
PHOTOMONITOR

Bracket (London)



Liz Deschenes
'Bracket (London)',
Installation view,
Courtesy of Campoli Presti,
London / Paris

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14.10.13 - 14.12.13

Campoli Presti / London / England

Bracket (London) / Reviewed by Nicolas Epstein / 09.12.13

Many a gallery's press release proclaims that the photographer whose work is on show has examined the material conditions of the medium. However, few contemporary art photographers are as emphatically committed to this examination as the American Liz Deschenes (b. 1966). A master of creative exposures, Deschenes makes use of natural light to create her camera-less works, six of which are currently on display at *Bracket (London)* her fifth solo show at Campoli Presti.

The artist's photograms (pictures made with photographic materials but not through the use of a camera) have precedent in the history of photography. They recall the work of William Henry Fox Talbot, a nineteenth century photography pioneer. Fox Talbot exposed photosensitive paper that was placed underneath objects to a light source in order to create a latent image. The paper was then chemically treated to make the image visible to the naked eye, creating, in his words, a 'photogenic drawing'. Many years later, Man Ray produced 'Rayographs'. These were created with a similar process to Talbot's photograms but using different chemicals and multiple exposures so that objects would materialise on the final print as if super imposed on top of one another.

Liz Deschenes' work both stems from and adds to this lineage. Working nocturnally, the artist exposes photosensitive paper to moonlight for several hours. She then fixes the paper with silver toner creating an elemental, rich and eerie effect. When looking at the works in *Bracket* from a distance they appear to be tarnished, though a closer inspection reveals a painterly expressivity with marbled textures streaking across the surfaces of the silver gelatin prints. One notices the fingerprints of the artist and semblances of smoke and water brought forth through chemical processing.

Bracket consists of large scale photograms that span gracefully across a room partitioned into two sections. The first section consists of four aluminium mounted parallelogram prints created specifically for the space in which they are shown. Deschenes chose this specific geometric form to resemble the outlines of the sunlight that pours onto the floor of the gallery through the overhead windows during the daytime. The works are architectural and reconfigure the environment in which they are displayed. More than just being photographic, these works are sculptural abstracts that exceed our often-confined expectations of what art photography can do.

In the second section, a silver toned silver gelatin print curving into a deep white frame juts out of the wall. It resembles a concave mirror, reflecting the viewer but also signalling the reflective nature of photography as a medium. We question: what does/can photography reflect besides the view of a photographer? The second work extends perpendicular to the wall with a dulled metallic presence. It represents a play on monochromatic painting. But while a monochrome in acrylic exists in stasis for many years, the chemicals that form Deschenes' photogram are in a state of flux leading to a gradual shift in colours and oxidization that changes the appearance of the piece. For most silver gelatin prints, these chemical shifts create unwanted degradation but here they are desirable and an intended part of the composition.

Indeed, Deschenes' work examines the material condition of the photographic medium but it also does much more than that. It explores the potential of photography and the ways in which it can be used to create a space that is both contemplative and architecturally intriguing. *Bracket* is not just an examination, it is a reminder of photography's vast capabilities.

- Nicolas Epstein