

ARTFORUM

Critic's Picks

Martha Wilson

P.P.O.W

535 West 22nd Street, Third Floor

October 22–December 22



Martha Wilson, *Beauty is in the eye*, 2014, inkjet print on paper, 17 x 25".

"Credibility equals reality," begins a typewritten text in Martha Wilson's work *SELF PORTRAIT*, 2014, "so that 'self' depends not on who you think you are, but on who others think you appear to be." This aphorism lays a conceptual foundation for the artist's instruction to viewers: "Write your impressions of me." Wilson invests this invitation with authorial power, yielding her would-be self-representation, via multiple photographic approaches, to external perspectives: "In so doing, you are creating me."

For over forty years Wilson has plumbed the sociocultural mechanisms that construct and contour notions of identity, beauty, success, and visibility, often playing on latent tendencies to judge, assume, and categorize. This exhibition of mostly new works testifies to the continued relevance and urgency of Wilson's practice, paying particular attention to the consequences of aging. *Beauty is in the eye*, 2014, shows a close crop of the artist's eyes, the left fully made up and the right au naturel, with the work's deadpan title printed under the left. The conspicuous absence of the words "of the beholder" suggests the limit of the self's constitution by the other, wryly locating beauty in the eye's physical attributes rather than its gaze.

Works in the exhibition employ formats and strategies Wilson has been using since the 1970s: instructions, combinations of text and image, costume drag, all infused with a humorous didacticism. They also bear a refreshing inclination to revisit old positions, as is the case with two other self-portraits: *Martha meets Michelle halfway*, 2014, riffs on *Tipper Gore's Advice for the 90s*, 1994, broaching a more ambivalent and less satirical relation to female authority figures while doubling down on provocation. This work is emblematic of Wilson's knack for producing uncomfortable images with deep political resonance, and bringing viewers into close contact with unquestioned and tricky prejudices.