



MALTBY

RETROSPECTIVE

3rd – 22nd DECEMBER 2021

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MALTBY

RETROSPECTIVE

3rd – 22nd DECEMBER 2021

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John passed away peacefully
on December 22nd, 2020.

John Maltby (1936 – 2020)

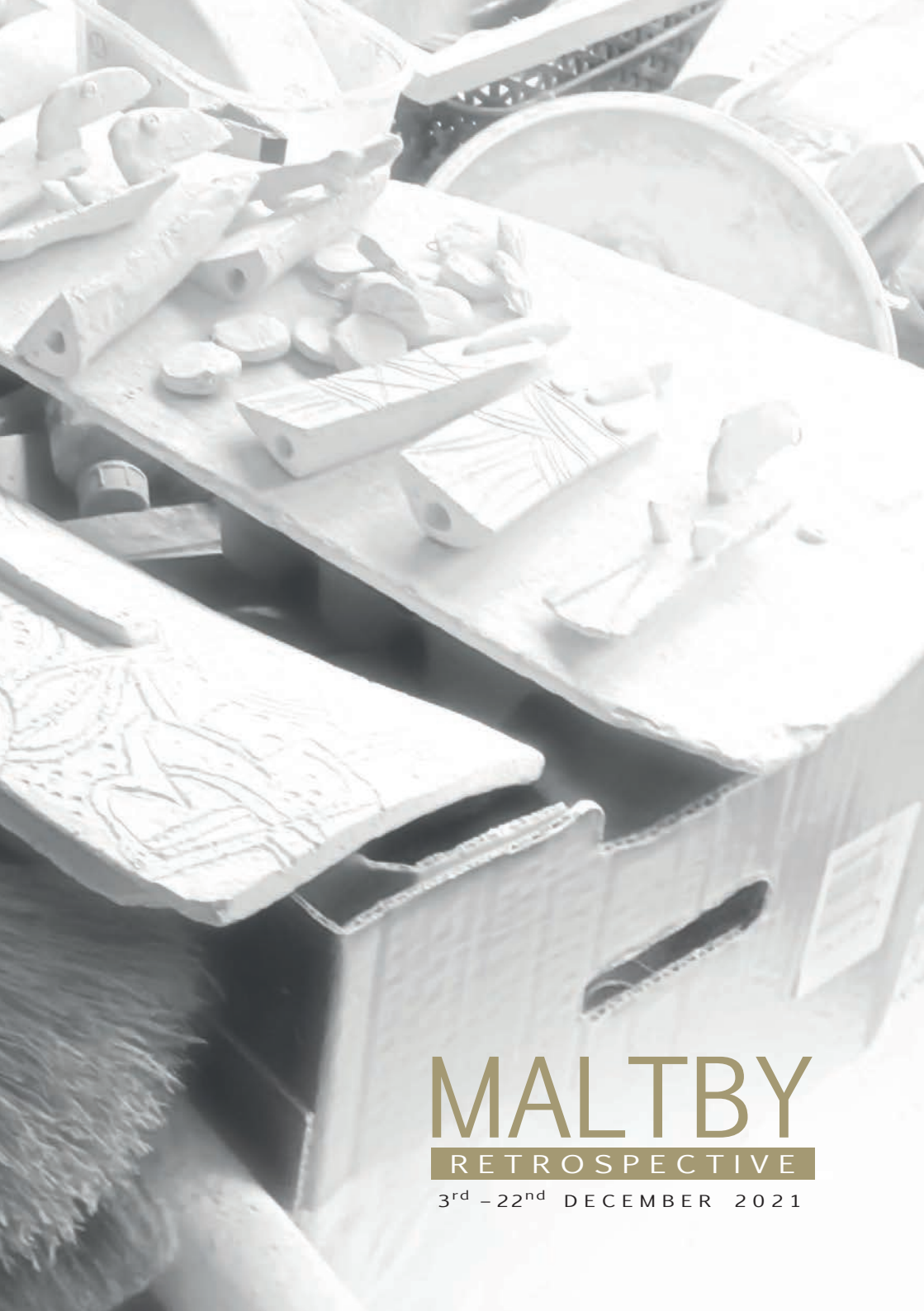
It is with great pleasure although bittersweet, that we present our retrospective exhibition of works by the internationally acclaimed potter, John Maltby. John was a great friend of the gallery and we were saddened to hear of his death at a time when he was still producing incredible ceramic sculptures, as you will see on examining the collection which feature early examples of his work right up to pieces from John's very last firing.

