

# Christmas Shopping: with Oxfordshire Artweeks

The airwaves hum with Christmas classics, and Father Christmas is ho-ho-ho-ing in the advert breaks, but for those wishing to dodge the commercialism, Oxfordshire Artweeks artists are helping you avoid the high street with pop-up exhibitions and Christmas fairs across the county. You'll find prints, pottery, glass art, mosaics, jewellery, and other inspired gifts all carefully crafted in secret spots across the county. **Esther Lafferty** shines her spotlight this month on just two of the makers involved.



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in four different sizes, possibly with different surface pattern but with the same original form,” says Kate. “Texture plays a key role in my work, and I emboss the silver with a variety of materials – the humblest of which often gives the most surprisingly delicate surface. In my Fragment series, for example, I use fabrics that hold precious memories to make marks from the past in fragments of silver which capture those moments of time. I then make a patchwork of these small textured silver pieces into a larger panel which is then hung from a torque style necklace made of beautiful, coloured climbing cord, making something strong and more permanent out of a fleeting moment.”

The very first of these works, for which she used pieces of fabric from her daughter’s baby clothes, she still wears today. “The climbing cord designed for climbing rockfaces represents strength, safety and the idea of ‘holding on,’” Kate explains. “It’s incredibly hard-wearing. There’s a popular lead grey with a yellow accent, yellow with grey, a festive red and a denim blue. I love denim,” she smiles. “It’s perfect for every day, and you’ll often find me in double or even triple denim in the studio.”

Kate also incorporates vintage silk beads from Paris into her Fragment works, appreciating the amazing craftsmanship of the women who made them in factories in the 1920s, the elegance of bourgeoisie fashion in the Roaring Twenties and their link back to the past.

Much of Kate’s work also evokes the natural world, with cleverly folded forms, soft lines and gentle curves, whether the sinuous lines of the weeping willow or flowers inspired by the simple patterns and “petal formations known as aestivation found in the back of my trusty wildflower book that I won aged 12”.

Her long-running Adelpha collection rose from the simple notion that the elements they include are all “born of the same womb”. Here, simple leaf shapes ▶

Jeweller Kate Wilkinson first fell in love with jewellery in her late teens when she discovered it involved flames, ‘bashing metal about’ and ‘fun’ chemistry: she still loves to experiment at her faithful bench in her suburban garden studio. Here she creates ‘endless’ silver units with the aid of a trusted rolling mill and various other hand tools. These – which vary in size, colour and texture – form the basis of her different collections, in which they are combined with other materials such as semi-precious beads, vintage glass, and even cork, offering infinite variety.

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made with a twist using an adapted tool and a simple repetitive movement, are soldered together in patterns both geometric and random, varying scales and surfaces.

Another collection, Luna, includes very small, detailed settings of coloured cork: “These are a reminder of the precious nature of cork forests and the biodiversity living within them”. She also uses coloured cork as an insert within silver half-moon shapes. “I have always liked the juxtaposition of unexpected materials in jewellery, and the use of the soft but strong cork and hard silver is a satisfying combination to work with. I also use gold plate and oxidise some pieces to create a different mood.”

For next year, the 30th anniversary of her graduation from the Royal College of Art with a degree in Goldsmithing, Silversmithing, Metalworking and Jewellery, Kate is planning a new Revival collection in which she revisits designs from her earliest years and remakes them with the benefits of three decades of experience – “Look out for ruffle chokers”.



Also combining traditional craftsmanship with modern aesthetics, Australian-born Anne Mills makes bespoke wooden bellows in the wilds of West Oxfordshire. She tells how she is inspired by fire, having spent much of her life in a landscape of sheep and wheat in New South Wales, Australia.

“Growing up in Australia it was always very hot, hot or warm, and so although I remember gathering wood for a fire and using an axe to chop it at a young age, we didn’t have a fire all that often. I have lived here [in Stanford-in-the-Vale] for nearly 15 years and we have a fire in a stove almost every evening. Even now, it still feels like a luxury and it’s such a source of pleasure for me. It’s a wonderful welcome, and the flickering flames are such a focal point. I use bellows to bring the coals alive so they glow red hot and I love creating bellows because they both beautiful and functional: they are strong and also add power to a flames in a way you can see.”

Each pair of bellows has a different character that comes from a variety of woods – from contemporary pale Sycamore Ash, including the intriguing Olive Ash, to traditional English oak – and coloured leather. Anne takes time searching for woods that have interesting features she can bring out to give each one its own distinctive quality.

“I particularly like using knotty grainy local hardwoods and combining them with sheep leather sometimes as soft as a luxurious Italian coat,” she continues. “And while bellows are the perfect companion at a Christmas fireside, I also make special long-nosed bellows for the BBQ or a firepit, so the nozzle fits through the grill. They remind me of an inquisitive Australian Echidna (ant-eater)!”

To see Kate’s jewellery this month, at The Gallery at Waterperry, at the Sarah Wiseman Gallery in Summertown, Oxford or on-line via the Buckinghamshire Craft Guild, and you can visit Anne in her Stanford in the Vale studio from 13-23 December – see details at [artweeks.org](http://artweeks.org)