

Bellmer Nauman Pondick: Material Desire

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Nunu Fine Art, New York
in collaboration with
Sonnabend, New York and Ubu Gallery, New York



Hans Bellmer, Plate from
La Poupée ["The Doll"], 1936



Bruce Nauman, Reproduction proof of
Self Portrait as Fountain, 1966



Rona Pondick with
Charms, 1992

Nunu Fine Art, New York is pleased to announce the exhibition *Bellmer Nauman Pondick: Material Desire*, which brings together three artists—Hans Bellmer, Bruce Nauman, and Rona Pondick—separated by generations and geographies, yet united by their engagement with the human body as material, and subject, and as a tool for experimentation and exploration of the implications of the psychic self. “Guided by Rona Pondick’s selection of the artists’ works, her own practice, and her deep, career-long engagement with the body, we are encouraged to look differently, ahistorically, and creatively at the juxtaposition of these artists, despite their temporal and geographical remove from one another.”¹

The exhibition will showcase vintage photographs from Bellmer’s 1930s *La Poupée* series, photographic works and videos from the 1970s by Nauman, and a selection of Pondick’s sculptures, primarily from the 1990s, to examine the desire to understand and shape the self; not by depicting the whole, but by disassembling its parts. For all these artists, the body is a vehicle for the exploration of psychological impulses, grounded in the materiality and color of their work, and in the spaces that the work occupies.

Bellmer’s iconic *La Poupée* dolls, with their ball-jointed, mutable anatomies, suggest a body caught between trauma, play, and invention. His photographic tableaux, made during the inter-war period in Germany, staged these theatrical disarticulated surrogates in exaggerated, impossible, and suggestive poses. As Bellmer stated: “...the body is like a sentence that invites us to rearrange it, so that its real meaning becomes clear through a series of endless anagrams. I wanted to reveal what is usually kept hidden...”² Bellmer’s dolls become both surrogates and symbols that reflect a range of desires, while being

provocative about how representations of the feminine body and gender were used during the Nazi era. Bellmer was labeled a degenerate artist, and in 1938, he fled from Berlin to France, where he joined the resistance, and was captured and interned in a camp in Aix-en-Provence. Upon his release in 1940, Bellmer's focus expanded to drawing, engraving, painting, and sculpture, all centered on the body.

During the 1960s and 70s, Nauman turned toward using his own body as a medium and subject. In much of this work, he renders the body uncanny, sometimes absurd, but always charged. This exhibition includes five studies for holograms and two videos, all from the early 70s, where he manipulates his face, thigh, and genitals obsessively. In *Bouncing Balls*, Nauman jostles his scrotum repeatedly. In 1969, speaking in psychologically revealing terms, Nauman said, "Whenever I give a public presentation of something I did in the studio, I go through an incredible amount of self-exposure which can also function, paradoxically, as a defense."³ Since the 80s, Nauman has continued to work with photography and video, while adding other sculptural forms including casts of his own head and hands, and found taxidermy. Experimenting in a wide range of mediums and materials, Nauman is continuously exploring the psychological potential of the body through its parts.

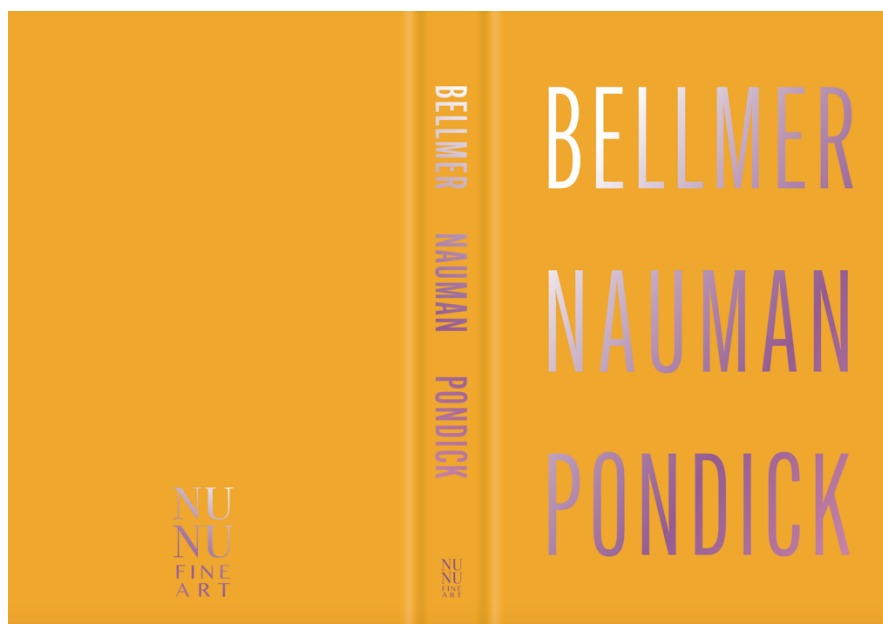
The bodily fragment has been a focus in Pondick's work since she began making sculpture in the 70s. In the mid-80s, she used found objects that relate to the body—shoes, teeth, chairs—integrating them in modeled forms to make often contradictory and disturbing relationships, that have been seen as emotionally, psychologically, and socio-politically charged. In the early 90s, she started taking casts from her own body—at first from her teeth, later moving to using her head, and other body parts—and continued to incorporate them in unlikely wholes. Pondick has described herself as "a material-holic," and she has a long history of using a wide range of materials, looking for their suggestive properties. In *Small Pink Treats* (1992), Pondick embedded casts of her teeth in small pink balls that look like candy—but with a sexual twist—and scatters four hundred of them on the floor. The most recent piece included in the exhibition, *Encased Orange with Pink Teeth* (2019–23), features an enlarged cast of Pondick's head floating in an acrylic block evocative of water, of embryonic fluid, and of birth and death. In her installations and individual sculptures—whether hanging, scattered, or encased—Pondick's psychologically charged work is always deeply engaged with the body.

Bellmer, Nauman and Pondick have deep connections to literature: Bellmer to Sade, Nauman to Beckett, and Pondick to Kafka. If Bellmer's studio was a laboratory of desire, and Nauman's a space for psychological unraveling, Pondick's is a site of bodily metamorphosis.

¹ Albert Godetzky. "Fleshing Out" in Bellmer Nauman Pondick: Material Desire (Nunu Fine Art, 2025), pp. 13-14.

² Quoted in Therese Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer* (University of California Press, 2001), pp. 5-6.

³ Quoted in Janet Kraynak, ed. *Please Pay Attention Please: Bruce Nauman Words: Writings and Interviews*. (MIT Press, 2005), p. 194.



The catalogue *Bellmer Nauman Pondick: Material Desire* is an outgrowth of conversations between Rona Pondick and Nunu Hung. So many rich connections between the three artists became apparent that they turned to the idea of a catalogue that would document, expand upon, and add to the central ideas of the exhibition.

The art historian and curator, Albert Godetzky, whose work often focuses on the intersections of historical art with contemporary artistic practices, wrote the essay “Fleshing Out.”

“Reflections on Material Desire,” follows the essay and is a conversation between Pondick and Hung, in which they discuss the genesis of the exhibition and many of the ideas behind the publication. The catalogue is then divided into three separate sections—Material Desire: ‘Body’, ‘Color’ and ‘Placed’. In each section, reproductions of Bellmer’s, Nauman’s and Pondick’s work are paired with quotations from the artists, from art historians and from critics, that point to and expand upon relationships between the artists.

All of the work in the exhibition is reproduced along with additional works by each artist.

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