



Best in Show

Pol Bury at Chelsea Art Museum; Carolee Schneemann's 'Painting, What It Became'; Wei Dong at Nicholas Robinson

By Robert Shuster

Tuesday, March 10th 2009 at 2:23pm

Carolee Schneemann: 'Painting, What It Became'

Whatever you think of Carolee Schneemann's art, which has often involved Dionysian displays of herself, you have to admire her enduring exuberance in making it. In this well-selected mini-retrospective of her career, Schneemann does everything—swiping a brush, swinging naked, having sex, or smooching a cat—with a kind of reckless candor.

That all-or-nothing approach began in the late 1950s with her paintings, showcased here. Schneemann seems to have tried out everything she'd seen—de Kooning's nervous portraits, Rauschenberg's combines, Cornell's boxed assemblages. The oil is thick and messy, the strokes lunging. It's as if Schneemann were hurrying to find an idea that really suited her.

That turned out to be her body, nude and (let's be honest here) packed with dynamite. What followed was a series of performances and films that combined the energy of action painting with feminist empowerment and the era's sexual breakout. Included in those shown here are the notorious *Meat Joy*, an orgy of barely clad men and women writhing among sausage, fish, and plucked chickens; *Body Collage*, which features the artist nude, coated in glue, and rolling around on toilet paper; and the 30-minute 1965 film *Fuses*, a silent, dreamy, and explicit sequence of Schneemann making ecstatic love to her boyfriend. Once dismissed as exhibitionist (like many of her works), *Fuses* now stands as her tour de force. With a nod toward Stan Brakhage, Schneemann painted and scratched the 16mm film, and fragmented its progression. Clouded by color and shadow, the images jump around like a distant memory of youthful vigor. In fact, the entire show is a little like that, and it's a delight. *P.P.O.W.*, 511 W 25th St, 212-647-1044. Through March 28.