated public art walk, which stitches together installations along the East London waterways from here to Stratford. Some of it follows The Tide, a riverside trail at the foot of 100ft-high cocktail bar London in the Sky, where waterbirds rustle among the reeds that frame the installations. There's Gary Hume's *Liberty Grip*, a pink-tipped bronze meant to show

three pieces of a mannequin arm, but vaguely suggestive if viewed from an angle; Antony Gormley's *Quantum Cloud*, a 98ft-high explosion of steel units arising from the outline of a human form; and Damien Hirst's *Mermaid*, crushed by a wavy coil like a novel *Laocoön*. All may soon be overshadowed by Mr Hirst's 60ft-tall *Demon with Bowl*, a headless creature from an ancient Mesopotamian nightmare, which may be placed by the Emirates Cable Car. If given the green light, it will be a massive counterpoint to Laura Ford's *Bird Boy*, which stands on a pontoon at the opposite end of the cable line, with a paddling of ducks to keep him company as jet skiers whizz past without sparing him a look.

It's harder to spot Madge Gill's intricate inked panels, almost overshadowed by the Royal Docks's Heroica Lounge, a graffitied bus-turned-pizza bar. A local woman with a tragic history that included losing her left eye to disease and two of her children to →









an early death, she found solace in art, filling hundreds of postcards, paper and calico cloths with swirling, often floral shapes. Much of her work was gifted to the local authorities and five reproductions now dot The Line. It's well worth trudging the uninspiring collection of warehouses from Star Lane to Cody Docks to reach her 'bridge'—a burst of orange, red and yellow petals covering the cable bridge bringing power to Canary Wharf—and the blue woman on a window at Three Mills Lane, a piece that could have come straight from Toulouse-Lautrec's studio.

Breaking up Gill's works are some show-stealing boats—not least an orange submersible complete with solar panels—and contemporary pieces with more of a Marmite quality. Rana Begum's *No. 1104 Catching Colour*, a cloud of sorbet-coloured mesh, floats alone among the Lego-like blocks of Botanic Square, by Canning Town. Abigail Fallis's *DNA DL90 helix*, laden with miniature shopping trolleys to mark the rise of the 'homo consumericus', surveys a meander in the River Lea, sandwiched between an Amazon warehouse and the outline of Canary Wharf looming over the opposite bank. By Bow Creek, Eva Rothschild's *Living Spring*, with its slender metal branches painted in bands

of red, black and green, deliberately bewilders viewers, challenging them to find their own interpretation for the work. And just before the Clock Mill, which has preserved the oast houses originally used to dry the grains, Tracey Emin's moving *A Moment Without You* commemorates a lost friend with five diminutive birds perched on long poles.

## 'Pushing the boundaries of the aesthetic and the possible, it propels art into a new dimension, which the public may love or hate'

Blink and you'll miss the subtle piece above the nearby House Mill: it's Virginia Overton's *Untitled*, a golden weathervane, its juniper shape a tribute to the history of this Newham landmark. There were mills on site since at least 1086, but the House Mill—the world's largest surviving tidal mill, originally used to grind flour for the bakers of Stratford—was converted into a distillery during the Gin Craze and, in 1872, became home to J. & W. Nicholson Lamplighter Gin.

Where *Untitled* celebrates local history, Thomas J. Price's *Reaching Out* is a tribute to ordinary people: one of the very few statues of black women in the UK, it portrays a young lady absorbed by her mobile phone, exploring the concepts of isolation, connection and technology.

Up ahead, past brambles laden with ripening blackberries, Anish Kapoor's ArcelorMittal *Orbit* tickles the clouds with its red metal coils, a king crowned by the dozens of cranes busily building the East Bank culture quarter, including offshoots of the V&A Museum and Sadler's Wells, a new University College London campus and the BBC Music Studios. The UK's tallest sculpture at 377ft tall, the *Orbit* is also one of its most controversial, having been variously dismissed as 'the Godzilla of public art' and 'The Eiffel Tower after a nuclear attack'. But this modern Tower of Babel, with its twisting slide and views of the London skyline from The Shard to the St Paul's, distils the essence of many of south-east London's artworks and magnifies it to an almost monumental scale: pushing the boundaries of the aesthetic and the possible, it propels art into a new dimension, which the public may love or hate, but which won't leave anyone indifferent. 🐉

## At home in London's art land



### Greenwich, £1.15 million

Set in a block that towers above the Greenwich Peninsula, this 16th-floor, 1,205sq ft apartment enjoys close up views of the O2 arena and the river. It has three bedrooms, a large open-plan kitchen, living and dining area and two balconies, plus access to a communal gym, pool and cinema.

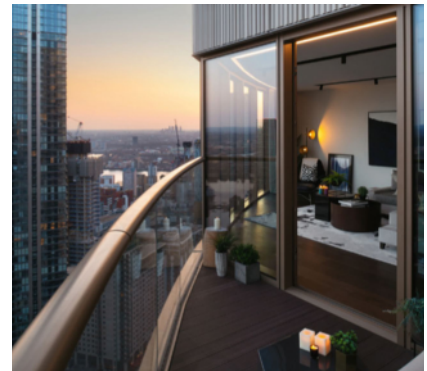
*Savills (020-7531 2530)*



### Stratford, £1.25 million

Perfect for both the Westfield Shopping Centre and the new culture quarter, this 26th-floor, three-bedroom apartment takes in long views of Zaha Hadid's Aquatic Centre, the ArcelorMittal *Orbit* and the London Stadium. The living room, in particular, opens onto a 670sq ft panoramic terrace.

*JLL (020-3893 4230)*



### Canary Wharf, £1.675 million

Designed by Pritzker-prize winners Herzog & de Meuron's, One Park Drive is a 58-storey sculptural masterpiece of curves and boxy sharp angles and this 1,354sq ft apartment sits on the 33rd floor, taking in long views of the river. Residents have access to a cinema, gym and 65ft swimming pool.

*Knight Frank (020-7861 5348)*