

# AS Photography

Sept – Nov 2018

# Abstract Forms

- What is abstract photography?
- 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.
- “What is real is not the external form, but the essence of things... it is impossible for anyone to express anything essentially real by imitating its exterior surface.” – Brancusi

# Typical things to photograph...

- Smoke, mist , fog, condensation
- Light, shadow, silhouettes
- cracks in the pavement
- fences and walls
- the colours of all the cars in the supermarket car park
- telegraph poles viewed from below
- TV aerials silhouetted against the sky
- mugs/cups in your kitchen cupboard seen from above
- your friends' hairstyles seen from behind
- all the things you eat in a week
- all of your clothes laid out one piece at a time on your bedroom floor

## KEY TECHNIQUES TO USE

Manual Focus

Slow Shutter Speed

Macro settings

Cropping

Close ups

# CASE STUDY : Albert Renger-Patzsch – The World is Beautiful

- Write a short introduction about the work of Albert Renger-Patzsch and the New Objectivity.  
**Issues to consider:**
- His attitude to photography and the advantages of the camera as a way of seeing
- The New Objectivity (Neue Sachlichkeit). How does Renger-Patzsch's work fit with the concerns of artists associated with this movement?
- The types of subjects he preferred to photograph
- The ways in which he explored the formal elements in his work e.g. form, light, rhythm, line, texture, repetition etc.
- His famous book 'The World is Beautiful'
- Other photographers at the time who were similarly interested in objectivity
- Contemporary photographers who have been influenced by the idea that ordinary objects and scenes can be photographed to reveal their beauty.
  
- Gallery of images
- Add a gallery of your favourite photographs by Renger-Patzsch (like the one here).



# Exploring The Formal Elements

You could write a more detailed analysis of one image in particular and/or compare images. Concentrate on their formal properties using your knowledge of the Formal Elements.

For example, compare and contrast these two images. What are their similarities and differences?:

ORGANIC vs GEOMETRIC

NATURAL vs MAN MADE

RHYTHM

PATTERN

REPETITION

DEPTH

TONE

LIGHT

LINE

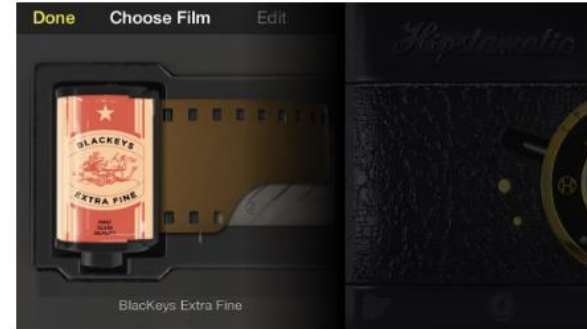
FRAMING/CROPPING



# A response...

## My response

The following series of images was taken on my iPhone using the Hipstamatic app. I chose a lens that would capture images clearly, without distortion and a black and white 'film' setting. I plan to make over 100 images so that I can edit them down to a smaller set.



