Flash: Carrie Schneider
December 6, 2014–March 14, 2015

Sarah is reading Zora Neale Hurston. She turns the page and her hand goes automatically to her face where she unthinkingly fidgets with her mouth. I take in the rise and fall of her breathing, visible beneath a cool white blouse, preparing myself for the moment when she finishes the first page. She is perfectly still, chin to chest, as she reclines against a serape-slung mustard couch. Birds twitter and a siren wails in the distance. Summer. Surely she is unaware that a singular coil of hair has escaped the bun atop her head, a harmless little joke meant just for my own pleasure. Where is she coming from? Has she been out there today, in the distant commotion of the street? Her right hand fingers the edge of the page anticipating the next turn.

This portrait is one of what will amount to 100 similar arrangements filmed and photographed by the artist Carrie Schneider. Sarah’s entire scene is scarcely longer than two minutes, and as in each case is determined by the pace of the subject’s reading. As soon as Sarah turns the page of her book, we are let into Rebecca’s home where our next subject is doing the same. The subjects who are named in Schneider’s Reading Women are double: the friends who have agreed to participate, identified by first name only, and the authors they have chosen, from Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf and Roseanne Barr to Angela Davis, Patty Smith, and Joan Didion. The artist filmed each woman for two hours and later chose scenes that depict their most engrossed moments.1 Here they are presented to us, presumably at their most vulnerable, naked from any self-consciousness. The experience of watching each one feels as private as being absorbed in a text. She reads words, and I read her.

Drawn from the artist’s own social group as demanded by the intimacy of the project, these portraits amount to an index of an artistic community. While the ages of the participants range from 19 to 76 and include musicians, writers, dancers, a graphic designer, a structural engineer, and a lawyer, the majority of women pictured are in their 20s, 30s, and early 40s, and many of them—like Schneider herself—are practicing visual artists.2

Notes
1. Schneider remarks that she finds her subjects “most disarmed” about 30–40 minutes into a sitting. Conversation with the artist, July 2014.
2. Conversation with the artist, July 2014.

Carrie Schneider (born in 1979 in Chicago, Illinois) is a New York-based photographer and filmmaker. Her work has been featured in solo exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki; Galleri Kritt/Trondheim Academy of Art, Norway; and Gallery Kalhama & Pippio, Helsinki. Her work has been included in group exhibitions and screenings at the Haggerty Museum, Milwaukee; The Kitchen, New York; Dumbo Arts Center, Brooklyn; Columbia College, Chicago; Artspace, New Haven; Kunsthal Charlottenborg Copenhagen, Denmark; and as part of the 2011 Pittsburgh Biennial at The Andy Warhol Museum.

Schneider earned her BFA at Carnegie Mellon University in 2001 and her MFA at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2007. She attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2007 and had a yearlong Fulbright Fellowship at the Kuvataideakatemia Finnish Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki in 2008. FLASH! is the first solo presentation of Schneider’s work on the west coast.

Flash! contemporary art series features single works made within the last year and is organized by Joanna Szupinska-Myers at UCRArtsBlock.

Flash: Carrie Schneider is the seventh project in the series. This presentation was supported in part by an anonymous donor.