

Myers, Terry R. "Rona Pondick's Animal Magnetism." *Rona Pondick, Head in Tree and other works 1999–2008*.
Exh. cat. (Ljubljana, Slovenia: TR3, 2008), pp. 33–36.



Dog

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Ko se je Gregor Samsa nekoč zjutraj zbudil iz nemirnih sanj, je ugotovil, da se je med spanjem preobrazil v velikanski mrčes.

Franz Kafka, *Preobrazba*

**Moški in ženska
sta eno.**

**Moški in ženska in kos
so eno.**

Wallace Stevens, "Trinajst načinov gledanja kosa"

As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found him-self transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.

Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis" with High Modernity

**A man and a woman
Are one.**

**A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.**

Wallace Stevens, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird"

Animalni magnetizem Rone Pondick

V pred kratkim izdanem delu *Radical Evolution*, je Joel Garreau – tako kot z zgornjim citatom Kafka – razkril svojo veliko dilemo kar v prvi vrstici: »*Ta knjiga se ne more začeti z zgodbo o telekinetični opici.*«¹ Garreau, izvrsten novinar in urednik (dela za cenjeni dnevnik *Washington Post*) je imel neovrgljive dokaze, da taka žival zares obstaja (izvemo, da ji je ime Belle, da prebiva na univerzi Duke, in da je, prav res, vsaj leta 2005, z mislimi premikala predmete). Toda stopnja odrekanja nejeveri, ki jo zahteva od svojih bralcev, da lahko resno obravnavajo njegove trditve, je milo rečeno izjemna. Oziroma, kot se je sam stvarno izrazil, »obstaja pomenljiv prepad med tem, kar inženirji v resnici ustvarjajo in tem, kar se zdi vsakdanjim bralcem verjetno.« Priznam, da nisem mogel dokončati knjige. Čeprav sem z navdušenjem bral o obetih, da bodo ljudje kmalu kako kot supermeni preskakovali stavbe, so me določeni zapisi (na primer razprava o možnosti, da dosežemo nekakšno nesmrtnost), odkrito rečeno, preveč vznemirili. (Podnaslov – *Obeti in nevarnosti izboljšanja našega uma in teles in kaj pomeni biti človek* ponudi vsaj malo dvoumnosti, ki bi jo morala imeti sodobna znanost.) Pravzaprav mi je v olajšanje, da umetnost ni znanost. Še več, Garreaujeva knjiga me je spomnila, kaj je ena od ključnih stvari, ki naredi velikega umetnika zares velikega: da lahko nedoumljivo spremeni ne samo v verjetno (pa tudi privlačno tako v estetskem kot fizičnem pomenu), temveč tudi nekako pomirjujoče neposredno pred našimi očmi. No, pa seveda tudi brezčasno.

Ustvarjanje Rone Pondick spremljam že dvajset let. Ključne značilnosti njenega dela so me vedno hkrati vznemirjale in pomirjale: sposobnost ustvariti iluzijo, da se material in celo oblika zavedata samih sebe in se poznata, in ne zgolj predstavljata oziroma uprizarjata taka stanja duha sproščena uporaba izjemno neposrednega, pogosto celo trapastega

Rona Pondick's Animal Magnetism

In his recent non-fiction book *Radical Evolution*, Joel Garreau – like Kafka above – revealed his major dilemma in the very first line: "This book can't begin with the tale of the telekinetic monkey."¹ Deftly executing his job as a reporter and editor (he works for the highly regarded *Washington Post*), Garreau had irrefutable evidence that such an animal did in fact exist (we learn from him that her name is Belle, she's at Duke University and, yes, at least in 2005, she was moving objects with her thoughts). But the level of the suspension of disbelief required from his readers to take his claims seriously could be, to say the least, extreme. Or as he dryly concluded, "[the] gulf between what engineers are actually creating today and what ordinary readers might find believable is significant." To that end, I'll admit that I've not yet been able to completely finish his book. While I was thrilled to learn about the prospect that humans soon could have Superman's ability to leap tall buildings in a single bound, some of the rest of Garreau's reporting (for example, his discussion of the growing prospects of achieving something like immortality), to put it bluntly still freaks me out. (The book's subtitle – *The Promise and Peril of Enhancing Our Minds, Our Bodies – and What It Means to Be Human* – provides at least some sense of the ambivalence that should be brought to today's scientific enterprise.) Ultimately it's a relief to me that art is not science. Moreover Garreau's book reminds me that one of the key things that makes a great artist great is that he or she can make the unfathomable not only believable (as well as attractive in both the aesthetic and physical sense), but somehow even soothing right before our very eyes. Not to mention timeless.

