

DISAPPEARING WITH EVERYTHING

After and With Carolee Schneemann

SARAH H. PAULSON

(HOLLY FAUROT & SARAH H. PAULSON)

Thanks to the past we (Holly Faurot & Sarah H. Paulson) can move to the future. Thanks to the movement we can transfer it to the next limb. Thanks to the copy, we can copy it again—and it will change. We repeat the movement of an arm. We videotape it. We ask someone else to copy the arm gesture. It falls apart. The movement melts into something clumsy. It scoops up the invisible dirt of the air and throws it about in a rage minus the anger.

We can copy because we copy. We don't copy (in an external sense) because the copy is living inside of us. The copy is living in the space between our (Holly and Sarah's) bodies, in the same way that it is living in the space between all bodies and between the spaces of one's own body. The copy is transmitted by the humanness of the body field. It is the game of hot potato. It is the transference. It is the ability to be in multiple places at one time.

We thank Carolee Schneemann for her body, her body in space, and her body's markings. The rubbings are what rubbed the tracks in the earth (and paint and canvas) so that we could use our bodies without having to lay the first tracks. Carolee as a painter, a performance artist, a female, and above all, a human—Her forms have granted us the permission and the faith that we can use bodies in art and living without vulnerability or regret. In performance, we are documenting our own lives. It is personal, and because we find faith in

the personal, it translates to those who have found some stray threads of the work to tie to their own stray threads. We run our lives through colanders so we can catch the drips after they fall to the bottom of the kitchen sink and mix with the residue of last night's sauce. It is that messy and that precise.

In my personal experience, being an artist is not a choice; it comes from something greater—a certain necessity. It is not my preference to regard myself as a performance artist. In the same way, Holly and I are not seeking to represent something outside of our centers. There is a necessary task to shove one's hand into one's own guts to pull out the accumulation of muck, and it is this muck that is presented.

In *Thank god for the one who pushes. "I hope I wait for the hug."* (2011), performed at English Kills Art Gallery (Brooklyn) during the Maximum Perception Performance Festival (curated by Peter Dobill and Phoenix Lights), Holly and I sit naked opposite one another rubbing the backs and tops of our heads together. Brush/grass rests in our laps, while two videos play behind us. In one video, I sit in an antique wheelchair de-needling severed branches from a fir tree. In the other, scenes of Holly rocking back and forth on part of the wheelchair are spliced with images of her imprinting her body with the rattan from the wheelchair. In front of us, our friend



Holly Faurot & Sarah H. Paulson, *Thank god for the one who pushes. "I hope I wait for the hug."* (2011). Performance with Katurah Hutcheson at English Kills Art Gallery, Brooklyn, New York. Photograph by Rob Peyrebrune. Image courtesy of the artists.

Katurah Hutcheson rocks on the same wheelchair part that Holly rocks on. Katurah eats chocolate out of a wooden printer drawer and spits it out. She burns moxa (mugwort) in the compartments, creating a mist of smoke. It took Holly and me thirty years of muck and shit, burnings, experience with the body, multiple moves, accumulations, purgings, prunings, relationships, adjustments, needles, gains, losses, and everything else to achieve this work.

Carolee holds a place in our thirty years of developing work, and therefore, is a shared figure in our nine years of collaboration. She holds this space in the same way that our accumulated experiences manifest themselves within a work.

Up To And Including Her Limits (1973-76) has been a secret song in my mind. We are so far from it, yet so close. It is impossible to neglect the romanticized movements of the body, mind, and spirit of the past;

however, in seeing this piece installed at the Museum of Modern Art in December, there was something primal, raw, and authentic that came through. The nude body was secondary—first was the work. The body was an instrument called forth to transcribe. This installation is the product of a liaison. Here, the body's form is no longer a body. The artist's body disappears in this installation, yet it still weights the space—the empty harness holds the invisible relic. It is the quality of line that comes through that pays reverence to the Master. Her body is held by her self as the Master Painter. At the same time, the installation takes the power away from the act as it zooms out to exist as an homage to the act.

This installation of *Up To And Including Her Limits* is a reversal of our performances in that the act of drawing (past) becomes a stand-in director, or placeholder, for the videos (present—derived from what came before and during “past”). The installation



Holly Faurot & Sarah H. Paulson, *Thank god for the one who pushes. "I hope I wait for the hug."* (2011). Video stills from video component of performance at English Kills Art Gallery, Brooklyn, New York. Images courtesy of the artists.

provides the reference point; the human in the video is the performer. The video follows the installation in this case. Carolee presents the audience with the unintended eroticism of doing what one does because one must do it. The ritual becomes seductive as the act of undressing is shown; yet the mind/body/spirit cannot be accurately translated. This work cannot speak about the body alone, because multiple skins or slates are being slipped in-between the audience and the piece. The audience is, at the very least, one layer removed. It is everything all at once—thrown at us (and at herself)—like overlapping and moving points on the body, or like the burden of being human.

