

Art Basel Unlimited
June 10 - 16, 2019

Martha Wilson
Halifax Collection, 1971 - 1974

For the 2019 edition of Art Basel Unlimited, P.P.O.W and mfc-michèle didier are pleased to present the groundbreaking early installation *Halifax Collection* by the feminist artist, non-profit gallerist, and activist Martha Wilson (b. 1947). From 1971 to 1974, Wilson taught English at the College of Art and Design in Halifax, Nova Scotia. During this time, Wilson documented her experiments with the effects of "camera presence" on self-presentation and social interactions, creating a remarkable volume of photographs, works on paper and filmed performances. Most frequently taking herself as subject, Wilson's transgressive, avant-garde work tackles political and social issues while simultaneously teasing out complexity and nuance through playful gestures and humorous juxtapositions. Art Basel Unlimited 2019 will be the first time *Halifax Collection* has been presented in its entirety.

The *Halifax Collection* stands as one of the earliest experiments in representing the personal as political within the context of male dominated field of conceptual art. During the course of her tenure Wilson was introduced to a series of influential post-modern artists and critics including Lucy Lippard, Vito Acconci, Yvonne Rainier, Jackie Windsor, and Carolee Schneemann, whose mentorship led to the years-long expansion of the *Halifax Collection*. In the performance *SELF PORTRAIT* (1973), Wilson poses as herself, inviting the audience to engage with the work by providing their impressions of her, only to later utilize these impressions within the work. In the *Posturing Series*, Wilson posed as a man posing as a woman (*Posturing: Drag*, 1972), and as a twenty-five-year-old posing as a fifty-year old woman trying to look like she is twenty-five (*Posturing: Age Transformation*, 1973). Wilson here prods social norms and mines stereotypes that continue to plague our everyday lives, frequently proposing new ways of looking at and thinking about gender politics, identity, and social values.

Halifax Collection also consists of Wilson's earliest film and video work, exploring prescribed roles for women through role-play, costume transformation, and invasion of other people's personae, forming the foundation for Wilson's now iconic performance and video-based practice. These films also reveal her increasing confidence in identifying as an artist, which many throughout her



Posturing: Male Impersonator (Butch), 1973
color photograph and text
19 3/4 x 14 in.; 50.17 x 35.56 cm



Breast Forms Permuted, 1972
gelatin silver print, text on paper
20 x 14 in.; 50.8 x 35.56 cm

life had told her was not possible for a female. Wilson's visage is shown, in *Deformation* (1974), in tight close-up as she uses makeup to transform from "the best she can look" into her "worst fear". In *Method Art* (1973), Wilson describes the formula screen actors use to convey emotion and then silently contorts her face to depict emotional states most commonly represented as female: tears, fury, laughter, apathy, fear, compulsion, sexual arousal, and physical pain. Wilson ingests the photograph of an ex-boyfriend in *Art Sucks* (1972) in an effort to regain the power he had taken from her with his own socially sanctified artistic practice. And in *Appearance as Value* (1972), Wilson sits at a table and reads a prepared text:

Appearance is the performance of value, but as a performer I am more concerned with engineering the impression that my standards are realized than with living up the standards themselves. I am not concerned which is more real - simply airing this piece on appearance as value makes fun of myself as a confident artist, while I assert that that is in fact what I am.

Martha Wilson moved to New York in 1974. In 1976, she established Franklin Furnace, a non-profit gallery and performance space which facilitated publications, experimental performances, exhibitions and online exhibitions for hundreds of artists including Coco Fusco, Pope.L, Martha Rosler, Michael Smith, Annie Sprinkle, and Ree Morton, among others. Wilson was also a founding member of DISBAND, a conceptual feminist punk band of artists who couldn't play any instruments. For four decades, Wilson has performed nationally and internationally in the guises of Alexander Haig, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, and Tipper Gore, among others. In the spring of 2008, Wilson presented *Martha Wilson: Photo/Text Works, 1971-74*, her first solo exhibition in New York City, at Mitchell Algu Gallery. Since 2009, Independent Curators International has traveled the exhibition *Martha Wilson: Staging the Self* to numerous university galleries and institutions throughout the United States and Canada. The corresponding catalog [Martha Wilson Sourcebook: 40 Years of Reconsidering Performance, Feminism, Alternative Spaces](#) received The Specific Object 2011 Publication of the Year award.



Deformation, 1974
black and white, sound
TRT 8:00



Art Sucks, 1972
black and white, sound
TRT 1:23



Method Art, 1973
black and white, sound
TRT 6:15