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A MUSEUM OF RONA PONDICK'S MAKING

Dakin Hart

In developing *The Metamorphosis of an Object*, Rona Pondick has stressed that the exhibition has no point. The purpose of this essay is to consider pointlessness as a philosophy of art appreciation – specifically, as an alternative to the discipline of art-historical scholarship and its contemporary stalking horse, the art museum exhibition.

Around 1534, Maarten van Heemskerck made a drawing of Michelangelo's *Bacchus* in the garden of the Roman art collector Jacopo Galli (fig. 1). Surrounded by fragments of ancient sculpture and missing its right hand, the statue looks like any other impressive, well-preserved antique. There is a legend about the *Bacchus* (probably apocryphal, but of a type common in Renaissance hagiographies) that Michelangelo broke the arm himself, buried the statue, had it "found," and at first passed it off as an antique – revealing it as his own only after it had been widely acclaimed as a masterpiece.[1] Latent in van Heemskerck's drawing is the implication that what makes Michelangelo's sculpture remarkable is its indistinguishability from the antiquities that surround it. Also palpable in the tableau is Michelangelo's conflicted attitude toward antiquity: a mix of admiration and a competitive defiance produced by a collecting culture that considered antique sculpture inherently superior to anything contemporary.

In his 1992 exhibition *Mining the Museum* at the Maryland Historical Society, Fred Wilson showed a set of slave shackles (excavated from the museum's storage) amid a selection of Baltimore repoussé-style silver (usually on view) in a case labeled "Metalwork 1793–1880." In the words of Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, as quoted in the exhibition catalogue, "in the tiniest details of their morphology and their organization, museums betray their true function, which is to reinforce for some the feeling of belonging and for others the feeling of exclusion."[2] Wilson's project, an epochal reinstallation of the museum's permanent collection, was a comprehensive indictment of the placid, nominally race-blind façade the Maryland Historical Society had been reflexively passing off as the state's history. The placement of the *Bacchus* in a garden of antiquities and the incorporation of slave shackles in a case of early-American silver, both milestones in the history of cultural perspective, represent a type of work that has come to be known as institutional critique. For Michelangelo and Wilson, the aim of mixing heterogeneous material in a single installation was to dismantle an institutional prejudice – by making visible something the institutions themselves innately obscured: the excellence of contemporary sculptors in Renaissance Italy and the passive racism innate in late-twentieth-century American museums. *Mining the Museum* was a particularly important landmark for museums because it so forcefully reified the indispensable precept of postmodernism: that because it is all but impossible to recognize our own blind spots, the only way to reveal and redress the intrinsic biases of a dominant culture is through the intercession of systematically marginalized perspectives.

While it has not been conceived as explicit institutional critique, *Rona Pondick: The Metamorphosis of an Object* represents a closely related phenomenon: the movement of artists into museums – not as the makers of objects, but as alien, quasi-curatorial organizing intelligences. Pondick's object selection and installation design constitute a dynamic alternative to the organizational methodology of the standard art museum model. What she means by "pointless" is that unlike other models, *The Metamorphosis of an Object* is not expressly polemical, has not been designed to communicate a specific idea, and has no neatly packagable thesis. Neither, and this makes it distinctive within the genre of artist's choice exhibitions, is it intended as a work of installation art. And, because Pondick has incorporated her own work into the thematic groups of objects she has selected from the Museum's permanent collection, it also represents something different from the now common plop-shock installations of contemporary art in otherwise unaltered museum galleries. Deceptively naïve-sounding, Pondick's themes are, not coincidentally, among the more conspicuously problematic in art-historical scholarship. The history of the interpretation of gestures in art, for instance, is for the most part a morass of vague,

