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The Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Winter 1992/3

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Rona Pondick: Pink and Brown
Billy Rose Pavilion
Winter 1992/3

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Pink or Brown?

Rona Pondick created the installation *Pink and Brown* during a three-week stay in Jerusalem, simultaneously converting the Billy Rose Pavilion into her temporary studio and exhibition space.

The images and materials she uses are highly suggestive and evocative, as are the colors pink and brown, which can be abstract, but also can be specific. Pink is usually considered the color of flesh, sensuality and emotions, while brown is perceived as standing for earth. Pondick has used lace and ribbon for pink, and used men's shoes and wax for brown. Male and female duality is concealed in each object, which may be conceived as a metaphor, and as such arouses as many associations as there are viewers who look at it.

Multiple anthropomorphic fragments that look like enigmatic fat and soft limbs dominate the entire first space of the pavilion, which resembles a theatre setting, a kind of jolly proscenium. Sealed with shoes at both ends, the legs hang from the ceiling at different lengths, suspended from pink ribbons which cascade to the floor. On the floor, scattered like fallen angels, are several "half-legs" including one pair of children's legs, which lie beside the entrance to the pavilion.

In all probability, the foot is to be taken as an ambivalent symbol. For Jung, it is what confirms man's direct relationship with the reality of earth (brown), and he considers that it is frequently phallic in significance.¹ But the foot, like the shoe and the footprint, also has funereal implications. In a sense, a dying man is "going away." Shoes arouse many more associations: according to Swedenborg, shoes symbolize "lowly nature," in the sense of both the humble and the despicable,² and they might also be seen as a symbol of the female sex organ. At the end one can find it difficult to distinguish which element is female and which is male, as they are completely fused in one unit. This act of "amputation" or fusion is determined by Pondick's attraction to desires and fantasies about the "other" - to sense a process of permutation....to know how it is to be Him or Her, at least once in our life. Furthermore, used shoes contain memories, revealing through their shapes thrilling stories about their anonymous owners.³

Before approaching the second, dark space, one passes three "transition" objects, all of them integral parts of the installation. First is the *Tongues*, which is one of several results of the artist's preoccupation with the subject of bed; second is a "corner" piece on the steps which divide the gallery into two spaces, consisting of a pile of twisted legs, with a brown shoe on one end and a baby bottle on the

other (another phallic element?). The third work, *Swing*, is suspended in midair. Christian Leigh describes it as "delicate and wholly (holy) white [with the exception of two soles (souls)], it appears to be a trapeze made from the bottom half of a small child, two tiny shoes pointing outward....like one of the gold and white cherubs in the late baroque Ansamkirche in Munich....the baby white swing holds within its grasp the promise of total redemption. It entralls, shocks, and thrills in the way that Kafka does. What is most impressive is that such suspense and restraint can come to fruition so rapturously."⁴

Finally we enter the gloomy space where morbid and disturbing heads, cast from wax in ten different types and sizes, lie in a horror-vacui way on the floor. Here culminates the ambiguity of the whole installation: are these macabre shapes a requiem for all embryos that were never born, or is this an open grave, a field of skulls, a memento mori commemorating all victims of massacres? Or are these some sort of vaginas, cruel and aggressive boxing gloves, huge beans, potatoes, kidneys or bizarre Redon-like or Munch-like creatures embodying a horrific cry of pain?

The two spaces of the installation complement and contradict each other at the same time. The first one is activated from the ceiling to the floor, fully lit, bright, predominantly pink; the second is grim, contemplative, minimal, unifying the chocolate-brown heads into a circle in the center of the floor.

Although this installation evokes an amalgamation of such contradicting thoughts and perceptions as joy and pain, birth and death, sex and fear, pleasure and cruelty, to mention just a few, the organic materials it deploys strengthen the overriding sense of the ephemeral that dominates the exhibition as it does life itself.

Suzanne Landau
The Landeau Foundation Curator
of Contemporary Art

1 C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, London, 1956

2 Harold Bayley, *The Lost Language of Symbolism*, London, 1912 (repr.. 1951)

3 The artist began to collect various objects, including shoes, around 1987. She soon found shoes to be the most appealing.

4 Christian Leigh, "Dark of Heartness, R. P.'s Scrap and Other Symbolism," text for the leaflet for the exhibition held at Beaver College Art Gallery, February 6 - March 3, 1992

