

## FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

Sat Feb 29 | 4:00pm & 8:30 pm |

Jack H. Skirball Series

\$15 [members \$9]

A single ticket is good for BOTH 4:00pm and 8:30pm programs

## DANGEROUS EROTICS: A TRIBUTE TO CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

REDCAT celebrates the life and work of Carolee Schneemann, one of the great American artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a panel discussion and selection of her films and videos. Schneemann's performances, films, paintings and installations were at the center of world art culture from 1960 until her death in 2019.

Unrelenting in confronting traditional roles and taboos imposed upon women, Schneemann defiantly embraced female sexuality and physicality with a power and immediacy that remains groundbreaking. Her early investigations into gender and "forbidden aspects of the female experience" (C.S.) laid the groundwork for much feminist art of the 1980s and 90s. The program will include music by James Tenney, her long-term partner and collaborator.

*Co-sponsored by the CalArts School of Music and Los Angeles Filmforum. Thanks to Electronic Arts Intermix and the Schneemann Foundation for their support.*

*Los Angeles Video Premieres*

### **Panelists in person: Peggy Ahwesh, Maggie Nelson, Lauren Pratt and Kenneth White**

"In 1963, to use my body as an extension of my painting-constructions," she later said, "was to challenge and threaten the psychic territorial power lines by which women were admitted to the Art Stud Club." — Carolee Schneemann

A genius of gesture, word, image, sensuality, and vitality, Carolee Schneemann died at 6 pm on March 6, 2019 in her beloved 18th century Huguenot house in Tillson, New York, surrounded by her cat (and the spirits of so many others) and the comfort of friendships and lovers she had known for decades. Over a lifetime of making art, pleasure, provocations, home, more art and always art—her emotional exactitude and generosity touched the earth, the art world, and the lives of countless human and nonhuman intimates and strangers. — *The Brooklyn Rail*

"A feminist visionary and one of the most influential artists of the late 20th century." — *The New York Times*

"Prior to Schneemann, the female body in art was mute and functioned almost exclusively as a mirror of masculine desire."

— Jan Avgikos, *Artforum*

“The magnitude of Schneemann's influence is undeniable... When she describes her body as a pleasurable weapon, a missile she sends into our repressive culture to blow it apart, Madonna's in-your-face eroticism immediately comes to mind.”

— Jane Harris, *Plexus*

“Carolee Schneemann was a visionary. She challenged taboos and was undaunted by censorship, including cancelled screenings of her 1967 film *Fuses*, bans on imagery documenting her 1975 performance *Interior Scroll*, and attacks on her later political work... Her language is the visceral, yet intensely political, language of the body, of gesture, of sensuality and eroticism. Even today, she remains radical.”

— Joy Garnett, National Coalition Against Censorship

“Carolee spent 45 of the 60 active years of her professional career creating work with intensity and integrity, a feminist artist before the art world knew of such a thing.... She shared her ardent attention to the erotics of creative living, her art summing up the intensity of her approach to friends, lovers, cats and her creative practice all meshed into one great life work.” — Amelia Jones, *The Guardian*

“Schneemann’s influence is profound. Artists informed by her work... include Matthew Barney, Marilyn Minter, Ragnar Kjartansson, and Lena Dunham—a list to which one might add Narcissister, Ana Mendieta, Rist, and just about anyone who, over the past half-century, has worked with bodies and identities as intricate, powerful, multivalent things—and as endless dynamos for exploration rather than as loci for shame.” — *ARTnews*, March 6, 2019

## **PROGRAMS:**

### **4:00PM - FILMS AND VIDEOS BY CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN [I]**

***Fuses*** (1964–67/2007, 29:37 min., 16mm, color, silent)

With Carolee Schneemann, James Tenney and Kitch

“Schneemann's self-shot erotic film remains a controversial classic. The notorious masterpiece... [is] a silent celebration in color of heterosexual lovemaking. The film unifies erotic energies within a domestic environment through cutting, superimposition and layering of abstract impressions scratched into the celluloid itself... *Fuses* succeeds perhaps more than any other film in objectifying the sexual streamings of the body's mind.” — *The Guardian*, London

