

The Oxford Times

WEEKEND

Thursday, May 25, 2023



FRESH
Spring show proves a fertile source of gardening inspiration

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Picturing the city: Bharat Patel takes a sideways view of the city

Shifting perspective

ESTHER LAFFERTY of Oxfordshire Artweeks meets artists picturing Oxford in new ways

In a city blessed with startling architecture, it comes as no surprise that Oxford's buildings have always fascinated artists. From JMW Turner to John Piper, the 'city of dreaming spires' has attracted creative souls and inspired great work.

And it continues to do so today. The built heritage of the city is the focus for a clutch of artists opening up their studios and galleries for Oxford-

shire Artweeks – the largest open doors festival of its kind in the country.

Having shone a spotlight on the wealth of creativity to be found around the county it is now the turn of Oxford to shine, with workspaces welcoming visitors until Monday.

In Headington, documentary photographer Bharat Patel presents Oxford in an alternative way, inspired by the way he imagines it is recalled by the tourists who pass through the city, in fleeting

fantastical and dreamlike memories.

"Oxford is famous worldwide," says Bharat. "I have seen so many tourists taking the standard photographs, yet the city is so much more than those iconic views. It includes both the historic and the modern, and it is full of corners and surprising things that are not often noticed or visited."

"I wanted to present Oxford from a different viewpoint, while still encapsulating the reality of the city I

have been intrigued by descriptions of recurring dreams in which people revisited locations, where buildings of stone surrounded by water were interconnected, and in which the dreamer glides effortlessly from one place to another. In *Recurring Dreams of Oxford*, I explore what some of the millions of visitors, or residents, may experience in their dreams; a confusing interplay between time and locations."

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INSIDE



THE BLUES

Visiting butterflies bring a dash of colour to the county's countryside

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EYESORES

Meet the Oxford artist putting the city's ugliest buildings in the spotlight

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GROW WILD

Nature lovers show us how to make our plots more wildlife-friendly

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FOCUS

For ART'S Sake



Peter Haxworth is shunning scenic views and highlighting the ugly monstrosities that blight the city. Tim Hughes finds out more

THE past month has once again revealed the huge wealth of artistic talent in our county.

Oxfordshire Artweeks continues until Monday, giving art lovers a chance to peep inside the workplaces of some of the city's talented painters, photographers, sculptors, jewellers and other creative individuals – and admire (or even take home) the fruits of their labours.

But while much of it celebrates the beauty of our surroundings, a more interesting perspective comes from artists who are less enamoured by what they see around them.

Best is Summertown's Peter Haxworth, who is presenting – among other works – Oxford Let Down – 12 watercolours in which he expresses his disappointment with some of the city's more recent buildings.

He says: "Oxford Let Down is the title of a little book that I have written explaining the reasons for my views about the buildings featured.

"I am not the only Oxford citizen who has grave reservations about some of the buildings that we have allowed to be built in our city in decades since the second world war.

"I felt strongly enough about this to select 12 buildings that seemed to me to have done the city no credit at all, with a handful of them being complete outrages.

"Thinking to spend some of my time in painting to some purpose, I selected 12 notable examples and painted them so that my feelings were placed on record. But just doing this did not seem sufficient, so I wrote this little book, explaining the reasons for my views, with comments by Martin Lipson, a friend and keen and experienced observer of cityscapes.

"This is available during Artweeks, for those interested."

Peter is also exhibiting eight table sculptures created in white acrylic – perhaps somewhat architectural in inspiration, which is not surprising given his delight in high quality building design in all its forms.

He particularly enjoys the strong tonal contrasts in the sculptures that are generated under directional lighting.

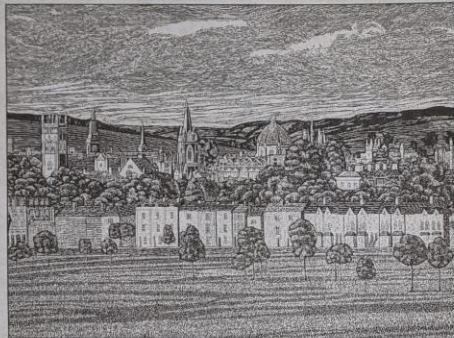
See Peter Haxworth's work at Tattersalls, Islip Road, Summertown

•More details from artweeks.org

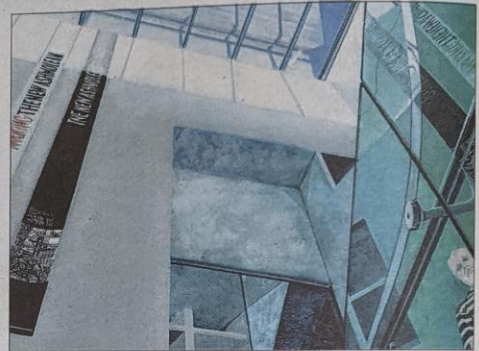


Peter Haxworth's picture of the Denys Wilkinson Building and, top, Seacourt Tower

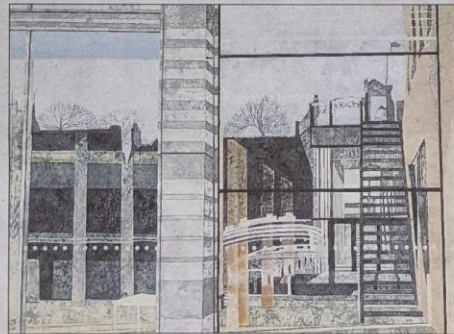
Reflections on the city's architecture



Jenny Dingwall takes a black and white look at the skyline



Different view by Wendy Skinner Smith



Wendy Skinner Smith reflects on composition



Bharat Patel takes a punt on twisting reality

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Bharat's photos capture the essence and splendour of Oxford with an intriguing interplay of time and places. Each surprising combination paints a mini-story which he hopes will encourage the viewer to take a fresh look at the city.

Another artist offering an alternative look at Oxford is Wendy Skinner Smith. Her paintings are the embodiment of her fascination with glass and its scope to reflect the world which often gives a refreshingly new perspective to classic views.

Wendy loves buildings and how light is reflected in glass, and combines these, often with the blue of the sky, to show a true representation of today's Oxford and the everyday experience in the city. Her paintings are often a mix of town and gown – a university college captured in a shop window for example, or a diner enjoying a view.

Each painting focuses on the effects of light: famous buildings framed in a window, as if seen by a passing pedestrian, or captured from the viewpoint of someone gazing through a window opposite.

Magdalen College appears reflected as a mirror image in the water of a lily pond at the Botanic Garden, the Jam factory is seen on the glass of the Said business school, and Lincoln College is an apparition in the frontage of Walters of The Turl.

There are a number of layers overlaid that the eye teases out as you look more carefully and each picture which appears to be a simple recreation at first glance is full of hidden depths. Each has been structured with the utmost care so that three different elements are included – the light on the glass itself, what's actually behind the glass and the reflection. It's an intriguing approach and the end results are modern without being abstract.

More traditional, and yet equally carefully composed, in East Oxford you can see stunning black and white linecuts of scenes around Oxford by Jenny Dingwall, who is an artist by night and a mathematician by day.

"My imagination is fired by pattern, symmetry, perspective and proportion – all mathematical principles that work to create a harmonious piece of art," she explains. "These principles inspire me to explore the way sunlight and shadow play on structures such as historic buildings. I enjoy using a black and white medium. By removing colour, I can focus on compositions emphasising the balance of light and dark, shapes and textures."

An unmissable with urban landscapes is evident in the art of Sue Smith whose expansive energetic general cityscapes in pen and ink are on show in St John the Evangelist Cloister Gallery on Iffley Road.

With a nonconformist approach to perspective she pulls the viewer's eye right into the picture. "Our brains don't think in a linear way and they can process multiple perspectives at one and that's what I'm trying to encourage," she says. "Although you can't see people in the pictures, you can sense the humanity in each. My whole career I have seen how losing security affects people and in my cityscapes, that security is represented as buildings, having walls around you within which you feel safe."

Representing the state of society as she sees it, Sue's cityscapes are more dystopic. Her architectural forms are drawn with jagged lines to give an edgy other-worldliness and the undefined edges which add a sense of dynamism hint at a story that is still unresolved.

However, while Sue's drawings are metaphors for insecurity, destruction, and vulnerability her map-like art is not dark or melancholic.

"I'd like to think my cityscapes offer hope," she says. "And if there's a map, then there's a way out. We can all help someone to find it."

Also see delicate papercuts by Kate Hipkiss and The Garden Studio in Summertown where Finn Coburn shows the exquisite architectural details of Oxford landmarks and pubs in his paintings.

