



CURRENTS

February, 1989

Rona Pondick



Angel, 1987-88, wax, plastic, nylon, pillows, 29 1/2 x 20 x 20"; Collection of Eileen and Michael Cohen, New York.
Photo: J. Kotter

We seldom expect art to be dirty--either literally or figuratively--but Rona Pondick's sculpture is just that. Angel, for instance, consists of five filthy pillows supporting a nasty knot of turd-like forms. Although the scatological content of her work (which appears not only in Angel but in all of the objects presented in CURRENTS) is quite striking, Pondick's attitude toward this subject matter is not moralistically dogmatic: she is sensitive to the pleasure as well as the embarrassment involved with trespassing social taboos or codes of polite behavior. Puddle for instance, which the critic Elizabeth Hess likened to "urine, maybe semen" [1] has a strong feeling of release in an artistic as well as a bodily sense. Not only does the "puddle" of lead look like a monument to someone's "letting go on the floor," but it is also a refreshing collapse of artistic decorum: as though the sculpture had lost its composure and dissolved on the floor.

Pondick's art is clearly reminiscent of Louise Bourgeois' sculpture where an erotic, and often grotesque, reference to the body is central. She also belongs in the context of what has been called post-Minimalism--meaning artists who manipulate the pure or "primary" forms of minimalist art of the 1960s. As the critic Michael Brenson has stated "Like many post-Minimalists [Pondick] wants to use shapes and materials prominent in Minimalism in ways that will arouse consuming, visceral feelings. . . . The bed, for her, is a place in which sex, birth, protection, sickness and death run together." [2] More recently artists like Robert Gober--who has also used the bed as an important metaphor--and even Haim Steinbach who places store-bought objects on Donald Judd-like shelves have similarly applied Minimalist vocabulary to more representational content.

Pondick's sculptures manifest a dramatic self-assertion which might be considered feminist in its impact (although this is not the artist's stated intention). Her frequent use of the bed as an image refers not only to the domestic environment but particularly to conventional "women's work": i.e. making a bed. Within this traditional arena of sexually inflected submission, however, a sharp aggressiveness erupts. In White Bed, for instance, not only is the place of rest imagined as monstrous pile of lumpy pillows on a block of wood, but on the top pillow lies one of Pondick's phallic, snake-

like fecal objects, soiling the whole thing. If, as the saying goes, Pondick has made her bed, she certainly isn't going to lie in it. She has used the waste of a (woman's?) body to make the bed uninhabitable. This gesture may be interpreted both as an act of resistance, and one of sensuality and release.

Like Aimee Rankin (whose sculptures are also included in CURRENTS), Mike Kelley, and others, Pondick has insisted on using the body as a subject for art--not the idealized body we associate with Greek sculpture, but rather the whole body as we live in it, complete with its repulsive and embarrassing processes and characteristics. In an era where sanitized sexuality is aggressively promoted through advertisements, television dramas, and even--with good reason--safe sex pamphlets, Pondick is insisting on a more complex, joyful and aggressive attitude toward the body as a metaphor.

David Joselit

1. Elizabeth Hess, "Ladies' Rooms," The Village Voice, May 24, 1988
2. Michael Brenson, "Rona Pondick--'Beds'," The New York Times, Friday, September 9, 1988

CHECKLIST

Angel, 1987-88

wax, plastic, nylon and pillows

29 1/2 x 20 x 20"

Collection of Eileen and Michael Cohen, New York

Mine, 1987

wax

32 x 28 x 22"

Courtesy fiction/nonfiction, New York

Puddle, 1987-88

cast lead

4 1/2 x 14 x 48"

Courtesy fiction/nonfiction, New York

White Bed, 1988

wood, paint, pillows, lead, wax, plastic and gauze

32 x 142 x 43"

Collection of Alan Dinsfriend, Boston

BIOGRAPHY

Born: 1952, Brooklyn, New York

Education: 1977, Yale University School of Art, MFA

1974, Queens College, BFA

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