



# ABSTRACT PHOTOGRAPHY

LARRY PETTERBORG

WINTER 2023



# REFERENCES

10 Tutorials To Help You Capture Stunning Abstract Photography

<https://www.lightstalking.com/abstract-photography-tutorials/>

Why Discovering Abstraction Is Essential for Your Photography

<https://fstoppers.com/education/why-discovering-abstraction-essential-your-photography-611704>

Have Nothing To Photograph? Abstract Photography Is Literally Everywhere... [Have Nothing To Photograph? Abstract Photography Is Everywhere... \(lightstalking.com\)](#)

HENRY LYMAN SAYEN



Daughter in a Rocker

# ABSTRACT ART

**Is “those pictorial phenomena which exclude the imitative principle of figurative art or figuration, by overcoming it with methods of plastic construction”**  
**THE HISTORY OF ART, 1988, Lowe & B. Hould Publishers**

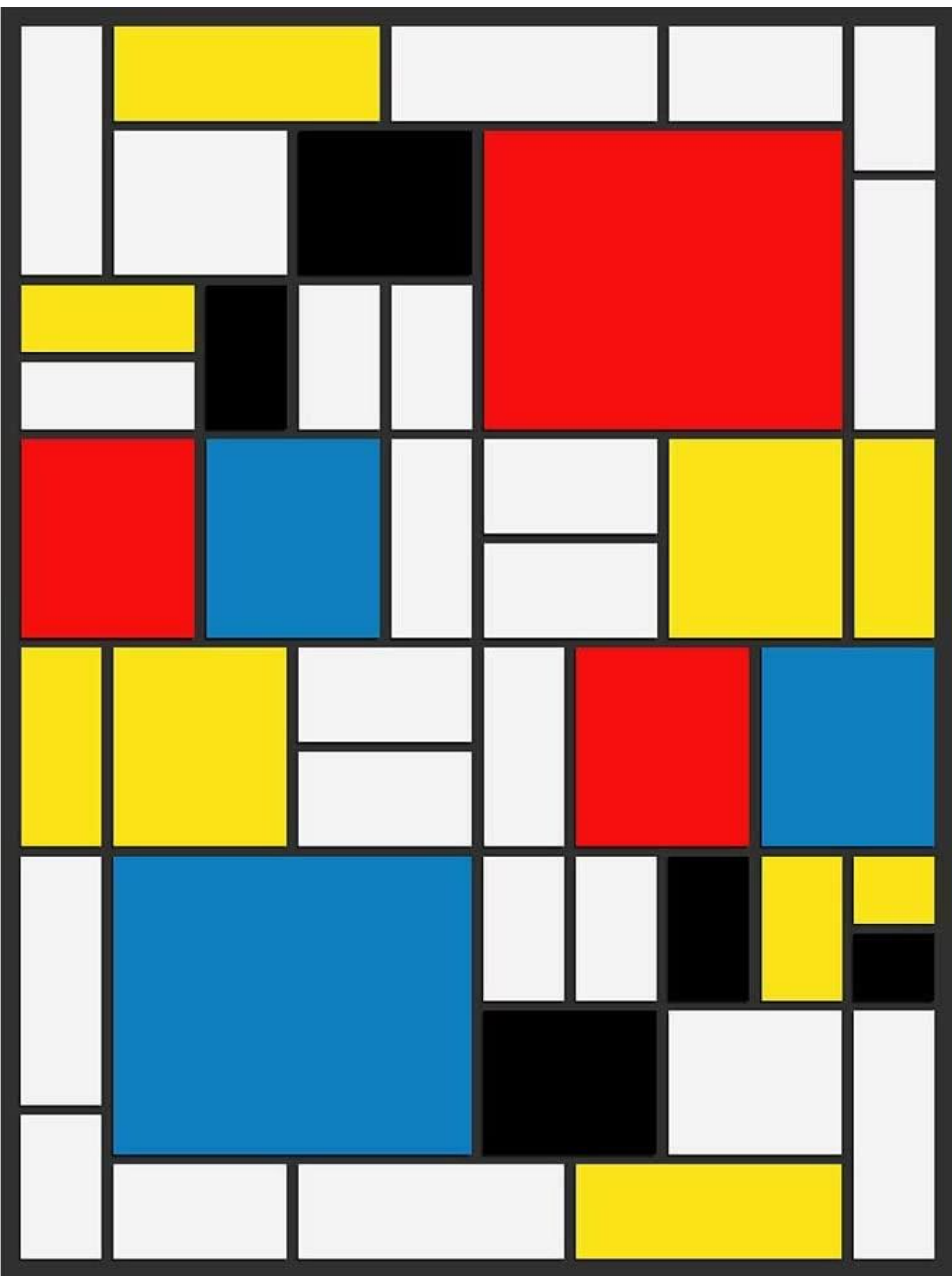
# ABSTRACT ART: A Brief History

“Abstraction” began in the late 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as artists reacted to the formal construction of images based on equilibrium, harmony, linear structure, and chromatic counterpoint by creating works that expressed their personal interpretations and subjective reactions to their subjects.”



By Vassily Kandinsky (1866-1944)





# PIET MONDRIAN:

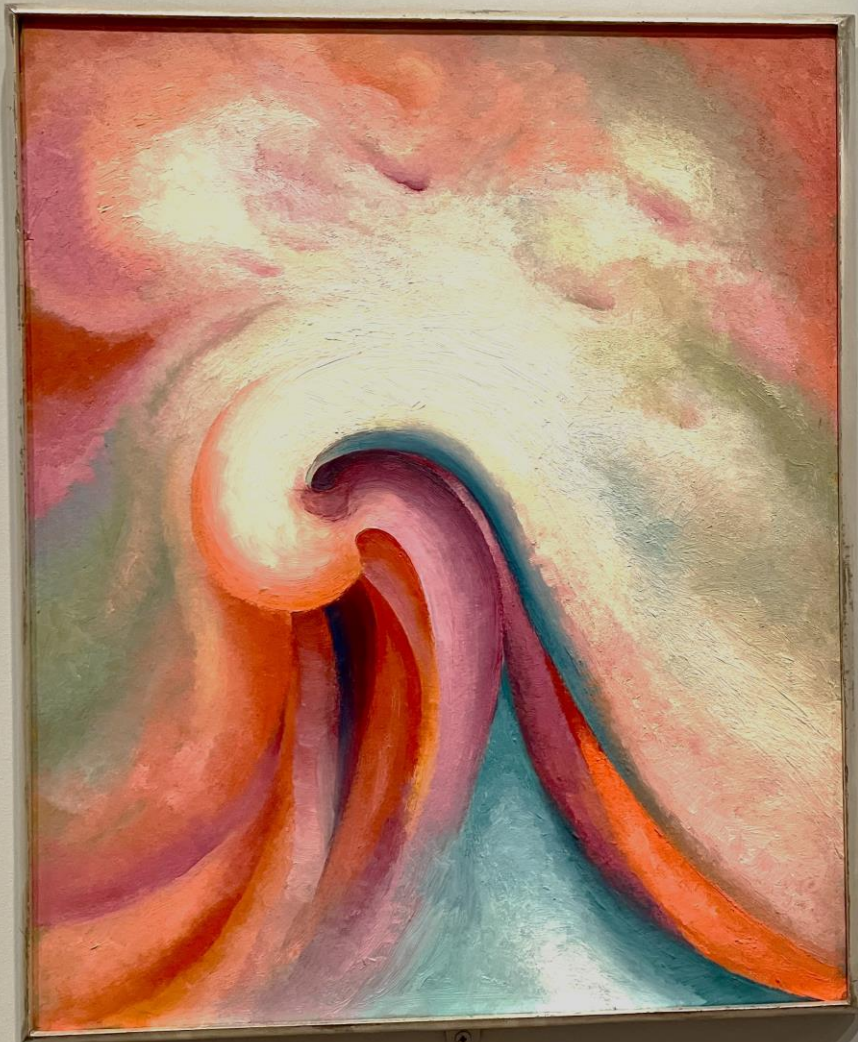
Wanted to create art “of pure relations”. His paintings are an expression of the relationship of the underlying elements of line, shape, and color hidden in every scene.



