JON BUCK
CODED FOR COLOUR
INTRODUCTION

My first memories of colour are the bleached yellows and earthy pinks of the craggy landscape surrounding Athens where I spent my early childhood. Returning to a more monotone London, and taking an early interest in Greek mythology, I childishly perceived myself as having a special connection to the art and culture of this ancient civilization; envisaging stark white togas set against azure seas with clean open spaces and cool white marble. So I was shocked to learn years later that the Acropolis, the very epitlem of my personal myth, had once been painted in gaudy reds, yellows and greens.

I imagine that for many people the discovery that Jon Buck’s brightly painted and patinated sculptures are bronze elicits similar surprise. In their mind’s eye bronze is an ancient material still constrained by a traditionally dull palette of verdigris greens, burnished browns and glossy Victorian blacks. They are forced to recalibrate their mental imagery and associations and look again.

Taking the time to look again at Buck’s work offers rich reward. Those that dismiss simple form for simple ideas will overlook the diverse lines of enquiry that Buck engages to explore the world around us. From Nickolaas Tinbergen’s theories of ‘superstimuli’ in the natural world and VS Ramachandran’s applications of it in art, to prehistoric cave paintings, anthropology and a love of poetry, Buck’s voracious reading informs and feeds his passion for exploring sign and symbol through sculpture.

Whilst these interests have remained fairly constant over the past three decades Buck’s making process has been relentlessly re-developed and refined, at times taking great leaps forward and at others enjoying a period of consolidation whilst he takes time to gain a fuller understanding of the impact on his sculptural language. Coded for Colour offers the perfect opportunity to gain an overview of Buck’s exciting adventure with form, surface and colour. In its most distilled sense this can be seen as a detailed naturalism steadily pared down to the brink of abstraction in an attempt to capture what Buck calls ‘the essence of the thing’ and ultimately to delight the viewer and stimulate the senses to maximum effect.

Whilst Buck’s work has seen a gradual reduction in form over the past three decades his mark-making has become more complex and has evolved through imprints and incised line into personal lexicons of symbols and raised glyphs. It is these glyphs that have most recently transcended their original surface to find form in their own self. For example Buck’s most impressive new monumental work Recalling the Dog has an ancestry that can be traced back over two decades of work through the Eidos works, Repository, Deep Down Dog to He-Dog.

Alongside this evolution has been Buck’s extraordinary journey with colouring bronze which he developed partly through necessity (to make early resins more permanent) and partly through his special collaborative relationship with Pangolin Editions to discover new patinas and techniques. From a restricted palette of standard patination emerged fleshy pink, midnight blue and rich red patinas which Buck combined with contrasting painted pigments and gold leaf. This led to a desire to experiment with brighter and more vibrant colours which only painted bronze could offer.

Marked Cat and Recalling the Dog shown here for the first time illustrate two new techniques that Buck has developed to continue his exploration of colour as an important fourth dimension in his sculpture. Marked Cat uses uniform stickers to mark out,
rather like masking tape, the areas he does not want painted and to give regulated pattern to an abstract organic form. In contrast, Recalling the Dog uses multiple layers of paint rubbed back in areas to give an almost thermal image of the sculpture which at once makes it throb and fade, challenging our senses of sight and touch. The technique also seems to give an instant timelessness leading us to question whether the layers of paint have been worn back and eroded over millennia. Like the Acropolis what is revealed beneath the surface of Buck’s work is innately beautiful but to enjoy it with colour we can relish the full impact and savour the delight.

POLLY BIELECKA
Pangolin London

A film by Distant Object Productions has been produced to illustrate Jon Buck’s evolution through colour. Please see our website for further details: www.pangolinlondon.com/artists/jon-buck

(LEFT) Mind Map (detail) 2009, Bronze Edition of 10
45 x 51 x 37 cm

(ABOVE LEFT) Recalling the Dog Maquette 2014, Bronze Edition of 10
37 x 50 x 20 cm

45 x 25 x 49 cm
One Can’t Two Can
Version II
1983. Painted resin and steel
Unique
160 x 50 x 40 cm
(RIGHT)  
Family  
1991, Bronze  
Edition of 8  
47 x 33 x 32 cm

(NEXT PAGE)  
Primal Woman  
1999, Bronze  
Edition of 10  
45 x 38 x 12 cm
Aurora
2003, Bronze and gold leaf
Edition of 10
50 x 54 x 20 cm

Back to Back
1999, Bronze
Edition of 10
29 x 67 x 15 cm
Pink Lady
2005, Bronze
Edition of 10
52 x 38 x 15 cm
(LEFT)
Black Wings, Red Fields  
2015, Woodblock print  
Edition of 10  
50 x 65 cm

(RIGHT)
Wishbone Bird  
2006, Bronze  
Edition of 10  
58 x 48 x 17.5 cm
Long Dog
2005, Bronze
Edition of 5
140 x 172 x 26 cm
You and Me
2009, Bronze
Edition of 5
215 x 271 x 47 cm
(LEFT)
Double Take
2005, Bronze
Edition of 10
34 x 43 x 6 cm

(RIGHT)
Field of Vision
2013, Woodblock print
Edition of 10
65 x 50 cm
Drawn In
2009, Bronze
Edition of 10
52 x 67 x 17 cm
Mind Map
2009, Bronze
Edition of 10
45 x 51 x 37 cm
Night Bird
2011, Bronze and gold leaf
Edition of 10
47 x 47 x 8 cm
(LEFT) 
Dancing to Time  
2014, Bronze  
Edition of 10  
54 x 32 x 15 cm

(RIGHT) 
On Reflection  
2014, Bronze  
Edition of 10  
44 x 53 x 9 cm
(LEFT)
Red Queen Rules
2011, Bronze
Edition of 10
70 x 52 x 11 cm

(RIGHT)
Matrilinear
2014, Bronze
Edition of 10
58 x 38 x 18 cm
Eidos XII, X, VIII, IX, XI, IV, II, XIV, VI, XIII, VI, I, XVI, V, III, XV
2012, Bronze Edition of 10
24 - 42 cm high each
Displayed in Coded for Colour as Eidetic Wall 200 x 250 cm
(ABOVE LEFT) 
Eidos IV 
2012, Bronze 
Edition of 10 
27 x 33 x 8 cm

(BELOW LEFT) 
Eidos VII 
2012, Bronze 
Edition of 10 
30 x 40 x 8 cm

(RIGHT) 
Repository 
2011, Bronze 
Edition of 10 
70 x 38 x 17 cm
Recalling the Dog  
Maquette  
2014, Bronze  
Edition of 10  
37 x 50 x 20 cm
Red Dog Angry
2015, Pastel and
charcoal on paper
Unique
50 x 65 cm

Blue Dog Lost
2015, Pastel and
charcoal on paper
Unique
50 x 65 cm
(LEFT)  
Cat in the Night  
2015, Pastel and charcoal on paper  
Unique  
50 x 65 cm

(RIGHT)  
Marked Cat  
2015, Bronze  
Edition of 10  
28 x 45 x 20 cm
(THIS PAGE)
Yellow Bird
2015, Bronze
Edition of 15
16 x 21 x 8 cm

(NEXT PAGE)
Beastform: Blue,
Cuff: Yellow,
Beastform: Red,
Cuff: Orange
2015, Resin
Edition of 20
12 - 20 cm high
including stand
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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All photography unless stated below is by Steve Russell:
Image of *Long Dog* on pages 22-23 is reproduced courtesy of the University of Leicester.