

BEHIND THE LINES
JON BUCK



You and Me
Bronze
Edition of 5
215 cm high

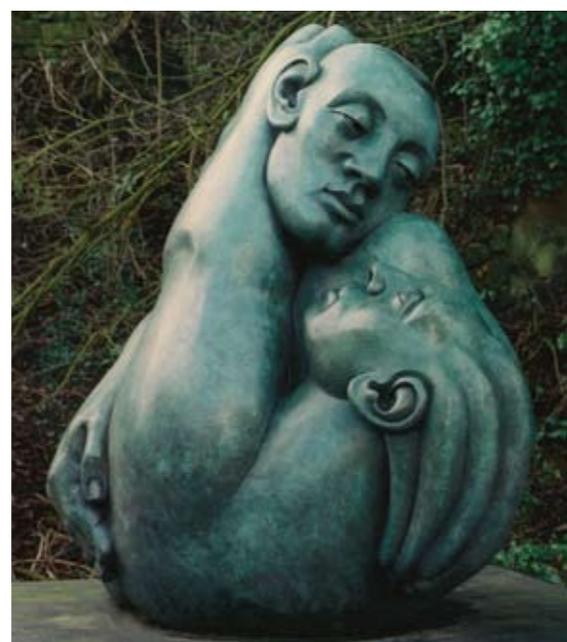
INTRODUCTION

As a maker you use making as a way of thinking, a way of having an intellectual interaction with yourself. You don't come up with a concept and give it over for someone to make - its more like making a poem - you simply have some notion of what you are trying to achieve and then intuition kicks in and you rely on your intuitive use of the language to come up with a new entity.

Jon Buck, September 2009

The standard canon of Western art history usually begins with prehistoric cave paintings and charts the journey of our artistic ancestors as they strove to produce ever-more realistic images that captured a subject or scene. Towards the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries however, a movement to undo this progression began to take place. Whether as a simple reaction against the traditional art establishment, or perhaps partly due to the advent of photography, artists turned their attentions away from realism and intense detail and found inspiration in the previously disregarded tribal arts of Africa, Oceania and North America. This broad movement, since given the loose term *primitivism*, included a wide variety of artists ranging from Gauguin to Gaudier Brzeska, Ernst to Moore, Picasso to Nolde. Inspired by the bold forms, vibrant colours and apparent freedom with which these tribal artists had formed their visual language the primitivists were intrigued to see works of great strength and vitality created using sparse detail and basic materials. Giacometti in particular was struck by how 'the more simple they become the more real they become'.

When Jon Buck began studying sculpture in the 1970s, the trend to reduce detail was at its zenith in the form of abstract minimalism. Whilst Buck found this intellectually stimulating he also found it distinctly lacking in any form of sensuality or content and decided to go against the trend and embark on a solo journey that would combine his two passions: making and nature.



At a time when Greenpeace and other environmental groups were coming to the fore, Buck's earlier works investigate the human relationship to nature and express a responsibility to it in a direct and uncompromising way. With their bold intertwining limbs and close marriage of animal and human subject matter, works such as *Embracing the Sea*, *Returning to Embrace* and *Peaceable Kingdom* can all be seen to embody these thoughts and inspirations.

Like the primitivists decades before him however, Buck's interests in psychology, ethology and anthropology encouraged him to move away from realism to explore other ways of communicating a message. As a result, his imagery became less obvious and more schematic. Animals, in particular birds and dogs, became personal totems and Buck found that they could express an idea just as poignantly as a human figure and that looking at animals was an effective, non-confrontational way of looking at ourselves. He says:

Along with the human figure, images of birds and dogs are the most common recurring theme in my work. To my way of thinking

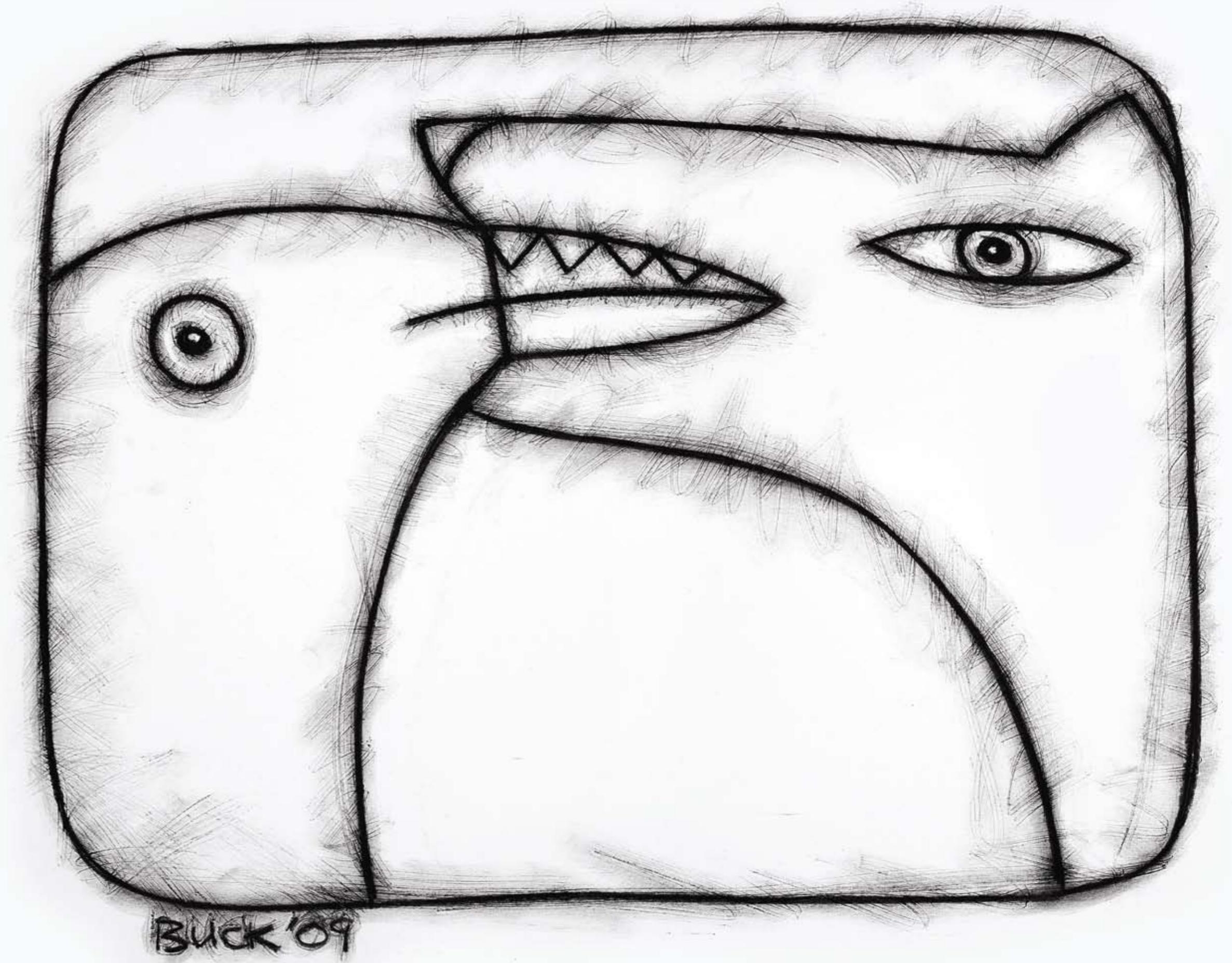
(ABOVE FROM LEFT)
Embracing The Sea
Bronze
Unique
300cm high

Returning To Embrace
Bronze
Edition of 5
150cm high

(ABOVE)
Peaceable Kingdom
Bronze
Unique
53cm high

they represent two opposing elements in our psychological make-up. The dog is Instinct, an innate impulsion and the bird is Intuition, an immediate insight without reason. Neither is an absolute and there are elements of both in all of us. The dog is ambiguous as an image; it can appear aggressive and untrustworthy on the one hand or faithful and foolish on the other.

