

art

Snatch Shot

Hannah Wilke

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts
31 Mercer Street
Through October 19

Back in the '70s, I interviewed Claes Oldenburg, who showed up with a glamorous woman named Hannah in tow. She didn't say much. But it was his interview, and at one point he remarked that he sometimes wished he could put the people he loved in boxes and just take them out when he wanted to play. Few people took Wilke seriously as an artist back then. She was too beautiful and too smart. When she showed her own phallic Ray Guns, Snatch Shots, and cunt-like chewing-gum accretions, it seemed to some like revenge for a relationship gone wrong.

If "Intra-Venus"—the posthumous show in which she ruthlessly exposed the physical ravages and emotional strengths of her own final illness—didn't cause a major reevaluation of this maverick feminist's work, the current exhibition of "Performatist Self-Portraits and Video/Film Performances 1976-85" should.

Here we can finally see the 10-monitor documentation of *So Help Me Hannah*, or watch *Through the Large Class*, the film of a 1976 piece in which Wilke, sporting a Beuysian fedora, did a sultry striptease behind Duchamp's masterwork. Flaunting her femininity like a weapon, she pitted herself against the big boys as a do-it-yourself incarnation of the *Bride Stripped Bare*. Her sharply politicized poster photos also commented on art, gender, value systems, and objects of desire—before Barbara Kruger, before Karen Finley, before the *Guerrilla Girls*.

A hundred quotations accompany 48 photos also called *So Help Me Hannah*. One, attributed to Richard Oldenburg, Claes's brother and former director of MOMA, reads: "Sometimes a show isn't a success at all until it is remembered wrongly ten years later." Sometimes the same is true of an artist, but in Wilke's case it seems less a matter of remembering wrongly than finally getting it right. —KIM LEVIN