MARTHA WILSON: STAGING THE SELF
Martha Wilson
Staging the Self

October 21, 2013 - January 31, 2014

Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series
2013-14 Estelle Lebowitz Visiting Artist in Residence
Douglass Library
8 Chapel Drive, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Curators: Judith K. Brodsky and Ferris Olin

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Martha Wilson is a pioneering feminist conceptual and performance artist and founding director of the important artist-run gallery, Franklin Furnace. Begun in 1976, Franklin Furnace is an innovative art space that serves as a model for documenting, promoting and preserving ephemeral art media, such as, artists’ books, installation art, video, online and performance art. Most recently it has reinvented itself as a virtual institution. In the last decade, Wilson also became Founding Director of the Franklin Furnace Archives, an organization that supports the contemporary avant-garde through funds awarded to under-represented artists creating contemporary work. Franklin Furnace launched the careers of numerous artists who have had great impact on the United States cultural landscape. New York Times critic Holland Cotter described Martha Wilson as one of “the half-dozen most important people for art in downtown Manhattan in the 1970s.”

We three have been activists/scholars/curators in the feminist art movement since the 1970s, and we have crossed paths often professionally throughout these intervening decades. We remember visiting Franklin Furnace in Tribeca in the late 1970s while conducting research for an artists’ book exhibition and symposium held at Rutgers in 1980. And we have pursued the same goals through parallel activities. While Martha Wilson was curating exhibitions and events for emerging artists in the alternative art space of Franklin Furnace, we were doing the same in our alternative art space, the Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series Galleries at the Douglass Library. We also shared a mutual interest in ensuring that artists are not erased from history and implemented that goal by establishing visual arts archives of unique documents, making
primary research materials accessible to current and future generations of artists, curators and scholars. Martha Wilson established the Franklin Furnace Archives and eventually digitized them, as we established the Miriam Schapiro Archives on Women Artists at Rutgers as a center for research on American women artists and art organizations, feminist art history, and women’s leadership in the visual arts.

Though Martha Wilson has made major contributions to the art world through Franklin Furnace and its archive, her artwork holds an equally important place in the histories of feminist and contemporary art. Since her graduate student days, her innovative performances, photographic, and video works explore female subjectivity through self-fashioning-role-playing, costume transformations, and the taking-on of other people’s personae often to create political satire. As a performance artist, for example, she founded and collaborated with DISBAND, the all-girl punk conceptual group of women artists who didn’t play any instruments, but instead used spoken word and noise to redefine the parameters of gender, identity, activism and politics. Her satirical performances as Barbara Bush, pearls and all, and Nancy Reagan in her red dress are legendary. One of her most striking videos is the one in which she deconstructs our social behavior revealing it as a casual putting on and taking off of various masks by using make-up, first to enhance her face, and then to distort it.

Martha Wilson had her first solo exhibition in New York in 2008, and the following year, Martha Wilson: Staging the Self, an exhibition of Ms. Wilson’s early photo/text work and one project from each of Franklin Furnace’s first 30 years, began international travel under the auspices of Independent Curators International, which later in 2011 published the monograph, Martha Wilson Sourcebook: 40 Years of Reconsidering Performance, Feminism, Alternative Spaces.

Wilson participated in numerous group shows throughout her career and within the recent past has been included in major retrospective shows focused on the history of contemporary feminist art.
She served as a Guest Editor at *Art Journal* and *Leonardo* magazines; and has received numerous grants for her performance art, including two National Endowment for the Arts and one New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships. Wilson has also been recognized for her support of freedom of expression, including an Obie Award for commitment to artists’ freedom of expression.

When the Institute for Women and Art began planning for the 2013-14 Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series exhibition season several years ago, we knew that Wilson’s many contributions to the visual arts made her the ideal candidate for the 2013-2014 Estelle Lebowitz Visiting Artist in Residence. We recognized that her work and artistic practices would engage the University community as well as serve as a model for women’s leadership in the arts.

Whether it be in her artistic practices or as an entrepreneur, arts administrator, and activist, Martha Wilson continues to refashion the self and her-self, always as a means to raise aesthetic, social, and political issues and to forge new paths for emerging and established artists. Her leadership strategies serve as models for those working in performance art and the maintenance of the cultural landscape. And her art practice in the world of performance and multi-media art is equally important both historically and as an influence on young artists today.

