

Living

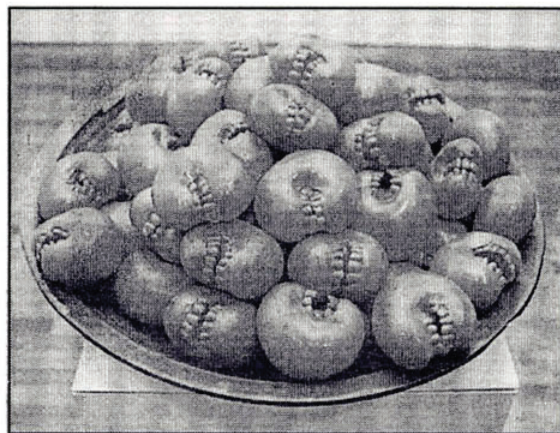
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What's it all mean? Decide for yourself says artist Rona Pondick, above, with her piece titled "Spiral." Her sculpture at right, "Fallen," is one of her furniture-themed pieces on display at the Art Museum. Although the work is humorous on the surface, some interpreters see dark statements beneath the whimsy.



Body by Pondick



MELVIN GRIER/The Cincinnati Post

These toothy-mouthed objects are part of a sculpture exhibit by Rona Pondick that opens Friday at the Cincinnati Art Museum.

Viewers may see shadows in artist's humorous works

By Jerry Stein
Post staff reporter

Rona Pondick doesn't care if you "misinterpret" her art. She wants viewers to construct their own stories.

The Brooklyn, N.Y., sculptor has filled two galleries at the Cincinnati Art Museum with her delightful sculptures for an exhibit that opens Friday. For starters, there's a mound of plastic heads covered with a skin of newspapers.

The mouths are made from those funny clacking teeth sold in novelty stores. It's quite a sight to see all these heads grinning up at you from the floor.

Ms. Pondick likes the motif of teeth. She also made molds of her own teeth and inserted them in red plastic spheres that suggest apples or tomatoes. They're stacked in a big wooden bowl.

Even more freaky is "Treats" (1992). This amusing sculpture is made up of scores of pink pool-ball-size plastic spheres with mouths and teeth scattered over the floor. Never has a floor looked so happy.

Ms. Pondick's drawings also focus on teeth behind red lips. Some drawings have words or numbers on them. She said she makes drawings and sculpture simultaneously. "They inform each other."

The exhibition is part of Cincinnati Art Museum contemporary art curator Jean E. Feinberg's ongoing "New Art 4" series. Each year, Ms. Feinberg selects shows that focus on both emerging artists and mature artists working in a variety of media and styles.

Ms. Pondick, who trained at Queens Col-

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Pondick

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lege, N.Y., and has a master's in fine arts from Yale University School of Art, has shown in many international exhibitions. She has work in the permanent collections at the important Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and the High Museum, Atlanta.

The exhibition, which includes 19 sculptures and drawings made between 1988 and last year, isn't all mouths and teeth. In the second gallery, furniture is featured.

Ms. Pondick said the psychiatrist Sigmund Freud ascribed sexual identity to inanimate objects. "He said chairs were feminine, but I couldn't see that," she said.

So she went to work. She turned one chair upside down, added high heels on two of its legs and covered it in lace.

Another chair has a formed cushion suggesting buttocks and the three legs wear a pair of men's shoes and one little girl's shoe. Some interpreters read dark meanings into the sculpture, but Ms. Pondick keeps her own interpretations to herself.

The empty, scuffed little baby shoes surrounding a bed seemed sad. Perhaps that's because I still have a similar pair — relics from a portion of youth I can't even remember. Beyond the laughs, this art can get personal.

"I want the viewers to participate," the artist said. "It is fear that makes people want detailed explanations in contemporary art from the artist."

And Ms. Pondick adds it is OK with her if people have more than one reading of her work. She says, initially, the viewer may think her sculpture is funny and then swing to a somber interpretation. In her words, viewers "fill in the blanks" with their own thoughts and stories.

It's difficult to stand in front of "Spiral," a floor sculpture that features a long, pink, curled proboscis and not make up some story. At the tapered end is a baby's shoe; the other end is fitted with a man's white leather loafer.

Ms. Pondick says she evolved to this art form after coming to understand herself as an artist. Early on, she considered herself a minimalist — the cool, simplistic style from the '60s propounded by such artists as David Judd and Tony Smith.

Minimalist sculpture was complementary to the neutral, stoic architecture of the era.

But as Ms. Pondick worked, she realized she was interested in making forms — the teeth and chairs — that refer to everyday life and experience. She's remained true to her aesthetic roots, though. The bed sculptures she creates, with children's shoes tied to them, are not real beds. They are as simple as railroad ties.

"New Art 4: Rona Pondick" begins Friday and continues through July 16 at the Cincinnati Art Museum, Eden Park. Admission: \$5.