



MEET THE ARTIST:

Rebecca Carrozza

As Oxfordshire Artweeks, the UK's oldest and biggest festival of artist open studios and pop-up exhibitions, bursts into life this month, we take a look at the life in the landscape in its glory and diversity. Inspired by The Springline Project, work by Artweeks first-timer Rebecca Carrozza, can be seen in a charming studio space in the pretty Ridgeway village of Aston Tirrold, along with that of popular landscape painter Anna Dillon



and aerial photographer Hedley Thorne. Festival Director, **Esther Lafferty**, met her to find out more about both the project and Rebecca's process.



A section of one of Rebecca's paintings, depicting Cholsey Church from beyond the railway line, was selected for the front of the Artweeks festival guide. "It's wonderful to see my work on the front cover. Such an endorsement is truly exhilarating at the same time as I launch my career as a professional painter," she smiles.

Rebecca describes how she has painted since childhood and always intended to pursue an artistic career. However, it was only last year, after nearly twenty years as a graphic designer, that she transitioned to painting full-time, encouraged by the experience gained through The Springline Project and the opportunity provided by a voluntary redundancy.

The Springline Project was a collaboration between local ecologists and artists Rebecca and Anna who, through public events, data collection, and art-making activities over the course of a year, engaged residents of the Astons and Cholsey with Oxfordshire wildlife and creativity. The result was a large-scale oil painting inspired by the landscapes and ecology along the local Springline walking route which



follows public footpaths bordering chalk streams, ditches, and winter brooks. This work comprises 10x1m-square panels, displayed as a continuous mural, featuring scenes from the walks and the species found during the different seasons. It is now permanently displayed in Cholsey Pavilion, and a copy will be on show during Artweeks.

“First, Rebecca and I walked the Springline route through the seasons, sketching and painting outside, taking photos and making observations,” explains Anna. “We used a large wall in my studio to lay out our photos, post-it notes and sketches, which enabled us to identify the important features of the mural such as nature sightings, chalk streams and winter-brooks, interesting buildings with historical context and seasonal changes.

One of the first challenges was to plan how we could work together on the same piece of artwork. We have different styles which complement each other, and it was important to establish and jointly agree a creative process. We also worked with the scientists as they gathered their data in the landscapes and the mural incorporates that data in a visual way.

We included over 120 species in the painting, an abstract composition that enables the viewer to see and recognise the landscape, whilst at the same time looking up, down and into the environment to see all sizes of wildlife,” continues Rebecca. “If you look carefully in panels 3-4, for example, you will notice plants



“ a collaboration between local ecologists and artists

such as Comfrey and tiny insects such as Demoiselle dragonfly alongside the much larger Grey Heron. Both the male and female species of the Stag beetle can be spotted by the sharpest of eagle eyes at the beginning of panel 4 and in panel 6-7, you can see the Yellowhammer, magnified in a circle and the magnificent Peregrine Falcon in a V-shaped triangle sitting on the severe steel girders of an electricity pylon.

I had to really study the species and their specific characteristics very carefully to make them recognisable and I learnt so much about the abundant and diverse ecology right on my doorstep,” she adds.

The photographic reference for many of the species comes from the outstanding work of the well-known local naturalist and photographer Alan Dawson who very sadly passed away in 2025. The painting is dedicated to his memory.

During Artweeks, a film made by Hedley, display boards, and maps and sketchbooks by both Rebecca and Anna will be on show.

Rebecca describes sketching ▶



from life as going to the “visual gym”—a practice that sharpens observation and brings meaning to any subject.

“Anything I paint, I want to experience in real life, which is why being outdoors in nature walking, sketching and soaking up the atmosphere is part of my practice. Equally, painting has to be seen in real life to be properly experienced. When you see a painting in real life, the light, the textures and the scale talk to you. One of the great things about Artweeks is that it puts the spotlight on people coming out to experience real art and I’m excited to be exhibiting as part of the festival because it is such a well-supported, vibrant event that includes a brilliant community of talented local artists that is just as diverse as the wildlife in the mural.”

Rebecca’s latest paintings continue the in-depth exploration of the landscape and nature with a particular focus on water, as The Springline Project walking route follows a network of water courses. “They’re a precious habitat for a whole variety of species as well as a source of artistic inspiration. Some of my waterscapes are inspired by stills from films as my phone camera moved above and below the water,” she smiles. “If you look carefully you will find both the female and male examples of the three-spined stickleback. I filmed these with my phone (in a bag) dunked in a drainage ditch.”



Anna Dillon

Anna’s vibrant landscape paintings and collages also tell stories of nature, history and place, and if good weather permits, Hedley will be conducting drone demonstrations in the garden.

Elsewhere in Aston Tirrold, visitors can also see ceramics, printmaking and more at two more Artweeks venues on a short walking trail. There are further venues just two miles away in North Moreton and Blewbury, so there’s loads to see in this neck of the woods – and in Oxford, and across the county... whatever your interest, and wherever you work, live, and love.

artweeks.org



Manda Tudge Carbon Chronicles

Henry VIII and Me

This month I’ve done a little historical digging, I was interested to compare my carbon footprint to someone living in pre-industrial times to see how I stack up against somebody in the Tudor era, before the industrial revolution really got going in the 1760s.

Carbon emissions per person have been going down steadily in parts of Europe, the UK and US since the 1950s, with better technology and a move away from coal. I’m interested because I have an idea that in pre-industrial times a person’s carbon footprint must have been zero or pretty close to it; we weren’t using plastic, wind and water-provided power, clothes were made of natural fibres so the carbon emissions must have been tiny.

Looking into it a bit deeper, I found that the Tudors were the first large-scale consumers of coal: it’s a little-known fact that during the reign of Henry VIII atmospheric carbon dioxide levels were at their highest peak before the Industrial Revolution got into its swing. Sea coal shipped from Newcastle to London was used instead of firewood – trees were becoming scarce as they were cut down for ship building and housing. Industries like dyeing clothes, brewing, salt making and brick baking turned to coal; it was cheaper and burned more reliably for longer. Visitors to London were upset about the ‘stinky’ London air that smelt of rotten eggs. By the time of the English civil war in 1640, London was dependent on coal, driven by inflation and a shortage of wood. And so the cycle repeats.

Nevertheless it’s reckoned that the carbon footprint, even of Henry VIII, would have been negligible compared to now. It’s not like Henry was frugal – even a camping weekend meant pavilions, statues, gateways to artificial lakes and fountains that ‘gushed forth wine and beer’. But the small amounts of coal being used didn’t add up to anything seen today: in the Tudor era carbon emissions were pretty much zero, compared to over 50 gigatonnes now... It’s sort of unbelievable when we think of what passes for normal in the 2020s.

I’m not advocating going back to Tudor times – I’d look crap in a kirtle for a start – but I like being reminded that our use of fossil fuels in our everyday lives hasn’t always been the case, and is, really, relatively recent.