**Judith K. Brodsky and Ferris Olin**
Exhibition Curators and Co-Founding Directors, Institute for Women and Art
Images

Text from artwork:

Captivating a Man
A reversal of the means by which a woman captivates a man: The man is made attractive by the woman. In heterosexual reversal, the power of makeup turns back on itself: captivation is emasculation.

September, 1972

Captivating a Man, 1972/2008
Color photograph and text
20 x 14 inches
Text from artwork:

Posturing
Form determines feeling, so that if I pose in a role I can experience a foreign emotion. This was an attempt at double sex transformation; I am dressed in “drag” so that the transformation from female to male, back into female. Theoretically, the uninitiated audience sees only half of this process, from the “male” into “female”.

February, 1972
Text from artwork:

Posturing: Male Impersonator (Butch)
1973
This was my unsuccessful effort to “pass” as a man in Men’s rooms in Halifax, Nova Scotia; men took one look at me and said, “Get out.”
Text from artwork:

Posturing: Age Transformation
I am a twenty-five-year-old artist trying to look like a fifty-year-old woman trying to look like she is twenty-five. I was extremely uncomfortable dressed up like a middle-aged female, which I take to be an index to how much fear I have of “past thirty” status in society.

November, 1973
Alchemy, 1973/2011
Color photographs
15 x 23 1/4 inches
A Portfolio of Models, 1974/2008
6 black and white photographs with 7 text pieces

A PORTFOLIO OF MODELS
These are the models society holds out to me: Goddess, Housewife, Working Girl, Professional, Earth-Mother, Lesbian. At one time or another, I have tried them all on for size, and none has fit. All that’s left to do is be an artist and point the finger at my own predicament. The artist operates out of the vacuum left when all other values are rejected.

8/1974

Text from artwork:

The Earth-Mother
She claims she doesn’t give a shit about the goddess. Actually, to be such a perfect mirror-reversal of her, in her workboots and braless peasant blouses, she is just as conscious of the goddess as the suburban queen. She flaunts her sexuality, not out of boredom, but because it is a natural function, god-given for us to enjoy. She has shelved her intellect for the time being, deriving fulfillment from working the land with her hands.
A Portfolio of Models, 1974/2008
6 black and white photographs with 7 text pieces

Text from artwork:

The Goddess
Her presence is felt by both men and women, and every member of society past the age of five is aware of her. She is the female-model archetype, an implicit image of reference. She always looks perfect. She also smells wonderful at all times. She has “sex-appeal.” However, she is asexual. We look but don’t imagine. Whether she is intelligent is irrelevant.
A Portfolio of Models, 1974/2008
6 black and white photographs with 7 text pieces

Text from artwork:

The Housewife
This woman aspires to goddessdom, but she is compromised by some everyday realities: she can’t spend all day on her face because she has to feed the kids. She can’t starve herself bed-slat thing because she has to keep her strength up. Sex is a routine part of her life, whether it be an exciting one or an unpleasant one. If she wants to be kinky, she might swap. She is intelligent, but has convinced herself that she is fulfilled.
A Portfolio of Models, 1974/2008
6 black and white photographs with 7 text pieces

Text from artwork:

The Lesbian
She hates the goddess, because actually the goddess was invented by the menon Madison Avenue. She alone sees through goddessdom, but unluckily, her sexuality is so misplaced that the rest of society ignores her. Her intelligence is a flyweight issue in light of her emotional problems.
A Portfolio of Models, 1974/2008
6 black and white photographs with 7 text pieces

Text from artwork:

The Professional
She plays down her competence to get along. Perhaps she is not beautiful, but she is extremely well-groomed, approaching goddessdom at least by the cost of her outfit. Her sexuality is a point of debate: does her job fulfill her and make her a self-loving person, or does she succeed in her job because she is frigid?
A Portfolio of Models, 1974/2008
6 black and white photographs with 7 text pieces

Text from artwork:

The Working Girl
She can only approach goddessdom insofar as her budget permits. She works very hard, and is given no credit for any brains she may or may not have. She relieves the drudgery of life by having a riproaring time in bed.
Text from artwork:

