

FLOYD JILLSON/Staff

'Shoes,' is one of two shoe sculptures in Rona Pondick's show at the Hillman Holland Gallery on view through June 15.



## Provocative Sculpture Explores Egos

By Catherine Fox  
Visual Arts Critic

### ART REVIEW

New York artist Rona Pondick's confrontational sculptures take the joke out of bathroom humor. Her spare but unsparing objects pierce through the protective shell of shared smirks, prodding the viewer to recognize our culture's ambivalent fascination with bodily functions and the uneasy demarcation between "pure" and "impure."

Freud viewed art as a form of regression, and Ms. Pondick takes us back with her in a small but provocative exhibition at Hillman Holland Gallery, all the while knowing that we haven't left our superegos behind.

"Silver Lining," a lumpy bronze mound covered with steel wool that sits unceremoniously on the floor, looks uncomfortably like excrement. Evoking the same association, strands of hair and aluminum foil mixed with gunky black liquid plastic form a pile on top of a pair of black suede high-heels. Their pointy toes peek out from the pile like the Wicked Witch's shoes under Dorothy's house in "The Wizard of Oz."

But this art has more than a whoopie cushion shock-'em-and-run mentality. For all its domesticity,

the shoe also can be a metaphor for so-called civilizing impulses that are really a form of cultural imprisonment. Any woman knows that pointed toes are a sexist torture. Thwarting the shoes' functionality with elemental muck is a blow for psychological freedom. As for the mound, if one subscribes to the connection Freud makes between excrement and money, "Silver Lining" might be construed as a commentary on the economic system in which art functions.

Like "Silver Lining," a merging of creation and waste, "Velvet Bed" reflects Ms. Pondick's interest in joining or confounding what we perceive as opposites. Associations to "bed" encompass birth and death, as well as the myriad experiences and opposing feelings in between — sexuality, sickness, comfort, pain, safety, vulnerability. The sculpture's long snaky shape, however, makes it look less like a bed than an altar.

Whatever it is, it offers no comfort, physical or spiritual. It is too narrow to lie on, and too unstable. A viewer attracted to the smooth

downy cushions probably will be repelled by the offering it contains — a decidedly fecal, heavy oblong bronze object that weighs down the cushions at one end and literally holds the piece together.

"Velvet Bed" is a sculptural incarnation of a popular bumper sticker on the condition of life and an acknowledgment that our bodies are inescapable.

The distilled forms and sensitivity to materials suggest the artist's roots in Minimalism. One can see the influence of her teachers at Yale University Art School — the intensity Joel Shapiro pummeled into a domestic in his miniature house sculptures, the abrasive assertiveness of Richard Serra.

It might be tempting to compare her to peers who use ordinary objects in a stark manner, but unlike such artists as Jeff Koons, whose silver-plated vacuum cleaners target materialistic ills of our culture, Ms. Pondick aims deeper. Her fierce and unrepressed art is meant to unsettle a psychological complacency. She lifts the veil of civilization long enough to remind us how fragile and artificial that veil really is.

Rona Pondick. Hillman Holland Gallery. Through June 15. 2575 Peachtree Road. 233-7494.