# Exploring light and tone



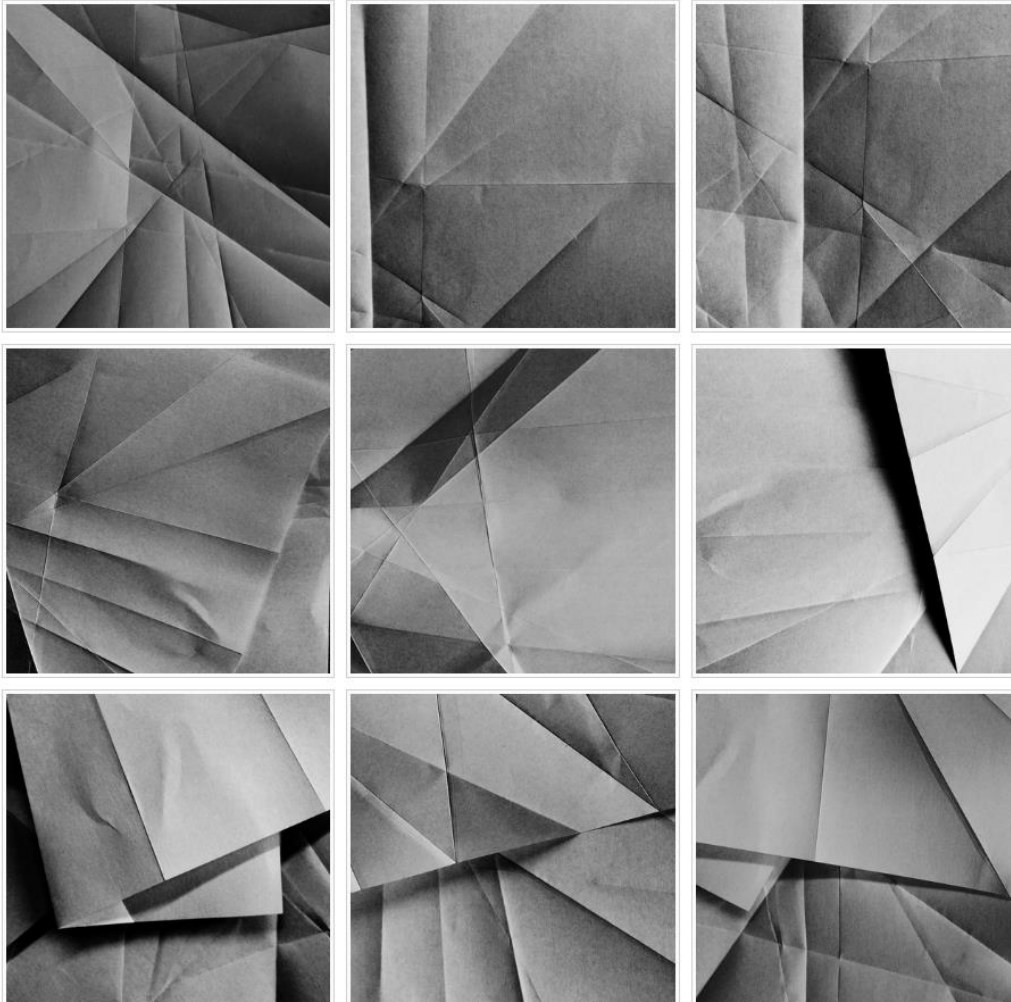
# Martin Creed



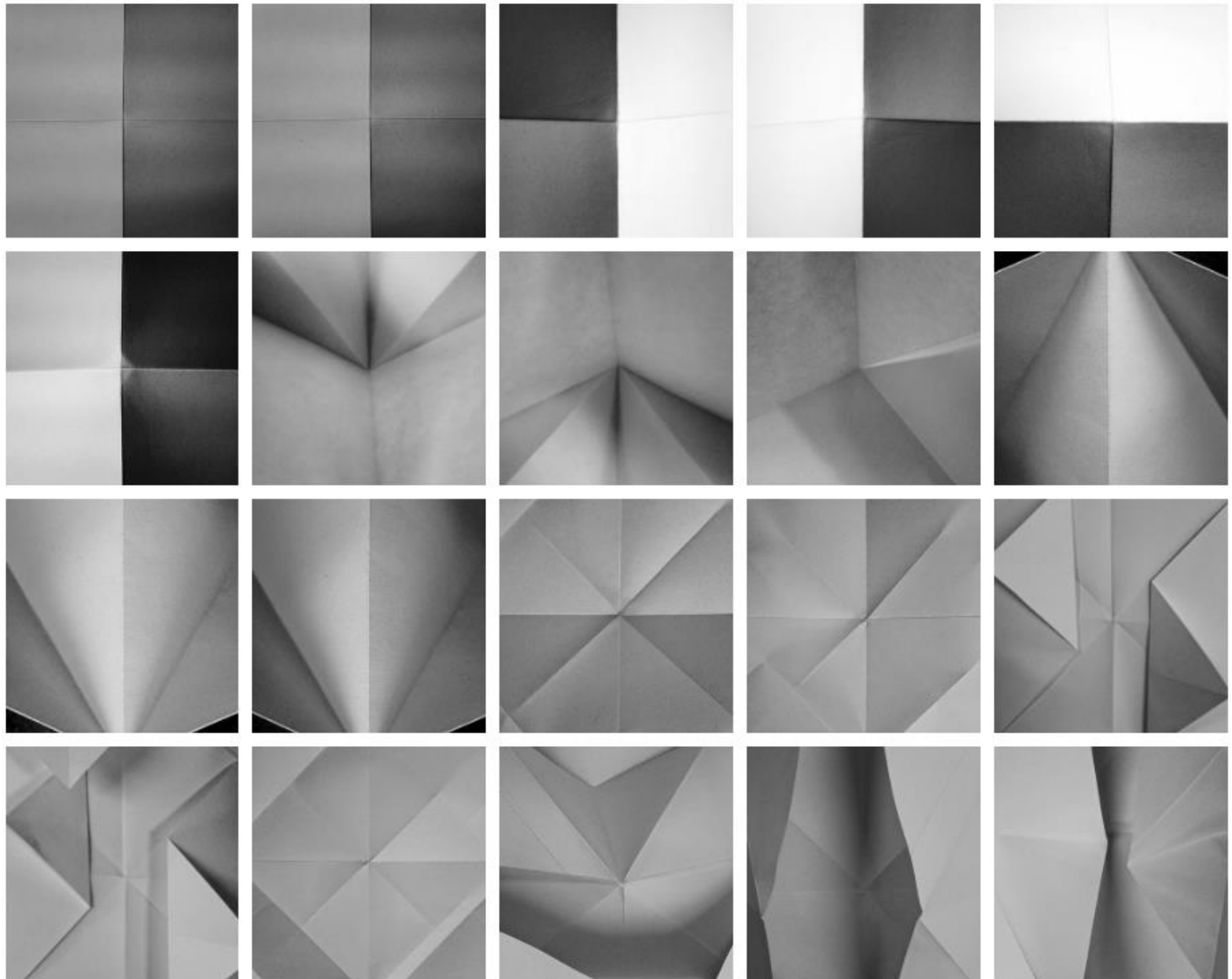


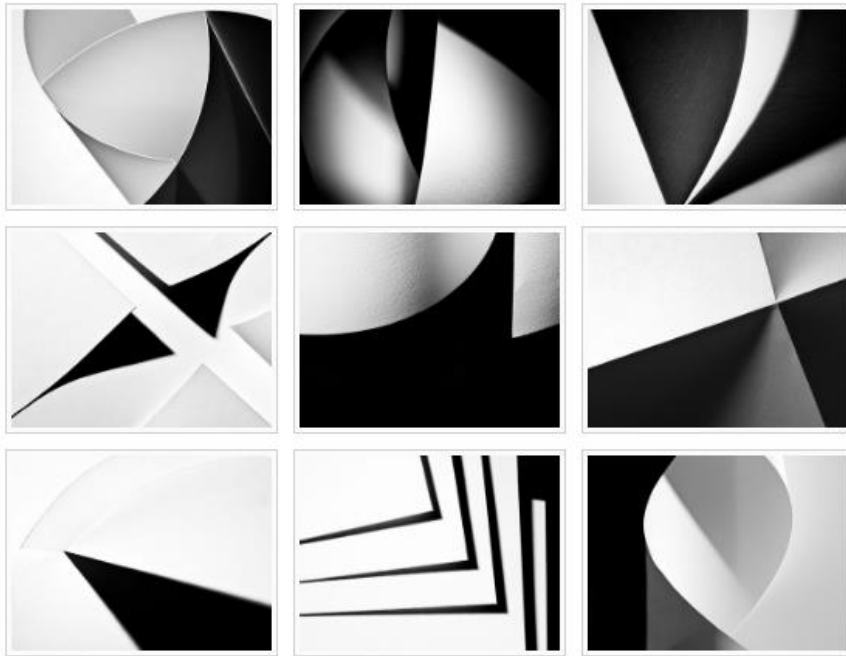
# Exploring Tone // creased paper

Edited images



Response #3





## Jerry Reed

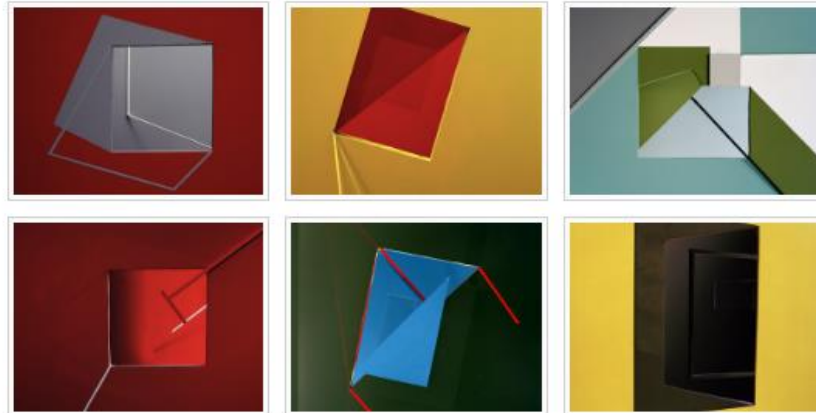
"Over time, I have come to see that what motivates me is the result of my having redirected *how* I make images, turning from the externally directed position of witness to that