



# DORSET GOES TO VENICE

Award-winning artist and anthropologist **SOPHIE MOLINS** reveals how Dorset is sharing its unique culture with its own pavilion at the prestigious Venice Art Biennale

Taking place every two years since 1895, the Venice Art Biennale (La Biennale di Venezia) is one of the most prestigious cultural exhibitions in the world with 800,000 visitors at the last iteration. Since the 1930s they have added music, cinema, theatre and the first international architecture exhibition to the line-up. Many countries have permanent national pavilions at the Biennale, built in wonderful differing styles at the event's two main sites: Giardini Gardens and the Arsenale (armoury). And for each Biennale an invited international curator chooses the theme. For 2024 it is Foreigners Everywhere. The Biennale lasts for six months from April to November. And, alongside the main event, the whole of Venice is taken over with fringe events in extraordinary locations. Exploring it by foot or by vaporetto (water buses) you will discover that artists have found unusual spaces – from old pharmacies and warehouses to libraries, palazzos and churches – and turned them into free fringe exhibitions. [labiennale.org/en](http://labiennale.org/en)

## A PAVILION FOR DORSET

PHOTOGRAPH: MOLINS

National pavilions dominate the Biennale, so I thought it was time to celebrate the local and the rural in a Dorset Pavilion. I wanted to share Dorset with an art world that can be very citycentric. I thought it would be fascinating for visitors to experience the contrast of a pavilion curated to reflect Dorset's verdant rolling countryside and rugged coastline with the magnificent opulence of Venice – with its golden-red architecture rising out of an intense blue lido. Both share so much complex history, as well as an ongoing battle with erosion of geology, of tradition, of habitat and rising tides.

The Dorset Pavilion reflects multiple facets of the county: Deep Time; Great Literary Traditions; Cinematic Dorset; Political Dorset and Visceral Dorset. We have a specially commissioned pamphlet to go with the exhibition in which Jon Woolcott, author of *The Real Dorset*, focuses on how the 'land lies in the stories; the stories lie also in the land'. Alexandra Blanchard writes about the *Bigby Stockholm*, an engineless barge anchored at Portland, housing migrants until the end of January 2025, and how 'those on board are just people, like those six Tolpuddle farm workers, who have committed no crime except that of movement and they are just holding on to hope.'

