

TERENCE COVENTRY



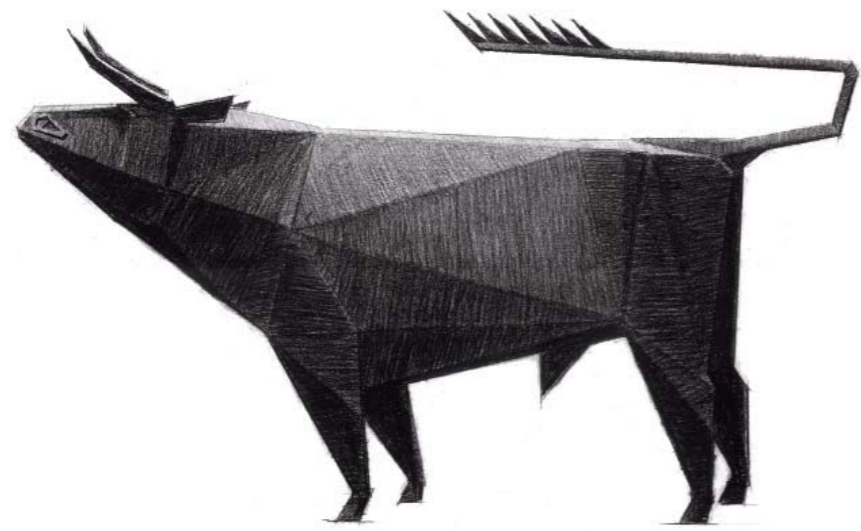


The principle that I work by in my studio is very simple; there's either a rightness or a wrongness to it and if I don't feel comfortable with what I'm doing then I have to have the courage to hack into it to find the rightness again.

TERENCE COVENTRY
March 2011



Monumental Steel Bull
Powdercoated steel
Unique
244 cm high, 410 cm long



(ABOVE)
Bull
Photographic print
on watercolour
paper
Edition of 30



(RIGHT)
*Monumental Steel
Bull (detail)*
Powdercoated steel
Unique
410 cm long



Woman with Bull II
Forged steel
Unique
73.5 cm long

Man Releasing Bird
Bronze
Edition of 10
54 cm high





(LEFT)
Man Releasing Bird
(detail)
Bronze
Edition of 10
54 cm high



(ABOVE)
*Woman with
Outstretched Arms*
Forged Steel
Unique
28.5 cm high

Monumental Steel
Cormorant II
Powdercoated steel
Unique
125 cm high







(ABOVE)
Cormorant II
Bronze
Edition of 10
48 cm long



(RIGHT)
*Monumental Steel
Cormorant I*
Powdercoated steel
Unique
145 cm high



Cormorant I
Bronze
Edition of 10
46 cm high

Displaying Blackbird
Powdercoated steel
Unique
119 cm high





(LEFT)
Steel Bird VI
Powdercoated steel
Unique
258 cm high



(ABOVE)
Steel Bird VIII
Powdercoated steel
Unique
258 cm high

Tree of Jackdaws
Bronze
Edition of 10
75.5 cm high



Couple III
Bronze
Edition of 10
54 cm long





(LEFT)
Woman on a Bench
Bronze
Edition of 10
28.5 cm high



(ABOVE)
Couple III
Bronze
Edition of 10
54 cm long

*Monumental
Balanced Man*
Plaster for Bronze
Edition of 5
Approx 245 cm high





(ABOVE)
Steel Rider
Forged Steel
Unique
50 cm high



(RIGHT)
Balanced Man Maquette
Bronze
Edition of 10
46 cm high



Seated Woman
Bronze
Edition of 5
71 cm high



Crouching Figure
Bronze
Edition of 20
8 cm high



Steel Bird VII
Powdercoated steel
Unique
130 cm wide



(ABOVE)
Steel Bird VII
Powdercoated steel
Unique
130 cm wide



(RIGHT)
Three Birds Circling
(work in progress)
Powdercoated steel
Unique
206 cm high



