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Critic's Pick | Faith Wilding

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View of "Faith Wilding," 2015.

LOS ANGELES  
ARMORY CENTER FOR THE ARTS

"Waiting for my breasts to develop . . . Waiting for my breasts to fill with milk . . . Waiting for my breasts to shrivel up": So goes the arc of Faith Wilding's poem *Waiting*, delivered at the installation *Womanhouse* in 1972, a video of which is on view in the Armory's old munitions vault. In this clip from the 1974 documentary by Johanna Demetrakas, Wilding rocks forward and back with each line, her hands in her lap, for a performance of the woefully passive woman she refused to become. Rather than "waiting for him to pay attention to me"—"him" being the male-dominated art world—Wilding instead formed her own circle, taking part in Judy Chicago's Feminist Art Program and the program's creation of *Womanhouse* in Los Angeles. Though her retrospective in 2015 is long overdue, it presents a practice not of waiting but of gradual, insistent growth.

Watercolors from the mid-1970s unfold like cool-toned versions of Chicago's central core symbology, as in the crisp "Moth Triptych," 1974, or embellish bifurcating and radiant floral or insect motifs with passages from the likes of Virginia Woolf and Hilda Doolittle, with the latter excerpted in *Tribute to the Angels*, 1975. This neat geometry is rare in a body of work that favors the more organic symmetry of shells, leaves, fruit, and genitals. A number of shaped, unstretched canvases, the "Leaf Series" of 1979, meld brushy brown, red, and turquoise oils into cocoon-like forms. Made a few years after *Waiting*, these works show a Wilding well into the metamorphoses of her work, not "waiting to be beautiful" or "waiting for the secret," but beautiful and secret, both.

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