

Carolee Schneemann: Body Politics

Barbican Art Gallery

8 September 2022 – 8 January 2023

Media View: Wednesday 7 September 2022

www.barbican.org.uk/caroleeschneemann

#caroleeschneemann @barbicancentre

This exhibition has been generously supported by the Terra Foundation for American Art, Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne, Carolee Schneemann Foundation, Helen Frankenthaler Foundation and members of the Carolee Schneemann Exhibition Circle.



Carolee Schneemann, *Up to and Including Her Limits*, 10 June 1976. Performance at Studiogalerie, Berlin. Photograph by Terry Slotkin. Carolee Schneemann Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (950001) © 2022 Carolee Schneemann Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / DACS, London.

Carolee Schneemann: Body Politics is the first survey in the UK of the work of American artist Carolee Schneemann (1939-2019) and the first major exhibition since her death in 2019. Tracing Schneemann's diverse, transgressive and interdisciplinary work over six decades, the show celebrates a radical and pioneering artist who remains a feminist icon and point of reference for many contemporary artists and thinkers.

Addressing urgent topics from sexual expression and the objectification of women to human suffering and the violence of war, Schneemann's work is concerned with the precarious lived experience of humans and animals. With over 300 objects, the exhibition draws from the Carolee Schneemann Foundation, as well as numerous private and public collections, spanning the extraordinary range of Schneemann's artistic output. Bringing together paintings, sculptural assemblages, performance photographs, films and large-scale multimedia installations, as well as rarely seen archival material including scores, sketches, scrapbooks, programmes and costumes, this exhibition positions Schneemann as one of the most relevant, provocative and inspiring artists of the last century.

Jane Alison, Head of Barbican Visual Arts said:

We are delighted to be staging this major exhibition of experimental artist Carolee Schneemann. The Barbican has a long history of exhibiting radical, boundary-pushing artists, especially those whose work continues to influence contemporary practitioners. This exhibition also follows a line of exciting Barbican shows focused on pioneers of performance, including Michael Clark: Cosmic Dancer (2020), Trajal Harrell: Hoochie Koochie (2017), Ragnar Kjartansson (2016) and Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown and Gordon Matta Clark: Pioneers of the Downtown Scene, New York 1970s (2011).

The title of the exhibition reflects that for Schneemann, the personal was political. She was engaged with an expansive kind of body politics, setting out to challenge the restrictive idea that the body and mind were divided. Schneemann took the sensory experience of her own body as a starting point – she understood her body as inextricably linked with its environment and others and recognised and challenged how history had defined the lives and bodies of women. However, Schneemann was not only concerned with the specifics of being a woman – in her writing in the 1970s, she reflected on the merits of finding 'neutral' instead of gendered terms and furthermore, her body politics engaged with the abuse of power across global conflicts.

Schneemann was a trailblazer, whose work defies easy categorisation. Known predominantly as a performance artist, she was adamant throughout her life that she was

foremost a painter. Opening the exhibition are the artist's rarely seen early gestural paintings, including *Aria Duetto (Cantata No.78): Yellow Ladies* (1957) and *Pin Wheel* (1957), a kinetic painting activated by the potter's wheel on which it is mounted.

In her early works on canvas, Schneemann grappled with the influence of American Abstract Expressionism as well as the sensory painting style of Paul Cézanne, but remained frustrated by the heroized, male-dominated canon of art history. From the early 1960s, she sought to expand her works outside the limits of the frame, incorporating found objects and fragments from everyday life to produce 'painting-constructions' and 'box-constructions'. For the assemblage *Colorado House* (1962), she slashed, ripped and reconfigured what she considered to be failed paintings, while for the diorama-like *Pharaoh's Daughter* (1966), she filled a wooden box with glowing lights, slides of biblical scenes and mirrors.

The exhibition charts Schneemann's radical work using her own body as a medium, often directly addressing the misogyny she experienced, the historical suppression of women and the taboos around women's bodies. Key works include a series of photographs from Schneemann's first solo performance *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions for Camera* (1963), in which she staged a series of gestures amid a sprawling environment of materials.