•See artweeks.org for more information

Seek city's creative gems

ESTHER LAFFERTY shines a light on two skilled craft masters who have opened their studio doors for Artweeks

FOR most of the year you wouldn't know they are there, but in houses, workshops and studios around the city, Oxford artists are beavering away creating remarkable work. They include not just painters but highly skilled craftsmen and women, making everything from large pots and huge sculptures to intricate items of jewellery.

Among the latter is silversmith Tony Thomson, who has opened his home workshop in Jericho for the 30th anniversary of Oxfordshire Artweeks – which continues until Monday.

Tony is inviting curious visitors to visit and see the natural treasures he collects and stores to transform into bespoke and characterful jewellery and stylised spoons. These range from fossils and gems to sea-glass and even porcupine quills.

Tony's basement studio is a fascinating place to explore, with the beautiful, the unusual and the unexpected crammed into small sets of drawers labelled pearls, opals, sea glass, shells and fossils as they wait to become pieces of jewellery.

The range of colours is extraordinary, ranging from sparking elliptical stone in browns and reds patterned with light-hearted squiggles, part of a fossilised dinosaur bone, to watermelon tourmaline, a stone with delicate rings of white, pink and green as luscious as the fruit itself and a type of quartz, shot through with golden threads.

As he works, he is surrounded by tools of his trade, which include a rolling mill, cutting equipment and cuttlefish bones. Cuttlefish bones, explains Tony, are a gift from nature for the jeweller. They can be used to create texture or carved into to create a mould, a sustainable ancient technique.

When creating a piece, Tony begins by selecting a stone, or a selection of stones, inspired by their look and shape – maybe a fossil or a beach find or a colourful gem with a striking pattern – which he enhances with precious metal using various silver and gold working techniques, many dating back to ancient times.

"The quality of the craftsmanship in ancient times was extraordinary," he says. "The way they created them was fascinating technically. Even today, we haven't been able to improve on their methods."

To hammered and flattened silver, Tony also often adds a small silver bird or two, cast in wax – simple delicate silhouettes adding an extra dimension to his designs: one popular and unusual ring in his collection has two birds on the end of a concave bowl like a small birdbath, for example, while other rings are square, a design that works surprisingly well for the wide-knuckled.

Three hundred metres away, in a pretty garden studio, artist Wendy Newhofer creates freestanding pieces and wall panels of gorgeous glass inspired by the natural world in a palette of refined soft hues which has become her trademark.

The cool blues, yellow and gold, and organic green and pale pink suit her quiet elegance perfectly, but she laughs that this hasn't been a conscious decision. Rather it's the result of the



Piece by Wendy Newhofer

way she chooses to work. She says: "Lots of glass art, especially fused glass, is very bold in colour, but when I first worked with glass as I was transfixed by the amazing blue you achieve by simply adding copper leaf to clear glass and it's a combination I have continued to use."

"Visitors to the studio are always surprised by the colours created by putting a silver of metal leaf between layers of glass and heating them together. As well as copper, I also use lots of silver and aluminium leaf too, metal foils which are slightly thicker and wire in various diameters. The colours you see in my pieces are all purely the result of the chemical reactions that take place in the kiln. By using different thicknesses of leaf and foil, and different combinations I can in my designs."

"I use copper to create the beautiful blue that underpins most of my designs, but if you use a thicker layer you create an iridescent black instead, and thicker still will produce a red. It's exciting that just a small tweak can change samples of the different combinations I have used and what the final effect is so I can try and recreate different hues."

"It isn't a perfect science but it is pure chemistry and it always feels like a mysterious medieval alchemy! I never quite know what the finished pieces will look like so it's always a real thrill when I open the kiln and see how each has turned out."



She continues: "As well as taking my inspiration from the natural world, I have a love of textile design and an extensive collection of beautiful books with illustrations of fabric patterns through the ages."

"These have also been a big inspiration for much of my work, especially the 50s mid-century modern designs which have had a resurgence in



Tony Thomson and, left, pieces of his jewellery

popularity over the past few years. I enjoy their repeated motifs and find myself continually drawn to their strong visual impact."

Tony's Plantation Road workshop and Wendy's Southmoor Road studio are open to the public until Monday.

● Check artweeks.org for opening hours, and to see more on the many other open-studio events.



Wendy Newhofer