

SATURDAY, MAY 22, 2004 | SECTION E

# ARTS & LIFE

THE PLAIN DEALER

## ART

### Classical and digital worlds inspire sculpture

DAN TRANBERG  
*Special to The Plain Dealer*

The work of New York artist Rona Pondick recalls the great themes of ancient Egyptian sculpture. Yet it also makes use of digital technology so advanced that in order to create it, she worked with the U.S. military.

Pondick's strikingly elegant exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland is unlike anything the museum has done in years.

The main galleries are devoted entirely to a single body of work, offering a rare opportunity (in Cleveland) to see how a mature artist can thoroughly flesh out an idea.

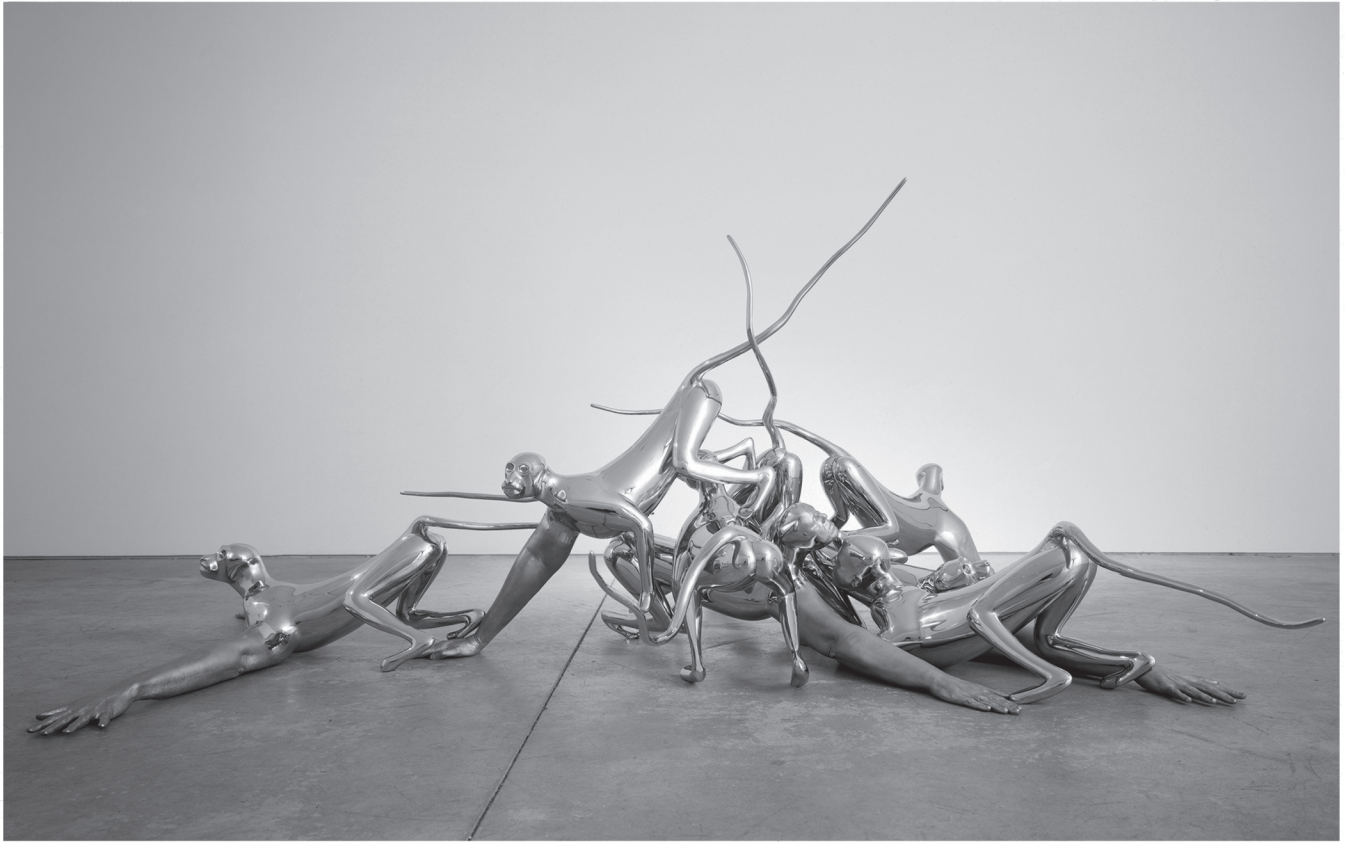
The show includes 10 highly ambitious stainless-steel sculptures created over a period of six years.

