

Jon Kipps

[X]

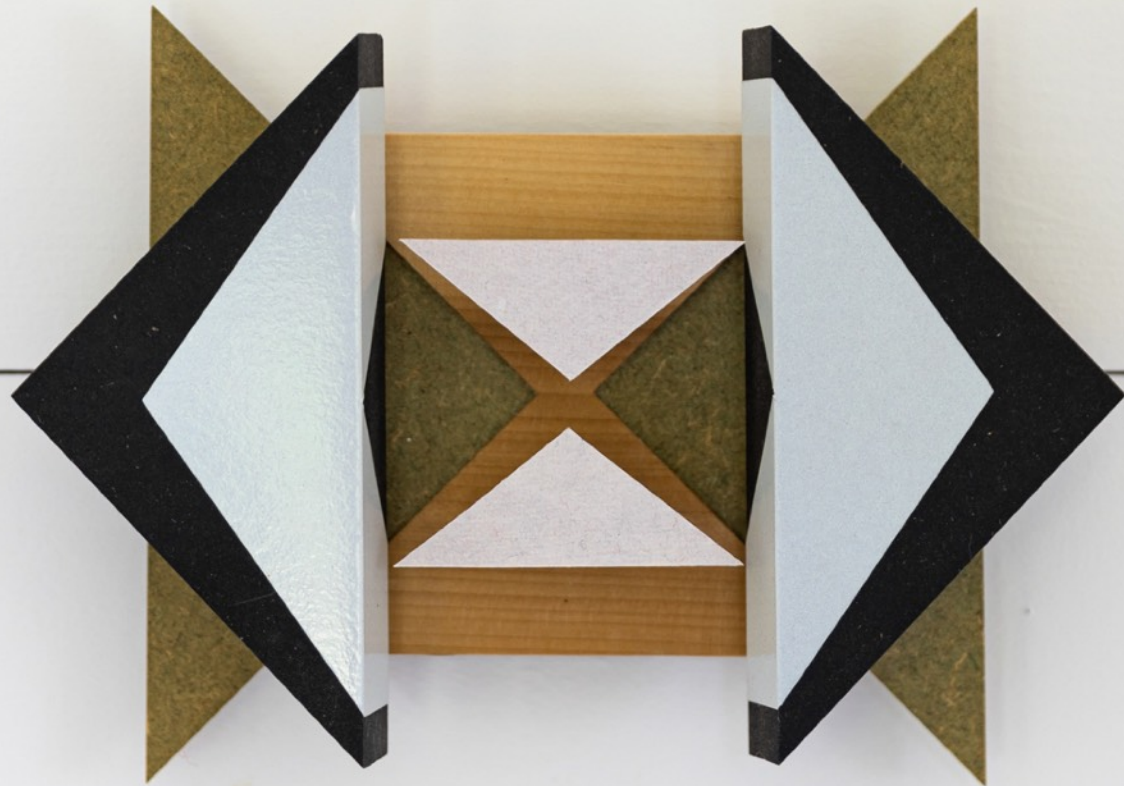
Thirsk Hall Sculpture Garden

9 July – 22 October 2022

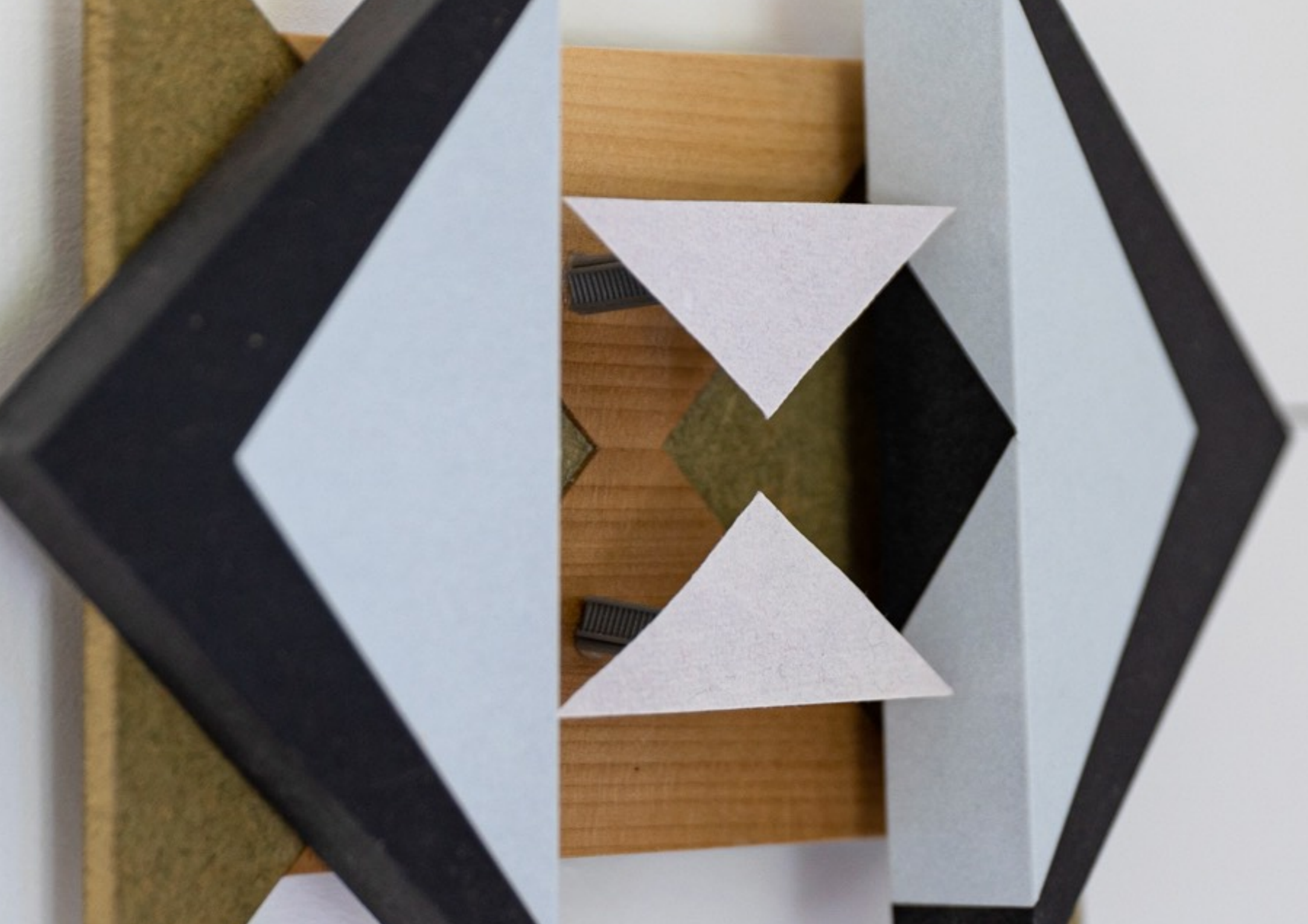
Text written by Robbie Fife  
Documentation by Joe Lang







*Backtrack*, 2021  
Tulip, MR MDF, valchromat, cable  
ties, washi, reflective stickers  
13.5cm x 5cm x 19cm





*Pharaoh Overlord, 2020*  
Walnut, paper pulp, paint  
17cm x 7cm x 13cm





*Integrity, 2022*

MR MDF, Ash, spray paint, acrylic paint, card  
16cm x 16cm x 4.3cm





*The Armed, 2022*  
Walnut, ash, valchromat  
19.5cm x 17.5cm x 5.2cm



## [X] - A Reflection on the Exhibition Written by Robbie Fife

[X] is a solo exhibition of sculptures by Jon Kipps. [X] is an emphatic title – specifically obscure. It denotes nothing definitive and remains enigmatic. Yet the X in [X] serves as a familiar symbol, with multifarious meanings to us. [X] holds great potential for the puzzle lover, it is active and functional, waiting to be unlocked. X is an abundant symbol. It features in science fiction, in mathematics and physics; Elon Musk, the richest person in the world, an undeniably influential figure, is founder of X.com and SpaceX and father of X AE A-XII Musk (X being their first name). Jill Lepore in her BBC Radio 4 series, *Elon Musk: The Evening Rocket*, describes our current system, fuelled by Silicon Valley, as X Capitalism. X is around us.

