



### INTRODUCTION

Jason Wason is a ceramicist who lives as he works, uncompromisingly and devoid of excess, on the windswept moors of West Penwith in Cornwall. In this unforgiving place, where the winter gales blowing in from the Atlantic lash his isolated granite farmhouse and studio, he produces an extraordinary body of work of austere beauty and commanding presence. As with all good work, it is an expression of both the person and the place.

On his return from travelling as a young man, Wason established a craft co-operative in Scotland where he built a wheel and taught himself to throw. After a number of years, he moved down to the Southwest and found employment as a production potter at the Leach Pottery in St Ives where he developed his eye and acquired the disciplines of his craft.

In the thirty or so years since striking out on his own, Wason has exhibited regularly. He sells virtually everything he produces to discriminating collectors in this country and abroad. The Japanese regard his work particularly highly and his work can be found in several public and private collections. Yet Wason remains stubbornly outside the mainstream of British potters and is not as widely known – despite the memorable name – as his work would warrant. To some extent this is deliberate on his part. He is a true independent who follows his own instincts, remaining aloof from the vicissitudes of artistic fashion.

Wason's works are distinctive: strong, sculptural forms with delicate articulation, they appear to inhabit more space than they occupy. If they recall any studio potter to mind for their sculptural integrity, it would be Hans Coper, a German *émigré* who came to England in 1939 and was an influential modernist. Interestingly, Wason now works on Coper's original wheel. Like Coper, Wason leaves his work unglazed, treating the surfaces instead with metal oxides, some garnered from disused mine workings near his home. Combined with the texture of the fired clay, these produce a subtle metallic effect. The shapes derive from traditional vessels and other container forms but have evolved onto another plane. They have left functionalism behind and arrived somewhere where simply being, rather than being for a purpose, is their essence.

Consider the darkly enigmatic names he has given to some of the pieces in this exhibition: Ancestor Jar, Silent Witness, Reliquary, Mother's Bowl, Guardian Vessel. These hark back to sacred rites, to ritualistic paraphernalia and to long-gone civilisations lost in the mists of time. Given where Jason Wason has chosen to operate – in the heartland of prehistoric Britain – this is not surprising. He is surrounded by middle-Bronze Age field patterns from a time when people first cleared the land for cultivation three and a half millennia ago. Near to his home are the ancient remains of sacred sites: standing stones, stone rows and stone circles: menhirs, dolmens, cromlechs and fougous. The identity of their builders is shrouded in mystery, but religion and spirituality must have been central to the way in which they perceived their world and conducted their lives. Their belief systems and practices, as indeed their very bones, have seeped into the ground out of and upon which Wason now conjures up his creations.

This exhibition is the fruit of a year's collaboration between Wason and Pangolin Editions Foundry. The decision to cast a selection of his timeless works in bronze follows an evolutionary route from clay to metal which was first established by the ancient Chinese nearly four thousand years ago at the beginning of their Bronze Age. The Chinese had used ceramics and jade during the Neolithic Period to create their most revered cultural objects but by the time of the Shang (1500-1050 BC) and Zhou (1050-221 BC) dynasties, they had mastered the techniques of bronze casting and were achieving remarkable results. According to the Shang belief system, ancestor veneration by the ruling class would secure the ancestors' intercession in the spirit world on behalf of the living and ensure good fortune. Respect for the ancestors was made manifest by the use of precious bronze containers for ritualised offerings of food and wine. Wason's vessels have no such explicitly ritual purpose today of course, but do have an affinity with ancient Chinese bronzes. It is therefore apt that he should be one of the first ceramic artists to have had such a body of work cast in bronze by Pangolin since Rungwe Kingdon and Claude Koenig established their foundry twenty-five years ago.

