



Jo Marshall

Long-time Artweeks exhibitor Jo Marshall is exhibiting in Chilton this May alongside Ardington jeweller Lisa Wallis and painter Lin Kerr. Her popular designs, inspired by the local countryside, include blackbirds, hares, striking silhouettes of trees, the moon, and the Uffington White Horse.

“I grew up in Oxford and one of my most vivid memories is visiting the Uffington White Horse as a small child and standing on the eye – although they ask you not to stand on the chalk these days. I’d never been anywhere else like it, and I remember thinking it was the most magical place on earth. It was a special family day out with my grandmother and uncle, all of us crammed into the car as you did back then and I was probably on the parcel shelf! There was no one else there except my family and I felt as if we’d discovered a secret place. We had a picnic and we rolled down the hill carefree. It was bright sunshine and so in my mind, that’s how I always imagined it. There’s something about the hill and the views that strikes a deep chord. Up on the top, you have the iron-age earthworks of Uffington Castle, The Manger and Dragon Hill below you and then the flatter Thames valley rolling away into the distance and you feel truly grounded in the landscape and its ancient history. It’s a stunning view and an incredible place.

When I moved to Uffington, after a few years as a graphic designer in London, there was a horse in the field next door that belonged to a local potter. I had three small children by then and so I took pottery lessons almost as therapy, to give me a release from the everyday practicalities of family life. It was heaven, and sometime later I bought a potter’s wheel and a kiln and other bits and pieces from another local potter who was retiring. They were ancient, ‘shabby chic’ I called them, but they were just what I needed to keep my creative side inspired and after that I spent as much time as I could in the garage.

There’s something amazing about taking a blob of mud that’s

literally come out of the earth and making it into something that’s useful and beautiful. I loved it immediately and I still find it just as exciting twenty years later,” she smiles.

Jo’s pots are highly decorative functional pieces in a stylish, colourful palette in which a light midnight blue, a cheerful turquoise, soft sunshine yellow, and a harmoniously peachy sunset figure strongly, colours inspired perhaps by the light at dawn and the colours of dusk and twilight hours. “They’re the most expectant times of day,” she explains, “when you are likely to see the most wildlife.

I use a ‘paper resist’ technique to put the hare onto my pottery,” she continues. “I use lots of layers of coloured slips and for each individual animal or decorative motif which I carefully hand cut from paper and stick to the surface to resist the application of slip or glaze. Then the design stands out the colour of the layer beneath. It’s very labour-intensive but it’s a labour of love!

I have always been very drawn to hares and this part of the Vale, and White Horse Hill in particular, is one of the best places in the country to see hares. If I was in Philip Pullman’s Northern Lights (or The Golden Compass film), my daemon would definitely be the hare. He’s such a beautiful animal. I love his free-spirited and elusive nature. They are becoming more of a rarity, so it is a real treat to see one, and when you do, there’s this wildness about him – or even that madness of the March hare – paired with a confidence which is an unusual quality in British wildlife. He won’t come near you but he isn’t scared away by you either.”

Alongside blackbirds and hares, in a co-exhibitor’s new home gallery in Chilton, visitors can also browse pieces with random abstract Sgraffito designs, in which she scratches through the top surface of the slips to reveal a lower layer of a contrasting colour. These are each an emotional response to events, each ‘mad platter’ a Wonderland journey with paths leading in different directions.