We hope you enjoy the exhibition as much as we have enjoyed curating it. It's been a pleasure, to be surrounded by so much of John's work.

Matt & Ella







MALTBY

RETROSPECTIVE

3rd – 22nd DECEMBER 2021

John Maltby - an appreciation

John Maltby was one of the UK's leading ceramic artists whose career, stretching back over six decades, continued to evolve and amaze, culminating in his latest highly distinctive and evocative works. His influences were wide ranging and his style was both eclectic and distinctive, something which should not surprise us considering the breadth of his vision, experience and travels.

Over the years John produced a diverse range of work deriving from a re-imagining of his influences from childhood onwards. His signature motifs appear in the form of figurines, tiles, vases and set pieces. They blend the figurative with the abstract, presenting us with a distinctive cast of mythical figures, sea creatures, boats, angels and a variety of non-organic subjects brought to a strange and beautiful life.

In all these we may discern the landscapes and stories which influenced him, particularly the world of the past and its shadowy depths to which he lends an evocative mastery. It is common to regard John Maltby as a very English artist and this is, to an extent, the case.

However, John's influences transcend this. Such is the complexity of his mature work it is probably more accurate to say that, although an English artist in his style, we still detect traces of his early eastern influences along with a mythic feel which is distinctly European. Through the course of his long career he melded a series of influences and inspirations into a highly distinctive artistic signature.

In John Maltby's work we may trace connections with Bernard Leach and the 20th century's golden age of British pottery. The influence of Klee, Wallis, Moore and, particularly, I would argue, Picasso, alongside his early grounding in the Anglo-Oriental style and the art of the ancient world, produce a highly distinctive and heady mix into which he interpolated his own particular style.



So how did John evolve into the artist he became?

Growing up on the Lincolnshire coast in the town of Cleethorpes, his childhood influences and experience were framed by the sea, fishing, boats and the flat salt marshes spreading out towards an imperceptible horizon. Very similar in fact to the landscape that inspired so many of the ghost stories of M.R. James. These early influences can be traced right through to his last works.

John was educated at grammar school before taking a degree at Leicester College of Art where he specialised in sculpture before studying for a year at Goldsmiths College in London. Like many art students he found his way into the stop-gap profession of teaching.

John's life took a turn at the beginning of the nineteen sixties when he read 'A Potter's Book' by the eminence grise of British pottery, Bernard Leach, who he visited in 1962. Leach had a considerable reputation and was considered as setting the standard by which others were judged. He suggested that John contact his son, David, at David's studio in Bovey Tracy, Devon.



Both Leaches were heavily influenced by the tradition of oriental, specifically Japanese, ceramics and had worked in partnership with cutting-edge Japanese artists. The visit to David Leach proved to be a life-changing experience. John Maltby was married to his much loved wife, Heather, who sadly passed away in 2007; they had two children together, Joe and Philippa. John was working as a teacher but decided to stake everything on a career in art by taking an apprenticeship with David Leach.

David had been brought up influenced by the Anglo-Oriental style practised by his father, Bernard, who had worked alongside leading Japanese ceramicists such as Shoji Hamada. Elements of this rubbed off on John. After a two-year apprenticeship John took a bold gamble and set up his own studio, Stoneshill Pottery near Crediton in Devon, where he worked for the rest of his life.

Despite the stability of the location, his work between 1964 and 2021 was an extended creative journey in which he established a distinctive and highly evocative style becoming one of the most creative and original ceramic artists in the UK. His work, always following the path his artistic muse took him rather than seeking commercial success, was in demand worldwide.

We can get an idea of John Maltby, the man, in the quote below from Matthew Leech of Cheshire Art Gallery as he talks about John Maltby.



"Having already agreed with John that we would have a Maltby Solo exhibition in 2021 featuring John's latest work, and the devastating news of John's sudden passing, I thought it only right for us to press on with a very different exhibition. A celebration of John's life, which includes some earlier pieces of work that he was so famous for. We wanted this exhibition to be something that John would have been proud of and we hope we've achieved this. Apart from being an exceptional artist he was an amazing man."

It was a chance encounter with Joe Maltby, John's son, which resulted in an invitation to Stoneshill Pottery.

"I was a little apprehensive as I had been forewarned that John was a bit of a character, somewhat eccentric and would suffer no fool. John was known for having a select few galleries that he was represented by. However I was just pleased to meet the artist I had admired for so many years, especially as John had been extremely inspirational to so many current artists.

I need not have worried as we hit it off straight away, enjoying a special friendship and great working relationship from that moment on.

I looked forward to my visits with John, due to distance they were not as often as I would have liked but we kept in regular contact on the phone, John had a great sense of humour and he is dearly missed."



The first real step towards the Maltby style was taken when, following a couple of years of producing the type of pots he'd been working on at Bovey Tracy, John began to realise that producing Anglo-Japanese works, fine as they were, was not for him. In fact, he found it neither artistically satisfying nor enabling. In producing work in the style of other artists he was stifling his own inner artistic voice.

So John took the bold step of moving away from the shackles of this style. In the search for his own artistic voice, he was influenced by a wide range of disparate artistic styles from which elements, having been distilled in his own imagination, could be merged into something new. Something that would result in an instantly recognisable individual style.

This is not to imply that his oriental influences were in any way discarded, they were, rather, melded into the style that became his own. They can be seen, for example, in the texture, colouring and particularly the shape of the honest workmanship on some of the beautiful and asymmetric vases on display.

We may still discern how these stylistic influences with their philosophical eastern concomitants, developed in John's later work. The designs on the cup form (Catalogue No.5) in the exhibition, with the Maltbyesque sharp edges, show a primitive design of a brick red half sun shining on flowers on the front. The abstract reverse side suggests the dark earth beneath the surface from which the flowers grew. The holistic message of the piece perfectly suggesting a visual Haiku.

Striving for a unique voice is a hard and lonely road to travel. This is a path which not many modern artists are prepared to take and of those who do, few manage to complete the journey. In John's case it was a journey that stretched from 1964 until 2020 including the hiatus of major heart surgery in 1996. The consequences of the surgery made it more difficult to create large scale pieces thus imposing an enforced change to his methodology, leading to a new direction in terms of both scale and subject matter.

This artistic trajectory ended, it can be argued, in works that may be ranked amongst the best and most arresting of his career. Continuing to develop, innovate and improve over such a timespan is rare and it is difficult to find comparisons amongst modern British artists.

John's work is in demand across the globe and he has exhibited across Europe, the USA and the UK. An understanding of his sustained popularity lies not only in the inner integrity of the work but also from the flow of his development through several distinctive styles as he followed the path along which his art led him. Although demanding, this is also liberating, something best expressed in his own words.

"The flexibility of idea and image can be expressed more freely. Therefore, the constraints of function are no longer present. I feel newly liberated from some of the restraints of ceramic tradition. However I hope that those skills of the 'Leach' tradition can be assimilated into and contribute to the vitality of the work."



So, what is it that makes Maltby's work so innately challenging and satisfying?

I would suggest we start to answer this by examining the emotional and intellectual impact of the works themselves upon their viewers. John's inspiration from nature and the more remote periods of history are melded into the archetypes that haunt our subconscious.

This mixture of the modern with its ritual antecedents provides a heavy brew of figures pregnant with meaning; compelling, but ultimately unknowable. Much of John Maltby's work and particularly his later work, references the ancient world, its traditions and archetypes. It cannot be overstressed how his feeling for this sets him apart and renders his work so distinctive.

