

the village
VOICE
ART

An Artist's Metamorphosis

ZOO STORY

RONA PONDICK

Sonnabend Gallery
 536 West 22nd Street
 Through May 4

For years, the sculptor Rona Pondick has explored the vexed and liminal terrain of humanity's abject impulses, with swarms of fleshly pink blobs whose misshapen teeth are poised for biting, or elongated legs hanging from the ceiling like misbegotten suicides. Her current show at Sonnabend strikes out in a new direction with a series of 11 sculptures that meld animalistic figures with uncannily accurate reproductions of her own body parts. All but two of the works are cast in stainless steel, whose malleable surface is alternately shined to a high polish or replicates in matte finish the minutest details of her skin texture, from the pores on her chin to the wrinkled soles of her feet.

In *Fox* (1998–99), the small animal's prancing, tensile energy, expressed in smooth, Brancusi-like forms, is weighed down with the artist's oversized head, which bends to the floor—quicksilver imagination meets terrestrial reality. In *Monkeys* (1998–2001), a gleaming, baroque tangle of manically gambling creatures, recently released from some intergalactic zoo or automotive body shop, is anchored to the ground by casts of the artist's broad forearms and her splayed hands. On two of their bodies, her concentrated, straining face with eyes closed appears in miniature. The elegant *Ram's Head* (2000–01) shows the same features in yellow-blue steel, crowned with ornamental horns and spouting long earrings made of multiple, diminutive Rona heads.

Pondick claims these hybrids descend from such illustrious ancient and modern precursors as the Sphinx, Egyptian hieroglyphs, and Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Surely there's also a shamanistic element to the artist's appropriation of animal grace and power. The dualities they evoke (and scramble) are manifold: abstraction and figuration, reason and myth, bestial nature and the mind's fantasies, self-portraiture and art as a mirror for others. For in these strange beings, we see our own reflection, as in a car fender or the blade of a knife. —Leslie Camhi