
Cristea Roberts Gallery

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Press Release

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Emma Stibbon: Melting Ice | Rising Tides

23 October – 22 November 2025



Breaker, 2023
Ink, sea salt and Eastbourne sea water
153 x 342 cm

Cristea Roberts Gallery is delighted to present ***Melting Ice | Rising Tides***, a solo exhibition by Emma Stibbon. In a pivotal body of work, the artist presents new drawings, prints and an immersive installation, that bring us to the front-lines of climate change, connecting vanishing polar ice and surging sea-levels with the unprecedented erosion taking place on UK coastlines.

Like J.M.W Turner centuries before her, Stibbon bears witness to the changing landscape around us, bringing this powerful body of work to a London audience for the first time.

The exhibition opens with *Berg II* and *Sea Ice, Svalbard, 2023*, haunting, large-scale watercolours based on the artist's expeditions to the High Arctic and the Weddell Sea in Antarctica. Stibbon begins by making numerous sketches out in the field; the artist has described how the weather often works its way into the drawings, with spots of snow permanently marking the paper or media freezing on the page.

These preliminary drawings form the basis of her paintings when the artist returns to her studio in Bristol. The resulting watercolours, monumental in size, depict sea-ice breaking over dark seas and ice-bergs shrouded in sea-mist, disappearing into the horizon.

With sea-levels estimated to rise by 1-5m by the end of this century due to ice sheet melt, Stibbon's work is an urgent call to action; many of these glaciated sites have changed beyond recognition in only a matter of years, with catastrophic repercussions for communities, wildlife and coastlines. For the next chapter of her research, the artist returned to UK shores, to the soft chalk coastlines of Sussex, where unstable cliffs are falling into the sea at an increasing rate due to rising sea-levels.

In two monumental drawings, *Eastbourne, Sea groyne*, and *Breaker, 2023*, a powerful wave heaves towards the Sussex shore, charged by climate-warming.

Stibbon includes elements of the landscape and naturally-occurring materials into her work; these inky drawings are made with seawater derived from the coastline, capturing the inherent physicality of the ocean. In *Coastguard Cottage I (Birling Gap)*, 2024, a house sits precariously on the edge of a fragile cliff, the exposed cliff-face rendered in chalk. Stibbon highlights the uneasy tension between receding coastlines and the increasingly volatile ocean.

On the North Devon coast, characterised for its harder sedimentary rocks, the artist decided to work with newly exposed pigments revealed through recent rock falls along the dramatic Devon Abbotsham cliffs, including Bideford Black, a geologically unique earth pigment ground for its dark hue. The artist, who often works with geologists and scientists, discovered the precise section of cliff was also the subject of a study by Imperial College, predicting that sea-level rise will accelerate the erosion of the rock coast at a rate not seen for 3,000 to 5,000 years.¹

To emphasise the threat to rock coasts that make up half of the Earth's coastlines, Stibbon will present an immersive installation at Cristea Roberts Gallery. *Rock Fall, 2025*, is a site-specific and hyper-realistic drawing of the cliff-face in North Devon, measuring three metres in height that cascades into the gallery floor. Using pigments ground from rocks from the site, such as sandstone, clay, shales and limestone, the installation also includes actual rocks and mixed media to capture the varied geology and palette of colours developed over thousands of years.

Stibbon affirms her commitment to working from nature: *"I feel working from landscape today has never been more pressing. I'm increasingly aware that I am living through a time of unprecedented change and that we need to understand what we are doing, and what we stand to lose."*

¹ Dr Dylan Rood, Imperial College London *Sea level rise to dramatically speed up erosion of rock coastlines by 2100*, Science Daily 2022

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The artist considers the concept of the Sublime, to suggest to her audience that humanity can no longer admire spectacular scenes of nature from afar, instead Stibbon places us inside the frame of view. As ice melts in the polar regions and oceans gather force, our local cliffs crumble, enmeshing our present-day and futures within the extremities of the climate crisis, that can no longer be ignored.

The exhibition is accompanied by *Melting Ice | Rising Tides*, a catalogue published by Towner Eastbourne and the Royal Academy of Arts which contains a foreword by former Green Party leader, Caroline Lucas, as well as an artist interview by curator Sara Cooper and an essay by author Richard Fisher.

Melting Ice | Rising Tides is the last venue of a major touring exhibition which opened at Towner Eastbourne in May 2024, Burton at Bideford in May 2025, and ends its national tour at Cristea Roberts Gallery in autumn 2025.

Emma Stibbon: Melting Ice | Rising Tides is part of London Art+Climate Week, a multi-day event spotlighting exhibitions and activations across London on the topic of climate action in the arts. Presented by Gallery Climate Coalition and gowithYamo, London Art+Climate Week runs parallel to COP30 from 12 – 16 November 2025.

The artist also features in a short documentary coordinated by Towner Eastbourne and Burton at Bideford that can be watched via [YouTube](#).

Visitor information

Tues - Fri 11am - 5.30pm
Sat 11am - 2pm
Closed on Mondays, Sundays and public holidays

Free admission

Travel: Piccadilly or Green Park underground station
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About the artist

Emma Stibbon was born in 1962 in Münster, Germany. She studied for her Fine Art BA at Goldsmiths, University of London; and an MA in Research Fine Art the University of the West of England, Bristol.

Stibbon's research has led her to undertake residencies including Artist Placement in Antarctica, organised by the Scott Polar Research Institute; the Arctic Circle.org expedition to Svalbard in the High Arctic; Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Connecticut; Artist in Residence at Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park; Artist in Residence at Death Valley National Park and to document receding glaciers in Ecuador with Project Pressure. She was elected Royal Academician in 2013 and in 2018 she was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Letters from the University of Bristol. In 2019 she was awarded the Queen Sonja of Norway Print Award, Svalbard, High Arctic.

Her work is exhibited internationally with recent solo and group exhibitions at Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool, Liverpool; Hastings Contemporary, Hastings; The Heong Gallery, Downing College, Cambridge; Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Norwich; Ferens Art Gallery, Hull Museums, Hull; Mead Gallery, University of Warwick, Warwick (2025); ; New York Public Library, New York; Wells & Mendip Museum, Somerset (2024); University of San Diego, California; Safnahús Vestmannaeyja, Iceland (2023); Villa Merkel, Esslingen am Neckar, Germany; Royal West of England Academy, Bristol (2022); York Art Gallery, York and Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal (2019); Cristea Roberts Gallery, London (2019, 2017); Verrey Gallery, Eton College, Berkshire (2017) touring to Rochester Art Gallery; Galerie Bastian, Berlin (2017, 2015); and Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge (2015).

Her work is held in numerous private and public collections including the British Museum, London; Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool, Liverpool; Stadtmuseum, Berlin; Potsdam Museum, Potsdam; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery; Pallant House Gallery, Chichester; the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon-Tyne; the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; New Art Gallery, Walsall; New Hall Art Collection, Murray Edwards College, Cambridge; and Royal Academy of Arts, London.

Emma Stibbon lives and works in Bristol, England.