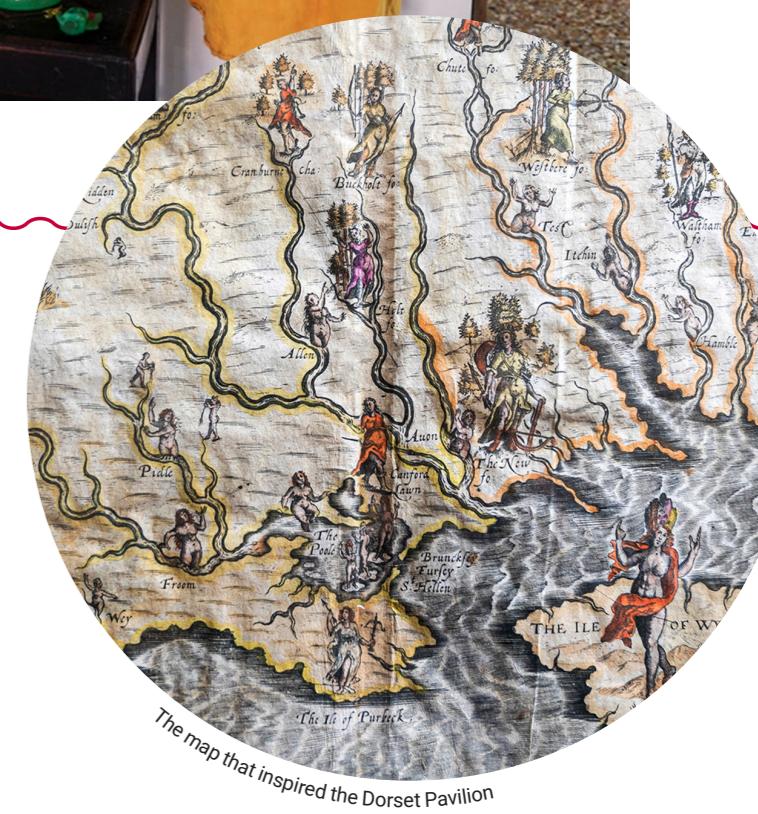


Sophie Molins in the Dorset Pavilion by her glass work *Europa* inspired by trinkets left behind in Dorset by Romans

## WELCOME TO DORSETSHERE

This map is the inspiration for the Dorset Pavilion. Found at an auction house – the site of so many local treasures as they change hands and pass down through generations – it was originally created in 1622, to illustrate *Poly-Olbion*, a topographical poem describing Great Britain by Michael Drayton. It exquisitely captures the playfulness of the land: the map is almost empty, except for trees, ancient names, a person scything, several frolicking river nymphs, and extraordinary hills that drift to the sea. Welcome to Dorset-shere! >

'I wanted to share Dorset with an art world that can be very citycentric'



The map that inspired the Dorset Pavilion



## LITERARY DORSET

The writing heritage of the county is referenced in Lyme Regis artist Flora Woods' contemporary silhouette print of her daughter (above). In the pre-photographic 19th century these were all the rage, and it conjures up the Dorset heroines of Thomas Hardy, John Fowles' enigmatic French Lieutenant's woman, or the drama played out on The Cobb at Lyme Regis in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*.

Jane Fox's painting *Life is but a Dream* (right) depicts an enigmatic scene that could be from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* – a site where childhood adventures begin. And Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* series was inspired by her frequent stays on the Isle of Purbeck.

