JON BUCK

MAKING A POINT: THE POINT OF MAKING

Cherry Ripe
1983
Painted Resin
Unique
48 cm high

INTRODUCTION

One of the great delights of being a bronze caster is the opportunity it gives me to follow the evolution of a sculptor through years of collaboration. In Jon Buck's case, our working relationship began more than twenty-five years ago. We first met when Claude and I were students at Art College in Cheltenham at the same time that Jon was a Fellow there. He taught one day a week and for the rest of the week had a studio to produce his own sculpture. Jon's work had a profound effect on me. I was struck by its individuality and bold realism. It was vividly painted and humorous; it intrigued me and made me smile. The well-modelled surfaces were all about form and the way one element flowed rhythmically into another, making sense both as form and as sculpture. These bright, colourful and beautifully-crafted sculptures were a complete contrast to the minimalist abstract art that prevailed at the time. Jon's work stood out as totally individual and as I found out, so did the man. His lively personality, zest for life and a relentlessly inquiring mind meant that Claude and I spent more and more time in his studio.

Shared passions for sculpture, prehistoric art, Africa, nature in general and birds in particular, inevitably led to a close friendship. Visiting Jon and his wife Jane at home, I was struck by their scrapbooks and diaries of travels, notes with photos cut from newspapers and magazines, a personal record and library of visual information. Jon's curiosity was inspiring and his enthusiasm infectious. Our friendship endured beyond college and our relationship was reinforced when Claude and I started our own foundry. Jon was our first client and we have continued to work together ever since, and when Jane came to work at Pangolin a few years later, our futures were inevitably intertwined. I have watched the evolution of Jon's sculptural language from the early narrative, painted-resin figures, through the interlocked pieces of the 1990's, to the current highly-coloured, pared-down symbolic objects.

This catalogue follows that development and illustrates the growth of Jon's ideas and images through his individual lexicon of shapes. He has never been afraid to tread an unconventional path to create personal, meaningful and beautiful objects.

Who, as a child, hasn't played with raindrops on an outdoor table, pulling at the random bubble-shapes to exaggerate the animal or bird of our imagination? Who has not played the same game with clouds? I would always find a familiar repertoire of creatures appearing in the shifting shapes of water vapour, strange human-animal combinations morphing from deep inside my mind into the random shapes above me. Jon's sculptures remind me of this game. It is as if he has pulled at his bubbles of water until what he is imagining becomes obvious to us. This is the magic of making! Such simplicity is hard to reconnect with as an adult. Through a process of 'making' Jon has sought to rediscover the images in his own mind that somehow make the emotional connection between art and life, between seeing and thinking. In doing so he has created his own lexicon of totemic images that inevitably relate to ours.

Man naturally relates to other life forms. We tend to identify with animals or plants, whether they are roses, dogs, or horses and often to such a degree that our lives are coloured and shaped by them. Images which represent these objects of passion can become a 'totem' which draws us in and invokes a powerful connection. Such adopted icons, together with the appropriation of natural forms, create a basic language inherent in all humans, unique to an individual but also universal enough to be relevant to the larger social group.

Jon has made hundreds of sculptures, done thousands of drawings and looked at millions of images. His early work seems quite different from his most recent and to follow its development is a fascinating journey. He is able to explain far better than I can, how his research into science and the history of art have influenced the course of his work and how writers have inspired new visual explorations and adventures.

Simply a Pig
1984
Bronze
Edition of 6
15 cm high

However, I know Jon as a maker, a person who crafts his thoughts and ideas with his hands. The central role that making and makers have had since the dawn of our cultural lives was recently illustrated in the powerful and riveting radio programme by Neil McGregor: 'A History of the World in a Hundred Objects'. It was a wonderful way of charting humanity's ideas and achievements through looking at its material remains. He did not see them simply as historical relics but as vessels of thought, capsules of energy, technological achievements and the sensitive responses of individuals to the world around them.

One can sense the joy of making in all Jon's work through his generous, fecund and tactile forms. This comes from a natural ability to manipulate clay and celebrate its sensuous character. The making process dictates the final image, creating simplicity, sense and order out of amorphous clay.

In his first job as a bird keeper at Bristol Zoo, Jon's natural skill was put to good use. He painted images, signs and labels, describing for visitors the enormous diversity of the birds in his care, picking out the most distinctive features of each species so that identification was easy. This did two things I believe: it exercised his need to create images and it reinforced his connection to birds. His fascination was more than visual. He tended to his rare and exotic charges so well that many nested and reproduced, often for the first time in captivity. Conservation and natural science have continued to be fertile areas of Jon's thinking. Though Jon is essentially a sculptor of the human form, the bird occurs and recurs throughout his oeuvre. The sheer diversity of birds, their endless forms, colours and shapes, their symbolic significance to us, the purity and mystery of the egg and the wonder of flight are I think, taken together, a talisman that links much of Jon's work. It is a passion I know and understand well.

He was given the confidence to become a sculptor when he saw photographs of Reg Butler at work in his studio. The idea that one could earn a living from making objects inspired him to go to art school. There he honed his craft; long sessions in the life class gave him a profound understanding of the human body and by working at life-size and over, he practised handling large quantities of clay. The push and pull or tear and squeeze of manipulating the clay, like doodling in three-dimensions, conjures up shapes and images in the mind. However defined Jon's idea for a sculpture is, it comes to life in the making process. On this journey the idea is subject to endless tweaks and changes, sometimes complete revisions, necessitated by the way in which the image comes to reflect the idea. This intuitive making process has become more pronounced the less he has tried to replicate the shape of things. In his earliest works he described things in fully–formed, rounded realism. He was enjoying his ability to recreate in clay a likeness of someone or something. That process and the resulting object can be very satisfying and rewarding: '*Simply a Pig*' is joyously smug, smiling back at us, knowing in its sensuous humour and luxuriating in its verisimilitude.

One Can't Two Can
1983
Painted Resin & mixed media
Unique
153 cm high

In Her Lady's Chamber
1981
Painted Resin
Unique
100 cm high

They All Look Alike To Me
1983
Painted Resin
Unique
92 cm high

However, art does not come from skill alone and over time Jon became conscious that the satisfaction of recreation no longer fulfilled his creative needs. The 1980's saw him explore a new approach in a series of works with witty metaphorical titles, pursued as a direct reaction to the over-intellectual and restrictedly formal work predominating the era. Two beautifully - modelled toucans, *'One Can't, Two Can'* is a visual statement that explores Jon's primary concerns about pets, zoos, captive breeding and conservation. Such visual ideas permeate Jon's work. In *'They All Look Alike To Me'*, three almost identical penguins make an ironic statement which parodies bigoted views on race and other differences. This sensual/ intellectual combination proved a fertile creative stimulus for a while and many vibrantly-coloured, witty pieces ensued.

At the same time, alongside *'In Her Lady's Chamber'* and *'Chorus Line'*, a more personal set of heads were evolving with animals and birds modelled into their hair. Could it be that at some stage of the modelling process a squidge of clay intended as hair suggested in Jon's mind a bird? This totemic image has returned in one form or another ever since.

These pieces also had witty, metaphorical titles and remained within his overtly humorous vein of work yet they also broke free from a certain literalness that realism can induce. They felt monumental while retaining a domestic size, fragments not just of a figure but of a form, and continued Jon's process of simplification.

At this time Jon was showing with the Nicholas Treadwell Gallery. Work was selling well and Treadwell showed in major international art fairs. However, the gallery label of 'Superhumanism' and its emphasis on humour came to feel restrictive and was the impetus for Jon to move on and to develop his sculptural language further.

In the Beginning
1988
Bronze
Edition of 8
40 cm high

ABOVE RIGHT
Embrace III
1990
Bronze
Edition of 8
46 cm high

BELOW RIGHT
Tasting the Fruit
1988
Bronze
Edition of 9
18 cm high

Jon's sculptures have always had the sense of fullness, like a developed chick within the egg. The forms have a great feeling of tautness as though they have fulfilled their potential. The meeting point of these bulging forms creates a line, a drawing between the forms which seductively delineates the elements and highlights the features. In Jon's quest for a wholeness of object and his struggle to create a new reality, drawing into the form became an important part of the process. *'In the Beginning'*, a Janus figure of a man and woman walking apart whilst trapped together, was the start of a whole new body of work about the interdependence of forms and figures. The pull and push of this seminal piece is an apt metaphor for Jon's sculptural exploration. His large bronze commission *'Tower of Strength'*, four figures balanced one on top of another, exploits this very sense of interdependency. In these works the sculpture itself depends upon the concept of togetherness and through their realisation Jon further evolved and honed his language.

In *'Tasting the Fruit'*, *'Family'* and *'Peaceable Kingdom'* Jon made more use of rounded, monolithic forms, contained as it were within an invisible membrane, like the embrace of interlocked twins inside the womb. This was a clever formal device for the expression of the physical and emotional symbiosis between individuals or that of Humanity with the world.

As one looks at the generous forms of *'Family'*, all that skin between mother, father and child, the emotional feeling of contact heightens our own experience of touch. As an image of the knot of the primary human unit *'Family'* excels; it is slightly defensive, protective against the outside world yet is warm, touching and tender.

This strong sense of connectedness and contentedness found renewed expression in the 'embrace' series. Here the knot is of two figures so locked together as to have been hewn from one block of stone, the limbs and bodies so intertwined that it is a puzzle to work out whose hand or foot is whose. These sculptures reached a logical climax in *'Returning to Embrace'*, in which the couple are so wrapped up in each other that between them they only need one pair of legs and arms. Strangely, one doesn't immediately notice that there is anything missing; the economy of language only serves to intensify the feeling of togetherness and total dependency.

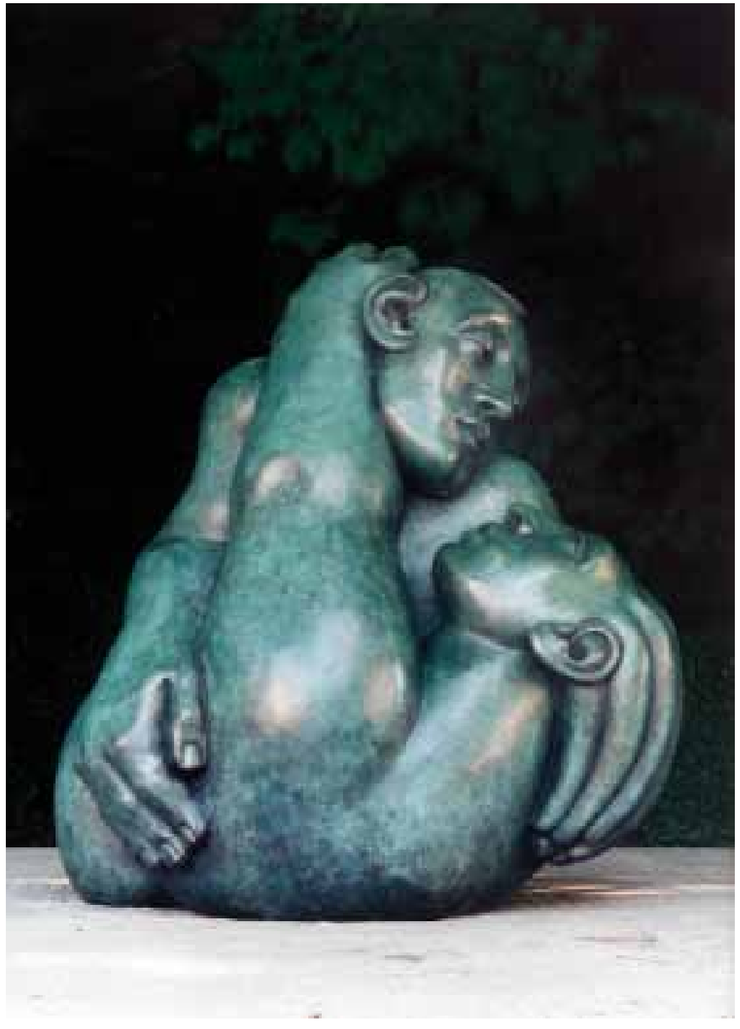
LEFT
Family
1991
Bronze
Edition of 8
51 cm high

