



**TERENCE COVENTRY**  
Sculpture, Prints & Drawings



## FOREWORD

Terence Coventry tackles making art in a direct and matter of fact way. He would argue that the spirit of the subject just arrives through the making process and is wary of wordy explanations: 'no-nonsense sculpture!', 'what you see is what you get' and 'the sculpture speaks for itself' is how Terence describes his activity. For him, art is essentially the most satisfying arrangement of facets, shapes and forms that collectively sum up a subject matter.

Like many practical people, Terence eschews any romantic notions of being an Artist. He relates to Walter Gropius' definition of the artist being an exalted craftsman and as such, practises daily and sculpts what he knows. This familiarity enables Terence to take sculptural liberties, to distort, change or emphasise elements, like adding humour and playing with the chunky, hewn, cubistic language that has evolved to become his signature.

Having farmed for so many years, exiled on his Cornish cliff, Terence is somewhat an outsider in the Art World. His sculpture exists in spite of any vagaries or trends in the Arts. His is an intensely personal art, practical and unpretentious, honest and imbued with great integrity. Born as they were out of the hard graft of farming, his earliest carvings did not escape an inevitable element of personal therapy but as he persevered, Terence's sculpture developed through obsession into a mature, individual and confident language. His is an Art that would out; he is driven to create these forms and they would exist even if their sole audience was Terence himself.

Sourcing subject matter close to hand, Terence often sculpts the animals he farmed. These are not the idealised portraits of champion show animals, so beloved of 18th Century painters, nor are they nostalgic images of a non-industrial past but are instead the celebration of our inherent relationship with the animals we have bred over the millennia. The connection between man and beast, the farmer and his herd, is constant and all-pervading. These animals have helped to shape the world as we know it and in turn, through selective breeding, farmers have shaped them. Terence's bulls are neither the Aurochs of Lascaux nor his pigs the wild boar of a Renaissance hunting scene. They celebrate our interdependence and that makes them oddly relevant to us. We recognise and feel connected to them.

Animals are frequently a vehicle of expression for artists; since the dawn of our humanity we have depicted them as deities, sacred symbols of strength and power, or earthly fecundity. We have harnessed their wildness to appropriate as our strength; we have revelled in subduing and controlling them, hunting and eating them. At the other extreme, we have fashioned them into sentimentalised creatures of bland sweetness, rendering them impotent and irrelevant.

(LEFT)  
Terence Coventry  
working in his studio  
Photo: Peter Harris



(LEFT)  
*Joyrider I*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 52 cm

Terence's rugged forms hold a respectful acknowledgement of our collaborative history. His dogs and horses, bulls, goats and pigs, are monuments to a world unrecognisable without our fellow animals. The potent power of the bulls, the virility of the boars and the touching quizzicality of the birds are not their only attributes. Through Terence's hands, the overriding feeling expressed is one of respect, which imbues his sculpture with dignified self-assurance. Far too familiar with his subject to produce a mere observation of an animal, Terence is primarily making constructions. He instinctively uses the basic three-dimensional grammar of line, mass, form and texture, his own distinctive language, instantly recognisable, where abstraction and realism are in a careful balance, making objects that both stimulate the mind and reward the senses and even make us smile.

The birds are a recurring element in Terence's work. Bipedal and inquisitive, they pace the land with anthropomorphic attitude. Their specific attributes always shine through, no matter how simple the formal reductions of their construction. Rooks, Ravens and Jackdaws, with their metallic, shiny plumage, are Terence's particular favourites. Long-lived and intelligent, omnipresent and adaptable, curious and unafraid, the Corvids epitomise the wild, free interface between Nature in the raw and our attempts to work with the land and elements.

They have inspired a wonderful series of avian forms as diverse as the subjects themselves. Some are monolithic forms in which the predatory watchfulness of the Raven is fused with the standing stones of the Cornish landscape. Some are witty groups of garrulous Jackdaws, like protagonists in conversation, where each character is carefully differentiated by an economic arrangement of facets and forms. There are also dynamic silhouettes of choughs and rooks alluding to the exhilarating weightlessness of flight with gravity-defying stances and half-opened wings sometimes suggesting the threatening profiles of fighter jets, in a parallel search for simplicity of form.

The Human-animal relationship is expressed by more intimate means in the Riders group of sculptures. In the earlier pieces the riders become a centaur-like part of the animal, comfortable and at one. Later sculptures are a joyful balancing act where man and beast are free and unfettered, associating naturally, by choice, in fact as a means of expression itself.

Terence ceased farming over a decade ago. He now concentrates full-time on making sculpture, and the human form is resurfacing as a subject and arriving in dynamic shape. The Vital Man series is a set of truncated figures stating directly 'I am a man' but just below their hewn facets the coiled energy of a spring invigorates them with an exuberant joy, exalting in an independent and self-reliant spirit.

If Art echoes Life, perhaps these vital, joyous figures are expressions of Terence's long-awaited independence to say what he chooses to say with the effortless means to say it. For those of us looking, it is a rich and rewarding experience.

