

PRESS RELEASE

HANNAH WILKE

27 SEPTEMBER – 21 DECEMBER 2018

OPENING: WEDNESDAY 26 SEPTEMBER, 6-8PM

"Since 1960 I have been concerned with the creation of a formal imagery that is specifically female... Human gestures, multi-layered metaphysical symbols below the gut level translated into an art close to laughter, making love, shaking hands... Eating fortune cookies instead of signing them, chewing gum into androgynous objects... Delicate definitions... Rearranging the touch of sensuality with a residual magic made from laundry lint, or latex loosely laid out like love vulnerably exposed... continually exposing myself to whatever situation occurs...."

Hannah Wilke: *A Retrospective*, University of Missouri Press, 1989, p.139.

Alison Jacques Gallery is proud to present an exhibition spanning three decades of the American painter, sculptor, photographer, video and performance artist Hannah Wilke (1940 – 1993), in partnership with The Hannah Wilke Collection and Archive, Los Angeles.

Wilke's firm legacy as a pioneering, often controversial, feminist and conceptual artist is evident not only in her early use of vaginal imagery as a feminist intervention but also in her radical choice of materials. The use of terracotta and ceramic, latex, chewing gum and erasers was unusual for this time period and their characteristics of malleability and fragility reflect the sense of vulnerability that is consistent throughout Wilke's practice.

Over the last decade, major museums have acknowledged Wilke's previously overlooked importance through significant acquisitions: MoMA, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; LACMA, Los Angeles and Centre Pompidou, Paris. Tate, London recently acquired Wilke's iconic installation *Elective Affinities* (1978) consisting of 76 glazed porcelain white sculptures laid out in grid-like formats; a maquette for this work, *Untitled* (1977), is included in the current exhibition.

Bringing together works from the early 1960s through to 1987, this is the first time since Wilke's death in 1993 that her paintings on canvas from the 60s have been exhibited. The colours of these works and the forms depicted, relate to many of Wilke's drawings and sculptures. Other lesser-known intensely coloured small-scale works on paper are shown alongside Wilke's iconic performance photographs including *Gestures (Triptych)*, (1974 – 76) in which the artist stretches and contorts her face directly at the camera, using her skin as a malleable sculptural medium. As Wilke explained *Gestures* shows "*the pathos past the posing*" and this reference to primal female instinct was fundamental to her thinking.

From the beginning, drawing was central to Wilke's practice as well as her considered use of colour. The early abstract works on paper and card from the 60s, often in charcoal, pastel and pencil reference the body sexually with yonic and phallic shapes merging within floral landscapes to create sensual abstract forms. As Wilke stated, she was concerned with creating: "*a new language that fuses mind and body into erotic objects that are nameable and at the same time quite abstract. Its content has always related to my own body and feelings, reflecting pleasure as well as pain, the ambiguity and complexity of emotions.*" (Hannah Wilke, *A Retrospective*, University of Missouri Press, 1989, p.139).

Central to the exhibition is one of Wilke's largest installations, *Untitled*, (1974 – 77) consisting of 103 painted flesh-coloured terracotta sculptures. Although the forms are arranged in a scattered configuration they are, as with many of Wilke's multi-part sculptures, confined within the minimalist square and show "*Wilke's subversion of the Minimalist/Conceptualist concern with systems, while also demonstrating her genius for fusing her personal, bodycentric feminism with the formal issues and rigorous philosophy of Conceptualism*" (Paige K. Bradley, *Artforum*, October 2014).

Hannah Wilke (born Arlene Hannah Butter, New York, NY, 1940; d. Hannah Wilke, Houston, TX, 1993). Wilke studied at Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia and taught at the School of Visual Arts, New York (1974 – 1992) where in 1972, she founded the school's ceramics department. Wilke had two solo museum exhibitions during her life: *Hannah Wilke: Starification Photographs and Videotapes*, Fine Arts Gallery, University of California, Irvine (1976); and *Hannah Wilke: A Retrospective*, University of Missouri, Missouri (1989) as well as a posthumous museum survey show; *Gestures* curated by Tracy Fitzpatrick, Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY (2009).

Recent major group exhibitions include: *Virginia Woolf: An Exhibition Inspired by Her Writings*, Tate St Ives, UK (2018); *Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason, 1950 - 1980*, Met Breuer, New York (2017); *Generation Loss: 10 Years of the Julia Stoschek Collection*, Düsseldorf (2017); *Campaign for Art*, SFMOMA, San Francisco (2016); *The Imaginary Museum*, Tate Liverpool, UK (2015) toured to MMK, Frankfurt and Centre Pompidou-Metz, Metz (2016); *Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women 1947-2016*, Hauser, Wirth & Schimmel, Los Angeles (2016).

The Hannah Wilke Collection and Archive, Los Angeles was founded in 1999 by Hannah Wilke's sister Marsie Scharlatt and her family, and has been represented by Alison Jacques Gallery since 2009.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT FIONA MCGOVERN

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FORTHCOMING:

BRANKO VLAHOVIĆ (PROJECT ROOM), 16 NOVEMBER – 21 DECEMBER 2018

IAN KIAER, 1 FEBRUARY – 30 MARCH 2019

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