Peaceable Kingdom
1989
Bronze
Unique
53 cm high

Aware that the 'embrace' idea could become overly romantic and sentimental, Jon looked for ways to expand the theme to include the whole circle of life. '*Bird and Fish*' and '*Cat and Bird*' show Nature 'red in tooth and claw'; '*Tree of Life*' and the monumental '*Rima Reborn*' bring Man together with other elements of the natural world. In these works the marriage of form and content is enhanced by the use of patinated bronze; colour is still important but as part of the unified surface of the object. Gone, for the moment, are the distinct, bright colours that the earlier painted figures relied on. Perhaps this marked a new impetus to break free from the restriction of a single form of communication. Concerned that bronze, his medium of choice, was perhaps not being used for its intrinsic strength and that drawing could be more than simply a line incised into form, Jon now separated out the figure and made it stand alone, free of the enclosing membrane. These new pieces emerged with a stark simplicity. In '*Man Alone*' and '*Outcasts*', almost stick-like in structure, Jon broke free from the idea that form had to be massive, heavy and monolithic. However, though the form had changed with this new lighter approach, in '*Equilibrium*', we still see the idea of interdependence in a couple spinning gyroscope-like in its own enclosed world.

ABOVE
Man Alone
1993
Bronze
Edition of 10
58 cm high

BELOW
Tree of Life
1989
Bronze
Edition of 5
101 cm high



Returning to Embrace
1997
Bronze
Edition of 5
150 cm high

The casting process has always been integral to Jon's working practice. With *'Dream Cast'*, *'Man of Parts'* and *'Cast Apart'* he used the principles of bronze casting to explore a theme of separation, separation not only of 'the couple' but also of the single figure into basic building blocks. This allusion to the process of casting enables the viewer to imagine and visualise the construction of a sculpture, much as an 'airfix' model can be visualised from its many components. Jon's new vocabulary of slimmer forms allowed him to utilise the tube-like structures used for casting bronze as both frame and separators for these ingeniously conceived sculptures. They are however a complete illusion, being totally conceptual in that they are non-functional.

Equilibrium (detail)
1993
Bronze
Edition of 5
180 cm high

RIGHT
Cast Apart
1994
Bronze
Edition of 10
68 cm high

Throughout this time Jon was not only working on a domestic and personal scale but was also awarded several prestigious public commissions and in these works he addressed many of the same concerns. He relishes the opportunity of public commissions for specific sites. These allow him to express 'the point of making' to a much wider audience and on a much bigger scale than is usually possible. However, they also present different challenges; making work for a public space can be contentious and arouse strong feelings. Whilst *'Monumental Family'*, outside Milton Keynes Hospital, is a much-loved piece where the scale of the ample, generous forms emphasises the warmth and tactility of the figures, '*Looking to the Future*', commissioned for West Swindon, suffered repeated vandalism and eventually became damaged beyond repair.

Looking to the Future
1984-5
Painted Resin
Unique
Over life-size

Monumental Family
(detail)
1996
Bronze
Edition of 5
170 cm high

'Embracing the Sea' on Deal Pier, in which the fisherman is cast in the role of guardian of the ocean and its ecology, was initially received with mixed feelings by the local community. Over the years it has become an emblem for the town and its inhabitants and won the Rouse Kent Award for Public Art. This monument to the boat-building tradition of Deal brings the 'embrace' series to a dramatic finale.

Embracing the Sea
1998
Bronze
Unique
300 cm high

Outside Harlesden Law Courts stands *'On Our Heads'*, an enormous head like a fragment of some archaic monument, idealised, classical and of pensive expression. On this head Jon placed two thin, separated figures, very much like those in *'Equilibrium'*. Instead of spinning in harmony they are in grappling discord. In another direct parallel to his studio work, Jon took the constructs of etiolated figures and separate yet linked figures, like *'Single Girl'* and *'Cast Apart'* and exaggerated them further in the two enormous bright blue figures of *'In the Swim'*, commissioned for the West Quay Centre in Southampton.

In the Swim
2000
Bronze
Unique
200 cm high

RIGHT
On Our Heads
1994
Bronze
Unique
180 cm high

Back to the Beginning
1999
Bronze
Edition of 5
220 cm high

Goodwood Goddess
2000
Bronze & gold leaf
Edition of 5
220 cm high

In contrast to large public commissions which are slow to construct and take up a huge amount of space, materials and energy, small objects are a means to refine the sculptor's vocabulary. For a while Jon's sculptures became very small, sculptures for the hand, personal talismans like his own versions of Palaeolithic Venus figures. I think Jon was casting about for new adventures and working on a tiny scale meant he could experiment quickly and easily with form. He played with dropping lumps of clay on the ground until the resulting distortions suggested a figure on which he elaborated. Some of these sculptures were cast into bronze in a series known as '*Chance Pieces*'. The use of found shapes and happy accidents was also a mechanism to tap into the primitive instinct to create significant forms out of random shapes. Jon felt perhaps the narrative was becoming too strong a part of his sculpture and he needed the object itself to be the story.

Chance Piece I, II,
III & IV
1999
Bronze
Edition of 12
9-16 cm high

Artefact I, II & III
1998
Bronze
Edition of 12
19-22 cm high

Going deep below the earth into ancient caves where the walls have been etched and painted by our ancestors many thousand of years ago, will naturally induce feelings of connection within us. However it is hard to imagine beforehand quite how profound a sense of connection these images will provoke. The drawings feel so fresh and modern and they communicate so directly and immediately with us; such power is exhilarating. Jon experienced exactly these feelings when he visited the Palaeolithic caves of France which left him wanting to create something with a similar directness of message. We can guess at some of the narrative behind the art in the caves but it is the image itself without other elaboration that makes the connection.

Alongside the influence of cave art was Jon's long-term fascination with Romanesque and traditional African art which he now also looked at for its inherent formal qualities. The bold, direct and inventive forms that characterise much medieval and African sculpture share certain attributes with the cave paintings and this primal directness was something Jon was seeking. In '*Artefacts I, II and III*', the spoon, fork and knife are a direct reference to the functional tools of ritual from Africa and medieval relics of ancient Europe.

In 1999 the gallery offered Jon a one-man exhibition for the following year. He immersed himself in his studio for several months until he was ready to show us his new body of work. Jon had not spoken about how it was evolving and I had seen no sketches or images; nothing prepared me for what I was about to see. As one by one the plastic covers protecting the clays came off, I was left dumbfounded by the freshness, the completeness and the inventiveness of his vocabulary. I was also hugely excited: these images looked so new and yet were still undeniably Jon's. They had all the simple strength of the primal arts and their surfaces were patterned with small stencilled and stamped glyphs giving a surface tension that was both visual and sensual. Jon had unleashed a powerful personal voice, stronger than ever before and I remember being deeply moved by the sense of new life and adventure that I saw before me.

'Go-Between' was the landmark piece of this body of work. It is a reincarnation of the early painted resin heads with animals, revisited after twenty years life-experience and evolution. A pattern of squiggles covers its surface, much as one might make distractedly whilst talking on the telephone or like the ochre dashes repeated on prehistoric cave walls. These have an extraordinary effect, making the surface visible, actually tangible, in the way goose-bumps give our skin an all-over sensation and unlike the smooth 'embrace' pieces where the invitation to caress is irresistible. This was an important element and a device Jon was to use throughout this series, titled collectively 'Intimate Connections'.

Go-Between
1999
Bronze
Edition of 10
55 cm high

Primal Woman
1999
Bronze
Edition of 10
45 cm high

Unlike in the 'embrace' series where lines are drawn between the forms, here the glyphs are engraved into surfaces, a new use of drawing which helps to elucidate the form. Some are proto-drawings or small symbols of the object itself as in *'He-dog'* or *'Primal Woman'*; others perhaps suggest patterns of coat or feather but mostly they intensify the quality of surface. With this mark-making came a return to the use of colour. Jon wanted these impressed marks to be in contrast to the main body of the sculpture. We had much debate and adventures in the patina room trying to achieve the perfect balance. Patina chemicals, pigments, wax resists and lengthy painting into every impressed mark were all tried and used in one form or another. The colours brought new vitality over and above that of the sculptures themselves, somehow making the surfaces vibrate even more than they would on their own. These were not ancient artefacts; the colour had done something else – it made the sculptures look contemporary.

Jon's totemic characters of dog and bird in particular feature strongly in this series. Perhaps as Levi Strauss believed, animals are useful for thinking with. Maybe in Jon's sketchbooks and proto-sculptures, there are equivalents to the messengers of ancient Egypt, go-betweens for making and thought, life and art.

LEFT
Polymorph
2000
Bronze
Edition of 10
27 cm high

Bluebird
1999
Bronze
Edition of 10
32 cm high

Amongst the animals, hybrid bird-goddesses and figures, are two more abstracted pieces, '*Bluebird*' and '*Polymorph*'. These forms are vaguely familiar from their outlines in Jon's sketchbooks, not quite random but not overly conscious either. I think these sculptures materialised from deep in Jon's subconscious and have been elaborated in the making process. They seem to stand somewhat apart from the rest of the series, calling on our imagination to question what they are and what they do and this abstraction comes to the fore again in later pieces.

Emboldened by the success of 'Intimate Connections', Jon pressed on, making forms that were freer and simpler than before. As his sculptural language evolved, he felt more able to distort and play with human bilateral symmetry and that of all life. A series of morphed forms emerged, far more radical than the figures in *'Returning to Embrace'*, dependent upon our mind's ability to accept their unity. He was playing with form as freely and spontaneously as he did with shape in his sketchbooks: *'Neophorm'* is an embryo-like sculpture which seems as though it could develop into an animal or human with equal ease.

