

review

by Saul Ostrow

Artists excite viewers' minds by stimulating experiences, associations, and ideas, offering them up in new contexts or unexpected ways. The reason is that human experiences and feelings are not reducible to the events we associate with them. In turn "what" may be represented and "how" requires the artist to re-imagine what the visual equivalence of such experiences or ideas can be. This is further confounded when the artist's subject is the aberrant fantasies, fears, and yearnings that constitute the dream world of our desires and phobias. Rona Pondick chooses to express these anxieties through images that are at once archetypal, literal, and paradoxical.

In the 1990s, Pondick produced slightly soiled, anthropomorphized baby bottles wearing Mary Janes, and rooms filled with small bulbous fleshy pink forms fitted with mouthfuls of teeth. Such works were at once humorous and psychologically provocative. In her exhibition of recent sculptures at MOCA Cleveland, Pondick moved beyond such abject preoccupations, offering in their place a cast of characters consisting of human/animal hybrids that evoke pathos and introspection.

The verisimilitude and flawless execution (the result of digital imaging and modeling technologies) of these assemblages of rudimentary biomorphic and animal forms sporting human faces and appendages provoke possible narratives. For instance, it is hard to ascertain whether these "beings" may be evolving, devolving or exist as a unique species. Or perhaps they are maudlin visitors from a parallel universe that unlike our own is ordered by fluidity, languor and improbability. This vision of polymorphic perversion and Kafka-like metamorphoses uses Surrealism as a framework for their interpretation. I use that term here as it refers to the concept of a hyper-reality circumscribed by the phantasmagoria of chance moments, incongruities, and uncontrollable events.

In order to emancipate themselves (and by turn their audience) from the tyranny of sublimation and the promise of transcendence, artists have made common fare of the irrationality associated with the unconscious and the deranged. The intended goal of this project is the liberation of the imagination so that the confused, chaotic jumble of preposterous and inconsistent moments that surround our lives will enrich us rather than merely threaten our sense of order.

No longer restrained by the repressive alternatives of believing in the either/or of subjective and objective reality, Pondick's works can be viewed instead as expressions of the extravagance and speciousness of the seamless realities informed by photography, cinema, television, and the digital. As these media have eroded, so has the boundary between our sense of the real and the unreal in which we are willing participants in a spectacle where the pliant and resilient humanoid creatures that once only existed in the fictitious and

Rona Pondick: Mixed Fictions



safe spaces of cartoons and comic books increasingly become our models. As such, Pondick's "beings" are reminiscent of the mercurial humanoids sent from the future in the films *Terminator 2 & 3*; their ability to morph into anyone or thing makes them that much more dangerous.

Beyond such readings, there is also a psychological one, because the face and hands on these sculptures are that of the artist's. This leads to speculation on Pondick's self-perception, not only of her physical being and gender, but as an artist who occupies an interim state between the imagined and phenomenal worlds. As a result, Pondick's "beings" may be read as a metaphor or analogy for the effect mutability has on our conception of "self" in a world defined by fixed forms and appearances.

Rona Pondick: Recent Work
MOCA Cleveland
May 14 - August 8

FOX, 1998-1999
Stainless Steel
14.5 x 8 x 38 inches
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery