

Carolee Schneemann:
Parallel Axis, 1973, 4 gelatin
 silver prints on board, 30 by
 45 inches overall; at Carolina
 Nitsch.



her heroes, Freilicher's works hum with vibrant color, but the exhibition included recent paintings, such as *Harmonic Convergence* (2008), *Hydrangea* (2008) and *Window* (2009), which also feature neutral, earthy tones. The flowers' petals are rendered in explosive colors in these paintings, but the vases, the tables they sit on and the background forests or boxy assemblages of urban buildings are direct descendents of Giorgio Morandi's pacific compositions.

These somber works, however, did not dominate the exhibition. Rather, the space was filled with spring in full eruption. Freilicher's paintings offered a reprieve from the lingering winter and faltering economy. One sensed how landscapes and flowers have the power to arouse an almost primitive predisposition toward vitality and unadulterated joy.

—Nick Obourn

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

CAROLINA NITSCH AND P.P.O.W.

Carolee Schneemann's radical, body-centric performance art reached its apex with *Interior Scroll* (1975), in which the artist read aloud from a typescript she unspooled from her vagina. A documentation of the original performance in East Hampton, N.Y., in 13 striking black-and-white photos (by Andrew McCall), was on view at Nitsch in "Performance Photographs From the 1970s," alongside a segment of the 2-inch-wide, accordion-fold scroll (*Scroll Box—The Cave*), in which Schneemann denigrates masculinist criticism. The era's sexual politics

are elsewhere foregrounded. In the five 29-by-23-inch panels of *Bloodwork Diary* (1972), Schneemann organized menstrual blottings on squares of tissue paper into a grid, that emblem of patriarchy. For the 1973 photowork *Parallel Axis*, Schneemann arches her body over the racing perspective of a train track whose vanishing point coincides with her straining thighs.

Early in the preceding decade, Schneemann clearly had begun to find the conventions of painting inadequate. Yet in the essay accompanying "Painting, What It Became," at PPOW, curator Maura Reilly vigorously supports the artist's dubious claim that her mature performative work was a refinement rather than a repudiation of the formal issues that preoccupied painters: gesture, framing edge, figure/ground and the use of everyday materials.

While her early canvases are conventionally expressionistic, *Fur Wheel* (1962), a slowly rotating lampshade frame outfitted with animal pelts, bits of mirror and squashed, dangling tin cans, conveys Schneemann's dissatisfaction with static arrangements of pigment and support. At 8 by 11 feet, *Four Fur Cutting Boards* (1963), resembling a folding screen, is bedecked with motorized umbrellas, a hubcap, shelflike protrusions and strokes of red and blue paint. The artist gets more of herself into her work by positioning her paint-streaked, camera-ready body in front of *Four Fur Cutting Boards*, demoted to a prop, as documented in *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1963), a suite of black-and-white photos.

A bathing-suited Schneemann and company made a spectacle of themselves in *Meat Joy* (1964), a 12-minute film of the restaging of the original Paris performance at Judson Church in New York. It opens with ritualistic, synchronized movement that leads to a simulated orgy, garnished with sausages, dead fish and a chicken carcass. Pots of paint and clouds of crumpled paper mock solitary, studio-bound angst, as does the soundtrack of traffic noise and French pop tunes. The 30-minute, silent *Fuses* (1964-66) documents Schneemann and her partner's lovemaking. The film stock is painted, burned and scratched, shrouding the action in clouds of colorful distortion. Beautiful and absorbing, its formal devices—jump cut, close-up, dissolve—are cinematic, not pictorial.

Her legacy secure as a protofeminist pioneer of body art, Schneemann is understandably keen to keep interpretive avenues open. But how are trailblazers' endeavors consumed and digested by future generations? Does an appeal to a "postfeminist" audience require distancing that work—as the PPOW show in effect did—from an awareness of the crushing sexism that precipitated it?

—Stephen Maine