

OX

MAGAZINE

OXFORDSHIRE'S FINEST

OCTOBER 2025



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

**OXFORD SCIENCE
+ IDEAS FESTIVAL**



The
**Science
& Ideas**
Edition

AUTUMN IN OXFORDSHIRE: WHAT TO DO | WHAT TO WEAR | WHAT TO SEE | WHERE TO GO

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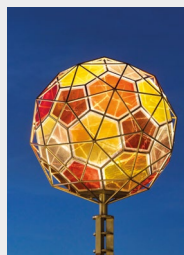
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COVER IMAGE

photo: Hufton + Crow
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Welcome

To the October edition of OX Magazine. In this issue we've worked with the brilliant Dane Comerford, Director of IF Oxford: The Oxford Science and Ideas Festival which is taking place across the city from 17 October-2 November. Our striking cover reveals a detail from the magnificent Olafur Eliasson installation at Oxford North, and on pXX you will find him in conversation with Dane, discussing the inspiration behind Your Planetary Assembly; the eight glass polyhedrons which make up the Icelandic-Danish artist's first permanent artwork in the UK.



I'm a huge fan of Eliasson's art and am very grateful to showcase his work on our cover this month. Another dream came true for me in this issue when I spoke with Dale Davies, bassist and musical director for Amy Winehouse. Dale is currently on tour with The Amy Winehouse Band, and he spoke candidly with me about his friendship with Amy and the legacy of her music. I was also fascinated to speak with Merlin Sheldrake, author of 2020's breakaway bestselling book, Entangled Life. He comes to Oxford in October to tell us why the future is fungi.

Fashion focuses on chocolate and berry notes; James Mitchell is back with his style notes for me; and we proudly showcase the Ripples of Change, the sustainable fashion show at Blenheim Palace.

Michelle Heather has advice on overwintering sweet peas and finds out more about the flood resilient garden now on display in Wallingford. Our art pages are inspired by Photo Oxford and food lovers should turn to pXX for Dan Spindler's review of The Beefy Boys who have just opened at the Westgate Centre. I defy anyone to read his words without immediately craving a juicy bite and happily they've also shared a recipe for one of their signature burgers.

All of this plus we find out What Makes Me with Maisie Smith (aka Eastender's Tiffany Butcher) who will be on stage in the role of Marge Sherwood at the Oxford Playhouse. Our top ten's are serving all the autumn-energy you could wish for: our focus this month is on timepieces ahead of the clocks changing, scented candles (pass the pumpkin) and our ultimate bake-off essentials.

Finally, huge thanks to the Ashmolean for allowing us to reproduce an extract from their new publication on May Morris. Whether you're an admirer of or a participant in the craft of embroidery, I hope you enjoy admiring Morris' exquisite work and finding out a little more about her role in father William Morris' decorative arts company.

Sophie xx

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Browse the Universe this October

This month, from 17 October – 2 November, IF Oxford, the city's science and ideas Festival, is bringing more than 100 exciting, intriguing and unexpected events and activities for adults, children and teenagers to 30 venues in and around Oxford.

Taking place in Oxford Playhouse, the Ultimate Picture Palace and cosy pubs, and outside at Oxford City Farm, graveyards and touring the city, the programme is packed with fresh ideas on the past, the present and the future. It includes cutting-edge thinking on topics from conservation and climate change, to myths and monsters, poetry and prophecy. With hands-on activities, art, theatre, discussions and demonstrations and much more, the programme is guaranteed to spark your curiosity whatever your interests.

Events include Stand-Up Science with Jericho Comedy, a 'Crufts' for robodogs, a look back at 200 years of photography at the Museum of History of Science, a 'wormery workshop' and an exploration of whether bread is alive at an artisan bakery. With so much to choose from, here are some tasters to whet the appetite.



The Magic of the Moon

If you're the kind of person who reaches for the stars, head to the Weston Library to see a rare treasure of early astronomy, a drawing of the moon as it was first seen by 17th century Polish stargazer Johannes Hevelius who drew it meticulously from his telescopic observations. This first ever detailed map of the Moon is on show within the original 1647 edition of Hevelius' Selenographia, sive Lunae descriptio (Selenography, or A Description of the Moon), and is the muse for experimental Pianist Marcin Masecki's avant-garde improvised music, highlighting the ethereal mysteries of Earth's closest partner.

