

Sheilah Wilson, a Nova Scotian by birth, completed her MFA at Goldsmiths College in London.

Her work has been in several shows in Santa Fe, including *Flight of Fancy*, curated by Laura

Addison, at the New Mexico Museum of Art. **Wilson is best known for her performance-based narratives and her cursive neon pieces that spell words like “yes,” “please,” and “still here.”** She lives between Cerrillos

and Madrid with her dog, Bijou, and her horse, Boy. Wilson plans to leave Santa Fe and journey to

New Zealand to attend a residency program later this year.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANA WALDON



Relating to Feminist Art

I don't wake up every morning and look in the mirror and think, *Girl you are a woman artist making art because there was a movement called Feminism and I am here to continue the celebration.* But I do think when someone asks me, or I am reading about it, how important Feminism was and is, still. As an artist, I make a story. To be a woman artist making a story that is completely personal and issues from my own kingdom of sense is revolutionary and indebted to Feminism. There would not be an audience for these alternative narratives if Feminism had not happened. Feminism made us rethink our whole value system, and the art world has grudgingly admitted that the personal might be political. Every part of the art world, and many artists, have been influenced by Feminism.

Inner Power

I am interested in women who defy our sense of the norm. I find these women exhilarating in that they are both terrifying and awe-inspiring. I remember watching *Carrie* at a sleepover in sixth grade; I was completely traumatized at the idea of being ostracized as Carrie was, and also terrified and thrilled by the idea that I might have some inner power. I admit that I tried to move some cereal boxes with my eyes after watching the movie. I made a piece using Carrie's name made out of spray foam a couple of years ago. It was a homage to *Carrie* (à la Brian De Palma), but also it was just out-of-control, gravity-defying foam letters leaning against a wall signifying the name of a woman you may or may not associate with a movie.

Who is Anna Swan?

Anna Swan is another example of a woman who defies. Swan was born outside of my hometown in the New Annan/Tatamagouche area of Nova Scotia. She weighed eighteen pounds at birth and grew to be over eight-feet tall. She was born in the mid-nineteenth century, and eventually was recruited by a circus. The Anna Swan Museum was housed in a little farmhouse where all the freakish things from the province were sent. I remember being terrified by a stuffed two-headed calf that was kind of stuck at the end of a hallway. There were also clothes of Swan's pinned to the walls of the farmhouse—the museum made a big impression on me. There aren't too many out-of-the-ordinary role models growing up in a fishing village, but Anna Swan was one, for sure. I started the Anna Swan Fan Club last summer at ART Santa Fe as part of the CCA/Discoarse project. All people who joined got a Rice Crispy square and, depending on their membership level, an item with I LOVE YOU ANNA SWAN written on it—products ranged from T-shirts to pillowcases to key chains.

Being an Artist in Santa Fe

I always feel kind of like a freak in Santa Fe. I guess that's because my work is more about ideas and ways of engaging with an audience, and a sense of alternative story and, for sure, humor. I don't feel like I fit in. There isn't any adobe sunset, animal sculpture, or shaman spirit painting to take back with you after visiting my artwork. I get frustrated sometimes. I work my frustration out by setting up a roadside attraction or establishing a fear collection or offering free laundry, and really messing with ideas of what art is.

The Free Laundry Project

I was sitting in Harold's Laundromat in Albuquerque doing laundry last fall. I was just doodling, and wrote down "true happiness is free laundry." I looked at it, thought about it for a while, and then I thought that I should make free laundry a reality. I proposed the idea to the Center for Contemporary Art, because I was getting very excited about the idea of turning the gallery into a place of exchange and usefulness in a completely different way than we are accustomed to. I love deconstructing the notion of precious artwork by reconfiguring expectations of a gallery space. I believe this particular project takes on a special relevance since laundry is typically women's work. And here we are in 2008 with the seventh SITE Santa Fe biennial happening, and eighty percent or so of the artists are men. When I found that fact out, it made the *Free Laundry Project* seem even more important. ♥