of author. In so doing, I accept the entire authorship of the creative process from my creation of the paper sculpture to making 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.



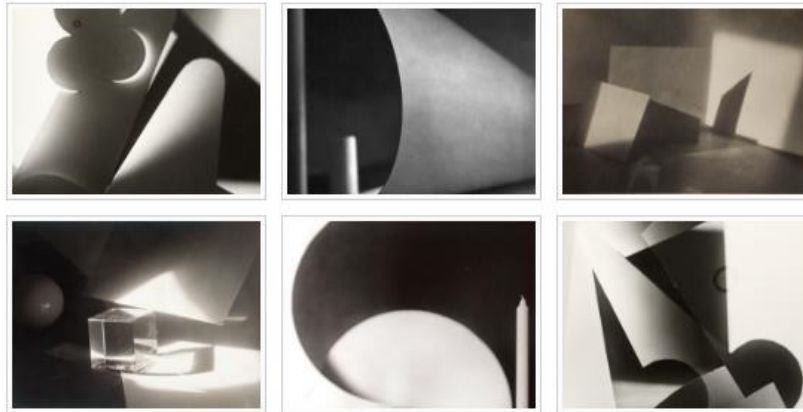
## Response #1

Using similarly limited materials - paper and light - create a response to these artists' work.

Consider the various ways in which you could manipulate the paper through **cutting, tearing, folding, puncturing, combining** etc.