Human and animal heads also became a reoccurring subject. As a key mechanism to human and animal communication heads provided the perfect opportunity to create small scale sculptures with a big presence. Acknowledging the head as a 'house for ideas' Buck found that by imposing objects on top of the heads, the sculptures were given a new dimension - not only in a humorous way but primarily as an indicator of another presence, a belief or an *alter ego*. *Go Between* for example, depicts a young head whose expression is relaxed yet intent and not at all surprised by the small, fully formed bird perched above. We instantly recognise that there is a relationship between the two but naturally query how to fully understand it.



Beak In The Bark
Charcoal on Paper
Unique



Historically, the depiction of man and bird appears in many cultures and symbolises magical properties and wisdom. It is a theme that Buck has continued to develop as can be seen from two sculptures present in this latest body of work: *Headland* and *Birdman*. Both these bronzes with their beautiful, rich patinas and contrasting markings have an immediate presence both as separate entities and combined as a whole. Our natural curiosity is intrigued by the way the bird has been incorporated into the head and with the titles giving away little, leaves us to ponder their association – is it a real relationship or imaginary? What does the bird symbolise? What is the meaning?

As the animals have become a lexicon of sculptural language so too have the marks made upon them. As Buck's work developed in bronze he found unique solutions to enliven the muted palette of patinas he had to use as a result of his chosen medium. By transforming the surface of each sculpture with a stylised symbol or motif Buck not only changed the form of the work but also enhanced its message. This 'sculptural handwriting' has been steadily refined over the past ten years and in the new body of work has developed from the repeated singular motif to concentrate primarily on the drawn line and multiple motifs. Buck describes this progression:

A natural evolution from imprinting the whole surface of my sculptures with geometric patterns was to replace them with a drawn line. This fundamentally changed the nature of my work.

(ABOVE FROM LEFT)

Go-Between
Bronze
Edition of 10
55cm high

Birdman
Bronze
Edition of 10
70cm high

Headland
Bronze
Edition of 10
74cm high

(BELOW FROM LEFT)

Primal Woman
Bronze
Edition of 10
45cm high

He-Dog
Bronze
Edition of 10
38cm high

Venus
Bronze
Edition of 10
29cm high

On the one hand it became more narrative but at the same time it led to simpler sculptural forms. It has also had the consequence of compressing the act of drawing and of making sculpture into one process. I now found that spontaneous drawings made in the sketchbook could have a much more faithful recreation as a sculpture. Previously it had always been an interpretation of what one assumed the perspective of the drawing indicated.

By blurring the boundaries between drawing and sculpting Buck is experimenting not only with process but with our traditional concepts of dimension in a rarely seen way, turning our expectations on their head. Many of his recent sculptures have just two bold sides that encourage us to view them head on – perhaps for maximum impact – which is an unusual decision for a sculptor. In addition to this, he exchanges the traditional three dimensional rendering of surface and form in the sculpture for simple lines which recall the act of drawing in two dimensions.

Indeed it seems the more two dimensional the work, the more intricate and complex the surfaces of the sculptures become. For example *Poetry of Line*, *Widescreen Woman* and *Parrot Fashion* all seem to take the idea of sculptural handwriting to another level and whilst evoking Maori tribal tattoos and carvings in some way, also give these surprisingly two dimensional sculptures an added dimension.

Drawing is very much a part of Buck's working process and it is interesting to note that in his drawing his approach is remarkably





(ABOVE)
Stardog
Bronze
Edition of 10
39cm high

(LEFT)
Double Take
Bronze
Edition of 10
34cm high



sculptural, often working into the surface of the paper itself with sandpaper to achieve a very unusual visual effect. In the same way that prehistoric cave painters marked their presence through art so too does Buck mark his physical presence as both sculptor and draughtsman in his work.

An important influence on both the coloration and the markings of Buck's recent work has been Dutch zoologist and ethologist Nikolaas Tinbergen. Through experiments with seagulls and their chicks, male sticklebacks, and butterflies, Tinbergen proved that by exaggerating the stimuli that commonly elicit a response, for example by increasing the saturation and contrast of colours in pre-existing markings, a heightened response from the animals could be achieved. Tinbergen called these enhanced triggers '*supernormal stimuli*'.

Whilst Buck had been aware of Tinbergen's experiments for some time it was not until he heard a lecture by V. S Ramachandran, Director of the Centre for Brain and Cognition in California, on how these experiments could be applied to certain works of abstract art that he realised how they might be relevant to his own work.



(LEFT)
Lying Lady
Bronze
Edition of 10
30cm high



(RIGHT)
Long Dog
Bronze
Edition of 5
143cm high



(LEFT)
Poetry of Line
Bronze
Edition of 10
71 cm high



(RIGHT)
Interior Dimensions
Charcoal on paper
Unique

The body of new sculptures included in this exhibition, with their brightly painted and patinated surfaces, seem to form Buck's own sculptural experiment in super stimuli. The combination of his simplified forms with what could be called 'super-saturated' colours certainly elicits an instant visual response of fascination, intrigue and awe.

Whilst many artists have used bright colours to make up for a lack of depth in their subject matter Buck's work is supported by a stimulating and academic thought process where even the more abstract organic forms like *Mind-Map*, *Papilliform* and *Large Proteiform* demand intellectual interpretation from the viewer to great effect.

This ability to initiate an instant response to a work whilst challenging the viewer intellectually is a talent that should certainly be celebrated. If everything since the Greeks has been imitation of the human form then one could say that the influence of *primitivism* was the catalyst that reawakened us to the essence of figurative sculpture. With this exhibition Jon Buck has taken this reawakening one step further to create works which truly are innovative, exhilarating and original.

POLLY BIELECKA

As it is impossible to convey all of Buck's inspirations and interesting thought processes in such limited space we are thankful to him for providing some illuminating and insightful quotes alongside each work which we hope you'll enjoy.

