

# Art in America

November 1993

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## Rona Pondick at Jose Freire Fine Art

In exhibitions in Israel and New York last season, sculptor Rona



Rona Pondick: Installation view, 1993;  
at Jose Freire Fine Art.

Pondick turned to installation and, in so doing, gave her work a new expansiveness and aggressive edge. The creepy, surrealistic iconography the artist is known for persisted, but this time she paid a theatrical homage to scatter art in the rhythmic disposition of elements. This move allowed her to freshen work that, to a certain degree, relies on shock—and thus viewer unfamiliarity—for its expressive impact.

Huge, stuffed, cigar-shaped objects upholstered in pink lace

with a man's shoe at either end were suspended vertically from the ceiling by pink ribbons. In the first room, they were crowded together like sides of beef hanging in a meat-packing factory, but gradually thinned out. Underfoot was a generous scattering of roundish objects about the size of tennis balls, covered with patchy black hair, which were split open to display clenched or gnashing yellow teeth. In addition to the balls, Pondick showed mounds of cast plaster baby bottles with latex nipples.

As a whole, the installation read as a kind of nightmare birthday party where the superintending adults, favors and gifts were reconstituted as grotesque hybrids. Sporadically, a unique object was thrown in; for example, a swing with baby shoes at each end and a bottle nipple at center—a powerful, fetishistic conflation of the archetypal symbols of infancy. This is not the first time that the artist has exhibited groupings of her perverse, labor-intensive objects. Their abundance and recurrence in each show and over time evoke a primal trauma.

Psychoanalytic narratives and their art-historical familiar, Surrealism, have often been referred to in critical writing on Pondick. This year's hair-and-tooth balls reasserted the artist's indebtedness to Meret Oppenheim, just as her breast-like bottles recall Louise Bourgeois. These references have all been noted before, however, pointing to the danger that the artist's tale may grow repetitious. Still, I must confess to a genuine frisson when I tripped over one of those fierce little balls—which seem nothing less than disembodied monads of rage.

—Faye Hirsch