## 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.

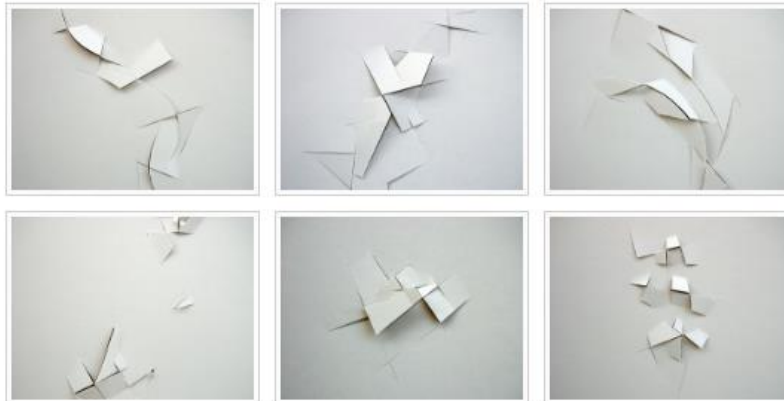


## Jaroslav Rössler

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.



# Finalising



## Evaluation

This is my favourite image from the set. Despite only using a normal piece of paper, my iPhone and cheap photo editing software I was able to create a pleasing abstract image in response to the work of Francis Bruguière and Vjeko Sager.

Camerabag helped me create more dramatic tonal contrasts. I was also keen to introduce a little more texture through the addition of grain, as if the images had been shot on fast film. I really like the sudden shifts in tone either side of the creases in the paper.

I think this image would look good either printed quite small (perhaps 6 x 4 or smaller) so that the viewer was forced to peer at the image at quite close range. Or it might also work well printed very large so that the viewer's experience of it would change depending on whether s/he was close to the picture or further away.



# Surfaces

- Photography is extraordinarily sensitive to the surface of things, the way light, captured and frozen in time, reveals the texture of reality.
- Ideas about the essence of photography were hotly contested in the decades following the First World War.
- Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's thoughts about photography making "visible existences which cannot be perceived or taken in by our optical instrument, the eye", later referred to by Walter Benjamin as the "optical unconscious", were developed at the same time as other photographers and writers asserted the power of the camera to document visible reality.
- As photographers began to probe beneath or behind the outer layer of visible reality, so others exploited the extraordinary ability of the camera to capture the surfaces of things in all their beauty and specificity

“The camera should be used for a recording of life, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the thing itself, whether it be polished steel or palpitating flesh.”  
-- Edward Weston, 1924

# Ernst Haas

Ernst Haas was a photojournalist and a pioneering color photographer. During his 40-year career, the Austrian-born artist bridged the gap between photojournalism and the use of photography as a medium for expression and creativity



# Luigi Ghirri 1943-1992

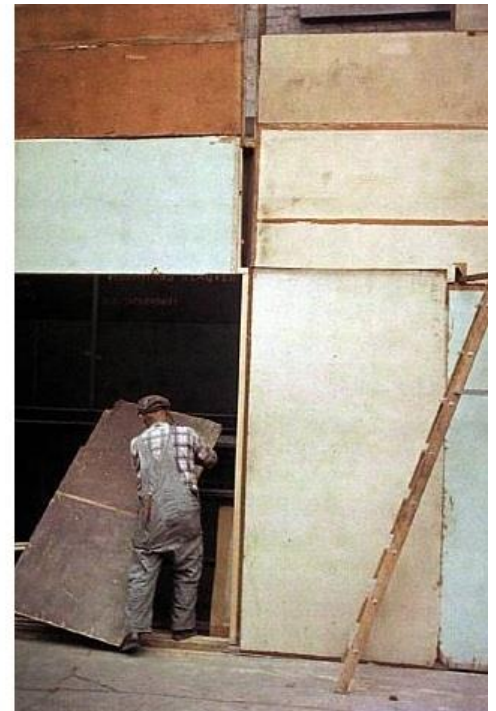
**“I take photographs in colour because the real world is in colour, and because colour film has been invented,” he wrote.**



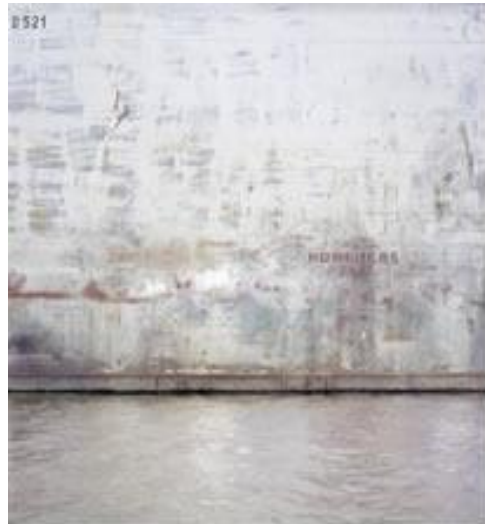


# Saul Leiter 1923-2013

**I learnt to see what others do not see and to react to situations differently. I simply looked at the world, not really prepared for anything."**



# Frank Hallam-Day





## Aaron Siskind

Both of these artists have at times captured the abstract qualities of layers, texture and detritus left by man as he creates something useful, like a poster or road markings and a pavement.

