

Emma Critchley

Soundings

John Hansard Gallery
8 February–3 May 2025

#JHGCritchley

John Hansard Gallery, part of the University of Southampton, is delighted to announce *Soundings*, a captivating new exhibition by renowned artist Emma Critchley.

This thought-provoking showcase combines filmmaking, choreography, and public engagement to address the urgent and complex issue of deep-sea mining.

Critchley, who has been deeply engaged with the subject for years, shines a light on this looming ecological challenge. With global conversations intensifying, as the 2-year road map for finalising the regulations for commercial mining comes to an end in 2025, this project prompts audiences to consider the ecological, geopolitical, and cultural stakes involved in mining minerals from the deep. Much of the seabed is legally the shared responsibility of all humankind. As a regulator of the earth's climate and a source of food, materials, cultural heritage, and identity, how we choose to consider, portray, and talk about it is fundamental to how we govern it.

At the heart of the exhibition is a striking multi-screen film installation that immerses viewers in the tensions and possibilities surrounding deep-sea mining. Through film, sound, and dance, Critchley invites audiences to connect with the seemingly inaccessible deep ocean from an intensely embodied perspective.

On certain days during the exhibition, a dancer will activate the installation by encountering and moving with deep-sea creatures on the screens. Created in collaboration with dancer Maya Carroll and choreographer Siobhan Davies, these performances use movement and music to create a profound emotional bridge to the deep ocean. The installation offers a space for dialogue, debate, and contemplation.

Critchley's work takes you from intimate encounters with deep-sea creatures, to the resonance of ancestral stories, and through to the hand-drawn maps of the first ocean cartographer, Marie Tharp. The voices of Pacific activists, lawyers and scientists resonate throughout, reflecting the nuanced debates.

Public engagement is a key element within *Soundings*, with events running both prior and throughout the exhibition. Together with TBA21-Academy's Ocean Literacy & Marine Specialist, Fiona Middleton and Ocean Law & Policy Specialist, Mekhala Dave, Critchley has worked collectively with communities and specialists nationally and internationally (i.e. the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton [NOCS],

marine biologists, ocean law experts, and indigenous activists) to explore our own relationship with the deep ocean and the subject of deep-sea mining.

In 2024, Critchley collaborated with writers, freedivers, marine biologists, and activists for *Walk to the Bottom of the Sea*, a participatory event inviting the public to symbolically traverse the 7-mile depth of the ocean floor, sparking new conversations at key oceanic milestones.

Included in the installation is a co-written open letter: *Rights of the Deep*, a contribution to the growing Rights of Nature movement. This letter brings together indigenous Pacific activists, legal scholars and marine scientists to co-write an open letter about our relationship with the deep-ocean and the need to protect it.

Soundings is supported by John Hansard Gallery, Tate St Ives and Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts with public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England. It is presented in cooperation with John Hansard Gallery, Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts, Tate St Ives and Quay Arts. *Soundings* was also kindly supported by South East *Dance*.

Rights of the Deep was originally commissioned by Science Gallery London.

Soundings will also be presented at Tate St Ives from 24 May – 21 September 2025, and at Quay Arts, Isle of Wight from 10 October – 19 December 2025.

John Hansard Gallery and Quay Arts are both National Portfolio Organisations, supported by Arts Council England.

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Notes for Editors

Emma Critchley

Emma Critchley is an artist who uses water as a formal material property within a range of media including film, photography, sound, installation, and writing. Her work explores the underwater environment as a political, philosophical, and environmental space. Emma Critchley studied at the Royal College of Art, and her work has been shown extensively in galleries and institutions nationally and internationally.

www.emmacritchley.com

In 2019, Emma was the winner of the *EARTH WATER SKY* residency programme with Science Gallery Venice, where she has been working with the Ice Memory Project. The resulting film installation launched in the official Italian Pavilion of the Venice Architecture Biennale 2021, and went on to be exhibited in partnership with Science Gallery Venice in the same year.

John Hansard Gallery

John Hansard Gallery is a locally engaged and internationally recognised contemporary art gallery in Southampton. Being part of the University of Southampton, the Gallery aims to create extraordinary encounters with the rich diversity of contemporary art that inspire people and communities to change the world for the better. To realise this, the Gallery creates innovative and critically acclaimed contemporary art exhibitions, events, engagement and research projects that excite, challenge, represent and reach the widest possible public audience.

Learning and engagement are at the heart of the Gallery and underpin all its activities. The innovative education and public programme is accompanied by special community-focused projects, including activities for all ages and levels of experience. John Hansard Gallery was established in 1979 and is a National Portfolio Organisation supported by Arts Council England.

jhg.art

University of Southampton

The University of Southampton is one of the UK's leading teaching and research institutions, with a global reputation for research and scholarship across a wide range of subjects. The University combines academic excellence with an innovative and entrepreneurial approach to research, supporting a culture that engages and challenges students and staff in their pursuit of learning.

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