

Recreating life: Patrice Moor's detailed botanical studies are carefully built up over time, using thin layers of paint

Matters of life and death shown in oil

A trip to the University of Oxford Botanic Garden can be a sobering experience at this time of year, as one wanders among the decaying winter die-back amid a swarming army of bright green shoots busting through the hard ground.

Immersing herself in the garden, visual artist Patrice Moor has spent 18 months as artist in residence at there; making sketches, taking photographs and sometimes taking a few specimens out of the garden and back to her studio in London.

Beautiful, yet not built with beauty in mind, the University of Oxford Botanic Garden was founded in 1621, as a physic garden growing plants for medicinal research, and is one of the oldest scientific gardens in the world.

Today, the garden contains more than 8,000 plant species within its modest 1.8 hectares of grounds, making it one of the most diverse yet compact collections of plants in the world.

Moor came to her Oxford post after a period of residence at the Royal College of Physicians in London where, surrounded by buildings, her oeuvre took a turn from being focused on the cranial to the botanical, she explains.

"I was asked by the Royal College of Physicians to inspire myself from the medicinal garden to produce some works. This made me realise how integral plants were to my areas of interests: life, decay and death."

In Oxford, she felt overwhelmed by the concentrated collections and the possibilities that might open up before her eyes with the changing seasons.

Where&When

Patrice Moor: *Nature Morte*

- University of Oxford Botanic Garden
- Until May 4
- Visit botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk and patricemoor.co.uk

Sarah Mayhew Craddock views the beauty of nature captured in art



Moor's artistic career was launched more by chance than design. Just as she was about to start an MA in law, she found out she was pregnant with twins.

After the twins were born, she found herself immortalising the various, rapidly changing phases of her babies' lives at first in watercolour and then later in oil, her preferred medium.

A familial lifecycle of her own making had begun and she was captivated by it; though not from an introspective or macabre perspective, but from the cool and collected humanist perspective of memento mori and with a celebratory chime that transcends her paintings.

"My work is realistic, but I find reality extraordinary. By looking at something closely and carefully, and being faithful to what you have in front of you, often the object, the plant, evolves as if by alchemy. These are extremely exciting moment of surprises and a real joy."

Moor is an artist who identifies life,

decay and delight in everything. Being in a garden makes her subject matter all the more interesting, as there is a potent, indomitable sense of transience as the cycle of life surrounds you in a garden.

"After my residency at the Royal College of Physicians, where I inspired myself from the medicinal garden to produce some works, I was thrilled to be given the opportunity to immerse myself further in the subject of plants.

"My subject is not morbid; there is an emphasis towards life holding death in mind and the cycle of life."

Highlighting the diversity and fragility of living things, as well as the transience of plants and their lifecycles, the themes of life, death and decay underpin Moor's 15 expertly executed oil paintings on display in the city's Botanic Garden

until May 4. These paintings have been a labour of love, a dedicated mark of respect for life and the powers of nature. Moor's paintings in *Nature Morte* take a great deal of time to create, she works by building up thin layers of paint to create a succulent, delicate, translucent vegetal aesthetic. The sunflower painting in this exhibition, for example, took four months to complete and she has taken several weeks each.

"I am instinctive in my approach and tend not to plan," she explains. "My approach is purposefully not intellectual or cerebral. I don't think you choose your subject; the subject chooses you."

The half-Dutch and half-Luxembourg London-based artist possesses a sense of respect and a drive for understanding the world from an holistic perspective that would have served her well in a career in law.

However, having seen the work she is exhibiting in *Nature Morte*, I feel certain Moor made the right career choice.

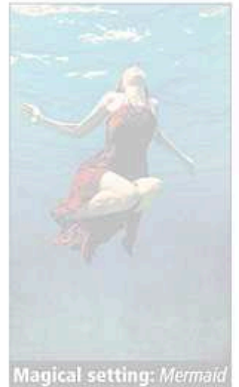
ON THE HORIZON

Celebrity Chef Dinner

DINER DES PROTÉGÉS

■ Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons
 ■ March-November
 ■ Call 01844 277 484 or see belmond.com/lemanoir
 To celebrate 30 years of Le Manoir, Raymond Blanc is welcoming back members of his brigade to host a series of Diner des Protégés at his two Michelin Star Oxfordshire restaurant.

Throughout 2015, guests will be able to savour the acclaimed chefs' signature creations during an evening of gastronomic excellence. The food of Belmond Le Manoir will be reflected in each menu, which will include an introductory course from Raymond Blanc, as well as one from executive head chef Gary Jones and pastry chef Benoit Blin. Confirmed chefs taking part include Michael Caines, Ollie Dabbous, Martin Burge, Paul Heathcote, Adam Simmonds, Eric Chavot, Bruno Loubet and Alan Murchison



Magical setting: Mermaid

Plundering this haunting tale for its dark, erotic, mythic power, writer and director Polly Teale (Mary Shelley, Brontë) transports the tale to a contemporary setting. A choir of young women helps to create an unearthly musical landscape and a magical world of mermaids. Age guideline: 12+

Comedy

SEANN WALSH – 28

■ Glee Club, Oxford
 ■ Friday, April 24
 ■ Box office: 0871 472 0400 or glee.co.uk/oxford



Back to Blanc: Raymond's chefs return for a birthday

The Diner des Protégés evenings will include a champagne Laurent-Perrier reception with canapés and a signature dinner with accompanying wines, coffee and petits fours. The evenings are priced at £225 per person.

New drama

MERMAID

■ Oxford Playhouse
 ■ Tuesday-Saturday, May 19-23
 ■ Box office: 01865 305305 or oxfordplayhouse.com
 Oxford Playhouse's resident company, Shared Experience, is bringing a spellbinding new production to Oxford, as a bold reimagining of Hans Christian Andersen's tale of love, loss and desire.



Growing up: Seann Walsh

Coming up Paul Carrack has done everything, it seems, but he's also proving to be a highly accomplished solo artist

Music/p4&5