

# What Matters

Carolee Schneemann

*In 2006, Katarina Weslien, a visual artist and then director of graduate studies at Maine College of Art, in Portland, asked several artists to write short texts on the most important things in their practice and life for a book to be called "What Matters." The book was never published but the texts were saved, and Weslien offered Schneemann's contribution for this issue.*

What matters is taking the laundry, emptying kitty litter, answering and filing the 43 e-mails that came in this week. What matters is sufficient folders and files, digging through folders, albums, files, boxes for photos, statements, reviews, edits, interviews to fulfill requests from students, researchers, curators, teachers, nuisances, editors, photographers, videographers. What matters is getting everything organized for endless ridiculous imperious deadlines via Fed-Ex, DHL, fax, e-mail, phone, dog team, post office. What matters is finding out if my lover will travel east. What matters is if the chimney needs cleaning, if the sump pump will clog threatening to flood the basement and the furnace, if the wood pile can be moved before the next snowstorm, if the guy with the plow will turn up, if I can restore the border garden which was destroyed by the plow guy, if the idiots on the Rail trail will ever stop racing their screaming snowmobiles. What matters is rushing to yoga on time, getting to the bus to NYC, getting to Rhinecliff for the train to Montreal, getting to Albany for the flight to Colorado, getting the bicycle oiled, getting the ski pole mended. What matters is cleaning out the vegetable drawer in the fridge and facing the back shelves. What matters is scanning the photographs for the 20-page computer collage. What matters is replacing ink cartridges and paper for the printer, preparing the lecture, scanning slides, meeting with R to edit the new dualchannel DVD. What matters is calling the dentist, the veterinarian, the acupuncturist, Planned Parenthood. What matters is research on fascism, militarism, political suppressions, censorship, control of media and immigration, Bush lies fabrications fundamentalisms. What matters is the steady erosion of our constitution. What matters is designing the invitation card, getting to the gallery to install

the exhibit, to paint the walls, to climb up and down ladders, setting sight lines, to crawl around on the floor laying out photo-grids, checking gallery lists of writers, curators, friends . . . even collectors? What matters is emailing 1,300 invitations on endlessly corrected lists, washing my hair, drying the underwear on the radiator, emptying the ashes from the pot belly stove, scrubbing the toilet bowl, dusting, vacuuming, shoveling snow, to go dancing. What matters is writing recommendations for students, other artists, friends, phoning friends, birthdays, deaths, lovers, illnesses, joyful or grief-ridden events. What matters is rewriting, editing statements, press releases, bios, interviews. What matters is researching to dream better, to teach better, to lecture better. What matters is crawling into bed with books and the cats if the lover is far away. What matters is walking out to the cliffs, being dazzled in the blizzard, photographing shadows over the pond as the ice recedes. What matters is paying bills, sending invoices, calling the bank, trying to get work back from resistant galleries, trying to get paid, trying to get the next teaching/lecture position; negotiating ridiculous salaries, negotiating travel, sending statements on the work, keeping up the CV. What matters are the unexpected grants, the amazing analysis of work, the invitations to show films or exhibit installations, appreciations, and the work in motion! What matters is having to answer surveys, questionnaires, inquiries, intrusions which increase the drench, distractions, tension, struggle of the daily art-life.

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