*Monumental
Gannet Head*
Bronze
Edition of 5
205 cm high



(LEFT)
Rook
Bronze
Edition of 10
34 cm high



(ABOVE)
Hounds
Photographic print
on watercolour paper
Edition of 30

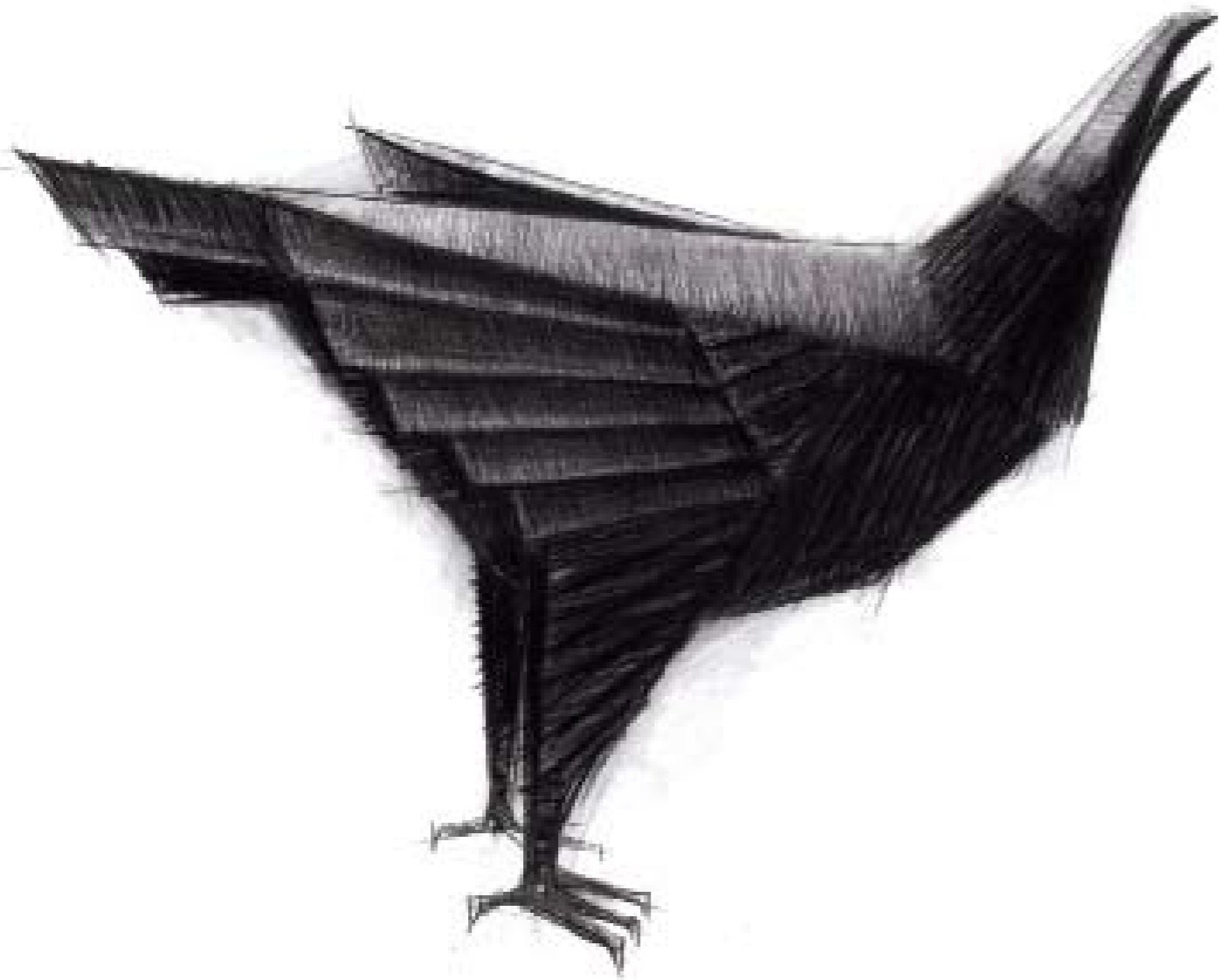
Monumental Rook
Bronze
Edition of 5
180 cm high





Steel Avian Form
Forged Steel
Unique
51 cm high







(PREVIOUS PAGE)
Ravens
Photographic print
on watercolour paper
Edition of 30

(ABOVE)
Swallow Form
Bronze
Edition of 10
45 cm high

(RIGHT)
Steel Bird IX
Powdercoated steel
Unique
200 cm high



Monumental
Steel Avian Form
Powdercoated steel
Unique
185 cm high





Steel Bird V
Powdercoated steel
Unique
108 cm wide

TERENCE COVENTRY

IN CONVERSATION WITH RUNGWE KINGDON & POLLY BIELECKA
MARCH 2011

PB: We are delighted to have your largest steel work *Monumental Steel Bull* at the gallery for your second London solo show. Can you tell me how it came about?

TC: The starting point for my interest in the bull as a subject was partially because there were bulls actually out there in the surrounding fields. Our neighbouring dairy farmers would run what they called a 'catch bull' for any cows that were still to be served or had been missed out by artificial insemination. Those bulls were powerful animals bursting with energy, power and hormones and I wanted to express the obvious male thrust in that animal in a vital image.

When I was making the work I got the most amazing reactions from people who saw it in its untreated form in my workshop. Ofcourse it looks big now but in my small workshop it was a huge construction in a tiny, contained space. I wasn't aware of the reaction it could provoke as I was so involved in the making and was concentrating more on solving the problem of how to bring those next two metal plates together. You've no idea some of the contraptions I had to make, talk about Leonardo da Vinci! I had bits of rope and wood for levers to try and make steel plate do what it didn't want to do and huge great clamps that would suddenly decide that they didn't want to be clamps anymore but they wanted to be something that whizzed across the workshop and whacked into the other side with the pressure I'd put them under! It was a real challenge but my god it was interesting.

