

Carolee
Schneemann

Kinetic Painting



Museum der Moderne
Salzburg



PRESTEL



Carolee Schneemann
Kinetic Painting

Edited by
Sabine Breitwieser

for the
Museum der Moderne Salzburg

Texts by
Sabine Breitwieser, Branden W. Joseph,
Mignon Nixon, Ara Osterweil,
Judith Rodenbeck, and Carolee Schneemann



Museum der Moderne
Salzburg

Prestel

Munich • London • New York



Self-portrait, 1955
Oil on canvas

*I had to get that nude off the canvas,
frozen flesh to art history's con-
junction of perceptual erotics and
an immobilizing social position.¹*

*Because I am really a painter—
a media artist—there must be some
compelling material that can only
be enacted live, so I become an in-
strument of real time.²*

Carolee Schneemann

Kinetic Painting: Carolee Schneemann's Media

Sabine Breitwieser



Girl on the stage, on her knees, 1940s
Childhood drawing
Pencil, pen, and crayon on paper

In the following pages, I will try to outline the development of Carolee Schneemann's art, highlighting her employment of different media, disciplines, and genres, from her early portraits and landscapes through her assemblages and the use of fire as a painterly material to her groundbreaking performances, experimental films, and large-scale installations in which electronic media play a prominent part. Art historians have primarily taken note of Schneemann as a pioneer of performance art and in the 1960s, as an assertive woman artist addressing issues of (female) sexuality and lust in provocative works which inevitably courted controversy. Schneemann's vital contributions to the establishment of a feminist art practice, her «painting constructions,» her choreography and performances, and her experimental films, whose full significance has not yet been recognized: these are only some facets of her oeuvre, and a thorough review of her prodigious output, which now spans six decades and reflects the period's social and technological changes in its extraordinary diversity, has long been overdue. The central idea, however, that has driven the evolution of Schneemann's creative expression has been a steadily expanding conception of painting; despite or, rather, because of the interdisciplinary nature of her process, it is aptly characterized by the notion of painting in motion—*kinetic painting*.

From Childhood Drawings to the (Self) Portrait

Carolee Schneemann was born in Fox Chase, a neighborhood in northeastern Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1939. Her father was a country doctor, and her mother took care of the family; as the oldest child (a brother and a sister followed), Carolee was responsible for the problems and activities of the younger children and had domestic household duties. She later chose one of the numerous drawings she created at the age of four or five for the cover of her feminist artist's book *Cézanne, She Was a Great Painter* (1974). As a high school student, Schneemann ran away and traveled to Pueblo, Mexico, on a fellowship from the organization Experiments in International Living. She also attended the Putney School in Vermont, but her family took her out after a short time because it seemed too progressive.³ After high school, she was awarded a full scholarship to study art at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. In 1954, the year before she enrolled at Bard, she painted a self-portrait that shows her self-confidently looking straight at the beholder. Schneemann's recollections suggest that at the time, a young woman of her potential met with little support for her interests at the school.⁴ Louis Schanker was the only teacher there to appreciate her determination as an artist, but instead of nurturing her talent in painting he showed her how to prepare garlic for salad.⁵ Her philosophy professor discouraged her from working on Simone de Beauvoir

1 Carolee Schneemann, «Interview with Kate Haug,» *Wide Angle* 20, no. 1 (1977): 1–19. Reprinted in *Carolee Schneemann: Imaging Her Erotics* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), 28.

2 Carolee Schneemann, «Interview with Carl Heyward,» *Art Papers* 17, no. 1 (January–February 1993): 9–16. Reprinted in *Carolee Schneemann: Imaging Her Erotics, 196*.

3 Carolee Schneemann in e-mails to the author, June 2015.

4 Bard College now ranks among the United States' leading and most innovative institutions of higher education.

5 Carolee Schneemann in e-mails to the author, June and September 2015: «He showed me how to use garlic properly for a salad, and he showed me the first example of an artist living in a New York City loft, filled with paintings, art materials.»



Willem de Kooning, *Excavation*, 1950
Oil on canvas
The Art Institute of Chicago.
Mr. and Ms. Frank G. Logan Purchase
Prize Fund; restricted gifts of
Edgar J. Kauffmann, Jr., and
Mr. and Ms. Noah Goldowsky, Jr.



Jackson Pollock and
Lee Krasner, 1950
Photograph by Hans Namuth

and recommended that she devote herself to «masters» like Jean-Paul Sartre instead. When, for lack of access to professional models for nude studies, she painted several nude self-portraits, she was sent on a leave of absence. (No objections were raised to her posing nude for her fellow male painting students.) She continued her studies on another scholarship at Columbia University's School of Painting and Sculpture in New York, where, in 1955, she met James (Jim) Tenney, an aspiring composer in training at the Juilliard School to whom she was subsequently married for thirteen years. Tenney also introduced her to the experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage, who became a close friend but was—according to Schneemann—deeply conflicted as to how he shared his intellectual friendship with Jim with her and how she would fulfill his expected female provider role. In 1958 Schneemann chose to paint not the later well-known filmmaker but his wife, Jane, an early anticipation of the probing examination of women's role in the arts that would be a major theme in her oeuvre. Despite several setbacks, she finished her studies at Columbia University,⁶ returned to Bard College, and graduated in 1960.

From the Figure in the Landscape to Painting Constructions in the Orbit of Abstract Expressionism and Experimental Music

From the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, Schneemann devoted most of her energy to landscape painting, a demanding genre of representational art. «A teacher with a superficial eye for my temperament advised me to study the Expressionists.... Kokoschka in particular. But it was Cézanne who immediately drew my attention; the precision of the act of painting as space was incomparable,» the artist wrote in a statement in 1963.⁷ The brief essay also notes another character who deeply influenced her at the time: the mathematical biologist D'Arcy Thompson,⁸ in whose writings she found encouragement as she began to devise a lexicon of forms derived from her individual perception and interpretation of natural phenomena. Schneemann felt herself to be «a part of nature; it was a living, expressive, animated world that sometimes responded to my wishes.»⁹ *Summer I (Honey Suckle)* (1958), which renders a natural scene in expressive and rhythmical brushstrokes, illustrates her pictorial idea of human existence in an «intoxicating natural world.» At the time, Schneemann was working beside Tenney's studio, so she frequently overheard him practicing his etudes, whose defining qualities were dissonance and fragmentation; he was immersing himself in the piano music of Charles Ives, who worked with aleatory elements and used polytonality and polyrhythm to make something new out of the historical configuration of traditional American music being fractured into cacophony, simultaneous sound layers and nontraditional instrumentality. Influenced by Paul Cézanne's painterly textures, in which visible traces of the brushwork allow the beholder to witness the creative process, and the aleatory patterns of Tenney's music, Schneemann's work from this period evinces the earliest contours of her kinetic painting, which her subsequent encounter with the New York School would throw into sharper relief.

By the mid-1950s, Abstract Expressionism in its American varieties had conquered the world.¹⁰ In 1949 *Life* magazine had celebrated Jackson Pollock as the «greatest

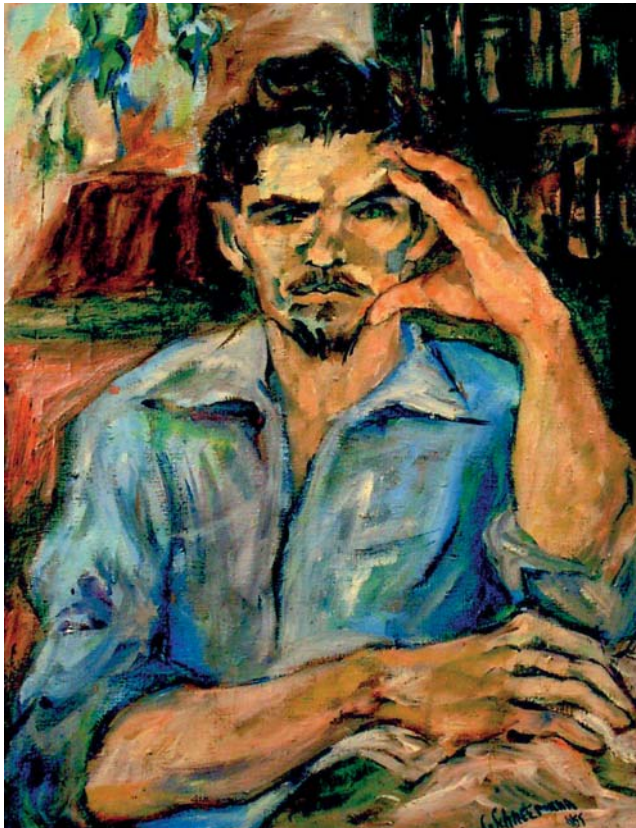
⁶ Recalling her time at Columbia University, Schneemann emphasizes the influence of Professor Andre Racz (Cluj, Romania, 1916–Englewood, NJ, 2008), who taught her nude drawing class.

⁷ «Statement by C.S.» [1963], in *Carolee Schneemann: Early & Recent Work*, exh. cat. (New York: Max Hutchinson Gallery; New Paltz, NY: Documentext, 1982), n. p.

⁸ Sir D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson (1860–1948) was a Scottish biologist and mathematician.

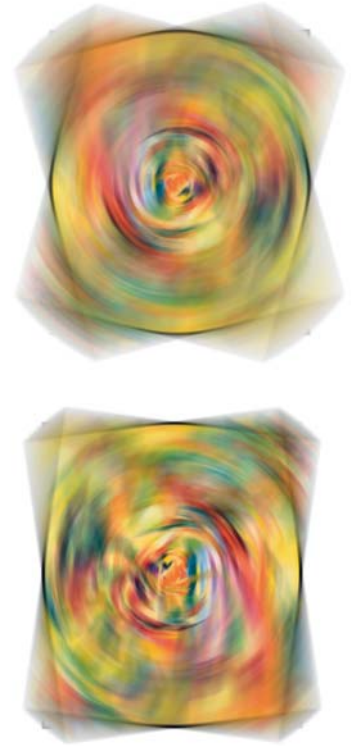
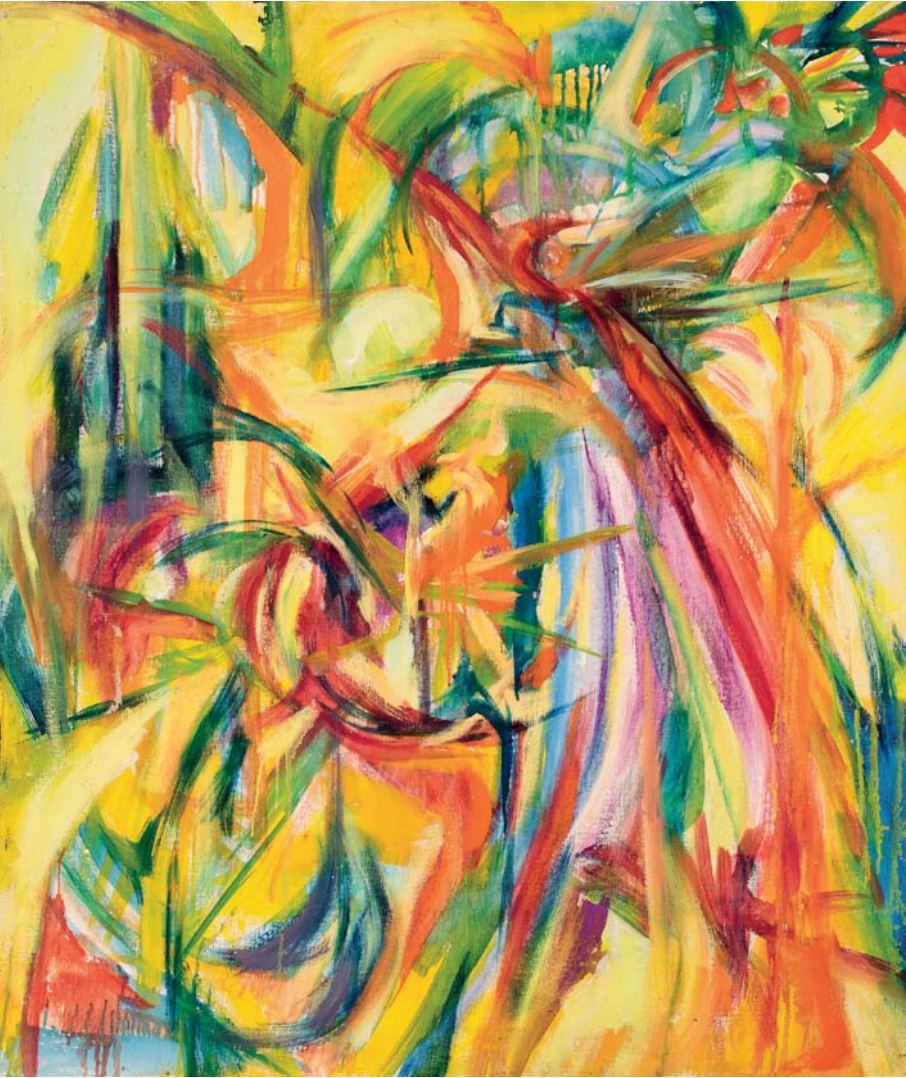
⁹ *Schneemann: Early & Recent Work*, n. p. (see note 7).

