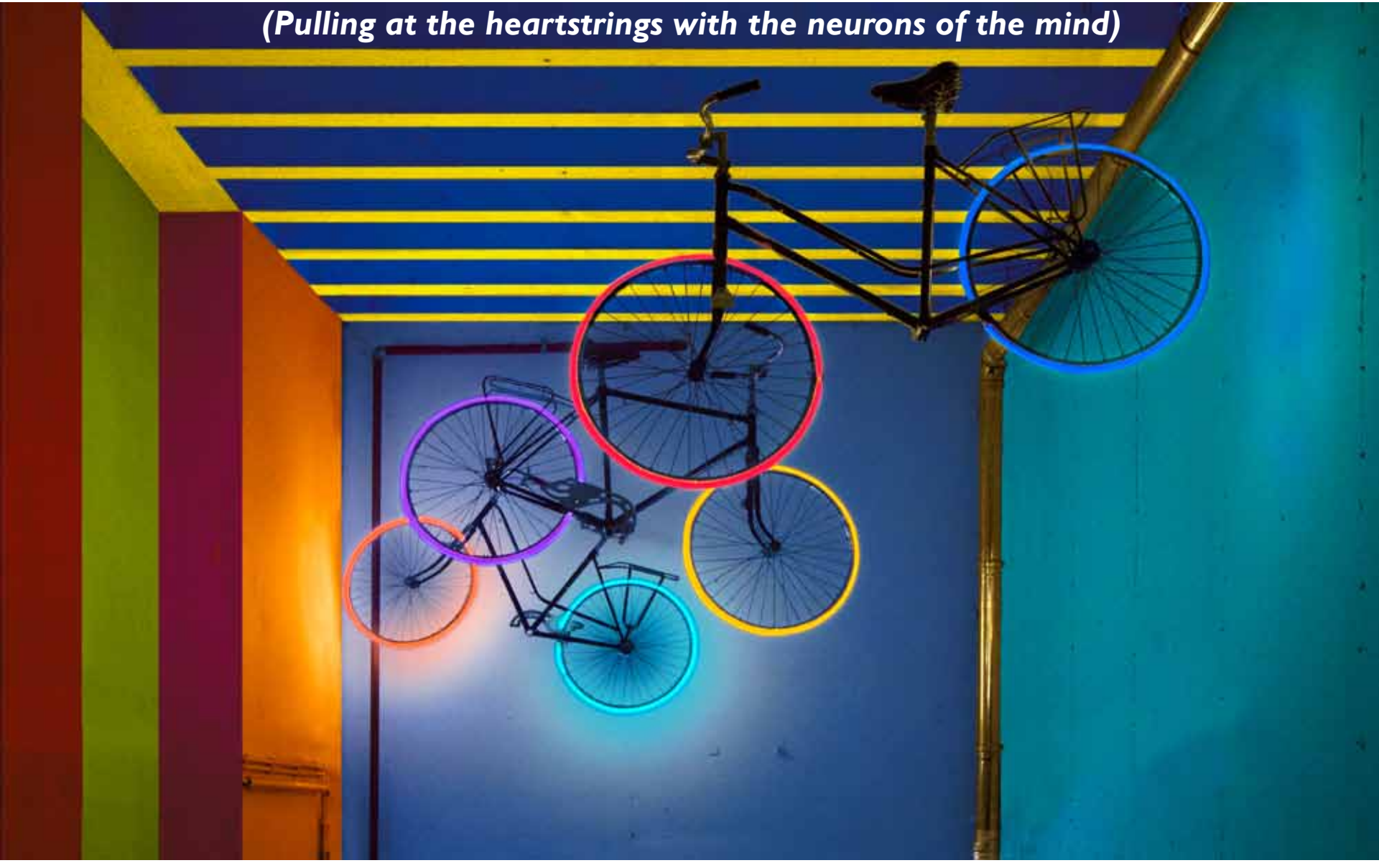
True Colours

(Pulling at the heartstrings with the neurons of the mind)



Christopher Cristóbal Newberry

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Text and images by

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Preface

The images in this book were created between 2008 and 2021. They are divided into five series, starting with "Gestalt Blue Skies", then "Platonic Views", "Abstracted Colour", "Lockdown" and finally "Absent".

The running theme is 'perception' in relation to 'truth' – the 'true colours' of people, ideas and information. How humans see and interpret information – including visual information. I am not an expert in the field of perception – not in any scientific sense, but I have read and thought a lot about it using scientific analyses. And I hope to have some small influence on the debate about how we interpret information and why we interpret it in certain ways.

When I started creating these images in 2008 I hadn't really thought the whole thing through. I didn't know exactly where I was going. Things sort of developed from the idea that people always come up with a conclusion even when they have only partial, but not all, information on a subject, idea or image. We invent, we make up the missing information (*Fig 1*).That's basic Gestalt theory. Then, still regarding Gestalt theory, I started thinking about how we tend to idealise images by thinking of them diagramatically – in terms of geometry, symmetry, straightness: so, for example, sky, sea and land became three long rectangles (*Fig 2*). This led me to consider at what point something we interpret as real or truthful is actually not so. When Donald Trump's views started to be believed by many and when conspiracy theories became so prevalent on social media I thought there was a clear link between 'post-truth' and my images. Both may seem real, but may not be – 'fake news' or conspiracy theories are said to be based on facts. That gives them the false appearance of reality or truth. Many of my images appear to be true, but either shapes, symmetry or colours or a combination of these could not possibly be 'truthful', because I transformed an original photo into geometric shapes, dead-straight lines and saturated colours.

2020 brought the Covid 19 pandemic and 'lockdown'. As my partner and I couldn't leave our home except for groceries and a daily session of exercise, that forced me to have a much closer look at my immediate surroundings: my house, my garden and my exercise route. Having nothing else to work with, I created images using those surroundings. However, instead of a single, coherent image as in normal photography, I took dozens of pictures of scenes, such as an unmade bed or a ceiling. I put those pictures togeher to form a single image and then recoloured it. I divided each scene into squares and, using certain formulas, put those squares into a larger 11x11 square. That process produces new patterns and symmetries (*Fig 3*).

All together the five series come under the heading of "True Colours". People's 'true colours' are not always obvious and should be questioned.

Fig. 1 When we don't have the whole picture, we make assumptions which complete it, we fill in the gaps.

Fig. 2 Perfect rectangles do not exist in nature, only in our mind.

Fig. 3 A ceiling photographed in its entirety, bit by bit, recoloured, segmented and reincorporated as squares.

Contents

Introduction

Truth, Truthiness, Verisimilitude, Fake News and Plain Old Lies: What are the True Colours?

