

## Oxfordshire Artweeks

**T**his year, Oxfordshire Artweeks, the UK's oldest and biggest artist open studios event bursts into life on 6th May with a festival that promises to be fit for a king.

In and around Banbury, venues will be throwing open their doors from Cropredy to Deddington and Milcombe to Middleton Cheney for the second week of the festival (13th-21st). Within a 10 mile radius of Banbury Cross you'll find 34 art spaces - both open studios and pop-up exhibitions - where as many as 100 artists and makers are welcoming you, for free, to see their art and chat about their materials, methods and inspiration.

From the traditional to the contemporary and multidisciplinary, there's something to delight, intrigue and inspire everyone. Explore painting, sculpture, ceramics and printmaking; look out for fashion and furniture; discover glass art, mosaics and other marvels; and perhaps choose a treasure or two to take home with you.

In the centre of Banbury, you can visit three venues including Church Lane Gallery which promises to be packed with original artworks in many shapes and forms and the Plum Gallery on Parson's Street.

Here you'll find art by Tom Eden and Nadia Birbeck who have been inspired by the urban environment and are showcasing drawings influenced by Japanese comics and street art alongside gestural mark making combined with mono printing.

Artists Belinda Moore and Susan Andrews have been inspired by vibrant colours so visitors will find dotty upcycling and dreamy observations of the domestic sphere finding pleasure in the mundane existence of our everyday.

There's colour galore, too, in the Banbury Mill where first-time exhibitor illustrator Meg Hiorns combines vibrant colours with feminist themes to create both bright and powerful works in her inimitable sassy style. This exhibition will follow a variety



of themes as Meg explores femininity both with joyful simplicity and in more complex pieces filled with female rage, investigating the idea of softness and anger.

In Middleton Cheney there are six talented artists and makers in The Barn at The New Inn showcasing a variety of art - and if you think art is just paintings, then think again!

Here, alongside quirky animal portraits and stylised townscapes and boats bobbing in bright blue harbours, you'll find mixed media textile art. Ceramics inspired by the local countryside, carved wooden spoons and handmade journals by designer-maker Sharon Highway of Mallory Journals. Who hand-binds individual and custom journals, bringing together beautiful leather, sumptuous soft cork, decorative papers, ribbon, beads and buttons in a rainbow of colours to create tactile journals to hold treasured words and illustrations. "I have always been a keen reader, and I love the romance of the idea of writers curled up in an attic, putting ink to clean crisp paper for a diary or a novel!" smiles Sharon.

"I start by choosing a leather colour, from a selection of around twenty shades which I buy in large hides from Italy, and pairing it with a lining paper. For vegetarian and vegan

writers and sketchers, or people who prefer something different, I also use cork fabric for covers, in its natural colour, dyed or printed.

Cork oak trees are grown in beautiful orchards in Portugal, orchards that suffered when we turned to screw-cap tops on our wine and so the farmers diversified! However, it's the lining that really adds the character. There's something magical about opening a journal's cover and discovering an enchanting pattern, colour and style inside that you can't see from the outside. I gather the paper from everywhere and have hundreds of designs ranging from Golden Dandelions to Jungle Safari or Indian motifs, vintage maps and atlases.

Whether you're an enthusiastic day-tripper or an experienced art collector there's plenty to catch your eye. Get your hands on a copy of the festival guide from the library or other local information point or browse the full exhibition listings by location or type of art at [www.artweeks.org](http://www.artweeks.org).

If you are unable to get to any venues for real, or you simply appreciate seeing art from the comfort of your own home, there is a vast on-line showcase too - visit [www.artweeks.org/latestshow](http://www.artweeks.org/latestshow) to get you started.



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01295 810711 or 07912 045094  
Email: [marlene@rosecare.co.uk](mailto:marlene@rosecare.co.uk)