

LOVE WHAT YOU DO:

Artweeks Prize-winning Artist, David Williams

Tucked away in the quiet West Oxfordshire village of Bampton, sculptor David Williams is the winner of the 2022 Artweeks Mary Moser Award, an annual award intended to help develop the career of an artist who has taken up art professionally after time working in another sector. Esther Lafferty chatted to David to find out more about his growing love of sculpting and his plans for the future.

“I never took art at school,” explains David. “It wasn’t considered appropriate for sensible serious students and so I did a degree in Chemistry and trained as a chemistry teacher. Then, when I was first teaching I took evening classes to learn to develop black and white photography. It was probably an obvious choice for a chemist, but I was actually more interested in taking the photos rather than the process of creating the finished print. After a while, the teacher left and so I took over teaching the group and since, for most of my career, I have been teaching photography at school alongside chemistry.”

I began stone carving about eight years ago when my children bought me some stone-carving chisels for Christmas because I had been saying for a long time that I fancied having a go at it and I was really keen to repurpose discarded pieces of local stone. I’d always been fascinated by stones and pebbles and have often built little stacks of them around the house. I love the idea that stones are millions of years old and have been used in different ways in previous centuries, in buildings and drystone walls for



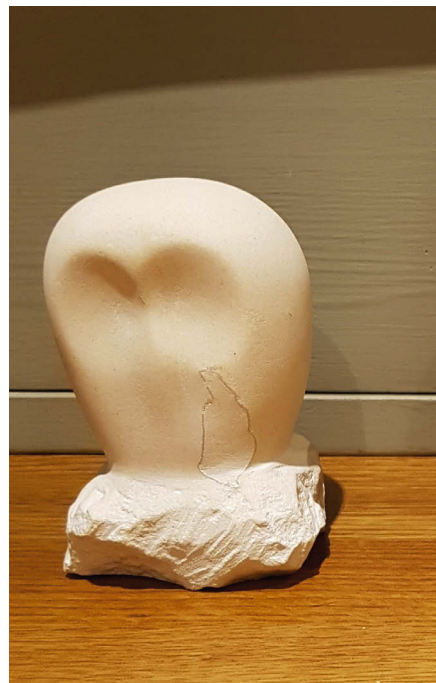
example. Last year I carved a fruit bowl from a lump of Cotswold stone that was discarded when Bampton Library

was refurbished, and was part of the library when the building was used as the hospital in Downton Abbey!

Now I use lots of different types and interesting lumps of old stone which have been brought to me by friends and family across the country when they come to visit, and I buy some too. I usually start with a piece of stone that already has a shape and that will often suggest to me what the finished piece might be.”

Most of David’s pieces are inspired by nature, either echoing the shapes he sees or else carved in a stylised way. Recent work has included big sections of sunflowers, nearly a metre across, in offcuts of Ancaster limestone and his popular sleek owls which have an elegant globular form that “no ornithologist would identify” he laughs. Generally designed for the garden, the range

“Everyone likes to fiddle with a pebble





also carve dimples into rocks with a special diamond-edged cutter and add a touch of gold leaf which really sings out in the right light. They're like mini-sculptures for people who haven't the space for something bigger. "I'm looking forward to devoting increasingly more time this year on what started as a hobby and has become more of a way of life," he continues. "I also now teach day-workshops for people who would like to have a go at stone carving. I'm absolutely delighted to have won the Mary Moser Award and will be putting the prize money towards developing a website."



When David isn't teaching or stone-carving, David spends evenings and weekends as a volunteer Blood Biker for the charity SERVONB which delivers out-of-hours blood and blood products for the NHS.

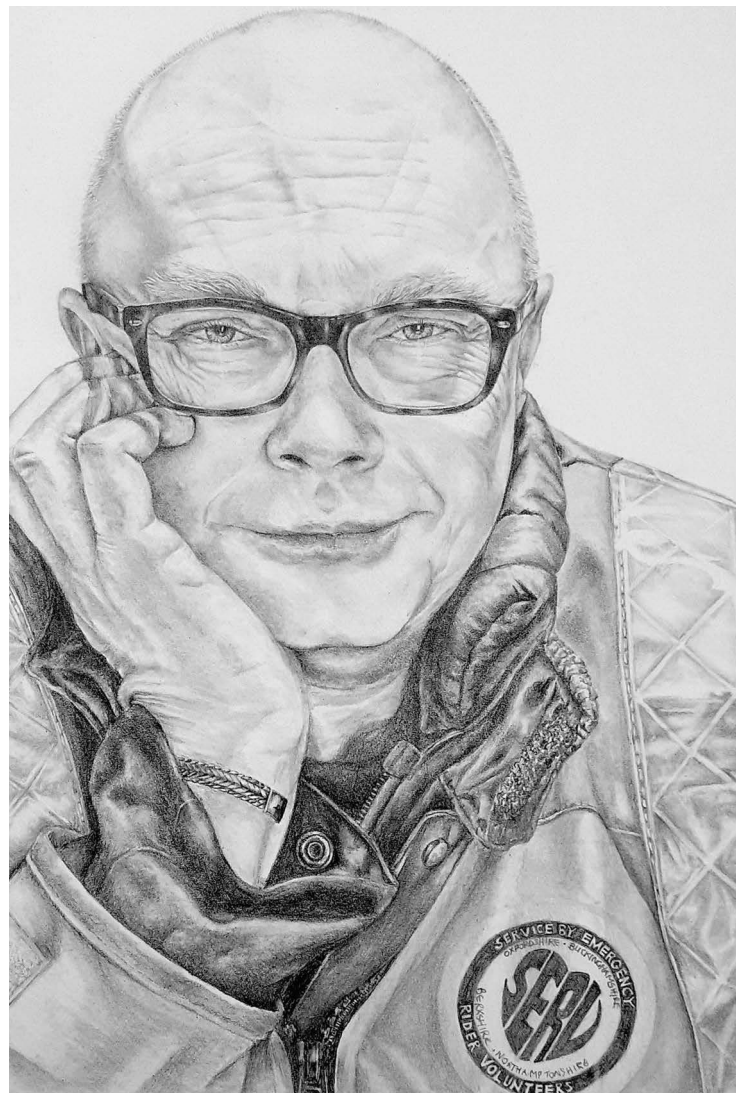


includes bird baths and animal forms atop a rectangular plinth into which David carves decorative designs or quotations.

"I have often used a circular shape for the animals – leaping fish or flowing otters – as I like the idea, inspired by Barbara Hepworth, of being able to see through a sculpture. I am also inspired by the books of Robert MacFarlane and Jackie Morris: I also enjoy working with text and did a course in letter-cutting which is quite technical and requires other skills," he continues

Limited in size by what he can manage in the back garden, and what he and wife can carry through the garage, David also makes a range of gilded pebbles to fit – literally – every pocket.

"I have a favourite stone, a flint that I found on West Wittering beach years ago when my children were tiny," he explains. "It is dark brown with a circular dimple that's pure white and it's beautiful. I've always been fascinated by it and I find it soothing to turn it in my hand. As a teacher, I collect small pebbles that are interesting shapes or have holes in them and give them to students as worry-stones. Everyone likes to fiddle with a pebble and they're like the most simple version of therapy! Now I



This portrait of David was drawn by Cumnor artist Sue Side with whom he is exhibiting for Oxfordshire Artweeks in May (14-22; venue 198). It was part of the Portraits for NHS Heroes initiative for which David carved a line drawing of a volunteer in the first vaccine trials onto stone.