Truthiness and Post-Truth

In 2005 the American Dialect Society's word of the year was "truthiness". The American comedian and political satirist, Stephen Colbert, (*Fig 4*) came up with a spoof term for "the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than facts or concepts known to be true". That is 'truthiness'. Fast forward 10 years and The Oxford Dictionary nominated 'post-truth' as its word of the year, defining it as: "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". Both terms refer to our current post-truth times.

In essence 'truthiness' and 'post-truth' refer to a strong in-built human tendency to believe what one wants to believe, in accordance to one's feelings, despite evidence to the contrary. In my opinion, some of the results of this tendency are religion, nationalism, racism, elitism and many, many more 'isms'. Truthiness and post-truth are modern concepts, but they are highlighting something that has long existed.

Truth, Lies and Verisimilitude

The words 'truth', 'lies' and 'verisimilitude' on the other hand, have been around for a very long time.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, "Truth is the actual fact or facts about a matter". In truth there are no "alternative facts", as Kellyanne Conway, Donald Trump's Press Secretary, once put it in a press conference. The opposite of the truth is a lie: "something that someone says or writes which they know is untrue in order to deceive". It's done on purpose. And in between truth and lies there is verisimilitude: "the quality of seeming true or of having the appearance of being real". From the Latin, 'veritas' (truth) and 'similitudo' (similar): Similar to truth … but not truth. This concept can apply to art, novels, films and, in my case, images derived from photography. (*Figs 5* and *6*)

Fig. 5 Stephen Colbert popularised the word 'truthiness' in 2005.

Fig. 5 An example of 'verisimilitude'. It looks like reality … but notice the shape of the island. Is anything in nature so symmetrical?

Fig. 6 The post-truth world is full of media and social media fake news. Fake news only works if it seems real.

Fig. 7 In 1917 two girls took pictures of themselves with cardboard fairies – people believed it.

Fig. 8 Having lost a son in the Great War, Arthur Conan Doyle was a spiritualist who firmly believed that the Cottingley fairies photo was genuine.

Fig. 9 This image by the author is not meant to be 'verisimilar', but a lie. Its purpose is to deceive while purporting to express reality.

Fairyland

The Cottingley fairies story was a lie (*Fig 7*), that is, it was intended to deceive. Perhaps not maliciously, perhaps it all started as a joke, but in 1917 two little girls went to the back of their garden and took pictures of themselves playing with little fairies. The fairies were actually cardboard cutouts. The girls showed the pictures to their parents claiming the fairies were real. Their mother believed them. She took the photos to the Theosophical Society which happily accepted the photos as "conclusive proof" that there is a spiritual world. These were no nincompoops. Among their members was the creator of Sherlock Holmes, the most rational and intelligent of fictional characters. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (*Fig 8*) took the pictures as evidence that it was possible to communicate with the spiritual world. He even gave public lectures on the photographs. To our modern eyes, they are obviously fake photos, but back in 1917 after more than 3 years of a devastating war where millions had died, many, many people were desperate to believe that their dead loved ones could still somehow survive as spirits. Conan Doyle himself had lost his eldest son and his only brother to the war. He wanted to believe it. The girls' little white lie led to large numbers of people believing a big lie. Even though that was never the girls' intention. It happens now too.

Blood Moon

In early 2019 there was a Blood Moon, where the full moon appears very large and red during a lunar eclipse. Some people take this phenomenon as a sign that the end of the world is nigh. There were a lot of fake photos being circulated on social media and as a joke, I published one of my own. I used the same basic technique as the girls in Cottingley: one real and one false image superimposed on each other. I used a photo I had taken of Dieppe harbour and a picture of a blood moon downloaded from the Internet. I put the two together and – voilà – a fake (*Fig 9*). I posted it on Facebook, fully expecting people to have a laugh. To my amazement, many believed the image to be true. I honestly thought it would be spotted immediately as a fake. I came clean confessing its fakeness, but by then it was too late. I had deliberately set out to deceive, so it was a lie – joke or not. Some didn't see my confession and may still believe it to be true.

However, that image is an exception to my work. My works are verisimilitudes, based on truth with the purpose of exposing 'truthiness' and lies. By clarifying that they are not truth and they are not lies, they become verisimilitudes.

The camera doesn't lie??

In the past people used to say, "the camera doesn't lie". The Cottingley girls showed us that the camera certainly can lie. When creating an image, I start off with the truth: objects that in fact exist. When light hits these objects, it bounces off of them and into our eyes. Usually, reflected light warns us of the presence of an object so we don't bump into it. For any practical purpose, if we can see the object with our eyes and touch it, then it is real – it is factually there. If the objects are lit, a camera can pick up their reflection on film or image sensors. When viewed we can say that the resulting image is 'truthful'. Depending on the shapes, forms, colours and composition we can think of those truthful images as beautiful, ugly or, perhaps, mundane – uninteresting. Take a car park.

Car parks and verisimilitude

Car parks on the whole are not beautiful objects. This one (*Fig 10*) in Bruges was certainly not a thing of beauty, but it did have bicycles dangling from the ceiling with neon lights as wheels, so I took an interest. I photographed the scene and the resulting image is 'truth'. It is not the object itself, but a truthful reflection of the object. However, then I transformed the image (*Fig 11*): I straightened and made the lines perfectly horizontal and vertical, changed the colours, got rid of superfluous objects such as pipes and straps. (*Fig 12*) Then, the image becomes more and more abstract, but conserving a degree of verisimilitude: There really are 3 bicycles in a room with pipes. That much is true, but bicycles don't usually float in the air, so the image is verisimilar. The image becomes idealised with its almost perfect shapes and saturated colours – many of them complementary.

Verisimilitude: Not truth, but not lies

The difference between the images in this book and those of the Cottingley fairies and my 'blood moon' pictures is that the former are not intended to deceive, whereas the latter are lies. Photography used to be regarded as trustworthy compared to other forms of visual communication, such as painting. With digital photography all vestige of trustworthiness is gone. A photograph may or may not tell the truth. Today we are being bombarded constantly with fake news, "alternative facts" and truthiness: all intended to mislead or obfuscate.

Fig. 10 Starting off with the truth: A rather mundane entrance to a car park with 3 bicycles dangling from the ceiling.

Fig. 11 While conserving a degree of verisimilitude, the image is now almost abstract, missing superfluous objects that hinder.

Fig. 12 Detail – Before and after: Lines have been straightened, colours have been changed and saturated, and superfluous objects such as pipes and straps have been eliminated, creating the illusion that the bicycles float.

Fig. 13 Descartes, Truth v Trump, Post-truth.

Verisimilitude: Post-truth

At the time of writing, we are living in a period where too many falsehoods are used in politics and in mainstream and social media – not necessarily lies. They are statements meant to confuse and obfuscate. Many perceive these falsehoods as 'true'. Facts are no longer the main component in forming opinions and making decisions. Today, opinions and decisions rely more on perceptions, on 'gut feelings' (*Fig. 13*). Populist ideologies have exploited this. As societies, we are in danger of being governed by populism. It's happened before – many times (think of Nero, Robespierre, Hitler, Pol Pot, etc.). Populism provides simple answers to complicated questions, answers that large numbers of people want to hear, rather than truthful ones. People want 'truthiness'. People see, hear and read what they want to see, hear or read – not what there is to be seen, heard or read.

Make objectivity great again

The images in this book are not real. They are not truthful. They are at the same time, not meant to confuse and obfuscate. In fact they are intended to clarify that indeed, they are not truthful in very much the same way as Magritte's painting, The Treachery of Images (*Fig. 14*). They are images captured from reality, however what I am showing is not what there is, but what I wish to show. The images are platonic views, idealised views. These images say to the viewer that this is not reality. The image has been transformed into what I want it to be rather than what it actually is and there is nothing wrong with this so long as I'm not trying to make you believe they are true – particularly when your believing is to my advantage!

The images are a quasi-reality. They are verisimilar – many look real, but aren't. Novels, for example, are verisimilar. Novelists can shape their stories in any way they see fit, in order to provoke an emotion in the reader. News items are (at least in theory) factual. The news may also provoke an emotion, but it is not designed to do so, news should be designed to inform using facts. The same can apply in other areas: Films are verisimilar, while documentaries are factual; landscape paintings are verisimilar, while landscape photography is factual. Scarily, any of these 'factual' products can be turned into 'verisimilar' ones. And they are … all the time.

Fig. 14 René Magritte is telling us that this is not a pipe. – and indeed it is not. If he said, "this is a pipe", he would be lying and obfuscating.

So what?

I am hoping that my images may contribute to art and society in two ways: First, to remind viewers that what purports to be truth should be questioned and verified. Secondly, to please the eye with bigger than life colour and idealised shapes, forms and patterns. The intention is to create interesting and aesthetically pleasing images, but without trying to evocate any particular emotion. They are deadpan. However, discovering that the original source of the image is true may bring to the viewer some kind of emotion and sense of beauty, in the sense that a mathematician may find emotion and beauty in an equation,

In 1817, referring to the verisimilitude of novels, Coleridge (*Fig. 15*) invented the term: "Suspension of disbelief": To enjoy a novel one must forget it is fiction – at least while it is being read. I ask the viewer not to suspend disbelief, but to enjoy the image while knowing that, whatever it is, it is not truth. I'm pulling at the heartstrings with the neurons of the mind. I hope.

Fig. 15 Samuel Taylor Coleridge invented the term "suspension of disbelief".

Images

1) Gestalt Blue Skies

We only ever have a partial view of reality, though the answer to everything is in that blue sky.

Fig. 16 A Christmas stocking is mysteriously filled during the night by a deity that has a personal interest in the recipient (a toddler in this case). If the child were more rational she would accept that she has no idea how the stocking was fillled. All she know is that her parents didn't do it, because they told her it was Santa.

Fig. 17 Most of us have a lot of cultural references as to what is missing from the picture and suppose it is an Esso petrol station sign. But what is missing could be anything or maybe nothing is missing at all. But people will make assumptions on the information they have, no matter how incomplete it may be.

For years I've wondered why it is that most people from practically every culture in the world at any time in history have believed and still believe now in some sort of god.

Scientists can explain the universe from a microsecond after the Big Bang, but they don't know what happened just prior to that tiny fraction of time nor how the Big Bang came about. Because they can't explain that part of creation, some of those scientists have drawn the conclusion that God did it. And it isn't any old god. It is a god that takes a special interest in each of us personally, whom they worship and pray to. These are human beings who are otherwise rational, but when they are confronted with a phenomenon, such as the creation of the universe, about which they only have partial information, what do they do? To get the whole picture they make up the parts they don't yet understand!

This is a parallel situation: A little boy wakes up on Christmas morning to find that his stocking is full of presents. *(Fig. 16)* It is not obvious to him that there is a perfectly feasible explanation, namely that his parents put them there! At this stage in his development, the child doesn't yet have the capacity to deduce what has happened simply because the information he has available to him is insufficient. His parents explain what is an incomprehensible phenomenon: Santa Claus brought them for him because he's been such a good boy. This satisfies him and he accepts the existence of Santa Claus as the cause of a phenomenon he couldn't otherwise understand - i.e., the mysterious aparition of presents under the Christmas tree. Therefore, he believes in Santa Claus because "thus it was foretold" or "thus it was written" by the prophets, his mum and dad.

Personally, I am fanatically agnostic. God probably does not exist and if he does, he probably won't be "he" (in future, I shall call the deity "it") and it will most likely not take a blind bit of interest in me personally. I am quite happy to accept that. The whole of creation is something I simply do not understand and probably no one will ever understand. Much as I would love to

read the true explanation of the creation of the universe in New Scientist magazine (other popular scientific magazines are available), I don't have the compulsion to "complete the picture" by inventing the rest of it. That is what I believe human beings have done for thousands of years: when unable to "complete the picture" of creation or other unexplained phenomena due to a lack of information: they simply "make it up". They fill in the gaps with stories or myths. Perhaps most human beings have a need to "complete the picture" or we may even be genetically programmed to do so.

Blue skies are a window through which we see time, space and creation. In blue skies (including very dark blue at night) we find chaos and infinity. Millions upon millions of galaxies, each with millions upon millions of stars. Black holes. Dark matter. Dark energy. The inexplicable. (*Fig. 18)* What I've done with Gestalt Blue Skies is place finite, explicable, man-made objects in the foreground of the infinite, inexplicable, perhaps God-made astral bodies as a backdrop. But only partially. It's up to the viewer to close the image – or not: Accept it as it is.

I present minimum information for the viewer to try to make sense of the image. I'm looking for the point at which it is possible to make sense of an image with the absolute minimum of information. *(Fig. 17)* If you show a baby two dots, side by side on a piece of paper, the baby will stare at them – apparently two dots is enough information for human beings to surmise a face. For some people the partial images presented here will be easily recognisable, but much depends on culture. What may be blatantly obvious to the British may be a complete mystery to Mexicans, Chinese or Italians. Truth and reality, God or no God, is with the beholder, notwithstanding the possibility of completely misunderstanding the incomplete picture. No one can prove otherwise. But, though I know that the beholder will try to complete the picture, my hope is that the photos will be seen as what they are – a partial view of something bigger .

