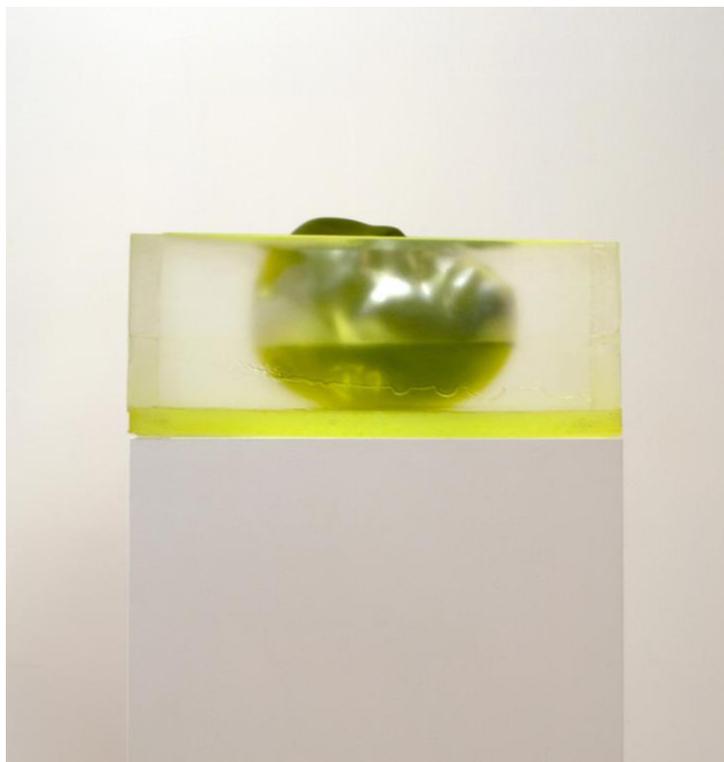


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# ***BOMB***

*Rona Pondick Works: 2013–2018* by Jessica  
Holmes

*Sculptures that depict the body's predicament.*



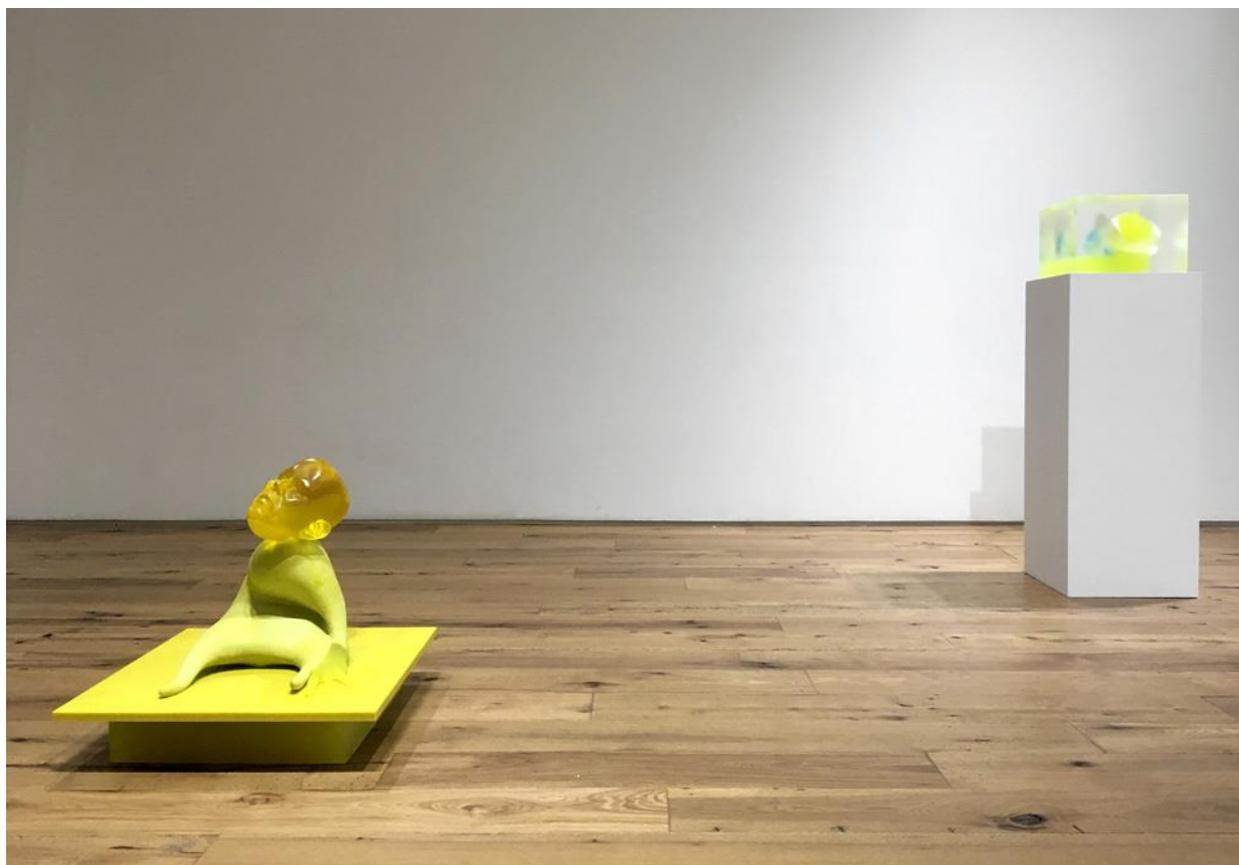
Rona Pondick, *Floating Green*, 2015–17. Pigmented resin and acrylic. 8 3/8 x 17 1/8 x 17 1/8 inches. Courtesy of MARC STRAUS, New York, and the artist.

