

## CHICAGO

## Carrie Schneider

Monique Meloche // January 11–February 1

YOU ARE WHAT you read. Photographer Carrie Schneider illuminates this truism in "Reading Women," her third solo exhibition at the gallery. *Reading Women*, 2012–13, is also the title of a three-hour video montage featuring 70 women reading books silently in their homes, each beside a sunny window. At the turn of the page a new woman appears reading in her favorite chair in a room of her own.

The absorbed readers in these intimate domestic scenes intentionally recall Mary Cassatt's 1874 painting *Woman Reading*, an important touchstone for Schneider. While the subject of a singular female reading a book had been depicted over the centuries in Western art, from Rembrandt and Vermeer to Fragonard and Renoir, Cassatt was perhaps the first female artist to take it up. Cassatt did not depict exclusively female readers (she sometimes included men and families), but Schneider's multiyear project sustains and elaborates Cassatt's positive, proto-feminist approach. Each woman in Schneider's video reads a book of her choosing by a female author.

The first appearance of a woman reading in Western art may be that of the Virgin Mary in Annunciation scenes, notes art historian James Conlon in a 2005 essay. This set the interpretive tone for all subsequent artworks featuring the motif. He writes, "The scene of any woman reading becomes, at least metaphorically, a scene of potential annunciation, a scene of sexual subversion in which progeny can happen without male input." In Schneider's video, some sitters actively absorb and react, as if having a mental orgasm. But the film

mostly unfolds as calmly as Warhol's 1963 *Sleep*, with quiet breathing and peaceful faces. Viewers are given access to the scene, but not the invisible revolutions of the mind.

—Jason Founberg



Carrie  
Schneider  
*Abigail  
Reading  
Angela  
Davis (An  
Autobiography,  
1974)*, 2014.  
C-print,  
36 x 30 in.

