

## FOCUS

# For ART'S Sake



Esther Lafferty visits an Oxfordshire artist whose captivating work reflects her rural upbringing and love of nature

THIS month the county blossoms with art as the Oxfordshire Artweeks festival sees about 500 venues inviting us in to enjoy paintings, photography, textile art, pottery, jewellery, sculpture and other art and crafts.

This week, the focus is South Oxfordshire. Nestled along the Thames valley and the Ridgeway is art, craft and design in both intimate open-studio settings and large pop-up exhibitions.

Rachael Anders is a colour pencil artist in Didcot, who specialises in wildlife and birds, as well as taking pet portrait and floral commissions, often with an inbuilt narrative. Although a newcomer to the festival this year, opening her home studio to visitors, her kingfisher illustration was chosen to grace the cover of the 2023 Oxfordshire Artweeks festival guide.

"I always loved to draw as a child," says Rachael. "I was enchanted by the classic Flower Fairy illustrations by Cicely Mary Barker, which were first published 100 years ago this year. I loved the detail and the colour, the way each fairy represented a flower and the whole narrative behind each picture.

"Weirdly though I never took art at school. I remember the class being told to draw a bowl of fruit on a table and it seem interminably dull. It wasn't 7 years ago when I was randomly sketching the cat that my partner suggested that I should consider changing career and becoming an artist. I took an intensive course, trying my hand at many media, but I found I always came back to the natural world. I grew up in rural West Hanney so it's drawing flowers and wildlife that I feel most at home.

## Growing up in West Hanney, drawing flowers & wildlife makes me at home

"I'm working on a bird series, including a kingfisher, a robin, a bluetit, a woodpecker and a greenfinch. There's something so special about birds: they're rather like the Flower Fairies of the natural world.

"There's so much I love about birds. Many birds are also so tiny, so delicate and yet so clever and they can be so colourful. I love that they sing beautifully evoking such feelings of spring and joy.

"We take it for granted but birdsong is such a treasure – a world without birdsong would be a much poorer place. But best of all about birds is that they can fly – that's the superpower I would choose if I could – I'd love to be able to see the world they way they do and to swoop above the landscape."

● More on Artweeks at [artweeks.org](http://artweeks.org)

● For more Oxfordshire art, see Pages 39 and 44



Kingfisher by Rachael Anders