

Abstraction

A LEVEL PHOTOGRAPHY



Abstraction...

The relationship between photography and abstraction is fascinating. Unlike other visual art forms which begin with a blank space or surface that has to be filled by the artist, photography begins with a world full of information. The conventional job of the photographer is to select and capture a small portion of reality in a relatively faithful manner.

However, it could be argued that all art, including photography, is essentially abstract.

Photographs are versions of reality. They are flat. They have edges. Photographs are artful selections. They are silent.

In the early years of photography, certain artists understood this aspect of the medium and emphasised the abstract qualities of photographs and the **disinterested eye** of the camera. This tradition of abstraction in photography continues to the present day.

The view from here...

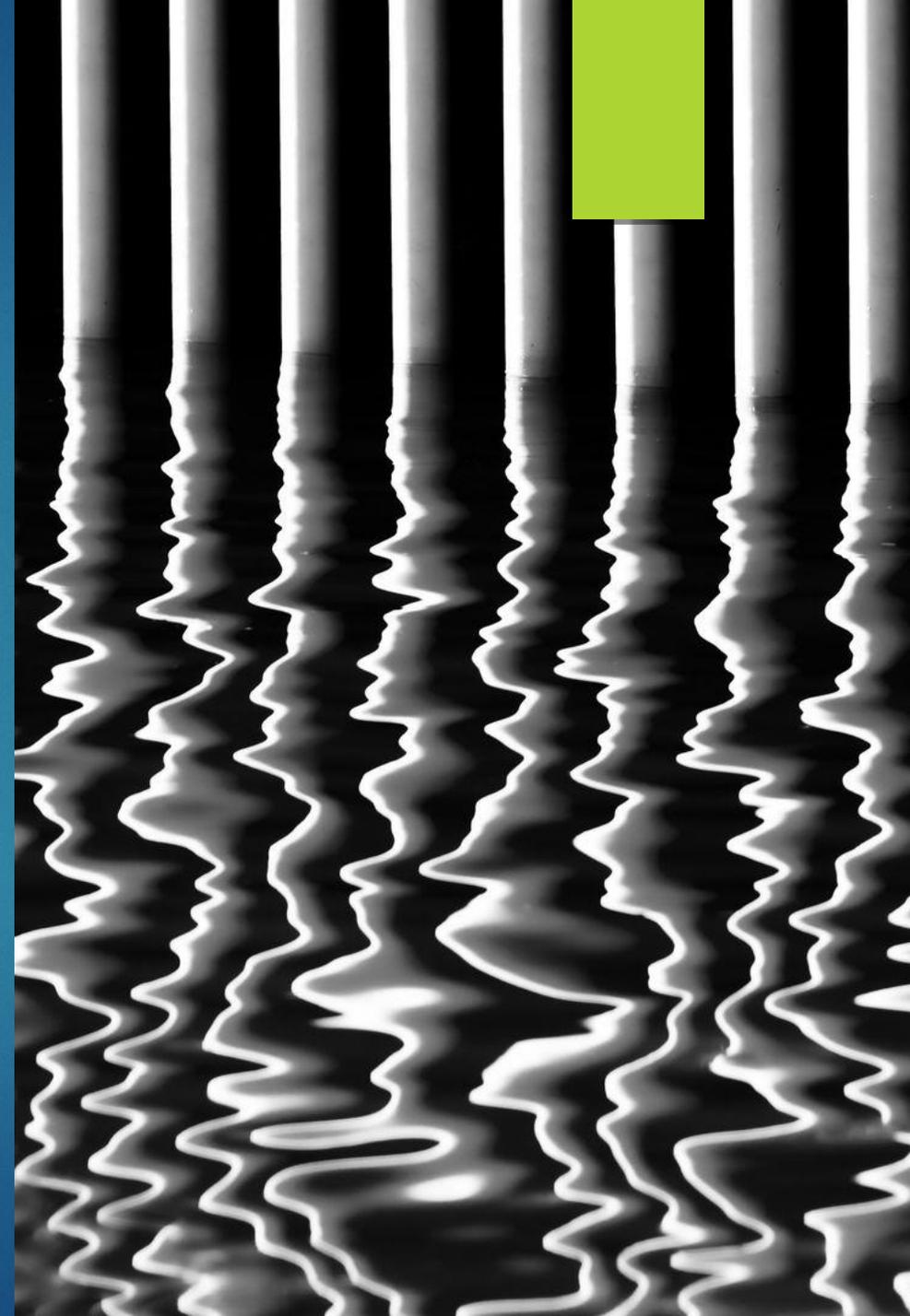
▶ All photographs are, to some extent abstractions. Whether you agree with this will be largely dependent on your understanding of - or definition for - the term abstraction, which in itself is quite ambiguous.

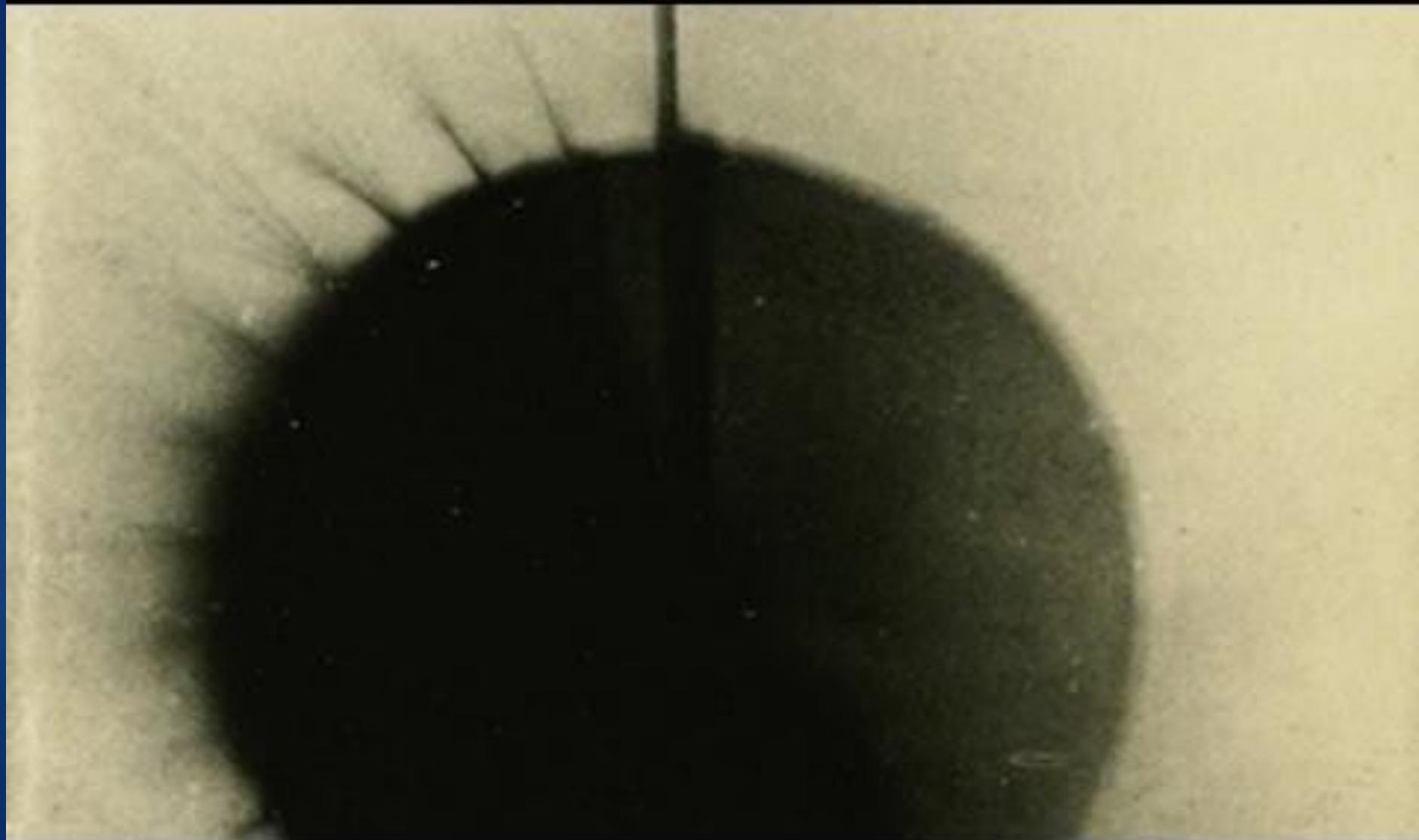
ABSTRACTION - Dealing with ideas rather than events

- ▶ Freedom from representational qualities (in art)
- ▶ The process of considering something independently of its associations or attributes
- ▶ The process of removing something

Let's think about the following questions...

- ▶ Would you disagree with any of the following?
- ▶ Photographs are illusions
- ▶ Photographs are flat
- ▶ Photographs are not real
- ▶ Photographs are surreal
- ▶ Photographs are made up of...dots, tones, textures, shapes, colours...visual (or formal) elements.





Abstraction Project...

You must start this project by completing the following tasks...

Research the history of abstraction in photography. Check out the images on **the Pinterest page**. Watch the video about the history of abstraction in photography and make notes on it and watch the YouTube vodcast which explores some famous and not so famous examples of photographic abstraction, again making notes.

Write a short introduction **explaining your understanding** of abstraction in photography.

Choose a quotation that **helps you to think** about the meaning of abstraction in art and photography.

Use www.photoquotes.com

Find your own resources and document them in your book with a analysing the work a describing what place they have in the concept of abstraction and what you have learnt from them

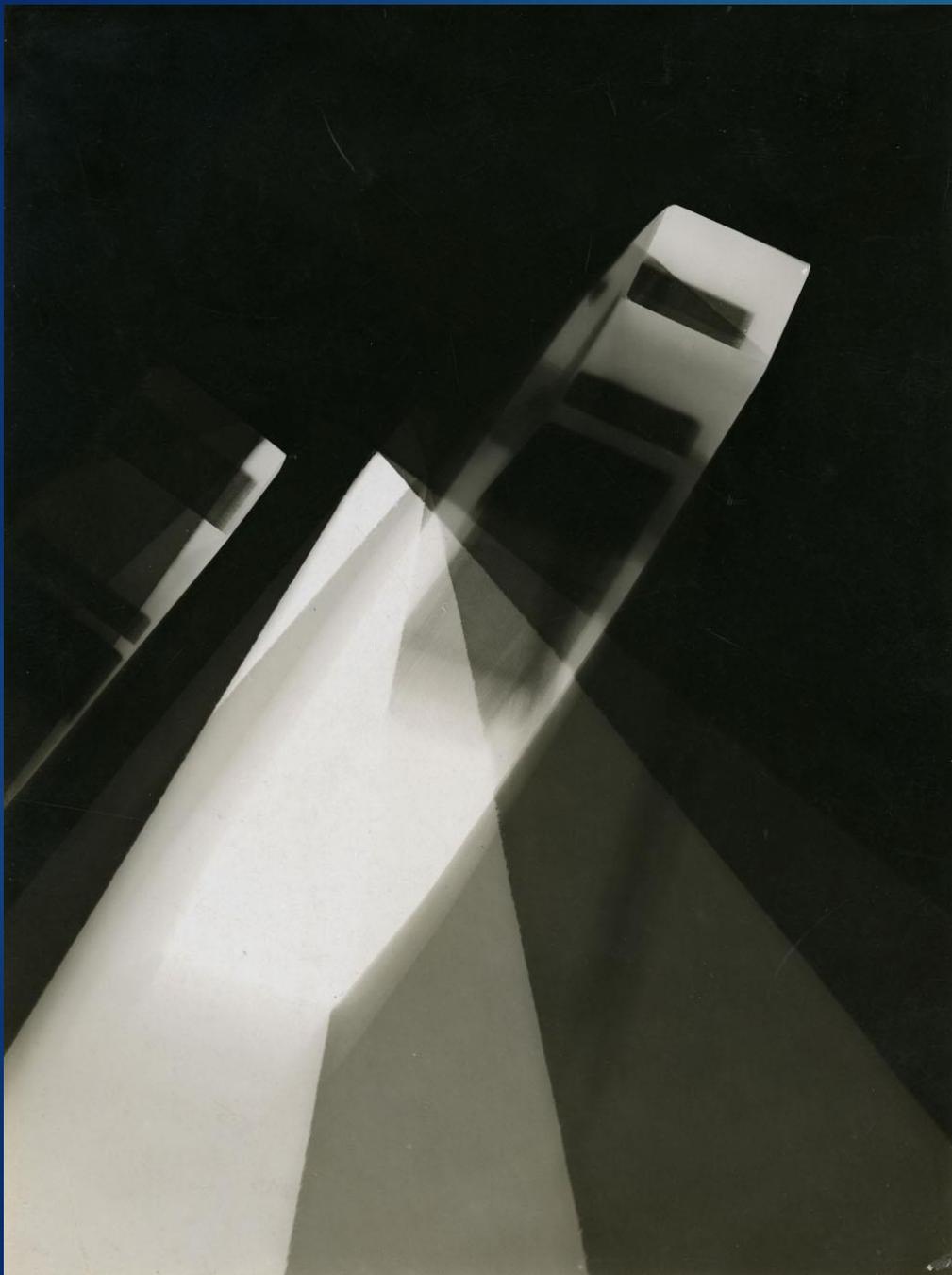
Create a series of Galleries featuring the work of Francis Bruguière, Jaroslav Rössler, Vjeko Sager, Jerry Reed, Tamara Lorenz and James Welling including **your understanding** of their work in the context of abstraction.

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Abstract constructions...

