

Carolee Schneemann, still from *Fuses* 1964-67, 18 minutes, 16mm color film (copyright the artist)

Schneemann, Carolee (1939-)

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Carolee Schneemann is an American artist (b. Pennsylvania, United States) whose work interrogates vision as embodied experience. She has produced films made to be screened in conventional theatrical contexts and has also innovated the use of filmic and video-graphic elements in collage environments and happening-like performances. Schneemann is known within the larger context of postwar art for incorporating her own body into works of performance such as *Eye/Body* (1963), *Meat Joy* (1964), *Interior Scroll* (1975), and *Up To And Including Her Limits* (1973-6). Trained as a painter, she embraced film as a means of radically expanding the medium beyond the canvas. Her process is rooted in the dynamic relation between perception and visibility, particularly as it concerns the body’s legibility within a social matrix of power and difference. In her film, *Fuses* (1967), she works against conventional cinematic codes of eroticism while exploring her sexual relationship with composer James Tenney. The work, a densely layered collage, records moments of lovemaking and everyday life over the course of a year. Schneemann emphasizes the haptic and tactile qualities of vision by baking, stamping, and exposing the film to natural elements, drawing an analogy between the materiality of bodies on screen and the celluloid substance of the film itself.

Intimate elements of her life beyond sexual pleasure are the focus of subsequent films in the *Autobiographical Trilogy* made up of *Fuses*, *Plumb Line* (1971) and *Kitch’s Last Meal* (1978). Schneemann uses film formats in unconventional and often metaphorical ways, for example, splitting the frame into four quadrants to create Rorschach-like effects and double exposures in *Plumb Line*, which suggests the break up of a relationship and subsequent mental breakdown it provoked. *Viet Flakes* (1967), no less personal a film, records Schneemann’s close analysis of a collection of news photographs clipped from the underground press by the artist during the build-up to the Vietnam War. In this work, she intervenes in the dissemination of media images as information, leaving her imprint on material that might otherwise disappear into the flux of media overload. The film has been screened as a stand-alone piece, but originally figured as an important element in a series of multi-media performances that Schneemann staged in protest of the Vietnam War, including *Snows* (1967), *Night Crawlers* (1967)*,* and *Illinois Central* (1968).

In the move from painting towards filmmaking, Schneemann began to explore the dynamics of vision through performance and immersive installation. For example, in *Ghost Rev* (1965), made in collaboration with the artist collective USCO, she and another performer engaged in a series of physical actions–shredding and painting the screen, crawling through the audience–that directly interfered in the process of projection, disrupting the fixity of the frame with the activity of the body. Other multimedia works such as *Meat System I: Electronic Activation Room* (1970) incorporated film projection as one element in an overwhelming sensory surround designed to bombard viewers with the sounds and images of the popular media. Since the early 1980s Schneemann has been working with video, often as an element within sculptural installations that built upon an iconography of autobiographical and historical motifs uncovered through research guided by intuition and attentiveness to coincidence in everyday life. Moving images play a significant role in Schneemann’s extended meditation on the body as the locus of perception and simultaneous object of vision, whether in the midst of intimate pleasure, media spectacle, or even quotidian domesticity.

Works

***Films***

**VietFlakes** *1965-67, 16mm, 11 minutes, black and white toned/sound*

**Fuses (Part I of Autobiographical Trilogy)** 1964-67, 22 minutes, 16mm, color/silent

**Plumb Line (Part II of Autobiographical Trilogy)** 1968-71, 18 minutes, Super 8mm step printed to 16mm, color/sound

**Kitch's Last Meal (Part III of Autobiographical Trilogy)** 1973-1978, variable units from 20 to 120 minutes, Super 8mm dual projection, color/separate sound

**Films (available on video)**

[**Fuses**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=6886)*1964-66, 29:51 min, color, silent, 16 mm film on video*

[**Viet Flakes**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=6900)*1965, 7 min, toned b&w, 16 mm film on video*

[**Plumb Line**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=6894)*1968-71, 14:58 min, color, sound, Super 8mm film on video*

[**Kitch's Last Meal (Composite)**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=13366)*1973-76, 54:13 min, color, sound*

***Performance Documentation***

[**Meat Joy**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=14751)*1964-2010, 10:35 min, color, sound, 16 mm film on video*

[**Water Light/Water Needle (Lake Mah Wah, NJ)**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=6904)*1966, 11:13 min, color, sound, 16 mm film on video*

[**Body Collage**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=13364)*1967, 3:57 min, b&w, silent, 16 mm film on video*

[**Snows**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=6896)*1967, 20:30 min, color and b&w, silent, 16 mm film on video*

[**Illinois Central**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=14747)*1968, 18:25 min, color, 16 mm film on video*

[**Up To and Including Her Limits**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=6898)*1976, 29 min, color, sound*

***Video***

[**Fresh Blood**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=6884)*1983, 11 min, color, sound*

[**Souvenir of Lebanon**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=11999)*1983-2006, 6 min, color, sound*

[**Catscan**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=6811)*1988, 13 min, color, sound*

[**Ask the Goddess**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=6800)*1991, 7 min, color, sound*

[**Four Recent Installations**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=6816)*1993, 5 min, color, sound*

[**Interior Scroll - The Cave**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=6890)*1995, 7:30 min, color, sound*

[**Vulva's School**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=6902)*1995, 7 min, color, sound*

[**Mysteries of the Pussies**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=14733)*1998-2010, 5:24 min, color, sound*

[**Devour**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=9260)*2003-04, 8:40 min, color, sound*

[**Americana I Ching Apple Pie**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=13368)*2007, 16:37 min, color, sound*

[**Carl Ruggles Christmas Breakfast 1963**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=12803)*2007, 9:04 min, color, sound*

[**Infinity Kisses - The Movie**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=14256)*2008, 9 min, color, sound*

[**Precarious**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=14648)*2009, 4:56 min, color, sound*

[**Pinea Silva**](http://eai.org/title.htm?id=15098)*2012, 9:27 min, color, sound*

***Further Reading***

*Carolee Schneemann: Up To and Including Her Limits*. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996. Texts by Dan Cameron, Kristine Stiles, David Levi-Strauss.

Haug, K. (1998) “An Interview with Carolee Schneemann” *Wide Angle* 20 (1): 58-62.

MacDonald, S. (1980) “Carolee Schneemann's Autobiographical Trilogy.” *Film Quarterly* (Fall 1980): 27-32.

Schneemann, C. (2002) *Imaging Her Erotics-Essays, Interviews, Projects*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Schneemann, C. (1979, 1997) *More than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings*. Kingston, New York: Documentext.