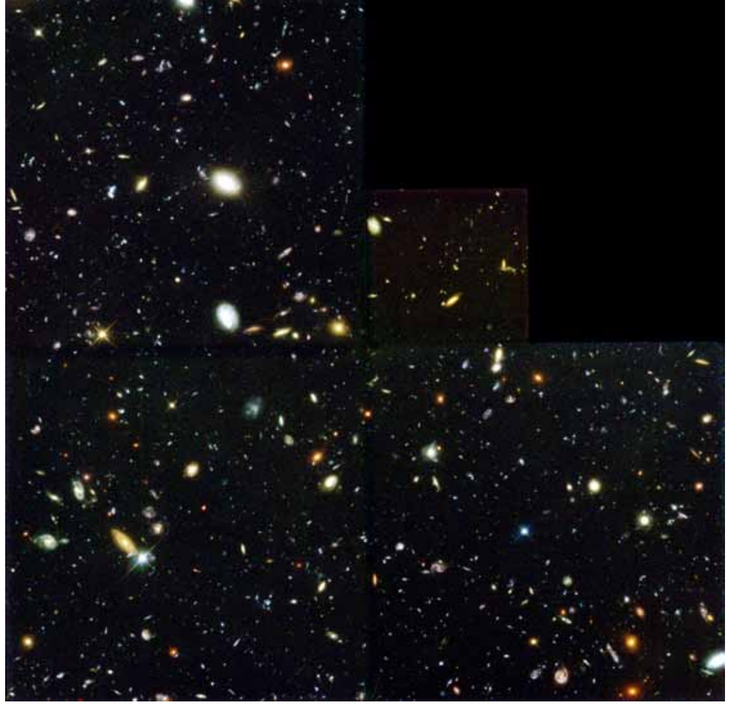

Fig. 18 This is a tiny two-degree slither of the sky. It contains about 15,000 galaxies (each tiny dot is a galaxy - not a star). There are about 2 trilliion galaxies in the universe. Each galaxies has about 100 billion stars. This is what there is in those blue skies.

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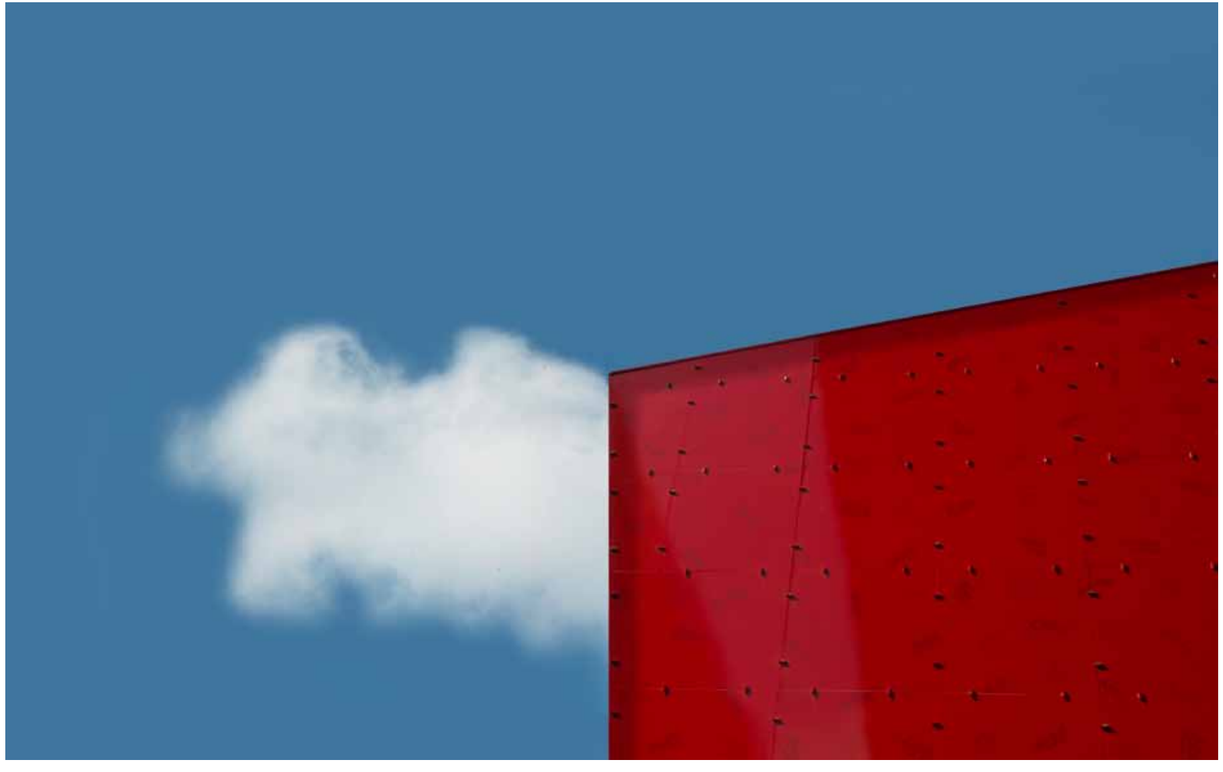
2008

