

‘She Was Like a Force of Nature’: Yvonne Rainer, Marilyn Minter, and Others Pay Tribute to the Late Pioneering Artist Carolee Schneemann

Artists, colleagues, and friends remember Carolee Schneemann as a determined visionary, a generous spirit, and a dedicated cat lover.

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Carolee Schneemann, the painter, performance artist and filmmaker [who died last week at age 79](#), was the sort of person who “had a lot of best friends,” recalls her longtime art dealer Wendy Olsoff. The artist, who died of breast cancer, a disease she had lived with for more than 20 years, is remembered as a determined artistic visionary, a generous friend, and a doting, dedicated cat owner.

We asked a selection of her friends, colleagues, and admirers to pen tributes to the artist. Here is what they said.

Carolee Schneemann, *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions for Camera* (1963/2005). Courtesy of MoMA PS1.

Joan Semmel, artist

Carolee was like a force of nature equipped with an analytical brain. One was always swept away by her sheer beauty and her ability to see underneath the pretenses that society imposes.

I invited her to participate in an exhibition in 1976 (I think it was) that Joyce Kozloff and I curated at Ashawagh Hall in East Hampton. It was a show of women artists, a then-radical undertaking in the home of Ab Ex, and I wanted a few people who were performance or film artists. Carolee came to East Hampton with her cat (who was 17 years old and needed to have fresh chicken livers for her health), a photographer, and, in this very essentially conservative environment, stood nude on a folding table, painted her body and did the first performance of her iconic piece of pulling the scroll from her vagina and reading the comments made to her as an artist by various male artists, while the photographer documented the proceedings. The piece of course became iconic in the movement and beyond. The day before the performance, Carolee asked me if I had any glue that would withstand vaginal flux. I couldn’t imagine what on earth she was thinking but of course she needed to make the long scroll of insults that she would pull from her vagina.

Many years later when we were on a panel together her presentation was so brilliant that I remember saying, “Wow, who could follow that?” in total admiration, as I had to, indeed, follow that.