

Art is a laughing matter

ESTHER LAFFERTY uncovers art to make us smile as Oxfordshire Artweeks focuses on studios within the ring road

ART can be high-brow and serious. It can teach us things about the past and remind us of people and places, or it can evoke great emotions.

It can also, be light-hearted and fun, as some of the Oxford artists opening their studios for the Oxford city section of the Oxfordshire Artweeks festival reveal.

East Oxford's Clive Goddard had always dreamed of being a cartoonist but on leaving school was persuaded to opt for 'proper job'. It wasn't until his 40s that he began drawing cartoons to send to magazines and newspapers in the hopes that they would publish one and Private Eye did.

Clive then became a freelance illustrator and cartoonist and is now the author-illustrator of a series of children's books (Fintan Fedora the World's Worst Explorer) and Chairman of the Professional Cartoonists' Organisation which champions cartooning as an art form. A selection of these is on show this week at The Gardener's Arms in Plantation Road, Jericho.

Clive's cartoons, which regularly appear in Private Eye and other magazines and newspapers, reflect on what is going on in the world around us, poking fun at the news, society, and the moral and cultural climate in which we live rather than being overtly political. One of his current favourites (and the winner of The Mel Calman Award for Pocket Cartoon of the Year last year) was drawn during Liz Truss' brief spell as Prime Minister and alluded to the general disaster that the country found itself in.

He says: "Although I have worked with many publications now for a long time, so I think I know them well. I often can't second guess what cartoons they will choose to publish. For example, The Sun has used several related to art history including one about German painter Albrecht Dürer which was unexpected - although it included a saucy inference - whilst The Spectator occasionally goes for something that's simply daft. "I have also been surprised to discover that people's card buying habits show that the smuttier the cartoon, the better



Clive Goddard has fun with cartoons in the Sun on Sunday



the card sells." He goes on: "Interestingly people assume you must share Rupert Murdoch's political stance if your work is published in one of his newspapers, but that isn't necessarily the case. I was the stand-in cartoonist for The Sun for a period of time including the week that Margaret Thatcher died. The expectation was a cartoon that didn't necessarily align with what I really thought. Fortunately I managed to come up with an idea that worked for me and suited them and so I got away with it."

Over in Summertown, in The Spice of Life, a large group exhibition that includes a wide variety of photography and paintings, you'll find an amusing selection of animals by ceramicist Kate Byrne.

Alongside her pots, and platters, created in a Bletchington studio, you'll find, among a selection of domestic and recognisable animals, a tribe of Tawpaws, Quoques and Peris, imagined animals from a weird and wonderful other world.

"I have always liked odd-looking animals best, like the giraffe and the Gruffalo," smiles Kate. "If giraffes didn't exist and you drew one, people would think it looked crazy and the Gruffalo doesn't exist but I wish it did."

"During lockdown, I wanted to have do something light-hearted and so I began inventing hybrid animals. They are each a mixture of different endangered animals, my favourite bits



of each, with combined names to match."

The Peri is a combination of a rhino, an elephant, lizard and a toucan with a curled lizard's tail and a toucan's beak. The Tawpaw puts elements of a red panda and a macaw on a tapir's body.

She goes on: "The tapir is one of my favourite animals because of their distinctive divide between their black front half and their white rear; and because of their crazy flexible nose. It's like a short elephant's trunk and can even be used as a snorkel when the tapir is underwater."

"I also created the Quoque, a combination of a Quokka, a Pelican and Turtle, which has a turtle's shell and a



pelican's long beak. The Quokka is a little known marsupial about the size of a cat which is found only in Australia, on an island near Perth. For this hybrid I used its legs and long wallaby feet but the Quokka has the most amazingly smiling face and funny little hands which I definitely intend to incorporate into my ceramics soon!"

●Oxfordshire Artweeks runs until May 29. See artweeks.org for opening hours, and to see more on the many other open studio events and pop-up exhibitions taking place nearby



Kate Byrne's amusing creatures, above and far right