¹⁰ For the political dimensions of Abstract Expressionism, see Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

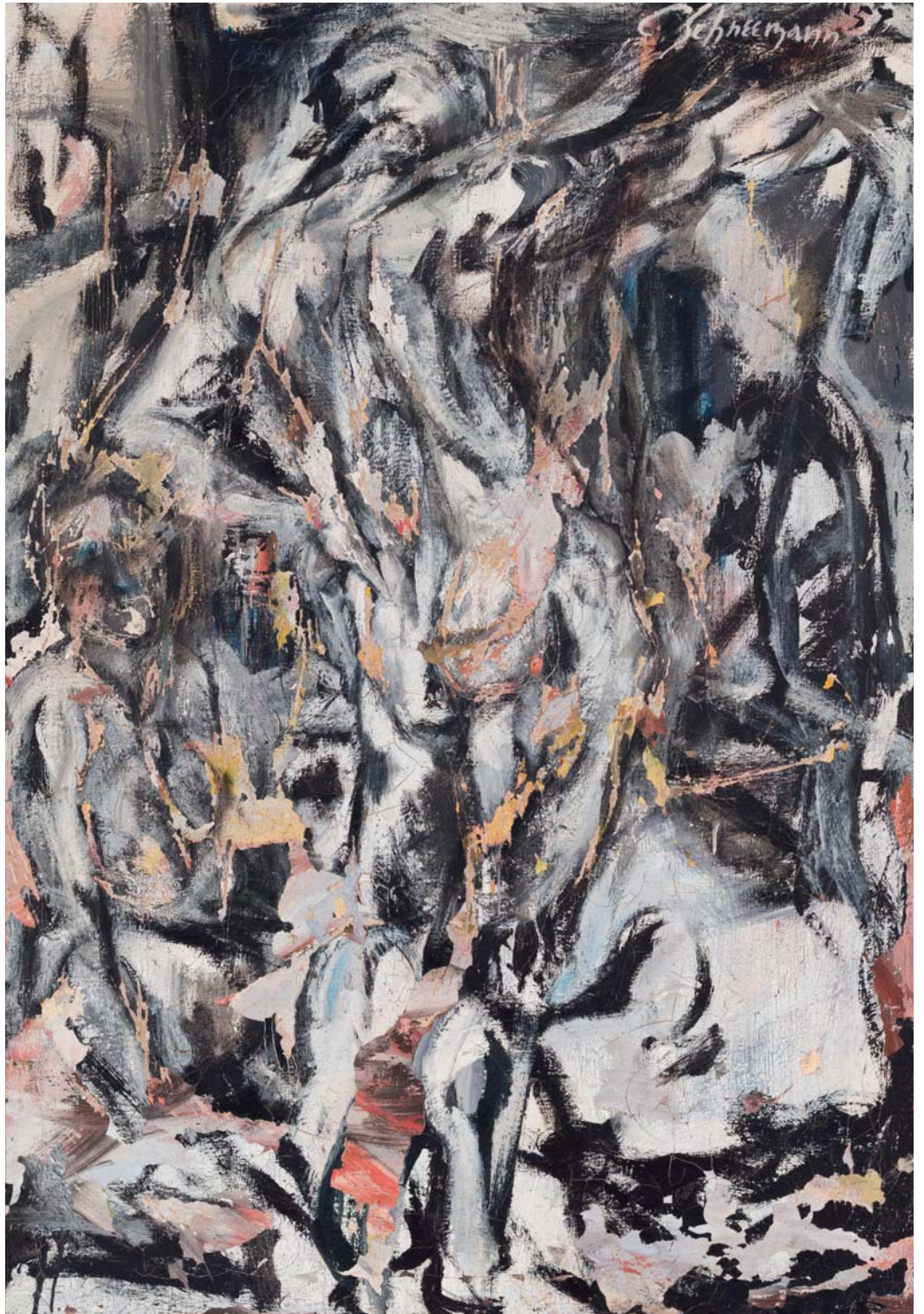


Portrait of J.T., 1955
Oil on canvas

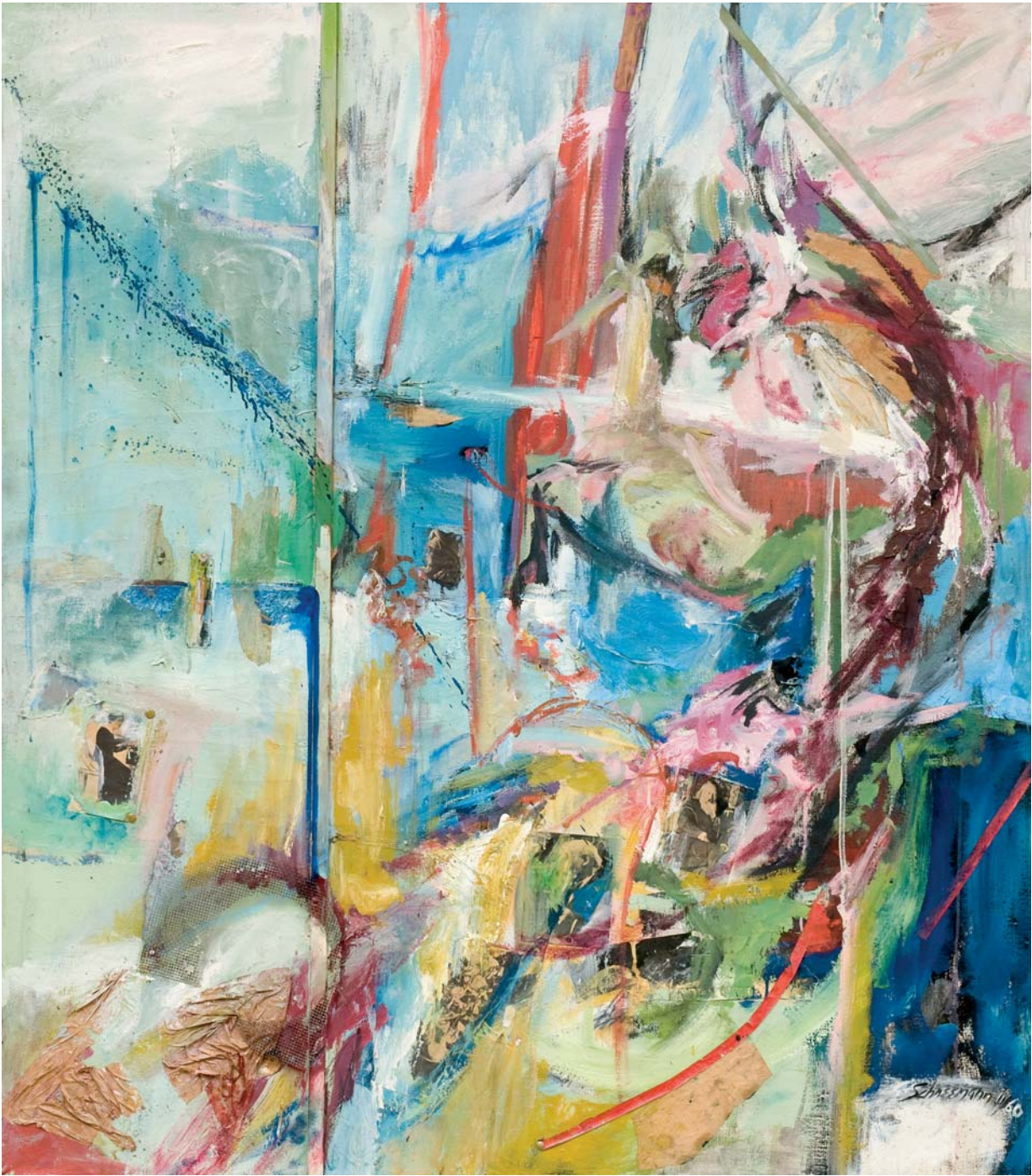
Portrait of Jane Brakhage, 1958
Oil on canvas