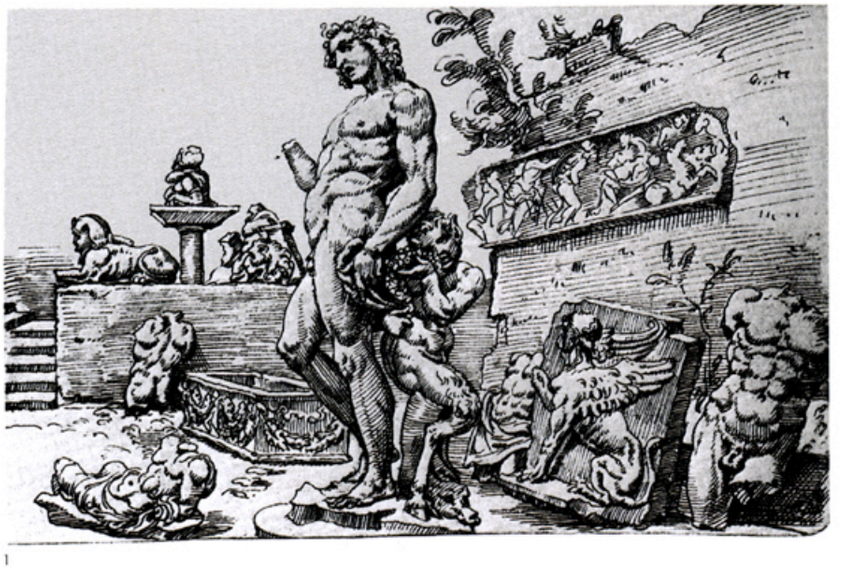

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Fig. 1
Maarten van Heemskerck
(1498–1574)
Drawing of the Garden in the Casa Galli, with Michelangelo's Statue of Bacchus
Sketchbook I.72
Ca. 1534
Pen and ink on paper
5 x 8 inches (13 x 20.5 cm)
Kupferstichkabinett,
Staatliche Museen, Berlin

anachronistic, and culturally inapposite projections: modern readings of unfamiliar mores without much basis in contemporaneous sources.[3] In the case of hair, supposed trademarks such as "Leonardesque" curls have been widely overused as evidence in the attribution of pictures. With both gesture and hair, the danger has resided in accepting as true what seems obvious because it is detailed, a problem Roland Barthes identified as the reality effect – the displacement of truth by a density of facts.

Institutional critique may not be Pondick's point, but that is nevertheless what *Rona Pondick: The Metamorphosis of an Object* is – not Pondick's critique of the Worcester Art Museum, but the Museum's critique of itself, recognizing that Pondick's perspective on the collection represents an alternative to its own.

THE MUSEUM AS SYSTEM

Taking as a given that Pondick's exhibition represents a critical view, what exactly is being critiqued and how? As Bourdieu and Darbel (and others) have noted, the museum is, in and of itself, a system of interpretation.[4] By their nature, such systems function by highlighting certain features of the material within their control and hiding others, whether purposefully or not. Following the systematic practice of art history, art museums' choices incline strongly toward the construction of clean and efficient narratives.

There is a simple explanation for this. Museums are organized more or less according to the principles of categorization the scientist Carl Linnaeus established for systematizing our knowledge of the natural world (kingdom, class, order, genera, and species). Linnaeus is prominent among those we have to thank, or blame, for our deep-seated belief (in the West) that understanding is synonymous with systematic organization. As signaled by Pondick's choice of title, the presiding cosmography of *The Metamorphosis of an Object* is Ovid's. If anyone deserves the moniker of the anti-Ovid, it is Linnaeus, whose *Systema Naturae* (1735) outlines the system of classification we first learn in elementary-school Biology. The central organizing principle of the poem, which describes the creation of the universe and its history, is physical mutability. From the first line, "Of bodies changed to various forms, I sing" (Dryden trans., I.1), Ovid links that mutability, as do nearly all creation stories (including the biblical version), with the making of art. And in *Metamorphoses*, in which Ovid describes the formation of all things from the "shapeless unwrought mass of inert bulk" (Martin trans., I.10), the principal metaphor is sculpture.

By defining the natural world in logical terms, natural philosophers like Linnaeus supplanted myth, superstition, and most other forms of instinctive explanation, including Ovid (for centuries used as a kind of popular encyclopedia), with predictable, verifiable results generated by the scientific method. Art historians, following the arc of Western academic practice, have organized information about works of art according to a system of classifications based on analogs for those of Linnaeus. This includes the categories one finds on museum wall labels (culture, region, period, and medium).

