

# MASS MoCA

## NEWS RELEASE

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### Liz Deschenes: *Gallery 4.1.1*

*Prolific artist turns photography into a site-specific, sculptural, immersive, and interactive experience at MASS MoCA*

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"There was a striking economy of means in this photographic cave. Deschenes found a seemingly simple way to make viewers active participants in the work. The panoptic photograms 'saw' visitors to the extent that anyone in the space subtly altered the light cast onto each sheet. At the same time, viewers could see their own imperfect reflections in the surfaces. Standing in the gallery felt like being in nature—one was immersed in a sensate experience. Deschenes's work is informed by a rigorous attention to the history of photography. But what speaks to me is the way she captures light. Deschenes often uses moonlight as the source of illumination, creating an ineffable feeling. I find that in much of her work, the order and permanence of architecture and the chaos of nature come together in an otherworldliness that brings the outside in." — **N. Dash** on **Liz Deschenes**, July 2014



*Bracket (London)*, 2013. Installation view, courtesy of Campoli Presti, London / Paris

*North Adams, Massachusetts* — One of the leading and most respected and influential photographers of her generation, **Liz Deschenes** takes the fundamental conditions of photography and its display as the subject of her work. Over the past two decades, she has expanded the possibilities of “self-reflexive” or “concrete” photography, making visible the materials and processes of the medium — namely, the interaction of paper, light, and chemicals. She is

perhaps known best for her photograms that are produced without a camera. Deschenes returns to her native Massachusetts, showing new work in her first solo exhibition in the state, opening on **May 23, 2015**, with a reception for the artist.

# MASS MoCA

## NEWS RELEASE

To create her atmospheric, monochromatic photograms, the artist exposes light-sensitive, silver-gelatin paper to ambient light before toning and fixing it. The variations in natural and artificial light, atmospheric conditions, and chemicals create marbled, reflective surfaces that take on the look of metal and that continue to oxidize, darken, and change color over time. The complexity of Deschenes' images is evident in the range of descriptions given them, which range from meditative, elegiac, and somber to playful, captivating, surprising, and mind altering.

The artist's works often engage directly with their surroundings, the unique architecture, lighting, and history of a space being active participants in the work. "Camera literally means 'room' in Latin," Deschenes explains. In her work, the gallery can become a stand-in for the otherwise absent camera — as well as the traditional darkroom. At MASS MoCA, the natural light flooding through a wall of windows contributes to the constantly shifting appearance of Deschenes' photographs, which continue to develop over time.

While Deschenes' works are not representational in a traditional sense, her photographs record the passage of time as well as the changing conditions of the exhibition space, both in the reflections of viewers and their movement in the photographs' mirror-like surfaces. In many instances, the works' shaped supports are designed to mimic the shadows and light of a particular site. Deschenes' photographs often take on sculptural qualities in their three-dimensional configurations and materiality, and also in the way they occupy the exhibition space. The pieces have variously been draped on the floor, hinged at right angles to the wall, situated in corners, or suspended from the ceiling. Both their careful placement and their non-referential images emphasize the viewer's awareness of his or her own perceptual and physical experience in the gallery.

Deschenes practice is perhaps best described in her own words: "I am interested in photography cultivating a self-reflexive dialogue, while simultaneously reflecting the world at large, and utilizing a vocabulary that integrates concept with form."

### **About the Artist**

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. Deschenes currently

# MASS MoCA

## NEWS RELEASE

has a project on view at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and was recently the subject of a solo exhibition at the Secession, Vienna (2012). The artist's 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); and the 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, 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.

### **Related Programming**

In conjunction with her solo exhibition, Deschenes chose six artists for participation in a concurrent group exhibition, *Artists' Choice: An Expanded Field of Photography*. The work of Dana Hoey, Craig Kalpakjian, Miranda Lichtenstein, Josh Tonsfeldt, Sara VanDerBeek, and Randy West is featured.

### **Sponsorship**

This exhibition is supported by a grant from the Artist's Resource Trust with additional funding provided by the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation and the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

### **Images**

A collection of high-resolution images is available here: <http://bit.ly/1BMcMn2>.

### **About MASS MoCA**

MASS MoCA is one of the world's liveliest (and largest) centers for making and enjoying today's most important art, music, dance, theater, film, and video. Hundreds of works of visual and performing art have been created on its 19<sup>th</sup>-century factory campus during fabrication and rehearsal residencies, making MASS MoCA among the most productive sites in the country for the creation and presentation of new art. More platform than box, MASS MoCA strives to bring to its audiences art experiences that are fresh, engaging, and transformative.

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## NEWS RELEASE

MASS MoCA's galleries are open 11am to 5pm every day except Tuesdays. The Hall Art Foundation's Anselm Kiefer exhibition is open seasonally beginning spring 2015. Gallery admission is \$18 for adults, \$16 for veterans and seniors, \$12 for students, \$8 for children 6 to 16, and free for children 5 and under. Members are admitted free year-round. For additional information, call 413.662.2111 x1 or visit [massmoca.org](http://massmoca.org).