

Peter Hujar, *David Wojnarowicz (Hand Touching Eye)*, 1981 © The Peter Hujar Archive / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2026

Peter Hujar / Liz Deschenes: Persistence of Vision

19.3.–28.6.2025

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GROPIUS BAU

75 Berliner Festspiele

Peter Hujar / Liz Deschenes: Persistence of Vision

Bringing together works by Peter Hujar and Liz Deschenes, *Persistence of Vision* opens an intergenerational dialogue on photography. Marking the first major exhibition of both Hujar's and Deschenes' work in Berlin, the show proposes an expansive understanding of the medium while foregrounding the uncompromising clarity of vision that defines their practices.

"I make uncomplicated, direct photographs of complicated and difficult subjects. I photograph those who push themselves to any extreme and people who cling to the freedom to be themselves."
— Peter Hujar

Working in New York City from the 1960s to the 1980s, **Peter Hujar** (1934–1987) captured the transformative cultural era between the Stonewall uprising and the onset of the AIDS crisis in piercing black-and-white photographs. Deeply rooted in and inspired by the artistic life of the East Village, he portrayed New York's downtown avant-garde and queer communities, including figures such as William S. Burroughs, Candy Darling, Susan Sontag, Paul Thek and David Wojnarowicz. Spanning portraits as well as incisive images of animals, nature and urban ruins, Hujar's work explores themes of community, sexuality, decay and death.

With around 120 photographs, many of them on view for the first time in Berlin, *Persistence of Vision* provides a comprehensive insight into all phases of his œuvre, from early photographic experiments in the 1950s to his mature studio works made before his death in 1987 from AIDS-related illness.

In the exhibition, Hujar's photographs are interspersed with contemporary works by New York City-based artist Liz Deschenes, inviting viewers to consider each artist's practice in a new light. Although belonging to different generations and employing distinct visual languages, both artists share a deep interest in the material possibilities and techniques of photography, architecture and the role of beauty.

"My work is often in reaction to the limited scope that photography is often understood by. I think photography is capable of much more than representing a particular moment in time."
— Liz Deschenes

Liz Deschenes (*1966) creates sculptures and non-representational photographic works that employ the fundamental properties of the medium – light, chemistry and time – to explore the very essence of what a photograph can be.

In early projects such as her *Elevations* or *Green Screen* series, Deschenes approaches colour as a central subject, creating monochrome works that unsettle the distinction between photographic image and physical object.
In more recent work, she has turned to photograms, exposing black-and-white photographic paper to natural and artificial light at night outdoors, and uses chemicals to fix and process the exposure, to create silvery images that reveal subtle tonal variations and delicate surface textures. One of her more frequently recurring mediums is glass, both as a printed surface and in sculptural works without a photographic component. Many of these works take on a sculptural and processual quality, reflecting both the surrounding exhibition space and the gaze of the viewer, and continuing to evolve over time through ongoing oxidation.

The exhibition *Peter Hujar / Liz Deschenes: Persistence of Vision* is presented on the first floor of Gropius Bau. Several galleries are centered around grid installations of photographs inspired by Hujar's exhibition at Gracie Mansion Gallery in 1986 (which would be the last in his lifetime), where the works were presented in a tightly structured yet seemingly random configuration. His images formed an ensemble that resisted categorisation, whether depicting nudes, portraits, animals or ruins.
The power that lies in difference – central to Hujar's thinking – also informs Deschenes' practice, which continually challenges established conventions of the medium.

Works by the two artists are presented in direct juxtaposition, creating a dialogue between their distinct approaches. Liz Deschenes' moonlight-exposed photograms enter into a poetic exchange with Hujar's cinematic pictures of New York City at night, underscoring their shared exploration of night not only as a subject matter but as a medium in its own right. In another gallery, Hujar's photographs of ruins meet Deschenes' *Retaining* sculptures, inspired by scaffolding systems designed to stabilise historic buildings undergoing preservation.
Together, these works resonate with the Gropius Bau's own architectural history: after the near-total destruction of its roof and upper floors during the Second World War, the building stood as an abandoned ruin until 1978.

Deschenes' works introduce a dramaturgical rhythm to the exhibition. Her works are attuned to motion, light, and the presence of bodies in space. Juxtaposed with Hujar's intimate portraits of friends and peers, they invite visitors to gain a deeper, more sustained engagement with the act of viewing.

