



Ron Mueck (Australian, b. 1958). *Two Women*, 2005. Mixed media. Glenn Fuhrman Collection, New York

Educator packet for the special exhibition

***Ron Mueck***

on view at the Brooklyn Museum, November 3, 2006–February 4, 2007



# Two Women

## Representing the Figure

### Description

This sculpture faithfully reproduces the minute details of two human figures. They stand on a small base, huddled close together as if in conversation. On the left, one of the women stands with age-sloped shoulders, her hands gathered in front of her, with a gold wedding band visible on her left ring finger. She has very light, almost translucent skin, and short, somewhat unruly, curly white hair. Her oversized winter coat covers all but a glimpse of her flowered blouse and black skirt. She has on a pair of thick stockings and black penny loafers. While her brow is furrowed, her companion's eyebrows are slightly raised. This second figure wears a similar outfit, a chocolate-and-dark brown checked coat, black skirt, brown stockings, and laced walking shoes. Some wisps of hair have escaped her bun. Her arms are folded across her chest.

Everything is lifelike, down to the wrinkles on the women's faces and the creases in their stockings, but the figures are much smaller than life-size, standing just 33½ inches high.

### Artist Background

Ron Mueck was born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1958. He began his career as a puppet maker, working for an Australian children's television program. He later worked for Jim Henson on *Sesame Street* and *The Muppets* and supervised the special effects for two feature films. In 1996, he made a sculpture of Pinocchio for the painter Paula Rego, his mother-in-law. Charles Saatchi, a well-know art collector, noticed the sculpture and a year later included Mueck in the exhibition *Sensation*, which opened at London's Royal Academy, and later traveled to the Brooklyn Museum.

Mueck's figures are startlingly realistic. Each work includes many details, such as the stubble on a man's chin or the veins beneath the skin's surface.

However, his use of gesture, pose, and scale are also very important in his work, as they act to engage the viewer's emotions and aid the viewer in understanding the psyche of the figures he depicts. In his work to date, Mueck has explored themes of birth, infancy, youth, adolescence, sexual maturity, middle age, old age, and death.

### Artistic Process

The process of creating the fiberglass and silicon sculptures requires many steps. First, to determine the figure's pose, Mueck begins by making a series of small clay models, using photographs of the human form or live models. Then he decides how large or small to make the figure using a series of drawings. Next, Mueck sculpts the figures in clay with all the lifelike details of expression and skin texture that appear in the finished work. If the sculpture he is making is very large, he must first build a metal frame, wrap it with wire mesh, coat it with plaster strips, and cover the entire surface with clay. Then he can create a mould using the clay figure and take a cast with silicone or fiberglass if the figure is very large. The final steps involve painting details like veins and blemishes and gluing each individual hair in place.



Clay figures for *Two Women*. Courtesy of the artist and Anthony d'Offay, London



**The artist making final adjustments to *Two Women*. Courtesy of the artist and Anthony d'Offay, London**

## Questions for Viewing

Describe the sculpture. What are the figures doing? How are they feeling? What details do you notice in their facial expressions and gestures that express these feelings?

Imagine a setting where the figures are standing. What is going on around them?

These figures are only 33½ inches tall. Why do you think that Mueck chose to work in this small scale?

How would the sculpture change if the figures were larger than life-size?

How does Mueck make this sculpture look so real?

Does the sculpture continue to look realistic the more you look at it? How so? Why do you think Mueck uses silicone and fiberglass for his sculptures instead of marble or bronze?

## Classroom Activities

### *Emotional Baggage*

Write a list of different emotions or feelings. Put those words on cards and place them in a bag. Pick out one card and act it out in front of a partner or the entire class. Can they guess the word? Discuss how facial expression and gesture help to convey your selections.

### *Super Size Me*

Experiment with scale. Create sculptures of one subject in three very different sizes. What materials will you use to make a tiny sculpture? A large one? Why?

### *Artistic Process*

Make a clay figure that explores a mood or feeling. Follow the same process as Ron Mueck: Take plaster casts of your hands and feet. Use large-scale exploratory drawings. Create small-scale clay models. Experiment with placing your sculptures in strange situations.

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