RUNGWE KINGDON



(ABOVE)  
*Monumental Vital Man IV*  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
Height 81 cm



(ABOVE LEFT)  
*Vital Man I*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 21 cm



(ABOVE RIGHT)  
*Vital Man II*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 28 cm

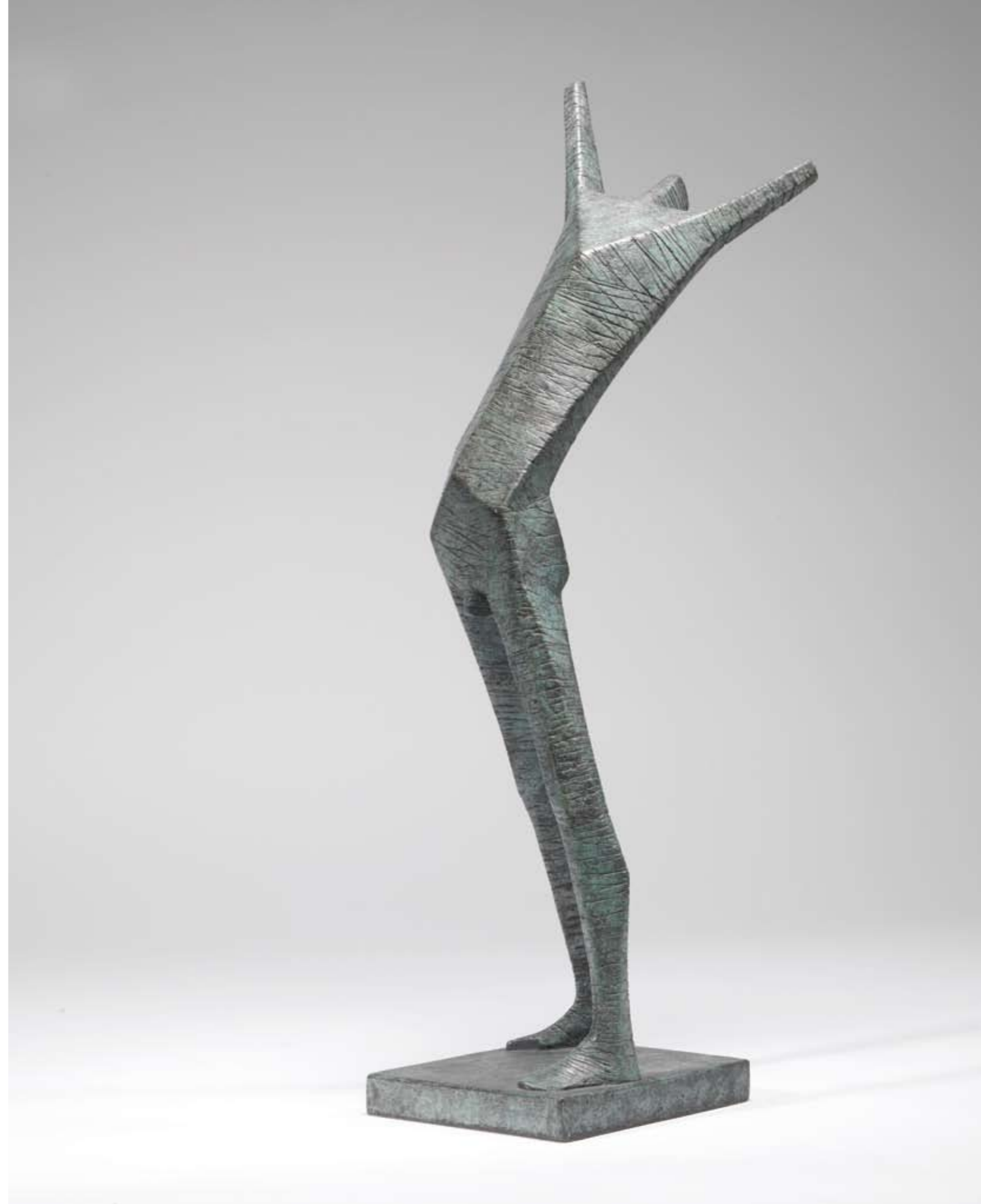


(RIGHT)  
*Vital Man III*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 57.5 cm



(LEFT)  
*Monumental Vital  
Man VI*  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
Height 208 cm

(RIGHT)  
*Vital Man VI*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 59.5 cm





(ABOVE)  
*Vital Man V*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 30.5 cm



(LEFT)  
*Study for  
Vital Man*  
Charcoal on paper  
Unique

(RIGHT)  
*Vital Man IV*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 18.5 cm





(ABOVE)  
*Study for Joyrider I*  
Charcoal on paper  
Unique



(RIGHT)  
*Joyrider II*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 53 cm





(RIGHT)  
*Standing Bull III*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 39 cm



(RIGHT)  
*Joyrider III*  
Forged Steel  
Unique  
Height 57.5 cm



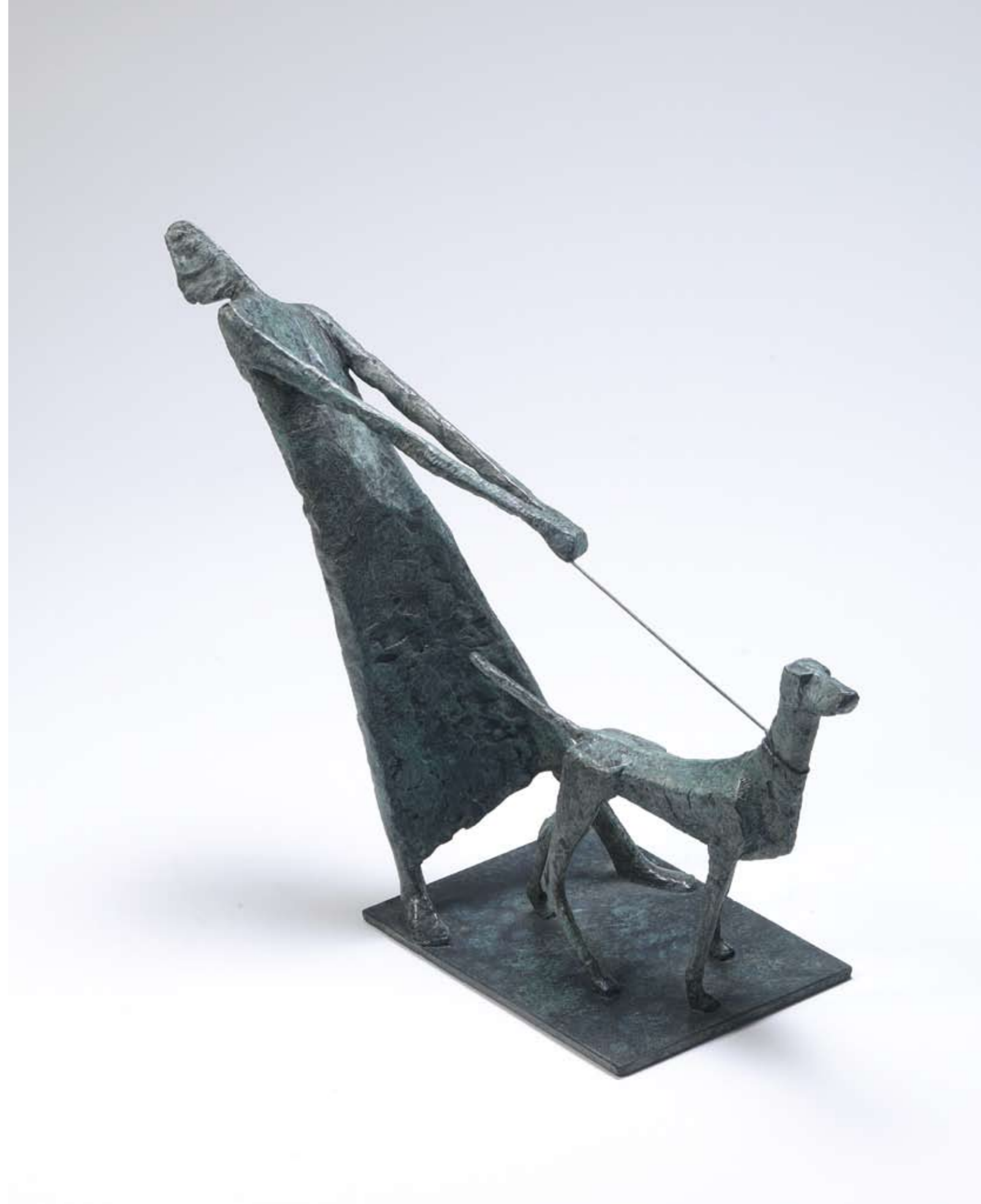
(ABOVE)  
*Rider I*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 63 cm