“Made in increments between 1964 and 1967, *Fuses* is a beautiful, complex work, among Ms. Schneemann’s most moving achievements. Like much of her art, it bridges interior and exterior worlds: we see the lovers in their darkened bedroom and we see a rural landscape in changing seasons beyond the window. It’s hard to follow: organically, it’s here, then it’s there. But the flow, metaphoric and visual, is

rich. And like so much of her art, the dynamic is fundamentally collaborative, shared.” — Holland Cotter, *The New York Times*

"Pornography is an anti-emotional medium, in content and intent, and its lack of emotion renders it wholly ineffective for women. This absence of sensuality is so contrary to female eroticism that pornography becomes, in fact, anti-sexual. Schneemann's film, by contrast, is devastatingly erotic, transcending the surfaces of sex to communicate its true spirit, its meaning as an activity for herself and, quite accurately, women in general. Significantly, Schneemann conceives the film as shot through the eyes of her cat — the impassive observer whose view of human sexuality is free of voyeurism and ignorant of morality.

In her attempt to reproduce the whole visual and tactile experience of lovemaking as a subjective phenomenon, Schneemann spent some three years marking on the film, baking it in the oven, even hanging it out the window during rainstorms on the off chance it might be struck by lightning. Much as human beings carry the physical traces of their experiences, so this film testifies to what it has been through and communicates the spirit of its maker. The red heat baked into the emulsion suffuses the film, a concrete emblem of erotic power."

— B. Ruby Rich, Chicago Art Institute

### ***Water Light/Water Needle (Lake Mah Wah, NJ)***

(1966, 11:13 min., 16 mm film on HD video, color, sound)

Schneemann's classic 1966 aerial "Kinetic Theatre" work was first staged at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery, with eight performers moving to a score of randomized encounter on layers of rigged ropes and pulleys. One of two video documents of this early and influential performance, this version is enacted outdoors in trees and across the surface of a lake, in sequences directed by Schneemann. – Electronic Arts Intermix

### ***Infinity Kisses — The Movie***

(2008, 9:18 min., HD video, color, sound)

*Infinity Kisses - The Movie* completes Schneemann's exploration of human and feline sensual communication. It incorporates extracts of the original 124 self-shot 35mm color slide photo sequence, *Infinity Kisses*, in which the expressive self-determination of the ardent cat was recorded over an eight-year period. *Infinity Kisses — The Movie* recomposes these images into a video, in which each dissolving frame is split between its full image and a hugely enlarged detail.

Cluny 1980–1988. Vesper 1990–1998. – Electronic Arts Intermix

“Since he was a kitten, my cat Cluny woke me every morning with deep kisses. During each week (even half-asleep) I reached for a hand-held Olympus camera to film our kissing. Lighting, angles, exposure, and focus were always unpredictable. The intimacy between cat and woman becomes a refraction of the viewer’s attitudes to self and nature, sexuality and control, the taboo and the sacred. Cluny died in 1988 after being bitten on his mouth by a rat. He was reborn as Vesper in 1990 and

continues the kissing expressivity until his death of leukemia in 1999.”  
– Carolee Schneemann

***Vulva's School*** (1995, 7:15 min., color, sound)

A performance in which Schneemann personifies an irrepressible vulva, which engages two animal hand puppets in a clamorous deconstruction of sexual bias in French semiotics, Marxism, patriarchal religions and physical taboos. – Electronic Arts Intermix

### **5:00pm: PANEL**

Peggy Ahwesh, Maggie Nelson, Lauren Pratt, Kenneth White and moderator Steve Anker will discuss intersections between Schneemann's life and work, her radical aesthetics, and her revolutionary stance as a woman artist working within a misogynist culture.

