



**ILEANA
SONNABEND**
AN ITALIAN PORTRAIT

RONA PONDICK

(b. Brooklyn, New York, USA 1952)

Dog, 1998-2001

Yellow stainless steel; edition of six
plus one artist proof

71 x 42 x 81.3 cm

The Sonnabend Collection

The theme of transformation, whether benign or malign, threads through the whole history of mankind. The hybrid (from the Latin *hybrida*, the crossing between races or between different social classes in Ancient Rome) is an arbitrary juxtaposition of diverse elements, animate and/or inanimate. A hybrid is a passage, from one given form that exists in nature, to another that contaminates it, originating in the mind of man. The iconography of the 'marvel' the monstrous as prodigy, the manifestation of something extraordinary, often divine, eliciting reverential awe as well as horror especially when confronted by the half human half animal, finds fertile ground in our imaginations. From the fantasies of the earliest cave dwellers to the orbiting space stations of our millennium, in movies, videos, comic books, video games and toys, our world throbs with hybrid beings, mainly inspired by the iconography of the past, and enriched by cybernetic invention and scientific experiment. A being that is half human and half animal is bound to the notion of the supernatural. In Greco-Roman mythology, the progeny of Echidna, the monstrous female whose lower body is in the form of a serpent, and of Typhoeus constitute a glittering repertoire of monsters, from the Sphinx, with male or female face and the body of a lion, to the Harpies, the Lernean Hydra, the Chimera, Ladon the guardian of the Garden of the Hesperides, and the Nemean Lion. There are the mythical Gorgons, their heads crowned with snakes, boar's tusks protruding from their lips, hands of bronze and wings of gold, Centaurs, half men and half horses, and the Minotaur half man, half bull. In the Middle Ages, the waterspouts and capitals that embellished the cathedrals were often peopled by monstrous and zoo-anthropomorphic creatures. Some Flemish Renaissance painting descended directly from this ancient iconographical tradition, including Hieronymus Bosch's triptych of the *Garden of Earthly Delights* (Museo del Prado, Madrid), which is infested with fantastical hybrids. Since 1998, the American artist Rona Pondick has developed her own versions of the classical Greco-Roman hybrid and its subsequent derivations in Italian sculpture, but inevitably she filters them through contemporaneity by making them of shiny stainless steel, inducing the shock that a Surreal image combined with a familiar material (as stone was to the Ancient Romans) can transmit.