Humanity's most durable goods are those produced from baked clay, whether sun-dried or kiln-fired. Pottery is so long-lasting that it is indispensable to archaeologists in the interpretation of past civilisations. Clay is abundant and easy to obtain. A single individual with the requisite skills can dig the clay, throw or coil a pot and then fire it. Metal casting on the other hand requires a collaborative effort. From extracting, crushing and refining the ore to making the mould, casting and finishing the piece, the process is both resource- and labour-intensive. What then is the point of taking studio





pottery and casting it in bronze, or indeed, as in two examples in this exhibition, in silver? Self-evidently not to make it last longer, nor simply to create an edition from the same mould. It would be more straightforward to do that directly in clay; bronze is more robust than clay, less prone to damage, and the inherent strength of the metal allows it to be worked into certain shapes or forms beyond the capacity of clay. Both of these advantages come at a price however, there is a weight penalty and a cost penalty; a bronze object is far heavier than a clay one and infinitely more expensive to produce. That gives a clue to one possible answer: value. The high cost of a bronze object – or more so a silver one – makes it intrinsically precious and enhances its worth beyond its mere 'artistic value'.

However the real answer to the question isn't mercenary; the technology of metal casting makes it possible to produce something different from, but just as valid as, an original object. The cast faithfully replicates the shape and texture and if desired also the colour of the original. But metal isn't clay; the whole casting process invests the new object with a different personality. Metal feels different from clay and can be made to look different too. That became apparent when I watched Rungwe Kingdon skilfully applying patination to one of Jason's recently cast bronze pieces. Ancient Chinese bronzes acquired their characteristically beautiful green patina through oxidation as a result of having been buried underground for millennia. Rungwe was using a technique for speeding up the natural process of

(ABOVE LEFT)

Ancestor Jar

Fired Clay

Unique

63 x 22 cm

(ABOVE RIGHT)

Mother's Bowl

Bronze

Edition of 5
30 × 55 cm

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patination, indeed for making it instantaneous. He achieves a range of different effects by stippling specially formulated chemical compounds onto the metal surface under controlled heat from a blowtorch. Watching him transform base metal into something that glows with colour, that can be made to reveal more or less of the underlying texture of the original, is to witness alchemy.

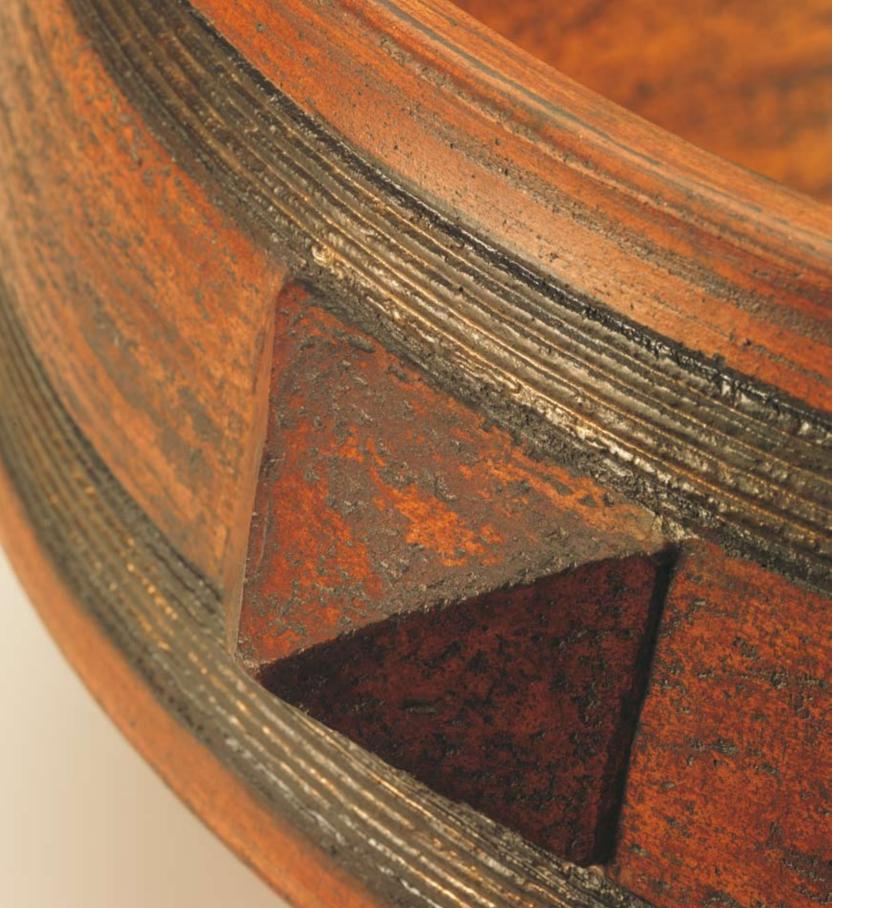
Nine of the new works created especially for this exhibition are bronze, two are silver and the rest ceramic. It is interesting to ponder whether the ones intended for casting differ in any respect from those that weren't. Of the nine bronzes, the lovely green Reliquary is possibly closest to an 'authentic' Chinese bronze although Jason is careful to avoid emulation. Accordingly his piece, unlike a Chinese bronze, lacks flamboyant decoration. On the other hand, Silent Witness, that tall amphora-shaped bronze with its exaggeratedly small handles, poised elegantly on its pointed base, looks like a pottery wine or oil storage jar from the classical Mediterranean world. Mother's Bowl, another bronze, is soft and round. Its pink colour and flaky texture, its burnished handles in the form of a woman's breasts, call to mind erotic Hindu temple carvings in sandstone. The ceramic pieces which haven't been cast include Ancestor Jar and Pouring Vessel. Here Jason has worked more than his usual amount of metal into the clay surfaces. Either could be taken for a bronze cast. So we are left with a beguiling interplay between form and substance, purpose and material, intention and effect. Nothing in this show is conventional or quite what it seems. Each individual exhibit repays close inspection. The cumulative effect is astonishingly powerful.

