

## FOREVER MAGIC

Sheilah Wilson performs small miracles (watch her melt snow in the palm of her hand), attempts levitation, and illuminates moments of enchantment in the mundane details of everyday existence. Using her body as medium, she offers herself –vulnerable, tender and brave—before the vastness of life, daring the world to take notice. She is a heroine of the absurd and of the unheroic everyday. She unfolds epic myths, miniscule truths, and regales her viewer with elaborate and often seemingly arbitrary narratives. She founded a fan club for a giantess, hand wrote apologies on a thousand books of matches, and vowed in white neon to *Make Art that is Forever Magic*.

Her work ranges in medium from helium balloons to neon, text, twigs, photography, video, sewing, and spray foam. The mutability of medium suggests an urgency of transmission. She employs and transforms the raw material within reach into a crucial missive before the moment has forever slipped beyond her reach. Epic and precarious, the stories she tells are wistful and tender fabrications of specific flashes in time, memories remembered and precise places conjured.

In her words *“I am curious how the conflation of the personal, geographical and historical can become mythological, absurd, a lie—or all of the above. I have been committed to my work in a quest for the brief moment that this absurd, entropic, self- created universe can exist—before it all falls down.”*

Now teaching in the Midwest, Wilson lived in the American Southwest for nearly a decade. The vast aridness, the sublime beauty and limitlessness of space deeply impacted her work. Wilson once described New Mexico as *“that beautiful land. I wanted to eat it up and swallow it and make it in my own image! And the futility of it, and the trying of it.”* Driving in the desert heat, it is common for puddles of water to emerge suddenly from the parched pavement. These puddles are mirages, illusions, a deception of desert light. They are optical phenomenon, yet the puddles convincingly reflect the sky and clouds in their pools and can be captured in a photograph. They are utterly real until they disappear without a trace. Their existence remains a myth and a memory. Wilson’s art is awash in mirages.

Conceptual artist Olafur Eliasson stated that, “the experiment as a mode of inquiry is necessary if we are to insist on a constant, probing and generous interaction with reality. Or to put it differently: by engaging in experimentation, we can challenge the norms by which we live and thus produce reality.” Sheilah Wilson makes the indescribable visible, teases out truth from incongruity and fiction. She asserts brave ideas and enacts tiny feats of daring with equal parts timidity and audacity. She invites us to join her leap into certain and absurd futility for a glimpse of hope, healing, boundlessness, and enchantment. Wilson disrupts the order of things, changes the unchangeable, lifts off the earth, and attempts transcendence. She wants to be for infinity. And she makes art that is forever magic.

CYNDI CONN, *Program Director*, Creative Santa Fe