### **7:00pm-8:15pm: SCHNEEMANN VIDEOS IN REDCAT'S LOBBY**

**Performance documents:** *Snows* (1967/2009, 20:24 min.) *Up To and Including Her Limits* (1976, 29 min.), *Fresh Blood* (1983, 11 min.) and *Ask the Goddess* (1991, 8:24 min.).

### **8:30PM - FILMS AND VIDEOS BY CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN [II]**

Preceded by tributes from colleagues: dancer/filmmaker **Yvonne Rainer** (read by Monica Majoli) and others.

***Blue Suede*** (1961, 3:24 min., analogue tape/CD) by James Tenney

***Viet-Flakes*** (1962-67/2015, 8:31 min., 16 mm on HD video, toned b&w, sound collage by James Tenney)

*Viet-Flakes* was composed from an obsessive collection of Vietnam atrocity images, compiled over five years, from foreign magazines and newspapers. Schneemann uses the 8mm camera to "travel" within the photographs, producing a volatile animation. Broken rhythms and visual fractures are heightened by a sound collage by James Tenney, which features Vietnamese religious chants and secular songs, fragments of Bach, and '60s pop hits. – Electronic Arts Intermix

"One of the most effective indictments of the Vietnam War ever made." — Robert Enright, *Border Crossings*

***Carl Ruggles Christmas Breakfast 1963***

(1963/2007, 9:02 min, 16 mm on video, color, sound)

“In her earliest film, newly transferred to video, Schneemann presents an abstracted portrait of the American composer Carl Ruggles, known for his irascible personality and finely-crafted atonal music. Ruggles is seen enjoying pie a la mode and ruminating on subjects ranging from Christmas to his incomplete opera *The Sunken Bell*. The hand-painted film stock heightens the impressionistic vitality of this snapshot of the 84-year-old composer, who is heard paraphrasing Freud: “Everything that you do is a matter of sex. That is the great passion of life.”  
– Electronic Arts Intermix

***Meat Joy*** (1964/2010, 10:33 min., color, sound, 16 mm on video)

Writes Schneemann: "*Meat Joy* is an erotic rite — excessive, indulgent, a celebration of flesh as material: raw fish, chicken, sausages, wet paint, transparent plastic, ropes, brushes, paper scrap. Its propulsion is towards the ecstatic — shifting and turning among tenderness, wildness, precision, abandon; qualities that could at any moment be sensual, comic, joyous, repellent. Physical equivalences are enacted as a psychic imagistic stream, in which the layered elements mesh and gain intensity by the energy complement of the audience. The original performances became notorious and introduced a vision of the 'sacred erotic.' This video was converted from original film footage of three 1964 performances of *Meat Joy* at its first staged performance at the Festival de la Libre Expression, Paris, Dennison Hall, London, and Judson Church, New York City."

***Body Collage*** (1967, 4:12 min., b&w, silent, 16 mm on video)

*Body Collage* is a visceral "movement-event" from 1967, in which Schneemann paints her body with wallpaper paste and molasses, and then runs, leaps, falls into and rolls through shreds of white printer's paper, creating a physicalized corporal collage. "My intention was not simply to collage my body (as an object), but to enact movement so that the collage image would be active, found, not predetermined or posed," writes Schneemann. This is a newly restored version of this seminal work.  
– Electronic Arts Intermix

***Plumb Line*** (1968–71, 15 min., 16mm, color, sound)

The dissolution of a relationship unravels through visual and aural equivalences. Schneemann splits and recomposes actions of the lovers in a streaming montage of disruptive permutations: 8 mm is printed as 16mm, moving images freeze, frames recur and dissolve until the film bursts into flames, consuming its own substance. The film is a devastating exorcism, as the viewer sees and hears the film approximate the interior memory of the experience. – Electronic Arts Intermix

"*Plumb Line* was beautiful, laying everything open even more than *Fuses* — a very public private film — and as clear as crystal." — David Curtis

***Interior Scroll - The Cave***

(1975-1995, 7:31 min., 16mm on HD video, color, sound)

Edited and produced by Maria Beatty.