The following artists demonstrate what can be achieved with very simple materials - paper and light. Each of them seems more interested in the formal (abstract) elements of photography than in representing the subject naturalistically. In his entry in the Photographers Playbook (Fulford and Halpern, 2014), Denis Defibaugh suggests:

Make thirty-six unique, beautiful photographs of one piece of white bond paper. You may not cut or tear the paper, but you can fold it, roll it, or crumple it. Shoot on a white background in a studio with spotlights and soft light. Use colour filters on the spotlights, if you desire. There should be nothing else in the photographs but one piece of bond paper. Explore lighting and change the lighting for each photograph.



The enemy of photography is the convention, the fixed rules of 'how to do'. The salvation of photography comes from the experiment.

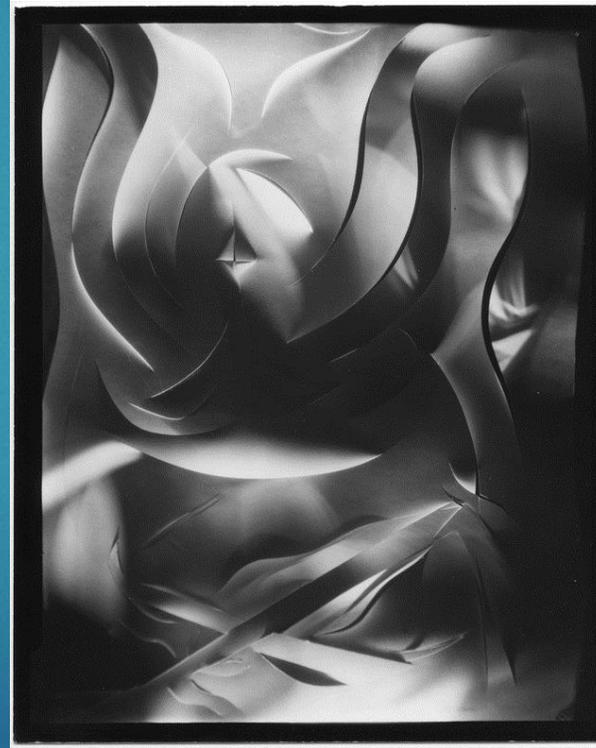
-- Laszlo Moholy-Nagy

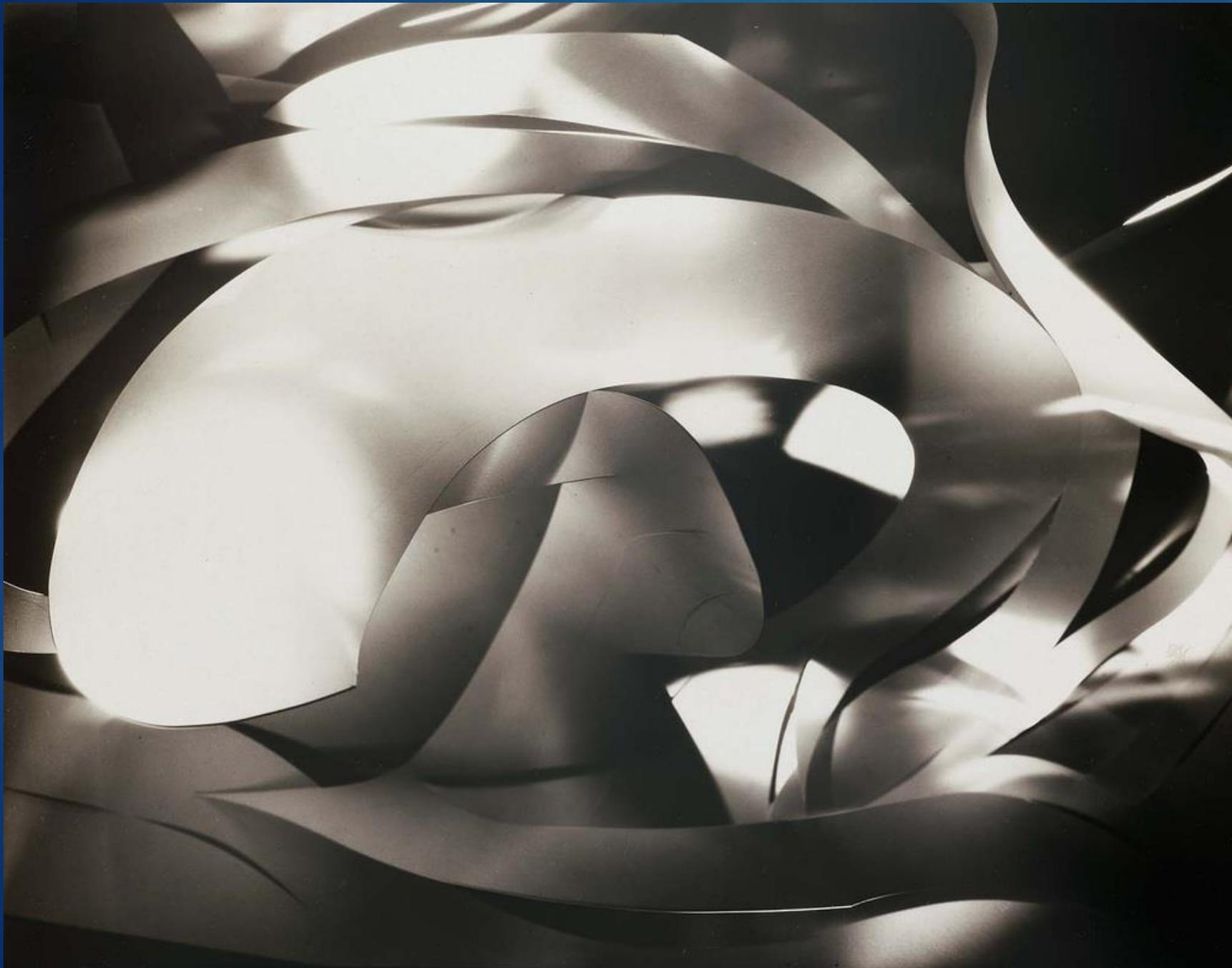


What lives in pictures is very difficult to define... it finally becomes a thing beyond the thing portrayed... some sort of section of the soul of the artist that gets detached and comes out to one from the picture.
-- Francis Bruguière

Francis Bruguière...

Bruguière was an American photographer who moved to London in 1928 where he began to experiment with non representational photography. Of these, the cut paper abstractions are particularly beautiful. The photographer exploits the endlessly subtle qualities of both paper and light, manipulating both in order to create complex patterns of texture and form.

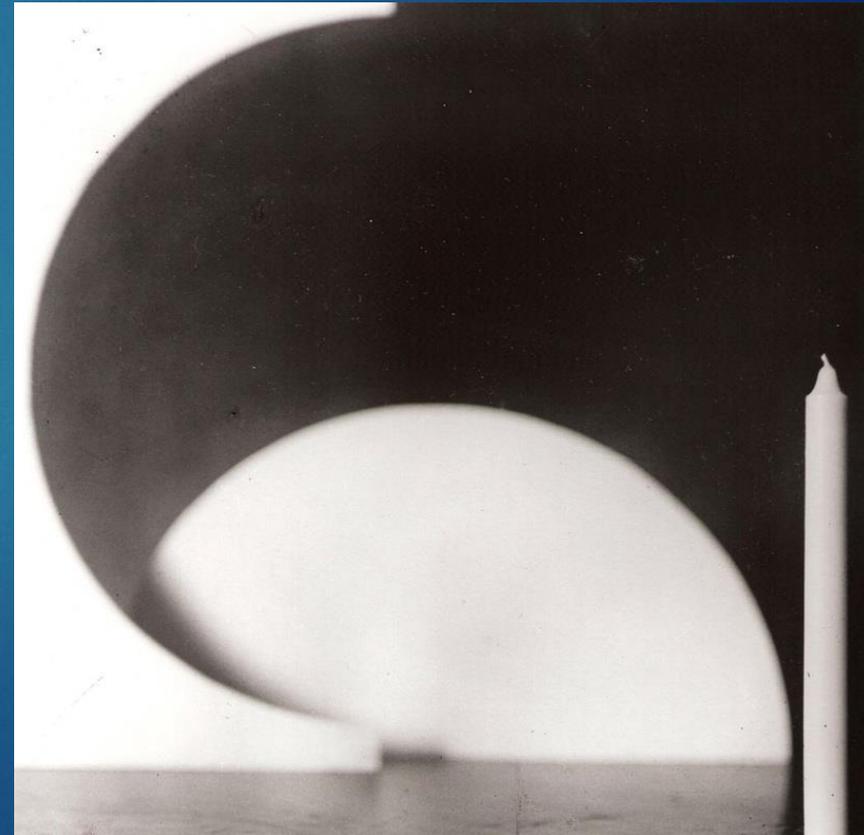
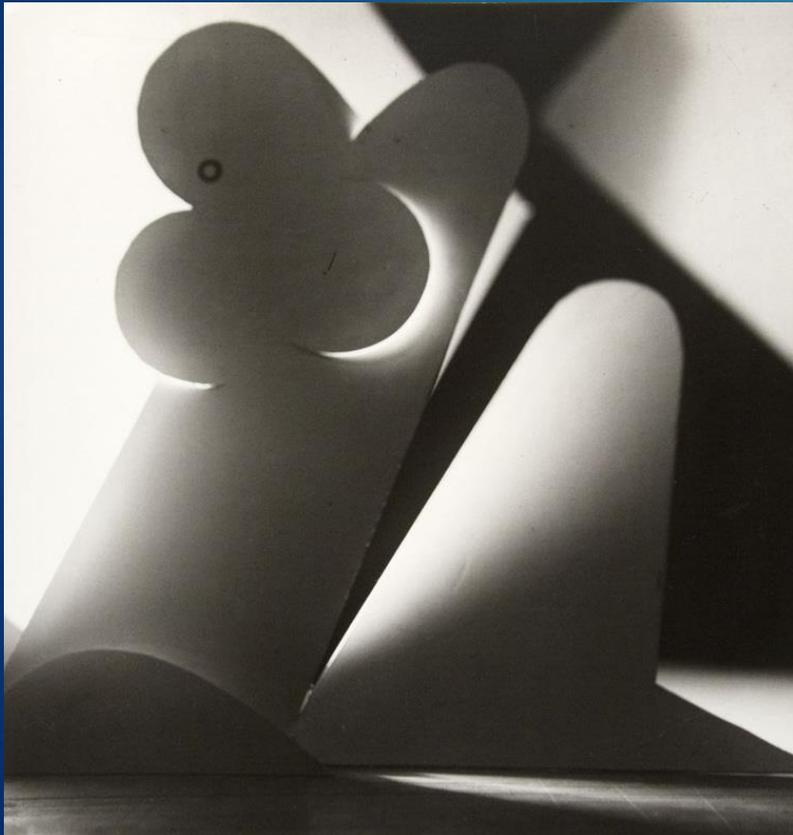


