

# moniquemeloche

2154 W. Division Street, Chicago, IL 60622  
773.252.0299 www.moniquemeloche.com



## Subtleties in Reading: Carrie Schneider at Monique Meloche

Lori Zimmer / MutualArt January 15, 2014

*Reading Women*, a new exhibition by Carrie Schneider at Monique Meloche in Chicago, invites viewers into a world of intimate simplicity, devoid of the distractions by modern day electronic gadgetry that have engrossed day-to-day life. The project documents seventy women, mostly from creative backgrounds, as they read a personally selected book by a female author. Comprising photographic portraits as well as video and an exquisite corpse style artist book, *Reading Women* captures the innocent moments of total abandonment of self-awareness that comes when one allows herself to be totally taken over by the powerful narrative of a good book.



*Aura reading Maarit Verronen (Pimeästä Maasta, 1995), 2012-2014. All images courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.*

For the project, Schneider asked female friends, mostly of the artist, writer and musician persuasion, to allow her to film and photograph them while reading a book. In order to urge the abandonment of self-awareness, Schneider chose to film and shoot the subjects in the comfort of their own homes and studios, sprawled out on their favorite chair or sofa before a video and still camera set up side by side. Each sitter was then asked to select a book of her choice by a female author, and read for a two hour period. As time passed, the sitter became less aware of the presence of Schneider or her cameras, and allowed herself to be taken over by the book she had chosen. Body language relaxed, the subtle nuances of facial expression loosened as the awareness to put on a "camera face" slowly melted into the text before each sitter. Meanwhile, Schneider's cameras remained documenting the coveted and rare depth of concentration and focus that the artist feels can only be brought on by immersing oneself in a book.

The exhibition brings a well-rounded collection of multi-media works. Four of the seventy large scale photographic portraits are framed and hanging in the gallery, while a single channel video installation plays on loop. Fifteen additional framed photographs will be available for view in

Monique Meloche's booth at the Armory Show in New York, from March 5-9, 2014. Linking the viewer to the women shown, Schneider has also produced an "exquisite corpse" artist book of photographs that viewers can leaf through, that shows imagery of each woman's hands holding her book at the last page she finished when the shoot was over. The photographs and film follow the women as they partake in the cerebral journey of each volume, capturing every facial reaction and emotion felt while engrossed in reading the pages. Each reader is linked to the next literally and visually in the three hour film, as Schneider uses the turning of a page as the transition from one reader to the next.

# moniquemeloche

2154 W. Division Street, Chicago, IL 60622  
773.252.0299 www.moniquemeloche.com



*Evan reading Anne Lamott (Traveling Mercies, 2000), 2012-2014.*

*Vanessa reading Nathalie Sarraute (Portrait d'un Inconnu, 1948), 2012-2014*

The exhibition shows the nuances and delicate behaviors that happen during the process of reading an actual book, an act that can feel like a distant notion in a technology-obsessed world of e-readers, constant text messages, and continuous connection to the internet. But the images also plant a foot in Feminist art – although subtly, by linking each woman to a female author she has chosen to not only read, but be documented for the project with. The sitter's choice of author and genre, from fiction to biographies – whether it was a rare edition, a gift from someone special, or had sentimental value – creates a dialogue between book and reader, and this importance is accentuated with Schneider's title for each piece. For example, in *Abigail reading Angela Davis (An Autobiography, 1974)*, the viewer immediately begins to draw conclusions about Abigail that link her with the feminist and activist history of Davis. The hardcover volume is old and cloth bound. Abigail holds the book open with care as to not over stretch the spine, making the viewer wonder if the volume has value beyond the subject alone.

*Michelle reading Betty Smith (A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, 1943)* shows the reader sitting by the light of a great open window. The fire escape is visible through the screen. Michelle sits in a Mid-Century modern chair amongst a collection of vintage furniture, and the viewer can imagine a sunny relaxing day in Brooklyn, with the reader connecting to the historic narrative about the borough in which she lives.

# moniquemeloche

2154 W. Division Street, Chicago, IL 60622  
773.252.0299 www.moniquemeloche.com



*Abigail reading Angela Davis (An Autobiography, 1974), 2012-2014.*

*Michelle reading Betty Smith (A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, 1943), 2012-2014.*



In *Rebekah reading Sofia Gubaidulina (Concerto for Bassoon and Low Strings, 1975)*, the sitter is cozied onto a window ledge. The book is a complicated arrangement by Soviet era composer Guibaidulina who is known for her escapist music involving unusual combinations of instruments, and the viewer can imagine Rebekah hearing the concerto in her head as she reads the notes. Coupled with the bright open window, the scene is serene, peaceful and a moment of total relaxation for the sitter who has given herself over to the arts.

*Reading Women* is a continuation of Schneider's oeuvre which uses photography, video and film to explore the notions of appropriate, culturally expected behavior. This series pushes beyond her narrative pieces exploring the subject, and instead uses the factor of time to allow her subjects to abandon their ideas of "posed behavior," using the engrossing practice of reading a book as the key to capturing totally natural reactions and expressions.