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Een comparatieve studie van de doodsthematiek in het fotografisch oeuvre van Sally Mann, Lucinda Devlin, Hannah Wilke en Francesca Woodman

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in het fotografisch oeuvre van Sally Mann,
Lucinda Devlin, Hannah Wilke en Francesca Woodman

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1. Voorstelling van het project: Spel met de dood bij vrouwelijke kunstenaars.

Een comparatieve analyse van de doodsthematiek in het fotografisch oeuvre van Sally Mann, Lucinda Devlin, Francesca Woodman en Hannah Wilke.

1.1 Motivatie

Wetenschappelijke motivatie

De dood, een alomtegenwoordig en onvermijdelijk aspect dat met het leven verbonden is, en de daarmee rijzende vragen naar de zin van het leven, de ziel,… teisteren de mensheid al vanaf zijn prille bestaan. Vandaag zijn deze vragen naar leven en dood nog steeds brandend actueel en universeel. Het is een onafgesloten debat, een debat dat nog eeuwig zal doorgaan aangezien er geen sluitend antwoord is op de vraag 'wat is dood'. De doodsthematiek is dus een notie die op ons allen betrekking heeft. En na een eerste verkennend literatuuronderzoek[1] kan gesteld worden dat er nog weinig vergelijkend onderzoek verricht is naar de doodsthematiek bij verschillende vrouwelijke kunstenaars.
Eveneens zijn de vier Amerikaanse kunstenaressen/fotografes, Sally Mann, Lucinda Devlin, Francesca Woodman en Hannah Wilke, geen algemene kennis binnen de Europese grenzen.

Persoonlijke motivatie

Het idee van een onderzoek naar het thema spel met de dood bij vrouwelijke kunstenaars ontstond vanuit verschillende invalshoeken.
Ten eerste werd ik enkele jaren geleden aan het denken gezet over het gegeven van vrouwen in de kunst, door het lezen van Cynthia Freelands inleiding tot de kunsttheorie 'Maar is het kunst?'[2]. In dit boek wijdt ze een hoofdstuk – vijf: Sekse, genie en guerrilla girls – aan de minderheidsgroepering van vrouwelijke kunstenaars en de dominantie van mannen in het kunsthistorische canon. Hoewel er reeds een vruchtbare strijd werd gevoerd door feministen, die voornamelijk

[1] PAPE S., 'Spel met de dood bij vrouwelijke kunstenaars' [bachelorpaper].
[2] FREELAND C. (2004), pp. 115-136.

gedurende de negentiende en twintigste eeuw opkwamen voor de gelijke rechten van de vrouw ten opzichte van de man op alle vlakken van het leven, is er hedendaags nog steeds onderhuids een scheiding man – vrouw aanwezig. Of zoals de Duitse hedendaagse kunstenares Birgit Brenner het in een gesprek[3] verwoordde: elke vrouw die haar dromen nastreeft wordt als een feministe bestempelt. Want vrouwen moeten harder vechten om hun dromen te verwezenlijken. Het was eveneens opvallend voor mezelf om vast te stellen dat ik voornamelijk mannelijke kunstenaars kende en slechts een handvol vrouwelijke. Vandaar mijn keuze om de vrouwen binnen de kunstwereld onder de aandacht te brengen.
Ten tweede was er het artikel[4] dat ik gelezen had over de tentoonstelling Gorge(l) beklemming en verademing in de kunst die plaats vond in het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten te Antwerpen van 7 oktober 2006 tot en met 7 januari 2007. De bezoeker kreeg een selectie kunstwerken voorgeschoteld die hem bij de keel grijpen en de adem afsnijden. Binnen die selectie van werken lag de nadruk vooral op de gevoelsmatige kunst gecreëerd door vrouwen.
Vanuit deze twee ervaringen ontsproot in samenspraak met mijn promotor, prof. Dr. Claire Vandamme, het idee om het thema van de dood in al zijn verschillende geledingen te gaan onderzoeken bij vrouwelijke kunstenaars.
Zelf had ik enkele jaren voordien, binnen de humaniora opleiding toegepaste beeldende kunst aan het Sint-Lucas instituut Gent, gewerkt rond het thema van de vrouw als levensbron (vruchtbaarheid, zwangerschap – maan, en geboorte - zon) in het kader van mijn geïntegreerde proef. Hierdoor begon ik toen reeds na te denken over de dood, omdat deze beide begrippen leven en dood onherroepelijk met elkaar verbonden zijn.

De keuze om voor de masterproef verder te werken op het medium van de fotografie ontstond eveneens uit verschillende inzichten.
Ten eerste is er de inhoud van het woord fotografie, wat 'schrijven met licht' betekent. De term is namelijk afgeleid van de Griekse woorden 'photos' en 'graphos', wat respectievelijk 'licht' en 'schrijven' betekent. De

[3] BRENNER B. [in gesprek met Marjan Van Zeir en Stefanie Pape] (11.02.2007).
[4] BRAET J. (oktober 2006), pp.68-72.

vrouwelijke kunstenaars leggen de dood 'schrijvend met licht' vast. Dit staat in schril contrast met de mystiek van de dood die in tegenstelling tot het leven (daglicht) in verband wordt gebracht met het verdwijnen van het licht en het verschijnen van de duisternis (nacht). Eveneens is het merkwaardig dat de vrouwelijke vruchtbaarheidscyclus – die dus instaat voor het nieuwe leven op de aarde – in verband gebracht wordt met de nacht en de cyclus van de maan, terwijl de zon eerder het mannelijke symbool voor de levenskracht vormt.
Ten tweede was er de lezing van Catherine De Dycker over Thomas Struth op het symposium 'Touch me don't touch me'[5]. Mevrouw De Dijcker had het onder andere over de fotografie als wetenschappelijk element die op een rationele en objectieve wijze de werkelijkheid registreert, en datgene wat aan het blote oog ontsnapt, ontsluiert. Fotografie als het ontleden van het vluchtige, het verborgene zichtbaar maken. De fotografie als een medium dat heel dicht bij de werkelijkheid staat en toch iets transcendent en onvatbaars als de dood als onderwerp neemt.
Ten derde was ik het meest geprikkeld door het oeuvre van de vier fotografes die tot een (school)jaar terug onbekenden waren. Een sprong in het onbekende leek een uitdagende en boeiende keuze.

1.2 Vraagstelling

Vanuit deze fascinatie en visuele prikkelingen ontstond een vloed aan vragen zoals: Hoe gaan vrouwelijke kunstenaars om met het thema van de dood? Op welke manier geven ze vorm aan hun ideeën betreffende dood, vergankelijkheid, aftakeling…? Waarom nemen ze dit als gegeven op in hun kunst? Wat zijn de onderliggende elementen die hen drijven tot een confrontatie, een spel met de dood? En meer specifiek op de Masterproef toegespitst: hoe komt de doodsthematiek op diverse wijzen aanbod binnen eenzelfde medium?

1.3 Doelstelling

Vanuit het gegeven dat nog weinig vergelijkende studies werden ondernomen met betrekking tot de vrouwelijke kunstenaars en hun spel

[5] DE DIJCKER C. [symposium Leerstoel Karel Geirlandt] (07.12.2006).

met de dood, vloeit mijn doelstelling, namelijk een thematisch comparatieve analyse voort.

Vooraleer het oeuvre van de gekozen vrouwelijke kunstenaars te ontleden en aan een vergelijkende analyse te onderwerpen, is het mijn intentie te duiden wat de noties dood, vrouwelijk en fotografie impliceren, en hoe ze met elkaar in verband gebracht kunnen worden. Het leek mij uitermate belangrijk eerst stil te staan bij de kernbegrippen van het onderzoek. Eveneens is het relevant om de doodsthematiek in de kunstgeschiedenis vluchtig onder de loep te nemen.

Naderhand is het mijn intentie het oeuvre, en meer specifiek de met de doodsthematiek gelieerde reeksen, van de vier door mij geselecteerde kunstenaars te analyseren. Vooraleer met de vergelijkende analyse te starten, is het belangrijk de vier kunstenaars afzonderlijk te belichten en hun 'doodsseries' binnen een breder artistiek kader te plaatsen. Op die manier hoop ik tot een dieper inzicht in hun beweegredenen te komen, en topics die voor vergelijking vatbaar zijn te destilleren en analyseren.

2. Materialen en methoden

Nadat het onderzoeksthema in het academiejaar 2006–2007, in samenspraak met mijn promotor – prof. dr. Claire Vandamme – werd vastgelegd, ging ik op zoek naar vrouwelijke kunstenaars die op de een of andere manier met de doodsthematiek omgaan.

Frida Kahlo was één van de eersten die op mijn lijstje kwam te staan aangezien ik een korte tijd voor het bepalen van het thema de speelfilm 'Frida'[6] zag. Marina Abramovic en haar soms levensbedreigende performance werd reeds aangehaald door mijn promotor bij het vast leggen van het onderzoeksthema. Onmiddellijk dacht ik daarbij eveneens aan de gelijkaardige performancekunst van Gina Pane.

Naar aanleiding van een recensie in het tijdschrift Knack[7] bezocht ik de tentoonstelling Gorge(l): beklemming en verademing in kunst in het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunst te Antwerpen. Daar kwam ik in aanraking met enkele kunstenaressen – Ana Mendieta, Francesca Woodman, Marlene Dumas, Frida Kahlo – met een beklijvend oeuvre waarin de doodsthematiek een plaats toebedeeld kreeg.

Enkele andere kunstenaressen kwamen op diverse, toevallige wijzen aan het licht. Een zondagochtend bezoekje aan het S.M.A.K. te Gent was voldoende om Agnes Varda en haar aangrijpende installaties aan de lijst toe te voegen. Tijdens een try-out van het theaterstuk "Geletterde Mensen"[8] – een voorstelling waarin de auteurs Tom Lanoye en Antije Krog fragmenten uit hun oeuvre voordroegen – bracht Krog een gedicht naar voor over *het Ouderpaar* van Käthe Kollwitz. Op die manier werd ook zij toegevoegd aan de lijst. De series *Omega Suites* van Lucinda Devlin en *Intra-Venus* van Hannah Wilke, alsook de jutte beeldengroepen van Magdalena Abakanowicz ontdekte ik door in boeken te snuisteren.

Een ander kanaal dat me een duwtje in de rug gaf, was de vzw Gynaika[9] en meer specifiek hun medewerker Peter Bondewel die enkele van de

[6] TAYMOR J. [speelfilm] (2002).
[7] BRAET J. (oktober 2006), pp.68-72.
[8] KROG A. en LANOYE (act.) (19 oktober 2006).
[9] http://www.gynaika.be/site/pages/home.php: een culturele vereniging, die het principe van gelijke kansen verdedigt, staat voor geestelijke groei en ontplooiing, voor innerlijke verrijking, voor openheid en begrip; Gynaika heeft aandacht voor gender in de artistieke wereld, voor vrouwelijke kunstenaars, voor diversiteit van cultuur, voor sociale aspecten in de kunstwereld en voor sociaal-artistieke projecten.

kunstenaressen – Francesca Woodman, Ana Mendieta en Marina Abramovic – bevestigde, maar eveneens de weg opende naar andere: Sally Mann en Regina José Galindo.

Nadat ik dertien kunstenaressen en hun spel met de dood ontdekt had, besloot ik me in eerste instantie te informeren over de noties dood en vrouw(elijk). Ik ging op de volgende manier te werk. Eerst werd er online in de databanken van verscheidene bibliotheken gezocht naar bruikbare boeken aan de hand van trefwoorden zoals 'dood', 'vrouwelijkheid', 'dood in de kunst', 'vrouwen in de kunst',… Daarna werden de veelbelovende titels doorbladerd, ontleend en gelezen. Voor het begrip dood werd voornamelijk beroep gedaan op religieus en filosofisch getinte essays die de nadruk legden op de problematiek en de verschillende interpretaties rond het gegeven. Ook in een algemene encyclopedie werden de diverse interpretaties binnen verscheidene sectoren opgezocht, om het begrip in een zo breed mogelijk kader te plaatsen. In verband met het begrip 'vrouwelijk' vielen me twee nuttige en heel verschillende werken te handen, namelijk het boek van Francis Smets en de tentoonstellingscatalogus Femme Fatale, die het vrouwelijke of met andere woorden het vrouw zijn vanuit diverse invalshoeken belichten, maar toch in essentie op hetzelfde terugkomen namelijk dat de vrouw naast het leven ook de dood in zich draagt.

Ook door eenvoudig in de bibliotheken te snuisteren stootte ik op verschillende bruikbare boeken.

Naderhand ging ik opzoek naar informatie over het oeuvre en leven van elke vrouwelijke kunstenaar die op mijn lijst stond met de intentie de vragen waarom en hoe ze de doodsthematiek opnemen in hun oeuvre oppervlakkig af te tasten. Dit via allerhande kanalen. In de eerste plaats werd zoveel mogelijk literatuur geconsulteerd. Over de vrouwelijke kunstenaressen waarvan weinig tot geen literatuur voor handen was, werd opzoekingwerk verricht op het internet waarbij de voorkeur uitging naar de websites van galerijen wegens hun grotere betrouwbaarheid. Het opzoekingwerk gebeurde voornamelijk met het oog op de doodsthematiek, maar eveneens werd informatie verzameld over hun complete oeuvre om hun spel met de dood in een breder, algemener kader te kunnen plaatsen.

Zoals in de colleges “fundamenten van de moderne en hedendaagse kunst” aangeleerd werd, is het belangrijk kunst vanuit verschillende invalshoeken te bekijken om tot een degelijke ontsluiting te komen. Vanuit deze visie werd geopteerd het werk van de verschillende kunstenaars vanuit verscheidene invalshoeken te bekijken. De literatuur werd dus niet geselecteerd op basis van een of andere methodologie. Eerder werd geopteerd zoveel mogelijk diverse inzichten te bestuderen. Ook werd weinig rekening gehouden met de specifieke doelgroepen en de daarop volgende implicaties aangezien ook meer gevulgariseerde werken een wetenschappelijke studie impliceren. Wel werd een selectie gemaakt betreffende de internetbronnen en hun wetenschappelijk betrouwbaarheid. De voorkeur ging hierbij uit naar de websites van galerijen en musea, op enkele uitzonderingen na.

In het verlengde van dit eerste verkennend literatuuronderzoek – dat aan het einde van het vorige academiejaar (2006 – 2007) neerslag vond in de bachelorpaper – werd geopteerd om vier vrouwelijke kunstenaressen en hun spel met de dood aan een comparatieve analyse te onderwerpen. In eerste instantie was het dus belangrijk een weldoordachte keuze te maken betreffende de vraag welke vier van de dertien kunstenaressen ik nog dichter onder de loep zou nemen. Dit was geen gemakkelijke opgave, maar na een periode van bedachtzaamheid opteerde ik voor de vier kunstenaressen – Sally Mann, Lucinda Devlin, Hannah Wilke en Francesca Woodman – omdat die allen de doodsthematiek vanuit het zogenaamde objectief en werkelijkheidsregistrerende medium fotografie benaderden. Enerzijds werd deze keuze ingegeven vanuit het ambigue gegeven dat fotografie letterlijk ‘schrijven met licht’ betekent, wat sterk in tegenstelling staat met de notie van de dood die met de donkerte van de nacht in verband gebracht wordt. Anderzijds werd de keuze mede ingegeven omdat deze vier vrouwelijke kunstenaars mij voordien onbekend waren. De masterproef kreeg op die manier het statuut van een avontuur waarbij ongekende gebieden verkend zouden worden.

Nadat de keuze voor de vier fotografes door prof. dr. Claire Vandamme werd goedgekeurd, besloot ik opzoek te gaan naar meer informatie betreffende het oeuvre en leven van deze vrouwen.

In eerste instantie werden daar waar mogelijk nog internetbronnen via de websites van de galerijen bijeen gesprokkeld. De bibliotheek van het S.M.A.K. werd geconsulteerd en aangezien ik me dagelijks wou omringen met de fotografie van de vrouwelijke kunstenaressen opteerde ik voor de aankoop van enkele fotoboeken van de betreffende fotografes wat de consultatie van anders in België moeilijk of niet consulteerbare boeken vergemakkelijkte.

Net als voor de bachelorpaper het geval was, wordt in een eerste, inleidend hoofdstuk nagegaan wat de overkoepelende begrippen van het onderzoek – dood, vrouw(elijk) en fotografie – kunnen beteken en in hoeverre de doodsthematiek doorheen de kunstgeschiedenis tot ons komt. Binnen dit gedeelte was het mijn intentie om eveneens terug te koppelen naar de bachelorpaper door een kort overzicht te integreren van de vrouwelijke kunstenaars.

Een tweede hoofdstuk belicht kort de vier vrouwelijke kunstenaars en hun spel met de dood binnen het breder kader van hun complete artistieke oeuvre. Deze situering van de doodsthematiek binnen hun oeuvre was, samen met het voorafgaand onderzoek naar de drie overkoepelende termen, de aanzet om tot enkele comparatieve topics te komen die naderhand in een derde hoofdstuk uitgewerkt werden waarbij de verschillen en gelijkenissen binnen hun spel met de dood geduid worden.

Afrondend wordt een algemeen besluit, terugkoppelend naar de vragen die aan de basis van dit onderzoek lagen, geformuleerd. Binnen dit overkoepelend gedeelte wordt zowel aandacht besteed aan de onderzoeksresultaten als aan problemen waarop tijdens het onderzoek gestuit werd en eventuele mogelijkheden tot verder onderzoek.

3. Inleiding

3.1 Situering van de begrippen dood en vrouw(elijk) en fotografie

3.1.1 De Dood

Sinds het bestaan van de mensheid is de doodsproblematiek een netelige en veel in vraag gestelde kwestie. Wat is dood? Niet meer leven, ophouden met zijn, stoppen met bestaan, sterven als het absolute einde of als overgang, … ?
Samen met de vraag naar 'dood' rijst onvermijdelijk de vraag naar 'leven' vermits deze twee begrippen heel nauw samenhangen. Om een antwoord te geven op de vraag 'wat dood is' moet er een bepaalde visie zijn op 'wat leven is of inhoudt'. Zijn dood en leven complementair of zijn dood en geboorte eerder elkaars tegengestelde, de twee zijden of uitersten van het leven?

De doodsproblematiek is een essentieel gegeven in het menselijke bestaan. Vragen als 'waarom leven we', 'wat is de zin van het leven', 'waarom sterven we', 'waar komt de dood vandaan',… vormen een ingewikkelde denkstof die de mens al eeuwig bezig hield, houdt en bezig zal houden. Problematisch omdat één concreet, algemeen antwoord onbestaande is. Vanuit verschillende invalshoeken werden allerhande verklaringen naar voren geschoven. Maar allen zijn het slechts speculaties omtrent existentiële vragen waarop waarschijnlijk nooit één sluitend antwoord zal gegeven worden. Zo werd de 'dood' op heel uiteenlopende manieren ervaren en verklaard. Vele van deze verklaringen/ervaringen vinden we nog steeds terug bij de verschillende geloofsovertuigingen (religies/godsdiensten). De dood wordt gezien als het absolute einde, verlossing, straf, voortzetting van het aardse leven in een andere/geestelijke vorm, overgang,… Dood werd en wordt nog steeds ervaren als een mysterie.[10] Dikwijls wordt de dood ook met een zeker angstig gevoel benaderd omdat een eenduidig en absoluut antwoord onbestaande is.

[10] Zoals blijkt uit de verschillende filosofische en godsdienstige boeken die rond dit thema handelen.

Zonder te veel uit te wijden kan gezegd worden dat het christendom, jodendom en de islam een uitzicht over de dood heen bieden.[11] Ze hanteren het principe van een onsterfelijke ziel in een vergankelijke lichaam die in een andere (geestelijke) wereld verder leeft. Het hindoeïsme en boeddhisme daarentegen hechten geloof aan het principe van de reïncarnatie of wedergeboorte waarbij het individu een kring van verschillende levensvormen moet doorlopen om tot onthechting van het aardse leven en alzo tot de absolute verlossing – opname in Brahmaan – te bekomen.[12]

Het problematische aspect, en ook het aspect dat de mens doet vrezen voor de dood, is het feit dat er slechts één enkel vaststaand gegeven is, namelijk dat iedereen sterft. Maar wanneer, hoe en waarom – het kernelement van de problematiek – is niet geweten. Enkel het feit dat we sterven, is een zekerheid. Al van het prille begin, vanaf de geboorte en zelfs al voordien tijdens de ontwikkelingsfase, hangt de dood als een absoluut gegeven, als een zwaard van Damocles, boven ons hoofd. De dood is van alle tijden en is alomtegenwoordig. Al staan we er niet alle dagen bewust bij stil, dagelijks sterven duizenden mensen. Ze sneuvelen in oorlogsgevechten, sterven van honger, ziekte, ouderdom,… Het is een vaststaand gegeven waar we niet onderuit kunnen. Dit maakt de notie 'dood' zo ondoorgrondelijk en is ook de reden waarom sinds het begin van de mensheid getracht werd er een verklaring voor te vinden.
Wanneer we de algemene biologische, geneeskundige verklaring van de termen leven en dood erop na slaan, kunnen we stellen dat 'leven' een toestand is van een in de natuur voorkomend systeem dat gekenmerkt wordt door eigenschappen als groei, voortplanting en veranderlijkheid. 'Dood zijn' is het ophouden met leven. Dit treedt op bij een stoornis in één van de vitale lichaamsfuncties. Dood zijn is aldus het afsterven of stoppen met functioneren van een organisme waarbij de materie haar functie verliest.[13] Maar in deze algemeen wetenschappelijke verklaring is de grens tussen leven en dood eveneens moeilijk te trekken. We kunnen

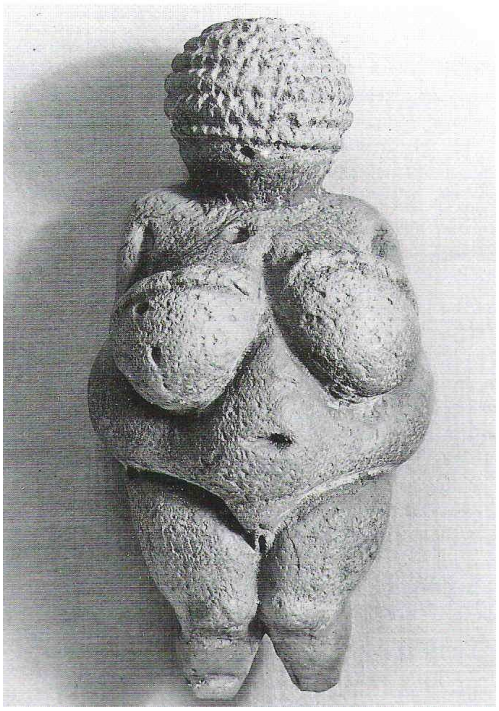
[11] N.N., *Oosthoeks encyclopedie* (1960), pp. 431-434.
[12] IBIDEM.
[13] IBIDEM.

dit onder andere afleiden uit allerhande verschillende medische termen zoals klinische dood en hersendood, waar ligt de grens?[14]

Liefde en dood, zijn net als leven en dood, twee zaken die eveneens doorheen de tijd vaak met elkaar verbonden worden. Hoewel het tegenpolen zijn, Eros/levens of liefdesdrift en Thanatos/doodsverlangen, toch hebben ze gemeenschappelijke karakteristieken. Ze tillen de mens boven een banale realiteit, of met andere woorden: ze zorgen voor het fysiek beleven van transcendentie.[15]

3.1.2 Vrouw(elijk)

De houding ten opzichte van de vrouw is al eeuwenlang een ambigu element. Enerzijds werd ze aanschouwd als de schenkster van het (nieuwe) leven, de moeder/madonna, anderzijds werd ze bestempeld als de verleidster tot het kwade, de femme fatale/hoer die enkel dood en destructie brengt.



Afb.1. *Venus van Willendorf*, ca 25000-20000 v.C.

[14] IBIDEM: Iemand is klinisch dood wanneer geen waarneembare tekens van leven kunnen vastgesteld worden: geen hartslag, ademhaling of bewustzijn, maar reanimatie redding kan betekenen.
Iemand is hersendood wanneer de hersenen niet meer functioneren en het lichaam niet langer in staat is de temperatuur, bloeddruk en ademhaling zelf te regelen.
[15] BROKKEN A. e.a. (1992), p. 29.

De oudste afbeeldingen van het vrouwelijke naakt zijn de befaamde prehistorische Venusbeeldjes, waarvan de meest bekende ongetwijfeld de Venus van Willendorf (afb.1) is. Heel vaak worden deze beeldjes geïnterpreteerd vanuit de vruchtbaarheidsmagie. Volgens Francis Smets moeten we van deze interpretatie loskomen wanneer we een diepere, verder reikende metaforische visie op het vrouwelijke willen ontwaren.[16] Maar wanneer we de sterk benadrukte, vrouwelijke lichaamsdelen onder de loep nemen, kunnen we deze vanuit een rationele biologische invalshoek binnen de vruchtbaarheidscultus verklaren. De geaccentueerde borsten, heupen en bolle buik verwijzen aldus naar de vrouwelijke kracht leven te schenken. De brede heupen kunnen in verband gebracht worden met de anatomische constructie van het vrouwelijke bekken. In vergelijking met de mannelijke partner blijken deze inderdaad breder daar het de vrouwen zijn die het nageslacht moeten baren. Bredere bekken/heupen vergemakkelijken deze functie. Ook de zwaardere borsten kunnen vanuit deze invalshoek verklaard worden. De vrouwelijke borst bevat de melkklieren die van groot belang zijn bij het zogen van hun jong. Tijdens de zwangerschap zwellen de borsten van de vrouw door de melkvorming. De bolle buik representeert zodoende het nieuwe leven dat zich gedurende negen maanden ontwikkelt in de baarmoeder van de vrouw.

Aldus kunnen we de vrouw beschouwen als de schenker van leven, ze heeft dan ook een cruciale rol binnen de voortplanting. Maar telkens nieuw leven op de wereld gezet wordt, komt de dood als een onherroepelijk gegeven de wereld mee binnen geglipt.

In de Westerse wereld is de bekendste vrouw–moeder de Heilige maagd Maria. Maar ook hier is de tegenstelling niet ver te zoeken. Enerzijds kennen we haar afgebeeld als jonge moeder die zich op een tedere en liefdevolle wijze met haar kleine spruit bezig houdt (afb.2). Anderzijds wordt ze vaak als rouwende moeder, die het moeilijk heeft haar zorgelement los te laten, afgebeeld. Een voorbeeld van zo'n Piëta is deze van het Vaticaan van de Italiaanse Renaissance kunstenaar Michelangelo (afb.3). In dit beeld voelen we de zowel de eenheid als de onderlinge verdeeldheid tussen aarde en hemel, moeder en kind. Het dode lichaam van Christus is als één met het treurende lichaam van zijn moeder. Hij

[16] SMETS F. (2002), pp.105-107.

wordt quasi volledig in haar schoot en gewaad opgenomen. Ze bevinden zich in hetzelfde vlak. Maria echter is volledig onderhevig aan de zwaartekracht, haar gewaad raakt met brede plooien de aarde, terwijl Christus' lichaam de aarde amper raakt.



Afb.2. MICHELANGELO, *Madonna met Kind*, ca 1501-1504.



Afb.3. MICHELANGELO, *Piéta,* ca 1500.

De vrouw werd niet alleen door de eeuwen heen met 'leven' (als moeder) in verband gebracht, evenzeer werd ze met de dood, lijden, vergankelijkheid en destructie gelieerd. Ze werd gevreesd voor haar seductieve kracht omdat deze haar in staat brengt de mannen te manipuleren en ten gronde te richten. Het was voornamelijk vanuit die optiek dat de man besloot de vrouw aan banden te leggen, om haar zo de vrijheid te ontkennen opdat ze zich niet van haar natuurlijke machtspositie zou bewust worden.[17]

De notie van de 'femme fatale', die Eros en Thanatos verbindt, vinden we doorheen de eeuwen terug. Maar het is voornamelijk in de negentiende eeuw dat deze een hoogvlucht kende door de toenemende ambigue visie omtrent de vrouw.[18] In de negentiende eeuwse samenleving moest de vrouw haar plaats kennen. Binnen het gezin vormde ze een hoeksteen van de maatschappij, en vervulde ze de rol van de vrouw aan de haard die, volgens de door de man opgelegde normen, instond voor het huishouden en het verzorgen van de kinderen.[19] Deze hoeksteen visie

[17] BROKKEN A. e.a.(1992), p. 9.
[18] IDEM, p. 11.
[19] IDEM, p. 9.

kunnen we reeds terugvinden in het zestiende eeuwse humanisme die de verering van Sint-Anna promootte.[20]

De strenge moraal omtrent het seksuele leven droeg eveneens een steentje bij tot de dubbelzinnige houding ten opzichte van de vrouw tijdens de negentiende eeuw. Het seksuele leven binnen het huwelijk werd verstoord en verdord aangezien seks enkel en alleen ter voortplanting mocht dienst doen. De vrouw aan de haard werd dus in verschillende opzichten beteugeld terwijl haar mannelijke partner een grotere erotische vrijheid genoot. Hij had immers het bordeel als uitlaatklep voor zijn seksuele uitspattingen.[21]

Maar ook voordien was de notie 'femme fatale' aanwezig. Volgens de christelijke traditie is Eva de eerste vrouw en ook onmiddellijk de eerste fatale vrouw. In de Genesis lezen we dat Eva zich door de slang laat verleiden om de verboden appel van de boom der kennis tot zich te nemen, en door te geven aan Adam. Aldus verleidt de vrouw de man tot zonde waardoor ze beiden uit het hof van Eden verbannen worden.[22] Eva's daden brachten de mens dood/sterfelijkheid, lijden en barensweeën (de pijn bij het baren van een kind) als sancties van een getoornde God. Ook hier sluipt de ambiguïteit met betrekking tot de vrouwelijkheid binnen aangezien de naam Eva in het Hebreeuws 'de moeder van alle mensen' betekent.[23] Ze draagt de beide opponenten leven - dood met zich mee. Naast Eva vinden we in de Bijbel nog enkele andere fatale vrouwen terug (Delila, Judith, Salome,…)[24] die de mannen ten gronde richten.

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[20]LODWICK M. (2006), p. 126: Volgens overlevering is Anna de moeder van Maria. Er zijn twee types afbeeldingen waarvan het tweede type weergave haar sinds de renaissance voornamelijk voorstelt met de Heilige familie.

[21] BROKKEN A. e.a.(1992), p. 11.

[22] IDEM, pp. 21-25.

[23] LODWICK M. (2006), p. 120.

[24] IDEM, pp. 202-203: Delila was een Filistijnse vrouw waarop Simson, een groot strijder die kracht kreeg door zijn haren, verliefd werd. Zij werd door zijn rivalen, de Filistijnen omgekocht om zijn geheim te ontdekken. Na veel gesmeek vertelde hij haar de waarheid, waarop ze hem op haar knieën in slaap zong en zijn krachtgevende haren liet afknippen. Alzo konden de Filistijnen hem gevangen nemen, staken ze zijn ogen uit en lieten hem maïs malen. Maar zijn haren groeiden terug en Simson kon wraak nemen.

IDEM, p. 173: Judith was een mooie jonge vrouw wiens moed en durf symbool stonden voor de joodse strijd tegen de vijand. De stad waar ze woonde werd belegerd door de Assyriërs onder generaal Holofernes. De Israëlieten stonden op punt van overgave, toen Judith vrijwillig aanbood haar stad te redden. Samen met haar dienares bezocht ze het vijandige kamp alwaar ze Holofernes met haar

Het destructieve, fatale, dodelijke vermogen van de vrouw staat ook in verband met haar macht over leven en dood. Als moeder geeft en beschermt ze het leven. En tegelijkertijd manifesteert ze zich als beschermster van de doden aangezien ze bij het overlijden of de begrafenis van een familielid vaak de rol van pleurante op zich nam om alzo de gevoelens van verdriet en rouw te veruiterlijken.[25]

Een ander aspect dat ook van belang is bij het onderzoek naar de doodsthematiek, is hoe vrouwen zelf de dood ervaren. Volgens Els Berkhout-Dhont, geestelijk raadsvrouw, is het grote verschil tussen de twee seksen dat vrouwen veel minder nadenken over de onsterfelijkheid. Door het dragen en baren van kinderen ervaren ze een soort scheppingselement. Hun nageslacht is hun onsterfelijkheid, een creatie van hun eigen lichaam. Het basale, dat een nieuw leven voortkomt uit de eigen cellen, uit het eigen lichaam, dat is naar haar mening een optimale vorm van onsterfelijkheid. Bij mannen is onsterfelijkheid veel meer verbonden met activiteiten en voortzetting. Als mannen jong sterven, hebben ze vaak het gevoel dat ze nog zoveel hadden willen of moeten doen. Vrouwen daarentegen vinden het moeilijk het zorgelement los te laten en degenen die achter blijven vaarwel te zeggen…[26]

3.1.3 Fotografie

Net als de dood en vrouwelijkheid draagt ook het medium fotografie een ambigue tegenstelling in zich.
Van het medium fotografie wordt dikwijls gedacht dat het zich op een directe en objectieve wijze verhoudt ten opzichte van de werkelijkheid. Het wordt vaak omschreven als een rationeel werkelijkheidsregistrerend

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schoonheid betoverde waarop hij haar uitnodigde voor een maaltijd met de intentie haar te verleiden. Maar hij werd dronken en viel in slaap, waarop Judith hem met zijn eigen zwaard onthoofde en alzo de vijand versloeg.
IDEM, p. 201: Salome, de dochter van Herodias, danste voor Herodus in ruil voor het hoofd van Johannes de Doper. Johannes de Doper werd gevangengenomen wegens zijn kritiek op het incestueuze huwelijk tussen Herodias en Herodus Antipas. Herodus wilde hem terechtstellen maar vreesde de reactie van het volk die hem als een profeet beschouwde. Salome maakte misbruik van Herodus' zwakheid en danste op zijn verjaardag voor hem waarop hij haar alles wat ze wenste beloofde. Opgestookt door haar moeder eiste ze het hoofd van Johannes op een schotel, wat Herodus met tegenzin liet uitvoeren.
[25] BROKKEN A. e.a. (1992), p. 25.
[26] ELDERS F. (1994), p. 13.

medium dat hetgeen dat aan het blote menselijke oog ontsnapt kan zichtbaar maken.[27] Maar ook een foto is slechts een beeld, en beelden zijn visuele tekens of inhouden die op de een of andere manier naar de ons omringende realiteit verwijzen. Ook de fotograaf is, net als de beeldende kunstenaar, een individu die in een beeld zijn verhouding tot de realiteit poogt vorm te geven of uit te drukken. Daardoor zijn beelden altijd subjectief aangezien ze vervaardigd worden door een particulier individu die een geheel eigen wijze van denken en voelen bezit. Ondanks deze subjectiviteit kan toch gesteld worden dat de fotografie zich op een bijzondere wijze verhoudt tot de werkelijkheid. Het is binnen deze relatie dat het fotografisch paradox kan gesitueerd worden. Het is namelijk zo dat in één en hetzelfde beeld twee tegengestelde elementen kunnen onderscheiden worden. Enerzijds is er een grote gelijkenis met de werkelijkheid en anderzijds (en tegelijkertijd) is er een illusionaire vervreemding van de realiteit aanwezig.[28] De fotografie is dus een medium dat een dubbele verhouding heeft met de werkelijkheid waardoor het in de weergave van de dood een speciale positie inneemt. Zowel de dood als de fotografie dragen tegelijk deze dubbelzinnige relatie van realiteit en irrealiteit in zich. Misschien is juist daarom de fotografie dus het medium bij uitstek in de pogingen de dood te vangen.

Eveneens kan opgemerkt worden dat de term fotografie[29] zich – op linguïstisch niveau – merkwaardig verhoudt ten opzichte van de dood. Het woord fotografie, wat voor het eerst gebruikt werd door Joseph Niépce op 9 mei 1816 in een brief aan zijn broer, is van het Grieks afgeleid en betekent in de letterlijke zin 'schrijven met licht'.[30] Al schrijvend met licht wordt de dood, een notie die reeds geruime tijd in verband gebracht wordt met de komst van de donkerte van de nacht terwijl het leven veeleer geassocieerd wordt met de warme en lichtende stralingen van de zon (het daglicht), vastgelegd.

[27] SONTAG S. (1979), p. 72-74.
[28] SWINNEN J.M. (1992), pp. 35-36.
[29] IDEM, p. 50: De camera als een spiegel met een geheugen. Ook dit aspect draagt bij tot de ambigue relatie van het medium-dood aangezien deze in het vereeuwigen of nemen van een foto een centrale rol speelt en tegelijk als object in verband kan gebracht worden met de vergankelijkheid (de vanitastaferelen).
[30] IDEM, p. 16.

3.2 Beknopt overzicht van de doodsthematiek binnen de kunstgeschiedenis

3.2.1 Algemeen overzicht

Aangezien het mysterie betreffende leven en dood eeuwenoud is, is het niet verwonderlijk dat het thema van de sterfelijkheid en vergankelijkheid één van de grootste in de kunstgeschiedenis is. Op diverse manieren wordt de doodsthematiek binnen allerhande kunsttakken behandeld.

Doorheen de beeldende kunst komt de dood in verschillende gedaanten tot ons. We zijn ermee vertrouwd sinds het lijden van Christus en de heiligen, een thema werd. De dood wordt teruggevonden in de verschijning van Christus, heiligen en allerhande mythologische en Bijbelse figuren die op een gruwelijke wijze de dood tegemoet gingen of anderen er toe veroordeelden.[31]
De Westerse mens werd doorheen de kunstgeschiedenis dikwijls aan zijn sterfelijkheid herinnert door de veel voorkomende voorstelling van het *Laatste Oordeel* dat ons een zicht geeft op de wereld bij de wederkomst van Christus aan het einde der tijden, waarbij de doden uit hun graf opstaan om voor de opperste rechter te verschijnen. Wanneer we de compositie van het tafereel door Pieter Pourbus (afb.4) bekijken, zien we een tweedeling, zowel horizontaal als verticaal: het wordt in twee registers ingedeeld – hemel en aarde – en de aarde op zich wordt eveneens in twee vlakken opgedeeld – goed en kwaad – wat in het voorplan doorbroken wordt door de figuren die uit hun graf klimmen en nog geen beoordeling kregen. In de hemel zien we hoe Christus in zijn verrezen gedaante het lot van de doden bepaalt. Met brede gebaren oordeelt de opperste rechter over het goede en kwade op aarde, terwijl engeltjes hem een witte lelie en een zwaard aanreiken, respectievelijk symbool voor de barmhartigheid en rechtvaardigheid van zijn oordeel. Aan Christus' voeten zien we twee engelen die met blaasinstrumenten het gebeuren op aarde aankondigen. De zoon Gods wordt geflankeerd door een groep heiligen en gelukzaligen. In het onderste register zien we hoe de doden uit hun graven opstaan en de Verlossers oordeel ondergaan. In het voorplan zien we er nog enkele uit hun graven

[31] MIGLIETTI F. A. (2003), p. 64.

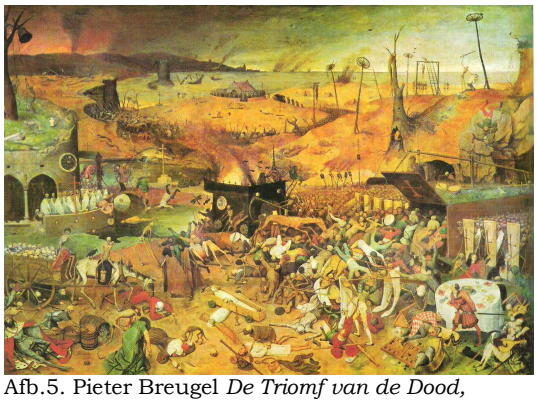
klimmen, een enkele nog als skelet en nog niet tot de menselijke gedaante verrezen, met centraal een verrezen vrouw die Christus aanschouwt. Daarachter zien we hoe de definitieve splitsing tussen goed en kwaad geschiedt. Links op het groene gras dat beschenen wordt met Christus' zonnegloed, staan de gelukzaligen die via een neerdalende wolkentrap met hulp van engelen in de hemel opgenomen worden. Rechts daarentegen zien we een wirwar van verdoemden met smekende en verschrikte blikken, die door duivelachtige wezens naar de onderwereld worden meegesleurd. Donkere opstijgende rookwolken suggereren de helse vuren. Als we tussen de twee groepen doorkijken naar het achterplan zien we hoe de verdeling tussen goed en kwaad zich in een uitdijende beweging voordoet. En als we dichterbij een kijkje nemen, zien we centraal op de achtergrond een brandende verwoeste stad, product van de mens, in een sereen door God geschapen landschap.



Afb.4. PIETER POURBUS, *Het Laatste Oordeel,* 1551.

Eeuwenlang werd de dood vaak vereenzelvigd met een mannelijk skelet, enkele uitzonderingen in acht genomen. Magere Hein of Pietje de Dood terroriseerde iedereen die zijn pad kruiste. De dood werd als een

huiveringwekkend en angstaanjagend 'iets' afgebeeld.[32] Een voorbeeld van de dood verpersoonlijkt door de Magere Hein vinden we in Pieter Breugels *De Triomf van de Dood* (afb.5). In dit werk toont hij dat we allen sterfelijk zijn. De dood, hier verpersoonlijkt door een volledige troep skeletten, spaart niemand, zowel de koning, de edelen, als de arme boeren moeten eraan geloven. Eveneens toont Breugel enkele verschillende wijzen van sterven.



Afb.5. Pieter Breugel *De Triomf van de Dood,* 1562-1563.



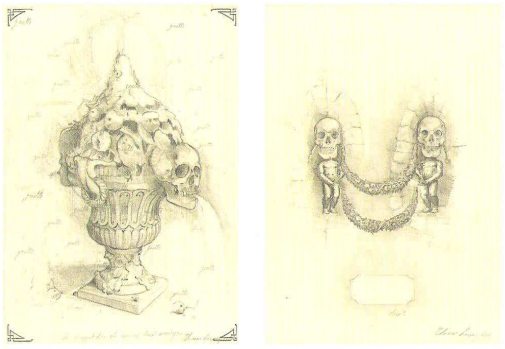
Afb.6. GOYA, *Executie van de opstandelingen (3 mei 1808),* 1814.

Tijdens de negentiende eeuw veranderde deze verpersoonlijking geleidelijk aan. Het mannelijk schrikwekkende skelet werd stilaan vervangen door de Engel des Doods, waardoor de dood enigszins zijn boosaardige en dreigende karakter verloor. De dood werd op die manier vereenzelvigd met een (vriendelijke) jongeling die rust en vrede brengt.[33]
Een ander gedaante waarin de dood de kunstgeschiedenis binnensluipt, zijn de taferelen die de dreiging en de vernietiging van de oorlog tonen. Eén van de meest gekende oorlogstaferelen is ongetwijfeld Goya's *Executie van de opstandelingen (3 mei 1808)* (afb.6) dat voor vele andere kunstenaars als meesterlijk voorbeeld dienst deed. Naast dit meesterwerk creëerde Goya voordien reeds gravures die de gruwelijke realiteit van de oorlog in beeld brachten. Deze werken benadrukken de zinloosheid en wreedheid van geweld.

Ook in de moderne kunst komt de dood, nu niet meer noodzakelijk in de gedaante van een skelet of engel des doods, aan bod. Hedendaags lijkt de nadruk te liggen op het reële aspect van de eindigheid: thema's als oorlog, ongelukken, moord… Men gaat minder in de hemel/hel kijken en

[32] BROKKEN A. e.a. (1992), p. 29.
[33] IBIDEM

richt zich meer tot de aardse wereld. In de modern - hedendaagse kunst wordt niet langer getracht de dood te verpersoonlijken, maar lijkt eerder een poging te worden ondernomen de dood als een 'sfeer' te vangen of te evoceren. Desondanks blijven het skelet en doodshoofd wel nog steeds een belangrijk motief binnen de beeldende kunst. Het skeletmotief komt bijvoorbeeld dikwijls voor in het werk van de Mexicaanse kunstenares Frida Kahlo maar ook in het oeuvre van de hedendaagse kunstenaar Thomas Lerooy (afb.7-8) is het een weerkerend element.





Afb.7-8. (links) THOMAS LEROOY, *La Goutte,* 2005 /*Duo2,* 2005.

Afb.9-11. (rechts) ANDY WARHOL, *Most Wanted Men n. 12 (Frank B),* 1964/ *Five Deaths,* 1962-63/ *Electric Chair,* 1967.

De doodsthematiek vinden we onder andere in het oeuvre van Andy Warhol. Zijn *Big Electric Chair* (afb.10) of *Death and Disaster* (afb.11) reeks suggereren zijn interesse voor de sterfelijkheid. Ook bij andere kunstenaars is een fascinatie voor de dood en sterfelijkheid terug te vinden. Naast deze vluchtige voorbeelden zijn er nog talrijke anderen mogelijk aangezien de doodsthematiek één van de grootste thema's is in de kunstgeschiedenis.

Ook het thema van vergankelijkheid kwam en komt nog steeds frequent aanbod in de kunst.
Vanaf de vijftiende - zestiende eeuw zocht men in stillevens de intensiteit van het volle leven uit te drukken door middel van de weelderige, uiterlijke verschijningsvormen der dingen, maar er zat een keerzijde aan. De mooie objecten werden doorgaans afgebeeld op het moment van verval: bloemen verwelken, het fruit barst van overrijpheid, de pijp rookt uit, de kaarsen branden op... Daarbij komt dat ook uurwerken, zandlopers en doodshoofden, objecten die wijzen op het verstrijken van de tijd, worden opgenomen in de compositie. Deze taferelen steunen op

een vers uit Prediker: *Vanitas vanitum et omnia vanitas (ijdelheid der ijdelheden, alles is ijdelheid).* De boodschap is dat alles vergankelijk is, aan de dood ontsnapt niemand, de dood zit verscholen in alle levende dingen. De Franse term voor het stilleven, nature mort, bevat ook het vergankelijke aspect. De zeventiende eeuwse barok was, met zijn chronische gevoeligheid voor dood en verderf, de bloeitijd voor de vanitastaferelen. De idee werd graag overgenomen door de negentiende eeuwse decadenten die dankbare erfgenamen waren van de macabere barok.[34]

In de negentiende eeuw werd ook de vrouwelijke schoonheid in verband gebracht met vergankelijkheid. Hier kwam het motief van de spiegel aanbod, deze weerspiegelde wat vergankelijk was.[35] Hans Baldung Griens *Three Ages of Man* (afb.12) kan hiervoor als voorbeeld dienen. We zien een symbolische representatie van de vrouw en haar drie leeftijden.[36]



Afb.12. HANS BALDUNG GRIEN, *The Three Ages of Man,* 1509-1510.

[34] IDEM, p. 47.
[35] IBIDEM
[36]Kunsthistorisch Museum Wenen:
http://www.khm.at/system2E.html?/staticE/page220.html

De oude vrouw in het werk staat oog in oog met de dood en poogt zijn zandloper af te wenden. Het ijdele jonge meisje die zichzelf in een spiegel bewondert, merkt zijn aanwezigheid niet. En het kleine kind kijkt nog indirect, doorheen een sluier, naar de wereld. De kinderlijke blik is nog onschuldig aangezien de concepten dood en seksualiteit nog geen diepgaande betekenis hebben.

Hedendaags wordt de vergankelijkheid in de kunst op andere wijzen afgetast. Ze wordt niet meer enkel thematisch aanschouwd. Vroeger moest een kunstwerk een zekere eeuwigheidswaarde hebben waardoor de kunstenaar 'onsterfelijk' werd. Vandaag hoeft kunst geen oneindige bestaanswaarde te bezitten. Hedendaagse kunstenaars werken met vergankelijke materialen die na verloop van tijd vergaan waardoor het kunstwerk, net als de maker, sterfelijk wordt. Een voorbeeld is A. Lanckmans *Korf*. In dit werk zit zowel een eeuwigheidswaarde als een eindig aspect verborgen. De korf is een vorm waarin objecten bewaard kunnen worden, maar deze is fragiel aangezien het vervaardigd is uit handgeschept papier. In het handgeschept papier bracht ze allerhande persoonlijke documenten samen, waarvan ze vond dat anderen deze na haar dood niet mochten lezen. Alzo verbind Lanckman het aspect van het bewaren met het vergaan.[37]

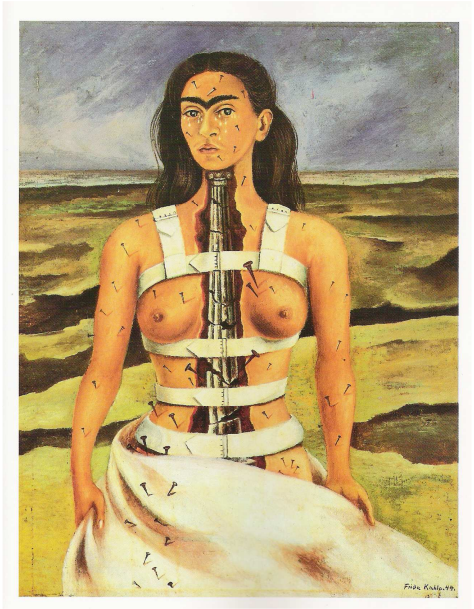
3.2.2 Vrouwelijke kunstenaars en hun spel met de dood

Doorheen de zoektocht, met betrekking tot de bachelorproef, naar wat de dood als ruim begrip kan inhouden en naar hoe en waarom sommige vrouwelijke kunstenaars dit als prominent gegeven binnen hun artistiek oeuvre opnemen, kon vastgesteld worden dat verschillende kunstenaressen steeds wel één of meerdere werken creëerden die op de een of andere manier aan de dood, sterfelijkheid en vergankelijkheid gelieerd zijn. Dit binnen de verschillende media van de beeldende kunsten. Allen gaan ze op een subjectief getinte wijze met de noties rond leven en dood om.

Het is opvallend hoe bij de vele vrouwelijke kunstenaars een autobiografisch gegeven aan de basis ligt of hand in hand gaat met hun

[37] VANDAMME C. [college] (12.10.2006).

spel met de dood. Het zelfportret met de dood vinden we prominent terug in het oeuvre van de Mexicaanse kunstenares Frida Kahlo (afb.13), die, net als Hannah Wilke (afb.14), haar zieke en aftakelende lichaam toont. Kahlo leefde na een zwaar busongeval hand in hand met de dood. Volgens de dichter A. Henestrosa leefde ze al stervende. Voor Kahlo was schilderen als een dialoog met haar innerlijke werkelijkheid, vandaar dat haar oeuvre de dwingende behoefte weerspiegelt om de ondragelijke pijn in haar leven vast te leggen. Omdat ze aldus voortdurend de dreiging van de dood voelde, gebruikte ze dit motief/thema veelvuldig in haar werk.[38]



Afb.13. FRIDA KAHLO, *De Gebroken Zuil,* 1944.



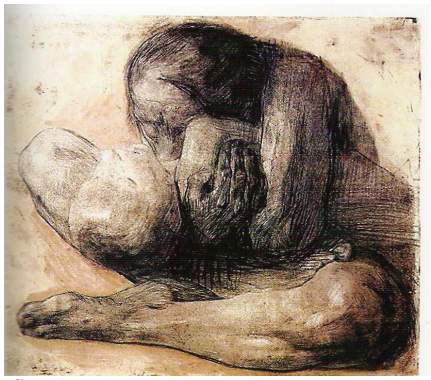
Afb.14. HANNAH WILKE, *Intra Venus Series No. 10, June 22, 1992,* 1992.

In het werk van Käthe Kollwitz en Agnes Varda zijn persoonlijke tragedies eveneens voelbaar. Varda, de grootmoeder van de Nouvel Vague, rouwt in haar video-installaties – *Le Tombeau de Zgougou* en *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier* (afb.15) – om de dood van haar kat en haar echtgenoot, cineast Jacques Demy.[39] Kollwitz rouwt om het verlies van haar zoon tijdens de eerste wereld oorlog en dat van haar kleinzoon tijdens de tweede.[40] Maar beiden verbinden ze hun individuele verlies aan het collectieve. Ze verliezen het universele aspect van de dood, verdriet en ellende, niet uit het oog. Voor de indrukwekkende video-installatie *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier* interviewde Varda dertien weduwes op het

[38] VIGUE J. (2003), p. 411; N.N., *Frida Kahlo – Le Casa Azul* (1993), p. 13.
[39] N.N., *SMAK Educatieve tekst Agnes Varda* (2006).
[40] VIGUE J. (2003), p. 335; KLEBERGER I. (1994), p. 133; DE GRUYTER J. (1931), p. 15.



Afb.15. AGNES VARDA, *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier,* 2004-2005.



Afb.16. KATHE KOLLWITZ, *Vrouw met haar dode kind,* 1903.

Bretoense eiland Noirmoutier, waar haar overleden echtgenoot geboren werd. Elk van hen vertelt over de dood van hun echtgenoot, het verdriet en de leegte die deze achterlieten in hun leven.[41] Een belangrijk sociaal en persoonlijk thema dat prominent aanwezig is in de kunst van Kollwitz zijn de twee werkelijkheden die het moederhart vervullen (afb.16). Enerzijds de onvoorwaardelijke liefde van de moeder voor het kind, anderzijds de angst dat dit meest kostbare haar zal worden ontnomen, haar zal geroofd worden door de dood ten gevolge van schrijnende armoede en oorlog.[42] Magdalena Abakanowicz' beeldengroepen van naar het menselijke lichaam gemodelleerde figuren (afb.17), die zijn opgebouwd uit fragiele en kwetsbare materialen als hars, jutte en paardenhaar, kunnen hier eveneens vermeld worden. Deze tonen enerzijds haar persoonlijke trauma uit de tweede wereldoorlog – ze zag hoe haar moeder door dronken soldaten zwaar verminkt werd – anderzijds geven ze de herinnering aan de Poolse condition humaine en concentratiekampen weer.[43]

De Amerikaanse performance/body art kunstenares Ana Mendieta verwerkt eveneens een autobiografisch element in haar oeuvre. Het gevoel van eenzaamheid en verstoten te zijn uit de baarmoeder dat zijn oorsprong vindt in haar verplichte vlucht naar de Verenigde Staten waarbij ze haar roots en familie in Cuba moest achterlaten, is sterk voelbaar in haar prachtige *Silueta Serie* (afb.18), bewaart in foto en film. Deze serie onthult haar verlangen om terug te keren naar de levensbron.

[41] N.N., *SMAK Educatieve tekst Agnes Varda* (2006).
[42] POSNER H. (2002), p. 291; DE GRUYTER (1931), p. 14.
[43] BECKETT W. (1998), p. 16; BOHM-DUCHEN M. e.a. (1995), pp. 129, 146.


Afb.17. MAGDALENA ABAKANOWICZ, *80 BACKS,* 1976-1980.


Afb.18. ANA MENDIETA, *Untitled from the Silueta series,Salina Cruz Mexico,* juli 1976.

Ze legt zich naakt in een graf en nodigt de aarde uit haar te (ver)grijpen. Met dit nemen legt ze de link tussen Eros/liefdesdrift en Thanatos/doodsdrift. Mendieta speelt met de notie zelflichaam door de sporen die het nalaat te registreren. In de eerste Silueta ligt de artiestes naakte lichaam in een rotsopening met allerhande planten en bloemen over zich heen. Later wordt de relatie tussen haar lichaam en de aarde dubbelzinniger. Haar fysieke lichaam verdwijnt, enkel haar silhouet/schaduw blijft over. Maar Mendieta's spel met de dood ontstond niet enkel uit een autobiografisch element. Ze hanteerde haar kunst eveneens om een sterk sociaal-politiek statement, met betrekking tot het misbruiken en onderdrukken van vrouwen, de wereld in te sturen.[44]

Via de methode van de re-enactment art – het terugkeren naar historische drama's – legt Regina José Galindo binnen haar oeuvre de klemtoon op een intrinsieke politieke kwaliteit. Dood en agressie vormen binnen dit kader een hoofdthema. Doorheen haar acties gebruikt ze haar lichaam als dat van de maatschappij en herinnert ze ons op die manier aan wat er in de echte, wrede wereld gebeurt. Zo is de performance *Who can erase the traces?* – een wandeling van het Gerechtshof naar het Nationale Instituut van Guatemala waarbij Galindo een spoor van bloederige voetafdrukken achterliet – een herdenking van de slachtoffers van een gewapend conflict in Guatemala en tevens een protest tegen de presidentkandidaatstelling van de ex-dictator Rios Mintt, onder wie een bloederig bewind werd uitgevoerd.[45] De serie *Bringing the war home* (afb.19) van Martha Rosler verkondigt eveneens een sterk politieke

[44] POSNER H. (1998), pp. 164, 166, 167; SMETS F. (2002), p. 247.
[45] SCOTINI M. (curator) [internet] (2005), alinea 4; GOLDMAN F. [internet] (winter 2005/2006), alinea 1-2.

boodschap. Deze serie toont een aantal fotocollages die gruwelijke oorlogsbeelden combineren met frivole reclamefoto's uit onze wekelijkse magazines.



Afb.19. MARTHA ROSLER, *Lounging Women* from *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful (new series)*, 2004.

Naast het 'onschuldig' spelen met de doodsthematiek zijn er vrouwelijke kunstenaars die hun spel met de dood heel serieus en letterlijk opvatten. Gina Pane en Marina Abramovic zijn beiden performance – bodyart kunstenaressen die op eenzelfde wijze met een gelijkaardige thematiek omgaan. Bij beide kunstenaressen staat zelfpijniging centraal. Ze flirten letterlijk met de dood en sterfelijkheid door hun lichaam zowel fysiek als mentaal tot het uiterste te drijven.

Abramovic voert doorheen haar artistieke carrière een onderzoek naar de fysieke grenzen en het mentale potentieel van haar lichaam doorheen het medium van de performance. Deze performances doen dienst om haar lichaam van allerhande culturele beperkingen en taboes te ontdoen. Abramovic kwam, door haar verre reizen en ontmoetingen met niet-Westerse culturen, tot de vaststelling dat we onze angst voor de dood

moeten overwinnen, en ons bewust moeten zijn van het tijdelijke van het leven.[46] In een reeks soloperformances, *Rhythms*, onderzocht ze door middel van allerhande performances de grenzen van haar lichaam. Tijdens de uitvoering van *Rhythm 5* stak ze een vijfpuntige houtenster aan die doorweekt was van petroleum, na een aantal rituele handelingen – zoals bij elke sterpunt het afknippen van lokken haar en teennagels – legde ze zich te midden de brandende ster. Door de rook raakte ze buiten bewustzijn. Wanneer de vlammen omheen haar benen sloegen en ze niet reageerde, eindigde de performances toen het publiek besloot haar uit de levensbedreigende situatie te halen. Hier werd ze aldus geconfronteerd met de limieten van haar lichaam: het buiten bewustzijn.[47]
Gina Pane daarentegen wou door met de dood te flirten, door een confrontatie met angst en pijn de toeschouwer van haar performances uit de verdoofde Westerse wereld wakker schudden.[48]

3.2.3 Besluit

De dood heeft de mensheid enorm gefascineerd, en fascineert nog steeds. Het is dus niet verwonderlijk dat naast de pogingen een filosofisch – religieuze verklaring te vinden voor dit universele mysterie, men eveneens een antwoord tracht te bieden via de kunst. Via de beeldende kunst trachtten kunstenaars, mannelijk en vrouwelijk, een gestalte te geven aan de dood en deze notie langs deze weg als het ware tastbaar te maken.
Het spreekt voor zich dat dit korte overzicht slechts een fractie is van hetgeen zich in de kunstgeschiedenis voordoet. Ook de selectie vrouwelijke kunstenaars is slechts een fractie van diegenen die de notie 'dood' verwerken binnen hun oeuvre. Verschillende andere voorbeelden zijn mogelijk. Ook mannelijke kunstenaars tonen interesse voor het mysterie rond leven en dood. De dood maakt immers geen onderscheid tussen man en vrouw, of zoals singer-songwriter Bonnie Prince Billy het formuleert: "death to everyone, is gonna come"[49].

[46] DARGE M e.a. (1996), p. 15; ABRAMOVIC M. (1995), geen pagina nrs.
[47] STOOSS e.a. (1998), pp. 66-72.
[48] MIGLIETTI F. A. (2003), pp. 19, 28.
[49] BONNIE PRINCE BILLY, [cd] (1999), nr. 5.

I am here, right here
Where god puts none asunder
And you, in black dress and black shoe
You do invite me under
Go on, go there
You can see me aging
Stars turn, balls burn
Coming kids are raging

Death to everyone is gonna come
And it makes hosing much more fun
Death to everyone is gonna come
And it makes hosing much more fun

Every terrible thing is a relief
Even months on end buried in grief
Are easy light times which have to end
With the coming of your death friend

Death to everyone is gonna come
And it makes hosing much more fun
Death to everyone is gonna come
And it makes hosing much more fun

So strap me on and raise me high
Cause buddy I'm not afraid to die
But life is long and it's tremendous
And we're glad that you're here with us
And since we know an end will come
It makes our living fun

Death to everyone is gonna come
And it makes hosing much more fun
Death to everyone is gonna come
And it makes hosing much more fun

Death to me and death to you
Tell me what else can we do die do
Death to all and death to each
Our own god-bottles within reach

Death to everyone is gonna come
And it makes hosing much more fun

4. De vrouwelijke kunstenaars en hun spel met de dood binnen het medium fotografie

4.1 Sally Mann

4.1.1 De verloren onschuld

Sally Mann (°1951) onderzoekt in haar vijfdelige serie *What Remains* de eindigheid van het leven. Ze gaat opzoek naar de geheimen van de dood en de rol van de aarde die het lichaam onherroepelijk tot zich neemt.
Het thema van de sterfelijkheid en het voorbij schrijden van de tijd is doorheen haar oeuvre steeds onderhuids voelbaar. Ze speelt een subtiel spel in de psychologische weergave van de opsplitsing van de zogenaamde onschuldige kinderwereld en die van de bedorven volwassenen.[50] Mann bestede grote aandacht aan het opgroeien van (haar drie) kinderen waarvoor ze faam en blaam kreeg.[51] Het verliezen van de onschuld weeft zich als een rode draad doorheen haar oeuvre. Zo portretteert *At Twelve: Portraits of Young women* (afb.20) op een intieme wijze twaalfjarige meisjes die zich aan de grens van kindsheid naar volwassenheid bevinden. De jonge meisjes verliezen hun onschuldige, gesluierde blik op de wereld aangezien ze door hun eerste menstruatie en



Afb.20. SALLY MANN, *Untitled from the At Twelve Series,* 1983-1985.

[50] WILLEMSEN P. (datum ongekend /vermoedelijk 1997), p. onbekend.
[51] HAIJTEMA A. (23.01.1997), p. 12.

de ontwikkeling van de geslachtskenmerken de zogenaamde onschuldigheid van hun lichaam verliezen. Na de menstruatie is het jonge vrouwenlichaam instaat te concipiëren, waardoor ze naast de gave nieuw leven op de wereld te zetten eveneens een kweekvat voor de dood wordt. Ook binnen de intieme serie *Immediate Family* (afb.21) waarbij ze de camera met een zachte, moederlijke blik op haar drie kinderen richt, is het gegeven van het verliezen van de (kinderlijke) onschuld een belangrijk concept. Terwijl *At Twelve* zich veeleer richt op het moment aan de grens waarbij de onschuld reeds aan de onderhang onderhevig is, richt *Immediate Family* zich veeleer tot het vastleggen van de onschuld, maar de dreiging van de bedorven en zelfbewuste wereld van volwassenen is ook hier niet ver weg. De onschuld van de kinderen wordt via de portretfotografie vereeuwigd, en op die manier worden de foto's van de verloren momenten als een herinnering aan het leven.



Afb.21. SALLY MANN, *White Skates,* 1990.

Eveneens binnen de landschapsreeks *Deep-South* speelt het gegeven van de verloren onschuld een centrale rol. Mann werd zich doorheen de creatie van *What Remains* steeds meer bewust van de ambigue rol die de aarde/het landschap speelt bij de regeneratie van het leven. De aarde is zowel een moederlijke levensbron als een tombe die de dode lichamen

verorbert. Ook het landschap is zijn onschuld verloren, het draagt de littekens van de soms gruwelijke geschiedenis die er plaats vond.

De ambigue elementen die het vrouwelijke leven kenmerken door het verliezen van onschuld en het besef van de eindigheid van het leven[52] kenmerken Mann's oeuvre en denken.[53] Maar in de serie *What Remains* lijkt ze afstand te nemen van deze ambiguïteit. De doodsthematiek en het besef van vergankelijkheid vormt hier klaarblijkelijk de hoofdnoot.



Afb.22-23. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *What Remains*, 2000.

Maar toch eindigt ze de serie met extreme close-ups (afb.22-23) van haar drie kinderen waarbij ze hun gezichten onherkenbaar door een donkere atmosfeer laat omringen. Bevinden haar kinderen zich in de warme, donkere en beschermende omgeving van de baarmoeder of in een verterend aards graf? Ook binnen deze lugubere reeks laat haar moederlijke gevoel van zorg haar niet onberoerd.

Naast het verliezen van de onschuld dat aan het gegeven van Eros en Thanatos kan gekoppeld worden, lopen doorheen Sally Mann haar oeuvre nog andere rode draden die het als een geheel aan elkaar knopen.

Een eerste vaststaand gegeven is de plaats (Virginia) waar ze geboren en getogen werd en nog steeds met haar echtgenoot en drie kinderen

[52] CANTOR S. [documentaire] (2005): Mann haar echtgenoot, Larry, heeft een spierziekte waardoor zijn spieren enzymen lekken en langzaam aan wegkwijnen.
[53] MANN S. en PRICE R. (1999), geen paginanummers: hierin stelt ze dat de botten onder haar voeten kraken telkens ze haar domein bewandelt…

vertoeft.[54] Het landschap van het conservatieve Zuiden in de Verenigde Staten vormt in haar fotografisch oeuvre de achtergrond en treedt in latere reeksen als onderwerp op de voorgrond. Een tweede element dat haar oeuvre doorvlecht is het spontane ontplooien van nieuwe onderwerpen of ideeën voor een fotografische document of onderzoek die op een vrijblijvende wijze aan het oplettende oog van Mann toevallen.[55] De verschillende reeksen die elk een andere invalshoek impliceren kunnen op die manier toch met elkaar in verband gebracht worden. Op een organische manier stroomt het ene uit het andere voort. Zo vormde het onderzoek naar de littekens die een levenloos lichaam achterlaat in het landschap in de *Antietam*-sectie binnen de *What Remains* reeks een aanzet tot het verdere onderzoek naar het zuiderse landschap binnen de serie *Deep-South*. Een derde aspect dat Mann's oeuvre doorkruist is het verband dat ze legt tussen het medium fotografie en de tijd: de fotografie wordt een medium dat als een deur toegang biedt tot het verleden, heden en de toekomst. De fotografie krijgt op die manier de functie van de herinnering aan een verloren tijd toebedeeld. De portretten die ze zowel van haar kinderen en de twaalfjarige meisjes als van de landschappen neemt, kunnen als metafoor van de verloren onschuld aanschouwd worden.[56] De (portret)fotografie krijgt op die manier de functie van het herinneren aan een verloren moment in het sterfelijke bestaan dat voor het nageslacht bewaard wordt en op die manier gevrijwaard blijft van de dood. Het leven wordt op deze wijze vereeuwigd.[57]

Dit besef van eindigheid van het menselijke bestaan vormde een aanzet tot het onderzoek naar het verschil tussen leven en dood. Maar ook de interesse van haar vader voor de dood binnen allerhande culturen was een belangrijke drijfveer voor haar onderzoek naar de geheimen van de dood en de opname van het levensloze lichaam door de aarde.[58]

4.1.2 De moederschoot en de dood

What Remains is een vijfdelige serie die de oneindige cirkel van leven, dood en regeneratie visueel uitbeeldt. Mann exploreert binnen deze

[54] MANN S. en PRICE R. (1999), geen paginanummers.
[55] N.N., *Dog bone photos* [internet] (2005), alinea 2-3.
[56] CLARKE O. Jr. [internet] (datum ongekend), alinea 4.
[57] MANN S. en PRICE R. (1999), geen paginanummers.
[58] MANN S. (2003), p. 6; MANN S. en PRICE R. (1999), geen paginanummers.

lugubere reeks het onderscheid tussen lichaam en geest, leven en dood vanuit twee verschillende invalshoeken – de resten en het landschap.[59]
De aanzet voor de reeks was de dood van haar geliefde greyhound Eva. Toen deze overleed was Mann zwaar getroffen door het verlies van een trouwe kameraad en was ze niet in staat het kadaver te begraven, dus vroeg ze een vriend een gunst. Maar nadien was ze nieuwsgierig naar wat er uiteindelijk van haar hond geworden was. Een jaar later besloot ze de resten die in een metalen kist aan de rand van haar eigendom en het omringende bos begraven waren, op te graven. Aldus kwam ze om sentimentele overwegingen tot de idee de resten fotografisch te documenteren. Hieruit ontstond de eerste sectie *Matter Lent*, een fotoreeks die de ontbinding en stoffelijke resten van haar hond vastlegt.[60]
Het vaststellen hoe de aarde het lichaam van de hond tot zich nam, stimuleerde haar tot een verder onderzoek naar de eindigheid van het menselijke bestaan, en de wijze waarop de aarde het levenloze lichaam verteert wat resulteert in de tweede sectie *Untitled*. Deze sectie documenteert de ontbinding van menselijke resten op een site van de Forensisch Antropologische Universiteit in Tennessee. Het betreft een wetenschappelijke onderzoeksite waar wetenschappers, studenten, dokters en ordehandhavers de decompositie van lijken bestuderen. Op een respectvolle en poëtische wijze fotografeert Mann de levenloze lichamen waarbij ze telkens opnieuw tot het besef kwam dat deze resten ooit mensen waren en waardoor ze zich de vraag stelde wanneer een mens een stoffelijke rest wordt.[61] Net als de foto's uit sectie *Matter Lent* lijken de foto's op het eerste zicht abstract maar stilaan kunnen de contouren en lichamen onderscheiden worden van het donkere landschap dat de lijken tot zich neemt en de resten als het ware één worden met de aarde. De lichamen maken op deze site deel uit van het landschap en de aarde verorbert de levensloze lichamen geleidelijk aan tot ze volledige verdwijnen.
Nog een stap verder in haar onderzoek naar de dood en de verorbering door de aarde is *8 December, 2000*. Deze datum verwijst naar een tragische gebeurtenis die zich afspeelde nabij haar woonplaats en waarvan ze ooggetuige was. Mann zag hoe een ontsnapte gevangene aan

[59] BROOKMAN P. [internet] (2004), alinea 1.
[60] N.N., *Sally Mann – Wall text* [internet] (2004), alinea 5.
[61] N.N., *Sally Mann – Wall text* [internet] (2004), alinea 7.

de grens van haar eigendom met het omringende bos één van de pistolen die hij bemachtigd had tot zichzelf richtte en zichzelf het leven ontnam. Wanneer het tumult dat deze schrijnende situatie uitlokte, verdwenen was en de ordehandhavers met het dode lichaam het terrein verlieten, trok Mann naar de plek. Daar keek ze gefascineerd toe hoe de aarde een plasje bloed als een gulzige slok tot zich nam. Vanuit deze ontstellende ervaring besloot ze de littekens die deze tragedie op de aarde achtergelaten had te vangen.[62] In het verlengde van deze onthutsende ervaring vloeide spontaan de idee voor de vierde sectie *Antietam* voort. In deze sectie zet Mann haar onderzoek naar de littekens die het dode lichaam nalaat verder door het geweld en zijn historische relatie met het landschap te exploreren. Daarvoor trok ze naar de Antietam Kreek in Shapsburg, Maryland, waar in 1862 vele doden en gewonden vielen tijdens een veldslag in de Amerikaanse burgeroorlog.[63]

De *What Remains* reeks wordt afgesloten met een gelijknamige sectie extreme close-up portretten van haar drie kinderen. De moederlijke, liefhebbende blik van Mann komt opnieuw aan de oppervlakte tevoorschijn. De aanzichten van haar kinderen worden door een donkere vlekkerige zee omgeven. De achtergrond, het donkere van de nacht, slorpt hen als het ware in één teug op. Ze lijken te zweven in een dampige atmosfeer: bedolven onder de aarde die het lichaam tot zich neemt of opgenomen in een beschermende baarmoeder, de plaats waar nieuw leven ontstaat? Het onderwerp lijkt anders dan in de vier voorgaande secties maar toch is de sfeer en thematiek identiek, en verbindt deze sectie de verschillende series binnen haar fotografisch oeuvre. Mann eindigt met deze foto's om te concluderen dat het omarmen van de dood enkel meer appreciatie voor het leven voortbrengt. Een intense appreciatie voor het leven mocht reeds blijken uit voorgaande series waarin Mann met veel liefde en respect haar medemens en kroost in beelden voor het nageslacht vereeuwigde.

