

Friday, September 19, 2014

An Interview with the American Sculptor Rona Pondick: Visceral Meaning

The American sculptor, Rona Pondick, is known internationally. She is represented by Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris/Salzburg and has worked with Sonnabend Gallery since 2000. Her work is focused on the concepts of metamorphosis and hybridization. One of her works has been selected for the show "From Rauschenberg to Jeff Koons" (Ca' Pesaro, Venice, from May 31, 2014 to January 4, 2015).



Rona Pondick, Monkeys, 1998-2001, courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac

How does it feel to manipulate matter itself to create a sculpture?

When I am working and in it, it's difficult for me to understand what the driving force is. I don't know why I choose any image but I am interested in how the physical makes psychological impact. I want the viewers to feel my work in their own body.

I like this definition: "how the physical makes psychological impact." What does it mean?

Sculpture is a solid by nature, but the meaning it holds or its impact, or symbolic interpretations varies. From the beginning, my work has been about a metamorphosis. Franz Kafka and the idea of transformation, something in flux, and things mutating relate to my work process. When I am working within each piece there is an evolution. Forms start shifting, and as the form shifts the meaning changes.

One of the conceptual consequences of the term "metamorphosis" is "hybridization," that sounds more "artificial" somehow and is a very important element of your not only poetic, but also philosophical and scientific approach to reality. Is it possible to find, in those shape shifting forms and visions, a mirror of the current state of being contemporary?

That is one of many ways that viewers have seen my work.



Rona Pondick, Wallaby, 2007-12, courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac

Do you mean that perception is fundamental to trigger the imagination of the viewers? I'm thinking about "Milk Man," 1989 or "Pillow Head," 2009 for example. What kind of reaction do you want to obtain, exactly? What do you expect?

Perception is fundamental—how else would people have a response? I don't want my work to elicit any single response. I have made sculptures that I find funny while other

people have found these same pieces terrifying. Or the opposite occurs. I am interested in contradiction and I also think contradiction is what makes us tick. Our own contradictory desires are what drive us and make us interesting and human.

What would you choose between the dreamlike world produced by an individual and the dreamlike imagery conceived by a wider, collective mind? Obviously those symbols whose meaning is objectively interpretable are more fit to be understood by a wider audience.

I'm not sure what you mean by "imagery conceived by a wider, collective mind." But I know I am as comfortable looking at objects that were made in the past as I am looking in my own time. While I think it is impossible to totally understand what a sculpture meant inside its own time and culture I know that I find things throughout history that are resonant and useful for me as a maker.

In 2009 I had a show at the Worcester Art Museum. The curator, Susan Stoops, invited me to curate an exhibition using objects from their encyclopedic collection and install them with my own work. I called the show the "Metamorphosis of An Object."



Rona Pondick, Milkman, 1989, courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac

It was an interesting challenge; how to look at objects from different cultures and different periods in history and organize the show of these objects in combination with my own sculpture. As a sculptor who is very involved with making, it is natural for me to ask how another object was made. Why was it made the way it was made? Did

technology affect the materials and making at that time? How did the materials affect the imagery and its meaning?

I organized the show around three themes, making groupings of visually related objects under the categories of Gesture and Posture, Representations of Hair, and Repetition of Imagery. I installed objects dating from B.C to the present from Egyptian, Cycladic, Greek, Pre-Columbian, Asian, Indian, African, and European cultures, along with my own sculptures, without any didactics or identifying labels because I wanted the show to be a visual experience.

Is your work about some sort of "future archeology"? If archeologists of the future found your works of art would this discovery allow them to know more about you as an individual, but also about our culture in the 21st century?

I think that my work is an extension of me. But how my work will be seen in the future in another century is out of my control. How do you think my work will be seen?

My answer to your question is that your work will become, in the future, crucial to understand not only your point of view about reality, but also the human mind and the mechanism of perception. What are you working on now?

I am continuing to work with both the animal/human and tree/human hybrid forms and am trying some new and interesting materials.

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Rona Pondick, Muskrat, 2002-05, courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac



Rona Pondick, Dog, 1998-2001, courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac



Rona Pondick, Crimson Queen Maple, 2003, courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac



Rona Pondick, Crimson Queen Maple, 2003, courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac



Rona Pondick, Dirt Head, 1999, courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac



Rona Pondick, Hump Chair, 1992, courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac