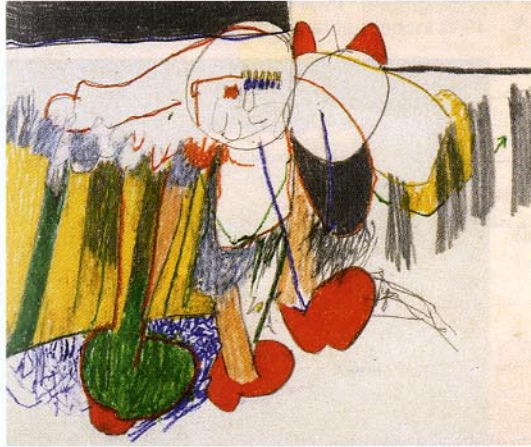


Hannah Wilke: Untitled,  
1965, pastel and graphite  
on paper, 12¾ by 14¾  
inches; at Ronald Feldman.



## HANNAH WILKE RONALD FELDMAN

Hannah Wilke (1940-1993) is best known for her performative work: the "Starification Object Series," begun in 1974, in which she photographed herself with vaginal-shaped pieces of chewed gum stuck to various parts of her body; *Through the Large Glass*, a video of the striptease she did behind Duchamp's iconic piece at the Philadelphia Museum in 1976; and the "Intra-Venus" photographs (1992-93), self-portraits documenting her struggle with the lymphoma that killed her at age 53. While her greatest notoriety arose from the use of her own (often naked) body as material, Wilke was also an avid draftswoman, as seen in a recent show that included works on paper dating mainly to the late '60s.

Made in a range of styles, Wilke's early drawings offer a glimpse of the artist she was to become—playful, witty, sexy. Pieces from the early 1960s executed in charcoal and black ink display a fierce, raw vitality, their abstract imagery often suggesting breasts or phalluses. Wilke then added pastels to her repertoire and began experimenting with a more graphic, bold, colorful style with elements recalling Miró's airy blobs or

Adolph Gottlieb's hovering orbs. In the early '70s she adopted a softer touch and palette. In one drawing, a scalloped circle inscribed with the words "This was once my mother's plate" is placed next to a few delicately rendered flowers that extend from the crumbling end of a pale yellow rectangle. One feels that Wilke is beginning to explore, and tentatively celebrate, her femininity, allowing a vulnerable, personal side to show through. She continued in this vein with mixed-medium works that feature collaged elements with distinctly sentimental overtones—a flower (*Rose in Water*, ca. 1970) or details from Victorian-era illustrations, such as a hound peering from his wooden shelter, three little boys drinking tea, and an elegant dandy. What saves these collages from mawkishness is the quiet minimalism present in the almost invisible pastel stripes that frequently serve as a ground.

It would be misleading to propose that Wilke's work followed a linear trajectory. She continued to use biomorphic, eroticized forms as well as figurative imagery, as seen in a few pieces from the '70s. But some works took a more conceptual turn. A scribbled text piece, *Crucifixion Complex* (1978), alludes to Wilke's Jewish heritage through wordplay, turning PREJUDICE into PRAY JEW DIES; and for *Criminal Fingerprint Record* (1977), she asked a local police precinct to take her fingerprints, then incorporated them into the piece. It's a crucial shift, revealing an artist confident enough to push social limits as well as her own esthetic.

—Claire Barliant