We read an X as an unknown, a gap in knowledge, a blank, a cross, a wrong, a kiss, an indicator of location, and ultimately an indicator of potential. Kipps' sculptures are imbued with the same kind of unknown and potential meaning. Some, such as *OFF* (2020), *The Armed* (2022) and *Behexen* (2020), containing the X shape itself, fit into our environment like cryptic sign posts – beautified, ornate but nonetheless arcane architectural fixtures. These works operate as mysterious way markers, leading us on like the potential discovery of the value of X in a mathematical equation.

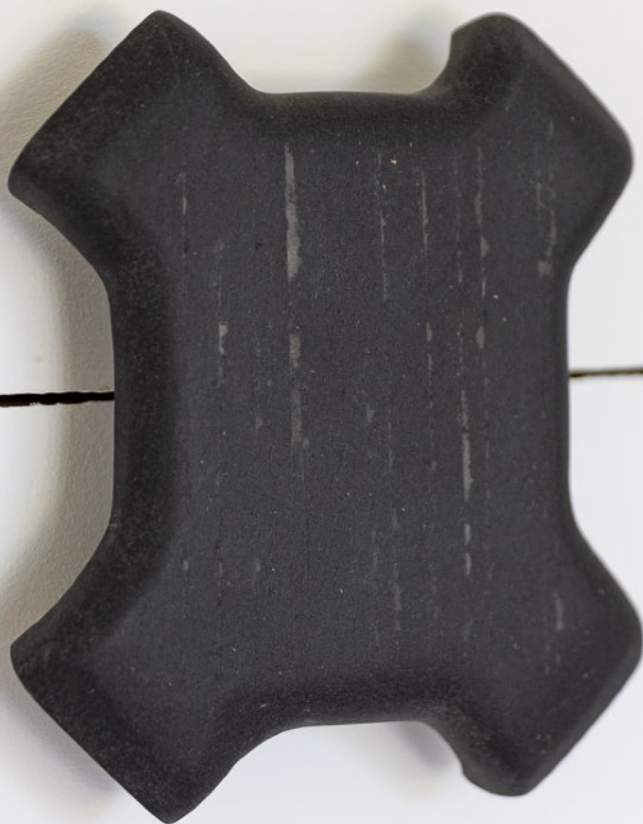
In the penultimate chapter of Robert Macfarlane's book, *Underland*, he talks about the burial of radioactive material and the ongoing lengths to which key members of our civilisation are going to both secure that waste and to warn future life forms what they risk in opening the burial sites encasing it. Thomas Seboek, a linguist and semiotician, suggested in 'Communication Measures to Bridge Ten Millennia' (1984) that a universal signifier, a transcendental sign or symbol could not survive for long enough and still communicate effectively to future beings, instead an 'atomic priesthood' ought to be developed that would carry the messages of location and warning via an active system of myth and folklore handed down over generations. The impetus for this series of small sculptures came from Kipps considering "what warning markers designed by me might look like" – a marker that carried and conveyed a contained power and potential risk "10,000 years into the future, where our current languages and cultures are completely obsolete." The futility of such an object is not lost on Kipps. But the challenge of creating these, nonetheless, gives them a positive purpose, albeit with ominous undertones. [X] in this context is not to be unlocked but heeded as a warning.

[X] has a physical shape too, one that we have a subconscious awareness of – the cross brace, essentially an X placed within a rectangular structure, used for strength, is ubiquitous in design – we see it in bridges, in scaffolding, in chairs and shelving. The more Kipps sculptures we see, the more our reading of this specific lexicon starts to develop and whilst unique, we realise that we already know similar visual languages, ones we read seamlessly on a daily basis. We know how to read a fixture on a building, even if we don't know its function, it is part of our environment. The step into the language of Kipps' sculpture is really a sideways one, it's just that meaning and purpose aren't purely functional in the way that, say, a scaffolding bracket is. It is a language that is nearly familiar to us, but we are reading it in the context of art objects, which often have more esoteric purposes.



