

TERENCE COVENTRY
BIRDS AND BEASTS



FOREWORD



Angry Goose in
Coventry's studio, 2014

It was at his first solo show at Pangolin London in Kings Place that I first encountered Terence Coventry's sculpture. The forms seemed so familiar and yet refreshingly foreign, bursting with an infectious vitality. There were mischievous little jackdaws peering down chimneys, heads tilted with curiosity. There were handsome hounds, standing proud and alert; we're allowed to catch a glimpse just as their attention is keenly focused ahead, they're poised to bolt. There was a hog on its back! With utter abandon and apparently with great vigour it was scratching its back and it is one of the most wildly joyous things I can imagine. There was a couple; a man and a woman sitting on the ground facing each other, knees almost touching, his hand resting comfortably, casually on her knee. It is a tender moment. As I walked around them, every perspective revealed another piece of their puzzle, something more about their story: compassion, confidence, togetherness. All of the bronze and steel forms have a powerful sense of movement that held my attention and drew me into their stories.

I first met Terence Coventry in 2010 at his home in Cornwall. My work as a documentary filmmaker provided me with an opportunity to spend some time with him and an excuse to be nosey. He humoured me as I circled around him while he worked. He laughed at me a little as I followed him with my camera, around fields and over cliffs, whilst he fed the chickens and walked the dogs.

Terence was born in Birmingham in 1938 and from a young age showed promise as a painter, eventually winning a place at the Royal College of Art. After only a couple of weeks at the college, his desire to make sculpture compelled him to investigate the sculpture department but it was immediately clear that painters were not welcome. This provoked the determined and fiercely independent Terence to withdraw from the RCA in protest. Vowing to "put the art thing behind him", he began his National Service instead. It was while he was with the RAF, posted to Hartland Point in north Devon that Terence met his wife, Win.

Win and Terence settled in Coverack, West Cornwall in 1962 and set out to build a future together. Times were tough and money was tight but they saw potential in pig farming and over time built a very successful business.

Although ostensibly unrelated to art, farming provided an outlet for his creative urges. Economics meant that if something was broken it was mended instead of replaced. And "pigs are destructive creatures" so there was plenty of need to build structures like sheds and fences.

Inspiration was everywhere. Farming gave Terence endless opportunities to observe the natural world and interact with it and over the years he felt himself becoming more aware; he looked closely, thought carefully and listened to his own instincts. This would eventually inform the language of his sculpture which he concentrated on once he retired from farming in the 1990's.



There is a bright sunny room at the back of the house where Terence draws. It is a hive of quiet activity. There are paintings in frames and some sculpture nestled in corners or perched on surfaces around the place. Large pieces of paper and small scraps are given equal billing on tables and easels, on chairs and in drawers. Some are quick loose sketches that betray movement and atmosphere. Others are more precise drafts with notes about angles and lines and measurements, like an equation being worked through. It is here that Terence begins to process the logic of his sculptures. It is all about “problem solving”. Out of the window and across the lawn you can just about see the farm workshop.

In his workshop Terence solves the problems with his hands and a degree of stubbornness. I follow him through the door but Terence doesn’t hang around - he gets straight to work with a welding torch. It is a large, functional space and I get the impression that he doesn’t usually have visitors in here. He wrestles with a bird form made from large sheets of steel, spinning it around with force and urgency, almost irritation. There is something about “the space between” two flat planes that he thinks is not right; how the angles open and compress space, how the lines relate, doesn’t quite satisfy him. He seems too distracted by this to talk about it. Eventually, when he thinks that it might be “right” he’ll ask Win to come in and have a look.

Dotted around the immediate landscape, positioned near gates and between trees, along paths and around the field that lies between the house and the coastal slope of Mears Cove are sculptures that map Terence’s innate desire to sculpt. He is present in these forms; they expose something of what he feels.