Composition GBS 0001
Twyford, Hampshire
2008

Composition GBS 0031
Madrid, Spain
2009



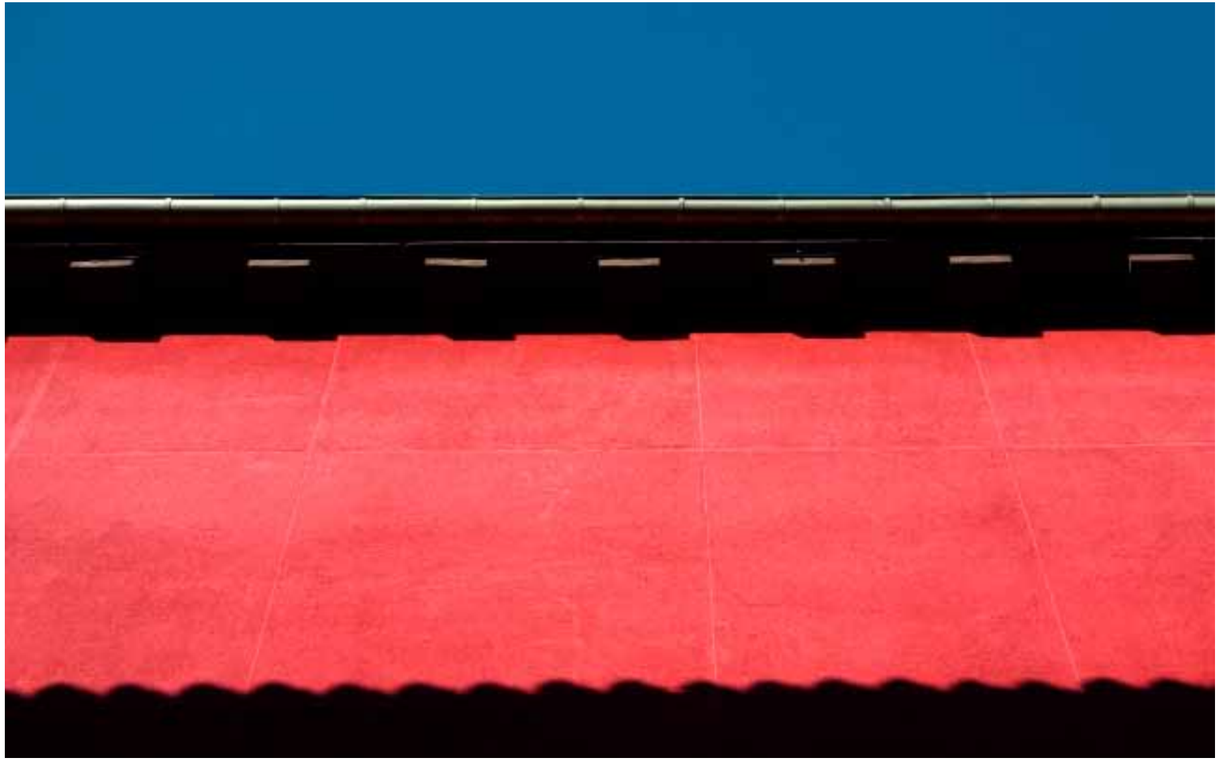
Composition GBS 0046
"Tin-Tin"
Antwerp, Belgium
2018

Composition GBS 0002
Southampton, Hampshire
2008

Composition GBS 0005
Camberley, Surrey
2008

Composition GBS 0035
Mexico City
2013

Composition GBS 0045
Madrid, Spain
2016



Composition GBS0012
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Composition GBS0030
Otterbourne, Hampshire
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Composition GBS0024
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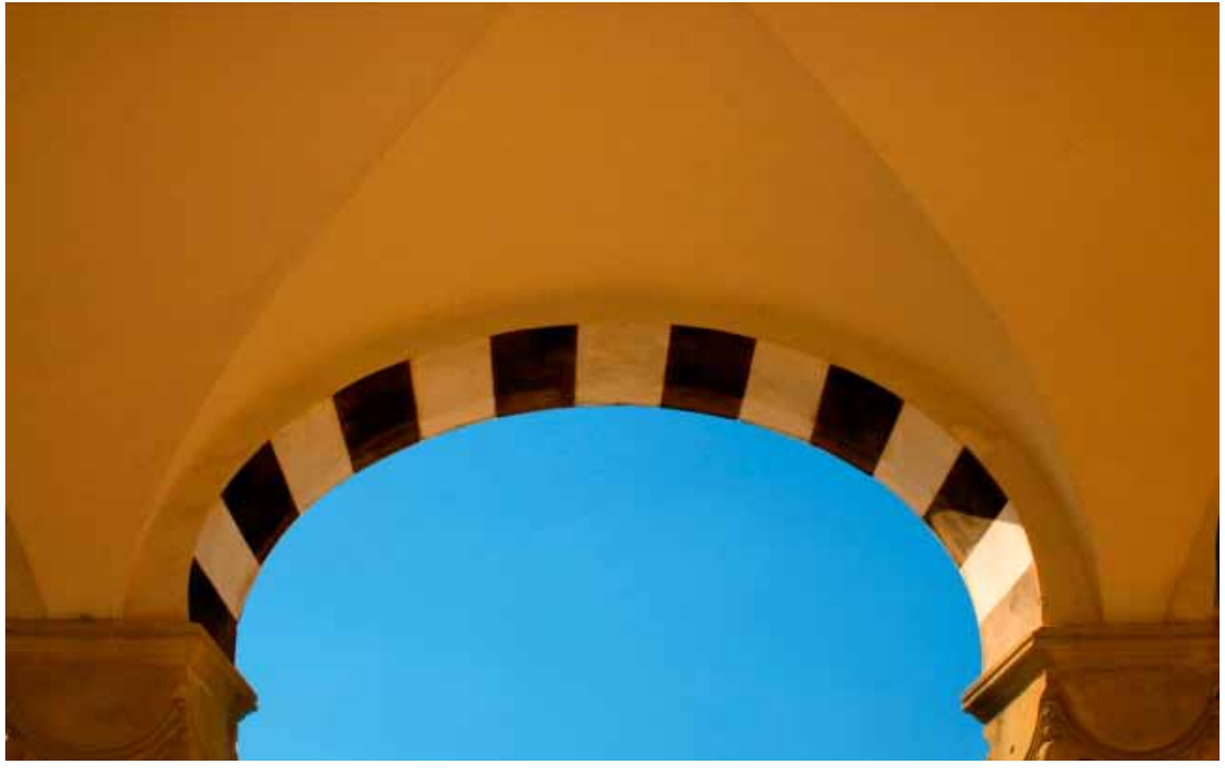