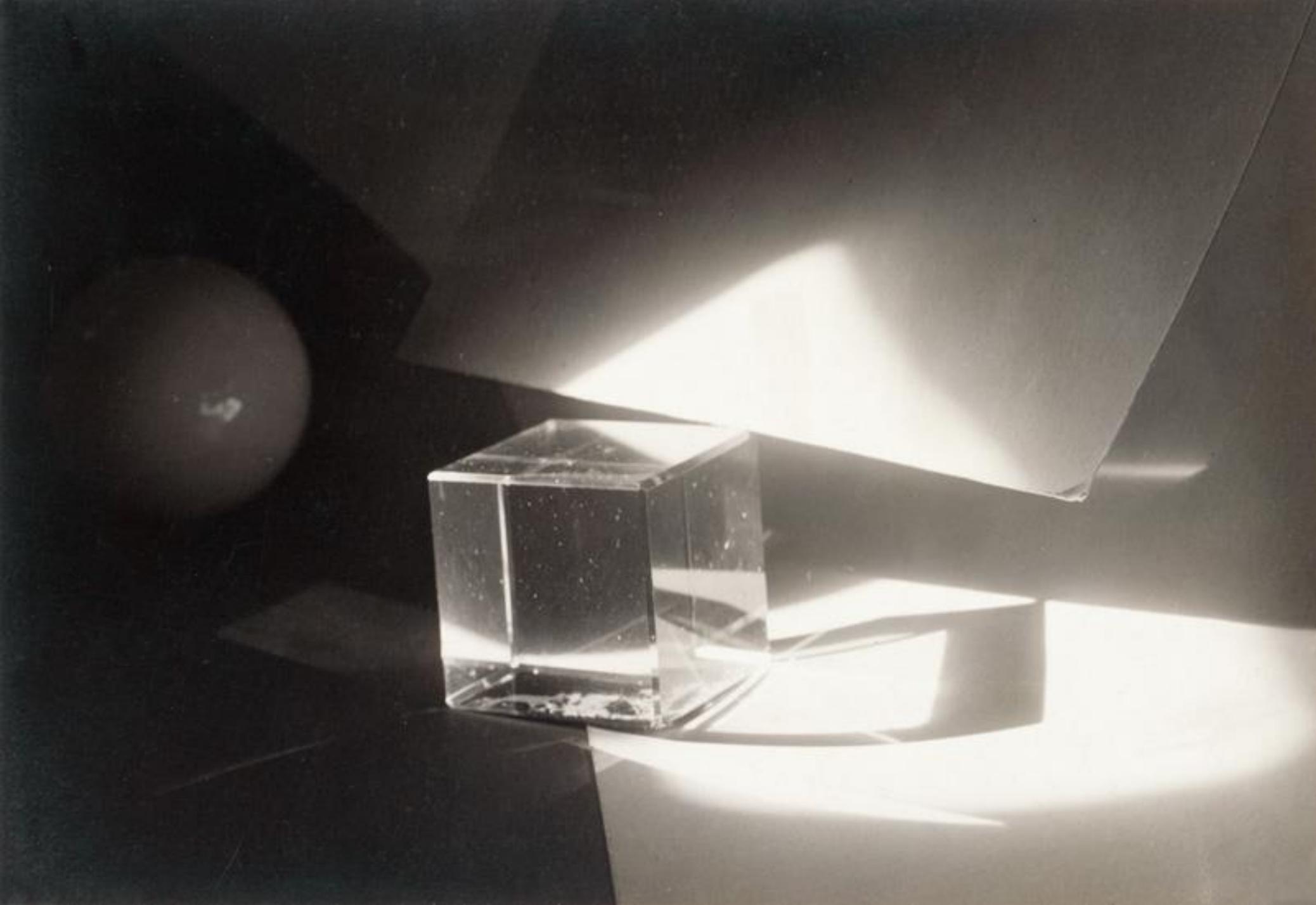




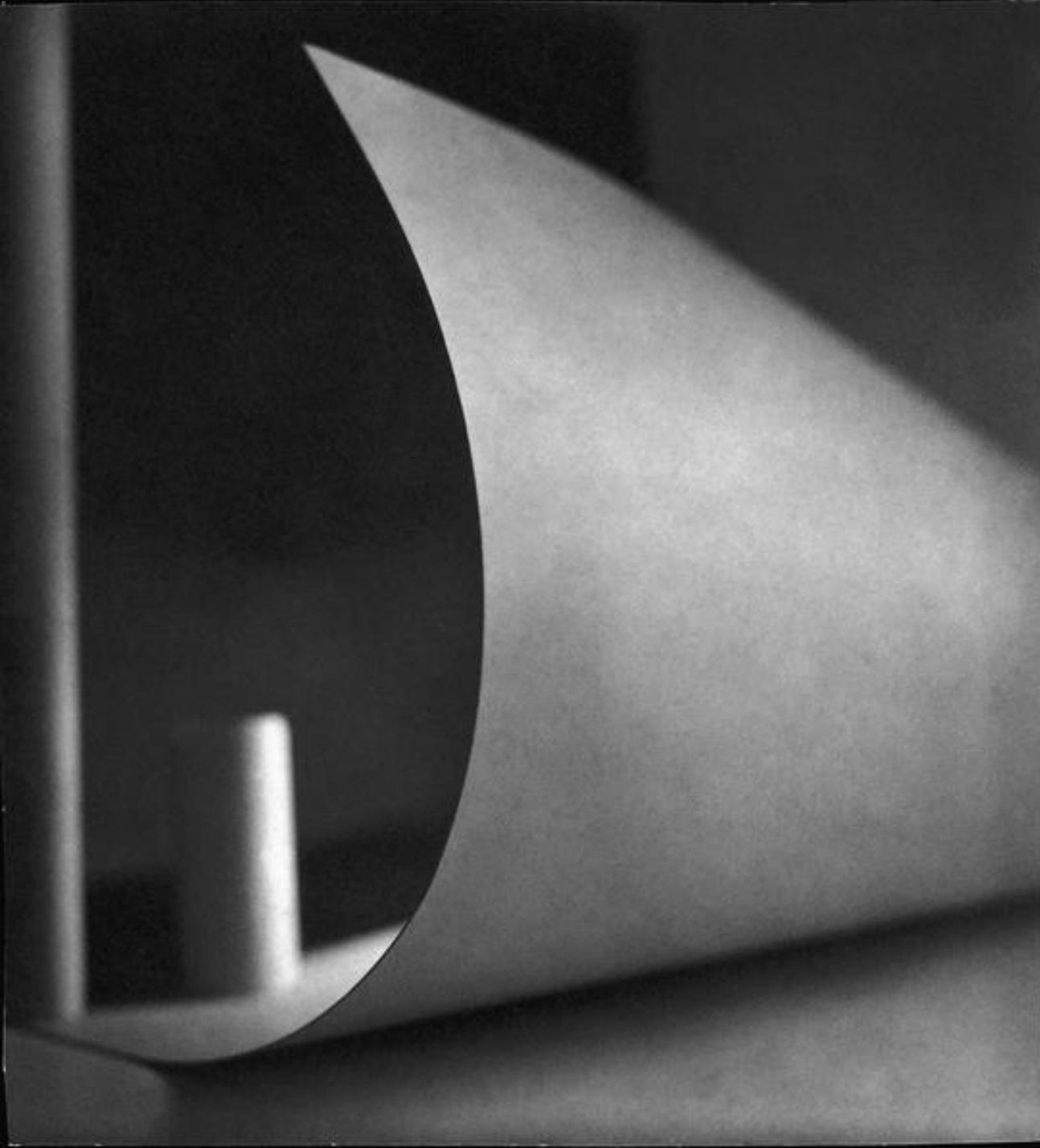
Jaroslav Rössler

Rössler was a Czech avant-garde photographer who became known for combining different styles of modern photography including cubism, futurism, constructivism, new objectivity, and abstraction. His photographs often reduced images to elementary lines and shapes, exploring the contrast of light and shade. He experimented with a wide range of techniques and processes including photograms and double exposures.





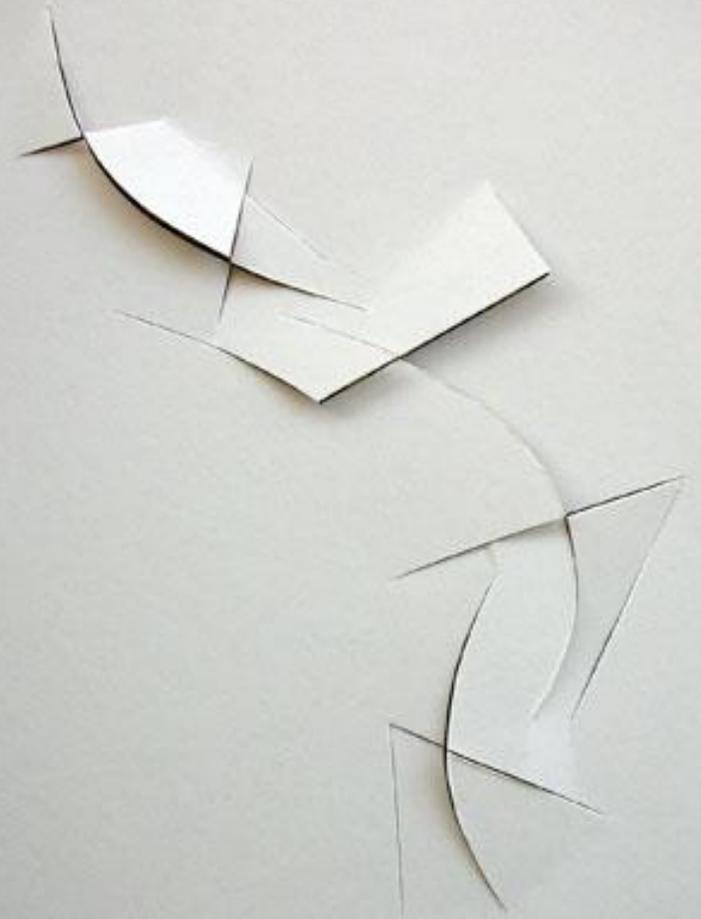
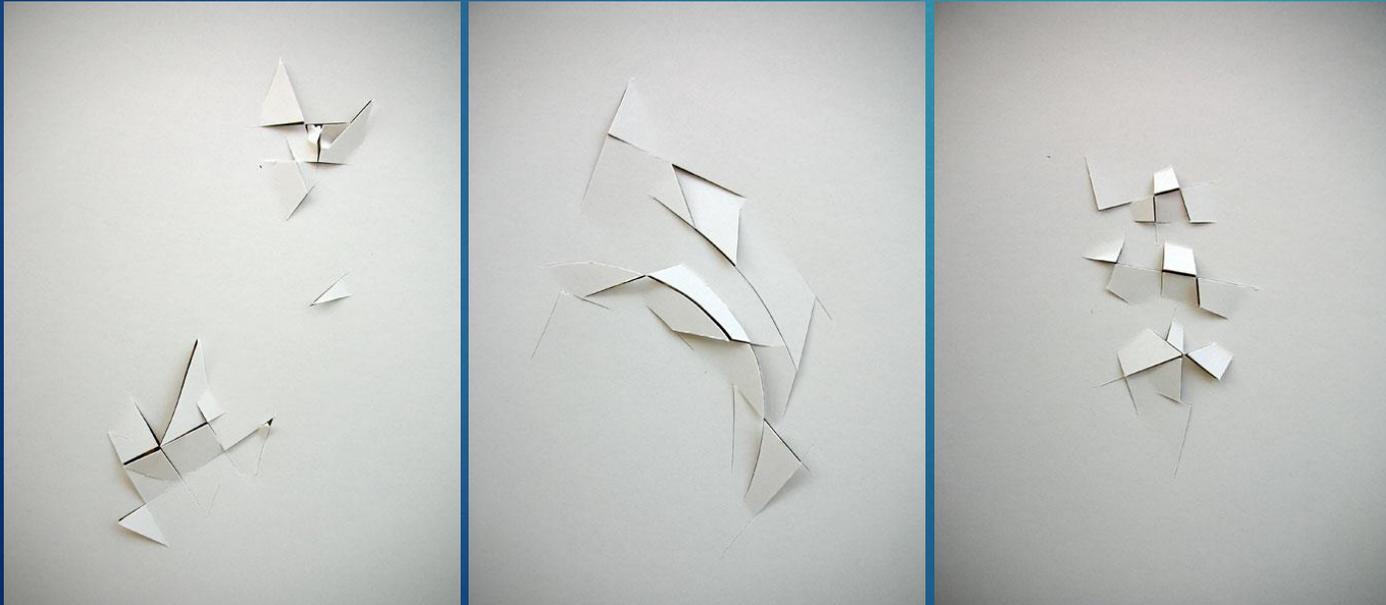