For *Up to and Including Her Limits* (1976), she hung naked from a harness suspended in the corner of a paper-lined stage set, creating gestural abstract marks with crayons as she swung back and forth in a trance-like state. The resulting large-scale installation from the 1974 performance at Anthology Film Archives in New York is presented alongside video footage and extensive photographic documentation. One of Schneemann's most powerful performances, *Interior Scroll* (1975 & 1977) is highlighted in the exhibition, the artist's rallying cry against the persistent devaluing of the female body and intellect in patriarchal society.

In the early 1960s Schneemann was living in New York City and was embedded in the downtown scene. She became a founding member of the Judson Dance Theater, a group of avant-garde interdisciplinary artists including Yvonne Rainer, Lucinda Childs, Trisha Brown, David Gordon and Steve Paxton, who took everyday gestures and materials as their impetus.

Schneemann described her group performances as 'kinetic theatre', incorporating complex movement scores, sets, lighting, sound and technical innovations. Numerous performances are represented through photographs, films, scores, sketches, notes and costumes, including one of Schneemann's most iconic performances *Meat Joy* (1964). This epic group performance was conceived as a sensory celebration of flesh. Devised, as many of her works were, from images from her dreams, *Meat Joy* saw untrained performers (including a poet, balloon salesman and teacher) dressing and undressing and performing mass body exercises – skidding, rolling, leaping and twisting – among paper, paint, raw fish and chicken.

Carolee Schneemann: Body Politics presents Schneemann's remarkable film work, in which she forged a new experimental language, exploring sexual desire, challenging the male gaze and taking her daily life and relationships with humans and non-humans (specifically cats) as source material. Landmark film *Fuses* (1964–67) is shown in its entirety, a self-shot portrait of Schneemann and her partner James Tenney having sex, with the cat Kitch as witness and companion. This radical piece, made over the course of three years, celebrated heterosexual pleasure and set out to question, expand and complicate representations of the female body and sexuality, offering a new proposal for the expression of erotic experience.

A focused section of the show shines a spotlight on Schneemann's formative time spent in London. The city provided the context for several of her experimental performances, including *Round House* (staged at the Roundhouse in 1967, as part of a line-up that included poet Allen Ginsburg, anti-psychiatrist R.D. Laing and Black Power activist Stokely Carmichael, among others), *Naked Action Lecture* (performed at the ICA in 1968), and *ICES STRIP/ISIS TRIP* (performed on roller skates on a train travelling from London to Edinburgh in 1972).

The final section of the exhibition includes a series of works that address the precarious nature of life and the politics of human suffering in the context of the Vietnam War, the Civil War in Lebanon, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the artist's own fight with cancer. Schneemann's film *Viet-Flakes* (1962–67) and the related performance *Snows* are some of the earliest anti-Vietnam War works – they confront the violence of military intervention while probing the experience of viewing anonymised images of suffering.

Known/Unknown: Plague Column (1995–96) reckons with Schneemann's own diagnosis of non-Hodgkin lymphoma and breast cancer whilst probing the misogynistic representation of women. Through these works and others, Schneemann confronts the deeply personal experience of navigating the political and reflects on how we are implicated in the power structures embedded within society.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Press Information

For further information, images or to arrange interviews, please contact:

Mary Doherty – +44 (0) 7716 701499

mary@sam-talbot.com

Visual Arts Press

visualartspress@barbican.org.uk

Press images available online from the Barbican Press room

A link to the image sheets can be found in the 'Downloads' box on the top right-hand side of the page from: <https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/carolee-schneemann-body-politics>

Barbican Press Room

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Press team's contact details are listed on our website at <https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room>

Press tickets

To ensure the safe flow of visitors through the Barbican, all press tickets will need to be booked 48 hours in advance by contacting a member of the Barbican's Communications team. You will be unable to enter without a pre-booked ticket and so please do get in touch prior to your visit. We look forward to welcoming you to the Barbican.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Barbican Art Gallery, Silk Street, London, EC2Y 8DS, barbican.org.uk

Exhibition

Carolee Schneemann: Body Politics is at Barbican Art Gallery from 8 September 2022 – 8 January 2023. The exhibition is curated by Lotte Johnson and designed by vPPR Architects with graphic design by A Practice for Everyday Life. This exhibition has been generously supported by the Terra Foundation for American Art, Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne, Carolee Schneemann Foundation, Helen Frankenthaler Foundation and members of the Carolee Schneemann Exhibition Circle.