A smooth, oblong head, encased in what appears to be a viscous substance, struggles to emerge in Rona Pondick's *Floating Green* (2015–17), one of a dozen of her most recent sculptures currently on view at MARC STRAUS in New York City. The nose and part of the face, made from resin, bob above the surface of an acrylic box, whose properties suggest a gelatinous substance

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tinted the alarming green of pond scum, though in actuality the material is hard, inflexible. The rest of the head remains submerged, seemingly locked in existential tension: will or won't this being survive?



*Rona Pondick Works: 2013–2018*. Installation view. Photos by Ken Tan. Courtesy of MARC STRAUS, New York.

This suspension lies at the heart of many of the sculptures in *Rona Pondick Works: 2013–2018*. Pondick, who has been working since the late 1970s, is known for her use of the human body in her sculpture, elements of which since the late 1990s she has often fused onto animal or plant forms to create hybrid beings that are at once alien and familiar, uncanny and often humorous. Though some of these newer works are composite creatures, quite a few are not; and despite the bright, candy-colored hues of most of the

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sculptures on display, their overall mood has taken a turn to more somber, reflective territory. This may be due in part to Pondick's own health condition. Since 2006, she has grappled with cervical spondylotic myelopathy—severe compression of her spine—as a result of which she has endured periods when she has been unable to work, had several surgeries, and experienced chronic pain. As Pondick noted to art historian Lynn Zelevansky, who authored the catalogue essay that accompanies the show, “The body has been a subject of my work since the '80s, but now it's my body.”

Pondick has needed to make certain concessions in her practice in order to keep working; one of them is a shift in her materials. The sculptures at MARC STRAUS are all composed of acrylic, resin, and Apoxie (a type of modeling compound), which she can manipulate, bake, and temper in her studio and which don't require foundry visits or other outside resources the way her prior, stainless steel works generally did. *Upside Down Green*(2018) is a subtle meditation on the artist's present existence. Encased in an acrylic cube, a green human head on a small, animalistic body hangs upside down from the ceiling of the box. As one circles around the small sculpture, a sense of distinct unease develops. There is an understated component to the sculpture that provokes a somatic queasiness. Though it may not be easy to see at first glance, once recognized it is nearly impossible to ignore that the lines of the cube are not of equal length, and the shape rests aslant on its pedestal. In its off-centered essence, and in the physical containment of the being in *Upside Down Green*, Pondick's own predicament of her body and its recent limitations seems present.

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Rona Pondick, *Orange Pink Green Grey*, 2015–17. Pigmented resin and acrylic. 19 x 17 3/4 x 17 3/4 inches. Courtesy of MARC STRAUS, New York, and the artist.

A work such as *Encased Blue Blue* (2015–18) manifests the psychological toll that these physical restrictions might also arouse. Once again, Pondick has encased an ovoid head in an acrylic box, though this one remains upright and is entirely disembodied. However, within the box she has formed the acrylic so that it appears to have sliced the head in half, and in front of one of the ears a frame of blue surrounds a smaller, opaque black square. This smaller square-

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within-the-square brings to mind the screen of an x-ray apparatus. From the side of the sculpture where one faces the blue-and-black square head on, it blocks the view through the otherwise translucent cube, and just below deliberate wobbles and waves are visible in the acrylic, which distort the shape of the blue head so that it seems as if the viewer is peering at the spongy coils of a brain. Despite the surgical undertones of the work, it is deeply emotional, bringing into sharp focus not only frailties of the body, but also the frustrated perseverance of the intellect when that body begins to deteriorate.

Looking at *Encased Blue Blue*, one feels the fraught anxiety that must occasionally overcome a sharp mind as it contemplates its vessel slowly wearing away. Pondick has channeled this helplessness, not only identifying it but also metaphorically capturing it in the hardened materials of her work. She manifests the inevitable limbo of late-age living that eventually catches up with us all, in one way or another.

[Rona Pondick Works: 2013–2018](#) continues at MARC STRAUS in New York City until December 16.

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