Voor de serie *What Remains* hanteerde Mann antieke camera's met beschadigde lenzen zodat de focus troebel wordt, strepen en krassen door overbelichting ontstaan en een gevoel van verstreken tijd geëvoceerd

[62] N.N., *Sally Mann – Wall text* [internet] (2004), alinea 8-10.
[63] N.N., *Sally Mann – Wall text* [internet] (2004), alinea 11-12.

wordt. Daarnaast hanteerde ze eveneens een oude fotografische techniek: de collodium – glas techniek die gebruikt werd in de 19de eeuw ten tijde van het ontstaan van het medium.[64] Mann's foto's krijgen door deze omslachtige techniek een grotere poëtische zeggingskracht die haar idee over het medium fotografie als deur naar het verleden – heden – toekomst enkel kracht bijzet. Door het hanteren van oude, versleten camera's en lenzen en het collodium – glas proces krijgen de beelden een transcendente gelaagdheid of een tijdloze sfeer over zich heen, wat voornamelijk te maken heeft met de vrij lange belichtingstijd van ongeveer zes minuten.[65]

De aanzet om deze techniek te leren beheersen was een toevallige vondst van negentiende eeuwse glasplaten negatieven van een lokale fotograaf op een zolder. Mann was ontroerd door de negatieven en besloot de techniek te leren. Ook het dubbele aspect van de techniek intrigeerde haar. Enerzijds werd collodium gebruikt voor het verzorgen van wonden tijdens de burgeroorlog waardoor ze het passend vond de techniek opnieuw in het Zuiden te integreren. Anderzijds zijn er de sterftgevallen die aan de techniek gerelateerd zijn. Voor de techniek zijn twee vloeistoffen vereist, cyanide en graanjenever, waardoor het drinken van de verkeerd fles fataal was.[66] De technieken en instrumentaria voegen aldus een extra mystieke, poëtische dimensie toe aan het onderzoek naar de sterfelijkheid en de opname van het levensloze lichaam tot de aarde. De dood als een alomtegenwoordig gegeven en het evoceren van de ongrijpbaarheid daarvan wordt op deze wijze op een treffende manier geëvoceerd. Het spel met het collodiumproces en de beschadigde, antieke lenzen en camera zorgen ervoor dat de verbinding tussen de verschillende tijden, verleden – heden – toekomst, op een zachte manier nauwer wordt. Ze speelt een subtiel spel met een ambigue connotatie: terwijl de spanningsboog tussen de drie tijden verkleind wordt, neemt ook de ongrijpbaarheid en het transcendente aspect van de lineaire tijd toe. De dood wordt niet als een welomlijnd, eenduidig gegeven afgebeeld maar veeleer wordt de sfeer van mysterie en onduidbaarheid weergegeven.

[64] N.N., *Sally Mann Biographie* [internet] (2005), alinea 1.
[65] N.N., *Sally Mann* [internet] (2006), alinea 2.
[66] N.N., *Collodion process* [internet] (2005), alinea 3-6.

4.2 Lucinda Devlin

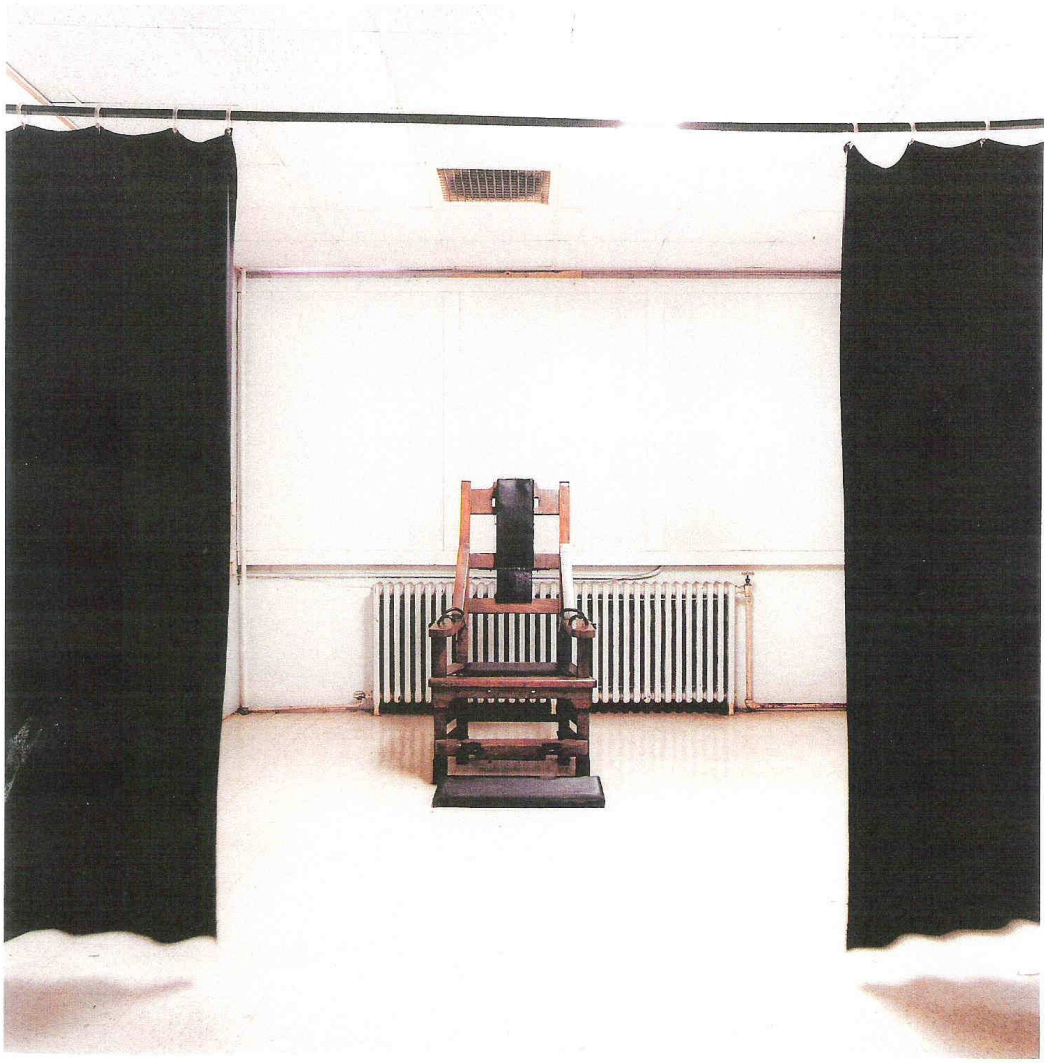
4.2.1 De psychologie van interieurs

Lucinda Devlin (°1947) exploreerde doorheen haar fotografisch oeuvre aanvankelijk de hedendaagse Amerikaanse cultuur[67], maar algauw breidde ze haar onderzoeksveld uit tot de Westerse maatschappij[68]. Daartoe onderzoekt ze hoe architecturale ruimten en de daarbij horende objecten de waarden en normen van de cultuur die hen creëerden en hanteren, uitdrukken.[69] Aangezien de ruimtes en objecten met culturele betekenis beladen zijn, is het mogelijk via deze architecturale weergaven van interieurs een beeld te schetsen van de psyche van een groot segment van de Westerse maatschappij.
Een opvallend gegeven dat haar fotografie kenmerkt is de volledige menselijke afwezigheid. Net als een archeoloog poogt Devlin aan de hand van artefacten die met betekenis beladen zijn de psyche van de maatschappij te reconstrueren of weer te geven.

Binnen dit overkoepelende thema van het fotografische schetsen van de psychologie van de Westerse maatschappij aan de hand van ruimtes waarin de menselijke aanwezigheid enkel via de objecten voelbaar gemaakt wordt, is de doodsserie *The Omega Suites* een logische verder zetting van haar fotografisch onderzoek.
Tussen 1991 en 1998 fotografeerde Devlin in een 20 tal staatsgevangenissen, met de toelating en medewerking van de lokale overheden, de doodskamers, waar de doodstraf werd of nog steeds wordt uitgevoerd, en andere daaraan gelieerde ruimten.[70] Ze doopte de serie, van een 30 tal beelden, tot *the Omega Suites* (afb.24). Omega, de laatste letter van het Griekse alfabet, als metafoor voor de eindigheid.[71] De doodskamers, waar de executies uitgevoerd worden, worden door haar als de eindstop van de sterfelijkheid, de ultieme eindhalte van het leven beschouwd. De reeks *Omega Suites* onderzoekt aldus de Amerikaanse industrie van de gelegaliseerde moord, en stelt zo automatisch de

[67] N.N., *Lucinda Devlin* [internet] (2007), alinea 1.
[68] De serie *Water Rites* portretteert Duitse kuuroorden, op die manier kan gesteld worden dat ze nu eerder de Westerse cultuur (een begrip dat een bredere omkadering bevat) onderzoekt aan de hand van ruimtes.
[69] N.N., *Lucinda Devlin: The Omega Suites, Artist talk* [internet] (2005), alinea 3.
[70] GROSZ D. [internet] (24.08.2006), alinea 1.
[71] N.N., *Lucinda Devlin: The Omega Suites, Artist talk* [internet] (2005), alinea 1.

ethische vraag naar de noodzaak van de doodstraf. De reeks is een krachtig architecturaal portret van de "death row".[72]



Afb. 24. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Electric Chair, Indiana State Prison, Michigan City, Indiana,* 1991.

Devlin beweert dat haar persoonlijke mening omtrent het wel of niet goedkeuren van de extreme juridische straf niet relevant is. Volgens haar spreken de beelden voor zichzelf, en is het eerder haar bedoeling dat het publiek met het gegeven van gelegaliseerde executie geconfronteerd wordt.[73] Aldus spreken de objectieve foto's voor zichzelf, maar verraden tevens een kritische reflectie van de fotografe jegens de niet omkeerbare straf. De foto's tonen op een rationele, koele maar tegelijkertijd esthetische wijze de "death row". Het publiek wordt aangetrokken door de

[72] LEFFINGWELL E. [internet] (01.2007), alinea 1; GROSZ D. [internet] (24.08.2006), alinea 1.
[73] N.N., *Lucinda Devlin: The Omega Suites, Artist talk* [internet] (2005), alinea 2; GROSZ D. [internet] (24.08.2006), alinea 2; LEFFINGWELL E. [internet] (01.2007), alinea 3.

schoonheid van de foto's maar een afstotende beweging neemt plaats wanneer de wrede realiteit van het onderwerp de kop op steekt.[74]
Opvallend is – net als bij de meeste van haar fotografische reeksen het geval is – het ontbreken van enige menselijke aanwezigheid.[75] We worden enkel geconfronteerd met de koele, rechtlijnige architectuur en de instrumenten die de dood in gang zetten. Wanneer de intentie van de taakgerichte apparatuur niet overduidelijk is, kondigen Devlins nuchtere titels het doel aan van elke kamer die geconstrueerd of aangepast werd met oog op een specifieke rol in de nog steeds plaats vindende theatrale straf.[76] Er ademt een medogenloze sfeer van institutionele onverschilligheid[77]. De kippenvel gevende stilte voor en/of na het fatale gebeuren wordt op die manier voelbaar gemaakt.

Lucinda Devlin maakte voor *The Omega Suites* serie gebruik van een Hasselblad camera die karakteristiek rechthoekige formaten oplevert. De beelden werden met grote zorg en een soort klinische blik gecomponeerd.[78] Wanneer ze de beelden printte, maakte ze chromogene aanpassingen die de beelden in de richting van een cyaan, groene en rode kleur uitsturen. Het kleurenpalet krijgt op die manier een intensiteit waardoor het aura van dood, onzichtbaar voor het blote oog geaccentueerd wordt en de details zichtbaar toenemen. Alles is even scherp afgebeeld, wat de rationele blik versterkt.[79] Ook al beweert Devlin dat haar persoonlijke mening omtrent de doodstraf geen deel uitmaakt van het werk, en de beelden voor zichzelf spreken, kunnen we toch stellen dat ze de toeschouwers voorzichtig in een bepaalde richting duwt.

4.2.2 Levensdrift en doodsverlangen doorheen architecturale ruimtes

Naast de menselijke afwezigheid die haar fotografie kenmerkt, speelt een ambigue invulling van de kamers ten opzichte van het menselijke, vergankelijke lichaam, een kenmerkende rol. Enkele reeksen waarin het menselijke lichaam centraal staat – *Pleasure Ground, Corporal Arenas, The Omega Suites* en *Water Rites* – ontstonden naar aanleiding van

[74] N.N., *Lucinda Devlin: The Omega Suites, Artist talk* [internet] (2005), alinea 2.
[75] GROSZ D. [internet] (24.08.2006), alinea 2.
[76] LEFFINGWELL E. [internet] (01.2007), alinea 2.
[77] GROSZ D. [internet] (24.08.2006), alinea 2.
[78] N.N., *Lucinda Devlin: The Omega Suites, Artist talk* [internet] (2005), alinea 2.
[79] LEFFINGWELL E. [internet] (01.2007), alinea 3.

andere voorgaande reeksen waarin een bepaald aspect van de maatschappij aangaande het menselijke bestaan werd geëxploreerd.
Een ander belangrijk element dat haar foto's van architecturale ruimten lijkt te kenmerken is het gegeven dat de interieurs een soort passiviteit vereisen. De kamers en hun gesofistikeerde apparatuur en technologie krijgen een dominerende, controlerende rol waarbij het lichaam een ondergeschikte maar desalniettemin centrale rol toebedeeld krijgt.[80]

Levensdrift en doodsverlangen, de twee tegengestelde driften, die volgens psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud de mens in zijn handelen sturen, kunnen binnen het artistieke oeuvre van Lucinda Devlin terug gevonden worden.
Een eerste reeks waarin de levensdrift in de vorm van het genieten van het leven kan terug gevonden worden, is *Pleasure Ground* (afb.25-26).



Afb.25. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *2002 Disco in Space, Westvale (New York),* 1978.



Afb.26. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Burnsville FantaSuite Hotel, Beachblanket Bingo Room, Minneapolis (Minnesota),* 1989.

Deze reeks exploreert ruimtes die ontworpen werden voor het nastreven van plezier en genot. Aan de hand van de functies van de kamers kunnen deze in verband gebracht worden met de levensdrift waarbij ontspannende tijdverdrijf een centrale rol speelt. De ruimtes die Devlin aan de toeschouwer presenteert zijn voorbeelden waarin de modernistische gedachte van de wegwerp cultuur – het oppervlakkige geluk en genot – wordt geïllustreerd.[81]

[80] DEVLIN L. [internet] (2006), alinea 8.
[81] DEVLIN L. [internet] (2006), alinea 4.

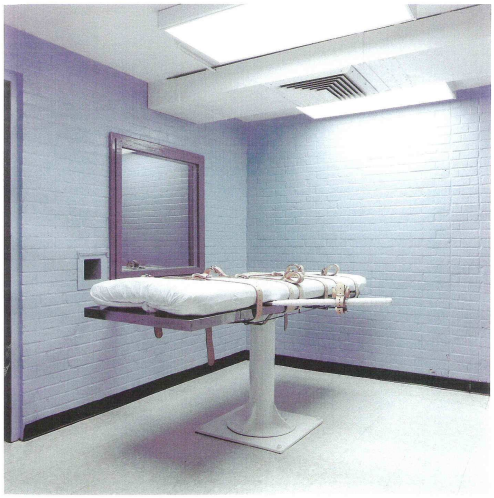


Afb.27. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Corporal Arenas, Morgue Outlook Hospital, Summit, New Jersey,* 1989.



Afb.28. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Operating Room #8, Forrest General Hospital, Hattiesburg, Mississippi,* 1998.

De reeks *Corporal Arenas* (afb.27-28) daarentegen onderzoekt de mythologie die de apparaten en de technologie in de behandeling van het menselijk lichaam omringt. *The Omega Suites* (afb.29-30) ontstond in het verlengde van deze reeks. Devlin vond het namelijk opmerkelijk hoe de



Afb.29. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Lethal Injection Chamber, Texas State Prison, Huntsville, Texas,* 1992.



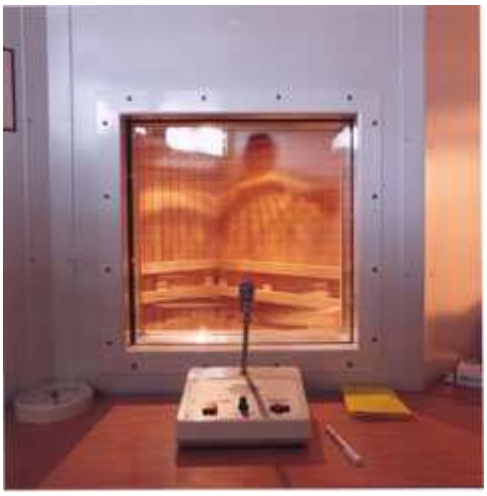
Afb.30. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Lethal Injection Chamber from Witness Room, Parchman State penitentiary, Parchman, Mississippi,* 1998.

ruimtes die voor een geheel tegengestelde functie – de ene voor het redden (levensdrift) en de andere voor het ontnemen van mensenlevens (doodsdrift) – ontwikkeld werden en toch eenzelfde sfeer ademen.[82]
Een ziekenhuis ademt op zich een dubbelzinnige sfeer. Enerzijds worden mensen daar opgenomen en onderzocht met als intentie het redden van levens, maar anderzijds is het evenzo een broeihaard van de dood. Nieuw

[82] DEVLIN L. [internet] (2006), alinea 7.

leven wordt er geboren en oud gered, maar eveneens komen vele mensen daar aan hun einde.

Ook de serie *Water Rites* (afb.31-32), die Duitse kuuroorden in beeld brengt, ontstond in het verlengde van deze voorgaande reeksen. Of het



Afb.31. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Kältekammer, Therapeutisches Zentrum, Bad Harzburg,* 1999.



Afb.32.LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Fürstenbad, Palais Thermal, Bad, Wildbad,* 1999.

nu een doodskamer, een chirurgische operatiekamer of een watertherapie kamer is, het menselijke lichaam wordt een gegeven dat gecontroleerd wordt door krachten die daarbuiten liggen.[83]

Maar net als in de voorgaande series het geval was, is de scheidingslijn tussen de levens- en doodsdrift moeilijk te trekken. Verschillende foto's uit de *Water Rites* serie associëren aan de doodskamers uit *The Omega Suites* serie. Maar ook een verband met de *Corporal Arenas* foto's is niet te ontkennen. Hoewel de kuuroorden ontworpen werden met als doel de mensen van gezondheid- en schoonheidszorg te voorzien, ademen ook deze ruimtes een ambigue sfeer, en kunnen ze naast deze levensdrijvende impuls geassocieerd worden met de doodsdrift. De grens in de betekenis of het gebruik van de *Water Rites* foto's, is niet steeds eenduidig te trekken. Bij het bekijken van deze reeks maakt de toeschouwer associatief verbindingen tussen deze reeks en de voorgaande reeks, *The Omega Suites*.

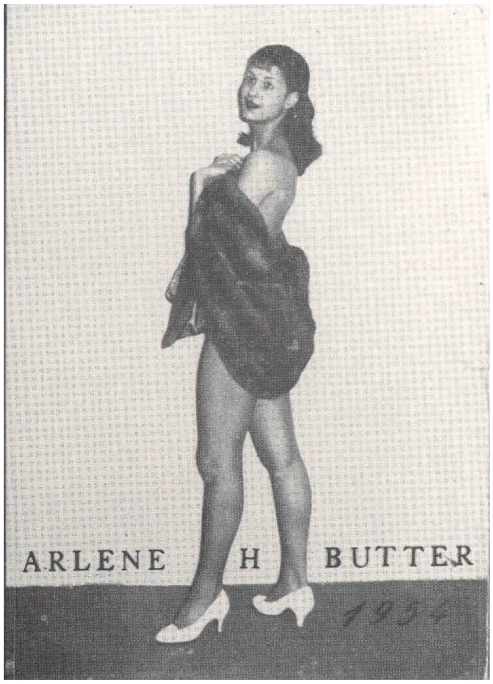
Het desolate van de settings, in alle drie de reeksen, creëert een spanning. De ruimtes wachten als het ware op de menselijke aanwezigheid. Het desolate doet het moment voor of na het gebruik vermoeden en zorgt voor een dubbelzinnig en bevreemdend gevoel.

[83] DEVLIN L. [internet] (2006), alinea 8.

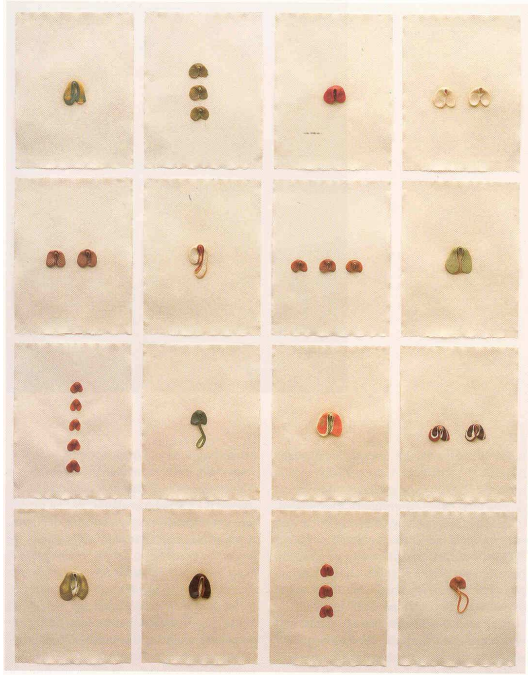
4.3 Hannah Wilke

4.3.1 Vrouwelijkheid: feminisme of narcisme (?)

Hannah Wilke (1940-1993) presenteerde, sinds ze op veertienjarige leeftijd schaars gekleed – enkel met een stola van haar moeder rond zich heen gedrapeerd – poseerde (afb.33), zichzelf in eindeloze variaties binnen het thema van het vrouwelijke icoon voor de mannelijke fantasie.[84] Ze hanteerde haar sensuele lichaam en schoonheid om de door mannen gedomineerde blik op het (naakte) vrouwenlichaam te becommentariëren.[85]



Afb.33. HANNAH WILKE, *Arlene Hannah Butter,* 1954.


Afb.34. HANNAH WILKE, *S.O.S. Starification Object Series,* 1975

Doorheen haar carrière werkte Wilke met onderwerpen die gelieerd waren aan het feminisme en vrouwelijkheid, en exploreerde ze de vrouwelijke vormen. Het ontblote vrouwenlichaam, in de meeste gevallen haar eigen lichaam, werd één van haar primaire handelsmerken naast de sculpturen vervaardigd in diverse materialen – ceramiek, kneedgom, kauwgom e.d. – waarbij de associatie met het vrouwelijke geslachtsorgaan nooit ver weg is

[84] VINE R. [internet] (05.1994), alinea 1.
[85] PEDERSEN V. [internet] (02.1994), alinea 1.

(afb.34).[86] Door dit expliciete gebruik van haar naakte lichaam en de sculpturen die aan vrouwelijke geslachtsdelen refereren werd Wilke dikwijls als een femme fatale, een sensuele verleidster bestempeld. Zowel door de door mannen gedomineerde wereld als door feministische groeperingen werd Hannah Wilke als een narcistische exhibitionist afgeschilderd.[87] Maar haar kunst reikt verder dan het formalisme en de oppervlakkigheid waarvan ze door deze harde kritiek beschuldigd werd. Het narcisme waarvan Wilke dikwijls beschuldigd werd, impliceert immers ijdele en egoïstische zelfliefde, liefde en ongeplaatste trots voor haar uiterlijke schoonheid. Maar wanneer haar oeuvre grondiger bestudeerd wordt, kunnen de cynische en kritische commentaren op de in alle hoeken van het leven door mannen gedomineerde blik onderscheiden worden. In plaats van het ideaalbeeld van de schoonheid van een vrouw klakkeloos te aanvaarden en te ondersteunen – waarvan ze door de feministen beschuldigd werd – speelt ze met deze notie door onder andere het spelen met taal. Een voorbeeld is *I Object: Memoirs of a Sugar Giver* (afb.35). Wilke ligt roerloos neer op haar rug, haar geslacht is duidelijk zichtbaar, verschillende objecten omringen haar. Met deze beelden van haar naakte lichaam omgeven door enkele objecten in combinatie met de hoofdtitel van de serie speelt ze met de dubbele betekenis van de taal en de vrouw. “I Object” kan enerzijds gelezen worden als ‘ik ben een object’ waarmee gesneerd wordt naar de wijze waarop mannen met het vrouwenlichaam of vrouwen in het algemeen omgaan, anderzijds kan het eveneens gelezen worden als ‘ik kom in opstand’ waarmee Wilke het feministische gedachtegoed van het in opstand komen tegen de onderdrukking van de vrouw die door de man als louter gebruiksvoorwerp behandeld wordt, bespeelt.[88]

[86] N.N., *Hannah Wilke: Intra-Venus, Press Release* [internet] (02.12.1993), alinea 3; HESS E. [internet] (15.01.1993), alinea 2; DIEHL C. [internet] (04.1994), alinea 1; HESS E. [internet] (15.01.1993), alinea 4.
[87] PERCHUK A. [internet] (04.1994), alinea 4; EDELMAN R.G. [internet] (05.1994), alinea 3.
[88] GOLDMAN S. (31.10.1998 tem 17.01.1999) pp. 26-27.



Afb.35. HANNAH WILKE, *I Object: Memoirs of a Sugargiver,* 1977-1978.

Ze speelde doorheen haar oeuvre met de contraverse positie van de vrouw als moeder, femme fatale/hoer en feministe.[89] Het loskomen van het door mannen opgelegde schoonheidsideaal speelt een belangrijke rol in haar oeuvre. Reeds toen Wilke nog niet frequent volledig lichamelijk voor het publiek – voor de lens of in performances – verscheen, kan een kritische commentaar op de ideale norm onderscheiden worden. De vroegste werken van Wilke waren de vulva/vagina aandoende sculpturen vervaardigd uit ceramiek en latere uit diverse andere materialen. Ze maakte steeds reeksen, herhalingen van een figuur, maar nooit identiek waarmee een subtiele kritiek op de eenduidige schoonheidsnorm kan gelezen worden, namelijk dat elke vrouw anders is en geen van allen aan de hoog opgelegde norm kan voldoen. Maar eveneens suggereren deze veelvuldig voorkomende vormen biologische regeneratie en celdeling waardoor Wilke erin slaagde een artistiek proces en product met het regenereren van leven en levendigheid aan elkaar te knopen.[90] Deze sculpturen zijn een vaststaand element die in verschillende reeksen binnen haar oeuvre hernomen worden in combinatie met andere media en materialen. Zo combineert de *S.O.S. Starification Object Series* (afb.36) fotografie, performance en vaginale sculpturen vervaardigd uit kauwgom

[89] FRUEH J. (1989), p. 41.
[90] IDEM, p. 18, 20-22.

die ze het publiek aanbood en naderhand recupereerde. Binnen dit werk vormt de kritische hoofdnoot een commentaar op de opgelegde schoonheidsidealen waarbij ze opnieuw op een ambigue wijze naar verschillende invalshoeken verwijst. Enerzijds verwijst ze naar de Westerse schoonheidsnormen die opgelegd worden aan de hand van de zelfbewuste, clichématige poses. Anderzijds kan een verwijzing naar het Afrikaanse schoonheidsideaal en de gewoonte littekenweefsel aan te brengen aangevoeld worden. Maar de vaginale kauwgomsculpturen die haar lichaam bedekken, kunnen aan de hand van de materie waaruit ze vervaardigd zijn met de wegwerpbaarheid van glitter, glamour en schoonheid in verband gebracht worden.[91]



Afb.36. HANNAH WILKE, *S.OS. Starification Object Series,* 1974-79.

4.3.2 Vrouwelijkheid en de Dood

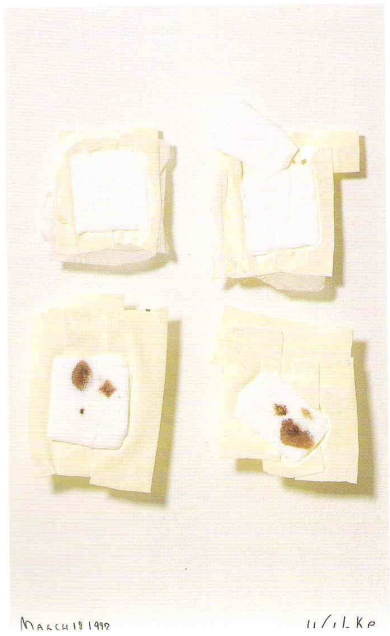
Wilkes visie op kunst was dat deze heel nauw verbonden was met het leven.[92] Wilke hield van het leven, ze bestond graag. Dit is dan ook de enige vorm van narcisme – het graag bestaan waarbij het niet bestaan of de eigen sterfelijkheid als een ondenkbare gedachte wordt ervaren – waarvan ze eventueel kan beschuldigd worden. Ze bestond graag en haar scheppende act in de kunst was als een teken van leven. Haar kunst was een onderdeel van haar bestaan en was een drijvend element in het

[91] FISHER A. M. (31.10.1998 tem 17.01.1999), p. 50.
[92] IDEM, p. 11.

omgaan met dat bestaan.[93] Het narcisme als ijdele en egoïstische zelfliefde waarvan ze eerder in haar carrière beschuldigd werd, wordt door de *Intra Venus* serie ondermijnd. Met eenzelfde kritische, feministisch getinte visie zette ze haar werk van zelfrepresentatie verder toen ze tegen de levensbedreigende ziekte, lymfekanker, streed. *Intra Venus* – godin van de liefde aan medische drugs[94] – is Wilkes laatste werk. Het bevatte een reeks van een aantal groter dan levensgrote kleurenfoto's aangevuld met tekeningen, sculpturen en collages vervaardigd met lege medicijnendoosjes, de verbanden en het haar dat ze verloor tijdens de chemotherapie (afb.37-38).[95]



Afb.37. HANNAH WILKE, *Brushstrokes January 21, 1992*, 1992.



Afb.38. HANNAH WILKE, *March 18, 1992,* 1992.

Gedurende de latere stadia van haar fatale ziekte werkte ze samen met haar echtgenoot, Donald Goddard, aan de serie foto's die de harde realiteit van haar mentale en fysische transformatie documenteren.[96] De groter dan levensgrootte foto's, vaak in diptieken opgesteld, tonen de aftakeling van haar lichaam en het verschralen van haar uiterlijke schoonheid. De reeks getuigt van een mentaal sterke vrouw die vecht voor haar leven maar een confrontatie met de dood niet lijkt te schuwen. Haar

[93] IDEM, p. 11, 20-22.
[94] SMITH R. [internet] (30.01.1994), alinea 5.
[95] WARR T. en JONES A. (2000), p. 148-149.
[96] N.N., *Hannah Wilke: Intra-Venus, Press Release* [internet] (02.12.1993), alinea 1.

misvormde, opgezwollen, gekneusde en haar verliezende lichaam is niet langer mooi en jong, het voldoet niet langer aan het ideaal van het vrouwelijke lichaamsbeeld.[97] Toch alludeert ze hierop door 'calendar girl' poses[98] aan te nemen waarbij de witte ziekenhuis pantoffels, die de sandalen of botten met hoge hakken uit vroeger werk vervangen, voor een cynische toets zorgen. Ook de stereotiep mooie mensen sterven net als de zogenaamd lelijke of niet mooie mensen, iedereen sterft, was Wilkes conclusie.[99] Ook haar moeder, Selma Butter, stierf aan de gevolgen van kanker, een enkele decennia voor haar dochter. Toen ze haar moeder zag sterven klaagde Wilke dat de klinische procedures haar – de zieke individuen – van hen wegnamen, haar verstopte alsof de dood en de aftakeling een zaak van persoonlijke schaamte was.[100] Van 1979 tot



Afb.39. HANNAH WILKE, *Selma Butter, 1979 / Selma Butter, 1982*, 1979-1982.

1982 fotografeerde ze haar moeder terwijl deze doorheen de laatste stadia van haar fatale ziekte ging (afb.39). Wilke vertelde dat het nemen van de

[97] WARR T. en JONES A. (2000), p. 148-149.
[98] VINE R. [internet] (05.1994), alinea 3.
[99] PERCHUK A. [internet] (04.1994), alinea 5.
[100] VINE R. [internet] (05.1994), alinea 5.

foto's van haar stervende moeder haar een soort energie gaf. De foto's van de stervensweg waren als het ware het grootste bewijs van leven.[101] Aan de hand van deze visie kan gesteld worden dat de portretfoto's die ze van haar moeder nam als een herinnering of als een ode aan het leven, dus een overwinning op de anonimiteit van de dood is.

Ook binnen deze *Intra Venus* reeks bespeelt Wilke de dubbele houding die ten opzichte van het vrouwenlichaam bestaan, namelijk de moeder – hoer ambiguïteit die doorheen haar oeuvre steeds voelbaar is, wordt ook hier naast elkaar uitgespeeld. Naast de hautaine kalenderpose en de kariatiden pose met de bloemen gevulde vaas op haar hoofd, verschijnt Wilke eveneens als een serene Heilige Maagd, gehuld in een blauw doek, waarschijnlijk een hospitaal deken. Met gesloten ogen die rood zijn van vermoeidheid en haar door de chemotherapie vaal geworden huid, lijkt ze te berusten in haar lot (afb.40-41). De vulva-achtige sculpturen die reeds



Afb.40-41. HANNAH WILKE, *Intra Venus Series No. 4., February 19, 1992/ July 26, 1992,* 1992.

binnen de serie als ode aan het leven van haar moeder terugkeerden en een wrange smaak kregen, ontbreken binnen haar allerlaatste werk niet. Maar Wilke wisselde de levendige primaire kleuren in voor donkere tinten

[101] HIRSCH F. [internet] (05/06.1994), alinea 2.

– zwart, metalliek. Door de combinatie met de foto's die zowel het sterven van haar moeder als van zichzelf weergeven, worden de sculpturen meer dan de seksuele geslachtsorganen van een vrouw. Ze kunnen zowel als een warme moederlijke levensschoot en als een donkere graftombe geïnterpreteerd worden. Net als de sculpturen hebben de foto's uit de twee reeksen een tegengestelde kleurigheid. De fotografische reeks van haar moeders gevecht met de dodende ziekte werd, op enkele uitzonderingen na, in neutrale zwart-wit tinten vastgelegd, terwijl Wilkes gevecht in felle kleurschakeringen uitgebeeld wordt. Misschien hebben de felle kleuren die Wilke hanteerde te maken met haar geloof in genezing. Volgens haar echtgenoot, Donald Goddard, wou Wilke de reeks in eerste instantie 'Cured' noemen. Ondanks haar enorme wilskracht de ziekte te overwinnen wist ze volgens hem diep vanbinnen dat dit niet het geval zou zijn[102], en veranderde ze de titel wat getuigt van verzoening met haar sterven. Hierom zouden we eventueel van narcisme kunnen spreken omwille van haar passie voor het leven en haar ongeloof en onwil aan de levensbedreigende ziekte te bezwijken.

Op 28 januari 1993 bezweek Hannah Wilke aan de complicaties van de lymfekanker waartegen ze vijf jaar lang een harde strijd voerde. De expositie die in 1994 plaatsvond in de Ronald Feldman Gallery te New York plande ze tot in de details zelf, de titel incluis.[103]

Intra-Venus is op zichzelf gezien een eenvoudig, pijnlijk document van een vrouw die aan kanker sterft. Maar in de context van Wilkes kunst als geheel, wordt het niet alleen zinvoller maar compenseert het ook het zogenaamde narcisme van haar vroeger werk dat op die manier doordringender wordt en met meer betekenis dan toen gezien kan worden. Het is het laatste stuk in de puzzel, datgene wat haar leven en werk zin heeft.[104] Haar allerlaatste reeks wordt op die manier een prachtige afsluiter aangezien het haar miskende visie op de wereld, het leven en de kunst met een vuistslag verduidelijkt. Met *Intra Venus* eindigt ze op een waardige wijze haar leven en het daarmee nauw verbonden artistieke oeuvre als een liefdevolle ode aan het leven.

[102] GODDARD D. (08.01.1994 tem 19.02.1994), p. 16.
[103] DIEHL C. [internet] (04.1994), alinea 2-3.
[104] DIEHL C. [internet] (04.1994), alinea 4.

4.4 Francesca Woodman

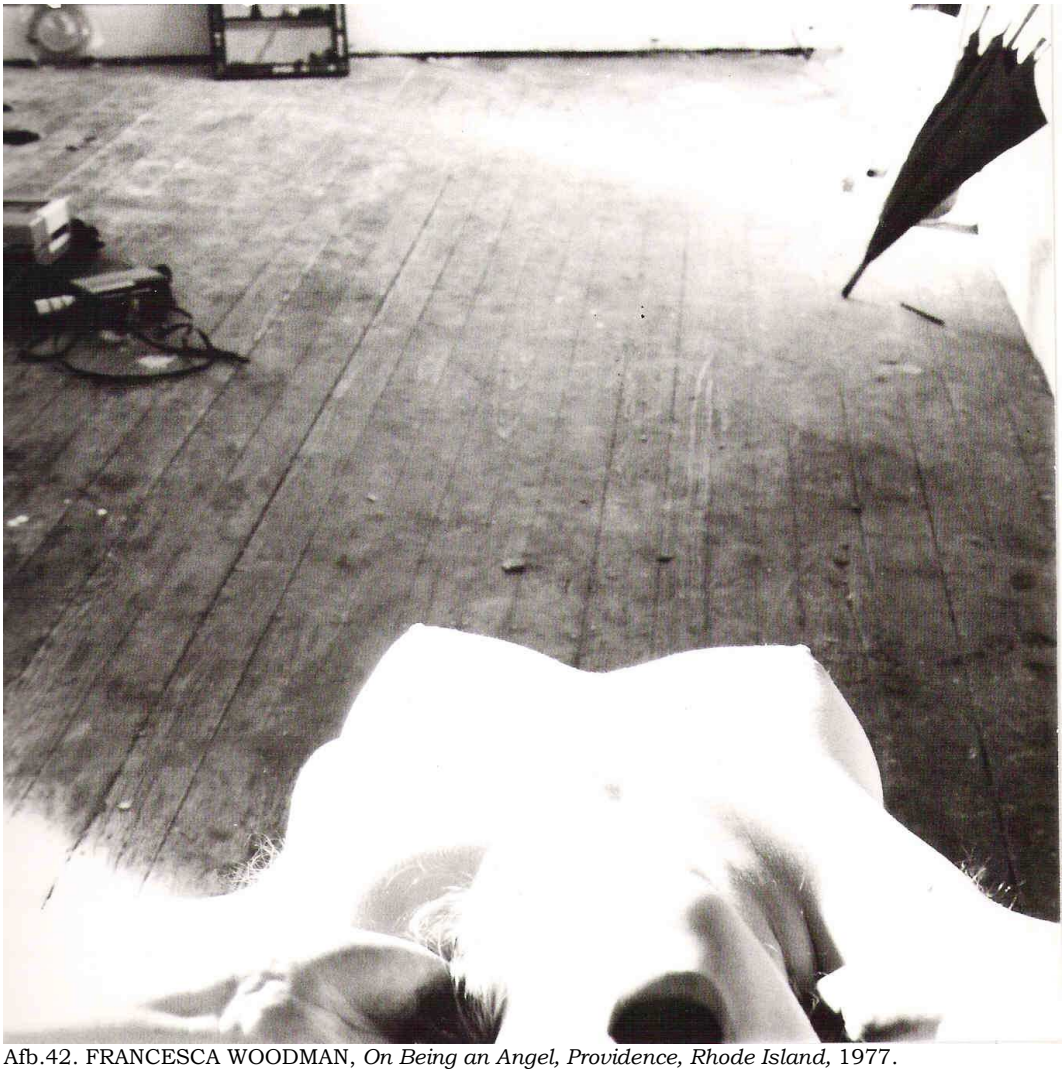
Francesca Woodman (1958-1981), dochter van twee kunstenaars, begon reeds op dertienjarige leeftijd met het produceren van fotografisch werk met een diepgaande en esthetische gelaagdheid.[105] Gedurende haar korte leven – op tweeëntwintig jarige leeftijd pleegde ze zelfmoord door uit het raam van haar appartement in New York te springen – produceerde ze in ongeveer acht jaar een vijfhonderd tal foto's.

4.4.1 Op de grenzen van het zijn: verdwijnen en verschijnen

Het fotografisch oeuvre van Woodman wordt gekenmerkt door het onderwerp dat bijna exclusief haar zelfportret was. Ze hanteerde haar kwetsbare lichaam als een anoniem object dat ze bestudeerde in diens relatie met de tijd en ruimte, en in dialoog met andere objecten.[106] Doorheen dit onderzoek naar de relaties die het lichaam met de omgeving kan aangaan, speelt ze als het ware een spelletje verstop–en–vind met de blik van de toeschouwer doordat ze zich steeds op de grens van het verschijnen en verdwijnen bevindt. Hoewel volgens verschillende critici de interpretatie van haar fotografisch oeuvre overschaduwd wordt door haar zelfmoord, kan niet ontkend worden dat deze spelletjes als een dansen met de schaduw van de dood kunnen gelezen worden. Maar volgens V. Aletti kan dit verschijnen–verdwijnen eveneens gelezen worden als een zoektocht naar het uitdrukken van hetgeen onzegbaar is.[107] Doorheen haar foto's, die een intieme schaal hebben, tastte ze de grenzen tussen het zichtbare landschap van het lichaam en diens onzichtbare tegenpool, de psyche, af. Woodman lijkt gefascineerd door de vraag naar de grenzen tussen het lichaam en de afbeelding daarvan.[108] Kan de afbeelding van het zelf de diepere psychologie van het lichaam en diens ziel doorgronden?
Een bewustzijn over het verstrijken van de tijd en imitaties van de dood maken deel uit van heel wat van haar werken.[109]

[105] POSNER H. (1998), p. 167.
[106] N.N., 'Francesca Woodman' in 'The Photographers' Gallery' [internet] (datum onbekend), alinea 3.
[107] ALETTI V. [internet] (10.1998), alinea 3.
[108] ROMANO G. [internet] (10.1998), alinea 6; TURNER F. [internet] (1998), alinea 4.
[109] POSNER H. (1998), pp. 167-170.

De *Angel*–serie (afb.42) die Woodman in Rome ontwikkelde – ze was daar voor een jaar naar aanleiding van een uitwisselingsprogramma van haar school – getuigt van haar fascinatie van het lichaam dat een spookachtige verschijning wordt. Hier gebruikt ze duidelijk haar lichaam om beelden van vergankelijkheid en transparante spookverschijningen te creëren. De foto's presenteren een metafysische aanwezigheid, een portret van een onzichtbare essentie, een gevoel van leven.[110] Ze verschijnt als een engel, tussen lichaam en geest, die op de wereld zal neerdalen of er zich van onttrekt.[111]



Afb.42. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *On Being an Angel, Providence, Rhode Island,* 1977.

Vele van haar foto's werden genomen in leegstaande, vervallen huizen waar reeds een zekere sfeer van voorbijgaande tijd en verval/vergankelijkheid voelbaar is. De kunstenares begint te metamorferen in deze huizen. Zowel fotografisch als symbolisch wordt de

[110] WARR T. en JONES A. (2000), pp. 170-171.
[111] POSNER H. (1998), pp. 169.

grens tussen haar lichaam en de omgeving wazig.[112] In *Untitled* (afb.43) poogt ze één te worden met de ruimte. Voor haar ontblote rug houdt ze een visgraat die het patroon zichtbaar in de krakelingen van de muur weerspiegelen. Deze visgraat fungeert als een bindend element tussen de omgeving en het zelf.



Afb.43. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *Untitled (New York),* 1979.

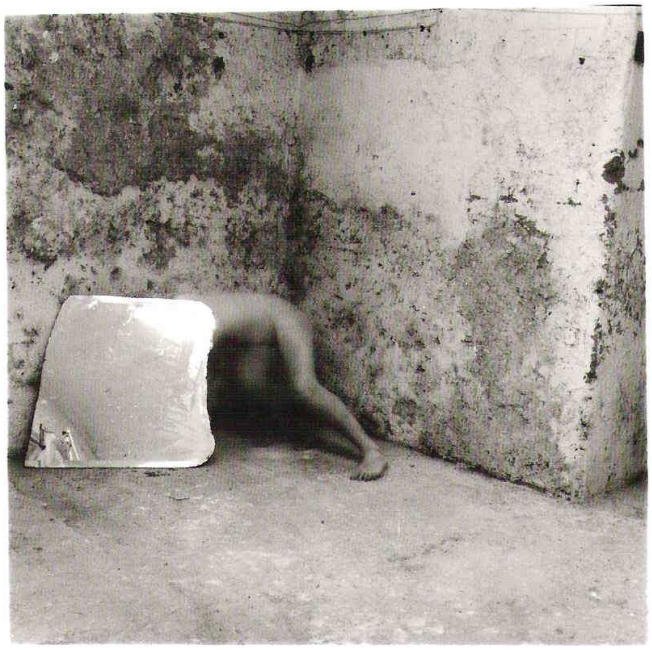


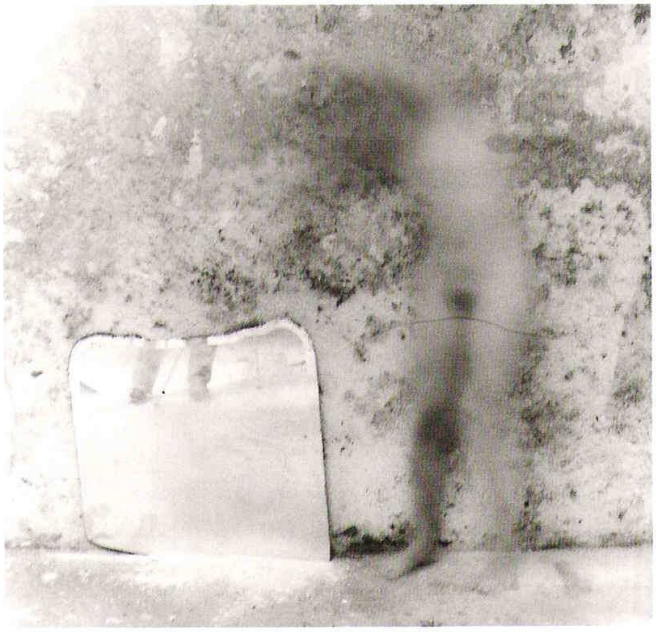
Afb.44. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *House # 4, Providence, Rhode Island,* 1976.

Woodman verschijnt en verdwijnt, ze dwaalt in deze interieurs rond als een fantoom. De *House*–serie (afb.44) toont dit spel met de fysieke en psychische limieten. Ze speelt verstoppertje in de desolate setting van leegstaande huizen: ze verdwijnt in een waas achter een versleten schoorsteenmantel, achter afpellend behangpapier,… Eveneens onthullen vele van haar foto's een spanning tussen lichamelijke aan- en afwezigheid. De serie *Self-Deceit* (afb.45-46) onthult deze spanning. Ze reikt vaak uit het beeldkader en verbergt zich achter een object of draait haar lichaam weg van de toeschouwer. Ze gaat volledig op in de omgeving, ze wordt er één mee als een soort camouflage. Roger Caillois onderzocht dit mechanisme van camouflage gehanteerd door insecten. Hij wees op het feit dat deze mimicry niet enkel eenvoudige bescherming biedt, want dit principe kan levenbedreigend zijn. Sommige insecten eten elkaar op omdat ze te goed gecamoufleerd zijn en een onderscheid met de omgeving niet zichtbaar is. Caillois noemt dit principe kannibalistische zelfdestructie. De foto's van Woodman die als metafoor voor 'ik ben' kunnen gelden, kunnen even snel omslaan in 'ik ben niet, ik besta

[112] IDEM, pp. 168.

niet'.[113] Op tweeëntwintig jarige leeftijd eindigde ze vroegtijdig haar leven. De sfeer van melancholie en het aspect van haar zelfmoord is ondanks de gelaagdheid van haar artistieke werk toch sterk voelbaar.[114]





Afb. 45-46. FRANCESCA WOODAN, *Self-deceit # 5 en 7, Rome,* 1978.

[113] SUNDELL. M. (1996), pp. 435-438.
[114] POSNER H. (1998), p. 170.

4.4.2 De transcendentie van de fotografie

In haar fotografie onderzocht Woodman eveneens de mogelijkheden en beperkingen van het medium. Ze speelde met de twee dimensies van een foto door in haar enscenering platte en drie dimensionale beeldelementen op te nemen. De werking van het licht zette ze naar haar hand door tijdens de opname gebruik te maken van reflecties of zwart of wit pigment. Tijdens het afdrukken hield ze bijvoorbeeld haar hand tegen het oppervlak zodat er intense witte vormen ontstonden.[115] Maar ook met de lengte van de belichtingstijd speelde Woodman in de weergave van het lichaam als een spookachtige verschijning. Ze manipuleerde op die manier de uitkomst van haar foto's waardoor deze als het ware boven de tijd uitstegen. Aangezien Woodman haar foto's nauwkeurig ensceneert en haar lichaam steeds als een anonieme entiteit afgebeeld wordt, is de herinnerende functie van de fotografie niet zozeer aan de orde. Toch speelt ze met deze elementen doordat haar fotografie zich telkens op de grens tussen leven en dood bevindt. Terwijl de omringende achtergrond steeds haarscherp wordt afgebeeld, verdwijnen de figuren in een mystieke waas. Het besef dat het leven op aarde slechts een tijdelijk statuut is, lijkt de fotografie van Woodman te doordrenken.

[115] SCHOONHOVEN H. [internet] (2007), alinea 4.

5. Comparatieve analyse van de doodsthematiek

Naast het gegeven dat de vier vrouwelijke kunstenaars allen uit de Verenigde Staten afkomstig zijn, lijkt hun artistieke praktijk op het eerste zicht weinig gelijkenissen te vertonen. Wat hen binnen deze onderzoekspaper verbindt, is – naast hun geslacht en afkomst – de opname van de doodsthematiek binnen hun fotografisch oeuvre. Wanneer de doodsreeksen van de vier kunstenaressen naast elkaar bekeken worden, valt het niet te ontkennen dat ze allen op een geheel authentieke wijze de dood en de daaraan verwante concepten weergeven, maar toch kunnen naast de diversiteit in de weergaven van de dood eveneens enkele overeenkomsten onderscheiden worden.

5.1 De drijfveren tot een spel met de dood binnen hun fotografisch oeuvre

Eén van de elementen die de vier vrouwelijke kunstenaars van elkaar onderscheiden, zijn de impulsen die elk van hen tot een spel met de dood drijven. Zoals bij elke kunstschepping het geval is, zijn deze drijvende en inspirerende elementen niet eenduidig want vaak is de kunstschepping het gevolg van bewuste en onbewuste impulsen die een invloed op de kunstenaar uitoefenen en culmineren. Een kunstwerk kan dus aan de hand van diverse invalshoeken ontsloten worden aangezien het meerdere betekenislagen in zich draagt.

In een poging om de vraag naar het waarom van de opname van de doodsthematiek in hun artistieke oeuvre te beantwoorden, kan vanuit twee invalshoeken vertrokken worden. Enerzijds kan vanuit het kunstwerk zelf vertrokken worden en de wijze waarop het zich tot het oeuvre verhoudt, of met andere woorden is het belangrijk na te gaan in hoeverre de thematiek binnen de kunstpraxis benaderd wordt. Anderzijds kan vanuit de kunstenaar vertrokken worden, of met andere woorden kunnen de gevoelsmatige en persoonlijk elementen uit het leven van de kunstenaar in verhouding tot de doodsthematiek bestudeerd worden. Beide invalshoeken zijn belangrijk in de poging tot het begrijpen van het waarom van een spel met de dood aangezien een kunstwerk steeds gemaakt wordt door een mens, een vat vol gevoelens en

gedachten. Het kunstwerk kan iets vertellen over de kunstenaar terwijl de elementen uit de levensloop van de kunstenaar een licht kunnen werpen op het werk waardoor het beter begrepen kan worden. Maar het is belangrijk te vermelden dat beide elementen elkaar dikwijls overlappen aangezien de relatie vanuit de twee richtingen kan bekeken worden.

5.1.1 Vanuit het kunstwerk en de verhouding tot het oeuvre

Wanneer we vanuit de fotografie van Woodman vertrekken, kan opgemerkt worden dat haar foto's zich laten kenmerken door een merkwaardige en ongrijpbare spanning tussen het verschijnen en verdwijnen. Ze speelt een wazig spelletje verstoppertje met de blik van de toeschouwer waarbij haar eigen vaak ontblote lichaam zich tussen een toestand van zijn/leven en niet-zijn/dood bevindt. Verschillende fotoreeksen creëren een esoterische tussenruimte waarin haar lichaam één lijkt te worden met de omgeven ruimte. Haar lichaam verdwijnt achter afbladderende stukken behangpapier, wordt een wazige vlek achter de schoorsteenmantel, een geest, of reikt buiten het beeldkader. Van de vier fotografes is Woodmans spel met de dood het meest ondoorgrondelijk. Misschien kan beweerd worden dat de doodsthematiek in haar volledige oeuvre sluimerend aanwezig is, en zich niet zozeer slechts binnen één enkele reeks duidelijk manifesteert.[116] Eveneens belangrijk te vermelden is dat ze als een zeer jonge fotografe in feite nog opzoek was naar de ontwikkeling van haar eigen stijl aangezien alle foto's ontstonden tussen de leeftijd van dertien en tweeëntwintig.[117]

Lucinda Devlins *The Omega Suites* reeks is in eerste instantie een logische verder zetting binnen haar artistieke creatie. Het schetsen van de psychologie van de samenleving aan de hand van door de maatschappij geconcipieerde en gehanteerde interieurs vormt het hoofdthema binnen haar artistieke onderzoek.[118] Vanuit deze optiek sluit

[116] Zoals gebleken uit de afzonderlijke situering van de doodsthematiek binnen het oeuvre van de vier vrouwelijke kunstenaars is ook bij Mann, Devlin en Wilke de dood sluimerend aanwezig binnen hun volledige artistieke praxis. Wel dient opgemerkt te worden dat de doodsthematiek binnen hun oeuvre aan de hand van bepaalde reeksen van dichtbij benaderd of uitgewerkt wordt: Mann – *What Remais*, Devlin – *The Omega Suites,* Wilke – *Intra Venus*.
[117] TOWNSEND C. en WOODMAN G. (2006), p. 6.
[118] N.N., *Lucinda Devlin: The Omega Suites, Artist talk* [internet] (2005), alinea 3.

de reeks naadloos aan bij haar globale creatieve werk. Net als bij Wilke het geval is, was het niet de eerste reeks waarin Devlin een aan de dood verwante thematiek binnen haar fotografisch werk opnam. Reeds enkele jaren voordien concipieerde ze de reeks *Corporal Arenas* die beelden uit ziekenhuizen vastlegde. Volgens Devlin ontstonden de *Omega Suites* foto's in het verlengde van deze *Corporal Arenas* foto's omdat ze het een interessant gegeven vond dat beide soorten kamers aan de dood gelieerd zijn en eenzelfde sfeer ademen, maar desondanks voor geheel verschillende doeleinden ontworpen werden. Ziekenhuizen werden geconcipieerd om mensenlevens te redden terwijl de doodskamers daarentegen ontworpen werden voor een tegenovergestelde functie, namelijk het ontnemen van mensenlevens.[119]

What Remains lijkt in eerste instantie een eigenaardige afwijking in het artistieke oeuvre van Sally Mann aangezien ze voordien voornamelijk bekend was voor de portretfotografie van kinderen, in de meeste gevallen haar drie kinderen. Maar uiteindelijk toont ze reeds in haar vroegere reeksen interesse in het verliezen van onschuld van de mens, het opgroeien van kinderen. Doorheen haar reeksen *At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women* en *Immediate Family* toont ze een fascinatie voor het ontwikkelen van het leven, als een stadium in het zijn van de mensheid waarbij de concepten rond dood en seksualiteit sluimerend aanwezig zijn. *At Twelve* kan gelezen worden als een allusie op de zich ontwikkelende seksualiteit van de twaalfjarige meisjes die zich op de grens van kinds- en volwassenheid bevinden, waardoor hun lichaam met de ambiguïteit van conceptie en destructie kan gelieerd worden. De kinderen kijken met een gesluierde blik naar de wereld van de volwassenen maar gaan tegelijkertijd hun gedrag imiteren. Mann toont met een liefhebbende, intieme moederlijke blik de leefwereld van kinderen die enerzijds kwetsbaar en onschuldig lijken maar anderzijds ook zelfbewust zijn. Maar daarentegen lijkt de interesse voor de doodsthematiek veeleer aan te sluiten bij de functie van de portretfotografie die de gezichten van geliefden en verloren momenten van de vergetelheid van de verleden tijd moet vrijwaren. Of met andere

[119] DEVLIN L. [internet] (2006), alinea 7.

woorden de fotografie die de dood overwint.[120] Er kan dus gesteld worden dat het vergankelijke aspect van het leven – de verloren onschuld – reeds voordien binnen het oeuvre van Sally Mann sluimerend aanwezig was.

Hannah Wilkes *Intra Venus*, een persoonlijk document van haar lijdensweg/stervensproces, sluit op een waardige en confronterende wijze haar gehele artistieke oeuvre af, en werpt er tevens nieuw licht op waardoor de beschuldigingen van formeel narcisme[121] die ze de jaren voordien naar haar hoofd geslingerd kreeg, weerlegd kunnen worden. Hannah Wilke was een veelzijdig kunstenares die voornamelijk bekend werd door het veelvuldige gebruik van haar naakte lichaam en aan het vrouwelijk geslacht geassocieerde sculpturen.[122] Ze was een mooie vrouw en hanteerde haar lichamelijke schoonheid om de door mannen opgelegde schoonheidsidealen te bekritiseren.[123] *Intra Venus* is een verder zetting van deze feministisch getinte commentaar waarbij ze haar aftakelende, doodzieke lichaam aan de camera blootstelt. De complexe boodschap achter dit werk, dat aansluit bij haar volledige oeuvre, is dat alle mensen, mooi of lelijk, sterven en ouder worden, en diegene die niet aan de schoonheidsnormen voldoen zich niet hoeven te verbergen.[124] Net als bij Devlin had Wilke reeds voordien de dood binnen haar artistieke praxis opgenomen. Toen haar moeder een hard gevecht tegen borstkanker voerde, waaraan ze uiteindelijk bezweek, fotografeerde Wilke haar lijdensweg met een warme blik. Zoals ook bij Mann het geval is, hield Wilke van het leven en was een confrontatie met de keerzijde een logisch gevolg aangezien ook het donkere aspect deel uitmaakt van dat leven.

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[120] MANN S. en PRICE R. (1999), p. ongenummerd.
[121] Ook het narcisme is een ambigue notie. Enerzijds houdt dit loutere formele zelfliefde in, maar anderzijds kan het eveneens benaderd worden als het graag bestaan waarbij de gedachte onbestaande te zijn ondenkbaar is. Op die manier kan *Intra Venus* eveneens op twee wijzen benaderd worden. Enerzijds als weerlegging van het puur formele narcisme waarvan ze beschuldigd werd aangezien ze haar voordien mooie lichaam in verval toont. Anderzijds als een top gedreven vorm van narcisme doordat ze het leven niet wil loslaten.
[122] DIEHL C. [internet] (04.1994), alinea 1; HESS E. [internet] (15.01.1993), alinea 4.
[123] PEDERSEN V. [internet] (02.1994), alinea 1.
[124] N.N., *Hannah Wilke: Intra-Venus, Press Release* [internet] (02.12.1993), alinea 1.

5.1.2 Vanuit de kunstenaar

Francesca Woodmans drijfveer tot het spel met de dood blijft alsnog onduidelijk aangezien haar ouders slechts met mondjesmaat persoonlijke informatie los laten. Verschillende critici stellen dat haar oeuvre als een zelfmoordbrief kan gelden, en dat haar sprong uit het raam van haar appartement in New York aan de hand van haar fotografie voorspelbaar was.[125] Anderen stellen daar tegen in dat haar artistieke oeuvre niet al te zeer vanuit deze zelfmoordoptiek mag geanalyseerd worden.[126] Maar toch is het niet onmiskenbaar dat Woodman zich tot op zekere hoogte met het zijn en niet zijn – de verdwijn - verschijn spelletjes die ze met de toeschouwer speelt – bezighoudt. Verdwijnen kan gelijkstaan aan niet zijn: onzichtbaar en vergeten worden wat gelieerd kan worden aan de dood, het niet langer bestaan. Het verschijnen, kan dan weer als een akte van bewijs van bestaan fungeren waardoor de fotografie het zijn vastlegt en haar van het volledige verdwijnen, de dood, vrijwaart. Een wazig spel met de uiterste grenzen van het leven is kernschetsend voor het oeuvre van Francesca Woodman en geeft misschien toch de getormenteerde geest van de fotografe die in een tussenwereld, het zijn en niet-zijn, als het ware gevangen zit, weer.

Net als Woodmans drijfveren tot een spel met de dood qua subjectieve of autobiografische elementen niet volledig achterhaalbaar waren, lijkt Lucinda Devlins *The Omega Suites* reeks in eerste instantie een logische verder zetting binnen haar artistieke creatie. Terwijl bij de andere drie vrouwelijke kunstenaars veeleer subjectieve elementen aan de grondslag van hun spel met de dood lijken te liggen, vertrekt Devlin eerder vanuit een objectief standpunt maar desalniettemin is haar mening over de doodstraf onderhuids in de foto's aanwezig. Haar misnoegen over de kilheid en wreedheid van deze ultieme straf spreekt vanuit de onverbloemde steriliteit en koelheid waarmee ze de doodskamers afbeeldt. In tegenstelling tot de andere vrouwelijke kunstenaars poneert Devlin dat haar oordeel over de verscheidene kamers die ze fotografeert niet aan de orde is aangezien haar intentie een objectieve schets in de

[125] POSNER H. (1998), pp. 170.
[126] VAN LOO S. e.a. (2006), p. 101.

weergave van de maatschappelijke psychologie is.[127] Terwijl bij Woodman, Mann en Wike het gevoelsmatige van de kunstenaar een belangrijk gegeven is, lijkt dit bij Devlin geen enkele rol te spelen daar ze zich zo objectief mogelijk tegenover haar onderwerpen/ruimtes tracht te positioneren.

In tegenstelling tot Lucinda Devlin en Francesca Woodman waarbij de persoonlijke, emotionele drijfveren niet achterhaalbaar waren, spelen deze binnen de kunstschepping van Sally Mann en Hannah Wilke onmiskenbaar een voorname rol.
Net als Sally Mann verloor Hannah Wilke haar vader.[128] De dood van de vader had op beide een diepe invloed maar niettemin maakte dit verlies hun liefde en fascinatie voor het leven sterker.
Mann haar vader was de lokale dokter in het stadje te Virginia waar ze opgroeide en tot op vandaag nog steeds woont. Volgens haar kinderen heeft ze de fascinatie voor het dode, het niet meer levende van haar vader geërfd.[129] Maar het opnemen van de doodsthematiek, het centrale onderwerp in haar collodium – glasplaten fotoreeks *What Remains*, culmineert meerdere drijfveren. Het sterven van haar vader was er één van, maar ook andere aspecten speelden een cruciale rol in het ontwikkelen van de specifieke doodsthematiek. Ook het gegeven dat haar echtgenoot, Larry Mann, een spierziekte heeft waardoor zijn spieren stilaan wegkwijnen, openden haar ogen voor het besef van de vergankelijkheid.[130] Een derde aspect dat misschien een invloed had op de wijze waarop Mann haar onderzoek naar de scheiding tussen leven en dood aanvankelijk aanvatte, is het gegeven dat zij en haar broers tijdens de bijbel- of godsdienstlessen als enigen op de gang moesten zitten.[131] Geen godsdienstlessen betekent immers dat ze geen vooringesteld idee van de onsterfelijke ziel in een vergankelijk lichaam en de visie van het leven na de dood in het hemelse hiernamaals of aardse paradijs niet van jongs af aan in gelepeld kreeg. Maar de gebeurtenis die als het beginpunt

[127] N.N., *Lucinda Devlin: The Omega Suites, Artist talk* [internet] (2005), alinea 2; GROSZ D. [internet] (24.08.2006), alinea 2; LEFFINGWELL E. [internet] (01.2007), alinea 3.
[128] MANN S. en PRICE R. (1999), p. ongenummerd; FRUEH J. (1989), p. 79.
[129] MANN S. (2003), p. 6.
[130] CANTOR S. [documentaire] (2005).
[131] MANN S. en PRICE R. (1999), p. ongenummerd.

van de reeks aanschouwd wordt, is het moment dat haar geliefde hond overleed en de nieuwsgierigheid naar hoe de aarde het dierenlichaam tot zich had genomen, aanwakkerde.[132] Vandaar uit ontwikkelden zich op een geheel spontane wijze de vijf delen die de serie *What Remains* tot een geheel maken. Een vierde aspect dat het fotografisch onderzoeksproject naar het niet meer leven in een specifieke richting duwde, was de tragische gebeurtenis van een ontsnapte gevangene die zelfmoord pleegde. Een dramatische gebeurtenis waarvan Mann ooggetuige was. Door deze tekenende gebeurtenis kreeg haar fotografische onderzoek een nieuwe wending, en richtte Mann de camera naar een nieuw onderwerp: het landschap, waarbij ze trachtte de littekens en de verloren onschuld van de aarde in de rol van de regeneratie van het leven, vast te leggen.[133] Ook de negentiende eeuwse fotografische techniek, collodium - glasplaten, en de antieke, versleten camera's met gebroken sluiters en beschadigde lenzen die ze hanteert, kwamen als een toevallige vondst ter haar attentie.[134] De materialen bezorgen de fotografie een transcendente waas die de ongrijpbaarheid van de dood naast de aardse aanwezigheid op een poëtische en esthetische wijze weergeeft.

Net als in het oeuvre van Sally Mann ontstond de aandacht voor de doodsthematiek in het oeuvre van Hannah Wilke op een spontane en organische wijze. Haar artistieke praktijk was eveneens nauw met het leven verbonden, leven en kunst vormden volgens haar visie een geheel.[135] Hoewel de thematische inhoud binnen hun oeuvre enorm lijken te verschillen, werd ook Wilke door het lot tot de doodsthematiek geleid. De intrede van de doodsthematiek in het oeuvre van Hannah Wilke valt te situeren op het ogenblik dat haar moeder, Selma Butter, een gevecht tegen de levensbedreigende ziekte, de uitzaaiingen ten gevolgen van borstkanker, startte. Van 1979 tot 1982 fotografeerde Wilke haar stervende moeder met een bewonderende, intieme blik van een liefhebbende dochter.[136] Het blijkt voornamelijk toen te zijn dat ze besefte dat de dood, net als haar kunst, onherroepelijk met het leven verbonden is. Waarschijnlijk kan gesteld worden dat de strijd en waardigheid van

[132] MANN S. (2003), p. 6.
[133] N.N., *Sally Mann – Wall text* [internet] (2004), alinea 8-12.
[134] N.N., *Collodion process* [internet] (2005), alinea 3-6.
[135] FRUEH J. (1989), p. 11.
[136] HIRSCH F. [internet] (05/06.1994), alinea 2.

haar moeder een positieve invloed had in het aanvaarden van haar eigen sterfelijkheid waardoor ze mentaal sterk was in het documenteren van haar eigen lijdensproces waarbij ze de publieke blik bij het aftakelen van haar lichaam niet schuwt. Maar eveneens wendde Hannah de sterfelijkheid en de aftakeling aan om haar feministisch getinte commentaar op het vrouwelijke schoonheidsideaal verder te zetten.

5.1.3 Besluit

Er kan besloten worden dat de drijfveren tot een spel met de dood binnen het fotografisch oeuvre van de vier vrouwelijke kunstenaressen zowel vanuit het autobiografische elementen als vanuit het oeuvre zelf kan benaderd en eventueel verklaard worden.

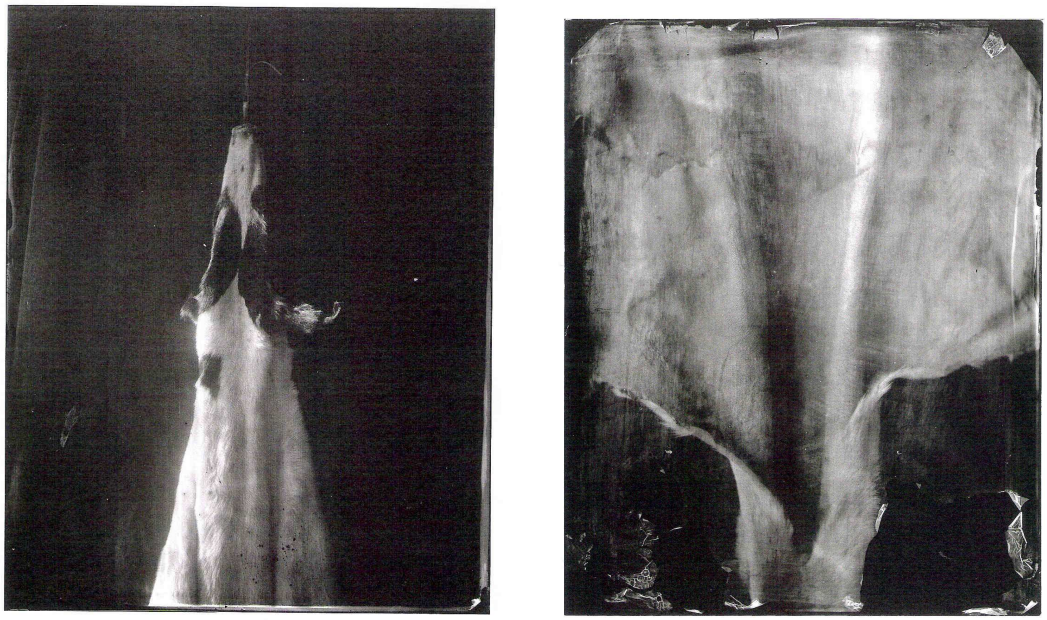
5.2 Aardse realiteit versus spirituele transcendentie (?)

De dood is een ongrijpbaar mysterie dat de mens sinds lange tijd fascineert. Enerzijds worden we dagelijks geconfronteerd met zijn tijdloze en universele aanwezigheid, maar anderzijds lijkt de dood de werkelijkheid te overstijgen omdat er nu eenmaal geen eenduidig antwoord op wat het wezenlijk inhoudt, kan gegeven worden. De dood is zowel reëel als dat het als een transcendent gegeven de werkelijkheid overstijgt. Dit gaat gepaard met de opsplitsing van het vergankelijke lichaam als verwoestbare en tijdelijke kerker waarin de onsterfelijke ziel gedurende een beperkte periode verblijft.
Hetgeen de vrouwelijke fotografen binnen deze notie van realiteit en transcendentie bindt, is het gegeven dat ook binnen de verscheidene fotoreeksen de eenduidigheid ontbreekt. De kunstenaressen richten hun lens zowel naar de realiteit als dat ze een transcendente, ongrijpbare en vluchtige sfeer evoceren. Allen vertrekken ze vanuit een zekere realiteit, maar de ene kunstenares lijkt meer nadruk te leggen op het transcendente element terwijl de andere veeleer in de aardse werkelijkheid geworteld blijft.
In elke foto steekt de dood de kop op, en worden de toeschouwers ermee geconfronteerd maar de wijze waarop de confrontatie verloopt, de dood als een harde werkelijkheid of een mysterieus en poëtisch transcendent

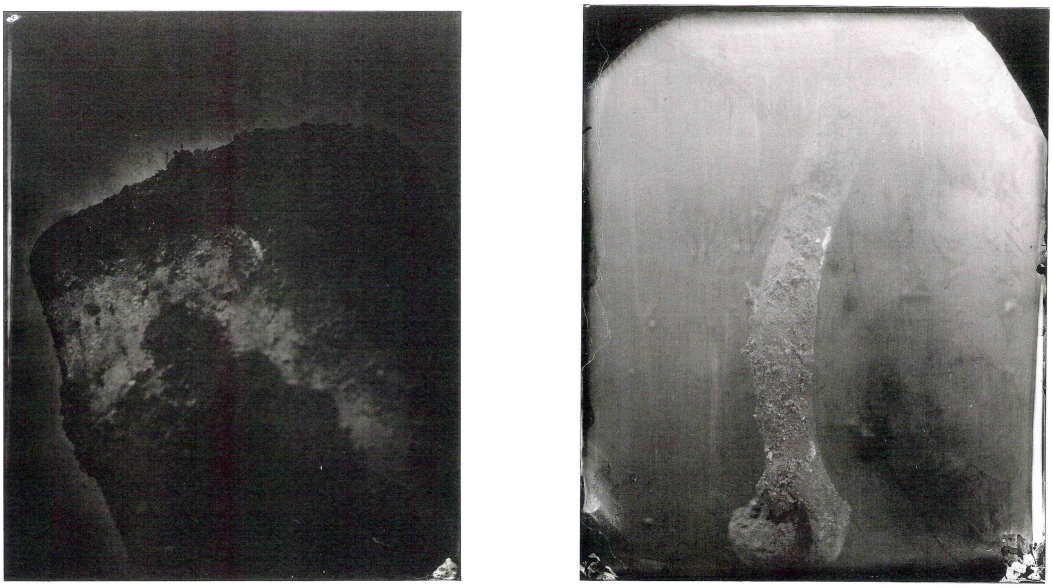
gegeven, is net als de invalshoeken voor hun spel met de dood geheel uniek en veelzijdig.

