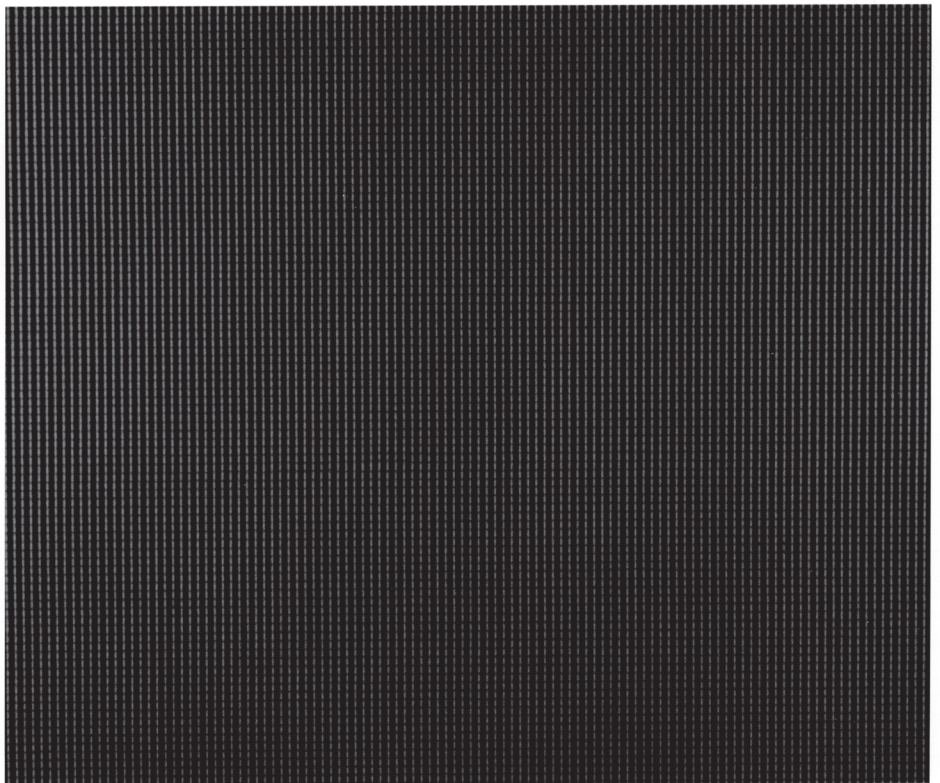


The First Work I Saw

In 2000, I was working on a show, printing at Laumont Lab. My printer wanted me to view a test in a certain neutral light and took me to the main viewing room, where photographs by a wide range of photographers are constantly being push-pinned to the wall for assessing. That day, as we came into the room, I was struck by a large, solid green print pinned to the wall—no “image,” just a bright green field. WOW. The first impression was “What a color!” There was no apparent “image.” And yet there is something familiar about this green. Then I recognized it. It is a picture of a green screen, the one against which people or objects are photographed, much like non-repro blue—a color meant to disappear or be canceled out in processing in order to lay in an alternative, false background. The power of the print worked for me viscerally and conceptually. It is the big bright surface of deceit. “Who made this?” I asked. It was the work of a “young” artist, Liz Deschenes.

