

PERFORMING FRANKLIN FURNACE

PRATT MANHATTAN GALLERY

144 West 14th Street, Second Floor, New York, NY 10011



February 20–April 30, 2015

Opening Reception:
Thursday, February 19, 6–8 PM

Gallery hours:
Monday–Saturday 11 AM–6 PM,
Thursday until 8 PM

Performing Franklin Furnace is organized by Independent Curators International (ICI), New York, and was initiated by guest curator Peter Dykhuis. The exhibition, tour, and the accompanying publication *Martha Wilson Sourcebook* are made possible in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, The Cowles Charitable Trust, and by the generous support of the ICI Board of Trustees.

Image: Willie Cole, *Ten Thousand Mandelas*, installation view, May 27–June 25, 1988, image courtesy of Franklin Furnace Archive, Inc.

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Franklin Furnace’s mission is to present, preserve, interpret, proselytize, and advocate on behalf of avant-garde art, especially forms that may be vulnerable due to institutional neglect, their ephemeral nature, or politically unpopular content. Franklin Furnace is dedicated to serving artists by providing both physical and virtual venues for the presentation of time-based visual art, including but not limited to artists’ books and periodicals, installation art, performance art, and unforeseen contemporary avant-garde artforms; and to undertake other activities related to these purposes. Franklin Furnace is committed to serving emerging artists; to assuming an aggressive pedagogical stance with regard to the value of avant-garde art to life; and to fostering artists’ zeal to broadcast ideas.

—Franklin Furnace mission statement

Franklin Furnace

In 1976, artist Martha Wilson built on her existing interest in and dedication to collaboration, experimentation, and “activist” or socially engaged art when she founded the nonprofit art space Franklin Furnace. As the organization’s mission statement makes clear, Wilson intended Franklin Furnace to support the creation of avant-garde work that was ephemeral (performance or installation art, for example), controversial, or otherwise unlikely to be supported by existing art institutions. From 1976 to 1996, Franklin Furnace’s storefront, at 112 Franklin Street in Tribeca, presented groundbreaking performance, video, and installation art; it also compiled one of the largest collections of artist books published post-1960. In 1997, the decision was made to close the storefront space and continue the organization’s mission via an online platform at www.franklinfurnace.org. Since that time, Franklin Furnace has continued to advocate, fund, document, and defend new work by supporting it financially through grant-making, maintaining and adding to its vast archive, and initiating and collaborating on a variety of other programs aimed at education, preservation, and more.

Martha Wilson

Martha Wilson (b. 1947) began making performance-, video-, and photo/text-based art in the early 1970s. Her body of work has consistently been concerned with the negotiation and performativity of identity, and she is perhaps best known for performances in which she impersonated and “invaded” figures such as Barbara Bush and Nancy Reagan. From 1978–82, she was also a member of the downtown New York feminist art group DISBAND.

ICI and Martha Wilson

In 2011, recognizing the tremendous influence and importance of Wilson and Franklin Furnace, Independent Curators International (ICI) and curator Peter Dykhuis organized the traveling exhibition *Martha Wilson*, which would present selections from Martha’s own body of work in addition to work by other artists created under the auspices of and documented in the archives of Franklin Furnace. An important component of the exhibition—and one very much in keeping with Franklin Furnace’s own dynamic and collaborative approach—is that it is not static, but instead evolves with each traveling venue, so that each hosting institution works with Wilson to shape the program in concert with institutional and local concerns and context. The current version of this exhibition, *Performing Franklin Furnace*, which will take place across three New York City venues from February 19 to April 30, 2015, will be the final iteration.

Performing Franklin Furnace and Pratt Institute

The Pratt Manhattan Gallery component of *Performing Franklin Furnace* presents thirty projects selected from the Franklin Furnace archive, with one project from each year of Franklin Furnace’s first thirty years. Including both original work and documentation of seminal work by Vito Acconci, Eric Bogosian, Willie Cole, Jenny Holzer, Tehching Hsieh, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Ana Mandieta, Shirin Neshat, Martha Rosler, William Wegman, and many more, the exhibition presents video, photographs, and a variety of ephemeral printed and promotional material—posters, press releases, announcement cards, etc. Additional materials—including catalogues and/or documentation of several exhibitions which took place at Franklin Furnace, a selection (in the form of approximately 450 notecards) from Franklin Furnace’s artists’ books bibliography, materials related to Franklin Furnace’s “Sequential Art for Kids” programming, and copies of *Flue*, a newspaper published by the organization—provide a sense of the scope of Franklin Furnace’s activities.

