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# The Aston Tirrold Art Trail

(18-19, and 25-27 May)

Walk the pretty village art trail, and you'll find four stunning venues open for Artweeks this year, including the new venue, Finches, on Baker Street, where printmaker Deb Sutcliffe is exhibiting her linocuts and wood engravings alongside painter Caroline Vivian, an Artweeks newcomer whose still life and landscapes have a quiet contemplative quality.

Many of Deb's works depict the human body, often in repose, and are based on both imagined forms and life-drawing. She is attracted to the curving lines of the human figure and uses as few lines as possible to show the form she sees in front of her, but she is obsessive about those lines and works at them endlessly until she achieves the look she is after by gradually varying the line width. The beauty of her art lies in the resultant strength in simplicity.



'I look a lot and draw a little,' she smiles. 'A five-minute sketch after studying the model provides the best starting point – you capture more life that way. I then mull over the sketch to see how I can crop it and if I can do without any of the lines, reducing it even further. The simpler I can make an image, the more effective it is.'

'I like my figures to be anonymous so that the viewer can see what they want to see in them; I want them to be universal figures,' says Deb. 'Sometimes even the sex is ambiguous.'

Influenced by ancient, incised rock art where she imagines running her fingers in the grooves and by the elegance and grace of Japanese woodblock prints, Deb takes a block of wood or a piece of lino, and carefully cuts her minimalist figures into the surface, and uses the finished design to print from on a traditional press. The process of carving the line is

actually very precise, slow, and steady, despite the apparent simplicity of the finished picture which is both classic and contemplative. 'The world seems fast and furious to me, and I want my figures to be an escape from that,' she explains.

Deb prints, almost always, in a single ink so that the lines of her figures shine out in white from a block of strong, flat colour. The colour she chooses for each is, she feels, almost dictated by the figures themselves, and the mood that best represents them. Although a black ink appeals to the print-making purists



who value the traditional simplicity of white line nudes most of all, Debbie often prefers the rubine red she uses.

One of Deb's latest prints, *Eve and the Apple*, produced for the Society of Wood Engravers, draws on both the figurative series for which Debbie is best known and a set of prints 'Garden Treasure'. This latter series evolved - increasingly in green and orange, ochres - from things Deb, a keen gardener, either grew or found in her garden combined with vases and jugs she has been given or inherited, which all seem to share the figurative curves she is drawn to - even her Arum Lily seems to suggest an elegant leg! When working out the design for *Eve*, Deb used the curves of an apple core to echo the curves of the figure. She says,

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'I could only lay my hands on a hard, tart, cooking apple when I wanted to work out this design and spat out each bitter mouthful as soon as possible while creating the right shape! She's a very knowing Eve,' chuckle Deb, 'because the apple is well and truly eaten!'

Deb's latest project has been a study of the objects in the antiquities section of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. "I have focussed on small sculptures and pots decorated with images of animals - a new subject area for me-and produced a series of linocuts which are now being made into a letterpress book with Richard Lawrence at Hurst Street Studios [Artweeks venue 308, Oxford, open 11-19 May]."

Also on Baker Street, at Springfield House, Helen Young transports visitors to the cool icy environments of Greenland and Svalbard. "I love ice," she explains. "I was first entranced by the power of ice when I went to Iceland which I found to be magical, intriguing, and unexpected. There was a volcanic stretch of coast called Diamond Beach where glacial ice lay in glittering broken shards on the dark black sand like something from a Snow Queen fairytale. The landscape in the moonlight was just sublime."

"I try to mirror phenomenal range and layering of colours in ice in my work as I build up transparent colours like Phthalo Turquoise which is a brilliant cool aquamarine-blue shade, with Prussian Blue and layered with whites. To these I add cold wax to create bold textured abstracts inspired by the lines and form of the Antarctic that recall the feeling of being in that icy environment."

Helen's exhibition promises an immersive experience for the viewer as they stand surrounded by this vivid series of paintings that are like fragments of ice themselves and almost seem as if they too will melt away emphasising the ephemeral nature of the icebergs, the changing glacial



landscape, and the urgent need to protect this environment for the sake of the whole planet.

Alongside, taking inspiration from her Hispanic heritage, Oxford-born Pippa Smith aims to transport her viewers to the warmth of the Mediterranean through her bright and quirky still-life paintings. Using a bold colour pallet and impressionistic brush strokes; her depictions of seafood and other table settings are modern celebrations of the traditional still-life genre. Here too, you can also see Mandy Reid's pet portraiture and Guilia Valentini's eclectic, contemporary jewellery designs are an unusual fusion of Italian design and South African craftsmanship, each individually handwoven using semiprecious gemstones and glass beads.

On Aston Street, alongside aerial photography of the Ridgeway and the Downs, enjoy Anna Dillon's bold oil landscape painting and abstract monoprint/collage work that draw on her previous career as a graphic

designer, each telling a story of our heritage, environment, and social history.

At the same venue, with a background in horticulture and a keen eye for detail, Artweeks newcomer Abigail Panzeri presents botanical realism in watercolour, inspired by the variety, forms and colours of flowers and plants as they change through the seasons.

The final venue, last but not least, is Susanna Brunskill's Aston Street studio where, tucked in a delightful cottage garden behind her old, thatched house, original paintings, cards, and prints will be on show, and in the conservatory see Lucy Burleston's lovely ceramics. Susanna's paintings include including one of the iconic trees at Sycamore Gap. Particularly inspired this year by local landscapes, she started with the Picks Field approach to the hill fort of Blewburton – and look out for a friendly bounding hare.