

Martha Wilson

Mona /Marcel /Marge

October 22 – December 22, 2015

Opening Reception: Thursday, Oct. 22, 6-8 pm



P·P·O·W is pleased to present an exhibition of new works by Martha Wilson. Since the early 1970s, Wilson has created conceptually based performances, videos, and photo/text compositions that grapple with constructions and manifestations of feminism, identity, and the way we construct and present ourselves. Frequently taking herself as subject, Wilson creates transgressive, avant-garde works that address political and social issues, teasing out complexity and nuance by infusing her work with playful gestures and humorous juxtapositions.

Mona/Marcel/Marge will feature new photo/text works that draw on self-portraiture, art history, political figures, and popular culture to comment on subjectivity, identity, and gender. While this new body of work draws a clear line to her work from the 70's through today, her work and attitude has evolved from what Wilson describes as “the concerns of a young woman to the concerns of an old lady,” and sees her turning an eye to the way in which the public gaze projects social values onto women as they grow older. “I’m looking at age and the status of women,” Wilson says, “but we are still in the same absurd state that we were in in the 70s... This is my current response to the predicament that we find ourselves in when born female.”

With this body of work Wilson depicts herself in the role of subjects as diverse as famous women throughout history like Tipper Gore and Michelle Obama, a panda bear, and a Mona Lisa/Marge Simpson mash-up. The vast majority of her works include text placed alongside or overlaid upon her photographs--a direct expression of the inner landscape she is trying to craft and a comment on the experiment that she is enacting.

The works – from *New Wrinkles on the Subject*, in which she here turns her face into a line drawing of wrinkles, to *Life/Style Lift*, a portrait of her face taken while hanging upside down, spoofing a company that advertises face lifts on TV – see her meditating on the condition of and expectations for an aging woman in America.

Wilson’s work also draws on art history, positioning her in relationship to the artists she admires, is responding to, and is working in relationship to or against. Portions of the gallery will be painted terra cotta red and Wedgewood blue, mimicking the walls used to display classic works of art in museums around the world. From *Self-Portrait with Felt Hat*, 2014, a diptych that features Van Gogh’s *Self-Portrait with Felt Hat*, 1887/8, alongside her modern iteration of the work; to *Homage to Ad*, which will include nine never-before seen photos from the 1974 photoshoot for *A Portfolio of Models*, darkened to near-black and portrayed in a grid like Al Reinhardt’s *Abstract Painting*, 1960-66, Wilson carves out a distinctly female position for herself in the cannon of art history.

Wilson continues to prod social norms and mine the stereotypes and conventions that plague our everyday lives in an effort to propose new ways of looking at and thinking about gender politics, identity, and social values. Subtle humor has always permeated Wilson’s work, but we here see her taking a more overtly funny and lighter approach, inviting viewers to join her in laughing at the absurd reality of contemporary society.

Martha Wilson (b. Philadelphia, PA) lives and works in New York. Written into and out of art history according to the theories and convictions of the time, Wilson first gained notoriety thanks to the attention of curator Lucy R. Lippard, who placed Wilson's early efforts within the context of conceptual art and the work of women artists. Commenting on Wilson's first projects, art historian Jayne Wark wrote in 2001:

In her conceptually based performance, video and photo-text works, Wilson masqueraded as a man in drag, catalogued various body parts, manipulated her appearance with makeup and explored the effects of "camera presence" in self-representation. Although this work was made in isolation from any feminist community, it has been seen to contribute significantly to what would become feminism's most enduring preoccupations: the investigation of identity and embodied subjectivity.

Wilson's early work is now considered prescient. In addition to being regarded by many as prefiguring some of the ideas proposed in the 1980s by philosopher Judith Butler about gender performativity, many of her photo-text pieces point to territory later mined by Cindy Sherman, among many other contemporary artists.

As Founding Director of Franklin Furnace Archive, Inc., Wilson was described by *The New York Times* critic Holland Cotter in 2008 as one of "the half-dozen most important people for art in downtown Manhattan in the 1970s." Franklin Furnace is an artist-run space that champions the exploration, promotion and preservation of artists' books, installation art, video, online and performance art. She was a founding member in 1978 of DISBAND (including Ilona Granet, Donna Henes, Ingrid Sischy and Diane Torr), the all-girl conceptual feminist punk rock band of artists who couldn't play any instruments, and has since performed in the guises of political figures, including Alexander Haig, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, and Tipper Gore. In 2008, she had her first solo exhibition in New York at Mitchell Alpus Gallery, *Martha Wilson: Photo/Text Works, 1971-74*; in 2009, *Martha Wilson: Staging the Self* began international travel under the auspices of ICI (Independent Curators International); and in 2011, ICI published the *Martha Wilson Sourcebook: 40 Years of Reconsidering Performance, Feminism, Alternative Spaces*. Martha Wilson joined P.P.O.W Gallery in 2011 and mounted a solo exhibition, *I have become my own worst fear*, that September.