

ARTS/C1
UNUSUAL SCULPTURE
BLENDS ANCIENT
AND MODERN

The **METROWEST**
DAILY NEWS

2006
DISTINGUISHED
NEWSPAPER
N.E. Newspaper
Association

METRO
EDITION
☆☆

COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER COMPANY • www.metrowestdailynews.com

SUNDAY, MAY 17, 2009

VOLUME 11 • NUMBER 210 • 72 PAGES • 10 SECTIONS •



Past
present



RONA PONDICK'S SCULPTURES ARE AN AMALGAM OF THE

ANCIENT AND THE MODERN

By Chris Bergeron
DAILY NEWS STAFF

WORCESTER – From Ovid to the X-Men, artists of all cultures and times have regarded shape-shifting as the primal human urge to shed mortal bodies for supernatural possibilities.

Mixing ancient skills with 21st century technology, artist Rona Pondick has sculpted intriguing hybrid creatures that fuse human and natural forms in provocative ways.

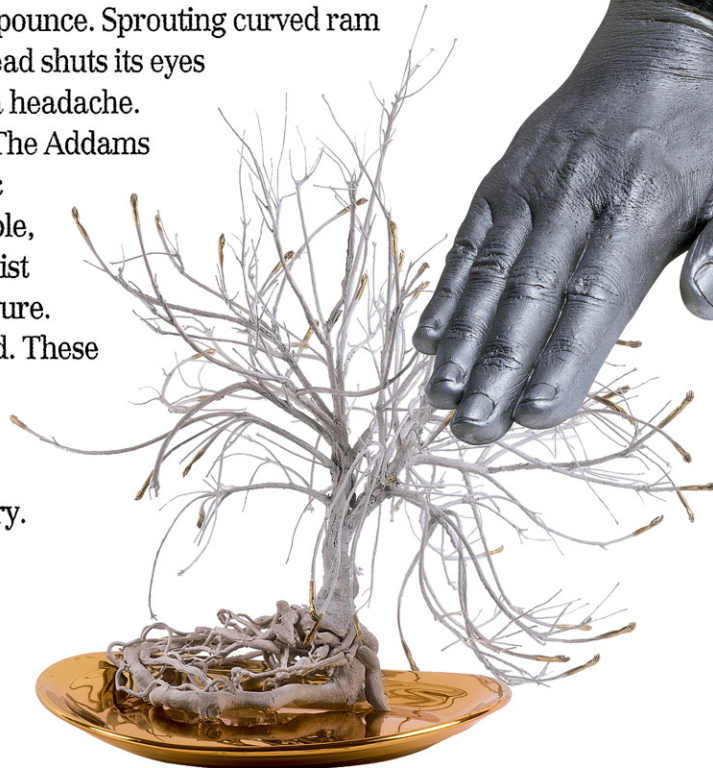
Visiting “Rona Pondick: The Metamorphosis of an Object” is a like tumbling down a rabbit hole and waking up in a sculptural wonderland at the Worcester Art Museum.

A fluffy-haired monkey with Pondick’s stainless steel face crouches about to pounce. Sprouting curved ram horns, a human head shuts its eyes tight as if fighting a headache.

Like Thing from “The Addams Family,” a metallic hand rests on a table, attached by the wrist to a tiny human figure.

Don’t get spooked. These creatures are not Dr. Moreau’s mutants spawned in an island laboratory.

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THE ESSENTIALS:

The Worcester Art Museum is located at 55 Salisbury St., Worcester.

Hours: The museum is open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday. It is open the third Thursday of every month 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Admission: \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors and full-time students with current ID, and free for children under 17. It is free Saturday morning 10 a.m. to noon, sponsored by TJX Companies.

Artist Rona Pondick will discuss her exhibit Wednesday, Sept. 23.

A lavishly illustrated catalog, “Rona Pondick: The Metamorphosis of an Object,” accompanies the exhibit and is available in the museum gift shop.

For more information, call 508-799-4406 or visit www.worcesterart.org.

In a new exhibit, “Rona Pondick: The Metamorphosis of an Object” at the Worcester Art Museum, the artist is showing 14 pieces made over the last decade, mixing them with 42 ancient sculptures from the museum’s collection.

Pondick exhibit shows 'Metamorphosis'

PONDICK, *From C1*

Instead Pondick's distinctive hybrids rub elbows, paws and—in one case, smooth shiny buttocks—with Egyptian pharaohs, Roman emperors, Asian Buddhas and African masks.

Pondick is showing 14 pieces made over the last decade and mixed in with 42 ancient sculptures from the museum's collection. They are displayed in thematic groupings that challenge viewers to examine old traditions and contemporary trends on their own terms.

In one grouping representing



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"Gesture & Posture," Pondick's stainless steel "Otter" — with the artist's face as usual — is displayed along with a New Guinean ancestor figure, "Greek Female Goddess with a Birdlike Face" and a ceramic Mexican statue of a "Woman in a Turtle Shell."

That mingling of traditional and cutting edge sculpture is exactly why "Metamorphosis of an Object" provides funky fun along with profound insights into the art and artifice of sculpture.

Like the raisins in the rum cake, Pondick's sculptures add unexpected flavor to the eight groupings which are subdivided into three main themes: "Gesture & Posture," "Repetition of Imagery" and "Representations of Hair." A fourth grouping, "Pondick and Technology," shows how she uses 3-D computer scanning to create urethane molds later cast in stainless steel.