Softdog
2005
Charcoal on paper
50 cm x 65 cm

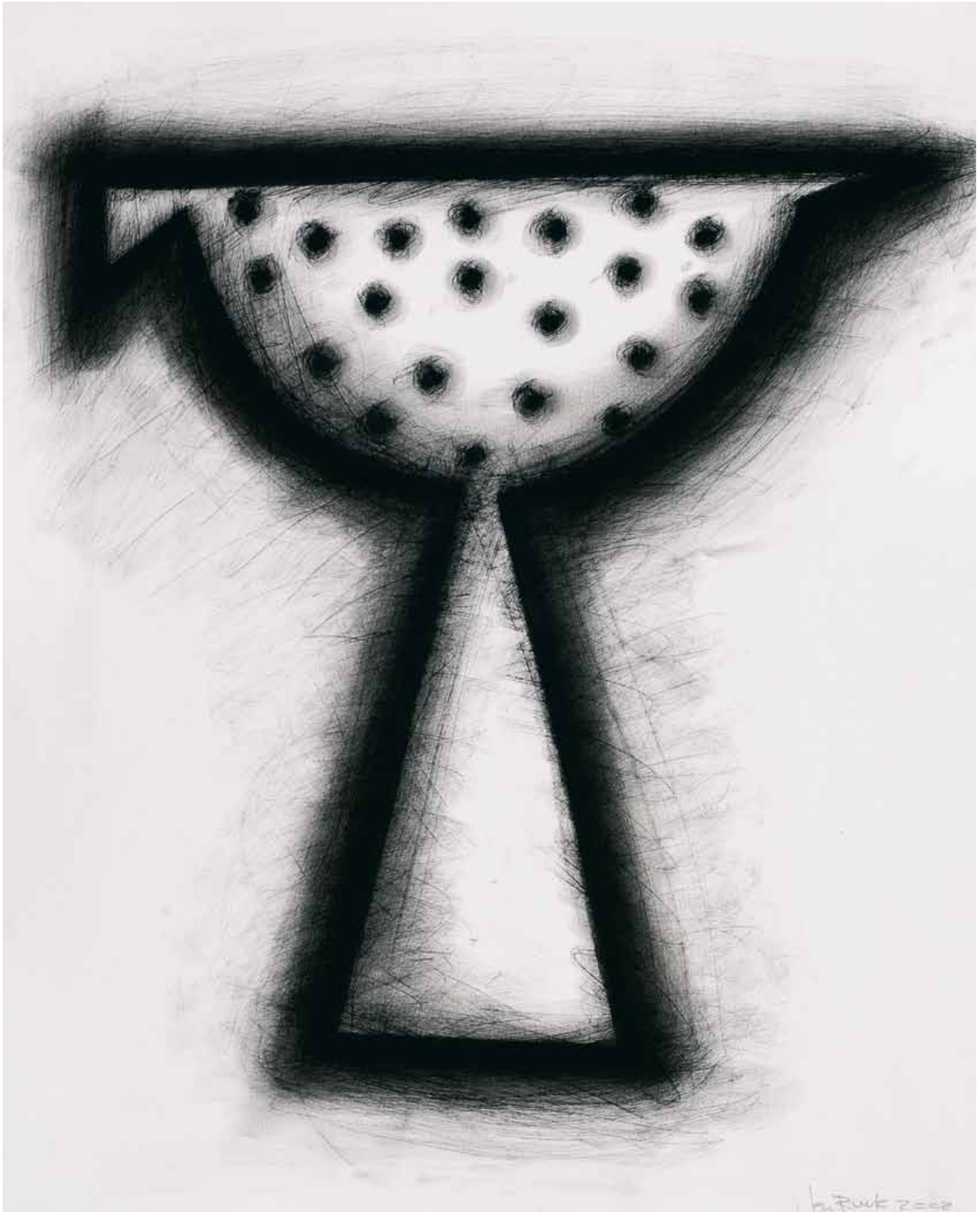
Neophorm
2005
Bronze &
stainless steel
Edition of 10
13 cm high

At the same time drawing also became a major part of Jon's practice. No longer sketches or visual notes, these were finished works in their own right. Here too, Jon's means of arriving at his images is very distinctive and sculptural. Carving into thick paper with abrasive tools and sandpaper together with more traditional use of charcoal gives his graphic work a honed, textural quality. The edges of the line seem to curve round, a sfumato effect that gives the illusion of form.

With his next major exhibition, 'Odd Birds and Other Selves', a certain lateral compression of the sculptural form, first seen in 'Intimate Connections' with '*Moondog*' and '*Primal Woman*', took on a new importance. The glyphs evolved into free line-drawing which reinforced the image and described new elements. Jon's economy of line, colour and form were all working together in sculptures that at first seem simple yet reveal hidden depths. '*Wishbone Bird*', a bright red sculpture, is a simple 'catapult' form with one arm pinched out into a beak. We see the sculpture completely as a bird: the drawing into this most essential of shapes pulls the bird to the forefront of our perception. Rudimentary feet engraved into the cylindrical trunk and lines suggesting a feather in the tail are all that are needed.

Moondog
2000
Bronze
Edition of 10
27 cm high

RIGHT
Early Bird
2002
Charcoal on paper
65 cm x 50 cm



LEFT
Wishbone Bird
2005
Bronze
Edition of 10
58 cm high

Taleteller
2005
Bronze
Edition of 10
20 cm high

The bird predominates in this eponymous exhibition. In *'Phatburd'*, whose humorous, dumpy shape is reminiscent of a flint nodule, the engraving brings out the 'birdness' of its basic form. In a similar way, *'High Flyer's'* rocket-shape points dynamically towards space, wings outstretched, crucifix-like, and once again the drawn-in lines delineate its avian character. *'Taleteller'* is a diminutive cradle-shape, leaning forwards, balanced by its heavy tail, polka-dotted with blue resin spots inlaid in a verdigris patina. It would be hard to imagine a form more simple that still summed up the essence of its subject. As Einstein said of scientific explanations, they should be as simple as possible but no simpler.

ABOVE
Phatburd
2005
Bronze
Edition of 10
40 cm high

MIDDLE
High Flyer
2005
Bronze
Edition of 10
73 cm high

BELOW
Double Take
2005
Bronze
Edition of 10
34 cm high

NEXT PAGE
Back to Back
1999
Bronze
Edition of 10
30 cm high

With *'Double Take'* Jon returned to the idea of two bodies in one as in the 'embrace' series. This flattened form of two copulating birds also harks back to *'One Can't, Two Can'*. However, Jon had now completely absorbed into one image the concept of the toucans and the embraces, bringing vividly to life the ritualised behaviour of displaying birds in this pillar-box-red sculpture. Jon's birds remind me of Colin Tudge's summation in his book 'The Secret Life of Birds': "*The more we look at them, the more they tell us about ourselves and the way the world really is*." Despite the plethora of bird images throughout history, Jon's sculptures feel new, fresh and original.

Bird behaviour and display is a subject close to Jon's heart, not only from the point of view of having been a zoo-keeper but also through his interest in the early studies in ethology by Niko Tinbergen and his colleagues. They experimented with gull chicks and the way they responded to their parent's beak at feeding time. A heightened response was provoked when a model beak, progressively much brighter, larger and simpler than the real thing, was presented. The model which solicited the greatest response was a yellow stick with three red rings at the tip. I believe Jon is somehow seeking a 'superstimulus' for our own perceptions, just as Tinbergen was with his gulls; simplifying the form, supersaturating the colour, reinforcing and colouring the outlines, to make the object the focus of an emotional stimulus.

The push and pull of *'In the Beginning'* which also found a later incarnation in *'Back to Back'*, is another familiar theme in Jon's work. In trying to express the duality of a relationship, its unity and its separateness, he also often revisits 'the head'. In *'Eachway Heads'*, as with *'In the Beginning'*, two individuals pull their separate identities from a common entity. In *'Midnite Movie Heads'*, they face inwards, two becoming one as their two profiles register as a single face in our minds, a single identity.

Eachway Heads
2005
Bronze
Edition of 10
41 cm high

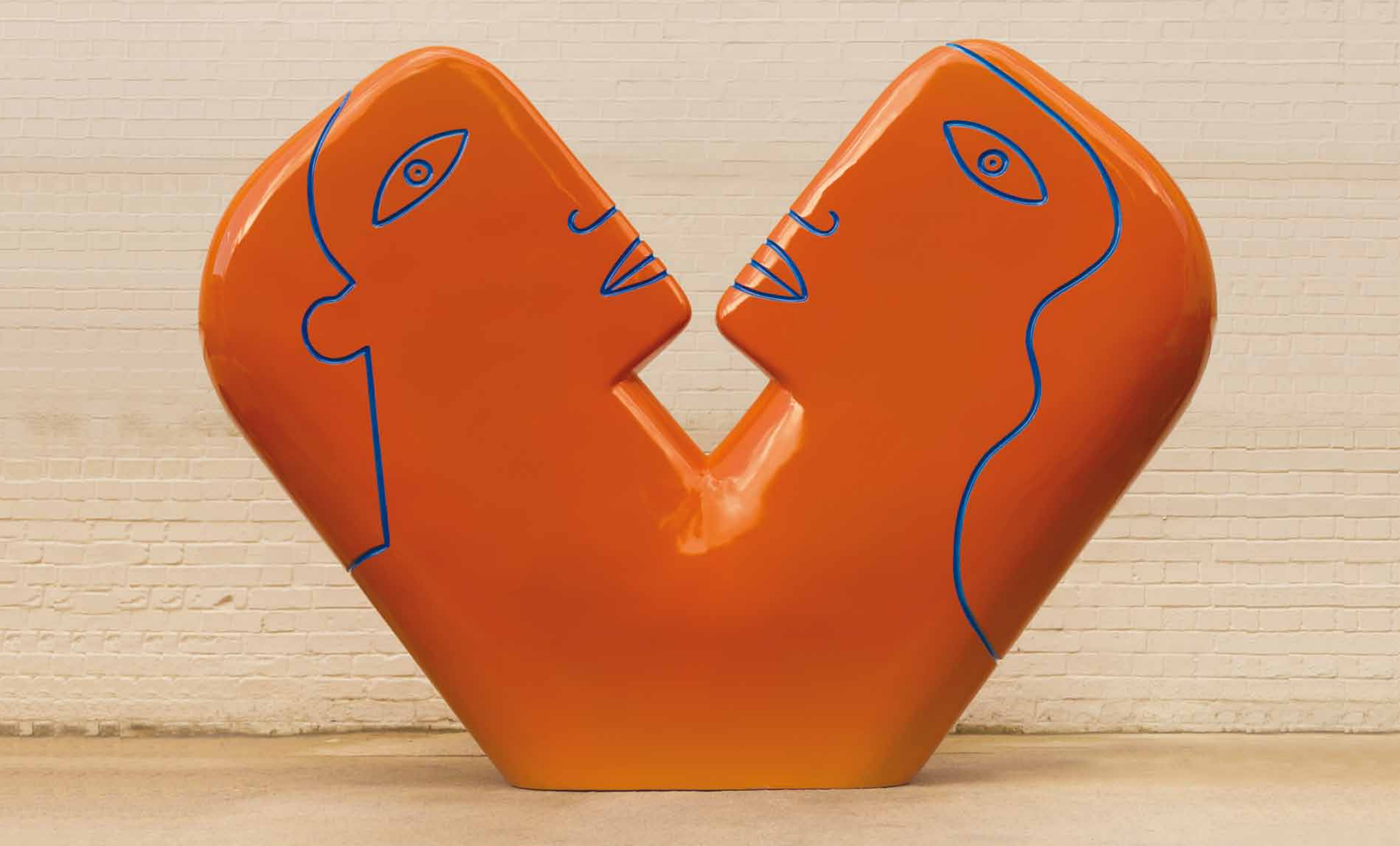
RIGHT
Midnite Movie Heads
2005
Bronze
Edition of 10
75 cm high

LEFT
Ship to Shore
2007
Bronze
Unique
300 cm high

NEXT PAGE
You and Me
2009
Bronze
Edition of 5
215 cm high

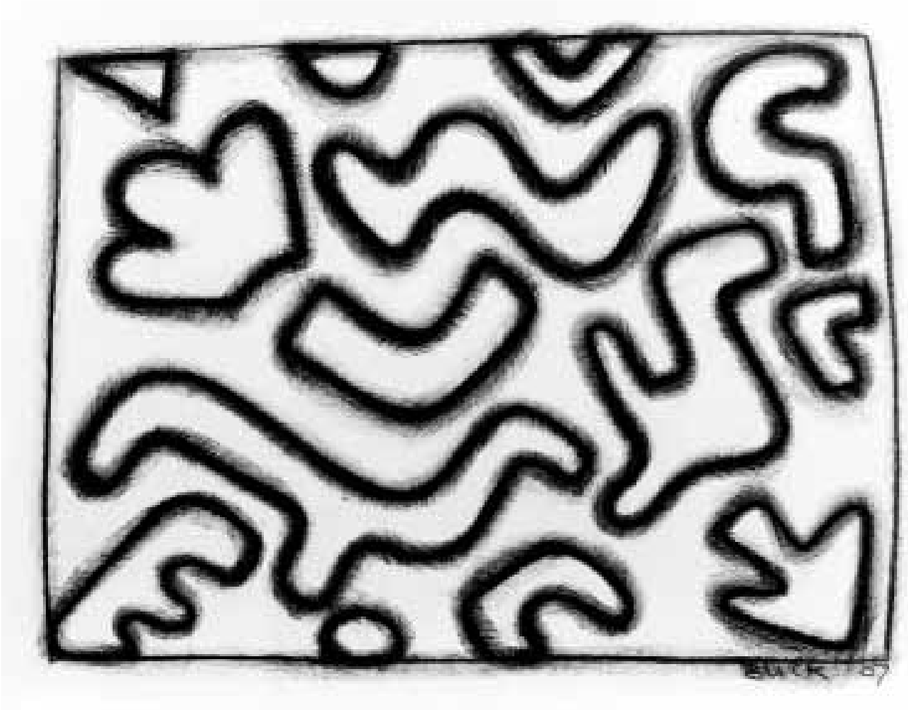
In a poignant expression of this idea, the bollard-shaped monument *'Ship to Shore'* incorporates stylised portraits of Jon's mother and father. One figure looks out to sea and the other back to land and home. Like previous generations of his family, Jon's father was a Bristol Channel pilot and lived and worked near Portishead where the four-metre high sculpture is sited.

