

Translating experience: art of words and spirit

RONA PONDICK
At: Howard Yezerki Gallery, 11
Newbury St., through Nov. 2

By Nancy Stapen
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

Fall is traditionally the richest season in the art world. Three not-to-be-missed shows this week prove that, despite the recession, Boston's galleries continue to offer work of the highest caliber.

Art Review The prominent New York sculptor Rona Pondick has been seen locally in group shows (notably MIT's controversial "Corporal Politics"); she has her first Boston solo show at the Howard Yezerki Gallery.

Pondick also works with images of the body, but her surreal juxtapositions probe the psyche's repressed recesses. At once playful and nightmarish, these are objects riddled with the anxiety of unresolved conflicts. Closely aligned with Freudian theory, they delve into the realms of fetish and fixation.

Although Pondick taps into a universal reservoir of angst, her focus is on female sexual development. In the floorpiece "No," a pair of Mary Janes (that emblem of little girlhood) sprouting "legs" made from plaster-filled baby bottles is poised in the center of a lumpy canvas pillow. "No" intimates both solace and shame; the milky baby bottles imply nurturing, and the pillow is soft and inviting. But a large stain seemingly seeping from the Mary Janes suggests a forbidden sort of dirtiness, perhaps bedwetting. "No" conjures an agonized childish universe where comfort and helplessness are inextricably entwined.

"Red Platter" consists of a wooden plate heaped with a mound of crude, fist-sized waxy red heads. Each has but one single recognizable feature: a set of red teeth. The warm red tones suggests heat, and the heads seem to be chattering or laughing, but in a mad way that is chilling. They also resemble apples, the biblical fruit of knowledge and shame. Nevertheless, they cannot be classified within the mind's catalog of known objects. Disconcertingly enigmatic, "Red Platter" dredges up



Probing the psyche: Pondick's "Ballerina."

unsettling associations with such diverse phenomena as cannibalism, mass graves, lust and the expulsion from Paradise, or just some cosmic joke of the gods. It is at once contained yet utterly out of control. In short, it manifests Freud's theory that an underlying irrationality is barely reined in by society's veneer of civilization.

"Baby" is a pair of truncated legs made up of infant's shoes and brown wax calves culminating in baby bottles, which rests horizontally on a shelf. With its unisex symbolism and scatological associations, the work acts as a more generalized comment on human maturation, again rooted

in psychoanalytical theory. Specifically, it alludes to the necessity of successfully passing through the anal and oral stages of development. Cut off and immobile, these "Baby" legs eerily convey the crippling effects of being stuck in infantile behavior.

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