



MEET THE ARTIST: Sophie Bass

From 4-27 May, the annual Oxfordshire Artweeks festival paints the county with colour, inviting you to visit artist studios and pop-up exhibitions in houses and gardens, churches, manors and castles across the county and experience art of all kinds in an easy, friendly (and free) way. With more than 500 exhibition events that reach from Banbury to Blewbury, Burford to Bicester and Turville and Thame, you'll find artists, makers and designers working with paint, clay, textiles, photography, wood, metal, glass, mosaic and more.



Sophie Bass



People Power

Among them, Artweeks newcomer Sophie Bass creates vibrant bold paintings with gouache paints, pencils and fineliners in a distinctive contemporary style. They are bursting with vivid colour and strong characters. Here Esther Lafferty asks about her art, her inspiration and how she hopes her art can help change the world.

“I’ve always been obsessed with pictures. I love detailed artworks that entrance me, almost like a type of magic and so I’m trying to draw people into my own art, to captivate them in the same way,” Sophie explains. “My paintings are inspired by music, mythology, folk tales and symbolism and I strive to weave stories and meaning into every piece.

“I work largely within the music industry, designing record covers including albums by British saxophonist and rapper Soweto Kinch, who is hosting the new BBC 3 show Round Midnight, championing the British jazz scene. I illustrated both The Black Peril and his latest album, White Juju in collaboration with the London Symphony Orchestra. White Juju is the insidious spell cast by centuries of systematic racism, and ‘the matrix of sacraments and symbols established by empire builders over the last 400 years.’



Global Sisterhood

My visual influences span far and wide, but what connects them all is the way humans create striking things of beauty to serve a higher purpose, be that political, religious or musical. The art I love most is created from a deep sense of human emotion including political art like anti-apartheid graphics, certain types of religious art; Tantric Hindu art, Orthodox icons and Persian and Indian miniatures, and where music and art meet in acid rave flyers from the 90s, jungle mix-tape covers, DIY Punk posters, old spiritual jazz artwork and psychedelic 60s sleeves.

My heritage also informs my work. My family tree is fascinating to me and spans the whole globe. But closest to my heart is my motherland of Trinidad and Tobago. My mum moved to England to pursue arts at university and has lived here ever since, but her whole family are in T&T so we've been visiting since I was a baby.

I'm grateful to my parents for instilling in me the importance of knowledge and culture outside of my own, listening to music and reading me stories from around the world. I grew up with children's books full of stories and illustrations from everywhere. That's where my love of stories and pictures began, and I still have them all on my bookshelf."

Because of her love for children's books, Sophie has been thrilled to illustrate several books for children, and hopes her pictures inform and inspire future generations. "I love creating worlds for kids to get lost in; it's a dream job for me," she adds.

"I've been lucky to have worked on some really meaningful kids books, my first being John Agard's *Windrush Child* (Walker Books 2022). It was an honour to illustrate this poetic tale of a young boy arriving from the Caribbean on the *Windrush* to start a new life in England. The lyricism and nostalgia with which John writes made illustrating this book a very moving experience. For my first picture book to be about something so close to my heart meant I

“ I love the political and spiritual symbolism of different colours

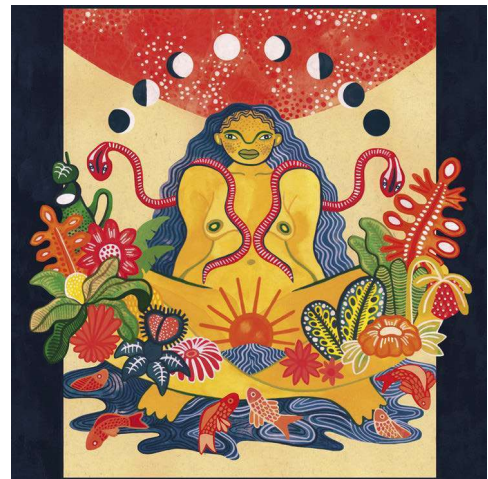


▲ Above: Black Peril Tour
 ◀ Left: Songs of our mothers
 ▼ Below: Spingtime





Namvula No Borders



She gave birth to the Earth

treasured every moment. This felt an important time to honour and thank the Windrush generation, who sacrificed and gave so much only to face so much adversity both then and now.