5.2.1 Aardse realiteit: de dood en zijn gedaanten binnen de werkelijkheid

In haar artistiek onderzoek naar de grens tussen leven en dood, en de rol van de aarde in de regeneratie, richtte Sally Mann haar antieke camera met beschadigde lens in eerste instantie naar de aardse realiteit. Mann startte dit fotografisch onderzoek naar aanleiding van het overlijden van haar hond waardoor haar fascinatie en nieuwsgierigheid naar de opname van het dode lichaam door de aarde aanwakkerde. De beenderen en de



Afb.47-48. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *Matter Lent*, 2000.



Afb.49-50. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *Matter Lent*, 2000.

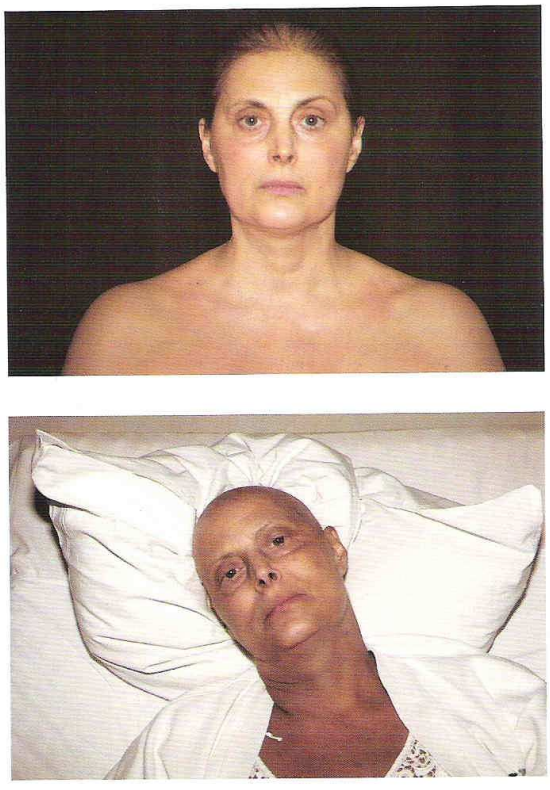
vacht van het huisdier werden na hun opgraving als het ware archeologische vondsten, een bewijs van leven in het verleden, geregistreerd. De donkere tinten die Mann hanteerde om de overblijfselen van de hond vast te leggen, evoceren het gevoel van de landschappelijke tombe waarin ze door de aarde verteerd werden. Terwijl sommige foto's de beenderen die vanuit een schemerige achtergrond te voorschijn komen, onthullen (afb.47-48), zorgen andere foto's veeleer voor een mysterieuze sfeer doordat de objecten – de vacht en diverse soorten beenderen – en hun betekenis moeilijk achterhaalbaar zijn. Verscheidene foto's bemoeilijken door hun besmeurde waas de mogelijkheid tot een definitie van het gefotografeerde object (afb.49-50). Dus hoewel hier voornamelijk aardse resten onder de loep genomen werden, blijft toch een mysterieuze sfeer, die het overstijgende en ongrijpbare aspect van de dood voelbaar maakt, aanwezig. Binnen deze foto's lijkt een eenduidig fotografisch antwoord op de vraag wat leven en dood scheidt eveneens onmogelijk. Ook de aardse realiteit van de verteerde overblijfselen wordt door een waas van een aan de werkelijkheid ontstijgend mysterie omgeven. Hetzelfde geldt voor *Untitled* (afb.51), de tweede sectie binnen de *What Remains* serie. Deze sectie bevat foto's die de ontbinding van



Afb.51. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *Untitled*, 2000.

menselijke resten documenteert. Mann trok voor deze reeks naar een forensische onderzoekssite waar de decompositie van menselijke kadavers door wetenschappers onderzocht worden. Hoewel deze foto's ons zonder twijfel meer met onze eigen sterfelijkheid confronteren blijft alsnog een smeuïge waas de directe confrontatie met de dood verhullen. Mann's fotografische techniek zorgen voor dit mysterieuze, poëtische en romantisch fluïdum die de doodsthematiek op een sterk geësthetiseerde wijze onder het oog van de toeschouwer brengt.

Aan de hand van deze registraties van menselijke ontbindende resten confronteert Mann, net als Hannah Wilke met haar *Intra Venus* serie, de toeschouwer met de vergankelijkheid en aftakeling van het lichaam. Maar in tegenstelling tot Wilkes rechtuit – rechtaan fotografische documenten van haar stervensweg (afb.52) presenteert Mann het thema van de dood en sterfelijkheid op een zachtere en meer verteerbare wijze.



Afb.52. HANNAH WILKE, *Intra Venus Series No.7, February 20, 1992 / August 18, 1992,* 1992.

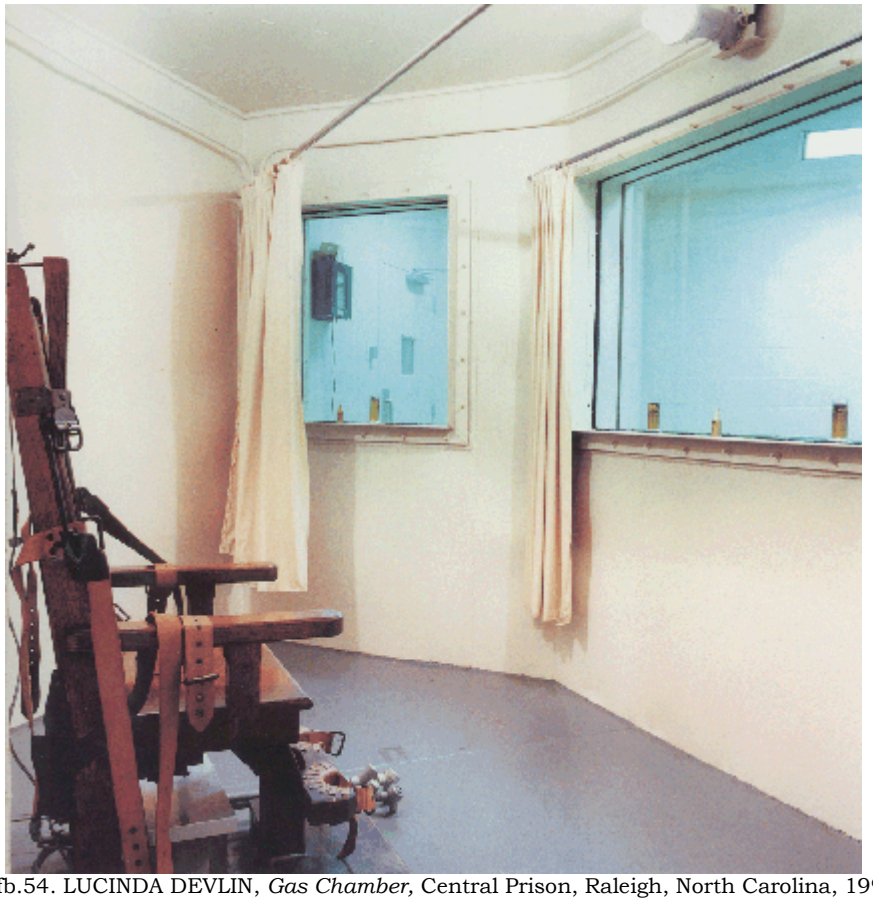
Terwijl Mann via fotografische technieken en het gebruik van versleten camera's en lenzen de dood en het mysterie dat eraan verbonden is via een soort feeërieke sfeer onder het oog van de toeschouwer brengt, confronteert Wilke zonder enige waarschuwing met de dood die in haar zieke lichaam aanwezig is en door haar aderen[137] stroomt. Wilke is één van de fotografes die veeleer in de aardse realiteit geworteld blijft. In het fotografisch document van het sterven, zowel in haar moeders strijd als in haar eigen gevecht tegen de hardnekkige kanker toont ze het aftakelen van het sterfelijke lichaam zoals het doodgewoon alle dagen in de wereld plaats vindt. Ze maakt van deze documentaire fotografie, die zowel persoonlijke als artistieke elementen in zich verbindt en haar volledige oeuvre in een ander daglicht zet, geen spiritueel of transcendent gegeven. In tegendeel, Wilke toont veeleer de rauwe realiteit van het vergankelijke lichaam (afb.53). De groter dan levensgrootte *Intra* Venus foto's worden als het ware een harde vuistslag die de toeschouwer de harde werkelijkheid waaraan niet te ontkomen valt in het gezicht slingert. De foto's zijn, net als bij Sally Mann die aan het einde van haar doodsreeks



Afb.53. HANNAH WILKE, *Intra Venus Series No. 11, March 8, 1992; August 24, 1992; December 11, 1992; May 13,1992,* 1992.

[137] De titel *Intra Venus* verbindt de twee begrippen intraveneus, wat 'in de aderen plaats vindend' betekent, en Venus als het ultiem symbool voor de vrouwelijke schoonheid. Op een spelende wijze verbindt Wilke aldus tweetalige begrippen ziekte en schoonheid tot een geheel.

besluit dat de dood dient omarmd te worden, een ode aan het leven waarbij de sterfelijkheid als een onafscheidelijk aspect daarvan aanvaard wordt. Beide kunstenaressen beseffen dat de dood deel uitmaakt van het leven en dat slechts wanneer dit besef opgenomen wordt en niet langer ontkend of gevreesd wordt, de mens ten volle van het leven kan genieten.
Ondanks de weergave van de harde realiteit van de sterfelijkheid van het menselijke bestaan kan ook bij Hannah Wilke een splitsing tussen twee niveaus, het aftakelende, zwakke lichaam en een sterke geest, onderscheiden worden. Wilkes fotografie getuigt van een sterke mentale toestand terwijl ze fysiek steeds meer achteruit gaat. Dus ook hier kan een splitsing tussen het zogenaamde geestelijke (transcendente) en fysieke (aardse) gemaakt worden. Maar dit wordt niet door een wazige blik en spel van verschijnen en verdwijnen wat het ongrijpbare karakter van de dood als eeuwig mysterie evoceert – zoals in het artistieke werk van Woodman en Mann – weergegeven. Net als Devlins *Omega Suites* zijn de beelden uiterst scherp en met een kleurentoevoeging vastgelegd. De nadruk ligt zowel bij Wilke als bij Devlin op de aardse realiteit van de keerzijde van het leven, alhoewel ook hier een eenduidig antwoord als verklaring van de dood en zijn inhoud afwezig is.
Devlins fotoreeks, waarin alle menselijke aanwezigheid ontbreekt, lieert doorheen kamers en voorwerpen aan de doodstraf (afb.54). Maar algauw wordt de toeschouwer overweldigd door de koele stilte die de kamers uitstralen en aan het ijzige moment vlak voor of na het uitvoeren van de ultieme straf doen vermoeden. Enkel de oorverdovende stilte die achterblijft wanneer het leven uit het lichaam verdwenen is en de laatste zucht de adem afsnijdt, is voelbaar doorheen de foto's. Hoewel Devlins fotografie sterk aan de aardse realiteit van het menselijke zijn verbonden is, zweeft ook deze nuchtere 'down to earth' doodsserie tussen de aardse realiteit – de kamers en de voorwerpen – en de transcendentie van het mystieke aspect van de dood als het eeuwenoud onoplosbare mysterie – de menselijke afwezigheid en koele sfeer doormiddel van de heldere kleuren. De onvatbaarheid van het sterven wordt voelbaar gemaakt door de kille stilte die de kamers uitstralen. Desondanks lijkt het reële te overheersen: de doodskamers spreken niet zozeer over de transcendentie van de dood, maar tonen veeleer de wreedheid van een gelegitimeerd en georganiseerd systeem in het roven van levens. De foto's schetsen de



Afb.54. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Gas Chamber,* Central Prison, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1991.

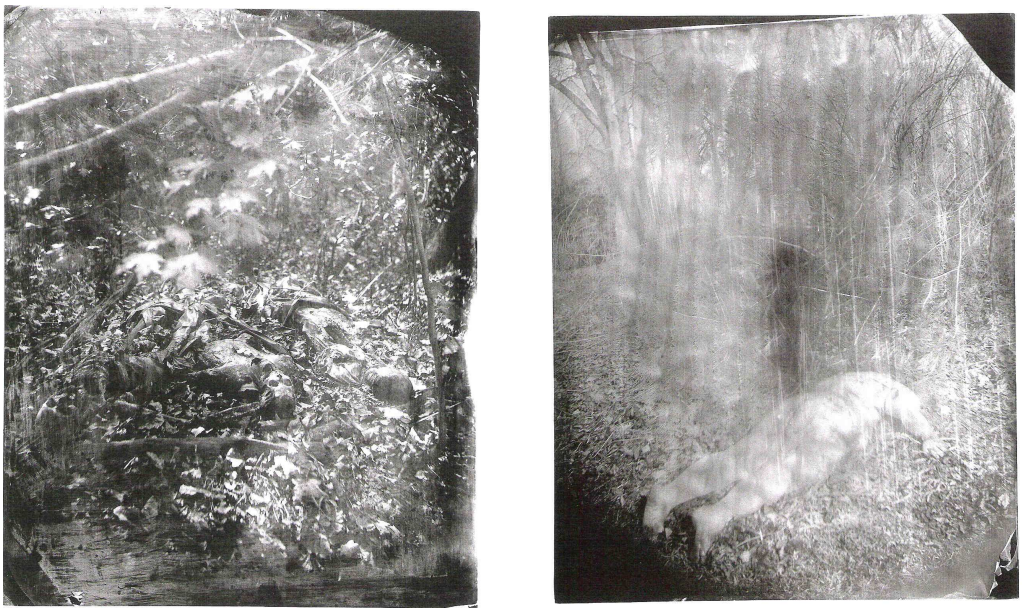
ijzige menselijke meedogenloosheid in het uitvoeren van deze ultieme straf.

Er kan dus gesteld worden dat zowel Wilke als Devlin veeleer geïnteresseerd zijn in het ontbloten van hetgeen in de maatschappij aanwezig is maar desondanks verscholen blijft achter gesloten deuren.

5.2.2 Transcendentie: de dood als onmogelijke essentie die de werkelijkheid overstijgt

Sally Mann, die zich in eerste instantie naar de wezenlijke en in de werkelijkheid aanwezige (dode) resten van het leven wendde, evolueert doorheen de verschillende secties van *What Remains* naar een mystieke weergave van de dood. Reeds in de *Matter Lent* sectie die de verteerde overblijfselen van haar hond registreren, is de aanwezigheid van een mystiek component voelbaar. Dit voornamelijk door middel van het reeds vermelde gebruik van negentiende eeuwse fotografische technieken en materialen die voor een gevoel van een reeds verstreken tijd instaan. Maar het is voornamelijk vanaf *Untitled* (afb.55), de foto's die de

decompositie van de menselijke lijken registreren, dat het mystieke en transcendente element zijn intrede doet. De beelden worden gekenmerkt door een overbelichtte, gekraste waas die het rechtstreekse en onverbloemde contact met de doden sluiert. In één van deze foto's (afb.56) ligt een dood lichaam op zijn buik in het met bladeren bedekte gras nabij een kale struik. Het beeld van het door een grijze waas omgeven levensloze lichaam wordt verticaal doorkruist met krassen. Deze



Afb.55-56. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *Untitled*, 2000.

overbelichte krassen associëren aan de lichtgevende stralen die op aarde neerdaalden bij de ter hemel opneming van Maria. De wazigheid en overbelichting die de foto's binnen deze reeks kenmerken, evoceren dus iets dat zowel aan het blote oog als aan het oog van de werkelijkheidsregistrerende camera ontsnapt. Wanneer Mann binnen de secties *December 8, 2000* (afb.57) en *Antietam* (afb.58) haar camera op



Afb.57. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *December 8, 2000*, 2000.



Afb.58. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *Antietam*, 2000.

het landschap richt in een poging om zijn littekens van verloren onschuld vast te leggen, evolueert ze weg van de aardse realiteit naar een mystieke werkelijkheid. Door de collodium – glasplaten techniek kregen de twee eerste reeksen die de dood in het aangezicht keken eveneens een mystieke poëtische gelaagdheid en een transcendente gloed over zich heen. Maar de wijze in het kijken naar de dood als een wezenlijke realiteit waar geen mens kan aan ontkomen, lijkt aan belang in te boeten naarmate de reeks vordert. De rechtstreekse, visuele verbinding met het sterfelijk leven lijkt afwezig. Maar wanneer de toeschouwer op de hoogte gebracht wordt van de gebeurtenissen en gedachten[138] die aan deze secties vooraf gaan, wordt de kloof tussen de onderlinge verbinding van de doodsthematiek en de landschapsfoto's overbrugd.



Afb.59. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *My House, Providence, Rhode Island,* 1976.

[138] MANN S. (2003), p. 70: *December 8, 2000* is het artistieke gevolg van Mann haar ooggetuigenis van een zelfmoord, dit werd de aanzet om haar camera naar het land te richtten en de littekens uit het verleden te vangen. *Antietam* is een site waar tijdens de burgeroorlog vele mensen gewond raakten en sneuvelden.

Woodmans fotografie leunt qua transcendentie sterk aan bij de *What Remains* serie van Sally Mann, maar toch is de thematiek en techniek wezenlijk anders opgevat. Woodman ensceneert en onderzoekt de intimiteit van haar lichaam. Ze verschijnt en verdwijnt in vaak desolate en vervallen settings waardoor de tijd onbestaande lijkt (afb.59). Ook bij Sally Mann krijgen de foto's door het hanteren van negentiende eeuwse technieken en versleten materialen een tijdloos aspect waarbij ze als een deur naar verscheidene tijden – verleden, heden en toekomst – kunnen gelden. Maar bij Francesca Woodman krijgen de foto's eerder de functie van een tussenwereld toebedeeld. Woodman wordt door de verhullende - onthullende spelletjes die ze met de blik van de toeschouwer speelt als het ware een esoterisch wezen dat tussen zijn (leven) en niet zijn (dood) dwaalt. Woodman lijkt, net als sommige hondenbeenderen in de fotografie van Mann, in de achtergrond van de omgeving te verdwijnen.

5.2.3 Besluit

Samengevat kan gesteld worden dat Devlin en Wilke, ondanks hun diverse onderwerpen – Wilkes zieke lichaam en Devlins doodskamers – beiden veeleer in de werkelijkheid geworteld zitten en hun camera's eerder naar de aardse werkelijkheid omtrent de sterfelijkheid richten, terwijl Mann en Woodman eerder de mystieke toer opgaan en een ongrijpbare en transcendente waas rond het onderwerp creëren. Maar ondanks de grote diversiteit tussen de vier vrouwelijke fotografen in de weergave van de doodsthematiek kan er toch één opvallende gelijkenis onderscheiden worden. De dood als een werkelijkheid waaraan niet te ontkomen is en die alsnog als ongrijpbaar, mysterieus en beangstigend ervaren wordt. Alle foto's zijn een confrontatie met onze sterfelijkheid, maar de ene foto grijpt al meer naar de keel en snijdt de adem af op een beklemmende wijze, terwijl de andere eerder een ontroerende en esthetiserende werking heeft.

5.3 De dood als taboe (?)

De dood wordt binnen de Westerse maatschappij niet enkel als een onverklaarbaar mysterie ervaren, eveneens wordt deze notie door taboe omgeven. De dood is als het onuitspreekbare dat de Westerse mens angst

inboezemt omdat deze vreest voor het onbekende. Aangezien kunst vaak poogt het onuitspreekbare vorm te geven, kan gesteld worden dat het een taboedoorbrekende functie kan bevatten. Binnen het fotografisch oeuvre van de vier vrouwelijke kunstenaars wordt deze met taboe beladen thematiek opgenomen. Maar zoals reeds eerder vermeld – binnen het vorige topic aardse realiteit versus spirituele transcendentie – verloopt de confrontatie met deze onuitspreekbare werkelijkheid op uiteenlopende manieren.

Francesca Woodman speelt aan de hand van een persoonlijk ontwikkelende symboliek van verschijnen en verdwijnen met het met taboe beladen thema. Maar hoewel ze als het ware danst met de schaduw van de dood door een delicate evenwichtsoefening op de grenzen van het zijn, omzeilt ze doorheen haar poëtische en esthetische foto's de harde confrontatie met de onbekende en angstaanjagende werkelijkheid. De toeschouwer ervaart bij het bekijken van de foto's, die een intieme schaal hebben, een speelse gespannenheid die desondanks geen verontrustende werking heeft aangezien deze een oplossing kent in een soort transcendente tussenruimte. Ook bij Sally Mann is het taboedoorbrekende aspect niet zozeer aan de orde. Hoewel ze zich ervan bewust is, was het niet haar intentie het taboe rondom de notie dood te doorbreken.[139] Veeleer poogt Mann met behulp van de fotografie antwoorden te formuleren op vragen – wat doet de aarde met de dood en omgekeerd wat doet de dood met de aarde – die door toevallige gebeurtenissen – de dood van haar hond en de zelfmoord van een ontsnapte gevangene – opborrelden. Doormiddel van de fotografische techniek met de vrij lange belichtingstijd krijgen de foto's een wazige laag over zich heen waardoor de toeschouwer in de confrontatie met de dood als het ware wordt afgeschermd.
Hannah Wilke daarentegen confronteert de toeschouwer op een onverbloemde wijze met het aftakelende en vergankelijke lichaam, zowel met dat van haar moeder, Selma Butter, als met dat van haar zelf tijdens hun gevecht tegen de levensbedreigende ziekte, kanker, waaraan ze beiden uiteindelijk bezweken. Haar *Intra Venus* reeks is een verderzetting van haar kritische commentaar op de schoonheidsnormen en –idealen

[139] CANTOR S. [documentaire] (2005).

die door de door mannen gedomineerde wereld worden opgelegd. Met deze reeks kan gesteld worden dat ze een taboe wil doorbreken, namelijk dat ziekte en ouderdom geen zaken van persoonlijke schaamte hoeven te zijn, en dat ze niet uit de maatschappij verdrongen mogen worden maar daarentegen erin opgenomen moeten worden aangezien deze keerzijde eveneens deel uitmaakt van het leven. Aan de hand van groter dan levensgrootte foto's met heldere kleurentoevoegingen die dikwijls in een diptiek – verschillende periodes – staan opgesteld waardoor het effect van de dood die door haar aderen stroomt beter zichtbaar wordt, confronteert ze de toeschouwer zonder enige waarschuwing met de harde realiteit van het vergankelijke lichaam. Het onuitspreekbare wordt op een onverbloemde wijze aan de toeschouwer getoond.
Lucinda Devlins fotografie van de doodskamers toont de harde en koude werkelijkheid van de gelegaliseerde moord, waardoor ze de hypocrisie van het taboe aansnijdt. De dood als een onuitspreekbaar gegeven dat wel zonder enkele aarzeling uitgevoerd wordt? Devlin speelt net als Woodman met het aantrekken en afstoten van de blik van de toeschouwer. In eerste instantie wordt de blik van de kijker gestreeld omdat de foto's op het eerste zicht geassocieerd kunnen worden met moderne interieurfotografie uit één of ander woon–tijdschrift. Geleidelijk aan sijpelt het besef van de wreedheid en medogenloosheid naar binnen waardoor de afkeer van de koele ruimtes wordt ingezet.

5.3.1 Besluit

De vier vrouwelijke kunstenaressen pogen het onuitspreekbare vorm te geven maar dit betekent niet dat ze allen het taboe dat omheen de dood dwaalt, willen doorbreken. Woodman en Mann hanteren een zachte en poëtische esthetiek in hun poging het onuitspreekbare vorm te geven, waardoor de kijker, zoals reeds eerder vermeld, op een zachter verteerbare en niet zozeer verontrustende wijze op het met taboe beladen gegeven wordt gewezen. Wilke en Devlin daarentegen, die beiden veeleer in de werkelijkheid geworteld zijn, spelen wel meer met het taboe aspect dat rondom de doodsthematiek aanwezig is. Toch is het belangrijk op te merken dat de invalshoek bij beiden geheel verschillend is. Terwijl Wilke de vergankelijkheid van het lichaam toont, wijst Devlin veeleer op de

hypocrisie van de dood dat zogenaamd onuitspreekbaar maar daarentegen wel uitvoerbaar is.

5.4 Het medium fotografie en de dood

Zoals reeds in de inleiding gesteld werd, draagt het medium fotografie net als de dood en het vrouwenlichaam een dubbelzinnige tegenstelling in zich. Dikwijls wordt van het medium fotografie gedacht dat het zich op een objectieve en directe manier ten opzichte van de werkelijkheid verhoudt. Fotografie wordt dan ook vaak als een rationeel werkelijkheidsregistrerend medium omschreven, dat in staat is datgene wat aan het blote oog ontsnapt weer te geven. Vanuit deze optiek is het interessant een link te leggen met de notie dood, een gegeven dat in de werkelijkheid aanwezig is maar desondanks aan alle menselijke inzichten en kennis ontsnapt. Kan de fotografie als het zogenaamd werkelijkheidsregistrerend medium bij uitstek de dood als een ongrijpbaar en meerduidig gegeven voor het blote oog zichtbaar maken? Wanneer we de doodsreeksen binnen het fotografisch oeuvre van de vier vrouwelijke kunstenaars bekijken, zou ervan kunnen uitgegaan worden dat dit inderdaad mogelijk is. De dood wordt bij allen wezenlijk voelbaar gemaakt. Maar ondanks de zogenaamde speciale relatie die het medium met de ons omringende werkelijkheid heeft, is ook een foto slechts een beeld. En beelden zijn visuele tekens en/of inhouden die op de één of andere wijze naar de realiteit verwijzen. Ook de fotograaf is, net als de beeldende kunstenaar, een particulier individu die met zijn geheel eigen wijze van denken en voelen in een beeld dat hij vervaardigt zijn verhouding met die werkelijkheid poogt uit te drukken of vorm te geven. Dit heeft als gevolg dat beelden altijd subjectief zijn.[140] Dus naast de grote gelijkenis die eenzelfde beeld met de werkelijkheid vertoont, is er steeds eveneens een fictionele vervreemding aanwezig.[141]

Het gebruik van het medium fotografie is hetgeen wat de vrouwelijke kunstenaars in hun spel met de dood overduidelijk met elkaar bindt. Al schrijvend met licht pogen ze de donkere kant van het leven vast te leggen. Toch hanteren ze elkeen op een verscheidene wijze het medium.

[140] SWINNEN J.M. (1992), pp. 35-36.
[141] IBIDEM

Maar ondanks de diverse methoden kan gesteld worden dat de weergave van de doodsthematiek in hun oeuvre gekenmerkt wordt door een of andere manipulatie van het medium, waardoor een beoogd doel bereikt wordt. Hierdoor wordt de paradox in de verhouding ten opzichte van het medium tot de realiteit bevestigd. Zoals reeds uit het voorgaand topic, aardse realiteit of spirituele transcendentie, bleek, vertrekken de kunstenaressen van een realiteit maar toch leek de ene al meer dan de andere in de werkelijkheid geworteld. Terwijl de manipulatie in de meer transcendent gerichte beelden van Mann en Woodman prominent voelbaar is aan de hand van lichtvlekken, krassen en een troebele focus, lijken Devlin en Wilke veeleer de fotografie als een werkelijkheidsregistrerend medium te hanteren.[142] Maar ook zij manipuleren de uitkomst door het toevoegen van kleuren waardoor de beleving van het beeld emotioneel bepaald wordt.[143] Elk beeld is dus subjectief ingekleurd en illustreert de particuliere verhouding van het scheppende individu ten opzichte van de omringende werkelijkheid en de notie dood.

5.5 Het Portret en de dood

Een portret is een afbeelding van een persoon of een groep mensen, een al dan niet artistieke voortstelling waarbij de weergave van de gezichtskenmerken en het inzicht in de persoonlijkheid van de afgebeelde individuen een belangrijke positie inneemt. Reeds tijdens het ontstaan van het medium werd de portretfotografie – voornamelijk sinds de belichtingstijd in hoeveelheid afnam[144] – een belangrijke categorie binnen de fotografie. Portretten werden vaak gemaakt naar aanleiding van gebeurtenissen en werden dikwijls voorafgegaan door het traditionele opdirken: de gehele familie of enkele leden die in hun beste zondagse kleren voor de (reizende) fotograaf poseerden. Later met de komst van de snapshot boette het opdirken en het poseren aan belang in. Maar reeds

[142] N.N., *Wall text Sally Mann* [internet] (2004), alinea 5-6; SCHOONHOVEN H. [internet] (2007), alinea 4.
[143] LEFFINGWELL E. [internet] (01.2007), alinea 3.
[144] STALPAERT C. [college] (04.10.2007): Voordien was de belichtingstijd zodanig lang (tot acht uur tijd) dat het geen nut had portretten te maken aangezien door een enkele beweging de figuur verdween in een wazige vlek. Daarom fotografeerde men aan de beginperiode van het medium veeleer landschappen, stillevens en lijken.

lang voor de komst van de fotografie als werkelijkheidsregistrerend medium waardoor de mimesiscrisis in de beeldende kunsten afgesloten werd, bestond de portretkunst waarbij individuen of groepen vereeuwigd werden. Van de portretkunst kan dus beweerd worden dat een van zijn voornaamste doelen het bewaren van een gezicht is, waarbij de herinnering als een hulpmiddel tegen de wrede vergetelheid van het geheugen alzo de anonieme dood overkomt. Op die manier wordt de portretfotografie een deur naar de verschillende tijden: het verleden, het heden en de toekomst. Een voorbeeld van de herinnerende functie van de portretfotografie waarmee we allen wel al eens geconfronteerd werden, zijn de doodsprentjes die de familie van een overledene in veelvuldigheid, als een ode en respect voor het leven van de dode, uitdeelt.[145]
Het is dan ook niet verwonderlijk dat Reynold Price, naar aanleiding van het fotoboek met betrekking tot Sally Mann's *Immediate Family,* poneert dat de portretfotografie en de dood nauw met elkaar verbonden zijn. De fotografie kan namelijk als een souvenir aan een verloren moment functioneren. Zo helpt het ons de gezichten en/of gebeurtenissen uit het verleden van de vergetelheid te vrijwaren. Deze impuls om een gezicht van de dood te redden is tot ver in het verleden van de mens terug te vinden.[146] De portretten documenteren het leven van een individu of een groep waardoor ze als een bewijs van bestaan kunnen fungeren.

Zoals zal blijken uit de onderstaande analyse ontbreekt ook hier de eenduidigheid aangezien het portret op verschillende wijzen kan benaderd worden: Devlin die de psyche van de Westerse maatschappij portretteert aan de hand van architecturale ruimten. Mann die zich richt tot het fotograferen van (haar) kinderen en eveneens de met littekens bedekte landschappen portretteert. Wilke die zowel haar moeder en zichzelf portretteert in de nabijheid van de dood, en Woodmans subtiele spel in de weergave van haar lichaam. De vier vrouwelijke kunstenaars

[145] MANN S. en PRICE R. (1999), p. ongenummerd: Price die vertelt hoe tijdens zijn jeugdjaren toen de fotografie nog een schaars voorkomend en vrij kostelijk medium was, een jongentje van zijn klas een doodsprentje van zijn overleden grootvader gekregen had, de enige afbeelding die van deze man ooit genomen werd…
Er moet weliswaar opgemerkt worden dat de mogelijkheid bestaat een andere afbeelding dan het portret van de overledene op het gebedsprentje te plaatsen.
[146] MANN S. en PRICE R. (1999), p. ongenummerd.

kunnen aldus binnen deze notie op diverse wijzen met elkaar in verband gebracht worden.

5.5.1 Het herinnerende portret en de moeder – kind relatie

Zowel in het fotografisch oevre van Sally Mann als dat van Hannah Wilke is de herinnerende en anonieme dood overwinnende functie van de portretfotografie aanwezig. Beide kunstenaressen fotograferen hun geliefden. Maar onmiddellijk kan tussen deze twee fotografes een belangrijk onderscheid opgemerkt worden. De invalshoek van waaruit de portretfotografie deze functie toebedeeld krijgt, is weliswaar geheel verschillend. Terwijl Mann zich met een intieme moederlijke blik voornamelijk richt tot haar drie kinderen, wendt de kinderloze Hannah Wilke zich daarentegen tot haar moeder en diens harde strijd tegen uitgezaaide borstkanker, waarna ze uiteindelijk terug de camera naar zichzelf richt in het vastleggen van haar eigen strijd tegen hardnekkige lymfekanker.



Afb.60. SALLY MANN, *Blowing Bubbles,* 1987.

Sally Mann is als fotografe voornamelijk bekend omwille van de portretteringen van haar drie kinderen – de portretreeks *Immediate Family* (afb.60) – waarbij ze een subtiel spel speelt in de psychologische weergave van de opsplitsing van de zogenaamde onschuldige

kinderwereld en die van de bedorven volwassenen.[147] Met deze reeks waarin het opgroeien van haar kroost vereeuwigd werd, werd ze door de wereld zowel met lof als met blaam overspoelt.[148] Een mooi voorbeeld van de intieme, moederlijke blik bij het vastleggen van een verloren moment is *The Wet Bed* (afb.61). Centraal in de foto staat een wit bed, die een vochtige plek vertoont, waarop Mann's jongste dochter, Virginia, poedelnaakt in een onschuldige



Afb.61. SALLY MANN, *The Wet Bed from the Immediate Family series,* 1987.

positie in een diepe slaap[149] afgebeeld wordt. Het bed waarop het kleine kind met opengesperde armen als in een positie van overgave – de overgave aan het gevecht met de slaap dat waarschijnlijk aan de foto vooraf ging – ligt, is volledig wit, als de kleur van de onschuld en maagdelijke deugd. De omgeving is donker en details zijn niet onderscheidbaar. De licht – donker symboliek kan binnen deze foto als volgt gelezen worden: de dreigende donkerte van de nacht omringt het kleine kind, maar ze wordt afgeschermd door de witte helderheid van het bed die als een wolk het kind van de verdwijning in de donkerte van de omgeving vrijwaart. In de donkerte van de nacht licht het nieuwe leven

[147] WILLEMSEN P. (datum ongekend /vermoedelijk 1997), p. onbekend.
[148] HAIJTEMA A. (23 januari 1997), p. 12.
[149] God van de slaap = Hypnos, de tweelingbroer van Thanatos, de personificatie van de dood.

op. Misschien kan het witte bed in de donkerte van de omgeving geassocieerd worden met de volle maan die in verband wordt gebracht me de vrouwelijke conceptiecyclus en haar scheppende kracht.
Ook de *At Twelve: Portaits of Young Women* serie getuigt van deze herinnerende en vereeuwigende functie van de fotografie. Mann legt binnen deze reeks aan de hand van portretteringen het verloren moment in de overgang van kind naar volwassene individu vast. Hoewel bij sommige foto's de weergave van de gezichtkenmerken niet centraal staan, blijft deze souvenirfunctie alsnog overeind. Een voorbeeld van zo'n foto waarbij de gezichtskenmerken van het twaalfjarige meisje niet centraal staan, is *Untitled* (afb.62). Deze toont ons twee generaties samen in een



Afb.62. SALLY MANN, *Untitled from the At Twelve Series,* 1983-1985.

beeld. Hoewel het jonge meisje, Sherry, haar gezicht zich buiten het beeldkader bevindt, waardoor een spanning ontstaat, blijft de herinnerende functie van het portret onderhuids aanwezig doordat het meisje geflankeerd wordt door een afbeelding van haar grootmoeder op dezelfde leeftijd. De spanning die dit beeld creëert, kan in verband gebracht worden met de ambiguïteit die in dit beeld hand in hand samen gaan. Enerzijds zien we grootmoeders afbeelding waardoor haar bestaan herdacht wordt, terwijl anderzijds onze nieuwsgierigheid naar Sherry's gezichtkenmerken aangewakkerd worden. De dubbele kanten van het

geheugen – herinneren en vergeten – zijn aldus beiden binnen deze foto aanwezig.

Het verliezen van de onschuld weeft zich als een rode draad doorheen Sally Mann's oeuvre waarbij het thema van de sterfelijkheid en het voorbij schrijden van de tijd nooit veraf is.[150] Mann lijkt binnen de serie *What Remains* afstand te nemen van het portretteren van haar kroost aangezien de doodsthematiek, het besef van vergankelijkheid en de rol van het landschap in de regeneratie van het leven binnen deze reeks de hoofdnoot vormt. Maar toch laat haar moederlijke gevoel van zorg haar binnen deze lugubere reeks niet onberoerd. Mann eindigt de serie met extreme close-ups van haar drie kinderen waarbij ze hun gezichten als het ware onherkenbaar door een donkere atmosfeer laat omringen (afb. 63-64).[151] Bevinden haar kinderen zich in de warme, donkere en beschermende omgeving van de baarmoeder of in een verterend aards graf? Het verband met de dubbelzinnigheid die in het vrouwenlichaam gesitueerd wordt, is in deze foto's duidelijk terug te vinden. Enerzijds kunnen de extreme close-ups gelezen worden als zijnde aanwezig in de warme, donkere en beschermende atmosfeer van de



Afb.63-64. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *What Remains*, 2000.

[150] MANN S. en PRICE R. (1999), geen paginanummers: hierin stelt ze dat de botten onder haar voeten kraken telkens ze haar domein bewandelt…

[151] CANTOR S. [documentaire] (2005): Hoewel voor de toeschouwer de gezichtskenmerken moeilijk of niet herkenbaar zijn, blijkt dit voor Sally Mann niet zo te zijn. Zij vond het treffend dat deze met een fluïdum bedekte foto's, bekomen door een belichtingstijd van zes minuten, hen zo kenmerkend weergaven.

moederlijke baarmoeder, de plaats waar het nieuw leven zich genereert. Kan Mann hierdoor in verband gebracht worden met het statement van Elke Berckhout-Dhont. Zij beweert namelijk dat het voor vrouwen tijdens het stervensproces of de gedachte aan hun eindigheid moeilijk is om het zorgelement los of achter te laten. Binnen deze optiek kan dus beweerd worden dat Mann haar kinderen/zorgelementen niet wil los laten en hen door een beschermende waas van de wereld poogt af te schermen. Maar anderzijds kunnen de wazige weergaven van hun aangezichten gelezen worden als de gezichten die verteerd worden door de aarde wanneer deze zich in hun donker landschappelijke tombe bevinden. De gezichten worden als het ware verteerd door de wreedheid van het geheugen, een gegeven dat de portretfotografie kan overwinnen. Deze foto's dragen dus net als de vrouw, die net als schenker van nieuw leven met het brengen van de dood in verband wordt gebracht, een dubbelzinnig besef in zich. De vrouwelijke baarmoeder als een donkere grot waarin leven ontspruit en als graftombe die het leven terug tot zich neemt.

De omgekeerde benadering – de liefhebbende dochter die haar doodzieke moeder fotografeert – is terug te vinden in het artistieke oeuvre van Hannah Wilke. Terwijl Mann de dood en het leven benadert vanuit haar positie als een moeder, vertrekt Wilke vanuit het perspectief van het kind dat uit de moeder geboren werd.



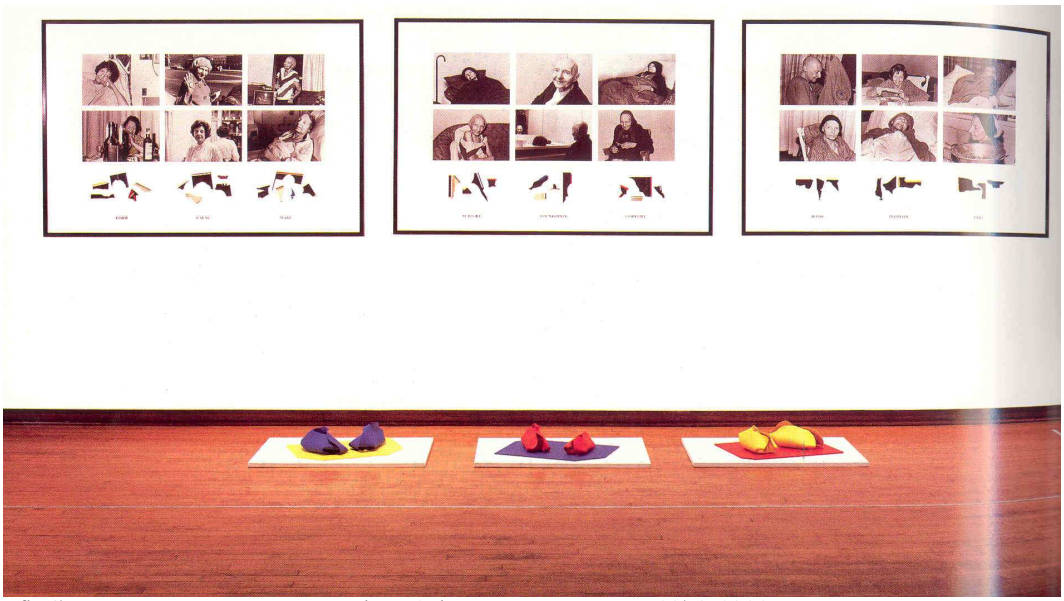
Afb.65. HANNAH WILKE, *Dancing in the Dark,* 1978.



Afb.66. HANNAH WILKE en haar moeder, Selma Butter, in het New York Hospital, 1982.

Toen in 1978 haar moeder, Selma Butter, een beroerte kreeg en een voordien onderdrukte kanker hardnekkig terugkeerde, besloot Hannah Wilke haar kunst op te 'offeren' voor haar moeder. Haar opoffering, die zijn resultaat vond in aangrijpende werken die gerelateerd zijn aan haar

moeders sterven, was een teken van eerbiedige liefde en een demonstratie van een krachtige moeder – dochter binding (afb. 65-66).[152] Van 1979 – het jaar van de vaststelling dat de kanker niet overwonnen was – tot 1982 fotografeerde ze haar moeder terwijl deze doorheen de laatste stadia van haar fatale ziekte en leven ging. Ze nam gedurende vier jaar honderden foto's van haar doodzieke moeder die een sterk document vormen waarin de liefhebbende kracht en binding tussen moeder en kind als een primair onderdeel van het leven wordt vastgelegd.[153]
Een van de grootste stukken ter ere van haar moeder is de *In Memoriam: Selma Butter (Mummy)* (afb.67). De zwart-wit foto's van haar moeder



Afb.67.HANNAH WILKE, *In Memoriam: Selma Butter (Mommy),* 1979-1983.

worden vergezeld van collagevormen die zijn uitgesneden als abstracte en deconstruerende lichaamsdelen en de ruimte die rondom haar moeder aanwezig is. Deze representeren de noodzakelijkheid in de creatie van leven, net als de drie paren vagina-achtige sculpturen in de primaire kleuren, blauw, rood en geel.[154] Met deze sculpturen refereert Wilke dus naar de tegenstrijdigheid die in het vrouwenlichaam verscholen zit, namelijk de baarmoeder – graftombe dubbelzinnigheid. De kleurrijke en in haar oeuvre veelvoorkomende sculpturen rondom de portretfoto's van haar moeder zijn als het ware het kleurrijke tuinen van het leven in de nabijheid van de dood.[155] In een interview met Linda Montano

[152] FRUEH J. (1989), p. 79.
[153] IBIDEM.
[154] IBIDEM
[155] IDEM, p. 84.

reflecteerde Wilke over haar kunst waarbij ze stelde dat haar moeder doorheen deze vaginale sculpturen altijd al aanwezig geweest was in haar werk als vrouw en bron van leven en regeneratie.[156]
Wilke getuigde dat het tijdens het nemen van de foto's van haar stervende moeder het haar niet zozeer te doen was om het al dan niet maken van een goede foto. Op dat specifieke moment was het belangrijker haar moeder in al haar realiteit en essentie vast te leggen.[157] Naast deze vereeuwigende kracht van de fotografie, geloofde Wilke in een soort genezende kracht, een genezing van de geest. Ze geloofde in de gedachte dat door het poseren en het nemen van foto's haar moeder een nieuw soort energie toebedeeld kreeg waardoor ze buiten de ziekte terug in het leven gesteld werd. Een troostende gedachte die Wilke later zou doortrekken in het vastleggen van haar eigen stervensweg.[158] Deze gedachte komt waarschijnlijk voort uit Wilke's klacht dat toen ze haar moeder zag sterven de klinische procedures haar – de zieke individuen – verstopten alsof de dood en de aftakeling een zaak van persoonlijke schaamte was.[159] Dus ook deze serie past net als het document van haar eigen stervensweg – *Intra Venus* – binnen het bekritiseren van de schoonheidnormen en –idealen opgelegd door een door mannen gedomineerde wereld waarbij oudere vrouwen en stervenden als het ware een taboe vormen.

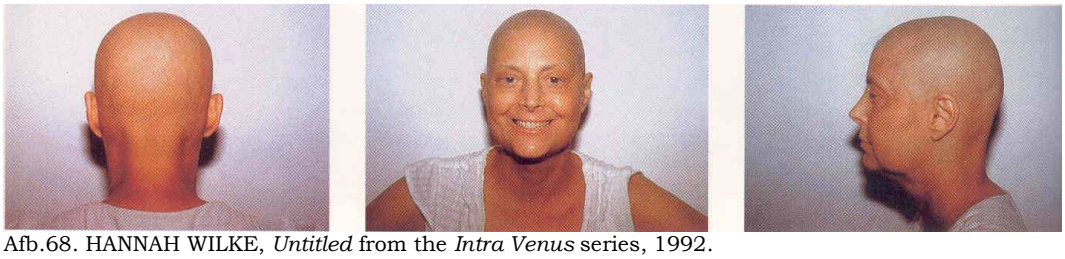
Ondanks de verschillende invalshoeken die beide fotografes aan de dag brengen, behoudt de portretfotografie binnen hun artistieke oeuvre eenzelfde functie, namelijk deze van het vastleggen van de verloren momenten en het overwinnen van de vergetelheid van het wrede geheugen. De fotografie vereeuwigt de geportretteerde waardoor deze als het ware op een zeker niveau de anonieme dood overwint. De foto's bewaren op die manier de intieme en liefdevolle band tussen moeder en kind (Mann) en omgekeerd (Wilke). De baarmoeder – graftombe tegenstelling – die dikwijls in verband wordt gebracht met het vrouwenlichaam en de dubbelzinnige krachten die daarin gesitueerd worden – speelt bij beiden een belangrijke rol in het beleven van de

[156] GOLDMAN S. (1999), p. 36
[157] FRUEH J. (1989), p. 79.
[158] IDEM, p. 82; GOLDMAN S. (1999), p.40.
[159] VINE R. [internet] (05.1994), alinea 5.

intieme relatie met de geportretteerde en de regeneratie van het leven. Sally Mann bekijkt dit gegeven vanuit haar positie als een moeder, terwijl de kinderloze Hannah Wilke het benadert vanuit de positie van het kind. Maar voor beide kunstenaressen is het fotograferen een intieme daad wat de krachtige en liefdevolle binding moeder - kind in zich draagt.

5.5.2 Het zelfportret in de nabijheid van de dood (?)

Aan de hand van het frequente gebruik van hun naakte lichaam binnen hun artistieke praktijk kunnen Hannah Wilke en Francesca Woodman met elkaar in verband gebracht worden. Beiden worden ze dikwijls als feministisch getinte kunstenaressen die met hun artistieke bedrijvigheid de mannelijke dominantie met betrekking tot de vrouwelijke schoonheid in alle geledingen van de maatschappij bekritiseren, bestempeld.[160] Ook in hun spel met de dood krijgt het eigen lichaam een centrale plaats toebedeeld. Op het eerste zicht lijkt het erop dat het bij beide vrouwelijke kunstenaars een zelfportrettering in de nabijheid van de dood betreft, waardoor de foto's eveneens een herinnerende functie als een bewijs van bestaan toebedeeld krijgen. Maar daarnaast treden deze foto's buiten de grenzen van het zelf waardoor ze verder reiken dan een louter zelfportret als bestaansakte om de vergetelheid te overwinnen.



Afb.68. HANNAH WILKE, *Untitled* from the *Intra Venus* series, 1992.

Wilke's *Intra Venus* reeks (afb. 68) lijkt op het eerste zicht louter een zelfportret met de dood, die doorheen haar aderen stroomt. De reeks zelfportretten vormen een persoonlijk document van haar lijdensweg. Ze toont haar aftakelende, haar verliezende en opzwellende lichaam. Maar qua betekenis zijn de foto's dieper gelaagd dan deze zelfportrettering in de nabijheid van de dood. Het is eerder een logische verder zetting van haar artistieke praxis van zelfpresentatie waarbij haar lichaam een medium vormt. Haar lichaam treedt verder dan het louter presenteren

[160] ALETTI V. [internet] (1998), alinea 3.

van het zelf en staat dus in voor een meer algemene benadering van het vrouwelijk lichaam en haar commentaar op de door mannen opgelegde schoonheidsnormen en –idealen. Er kan dus gesteld worden dat ze haar lichaam als een doorgeefluik hanteert in het verspreiden van een bepaalde visie of kritiek.[161] Tijdens haar gevecht tegen de levensbedreigende ziekte zette ze haar werkwijze door. Haar zieke lichaam hanteert Wilke in het statement dat iedereen aftakelt, ouder wordt, sterft en dat deze keerzijde van het leven geen taboe hoeft te vormen. Ouderdom, ziekte en dood hoeven geen persoonlijke zaak van schaamte te zijn en hoeven niet uit de maatschappij verdrongen te worden, maar verdienen in tegenstelling de nodige aandacht. Op die manier treden de zelfportretten dus buiten de grenzen van het zelf en reiken ze op het niveau van betekenisgelaagdheid verder dan een particulier document aangezien Wilke's lichaam een medium wordt om een meer universele boodschap door te geven. Maar desondanks deze achterliggende gedachte kan niet ontkend worden dat de *Intra Venus* foto's eveneens een hoogst persoonlijk document vormen en daardoor als een bewijs aan haar bestaan en gevecht tegen de fatale kanker vereeuwigen. Wilke vertrekt aldus uit het persoonlijke maar verliest het sociale aspect niet uit het oog.

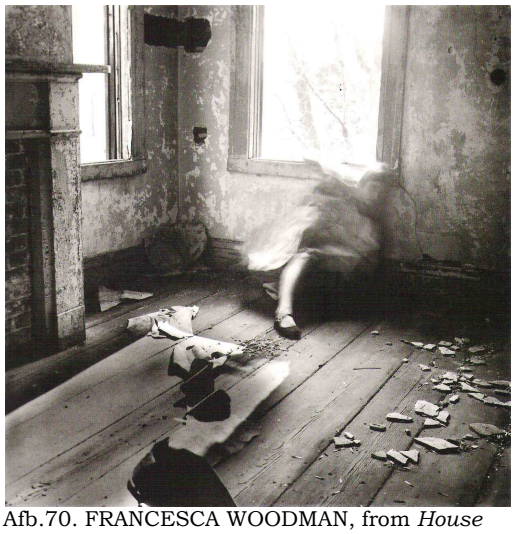
Terwijl in de fotografie van Wilke, Wilke zelf steeds duidelijk herkenbaar in het beeldkader afgebeeld wordt, is dit bij Woodman niet het geval. Hoewel ze zichzelf dus veelvuldig als onderwerp neemt, lijkt ze niet zozeer begaan te zijn met de bewarende of herinnerende functie van de portretfotografie. Haar gezichtskenmerken blijven dikwijls van de camera gespaard aangezien ze zichzelf steeds als een anoniem en verdwijnende – verschijnende entiteit afbeeldt.[162] Haar lichaam verdwijnt achter afbladerend behangpapier, verschijnt als een wazige vlek, reikt buiten het beeldkader of wordt één met de achtergrond. Ze gaat dus als het ware volledig op in de desolate en vervallen omgevingen – die eveneens kenmerkend zijn binnen haar oeuvre – ze wordt er één mee als een soort camouflage (afb.69-70). Roger Caillois onderzocht dit

[161] Ook in de portretten van haar moeders sterven is deze gedachte onderliggend aanwezig.
[162] ALETTI V. [internet] (1998), alinea 2.

verdedigingsmechanisme bij insecten en wees op de gevaren aangezien een te goede aanpassing of integratie levensbedreigend kan zijn. Binnen



Afb.69. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *Untitled (Rome),* 1977-78.



Afb.70. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, from *House* series, *Providence, Rhode Island,* 1976.

deze optiek kunnen Woodmans foto's naast de herinnering aan het leven of als bewijs van bestaan eveneens als het compleet tegengestelde, een metafoor voor 'ik besta niet', gelezen worden.[163] Hier ligt de spanning die haar artistiek werk en spel met de dood kenmerkt: de spanning tussen het verschijnen – verdwijnen, of met andere woorden tussen zijn/leven en niet zijn/dood die slechts in een esoterische tussenruimte een tijdelijke oplossing vindt.

5.5.2.1 Zelfpresentatie als de godin van de liefde in nabijheid van de dood

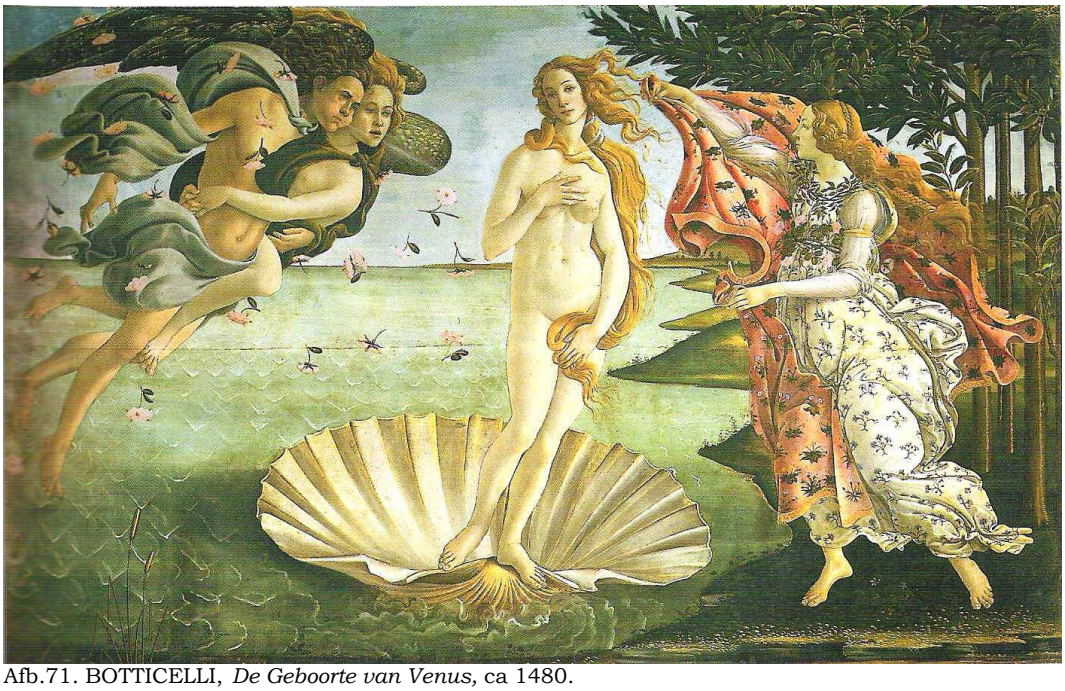
Een voorbeeld van de manier waarop de zogenaamde zelfportretten buiten de grenzen van het zelf treden, zijn de onderliggende associaties naar het ongrijpbaar ideaal van de godin van de liefde. Aan de hand van de weergave van hun naakte lichaam bespelen ze de blik van de (mannelijke) toeschouwer en diens onhoudbare normen en idealen met betrekking tot de identiteit van de vrouw.

Doorheen de Westerse kunstgeschiedenis werd de mythologische Venus[164] - figuur, dikwijls door mannelijke kunstenaars aangewend als onderwerp om het vrouwelijke naakt weer te geven. Een voorbeeld van

[163] SUNDELL. M. (1996), pp. 435-438.

[164] LODWICK M. (2006), p. 112; HUSAIN S. (2006), p. 36: Venus, de Romeinse dubbelganger van Aphrodite, was een van de twaalf belangrijke Olympische goden die naast haar zeggenschap over de erotische liefde en vrouwelijke schoonheid ook andere rollen vervulde, waaronder die van moeder waarbij ze symbool stond voor de vruchtbaarheid en als brenger van de dood.

één van de meest gekende sensuele naakte Venus-figuur is onder andere Botticelli's *De geboorte van Venus* (afb.71). Op die manier werd Venus doorheen de jaren voornamelijk gerelateerd aan het vrouwelijke schoonheidsideaal.



Afb.71. BOTTICELLI, *De Geboorte van Venus,* ca 1480.

Venus en de dood vinden we al terug in Hannah Wilkes allerlaatste serie *Intra Venus* waarin ze haar feministisch getinte commentaar op het door mannen gedomineerde vrouwelijke schoonheidsideaal op een moedige en waardige manier verder zet. Met deze ultieme serie bood ze tevens een antwoord aan de beschuldigingen van narcisme die ze doorheen de jaren naar haar hoofd geslingerd kreeg.

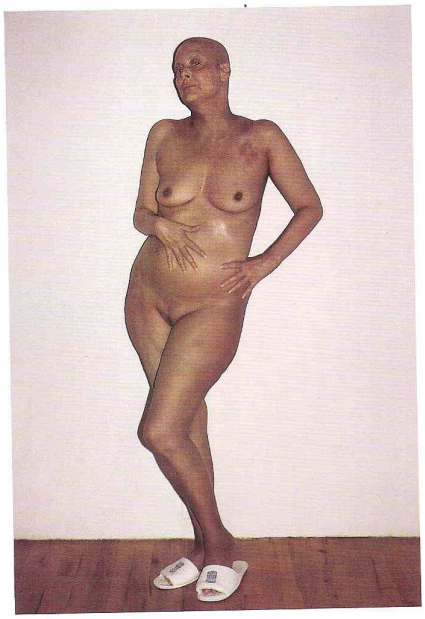
Woodman speelt net als Wilke een spel met de geprogrammeerde blik van de toeschouwer. Maar terwijl Wilke doorheen haar oeuvre veeleer openlijk flirt met die blik en de conventies aan de hand van schaamteloze en gestevolle poses en het cynische gebruik van taal, speelt Woodman een subtieler verleidingspel. Woodmans naakte lichaam verschijnt en verdwijnt. Doorheen een spel van verhullen en onthullen krijgt het spelletje verstoppertje een sensuele geladenheid van aantrekken en afstoten. Wilke daarentegen ontmantelt de door mannen gedomineerde blik en het opgelegde schoonheidsideaal en seksualiteit van de zogenaamde femme fatale aan de hand van snijdend, cynisch taalgebruik, en niets verhullende poses die zich soms aan de grens van het vulgaire bevinden. Net als Wilke – in haar vroegere werken – wordt

Woodman als het ware een begerenswaardige Venus als een ongrijpbaar of onhoudbaar ideaal.

Met haar allerlaatste serie, *Intra Venus*, speelt Hannah Wilke met de notie van de mythologische Venus - figuur die voornamelijk met het door de man opgelegde vrouwelijk schoonheidsideaal geassocieerd wordt. De titel *Intra Venus* – de godin van de vrouwelijke schoonheid aan de



Afb.72. HANNAH WILKE, *Super-t-Art,* 1974.



Afb.73. HANNAH WILKE, *Intra Venus Series No. 3, August 9, 1992,* 1992.

medische drugs[165] – verbindt de twee begrippen, intraveneus[166] en Venus (als mythologische godin), op een snedige wijze net als in vele van haar andere kunstwerken gebeurde. Wilke maakt een verbinding tussen het met medicijnen volgepompte, zieke lichaam met zijn intraveneuze invasies, en het geseksualiseerde vrouwenlichaam waarbij de Venus-figuur het essentiële seksueel object binnen de Westerse kunst is (afb.72-73).[167] Haar feministisch getinte visie op het vrouwelijk schoonheidsideaal wint aan kracht aangezien ze zonder enige schroom haar door ziekte en aftakeling getekende lichaam aan de camera blootgeeft. Dat de Venus-figuur die symbool staat voor de vrouwelijke schoonheid vergankelijk is, is de sterke boodschap die van dit werk

[165] SMITH R. [internet] (30.01.1994), alinea 5.
[166] Intraveneus betekent in een ader plaatsvindend. De chemotherapie verspreidt zich door haar lichaam via haar aderen net als de levensbedreigende ziekte…
[167] JONES A. (08.01.1994 tem 19.02.1994), p. 9.

uitgaat. Deze ultieme reeks is een waardige afsluiter van Wilkes volledige oeuvre, en toont tevens aan dat de beschuldigingen van narcisme op vooroordelen en onbegrip gesteund zijn. Wilkes artistieke praktijk gaat verder dan deze oppervlakkige zelfliefde waarvan ze dikwijls vanuit allerhande hoeken – zowel de feministische als de door mannen gedomineerde wereld – beschuldigd werd.

Terwijl bij Wilke de link tussen de mythologische Venus-figuur die doorheen de tijd de personificatie van het vrouwelijke schoonheidsideaal werd, doorheen de titel van haar ultieme reeks directer voelbaar is, is deze niettemin eveneens subtiel aanwezig in het oeuvre van Woodman.



Afb.74. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *Untitled, MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire,* 1980.

Het naakte, sensuele lichaam van Woodman wordt op een speelse verhullende – onthullende wijze tentoongesteld waardoor er een spanning van onvatbaarheid ontstaat waarbij het onduidelijk is of ze deze wereld betreedt of verlaat. In een van de reeksen, *MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire* (afb.74), staat haar naakte vrouwelijke lichaam dat in beide handen een kleine ronde vorm vasthoudt, centraal. Een van deze foto's toont het naakte lichaam dat zich doorheen het water voortbeweegt, de armen gespreid, weg van het lichaam, het hoofd buiten

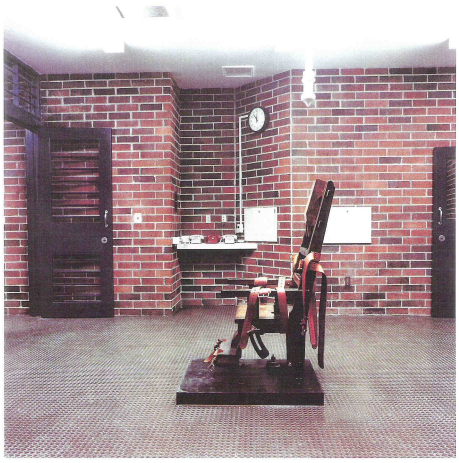
het beeldkader. Is deze foto een evocatie van de mythologische Venus-figuur[168] die als een godin uit het oerwater geboren wordt, of eerder de weergave van een jonge, getormenteerde vrouw die steeds dieper het water betreedt om op die manier de verdrinkingsdood te bewerkstelligen.[169] Binnen deze foto is, net als vele andere foto's uit Woodmans artistieke oeuvre, een spanning tussen verschijnen en verdwijnen voelbaar, en blijft haar identiteit als het ware verscholen voor de camera.

5.5.3 Aanwezigheid versus afwezigheid (?) in het portret

Zoals reeds vermeld kan het portret als begrip vanuit een bredere invalshoek benaderd worden dan slechts een weergave van de karakteristieke gezichtskenmerken van een individu of groep. Ook de maatschappij of een landschap kan geportretteerd worden.
In de fotografische doodsreeksen van zowel Mann als Devlin wordt de menselijke aanwezigheid doorheen zijn afwezigheid voelbaar gemaakt. Ook Woodman kan in verband gebracht worden met deze notie aangezien ze zich binnen haar fotografie op de grens tussen aan- en afwezigheid bevindt.

Devlin poogt doorheen haar fotografisch oeuvre een psychologisch portret te schetsen van de Westerse maatschappij aan de hand van architecturale ruimtes en de daarin gesitueerde objecten die het gebruik van deze desolate kamers illustreren. Haar fotografisch onderzoek naar de waarden, normen en geloof van een samenleving wordt gekenmerkt door menselijke afwezigheid wat een spanning creëert. Hoewel fysieke menselijke aanwezigheid ontbreekt is deze desalniettemin sterk voelbaar. De doodskamers krijgen daardoor een extra dimensie (afb.75-76). De

[168] HUSAIN (2006), p. 51: In de Griekse mythologie ontstond Aphrodite, of Venus als haar Romeinse tegenhanger, toen Uranus, de god van de hemel, gecastreerd werd en een laatste machtige zaadlozing had die de zee met schuim bedekte waaruit de godin tevoorschijn kwam. De godin die uit de zee geboren werd, leefde eveneens in een gedegradeerde vorm als watergeest, sirene of zeemeermin. De eerste zeemeerminnen waren waarschijnlijk beelden van Aphrodite met een vissenstaart die mannen van het land verleidden en hen naar hun onderwaterrijk meetrokken.
[169] Deze foto kan op die manier eveneens geassocieerd worden aan het einde van de Kleine Zeemeermin – een negentiende eeuws sprookje van Hans Christian Andersen – die na een onbeantwoorde liefde het water induikt en geleidelijk aan in schuim verandert.



Afb.75. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Electric Chair, Broad River Correctional Facility, Columbia, South Carolina,* 1991.

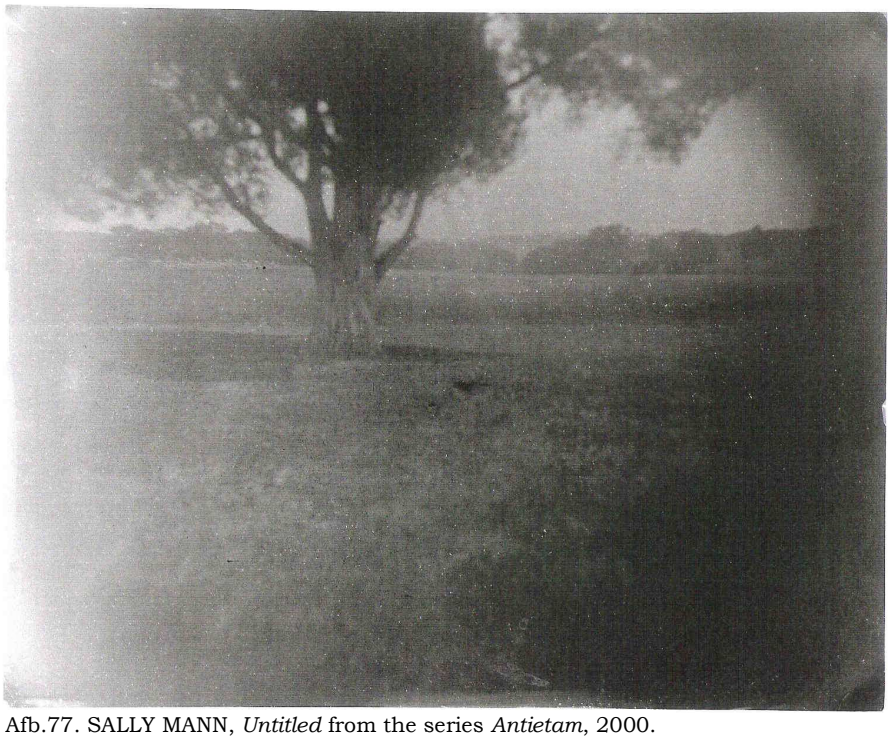


Afb.76. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Witness Room, Broad River Correctional Facility, Columbia, South Carolina,* 1991.

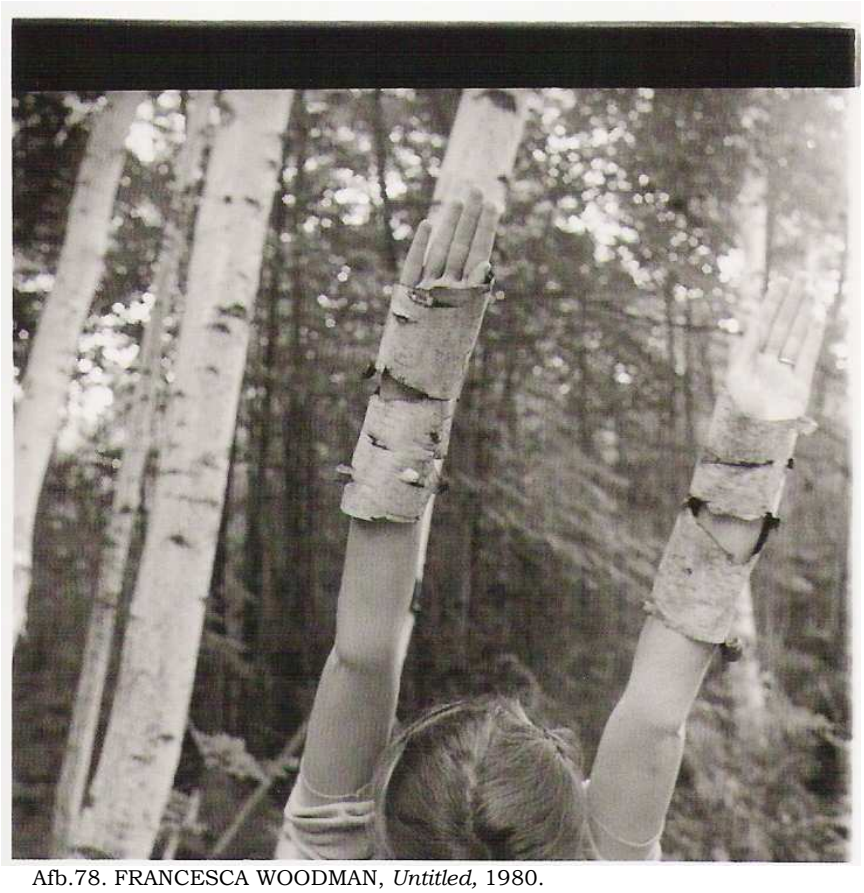
ijskoude spanning die de terechtgestelde moet doorstaan terwijl diens laatste minuten leven voorbij tikken onder het toeziende oog van getuigen worden met een barre kilheid voelbaar gemaakt. Het desolate gevoel dat de doodskamers uitstralen doen het moment voor of na de executie vermoeden waardoor de ruimtes aan zeggingskracht winnen. Door de menselijke afwezigheid wordt de medogenloosheid van deze ultieme straf nog treffender.

Misschien kan over Devlin beweerd worden dat ze als een archeoloog te werk gaat. Archeologen bestuderen en reconstrueren menselijke samenlevingen uit het verleden aan de hand van onder andere artefacten en andere elementen die menselijke aanwezigheid op een indirecte wijze kenbaar maken. Net als een archeoloog poogt Devlin aan de hand van deze indirecte bronnen de menselijke aanwezigheid en zijnsbestaan als het ware te reconstrueren. Ook de landschapsportretteringen van Sally Mann sluiten naadloos bij deze archeoloog-achtige gedachte aan. Terwijl ze in de eerste twee secties – *Matter Lent* en *Untitled* (afb.77) – van de *What Remains* serie voornamelijk onderzocht hoe de aarde de resten van wat ooit levend was, verorbert, richtte ze zich in de secties *8 December, 2000* en *Antietam* naar hoe leven en dood sporen achterlieten in het landschap. Zoals in de foto's van Lucinda Devlin ontbreekt de fysieke menselijke aanwezigheid. Maar ook hier wordt de aanwezigheid voelbaar gemaakt aan de hand van de zogenaamde sporen de mens in het landschap achterliet.

Op die manier worden de foto's van zowel Lucinda Devlin als Sally Mann waarin alle menselijke aanwezigheid ontbreekt eveneens een bewijs of herinnering aan het bestaan.



Afb.77. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *Antietam*, 2000.



Afb.78. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *Untitled,* 1980.

Woodmans fotografie daarentegen wordt niet zozeer gekenmerkt door totale menselijke afwezigheid. Hoewel ze haar lichaam poogt te integreren in de desolate settings, verdwijnt ze nooit volledig uit het beeldvlak. Er blijft altijd een deel van haar lichaam zichtbaar (afb.78). Maar, zoals reeds vermeld, krijgt haar fotografie door dit subtiele spel op de grens een dubbele geladenheid. Enerzijds kan het gezien worden als een uiting van bestaan waardoor de foto een herinneringsbewarende functie toebedeeld krijgt. Anderzijds is het tegenovergestelde, de foto als een uiting van de gedachte niet te bestaan aangezien de opname in de omgeving overheersend is, ooks een mogelijke optie.

