



Jean White

Plight of the Birds

by Tim Saunders

Critically endangered birds are the focus of award-winning ceramic artist Jean White. A bird watcher for several years, she combined her two interests early on in her ceramics making at evening classes. [\(Add a note of where she is based. Did she have a career or focus before turning to clay?\)](#)

“My masters focused on finding a narrative to drive my work forward,” explains White, who wanted to do something to publicize the severe decline of species such as the swift (great bustard), which was previously vulnerable and is now treated as endangered. “This has become raising awareness of Red List Birds, using metaphors. I use sprigs because of the similarity in their appearance to fossils and I can therefore imply extinction by using them.”

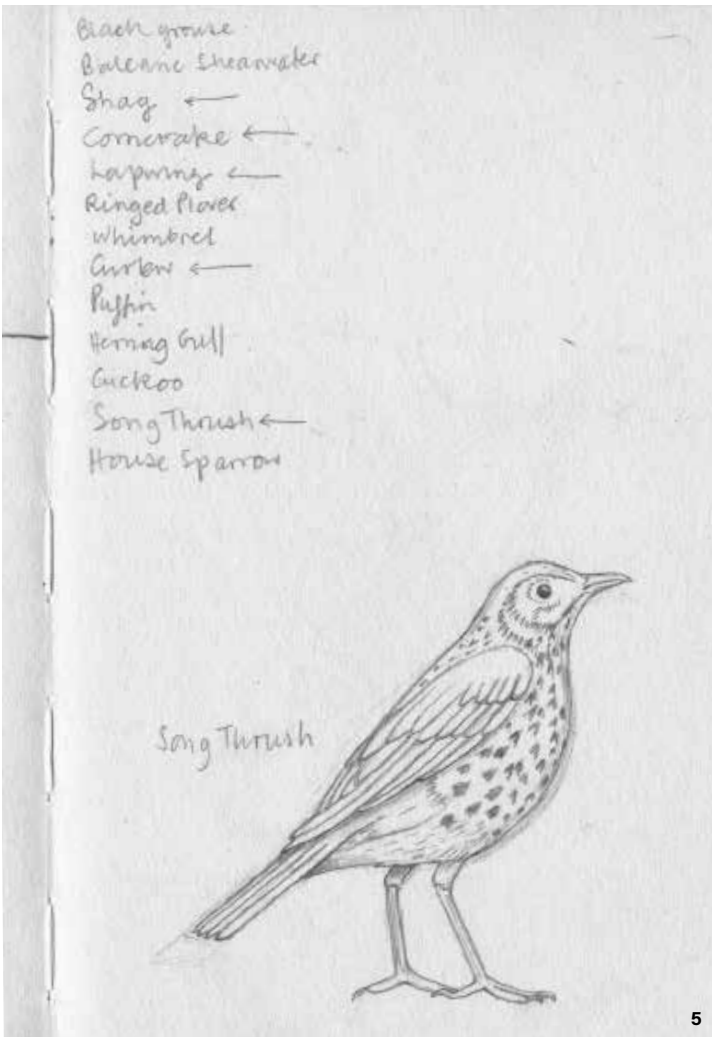




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kept to a minimum—“just the insides of the mugs I make,” where she uses a ready-made glaze powder and adds water.

There is no need for a wheel. “I have done a little throwing and would like to perhaps pursue that someday, but then there are so many possibilities with ceramics, something else will probably happen instead.”

Her garage is home to a 46-liter Ikon V46 electric kiln, “which is very well-built”. A typical day for White “usually includes something to do with ceramics: anything from applications, firing, sanding, casting, drawing, carving, mold making, and admin. It varies according to what I’m preparing for.”

New Work and Inspiration

New work is White’s current focus as she prepares for an exhibition in the summer of 2024. “I will definitely be making new sprig molds with new bird species and hopefully new model shapes,” she says. “I also have to have enough work to restock galleries as well as prepare for a fair I’ve been selected for.”

She plans to extend her *Future Fossils* collection, adding new species and new shapes to keep collectors’ (and her own) interest. “I have a new fair to try and hope to be accepted for ones I’ve done before,” White says, adding, “I have an exhibition to prepare for which will involve other makers interested in birds and their plight.”

“Always interested” in art as a child, White was surrounded by inspirational family members. “My grandmother was always making things, painting, sewing, and anything that caught her eye. I remember she gave me a ‘how to paint’ book that I worked through over and over again. Dad was a trained cabinet maker who taught woodwork and was always making furniture and then writing articles for woodworking magazines. So, making was definitely around me as a child. My family was very supportive when I chose



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to start art at A-level and I was always keen on drawing/painting/ making as a child.”

As a teenager, White was taken to art galleries “and was very drawn to Pablo Picasso and David Hockney as artists.” Her love of art saw her pursue it past A-level. She did a Foundation Art & Design course and then a BA Hons graphics/illustration degree.

“Pottery was just not on my radar at all, though. I bumped into using clay really. I enrolled in a printing course at my local college, but there weren’t enough students to run the course, so they offered me a place on their ceramics evening course instead, which I did one evening each week as a hobby for several years. Then the college closed down entirely, by which time I was seriously interested in ceramics, so I started an MA in Craft: Design at Manchester Metropolitan University specializing in ceramics. The second year of my MA at Manchester I had to complete in lockdown (I therefore missed out on some of the hands-on side) so topped up

at Staffordshire University to improve my mold-making skills. I did a semester at Staffordshire University on their MA course.”

(Does White have another job outside her studio practice or does she support herself with the sale of work?)

White’s ceramics, which typically sell for under \$249 (£200), are available in Manchester Art Gallery (where she won their Showcase Award in 2021), The Bluecoat Display Centre in Liverpool, Cambridge Contemporary Crafts, New Ashgate Gallery in Farnham, Flux in Bristol, and Frivoli Gallery in London. “I find my sales steady and I am gradually finding the right places for my work to sell.”

Learn more, www.jeanwhiteceramics.co.uk.

the author *British journalist Tim Saunders writes about art and ceramics. When he has time, he enjoys painting and making.*