I make up the image of my perfection
March, 1974

I make up the image of my deformity

Color photographs and text
19 x 25 inches
Before and After, 1974/2008
Color photographs
26 x 68 inches
Beauty + Beastly, 1974/2009
Black and white photographs
17 x 23 1/2 inches
I Have Become My Own Worst Fear / Deformation, 1974/ 2009
(Above) Video, 9 minutes
(Right) Print on canvas, 87 x 4 inches
Details

_Growing Old_, 2008-09  
Pigmented ink print on hahnemuhle bamboo paper  
8 panels, 21 x 21 inches each; 1 panel, 35 x 35 inches
The Legs Are the Last to Go, 2009
Pigmented ink print on hahnemuhle bamboo paper
19 1/4 x 13 1/4 inches
Mona/Martha/Marge, 2009
Pigmented ink print on canvas
19 x 11 1/2 inches
"Name = Fate, 2009
2 black and white photographs and text
21 1/4 x 29 1/4 inches"
Text from artwork:

Red Cruella Glad
Red Cruella Mad

Red Cruella, 2010
2 color photographs and text
21 1/4 x 29 1/4 inches
Exhibition Checklist

_Captivating a Man_, 1972/2008  
Color photograph and text  
20 x 14 inches  
Edition of 4, 2APs  

_Posturing: Drag_, 1972/2008  
Color photograph and text  
20 x 14 inches  
Edition of 4, 2APs  

_Posturing: Male Impersonator (Butch)_, 1973/2008  
Color photograph and text  
20 x 14 inches  
Edition of 4, 2APs  

_Posturing: Age Transformation_, 1973/2008  
Color photograph and text  
20 x 14 inches  
Edition of 4, 2AP  

_Alchemy_, 1973/2011  
Color photographs and text  
15 x 23 1/4 inches  
Edition of 5, 2APs  

_A Portfolio of Models_, 1974/2008  
6 black and white photographs with 7 text pieces  
20 x 14 inches, each  
Edition of 4, 2APs, 1IP  

Color photographs and text  
19 x 25 inches  
Edition of 4, 2APs  

_Before and After_, 1974/2008  
Color photographs  
26 x 68 inches  
Edition of 5, 2APs  

_Beauty + Beastly_, 1974/2009  
Black and white photograph  
17 x 23 1/2 inches  
Edition of 3, 1AP  

_I Have Become My Own Worst Fear/Deformation_, 1974/2009  
Video 9:00 minutes; Print on canvas  
87x44 inches  
Edition of 5  

_Growing Old_, 2008-09  
Pigmented ink print on hahnemuhle bamboo paper  
8 panels, 21 x 21 inches each; 1 panel, 35 x 35 inches  
Edition of 5, 2APs  

_The Legs Are the Last to Go_, 2009  
Pigmented ink print on hahnemuhle bamboo paper  
19 1/4 x 13 1/4 inches  
Edition of 5, 2APs  

_Mona/Martha/Marge_, 2009  
Pigmented ink print on canvas  
19 x 11 1/2 inches  
Edition of 5, 2APs  

_Name=Fate_, 2009  
2 black and white photographs and text  
21 1/4 x 29 1/4 inches  
Edition of 5, 2APs  

_Red Cruella_, 2010  
2 color photographs and text  
21 1/4 x 29 1/4 inches  
Edition of 5, 2APs
Selected CV
Martha Wilson
Represented by P.P.O.W. Gallery, NYC marthawilson.com
marthawilson.com

EDUCATION
2013 Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts, NSCAD University
1972 Fellowship at Dalhousie University
Completed one year toward Ph.D. degree, English Literature
1971 M.A. English Literature, Dalhousie University
1969 B.A. cum laude, Wilmington College

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2011 Martha Wilson: Staging the Self, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
2011 I have become my own worst fear, P·P·O·W Gallery, New York, NY
2009 Martha Wilson: Staging the Self, Dalhousie University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia; Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Curated by Peter Dykhuis, traveled through 2013 under the auspices of Independent Curators International