I have now experienced Rona Pondick's work for twenty years, and I remain simultaneously freaked out and comforted by what surely will always be its most critical characteristics –

humorja ter nikoli pasivno sprejemanje tistega, kar še vedno imenujemo, ne glede na Garreaueva opozorila o bližnji prihodnosti, človeška pogojenost. Leta 1990, ko je bilo umetniščino delo še posebej naporno (ker se je, spet, včasih zdelo več kot samo skatološko, in verjetno tudi samo kot malce izčiščena verzija telesnega izločka), sem zapisal, da »dela Rone Pondick sprostijo potlačene stvari, tako da jih reaktivirajo v oblikah, ki izrabljajo formo, da bi predstavile prvinskost.«³ Po dvajsetletnem ukvarjanju z njenim delom, ki se je, to je treba poudariti, medtem izrazilo in konsistentno razvijalo, še vedno stojim za tistim, kar sem zapisal takrat, in mislim, da moje trditve zajamejo tudi poznejše stvaritve, vendar z bistvenim popravkom, predvsem zaradi hibridnih živalsko-človeških skulptur ki so nastale v zadnjem desetletju. Te skulpture, ki jih je, zanimivo, trinajst (kar me spomni na pesem Wallaca Stevensa), prenesejo besedo »izrabljajo« in spreminjajo tisto, kar sem mislil kot posredno pohvalo umetničinem ambivalentemu razmerju s pravili doktrine minimalizma v nekaj, kar se zdi predvidljivo in celo adolescentno (z moje strani, ne njene) v primerjavi s skrivnostno in brezčasno navzočnostjo teh figurativnih pojavnosti. Preprosto rečeno, zaradi svoje mirnosti so skulpture spektakularne, zaradi negibnosti pa so tako ohromljuječe. Ne sprostijo samo nekakšne potlačenosti (v freudovskem ali drugačnem pomenu) v okolico in/ali situacijo, temveč se zdi, da ti živalsko-človeški hibridni objekti privlačijo in pridobivajo energijo iz prostora in z njo še bolj utrdijo svojo nepremičnost, da lahko vsrkamo neustavljivo silo, ki izhaja iz njihovih psiholoških in materialnih lastnosti. (Z drugimi besedami, ko jih gledamo, prostor okoli njih izgine.) Učinkujejo kot neverjeten magnet, animalni oziroma »živalski magnetizem«, kar nas pripelje do nenavadnega izvora tega izraza. Umetniščino združevanje vseh razsežnosti jaza z verjetno večnim drugim (Garreaueva knjiga ne omenja možnosti živalsko-človeških hibridov) ostaja v samem bistvu človeško, a nas hkrati vrača k prvinskemu.

Ko v angleščini rečemo, da nekdo izžareva »živalski magnetizem«, po navadi merimo na nekakšno seksualno privlačnost, ki jo dojemamo instinktivno. Ne gre torej za magnetizem v dobesednem pomenu, torej da bi bil kdo sposoben fizično povleči druge predmete ali telesa s silo podobno gravitaciji. Vendar je imel izumitelj izraza, Franz Mesmer v mislih prav tako silo.⁴ Besede žival [animal] naj ne bi izbral zaradi njenega pomena nečloveškosti, temveč naj bi izhajal iz pomena njenega latinskega korena, besede animus (duša). S to besedno zvezo je Mesmer označil pojav, da imajo ljudje in živali v telesih nekakšno magnetno tekočino, ki bi lahko delovala terapevtsko. Izbral je levi prilastek animalen, da bi ločil to vrsto magnetne sile od tistih, ki jih izžarevajo določeni minerali, in večjih kozmičnih sil, kot je gravitacija. Čeprav ni presenetljivo, da je komisija, ki jo je imenoval Ludvik XVI., leta 1784 ovrгла njegove teze, zaradi Mesmerja v psihologiji govorimo o mesmerizmu (z ali brez uporabe hipnoze), kar pa po Mesmerjevem mnenju ni posledica dovzetnosti uma za sugestije, temveč magnetne tekočine, ki se pretaka nekje po naših telesih in je bistvena za to, da si upamo poizkusiti stvari, ki si jih pri polni zavesti nikoli ne bi.