The other inspiration for the bull was the way Picasso treated bulls as a ferocious image. I found he was entirely at home with expressing the way bulls moved in bull rings and it opened a door for me and gave me a freedom to use my manner of working to express what I feel about bulls not just being heroic but being everything.

PB: The exhibition includes quite a number of new steel pieces. When you're starting a work is there a conscious decision to differentiate between the bronze and steel and what is the essential difference?

TC: Well the essential difference is that the bigger the steel piece is, the thicker the steel plate. If the steel plate gets up to over a quarter of an inch thick then you've got one hell of a job to manipulate it so you have to think about the bigger pieces in more minimal terms and I have to consider what is the most I can do with this metal?

A lot of what I do is about solving problems and the more knowledge you have of how you solved the previous problems the more you can apply them to the next ones. With steel in particular its about being conscious of what the practical possibilities are so that you can try and treat the medium with some sort of respect. Plaster is much more organic, you can manipulate it and make curves, whereas steel is more restrictive and its very hard to make it bend so there is an inherent discipline to it. To counter this rigidity, I try to introduce a subtlety of message into the work that gives the viewers eyes a journey through the piece and if you look carefully at the construction of many of the steel works the key lines are constructed to be moving forward. I don't expect the viewer to be aware of that but I feel very satisfied to get a subliminal structure, even on the plaster works, that leads the eye forward.

PB: Is that where the surface texture of your original plasters also takes on an importance?

TC: Yes. Certainly the surface texture on the plasters is not haphazard. The way the surface texture is manipulated is definitely deliberate and through experience I've learnt that I can alter the viewer's perception of the form by the way that texture is applied. I can accentuate or flatten out a form by its texture and I spend as much time on the final surface texture of a plaster work as I do on the making - it's a very deliberate process and it's very important to me personally. I've got no idea how important it is to the viewer but I'm not concerned with that. I'm concerned with my response to what I'm doing and how satisfied I am with it.

PB: You've mentioned in the past a few of the sculptors you admire such as Picasso and Michelangelo but I understand Marino Marini was also a strong influence. What is it about modern sculptors of that time that particularly inspires you?

TC: I thought the early twentieth century was a golden time for sculpture. Epstein broke the mould to me and his images were so incredibly vital and arresting when I was a student that I became very interested in finding out all I could about the way he worked. The greats, the admired people in my student days were mainly the Post War sculptors and particularly the 'Geometry of Fear' artists – I found that concept interesting. Of that bunch I was most appreciative of Lynn Chadwick's work from the 50s to the late 60s. That was a period which to me Chadwick could do no wrong.

I was also fascinated by Marino Marini and I visit the Marini Museum in Florence whenever I can. Generally there are only two or three people in there which I find extraordinary considering there are two mile queues to see the Renaissance art which most of us don't really understand or have the time to look at. In any case, when I go into the Marini Museum the hair stands up on the back of my neck he's saying something so direct to me. I think it's the way he manipulates form and the innocent way he treats the human head, it's so minimal yet so expressive, it's magic, how does he do that?! In one of the side chapels there is a horse in its final death throes, the figure is falling down off its back and it's just gobsmacking it really is. Marini's treatment of form is completely different to mine, it's much more organic but his language is very accessible to me and I have a huge appreciation of how he treats it. Manzu's treatment of the human form was also admirable and particularly with the earlier stuff, the weight that he gets into the form and his treatment is really impressive.

Keith Leonard was my tutor at Stourbridge art school - he was an incredibly gifted artist. Side by side we used to work together out of hours and his encouragement and his way of quietly opening my eyes to the possibilities of manipulating space was amazing. I can remember when I was in my first year of art school we had to do a lettering class which at the age of 16 didn't sound very exciting! I went in there groaning and Keith Leonard was the tutor. There were only about six of us on the course and he showed us pictures of the lettering on Trajan's Column. It was just like a door opening. I don't know whether the others got it but Keith made me realise the vitality of the letters marching round this column and how they were subtly weighted at the leading edge so that they appeared to be moving forward. It's incredibly beautiful when someone opens an extra door to you and explains what's unique about it. That was one of those earth moving days.

PB: Were doors opened for you in the same way at the Royal College of Art?

TC: Not for me unfortunately, no. Keith Leonard left the year before I applied to the Royal College of Art to work for Barbara Hepworth and that finished the sculpture

department at Stourbridge. My tutors told me to be realistic and apply as a painter and then change when I got there. I was accepted and got dreadful digs in Notting Hill Gate with another friend from Stourbridge. I was in the painting school for a few weeks when I thought well now's the time to go and have a look around the sculpture department. I probably spent two weeks there before I was discovered but unfortunately they wouldn't let me transfer courses. I went back to the painting side and was there for a bit longer but I'd got no interest at all. I knew I had to do my National Service so I thought I might as well get it done and within two or three weeks I was an Aircraftsman Three on twenty four shillings a week and that was when I met my wife Win.

I was based at a small RAF camp not far from Win so it was through her family that I got back into farming. Farming, it sounds ridiculous, but farming is not that dissimilar to making sculpture because you actually make a hell of a lot of things. It sounds stupid to say that when you're ploughing a field you're making sculpture but you're moving hundreds of tons of earth - eat your heart out you installationists! I was doing it on a big, big scale 30 acres at a time and perhaps moving a thousand tons of earth so to see the lines that the plough was making through it was fantastic. At the same time of course these huge flocks of birds would come in and if a plough hit a stone and jumped out of the ground I'd be so interested in the birds reactions that I'd be gunning along and the plough would be up in the bloody air because I was looking at the birds! You had a unique vantage point from the tractor cab because the birds had no fear of it at all, so being so close to them I became acutely aware of their beauty.

PB: Was it through farming that you also learnt to weld?

TC: Well it was certainly more a matter of having to learn than wanting to. Pigs are the most destructive animals and would break anything that they possibly could. There was no way that we could afford to have outside craftsmen coming in so I bought an old Oxford welder in a sale. I had no idea how to use it and used to stick the rods in and make an awful mess of it. Fortunately, I had a blacksmith who I was quite friendly with who kindly spent about an hour just showing me the rudiments and it went from there. After that I spent a lot of time in the workshop and became interested in the different methods of welding and of course that served me very well when I went back to sculpture because the first requirement of a piece of sculpture is to make it stand up and a lot of sculptors have great difficulty in doing that.

PB: The figure seems to have an increasing presence in your work – is that due to an improved confidence?

TC: When I initially found my language I found it much easier to make animalia or bird forms by simplifying them and working in a more linear way than I did with the human form. I found it much more difficult to treat the human form in the same way and made several attempts which I thought were totally unsatisfactory. The turning point was thanks to Michelangelo's 'The Dying Slave' which I have a small copy of. I took it into my workshop and tried to translate it using the same treatment of form that I'd been using with animals. It was never cast or actually finished but somehow it unlocked something and I became much more able to deal with the human form.

I have a habit of working in series so if I zero in on a subject matter I'll often need to work it out in a series of two, three or even four versions in different sizes and then I'll move onto something else. I suppose I'm very restless - always looking. I spend a lot of time walking the dogs and we live in a beautiful place here, right on the edge of the cliffs. When I'm walking I'll often stumble over something stupid because I'm looking at birds and taking the things in that you see naturally but observing them more precisely.

Like the way a bird comes out of a gliding stance into using thermals and that transition. When gulls and ravens do it, you see them glide down on the thermals in a long straight glide and then they'll go into a spiral its just magical - you've got to wish you were up there with them. At this time of year the buzzards are mating and doing these display flights where they're just spiralling and spiralling and spiralling and they go so high that you can't actually see them, they just vanish. It's the way that those airborne forms can relate to each other and open out that I find so fascinating. With ravens you see how they interact with each other and the way they respond in the perched attitudes, the way they tilt and acknowledge each other sometimes in threat stances, its fascinating and its all going into my work somehow.

RK: It seems to me that recently there's been more of a progression towards making units, dialogues and relationships and that your images of masculinity and virility often now have a female element introduced. I wondered how important the idea of relationship has been to the work?

TC: That's absolutely true, I'm very interested in the reaction of one piece to another but I'm actually more interested in the manipulation of the space between them. Often when I relate a human figure to an animal I introduce an element of fun. I don't think it always has to be Poe-faced – its more a case of just trying to express exhilaration, the joy and vitality of life. I don't think it devalues it does it? In the *Woman with Bull* series I like the fact that the figure is part of the bull but also separate and I like to be able to move the figure around the bull to experiment with it being passive or reactive.

PB: Since your last show you've been to hospital and undergone a number of serious operations. Has this experience made you more acutely aware of vitalism and life and has that had an impact on your recent work ?

TB: The experience certainly made me realize to my horror that I wasn't immortal and that there was going to be an end at some time so I had better jolly well get on with it and cram it all in! As you get on, life becomes a much more fragile possibility so if you've got something to say you need to say it. There's no doubt that I'm much more aware of my own mortality and that the standard that I set myself will perhaps decrease due to my physical ability so I have a dread and fear of that. I also worry that like many other artists I've seen I'll start going through the motions rather than creating but I just hope my friends will have the courage to say to me perhaps you should read a book instead!



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