

T o t e m   B o d y



# Totem Body

Kate Walters • Sandy Sykes • John Simpson • Nicolas Moreton

Janet Waring • Alexis Rago • Mark Gibbs • Lorraine Clarke

Barry Cottrell • Briony Marshall • Sue Freeborough

Kassandra Damaskos Isaacson • Elisa Cunial Trotta

Jürgen Werner Kremer • Tristan Stevens

Foreword by Barry Cottrell

Introduction by Jürgen Werner Kremer

The Crypt Gallery at St Pancras Church • London

10 - 26 June 2011



Protoangel • Normanby by Spital

FOREWORD

Totem Body is an exhibition about rediscovering the animal in human nature and celebrating our “creature consciousness”. Here, in the numinous and evocative atmosphere of the Crypt Gallery, fifteen artists have come together to explore and reveal the primal power and totemic symbolism of our embodiment as a human animal.

Totems are essentially living symbols of unity and kinship, and amongst indigenous peoples they have usually been animals. The human body is portrayed in this exhibition as a totemic creature in its own right – as a symbol of our unity with all other human beings, and emblematic of our common biological and mythic origins which we share with other animals.

In curating this exhibition I have often felt like a hunter on the trail of a rare and elusive prey, tracking, and noting tell-tale signs, sniffing the wind, then suddenly stumbling, almost as if by accident, across the magical creature in a clearing in the forest.

All of the artists here share a certain vision that combines, in their own unique way, an awareness of the elemental, the corporeal, the indigenous, or the totemic, with the courage to remain true to that vision. I salute them!

Barry Cottrell

Artist, Curator

## INTRODUCTION

## Totem Body and the Recovery of Indigenous Mind

The recovery of indigenous mind is the imperative to renew an ancient human potential for the future of humanity. Past and present shamans - and shamanic or indigenous cultures - can help illustrate psychospiritual and social practices that have the potential to guide us out of our addiction to progress, a compulsion seemingly beyond the grasp of our self-reflectiveness. The shamanic potential is the integration of body and mind, of different parts of our brain, and ritual and narrative practices that benefit communities. Animal, plant, and other totems carry traces of ancient memories and are evocations of our primordial minds. Shamanic imagination stands in polar opposition to contemporary dissociative social practices creating individuals who impose rationalistic, left-brain thinking on realities that cry out for embodied presence, multiple ways of knowing, and integrative human knowledge and wisdom.

To be sure, to see the imperative for the recovery of indigenous mind as a nostalgic or retro-romantic call to create islands of fantasized tribal pasts is nothing but the shadow side of our mindless addiction to progress. In order to avoid this seductive pitfall we have to ask: How did we get here? How did we lose the connections with a fuller sense of self and presence? As a prerequisite for the recovery

of indigenous mind, we need to face our collective shadow material, including the histories of traumatic splits, (colonial) dispossessions, dislocations, and (genocidal) threats to survival. Facing the shadow also entails inquiring about ancestral roots – both in a very literal sense (of personal family history, and linguistic, anthropological, mythological, historical, and archeological data) and also with the full use of our imaginal intuition. These, together, form a basis for the recovery of an ancient potential for the future, the creative and imaginative presence of indigenous mind revitalized.

The modern sense of self is increasingly anaemic and restrictive in its inflated sense of mastery — control measured in terms of profit — but the cracks created by postmodernism in the modernist edifice open the way for the reemergence of indigenous selves. If we locate ourselves with the special gifts each one of us carries at the intersection of place (ecology), seasonal and stellar cycles, family and cultural histories, renewed ceremonies and rituals, and the mythic stories we carry, then we can reimagine ourselves for a future that cherishes technological advances in a universe concerned with balancing individuals and societies within a holistic web of storied knowledge and social practices. While such imaginations are provincial in origin - in its best sense: honouring

specific place - they must encircle the cosmopolitan to achieve full maturity.

Our obsession with progress demands the compulsive move forward as the only option in the face of crisis, an option sorely lacking in imagination; the recovery of indigenous mind opens avenues for the development of compassionate reflection, not-doing, forward movement with awareness of the past, and questions of balance. Analyzing a potential action in terms of its impact seven generations forward is the mandate of a shamanic practice that attempts to heal individuals as well as cultures. Move forward we must, but healing our progressivist compulsion in doing so may open hidden options of human resilience and point to unexpected adaptive responses to the crises of our time.