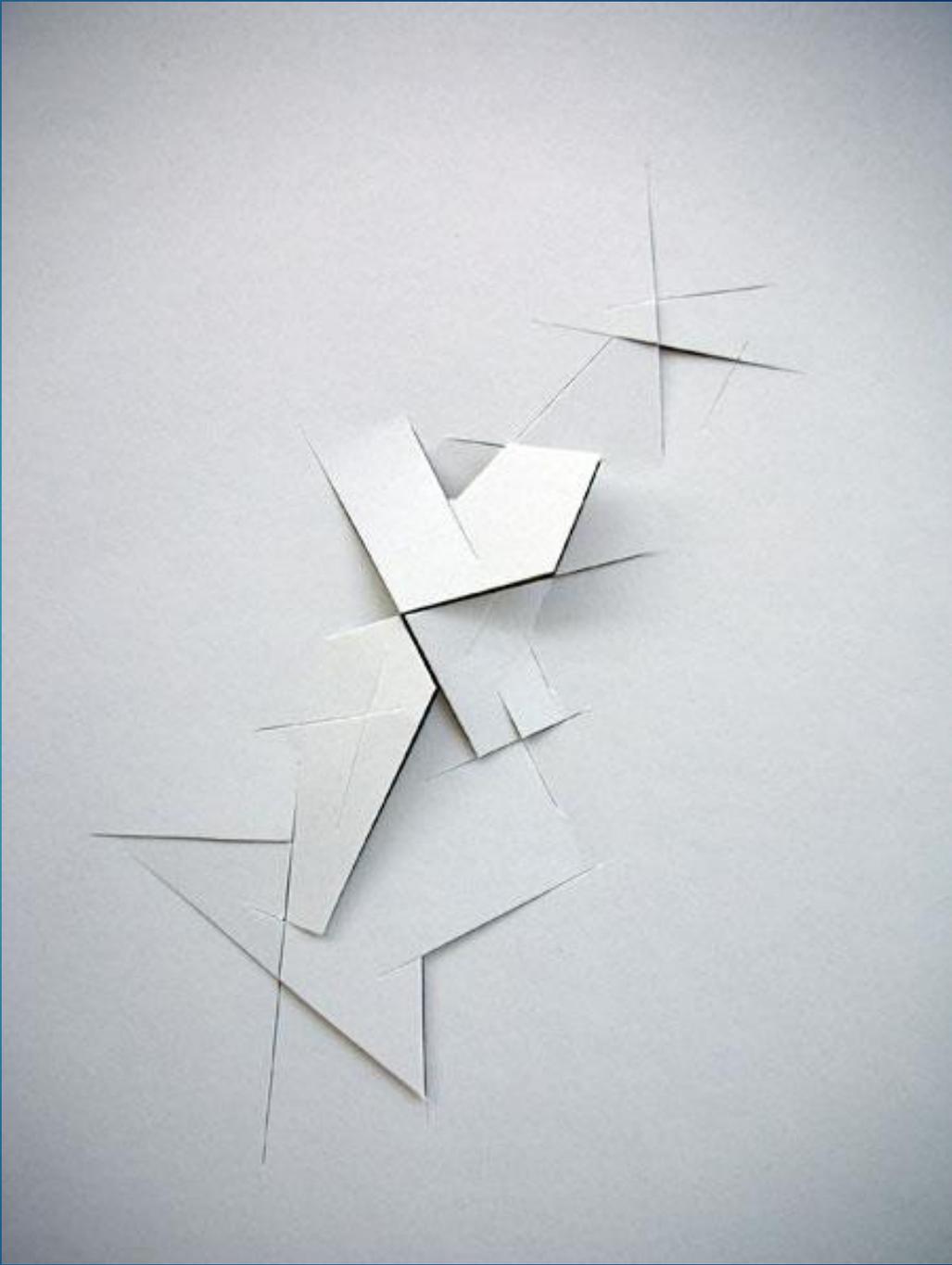
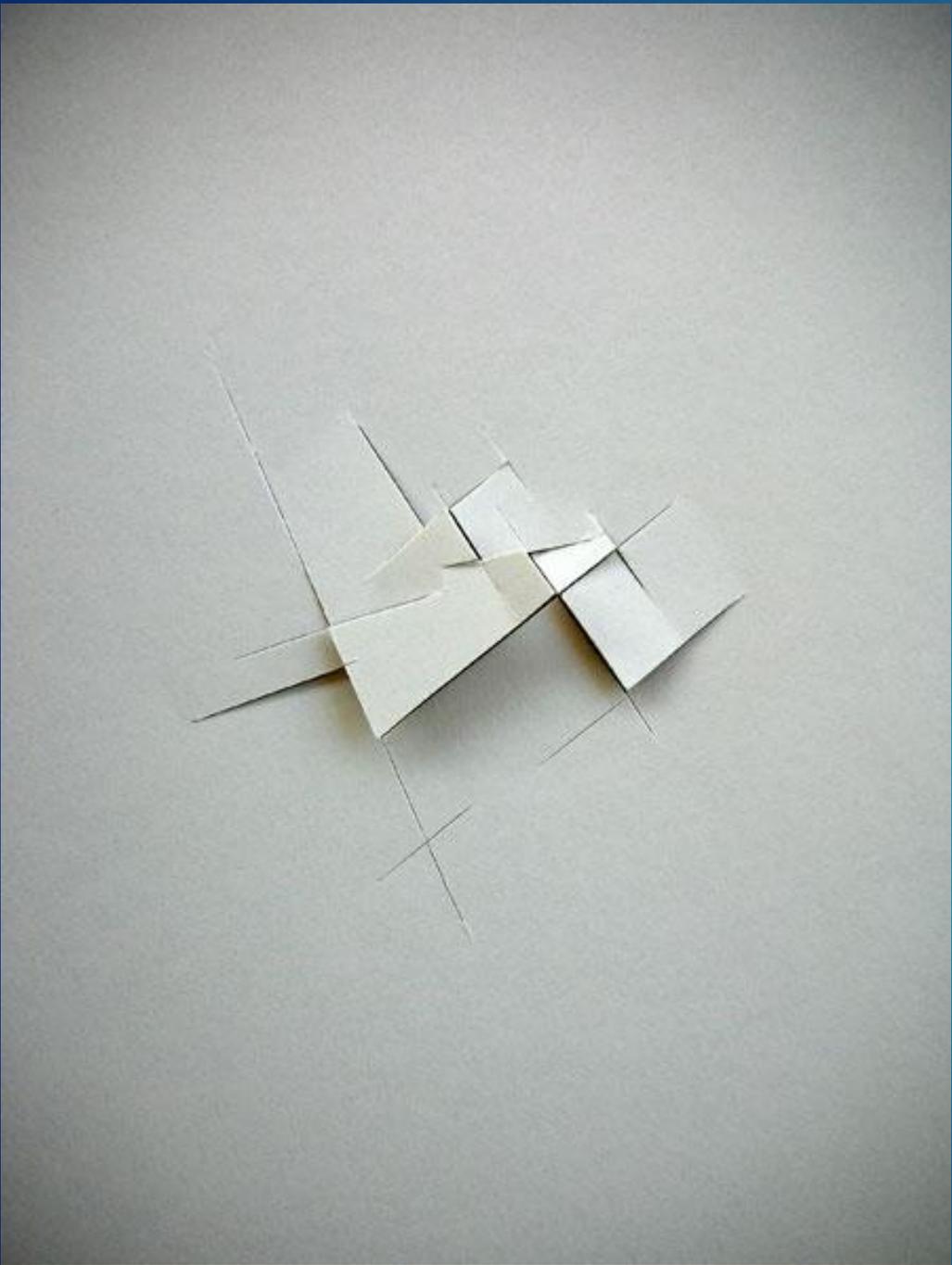


Vjeko Sager

Sager is a contemporary artist whose series '[Antimatter](#)' combines cut paper abstractions reminiscent of those by Francis Bruguière with charcoal drawings.

Whereas Bruguière's images explore dramatic contrasts of light and shade, Sager's photographs are much lighter in tone. The cuts in the paper are mostly located in the central section of the paper. They tend to be shorter and straighter, producing subtle disruptions of the paper's surface that remind me of architects' models.

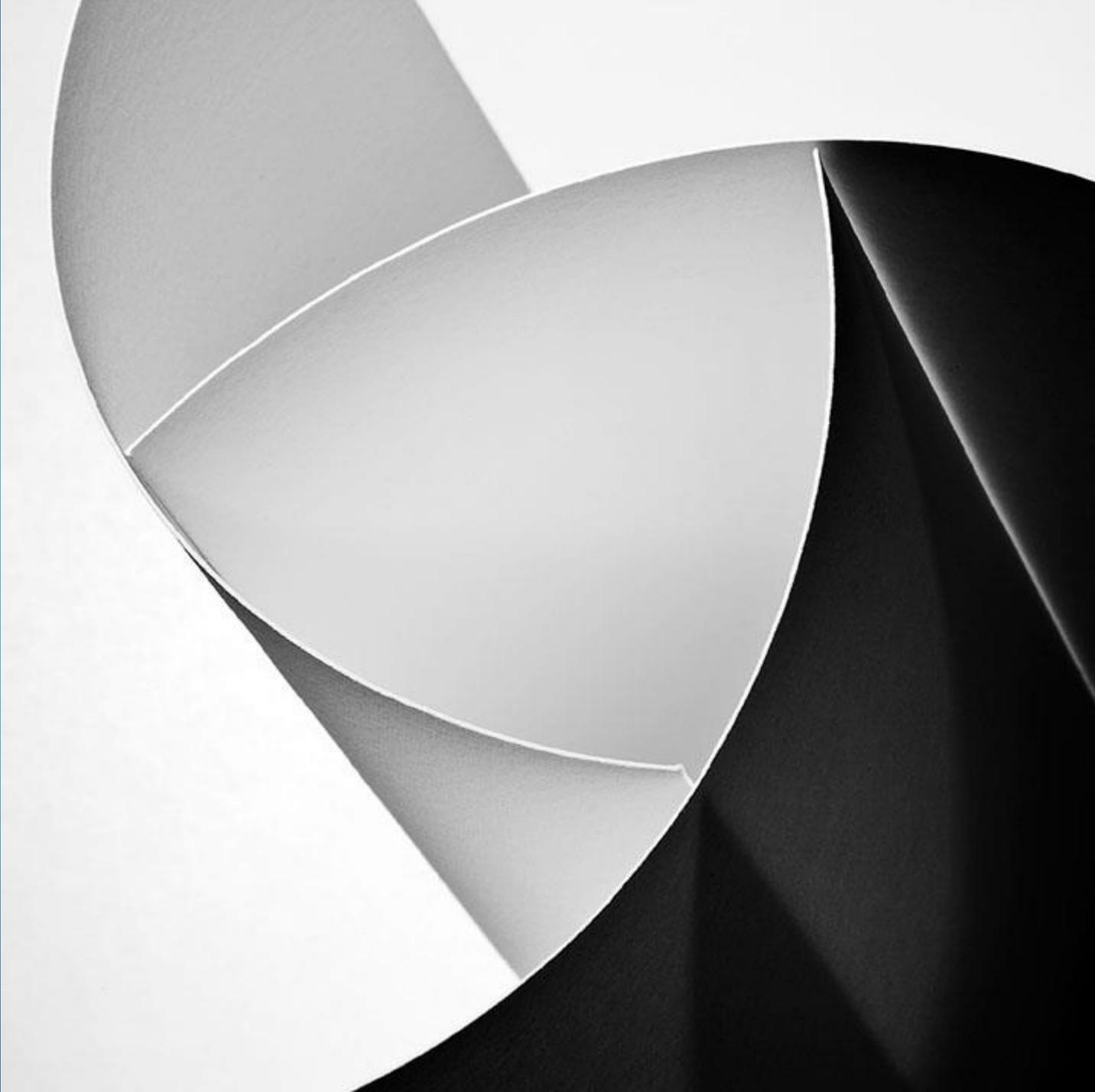




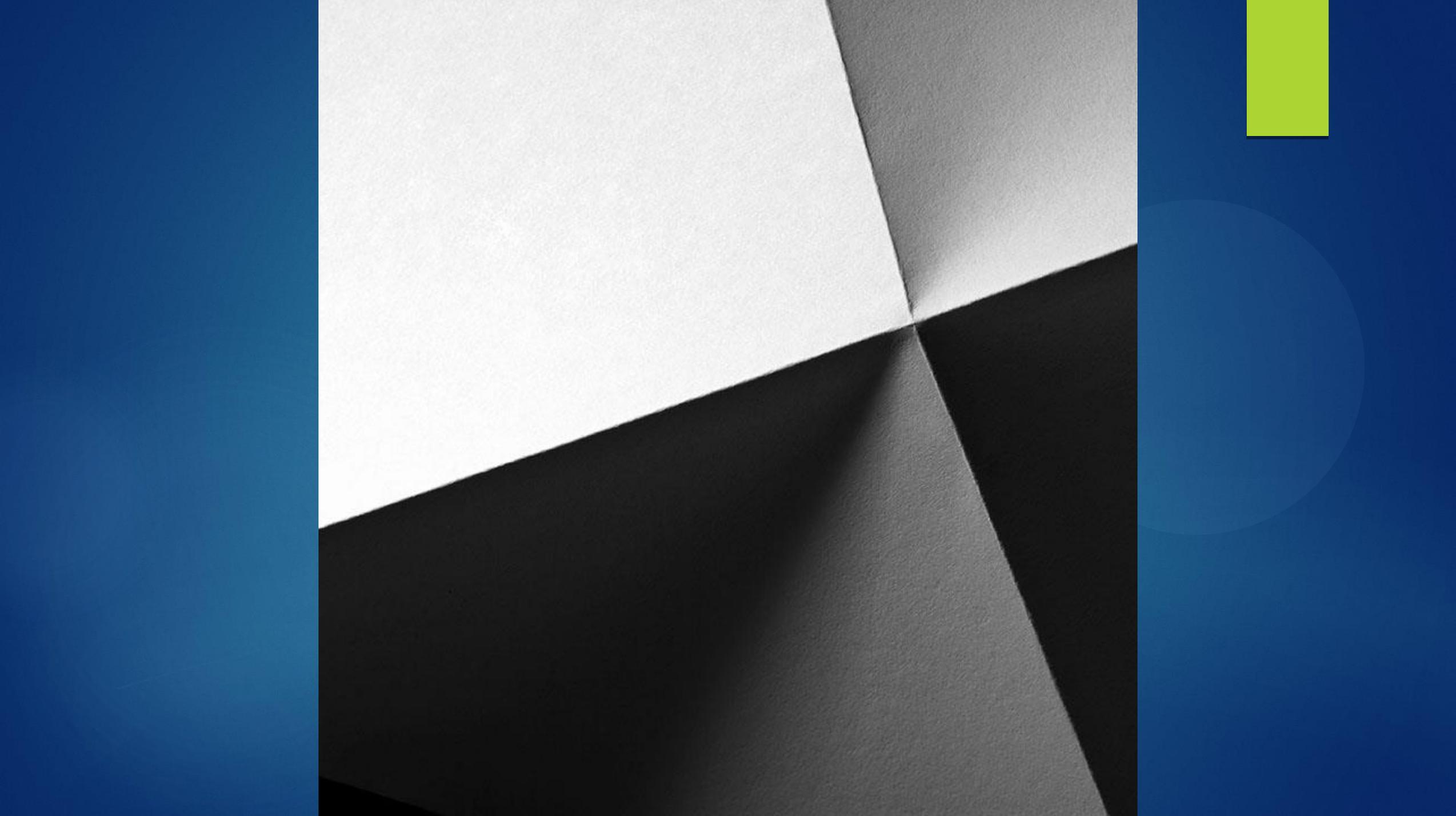
Jerry Reed

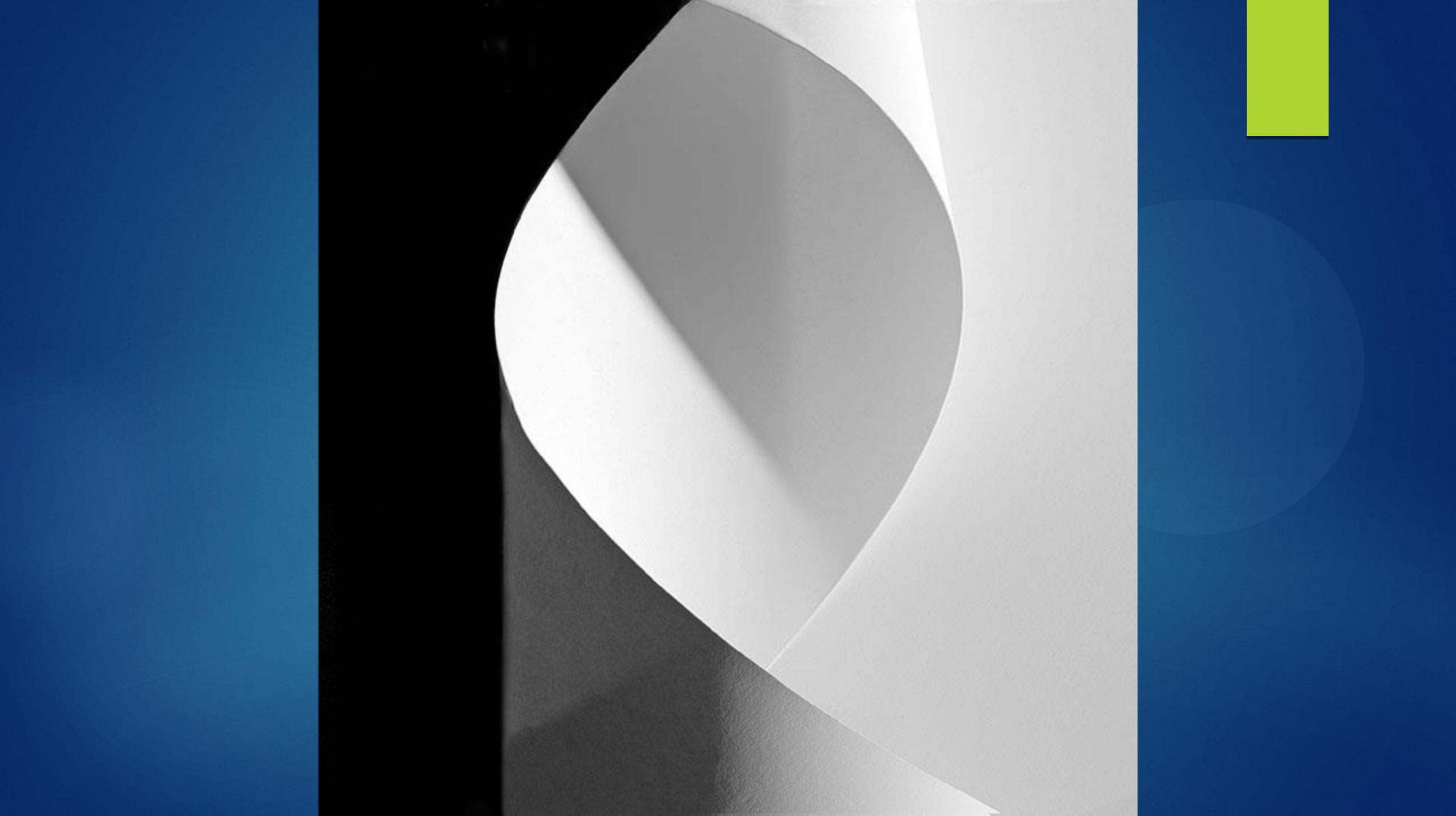
"Over time, I have come to see that what motivates me is the result of my having redirected *how* I make images, turning from the externally directed position of witness to that of author. In so doing, I accept the entire authorship of the creative process from my creation of the paper sculpture to making of the fine art print. **Paper Work**, my current three-year project is comprised of twenty-six images. In my studio, I shaped two-dimensional art papers giving them edges and volumes, then lit them dramatically utilizing Fresnel lighting to emphasize their three-dimensional forms. Though ephemeral, my forms are preserved photographically."

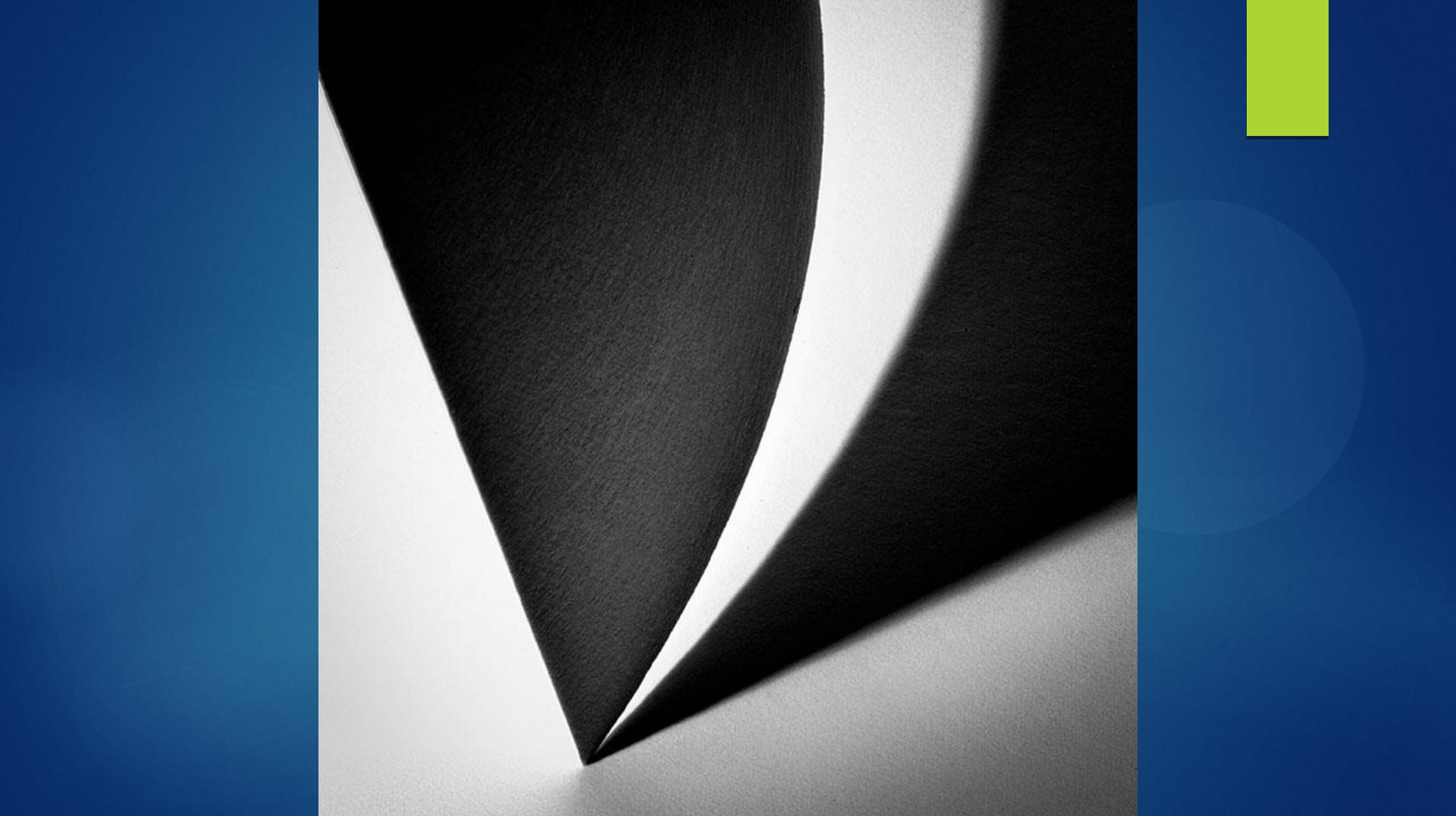
Photographer Jerry Reed cites both Rössler and Bruguière as influences on his work. His objective and analytical approach to documenting visual effects may reflect his early career as a scientist.











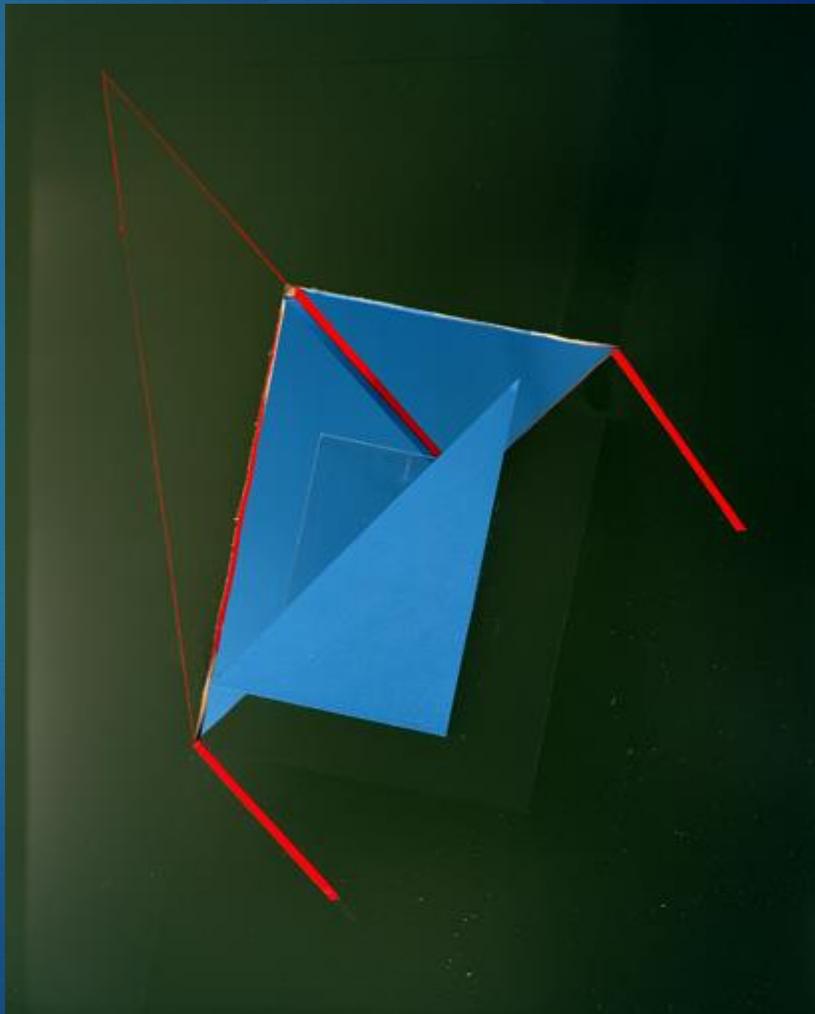
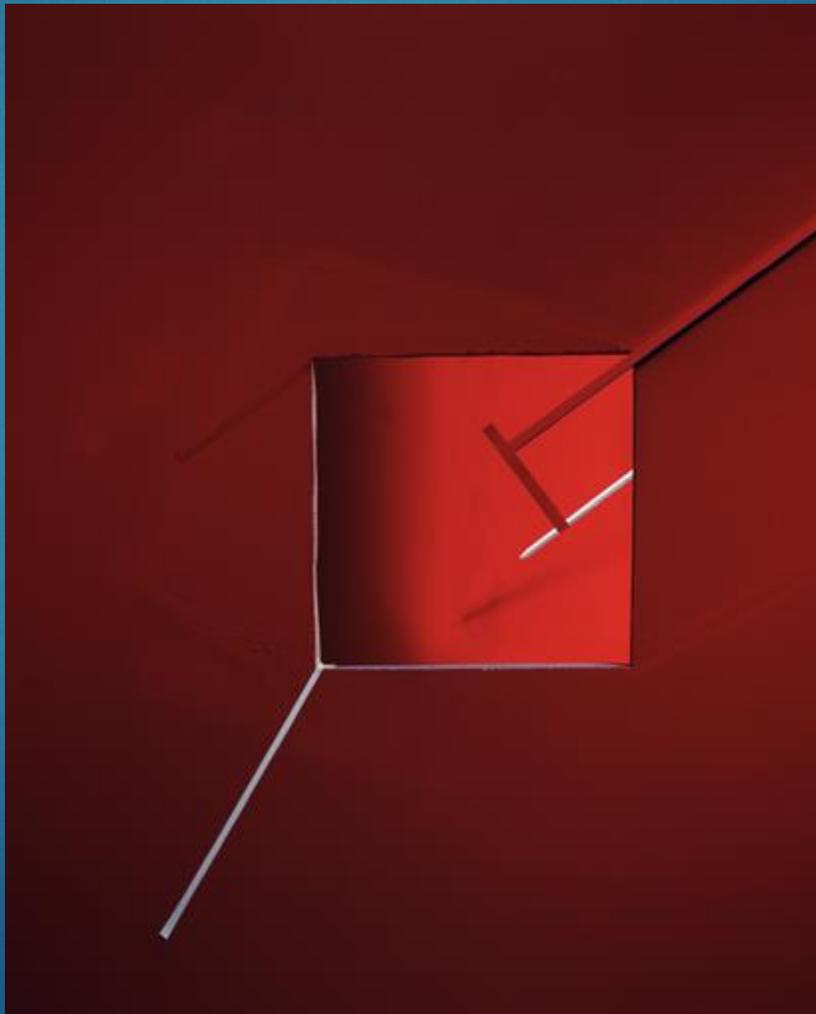


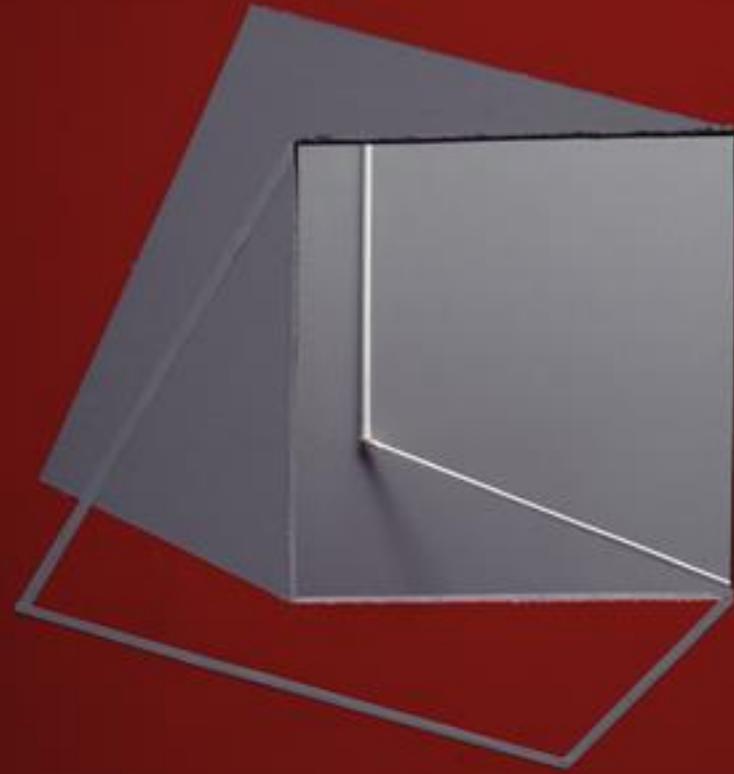
Tamara Lorenz

► German artist [Tamara Lorenz](#) creates various constructions which she then photographs to exploit their abstract properties. The addition of strong planes of colour provide another source of contrast in addition to those of line, shape, tone and texture.