Over in Zone ONE, the new hands-on Festival Zone at Oxford North, children and adults can wander the Solar System with Creation Theatre and look to the sky, become time-travelling star explorers, explore The Tamarind Galaxy and African astronomy, meet scientists and engineers making stars on Earth, and even hold pieces of asteroids, comets and the Moon itself.

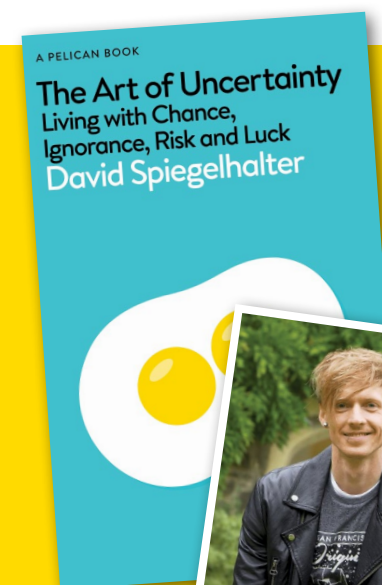
Back on planet Earth, teenagers are encouraged to 'hack the planet' at the Oxford Westgate Library in a gamified decision-making event, and over in East Oxford in a surprisingly Narnian event space, journalist Tom Ough invites Festival visitors to think about how to avert disaster and 'defuse doomsday', with real stories from scientists and visionaries racing to prevent global catastrophes.

Making good decisions in an uncertain world

We live in a world where chance, luck and coincidence play a big role: do roughly 40% of football results, for example, really come down to luck rather than talent? And if uncertainty is inevitable, how do we best live our lives? Especially for IF Oxford, statistician Sir David Spiegelhalter OBE, Emeritus Professor of Statistics at the University of Cambridge, dissects the data to help you understand the risks around us and assess the chances of what might happen in the future.

Using the principles of probability and captivating real-world examples, he'll show how thinking more analytically about everything from medical advice to pandemics and climate change forecasts helps explain why we can be so confident that two properly shuffled packs of cards have never, ever been in the exact same order.

There's more on the possible and the improbable as science-wizard Richard Robinson demonstrates the quirky science of 66 Impossible Things and larger-than-life mathematician-cum-comedian Dr Tom Crawford, back by popular demand, checks out the comedic world of unusual 'award-winning' research – including the delights of postman's testicles – for the annual IgNoble prizes.



The music of moths

Music, science and the hidden rhythms of the night intertwine in the Oxford University Museum of Natural History with composer-violinist Ellie Wilson, who selected a single evening of data on moth activity and transformed it into a hauntingly beautiful soundscape, Moth x Human, a sonic journey into the world as it comes alive after dark.

"I don't think I realised quite how much time would be spent staring at spreadsheets before I could start making music!" she smiles. "I was introduced to scientists at the UKCEH [The UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology] who use an automated, solar-powered device that records moth activity overnight. It has a light source to attract moths, a camera to photograph them and a computer plus AI to identify the species and timestamp for each visit."

As biodiversity declines globally, the quiet disappearance of insects often goes unnoticed," said Wilson. "I wanted to compose a piece that not only reflected this loss, but also allowed the insects themselves — specifically moths — to help create it, resulting in a sort of interspecies dialogue between moths and humans."

Other mini-beast inspired events and activities at Oxford University Museum of Natural History include Incredible Insect crafting afternoons and The Great Big Bug Show, an interactive family event with rapping poet Simon Mole and his musician mate Gecko for a family show full of poems, raps and songs all about your favourite (and some you haven't heard of yet). "Expect minibeasts and massive beats," remarks Dane Comerford, Festival Director of IF Oxford. "I'm told that every tune is an earworm — even the ones about woodlice"

Moth x Human by Ellie Wilson, in collaboration with
Oxford Contemporary Music
7.30pm Friday 17 October 2025

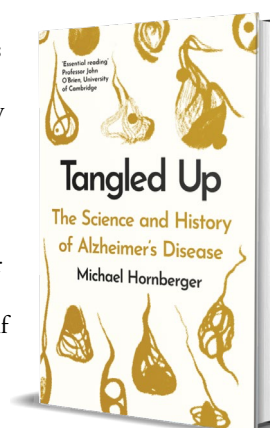


Healthcare: from horror to hope

There are, apparently, surprising connections between gruesome zombie outbreaks and serious healthcare systems. A light-hearted comparison of zombies from fiction, at Modelling the Undead: what can zombies teach us about public health? sheds light on the development of medicines and possible solutions to real-world healthcare challenges — a perfect event for an Oxford Halloween night.

