

Hybrid Immortality: Rona Pondick's Fantastical Self-Portraits

By Albert Godetzky ☒ November 29, 2022 9:00am



View of Rona Pondick's *Monkeys*, 1998-2001, stainless steel, 41¼ by 66 by 85½ inches.
PHOTO JOHANNES STOLL / COURTESY BELVEDERE, VIENNA

At first encounter, Rona Pondick's large-scale stainless steel sculpture *Monkeys* (1998–2001), currently on view in the Belvedere palace and museum in Vienna, may seem incongruous with the decorative opulence of the surroundings. The work comprises eight sleek shining simian bodies chaotically scrambling over one another. In contrast, the Belvedere's Carlone Hall—named after Carlo Innocenzo Carlone, the Italian artist who contributed the room's painted walls and ceiling in the 1720s—is a Baroque confection bursting with ornamental forms, colors, and illusionistic architecture, all rendered in fresco. Look slowly, however, and this marriage of distinctive elements from widely disparate periods reveals itself as a clever juxtaposition and a case of curatorial savvy.

羅娜·龐迪克（Rona Pondick）目前在維也納美景宮和博物館中展出的大型不銹鋼雕塑〈猴子〉（1998–2001），一開始看似與周圍裝飾華麗的環境格格不入。這件作品包括八個光滑閃亮的猿猴身體，混亂地攀爬在彼此之上。相比之下，美景宮中的卡羅內大廳充斥著巴洛克風格，建築內部全部皆以壁畫呈現，富含色彩、裝飾性，甚至帶有幻覺感。卡羅內大廳以卡羅·伊諾奇恩佐·卡羅內（Carlo Innocenzo Carlone）命名，他是在1720年代為大廳繪製壁畫和天花板的義大利藝術家。然而，仔細觀察之下，這兩個來自完全不同時期的獨特元素相結合，卻顯示出巧妙的並置和策展的精明。

Both the sculpture and the paintings play with spatial illusion. Pondick's mischievous animals appear to spew into the room from some mysterious source, while Carlone's figures seem to

tumble from their celestial dwellings, and the painted architecture defies the room's structural simplicity. All the components are about metamorphosis and the imaginative possibilities of change.

Hovering in the ceiling above is Aurora, ancient Roman goddess of the dawn and renewal, while scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* appear on the walls below. Pondick's monkeys are themselves transforming into hybrid creatures with human arms and heads. The painted scenery of the Hall, a venue once used for grand receptions, invites visitors to fantasize about the cyclicity and changing nature of human life. Pondick further pursues this strategy: the surfaces of her lustrous, undulating sculptures distort not only the room but its guests, who thus take part in the animal/human metamorphosis. Moving around *Monkeys*, viewers can follow their own elastic reflections until the images come to a halt on the matte surfaces of the human limbs and heads.



Monkeys (detail).
PHOTO JOHANNES STOLL / COURTESY BELVEDERE,
VIENNA

雕塑和畫作都以玩轉空間錯覺為主軸。龐迪克頑皮的動物似乎從某個神秘的來源噴湧進空間之中，而卡羅內的人物則似乎從天上墜落，繪製的建築違抗空間的簡單結構。所有元素與變態和變化的想像可能性有關。

懸浮在上方的天花板的是古羅馬黎明和重生女神 — 歐若拉，而奧維德的《變形記》場景則出現在下方的牆壁上。龐迪克的猴子變身成具有人類手臂和頭部的混合生物。大廳的彩繪風景，曾舉辦盛大的舞會，邀請賓客幻想人類生活的周期性和變化的本質。龐迪克進一步追求這種策略：她光滑、波動的雕塑表面不僅扭曲空間，還扭曲在空間中的觀眾，使他們參與動物/人類的變態。在〈猴子〉周圍移動，觀眾可以追隨自身彈性的倒影，直到影像止於人體四肢和頭部的霧面上。

This installation—the latest in a growing number of institutional presentations for Pondick—is an opportunity to reassess the New York-based artist's nearly 40-year career. The experiential nature of her art calls attention to cultural, historical, and biographical factors of her life, to be sure—but even more so to her means of physically making the work. Before the stainless steel pieces, which appeared in 1998 with her first use of then nascent 3D scanning and printing technology, Pondick employed masses of wax, unfurled lengths of lead, fecal clumps of bronze pillowed in satin, and mounds of chattering teeth ensconced in newspaper clippings. Since the late 1990s, she has been using molds taken from her own head, arms, and legs that she manipulates by hand in size, proportion, and finish to create a final cast in her chosen medium.

