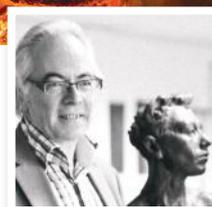


THE ARTS

Artists & Makers in Milton Keynes

Striking work, creatively lit,
from Helen DenDulk



JOHN BEST, CHAIR
ARTS GATEWAY MK

This month I'm looking at a wide and important group of artists in the city, the artists and makers captured in a really definitive and handsome book just published. I'm no great fan of the Art Book, the collections of striking pictures set out to impress, and destined for an undisturbed decade on the drawing room table. *'Maker-Artists of Milton Keynes'* is much more than that, setting out as it does a cameo of each of 25 artists, giving several pages of insights into the artist and their practice. It captures a moment in time of MK's creativity, through the people who make up our creative capital. And it deserves a read.



Researchers, artists and authors Linda Wilks and Ann Pegg, captured by Gyosei Art trail by Brian Tomlinson



and Andrew McDermott, inspired by *MK Arts Centre*. The ceramicist I want to highlight is Rosa Wiland Holmes.

Danish potter Rosa Wiland Holmes, a new artist to me, moved from London to Great Brickhill around a year ago. I'm always impressed when people arrive, make contact with networks within days and, almost certainly, have an impact within months. Rosa works from a home studio but has links with *Westbury Arts Centre*. She brings to MK a background in menswear and childrenswear design and, in applying it to ceramics, is very focused on ensuring her practical ceramic ware does what it says. But she surrounds herself with stylish items from her Danish background, both in the furniture and directly in the pottery she produces.

Short cut

This excellent book is the brain-child of academics Linda Wilks and Ann Pegg, supported by over 150 exemplary images from photographer Brian Tomlinson (all images here from the book are by him). The three of them are rooted in local creativity, living respectively in Olney, Bletchley and Newport Pagnell, and all three have creative practices of their own. It's always good to see local writers published, better still when they are so clearly part of MK's creative scene, and better still that the quality of their subject matter is so good. This is the sort of evidence we need to show the world that MK means to make an impact, and is steadily building the range of diversity across its arts community that other places take centuries to achieve.

Rather than follow the structure of the book I am grouping the 25 artists into five categories, and selecting for a deeper look one artist from each category. My five categories are Ceramics and Pottery; Textile Artists; Artists in Special Materials; Multi-media Artists and Artists making Specialist Artefacts. All will become clear...

Ceramicists and potters

The book has interesting sections on Venezuelan artist Juan Victor Cobos (with some fabulous images), Mark Compton, with the soda-fired kiln he shares with Kirsteen Holuj, both working from *Westbury Arts Centre*,



Rosa Wiland Holmes at work with
inspiration from chickens and garden

Textiles

The book covers several textile artists, including **Jane Charles**, of whom I've written before, batik artist **Jane Sharp**, weaver **Julienne Hanson** and **Sally Hutson**. The textile artist I want to focus on is **Helen DenDulk** working from a studio at *Westbury Arts Centre*.

Australian **Helen DenDulk** now lives in Campbell Park and really appreciates the evolution of MK. She is retired after several years as a secondary school teacher. She produces abstract pieces, conceptual rather than pretty, but having tremendous impact. Projects often evolve beyond the initial proposition but maintain a clear thematic purpose. At the same time she keeps a firm grasp of the craft and technique of her genre, running a regular machine-sewing class at *Westbury Arts Centre*.

Artists in special materials

Ceramicists and textile artists work with a chosen category of material. This category extends the same principle more widely across **Lynne Lane** (glass), **Melanie Watts** (mosaics, and of whom I've written before), **Kate Edwards** (metals), **Nicholas Packham** (blacksmith, of whom I've written), **Louis Francis** (stone) and **Rosemary Wright** (wood turner). A vibrant arts scene will have creatives working in every medium, with every group of materials, in every genre. This sets out MK's account, from where we move forward...

Stained glass artist **Elaine Marsh** finished a globe-trotting public service career and embarked on an MK-based stained glass practice where she could explore new techniques and approaches and could experiment. Her three-dimensional curved pieces are becoming too large to complete in a day and, as they grow, they call for bespoke approaches. It has been great watching her explore and develop in her *Arts Central* space over the last 18 months as her practice has evolved.



