



Monkeys (detail)

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Rona Pondick.

Rona Pondick pri svojem ustvarjanju brez zadržkov izkorišča vsak del lastnega telesa v umetniške, poetične in filozofske namene. Noge, roke, dlani, ušesa, usta in celo iztrebki so njena orodja, ki jih uporabi tam, kamor praviloma ne sodijo. Njena usta, polna zob, nešteto krat replicirana v gumi, vosku, nerjavnem jeklu, mešanici zemlje in voska in živobarvni plastiki ter zamaskirana kot lobanje, sadje ali vagine dentate so postala ikone bistroumnosti in provokacije. Nadomeščajo tako avtorico samo kot njene želje in poželjenja; potrebujejo, hlepijo in so samouničevalne.

Skozi ustvarjanje s širokim naborom materialov a zadnje čase največ s kovinami, se manifestira kot objektivna in neustrašna, ranljiva in strah zbujujoča. Vprašanja, ki jih zastavlja njeno delo, so najprej *Kaj sem?* in šele nato *Kdo sem?* *Kaj smo?* in nato *Kdo smo?* Po njenem smo kompoziti, fragmenti narave in domišljije z neskončno možnimi kombinacijami in v nenehnem prehajanju.

Lepota in grdota sta eno in isto. In prav tako fantazija in resničnost. Protislovje je pravilo: Rona Pondick pokaže, da brez njega umetnost nima pravega pomena. "*Lepota in pomilovanje – bliže definiciji umetnosti ne moremo,*" pojasni Vladimir Nabokov v znamenitem predavanju o Kafkini Preobrazbi. "*Kjer je lepota, je tudi pomilovanje, in sicer iz preprostega razloga – ker mora lepota umreti: lepota vedno umre, način umre z materijo, svet umre s posameznikom.*" Med desetimi predstavljenimi skulpturami, ki so nastale med letoma 1998 in 2008, so tudi človeško-živalski in človeško-rastlinski hibridi. Pri prvih je živalski element delno razpoznaven, človek pa je vedno Rona Pondick. Amalgami kovinskih telesnih delov zasnovani s tridimenzionalnim skeniranjem in hitro izdelavo prototipov, ki umetnici omogočata reprodukcijo same sebe in vsega drugega v različnih velikostih, ohranjajo integriteto posameznih delov in celote.

Nenehno spreminjajo obliko. Posamezni elementi so v konstantni interakciji, medtem ko se celota preobrazi pred našimi očmi. Njena glava, njen hladen in brezizrazen obraz, ki spominja na posmrtno masko, vseskozi potrjuje božansko moč umetnice, ki je stvarnica in celo uničevalka. Hkrati pa jo lahko dojemamo kot anonimnega slehernika, ki je ključni povezovalni element.

V njenih zgodnjih delih prodornost posameznih telesnih delov ki delujejo kot raztrošeni fragmenti, in predmetov (svinčene postelje, čevljev), ki nastopajo kot njeni nadomestki,

Rona Pondick.

Rona Pondick has never hesitated to exploit every part of her body to artistic, poetic, and philosophical end. She uses her legs, her arms, her hands, ears, mouth, and even feces as tools of exploration going where few body parts have gone before. Her tooth-filled mouths endlessly replicated in rubber wax, stainless steel, dirt mixed with wax, candy-colored plastic, masquerading as skulls, fruit, or vaginas dentate have become icons of wit and provocation. They are stand-ins for Pondick herself and for her desires and appetites, needy greedy and self-consuming.

Working in a range of materials, mostly metals today she renders herself objective and fearless, vulnerable and fearsome. Pondick's work poses the question, *What am I?* before *Who Am I?* And by the same token *What and who are we?* The answer by her reckoning is that we are composites, fragments of nature and of imagination, ever recombining and in transition.

Beauty and ugliness are one and the same. So are fantasy and reality. Contradiction is the rule without it, Pondick shows, art can have no real meaning. "*Beauty plus pity—that is the closest we can get to a definition of art,*" Vladimir Nabokov points out in his famous lecture on Kafka's "Metamorphosis." "*Where there is beauty there is pity for the simple reason that beauty must die. beauty always dies, the manner dies with the matter the world dies with the individual.*" The ten sculptures in this show, made between 1998 and 2008, include animal/human and human/fauna hybrids. In the animal/human amalgams of body parts, the animals are somewhat recognizable the human is always Pondick. Composed of metals and conceived through 3D scanning and rapid prototyping which enable the artist to reproduce herself and everything else in many sizes, they retain the integrity of the parts as well as of the whole.