Pin Wheel, 1957
Oil on canvas, wood, mounted on
turning steel potter's wheel

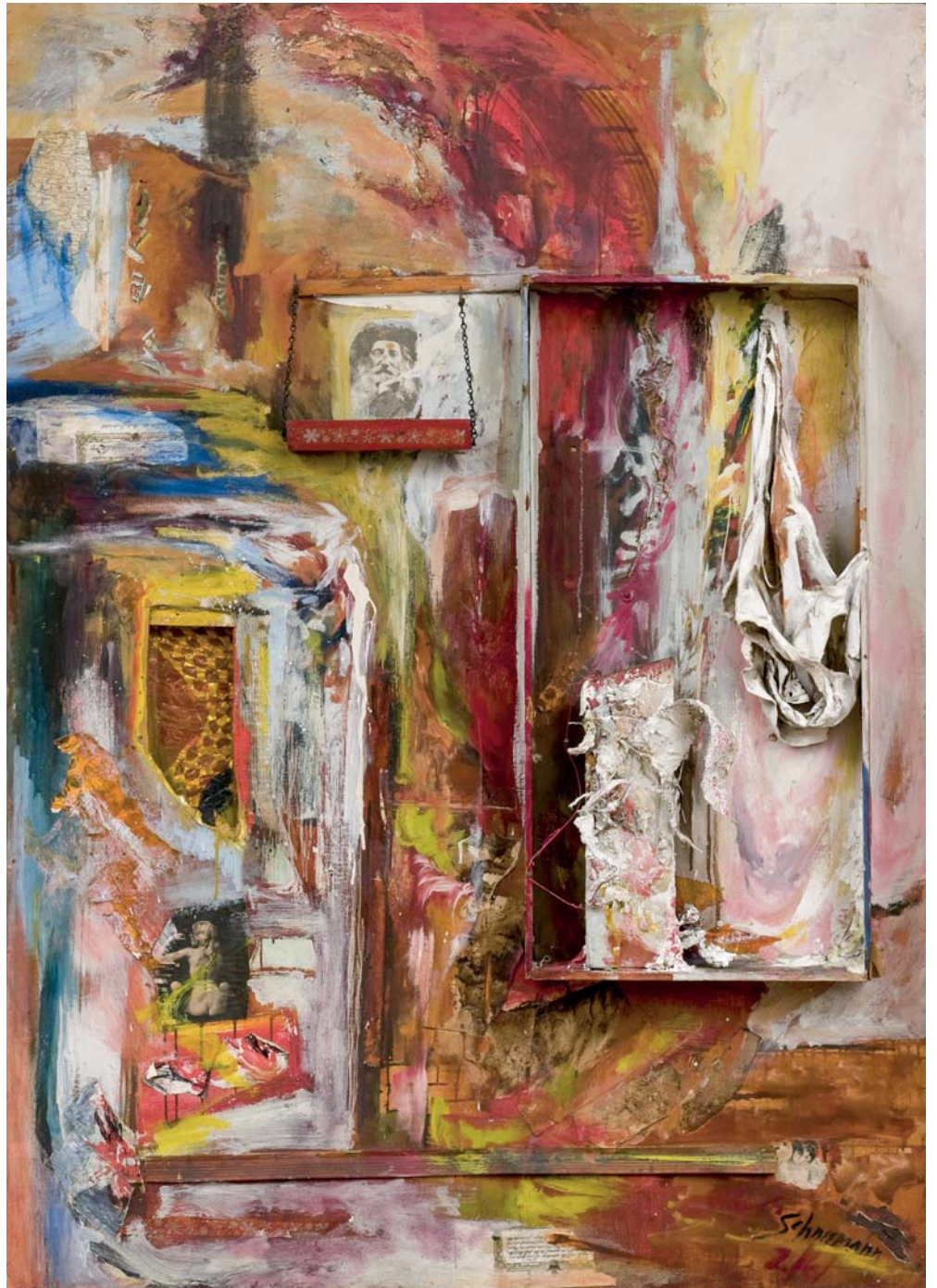


Three Figures
after Pontormo, 1957
Oil on canvas



Tenebration, 1961

Oil paint on canvas, paper, wood strips,
cloth and photographs (Wanda
Landowska, Johannes Brahms,
and Ludwig van Beethoven) mounted
on wooden board



Sir Henry Francis Taylor, 1961
 Oil paint, photographs (gelatin silver prints,
 e. g., Sir Henry Francis Taylor
 by Julia Margaret Cameron),
 underpants, plaster, swing glass,
 on Masonite panel



Fur Wheel, 1962

Lamp shade base, oil paint, fur,
tin cans, mirrors, glass, mounted
on turning wheel (motor)

Generali Foundation Collection—Permanent
Loan to the Museum der Moderne Salzburg
Inv. No. GF0031750.00.0-2015



Glass Environment for Sound and Motion, 1962

Score

Props

Hammers to smash the wired glass, to sound on glass nails—to be hammered in across the stage, to be scattered a long bench electric fan baby carriage large pink plastic ball a long pole with silver strips gourds bells violin trombone large cardboard box a chair high-intensity flashlights

Sounds and Motions

All movements have the potential of creating sounds with the glass environment. Improvisations develop by attention to one another in which exchanges, duplications, and initiations of actions are experienced as inter-related and mutually informing.

Performers write out lists of possible actions, spatial positions, interactions, work with props and forays into the audience. Props and objects as well as actions and positions are switched and exchanged—repetition, variation.

Durations of improvisation in «Soft Materials» and «Display» are controlled by the overhead stage lights (worked by Billy Linick). Actions are arrested when the lights go off. Each blackout functions as a scene change, though a performer might simply shift from one leg to another. The changes are as discrete or extreme as each performer decides they should be. Billy scores the stage lights to go on and off in rotating sequences. No one group of lights will be on for more than three minutes; blackouts do not exceed thirty seconds.

*Basic Movements,**Characteristic Sounds*

Notes to performers conceived for the particularities and contrasts between types; each seen as vivid, distinctive.

Judy: small, round, compact, un-selfconscious, innocence and efficiency of temperament. Graceful, calm.

Arlene: pressure outward, controlled wildness, poignant energy—to be «pleasing,» vulnerable, a radiance.

Yvonne: pressure inward, strength, intensity; not to be «pleasing»; concentration, a severity, explosive.

Judy, Arlene, Yvonne; a slow shuffling walk—bend forward, fall onto hands, walk on hands, fall onto floor. Rest, rise up on hands, straighten back, slow shuffle walk, bend forward, fall onto hands, etc....

