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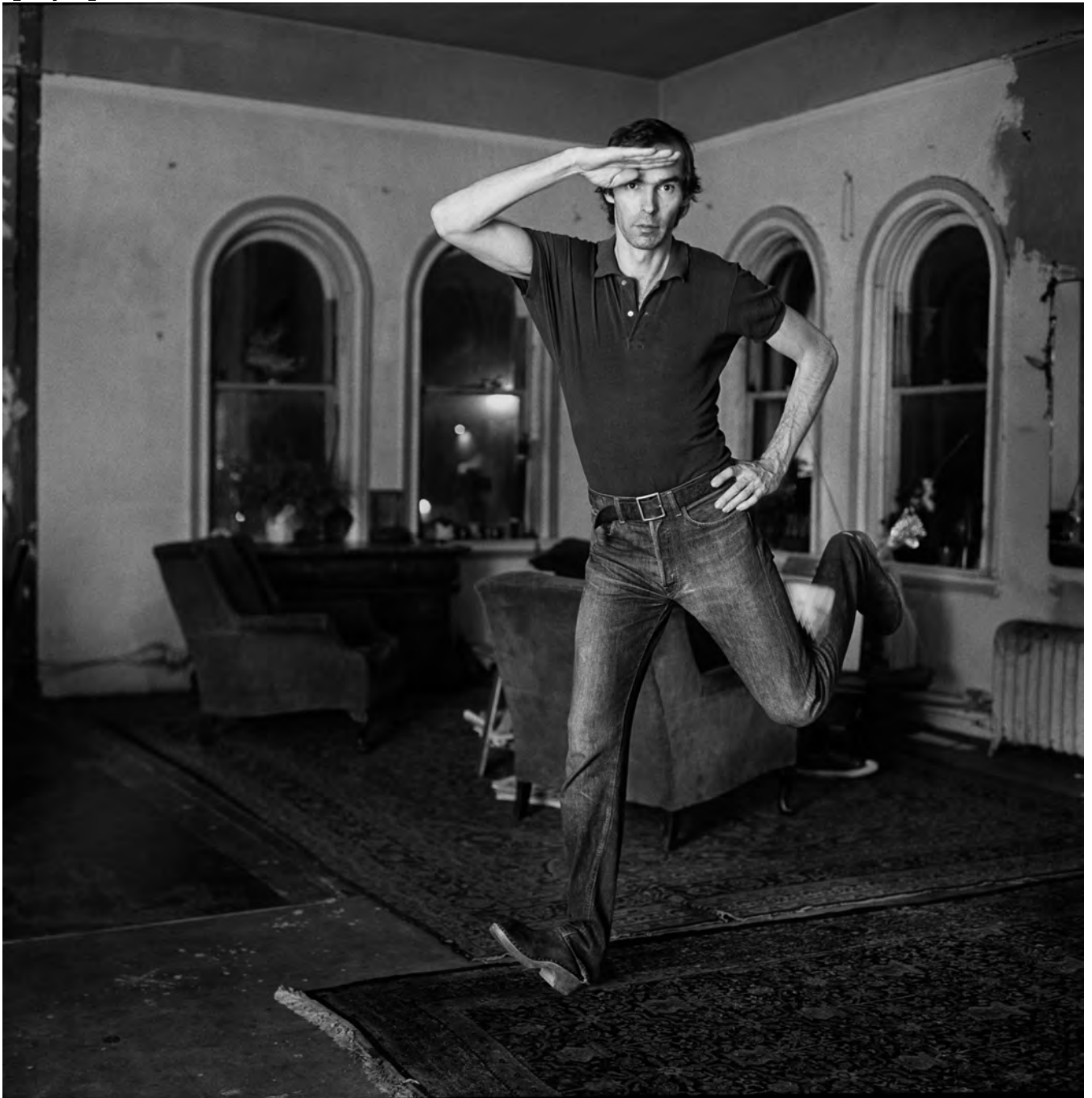
Exhibition Tip: 'Persistence of Vision' at Gropius Bau

Peter Hujar and Liz Deschenes' intergenerational joint exhibition stretches the medium of photography into new forms.



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

The photographer Peter Hujar never became widely known in his short lifetime – cut brutally short by complications from HIV – though he never seemed especially troubled by this lack of recognition. Despite moving within New York’s achingly cool art scene of the 1970s and 80s, the New Jersey-born artist remained dismissive of Andy Warhol’s fame-hungry convulsions and a touch contemptuous of Robert Mapplethorpe’s rise to becoming a bona fide gallery darling. Hujar was never one to play up to the art market.



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

“I never knew him personally,” says the New York–based photographer Liz Deschenes, whose work will be shown in dialogue with Hujar’s in *Persistence of Vision* at Gropius Bau. “But from what I’ve read, he didn’t particularly like galleries. Not that this prevents you from having a career, but I think it shaped how he moved through the art world.”

The sheer diversity of Hujar’s photographic work likely played a role as well. Working almost exclusively in black and white, he photographed friends, buildings, bodies of water, human bodies, decaying ruins, a dead gull, Candy Darling on her deathbed, catacombs, cars, cityscapes, a crushed heap of metal. Nearly always small in size, the photographs appear precise, organised, faintly standoffish – yet, somehow they can often feel intimate and strangely tender, too.



Peter Hujar, Beauregard and his Dog Pilar (I), 1983 © The Peter Hujar Archive / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2026

“You can always tell if it’s a work by Hujar,” Deschenes continues. “There’s something about them that means they could only really have ever been made by him.” Meticulously arranged according to Hujar’s exacting layouts, his architectural images possess a distinct, haunting authority. In nighttime shots of New York, sodium light pours from windows, causing structures to glow with a cold, peculiar incandescence. “He was an extraordinary technician,” she adds. “His work is sculptural, the way he converted three-dimensional space into two dimensions.”



Liz Deschenes, Warp / Weft #1 & #2 (Diptych), Warp / Weft #3 & Untitled (Gorilla Glass 100), 2024-2025 © Courtesy of Liz Deschenes and Emanuela Campoli, Paris / Milan, Photo: Andrea Rossetti

The exhibition opens with Warhol's *Screen Test* of Hujar, a film made in the mid-1960s. Silent, Hujar stares back with unflinching intensity, swaying gently, living up to Warhol's nickname for him: the boy who never blinks. The work is paired with Deschenes' *Frames Per Second*, a series that synchronises with the speed at which the human eye perceives a sequence of still images as movement. "I'm interested in how time operates differently across works," she explains. "You feel something shift when time is broken up, even if you can't immediately articulate it."



Liz Deschenes, Untitled (Claude Glass 1), 2023 © Courtesy of Liz Deschenes and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, Photo: Stephen Faught

Deschenes has long engaged with photography's material and conceptual conditions. In her series *Shift / Rise* (2010), she used moonlight to alter bare photogram paper, the material's responsiveness to light rendering it volatile, almost flesh-like in its sensitivity. "Everybody's work changes over time – even Peter's," she continues. "I just make it readily apparent in my work. I don't find fixity interesting. Photography is light-writing – it's malleable."



Peter Hujar, Candy Darling on Her Deathbed, 1973 © The Peter Hujar Archive / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2026

It's intriguing to see how the dialogue between the two artists unfolds. Despite being separated by generations and approaches, they share an understanding of photography as a tactile process, one that's painstakingly prepared and produced. "But how do you really make an exhibition with an artist you can't talk to?"

Deschenes considers. Part of her response has been to draw directly on the scale and history of the Gropius Bau itself, developing new linen works suspended slightly away from the wall, allowing the architecture of the gallery rooms to remain present. "It's a response to the building: its high ceilings, its history," she says. "The intervention is subtle, not didactic. I'm not superimposing something onto the wall. I'm just hoping people feel it."

Since Hujar's death in 1987, art-historical attention has often narrowed around his portraits of postwar New York's canonical figures, sometimes eclipsing the breadth of his wider practice. "There's a photograph of Paul Thek that always stays with me," Deschenes says. "He's looking at Peter but also looking away, as if lost in thought. Something about it, I find it hard to understand – which is why I keep returning to it."

Persistence of Vision, *Mar 19–Jun 26, Gropius Bau, details*