Eventueel zou van Wilke eveneens beweerd kunnen worden dat ze aan de hand van de vagina-achtige sculpturen het vrouw–zijn en de regeneratie van het leven portretteert.

5.5.4 Besluit

De portretfotografie als een bewijs van bestaan is terug te vinden bij de vier vrouwelijke kunstenaars. Binnen hun oeuvre en hun spel met de dood worden de foto's met een documenterende functie van het herinneren beladen. Maar zoals gebleken kan het begrip portret/portrettering bij elk van hen op een geheel verschillende wijze benaderd worden aangezien deze functie van de fotografie door elk van hen op een andere wijze wordt ingevuld. Toch was het mogelijk enkele parallellen door te trekken. De portretfotografie van Sally Mann en Hannah Wilke vereeuwigt de moeder–kind band. Maar terwijl Mann haar camera vanuit het moederschap op haar kroost richt, vertrekt Wilke vanuit de omgekeerde richting. Eveneens kon Wilke met Francesca Woodman geassocieerd worden aangezien zij hun broze lichamen, die buiten de grenzen van het zelf treden, in de schaduw van de dood presenteren. Devlin leek op het eerste zicht een buitenbeentje binnen deze topic maar kon toch in verband gebracht worden met de landschapsportretteringen van Sally Mann waarin eveneens alle menselijke aanwezigheid ontbreekt. Bij nader inzien kon zelfs Woodman hieraan gelinkt worden daar zij een spel speelt op de grens van aan- en afwezigheid.

Het is eveneens belangrijk op te merken dat de herinneringfunctie of eeuwigheidswaarde van de fotografie, of kunst in de bredere zin, naast de vereeuwiging van een individu, groep, gebeuren of object kan bekeken worden vanuit de vereeuwiging van de scheppende hand erachter. De vrouw die (eventueel) achter de camera verscholen zit, laat haar oeuvre na aan de wereld waardoor deze als een herinnering aan haar bestaan wordt. Doorheen de kunst leeft de kunstenaar verder.

5.6 Levensdrift en doodsverlangen

Levensdrift en doodsverlangen zijn twee begrippen die sinds de psychoanalytische driftenleer van Sigmund Freud beschouwd worden als de tegengestelde doch complementaire drijvende krachten in het menselijke bestaan. De mens wordt gestuurd door een verlangen tot zelfbehoud, wat zich onder andere uit in de seksualiteit, maar ook door een verlangen tot de terugkeer naar een levensloze toestand van volledige rust en ontspanning. De twee begrippen worden vaak geduid aan de hand van twee mythologische figuren, Eros (levensdrift) en Thanatos (doodsverlangen), die een onafscheidelijk koppel vormen. Terwijl binnen de mythologie Eros[170] naast de personificatie van de universele liefde en kracht die het universum samenhoudt ook als de drijvende kracht achter de aantrekking en afstoting en de voortplanting in de natuur wordt aanschouwd, is Thanatos[171] daarentegen de personificatie van de dood.
Hoewel het op het eerste zicht tegenpolen lijken te zijn, hebben deze twee begrippen het een en ander gemeenschappelijk. Beiden tillen de mens boven de banale realiteit uit. Of met andere woorden beiden zorgen ze voor het fysiek beleven van een transcendentie. Er kan gesteld worden dat de twee gegevens als in een symbiotische relatie verbonden zijn met het vrouwelijke lichaam dat al eeuwen lang de ambigue krachten van het construeren en deconstrueren in zich draagt. De moeder – hoer/femme

[170] De Griekse tegenhanger van de geromaniseerde Cupido of Amor – volgens de Romeinse mythologie de zoon was van Venus – de godin van de liefde – en Mars – de god van de oorlog en vruchtbaarheid – was hij volgens de Grieken de derde zoon van Chaos – de godin van leegte en verwarring.
[171] De zoon van Nyx – de godin van de nacht die net als Eros een kind is van Chaos – en de tweelingbroer van Hypnos – de god van de slaap – is een figuur uit de Griekse mythologie die vaak vergeten werd aangezien hij overschaduwd werd door Hades, de god van de onderwereld waar de doden heen reisden na hun overlijden.

fatale en baarmoeder – graftombe dubbelzinnigheid kan in het verlengde daarvan gezien worden.

De twee driften die de twee zijden – leven en dood – van het leven vertegenwoordigen, zijn aanwezig in het oeuvre van de vier vrouwelijke kunstenaars. In de manier waarop dit koppel zijn intrede doet in hun artistieke praktijk kunnen naast gelijkenissen eveneens verschillen onderscheiden worden.

5.6.1 Eros, Thanatos en het vrouwenlichaam

Hoewel Mann, Wilke en Woodman het mythologische/psychoanalytische koppel binnen hun artistieke praxis voornamelijk met het vrouwenlichaam verbinden, differentiëren deze drie kunstenaressen zich in de wijze waarop deze verbinding plaats vind.

Sally Mann bekijkt de wereld, net als de drie andere fotografes, doorheen haar camera maar met een visie die en doordrenkt is met koesterende moederlijke gevoelens en met een besef van vergankelijkheid.[172] De Eros – Thanatos thematiek doorvlecht Mann's oeuvre als een rode draad en komt doorheen haar reeksen op diverse wijzen tot uiting. Zo portretteert *At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women* op een intieme wijze twaalfjarige meisjes die zich aan de grens van kindsheid naar volwassenheid bevinden. De jonge meisjes verliezen hun onschuldige, gesluierde blik op de wereld aangezien ze door hun eerste menstruatie en de ontwikkeling van de geslachtskenmerken de zogenaamde onschuldigheid van hun lichaam verliezen. Na de menstruatie is het jonge vrouwenlichaam instaat te concipiëren, waardoor ze naast de gave nieuw leven op de wereld te zetten eveneens een kweekvat voor de dood wordt. Het onafscheidelijke koppel Eros en Thanatos doet dus op die manier zijn intrede in hun wereld. Binnen deze reeks speelt Mann met deze seksuele connotatie aan de hand van symbolische elementen. Zo staat in *Untitled* (afb.79) een twaalfjarig meisje volledig in het wit gekleed, als een jonge bruid of communicant, voor de wasdraad. Het meisje wordt geflankeerd

[172] CANTOR S. [documentaire] (2005): Mann is moeder van drie kinderen en heeft dus de scheppende kracht van haar lichaam ondergaan, maar door de spierziekte van haar echtgenoot en het sterven van haar vader is ze zich des te meer van de vergankelijkheid van het lichaam en het leven bewust.

door twee bedspreien, waarvan degenen die zich langs de linkerkant bevindt, twee bloedvlekken ter hoogte van haar schouder, toont. Onmiddellijk legt de kijker de link tussen de maagdelijkheid van de jonge bruid die verloren gaat op de eerste huwelijksnacht of de eerste menstruatie die onverwachts bij het meisje voor ongemakken en plotse volwassenheid zorgt. Ook in de houding van het meisje kan een link met het verliezen van onschuld gelezen worden: ze staat met haar armen open, haar hoofd achterover



Afb.79-80. SALLY MANN, *Untitled from the At Twelve Series,* 1983-1985.

hellend tegen de wasdraad met in haar handen nylonkousen die een als een rechte plank over haar buik gespannen zijn. Hierin kan men de houding van de overgave of de houding van de gekruisigde Jezus Christus die stierf ten voordele van het verliezen van de onschuld, herkennen. Het meisje betreedt aldus de volwassen wereld waar onschuld als het ware onbestaande is. Maar ook als communicant is ze een bruid, die van Christus. Via het ritueel van de plechtige communie betreedt ze aldus de wereld van volwassenheid. De volgens ons ideale, zogenaamde seksloze en onschuldige kinderwereld wordt steeds meer door Eros en Thanatos gecorrumpeerd. Een andere foto, *Untitled* (afb.80), toont ons een meisje verkleed en geschminkt als een vamp met een halflege fles drank in haar handen. Het jonge meisje imiteert het gedrag van volwassenen dat als een dreiging haar onschuld aantast. Maar een dun stukje stof, een soort voile, verzekert haar nog even van haar onschuldige, kinderlijke blik. Zoals het attribuut van de voile, die de kinderlijke onschuldige blik uitbeeldt, kan de minireeks *The Two*

Virginia's # 1 tem 4 uit de serie *Immediate Family* eveneens geassocieerd worden aan Hans Baldung Griens *The Three Ages of Man*. De foto's van



Afb.81. SALLY MANN, *The Two Virginias # 1,* 1988.

de twee Virginia's, de oude zwarte vrouw die Mann opvoedde en Mann's jongste dochter, die door drieënnegentig jaar van elkaar gescheiden zijn[173], verenigen de twee zijden van het bestaan: het opgroeien of de bloei en de aftakeling of de nabijheid van de dood. Terwijl in *The Two Virginia's # 1* (afb.81) het kleine kind volledig is afgebeeld, is slechts een deel, het onderste lichaam van de oude, gerimpelde vrouw zichtbaar. Een oude, afgeleefde hand rust op het meisjes hoofd, een teken van genegenheid en bescherming of als het zwaard van Damocles, de nabijheid van de dood die ongeacht de leeftijd boven ieders hoofd hangt? Er kan hier naar aanleiding van een voorgaand topic – de portretfotografie en de dood – opgemerkt worden dat het doorgeven van namen naast de portretfotografie eveneens een wijze is om de dood te overkomen. Via een jongere generatie wordt de herinnering aan een oudere langs de weg van naamgeving doorgegeven als een vorm van

[173] MANN S. en PRICE R. (1999), p. ongenummerd.

respect voor het verleden. Op een bepaald niveau blijft de herinnering aan een bepaald persoon op die manier levendig en wordt de dood of de vergetelheid als het ware overwonnen.

Naast deze reeksen die hoofdzakelijk het leven documenteren richtte Mann haar camera naar de keerzijde van het bestaan, de dood. Maar ook in de *What Remains* serie, waarin voornamelijk het Thanatos gegeven wordt benadrukt, duikt Eros op. De extreme close-ups (afb.82-83) die *What Remains* afsluiten, illustreren de dubbelzinnige baarmoeder – graftombe tegenstelling, die eveneens in het oeuvre van Hannah Wilke

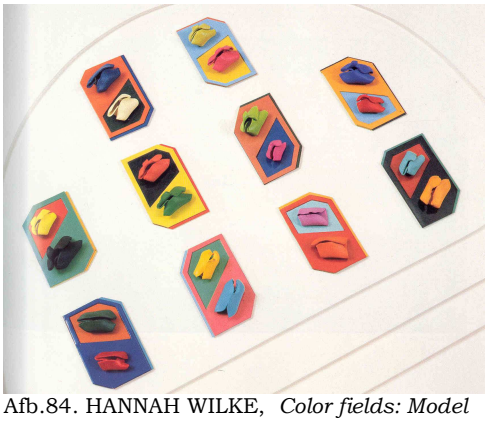


Afb.82-83. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *What Remains*, 2000.

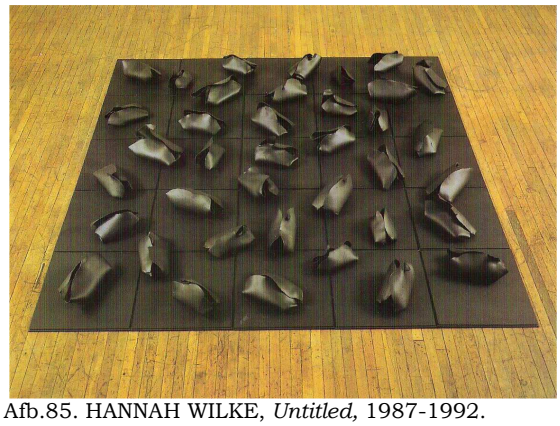
aanwezig is. Deze close-ups tonen de gezichten van haar drie kinderen gefotografeerd met een belichtingstijd van zes minuten waardoor ze zich in een donkere wazige atmosfeer bevinden. Enerzijds kunnen de close-ups dus gelezen worden als het leven dat uit Mann's lichaam voortsproot waardoor de gezichten zich in de warme, beschermende atmosfeer van de baarmoeder bevinden. Anderzijds kunnen de foto's geïnterpreteerd worden als de gezichten die door de aarde verteerd worden in een donkere graftombe.

Ook Wilke integreert deze baarmoeder – graftombe dimensie in haar kunst aan de hand van de vagina-achtige sculpturen die veelvuldig in haar oeuvre voorkomen. De vrouw wordt als een grot waarin leven ontspruit en als een graftombe die het leven daarentegen terug tot zich neemt. De foto's die de stervensweg van haar moeder, Selma Butter,

documenteren worden in presentatie vergezeld door de kenmerkende vagina-achtige sculpturen in heldere kleuren (afb.84).[174] Met deze sculpturen verwijst Wilke naar de ambiguïteit die in het vrouwenlichaam verscholen zit. De kleurrijke gegroepeerde sculpturen rondom de zwart-wit portretfoto's van haar moeder zijn de kleurrijke tuinen van het leven in de nabijheid van de dood.[175] Een omgekeerde gedachtegang vinden we terug in haar laatste reeks, *Intra Venus*. De vrolijke primaire kleuren werden ingeruild voor donkere tinten. In tegenstelling tot de reeks rondom het sterven van haar moeder stellen deze sculpturen niet langer baarmoeders voor waaruit nieuw leven ontstaat, maar worden het donkere graven waarin het leven stilaan wegebt. Het zijn niet langer tuinen van het leven, maar kerkhoven in de nabijheid van de eindigheid van het leven (afb.85).



Afb.84. HANNAH WILKE, *Color fields: Model for large-scale sculpture,* 1985.



Afb.85. HANNAH WILKE, *Untitled,* 1987-1992.

Terwijl Sally Mann en Hannah Wilke Eros en Thanatos voornamelijk met het vrouwelijke lichaam en de daarin gesitueerde tegengestelde krachten verbinden, is dit bij Woodman niet echt aan de orde. Maar toch lijken de twee driften met haar lichaam verbonden. Doorheen haar oeuvre voert ze een intiem onderzoek naar de psyche van haar lichaam waardoor het zich vaak in een toestand van verhullen en onthullen bevindt. Ze speelt een verstop en vindt spelletje met de blik van de toeschouwer. Dit zorgt voor een spanning die slechts in een soort tussenwereld een oplossing vindt. Het verdwijnen kan gelijkgesteld worden aan het doodsverlangen, het verlangen niet meer te bestaan, één te worden met de omgeving. In een foto van de *Space* serie (afb.86) verstopt Woodman zich in de desolate

[174] IBIDEM
[175] FRUEH J. (1989), p. 84.

ruimte achter afbladerend behangpapier. Maar ze verdwijnt niet volledig. Er is steeds een deel van haar lichaam herkenbaar. Deze drang naast het



Afb.86. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, from *Space series, Providence, Rhode Island,* 1977.

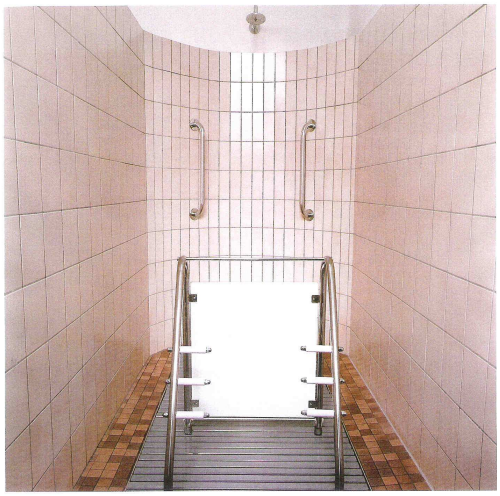
verdwijnen eveneens te voorschijn te komen kan in verband gebracht worden met de levensdrift. Woodman balanceert tussen deze twee pulsies en vindt haar evenwicht in een tussenwereld die ze via de fotografie creëert. Misschien kan haar zelfmoord dus toch in het verlengde van haar kunst aanschouwd worden, aangezien in deze drastische daad het verlangen naar een spanningsloze toestand van totale rust het delicate evenwicht overheerst.

5.6.2 Levensdrift en doodsverlangen in architecturale ruimtes

Wat Lucinda Devlin binnen dit topic van de andere drie kunstenaressen onderscheidt, is dat de twee driften niet met het vrouwenlichaam noch met de daarin gesitueerde ambigue krachten gelieerd worden. Devlin poogt met haar artistieke praktijk de psychologie van de Westerse maatschappij te schetsen aan de hand van allerhande architecturale ruimten waarin elke menselijke aanwezigheid ontbreekt. Hierdoor maakt

ze geen onderscheid tussen de geslachten, man – vrouw, aangezien een samenleving uit beiden bestaat. De driften die de mens in zijn handelingen sturen komen tot uiting aan de hand van de functies van de ruimtes die Devlin portretteert.

We kunnen de reeksen onder verdelen volgens de twee driften. Aan de ene kant kunnen we de *Pleasure Ground* en *Water Rites* series als de weergave van de levensdrift bestempelen aangezien deze kamers portretteren die instaan voor de geneugten van het leven. Aan de andere kant zouden we de *Corporal Arenas* en *Omega Suites* als de keerzijde van het leven kunnen bestempelen aangezien deze de donkere kant van het leven, dood en ziekte, illustreren. Maar deze eenduidige onderverdeling voldoet niet. Hoewel de *Corporal Arenas* reeks in eerste instantie associeert met ziekte en ouderdom of met andere woorden het vergankelijke leven en de nabijheid van de dood, hebben deze ziekenhuiskamers daarentegen een tegengesteld doel. Deze kamers illustreren namelijk eerder de levensdrift dan het doodsverlangen aangezien ze door de maatschappij geconcipieerd werden met als functie het verbeteren en redden van mensenlevens. *The Omega Suites* ontstonden in het verlengde van deze *Corporal Arenas* omdat Devlin het merkwaardig vond dat deze twee architecturale ruimtes eenzelfde sfeer uitstralen terwijl deze een compleet tegengestelde functie – het redden en executeren – hebben. De *Water Rites* foto's ontstonden eveneens in het verlengde van dit gedachtegoed. Deze reeks portretteert kuuroorden die enerzijds instaan voor de medische en anderzijds recreatieve verzorging van het menselijke lichaam. Maar ook deze ruimtes ademen een dubbele

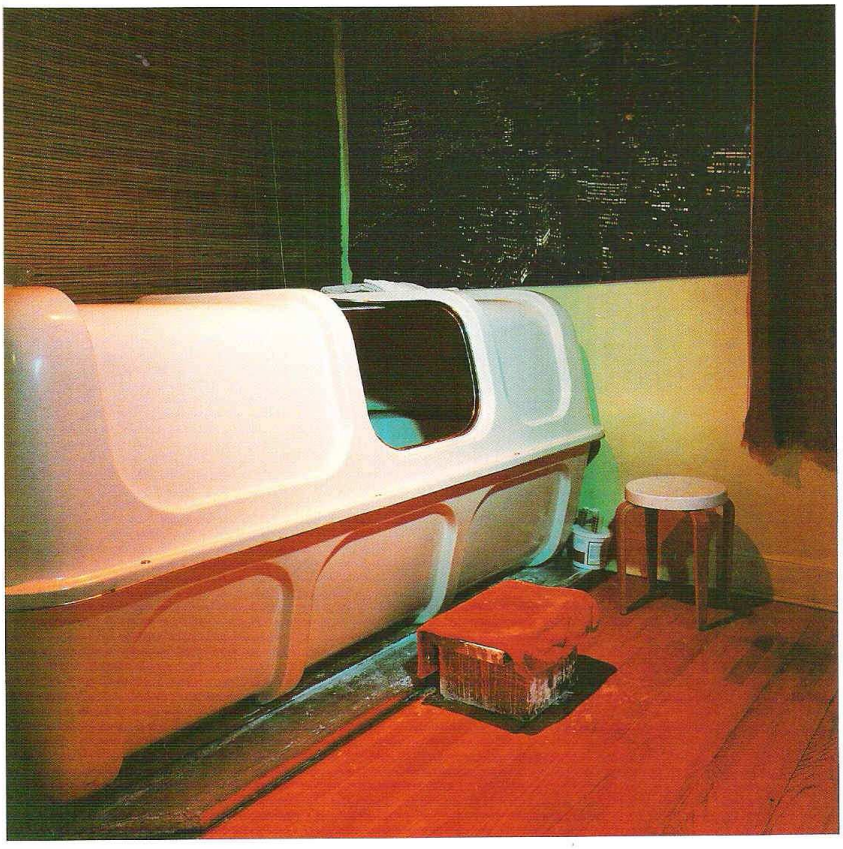


Afb.87. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Kneipp-Anwendung, Kurmittelhaus, Bad Bertrich,* 1999.



Afb.88. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Gas Chamber, Maryland State Peniteniary, Baltimore, Maryland,* 1991.

sfeer.[176] Wanneer we *Kneipp-Anwendung* (afb.87) uit de *Water Rites* serie naast de *Gas Chamber* (afb.88) bekijken zou ervan kunnen uitgegaan worden dat deze foto's een soort diptiek vormen waarin de ene foto de binnen- en de andere de buitenkant van zo'n gaskamer illustreert. Dus ook in de ruimtes die de geneugten van het leven representeren, kan een doodsverlangen, waarbij opzoek gegaan wordt naar een toestand van totale rust, onderscheiden worden. Een ander treffend voorbeeld uit de *Pleasure Ground* serie is de *Private Isolation Tank* (afb.89) die niet enkel qua uitzicht aan een grafkist doet denken maar eveneens qua functie – het bekomen van totale ontspanning – de tegengestelde driften in zich draagt.



Afb.89. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Private Isolation Tank, Syracuse (New York),* 1985.

Wat de reeksen onderling verbindt, is de mythologie van de apparaten en technologie die in elke reeks een dominerende rol speelt tegenover het vergankelijke mensenleven.[177] Op die manier kan toch gesteld worden dat Devlin de twee driften die de mensen sturen in hun handelingen toch

[176] DEVLIN L. [internet] (2006), alinea 7-8.
[177] DEVLIN L. [internet] (2006), alinea 8.

met het menselijke lichaam in verband brengt, maar zoals reeds vermeld zonder een onderscheid te maken tussen de geslachten.

5.6.3 Besluit

Terwijl Sally Mann en Hannah Wilke het mythologisch/psychoanalytisch koppel binnen hun artistieke oeuvre voornamelijk met de ambiguïteit die zich in het vrouwenlichaam situeert – de baarmoeder–graftombe tegenstelling – in verband brengen, speelt Woodman een delicaat spel met deze driften die zich in haar zijn manifesteren. Haar fotografie getuigt van de spanning tussen de tegengestelde krachten die het menselijke bestaan sturen. Ze visualiseert deze pulsies aan de hand van het verdwijnen en verschijnen van haar naakte en broze lichaam. Net als Wilke in haar *Intra Venus* reeks balanceert Woodman tussen leven en de nakende dood. Maar ook Devlin en haar fotografie waarin alle menselijke aanwezigheid ontbreekt, lieert Eros en Thantos aan de hand van de architecturale ruimten en diens apparatuur aan het vergankelijke lichaam. Maar terwijl bij Wilke, Mann en Woodman het vrouwelijke lichaam een centrale rol inneemt, is dit bij Devlin niet aan de orde aangezien ze geen onderscheid maakt tussen man–vrouw in de portrettering van de Westerse maatschappij.

6. Besluit

6.1 Terugkoppelend naar de onderzoeksvragen

De drijvende vraag achter dit comparatief onderzoek was in eerste instantie waarom en hoe de doodsthematiek bij vier vrouwelijke kunstenaars – Sally Mann, Lucinda Devlin, Hannah Wilke en Francesca Woodman – met hetzelfde zogenaamd objectief en werkelijkheidsregistrerende medium, de fotografie, vastgelegd werd. Vooraleer de comparatieve analyse te starten, bleek het noodzakelijk eerst de vraag te stellen naar wat de drie overkoepelende termen – dood, vrouw(elijk) en fotografie – kunnen betekenen en in hoever deze onderling met elkaar geassocieerd konden worden. Doorheen het onderzoek werd het algauw duidelijk dat ambiguïteit hetgeen was dat deze drie noties onderling verbindt. Het vrouwenlichaam draagt namelijk de twee krachten of zijden van het leven, het concipiëren en deconstrueren – de baarmoeder–graftombe of moeder–femme fatale/hoer tegenstelling – in zich. Hoewel de dood daarentegen een meer veelzijdig begrip is en geen eenduidigheid hieromtrent bestaat, kan toch gesteld worden dat het zich zowel in de werkelijkheid als daarbuiten situeert. Ook de fotografie wordt gekenmerkt door zo'n dubbelzinnige relatie ten opzichte van de werkelijkheid aangezien deze de realiteit registreert maar tegelijkertijd ook de particuliere verhouding van de fotograaf met die werkelijkheid illustreert.
Uit dit voorafgaand onderzoek naar de drie overkoepelende termen ontsproten verschillende inzichten die naderhand in de ontleding van het spel met de dood bij de vrouwelijke kunstenaars de deur openden naar beter inzicht. De ambiguïteiten die hier reeds aanbod kwamen, zouden in een later stadium van het onderzoek uitgangspunten of topics – bijvoorbeeld: levensdrift en doodsverlangen of aardse realiteit versus spirituele transcendentie – vormen ter vergelijking van de doodsthematiek in het fotografisch oeuvre van de vier kunstenaressen.

Wat deze vier vrouwelijke kunstenaars – Sally Mann, Lucinda Devlin, Hannah Wilke en Francesca Woodman – tot een spel, een confrontatie met de dood dreef was, naast de vraag naar hoe de dood vorm gegeven werd, een essentiële vraag. Maar wat de kunstenaar drijft tot creatie is

een complexe vraag dat, net als de vraag naar wat de dood is, geen eenduidig en eenvoudig antwoord inhoudt. De drijvende kracht achter kunstschepping kan namelijk meerdere aspecten in zich dragen. Om tot een breder inzicht in de betekenis van een kunstwerk te komen, is het belangrijk het vanuit verschillende invalshoeken te ontsluiten. Daarom werd geopteerd om de doodsthematiek te benaderen vanuit het artistieke oeuvre – waardoor de vraag naar hoe de dood werd vorm gegeven, beantwoord werd – en in de mate van het mogelijke vanuit het leven van de kunstenaar. Deze tweezijdige benadering leverde zowel voor Hannah Wilke als voor Sally Mann enkele concrete antwoorden op. De persoonlijke confrontatie met de sterfelijkheid die zich op verschillende niveaus voordeed – de lijdensweg van een ouder, het overlijden van een geliefd huisdier, de getuigenis van een zelfmoord, de strijd tegen een dreigende ziekte – dreef hen tot een spel met de dood. Ook vanuit de aansluiting met het overige artistieke oeuvre werd de opname van de doodsthematiek verduidelijkt. In het geval van Lucinda Devlin en Francesca Woodman waren de antwoorden op de vraag naar het waarom van de opname van de doodsthematiek niet volledig invulbaar. De autobiografische of hyperindividueelste impulsen die hen tot een dansen met de dood dreven, waren niet te achterhalen. De confrontatie met de georganiseerde dood lijkt bij Devlin voornamelijk te zijn ontstaan vanuit haar artistieke onderzoek naar de psychologie van een maatschappij aan de hand van allerhande interieurs. Persoonlijke, meer subjectief getinte drijfveren waren echter niet achterhaalbaar. Maar alhoewel ze het tegendeel beweert, is haar misnoegen over deze gruwelijke en ultieme straf aan de hand van de ijskoude en cleane weergave toch onderhuids voelbaar. Wat Woodman betreft was het, niettegenstaande de kritieken, onmogelijk los te komen van haar zelfmoord om een breder inzicht voor haar poëtisch spel van verschijnen en verdwijnen te bereiken. Net als de dood een mysterie is waarop geen glashelder en voldoende toereikend antwoord kan gegeven worden, is Woodman de fotografe waarbij nog vele vraagtekens openstaan.

6.2 Problematische aspecten

Naast de inzichten die uit dit onderzoek ontsproten, is het eveneens belangrijk enkele problematische aspecten te vermelden.

Een eerste problematisch gegeven dat reeds tijdens het voorafgaand onderzoek naar de drie overkoepelende termen – dood, vrouw(elijk) en fotografie – opdook, was de moeilijkheid om glashelder over de dood te schrijven aangezien deze notie geen essentie maar een veelheid aan interpretaties impliceert die elkaar ook dikwijls overlappen. Op die manier kunnen de diverse aandachtspunten die de comparatieve analyse opdelen vaak met elkaar in verband gebracht worden. Zo kan bijvoorbeeld de manipulatie van het medium en het gebruik van kleuren geassocieerd worden met de opsplitsing tussen de aardse realiteit en spirituele transcendentie. Woodman en Mann, die beiden veeleer met de transcendentie in verband gebracht kunnen worden, hanteren, naast de zwart-wit tonen, bepaalde fotografische technieken waardoor krassen, wazige lichtvlekken en dergelijke bekomen worden. Devlin en Wilke, die daarentegen eerder met de aardse werkelijkheid geassocieerd kunnen worden, hanteren heldere kleurtoevoegingen om het contrast van het leven in de nabijheid van de dood te benadrukken. Maar ook binnen deze opdeling van aardse realiteit en spirituele transcendentie is er geen eenduidigheid aangezien beide elementen steeds deel uitmaken van de thematiek en dus eveneens voelbaar zijn in de foto's. Dus zowel tussen de verschillende topics als daarbinnen zijn overlappingen ingegeven door de meerduidigheid van de interpretatie mogelijk.

Een tweede problematisch aspect betreft de stelling dat de onderzoeker bij de aanvang van een wetenschappelijk onderzoek in eerste instantie moet pogen los te komen van de particuliere motiveringen die hem/haar drijven om op die manier tot een meer objectieve werkwijze te evolueren. Ondanks de poging om deze werkwijze te hanteren en op een zo onbevangen mogelijke manier het artistieke oeuvre van de vier vrouwelijke kunstenaars te benaderen, is het onmiskenbaar dat met betrekking tot kunst objectiviteit quasi onmogelijk is aangezien kunstbeleving en analyse steeds ontspruit uit de verhouding tussen het werk en de toeschouwer/onderzoeker. Hoe verder het onderzoek vordert hoe meer je met lichaam en ziel in de thematiek ondergedompeld geraakt. Maar ook enkele toevallige gebeurtenissen kunnen het onderzoek kleuren. Toen bijvoorbeeld begin november 2007 bij mijn grootmoeder borstkanker werd vastgesteld, werd de band met het onderzoek des te subjectiever.

Het is dus belangrijk te vermelden dat de inzichten die ik in dit onderzoek naar voor schuif slechts particuliere interpretaties zijn die door andere weerlegd of aangevuld kunnen worden. De intentie van de scriptie was dus in de eerste plaats een poging om tot inzicht in het spel met de dood bij vrouwelijke kunstenaars doorheen het medium fotografie te komen.
Een ander opvallend aspect waardoor ik soms op een zij–spoor geraakte was dat hoe verder het onderzoek naar de dood vorderde hoe meer ik steeds bij het tegengestelde aspect, het leven, uitkwam. Hoe dichter de doodsthematiek onder de loep genomen wordt, hoe meer je in het leven geworteld raakt want deze twee elementen zijn nauw met elkaar verbonden en dood kan slechts intrede doen wanneer leven aanwezig is. Maar ondanks dit besef dat alles wat leeft ooit moet sterven, ondanks mijn onderdompeling in de donkere, lugubere thematiek van de keerzijde van het leven viel het onvoorziene en plotse afscheid van een goede kennis mij heel zwaar. De komst van de dood is dus ondanks het besef en de aanvaarding toch zwaar en bevreemdend. Degene die ooit was, is niet meer…

6.3 Mogelijkheden tot verder onderzoek

Betreffende het spel met de dood bij vrouwelijke kunstenaars zijn vele paden nog niet bewandelt. Er zijn nog verschillende andere vrouwelijke kunstenaars die met een ander medium dan de fotografie met de dood dansen en met elkaar in verband kunnen gebracht worden in de wijze waarop en waarom ze met deze lugubere thematiek omgaan.[178]
Eveneens is het interessant de vraag te stellen naar wat hun blik nu precies zo vrouwelijk of feministisch maakt. Een comparatief onderzoek naar de blik van mannelijke en vrouwelijke kunstenaars betreffende de doodsthematiek zou eveneens een mogelijke optie zijn.

[178] PAPE S., 'Spel met de dood bij vrouwelijke kunstenaars' [bachelorpaper], pp. 31-35.

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Afb.0. (voorblad) SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *Untitled*, 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 63.

Afb.1. *Venus van Willendorf*, ca 25000-20000 v.C, kalksteen, 11,10 cm (hoogte), Natuurhistorisch Museum van Wenen en Natuurhistorisch Museum van Wenen. Foto: JANSON H.W. & JANSON A.F., *History of Art,* Londen, Thames & Hudson, 2001, p. 35.

Afb.2. MICHELANGELO, *Madonna met kind,* ca 1501-1504, marmer, onbekend, Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, Brugge en Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, Brugge. Foto: http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk_(Brugge).

Afb.3. MICHELANGELO, *Piéta,* ca 1500, marmer, 173,90 cm (hoogte), Sint-Pieterskerk, Rome en Vaticaan. Foto: JANSON H.W. & JANSON A.F., *History of Art,* Londen, Thames & Hudson, 2001, p. 438.

Afb.4. PIETER POURBUS, *Laatste Oordeel*, 1551, olieverf op paneel, 228,50 x 181 cm, Groeningemuseum Brugge en Groeningemuseum Brugge. Foto: prentkaartje Groeningemuseum Brugge.

Afb.5. BREUGHEL, *De Triomf van de Dood,* 1562-1563, olieverf op paneel, 162 x 117 cm, Prado te Madrid en Prado. Foto: DONY F.L.M. (red.), *Meesters der Schilderkunst – Pieter Brughel,* Rotterdam, Lekturama, 1976, p. 26.

Afb.6. GOYA, *Executie van de opstandelingen (3 mei 1808)*, 1814, olieverf op doek, 266 x 345 cm, Prado te Madrid en Prado. Foto: BUCHHOLZ E.L., *Francisco de Goya,* Keulen, Könemann, 2000, p. 71.

Afb.7. THOMAS LEROOY, *La Goutte,* 2005, potlood op papier, 49 x 35 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Courtesey Galerie Rodolphe Janssen. Foto: EECKHOUT T., *In search of past times, new spaces, stranges worlds… - Lucy Mckenzie / Thomas Lerooy (BePart Waregem),* Provincie West Vlaanderen, Waregem, 2007, pagina ongenummerd.

Afb.8. THOMAS LEROOY, *Duo2,* 2005, potlood op papier, 49 x 35 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Courtesey Galerie Rodolphe Janssen. Foto: EECKHOUT T., *In search of past times, new spaces, stranges worlds… - Lucy Mckenzie / Thomas Lerooy (BePart Waregem),* Provincie West Vlaanderen, Waregem, 2007, pagina ongenummerd.

Afb.9. ANDY WARHOL, *Most Wanted Men n. 12 (Frank B),* 1964, zeefdruk, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MIGLIETTI F.A., *Extreme Bodies: The use and abuse of the body in art,* Milaan, Skira, 2003, p. 66-67.

Afb.10. ANDY WARHOL, *Big Electric Chair,* 1967, zeefdruk, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MIGLIETTI F.A., *Extreme Bodies: The use and abuse of the body in art,* Milaan, Skira, 2003, p. 66-67.

Afb.11. ANDY WARHOL, *Five Deaths,* 1962-63, zeefdruk, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MIGLIETTI F.A., *Extreme Bodies: The use and abuse of the body in art,* Milaan, Skira, 2003, p. 66-67.

Afb.12. HANS BALDUNG GRIEN, *The Three Ages of Man,* 1509-10, olieverf op paneel, 48.2 x 32.5 cm, Kunsthistorisch Museum van Wenen, Kunsthistorisch Museum van Wenen. Foto: website van het Kunsthistorisch museum van Wenen, op http://www.khm.at/system2E.html?/staticE/page220.html.

Afb.13. FRIDA KAHLO, *De Gebroken Zuil,* 1944, olieverf op linnen gemonteerd op hardboard, 40 x 30.7cm, Mexico-stad, collectie Dolores Olmedo. Foto: KETTENMANN A., *Frida Kahlo 1907-1954: Leed en hartstocht,* Keulen, Taschen, 1999, p. 69.

Afb.14. HANNAH WILKE, *Intra Venus Series No. 10, June 22, 1992,* 1992, performalistische zelfportretten met Donald Goddard, chromagenic supergloss prints met overlaminate, 181,61 x 120,65 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: WILKE H., *Intra Venus,* New York, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, 1995, p. 27.

Afb.15. AGNES VARDA, *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier,* 2004-2005, video-installatie, 35mm film geprojecteerd op DVD (9mn30) steeds herhalend en 14 videofilms (3mn30) op monitors en panelen van 3 x 4m, 14 stoelen met 14 koptelefoons, verblijfplaats onbekend. Foto: N.N., *SMAK – Tentoonstellingskalender 10.2006 – 12.2006*, Gent, s.e., 2006, p. 17.

Afb.16. KATHE KOLLWITZ, *Vrouw met haar dode kind,* 1903, gegraveerde ets geretoucheerd met zwart krijt, grafiet en metaalgoud verf op zwaar geweven papier [trial proof], 41.7 x 47.2cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Foto: VIGUE J., Grote meesters van de schilderkunst – schilderessen, S.l., Zuid Boekproducties, 2003, p. 337.

Afb.17. MAGDALENA ABAKANOWICZ, *80 BACKS,* 1976-1980, jutte en hars, 61 x 50 x 55 cm – 69 x 56 x 66 cm – 72 x 59 x 69 cm, Pusan, Zuid-Korea, Museum van Moderne Kunst. Foto: BECKETT W., *Contemporary women artists*, Oxford, Phaidon, 1988, p. 17.

Afb.18. ANA MENDIETA, *Untitled from the Silueta series,Salina Cruz Mexico,* juli 1976, afdruk uit nalatenschap, 2001 (uit reeks van 9 c-prints in kleur), c-print in kleur, 40.6 x 50.8 cm, courtesy of the Estate Ana Mendieta Collection and Gallery Lelong, New York. Foto: VAN LOO S. e.a., Tent. *Cat. Gorge(l) – beklemming en verademing in kunst*, Antwerpen, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 2006, pl. (gn paginanr).

Afb.19. MARTHA ROSLER, *Lounging Women* from *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful (new series),* 2004, fotomontage, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: ROSLER M., 'Bringing the War Home', in: *A Prior magazine,* vol.15, 2007, p. 143.

Afb.20. SALLY MANN, *Untitled from the At Twelve Series,* 1983-1985, gelatine zilverprint, 26,90 x 34 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: MANN S. en BEATTIE A., *At Twelve: portraits of young women,* New York, Aperture, 1988, p. 15.

Afb.21. SALLY MANN, *White Skates,* 1990, gelatine zilverprint, 50,80 x 61 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S. en PRICE R., *Immediate Family,* Londen, Phaidon, 1999, p. ongenummerd.

Afb.22. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *What Remains*, 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, 127 x 101,60 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 123.

Afb.23. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *What Remains*, 2000, gelatine zilverprint, 127 x 101,60 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 110.

Afb.24. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Electric Chair, Indiana State Prison, Michigan City, Indiana,* 1991, C-prints, ca. 49, 5 x 49,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: BREIDENBACH S. (ed.), *Lucinda Devlin – The Omega Suites,* Göttingen, Steidl, 2000, p. ongenummerd. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin, 2000 en **m** Fotografie.

Afb.25. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *2002 Disco in Space, Westvale (New York),* 1978, kleuren foto, 49 x 48,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: ARBAIZAR P., *Lucinda Devlin - Pleasure Ground,* Parijs, Bibliothèque national de France, 2002, p. ongenummerd. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin.

Afb.26. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Burnsville FantaSuite Hotel, Beachblanket Bingo Room, Minneapolis (Minnesota),* 1989, kleuren foto, 49 x 48,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: ARBAIZAR P., *Lucinda Devlin - Pleasure Ground,* Parijs, Bibliothèque national de France, 2002, p. ongenummerd. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin.

Afb.27. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Corporal Arenas, Morgue Outlook Hospital, Summit, New Jersey*,1989, C-print, ca 49 x 48,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: de Galerie m Bocum website, op http://www.m-bochum.de/artistpic_en.php?aiid=564. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin.

Afb.28. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Operating Room #8, Forrest General Hospital, Hattiesburg, Mississippi,* 1998, C-print, ca 49 x 48,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: de Galerie m Bochum website, op http://www.m-bochum.de/artist_info2_en.php?SID=pI4n3tpXcDwz&aid=60&aifid=136. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin.

Afb. 29. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Lethal Injection Chamber, Texas State Prison, Huntsville, Texas,* 1992, C-prints, ca. 49, 5 x 49,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: BREIDENBACH S. (ed.), *Lucinda Devlin – The Omega Suites,* Göttingen, Steidl, 2000, p. ongenummerd. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin, 2000 en **m** Fotografie.

Afb. 30. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Lethal Injection Chamber from Witness Room, Parchman State penitentiary, Parchman, Mississippi,* 1998, C-prints, ca. 49, 5 x 49,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: BREIDENBACH S. (ed.), *Lucinda Devlin – The Omega Suites,* Göttingen, Steidl, 2000, p. ongenummerd. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin, 2000 en **m** Fotografie.

Afb. 31. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Kältekammer, Therapeutisches Zentrum, Bad Harzburg,* 1999, C-prints, ca 49,5 x 49,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: BREIDENBACH S. (ed.), *Lucinda Devlin – Water Rites,* Göttingen, Steidl, 2003, p. 49. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin en **m** Fotografie.

Afb. 32. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Fürstenbad, Palais Thermal, Bad, Wildbad,* 1999, C-prints, ca 49,5 x 49,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: BREIDENBACH S. (ed.), *Lucinda Devlin – Water Rites,* Göttingen, Steidl, 2003, p. 21. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin en **m** Fotografie.

Afb.33. HANNAH WILKE, *Arlene Hannah Butter,* 1954, foto op karton, 51,20 x 44,80 cm, performalistisch zelfportret met Marcie Butter (Scarlatt), onbekend en onbekend. FRUEH J., *Hannah Wilke* [tentoonstellingscatalogus], Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 1989, p. 64.

Afb.34. HANNAH WILKE, *S.O.S. Starification Object Series,* 1975, kauwgom op papier in 4 plexiglazen boxen, 89,51 x 69,46 x 7,52 cm (elk), onbekend en onbekend. Foto: GOLDMAN S., 'Gesture and The Regenaration of the Universe', in: *Hannah Wilke – A Retrospective* [tentoonstellingscatalogus], Kopenhagen, Nikolaj – Contemporary Art Center, 31.10.1998 tem 17.01.1999, p. 25.

Afb.35. HANNAH WILKE, *I Object: Memoirs of a Sugargiver,* 1977-1978, cibachrome, elk 61,44 x 40,96 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: FRUEH J., *Hannah Wilke* [tentoonstellingscatalogus], Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 1989, p. 132.

Afb.36. HANNAH WILKE, *S.OS. Starification Object Series,* 1974-79, 28 zwart-wit foto's, 15x 10cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: RECKITT H. en PHELAN P., *Art and Feminism,* Londen, Phaidon, 2001, p. 107.

Afb.37. HANNAH WILKE, *Brushstrokes January 21, 1992,* 1992, de kunstenares' haar op papier, 76,20 x 57,15 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: WILKE H., *Intra Venus,* New York, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, 1995, p. 39.

Afb.38. HANNAH WILKE, *March 18, 1992*, 1992, verbanden van beenmerg transplantatie op plexiglas, 82,55 x 71,12 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: WILKE H., *Intra Venus,* New York, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, 1995, p. 44.

Afb.39. HANNAH WILKE, *Selma Butter, 1979 / Selma Butter, 1982*, 1979-1982 cibachrome, elk 76,80 x 102,40cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: FRUEH J., *Hannah Wilke* [tentoonstellingscatalogus], Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 1989, p. 135.

Afb.40-41. HANNAH WILKE, *Intra Venus Series No. 4., February 19, 1992/ July 26, 1992,* 1992, performalistische zelfportretten met Donald Goddard, twee panelen - chromagenic supergloss prints met overlaminate, 181,61 x 120,65 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: WILKE H., *Intra Venus,* New York, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, 1995, pp. 32-33.

Afb.42. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *On Being an Angel, Providence, Rhode Island,* 1977, gelatine zilverprint, ca 25 x 20 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: TOWNSEND C. en WOODMAN G., *Francesca Woodman – Scattered in Space and Time,* Londen, Phaidon Press, 2006, p. 125.

Afb.43. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *Untitled (New York),* 1979, gelatine zilverprint, ca 25 x 20 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: TOWNSEND C. en WOODMAN G., *Francesca Woodman – Scattered in Space and Time,* Londen, Phaidon Press, 2006, p. 194.

Afb.44. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *House # 4, Providence, Rhode Island,* 1976, gelatine zilverprint, ca 25 x 20 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: TOWNSEND C. en WOODMAN G., *Francesca Woodman – Scattered in Space and Time,* Londen, Phaidon Press, 2006, p. 108.

Afb.45. FRANCESCA WOODAN, *Self-deceit # 5, Rome,* 1978, gelatine zilverprint, ca 25 x 20 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: TOWNSEND C. en WOODMAN G., *Francesca Woodman – Scattered in Space and Time,* Londen, Phaidon Press, 2006, p. 157.

Afb.46. FRANCESCA WOODAN, *Self-deceit # 7, Rome,* 1978, gelatine zilverprint, ca 25 x 20 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: TOWNSEND C. en WOODMAN G., *Francesca Woodman – Scattered in Space and Time,* Londen, Phaidon Press, 2006, p. 157.

Afb.47. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *Matter Lent*, 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 9.

Afb.48. SALLY MANN, *Untitled from the series Matter Lent*, 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 14.

Afb.49. SALLY MANN, *Untitled from the series Matter Lent*, 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 23.

Afb.50. SALLY MANN, *Untitled from the series Matter Lent*, 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 28.

Afb.51. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *Untitled*, 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 53.

Afb.52. HANNAH WILKE, *Intra Venus Series No.7, February 20, 1992 / August 18, 1992,* 1992, performalistische zelfportretten met Donald Goddard, twee panelen -chromagenic supergloss prints met overlaminate, 120,65 x 181,65 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: WILKE H., *Intra Venus,* New York, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, 1995, p. 28.

Afb.53. HANNAH WILKE, *Intra Venus Series No. 11, March 8, 1992; August 24, 1992; December 11, 1992; May 13,1992,* 1992, performalistische zelfportretten met Donald Goddard, vier panelen - chromagenic supergloss prints met overlaminate, 76,20 x 101,60 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: WILKE H., *Intra Venus,* New York, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, 1995, p. 30.

Afb.54. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Gas Chamber,* Central Prison, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1991, C-prints, ca. 49, 5 x 49,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: BREIDENBACH S. (ed.), *Lucinda Devlin – The Omega Suites,* Göttingen, Steidl, 2000, p. ongenummerd. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin, 2000 en **m** Fotografie.

Afb.55. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *Untitled,* 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 55.

Afb.56. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *Untitled,* 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 67.

Afb.57. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *December 8, 2000,* 2000, gelatine zilverprint met koper–toning, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 76.

Afb.58. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *Antietam*, 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, 96,50 x 121,90 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 89.

Afb.59. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *My House, Providence, Rhode Island,* 1976, gelatine zilverprint, ca 25 x 20 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: TOWNSEND C. en WOODMAN G., *Francesca Woodman – Scattered in Space and Time,* Londen, Phaidon Press, 2006, p. 105.

Afb.60. SALLY MANN, *Blowing Bubbles,* 1987, gelatine zilverprint, 50,80 x 61 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S. en PRICE R., *Immediate Family,* Londen, Phaidon, 1999, p. ongenummerd.

Afb.61. SALLY MANN, *The Wet Bed from the Immediate Family series,* 1987, gelatine zilverprint, 50,80 x 61 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S. en PRICE R., *Immediate Family,* Londen, Phaidon, 1999, p. ongenummerd.

Afb.62. SALLY MANN, *Untitled from the At Twelve Series,* 1983-1985, gelatine zilverprint, 26,90 x 34 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S. en BEATTIE A., *At Twelve: portraits of young women,* New York, Aperture, 1988, p. 24.

Afb.63. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *What Remains*, 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, onbekend, 127 x 101,60 cm en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 106.

Afb.64. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *What Remains*, 2000, zilverprint met vernis, onbekend, 127 x 101,60 cm en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 119.

Afb.65. HANNAH WILKE, *Dancing in the Dark,* 1978, Performalistische zelfportret met Donald Goddard, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: FRUEH J., *Hannah Wilke* [tentoonstellingscatalogus], Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 1989, p. 92.

Afb.66. HANNAH WILKE en haar moeder, Selma Butter, in het New York Hospital, 1982, zwart-wit foto door Donald Goddard, onbekend, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: FRUEH J., *Hannah Wilke* [tentoonstellingscatalogus], Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 1989, p. 97.

Afb.67. HANNAH WILKE, *In Memoriam: Selma Butter (Mommy),* 1979-1983, zwart-wit foto's, paier, collage, geschilderde ceramieken sculpturen, 102,40 x 491,52 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: FRUEH J., *Hannah Wilke* [tentoonstellingscatalogus], Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 1989, p. 136. Copyright © Eeva-Inkeri.

Afb.68. HANNAH WILKE, *Untitled* from the *Intra Venus* series, 1992, performalistisch zelfportret met Donald Goddard, drie kleuren foto's, 35,56 x 96,52 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: *Hannah Wilke – A Retrospectve* [tentoonstellingscatalogus], Kopenhagen, Nikolaj – Contemporary Art Center, 31.10.1998 tem 17.01.1999, p. 86.

Afb.69. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *Untitled (Rome),* 1977-78, gelatine zilverprint, ca 25 x 20 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: TOWNSEND C. en WOODMAN G., *Francesca Woodman – Scattered in Space and Time,* Londen, Phaidon Press, 2006, p. 154.

Afb.70. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, from *House* series, *Providence, Rhode Island,* 1976, gelatine zilverprint, ca 25 x 20 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: TOWNSEND C. en WOODMAN G., *Francesca Woodman – Scattered in Space and Time,* Londen, Phaidon Press, 2006, p. 107.

Afb.71. BOTTICELLI, *De Geboorte van Venus,* ca 1480, tempera op doek, 180 x 280 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze en Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze. Foto: JANSON H.W. & JANSON A.F., *History of Art,* Londen, Thames & Hudson, 2001, p. 421.

Afb.72. HANNAH WILKE, *Super-t-Art,* 1974, zwart-wit foto, 16,51 x 11,43, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: WILKE H., *Intra Venus,* New York, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, 1995, p. 2.

Afb.73. HANNAH WILKE, *Intra Venus Series No. 3, August 9, 1992,* 1992, performalistische zelfportretten met Donald Goddard, chromagenic supergloss prints met overlaminate, 181,61 x 120,65 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: WILKE H., *Intra Venus,* New York, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, 1995, p. 26.

Afb.74. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *Untitled, MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire,* 1980, gelatine zilverprint, ca 25 x 20 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: TOWNSEND C. en WOODMAN G., *Francesca Woodman – Scattered in Space and Time,* Londen, Phaidon Press, 2006, p. 224.

Afb.75. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Electric Chair,Broad River Correctional Facility, Columbia, South Carolina,* 1991, C-prints, ca. 49, 5 x 49,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: BREIDENBACH S. (ed.), *Lucinda Devlin – The Omega Suites,* Göttingen, Steidl, 2000, p. ongenummerd. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin, 2000 en **m** Fotografie.

Afb.76. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Witness Room, Broad River Correctional Facility, Columbia, South Carolina,* 1991, C-prints, ca. 49, 5 x 49,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: BREIDENBACH S. (ed.), *Lucinda Devlin – The Omega Suites,* Göttingen, Steidl, 2000, p. ongenummerd. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin, 2000 en **m** Fotografie.

Afb.77. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *Antietam*, 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, 96,50 x 121,90 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 94.

Afb.78. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, *Untitled,* 1980, gelatine zilverprint, ca 25 x 20 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: TOWNSEND C. en WOODMAN G., *Francesca Woodman – Scattered in Space and Time,* Londen, Phaidon Press, 2006, p. 219.

Afb.79. SALLY MANN, *Untitled from the At Twelve Series,* 1983-1985, gelatine zilverprint, 26,90 x 34 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S. en BEATTIE A., *At Twelve: portraits of young women,* New York, Aperture, 1988, p. 21.

Afb.80. SALLY MANN, *Untitled from the At Twelve Series,* 1983-1985, gelatine zilverprint, 26,90 x 34 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S. en BEATTIE A., *At Twelve: portraits of young women,* New York, Aperture, 1988, p. 33.

Afb.81. SALLY MANN, *The Two Virginias # 1,* 1988, gelatine zlverprint, 50,80 x 61 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S. en PRICE R., *Immediate Family,* Londen, Phaidon, 1999, p. ongenummerd.

Afb.82. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *What Remains*, 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, 127 x 101,60 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 118.

Afb.83. SALLY MANN, *Untitled* from the series *What Remains*, 2000, gelatine zilverprint met vernis, 127 x 101,60 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: MANN S., *What remains,* Boston, Bulfinch, 2003, p. 107.

Afb.84. HANNAH WILKE, *Untitled,* 1987-1992, geschilderde ceramieken sculpturen op een houten basis, 17,78 x 248,92 x 248,92 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: WILKE H., *Intra Venus,* New York, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, 1995, p. 34.

Afb.85. HANNAH WILKE, *Color fields: Model for large-scale sculpture* in het Federal Plaza te New York, 1985, gemaakt voor de "titled Arc" show in de Stonefront voor architectuur te New York, geschilderde ceramieken sculpturen op een houtenbasis, 71,68 x 71,68 x 5,12 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: FRUEH J., *Hannah Wilke* [tentoonstellingscatalogus], Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 1989, p. 113. Copyright © Lisa Kahane.

Afb.86. FRANCESCA WOODMAN, from *Space series, Providence, Rhode Island,* 1977, gelatine zilverpirnt, ca 25 x 20 cm, onbekend en onbekend. Foto: TOWNSEND C. en WOODMAN G., *Francesca Woodman – Scattered in Space and Time,* Londen, Phaidon Press, 2006, p. 109.

Afb.87. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Kneipp-Anwendung, Kurmittelhaus, Bad Bertrich,* 1999, C-prints, ca 49,5 x 49,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: BREIDENBACH S. (ed.), *Lucinda Devlin – Water Rites,* Göttingen, Steidl, 2003, p. 85.

Afb.88. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Gas Chamber, Maryland State Peniteniary, Baltimore, Maryland,* 1991, C-prints, ca. 49, 5 x 49,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: BREIDENBACH S. (ed.), *Lucinda Devlin – The Omega Suites,* Göttingen, Steidl, 2000, p. ongenummerd. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin, 2000 en **m** Fotografie.

Afb.89. LUCINDA DEVLIN, *Private Isolation Tank, Syracuse (New York),* 1985, kleuren foto, 49 x 48,5 cm, onbekend, onbekend. Foto: ARBAIZAR P., *Lucinda Devlin - Pleasure Ground,* Parijs, Bibliothèque national de France, 2002, p. ongenummerd. Copyright © Lucinda Devlin.

Internetbronnen

- LUCINDA DEVLIN

DEVLIN L., 'Statement of Technique' [4], 2004, geraadpleegd op 15.05.2007, op de Paul Rodgers/9W Gallery website, op http://www.paulrodgers9w.com/artists/l_devlin/tech.html.

Camera: Hasselblad 2 1/4 square format
Print type: Chromogenic

Procedure:
Camera on a tripod, long exposures. The pictures are taken with available light - this is any light that is present in the scene (no added artificial light) It might include daylight, tungsten, fluorescent alone or in combination.

Color film is balanced for a particular light source. The film I use is balanced for tungsten, therefore it should record tungsten light somewhat accurately. However, tungsten balanced film will record daylight as cyan (blue/green) and fluorescent light as more green. So you can see the difficulties which might arise if more than one light source exists. These difficulties become more pronounced with the long exposures because color shifts (in the way the film responds to light) may occur.

I do not use color correction filters on the camera since you can only make a correction for one light source and not the others which may exist in the scene. I do all color correcting in the printing by changing the color filtration on the enlarger. Sometimes, all color shifts can be corrected to make the image "appear" normal. But, if two light sources exist one has to make a decision as to which one to correct for. This makes for colors in some pictures which you would not see with your eye in the original scene.

Ex. Arkansas-red, Illinois--cyan
Color serves as a compositional element and can appear as a plane of color
that only exists in the photograph.

N.N., 'Press Release: Lucinda Devlin – The Omega Suites' [5], 2000, geraadpleegd op 15.02.2007, op de Paul Rodgers/9W Gallery website, op http://www.paulrodgers9w.com/artists/l_devlin/devlin_press1.html.

Lucinda Devlin
The Omega Suites
Press Release
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Paul Rodgers/9W is pleased to announce the American photographer Lucinda Devlin's first solo exhibition in New York and the inaugural exhibition of the gallery. The exhibition will consist of "The Omega Suites", which will also be featured in an exhibition this summer at the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst Galerie in Berlin, together with a book entitled "The Omega Suites" from Steidl Publishers, with 30 full color pages and text by Barbara Rose in English and German.

During the period from 1991 to 1998 Lucinda Devlin visited penitentiaries in 20 states, always with the permission and cooperation of the local authorities. The result, "The Omega Suites", provides a portrait, in 30 images, of execution chambers operated by the American justice system across the United States. As such, this body of work brings startling clarity to one of the great ethical questions facing contemporary America, about which public opinion is currently passionately divided.

"My personal view of the role of capital punishment in our society is not at issue in these photographs," states Lucinda Devlin. "Rather, I have attempted to let the environments themselves communicate directly with viewers." In these photographs, we witness those places where society sanctions the taking away of life. Through them, we see what is not there, and in doing so, we are invited to explore the inescapable dimension of negation present in these works where art and the world intersect.

The exhibition will present 30 images of "The Omega Suites". The photographs are chromogenic color prints, and will be available in 19 1/2 inch X 19 1/2 inch format, with selected images available in a 29 1/2 inch X 29 1/2 inch format.

Lucinda Devlin has received fellowships from the National Endowment of Arts and the Aaron Siskind Foundation, and has been an Artist in Residency in the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, of Berlin, Germany.

LEFFINGWELL E., 'Art in America, Lucinda Devlin at the Paul Rodgers/9W Gallery' [3], 01.2007, geraadpleegd op 15.02.2007, op de Paul Rodgers/9W Gallery website, op http://gallerydriver.com/Attachments/Art%20In%20America.doc.

Lucinda Devlin at Paul Rodgers/9W

From 1991 to 1998, Lucinda Devlin was the guest of penitentiaries around the country, where, using a Hasselblad with its characteristic square format for long exposures, she worked in the emptied abattoirs of legalized murder: death chambers, holding cells, an executioner's room and witness rooms. Although *The Omega Suites*, her examination of America's industry of execution, has been published and exhibited since 1992 in Germany, Austria and the U.S., the images had never been seen as a group in New York City. This thoughtfully sequenced selection focused on Devlin's formal preoccupation with the architecture of penitentiaries beyond death row, where the furnishings and instruments quietly suggest an unvoiced moral indictment that is at the heart of this somber project.

If the intentions of the task-built apparatus were not sufficiently clear, Devlin's titles announce the purpose of each site as a room constructed or adapted for a specific role in the ongoing theater of capital punishment. In *Lethal Injection Chamber, Nevada State Prison, Carson City, Nevada* (1991), a padded plinth crossed with restraining straps and a window beyond are seen through a lozenge-shaped steel hatch. A wheel fitted to the oval door and a gasket around its opening betray the room's conversion from a previous existence as a gas chamber, as though in refinement of the process. At the time of Devlin's visit, the rustic killing tower of *Gallows, Department of Corrections, Smyrna, Delaware* (1991) was still in use as that state's prescribed means of exacting the ultimate punishment. Of the photographs included in this exhibition, only these two were illuminated by natural light.

Devlin makes chromatic adjustments at the time of printing that may skew images toward cyan and green and, in one instance, blood red. These intense planes of color articulate an aura of death undetected by the naked eye, as the telling details accumulate. A holding cell with sink, toilet and cot seems economically designed and easily cleaned. There are exhaust fans, reflections of clocks on panes of glass, an exit sign above a door. There is a line of telephones, one of them red, and a particularly grotesque electric chair of bright yellow enameled wood, courtesy of a workshop in the state of Alabama. The supporting arms of gurneys extend in cruciform. A trailer serves as a portable injection room. In a statement made available by the gallery, Devlin comments that her view of capital punishment is not at issue in the work. She correctly believes that these images speak for themselves.

—*Edward Leffingwell*

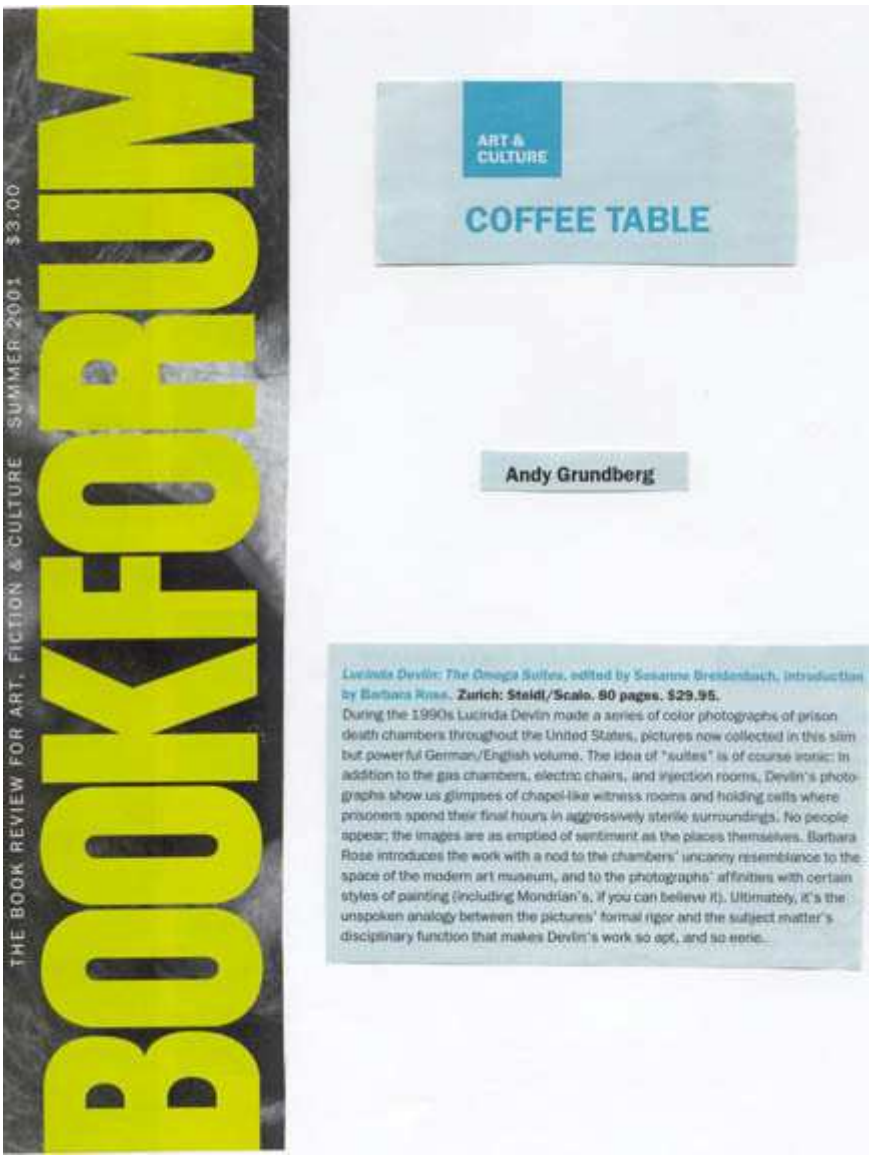
Art in America
The World's Premiere Art Magazine

Lucinda Devlin: *Electric Chair, Holman Unit, Atmore, Alabama*, 1991; chromogenic print, 19⅛ inches square; at Paul Rodgers/9W.



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GRUNDBERG A., 'Lucinda Devlin: The Omega Suites' [1], zomer 2001, geraadpleegd op 15.05.2007, op de Paul Rodgers/9W Gallery website, op http://www.paulrodgers9w.com/artists/1_devlin/lucinda%20bookforum.htm.



N.N., 'Lucinda Devlin' [4], 04.2007, geraadpleegd op 15.05.2007, op de Paul Rodgers/9W Gallery website, op http://www.paulrodgers9w.com/?method=Artist.ArtistDetail&ArtistID=D83F2E92-115B-5562-AAF442F1B71AA7DA.

"For in the immediate world, everything is to be discerned, for him who can discern it..." - from Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, James Agee & Walker Evans.

Lucinda Devlin was born in 1947 and belongs to the generation of American photographers who pioneered fine art color photography. Her photographs are both noted for their attention to formal composition, capturing a delicate balance of available light and intense color values, and for their focus on carefully selected, though disparate, themes of subject matter.

Devlin always uses a square format with a wide angle lens, allowing her to step in close to her subject. The technique creates a sense of intimacy and spatial depth. The viewer is invited to enter the space of the photograph and discover how it would feel to be in these divergent, often constrained and uncomfortable, environments.

Devlin occupies a distinct position in current photographic practice. Although she is one of the early exponents of a contemporary photographic approach which emphasizes objective point of view, she

also introduces layers of questioning and ambiguity into her images. While her photographs reveal the ubiquitous artificiality of contemporary life, she also offsets theatrical contrivance with close attention to the real world. Ultimately Devlin belongs in the American narrative tradition and the object of her inquiry is the real condition of the human subject.

April 2007
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N.N., 'Lucinda Devlin' [1], 07.11.2000, geraadpleegd op 15.05.2007, op de Paul Rodgers Gallery website, op http://gallerydriver.com/Attachments/The%20Village%20Voice.doc.

The Village Voice, november 7, 2000, vol. XLV No.44

LUCINDA DEVLIN Devlin's smart chilling photos of death chambers in American prisons are deadpan studies in dead-end interior decoration. Most of these minimalist spaces- whether they house gas chambers, electric chairs, or pallets for lethal injections- have an antiseptic severity that suggests a cross between a hospital room and a corporate corridor. Devlin shoots these rooms with a keen eye for their florescent-lit banality as well as their unlikely decorator touches: cinderblocks painted bright red, a final holding cell with one ocean-blue wall. Paul Rodgers/9W, 529 W 20th, 414-9810, through 12/16.

N.N., 'Lucinda Devlin: The Omega Suites, Artist talk by Lucinda Devlin' [4], 21.04.2005, geraadpleegd op 15.02.2007, op de David Winton Bell Gallery website, op http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/David_Winton_Bell_Gallery/devlin.html.

Artist's talk by Lucinda Devlin
Thursday, April 21, 2005, 5:30 p.m., List Art Center Auditorium

Between 1991 and 1998 Lucinda Devlin photographed in penitentiaries in twenty states, with the permission and cooperation of the local authorities. She called the resulting series *The Omega Suites*, alluding to the final letter of the Greek alphabet as a metaphor for the finality of execution. The series includes thirty chilling color photographs of execution chambers and associated spaces, such as holding cells and viewing rooms. With over 3000 inmates on death row and 70 percent of US citizens supporting the death penalty, *The Omega Suites* brings focus to one of the great ethical questions facing contemporary Americans, about which public opinion continues to be passionate.

Working with a Hasselblad camera and long exposures in existing light, Devlin created surprisingly beautiful images. Viewers are often drawn by this beauty and then repelled by the reality of the subject. Devlin expresses an interest in "let[ting] the environments themselves communicate directly with viewers," and the carefully composed and clinically sterile images are, indeed, as objective as our preconceptions allow.

Throughout her work, Devlin examines how architectural spaces express the values of the culture that creates and uses them. Her other subjects include: *Corporeal Arenas* --operating rooms, mortuaries, autopsy rooms; *Pleasure Grounds*--discos, tanning salons, peep shows, and fantasy hotel rooms; and *Water Rites*--German spa facilities.

Lucinda Devlin's work has been shown extensively in Europe and the United States, including international venues such as the 49th Venice Biennale (2001) and the 25th Biennale de Sao Paulo (2002). She is the recipient of numerous awards including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Aaron Siskind Foundation, and an Artist's in Residency at the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, Berlin. Born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1947, Devlin lives and works in Indianapolis, Indiana.

GROSZ D., 'Depicting an ugly America, Gallery Going' [9], 24.08.2006, geraadpleegd op 15.02.2007, op de Paul Rodgers/9W Gallery website , op http://gallerydriver.com/Attachments/devlin%20article%20from%20the%20Sun%20Aug.24.pdf.



August 24, 2006 Edition > Section: Arts and Letters

Depicting an Ugly America

Gallery-Going

BY DAVID GROSZ
August 24, 2006
URL: http://www.nysun.com/article/38449

From 1991 to 1998, with the permission of local authorities, Lucinda Devlin took photographs at 20 penitentiaries across America. The resulting group of 30 images, called "The Omega Suites" after the final letter in the Greek alphabet, is a powerful architectural portrait of death row, depicting final holding cells, witness viewing rooms, and, most alarmingly, the instruments of death themselves: gas chambers, electric chairs, gallows, and lethal injection tables.

The images lack all signs of human presence and communicate a frightening institutional indifference. Ms. Devlin has said, somewhat disingenuously, that the goal of her work is not to broadcast an agenda but to allow spaces to speak for themselves. She furthers this impression by creating an illusion of photographic objectivity: Each image is a simple composition that suggests a straight-on documentary approach. This strategy achieves considerable effect, and most viewers, whatever their opinion on capital punishment, will cringe at the sight of these sterile spaces with glowing flourescent bulbs and vast stretches of empty wall colored in lifeless beiges and grays.

While "The Omega Suites" has been shown in museums, galleries, and international art fairs, as well as published widely, many fans may not know how seamlessly they fit into Ms. Devlin's larger oeuvre, which includes several other collections of peopleless interiors shot in the same matter-of-fact reportorial style. Paul Rodgers/9W Gallery's summer show corrects this, juxtaposing selections from the artist's "Pleasure Ground" series (1977–ongoing) — images of the American leisure industry, including hotel theme rooms, discos, nudie shops, and tanning salons — with some of her death-row photographs. This provocative installation reconsiders both bodies of work and enlarges one's appreciation of Ms. Devlin's overall project.

"Northern Lights Room, Fanta Suite Hotel, Minneapolis, Minnesota" (1989) depicts a rather hideous hotel suite. One views the bedroom though its doorless entryway, which, like the interior, is lined with white slabs meant to resemble the ice wedges of an igloo; however, with an air vent and several light switches all too plainly visible, the attempt at illusion only goes so far. At the center of the room there is an octagonal waterbed, its sheets a dark ocean blue. Two stuffed penguins on a floating iceberg pillow stand in its midst, and a trophy polar-bear skin clings to the igloo's back wall.

Garish and preposterous, this room holds little appeal — even polar fetishists, should they exist, would likely be turned off by the careless confusion of arctic (igloo, polar bear) and antarctic (penguins) elements — and when the image is presented in isolation this seems to be precisely its point. But the work elicits more than just snobbish chuckles when hung beside "Lethal Injection Chamber From Family Witness Program, Parchman State Penitentiary, Parchman, Mississippi" (1998).

The formal similarities between the two photographs are immediately evident. "Lethal Injection Chamber" also looks through an opening (in this case, the window of a witness room) onto an interior space dominated by a bedlike resting place (a lethal injection table). And its few details — a clock that ominously reads 1:57, a microphone that dangles a few feet above the headrest (to record the condemned's last words?), and a crude spotlight angled toward the table — recall the tacky decor of the Northern Lights room.

More significantly, when placed side by side, these images feed off each other to present a broad criticism of American culture, in which the institutional minimalism of the death chamber and the chintzy ostentation of the hotel room are opposite sides of the same coin. Both spaces are characterized by near total disregard of aesthetic values and seem testaments to the onset of cultural decadence.

Another juxtaposition pairs "Private Isolation Tank, Syracuse, New York" (1985) and "Gas Chamber, Arizona State Prison, Florence, Arizona" (1992). Here the uncomfortable architectural similarities between a space designed for relaxation and soul-searching and another intended to end a life are plain for all to see.