Composition GBS0007
Italy
2008

Composition GBS00 17
Madrid, Spain
2009

Composition GBS0016
Madrid, Spain
2009

Composition GBS0014
Madrid, Spain
2009

Composition GBS0018
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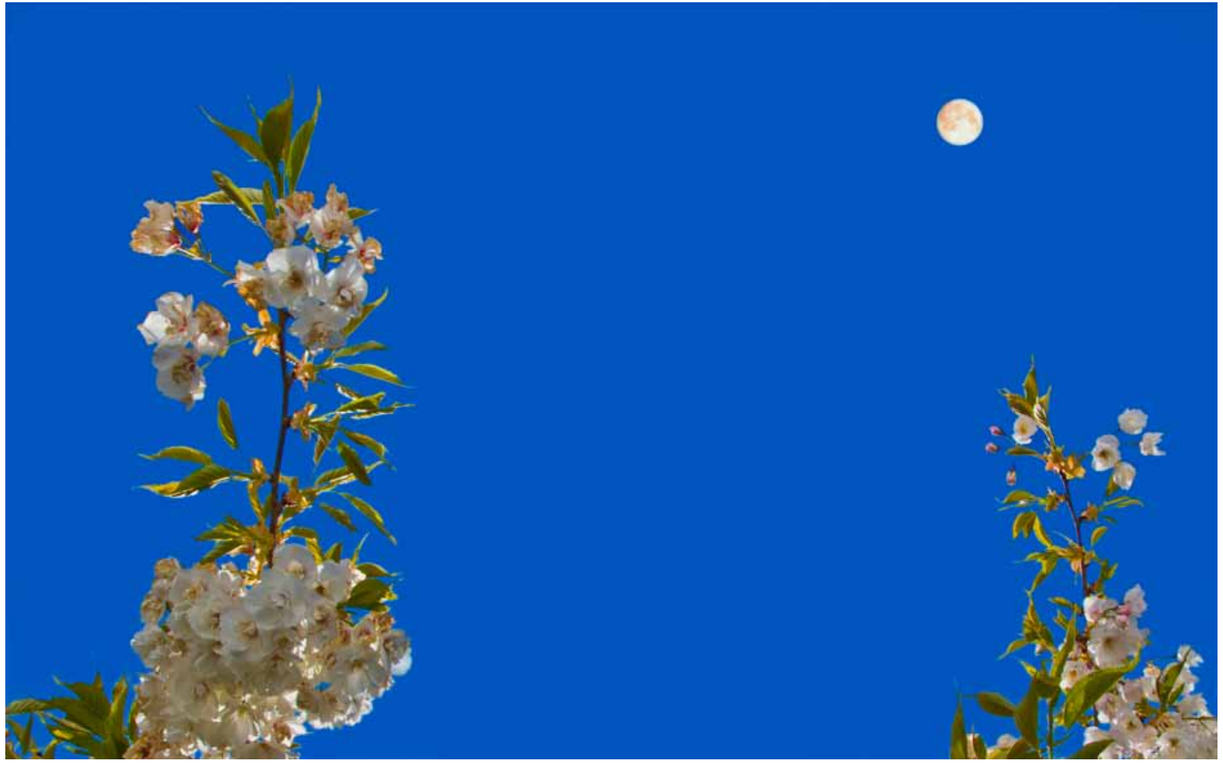
2009

Composition GBS0010
Madrid, Spain
2009

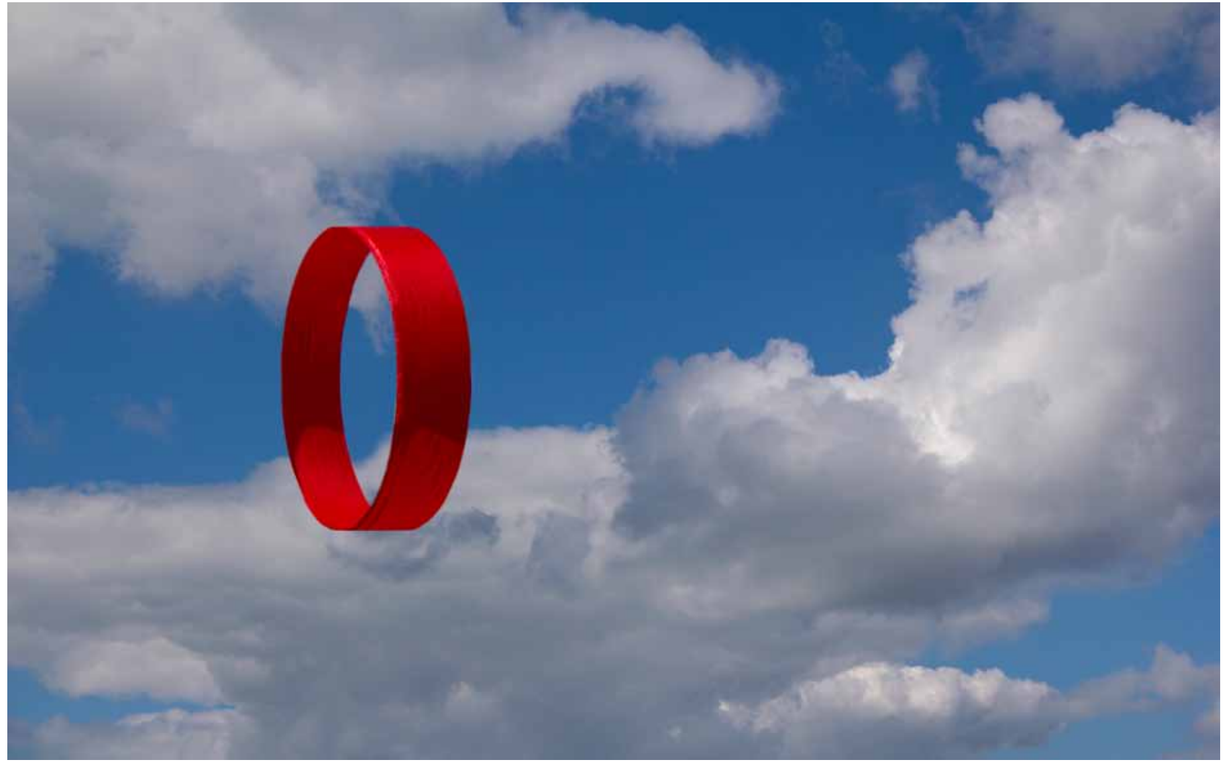
Composition GBS0011
Italy
2008

Composition GBS0032
Madrid, Spain
2009



Composition GBS0047
Twyford, Hampshire
2021

Composition GBS0039
Portsmouth, Hampshire
2015



Composition GBS0040
Portsmouth, Hampshire
2015

2) Platonic Views

"(The artist is) an imitator of images and is very far removed from the truth" – Plato, Republic X, 27

The ideal, the perfect exists only in our minds; everything in the empirical world is imperfect. Fortunately. – Christopher Newberry, "True Colours", p. 33

According to Plato the world we experience around us, is a shadow of the Ideal World, which is in his concept the "Real World'. The world we experience, the empirical world, is a copy of the Ideal World and the Ideal World can only be discovered by the mind. Everything in the experienced or empirical world is a pale imitation of its perfect counterpart in the Ideal World. This applies to everything. Beauty. Justice. Nature. Morality. Animals. Objects. Everything has a perfect essence which only exists in the Ideal World – what Plato considers to be the 'real world'. Geometry for example: The perfect straight line and the perfect circle. The ancient Greeks understood the concept of a straight line: the shortest distance between two points. A point has no dimensions and the line only has one dimension: length. The circle has two dimensions and is defined by Euclid as "a plane figure bounded by one curved line, and such that all straight lines (the radius) drawn from a certain point (centre) within it to the bounding line, are equal". *(Fig. 20)* However, the ancient greeks had no means of actually producing anything like a straight line or a circle. In the Greek world nothing was straight, smooth, circular or transparent. It wasn't until 1864 that Peaucellier devised a way to draw an almost perfect straight line. By 'almost perfect' straight line, we mean that

Fig. 19 Plato, the master, and Aristotle, the student, are the two central figures in this painting by Raphael, "The School of Athens", 1509.

the line does not deviate by more than one nanometre (a millionth of a millimetre) per metre. Plato probably had no idea about nanometry or microscopy. The straight line in Plato's time was indeed a very pale imitation of the ideal.

