

Jo Naden Catching Fishiness

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Jo Naden Catching Fishiness

You pick up one of Jo Naden's small sculptural pieces and feel the 'thinginess' of a small intense object in your palm. Then you look across the gallery and catch a glimpse of a fish seeming to dance in non-existent water. There's a creative contradiction at the heart of Jo Naden's work, a battle between the silvery lightness of that fish and the unexpected weight and heft of the piece in your hand.

Jo grew up on a farm in Buxton, Derbyshire. The land is limestone country, full of sacred wells. Water underpins the land there. The house she lived in was on Waterswallows Road.

'I was often preoccupied with fishing, net and jar style, for taddies and newts. This was in round ponds, dewponds, where animals drink, and I believe thought to have been created as way-markers in the landscape. Also later, when older, young teens I guess, I would go onto the moors and spend ages enjoying the still purity of small mires and tiny pools in peatland bog. I also tickled trout in the stream.'

This made me think of Emily Bronte's line: 'I'll walk where my own nature would be leading'. And Jo did follow her own way. She left home at 15, escaping to the softer Cheshire landscape, a gentleman farmer, with butterfly nets and Jersey cows. But the time spent wandering the Derbyshire countryside, mostly alone or with her dog, has been the foundation for much of her thinking and her sculpture. 'We didn't go out much when I was a child, but what we did do, was go to a place called the Ebbing-Flowing Well and I remember standing for what seemed like hours and hours waiting for a water spout to come up from a limestone shaft. I don't think it ever did. It was my father's idea of a good time....' 'Being out in the landscape walking, particularly with the dog of the time, was and still is much of what I do, returning again and again to a series of defined areas in a location rather than the long track type of walking, more of a meditation than a mission.'

It's that meditative part of her that always finds its way deep into what she makes. The links between earth, moon and water are vital to her work.

'I have made moonstones, at each full moon, for some several years now, it is a returning to the measurement of my time passing. A making process that brings together the watery fluidity of clay, the cyclical nature of the moon, and time. It's a time set aside out of everyday life, to focus on a single meditative activity.

As a child I was fascinated by the moon and having an intense longing for it, would remake my bed in the floor level windowsills of the house where I lived, dreaming into its journey as it floated up the hill beside the house, becoming tangled in the upper branches of the large slender trees of the wood before disappearing out of sight. In winter I would walk home in moonlight nights across the farm fields, the snow would be cracking underfoot and all was monochromatic illumination. Vapours of my breath showed a turbulence in the air.'

Her training as an artist used the meditative work of life drawing as a significant starting point. She would go to London to attend life drawing classes with Cecil Collins at Central St Martins. He was an inspirational teacher with a quiet charisma that she responded to. His legendary insistence on detailed, apparently mechanistic ways of drawing would force students to concentrate on technical workings so that they completely abandoned all self-conscious thought. The resulting work was infinitely better. The aim was 'to lose all the boundaries between me and what I was drawing'. Today, drawing, and that concentrated link with the object or idea, is another foundation of Jo's practice.

Much of her early work was in the form of public sculpture, responding to the sense of a place, trying to find some way of making a necessary magical connection between object and subject. She was influenced by Goethe's ideas, particularly his methodology, based on the intimate interaction of observer and observed. His discussion of how experiment with natural phenomena leads to knowledge and from there to the capacity for expansion, insight and revelation, has been a crucial component of her work.

Recent work has become smaller. She is concerned with relating her forms to the viewer's relationship with the object, for example, to the water hollow of the hand. Her series of contemporary medals based on the Gawain legend came initially from a commission from the British



Art Medal Society. Jo decided to work out the necessary techniques for such work by setting herself a project. Linking together botany, geometry and Celtic mythology, contemplating the idea of the wildwood and its decline, she made a small series of medals. Gawain left the safety of Camelot and made a journey where he met himself reflected in the outer landscape. The medals mirror this journey.

Again, we find the seesaw between objective and subjective experience. And this mirror effect can be found in an early work of triangles made to reflect the movement of both sea and sky. This is today expressed in Jo's interest in working with glass as a material.