Eachway Heads
Bronze
Edition of 10
41cm high



CATALOGUE

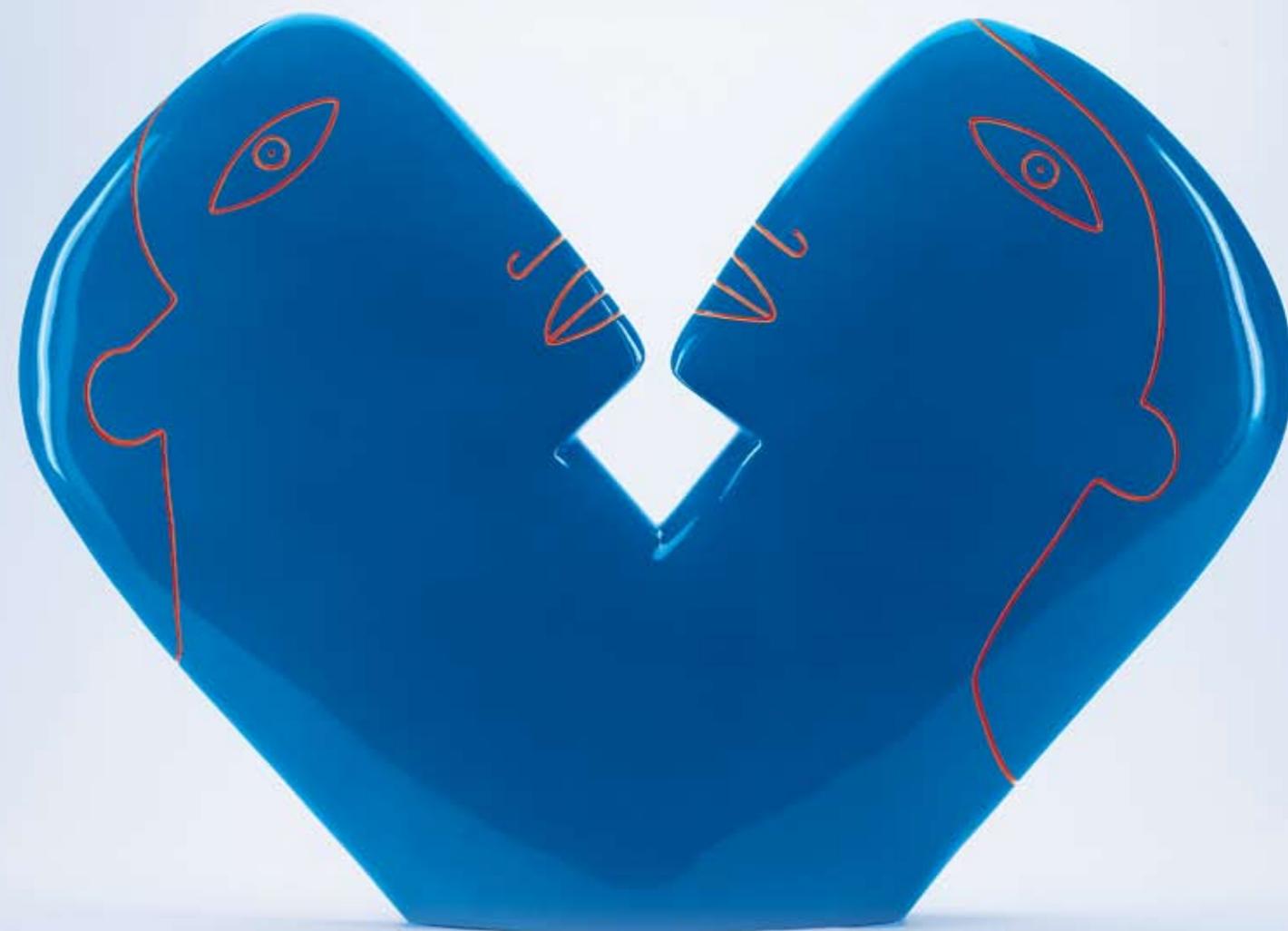


RIGHT IN TIME

Closely related to 'Eachway Heads' and 'Midnite Movie Heads', this work seems more animated. Oddly, the way in which the two heads incline away from each other makes them seem more intimate than in the other pieces.

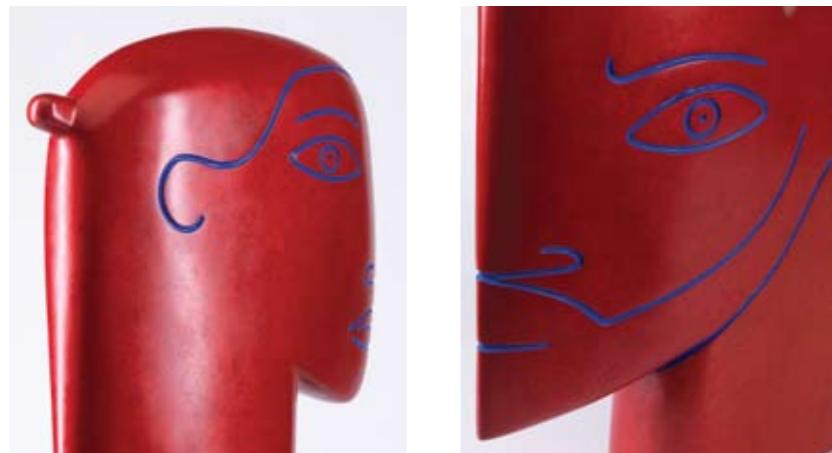
At the same time the sculpture is more dynamic and implies movement; perhaps they are dancing their way through time? The title makes several references: the attitude of the heads is reminiscent of the hands of a clock; perhaps conceitedly, they are also right for this moment. However, the title is mainly suggested by a Lucinda Williams' song of the same name, in which she sings of her partner being 'right in time' with herself.

Right In Time
Bronze
Edition of 10
63cm high



SHIP TO SHORE MAQUETTE

This sculpture has close associations for me. The four metre high version sits on the dockside of Port Marine, once Portishead Docks, in Somerset, the locale where I grew up. Its simple shapes echo the bollards that are still dotted along the old pier and the bright red colour is reminiscent of objects employed to signal shipping hazards. Two heads, one male and the other female, are superimposed one on top of the other. The man looks out to sea and the woman back to land. 'Ship to Shore' was a form of radiotelephone that connected the two and was based at Portishead. This sculpture really alludes to those who travel and those who wait for their return. In this way I am making direct reference to my own parents who more or less lived this life in that place.



*Ship to Shore
Maquette
Bronze
Edition of 10
78cm high*





DEEP DOWN DOG

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 with 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.