這個裝置藝術作品重新審視龐迪克近40年的藝術家生涯，更是她在眾多機構展覽中的最新作品。她的藝術所具備的體驗特質，引發觀眾對其文化、歷史和背景等因素的關

注。其中，最引人注目的是她實際創作的技術層面。在1998年首次使用新興的3D掃描與列印技術之前，龐迪克使用大量的蠟、鉛條、用緞子襯墊的青銅塊，以及被報紙包夾、一堆嘎嘎作響的牙齒，來創作雕塑。自1990年代後期以來，她一直以她的頭像、手臂和腿的塑形，手工操控這些塑形的大小、比例和表面，以所選的材質製作最終雕塑作品。



Encased Magenta Green, 2018, pigmented resin and acrylic,
16 by 8 1/2 by 8 1/2 inches.
PHOTO RONA PONDICK / COURTESY NUNU FINE ART,
TAIPEI

This is a highly generative process, reminiscent of the way Auguste Rodin worked on the Gates of Hell (1880–1917), deriving countless sculptural inventions from a few prototypes. Recently, Pondick has been reintroducing color into her work by way of acrylic and resin. The colors lend titles to an ongoing series of self-portrait heads. Encased Magenta Green (2018), for instance, is a magenta head afloat on a pool of translucent greenish-blue inside a block of cloudy acrylic. When creating these pieces, Pondick leaves some processes to chance, allowing the material to dictate the final form. Casting lines, uneven edges, air bubbles, solidified ripples, and other irregularities remain as traces of time and marks of labor. The finished works are not “transparent” in the modernist sense; the enclosed object is not easily examined. Instead, the material imperfections create ambiguity and mystery; Pondick’s head, hovering with an eerie solarized effect, appears like an apparition, perhaps a death mask reawakening to a technicolor afterlife.

從原型中創造無數雕塑的過程，讓人聯想到奧古斯特·羅丹（Auguste Rodin）打造作品〈地獄之門〉（1880–1917）的方式。龐迪克最近一直透過壓克力和樹脂將顏色重新導入她的作品之中。目前進行中的自畫像頭系列皆以顏色命名。例如，〈套中洋紅綠〉（2018）呈現一顆洋紅色的頭像飄浮在混濁的又帶有透明藍綠色的壓克力塊中。在創作這系列作品時，龐迪克不刻意強求作品的最終形式，而是由材料來決定。鑄造線、不規則的邊緣、氣泡、凝固的漣漪和其他不規則所留下的時間痕跡和勞動標記。完成品不是現代主義的意義上的「透明」，其中封閉的物體也不容易檢視。材料緣故所出現的瑕疵創造模稜兩可和神秘的感覺。懸浮著一種怪異的光澤，龐迪克的頭看起來像幽靈，也是來世可能重新甦醒的彩色死亡面具。

Like many other examples of the artist’s work, these encased heads suggest an experience of the self beyond the body. Head in Tree (2006–08), currently on view at the Belvedere in a group exhibition concerning trees in art, features a head lodged in an arboreal tracery of steel nearly nine feet above the ground. As writer Pac Pobric recently revealed in Artnet News, the imagery for Head in Tree originated in a morphine-induced vision Pondick had while recovering from spinal surgery; her husband, painter Robert Feintuch, later told

Pondick that the work's precariously slender trunk came to substitute for her spine, her lifeline, Pobric reported.

和藝術家其他作品一樣，這些封裝的頭顯示超越身體的自我經歷。作品〈樹中之首〉（2006–08），以單顆頭像困在離地面近九英尺高的樹形鋼結構中，目前在美景宮中關於藝術中的樹木群展裡呈現。正如作家帕克·波布里克（Pac Pobric）最近在Artnet的報導中所透露，〈樹中之首〉的形象起源於龐迪克經歷脊椎手術的康復期間，受到嗎啡影響所產生的幻象。根據波布里克的報導，她的丈夫、畫家羅伯特·費恩特（Robert Feintuch）後來告訴龐迪克，作品中那不穩的纖細樹幹代替了她的脊椎，成為她的生命線。

In sculptures such as *Monkeys*, *Encased Magenta Green*, and *Head in Tree*, Pondick portrays the human subject as a being experiencing constant tension between mind and matter, afflicted with corporal dysfunction, facing the prospect of oblivion. Her work evokes dreams of rebirth, renewal, and reincarnation through transformation and metamorphosis, while offering exquisitely wrought visions of what that other life might look and feel like.

在諸如〈猴子〉、〈套中洋紅綠〉和〈樹中之首〉等雕塑中，龐迪克將人類主體描繪成在心靈與物質之間經歷持續緊張、受到肉體功能障礙折磨，面臨被遺忘前景的存在。她的作品透過轉變和變態喚起重生、更新和輪迴的夢想，同時提供精巧製作的異世界遠景，展現另一種生命可能的模樣和感受。

Pondick's visual language—particularly in the animal-human hybrids—finds precedent in centuries of imagery that merges human bodies with those of other animals. Whether monumental Egyptian statues of gods, the satyrs and minotaurs depicted on Greek vases, Mayan ceramic figurines, or Hieronymus Bosch's paintings of phantasmagoric creatures, such works may reveal a desire to express divine power and protection, or to expose the animalistic tendencies in human behavior. *Monkeys*, with its unruly troop of primates, clearly evokes the latter view, while *Dog* (1998–2001), featuring the artist's head and arms on a canine body, bespeaks the former. *Dog* sits on the floor with eyes closed, a self-contained sentry granting no admittance, like a sphinx guarding secrets or a reliquary preserving vital organs.



Dog, 1998-2001, yellow stainless steel, 28 by 16½ by 32 inches.
PHOTO RONA PONDICK / COURTESY GALERIE THADDAEUS ROPAC,
LONDON/PARIS/SALZBURG/SEOUL, AND SONNABEND GALLERY,
NEW YORK

龐迪克的動物與人類混種的視覺語言，可以在數個世紀以來的圖像中找到前例。這些圖像將人體與其他動物的身體融合在一起，像是埃及神像的宏偉雕像、希臘花瓶上描繪的羊鬼和牛頭怪物、瑪雅陶瓷小雕像，還是希

羅尼穆斯·博世 (Hieronymus Bosch) 所描繪如幻影般的生物。這些作品可能表達神聖的力量和保護的慾望，或者揭示人類行為中的動物傾向。〈猴子〉以其不羈的靈長類群體，明顯地呼應後者的觀點，而〈狗〉 (1998–2001)，展示藝術家的頭和手臂放在犬的身體上，則表達了前者的觀點。狗坐在地板上，雙眼閉合，如同一個自給自足的哨兵，不容進入，就像守護秘密的獅身人面像般，或甚至是保存重要器官的聖骨匣。

Biography and material history are just two of the lenses through which Pondick's work has been interpreted. More critical approaches, especially prevalent in the 1980s and early 1990s, referenced Freud and feminism. In a January 1990 *Art in America* review, Nancy Princenthal implied that Pondick's sculptures might reflect sexual politics in the rapidly changing American workforce. *Pink Balls & Brown Pump* (1991), with its two titular elements suspended on a wire, seems to substantiate this reading. A woman's shoe filled with pink epoxy is balanced by a pair of tooth-studded balls enlarged by an accretion of the same modeling compound.

傳記和物質歷史僅是解讀龐迪克作品的兩大借鏡。更具批判性解析則可以參考在1980和1990年代初盛行的弗洛伊德和女性主義。在1990年1月的《*Art in America*》評論中，南希·普林森瑟爾 (Nancy Princenthal) 暗示，龐迪克的雕塑可能反映美國勞動力迅速變化的性別政治。作品〈粉紅球與棕色高跟鞋〉 (1991)，將作品名中的兩個元素懸掛在一條鋼絲上，似乎證實了這種解讀。女鞋裡裝滿粉紅色的環氧樹脂，由同一建模化合物所形成且帶有牙齒的球平衡著。

Formally, the work points to Alexander Calder's whimsical mobiles, yet conceptually it recalls Louise Bourgeois's tragicomic, sexually allusive *Fillette* (1968). But where Bourgeois's decaying phallus—titled after a small wine bottle or, more disconcertingly, a young girl—remains essentially organic in form, Pondick's hanging pieces deliver a more varied array of socially defined gender references. *Pink Balls & Brown Pump* can be seen as a representation of a perpetual tension between the sexes: the highheeled pump appears to kick the scrotal orbs, which, in turn, seem to want to chomp at the shoe. Yet, as the sculpture rotates or the viewer circles it, the two elements appear to merge and form a union, albeit a disquieting one. The conceit is as clever as it is simple: antagonisms and contradictory desires are part and parcel of interhuman relationships.

在形式上，這件作品指向亞歷山大·考爾德 (Alexander Calder) 異想天開的懸掛裝置，但在概念上，它讓人聯想到路易斯·布爾喬亞 (Louise Bourgeois) 那種悲喜交加、帶有性暗示的作品〈女童〉 (1968)。但布爾喬亞的腐爛陽具形式維持有機，以小瓶葡萄酒命名，更令人不安地解讀，也或許是對年輕女孩的稱呼，而龐迪克的懸吊作品則提供更豐富的社會定義下的性別寫照。〈粉紅球與棕色高跟鞋〉可以被視為對性別之間永恆張力的一種表現：高跟鞋似乎要踢到陰囊般的球體，而反過來，這些球體似乎又想咬住鞋子。然而，當雕塑旋轉或觀眾繞行、觀看它時，這兩個元素似乎合而為一，形成一種令人不安的結合。這個巧妙而簡單的概念是：對抗和矛盾的欲望是人與人之間關係的一部分。

Pondick has returned again and again to isolated body parts with an imaginative sensitivity that gives her work exceptional power. When invited in 2015 to participate in a project for which artists respond to works in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, she chose to talk about a group of ancient Egyptian sculpture fragments—mouth, eye, breast or hand-shaped shards evincing once complete bodies. At one point in the resulting video, she looks at these fragments as though they had been made that way intentionally, and notes that each has a life of its own.

龐迪克一再回到孤立的身體部位，以敏感的想像賦予她的作品卓越的力量。當她在2015年應邀參與由藝術家回應大都會美術館收藏品的項目時，她選擇談論一組古埃及雕塑的碎片，其中包括嘴巴、眼睛、乳房或手形的碎片。這些碎片曾經構成完整的身體。在影片中，她看著這些碎片，彷彿它們是故意製作的，並指出每個碎片都有自己的生命。



Pink Balls and Brown Pump, 1991, rubber teeth, shoe, epoxy modeling compound and wire, 23½ by 11 by 18 inches.
PHOTO RONA PONDICK / COURTESY STEVEN ZEVITAS GALLERY, BOSTON, AND GALERIE THADDAEUS ROPAC, LONDON/PARIS/SAI ZBUJRC/SEOUL.

Such observations about millennia-old sculptural remnants could apply to Pondick's use of body parts, particularly in the "teeth" works she created between 1990 and 1997. Toy shop chattering teeth, along with the artist's own more lifelike dental casts, were the source materials for these pieces. In *Little Bathers* (1990–91) as well as the seminal installation *Dirt Head* (1997), bodies have seemingly shattered and disintegrated. Yet, rather than present the mouths as broken irregularly, Pondick has made them whole again. Pink plastic in the earlier work, brown soil in the later, they have become little self-sufficient entities.

