JON BUCK TIME OF OUR LIVES



Tocsin 2018, Bronze Edition of 10 75 x 45.5 x 32 cm

JON BUCK: LIFE-BOATS

e are anxious these days about what it means to capture something: we worry about representation, about ownership, about appropriation. Having our hand in things seems to have wrecked the world for the rest of life. Having, one way or another, caged our planet, we now feel ourselves a species adrift – we have become unnatural in nature.

What is left, then, for an artist to do - anavowed maker of things, a haptic human or capture-junkie? Jon Buck's new art engages with these challenges by making objects that ask questions about their making and their meaning. He has a series of bronze sculptures that are beautiful but which don't allow their beauty to be the end of them. They are also useful and they are also troubling. Here are preserving vessels, a jar to catch tears in, an ark, a seed bank for bad weather ahead, and bells to toll for all but also to navigate by. The wonder of these assorted domesday chariots is how noisy they look. They are annotated all over with jostle and clamour, with kingdoms of voices and of signatures. Their surface is what they are all about: nothing is going silently to its end and, since we're all in this together, we must sing too.

Within moments of meeting Jon for the first time we were talking about water. We stood at a window at Pangolin Editions – the foundry and gallery that have cast his new work and are showing it in two exhibitions in 2019 – and looked out over the fast flowing shallows of the River Frome. I'd seen a muscled trout butting into the current as I got out of my car and Jon reported dippers and grey wagtails, birds that endorse clean and quick water, and there are otters too. The industrial works that darkly veined these otherwise rural valleys of Gloucestershire came here for the water and they fouled it for a hundred years or more as they laboured. Along with Pangolin, other contemporary concerns, similarly clean and pollutionconscious, have occupied the old sites. And today art is being made there that tells a comparable story of ruination and of possible recovery.

lon grew up on the banks of muddier waters – the River Avon, which having fashioned Bristol leaves the city for the Severn Estuary via the great limestone gash of the Gorge. The Avon is tidal between the Severn and Bristol, and the Bucks lived between the rocks and the water, on the south side of the brown river that has run forever thick with West Country runoff. The whole of the Severn Estuary and its contributing rivers amounts to one perpetually unresolved debate between shore and sea, between salt-water and mud-slide, between the full and the empty, between the wild and the managed, between safety and threat, between home and away.

There are eight generations of river pilots in Jon's family: men who went aboard ships in the Severn or the Bristol Channel to guide them into port. His was the first generation to break with the family



Jon Buck in his studio, March 2019

tradition. It was good business but it was also a humane calling. Very few of us can walk on water and making landfall is still the goal for all.

With something like this in mind, Jon has been building arks for some time. He dates his new work that we see in these two shows back to 2015 but in many ways his whole life has prepared him for it. One three-dimensional example of this is a sculpture he made in 1988 of nature's first pilot – a head of Noah capped by a magnificent raven. More recently, the sometime riverside boy came to boat building as something like an emergency measure, in the stark light of a global catastrophe that too many of us are still in the dark about: life is grievously wounded and all of it is under threat. The scale of the calamity is so large that we cannot see it, although it is right there in front of us, like a last elephant in the room that is our world. Species extinctions, ecosystem collapse, habitat loss, climate crisis – the words blot out the sun, drown the moon, screw up the seas, and parch the land.

What can anyone do against them? And, what can one artist add to the world so that we might better feel these woes, so that we might mend them?

Jon has been alive to the natural world around him all his life. He told me that he remembers, as a child, standing in the fields at Ham Green on the Avon: "Just standing and taking it in." Later he came across the phrase 'to commune with nature' and he realised he knew what it meant and that it

was something he'd long been busy with. Before he became a sculptor, he worked for a time as the Keeper of Birds at Bristol Zoo. He didn't like the title or what it implied but we should remember it. Sometimes he was called away from the zoo to attend to lost and injured birds that people had come across. He once rescued a little auk - a seabird of the Arctic Ocean – that had inadvertently pitched up in the middle of Bristol. He did for it what he could. And he still communes to this day. Nowadays, he knows the otters that have come back to the Frome; but he also knows of the birds that are not at Ham Green on the Avon any longer – he feels and registers what has been called the great thinning of nature.

Two series of sculptures from Jon's recent work explicitly address the anthropocene – this new era that we have created whereby our actions are determining how life goes and will go for the rest of our planet. These sculptures make thoughtful play around two ancient practical objects that have also long



been used to signify where and how we are in the world. There are bells and there are boats – more specifically, there are warning tocsins and there are rescue vessels: bronzes made in the shape of slightly flattened Chinese-style bells; and arks, as Noah would recognise, curved at bow and stern, sea-worthy but also sometimes with legs that might allow them to settle on the land if ever the waters subside.

A patina colours and textures the surfaces of the bells and the arks and they are further marked – thickened, we could say – with crowded raised patterns of what Jon calls glyphs. These are sometimes lines that might be the representation of a wave or a cloud or a horizon or the energetic movement of basic life that we might see enlarged as medical imagery or microscopy; these are sometimes a species of runic writing; these are sometimes the icons and symbols we have become habituated to in our digital lives (there is a lovely joke in a drawing of a yellow-bright oriole in a spring green-leafed

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"...We are all dangerous to other species" through our contemporary lives.' 'Extended phenotype - use of signs symbols allow us to operate en masse to become a super organised eusocial and a threat to earth's biodiversity. And that in the end is a threat to ourselves.' 'There is every reason to believe that if humans had not arrived on the scene, the Neanderthals would be here still. along with wild horses and woolly rhinos. With the capacity to represent the world in signs and symbols comes the capacity to change it, which as it happens, is the capacity to destroy it. A tiny set of genetic variations divides us from the Neanderthals, but that has made all the difference.'

> Extracts from *The Sixth Extinction*, Elizabeth Kolbert





Making a Difference: Red is for Rhino 2018, Pastel on paper Unique 49.5 x 65 cm *Taste for the Beautiful:* Refresh, Refresh, Refresh 2017, Pastel on paper Unique 49.5 x 65 cm

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world surrounded by the refresh symbols we know from computing); but, most of all of these glyphs are of animals – outlines that a child or a toy-maker or a Palaeolithic cave-painter or a graffiti-tagger might sketch – an ibis, a gorilla, a salamander, a rhinoceros, and many more. All these glyphs show |on to be an arkivist, or a keeper as much as he ever was. Darwin ended his Origin of Species with a joyous panoramic image of all life living together on an 'entangled bank'. Jon's decorated bells and arks give us the same, with an added sense of pressing threat. These biodiverse scenes are on a bell that might toll for all of their life, or they are netted on the side of an ark that might be required to fetch their threatened forms to safety.

Jon has previously said that he thinks of sculpture as 'the silent song'. His new work is articulate in a new way for him, perhaps, and



it will speak to all who encounter it. The bells that |on has made do sound – bluesy plangent domesday chimes – but we should think also of the navigating bells on the River Severn, tolling as the tide turns, when the silt of all the land is run out to sea, and think of an ark rocking on the waters there, the slap of the waves against the hull, and from within its hold the fantastic riot of noisy life, that marvellous party, awaiting a haven and first steps back on to the land. The raven Noah released never returned to the ark, but a pair now breeds in the Avon Gorge and they fly over |on Buck's old haunts most days. They weren't there when he was a boy. Some stories out of the ark make for happier news than others and on's bronze life-boats are loud and freighted with good things that we must try to keep.

Will there be – asks a poem by Bertolt Brecht – singing in the dark times? Yes, it answers, there will be singing about the dark times.

Tim Dee

Tim Dee writes on birds, nature, people and places. He wrote *The Running Sky* and *Four Fields*. His last book *Landfill* was about gulls and rubbish and the organising of both; his next book, *Greenery*, will be about the spring.

> (LEFT) Argentum Vivum 2016, Sterling Silver Edition of 10 22.5 × 10 × 10 cm

(RIGHT) Ark: High and Dry 2017, Bronze Edition of 3 212.5 x 363.5 x 93.5 cm Installed at Chester Cathedral from July - October 2017



"We have to regain our experience of connectedness with the entire web of life."

