

## Liz Nielsen: *Edge of Forever* @ Miles McEnery

9 November 2022 | By Loring Knoblauch

**JTF (just the facts):** A total of 8 color photographic works, framed in white and unmatted, and hung against blue and white walls in the single room gallery space and the entry area. All of the works are analog chromogenic photograms on Fujiflex, made in 2021 or 2022. Physical sizes range from roughly 53×38 to 95×53 inches, and all of the works are unique.

A catalog has been published by the gallery to accompany the exhibition.



*Installation view at Miles McEnery Gallery*

**Comments/Context:** The idea of stepping into complete darkness and creating physical artworks out of light has always seemed like something approaching alchemy. There is a kind of scientific magic taking place in such an effort, where light sensitive materials are blasted with colored/filtered lights, blocked with cutouts, screened with negatives, and layered by multiple exposures, the resulting compositions creating scenes and setups that never were exactly, at least in the usual photographic sense.

For the better part of the past decade, Liz Nielsen has been patiently working in the dark, methodically exploring the possibilities of camera-less color photograms. Of course, there is some degree of chance inherent in her process (mostly in the precision of alignment or placement in the dark), but for the most part, her compositions are carefully planned and pre-visualized. Over the years, her images have oscillated back and forth at the edge between abstraction and recognizable representation, where overlapping triangles, squares, circles, and strips have been gathered and layered into complex geometries and elemental forms, some seeming to evoke the simplified shapes of mountains, suns, moons, and landscapes.

Nielsen's recent works feel fuller and more muscular than before, expanding further into space and holding the walls with more authority. The compositions have been built out of brightly colored rounds that we might interpret as smoothly curved stones, polished rocks, weathered shards of sea glass, or perhaps larger boulders



*Cover of Exhibition Catalog*

when just a few fill the frames. Many of her arrangements mimic arches, cairns, totems, and other stacks of stones set on what might approximate the ground, where the layered step-wise forms climb upward or bend over with precariously implied instability. The shapes are just open ended enough that we can see symbolic markers and hand built monuments if we want, or we can simply step back and allow the candy colored shapes to dance and shimmer.

The simplicity of Nielsen's forms can oftentimes feel disarmingly easy or overly literal, but her nuanced control of additive color is really where the power in these pictures lies. Almost none of these little rounds are flat and uniform in their color, nor are they particularly painterly – this color is resolutely photographic, with flares, shines, gradients, and fluid transitions that are unique to a medium of light. Many have a thin edge in a complimentary color, like a shadow, an echo, or a deliberately misaligned/doubled effect, and some have subtle surface textures and features, like splatters, droplets, papery wrinkles, and even fogged clouds. All of these details give the rounds presence, almost like a hint of depth and three dimensionality, and the extra glossy surface of the Fujiflex paper further amplifies the pop in Nielsen's complex colors, especially when the backdrop is left to fall to white.

The increases in scale and intensity found in these new works feel like a natural next step for Nielsen, and the crossover to a new gallery relationship (with a painting heavy stable) signals a desire to bridge her photographic practice toward new kinds of artistic ideas and mindsets. Given Nielsen's working methods, her success ultimately lies in her ability to deliver engaging built-from-scratch compositions, and these new works have plenty of buoyancy and verve, while still retaining a sense of joyful approachability. This consistent pulse of positive energy is likely what will bring viewers back for more.