



Headshrinker

The sleep of reason brings forth monsters," wrote Goya in 1797, just as the Enlightenment in Spain was coming to a crashing end. Today, Rona Pondick draws on our enlightened technology to produce irrational mutations, capable of seducing us with their awful beauty.

"These pieces made me think of an image I recently saw in the newspaper," says the artist. "This mouse had an ear growing out of its back. The image looked like my work, and [yet it] was of something real, an actual scientific experiment. How exciting and terrifying!"

Pondick started with casts of her head and limbs, attaching them to models of animals' bodies. The titles—*Cougar*, *Fox*, *Marmot*, *Dog*—seem self-explanatory. But something's not quite right about the animal shapes she uses: hairless and smooth, they have a fetal feel. She works the resulting sculptures, building them up in places and smoothing them out in others, until they're perfect portraits of sleeping monsters, all with Pondick's head.

In a recent work, *Monkeys*, Pondick uses the new rapid-prototyping, three-dimensional printers that have brought sculpture into the digital age. The technology enables her to

render a computer scan of her head in three dimensions. These 3-D files, which are scalable to any dimension, can then be printed out as objects. "The level of detail I wanted made this very difficult," she says. "Each time we scanned my head, the computer would crash. In the end, we needed three quarters of a million dots, or 'cloud points,' to create my head." At that resolution, the copy captures every pore and follicle. "The details are so fine," says Pondick, "that it worked perfectly when I combined my shrunken heads with the monkey bodies and the casts of my arms."

The process inspired a new work, *Worry Beads*. This time the artist has scanned her head, printed out bead-sized 3-D copies, and strung them, like headhunters' rosaries. She casts the finished shapes in rubber and stainless steel, adding an improbably high-tech dimension to the work. The polished stainless steel looks like liquid mercury. The black rubber looks at once scientific and fetishistic.

A close friend of Pondick's, Lucy Shapiro, visited the artist at her studio while she was working on the first of her human-animal hybrids. Shapiro also happens to be the head of developmental biology at Stanford University School of Medicine. Pondick recalls, "When she saw these pieces, her response was, 'Oh my God, this is what people fear science will produce. This is my work.'"

— George Fifiield



Rona Pondick, *Fox*, 1998-99.
Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery