

The Armory Show Pier 94, Booth 818 Two-Person Exhibition

March 5 – 8, 2020

Transgender representation in popular media has become more and more prevalent in recent years. Paradoxically, greater visibility and acceptance has coincided with an increase in violence against trans people, as well as an increase in legislation that aims to narrowly define one's gender as an immutable trait that is determined by the biological sex assigned at birth. Concurrently, violations of women's bodily autonomy are rampant in the form of sexual violence, and legal incursions threaten hard-won gains for reproductive rights. Amid these alarming trends, Ronald Feldman Gallery's 2020 Armory Show booth will present work by Cassils and Hannah Wilke – two feminist-informed artists who centralize their body in their art practice, and use performance, sculpture, and photography to directly confront the dominant regimes of sex, gender, and power.

CASSILS (b.1975)

Operating from a space of indeterminacy, spasm, and slipperiness, Cassils is a visual artist working in live performance, film, sound, sculpture, and photography. They have achieved international recognition for a rigorous engagement with the body as a form of social sculpture. Drawing on conceptualism, feminism, body art, and gay male aesthetics, Cassils rigorously trains their body for different performative purposes. It is with sweat, blood, and sinew that Cassils constructs a visual critique around ideologies and histories.

In the original live performance of *Becoming an Image*, Cassils unleashes an attack on a 2,000 pound wet clay obelisk in total darkness. The spectacle is illuminated solely by the flash of a photographer, burning the periodic visible images into the retinæ of the audience. On exhibition are the resulting color photographs, which depict the naked artist sweating, grimacing, and flying through the air with primal force. *Becoming an Image* was originally conceived as a site-specific work for the ONE Archives in Los Angeles, the oldest, continually active LGBTQ archive in the United States. Cassils continues to perform this work around the world.

The Resilience of the 20% is a solid bronze sculpture cast from the bashed clay remnants of *Becoming an Image*. The title refers to a sickening statistic: murders of trans people increased 20% worldwide in 2012 alone. Bearing the imprints of the violence inflicted on it, the sculpture becomes both a monument to the resilience and persistence of trans individuals and communities and a memorial to the lives that have been taken. The sculpture will be presented in front of a wall hung with custom wallpaper made from over a hundred photographic "out takes" from *Becoming An Image*, invoking Eadweard Muybridge and his pioneering work in photographic studies of motion.

The *Alchemic Series* are color photographs exalting the tension and beauty of trans embodiment, depicting key sections of the artist's form - torqued, ripped, and gilded. Cassils' alchemy positions the trans body in the tradition of classical sculpture or, more recently, Mapplethorpe's nudes.

Based in Los Angeles, they have exhibited their work in numerous solo exhibitions and live performances in North America, Australia, and Europe. In 2017, the artist was awarded a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship.

HANNAH WILKE (b.1940 – d.1993)

Wilke was a seminal artist of the late 20th century who pioneered original feminist content and new forms of art, even going as far as referring to herself as “living” sculpture. She significantly contributed to a burgeoning erotic freedom with her controversial photographs and performance videos featuring her own youthful, beautiful, and unapologetically sexualized body. Wilke’s art, however, is grounded in sculpture. Wilke most often used materials that were soft, malleable, and capable of being manipulated and formed easily by hand. Latex, a medium that became popular with artists in the 1970’s, had a particularly flesh-like and tactile quality that appealed to her. The major sculptures from the 1960’s and 1970’s presented at the Armory Show, as well as Wilke’s broader body of work, continue to inspire and influence artists of many generations.

Ponder-r-rosa Series 3: Double Sun (triangle), Blue Champagne (square), Broken Blossoms (circle), is a 17 foot wide wall installation consisting of fifteen floral “labial” shapes built up with layers of circular latex sheets which are bound together with metal snaps. The soft, supple quality of the organic rosette forms is contrasted with the grid-like arrangement of the overall work. It is a magnificent achievement and universal statement that melds the artist’s emotional interior with direct references to the body.

Vertical Verde for Garcia Lorca is an 8 foot wide installation consisting of five vertical latex sculptures that gradually rise from left to right. Dark colored and with a phallic-shaped motif, this work is a poignant counterfoil to the light-colored, rounded forms of *Ponder-r-rosa* and one of the few extant works by the artist in this material.

159 One-Fold Gestural Sculptures was originally presented as the centerpiece of Wilke’s 1974 solo exhibition at Ronald Feldman Gallery. Dozens of the artist’s signature forms, in a great variety of sizes, are placed in a random pattern within a big rectangle. It was the largest work the artist had created up to that time, and may have been Wilke’s response to the hard-edged geometry that informed so much of the painting and sculpture in the 1970’s. A deeper interpretation is that Wilke evokes the paradox between identifying as an individual and at the same time with the collective – an ambitious statement about the human condition.

Wilke’s work continues to generate discourse around the intersections of artistic and cultural practices. Noteworthy public collections that include her work are the Albright-Knox Gallery, Centre George Pompidou, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Tate Modern, Whitney Museum of American Art, Williams College Museum of Art, among many others.

With both joy and sadness, we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the artist’s birth, which falls on March 7, 2020.

“Although Cassils and Hannah never met, their work presented side-by-side reinforces the fact that social norms are not unchangeable, and visual art is often at the forefront of social issues,” says Marco Nocella, a Ronald Feldman Gallery Director and curator of the booth. “Their work originates from deeply-felt beliefs that have been shaped by their personal experience, reminding us that the personal is political.”

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