(ABOVE)
Verso
1998, Bronze
Edition of 5
89 cm high



(ABOVE LEFT)
Two Swifts on a Pole
(detail), 2013
Powdercoated steel
Unique
236 cm high



(ABOVE RIGHT)
Corten Owl II
2013, Corten steel
Unique
77 cm high

And to experience his sculpture outside in this way, in the place that it is made, is to understand how important it is for Terence to be outside – not only close to the elements but also outside in the sense that his sculptural sensibility has grown and evolved quite apart from the art establishment, unmediated by any flimsy fashion.

In the past year, a number of new forms have found their place in Coverack. A small owl sits comfortably and self-assured, alert to the landscape and very much a part of it. It continues in the language of formal lines and flat planes that Terence has developed to express avian forms. The surface appears to be rusting but in fact it isn’t – the Corten steel constantly renews itself by oxidizing. This material is inherently “difficult to control” but Terence enjoys the “surprises”: “sometimes what nature does is wonderful, beyond what I could do”. The form will survive for years but the surface will constantly change. His work is fundamentally engaged with the landscape of this coastline; it is a dialogue between him and the elements. He has initiated a conversation that will forever open up new chapters in that owl’s story.

Now this owl and other new work will make the journey to London to take its place in his fourth solo show at Pangolin London. Terence has a striking new vocabulary on display: with soft curves and gently scooping surfaces, there is a break away from his language of flat planes and strict angles. The feeling is less formal, more serene. “I can remember last May or June lying on the lawn watching these swifts crossing over and I thought ‘I must remember this!’” and it was this feeling that gave Terence the “opportunity to make curved things”.



Two Gulls
2014, Powdercoated steel
Unique
94 cm high

Terence is inclined to explore the possibility of new ideas in series and it is a great joy to see various collections of swifts in the Pangolin gallery. They elegantly swirl around one another, supple wings stretched wide. The rhythm of the line and the space between the figures leads the eye on a journey around the group and allows the imagination to sense the joy of that moment on the lawn in the early summer of last year.

Terence is also using a new sort of mark on the surface of these swifts. His bronze forms are pleasingly tactile - their surfaces, textured with swirls and scratches, convey movement within the form and emphasise the hand that made them. Now he has brought that tactile sensibility to his work in steel: delicate marks made with a hammer give the birds a subtle but palpable vivacity.

To look at these forms is to catch a glimpse of what Terence feels about these birds and beasts. It is not idealised but profoundly sincere. It tells a story of relationships. He knows these birds and beasts from life.

LINDSAY POULTON

FURTHER READING

Terence Coventry: Hands On, Essay by Tom Flynn, Gallery Pangolin, 2012

Terence Coventry: New Work, Includes interview with the artist, Pangolin London, 2011

Terence Coventry, Sculpture: Prints and Drawings, Essay by Rungwe Kingdon, Pangolin London, 2009. Includes article *Natural Born Sculptor* by John Le Carré

Natural Born Sculptor by John Le Carré, *The Times*, 07.04.2007

Terence Coventry, Introduction by Peter Harris, Gallery Pangolin, 2006

CATALOGUE





(LEFT)
Angry Goose
 2014, Powdercoated steel
 Unique
 145 cm high



(RIGHT)
Angry Goose
 2014, Charcoal on paper
 Unique

Boar II Monumental (detail)
1999, Bronze
Edition of 5
100 cm high





Verso II
Charcoal on paper
Unique



Boar II Monumental
1999, Bronze
Edition of 5
100 cm high



Woman Releasing Bird (detail)
2014, Bronze
Edition of 10
63.5 cm high



(LEFT)
Man Releasing Bird
 2014, Bronze
 Edition of 10
 85 cm high



(RIGHT & FAR RIGHT)
Woman Releasing Bird
 2014, Bronze
 Edition of 10
 63.5 cm high