Soft Materials

Judy seated on bench. Yvonne enters with shuffle walk, flaps arms, makes the sound «umbah, umbah, UMBAH.» Judy, spinning, reaching, touching out, sits down (hums). Repeat. Arlene contracting and expanding as she rolls into a ball and flings arms and legs wide, exclaiming. Yvonne, standing still, turns head, bending, exhaling; vocalize muscular tensions. Andre, prolonged, sustained efforts: push-ups, a repeated phrase on trombone from a fixed position, extending tongue at a mirror. Exclamations. Arlene rolling on her back slowly, back and forth from behind the drapery. Philip on his back; holding trombone, slides slowly forward; breathes, coughs into trombone. Malcolm from stage to audience, through the aisles, walks on empty seats playing violin. Blackout. Judy takes Malcolm's violin, plays it ineptly while spinning in wide arcs. These arcs impinge on Andre doing push-ups; he rolls into Arlene, they embrace and roll across the stage into drapery and back out. Andre takes

trombone from Philip, plays it directing notes to bits of hanging glass as if to bounce the notes, sets off resonance; Malcolm responds to the timbre of clinking glass and trombone with staccato strokes on the violin. Yvonne throws out her arms, swings torso, bleats. Blackout.

Display

Everyone walks around asking «what's next?» Arlene goes and sits among the audience. Judy puts her head in the cupboard box and beats her fists on it. Yvonne lies on the floor, extending arms and legs, shrieks. Arlene rolls the silver pole over her. Blackout. Nails are hammered in across the stage; gradually one person replaces another completing the task. When the last nail is hammered in place everyone becomes still. Malcolm walks on the empty seats among the audience, plays one sustained note on the violin as long as possible. Philip, onstage facing away from the audience, into a mirror, whispers long sustained hiss into the trombone. Blackout.

Mirror (I)

Judy wheels Arlene back and forth in the baby carriage, doing movements of expansion, contraction on her knees. Judy's legs are wrapped in foil; as she spins the foil falls off, tangling around her feet; she continues spinning. Blackout. Philip stands in the foil striking the hanging glass with the violin bow. Arlene dumps over the baby carriage. Judy spins back and forth carrying an electric fan, hitting against the glass. Blackout.

Mirror (II)

The movements are slow, prolonged. The only source of light is

from the flashlights which I work from the audience area. In rhythmic sweeps and arcs, and fast on-off bursts, fragments of bodies are spotlighted, still or in motion. The light strikes mirrors at different levels within the stage, blinding the audience; performers' gestures and reflections of the audience are momentarily arrested in the beam.