*Planes Mistaken For Stars, 2022*  
Valchromat, paper pulp, plywood, spray paint  
21.5cm x 21.5cm x 5.5cm





*OFF!*, 2020  
Valchromat, filler, plastic, plywood  
13cm x 12cm x 3cm



*Twofold*, 2022  
Valchromat, mycelium, rubber, MDF,  
masking tape, paint  
14.5cm x 8.5cm x 7.5cm



How an anchor plate on the side of a building looks and works might provide a useful analogy for us to understand a Kipps sculpture. The anchor plate appears to us as a superficial adornment to a building, often placed seemingly haphazardly on a wall; they are commonly decorative, particular in style and their appearance bears little significance to the crucial job that they are doing. An anchor plate has a tie rod or bolt attached behind it that passes through the masonry, adding structural reinforcement and thus helping to prevent an exterior wall from moving laterally. They have been installed, hopefully, before there is a collapse, so they are preemptive in essence. They work for the future of the building, always active, and frequently adding an idiosyncratic beauty to the facade. Kipps' work doesn't hold up buildings, but many of the pieces could function aesthetically as elaborate anchor plates. Once on a wall they seem to become integral to it, working away statically, necessary adornments, adding history to a building whilst protecting its future. This is the quiet power and significance a Kipps sculpture engenders.

Jon Kipps is a careful, considered, deft artist – a craftsman. When you delve into the construction of his work, and construction is an imperative word, it shows itself to be adept, precise and methodical. In *Shackled* (2022) and *Twofold* (2022) (amongst others), Valchromat – a type of coloured wood fibre panel, an evolution of MDF – is cut and then finely shaped using a router, with angles worked out mathematically before being carefully glued so that the resulting forms are so accurate they could almost be pre-made by a machine. Only close scrutiny would give evidence of any minor inconsistencies resulting from the artist's hand. The result is that this skill can fly under our radar, unnoticed and humble, perceptible only to a keen eye. Furthermore, there are sweet intricacies to find; the X cut into the front piece of Valchromat in *Cold World* (2022) actually has two receding inlets if viewed from either side, much like the cross shaped arrowslits found in castle walls. They retain their cross shape as you look into the inner cavity and out through the mesh that obscures it from the other side. Intricacies such as these are easily missed but delightful when discovered. Set in contrast to Kipps' use of rougher, imprecise and often waste materials such as the masking tape in *Yourcodenameis:milo* (2022) and the paper pulp in *Pharaoh Overlord* (2020) and what you have is a dynamic object that wills you to decipher its construction.

Offcuts, stickers, discarded wrappers, paper pulp, unused packaging – waste material of all kinds is key in Kipps' practice. Its use intentionally undermines his technical proficiency with more traditional materials, not allowing the same level of refinement he can achieve with Iroko, Tulip or Walnut woods, for example. This introduces a different aesthetic in the work, one that is more flippant and playful, more akin to papier-mâché than to high end furniture design. The soft, fluffy, wool undercarriage in *Cold World* (2022) gives an otherwise hard, industrial and structurally robust object, one Kipps likened to a nuclear bunker (alluded to with its post nuclear apocalypse title), a gentle, slightly comic attribute. Its sturdy weight now has something to land on – a protective padding held in place by cold stainless steel. The humble wool resists any finesse and precision and, somewhat ironically, gives this piece its radical edge.



