Rona Pondick

Life-casting Process

I think of my own body as an instrument, the way a dancer does. There’s a lot of me in my work, but I do not see my work as autobiographical. My face, my hands, my feet, all the human parts of my sculptures are life-casts from my body. I think a life-cast feels like a death mask, and the removal from the body is palpable. It has a strong physical and psychological presence. I also think there is something disturbingly unnatural about it because the body is present but the life is missing. Bernini, a real hero of mine, said in order to imitate the natural, the sculptor has to make something unnatural. He also said that once you remove color from someone’s face, it no longer looks like the person. Many people have actually said to me, “That’s your face in the sculpture? It doesn’t look anything like you.” I find it so interesting that a life-cast of my face, a factual impression taken directly from me, people think looks nothing like me.

Rona Pondick

Transformations

Body language is a form of visual communication that needs little explanation. We all have conscious and unconscious visceral responses to objects that we feel in our own bodies that make psychological meaning. Otter, which is an erect animal, whose head is slightly twisted, with hunched shoulders, making it feel somewhat pathetic. And when I elongated its torso, I thought it might be more interesting to
make the piece asymmetrical, and at first I cut its paw simply with the idea to extend the arm so it looked like it was drooped hopelessly. And then I wondered what would happen if I replaced the paw with a human hand at that scale. And once I tried, the whole sculpture began to feel more pathetic and just really interesting to me.

**Rona Pondick**

**Otter and Other Hybrid Forms**

My animal-human hybrids are either walking, reclining, seated.... They claim their physical space as like territorial animals. The human parts are cast from my body, the animal parts on the other hand are modeled and highly polished. I want the human, detailed skin texture to merge naturally into the animal bodies. The physical posture of the animal and the human gesture help merge these two foreign bodies as well. I want my animal-human sculptures to be about a kind of emotional and psychological state that makes you aware of your own body, as I think Otter does. The hybrid form is a form that just goes back in history to the Neolithic time and moves through almost every period of art up until now. And to me that's very rich as an idea that something could exist all the way back to the Neolithic time, exist now, and still have meaning that is very, very concrete and solid in our own time.

**Mystery Family Tour**

You are looking at a sculpture by Rona Pondick. Listen and look carefully to explore the mystery of this unusual creature. The title of this sculpture is *Otter*. I don’t think I’ve ever seen an otter like this before! Have you? What do you notice about this creature? Do any of the parts look human to you? This otter’s head and hand are actually the artist’s own. Rona often uses casts of her own body parts in her work. Sometimes she uses her face or her arms and legs. Do you think this otter is more like an animal or a human? Take a look at the otter’s facial expression. Is this creature sad or happy? What do you think this otter might be thinking or feeling? Take a close look at *Otter*. Can you see yourself in the reflection? Do you think the artist knew that would happen? This sculpture is made out of stainless steel, a hard and durable metal. If you were the artist, would you have used a different material to make this sculpture? If so, what would you have used and why?