

Feature

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Artists reflect on city's scenes

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Oxfordshire Artweeks director

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

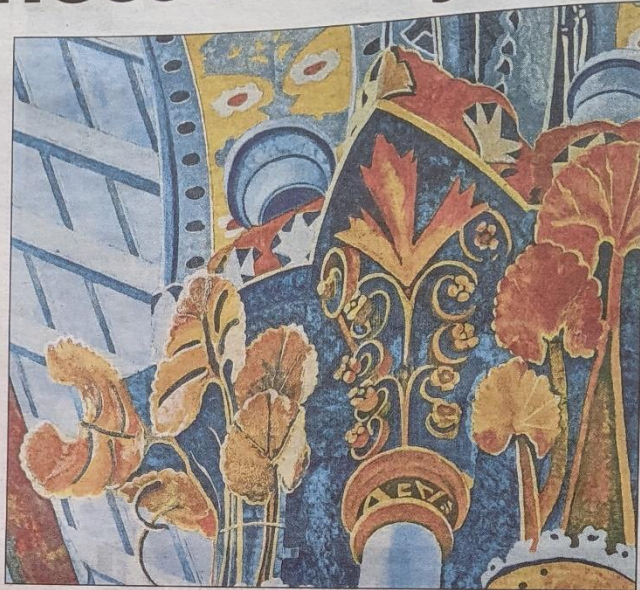
Having shone a spotlight on the wealth of creativity to be found around the county, it is now the turn of Oxford to shine, with workspaces welcoming visitors until Monday.

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.

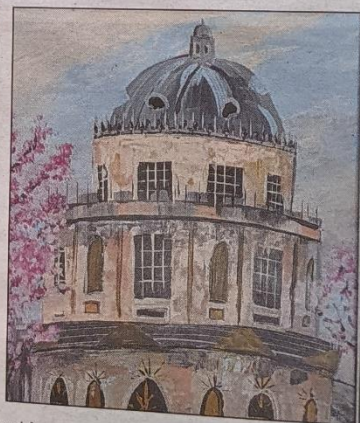
"Oxford is famous worldwide," says Bharat. "I have seen so many tourists taking the standard photographs, yet the city is so much more than those iconic views. It includes both the historic and the modern, and it is full of corners and surprising things that are not often noticed or visited."

"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."

Bharat's photos capture the



Museum column detail by Wendy Skinner Smith

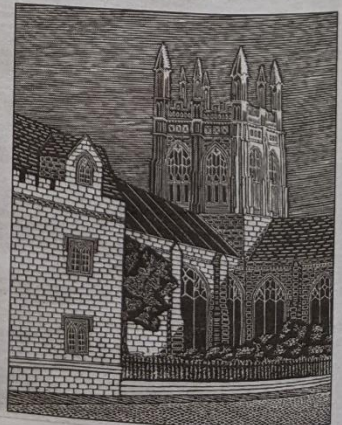
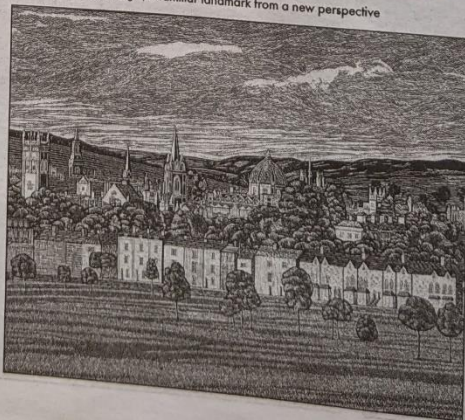


Elaine Allender's Bridge of Sighs. Right, a familiar landmark from a new perspective

Frideswide Square by Wendy Skinner Smith



Jenny Dingwall's black and white linocut scenes



from exciting new perspectives

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 lineouts 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 unease 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 Tilly 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



Above and below, different view of Oxford by Bharet Patel