*Glass Environment
for Sound and Motion
Performance*
Photos: Steve Schapiro

Top, from the left: unknown,
Yvonne Rainer,
Malcolm Goldstein
Bottom, front: Yvonne Rainer,
back: Arlene Rothlein





Noise Bodies
1965

Noise Bodies so uncomplicated—just Jim (James Tenney) and me—own body sound system. Crazy dressing each other in all the metal parts; hooking on the refrigerator tubes, ice trays, carburetor vents around our legs ... balancing the noise squeakers, flashlights, tea pot top «breasts.» ... Moving in the blackout, slowly the indefinable clanking, staccato percussion of the metal costumes as we walk the length of the darkened hall ... audience an intense mass, heat of them, silence ... the two spots flash on—the audience roars. We begin to touch and «play» the sound of our «debris bodies.» Furious, cacophonous exit totally concentrated on pitch and timbre of our strikes, moving fast through tripods, crouching photographers—applause over our din.

Actions performed on floor level

1. Bodies completely costumed in sound-making debris; penlights and squeakers on both of us.
2. In the dark we circle the space, lighting ourselves briefly (like fireflies); sporadic noises of the metal and squeakers.
3. Slowly move toward each other in the dark, beginning very rapid (staccato) lighting of the debris.
4. Circling about six feet apart; a spotlight goes on in the center between us.
5. Keeping eye contact we each pull out a gear-cable from the assembled costume parts (from an old car, they look like wands); constant circling of one another.
6. Slowly reach out and begin to play each other, first very lightly striking the bells, then striking the tin cans; circling each other more quickly in rapid exchange of strokes; increasingly cacophonous: metal pieces clang and crash together as the speed quickens (percussive, rhythmic).
7. A spotlight suddenly illuminates a large suspended metal wheel (bicycle rim) of «junk»; we begin to interpose strokes on the hanging wheel between strokes on each other.
8. One lifts the wheel down and begins to spin it as the other is striking debris on the wheel; the wheel is thrown in the air, caught by the other, and amid a crescendo of shattering noise and strokes we exit.

Performance

—
*3rd Annual Festival of
the Avant Garde*, Judson
Hall, New York, NY, US
28 August 1965

Performers:
Carolee Schneemann
James Tenney

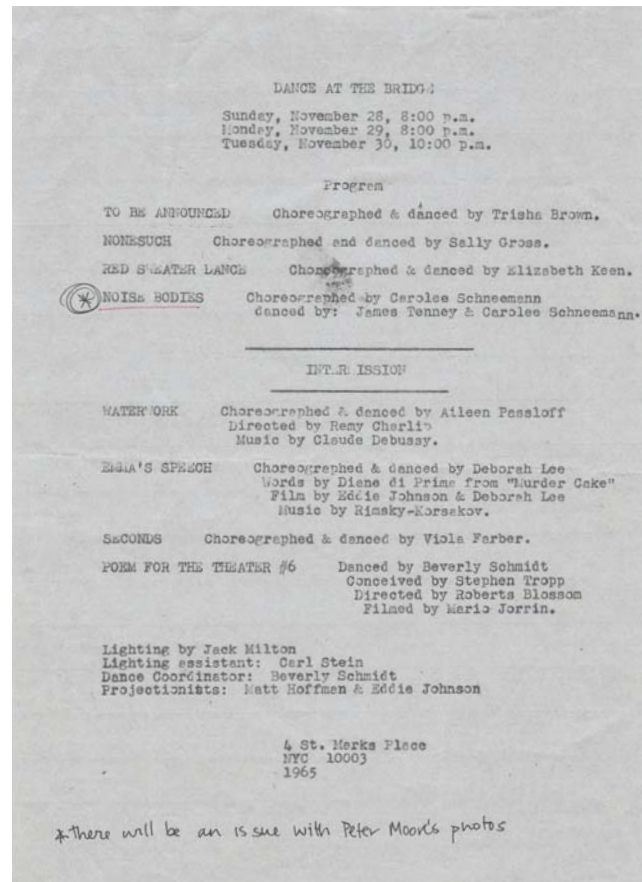




Photo: © Barbara Moore / Licensed by WGA, New York, NY



Photo: © Barbara Moore / Licensed by WGA, New York, NY



Photo: Charlotte Victoria



Photo: © Barbara Moore / Licensed by WGA, New York, NY

Noise Bodies,
Performance flyer

Photos top left, right,
bottom right:
Peter Moore, Performance
views of Carolee Schneemann's
Noise Bodies, 28 August 1965,
Judson Hall, New York, NY

Carolee Schneemann
and Alex V. Sobolewski
1965

Photographs

—
Photo series taken
in Schneemann's studio
122 West 29th Street,
New York, NY, US
December 1965

Photos:

Alex V. Sobolewski



Top left, right, center
left: *CS with Four
Fur Cutting Boards*
Center right: *CS in the
broken mirrors on the
back of Four Fur
Cutting Boards*
Bottom left, right:
CS with Nude Painting



Top left, right:
CS with Radiator
 Collection of Jeff and
 Leslie Fischer, Alexander
 Gray Associates
 Center left:
CS with Gloves (Radiator)
 Center right: *CS with Skull*
 Bottom left: *CS with Glass*
 Construction (*Hat Stand*)
 Bottom right:
CS with Candle

