

ARTnews

SUMMER 2002

VOLUME 101/NUMBER 7

NEW YORK REVIEWS



Rona Pondick,
Monkeys, 2001,
stainless steel,
41 1/4" x 66" x 85 1/2".
Sonnabend.

Rona Pondick

SONNABEND

In this startling show of her fascinating new works Rona Pondick offered a portrait of the artist as a group of bizarre, unsettling composites.

Sculpting her own body parts—head, arms, legs—and combining them with segments of imaginary, sometimes recognizable animals,

Pondick constructs a mythology devoted to the frightening and unfathomable subject of making art. These powerful pieces showed Pondick obsessed with herself as an artist.

Using digital technology to reproduce forms in three dimensions and in various sizes and materials—stainless steel, rubber, bronze—she is able to control the degree to which she integrates herself into a work.

While the tone and attitude of ancient Egypt predominated, so did the visual and psychological disjunction between ancient art and new technology. *Worry Beads* (1999–2001), for instance, a necklace of graduated green-patinated Rona-head beads, was among the most disconcertingly contradictory works in the show. Pondick's own stern visage stands in for ancient scarabs, adding an unexpected gravitas to a decorative object.

In *Dog* (1998–2001), a defiant Sphinx icon—body of a dog, head of the artist—the animal's body and strong human arms are highly polished, while the hands and face, evoking the formal heft of Rodin, are unpolished, earthy, with visible pores. Unlike Kiki Smith's animal-self amalgams, Pondick's have more an emotional complexity than a mythological resonance.

The show's tour de force, *Monkeys* (2001), is an excited tangle of limbs, both Pondickian and primate, struggling to achieve balance, or even to survive. Amid the tails and arms and legs and little monkey and artist heads, grounded by her formidable hands, many tales struggle to emerge. And these include art-historical ones: Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* comes to mind.

In the spirit of Cubism, the rust-toned *Untitled Animal* (1999–2001) features Pondick's outstretched leg, cut mid-thigh at a Brancusian angle, linked to a seallike body and topped by the artist's head shyly canted toward the floor. These metamorphoses invoke Kafka's story and classical mythologies. They suggest what we think we are, fear we are, or could become. They give substance to the psyche.

—Barbara A. MacAdam