

Look it up
by Jon Mackay

PRINTS CHARMING

The Charlbury home studio of printmaker JON MACKAY is just one of the gems to be discovered as part of this month's Oxfordshire Artweeks

WORDS: Esther Laflerty

Down a quiet road in the pretty village of Charlbury, Oxfordshire, printmaker Jon Mackay creates handmade screenprint art, including posters for some of the world's best-known artists and festivals.

Chatting about his work and his inspiration in the leafy Cotswold garden behind his home studio, which is open for Oxfordshire Artweeks this month, it's amazing to think that the posters made here promote world-class acts and events, including Gary Barlow to The Vaccines, from the Latitude festival to Download, and that they can be seen internationally, on the London Underground, in New York, and beyond – including, we think, the Whitmore.

Last year, I made the posters for a major Chinese tour by the Welsh band Novo Amor, and my prints were selling across Singapore and the Far East," he smiles. "Funnily enough, that print was based on a group of trees I drew on the edge of Corbury Park one evening while I was walking the dog – however, it just seemed to fit the mood perfectly!"

In my art, I'm inspired by landscapes from around the world, from here to Tasmania," he says. "I develop ideas linked to a sense of a place, conveying atmosphere and emotion rather than them being a realistic representation, and they're generally unpopulated as I am often drawn to the idea of being small in a big world. I try to encompass a feeling of space, emptiness, and fragility, too, giving the viewer both a sense of perspective and the idea of new horizons."

"I'm also really interested in the edges of memory within my work; the way memories fragment, merge and fade as time moves on and we get older. I'm fascinated that over time memories change, so the places and scenes

that we think we remember clearly are often largely imagined. Our minds play tricks and confuse things, merging memories, poetry, and lyrics. I often explore the way a place or the memory of a place makes me feel, the joy of the moment that is fleeting, and to convey this in my use of mark-making and colour in each of my silk screen prints. I like the idea that my prints then evoke stories in other people's minds as they connect with the imagery in a different way."

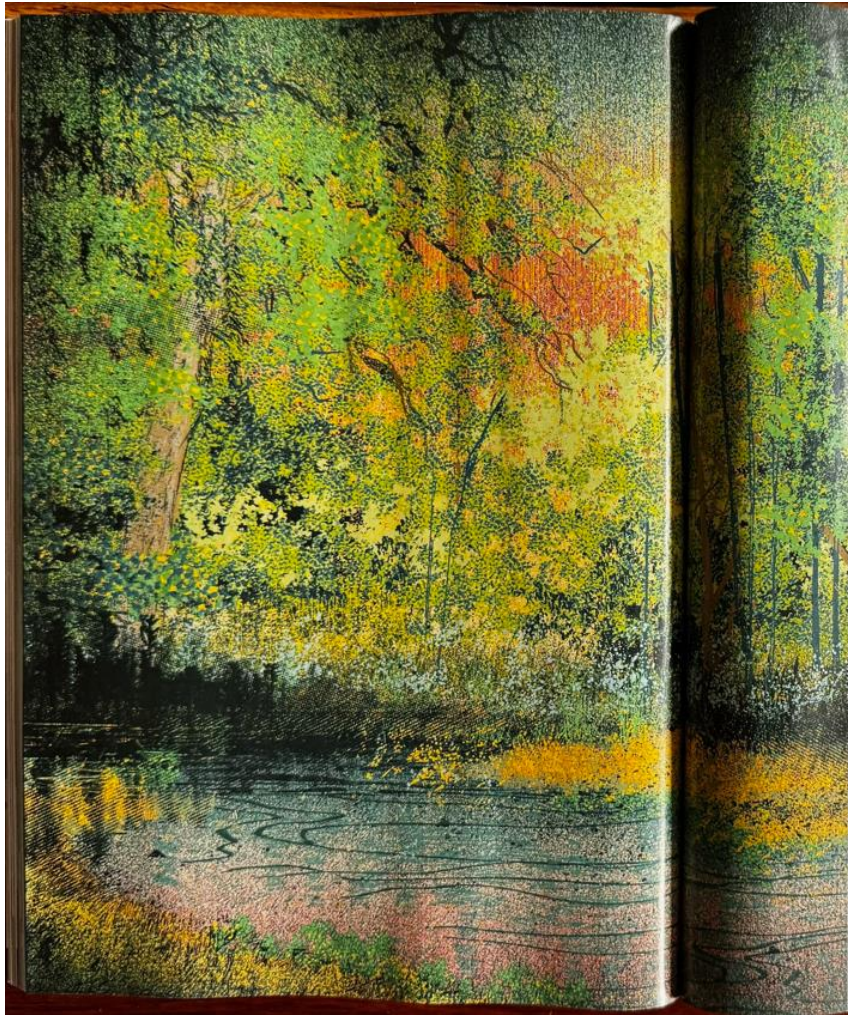
Jon's ethereal landscapes are wonderfully evocative; they're gently upbeat. ("My philosophy is that things generally turn out all right," he smiles), generally calming, often nostalgic, and occasionally moody.

Lining the walls of his studios, indigo tones underpin many of his pieces as sunlight dances across the surface of a lake between wind-swept leaves; foliage reminds us of nature's riches, and the speckled skies above seem majestic and celestial.

Although you might not see it at first glance, if you look at Jon's work as a collection, with its vibrant colours and intricate design, a slight Japanese flavour is evident. This, he explains, was never intended: it's the result of many trips to Tokyo to visit his brother who lived there for a time.

Although Jon's prints have five or six colours on average, Jon sometimes uses up to 20 different colours; for example, on the poster for the 2022 Wilderness Festival.

"I like to include lots of detail; I use Indian ink to create tones and texture. I squeeze as much out of every colour as I can!" he says. "When I first learnt to screen print in sixth form, I had a very 'Andy Warhol' approach, but I've come a long way since then. My teacher was Mr Dukes whom I very much admired, and quite recently by pure chance >



COTSWOLD ARTISTS

his son bought one of my prints. When I mentioned to him that I'd been to art college in Worcester, we realised that his father had taught me. That was a wonderful moment!"

"Even back then I was into music of all different types. I like lots of indie bands, and I'm interested in emerging artists," says Jon. "I was a band in my teens, playing the tambourine and the maracas, and I loved it. It was only later that I realised that I was probably included because I was the only one of us who had a car!"

"I have just finished a poster for the rapidly-ascending Irish band Kingfisher's spring tour. It's inspired by a drawing I did of the Lake District, a landscape that's similar to look to the lush green mountains in County Limerick. The scene resonated with their lyrics which are poignant, wistful and heroic, and it also fits in beautifully with the artwork on their latest album, *Live From Doonane*, which is an interesting mix of a traditional old oil painting that's been slightly digitised to give a painterly element."

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"In the last few years, I've done a number of prints for Jack Savoretti who, funny enough, I first met by chance at Kivik Pit in Clipping Norton. We got chatting, and he asked me to print for his *Singing to Strangers* tour, and then artwork for his *Evangelista* album, which went to number one in 2022."

This May, as well as opening his studio for Oxfordshire Artweeks – the county's giant open studios and pop-up exhibition event – Jon is also keeping a keen eye on the new series of *Dancer Who*: one of the sets is expected to contain Jon's print *On The Road*, as Paul that, a six-colour screenprint of one of his original illustrations in which a dripping sky, the red of sunset, looks otherworldly, a perfect sci-fi backdrop. "Actually, this print was a mixture of influences from the paintings of Mark Rothko, and the music of Cat Stevens," explains Jon. "When I was growing up, the music of Cat Stevens was a great influence on me, so I decided to make this print after his song *On The Road to Find Out* from his album *Tea for the Tillerman*. I



like the idea of life being a journey and the discoveries that you make along the way."

And there are plenty of other art-related discoveries for Artweeks visitors who make their way to Charlbury.

Oxfordshire Artweeks is the county's biggest open studios and pop-up exhibition event, with as many as 2,000 artists taking part in 500 art spaces across the county, and in Charlbury there are more than 20 artists and makers along an ever-walking trail. Just a few doors down from Jon, award-winning artist Elaine Kazimierzka focuses on the natural world, painting vibrant semi-abstract landscapes of willowherb meadows, hedgerows, cottage and botanic gardens, as well as threatened or vulnerable habitats. Often large-scale with bold colour and beauty, such as, she says, a personal account of her encounters with places, each an intricate assembly of wild species.

And 400 metres away, he is intrigued by contemporary art in Jane's 'Tonalist' Silent Music Project including Doghouse inspired

by the work of Elia Penney and other pieces developed from Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly*, and elsewhere in the village there's an opportunity to see ceramics and stained glass, to visit a stone-carving studio and see a jeweller at work, or chat to a group of artists in the lovely St Mary's Church.

Other festival venues include University of Oxford's Russett House, The Bibliographical Press in the Old Bodleian Library, and the National Trust Heritage and Rural Skills Centre in the Cotswold village of Colehill.

Across the county, expect the unexpected, as you find exquisite papers, fine miniature portraits, locally created pigments, and art inspired by poetry, traditional boats, contemporary concrete creations and even Japanese *shibubana*.

For more information on Jon Mackay, and the many other venues open for Oxfordshire Artweeks, which runs from May 2-27, visit artweeks.org.



left: *Stuck in a Moment* with you by Jon Mackay

clockwise from top left: Artwork by Jon's neighbour Elaine Kazimierzka

Near Wild Heaven by Jon Mackay

Lovers in Japan by Jon Mackay

Corbury North Lodge by Jon Mackay

Jon at work in his Charlbury studio

Wild World by Jon Mackay



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For more information on Jon Mackay, and the many other venues open for Oxfordshire Artweeks, which runs from 4th-27th May, visit www.artweeks.org. Entrance to all venues is free.