Seeking a status equivalent to that of the hard scientist – and aspiring to the ontological reach and abstract seriousness of the philosopher or the theoretical physicist – we art historians have, throughout the twentieth century, increasingly shaped our subject to achieve such intellectual distinction. In essence, out of system envy we have turned the preservation, display, and study of art into an orderly and logical pursuit – despite the fact that art is not strictly, or even very frequently, pursued as a rational mode of analysis. In fact, more often than not, at least from the Enlightenment on, artists have offered alternatives to science: they have sought to complicate rather than explain, compound rather than clarify. There is an irrefutable logic to establishing facts as a baseline for scholarship. On the other hand, it is equally true that inexorable logics are among artists' most enduring targets, at least since the beginning of the modern era, and of least cultural interest to the general public. The problem with facts,

particularly within the structure of the museum experience, is that they have become the trees for which we have lost sight of the forest planted largely by intuition.[5]

Not much art is produced by the scientific method, for the simple reason that artists rely more on instinct and open experimentation than on logic and the systematic testing of hypotheses. This is one of the more significant implications of Pondick's "pointless" installation, which follows no program other than her eye's responsiveness to her own working curiosity. Pondick's thematic groupings are reconstructed artifacts of her creative process – in which objects are brought together not to answer questions but to suggest methods of inquiry. What we are supposed to understand by this is that her system of organization is as uninhibited by categorical facts as museums and scholars are restricted by them.

Pondick's intuitive looking simply represents a different model for understanding art. The lesson we should take from Pondick the curator is that knowing is not a unitary state: there are many different ways of knowing, many different styles of knowing, and many different systems of knowing. The methodical accumulation of facts – and the related taxonomic organization of objects in museums – represents only one. The detailed way artists look at the work of other artists is another.

MALRAUX'S *MUSÉE IMAGINAIRE*

As the study of art has come more and more to resemble science or philosophy, we have forgotten, in the words of André Malraux (echoing Hamlet), that "our knowledge covers a wider field than our museums."[6] The practice of art history was not always so rigidly structured; it used to include a much wider range of approaches to objects, many of them more intuitive than current academic fashion allows.

Malraux, the French cultural impresario who in the late 1940s and early '50s published a series of art books constituting what he called a *musée imaginaire*, was among the first to articulate some of the museum's systemic implications for looking at art. Reflecting on the shift that was taking place as the study of art became "more and more intellectualized,"[7] Malraux described the museum-as-institution as "a great field of comparison," operating "within a space neutralized by efforts to range and to classify," with "meaning now the master model – having supplanted beauty."[8] In other words, he recognized the art museum, with its ordered galleries and specimen-style display, as a physical metaphor for a new and hegemonic system for understanding art. To which his *musée imaginaire* was, in part, conceived as an alternative.

Bringing together on the page works that could never be seen side by side, and focusing on details (of sculptures in particular) that a visitor to the world's museums and monuments could never get in a position to see, Malraux's *musée imaginaire* produced a new context for understanding the quality and nature – and, by extension, the structure – of the museum as an art-viewing system. Presented in striking black-and-white photographs, most taken in strong raking light on plain studio backgrounds from unusual angles, Malraux's comparisons emphasize surface texture, specific details, and non-contextual associations, thereby encouraging close study of the sort most museum installation design discourages.[9] Leafing through Malraux's *musée imaginaire* is an exercise in the alternative perspective as an interpretive methodology; every object is made to seem new and extraordinary – even those, or especially those, already most familiar.

The first volume of Malraux's *Le Musée imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale* (Gallimard, 1952–54), one of the more obscure in the series, is devoted to full-page details, mostly heads, selected from across the range of world sculpture.[10] For artists like Pondick (who owns a copy), the close looking, cross-cultural comparisons, and condensed ahistoricity that this volume conveys are fundamental values. Malraux's *musée imaginaire* continues to be of interest today – despite scholarly disdain for the vague humanism of its thesis that art is a universal, unifying language – because it is such an instructive archetype of the pluralistic formalist

Fig. 2
Rona Pondick
Master for cast of
Otter (detail)
2002–04
Urethane and epoxy resin
30 ½ x 6 ¾ x 23 ¾ inches
(77.5 x 17.2 x 60.3 cm)

model that produced it. That model, while considered inadequate to rigorous scholarship today, is one that has always been, and undoubtedly always will be, part of many artists' basic programming.[11]