One would hardly think that there was any relationship between the tawdry spaces of the leisure industry and the hidden corners of death row. But in the world of Lucinda Devlin, such similarities exist and also transcend questions of method or style. "The Omega Suites" and "Pleasure Grounds" are parts of a large thematic project, the beginnings of a systematic critique of American interiors. In these crude and careless spaces, the artist suggests, abject ugliness can be a form of moral depravity.

BAKER R.C., 'Bipolar' [1], 13.07.2006, geraadpleegd op 15.02.2007, op de Paul Rodgers Gallery website, op http://gallerydriver.com/Attachments/Lucinda%20Devlin%20V%20Voice%20review.pdf.

the village VOICE

Best in Show

Bipolar

by R.C. Baker
July 13th, 2006 5:05 PM



Gas Chamber, Central Prison, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1991
Lucinda Devlin

Lucinda Devlin
Paul Rodgers/9W Gallery
529 West 20th Street
Through late August

Sex and death are an eternal couple. Lucinda Devlin has dogged the pair across America, shooting 30-by-30-inch color photos of themed luxury suites and execution chambers. In a Minneapolis hotel's "Northern Lights" room, guests aregreeted by a furry polar bear rug and two plushie penguins beckoning from atop a massive round bed; not penguins buta thinly padded gurney crisscrossed with slack leather straps in the lethal-injection chamber awaits a prone body in a Parchman, Mississippi, penitentiary. Other dissonant juxtapositions include a private isolation tank in Syracuse, its step stained with salt from the warm water inside, and the bulbous steel door fronting the Arizona State Prison's gas chamber, which is covered with valves and rubber seals like a diving bell. Boise's condemned meet their maker on a broad bench in a wood-paneled, low-ceilinged room, with orange carpeting right out of a suburban den; surprisingly, the empty weightlifting benches in the windowless Kelly Lynne Figure Salon are similarly shot through with despair.

DEVLIN L., 'About my photographic series' [8], 2006, geraadpleegd op 15.05.2007, op de Galerie m Bochum website, op
http://www.m-bochum.de/artist_info_en.php?SID=3m2MJeOhZZ29&aid=60&aname=LucindaDevlin.

Lucinda Devlin
About my photographic series

My work as an artist has been exploring contemporary American culture through the psychologically complex domain of interior spaces. I have found that spatial settings can provide unique cultural readings on how spaces, bjects and artifacts can construct meaning.

Series, since
Pleasure Ground, 1977
Corporal Arenas, 1980
Speleological Explorations, 1980
Habitats, 1985
The Omega Suites , 1991
Water Rites, 1999
Field Culture, 2005
Subterranea, 2006

I explore these ideas through series of pictures which collectively define many of the mores, values or beliefs of large segments of the American culture. I feel the photographs contain rich layers of information enabling them to be viewed and interpreted in numerous ways.

Pleasure Ground explores contemporary environments which have been designed primarily for the appeal of the middle class. These interiors have been specifically constructed, sometimes elaborately, for the pursuit of myriad of pleasures and exemplify modernist thought about design and materials in what has become a "throwaway", transient culture. These spaces carry an underlying code, a promise of pleasure. People who engage in the activities suggested by these rooms are in control; they choose to participate and are therefore pro-active in their pursuit of pleasure.

In the series *Habitats and Corporal Arenas*, it seems that others are in control. Habitats continues to explore man-made environments, but those which are created for captive animals. Our ironic attempts to artificially reproduce vanishing ecosystems as well as the exploitation of animals in theme parks and tourist attractions reflect attitudes toward animal life and the natural world in general that are currently in a state of transition.

Corporal Arenas specifically addresses the mythology that surrouds the spaces apparatus and technology present in the treatment of the body. The tools are designed to fuction but appear to be cool, imposing, dominating. These spaces force passivitiy, which makes us feel frightened and vulnerable.

The activities carried out in *The Omega Suites* require the ultimate in passivity. Originally, it was this progression from Corporal Arenas that brought me to execution rooms. I found a great similarity between the spaces designed for healing and those designed for killing. These picutres were not intended as a polemic against the death penalty. But soon, the project took on a life of it's own and I became totally obsessed with this world of execution. And so I set out to find out all I could about the people and institutions and the accoutrements and rituals of this death work.
Water Rites explores current day Kurbaden in Germany which has a highly developed network of spas offering medicinal and health benefits through a variety of curative measures including massage, hydrotherapy, and physical therapy. These curing baths have long flourished under a system of state supported health insurance, but many have now found it necessary to change due to a reduction in those benefits.

Water Rites is a continuation of the ideas generated by Corporal Arenas and
The Omega Suites. Whether it is a lethal injection chamber, a surgical operating theatre, or a water therapy room, the body becomes an entity controlled by forces outside of itself. But it is in spa treatments where we begin to see a confluence of the discomfort associated with medicine and the pleasure associated with beauty treatments.

MULLINS C., 'Feature: Death Row' [14], in: *contemporary-magazine* [artikel], nr.36, 2001, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Contemporary Magazine website, op http://www.contemporary-magazine.com/feature36.htm.

FEATURE: DEATH ROW

Inspired by the tate's current warhol show, Charlotte Mullins examines three contemporary artists whose work looks at representations of death

In a 1963 interview, Andy Warhol admitted that everything he did revolved around death. Since the first painting in his Disaster series featuring the front page of the New York Mirror from 4 June 1962 with the screamer '129 Die in Jet!', Warhol's fascination with death, and how it was reported in the media, grew to epic proportions. Death was even his spur to create his citrus-haired Marilyns and urbane Jackie O portraits – he first used Marilyn Monroe's image just days after she had died from an overdose of sleeping pills, and his images of Jackie O came from the paparazzi shots of her at JFK's funeral.

Warhol's obsession with reported death evolved in his Disaster series, from the electric chairs taken from the press photographs he avidly collected to car crashes and suicides lifted from the newspapers. He took images of everyday people in extraordinary circumstances that had been fed to the general public by the press: an ambulance that had crashed, a woman who had jumped off a building, or a man impaled on a telegraph pole all became the subject of his art. He laconically commented on the sensationalism of death in the media – that it made good news, and therefore sold papers and boosted ratings.

Warhol's exploration of media 'disasters' has proved a rich legacy for film, from Terrence Malick's 1973 classic Badlands, where Sissy Spacek relates the homicidal events of the film by reading extracts from the media magazines she's addicted to, to Oliver Stone's Natural Born Killers of 1994, where the young couple go on a killing spree accompanied by a TV chat-show host who reports on their 'antics' and turns them into something akin to folk heroes. Films like these are now broadcast on TV, intercut with the News and adjacent to current affairs coverage, so the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality becomes complete.

But more recently, certain artists have chosen to bypass second-hand press images of the kind favoured by Warhol. Death may be more palatable, or somehow less real, once it has been through a few filters, but artists such as Arnold Odermatt, Lucinda Devlin and Andres Serrano have removed the media blinkers that control what we see and how we see it, and are returning to the scene of the crime, this time alone.

Arnold Odermatt's black-and-white photographs were taken during his career as a police photographer in Switzerland. Many were taken in the 1960s, at the same time as Warhol was using press photographs of car crashes for his work. It has only been comparatively recently that Odermatt's gentle images have been presented as art, most notably at last year's Venice Biennale. Gentle is not a word you would normally associate with images of fatal car-crashes, which were often the subject of Odermatt's working lens. But the crumpled cars lying upside down on snowy roads or half-submerged in lakes were often photographed some time after the accident had occurred – the lake unrippled, or the snow covering the scars of the crash. In Buochs (1965) a badly dented VW beetle lies abandoned in the shallows of a mountain lake. In one version, a swan glides behind it, the clouds play around the mountain-tops, and a silhouetted man stands with his back to the scene, fishing rod in hand. The event is over, and the day goes on. It appears far too calm for Warhol to have contemplated using it as source material, but in many ways it shares common ground with Warhol's Green Burning Car I from 1963. Warhol chose an image that shows a pedestrian strolling by a burning car, taking a cursory look at the spectacle of the car crash and the driver impaled half-way up a telegraph pole. It is the normality of the man walking by – and the man fishing in Odermatt's photograph – that brings you up short. The difference between these two scenes is that Warhol initially experienced the image he later used via a newspaper like everybody else, whereas Odermatt was the official witness who confronted the reality of the fatal car accident himself. Warhol went for the sensational image of the moment; Odermatt recorded the scene with timeless melancholy – every new day would bring a new death for him.

Lucinda Devlin's Omega Suites, completed over the course of the 1990s, depict the end of the line for certain convicted criminals: they are portraits of the hardware used for licensed killing in America. Although taken in twenty states, the windowless, featureless, clinical spaces could be anywhere – they could all exist in one building; they could not exist at all. The central feature, the electric chair or the injection table, is isolated in the room. There are no people present, but the lights are on, so the scene is set. There is no sense of the looming, physical presence of the chair as seen in Warhol's series.

These are blank canvases, devoid of Devlin's emotions – does she believe in the death penalty or not? – so as to leave them open for your own.

Images in the press distance us from the reality of an event in a way that these images don't, or won't. Here, with the absence of a body in the chair, or on the table, you are sucked into the scene, to stand on the smooth white linoleum, squint under the cold strip lights, face the two-way mirror. Perhaps you imagine you are behind the mirror, looking into the execution chamber, seeing but not being seen. But the lack of a body, a known criminal in the chair, is intimidating. It could be anyone who is condemned to die next. Who will they call? What have they done?

In Warhol's Orange Car Crash 14 Times, or Suicide (Purple Jumping Man), both 1963, the victims are present. We can't see who they are, but we know they are not us. Even in Warhol's Electric Chair series, the empty chair has a physiognomic presence of its own, with the heavy black ink of the screenprint giving it its own spectral presence. The reality of the chair and its use is distanced by Warhol's process of reproducing it. Devlin has chosen to avoid any such distortion of her subject matter. Her images are matter-of-fact rather than dramatic – the injecting table seen from the side, with its white cover blending in to the wall behind, the electric chair small and unassuming, and the light even and balanced giving the air-conditioning duct or the clock as much attention as the chair or bed.

Taken over time, using a classic Hasselblad camera and long exposures, it is as if the timelessness of Odermatt's crash scenes has come indoors. Every Devlin photograph is different, yet somehow every one means the same thing. Warhol said when things are exactly the same, their meaning evaporates; 'when you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect'. But these one-liners don't wash here. Devlin's repeated images of electric chairs and gas chambers choke you with feeling – their emptiness becomes a vehicle for your emotions, and the more examples you see, the worse it gets.

In Roland Barthes' key text on photography, Camera Lucida (1980), he talks about certain elements in photographs pulling you into their sphere. He calls it the punctum, 'the element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me'. In Warhol's first Electric Chair paintings of 1963 the occasional detail was left in, such as the sign SILENCE in Double Silver Disaster which is nailed to the top of the door to the right of the chair. Devlin seems to carefully construct her blank, neutral tableaux with incidental features – a prominent air-conditioning grill, a wall-clock – which are used to draw you in. The clock in Electric Chair, Greensville Correctional Facility, Jarratt, Virginia, 1991 is set at 12.10. You find yourself wondering if that is am or pm, what time the execution begins, and why would you need a clock behind the electric chair anyway? Warhol soon avoided any extraneous details, yet Devlin seems to enjoy the relationships between things, using them to activate the viewer. Here, she uses the sanitised reality of contemporary death chambers to create something horrific in our own minds. No bloody characters are provided – your imagination is left to fill in the blank spaces of what is about to happen, or just has. This neutrality, the bland atmosphere of licensed killing, is the home of the modern day grim reaper, who scrubs up and wields a clipboard and chemistry degree instead of a scythe.

In 1992, Andres Serrano finally obtained permission to take photographs in one of New York City's morgues. Over the course of a few months, he completed a series of works which bring you face to face with death. Only one image in the series is of a bona fide Jane Doe, a nameless corpse who died at the hands of the police. Her face is mottled brown and pink as if from burning, and a sticky red patch on her left temple points to how she died. It is the only image to give the face in full profile (a condition of Serrano taking photographs in the morgue was that identities could not be revealed). So an oldish man with a hooked nose who died from infectious pneumonia (so the title tells us) has his upper face hidden under a blood-red velvet cloth; a man who died from rat poisoning can only be seen from his instep, across which is a bloody wound with more than a passing resemblance to the stigmata. These images hit hard; faces purple and swollen from drowning, people hacked to death. A selection from the series was recently presented at London's Victoria and Albert Museum as part of Give and Take. They were hung next to sculptures of gored knights and headless dragons, martyred saints and weeping Madonnas. (The rat poison photograph was positioned behind a small Christ on a cross.) Their contemporary medieval audiences would have been used to seeing death – it was very much part of daily life. But for us, whose view of death is as sanitised as Devlin's Omega Suites, and who talk of people 'laid to rest' rather than dead, the reality is hard to stomach. But as with much of Serrano's work, the sheer beauty of the image, the rich saturated reds of the scarves (and the blood), the thick black backgrounds like velvet curtains, seduce the senses. And the corpses' lack of identity is intriguing – who were they? What did they do? Why did they die? As with Devlin's photographs, they invite curiosity, despite your initial repulsion.

Serrano's Morgue photographs are not the sensationalised tabloid photographs of car accidents and riots that Warhol was so fascinated by. But they are not straight documentary shots either. As with Devlin, who carefully balances the geometric rigour of the execution chambers within the frame of her camera, Serrano may be right at the scene of death, yet he reports on it through living eyes. The image doesn't have to be gory anymore – the very fact that Serrano went face to face with the dead and Devlin paced around electric chairs and injecting tables is enough for our squeamish constitutions. And as with Odermatt's calm scenes of deadly incidents, their power lies in this serenity.

These three artists have all spent time documenting reality for public consumption – Odermatt as an integral part of his job for the Swiss police, Devlin before she started to show her work in 1995 at the age of 48, Serrano during his time at an advertising agency. Serrano recently took photos for the New York Times who called him up on the morning of September 11 to ask him to photograph events of the day (failing to get past security barriers in downtown Manhattan, he took photographs of Arabs praying in a mosque). Yet while they have all worked in line with the media, their art continues to critique the media's ongoing sensationalisation of life and death events by going beyond the familiar 'disaster' shots and staring death itself in the eye.

Charlotte Mullins is a freelance art critic Lucinda devlin, The Omega suites #8: Electric chair, Greensville Correctional Facility, Jarratt, Virginia, 1991, c-print photograph. Courtesy: Paul Rogers Gallery/9W, New York
Andres Serrano, The Morgue (Jane Doe killed by police), 1992, c-print photograph. Courtesy: Barbican Art Gallery, London

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- SALLY MANN

N.N., 'Sally Mann Biographie' [1], in: Art:21 [biografie], 2005, geraadpleegd op 15.02.2007, op de Art:21 website, op http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/mann/index.html.

Biography
Sally Mann was born in 1951 in Lexington, Virginia, where she continues to live and work. She received a BA from Hollins College in 1974, and an MA in writing from the same school in 1975. Her early series of photographs of her three children and husband resulted in a series called "Immediate Family. In her recent series of landscapes of Alabama, Mississippi, Virginia, and Georgia, Mann has stated that she "wanted to go right into the heart of the deep dark South." Using damaged lenses and a camera that requires the artist to use her hand as a shutter, these photographs are marked by the scratches, light leaks, and shifts in focus that were part of the photographic process as it developed during the 19th century. Mann has won numerous awards, including Guggenheim and National Endowment for the Arts fellowships. Her books of photographs include "Immediate Family," "At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women;" and "Mother Land: Recent Landscapes of Georgia and Virginia." Her photographs are in the permanent collections of many museums, including The Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C.

"Deep South," 1998
ART ESSAY | PHOTOGRAPHY

"Mother Land," 1996
ART ESSAY | PHOTOGRAPHY

Dog Bone Photographs
INTERVIEW

Collodion Process
INTERVIEW

N.N., 'Dog bone photos' [11], in: Art:21 [interview], 2005, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Art:21 website, op http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/mann/clip3.html.

Dog Bone photos

ART:21: Could you talk about the dog bone prints?

MANN: If I could be said to have any kind of aesthetic, it's sort of a magpie aesthetic—I just go and I pick up whatever is around. If you think about it, the children were there, so I took pictures of my

children. It's not that I'm interested in children that much or photographing them—it's just that they were there, and it's the same with dog bones. I just had dozens of dog bones all over my living room floor, so I photographed them. In fact, I was sort of looking at those dowels over there and thinking, "You know, I bet I could make a good picture out of that pile of dowels."

It's just this sort of little magpie thing—that something will catch my eye and I'll go for it. They don't have any real meaning; it's just that they have an allure somehow. The texture and all that stuff that catches your eye, I guess. That leads us into a segue for something we probably don't need to get into now, but there's something about the way I approach photography which is very spontaneous. I mean, I see a dog bone, I bring it in, I take a picture, I like the picture, I'll show you the first picture I took. I thought "Hey, that's a pretty good picture." So then I go collect all the other dog bones and I bring them in and I take a few more pictures and then I put them on the wall. And then, before long, the gallery says, "Well, let's do a show of dog bones." So we do a show of dog bones, and then some cynical postmodern critic will come along and say, "Oh my god, look at the show of dog bones; what do you suppose it means?" And it means that I want to see what dog bones look like photographed.

The same thing happened with the pictures of the children: they were just photographs of my children doing what children do, and they got layered with all of this, often absurd, psychological stuff. You know, these sort of guys sitting around in Yale stroking their beards with their little leather coated jackets saying, "Well, it must mean this..." It means that I was a mother taking pictures of my children. Anyway, I'm just taking pictures of dog bones.

ART:21: Can you talk about the use of ordinary objects in the history of photography?

MANN: I keep thinking of Irving Penn and those cigarette butts he did. They're enough like those pictures that I'm a little daunted in this pursuit. When they go up on the wall, I can see all those critics saying "Oh yes, but Irving Penn did this fifteen years ago. Why is she even bothering?"

ART:21: Is there anyone else who has specifically influenced this series of photographs?

MANN: I look at a lot of people's work. I mean, I'm a shameless borrower. But in this case, it happened so spontaneously that I didn't actually say "Oh, maybe I'll take a picture just like that Irving Penn I remember being so good." These dog bones are just making art the way art should be made, I think, without any overarching reference. Just for fun, if you can imagine that. Art for fun. Sometimes it is fun.

ART:21: What do these dog bone prints remind you of?

MANN: Actually, what I like about these dog bones is their ambiguity, because you can't tell what size they are. First of all, you don't know what they are. And second of all, they almost look like big massive carved stones. You know, if it doesn't have ambiguity, don't bother to take it. I love that, that aspect of photography—the mendacity of photography—it's got to have some kind of peculiarity in it or it's not interesting to me. I have to admit, the dog bones in the pictures look so massive—they look like Stonehenge or something sitting there—so it takes you a while to figure out what they are, or maybe you don't figure it out. I guess unless you come in here, you don't. So maybe they'll think I'm photographing Brancusi sculptures.

ART:21: Is there anything else about your photographic process that you would like to add?

MANN: You mean the moment that's just enough time to make your quick prayer? There is something about this process, and about the whole 8 by 10 business, that takes it out of the arena of the snapshot, even though, of course, I'm always desperate for that feeling. I wanted those family pictures to look effortless. I wanted them to look like snapshots. And some of them did. My most successful pictures—I can show you which ones—I think work the best are the ones that just look like they were taken with a 35 millimeter, but it's a process and there's a reverence that goes along with it—that you have to pay your dues to the photo gods, I guess. But there is a kind of reverence that goes along with doing this process. Of course it has all that vestigial stuff that goes with it. I mean, you can't do this without thinking "Oh, Carlton Watkins and all those men in their wagon trains pulled by mules out there in the blistering heat with no running water." Maybe the gods that you're paying reverence to are those. The ones that preceded you, because it's an extraordinarily difficult process in the field.

N.N., 'Collodion process' [13], in: Art:21 [interview], 2005, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Art:21 website, op http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/mann/clip2.html.

Collodion Process
ART:21: Could you take us through some of the steps of your photographic process, especially the collodion process?

MANN: I learned this process from Mark and France Osterman who are masters. They showed me how to do it correctly, but it's just that I never am quite able to. I'm sure they'll be dismayed if they ever see this film. I went to their house and they walked me through all the steps, and it's complicated. For starters, It's hard to get these chemicals. Collodion, ether...they're all controlled...of course grain alcohol you can get, but you can't get it in Virginia. And the camera—you have to have a separate piece for the camera made to put the plate in. But once I made up my mind to do it, of course I pursued it with comical tenacity and got all this stuff pulled together and learned how to do it. It's not uncomplicated, and it's sort of a cranky process. It doesn't allow for much sloppy technique.

For instance, the glass has to be absolutely perfect glass, can't be just glass you buy at the hardware store. Oh no, it has to be framing glass, it has to be perfectly clear glass, and you have to wash it very carefully. You're not supposed to wash it with this (Windex). You're supposed to wash it with a special glass wax, and all the chemicals have to be fresh and the water distilled and so forth. Anyway, to coat the plate: Let's just say this is the glass. You have to pour the collodion coating, which is collodion and ether mixed together, in one very quick motion. It has to cover evenly, and you have to get it off as fast as you can, otherwise you have streaks. Then you take the plate to the silver nitrate, and for reasons that escape me completely, the silver nitrate sticks to the collodion and ether, and coats it, and at that point, it's light sensitive. It takes about five minutes, then you put it in the special back for the camera and carry it dripping to the camera, and you have, at that point, no more than two or three minutes to get the picture before it dries. It dries quickly because the ether and the collodion evaporate. The developer is a mixture of grain alcohol and ferrous sulfate and the developing is just a repeat of the coating. You basically pour it over the plate. And then you fix it in plain sodium thiosulphate. You can also fix it in, oddly enough, cyanide, but there have been wet plate related deaths, due to people drinking their cyanide instead of their grain alcohol.

One of the appropriate metaphoric things in this whole process is that I found out from a doctor that collodion was used in surgery during the Civil War to bind wounds, and I thought "Oh, how fitting that I should be taking this process to the deep South."

ART:21: What triggered the desire to use glass plate negatives?

MANN: I guess because I was so immersed in that whole glass plate, 19th Century aesthetic, it was natural to want to learn how to do this. Back in the early '70s, when we came back from Europe, Larry and I were poking around up in the attic of this five story building on the W&L campus and we found this collection of glass negatives that had been taken around Lexington right after the Civil War by a local photographer. In fact, he photographed at the cabin right here on the farm. It was an amazing moment when I held up a glass plate and damn, it was a picture of the same cliffs that I've looked at my whole life, exactly as they are now, even the little vines hanging down. Those same vines are still there, and these ancient arborvitae trees which obviously had fallen over 100 years ago—there they were in the glass plate.

It was a moving thing to see these images and be able to retrace his steps to a certain extent. He photographed the landscape around here beautifully, and of course it's the aesthetic I'm most partial to. I love those J.B. Greene pictures and Gustav LeGray and Atget. I'm surprised it took me this long to get to this process, because I've always admired that aesthetic and find it redolent with past. I just need to inject a little of the present in it. Obviously I don't want to take the same pictures he took.

ART:21: How much time did it take you to master the technique?

MANN: I never mastered it.

ART:21: How much practice then?

MANN: You know, I'm just anal enough—you wouldn't know it to look at my Hogarthian clutter around here—but I'm just anal enough to find this process satisfying. I can concentrate with gimlet intensity for short periods of time and pouring the plate is about right for me. I can get the plate coated which is the important part. And that's the part that you just can't mess up. And the rest of it didn't take long at all. It's just like making every other photograph really, if you think about it.

ART:21: Could you talk about the equipment you use and why?

MANN: Well, you know I told you that none of my equipment has ever been any good, I certainly could go out and buy a good, tack-sharp lens that would take the perfect picture that's in focus from end to end. But instead, I spend an awful lot of time at that antique mall looking around for these lenses with just the right amount of decrepitude. The glue has to be peeling off of the lens elements, it's great if its mildewed and out of whack—a lens is made up of several different pieces of glass which are supposed to stay glued in the right relationship with each other—but my most prized lens has one of the pieces of glass askew, so when the light comes in it it's refulgent. It just bounces all around and does this great sort of luminescent thing on the glass. You can tell a good ruined lens right from the get-go....they are the ones you find in the trash cans of old photo studios, in some ghost town in Iowa. I mean, that's the kind of lens I'm looking for.

N.N., 'Mother Land' [2], in: Art:21 [essay], 2005, geraadpleegd op 18.06.2007, op de Art:21 website, op http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/mann/card2.html.

Mother Land series

Outfitting her large-format 8 x 10 camera with undersized and often damaged lenses, Sally Mann's contemporary landscape photographs admit the light leaks and imperfections of the photographic process. Occasionally, a distortion becomes the central element in a work. These blotches or scratches seem to erupt out of the atmosphere, obliterating the horizon and local vegetation. A cloudy mist hovering over the land is often a part of Mann's photographic process. While the pictures of Virginia are dark and lush, saturated with a romanticism that is the cornerstone of Southern literature, the images of Georgia tend to be barren and overexposed. These pale, nearly white images of an abandoned wall or a fallen tree often evoke a sense of loss. This feeling is accentuated by the artist's treatment of the image, washing out the contrast between light and dark, and using a soft focus that diminishes detail. Like a hazy memory, the viewer is left struggling with his or her own means of perception, filling in the narrative and visual gaps with imagined scenarios.

Sally Mann is an artist deeply in love with the South. Turning to images of trees, fields, and local ruins after many years of making her own children and family the subject of her work, Mann has brought into focus the landscape that formed the backdrop for the "Immediate Family" series. Steeped in nostalgia, the "Mother Land" photographs of Georgia and the artist's native Virginia seem to emerge out of a different time. Reminiscent of images taken in the 19th century, the style of Mann's recent work has been influenced by a cache of 10,000 glass negatives that she found in the attic of the University of Lexington in 1972. Taken by a returning Civil War veteran, Mann discovered that many of the images were familiar views of the rivers and cliffs that surround her home. Whereas the post-Civil War images are over a century old and evoke places in the present, Mann's "Mother Land" images, taken in 1996, seem to recall places from a forgotten past.

N.N., 'Deep South' [2], in: Art:21 [essay], 2005, geraadpleegd op 18.06.2007, op de Art:21 website, op http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/mann/card1.html.

"Deep South" series

At times gothic in their sensibility, Mann's murky, dark images of Louisiana and Mississippi have an anthropomorphic quality. One image of a forest floor focuses on a group of gnarled roots writhing in a sea of mist. Mann's technique enhances this hazy view, turning this ordinary plot of land into something magical and foreboding. Other images focus upwards, capturing the last remaining columns of a plantation home. These abandoned monoliths seem as ancient as the trees that surround them, less the product of human hands than of the land itself. An image of a tree in Woodville, Mississippi becomes a striking symbol of the condition of the South. Cutting deep into its trunk, a massive scar becomes the focal point of an otherwise idyllic image; and yet the tree continues to thrive, just as the South itself. "These pictures are about the rivers of blood, of tears, of sweat that Africans poured into the dark soil of their thankless new home," writes Mann, remarking on the difference in tone between the "Deep South" and "Mother Land" images. Pregnant with unseen histories and the anonymous footsteps of millions, Mann's tea-stained, antique-looking images depict a landscape of the present in the throes of the past.

To produce the "Deep South" series, Sally Mann traveled alone to the neighboring states of Mississippi and Louisiana. Bordering on the Mississippi River, each state is rich with its own history and mythology, extending from the legacy of slavery to the Confederacy to the more recent Civil Rights era. While the photographs of the Virginia landscape in "Mother Land" were charged by Mann's love and

romantic eye for her native landscape, the "Deep South" images are no less intimate, despite the fact that this was the artist's first trip to Mississippi. With activist parents and a brother who was arrested during the Civil Rights demonstrations, Mann's images are informed by what is most absent in the images: people. A striking example is a photograph of the Tallahatchie River in Mississippi. Low to the ground and seemingly anonymous in its rustic beauty, this ordinarily beautiful spot on the bank is also the place where the body of a 14-year-old black boy named Emmett Till was found - kidnapped and killed by a group of whites in 1955. Mann's camera makes a monument out of the river's silent edge. Dedicating this work to the memory of young murdered boy, Mann's other photos in the series have a similar historical charge. "We must understand that the Mississippi River was a huge swamp, and now the Delta is completely dry and one of America's most productive areas, cleared by millions of sweating humans," remarks Mann. Aware of the ghosts that populate this area, Mann's photographs speak to humanity's enduring, troubled existence within the landscape.

BROOKMAN P. (curator),'Sally Mann: What Remains' [4], 2004, geraadpleegd op 15.02.2007, op de Corcoran Gallery of Art website, op http://www.corcoran.org/exhibitions/previous_results.asp?Exhib_ID=83.

Sally Mann:
What Remains
6/12/2004 to 9/6/2004 :: press

Sally Mann: What Remains presents this celebrated photographer's most recent body of work, a five-part series that explores the ineffable divide between body and soul, life and death, earth and spirit. The project is organized into five sections that visually depict the eternal cycle of life, death, and regeneration. What Remains draws upon the artist's personal experiences as inspiration for a haunting series about the one subject that affects us all: the loss of life and what remains.

The Corcoran Gallery of Art has had a long relationship with Sally Mann. The Lewis Law Portfolio, her first museum exhibition, premiered here in 1977. Born in Lexington, Virginia in 1951, Mann is perhaps best known for Immediate Family, her photographic series and book that features artful and intimate photographs of her husband and three children in everyday moments. These evoke a mother's inquisitive gaze at her own family within a dreamlike rural environment. Immediate Family helped redefine how we think about the complex relationships between a photographer and her subject. Her other major projects include Second Sight, At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women, and Mother Land: Recent Landscapes of Georgia and Virginia.

Mann's work is produced in series that often unfold in poetic sequences of pictures. She combines sophisticated historical and aesthetic sensibilities with a highly personal, philosophical look at real life in the American South. Some of her photographs are fictional and some quite real, but they all connect her memories of a bucolic childhood growing up on her father's Shenandoah farm to an innate, emotional feeling for the landscape.

Never one to shy away from challenging subject matter, Mann asks us in What Remains to contemplate the beauty and efficiency with which nature assimilates the body once life is over. Here she seamlessly connects the landscape of the earth to the topography of the body and examines how both are tightly interwoven. Yet she creates tension between the two. As the exhibition progresses, portrait faces of her children emerge from the darkness of the alchemical photographic process, surrounded by murky images of the landscape, as if struggling to become free of the earth that inevitably reclaims the body.

N.N., 'Wall text Sally Mann' [16], 2004, geraadpleegd op 15.02.2007, op de Corcoran Gallery of Art website, op http://www.corcoran.org/exhibitions/PDFs/Mann/Mann_Wall_text.pdf.

Sally Mann: What Remains WALL TEXT

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--
Matter Lent
Created with an antique 8x10-inch view camera, using the wet-plate collodion process, these images document the decomposition of the of Mann's beloved pet greyhound Eva in a manner that is at once painterly, sculptural, and photographic. When Eva died, Mann buried her body in the woods. She returned the following year and disinterred the remains. Her photographs of Eva's bones and fur are at once anthropological and abstract, sometimes evoking astronomical views of galaxies and stars, sometimes resembling pictorial records from an archeological dig.
Introduced in 1851, the wet-plate collodion process is a method of making photographic negatives on a glass plate coated with light-sensitive chemicals. The plate is coated with a silver nitrate solution, loaded in a plate holder into the camera, and exposed while still wet and sticky. The photographer has only about five minutes to make the picture before the solution dries. A number of these photographs are presented in the exhibition as ambrotypes. To produce these, Mann backed her original collodion negatives with ruby glass, creating modern versions of this traditional photographic process popular in the 1860s. When the negatives are backed with this dark, translucent material, the image is reversed and can be viewed as a rich, warm-toned positive photograph.
--
Untitled
Incorporating the most visually graphic photographs in the exhibition, this section includes images taken at the University of Tennessee Forensic Anthropology Facility, a study site where scientists, students, doctors, and law enforcement officers research the decomposition of human remains. In these varnished gelatin silver prints made from her original glass plate negatives, Mann does not avert her eyes from the reality of decay. Speaking about these images, Mann says, "there's a moment where you look at a body and say, 'that was a human being.' That was someone who was loved, cherished, caressed. That's a very tough one for me, the whole question of when a human becomes remains. That question came up over and over again while I was doing this work."
--
December 8, 2000
Because of a big bend in the river, our farm has water on three sides, a classic stronghold. This fact, coupled with the long views from our house, explains why at first we had no locks on the doors.
When the sheriff called to suggest locking up against an escaped prisoner, I was briefly amused by the impossibility of this, then paralyzed by bogey-man-under-the-bed fear. The fear was appropriate: the prisoner, a felon with sex offenses on his record, had escaped custody with two pistols and a shotgun. When he reached the river below our house he swam it, forcing his pursuers to backtrack by car to the nearest bridge. I was alone on the farm except for this wet, unhappy man with the guns.
He must have ditched the shotgun because by the time he approached the house he only had the pistols. Ducking behind a tree, he put one of them to his head. His shot was tinnily distinguishable from the rifle shots of the police who had appeared at the last moment. He fell among the stumps and bracken, just a kid after all, my son's age, bled out in the milky winter light.
When it was over and the trucks and cars and helicopters had cleared out, I walked over to the place where he died. The underbrush was matted down, there were patches of blue and orange spray paint marking coordinates of some kind, yellow crime tape hung on the wild rose, and there at the base of a hickory tree was a glistening pool of dark blood. I was tempted to touch its perfectly tensioned surface. Instead, as I stared, it shrank perceptibly, forming a brief meniscus before leveling off again, as if the earth had taken a delicate sip.
Death has left for me its imperishable mark on an ordinary copse of trees in the front yard. But would a stranger, coming upon it a century hence, sense the sanctity of the death-inflected soil?

--
Antietam
A suicide on her property was the transitional incident from which the photographs in this section unfold. As a witness to life meeting death at her doorstep, she chose to introduce the subject of violence and its historic relationship to the land.
On a single day in September 1862, 23,000 men were killed, wounded, or declared missing on the infamous Civil War battlefield along Antietam Creek in Sharpsburg, Maryland. Mann's large-scale photographs of this now-hallowed landscape, also made using the wet-collodion process, encourage viewers to contemplate the role of photography in documenting history, war, the passing of time, and death's sanctification of the soil. Mann has photographed several Civil War battlefields but Antietam was especially meaningful for this project. Wandering the fields where soldiers lost their lives in record numbers, Mann felt compelled to record the feeling of "…walking among the accretion of millions of remains, walking in effect on the shifting remains of humanity."
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What Remains
More than 60 extreme close-up portraits of Mann's three children form an elegiac and loving coda to the preceding photographs in the exhibition. While the subject matter of this section contrasts sharply with that of the other four, viewers will certainly recall the earlier images when looking at them. As in the previous room, many of these portraits are presented as ambrotypes, with her original glass-plate collodion negatives lying in two long lines on a table, as if floating in a dark sea. With these images, Mann concludes, "Death is best approached as a springboard to appreciate life more fully. That's why this show ends with pictures of living people, pictures of my children. This whole body of work is a process of thanksgiving."
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All things summon us to death;
Nature, almost envious of the good she has given us,
Tells us often and gives us notice that she cannot
For long allow us that scrap of matter she has lent…
She has need of it for other forms,
She claims it back for other works.
Jacques-Bénigne Bousset (1627-1704), "On Death, a Sermon"
--
—when a human body
is drained of its broths and filled
again with formaldehyde and salts,
or unguents and aromatic oils, and pranked
up in its holiday best and laid out
in a satin-lined airtight stainless-steel
coffin and stowed in a leakproof concrete vault—
I will know that if no fellow-creatures
can pry their way in to do the underdigging
and jiggling and earthing over and mating
and egg laying and birthing forth,
then the most that can come to pass
will be a centuries-long withering
down to a gowpen of dead dust, and not ever
the crawling of new life out of the old,
which is what we have for eternity on earth.
Galway Kinnell, "The Quick and the Dead"
--
Pensive on her dead gazing I heard the Mother of All,
Desperate on the torn bodies, on the forms covering the battlefields gazing,
(As the last gun ceased, but the scent of the powder-smoke linger'd,)
As she call'd to her earth with mournful voice while she stalked,
Absorb them well O my earth, she cried, I charge you lose not my sons, lose not an atom,
And you streams absorb them well, taking their dear blood,
And you local spots, and you airs that swim above lightly impalpable,
And all you essences of soil and growth, and you my rivers' depths,
And you mountain sides, and the woods where my dear children's blood trickling redden'd
And you trees down in your roots to bequeath to all future trees,
My dead absorb or South or North—my young men's bodies absorb, and their precious precious blood,
Which holding in trust for me faithfully back again give me many a year hence,
In blowing airs from the fields back again give me my darlings, give my immortal heroes,
Exhale me them centuries hence, breathe me their breath, let not an atom be lost,
O years and graves! O air and soil! O my dead, an aroma sweet!
Exhale them perennial sweet death, years, centuries hence.

Walt Whitman, from Leaves of Grass
--
What thou lovest well remains,
the rest is dross
What thou lovest well shall not be
reft from thee
Ezra Pound, “Canto 81”
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MANN S., ‘What Remains’ [13], in: The Arts/Photography [The Books], laatste update: niet geweten, geraadpleegd op 15.02.2007, op de Hachette Book Group USA website, op http://www.twbookmark.com/books/66/0821228439/chapter_excerpt17573.html.

What Remains by Sally Mann

AT OUR HOLIDAY TABLE, HEADS BENT OVER the warmed Wedgwood, we said a peculiar grace. Our father, who intoned it with an air of not quite credible piety, attributed it to Oscar Wilde, but we were pretty sure he composed it himself. It went like this:

O great Pelican of Eternity
that piercest thy breast for our food
we are thy fledglings who cannot know thy woe.
Bless this shadowy food of substance
whose last eater shall be worm
and feed us rather
on the visionary food
of dreams and grace.

This blessing, like the art all around us, reflected the singular aesthetic of our dad, who jokingly claimed that there were three avenues for artistic expression: Sex, Death, and Whimsy. All were abundantly represented, but it was the middle one, and especially the iconography associated with it, that most interested him all his life. Cajoling my mother from cave to cathedral, lavishing his distinctive longhand on reams of yellow paper, for decades he researched how artists from all cultures have portrayed death.

As a physician, he'd seen his share of it. Among his effects I found this picture that he took of a patient's backyard. On the back is inscribed: "Graves of 4 children in one family who died in one year, Timber Ridge, Va, I94?" Death was normal back then. People died at home. Animals eaten by a family were usually killed on the property. Their culture did not have the buffers that ours does protecting us from death's realities. But, even for the time, he was an uncommonly direct man. Not for him the euphemisms of death—it was a dead body, not "remains," nobody "passed," there was no "eternal rest." People died and that was it.

When the time came for him to do it, he was predictably unalarmed. As a family we tried to follow suit, maintaining our irreverent humor as he lay dying on the couch. But we were stunned into silence when the actual moment of his death occurred, for it was a very clear—forgive this—passing. He did, in fact, give up the ghost. We saw it happen. Within a minute, his color changed to death's own cyanic gray, the muscles of his face slackened, and he sagged into lifelessness.

His death laid me flat for almost a year. Now, many deaths later, I am as perplexed by the experience as ever. Where did all of that him-ness go? All that knowledge, the accretion of experiences from a remarkable life, the suffering—his and others'—he had borne, the beauty, life's own rapturous visions? It was, as the song says, as if a library burned to the ground.

I am not susceptible to the supernatural, but, still, look at this photograph of us with his ashes: What the hell is that spirit crow alighting my brother's foot?? Crows held a special place in my father's heart, and he insisted with impish anticipation that he would be reincarnated as one. So, really, what's with the white crow??

Our kids chalk lip my "death thing" to genetics, blaming it, along with other things I do, on my father. They note the seeming contradiction: I appear to be at once inured and vulnerable. For example, I wept noisily over the Valentine's Day death of my greyhound Eva, unable to look at her body lying frozen on a plank in the barn. And yet I was still curious about what would finally become of that head I had stroked, oh, ten thousand times, those paws she so delicately crossed as she lay by my desk, rock-hard nails emerging from the finest white hairs.

Was it ghoulish to want to know? Was it maudlin to want to keep her, at least some part of her? Was it disrespcectful to watch her intimate decomposition? I put these questions aside, picked tip the phone, and called a friend who, bless his heart, didn't bat an eye at what I was asking him to do.
* * *
When the land subsumes the dead, they become the rich body of earth, the dark matter of creation. As I walk the fields of this farm, beneath my feet shift the bones of incalculable bodies; death is the sculptor of the ravishing landscape, the terrible mother, the damp creator of life, by whom we are one day devoured.

She devoured Eva in much less time than I expected. I undid the metal cage in which I had buried her and found what looked like a stick drawing of a sleeping dog: her bones, punctuated by tufts of indigestible hair and small cubes of adipocere, appeared like a constellation in a rich black sky. After bagging the larger bones, I reverently picked out the tiny pieces that remained—tail bones, teeth, and claws, brushing the fragrant humus as an archaeologist might. Back on the floor in the studio I reassembled her, head to tail; bone by bone.

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MAHDESIAN L., 'Bell Gallery to present Still Time: Sally Mann photography exhibition' [7], in: The Brown University News Bureau [aankondiging], 20.12.1996, geraadpleegd op 18.06.2007, op de The Brown University News Bureau website, op http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/1996-97/96-057.html.

Bell Gallery to present Still Time: Sally Mann photography exhibition

Still Time: Sally Mann, a retrospective exhibition of 60 photographs taken over 25 years, will be presented by the David Winton Bell Gallery of Brown University, from Feb. 1 to March 9, 1997.

PROVIDENCE, R.I. -- The David Winton Bell Gallery will present Still Time: Sally Mann, a retrospective exhibition of photographs by American artist Sally Mann, from Feb. 1 to March 9, 1997. The artist will discuss her work on Monday, March 3, at 5:30 p.m., in the List Art Center Auditorium, 64 College St., in Providence.

Still Time features 60 photographs from several series ranging from 1971 to 1996. Included are Mann's powerful and well-known series At Twelve and Immediate Family and lesser-known landscapes, still lifes and portraits, many of which are executed in platinum, Cibachrome or Polaroid. The exhibition ends with large-scale landscapes that currently occupy the photographer's time. A catalogue printed by Stinehour Press and published by Aperture accompanies the show.

At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women is a revealing collective portrait of girls on the verge of adulthood. Like all of Mann's work the series was photographed in Rockbridge County, Virginia, (near Lexington) where she grew up and where she intends always to live. A sense of place pervades Mann's images. She describes the area as one of "rare serenity and innocence" and continues, "the same conservatism that has so gracefully preserved this land in a near time-warp has also, to a certain extent, retarded our awareness of the outside world." In this close-knit community, where Mann's father was the respected local doctor, the artist is accorded a level of trust which may seem unusual to some. With the cooperation of these young girls and their families, she portrays the dichotomies of this precarious age, the sweetness and the impending realities - the only girl on a boy's softball team, a young girl in her first formal dress, a girl pictured with her mother's boyfriend (who Mann later learned was molesting her).

Of equal intensity are the works that are united in Immediate Family. Begun in 1984 (one year after At Twelve), the series documents the growth of Mann's children over more than 10 years. Emmett, Jessie and Virginia, who have become familiar figures to thousands of viewers who they will never meet, are growing up in much the same way as their mother did. In her compelling introduction to Immediate Family, Mann discusses the constancy of her birthplace and her history - the women for whom her daughters are named and her eccentric father who decorated the gardens with carvings of tree gods.

Still Time allows for a rare insight into the development of Mann's art both before and after these momentous series. Sally Mann's career in photography began in 1969 when she took her first shots while at Vermont Putney School. She studied with Norman Sieff at Bennington College and received her B.A. and M.A. from Hollins College in her native Virginia. From this time on, Mann's pictures take on a diaristic quality, reflecting stages of her life as an artist and mother. The earliest works in the exhibition are part of her first series, Dream Sequence (1971). A thoughtful examination of the female psyche, these prints introduce the viewer to the complex world of relationships between women and

girls, a subject that Mann would pursue in later works. The lushness of the Shenandoah Valley is portrayed in early landscapes dating from 1972 to 1974. The last of these images were taken with a hundred-year-old 8 x 10 camera that was given to Mann by a friend. The 8 x 10 would become Mann's camera of choice. These early landscapes show the distinctive vignetting that results from using a lens which does not completely cover the film plane.

Widely renowned, Sally Mann is the recipient of numerous grants and fellowships including three National Endowment for the Arts grants, two National Endowment for the Humanities grants and a Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, among others. Her work is part of the collections of such prominent museums as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

CLARKE O. Jr., 'Sally Mann' [7], in: Art Scene [article], datum ongekend, geraadpleegd op 18.06.2007, op de Art Scene website, op http://artscenecal.com/ArticlesFile/Archive/Articles1997/Articles0997/SMannA.html.

SALLY MANN

(Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills) Sally Mann has become a familiar name to anyone who follows contemporary photography. Her most familiar, and controversial, imagery focused on the lives of her three children. These were tales of innocence, or of innocence about to be shattered by the intrusion of the adult world with its lies, violence, and a thousand other sins. They are powerful works evocative of age, so pure and because of their purity, so vulnerable. It is the tragedy of growing up.

Those of you expecting more of the same are in for a big surprise, but an even bigger treat. Mann exhibits a selection of 15 prints from her new series "Mother Land: Recent Georgia and Virginia Landscapes". All are large format photographs (30 x 40" and 38 x 48") printed by the artist, with frames designed by her also. Now we find her turning the camera to the land from which much of her early inspiration came.

More important is the feel of these images. The artist has attempted to capture the spirit of Pictorialsim, which dominated photography from the 1890's to the end of the 1930's. This style, which attempted to imitate painting, particularly that of Tonalists such as James McNeil Whistler, is known for its dramatic effects achieved through the use of special lenses and bold manipulation in the darkroom. The images are dominated by a fuzzy, dark, moody and atmospheric quality.

Considering Mann's love of collecting old lenses it is not surprising that she should turn to an old genre to explore a familiar theme--our loss of innocence. The unsoiled image of the land recalls the pristine work of early photographic pioneers Carleton Watkins and Timothy O'Sullivan, who captured the beauty of the Old West. Instead of focusing on young children to remind us of what we have lost, the land now symbolically stands for the various stages of humankind. This wonderful Victorian sensibility fits in nicely with her previous work, which always had a subtle 19th-Century quality.

Mann is entering into a dramatic dialogue with the history of her medium, not only evident in the use of Pictorialist style, but for the sense of chance that she allows to enter into the picture-making process. Her use of these antique, and often less than perfect, lenses give her unexpected results. This is the opposite of the extreme control exerted by her predecessors. Furthermore, she does not "correct" the images in the darkroom, simply printing whatever she is given. It is the disparate combination of factors that make the work so powerful. They have an archaic feel, while retaining critical elements of modernism.

The large scale further enforces this feeling of antique prints created in an artesian environment. They function as haunting evocations of a gentler age: a hay cart in the field, a wall of split wood rails; a moody lake or an old fort. These highly charged pastoral scenes are inhabited by our imaginations, which quickly fill the scene with possibility.

The unique power possessed by our most gifted artists is the ability to help us see in a new way. Here, Mann reinvestigates the land of her native South, leaving a series of majestic and unforgettable images which serve as simple mirrors on the complexity of modern life and the responsibility of becoming an adult: the pain of growing up. This is her best work to date, and holds their own with the masters of the medium's past.

N.N., 'Sally Mann' [4], 2006, geraadpleegd op 18.06.2007, op de Gagosian Gallery website, op http://www.gagosian.com/exhibitions/980-madison-2006-03-sally-mann/.

Gagosian Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of large-format photographs by Sally Mann. Executed between 2000 and 2004, these works consist of images of the faces of her three children Emmett, Jessie, and Virginia. Selected works from her "Battlefields" series are on view as well.

These powerful images of Mann's children are simultaneously painterly and photographic. They are made from wet-plate collodion negatives, produced by coating a sheet of glass with ether-based collodion and submerging it in silver nitrate. The resulting light sensitive plate, loaded into a plate holder and attached to the camera, must be exposed while still wet, a period of approximately 6 minutes. The photographers who originally used this method, which was introduced in 1851, worked to perfect the process and avoid irregularities. Sally Mann, however, embraces these aberrations; she celebrates the peculiar flares, stains and dust trails unique to the collodion process. She describes them as serendipitous, as "perfect flaws" which help create the mystical and poetic quality of the photographs. Perhaps because of the lengthy exposures (as long as 6 minutes and never less than 3), the images possess a transcendent timelessness. It may be this sense of suspended time, as much as genetics, that renders the faces of Mann's children eerily interchangeable. Enigmatic, they seem to be awaiting the viewer's glance to wake from their shadowed stillness and take their next breath.

A true Southern artist, Sally Mann has steeped herself in the history of the South, continually searching to capture the spirit of time and place. As a Southerner she states, "Our history of defeat and loss set us apart from other Americans and because of it, we embrace the Proustian concept that the only true paradise is a lost paradise. But we know that love emerges from this loss, becomes memory and that memory becomes art."

Sally Mann was born in Lexington, Virginia in 1951. She has won numerous awards, including three National Endowment for the Arts fellowships and a Guggenheim fellowship. Her photographs are in the permanent collections of major museums and private collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Whitney Museum of American Art and The Corcoran Museum of Art.

N.N., 'Sally Mann' [1], 2007, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Robert Koch Gallery website, op http://www.kochgallery.com/artists/contemporary/Mann/index.html.

Sally Mann (American, 1951 -)

Taken against the backdrop of her woodland home in Virginia, Sally Mann's black and white photographs of her children portray the universal qualities of dignity, individuality and intimacy. Sally Mann has exhibited and taught nationally. Her work is in collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. She has received numerous awards including N.E.A. grants; N.E.H. grants; and a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship.

- HANNAH WILKE

N.N., 'Hannah Wilke: Intra-Venus, Press Release' [4], 02.12.1993, geraadpleegd op 04.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/exhsolo/exhwil94.html.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 2, 1993
Hannah Wilke INTRA-VENUS
January 8 – February 19, 1994

INTRA-VENUS is Hannah Wilke's last work. She died on January 28, 1993 of complications from Lymphoma. During the later stages of her illness, she collaborated with her husband, Donald Goddard, on a series of photographs documenting the realities of her physical and mental transformation.

Thirteen of these 72" x 48" images are included in the exhibition, as well as related watercolors, sculptural objects, and drawings.

Throughout her career, Hannah Wilke dealt with issues of feminism and femininity. The body, in most instances her own, became her primary subject matter and the springboard for her latex, chewing

gum and ceramic sculptures, numerous performances, and two dimensional works. Her interests encompassed the broader issues of life and death and their effects on the mind and body. She included her family and friends in her works and in particular, her mother, Selma Butter, who also dies of cancer in 1982.

There will be an opening reception on Saturday, January 8 from 5 –7 p.m. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The gallery will be closed for the holidays from December 24 to January 3. For more information contact Susan Yung at (212)226-3232.

SMITH R., 'An Artist's Chronicle Of a Death Foretold' [12], 30.01.1994, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1994/wilke%20in%20ny%20times.html.

The New York Times, January 30, 1994
An Artist's Chronicle Of a Death Foretold

Hannah Wilke spent much of her life posing for the camera in ways that raised eyebrows. In 1954, when she was just 14, she had her picture taken wearing nothing but her mother's mink stole, vamping coyly in front of a wall on which her name was spelled in big letters: Arlene H. Butter.

By the early 1970's, after art school and a failed marriage, Wilke began taking pictures of herself stripped to the waist, her well-shaped torso dotted with little folded shapes of chewing gum that had a none too vague clitoral aspect. (These tiny objects, miniaturized versions of Wilke's sculptures made of fired clay and then latex, were part of her pursuit of a "formal imagery that is specifically female.")

Over the next two decades one became accustomed to seeing photographs of Wilke, usually partly or entirely nude, in magazine articles and books about feminist art or performance art, as well as in her gallery shows and on her exhibition announcements. Good-humored, almost girlishly awkward, these images blended feminism, narcissism and exhibitionism in unsettling ways. They seemed to be little more than the artist's enthusiastic exploitation of her own dark-haired good looks.

Eyebrows may elevate once more over the photographs Wilke made during the two years before her death, from lymphoma, early in 1993. And if they do rise, the heart will probably go with them, right into the throat.

Working with her second husband, Donald Goddard, Wilke left a searing record of her final illness. It consists of nearly a dozen large, brazen-as-ever color self-portraits that dominate her posthumous exhibition at the Ronald Feldman gallery in SoHo (through Feb. 19). In a bit of characteristic Wilke wordplay, the show's title is "Intra-Venus"- the goddess of Love on medicinal drugs. The stark power of these images is nearly physical; it can keep you hesitating at the door, reluctant to step into the gallery.

In them, Wilke's beauty lies in waste, but her spirit is strong, as is her desire to keep on working or living, whichever comes first. As always, her artistic materials are her own life and body; her goal, self-exposure and the concomitant unease it arouses in the viewer. But now she has company- the specter of her own death- which adds a new dimension to her courage and her art.

Are these last Wilke art or documentary? Are they good or just sensational? They tend to push such questions aside brusquely with an unusual combination of honesty and artifice. In them Wilke, shown nude or partly dressed, alternates between ignoring death and staring it in the face, while at the same time refusing to obscure any signs of its approach. As she strikes her poses, sometimes imitating the Old Masters, sometimes her own work, her face and body give a full account of the ravages of disease and treatment.

In many instances her head is bald, her body swollen, her face puffy, her eyes sunken, her skin darkened by chemotherapy. Tubes extend from her chest and arms: bandages, the result of painful bone marrow harvesting, pad her spreading hips. In one image, she mutely sticks out her tongue, so the camera can record how its surface has been split open by chemotherapy. The larger-than-life scale of the images makes the facts of her condition unavoidably palpable. (They virtually eliminate, and therefore underscore, the esthetic distance operating in similar works, like Cindy Sherman's made-for-the-camera grotesqueries or Andres Serrano's morgue pictures).

The photographs are dated and frequently juxtaposed in diptychs that contrast emotional and physical states, usually from bad to worse. In one work, an image of the artist as a smiling Greek caryatid, standing nude with a vase of flowers crowning her thinning hair, is juxtaposed with one taken several

months later. Here she sits immobilized, swollen almost beyond recognition, a white shower cap on her seemingly hairless head, her bare chest more trussed than bandaged. Heavy with sadness, she looks right at the camera as if to say: "Look. See what I'm going through."

In another diptych, Wilke spreads her manicured hands coquettishly across her face in a pose typical of her earlier work, except that now no long dark tresses complete the effect. The second image shows her head and shoulders wrapped in a blue blanket, like the Madonna; her eyes are lowered, her ashen features so still they seem more like sculpture than living flesh.

There is plenty that is unbearable about these images, plenty that makes one want to turn away. Yet something about Wilke's presence is steadying and soothing. "You looked at me then," she seems to say. "Well, look at me now." Her challenge makes us consider once more, the way women are objectified by society and discarded as they become old or ill.

But it also invites us to look at the essence of her art and her self- which was not her beauty, or her liberated sensuality or her narcissism. Rather it was an extraordinary degree of self-love, a simple pride of being that is difficult for anyone, but especially women, to muster. It fueled Wilke's art throughout her life, and in the end it flared into a torch with which she illuminated her farewell performance.

PERCHUK A., 'Hannah Wilke' [5], 04.1994, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op
http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1994/wilke%20in%20artforum.html.

Artforum, April 1994
HANNAH WILKE

"Nowadays us pretty white girls have to watch what we say," Hannah Wilke remarked when I first met her several years ago. The triumph of her final exhibition, and of her entire career, is that she never heeded this advice. "Intra-Venus," 1991-93, is a microcosm of the forms and concerns of Wilke's oeuvre, as well as a document of the last few years of her life during which she underwent treatment for lymphoma.

The images that quite literally dominate the exhibition are the 13 larger-than-life self-portraits, done in collaboration with her husband, Donald Goddard, which depict Wilke at various stages of her illness and treatment. Most often grouped into diptychs or triptychs, these photographs are unsparing and severely test the viewers' endurance. A particularly arresting diptych shows Wilke at an early stage of her treatment with a shirt tied round her head and a bright-red tongue sticking out of equally red lips, with an exaggerated half-laughing/half-screaming expression, alongside an image of her, head titled back to reveal cotton plugs completely closing and distorting her nose, her open mouth holding a tongue that is a mass of blood, loose skin, and pus. Perhaps the most chilling is a single image of Wilke staring directly at the viewer, long wet strips of hair coming down over her head and face, revealing her mostly bald scalp. What separates these photographs from other artists' portrayals of disease and impending death is the seamlessness with which they fit into the body of Wilke's artistic production.

Wilke chose to begin her 1989 retrospective at the University of Missouri with a nude photograph of herself at age four, and one of her first works of art was a self-portrait, again naked, at 14. Wilke used her body in the guise of pinup, Playboy centerfold, and classical goddess. This was part of a complex discourse that refused to deny the pleasure of both narcissism and of being the object of voyeurism, while maintaining control of production and representation. But two sets of earlier work that directly presage the "Intra-Venus" series more obviously reference the harsh social realities that underlie these presentations of herself. In the "S.O.S.- Starification Object Series," 1974-82, Wilke photographed herself with her body covered by her signature folded vaginal shapes made of chewing gum. She referred to herself as the "S.O. (Starification Object)" in recognition of the fragility and the consuming nature of the bubble-gum fascination with beauty and celebrity. The "So Help Me Hannah Series: Portrait of the Artist with Her Mother, Selma Butter," 1978-81, juxtaposes Wilke- bare chested, fully made up, and with a come-hither expression- beside her mother, whose bare chest is marked by a long mastectomy scar and lesions, looking shyly away from the camera. Wilke covers her chest with small metal objects, "scars" she called them, "To wear her wounds, to heal my own."
While the photographs in "Intra-Venus" form the last link in a consistent chain, the drawings and sculptures construct a parallel dialogue with other kinds of artistic production. A box made out of a wire birdcage and plastic medicine bottles and syringes is a witty reference to Marcel Duchamp's Why Not Sneeze Rrose Sélavy?, 1921, while a series of exquisite abstract drawings made from the artist's hair as it fell out from chemotherapy give new meaning to the notion of process. Two matching, lead-

alloy neck blocks (used during radiation treatments) perform a function Wilke had often set for her work: using gesture to turn Minimalism into Abstract Expressionism.

To critics who often denigrated her work for being too narcissistic or exhibitionistic, Wilke had and deserves the last word, "It was risky for me to act beautiful, but the scars representing the ugliness of society sometimes went unnoticed. People often give me this bullshit of, 'What would you have done if you weren't so gorgeous?' What difference does it make?..Gorgeous people die as do the stereotypical 'ugly.' Everybody dies."

DIEHL C., 'Hannah Wilke' [3], 04.1994, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1994/wilke%20in%20artnews.html.

ARTnews, April 1994
HANNAH WILKE

Exposing herself in her art is what Hannah Wilke did in life, and now in death. When she was 14, she had her sister photograph her wearing only high heels and her mother's mink stole. As an adult, she was very beautiful and clearly knew it. In the 1970s, her unclothed body became her medium in photographs and performances that now, in comparison with Karen Finley and Annie Sprinkle, may seem tame but at the time gave Wilke the reputation of a radical feminist. She pioneered the use of feminine imagery and the vulva became her trademark. She made vulvas out of everything - laundry lint, clay, kneaded erasers - and her best-known photographs show her in glamorous poses, with tiny vulvas made of chewing gum stuck all over her face and nude torso. Later she documented her mother's unsuccessful fight with breast cancer (most striking is a double portrait that contrasts a young, glowing Wilke with her aging, mastectomized mother) and finally her own battle with lymphoma, to which she succumbed in January 1993.

Wilke herself planned every detail of this show, including its title, "Intra-Venus." Her sculptures and drawings were represented, along with collages on Arches paper of her hair as it fell out from chemotherapy. But these were overwhelmed by the dozen oversize photographic prints of Wilke herself (taken by her husband, Donald Goddard), an unflinching chronicle of her disease and devastation by chemotherapy and a bone-marrow transplant. We see Wilke bald and bloated, sitting on a portable toilet, and a straight-on shot of her spread legs in a tub. We see her nose stuffed with cotton, her bloody tongue. But we also see her spirit as she assumes a mock-model pose, one hand on hip, the other behind her head, or, wearing only bandages, balancing a vase of flowers on her head.

This is not easy work to take. Seen on its own, it is the simple, painful document of a woman dying from cancer. But in the context of Wilke's art as a whole, it not only becomes more meaningful but also cancels out the narcissism of her earlier work, imbuing it with more purpose than could be seen at the time. "Intra-Venus" is the last piece in the puzzle, the one that makes Wilke's life and art make perfect sense.

VINE R., 'Hannah Wilke at Ronald Feldman' [5], 05.1994, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1994/wilke%20in%20art%20in%20america.html.

Art in America, May 1994
HANNAH WILKE AT RONALD FELDMAN

From the day she first posed nude and wrapped in her mother's mink stole at the age of 14, Hannah Wilke presented endless variations on the theme of the female icon- from male fantasy object to defiant feminist to unabashed narcissist. Throughout the '70s and '80s, she used her stylish and slightly dangerous beauty to suggest- through arresting photographs, sculptures, performances and writings- the subliminal power struggles inherent in "civilized" sexuality. "Intra-Venus," the punning title of her last exhibition, seemed to promise more of the same: the 52-year-old love goddess in treatment, healing herself. Nothing, not even prior knowledge that the works would actually document Wilke's losing battle against lymphoma, could prepare viewers for the devastating color images that awaited them.

At once macabre and humorous, terrifying and sublime, the 13 over-life-sized prints were personally selected by Wilke from slides taken by her second husband, Donald Goddard, during the five years (1987-93) that the artist struggled with her fatal disease. Overwhelming in physical candor as well as

scale, these shots deliver a kick-in-the-stomach effect- recalling those photos of her cancer-ravaged mother with which, just a decade ago, Wilke matched pictures of herself in radiant midlife health.

Here she is peering out through the last strands of wet hair, here showing her blistered tongue, here holding a pot of hospital flowers on her head, here striking a calendar-girl pose that only accentuates the bloat and sag induced by time and malady, here nonchalantly exposing her anus and genitals as she reclines in a tub. Even at the most humiliating moments, Wilke retains her dignity, her sense of self-affirmation through physical and emotional boldness. Bald, naked, hooked to IV tubes, squatting on a portable toilet, she sports the saving irony of a performer playing a last, uncompromising role- as dying crone. The frontality of her images, the directness of her gaze, obliterate all esthetic defenses.

On the floor in each room was a tile grid supporting aggressively enlarged ceramic versions of the vulvic forms Wilke previously made in miniature, using materials like chewing gum, latex or ling. But nearby stood evidence of the body's negation: two lead alloy neck radiation blocks, a cagelike basket of pill cases and syringes, framed bandages from a bone-marrow harvest, globs of hair shed during chemotheraphy. A series of expressionistic watercolors in which she depicted her debilitated face and hands seems mild by comparison.

Watching her mother die, Wilke once complained that clinical procedures take the afflicted away from us, hiding them as though death itself were a matter of personal shame. Her own last gesture, rare in this self pitying age, demonstrates a better way to handle genuine trauma, without becoming a victim: by facing the truth without blinking, by bearing it.

HIRSCH F., 'Hannah Wilke' [3], 05/06.1994, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1994/wilke%20in%20flash%20art.html.

Flash Art, May/June 1994)

Taking pictures of a dying person was not new to Hannah Wilke by 1991-92, when she was working on "Intra-Venus," a body of work posthumously exhibited at Ronald Feldman: from 1979-83 she photographed her elderly mother, Selma Butter, as she went through her final illness. Nor was taking pictures of herself new to Wilke, her eye ever trained upon her own body throughout her 25-year career. The combination, however, proclaimed the sad eventuality that this career was coming to a close – but not without a last burst of narcissistic vitality. For all the gory details in over-lifesize color photographs – the stained bandages, the bleeding gums, the bruises from innumerable chemotherapeutic treatments for the lymphoma that eventually, in January, 1993, killed her; for all the morbid relics – the Plexiglas box filled with empty prescription bottles (Why Not Sneeze?), the "brushstrokes" made of lost hair, the bandages stained from bone marrow harvest but mounted for display – for all these signs of illness and death, "Intra-Venus" proclaims a revitalizing self-interest that could fuel the artist even at her most physically debilitated. A huge triptych is shockingly personal: Wilke at left naked, bald and seated with an IV in her breast, at right her bruised nude body stands in a defiant post. In between, Wilke is taking a bath, her legs up and her sex mugging for the camera. Here is not only a body aggressively displaying its wounds but also its femininity in middle age.

The photographs are "chromagenic supergloss prints" and the color is incredibly vivid. The reddest red for a bloody mouth, the yellowest purple for bruises. Wilke is reported to have said about the series on her dying mother that being photographed "gives you a certain kind of energy." So it would seem in this work, where color is offered up as a proof of living. All the more compelling, then, was the installation of Wilke's trademark vaginal folds in ceramic painted ashen gray, as if to concentrate here any despair banished from the rainbow elsewhere ironically resplendent.

Hannah Wilke was instrumental in the development of body-centered art, her precedent key to an entire generation of performative artists. In her final project, Wilke reformulated the message, sounding clear to an age absorbed with the spectacle of a premature dying.

N.N., 'Ars Morendie' [1], 01.1994, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1994/wilke%20in%20art%20newspaper.html.

The Art Newspaper, January 1994
ARS MORIENDI

NEW YORK. Artists, of course, are supposed to be used to struggle and adversity. When US artist Hannah Wilke knew she was dying of cancer she intensified a practice that had long occupied her: using the image of her body, via photography, to say things about being human, about being a woman and about living in the late twentieth century. The fact that she was, in the end, horrendously ravaged by her disease did not deter her in the least- quite the opposite: she redoubled efforts to document the relentless destruction of her body and even used the hair which fell from her head to make brushes for self-portrait watercolours. Before she died last year she selected a group of those watercolours and of the life-sized colour photographs taken over 1991-92 for a show which her long-time dealer Ronald Feldman has mounted this month (8 January- 19 February). Called "Intra-Venus", it stands as a tribute to a brave and unflinching eye. Photo Donald Goddard. G.B.

PEDERSEN V., 'Gallery Go 'Round' [1], 02.1994, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1994/wilke%20in%20paper.html.

Paper, February 1994
Gallery Go 'Round

For Hannah Wilke (1940-1993), the personal has always been the political. Her particular brand of feminist polemics was fired in the heady crucible of the hedonistic 60's and the burgeoning feminism of the 70's. Many artists have used their own bodies as subject matter, but Wilke's confrontational work rises above the pack. Her distinctive voice, which tapped into the explosive feminist scene of the 70's, has been validated by the likes of Janine Antoni and Sue Williams. Her use of materials- chewing gum, chocolate, erasers, latex and lint - and her radical, soft vulvular sculptures were both strikingly conceptual and powerfully erotic and emotional. "Gum is the perfect metaphor for the American woman- chew her up, get what you want out of her, throw her out and put in a new piece," she once stated. Wilke was also very beautiful, and she used that beauty to critique the male gaze. This month, Ronald Feldman is presenting an exhibition of her last work, Intra-Venus, which documents her losing battle with lymphoma (she died last January at age 52) and exalts her courage. These harrowing color photographs confront the ravagement of cancer, and the dignity of her struggle to overcome it. Also on view are some beautiful watercolors, drawings and sculptures. (At Ronald Feldman, 31 Mercer St., through Feb. 19.) * V.P.

HESS E., 'Fem Fatale: Hannah Wilke' [6], 15.01.1994, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1994/wilke%20in%20village%20voice.html.

The Village Voice, January 15, 1994
FEM FATALE
Hannah Wilke
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

If Hannah Wilke slipped through the cracks in the last decade of her life, making art in an unappreciative world, she will not be overlooked in death. As artists die younger and younger, they are making work that speaks from the other side. This is Wilke's last and ultimate picture show. Every piece, every frame, every inch of the installation was planned by Wilke prior to her death from cancer on January 28, 1993. The show is as devastating as it is extraordinary. It should be a milestone for this exhibition season.

This presentation, ironically, breathes new life into Wilke's entire oeuvre. What more could any artist demand from his or her final body of work? It has always been difficult to place the variety of Wilke's objects into one conclusive, neat category. Wilke is known, largely, for her self-portraits, and for her abstract but suggestive ceramic sculptures; she was also an early performance artist and always a biting conceptualist. All her art, regardless of medium, was an ongoing, frequently irreverent exploration of the female form; Wilke's own body was the body in question, which the artist readily showed off to viewers.

Always an exhibitionist, Wilke was an early transgressor who felt antagonistic toward the more puritanical, more rigid elements of the feminist art movement. Her interest in her own image eventually took on narcissistic proportions as the artist photographed herself throughout her career. It is crucial to understand, prior to viewing this final group of self-portraits (made in collaboration with her husband, Donald Goddard), that Wilke's use of her naked body was consistent throughout her work. She didn't get sick and suddenly decide to display the ravages of illness. Wilke just continued to make her art up until her death, fiercely insisting on the vitality of her own body and the immortality of her art.

Walking into the exhibition, we are greeted by a room of large (71 ½-inch by 47 ½-inch) color photographs, each one dramatically presenting Hannah Wilke bigger than life. In the center of the room lies a black, funeral sculpture: a flat grid of ceramic squares with a number of the artist's trademark abstract vaginas. The portraits are horrifying and mesmerizing. Wilke's body is violated by chemotherapy and bone-marrow transplants in ways that only cancer patients know. In one work, her nose is plugged with cotton, presumably to stop the bleeding, and her open mouth reveals a layer of skin that has peeled off the back of her tongue; in another piece, Wilke sits in a stupor, naked and hairless, on a portable john. In a photo that comes closest to depicting the reality of death, Wilke lies naked in a bathtub as the last bit of water goes down the drain; her most private parts are revealed absolutely matter-of-factly.

The fight depicted in these images is to preserve life - at almost any cost. But the more time we spend with these images (13 in all), the more the initial shock of malady recedes, and the old Wilke emerges, posing, posturing, mimicking, in total control of her misshapen, yet always heroic, body. These are courageous works of art.

A series of "drawings" made with the artist's hair, as it fell out during chemo treatments, are surprisingly seductive while at the same time somewhat chilling; the simple act of transforming her hair into art becomes a testimony to the artist's adoration of her own body, and to the essential value of every (female) body. These works bring Wilke's physical presence right into the room. While traditional drawing was never the artist's best medium, a series of small works on paper, done in the hospital, are the most intimate statements in the exhibition. Wilke painted miniature watercolors of her face, with and without hair, or wearing a turban, treating these changes in physical attributes like changes in her wardrobe; the works are light, but tinged with tragedy. There are six exquisite portraits of hands that Wilke made lying in bed with an IV stuck in her wrist; she used her other hand to paint. The color stains the paper and seems to flow through her translucent flesh like blood. All these works compose a series called "Intra-Venus," the title of the show and one of Wilke's signature puns. Perhaps her last one.

EDELMAN R.G., 'Hannah Wilke' [3], 05.1994, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1994/wilke%20in%20art%20press.html.

art press, May 1994
HANNAH WILKE

This powerful and poignant exhibition presented Hannah Wilke's final works: a series of enlarged photographic self-portraits (in collaboration with her husband, Donald Goddard), a ceramic sculpture and a collection of objects related to her battle with lymphoma which ultimately took her life at the age of fifty-two a year ago. Wilke, a sculptor and conceptual artist, was best known for using her own body as her medium, the central focus of her work in the late sixties and early seventies. Her provocative output anticipated the current younger generation of conceptual and performance artists who use the (female) body for political and social critique. Having emerged in the U.S. art world in the last decade, this generation includes Kiki Smith, Karen Finley, Sue Williams and Janine Antoni.
Wilke's signature sculptures of the seventies, organic-shaped objects often interpreted as images of flowers, fortune cookies or female genitalia, were fashioned out of clay, latex, kneaded erasers, laundry lint and chewing gum. The artist attached pieces of the last-named material to her body like tiny orifices which she documented in a group of photographs. Wilke's sculpture Venus Pareve, a self-portrait of her torso in chocolate, conflated the notion of the female body as an object of desire and consumption. Her photography, nude self-portraits and performance pieces were often confrontational, the performances incorporating text (as in So Help Me Hannah from 1978) taken from critical writers. Wilke's work seemed like a mix of the spontaneous, erotic humor of Yves Klein with the serious, didactic pronouncements of Joseph Beuys.
In this exhibition, every piece contributes to an unrelenting appraisal of her deteriorating physical condition. In the past, Wilke's physical beauty made some critics and artist suspicious of her agenda, assuming that her work was part exhibitionism and part narcissistic indulgence. However, the artist's

photographs of her mother after surgery for breast cancer (her mother died in 1982) started Wilke on a process of self-examination that culminated with Intra-Venus, a series of blown-up photographs of her body ravaged by her own illness. Suffering from the effects of chemotherapy and bone-marrow transplants, her body bandaged and bulging from swollen lymph glands of her neck, shoulders and abdomen, her hair gone, Wilke poses and presents images of pain, defiance and even humor. She captures the full range of human emotions, from rage to resignation, which arouses profound responses from even the most jaded viewer. The 72 x 48" color photographs are shown as diptychs, one image used as a counterpoint for another. In one diptych, Wilke is shown in a large plastic cap with tubes attached to her breast, next to a picture of the artist posed naked with a pot of flowers on her head, like a nude from an Ingres painting, with bandages. In another she is completely bald, a sad expression on her tired face, paired with herself wrapped in a towel like a Renaissance Mary Magdalen. There are also delicate watercolors of her face and hands in lurid, expressionist color, and minimalist objects, like the radiation blocks used in her treatment, that the artist signed, á la Duchamp. Taken together, this exhibition demonstrated that Hannah Wilke had the courage of her convictions.