These things could easily be ignored, but framed in this way they obey the rules of compositional rules of balance and even the golden ratio at times.

Subtleties in the texture and how shapes are juxtaposed offer up a graphic take on contemporary photography.



## The Boyle Family



My responses to The Boyle Family

# Typologies

## “Classification”

- “Throughout the modern era, photography has been enlisted to classify the world and its people. Driven by a belief in the scientific objectivity of photographic evidence, the logics utilized to classify photographs-in groups and categories or sequences of identically organized images-also shape our visual consciousness. In the twenty-first-century, new digital technologies and globalization have radically transformed the applications of photography, making the reconsideration of photographic information systems ever more urgent.”  
-- from The Order of Things, an exhibition at the Walther Collection, 2015
- This project is designed to encourage you to consider one particular way in which photography has been employed. The camera's ability to make an accurate record of particular visual phenomena has meant that artists and photographers, seeking to make a systematic document of aspects of the world, have been repeatedly drawn to photography. In their hands, the camera has been used as a tool for witnessing and classifying types of subjects - people, buildings, objects etc. - gathering this evidence together in one place (often a book or exhibition) so that the viewer is able to see and assess it.
- This approach to photography is sometimes referred to as typological, a typology being a study or interpretation of types of things.
- Some initial questions:
- Why is the camera (and photography) particularly well-suited to the creation of typologies?
- Why might artist/photographers be interested in creating typologies of things?
- What issues or problems might you anticipate in setting out to create a photographic typology?

# August Sander - The Face of Our Time



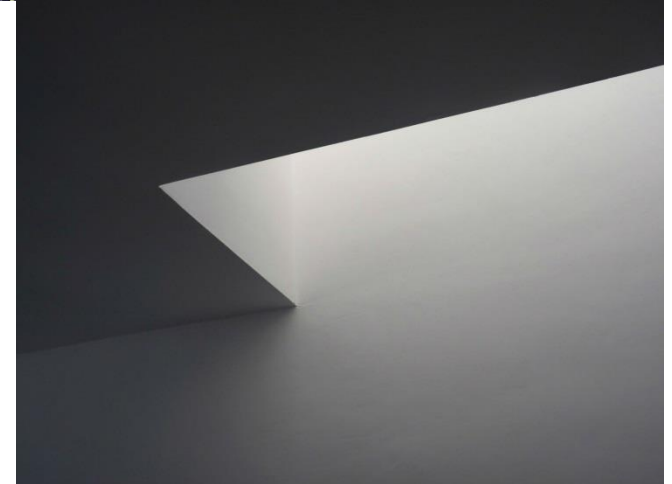
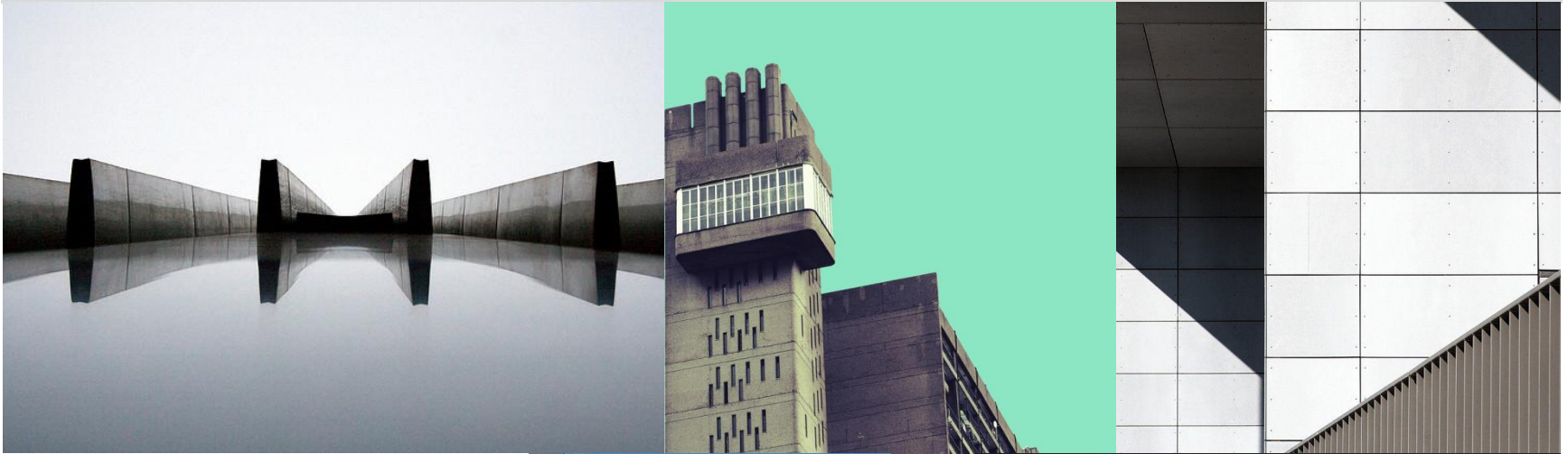
- One of the strategies photographers have used to explore the theme of Contrast is to create a series of images of the same or similar people and/or objects. This approach is often referred to as a typological study - a classification of subjects according to type. **One of the first such studies was by the German photographer August Sander**, whose epic project 'People of the 20th Century' (40,000 negatives were destroyed during WWII and in a fire) produced volume of portraits entitled 'The Face of Our Time' in 1929. Sander categorised his portraits according to their profession and social class.
- Sander's methodical, disciplined approach to photographing the world has had an enormous influence on later photographers, notably Bernd and Hilla Becher. This approach can also be seen in the work of their students **Thomas Struth and Thomas Ruff**. Other photographers who have explored this idea include Stephen Shore, Gillian Wearing, Nicholas Nixon, Martina Mullaney and Ari Versluis.