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
2013 Good Girls Memory_Desire_Power, National Museum of Contemporary Art (MNAC), Bucharest, Romania
2013 Sequences in Real Time Art Festival, Reykjavik, Iceland
2013 Femfolio, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, DE
2013 Striking Resemblance: The Changing Art of Portraiture, Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ
2013  SKIN TRADE, P·P·O·W Gallery, New York, NY
2012  Martha Wilson, Arcadia University Art Gallery, Glenside, PA
2012  Materializing Six Years: Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art, Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY
2012  Laughter (Riso), Electricity Museum, Lisbon, Portugal, through 2013
2012  Moving Image Contemporary Video Art Fair, New York, NY
2012  Project Inc., Revisted, Churner and Churner, New York, NY
2010  DONNA: AVANGUARDIA FEMMINISTA NEGLI ANNI '70 dalla Sammlung Verbund di Vienna, curator Gabriele Schor, Galleria nazionale d'arte moderna, Roma
2010  The Man I Wish I Was, curator Kharis Kennedy, A.I.R. Gallery, NY
2009  40 Years, 40 Projects, curator Matthew Higgs, White Columns, NY
2009  re.act.feminism, curators Bettina Knaup and Beatrice K. Stammer, in partnership with the Akademie der Kunste, Berlin, Germany
2008  Looking Back: The White Columns Annual, selected by Jay Sanders, NY
2006  The Downtown Show, Grey Art Gallery, New York University, New York, NY
2005  How American Women Artists Invented Post-Modernism, Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

SELECTED PERFORMANCES
2013  Barbara Bush on LA, Pitzer College Art Galleries, Los Angeles, CA
1992  Barbara Bush On Abuse, Cooper Union, New York, NY
1985  Just Say No to Arms Control, Brother Ron’s Gospel Hour, New York, NY
1980 DISBAND at Spazio Zero, Rome, Italy

SELECTED GRANTS AND AWARDS
2012 The Yoko Ono Courage Award
2001 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, Performance Art
1993 Citation by Robert S. Clark, Nathan Cummings, Joyce Mertz-Gilmore, Rockefeller and Andy Warhol Foundations for commitment to the principle of freedom of expression
1992 Bessie Award for commitment to artists’ freedom of expression
1992 Obie Award for commitment to artists’ freedom of expression
1991 Skowhegan School Governor’s Award for Service to the Arts
1983 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, Performance Art

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY
Colucci, Emily, “Is It Punk To Grow Old Ungracefully?” Hyperallergic (September 19, 2011).
Denson, G. Roger, “‘Old,’ ‘Crazy’ and ‘Hysterical.’ Is That All There Is?” Huffington Post (October 5, 2011).
TEACHING AND LECTURING
2010-11  “Embodiment,” Parsons School of Design
2002    “Live Art on the Internet,” with Toni Sant, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University
2000    “Going Virtual,” with Toni Sant, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University
1999-2000 “The Arts in New York City,” Baruch College
1979    “Women in the Arts,” Nova Scotia College of Art and Design

EDITORIAL AND VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES
2002-2004 Treasurer, Performance Studies International
1991    Member of the Editorial Board, Art Journal

COLLECTIONS
Banco Espirito Santo, Lisbon, Portugal
Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
Sammlung Verbund, Vienna, Austria
Smith College, Northampton, MA
INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN AND ART

The mission of the Rutgers Institute for Women and Art (IWA) is to transform values, policies, and institutions, and to insure that the intellectual and aesthetic contributions of diverse communities of women in the visual arts are included in the cultural mainstream and acknowledged in the historical record. To accomplish the goal, the IWA invents implements, and conducts live and virtual education, research, documentation, public programs, and exhibitions focused on women artists and feminist art. The IWA strives to establish equality and visibility for women artists who are underrepresented and unrecognized in art history, the art market, and the contemporary art world, and to address their professional development needs. The IWA endeavors to serve all women in the visual arts and diverse global, national, regional, state, and university audiences.

Founded in 2006, the Institute for Women and Art is actively engaged in:
* Exhibitions and public programming organized by the award-winning and nationally recognized Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series, founded in 1971 by Joan Snyder, and other sponsored events through the United States and abroad.

* Educational and curricular development led by The Feminist Art Project (TFAP) through FARE: Feminist Art Resources in Education for K-12, college students, and their teachers. (feministartproject.rutgers.edu)

* Research and documentation facilitated by the Getty Foundation and New Jersey State Council on the Arts-funded Women Artists Archives National Directory (WAAND, waand.rutgers.edu), as well as the archival collections found in the Miriam Schapiro Archives on Women Artists.

IWA Staff

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