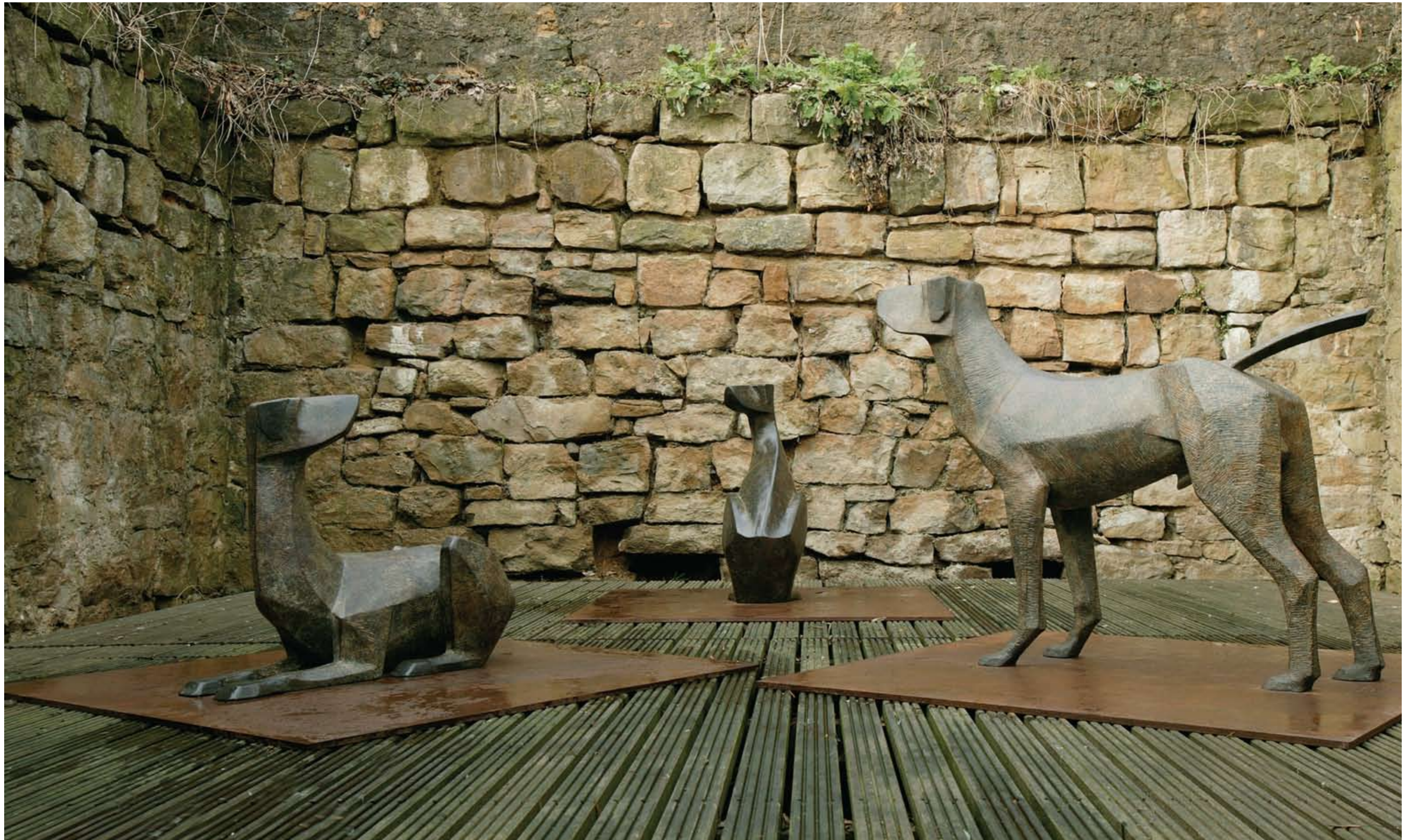
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*New Riders*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 64 cm



(ABOVE)  
*Study for Walkies*  
Charcoal on paper  
Unique



(RIGHT)  
*Walkies*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 33.5 cm



(PREVIOUS PAGE)  
From Left:  
*Lying Hound*  
Bronze  
Edition of 7  
Height 52cm

*Hound II*  
Bronze  
Edition of 7  
Height 64 cm

*Standing Hound*  
Bronze  
Edition of 7  
Height 75 cm

(RIGHT)  
*Sitting Boar*  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
Height 112 cm





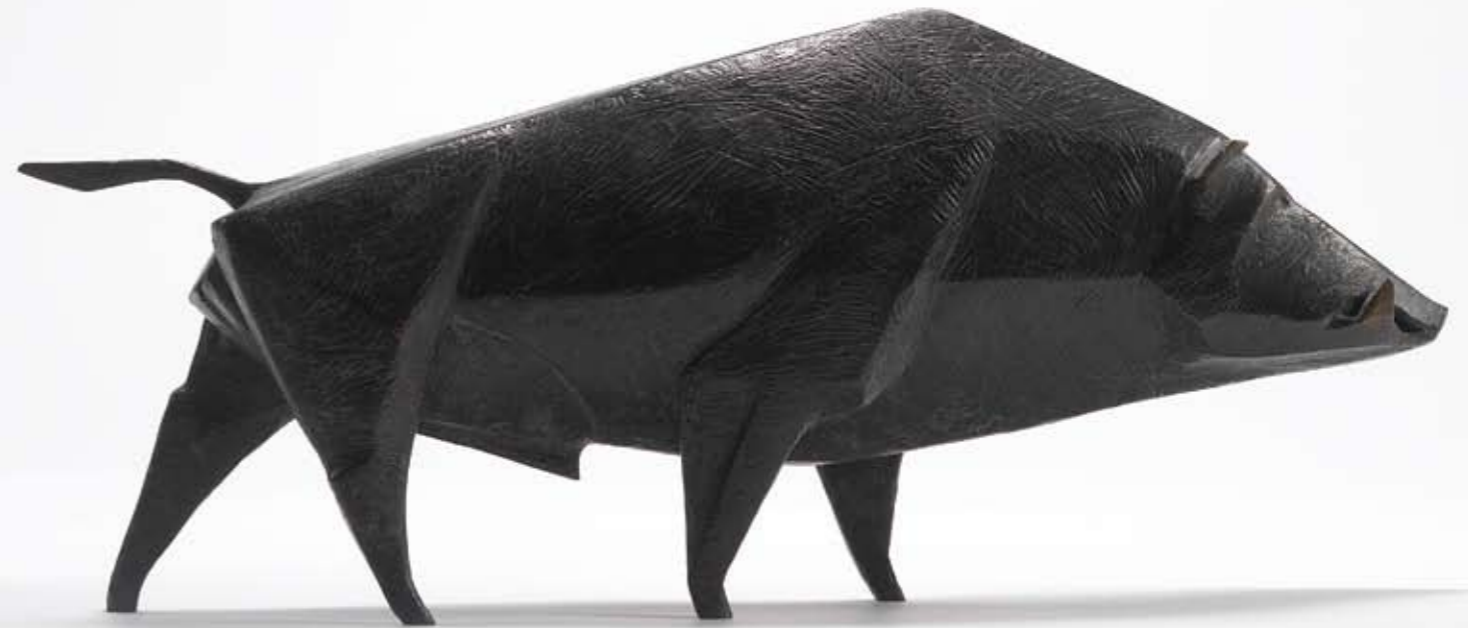
(ABOVE)  
*Boar II*  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
Height 100 cm  
Photo: The Artist