CONNOISSEURSHIP

The art-historical discipline that has been most closely associated with detailed observation is connoisseurship, the discriminating visual examination of works of art for the purpose of making qualitative judgments about them. Because it exalts the subjective judgments of aesthetic authorities at a time when academia has become preoccupied with dismantling authority and establishing more flexible objective criteria – and because it failed as a reliable method of attribution – connoisseurship today is at a low ebb. A regrettable consequence is that the careful observational skills that it requires and promotes are missing in a field awash in practices notable for their disinterest in the physical object (prime examples being the conducting of primary research by means of electronic media, low-resolution PowerPoint presentations, and spatially illiterate installations of sculpture planned in two dimensions).[12]

Bernard Berenson, one of a handful of scholars who attempted to turn connoisseurship into a science of attribution, wrote with insight about the fine-grained nature of artists' visions and the corresponding degree of resolution we need to bring to our attempts to understand them:

Attention itself tends to crystallize into habits of regarding certain features and details, and disregarding others. Habits of execution will, therefore, tend to become strongest where habits of attention are weakest. . . . It is in the less expressive features . . . that habits of attention are weakest, and habits of execution, consequently, strongest. . . .

Of all the exposed parts of the human figure, the ears are least capable of sudden change of character. After the ears come the hands. The ears therefore get the least attention, so little that one person in a thousand knows the shapes either of his own, or his dearest friend's. . . . And all that holds true of the ears and hands holds true of even less expressive and less noticed details, as, for instance, hair and dress, regarded not as a whole where they are entirely at the mercy of fashion, but in such details as a particular ringlet, or a particular fold. As long as a painter gives our hair and clothing a certain cut, we do not demand the exact reproduction of every hair and fold. Even if the artist had the patience to reproduce them, we should lack the patience to audit his account. The hair and clothing, then, also permit of the formation of habits in their execution. And we might thus examine every detail of every conceivable picture with figures, to see what chance it gave for the formation of habits of execution.[13]

Berenson's argument is that artists' treatment of the least expressive details of their subjects' physical appearance is most likely to derive directly and almost autonomically from their training, which, Berenson reasons, provides the best clue to an artist's origins and, ultimately, identity.

As a method of attribution this proved to be mostly impracticable nonsense. But Berenson's interest in the relationship between habits of observation, methods of execution, and the art object at the level of the minute, seemingly insignificant detail is worth noting because it describes the nexus that is also at issue in Pondick's *The Metamorphosis of an Object*. In fact, the model most obviously underlying the design of the exhibition is Pondick's connoisseurship of artistic practice as a methodology for understanding art.

HAIR AS A LENS

Art historians often treat a work of art as if it were a proof, a dissertation, or an exhaustive survey of a particular idea. But artists are not scholars or scientists. They look narrowly when we expect them to have a view of the whole, dig deep when we assume they are skimming the surface, know nothing about the subjects on which we want them to be exactingly well-informed, and generally follow their interests in ways that defy the Linnaean definition of understanding. So

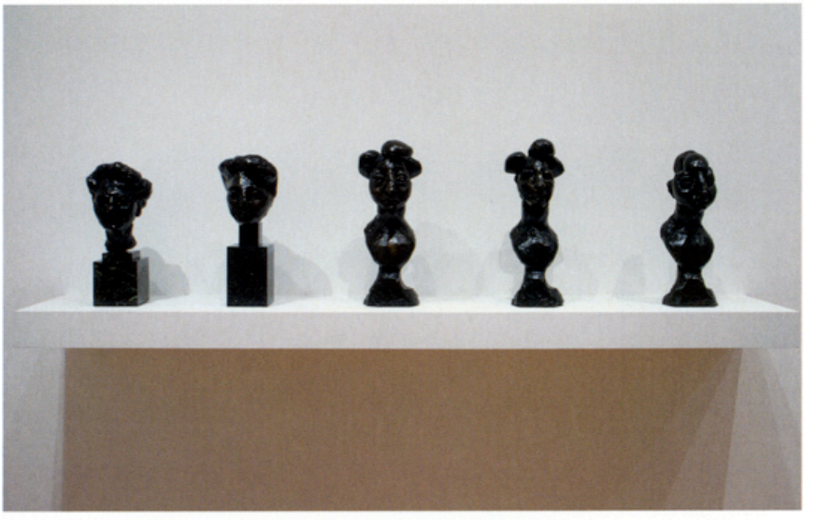

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Fig. 3
Henri Matisse (1869–1954)
Jeannette I–V (installation view)
1910–13
Bronze
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2004
© 2008 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Digital Image
© The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY

Fig. 4
Angolan
Mask (Mwana Pwo)
Early 20th century
Wood and hemp
26 x 10 x 7 inches
(66 x 25.4 x 17.7 cm)
Private collection

how does artistic curiosity play out as a methodology of art appreciation?

Hair, one of the more loaded cultural signifiers found in works of art, has long attracted the attention of scholars working in sociological, ethnographic, religious, and other veins, for whom art is often a source of direct evidence.[14] To condense their conclusions, concepts common to the treatment of hair in various cultural traditions include signifying important life transitions (such as the cutting of hair as an indication of mourning), links between the presence or absence of hair and health, the length or kemptness of hair and sexuality, hair style and social status, and hair as a window onto the interaction between individuals and societies.[15] All of the contexts for understanding hair provided by the social sciences can be usefully applied in interpreting Pondick's sculpture, which is rich in portentous hair imagery.

Hair is not the subject of this exhibition, however. What is on view in Pondick's hair group, as well as the others, is the artist's habits of observation, the interests and methodologies she has developed around them, and what we can learn as appreciators of art by watching her think visually about how the hair on these objects was conceived and executed. By bringing together a heterogeneous group of heads and (through installation design) focusing our attention on technique as a guide to modes of thought, Pondick opens a door – whereas museum label copy giving name, rank, serial number, and maybe some bit of ethnography tends to close a file. One way to look at the hair in a work of art is to use it – as Berenson did, and curators and scholars do – as a way to slot the object into the right case in the appropriate gallery, or as a pointer or index to a related body of knowledge. Pondick's is to use what hair reveals about the way a certain artist conceptualized a huge and ongoing challenge of representation.[16] She does this by removing these objects from the taxonomic frameworks in which they are usually sequestered and by exposing the representational and technical choices that produced them. The obvious contemporaneity of her own works makes the artistic choices of the others manifestly real. By inserting her own processes – both her visual cognition and her creative choices – into the gallery she facilitates an interchange between viewer and objects that stands in stark contrast to the by turns gnomic and academic stance of the typical installation.

To understand how different Pondick's approach to exhibition design is we have only to look at a more conventional example. In the Museum of Modern Art's permanent display of five busts by Henri Matisse – *Jeannette I*, *Jeannette II*, *Jeannette III*, *Jeannette IV*, and *Jeannette V* – the heads are arranged chronologically from left to right, as if in an evolutionary (from ape to man) kind of lineup (fig. 3). Typical of the way they are often presented, MoMA's installation suggests an interpretation that seems both axiomatic and unassailable: that Matisse made the heads as a lesson in serial abstraction. And that is, of course, how they are usually described in museum label copy. The problem is that Matisse did not show them this way, or even all together at one time, and there is little evidence to suggest that he considered them a series.[17] That there is great variation in the naturalism of the treatment of the heads is undisputable. But the act of organizing them into a group and showing them in a chronological sequence, which seems like it should be the most logical and neutral way to display them, is actually a de facto form of teleological interpretation.

Such ostensibly clear-cut presentations underline the taxonomic prudence that prevails in the scholarly approach to art in museums, as well as its unintended interpretive consequences. In the spirit of Malraux, Pondick uses hair as an alternative organizing principle precisely because it cannot easily be drawn into the kind of ends-driven analyses that make up so much academic art history. Most of all, by organizing around universal themes, Pondick precludes the limiting and often interpretively erroneous taxonomic criteria that tend to fill the voids in understanding (as in the case of Matisse's *Jeannette*). Rather than settle for taxonomic appropriateness, Pondick's approach to the exhibition of like with like is to focus on specific, positive, and demonstrable

creative resonances. Her focus on the details of artistic practice promotes a style of viewing that is periodic and perambulatory, repetitive and recursive, unpointed, and loosely organized. As long as people have hair, artists will consider and represent it; that is as far as her theoretical premise goes. Hair approached this way becomes an open-ended field of research rather than a key to interpretation.

