

MICHAEL COOPER





# INTRODUCTION

I can remember Michael's first sculpture. It was the head of his baby daughter Lorien cast in bronze. Since Lorien was my god-daughter, and I, at the time, was Michael's lodger in his Pimlico home, I became the lucky recipient of one of the casts. When I looked at it carefully I was astounded; because it was such an accurate likeness, rendered with expressiveness and flourish. None of us, his friends, had any idea that he was actually becoming a sculptor. We knew he went to spend time with sculptors – Anthony Gray and Jonathan Kenworthy – but I assumed that his attendance there was like my afternoons at Heatherly's life-drawing classes during the holidays and in various artists' studios in Paris, alleviating the tedium of having to learn something at the Sorbonne. Occasionally, at cocktail hour, I would encounter David Wynne folded up in a corner of his living room. Only much later did I learn that Michael had been his helper in assembling *The Boy With A Dolphin* which sits on Cheyne Walk overlooking the river and remains the single most inspirational public sculpture in London.

He never talked about his ambitions as a sculptor. He says now that he was worried that he was a *dilettante* and that if asked what he was going to do – as often happened – to answer that he was going to be a sculptor might provoke disbelief. It all started whittling wood during long, soggy evenings in Ireland. Then he spent a year in a stone-mason's yard under the Waterloo arches and there, amid the rasp, grime and dust, first realised what he really wanted to do; 'Chipping stone' he called it, so of course we did not take it seriously. Others did, particularly Derek Hill and Grey Gowrie, who encouraged him at the time when he needed it most.

And it is we, among others, who have benefited. Our house is animated by creatures transformed by Michael's imagination. A coiled serpent in bronze gazes out across the garden, a large turtle lounges at the rim of a water tank, a seductive white torso stretches indoors and sweetly reminds me of days past. My favourite is the great white albatross – branded by my daughter as "the duck" being unacquainted with the species – sitting on a high parapet beneath which a pair of hoopoes nest each year and bring up their young. When they leave we put up a ladder to clean off their additions since they enjoy sitting on its warm back to survey the surroundings.

It is the physicality of carving that draws him to his studio. The hammer and the chisel, and the blocks of stone each with their own personality. It is like a conversation but an intuitive one, which when it flows makes sense



of every strike. Having built up a knowledge of skeletons, human and animal, to provide the structure for understanding the tension between bone, flesh and skin, he found it possible to express the sensuality of stone. This is the joy of sculpting, he says, the revealing of its unexpected potential: "Stone, in spite of its hardness, can be soft like a buttock."

Casting in bronze is a more recent endeavour made possible by the collaboration with Rungwe and Claude Kingdon at Pangolin Editions, their foundry near Stroud. It was they who made Michael understand the validity of casting bronze versions of his sculptures. He considers them artists in their own right and it is this partnership with their deep knowledge of bronze that has enabled him to extend his own range.

*"I experienced at times a feeling that something had been achieved which was correct and harmonious, almost in spite of myself. It was like a dimension that I could only glimpse. These moments were most apparent when I was working on sculpture. There would be times when some other faculty seemed to be working, allowing me to see other aspects of the work and achieve a result often quite different to what I had planned. As I carved a block of stone, it became possible to harmonise with the material and work in partnership with it rather than in conflict. The physical effort of carving and the concentration required produce a very precise focus, suspending the usual thought process and allowing another part of me to function."*

Every artist will recognise what he describes. And there is little that one can add. But were I to be asked what I thought was Michael's particular characteristic as an artist, I would say his humility. It is this which allows something to pass through him. He does not get in his own way.

OLIVER HOARE

(ABOVE)  
Photo of a Hoopoe  
and Michael  
Cooper's *Albatross*

(RIGHT)  
*Big Bear*  
Bronze  
Edition of 6  
193 cm high



*Large Snail*  
Bronze  
Edition of 6  
92 cm high





(ABOVE)  
*Curled Figure*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
32 cm long



