

ARTFORUM

RONA PONDICK FICTION/NONFICTION

In Rona Pondick's edgy and frequently funny new works, the body seems to speak from every pore. Hoping to bridge the duality of the psychic and the physical, Pondick readdresses the born-to-die body we all live in, as both the house of our flesh and home to our dreams and fears. The image we thought we knew is dismembered and disfigured, offering palpable psychological resonances that reconcile visible and invisible worlds.

Reconciliation takes formal as well as ideational forms in Pondick's work, as diverse styles converge. Her voice is rooted in Surrealism, and the urge to unite distinct realities that fuels the collage esthetic serves her vision. In *Loveseat*, 1991, one of seven discrete pieces exhibited, Pondick presents her most compacted oppositions. Where furniture (in particular the bed) suggested the body in her earlier work, here it becomes the body itself. As if holding their breath, the cushions become breasts (or buttocks), and the front legs, sporting men's formal shoes, bracket a smaller penislike leg footed with a tiny "Maryjane," which hangs from the center. We look down on this piece as we would on a small child; we read its blue lace covering as an antique layer on this psychologically laden vision of childhood. *Baby Blue*, 1990, a pair of stuffed polyester blue tights growing like aberrant legs from white baby shoes, hangs from tacks on a nearby wall. One wonders about the strong formal association with Pondick's earlier fecal mounds, but a more central question revolves around the extension of a narrative suggested in *Loveseat*. Is this "Maryjane" years later? And how shall we call what went wrong? As in most of Pondick's images, more questions are raised than are answered.



Rona Pondick, *Loveseat*, 1991, wax, shoes, plastic, and lace, 17½ x 21 x 26".

Comic Limb, 1991, offers another unsettling image of the body that attracts us even as we want to turn away. Here the idea of dismemberment is made particularly palpable: a single, severed wax and plastic leg is partially covered by pages from "Spider Man" comic books. The popular cultural reference helps move this reduced version of human form even further away from any narrative image of the body. To add to the mystery, the foot of this club-shaped form sits awkwardly in a pale satin pump that identifies its gender but hardly offers illumination. In its totality, *Comic Limb* seduces us with its unlikely materiality and keeps us focused on its unresolved associations.

In direct contrast, *Little Bathers*, 1990–91, further opens the door on metaphorical meanings. Five hundred pink heads, with outsized toothy grins, are scattered on the floor. The soft rectangle they form together swerves slightly to acknowledge a column in the gallery. What's most compelling about these irregular plastic spheres with rubber teeth is the chattering sound they seem to make and the movement they imply. Here the visible and the invisible are made equally apparent; it is as if these hand-size heads had crossed this line and made their presence virtual. A few months prior to this exhibition, Pondick installed both *Comic Limb* and *Little Bathers* at the Beaver College Art Gallery in Pennsylvania. While there is a strong sense of intentional placement and lighting to control our experience of the individual pieces at fiction/nonfiction, the installation consider-

ations at the Beaver Gallery add another dimension to the work. *Comic Limb* is encountered first. In an otherwise darkened space, one is naturally drawn to the lone spotlight image. Peering around the corner of a partial wall, a man's brown shoe lying on the floor redirects our attention to the second part of this installation, consisting of a truly awful pink-lace-covered snake/leg that curves out. This leg is capped with a second shoe at its other end. Within the curve of this form, 148 of the original 500 "Little Bathers" are randomly sprawled across the floor as if they were spawning; it is as though they were eggs that might grow tails and swim off if the giant leg weren't bordering their shore. Suspended above is a new, smaller version of the disembodied pink leg made of white cloth with white shoes. Is the cycle about to repeat itself? An explicit family romance animates this installation and seems to confirm the more subtle dialogue between the discrete objects exhibited at fiction/nonfiction. Working with images that run the risk of seeming either psychologically opaque or trite, Pondick manages to give her poetic anxiety convincing physical life.

—Eileen Neff