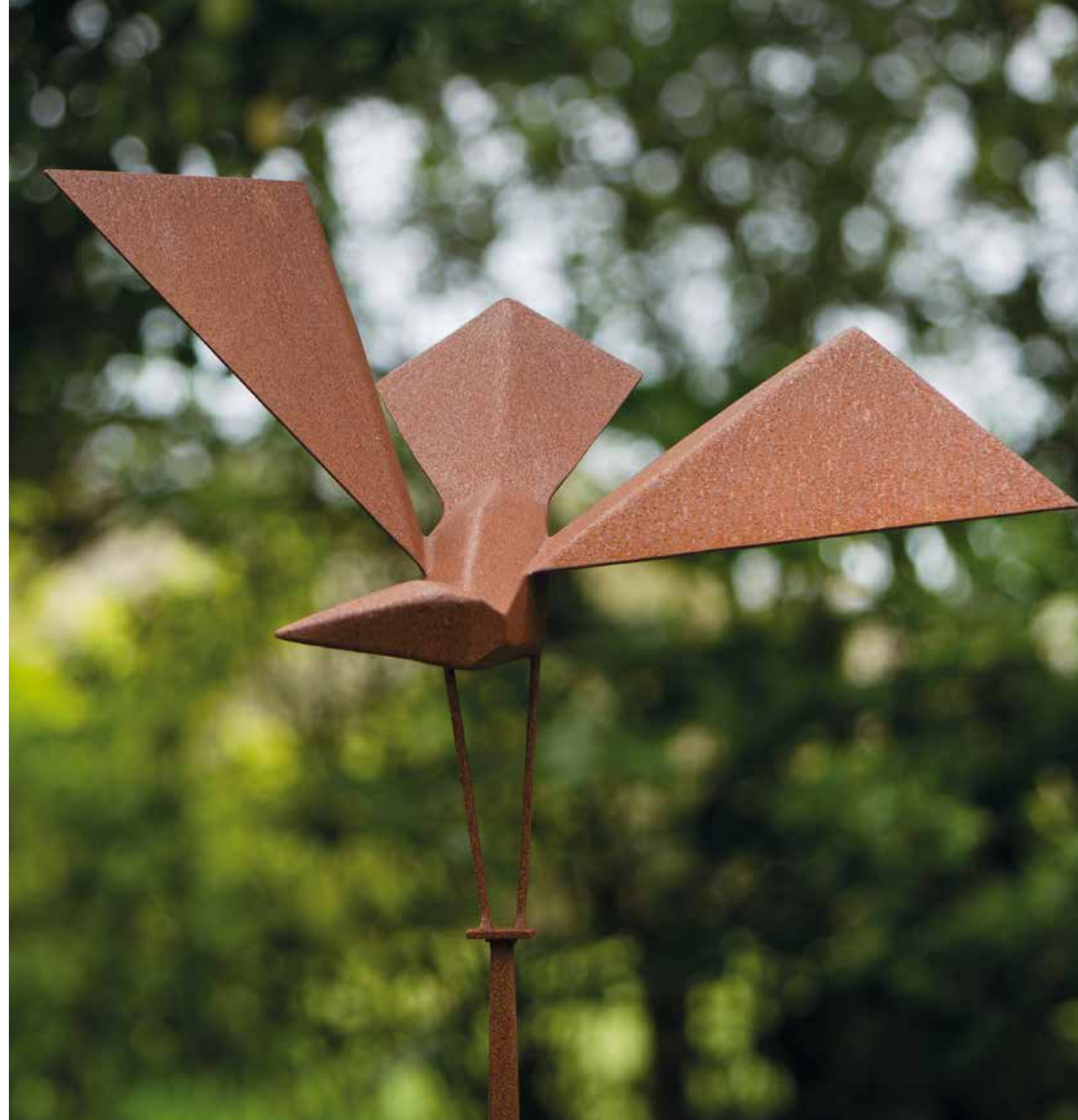


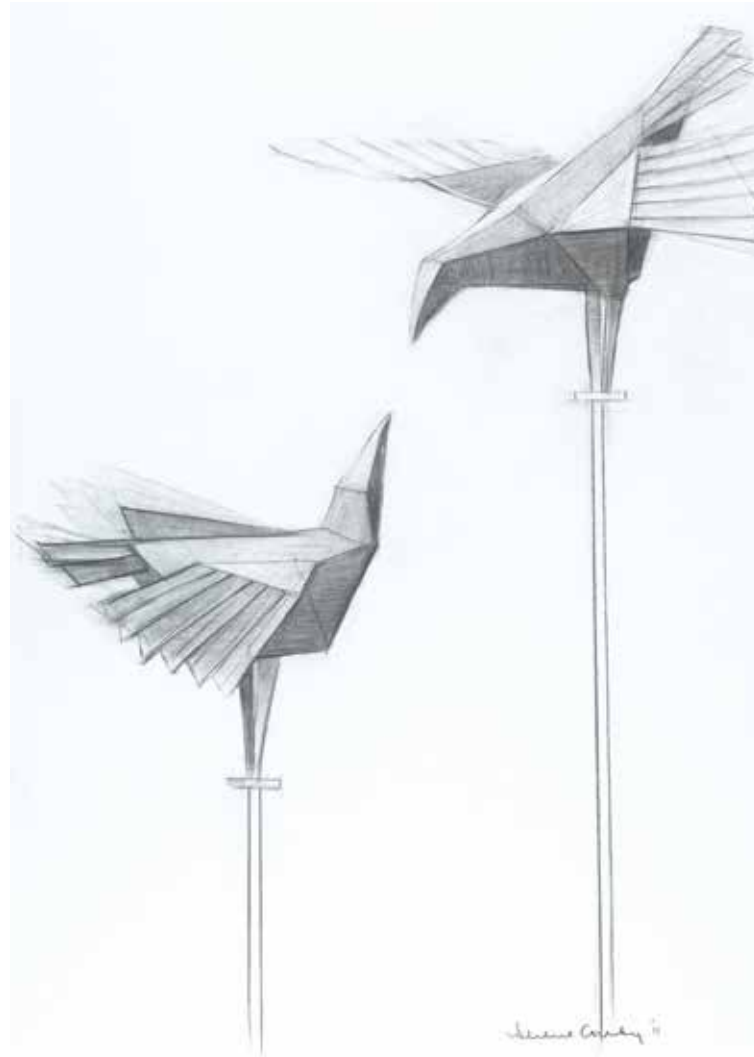
(LEFT)
Woman Releasing Bird
 2013, Charcoal on paper
 Unique