Artistic creations - body paintings, murals, rock carvings, hide paintings, jewelry, sandpaintings, carvings, architectural monuments, medicine bundles, etc. - are an important manifestation of shamanic visionary powers. Traditional Navajo sandpaintings evoke the presence of balance, as do Hopi Michael Kabotie's contemporary ceremonial murals, which include images such as a computer and a Tibetan monk. Andy Goldsworthy and Richard Long are their non-indigenous fellow artists. It seems urgent that we develop shamanic visions that heal past traumatic splits and pull us into a

sustainable future. In shamanic work, personal healing cannot be separate from cultural healing. For individuals to heal themselves today means also to work on healing the cultural fabric so that mental and physical health is supported by social systems - economies, education, media, art, etc. - that facilitate balance.

In the Old Norse universe, part of my ancestral inheritance, to move forward meant to first take a step backward in order to bring the past along with awareness. Here a healer was seen as capable of manipulating the cosmos by way of working in the microcosm made present in ceremony. The shamans for the future need to regain this potential by integrating ancient holistic capacities - of our spirits, minds, brains, bodies - with recovered and renewed stories that open visionary windows on possibilities that progressivism fails to see. This is not going backward, this is going forward to heal, to make whole, to use our imagination to change the stories we are participating in now. The encounter with Totem Body and the ritual reengagement of our primordial minds guide us into the shamanic center of responsible co-creation so that chance and grace may weave healing.

Jürgen Werner Kremer

Kate Walters

Sandy Sykes

John Simpson

Nicolas Moreton

Janet Waring

Alexis Rago

Mark Gibbs

Lorraine Clarke

Barry Cottrell

Briony Marshall

Sue Freeborough

Kassandra Damaskos Isaacson

Elisa Cunial Trotta

Jürgen Werner Kremer

Tristan Stevens

## Kate Walters

My way to explore and research feelings about life, the impulse towards higher consciousness and the relationship between humans and animals is through drawing, most especially through the process of letting go completely into the creative act.

I work with liquid watercolours on thick smooth paper which I prepare myself with home-made gesso. Working on this surface, which allows for almost countless re-drawing, allows the drawings to emerge, to evolve: in truth each piece often takes hours of struggle and apparent dead-ends before something I could not possibly have known is described on the paper.

I see my process of working as akin to stepping into an opening, a threshold between worlds, where I throw a metaphysical net, as it were, which is entered by the fugitive from the invisible realm. The paper itself then echoes my process; the surface of the paper becomes another threshold where the subtle allows itself to appear; the net settles gently on the page, the fugitive is revealed. Some of my most recent works explore how invisible, highly-evolved beings can be disguised as animals. Throughout my life certain animals have appeared to me when I've felt as if I've been struggling; my belief and experience is that animals can be blessed with a quality of nobility, intense sensitivity, and a most generous capacity for loving.

By exploring hidden aspects of our lives, or peripheral experiences we might share, or elements which may be unconscious or coming to consciousness, my work is open to interpretation according to a viewer's experience and awareness.

I have trained for many years in classical shamanism



*Living Close as Breath January 11*, watercolour, 44 x 30 cm

and I bring my experiences of the teachings of indigenous, First Nations people to bear in my practice and in my images. I am also inspired by the teachings and example of St. Francis of Assisi. I am devoted to my life as an artist; to me the process of making work is a devotional one.



*Manuscript 7: Janus*, woodcut, 100 x 150 cm approx.

## Sandy Sykes

The head in ancient cultures was believed to contain a person's spirit after their death and to hold a powerful spiritual force. Janus, the two headed deity from both Celtic and Roman mythologies looks towards the past and the future at the same time. He is a symbol of opposites, of change and transition. Seen as a god of doorways, gates and bridges he has the power to block entry or allow admittance. The square, which bars the way in this print contains the personal marks of numerous students who were trying out one of my electric tools on a block of wood in various teaching sessions. The graffiti of humanity hovers on the threshold of life and challenges death. Research into literature and imagery from many different cultures, including the study of old manuscripts defaced and repaired, burnt or written over has further inspired the work. This hand-rubbed woodcut is from a series of 20 unique prints titled 'Manuscript'. Measuring approximately 1 metre x 1.5 metres on constructed Indian ecological paper the prints are multi-layered, and complex of surface. Using wood and lino cuts, etched metal and plastic surfaces alongside tissue and assorted papers, a palimpsest of chine-collé and collage, repeated rubbings and transfers evolve into mystery and impenetrable time.

