

Rona Pondick

Sonnabend

In this exquisite exhibition, Rona Pondick's sculptures, along with some delicately colored drawings, were a blend of the uncannily conceived and the meticulously handcrafted. Gleaming bronze and stainless-steel figures—sometimes lustrously painted, as in *Dwarfed White Jack* (2010–12)—conjured Gothic tales of Kafkaesque metamorphoses.

The show was elegantly installed throughout the several rooms of the gallery, with each fanciful work usually placed low and given enough space to cast its singular spell. Pondick's bizarre but beautiful hybridizing of her head, hands, and other body parts with a beaver, a wallaby, a prairie dog, trees, and pillows is something she has been doing since the late 1990s. It's an exploration of the connections between human and nonhuman manifestations of life that seems at once extremely personal and conceived from a critical distance. Pondick's images, after all, are not self-portraits, but abstractions with disquieting psychological reverberations; they paradoxically attract and repel, as in *White Beaver* (2009–11), where the



Rona Pondick, *Ginko* (detail), 2007–12, stainless steel, 57¼" x 33¾" x 41". Sonnabend.

human head, chin scraping the ground, is about half the size of the animal body. Another of Pondick's tactics is to unexpectedly shift the scale of her various, realistic components from life-size to tiny—some heads are so small they seem to be merely seeds—radically transforming the sculptures' meaning and impact.

Notable exceptions to the ground-bound works were *Ginko* (2007–12), a tree with hands for leaves, and *Head in Tree* (2006–8), a stainless-steel semblance of a tree, commandingly framed by the entryway at the rear of the gallery. Nested in the crux of latter's bare, candelabrum-like branches is a flawlessly smooth, silver head, its eyes shut, grieved or bemused by its altered state—or resigned. However interpreted, it was one of the most hauntingly poetic images in the show.

—Lilly Wei