

Patricia Faure Gallery

Pleasure and Pain: About 250 figurines make up Rona Pondick's "Blue," a maddeningly simple sculpture loaded with associations ranging from frightening to funny and riddled with many emotions between these extremes. Most of the laughter elicited by the artist's fetishistic figures is nervous: snickers and giggles that involuntarily erupt when you're uncomfortable and too embarrassed to admit it.

At Patricia Faure Gallery, Pondick's hand-molded totems lie on their backs with stubby legs sticking outward to form the circumference of a large, solid circle. Each consists of a fist-sized head atop a cucumber-shaped body from which usually emerge thumb-scaled arms and legs.

In various shades of blue, some of these crude wax sculptures have only two limbs. Others have none. Their torsos taper to a blunt, root-like tip. Most have appendages whose scale doesn't match. Depending on how you see these creepy pieces, one limb of each pair is either atrophied or undeveloped, and the other is either normal or swollen, often obscenely.

Every head, however, has a full set of human teeth, although no gums, tongue or lips are present. Ineffective aggression, rather than any kind of vulnerability, emanates from the New York-based artist's menagerie of unformed, fetus-like beings.

Resembling a cross between the murderous, newborn monster from "Alien" and a mutant mandrake root, Pondick's menacing figurines would be terrifying if they weren't pint-sized. Given their explicit sexual references, however, they are scary in their refusal to distinguish between oral gratification and anal retention. Pondick's supine army revels in the fact that art's pleasures are often linked to its pains.

■ *Patricia Faure Gallery, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 449-1479, through May 25. Closed Sundays and Mondays.*

By David Pagel
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