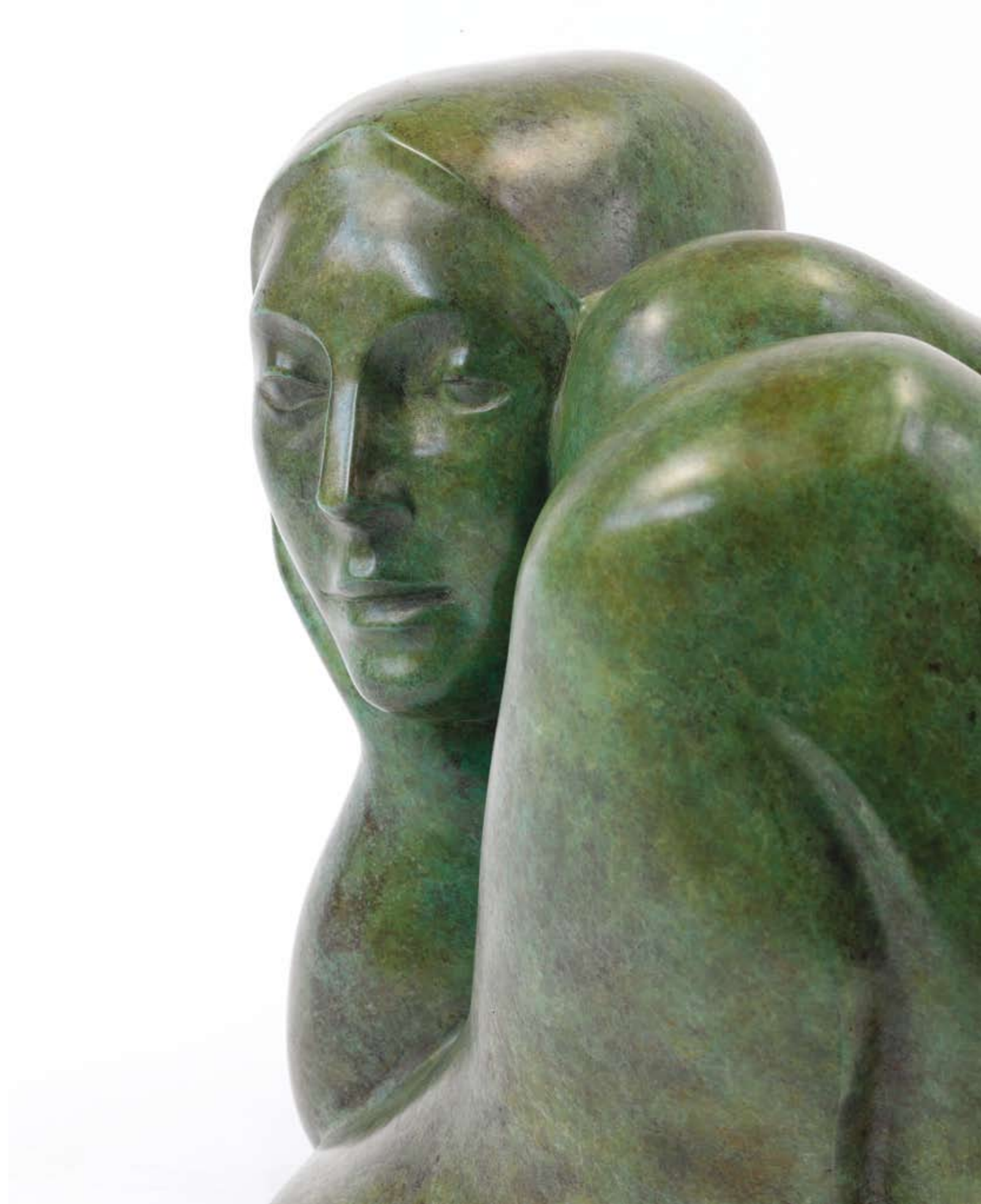
(RIGHT)  
*Curled Figure*  
Marble  
Unique  
32 cm long



*Polar Bear*  
Marble  
Unique  
29 cm high



*Curled Girl*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
33 cm high





*Hare*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
29 cm high





*Camel*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
66 cm long



(ABOVE)  
*Camel*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
39 cm high



(RIGHT)  
*Crab*  
Verona Marble  
Unique  
13 cm high



*Wolf*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
45 cm high



*Wolf*  
Stone  
Unique  
45 cm high



(ABOVE)  
*Grizzly Bear*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
30 cm high



(RIGHT)  
*Seated Bear*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
45 cm high