Ko je Rona Pondick v svojem delu konec osemdesetih prvič uporabila večje količine kovine, je, zanimivo, skoraj vedno izbrala svinec, nemagneten material, ki je odporen tudi na druge sile, na primer rentgenske žarke, in kot element nikakor ni hibrid. V delu *Lead Bed* (1987/1988) je umetnica z njim ustvarila izjemno neudobno posteljo in odgrnila temprano zgornjo prevleko, kot bi nas vabila, naj zlezemo vanjo. Seveda to nikomur ni prišlo na misel, ne samo zaradi neudobnosti ali celo

its ability to make material and even form appear as if they were psychologically self-aware in and of themselves rather than merely representative or illustrative of such states of mind its comfort with brazenly straightforward, often ridiculous humor and its anything but passive acceptance of what we can still call, despite what Garreau warns us is in our near future, the human condition. In 1990, when Pondick's work was particularly hard to take (because, again some of it seemed more than merely scatological, and quite possibly an only slightly cleaned-up version of bodily excreted waste material itself), I wrote that "Pondick's pieces release the things that have been repressed by reactivating them in shapes that 'exploit' the formal in order to present the primal."³ After engaging with her work for two decades – during which it should be stressed, her work has developed forcefully and consistently – completely stand by what I wrote at the time, and I also believe that my claim pertains to all of her subsequent work, with one significant adjustment in wording made especially necessary by her hybrid animal/human sculptures of the past decade. These sculptures – of which there are, intriguingly enough, thirteen examples to date (reminding me of Wallace Stevens's poem) – withstand the word "exploit" transforming what intended at the time as an implicit nod to Pondick's ambivalent relationship with the rules and regulations of doctrinaire minimalism into something that now reads as predictable and even adolescent (on my part, not hers) in the face of the uncanny and timeless presence of these figurative presences. Simply put, it is their calmness that makes them so spectacular and it is their *stillness* that makes them so transfixing Rather than merely releasing any repression (Freudian or otherwise) into the atmosphere and/or situation, Pondick's hybrid animal/human objects seem to be attracting and acquiring energy from their surroundings and using it to reinforce even further their immovable positions to absorb the irresistible force of their psychological and material properties. (Put another way while we are looking at them, the room disappears.) Embodying a formidable level of animal magnetism that takes us back to the unusual origins of the term, Pondick's merging of the full implications of self with what is likely to always remain the other (Garreau's book makes no mention of the possibility of actual animal/human hybrids) remains fundamentally human while yet again redelivering us to the primal.

When we say that someone has animal magnetism we usually only mean that he or she gives off a kind of sexual attraction that is both delivered and received instinctually not that he or she is literally magnetic, or somehow capable of exerting an actual pull on other objects or bodies with a force similar to gravity However the inventor of the concept, Franz Mesmer had just such a force in mind.⁴ Supposedly selecting the word animal not for its not-human connotations, but instead for the meaning of its Latin root *animus* ('soul'), Mesmer put forward the notion that humans and animals contained within their bodies a type of magnetic fluid that could function as a kind of therapeutic agent. He also chose the qualifying term animal in order to distinguish this type of magnetic force from the type found in certain minerals, or such larger cosmic forces as gravity itself And while it will come as no surprise that Mesmer's claims were found to be baseless by a commission set up by Louis XVI in 1784, it is because of Mesmer that when we discuss other more psychological territory we speak of being 'mesmerized' with or without the use of hypnosis, which Mesmer also thought was made possible not by susceptibility of the mind to the power of suggestion, but rather by that magnetic fluid itself flowing somewhere in our bodies and instrumental