# Bernd and Hilla Becher – Typologies of industrial architecture

- The husband and wife team of Bernd and Hilla Becher began photographing together in 1959. Bernd (1931–2007) and Hilla (b. 1934) Becher documented architectural forms referred to as “anonymous sculpture” for over thirty years.
- Their extensive series of water towers, blast furnaces, coal mine tipples, industrial facades, and other vernacular industrial architecture comprise an in-depth study of the intricate relationship between form and function.
- Many books on their work are in publication, each titled after the industrial structure that they document.
- -- Fraenkel Gallery

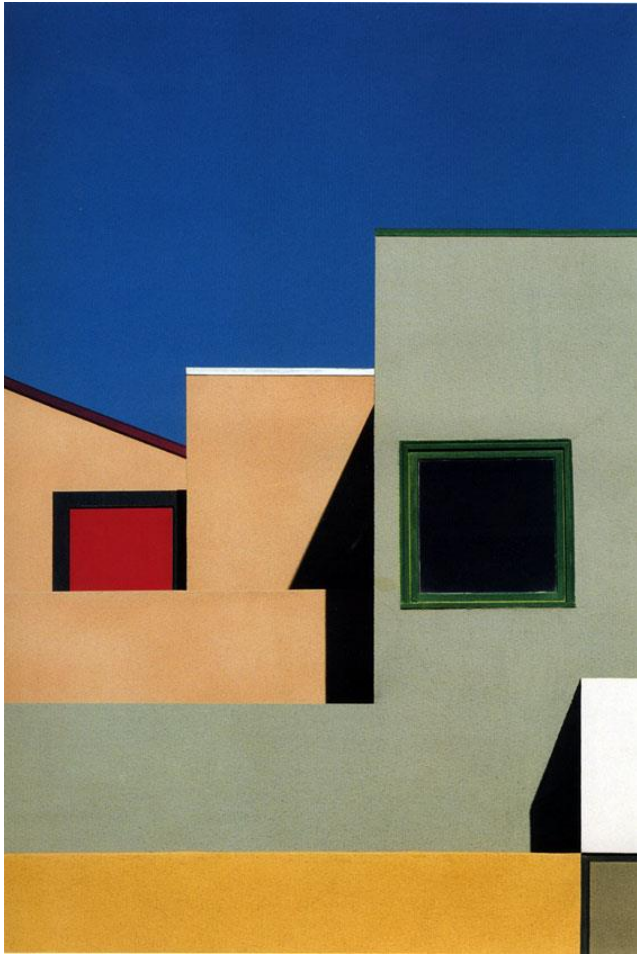


# Minimalism



Jon Setter / Julian Schulze / Grant Hamilton / Matthieu Venot / Kevin Saint James / Kyle Jeffers

# Franco Fontana





Using coloured paper to create abstract shapes



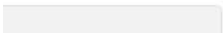
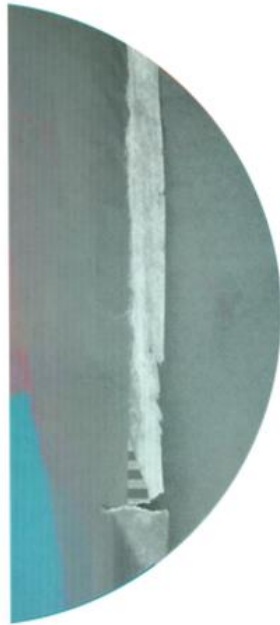
# Extending the idea...

## Edited images

I decided to edit my photos in an application called Camerabag. I chose a subtle filter that gave the images a slightly Cross Processed look. I exported these as separate files ready for further editing in Photoshop. Here you can see the **before** and **after** images.

In Photoshop I used the Elliptical Marquee Tool with a constrained ratio of 1:1 to create circular selections of each image. I saved these as png files with a transparent background.