The Festival is also an opportunity to chat online with University of Oxford medical researchers about their career journeys and to explore what studying medicine is like today.

It offers, too, a chance to consider women's pain — the science, the silence and the system; and to delve into the story behind Alzheimer's disease and its growing incidence. Professor Michael Hornberger, the author of the new book Tangled Up: The Science and History of Alzheimer's Disease, promises a whistle-stop tour of this condition which was named for the pioneering doctor who first diagnosed it in 20th century Germany. His patient, Mrs Auguste Deter, could remember her wedding but not her husband's name or where they lived: her old memories thrived, yet she found it difficult to create new ones. While discussing variants, genes, biomarkers, modern diagnosis and new treatments, Hornberger will explain how you can best protect yourself and your family from developing the disease.



For more on these and the many other IF Oxford events, visit www.if-oxford.com

Light, Connectivity, and the City to Come

Internationally acclaimed artist **Olafur Eliasson** unveils his first permanent public sculpture in the UK: a shimmering, light installation at Oxford North. In an exclusive conversation with IF Oxford Director, Dane Comerford, Eliasson reflects on perception, place, and how art can help us navigate a changing world.



photo: Hufon + Crow © 2025 Olafur Eliasson

CONCEPT AND CREATIVE VISION

Dane: Please describe the new sculpture you've created for Oxford North; what is it called, and how would you introduce it to someone seeing it for the first time?

Olafur: *Your planetary assembly* is inspired by models of the Solar System and is reminiscent of the orreries at the University of Oxford's History of Science Museum. *Your planetary assembly* weaves throughout Fallaize Park, a two-acre public park that opens today as part of the 1 million sq ft new global innovation district Oxford North.

Winding along a path that cuts through Fallaize Park's green landscape, the artwork will offer visitors a point of orientation. From dusk, the polyhedrons will be illuminated in colours inspired by the dominant tones in telescopic imagery of the planets, with each sculpture providing a space for visitors and passers-by to congregate.

Your planetary assembly, 2025, draws on my longstanding interest in public space, taking inspiration from historical gathering places such as the agora of ancient Athens and Thingvellir in Iceland where people came together to negotiate, discuss and debate.

Dane: Your work often invites us to reconsider how we perceive the world.

What questions or ideas were you exploring through this piece?

Olafur: One of the things that interests me about these geometrical forms is the fact that they are rather underrepresented in our built world, where much design is defined by efficiency – by squares, right angles, and orthogonal lines. In that sense, they present an alternative that is both regular and somehow excessive. In short, they suggest that we could design the world differently. And to position them in public space as well is a proposal about how we relate to civic space and to the towns or cities we move through. Ultimately, it's about creating a comfortable space to share with others.

Dane: What role did science or scientific thinking play in shaping this work?

Olafur: As an artist, I am very inspired by the conversations I have had with scientists over the years. So, I actively seek out collaborations where I can incorporate science and work together with scientists. At the same time, it's always important for me to add that I approach science from an artistic standpoint. Science, in this artwork, plays an inspirational role – it is more the feeling of science as a major human



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endeavour to understand and describe the structures of the world over time. The forms can be understood on a micro or macro level as referring to elements or planets, in much the way that Kepler so long ago found inspiration in the Platonic solids in his search for order in the relationships of the planets in the solar system. Here, however, it is not a one-to-one representation or allegory. They present a way of thinking. There is a logic evident in the combinations of related polyhedra, and a systematization of colours that I believe is relevant to what it is we do when we engage in scientific thought.

Dane: How did the landscape and urban development context of Oxford North influence your conceptual approach?