SEE ART | E6



COURTESY OF SONNABEND GALLERY

Rona Pondick's stainless-steel sculpture "Monkey with Hair" is being exhibited publicly for the very first time at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland.



COURTESY OF SONNABEND GALLERY

The centerpiece of the MOCA Cleveland show is "Monkeys" (1998-2001), consisting of eight separate figures that appear to be in the process of spreading out across the gallery floor.

## ART

FROM E1

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Each combines startlingly detailed reproductions of Pondick's own body parts with animal bodies, producing hybrid visions that are as disturbing as they are alluring.

Pondick used cutting-edge three-dimensional plotting and modeling technology to scan her head, arms, legs, feet and hands and produce lifelike casts. "It took a year to scan and output the first prototype of the head, because the enormity of the data repeatedly caused the computer to crash," Pondick said.

In search of ways to accomplish the task, she ultimately formed relationships with leaders in the field of digital technology, including the military. "I'm not one of those people that's naturally good with computers," she said.

Pondick's goal of creating scalable three-dimensional images of her body parts was essential to the core idea of her work, which is all about metamorphosis. In works such as "Pine Marten," from 2000-01, her head is significantly smaller than her hand. Connected to the seemingly lithe body of a reclining weasel-like creature, the human parts suggest that they are caught in a kind of Kafkaesque transition — morphing before your very eyes.

Regardless of their scale, each representation of Pondick's face, hand or leg is astoundingly detailed, showing every pore, every wrinkle and every hair. As a result, each work is charged with a frightening kind of human presence. By contrast, most of the bodies or torsos are articulated in a sleek, abstract style that makes them resemble liquid

REVIEW

## Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland

**What:** The solo show "Rona Pondick: Recent Work."

**When:** Through Sunday, Aug. 8.

**Where:** 8501 Carnegie Ave., Cleveland.

**Admission:** Suggested amount is \$4 for nonmembers, \$3 for students and seniors; free on Fridays. Call 216-421-8671 or go to [www.contemporaryart.org](http://www.contemporaryart.org).

mercury.

Pondick used a synthetic material to create the animal forms with traditional sculpting techniques. This approach adds yet another level of metamorphosis to her work, merging historical and cutting-edge technologies. In the end, each piece is cast as a single stainless-steel form — a seamless blend of old and new, animal and human.

Considering Pondick's use of her own likeness, one can read her pieces as a projection of her own physical, intellectual and psychological entanglement with her work: the virtual loss of self in the process of making art, and the struggle to regain it.

Though most of her works are solitary figures, the centerpiece of the show is a group of eight. Titled "Monkeys," it immediately conjures images of biological forms in the process of multiplying.

While each of her pieces raises the subject of biological and genetic engineering, "Monkeys" does so in the most dynamic way. The hybrid creatures appear to be literally crawling out from an invisible Petrie dish, spreading across the floor of the gallery as if they're on the verge of consuming it.

Some of Pondick's solitary figures take on a more iconic presence. "Dog," for instance, assumes the traditional form of a



COURTESY OF SONNABEND GALLERY

**The human parts in Pondick's sculpture "Untitled Animal" are made using digital 3-D plotting and modeling technology and are all based on her own body.**

sphinx — a human head with an animal body in an upright, symmetrical pose. "Monkey with Hair," which is being shown for the first time in Cleveland, takes on a more immediately visceral feel. The body is covered with peppery synthetic hair, making it appear as though it had been prepared by a taxidermist.

Each of these attests to the remarkable breadth of Pondick's investigations. Consistent as they are, every one of her pieces takes you to a different place, alternately referencing mythology, history and psychology with equal aptitude.

Though Pondick is referred to as a midcareer artist, she is inarguably among the most accomplished sculptors in America. She was featured in the 1991 Whitney Biennial and has since exhibited extensively in museums and galleries throughout the United States and Europe. Her work can be found in the permanent collections of the

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the National Gallery of Art, Washington; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

It's difficult to think of another current artist with such virtuosity, whose work is simultaneously beautiful, unsettling, innovative, provocative, timely and historically grounded.

As an exhibition, the show should be viewed as another feather in the cap of curator Margo Crutchfield, who organized it — and of MOCA Cleveland in general — for continuing to raise the bar on the quality of internationally significant exhibitions featuring the best artists working today.

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