Rather than photographs of things, each image seems to create its own reality. Consequently, the viewer is unable to recognise a conventional subject and is occupied with the business of looking.

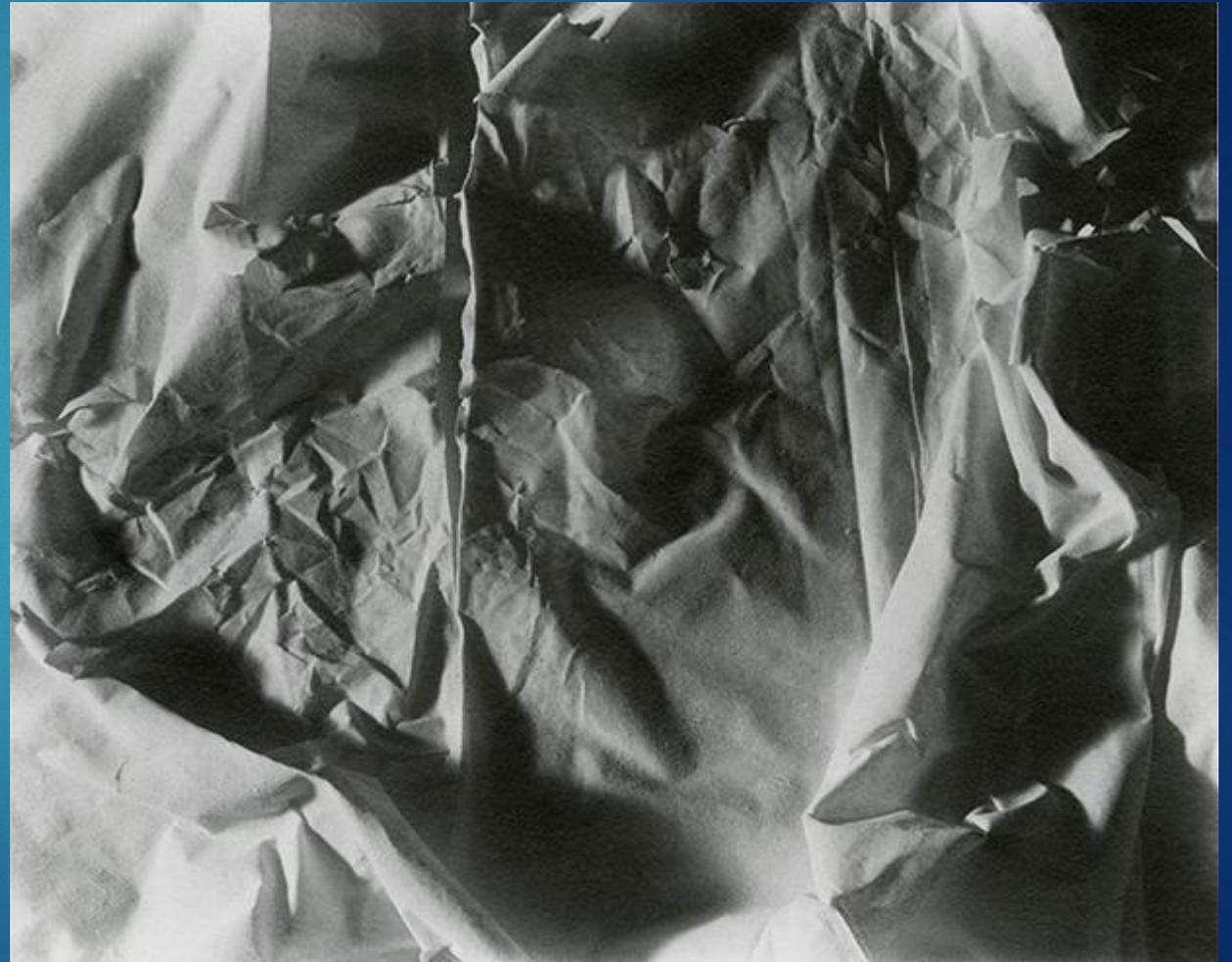


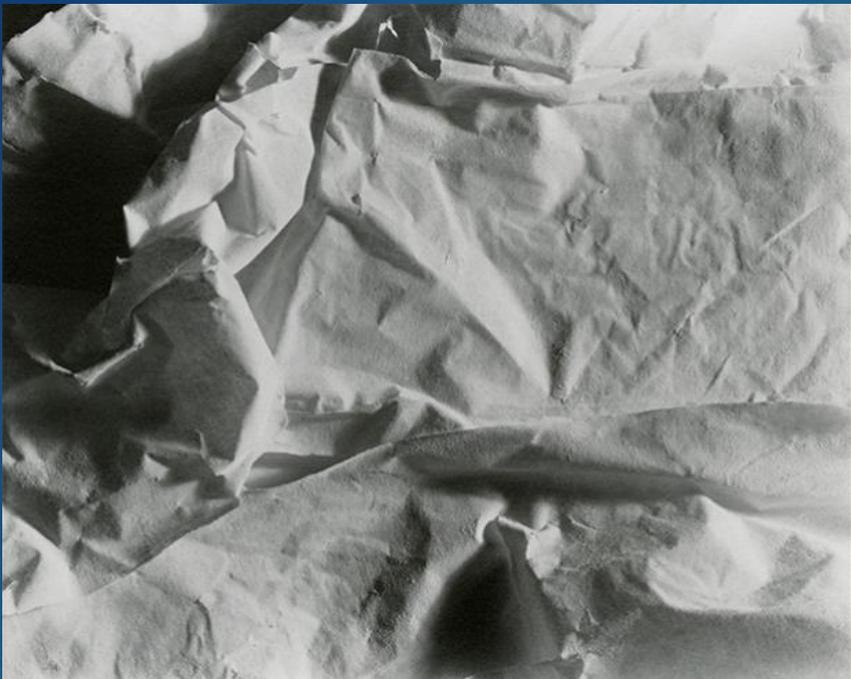




James Welling

Although these images, entitled '[Abstract Photographs](#)' resemble sheets of paper they are, in fact, made from filo (phyllo) pastry dough. The artist explains: "A lot of my work is intuitive and comes from just trying different things. With the money from the sale of my first aluminum foil photograph, I bought a wooden 8-by-10 camera and started photographing draped cloth. At the same time I was also photographing crumpled shards of dry phyllo dough. Without much premeditation, I combined the two, and sprinkled dough on the draped cloth. Against the dark fabric, the dough suggested, perhaps, torn book pages from the diary I'd photographed, or geological debris fallen from above." Welling has also experimented with other unlikely materials such as tinfoil, gelatin and ceramic tiles.







Brendan Austin

► Brendan Austin creates imaginary landscapes out of crumpled pieces of paper. He calls them 'Paper Mountains'. Austin examines what we mean by nature and the way humans have impacted upon it. "The isolated desert city running on oil generators, the mars like landscapes of a volcanic environment and the mountains made from paper all attempt to start a conversation concerning the loss of meaning and reality." The resulting images appear both recognisable as landscapes but also suggest a sense of artifice. Humble materials are made to carry an important message.

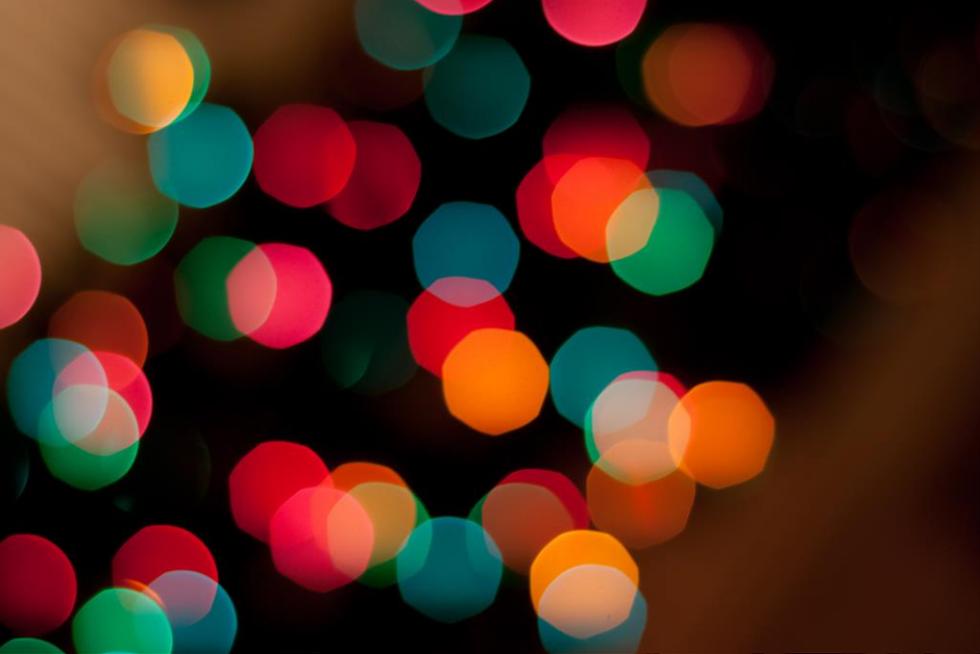




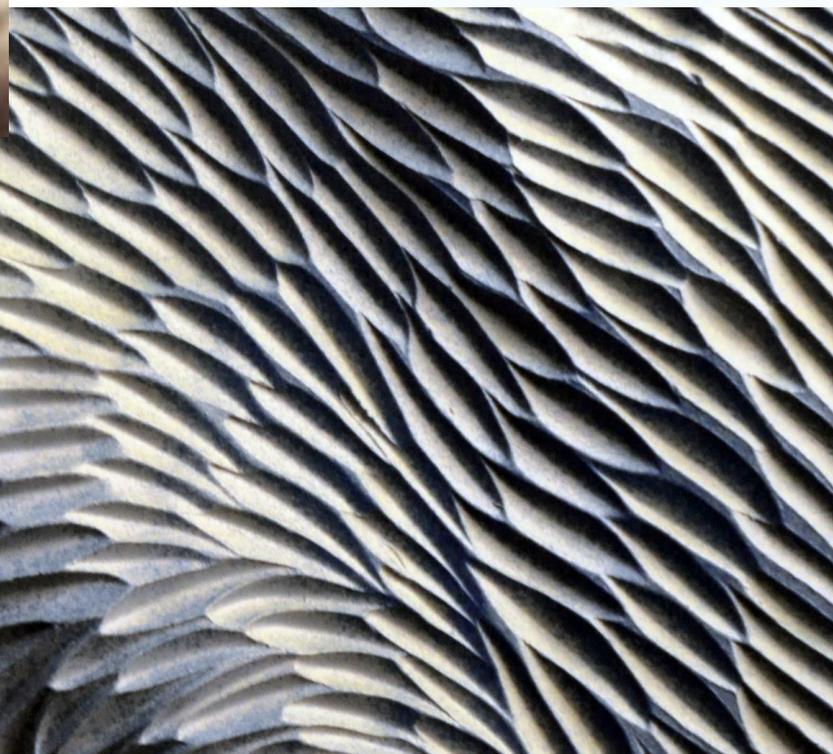


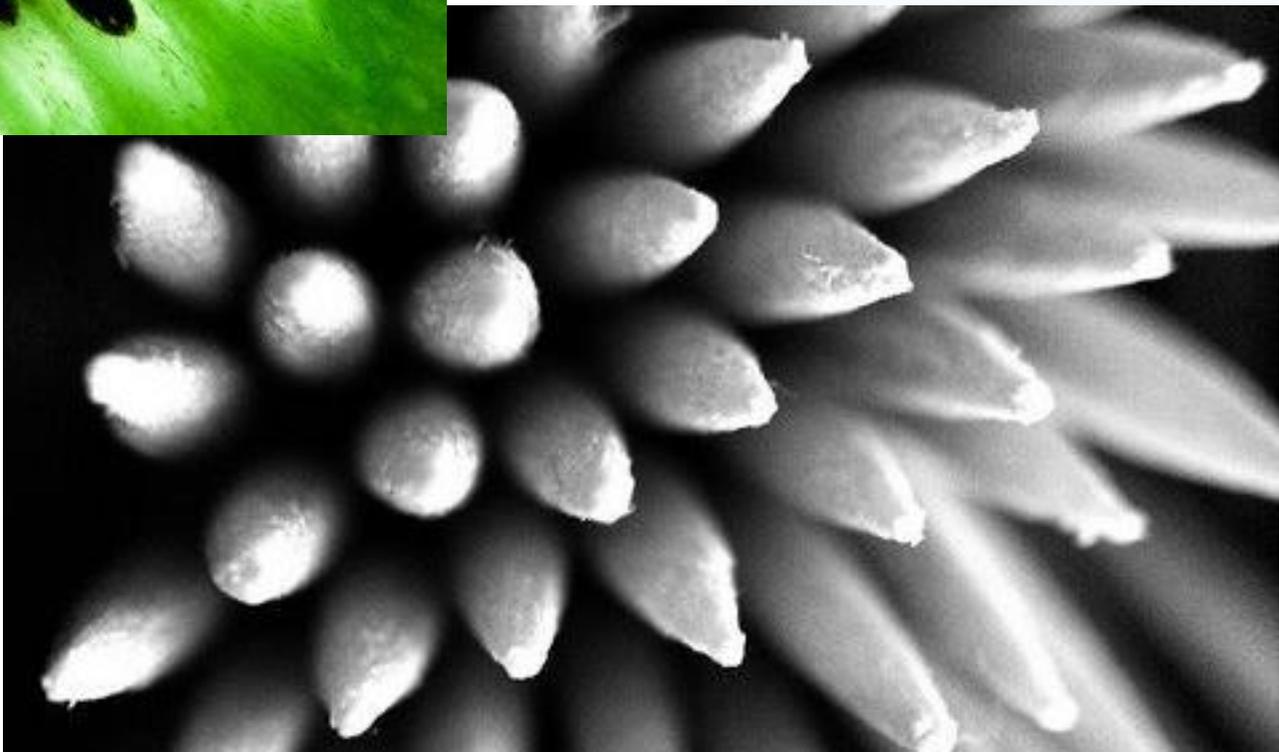












Abstract – or non-objective, conceptual photography – concentrates on line, form, colour, texture and shape. Often the viewer will be left wondering what the original object was.