(RIGHT)
Man Releasing Bird
 2010, Bronze
 Edition of 10
 54 cm high



Alighting Bird II
2013, Corten steel
Unique
102 cm high





(LEFT)
Two Birds
 2011, Charcoal on paper
 Unique

(RIGHT)
Tree of Jackdaws
 2010, Bronze
 Edition of 10
 75.5 cm high





*Two Winged Forms
(Mother and Child)*
2013, Bronze plate
Unique
58 cm high



Swifts I
2013, Charcoal on paper
Unique



Swifts I
2013, Bronze
Unique
76 cm high



Two Swifts on a Pole
2013, Powdercoated steel
Unique
235 cm high

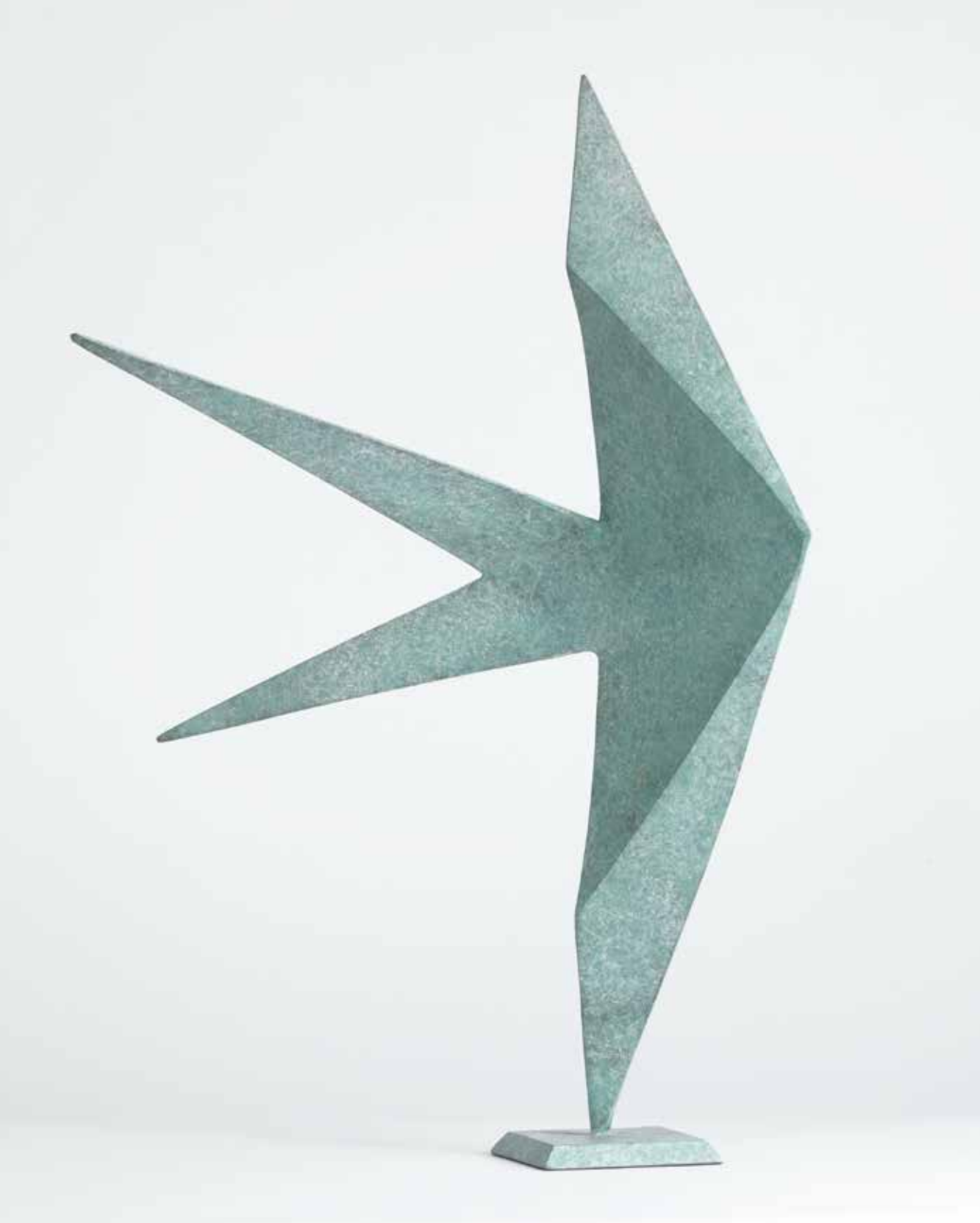




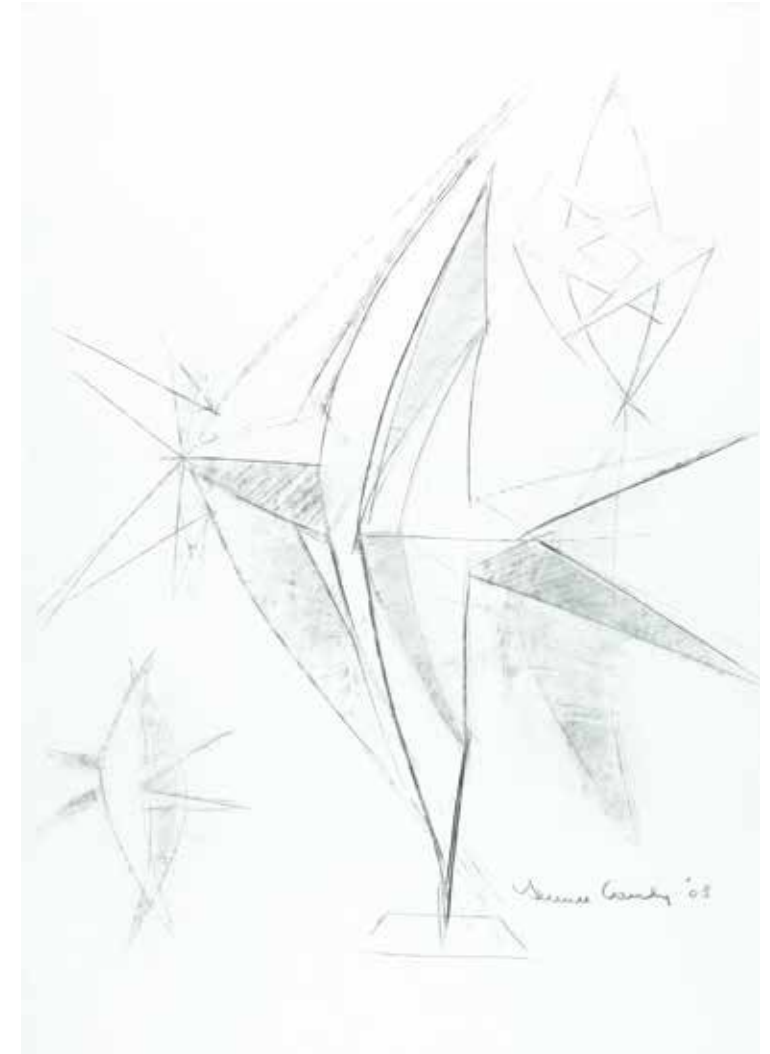
(LEFT)
Corten Winged Forms
 2012, Corten steel
 Unique
 227 cm high
 On view at Coverack
 Sculpture Park