> The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision, Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi, 2014

CATALOGUE

Wellhead 2019, Bronze Edition of 10 50.5 x 66 x 23 cm







Seeds of Doubt 2018, Bronze Edition of 10 32.5 x 73 x 18 cm

Taking the Toll 2019, Bronze Edition of 5 200 × 140 × 64 cm



Up and Over 2019, Bronze Edition of 10 40.5 × 35 × 22 cm









Matrices: Webs of Diversity V 2018, Pastel on paper Unique 49.5 x 65 cm

Matrices: Webs of Diversity VI 2018, Pastel on paper Unique 49.5 x 65 cm

Matrices: Webs of Diversity I 2018, Pastel on paper Unique 49.5 x 65 cm



Sculpture: Melting Point 2018, Pastel on paper Unique 49.5 x 65 cm



The Whole Caboodle 2018, Bronze Edition of 10 45 × 54 × 27 cm



In Ferment 2018, Bronze Edition of 10 74 × 52 × 16 cm







Ringing the Changes 2019, Bronze Edition of 10 62 × 38.5 × 38 cm



A World of Difference 2019, Bronze Edition of 10 22.5 x 41 x 11 cm





Bigger Beast 2019, Bronze Edition of 10 27 × 34 × 8 cm







Sculpture: Strange Fruit 2018, Pastel on paper Unique 49.5 x 65 cm *Sculpture: Bigger Beast* 2019, Pastel on paper Unique 49.5 x 65 cm

Standing By 2019, Bronze Edition of 10 30 × 48 × 13 cm





Touch of Nature 2018, Ceramic Unique 62.5 x 45 x 16 cm





Lexicon 2008, Sterling Silver Edition of 10 18 × 13 × 8 cm





Strange Fruit 2019, Bronze Edition of 10 50 × 63 × 18 cm





Ark: High and Dry Maquette 2018, Bronze Edition of 10 41.5 x 71.5 x 19 cm







Taking the Toll Maquette 2018, Bronze Edition of 10 59.5 x 43 x 17 cm

Catatonic 2019, Bronze Edition of 10 33 x 27 x 7 cm







Less Than No Time 2018, Ceramic Unique 48.5 × 30 × 30 cm

Man Oh Man 2019, Bronze Edition of 10 29.5 × 19 × 7 cm





Lachrymal Vase 2018, Bronze Edition of 10 52 × 34.5 × 33 cm



Barking 2019, Bronze Edition of 10 28 × 39 × 7 cm







Cast Adrift 2019, Bronze Edition of 10 24.5 x 39 x 14 cm

Repository 2012, Bronze Edition of 10 70 × 38 × 17 cm







(LEFT) Eidos VII 2012, Bronze Edition of 10 30 x 38 x 5 cm

Eidos XIV 2012, Bronze Edition of 10 26.5 x 36.5 x 5 cm

(RIGHT) *Part of the Puzzle* 2012, Bronze Edition of 10 60 × 71.5 × 15 cm





(LEFT) Red Queen Rules 2012, Bronze Edition of 10 70 × 51 × 11 cm

(RIGHT) Marked Cat 2015, Bronze Edition of 10 28 x 45 x 20 cm





Symphysis 2011, Bronze Edition of 10 32.5 x 39.5 x 16.5 cm



Animal Glyphs 2019, Glazed ceramic Unique Heights ranging from 9.5 to 26 cm



Curved Cat 2019, Bronze Edition of 10 16 x 26 x 19 cm

Preserving Vessel 2018, Ceramic Unique 38 × 31 × 31 cm









Sculpture: Cast Adrift 2018, Pastel on paper Unique 49.5 x 65 cm

Arks for the Anthropocene: All Adrift III 2018, Pastel on paper Unique 49.5 x 65 cm

Arks for the Anthropocene: Standing By 2018, Pastel on paper Unique 49.5 x 65 cm



Arks for the Anthropocene: Seeds for a Future I 2018, Pastel on paper Unique 49.5 x 65 cm



Few and Far Between 2016, Bronze Edition of 10 34.5 x 58 x 18 cm

JON BUCK b. 1951

1970-75	Employed as Keeper of Birds at Bristol Zoo
1975	Fine Art Foundation Cardiff University
1976-79	BA (Hons) Fine Art, Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham
1979-80	MA Fine Art, Manchester Polytechnic
980-8	Fellow in Sculpture, Gloucester College Art and Technology, Cheltenham
1984	Artist in Residence, Borough of Thamesdown, Swindon
1990	Elected Member of Royal West of England Academy
99 -20	Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Southampton Solent University
1994	Elected Associate of Royal Society of Sculptors
1995	Artist consultant for Caerphilly Town Centre Enhancement Scheme
1998	Artist consultant for the refurbishment of Deal Pier
1999	Wins Rouse Kent Award for Public Art
2004-09	Three projects with Ruwenzori Sculpture Foundation, Uganda
2012	Elected Fellow of Royal Society of Sculptors

RECENT SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 'Jon Buck: Time of Our Lives', Pangolin London, Kings Place & Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire
- 2015 'Coded for Colour', Pangolin London, Kings Place
- 2014 'Without Words', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire
- 2012 'Turning Inside Out', Pangolin London, Kings Place
- 2011 'Making a Point: the Point of Making', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire
- 2009 'Behind the Lines', Pangolin London, Kings Place
- 2005 'Odd Birds and Other Selves', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire

2000 'Intimate Connections', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 'Sculpture Open', Royal West of England Academy, Bristol
- 2018 'Sculptors' Maquettes', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire 'Decade: 10 Year Anniversary', Pangolin London, Kings Place
- 2017 'ARK', Chester Cathedral, Chester
- 2016 'Jubilee', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire 'Nature of the Beast', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire 'Sculpture in the Garden', Pangolin London, Kings Place
- 2015 'Toro', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire 'Sculptors' Prints & Drawings', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire
- 2014 'Crucible 2', Gloucester Cathedral, Gloucester 'Sculptors' Prints & Drawings', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire
- 2013 'Sculptors' Prints & Drawings', Part of Impress' 13 International Printmaking Festival, Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire (also in 2011 and 2009) 'Drawn', Royal West of England Academy, Bristol
- 2012 'Sculptors' Drawings & Works on Paper', Pangolin London, Kings Place
- 2010 'Crucible the Sculpture Show of the Decade', Gloucester Cathedral 'Figuring it Out', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire 'Stirred for a Bird', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire
- 2009 'A Celebration of British Sculpture', Harold Martin Botanic Gardens, Leicester 'Fire and Brimstone', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire
- 2008 'Sterling Stuff II', Pangolin London, Kings Place 'Image', Steve Russell at the Campden Gallery, Gloucestershire
- 2006 'Animals and Birds', Jubilee Park, Canary Wharf, London 'Out of the Melting Pot', Dexia Banque Internationale, Parc Heintz, Luxembourg
- 2003 'BLOK', Festival of Sculpture, Canterbury 'Sterling Stuff', Gallery Pangolin, Gloucestershire, also travelled to Sigurjon Olafsson Museum, Reykjavik, Iceland and the Royal Academy, London
- 2002 'Fantastic Animals', Donjon de Vez, Paris, France 'Thinking Big: Small Work for Large Projects', Peggy Guggenheim Museum, Venice, Italy
- 1999 'The Shape of the Century: 100 years of Sculpture in Britain', Salisbury Cathedral & Canary Wharf
- 1980-85 'Superhumanism', Nicholas Treadwell Gallery

COMMISSIONS

- 2018 In Man's Nature, 240cm high bronze, Uniciti Sculpture Park, Mauritius
- 2007 Ship to Shore, 300cm high bronze, Portishead Quays, North Somerset
- 2005 Aurora, 50cm high bronze, Haberdasher's Livery Hall, City of London
- 2004 Flat Out, 200cm high bronze, Centre for Sport, Exercise and Health, Bristol University
- 2002 Family, 170cm high bronze, Paddington Central Development, London
- 2001 Equilibrium, 165cm high bronze, Milton Keynes General Hospital Goodwood Goddess, 220cm high bronze, Cass Sculpture Foundation, East Sussex
- 2000 In the Swim, 200 cm high bronze, West Quay Shopping Centre, Southampton Family, 170cm high bronze, Milton Keynes General Hospital
- 1999 Returning to Embrace, 150cm high bronze, Canary Wharf, London
- 1998 Embracing the Sea, 300cm high bronze, Deal Pier, Kent
- 1996 New Age, 90cm high bronze, New Consulate General Building, Hong Kong

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pangolin London and Gallery Pangolin would like to thank Jon Buck for this remarkable body of work. Our thanks also go to Tim Dee for his insightful essay, Pangolin Editions for their skill and dedication and Steve Russell Studios for their photography.



Published to coincide with the exhibition Jon Buck: Time of our Lives

Pangolin London 1st May - 8th June 2019

Gallery Pangolin 13th May - 29th June 2019

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GALLERY PANGOLIN 9 Chalford Industrial Estate, GL6 8NT T: 01453 889 765 www.gallery-pangolin.com (COVER IMAGE) Fractured: Cracked Earth II 2018, Pastel on paper Unique 49.5 x 65 cm

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