A major strand in the thought patterns and rituals of ancient societies was the passage from the kingdom of the living to the kingdom of the dead and it is worth bearing this in mind when examining the exhibition.

This feeling for the past in John's work was very well captured by Andy Christian in *Ceramics Review*.

'He gathers fragments of poetic texts and his storytelling has both rhythm and pace. He knows well that art does not have to be wholly understood but is best left in metaphor and paradox.'



Title:

LARGE VASE WITH FLOWERS

Dimensions: (CM)

39(H) x 24(W) x 7(D)

Price:

£4,499





Cat No.2

Title:

VESSEL WITH TOP HANDLE

Dimensions: (CM)

32(H) x 22(W) x 6(D)

Price:

£2,499



Cat No.3

Title:

VESSEL WITH HANDLE BIRD & SUN

Dimensions: (CM)

14(H) x 15(W) x 10(D)

Price:

£1,999

Title:

SPADE VASE

Dimensions: (CM)

20(H) x 16(W) x 7(D)

Price:

£2,499



Title:

CUP FORM WITH FLOWERS & SUN

Dimensions: (CM)

13(H) x 15(W) x 6(D)

Price:

£1,599



Title:

FOOTED BOWL

Dimensions: (CM)

5(H) x 18(W) x 16(D)

Price:

£1,399



Title:

LARGE RECTANGULAR VESSEL

Dimensions: (CM)

41(H) x 27(W) x 9(D)

Price:

£3,999



Title:

LARGE CUP FORM

Dimensions: (CM)

16(H) x 22(W) x 7(D)

Price:

£1,599



Title:
VESSEL WITH SUN & BOAT

Dimensions: (CM)
22(H) x 20(W) x 7(D)

Price:
£2,499



Cat No.10

Title:

FLASK VASE

Dimensions: (CM)

16(H) x 18(W) x 5(D)

Price:

£2,999



Cat No.11

Title:

LARGE VESSEL WITH HANDLE

Dimensions: (CM)

28(H) x 37(W) x 10(D)

Price:

£1,749



Title:

LARGE VASE

Dimensions: (CM)

34(H) x 23(W) x 8(D)

Price:

£3,499

Title:
VESSEL WITH SMALL ROUND HANDLE

Dimensions: (CM)
17(H) x 17(W) x 9(D)

Price:
£1,249



Cat No.13

Title:
VESSEL WITH HANDLE

Dimensions: (CM)
15(H) x 23(W) x 6(D)

Price:
£1,699



Cat No.15



Cat No.14

Title:
BOWL

Dimensions: (CM)
7(H) x 22(W) x 22(D)

Price:
£899



Cat No.16

Title:
SPADE VASE WITH FLYING BIRD

Dimensions: (CM)
28(H) x 21(W) x 10(D)

Price:
£2,699

Title:
ALFRED AUTOMA

Dimensions: (CM)
38(H) x 24(W) x 6(D)

Price:
£1,199



Cat No.17



Cat No.18

Title:

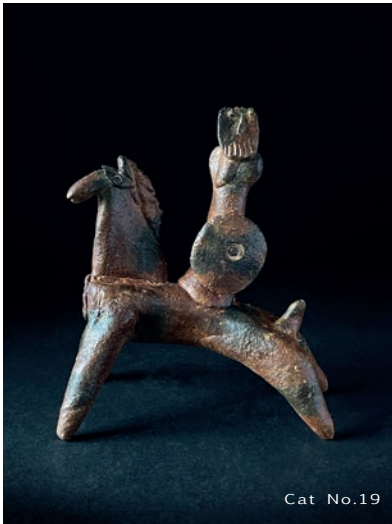
2 FIGURES & A RUIN

Dimensions: (CM)

25(H) x 20(W) x 9(D)

Price:

£1,999



Cat No.19

Title:

HORSE & RIDER

Dimensions: (CM)

14(H) x 7(W) x 11(D)

Price:

£749



Cat No.20

Title:

JOHN GUARDIAN

Dimensions: (CM)

22(H) x 9(W) x 5(D)

Price:

