

Volcanoes and damp squibs

Margate's new gallery opens with a bang, but its inaugural show veers between brilliance and banality

Rachel Cooke

Russell Crotty's room, a collection of charts and delicate globes, is adorable and the American artist has at least fashioned one fibreglass sphere especially for the show. *Walking Towards Dreamland* – suspended almost invisibly so that it seems to float in the air, light as a dandelion clock – is decorated with white cliffs over which, on close inspection, is etched a strange graffiti of Margate words and experiences. It's delightful, capturing the coast's beauty and its fugitive underbelly in a scant series of lines.

The show's highlight is Ellen Harvey's commission, *Arcadia*: a wooden hut, inside which are large rectangles of etched glass with light behind them, each one showing a Margate harbour scene (including Primark and Arlington House, an infamous 1960s tower block). Outside is a sign saying "Arcadia", made of light bulbs and written in the same typeface as the one for Margate's Dreamland amusement park (now closed but soon, it's hoped, to reopen as the world's first museum of historic rides).

Dreamland, which opened in 1920, was a British version of Coney Island's Dreamland, which burnt down in 1911, and for this reason, along one wall is a projection of the Atlantic; you can hear the waves roll inside the hut. *Arcadia* is brilliant: beautiful, witty, poignant, site-specific, exactly the kind of thing I was hoping to find. The gallery should – must! – get a purchase fund going: this piece belongs here.

Meanwhile, though I accept it's an amazing achievement to have got this far, and wish them all the luck in the world, I think the people at Turner Contemporary have a little work to do. It took me 90 minutes to get to Margate by train, but less than half that time to walk the gallery.

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