

CAROLEE SCHNEEMAN, CARRIE MAE WEEMS AND JENNY PERLIN

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Carolee Schneemann, *Eye Body #5*, 1963. B&W photograph by Erro. 16 3/4 x 20 3/4 inches framed. Image courtesy of Jack Tilton Gallery.

A group exhibition of works by women artists Carolee Schneemann, Carrie Mae Weems and Jenny Perlin possesses no singular signifier of femininity, although it predominately deals with feminine representations. This show is not trying to push for a unifying theme, it simply provides a view of three women of three generations who make art. In this way, the works speak for themselves, avoiding the problematic aspects of an "all-women exhibition" construct. In fact, the three artists show in completely separate spaces of Jack Tilton's spacious gallery. Despite the exhibition's timid absence of a title, the questions of authorship, power and control of representation impose themselves upon viewers in the work of all three artists.

Jenny Perlin's captivating three-channel video installation *Sight Reading* (2004) only resembles the documentary mode of filmmaking. The artist's strategic interventions reveal her presence to be much more than simply documenting an action. The action in this particular case is a sight-reading performance by three different classically trained pianists who are recorded while performing Schumann's Piano Concerto in

A minor for the first time. As they make mistakes—which they often do while grappling with the complex score—Perlin's punishes them by fading to black for five seconds, before resuming. Thus, the three channels fall out of sync and what started out as a harmony of three players becomes a disjointed cacophony.

Carolee Schneemann mounted a superbly elegant display of the photographic documentation of her pioneer actions and performances from the 60s and 70s: *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1963), *Ices Strip* (1972), *Parallel Axis* (1975), *Up To And Including Her Limits* (1976), and a video of her in action, *Body Collage* (1967). As early as 1963, Schneemann was at the forefront of the body art movement, working with her own rather spectacular body. This artist photographed her own eroticized body incorporated in an environment of large panels, broken mirrors, glass, lights and motorized objects. Schneemann utilizes different strategies when dealing with the feminine presence and its representation, creating new perspectives of the female body as both subject and object.

Avoiding mere recapitulation of her pioneer work, Schneemann revisits with vigor her seminal work of 1975, *Interior Scroll*, by making a new, clean, visually compelling print. Having transformed this extraordinary performance into a photographic scroll of sorts, the (artist's) "live body" is not longer a site of representation, it has been transposed into the photograph.

The documented material, which had become the "forensic evidence" that bears witness to the original event transcends mere documents and becomes an art object in its own right.

Carrie Mae Weems' photographs possess a stark beauty. In the project *Sites for Record* (2005), commissioned by Beacon Cultural Foundation, Weems disguises her representations in documentary mode, by capturing the decay of a post-industrial city and its transformation. But only on the surface are these photographs documentary: Weems represents herself, with her back to the camera, clad in black and barefoot. These photographs investigate racial and gender implications of representation. The most powerful image in the series shows Weems lying on the front lawn of a traditional American house with a porch and an American flag. Her dark silhouette undermines the viewer's expectations of traditional female representations. Although she evokes a traditional reclining nude, she subverts the pose by turning her back to the viewers. The artist, having the ultimate control, blocks the viewer's gaze, and lets us see only what she wants us to see.

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