

ARTFORUM

Chicago

Carrie Schneider

MONIQUEMELOCHE
2154 W. Division
March 31–May 12

For her new collection of photographs, “Burning House,” 2010–11, Carrie Schneider returned twelve times to a small island in the center of a rural Wisconsin lake. On each visit, she hauled or canoed a small house with her, and then set it on fire before submitting it to the panoramic sweep of her lens. The resulting pictures are by turns unsettling, inviting, and enigmatic.

While the exhibition’s press release assures us that Schneider’s take on the well-worn genre of landscape includes some deep performative element, and that the pictures hark back to Monet’s studies of light in the French countryside, the work isn’t as exotic as all that and, indeed, is rooted in the richer terrain of Schneider’s American predecessors. In *Burning House (December, midday)*, 2011, for instance, one sees no traces of fire—only a warm, inviting glow across a sheet of winter ice on which the artist’s footprints can be made out. Each of these single images is pure *Walden* or, for a contemporary audience, maybe a nod to the cabin in the woods where Bon Iver cut its first album.

Taken together, the pictures tell a layered story—but it is not the studied record of optical changes familiar to the Impressionist tradition. Instead, modulation of angle, distance, time, and season all suggest grander historical cycles straight out of Thomas Cole’s reuse of a mountainscape for his 1836 “The Course of Empire” and its suggestion of an American cultural zenith followed by decadence and ruin. And the piercing oranges and unctuous borealis effects recall the acidic landscapes of Ed Ruscha, who himself painted the LACMA in flames. But where Cole and Ruscha each worked in a more allegorical register, Schneider’s pictures hit so hard during this long season of austerity precisely because they are, literally, close to home. The American landscape represents providence and safe haven, but here we are met only with a house on fire, over and over again.

— Ian Bourland



Carrie Schneider, *Burning House (July, sunset)*, 2011, C-print, 40 x 50".