(RIGHT)  
*Verso*  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
Height 89 cm



(ABOVE)  
*Sitting Boar Maquette*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 27 cm



(RIGHT)  
*Boar I*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
Height 24 cm



(ABOVE)  
*Goat I*  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
Height 158 cm



(RIGHT)  
*Goat II*  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
Height 88 cm





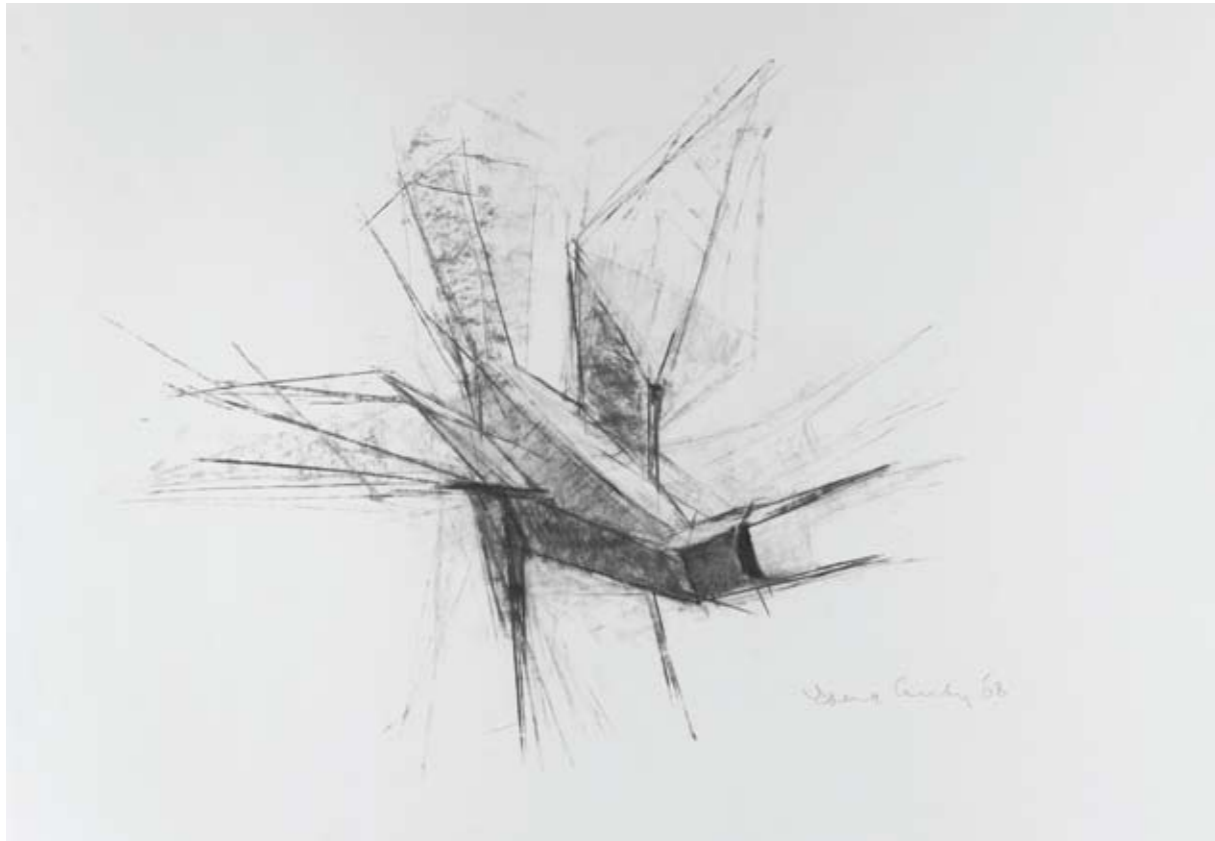


(PREVIOUS PAGE)  
*Avian Form VI*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 32.5 cm

(ABOVE)  
*Avian Form V*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 28.5 cm

