



# RONA PONDICK: THE METAMORPHOSIS OF AN OBJECT

Worcester Art Museum  
55 Salisbury Street  
Worcester, Massachusetts

Through October 11

On a pedestal, a row of four figures: a seated pharaoh, hands rested on his knees; a Mexican male, legs pulled up to his chest, arms folded; Buddha, legs crossed in a lotus position; and a human-headed dog leaned back on its haunches, its master's hands replacing its paws.



All told, this quartet of sculptures spans four millennia (2000 B.C. to the present day) and encompasses dissimilar mediums (bronze, stainless steel, ceramic, limestone).

The totems showcased in the Worcester Art Museum exhibit "The Metamorphosis of an Object," featuring the work of New York City sculptor Rona Pondick, clearly represent the clashing states of dominance, relaxation, inner tranquility and supplication.

Blending sculpture from several centuries, "Metamorphosis" explores the implications inherent in gesture and posture, as well as the various treatments of hair and the impacts of repetition in art through the ages. Pairing shiny sleekness with textured skin, wild manes with bald domes, patina with pristine and contrasting figures in varied poses, the exhibit juxtaposes 14 of Pondick's pieces with world sculpture selected from the WAM collection.

Nearly all of the Brooklyn artist's figures clash texture and the lack thereof; the sculptures meld from one to the other, appearing as a mish-mash of body parts, deformed creatures of evolution. The eyes, nearly always eased shut, are irrelevant. The focus is form — the outside, not what's within.

On one pedestal, a giant hand, hazy silver and coarse with the lines and cracks of a working person, morphs into the stainless steel, mirror-shiny lower half of a lounging cat. Nearby, life-cast heads are arranged like nesting dolls — each one the larger interpretation of its predecessor, and each, except one, is bald — illustrating the progression of the creative process.

Meanwhile, various busts and disembodied heads — Chinese, Greek, French, Roman, Egyptian and the artist's herself — focus on hair as portrayed in art. The study of hair in sculpture illuminates "deep meanings that range from the social, ritualistic, symbolic, and fetishistic to the emotional," Pondick has said.

There's a bronze Roman woman, locks tightly twisted in a bun, shoulders mottled and decayed; a black basalt Roman ruler, looking quite gruff; an

THIS PAGE TOP: *Monkey with Hair*, 2002–03, stainless steel and modacrylic hair.

ABOVE: *Muskrat*, 2002–05, stainless steel.

RIGHT PAGE TOP: *Mouse*, 2002–06, stainless steel.

RIGHT PAGE BOTTOM: *Monkey with Hair*, 2002–03, stainless steel and modacrylic hair.



Angolan mask, wood and hemp dreadlocks dangling like door beads; Greek and Chinese faces, crafted from wood and limestone, elaborate cornucopia crowns and head dresses cloaking their tresses. As centuries progress within these pairings, hair becomes less and then more shameful, vacillating between an asset to be showcased and a naked display requiring adornment. And by the 21st century, it is free to flow, wild, no longer tightly wound, no longer hidden.

As evidenced in Pondick's interpretation: two "Monkeys with Hair" — one grey, one black — posture with grimaced faces, their bodies shapeless under untamed fuzzy tufts. Resting on human hands, their shiny, protruding behinds — like those of a baboon — lead to twisty, irritable tails. A "Fox," meanwhile, appears ready to pounce with its seamless, curvy feline body, tail straight and sharp like a dagger. This slinky form is contrasted with a human head topped with a crop of slicked-back hair. Yet there's not enough support to keep it up; the head bows and droops, too heavy.

With this last work, perhaps the sculptor hints at the shallowness of humanity: we attend so much care to our outsides, the exterior, yet our minds we neglect.

Taryn Plumb