In a vast underground cave, Schneemann and seven nude women perform the ritualized actions of *Interior Scroll* — reading the text as each woman slowly extracts a scroll from her vagina. The scroll embodies the primacy of an extended visual line shaped as both concept and action. The extracted text merges critical theory with the body as a source of knowledge. The images move from naked group actions into close-ups of the unraveling text. – Electronic Arts Intermix

***Devour*** (2003-04, 8:40 min., HD video, color, sound)

*Devour* is a single-channel version of the artist's multi-channel video projection installation of the same name. In this dense montage, the title comes to stand for both the voraciously synthetic head-on rush of contemporary media, and the corresponding near-addictive impulse of its consumers. – Electronic Arts Intermix

“Perceptual tensions drive a range of images edited to contrast evanescent, fragile elements with violent, concussive, speeding fragments. Looped sources of the imagery combine political disasters, domestic intimacy and the ambiguous menace within enlarged details of gestures—both human and mechanical.”

– Carolee Schneemann

***Pinea Silva*** (2012, 9:24 min.)

“*Pinea Silva: Lost Meanings of the Christmas Tree*, a performance-lecture by Carolee Schneemann, was first presented on December 15, 2011 as part of the 40th Anniversary Benefit at Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI). In *Pinea Silva*, which takes its name from the Latin for “pine grove” (after a grove on Mount Boreas mentioned in Virgil's Aeneid as sacred to the Roman Mother Goddess Cybele), Schneemann posits a gendered interpretation of the Christmas tree as symbol. Aided by a PowerPoint presentation of images culled from the Internet, the artist analyzes traditional Christmas imagery with an eye toward the psycho-sexual. She interprets how the use of this imagery at Christmastime asserts a hetero-normative culture in which female sexuality is suppressed, and posits the reversal or re-writing of traditional symbols in which the Christmas tree is understood as vulvic.”

– Electronic Arts Intermix

## **THE ARTIST:**

**Carolee Schneemann's** pioneering work ranges across disciplines, encompassing painting, performance, film and video. Her early and prescient investigations into themes of gender and sexuality, identity and subjectivity, as well as the cultural biases of art history, laid the groundwork for much work of the 1980s and '90s. Her bold challenges to taboo and tradition can be seen as inspiring and influencing artists as varied as Paul McCarthy, Valie Export, the Guerrilla Girls, Tracy Emin and Karen Finley.

While she is often described as a performance artist, Schneemann first studied painting, and that training informed the course of all her subsequent work. It can be seen in her continuing identification as a painter and a formalist, in her attention to art-historical figures such as Cézanne, and in the hand-coloring and mark-making to

which she subjected the surface of some of her films. However, the effect of her early experience with painting was also reactive and negative; she recognized, as a woman in the early 1960s working in a male-dominated medium, that "the brush belonged to abstract expressionist male endeavor. The brush was phallic."

This realization coincided with an explosion of new artistic forms, and while Schneemann would never give up painting, she turned her attention to the downtown New York avant-garde's locus of film, dance, theater, and performance. Her involvement with this scene, including work with the Judson Dance Theater and time spent at Warhol's Factory, as well as participation in events such as Robert Morris's *Site* (1964), in which she appeared onstage as Manet's *Olympia*, proved crucial to her own concept of what she would call "kinetic theater."

Although she had experimented with performance as early as 1960, her work in this vein went public with the notorious 1964 action and film *Meat Joy*. This "celebration of flesh as material," replete with naked bodies, raw fish, chickens, and sausages, was contemporaneous with the sensationalist Viennese Aktionist group, and, at least superficially, shared some of the concerns of those artists, who referred to her as their "crazy sister." However, rather than pursuing their interests in the scatological and the morbid, Schneemann presented *Meat Joy* as an "erotic rite," foregrounding human sexuality and Dionysian ecstasy with a powerful and subversively affirmative spirit.

Schneemann's undaunted spirit asserted itself even more explicitly a year later in her "anti-porn" collage-film, *Fuses*, conceived of as a response to work by her friend, the experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage. The film challenged dominant modes of interpretation, and was also a provocation to both the avant-garde film establishment and the feminist movement.

This go-it-alone criticality is one of the major strands of Schneemann's work. When critiqued for her interest in sexuality and use of her body as medium, she always offered an unapologetic defense, pointing out, for example, "If I am a token, I'll be a token to be reckoned with." Her insistence on integrating the form and content of her art can be seen as quite radical in that it collapses work and life, thought and flesh and nature and. For Schneemann, the focus on the "experiential erotic body" is a method of empowerment, and an antidote to what she sees as a tendency of feminist art historians to discuss female sexuality exclusively as a male construction.

Schneemann's project, then, is in ways concerned with reclaiming those signifiers, actions, and ideas that have historically been denied women, and, to a lesser degree, artists in general. Her work should not solely be viewed as feminist, although she is certainly a pioneer in that area. Rather, her focus has also been on countering traditional art historical accounts, and in mapping what she calls "Istory," in an attempt to see "where the taboos and censorious conventions are embedded aesthetically." This tendency to identify what has been deemed sacred and what has been declared obscene can be seen in works like *Art is Reactionary* (1987), and in her research into historic artifacts as far-flung as Victorian art-books and Neolithic cave drawings.

Born in 1939 in Fox Chase, Pennsylvania, Schneemann received a B.A. from Bard College and an M.F.A. from the University of Illinois, and holds Honorary Doctor of

Fine Arts degrees from the California Institute of the Arts and the Maine College of Art. Her work has been exhibited throughout the world, at institutions including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Film Theatre, London; Tate Liverpool, UK, and PPOW Gallery, New York.

In 1997, a pioneering retrospective of Schneemann's work entitled *Carolee Schneemann — Up To And Including Her Limits* was held at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. A subsequent retrospective of over forty works was exhibited in 2010 at the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, State University of New York at New Paltz, and traveled to The Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, and Krannert Art Museum, Champaign, Illinois. Schneemann received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the College Art Association, an Anonymous Was A Woman award, the Ono Lennon Courage Award, and a USA Rockefeller grant, among others. In 2017, she was awarded the Venice Biennale “Golden Lion” for Lifetime Achievement.

Schneemann's published books include *Cezanne, She Was A Great Painter* (1976); *Early and Recent Work* (1983); *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings* (1979), *Imaging Her Erotics — Essays, Interviews, Projects* (2002). She taught at many institutions, including New York University, California Institute of the Arts, Bard College, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Carolee Schneemann lived in New Paltz, New York until her death on March 2019.

#### **THE PANELISTS:**

**Peggy Ahwesh** has produced one of the most heterogeneous bodies of work in the field of experimental film and video. A true *bricoleur*, her tools include narrative and documentary styles, improvised performance and scripted dialogue, synch-sound film, found footage, digital animation, and crude Pixelvision video. Using this range of approaches, she has extended the project initiated by 1960s and '70s American avant-garde film, and has augmented that tradition with an investigation of cultural identity and the role of the subject. Her work has shown at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; the Balie Theater, Amsterdam; the Filmmuseum, Frankfurt; the Rotterdam International Film Festival, Rotterdam; Museu d'Art Contemporani Barcelona (MACBA), Barcelona; the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Microscope Gallery, New York and Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles, among other venues.

Maggie Nelson is the author of nine books of poetry and prose, many of which have become cult classics defying categorization. Her nonfiction titles include the *New York Times* bestseller and National Book Critics Circle Award winner *The Argonauts* (2015), *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (2011; a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year), *Bluets* (2009; named by *Bookforum* as one of the top 10 best books of the past 20 years), *The Red Parts* (2007; reissued 2016), and *Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions* (2007). In 2021 she will publish a work of cultural criticism titled *The Myth of Freedom*, followed by a book of art



essays in 2022. In 2016 she was awarded a MacArthur “genius” Fellowship. Also in 2016, Nelson wrote a long essay on Carolee Schneemann for the Artist’s Institute, a shortened version of which was published in the *New Yorker* after Schneemann’s death, and which can be found at: <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-re-enchantment-of-carolee-schneemann>.

**Lauren Pratt** worked closely with Carolee Schneemann in New York City during the early 1980s, and the two remained close throughout Schneemann’s life. She worked as Carolee’s archivist, manager, and agent, traveled with her, had lots of fun with her, and performed with her at C.W. Post College and The Limelight. Introduced to James Tenney by Carolee in 1987, she married him the following year, and acted as Jim’s manager and agent for the next nineteen years. Since his death in 2006 she has co-edited his first collection of writings, *From Scratch* (U. Illinois Press), and executive produced the premiere recording of his *Changes: 64 Studies for 6 Harps* (New World). In addition to overseeing completion of his scores and preparation of his papers for the York University Archives, she is preparing a second collection of Tenney’s writings. She is the Associate Producer for Music at REDCAT and the in-house producer for many CalArts music events, and she coordinates the music career program in the Herb Alpert School of Music at CalArts.

**Kenneth White** is Assistant Professor of Film Studies in the Cinema Department at the State University of New York at Binghamton. He is editor of the books *Carolee Schneemann: Unforgivable* (Black Dog, 2015) and, with Annette Michelson, *Michael Snow: October File* (MIT Press, 2019). He is an editor of *Millennium Film Journal*, the bi-annual periodical of moving image art criticism, history, and theory, published by the Millennium Film Workshop, and edited the special issue focusing on Carolee Schneemann (Fall, 2011). He is a member of the board of directors of the Carolee Schneemann Foundation. White was educated at Syracuse University (BFA Art Media Studies 2005) and Stanford University (PhD Art History and Film Studies 2015). He was a participant in the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program in 2013-2014 (Critical Studies) and 2014-2015 (Studio). He was Faculty of Curatorial Studies in the Whitney Program before joining Binghamton’s Cinema Department. White is at work on a history of American media art of the late Vietnam War era entitled *Hyperventilation Syndrome: Media Cultures, Control Societies—ca. 1970*.

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#### UPCOMING FILM/VIDEO PROGRAMS

**Mon Mar 2**                    **MANIA AKBARI and DOUGLAS WHITE**  
*A Moon for My Father*

**Sat Mar 7**                    **ISAAC JULIEN**

*Better Life (Ten Thousand Waves)*

**Thu Mar 12 EPHRAIM ASILI: The Diaspora Suite**

**Mon Apr 6 CHRISTINE PANUSHKA**  
*Blood of the Family Tree*

**Mon Apr 13 ULRIKE OTTINGER**  
**7:30 pm** *Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press*

**Mon May 11 DANA BERMAN DUFF**  
**Re-productions – New Films**

**REDCAT | THE ROY AND EDNA DISNEY/CALARTS THEATER**

is located at 631 West 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012 - at the corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> and Hope Streets inside the Walt Disney Concert Hall complex. Parking is available in the Walt Disney Concert Hall parking structure and at adjacent lots. Unless otherwise specified, tickets are \$12 for the general public, \$9 for members. Tickets may be purchased by calling 213.237.2800 or at [www.redcat.org](http://www.redcat.org) or in person at the REDCAT Box Office on the corner of 2nd and Hope Streets (30 minutes free parking with validation). Box Office Hours: Tue-Sat | noon–6 pm and two hours prior to curtain.