**GEORGIA O'KEEFFE**  
(1887-1986)

**“THE MOTHER OF  
AMERICAN MODERNISM”**  
(Wikipedia)





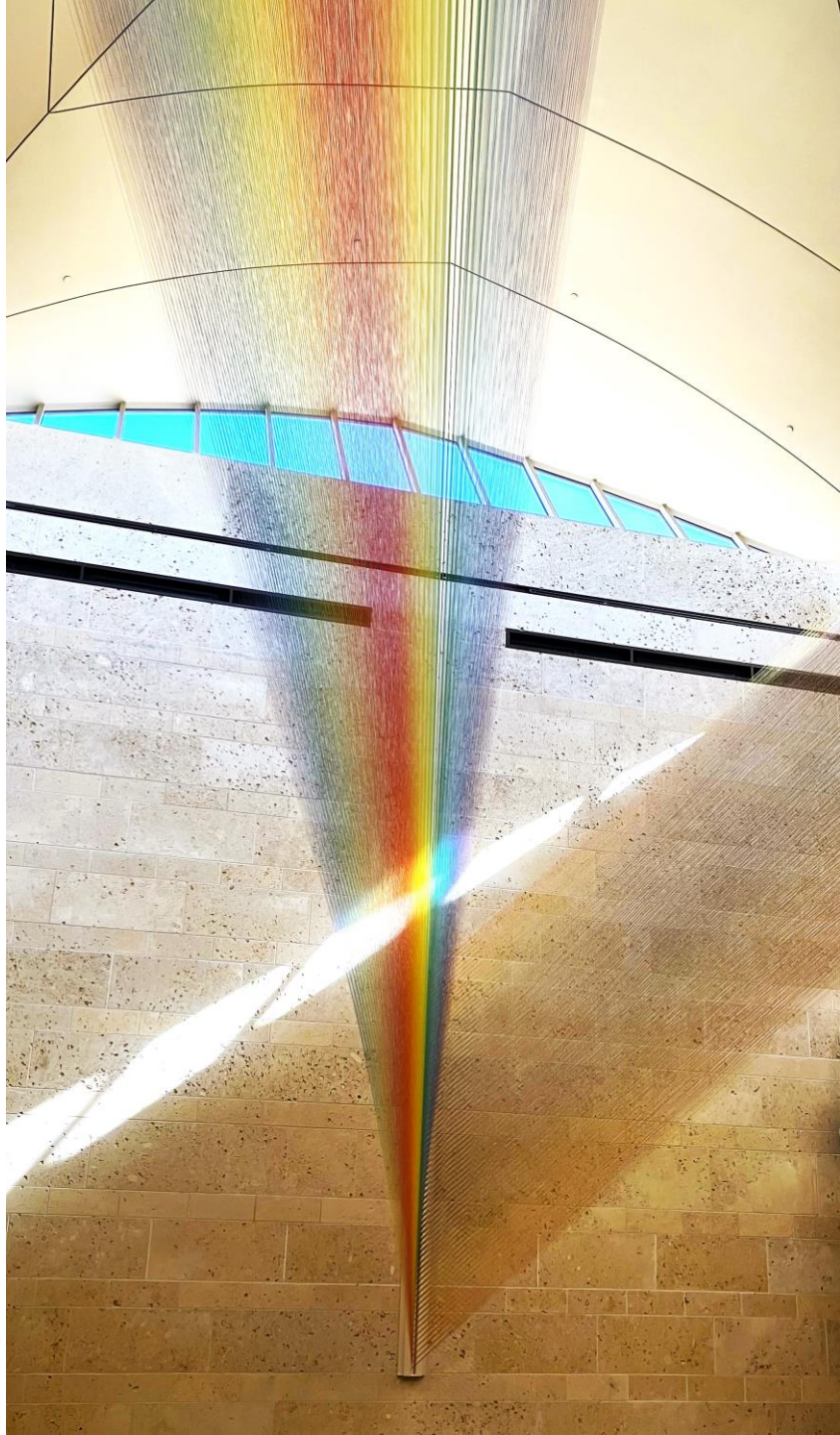
Georgia O'Keeffe  
(1887-1986)

**Series I—No. I**  
1918  
Oil on composition board

Purchase with assistance from the Anne Burnett Tandy Accessions Fund  
1995.8

After teaching for a year and a half in the Texas Panhandle, O'Keeffe returned to New York City, where she created this radiant work. The painting is an exploration of the possibilities of color and form in an unfurling shape defined by arcs of swirling coral, magenta, and turquoise, accented by patches of white. "The abstraction is often the most definite form for the intangible thing in myself that I can only clarify in paint," she remarked. This statement and work reveal O'Keeffe's staunch independence at a time when women were not encouraged to pursue occupations outside the home, let alone become artists.

“The abstraction is often the most definitive form for the intangible thing in myself that I can only clarify in paint” (Georgia O'Keeffe)

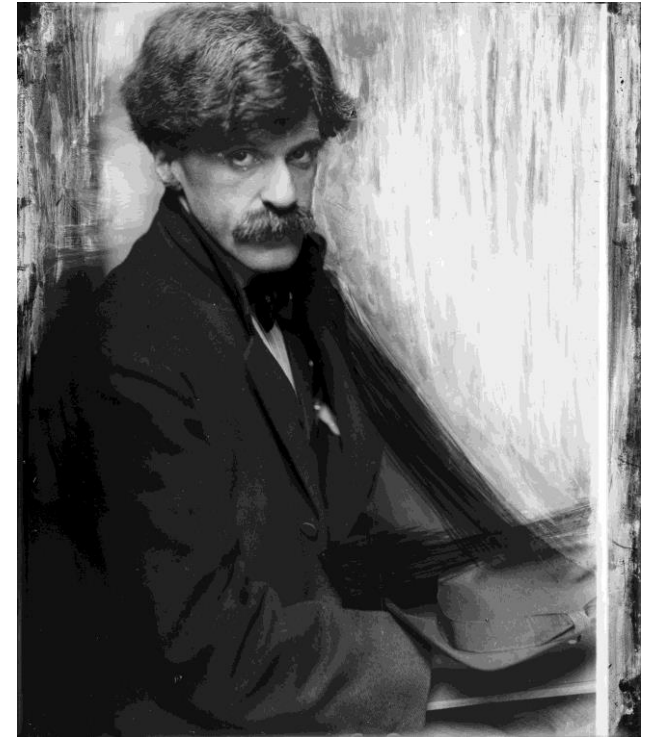


# ABSTRACT PHOTOGRAPHY

“Here’s the acid test: If you look at a photo and there’s a voice inside you that says ‘What is it?’....Well, there you go. It’s an abstract photograph.” (John Suler)



ALFRED STIEGLITZ (1864-1946),  
WAS A PHOTOGRAPHER,  
PUBLISHER, AND GALLERY  
OWNER. HE CHAMPIONED  
PHOTOGRAPHY AS AN ART  
AND HELPED INTRODUCE  
NORTH AMERICA TO  
MODERN ART FROM EUROPE.

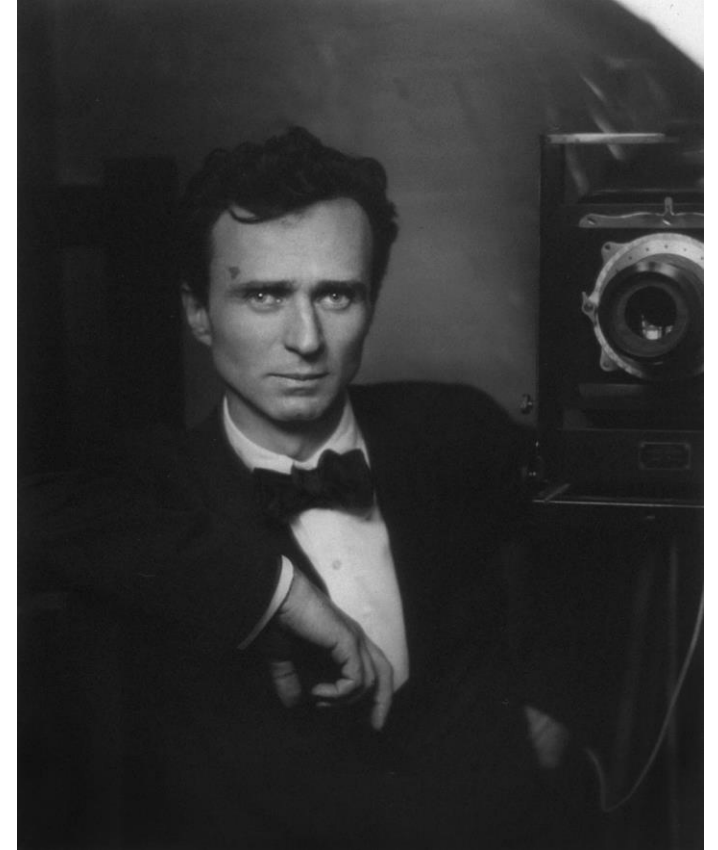


Stieglitz made a series of cloud photographs he called *Equivalents*. These images were intentionally done without context. He did these as an expression of **his mental state** at the moment of capture. It has been said that this group of photographs represents the pinnacle of Stieglitz's abstract photography.





EDWARD STEICHEN  
(1879-1973), HELPED FORM  
THE *PHOTO-SECESSION*  
GROUP, CO-FOUNDED  
*CAMERA WORK* AND THE *291*  
*GALLERY (WITH STIEGLITZ)*.  
HE IS KNOWN FOR  
IMPRESSIONISTIC PAINTING  
AND PHOTOGRAPHY.





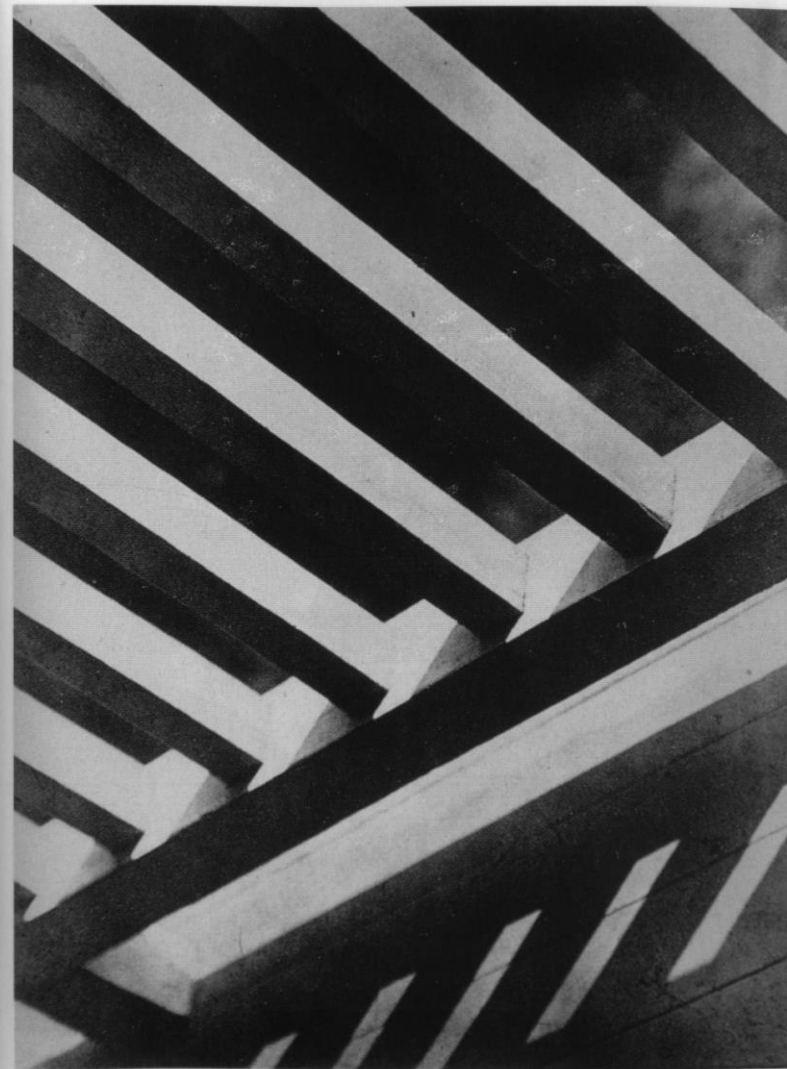
**“ONCE YOU  
REALLY  
COMMENCE TO  
SEE THINGS,  
THEN YOU REALLY  
COMMENCE TO  
**FEEL** THINGS”**







PAUL STRAND (1890-1976),  
“THE ARTIST’S WORLD IS  
LIMITLESS. IT CAN BE FOUND  
ANYWHERE, FAR FROM  
WHERE HE LIVES OR A FEW  
FEET AWAY. IT IS ALWAYS ON  
HIS DOORSTEP.”



26. Paul Strand: *Sence, Twin Lakes, Connecticut*, 1916, platinski tisk, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.





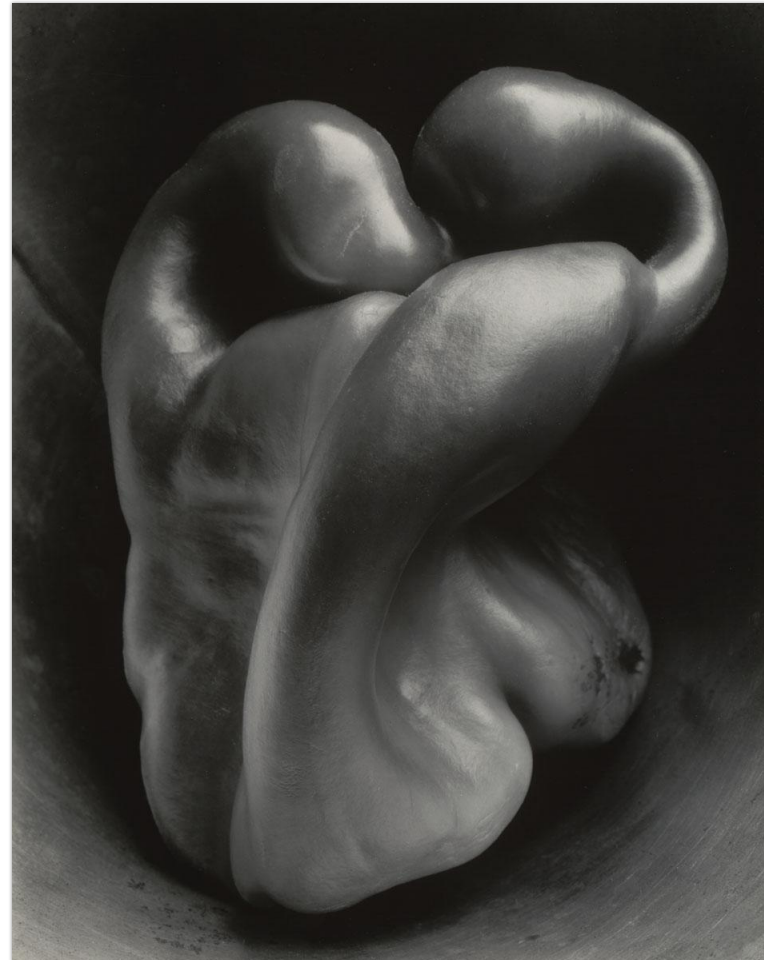
EDWARD WESTON (1886-1958).

“Anything that excites me for any reason, I will photograph; not searching for unusual subject matter, but making the commonplace unusual.”

(Edward Weston)

“I have done perhaps fifty negatives of peppers: because of the endless variety in form manifestations, because of their extraordinary surface texture, because of the power, the force suggested in their amazing convolutions. A box of peppers at the corner grocery hold implications to **stir me emotionally** more than almost any other edible form, for they run the gamut of natural forms, in experimental surprise.” (Edward Weston)

On the back of a print of one of his peppers that he gave to a friend, Weston wrote, "As you like it – but this is just a pepper – nothing else – to the impure all things – are impure." (Wikipedia)







AARON SISKIND (1903-1991).

“As the language or vocabulary of photography has been extended, the emphasis of meaning has shifted, shifted from what the world looks like to **what we feel** about the world and what we want the world to mean.” (Aaron Siskind)



“When I make a photograph, I want it to be an altogether new object, complete and self-contained,” (Aaron Siskind)

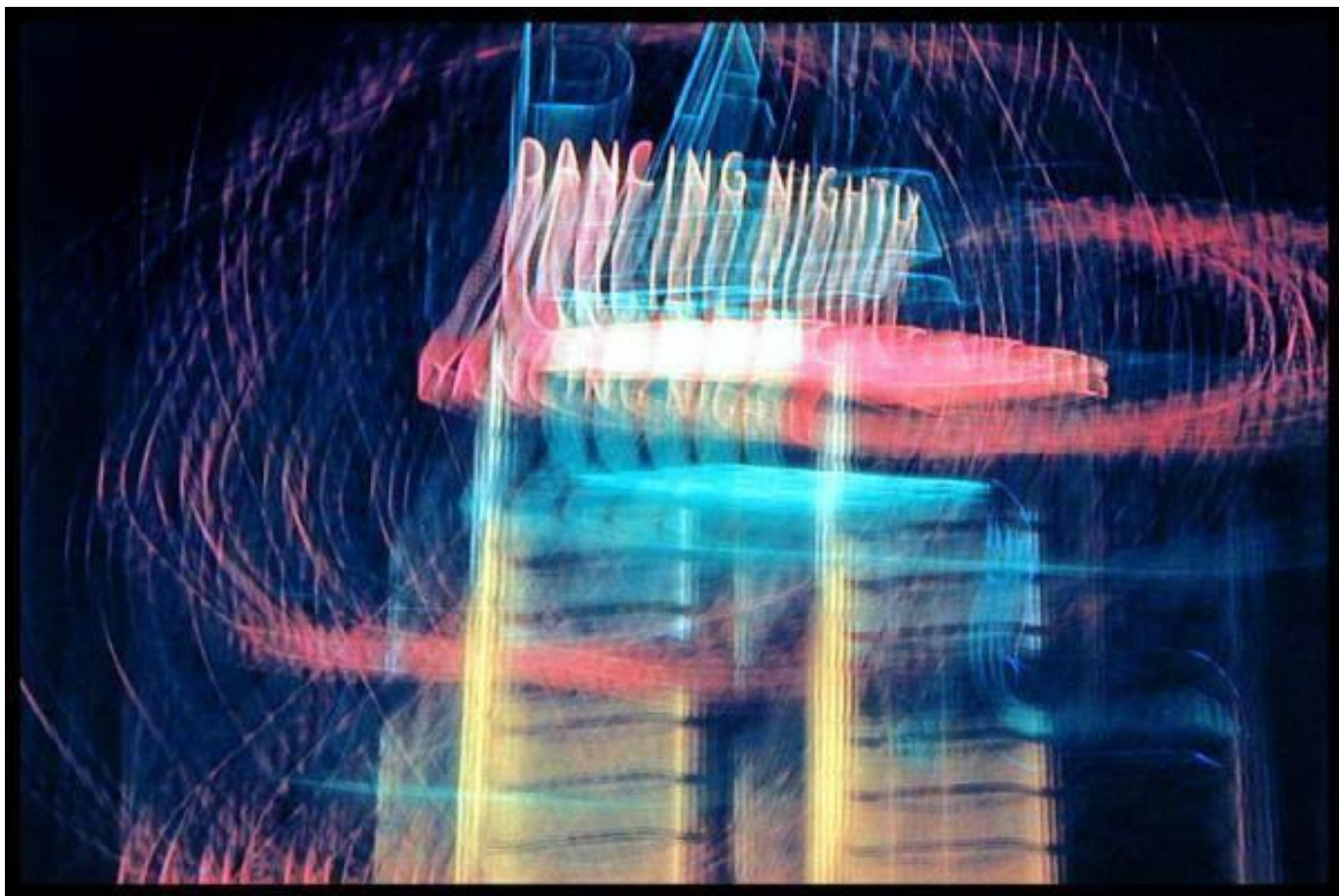
“Siskind’s abstractions ... are not only a critical chapter in the history of photography, they also imbue his everyday subjects with a kind of gravity and significance,” (Elizabeth Siegel, Curator, Art Institute of Chicago)