'You and Me', a huge, bright orange sculpture is the most recent of these paired heads or embraces of the mind. It stands laterally and like *'Equilibrium'* implies a couple linked, spinning in their private world, a world of sensuous interaction and interdependence, the story of a relationship embodied in an enigmatic and striking object. At this scale the flattened, mask-like heads have an architectural grandeur. The lines, drawn by the width of Jon's thumb, are dragged through the surface. Instead of being dictated by the movement of fingers or wrist as in the smaller sculptures, the drawing in *'You and Me'* relies on movement of the whole body. This energy invigorates the whole piece; drawing and sculpture are truly interlinked.



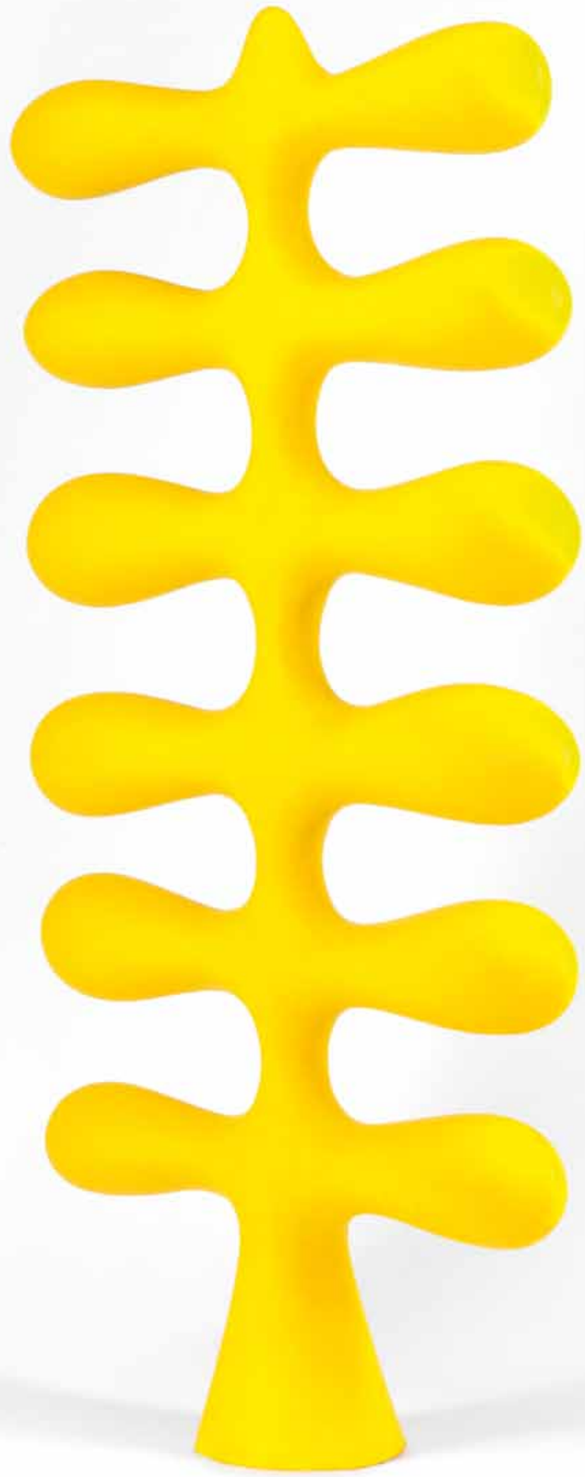
Drawing is the most immediate and the simplest of all visual arts and sculpture is one of the most time-consuming and labour-intensive. Jon combined the two in dynamic equilibrium in his body of work for 'Behind the Lines'. Inscribed outlines reinforce the volumetric shape of the sculptures which pulsate optically with their contrasting colours. The drawing is not calligraphic however and does not rely on flourish and serif for impact. It is more like the lines of the colour-field painters, a description pulling an image to the surface of the imagination. This is in order that the drawing remains relevant to the form. The sculpture is not a clean slate upon which to create a drawing, it is in itself a drawn shape. In the same way that prehistoric painters utilised the bumps and crevasses of the cave wall to heighten the impact of the drawn outline, so Jon's drawn lines intensify the image of the sculpture.

Mind-Map
2009
Bronze
Edition of 10
45 cm high



Birds, Beasts and Bodies
2007
Charcoal on paper
50 cm x 65 cm

RIGHT
Large Proteiform
2009
Bronze
Edition of 10
44 cm high



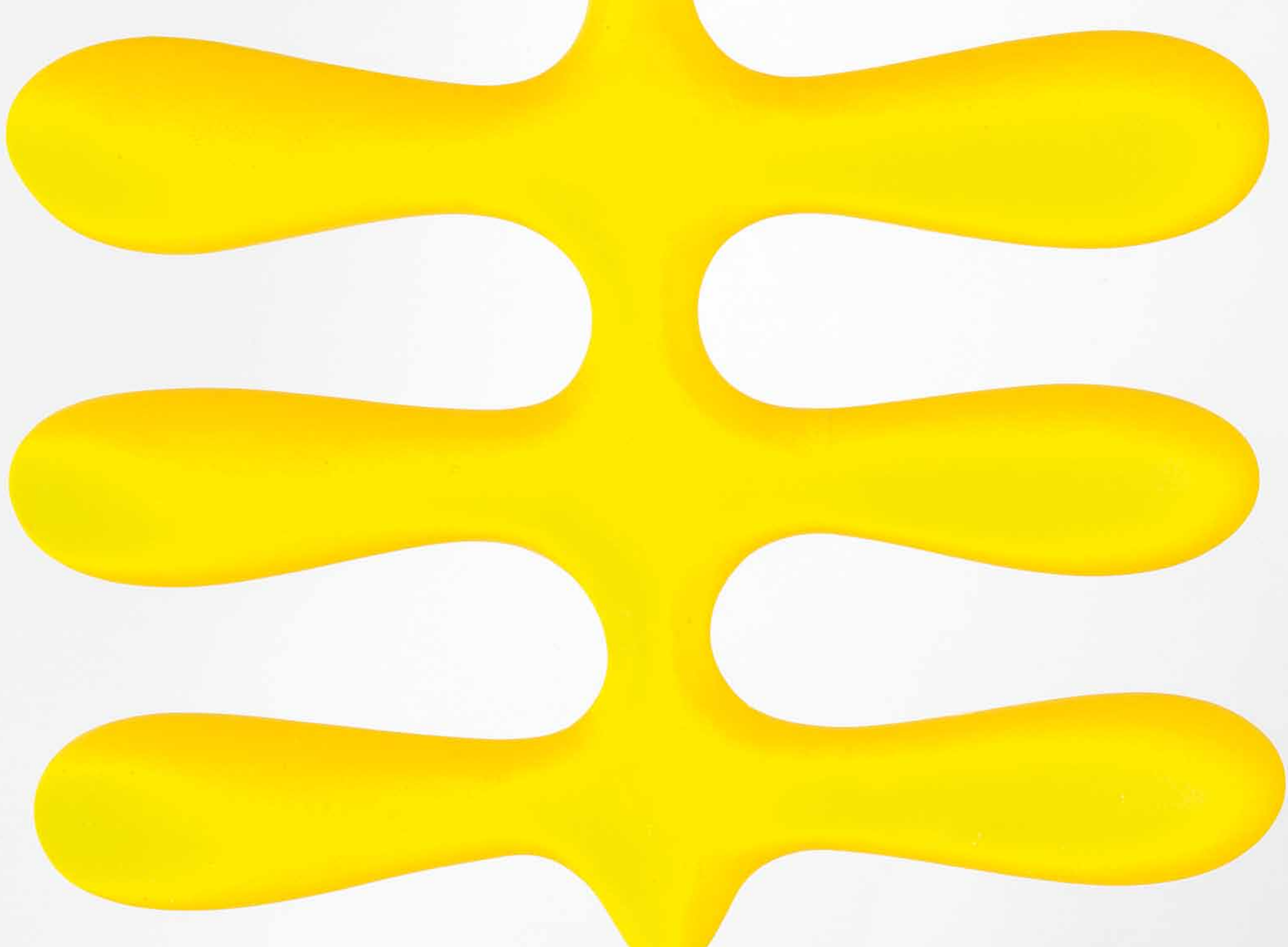
LEFT
Brain Wave
2008
Bronze
Edition of 10
81 cm high

Convolved
2009
Bronze
Edition of 10
31 cm high

These sculptures stimulate the intellect as well as the emotions. *'Brainwave', 'Mind-Map'* and *'The Nature of Thought'* all make reference to this, reflecting Jon's fascination with the way the process of making is also a way of thinking. However, in making the sensual is never far away and like the earlier *'Polymorph', 'Papilliform', 'Proteiform' and 'Convolved'* are unabashed, sumptuous, tactile sensations.

I have watched Jon's sculpture evolve over thirty years and found the experience of collaborating with him exciting and a privilege. It has been humbling to see him hold to his beliefs with so much integrity; it has been a delight to share his enthusiasms for Africa, Nature, prehistoric and early sculpture. I am sure that, like all evolving processes, Jon's sculpture will continue to develop with inventiveness, determination and individuality as it has done to date and I look forward with anticipation to the next chapter in our adventure.

Rungwe Kingdon



Birdman
2009
Bronze
Edition of 10
70 cm high

Headland
2009
Bronze
Edition of 10
74 cm high

My Pretty Chicken
1983
Painted Resin
Unique
62 cm high

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

"*Making is thinking*" [1]

With those who believe that images speak louder than words I would have to agree. To conflate and misquote the poet Charles Causley I find the articulacy-bird as tricky as a ten-foot snake. However, partly as a process of personal reflection and partly in answer to those who are puzzled by the way my work has changed over the years, I have written the following notes. I hope they will provide some insight into the objects I make and why I make them.

