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Rona Pondick

Janis
110 West 57th Street
Manhattan
Through Oct. 25

Rona Pondick's "Tree" lingers in the mind like a weird dream. In the softly lighted gallery, a leafless silver tree (cast aluminum, actually) stands in a field of dirt. Strewn about on the ground are two kinds of strange fruit: smooth, silvery orbs with human teeth and dirty, potatolike pods, also with teeth. Funny, scary and sad, these little monsters are like babies, vulnerable and powerless but possessed of powerful urges of appetite and rage. Perhaps they are hungry and mad at their mother, the tree, for abandoning them.

Looking at this eerie yet comical tableau, you feel that Ms. Pondick has tapped into an ancient underground pool of desire, anger and grief. There is something mythic about the scene; it could represent a primeval story about the origins of the world in darkness and light.

Ms. Pondick's less successful work is more amusing than haunting. In "Aaron's Ear," for example, oversize bright red ears clinging like fungi to a newspaper-wrapped trunk dangle over a pile of newspapered spheres, each with a mouth made from joke-store chattering teeth. Also less psychologically resonant were some pillows, cast in fiberglass and bearing minutely printed silver letters that spell "I want" over and over. Substituting text for metaphor, these works flatly say what they mean rather than projecting their Freudian complexes in hair-raising images.

KEN JOHNSON