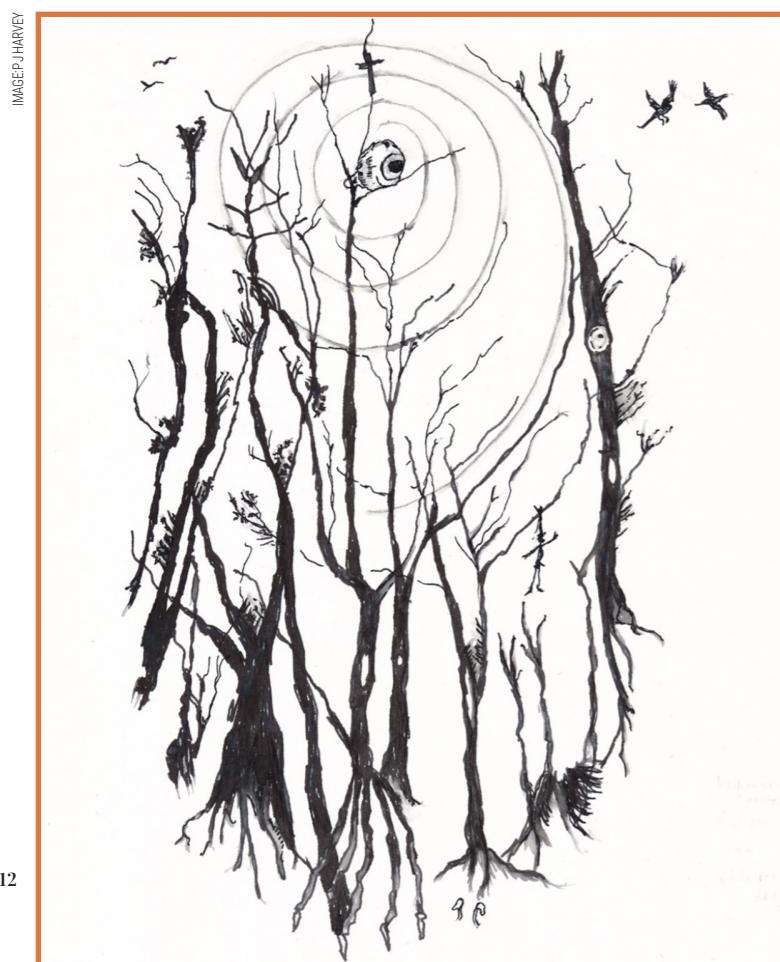
PHOTO: JANE FOX STUDIO/COM/ABOUT



IMAGE: SOPHIE MOLINS

## CAPTURING the LANDSCAPE

As you enter the Dorset Pavilion, a hallway hung with paintings by Ella Squirrell and Henrietta Hoyer Millar radiate the Wessex landscape. The artists capture this in very different ways. Hoyer Millar paints from the Dorset studio, bequeathed by her godmother, who was a painter. These draw on deeply familiar places of a Dorset childhood (pictured is *The Lane in Spring*), with a great sensitivity to the topography, the fluctuating weather and the play of light. Squirrell is a multidisciplinary artist who grew up in Bridport. Informed by exploring the destabilisation of fixed identities: race, gender and sexuality, these portraits (pictured below is *Waiting for Spring*) are often set in a Dorset landscape. >



## P J HARVEY'S DORSET

Within the Dorset Pavilion there is a piece by PJ Harvey (pictured), the double Mercury Prize-winning musician and writer who grew up in West Dorset. It is a depiction of her illustration, *Realm of Orlam*. Last year Harvey published a full-length book *Orlam*, written in the Dorset dialect with a facing-page English translation, so readers can follow the richness and subtlety of the original poem with ease. It is a remarkable coming-of-age tale of nine-year-old Ira-Abel Rawles who lives on Hook Farm in the village of Underwhelm. Harvey draws on the rituals, children's songs, chants and superstitions of the rural West Country, and Ira-Abel creates the twin realm through which she can make sense of an increasingly confusing and frightening world.



## FIELD WORK

Amanda Wallwork's field maps (pictured is Culliford) are an intimate, delicate and distilled reference to the archaeology and geology of place. Recent commissions include works reflecting the prehistoric ceremonial landscape of the South Dorset Ridgeway. Her immersion, extraction and abstraction from across deep time, results in a form of mapping – a collection of ideas and ideologies – symbolising an activity in time and place. Wallwork curated the B-side festival on the Isle of Portland with artist Alan Rogers whose work explores connections between coastal environments, maritime industries, and the saline air that rusts and rots surfaces. Rogers often uses pigments which are ground from the terrain surrounding the work's creation and distilled into the essence.