£1,599



Title:
ANGEL OF THE MARSHES 2007
Dimensions: (CM)
35(H) x 19(W) x 9(D)
Price:
£2,749

Title:

FAMILY & BOAT 2007

Dimensions: (CM)

30(H) x 69(W) x 9(D)

Price:

£9,999



Cat No.22





Title:

QUEEN WITH EARRINGS

Dimensions: (CM)

26(H) x 17(W) x 8(D)

Price:

£2,499



Cat No.24

Title:

LARGE ANCIENT KING

Dimensions: (CM)

43(H) x 18(W) x 10(D)

Price:

£4,199



Cat No.25

Title:

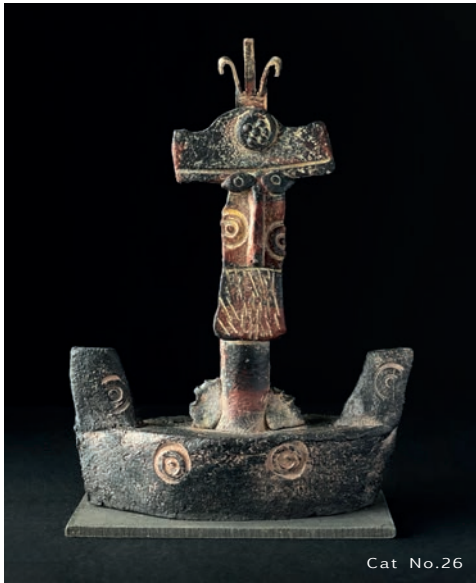
GUARDIAN I (A piece from John's last firing)

Dimensions: (CM)

20(H) x 7(W) x 7(D)

Price:

£1,249



Cat No.26

Title:

ADMIRAL IN BOAT

Dimensions: (CM)

20(H) x 15(W) x 5.5(D)

Price:

£2,349



Cat No.27

Title:

SEATED WOMAN ON WALL

Dimensions: (CM)

14(H) x 12(W) x 5(D)

Price:

£1,399

Title:

LARGE GUARDIAN

Dimensions: (CM)

27(H) x 9(W) x 6(D)

Price:

£1,799





Title:

KNIGHTS TOMB

Dimensions: (CM)

17.5(H) x 20(W) x 6(D)

Price:

£1,749



Cat No.30

Title:

SHELTERING

Dimensions: (CM)

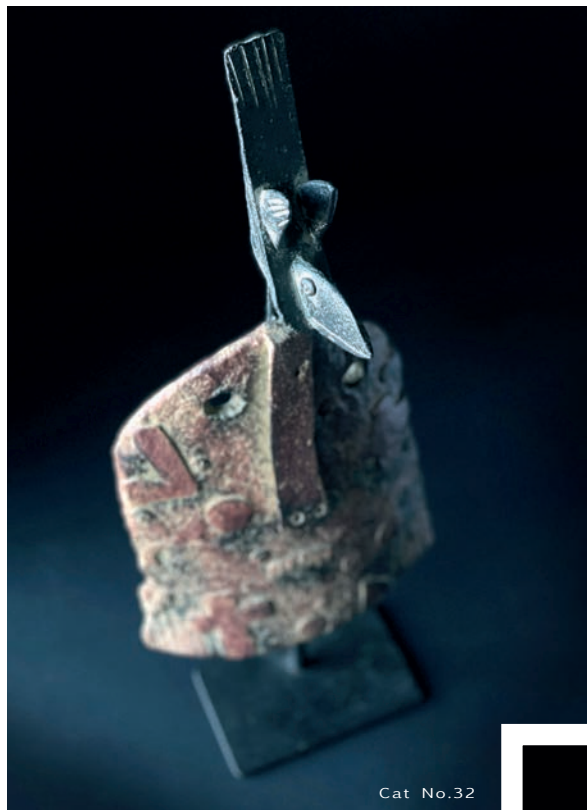
15(H) x 17(W) x 6(D)

Price:

£1,749

Title:
ONE EYED KING WITH BIRD
Dimensions: (CM)
48.5(H) x 18(W) x 18(D)
Price:
£3,999