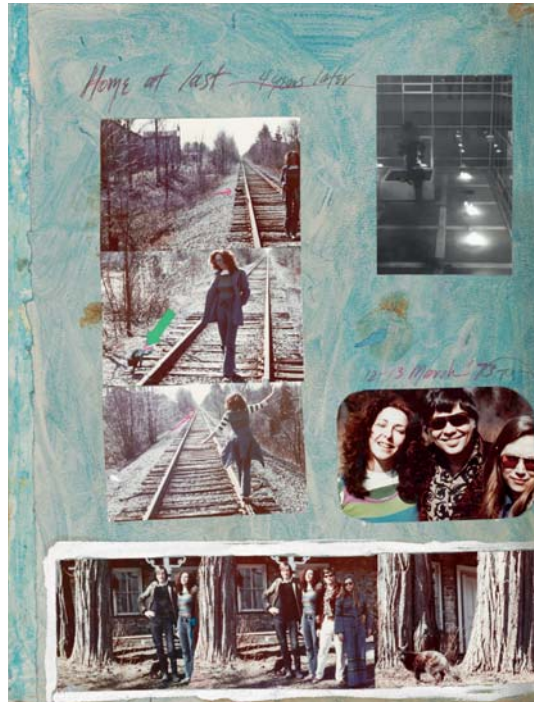
Snows Drawings, 1966





Snows Drawings, 1966
9 drawings
Watercolor, crayon,
and ink on paper







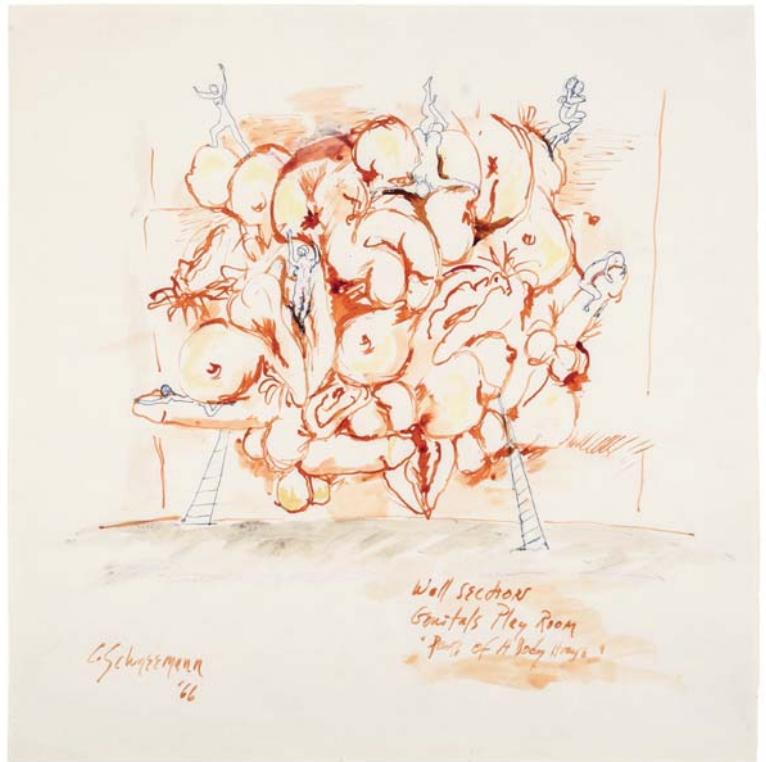
Life Book 3, 1970–1990s
 Sketchbook, pp. 17, 36, 64, 91
 M1892 Carolee Schneemann papers,
 circa 1954–2012, courtesy of the
 Department of Special Collections
 and University Archives,
 Stanford University Libraries

Life Book 2, 1970–1990s
 Sketchbook, pp. 106–107
 M1892 Carolee Schneemann papers,
 circa 1954–2012, courtesy of the
 Department of Special Collections
 and University Archives,
 Stanford University Libraries

Parts of a Body House, 1966
Watercolors



Parts of a Body House:
Guerrilla Gut Room 1, 1966
Watercolor on paper



Parts of a Body House:
Guerilla Gut Room II / Wall
Section Genitals Playroom, 1966
 Watercolor on paper

Parts of a Body House: Genitals
Playroom I / Genital Wall, 1966
 Watercolor on paper



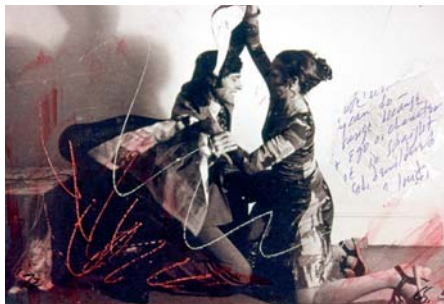
Exercise for Couples
1972



Exercise for Couples, 1972
10 gelatin silver prints
with paint wash
Photos: Felipe Ehrenberg

Performers: Carolee
Schneemann, Anthony McCall

Aggression for Couples
1972



Aggression for Couples, 1972
8 gelatin silver prints,
handwritten text, and
paint wash
Photos: Felipe Ehrenberg

Performers: Carolee
Schneemann, Anthony McCall

Up to and Including Her Limits, 1973–1976

Berkeley Notes, Structural concept of the actions

I. TRACKINGS: tracks in space map a time process

Marks referential to actions producing them—both visible and invisible, durable and nondurable

Suspended on the rope, the «automatic drawing» maps time process and the time process is «charted» (factored) by spatial signs

II. The architectural space of the museum: political and personal

1. What it imposes, provokes, permits what I discover, adapt to, change: embedded modes of behavior and an aesthetic ideal taken for granted—invisible cultural assumptions

2. Drawings and notes before seeing the actual space, a «pre-view,» projective (like automatic writing)

Preparatory work: imagining the architecture, geography, food, temperature, light, tonality inside and outside, water sources, energy—my own and the place (materials, dimensions, containment of the body ...)

3. First time in California
Istory of the museum—what is its community?

How is Berkeley distinctive?
When and why is a living artist invited (acceptable) in a museum?

III. Dismantling the fixity of museum patterns/cultural sets

1. Arrive at the museum when it opens—with the cleaners, guards, secretaries, maintenance crew—remain until closing

2. NO «performance»: Museum becomes my home, studio; my cat Kitch lives there with me
Construct, arrange a «home,» work environment: kitty litter, table, chair, bowls of water, food for Kitch, green plants, clock, typewriter, change of clothes, papers, books, drawing materials, rug, pillows

3. ON and OFF the canvas

The artist, the nude—at home, at work

Still life elements: fruit, eggs, clothes, dishes—use in actions of exploring and organizing the space

Aromas: off the canvas—rags soaked in turpentine (old art odors); fresh oil paint, palettes (not used)

IV. THE TRACKS

1. Attaching rope from twenty-five-foot-high ceiling side of lower gallery suspended on the rope—sustained duration so long as concentration endures
Chalk in hand—motion of body by tension/relaxation with the rope mark motions on floors, walls ... accumulative

2. Nude woman (artist) walks through the museum

3. *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*: nude outside on the grass has lunch
People gather to observe her
The cat walks in the grass
The people and the nude in conversation

4. Invisible tracks: dip my feet and the cat's paw in pans of flour: we follow each other across floors—cross tracks, parallel, apart, etc.