Abstract photography is not about the literal view; it will introduce the viewer to the emotional link that the photographer had with an object or subject.

When you look at or engage with abstract photography, you are meant to enjoy the way the image makes you feel. Indeed, it is more about emotionally connecting with the image than recognising the original subject. Shooting abstract images should tap into your imagination and get you seeing things in a new light.



Unfettered by rules

Children are particularly good at creating abstract images. They are unfettered by the rules that we apply to our own photography. Often as adults we neglect to truly look into a subject, only recognising the 'bigger picture'.

On the flip side, shooting abstract images is not about blindly taking lots of close-up shots hoping that one turns out OK. It is really about looking into the subject, searching for something different that catches your eye that perhaps reveals the essence of something else within the object. 'Shoot less, see more' is the golden rule here.

Abstract photography takes on different forms for each individual, so no two photographers will see an object in the same way if they are truly faithful to their own creative spirit. Therefore, there's no point in Googling 'abstract photography in my home town', for instance, to see what others have done. It is important to be driven by your own way of 'seeing'.



Some top tips...

Themes

Shooting in an abstract manner involves adopting one or a combination of these themes: patterns, textures, angles, shapes, lines, tone variation, colour variation, perspective, distance from subject, depth of field, symmetry, geometry, reflections, shadows, contrast, movement (see panel on next page), length of exposure, blur (subject and bokeh), multiple exposure (both in-camera and post-processing) and cropping (ideally in-camera).

I use this photography genre to open my eyes, especially if I have reached a plateau with my usual style of image making.

Getting started

Starting with the 'less is more' theory, let's look at equipment. I only ever take one body – my Fujifilm X-Pro2 – and two lenses with me (a 56mm and 14mm), which are both primes.

I choose primes over zooms usually because zoom lenses make me a little lazy. Rather than exploring a potential subject by looking around and moving, I will just zoom in or out and not always walk around my subject – this happens a lot if I am feeling uninspired with my normal work.

Don't be restricted

Leave your tripod at home – seriously. A tripod can restrict you and get in the way of your shooting, especially in city centres. However, you can use a tripod for some forms of abstract work, such as long exposure or intentional camera movement. I usually decide on what I am thinking of shooting before I leave home.

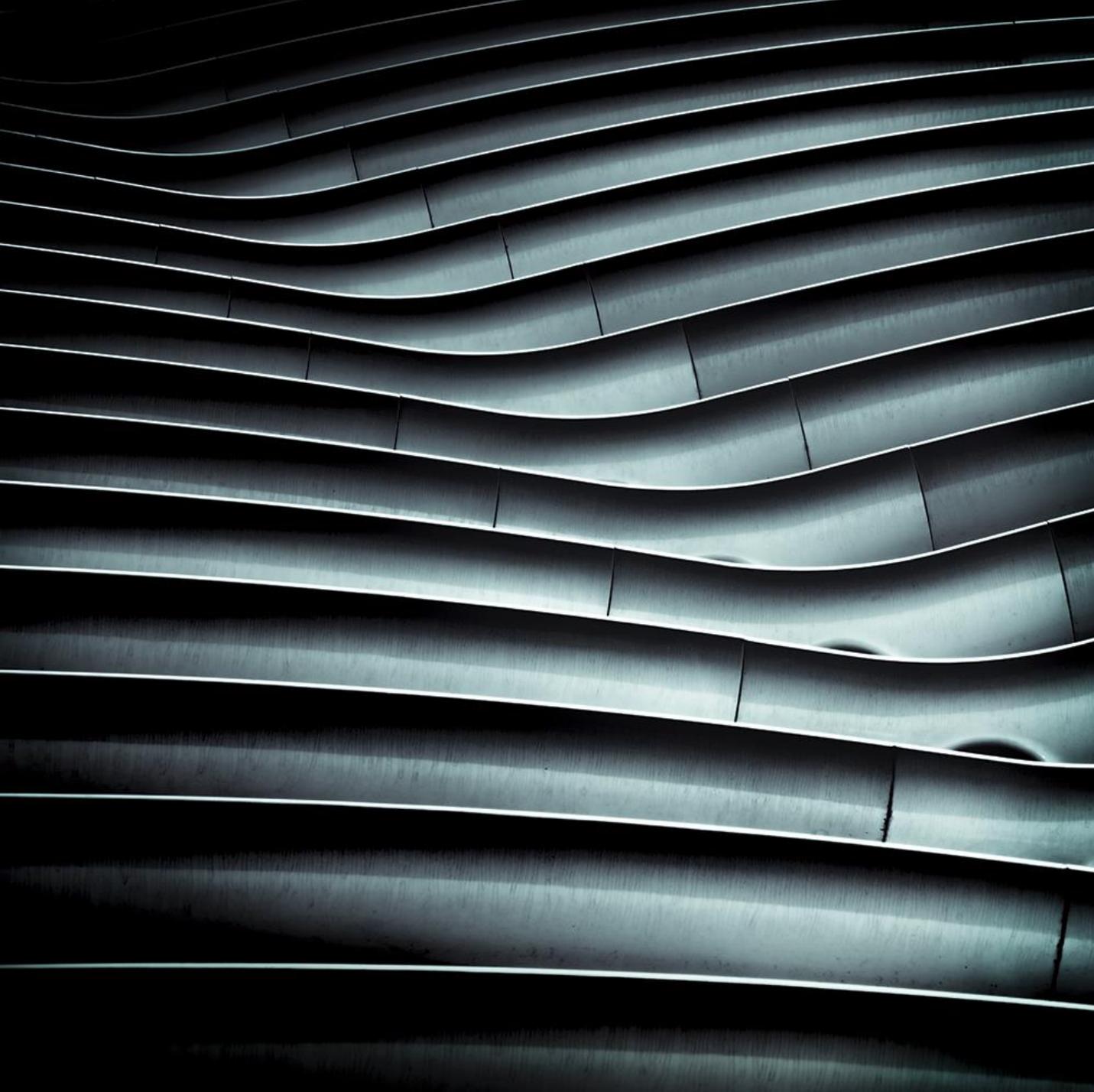
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Speaking of leaving the tripod at home, you can actually start at home – one of the joys of shooting like this is that you can start in your own house or garden.

Work your subject hard, try shooting at different angles and with or against the light, watch how the textures and shadows change as you move, and observe how the light coming from behind gives a completely different feel to frontal light. Don't be afraid to push your highlights right up or use your exposure to darken the shadows down until they almost fill in. Extreme high or low-key rendering can really make the mundane stand out.

Finally, as photographers we are governed by rules about focus, exposure, composition and depth of field. At times, these conspire against us 'seeing' what's happening. Where possible, try to forget the rules – see them as guidelines, and don't get freaked out when you like something that you've shot that does not have real sharpness or that fails to follow the rule of thirds. Be free to create!



Post- processing

Be bold! Notice how a colour subject renders when you apply a blue, red or yellow filter to it in Adobe Photoshop Lightroom. Don't be afraid to increase clarity and saturation – use radial brushes to add effects on certain areas. Experiment with the filters offered by some of the processing software.

Look out for....

- Light
- Line and Curve
- Colour
- Pattern and Texture
- Shadow
- Movement



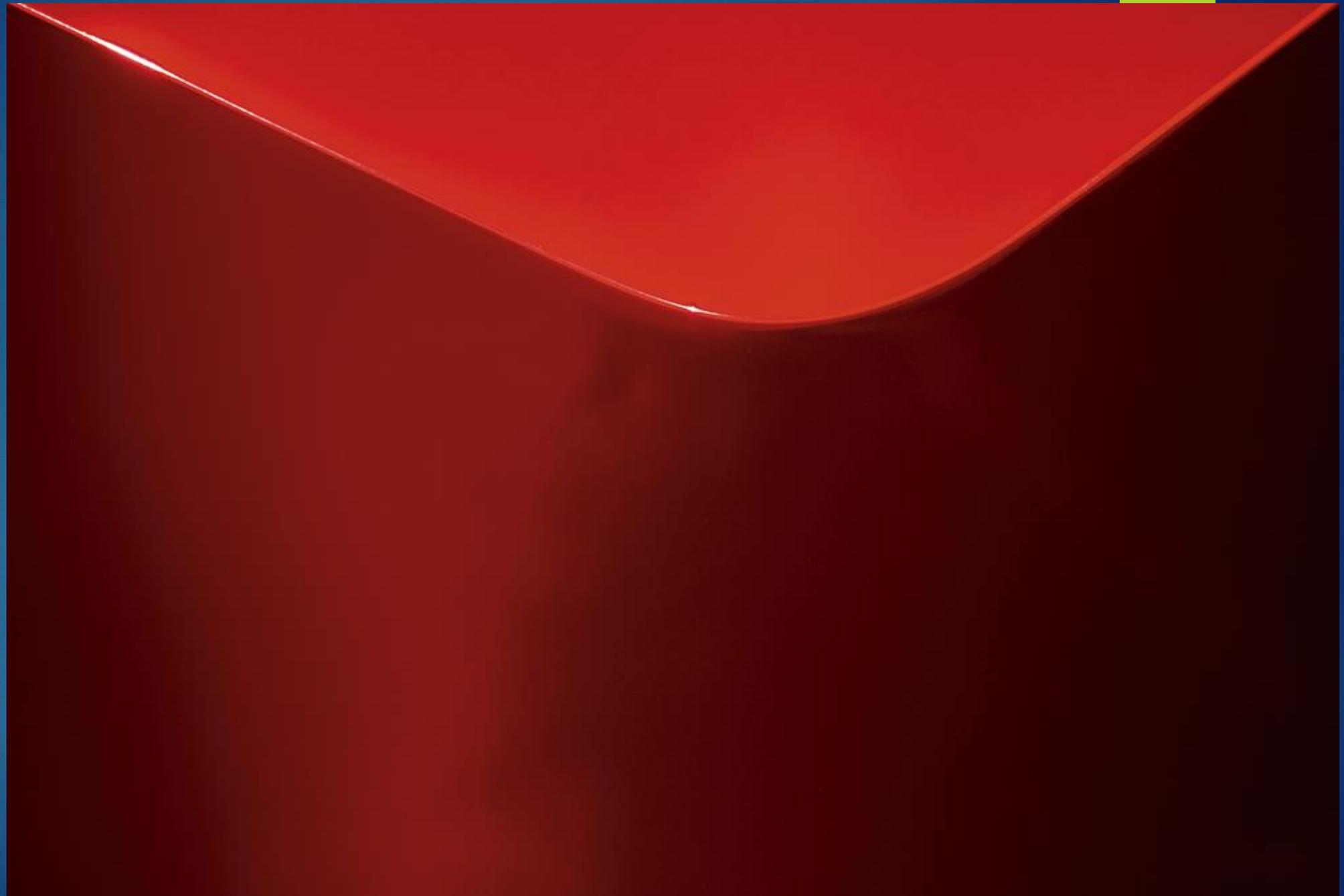
Light

As with most forms of photography, light is your friend. However, you don't need the 'golden hour'; just watch how the light works over your subject, how it emphasises areas, adds texture and gives the form life. Work with the light available, as well as against it.



Line and Curve

Lines and curves lead your viewer around the image. You have that power in your hands, but pay attention to composition when shooting lines and curves. Be aware of the distances between the lines, pay attention to the details, and give lines and curves a purpose.



Colour

Look for variations in colour: tonal colour changes are beautiful, whereas contrasting colours can be breathtaking. Also, think how the colours might translate in black & white. Try to envisage the final image as you shoot. Saturated colours will grab a viewer's attention.



