

The New York Times

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, APRIL 14, 2006

WEEKEND Arts FINE ARTS
LEISURE

Art in Review

Rona Pondick

*Sonnabend Gallery
536 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
Through April 22*

Veering away from the raw, earthy materials and found objects she used to depend on for her viscerally Freudian assemblages, Rona Pondick began using sophisticated metal-working technology in the late 90's to create strange, funny and sad self-portraits: stainless steel sculptures that have smooth and shiny animal bodies and realistic faces and hands copied by digital means from Ms. Pondick's own body.

Standing on its hind legs, two and a half feet high, "Otter" has a sleek, cylindrical body that looks as if it was formed from mercury. It also has one little human hand and the mournful face, with closed eyes, of a middle-aged woman. The Dali-esque "Cat" has a small, reclining, feline body, a doll-sized human head and, most alarmingly, a twice-life-size human hand realized in hyper-realistic detail.

The tour-de-force of the show, called "Crimson Queen Maple," is a low, ornamental tree cast in stainless steel measuring almost 12 feet across. You could mistake it for a real tree until you get close and discover scores of tiny human heads growing from its branches like buds.

Ms. Pondick's sculptures are like three-dimensional stills from a science fiction horror movie — imagine a futuristic version of David Cronenberg's film "The Fly." They are technically slick — too much so, some will say — but they vividly express how unstable, disjunctive and frightening states of human consciousness can sometimes feel.

KEN JOHNSON