

Flash: Carrie Schneider

December 6, 2014–March 14, 2015

Sarah is reading Zora Neale Hurston. She turns the page and her hand goes automatically to her face where she unthinkingly fidgets with her mouth. I take in the rise and fall of her breathing, visible beneath a cool white blouse, preparing myself for the moment when she finishes the first page. She is a fast reader—she bends the cover and pages of the book back as her gaze moves to the top of the next. I take in the scene. I watch her eyes in profile, darting back and forth, blinking. Her head is propped and

perfectly still, chin to chest, as she reclines against a serape-slung mustard couch. Birds twitter and a siren wails in the distance. Summer. Surely she is unaware that a singular coil of hair has escaped the bun atop her head, a harmless little joke meant just for my own pleasure. Where is she coming from? Has she been out there today, in the distant commotion of the street? Her right hand fingers the edge of the page anticipating the next turn.



Molly reading Fanny Howe (*The Winter Sun: Notes on a Vocation*, 2009), detail
Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago

This portrait is one of what will amount to 100 similar arrangements filmed and photographed by the artist Carrie Schneider. Sarah's entire scene is scarcely longer than two minutes, and as in each case is determined by the pace of the subject's reading. As soon as Sarah turns the page of her book, we are let into Rebecca's home where our next subject is doing the same. The subjects who are named in Schneider's *Reading Women* are double: the friends who have agreed to participate, identified by first name only, and the authors they have chosen, from Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf and Roseanne Barr, to Angela Davis, Patti Smith, and Joan Didion. The artist filmed each woman for two hours and later chose scenes that depict their most engrossed moments.¹ Here they are presented to us, presumably at their most vulnerable, naked from any self-consciousness. The experience of watching each one feels as private as being absorbed in a text. She reads words, and I read her.

Drawn from the artist's own social group as demanded by the intimacy of the project, these portraits amount to an index of an artistic community. While the ages of the participants range from 19 to 76 and include musicians, writers, dancers, a graphic designer, a structural engineer, and a lawyer, the majority of women pictured are in their 20s, 30s, and early 40s, and many of them—like Schneider herself—are practicing visual artists.²

Notes

1. Schneider remarks that she finds her subjects "most disarmed" about 30-40 minutes into a sitting. Conversation with the artist, July 2014.
2. Conversation with the artist, July 2014.

Carrie Schneider (born in 1979 in Chicago, Illinois) is a New York-based photographer and filmmaker. Her work has been featured in solo exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki; Galleri KiT/Trondheim Academy of Art, Norway; and Gallery Kalhama & Piippo, Helsinki. Her work has been included in group exhibitions and screenings at the Haggerty Museum, Milwaukee; The Kitchen, New York; Dumbo Arts Center, Brooklyn; Columbia College, Chicago; Artspace, New Haven; Kunsthall Charlottenborg Copenhagen, Denmark; and as part of the 2011 Pittsburgh Biennial at The Andy Warhol Museum.

Artists Dana DeGiulio, Cauleen Smith, and Molly Zuckerman-Hartung are here, contemporary art curator Naomi Beckwith, too. Artistic concerns are also made visible in the artists whose writings many of these women select, including those of Moyra Davey, Miranda July, Adrian Piper, and Yvonne Rainer.

The pictured subjects are collaborators, having agreed to perform in this way for Schneider's cameras, and affording us the voyeuristic pleasure of watching them. They make careful selections in self-presentation that include not only a title and author, but also clothing, a place in their home, a pose, and in some cases, background music. What are we meant to deduce about Elizabeth who reads a text about site-specificity while lying on a wicker couch in a peach-colored t-shirt, or Bianca who leans a small book of poetry against her crossed knee? We are indeed given a volume of details about these subjects. However, just as we are denied access to the complex narratives they are experiencing in their reading, the frame of each portrait is also limited. In this way, *Reading Women* offers a complicated picture of premeditated, highly determined situations that are cut through with true moments of self-possession often only achieved in solitude.

—Joanna Szupinska-Myers,
CMP Curator of Exhibitions

Schneider earned her BFA at Carnegie Mellon University in 2001 and her MFA at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2007. She attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2007 and had a yearlong Fulbright Fellowship at the Kuvataideakatemia Finnish Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki in 2008. *FLASH!* is the first solo presentation of Schneider's work on the west coast.

Flash! contemporary art series features single works made within the last year and is organized by Joanna Szupinska-Myers at the California Museum of Photography, part of UCR ARTSblock. *Flash: Carrie Schneider* is the seventh project in the series. This presentation was supported in part by an anonymous donor.

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