strupenosti, temveč zaradi agresivne prisotnosti počrnele oblike izločka iz bronca, ki je ležala na blazini, perverzno pokrita z belim satenom. Tudi če bi bil svinec magnet, postelja ne bi izžarevala nikakršne živalske privlačnosti. Čeprav je umetničino delo pred dvajsetimi leti pogosto vsebovalo nekakšno psihološko ali morda namenoma patološko premestitev, ki na prvi pogled nima nič skupnega s premestitvijo v živalsko-človeških skulpturah, njeno delo in razvoj vseskozi zaznamuje osredotočenost na formo, ki jo tudi umešča v izjemno širok, a dosleden lok razvoja kiparstva, ki se začne pri starih Egipčanih in se katapultira v prihodnost zaradi trmaste navzočnosti teh del v večnem tukaj in zdaj.

Zato se zdi popolnoma smiselno, da je bila prva dokončana skulptura v seriji *Dog* (1998-2001), saj se brezkompromisno naslanja na sfingo in njeno uganko. Še vedno se spominjam prvega odziva na ta kip, ker že dolgo poznam Rona Pondick, sem bil popolnoma presenečen, da je svojo glavo posadila na pasje telo – čeprav je bilo njeno delo vedno telesno, ni nikoli uporabila sebe. Čeprav sem razumel, da je morala imeti v postopku odlivanja zaprte oči, me je veliko bolj prevzela presenetljiva čustvena vez, ki je izhajala iz popolne negibnosti. Umetnica je ta kip ustvarjala več let in ga večkrat odlila nazadnje v nerjavnem jeklu, tako kot tudi večino poznejših skulptur (Pri kipu *Dog* je uporabila zapleten tehničen postopek, da je postal odlitek rumenkast, zaradi česar je dobila površina edinstveno topel in magičen sijaj.)

Za ta niz je Rona Pondick odlila tudi druge dele svojega telesa: v kipu *Dog* so tudi njene dlani, ki so pritrjene na sprednje tace živalskega trupa. Tako kot odlitek glave so narejene z izjemno veliko podrobnostmi in neloščene, v nasprotju s pasjimi deli, za katere se zdi, da se bodo utekočinili. Pomaga nam tudi umetničin opis razlik v končni obdelavi in učinka na splošno navzočnost skulpture: »Želim, da bi se človeška, podrobna tekstura kože naravno združila z živalskimi telesi. Rada bi, da se zdi, kot bi ti dve ekstremni stanji trčili v enem telesu. Fizična drža živali in človeške kretnje pomagajo združiti ti dve tuji telesi.«⁵ Jasno je, da trk v teh skulpturah učinkuje zelo drugače kot prej, v nasprotju z motečim sopostavljanjem materiala in najdenih predmetov v zgodnejših delih, ki bi lahko kadar koli destabilizirali situacijo, v teh delih človeške komponente vedno upočasnijo živalska telesa, navidezno pripravljena na preoblikovanje, in jih pripravijo do samozadostnega počitka, zaradi česar trk vsekakor ni eksploziven.

Prav tako se zdi, da je stabilnost kipa *Dog* umetnici omogočila, da hitro razvije drže in poze prvega niza skulptur ki so začel nastajati leta 1998 in 1999. Spokojnost skulpture *Marmot* (1998-1999), na primer poudarjajo nenavadni odlitki vijoličastočrne silikonske gume in, kar je pomembneje, fizična specifičnost drže vzpostavlja njegovo osebnost: to bitje je v nezavesti, čeprav hkrati opazimo tudi neskladnost njegovih okleščanih rok, ki so enkrat razprte, drugič stisnjene v pest. V nasprotju s tem je *Fox* (1998-1999) videti, kot da končuje nastop, ker je Pondickina glava globoko sklonjena, za rep pa se zdi, da bo v tem hipu nevarno zamahnil. Tako za *Cougar* (1998-1999) kot *Untitled Animal* (1999-2001) se zdi, da se nekje vmes med dogajanjem in negibnostjo, predvsem za slednjega, kjer se človeška noga, ki prodira skozi stegna, konča z izjemno realističnim stopalom. Še bolj osupljiva je različica, ki je odlita v ogljikovo jeklo in ima izjemno otipljivo oranžno rjo. In nenazadnje, skulptura *Monkeys* (1998-2001), ki pretirava z vsem, popolnoma izrabi tehnologijo za odlivanje in razširi položaj dela iz singularnega proti skoraj orgijastični pluralnosti. Vendar tudi pri taki razigrani raznoterosti delo še vedno temelji na več odlitkih umetničnih rok in odlitku glave z zaprtimi očmi

in any attempt to make us do things we would never dare while fully conscious.