In looking at hairstyling as an artistic practice in some African cultures, Niangi Batulukisi has suggested that because it is as close to making sculpture as most people will ever come, it may be the one skill set that equips the layperson to approximate a visceral understanding of the choices that go into making art.[18] If she is right, the experience we have teasing the strands, massing piles, and defining curls and locks in our hair (analogous to modeling and carving) makes Pondick's choice an especially effective means to the end of showing the casual museum visitor how to connect with the habits of mind and process latent in an object.

The analogy between hairstyling and art making can be carried one step further, as Batulukisi does in relation to contemporary African cultures:

> *Hair stylists today express a certain freedom in interpreting signs, motifs, and cultural symbols. This trend appears more and more among contemporary artists who are moving away from the social conventions in which these hairstyles were created. Their preoccupations are purely aesthetic and artistic, yet they allow the artists to perpetuate the symbolic traditions of hair by reproducing ancient hairstyles.*[19]

This is a good description of contemporary art practice in the West and what Pondick is often after in her own work, which is informed by multiple traditions (many of which are included in the exhibition) without being over-determined by them or falling into pastiche. This is the lesson of Malraux's *musée imaginaire* as well: that universal access to multiple traditions produces a sort of aesthetic heterogeneity that defies analysis by strict association with any one tradition, even as it serves to honor and perpetuate its sources.

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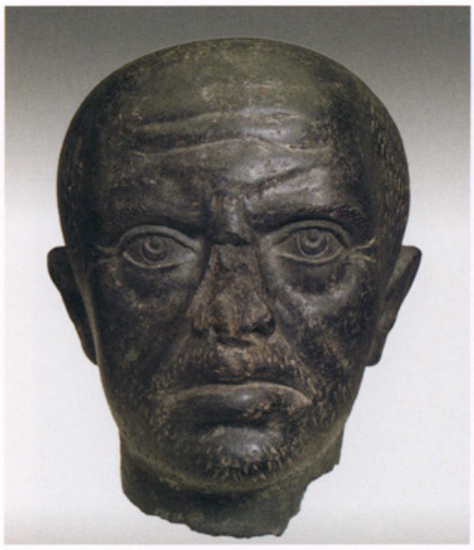
Fig. 5
Roman
Portrait of a Lady (Possibly a Daughter of Marcus Aurelius) (detail)
160–180
Bronze
21¼ x 18½ x 13⅜ inches
(54 x 46.9 x 34 cm)
Worcester Art Museum, 1966.67

Fig. 6
Rona Pondick
Dog (detail)
1998–2001
Yellow stainless steel
Edition of 6 + 1 AP
28 x 16½ x 32 inches
(71.1 x 41.9 x 81.3 cm)



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The art museum model as it has developed, supported by the taxonomic style of art-historical scholarship, has become so compartmentalized and so cautious that the reality of the museum as cultural cornucopia and universalizing resource exists more in theory than it does in practice. With its encyclopedic collections formed on humanistic Malrauxian principles, the Worcester Art Museum is in an ideal position, as it has astutely recognized, to benefit from having an artist exploit the diversity of its collections to truly integrative artistic ends.

UNKNOWN, THE ARTIST

The most important consequence of Pondick's multicultural, transhistorical exhibition of representational techniques and strategies, however, is the level at which it allows us to engage the unknown makers of ancient and non-Western objects – not as ethnographic categories, generic representatives of unfamiliar cultures, or exemplars of cultural mores, but as individual artists.

Standing in front of alien objects produced in an unfamiliar culture an almost incomprehensibly long time ago, it can be difficult to remember that each one was made by an individual with a mind no less capable of conceptual complexity than Michelangelo, Marcel Duchamp, or Pondick herself. The disconnect between what we can infer from objects presented as material culture and the individuality of their makers is particularly hard to overcome in the case of works (usually non-Western or prehistoric) bearing labels attributing them to "Anonymous" (a designation that is reliable only in always being wrong), the somewhat less inaccurate (but still misleading) name of a culture, nationality, or region, or the entirely accurate (if totally unsatisfactory) "Unknown."