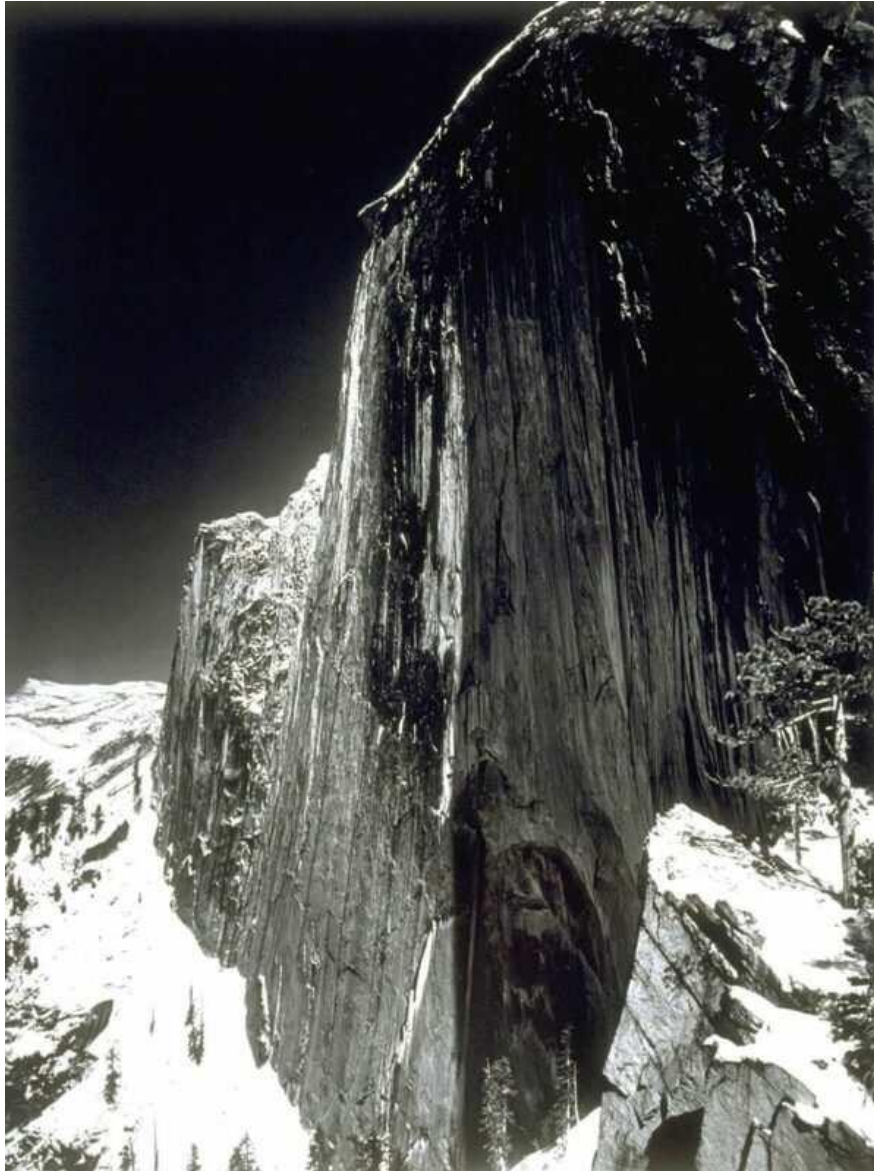
## HARRY CALLAHAN (1912-1991).

“He worked at Chrysler when he was a young man then left the company to study engineering at Michigan State University. He dropped out, returned to Chrysler and joined its camera club. Callahan began teaching himself photography in 1938. He formed a friendship with Todd Webb who was also to become a photographer. A talk given by Ansel Adams in 1941 inspired him to take his work seriously.”



“I wish more people felt that photography was an adventure the same as life itself and felt that their **individual feelings** were worth expressing. To me, that makes photography more **exciting.**” (Harry Callahan)

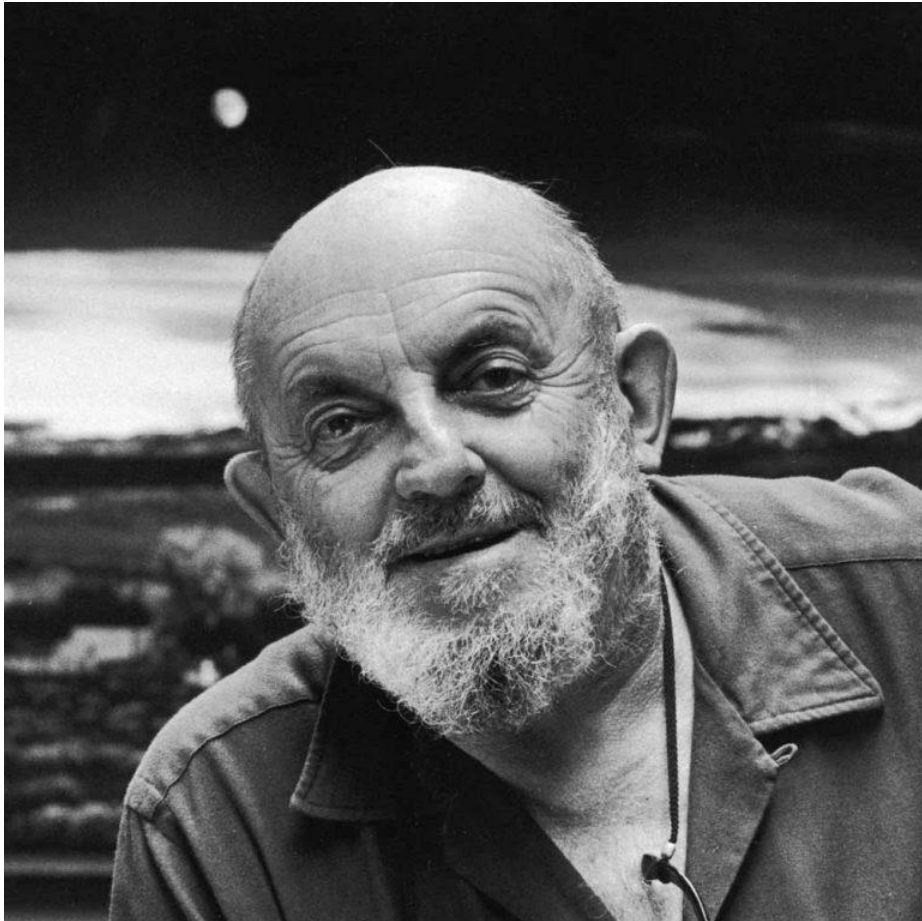




*MONOLITH, THE FACE OF HALF DOME, YOSEMITE VALLEY, 1927*

**“This was Adams’ first photograph that gathered the attention of the public and the art world. Using his Korona camera, Adams captured his iconic photo of Half Dome in Yosemite National Park after a difficult hike. Initially using a yellow filter, he then swapped it for a red filter to darken the sky, brightened the snow, and brought forth all the monumental detail and enormity of Half Dome, making it glow under the black sky.”**

(25 Famous Photographs by Ansel Adams (& 6 Fun Facts) [thecollector.com](https://thecollector.com))



Adams said of this photograph, "I had been able to realize a desired image: not the way the subject appeared in reality but **how it *felt to me*** and how it must appear in the finished print." One biographer calls *Monolith* Adams's most significant photograph because the "extreme manipulation of tonal values" was a departure from all previous photography. Adams's concept of visualization, which he first defined in print in 1934, became a core principle in his photography.

(Wikipedia)