Olafur: In planning the work, I looked at the development and specifically chose the location of the work in a publicly accessible green space that could function as a kind of gathering site for the various residents and employees of the neighbouring buildings. The work should integrate well into the site that is being planned, and I hope it will be adopted by the people who use the space. ▶

Walk the solar system with Orbit in Fallaize Park, OX2 8GE

Take a guided journey through the Solar System with a new show from Creation Theatre, launching for a playful stroll through space. This immersive performance brings together movement, storytelling and light to experience *Your planetary assembly* for the first time.

Thursday 24 October 2025, from 4 – 8.30pm,

Orbit is part of the IF Oxford event Zone ONE, an opportunity to get hands-on with experiments and demonstrations at Oxford North.

Free to attend; tickets available at: www.if-oxford.com

INTERACTION AND PUBLIC EXPERIENCE

Dane: Much of your work responds to light, weather and time. Does this piece shift or change depending on how and when it's experienced?

Olafur: The work reacts powerfully to the changing light conditions. The light elements installed in the polyhedra make the experience of the work change depending on the time of day or year that it is encountered. The colourful shadows, for example, that are cast by the lights inside shining through the different colours of glass and steel frameworks, may only be visible at night time or twilight. But also the sunlight will cast splotches of coloured light when it shines through the glass panes on bright days.

Dane: What does it mean to install a work like this in a public, future-facing district that's being designed around innovation, science and community?

Olafur: I see the artwork as having the potential to attract people to occupy the space with life. The special mix of work environments – of research and study, housing and work – will bring together a diverse population, and perhaps the works can be there as nodes for these different groups to gather around.



REFLECTION, LOOKING FORWARD

Dane: How do you see the role of art in spaces of scientific and technological development?

Olafur: It is not always immediately clear how the fields of art and science can work together. This is a topic that I have been exploring together with my friend, the anthropologist Andreas Roepstorff, from Aarhus University. For a number of years now, we have been leading a group of scientists and artists working together on an art-science collaborative project called Experimenting, Experiencing, Reflecting. We've discovered a lot of commonalities, even when we are aware that the foundational assumptions of the two fields may differ, in terms of what it means for an experiment to be successful or even complete. I believe art can contribute to this conversation by proposing alternative criteria for evaluating what we do and how we think.

Dane: What does this sculpture offer to passersby who may not encounter art in daily life?

Olafur: I would like to see the work become inspiring for the people using the space, whatever their backgrounds. I expect even those

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who do not necessarily have a close relationship to art will marvel at the unexpected forms, which are quite different from the simple, efficient forms of day-to-day life. Many of these polyhedra are not familiar to a large audience, so this can be quite exciting to encounter something like this unexpectedly. And you might move around to get a closer look, to investigate the way the glass structures and the steel frameworks relate to one another, to see if you can understand how they are constructed, or simply to admire the colour combinations. I think there are many entry points for a very broad public.

Dane: This is your first permanent UK work. What made Oxford the right context for your vision?

Olafur: Oxford's rich history as a place built around knowledge makes this a particularly interesting location for a work like this. As I see the structures being about visualising thinking, the process of synthesising ideas. I am very honoured to be contributing with a work to the city's continual development that may inspire new ideas arising in the neighbouring labs.

Dane: How do you hope the public will interact with the work?

Olafur: I hope the public adopts the work as an agent within the new urban environment. I hope it becomes a site where people are happy to gather, to take time to meet with one another or simply spend time together. I love the idea that when you are making plans with a friend, you might say, 'Meet me at Mars at five.' It will be nice to see the works really become players in the day-to-day life of anyone who visits, lives in or works at this wonderful new part of Oxford.

Zone ONE is part of Oxford North Engage, the art, culture, social value and legacy programme, delivered with Contemporary Art Society by IF Oxford, the city's science & ideas Festival in collaboration with Modern Art Oxford, Creation Theatre and Fusion Arts.

Oxford North Ventures GP LLP is the joint venture established in 2022 between Thomas White Oxford (the development company of St John's College, Oxford), Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan and Stanhope PLC. Together, with Fletcher Priest Architects (masterplanner and architects) and Gustafson Porter + Bowman (landscape architects), they are delivering Oxford North, a globally significant new district for science and innovation, including carbon-efficient labs and workspaces, community facilities, public art, and major infrastructure investment: www.oxfordnorth.com

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17 October – 2 November 2025

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