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A garden mural takes shape on canvas panels in the Sussex, England, studio of decorative painter Lucinda Oakes, who is pictured at left and below, touching up foliage. *Below left:* A trompe l'oeil trellis with tulips and roses.



## VIEW MASTER

Walls become romantic trompe l'oeil vistas in the hands of decorative painter Lucinda Oakes

**B**espoke painting is in Lucinda Oakes's genes. Her father is the legendary George Oakes, who led the London design studio of Colefax and Fowler for 30 years, and she "learned a lot from watching him," she says.

After graduating from the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, Oakes made and sold hand-painted silk scarves, but one day a career-changing commission came her way: to mural a garden room in Italian fresco style. "The decorator initially approached my father. He'd just retired, so he offered to design the mural and taught me how to mix colors and lay on background washes, marbling, grisaille, and trompe l'oeil," she recalls. "It was then that I realized I could earn a living using my artistic skills in a practical way."

Today Oakes lives and works in Sussex, 90 minutes south of London, turning out romantic wallpapers, tablecloths, fireboards, and much more—mostly sparked by 18th-century artwork. Murals, though, remain her passion. Commissions arrive via

top decorators such as Guy Goodfellow and Colin Orchard, while her watercolors and prints are sold at London's Ramsay gallery. "Large-scale painting is the most

challenging and exciting work," she says. "I start with fat house-painting brushes and end up using a very thin watercolor brush."

To convert one particular drawing room into a virtual glade, Oakes created floor-to-ceiling panels with trees whose branches trail around architraves and doors. Trompe l'oeil Portuguese tiles line a room for another client, and a ballroom was embellished with marbling inspired by an Italian church.

Best known is her work at Ballyfin, the deluxe Irish country-house hotel. There she conjured lush landscape cartouches for a dining room wall and transformed a bedroom into a trellised garden. The latter took eight months to complete. "I always find the whole process immensely satisfying," the artisan says. "Then a week later I think, I wish I'd done that bit differently."

[lucindaaoakes.com](http://lucindaaoakes.com), [ramsayonline.net](http://ramsayonline.net) —NICOLE SWENGLEY