HUMPHREY D., 'Hannah Wilke at Ronald Feldman Fine arts' [2], 05/06.1994, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1994/wilke%20in%20art%20issues.html.

Art Issues, May/June 1994
HANNAH WILKE at RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS

…Hannah Wilke's final series of works, "Intra-Venus," speaks from a time immediately prior to her death in 1993. With the help of her husband Donald Goddard, Wilke created life-sized photographs of herself during her treatment for lymphoma. These documents, alongside the images and objects surrounding them in the exhibition, evidence the deformation of her body wrought by illness and its treatment, as well as Wilke's complex relationship to her own physical decay. Brushstrokes places bunches of the artist's hair, lost during treatment, in picture frames. March 18, 1992 presents four bandages from a "bone marrow harvest." The precise dating of the works chronicles and memorializes a grotesque medicalized dying as well as Wilke's irrepressible vitality throughout that process. Her art-making becomes an intense form of living, and an extension of the terms and preoccupations of her life's work. These images have a retroactive effect on interpretations of her earlier body-performance photographs, functioning as an epilogue to what is now starting to acquire an almost narrative structure. The consistent depiction of her nakedness over the course of her career navigates through the dynamics of public and private relations, exhibitionism, narcissism, feminism, and sexual politics. The act of undressing becomes a kind of dressing-up under extreme duress. Wilke invariable treated the public gaze as a medium in which she vacillated between provocation and confession, a playful yet deadly serious game. The camera and its surrogate- our attention- acquire a kind a magic potential in Wilke's hands, establishing an unstable relation of power that is both pleasurable and deforming.
Wilke's life-long commitment to depict her naked body in public has a political component. These last images testify to the voicelessness of physical pain. The silence of the pictures is highlighted in a pair of open-mouthed photographs, June 10, 1992/May 5, 1992, in which the raw and bloody inside of Wilke's mouth and plugged nose goes from bad to worse, suggesting what nineteenth-century author J.K. Huysmans called the "useless, unjust, incomprehensible, inept abomination that is physical pain." Pain resists language, and perhaps even destroys it. The mute indignity of suffering usually causes people to shrink from the public gaze and urges culture to quarantine the dying. Wilke's earlier documentation of the death of her mother sought to heighten the living within dying. These last works, yet again, are a dramatic substantiation of her specific certainties of sex, death, and pain. As opposed to a great deal of contemporary art that proceeds from doubt or ironic distance, this art is an elegiac t estament to certainty.

CHENEY E., 'Hannah Wilke: Intra-Venus' [6], 07/08.1994, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1994/wilke%20in%20art%20papers.%20html.html.

Art Papers, July/August 1994 - HANNAH WILKE: INTRA-VENUS

Hannah Wilke's work has always explored issue of pleasure and pain, and her posthumous show at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts is no exception. All of the characteristic Wilke elements are here: the threatening mechanical objects, the seductive poses, the use of cynical puns (her manipulation not only of the language of the body, but of language itself), but now they have an even greater resonance. Whether or not one is familiar with Wilke's work, the exhibition is startling in its honest documentation of the last two years of Wilke's life. More astonishingly, however, is the way her earlier work seems almost prophetic in its anticipation of her death.

Since the 1960s, Wilke has been known alternately as a sculptor, working to create a specifically female iconography, a performance artist using her body, according to critic Joanna Frueh, as a "moving site of revelation," and a photographer who "exposes" her bare body to the camera. "Intra-Venus" consists of a series of large scale color photographs of Wilke passing through progressive stages of chemotherapy. We see everything from the slit on her tongue from the radiation to the bruises on either side of her body from the bone marrow harvesting. An early picture shows her running her hand through her rich mane of hair, so thick and plentiful, so clearly a part of her identity. In all of her photographs, her hair has always commanded attention, expressing her sensuality, whether she twisted it into rollers or let it drape across her bare chest or fall over her nipples. The gradual loss of her hair, recorded in the photographs (at the end of the show, clumps are displayed under Plexiglas frames, in a work called Brushstrokes), ought to strip her of her sensuality; yet Wilke exudes an inner strength and confidence. In the past Wilke was criticized for her narcissism and self-indulgence. "Intra-Venus" should dispel such notions.
In 1981, Wilke made a piece called Vein Attempt- Broken Blood Vessel from Heel Kicking Hannah. In this prescient photograph, Wilke sits in a wheelchair, its silver wheels contrasting with the ivory curves of her body, her lush tresses. Wilke's body is smooth, unharmed. There is neither blood nor any obvious pain. She toys with something underneath her leg. Ironically the wheelchair, an instrument meant to assist the victim, is the most threatening element in the picture.
In her 1974 "Starification Object Series, S.O.S.," she is bare-chested and pressed into her skin are wads of chewing gum. Her poses mimic those of the fashion models. She dons a sexy cowboy hat in one photograph, a pair of dark glasses in another, at once identifying with these "objects" of beauty and criticizing the culture's manipulation of them. The knots of gum, neat forms with a hole in the center (Wilke's characteristic form representing the female) are vulvas, the loci of woman's power and mystery, but they also read as bruises or scars. Wilke wears the marks of a consumer society, which chews her up, scars her. Wilke is both "star" and "scarred." Female beauty and its consequent power comes at a painful price.
Twenty years later Wilke is literally scarred. In Bandages from Bone Marrow Harvest, she stands naked, perching a porcelain vase full of flowers on her head. White bandages are taped into either hip to cover the bone marrow harvesting. The actual bandages hang under Plexiglas across the room, stained with blood and marrow. Her body, in this picture, retains some of its former shapeliness and beauty, and this only makes the later pictures, in which her body looks swollen and limp, more painful to see. The viewer gets a sense of the rapidity of the disease, its ability to tear swiftly through the body.
The series of photographs "Selma Butter (Mommy)" (1979-83), in which Wilke documents her mother's battle against and eventual death from cancer, were more emotionally evocative to me. Wilke said that photographing her mother was a way of being intimate with her and perhaps photographing herself is a way of getting close to the viewer, telling us the most private details of death and disease, details that perhaps some of us would prefer to avoid. What could be more personal than a picture of Wilke shitting in a metal hospital can or lying with her legs open in a bathtub? And yet perhaps we, as viewers, withdraw from such intimate displays, particularly when they are threatening and ugly, rather than sensual. In any case, Wilke's project goes well beyond sentimental seduction. Like most great artists, she mines territory that others would rather leave buried, pulling up parts of the human condition with painful precision and presenting them in all their nakedness.

SMITH R., 'Hannah Wilke, 52 Artist, Dies; Used Female Body as Her Subject' [8], 29.01.1993, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1993/wilkeobitinnytimes.html.

Obituary in The New York Times, Friday January 29, 1993
Hannah Wilke, 52 Artist, Dies; Used Female Body as Her Subject

Hannah Wilke, a sculptor and Conceptual artist who made the body and female sexuality the subject of her work, died yesterday at Twelve Oaks Hospital in Houston. She was 52 and lived in Manhattan.
She died of complications from lymphoma, said her husband, Donald Goddard.

In the late 1960's and early 70's, Ms. Wilke startled the art world with beautiful sculptures made of latex or ceramic whose layered and folded flowerlike forms were both abstract and yet highly suggestive of female genitalia. This fortune-cookie-like configuration became the artist's signature; it was sometimes small and made of homey materials like chewing gum or laundry lint, or it could be larger and painted with Abstract Expressionist brushstrokes. These forms could hang on the wall, or be marshaled in great numbers across the floor, or be stuck directly to the body of the artist herself, as they were in some of her Conceptual photographic pieces.

In some ways, Ms. Wilke was part of the Post-Minimalist soft-sculpture esthetic that emerged in the early 1970's and that included artists like Eva Hesse and Keith Sonnier. But she brought to this

esthetic a stronger sense of the erotic and an often witty political edge. Striking in appearance, she forthrightly made herself the primary subject of her videotapes, performance pieces and photographs, often posing nude or partially clothed in ways that ridiculed the role of the female nude in art. While some critics called her work narcissistic, others saw it as probing the mechanism of narcissism and voyeurism.

In the late 1970's, Ms. Wilke's involvement with the female body became even more personal when her mother contracted cancer and the artist began to photograph the physical ravages of the disease and its treatments. In 1986, when cancer was diagnosed in Ms. Wilke, she began a series of daily watercolor drawings of her face, her hands or flowers. With the help of her husband, she also turned the camera on herself, documenting her illness is a series of large-scale color photographs.

Ms. Wilke, whose original name was Arlene Hannah Butter, was born in New York City on March 7, 1940. She earned a bachelor of fine arts degree and a teaching certificate from the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia in 1962 and taught sculpture at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan for many years. Since her first one-woman exhibition in 1972, she has been represented by the Ronald Feldman Gallery in Manhattan.

He work is represented in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Jewish Museum in New York City, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, the Milwaukee Art Museum, and the Allen Art Museum in Oberlin, Ohio. A retrospective of her career was organized at the University of Missouri at St. Louis in 1989.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by a Sister, Marsie Scharlatt of Los Angeles, and two stepdaughters, Katie Goddard of Minneapolis and Nellie Goddard of Chicago.

RAVEN A., 'Hannah Wilke, 1940-1993' [12], 23.02.1993, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1993/wilkeobitinvoice.html.

Obituary in The Village Voice, February 23, 1993, p. 81.
Hannah Wilke, 1940-1993

Fourteen years old and naked. Hannah Wilke smiles over her shoulder, clutches a mink stole to her bosom, and shows a lot of leg. At her ankle, Wilke's 1940 birth name. Arlene H. (Hannah) Butter, is lettered across the print in this, the first of the many Conceptual photographic works in which she used her own body as an evolving subject and consistent female emblem. Wilke also bared herself in sculptures, performances, and films for personal self-documentation and as a feminist art form until shortly before her death in Houston, Texas, on January 28 at age 52.

Wilke was a forerunner for a generation of younger Conceptual and performance artists and one of the most germinal of contemporary practitioners to use her nude beauty to valorize female form and the criticize the cultural devaluation of the feminine. Completely abstract, her ceramics (shown at the Castagno Gallery in New York City as early as 1966) and her latex works of the late '60s and early '70s seemed at the same time to be faithful representations of flowers, fortune cookies, and the folding labia of female genitals. She was thus the first to use the vaginal imagery that – for advocates and detractors alike – became a hallmark for feminist art during the 1970s.

The intelligence in Wilke's work is always visceral and often erotic. Her materials, which range from clay and latex to laundry lint, kneaded erasers to chewing gum and chocolate, are analogies for female physiology – the guts she wanted to show "through" her skin, and her intention to get under yours.

Beautiful by anyone's standards, Wilke used her shape, her surface, and her stance paradoxically, to express rage, disgust, self-hatred, and defiance. "In the United States," she said in 1976, "the state of nudity is still a problem." The complicated and perverse connection of women to the womanish body and its allure can be glimpsed in Wilke's sassy demeanor on an edge between glamour and the grotesque. Venus Pareve, a sculptural self-portrait of the artist's torso in chocolate (that can, according to Jewish dietary laws, be eaten with anything) is a succinct summing-up of Wilke's abilities to embody living the contradictions of woman and artist.

Abstract Expressionism was not only her signature stroke and immediate historical heritage but also emphasized her commitment to process itself. Wilke "soiled" Minimalism, on the other hand, by using its forms for off-color presentations of the foul feminine organism. Her Needed-Erase-Her series of 1974 features six squares in two neat rows, each composed of a different size or style of tiny cunt sculpture.

So Help Me Hannah (a 1978 installation from a performance in which the artist was photographed nude at P.S. 1) appropriates texts from critical writers. But Wilke's conversation is with viewers and is always deconstructive in its impassioned analytical posture, while postmodern in its mixing of texts and images, styles and media, representation and formal purity.

Wilke attended the Tyler School of At in Philadelphia, where, at the Philadelphia Museum, Duchamp's The Large Glass is on permanent display. Her felt connection to Conceptual Art is expressed most specifically in relationship to Duchamp. In the filmed performance Hannah Wilke through the Large Glass, she is, she claimed, stripped bare and a bachelor. Her involvement with puns as deconstructive tools and with language in general contributes to the effectiveness of this work as a turnabout tale that both honors and unmasks a male myth while proffering a feminist revision.

Hannah in jeans, breasts and belly out there, leans against a wall of delicate latex sculptures in a 1980 photo. These works were larger, more controversial – cunts, pussies, boxes, she insisted – less embraceable despite their formal appeal. The picture, snapshot size, is an installation photo of Ponder-r-rosa Series at Ronald Feldman gallery. On the back of the card, an invitation to a party for Hannah's 40th birthday. Above the handwritten information appears the small cunt that is her essential autograph.

Imposing color photographs graphically portray Wilke's mother, Selma Butter, after surgery for breast cancer. Wilke called Butter's baldness from chemotherapy treatments "her Auschwitz." Yet Wilke, inn almost identical poses, complements Butter's portraits with her own: "to wear her wounds," Wilke said, "to heal my own."

Wilke believed in art magic. But taking photographs did not save her mother. The scarred, emaciated exposure of Butter served up a view of human suffering, mutilation, and the inevitable deterioration of the physical self that would, moreover, prove prophetic. In June 1987, Wilke was also diagnosed with cancer – lymphoma in her neck, shoulders, and abdomen.

Visiting the Ronald Feldman gallery, where Wilke has shown her work since 1972, I saw the color slides that she had selected to be printed for her next exhibition. Characteristically, she provokes via the confrontational poses of an unruly subject. Hannah without hair, body bloated and bandaged, tubes everywhere, once more puts her self right in my face.

Hannah wrote.
Remember me
Remember me?
Remember me
I will.

ROBINSON W., 'Obituary Hannah Wilke' [1], 03.1993, geraadpleegd op 02.04.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1993/wilkeobitinartinamerica.html.

Obituary in Art in America (March 1003), p. 134.

Hannah Wilke, 52, New York artist whose work addressed issues of sexual politics and human mortality with humor, innovative materials, and an evocative lyricism, died of cancer on January 28 in Houston. Her conceptually oriented works of the early 1970s included performances and photo-works using her own nude body. She is perhaps best known for petal-like sculptures made of latex, laundry lint, chewing gum or ceramic, suggestive of female genitalia, arrayed singly or in groups on the floor, the wall or on her own body. In the 1980s she began documenting the battle with cancer of her mother, Selma Butter, through photographs that captured a sense of vitality in the face of disease. In 1987 she was diagnosed with cancer herself and began making a series of evocative watercolor self-portraits. She taught at the School of Visual Arts since 1974 and exhibited at Ronald Feldman since 1972.

N.N., 'Hannah Wilke – American 1940-1993' [3], datum onbekend, geraadpleegd op 18.06.2007, op de David Winton Bell Gallery website, op http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/David_Winton_Bell_Gallery/wilke.htm.

American artist Hannah Wilke was born in New York in 1940 and died prematurely from cancer in 1993. Although she worked primarily as a sculptor, she also produced many drawings, photographs, and videos that deal with social, political, and gender issues. Her work has been affiliated with many different contemporary movements, including Abstract Expressionism (stress on creative process and individual gesture), Minimalism (focus on reductive form and materiality of the object), and Conceptualism (practice of social criticism). Yet, her oeuvre is best understood, on the one hand, vis-à-vis Marcel Duchamp's involvement with language, eroticism, and twisted humor, and, on the other hand, in connection to Body and Performance Art in the use of her own body to address issues of sexuality.

Wilke believed in physical and emotional self-exposure as both an aesthetic and a spiritual process of undressing the body and soul. Although they experiment with many materials--such as clay, lint, latex, chocolate, chewing gum, and her own body--all of her works carry something sensual and horrific, beautiful and destructive. Wilke's sculptural pieces rely on minimalist aesthetics of systematic ordering and repetition, yet they are imbued with metaphoric, organic, and sexual implications. Some suggest human flesh or flowers as symbols of blossom and delight, and others take the form of sags or hangings on hooks as signs of deterioration or decay. While her ceramic groupings resemble neatly planted gardens, her chewing-gum pieces are phallic forms breathing with eroticism

The three Chewing Gum pieces, dating from 1975, belong to the latter category. There are each collages of chewing gum pieces attached to sixteen small sheets of paper, arranged in a grid format and framed in a Plexiglas box. Their structure is based on orderly, repetitious forms of folded chewing gum pieces in flesh tones, suggestive of biological replications and divisions. Yet, when in some sculptural works adhered to Wilke's chest, breasts, and abdomen in other works, those chewing gum pieces gain another possible meaning--evoking wounds or body scars.

The naked body as a sculptural form, or as object of art, was Wilke's primary means of expression. In the 1970s and early 1980s, she produced a series of performances, videos, and photographs in which she used her own body to confront the erotic representation of women in art history and popular culture, and to examine issues of sexuality, femininity, and feminism. For Wilke, feminism was intrinsically more important than art; art with a focus on the body was a way to engage those issues and contribute to the Women's Art Movement. In order to liberate the notion of the female body from a "mother-whore" syndrome (caring-nurturing, and seductive-dangerous figure), Wilke started to employ her own body as an object. She treated it either as a sculptural form on which she would place her chewing gum pieces, or as a living sculpture, acting in performances and videos. By doing so, she aimed to provoke the public's critical response and to argue for a self-spoken female eroticism that had not been welcomed in western culture. Moreover, eroticism was for her an open call to see the female body as "the sexy and the self-respecting, the sensuous and the serious" body, rather than just as the sexualized body passively waiting to be satisfied by a man. Thus, it was an act of political freedom in a male-dominated culture.

N.N., 'The World Tour Rolls Into Town, Sprawling but Tidy' [14], 03.2006, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/2006/wilke%20in%20ny%20times.html.

The New York Times, March 10, 2006
The World Tour Rolls Into Town, Sprawling but Tidy

However you think of it, the fair is here. It's immense. And for the art world's many V.I.P.'s — collectors, dealers, donors, "friends" — it is a very V.I.P. affair, with a full calendar of restricted-access events.

These began with the White Party on Wednesday, the fair's kickoff gala, sponsored by Whitewall, "the first art lifestyle magazine," as it calls itself, and a pre-party lecture by Alain Badiou, a French philosopher influenced (according the fair's press material) by Plato, Hegel, Lacan and Deleuze, who spoke on "Speaking the Unspeakable."

The weekend ahead will be spiced with visits to private New York collections, one "vibrant," another "quite personal," another "on the 66th floor." And it will include "Critical Conversations in a Limo," intimate chats between V.I.P.'s and critics and curators for hire held in cars zipping between the

Armory Show and DIVA, the Digital and Video Art Fair, one of several concurrent fairs in the city. (Scope Art Fair, the Pulse-Art Fair and the Los Angeles Art Fair are others.)

But for general admissions types like you and me, there is the Armory Show itself. Every new edition looks slightly different, partly in response to kvetching about the previous one. At one time, the show was badly overcrowded, with booths no bigger than walk-in closets. There was a revolt. The cry went up for more, more, more space. Now there is more, but at the cost of reducing the numbers of galleries. The count is 154 this year, and several notable names — Barbara Gladstone, Marian Goodman, Luhring Augustine, Daniel Reich — have dropped out.

Opened-up space also makes for some zany configurations near the front of the show, where at certain points you may not be sure of whose booth you're in. But beyond that point everything falls into regulation aisles-with-compartments order.

Indeed, this year's fair looks particularly neat. Certain galleries (Sean Kelly, Zeno X) have gone for an almost arctic spareness. Many adhere to a formulaic display: biggish painting (or photograph), medium-size sculpture, little paintings (or drawings) in a nook. Expensive, less expensive, beginner's luck.

The mix can work great. I liked everything I saw in Galleri Charlotte Lund's selection of young Swedish artists, and especially a magical painting of two young women — the artist and her lover — by Ulrika Minami Warmling. The same was true at Kurimanzutto from Mexico City, with work by Carlos Amorales, Daniel Guzmán and Damián Ortega, a stimulating triumvirate.

Individual items of interest are in good supply: an eye-fooling sculpture by Heather Rowe at D'Amelio Terras is one; a sizzling-hot-looking painting that seems to be crying real tears by Aaron Curry at David Kordansky is another. If new work by the veteran Robert Mangold offers a model for a kind of cool neo-Minimalism we're seeing a lot of these days, paintings by Barry McGee (at Deitch Projects) and Jannis Varelas (at the Breeder) exemplify a trend of Pop-inflected, M.F.A. Outsider Art.

In general, dealers seem to have figured out that booths installed as mini-group shows tend to look a bit too much like what they really are: shops packed with product. Maybe that's why we're seeing so many solo exhibitions at this year's fair.

They aren't all scintillating. Neither Ena Swansea at Galeria Crone, Andreas Osarek, nor the Luc Tuymansesque Janis Avotins at IBID did much for me. But Robert Melee did, in an update of an earlier Chelsea solo at Andrew Kreps. Likewise, Terence Koh with his nightmare Port-o-San at Peres Projects. And Ashley Bickerton, who has turned Lehmann Maupin's booth into a demented South Seas salon.

Atul Dodiya has a far-less-eager-to-please installation at Nature Morte, of gallows framing passages from Tamil religious poetry, and Gary Simmons has a beautiful wall drawing outside the exhibition area at Pier 90. But the most moving — disturbing, funny, out-of-place-looking — sight for me was a Hannah Wilke retrospective at Ronald Feldman.

From her early, sassy feminist videos to self-portrait photographs, taken when she was dying of cancer, Ms. Wilke (1940-93) encompassed an amazing emotional, conceptual and political range: narcissism and mockery of narcissism; seduction and defiance; materialism and impermanence.

For me, she's the V.I.P. of this year's fair, and her presence raises many questions. Why don't we see more of the generation of female artists she represents? Why don't we see more contemporary female artists than the paltry number visible in galleries today? Why has art, the only remaining corner of Western "high" culture that can still offend established power, settled for doing so much less? Settled for being aisle upon aisle of smart, well-schooled knickknacks?

I don't know, but a thought came to me after I left the fair. The Armory Show two years ago, in 2004, was in every way of a piece with the 2004 Whitney Biennial: bright, light, expensive, fun. This year's Armory Show also coincides with a Biennial, but a darker, scrappier, more rebellious one, from which it feels utterly different. Is art changing in ways that art fairs cannot accommodate? For some of us, this is a very important question. And we hope the answer is yes.

N.N., 'Press release Hannah Wilke: Performalist Self-Portraits and Video/Film Performances, 1976-85' [6], 16.09.1996, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/exhsolo/exhwil96.html p.

For Immediate Release: September 16, 1996: HANNAH WILKE -PERFORMALIST SELF-PORTRAITS AND VIDEO/FILM PERFORMANCES 1976-85; INCLUDING SO HELP ME HANNAH, THROUGH THE LARGE GLASS, AND RELATED WALL WORKS - SEPTEMBER 21 - OCTOBER 19

The Feldman Gallery will present video/film performances by Hannah Wilke from 1976-85 including So Help Me Hannah (1978) and Through the Large Glass (1976). The exhibition will also include photographs and other wall works related to these performances.

Hannah Wilke has played a seminal and innovative role in the history of performance art and remains an important influence on contemporary art today. Throughout her career, and even before it formally started in the early l960s, Hannah Wilke periodically created work -- drawings, photographs, live appearances, videotapes, audiotapes, film, advertisements -- that involved her own performance. They began with photographs in childhood and adolescence and continued through the videos and photos that recorded her final illness with lymphoma.

None of this was calculated. It simply happened as a natural extension, or aspect, of her art. The early performalist pieces are rather simple compared to the later: a photograph, an 8mm movie, a videotape of Hannah cutting her lover's hair, another of her reacting to her brother-in-law's death. Gradually the performances and their offspring grew in their drama and complexity.

There are several performances during Hannah's career that are linked to series of works in different mediums, none of which can be said to be the primary one. Two major performances and related works are featured in this exhibition; others will be shown later. The two are "So Help Me Hannah," extending from 1978 to 1985, and "Through the Large Glass," which touches on work done from 1976 to 1991. Those dates are not definitive; details keep reappearing.

On view for the first time in the current exhibition is the full 10-monitor video piece So Help Me Hannah, which Hannah planned but was only able to exhibit on a smaller scale during her life due to lack of funds. It brings together videotapes of Hannah's five separate performances of the same piece in Washington, D.C., New York, London, Ontario, and Windsor, Ontario, each of which was recorded by two video camerapersons. Accompanying the video work is the original multimedia photo performance of "So Help Me Hannah" that occupied a classroom in P.S. 1 in fall 1978, monumental photos and texts derived from that series, and the photographic diptych Portrait of the Artist and Her Mother.

Through the Large Glass, on view in the gallery's second room, is a ten-minute film of Hannah's performance in the Philadelphia Museum of Art behind Marcel Duchamp's The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even. The film is accompanied by Philly, a video documenting the filming; Suit Suite, photographs of Wilke's apparel for the performance; posters for the film, and I Object: Memoirs of a Sugargiver, the cover of Hannah's autobiography. This work was first exhibited by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in 1978.

There will be a reception on Saturday, September 21 from 6 - 8. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 - 6.

SMITH R., 'Hannah Wilke: Performalist Self-Portraits and Video/Film Performances, 1976-85' [6], 27.09.1996, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1996/wilke%20in%20ny%20times.html.

The New York Times, September 27, 1996
HANNAH WILKE
Performalist Self-Portraits and Video/Film Performances, 1976-85'

The performance artist and sculptor Hannah Wilke, who died in 1990 at the age of 52, wielded her body like a blunt instrument. Her aim was far from precise, but luckily her target was large: the male dominance of art and the long tradition of the female subject, muse and (mostly nude) model.

Designating herself the latest in that line, Wilke became her own model and muse, undressing for the camera with a vengeance, flaunting her good looks with a combination of honesty, pleasure and irony that was, and is, hard to decode. Was Wilke simply a victim of her own narcissism, or was she really upsetting the apple cart?

This exhibition suggests that it was a bit of both, that Wilke rebelled against her further objectification as a woman by taking matters into her own hands, objectifying herself even more blatantly, while taking on the male artists who piqued her interest or her ire. On view is the ray-gun collection that Wilke accumulated in response to the work of Claes Oldenburg, with whom she lived for several years starting in the late 1960's.

Also here is a 1976 video, "Through the Large Glass," in which Wilke executes a languid striptease behind the cracked transparent surface of Marcel Duchamp's masterpiece "Large Glass: The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even" at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; shedding a man's white satin suit, she cleverly becomes both bride and bachelor.

On a bank of video monitors that combine tapes of five performance pieces, she romps and preens for the camera, rolling about on the floor, slinking her hips and cocking an eyebrow; her voice-over spouts pertinent quotes from Marx, Nietzsche, David Bourdon and Lucy Lippard concerning capital, creativity, art and herself. Finally, a piece contrasting photographs of the naked torsos of Wilke and her mother, who was recovering from a mastectomy, presages the artist's final works, when, dying of cancer, she would continue to vamp for the camera, as if daring the illness to take her life.

There are times when Wilke's work doesn't quite come together, when it's too casual and not thought through enough. But she was indisputably among the first of her kind as a feminist performance artist, as this exhibition, so full of her anger, intelligence and physical bravura, almost unfailingly confirms.

HOLLIDAY T., 'Hannah Wilke, in her prime' [10], 21.10.1996, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1996/wilke%20in%20wall%20street%20journal.html.

The Wall Street Journal, October 21, 1996
HANNAH WILKE, IN HER PRIME

Sporting nothing but high-heeled sandals and a small handgun, the nude Hannah Wilke prowls the room. In slow-motion action, she flips her long brown hair off her shoulder and slinks past the deserted school room, the school yard, the bathroom, the rooftop, the dumpster. She points her shiny gun and stalks her prey- and we are ensnared.
Wilke carried out this bit of performance art for the camera in 1978 in New York, where it was first shown and can be seen again now at her gallery, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts (up through Oct. 26). It's the midcareer work of an American artist who in her teens began to photograph herself in the nude and who made the female body- her own, specifically- the subject of her life's work, which ended in 1993 when she died of cancer at the age of 52.
She worked on this project, titled "So Help Me Hannah," from 1978 to 1985. In the 48 black-and-white "performalist self-portraits" (her husband, Donald Goddard held the camera), her audacity- and her appealing body- get our attention; her attractive face, and obvious sense of humor, hold it , as we try to figure out just what she's up to. She's playing a role, maybe James Bond's Pussy Galore but without the tease. Her look is not come-hither or pouty, but sometimes deadly serious, others mildly amused. In one shot, she huddles on the ground, arms wrapped around her legs, gun in hand, staring up at us, faintly frightened but defiant. Is her art about her body or her mind?
If the photos aren't clear on this point, 100 individually framed quotations from various artist and critical writers help to focus Wilke's intentional ambiguities. Across the room, they all come together, as 10 video monitors play five different versions of a similar performance, with Hannah's monotone voice-over repeating the wall quotes. Here she again graces an empty room with the heels-and-gun-only look; in a slow-motion dancelike series of poses she writhers, twists, reaches out and lolls on the floor, ending up in a sprawl of death as the last quote rings in our ear.
In 1985, Wilke told an interviewer: "In the 'So Help Me Hannah' performance I am nude for 28 minutes, and after a few minutes people forget the nudity and begin to listen to what I have to say in the quotations by Nietzsche, Hitler, Oldenburg, or other artists and historians."
For me, first seeing the piece in 1966, it did work that way. But it had a very different effect on people who saw it in the '70s, when it was first exhibited. Wilke was one of the first and most controversial of the artists who used their own bodies in the creation of feminist art. Sex and violence were certainly not new to art then, but the way in which Wilke presented them was. Exploiting her own body to comment on the history of exploitation of women in both high and popular culture didn't go over that well with either the mainstream art world or the mainstream feminist camp.
"Narcissistic" was the popular judgment of her work at the time. And the second room of this exhibition gives it some credence. In this 1976 work, "Through the Large Glass," she performs a

seductive striptease behind Marcel Duchamp's plate-glass sculpture "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even"; stripping away a man's white silk suite she plays the roles of both bride and bachelor, once again wresting back control of the female body.
Those who said she was just an exhibitionist insisted that she couldn't or wouldn't use her body in her art if it weren't traditionally beautiful. Were they ever wrong. And Hannah proved them so with her last project, "Intra-Venus" (first shown posthumously, and now on view at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography), a series of large color portraits of herself, once again nude, as she loses her life to lymphoma. Now she is bloated, bald and violated by intravenous tubes, but she is ever the in-your-face exhibitionist, exploring the realm of the forbidden.
"The image of the artist was always male," she once explained, and his subject female. "But why should we have this mind-body male-female duality? The mind and body are one, so I tired to make art an expression of that connection."
Her photos are deliberately of pedestrian quality, the video production values low, so that no slick technique, no beauty besides her own, detracts from Wilke's message, which is the sole aesthetic of her art. That message was always ambiguous, if not ambivalent. However, viewing her work from a hindsight of almost 20 years, one can finally get past the scandalous aspects of her art and reflect on the conditions that compelled her to make it. This work is a product of its times, and if in many ways it seems almost laughable now, it's only because women's roles as artists, and their artistic freedom, are taken for granted. But for that very fact, we have Wilke and a few other fearless pioneers to thank. The nude Hannah Wilke gets the last laugh after all.

LEVIN K. ' Snatch shot, Hannah Wilke' [4], 08.10.1996, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1996/wilke%20in%20voice.html.

The Village Voice, October 8, 1996
Snatch Shot
Hannah Wilke

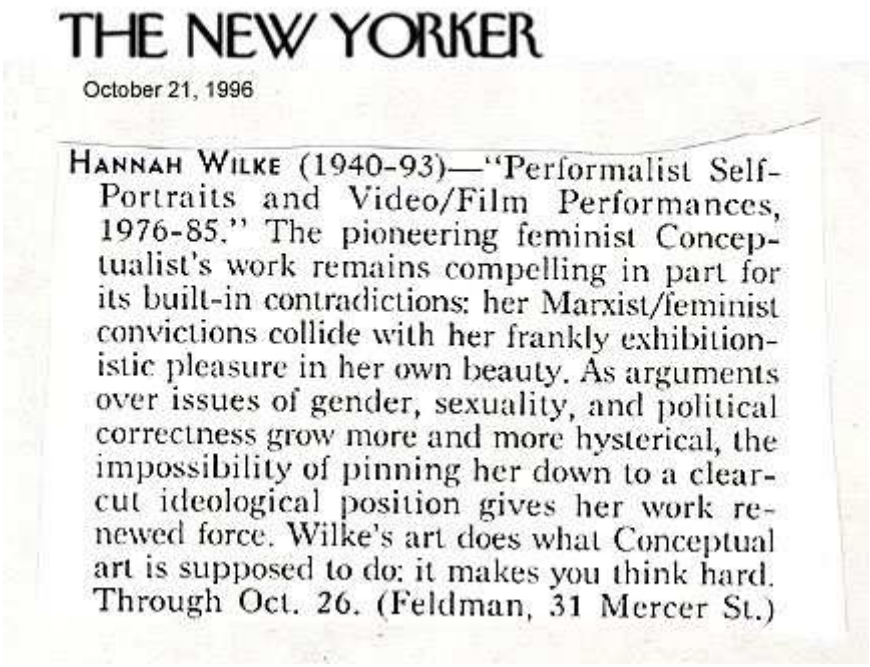
Back in the '70s, I interviewed Claes Oldenburg, who showed up with a glamorous woman named Hannah in tow. She didn't say much. But it was his interview, and at one point he remarked that he sometimes wished he could put the people he loved in boxes and just take them out when he wanted to play. Few 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 "Performalist 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 Glass, 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. Here 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.

N.N., ' Hannah Wilke' [1], 21.10.1996, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1996/wilke%20in%20new%20yorker.html.



THE NEW YORKER

October 21, 1996

HANNAH WILKE (1940-93)—"Performalist Self-Portraits and Video/Film Performances, 1976-85." The pioneering feminist Conceptualist's work remains compelling in part for its built-in contradictions: her Marxist/feminist convictions collide with her frankly exhibitionistic pleasure in her own beauty. As arguments over issues of gender, sexuality, and political correctness grow more and more hysterical, the impossibility of pinning her down to a clear-cut ideological position gives her work renewed force. Wilke's art does what Conceptual art is supposed to do: it makes you think hard. Through Oct. 26. (Feldman, 31 Mercer St.)

SCOBIE I. 'Hannah Wilke: Performalist Self-Portraits and Video/Film Performances 1976-85' [1], 10.1996, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1996/wilke%20in%20ny%20soho%20arts96.html.

NY Soho Arts Magazine, October 1996
HANNAH WILKE: "Performalist Self-Portraits and Video/Film Performances 1976-85"

Hannah Wilke was an innovative and beautiful artist who died at the age of 52. Her work encompassed performance, sculpture, photos, film and drawing. This exhibition based on self-portraiture, presents video/film performances, photos and a recreation of assemblages. In her lifetime, Wilke was known as Claes Oldenburg's former girlfriend. Unsurprisingly, there was no acknowledgement of her collaborations with him. When he exhibited their mutual "Raygun" collection in Europe, Wilke was given no credit. Her own collection of found raygun objects has been meticulously recreated from photos of the original P.S. 1 exhibition. Also shown are 48 photos, as well as posters with incorporated text. Like today's supermodels, Wilke was thin, elongated, and the camera loved her. She used her beauty aggressively, objectifying herself and confronting the audience. Her life fueled her art. In 1958, Wilke first began crating vaginal art. In 1974, she gave performances at the Kitchen. Her mother's illness and mastectomy were all photo documented. Hannah's final works reflected her own battle with lymphoma. She was a longtime Soho resident, and captured her neighborhood in evocative black and white nude self portraits on fire escapes and a roof. Ronald Feldman has represented Hannah since 1972. For the first time, the full ten monitor piece "So Help Me Hannah" brings together five of her separate performances from New York, Washington, London, Ontario, and Windsor. This exhibition, curated with the assistance of Don Goddard, Wilke's husband, celebrates a complex and avant-garde feminist artist. It also makes one mull over the importance of an eventual comprehensive retrospective of Hannah Wilke's work.

MCCLURE L., 'Hannah Wilke' [7], 10.1996, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1996/wilke%20in%20review.html.

Review, October 1, 1996
Hannah Wilke

So Help Me, Hannah. Indeed. You can almost hear her authoritarian voice in the title of this series, reprimanding herself for her outrageous, rebellious behavior. But as these mid-career performances, videos, and photographs by the late artist reveal, Wilke would not stop pushing the envelope of "acceptable" art.

While these works have already been seen, the show brings them together in a new way. It contextualizes the artist and her work. For those of us who became acquainted with Wilke through the feminist, art historical, academic readings of her work of the last decade, this exhibition offers something fresh. Reproduced photographs and video stills don't provide the full picture. It is a treat to view the videos here (the strongest parts of the show, in my estimation) because they clarify Wilke's strengths. The sheer force of her power in front of a live audience, and her mastery of performance, justifies her status as icon in feminist art history.

This show also illuminates just how derivative and, frankly, tired, so much of current "exhibitionist" art really is. While today's viewer thinks nothing of Wilke's nudity and exposed genitals, she was treading new ground in her time. With other body artists of the early '70s, Wilke firmly established the notion of the personal as political, which today is dangerously close to becoming a cliché.

Wilke's videotaped performances demonstrate the purposeful, knowing, premeditated nature of her actions and poses. She was certainly not just a beautiful woman who knew how to seduce the camera (and audience). Nor did she simply want to exhibit her own beauty. Rather, she was a beautiful woman who intended to do so in order to expose the problematic of being an inculturated woman. What we see in these performances is Wilke's calculated portrayal of the inherent performativity of femaleness itself.

Wearing high-heeled sandals and wielding a multitude of guns, Wilke appears as a Bond girl – on the run but with make-up and hair perfectly in place. Everything is about simultaneously exposing and embodying the oppressiveness of women's (particularly women artists') roles in society. There is no need to elaborate on these issues – in current thought, this kind of cultural definition is clearly understood. Such work couldn't be created today. We have moved beyond its simplicity and naiveté. I'm not sure that's progress.

It is the vacillation between sexually powerful and vulnerable in these images that sums up Wilke's enterprise. It was really her own identity and role that she was attempting to get a handle on. Including text from powerful (at least in the art world) men and women (Kuspit, Kozloff, Oldenberg, Reinhardt, Lippard, Baker), she was grappling with where she and her art fit in.

And it is, was (is!) art. Wilke was a pioneer. This show, however, feels more like a memorial – the sadness in the air at Feldman is palpable. There's something not quite right about viewing these "before" images now that we know what the "after" looked like. The haunting images of Wilke's post-mortem IntraVenus exhibition linger. Remembering her ravaged body, it's impossible to see these images on their own.

N.N., 'Press release: Hannah Wilke: Sculpture and other works' [9], 28.09.1999, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/exhsolo/exhwil99.html.

For immediate release: September 28, 1999
HANNAH WILKE: SCULPTURE AND OTHER WORKS
OCTOBER 16 – NOVEMBER 13

Since 1960 I have been concerned with the creation of a formal imagery that is specifically female, a new language that fuses mind and body into erotic objects that are namable and at the same time quite abstract - Hannah Wilke

The Feldman gallery will exhibit sculpture and photographic works relating to performance by Hannah Wilke, a pioneering Conceptualist whose work remains influential today. The exhibition, with selections from the first twenty years of her career, includes erotic shapes sculpted from clay, latex,

erasers, and chewing gum as well as work in which the artist uses her body as statement. Achieving recognition in the 1970s, Wilke has become an icon in feminist art history.

The exhibition traces Wilke's work in clay, beginning in the 1960s, with box-shaped sculptures of female and phallic imagery. 176 One-Fold Gestural Sculptures, prototypical pink ceramics, exhibited at the Feldman Gallery in 1974, further evolves the depiction of the abstracted vaginal form. Clay sculptures from the 1980s are large-scale, single-fold shapes in a variety of colors, placed on boards, that relate to themes of regeneration.

During the 1970s, Wilke experimented with untraditional sculptural materials for their special properties and metaphoric associations. The exhibition includes latex wall pieces, consisting of malleable layers of flesh-like folds, and sculpture of tiny, labia-shaped forms manipulated from gray art erasers (Needed-Erase-Her Series) and colorful pieces of chewed gum (S.O.S. Starification Object Series).

Also from the S.O.S. Starification Object Series are three large photographs of Wilke assuming stereotypical poses of femininity, her semi-nude body pocked with the small vulva shapes sculpted from chewing gum. Widely reproduced, these images comment on female beauty and the cultural representation of women and their bodies.

The exhibition includes work from a performance-installation, My Count-ry 'Tis of Thee. Performed at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery on July 4, 1976, and involving the local community, Wilke turned the patriotic theme into a "matriotic" one, creating three monumental photographic murals of her bare-breasted self as priestess-goddess and a frieze of dozens of gum sculptures.

Laura Cottingham writes that Hannah Wilke's work "encompasses satire and criticism, humor and didacticism, provocation and pathos, love and death, sentimentality and eroticism, beauty and kitsch; indeed there are few twentieth century artists who can match the emotional range Wilke mastered in her art."
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The Feldman Gallery has exhibited artwork of Wilke since 1972 including two exhibitions which the International Association of Art Critics awarded best gallery show of the season -- Intra-Venus, 1994, referring to illness and exhibited posthumously, and Performalist Self-Portraits, 1996. Current exhibitions include a traveling retrospective at the Helsinki City Art Museum and The American Century: Art and Culture, 1900-2000 at the Whitney Museum.
***
There will be a reception on October 16: 6 – 8. Gallery hours: 10 – 6, Tuesday - Saturday. Monday by appointment. For information, contact Breck Hostetter (212) 226-3232 or breck@feldmangallery.com. www.Feldmangallery.com.

BELASCO D., 'Jewish Body Art: Hannah Wilke's feminist works on display in Soho' [15], 5.11.1999, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1999%20new/wilke%20in%20jewish%20week.html.

The Jewish Week, November 5, 1999
Jewish Body Art
Hannah Wilke's feminist works on display in Soho.

Marked off by masking tape, Hannah Wilke's "159 One-Fold Gestural Sculptures" rest serenely on the floor of the Ronald Feldman Gallery. These simply folded pink clay sculptures, one of Wilke's iconic body works, are crucial in art history as unique abstractions of female genitalia. But if we look at them with Jewish eyes, there's another possible interpretation: hamentashen.

By developing a dynamic aesthetic vocabulary of the female body, Hannah Wilke was a key figure in the emergence of feminist art and erotics in the 1970s. Like most Jewish artists, her identity has largely dropped from art historical discourse, but Wilke herself had a distinctive Jewish interpretation of her art, including the hamentashen theory. Now, in "Hannah Wilke: Sculpture and Other Work," we have the opportunity to find the Jew in her art.

"Wilke's work remains important because it speaks to a part of our contemporary history, how women see themselves as part of the world," Ronald Feldman told The Jewish Week. "She uses female iconography, as opposed to a man using female iconography. It was quite radical to make art with her own body and about her own life, as a woman, and as a Jewish woman."

Born on the Lower East Side in 1940 and raised in Queens and Great Neck, L.I., Hannah Wilke was one of the first and most sophisticated artists to self-consciously present new images of women's bodies. And unlike most abstract expressionists who insisted on the singularity of their work, Wilke readily admitted that her art sprang directly from her Jewish consciousness.

In a 1978 interview in Visual Dialog, she confessed, "I know my work is related to my Jewishness." Growing up in a religious, but not observant, home, Wilke claimed to have experience Judaism as at once restrictive and inspirational. The prohibition of the creation of graven images, as well as the tradition of women's uncleanness, gave her the space and the incentive to develop her own visual language of the female body.

The form of repeatedly folded sculptures that make up "159 One-Fold Gestural Sculptures" reappear in other work throughout the exhibition as a strategy to express the demand that women be present in the public sphere. Wilke attributed her interest in repetition to her fascination for the magical spirituality of Hebrew prayer and the cyclical nature of Jewish ritual.

Taken to represent not just a woman but a Jewish woman, each of the abstractions is an assertion of Wilke's reliance on Jewish themes to comment on the larger society.

Wilke first gained attention in 1972 with her sexually charged latex wall sculptures. At the Feldman Gallery, "Rosebud," a four-foot-long procession of salmon-colored latex ruffles, evokes a sensuous wave of labia. This exuberant, though serious, expression of erotics seems crude compared to her more witty later works, which incorporate photographic self-portraiture and a unique vulvic iconography of chewing gum, erasers, and ceramics.

Wilke's strongest version of this form, and what she might be most famous for, is "S.O.S. (Starification Object Series)." (Only one example is on display, but others can be seen at the Whitney Museum's current "The American Century.")

Wilke photographs herself topless as a satire of Hollywood-inspired poses. Bits of folded chewing gum are affixed to her skin, marring her image and asserting the importance of contradiction. By freely displaying her (beautiful) body, however, Wilke had to argue this point, fighting off critical attacks of being a "narcissist."

Thankfully, Wilke also maintains a sharp sense of humor. She cast her torso in chocolate for "Venus Pareve," which was shown in The Jewish Museum's seminal 1996 exhibition "Too Jewish?" Wilke's wit is most adeptly expressed in "USS Missouri" and "Atlantic City, New Jersey," where she overlays a female narrative on found postcards of traditional tourist traps, covering them with dozens of tiny twists of clay.

In the most fascinating work in the show, Wilke uses handwritten texts to reveal her feelings about her secondary status in society, as a woman and a Jew. "Crucifixion Complex," a drawing executed in 1978, depicts a cross surrounded by notes, visual puns, and word plays. "Eraser… Erase Her," Wilke wrote. Nearby, she associated "But I am Jewish," with the phonetic transformation of "PREJUDICE" to "PRAY JEW DIES."

In later work unfortunately not on display, Wilke photographed her mother's slow deterioration from cancer, which Wilke called her "Auschwitz." Growing up surrounded by images from the camps, Wilke looked to her mother to understand the fundamental process of dying. This process foreshadowed Wilke's own death from lymphoma in 1993, which she documented in visceral photographs and drawings.

The Feldman Gallery also exhibits other important artists like Eleanor Antin, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and Leon Golub who work with Jewish themes. Feldman denies taking a special interest in Jewish art, but at the same time, he admits that self-identified Jewish artists like Wilke are making a significant contribution.

"What has happened is that Jewish artists have materialized. The so-called prohibition of representation has long since passed into history," Feldman said. "Jewish artists have found a voice and are expressing it."

GREGOS K., ' Hannah Wilke' [5], 02/03.2000, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Art Gallery, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/2000/wilke%20in%20contemporary%20visual%20arts.html.

Contemporary visual arts, February/March 2000
Hannah Wilke

Hannah Wilke's recent exhibition, six years after the artist's death from cancer, provided us with an opportunity to re-evaluate the work of a multi-faceted artist who was one of the driving forces in feminist art of the 1970s. Throughout her career, Wilke centred on the exploration of female identity and experience, focusing on the construction, representation and consumption of the image of woman.

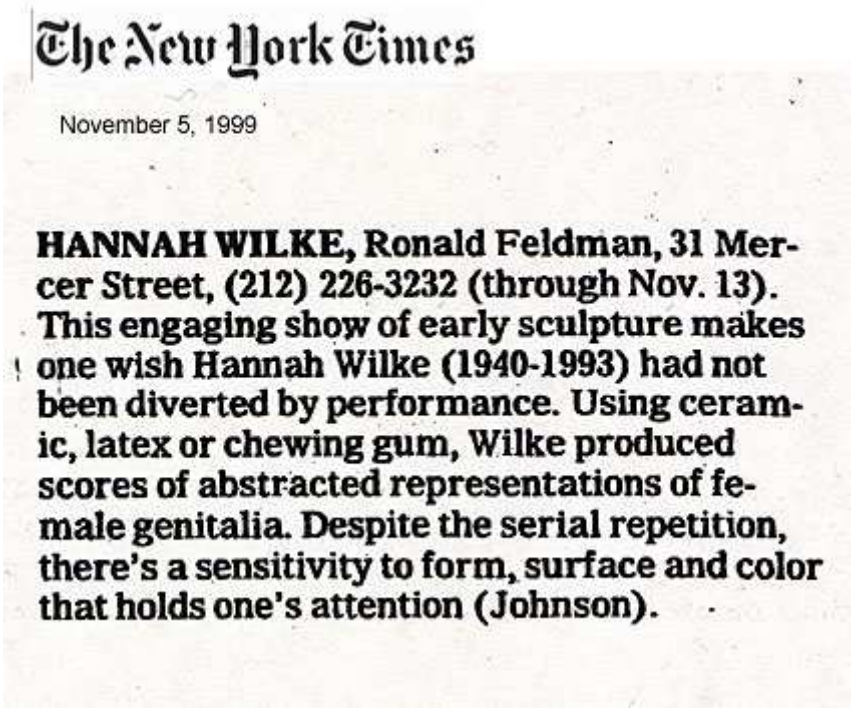
This exhibition included sculpture and other work from the first twenty years of the artist's career, from the clay box-shaped sculptures of female and phallic imagery of the sixties and continuing through her trademark chewing gum 'sculptures' of the seventies to her clay sculptures of the eighties. In these, one can trace Wilke's preoccupation with biomorphic forms that allude to sex and female genitalia; throughout there are references to the experience of female sexuality, and articulations of a very specific feminised sculptural idiom in which process and gesture are equally as important as form.

The 176 One-Fold Gestures (1973-4), displayed on the floor at Ronald Feldman, are a series of understated pink ceramic vaginal sculptures; the pieces are similar but no two are alike. In contrast to the minimalist geometry and austerity so prevalent during that time, these objects are fleshy, sensuous, luscious, curvilinear, and boldly suggestive of female sexuality. Here Wilke unabashedly reveals that which is normally concealed, and makes public a woman's intimate experience of her body in a corporeal sculptural landscape that is as visually enticing as it is upfront. In Rosebud, on the other hand, a large wall piece in which delicate layers of latex flow over one another in an accumulation of flesh-like folds that seem to develop organically, Wilke is more suggestively sensual, hinting at a kind of abstracted eroticism. Needed Erase-Her is also a comment on gesture and variation. Wilke has transformed grey erasers into a variety of vulval forms. Applied to old postcards of cities and monuments, they mark what the artist considers to be predominantly male spaces and structures with very private symbols of female presence.

The show also included works from Wilke's well know S.O.S. – Starification Objects Series, photos of Wilke herself in a variety of glamour-girl poses that reference fashion photography and pin-ups, and attempt to challenge stereotypical representations of femininity while also commenting on the commodification of desire. Wilke's otherwise picture-perfect image is disrupted by a multitude of vaginal, scar-like shapes sculpted from chewing gum; affixed to her body, they stigmatise it and disrupt the pleasure of the gaze.

Despite being relegated to a strictly feminist discourse, Wilke's work reveals a plurality of strategies and methods which continue to be relevant today in the post-feminist nineties. Her use of a wide range of media, from video and performance to photography and sculpture, makes her one of the first cross-media practitioners. In her use of autobiographical references and personal narrative strategies, in the deployment of her own body as a fetishised object and her willingness to expose herself and make art out of her life, she reflects concerns that lie at the forefront of artistic production today. In a formal language that is specifically female, she manages to transcend the issue of sexual politics, pointing to the wider complexities of gender and identity. Profoundly humanistic, Wilke's work is an affirmation not only of her sex but of life in general. It may be seven years since her death, but Wilke's work and courage continue to haunt, intrigue and inspire.

JOHNSON, 'Hannah Wilke' [1], 5.11.1999, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1999%20new/wilke%20in%20ny%20times.html.



The New York Times

November 5, 1999

HANNAH WILKE, Ronald Feldman, 31 Mercer Street, (212) 226-3232 (through Nov. 13). This engaging show of early sculpture makes one wish Hannah Wilke (1940-1993) had not been diverted by performance. Using ceramic, latex or chewing gum, Wilke produced scores of abstracted representations of female genitalia. Despite the serial repetition, there's a sensitivity to form, surface and color that holds one's attention (Johnson).

N.N., ' Hannah Wilke: About Face' [4], 09.08.1989, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/exhsolo/exhwil89.html.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 9, 1989

HANNAH WILKE - About Face
September 9 –October 7

In November 1986, Hannah Wilke began a series of watercolor self portraits. Eight months later, and during the following two years, she extended the series in a larger format (52 x 72 inches). This group of paintings comprise her current exhibition at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts with related graphic and photographic works created before and during this period. This new series, titled B.C., is composed of watercolor images that are simply faces – disturbing but luminous, abstract but real. They continue the self-images that have been central to Wilke's sculpture, photography, video and film since the mid-1960's. They represent what is seen and understood by the artist of her own physical and emotional state, which included the onset of illness before she was fully aware of it.

More than any of her earlier work, the paintings recognize and signify change – the recording of moment and chance, the workings of a constantly changing inner voice. Complementing them are photographs and drawings of events, people, and relationships that are the context for the self-portraits.

There will be a reception for the artist on Saturday, September 9 from 5 to 7 p.m. Gallery hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10 – 6, Mondays by appointment. For more information, please contact Susan Yung at (212)226-3232.

Available in September: Hannah Wilke: A Retrospective, essay by Joanna Frueh, edited by Thomas H. Kocheiser, University of Missouri Press, 1989. 176 pages, 55 color & 77 b/w illustrations, $25.

HESS E., ' Self- and selflessportraits, Hannah Wilke' [4], 26.09.1989, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1989/wilke%20in%20village%20voice.html.

The Village Voice, September 26, 1989
SELF- AND SELFLESS PORTRAITS - HANNAH WILKE.

Feminist artists aren't usually known for their bodies, but Hannah Wilke is an exception. She has been flaunting her naked self in performances and photographs since the early '70s, and her figure has become her signature image. Vaginas, for instance, were once putty in her hands, as she fashioned tiny facsimiles out of chewing gum, and then stuck them all over her skin. Wilke has struck innumerable narcissistic poses to wallow in cultural obsessions with the female body; her goal is not so much to annihilate these obsessions as to reclaim them, for better or worse.

"Body Art" worked its way into critical vernacular as Wilke, along with Carolee Schneeman, an originator of the genre, liberated their libidos in live performances. Postmodernists, such as Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman, who continue to mind the same vein, prefer to dress up the body or employ its appropriated versions; Wilke has always emphasized flesh- her flesh. She is one of few artists who continues to place their own bodies on the front lines of their work.

In her current exhibition, the main gallery is filled with a new series of watercolor self-portraits of the artist's face. These abstract, masklike ovals of color look like private exercises or experiments, nevertheless, they are surprisingly slight in comparison to Wilke's previous achievements. The heart of the show is in the back room, where Wilke continues to take on the difficult issues of illness, family, and body.

In a series of large photographs of her aging and ill mother, who died of cancer seven years ago, Wilke takes us instantly into the psyche, if not physical body, of a woman who is knowingly facing death. These are intimate shots, blown up larger than life, which freeze and contemplate the relationship between mother/subject and daughter/photographer. Wilke's identification with her mother is tangible; one can sense the artist attempting to prolong her mother's life through the work. Beneath her mother's portraits, Wilke sketches a number of delicate birds, in contrast to the harsh black-and-white realism of the photos; the maternal portraits hover over the small birds, as if they are nesting. Wilke has also recently gone through a bout with illness. In a diptych titled Handle With Care, she lies in bed with her eyes closed and a large bandage on her neck. A colorful bird (the artist, apparently, has a number of pet birds) sits on her head quite naturally, like a hat. In the second photo, Wilke cups one of her breast, as if guarding it from potential tumors or hasty surgeons; her mother had a mastectomy, which was the subject of an earlier work. Even in illness, however, the artist's "Hollywood" glamour - her trademark- shines through. Wilke's body has become a temple of sorts, and, despite her bandaged wound, it looks as sacred as ever. Yet, this show is tinged with fear. The inclusion of several older pieces, which feature a little girl, and a self-portrait of a younger Wilke creates a sense of loss. Illness may be Wilke's current metaphor, but autobiography remains her antidote…

KIMMELMAN M., ' Hannah Wilke' [3], 29.09.1989, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1989/wilke%20in%20new%20york%20times.html.

The New York Times, September 29, 1989
HANNAH WILKE

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.

E.H.-A., 'Hannah Wilke' [4], 11.1989, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1989/wilke%20in%20artnews.html.

ARTnews, November 1989
HANNAH WILKE

Hannah Wilke is best known for her staunchly feminist multimedia art, but her new imagery deals with larger concerns- life and death. Alluding to her battle with cancer, it communicates her own mortality in both lyrical and defiant terms. While these qualities have always defined her art, Wilke's new subject matter is best suited to her opposing sensibilities. Her latest paintings, photographs, and drawings are as moving as they are arresting.

Wilke expresses the ephemerality of life in four oversize photographs taken of her emaciated, bald mother, who died of breast cancer in 1982. Beneath each image are small drawings of birds suggesting the soul, the air, and all that is fleeting. The artist grappled with her fear of dying in less poignant terms when she created a series of nine-panel drawings (1989). She angrily sketches faces that shriek, cackle, or gape- responses to the imminence of death.

These works invest Wilke's self-portraits, which have always been confrontations, with a new kid of restraint and sadness. In Handle with Care (1987), the artist photographs herself lying on a bed, eyes tightly shut, arms crossed over bare breast, hair fanning across white sheets. Three live birds perch on her hand. Although Wilke's image clearly alludes to Courbet's Woman with a Parrot, her photograph is less about denuding the nude in art history than it is about her own fate. Her deathly pose forges a morbid bond between mother and daughter.

In 21 watercolors, executed from 1986 through '88, Wilke pokes fun at macho Action Painting and the stodgy idea of a signature stroke. She creates a tangled image of broad, clearly delineated marks through economical twists and scribbles of a wide brush, in April 19, 1988. Here Wilke reveals her pleasure in the act of painting, a simple expression of her joy in living.

LEVIN, 'Hannah Wilke' [1], 3.10.1989, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1989/wilke%20in%20village%20voice%20short.html.



October 3, 1989

Hannah Wilke: Her forte is self-exposure, and in this intelligent autobiographical show, which Wilke calls "About Face," she unsparingly reveals—besides the self-images she's best known for—her relationships and her physical and emotional states. The new squiggly red-yellow-and-blue watercolor self-portraits seem a startling departure from her past work until you connect them to her early chewing gum pieces. Through October 7, Ronald Feldman Gallery, 31 Mercer Street, 226-3232. (Levin)

LIU C., 'Hannah Wilke' [3], 12.1989, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1989/wilke%20in%20artforum.html.

Artforum, December 1989
HANNAH WILKE

Hannah Wilke makes feminism look easy, and why shouldn't she? After all, she's been committed to sketching out a language of female eroticism on the drawing board of representation for years now. The strongest work in this show was the "Seura Chaya" series, 1978-89, which juxtaposes photographs of Wilke's mother, ill from cancer and bald from chemotherapy, with drawings of the artist's bird, Chaya. (Wilke got the bird after her mother's death.) This work is testimony to the courage of both mother and daughter. Wilke had written that by obsessively photographing her mother, she had hoped to give her more life. She wants to transform the will to fix an image, to represent her mother, into an act of lifegiving. But Wilke's mother, with her huge eyes, smooth head, and emaciated body, looks all the more fragile and isolated by her physical deterioration. Yet there is beauty here and strength as well.

Wilke is well-know for appearing nude in her work. She projects a hippylike comfort with her own nakedness. But her self-exposure, which translates as some kind of rhetoric of sexual freedom for women, is too facile, too simple a formulation. The work of artist like Cindy Sherman and Aimee Rankin has shown female sexuality to be the site of as much pain as pleasure. The culturally acceptable forms of abuse of women have been giving way at a painfully slow rate, rendering Wilke's position both problematic and out of sync. Her self-portrait, naked in bed with her birds (Handle with Care, 1987), is sweet but remarkably lifeless.

Wilke's watercolor self-portraits are more contemplative than introspective. Made obsessively over a number of years, they show Wilke's varying vision of herself. Some are moody and angry, some remarkably opaque, others dense and animalistic. These images are painted with large daubs of swirling color. The most recent ones, form the "About Face" series, 1989, consist of nine masklike faces on one piece of paper. The earlier ones are huge, almost expressionistic in style. Each presents a face that is like a new distorting mirror, faithfully reproduced by an artist who, in the process of reenacting the false myth of feminine narcissistic rapture, reveals entirely other truths.

N.N., 'Hannah Wilke' [1], 25.09.1989, geraadpleegd op 15.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/Press%20pages/1989/wilke%20in%20new%20yorker.html.

THE NEW YORKER

September 25, 1989

HANNAH WILKE—Titled "About Face," this trenchant and—as is always the case with this often brilliant and quite relentless artist—very personal exhibition of works in mixed mediums (watercolors, drawings, and photographs) establishes some stunning parallels between natural beauty and the ravages of old age and illness, and between states of innocence and the ever-present possibilities of sexual corruption. Key subjects include Wilke's pet lovebirds, her dying mother, and Wilke herself. Through Oct. 7. (Feldman, 31 Mercer St.)

N.N., 'Press release: Hannah Wilke, Polychrome Sculpture & Photographs' [5], 13.11.1984, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 13, 1984
HANNAH WILKE - Polychrome Sculpture & Photographs
December 1 – December 29, 1984
Gallery Hours: Tues – Sat 10-6 PM

Hannah Wilke's exhibition at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts combines two separate but related aspects of her art. Polychrome ceramic sculpture, ranging from tabletop and pedestal pieces to major floor pieces, merge painting and sculpture in unprecedented ways. Photographs portraying the artist's mother during the last years of her life are also keys to the moral, teleological and generative principals that have informed Wilke's art for more than 25 years.

The painted sculptural works are three-dimensional forms on two-dimensional grounds, literally sculptures on paintings. They are neither additive nor subtractive in the tradition of modeled or constructed sculpture, but are physical manipulations of a constant in mass and motion. Based on a fundamental but infinitely variable language of geometry, number, size and relationship, they transform mathematical order into organic presence, molecular or cellular structure into aesthetic structure. Two-dimensional circles become gestural bodies; polygonal bases become ostensible spatial limits. Each is enfolded and superceded by the other. They are images and symbols of genesis, extensions of a life force that is the artist's action.

Color, which had always been singular and inherent in Wilke's sculptural materials, is now a property of painting, a gestural property that both contrasts and integrates form and field. The monumental floor pieces are like landscapes, paying homage to the extraordinary integrity and formal beauty, continuity and unpredictability of nature. The portraits of Selma Butter, the artist's mother, are homages to the same qualities in human life. Each picture is part of a sequence and yet totally integrated in itself. In the triptych, IN MEMORIAM, SELMA BUTTER (MOMMY), combining sculpture and painting with language and photographs, Wilke makes an art that is not subordinated but is created in the service of life.

In the past year, Hannah Wilke's work has been shown in several exhibitions in the United States and Europe. A significant group of works, stressing the political aspects of her art was selected by Lowery Sims, Associate Curator of 20th Century Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for the New Museum's exhibition, "Art and Ideology." A one-person exhibition called "Performalist Self-Portraits" was recently presented at the Gross Gallery of the University of Arizona in Tuscon, curated by art historian Joanna Frueh. Wilke's work is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Allen Art Museum of Oberlin University, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and many other public and private art collections. Part of the work in this exhibition was made possible by a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship awarded to Wilke for 1982-83.

The public is invited to the opening on Saturday, December 1st. A reception for the artist will be held from 5 to 7 PM on that evening. The gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 AM to 6 PM, Mondays by appointment only. Admission is free. For further information concerning the exhibition, contact Babara Goldner at (212) 226-3232.

HENRY G., 'Hannah Wilke at Feldman' [4], 07.1985, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery webste, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

Art in America, July 1985: HANNAH WILKE AT FELDMAN

Having watched her development as an artist for a decade, this observer has come to the conclusion that Hannah Wilke has two great loves- the love of the amorphous, and the love of the highly personal. It was personal, highly personal, when in a 1978 show Wilke featured answering-machine messages from, among others, several lovers. Amorphousness characterized Wilke's early sculpture, assembled from masses of petallike, flesh-tinted layers of thinly poured latex, held together with grommets and mounted, quivering, on the wall. Personal and amorphous were the wads of chewing gum Wilke stuck all over her nude body in photographs which are remembered, fondly or not, by art cognoscenti to this day.

These two principal tendencies in her work carried over into her latest show; but, in the intervening years since '78, they have become passions- indeed, compulsions. The amorphous? It was all over the

place in the new sculptures Wilke exhibited. These were tabletop, pedestal, and on-the-floor pieces composed of one or two or maybe three polychrome pastry-shell-like forms, with more "pastry" inside and painted all over à la de Kooning. They were shown resting on semi-oblong masonite bases of a single color, often bordered by paint-speckled bands. There were row upon row of these objects, with titles like "Of Relativity Series" or Support Foundation.

Also on show were photos from Wilke's highly personal "In Memoriam Series"- black-and-white and Cibachrome pictures of her mother, Selma Butter, taken as she was dying of cancer. She was depicted in progressive phases of her illness- looking wasted in the hospital with no hair, looking frail in bed, and so on.

The photos evidence a real talent for loving informal portraiture. They have much of the same courageous sensitivity to the subject that Avedon showed in his portraits of his dying father. But in my view Wilke went too far in certain works. A Portrait of the Artist with Her Mother, Selma Butter was a diptych featuring, on the left, Hannah posing attractively nude with various metal objects stuck to her body (a throwback to the chewing gum, no doubt), and, to the right, a nude, gaunt Mrs. Butter, one breast removed and cancer festering over her right side. The effect, to me, was cruel, though Wilke showed as much courage in taking these photos as her mother did in being photographed. Perhaps Wilke was trying to exorcise our common fears of death, especially death by cancer. Whatever her intention, the effect of the show was devastating, but with art played off against death, the fascination of death got the upper hand.

BASS R., 'Hannah Wilke' [5], 03.1985, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

ARTnews, March 1985 - HANNAH WILKE

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 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.

N.N., 'Sculpture and Photographs by Hannah Wilke' [1], 7.12.1984, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

The New York Times

December 7, 1984

Sculpture and Photographs by Hannah Wilke (Ronald Feldman Gallery, 31 Mercer Street): In a one-person show that has been too long delayed, Hannah Wilke shows group upon group of small polychrome sculptures. Though they sometimes look like exceptionally inventive examples of takeout food, they will also bear an anatomical interpretation. Quietly provocative in shape, they are inventive enough in their coloring to do without the painted bases that support them.

They are set off by a series of remarkably explicit photographs of Miss Wilke's mother in the last stages of cancer. An indomitable spirit gazes out at us from these photographs, thereby allaying some of the more widespread of contemporary terrors. But the two parts of the show make for an uneasy mix. (Through Dec. 29.)

LEVIN, 'Hannah Wilke: Support foundation comfort' [1], 18.12.1984, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

the village VOICE

December 18, 1984

'Hannah Wilke: Support Foundation Comfort': The obsessive variations on a mother-daughter generational theme in this no-holds-barred show include roomfuls of splashy paired and multiplying female fortune cookie forms, a long row of nude Hannah figurines, and a series of painfully courageous photographs of her mother dying of cancer. It's pretty strong stuff. Through December 29, Ronald Feldman Gallery, 31 Mercer Street, 226-3232. (Levin)

N.N., 'Press release: Hannah Wilke, Through the large glass' [10], 10.03.1978, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE March 10, 1978: HANNAH WILKE - THROUGH THE LARGE GLASS
MARCH 18-APRIL 1, 1978

The exhibition features a film by Hannah Wilke, Through the Large Glass, of her performance at the Philadelphia museum of Art based on Duchamp's major work.

Accompanying the 16-mm color film will be Wilke's 30-minute videotape, Philly, documenting the making of the film.

Drawings, prints, photographs and other objects relate to the film and video in a broader way.

In the performance, which ambiguously plays out the roles of bachelor and bride, artist and art-object, voyeur and erotic object, as she is seen directly behind Duchamp's "Large Glass," Wilke uses the Glass as a stage, a framing device for her own moving, ultimately nude, figure within the abstract configuration of Duchamp's work, both complementing its intricate illusions and challenging its relegation of experience to intellectual knowledge.

Her interest in using her body as a living sculpture relates closely to earlier sculpture, in which repetitive pattern, gestural composition and subtle change are of paramount importance.

The video contrasts sharply with the formal gestures and aesthetic concentration of the film, unfolding the serio-comic sequence of events that led up to and surround the actual shooting session.

Through the Large Glass was originally made in a different form for the full-length feature film "C'est la Vie Rrose," which was produced and distributed for German television by Hans-Christof Stenzel.

"C'est la Vie Rrose," in which Wilke plays herself in a picaresque allegory of Duchamp's career, has appeared throughout Europe winning gold medals in several categories of the German Federal Film Awards for 1977.

The film will have its American premiere on Thursday, March 23, at the Carnegie Hall Cinema, 883 Seventh Avenue. Film times are 2:50, 6:30, and 10:05.
A limited number of tickets are available through the Feldman Gallery. Call 249-4050

RUSSELL J., 'Hannah Wilke' [4], 24.03.1978, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

The New York Times, March 24, 1978
Hannah Wilke

Not many works of art made in this century have as vast a bibliography as the large transparent work by Marcel Duchamp that is called "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even" and has been for many years in the Philadelphia Museum.

Yet not one of those learned explainers has had the wit to do what Hannah Wilke lately did: to see what actually happens when a beautiful woman gets on the far side of the Duchamp and takes off all her clothes.

Miss Wilke volunteered for the job, all bachelors were kept at bay, the entire event was put on film, and we can see the result at the Feldman Gallery. Like the other videotapes that make up the bulk of the show, this one is very well photographed and not at all exhibitionistic. Marked adagio throughout, it leaves us with the kind of satisfaction that we got from a first-rate short story in the days when the short story seemed to be one of the highest forms of literature.

For further confirmation of that, see "Intercourse With …", which has to do with the way in which the stumbling announcements of an answering machine can return to haunt us.

FRACKMAN N., 'Hannah Wilke' [2], 03.1978, geraadpleegd op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

Arts Magazine, May 1978
Hannah Wilke

Possibly the most gorgeous face and body in town belongs to Hannah Wilke and there's a lot of it to be seen now at the Ronald Feldman Gallery. There is a color film of Wilke's performance at the Philadelphia Museum of Art where she did a sensuous and elegant striptease behind Duchamp's famous Large Glass. Wearing a fedora and a pantsuit with a vest and scarf, she carries this off with neat aplomb. In fact, she shows such poise that were it not for the accompanying black and white documentary film, which plays simultaneously with the color film, we might not suspect that she was fully human. However, the documentary shows that indeed she is vivacious, chews gum, spontaneously makes her androgynous "gundrops" and seems altogether likeable. That's part of the problem; how can anyone have that much looks, talent, intelligence, poise, etc.? This is not said facetiously but with a sense of awe. The color film and documentary make an amusing commentary on fantasy versus reality and Wilke's striptease is appropriate since Duchamp's Large Glass is also known as The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even.

Intercourse With … is a black and white videotape of Wilke's performance/lecture at the London Art Gallery and Museum in Ontario. A simultaneous videotape plays phone messages that she has received, presumably on a telephone answering machine, from friends, lovers, and family culled from the past five years. Visually, the focus is chiefly on her facial expressions and bodily reactions to the various messages. She seems to respond in a state of poetic reverie. The background music is schmaltzy. That she can make us believe it at all is surely a tribute to her artistry because most people replay their answering machines in a state of fatigue and anxiety. Of course, artists are not like the average person and Wilke certainly isn't the average artist. The gallery is also displaying Hannah Wilke photo-silkscreens, some photographs, and also the Hannah Wilke coin collection can – all very witty and cogent. Altogether, this show raises a lot of intricate questions, so better figure on a couple of hours' digesting time.