SAND DUNES,  
SUNRISE, DEATH  
VALLEY NATIONAL  
MONUMENT,  
CALIFORNIA. 1948

SOMMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY IS  
ABSTRACT







# WHY ABSTRACT PHOTOGRAPHY?

PROMOTES THE JOY OF  
PHOTOGRAPHY



# EXAMPLES

## THEMES

### ARCHITECTURE

WATER

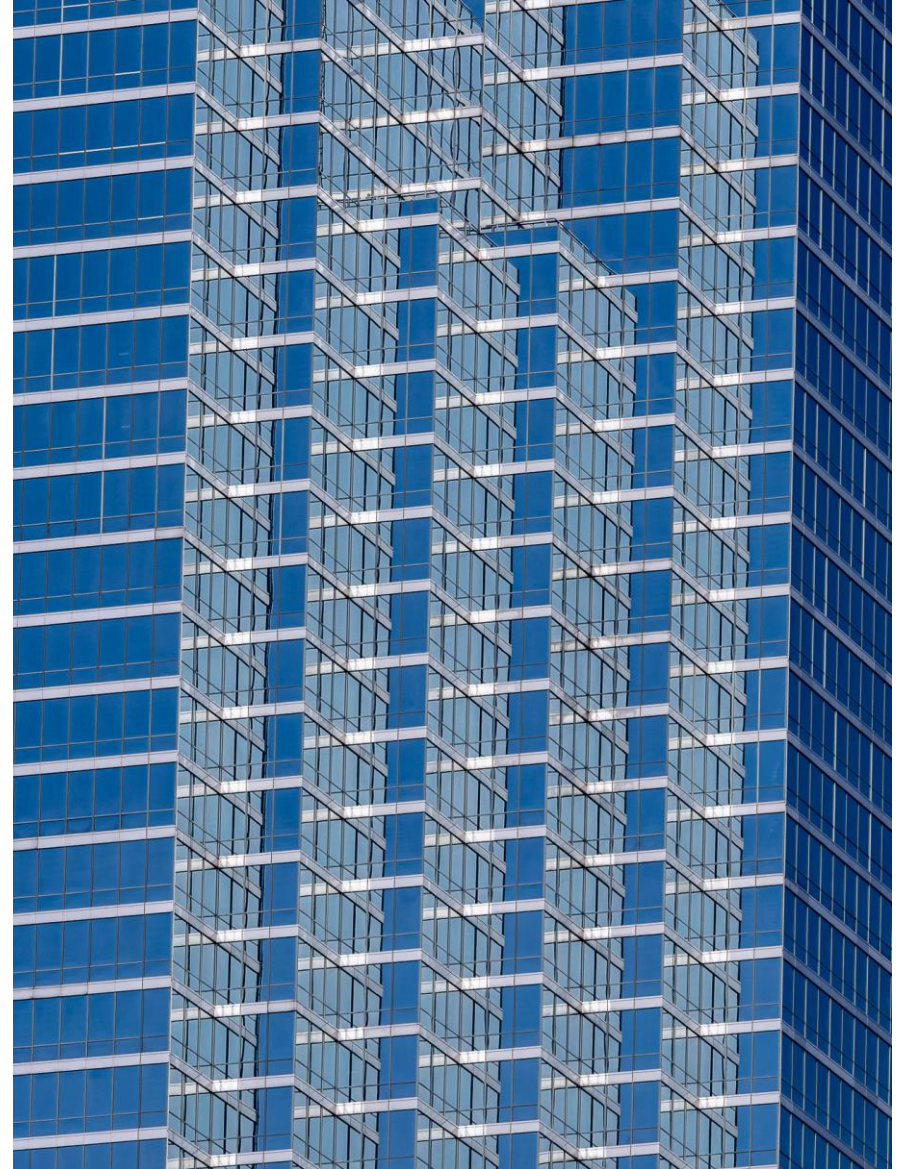
REFLECTIONS

FLORAL

EARTH

RUST

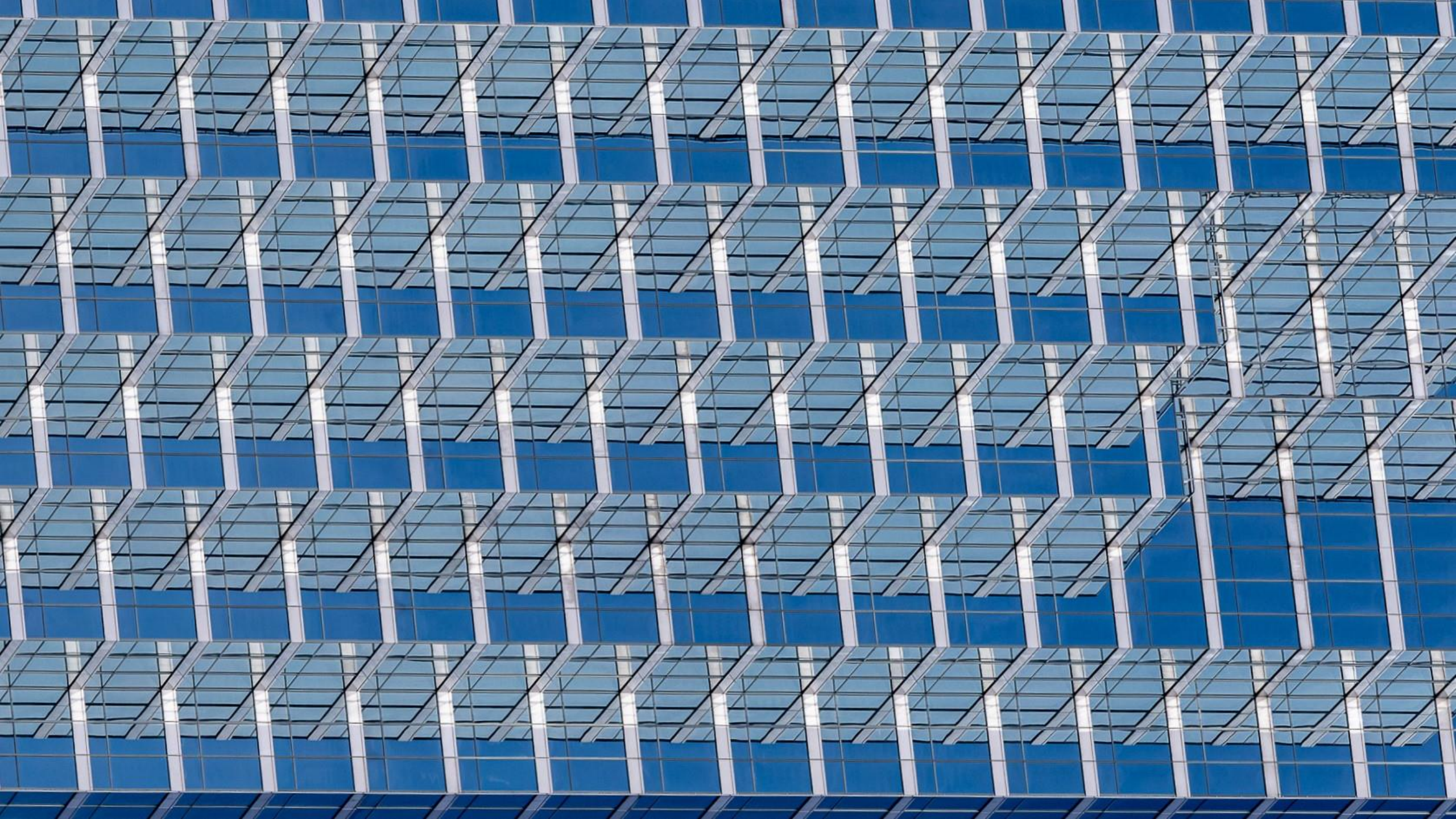
PARKING LOTS

























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**WATER**

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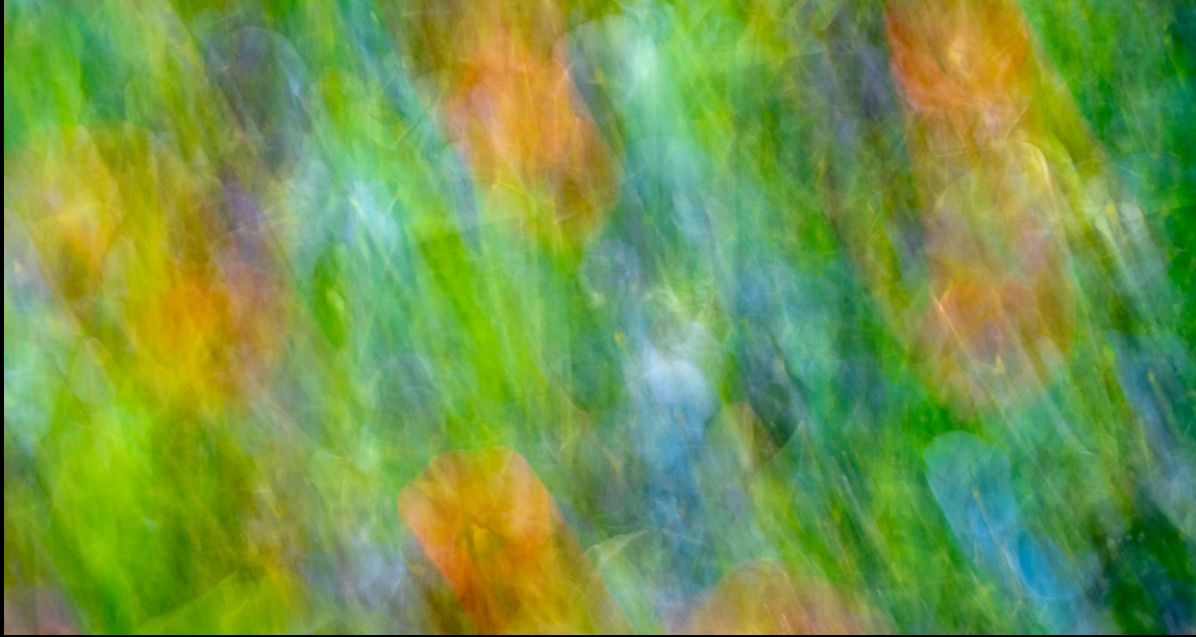
RUST