(RIGHT)
Winged Forms VI
 2013, Bronze plate
 Unique
 79.5 cm high



(LEFT)
Swallow Form
 2010, Bronze
 Edition of 10
 45 cm high



(RIGHT)
Study for Swallow Form
 2008, Charcoal on paper
 Unique

Monumental Gannet Head
2010, Bronze
Edition of 5
205 cm high





(LEFT)
Avian Form VI
 2009, Bronze
 Edition of 10
 32.5 cm high



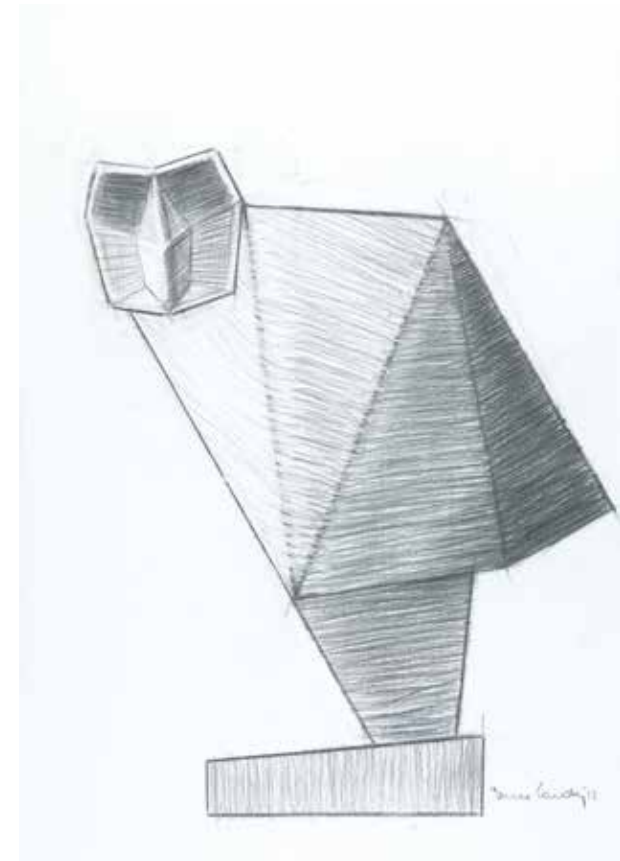
(RIGHT)
Silver Avian I
 2014, Sterling silver
 Edition of 20
 6 cm high