ICI has described these thirty projects as constituting a “self-portrait of sorts” of Martha Wilson, in that the body of work they add up to shares the concerns of and is in many ways inextricable from her own life’s work. Wilson chose these particular projects because of their historical significance; when they were created and presented, they challenged prevailing assumptions about gender, race,

politics, and what art could or could not be. But she also considered their relevance today, selecting projects that she feels are ripe for re-visiting and re-consideration. Thus the exhibition is not intended solely as a look back, but rather as an opportunity to re-activate and a potential catalyst for new explorations or directions. In this exploratory vein, the Pratt Manhattan Gallery will also host a symposium on April 22, investigating the many complex issues (economic, political, temporal, etc.) surrounding the re-enactment or re-creation of works of performance art.

Performing Franklin Furnace represents just the inaugural stage of what will be a long-term relationship between the organization and Pratt Institute: As of 2014, Franklin Furnace and its archive will be “nested” within Pratt’s Brooklyn campus. This arrangement, again very much in keeping with Martha Wilson and Franklin Furnace’s longtime commitment to both collaboration and education, will benefit both institutions, providing institutional stability for Franklin Furnace while giving Pratt students and faculty special access to Franklin Furnace’s archives, staff, programs, and worldwide network of artists. The archive, which will continue to be accessible to scholars and the public, will be a tremendous resource for curricular development and for Pratt’s students of fine art, art history, and library science. The nesting decision was announced along with the establishment of Pratt’s new Master of Fine Arts in performance and performance studies, which will launch in 2016 and will educate a new generation of performance artists and theorists. In addition, Franklin Furnace’s international network of artists (including almost 1,600 former Franklin Furnace fund recipients) will undoubtedly allow Pratt and Franklin Furnace to jointly invite some of today’s most influential practitioners to Pratt’s campus for talks, workshops, and classes that will educate both the Pratt community and the general public.

Concurrently with the Pratt Manhattan Gallery exhibition, *Performing Franklin Furnace* presents programming at two other venues, New York University’s Fales Library and downtown nonprofit art space Participant Inc. The Fales Library’s exhibition is a retrospective of Martha Wilson’s work, including both her early photographic work and New York-based performances. Participant Inc. will capture the spirit of Franklin Furnace’s former Franklin Street space, hosting a series of live performances by Cocco Fusco, Michael Smith, and other artists, plus an open day of improvisational and work-in-progress performances hosted by Clifford Owens.

—Olivia Good, Assistant Director of Exhibitions, Pratt Institute

Related exhibitions and events**At Pratt Institute:**

The Artist as Provocateur: Pioneering Performance at Pratt Institute
February 20–March 7, 2015
Rubelle and Norman Schaffer Gallery, Pratt Institute
200 Willoughby Avenue, Brooklyn, New York 11205

Knowledge Carnival

Karen Finley, professor, Art and Public Policy, Tisch School of the Arts at NYU leads her students in an evening of performance, video and installation.
Thursday, March 12, 6:30–9 PM
Pratt Manhattan Gallery

Panel Discussion

Wednesday, April 22, 6:30 PM
Pratt Manhattan Center, Room 213, adjacent to the gallery

Elsewhere:

Martha Wilson: Downtown
February 20, 2015–April 30, 2015
Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University
70 Washington Square South, New York, New York 10011

Performing Franklin Furnace Performance Series

Michael Smith: Thursday, February 26, 7 PM
Coco Fusco: Friday, February 27, 7 PM
Franklin Furnace Screenings: Saturday, February 28, 1–6 PM
Performances hosted by Clifford Owens: Sunday, March 1, 7 PM
Participant Inc.
253 East Houston Street, New York, New York 10002

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