

London

Hannah Wilke

ALISON JACQUES GALLERY
16 - 18 Berners Street
June 4–August 14

Hannah Wilke's premature death at the age of fifty-two can sometimes overshadow her work: While some people romanticize her as an artist struck down in her prime, others point to a one-dimensionality in her practice that, with more time, might have developed in a wider variety of directions. Whatever view one takes, there is little doubt that her focus on feminist issues was unwavering. This exhibition, though, clearly shows that her practice was much broader than it is often given credit for.

The show includes several of Wilke's most iconic photographs from her "S.O.S.—Starification Object Series," 1974–82, and the later series "So Help Me Hannah," 1978. Detractors have asserted that these images fail to pull off the undermining irony they aim for—and that Wilke's use of model-like poses slips into a narcissism that actually reinforces the stereotypes she seeks to subvert. It's an unfair characterization, but one easy to arrive at when the images are taken in isolation. By including several of Wilke's lesser-known works, however, this exhibition gives viewers a more complete picture. The centerpiece of the show is *Elective Affinities*, 1978, in which eighty-six porcelain sculptures are arranged in four faux-Minimalist grids. But rather than having the hard edges associated with Minimalism, every one of the ceramics collapses into labial folds. Then there is *Lincoln Memorial*, 1976, in which a postcard of the American monument is covered with kneaded erasers shaped into vaginal forms. With greater subtlety than her photographs, these and several other works on view undermine the masculine structures they take on. They demonstrate a clever, sardonic humor that permeates the whole exhibition—a raised eyebrow that manages to make its message understood in no uncertain terms.



Hannah Wilke, "S.O.S.—Starification Object Series," 1974–82, vintage silver gelatin print (detail), 7 x 5". Copyright © Marsie, Emanuelle, Damon and Andrew Scharlatt/VAGA, New York, NY. Hannah Wilke Collection & Archive, Los Angeles.

— Anthony Byrt