對於千年古老雕塑殘片的這種觀察，可見於龐迪克對身體部位的使用，尤其是她在1990年至1997年之間創作的「牙齒」作品中。這些作品的素材來自玩具店中的嘎吱作響的牙齒，以及藝術家自己更逼真的牙齒模型。在〈小浴者〉（1990–91）以及具有開創性意義的裝置藝術作品〈塵土頭〉（1997）中，身體似乎破碎和崩解。

然而，龐迪克並未將嘴巴呈現為不規則破碎的狀態，而是使它們再次完整。在早期的作品中是粉紅色的塑料，在後來的作品中是棕色的土壤，它們已經變成小而自給自足的實體。

Dirt Head has attracted different interpretations with each new showing. When first exhibited at the Johannesburg Biennale in 1997, the 10 tons of earth and 400 earth-toned apple-size "dirt heads" elicited fears in some viewers that the forms possessed magical powers. South Africa, which had recently ended apartheid, was then actively debating the social implications of its anti-witchcraft laws. At the Groninger Museum in the Netherlands the following year, *Dirt Head* was compared to news imagery from war zones in Rwanda, Yugoslavia, and Cambodia. Installed at the Museum of Modern Art in Salzburg, the earthen

dunes invaded the vaulted arcade of the Rupertinum building, evoking parallels with the Holocaust. At the Lyon Biennale in 2000, the piece was conceptually linked to cloning and genetics.

〈塵土頭〉每次展出都會產生不同的解讀。當它於1997年首次在約翰尼斯堡雙年展上展出時，10噸的土壤和400個色調如土、蘋果大小的「泥頭」引起一些觀眾的恐懼，認為這些形狀具有魔法能量。當時南非剛結束種族隔離制度，正在積極討論反巫術法律對社會的影響。在隨後的一年，當它在荷蘭的格羅寧根博物館展出時，〈塵土頭〉被比喻為盧安達、南斯拉夫和柬埔寨的戰區新聞縮影。在奧地利薩爾茨堡的現代藝術博物館中，這些泥土丘陵侵入魯珀廷劇院的拱廊，喚起大屠殺的聯想。在2000年的里昂雙年展上，這件作品在概念上與基因複製有關。



Dirt Head (detail), 1997, mixed mediums, 400 elements, each approx. 3 by 3 by 3½ inches, with 10 tons of earth.
PHOTO MAREK KRUSZEWSKI / COURTESY KUNSTMUSEUM WOLFSBURG

More recently, *Little Bathers* and *Dirt Head* were shown in “On Everyone’s Lips”(2020–21), a group exhibition focused on the oral cavity in art at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg in Germany . The show’s critical emphasis was on teeth—teeth exposed as an index of emotion, teeth remaining (even after disintegration of the mouth) as traces of biological existence. Since the exhibition was staged during the Covid pandemic, it was sobering to think of the mouth as a gateway for both life-giving and lifethreatening forces.

最近，〈小浴者〉和〈塵土頭〉在德國沃爾夫斯堡藝術博物館的群展「在每個人的嘴唇上」（2020–21）中展出，該展覽聚焦於藝術中的口腔。展覽的批判重點在於牙齒—以牙齒被暴露作為情感的指標。即使在口腔瓦解後，牙齒仍能保留，作為生物存在的痕跡。由於該展覽是在新冠疫情期間舉辦，將口腔視為既是賦予生命又是威脅生命的通道，讓人深感沈痛。

In the catalogue for the show, curator Uta Ruhkamp observes that Pondick’s “*Little Bathers*

have now been transformed into four hundred “earth heads” that threaten to dissolve into the monumental pile of soil on which they lie.” *Dirt Head* is, in short, a contemporary vanitas.

在展覽的目錄中，策展人烏塔·魯卡普（Uta Ruhkamp）觀察到龐迪克的〈小浴者〉現在已經轉變成四百個「泥土頭顱」，威脅並融入於巨大的土堆之中。簡而言之，〈塵土頭〉是當代的虛榮靜物畫。

Yet teeth, storing DNA that records our genetic makeup, are also lasting monuments to our identity. This concept lends *Dirt Head* an almost archaeological or forensic dimension: a human community seems to be preserved in the earthen mound—except that the community consists of Pondick herself, replicated 400 times.

