

art

with Sarah Mayhew



**IMPRESS OXFORD, at The North Wall Arts Centre, Summertown**

# Cutting edge



**B**OUND only by ability and a passion to print, Oxford Printmakers use some of the most up-to-date methods of screen-printing alongside techniques that remain unchanged since the time of Rembrandt.

Increasingly viewed as a dying form of fine art, printmaking is very much alive and kicking among the incredibly accomplished and dynamic artists that make up Oxford Printmakers, and the diversity of work on offer is proof that printmaking is as visually compelling now as it has been historically.

As you enter the exhibition, you're immediately met by Josephine Sumner's bold, bright and iconic jolly jungle. Celebrating much success currently, Sumner's *Giant Anteater*, top, featured in the Society of Wildlife Artists Annual Exhibition last September, and her colourful linocut *Woolly Monkey* has been selected for inclusion in the prestigious Originals 09 exhibition at Mall Galleries, London.

And when you see the energy and the idiosyncrasies of the animals present in Sumner's prints the reason behind this success is quite clear.

John Carey's dramatic etching and aquatint, *St Catherine's Monastery*, exudes an enormity that defies its scale. Carey juxtaposes dark and light to great effect, with a dark mountainous landscape towering behind the luminous church that sits before it, and in this way, the viewer is made aware of the magnitude of the role played by religion in this remote location.

Similarly, to stand before Flora McLachlan's prints is to see the world from an entirely new perspective. Possessing a mystic quality, McLachlan delves deep into the darkest corners of the forest.

The first time I saw McLachlan's work I exclaimed to a friend that it made me want to run naked through woodland. This was my third viewing of her work, and my heart raced just as it had on the first occasion. It feels at once liberating and

disconcerting to stand before these captivating visions; revelations that are ordinarily only privy to the wonders of the world of wildlife.

New to the Oxford Printmakers Co-Operative, McLachlan recently joined fellow exhibitors Irvine Loudon and Peter Lawrence as an Associate of the Royal Etchers and Engravers.

Caroline Maas's sketchy etching *Down From Wittenham*, is simply breathtaking, not least because it presents such a true representation of the English countryside on a typically grey and drear day. Maas is another of the Oxford Printmakers to have been selected to exhibit in the Originals 09 exhibition with her print, *Willesden Junction II*.

Many artists in this exhibition deserve commendation, from Irvine Loudon's powerful prints of war-torn devastation and gritty determination; the sculptural space created on the two-dimensional picture plane through Elizabeth Moriarty's simple, yet rhythmic, composition that captures the traits of the animals she depicts; Gerry Eaton's aquatic etchings with their Modernist, geometric fluidity and sense of movement that extends beyond the quiet of his carefully choreographed rectangles; to Elaine Williams' landscapes that are as inescapably 'Oxford' as any I have seen; yet the page is only so big...

*Impress Oxford* closes at 4pm tomorrow, so get your skates on, and roll on up to North Wall Arts Centre, South Parade, Summertown.

However, if you don't manage to make it to the exhibition, all is not lost, as this proactive group have several projects up their sleeves.

Clare Bassett currently has work on display at Branca, Flora McLachlan and Karian Van Assendelft have work at Sanders on the High Street, and Peter Lawrence's work can be seen at North Wall later this year in a May exhibition celebrating the 25th anniversary celebration of six Chairmen of the Society of Wood Engravers.



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