



THE ARTS



JOHN BEST, CHAIR
ARTS GATEWAY MK

Portrait and photo: Karen L French

Artists, Illustrators & Cartoonists

This month I'm looking at a broad field of artists, illustrators and cartoonists. The magicians who can capture character in a line drawing; who can bring a story to life, or who create a whole fantasy world wrapped up in pictures. As in all the creative groups I explore, Milton Keynes offers a great deal, and the more you look, the more you're amazed. I've looked at the surface and made a selection of half a dozen to highlight but, for every one there are probably several score others in their field, creating the magic.

A brush: with fame

Looking at near-instant magic I'll start with a great event that took place in Middleton Hall at the end of May, as a pre-launch for Bucks Open Studios. Probably the best art event I've seen in that space, BOS had invited 20 artists to paint four well-known celebrities, while startled passers-by could see the art emerging from canvas. A great way to capture the attention of people many of who will have been attracted by the celebrity subjects only to find themselves enthralled by the artistic process. The event produced a very diverse collection of styles and outputs, and the image I have selected above shows not only the excellent work by High Wycombe artist Karen L French, but also the bustle of people and easels that surrounded the artists.

Sian Sharp at MKArts Centre

Another fine artist making her mark in Milton Keynes is children's book illustrator Sian Sharp, from her studio at MK Arts Centre Almshouses. "I use scratchy ink nibs and delicate watercolours to create lively, quirky characters. I am never happier than when going out on sketching expeditions to draw animals and children. I also find inspiration in my love of comedy, history, puppets and theatre."



Travelling in Time
to CMK, Sian Sharp

She recently contributed to *Travelling in Time*, one of two children's publications produced as part of MK50 celebrations at primary age children it captures the nostalgic moves of MK's pioneers from London to the brave new city.

Dan Webb at Arts Central

Dan Webb quietly delivers excellent illustration from his Arts Central studio with really evocative children's story creations. His work has been exhibited in several shows, including *MK Calling* 2014. He writes: "I currently work part time in comics and book illustration, some of which have been past and present collaborations with writers

and local businesses." He developed his style – from crosshatch ink drawing to digital work – during his time at Aberystwyth University and his work has ranged across fantasy stories, portrait works and single panel comics. As well as current book projects, he is working on a webcomic called *My Best Friend is Blue*. It tells the story of a girl growing up in troubled times, with the comfort and guidance of her imaginary friend. It will be launched online in early August.



Dan Webb from
My Best Friend is Blue

Sheree Willis at Arts Central

Sheree Willis has been illustrating personal, quirky maps for events, gifts and stationery since 2010. As well as valuing her recognition within the wedding industry, to which her style fits very appropriately, Sheree is also proud of working on maps for Center Parcs and Sainsbury's, but also dedicates herself to local projects – her Milton Keynes *Cute Maps* grew into an MK gift collection and a relationship with MK Council developing their arts and culture map. She has also designed a

parish map for Stantonbury and is set to work on the upcoming Redhouse Park Arts Project.

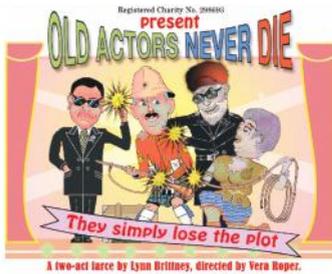


Derek Mynard of Bletchley

Bletchley-based Derek Mynard worked as an industrial engineer for 25 years before returning to

MK and setting up as a freelance designer and illustrator. He has impressed on me the range of work he did to help set MK on its successful way, through pen and ink work, painting, illustration,

graphic design, cartoon creation and publication of leaflets, books and a wealth of maps, depicting interesting local features, The Parks Trust information panels (still there), booklets (including how MK was planned), city walks, redway routes, Windows on the Past (Archaeology MK), Great Linford's Brick Kilns, Old Wolverton's history, etc, etc. That is some list and I agree that his work should be recognised.



A two-act farce by Lynn Brittain, directed by Vera Roper.

Ted Andrews, in the press

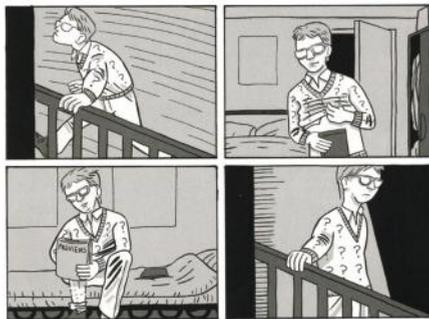
Also based in MK, Ted Andrews has worked the hard route as freelance illustrator to the national press, delivering jokes and art on a daily basis. His past clients include *The Sun*, *News Of The World*, and others. From the start he also had a passion for angling and both wrote and illustrated his own book, *Basic Fly Tying In Pictures*. It drew wonderful reviews and was in print for more than a decade. I've chosen an image from that strand of his work. Nowadays, Ted's drawing work includes personal cartoons for special occasions, calendar work and promotional material for small businesses and large corporates. His strength is not just his versatility as an illustrator.



