

# *Carolee Schneemann*

Flange 6rpm  
May 11 – June 22, 2013







1

Vulva's Morphia 1995  
mounted 36 panel photo grid with hand  
painting, text inserts on wood, and four  
electric fans, 96×60×4", overall installation

2

Untitled (from Dust series) May 1984  
ink, ashes, acrylic paint, string, vegetable  
dye, glass particles, photograph  
on fabric, and circuit board on heavy  
rag paper, 37×49½"

3

Saw Over Want 1980-82  
self-shot photographic grid: chromaprints,  
dye, text inserts on wood, 77×99", overall  
installation

## An Epistemology of the Kinetic

Movement has been a medium for Carolee Schneemann since the inception of her art practice. Beginning in the 1960s through the present moment, Schneemann has made more than 60 kinetic works. The vector of speed positioned against the metric of duration has shaped works that are at once temporal and affective. While much has been written about the influence of performance in Schneemann's work, this has been to the detriment of examining her agility and prowess with sculptural materials—especially those in constant motion. In a sense, this exhibition traverses three distinct periods of her sculptural concepts: one in which she placed much emphasis on the kinetic body itself as material, another in which she explored the flux of information as a political and aesthetic engine, and her most recent exploration—in Flange 6rpm (2011-13)—of moving serial abstraction.

The entrance of language into her work allowed her to re-think materiality. In particular, language transformed the way the body was represented. Saw Over Want (1980-82) and Vulva's Morphia (1995) present photographic representations of particular parts of the body, everyday objects and ancient icons. Both pieces are organized in grid-like formations with equal attention to language and image. In each, language emphasizes and confounds the image. Saw Over Want points to the seeming elementary phases of language acquisition, i.e. the words themselves herald from Schneemann's childhood diary, rehearsing early narrative as an already fractured performance of erotic longing, "saw over want, saw over want." Moreover, all original photographs that compose the grid of Saw Over Want were photocopied and then sent to a lab where they were converted into C-Prints, thereby degrading or inverting the indexical nature of the photographic. This process, to borrow from Schneemann, made them "sensual and tactile," giving the viewer a sense that the images were melting.<sup>1</sup>

Vulva's Morphia performs a similar language-to-image disjuncture, but instead of pointing to one's earliest efforts to write, the sentences refer more directly to the act of reading. Their tone mimics classic primers, such as the Dick and Jane series that was designed to teach children to read from the 1930s through the 1970s. Injected with the ideological frames of gender, class, and "good behavior," these books taught children the utopian conventions of American suburban values: family, property, monogamy, progeny, and pet care (in the

1930s, the books featured a cat replaced later by Spot, the dog). Schneemann's irreverent feminist primer turns Jane into a forceful, sophisticated Vulva who not only reads, but paints, deciphers, decodes, and defies her gendered norms: "Vulva strips Naked, fills her mouth and cunt with paint brushes and runs into the Cedar Bar at midnight to frighten the ghosts of de Kooning, Pollock, Kline." Schneemann enacts a reverse engineering of materials, converting the photographic into soft malleable sculpture blown by little electric fans. Hard and soft, stasis and movement are flipped: if, as Schneemann ruminates, "cock is a thing and cunt a place," then vulva is the substrate of this techno-erotic archive.<sup>2</sup> Ancient iconic vulva-like engravings are pushed up against red, hot "meat systems" cooled, moved, and expanded by electronic intervention. Lacan stripped bare by Tesla, renders gender signification into so many jarring fragments.

The grids of text and photography point insistently to the circuits of computer boards embedded in Schneemann's Dust Paintings (1983-86). Cross-referencing the glut of digital information generated by the violence that resulted from the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) with the detritus of found materials from local road kill (inserted in a painting from 1984 is a photograph of the carcass of a deer found near her studio in New Paltz), Schneemann generates maps of domestic and international conflict. The Dust Paintings prefigure her large scale Scroll Painting with Exploded TV (1990-91) [projected in this exhibition onto the floor in which the Dust Paintings are exhibited], as well as point back to her film, Viet Flakes (1965) and her multi-media performance, Snows (1967). The Dust Paintings, like Scroll Painting with Exploded TV, were made with automated processes—mechanized mops that shot out over the canvases dripping paint and shaking dust onto their surfaces. Schneemann describes the process of their creation: "it was like a snowstorm."<sup>3</sup> In both cases, the avalanches of materials that shower the canvases (and in respect to Snows, the performers) mirror the chaotic, immersive, often contradictory information that was generated in very specific conflicts (Lebanon, Palestine, and previously, Vietnam). The Dust Paintings, to borrow from Manuel DeLanda, depict the "storm in the computer," a simulation of emergent systems found in more simplistic models of fluctuating temperature and pressure levels associated with weather.<sup>4</sup> Information flows are not always readily apparent in Schneemann's



work, but they inform the heart and crux of her most ambient works. Indeed, one can feel the use of this tension throughout Schneemann's work over several different periods: materials like paint, light, fur, sound, foil, flour threaten to mute and envelop the more computational indexes of the work. But, indeed, this is both the conundrum and power of Schneemann's oeuvre: informational matrixes defy simple representation. In *Snows*, for example, audience members unknowingly controlled the flow of information (sound, color, and film) through their reactions—sensed by contact microphones—to the work.<sup>v</sup>