## John Simpson

Brighton based artist John Simpson has exhibited internationally with major shows in London, New York and Sao Paulo. He will be returning to Brazil in 2011 for his second show with Galleria Choque Cultural. In recent years he has shown alongside modern masters such as Hockney and Warhol. Commissions have included a contemporary take on Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* for inclusion in an exhibition with Sir John Tenniel's original wood engravings and Salvador Dali's *Alice* lithographs. Simpson's primary medium is the Monotype, a process which is recognised as the most direct and painterly form of Printmaking. Using a combination of drawing and painting in oil based ink, layers of image are combined on the paper to create the finished work. These layers are created by working the tar like ink on a glass surface or by drawing on the reverse of the paper while placed on a smooth inked plate. 'The Monotype print process extends the possibilities of traditional drawing, the marks are made by anything which applies pressure to the surface, even just hands for a very direct approach'. Simpson's original Silkscreen prints begin life in the same way but the layers are pressed onto film rather than paper. The layers are kept separately in order to create the screens for the next stage of the editioning process.



*Actaeon Surprised by Diana*, monotype, 100 x 100 cm

Drawing has always been the most important element in Simpson's work, which relates to the graphic tradition of artists like Francisco Goya and Edvard Munch. His work references the world of folk tale and myth, exploring the relationship between the human figure and animal forms. Often introducing contemporary elements to these classical subjects, Simpson's imagery seems caught somewhere between childhood imagination and adult reasoning. 'I don't wish to Anthropomorphise these creatures but rather to reflect

on man's position within nature'. Simpson believes it is a mistake to project ideas of human behaviour onto the animals which appear in the work. The puzzling relationships between species we see in the ink are created to highlight man's imbalance within the environment. It is his ability to capture the physical and psychological nature of these creatures, which empowers the work. The resulting imagery can both disquiet and enchant in equal measure.



## Nicolas Moreton

'Sculpture is for the senses. It should have a personality and character of its own.

I have always believed in living through a work from its raw conception to its completion.

Working the stone directly only with hand tools. Creating a work that will be itself.

I have worked stone now for twenty-five years and the passion and the drive to carve this iconic material has never diminished. Somehow one cannot help but feel and be aware of the role of this medium through the ages, and I strongly believe that stone still has the visual and tactile presence to make it a prime means of contemporary expression.'

*Sunflowers (Man and Boy)*  
Clipsham Blue limestone and 24 carat gold  
height 120 cm



*Totem - Goddess*  
99.5 x 37 x 43.5 cm



*Totem - Anthropomorph*  
175 x 32 x 25 cm



*Totem - Egg*  
97 x 61 x 30 cm



*Totem - Grass*  
171 x 50 x 24 cm

## Janet Waring

Janet Waring's work as a parallel anthropology codifies in painting, drawing and sculpture, notions of shared descent. Her sculptures are assembled from artifacts and biofacts including redundant objects that often possess associations with day to day intimacy. The potential vitality inherent in these items is used in a

transformative process integrating with the works notions of veneration associated with sacramental and ritualistic objects. The Totems' bilateral symmetry hints at animal origin locked within individual and collective memories. Her artistic training was undertaken in Florence, Italy where she lived and

worked for a decade. She is a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London, reflecting an explicit interest in natural history, and has an honours degree in botany. She exhibits both in the UK and abroad and has given solo shows in notable public galleries.

## Alexis Rago

Alexis Rago conceives his work as an artificial natural history moving from within biological notions into metaphor and analogy. He draws together evolution and morphology, archaeology and ethnology with tribal and sacred art to develop 'ideal' models in a *Kunstkammer* of speculation on the deep past. This process produces a tension between the alien and familiar by virtue of the ideas that run subliminally through our framework of perception and being. As J.G. Ballard put it, 'Each one of us is as old as the entire biological kingdom, and our bloodstreams are tributaries of the great sea of its total memory'.

