

**PERHAPS TOO MUCH** has been made of the psychoanalytic content lurking under the surface of Rona Pondick's simultaneously shadowy and intensely palpable objects. Then again, an artist whose signature forms have included gumballs with teeth, baby bottles, women's shoes and dirty pillows seems to invite Freud-laden interpretations. Pondick's latest sculptures are curiously scaled-down human heads cobbled to mammalian-like bodies, which occasionally incorporate a cast of the artist's hand or arm. And like Dr. Frankenstein's tragic monster, these creatures manage to evoke the wretchedness and tenderness of life in the natural world.

Pondick gives them simple titles: *Dog*, *Marmot*, *Cougar*, *Fox*; but these beings are only a distant reflection of the animals for which they are named. Cast in highly polished stainless steel, aluminum, bronze or industrial rubber, the bodies are hairless and smooth. In steel, they are burnished to the sheen of mercury. Humanoid heads with closed eyes seem lifeless, while the bodies to which they are fused are fluid, animate. Using 3-D digital technology, Pondick has recently been shrinking her life cast, retaining lapidary detail in a series of six-inch heads with stunted simian bodies. This work in progress, titled *Monkey*, is a jumbled melange of primate-like shapes.

These are monsters in an originary sense, as in *monstrum*: a portent, warning. But Pondick's monsters are determinedly contemporary, embodying cultural fears about genetic manipulation and experimental mutation. What if molecular biologists could replicate the chimerical creatures that mythology created to terrify and titillate? Pondick says, "Biological experiments provoke fear and desire . . . two words I've always thought of to describe my work." There is perverse sensuality at play here, obscuring our sense of pity for Pondick's haunted, homely offspring.

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(next page) Rona Pondick, *Marmot* (Horizontal view), 1998-99, Silicon rubber, 6 x 29 1/4 x 21". Images courtesy Sonnabend Gallery.

(below) Rona Pondick, *Fox*, 1998-99, Stainless steel, 37 x 9 x 14".

