

MEET THE MAKER:

The Copperologist

This month and next, hundreds of local artists and makers are taking part in festive events or hosting their own as part of the Oxfordshire Artweeks Christmas Season.

Amongst these is artist and maker Rachel Gabriel, an Oxford artist who has recently begun making necklaces with copper – their glorious and bright colours complementing the vibrant semi-abstract landscapes for which she has, until now, been best known. These semi-abstract landscapes, often painted on wood panels, use strong colour, lively texture, and layered mark-making to capture not just places, but emotions and memories, fragments of the past, a touch of enchantment and a sense of place. There's a clear synergy, she tells **Esther Lafferty**, between this wall art and her new jewellery venture, as both are infused with an energy and a beauty









drawn from the natural world, from fire and water, hinting often at where the land meets the sea.

Rachel explains how her recent journey to become The Copperologist involved not only science and artistic flair, but some surprises from the past.

"Did you know that when the Statue of Liberty arrived in New York in 1885, she was the warm reddish-brown colour of freshly exposed copper. But then copper did what copper does. It reacted with the world around it. Oxygen began changing the surface first. Over time, moisture, salts and atmospheric chemicals joined the party, creating a complex mixture of copper compounds. (And if you're asking why someone doesn't simply polish her, it's because that green patina isn't merely decorative. Lady Liberty is perfectly happy with her green transformation as it helps protect the copper beneath from further corrosion.)

I have always loved copper. I even have a copper toaster and a copper cocktail shaker.

"my obsession with copper is in my DNA





I've bought lots of copper jewellery over the years, but I was frustrated by how quickly it tarnished. Within weeks or months, pieces that looks fabulous on the day I bought them became dull and dirty and end up relegated to the back of a drawer. Even the ones with protective coatings eventually wore away, with the same result.

However, I loved copper too much to give up on it, so I set out to find another way. After a year of experimentation, I developed a method of transforming copper with flame and Verdigris, then sealing the finished artwork beneath a glass dome so that it is protected from the air and everyday wear. I then showed my first copper pendants to the Oxfordshire Artweeks audience in May, displaying them alongside my paintings to see what people thought. They loved them. They bought them. Some even bought two! I was thrilled.

Interestingly, at the same time, when my sister was researching our family tree this spring, she discovered something extraordinary. Three generations of my family had worked in the South Wales copper foundries and so my obsession with copper is in my DNA.

My great-great-great-great-grandfather Thomas is the earliest family member whom we are sure worked in Swansea's copper industry, although sons usually followed fathers in terms of career choice in this era, so his father was probably a copper worker too. He also kept sheep on a smallholding called Glyncasnod.

His son John (my great-great-great-grandfather) then followed in his father's coppery footsteps. He appears in the 1841 census simply as 'copperman', which sounds less like a profession and more like an excellent superhero," Rachel laughs. "We don't know for sure which foundry he worked in because the ▶

Swansea Valley was by then positively on fire with furnaces. He then moved to the nearby town of Burry Port so he could become a furnace man at Elkington & Co.

I too grew up in Swansea, which had earned the nickname Copperopolis in the mid nineteenth century because it was the heart of the world's copper industry, smelting between 40% and 70% of the world's copper. And without knowing any of this, I discovered I had become a fourth-generation copper maker. That newly discovered heritage from Copperopolis gave me the idea for a new artist name: The Copperologist. It is a slightly quirky word for people who love museums, alchemy, secret elixirs, chemical reactions and Verdigris. And copper, of course."

For the like-minded, and for those who simply like pretty unusual jewellery, Rachel is creating collections of twelve pendants, each unique, and each presented like a precious museum treasure in a wooden slide-drawer box inspired by all the drawers in the Pitt Rivers. "Each box has its own provenance card and a curious little copper artwork waiting inside, in extraordinary blues, greens, reds, oranges and golds."



Rachel will be showing The Copperologist copper pendants at other works at the Oxford Etsy market at the Examination Schools on Oxford High Street on Sunday 15 November (10am-4pm) and she will be painting live in the gallery at Burford Garden Company on Sunday December 6th (11am-4pm). You can also see more on Rachel at **thecopperologist.com**

To see more seasonal art and browse venues to visit during the Oxfordshire Artweeks Christmas Season, and enjoy an online autumn-winter show of seasonal and festive art, ceramics, jewellery and more, visit **artweeks.org**



Sam Faith

Fireworks and Sedition

Fireworks and sedition, that's what November means to me. Fire and rebellion, oh yes. The clocks may shrink time, but I will not be diminished.

As this year's wheel spins to its close, I'm going to nurture my rebel heart, because it's not easy being a seditionary. For as much as I try to toe the line, try to be demure and fit in, I'm a wild creature at heart. I just can't help it. November's fireworks ignite me: rockets, roman candles, sparklers. I love the smell of gunpowder, treason and plot. It's a reason to wake up in the morning.

Another thing I love is rock music. If I was listening to disco throughout the autumn, now winter approaches I'm gonna dust off my red vinyl limited edition of Queens of the Stone Age's Songs for the Deaf and rock out.

I'm gonna turn it up full blast and give the neighbours a fright. I'm gonna grab my three-quarter-size Gibson SG copy (I'm a small woman; the full size is too big) and shred along to those gut-wrenching chords. I'll follow it up with Led Zep III and stamp my feet as I strum along to Immigrant Song. Oh yes, this little woman is gonna sing and scream until I feel the atavistic presence of my Scandi ancestors vibrate my very mitochondria!

Beware, my enemies, for 'I rise with my yellow hair and I eat men like air', I will say in a low voice, as I devour Sylvia Plath, Charles Bukowski and Rilke afterwards on the couch. Yup, I'm going to drink in every rebellious word with relish. I'll ululate like a Viking shield maiden and polish my axe.

Because this winter, I'll be ready for whatever it brings. There's no bad weather, it's said, only bad clothing. My clothing is gonna be badass. I'm gonna dig out my leather trousers, get my biggest boots on and don my biker jacket with attitude. As the fireworks scream across the chilly orange sky, I'm gonna strut and swagger, hold my head high and fire up my rizz.

Oh yes, I'll greet whatever the cold months bring. I'll caper in the rain and laugh at the snow. This year there will be no grumpy, bah humbug hibernation. I'm going to make the hours of diminishing daylight count, and when the night comes in earlier on its countdown to the solstice, I will welcome its velvety blackness like an old friend.