Silver Avian II
2014, Sterling silver
Edition of 20
7 cm high





(LEFT)
Corten Owl II
 2013, Corten steel
 Unique
 77 cm high



(RIGHT)
Owl
 2013, Charcoal on paper
 Unique



(LEFT)
Small Standing Dog
 2011, Charcoal on paper
 Unique



(RIGHT)
Sitting Hound
 2000, Bronze
 Edition of 7
 75 cm high



(FAR RIGHT)
Hounds
 Photographic print
 on watercolour paper
 Edition of 30



(LEFT)
Lying Hound
 2003, Bronze
 Edition of 7
 52 cm high

(RIGHT)
Corten Hound
 2013, Corten steel
 Unique
 79 cm high
 On view at
 Coverack
 Sculpture Park





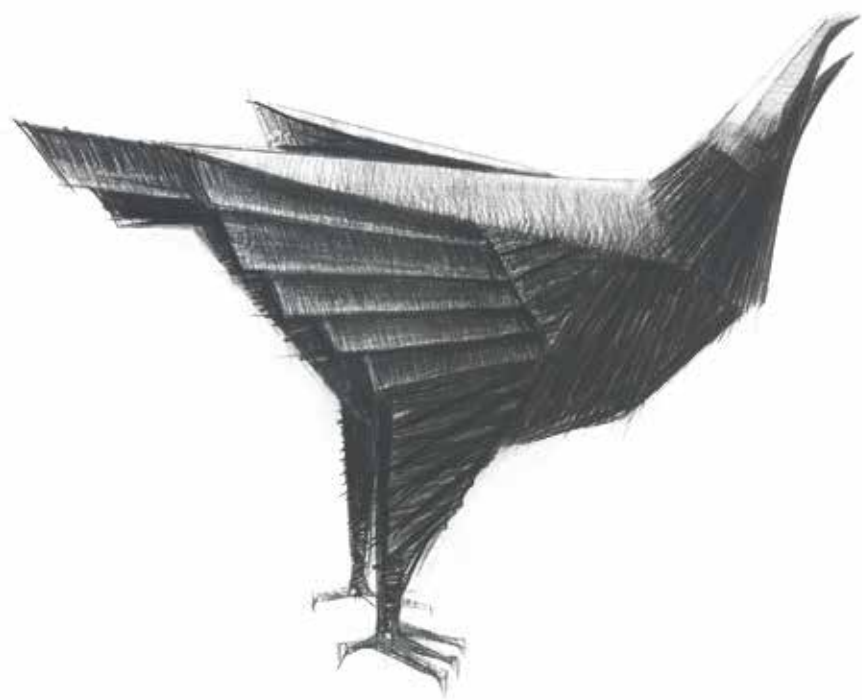
Study for Bird Alighting
2013, Charcoal on paper
Unique



Jackdaw
2008, Sterling Silver
Edition of 10
18.5 cm high



Jackdaws on Chimney
2006, Bronze and
stainless steel
Edition of 10
50 cm high



Raven
2011, Charcoal on paper
Unique



Jackdaws on Ridge
2005, Bronze and
stainless steel
Edition of 10
40 cm high

New Riders (detail)
2007, Bronze
Edition of 10
64 cm high





(LEFT)
New Riders
 2007, Bronze
 Edition of 10
 64 cm high

(RIGHT)
Joyrider II
 2008, Bronze
 Edition of 10
 53 cm high





Steel Cormorant
2014, Forged steel
Unique
48.5 cm high



Steel Pelican II
2012, Steel
Unique
237 cm high
On view at Coverack
Sculpture Park

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pangolin London would like to thank a number of people for their help in bringing this exhibition and catalogue to fruition. Firstly to Terence for his unwavering dedication to making new work and to Win Coventry for all her support. To Lindsay Poulton for a fresh and insightful introduction, to Pangolin Editions and Gallery Pangolin for their support in bringing this exhibition together and finally to Steve Russell for his masterful photography.



Published to accompany the exhibition:

Terence Coventry: Birds and Beasts

28 May - 28 June 2014

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Kings Place

90 York Way

London N1 9AG

T: 020 7520 1480

W: www.pangolinlondon.com

Printed in Century Gothic and Corbel

Designed by Pangolin London

Printed by Healeys Printers

Photography by Steve Russell

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(ABOVE) *Self-Portrait*, Charcoal on paper, Unique