

Carolee Schneemann
Water Light/Water Needle

Frieze New York - Spotlight
Booth B49
14 - 17 May 2015
Preview Day: 13 May 2015
20 Randalls Island
New York, NY 10035
United States

Artist in Attendance
11am-12pm, 13 May, booth B49



CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN, *Water Light/Water Needle*, 1966, vintage gelatin silver prints

Carolee Schneemann: *Water Light/Water Needle*

Frieze New York 2015 will see the return to New York of Carolee Schneemann's seminal 1966 performance *Water Light/Water Needle*. Originally performed in St. Mark's Church in 1966, the performance was thoroughly documented and now exists in form of vintage photographs, diagrams and film as well as a series of recent painted photographs made by Schneemann for her first solo exhibition in the UK (February-March 2014, Hales Gallery, London). Hales Gallery's presentation of *Water Light/Water Needle* in the Spotlight section of Frieze New York will mark the first time this material is shown in the US.

Conceived in 1964 through drawings and notes as an aerial work comprised of ropes and pulleys rigged across the canal at San Marco in Venice (Italy), *Water Light/Water Needle* was realized for the first time in March 1966 at St. Mark's Church, New York. Following the premier, the concept was resituated and performed once again in May of the same year on the Havemayer Estate in Mahwah, New Jersey. The Hales Gallery booth in 'Spotlight' will feature the film edited by Schneemann from original performance footage, diagrams made in 1965/1966 used to conceive the work, vintage photographs from 1966 documenting the performances, as well as recent paintings made from enlarged, revisited photographs. This presentation will approach the pioneering artist's work through a variety of media, showcasing not just the performance itself, but also the different stages in which it was made: conception, performance, contemporary response.

About *Water Light/Water Needle*

Following the success of the provocative performance, *Meat Joy* (1964), Schneemann received a ticket to attend the 1964 Venice Biennale. Venice dazzlingly situated the reversible figure and ground, water and sky, light and shadow, solidity and transparency. "This mirroring of water and sky introduced my visual concept of bodies moving within an anti-gravitational frame." A sensation of floating and suspension provoked Schneemann's imagery of layered ropes on which performers seemed to be 'rising out of' rather than 'being upon' actual space. Writing on these experiences in Venice, Schneemann noted "If Illinois had been an 'empty stage,' Venice was full, a constant performance arena of operatic proportions. In Illinois my own verticality and frontal vision centered as a hub in a wheel, or plumb-line positioned in the unvarying expanse; only the details of forms close to the body shifted scale. If Venice's water is 'ground,' duplicating, reflecting the repeated upright rhythms - whatever is above the horizon line is also below the horizon line mirrored in water."¹ Although there were suggestions for numerous locations for the performance (L'Opera de Lyon were interested in supporting the work) Schneemann would first get to enact the piece 2 years later in New York City.

Inspired by these thoughts and images Schneemann initiated the St. Mark's Church premier of *Water Light/Water Needle* which featured 8 participants: dancers, painters, actors and writers. The actions were positioned within layers of 3/4 inch manila rope attached to the walls with steel supports and specially designed pulleys. The work's intention was not to be acrobatic but rather demonstrate a unique physicality of each body within very particular, orchestrated parameters. Performers skillfully and rhythmically moved within the ropes until encountering one another where they then maintained physical contact. This interaction caused suspension of time, pulse and movement. Schneemann saw the ropes as "flesh extensions" and encouraged the participants to feel physical connectedness to one another. This connectedness was exemplified in a series of rules: when participants came up behind one another they had to combine their intentions to sustain coordination to adjust position. As with much of Schneemann's work, the body is the surface on which a discussion between 'body as subject' and 'body as object' takes place.

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An architect offered structural advice, a sculptor built the metal work systems and a local shipyard donated the rope. Suspended above the audience, the arrangement of the ropes still mirrored that of Schneemann's visions in Venice, and on adjoining pulleys, were 'clouds'; large orbs of paper and plastic filled with lights, used by the artist to signify the beginning and end of movement sequences. The performances in St. Marks were held in near darkness (all but a soft green and blue lighting) and began with performers bursting from cupboards situated at the sides of the room. Crowds were ushered in by the female guides or "Sherpardesses" and sat underneath the activity on piles of crumpled newspaper, watching the performance above. As well as kinetics, sound has always been important to Schneemann. The sounds layered over the *Water Light/Water Needle* video are those of the moving 'clouds' on pulleys and bodies shifting over taught ropes. Fragments of Bach-Vivaldi in A minor also echoed in the background of the Church. The success of this kinetic theater piece at St. Mark's Church encouraged Schneemann to take the work outdoors to reflect on the original Venetian concept. A grotto of trees and lake were located in MahWah (New Jersey) through the help of an assistant whose father, a psychiatrist from Venice, was building an office on land originally belonging to the abandoned Havemeyer Estate. The Havemeyer art collection of impressionist works is central to the Metropolitan Museum Collection. These works were purchased by Louise Havemeyer, daughter of the sugar baron and best friend of Mary Cassatt who advised her on the investment.

Carolee Schneemann (b. 1939, Illinois) received a B.A. from Bard College and an M.F.A. from the University of Illinois. She holds Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degrees from the California Institute of the Arts and the Maine College of Art. In 2015 the Museum Der Moderne Salzburg will hold a retrospective of Schneemann's work, curated by Sabine Breitwieser.

Schneemann's work has been exhibited worldwide, at institutions including the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (US); the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (US); the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (France); The Reina Sophia Museum, Madrid (Spain) and The Museum of Modern Art, New York (US). In 1997, a retrospective of her work entitled 'Carolee Schneemann - Up To And Including Her Limits' was held at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. The Museum of Modern Art, NY featured Schneemann's installation 'Up To And Including Her Limits' in the exhibit 'On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century' and recently acquired this installation. Schneemann's work is included in many important collections including Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (US); Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (France); Franklin Furnace, New York (US); Hamburger Bahnhof Museum, Berlin (Germany); Hirschhorn Museum, Washington D.C (US); Institute of Contemporary Art, London (UK); Institute of Contemporary Art, Chicago (US); Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (US); Museum of Modern Art, New York (US); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (Sweden); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (US); Peter Norton Collection, California (US); Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia (US); Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence (US); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California (US); The Whitney Museum of Art, New York (US); Yale University Art Gallery, Connecticut (US).

A feature length film on Schneemann's work and history entitled *Breaking the Frame* by Marielle Nitoslawska was completed in 2012 and shown at the Sundance Film Festival, Utah (US), Telluride Film Festival, Colorado (US), BFI/London Film Festival, ICA London (UK), FNC Montreal, Glasgow, Cleveland (US), WRO Biennial, Wroclaw (Poland), Videoex, Zurich (Switzerland) and NYFF51: Views From the Avant-Garde at Lincoln Center, New York (US).

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); *Correspondence Course* (2010) by Kristine Stiles, and *Imaging Her Erotics-Essays, Interviews, Projects* (2002). Awards received include: Art Pace International Artist Residency; two Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grants; Guggenheim Fellowship; Gottlieb Foundation Grant; National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship; Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship; and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the College Art Association. *Carolee Schneemann: Unforgivable* will be released with Black Dog Publishing in 2015.

Frieze New York: Established in 2012 by the founders of frieze magazine, Matthew Slotover and Amanda Sharp, Frieze New York aims to create the ultimate art fair experience, with a focus on living artists. The fourth edition of Frieze New York will feature over 190 of the world's leading contemporary galleries, with 63 participants from the fair's host city. Situated in Randall's Island Park, Frieze New York follows the establishment in 2003 of Frieze London, one of the world's most influential contemporary art fairs which takes place annually in Regent's Park, London. In 2012, Frieze also launched Frieze Masters, which coincides with Frieze London and is dedicated to art from ancient to modern. Frieze fairs are sponsored by Deutsche Bank.

Hales Gallery opened in 1992 as a contemporary art space in Deptford, South London, founded by Paul Hedge and Paul Maslin. In 2004 Hales Gallery moved to its new space in the Tea Building, a dynamic and creative hub in London's East End on the border of Shoreditch and the business district. For over 2 decades the Gallery has been a focal point for artists, collectors and institutional figures alike and has formed an important environment for the development and distribution of artworks and ideas, all of which has consistently attracted worldwide attention. At the core of the gallery's principles is the nurturing of emerging talents alongside that of some of the 21st century's most significant creative figures. Hales Gallery's commitment to artists whose work has garnered particular historical significance can be shown in it working with figures such as Carolee Schneemann (the gallery held Schneemann's first, highly commended London solo exhibition in 2014), Michael Smith (whom the gallery has worked with for over 10 years) and Frank Bowling OBE RA (the gallery has encouraged an international revival and assessment of his work). Alongside these artists, Hales Gallery has consistently and attentively supported and developed its younger artists' careers displayed in the success found by Tom Price, Omar Ba, Hew Locke, Rachael Champion and Trenton Doyle Hancock.

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