It's striking that when Pondick first used significant amounts of metal in her emerging work of the late 1980s, it was almost always lead, a material that is not magnetic, but resistant to other forces like x-rays, and, as an element, anything but hybrid. In *Lead Bed* (1987-1988), for example, Pondick used it to make an outrageously uncomfortable bed, turning down the malleable top sheet as if to invite us to climb in. Of course, that would be the last thing any of us would do, given not only the lack of comfort or even the toxicity of the situation, but also the invasive presence of a blackened bronze excremental form laid across a pillow perversely covered in white satin. Even if lead were magnetic, there's absolutely no chance of any form of animal attraction taking place in this bed. However, though much of Pondick's work from twenty years ago displayed a type of psychological, if not purposefully pathological, displacement that initially seems to be completely unlike that found in her animal/human sculptures, an unrelenting consistency to her careful attention to form has anchored not only the development of her work, but also its place in an extremely broad yet focused historical continuum of sculpture, reaching back to the Egyptians while catapulting itself into the future, all made possible by the work's stubborn presence in the perpetual here and now.

Therefore, it makes perfect sense that *Dog* (1998-2001) was the first sculpture of the series to be completed: it evokes the Sphinx, as well as its riddle, without apology. I still remember my immediate reaction to it: because of how long I've known Pondick, I was completely stunned to see her head placed upon the body of a dog – despite how utterly bodily her work had been, she had never before used her own form in it. Despite my understanding that the process of making a cast of her head would require that her eyes remain closed, I was far more caught up in the startling emotional connection that her utter silliness provoked. During the several years Pondick spent working on it she remade it several times; ultimately it was cast in stainless steel. As most of the subsequent sculptures would be. (In the case of *Dog* an elaborate technical process was used to give the steel yellowish cast, adding a uniquely warm and magical glow to its surface.)

Pondick cast other parts of her body for these sculptures: *Dog* also includes her hands, which have been attached to the front legs of the animal's torso. Like the cast of her head they are incredibly detailed and left unpolished, unlike the remaining dog parts of the body that seem to be almost liquid. Pondick's description of the distinctions in finishing and its subsequent effect upon the overall presence of the sculpture is helpful. "I want the human, detailed, skin texture to merge naturally into the animal bodies. I want these two extreme states to feel like they have collided in one body. The physical posture of each animal and the human gesture help merge these two foreign bodies."⁵ It is clear, however, that the collision that Pondick describes functions differently in these sculptures than it did before: unlike the jarring juxtapositions of materials and found objects in earlier works that perpetually threatened to destabilize their situation, in these sculptures the human components always slow down the seemingly ready-to-morph animal bodies, bringing them to a place of self-contained rest, making the collision far from explosive.

It seems as if the stability of *Dog* also allowed Pondick to quickly diversify the postures and the poses of the first set of sculptures that were all started in 1998 or 1999. The utter repose of *Marmot* (1998-1999) for example is heightened by