Deep Down Dog
Bronze
Edition of 10
46cm high



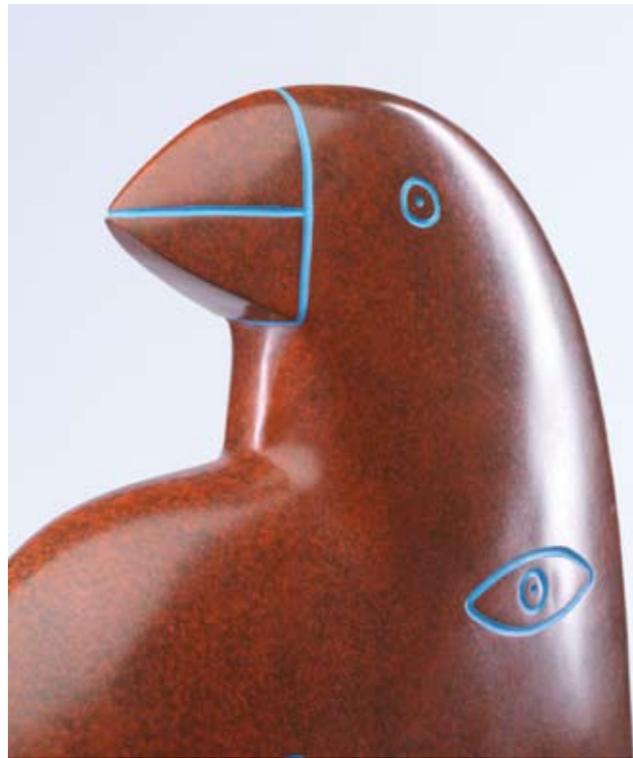
ON THE LINES OF LASCAUX

Caught in the act of falling, this bird-headed figure seems to epitomise the dilemma of our relationship with the rest of the natural world. This long and intimate connection seems to be in danger of failing. Like many others I have been fascinated by the drawings on the walls of the Lascaux caves which must be some of the first images that explored this relationship. The only figure to appear in the vast pantheon of animal symbols is a single bird-headed man lying inert with a disembowelled bison by his side. It is perhaps fanciful but in my imagination at least, my figure falls to join his prone body.

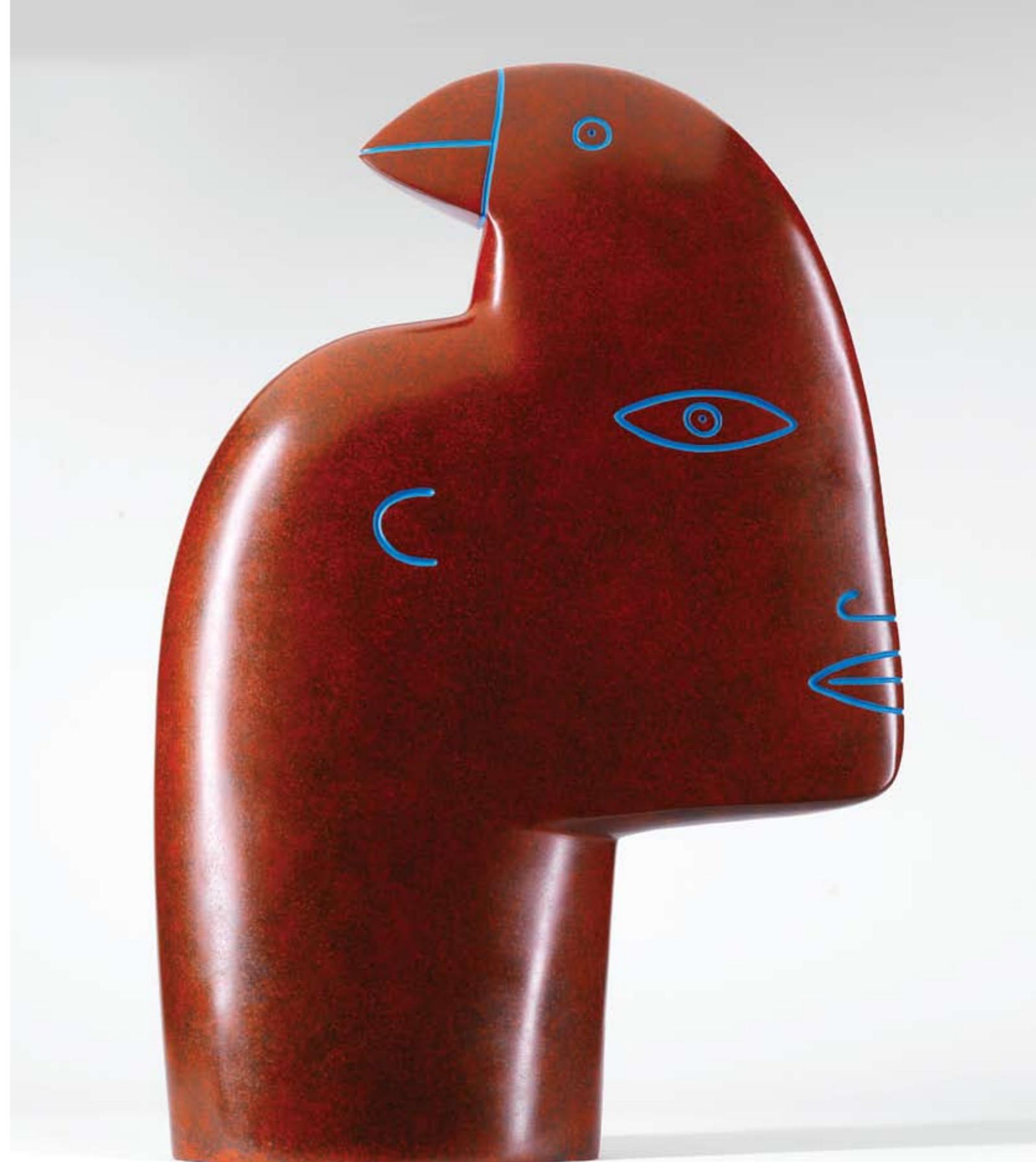
*On The Lines
of Lascaux
Bronze
Edition of 10
48cm high*

BIRDMAN

Bird-heads have been a constant preoccupation in my work and although I consider them all autobiographical to some degree, this one is more specifically so. In this sculpture, human and bird have been almost completely consumed into each other. Possibly this reflects how my relationship with birds is a longstanding one but more pertinently that it has changed its focus along the way. In my early years it was the flesh and feathered creatures with which we share our parochial lives that preoccupied me. Although I still take a delight in them, it is increasingly the more metaphorical ones inside my head that obsess me.



Birdman
Bronze
Edition of 10
70cm high



YOU AND ME

In sculpture, size definitely matters. A sculpture has to fit its context and what works in an intimate interior is unlikely to work in an architectural environment. This sculpture is an enlarged version of the piece 'Right in Time'. It has been re-titled; some of its original intimacy may have been lost in the larger version but in becoming monumental it can be perceived as more universal. 'You and Me' signifies the notion that these two heads could represent any of us caught in the endless embrace of life.

