

Reception desk by Tris Vonna-Michell for the new Focal Point Gallery in Southend-on-Sea (GB)



• Tris Vonna-Michell, *Tiles & Tides*, 2013 (photograph by Roger Plumstead)

BRUSSELS, OCT. 10 – Last September Focal Point Gallery inaugurated a reception desk designed by the Southend-born artist Tris Vonna-Michell. This exceptional work, entitled *Tiles & Tides*, is part of a series of artist's commissions launched to coincide with the opening of the new space of the gallery. Situated at the gallery entrance, the desk is inset with a diorama of the town's sloping seafront where the now-closed 'Never Never Land' adventure park once stood, alongside the original Victorian Southend Bandstand, which was later re-sited due to land slippage.

The exterior of the imposing piece of furniture is covered in rugged, glazed tiles created to replicate those in the interior of the town's former library, 1970s Brutalist building in which Focal Point Gallery was previously located. The originals were designed by the postwar sculptor and experimental ceramicist Fritz Steller, who appeared to have considered the Southend project as something of an 'experiment', with imperfections in the finished surfaces of tiles embraced. As well as considering the gallery's history, these local references continue the artist's ability to draw from

personal experiences of this part of Essex, where he was brought up. The layers of human and natural intervention of the region's coastline have been worked into the diorama model, with a consideration of interaction between humans and nature which also continues themes from his narrative installation *Ulterior Vistas*, 2012, where the spiritual aspirations of gardening movements were considered, particularly the English Landscape Movement, which prospered in the 18th century and prioritised informality and discovery above more restrictive landscaping.