



Meet Artweeks newcomer,

Gio Botto

Hi! I'm known as 'Tanks', a childhood nickname from my dad as cantankerous little girl. This is my first Artweeks having lived in Didcot all my life but now enjoying term times at Fine Arts University Bournemouth. I am lucky enough to have two studios throughout the year to work in, my uni studio and my home studio where, for Artweeks, I will be exhibiting a variety of recent Uni and previous works.



My current work is based on boxing. Why boxing, you may ask? What is it about boxing that draws me to paint it? Initially when watching the power of the UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) spectacle, Gio was drawn in by whole arena image, scenes of the crowds, the excitement of the lighting, and the boxing taking place in the centre as only a small part of this view. She remarks that while people have fought throughout history, now there is only a time and place for this behaviour in the ring under instruction with guidelines on sportsmanship, whilst others watch. Increasingly I focused on the human connections between fighters, between the ref and the crowd of onlookers, on muscles and movement, timeless images in the style and composition of George Bellows, an American realist painter, known for his powerful depictions of boxing matches and other gritty scenes in New York in the early twentieth century, with elements of Francis Bacon, and other contemporary artists in the mix.

I work from videos and footage sent to me by my friends, so they're personal and current. Sometimes I focus on one event or victory, or home in on the action. More recently it's become more about the loser, fallen in defeat. I am currently experimenting with adding textures into oil paint and creating blurring and movement, using bigger brushes and more contrast, on

alternative-coloured backgrounds and with different colour combinations to explore lighting. I love to study old masters such as Caravaggio for lighting and composition,

In stark contrast, also find churches and gravestones a great source of inspiration: I am not religious, but I respect people who are, and the value these buildings have to many. I love their age, architecture, and windows and also that the interiors have experienced so many different events and overheard so much, baptisms, funerals, weddings, and confessions – if only walls could talk... Graveyards too have their stories, as gravestones are entwined back into the mirroring the bodies that have been back to nature, and I enjoy painting ruined churches and derelict buildings too.

My third strand of work stems from a fascination with high-vis and construction workers. Last year, comments from TikTok followers lead to my very first one-man exhibition as a result of a series of paintings I was secretly painting in my studio in Didcot opposite a temporary base set up by a construction company outside my house. I adored the muck on their trousers and how they worked anonymously echoing images of Millet and Van Gogh sowers, the way they rested on their tools and their stature as they worked. I also enjoy painting the machinery too like big metal dinosaurs.

The studio atmosphere is a big part

of my enjoyment of painting. My Tik Tok and Instagram videos show how happy I am when painting, dancing around and listening to music, with dogs randomly coming to see what I am doing, or friends at uni popping in. Where possible I like to paint large and I love the quick energetic 2-5-minute poses in life drawing, capturing what you want to say in an instant. My paintings too are often created really fast.

I am lucky enough to be able to join in Artweeks and also have the experience of a fine art degree surrounded by fellow artists and tutors: any questions people ask about my work help me to decide where I'm going next! There will also be a selection of life drawings and sketchbooks to browse, and older canvases/boards ranging from dogs, self-portraits in lockdown, oil painting of sunsets, painting by candlelight, life-paintings, shoes etc.

all of which have been of the fun journey or art that's led me to where I am now.

I hope to be painting throughout the exhibition so can try to answer any questions or if you are thinking about Foundation or an Art Degree, I may be able to help.

Gio is exhibiting at Artweeks venue 460, 134 Brasenose Road, Didcot OX11 7BS from 11am-6pm on 18-20 and 25-27 May.