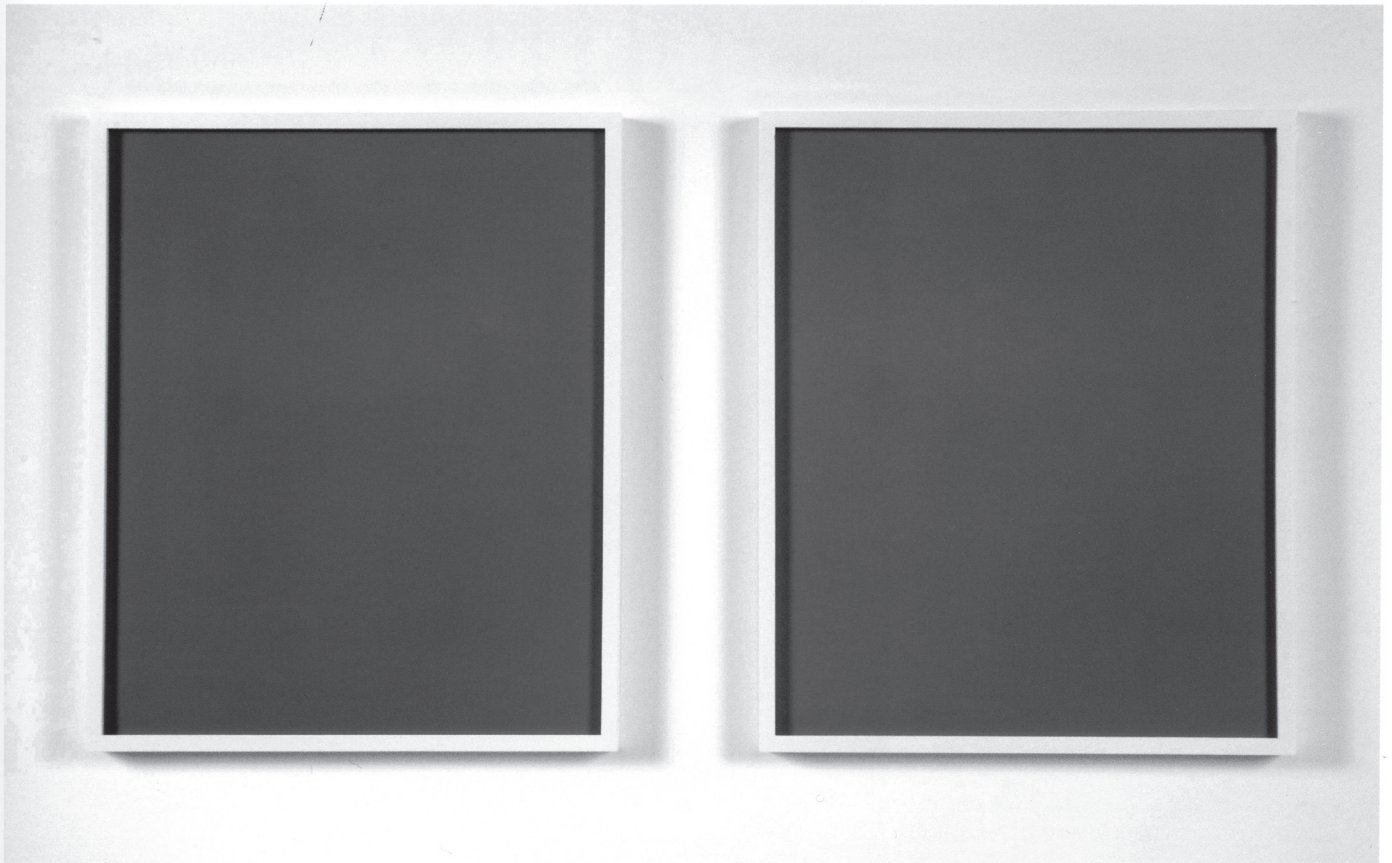


Liz Deschenes
Fujiflex mounted on plexiglass (detail), 2001
66 × 50 inches (167.6 × 127 cm)
[LD1049.01]

A Studio Visit

Liz and I had a studio visit recently at my studio in New York. I asked her to bring her computer, as she prefers to show installation works as they appear *in situ* in a public space rather than as “objects” out of their site-specific contexts. I had seen two shows of Liz’s at that point, *Registration* in 2007 and *Tilt/Swing* in 2009. They seemed to propose a kind of threshold—the edges where photographs stake their claim as form; objects with a size, a color, a shape; moiré patterns that activate surfaces of the photographs, and reflective prints, which defy the narrative fantasy of analogue space. I remember two red vertical rectangles, side by side, framed in white. Again there was a striking presence and a defiance of pictorial space, of depiction.

Liz Deschenes
Dye transfer prints (diptych), 1997-2003
Unique prints
Sheet size each:
19 × 15½ inches (48.3 × 39.4 cm)
[LD1069.03]

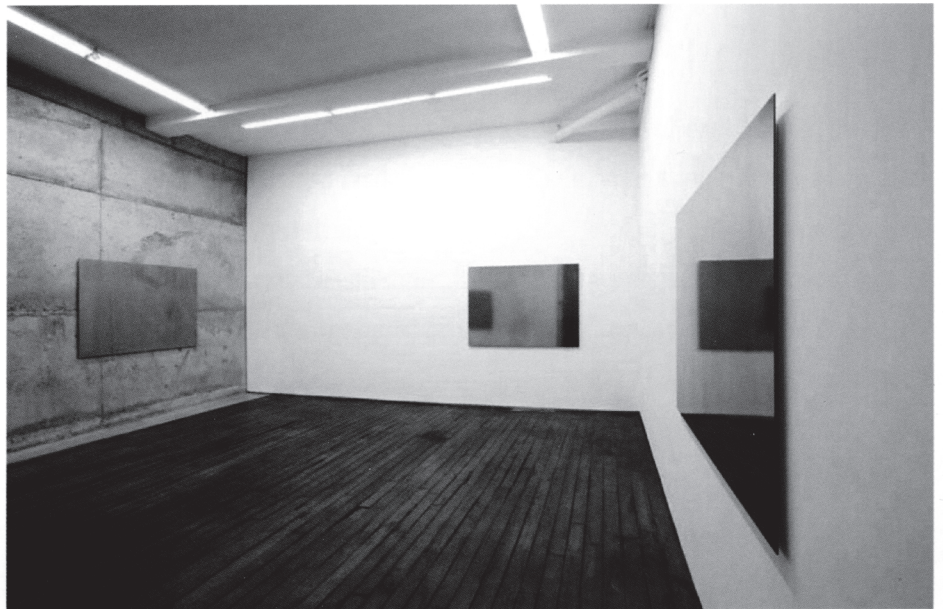


I Asked Her To Show Me More

Liz showed me designs for an upcoming installation at the Art Institute of Chicago. Her joint installation, with Florian Pumhösl, will be based on an installation design by Bauhaus artist Herbert Bayer. For this installation, Liz has altered Bayer's design to create a different sensory experience using panels that snake through the galleries and break up the physical space.