Mayfly Trilogy, Ted Andrews

Paul B Rainey, a graphic novelist for MK

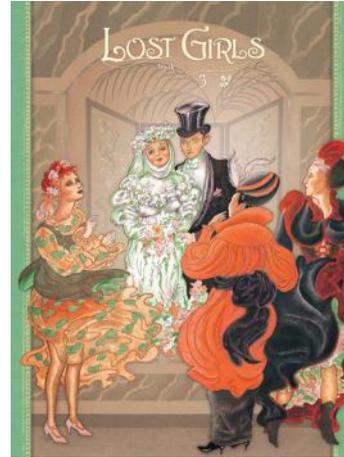
This MK-based graphic novelist has produced a memorable piece of work in *There's No Time like the Present*, published in 2015. Like many graphic novels it started life in the Small Press sector as a series of shorter pieces, in this case self-published, which were then collected into a single, substantial hardback by Escape Books. It is "Both a well-observed tale of the everyday lives of unexceptional people, and a wild science fiction story involving time travel and its far-reaching implications." Drawing in part on his personal experiences, the book is authentically set in Milton Keynes, or at least a Milton Keynes. He clearly aspires to create a 'British' feel to the book, at a time when the comic and graphic novel genre tends to be brashly trans-Atlantic. In one interview I saw the author suggested its Britishness lay in a downbeat, comparatively understated celebration of disappointment. Maybe not quite the message we want about MK, but this is, after all, Art.



A celebration of disappointment, Paul B Rainey

Alan Moore, a graphic novelist for Northampton

Alan Moore is the ageing enfant terrible of the comic genre, described in a Guardian review as "serious, complex and shocking, whose work is utterly sensational yet repays looking at again and again" (Jonathan Jones). Moreover, like Damian Hurst and many of the Old Masters he doesn't create his images himself but works, like a film director and screenwriter, with visual artists who realise his extraordinary visions. He provides the concept, narrative, words and production. While not strictly of MK, he is local-ish. He was born, lives and works in Northampton which is the



Extremes of decadence given the graphic treatment

subject of his most recent work of monumental experimental fiction: the 1200-page *Jerusalem*. Having produced many comic strips from the 1970s onwards, he is primarily known for his graphic novel output, including *Watchmen*, *V for Vendetta* and *From Hell*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and the occult-based *Promethea*, several of which have been made into successful feature films.

Moore is the giant of British adult comics. That phrase 'adult comics' articularly applies in his case. *Lost Girls* (2006) is one of a sequence of comics in which Moore has delved ever deeper into the late nineteenth-century psyche... and here takes on the delights of decadence, illustrated by his now wife Melinda Gebbie. In this family magazine we are only able to show the cover...

Frequently described as the best graphic novel writer in history, last autumn he announced his retirement from writing comics, concentrating instead on film and novels. His previous novels may have been a product of his deepest fantasies, but *The Boroughs* (as the city in *Jerusalem* is colloquially known) is a thinly disguised Northampton. It's not only Milton Keynes that gets a dystopian treatment in the fantasy world of graphic novels.

Conclusions

I have greatly enjoyed this expedition into the fantasies that artists create, and in the fantastic worlds that comics, graphic novels and even illustrators of children's books nourish. At the heart is this magic skill of making images and challenging realities which lies at the heart of every artist's work. We have plenty to explore in MK and plenty to be amazed by. ■



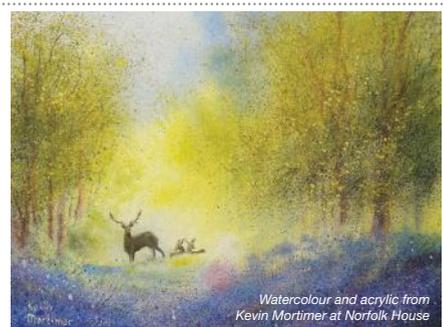
NEWS FROM ARTS CENTRAL

We remain in our principal Norfolk House premises, and keep looking for two more, our seventh and eighth. We are slightly over 50 creatives at present, and feel there is significant extra demand for filling new studios in MK.

Current programmes are still **Culture Challenge** (artists into schools), **Creative Workspace Network** (collaboration with other spaces), and **MótuS** (dance programmes). Plans are now well

advanced for the first **MK Literature Festival** from 22nd September, and the second **MK Arts Week** from 30th September. Put those dates in your diary. We'd like your help on all those projects.

Planned exhibitions include watercolour and acrylic artist **Kevin Mortimer** at Norfolk House and Sculpture by **David Moore** at AC@Cornerstone gallery until the end of August.



Watercolour and acrylic from Kevin Mortimer at Norfolk House

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