PARKING LOTS

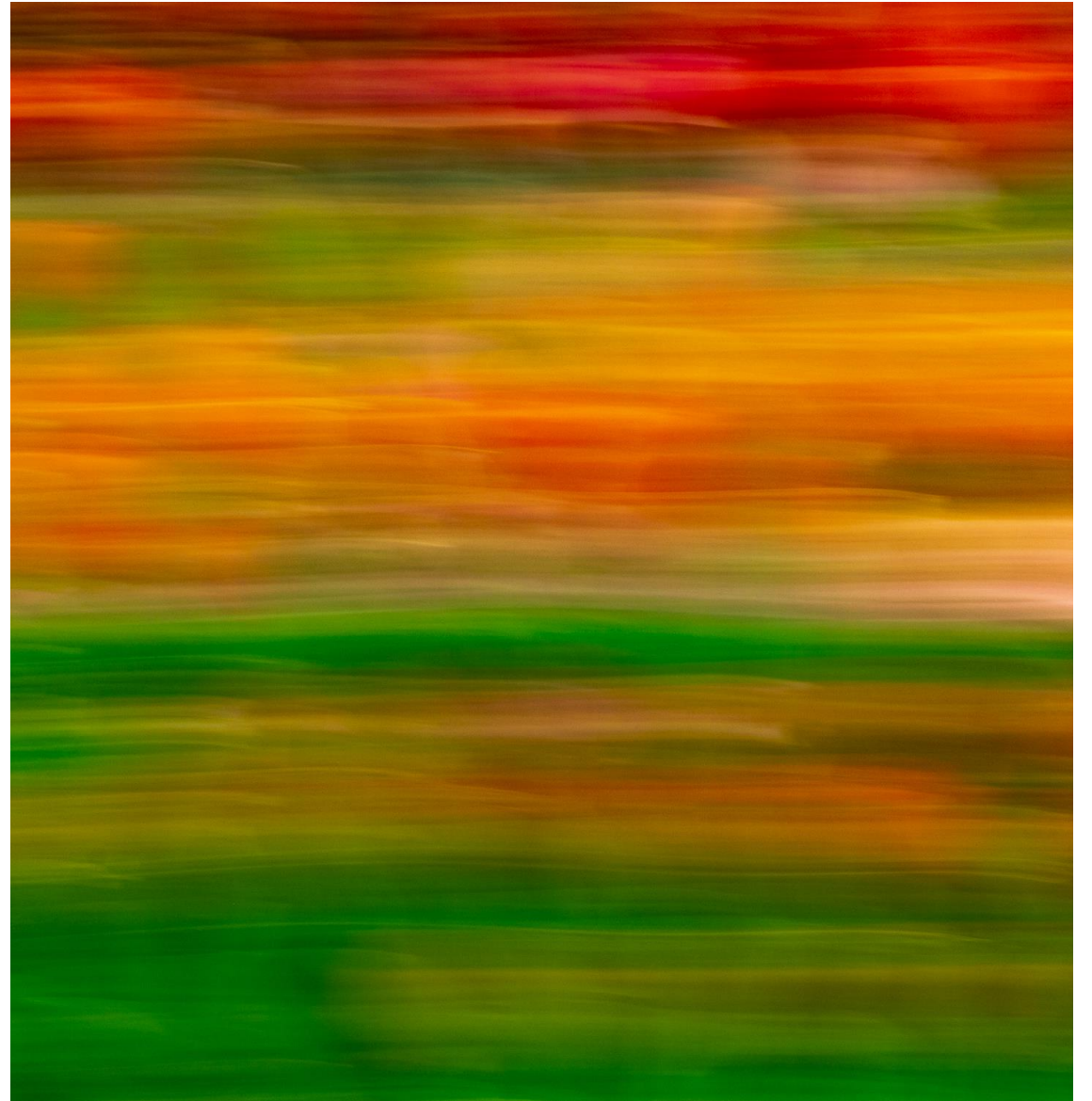
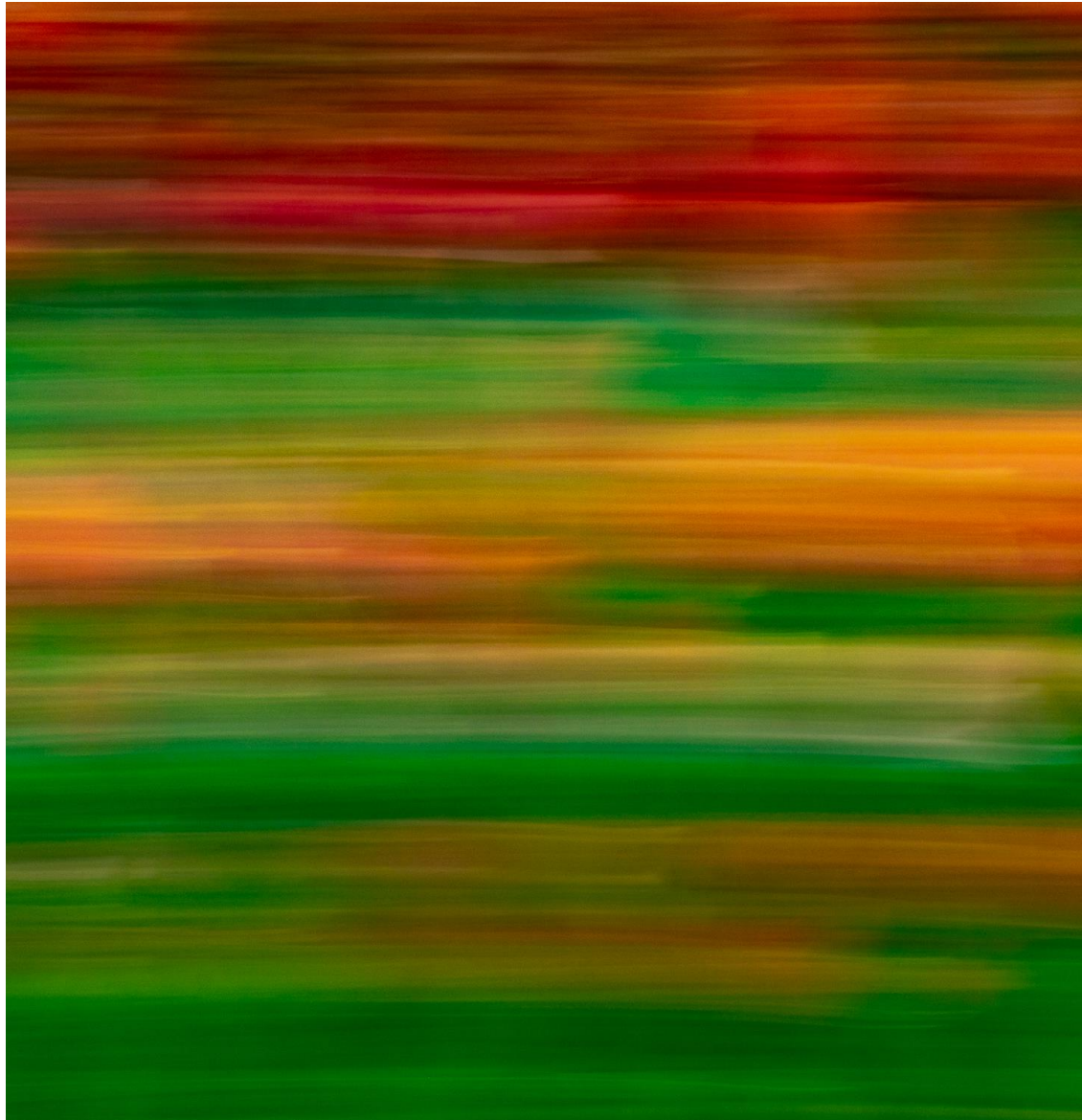