The more art historians know about the cultures in which these unknown makers worked, the less likely they are to speculate or make generalizations about the intent or meaning of either maker or object. As this material has been removed from the domain of anthropology and ethnography and integrated into art museum collections as art, the reluctance of art historians to presume to interpret it has had the perverse effect of making it increasingly abstract and incomprehensible. It has not helped that the original goal of importing non-Western art into Western art museums was to "elevate" the material culture of other civilizations to the level of regard we have for art by viewing and presenting it as a source of formal inspiration.[20]

The basic problem with the systematic organization, study, and presentation of art objects, is that, to borrow a phrase from Berenson, "the artist is not a botanical but a psychological problem."[21] We cannot, in other words, understand the artist by treating the object as a specimen of the culture. The closest we may ever come to touching the minds of "Roman (?)" maker of *Portrait of a Ruler (Possibly Diocletian)* (fig. 8) and " ," the artist responsible for the Angolan *Mask (Mwana Pwo)* (fig. 4), may well be through Pondick's thinking about how to reverse engineer the marks they have left on these objects. What is clear in any case is that while "Egyptian, 18th Dynasty" and "Chinese, Northern Qi Dynasty," may be the best that current scholarship can manage, to view *Ay, Fan Bearer* (p. 75) and *Head of a Buddha* (p. 74) as the products of cultures rather than individuals – as if *volkgeist* (the spirit of the people) were an adequate method of explanation – is a distortion created by the structure of the museum model.

Berenson often said that he trusted his eye more than any documentation. Bravado aside, this is not a bad paraphrase of what we should take away from *The Metamorphosis of an Object* about how to reorient ourselves to the museum: to account in our looking for the cultural and temporal balkanizations the gallery plan and label copy represent and to invest more of our interest in what can be discerned directly by comparing representational practices – not as a replacement for, but as a supplement to, the (often sparse) known facts.

A connoisseur looks at objects in order to appraise and attribute: "Michelangelo made this because the hands are too beautifully shaped to have been made by anyone else." A curator looks in order to categorize and make sense of: "The ex-

Fig. 7
Thailand
Seated Buddha in Marajivaya (detail)
Late 15th–early 16th century
Bronze
31 x 22 ½ x 9 ½ inches
(79 x 57 x 24 cm)
Worcester Art Museum, 1998.190

Fig. 8
Roman (?)
Portrait of a Ruler (Possibly Diocletian)
284–315
Black basalt
8 x 6 ⅜ x 16⅜ inches
(20.3 x 16.3 x 16.7 cm)
Worcester Art Museum, 1974.297

Fig. 9
Roman
Portrait of a Lady (Possibly a Daughter of Marcus Aurelius)
160–180
Bronze
21¼ x 18½ x 13⅜ inches
(54 x 46.9 x 34 cm)
Worcester Art Museum, 1966.67

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Fig. 10
Roman Egypt
Portrait Mask of a Young Man
2nd century
Plaster with traces of polychrome
9 ¾ x 7 ⅛ x 5 ¾ inches
(24.7 x 18 x 14.3 cm)
Worcester Art Museum, 1970.53

Fig. 11
Rona Pondick
Dog (detail)
1998–2001
Yellow stainless steel
Edition of 6 + 1 AP
28 x 16 ½ x 32 inches
(71.1 x 41.9 x 81.3 cm)

pressive, non-representational elongation of this statue's hands is characteristic of early Mannerism." On the rare occasions when the public visits art museums with a purpose, what they are most likely looking for is creative inspiration. The irony is how difficult it can be to find in museums organized like entomological specimen storage at the Museum of Natural History. What separates artistic research from the sort carried out by art historians, and this exhibition from the kinds they tend to organize, is that for most artists, like most laypeople, the inspiration to be found in museum collections is more personal, more intimate, and less fact-based than art history presently allows. The current fashion is to use objects as little more than figure illustrations in an ever-expanding textbook of visual culture. *The Metamorphosis of an Object* – as a manifestation of the "pointless" compass of the creative process at its most focused – is Rona Pondick's attempt to publicly restore some individuality and illogic to the many objects in museums that have been artistically neutered by historical circumstance and scholarly convention. How does an artist look? That is the revelation and the point of this unusual exhibition.