*Hippo*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
51 cm wide

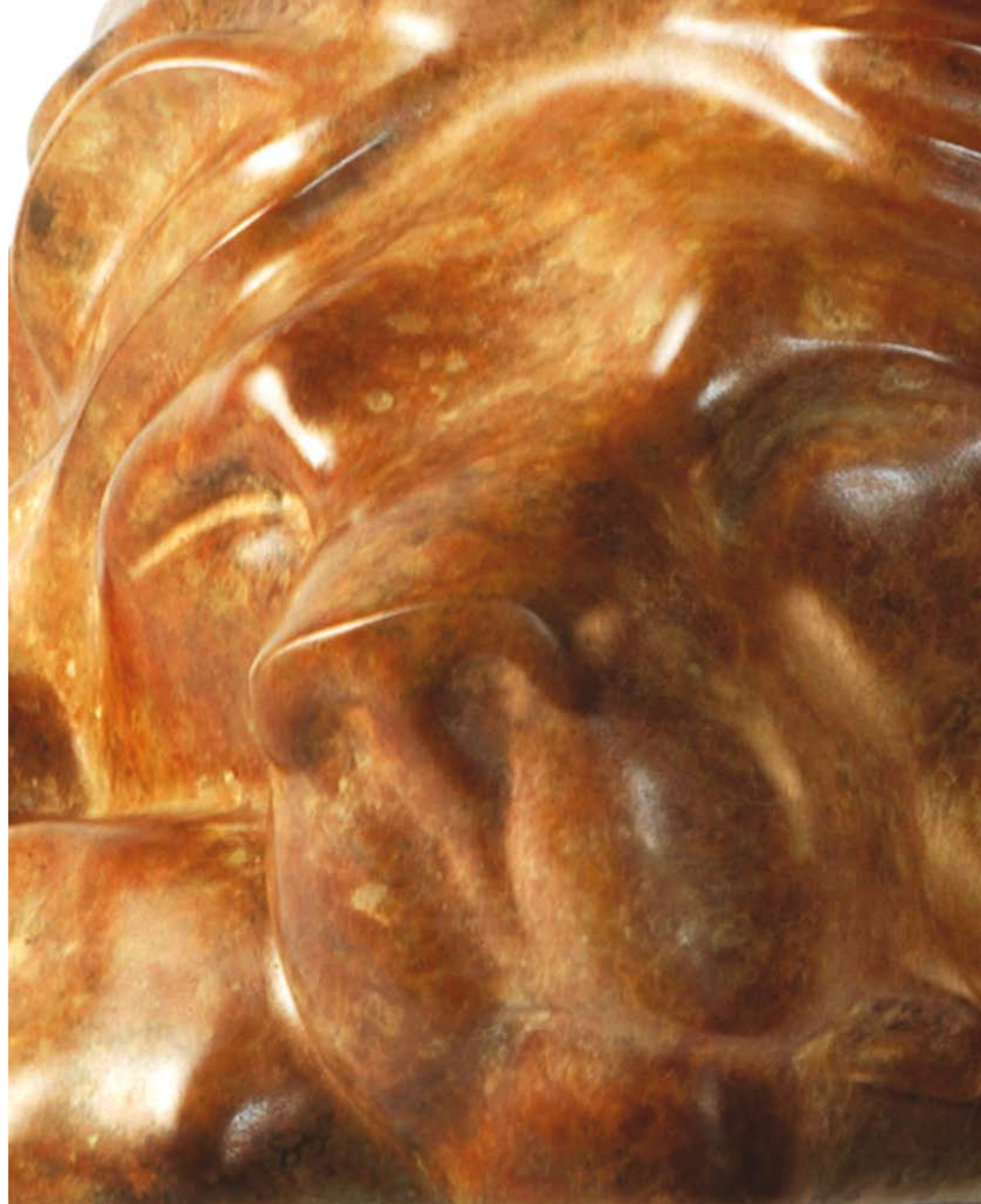


*Rhino*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
57 cm wide



(ABOVE)  
*Jaguar*  
Sterling Silver  
Edition of 9  
4 cm high

(LEFT & RIGHT)  
*Lion Resting*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
28 cm high



*Mother & Child*  
Marble  
Unique  
40 cm high







*Gorilla Standing*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
29 cm high