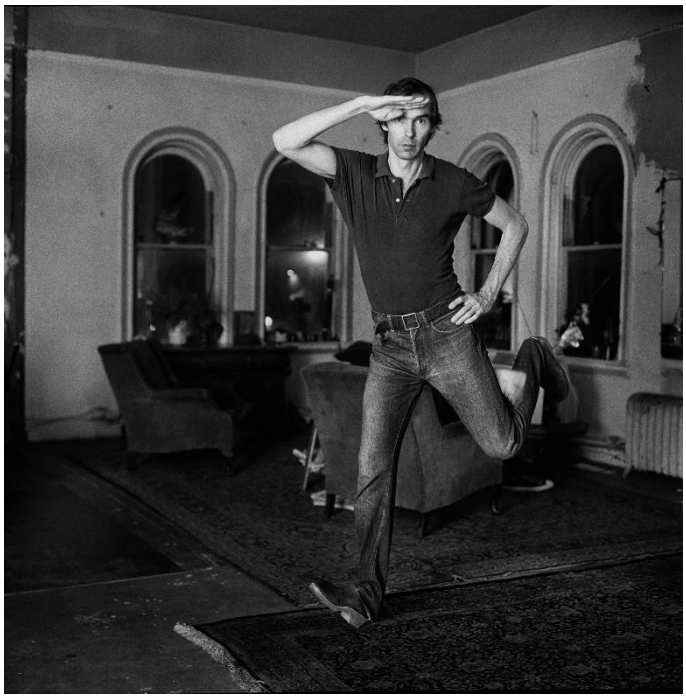
Curated by Eva Respini, Co-CEO and Curator at Large, Vancouver Art Gallery, with Monique Machicao y Priemer Ferrufino, Curatorial Fellow Exhibitions, Gropius Bau
Exhibition Management: Filippa Carlini, Project Management

In partnership with Gropius Bau, the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn presents *Peter Hujar. Eyes Open in the Dark* from 27 February to 23 August 2026.

Peter Hujar

Peter Hujar (1934–1987) was raised by his Ukrainian immigrant grandparents in a semirural New Jersey community. As a child, he began to document the animals and farm life surrounding his family's house, using his mother's camera. At the age of twelve, he moved to New York City to live with his mother and stepfather.

In high school, an English teacher recognised his potential and encouraged him to pursue photography. Upon graduating, Hujar worked as an assistant to editorial photographers and used the studios' darkrooms to make his own prints. A Fulbright scholarship took him to Italy in 1962, where he studied film and travelled extensively. A visit to the Palermo Catacombs with his then-partner Paul Thek left a deep impression and sparked a lasting concern with mortality. Back in New York City, Hujar socialised with fellow artists, writers and performers active in the East Village, portraying iconic figures such as Candy Darling, William S. Burroughs and Susan Sontag. A masterclass with photographer Richard Avedon in 1967 marked a turning point for Hujar: it led him to leave his commercial photography job and dedicate himself fully to his artistic practice. Capturing scenes of avant-garde and queer life between the 1969 Stonewall uprising and the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, his photographs serve as documentation of the community's efforts to carve out spaces of resistance.



Peter Hujar, *Self-Portrait (I) Jumping*, 1974 © The Peter Hujar Archive / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2026

Known for his uncompromising character and meticulous control over how his work was presented, Hujar never achieved mainstream success during his lifetime. It was only after his passing due to an AIDS-related illness that his photographic work gained wider recognition and admiration.

Liz Deschenes

Liz Deschenes was born in Boston and lives and works in New York City. She earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Rhode Island School of Design, where she studied broadly with a concentration in Photography. She currently teaches in graduate programmes in New York City, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary pursuits and research.

Deschenes has explored the fundamental properties of photography – light, chemistry and time – and implemented newer printing technologies and substrates. One of her more frequently recurring mediums is glass, both as a printed surface and in sculptural works without a photographic component. In all her work, Deschenes pushes the boundaries of medium-specificity and questions what a photograph can be.

Deschenes' distinct visual language resists fixed meanings, emphasising photography's inherent fluidity. Many of her works acquire architectural qualities, reframing the spaces they inhabit.
In her sculpture, she explores how viewers move through space and encounter art in relation to architecture. Through spatial arrangements that shift with the viewer's position, Deschenes' work poetically addresses the conditions of perception: through which devices – bodily and technological – do we experience the world?



Portrait of Liz Deschenes

Information and Contact

Press material

Further information and a selection of press images is available for media coverage in our press section (gropiusbau.de/press).

Please note that only installation views may be photographed in the exhibition. If you plan to take individual photographs of works, including close-ups, they must be approved by the art-work's rights holders.

Login details

Username: GBPresse
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Press contact

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Opening hours

Monday to Friday 12:00–19:00
Saturday / Sunday / public holidays 10:00–19:00
Closed on Tuesdays
24.12.2026, 31.12.2026 closed

Tickets

Tickets can be purchased on site at Gropius Bau and in our online shop: gropiusbau.de/tickets

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A division of Kulturveranstaltungen des Bundes in Berlin GmbH

Funded by

Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media

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