



Martha Wilson: Staging the Self

Curated by Peter Dykhuis, Director Dalhousie Art Gallery
Co-organized by Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia and iCI (Independent Curators International), New York

Premiering at the Dalhousie Art Gallery Thursday, March 19, 2009 8pm, where it will remain on view through May 10, 2009
ICI Tour Dates: May 2010 through June 2012

Martha Wilson is a pioneering feminist artist and gallery director, who over the past four decades has created innovative photographic and video works that explore her female subjectivity through role-playing, costume transformations, and invasions of male and female personas. She began making these videos and photo/text works in the early 1970s, when she was working toward a Ph.D. in English at Dalhousie University and teaching English at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, where, as Wilson has said, she was “a woman artist whose works were scorned in 1972 by her male colleagues.” She further developed her performative and video-based practice after moving in 1975 to New York City, where a year later she founded and then directed Franklin Furnace, an artist-run center dedicated to the exploration and promotion of artists’ books, installation art, and video and performance art.

This exhibition presents three interwoven layers of Wilson’s career, throughout which she has been a force of transformative change, considered both within the context of early feminist and socially engaged studio practice, and in her role as a disseminator of like-minded individuals’ work. A selection of Wilson’s early solo photographic works from her years in Halifax, a transitional period of her life, shows some of her innovations in playing

with different identities such as a man dressed in drag or, as a 25-year-old artist, portraying a 50-year-old woman attempting to look 25. Beginning in New York in the mid-1970s, she continued to be active as a performance artist, in collaboration with other feminist performers in the female group Disband (1978–82) and then in solo performances in which she “invaded” the personas of Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, and other political figures. The third stage of Wilson’s career is represented in the exhibition by her selection of projects by other artists—one project from each of Franklin Furnace’s thirty years of programming, from 1976 through 2006—which creates a self-portrait of sorts. The projects Wilson has chosen are historically significant for pushing the boundaries of exhibition and display practice, as well as disrupting cultural expectations about art, politics, gender, and race.

Martha Wilson: Staging the Self is curated by Peter Dykhuis, director of the Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, where it opens in 2009. A fully illustrated catalogue, with essays by Dykhuis and guest writers Jayne Wark and Larry List, will be co-published by ICI and the Dalhousie Art Gallery.

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For additional information or visual materials, please contact Michelle Jubin at 212.254.8200, ext. 21, or jubin@ici-exhibitions.org. Visit ICI’s website: www.ici-exhibitions.org