



The Artist's Hand

photographs, films and videos by Carrie Schneider

Robert T. Wright Community Gallery of Art, College of Lake County

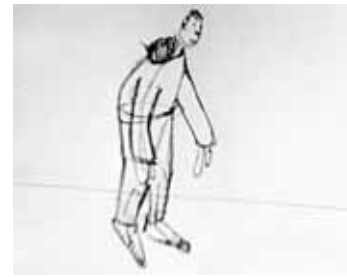


Learning to Fall

The hand takes on a personality of its own in Carrie Schneider's photographs and films. Whether grasping or groping, caressing or scrubbing, shadowing or doubling the movements of another person, the hand conveys a desire for connection and cathexis in abstract, gestural form. In the video "On Mom's Lap" (2006), we see Schneider curled in her mother's lap, the latter's face lying just out of frame. In an attempt to snuggle closer, Schneider puts her hand on her mother's shoulder. Her mother gently pushes it away. Schneider's fingers creep up again, this time more insistently, and is met with countervailing pressure from her mother's hand, which gently but firmly moves her back in a cycle of push and pull that continues until a temporary compromise is reached.

It's a primal dance, this tango of palms and fingers, parent and child, self and other, one that anyone who's experienced the messy conundrums of human intimacy (and that means almost all of us) has danced many times before. Whether it takes the form of a mirrored *pas de deux* or an awkward clinch on a barroom dance floor, the dance, in Schneider's lexicon of images, metaphorically enacts the ambiguous relation of self and other. And of course, as Freud and subsequent generations of psychoanalytic theorists have argued, we first become aware of our selves in relation to an Other in the context of the nuclear family unit.

"On Mom's Lap" is one of four works that comprise *Family Videos* (all 2006), which were inspired by Schneider's own childhood memories. The artist enlisted her parents and her adult siblings in reenactments of ordinary moments from childhood in which physical expressions of love and affection were tinged with ambivalence or aggression. In one, Schneider's younger brother lies on top of her, smothering her body with his own; in another, her father washes her hair, his touch



painfully rough yet also tender. The video "Big Brother's Sweater" is based not on actual events but on her emory of wanting to be as close to her older brother as possible, so close that she could squeeze herself into his bulky grey sweater.

This idea is taken a step further in Schneider's *Derelict Self* photographs, which posit the act of mimicry and doubling as a perverse gesture of self-fulfillment. In these images, the actions of a young man (Schneider's older brother) are furtively mirrored by a smaller, slightly disheveled-looking female figure (Schneider) whose hair and dress are styled in a manner similar to his. The smaller figure shadows the larger one's physical trajectory: she sleeps beside him, drapes her arm alongside his over the mattress; stretches her arm out for the same book or brand of cereal; wraps her wet body around his in the bathtub and simulates his movements while urinating. In its efforts to achieve coherency, the derelict self mimics or appropriates the behaviors, actions and even the form of someone or something other than itself. In doing so, however, it begins to lose touch with its original form, like an abandoned house that's fallen into disrepair.

Schneider's images also give physical shape to derelict feelings and emotions—the kind that are profoundly felt but are difficult, if not impossible, to openly acknowledge. Perhaps this is why they so often feature characters of a peculiar and even monstrous nature: the writhing, double-bodied male/female dancers in *Slow Dance* (2009); the amorphous figure cocooned in shapeless grey felt in *Utö* (2008); the woman whose body appears to be caving into the reflective glass of a boutique window (*Recession*), or whose face is swallowed up by a pile of McDonald's cheeseburgers (*Miss America*; both photographs 2009).

Top: Carrie Schneider, sketch for Slow Dance storyboard, 2009

Schneider's more recent bodies of work explore notions of the self in relation to its surrounding landscape. The photograph *In the Pines (Fallen Women)*, 2006/2008, is set in a picturesque woodland setting where sunlight glints through the trees. Wearing a white tank top and panties, Schneider lies on the ground, gazing with a lover's focus at the small mound of earth that is cupped within her left hand. She assumes a similar pose in the photograph *From Here* (not included in this exhibition), which riffs on the famous surf-soaked love scene from the 1953 film *From Here to Eternity*. *Fallen Women* references another type of "derelict self:" the familiar cliché of the good woman who is undone by her own sexual desire. But this work also hints at some of the more feral aspects of erotic yearning that don't fit into Hollywood's airbrushed take on what it means to fall in love. Schneider's *Fallen Women* photographs also bear comparison to the work of an earlier generation of female artists like Ana Mendieta, whose practice involved an intense and at times erotic identification with land and landscape. Mendieta's *Siluetas* come foremost to mind, along with her 1975 performance *On Giving Life*, in which the naked Mendieta mounts, embraces



and "breathes life" into a skeleton she has placed on the grass—a series of actions that requires us to consider procreation, sexuality and perversion as coherent aspects of feminine identity.