The sculptures are accretions of countless simple small events forming complex structures or three dimensional 'drawings'. They are directly modelled in clay as part of an evolving secular reliquary or sacred natural history in which icons or votive offerings serve to express a non-anthropocentric sense of place.



*Glossolalia*  
fired clay, height 55 cm



## Mark Gibbs

Perhaps prompted by the threat to the Arctic, Mark's recent work has taken on a Northern theme depicting creatures of forest and tundra and referencing prehistoric art. Animals such as wolves, bison and reindeer are presented as shamanic guardian spirits, beasts of power with ancient antecedence, yet increasingly isolated, inhabiting a diminished, fractured environment. While under the permafrost issues of deforestation and climate change emerge.

The work infers the expanse of the Great North and the depths of the Wild Wood; both metaphors for the mind and its creativity, fusing exterior and interior worlds. However, the undeniable physical presence of the animal is always the primary subject. Mark's work has been exhibited internationally and was highly commended at the 2010 Wildlife Artist of the Year Competition.



*Above: Follow Flow*  
mixed media  
35 x 35 x 17 cm

*Below: Guardian Spirit*  
mixed media, wall mounted sculpture  
30 x 35 x 14 cm

## Lorraine Clarke

Lorraine Clarke's work, influenced and informed by anatomy and aspects of the medical world, takes multiple forms from large installations to small and finely crafted collections, incorporating found and made objects and infused with research.

Through her creative process, transforming materials - often regarded as detritus - into objects of contemplation, new and strange yet somehow familiar, demonstrating the power of objects to embody the investment of abstract powers, she challenges the viewer to reflect upon what it is we consider human, what organic, what manufactured, what magical.

Following her Post Graduate in Art & Psychopathology, Lorraine Clarke lived and worked in Italy for 19 years. In 2002 she co-founded Euroart Studios in London.

*Pantheon of Spirits* (detail)  
mixed media, detail height 55 cm  
overall dimensions 187 x 139 x 57 cm





*Totem*, linocut, 33 x 44.5 cm

## Barry Cottrell

‘Lifting a brush, a burin, a pen, or a stylus is like releasing a bite or lifting a claw.’ Gary Snyder

If asked why I practice as an artist/maker, the answer would be because the creative interaction between mind and materials makes me come alive. The voltage turns up and

life becomes electric. The activity awakens the ‘animal within’ and amplifies the strange intimacy of this vital other.

## Briony Marshall

Zoetic Omen was developed during my three month residency in a bronze foundry in Pietrasanta, Italy. In Spring 2010, I became fascinated with the materials of the bronze casting process, and developed an almost shamanistic ritual of pouring molten wax in cold water, to create forms that tap into natural forces. I was also doing a lot of reading about climate change and historical accounts of different societies' responses to their over-exploitation of natural resources. The resulting sculptures investigate the duality of nature's fragility and power.

With a background in biochemistry and traditional sculpture training, Briony Marshall aims to fuse an intellectual/conceptual approach with an intuitive, materials inspired process to develop works that attempt to make sense of the big questions in life and the little questions of daily existence.



*Zoetic Omen*, bronze 1/8, height 45 cm



## Sue Freeborough

### Memory Vows

'Sue Freeborough's bronze *Memory Vows*, [is] a standing female figure bristling with nails like a tribal fetish. Perhaps partly inspired by the famous Paleolithic limestone carving known as the Willendorf Venus. Freeborough reinvents that totemic female form as a piece of contemporary ethnographica. The clenched fists and rapt expression suggest a mystical marshalling of bodily energy, an energy exuding from every pore and follicle.' - Tom Flynn, catalogue for *Body Language*, Gallery Pangolin

My work essentially refers to the body, whether directly or obliquely. It is through the body that I address human issues such as relationships, identity and personal values. My overall aim is to consider contemporary issues and attitudes in sculptural, philosophical and political terms, and to evoke through sculpture's duality of form and meaning a rich and provocative mix.