I find myself fascinated by this to and fro struggle between lightness and movement on the one hand and the necessary weight and solidity of sculptural form on the other. This is best demonstrated by Jo's telling of 'the story of the fish'.

'It is some years ago now. I had begun some experiments with water in the studio – I wanted to try to understand how water and form relate in a more direct way. I went to a stream quietly tucked away where there was a combination of slow shallows in close proximity to channels of lively movement. On the bank I melted wax in a pan over a fire. I decided to try pouring midstream, anticipating that the wax would quickly rush away with the water; I bridged the flow with a tennis net to catch escaping wax. There was a particularly interesting cascade over a rock where the water gushed downwards, folding into itself – I poured the wax in at this point.

I was astonished to see eyes, gills, it was definitely a fish! In fact I said out loud, I've caught a fish! I was presented with questions to which there are no simple answers. Where do the forces live that shape the fish? Do they come from the activity of the fish or from the movement of the water? Does the water have a memory of this within it? It made the hairs on my head stand on end; a glimpse into a deeper level of seeing.'

Practical experiment finds itself comfortably at ease with big philosophical questions. In Jo Naden's work, the steady, thoughtful business of the sculptor is to learn, practise and make beautiful what begins in nature.

A flock of birds settle - the green field re-echoes where there is a brisk bright stream.

Irish; author unknown; ninth-tenth century.



Shining Stone: A response to Lammas Land, Shenstone, Staffordshire County Council, commission 2002.

Intro

This collection of sculptural works and drawings is grouped into three areas to give a framework for the preoccupations and concerns that underpin my practice; work is produced as a consequence of enquiry and distillation. My thinking oscillates through areas of objective analysis and subjective experience and grapples with the nature of a developing and expanding consciousness in all beings.

While larger sculptures address mass and space, the smaller forms, including the medals, are intended to be experienced in the hands, where engagement with the work becomes more intimate; one is both viewer and participant.

The choice of bronze and iron as materials for the sculptures acknowledges the archaeological ages when objects of a portable, potentially ritualistic nature offer glimpses into a time past. Searching for a material to address form within the formless nature of water has proved more of a challenge; marbling and wax-pouring experiments directly into moving water have yielded interesting results, whilst mirror-polished stainless steel offered a robust three-dimensional solution for commissioned works, where reflection defined form. Now, however I am beguiled by glass, with recent explorations suggesting much 'wateriness' in addition to having a pleasing authority when juxtaposed with bronze, evocative of water, earth, fire boundaries.



The beginning

At the shore's edge I watch the tide come in, millions of molecules of water turn; a huge tongue of water rasps towards the land, its curved form describes the bay it has made, perfect straight lines triangulate out behind in the water's reach; it seems all is there at that time. Earth, a time embedded; Water, a memory of time. Moonstones, made at each full moon, measure the passing of time. Clay, hand-moulded spherical objects existing as a result of a meditative process, can be through their hollows and protrusions equated to the fluxing water and landmasses of earth, where macrocosm is reflected in microcosm, being similarly subjected to the forces and phenomena of time and location.



Three forms, one bronze, two glass

Earth in our hands, 2017

Bronze, lost-wax process Kiln-cast glass, lost wax process h. 9cm Edition of 5

The prime nature of the sphere is seen in early evolutions of life, as with sea urchins and jellyfish, and in the plant world, mistletoe, where activity extends from the centre to its circular periphery.



When the sphere departs from its continuum and takes forward a direction we are aware of this with the Beginnings of new forms as seen in the egg, or buds. With this process of activity tensions and inversion ensue, Flype. Tensions create polarization and with circular momentum a central hollow space is created, as seen within the plant stem; Circle Round.

