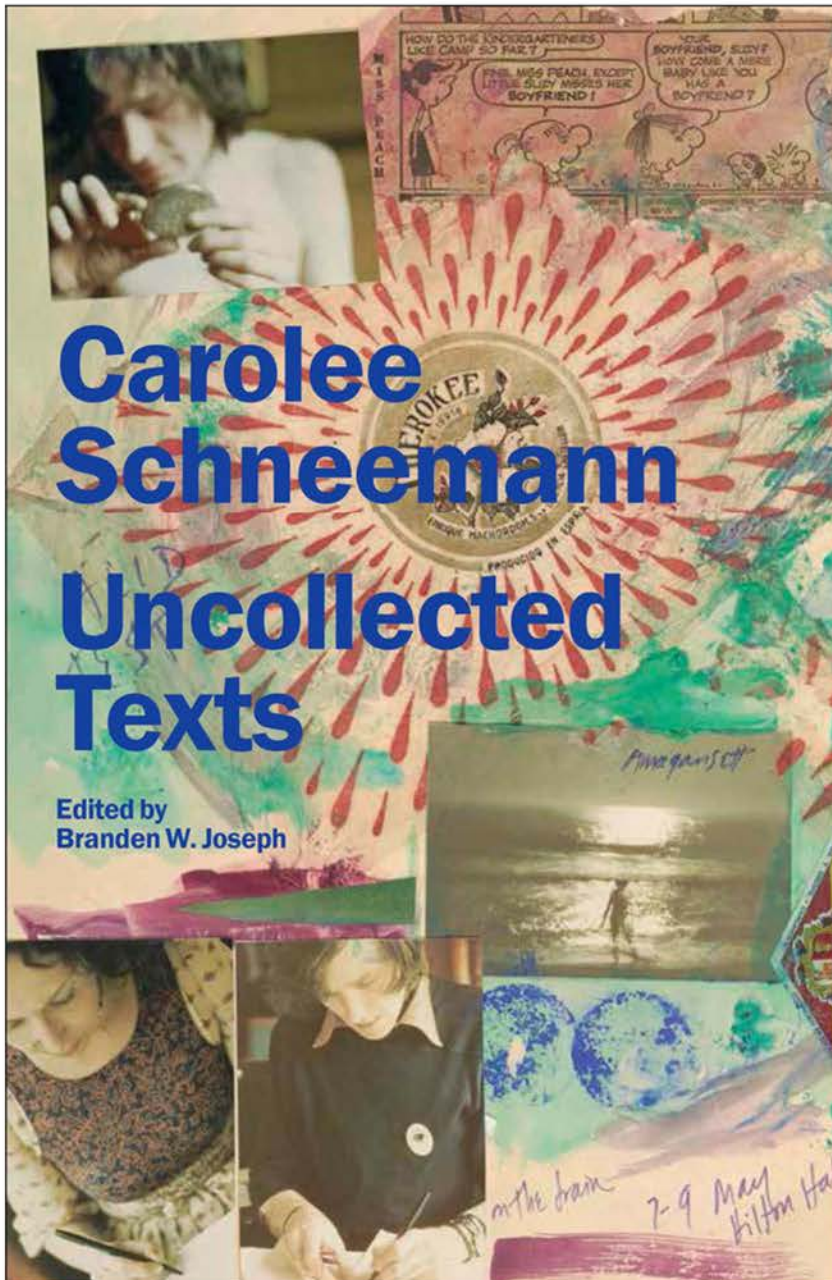


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Editing a collection of artist Carolee Schneemann's writings.



In conjunction with *Kinetic Painting*, the stunning retrospective of Carolee Schneemann's work, I talked to consulting curator Branden W. Joseph about editing the new book of the artist's writings, *Uncollected Texts* (Primary Information). This short but in-depth compilation shows Schneemann's reflections on her own art from 1956 to 1982, as well as her contributions to sociopolitical philosophy, theories of performance, and poetry. Her writing traverses the postwar poetic forms of Deep Image and Open Field, while simultaneously exploring diaristic, kinetic, and structuralist tendencies that open up her art and text to what Joseph calls her "haunting engagement[s] with the other."

—Felix Bernstein

Felix Bernstein Indeterminacy comes up throughout the collection, especially in terms of Schneemann's Kinetic Theater which destabilized the roles of artist, critic, performer, and audience. She describes this as, "Energies sparked and clarified by this sensory immediacy ... recognized as exploratory processes ... All of which served to keep my work outside the prevailing critical attitudes." Despite the fact that she is articulating her theory of Kinetic and Visual Theater simultaneously with the Happenings, why do you think her work was excluded so often from canonical representations of the period

Branden W. Joseph The first part of an answer would be to acknowledge that Schneemann's work was excluded in quite surprising ways. Michael Kirby's 1965 book *Happenings*, for instance, excludes her. Whereas Michael Benedikt's book on radical theater, *Theatre Experiment: An Anthology of Modern Plays*, included her, which I find quite interesting, Kirby's book, which basically codified Happenings, excluded her. Also, interestingly, when Susan Sontag writes about Happenings in the article "Marat/Sade/Artaud," she states that *Meat Joy* is "the best recent work in [the] genre," but when she republishes her essay in *Against Interpretation*, she excises that comment. The republication is, of course, the most cited version of Sontag's essay. Nobody goes back to *Partisan Review* to find that line on Schneemann. And Schneemann writes about this excision in her journal. Schneemann is also very tangentially acknowledged within the Judson theater scene at the time. Jill Johnston, who reviewed dance in the *Village Voice*, didn't really like anything that Schneemann did, except *Lateral Splay*, which was the most task-like, Judson-like, stripped-down thing that she probably ever did in dance. Schneemann once said that the exclusion comes from male writers not wanting to deal with aspects of female experience, but she did acknowledge Al Hansen, who wrote about her in a "primer" on Happenings that was quite widely read. So it's certainly a contested history, or a multipronged history, but it is true that the most canonic early discussions tended to write her out.

FB In the 1965 piece "*Meat Joy* and the Kinetic Theater," she describes "a picture plain as dimensional as dream is, or landscape." Now we're in 2018 and retrospectively looking at her work, and also seeing her continue to work, and I'm wondering how you see her relationship to the punning claim that the picture "plain" is an open field, and her movement away from the two-dimensional plane of painting, while drawing from Cézanne's doubting and shifting perspectives.

BWJ Schneemann's relationship to painting is interesting. She doesn't simply claim, "I'm a painter"; she claims that she's a landscape painter, and for her that means several things. It means that, as a landscape painter, a plein-air painter, someone who paints out in the motif, the motif is not just in front of you, it's all around you. The second aspect that she emphasizes is that the motif is always changing. So you're trying to paint a tree or something, and a gust of wind comes and all of the branches move, and the leaves move, and things change. The third is that you, out there in front of the canvas, are also moving. Already, then, in her notion of painting you have a spatial surround, movement of the motif, and movement of the painter. All three of those aspects will become, in *Meat Joy*, an arena of action. So her understanding of painting is already multidimensional and temporal.

In her correspondence with the filmmaker Stan Brakhage, she'll talk about Cézanne being proto-cinematic because he captures a difference in temporality. Her notion of painting is thus multidimensional and temporal. When she makes the pun that she wants painting to be a picture plain—P-L-A-I-N—that is like a landscape, that's coming from her experience in the landscape. She even does an experiment when she's young of trying to paint underwater. She goes underwater and has the palette floating above her, and she's looking at this underwater landscape and painting it above her head in the air. She'll also talk, moving from landscape painting into abstract expressionism, about the need for the painter to move and how she would have to do physical exercises before painting. She had to loosen up and get a certain rhythm in her body before she's painting. That's a transposition of the active brushstroke of Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Joan Mitchell. So painting is, at its inception, already a supercharged, multidimensional, multi-temporal thing for her. I've always been impressed with *Flange 6rpm*, the last piece in her retrospective. She doesn't ever return to just a flat picture; she continues to create monumental, moving, surrounding environments.

FB This collection details the importance that dream has on her work. And recently, when Schneemann was asked at the MoMA PS1 event for the book, "What comes first when you do a performance? Is it a drawing, or is it a concept, or do you just start moving around?" She said it always goes back to a vision or a dream and the hand-eye. Would you say the dream is a structural unit for her?