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NOTES

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Joanna Rowntree, the objects conservator who first introduced me to Rona Pondick's work, whom both the artist and I had the good fortune to count as a colleague.

1. See James Hall, *The World as Sculpture: The Changing Status of Sculpture from the Renaissance to the Present Day* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999), p1. 63, and Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 201–05.

2. In Lisa G. Corrin, *Mining the Museum*, exh. cat. (New York: The New Press, 1994), 1.

3. Interpreting hands pressed together palm to palm as a universal gesture of piety is an example. A notable exception is Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (London: Oxford University Press), 1988.

4. There is a well-developed critical literature on this subject. See chapter 9 of Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (London: Oxford University Press), 1998.

5. My and Rona Pondick's friend Günter Kopcke, a professor of ancient Greek art, calls the scholarship of true but unimportant minutiae "footnote business."

6. André Malraux, *The Voices of Silence: Museum without Walls* [*Le musée imaginaire*], trans. Stuart Gilbert and Francis Price (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1967), 10. Malraux referred to Hamlet's line "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy."

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 342–43. See Rosalind E. Krauss, "Postmodernism's Museum without Walls," *Thinking about Exhibitions* (New York: Routledge, 1996), for a suggestive reading of Malraux that proposes museum architecture as a cognitive scheme for different modes of art appreciation.

9. An example of the enduring popularity of this approach is the series "Hidden in Plain Sight" published in the *New York Times* in late summer 2008, with features on textures, animals, tabletops, and hands (http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2008/08/29/arts/20080829_HIDDEN_GRAPHIC.html).

10. The series is generally known in English as "the museum without walls."

11. Though seminal to the creation of the encyclopedic museum, this ethos has long since lost the intellectual impetus it once held for museums.

12. Close examination has become the methodological province of technical art history. For an introduction, see *Getty Conservation Institute Newsletter* (spring 2005) (http://wwwgetty.edu/conservation/publications/newsletters/20_1/).

13. Bernard Berenson, *Lorenzo Lotto: An Essay in Constructive Art Criticism* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1905), xix–xx.

14. See Karen Lang, "Shaven Heads and Loose Hair, Buddhist Attitudes toward Hair and Sexuality," *Off With Her Head: The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1995); Page du Bois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and Molly Myerowitz Levine, "The Gendered Grammar of Hair," in *Off With Her Head*.

15. That hair is a potent cultural signifier, and therefore a great guide to systems of thought, is a common thesis. The African art scholar Frank Herreman has argued that this is true in African cultures because hair is arguably the only part of the body that can be easily, quickly, and dramatically altered to produce metamorphic change, making it a notably mobile and flexible signifier. See Frank Herreman, "Hair: Sculptural Modes of Representation," in Roy Sieber and Frank Herreman, *Hair in African Art and Culture*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum for African Art, 2000), 47.

16. Pondick is also interested in the idea that because of its physical complexity (computers are only now becoming powerful enough to produce working three-dimensional models of the 100,000–150,000 strands on the average human head), hair is an especially good medium for looking at how artists conceptualize representational problems.

17. See Michael Mezzatesta, *Henri Matisse: Sculptor/Painter*, exh. cat. (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1984), 88–91. For an installation view of Matisse's show at Galerie Bernheim-Jeune in 1913, see Dorothy Kosinski, Jay McKean Fisher, and Steven Nash, *Matisse: Painter as Sculptor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 60. For a view of his Galerie Pierre exhibition in 1930, see Albert E. Elsen, *The Sculpture of Henri Matisse* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1971), 111.

18. Niangi Batulukisi, "Hair in African Art and Cultures," in Sieber and Herreman, *Hair in African Art and Culture*, 26.

19. Ibid., 37.

20. This point, where the intellectualization of Western art history and the elevation of meaning over beauty crosses the aestheticizing of non-Western material, is one of the unresolved paradoxes of modernism.

21. Berenson, *Lorenzo Lotto*, xxi.