Flype entomology: Scottish word meaning to fold or turn back, Flype consists of moving a tangle T 180 degrees –Tait's Knot Theory



Beginnings, 2017

Bronze, lost-wax process h. 9cm w. 14.5cm d. 10cm Edition of 5



Beginnings, 2017

Kiln-cast glass, lost-wax process h. 9cm w. 14.5cm d. 10cm Edition of 5



Flype, 2017

Bronze, lost-wax process h. 7.5cm w. 14.5cm d. 11cm Edition of 5

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Flype, 2017

Kiln-cast glass, lost-wax process h. 7.5cm w.14.5cm d. 11cm Edition of 5



Circle Round, 2017

Bronze, lost-wax process h. 4.5cm w. 18cm Edition of 5

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Circle Round, 2017

Kiln-cast glass, lost-wax process h. 4.5cm w. 18cm Edition of 5



Studio

Stourbridge is the historic heart of glass manufacturing and where my studio is currently based.

It is also famed for fifty types of trilobite that inhabited the Silurian Seas some 423 million years ago, now evident as limestone fossils. Extraordinary in many ways the development of the trilobite crystal eye set it apart; being perhaps the first creature to look out upon the world.

Was this the distant beginnings of our own seeing, our own objectivity?

"On the cliffs of Britannia are many figured stones which contain the representations of sea creatures. There are birds, fish, dragons and shells. The forms appear when the conditions of the weather stimulate their development from the seeds of the sea animals which have been carried by the wind and deposited inland. The creatures grow very slowly but it is occasionally possible to observe them coming to life."

From the expedition journal of Pliny the Elder, 23-79a.d

Fossil drawings

Fossil drawings, observations of crinoid specimens at Dudley Museum and Art Gallery from a larger body of work entitled '...the fossils grow slowly,' made in response to The Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve, the drawings acknowledge the process of fossilization through use of small-scale mark-making suggestive of the mineral rich waters that enter the fossil mould.





Fossil I

Original drawing, ink on paper Framed size h. 45cm w. 36cm Mount window h. 22cm w. 18.5cm



Fossil II

Original drawing, ink on paper Framed size h. 45cm w. 36cm Mount window h. 27cm w. 17.5cm



Fossil III Original drawing, ink on paper Framed size h. 45cm w. 36cm Mount window h. 27.5cm w. 17.5



Fossil IV

Framed size h. 45cm w. 36cm Mount window h. 29cm w. 19.5



Derived from an experiment into the formative qualities of water, questioning the notions of whether water has memory Reference: The Field Centre Research Journal Vol. 1 no 1 2014 issn 2055-5156

Water Fish, 2013 Bronze, lost-wax process h. 27cm w. 36cm incl. stainless steel base Edition of 5



Boat Form, 2007

Bronze, lost-wax process, on a slate base h. 780cm w. 240cm d.100cm incl. base Edition of 5



We look through; a universal continuum perpetually spinning through its own centre - spiralling energy systems define our being - within the spiralling galaxy we turn.

Derived from The Mystic Spiral, Journey of the Soul. Jill Purce 1974.



World View I, 2011

Bronze lost-wax process w. 10cm d. 1.5cm Edition of 20

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Of earth: obverse



World View, II, 2011

Bronze lost-wax process w. 9cm d. 2cm Edition of 20

The beginning of time

Life in caves after the last ice age with a bone needle and a collection of other small tools; I ponder on how this experience would have been, there, in the outside world would be inspiration in abundance. Conjecture draws together the observed and the experienced; the magnetic sense of earth, the spinning of time and season, the force of the moon; tides, time and measure, the pulling of horn and nail, while birds at their nesting weave; baskets of air, of earth and water.





Veil of Isis, 2010

Bronze, lost-wax process h. 43 cm w. 16.5 cm d. 10cm Edition of 5


Needlewoman, 2016

Bronze/iron, cold-cast resin process h. 72cm w. 13.5cm d. 6.5cm, incl. base Edition of 5



Stargazer, 2016

Bronze/iron, cold-cast resin process h. 46cm w. 37cm d.10cm, incl. base Edition of 5



Basketmaker, 2016

Bronze/iron, cold-cast resin process h. 53cm w. 35 cm d. 7cm, incl. base Edition of 5



Spinner, 2017

Bronze/iron, cold-cast resin process h. 40cm w. 30cm d. 8cm, incl. cast iron base Edition of 5

The Moon was once much closer to earth; days were shorter, it continues to pull away from us, this phenomenon is recorded in the spirals of the snail shell expansion.



