

## craft horizons

Schwartz, Barbara. *Craft Horizon*,  
October, 1972.

### **Hannah Wilke**

Hannah Wilke, thirty-two, was born in Manhattan and graduated from Temple University. She resides in a Westbeth studio apartment, but her need for space has increased with the expanded scale of her work, and this summer she used an additional studio on Broome Street to pour her present material: latex. After Wilke has made the desired organic shapes, she employs them, when dry, as modules for more elaborate abstractions assuming sexual and botanical associations. These sensual connotations are not sublimated. Literally and metaphorically, they are multileveled. Gently tinted, her folding and unfolding forms deal in delicacy – substantially. “Female sexuality has been masked. Vaginas have been obliterated from the imagery of femininity,” so wrote Germaine Greer, and Wilke concurred when she began making sculpture of this ilk in 1960 before publication of *The Female Eunuch*. “Who has the guts to deal with cunts?” Wilke asked.

Her sensibility is affirmative. The flexible forms offer the beauty and intricacy of a conch; the safety and privacy of pockets; a source of communication, intimacy, and love. Wilke is unafraid to exemplify the properties of women.

Her fragile color, the pastel hues of bathrooms and babies’ rooms, is evident in her sensitive drawings and tiny terra-cotta “blooms” or “boxes” with gaping mouths, innocently erotic, kept in Plexiglaslike preserved orchid corsages. The recent sculptures – the vertical “Chocolate Pancake,” and the horizontal “Bowtie Bone” – are stacked and snapped across the wall. To combine parts, dime store snaps (with their own connotations) fasten the elements together and solve the structural problem of adhesion.

Talk about woman’s art! After washing brightly colored towels, Wilke discovered particles of lint had become a clump of stuff and thus her innovation: laundry lint sculpture, soft to sight and touch, a material extension for her specialized imagery. Fifty of these, combined as a homage to women (one for each state?), express a range of emotional gesture and context. In another new method lengths of rough twine are positioned in latex when it is just beginning to solidify. Like ribcages, these implement firm, intermittent support, allowing for greater volume and textural contrasts. Wilke’s layered pieces accentuate many intrinsic distinctions: nuances of cream, peach, rose, beige, and brown are all flesh tones alluding to the rubber pants of infancy, the underwear of adolescence, the girdles of adulthood, or the ashen powdered faces of old age. Being a woman is different from being a man.