# Other influences

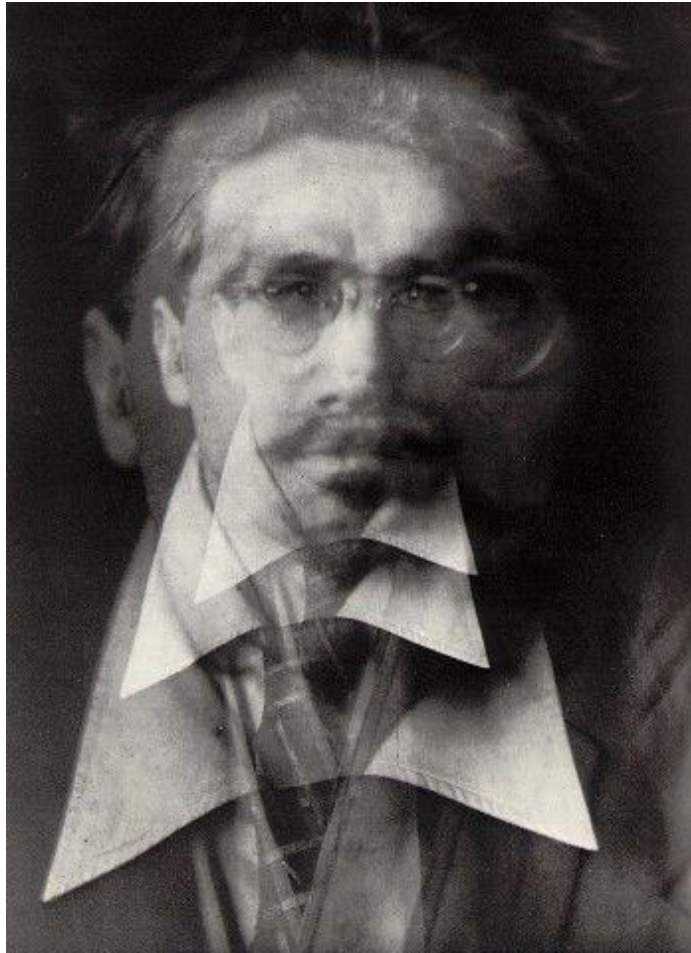
- Artists: Ben Alper, Molly Brandt, Ellen Carey, Lynne Cohen, Linda Connor, Annie Laurie Erickson, Ben Fain, Jackie Furtado, Nick George, Ann Hamilton, Peter Happel Christian, Whitney Hubbs, Lowey & Puiseux, Jessica Mallios, Man Ray, Casey McGonagle, Eileen Mueller, John Opera, Gina Osterloh, Justin James Reed, Meghann Riepenhoff, Melanie Schiff, Adam Schreiber, Frederick Sommer, Sonja Thomsen, Minor White, Jeff Whetstone, and Anonymous.

# Alvin Langdon Coburn

- Alvin Langdon Coburn, (born June 11, 1882, Boston, Mass., U.S.—died Nov. 23, 1966, Rhoson-Sea, Denbighshire, Wales), American-born British photographer and the maker of the first completely nonobjective photographs.
- In 1913 Coburn exhibited five photographs collectively titled *New York from Its Pinnacles*, showing street scenes viewed from above. These photographs, especially *The Octopus, New York*, display a novel use of perspective and an emphasis upon abstract pattern. In 1917 he began taking the first completely nonobjective photographs. He called them vortographs to associate them with the Vorticists, a group of English writers and painters who had been influenced by Cubism and Futurism, as Coburn himself had been. Vortographs were a deliberate attempt to prove that photographers could fracture space into abstract compositions as Cubist painters and sculptors had done.



# Coburn and prisms



# Jaromir Funke

Funke's photographs represent a wide range of subjects and styles. This selection, however, demonstrates his interest in using the camera to reveal textures, shapes, forms and the play of light on various materials, both man-made and organic.



<https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/#home>

# Eileen Quinlan

## Eileen Quinlan:

"Her trials with materials, and her use of the camera and mirrors—both traditionally considered vehicles of representation—to create abstractions underline her interest in the act of looking, rather than in idolizing her outcomes. Quinlan creates her kaleidoscopic images by using a physical setup that she then shoots with a medium-or large-format camera. The materials featured—smoke, paper towels, reflective surfaces including Mylar—are all combined and recombined throughout the works. Shards of mirrors ricochet textures and beautifully saturated color between the fractured surfaces of the installations; the resultant images are labyrinthine frames of folded perspective that bear more in common with nonobjective painting than photography. Quinlan isn't precious with her process; the surface of the film is often degraded and scratched, as in *Smoke and Mirrors #205*, and the images' aspect ratio is often blown beyond the original proportion to yield grainy images. The way the artist plays with the elements commonly used to judge the quality of a representational photograph allows us to see the technical process as the end, not merely the means."