5. Typing a score as the events occur

6. Floating eggs among the fish in the garden pond

7. Rolling eggs by elbow, knee, nose through the museum spectators participate

8. Kitch's outdoor tracks; sustained durations (filmic) as people observe her movement out of museum, along shrubbery; perimeters of walls and garden defined—light and shadow, covering foliage, open space
Our relation to the fifty or so people arriving in «our» garden

Impression of the bodies remains in the grass

9. Time intervals: pattern of the day on and off the rope, spatial intervals which bring people directly into spaces I inhabit they arrive down a long ramp. Our contact.

10. Habitation materials: lunch and dinner grease, wine, peels, napkins, plates, cups, clothing, etc.

11. Video a team of three women has instructions to watch, wait, and film actions at the moment they are most realized (unselfconscious). Their main attention is to my motions on the rope; the cat, spectators and related events are taped as well. Repetition, mirroring, replay.

V. The Exhibit—9 Walls

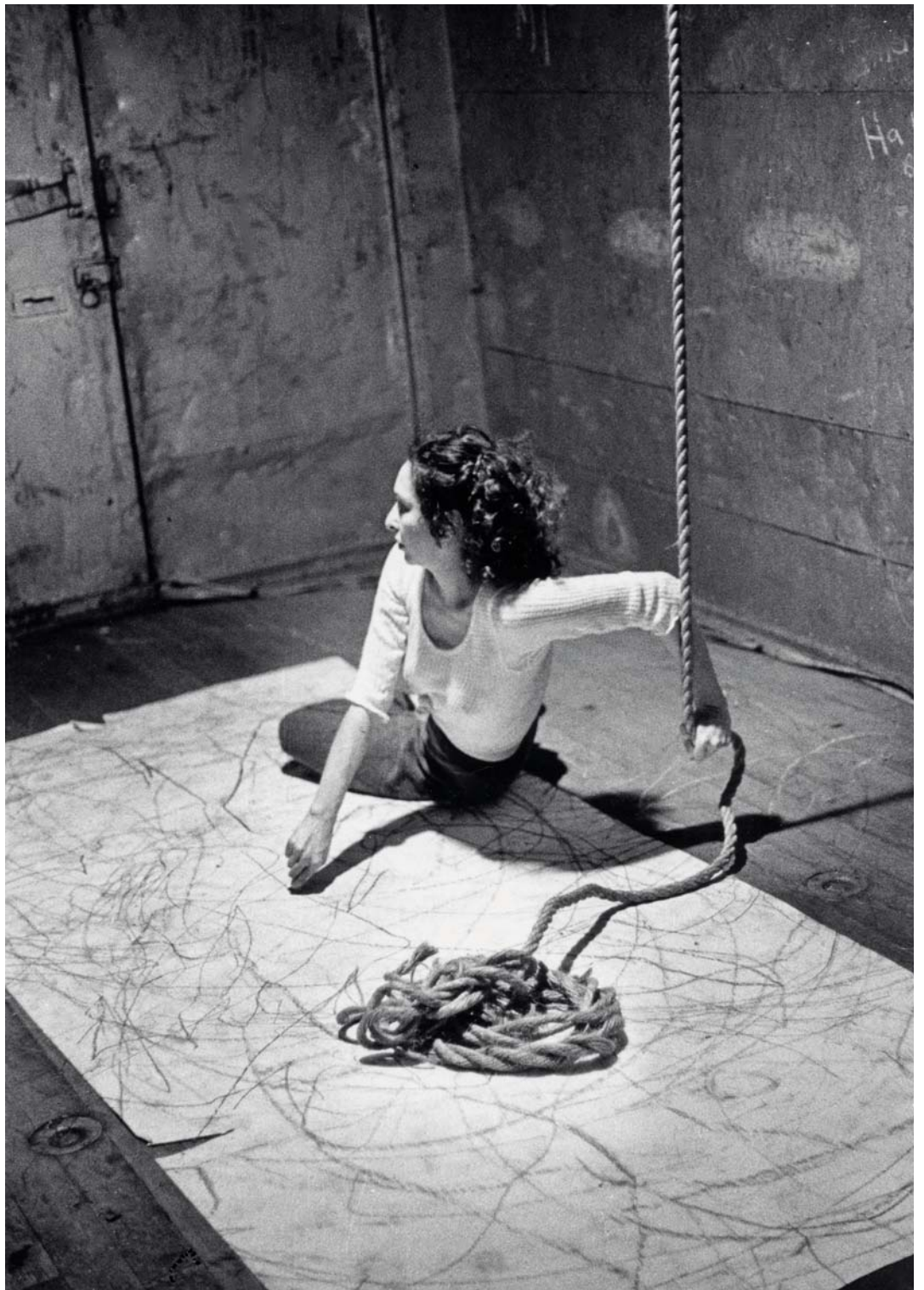
Wall 1. *What Lies Behind*: posters, exhibit flyers from past works.

Wall 2. *How Did You Get Here*: index file of schools, museums, persons I wrote to arrange a tour in California; form letters I sent and the replies (or marked «no reply»). This resulted in several messages being made directly on the letters: «I'm sorry our budget was committed» ... «Glad you got here,» «Please write us again.»

Wall 3. *Getting Here*: tracks of arranging life details in order to leave home. Domestic work advice to partner: dust, laundry, shale, straw, manure for garden, weeding, set out early sprouts. Bills to be paid/to be delayed. Letters to Calif.—museum, Millie Hodson, Tom Luddy/travel arrangements. Materials to take/preparatory drawings and scores.

Wall 4. *Being Here*: Accumulated handwritten maps of Berkeley streets; find health food store, grocery, photography store; welcome note from host Tom Luddy: «your room is on the left ... hope our cats get along ... Kenneth Anger may be staying upstairs, I return on Thursday,» etc. ... scraps of paper: phone numbers, names, assistance, meetings. ...

Wall 5. *Messages Today*: On this wall (and on museum stand located near central reading and writing table) instructions notify the spectators to ring a bell if they wish to speak with me—thus determining the cycles of the rope suspension. Many people felt unable to intrude on my concentration but wrote messages on the wall, tacked up notes, letters, reactions ... (Central table had a bell, notepaper, pens, books of my writings).



Trackings,
9 December 1973
Performance
10th Annual Avant
Garde Festival, Grand
Central Terminal,
New York, NY, US
Photo: Tal Streeter