They are shapeshifters. Discrete elements remain in constant play as the whole metamorphoses before our eyes. Through it all, Pondick's head her face, like a death mask steely and expressionless, asserts a godlike power—the artist as creator and even destroyer. At the same time she can be viewed as an anonymous "every-human"—the key to holding it all together.

In Pondick's early works, the poignancy of the isolated body parts as scattered fragments and the objects performing as her surrogates—a lead bed shoes—evoke Philip Guston's autobiographical works with their recurring powerful, humble symbols. One senses the same intense emotions in Pondick's.

s pomnijo na avtobiografska dela Philipa Gustona s svojimi ponavljajočimi se izrazitimi, ponižnimi simboli. Enaka močna čustva je začutili tudi v delih Rone Pondick. Toda v poznejših stvaritvah, hibridih, se nekoliko oddalji od sebe in stopi v večje in skrivnostnejše območje; tako, ki predpostavlja neskončen potencial genetskih mutacij in genskega inženirstva. Tu živi duh Kafkinega Gregorja Samse in evocira globok človeški strah pred izgubo nadzora, pred tem, da bi se zbudili kot stvor in navdajali ljudi z gnusom.

V te kompozite so vgrajene literatura, mitologija in folklor, kar še obogati zmedo. Odmevi Berninija in Brancusija se spleto s poezijo in z občutjem Walta Whitmana ter s kritičnim pogledom Nabokova. Rona Pondick se dviga nadnje kot sfinga iz grške mitologije, živalsko božanstvo, ženska in zaščitnica, ki zastavlja uganko življenja: "Kdo hodi zjutraj po štirih, opoldne po dveh in zvečer po treh?" Odgovor je: "Človek – kot dojenček se plazi po vseh štirih, ko odrase, hodi po dveh, in ko ostari si pri hoji pomaga s palico." Tiste, ki niso pravilno odgovorili, je ubila ali požrla. Sfinigin odgovor leži v osrčju tematike, ki jo raziskuje umetnica. Človeška zver ni enaka iz trenutka v trenutek. Nabira si izkušnje, znanje in telesne hibe; v resnici je amalgam, ki izvirnost ohranja v svoji srži.

Ironično pa je tudi sama sfinga spreminjajoč se hibrid – v egipčanski mitologiji je po navadi upodobljena kot bog sonca ali kralj z levjim telesom, včasih pa ima ovno glavo. Po grškem izročilu je ženskega spola ima glavo ženske, levje telo in pogosto ptičja krila. Tako ne preseneča, da rumeno-modri kip *Ram's Head* (2000–01) združuje umetnično glavo v ovni preobleki in uhane, s katerih visijo majhne glave Rone Pondick.

V delu *Untitled Animal* (1999–2000) iz karbonskega jekla ustvari pomilovanja vreden skupek delov, ki so komaj povezani – umetničina noga je presekana sredi stegna z brancusijevskim rezom, drži se torza, na katerem so njeni udje, med drugim mlahava in zakrnela noga ter roka, ki se začne kot njena in konča kot plavut. Mehek modernističen videz je v nasprotju z emocionalno kompleksnostjo umetniškega dela.

A pod krinko resnobnosti in samozavedanja teh nedoumljivih bitij vseskozi teče globoka rdeča nit humorja. Zmedeno poskakovanje človečnjakov v spektaklu iz nerjavnega jekla *Monkeys* 1998–2001 zaznamuje norčavost – umetnica, ki skozi igro v baročni fantaziji hkrati poganja razvoj svojega dela in ga drži na mestu. Umetničine matirane roke so nesorazmerno velike in težke ter v kontrastu s fluidnostjo preostale skulpture – opletajočih repov in izzivalnih zadnjih plati. Segajo in se širijo navzven kot podlaga. Opice je težko nadzorovati. Predstavljajo umetniško domišljijo, so radovedne in domiselne, norčave in sočutne; so naravni oponašalci in hitro jim lahko upade moč.