You and Me
Bronze
Edition of 5
215cm high



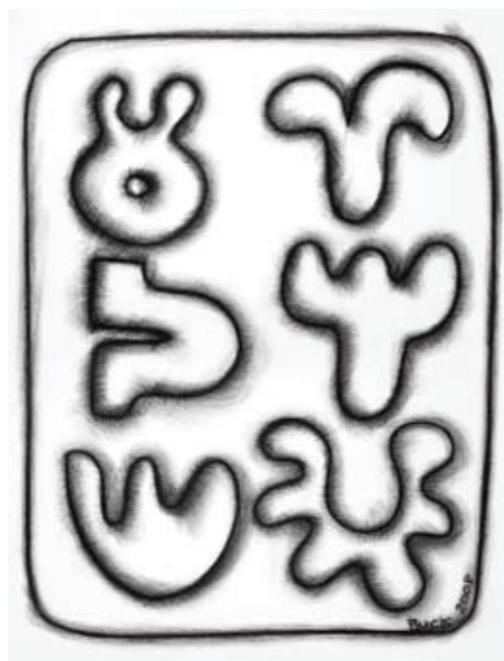
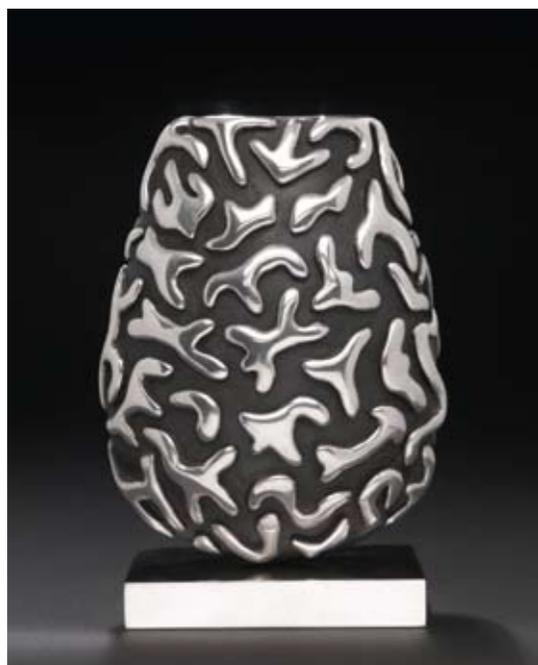


LARGE PROTEIFORM

Developed from the silver version of the same name, this sculpture allies itself to a number of my sculptures that are of a more abstract nature. They come from my desire to break away from the flattened forms that evolved to allow the drawn elements to function. These works are deliberately sensuous and released from linear demands seem to spring out to investigate all 360 degrees of their surrounding space. The sculpture is without a specific narrative but instead induces a feeling of tactility. At the same time it is hard for the viewer not to make connections and comparisons with things already experienced. For me, although not intended, I cannot help but be reminded of my earlier goddess figures and a seeming affinity with the Artemis figures of Ephesus.

Large Proteiform
Bronze
Edition of 10
44cm high





LEXICON

For me silver has a quixotic quality. The primitive proto-forms of the sculpture seem to float around on the dense black surface, suggesting they have a mutating nature like blobs of mercury. I like to think that sculpture can act as a sort of visual prompt. In this work each element is part of a visual vocabulary that has the propensity to develop into meaning.

(RIGHT & ABOVE LEFT)
Lexicon
Sterling Silver
Edition of 10
18cm high

(ABOVE RIGHT)
Form Dialogues
Charcoal on paper
Unique



MIND-MAP

This sculpture protrudes in all directions like 'Proteiform' but whereas its surface is smooth and devoid of any narrative information, this work is heavily marked. The introduction of contour lines give it the appearance of some sort of undulating landscape and the addition of incised glyphs gives it the quality of a three-dimensional map. However it appears not to be the map of a physical landscape but more the terrain of a mind-map.

Mind-Map
Bronze
Edition of 10
45cm high





PARROT FASHION

Parrots are among the cleverest and most long-lived of all birds. They are also often great mimics and probably for these reasons have been greatly prized as household pets. In our earliest evolution our own abilities to mimic must have helped to separate us from our hominoid cousins. Parrots have other parallels with us; they are some of the gaudiest and most garrulous birds in the world. Were we to have an avian equivalent then surely parrots would fit that bill. They are gaudy and vulgar, noisily and continually disputing each other's lives. The question is I suppose, who is copying whom?

Parrot Fashion
Bronze
Edition of 10
53cm high





PROTEIFORM

Proteus, Greek god of the sea had the power of prophecy but would assume different shapes to avoid having to answer irksome questions. The repeated forms and the highly reflective nature of silver produce a surface difficult to define. As a consequence there is a feeling that this sculpture is not static but always on the point of change.

*Proteiform
Sterling Silver
Edition of 10
21.5cm high*





BIOMORPH

In S B Carroll's fascinating book 'Endless Forms Most Beautiful' 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.

Biomorph
Bronze
Edition of 10
75cm high







(ABOVE)
Forms of Adaptation
Charcoal on paper
Unique

(LEFT)
Lines of Lineage
Bronze
Edition of 10
56cm high



LINES OF LINEAGE

This sculpture morphed into many identities before maturing into this final stage. In evolving into this manifestation of a fruiting body it is probably most allied to 'Biomorph', whose forms are echoed along the tops of the pod-like structures. In the process of making this work I imagined it to be a conflation of Mendel's pea experiments with some sort of fallopian process; in any event it definitely has a reproductive essence.

PAPILLIFORM

Related to my other organic-formed sculptures, it is the colour that sets this piece apart from its contemporaries. There is also something very architectural about the form of this piece; it is almost as if it were a fragment broken from some exotic temple. At the same time it is undeniably sensuous in its physicality.

