

Hannah Wilke

*Ronald Feldman Fine Arts
31 Mercer Street
Through Oct. 7*

Like Ronald Jones's sculptures, Hannah Wilke's latest works deal with illness, but in Ms. Wilke's case the illness is her own and it is deeply felt and movingly expressed. Since the 1950's, she has been making sculptures and has produced photographs, films and drawings that deal with issues of sexuality and, in particular, with images of women. Ms. Wilke has appeared in many of her own works. Narcissism, voyeurism and feminism have been among the themes of central importance to her and she has addressed them in ways that are both biting and funny.

In 1986, Ms. Wilke was diagnosed as having cancer and around that time she began the series of watercolors that are on view in this show. They are self-portraits composed of swirling, multi-colored lines. Some of them cohere into an anguished expression, others look more at ease. Each of Ms. Wilke's watercolors was done on a separate day. Together they form a diary of unusual perception and vivacity. It is as if, by making these works, Ms. Wilke was continually rejuvenating herself.

The show also includes, among other things, photographs of Ms. Wilke's mother, Selma Butter, who underwent treatments of chemotherapy that left her bald. The artist has fixed, underneath the photographs, sketches of birds that affectionately caricature her mother's appearance. To Ms. Wilke, cancer may disfigure but it does not dehumanize. Her show is filled with compassion and dignity.



Lisa Kahane

"B.C. Series," April 24, 1988, a watercolor self-portrait by Hannah Wilke at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts.