



CARRIE
SCHNEIDER

SPHINX

MASS MoCA



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Photographs have a long-standing and fraught relationship to power, authority, and the feminine subject, along with an undeniable hold on our psyches. Carrie Schneider begins with this understanding and mines the camera's relationship to time and the subconscious to reveal its imaginative potential. Her exhibition, *Sphinx*, features three new bodies of photographic work and a 16-mm film, all made in the last 2½ years, with the isolation of the pandemic as a backdrop.

Deep Like (2020–2021) is composed of 105 unique photographs created over the course of a year. Seen together, the works function as a kind of pandemic diary, reflecting a desire to look outward and find connection while simultaneously providing a glimpse into the artist's interior life. Unable to travel and take her camera out into the world, the artist built a room-sized camera with plastic sheeting and a Rodenstock lens and brought her world to it. Like all of us, while confined at home, Schneider sought community and inspiration virtually, finding subjects for her work on her phone: in friends' social media feeds and in online reproductions of art formative to her own thinking. Over time, she built a vocabulary of source images which repeat within her photographs. This lexicon includes works by Chantal Akerman, Imogen Cunningham, Francisco Goya, Sigmar Polke, Twyla Tharp, Charline von Heyl, Sol LeWitt, Jeff Wall, Carrie Mae Weems and others, which she merges with personal images, ranging from her son's drawings to her own random snapshots. Schneider exposes

these existing images, one after another, onto photographic paper, creating a single photograph from multiple exposures. The sumptuous, enigmatic results bring to mind the fuzzy contours of memory and the simultaneous collapse and expansion of time and space, which became all the more palpable during the pandemic.

To create her dream-like images, Schneider works in the dark, the traditional locus of photography as well as dreams and the unconscious mind. Often working before sunrise, she cuts sheets of photo paper from their rolls by feel alone, resulting in imperfect shapes that give the photographs a sense of energy and spontaneity. Though she works in the dark to avoid sunlight exposing the paper, Schneider welcomes random light bleeds which animate the works, producing color washes that lend a painterly appearance to the superimposed images.¹ Schneider calls her camera an "abstraction device," capable of transforming the recognizable imagery of her appropriated source material into something less concrete or familiar, but far richer and closer to the complex realm of the mind and its mysterious workings. While her analog process is rooted in traditional photography, Schneider's incorporation of found imagery, along with her phone, brings the work squarely into the present. The title of the series takes this one step further with its nod to the act of "liking" a post deep in the past of someone's social media feed. The result of falling down the rabbit hole of an endless string of posts might be losing oneself (and time)—or the baring of oneself and one's own desires.

Throughout the exhibition, Schneider produces a veiled projection of self using film stills of actresses Romy Schneider in *L'Important C'est d'Aimer* (1975) and Sissy Spacek playing the titular character in *Carrie* (1976). These images of “Carries” and “Schneiders” are a playful reference to the artist’s own name and an acknowledgment of the role of images—both analog and digital—in the construction (or deconstruction) of self. Our subconscious relationship to the image—particularly our draw toward the human face—is at the core of Schneider’s investigations. Influenced by the psychoanalytic feminist film theory of writer/filmmaker Laura Mulvey, Schneider mines

images from films made around the same time as Mulvey’s seminal 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in which she posited that the female image—often cropped in a close-up—functions as a passive object of male desire and control. Meant to be experienced on the “big screen” in a darkened theater, the film’s effects shift—and might even intensify—on the small screens of laptops and phones.

Images of these screen icons first surfaced in Schneider’s work in *Deep Like* and have taken on more weight, both literally and metaphorically, as the artist’s work has become more sculptural. Schneider’s photographs possess a marked materiality. This is especially true of the large-scale works that naturally developed out of *Deep Like*; in 2022, the artist began working with 40-inch wide paper rolls, cutting them (again, in the dark) every five feet or so. The irregularly shaped sheets move and curl dramatically until restrained under glass. Eight examples from this ongoing body of work are included in the exhibition. The heft of the large rolls and the physical experience of handling them led Schneider to realize more fully the sculptural possibilities of the material. The resulting three-dimensional pieces—each composed of an entire photo paper roll, some hundreds of feet long—give her subjects a body of sorts. In *Revenge Body* (2022) and *Eve of the Future* (2023), the faces of these screen icons repeat down the lengths of enormous photographs, which the artist lets unfurl in wave-like folds. In similar fashion, the work *Infinite Kill* (2023) extends horizontally across the gallery wall, bulging out in regular intervals, as Romy Schneider’s abstracted face is reproduced as a negative image *ad infinitum*. The artist compares her obsessive repetition of enlarged details to a forensic investigation, an attempt to dig deep inside a film to find some evidence of its truth, how it acts upon us. The work’s title suggests the hunt but also the violence directed towards women in the history of film, which has traditionally framed feminine subjects as sexualized objects or monsters. Emphasizing these tropes, Schneider engages the image of *Carrie*, a young woman taunted for her menstruating body and frozen in a moment of shame and violence, and the talented, yet tragic Romy Schneider who can be read as a classic femme fatale. Romy Schneider