There is an acknowledgement of the struggle that was a struggle, which is now no longer the struggle. Again, the body has disappeared in real time and remains via the moving archive. The only movement that remains in real time is through the lines of the drawing. The harness exists on an edge between harsh physicality and delicate entanglement. We see Carolee in the video swinging with arms up in a snapshot image of playfulness, which transforms to a recline that calls to mind a degree of rigor. Again, it is everything: the playfulness, the humor, the burden, the beauty, the tenderness, the rebellion, and the sacrifice.

This corner in the MoMA takes on the form of a canyon. What comes with the freefall is the paradox of constriction and expansiveness. Nestled yet breathless. The visceral experience of a scene or a painting or a walk through someone else's space is both irreproducible and immediately recognizable. It is a reminder that

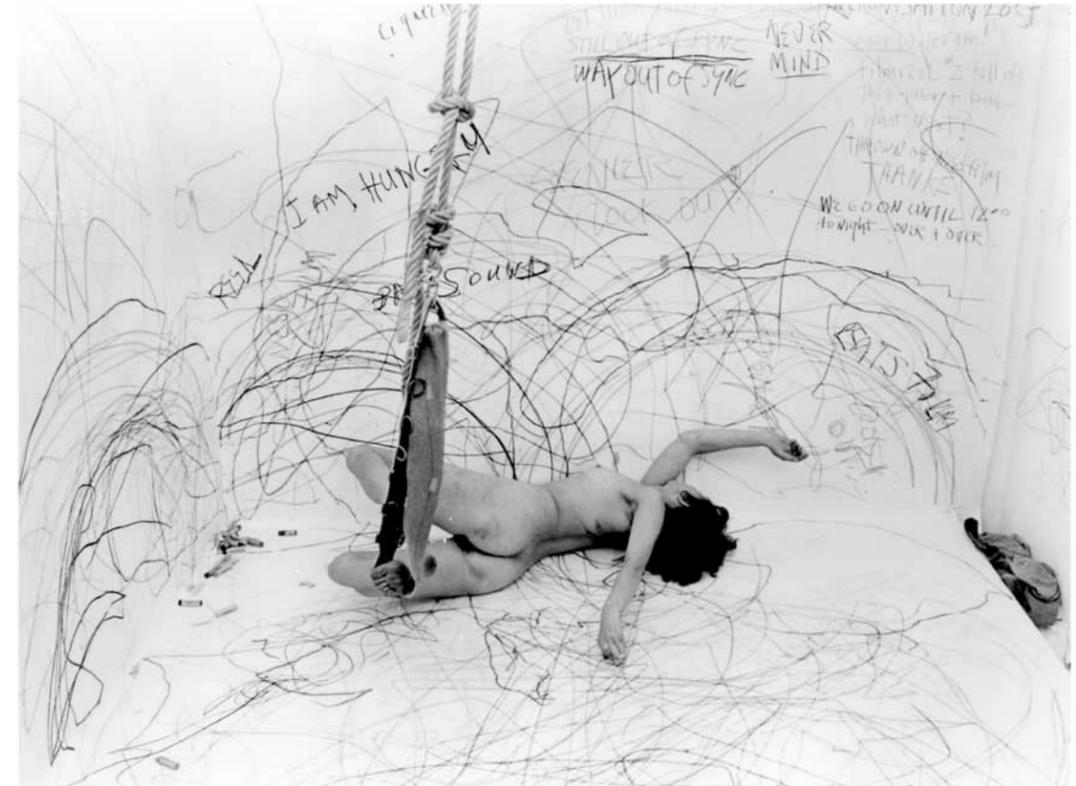
humans share experience originating from different and distinct moments. Her lines strike certain chords, and when the right scene on a video matches up, there is an opportunity to experience a sliver of ecstasy or simple nostalgia for something unknown. The limbs, the suspension, the dragging, the feeling of being suspended—aided or restricted: This is the paradox.

The repetition and the mundane result in an elevation. She doesn't seem to perform. She merely allows a glimpse in. It is like watching someone's lips graze the lip of a glass and noticing how the skin pushes against the delicate surface. It is like noticing how the flesh molds itself and unmolds itself until we don't know which side is more delicate. Carolee's work allows us to zoom in and zoom out and witness the precious and fleeting nature of experience.

Years ago, Holly and I wrote the following text about our performances:

We'd like to share our epiphanies, moments of hopelessness, debauchery, victories, whirlwinds of energy, and secret exchanges through these intimate spectacles. The performances are a celebration and a reminder of everything that can happen all at once. We seek to bring humanness and the body to the public in its most shimmering form, whether it is through a triumphant sensory experience or a grotesque yet celebrated vision of reality.