Delo *Monkeys* je še posebej prodorno, saj figure preveva sentimentalnost in ranljivost. Nekatere glave (umetničine lastne) pokorno in malodušno počivajo ena na drugi. Toda skupaj zberejo samozavest in videti je, kot bi se pomikale "naprej" pri čemer smer narekujejo Pondickini telesni deli. Zadaj pa so nagnetene ena čez drugo, šepave in nezmožne napredovati.

V nasprotju pa je figura iz nerjavnega jekla *Muskrat* s karikiranim telesom in privzdignjenimi stopali zelo sijoč lik, od stopal in repa navzgor vse do prevelikega matiranega palca, iznakažene roke in miniaturne glave umetnice. Mar se Rona Pondick tako vidi?

V čudovitem delu iz rumenega nerjavnega jekla *Dog* 1998–2001 – sfingi današnjega časa – se Rona Pondick podobno najbolj približa avtoportretu. Zavzame močan frontalen položaj, nepopustljiv in celo kljubovalen, roke so z dlanmi vkovane v tla kot noge, medtem ko izpod njenih udov nežno sije krotko pasje

However in her later pieces--the hybrids--she achieves some distance from her immediate self and steps into a larger more mysterious area—one that imagines the infinite potential of both genetic mutation and genetic engineering. The ghost of Kafka's Gregor Samsa lives here evoking the deep human fear of losing control, of waking up a monster and inspiring disgust in people.

Art history and literature, mythology and folklore are integrated into these composites, enriching the confusion. Echoes of Bernini and Brancusi engage with the poetry and sentiments of Walt Whitman and the critical observations of Nabokov. Pondick presides throughout as the Sphinx—in Greek, the animal deity woman protectress—who poses the riddle of life: "Which creature in the morning goes on four feet, at noon on two, and in the evening upon three?" The answer is. "Man—who crawls on all fours as a baby, then walks on two feet as an adult, and walks with a cane in old age." Those not in the know were killed or devoured. The Sphinx's answer lies at the heart of Pondick's matter. The human beast is not the same from moment to moment. As it accumulates experience, knowledge, and physical deformity it really is an amalgam that also retains the original at its core.

Ironically Sphinx itself is a metamorphosing hybrid—usually portrayed in Egyptian mythology as a male sun god or king with a lion's body although sometimes it bears the head of a ram. According to Greek lore it's a female, bearing the head of a woman, body of a lion, and often wings of a bird. Not surprisingly in a yellow-blue stainless steel piece *Ram's Head* (2000-01) the artist assumes the guise of a ram's head bearing dangling little-Pondick earrings.

In *Untitled Animal* (1999-2000), Pondick uses carbon steel to contrive a pathetic body of parts, barely connected—the artist's leg severed mid-thigh with a Brancusi-esque slash, and fastened to a torso featuring her own limbs accompanied by a limp vestigial-looking leg and an arm that begins as her actual one and finishes up as a fin. A smooth Modernist attitude contradicts the strangeness and emotional complexity of the piece.

Meanwhile, beneath the seriousness and self-consciousness of these unfathomable beings runs a deep vein of humor. The confused cavorting of the simians in the stainless-steel extravaganza *Monkeys* 1998-2001 bears an undertone of monkey business—the artist at play in a Baroque fantasy propelling the evolution of her work and at the same time holding it in place. Pondick's matte-finish arms, disproportionately large and heavy here in contrast with the liquid look of the rest of the sculpture—the flying tails and defiant rear ends, stretch out as a base of control. It's hard to keep the monkeys in check. They represent the artistic imagination—curious and inventive, devilish and compassionate they are natural mimics and are easily frustrated.

Monkeys is especially poignant, with sentimentality and vulnerability pervading the figures. Some of the heads (their creator's own) rest submissively and despondently atop one another. As a group, however they gather confidence and appear to be moving "ahead," led by "Pondick" parts. But at the back they huddle and overlap, limp and incapable of progressing.

By contrast, the stainless-steel *Muskrat* with its cartoonish body and upturned feet is a very shiny character from the feet and tail up until we get to the dull-finish outsize thumb, disfigured hand, and miniscule head of the artist. Is this how Pondick sees herself?