The artist's camera. Photo by the artist



The artist in her studio. Photos by Luis Salazar and Sofia Taylor



Carrie Schneider, **Dominant Eye**, 2021. Unique chromogenic photograph made in camera. Approximately 25 × 20 inches. Collection of Charline von Heyl



Carrie Schneider, **February**, 2021. Unique chromogenic photograph made in camera. Approximately 25 × 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist, Candice Madey, New York, and CHART, New York

appears yet again in a 400-foot long photograph titled **Madame Psychosis (Joelle Van Dyne)**. The work twists and turns on a platform like a filmstrip unleashed and unspooled from its projector or like disemboweled intestines on a mortuary slab. The title of the work references David Foster Wallace's 1996 novel *Infinite Jest* in which a 'lethally addictive' film depicting a woman's face causes anyone who watches it to die because they are unable to look away. In her book *Death 24x a Second* (2006) Mulvey describes the possibilities that new technologies offer us, with the capacity to look away—or look again—which Schneider models in her translation of the moving image to a proliferation of stills culled from a hand-held streaming device. The ability to stop the forward motion of time and narrative, to freeze a frame, or repeat it and find new moments of significance skews conventions of spectatorship.

Schneider's exhibition culminates in a cinematically-scaled projection of a 16mm film titled **Sphinx (the answer isn't man)**, which is crafted from 316 stills of Romy Schneider's face. The artist sourced the stills from *L'Important C'est d'Aimer* from her phone and reproduced them as photographs, which she

then reanimates as a moving image. The artist's hands and phone are visible amidst the changing exposures. This reveal of process interrupts the film's sense of seamless time, yet the magic pull of her face seems no less mesmerizing. Schneider thinks of her use of this clip of Romy Schneider as "a lost screen test," referencing Andy Warhol's 472 films (1964–1966), which he called "living portraits." Like Warhol, Schneider slows down her film to 16 frames per second, allowing us to take in the nuances of her subject's expressions, to humanize her, as she looks at the camera with a mix of fear, sadness, contempt, resignation, and resistance. Does the "Sphinx" of the title of this work and the exhibition refer to Romy Schneider, Carrie Schneider, the camera, or the image itself? The riddle is yet to be solved.

— Susan Cross, Senior Curator, MASS MoCA

1 The artist works intuitively, likening her process to automatic writing and embracing chance in the work, yet her process is rigorous. She faithfully records in her notebooks (several on view) the painstaking steps used to create each work, each negative image inverted and re-exposed to make a positive.

Carrie Schneider (b. 1979, Chicago) is based between Hudson, New York, and New York City. She received an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BFA from Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh. She has exhibited her photographs and videos at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Pérez Art Museum Miami; The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; The Art Institute of Chicago; The Kitchen, New York; Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; the Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki; Galería Alberto Sendros, Buenos Aires; and santralistanbul, Istanbul. Her work has been reviewed in *The New York Times*, *Artforum*, *VICE*, *Modern Painters*, and *The New Yorker*. She received a Creative Capital Award and a Fulbright Fellowship, and attended the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program and the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture. Her work is in numerous public collections including The Art Institute of Chicago; Minneapolis Institute of Art; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; Haggerty Museum of Art, Milwaukee; Centre Canadien d'architecture, Montreal; Art in Embassy, Mbabane, Swaziland; University Galleries, Illinois State University; and DePaul University Public Collection, Chicago.

Carrie Schneider: Sphinx

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Curated by Susan Cross, Senior Curator, MASS MoCA

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Front cover: Carrie Schneider, *francahiga*, 2020. Unique chromogenic photograph made in camera. Approximately 24 x 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist, Candice Madey, New York, and CHART, New York

Back cover: Carrie Schneider, stills from *Sphinx (the answer isn't man)*, 2023. 16mm film, color, silent. Courtesy of the artist, Candice Madey, New York, and CHART, New York

Interior flap: Carrie Schneider, *Revenge Body*, 2022. Unique chromogenic photograph made in camera. 20 x 2.700 inches (installation dimensions variable). Courtesy of the artist, Candice Madey, New York, and CHART, New York