*Cold World, 2022*  
MDF, walnut, valchromat, aluminium mesh,  
stainless steel, rubber, wool, spray paint  
17cm x 20cm x 10cm





*Shackled*, 2022  
Valchromat, spray paint, MR MDF, rubber  
15cm x 8.5cm x 4.5cm





*Yourcodenameis:milo*, 2022  
Iroko, sticky labels, cardboard, acrylic, masking  
tape, spray paint, birch ply  
14cm x 14cm x 8.5cm





*Common Icon*, 2021  
Mycelium, valchromat, plastic, foam, rubber,  
plywood  
29.5cm x 15cm x 8.5cm



Much like built in obsolescence in modern technology (although not capitalistic and conniving), anything seemingly slapdash in Kipps' work is premeditated. A material's impermanence, its natural instability and its transmutability are readily accepted, even embraced and used by Kipps. The changing tone of oiled Iroko in *Reign Supreme* (2022) as it slowly matures with age is just as much part of the work as the red anodised aluminium that will remain unchanged over the same time period. This is part of the magic of these art objects. The sculptures don't stay entirely dormant in their finish.

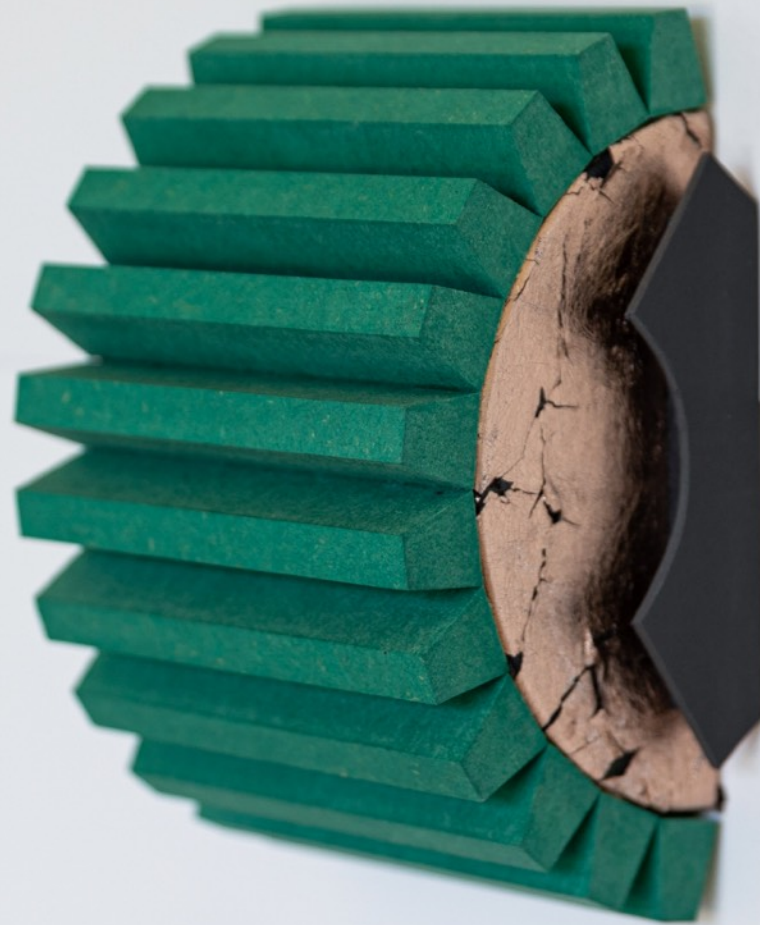
Lo-fi attributes in the work speak of Kipps' more punk predilections. Not only does the choice to use cheaper, everyday materials highlight technical hurdles and aesthetic preferences it also has a significant conceptual role – that of subverting the power and prestige associated with more expensive materials such as bronze, steel or stone. Frequently cardboard, MDF, fabric or sprayed masking tape play a similar role as or even impersonate these tougher and pricier materials. This decision shows us where Kipps' allegiances lie and they are certainly not in the world of the exclusive. In *Turning Point* (2022) the cracked bronze/copper sides are in fact made of a repurposed shiny vinyl fabric skirt. The walnut arc in *Trash Talk* (2022) is held in place and sandwiched either side by wire mesh and paper pulp cardboard (if you look carefully past the mesh you see a sparkly piece of card from a Christmas cracker). There is a subtle play happening between these differing materials and thus their hierarchies. It is a deliberate acknowledgement and gentle rebuke of the pervading top down power structures we live with; in Kipps' sculptures strong, expensive and new don't tower over soft, delicate, and old. They are given equal, if not increased, weight and standing. These throwaway materials mirror punk's admirable endeavour to be both anarchic and inclusive.