The concept driving the exhibit is elegantly simple. Show in one gallery an eclectic mix of works on a common theme such as Michelangelo's "Pieta," Mary Cassatt's cultured mother, Whistler's dour old ma and National Enquirer cover photos of Octomom.

Just look and think how artists across time represented motherhood and the feminine ideal. And wonder why has this extrafecund tabloid mom sprung from that ancient lineage and what, if anything, does it mean?

In collaboration with WAM staff, Pondick has made a spell-binding exhibit about transfor-

mation, the dream-like shifting from one form to another found in the art and mythology of nearly every culture through the ages.

Don't believe it?

Eve is born from Adam's rib. Circe turns Odysseus' crew into swine. Suffering

changes

Shakespeare's

King

Lear from a proud king into a battered but wiser old man. Miley Cyrus puts on a wig and becomes Hannah Montana.

Pondick stirs up 40 centuries of art history by inserting hybrid versions of herself into the mix.

Performing self-surgery, she seamlessly stitches her own face, head and hands onto the stylized bodies of otters and trees, monkeys and mice.

It can be as elemental as a dormant pupa becoming a glorious butterfly or mysterious as a long-tailed muskrat with Pondick's little head. It can be as ancient as a pine marten rising from Pondick's polished hands or as contemporary as Wolverine at the multiplex.

Best of all, rather than tell you what she's doing, Pondick

wants you to digest it by trusting your eyes and guts.

Rather than distracting viewers with labels and wall text, Pondick and Curator of Contemporary Art Susan Stoops are urging them to "look first and read later."

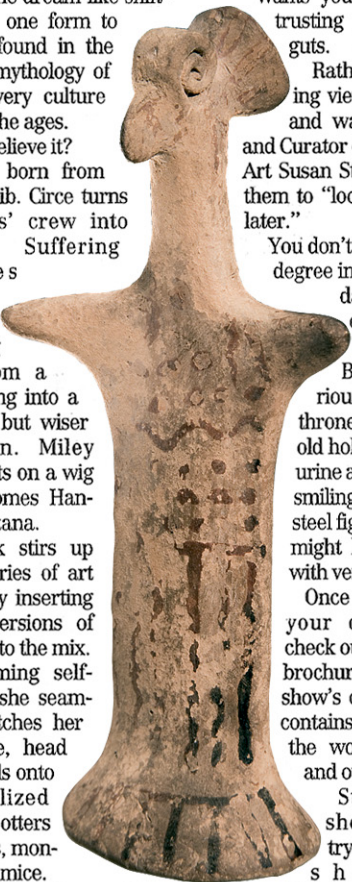
You don't need a graduate degree in art history to be dazzled by the unexpected sight of a serene seated Buddha, an imperious pharaoh on a throne, a 1,000-year-old hollow Mexican figurine and Pondick's unsmiling face atop the steel figure of a dog that might be a dachshund with very long forelegs.

Once you've formed your own opinions, check out an informative brochure that details the show's organization and contains specifics of all the works by Pondick and other artists.

Stoops said she's been trying to show

Pondick's work at WAM for nearly a decade because she considers her one of the most original sculptors working today.

Working together to organize the show, they considered a solo exhibit or showing Pondick's



work in conjunction with pieces from WAM.

"Rona" said integrating her work with the museum's collection would be a complete fantasy for her," Pondick said.

After working with the artist, Stoops said, "I was absolutely fascinated to learn how familiar Rona is with ancient sculpture from around the world.

"She's very knowledgeable about ancient casting and carving techniques. Yet she's very familiar with the newest techniques involving digital imaging," said Stoops. "She has so much insight into the historical context of her work."

Stoops believes Pondick decided to show her work with sculptures dating back 40 centuries "to explain her connections to the past and explain what she does."

"Rona has said many people don't understand what she's doing. I think she wants to open up the closet and let people see her process," she said.

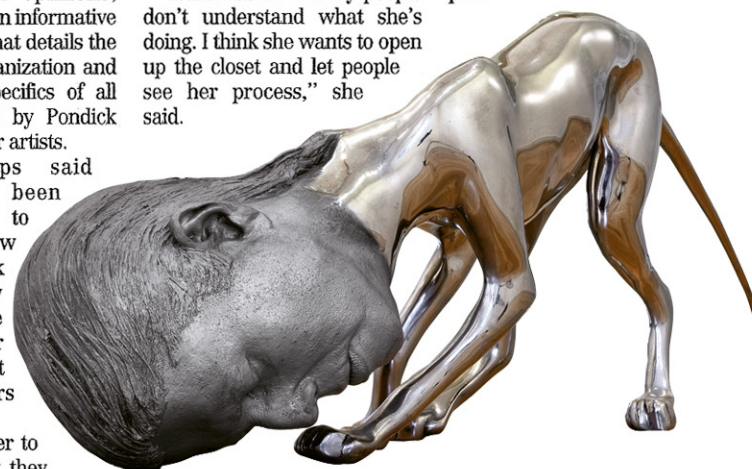
Stoops said the current show is "really two exhibits."

"It introduces the audience to Rona's work over the last decade and shows these works within the context of the past," she said.

After admiring Pondick's hybrids for years, Stoops now feels the human parts molded from the artist's own features "appear to be introspective" while "the animal bodies are more extroverted."

While interpretations vary, she thinks Pondick's hybrids are "ultimately lodged in the world of humans because she uses her own face and hands."

"Rona works hard to make the transition between human and animals so seamless. People, rightly, have lots of different reactions to her work," she said. "I think she lets that happen as much as she makes that happen."



Rona Pondick's current exhibit mixes her new work with some ancient items from the Worcester Art Museum's collection.