

Hannah Wilke

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts
31 Mercer Street, SoHo
Through Oct. 13

It is not news that Hannah Wilke kept working until her death from lymphoma in January 1993. The large color photographs of her Intra-Venus series, first exhibited in 1994, continue her particular form of feminist body art while charting her declining health and her rebellious nose-thumbing spirit.

— But it turns out there are Intra-Venus videotapes (now CDs), as well. Ms. Wilke and her companion, Donald Goddard, made 16 two-hour tapes of the last two and a half years of her life. She intended that these would run simultaneously on a grid of 16 wall monitors. Now for the first time they are.

These tapes might be described as raw material for a documentary that was never made. In chronological order, they show the artist moving toward her own demise: losing her hair, bathing, removing bandages, dining with

friends, getting chemotherapy, floating naked in a swimming pool and communing with her beloved parrot and parakeets. She marries Mr. Goddard in a loft full of people; draws and paints watercolors in her studio and at the hospital. She vamps before a mirror, singing “I Feel Pretty,” or dances, alone, in her studio.

Occasionally the robed and turbaned Ms. Wilke eerily evokes portraits of other artists: Goya, Fragonard, Max Beckmann, the bedridden Matisse. At the end, we see her groan in pain and pass into a final coma.

But these tapes are more than raw material. Their simultaneous presentation multiplies them into something both artful and relentlessly real. They record the formation of memory in all its accumulating experiences, moments of connection and isolation, its quotidian details and feelings. It is amazing to have access to this memory, whose most intense version died with Ms. Wilke but whose fragments live on among those who were part of her final journey.

ROBERTA SMITH