in neskončno mirnim obrazom, ki je strateško usmerjena v nas. V zadnjem nizu skulptur ki ga ustvarja od leta 2002, umetnica pri združevanju človeških in živalskih oblik uporablja več pretiravanja. V večini primerov so ta dela nadvse smešna, predvsem zato, ker uspejo ujeti vmesno točko med živalmi, ki se vedejo kot ljudje in obratno. Čeprav nam na ustnice narišejo nasmeh, so še vedno enako vznemirljive; morda je naš smeh plod tako strahu kot tudi identifikacije. Kljub temu je stoječa drža kipa *Otter* (2002-2005) zelo prikupna, še bolj zaradi simpatično-prismuknjene načina, kako pomanjšana umetničina speča glava, velikosti punčke, počiva na ramenih. Še manjša je glava na kipu *Muskrat* (2002-2005) ki učinkuje še bolj absurdno, saj ima namesto roke velikanski palec. *Cat* (2002-2005) in *Mouse* (2002-2006) obe spominjata hiperrealistične balone v obliki živali – prvi ima navidezno napihnjeno različico umetničine roke, drugi pa glavo v naravni velikosti, ki povsem prevlada nad telesom malega glodalca. Ni naključje, da se kar naprej vračam k umetničini glavi in dlanem, saj so še vedno vir privlačnosti, ki nas mesmerizira in omogoča, da vsemu verjamemo.

Chicago, 2008

its idiosyncratic casting in purplish-black silicone rubber but more importantly its personality is established by the physical specificity of its position this creature is unconscious, despite the jarring discrepancy of its truncated arms that end with an open hand on one and a closed fist on the other in contrast, *Fox* (1998-1999) looks as if it were completing some kind of performance, with its version of Pondick's head bowed low to the ground and a dangerous icicle-like tail ready to strike. Both *Cougar* (1998-1999) and *Untitled Animal* (1999-2001) seem to be situated somewhere between action and stillness, particularly in the case of the latter in which a human leg that has been cleanly through its thigh ends in a remarkably realistic foot. This is made particularly uncanny in the version Pondick cast in carbon steel that has a surface of extremely tactile orange rust. And, finally *Monkeys* (1998-2001) wonderfully takes everything too far from stretching the limits of the technology available for casting to expanding the situation of the work far beyond the singular toward a near-orgiastic plurality Even with such exuberant multiplicity however this work is still firmly anchored by several casts of Pondick's arms as well as one of her head, strategically aimed up at us, eyes closed, with its unendingly quiet face.

With the latest group of sculptures, all begun in 2002, Pondick has increased the level of exaggeration in her merging of human and animal forms. In most cases, these works are laugh-out-loud funny largely because they strike a perfect balance between animals acting like humans and vice versa. Despite the smile they may put on our faces, they lose none of their disturbing qualities; it may be that our laughter is based as much in fear as in self-identification Nonetheless, the standing pose of *Otter* (2002-2005) is particularly endearing, augmented by the sweet-yet-silly way that Pondick's doll-size sleeping head rests on its shoulders. Her even tinier head atop *Muskrat* (2002-2005) is made all the more absurd by one oversized thumb taking the place of an arm, while *Cat* (2002-2005) and *Mouse* (2002-2006) are both almost like hyper-real balloon animals, with a seemingly inflated version of the artist's hand on the former and a life-size version of her head attached to the latter that completely overwhelms the little rodent's body It's no accident that we keep returning to the artist's head and hands; they remain the source of the attraction, keeping us mesmerized while enabling everything to remain believable in the end

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¹ Joel Garreau, *Radical Evolution: The Promise and Peril of Enhancing Our Minds, Our Bodies and What It Means to Be Human* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), str. 3.; Herbert Grün, *Založba Karantanja*, 1994 *Splet norosti in bolečine*

² *Ibid.*

³ Terry R. Myers, »Pressing Pleasures: The Urgent Sculptures of Rona Pondick,« *Arts Magazine* 65 (November 1990), str. 90.

⁴ Glej <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesmerism>.

⁵ Octavio Zaya, »The Metamorphosis of an Object Maker: An Interview with Rona Pondick.« *In Rona Pondick: Works 1986-2001* (New York: Sonnabend Press, 2002), str. 132.

¹ Joel Garreau, *Radical Evolution: The Promise and Peril of Enhancing Our Minds, Our Bodies and What It Means to Be Human* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), p. 3.

² *Ibid.*

³ Terry R. Myers, "Pressing Pleasures: The Urgent Sculptures of Rona Pondick," *Arts Magazine* 65 (November 1990), p.90.

⁴ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesmerism>.

⁵ Octavio Zaya, "The Metamorphosis of an Object Maker: An Interview with Rona Pondick." *In Rona Pondick: Works 1986-2001* (New York: Sonnabend Press, 2002), p. 132