The Magic Callaloo, which was published last month (Walker Books; April 2024) is the third children's book I've worked on," she continues. "It's an amazing retelling of Rapunzel from an anti-colonial viewpoint written by the incredible Trish Cooke. This was a dream project as it was the kind of storybook I loved when I was younger, so it felt like a full circle moment. To be creating these colourful fairytale scenes inspired by the Caribbean and west Africa was so exciting.

Colour is very important in my work. I love the political and spiritual symbolism of different colours and the way they directly affect your mood. For example, I use a lot of red as it connotes passion, anger and change, then I apply a balance with yellows as they feel like hope, light, joy. There are also colours I use just because I love the lushness of them; gorgeous rich magenta pink and dreamy cobalt blue. I could talk about colour all day, however, the most important colour I use in my work is black: I've always been attracted to graphic black and white artwork, it feels powerful, bold and direct.

I also want people to feel empowered and driven to action when they see my work. My message is one of solidarity and liberation. I believe art is of the utmost importance when it comes to social change and activism. It's what draws people in and makes complex political ideas and messages accessible. Toni Cade Bambara, American civil rights activist and ▶



author said ‘The role of the artist is to make the revolution irresistible’ and that is what I live my life by. Art allows people to envision a better, fairer and more peaceful world. In my life I am surrounded by amazing activists and change makers and I’m so grateful to play a part with my art.

As an illustrator, I have worked on many meaningful projects from the homelessness and the refugee crisis, to decolonising the curriculum, intersectional feminism and the importance of nature and our connection to it. In the run up to Artweeks, I’m working with a team of artists and activists on a Hackney community festival called ‘If mi nuh laugh mi cry!’, exploring and responding to the archives from the HCDA (Hackney Community Defence Association) which was set up in 1988 to provide victims of police brutality with a campaigning voice. The world is a very heavy place, I can’t imagine making artwork that’s not an attempt to make it better.”

The Coach House, Wallingford, where Sophie is exhibiting her art during Oxfordshire Artweeks (listing 414) is a far cry from Hackney. In a stunning home gallery in a lush leafy setting close to the old castle in the heart of town, she is showing her work alongside contemporary depictions of local scenes along the Ridgeway and in the Chilterns by Christine Bass and handmade stylised jewellery by Kate Wilkinson with classic clean designs and a subtle matte sheen that catches and reflects the light.

artweeks.org



Eloise Lonsdale

Gen Z Frenzy

The Middle Bit

By the time this edition of OX Magazine is out, I’ll be on the other side of the world, most likely a little sunburnt and full of a lot of ramen. I’m leaving my very jammy role as Entertainments Editor to go travelling. It recently dawned on me though, that for the first time in my life I have no idea what’s next for me, and I don’t think I mind.

In an unstable world with an unpredictable future, Gen Z like to have a solid plan laid out ahead of them. We need to have a steady job lined up that aligns with our career progression schedule and salary expectations; we need to have a savings plan and a few pages of the Bloor Homes New-Build catalogue earmarked; and we MIGHT have a locked notes page of baby names on our phones, just for good measure.

As well as providing a sense of control amidst a shaky political climate, a lot of this need to plan our lives comes from how easy it is to compare ourselves to others – yes here comes the social media slander... Of course it’s not all bad, but if you’re in a wobbly headspace and dive into a scroll-hole full of people you went to school with who are doing what you want to do, and look hot doing it, you’re not going to feel better.

I realised that for a long time I’ve been looking ahead to an end goal and judging myself against it, while assuming the middle bit will just ‘happen’. Instead, it’s time to prioritise the middle bit. The ‘journey’ (if that’s not the most sickeningly cliché thing ever) and the dreams I’ve had that I have always assumed will never happen for some reason; like the one I’m doing right now by leaving a great job to go travelling. My boyfriend has a dream that involves owning a piano bar (despite not playing the piano) and “always wearing a hat” so we’ll see about that one too...

I don’t know what will happen when I come home – or if I will at all – but I do know I’m going to be happy, and for now that’s enough. It’s been a joy to overshare, overthink, and overcome some pretty tricky topics in this column, I hope you’ve had fun too.

Love u, bye x