Papilliform
Bronze
Edition of 10
70cm high

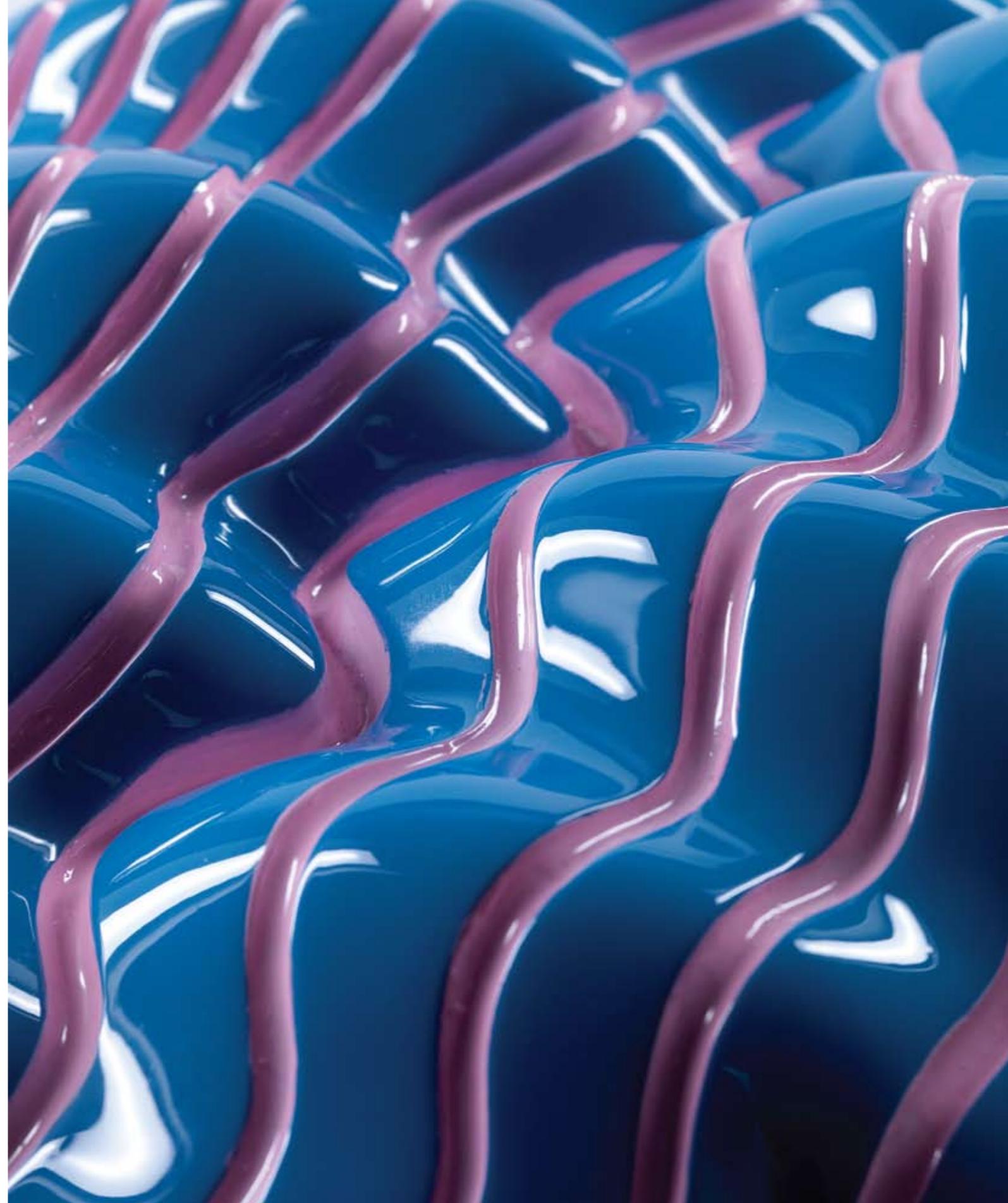


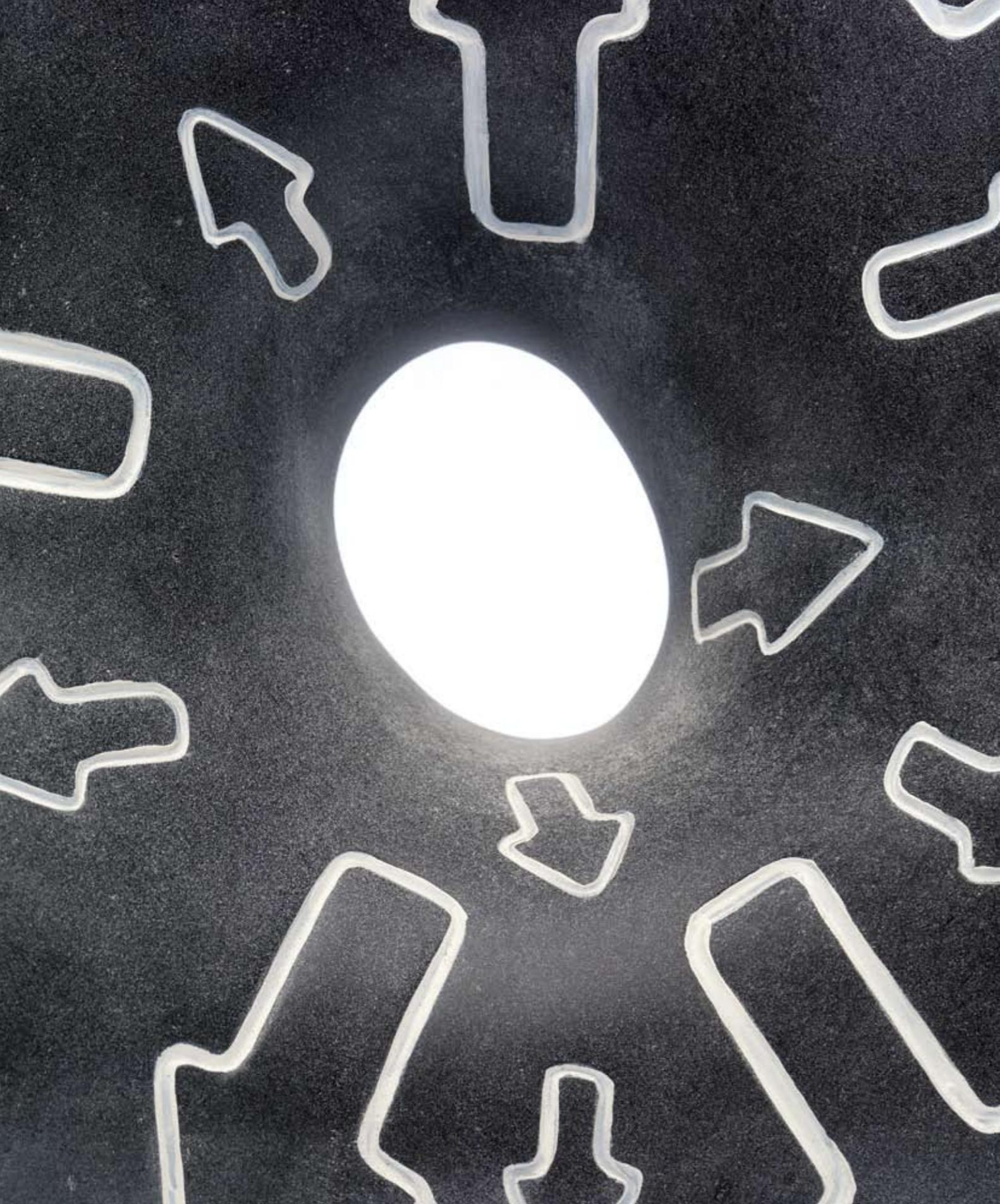


CONVOLVED

As with many of the less referentially-based sculptures this piece underwent many manifestations during its making. I became primarily interested in how the striated incisions change the surface in a way that draws out and emphasises the form. To me this sculpture makes many biological connections: the shells of bivalves, the elastic skin of a whale's throat and even the puckering of our own skin.

Convolved
Bronze
Edition of 10
31cm high





A BRIEF MOMENT IN TIME BETWEEN THINKING AND SEEING

Like my other organic-based sculptures this one expands out in all directions. The simple arrow-like symbols that cover the surface seem to denote not only direction but, like the dots on a computer screensaver that rush towards you, also imply movement or even time. The sculpture has the overall appearance of exploding away from an empty centre. It could be interpreted as alluding to the cosmos but perhaps it is more like the imagined process of thought.

*A Brief Moment
In Time Between
Thinking and Seeing
Bronze
Edition of 10
59cm high*

POETRY OF LINE

The face, its features and its lines are how we recognise each other and how we gauge the emotional responses in others to ourselves. In previous work I have used the drawn line to describe those salient features. However, other creatures may see us altogether differently. Our perception of the world is very limited, even our eyesight, the most sophisticated of our senses, is puny compared to many in the animal kingdom. In this work I have in-filled the surrounding areas with contour-like patterns as if a kind of new technology has allowed us to see some previously undetectable physical trait. The completed work conjured up a memory of the face of the poet W H Auden and brought to mind his poem 'The Age of Anxiety' which reminds me that through art we have other ways of seeing.