> ANTHONY FAGIN Falmouth, Cornwall November 2009

Reliquary Bronze Edition of 5 21 x 48 cm

# CATALOGUE







(ABOVE)
Low Slung Vessel
Bronze
Edition of 5
17 x 55 cm

(LEFT & RIGHT) Studded Bowl Fired Clay Unique 31 × 55 cm





The Party Is Over Fired Clay Unique 57 × 54 cm





Guardian Vessel Fired Clay Unique 42 x 52 cm









Silent Witness
Bronze
Edition of 5
164.5 x 24 cm





(ABOVE)
Reliquary
Fired Clay
Unique
22 x 45 cm

(RIGHT)

Red and Gold Vessel

Fired Clay

Unique

52 x 55 cm

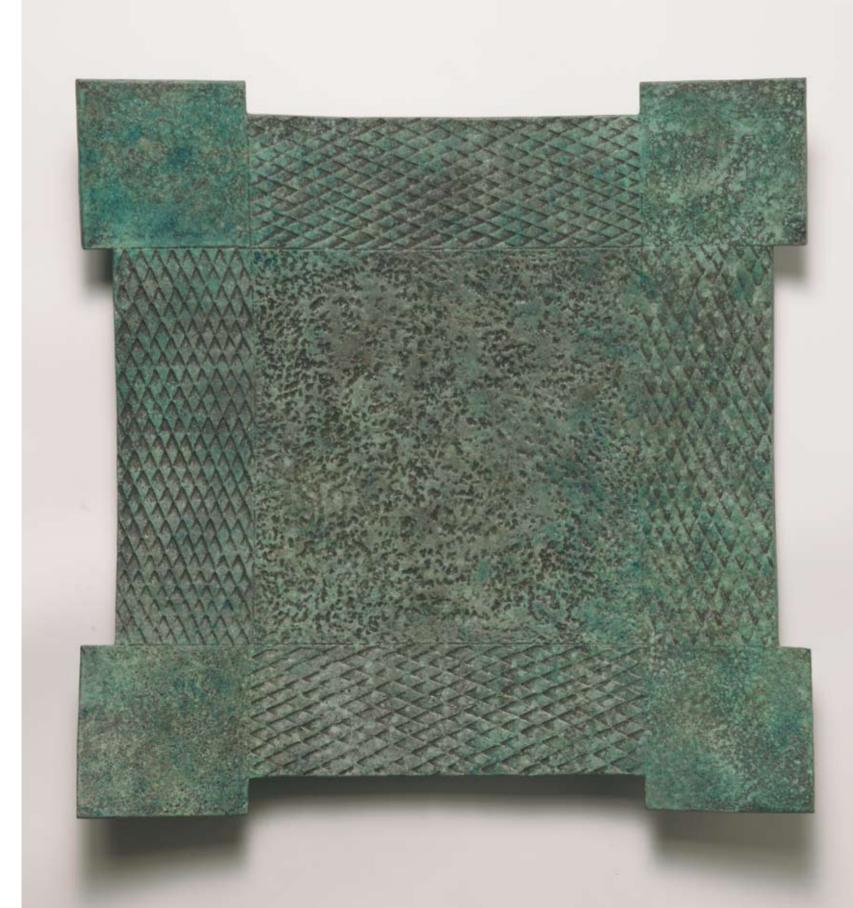




Silver Jar Sterling Silver Edition of 5 15 x 19 cm







No Man Is An Island Bronze Edition of 5 10 x 52 cm





(ABOVE)

Pouring Vessel

Fired Clay

Unique

24 × 40 cm

(LEFT & RIGHT)
Gold Bowl
Fired Clay
Unique
20.5 x 32.5 cm





Gold Lustre Vessel Fired Clay Unique 33 × 41 cm



(ABOVE & OPPOSITE)

Gold Lustre Vessel

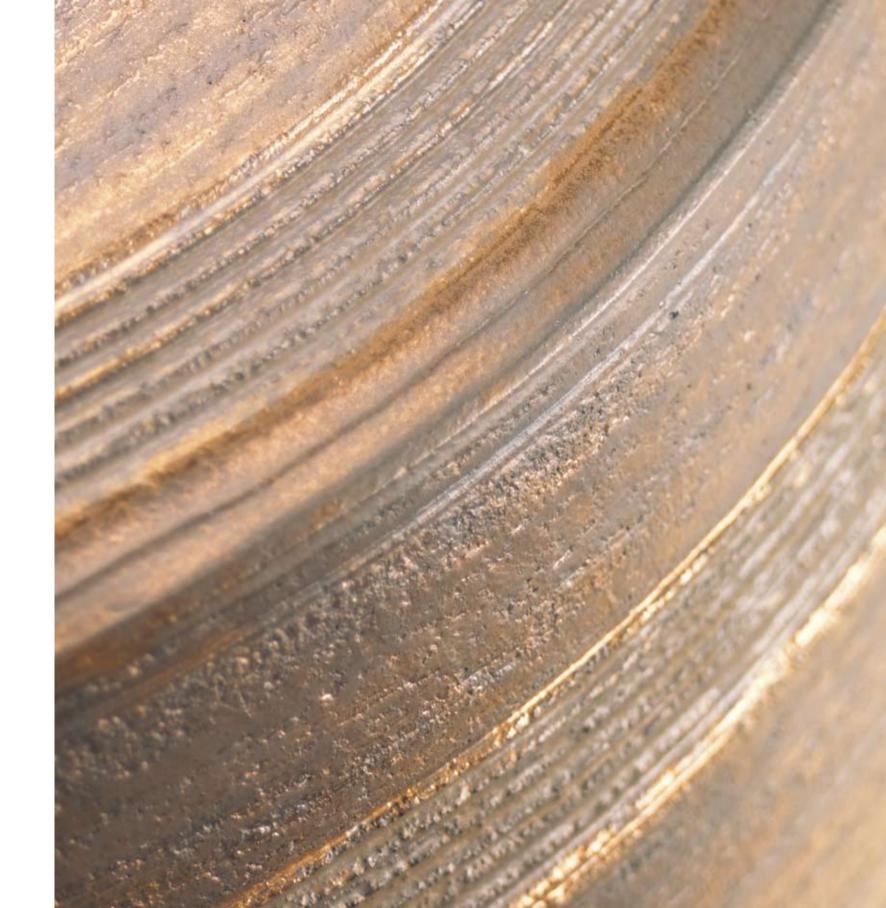
Fired Clay

Unique

33 × 41 cm

(RIGHT)
Small Studded Bowl
Fired Clay
Unique
18 x 26.5 cm







Mother's Bowl Bronze Edition of 5 30 × 55 cm







(ABOVE)
Small Bowl
on Conical Feet
Fired Clay
Unique
15 x 14 cm

(RIGHT & OPPOSITE)