Cat No.32

Title:

BIRD & HELMET 2012

Dimensions: (CM)

45(H) x 18(W) x 8(D)

Price:

£3,799



Cat No.33

Title:

LEGLESS GUARDIAN

(A piece from John's last firing)

Dimensions: (CM)

11(H) x 8(W) x 3(D)

Price:

£799



Title:

PRINCESS WITH EARRINGS 2012

Dimensions: (CM)

27(H) x 13(W) x 9(D)

Price:

£2,499



Cat No.35

Title:

FORMIDABLE ANGEL 2011

Dimensions: (CM)

32(H) x 16(W) x 8(D)

Price:

£1,999



Title:

ROYAL BARGE

Dimensions: (CM)

20(H) x 14(W) x 6(D)

Price:

£2,249

Title:
LARGE KINGS HEAD

Dimensions: (CM)
33(H) x 15(W) x 12(D)

Price:
£2,499



Cat No.38



Cat No.37

Title:
BEARDED KING WITH EARRINGS

Dimensions: (CM)
25(H) x 13(W) x 7(D)

Price:
£2,499



Cat No.39

Title:

COUPLE IN LOVE (A piece from John's last firing)

Dimensions: (CM)

16(H) x 8(W) x 7.5(D)

Price:

£1,649

Title:

GUARDIAN II (A piece from John's last firing)

Dimensions: (CM)

21(H) x 7(W) x 7(D)

Price:

£1,249





Title:

KING & RAVEN

Dimensions: (CM)

32(H) x 20(W) x 10(D)

Price:

£3,499



Cat No.42

Title:

ANGEL WITH FLOWERS

Dimensions: (CM)

20(H) x 8(W) x 5(D)

Price:

£1,499



Cat No.43

Title:

QUEEN WITH EARRINGS

Dimensions: (CM)

25(H) x 10(W) x 7(D)

Price:

£2,499



Cat No.44

Title:

4 FIGURES & SCULPTURED HEAD

Dimensions: (CM)

27(H) x 21(W) x 11(D)

Price:

£2,199

Title:

ANGEL (A piece from John's last firing)

Dimensions: (CM)

25(H) x 8(W) x 5(D)

Price:

£1,749





Cat No.46

Title:
THREE STANDING FIGURES
Dimensions: (CM)
29(H) x 42(W) x 12.5(D)
Price:
£4,499

Title:
FIGURE WITH TREE 2006
Dimensions: (CM)
46.5(H) x 26(W) x 17(D)
Price:
£2,499







Cat No.48

Title:

SEATED LADY WITH FLOWERS

(A piece from John's last firing)

Dimensions: (CM)

19(H) x 11(W) x 6(D)

Price:

£1,749

Title:

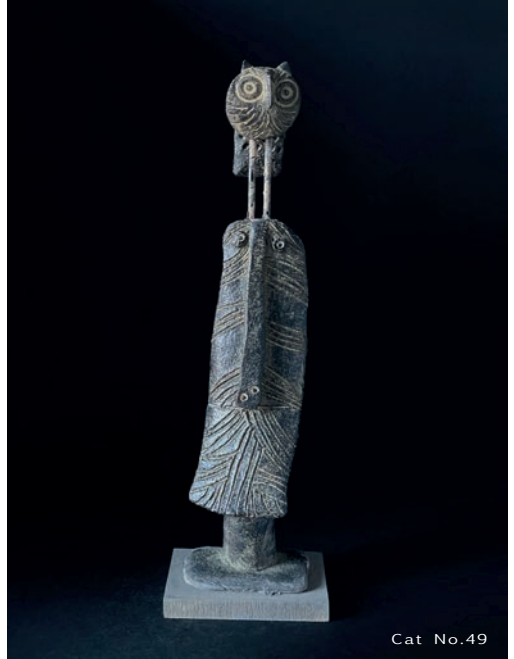
WISE OWL

Dimensions: (CM)

32(H) x 9(W) x 7(D)

Price:

£1,999



Cat No.49



Title:

TALL CROWNED FIGURE WITH EARRINGS

Dimensions: (CM)

60(H) x 22(W) x 12(D)

Price:

£3,999

Cat No.50



The Guardians, Kings and other inhabitants of the Maltby world on display here, with their beguiling enigmatic character, engender an immediacy of impact as they drag us into their world. They seem to combine their role as symbols of power with a sense of something approaching serenity.

As the artist must have intended, we discern a feeling in the figures to which we respond but don't fully understand. However, as is always the case with good art, we try to interpret what we see which gives the figures a richer and deeper dimension.

Look carefully at the individual exhibits, at the skilful blending of simplicity and detail. For a good example of this study, for a moment, the Guardians with their slab like torsos and small schematic heads. Then look at the hachuring (similar to that found on figures excavated at Troy and Mycenae) on the lower two thirds of the torsos which serves as some type of tunic. Their faces look out at us with an unreadable expression.

They stand on modern utilitarian poles instead of legs. This final touch gives them an enigmatic nature suggesting we only understand part of their story, rather like something recently excavated and incomplete leaving us with a mysterious void in our understanding.

A truly creative artist needs to have a particularly rich psychological hinterland, something distinct from which works of originality can flow. It is the combination of this with the hard won skills of technical expertise that give the artist a particular imprimatur that makes the subjects resonate with feeling and meaning.

To fully understand how this works in the art of John Maltby it is worth looking in detail at a couple of his larger pieces, both featured in the exhibition, which from the first glance reveal Maltby's artistic signature. We can see the way the artist's influences and imagination combine to produce work of depth and feeling.



John Maltby (1936 – 2020)

The first piece is a large figure, a king with a dark bird perched on its head. (Catalogue No.31) Both elements of this are symbolic but if we understand the significance of the bird then the inner nature of the piece can be better appreciated. The bird had a particular significance for Maltby. Sometimes he saw it, sometimes he imagined it, at times he wasn't sure if it actually was there or in his imagination. Here the bird sits on the king's head in a brooding work that transmits the interplay of the real and imagined in all of our lives, something as true for the present as for the deep past.

It is well worth looking closely at this piece as it contains many of the elements that run through Maltby's work as well as surprising nods to different influences in a rich, strange mix. A large spherical cone with sharp edges comprises the head of a king topped by a sharply delineated crown and supported by a long column representing a neck. This structure contains the curving surface of a highly abstract face. In many ways this reminds us of Picasso's most successful use of cubism.

Look at the disparate elements of the face: one round eye, an eye in the form of a cross at a much lower level, a straight line which splits the face in half and three off-centre triangles for a mouth set in a fissured broken surface. The description of the component elements reads as an exercise in confusion but one brief glance and the viewer is under no illusion as to the power of the image, which is at first glance seen as a unity and not an assemblage of parts.



On top of the head the enigmatic bird from Maltby's imagined realms dangles a fish from its elongated beak above the eyes of the king. This as a whole contains a considerable mix of symbolic messaging for a ceramic work and yet delivers an immediate emotional visual impact, while, I think carrying something that was of real meaning to the artist.

The second piece combines several of Maltby's key themes in one powerful statement. A large ancient boat, (Catalogue No. 22) Janus like, with two prows facing both ways each augmented only by a simple inscribed unseeing eye sails eternal waters. Darkly monochromatic, the nature of the boat is underscored by the ghostly crew or perhaps passengers. In this piece we have a perfect example of some of the major sources that influenced John's work presented through the medium of his singular imagination. We feel the immediate impact of these figures despite not understanding them thereby invoking what Jung termed the collective unconscious.

These figures are placed in two groups of women and warriors arranged in a supplicant or ritual nature. One of the women bears the horizontal figure of a child bound in swaddling clothes, perhaps an offering or act of mourning. In many ways this again reminds us of a ship burial. The faces, including that of the swaddled child, gaze out at us in expectation. As if we are the work of art being inspected rather than they are.