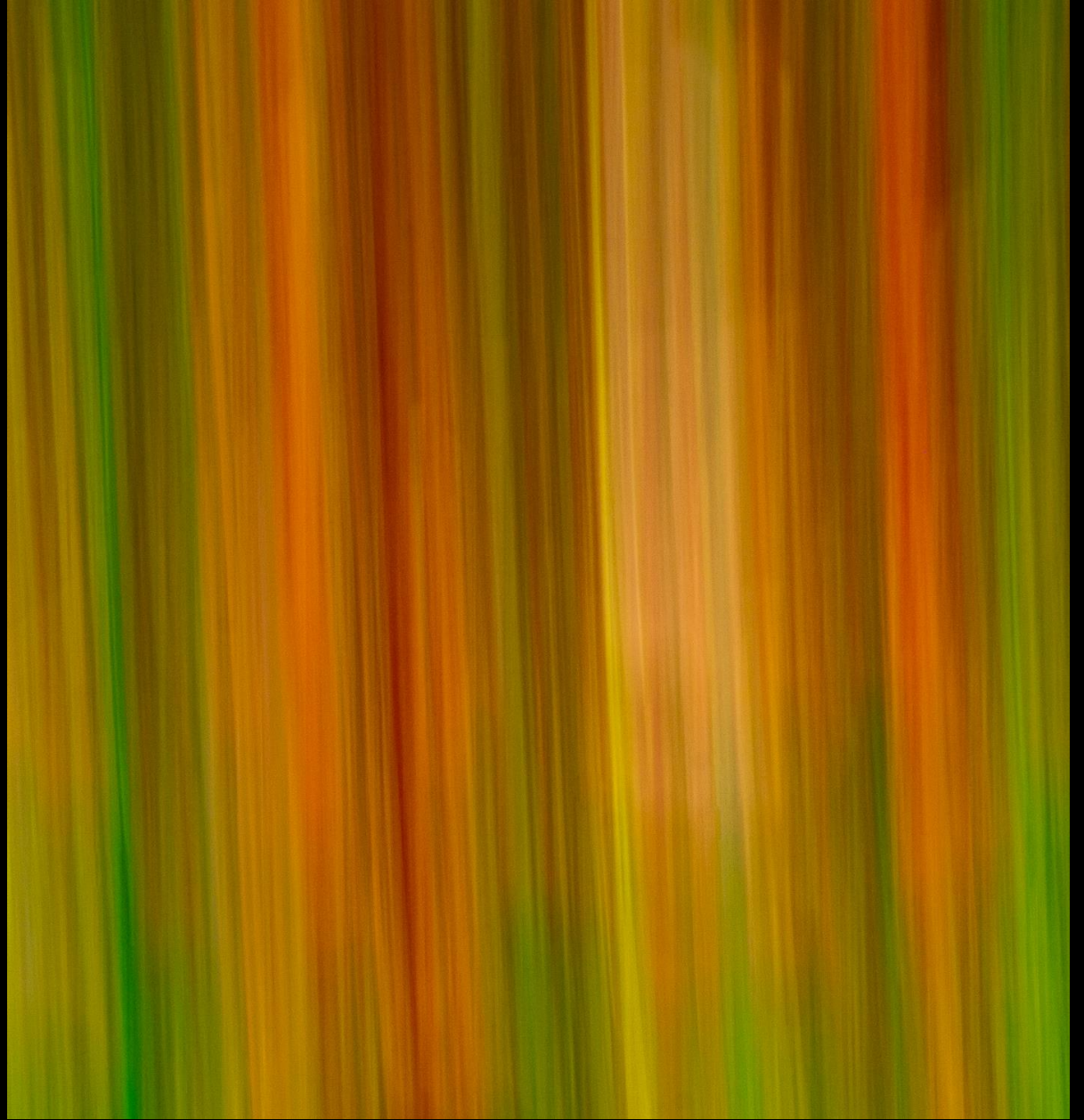


































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**EARTH**

RUST

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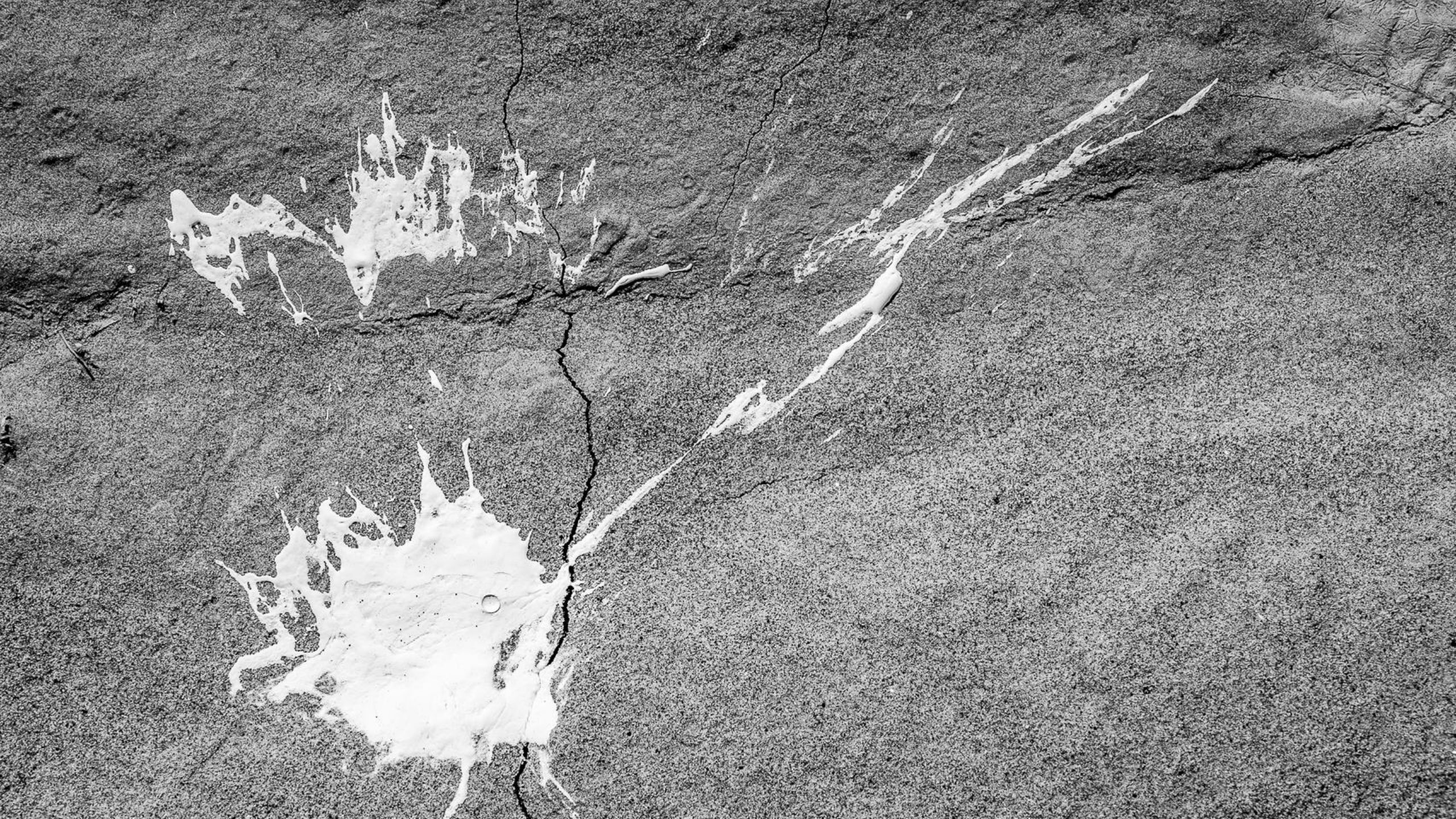








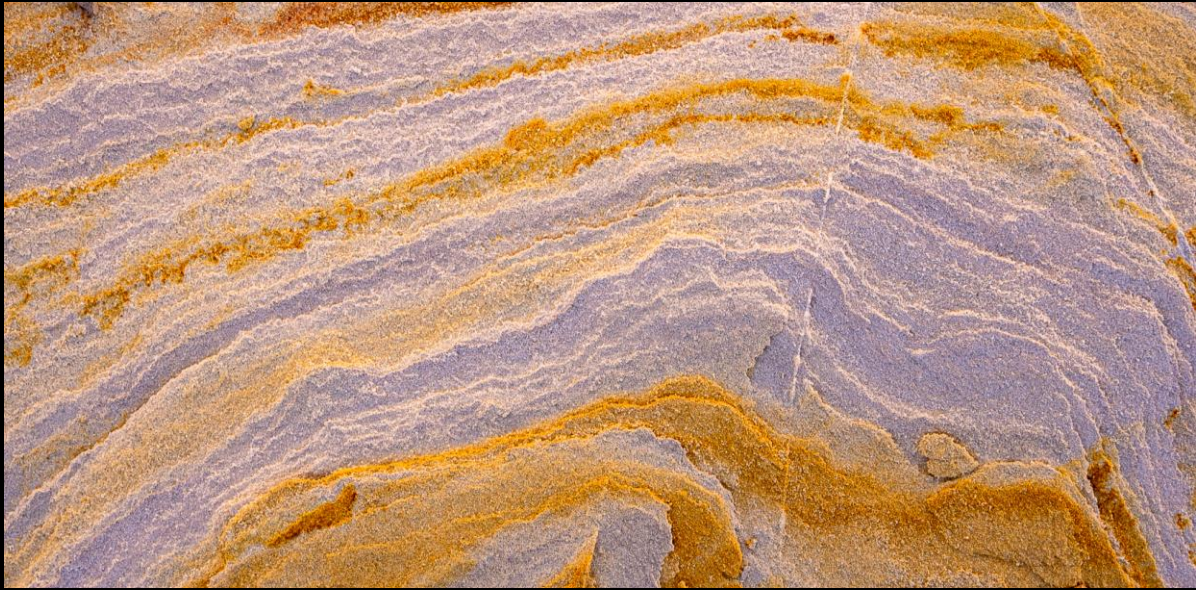














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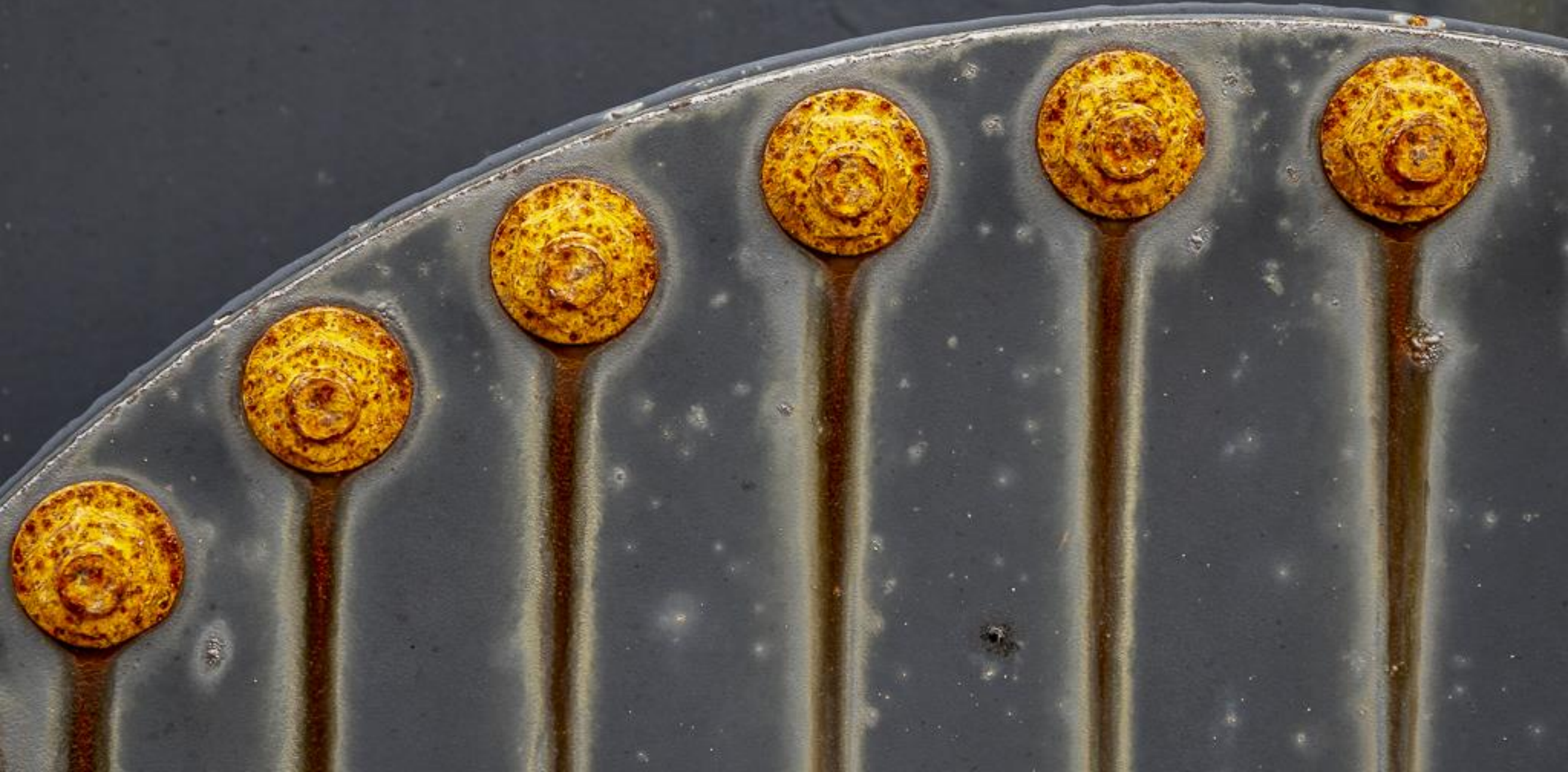




