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 **ARTS**

Fluent in confluences

RONA PONDICK

At: Howard Yezerki Gallery,
460 Harrison Ave., through
Oct. 13. 617-262-0550

By Cate McQuaid

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Monkey, saint, and artist fantastically come together in one of several photographic images that sculptor Rona Pondick has up at Howard Yezerki Gallery. In it, she joins the heads of two sculptures: her own “Monkey With Hair” and a 14th-century French “Head of an Apostle or Saint” limestone piece from the Worcester Art Museum collection.

Pondick has a separate exhibit at the Worcester museum, “The Metamorphosis of an Object,” up through Oct. 11, in which she gathers her own figurative sculptures with those from the museum’s collection, spanning cultures and historic eras. Here, she deepens the theme by marrying disparate sculptures into one image. The WAM show is like a cocktail party, with a compelling array of types hobnobbing together. The Yezerki show is more like a hall of mirrors: The figures gaze directly out at us, like reflections.

“Monkey With Hair,” like most of Pondick’s sculptures, is a hybrid of human and animal, with the human parts coming from life casts of the artist herself. This is her face, in gleaming stainless steel, with eyes closed and a downturned mouth, as if in pain. Wild gray-black monkey hair flies from the head. The other half of the photograph shows a rough, gray French head, bearded and placid, with frank, open eyes.

Each of the photos (all offset lithograph prints) presents a Jekyll/Hyde split, matching up half a Pondick piece with half a work from the WAM collection. The pairings have formal connections. Pondick’s “Dog,” in yellow stainless steel with a human head and arms, shares the angular musculature and gold tones of the 15th- or 16th-century bronze Thai Buddha, seated in a lotus position, with which it has been conjoined.

The formal confluences that electrify the WAM exhibit anticipate these images, but here Pondick’s presentation, actively merging the historic art with the contemporary, charges this work with an unnerving psychological current. In her sculptures — including, in this show, “Untitled Animal,” which appends a hu-



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man leg and hand to a reclining, earless feline creature — the melding of human and animal compels us to imagine our own animal natures. The merging of a saint’s head with Pondick’s monkey, which is also a self-portrait, prompts even more delicious connective nuances. The suffering woman/monkey and the

serene saint become aspects of a single being, shifting from the realm of the symbolic into the juicier realm of what it’s really like to be human.