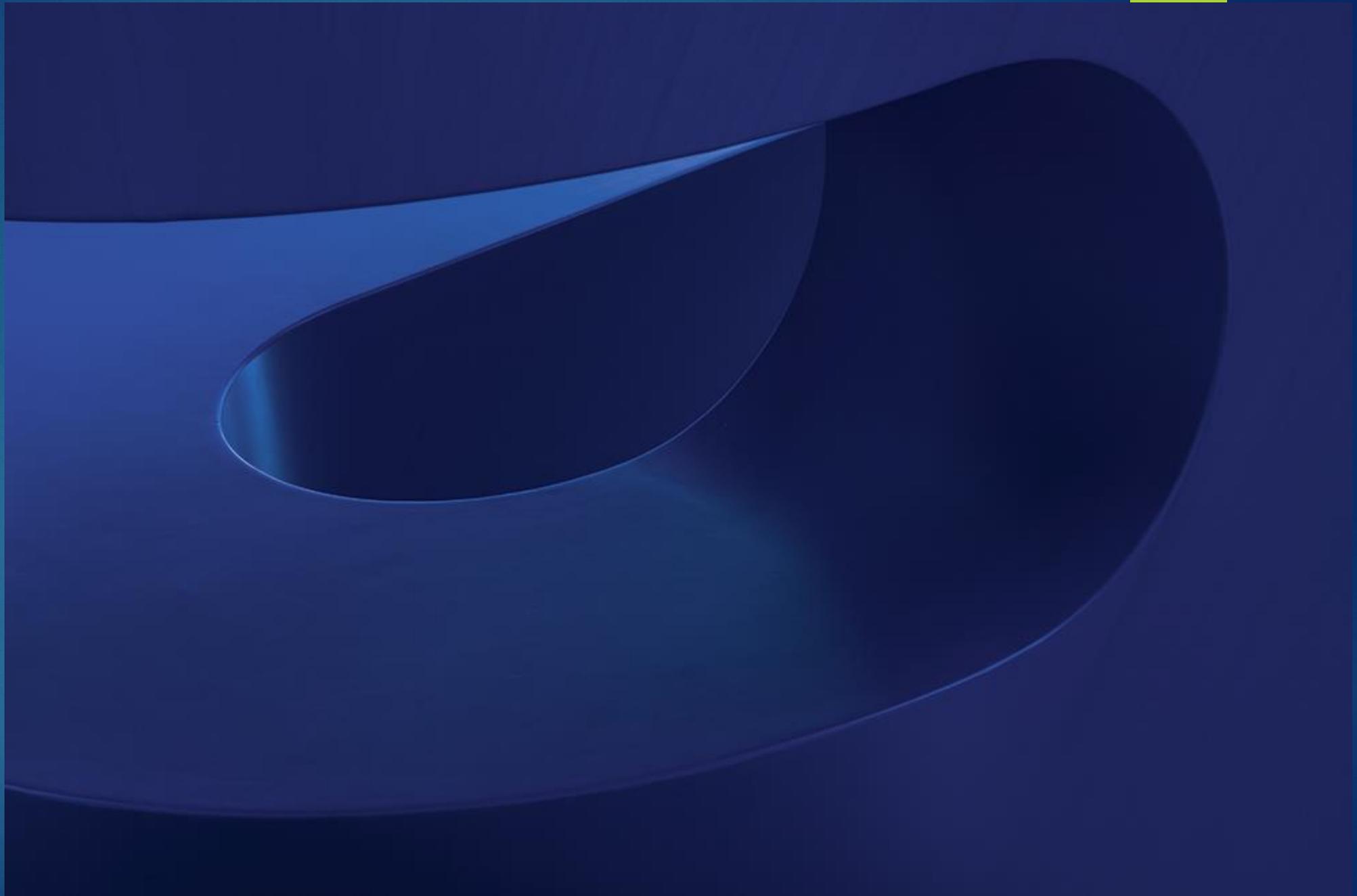
Pattern and Texture

Patterns and textures can be great fun and they can be found everywhere, from the jeans you are wearing to a skyscraper with hundreds of windows. You can see them everywhere. Just use the repetition of pattern to lead your eye in a certain direction.



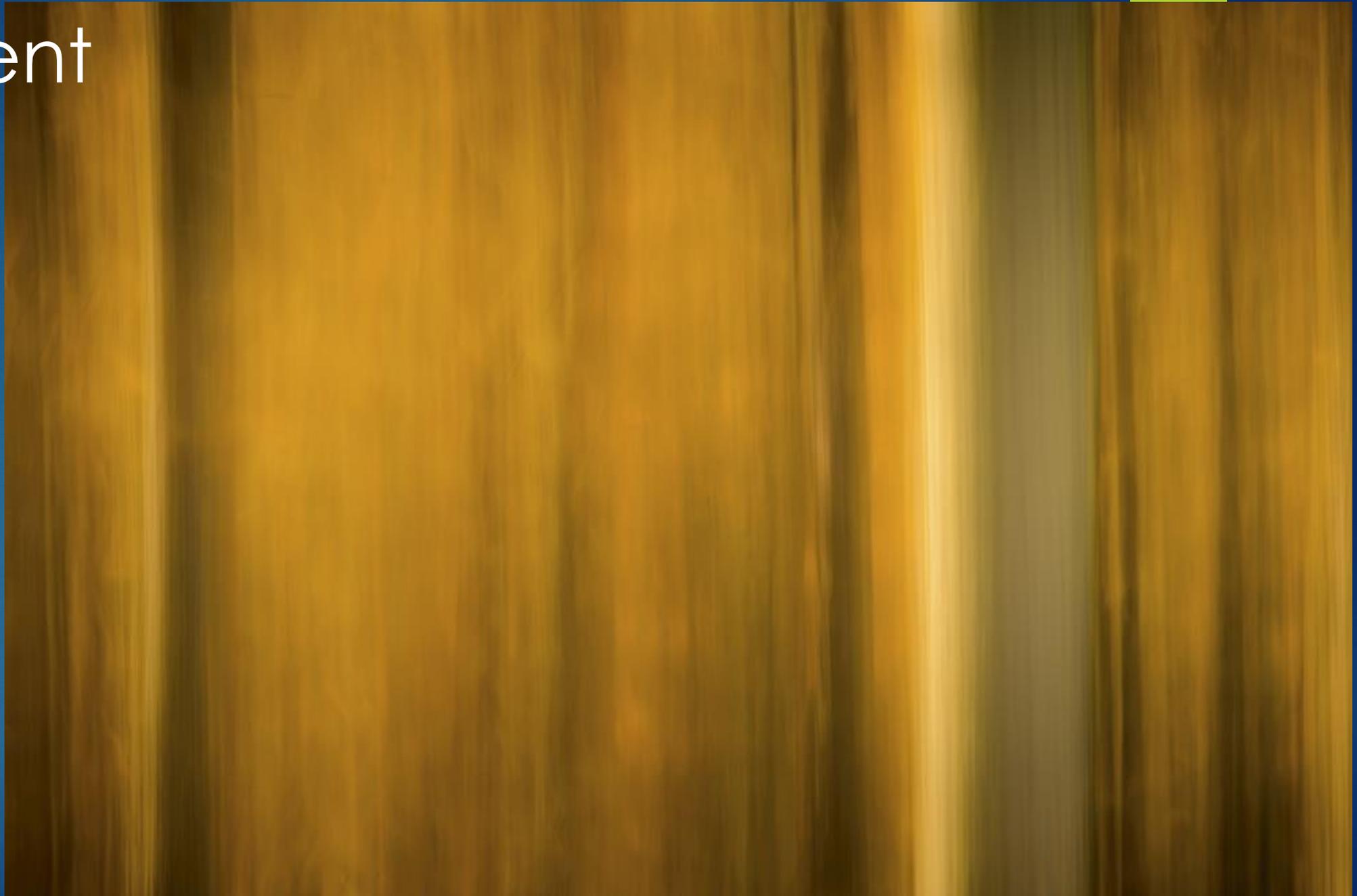
Shadow

Shadows create abstract shapes and patterns in themselves. Watch for how a pattern and a shadow work together – the area may only be small, but remember small is beautiful, and in the final image no one will have any idea about how big the subject is.



Movement

One of the most effective ways of creating abstract images is the use of intentional camera movement (ICM). Look for subjects with strong lines or colours and follow their direction by panning your camera. You may need a tripod.



Top Tips...

1. Don't rush

Invest a little time exploring a subject. Try to work through your subject – walk around it and look at how the angles and lines change as you move.

2. Start small

Often the best subjects can be found in a very small area – perhaps a small circular walk, in your garden or even on a table in a coffee shop.

3. Less is more

Aim to see more and shoot less. It's a difficult thing to do in the digital age, but discipline yourself to only shoot when you feel the image has come together without the camera.

4. Repetition

Look for repeating patterns. These will help direct the viewer around your images.

5. Experiment

Don't be afraid to try new things: multiple exposure, defocused images, rotating your camera – get out of your comfort zone.

6. Be brave and use your imagination

Not everyone will like what you do, so don't be put off by people not endorsing your initial efforts. Likewise, not every shot will be a winner. But if you use every ounce of creativity you possess and you are truly open to seeing the potential in normal objects, your visual excitement will know no bounds.



Project Brief...

You must start this project by completing the following tasks...

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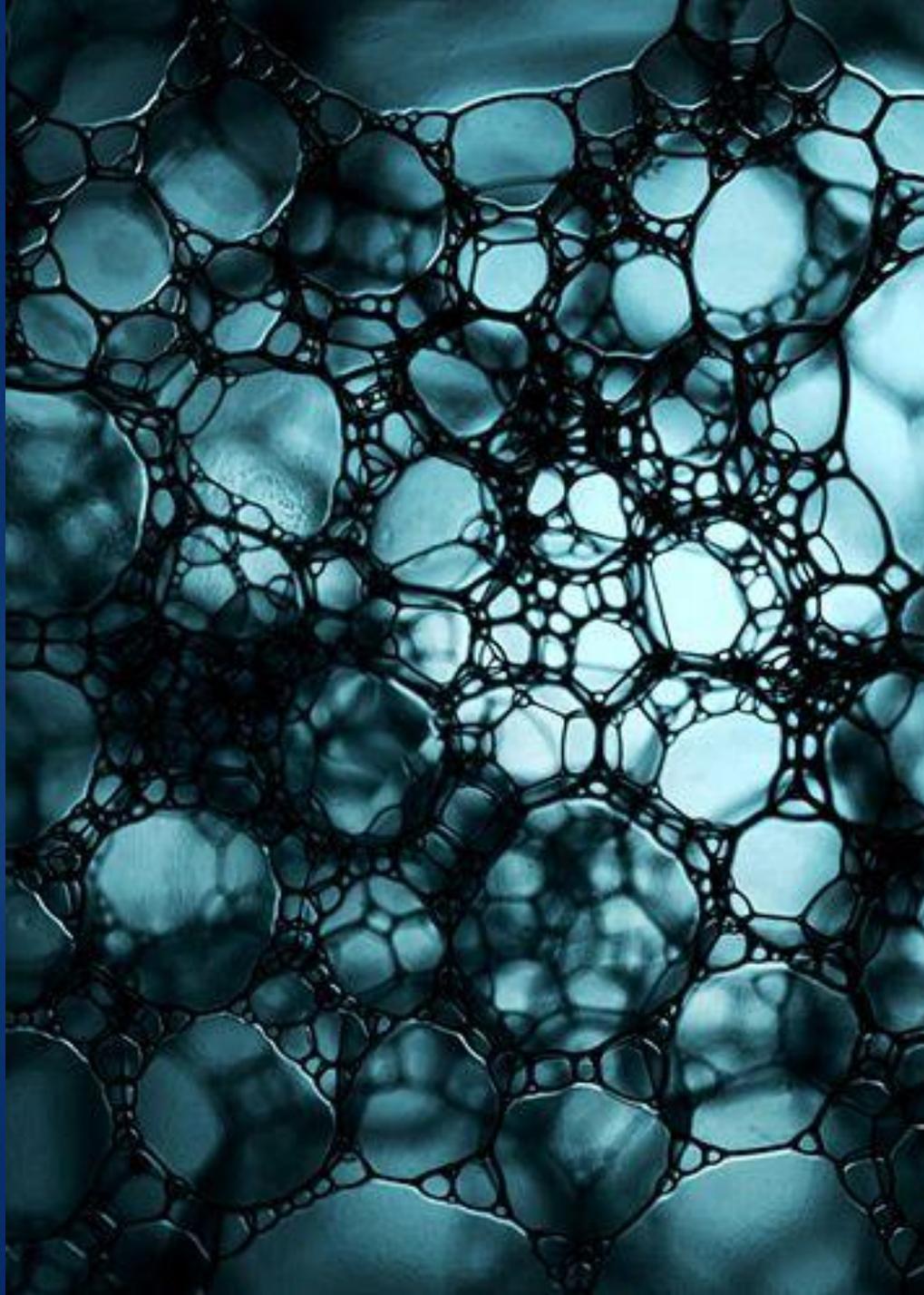
Project Brief...

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Create a series of artist research featuring the work of Francis Bruguière, Jaroslav Rössler, Vjeko Sager, Jerry Reed, Tamara Lorenz and James Welling including your understanding of their work in the context of abstraction.

Make thirty-six unique, beautiful photographs of one piece of white bond paper. You may not cut or tear the paper, but you can fold it, roll it, or crumple it. Shoot on a white background in a studio with spotlights and soft light. Use colour filters on the spotlights, if you desire. There should be nothing else in the photographs but one piece of bond paper. Explore lighting and change the lighting for each photograph.

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A vertical strip on the left side of the slide shows a microscopic view of plant cells, likely from a leaf, with a complex network of cell walls and large, rounded cells. The image is in shades of teal and blue.

Project Brief...

Explore different possible subject matters...
These may include natural form, light, liquid,
movement, architecture, everyday objects etc.
(try to avoid portraiture/body based images)

*Create a Mind map and a visual mind map to note
down all of your ideas.*

*Research at least 6 Photographers taking
photoshoots throughout developing your idea into
a project.*

*Produce a series of 6 images that will be handed in
at the end of the project.*

DEADLINE Monday 19th MARCH

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