



Born in Boston in 1966, Deschenes earned her B.F.A. at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1988. Since the 1990s, she has been exhibited widely across Europe and North America. She has had solo exhibitions at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2014-15) and at the Secession, Vienna (2012). Her work has also been featured in numerous group exhibitions, most notably at the International Center for Photography, New York (2014); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2013); Art Institute of Chicago (2012); and in the 2012 Whitney Biennial. Deschenes is represented in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; CCS Bard Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Art Institute of Chicago; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Centre Pompidou, Paris. Recently awarded the deCordova's 2014 Rappaport Prize, Deschenes is also a professor in the Visual Arts department at Bennington College. She lives and works in New York.

Liz Deschenes:
Gallery 4.1.1
 May 23, 2015 – April 2016

All work courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York.

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Cover, inside flap:
Gallery 4.1.1, 2015
MASS MoCA (Installation view)
 Pigment prints on acrylic, 5 framed elements
 74½ x 57½ x 10 inches each
 Courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York
 Photo: David Dashiell

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 GALLERY 4.1.1

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Described as “concrete photography,” Liz Deschenes’ work takes photography itself—and its properties—as its subject. Rather than producing a representation of the external world, Deschenes manipulates and reveals the materials and processes of her medium. She is influenced by early pioneers such as Louis Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot, whose experiments with light and chemicals led to the first photographic images in the 1830s. Deschenes has noted that she is "interested in the period before the official invention of photography and its indoctrinations." Her photographs maintain a similar spirit of investigation, embracing uncertainty and possibility, while utilizing both new and outmoded technologies. Their range and complexity can be gleaned in the variety of descriptions assigned them: meditative, elegiac, somber, playful, captivating, surprising, and mind altering.

Deschenes’ mostly monochromatic works are both self-reflexive and engaged with their surroundings, drawing attention to the rooms they occupy by reflecting them in their surfaces and, often, in shaped supports designed to mimic the shadows and angle of light in a particular site. Occupying the space in a sculptural fashion, Deschenes’ photographs have variously been draped on the floor, hinged at right angles to the wall, and nestled in corners. Both their

unorthodox placement and their non-referential images focus viewers' attention not only on the tangible parameters of the medium but also on their own perceptual and physical experience in a space.

The title of Deschenes’ exhibition at MASS MoCA—*Gallery 4.1.1*—reflects the integral role that the surrounding architecture plays in the installation (and is closely related to her recent exhibition, *Gallery 7*, at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis). The form and scale of the new works on view are based on the proportions of the gallery's windows, the dominant feature of the space. Deschenes has installed five freestanding objects, reminiscent of Minimalist sculptures, which provoke a heightened sensitivity to the gallery's characteristics as well as alternative ways of navigating it. Like much of the artist's



Bracket (London), 2013
Campoli Presti, London (Installation view)
Silver toned silver gelatin prints mounted to aluminum
72 × 36 inches each
Courtesy of the artist and Campoli Presti, London / Paris.



Gallery 7, 2014
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (Installation view)
9 silver toned black-and-white photograms mounted to aluminum and 4 pigment prints on acrylic
11 framed elements, 62 × 38 × 8 inches each
Courtesy of the artist, Walker Art Center, and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Photo: Gene Pittman

work, the installation uses both doubling and asymmetry simultaneously. Here she has reduced the size of the windows and also their number in her installation: Six windows. Five photographs. As she notes, something is always slightly off-kilter in the work—perhaps a reminder that no photograph is truly a 1:1 likeness of its subject.

The large, open rectangular frames house five unique monochromatic panels which can be viewed from both sides (the printed side is matte). Each is angled within its frame. This subtle variation within Deschenes' series of repeated elements, brings to mind the Minimalists’ serial impulse as well as their embrace of phenomenology and the observation that the form of a sculpture is affected by the viewer as he or she moves. In Deschenes’ work, the angle of the photographs exaggerates those perspectival shifts; rendering them physical rather than merely visual. The movements of viewers also alter the photographic images, which reflect and reveal the viewers’ shadowy forms, placing the works in a constant state

of change: they are never the same, never static.

The works were produced with a state-of-the-art digital pigment printing process and are printed directly on translucent acrylic panels. The varied blue tones—which range from light blue to blue-green to blue-purple—are based on the Blue Wool Scale, a system originally developed for the textile industry to measure the permanence of colored dye. There is a serendipitous intersection between the form and content of Deschenes’ photographs and the history of the MASS MoCA complex, which was originally home to Arnold Print Works, a producer of dyed and printed textiles. The Blue Wool Scale has since been adopted by the printing industry and by museum conservators, who use it to determine the degree to which works of art fade under exposure to light while on display.

Deschenes is interested in the formal properties of color: its saturation, and its density, as well as its elusiveness. Her work, much like the Minimalist form, addresses color in terms of the relativity of its apprehension, influenced simultaneously by the mind and the body, filtered through the eye of the viewer. There is both science and subjectivity to color; it is enticingly slippery, fading or shifting, if not under the effects of light, then under those of memory.

Rather ironically, the pigment prints that Deschenes has based on the blue fade cards are far more lightfast than the dyed cloth that inspired them, and are more stable than many of Deschenes’ works, especially the photograms for which she is perhaps



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best known. She makes those works without a camera, exposing silver-gelatin paper to ambient light and then arresting the image with a fixer. The variations in natural light, atmospheric conditions, and chemicals create marbled, reflective surfaces that continue to oxidize and darken over time, taking on tones that the artist cannot control or predict. The pigment prints on view are also in their own constant state of flux—changing in hue, tone, and translucency minute by minute, hour by hour, with the variation in the natural light coming through the gallery windows. Reflecting the passage of time, Deschenes’ work questions

photography's traditional association with capturing the past—its status as a record of a single moment frozen in time—and proposes the possibility of a present and a future embedded in the image. In a sense, Deschenes has transformed the gallery into a camera (as she points out, "camera," in fact, means "room" in Latin), recording each current and passing moment, with the acrylic panels—which reflect light—functioning as both lens and film.

Susan Cross, Curator