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EXHIBITION REVIEWS



View of Rona Pondick's *Dog*, 1998-2001, among ancient sculpture from the museum's collection; at the Worcester Art Museum.

WORCESTER, MASS.
RONA PONDICK
WORCESTER ART MUSEUM

Only 13 of the 43 figurative sculptures in Rona Pondick's exhibition "The Metamorphosis of an Object" were made by the artist. The rest of the objects—primarily antiquities—in this fascinating confab were selected from the Worcester Art Museum's collections. Elegantly installed, with Pondick's cast-metal chimeras seeded by category ("Gesture and Posture," "Representations of Hair," "Repetition of Imagery") within groups of related museum works, the show aimed to reveal the artist's historical muses.

For the past decade, Pondick has been at work on a strange menagerie, seamlessly grafting her own head and hands—matte stainless-steel likenesses derived from life casts—onto stylized, highly polished stainless-steel animal bodies of disproportionate sizes. Here, these hybrids' weirdness was greatly mitigated by their mingling with sculptural ancestors. Conversely, relieved of scholarly context and aligned sans Plexi on waist-high plinths, Pondick's picks from the museum's rich holdings of Greco-Roman, Asian, African and Pre-Columbian artifacts conveyed curious, and powerful, magic.

The lineup just inside the gallery stopped viewers in their tracks. Resembling an august council of time travelers were Pondick's yellow steel *Dog* (28 by 16½ by 32 inches, 1998-2001) flanked by the 500-year-old bronze *Seated Buddha in Maravijaya* from Thailand, a 1,000-year-old ceramic *Seated Male Figure* from Mexico and the 4,000-year-old limestone *Statuette of Hapidefai* from Egypt. All eyes were level with ours; all the figures are of similar sizes and all are seated—on haunches, in lotus pose, enthroned. Their collective authority is considerable, and *Dog* fit right in.

Pondick's morphed creatures rendered other posture groups slightly comical. Her 10-inch-high *Muskrat* (2002-05) mimicked the crossed-arm stances of the figures on either side: the neatly bearded, limestone-and-shell Mesopotamian *Statuette of a Man* (3000-2500 B.C.E., 14 inches high) and the marble Cycladic *Female Votive Figure* (ca. 2400 B.C.E., 6 inches high). The smug little trio's poses were distinctly, and trans-historically, evocative.

In the three separate groupings focused on hair, the elaborate craftsmanship of the historical examples tended to steal the show. Pondick's

entries in this category—two versions of *Monkey with Hair* (both 2002-03), their bodies covered by fake fur, and *Mouse* (2002-06) and *Fox* (1998-99), animal bodies married to the artist's head with its slicked-back hair—paled in comparison to antiquities like the limestone Greek *Colossal Female Head* (ca. 510-480 B.C.E.) and a wooden Chinese *Head of Guanyin* (1260-1368), with their obsessively detailed hand-carved coiffures. Pondick didn't duck the disparity between old and new artistry, adding a vitrine containing material that illustrated the high-tech process of creating her *Cat* (2002-05). One of the components, a large green thermoplastic hand computer-adapted from a urethane cast of Pondick's own, was as mesmerizing as anything shown.

Both provocative and generous, Pondick's installation was a rare chance to ponder a choice array of artifacts close up, at eye level and in the round. Her own wry objects acted as cicerones to a remote past while accreting new meanings for themselves.

—Ann Wilson Lloyd