*Flange 6rpm* is the newest work in the exhibition, as well as the most abstract. And, while it seems to resist interpretation through any of the frames addressed in this essay, presented in concert with *Dust Paintings*, *Vulva's Morphia*, and *Saw Over Want*, it seems to contain at least several of their methods: erotic pulse, temporal process, and torque. As is the case with many of Schneemann's initial impetuses for the structure of her pieces, she says to have first located the shapes in a dream. And, then: "the work evolved from a simple drawing which demanded realization as moving sculptures."<sup>vi</sup> *Flange 6rpm* is composed of seven sculptural units, hand-sculpted and cast in aluminum. They are at once awkward and elegant, moving continuously from side to side, upwards and downwards. The motorized "kinetic theater" of *Flange 6rpm* is reminiscent of similar non-mechanized movement patterns in Schneemann's *Snows* and *Up To and Including Her Limits* (1973–76) in which rope is the technology that allows for movements both vertically and horizontally. This recurs in mechanized form in *SNAFU* (2004) in which sculptural forms rise and fall on pulleys, embellished by a projection of horses edited so that they run vertically, rather than horizontally across their usual kinetic paths. *Flange 6rpm* seems to integrate both the horizontal and vertical axes that many of her kinetic works explore, except that—with each pass—the sculptural elements threaten to touch each other, "creating a sense of tension and unpredictability." The speed of six revolutions per minute that Schneemann often chooses to run the motors in most of her kinetic sculptures allows for an almost eerie, contemplative slowness. One might say that Schneemann's work offers—and this exhibition attempts to at least point toward this larger arc— an epistemology of the kinetic. Not the version that Futurism attempted to deliver, caught up as it was in the fervor of speed (rpm) as an end in

and of itself, but rather as an exploration, a careful, relentless study of the movement and shape of mark making—painting, drawing, writing, performing—as they intersect with and are transformed by the indexical apparatuses of film, photography, and distributed networks.

— Melissa Ragona

- i Personal conversation with Carolee Schneemann, New Paltz, New York, March 15, 2013.
- ii *Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects*, Carolee Schneemann, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002), 305. The full passage reads: "Vulva ruminates on 'negative space': if cock is a thing and cunt a place. As a painter, Vulva has never accepted the concept of 'negative space' as anything more than a construct by which to emphasize 'things' in a foregrounding...as if space started and stopped according to concept or will, rather than tactility, light, chaos, a shifting gestalt." "Meat systems" is a term that Schneemann uses to describe her works made in collaboration with the British artist John Liffon in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For a more extended discussion, see: "Terminal Velocities," Kenneth White, *San Francisco Arts Quarterly* 11 (Winter 2012).
- iii Personal conversation with Carolee Schneemann, New Paltz, New York, March 15, 2013.
- iv *Philosophy and Simulation: The Emergence of Synthetic Reason*, Manuel DeLanda, (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2011), 11.
- v *Imaging Her Erotics*, 82.vi Artist Statement for *Flange 6rpm* (2011-12), Carolee Schneemann, April 8, 2013.
- vii IBID.

*Flange 6rpm* marks P·P·O·W's fourth exhibition of the work of Carolee Schneemann. We have had the great honor of working with this exceptional and visionary artist since 2002 when the gallery presented "Embodied". In 2006 we organized "Corporeal—Photographic Works 1963–2005" and then in 2009 "Painting, What it Became" with a catalogue and text by Maura Reilly. The gallery has made an effort with each show to present the depth of Schneemann's life work, from her drawings, and paintings, photographs, collages, constructions, to her performance works and films through the entirety of her career. It is with great joy we present *Flange 6rpm* featuring the artist's most recent creation. We wish to thank Susan Alzner, Anneliis Beadnell, Tierney Drummond, Kelly Freeman, Helena Kaminski, Melissa Ragona, Aaron Zimmerman, and Project Projects for helping realize this exhibition.

— Wendy Olsoff and Penny Pilkington



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**P.P.O.W**

Front and back cover  
Flange 6rpm 2011-13  
foundry poured aluminum  
sculptures and motors,  
7 units, approximately  
48x28x36" each

Design by Project Projects

