

# M+B

## Los Angeles Times

### Ellen Carey's Photograms Turn Plain Paper Into a Topographic Head Trip

By Leah Ollman  
April 10, 2017

Ellen Carey's new works at M+B deliver generously on optical buzz and conceptual bang. They're photograms, but they also could be described as performative sculptures enacted in the gestational space of the darkroom.

For each piece, Carey wrinkles and creases a sheet of photo paper, selectively exposes it to light, then smooths it back and processes it. Pure hues of the spectrum splinter and pool across the page with lavish intensity. Shadows and color shifts correspond to the irregular surface — magenta down one side of a ridge and green down the other, for instance.

In the pieces titled "Caesura," the paper has been creased or accordion-folded vertically down the middle, and fine, vein-like fissures often run counter to the central axis. In the other works, the "Dings & Shadows," wrinkles occur at all angles. Every field is an interrupted field.

In a six-part polyptych ("Dings & Shadows RGBYMC," 2012), Carey assigns each panel one color but also introduces quietly thrilling deviations: a little wedge of red piercing the cyan like an arrow; a golden flame that flickers at the heart of the green.

Throughout this body of work, the paper's surface does double duty as object and subject, material and image. The literal and the abstract merge.

Carey's work nevertheless reverberates with associations. The fluid soaks of color invoke the stain painting of Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis. The interplay of volume, light and shadow recalls passages in Frans Hals, John Singer Sargent and others, where draping fabric takes on a dynamic, painterly life of its own. And, of course, there's resonance with the history of the photogram itself, especially its efflorescence among early modernists.

For more than two decades, Connecticut-based Carey has been exploring photography through inventive, physically involving, process-oriented work. Her recent efforts here are as wondrous as they are devious, beginning as they do with an act of destruction — a violation of the pristine surface that normally would render a sheet of paper useless



Ellen Carey, *Caesura*, 2016, photogram, 40 x 30 inches