There is no doubt that we all have an ambivalent attitude to change; many of us are upset by the things that we value most being superseded by innovations. We even consider our essential selves as static, until a glance in the mirror quickly disillusions us. On the other hand we get bored with the constancy of repetition and are excited by the introduction of the new. In nature it is change itself that fuels the existence of life. Mutations are simply mistakes in the passing on of DNA information to the next generation. It is these 'slips' that create new individuals whose unique features may allow them to adapt to change and ensure that they are more successful in surviving. This is natural evolution and it is the process that made us who we are today. It could be argued however, that in human culture there is a parallel evolutionary process taking place and moreover, that it is this that has made us the successful species we are. I would argue that art has been part of that success and that it is the making process itself that has been so important in stimulating mutations to develop new artistic languages.

The development of digital photography has the potential to make technically competent photographers of us all but there must be those who mourn the passing of the slower, almost alchemical process whereby a ghostly image gradually materialises through the murk of a bath of developing fluid. For me as a sculptor, there is something of the same mystery when the tangible reality of one's aspiration gradually materialises and takes form. It is a synthesis of eye, hand and mind interacting with material and process that I for one would not want to forego. It is a process that is capable of producing something dynamically new to the world, an artefact in its own right and yet at the same time an ambiguous object capable of a number of different interpretations both cerebral and emotional. Oddly however, there are many artists who do not wish to practice this age-old ritual, preferring instead simply to isolate objects from reality by changing their given context, the idea being that the conscious mind alone is the source of the creative process. Here I have to differ, because what I believe is lost is a certain kind of lyrical language whose grammatical compositions have the ability to fuse emotion with intellect. Art made through the dialogue between hand, eye and mind gives the artist an opportunity to stumble across signals that have the potential to profoundly move us. These have the propensity to act as sensual prompts to the viewer's own sensibilities. The search to find these symbolic triggers in making art is ancient and if we look back across time and place it is the schematic composition that is the norm rather than the exception. As in all art, the maker always needs to look back before moving forward.

Descartes, to some the father of modern philosophy, refused to trust his own bodily senses and proposed that it was by thought alone that he could prove his own existence, famously captured in his phrase *cognito ergo sum* – I think therefore I am. This legacy of separating the body from the mind and giving primacy to the human consciousness has had a profound effect on the way we think about ourselves and how we consider what it is to be human. Nowhere in our culture is this truer than in the visual arts.

Noah & the Raven
1988
Bronze
Edition of 5
63 cm high

Embrace II
1990
Bronze
Edition of 9
25 cm high

RIGHT
Preserving the Fish
1991
Bronze
Edition of 9
42 cm high

Man of Parts
1994
Bronze
Edition of 10
99 cm high

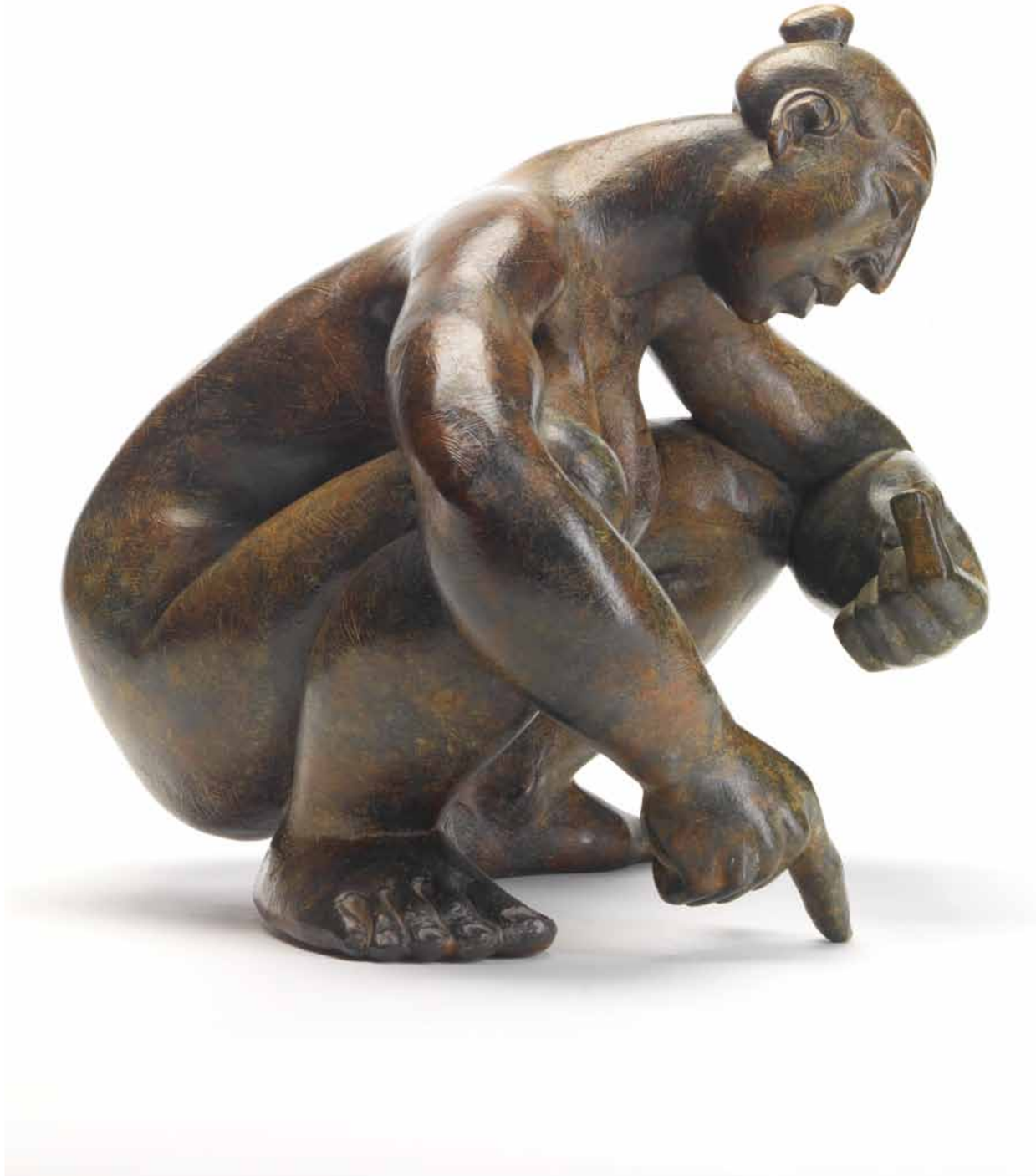
In the early part of the 20th century Marcel Duchamp asserted that he had released the artist from the 'tyranny of the hand' by way of his appropriated 'ready-mades'. The urinal for example, certainly tested whether 'the idea' has priority over language and whether context can take precedence over expression. Since that time these ideas have gained ascendancy. In contemporary sculpture especially, it is the display and reproduction of the 'real' that have become dominant and it is the artist's brand that has absorbed much critical attention. Michael Craig-Martin, Emeritus Professor of Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, promoted these ideas further. In 1974, by entitling a simple glass of water '*Oak Tree*', he asked us to reconsider its identity. There is no doubt that this work poses interesting questions about what art is and how powerful the authority of the artist can be but the question remains whether the artist can ever be successful in such a transformative gesture simply by nominating any physical object. While there is no doubt that this work can engage the intellect, what it fails to do in my estimation is stimulate our other senses and in particular it fails to evoke an emotional response.

I will try to explain why a direct relationship with material and process is so important for me and why I think it has the propensity to make a different sort of art object. The need to engage directly with the making process and to transform reality into what the sculptor William Tucker dubbed "*The Language of Sculpture*" [2] is for me crucial. If I were to adapt Descartes' phrase to explain my own personal philosophy it would be not so much *cognito ergo sum* but something more like *facio ergo sum* - I make therefore I am or perhaps to turn Descartes' dictum on its head, *sentio ergo sum* - I feel therefore I am. The ambiguity of the translation is interesting because the word 'feel' has so many connotations. It incorporates multi-meanings, suggesting the sensation of touch, the sense of emotion, the ability to have an opinion and above all the ability to respond to intuition over reason, all of which I consider to be essential elements in the creative making process. The stimulation of these senses is for me the essence of what the visual arts attempt to achieve.

Powerful images elicit a feeling, an emotional response first and foremost and then, only then, does that evoke an opinion, a thought or an intellectual idea. To my mind it is only through making, the interaction of the maker with material and process, that such images can be discovered. Although this act of making relies on the learning and refining of a craft, it is too simplistic to say it is that and that alone. The difference between art and craft is that a craftsman will know what he is to make at the outset and by employing his skills he will do his best to achieve that end. An artist by contrast uses his craft but is never sure what the outcome will be until the work is completed.

To understand why the arts have the ability to evoke such strong emotions in us, I think we need to go back well beyond the philosophy of the 17th century and to try to understand what art is and why it evolved as such an essential part of our human condition. There are many semantic arguments about whether the word art can be applied collectively to the making of visual objects in different times, places and cultures. Nevertheless, what is indisputable is that some form of aesthetic appreciation and manufacture of aesthetic objects goes back to the dawn of human culture. Archaeological evidence suggests that it goes back even beyond modern human's own existence though visual representation probably did not arrive until much later. It can be considered to have evolved as part of a human cultural revolution predominantly during the last 40,000 years although the sophistication of the earliest images so far discovered suggest this is likely to be a conservative estimate. If we are looking for universals in this enormous period of time it is useful to split the making of art into fundamental components, that is to say its 'subject', which is the symbolic or representational 'meaning' of the work and the 'object', which is the 'language' of the process by which it is formed.

Head to Head
1998
Bronze
Edition of 10
32 cm high



Pose
1994
Bronze
Edition of 10
30.5 cm high

RIGHT
Sowing the Seed
1992
Bronze
Edition of 10
33 cm high

Ancestor Bird
1999
Bronze
Edition of 10
33 cm high

To take visual language first, we need to accept that there are some physical human universals. How our senses function and how we perceive the world around us are things we share as a species. There are enormous differences imposed upon us by nurturing and cultural pressures. Nevertheless biology has a large part to play in our sensory-cognitive system. Our eyes and brains process shape, form and colour and organise pattern in much the same way in each of us. Making sense of this information and how we interpret it will vary according to our own experience and expectations. Our collective response to certain shapes, forms and colours in art could be a result of universal codes that lie deep within our neurological architecture. After all, we also respond intuitively to other stimuli; we collectively agree that certain smells, sounds or tastes evoke a sense of pleasure. We call these stimuli 'beautiful' because they chime precisely with our internal organisational processes.

The human history of art has created a culture of symbols that elicit responses no less efficiently than Nature's signals to animals. There have been many scholars and researchers who have recognised this phenomenon. In the renowned ethologist Niko Tinbergen's words:

"*The natural situation is not always optimal*" [3]

In his experiments in the field with birds, butterflies and fish he showed that in nature, offering an accentuated form of a 'super sign stimuli' would always produce a more dramatic response than the real thing. Neuroscientist V S Ramachandran has taken up Tinbergen's theory and postulates that some abstract modern art has a similar effect on human audiences. He also suggests the possibility of a universal visual grammar, something that he equates to the Sanskrit word 'rasa' that roughly translates as the 'essence of a thing'.

Since Neolithic times, humans have striven to capture this essence. By concentrating the form and efficiency of images they have attempted to improve Art's effectiveness over Nature. Art captures the order of beauty and the beauty of order. James Joyce recognised this beauty when engaging with an art object and used the term "*aesthetic arrest*" to try to explain the emotional experience of confronting such images. He further defined it by saying that we first perceive the whole, before becoming aware of the constituent parts and only then do we finally consider the relationship of the whole to each of the individual parts. He maintained that the essential factor in this experience is 'rhythm', the harmonious rhythm of relationships. Joyce described this experience of aesthetic arrest as an epiphany, which transcends ethics and didactic explanations.

Steven Mithen, Professor of Archaeology at Reading University, interestingly conjectures that the development of art in human culture was a direct consequence of important changes in the processing of information within the human brain. He describes in his book 'The Prehistory of the Human Mind' [4] his belief that modern humans developed something he termed "*cognitive fluidity*". From this we can understand that the evolution of a conscious mind allowed modern humans to be capable of a pluralistic view of the world. Art objects could be thought of as becoming a cognitive tool for storing and retrieving information. These images were often mnemonic in nature and relied on metaphor and analogy for interpretation. Mithen sums this up by saying it is the nature of art to have "*complex meanings via simple designs*".

In his book '*The Monkey in the Mirror*' [5] the anthropologist Ian Tattersall appears to agree. He suggests it was at some point in our history, possibly 60-70,000 years ago, that this cultural evolution occurred. It was a significant change in existence that triggered the need for a "*symbolic-cognitive*" process to develop. He suggests this process was also a direct consequence of the rise of human consciousness. Man became able to 'see' things that were not present but were in fact part of his memory and imagination.

Flock viii
2009
Monoprint
Unique
61 cm x 48 cm

Goddess
1999
Bronze
Edition of 12
14 cm high

RIGHT
Motherbird
1999
Bronze
Edition of 10
18 cm high

Back to the Beginning
Maquette
1999
Bronze
Edition of 10
22 cm high

By making art he was able to make those things physically exist; it was as though "*art had become visual thought*".

Merlin Donald, the cognitive neuroscientist, sums up these ideas by explaining that art affects both the physical eye and the conscious brain and that together they give us an interpretation which is then understood in the light of our social experience and our evolutionary history:

> *"The brain-symbol interface is the birthplace of art"* [6]

To understand art therefore we must employ both the physical and psychological elements of our minds. A schema is a mental framework that represents this knowledge and our brains naturally organise information into stable patterns of perception. These idealised forms reside in the memory and form both shared and personal codas. Thus art does not have to rely simply on capturing a physical reality in a mechanical way but can be much reduced and abstracted. Traditional artists in tribal communities recognised the power of this sort of representation and for millennia it was the unifying nature of art across cultures. In a sense, the history of Western art is alone in mimicking reality in such a mechanical way, and as Ramachandran reflects, Western art is an aberration rather than the norm. For a short period at the beginning of the last century Picasso and his contemporaries rediscovered the power of reduced schematic images. These were shockingly primitive to the refined Western sensibilities of the time, appearing not as a camera eye might see them but as our minds would perceive them, not simply as ideas but as raw emotions.

My proposal is that to make sculpture, perhaps somewhat like music, it is impossible to ignore its language simply to concentrate on the concept. The making process has a direct and complicit part in finding reduced and schematic signals. These connect not simply at the level of the conscious intellect but with the innate and unconscious parts of the brain that have evolved to give us pleasure and deep-felt emotion.

Through the making process the artist responds to a proposed idea and in doing so he discovers a new composition that marries emotion to intellect. Making art is searching for a form that will elicit a response from the innate part of the mind as opposed to the learnt cultural clichés of which we are already aware.

So far I have discussed the importance of discovering an aesthetic language in an attempt to give an art object its own validity. The second element of making is its subject: what do we make art about and why?

The first arresting aesthetic experience that I can recall occurred when I was about eight or nine; it was seeing a bird. I was stopped in my tracks by a jolting flash of intense sulphur-yellow pulsating against a May-day-blue sky and underscored by a verdant swathe of translucent hazel. I had no name for this bird or indeed for the emotion it evoked but I knew then the event had a major significance for me. Later I discovered my exotic interceptor's identity. Its Latin name, Emberiza citrinella, goes some way to celebrating its arresting appearance; its more prosaic common name is, rather disappointingly, *Yellowhammer*. This encounter led to 'the bird' and art being intrinsically intertwined in my mind ever since and the fact that the guidebook's colour plates did not come close to representing my experience demonstrates the essential gap between perception and reality.

This is not to say I am simply interested in the subject of birds in art but I have come to realise that the schematic visual language of bird plumage has a close alliance with the way that our own brains respond to colour, pattern and form to make sense of and appreciate the world. Darwin observed that birds are the most aesthetic of all animals and pointed out that the appreciation of aesthetics is not a uniquely human invention but had already developed in pre-human and animal evolution.

Flashback
2011
Bronze
Edition of 10
47 cm high

Early Bird
2003
Bronze
Edition of 12
14 cm high

RIGHT
White Dove
2001
Bronze
Edition of 12
27 cm high

Aurora
2003
Bronze & gold leaf
Edition of 10
50 cm high

In evolutionary terms, making art is costly in both time and effort. Nonetheless it does appear to have been a universal part of all human cultures. This means that as a cultural prerequisite it must have had some evolutionary advantage. It is likely that as a cognitive tool art allowed us to think about ourselves and consider our relationship to different environments more clearly. Perhaps more pertinently, it would have also given us a sense of identity, binding us to the group, giving an advantage to both the individual and the collective. Brian Boyd, English Professor at the University of Auckland, in his book 'On the Origin of Stories' [7] postulates that song is perhaps the oldest form of art, existing as it does in many other social species. It is a biological adaptation and as an evolutionary survival technique it helps develop bonds within the group and enhances individual identity. Art arrived later but archaeological evidence suggests that long before visual images emerged, art is most likely to have begun with body marking. Boyd rather intriguingly suggests that art was born out of "*chant and ochre*".

From decorating the human body, art must have evolved onto the surrounding surfaces in the environment and images have been found in wood, stone, ivory, bone and clay. Interestingly, although we make art to think about ourselves, much of the art that survives from these very early periods is depictions of animals and animal forms. Boyd tells us that even today almost all psychically normal humans will have tried to represent animals as part of their childhood play. He points out that when looking at prehistoric art in the caves of France and Spain we have no difficulty at all recognising and empathising with the animal images found there, although the artist's intention is lost. What seems to be the case is that very early on in our visual history, a language of animal symbols was being developed that expressed elements of our own identities. It is possible that narratives were already in existence whose central characters were animal in form. These animal metaphors were set down in our early cognitive minds and still have resonance today. As socio-biologist E O Wilson, in 'Consilience'[8] insists, the natural world is still embedded in our genes and cannot be eradicated.

Author and art critic John Berger also takes up this point, asking in his essay '*Why Look At Animals*' why we are today still so concerned with animals and animal images. He suggests the whole discipline of anthropology has been concerned with man's passage from nature to culture. Animals in the early history of man were intercessors between him and the natural world. Animal images make up a large part of man's early visual lexicon because in portraying an animal it has the propensity to become a signifier for an identifiable trait or characteristic that we recognise in ourselves. Berger says that although animals were displaced in the modern world by the Industrial Revolution, their 'physical marginalisation' has not necessarily led to their 'cultural marginalisation'. He writes:

> "*The animals of the mind cannot be so easily dispersed. Sayings, dreams, games, stories, superstitions and the language itself, recall them*" [9]

Berger is absolutely right to point out that we all use animals, birds and other creatures to express ourselves in everyday life. However this is brought into sharper focus and heightened importance in poetry and art. Poetry especially, concerned as it is with a dense metaphoric language, draws heavily on images of nature. Beasts and particularly birds have been the inspiration for many poets who, through the ages, have harnessed animals to capture the human spirit and our latent connectivity to all things natural. Poetry, it seems, has many parallels with my ideas about the characteristics of sculpture, in that it focuses on a language that changes observations of the world, from simply being reportage to one that draws out ambiguities and allows us to interpret them as images of totemic significance.

Houndog
2003
Bronze
Edition of 12
16.5 cm high

Shadow Hare
2003
Bronze
Edition of 12
14 cm high

Heptile
2003
Bronze
Edition of 10
12.5 cm high

Spikydog
2005
Bronze & steel nails
Edition of 10
30 cm high

RIGHT
Underdog
2009
Lead & bronze
Unique
32 cm high

Bird
2003
Bronze
Edition of 12
17 cm high

Countless poets have made birds the central character of their verse. Hardy's '*Darkling Thrush*' is a seer whose all-knowing optimism we could understand if only we could interpret its "*carolings of such ecstatic sounds*". In '*The Windhover*', Gerard Manley-Hopkins' alliterative language beautifully captures the awe-inspiring flight of the Kestrel as it hovers above the landscape and yet Hopkins makes it clear that he is also making allusions to some form of his own religious epiphany. Edward Thomas' '*Unknown Bird*' is even more elusive. Its voice, though tangible to him, is unheard by everyone else. Like some creative muse, the bird itself always remains just out of his reach, although for Thomas its song remained loud and clear. I would like to think that my sculpture might take on some of the lyrical overtones these poets have so powerfully captured.

When thinking about my sculpture '*Wishbone Bird*' I am reminded of Seamus Heaney's poem '*The Diviner*'. It is not about a bird in itself but suggests that the diviner is not just searching for water but like the poets' bird, is acting as a go-between for ourselves and our lost affinity with nature. Heaney uses the fork-shaped divining rod not simply as a physical sensor but also as a metaphor for the poet tapping into some sensed or hidden past knowledge. '*Wishbone Bird*' not only has a shape similar to the diviner's rod but also has comparable aspirations, connecting us with a more animist past. I wrote the following description of it:

> *"Hardly a bird at all if over-analysed but at the same time it is almost archetypal in its appearance. The overall wishbone-shape allows the graceful curve of the body to be supported on a column of equal proportions. Drawn lines fill in a certain amount of detail in an extremely schematic way. The bird surmounting a pole or staff occurs in a surprising number of cultures and often denotes that the bird has magical properties. One of the very earliest is drawn on the walls of the Lascaux Cave in Western France.*

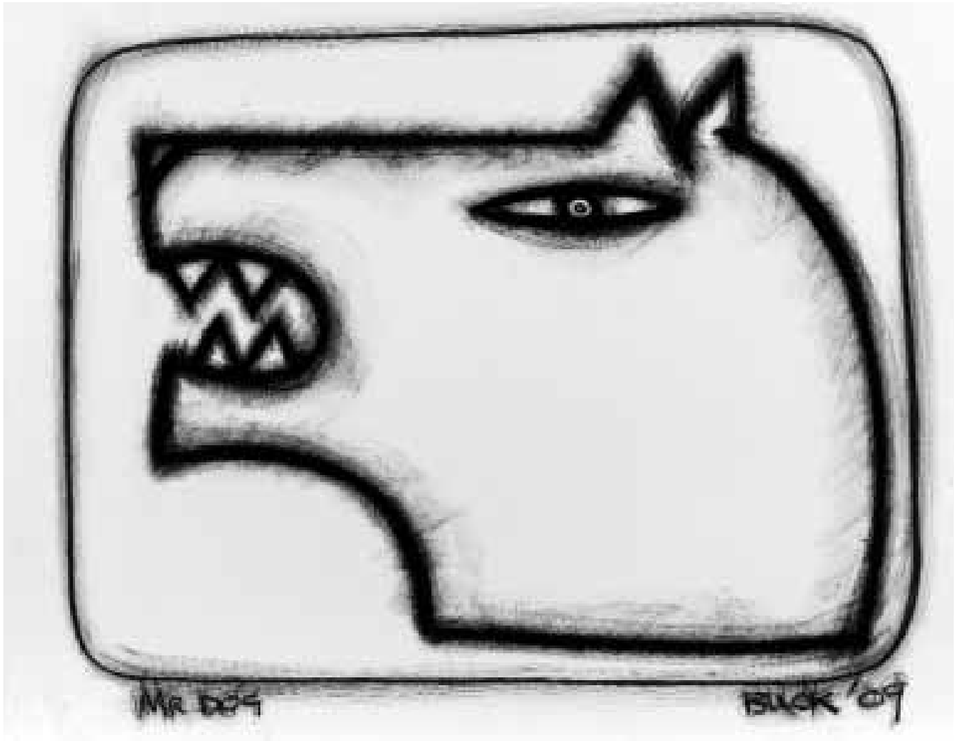
A bird-headed man, probably a shaman, lies in a trance-like state with his bird staff fallen from his grasp by his side. Our ancient connections with birds are not completely severed; magical beliefs may have gone but vestige-like superstitions remain. Which of us does not continue to encourage our children to make a wish when snapping the wishbone of a chicken carcass?"