The Snail and the Moon, 2017

Bronze lost-wax process w. 9cm d. 2cm Edition of 20

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Explores the Neolithic ditched enclosure and the droving of cattle with their moon pulled horns.

Horned Moon: obverse



Drove Road: reverse



Drover's Moon, 2017 Bronze lost-wax process, silver-leaf gilding w. 9.5cm d. 2cm Edition of 20

The two Bow-bird medals together explore the conundrum of the medal, where one side is connected with the other through the activity of turning it over.

Bow-bird

The two Bow-bird medals together explore the conundrum of the medal, where one side is connected with the other through the activity of turning it over. In this instance however it is the title that is turned, Bow-bird becoming, (into existence), Becoming Bow-bird, (fetching); combined they show the evolution of the bowline knot used for fishing nests since Neolithic times. The inspiration for the bowline is hypothetically suggested through the imagined Bow-bird, a water bird, and the twinings of its long neck. Since making these medallic forms a video showing swans in a tangle has circulated on Facebook.



First evolution of the bowline: obverse

Bow-bird becoming I, 2017

Bronze, lost-wax process h. 3.5cm w. 11cm d. 5cm Edition of 20



From below the water: reverse



Second evolution of the bowline knot: obverse

Becoming Bow-bird II, 2017

Bronze, lost-wax process h. 5 cm w. 14.5cm d. 3.5cm Edition of 20



Bridge and below: reverse

Shared Mythologies

Silver

Slowly, silently, now the moon Walks the night in her silver shoon; This way, and that, she peers and sees Silver fruit upon silver trees; One by one the casements catch Her beams beneath the silvery thatch; Couched in his kennel like a log; With paws of silver sleeps the dog; From their shadowy cote the white breasts peep Of doves in a silver feathered sleep; The harvest mouse goes scampering by, With silver claws, and silver eye; And moveless fish in the water gleam, By silver reeds in a silver stream.

Walter de la Mare





Fatted Calf, 2013

Bronze, lost-wax process h. 37cm w. 25cm d. 10.5cm incl. base h. 3cm w. 12cm d. 30cm Edition of 9

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loss

the calf calls all forest gatherings ceased

bull

marked ground only instincts past between

rush

in darkest bluff no victor is there seen

In search of the archetypal fish form: the salmon, according to Irish mythology, held all the knowledge of the world after eating nine hazelnuts that had fallen into a well.



Fish Form, 2011

Bronze lost-wax process h. 53cm w. 57 d. 9cm Edition of 5

Doves

Doves the universal symbol for love, and more recently peace, have been revered for millennia; with references dating back to 5000 BC, to the Goddess Astarte. The Dove along with the Eagle and the Raven, are a trinity of birds that rank highly in the symbols of Western association.

In the disused factories of our industrial past doves walk, I watch their loving affectations, and recall our shared collective past.

Initially commissioned by the Friends of Dudley Group of Hospitals as part of a larger sculpture titled Moon Bowl situated in The Prayer Centre Garden, Russells Hall Hospital.



Doves, 2008

Bronze lost-wax process h. 21cm w. 51cm d. 22cm Edition of 9



Dove, 2008

Bronze, lost-wax process h. 27cm w. 32cm d. 10cm Edition of 9



Inspired by Goldfinches and their habitation of boundary lands and pear orchards. A development from a larger sculpture commissioned by Lidl for the village of Finchfield, Staffordshire.

Pairings, 2014

Bronze, cold-cast resin process h. 36cm, incl. wood base w. 30cm d. 12cm Edition of 5 Water-birds revered in Chinese mythology, bridge the worlds of earth, air and water.



