

## **Bold Tendencies 2021 Q&A with Jesse Pollock**

**To start, could you give us a bit of background on yourself, such as where you studied, where you're currently based and some of your key interests as an artist?**

I studied Illustration at Camberwell College of Arts and graduated in 2015. I'm now living in Faversham, Kent and my studio is not far in Teynham. I'm currently obsessed with pastoral ideals, the idea of running away to the countryside where everything is green and mellow but with a dystopian undertone. How we look to the past to make everything better, which to some extent it can, but one can easily overdose and start to pretend the darker undertones of British society do not exist.

**What first inspired you to become an artist?**

I always wanted to be an artist, but I had it in my head that I needed to make money and get a job! Illustration made sense to begin with, however I soon realised I hated sitting on photoshop, and that making stuff in 3D was the only thing that gave me satisfaction. This is not to say that making 3D objects can't then become some sort of illustration but I knew that it wasn't what I was going to do.

The course at Camberwell was great and varied. In my second year, I went to the ceramics studio and learnt how to throw a pot on the wheel. I would make round bottle shapes over and over, I started stacking them, cutting them up, learning about slips, different clays, glaze etc.

I found out about Peter Voulkos, which was a turning point for me. He made sculpture for me, and what I wanted out of it, impulse and aggression. I wrote my dissertation on the use of clay in art and design. I then started replicating my clay works in steel. Once graduating, a £100 welder in my parents shed was way cheaper than paying high prices for a couple hours in a pottery studio.

**You graduated from Camberwell College of Arts in 2015 with a degree in Illustration. Traces of this can be seen in the etchings and embossed details on your sculpture. Has**

**this experience influenced your work as a sculptor, and do you still make illustrations behind the scenes?**

When I'm making a piece, I think about its silhouette — what the sculpture would look like on the horizon. I do not make any illustrations really. Over lockdown I made a few watercolours, even made a few acrylic paintings on canvas but I struggle to get any real satisfaction from it. Normally, I'm only satisfied if there's some sort of physically exhausting process.

The welded drawings come from my work in ceramics, a practice known as *sgraffito*! The words I write over my sculptures are normally things related to the countryside that make me laugh, something like “Bastard Farrier” or “teasel cut me”. I think of the drawings like litter scattered across the piece.

**Your sculptures and wall works use a unique combination of coloured silicone and steel — what was it that first drove you to use these materials, and how have you found their ability to communicate the ideas you are working with?**

Like I said earlier, I fell into making steel works at university to complement my ceramic works. But its instant results and accessibility kept me hooked. What I like about the welder is that it's like an oozing metal gun. I'm not a welder, I weld stuff up for structural purposes when needed, but normally I think of it like a molten-steel point and shoot. Slurping out. The steel-sheet buckles and bulges at the seams, there's a huge amount of frustration and tension forcing the form to do what I want with heat and a hammer. In the end product, I see this as a metaphor for a frustrated Britain, not knowing what it wants but it wants it now.

The silicone was used for function. I was making a lot of steel benches which are hard and slippery, so to stop you from sliding about I made a silicone cushion. Then the wall works followed as the silicone cushions reminded me of animal hides, like a hunting trophy pinned on a wall. I have not made any for a year and a half at least. The silicone pieces have a lot of process which I endured as I loved the results but at the moment, I want direct instant results.

**A core process in the development of your work is the use of 3D modelling software and iPhone drawings. These are then translated into manipulated steel. How do you find the process of translation between digital and analogue, and what is lost or gained through this process?**

For a while I have been working full-time cleaning water tanks and other water related works. During the last year I have been doing 3 - 4 days a week, it can interfere with productivity quite a lot just because I'd be tired getting to the studio in the evening, or there would simply be a lack of time in the studio.

Generating ideas on my Surface Pro or iPhone was a quick way to develop ideas whilst waiting for tanks to drain. I only use pretty basic programs, I'm not in any way tech. The 3D software helps by showing people what I want to make and what it will look like. The digital images are always plush, when showing a gallery or curator I have to stress that the final result will be far cruder!

**Over the past few years your works have focused on images and objects associated with rural England, especially areas close to where you live in Teynham, Kent. Can you describe some of the objects and images you have been working with and their significance to you?**

Fruit picking ladders and flagons have been a dominant form in my practice. The ladders are what cherry-pickers use to reach the top heights. The ladder is an instrument for progress and an example of us not allowing any part of the natural world to be left untouched. The ladders are now near-redundant and industrial farming makes the trees a lot shorter and easy to manage. Pickers pick from the floor. A flagon is what you get scrumpy cider in, a product from apple picking. Alcohol is a fundamental social axis in British society, I don't believe you can comment on or try to discuss British society without including alcohol.

**These subjects — often representative of an idealised pastoral past — are created in a way to suggest unease or a darker, more dystopian underbelly to the countryside. Is this something you are trying to communicate in your work?**

100%. I like the almost lawless freedom with the countryside, you can get away with stuff. I've been collecting a few shotgun shells I've found on public footpaths, stepping aside to let the crosser, ragging it, go past. And did you know it's legal to go rambling naked, where else can you be naked and get away with it.

The last month has been lambing season, it's lovely to see on my routine dog walk by the studio. Obviously, those little lambs are going to be killed and eaten, yet I wouldn't see those lambs jumping around if we didn't eat them or use them for cheese and wool. That kind of sums up how I look at the countryside, its beauty on the cusp of chaos, a fine balance. I love its honesty, which is something I like to achieve in my work.

**For Bold Tendencies 2021 you will create a new sculpture, *The Granary* – finished in reflective “candy orange” powder-coat. Why did you choose this form and colour for the sculpture, and what are some of the core ideas behind the work?**

I've always loved the form and function of a staddle stone, raising produce from vermin and damp. In this case, the staddle stones are human height, allowing the granary store to be safely refuted from contemporary life. The occupier can hide away, a countryside retreat. I imagine the occupier saying something like 'I want to get away from it all'.

I feel like staddle stones represent the precautions we may need to take, raising us from the high tides of monotonous bullshit. The finish is important, the highly reflective finish is acting as a warped mirror, reflecting you as the contributor and hypocrite.

I see Candy Orange as a futuristic rust colour; walking through the British countryside, it is pretty hard to not find some rusty agricultural equipment. I've been making steel sculptures for 6 years or so, always asking 'can it go outside?' and 'will it rust?'. Getting my works powder-coated in a jacked up rust gives me great pleasure.

**How do you think about your new commission in relation to the Bold Tendencies 2021 programme theme of Arcadia?**

*The Granary* asks the question: was Britain once a better place? Was it a quaint lush land, can we have it back please. *The Granary* is an example of our fantasy of the countryside and the rose-tinted views of what has been before us. At first it indulges in the beauty of this fantasy, but in reality what you have is a beaten, forced and frustrated product. I like to think my work is neither positive or negative, not pure nor evil, but in balance with chaos and harmony. *The Granary* is an escape to the countryside, an escape from civilisation with the stern reminder that you are also the enemy.

# **BOLD TENDENCIES**

**What have you got planned for the rest of the year — are there any special projects in the pipeline?**

I'm doing a group show in Sweden for Carl Kostyal Gallery that will be opening in May. I would have liked to have gone to it myself but this does not seem likely with COVID! I also have some work in this year's Contemporary Fulmer sculpture park for Brooke Bennington. Later in the year, I am hoping to do a residency in Zennor, Cornwall but we're yet to arrange dates on this one. Other than that, I will see where the year takes me.