Terra Foundation for American Art

The Terra Foundation for American Art supports individuals, organisations, and communities to advance expansive understandings of American art. Established in 1978 and headquartered in Chicago, with an office in Paris, its grant program, collection, and initiatives are committed to fostering cross-cultural dialogues on American art locally, nationally, and internationally.

Events

A dynamic programme of events will accompany the exhibition. Check the website for full listings: www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery

Book

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated book published by Yale University Press and designed by A Practice for Everyday Life. Tracing the full arc of Schneemann's life and work, the book sheds new light on the artist, with contributions by Jo Applin, Chris Bayley, Karen Di Franco, Jennifer Doyle, Elena Gorfinkel, Alison Green, Lotte Johnson, Emily LaBarge, Thomas (T.) Jean Lax, Eileen Myles, Melissa Ragona, Amy Sillman and Kenneth White. Archival material is interspersed throughout, offering intimate insights into Schneemann's creative process.

Barbican Art Gallery Shop

A selection of exhibition merchandise will be available from the Gallery Shop including the exhibition book and poster: www.barbican.org.uk/shop

Barbican Art Gallery and The Curve

Our visual arts programme embraces art, architecture, design, fashion, photography and film. Many of our exhibitions explore the interconnections between disciplines, periods and cultures, and aim to imagine the world in new ways. Designers, artists and architects are our collaborators in this process.

We invest in the artists of today and tomorrow; The Curve is one of the few galleries in London devoted to the commissioning of new work. Through our activities we aim to inspire more people to discover and love the arts. Entrance to The Curve is free. Through Young Barbican we offer £5 tickets to 14–25 year olds for our paid exhibitions, children under 14 attend for free.

Our exhibitions are complemented by comprehensively researched catalogues and a full range of public events. We develop engaging online content for audiences and offer special tours for schools. In partnership with renowned museums and art galleries, many of our exhibitions travel to reach both national and international audiences.

The Barbican believes in creating space for people and ideas to connect through its international arts programme, community events and learning activity. To keep its programme accessible to everyone, and to keep investing in the artists it works with, the Barbican needs to raise more than 60% of its income through ticket sales, commercial activities and fundraising every year. Donations can be made here:

www.barbican.org.uk/join-support/support-us/for-individuals/make-a-donation

About the Barbican

A world-class arts and learning organisation, the [Barbican](#) pushes the boundaries of all major art forms including dance, film, music, theatre and visual arts. Its creative learning programme further underpins everything it does. Over a million people attend events annually, hundreds of artists and performers are featured, and more than 300 [staff](#) work onsite. The architecturally renowned centre opened in 1982 and comprises the Barbican Hall, the Barbican Theatre, The Pit, Cinemas 1, 2 and 3, Barbican Art Gallery, a second gallery The Curve, public spaces, a library, the Lakeside Terrace, [a glasshouse conservatory](#), conference facilities and three restaurants. The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre.

The Barbican is home to Resident Orchestra, [London Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Orchestra, [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Ensembles the [Academy of Ancient Music](#) and [Britten Sinfonia](#), Associate Producer [Serious](#), and Artistic Partner [Create](#). Our Artistic Associates include [Boy Blue](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), Deborah Warner, [Drum Works](#) and [Michael Clark](#). The [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#) are the Barbican's International Orchestral Partner, the [Australian Chamber Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court, and [Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble.

Find us on [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Spotify](#)