

Oxford's #OxTrail2024 Takeover

Sobell House is hoping all Oxonians and visitors to the city will 'hoof' loads of fun this summer. For eight ox-traordinary weeks, Oxford's streets will be home to 30 bold and beautiful ox sculptures, as a fundraiser for this much-loved charity. However, before they're auctioned off in September, why not follow the OxTrail to see these unique oxen, for free, around the city. Each has been intricately designed and painted by a different artist, and along the way you'll delve into prehistory, discover a hapless highway man from Henley, spot a turquoise dodo, and other intriguing nuggets of Oxfordshire's past. **Esther Lafferty** finds out more.



In the Westgate centre, a bold bright ox in cheerful sunny day colours is painted with an Alice in Wonderland theme highlighting the joyful fantastical nature of this classic Oxford story. "When I saw the call for artists from the OxTrail via Oxfordshire Arweeks, I thought the idea of painting an ox sounded great and I wanted to paint a fun design," explains Abingdon artist Caroline Ritson. "I pondered ideas – a map, bikes, and then suddenly I thought of Alice, and I knew that was what I wanted to do. As a child I had a



very old edition that was once my Mum's, illustrated by Margaret Tarrant: I loved the imaginative story, the crazy characters and also the original black and white illustrations by John Tenniel. I began with a flat design in A4 so there were lots of changes as I adapted it for a life-size ox, incorporating the three-dimensional shapes into the painting. The Mad Hatter and a rather cross Queen of Hearts are each shown on either side of the ox's face, using the eyes and horns as if the ox has a split personality, whilst the rail doubles up as the Cheshire Cat's. Blonde-haired in a blue dress, Alice appears several times, tall and thin, with a long neck, and also playing croquet with the flamingos and the hedgehogs and keep your eyes open for a turquoise dodo."

The flavour of Oxford continues outside County Hall, on Cowmouflage by Arweeks artist Philippa Muir, who has painted a view of the dreaming spires, from South Park, on one side and a small Oxfordshire village in the distance on the other. She selected local wildflowers – forget-me-nots, dandelions, mallow and harebells – and a variety of leaves to decorate the ox's legs, and painted the head yellow and blue, reflecting the Oxford United



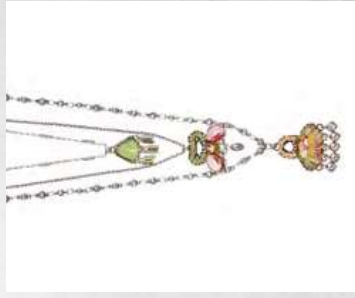
colours. Underneath the landscapes, he is a Friesian cow with patches of black and white. "I felt this demonstrated some of the complexity and interaction between town and gown, city and country, seen in Oxford," she explains. ▶



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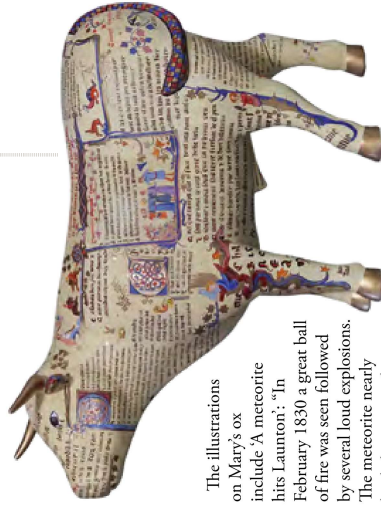
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Over at the Bodleian, an ox has been painted with a beautiful medieval manuscript design by Siân Tezel, Deputy Tours and Visitor Experience Manager for the Bodleian Libraries, one of the Ox Trail sponsors. "Working in the library, I wanted to bring one of our most celebrated treasures to a wider audience," says Siân. "I chose MS. Bodl. 264: 'The Romance of Alexander', the tale of Alexander the Great." The manuscript depicts glimpses of medieval life through vivid illustrations, and now, for the first time, can be seen painted in detail on an ox. "I loved painting it so much that it now has far more details than I intended, as I didn't want to finish. Doing this has deepened my appreciation of the 14th century scribes and illuminators," Siân continues.

Siân works in many mediums, including oils, watercolours, and charcoal to create her urban landscapes, architecture works, and portraits. "Some years ago, I won a national competition to paint a countryside themed work and I painted a portrait of a cow. It was the start of a new direction for me, and I worked with Laura Ashley and John Lewis producing paintings of every farmyard animal. However, I had never painted an ox until I was

chosen to paint on an actual ox for the upcoming Ox Trail." It is the old tales and oddities from across the country which have inspired a third artist, Woodstock's Mary Blackshaw, for her 'a map of Oddfordshire' design which you can see at Oxford City and County Bowls Club. "It's inspired by local eccentric and interesting stories such as The Haunted Wardrobe of Carterton, psychic alpacas in Chipping Norton, the wolves of Kidlington, Watlington lobsters and the Woodstock mock mayor," Mary tells me. "I wanted to highlight the Oxfordshire of everyday local people."



The illustrations on Mary's ox include 'A meteorite hits Launton', "In February 1830 a great ball of fire was seen followed by several loud explosions. The meteorite nearly landed on a man digging his garden and is now held at the Natural History Museum, London," she explains. "And did you know," she continues, "that the name Omroor is said to have originated from the tale of a landowner's wife, the burning Oat lady of Omroor. Her husband had agreed whatever land she could ride while the oats stayed burning, could be common land for the people, knowing that the oats would quickly burn out. However, legend has it that the oats burned longer than anticipated and the landowner's wife managed to ride around some 400+ acres, the area now known as 'Omroor'."

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You'll also find Oxley outside Summertown Library, where through its doors you'll find oxen grazing in the garden beyond. Head through the library to the Turill Sculpture Garden which is running an exhibition in parallel with the trail so visitors can enjoy a variety of oxen sculptures in other formats, from stone to glass, with a percentage of all sales going to Sobell House. The exhibition will include some oxen-themed pieces by the late Artweeks glass artist Vital Peeters who died last year and is very much missed by the Oxford art community.



For more on the Ox Trail and to discover where to see these oxen, visit oxtrail2024.co.uk