

BORTOLAMI

Faith Wilding

Being like leaves

55 Walker

September 9 – October 29, 2022

Bortolami is pleased to present a new exhibition by Faith Wilding, an artist renowned for her longstanding contributions to feminism and environmentalism. *Being like leaves*, her first solo show in New York City since 1995, focuses on Wilding's biomorphic abstractions of plants. Recent graphite drawings and watercolor paintings are shown in tandem with Wilding's *Leaf Series* from 1976-78, a series of large-scale oil paintings on shaped, unstretched canvas that seem to unfurl onto the wall, emulating the sinuous forms of fallen leaves.

Wilding was surrounded by wild, sprawling nature from birth. She was born in 1943 during the height of World War II. Her mother and her father, a Conscientious Objector, had fled to Paraguay from Europe with other large families in a Bruderhof Anabaptist Commune that had little contact with the outside world. As a child, Wilding explored and studied Paraguay's forests and waterways – spaces which are now eroded by deforestation and mono-cropping but were then dense with vegetation and teeming with life. In the sweltering summers, she and the other children would wrap themselves in banana leaves to keep cool.

It was in this rural and insular society that Wilding gained an appreciation for pacifism, community, agriculture, and the arts – as well as a resistance to the commune's strictly defined gender roles and subordination of women. Wilding emigrated to the United States at age 18 to attend the University of Iowa. As a graduate student she was integral to the founding of the Feminist Art Program at Fresno State College and CalArts, a group of all-women educators and students created to address gender inequities in pedagogy. Wilding worked on both an individual and collaborative basis with the group, developing highly influential performances and installations. By the mid-1970s, Wilding had developed an iconography of botanical and female forms that still drives her practice today.

Now 79 years old, Wilding is as prolific as ever. Her materials and methods combine the rigor of scientific illustration with the fantastic imagery of illuminated manuscripts, an aesthetic recalling John James Audubon as much as William Blake. Wilding draws flora like tree barks and seed pods from observation, rendering their textures in carefully modeled graphite. In her paintings she layers watercolor pigments over one another to create dense but luminous spaces, as if one is peering through a forest canopy towards the sky. Though her work is inextricably linked to plants, Wilding does not depict (or abstract) flowers like many of her art historical forebears. She instead digs deeper, looking to the complex symmetries of roots, branches and leaves as metaphors for change and regeneration – both internally to the body and externally to the planet itself.

The work of **Faith Wilding** (British, b. 1943, Paraguay) has been exhibited extensively worldwide since the late 1960s. A 2014 retrospective of Wilding's work, *Fearful Symmetries*, traveled to five venues across the United States. Wilding's work was also included in WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution, organized by Cornelia Butler, which traveled from the Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles) to the National Museum of Women (Washington, D.C.), MoMA PS1 (New York), and the Vancouver Art Gallery.

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This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of *Womanhouse*, the influential Los Angeles exhibition, installation and performance space organized by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, professors of CalArts' Feminist Art Program. At *Womanhouse*, Wilding's *Womb Room* fiber installation and performance, *Waiting*, are some of the best known and highly influential works of the 1970s Feminist Art Movement. Wilding was also a participant in several notable performances by Judy Chicago in the 1970s.

Wilding has exhibited at museums such as The Whitney Museum of American Art (New York); The Hammer Museum (Los Angeles); The Drawing Center (New York); Documenta X (Kassel); the Institute of Contemporary Art (Boston); the Singapore Art Museum; the Reina Sofia Museum (Madrid); Centre for Contemporary Arts (Glasgow) and the Bronx Museum of Art (New York). Wilding is Professor Emerita of Performance Art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and has taught at institutions Cooper Union, New York University, the Woman's Building in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Art Institute. While teaching at Carnegie Mellon University in the 1990s and 2000s she was a co-founder of the cyberfeminist collective, subRosa.

Wilding was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2009 and has been the recipient of numerous grants for the past five decades. In 2014, she was awarded the prestigious Women's Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Award.

Her publications include *By Our Own Hands: The History of the Women Artists Movement in Southern California, 1970-76* (Double X, 1977) and *Domain Errors! Cyberfeminist Practices!* (Autonomea, 2003).