Red and Gold

Mother's Bowl

Fired Clay

Unique
26 x 54 cm





Give Me That Old Time Religion Bronze, Sand, Quartz & Iron Pyrite Edition of 5 11 x 46 x 38 cm











A Devils Box of Tricks
Bronze, Sand
& Fossils
Edition of 5
11 × 44 × 47 cm





Red Vessel Fired Clay Unique 60 x 54 cm







(ABOVE)
Studded Bowl
Fired Clay
Unique
22 x 36 cm

(RIGHT)
Reliquary
Fired Clay
Unique
23 × 44 cm

(OPPOSITE)
Studded Bowl
with Handles
Fired Clay
Unique
35 × 44 cm







Snake Fragment Fired Clay Unique 64 x 56 cm



Closer to Home Sterling Silver Edition of 10 60 cm high









(LEFT & RIGHT) CloserTo Home

(FAR RIGHT) CloserTo Home

Fired Clay Unique 90 cm high

Fired Clay Unique 77 cm high





Guardian Vessel Bronze Edition of 5 25 x 87 cm







(ABOVE)

Pouring Vessel

Fired Clay

Unique

33 x 58 cm

(LEFT & RIGHT)

Red and Gold Vessel

Fired Clay

Unique

25 x 40 cm





(ABOVE)
Handprint Dish
Fired Clay
Unique
10 x 48 cm

(RIGHT)

Gold Zig Zag Fragment

Fired Clay

Unique
12 x 57 cm





(ABOVE)
Zig Zag Dish
Fired Clay
Unique
9 x 53 cm

(RIGHT)
Incised Fragment Dish
Fired Clay
Unique
9 × 54 cm



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(ABOVE)

Large Scaled Dish

Fired Clay

Unique

12 x 63 cm

(RIGHT)

Zig Zag Bell

Bronze

Edition of 5

11 x 73 cm (inc. box)



## JASON WASON

1946 Born, Liverpool

1964-1974 Travelled Europe, North Africa, Middle East and Asia

Austin Desmond Fine Art: London

1998

Set up Crafts community in Dumfrieshire, built a kick wheel from the back wheel 1974-1976

and half shaft of a Morris 1000 van, and learnt to throw

1976-1981 Leach Pottery, St. Ives, Cornwall

Works in own studio near St. Just, Cornwall 1981-present

#### SOLO & GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Burnt Offerings, Pangolin London 2010 Keio Department Store: Tokyo, Japan 2009 *In The Mix*, Pangolin London 2009 Sterling Stuff II, Pangolin London 2008 Jason Wason Ceramics, Lemon Street Gallery 2008 2008 Gallery St Ives, Tokyo, Japan Austin Desmond Fine Art, London 2007 The Circle is Unbroken, Lemon Street Gallery, Truro 2007 Austin Desmond Fine Art, London 2006 Kusakabe Folk Museum: Gifu, Japan 2005 Maruzen Department Store: Nagoya, Japan 2005 Seto City Art Museum : Japan 2005 Collect: Victoria & Albert Museum, London 2004 2004 Jason Wason Ceramics: Austin Desmond Fine Art, London Body and Form: Joanna Bird Gallery, London 2003 Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool 2003 Gallery Bizan: Seto Shi, Aichi, Japan 2002 Ceramica International, Penlee Museum, Penzance, Cornwall 2002 Potters from the Treasure House: Jason Wason, Yasuo Terada, Austin Desmond Fine Art, London 2002 Seto City Cultural Centre: Aichi Prefecture, Japan 2002 SOFA: Sculptural Objects and Functional Art: Chicago, USA. 2002 British Studio Ceramics Works from the New Millenium: The Clay Studio Gallery, Philadephia, USA 2001 SOFA: Sculptural Objects and Functional Art: Chicago, USA 2001 Japanese Connections: Seto Glass and Ceramic centre, Japan 2001 6 Chapel Row Gallery: Bath 2000 Seto studio Japan: Worked for two months with Yasuo Terada at Seto 2000 Japanese Connections : C Square Gallery, Nagoya, Japan 2000 Jason Wason, David Leach, Shinsaka Hamada and Tatsuzo Shimaoka: Dartington Hall, Devon 2000 Austin Desmond Fine Art : London 1999 Cobra and Bellamy: Chelsea, London 1999 Running Ridge Gallery: Sante Fe, New Mexico, USA 1998

