

INTERNATIONAL

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

Martha Wilson
Political Evolution

Fall 2017 International Artist-in-Residence
In residence September 11 > November 13, 2017
On view November 9 > December 31, 2017

Martha Wilson is a pioneering feminist artist and art space director, who over the past four decades created innovative photographic and video works that explore her female subjectivity. She has been described by New York Times critic Holland Cotter as one of "the half-dozen most important people for art in downtown Manhattan in the 1970s." In 1976 she founded Franklin Furnace, an artist-run space that champions the exploration, promotion and preservation of artist books, temporary installation, performance art, as well as online works. She is represented by P.P.O.W Gallery in New York.

Martha Wilson received an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University in 2013. She has received fellowships for performance art from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Foundation for the Arts; Bessie and Obie awards for commitment to artists' freedom of expression; a Yoko Ono Lennon Courage Award for the Arts; a Richard Massey Foundation-White Box Arts and Humanities Award; a Lifetime Achievement Award from Women's Caucus for Art; and the Audrey Irmas Award for Curatorial Excellence from the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College.

WHAT WAS THE ORIGATION OF YOUR POLITICAL EVOLUTION SERIES?

When I graduated from college in 1969, the Vietnam War was raging. My boyfriend didn't want to get drafted and I got a good fellowship offer so we took it as a sign to move to Canada. After I moved to New York in 1974 I started DISBAND, the all-girl band of women artists who couldn't play any instruments. When DISBAND disbanded in 1982, we were impersonating the members of Ronald Reagan's cabinet. I did one performance as Alexander M. Plague, Jr., one as Ronald Reagan, and then I found Nancy Reagan. So far, I have impersonated six political characters, and Political Evolution includes a portrait of each of them.

WHY DO YOU CHOOSE TO MANIPULATE YOUR OWN IMAGE?

My material is my own personality, in the social and political context in which I find myself. Women are born second class; exploring the absurdity of this condition has been my preoccupation from the 1970s forward. For example, in 1973 I did a performance for the camera entitled Posturing: Drag, for which I dressed as a man trying to look like a woman. For me, this experiment was a double sex transformation, from female to male to female; however, for the unwitting audience I simply looked like a drag queen.

Heyd Fontenot
Dallas, TX
Martha Wilson
New York, NY
Lili Reynaud-Dewar
*Grenoble, France/
Geneva, Switzerland*

Michael Smith
Curator

continued on reverse

ABOUT

THE EXHIBITION

artpace
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WHAT ROLE DOES PERFORMANCE PLAY IN YOUR ARTPACE EXHIBITION?

I consider everything I do, whether it be live performance, a video, or photo/text work to be performance art. This form of visual art expression was born, in my view, in 1910 in Venice, Italy when the Italian Futurist painters and poets published 800,000 copies of their manifesto, "Against Passeist Venice." From the Clock Tower above Piazza San Marco, they threw the copies on the heads of people coming out of church. The townspeople were outraged and ran up the Clock Tower where there was a fistfight in the stairwell. This physical confrontation marks a clash of ideas—still a hallmark of the form. In my opinion, good art is not about beautiful objects; it is about the embodiment of concepts that may foreshadow changes in the culture at large.

HOW HAVE YOU SEEN FEMINIST ART CHANGE THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

In the 1970s, there was no agreement as to what feminist art was. There were about twelve camps of women doing different kinds of work: Pattern and decoration, Goddess research, the Central Imagery folks, organic sculpture, performance art and video, the list goes on. There were also troubling social questions to be answered: Did feminist artists have to be lesbians? Could we wear makeup? How do we feel about pornography? We spent a lot of time yelling at each other. Now "feminism" is a term that most people think has a definition, but I can assure you that getting to this point was messy.

WHAT WAS YOUR PROCESS FOR CREATING NEW WORK AT ARTPACE?

When I came to San Antonio in March of 2017 for the orientation visit I said what I wanted to work on was Political Evolution, a set of portraits of me embodying my political characters. The staff asked me if I had considered Melania Trump—which led me to meld my interest in beauty with my interest in politics—hence *Makeover: Melania*.

Martha wishes to thank Charlie Kitchen for his help with installation and framing.

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