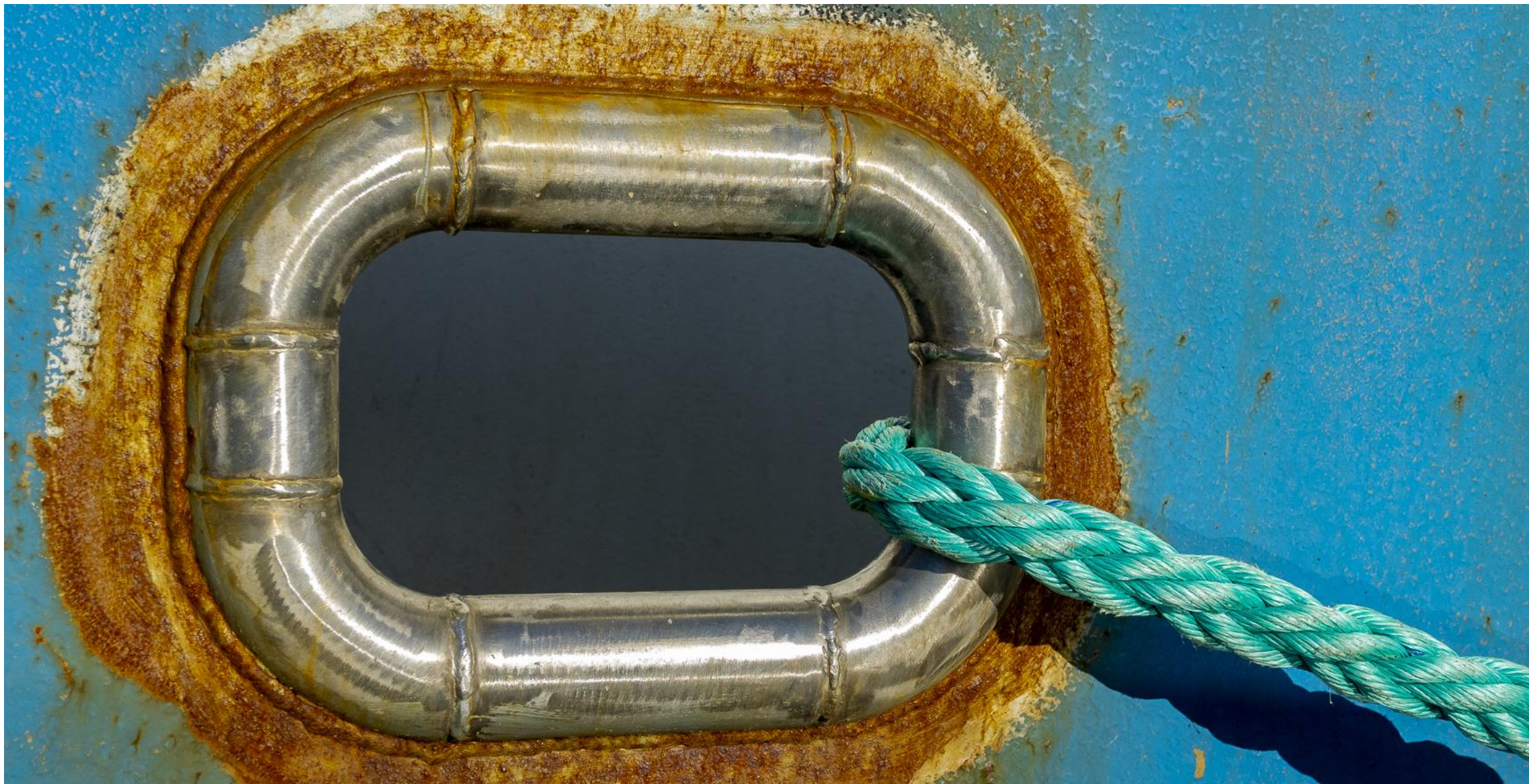














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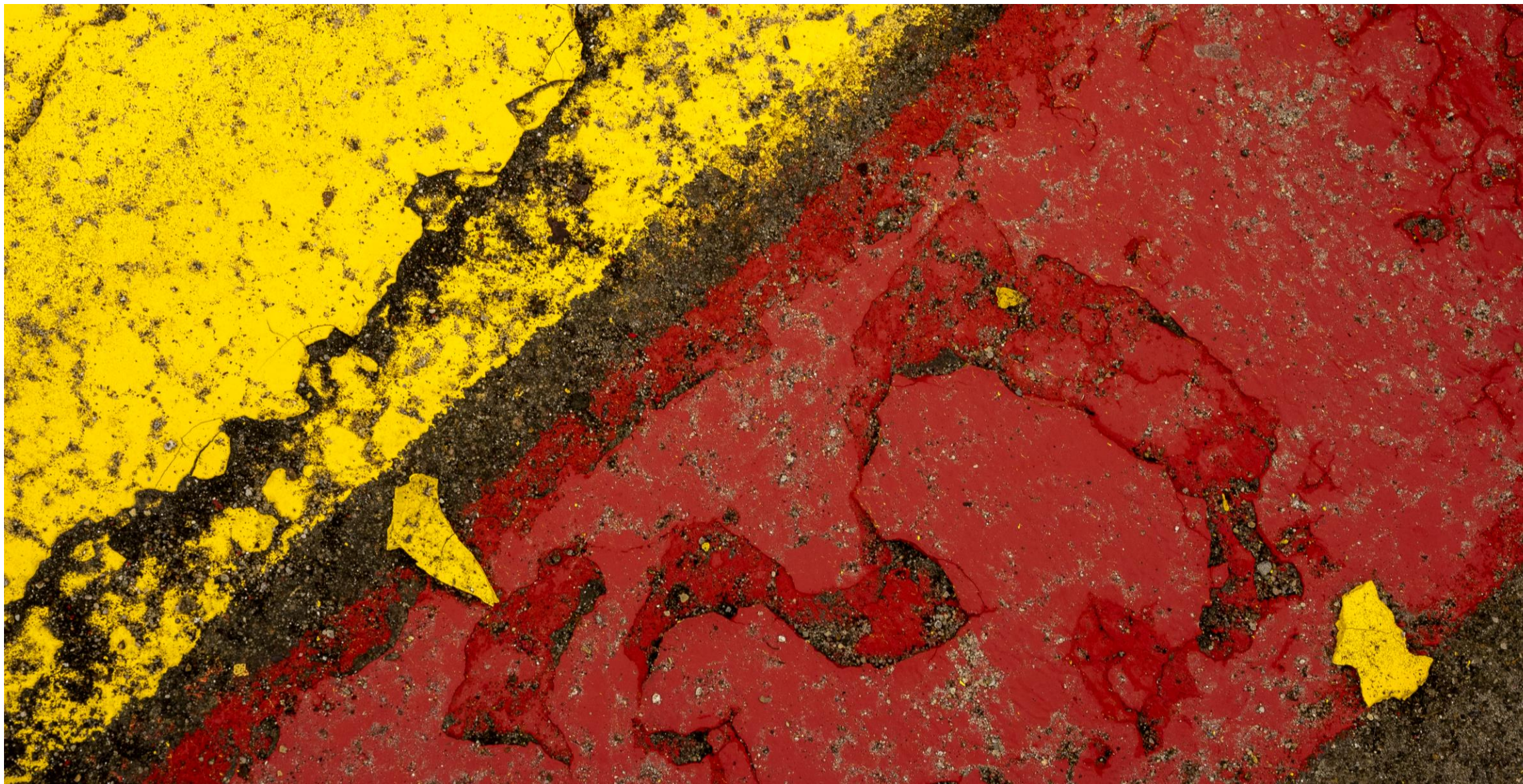




















Brazos Gallery

A CLOSER LOOK  
Parking Lot Abstracts and Artifacts  
Larry Petterborg



# QUESTIONS?





# HOMework

1. SPEND SEVERAL DAYS WALKING AROUND WITH YOUR CAMERA.
2. LOOK THINGS THAT RESONATE WITH YOU.
3. MAKE LOTS OF PICTURES.
4. EMAIL OR BRING (ON USB) THREE (3) IMAGES TO NEXT MEETING.
5. HAVE FUN!