BWJ In the introduction to the book, I begin and end with Schneemann's notion of the dream. *Uncollected Texts* concludes with this beautiful, long text from the *Cinemanews* on her film *Kitch's Last Meal*, in which she talks about dreams. She also talks about the origin of *Meat Joy* as being in a dream. The dream is, for her, this place—more a hypnagogic image than a dream—that exists in the moment between dream and awakening that Marcel Proust talks about, where there's a slight disorientation as the body comes into an actual form of perception. It's in that in-between moment that she comes upon certain motifs. The essay "Hormones Circling" actually charts that process. In it, she writes, "So in my sleep an image offers itself from sensation and is accepted for narrative journey shorn of source (his leg heavy over my own: an image of ... bureau drawers)—that's something she's seeing in the room —"the sheet twisted beneath my foot: skyward flash," and then the ultimate image: "a pair of dancers pulling a wagon past the place where I dress in burnt paper scraps)." So she's generating a type of imagery, which is coming from external and internal sources, bodily

metabolisms or positions of the body, thoughts that she is having, maybe ruminated over in the course of dreamwork, and external perceptions. Schneemann then recreates that imagery for the audience of her Happenings.

The dream doesn't just give her an image that operates in a conventional manner; it gives her a very complex, signifying particle that then calls for a complex reception. That's why her review of Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* is so intriguing to me, because she interprets it through a similar semiology, where she's assuming that what's on screen was produced through a similar process, which she's receiving bodily. She talks about it almost as the process of a dream operating backwards. So there's the production of the dream-image, this complex signifier, and then there's a reception, which is of a complex signifier as well. She discusses that, too, in the essay on *Kitch's Last Meal*, where she'll say it's like a dream operating "inside out."

Another thing the dream does, in relationship to her film *Viet-Flakes* and her work in the *Lebanon Series*, is that it becomes this place where the image of the other impinges upon the self. So when she starts to dream of atrocities in Vietnam, for instance, she's affectively feeling (completely phantasmatically, but still) and empathizing with bodies that are in a different location. The dream, for Schneemann, is the place where the other comes to impinge upon the self. So it's the seat of an ethical engagement. Another way that the dream operates, and this appears in her text about the death of the poet Paul Blackburn, is as a place where the loss of the other comes back to the self. So the dream is the space where people who have died or who have been lost will continue to live on. That's still the same type of ethical, psychic, haunting engagement with the other. One of the issues that I've come to think is extremely important about Schneemann's work, which I write about in the exhibition catalogue, is that it is profoundly driven by an ethics, by the relationship to an other. In approaching the topic of Schneemann's use of the body, which is often the fallback critical position, it's important to think about whose body it really is and how that body operates in relationship to other bodies. And you immediately have to take it away from being about one, to being about two—not about the self and narcissism, but the self in relation to the other and the ethics of that relationship.

Carolee Schneemann, *Uncollected Texts* is available from Primary Information.

Branden W. Joseph is the Frank Gallipoli Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University and a 2018–19 Guggenheim Foundation Fellow. He is the author of several books, including *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage* (2008); *The Roh and the Cooked: Tony Conrad and Beverly Grant in Europe* (2012); and *Experimentations: John Cage in Music, Art, and Architecture* (2016), as well as the editor of Kim Gordon, *Is It My Body?* (2014), and Carolee Schneemann, *Uncollected Texts* (2018). In addition, he has written widely on a variety of figures within the fields of art, music, and cinema, including Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Diane Arbus, Lee Lozano, Jutta Koether, Mike Kelley, Hilma af Klint, and Angela Bulloch. Last fall he acted as consulting curator, with Sabine Breitwieser, of *Kinetic Painting*, the first full-scale museum retrospective of the artist Carolee Schneemann, at MoMA PS1.

Felix Bernstein is the author of *Burn Book* (Nightboat, 2017). With the artist Gabe Rubin, he has presented film, music, and theater at MOCA Los Angeles, Issue Project Room, Anthology Film Archives, Reena Spaulings, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Their show *Folie à Deux* will be up this summer at David Lewis Gallery in New York.