(RIGHT)  
*Raven*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 32.5 cm

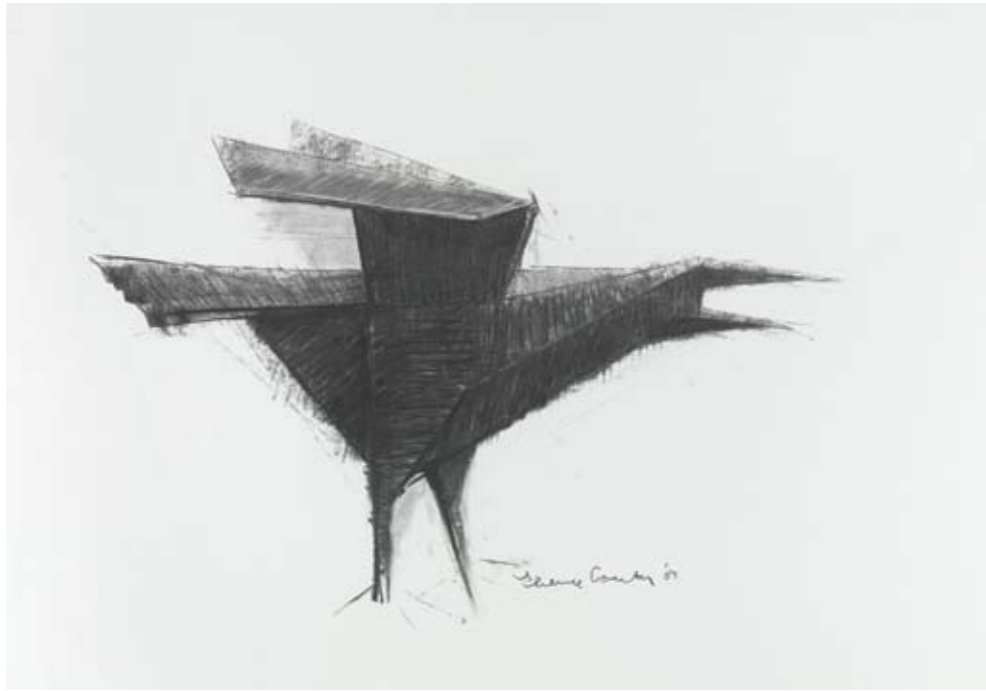




(ABOVE)  
*Study for  
Avian Form*  
Charcoal on paper  
Unique



(RIGHT)  
*Avian Form*  
Forged Steel  
Unique  
Height 38 cm



(TOP)  
*Study for  
Avian Form*  
Charcoal on paper  
Unique

(LEFT)  
*Study for Raven*  
Charcoal on paper  
Unique

(RIGHT)  
*Jackdaw*  
Sterling Silver  
Edition of 10  
Height 18.5 cm





(ABOVE)  
*Choughs*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 60 cm



(LEFT)  
*Jackdaw*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 17 cm



(RIGHT)  
*Jackdaws on  
Chimney*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 49 cm



(ABOVE)  
*Jackdaws on Ridge*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 39 cm

(RIGHT)  
*Gannet Head*  
Maquette  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 67 cm





(LEFT)  
*Monumental Avian  
Form*  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
Height 133 cm



(RIGHT)  
*Owl II*  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
Height 160 cm

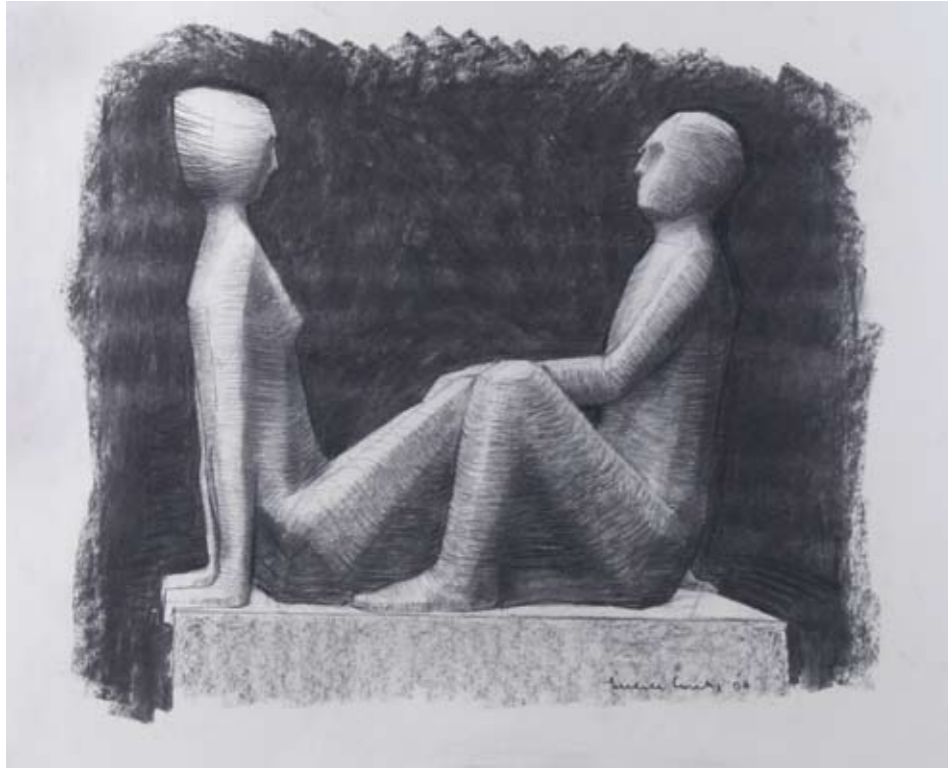




(PREVIOUS PAGE)  
*Couple I*  
Bronze  
Edition of 5  
Height 66 cm

(RIGHT)  
*Couple II Maquette*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 27 cm





(ABOVE)  
*Study for Couple I*  
Charcoal on Paper  
Unique



(RIGHT)  
*Talking Couple*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 32 cm

# NATURAL BORN SCULPTOR

John le Carré

On Christmas Day 1985, Terence Coventry, a Cornish farmer, presented his wife Win, herself a farmer's daughter, with a 5ft-long oak pig that he had secretly carved for her as a surprise. "We'd bought this second farm down the road. There was Dutch elm disease around and I had to cut down this scrubby old oak tree. Then I looked at the magnificent trunk, and I thought: let's use it, let's make something of what's there."

