## LIZ DESCHENES

"Liz Deschenes is a photographer who, in the best modernist tradition, pushes against the basic terms by which photography is conventionally defined: instantaneity, veracity, fixity, or reproducibility," writes curator and critic Matthew Witkovsky. Indeed, Deschenes uses durational photogramatic exposure to create unique, shifting surfaces that frequently function as sculptural or architectural rather than photographic objects. Deschenes stages the technical components of photography, both contemporary and anachronistic, while reflecting, compressing, and assessing the architectural settings that surround them, through her mirrors' simultaneous repopulation and evacuation of these spaces.

In her earlier work, Deschenes utilized landscape images as an entry point to address self-reflexive concepts of the medium. Her *Elevations* series utilized the rich and dense dye transfer color printing reminiscent of the golden age of Technicolor films, a process discontinued by Kodak in 1993. The project staged the seven standard colors developed by cartographers to represent ranges of the earth's elevation to produce a gradation of corresponding monochrome photographs. Deschenes' *Blue* and *Green Screens* foregrounded the invisible screens typically used as the invisible basis for special effects and absent background imagery. In her *Moiré* series, Deschenes photographed a sheet of perforated paper filtering the light coming through a window, and superimposed the ensuing negative with a duplicate on an enlarger to create an abstract, moiré pattern image. The result is an optically oscillating, dazzling body of work grounded in the manipulation of a single negative.

In her recent work, Deschenes exposes photographic paper to the night sky, develops it, and fixes the photogram with silver toner, creating misty silver surfaces brindled with slight changes in hue – affected either by exposure to ambient light, or the hand-application of the toner itself. After the photogramatic process creates these unique and varied surfaces, the works are mounted on aluminum or Dibond. Some of these photograms remain unframed and tend to oxidize over time, further problematizing the role of the photograph as fixed image on surface. Instead, purged of representational content, the photograph functions as an object that records how it has been, and continues to be, acted upon. The series originated with *Tilt / Swing*, an installation of six such "silver mirror" panels arranged in a 360-degree floor-to-ceiling configuration at Miguel Abreu Gallery, based on a diagram that 20th Century architect, designer, and artist Herbert Bayer drew to accompany his essay *The Fundamentals of Exhibition Design.* In her second iteration of the *Tilt / Swing* installation, the photographic panels were fully exposed to daylight, and brought to black in the development stage. Deschenes's subsequent individual silver and black mirror works stage the same time-based photographic processes in an energetic rather than taxidermic language, allowing variations in framing and size to act in myriad ways upon the surrounding conditions of display.

*Rates* (*Frames per Second*), Deschenes' 2018 exhibition at Miguel Abreu Gallery, furthered her inquiry into the history of image production techniques and the conditions of viewing developed in previous series. The seminal installation took the proto-cinematic experiments of 19th-century scientist and chronophotographer Étienne-Jules Marey as its point of departure, and was comprised of four equally wide, monumental multi-part works that span the length of entire gallery walls. The viewer was immediately engaged in a rhythmic progression through space, as he or she passed by a succession of thin strips of silver-toned photograms positioned at a constant interval from one another. The phenomenological experience produced by this rigorous sequencing of space is akin to a physical impression of time passing, of the body's movement being captured in formation. The installation's second half was comprised of slightly concave photograms that refer to Marey's diagrams, which recorded human steps with the use of photosensitive paper. In line with Marey's approach, Deschenes' works are not stand-ins for experience like pictorial photography, but instead point to the material conditions of their production and display.

In her most recent 2024 exhibition at Miguel Abreu Gallery, *Gravity's Pull*, Deschenes presents a stronger turn towards the effects of screen imagery on sensation and consciousness. The installation in the main gallery comprised of a series of ceiling mounted prints on Gorilla glass, a preferred alkali-aluminosilicate material of the screen universe stabilized into position by a rough band of stainless steel. These works simultaneously demonstrated a mode of connection to the first category of the photographic and a progressive distancing itself towards the realms of sculpture and

architecture. As screen images, they present the artist's initial attempt at capturing the world which gives way to the possibility of its alteration. These screens, being rendered opaque and suspended mid-distance between the floor and ceiling, were liberated from the surface of their native photographic domain into three-dimensional space. At the front of the gallery were placed two nearly identical black glass works that were opposite to one another. Their convex surface operated as an enlarged Claude glass, the visual device used by connoisseurs of landscape since the 18th-century. By turning one's back on the scene to observe the framed view through the tinted mirror, it allowed its viewers to add the picturesque aesthetic of a subtle gradation of tones. In these two parts of the exhibition, there was an expansion into the dimension of time, being pulled at once towards the past by the operation of the pre-photographic lens and being pushed towards the future by the color pixels floating in space. Panels having no established recto and verso, the viewer could oscillate between them as if through time, rendering possible the intimate zones of human experience.

*Liz Deschenes (b. 1966, Boston) lives and works in New York. She received a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1988. Institutional solo exhibitions of her work have been held at the George Eastman Museum, Rochester, NY (2025); ICA Boston (2016); MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA (2015); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2014); and Secession, Vienna (2012). Recent major two-person and group exhibitions include* Peter Hujar / Liz Deschenes: Persistence of Vision *at Gropius Bau, Berlin (2026);* Nineteenth-Century Photography Now*, The Getty, Los Angeles (2024);* Put It This Way: (Re)visions of the Hirshhorn Collection*, Washington, D.C. (2023);* Geneva Biennale: Sculpture Garden*, Switzerland (2022);* Une seconde d'éternité*, Pinault Collection, Bourse de Commerce, Paris (2022);* Shifting the Silence*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2022);* True Pictures? Contemporary Photography from Canada and the USU*, Sprengel Museum, Hanover (2021);* The Inconstant World*, ICA Los Angeles (2021);* Material Meanings: Selection from the Constance R. Caplan Collection*, Art Institute of Chicago, (2020); and* Luogo e Segni*, Pinault Collection – Punta della Dogana, Venice (2019), among others. Previously, her work has been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Extra City Kunsthal, Antwerp, Belgium; Museum of Modern Art, New York; International Center for Photography, New York; Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland; CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; Aspen Art Museum; Tate Liverpool; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*

*Deschenes' work is held in the permanent collections of Centre Pompidou, Paris; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Art Institute of Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; ICA/Boston; Pinault Collection, Paris; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; Aïshti Foundation, Beirut; CCS Bard Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; Milwaukee Art Museum; Princeton University Art Museum; Corcoran Museum of Art, Washington, D.C.; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C; and The Nelson Atkins Museum, Kansas City. In 2014, Deschenes was the recipient of the Rappaport Prize. Artist books and monographs include* Registration (*Paris: Three Star Books, 2022);* Liz Deschenes (*Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 2016); and* Liz Deschenes, Secession (*Vienna: Secession, Berlin: Revolver, 2012).*