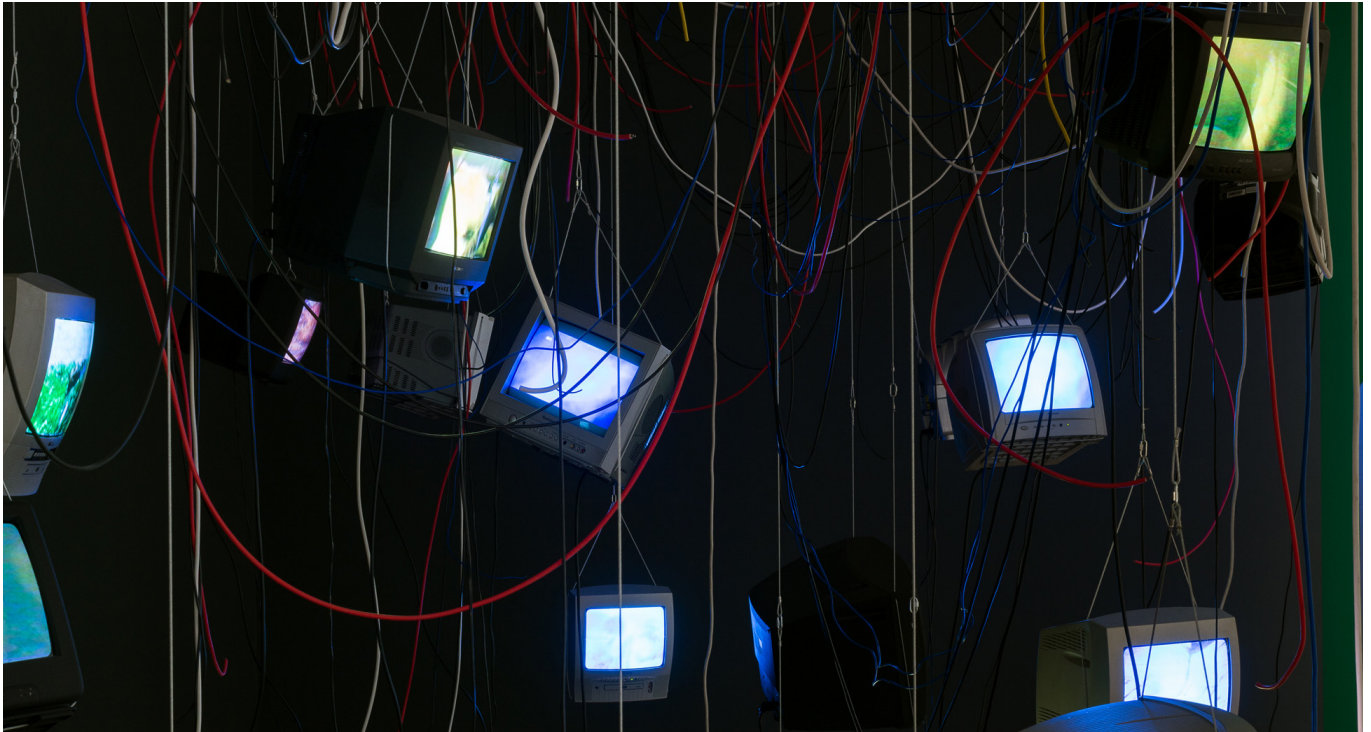


ARTWORKS LONDON

## CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

Philomena Epps, Carolee Schneemann: More Wrong Things,  
Artworks London, 20 May 2017



Installation view of Carolee Schneemann: More Wrong Things at Hales Gallery, London, 20 May - 24 June 2017.

This exhibition marks Carolee Schneemann's second solo show at Hales Gallery. Her early 2014 presentation at the gallery, *Water Light/ Water Needle*, considered the intersections between performance art, corporeality, feminist politics, and identity (perhaps, the themes with which Schneemann has been most commonly associated.) *More Wrong Things* takes a different tack, drawing attention to the artist's long-standing, deep engagement with global conflict, violence and suffering; starting with the seminal 1965 anti-war film *Viet-Flakes*, which was based on censored documentary images from American news outlets. Schneemann's anti-war stance is cemented within a wider feminist position, considering the body as a site of trauma, and interweaving the subjective with objective historical events and social structures.

The title of the exhibition is taken from Schneemann's multi-channel video installation of the same name, made during 2000-1. Eighteen video monitors hang suspended from the ceiling, while a complicated tangle of red and black wires, cables and cords intertwine mid-air and across the floor. *More Wrong Things* can be read as tying her engagement with performance, and with the art-viewing body, with bodies that experience trauma and tragedy

in the world-at-large. The videos are on an eight-minute loop, each monitor screening flickering footage from the artist's 'archive of personal and public tragedies'. These public tragedies include the siege of Sarajevo, riots in Haiti, newsreel images from Vietnam, and the destruction of towns in Palestine. Clips related to Schneemann's own life and practice have been interwoven. There is a sequence from her *Interior Scroll* (1975-77) performance - a shot of a piece of paper being pulled from her vagina. Then, almost in reverse, a penis enters a vagina. Water drips from a tap. A soldier shoots a prisoner. Olympic skaters cross an ice rink. A cat with blood smeared over its mouth stares into the camera, fresh from gnawing away at a dead animal. This oscillation between pleasure and pain, sex and violence, slowly builds an antagonistic and contradictory picture of the domestic and the state. The screen functions as a mediator and a transmitter of information. Escalated by the media, these images of violence and horror are seductive, pornographic even. In a Ballardian twist, the viewing experience in the gallery can be easily mirrored in the private sphere, by turning on the TV or visiting news websites we are caught complicit in the consumption of images of perpetual atrocity.

The implication of the audience in the act they have viewed through the image - turning passive spectator into active witness - is particularly geared towards Schneemann's exploration of the complicity of the West in the escalation of conflict in the Middle East. Her Dust Painting series from the 1980s - four of which are exhibited on the surrounding walls - were produced during a period of in-depth research into the war in Lebanon. In *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) Susan Sontag writes, 'to catch a death actually happening and embalm it for all time is something only cameras can do.' Schneemann's controversial work *Terminal Velocity* (2001-5) in which she created an enlarged black and white grid sequence of nine people falling to their deaths from the Twin Towers, explores the ability in which a photograph objectifies reality. In Sontag's words, photography 'turns an event ... into something that can be possessed'. Tragedy is cast as mutable, re-imagined in the guise of modernist form - renowned for its stark and deliberate lack of emotion. The immediacy and striking materiality of the work encapsulates Schneemann's broad and bold use of various media. The three elements of the show coalesce into a powerful and pertinent meditation on the visibility of the past in the present.