

The Belvedere opens an exhibition of works by Rona Pondick



Exhibition view "CARLONE CONTEMPORARY: Rona Pondick" Photo: Johannes Stoll / Belvedere, Vienna.

VIENNA.- A horde of monkeys descended on the Carlone Hall at the Upper Belvedere! They are hybrid creatures with human parts: Monkeys by Rona Pondick adopts the Baroque ambience's playful engagement with distance and proximity to the viewer. The [Belvedere](#) is showing this work in the series CARLONE CONTEMPORARY.

General Director and curator Stella Rollig comments: "With Monkeys Rona Pondick is creating a situation that is both disconcerting and at the same time seems very familiar: We recognize ourselves and the Other in one object – in terms of its depth and

multifaceted nature, capturing this moment resembles the Baroque frescoes by Carlo Innocenzo Carlone.”

Magical human-animal hybrids have populated the artist’s sculptural world since the year 2000. The cavorting monkeys incorporating parts of the human body are simultaneously wild, erotic, aggressive, and whimsical; the human face—the artist herself—either suffering or ecstatic. An overriding impression of ambivalence exists, of attraction and repulsion, and of other often contradictory impulses and drives.

From Egyptian sphinxes and deities, Greek centaurs, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, to mermaids in fairy-tales, chimera have exerted a fascination since time immemorial. The *Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka is arguably the most famous example from modern times, and was a source of inspiration for the artist.

Monkeys was created over a period of several years using an elaborate process. Transitions between human and animal are no longer visible—Rona Pondick researched works of the Old Masters in her quest to achieve this flawless execution. With the utmost precision, the artist cast parts of her own body or head using 3D technology to reduce the size of the life casts. She merged these with hand-sculpted animal bodies to create her human-animal hybrids. The meticulous handling of the stainless steel surface is also significant, for duality is manifested in materiality. The parts of the human body are lifelike whereas the animals are smooth and flowing. The monkeys’ movements and the complex dynamics of their interactions within the tangle of creatures exert a pull on viewers. Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s Baroque sculptures were an important influence in this regard. As we see in Bernini’s art, everything in Pondrick’s work seems to dissolve into flowing movement and only by walking around the sculpture can it be grasped in its entirety.

Rona Pondick: “My animal/human hybrid sculptures claim their physical spaces like territorial animals. I want *Monkeys* to occupy a room implying continuous movement like a baroque sculpture, and to suggest a kind of metamorphosis, as if it is unfolding in front of you. What’s paramount for me, is for a viewer to feel my sculpture psychologically, in their own bodies.”

Rona Pondick has been developing a versatile and moving sculptural oeuvre for over forty years. Her starting point was people—the body and symbolic objects such as beds, shoes, armchairs, and baby bottles—but since the late 1990s, nature has found its way into her work in the form of trees and animals. She always incorporates symbolic and metaphoric meanings to psychological ends.

The American sculptor was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1952. She studied under Richard Serra at Yale University School of Art, graduating in 1977. Since the 1980s, the artist has enjoyed international success with many solo exhibitions, including shows at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem; the Galleria d’Arte Moderna Bologna; the Rupertinum, Salzburg; and the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland. Her work has also been shown at numerous biennials, including the Whitney Biennial, New York, the Biennale de Lyon, the Johannesburg Biennale, Sonsbeek, and the Biennale di Venezia. Rona Pondick lives and works in New York.