There is something important about the physical relationship of art to the viewer, the walker, the looker, who moves through an exhibition, slowing down to look at things, aware of others peripherally. The sculptural nature of Liz's interactions and her use of photographic materials to create reflective surfaces clearly anchor themselves within the arena of photography. Even her choice of Bayer is significant, I suspect, because Bayer was known for the narrative installations he designed with Edward Steichen at MoMA in the late 1930s and 1940s. Liz's installations clearly point to this and yet resist the narrative impulse. Are they simply formal? I decided to challenge her on this. (I have confidence that her choices are well considered.) "Is it really important that the installation is based on Herbert Bayer? Can't you just make it? Is this conceptual camouflage an excuse to get away with making a beautiful installation?" Looking at an installation of a framed photograph that resembles a mirrored surface, she explains.

Liz Deschenes
Installation view
Sutton Lane,
Paris, 2009



“Does it need the conceptual armature?” I know the answer to this. The conceptual armature is precisely what the strength and resilience of this work turns on. It is grounded in its inquiry. All the conventional language and the expectations that it supports are set in relief by work that refuses to play by the rules. Are they photographs? Are they sculptures? The medium of photography seems critical to countering one’s expectations. It is simply an orientation, and the works reflect outwardly from themselves to talk about the framing of photography, historically, and about the conventions of seeing, displaying, making, or even owning art.

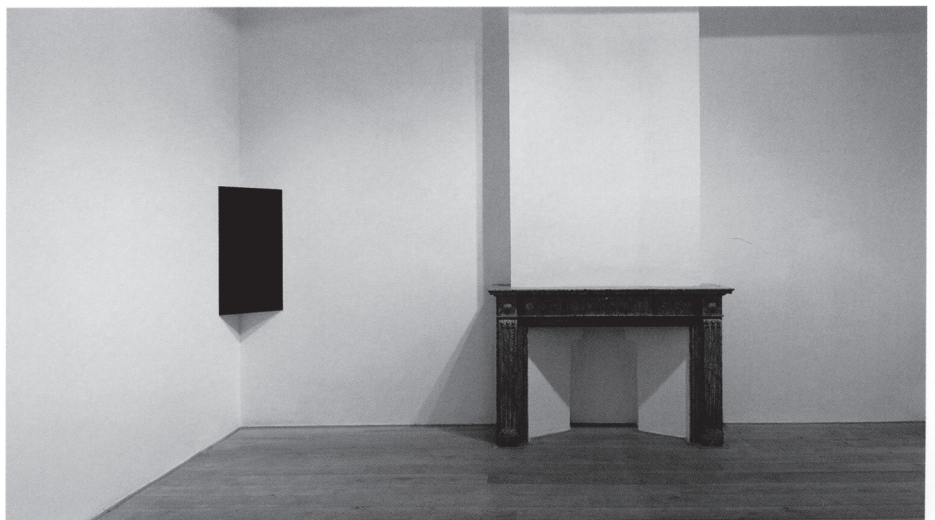
An installation shot of a work at the Langen Foundation in Germany shows a new format: two *Photo Corners* bracket the paintings displayed on adjoining walls. I question Liz in depth about the design of the *Photo Corner*. I am curious how it is hung. It straddles the corner but is itself a surface—black exposed photo paper. I ask her further about the detail of the design. How are they supported? What are they mounted on? What kind of photo paper is used? Carefully wary of becoming purely sculptural, her technical decisions are invariably derived from the vocabulary of photographic processes. Prints, laminates, backing materials, and wall brackets consistently employ

the techniques of fine photographs. Bracketing either end of a wall, Liz's work at the Langen Foundation causes us to consider anew all the artworks that span the museum wall.



Liz Deschenes
Installation view of the exhibition
Structural Analysis, Langen Foundation,
Neuss, Germany, 2011,
curated by Christiane Schneider
©Langen Foundation, foto Wolfgang Vollmer, Neuss 2011

One other stunning image she showed me was of an installation in an art gallery in Belgium: just a plain white room with a beautiful old fireplace and one mirrored print. Perfect. I find myself loving the way her works look and then trusting that if I slow down and think about them more, I will be rewarded. I keep Liz Deschenes's works in my mind's eye and unpack them when I wish. In their apparent simplicity, they question the complex of issues implicit in artistic convention.



Liz Deschenes
Shift / Rise
Installation view
Sutton Lane,
Brussels, 2010