

## HANNAH WILKE

—Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

ENTITLED "Support, Foundation, Comfort," this remarkable show of photographs and abstract polychrome sculpture was dedicated to the memory of Wilke's mother, Selma Butter, who died of breast cancer in 1982. The juxtaposition of the seemingly unrelated mediums told volumes about what it means to be both an artist and a woman.

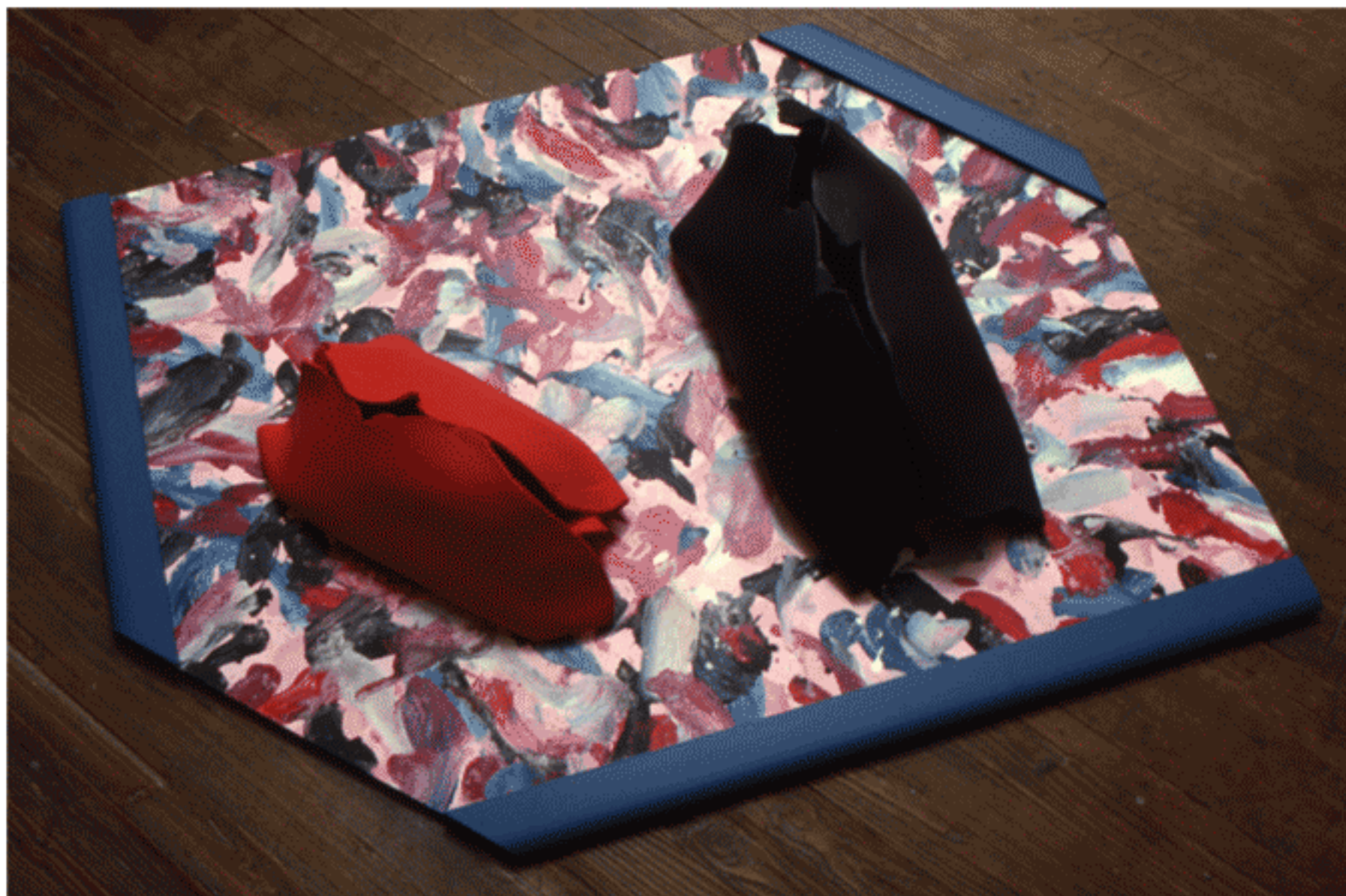
Part of the "In Memoriam" series, *Support, Foundation* (1983) consists of eight tabletop pieces, each of which is composed of two elegantly curved podlike clay forms on a polygonal hardboard base. Each combination of base and sculpted forms is painted with lush daring colors—pinks, aquas, violets, reds, yellows, blacks and creams—sometimes spattered or speckled, sometimes matt, sometimes brushed on with abstract-expressionist abandon but ordered by hard-edged stripes at the borders of the bases. Likewise, the much larger floor pieces in the "Of Relativity" series (1980-84) exploit the contrasts and affinities of one, two, three or four folded and painted forms to the rich painting of their geometric bases.

Bypassing the traditional categories of carved or modeled sculpture, Wilke rolls her clay into flat, round discs. She folds

the pieces by hand into forms that are unique despite the similarity of their facture. Anyone familiar with her earlier work will recognize allusions to female genitalia, yet there are also allusions to a myriad of natural objects, floral and even vegetal.

If the sculptures evoke the generation of life through the female principle, the photographs come to terms directly with the relationship of mother to daughter. Unflinchingly, Wilke photographed her mother in her hospital bed dressed up in a pretty nightgown and smiling for the camera, somehow responding to the love and concern of her daughter and acting as Wilke's collaborator and helpmate to the very end. Only in an occasional side view—taken perhaps when she was unaware—do we see sadness and bitterness in the old woman's face.

Likewise, Wilke did not hesitate to include a large Cibachrome diptych—a beautifully colored, erotically suggestive portrait of herself, her bare breasts decorated with gunlike ornaments—next to a photo of her dying mother, whose mastectomized chest is ornamented with the sores of the recurring cancer. This may not be easy to take, but it is courageous work that says something important about ideals of beauty and the ways that women are valued and devalued in this society. —R.B.



Hannah Wilke, *Untitled*, from "Of Relativity" series, 1980-84, acrylic and ceramic on hardboard, 48 by 84 by 12 inches. Ronald Feldman Fine Arts.

D. JAMES DEE