To fall is to momentarily lose control of the body, a feeling that can be both terrifying and exhilarating. When we stumble, we are displaced from our current train of thought and forced into acute awareness of ourselves, our bodies and surroundings. Here, then, we confront the limits of mimicry: a fall can be experienced firsthand but is impossible to replicate or reproduce mimetically, an idea which Schneider's 16MM film *Dress of Good Weather (How Not to Fall)*, 2008, dramatizes. A young woman (Schneider) is walking along the rocky shores of the Finnish seaside when she trips and falls. As she groggily arises, she looks down and sees her dress "ignite" with moving colors that evoke the sky on a beautiful day. Schneider's "dress of good weather"—a reference to Jacques Demy's 1970 film *Donkey Skin*—is an impossible object that reflects a fleeting circumstance. When the images disappear, the young woman repeatedly throws herself upon the ground in an unsuccessful attempt to recreate the original moment. The film ends with Schneider lying on the rocky shoreline, staring into a pool of water that reflects the dark, drifting storm clouds moving in the sky above. It is a moment of absolute physical presence, and it is perfect.

—Claudine Isé

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FEATURED WORKS

- 01 *Untitled (Pines)* from the series *Derelict Self*, 2006–2007
c-print, 36 x 30 inches
Collection of Evan Boris and Monique Meloche, Chicago
- 02 *(Utö)*, 2008
16MM film transferred to HD, 4:30
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago
- 03 *Family Videos (Dad Washing My Hair, Little Brother Crushing, Big Brother's Sweater, On Mom's Lap)*, 2006
suite of four digital videos transferred to HD, 3:00
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago
- 04 *Slow Dance*, 2009
HD film, 7:30
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago
- 05 *In the Pines*, 2006/2008
c-print, 58 x 76 inches
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago
- 06 *Dress of Good Weather (How Not to Fall)*, 2008
16MM film transferred to HD, 4:30
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago
- 07 *Dazzle Camouflage (for Peter)*, 2008
c-print, 45 x 60 inches
Collection of LFC/Martin Zimmerman
- 08 *Las Bebidas ("The Drinks")*, 2007
c-print, 48 x 60 inches
Collection of Caren Yusem, Chicago
- 09 *Untitled (Library)* from the series *Derelict Self*, 2006–2007
c-print, 30 x 36 inches
Collection of LFC/Martin Zimmerman
- 10 *Untitled (Woodchips)* from the series *Derelict Self*, 2006–2007
c-print, 36 x 30 inches
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago
- 11 *Untitled (Tub)* from the series *Derelict Self*, 2006–2007
c-print, 30 x 36 inches
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago
- 12 *Untitled (Bar)* from the series *Derelict Self*, 2006–2007
c-print, 30 x 36 inches
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago
- 13 *Ghost (for Salla)*, 2010
c-print, 40 x 60 inches
Collection of Caren Yusem, Chicago
- 14 *The Kiss*, 2008
c-print, 40 x 50 inches
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago
- 15 *Recession*, 2009
c-print, 30 x 36 inches
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago
- 16 *Miss America*, 2009
c-print, 30 x 40 inches
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago
- 17 *A House Burning*, 2010
four c-prints, 40 x 50 inches each; HD film, 1:00
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago
- 18 *Self Portrait (Levitating)*, 2009
c-print, 40 x 50 inches
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago



CARRIE SCHNEIDER (b. 1979 Chicago, lives Brooklyn) received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from Carnegie Mellon University (2001), and her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2007). She attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2007), and the Kuvataide-akatemia (Finnish Academy of Fine Arts) in Helsinki as a Fulbright Fellow (2007–2008).

Recent solo exhibitions include the Museum of Contemporary Art; Chicago, the Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki; and the Trondheim Academy of Fine Art, Norway. Group exhibitions include: santralistanbul, Istanbul; Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; Gallery 44, Toronto; The Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago; and The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh.

Schneider was a visiting artist at the Bergen National Academy of Art in Finse, Norway; HIAP Helsinki; the Atlantic Center for the Arts, Florida (with master artist Rineke Dijkstra); and the Centre for Contemporary Art in Lagos, Nigeria. Permanent collections include: Art Institute of Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Photography (Chicago), and Centre Canadien d'Architecture, Montreal. Awards include the Joan Mitchell Foundation Residency Grant, Illinois Arts Council Individual Artist Project Grant and a production grant from AVEK, the Finnish Center for Media Culture.

CLAUDINE ISÉ is a freelance arts writer who for the past decade has worked in the field of contemporary art as a writer and curator. Before moving to Chicago in 2008, Isé was Associate Curator of Exhibitions at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio, where she organized a number of solo and thematic group exhibitions. Currently she writes for artforum.com, art:21 blog, and ARTnews.



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Robert T. Wright Community Gallery of Art
August 20–September 26, 2010

Gallery Hours

Monday–Thursday, 8 a.m.–10 p.m.

Friday–Saturday, 9 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Sunday 1–5 p.m.

Holiday hours may vary.

Information

www.gallery.clcillinois.edu

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College of Lake County

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Cover: In the Pines (detail), 2006/2008, c-print, 58 x 76 inches