It makes for a reflection of the nature of art and the two-way process necessary for its appreciation and on the unknowable aspect that each piece of truly felt art contains. A great example of John Maltby as a mature and highly original artist.

John Maltby one of the last links with a distant golden age of British ceramic art and his journey from his collaborations with Leach to his later highly individual works takes us on a journey both rich and strange.

Each of the exhibits here will repay equally close scrutiny. Enjoy.



Author Nick Brown OBE FRSA

CAT NO	TITLE	H (CM)	W (CM)	D (CM)	PRICE
1	LARGE VASE WITH FLOWERS	39	24	7	£4,499
2	VESSEL WITH TOP HANDLE	32	22	6	£2,499
3	VESSEL WITH HANDLE BIRD & SUN	14	15	10	£1,999
4	SPADE VASE	20	16	7	£2,499
5	CUP FORM WITH FLOWERS & SUN	13	15	6	£1,599
6	FOOTED BOWL	5	18	16	£1,399
7	LARGE CUP FORM	16	22	7	£1,599
8	LARGE RECTANGULAR VESSEL	41	27	9	£3,999
9	VESSEL WITH SUN & BOAT	22	20	7	£2,499
10	FLASK VASE	16	18	5	£2,999
11	LARGE VESSEL WITH HANDLE	28	37	10	£1,749
12	LARGE VASE	34	23	8	£3,499
13	VESSEL WITH HANDLE	15	23	6	£1,699
14	BOWL	7	22	22	£899
15	VESSEL WITH SMALL ROUND HANDLE	17	17	9	£1,249
16	SPADE VASE WITH FLYING BIRD	28	21	10	£2,699
17	ALFRED AUTOMA	38	24	6	£1,199
18	2 FIGURES & A RUIN	25	20	9	£1,999
19	HORSE & RIDER	14	7	11	£749
20	JOHN GUARDIAN	22	9	5	£1,599
21	ANGEL OF THE MARSHES 2007	35	19	9	£2,749
22	FAMILY & BOAT 2007	30	69	9	£9,999
23	QUEEN WITH EARRINGS	26	17	8	£2,499
24	LARGE ANCIENT KING	43	18	10	£4,199
25	GUARDIAN I (A piece from John's last firing)	20	7	7	£1,249
26	ADMIRAL IN BOAT	20	15	5.5	£2,349
27	SEATED WOMAN ON WALL	14	12	5	£1,399
28	LARGE GUARDIAN	27	9	6	£1,799
29	KNIGHTS TOMB	17.5	20	6	£1,749
30	SHELTERING	15	17	6	£1,749
31	ONE EYED KING WITH BIRD	48.5	18	18	£3,999
32	BIRD & HELMET 2012	45	18	8	£3,799
33	LEGLESS GUARDIAN (A piece from John's last firing)	11	8	3	£799
34	PRINCESS WITH EARRINGS 2012	27	13	9	£2,499
35	FORMIDABLE ANGEL 2011	32	16	8	£1,999
36	ROYAL BARGE	20	14	6	£2,249
37	BEARDED KING WITH EARRINGS	25	13	7	£2,499
38	LARGE KINGS HEAD	33	15	12	£2,499
39	COUPLE IN LOVE (A piece from John's last firing)	16	8	7.5	£1,649
40	GUARDIAN II (A piece from John's last firing)	21	7	7	£1,249
41	KING & RAVEN	32	20	10	£3,499
42	ANGEL WITH FLOWERS	20	8	5	£1,499
43	QUEEN WITH EARRINGS	25	10	7	£2,499
44	4 FIGURES & SCULPTURED HEAD	27	21	11	£2,199
45	ANGEL (A piece from John's last firing)	25	8	5	£1,749
46	FIGURE WITH TREE 2006	46.5	26	17	£2,499
47	THREE STANDING FIGURES	29	42	12.5	£4,499
48	SEATED LADY WITH FLOWERS (A piece from John's last firing)	19	11	6	£1,749
49	WISE OWL	32	9	7	£1,999
50	TALL CROWNED FIGURE WITH EARRINGS	60	22	12	£3,999





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