The use of birds in art therefore, is an age-old tradition used by artists to signify our ability to transcend our conscious reality. Archaeologist Harald Hauptmann, excavating the Neolithic site at Nevali Cori in Turkey, expressed the following view of the stone carvings found at this ancient site:

"The bird perched on the head may have represented the soul of a human or a connection between this world and beyond" [10]

In contrast, although by far the oldest of our domesticated species, images of the dog seem to have represented something altogether more primeval in our make-up. The dog is the beast within; it is the impulsive, emotional side. In 'The Bedside Book of Beasts'[11], Graeme Gibson writes that while birds are associated with creativity, longing and imagination, beasts are overwhelmingly physical. Our language is littered with pejoratives associated with the word 'dog' but the dog can be a deeply ambiguous symbol. For some he is a comfort, to others his presence is deeply concerning.

Longdog
2005
Bronze
Edition of 5
143 cm high



LEFT
Man's Best Friend
2008
Bronze
Edition of 10
56 cm high

Mr Dog
2009
Charcoal on paper
50 cm x 65 cm

Deep Down Dog
2009
Bronze
Edition of 10
46 cm high

I wrote the following about one of my own dog images:

> *"Along with birds the dog is one of the most common recurring images in my lexicon of zoomorphic creatures. The three-legged variety now has the unnerving effect of seeming more convincing than the four-legged variety. This particular dog I realise, is deeply ambiguous, his tail belying the down-in-the-mouth-dog at the other end. The colour too is contradictory; although blue can be synonymous with depression, the shine and tone of the sculpture suggest the contrary and the overall effect is simply of absolute dog-ness."*

If the visual arts have evolved this simple symbolic language to investigate the complex narratives on which we base our social and cultural beliefs, where does this leave visual making today? Well I believe it remains just as important to us as it always has been; making is a fundamental way of thinking. Through an almost play-like activity with materials we test shape, form, line and colour to induce an emotional response to the ideas and information on which we base our understanding of the world. In the past, many stories and mythic narratives can also be said to have been poetic explanations of the creation of the earth, the beasts and the first humans who walked amongst them.

As an artist, I have begun to think that in our time there are two clear underlying narratives that should be considered and these complement and run parallel to each other. The first that underscores our contemporary perspective is the narrative that has been expanded by science. This is the extraordinary contextual history of our universe from the 'Big Bang' to the birth of the solar system, the formation of the Earth, the development of the first cells of life and on to the discovery of genes and genetic evolution. It is not only our comprehension of the mechanisms that govern these forces but our ability now to intervene and manipulate them that suggests that they may provide the story of our future.

The parallel narrative that preoccupies many of us is the story of our own personal identities, not merely a short historical perspective of a single individual but a view that can be seen through the cultural evolutionary lens of our entire human heritage. This narrative can also be explained through insights into our genetic make-up and it divulges our spectacular success as a species. Research into the human genome has shown how we have developed from our primal ancestors, tracing our migration out of Africa, our colonisation of the entire globe and finally our proliferation into so many extraordinary societies and cultures across time and place. Art is the medium by which we express these differences but at the same time it is the way we embrace and celebrate the universality of what it is to be human.

In 2000 I produced a body of work in which I believe I consciously started to address these two themes in a more direct and fundamental way. This meant developing a simpler and more direct sculptural language than I had previously employed. The resulting exhibition was called *'Intimate Connections'*. This title made allusions firstly to how intimately we all are connected to Nature, not just through a cultural perspective but also literally through a shared evolutionary process. The other *'intimate connection'* referred to is the debt we owe to our artist forebears. All generations draw on their artistic inheritance in one way or another; none of us operate within a vacuum. In the last hundred years we have had unprecedented access to images of art, not just from our immediate past but also from the dawn of human history to the most far-flung artistic culture.

Four-legged
Form II
2005
Copper
Edition of 10
17 cm high

Venus
2000
Bronze
Edition of 10
29 cm high

Diva III (detail)
2006
Charcoal & crayon
on paper
65 cm x 50 cm

RIGHT
Pink Lady
2005
Bronze
Edition of 10
50 cm high

Completely Golded
2004
Bronze & gold leaf
Edition of 12
19 cm high

RIGHT
Frontman II
2006
Charcoal on paper
65 cm x 50 cm

He-dog
1999
Bronze
Edition of 10
38 cm high

The art of Africa and images from our own prehistoric European inheritance are both particularly acknowledged in the sculptures for '*Intimate Connections*' and especially in the 'goddess' figures. I wrote this of '*He-Dog*' and '*Primal Woman*':

> *"A major part in Darwin's development of his thesis of Evolution was his study of the breeding of domestic animals. Insightfully, he conjectured that the changes in form that man could produce artificially in the short term could conceivably happen quite naturally given the enormous age of the earth that geologists had recently determined. This dog, like 'Primal Woman', carries stylised symbols of himself on his body. Unlike Darwin we now know that our inheritance is carried in our genes and that our chromosomes not only determine our sex but in the male, the Y chromosome, like the mitochondria in women, traces our line of ancestry back to one single progenitor. Dogs presumably carry the same genetic markers so that all dogs can be traced back to one particular He-dog or most probably He-wolf."*

Many of the earliest images known from across the world contain birds and animals as their central characters and even today, divorced as we often are from the real creatures, we find it important to bring to life their metaphoric cousins by way of art. Paul Gauguin, who could be considered the father of the Modernist movement, believed that nineteenth-century art had become moribund and needed re-vitalisation. In his famous self-exile in Tahiti, he looked beyond Western culture in an attempt, perhaps rather romantically, to re-align himself with nature. In doing so he fundamentally questioned why we need to make art and what art should be about. In his 1897 painting *'D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?'* Gauguin asks 'who are we, where do we come from, what will happen to us?'

Lexicon
2008
Sterling Silver
Edition of 10
21.5 cm high

It seems to me that these three basic questions are probably the foundation of all cultural narratives. It is entirely likely that these are the same questions that made art necessary in the first place and, I would maintain, remain equally as pertinent to us today. The legends and fables that answered these questions have varied over time and place and different cultures have created an array of stories with a cast of many characters but perhaps not so surprisingly, many have similar themes and messages. It would seem that there exist underlying human universals in our cultural as well as our biological selves.

During the 19th and 20th centuries many of these mythic allegories lost their veracity in Western culture and new versions that explained our world began to take precedence. Science was informing our views on the world in an unprecedented way and the explanations of contemporary science were based on real observations and testable theories. Through the work of extraordinary men like Darwin and Einstein, science with the help of technology, has unravelled more and more of the extraordinary nature of our physical selves and the universe we inhabit, from the sub-atomic world of particle physics to the genetic sequencing of our genome and beyond. Science, it would seem, gets closer and closer to answering the first two of Gauguin's questions but whether it will ever get close to answering the last will have to remain as conjecture. We have become used to seeing a wonderful world revealed by the electron microscope and the Hubble telescope but amazing as these images are, they are not art. Art is not simply about illustration. Art needs to encompass our emotional and psychological responses to the information we learn from science and we need to remember that art has evolved to influence our ancient unconscious selves as well as our contemporary conscious selves.

These underlying concepts inform my making and occasionally I like to think that practice and theory become enmeshed. In a sculpture called '*Biomorph*' made in 2009 for '*Behind the Lines*', the 'making' transformed the intention and the result was an image with interesting ambiguity as the title suggests. In the catalogue I wrote this accompanying note:

> *"In S B Carroll's fascinating book 'Endless Forms Most Beautiful'* [12] *I came across images of the metamorphic stages of a developing tadpole. By some sort of strange synchronicity it was that time of the year that the garden pond was full of spawn and I was able to inspect the real thing for myself. With a simple hand lens I could see the self-same forms and I made some drawings of their developments. In certain orientations some of these drawn images reminded me of the Palaeolithic Venus figures. The resulting sculpture I made holds some of that duality and ambiguity. It is undeniably sensuous but also draws attention to the way we enjoy the bilateral symmetry in ourselves and all living creatures".*

Shape, form and colour have always given me pleasure and perhaps that is why I was so attracted to birds at a very early age. It is also why I toyed with the idea of a career in natural history before setting off for art school. The zoo was a place where the senses were continually bombarded; it was an exotic world filled with brilliant colours, bizarre shapes and sensuous forms. The art college sculpture studio of the 1970s was by contrast a much duller place. There were two prevailing schools of thought: those who constructed with metal girders and found scrap-metal and the conceptual minimalists. Neither camp was concerned with sensuality or the provoking of emotional response and the lack of basic humanity I perceived in their work troubled and confused me. At the same time it instilled in me a certain resolve and determination to always go my own way.

Biomorph
2009
Bronze
Edition of 10
75 cm high

The Nature of
Thought
2009
Bronze
Edition of 10
55 cm high

Turning to the study of the figure, although it seemed retrograde to many, was an innovative and bold move for me. Making sculpture from the human figure was a delight and became a passion during my time as an undergraduate. Gradually however, my raison d'être for making had to be examined; why toil through the process of making when the materials were easily available to reproduce verisimilitude by directly casting from the body? Artists, particularly in America, were already making life-casts of individuals with startling and unsettling results. For those interested in reinvesting in figurative sculpture, casting did suggest immediate results without the toil of all that hand-eye decision-making. However, for me to take up casting in the place of 'making' would be to lose the very thing I valued most and as a consequence would put all the emphasis on the result and not on the process. Jean Dubuffet succinctly expressed my own feelings in his comment:

> *"I think it is so important for an artist to make an effort to relate his thought to what he has done, instead of stubbornly relating his work to what he has thought."* [13]

The process of making was and is by far the most exciting part of creativity; at the outset one has a vague ambition but one never knows exactly what the outcome will be, whereas with the process of life-casting the outcome is pretty much a foregone conclusion. The result amazes the viewer at first, simply for its seeming veracity but in the end always disappoints, appearing diminished in scale and devoid of life.

A great sculpture on the other hand, has some indefinable quality with which the sculptor seems to have imbued the work, something not quite like the subject in appearance but a composition that is infused with its essence and has an ability to move one deeply at an intuitive level. This effect seems more visceral than intellectual and quite indefinable. It is the reduced essence discovered through process and sculptural language that gives a work its emotional impact.