| 1997 | Six Chapel Row : Bath  |
|------|--|
| 1997 | Joanna Bird Gallery : Including Bernard Leach, Shoji Hamada, Michael Cardew, Tatsuzo |
|      | Shimaoko, Lucy Rie   |
| 1996 | Playing with Fire : Austin Desmond Fine Art, London                                  |
| 1995 | Ten Pieces : Tate Gallery St Ives, Cornwall  |
| 1995 | Japanese Connections : Touring Show  |
| 1995 | Gallery Gilbert, Dorchester  |
| 1995 | Gallerie Inart : Amsterdam, Holland  |
| 1995 | Boymans Van Beuningen Museum : Rotterdam, Holland                                    |
| 1995 | Vincent Gallery : Exeter   |
| 1994 | Raku Exhibition : Tate Gallery St.Ives, Cornwall                                     |
| 1994 | Andrew Usiskin Gallery : London  |
| 1993 | Excavation Series: Austin Desmond Fine Art: London                                   |
| 1992 | Maruzen Department Store : Tokyo, Japan  |
| 1990 | Playing with Fire : Austin Desmond Fine Art, London                                  |
| 1990 | National Museum and Gallery : Liverpool  |
|      |  |

#### **PUBLIC COLLECTIONS**

| 2006 | Work bought for permanent collection Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro, Cornwall        |
|------|--|
| 2008 | Work bought for Museum of Modern Ceramic Art, Mino, Tajimi, Gifu Prefecture, Japan |
| 2002 | Work purchased for permanent collection at Togei Messe, Mashiko, Japan             |
| 2002 | Work to go on permanent display at Bizan Tobo, Seto Shi, Aichi Prefecture, Japan   |

#### PRIZES AND AWARDS

| 2005 | South West Arts Council grant for residency to Seihoji Ancient Kiln Park Festival, Seto, Japan |
|------|--|
| 1998 | South West Arts Council Grant to travel and study ceramics in New Mexico                       |
| 1997 | Funded by British Council to do lecture tour throughout Israel, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem            |
| 1992 | Installation for British High Commission, Dhaker, Bangledesh                                   |
| 1990 | South West Arts Council Development Award to open European Connections                         |

#### PUBLICATIONS

Ceramic Review - Profile - Jason Wason - July Aug 2006 Raku, second edition, Tim Andrews, published by AC Black Journey to St Ives England - Kinship Beyond East & West - Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art Mimbres Potters - An article written by J. Wason, Ceramic Review, 18 Crafts - Exhibition review Six Chapel Row, Bath. edition 167 Raku - A review of contemporary work, by Tim Andrews, published by A. C Black Leach Legacy - St Ives and Its Influence, by Marion Whybrow, Published by Sanson and Co

Ceramic Review - Exhibition Review, No.173, September 1998 'In Their Element' - A film by Television South West 1992

Dictionary of British Potters - By Pat Carter, Scholar Press

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### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Burnt Offerings is the result of an exciting, year long collaboration between Pangolin and Jason Wason. During this time a number of people have worked extremely hard to make the exhibition come to fruition and we would like to take this opportunity to thank Jason and his wife Jo, Steve Maule and his highly skilled team at Pangolin Editions and Steve Russell for his superb photography.

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Burnt Offerings

January 13th - 27th Feburary 2010

Pangolin London

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