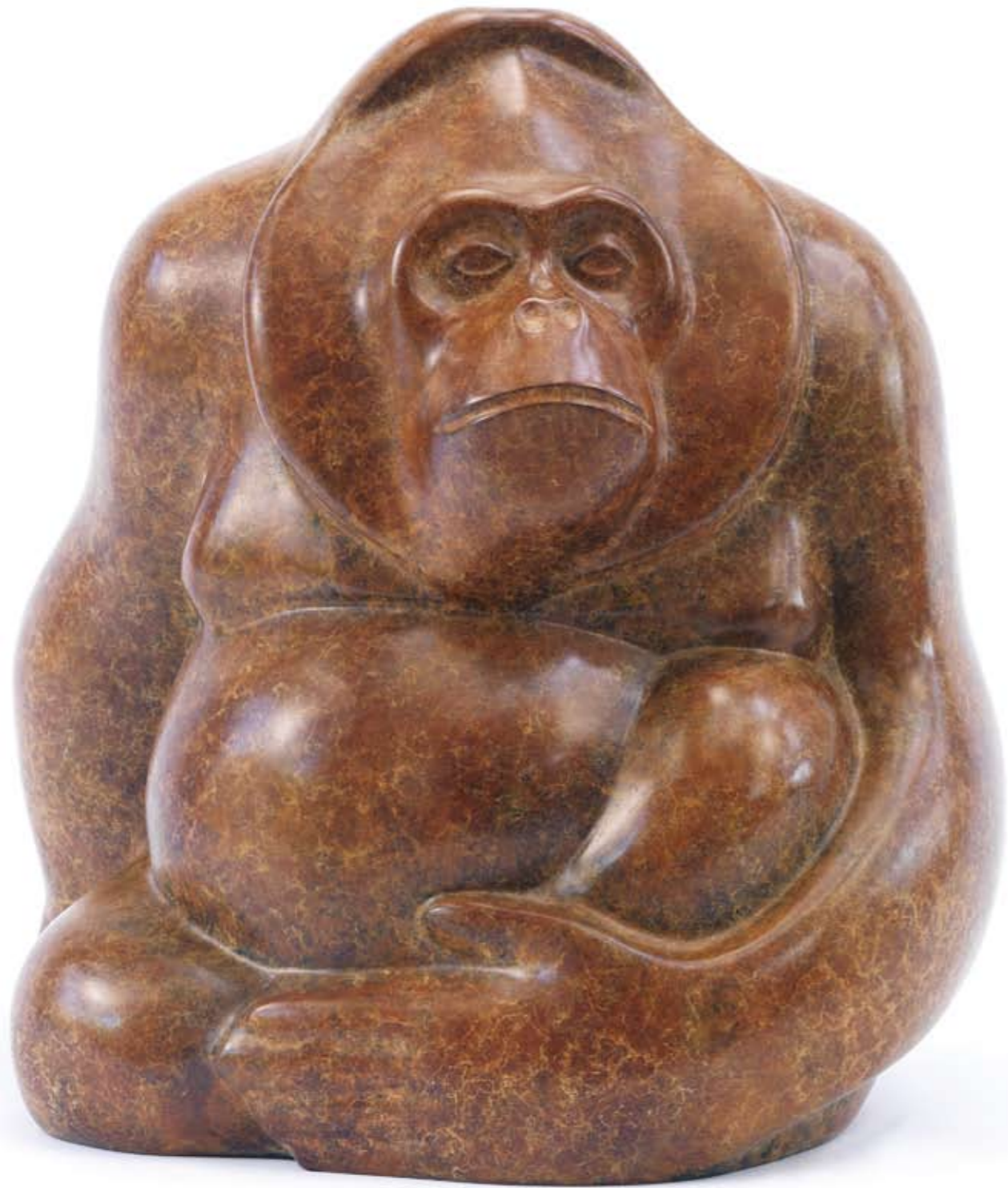
*Jaguar*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
48 cm high