This idea was something I first began to consider as a student, something that has continued to evolve over the years and is what I still strive for today. Sculpture that contains this 'magic of making', as I like to think of it, is rare but instantly recognisable, almost as if it is something we intuitively know but of which we were previously unaware. It is what we marvel at and are delighted by when confronted with the physical creations of fetish and totem displayed in collections at the British Museum or Musée du Quai Branly in Paris for example. Although the exhibits are ostensibly stripped of their social and cultural context, audiences still respond to the intangible connection, a recognition of a shared human condition across time and place – the magic of making. An object formed by a raid on the unconscious through the process of making moves us more profoundly and connects us with what can only be called the essential human experience – that is if we are lucky.

I will finish with the words attributed to Virginia Wolf:

> *"Art is not a copy of the real world; one of the damn things is enough!"* [14]

Jon Buck

Transmutation
2011
Bronze
Edition of 10
44.5 cm high

REFERENCES

1 Richard Sennett 'The Craftsman' 2008
2 William Tucker 'The Language of Sculpture' 1974
3 Nikolaas Tinbergen 'The Study of Instinct' 1951
4 Steven Mithen 'The Prehistory of the Human Mind' 1996
5 Ian Tattersall 'The Monkey in the Mirror' 2003
6 Merlin Donald 'A Mind So Rare: the evolution of human consciousness' 2001
7 Brian Boyd 'On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition and Fiction' 2009
8 Edward O Wilson 'Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge' 1998
9 John Berger 'About Looking' 1980
10 David Lewis-Williams & David Pearce 'Inside the Neolithic Mind' 2005
11 Graeme Gibson 'The Bedside Book of Beasts' 2009
12 Sean B Carroll 'Endless Forms Most Beautiful: The New Science of Evo Devo and the Making of the Animal Kingdom' 2005
13 Laurent Danchin 'Jean Dubuffet' 2001
14 Raimond Gaita 'The Philosopher's Dog' 2003

LEFT
Inner Man
2010
Bronze
Edition of 10
65 cm high

NEXT PAGE
Symphysis
2011
Bronze
Edition of 10
32.5 cm high

JON BUCK

b. 1951

Jon Buck was born and grew up near Bristol at the mouth of the river Avon. He came from a long line of Bristol Channel Pilots and his was the first generation to break with this family tradition. From an early age he was determined to go his own way and it was his deep fascination with the natural world that led to him to Bristol Zoo where he was Keeper of Birds for several years. Studying the animals and birds at close quarters gave Buck the opportunity to indulge in his passion for drawing. Gradually this enthusiasm became more central to his life and in 1975 he enrolled on a Fine Art Foundation course.

After finishing his first degree at Nottingham he took a Masters at Manchester and was then awarded a year's Fellowship at Cheltenham School of Art. In the early years of the eighties he began showing with the Nicholas Treadwell gallery based in London and became part of the disparate group of artists whose work came under the banner of 'Superhumanism', a term coined by Treadwell.

In 1984 Buck became Artist in Residence for the Borough of Thamesdown in a regeneration area of Swindon. This placement gave him the opportunity to make his first large-scale work and to take on the challenge of making art in a public place. Up until this point all his sculptures had been cast in resin and glass fibre. The Swindon experience was to show how inadequate these materials were for art in an external environment and led to Buck adopting bronze as his preferred media. The close relationship that has developed with his casting foundry, Pangolin Editions, has been central to Buck's use of traditional processes to make contemporarily relevant images.

He has worked as the artist consultant on a number of major projects with Camlin Lonsdale Landscape Architects, most notably on the successful Caerphilly Town Centre Enhancement Scheme in 1995. In 1998 he was chosen as one of a team for the enhancement and refurbishment of Deal Pier. The resulting work won the 1999 Rouse Kent Award for Public Art.

In 2004 Buck was invited to lead a sculpture workshop at Makerere University in Kampala on behalf of the Ruwenzori Sculpture Foundation. The Foundation is a charitable trust that promotes the arts and cultural exchange in East Africa and is supported by the British Council. In November 2007 he returned to Uganda to undertake further design research into tribal and clan totems for the Foundation.

Buck has exhibited extensively and internationally and has contributed to some of the most significant recent sculpture exhibitions in Britain. In 1990 he was elected a Member of the Royal West of England Academy and has been an Associate of the Royal Society of British Sculptors since 1994.

Selected Exhibitions

2011 '*Making a Point: The Point of Making*' Solo exhibition, Gallery Pangolin, Glos.
'*A Decade of Sculpture in the Garden*' Harold Martin Botanic Gardens, University of Leicester.

2010 '*Crucible – the Sculpture Show of the Decade*' Gloucester Cathedral.
'*Figuring It Out*' Gallery Pangolin, Glos. Four artists working with the human form.
'*Stirred for a Bird*' Gallery Pangolin, Glos.

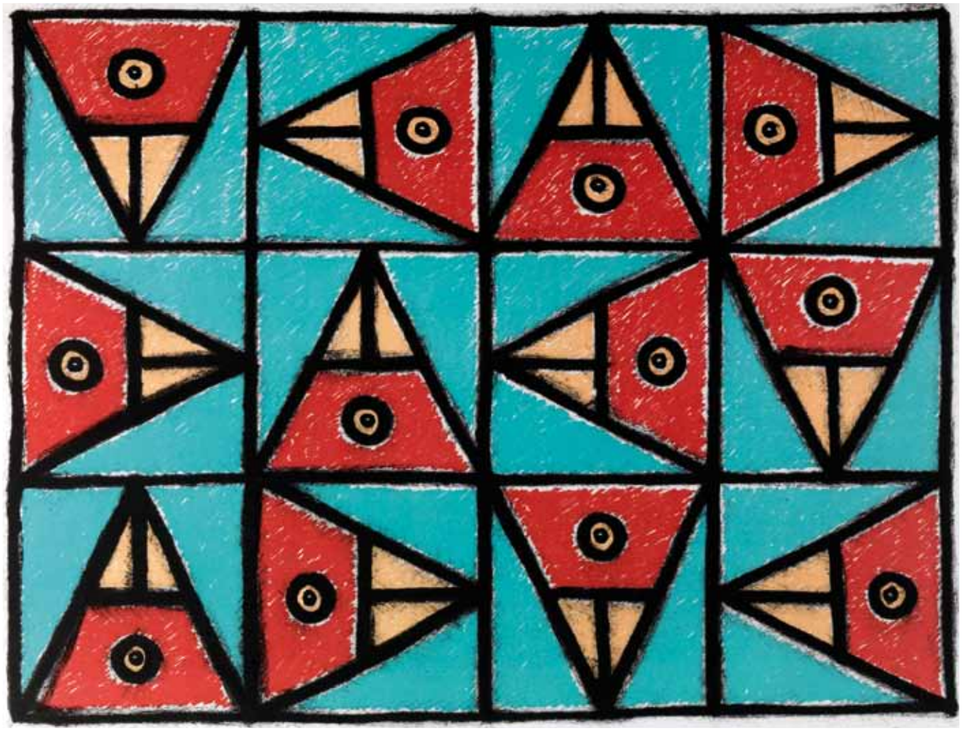
2009 '*Behind the Lines*' Solo exhibition, Pangolin London.
'*A Celebration of British Sculpture*' Harold Martin Botanic Gardens, University of Leicester.
'*British Silver Week*' With Pangolin London.
'*Fire and Brimstone*' Gallery Pangolin, Glos. Twelve sculptors invited to experiment with the casting process at Pangolin Editions foundry.

2008 '*Sterling Stuff II*' Pangolin London. Fifty artists invited to work in silver.
'*Image*' Campden Gallery, Glos. Collaborative exhibition with photographer Steve Russell.

2006 '*Animals and Birds*' Jubilee Park, Canary Wharf, London. Three artists invited to contribute.
'*Art London*' Chelsea, London, solo exhibition.

2005 '*Odd Birds and Other Selves*' Solo exhibition, Gallery Pangolin, Glos.
'*Out of the Melting Pot*' Dexia Banque Internationale, Luxemburg. One of a group of artists working in bronze.

2003 '*BLOK*' Festival of Sculpture, Canterbury.
'*Sterling Stuff*' Fifty artists invited by Gallery Pangolin to work in silver. Also shown at the Sigurjon Olafsson Museum, Reykjavik, Iceland and Royal Academy, London.



Pecking Order I
2011
Lithograph
Edition of 15
54 cm x 70 cm

2002 '*Fantastic Animals*' Donjon de Vez, Paris.
'*Thinking Big: Small Work for Large Projects*' Peggy Guggenheim Museum, Venice.

2000 '*BRONZE: contemporary sculpture in bronze*' Holland Park, London. Commissioned to make a sculpture for this year-long millennium exhibition.
'*Intimate Connections*' Solo show, Gallery Pangolin, Glos.

1999 '*The Shape of the Century: 100 years of Sculpture in Britain*' Salisbury Cathedral and Canary Wharf, London.

Public Commissions

2008	'*Out of the Blue*' 525cm high steel commission for Odyssey Complex, Belfast. Awaiting funding.
2007	'*Ship to Shore*' 300cm high bronze commissioned for Portishead Quays, Portishead, North Somerset.
2004	'*Flat Out*' 200cm high bronze commissioned for the Centre for Sport, Exercise and Health, Bristol University.
2000	'*In the Swim*' 200cm high bronze commissioned for West Quay Shopping Centre, Southampton. '*Goodwood Goddess*' 220cm high bronze commissioned for Sculpture at Goodwood.
1998	'*Embracing the Sea*' 300cm high bronze commissioned for Deal Pier, Kent.
1997	'*Common Knowledge*' Two 60cm high bronzes commissioned for Merthyr Tydfil Library.
1996	'*New Age*' 90cm high bronze commissioned for the new Consulate General, Hong Kong.
1995	'*Street Beacon*' 250cm high bronze commissioned for the refurbishment of John Street, Porthcawl.
1994	'*On Our Heads*' 180cm high bronze commissioned for the Law Courts, Harlesden, London.
1989	'*The Old Wiltshire Horn*' 100cm high bronze commissioned for Trencherwood Homes, Swindon.
1985	'*Looking to the Future*' Three over-life-size resins commissioned for West Swindon.

Permanent Collections

2005	'*Aurora*' 50cm high bronze purchased for Haberdasher's Livery Hall, City of London.
2003	'*Back to the Beginning*' 220cm high bronze purchased for Schiffer Collection, Pennsylvania, USA.
2002	'*Monumental Family*' 170cm high bronze purchased for Paddington Central Development, London.
2001	'*Equilibrium*' 165cm high bronze purchased for Milton Keynes General Hospital.
2000	'*Monumental Family*' 170cm high bronze purchased for Milton Keynes General Hospital.
1999	'*Returning to Embrace*' 150cm high bronze purchased for Canary Wharf, London.
1988	'*Tower of Strength*' 365cm high bronze purchased for the Andrew Brownsword Collection, Bath.

Publications

'Public Sculpture of Bristol'
Douglas Merritt, Francis Greenacre & Katharine Eustace, Liverpool University Press 2011
ISBN 978 1846316388

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ISBN 978 0713687590

'Bronze Sculpture - Casting and Patination - Mud Fire Metal'
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ISBN: 0 7643 2164 1

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'Sculpture at Goodwood - British Contemporary Sculpture 02/03'
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ISBN: 0 9537794 1 6

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Sculpture at Goodwood 2002
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Tony Birks-Hay, Marston House 1998 and 2004
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'The Encyclopedia of Sculpting Techniques'
John Plowman, Running Press 1995
ISBN: 1 5613853 2 8

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Malcolm Miles, Winchester School of Art Press 1989
ISBN: 0 9506783 8 4

'Superhumanism 2' - A Survey of a Current Art Movement'
Nicholas Treadwell Publications 1982
ISBN: 0 907932 01 0

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