



The Art of Glamour

As the red and gold leaves fall from the trees and the landscape becomes increasingly wintry, the minds – and talented hands – of Oxfordshire artists and designers have turned to Christmas cheer and festive offerings. Hundreds of talented Artweeks makers are, from 12th November until 12th December, welcoming visitors to dozens of venues and showcasing their goodies on-line, too, with an on-line Winter exhibition, a Christmas Season Virtual Art Trail and an Instagram Art and Craft fair (Thursday 25th Nov 7-9pm).



Across the county, jewellers, potters, painters, photographers, glass and textile artists, metal sculptors, mosaicists, stone carvers, and more, will be presenting unique handmade gifts. Expect beautiful bowls and platters destined to display the perfect feast, wearable art, and art in many varied media, inspired from the characters from seasonal fairy-tales and carols.

The recent art of Henley-based artist Kirsten Jones, for example, presents sumptuous shoe art glistening with glamour and shine. Shoes are a subject matter to which she returns to again and again, originally inspired by both the story of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* who wore their shoes out dancing after midnight every evening. In Grimm's fairy tale, a worried king challenges the princes of his kingdom to solve the mystery of his twelve exhausted daughters who sleep all day, and each morning their stylish shoes are found by their beds, worn-through from dancing. Doesn't that sound rather like the ideal festive season?

Kirsten loves to depict treasured everyday objects and their remembered or imagined histories and she has loved shoes all her life.

“ All the shoes in her work come with a story

“Shoes are universal, diverse and desirable,” she says. “Whatever the shoes or their purpose,” she says, “our shoes carry us through life and the story continues. They are a reminder of an event or a time of life, and are often evocative and deeply personal.”

She generally chooses vibrant colours and uses washes of acrylic, gesso and oil pastel with expressive brush strokes over neutral backgrounds that quietly set the scene. These include fragments of collaged papers including stamps, fragments of maps, Victorian collage papers and – for festival-flavoured footwear and flip-flops – drawn wild flowers. From perky polkadots to haute couture high heels, these mixed media pictures also include snippets of adverts for women’s garments and fashion brands cut from vintage fashion magazines including Vogue and Harpers. Several pieces are painted on a page of vintage music, including a vintage opera score from *Madame Butterfly* by Puccini – which the Welsh National Opera are performing at Oxford’s New Theatre in November. Kirsten has adapted the words of the opera to create an alternative interpretation; an optimistic statement of drama against this musical and cultural backdrop.

Her offerings for this winter are Party Shoes: glamorous, smart and glitzy, with real gold leaf to add that perfect sparkle and dynamism as the light catches across the picture. Decadent and daring, they celebrate ‘wild at heart’ girls, fusing style and a fun flamboyance. Each includes a butterfly representing the social butterfly in each of us, and most overlay a musical score celebrating love.



The first in the set, pink and winter blue against patches of fashion-inspired wording, is also accessorised by a recipe for Champagne Jelly. In ‘Party Shoes 9’ we find a fuzz of red fluff, adorned with a British Stamp under the franking mark ‘Be properly (ad)dressed’ and two hidden feathers with a luggage label. The background is a series of expressive brushstrokes based on the shop counter at The Dressing Room in Zug, Switzerland where Kirsten found these particular marvels.

All the shoes in her work come with a story: another pair are based on those worn by Marie Antoinette when she got married and many came originally from designer shops, markets and charity shops or were borrowed from friends. “The ‘Fashion Bubble’ Boots in another illustration were also found in Switzerland. “They are modern, elegant and yet just a bit on the edge,” she laughs. “Created from black leather and bubble wrap, they are a touch ▶



reminiscent of Blondie looking splendid in a black bin liner. The text I added includes a quote from Mary Quant, in German, French fashion adverts and definitions of boot and bubble from a 60s dictionary.”

The shoes in these paintings are unique and each tell a tale. When you choose an original piece of art, jewellery, pottery, or wood, one that’s truly one of a kind, hand-crafted with imagination and skill, not only does the piece personify the individuality of artist: your own character shines through your choice, too.

Furthermore, by buying directly from an artist, you also carry away a trilogy of tales: the story of its inspiration, the story of its creation and the story of how you found it, and were captivated. It’s the perfect conversation piece; “It was a dark and stormy afternoon. Armed only with the addresses of some Artweeks venues and a SatNav...”

For more information on dozens of venues to visit and to explore more Artweeks art and design, in an on-line show and a virtual Christmas art trail, visit www.artweeks.org.

You can also visit an Artweeks ‘Stories’ Art and Craft Fair on Instagram on Thursday 25th November. Head to @OxfordshireArtweeks to get first pick of the treasures on offer, and if you see something you like get in touch with the maker directly to organise a purchase. People can also view all the pieces in the Highlights after the event.



Eloise Lonsdale
Gen Z Frenzy

Kindness at Christmas

Kindness has become really important in recent years, notably since the #BeKind movement, where people realised online bullying was still actually bullying. Since then, the world online has been littered with people videoing themselves buying lunch for a homeless person, giving a stranger a compliment or paying for someone’s shopping – after all, if you didn’t film it, what’s the point? #Growth.

If you’re looking to radiate positivity, can I suggest moving beyond token good deeds and checklist-esque acts of kindness? Sure, there are the basic things like gifts, compliments, hugs or letting someone tell the same story you’ve heard 12 times already, but everything you buy, give, and consume could be kind, too.

As we approach Christmas – the time where people inexplicably empty their bank accounts to buy everyone a bath bomb – there are even more opportunities to surround yourself with kindness, starting with the gifts you give.

It’s easy enough to participate in ‘unkind shopping’. By this, I don’t mean being a b*tch to the cashier in Primark, but instead buying and gifting things like fast fashion, animal-tested cosmetics, and unsustainable gifts, all of which can all do more harm than good.

Another opportunity to spread kindness this festive season is to keep in mind those who are less fortunate than you. Christmas is undeniably a materialistic consumerist society’s dream (I write, using my MacBook), but it doesn’t have to be; take other people’s situations into account and maybe suggest this year that you go for a New Year’s Day lunch together, instead of the usual exchanging of your entire December wage slip.

Last year, Covid decided that 2020 was just not quite rough enough, and made me spend most of my Christmas in isolation. There was one thing though, which made it bearable and that was a Marks & Spencer’s Cheese Board. Oh wait actually there were two things: that, and a call from my mum. If you know anyone who’s not surrounded by people this year, spread your kindness by giving them a ring. If you have a cheese board knocking about, send that too.

Merry Christmas. Shop green and call your Nan x