Elaine Marsh's increasingly complex glass shapes

Multimedia art

Some artists' practices transcend the narrow single-genre parameters and several are profiled in this book... former Arts Central resident **Soraya Billimoria** is a good example, as is **David Whittington-Jones** who produces some diverting mixed media assemblages from his studio at *Westbury Arts Centre*.

The artist I want to profile here is *Arts Central* resident **Elaine McKenzie**. Across a very mixed creative practice she relates her projects to a very personal journey of finding her way in the world and her identity within it. It's no accident she found her way very few months after moving to MK from London to the very mixed environment of *Arts Central*, and no surprise that she appreciates the very diverse support it provides. Now living in Netherfield, she's beginning to get and appreciate MK, and actively supports the *AC@Cornerstone* Gallery.



Elaine McKenzie exploring identity through her art

Specialist makers

The fifth and final category is what I describe as the specialist makers in the mix. They range from Hungarian **Judit Acsai** producing clothing and shoes, through lacemaker **Elizabeth Knight**, milliner **Gillian Hughes** and former *Arts Central* resident **George Hart**, maker and designer of clocks under the label **Tox Clox**. All have great stories to tell.

Lisa Kinrade, maker of bespoke handbags as **Jack & Rose Vintage**, has been very active in supporting *Arts Central* since we were at Station House. Her neighbours have in turn been supportive of her in her quest for new designs for modern users that can incorporate vintage materials into designs that have a classic feel. With **Gillian Hughes** and half a dozen colleagues she was instrumental in convening *Weddings at Arts Central* which presents creative alternatives to conventional wedding adornment. Lisa is another example of Milton Keynes' creative strata which Lisa hopes will thrive in her two teenage children.

Conclusion

The book clearly places the art into the lives of the artists and into the life of MK. It provides some great insights into why the artists and makers take the path they do. It also provides a clue into what works to build MK's creative and artistic sector: it's about catching the right moments for each of the featured artists with the support and nourishment they need. I'm also struck by the high proportion of our emerging creatives are from outside the UK – a significant challenge for our Brexit negotiators if we are to safeguard the creative sector in particular.

There is a programme of follow-up workshop events to the book throughout the year as part of *MK50* celebrations starting at *Westbury Arts Centre* during May:

Meet the Artists

Friday 12th May, 5pm–8pm

Get Making Roadshow (Free event)

Saturday 13th/Sunday 14th May, 11am–5pm

Thursday 18th/Friday 19th May, 11am–4pm

Saturday 20th /Sunday 21st May, 11am–5pm

May Makers' Soirée (ticketed event)

Thursday 18th May, 7.30pm

You can get the book from local suppliers including **Eddie & Pearl** in Stony Stratford, **Mrs B's Emporium** in Wolverton, **MK Biergarten** in Wolverton, the **Central Library**, **Waterstones** and **Amazon...** or signed copies direct from the authors at makerartistsmk@gmail.com

Linda Wilks, **Brian Tomlinson** and **Ann Pegg** have done a great job for MK creativity. ■



Lisa Kinrade making vintage elegance



NEWS FROM ARTS CENTRAL

In April we failed to get the two new premises we were hoping for. In both cases the landlords decided to use their premises themselves, days after signing a lease with us. At least the buildings are to be used rather than left vacant. So we have squeezed a few more spaces into Norfolk House where we now have more artists than ever before.

Current programmes include **Culture Challenge** (artists into schools), **Creative Workspace**

Network (collaboration with other spaces), and **Mótus** (dance programmes in May). Planned programmes include a brand new **MK Literary Festival** in September, the second **MK Arts Week** in October and a possible **MK Film Festival** in October, all if we can get our act and funding together. And we'd like your help on these exciting projects.

Planned exhibitions include **Maliheh Zafarnezhad** (April/May), followed by **Sam Shane** and **Alan**



Self Portrait by Maliheh Zafarnezhad

Moore (June /July) at *Arts Central*. Young Photography call-out 'My MK' shows in May at *AC@Cornerstone*.

For those who *really* want to know where we are, you can sign up on www.artsgatewaymk.org.uk email me at john.best@artsgatewaymk.org.uk or call the office on **01908 241122**