Poetry of Line
Bronze
Edition of 10
71cm high





HEADLAND

A Tribute to the Poetry of Patrick Kavanagh

Although I was vaguely aware of Patrick Kavanagh as a poet, it was not until I was invited to make a proposal to commemorate him that I became deeply involved with his poetry. I felt an immediate empathy with his language, the way he described his relationship to the land and the sensuality it evoked in him. My sculpture 'Headland' was made in direct response to this lyricism. The image of the head is intended both as a corporal, flesh and blood woman but also as a force of Nature, his 'Miss Universe'. The bird that emerges from her head is a conflation of the bird in my sculpture 'Go Between' and Kavanagh's 'Pagan Poet' blackbird. He refers to Headland repeatedly in his poems, for him a special place, an area of the field left wild and uncultivated. In my sculpture I make reference to this by a delineating line that describes the features, like furrows ploughed into the land. The title also suggests an inner landscape of ideas and emotions that parallel the descriptive verse of his environment.

Headland
Bronze
Edition of 10
74cm high



GHOST IN THE DOG

A hybrid of the natural and the man-made, 'Ghost in the Dog' appears to have a forgotten function lost in time. The ghostly pale line of the incised contour echoes the outer form, giving it the appearance that the presence of the natural dog is trapped within a man-made straight-jacket.

Ghost In The Dog
Bronze
Edition of 10
45cm high





DRAWN IN

The title refers to the literal production of the image of a woman drawn into the tablet-like form of this sculpture. It also makes reference to the fact that she actually appears withdrawn from us. Balanced precariously on one hip she sleeps like a chrysalis or a muse refusing to wake.

Drawn In
Bronze
Edition of 10
48cm high

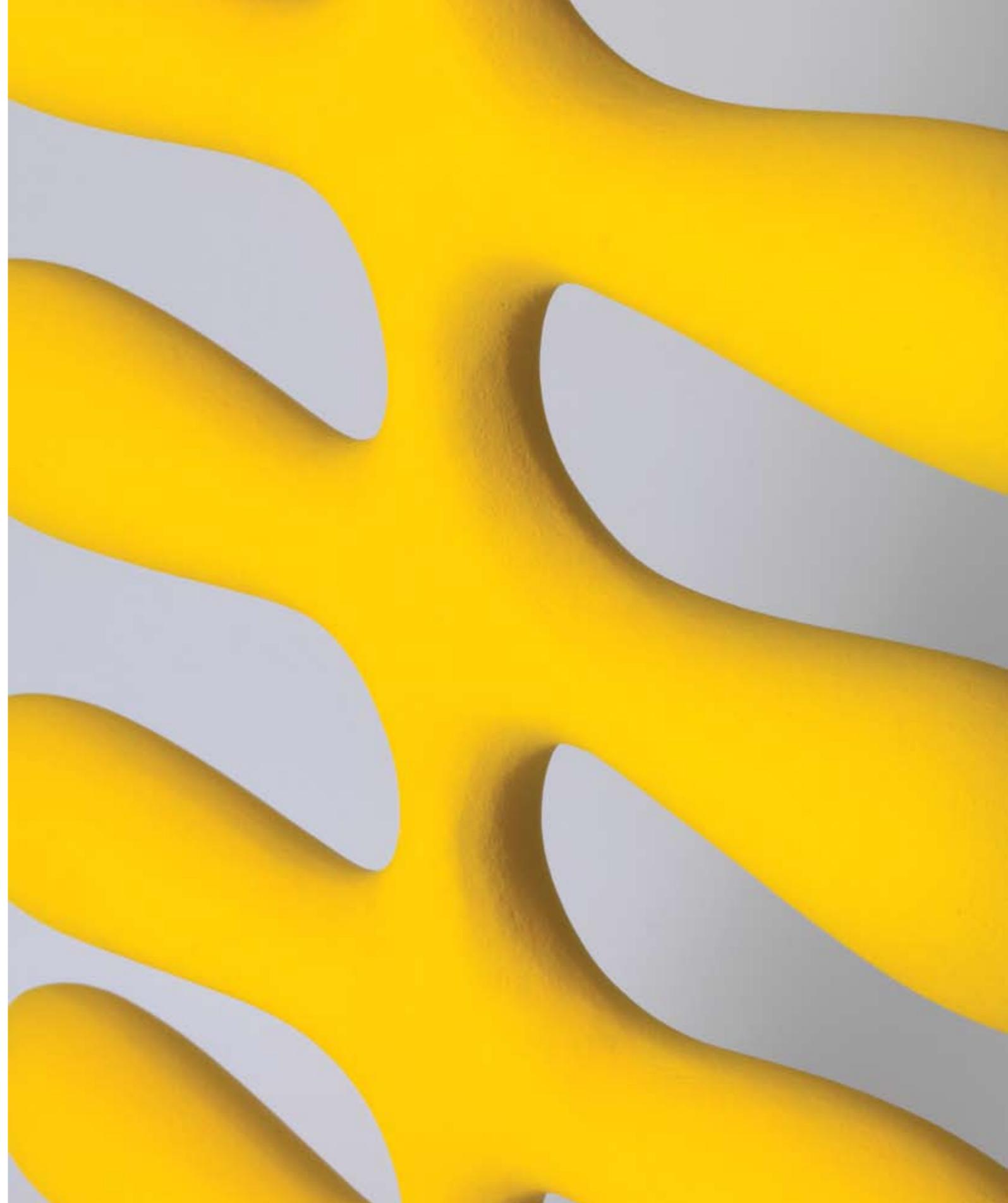




BRAIN WAVE

At some point I noticed that in my notebooks, when new work fails to emerge, an image not unlike this one invariably turns up. There is something deeply fascinating about the symmetry of repeated forms and the negative spaces they delineate. I finally made a three-dimensional representation of one of these doodles and the result seems to resemble some sort of vegetative or natural form. The title came not from any suggestion that it is some kind of cerebral emission made concrete but more as an ironic comment on finding an image to make.

Brain Wave
Bronze
Edition of 10
80cm high





HMMM HEAD

Rather like an escapee from a graphic novel this head carries a face of a girl drawn out in a single line of a constant width. On the reverse she carries her thought bubble encircling the inscription 'Hmmm'. This is a typical comic book exclamation yet its meaning is more than a little ambiguous. The viewer might even find themselves echoing this thought when looking at the sculpture.

WORRIED MAN

The man's puny arms frame his over-sized head and fingers inscribed into his forehead double as his furrowed brow. Although cartoon-like, the overall feeling is one of neurosis as if our minds are much too large for our emotional selves. This man is not so much an individual but a representative of our culture. The bright primary colours may suggest flippancy yet they help take the work away from the individuality of creed or race and it demands a more psychological interpretation.

(ABOVE)
Hmmm Head
 Bronze
 Edition of 10
 77cm high

(LEFT)
Worried Man
 Bronze
 Edition of 10
 73cm high



WIDESCREEN WOMAN

We all now receive our view of the modern world through the flat rectangular medium of the wide TV screen. 'Widescreen Woman' is the imagined image of the 'talking-head' that confronts us daily in our living rooms. Her flattened face is stretched and pressed up against the back of the TV screen, producing the swirling lines of distorted colour.