Water Bird I, 2015

Bronze cold-cast resin process h. 26cm w. 39cm d. 23cm Edition of 5

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Water Bird II, 2017

Bronze, cold-cast resin process h. 27cm, ex. base h. 50cm w. 45cm d. 12cm Edition of 5

The drawings are developed from paper darkened with charcoal prior to finding the flower forms by its removal.



Seeking the light

This way of working acknowledges the general response of plants to grow from the dark towards the light. The plants in this instance are ones that I am drawn to either in the garden or on longer daily walks with my dog. Their appeal may be their tenacious grandeur as with the marching armies of Rosebay Willowherb of the wayside, or the prickly nature of the Sweet Chestnut reminiscent of sea-urchins jostled on tides of Autumn's falling leaves. Dicentra: the distinctively shaped flowers interpreted as Bleeding Hearts or Dutchman's Breeches; a European cultivar originating from Vancouver.



Bleeding hearts, 2016

Original drawing, charcoal, conté on paper Framed size h. 54cm w. 78cm Mount window h. 30 cm w. 54cm

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Hyacinthoides non-scripta: the exquisite blue-violet appears to hover in the British Spring woodlands, a poisonous plant.

Bluebell, 2016

Original drawing, charcoal, conté on paper Framed size h. 74.5cm w. 57cm Mount window h. 51cm w. 33cm

Lunaria: the moon-like seedpods of this plant give it its name, it is a member of the brassica family; the leaves are edible.



Honesty, 2016

Original drawing, charcoal, conté on paper Framed size h. 66cm w. 66cm Mount window h. 42cm w. 42 cm Epilobium augustifolium: fireweed, found on disturbed land margins, a pioneer plant, with an edible pith.



Rosebay Willowherb, 2016

Original drawing, charcoal, conté on paper Framed size h. 88cm w. 67cm Mount window h. 64cm w. 43cm



Sweet Chestnut, 2016

Original drawing, charcoal, conté on paper Framed size h. 74.5cm w. 57cm Mount window h. 34.5cm w. 34.5cm Castanea sativa: the brown fruit from the broad-leaved sweet-chestnut tree is enclosed in a spiny case. Possibly introduced into Britain by the Romans who ground the nuts into flour or course meal; we enjoy the nuts now, roasted.

A Year and A Day: A series of five medals

Inspired by the fourteenth Century poem, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', as translated by Simon Armitage, and acknowledged as one of our first ecological poems; a place where myth and folklore intertwine within cyclical time. The medals are made with the intention of weaving glimpses of insight into the journey of the poem, and not necessarily to illustrate.





Then all which had risen over-ripens and rots and yesterday on yesterday the year dies away, and winter returns, as is the way of the world through time.

At Michaelmas the moon stands like that season's sign, a warning to Gawain to rouse himself and ride.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Simon Armitage. Fitt II. 530.

Holly ____

Holly, the first in the series of five medals and perhaps key to the ecological aspects of the poem; the obverse side referencing the ancient holly forest of the Long Mynd, while the reverse acknowledges botanical fourfold organization, and how this is reflected within Celtic orientation.



Holly: leaf and landscape: obverse

A Year and A Day I, 2011

Bronze, lost-wax process w. 10cm d. 3cm Edition of 20

The Green Man

The second medal recalls the Green man, he is 'entirely emerald green ... his horse, his axe, himself'

Gawain's journey from Tintagel to The Green Chapel may have followed the spine of the Long Mynd, an ancient Portway, and now considered a possible ancient trade route for axe heads. The reverse, an axe head in negative, reads as the haunches of the Green Horse adorned with its plaited and braided tail.



Axe: obverse

Horse: plaited tail: reverse

A Year and A Day II, 2011

Bronze, lost-wax process w. 10cm d. 2.7cm Edition of 20

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Camelot

The centrally placed third medal, and seat of power Camelot, geometrically and numerically suggest love trysts and divisions of direction and time; while the reverse re-creates The Round Table, simultaneously reminding us of Gawain's shield adorned on the inner side with the pentangle, a symbol held to represent the continuous cycle of all that is, in addition to being sacred to the eternal feminine.



The Court: obverse

A Year and A Day III, 2011

Bronze, lost-wax process w. 10cm d. 3.2cm Edition of 20

The Sun and Moon

Herne the Hunter: sun: obverse

Here in the fourth medal the polarities within the poem are experienced, day and night, sun and moon, the outer manifestation of the inner world. We can reference our mythical past; from the forest hunts of Herne the Hunter or Cernunnos the horned Celtic God, or dream into the worlds of Epona, the horse goddess, or perhaps reflect on the triple aspects of the Moon.



Goddess: moon: reverse

A Year and A Day IV, 2011

Bronze, lost-wax process w. 10cm d. 3.2cm Edition of 20

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The Green Chapel

The mound of a ravine in a desolate landscape, a deep axe-shaped cleft, the eye of Pan, the fifth medal resolves the journey that has taken Gawain A Year and A Day. Through turning we enter the ravine, through turning can fate or fortune change? The green girdle, (now the ceremonial baldric), gleaned from an encounter with the feminine, deflects the fatal blow administered by the Green Knight. Gawain turns to wind his way to Camelot, his heart crossed by the green girdle; he departs in humility with all that he has known.

The Baldric: reverse



The Ravine: obverse

A Year and A Day V, 2011

Bronze, lost-wax process w. 10cm d. 3cm Edition of 20

Making sculpture: the process

Work begins with wet clay, its soft fluid nature allows form to grow and expand; transition occurs as water evaporates and the clay begins to harden; the form becomes fixed, there is resistance; attention shifts from building-out, to reduction, a carving back to find the geometry of the planes, an experience paralleled for me in walking the land or touching the surface of a pebble-worn pool on the shoreline, there is a sense of knowing when the geometry is right, this rightness can be heard in the combined working sound of metal and clay edging together. At this point forms may be left to completely dry out prior to a kiln firing, rendering them more durable, or, have a mould impression taken to enable the sculpture to be translated into another material, and potentially be reproduced as an edition.

Then follows the mould-making and casting for the overall process known as lost-wax, which is both lengthy and complicated.

Moulds are usually in two parts, each part having a series of silicone rubber coats brushed onto the clay surface. Once cured, the silicone is backed up with a rigid plaster jacket. The original clay form is then removed from the mould, leaving a hollow space, a bit like removing a conker from a horse-chestnut. The case is put back together and the hollow space is then filled with liquid wax. The wax cools and hardens; the outer jacket and inner mould are removed to reveal the initial form (the conker) now translated into wax. The wax is worked to remedy any seam lines left visible from the mould, wax runners and risers are attached to assist in the pouring and escape of air during the investment-casting process.

This next process involves making a second mould from a ceramic slurry that is either sprayed or poured around the wax. Once the investment has solidified and cured the wax is melted out to create a hollow space. This can now be

filled with molten metal or glass, a technique in essence that has its origins in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia some 5,000 years ago. The now redundant ceramic shell is broken away to reveal the solidified form of glass or metal. There are various other cold processes that follow dependent on the material, including the removal of runners and risers and surface workings to arrive at the required finish. In the case of metal, coloured effects on the surface, called patinas, can be achieved by the application of heat and chemicals intended to mimic the occurrence of natural corrosion.

Bronze resin is not quite such a lengthy process as lost-wax casting; it follows the same making process up to the completion of the first mould, the hollow space then being filled with bronze powder and resin. Any coloured patination is completed as a cold process.

Mold-making is intriguing, it brings a similar satisfaction to cracking nuts, when after a little effort the kernel is revealed, or perhaps the opening of rocks to find fossils. It is that element of surprise we experience when the outer case is taken away and treasure is found within.

I appreciate the way the working processes of making the sculpture can be likened to geological forces; the initial making of the clay form parallels itself with the cycle of water, wind and air, with mould-making we are fossils embedded in strata, later we experience the elemental volcanic eruptions of fire as the solidification of molten metal or glass takes on form. Finally with patination we begin the reduction process again, and so the cycle continues.





Hands holding moonstone: Image credit Sarah Mcdowall