HENRY G., 'Hannah Wilke' [2], 03.1978, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

ARTnews, May 1978
Hannah Wilke

To any but the most devoted eye, film and video art of the past ten years has been, for the most part, boring. Wilke's films and tapes are anything but – she has avoided the static, impersonal nature of this brand-new fine arts medium by treating it personally, playfully, and with very frank eroticism.

Wilke's concern as an artist has always been with herself – or, to phrase it properly, her self, physical and emotional. A series of works related to the major film and video pieces in the exhibition proved the point: A Hannah Wilke Monument was a photo documentation of the artist's "happening" in front of the Albright-Knox Museum in Buffalo, in which she stood huge photo blow-ups of herself, nude from the waist up, in Greco-Roman costume, in front of the museum's façade of Greco-Roman male statuary. Along a lower frieze of the façade, Wilke affixed pieces of chewed gum. The gum motif reappeared in other nude photos – on a poster for the School of Visual Arts and a photo silkscreen on plexiglass called Marxism and Art ("Beware of Fascist Feminism"), in both of which shots Wilke had stuck gum all over her torso.

In these works, Wilke proved herself an artist unafraid of exhibitionism of the feminist-rankling, girlie-magazine sort; perhaps the last revenge of the physically attractive female is to display fully all of her attributes, including, as a kick-in-the-pants to slavering voyeurs, an artistic intelligence. This was perhaps the point to the major piece in the show, a film called Through the Large Glass (accompanied by a video, Philly, documenting the making of the film), in which Wilke, outfitted like next year's Jean Shrimpton, stood in front of Duchamp's The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and proceeded to strip herself bare – by herself= of course, without the aid of any bachelors. Woman-hater Duchamp was thereby put in his place by the mere expedient of an attractive woman acting out, and thereby contradicting, his title.

N.N., 'Press release: Hannah Wilke' [1], 01.08.1975, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE August 1, 1975
HANNAH WILKE
SCULPTURE AND DRAWINGS
September 13-October 18, 1975

The exhibition will consist of several latex wall sculptures and sculpture drawings. Some are made with chewing gum and others with kneaded erasers.
The gallery hours are Monday - Saturday; 10:00 - 5:30.

ANDRE M., 'Hannah Wilke' [1], 16.07.2007, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

ARTnews, November 1975 -Hannah Wilke

Wilke's latex wallhangings flower monochromatically in asymmetrical rows; color is so close that differences are subliminal. Miniaturist kneaded eraser or chewing gum saddles are mounted or, rather, massed behind plexiglass, as at some museo anthropologico; these two-and three-color harmonies generate the same satisfactions as Wilke's pastel graphic work. All the sculpture is done in pointed allusion to the female genitalia, as Judith Bernstein's Screw drawings allude to the male genitalia. Wilke's are pretty. Bernstein's are threatening; they both link clearly to feminism. Of course, Wilke is a sculptor and conceptual artist, and her repetitive use of a single painted hanging form in wall sculpture connects her to Lynda Benglis; and Wilke, like Benglis, is an art star. As Allen Ginsberg discovered years ago, taking your clothes off in public provokes serious critical commentary. In Wilke's S.O.S. Starification Object Series she stuck morsels of vagina-shaped chewing gum in different patterns over her naked body; since chewing gum does not stick long to hairless flesh, it was necessary to photograph the event. The model, in art, has traditionally been a woman and the artist a man; Wilke is both artist and model.

SAVITT M., 'Hannah Wilke: The Pleasure Principle' [10], 09.1975, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

Arts Magazine, September 1975
Hannah Wilke: The Pleasure Principle

By now everyone is quite well aware that Hannah Wilke does cunts. What her show at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts will reinforce is the wide range of her interlocking concerns and the multi-level evocative quality of her work.

The Ponder-r-Rosa (1974) latex wall pieces use opaque, roughly circular modules arranged in a number of ways. The most satisfying are the first in the series in which the modules form circular clusters which float on the wall. These are further f grouped by color into sections that become circular, square, and triangular arrangements. Unlike her earlier, more translucent latex and snaps works which sagged down with the burden of gravity deeply expressed, these works dot the wall with light and color. Like floating disks denying any sense of weight, they remind one of water lilies swimming in the expanse of the dematerialized wall, as the wall becomes both a literal structural anchor and a metaphorical reservoir of space. They also have a playful quality reminding one of pastel-colored candy dots on huge rolls of white paper.

Another more recent member of the series transforms the circle into a sculpted line. The green color with orange-speckled accents of the pieces, folded one above another, confirms one's desire to read this piece as a stem complementing the flowers. Taking up an idea embodied in her 1972 Chocolate Pancakes (in the collection of Claes Oldenburg), the new piece drops the anal association of the earlier work to deal more playfully with association to organic forms. At the same time, Wilke maintains a more assured formal rigor.

Her childlike playful attitude is most fully apparent in her bubble gum system S.O.S. in which a delicately colored curve of the chewed materials, evoking perhaps a disembodied nipple, the head of an erect penis, a clitoris, or a collar, is put on a piece of paper. In this manner, an evocative, composed form is fashioned by the artist with a perfect economy of means. It takes more effort to chew the gum than it does for Wilke to transform it into an art object. Noting the many hundreds of these curves produced, one sees that it is with the obsessive determination of an Abstract Expressionist that she

achieves the purity of planar shape. Her new work, as pure embodied gesture, achieves the goal of immediacy of Abstract Expressionist desires without the labored look of many Abstract Expressionist sculptural works. Going beyond the existential torment of action painting and the cool indifference of Pop and Minimal art, Wilke's work exudes a kinky come-on, an engaging wistfulness which may well define the positive pole of 1970s sensibility.

Wilke explains that he art is "seduction." In her S.O.S performance, she sits semi-nude and flirts while she has her audience chew for her. Wilke then proceeds to decorate her body with the bubble gum "stars." In the ceremonial aspects of the piece and in her treatment of her body as a decorative surface, the work relates to African cicatrisation decoration, a reference held in mind by the artist. The dual nature of the African custom (it enhances beauty and is a sexual come-on, and also relates to the status of woman behind the markings) is reflected in the seductiveness of Wilke's performing persona and the playing with women's roles as evidenced by the poses recorded on the playing cards. The performance only alludes to one's real inner scars. Since the "stars" are removable, Wilke experiences (and gives) more pleasure than pain.

In her last New York show, Wilke exhibited a series of kneaded erasers whose somber, drained gray tone and minute obsessive ness exhibited a sort of morbid humor (contained as well in the puns in the titles Need It – Erase Her, Need to Erase Her) expressive of our culture's anti-feminist stance. In her new drawings she puts some life into these works by sending them out into the deep perspective of old post cards, thereby causing Dada-Surrealist disruption of scale and meaning. The erasers pour out en masse into an otherwise deserted street scene invading the landscape. Like alien creatures in a sci-fi film, they overtake the sculptural base, thus wreaking havoc on our sense of limits and bounds. Wilke is an artist of transgression challenging our culture's veneer of high seriousness and offering an anecdote – pure pleasure.

Wilke, who, unlike fellow self-sculptor Claes Oldenburg, is "for an art that sits on its ass in museums," fantasizes r repeating the performance process in the Museum of Modern Art's projects area when she could gleefully hand out gum to young chewers. One imagines the liberating aspect of Wilke's pleasure of offering being countered by the reprimanding reaction of hostile parents, "Didn't I tell you never to accept candy from a stranger?"

Indeed Wilke herself is often the content of her art. Her activities in a variety of media often relate directly to this. In addition to S.O.S, one see Wilke's face in her first videotape Gestures (her body in a series of new tapes made with the cooperation of Paul Tschinkel), one hears her voice in her telephone tapes, and one sees her do a campy crucifixion in sandals and loincloth at the Kitchen. By manipulating the image of a sex kitten (female sex object), Wilke manages to a void being trapped by it without having to deny her own beauty to achieve liberation.

In reading the recent Art-Rite issue on painting, one is struck by the humanistic tone of many of the artists' statements. While they are by no means becoming sentimental, there does seem to be a renewed concern with the communication of human experience. While anti-illusionism is still championed, artists no longer seem interested in maintaining a militant stance against an academic painter's conjuring tricks. Instead, there is much talk about allusionism, perhaps a new catchword for 1970s art ideology.

In this respect Hannah Wilke's works are exemplary. Rather than representing cunts, cock heads, flowers, stems, or breasts, her terra-cotta folds, kneaded erasers, Ponder-r-Rosa series, and bubble gum curves allude to one's experience of their shapes and textures when encountered in nature. Using elements of the joke – Freud's powerhouse of compacted allusion – Wilke explores a range of evocative images and presences which affirm with a new sense of openness the pure humanistic pleasure principle.

HESS T. 'Hannah Wilke' [1], 13.10.1975, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

New York Magazine, October 13, 1975

Hannah Wilke, like Tuttle creates objects calculated to slide among the conventional Beaux-Arts categories. Are they sculptures, drawings, paintings, collages, or some kind of print, these golden latex cabbages, these kneaded erasers and blobs of bubble gum gently folded into pouting shapes – half-vagina, half-fortune cookie? There is a seductive move at the audience in Wilke's strategy. She has stuck a number of gooey bits to her handsome face and naked torso, flirted at a camera, and had some photos taken. They are droll and fetching. She has also marshaled blobs on old postcards and sheets of white paper. Bits of polychrome chewing gum are assembled into complicated, long-division

sums. The results are images that are disciplined, obsessional, given to ingenious patterns and to variations within very small limits. They are also ingratiating. In other words, Wilke seems to be trying to recapture a tribal or fold-art concept within a highly sophisticated, self-absorbed, urban context. Where a nineteenth-century Amish genius might tie 8,000 knots into a rug, Wilke folds as many bits of plastic into an exhibition. The effort is poignant, especially as Wilke, like most inspired fold artists, basks in a realization that she is doing the Lord's Good Work.

BOURDON D., 'Hannah Wilke' [3], 29.09.1975, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

The Village Voice, September 29, 1975

Feminist ideas play a key role in the art of HANNAH WILKE, soloing in New York for the third time at Ronald Feldman and MARY BETH EDELSON, a recent transplant from our nation's capital, who now has her first one-woman show in New York at AIR. Wilke is an ingratiating abstractionist with a developed sense of style, while Edelson is a Conceptualist whose work conveys more than one message. Both present works that incorporate photographs of themselves (yes, nude), in which they strike poses that deliberately allude to traditional sex objects or archetypal goddesses.

Wilke, like her good friend Claes Oldenburg, specializes in soft sculpture, latex-and-metal reliefs (about the size of place mats) that she mounts in rows on gallery walls. Her seductively tactile constructions remind many people of vulvas. Gallery-goers with less limited imaginations might also think of heads of lettuce, corsages of "shattered" carnations, and cloth rosettes. In order to make her "rosettes," Wilke pours colored latex (of the consistency of pancake batter) onto a plaster of Paris surface. When the "pancakes" have set, she gathers about 20 of them, fastens them together with metal snaps, then pins the cluster of latex leaves to the wall. Fifteen of these "rosettes" in faded-looking tints of yellow, blue, and pink, line one wall.

In addition to the latex-and-snaps pieces, Wilke presents other series of works that incorporate a multitude of chewed gum (looking like candy dots on sheets of paper) or picture postcards, adorned with platoons of kneaded erasers. She finds still another use for gum in a prototype for a "mastication box," a game containing 36 playing cards, chewing gum – and photographs of her topless self, embellished with wadded gum "beauty spots." Wilke, who has the most eloquent bare shoulder this side of Rita Hayworth, sees herself as a liberated woman who does not need to deny her own beauty. She compares the wadded gum ornamentation to African scarification designs. However, she spells it "starification."

N.N., 'Press release: Hannah Wilke' [1], 28.02.1974, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/exhsolo/exhwil74.html.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE February 28, 1974
HANNAH WILKE
March 16- March 30, 1974
The exhibition will include approximately 250 small single-fold gestural terra cotta sculptures by this young New York artist, a series entitled Needed Eraser Her, and a videotape Gestures.
The gallery hours are Monday - Saturday; 10:00 - 5:30.

DEAK E., 'Hannah Wilke at Feldman' [5], 03/06.1974, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/exhsolo/exhwil74.html.

Art in America, May-June 1974 - Hannah Wilke at Feldman

I am tired of people's one-sided involvement with Hannah Wilke's art, of their protestations that it is so erotic, so sexy. They make such statements only from sheer reflex – or out of defensiveness. Of course, Wilke's art is sexy and erotic, and she does make feminine art, but what if we look at her art as art, as regular art – the way we look at male art, or at that art by women which is considered neutral in content? Wilke's work is so good that one can sense he whole personality through it. She is committed to defining in art her own value as a woman. Moreover, she does this in an intensely honest way, expressing intimate, hurt, moody, lusty, ironic sentiments. She is vulnerable because she is a beautiful woman who makes obtrusively sexual images.

One of the rarest things in life is to see a physically beautiful person with a sense of humor, which Wilke also has. Hers is a complex one, and she needs it all because in spite of the excellence of her

work, people talk about her. They ignore the forms in her art and discuss only its content. She makes erotic art, with female content, with taboo images – taboo for men because it is done by a woman, and taboo for most women because they are too shy to acknowledge the source of the imagery. Perhaps her revolutionary female gestalt is overplayed. It is meant to have a loud public message, but, because of the subject's private nature, it can never be made public without making the artist extremely vulnerable. Hence, probably, her intuitive refuge in a sense of humor.

Wilke's recent show was hilarious – but with nervous overtones. She showed objects with her usual sexual theme, but this time they were all one kind of image: a simple double-fold form, in many small versions, repeated in several different materials. It was as if with their simple gesture she had also folded up the sway and grandeur of her earlier fleshy, latex veils. The new works are small, insignificant, humiliated vaginal evocations. The large number of them is not a substitution for the sensuality of the latex sculptures. By making hundreds of these little fuckers, she depersonalizes the very body part whose sensual quality depends so much on its individuality. She has made it into an asexual herd of repeated images. This frantic, obsessive multiplicity and abstracting from the image are a sign that Wilke is using art as some kind of defense, to keep the content under control.

In the best of her new work, the vaginal motif is dramatically mutated through color and changes of medium. Her bright "pink flamingos" have turned into a monochrome field of rigid, neutral, clay-colored floor objects. There was also on exhibition a row of real Chinese fortune cookies that played a nice Dada Readymade game – and now we all know what fortune cookies really look like.

Wilke seemed to be playing hid-and-seek through the formal curbing she imposes on her messages. A little Minimal here, a little process-and-materials there – is all very eclectic. However, she broke through, in spite of and because of all these formal ways of hiding. Her show made me imagine Paradise under female control. Regulation and order (as expressed in her compositional elements) were present but not overused. I cherish Wilke's expressive potential. I hope she can hold on to it by being hysterical, loud, cheap, silly, funny, formalist, sarcastic, full of sorrow. I hope she can remain a woman artist and hold on to her sense of humor. I don't care so much about her numerical ordering devices or the structural repetitions in her videotape pieces. They need structuring and organization, but her methods are not unique.

COLLINS J., 'Hannah Wilke' [7], 06.1974, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

Artforum, June 1974 - Hannah Wilke

"Since sexual issues still frighten, and male superiority still flourishes leaving cunt queens quite lonely …could we possibly find a better name for my kittens?" HANNAH WILKE charmingly asks this in reply to Art-Rite's recent question to several women artists: "Do you think there is a shared female artistic sensibility in the work of female artists?" Nancy Graves, Sylvia Stone and Joan Jonas said "No!", Laurie Anderson and Judy Chicago hedged; and Agnes Martin rejected the question. But Hannah Wilke's answer is the one I remember. It's the same way again. Irrespective of whether it's her earlier large latex wall hangings, or her present small terra-cotta and lint folds, or her video gesture pieces, her rhetoric has stuck on her art. She may, or may not, live up to her claim to be a "Public Princess of the new movement Pubism," but every time I see her work I think of pussy.

I don't give a shit about radical differences between men and women's art – the more androgynous the better – so I enjoy immensely Wilke's outrageous and witty rhetoric and the way it enlivens quite traditional sculpture. Just as I like her narcissistic infatuation with her own unquestionable good looks in her video here, I also remember her going on stage at the recent Joseph Beuys lecture and doing a nice "We should touch each other more" number as he held out her hand to him – The American Feminist meets the German Socialist! Great theater! To me Wilke's rhetoric and personality are inseparable from her art. The more personality she can get in it the better. Myth, I'm gradually learning, is not outside artworks to be ignored but actually part of looking at them. Perhaps the more myths artists get round their "dumb" objects the better.

What's interesting about Wilke's present show is how her rhetoric changes the work. Knowing what she's said, what are you to make of her beautifully made, pink, ragged edge, "one-fold-gesture" terra-cotta sculpture, of which there are 176 equally spread over the floor? Looking like hollow cabbage forms with turned-over edges, the group of single pieces occupies a floor area about 8' x 12'. Ranging in size from finger to palm scale, the pieces can be read two ways. You can either read them as metaphors for genitalia or as Process sculpture – one fold, two fold and so on. Wilke would clearly like both.

Wilke explores aspects of the terra cottas in an even more Process way with her double-fold lint pieces, of which 12 are in a soft line, again on the floor – although I don't know whether I should read anything into that. Subjugated kittens perhaps? Unlike the hard sing-fold terra cottas – only soft in a Bernini-like appearance sense – these lints look soft, and feel soft. You can, if you like your kicks vicariously, play around with them, because they're just two bits of lint loosely draped in crotch forms. Made, I understand, from lint collected from red and pink towels from Wilke's clothes dryer, a la Joel Fisher, each piece of lint is a beautiful faded pink or red. The lint folds are nice, casually fragile, sensuous things.

Although there are other things in the show, I like the terra cottas and lints best. I don't understand the rationale of the geometric layouts. A parody of the regimentation of women as sex objects? Seems too obvious. Obviously what interests Wilke most is the idea of folding, although I don't know what comes first, folding in art, or folding in life. Clay, lint, erasers and even cookies are all folded with loving care. But there is a problem with disembodied folded genitalia in art – as in life. If Germaine Greer is right, people persist in loving people not shapes. And to be erotic sex should have a context. Cunts, without women and cocks without men tend to be boring. You avoid all the interesting questions like "Who?" "Why?" "When?" etc. Although Wilke's objects are a step in the right sexual direction, the most erotic questions are still raised verbally.

Erotically, Wilke's video Gestures were more successful – or "hornier" in America, and "randier" in England – than the sculpture. Why? Well she's actually in them for a start. The video is probably the best thing in the show, because by being in the pieces, using just her head and hands, she gives the folding gestures, particularly more meaning. Stroking, kneading, preening and slapping her face were interesting but the folding mouths gestures were the naughtiest. Because she's sensuously breaking a cultural rule and that's one definition of erotic. Pushing at her lips and then folding them back to expose the underside, very slowly, and deliberately, as well as pushing her tongue out were powerful images. Using her mouth as a surrogate vagina and her tongue as surrogate clitoris, in the context of her face, with its whole psychological history, was strong stuff! Like a tasteful 42nd Street 'spread snatch,' but thankfully at the other end of the body. Hannah Wilke with the video appears to be moving into areas of sexuality hardly begun to be explored.

Wilke's position in the art world, then, is a strange paradox between her own physical beauty and her very serious art. She longs to fulfill her sexuality in an almost Marilyn-Monroe-like way; but her attempt to deal with this dilemma within the woman's movement has an air of touching pathos about it.

TANNENBAUM J., 'Hannah Wilke' [1], 05.1974, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

Arts Magazine, May 1974
Hannah Wilke

Hannah Wilke's "Floor Show," her second one-woman New York exhibition presents recent sculptural images of female genitalia and black and white video tape. Since the early 1960s Wilke has made small terra cotta boxes and shapes resembling vulvas and vaginas. Now, she continues to develop this iconography. Included are 176 one-fold gestural terra cotta pieces (1973-74). The number and arrangement of the pieces is arbitrary, and each element is a separate and complete sculptural form. These pieces vary in size (some are tiny), but all are painted a uniform soft pink. Each pocket-like form is made from a single thin layer of clay which Wilke folds into a multilayered piece that may look like a flower or a shell as well as a sexual organ. Some open up, while others turn inward; and edges may be ragged or smoothly scalloped. Thus here, as in the latex wall hangings exhibited in 1972, Wilke is concerned with the hardness and softness of "femaleness." The clay is hard but thin and somewhat fragile, whereas the delicate color and the folds and curves of the shapes suggest softness and flexibility. Wilke also works with soft materials. For example, there is a piece composed of a row of twelve lint sculptures on a board. (It took two years to collect enough lint from the washing machine.) The colors of these double-fold, open forms range from a warm rose to paler pinks, beige and yellow tones. Also, there are five works in which gray, round forms made from artists kneaded erasers are placed on square boards – in two pieces the elements are lined up in precise patterns, while in the others the arrangements are more casual. Wilke displays a sense of humor in the piece made up of thirty-one fortune cookies lined up on a board. The artist's presentation of this "found object" which resembles so closely the modeled genital images, causes the viewer to see the "real" world in a new way. In the silent video tape, Wilke makes gestures with her hands, head, and face which relate to the shapes or gestures of the sculptural floor pieces. She examines herself carefully and thoroughly – patting, massaging, caressing, pulling, pinching, and slapping each feature. Wilke expresses a range of

moods – she appears sad, joyous, playful, dazed, or remote. Her gestures are always sensuous and often erotic.

FRANK P., 'Hannah Wilke' [1], 06-08.1974, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

ARTnews

Summer 1974

Hannah Wilke (Ronald Feldman): One of the most effective artists working in a more or less explicitly erotic vein, Wilke's metaphors for female genitalia took the form of hoards of small, free-standing objects made of fresh or baked clay (only a few glazed), each one focused around an ovoid fissure. Many resemble clustered barnacles. Open-ended ones suggest fortune cookies, a visual pun acknowledged by Wilke with a row of real cookies. A videotape of Wilke massaging, pulling and otherwise distorting her face seems almost to mock the narcissism of so much video art while establishing an aggressive sensuality, born of malleability, that parallels and enforces the impact of her clay pieces.

N.N., 'Press release: Hannah Wilke' [1], 01.09.1972, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/exhsolo/exhwil72.html.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE September 1, 1972
HANNAH WILKE
September 12 - October 13, 1972
This is the first one-person exhibition of Hannah Wilke at the Ronald Feldman Gallery. Included in the exhibition will be large wall sculptures made of latex and snaps, which are vaginal images.
The gallery hours are Monday - Saturday; 10:00 - 5:30.

SMITH R., 'Hannah Wilke' [1], 11.1972, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

Arts Magazine, November 1972
Hannah Wilke

Hannah Wilke showed five wall pieces and some drawings in her first one-woman show at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts. Four of the works consisted of innumerable pieces of poured latex tacked to the wall and variously folded, overlapped and snapped to each other. The fifth was a row of fourteen smaller pourings of latex embedded with pieces of string. The latex is dyed many pink and flesh tones, all within a close, bright range. The pieces involve obsessive repetition, either of the string, the folds or the overlapping. The color and nature of the latex is itself extremely fleshy and suggestive; the folds, always around a small central opening, make it more so. But the obsessions never become excessive or forceful; the suggestions never succeed to a full-fledged abstract sexuality. An overriding sense of delicacy and taste restrains them in a state of overt, decorative pubescence. A mild objection is that the work involves an able but superficial use of some of Eva Hesse's ideas about imagery and materials: an "eccentric substance" used with eccentricity is at first conventional and pleasant and ultimately blatant because the material itself remains the most visible aspect of the work. Despite Wilke's obvious ability, the pieces simply do not get beyond their material at this point.

KINGSLEY A., 'Hannah Wilke' [2], 12.1972, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

Artforum, December 1972
Hannah Wilke

Hannah Wilke is clearly involved with the sensualist approach to sculpture. In her first one-woman exhibition after years of crafts-world obscurity as a ceramist, she shows remarkable assurance and facility. Her sensibility and her material seem to have fused perfectly and immediately into one strongly expressive whole. Wall sculptures on fleshy pink latex sheets hang on pushpins, bunched in groups of overlapping, snap-fastened flaps. They are so lusciously tactile that it is all but impossible to resist the urge to run their soft, spongy petals through your fingers. The five works range in coloration from a rich lobster orange through a pink spectrum down to palest natural latex yellow. They are made by pouring dyed or undyed liquid latex out on a wide bed of plaster. The latex thus picks up the dusty white grit of the plaster on its downside and is smooth and shiny on the upside. The works are assembled in either horizontal or vertical massings of a few to a dozen or so units. The best advantage is taken of the tactility of their alternating texture and color, of their bumps, and bubble holes, tears and irregular edges.

The submissive sagging of Wilke's material, its natural liplike ruffling, and the unavoidability of vulvic connotations conjoin to create an almost mesmerizing state of sexual-visceral vulnerability. It is very honest work. Her problem may be that it is too effortless, too facile. But only time will tell.

SCHWARTZ B., 'Hannah Wilke' [4], 10.1972, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

Crafts 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.

CRIMP D., 'Hannah Wilke' [3], 10.1972, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

ARTnews, October 1972 - Hannah Wilke

Hannah Wilke's wall pieces of rubber latex forms dyed pink/orange, snapped together and pinned to the wall provoke an irrepressible desire to touch them: touching them confirms their sensual appearance, achieved through luscious colors, all on the hot sexual side of the spectrum: and the latex feels organic, if not actually fleshy. Their vulnerability is underscored by their snapped-together structure; it can obviously be undone. The unsettling idea occurs that if you pulled the pieces apart, you'd never get them back together again. Yet beyond wanting to touch, one wants to unsnap – to violate. This metaphor of sensuality mixed with vulnerability is frank and touching.

Of a different character is a wall piece of natural latex units reinforced with parallel lengths of twine. Each of the 14 units has a built-in strength. One has a sense of multiple possibilities of arrangement and extension, and thus a sense of fecundity.

Wilke also shows drawings whose only relationships to the sculptures are pictorial concerns and feminist metaphor. Each of them employs a single collaged piece of memorabilia: greeting cards, advertisements, postcards from the early part of this century. I suspect that their little-girl/little-old-lady insipidity is meant sarcastically, as are their "insipid" pastel stripes. Wilke acknowledges her taste for the "feminine" with a vengeance, harnessing that taste to make tough ambiguous drawings.

ROSE B., 'Hannah Wilke' [1], 2.10.1972, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Ronald Feldman Gallery website, op http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/home_frame.html.

NEW YORK

October 2, 1972

Two one-man shows I liked because they were unpretentious and whimsical were Tal Streeter's *Kites* at the A.M. Sachs Gallery, 29 West 57th Street (thru Oct. 7), and Hannah Wilke's poured-latex sculptures at Ronald Feldman, 33 East 74th Street (thru Oct. 9). Ms. Wilke is working with overtly "female iconography"; there's no mistaking the inspiration for her flesh-colored soft plastic flowering buds. But somehow she gets away with such explicitness, and the effect is not vulgar but endearingly tender.

- FRANCESCA WOODMAN

ROMANO G., 'Francesca Woodman: on being an angel' [6], in: photoarts [journal], 10.1998, geraadpleegd op 15.05.2007, op de photoarts website, op http://www.photoarts.com/journal/romano/woodman/.

Francesca Woodman - on being an angel

It's difficult at times to find the proper words to describe certain works. You just want to slip the images right under the viewer's nose, feeling certain he will understand and share the feeling that, yes, nothing need be said. It's also demands a great effort to evaluate as photographs, pictures that look like rehearsals, the act of practicing in preparation for being an angel.

The photographs that Francesca Woodman took between 1975 and 1981 belong to this category. They cause the same kind of confusion that's so common when we speak about love: the ambiguity only increases with the strength of the feelings involved. In these pictures ambiguity reigns sovereign, fruit of the artist's respect for her inner world and her curiosity concerning a fragmentary but strong-felt reality.

Now that some years have passed, it's strange to consider that at a time when photography and art shared the same interest in what we called "de-constructionism" Woodman preferred to construct her scenes by superimposing various levels of the real rather than breaking down reality to study the image's constructive mechanisms. In a similar way, at the end of the 70s Cindy Sherman appeared on the scene with a series of photographic "Film Stills" that manifest the influences of the film culture and a linear approach to the image. Each picture was a "slice of life," walking the line between fiction and reality. Each picture provided the viewer with a precise image of a woman acting out our cliches concerning traditional female roles. But in spite of the common ground shared by these two photographers, Woodman never seemed interested in the cultural model of today's woman: there is no objective investigation in her work, only a personal kind of research. Basically, while Cindy Sherman offered — in image after image — a fragmentary vision of women, Francesca Woodman gave us a cumulative one, images that take on the woman's different models.

The influence of surrealism must also be considered for its interpretations of the female body, which represented a break with traditional models of representation. But even in this case, it would be risky to look for influences which, in the long run, might not hold much water. If surrealism sublimated the chance events, Woodman's photographs seem to be a complex of combinations, a space for the transitory, for change, but her work has little or nothing to do with the idea of improvisation.

Woodman was photographer and model, subject and object, at the same time. She utilized the female body to develop her own self-knowledge and not some representative but generic model of the world. The images of the body that this young American was experimenting with suggest a diffuse intimacy while tending to dissuade a voyeuristic approach. Unlike most of the images we are faced with on a daily basis, where the body is treated like a commodity to be used and consumed, or an icon to adore at safe distance, Francesca Woodman employs her body to initiate a dialog with herself. She places her body in familiar settings, though at the limits of our experience, presenting it as a symbol of receptivity, a meeting place between herself and the rest of the world, a communicative model in which information about her experience is presented and reflected upon. She uses her own body as a model to investigate her own vision and not another's vision of her body. Woodman projects images and symbols, hopes and fears onto the female body. She uses it like a gesticulative vector not fully known to her, communicating to the viewer the novelty of her encounter.

On the one hand, this attitude was motivated by the artist' s own youth, since these pictures were taken when Woodman was in her late teens and early twenties, in the years before she committed suicide. Art critic Kathryn Hixon wrote in her essay "Essential Magic" (Zurich, 1992): "Woodman's pictures are not de-constructive, but constructive. She added layers of reflection and mimicry within the photograph to confound the transparent recording of the real. The images become psychological portraits of the identity of the body, rather than identifying physical portraits that reveal the psyche." To mention the psychological component is very important in the analysis of Woodman's oeuvre. The symbolic reconstruction of reality, without doubt, can be considered as a mechanism in the recognition/awareness of reality itself. It's as though the artist were researching into the formation of her own personality by exhibiting— sometimes even in the photographs themselves — her impulses, reflections, vulnerability, her awareness of the moment, and the horror of sudden absence. Many of her pictures seem to go in this direction, from the early images taken in Providence, to the "Angel"; series and the portrait multiples, in which three women were portrayed with a picture of Woodman's face covering their own (an homage to Meatyard?). These are psychological portraits: not the visual records of daily existence but episodes in which the expressive capability of the artist's imagination is

intertwined with the richness and intimacy of her own life. Yes, we know, it takes a great effort to become an angel, and yet her pictures are still fluttering somewhere around our minds.

Gianni Romano - Milano Oct.1998

Biography
courtesy of Shedalle, Zurich
All photographs - courtesy of Woodman Estate

1958 April 3. Born in Denver, Colorado
1959-60 Family spends year in Florence Italy
1964-65 Boulder Public Schools
1965-66 Family returns to Florence / Second grade, Public School in Florence
1966-71 Boulder Public Schools
1972-73 Abbot Academy, Andover, Massachusetts / Summer in Antella, Italy (outside Florence)
1973-74 Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts / Summer in Antella
1974-75 Boulder High School, Graduation in June / Summer in Antella
1975-79 Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island
1977-78 Rome, Rhode Island School of Design Rome Honors Program
1978 Fall. Last semester at Rhode Island School of Design
1979 January. Moves to New York, 2nd Avenue / Summer in Stanwood, Washington. / Fall. Moves to 12th Street studio
1980 Summer. Fellow at the MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire
1981 January. Publication of "Some Disordered Interior Geometries"
January 19. Suicide in New York.

SCHOONHOVEN H., 'Francesca Woodman: voor altijd jong' [7], in:'Fotoboeken' [recensies en signalementen], 2007,, geraadpleegd op 05.04.2007, op de photoq website, op http://www.photoq.nl/reviews.php?review=103 .

Francesca Woodman: voor altijd jong

Vijfentwintig na haar dood brengt de Britse uitgeverij Phaidon een monografie met 260 foto's van Francesca Woodman uit. Er is ontzettend veel over deze vroeg gestorven Amerikaanse fotografe gepubliceerd. Chris Townsend inventariseert de verschillende standpunten en verbindt er zijn eigen conclusie aan.

Wanneer je als dertienjarige begint met serieuze foto's maken; je talent al vroeg wordt herkend en gekoesterd door onder andere je moeder en vader die beide professionele kunstenaars zijn; je uitblinkt op een gerenomeerde kunstacademie en voorzien van een beurs een jaar lang in Rome kan werken; je als fraaie jonge vrouw vaak figureert in je fotografie en een -zeker gezien je leeftijd - groot oeuvre achterlaat wanneer je op je tweeëntwintigste zelfmoord pleegt, dan ontstaat er een mythe rond je werk en persoon die haar eigen dynamiek heeft.

Francesca Woodman (1958–1981) maakte haar eerste doorwrochte foto's in 1972, vanaf het begin van haar academietijd (1975-1978) was zij uitermate productief. In het laatste jaar van haar studie werkte zij als 'artist in residence' in Rome. Ze ontving in de zomer van 1980 een toelage om in de Macdowell Colony, de oudste 'kunstenaarskolonie' van de Verenigde Staten, te kunnen werken. In datzelfde jaar werd haar werk op drie tentoonstellingen in New York getoond. In januari 1979 ging ze in New York wonen, waar ze zich twee jaar later uit een raam liet vallen.

In haar fotografie onderzocht Woodman de mogelijkheden en beperkingen van het medium. Ze speelde met de twee dimensies van een foto door in haar ensceneringen platte en drie-dimensionele beeldelementen op te nemen. De werking van het licht zette ze naar haar hand door tijdens de opname gebruik te maken van reflecties of zwarte of witte pigment. Tijdens het afdrukken hield ze bijvoorbeeld een hand tegen, zodat er een intens witte vorm ontstond. In één van haar foto's reikt het model naar een lichtvlek, die een plastische aanwezigheid heeft gekregen.

Francesca Woodman had een fascinatie voor onbestemde oudere ruimten, die in haar foto's tot leven lijken te komen: het behang raakt los, de schouw beweegt, door de muur steekt een hand. In bijna alle foto's figureerden één of meer modellen, meestal Woodman zelf en vaak geheel of gedeeltelijk naakt. De poses zijn zonder uitzondering dramatisch, theatraal te noemen. Soms hield ze een enkel ornament vast en altijd is er die geladen verhouding met de ruimte. Woodman had een zwak voor romantische, feminiene kleding. In combinatie met de non-descripte ruimten ontstonden beelden die boven de tijd

uitgetild lijken. Zelfs een koelkast in de achtergrond van één van haar foto's wordt dan een oeroud apparaat.

Omdat Woodman niet binnen het toen heersende genre (post-moderne fotografie die gebaseerd was op het idioom van de massacultuur) werkte, bleef haar werk enige tijd onopgemerkt, zo vermoedt de auteur Chris Townsend. In 1986 werd er een (reizende) tentoonstelling aan haar werk gewijd. De eerste essays verschenen en sindsdien is de stroom publicaties over Woodman niet meer gestopt. Townsend stelde een lijst van zeventig artikelen en essays samen. Daarnaast verschenen er nog negen catalogi. De ondertitel van deze monografie 'Scattered in space and time' lijkt evenzeer op haar werk als op de receptie van toepassing te zijn. De kunsthistorici bedachten interpretaties die aansloten bij hun eigen stokpaardjes. De één legt de nadruk op haar surrealistische kwaliteiten, de ander ziet in haar een kampioen van het feminisme. Woodman wordt een 'American Gothic' genoemd of tot de 'Post-Minimalisten' gerekend.

Uit haar aantekeningen - voor dit boek door haar vader geselecteerd en geredigeerd - blijkt dat ze een uitgesproken bewondering had voor de dichteres Gertrude Stein. Townsend, kunsthistoricus en docent aan de universiteit van Londen, ziet in haar werk overeenkomsten met de fotografie van Duane Michals, Ralph Eugene Meatyard en Deborah Turbeville.
In zijn tekst komen alle genoemde aspecten uit het oeuvre en leven van Woodman aan de orde. Hij bespreekt de verschillende interpretaties en koppelt steeds terug naar de beelden, waardoor hij één en ander in verhouding plaatst.
De auteur is duidelijk een bewonderaar van Woodman en dat heeft tot een monumentaal boek geleid. Of je van deze fotografie kan houden of niet, vast staat nu wel dat Francesca Woodman een indrukwekkend aantal foto's met een rijke beeldtaal en van een bijzondere coherentie heeft achtergelaten.

Han Schoonhoven

Francesca Woodman
scattered in space and time
foto's en collage's: Francesca Woodman
tekst: Chris Townsend
met dagboekaantekeningen en fascimilé-pagina's uit haar dagboeken
gebonden, 240 pagina's met 230 foto's in zwart-wit en 30 in kleur
uitgeverij Phaidon
prijs: 75 euro (tijdelijk aangeboden voor 60 euro)

ALETTI V., 'Francesca Woodman' [4], in: Features [open book], 10.1998, geraadpleegd op 05.04.2007, op de Village Voice website, op http://www.villagevoice.com/specials/vls/158/aletti.shtml.

Open Book by vince aletti - Francesca Woodman

What can you say about a 22-year-old girl who died? In the case of photographer Francesca Woodman, who threw herself out the window of her East Village loft in 1981, quite a bit but hardly enough. The daughter of artists, she began taking photos when she was 13, and found her subject and her style early on. Though friends sometimes appeared in her pictures, Woodman herself, frequently nude, was almost invariably the subject. "It's a matter of convenience," she explained. "I'm always available."

Though she appeared in much of the work as an anonymous, fragmented body, a tormented Everywoman, Woodman's presence was fraught with an almost hallucinatory, occasionally alarming level of self-dramatization. In one of her first pictures, clothespins clamp her nipples, navel, and torso; in later photos, she's smeared herself with dirt or paint, bound her legs with tape, or crawled under a shell of peeling wallpaper. In the decaying, abandoned spaces that were her favorite settings, she flails, grovels, jumps, and hides, often dissolving in a blur. Again and again, she reduces her body to a smudge of motion, a memory on film.

This ongoing disappearing act might foreshadow Woodman's final exit, but her work is less about erasure than persistence: the tenacity of an artist determined to find expression for the inexpressible--for desire, rage, confusion, fear. That she used her own body as a vehicle places her firmly in the feminist avant-garde of the late '70s and '80s, alongside Ana Mendieta, Hannah Wilke, and Carolee Schneemann, while anticipating Cindy Sherman, Karen Finley, Nan Goldin, and other contemporary gender warriors.

Still, there's something wounded about Woodman's work. "She treats herself like an apparition," Philippe Sollers writes here in a poetic, fitfully insightful essay. Only Sloan Rankin dares to sketch in

her friend's suicidal state of mind, but Woodman's death remains undiscussed. Attached to such a powerful and personal body of work, the mystery leaves Woodman ripe for iconization, mythicizing, and exploitation. But the inevitable movie of her life couldn't begin to compete with the rich, raw material she's already made of it.

TURNER F., 'Body and soul: A photographer leaves behind the makings of a myth in a series of curious, often haunting images' [7], in: The Boston Phoenix [Book reviews], 1998, geraadpleegd op 05.04.2007, op de Boston Phoenix website, op http://72.166.46.24//archive/books/98/08/27/FRANCESCA_WOODMAN.html.

Body and soul
A photographer leaves behind the makings of a myth in a series of curious, often haunting images
by Fred Turner

FRANCESCA WOODMAN, photographs by Francesca Woodman, edited by Hervé Chandès. Essays by Philippe Sollers, David Levi Strauss, Elizabeth Janus, and Sloan Rankin. Scalo Books, 160 pages, 90 duotones, $39.95.

If Francesca Woodman had been a poet, she would have been Sylvia Plath. Not the grotesque, determined suicide of "Lady Lazarus" (although Woodman did die by her own hand), nor the raging harridan of "Daddy," but the mysterious, sprite-like Plath of "Ariel," the one who marveled that she was on the earth at all, let alone in female form. Like Plath, Woodman devoted herself to the exploration of the visible landscape of her body and its invisible counterpart, her psyche. And like Plath, Woodman seems to have been born with perfect pitch in her chosen medium. Unlike Plath, however, Woodman has remained relatively unknown to the general public.

That could -- and should -- change with the publication of Francesca Woodman. Although portions of her work have appeared in several exhibition catalogues, Francesca Woodman is the first book to trace the entire arc of the artist's career. Opening with an eerie self-portrait made when she was 13 and closing with the wildly inventive portrait sequences she made in 1980, the year before she died at the age of 22, the book reveals what the earlier selections could only hint at: that over time, Woodman, like Plath, pared the music in her art down toward a single, haunting tone. Even as the range of her photographic techniques increased, the emotional range of her images contracted in ever tightening circles. A sense of loss and longing inhabited her earliest work, but by the end, it came to define it.

Still, with Woodman, as with Plath, we need to resist the temptation to define the art by the artist's suicide. Woodman's images are sometimes bleak, but they're often curious and playful as well. This is especially true of the work she did in Providence, Rhode Island. A student at the Rhode Island School of Design from 1975 to 1979, Woodman lived above the Pilgrim Mills dry-goods store and haunted the city's abandoned factories and Victorian manses. One afternoon, she borrowed Charlie, a famous (and famously fat) RISD model, stripped him naked, and set him to playing with various mirrors and windows in a rundown loft. Eventually Woodman took off her own clothes and joined him. The images of the two of them laughing and posing are hilarious, but as David Levi Strauss points out in his accompanying essay, Woodman's occasional captions remind us of a more serious intent. "Charlie has been a model at RISD for 19 years," she writes (under an image sadly not included here). "I guess he knows a lot about being flattened to fit paper."

Flattened to fit paper? How could anyone this funny, Woodman seems to be asking, ever be transformed into charcoal on paper? And within that question, Woodman asks others: What are the boundaries between our bodies and our images of bodies? Between our selves and our reflections? How could a man this alive ever disappear? Suddenly, what first appeared to be simply a series of cheerful snapshots becomes a row of gray windows, each granting a vertiginous glimpse into the canyons of life and death.

Or perhaps I should say life-in-death, since in Woodman's work, the two realms are constantly intruding on one another. Even in her earliest images, Woodman was fascinated with the ways in which the human body could be made to seem an apparition. As a young teenager, for instance, she photographed a naked person crawling through a large, cross-shaped gap in a tombstone. By using a slow exposure speed, she turned that person's body into a blur, even as she rendered the world around it crisp and clear. Woodman went on to use this technique throughout her life, photographing herself jumping, bending, waving, and stretching, usually in near-empty rooms. Clustered into small, thematic groups, these photographs make up a diary of a woman who would have us see her (and who would perhaps see herself?) as some Shakespearean nymph, always about to dart back into the wall.

Such imagery is not entirely without precedent or subsequent influence. As several critics noted in the late 1980s, Woodman learned a great deal from the narrative portraits of Duane Michaels. In retrospect, one can also see her work presaging the theatrical self-portraits of Cindy Sherman, or even the juvenile dramas Sally Mann composed of her children. Unfortunately, the essays that accompany Woodman's photographs leave these connections underexplored. Woodman's friend and sometime collaborator Sloan Rankin offers a brief set of personal reminiscences, while French novelist Philippe Sollers records his own, idiosyncratic impressions of Woodman's work. Elizabeth Janus describes a year that Woodman lived in Rome and the various artists she encountered there, and David Levi Strauss examines Woodman's debt to surrealism. Despite their occasionally critical intent, these essays ultimately grant more weight to Woodman's biography than to her artistic heritage, and to that extent they underestimate her achievement.

When Woodman leaped from the window of a building on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1981, she left behind the makings of a myth. But she also left behind images of an extraordinary internal life. Ultimately, it is the quality of that internal life, rather than the manner in which it ended, that illuminates Woodman's work.

HENSHALL J., 'The disturbing life, work and death of Francesca Woodman' [10], in: Arts & Culture, Fatal attraction, 23.08.1999, geraadpleegd op 05.04.2007, op de New Statesmen website, op http://www.newstatesman.com/199908230027.htm.

Fatal attraction / John Henshall
Published 23 August 1999
1 comment Print version Listen Photography - John Henshall on the disturbing life, work and death of Francesca Woodman

Evidently we are not supposed to piece together the true story behind the eight-year trail of tragedy that was the career and adult life of Francesca Woodman, a photographer from Denver, Colorado, who started taking pictures at the age of 13, pictures which are almost exclusively of herself and which frequently show her apparently evaporating on celluloid before our very eyes. Yet, as courageously as the curators of her first solo show here and the contributors to the book that accompanies it may try, they cannot disguise that this is a tale of reckless self-absorption, utter estrangement from reality and, ultimately, I believe, psychiatric or other illness of some kind.

Woodman was at art school in Providence, Rhode Island, spent a disconcertingly aimless, distracted sojourn in Rome then returned to America to rent a loft in Manhattan's bullishly bohemian Lower East Side. She spent much of 1980 at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, where she was artist-in-residence. At the end of 1980 she returned to New York and, in early January 1981, she published a distinctively bizarre book called Some Disordered Interior Geometries. Perhaps the title revealed more about her state of mind than she intended. Maybe it was the nearest she could bring herself to making a request for help. It is a seemingly deranged miasma of mathematical formulae, photographs of herself and scrawled, snaking, handwritten notes.

This woman has been hailed as a prodigy, a prophet and a putative genius. I can affirm that she left a thoroughly distinctive oeuvre. She materialises and dematerialises like an apparition in photographs whose mise en scene is deliberately so minimalist as to focus the viewer's attention on one thing and on only one thing, absolutely all the time: her. She regularly poses naked for no apparent reason. She hides, she partially covers herself, she reveals a foot, an arm, a view of the back of her shoulder. Her penchant for performing deshabillee was not always well received. She was once ejected from the Museum of Natural History in New York by a security guard who was astonished to find her stripping off in front of the animal exhibits in order to photograph herself with them.

She uses a whole repertoire of photographic legerdemain to create pictures in which she seems to dissolve into the print itself, like a medium swirling in ectoplasm in some news magazine for psychics. She rarely takes a "normal" photograph of any kind.

Woodman was, I think, a confused, disoriented woman whose obvious talent was tainted by a death wish from the time she picked up a camera. I imagine she deliberately contrived to dissolve in her autoportraits because from her early teens she had wanted oblivion. Barely a week after she published her strange and twisted book, she hurled herself from her apartment window on to a freezing and final sidewalk below. Her wish had been fulfilled. She was 23.

Woodman's friend from her college days at the Rhode Island School of Design, Sloan Rankin, shows us an extract from one of the last letters Woodman wrote to her, in late 1980: "My life at this point is like

very old coffee-cup sediment and I would rather die young leaving various accomplishments . . . instead of pell-mell erasing all of these delicate things . . . "

An unspecified catalogue editor confirms, perhaps unintentionally, in a terse, non-committal biography, what I suspected the moment I saw Woodman's frankly outlandish output: that what she really wished to be was a fashion photographer or some kind of photojournalist, but that she was torn between pursuing this goal and wanting to be the model in the pictures, the subject of the reportage, too: "She put together portfolios that she sent to a number of fashion photographers, among them Deborah Turbeville, whose work she had admired for some time, [but] her solicitations did not lead anywhere."

Rankin comes closest to what is obviously being glossed over in this show and its catalogue: that Woodman was mentally disturbed. Rankin notes: "I never had the impression that photography was the medium best suited for [Woodman] . . . " Yet she declines to say what she thinks might have been the right one. Woodman seems like an actress and choreographer who somehow chose at a dangerously early age the wrong modus operandi to get the results she was obviously hell-bent on achieving, with the appalling result that she found herself, in this lifetime, already a denizen of Dante's selva oscura, so decided to seek something more amenable in another one.

Rankin observes, "I did not see her during the bad days in New York", but again does not say what form these strange days took. She adds: "I remember the good days filled with wit and humour, turn of phrase and clever contradictions, the velvet, fur, tulle and taffeta-patterned days . . . " This faintly precious, lardy feel pervades the show.

Francesca Woodman wasted a powerful gift because she tried to exploit it before even she knew what it was, let alone what to do with it. She has left us a suicide note in the form of a decade's photography. You should see this show. As you wander round it, remember Woodman's random notes from a journal she kept: ostensibly she is deciding what to eat tonight: "tuna fish and a lot of peach mumble . . . I have ideas cooking - [I] simply need to get started before they stick to the bottom of the pan . ."

"Francesca Woodman 1958-1981" is at the Photographers' Gallery, Great Newport Street, London WC2 (0171-831 1772) until 18 September. A book/catalogue is published by Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain (Scalo Zurich and Thames & Hudson) at £27.50

N.N., 'Francesca Woodman' [5], in: The Photographers' Gallery, datum onbekend, geraadpleegd op 18.06.2007, op http://www.artmag.com/museums/a_greab/agblsps/agblsps7.html.

Francesca Woodman

On 19th January 1981, Francesca Wood man threw herself from the window of her loft in the East Village. She was twenty-two. The work she left behind has established her as one of photography's quiet legends. This exhibition - her first solo show in Britain - represents a life's work, starting with her first photographs taken at the precocious age of 13.

Woodman brought an understanding of symbolism, the Baroque, Surrealism and Futurism to her haunting, sensual, and occasionally, violent self-portraits. Her work is unusual in photography. It does not attempt to capture a suspended moment but instead shows us the elusiveness of time. Frequently, it contains elements of performance - she usually photographs herself in motion, often reduced to a blur.

Interested in how people relate to space, she played complex games of hide-and -seek, depicting herself fading into a flat plane - becoming the wall under the wallpaper, part of the floor, or sealed behind glass, constantly contrasting the fragility and vulnerability of her own body with the strength of the objects around her. Her body becomes an expressive tool which mingles with the other objects she chooses to photograph; gloves, eels, sheets, mirrors, fireplaces and flowers. Fascinated by limits and boundaries, Woodman's work conjures the precarious moment between adolescence and adulthood; between existence and the ultimate disappearance, death.

Born in Denver in 1958, Woodman was brought up in a family of artists. She studied at Rhode Island School of Design between 1975 and 1979 and spent a year in Rome on a scholarship. This was an extraordinarily creative period in which she was influenced by the classicism, sensuality and decay of Rome and she exhibited her photographs for the first time in the basement of the Maldoror bookshop-gallery. On her return to America she moved to New York. Some Disordered Interior Geometry the only book of her work to be published in her lifetime appeared in January 1981.

Francesca Woodman has been organised by the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain.

N.N., 'Francesca Woodman' [1], laatste update: 2007, geraadpleegd op 18.06.2007, op de Victoria Miro Gallery website, op http://www.victoria-miro.com/artists/21,biog/.

1958 born Denver, Colorado, died 1981.

Francesca Woodman produced a remarkable body of work before her untimely death in 1981 aged only 23. Her romantic, surreal, and often disturbing black and white photographs reference the history of modernist photography as well as presciently gesture towards more recent art about objectification and the female gaze. Her work is groundbreaking due to her unconventional methods of imaging the female body. By radically placing her own body at the fore of her photographs as a means of inquiry and self-expression, Woodman is firmly situated alongside her contemporaries of the late 1970's such as Ana Mendieta and Hannah Wilke. Her work also presaged artists such as Cindy Sherman, Sarah Lucas, Nan Goldin and Karen Finley in their subsequent dialogues with the self and reinterpretations of the female body.

N.N., 'Francesca Woodman- exhibition' [5], 2000, geraadpleegd op 18.06.2007, op de Victoria Miro Gallery website, op http://www.victoria-miro.com/exhibitions/all/_369/.

Francesca Woodman
28 June - 28 July 2000

Francesca Woodman took her first self-portrait at the age of thirteen and for the next several years she created a body of work that was prolific for its singularity of style and range of innovative techniques. Finding her forte, Woodman used photography as a means of articulating her voice during her childhood spent in Colorado, as a student at the Rhode Island School of Design and in Italy and New York.

Woodman is remarkable due to the overall sophistication of the photographs she created during her young life, and for her skilful incorporation of Italian futurism, surrealism, symbolism and performance art into a consistent yet often disarming narrative. Her work is ground breaking due to her unconventional methods of imaging the female body. By radically placing her own body at the fore of her photographs as a means of inquiry and self-expression, Woodman is firmly situated alongside her contemporaries of the late 1970's such as Ana Mendieta and Hannah Wilke. Her work also presaged artists such as Cindy Sherman, Sarah Lucas, Nan Goldin and Karen Finley in their subsequent dialogues with the self and reinterpretations of the female body.

Woodman was intrigued by how the body's three-dimensionality could be captured and contracted into a two-dimensional plane. So one sees her flattening herself as well as others, underneath large glass plates, massive frames, and behind layers of wallpaper. She frequently posed as the protagonist in theatrical settings staged in dilapidated buildings, industrial spaces and crumbling facades, which starkly contrasted with her youthful body, that in turn served as a landscape upon which she projected inventive portrait dramatisations.

Woodman's photographs are deeply emotive, and are fragmented statements of an extraordinary inner life: a nude girl transcending the body and becoming an angel; spilling out of a diorama and becoming as lifeless as the animals around her; or transforming into a blurred, elusive image as if an apparition. Like the Mexican surrealist Frida Kahlo a generation before, Woodman images her complex psyche with an uninhibited candidacy, bringing the viewer into the profound sanctum of her life.

In 1981, at the age of 22, Woodman committed suicide by jumping from the window of her New York apartment. Although her photographs seem to stand as a premonition -- indeed she displays a tireless and deep examination into the life/death axis -- Woodman left behind a greater legacy. She was a maverick in overturning more traditional usages of photographic portraiture, challenged preconceptions of femininity and femaleness, and laid the groundwork for other artists to follow.

N.N., 'Francesca Woodman' [4], 2007, geraadpleegd op 18.06.2007, op de Victoria Miro Gallery website, op http://www.victoria-miro.com/exhibitions/all/_486/.

Francesca Woodman
19 June - 28 July 2007

The second solo exhibition of work by American artist Francesca Woodman will include five large-format photographs presented for the first time along with a selection of some 30 photographs from the key formative periods in Francesca Woodman's career - Boulder, Colorado; Providence, Rhode Island; Rome and finally in America again at the MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire, and New York in 1980.

Released for the first time by the Estate of Francesca Woodman, the five photographs from a series entitled Swan Song were originally produced for the artist's graduate exhibition at Rhode Island School of Design in 1978. Forfeiting the intimate scale characteristic of her work, these one metre square images move the medium of photography away from its expected format of flat print on the wall by exaggerating the scale, and alluding to an alternative space. The five prints in this exhibition all share a similar rhythm and pattern that marks the continuity within the series. The same props are used throughout - fur, feathers, wire and a white sheet that both covers and supports Woodman's elongated, fragmented body. The prints were deliberately torn in order to resist the square format of photography as well as, when unframed (as they were installed in her graduate exhibition), to further soften the edge between the image and the wall. Woodman was to return to the larger scale towards the end of her career in 1980.

Woodman tested the boundaries of bodily experience in her work. Using her own body in various stages of transformation, deformation, alteration and effacement, the ensuing photographs suggest a strong sense of self-displacement. Often nude except for individual body parts covered with props, sometimes wearing vintage clothing, the artist is typically sited in empty or sparsely furnished, dilapidated rooms, characterised by rough surfaces, shattered mirrors and old furniture. In some images Woodman quite literally becomes one with her surroundings, with the contours of her form blurred by movement, or blending into the background, wallpaper or floor, revealing the lack of distinction of both - between figure and ground, self and world. In others she uses her physical body literally as a framework in which to create and alter her material identity. Holding a sheet of glass against her flesh allowing its transparent surface to frame her face and body. By squeezing her body parts against the glass and smashing her face, breasts, hips, buttocks and stomach onto the surface from various angles, Woodman distorts her physical features making them appear grotesque.

Through fragmenting her body by hiding behind furniture, using reflective surfaces such as mirrors to conceal herself, or by simply cropping the image, she dissects the human figure emphasising isolated body parts. In her photogrpahs Woodman reveals the body simultaneously as a deeply constituted active subject that is the producer of meaning; that although insistently there, is always somehow absent. This game of presence and absence argues for a kind of work that values disapperance as its very condition.

DANTO A., 'Darkness Visible: Francesca Woodman' [2], in: The Nation [issue], 15.11.2004, geraadpleegd op 18.06.2007, op The Nation website, op http://www.thenation.com/docprem.mhtml?i=20041115&s=danto.

Darkness Visible: Francesca Woodman - Arthur C. Danto

The remarkably gifted artist Francesca Woodman abruptly ended her brief life and career on January 19, 1981, leaping to her death from a window in her New York studio. Francesca was 22 years old. The work of her eight productive years, to which a small show at the Marian Goodman Gallery on West 57th Street is currently paying tribute, would have been magical and enigmatic whatever her fate, but the suicide caused viewers to wonder if it was foreshadowed in her images, which were mostly of herself. The relationship between an artist's life and work is always tentative, even when the life seems obviously to have been the subject of the work, as in the case of Marcel Proust. The best reason for reading his biography is to learn how different the life and the great novel are, despite the internal relationship between the two. The difference between the author and the narrator of Remembrance of Things Past is a matter of intricate interpretation, though both are named Marcel. And, of course, the novel does not end with the death of its narrator; it ends, rather, with his resolution to begin to write it. "Death is not an event in life," Wittgenstein said. "Death is not lived through."

Whether or not Francesca's suicide is projected in her art, the work seems revelatory of her inner life, not only because she is typically the model for the photographs of which it is made up but because of

the way she pictures herself. The photographs are of a young woman, often nude, often wearing the kinds of vintage clothes or intimate garments that Francesca's friends say she wore. They typically show her alone in the largely empty rooms, with stained, peeling walls and the odd piece of secondhand furniture, that she used as studios or living spaces or both. So people have pored over the prints with forensic eyes, looking for diagnostic clues. I must say the "evidence" strikes me as pretty crude. In one she shows herself in a bathtub, which a hermeneutical sleuth pounces on as metaphorically--a coffin! But models have been shown in bathtubs from Degas through Toulouse-Lautrec to Bonnard, without anyone thinking that mortality is a subtext. Or did the critic have in mind the fact that Seneca committed suicide in his bathtub, fearing a worse end at the hands of his dangerous disciple, the Emperor Nero? In fact, there is very little evidence in the photographs of one of the most important truths of Francesca's life: that she was a photographer, and indeed the very photographer who took the pictures. In a portrait taken in her studio in Providence, Rhode Island, she sits behind a large, boxy camera on a tripod. But it is by a friend, George Lange. The camera, so far as I have been able to discover, is never a prop in any of her sparsely furnished spaces. There are not even overlooked signs, like a telltale cable, except in the very early picture Self-Portrait at Thirteen, taken when she could have been as old as 17, judging by the date. It is a self-portrait as a 13-year-old girl, whose chief feature is her hair, which covers all her other features, and whose most conspicuous garment is a cable-knit sweater. It is a cable-knit image: The cable is deliberately left in the print to make the pun. Francesca was as fastidious about planting signs and meaning as a Flemish master. If there were so much as the shadow of a camera, it reflected an artistic decision. As it is, the photographic apparatus is always external to the image, though certainly internal to her life.

N.N., 'Francesca Woodman reconsidered' [76], in the Art Journal [conversation], 06/08.2003, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Look Smart-find articles website op http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0425/is_2_62/ai_103415706.

Francesca Woodman reconsidered: a conversation with George Baker, Ann Daly, Nancy Davenport, Laura Larson, and Margaret Sundell
Art Journal, Summer, 2003

The impetus for this round table came from the desire to extend an informal discussion following a screening of Elisabeth Subrin's The Fancy, an experimental film addressing the work and figure of the photographer Francesca Woodman. A student at the Rhode Island School of Design in the late I970s, Woodman produced a strikingly mature body of work before committing suicide in 1981 at the age of twenty-two. Although during her lifetime she participated in a number of exhibitions in alternative spaces in New York and Rome, Woodman's first significant public exposure came posthumously, through a 1986 exhibition coorganized by the Wellesley College Museum and the Hunter College Art Gallery. An accompanying catalogue featured essays by Rosalind Krauss and Abigail Solomon-Godeau. These texts, particularly the latter, which situated Woodman's work in relation to the postmodern feminist practice of artists such as Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger, played a determinate role in her initial art-historical reception. Indeed, it was through this lens that I first encountered her photographs in the early 1990s, and it was, in part, my sense of the limitations of Solomon-Godeau's analysis of Woodman's art as a strategic appropriation and subversion of stereotypes of femininity that motivated my own writing on Woodman.

Consisting mainly of self-consciously staged self-portraits or images of female friends acting as surrogates for the artist, Woodman's photographs exude a profound ambivalence-a simultaneous refusal and yearning to be constituted in the field of vision as an object of desire. The ideological orientation of Solomon-Godeau's text foreclosed the exploration of precisely this messier, less obviously "critical" but also potentially rich feature of Woodman's art. But while pointing to a model of subjectivity too complex to be adequately encompassed by 1980s feminism's politicized use of psychoanalytic theory, the ambivalent nature of Woodman's project also renders it susceptible to being read as a precedent for (and, by implication, a validation of) the pseudocritical examination of feminine identity taken up by a number of women photographers in the late 1990s. To reconsider Woodman's work in 2003 thus involves, on the one hand, a reassessment of its reception, both by art historians and artists, and, on the othe r hand, a reevaluation of the work itself. What, if any, is the critical potential of Woodman's art? To what extent and in what ways do her photographs resist their existing interpretative frameworks? If certain features of Woodman's work have been obscured or overlooked in prior readings, how might they be most productively illuminated and how might their elucidation alter our understanding of Woodman's art-historical significance? These are the questions that this discussion seeks to raise and begin to answer.
- Margaret Sundell

George Baker: I just got back from a trip to Rome, where I came across this really amazing little store run by a bibliophile in the Jewish ghetto. He had reproductions of Francesca Woodman's work all

over, and catalogues and posters related to Woodman, which were very clearly marked "not for sale," as if they were precious to him but were there to be shared and consulted. In the Roman context she's obviously still present and very much celebrated.

Margaret Sundell: She did spend a semester in Rome while she was studying at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Baker: It's the place where she's been exhibited the most since her death in 1981. I'm wondering what kind of reception she's had outside of Italy and the United States. The recent retrospective of her work was organized in France. (1)

Larson: She has received a lot of critical attention, although not during her lifetime.

Sundell: Awareness of the work has been growing, especially in the past eight or nine years. A lot more people seem to know about her work than when I was first introduced to it. In fact, I thought we should have this conversation in the wake of our group viewing of another artist's work about Woodman--Elisabeth Subrin's film The Fancy. (2)

Baker: How did you find out about Woodman?

Sundell: Through a photographer named Moyra Davey. She thought I'd be interested in Woodman, so she showed me the catalogue from a 1986 show at Wellesley College, the one organized by Ann Gabhart. And, of course, I was very interested.

Ann Daly: Wasn't that Wellesley exhibition the first introduction of her work to a larger audience too?

Sundell: Yes, the show and particularly the catalogue, since it had essays by Rosalind Krauss and Abigail Solomon-Godeau. But it still didn't get that much exposure. The catalogue wasn't widely distributed. I think the fact that Krauss and Solomon-Godeau reprinted their texts on Woodman in their anthologies, Bachelors and Photography at the Dock, really helped to raise Woodman's profile. (3) And Krauss put one of Woodman's photographs on the cover of Bachelors. The show at the Fondation Cartier, which was much more comprehensive than the Wellesley exhibition, was also important.

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Nancy Davenport: Woodman has certainly had a big impact on younger photographers, certainly on my students.

Baker: I'm interested in the different forms of Woodman's impact and reception. For instance, from what I've read in the Fondation Cartier catalogue, during her lifetime she was contextualized in relation to the painters who were emerging from the Transavanguardia--at least in Italy, where she befriended some of them and was exhibited with them.

Daly: That seems like a very strange way to position her work.

Baker: We also need to deal with how she is received now. The Wellesley show was the first moment for people in America to get to know her work, and in that context she was positioned ...

Sundell: ... in such a specific way ...

Baker: ... particularly by Abigail Solomon-Godeau, whose essay, "Just Like a Woman," tied Woodman's work to the feminist practices that were dominant in the mid- 1980s. She goes so far in bringing Woodman's work into the context of the eighties--into which it obviously doesn't really fit--as to argue that this is an art of appropriation, that Woodman is appropriating a patriarchal reservoir of images of the female body.

Sundell: Reading that essay for the first time, I remember being particularly frustrated by the way that Solomon-Godeau's effort to establish Woodman as a kind of crypto-1980S feminist led her to deal with a certain aspect of Woodman's work. Namely its willingness to play with various forms of seduction-with the seduction of presenting oneself as an object of desire, and also the beauty of the photographs themselves, that sort of seduction. I felt that SolomonGodeau's take on those issues was too restrictive and moralistic. On one hand, Woodman's work was "good" because it revealed the fact that femininity was a cultural construct, but insofar as it reiterated women's traclitional position as passive objects of the male gaze, it was "bad."

Baker: In that sense, I think your attraction to Woodman was very much in keeping with the way that feminist practice moved in the 1990s--toward trying to grapple more directly with things like beauty and seduction, subjects that had become, in a way, taboo during the 1980s.

Sundell: Yes, I think that's true. Seeing Woodman's work helped me articulate what I felt was not being adequately attended to or addressed in that moment of feminist practice.4 There was an almost iconoclastic prohibition against representing the female body, and I felt like that shut down the possibility for certain kinds of discussions.

Larson: I'm very much in agreement with Margaret. The male gaze became such a dead end for feminist critique, and Woodman's work offered a way to begin other discussions of representation and subjectivity, especially in relation to narcissism. There's an element of narcissism in Woodman's work, but the term is too loaded--too aligned with feminine vanity--to be addressed in the framework of Solomon-Godeau's essay. I think Woodman's work is useful for feminism precisely because it breaks the male gaze stranglehold by articulating a different set of terms. The concept of the male gaze was first developed in film theory and is closely linked to ideas about narrative cinema. And narrative really isn't an appropriate structure for dealing with Woodman's work, particularly given the work's engagement with seriality and repetition.

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Daly: Narcissism is also something that connects Woodman to a lot of work being done by women photographers now

Baker: You mean like the ones in the Another Girl, Another Planet show? (5)

Sundell: But I think Woodman's work is much more critical--although not necessarily only in the manner that Solomon-Godeau articulates. I think what most contemporary photographers have picked up on is the least critical aspect of her work.

Daly: I agree. That's one of the reasons I wanted to talk about her. There's so much going on in her photographs that's interesting to me and that I don't see happening in a lot of work today--like her use of seriality and repetition. That aspect of her work is also connected to something I find particularly compelling about Woodman--her relation to Surrealism.

Sundell: Solomon-Godeau deals with that. One of her main arguments is that Woodman uses strategies developed by Surrealism to denaturalize an essentialized conception of femininity

Daly: But she doesn't address it in terms of seriality and repetition. I guess I'm thinking more of the way Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois link art from the 1960s and 1970s to the dissident Surrealism of Georges Bataille and his concept of the informe, or the recent work by Krauss and Hal Foster that ties Surrealism to trauma and the Lacanian notion of the Real.

Larson: I was reminded of Woodman's work when I saw the Hans Bellmer show at the International Center for Photography--not only the use of seriality and repetition but also its performative aspects.

Baker: It's not just Surrealism she's engaged with. She plays with a number of important conventions of modernist photography I think she was self-aware enough about what she was doing in these photographs that we can assume it was intentional, even though Solomon-Godeau claims that she didn't have any knowledge of Surrealism. In this respect, I see her work as part of a larger tendency during the seventies to reiterate the tropes of previous artistic movements. If we want to deal with what's been left out of the critical analysis of Woodman's work, I think it's crucial to return to the moment in the seventies when her project emerges, and to examine its connections to the art of that time.

Larson: To feminism of that time?

Sundell: I'd rather talk about her relationship to Minimalism.

Daly: Me too.

Davenport: Why do you want to talk about her relationship to Minimalism instead of her relationship to seventies feminism? I think you have to talk about both of them, but to talk about Minimalism to the exclusion of feminism...

Sundell: It's not that I want to exclude feminism. I don't think you can really deal with the issues Woodman raises about subjectivity as if they were gender-neutral.

Baker: Who would want to...?

Sundell: It's more that the reception of her work has become so overdetermined by a certain kind of feminist reading.

Baker: Solomon-Godeau's essay is the best one we have. But it sets the stakes for that work in an incredibly specific way.

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Sundell: It's true. Solomon-Godeau did sec the stakes for Woodman's reception. It's certainly what I was responding to [in my essay]. But it shouldn't be the only matrix through which her work is assessed. So much of the analysis has taken place in relation to this one essay, which articulates something very significant about Woodman's photography--something that really resonated with Solomon-Godeau's desires and the desires of feminism at a particular moment, But that's not all that's going on in the work.

Daly: I do think Woodman's work can get a bit buried in that kind of reading. It would be great if there were a way to open up the discourse around her work, maybe by placing more emphasis on her interest in categories of representation and the disruption of the categorical.

Baker: As opposed to Solomon-Godeau's reading of Woodman through the lens of eighties postmodernism, there is a text that contextualizes the work in relation to the horizon of what it would have been possible for Woodman to know. Maybe this will sound perverse, but that's what Krauss's essay tries to do. It contextualizes the work.

Sundell: You mean Krauss's argument that Woodman took the framework of student assignments and transformed it into her mature artistic idiom?

Baker: Not just any student assignments, but the specific modernist teaching of photography Aaron Siskind was her teacher at some point. This is the lens through which Krauss examines Woodman, and it completely sidesteps the issues that Solomon-Godeau brings to the table. But it might allow us to return to the work and begin to pose other questions about it. That's what I'm interested in thinking about. I believe it's important to position Woodman's work within the range of practices emerging in the seventies. And when you do, some really astounding and strange connections begin to emerge. I'm not sure if they're all legitimate. But if you think about artists who died young in the seventies (or early eighties), you're struck by the deaths of Gordon Matta-Clark, Ana Mendieta, Robert Smithson, and Francesca Woodman. Now this is complete coincidence. But beyond that, on a formal level, I think there are important connections among their seemingly disparate projects....

Sundell: When I read Krauss's essay, though, I was more struck by the fact that she was trying to deal with a problem similar to Solomon-Godeau's--the problem of an embodied subject's transformation into a photographic image. But Krauss came at it from a totally different angle.

Baker: Yes, and in the process she articulates the context where that might begin to happen, and how that might happen at this particular moment in the seventies.

Sundell: Mendieta and Matta-Clark never occurred to me, but I was thinking about Vito Acconci earlier today. I think there are some interesting connections there, a similar interest in identity and subjectivity...

Daly: I was actually thinking about Woodman in the context of some of the pieces in the video screening you organized with Janet Kraynak for Art in General, Margaret, like Bruce Nauman's Exaggerated Walk around the Perimeter of My Studio. (6) I'm thinking specifically about his emphasis on distortions within structuring elements of physical and representational space. And Woodman works with ideas of dissipation and ruin in a way that's similar to Matta-Clark.

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Davenport: I'm sorry, but I think it has to be acknowledged that there's a major difference between Francesca Woodman and artists like Vito Acconci, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Bruce Nauman in terms of critical strategy. There's a vulnerability and lack of distance to Woodman's work that seems, well, sincere.

Sundell: I guess I always thought there was a kind of sincerity to Vito Acconci's vulnerability too. That's part of what makes him interesting, at least to me....

Davenport: But there's an irony in his work that isn't present in Woodman's. Her work is so much more about self-expression in an unmediated way than the artists you're bringing up.

Daly: I don't think anyone is trying to say that Woodman is identical to Acconci. But her work is very much about contrivance and artificiality.

Sundell: I agree there's a kind of earnestness to Woodman, which I think has a lot to do with her age. But can you really say that an image like Three kinds of melon in four kinds of light is unironic?

Davenport: Some of her work does have more distance to it, like the photographs of "Charlie the model." I was really thinking about the more famous pieces where she situates the female body within the idea of "the natural." It's not that I find her self-expression wholly uncomplicated or unconflicted, but many of her works seem less like a critical articulation of a problematic femininity and more like a repetition of the problem. Part of what I find interesting about Woodman's relationship to feminism of the seventies is how she might function as an embodiment of a cul-de-sac of feminism that keeps getting repeated. I think Woodman is a very interesting lens through which to examine the portrayal of the adolescent woman's body that's taking place in photography today.

Sundell: Do you think that contemporary photographers use Woodman's work to give themselves a kind of license . . .?

Davenport: Yes. . . maybe it's not her work so much as the way they've read the Solomon-Godeau interpretation. I see it most often as a teacher. I do object to the way many of my students engage with the work and the way they articulate the "Francesca Woodman strategy."

