

# ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

WORCESTER/BOSTON, MA

## Rona Pondick

WORCESTER ART MUSEUM/HOWARD YEZERSKI GALLERY

Rona Pondick first garnered attention in the late 1980s with her primal and disquieting assemblages of disembodied part-objects and prostheses, such as shoes, baby bottles, or mouths. Since 1998, however, the New York-based artist has taken a different tack, fashioning her own body parts in stainless steel and bronze and mating the results with a variety of flora and fauna, from muskrats to monkeys; for *Pyracantha*, 2005–2006, for example, she cast an exotic evergreen bush in stainless steel, replacing its pomes with minuscule self-portrait busts. Such hybrids formed the core of “Rona Pondick: The Metamorphosis of an Object,” an ambitious site-specific installation at the Worcester Art Museum, which traced the artist’s enduring fascination with physical and psychic transformation as well as her long-standing interest in the history of sculpture. To foreground the latter enthusiasm, Pondick, collaborating with curator Susan Stoops, arranged fourteen works among twenty-nine figurative sculptures from the museum’s holdings (in effect rendering the exhibition itself a hybrid). Spanning a variety of scales, styles, media, and cultures from the primitive through twentieth-century collections, the historical objects included a cinerary urn, a bronze portrait head of a lady, and an eleven-headed wooden statue; they were arranged to echo the stance, textures, and form of Pondick’s own pieces. With hopes that the sculptures would shed their historical references and “take on more physical, emotional, and visceral relations with the viewer,” the artist and curator left off identification labels, offering a fully illustrated checklist to those who wished to identify the objects. An additional display, “Pondick and Technology,” explained the ways in which the artist combined traditional sculptural processes (life casts, modeling, and carving) with high-tech methods (3-D-scanning and printing, digital resizing) to make *Cat*, 2002–2005, a reclining, stainless-steel sphinxlike creature, whose porous, human-scale hands are fused to a highly polished tiny feline body capped with the artist’s miniaturized head.

“Rona Pondick: The Metamorphosis of an Object,” 2009, is also the title of a limited-edition portfolio of nine offset lithographs printed on the occasion of this exhibition and presented, individually framed,



View of “Rona Pondick,” 2009.

at the Howard Yezerski Gallery in Boston. Each of the nine prints matches elements from Pondick’s sculptures with corresponding details from historical objects originating in Thailand, Italy, Mexico, France, Mesopotamia, Angola, and Japan. In the print featured on the cover of the Worcester exhibition catalogue, half of Pondick’s face and neck (cropped from a photo of *Dog*, 1998–2001) are paired with half of the head of the *Seated Buddha in Maravijaya*, a five-hundred-year-old bronze. The pained, introspective expression of Pondick’s furrowed brow and pursed lips is at once heightened and softened by its juxtaposition with the enlightened Buddha’s serenely closed eyes and tranquil smile, and the artist’s wavy pulled-back hair is countered by the Buddha’s bronze curls. Here, as in the other prints that fashion a single countenance by matching details from Pondick’s works with those from seemingly disparate sculptures, cultural difference is employed to visualize universal form.

—Francine Koslow Miller