Widescreen Woman
Bronze
Edition of 10
55cm high





WOMAN NO BIRD

Whereas the surface of 'Headlines' is vibrant, almost neurotically, with detail, this piece has none. It has a simple enclosing contour line that identifies the features. This is not to imply that her head is empty but that any further embellishment is unnecessary and her simplicity suggests a certain tranquillity.

Woman No Bird
Bronze
Special Edition
11cm high



HEADLINES

Although this is a tiny sculpture it develops the notion of the head as a repository for the self. Its collection of organic proto-forms etched into the surface hint that there lies within us the residue of our most ancient lineage. At the same time these drawn elements are suggestive of undeveloped ideas floating around inside our heads.

Headlines
Bronze
Special Edition
11.5cm high



MAN'S BEST FRIEND

Somewhat mask-like in appearance, this head with its primitive teeth of nails is almost reminiscent of a tribal artefact. An inscribed drawn line closely follows the profile of the head and in doing so emphasises and defines it. This contour line, drawn in the clay original with the forefinger, alludes to the earliest evidence of art-making known to us. In a similar way the contour of my own hand makes allusions to the stencilled handprints that those first prehistoric artists left for us to wonder at. Presumably they, like me, were announcing their own physical presence in the work. The position of the hand so close to those jagged teeth also reminds us that although man's best friend is the oldest of our domesticated beasts by a long way, not far below the surface the wild animal genes still exist.

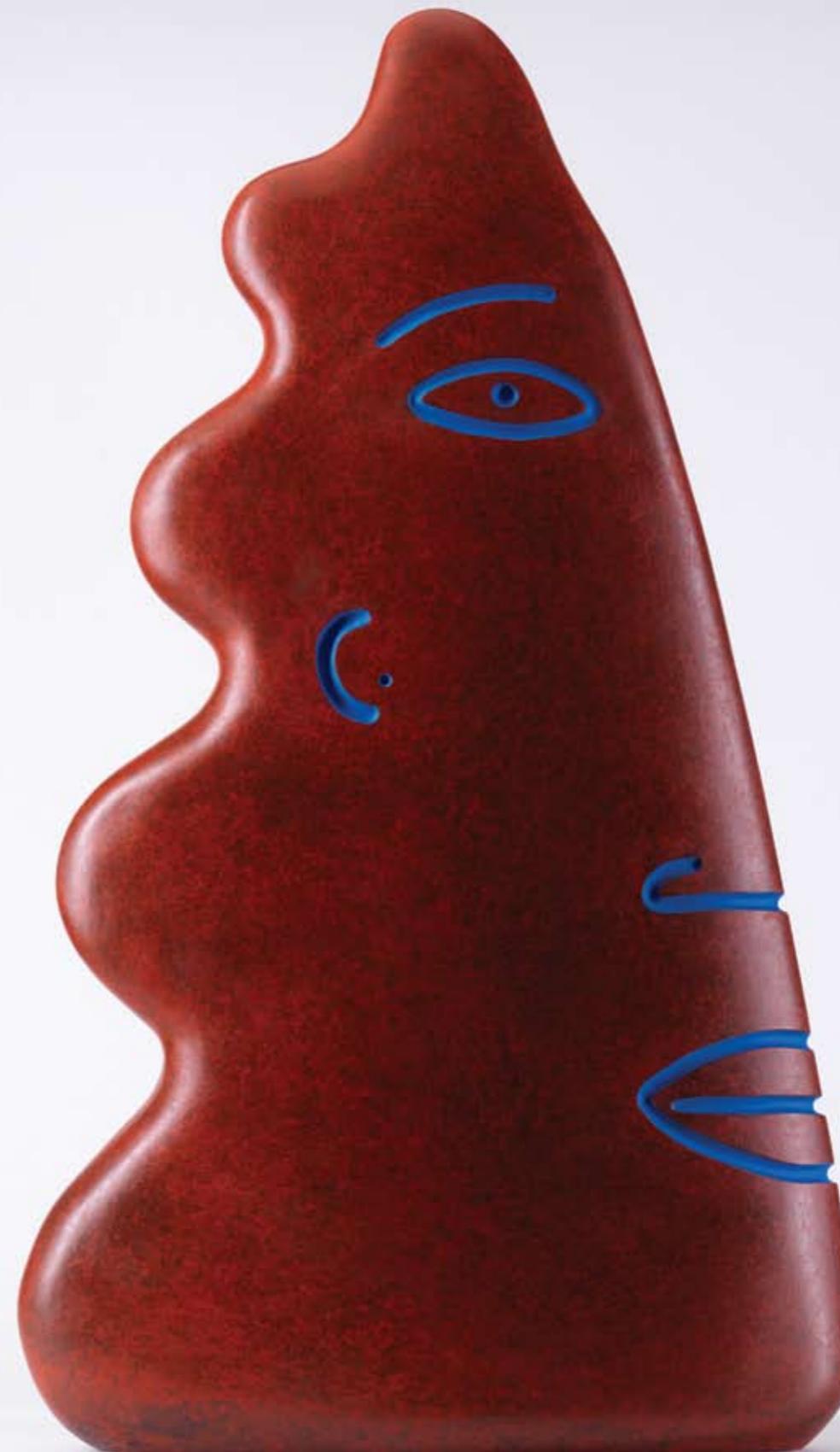
Man's Best Friend
Bronze
Edition of 10
56cm high



WAVE WOMAN

As humans we are specially programmed to relate to people's faces. In sculpture this has the effect of allowing us to regard a disembodied head without the same feeling of discomfort that other dismembered parts of the body often produce. In fact historically, heads make up a huge percentage of world sculpture. Images of the monolithic heads of Easter Island would find their way into most people's pantheon of great works of art. In our Western tradition, for the most part heads remain in the realm of naturalistic portraiture. Maybe for this reason it seems difficult to subvert normal expectations without engendering a feeling of the grotesque. However, I have attempted to do just that with this large head incorporating the hair and head into a single wide-based stable object. Red always seems to me slightly shocking for a sculpture but sensuous at the same time. I am very much in sympathy with Alexander Calder when he said: 'I love red so much that I almost want to paint everything red.'

Wave Woman
Bronze
Edition of 10
92cm high





THE NATURE OF THOUGHT

The pun in the title highlights the narrative of this work. The x-ray drawing on the sides of the man's head reflects many of the forms found on my small silver sculpture 'Lexicon'. The surface of that piece is covered in primitive, natural proto-forms held within its meniscus-like surface. Shapes similar to these, delineated in the brain-like area of this man's head, appear as if they are nascent ideas or even sculptures forming in the mind.

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



Mind Maze
Charcoal & coloured
pencil on paper
Unique





Jon Buck in his studio

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pangolin London would like to thank a number of people for their help in bringing this exhibition and catalogue to fruition. Firstly to Jon and Jane Buck for making the show possible. To Steve Russell for his patient commitment and excellent photography and finally to Steve Maule and all the Pangolin Editions team for their dedication and fine craftsmanship.

Published to accompany the exhibition:

Behind The Lines: Jon Buck
18 November - 24 December 2009
Pangolin London
Kings Place
London
N1 9AG
T: 020 7520 1480

Designed by Pangolin London
Printed by Healeys Printers
Photography by Steve Russell
© Pangolin London 2009

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