IMAGE: AMANDAWALLWORK.COM

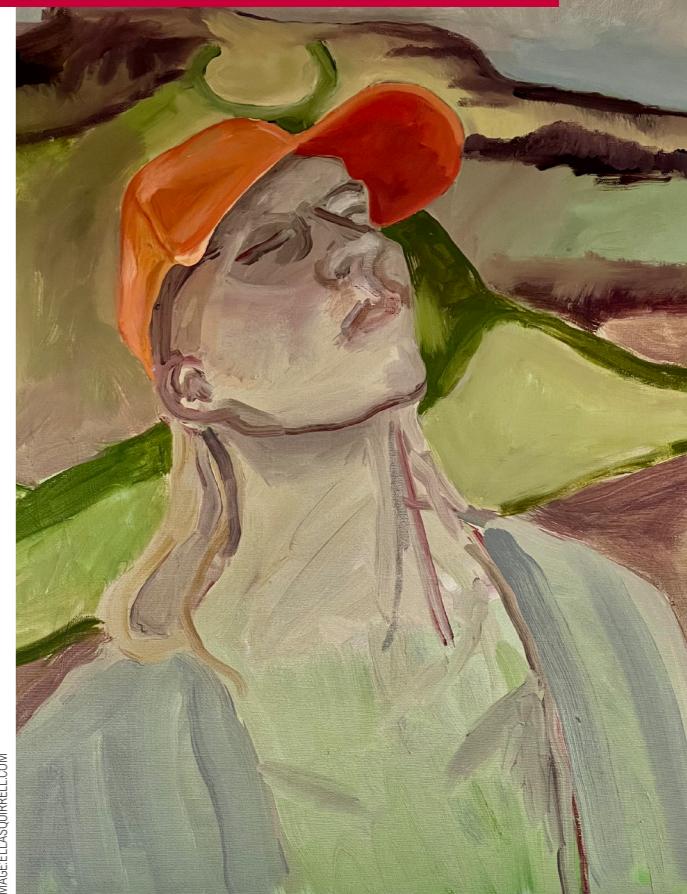


IMAGE: ELLASQUIRRELL.COM

## IMAGINING DORSET'S EUROPA

My glasswork *Europa* represents a time when Dorset was connected to Europe as part of the Roman Empire. The design is based on Roman trinkets left behind by legionnaires at Waddon Fort near Beaminster (AD 49-60). *Europa* was made on the island of Murano, by internationally feted master glass blower Giancarlo Signoretto (below right), who comes from a long-established family of Murano glassblowers. Thus, we take the inspiration of these Roman artefacts found in Dorset back to their European homeland, connecting past with present and re-link our cultures. This deep dig into the county's past is also reflected in Jacy Walls' subversive, fragile ceramics *Little Totems* which are punctured by metal and china fragments found in fields around her medieval house in Dorset. This fragmenting and mending continues in her tapestry *Echo*.



PHOTO: SOPHIE MOLINS



**'The design is based on Roman trinkets left behind by legionnaires'**

Jacy Walls' *Little Totems* ceramics and her tapestry *Echo*

PHOTO: JACY WALLS



IMAGE: ELLEN HARVEY INFO

## The DISAPPOINTED TOURIST

Following in a political vein is Ellen Harvey's painting of the enormous mausoleum at St Mary's, Holnest (pictured, also see *Echoes of the Past* column this month). Built by Erle-Drax in 1872, 15 years before his death, it was demolished in 1935, thus it qualifies for her grand scale work 'the disappointed tourist' where, through a website, anyone can elect 'a no longer existing place'. Harvey then re-creates it in a painting which is then added to the huge artwork at her solo exhibition at the Turner Contemporary gallery in Margate. Harvey grew up in Dorset and her painting-based monumental artworks often reference loss, change and ruination of civilisation and our relationship to the world around us.



PHOTO: LOWER HEWED FARM

## DORSET FERNS

Work by internationally renowned artist Andy Goldsworthy, made in collaboration with the Architectural Association's Hook Park site in West Dorset, is included in the exhibition. It shows a fossil-like spiral made with Dorset ferns (pictured is Andy working on the piece). The project was commissioned by Common Ground, an arts and environmental charity founded in 1983 (and now based in Dorset) by Sue Clifford, Angela King and Roger Deakin. This small, grassroots organisation collaborates openly to reconnect people with nature and inspire communities to become responsible for their local environment, mainly through commissioning artists to respond to place. Together with Lower Hewed Farm's director Alexa de Ferranti (an artist and curator), they co-produced the pamphlet for the Dorset Pavilion.



PHOTO: COMMON GROUND/HOOK PARK

## MAPPING A DORSET FARM

Alexa De Ferranti has made a beautiful sheepskin map (left) of the fields of her 45-acre organic farm on the borders of Dorset, Devon and Somerset. To enter the exhibition space and feel these underfoot is visceral. 'The sheep offer me everything from company to supper,' she says. 'I recognise the expression in their strange eyes, notice their position in the flock, remember what happened to them last year and the year before and try to preserve their friendships (because sheep develop long-lasting loyalties). Of all the objects that lie between me and my return to the earth, cured sheep skin might be the one I love the most.'

