

DAILY MAGAZINE

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Thursday, Feb. 14, 1991

The Philadelphia Inquirer

5-D

Art that shocks by its treatment of the mundane

By Edward J. Sozanski
Inquirer Art Critic

Over the last several years, Rona Pondick has made a name for herself with sculpture and installations that address cultural attitudes about sexuality and taboo subjects like bodily functions. Her work is explicit and disturbing; it employs the shock tactics of surrealism, but it's grounded in the most fundamental psychic concerns of everyday life.

Invited to create an installation for the gallery at Beaver College, Pondick responded with *Scrap*, a possible allusion to her use of used objects like shoes. It seems more likely, though, to be more mordant, referring to human rather than material discards.

Like much of Pondick's previous work, *Scrap* is minimal but not minimalist. It consists of only four elements, three of which are grouped in a pool of bright light. The fourth, a female leg clad in high-heel shoe, hangs on a side wall, only a few inches off the floor. In the darkened gallery, its spotlight presence is iconic and a little spooky.

Scrap demonstrates Pondick's ability to construct a complex psychological and emotional scenario from a few simple materials. It affects the viewer like a poultice, drawing to the surface repressed anxieties about sex, birth and traditional gender roles.

The largest element is an elongated, cigar-shaped pod made of cotton batting wrapped with pink lace, of the type used in women's stockings. Each end is capped with a man's shoe, creating the impression of a pair of splayed legs.

Next to this sexually ambiguous form, Pondick has spread an array of 148 grotesque little objects that resemble pink apples with teeth. (They're formed of dental plastic and fitted with Halloween choppers.) One thinks immediately of aberrant fetuses, or some alien and menacing life form.

Directly above the "little bathers," as Pondick calls them, hangs a "baby swing" — another pair of splayed legs, much smaller, capped with baby shoes and suspended on wires. The black comedy implicit in this element completes a chilling picture of a rather bizarre and fragmented nuclear family.

Scrap forces us to recognize the dark side of the sacred-profane duality intrinsic in the institutions of marriage, motherhood and family. In a rather blunt and chilling way, it deconstructs the mythology of those institutions by considering them as the consequences of sexual misadventure.

Beaver College Art Gallery, Easton and Church Roads, Glenside. Hours: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, 1 to 4 p.m. Sundays. Through March 3. Telephone: 572-2131 or 2133.