He is stating a maxim, perhaps a religious one: that it is our duty to create with whatever material we are given, whether the said material is our natural talent, our learnt skills, or the trunk of an oak tree, or all three. His voice is gentleman-rustic, a boarding-school boy who has taken to the land. The words come in bursts. First he loads, then he fires, then he studies his target to see the effect. With his height, his sky-blue eyes and curiously uneven posture while he stares at you, he reminds me at moments of Graham Greene. The face is puckish but hewn, the features are youthful, the quick gaze is never less than challenging. The huge hands are like frayed wicket-keeper's gloves. For 35 years, without either of us knowing it, this man and I have been approximate neighbours: I at Land's End, he on the Lizard, each of us on our separate isolated cliffs, addicted to the same Cornish sky and wild weather. West Cornwall is crawling with nearly-artists, but I had good reason to believe that Coventry was the real thing.

"Well, it's just obvious, isn't it?" he blurts, evidently concerned to dispel any hint of pretension. "I was a pig farmer, so I made her a pig!" He laughs in case he has been aggressive by mistake. Which is something else I seem to sense about him: he really isn't used to meeting people, even though these days he meets a lot of them.

Well, obvious to a point, perhaps. A pig farmer gets the urge to carve something, so what does he carve? A pig. That's obvious enough. But less obvious if the said farmer hasn't carved or drawn or painted anything at all for 25 years, having been one of the most promising young art students of his generation before storming out of the Royal College of Art in a huff in 1961. And less obvious again if he possesses a luminous artistic talent that, now out of necessity, now out of insecurity or self-denial, but perhaps also in response to some providential inner voice, he has put firmly to sleep for a quarter of a century, only to have it spring joyously awake at the sight of a fallen oak tree, and announce it's here to stay.

Less obvious, finally, when the said farmer, in thrall to this awoken talent, to this creativity deferred and now released, henceforth undertakes his own artistic re-education, devotes every spare moment to translating all the other creatures of his farmer's life into sculptural form: bulls, cows, the Cornish crows and gulls that scream and duel around him while he has spent all day on the tractor; the big, bumbly dogs that accompanied him on his hunting expeditions in the days, now past, when he still had the urge to kill.

"The last salmon I caught in the Fowey river, I looked at it and it was so beautiful I let it swim away," he says, and shoves the back of his great hand across his mouth.

When ploughing, he confesses, he also talked to dead sculptors in his mind: Michelangelo, Marini, no small fry. Not that he sees himself as a figurative sculptor, not at all, he assures me, combative again. He is a craftsman, he is an artisan, he makes things with his hands, but also with his – his what? Talent is not a word he uses. Genius would make him furious. Intellect is the nearest he will go.



(LEFT)  
*Swimmer*  
Bronze  
Edition of 10  
Height 50 cm

"And once I got back into it, I destroyed a lot of stuff," he says, lest I should suppose that, as soon as he had enjoyed his apotheosis, everything just skated along.

"He really did!" Win cheerfully confirms.

"I simply wasn't getting there. It takes years to find a definitive language. It didn't just happen like that. But once I've got the image fixed, I know I've got the skills to do the job."

The tale of Coventry's return to sculpture is the stuff of folklore in the close-knit community of sculptors and founders. It is best told by Rungwe Kingdon who, together with his partner Claude Koenig, runs Pangolin, now generally accepted to be the leading sculpture foundry in Britain, if not all Europe.

The year was 1986. Coventry was in what we may call the second stage of his reawakening. The oak pig, now one year old, was a start. But working in wood already disappointed him: "Wood's too limiting. People don't look at the sculpture, they just admire the wood." He tried using a resin mix, but it made him ill. "I was careless about the effects of the chemicals. They filled the house." I glance at Win; she is wearing a smile of sweet remembrance. "Yes, it was awful," she agrees, and the smile broadens. The answer, he decided, was to model in plaster and cast in bronze. In an outhouse that, with its home-made fish smokery and other Emmet-like devices, looks better suited to a mad inventor than an impassioned sculptor, he set to work.

Rungwe Kingdon takes up the story: "He'd called up Bristol University, who passed him on to us. Naturally we'd never heard of him. Nobody had. He said he was a sculptor and was doing his own casting, and he had a whole lot of books on it, and rubber all over the place, but the casting wasn't working out. The phone calls went on for weeks, this crazy DIY dialogue on bronze casting with a man we didn't know from Adam. We're saying do this, he's saying he's done it and it hasn't worked. So we say, do that. It wasn't very long before Claude and I said to each other: either he's barking mad or he's a genius.