*Lion Alert*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
37 cm high





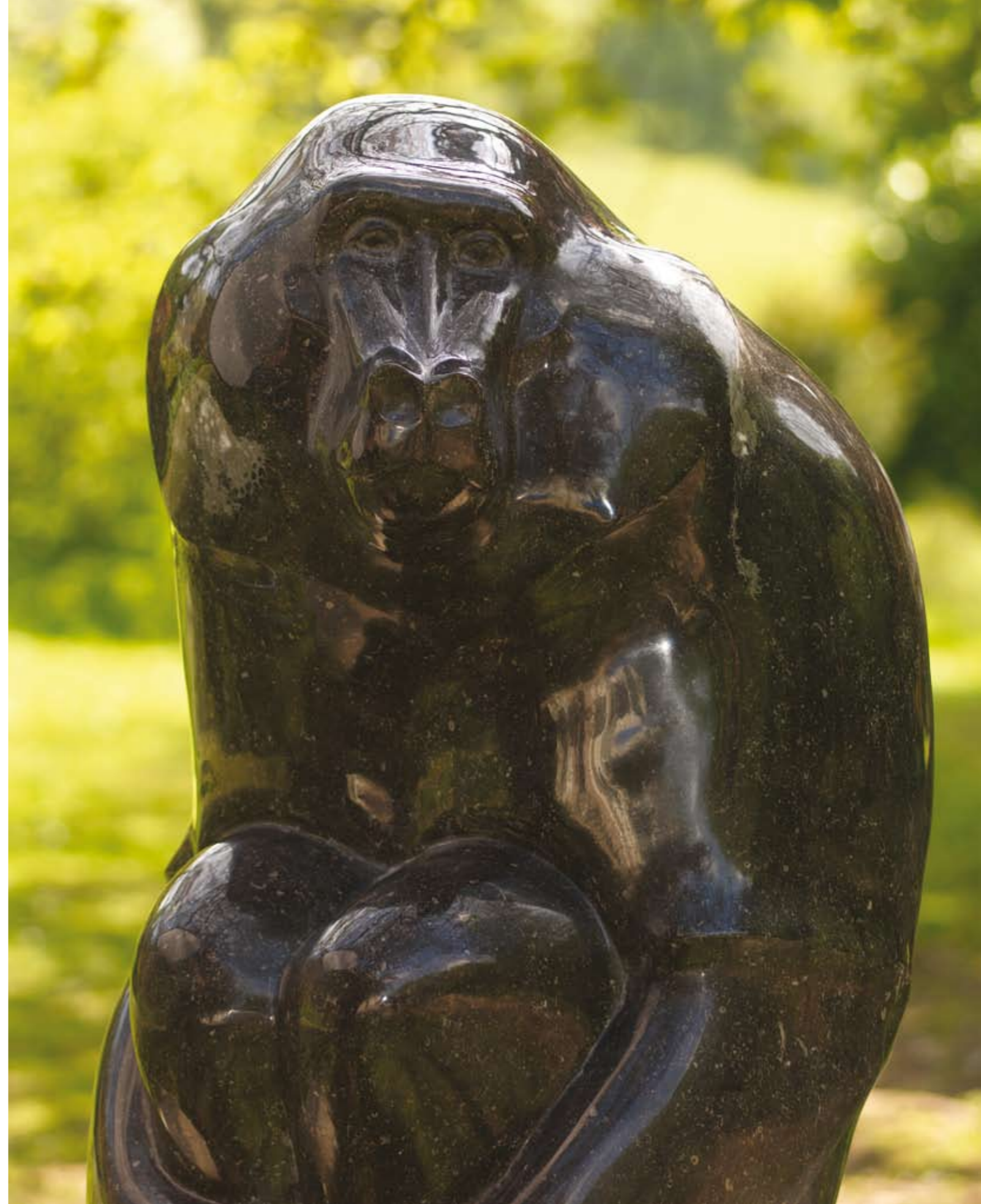
(ABOVE)  
*Reclining Gorilla*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
29 cm high

(LEFT)  
*Orang Utan*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
44 cm high



(ABOVE)  
*Small Orang Utan*  
Sterling Silver  
Edition of 9  
12 cm high

(RIGHT)  
*Baboon*  
Belgian Fossil Marble  
Unique  
88 cm high





(ABOVE)  
*Tiger*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
23 cm high



(RIGHT)  
*Cheetah*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
40 cm high

*Fox*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
50 cm high





(ABOVE)  
*Kneeling Torso*  
Marble  
Unique  
49 cm high



(RIGHT)  
*Kneeling Torso*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
49 cm high



*Torso*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
1m high





(LEFT)  
*Torso without Head*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
92 cm high

(RIGHT)  
*Standing Torso  
with Head*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
109 cm high





(ABOVE)  
*Reclining Head*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
14 cm high



(RIGHT)  
*Linked Figures Small*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
14 cm high

*Turtle*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
20 cm high





(ABOVE)  
*Python*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
14 cm high



(LEFT)  
*Walrus*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
32 cm high



(LEFT)  
*Penguin*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
52 cm high



(RIGHT)  
*Pelican*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
24 cm high



(RIGHT)  
*Owl*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
43 cm high

(CLOCKWISE FROM  
TOP LEFT)

*Pig*  
4 cm high

*Bear*  
3 cm high

*Owl*  
8cm high

*Camel*  
3.5cm high

*Walking Gorilla*  
2.5 cm high

*Snail*  
4 cm high

Sterling Silver  
Open Edition





*Snake*  
Bronze  
Edition of 9  
21 cm high





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pangolin London would like to thank a number of people for their help in bringing this exhibition and catalogue to fruition. Firstly to Michael Cooper for making the show possible by creating such an extensive body of work. Secondly, to Michael's wife Julie, for her patience and support as well as for kindly allowing us to photograph some of the works at her fine restaurant *The Sir Charles Napier* in Radnage. Our thanks also go to Oliver Hoare for writing such an insightful and personal introduction, to Steve Russell for his beautiful photography and finally to Steve Maule and the team at Pangolin Editions for all their dedication and hard work.

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