

MAY WILSON

Snowflake Collages 1965-1972

A pioneer of the “Mail Art” movement of the 1950s and 1960s and a singular voice in the artistic landscape of Feminism, May Wilson defied the accepted standards of the art world and of society, creating mixed-media works that explore the construction of gender and identity in both two and three dimensions. Born in Baltimore in 1905, Wilson’s life as a suburban housewife seemed a likely fate. At the age of 42, however, she committed herself to the idea of becoming an artist, enrolling in correspondence classes in fine art and art history (anticipating the departure of her grown children.) By promoting and selling her early efforts, Wilson was able to sustain a viable career as an artist. She produced what were regarded as “primitive” paintings by those in the surrounding suburban area, brightly colored canvases that lacked the spatial depth of Realism, reflecting the Modernist influence of Cezanne and his followers.

In 1956 the artist’s son, author and critic William S. Wilson, introduced his mother to the founding father of the network of Mail Art, the artist Ray Johnson (1927-1995.) The artistic exchange between the two not only fostered the growth of this ever-expanding network, but also provided Wilson with the much needed support and encouragement to experiment with unconventional materials and ideas, eventually working through the visual logic of abstraction to the expressive possibilities of three-dimensional construction. Wilson’s move from married suburban life into the avant-garde art scene of New York City in 1966 quickly won her the moniker “Grandma Moses of the Underground.” This well-deserved title not only reflects her leap from one life into another, but also a desire to liberate herself and the things around her from the strictures of convention. May Wilson’s daring reconstruction of art and life not only pushed the boundaries of polite good taste, but also offered an alternative vision of the world, one in which our trash became her treasure.

Excerpt from Pavel Zoubok Gallery: *Woo Who?* May Wilson, exhibition press release, New York, NY, 2008



MAY WILSON (1905-1986)

Place of Birth: Baltimore, Maryland, September 29, 1905

Education: Self-taught, Correspondence Courses in affiliation with the University of Chicago.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 *Ridiculous Portrait: The Art of May Wilson*, Morris Museum, Morristown, NJ
Woo Who? May Wilson, Pavel Zoubok Gallery, New York, NY
- 2001 "Ridiculous Portraits & Snowflakes", Gracie Mansion Chelsea, New York, NY, November 29 - December 29, 2001
- 1990 "May Wilson, The New York Years," Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York, NY, November 8 - December 8, 1990
- 1971 "May Wilson, Assemblages," Gimpel and Weitzenhoffer Gallery, New York, NY, December 7, 1971- January 7, 1972.
- 1970 "May Wilson," Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD
 Gertrude Kasse Gallery, Detroit, MI
- 1965 Henri Gallery, Washington, DC
 Baltimore Museum, Baltimore, MD
 Center Stage, Baltimore, MD
 Gertrude Kasse Gallery, Detroit, MI
 20th Century Gallery, Williamsburg, VA
- 1964 "Boxes by May Wilson," Goucher College Center, Goucher College, Towson, MD, November.
- 1963 Johns Hopkins Medical Residence
 Henri Gallery, Washington, DC
- 1962 Towson College, Towson, MD
 Johns Hopkins University
- 1960 Origo Gallery, Washington, DC
- 1957 "Collages and Monoprints by May Wilson," Peabody Bookshop Gallery, Baltimore, MD, March 7- April 2.
 Hilltop Theater, Baltimore, MD

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 "The Human Face is a Monument", Guild and Greyshkul, New York, NY
- 2007 "What F Word," Cynthia Broan Gallery, New York, NY
- 2006 "Constellation," Pavel Zoubok Gallery, New York, NY
- 2005 "Collage: Signs & Surfaces," Pavel Zoubok Gallery, New York, NY
- 2001 "Rupture & Revision: Collage in America", Pavel Zoubok Gallery, New York, NY, November 29 - January 5, 2002
 "Play", Pavel Zoubok Gallery, New York, NY, July - August
- 1998 "Male", Wessel and O'Connor Gallery, New York, NY, January 18 - February 22, 1998 Organized by Vince Aletti
- 1985 "The Doll Show: Artists'-Dolls and Figurines," Hillwood Art Gallery, C.W. Post, Long Island University, Long Island, NY, December 11, 1985 -February 7, 1986. (Catalogue)
- 1973 "Sneakers," Kornblee Gallery, New York, NY, July
 "Small Works: Selections from the Richard Brown Baker Collection of Contemporary Art," Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Rhode Island, April 5-May 6 (Catalogue)
- 1972 Baltimore Museum, Baltimore, MD
 "Artists' Benefit for Civil Liberties," Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, NY

- 1971 "The Image Bank Post Card Show," Fine Arts Gallery, University of British Columbia, Canada, October 13-30
Corcoran Gallery, Washington, DC
- 1970 "Human Concern/Personal Torment," University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, CA January 20-March 1.
"Whitney Museum Sculpture Annual 1970," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, December 12 1970-February 7 1971. (Catalogue)
"Assemblage," Gertrude Kasse Gallery, Detroit, MI
Corcoran Gallery, Washington, DC
"Painting & Sculpture Today," Indianapolis, IN
The New York Correspondance School", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
"Combine Works," Visual Arts Gallery, School of Visual Arts, New York, NY (Collaboration with Ray Johnson)
- 1969 "Birds and Beasts," Graham Gallery, New York, NY
"Art for Lindsay," A.C.A. Galleries, New York, NY
"Fetish Show," Alan Stone Gallery, New York, NY
"Human Concern/Personal Torment," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, October 14-November 30 (Catalogue). Show travels to University Art Museum Berkeley, CA
- 1968 "The American Federation of Arts Patriotic Traveling Show," New York, NY
"The Image Transformed," Gertrude Kasse Gallery, Detroit, MI
"Maryland Artists Invitational Exhibition," Baltimore Museum, Baltimore, MD
"Ten West Side Artists," Goddard-Riverside Community Center, New York, NY
- 1967 "69th National Exhibition, The Washington Water Color Association," The Institute of Contemporary Arts, Washington, DC
- 1966 Baltimore Junior College Invitational Sculpture Show," College Art Gallery, Baltimore, MD
"Group Show," Henri Gallery, Washington, DC
"First National Photography Exhibition," 20th Century Gallery, Williamsburg, VA
"Center Stage Auction," Goucher College Center, Towson, MD
- 1964 "The Edward Joseph Gallagher III Memorial Collection," The Baltimore Museum of Art, Traveling Exhibition, Wyman Park, Baltimore, MD, (Catalogue). Show travels to Arizona as a gift from Gallagher Family to The University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson, AZ (Catalogue)
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT
Smith College, Northampton, MA
Howard College, Washington, DC
International Gallery, Baltimore, MD
"Baltimore Collectors Exhibition," Jewish Community Center, Baltimore, MD
- 1963 Selections from the Collection of Mrs. Henry Epstein," Goucher College, Baltimore, MD, January 13-February 13 (Catalogue)
"The Sixteenth Area Exhibition", The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (Catalogue)
Morgan College, Washington, DC
- 1962 "Museum of Modern Art Traveling Assemblage Show," Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
"Exhibition of Staff & Faculty Collections," The Morgan State College Art Gallery, Baltimore, MD
- 1960 "New Ideas, New Media Show," Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, NY
- 1957 "Life In Baltimore," Juried Exhibit, The Peale Museum, Baltimore, MD
- 1955 "Life in Baltimore," The Peale Museum, Baltimore, MD

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Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY

Goucher College, Baltimore, MD

Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Dela Banque De Pariset, Brussels, Belgium

University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson, AZ

New York University, New York City, NY