From an [exhibition review in Time Out](#), 2007

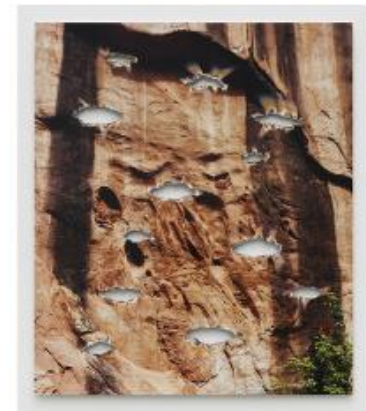




## Letha Wilson:

"Wilson has described herself as an amateur photographer, and on their own, the pictures are indeed nothing special: vistas of mountains and deserts, indistinguishable from vacation photographs taken at any time over the last century, appear alongside inscrutable close-ups of rocks, shrubs and trees. These nondescript outdoor shots are then subjected to various physical processes, including being pleated, cut, bisected by two-by-fours or partially obscured by flows of cement. Through such interventions, Wilson creates abstract approximations of each landscape's most immediate visual and sensory effects."

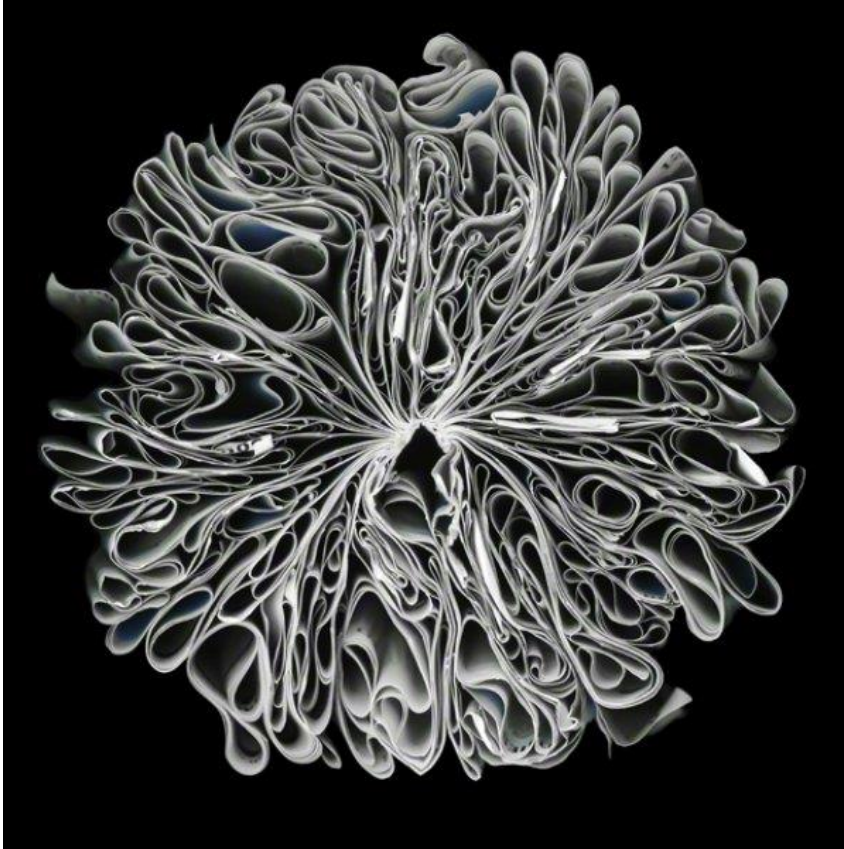
From a [review in Art in America](#), 2013



Response #4



# Cara Berer



# You should...

- Research the history of abstraction in photography
- 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.
- Create a series of Galleries featuring the work of Francis Bruguière, Jaroslav Rössler, Vjeko Sager, Jerry Reed and Tamara Lorenz, including your understanding of their work in the context of abstraction and the theme of Contrast.

# Example of An Evaluation

- I was inspired by a combination of the work of Jaroslav Rössler and Tamara Lorenz. Having found a stack of old wrapping paper that showed the signs of use I created a series of casual compositions, photographing the paper from a few centimetres using my iPhone.
- I made sure that I framed the paper so that the table beneath was not showing. I experimented with parallel and diagonal lines and combinations of colour and texture. Some of the images contained only two pieces of paper, whereas others were more complex and multi-layered. I like the contrast between the straight edges and those that are more frayed. I also enjoyed using the semi transparent paper through which you can see the other papers.
- Other than laying them on top of each other in different combinations, I didn't manipulate the paper. I simply accepted the folds and tears that were already there. The decision to alter the colours slightly and create circular selections was an attempt to further increase the level of abstraction in the images.
- Further interesting effects were achieved by overlaying and resizing 3, 4 or 5 of the circle images and experimenting with a variety of Blending Modes. These images were then further manipulated by being cropped using the Polygonal Lasso Tool and rotated.
- Next time, I intend to experiment with applying my own cuts and tears using only a single sheet of paper, influenced by Bruguière and Sager. I'm pleased with the final set of images which I may decide to print and display.