As Carolee swings between these multiple directions, both conceptually and literally, the



Carolee Schneemann, *Up To And Including Her Limits* (1973-76). Performance with crayon on paper, rope, and harness suspended from ceiling. Photograph by Henrik Gaard. Image courtesy of the artist

description above gets activated. Multiple planes and walls are touched by multiple planes and dimples in the body. She overlaps materials, content, media, surfaces and more to create something that reaches beyond a calculated arm span but that also leaves us with nothing. One gesture or contortion is replaced by another. The empty harness. The empty trousers. The spirit without the body. It is certainly *a reminder of everything that can happen all at once.*

Over the history of our collaboration, Holly and I have found our selves shedding multiple layers of skin. We have scraped ourselves of the grime and placed it on the table. We accumulate more. Each performance picks up where the last one left off. The empty harness reminds me of where we stand and where we once stood. We are becoming more invisible with a stronger and

stronger stance. The empty harness = The immortality of the invisible. I experienced this shivering of residue in the installation of *Up To And Including Her Limits*. The empty harness held her body, like a cradle beside the grown baby, channeling the heavens and the grave. We are working towards a white wall that is as great and as small as a chip of paint. There are colors behind it, and there are other chips on the floor. Where there was once a process there is now a speck. It leaves nothing but minute evidence that assimilates into the geography of space. There is no room for rehearsal—we strip from there even before the stripping.

As we disappear, as we age, as the process evolves and falls apart and opens itself again as something we would call a “performance,” we can thank Carolee. We can know that she has fallen open with us and before us—over and over again.



Holly Faurot & Sarah H. Paulson, *Rotten Metal Achievers* (2009). 5-hour performance at Grace Exhibition Space, Brooklyn, New York. Photograph by Iris Jaffe. Image courtesy of the artists.

Holly and I have one another. We have the past, and we have Carolee's body rubbing up against what we can rub up to. We have her copy; we have our copy; and we can tie them together with gratitude. When one copies or one follows, the following reverses, and it is unclear where the impetus for the movement began and to where it was handed. This is human language.

Performance is the closest effort we can make (beyond language) in matching what it means to be human. This means that there is a risk of a loss in translation, as well as a risk of projection and superfluous aspects that may be added to what comprises the human experience. This gap and what is transmitted from this gap is performance. The loss and gain add a vertical component through the linear line of existence. The cross is formed. The moment of performance forms the location of the crosshair.

We would not make our work if we knew how it would turn out. When we began collaborating on the *Strap Series* (2002-04), we removed ourselves from the performances. We stripped the performances of our baggage, which yielded beautiful works that held a degree of perfection. They couldn't continue, though, because they didn't carry our muck and guts. We realized that we needed to rebury ourselves with our stuff so we could take it off again and again.

Regarding our current process, we have developed a non-verbal language that can acknowledge or dismiss possible options within a work. We communicate in a way that allows us to come separately to the same or

similar conclusions, and then, at the last moment—even during a performance—we are able to sweep in to change a movement or direction. Our adaptability has increased to a level that reflects the layering of the process and product. It is like we're lying alive on our own graves—sandwiching the action of living and the future of death. That line forming the barrier and contract of life and death is what we have slithered up to. There is so much light in that. It is where it shines, and it is this place—this line—that is highlighted for an audience. The audience can then choose its position, and this position can shift.

Our 5-hour performance, *Rotten Metal Achievers* (2009), was broken down into five sections. In hour one, we rotate on limestone slabs under low hanging lights, while watching/following a video of a woman (Laura Barnard) swimming upstream in a river. Hours two, three, and four are composed of various sequences of copied movement and an interlude presented by the artist Daniel Bainbridge. During the final hour, the space is cleared of performers, and Holly and I rotate around one of the limestone slabs, surrounded by a pile of mulch. I perform a bull-like motion, which sweeps mulch behind me with the power of my leg. I remove the mulch, but more is piled on top. Holly has my head and my waist in her lunging grip, and she leads me in rotating around the mulch pile. Loss and gain. The task of endurance continues until no more mulch is left to be displaced. We end lying on top of one another, in a ring of dirt. A crop circle. An unintended portal. The



TOP Holly Faurot & Sarah H. Paulson, *Rotten Metal Achievers* (2009). Photograph by Iris Jaffe. Image courtesy of the artists.

BOTTOM Carolee Schneemann, *Up To And Including Her Limits* (1973-76). Performance with crayon on paper, rope, and harness suspended from ceiling. Photograph by Shelley Farkas Davis. Image courtesy of the artist.

bull's-eye pointing to the end. A dug out pit. Two slabs on a slab. It was a spontaneous movement of repetition, determined during the execution.

It took us until the last hour to find this resting place. It is the disappearance and the eradication of experience that instills power in a scene. It becomes rich and speaks of both the past and the future. I saw this stillness and moment between past and future in Carolee Schneemann's installation. This quiet is more powerful than our shared gestures, the common urgency, the reversals, the copy and the follow, aesthetic differences or similarities, performance labels, or starting points. Thank you, Carolee, for the empty harness. Empty harness = Everything and Nothing. You have given us permission to stand and lose it all at once.

Holly Faurot & Sarah H. Paulson have been collaborating on performance artworks since 2002. Faurot & Paulson live and work in Brooklyn, NY. Their work has been presented at English Kills Art Gallery, Brooklyn, NY; Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, NY; Grace Exhibition Space, Brooklyn, NY; Open Realization Contemporary Art Gallery, Beijing, China; and Landhaus Feuerlöscher, Prenning, Austria; among others. www.faurotpaulson.com