然而，牙齒儲存並記錄著我們的基因，也是我們身份的永恆紀念碑。這一概念使〈塵土頭〉具有近乎考古或法醫的維度：一個人類社群似乎被保存在這個土堆中 — 唯一的不同在於這個社群由龐迪克自己構成，被複製了400次。

The multiplication of her own image might be seen as Pondick’s chief tactic for symbolic self-preservation. In her most recent body of work—colorful acrylic pieces shown at Marc Straus Gallery in New York earlier this year— she has reduced the size of her head and the animal bodies on which it appears. In some cases, the bodies sprout multiple heads and so resemble a self-propagating viral form. This is in keeping with the artist’s ongoing dialectic between cleanliness and contagion, between dirt and translucent or reflective purity, and between the fugitive and the enduring aspects of life. Debris adheres to the little mouths in the earth on the gallery floor, where the toothy orifices seem to multiply and spread unrestrainedly.

倍增自己的形體可以被視為龐迪克象徵性自我保存的主要策略。在她最近於紐約的馬克·斯特勞斯藝廊展出、色彩繽紛的壓克力作品系列中，她縮小自己的頭部和動物身體的大小。在某些情況下，這些身體會長出多個頭部，因此看起來像是一種自我繁殖的病毒形式。這與藝術家在潔淨和傳染之間、在骯髒和半透明或反光的純淨之間，以及在生命的短暫和長久進行的持續辯證是一致的。碎片附著在藝廊地板上的小嘴巴，牙齒般的開口似乎不受限地倍增和擴散。



Head in Tree, 2006-08, stainless steel, 105 by 42 by 37 inches.
PHOTO JOHANNES STOLL / COURTESY BELVEDERE, VIENNA

In contrast, the stainless steel works (Pondick uses the surgical-grade variety) are inherently clean, slick, unblemished, and sealed off from the outside world. Then there are the heads and bodies suspended in acrylic, likewise a material associated with sterile operations and impenetrability. The blocks encasing the artist's heads bring to mind museum vitrines and how such modes of display attempt to preserve the past in perpetuity.

相比之下，不鏽鋼作品（龐迪克使用手術級別的不鏽鋼）天生潔淨、光滑、無瑕疵，且與外界隔絕。還有懸掛在壓克力中的頭部和身體，同樣是一種與無菌手術和不可滲透性相關的材料。封裝藝術家頭部的方塊讓人聯想到博物館的展示櫃，以及這種展示方式意圖永久保存過去。



Small Green Yellow Reds, 2019-21 pigmented resin and acrylic, 8 by 8 by 9 1/2 inches.
PHOTO RONA PONDICK / COURTESY MARC STRAUS GALLERY, NEW YORK

Pondick invites us to contemplate these inherent dichotomies of mind and matter, to question how we approach self-preservation in the face of crisis and change. But she also offers imaginative, fantastical proposals for dealing with change. Fragmentation need not be lamented when heads and other body parts recombine in visionary ways, regenerating with animal components, or taking on vibrant colors. Despite the historical expanse that separates *Monkeys* from Carlone's 18th-century paintings in Vienna, both projects suggest transformation and renewal, prompting us to reassess the handmade in relation to the technological, and to contemplate the nature of the human in a volatile world.

龐迪克邀請我們思考心靈和物質的這些固有二分法，質疑在面對危機和變革時我們如何面對自我保存。但她也提供豐富的想像力、幻想應對變革的建議。當頭部和其他身體部位以富含遠見的方式重新構成，以動物元素再生，或者呈現出生動的顏色時，我們無需悲嘆分裂。儘管〈猴子〉與卡羅內在維也納的18世紀繪畫之間存在歷史的差異，但這兩項創作都暗示著變革和創新，促使我們重新評估手工製作與技術之間的關係，並思考在不穩定的世界中人類的本質。

"Carlone Contemporary: Rona Pondick," featuring *Monkeys*, is on view at the Upper Belvedere, while *Head in Tree* appears in "Grow: The Tree in Art" in the Lower Belvedere, Vienna, through Jan. 8, 2023. Both works will be in Pondick's solo show at Thaddaeus Ropac, London, Mar. 29-May 13, 2023.

「卡羅內當代：羅娜·龐迪克」，展出作品〈猴子〉，正在美景宮上層展出，而〈樹中之首〉則在美景宮下層的群展「成長：藝術中的樹」展出中，展期至2023年1月8日。這兩件作品將在龐迪克的倫敦塔德達·羅帕克藝廊中展出，展期為2023年3月29日

至5月13日。