*Memory Vows*  
bronze, mild steel and stainless steel  
height 75 cm



*Dancers 3*, Ink on Chinese paper, 50 x 100 cm

## Kassandra Damaskos Isaacson

My interest has been in exploring the expressiveness of the human body. In drawing from dancers I have tried to observe movement as it becomes form through the medium of dance. I have done the dance drawings with ink on Chinese paper and have painted directly into some of these drawings. Always, I am trying to

keep the immediacy of the Dance present. Dance seen as it might be experienced by the dancer dancing.

Kassandra's most recent work has been a series of collaborations with dancers - Ballet in Small Spaces - and musicians. Projects in 2010 included DEC - Demonstration, Exploration

and Collaboration - at Ovada Gallery, Oxford, and the Cohesion Festival in improvisation in music, dance and the visual arts at Oxford's Pegasus Theatre.



*The Little Buddha Who Regurgitated Trees*  
pastel on cardboard, 20 x 30 cm

## Elisa Cunial Trotta

For Totem Body I have been inspired by my personal and professional explorations of the theme of initiation and its connection to our identity and the idea of Self.

I consider the body as a space – a tangible and physical space but also a symbolic and an invisible one – in which we can have different forms of experience. But in the body, and through the body, we can also recognise an emblem, indeed the totem through which we belong and connect to our origin. At the same time, this totem allows us

to strive towards a becoming and a potentiality. In its spatiality, the body can thus speak to us about temporality as well – past, present and future all condensed and expanded in one entity.

Elisa Cunial Trotta grew up in Ascona, Switzerland and graduated in psychology from Geneva University. She has worked in special education, clinical and developmental psychology, and is a practising existential therapist. She is currently completing her Professional

Doctorate in Counselling Psychology, exploring the theme of initiation through her final dissertation. She is a self-taught artist and has worked extensively with arts and creativity both with children and adults. She cultivates a specific interest in ancient healing traditions and their possible application and reinterpretation in today's modern world.

## Jürgen Werner Kremer

he raises his arms  
he raises his voice  
twin ravens fly  
down to the depths of memory founts  
up up toward star writ laws

down twin ravens fly  
as he raises his drumstick  
as he raises his chant  
down to the roots  
down to the riches  
the woman of memory  
the woman of measure  
the woman of becoming  
down to the three  
that gave life and destiny  
to the trees on the beach  
ash and alder

sacred trees  
the first humans

up twin ravens fly  
as he raises his drumstick  
as he raises his chant  
twin ravens climb  
the ancestor shuttle way  
milky way  
star ladder  
ravenmemory ravenmind  
enter the eye of the eagle  
shaman star  
ancestral light and law  
twin ravens enter the circle of elders  
grandmothers grandfathers  
hear our song  
hear our drum  
hear our need  
elders wait for the offering  
ravens sacrifice

memories  
painful memories  
of armor and berserker and witchhunts  
ravens purify  
rapes and killings  
elders point  
into the depth of the forest  
twin bears walking toward the village

twin bears offer their lives  
as Earth renews herself  
twin ravens wed twin bears  
they touch the hearts  
and the thumbs tear the final veils  
of unknowing and unseeing  
she  
bears  
marry twin ravens  
one couple turns skyward  
to hunt among the stars  
one couple turns earthward  
to hunt in ceremony

Jürgen Werner Kremer has devoted his personal shamanic and academic work to the psychology of the recovery of indigenous mind. His paintings explore the layers of our memories leading back to ancient ancestral roots. These layers evoke collective shadow material as well as inspiration for the Self to center itself in place, time cycle, community, mythic story, and creative imagination. Rock carvings from the European North, sacred architecture from the North American Southwest, images from his shamanic journeys, historical photos, prehistoric sculptures, as well as mythology, are his inspiration. The paintings are designed to trigger shamanic imaginations in the viewer and to reconnect with processes in our palaeo-mammalian brain for balancing. Animals are totemic ciphers and somatic traces of our primordial minds. The three staffs in this exhibition echo a palaeolithic site outside his hometown Hamburg, Germany; they signify a place of offering and ritual.



*Dancing Women*, mixed media/digital print, 20.5 x 13.8 cm



*Float On*, oil on canvas, 99 x 73 cm

## Tristan Stevens

I am becoming more involved in letting things evolve from the painting.  
I feel this is a sort of recovery to finding oneself through a process or ritual.



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