Similarly in the beautiful yellow stainless-steel *Dog* 1998-2001—a Sphinx for our times—Pondick comes closest

telo s krhkimi nogami. Tako kot drugod so tudi tu umetničine roke in glava nezloščeni in realistični, medtem ko je svetlikajoči se pes zloščen do visokega sijaja. S kontrasti, ki jih Rona Pondick ustvarja z različnimi končnimi obdelavami, poudarja umetniški nadzor nad stvaritvami in svojo identiteto ter prisili gledalca, da stopi korak nazaj in razmisli, kaj je resnično in kaj je domišljija. Kot pravi Nabokov: "Vsako izjemno umetniško delo je fantazija, saj odraža edinstven svet edinstvenega posameznika."

A umetničini moči preobrazbe ne podleže samo telo. Uroči tudi naravo, še posebej drevesa, s čimer se iz umetnice prelevi v čarodejko in kot alkimistka spremeni gole sive jeklene veje bonsaja v zlate ročice, ki zapeljujejo in moledujejo, in v glave, ki čakajo na padec, ko jih bodo požrli ali pa bodo prepuščene muhavosti usode. Roke, ki jih je manikirala stvariteljica in jih nenehno nadzira, so ozadje za zgodbo o Adamu in Evi. Umetnica, ki visi z udov in se valja po tleh, je nenadoma skušnjavka, grešnica Eva pa jabolko poželenja. Tu je umetnica tudi punčica lastnega očesa.

V novejšem delu, visokem in elegantnem *Head in Tree* (2006–8), je drevo rekvizit, s katerim upravlja umetnica in ne narava. Krošnja na visokem vitkem deblu varuje spokojno, zamišljeno glavo. Tu je čarovnije manj v ospredju je zlitje človeka in narave v eno.

Rona Pondick si je za svoje ustvarjanje izposojala tematiko, materiale in slog pri klasicizmu, modernizmu, minimalizmu in celo popularni umetnosti. Zdaj, ko pa ji je na voljo vse bolj dovršena tehnologija, lahko doda na seznam še "ultra-postmodernizem" Genetske spremembe so jo navdihnile, da je začela ustvarjati mitologijo prihodnosti. Umetnica Rona Pondick je bog oz. boginja Rona Pondick, saj lahko ustvari nepopoln a zanimiv svet. Tako kot Whitman bi lahko rekla: "Opevam sebe in se slavim, / in kar sem jaz dognal, to boš ti dognal, / kajti sleherni atom mojega telesa je tudi del tvojega. [...] Sem pesnik Telesa in sem pesnik Duše, / v meni so nebeške radosti in v meni so bolečine pekla, / prve negujem in jih množim, slednje prevajam v novo govorico."¹

New York, 2008

to the self-portrait. She assumes a powerful frontal pose, assertive, even defiant, her arms and hands firmly planted on the ground, like legs, while a gentle-looking canine, its legs almost frail in contrast with the artist's, glows softly from between her limbs. As elsewhere, Pondick's head and hands are unpolished and literal, while the dog is highly polished and reflective. The contrast in finishes allows Pondick to assert the artist's control over her creation and her identity and also forces the audience to step back and assess what is fact and fantasy. As Nabokov observed "Any outstanding work of art is a fantasy insofar as it reflects the unique world of a unique individual."

It's not only the body that succumbs to Pondick's powers of transmogrification. Nature, too—the tree in particular—falls under her spell. And Pondick the artist becomes Pondick the magician, alchemically turning bare, gray steel, bonsai tree branches into gold in the form of tiny budlike hands that seduce and implore, and heads waiting to drop and be consumed or left to the whims of chance. Manicured by the maker and under her constant supervision they provide the backdrop for an Adam and Eve narrative. As Pondick hangs from the limbs and rolls on the ground she is at once the tempter and Eve the sinner the apple of desire. Here she is also the apple of her own eye.

More Recently in her tall, elegant *Head in Tree* (2006-8), the tree stands as a prop, subject to the artist's, rather than nature's, control. One tall thin trunk with a cluster of branches at the top, harbors a serene meditative head. Here, there is less magic; rather a mutual accommodation of man and nature as one.

Through the years, Pondick has drawn on Classicism, Modernism, Minimalism, and even Pop for her subject matter, materials, and style. Now with the advent of ever more sophisticated new technology she can add to the list "ultra postmodernism." Genetic alterations have further inspired the artist to create a mythology of the future. Pondick the artist is Pondick the god/goddess, capable of creating an imperfect but curious universe. Like Whitman she can claim "I celebrate myself and sing myself And what I assume you shall assume, For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul, The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me, The first I graft and increase upon myself the latter I translate into new tongue."

New York, 2008