Except Kipps has no desire to throw anything away, in fact he is slowly making his practice increasingly sustainable. Many of the components of his sculptures have been given to him by friends that understand his appreciation for unusual and under appreciated forms, most recently packaging. Mycelium packaging has now become a key component for him. Mycelium is a fungal mass of branched, tubular hyphae – integral to plant and soil health and thus our ecosystem. It can be moulded and grown. You can feed mycelium and therefore once you have the raw materials for growth it can provide endless sculptural opportunities, without being a cost to the environment. It is now being used in all sorts of curious ways from fire resistant building material, to fashion items, to packaging. *Common Icon* (2022) and *Twofold* (2022) both contain mycelium structures. This is a whole new territory that Kipps is beginning to explore, with the opportunity to form different shapes and push the boundaries of a material, as yet, little used in visual art. Again, it comes back to a care for the future, just like the anchor plate that rescues the building, just like the warning marker that deters future generations from grave danger.



*Reign Supreme, 2022*  
Dyed walnut, anodised aluminium,  
Iroko, spray paint  
9cm x 12.5cm x 4.5cm





*Turning Point*, 2022  
Valchromat, wood, linoleum, fabric  
17cm x 12.3cm x 9cm





*Behexen*, 2020  
Tulip, MR MDF, Valchromat, cable  
ties, washi, reflective stickers  
13.5cm x 4.5cm x 12.5cm



*Trash Talk, 2022*

Walnut, paper pulp, wire mesh,  
cardboard acrylic & spray paint  
15cm x 8cm x 7.5cm









The Orangery  
Thirsk Hall Sculpture Garden



Jon Kipps (b.1986, Southend-on-Sea) graduated from the MFA Sculpture at Slade School of Art (Distinction) in 2014. Kipps was shortlisted for the Mark Tanner Sculpture Award 2020. Key exhibitions include: Residency #2 (w/ Dimitris Ameladiotis), Gonzo Unit, Thessaloniki, Greece 2021; The Long Goodbye (w/ Dan Pasteiner), U10 Project Space, Belgrade, Serbia 2020; Kuroko, Index Festival, Leeds 2019; Fogou (w/ Stuart Bowditch), May Project, London 2018; Arches and Velvet Curtains, Frank Kent and Jonathan Kipps, Royal Academy of Arts, London 2017; Fifteen, Kate MacGarry, London 2017; TAWI, Dakar Biennale OFF, Senegal 2016; Jonathan Kipps & Article 25, News of the World, London 2016; Works made in Japan, Musashino Art University, (Boise Travel Scholarship), Tokyo 2014; Re-Launch (commissioned architectural work), UCL Art Museum, London 2014; Get Cape Wear Cape Fly, album artwork, Cooking Vinyl records 2010.

Robbie Fife is a painter from North Yorkshire, living just outside Thirsk. Kipps and Fife studied at Slade School of Fine Art in London 2012-14, Kipps on the MFA Sculpture course and Fife MFA Painting. Since graduating the pair remained close friends and for years were studio neighbours in various studio complexes around South East London. Robbie has therefore seen the full evolution of this body of work and all of the creative twists and turns that occurred behind the scenes.

Kipps would like to give special thanks to Willoughby Gerrish for supporting and showcasing this new body of work, to Robbie Fife for writing the text, to Joe Lang for the exhibition photography, to Daisy Bell, Catherine Duck and everyone who has supported this part of his creative journey.

[www.jonkipps.co.uk](http://www.jonkipps.co.uk)  
[www.willoughbygerrish.com](http://www.willoughbygerrish.com)

The exhibition is open Wednesdays - Saturdays 11am-5pm

Thirsk Hall Sculpture Garden  
Thirsk  
YO7  
North Yorkshire

For sales and visitor enquiries please contact [info@willoughbygerrish.com](mailto:info@willoughbygerrish.com)