"We operated a mobile foundry in those days. We'd drive the van to the artists' studios and cast their work for them on the spot. So one day, we drove all the way down to the Lizard and walked in on Terence. And what we found was this amazing natural sculptor, full of pent-up energy after the long fallow period. You just felt all the things he'd been storing up in himself. It wasn't just in his work, it was in his gestures: these huge, abused hands, I couldn't think what he'd done with them. But he could draw as well as sculpt and his work was as fine as needlepoint."

Kingdon's voice becomes as fervent as Coventry's. "I just felt there was something so genuine and original and repressed that was bursting to come out. The sculptures he was making were what he knew about. They weren't driven by what was going on in the art world, but what was going on inside Terence."

If the Pangolin foundry has since gone from strength to strength, so has Coventry. In 2000, the Chelsea Gallery gave him a one-man show. A couple of years later, he was at the Guggenheim in Venice. With each year that passes, more galleries want him, more commissions pour in. But how many years has he got? In a wooden garage under a dust sheet sits a cherished Jaguar, which he calls his "boy's toy". Like his love of local rugby football, it suggests a side to Coventry I had not anticipated. "I thought I should have it now while I'd still got time," he says.

We are in his back garden, rummaging in the flower beds for what's left of the oak pig. Two elderly Labradors are helping us. It surprises me that the pig doesn't have more of a symbolic place in Coventry's life. But then I remember how reluctant I am to look at my own early work, so I suppose he is a bit the same. There is tension between us. The first time I was here, I came as a fan. I had bought two of his pieces on sight from the Pangolin gallery without knowing anything about him, let alone that he was my neighbour. I had responded to their economy and sense of play. Perhaps I had unconsciously recognised, from my own cliff, the same raucous, swirling forms of bird, beast and cloud. Here was a sculptor who knew his characters from life, I had felt. He abstracted from them, he refined them, and he made us smile and nod and say, "That's right".

But this isn't fan-club time. Coventry is trying to decide whether he will grant me an interview, and is blowing hot and cold. Creation is about honest response, he grumbles, buying time. To ensure the honesty, anonymity is essential. A creator must be the spectator to his own existence. I ask him whether he ever thinks about who he is addressing while he creates. Does he have a secret sharer, some off-stage familiar, alive or dead, whose approval he craves?

"It's very personal," he snaps, as if warning me to back off, and the next moment he is telling me the story of his life. Six years at boarding school and hated every day and night of it. Staff and boys alike were sadists. The arts weren't valued. Hopeless at maths, all he wanted to do was paint and draw. By 15, he'd learnt to be self-sufficient. At Stourbridge Art School there was this inspirational sculpture teacher called Keith Leonard. When Leonard left to work as Barbara Hepworth's assistant, Coventry had no one to teach him sculpture, which was why he had to choose painting to get into the Royal College of Art.

When he tried to get a toe in the sculpture department, they told him to get out. Painters were the lowest form of human life, they said. So he got out, all the way, did his National Service and went to Hartland in Devon, which was where he met this beautiful farmer's daughter: Win.

They started their farm with two acres and four little pigs and built it up to 250 acres and a flourishing pig farm with eight people working for them. It was more than hard work. It was absolute endurance, he insists, in another burst of ferocity. Luxury in the early days was a packet of fish fingers and tomato sauce, period.

We have found the oak pig. It lies half-hidden in a hydrangea bush. But Coventry is talking about *Avian Form* which, oddly enough, is one of the two pieces I bought from Pangolin before I knew him. It is *Avian Form* apparently, not the oak pig, that marks his renaissance:

"I'd made it, I called Win into the room, and I said, 'I've just made a sculpture!'" He is laughing wonderfully. "Now, every time I make a sculpture, I drag the poor woman out to look at it and she says nice things." He stops and ruminates. "I've never had an opportunity to feed off an audience," he adds.

Then he tells me about a gallery owner who, before Pangolin found him, had turned him down on the grounds that he was too old to be showcased. He was 48.

"I felt totally hopeless, deflated. It made me feel that my work was all that mattered. At least my work would survive me. Not many people have an opportunity to leave a legacy, do they?"

And yes, on reflection, he'd like to do the interview. It was time. He was ready for the spotlight, ready to accept the consequences of intrusion. As a matter of fact, quite a lot of people dropped in unannounced these days because they'd heard about his sculpture park out there on the cliff.

The oak pig lay on its side, rotting. In death, it remained curiously true to reality. The contours were still beautiful, tenderly nurtured by those gigantic hands. Wood or not, you couldn't help looking at the form. But call at Coventry's house today and ask to see the pig, and you will ask in vain. The Coventrys have consigned it to the happier pigsty in the sky. Why they did that is their secret. Perhaps they reasoned that its job was done. Terence had no wish, perhaps, to be saddled with an icon he no longer respected. Better that we wander the cliff-side meadows of his sculpture park overlooking Coverack Bay, and see for ourselves the magical creations that, over the past 25 years, have flowed from such an unlikely new beginning.

Introduction © David Cornwell 2009  
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Polly Bielecka  
Pangolin London

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