Continuing in the animal magic vein, Lyme Regis based artist and printmaker Hugh Dunford Wood has hand printed a heavy curtain full of arresting animal portraits (right) called *Peaceable Kingdom*.



IMAGE: HUGH DUNFORD WOOD



## ARTFULLY EARTHED

The Dorset Pavilion's earthy elemental atmosphere is further enhanced by Fiamma Colonna Montagu's totemic sculptures of high-fired porcelain and black and pigmented clays which contrast colours, textures and forms (pictured is *Spheres Portal*). The work resembles cairns and markers. Also using porcelain, Silva de Majo's beautifully glazed, smooth white porcelain vessels echo natural forms and the strangeness of nature. De Majo forages plants, seeds, fungi, earth, metals and minerals to fabricate the materials and mediums for her alchemical and botanical works. Her work draws from a lifetime of observation, and the experience of living closely with nature, reflecting the interconnected web of life.

PHOTO:FIAMMAMONTAGU.CO.UK

## Extraterrestrials and A WOOLLY GIANT

For 90 years Dudley Tolly lived beside Waddon Fort in a mud-floored farmhouse with Jurassic fossils embedded in its stone walls. On show for the first time, is his self-published booklet *Extraterrestrials: All Is Revealed* about his Dorset encounters with visitors from outer space. From outer space visitor to the fossils and specific found objects which form Will White's work (below). White became attuned to finding ancient objects over a year – a micro-second in the Earth's time – which were revealed at low tide along the beach at Seatown. They form the basis of his beautifully designed installations. Also, on show is Kalika Kulukundis' image of the priapic Cerne Giant, knitted from berry-dyed wool it is both uncanny and cosy (right).

IMAGE: SOPHIE MOLINS



PHOTO:@KALIKAKULUKUNDIS



PHOTO: THEO MCINNES & THOMAS RALPH

# CINEMATIC DORSET

Many Dorset-based novels have been adapted for the big screen, and Bridport is home to the UK's only film festival From Page to Screen which celebrates the adaptation. The county has also been used as a location for numerous films. There will be Dorset-inspired films screened at the Pavilion including Paul Wright's *Arcadia* (2017) produced by Common Ground and the BFI, which includes rare archive footage of rural life, local celebrations, village life and lost crafts. There is a haunting film *Water Flutes and elemental motet* by recent graduate Robyn Bamford. Other nods to film include Jeremy Gardiner's painting, *Dancing Ledge*, where the final scene of Derek Jarman's film *Jubilee* takes place.

Also included in the exhibition are stills (below) from *Comrades*, Bill Douglas's 1986 film which chronicles the story of the Tolpuddle Martyrs. *Comrades* also traces the history of rural entertainment using the director's collection of cinematic precursors, part of the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum at Exeter University. Ed Hall's *Union Banner* which depicts the Tolpuddle Martyrs' transportation ships alongside the *Bibby Stockholm* refugee detention barge in Portland, is also on show. Hall's banner was carried by refugees from the barge at the Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival in July (above).



PHOTO: DAVID APPLEBY



IMAGE: VERONICA HUBSON

# A SLOW BURN

The visceral in Veronica Hudson's work is implicit in the process of producing charcoal from wood on her West Dorset farm to make a creative tool for mark making. Hudson's work is about the slowing down, listening and responding to the subtle slow movements of nature and the land around her farm. Her body's memory of the physical work informs the marks which are drawn from years of working in the landscape (pictured is *Wild Onion Head*). Slow labour, made of months and years of noticing and painting the sky, sea and weather, gives Jon Adams paintings (his studio is in West Bay) a presence, depth and luminosity. This is highlighted by his use of hand-ground pigments.

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## MORE INFORMATION

DORSET PAVILION 2024 is at Biennale Spaces, Castello 96 / 95, Venezia 30122. It runs until October 30, Tuesday-Sunday, midday to 7pm. Details about the artists and their work as well as images from the Dorset Pavilion in Venice can be found at [lostsheen.black](https://lostsheen.black).