Baker: I'd like to know what you think that is.

Davenport: Enacting the myths and signs of femininity and calling it a critique. I think it needs to be acknowledged that certain deconstructive strategies--and I'm thinking again of how the "Just Like a Woman" essay situated Woodman- however necessary they once might have been, have run their historical course. Actually, what I see students picking up now from Woodman is not even the conflicts expressed by Solomon-Godeau but an interest in unmediated self-expression.

Sundell: I find it hard to believe that your students would look to Woodman's work to justify that kind of impulse.

Larson: Mine do as well. What I'm responding to with my students is an easy reception of her work, which I'm being forced to counter as a teacher. I show it in my class, and I try to stress other aspects of her project, like seriality, rather than the individual images where she's playing out little dramas. But that's the thing my students always grab onto.

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Daly: One of the things I liked so much about Subrin's film is the way she works against that kind of reading. It particularly comes across in the section where she has people reenact Woodman's photographs. There is an uncanniness about how the models can't inhabit the positions they are trying to fill, which is intensified by the twitching and uneasiness of their bodies as they struggle with this impossible quest of becoming Woodman. It is a very effective articulation of a kind of subjective impasse. It's also brought out by the way Subrin engages with Woodman through identification, through the insistent categorization and almost analytical dismemberment of Woodman's output, which is mirrored in Subrin's own piece. It's a nearly forensic dismembering and cataloguing--which is shown to fail. The reenactments mark this failure too. In talking about Subrin, I think I'm picking up on what Nancy and Laura are saying. A lot of young women photographers stage tropes of femininity without addressing these other mu ch more interesting and complex aspects of Woodman's work.

Davenport: That's why Subrin's film was so interesting to me, and that's why I wanted to show it in my classes. Subrin brings up the fact that only a small percentage of Woodman's photographs are regularly exhibited or reproduced. The image with the melon and the Charlie images are hardly ever shown.

Sundell: That's an important point. A lot of people have edited Woodman's work in a way that stresses the singular image and downplays her engagement with seriality. I think that's something I did to a certain extent.

Daly: This issue of seeing her work as singular images is important to counter. She often sequenced the work herself ... in particular the book she made in 1981 , Some Disordered Interior Geometries. (7)

Larson: And her other late works, the large-scale diazotypes, are multipanel pieces.

Sundell: There's definitely been a lot of editorializing of her oeuvre. For example, I was consciously trying to reinsert an aspect of Woodman's work that I felt had dropped out of Solomon-Godeau's selection. She focused heavily on the photographs that included some sort of fetishized object and much less on the ones that articulated a relationship between the body and its surrounding space.

Baker: Which is definitely a strong part of the work--those two elements, the investigation of space and the conditions of the fetish.

Sundell: Her work combines the two.

Baker: Right, and it is that combination that allows one to articulate a new historicization, I think, in terms of post-Minimalism and emerging feminist practice in the seventies. On the one hand, so many images take up some sort of staging of a subject, attempting to know space, to experience it in a phenomenological way. Not just the images you stress in your essay, which are about the dissolution of the boundaries between a body and space, but photographs that articulate this sort of ineffable, impossible attempt to experience something. Her friend Sloan Rankin, who was in many of the photographs, stresses this in her essay about Francesca--that it is the tactile dimension of the photographs that must be acknowledged, their interest ultimately in what one feels as a body as opposed to how one looks. She says something like, you wouldn't believe how many times I had to roll around in a material like flour or sawdust for Francesca, or do something bodily--to experience it, feel it, stand in a room in January that is not heated, stand there nude for four hours waiting for the right light. (8) This dimension of Woodman's practice is crucial: the images are deeply engaged in exploring the extreme limit of bodily experience, linking them very much to somebody like Acconci, linking them, indeed, to a performative and extreme reading of Minimalism's phenomenological engagement with bodily experience.

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Sundell: I agree. Her work is extremely performative.

Baker: On the other hand, there is Woodman's obvious interest in the fetish--if not her own practice of a type of (self-)fetishization--which allows one perhaps to begin to articulate the stakes of her work against someone like Mary Kelly. If one of the stakes of a piece like Post-Partum Document was the discovery and full exploration of what Kelly called "female fetishism," then one feels compelled to inquire how the fetishism at work in Woodman's project compares to this feminist project emerging at the same moment. The issue of the fetish was at the core of both Woodman's and Kelly's work, but it led them in what seem to be wholly opposed directions--one toward and one away from images of the female body. But perhaps, as I've been saying, Woodman's engagement with images and with looking needs to be complicated.

Sundell: The project I did on Woodman for the Whitney Program sort of deals with that. I was trying to show how Woodman's work is organized around these two poles--on one hand, her interest in the experience of space and, on the other, her interest in fetishization--and also to understand how these two poles relate to each other, because there's a real tension between them. The interest in space is very much about a bodily experience, which engages phenomenology and its limitations, and the interest in fetishization is very much about the disembodiment involved in producing oneself as a two-dimensional image--even if the body remains the subject of the image.

Daly: In the Space Squared series she seems to be trying to articulate a kind of confrontation between the body and the planes of the museum display case, as if space were something palpable--something capable of exerting physical pressure on the permeability of the body. That goes back to your essay, Margaret. It also makes me think of the Lacanian Gaze. The Gaze pins you in place, it turns you into a blot or stain, and that blot marks the point of your own annihilation, because it's an impossible point to see or occupy In Space Squared and in other works, this excessive bodily experience and impossible subjectivity are played out within the rectilinear geometry of interior spaces.

Sundell: That's definitely how I saw it. And picking up on what Nancy was saying earlier about feminism, I think Woodman specifically articulates that problem in terms of feminine subjectivity--and of what it means to be a female image-maker.

Daly: It's also something that, again, ties Woodman to Matta-Clark. They both emphasize palpable and ruinous properties of space--its potential to disrupt and dissolve gestalt or form through an extravagant dissipation and annihilation-what Bataille called "expenditure."

Baker: Can I just rephrase what I think I hear Ann and Margaret saying? What might make Woodman's work unique, a complete transformation of the context out of which she emerges, is that her reading of Minimalism's engagement with space flips it into an excessive, desperate mode rather than a euphoria of bodily experience. That one can know oneself, that one is constituted in a constant, mobile transformation of one's own sensory experience of space and interaction with objects: this is the utopian project of phenomenology and Minimalism, inasmuch as Minimalism is phenomenological. Now this is precisely what someone like Matta-Clark began to challenge by flipping such spatial explorations into experiences of excess and loss: vertigo, nausea, and disorientation. For Woodman to transfer that project to a photographic as opposed to a sculptural mode is a major step (although one could argue that Matta-Clark does this as well, as his work exists today only in photographs). And that would bring one into the territo ry that you are now articulating: an attempt to represent what is ineffable, impossible, in that utopian exploration of bodily experience. This would also be what makes it so hard to reduce Woodman's work to a sincere recording of bodily or autobiographical experience, to a simplistic documentation of the self If anything, she was documenting the limits of bodily experience, the impossibility of constituting the self

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Sundell: That's something Krauss pinpoints in her essay, when she talks about how Woodman played with photography's capacity to mirror and frame. It's also what I love most about her work, the way she captures that struggle to reduce a physical body to a photographic image-to something flat and framed. For me, that's the tension that animates her photographs, and it dovetails in such an incredibly eloquent way with so many problems of feminine identity.
Baker: What you're pointing to--and this is both what's missing from the nineties reception that Nancy brought up and what I find so remarkable about Woodman--is her amazing attention to her medium. You know that term, a painter's painter. I would say that Francesca Woodman is a photographer's photographer.

Larson: Along those lines, I always thought it was significant that she worked in a square format. A horizontal format is a very naturalized way to make photographs, particularly if you're working with a figure in a landscape. By using a square format, she creates a constricted space, in which a viewer is made aware of how the body is framed. Considering that so many of her photographs address the representation of space, the square format seems a deliberate choice. This is another reason I thought of her when I saw the Bellmer show.

Davenport: I'm curious how this notion of Woodman being a photographer's photographer connects to the discussion we've been having about her legacy. How does it make her work useful to contemporary practice?

Baker: What's incredibly useful in these photographs now is not just their attention to the medium of photography, but their attention to this medium in such a space of extreme outmodedness. Francesca was at ease in everything that was dusty, and had a predilection for mold," her friend Sloan says about her, and this decay is everywhere apparent in the images in ways that are important now. For one could say that, at the present moment, to pay such close attention to the medium of photography is itself not such a vibrant concern. Everyone's jumping ship, rushing headlong into the digital and into hybrid practices that are not perhaps as closely analyzed as they are in the work of artists like Sharon Lockhart or Cindy Sherman. Of course Woodman's work engages with hybridity as well, if you think of everything we've been saying about her articulation of sculptural concerns within the medium of the photograph--her collision of these formerly separate domains. Something like what Rosalind Krauss has recently call ed the "self-differing medium" might be important to reclaim in Woodman's working over of these hybrid conditions into a self-reflexive project. Here, I think, what Solomon-Godeau at one point calls the "gothicness" of these images--their decrepitude--becomes critical, dovetailing with the close analytic dissection of what a photograph is. This is important to reclaim now at a moment when the practice of photography is further in crisis, further instrumentalized, than it was even in the eighties. As an example of the kind of image I'm thinking of, take the photograph with the cast "death" mask placed over Woodman's genitals. What would be important in my reading of this image is the way in which Woodman positions her body--and by extension the photograph-literally between the mediums of drawing and sculpture. There is a complete attentiveness to where the photograph and where bodily experience have to be positioned.

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Sundell: That's great! A bigail Solomon-Godeau talks about that photograph too. But of course, she interprets the bracketing of the body as a way of denaturalizing the woman's sex. But there's actually

a very nice synthesis between what you're saying and what she was saying. You're both getting at the way that Woodman's work is so incredibly tuned in to issues of photographic representation.

Baker: To return to her essay, there's no doubt that Solomon-Godeau articulates beautifully the importance of Woodman's projet for the mid-eighties. Just the way your essay articulates beautifully the need that emerged in the nineties to treat issues like seduction and bodily experience in new ways. So, what we're left with is what it means to look at Woodman in 2003. What are the things about her work that are important to rearticulate now?

(1.) Philippe Sollers, David Levi Strauss. Elizabeth Janus, and Sloan Rankin, Francesca Woodman, tr. Rana Dasgupta, exh. cat. (Zurich: Scalo Verlag, 1998). The retrospective took place at the Fondation Cartier, Paris. in 1998.

(2.) Elisabeth Subrin, The Fancy, 2000. Digital video, 36 min. Distributed by Video Data Bank, Chicago.

(3.) Rosalind Krauss, "Francesca Woodman: Problem Sets," in Bachelors (Cambridge. Mass.: MIT Press, 1999); Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "just Like a Woman," in Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

(4.) Margaret Sundell, "Vanishing Points: The Photography of Francesca Woodman." in inside the Visible (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999). The essay was first published in Documents 3 (spring 1993).

(5.) The exhibition Another Girl. Another Planet, organized by Gregory Crewdson and Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn. took place at Lawrence Rubin Greenberg Van Doren Fine Art, New York. March 23--April 17, 1999. It featured work by Sarah Dubai, Katy Grannan, Dana Hoey. Sarah Jones. Justine Kurland, Malerie Marder. Liza May Post. and Vibeke Tandberg.

(6.) The screening, Redrawing the Line in Film and Video, was organized by Janet Kraynak and Margaret Sundell in conjunction with the exhibition Redrawing the Line, which was curated by Monica Amor and presented at Art in General. New York. in October 2000.

(7.) Francesca Woodman, Some Disordered Interior Geometries (Philadelphia: Synapse, 1981).

(8.) Sloan Rankin, "Peach Mumble, Ideas Cooking." in Sollers et al (see note 1).

George Baker is assistant professor of art history and codirector of the M.A. Program in Modern and Contemporary Art at Purchase College, State University of New York. He is an editor of October magazine and of the 2003 October Files publication James Coleman, published by MIT Press.

Ann Daly is a visual artist who has lived in Brooklyn for the past decade, exhibiting in the U.S. and abroad. Her recent photographs and video work investigate a haptic and distorted spatiality in garden and landscape architecture and can be seen in Cabinet magazine #6. She is an alumna of the Yale School of Art and the Whitney Independent Study Program.

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Nancy Davenport is a New York-based artist represented by the Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery. Her work was recently exhibited at the 25th Bienal de Sao Paulo, Fundacion Proa in Buenos Aires, the Rockford Art Museum in Illinois, Musee d'Histoire de Luxembourg, and Photo & Contemporary in Turin.

Laura Larson's work examines domestic space as a site of fantasy and longing. Her one-person exhibition Complimentary was shown in June 2002 at the Lennon, Weinberg Gallery in New York City. She is a lecturer at the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University and the International Center of Photography.

Margaret Sundell is an art historian and critic based in New York. A cofounder of Documents magazine and a regular contributor to Artforum, she is currently the arts editor of Time Out New York.

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Bibliography for "Francesca Woodman reconsidered: a conversation with George Baker, Ann Daly, Nancy Davenport, Laura Larson, and Margaret Sundell"

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HONINGMAN A.F., 'Francesca Woodman at Victoria Miro, London' [15], 05.06.2007, geraadpleegd op 16.07.2007, op de Saatchi Gallery website, op http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/blogon/2007/07/francesca_woodman_at_victoria_1.php.

FRANCESCA WOODMAN AT VICTORIA MIRO, LONDON

Calling art "adolescent' is usually a slur. During her precocious and prematurely arrested career, Francesca Woodman created art whose theme, appearance and purpose was superficially similar to what many intelligent artsy adolescent girls expressed. But unlike those other young women, Woodman was not simply narcissistic or polemic. Instead her work resounds with timeless poetic intensity, haunting beauty, philosophical poignancy and extraordinary talent.

Woodman committed suicide in 1981 by throwing herself from the window of her loft studio in Manhattan's Lower East Side. She was 22 years old. Because this was how her career ended, Woodman's destiny is to be remembered as New York's feminist Chatterton, the young poet whose tragic legacy as a doomed progeny was secured by his suicide at 17. Woodman's death has brought a following of critics, collectors and viewers eager to give her work the sensitive attention they imagine she lacked in life. Her talent deserves more than a doomed artist's homage, however, and while clues foreshadowing her suicide are there to be read in her work, many other elements are present as well.

The title of Woodman's thesis exhibition, "Swan Song," frames the works she hung in 1978 at the Rhode Island School of Design's square Victorian gallery as a unified suicide note. But unlike other artists whose tragic biographical threads seen in their art retroactively spell out 'cry for help', Woodman's beautifully troubled and troubling self-portraits are compelling because she was producing art in an era when feminism pioneered the idea that the personal was also political.

Woodman's biography is brief but evocative. More than any of her self-portraits, the available information about her creates a clear and compassionate image of a remarkably bright, sensitive and prolific co-ed. She studied at RISD, through which she received a grant to study for a year in Rome, where she had her first solo exhibition at a bookshop specializing in Surrealism and Futurism. At the time of her death, she had produced over 800 photographs using innovative techniques such as long-term exposure and double exposures that enabled her to create images reminiscent of Victorian spirit photography.

According to a statement by her father George Woodman, included in the press material from London's Victoria Miro gallery, her family discovered the prints she had included in Swan Song bound in a tight roll in her studio years after her death. The prints were so brittle and fragile that Woodman's parents could not unroll them. It was not until they connected with Nora Kennedy, the conservator of photographs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where the family donated her 1980 'Temple Project' series, that 'Swan Song' was seen again. By raising the ambient humidity of the prints, Kennedy was able to flatten them and restore the highly damaged delicate paper to a degree that allowed the images to be reproduced with computer technology.

The five large-format photographs and 30 smaller works comprise the second solo exhibition of Woodman's work hung in the airy industrial upstairs exhibition space of the Victoria Miro gallery. In addition to this exhibition, Phaidon Press has released a major monograph of Woodman's work with essays by Chris Townsend and her friend at RISD, Betsy Berne, a New York-based artist and novelist. Woodman's posthumous success is justified, but it raises questions about how her work would have developed and been perceived as she matured.

Woodman's brand of misery was, and sadly still is, common among young women. By producing such piercingly intimate art, Woodman (perhaps inadvertently) embodied some of the most salient and sadly persistent concerns crippling young women. An image that Woodman produced of her nude torso with her head cropped out of the frame, sitting against a painted backdrop pulling and aggressively squeezing the skin on her belly into folds, is a compelling image of female self-loathing. Incorporating her thin frame and lithe beauty, that vision of self-hatred appears pathologically akin to the amateur "art" self-portraits girls take of themselves on anorexia fan-club websites. Yet unlike those photos, where the only appropriate response is pity, the real frisson that comes from Woodman's work is that her art is simultaneously feminist and existentialist. Though her perspective is distinctly a young woman's, she explores and engages her humanity through an investigation into ideas and ideals of femininity. Unlike other, weaker adolescent artists, or artists whose work attempts to lend the political

and personal, Woodman's art is deeply tender and thoughtful because it is at once personal and universal.

Because Woodman was working at a significant time in the development of feminism, the scope of her artistic inquiry and use of her own body conceptually position her as related to self-consciously feminist artists from later in the 1970s such as Cindy Sherman, Hannah Wilke, Ana Mendieta and Karen Finley. This assessment of Woodman's art is supported by Berne's statement that Woodman "loved fashion and loved looking at women, more than men, really; she had chronic 'girl crushes' or intense jealousies, sometimes both at the same time, aimed at the same person." But regardless of whether Woodman was intentionally producing work in sync with feminist theory or political concerns, her art is universal in its message and impact.

The majority of the images in the one metre-square works from 'Swan Song' and the smaller images in the Victoria Miro Gallery's show are haunting nudes of Woodman in sparsely furnished, starkly decorated rooms. Her face is often obscured - either cropped out of the frame, blurred by her movement or covered with an object. In these images, she seems to be self-objectifying with almost painful pragmatism.

Like many other significant female or feminist artists who used their own bodies to represent all women's bodies, Woodman is beautiful. She had a dancer's physique which was graceful, strong and slender. Her awareness of her beauty comes across less as vanity than as an artistic sensitivity to the meaning of female beauty in an image. It is striking that at times Woodman seems to identify with her body, but that she mainly appears to regard it as a prop. She brilliantly embodies feminine concerns about the importance of physical beauty and beauty as an identity, primarily because she so often appears completely disconnected from her own body.

In one of the smaller, untitled images, Woodman's features are erased as she moved her head, but the thick patch of hair under her raised arm is arrestingly clear and matches the matted fur on the vintage stole she draped over her naked torso. The relationship between her body and the dead, decorative thing she has accessorized herself with is highlighted by the fact that her face is a blur. In this image and others, Woodman is clearly capable of using her body as if she were a hired model. This objective understanding of her body personifies Laura Mulvey's 1975 insight about women's split identity, "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness."

Berne described Woodman's personal style as "almost Elsa Schiaparelli-esque" and a "performance." In this context, her clothed images function as more revealing self-portraits than her nudes. In a number of the smaller prints, Woodman's combinations of floppy chiffon-patterned peasant dresses, oversized rain-boots, mangy fur stoles and braided hair are an eerie premonition of nineties grunge style. In one image, Woodman is situated in the center of the frame, wearing an unstructured 1940s-style housedress and loose braids. Her accoutrement resembles what the sharecroppers' wives photographed by Walker Evan wore. She hunches her shoulders and coyly looks away from the viewer. Wrapped around both of her arms are circles of Birch bark which, when one knows her history, come to resemble gauze bandages covering her wrists after a suicide attempt while her self-effacing stance and demure dress become undermined by the morbid message of the image. But like Victorian girls photographing themselves in fairy poses, Woodman's use of the bark makes her seem both ethereal and haunted. She could be a playful wood nymph, a fairytale victim or simply a sad young woman taunting death.

In one of the most affecting images in the show, Woodman is seated on a white wood stool with only her legs and arms visible. Her hands are clasped between her knees and she is nude, except for a pair of black Chinese slippers. The photograph's piquant high contrast causes the wood wall, floor and window to appear supernaturally white, as Woodman contemplates the black imprint of her body left on the dusty floor. The dense outline of her absent back and buttocks could be read as a sharp satirical comment on Yves Klein and his treatment of his female models. With the young woman who is both artist and model seen contemplating this iconic form on the floor, this photograph could be easily be identified as a feminist attempt to 'reclaim' the female body that Klein gleefully objectified - an intellectual project taken up in the sassy and smart performances by Karen Finley. But unlike Finley, the image is less a clever attack on patriarchal art history than an possible insight into a young woman's psychology as she considers the impact her body can have on her environment, its weight and perimeters, while struggling with thoughts of her mortality. And unlike the ephemeral shape her body left on the floor, Woodman's legacy is not fading.

Having myself attended the ultra-artistic, female focused and intellectually challenging Sarah Lawrence college, I recognize Woodman, though she was over twenty years my senior, as a peer. Her

art is poignantly familiar to me, and the stories told about her by Berne and her family fit seamlessly into a framework I recognize from my own Manhattan upbringing and liberal arts education.

Woodman's work remains raw, ripe and rewarding because she seems like a woman one would know and want to know. It is a great loss that younger generations of women will only know her through the extraordinary work she left behind, but, as each group of girls hopefully grows further away from the torments she embodied, her art remains an undying document of a deeply intelligent, beautiful and self-possessed woman artist.

JANUS E., 'Francesca Woodman: Some disordered interior geometries' [6], in Flash art (online) [artikel], 05/06.2007, geraadpleegd op 17.07.2007, op de Flash art website, op http://www.flashartonline.com/OnWeb/FRANCESCA%20WOODMAN.html.

FRANCESCA WOODMAN - SOME DISORDERED INTERIOR GEOMETRIES - Elizabeth Janus

"The beauty that addresses itself to the eyes is only the spell of the moment; the eye of the body is not always that of the soul" — George Sand

FRANCESCA WOODMAN'S photographs call up a host of contradictions: pleasure and pain, sensuality and starkness, transparency and solid form, flatness and multi-dimensionality, the frozen moment and the continuity of real time. Produced over the course of nine years from 1972 to 1981 (between the ages of 13 and 22), they at times look like school exercises, which is not by chance since many were answers to problems posed by her teachers. But in most cases Woodman's pictures transcend simple responses to questions and delve deeper into what it means to produce compelling and poetic images through photography, a medium that readily lent itself to her imagination and that she easily mastered. Photography, in its artistic and documentary capacities, invites a commingling of the photographed subject's psychological state and the photographer's eye. That Woodman was often on both sides of the camera gives her pictures an added dimension that moves beyond simple self-portraiture: they are stark reminders of how femininity is constructed and the power of the naked, female form to reveal as well as evoke desire.

During her brief lifetime Woodman produced a body of work (more than 500 negatives, contact sheets and prints) that indicates an acute and prodigious sense of herself as an artist. As a student at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in Providence between 1974 and 1978, she absorbed the lessons of her professors but was not immune to the artistic trends of the moment. Undoubtedly the predominance of Conceptual and Body art during the late-1970s must have had their effects on her aesthetic choices and likely reinforced her commitment to photography. Artists associated with these movements, as well as those committed to performance and feminism, harnessed photography's documentary potential as part of an investigation into the fundamentals of representation (Joseph Kosuth), as institutional critique (Martha Rosler, Louise Lawler), the re-examination of female stereotypes (Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons) or as visual traces of temporal actions (Laurie Anderson, Vito Acconci). As already noted in an early essay on Woodman's photographs by Abigail Solomon-Godeau, she, like other women artists of her generation, must have been aware of newly emerging film theories, particularly Laura Mulvey's ground-breaking essay Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (published in Screen in 1975) and its discussion of psychoanalysis and the social formations of the self through cinematic representations of women. These developments, as well as William Eggleston's breaking through the color barrier in art photography, lead to a boom during the early1980s that made photography the medium par excellence for artists interested in challenging the established criteria imposed on photography as art by modernist and pictorialist traditions. Artists who were not necessarily trained as photographers began to use it as one medium among many, considering its capacity to communicate in a significant and timely fashion not unlike the stones and chalks of the early image-makers in the caves of Lascaux or the brushes and chisels of painters and sculptors throughout the history of art.

Retrospectively, artists like Lawler, Sherman and Simmons, as well as Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince and Sarah Charlesworth, among others, have been grouped together as "the pictures generation" after the seminal essay Pictures, written by the American critic Douglas Crimp, who first published it in October (1979) and soon after organized an exhibition in New York City with the same title. Though their practices were diverse, one of the things these artists shared was that they were part of the first generation that grew up surrounded by moving images — television and cinema — and they chose photography for its ability to capture but also construct a rapidly changing vision of the world. Their work transformed, through a process that Crimp labeled "the photographic activity of postmodernism," the overabundance of visual information found in American popular culture into compelling, critical, but also beautiful pictures. Francesca Woodman, while part of this generation and thus clearly curious in similar ways (particularly in the representation of the female body), had an

aesthetic temperament that was much more rooted in the visual effects found, at first, in a kind of Victorian moodiness evidenced by the photographs of Julia Margaret Cameron, and then in the dreamy evocations of more complex levels of consciousness characteristic of Symbolism and Surrealism. In 1977, Woodman was selected from among the best RISD students to participate in the school's year long Honors Program in Rome. This time was to prove extremely important to her evolution as an artist, not only because of the way the city's aesthetic splendors — its art, architecture and quality of light — influenced her work, but also because she found at the city's flea and food markets the props, old clothes and other objects that made their way into her photographs. She spoke Italian, was already familiar with Italy and moved easily around city. Besides the markets, Woodman discovered timeworn cafes, an old pasta factory converted into studios by several Roman painters, and, near her apartment by Campo dei Fiori, a small bookshop run by two young bibliophiles. It was a place where Woodman spent hours and days and she saw first edition books and catalogues by and about Antonin Artaud, Balthus, Georges Bataille, André Breton, Isidore Ducasse aka Comte de Lautréamont, Louis- Ferdinand Céline, Friedrich Nietzsche and Odilon Redon. In addition to these and other well-known writers and artists, Woodman came across more obscure ones, such as the German Symbolist Max Klinger, who was an important influence on Giorgio De Chirico and whose series of etchings from 1881, Paraphrase über den Fund eines Handschuhs (Fantasies upon the Finding of a Glove), most likely inspired several of the images that Woodman included in her first artist's book, Some Disordered Interior Geometries (1981).

In Klinger's etchings, one sees a narrative unfold — a glove dropped by a woman, picked up by a man who invents fantasies about its owner — that presents a surprisingly concise visual essay on fetishism (which, not coincidentally, is contemporaneous with Freud's investigations into the unconscious and the formulation of psychoanalysis). The quality of fantasy or a dreamstate evocative of sexual desire found in Klinger's prints clearly interested Woodman, and using an old Italian geometry notebook she superimposed images of herself and handwritten texts onto the printed diagrams and geometry theorems. When Woodman wasn't using her own body as subject, she often asked her friend, Sloan Rankin-Keck, to act as model. The two young women met in 1975 during their first year at RISD, and Sloan became Woodman's most faithful and consistent collaborator over the next six years — more than half of the time Woodman actively worked. Their relationship — as best friends, fellow artists, collaborators — spawned some of Woodman's most gripping and poetic images, at times blurring, cropping and shooting the pictures in ways that masked the subject's identity so that the two friends' bodies became interchangeable. First in Providence, then in Rome and lastly in New York City, Sloan appears as the artist's doppelganger: reaching for a bright, sun-like orb painted on the wall of a snowcovered street (Sloan, 1975); as an angelic figure hanging from the doorway of a Roman palazzo (Angel Series, 1977/78); or, as a cascade of blond hair falling over the edge of a lion-footed bathtub (Untitled, New York, 1979/80). During their year in Rome (from September 1977 to May 1978), the two friends made weekly trips to Porta Portese and Piazza Vittorio, the markets where they bought the vintage clothes, fruits and fish that Woodman used for the mise-en-scènes she then photographed. Eels, or capitone, a Roman Christmas delicacy, found their way into several pictures produced that year. In one untitled print, her curved naked torso is stretched across a black-and-white patterned floor, enveloping a white bowl with a shiny skinned eel tightly coiled inside. (Woodman printed at least two versions of this image, with her body on either side of the eel.) While her form is slightly out of focus, the eel, its container and the fragments of floor tiles are stark and clear; there is a phallic quality to the fish, its black surface playing off the whiteness of the bowl and her hips, which catch the light in such a way that they seem to be glowing like the skin of the eel.

In a series of six photographs also made at this time, titled "Fish Calendar — Six Days" (1977/78), the palpable sensuality found in the eel picture is set against a more playful, humorous side. Here Woodman uses three lemons to represent the month of March and, like the pages of a calendar, each consecutive print includes one or more eels — on a table, a plate, hung between her thighs — to correspond to a specific number of days. For example, the print for March 2nd shows a marble table in the foreground, two of the three lemons on its right edge, a white plate balancing on its upper reaches with a third lemon and an eel on it. Behind the table to the left of the plate one sees Woodman's legs covered in black vertically striped stockings, cropped at the hips, and a second eel suspended between her legs. In the calendar's final photograph she sits naked, hugging her knees and in shadow, foregrounding the table but with her left half cropped out of the picture. The three lemons, cut and peeled, are on the table along with a single eel on the plate; the five other eels are draped across the table, their heads hanging off the front edge. Again both playful and erotic, these photographs indicate at the same time a lightness of spirit, an acute formal sense and a witty symbolism that was all her own. She demonstrated this spirit often during her year in Italy, which was characterized by constant conversations about books and art, intellectual stimulation and a warm, specifically Italian sense of familiarity. Friends who knew her then tell of receiving little notes, messages, drawings and small prints that she tacked to their doors when they were absent. One of these is in the form of a recipe written in Woodman's imperfect and coquettish Italian:

WINTER RECIPE FOR A FRIZZY OMELETTE À LA FRANCESCA
1 little bear-cub size of ricotta cheese
2 of those green apples that are so good on the
inside but ugly on the outside
shake in the same motion as Ducasse
1 of Cristiano's nuts
Grate into and stir well but I recommend doing it
with care and calm
Cook the mixture with warmth and tenderness. If the frittata doesn't fizz or its skin is tough it's worth convincing it or visiting it. If on the contrary the frittata/omelette is loose or too sensitive give it a round word and a special or rather little caress to convince it to correct itself. Also a bite on the edges. This frittata seems tiring but is delicious and very nutritious. It can last for a long time and it's tasty if kept warm and treated well. Enjoy!

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Francesca Woodman was born in 1958 in Denver, Colorado, and died in 1981 in New York.

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Surrealism and Self-Representation in the Photography of Francesca Woodman - Eva Rus, May 2004

"What happens…when woman serves as the looking-glass held up to women?"1

What happens when woman finds herself in the empty space between the signs symbolized by the gaze and her objectified image? How are the conditions of her visibility produced, then? Following a path through eccentric subjectivity, gender theory, semiotics and psychoanalysis, I'd like to argue about the several repercussions of the collusion between Surrealist practices and the negotiation of theoretical models of female subjectivity in the work of Francesca Woodman, a photographer whose largest body of work was produced in the late Seventies. Working with self-portraits, fantastical representations of the body, and even depictions of the absence of the body, Woodman expanded the exploration begun during Surrealism to express female subjectivity through hybridization, fetishization, and displacement of self.

Throughout art history, the woman has been fetishized by the male creative subject: both revered and feared as "Other", admired for the formal aspects of the female body, and cast in a passive role as object of the (male) gaze. The concepts and principles that focused Andre Breton and other male Surrealists of the 1930s and 1940s on the female, also limited their capacity to view women as independent, active subjects. They conceived of woman as man's mediator with nature and the unconscious, femme-enfant, muse, source and object of man's desire, embodiment of mad love, emblem of revolution2. The male objectification of woman responded to their need to employ a body charged with otherness in order to ensure their access to sur-reality3. That is to say that, at the same time that Surrealism attacked some bourgeois concepts, it ended up in the reinforcement of others. As Jean Baudrillard affirmed in a 1976 essay, Surrealism remained within the purview of the realism it contested and redoubled, through its rupture with the Imaginary; while what he called "hyperrealism", or the meticulous reduplication of the real, represented a much more advanced stage as it managed to eradicate this contradiction between the real and the real's hallucinatory resemblance to itself . That is to say that in "hyperrealism", the objectivity of the pure gaze went beyond the power of simulacra4. Within this essential paradox women were eventually doubly negated as subjects: first, because they were defined as mediums of men's communication; second, because woman's sexuality came to be reduced to its "natural" biological functions5. Woman functioned at best as an idealized "Other", at worst as an object for the projection of unresolved anxieties: male subjects sought transformation through a female representational object, which paradoxically reinforced the subject-object split that Surrealism was committed to overcoming6.

The work of female writers and artists inside Surrealism often subtly subverted the male dialogue; or it reversed the male and female positions within the dialogue, often realizing interesting dialectical exchanges based on women's own psychology and experiences7. Following the influence of Freud and anticipating Lacan's re-reading of Freud, women were believed to be closer to the unconscious than men, because they had not entirely entered the symbolic order8. However, Surrealist techniques and strategies that provided means for getting at repressed areas of the psyche were also helpful to women attempting to assert aspects of the self unacceptable within their traditionally prescribed roles. Surrealist principles were therefore employed to breaking down the binary oppositions of mind/body, rational/irrational, art/nature that had functioned to identify woman with the rejected term – body,

irrationality, nature – and situate her on an inferior position9. As a result, in response to an attempt to resolve the Surrealist polarities of inner and outer reality, many women Surrealists found in the self-portrait the suitable metaphor.

In their many self-portraits, women Surrealists like Remedios Varo, Leonora Carrington, and Frieda Kahlo revealed their rejection of the idea of women as an abstract principle, and a substitution of the image in the mirror as a focal point in their quest for greater self-awareness and knowledge10. The mirror became thus the icon for the process of self-representation which involved the identification of the subject with the object of the gaze, and then became, as De Beauvoir affirmed in The Second Sex (1949), the key image to the feminine condition. The use of the mirror as a tool of the artist eventually affirmed the duality of being, the self as observer and observed, at the same time spectator and object of spectacle, body and sign, image and representation11. To perform the terms of the production of woman as text and image finally led out of the mirror trap, and served as a demonstration of the non-coincidence of woman and women12.

A radical shift from the category of the Surrealist woman to that of Surrealist women, intended as a heterogeneous group of individuals for whom Surrealism had played a significant role in their attempt to shape an autonomous feminine subject13, had finally taken place. The starting point for women's personal quest took on the identification of the body as the main signifier of its own cultural politics as established by Surrealism, and led to the negotiation of a relationship between the female body and female identity. For the women artists influenced by Surrealism in the decades after WWII, the artist's own body was still a starting point in collapsing perceptions of the feminine self. The radical re-inventions of self-representation that had occurred in the 1930s and 1940s resonated in later artistic practices and articulated how the body was marked by femininity as lived experience14.

Surrealism continued to attract newer generations of artists (male and female) who were seeking to explore the unconscious as site of meaning and to challenge the essentialism of rationalist binary distinctions. Surrealism's appeal was nevertheless still created by its originary challenge of the bourgeois – therefore patriarchal – social institutions of church, state, and family; and by its insistence on the centrality of the artist's psychic life in the service of revolutionary politics15. Consequently, many women artists who were looking for a support and promise of social liberation from feminine traditional roles, as well as for a legitimation of the expression of female imaginary, perceived the appeal of Surrealist tropes. Generally speaking, the works of women associated with the words surrealist and surrealism in contemporary art, present a common engagement with issues of representation of structures of fabulist narrative, a concern with constructions of femininity through surface and image, a tendency towards the oneiric and the phantasmatic, a preoccupation with the psychic powers assigned to the feminine, and an interest in doubling, masking, and/or masquerade16.

In the late 1960s, a dramatic shift in European and American visual art practices began to emerge as a consequence of the drastic changes in popular consciousness. The very concept of high art established for visual culture was suddenly no longer unaffected. In the aftermath of WWII the success of American abstract expressionist painting had legitimated the passage of the monopoly of the concept of 'modern art' from Paris to New York. But after the United States had finally convinced Europe of its rightful place in the continuum of high culture, a new art began to emerge. The new concerns that were introduced and that still inform the art of the present, sought primarily to break from the ideological and material frame of traditional European aesthetics, calling for a new art that recognized the primacy of individual experience, and that consciously accepted the political terms within which human experience was produced and maintained, through a more direct engagement with life17. In this respect, new 'lower' art forms emerged in the shape of photography, video, installation, and performance.

Given that women's representations of women in 1970s visual art practices were mitigated by the cultural awareness of woman as object, they generally contained a certain self-consciousness of the social construction of the feminine as surface and image. Through the very act of re-presenting oneselves as subjects, 1970s women's self-representational narratives reclaimed the right to authorship, to authority and agency in the world. Moreover, many of the artistic processes that openly incorporated the artist's body were really about transcending it, getting outside of the corporal limitations of the human frame18, they were about the power of experience and the value of memory acquired through bodily physical gestures intended to enter into art dialogue19.

Grown up in the atmosphere of the Sixties' and Seventies' debates, during the nearly 23 years of her life, Francesca Woodman produced a body of approximately five hundred photographs that, re-discovered only in the late Eighties, have eventually raised her work to a quasi-cult status. Daughter of artists20, she grew up in the studios of her parents both in Colorado and Italy, and often spent her summer vacations in the family house of Antella, near Florence. She studied at Rhode Island School of

Design between 1975 and 1979 and spent a year in Rome on a scholarship. This was an extraordinarily creative period in which she was influenced by the classicism, sensuality and decay of Rome and she exhibited her photographs for the first time in the basement of the Maldoror bookshop-gallery. On her return to America she moved to New York. Some Disordered Interior Geometries, the only book of her work to be published in her lifetime appeared in January 1981.

During her early days Woodman not only developed an understanding of art making as a way of life, but mostly as a mode of thought. One of her first self-portraits, taken in 1972 when she was thirteen (Fig.1), is an early example of the characteristics that will then develop in her later photographs and that stress Woodman's preoccupation with herself as a subject of art. For instance, the investigation of space and the staging of the subject in a sort of hide-and-seek game of light and shade, the dematerialization of a body which seems to be associated with no face. How strong the similarities with a portrait of Joseph Cornell taken by Duane Michals that same year in New York, especially in the way in which the body is at the same time carved and hidden by light (www.pdngallery.com/legends3/michals/art/photos_large/joseph_cornell.jpg). In fact the narrative portraits of Duane Michals, as well as Aaron Siskind's modernist teaching of photography at RISD, Man Ray's techniques, Francis Bacon's study of space in relation to the individual, and the evocative power of Italian Transavanguardia, sensibly influenced Woodman's later work.

At age 14 Woodman found her guide to photography in a gifted teacher she met at Abbot Academy, Andover, Massachusetts. Wendy MacNeil, unusually for her time, focussed her teaching on the importance of ideas over technical preoccupations, which encountered Woodman's predilections. Woodman was indeed intensely fascinated by the work of contemporary photographers, such as Clarence John Laughlin and his gothic Southern Surrealism among others. However, the most profound sources of Woodman's work are not to be found in a relationship to contemporary mainstream photography of the 1970s, neither in the formalist modes privileged in art schools such as RISD, nor in the photographic work now designated as postmodernist, since Woodman's work contains no reference to mass culture, even if it regularly stresses the status of the photograph as representation21. The body of work that mostly seems to be recalled by Woodman's art, is Surrealist photography. However, what is really crucial in Woodman is her re-interpretation of it together with other complex interactions she matured during her year in Rome. Woodman improves Surrealist photographic techniques in order to reproduce their power in the oneiric representation of the self but meanwhile she tries to stage her own reading of woman's privileged place in the negotiation of desire.

If the juxtaposition of Surrealism and photography had seemed nothing but a paradox to Breton, this is because the revolution in values promoted from the 1930s, conceived of a reorganization of the very concept of the so-called photographic real versus a reification of unconscious activities. However, with the employment of techniques such as Ubac's brûlages22, Man Ray's rayographs23 and solarization24, and then negative printing, multiple exposure, photomontage, and photo collage, Surrealist photography allowed the possibility of a discursive re-interpretation of its more "straight" outcomes resulting from the instantaneous recording of events. One of the most interesting photographic strategies was that of photographic doubling. The appeal of the technique mainly resided in the very act of addition of a copy to its original, which created a sense of failing uniqueness of subject as well as a perception of difference. In this guise presence becomes seriality, and contributes to the spatial marking of the first element as a signifying simulacrum. Since repetition itself stresses the deliberate intentionality of the act of representation, we could argue that the production of meaning through doubling denotes doubling itself as the "signifier of signification"25. Spatial marking at the same time deals with the boundaries established by the camera frame, which mainly indicates the dichotomy between the experience of the real and the experience of representation that Surrealist photography deliberately marks in order to stress the act of artistic creation.

And doubling, as well as the serial multiplication of the image as principles and techniques, is widely spread in the photographs of Woodman, either in the guise of the use of mirror devices as in the Self-Deceit Roman series (1977-78), or in the form of addition of other models resembling her features in the portrayal of her own image (Fig. 2, 3). In Fig. 3 for instance we can see a portrait of three young girls, among whom Woodman has made herself recognizable (notice her black Mary Jane shoes), hiding their faces behind a drawing of Woodman's own face, a copy of which is also on the wall. The doubled image in Surrealism has often assumed a determination to break with unitary meaning or a deliberate attempt towards the simultaneous representation of the real and the unreal and/or the illusory (Fig. 2)26. At the same time the doubled image that provided women artists with a tool for a critique of otherness, also provided them with a means to argue about otherness by its reproduction as sameness; in other words, the woman made Other to herself, engaged in a dialogue with the very self that produced her life as narrative27.

Discussing women's autobiography, Sheila Rowbothan states that a woman cannot experience herself as an entirely unique entity because she is always aware of how she is being defined as 'woman', that is, as a member of a group whose identity has been circumscribed by the dominant

culture (male)28. Not recognizing themselves in the reflections of cultural representation, women develop a dual consciousness: the self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription. In taking the power of representation, women consequently project onto history an identity that is not purely individualistic, nor purely collective29. De Lauretis herself, expanding on Althusser's concept of the subject in ideology30, theorizes a subject that is at the same time "inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision"31.

It's difficult to avoid any reference to Lacan's concept of "mirror stage"32 (or of "misrecognition") when referring to the process of photographic doubling. Discussing the child's first encounter with its image in a mirror as the source of a fictional self-projection that influences subsequent identity formation, Lacan offered an interpretation of doubling as the replication of a conscious subject that becomes significant within a persistent exploration of the double as a structural principle of optical power. Lacan's theory of the subject, derived from Freud's concept of narcissism and the "specular ego"33, relegated woman to the position of signifier for the male other, her subjectivity determined by the discourse of patriarchy. If we agree to see the camera as being itself a mirror, we can observe Woodman's mirror photographs (Fig.2, 4) as an attempt for the renegotiation of bodily, temporal, spiritual boundaries during the enactment of her self/body through a registering of its traces and through images that suggest its absence. In particular, Woodman created a series of self-portraits entitled Self-Deceit (Fig. 2) in which she seems to be playing a game of hide-and-seek with the aid of a large mirror. Her nude figure crawls in front of the glass as if she were afraid to acknowledge her sense of otherness, and the mirror becomes a barrier that conceals rather than reveal identity. In a following series of self-portraits emblematically called A Woman/A Mirror/A Woman is a Mirror for a Man (1978) Woodman represents herself trapped in between a mirror and a transparent glass, as if hidden and confined within the boundaries of femininity.

In connection to the mirror image, in his 1919 essay 'The Uncanny'34, Freud ties the uncanniness generated by the idea of doubling to the primitive fear of mirrors: he reads the double as a first narcissistic projection that translates both the shadows cast by the body and the body's mirrored reflections. According to Otto Rank's study35, superstitious beliefs interpret the double as shadow as the earliest form through which the soul is imagined, or even as the form in which the souls of the dead return to haunt or take possession of the living, and the polished surfaces of mirrors themselves are believed to be a medium for the return of the dead36. Of course one has to consider the apotropaic potential of these creations of the mind that, while expressing the attempt to protect oneselves from a feared object, actually end up representing it through the strategy of doubling; and all this, if seen through Roland Barthes's eyes, could just validate photography's connection with death through its process of objectification of the subject37. In particular, Fig.4 associates the question of mirror doubling with another recurrent issue in Woodman's photographs: that of her seemingly dead or sleeping body.

Common features of Surrealism had been the belief in dream, in free association, in hypnotic states, in automatism, in ecstasy or delirium38; the concept of bassesse39 as developed by Georges Bataille, which had contributed to the theorization of horizontality as the pure expression of the instinctive animal nature; and the consideration of woman as a central, obsessional subject , especially in the guise of femme-enfant40, the so-called woman child who was believed to be an enchanting clairvoyant creature who through her youth, naiveté, and purity possessed enough direct connection with her own unconscious to allow her to be a guide for man. Therefore, if we just put side by side the belief in dream, the aesthetic theory of horizontality, and the idealization of the woman child as a medium for the access to the unconscious, we will see why the history of Surrealist art seems to be literally covered with bodies of sleeping or seemingly-dead young women (Fig. 4, 5).

Furthermore, this aspect in Woodman seems to be linked to the deliberate choice of denoting her own limp, lying, motionless body with common props of femininity such as dress, flowers and underwear, instead of leaving it nude as she mostly does in the majority of her self-portraits. The use and over-use of accessories41 is in fact a typical feature of Woodman's self-portraits that has been variously associated to fetishism42, in that they simultaneously provide an appropriation of the Surrealist fetish and an ironic critique of Surrealist fetishism. Garter belts, high-heeled shoes, jewellery, black Mary Jane shoes43, gloves, stockings, Easter lilies, Calla lilies, are all there to reveal "both her burgeoning womanhood and her understanding and deliberate assertion of 'the fetish status of the woman's body' as defined by Western art in general and the Surrealist photographs of Man Ray and André Kertész in particular"44.

Woodman's photographs are always characterized by an almost bare or basic setting in which her body and few other objects are displayed. Occasionally she portrays herself in the company of other people or in outdoor natural settings that, anyway, reveal little about the actual location, and practically nothing about the historical or social contemporary realities. Since 1972 Woodman started

to transform her own environment adopting unusual dress, behaviour and inhabiting unique surroundings, which constantly amazed and charmed all those who fell under her fairy-like influence45. Her environments, often densely installed with different collections of objects, are always very important to Woodman and frequently appear as the settings of her photographs. Woodman seems to prefer indoor, domestic derelict uninhabited interiors, which she uses as a stage to enact her personal mise-en-scene where the props of her choice suddenly lose their own intrinsical predictability and finally rise to a new existence in a totally new relationship with the feminine subject. Fig. 6 is a particularly meaningful example of this process. Woodman portrays herself nude and kneeling; with a hand she's hiding her pubis. In the foreground a white Calla lily has been put standing against a wall. The Calla lily is a symbol for pure, virginal love that here is instead positioned in order to resemble a phallic object, or rather a deadly one, since the Calla is also a poisonous flower and Woodman seems to be trying to protect herself from an unknown fate.

In Horizontale (Fig.7) Woodman adopts the same hiding gesture of the hand that, in this case, is doubly represented by a glove as a fetish and by the hand of the artist at the same time. What really looks amazing in this picture however, is the way in which Woodman's legs, bound by a ribbon forming a regular pattern on her flesh, create a contrast that plays against the geometric pattern of the rug below. In this way, if fetishism is the substitution of the unnatural for the natural, Woodman creates her own aesthetic object, a fetish of herself. A Surrealist precursor of Horizontale is Hans Bellmer's Unica (1958)46, featuring the artist Unica Zürn wound tightly with a string that crops her body like a piece of meat, therefore eliciting questions about sadomasochism and its relation to art. We know by the way that the male Surrealists of the 1930s and 1940s celebrated the Marquis de Sade as the incarnation of the free erotic desire capable of transforming human consciousness47; in short, Surrealism can be said to have explored the possibility of a sexuality that is grounded in the idea of the informe, in fantasy and representation, rather than on 'human nature'48.

A process of transformation of Woodman's body into an aesthetic object takes place in many of her self-portraits where, as in Fig. 8 and 9, her body is positioned and cropped to resemble something other, and it does so ironically, as if to confront and problematize her feminine identity. In both photographs her body is denatured, first into an embellished, mockingly feminine reproduction of Brassaï's phallic Nude49 (1933), then into a torso-face which ironically refers to Magritte's body-face in Le Viol (1934). But Woodman's attempted transformations of her body led her also further toward the accomplishment of proper physical metamorphoses, like in the three series Angels (1977-78), House (1975-76), Space² (1975-78).

Woodman always felt fascinated with the ways in which the human body could be made to seem an apparition. As a young teenager she photographed a naked person crawling through a large, cross-shaped gap in a tombstone. By using a slow exposure speed, she turned that person's body into a blur, even as she rendered the world around it bright and clear. Woodman used this technique throughout her life, photographing herself jumping, bending, waving, and stretching, usually in near-empty rooms. In 1977 she started the series On Being an Angel while still in Providence, and then subsequently completed the Angel Series in Rome in 1978 (Fig. 10, 11). Rosalind Krauss has hypothesized that some of Woodman's series might have originated from the framework of student assignments, and that the Angel Series might have stemmed from the need to respond to the task of photographing "a non-existent being"50. However true or not, Woodman's emphasis on distortions within structuring elements of physical and representational space, results here in the development of an ineffable, impossible attempt to experience something: Woodman's angel rises out of the bottom frame of the field, her breasts open out into the image, her wings float into light, her scream fills space.

During her year in Rome, the beauty of Baroque fountains had inspired Woodman's Angel Series, which she photographed partly in the premises of a spaghetti factory, but echoes of Italy pervaded Woodman's work in various changing forms also through the Self-Deceit and Eel Series, (both accomplished in Rome) and would have haunted her work even back in New York, in her Temple Project. In retrospect Woodman's experience in Rome seems to have been essential for her to develop core aspects of her later work in a way that goes from her profound appreciation of Italian architecture, to her fascination with the eclectic Symbolist, Surrealist, and Futurist range of books, catalogues and journals she found in the Maldoror bookshop, as well as to the lasting friendship relationships she established with the bookshop's owners and other artists who in Rome, in 1978, were in a transition from Minimalism and Conceptual art to the later called Transavanguardia.

Deeply engaged in exploring the extreme limits of bodily experience, Woodman gives shape to a strongly performative work that unveils her fascination with margins and boundaries. In the Angel, House, and Space² series her body dissolves, mutates, merges with the environment, and just like the Surrealists themselves had anticipated, she breaks with the notion of the unitary self and embraces a defamiliarized and at times threatening body of fragmentation and incoherence. Woodman's work in

the House and Space² series, both accomplished in Providence, offers images of the body that border on the unfamiliar, the uncanny, the transitional, and the grotesque. In the House series (Fig. 13, 14) Woodman explores issues of hybridity and transforms them into a self-reflexive project that owes much to Surrealism's concern with the collapse of interior and exterior reality, and finally leaves the body as a signifier of absence and deformity.

Distortions, faceless bodies, cropped bodies, dissolving bodies, all contribute to the idea of a constant transitionality and mutability of being. Woodman engages her body in a subtle and at times strongly dynamic physical exchange with the built environment, thus achieving the goal of both revealing and concealing her body and identity. She is the girl hidden under the detached mantel of the old fireplace, she is the woman in the wallpaper of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story, imprisoned in the overlaying pattern, creeping around the circumference of the room, who is unnamed because the experience she is undergoing robs her of her identity. She is the presence haunting those decrepit surroundings, and like one of H.P. Lovecraft's gothic creatures, that in the writer's imagination had really haunted the houses of Providence, Woodman is the ghost inhabiting the unhealthy, damp, sinister atmosphere of that dilapidated house51.

The Surrealist desire to dissolve any difference by blending the bodies with furnishings, architecture, or nature, responded to their belief in the possibility for dualities to coexist in a state of disunity; in fact for Breton, even the ultimate polarity between life and death could potentially coexist52. This desire in Woodman produces a strain of melancholy that most notably in the series Space² (Fig. 15) and From Space² (Fig. 16) succeeds in the accomplishment of a gloomy atmosphere of entrapment. While in some of the photographs she seems to be testing the potential of a dimly lit empty space in order to define it through the inscription of her freely moving body, in the 'cage' pictures the exploration of the geometries is taken to extreme effect. The 'cage' pictures expose Woodman's nude body entrapped in a glass and wood display case she had found in the storerooms of a museum. In this cage her body presses against the glass panes, it shines as if caught by a blurring blaze of light, or it appears like a shadow of claustrophobic imprisonment. What mostly emerges from this series is first of all the way in which a three-dimensional space is made to fit the square frame of a picture and, secondly, the significant choice of a cage as an object of study.

A characteristic of Woodman is her fondness for the square photographic format. A horizontal format is a widely accepted way to make photographs, particularly if working with a figure in a landscape. By using a square format, Woodman creates a constricted space instead, in which a viewer is made aware of how the body is flattened and framed and, considering that many of her photographs address the representation of space, the square format seems a deliberate choice. The choice of the display cage, on the other hand, is strongly indebted to the conceptual interpretation of the idea of 'display', which renders Woodman's body at least doubly objectified by a gaze that pins her twice as an object. Barthes has eloquently made clear that any choice to photograph a subject inevitably transforms that subject in a spectacle, and that photography has the power to transform a subject in an object, literally into "a museum object"53. At the same time the museum glass display case intensifies the impression of 'being on display', eternally at the center of the gaze. Images of women trapped in cages have often been taken by the Surrealists to convey disturbing ideas of a female exoticized other, and of masculine control54. Namely, if one function of the cage is that of the display, another is that of preventing the escape of what is considered to be threatening and monstrous.

In a famous essay, Julia Kristeva identified the feminine space, and more precisely the metamorphosed maternal body, with the monstrosity of the abject55. That which crosses or threatens to cross the 'border' is considered abject; of course the concept of 'border' may change, but the function of what's considered monstrous is the same. Woman, being herself a sign of 'otherness' is therefore deemed as monstrous, as an exotic monster to catch, tame and exploit in order to gain access to hermetic knowledge. The Surrealist assault on Western assumptions of bodily wholeness and integrity, and obsessively on female bodily wholeness and integrity, follows the dissolution of the natural and the assumption that woman, being herself the fetish par excellence, is nowhere in nature. Woman and photograph become then "figures for each other's condition: ambivalent, blurred, indistinct, and lacking in…authority"56. In fact, part of Woodman's artistic aspiration seems to rely on the use of the photographic means to reflect on photography itself, and to reflect on how the entrapped feminine fetish is disfigured in order to disavow the accomplishment of female subjectivity.

To conclude this journey across Woodman's photographs and Surrealist imagination, I'd like to focus on two last pictures, both taken in Rome, that I see as emblematically linked to the issue of othering and otherness. The first picture (Fig. 17) shows Woodman sitting on a chair (only her arms and legs are visible) and a dark human shape marked on the floor. The second picture, called Yet Another Leaden Sky (www.palazzoesposizioni.it/schede/woodman_foto2.htm), shows Woodman heavily clothed in a dark frock hiding her face behind a round white object while confronting a giant tortoise that is crossing the room. The 'tortoise' picture is particularly striking because of its intrinsic

absurdity, absurdity we only find in dreams. Here Woodman seems afraid of the exotic animal and hides her face as if seeking solace by choosing 'not to look'. The refusal to acknowledge the existence of the exotic in the realm of the everyday, domestic, cultural and urban interior, reflects the fear of the other as abject. The tortoise could be there as a symbol for the exotic objectification of the female self, for a threat of castrating female sexuality, or just as a metaphor for all the uncanny feelings people are afraid of, a metaphor for the need to shelter from the realities of life. Like Freud's 'uncanny' and like the mechanisms of dreamwork that so much fascinated the Surrealists, anything we find unidentifiable in terms of 'real world logic' belongs to the category of the marvelous. The marvelous, the exotic, the abject, all unite here in the creation of the uncanny other.

In the 'shadow' picture a human shape (presumably Woodman's) is lying at the feet of the sitting person whose fetish shoes mark as being Woodman herself. The issue of doubling as discussed earlier in this paper is self-evident; however there is more to it. I imagine that mark as being a water mark that Woodman made by simply lying on the floor. But water marks tend to dry and then fade, they are ephemeral, just like shadows, and phantoms. Freud sees the 'double' as an insurance against destruction to the ego, a denial of the power of death. In psychoanalytic terms, this double is the first narcissistic projection, the earliest form through which the soul is imagined. The double as shadow can be a self-projection, a locus of collapse of interior and exterior reality, a shield against limiting boundaries. And, in this self-representation in space, space itself is for Woodman like a "devouring force…[where] The body desolidifies with [her] thoughts, the individual breaks the boundary of [her] skin and occupies the other side of [her] senses…[Where she] feels [herself] becoming space"57.

As a woman of the 1970s, Woodman gets outside of the corporal limitations of her female human frame through the very act of incorporating herself as subject of her own art. Applying strategies of doubling, fetishization, and metamorphosis, Woodman renegotiates bodily, temporal, and spiritual boundaries. Her body, as the main signifier for feminine identity, symbolizes a margin that not only delimits the morphology of her imaginary self, but also allows the access to the unfamiliar, the social, the symbolic. Her body is an open boundary between the outer reality, the social institutions, the unconscious, the "Other". In brief, following Freud, Woodman affirms that we can become subjects only to the extent to which we also are bodies. So, if again we wanted to ask, What happens when woman finds herself in the empty space between the gaze and her objectified image? In Woodman's own words, woman would multiply her image and, in the midst of so many illusory ghosts of herself, she would conceal the true herself, who makes them move.58

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1 Teresa de Lauretis, Alice Doesn't. Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (London and Basingstroke: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 6-7 (italics mine).
2 Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf E. Kuenzli, Gwen Raaberg, eds., Surrealism and Women (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: MIT Press, 1991), p. 2.
3 Ibid., p. 6.

4 Jean Baudrillard, 'Symbolic Exchange and Death' in Mark Poster ed., Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988) pp. 119-148: 145.
5 Teresa de Lauretis, Alice Doesn't, p. 20.
6 Ibid., p. 8.
7 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
8 Ibid., p. 19.
9 Ibid., p. 8.
10 Whitney Chadwick, Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), p. 4.
11 Ibid., p. 92.
12 De Lauretis, Alice Doesn't, p. 36.
13 Whitney Chadwick, ed., Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 3-4.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., p. 5.
16 Ibid., p. 6.
17 Laura Cottingham, ed., Seeing Through the Seventies: Essays on Feminism and Art (Singapore: G+B Arts International, 2000), p. 119.
18 Ibid., p. 121.
19 See for instance Adrian Piper's performances in the streets of New York with balloons stuffed under her clothes, bubble gum stuck over her face, wet paint on the front of her shirt; Eleanor Antin's self-imposed weight loss; Carolee Schneemann's trapeze-style performance while suspended nude from a ceiling; Linda Montano's positioning in public dressed like a chicken.
20 George Woodman was primarily a painter from the 1950s until 1987, when he turned to photography full-time. For nearly 40 years he has divided his time between the U.S. and Italy, and he

has visited the Pitti collection regularly (the exhibition included work from the last eight years). His photographic images are highly constructed, with elements often double exposed or reversed, and layered over other images of objects, people or nature. Betty Woodman is a well-known ceramist.
21 Abigail Salomon-Godeau, 'Just Like A Woman', in Francesca Woodman: Photographic Work (Providence: Wellesley College and Hunter College Art Gallery, 1986) pp. 11-37: 18.
22 Photographs in which the image is modified by melting the negative emulsion before printing. Ubac describes the procedure as a system of placing the glass plate of an exposed negative over a heated pan of water in order to melt the emulsion (Rosalind Krauss, Jane Livingston. L'Amour Fou. Photography and Surrealism. New York: Cross River Press: p.42).
23 Cameraless "photograms" produced by placing objects directly on photographic paper, subsequently exposed to light (Ibid. p. 24)
24 Photographic paper is briefly exposed to light during the printing process, thereby altering in varying degrees the relationship of dark and light tones, introducing elements of the photographic negative into the positive print (Ibid., p. 28).
25 Expression borrowed from, Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked, trans. J. and D. Weightman (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 339-40.
26 As argued also in 'Corpus Delicti' by Rosalind Krauss, L'Amour Fou, p. 78.
27 Whitney Chadwick discusses this point in her introductory chapter to Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation, p. 29.
28 Discussed in Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice', in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 72-82: 75.
29 Ibid., p. 76.
30 Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses)Notes Toward an Investigation)', in Lenin and Philosophy (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971)
31 Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender. Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), p. 10.
32 Jacques Lacan, 'Le Stade du Miroir Comme Formateur de la Fonction du Je', Ecrits (Paris : Seuil, 1966) ; in English as 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I', Ecrits, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1982).
33 The formation of the subject around a dynamic of seeing/not-seeing that initiates the castration anxiety around which male sexuality is formed. In Whitney Chadwick, Mirror Images, p. 8.
34 Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. And ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-73), vol. 17, pp. 234-35.

35 Otto Rank, The Double, trans. Harry Tucker, Jr. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971).
36 Ibid., pp. 62-3.
37 Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 14.
38 Just think about Breton's fascination with Charcot's study on hysteria and Dali's famous 1933 photo collage in which he identified hysteria with the phenomenon of ecstasy.
39 An axial rotation from vertical to horizontal of the subject of representation, which apparently allowed the achievement of the informe - or rather of the shapelessness of meaning –Georges Bataille, 'Informe', Documents 1, no. 7 (December 1929) : 382.
40 This image of ecstatic inspiration was at the same time one of innocence and sexual ambiguity, at once erotic and irrational.
41 Notice how in Fig.5 Woodman appears as wearing 4 garter belts, surrounded by 2 pairs of stockings, looking herself like a garment left there lying on the sofa. If underwear garments have been commonly associated to fetish objects and therefore to phallic power, then Woodman's body in this picture has to be interpreted as a strong symbol of phallic power.
42 Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Dialogue and Double Allegiance. Some Contemporary Women Artists and the Historical Avant-Garde', in Whitney Chadwick, Mirror Images, pp. 128-154: 146-7.
43 See for example the use of the same type of 'schoolgirl' shoes in the Poupées series (1935) by Hans Bellmer.
44 Posner, 'The Self and the World. Negotiating Boundaries in the Art of Yayoi Kusama, Ana Mendieta, and Francesca Woodman', in Mirror Images, pp. 156-171: 167.
45 While at Abbot, sleeping in her closet, Woodman turned her room into a photography studio. It was when she filled the room with feathers that she provoked the house authorities, and her parents were advised that she was "too extreme". (Ann Gabhart. 'Francesca Woodman 1958-1981', in Francesca Woodman:Photographic Work, Wellesley College Museum and Hunter College Art Gallery ed., 1986: 53-58, 53).
46 Bellmer's photos of Unica had appeared on the cover of the Surrealist journal Le Surréalisme, même, no.4 (Spring 1958) – not hard to find for Woodman during her period at the RISD (1976-77). Furthermore, a number of books and articles about Surrealist eroticism appeared in the 1970s, with discussion and illustration of Bellmer's work. During Woodman's stay in Rome (1977-78), she surely

saw Surrealist photographic work in the avant-garde bookstore Maldoror; and also subsequently in New York (1979-80) when she met the art collector Timothy Baum, who als owns some Bellmer photographs.
47 See for instance Mary Ann Caws, et al., Surrealism and Women, pp. 19-20.
48 Rosalind Krauss, 'Corpus Delicti', in Rosalind Krauss, L'Amour Fou, pp. 55-112: 95.
49 Brassaï, Nude (1933); in this famous photograph, the female body and the male organ have each become the sign for the other. Another interpretation of this photograph by Woodman (Fig.13) is given by Susan Rubin Suleiman in her essay 'Dialogue and Double Allegiance', in which she argues that Woodman might have found her inspiration again from one of Bellmer's Unica photographs.
50 Rosalind Krauss, 'Francesca Woodman: Problem Sets', in Rosalind Krauss, Bachelors (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999), pp.161-177: 173.
51 "The small-paned windows were largely broken, and a nameless air of desolation hung round the precarious panelling, shaky interior shutters, peeling wallpaper, falling plaster, rickety staircases, and such fragments of battered furniture as still remained. The dust and cobwebs added their touch of the fearful", H.P. Lovecraft, 'The Shunned House' (1924), http://www.dagonbytes.com/thelibrary/lovecraft/theshunnedhouse.htm, The Complete Works of H.P Lovecraft, visited on 28 April 2004.
52 Posner, 'Negotiating Boundaries in the Art of Kusama, Mendieta, and Woodman', in MirrorImages, 156-171: 158.
53 Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, p. 13.
54 See for example Man Ray's Mannequin, 1938.
55 Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (1980), trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 53-55.
56 Rosalind Krauss, 'Corpus Delicti', p. 95.
57 Roger Caillois, 'Mimetisme et Psychasténye Legéndaire', Minotaure, no. 7 (1935), pp. 8-9. Quoted in Rosalind Krauss, L'Amour Fou, p. 74.
58 Francesca Woodman, Some Disordered Interior Geometries (Philadelphia: Synapse Press, 1981)

GOLDMAN F., 'Regina José' [3], in: BombMagazine [artikel], nr.94, winter 2005/2006, geraadpleegd op 06.04.2007, op de BombMagazine website, op http://www.bombsite.com/galindo/galindo.html, zie bijlage p.

Bomb magazine - Regina José Galindo by Francisco Goldman

Quien Peude Borrar Las Huellas? A Walk from the Court Of Constitutionality to the National Palace of Guatemala, leaving a trail of footprints im memory of the victims of armed conflict in guatemala, in protest of the ex-dictator Effraín Ríos Montt's 2003 presidential candidacy. All images courtesy of the artist.
A slight young woman in a black dress walks barefoot through the streets of Guatemala City, carrying a white basin filled with human blood. She sets the basin down, steps into it and then out, leaving a trail of bloody footprints from the Constitutional Court building to the old National Palace. The corrupt Constitutional Court had recently allowed the former military dictator, General Ríos Montt, to run for president despite the Constitution's barring of past presidents who gained power by military coup. A Guatemalan who didn't know that it was a performance titled Who can erase the traces?–or even who had never heard of performance art–would have had no trouble understanding the symbolism: the ghostly footprints representing the hundreds of thousands of civilians murdered, overwhelmingly by the Army, during the long years of war and after; the persistence of memory in the face of official policies of enforced forgetting and impunity. I've read (and have contributed) plenty of words, a surfeit of words, about violence and injustice in Guatemala. That trail of bloody footprints was the most powerful statement I'd encountered in ages.

I'd never paid much attention to performance art, but I do always keep an eye out for anything having to do with Guatemala. Regina José Galindo came to my attention when I read that she'd won the Golden Lion award for the best young artist at the 2005 Venice Biennale. She was awarded the prize for Who can erase the traces? as well as two other video presentations and one performance. In the latter she crawled inside a pale gray cube and whipped herself 256 times, one for each woman murdered in Guatemala so far that year.

Internet research revealed a prolific artist (Galindo writes poetry too) of astonishing imagination and conviction, who uses her body to create powerful visual metaphors and symbols that are never just obscure. In a group show on the theme of what it means to be a Guatemalan, she repeatedly injected herself with valium. In another performance, she put herself inside a garbage bag and was deposited at the municipal dump; crawled into the ring to fight with a professional wrestler; made a five-day journey from Guatemala to Lima, Peru, and back–blindfolded. That is a tiny selection. I'm awed by the

economy of her work, by her courage, by the spectacle of her self-devouring and obsessive seeking. Galindo expresses the Guatemalan experience with searing intimacy, its pain and horror and daily humiliation, but also its resiliency and peculiar vividness. As her Venice Prize recognizes, she also speaks universally; outside Guatemala, she must often seem like an artist from a Kafka story, on a riveting and terrible quest whose meaning seems both inexpressible and unbearably true.

SCOTINI M. (curator), 'Prometeogallery Presents Regina José Galindo' [9], in: ArtNexus [press release], 2005, geraadpleegd op 06.04.2007, op de ArtNexus website, op http://www.artnexus.com/ANnewsdetail/15159, zie bijlage p.

Press Release
Prometeogallery Presents REGINA JOSE GALINDO - Curator Marco Scotini

Opening: Tuesday, November 8, 19.00 hrs.
Dates: November 8, 2005 – January 8, 2006
Location: Prometeogallery, Via G. Ventura, 3 -20134, Lambrate, Milan

On Tuesday November 8, the opening of Ida Pisani's new art space in Milan, Prometeogallery, will take place, adjoining itself to the already well-known venue Lucca, located in the Church of San Matteo. The opening of this season will be the first Italian individual exhibit for the Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo, with artworks that have strong emotional impact created especially for this occasion.

Honored with the Golden Lion for best artist under 35 in the last edition of the Venice Biennale, participating in the exhibition project "Always A Little Further" directed by Rosa Martinez, Regina José Galindo has most recently been part of the Prague Biennale 2 and the Tirana Biennale. The artist made her first international appearance in the 2001 Venice Biennale, who had Harald Szeemann as curator.

Her actions in "Who can erase the traces?" became immediately famous within the public as representation of individual resistance and a collective portrayal of a civil, untrusting society. In this work, a young woman dressed in black makes her way across Guatemala City—from the Constitutional Court to the National Palace—with her feet covered in blood, fulfilling a silent and difficult act, condemning against the possible presidential election of former dictator Rios Montt. But ever since her first action in 1999, Galindo was already congregating the space of her own body with society's body, when—still unheard—she would chant her poetry while being suspended 10 meters above ground in an urban plaza in Guatemala City.

A true exhibitor of "reenactment" art, Regina José Galindo returns to the places that have served as public witnesses to history's dramas and, through the use of her body, "reenacts" those actions. The reenactments never attempts to identically recreate the happenings, but instead to restore the possibility of what could have been: her actions don't reinstate the past as it was, but bring about the possibility of it happening again. It is because of this that the center of Galindo's work is not a direct representation on itself, but instead a string of theatrical events used as key portrayals are the center of Galindo's rituals on scene: strange ceremonies, immediate actions that consist of either chants or acts done hic et nunc, reenacted within a real movement.

From here stems the intrinsic political quality of her work: not just the presentation of a generic discourse or a condemning operation. Without conceiving the "repetition", it is not possible to completely explain works as those presented in the past Biennale in Venice "(...) beatings", where the artist beats her own body a number of times equivalent to the number of Guatemalan women who have been killed during the last year. Or furthermore, there would not be a fair interpretation of the extreme actions that take place in works like "Imenoplastía", where the artist places her own body at risk. It is from here that the poetic feature of all of her artworks stem, works that she herself calls "acts of psychomagic", underlining even more the characteristics of suffering and strong emotional charge.

Within the Italian and Milanese context, prometeogallery attempts to promote the awareness of artistic practices that take place in emerging areas and give a voice to cultures belonging to lower-standing economies, while continuing the project Ida Pisani and the Prometeo Foundation have been working for some years now, which is to search and investigate contemporary art in Latin American and in Eastern Europe.

The expansive space of Via Ventura 3 of prometeogallery adjoins itself to the medieval Church of San Matteo in Luca, a site where the Prometeo Association has, during its four years of activities, since 2002, presented a series of exhibits by world renown artists, such as Anibal López, Carlos Amorales

and Julian Lede (Newly Rich), Santiago Sierra, Pawel Althamer, Adrian Paci, Radek Community, Gianni Motti, Marcella Vanzo, Sukran Moral, Frédéric Moser & Philippe Schwinger, along with the collaboration of international and Italian galleries.

Prometeo Association has even promoted collective exhibits of great importance, such as "Mexico Attacks!" in 2003 with curator Teresa Macrí, and "Producing Reality" in 2004 with curator Marco Scotini, who has presented thirty artists from seventeen Latin America countries. The Association has made numerous collaborations with national and international institutions, such as: Pragabienal, the MADC Museum from San Jose in Costa Rica, The Adriano Olivetti Foundation in Rome, with the individual exhibit of Anibal López, the Cívica Gallery of Trento and the MNAC of Bucharest, with two individual exhibits of Santiago Serra.

After the individual exhibit of Regina José Galindo, prometeogallery will actively continue hosting exhibits in the 2005-2006 season, including artists Ronald Morán, David Ter-Oganian, José Davila, Santiago Sierra, Gulsun Karamustafa, Erick Beltrán, Javier Tellez, Anibal López, and Maxim Karakulov.

Dankwoord

Graag zou ik de volgende mensen willen bedanken:

Mijn promotor: Prof. Dr. Claire Vandamme.

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Mijn grootouders voor het ontlenen van interessante boeken uit de openbare bibliotheek van Brugge.

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De museummedewerkers van het museum Dhondt-Dhaenens die me dankzij hun positieve ingesteldheid en vriendelijkheid eveneens moed gaven door te zetten, en meer specifiek Tanguy Eeckhout voor het geven van concreet advies.