Furthermore, according to Plato, art was an imitation of the world we experience – even further away from the ideal. Art in his eyes was a copy of a copy. Perspective and shading to give volume to a painting were merely tricks, to fool humans into believing they were true. Plato puts it this way: "The body which is large when seen near, appears small when seen at a distance (perspective) . . . (and the deception created) by light and shadow and other ingenious devices (in) painting or drawing . . . are far removed from truth . . . they have no true or healthy aim". *(Fig. 21)* If, as Plato believed, the aim of art is to imitate the world which we experience, then our contemporary techniques can create a very close resemblance. Photography, for example. The camera directly picks up the light reflected by the empirical world – as our eyes do –, and so the resulting photograph is a very faithful rendition of the that empirical world.

What would Plato make of modern methods of reproducing the empirical world? Would he consider them to be closer to the Ideal World than than was the 'experienced world' of his day? Perhaps we are no closer to the ideals of Beauty, Justice and Nature, but surely he would be astounded by how close art is to faithfully reflecting the 'experienced world'. Furthermore, if he saw our ability to produce the straight lines he never could have seen except in his imagination, he would be astonished by how much closer we are to his Ideal World.

At this moment in time, seen through my contemporaneous eyes, art is very close to perfectly imitating the 'experienced world', which I, like Aristotle, would prefer to call 'the real world'. If this is true, then I have chosen to skip a step. My photographic compositions are a copy, not of the 'experienced world', but of Plato's Ideal World. It is a world of balance and symmetry where lines are straight, curves are smooth, circles are perfect and the grass actually is greener. In fact when copying the 'experienced world', my copy is a better copy than the 'experienced world's' portrayal of the Ideal World. But even then my copy is not a perfect copy of the Ideal World. For example, this is as straight a line as you'll ever see, produced with advanced computer and sofware technology:

By definition a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. A point has no dimentions. A line has only one dimension – length. However, when you see the same line

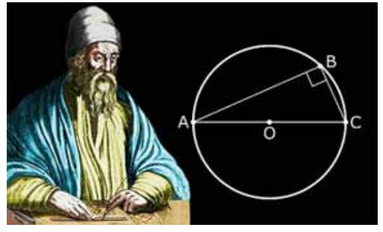


Fig. 20 The circle, according to Euclid: "A plane figure bounded by one curved line, and such that all straight lines (the radius) drawn from a certain point (centre) within it to the bounding line, are equal"

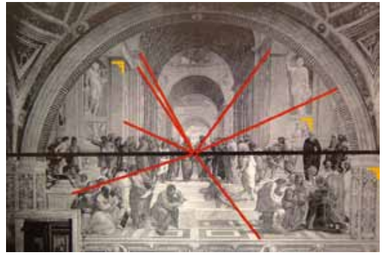


Fig. 21 Plato thought that art was far removed from truth, merely a deception: "The body which is large when seen near, appears small when seen at a distance (perspective) . . . (and the deception created) by light and shadow and other ingenious devices (in) painting or drawing . . . are far removed from truth . . . they have no true or healthy aim". This is the same picture by Raphael as in the previous page, showing one and two-point perspective.

blown up to a larger size, you can see it is not one-dimensional:

It is two-dimensional and once it's physically printed it is three-dimentional: When you look at what at first seemed to be a pefectly straight line blown up, you realise that it is made-up of a series of tiny squares (pixels) all in a row, which have both length and height. Once printed the ink will provide width. So it's not a straight line, but it is still closer to perfection than anything that exists in nature.

My images in the Platonic Views collection remind the viewer that they are not truth, because nothing in the empirical world could possibly approximate this level of 'Ideal World' perfection. And, by the way, I don't agree with Plato, that the Ideal World is the 'real world'. Like Aristotle, I´m quite convinced that we don't live in the Matrix and that the empirical world IS the real world.

Composition 001
"Principia"
Embleton Bay, Northumberland
2009

Composition 011
"White Cloud"
Embleton Bay, Northumberland
2009

Composition 231
“Salt Marsh”
Porlock, Somerset
2017

Composition 247
“God Rays”
Quettehou, Normandy
2016

Composition 023
"Symmetry Island"
Burgh Island, Devon
2009

Composition 016
"Twin Sheep"
Embleton Bay, Northumberland
2009

Composition 240
"Lorry in Pink"
River Itchin, Hampshire
2016

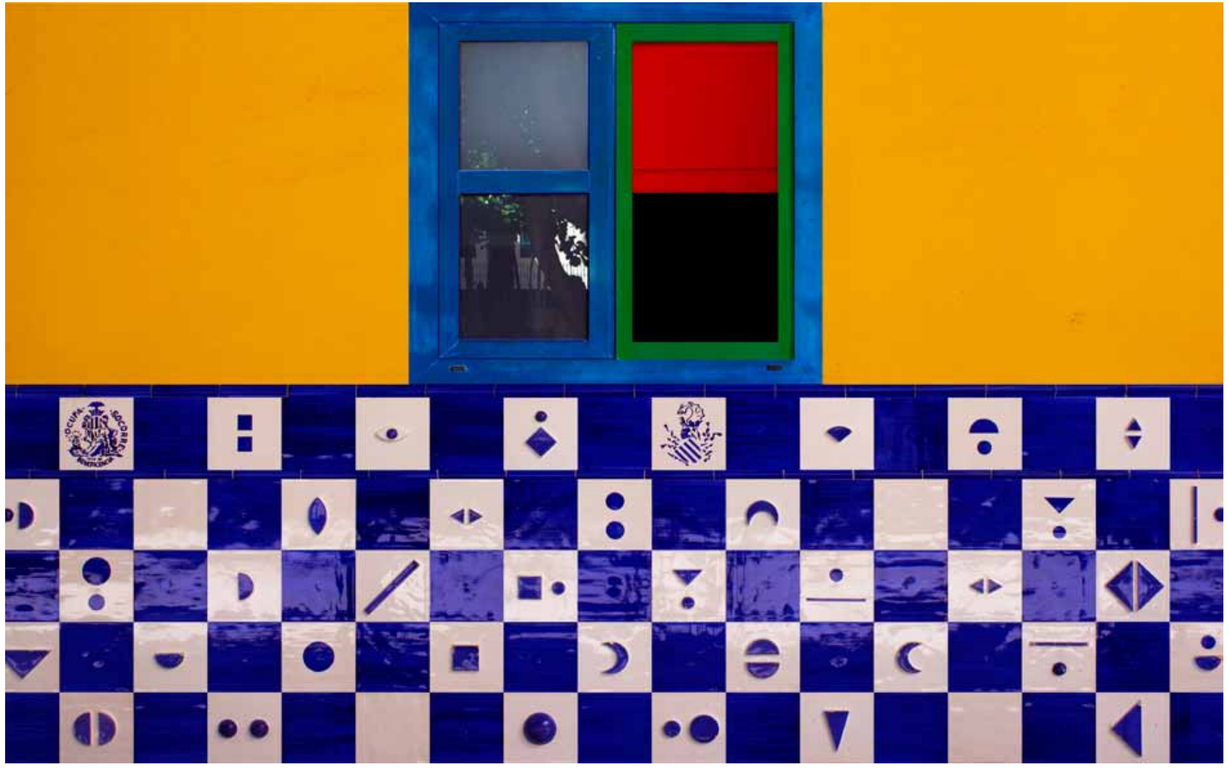
Composition 245
"Lorry in Purple"
River Itchin, Hampshire
2016

Composition 258
"Beetle"
Puerto Vallarta, Mexico
2017

Composition 279
"Closed for Winter"
West Wittering, Hampshire
2017

Composition 251
"Parking"
Puerto Vallarta, Mexico
2017

Composition 222
"Blue on Yellow"
Valencia, Spain
2016



Composition 221
"Tiles"
Valencia, Spain
2016

Composition 191
"Primary Media Colours"
Salford, Greater Manchester
2016

Composition 271
"Dancing Foes"
Winchester, Hampshire
2017

Composition 290
"Piazza"
Central London
2017

Composition 208
"Art Lovers"
London, England
2016

Composition 146
"Rich and Poor"
Venice, Italy
2015

Composition 097
"Sorrow"
Berlin, Germany
2014

Composition 172
"Efficiency"
Auschwitz, Poland
2015

3) Abstracted Colour

Platonic Views with more colour than the real world

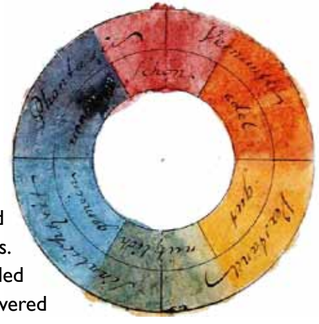


Fig. 23 Goethe's original colour wheel

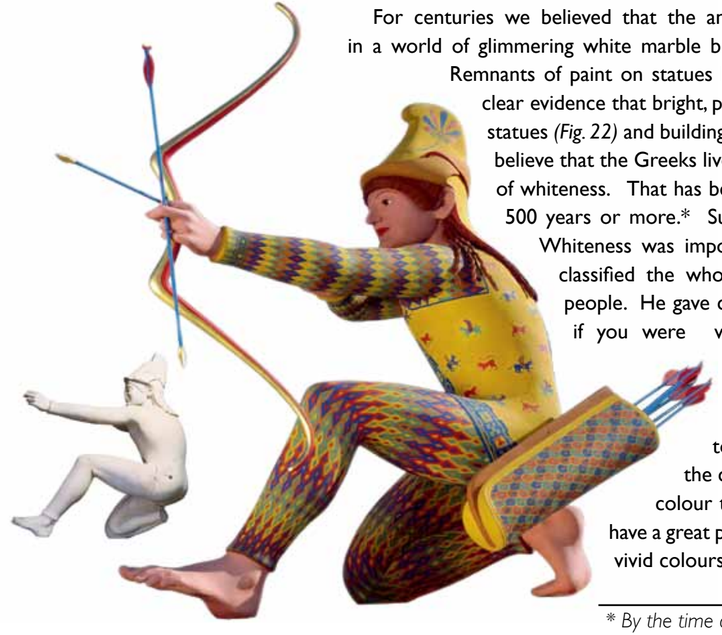


Fig. 22 Ancient Greek statue of an archer before and after restoring its original colours.

For centuries we believed that the ancient Greeks lived in a world of glimmering white marble buildings and statues. Remnants of paint on statues has recently provided clear evidence that bright, powerful colours covered statues *(Fig. 22)* and buildings, yet people chose to believe that the Greeks lived in an elegant world of whiteness. That has been the dominant belief in western cultures for the past 500 years or more.* Surely bright colours could not be a part of that world. Whiteness was important. 18th century biology taxonomist Carl Linnaeus classified the whole of the natural world according to ranks, including people. He gave certain characteristics to people according to their race: if you were white you would be gentle, acute, and thoughtful. If you were black you would be lazy, cunning and without shame. Europe believed that the whiter the statue, the more beautiful, elegant and refined it was. According to Goethe, (yes, that Goethe, who, by the way, invented the colour wheel *(Fig23)* and developed the basis for modern colour theory) "savage nations, uneducated people and children have a great predilection for vivid colours – people of refinement avoid vivid colours in their dress and the objects that are about them."

** By the time of the Renaissance people already believed that Greece was shimmering white. See Fig. 19 on page 33, "The School of Athens" by Raphael and notice the building and statues.*

Fig. 25 A Private View at the Royal Academy" by William Powell Frith -1881. Women's attire, though rich in colour was drab. Only one man is wearing a colour that is not black, white or brown. He wears a red tie and he has nothing to declare but his genius: Oscar Wilde.

Goethe would not have believed that ancient Greek culture, which we all regard as refined, had enjoyed precisely the bright colours liked by "savage nations". We are all product of our time, including Linnaeus and Goethe. European culture, particularly in the late 18th and 19th centuries was visually drab. They were the times of "dark satanic mills", the times of the industrial revolution. Coal and soot. Children chimney sweeps. This reflected on society: Women's wear was drab: light browns, blues or greys. *(Fig. 24)* Wealthy women's wear used deep, rich, tones of green, blue and brown, but was still drab. Men basically dressed in black and white, perhaps brown on festive occasions. *(Fig. 25)* By then Gothic cathedrals, which had been richly coloured in Medieval times, had lost their pigment and werre as grey as everything else. In 1838 Michael Faraday, the British scientist, was asked to provide a solution to the cleansing of the Elgin Marbles, then recently having been removed from the Parthenon in Athens to the British Museum in London. Faraday tried many methods, but failed to come up with an answer: "The examination has made me despair of the possibility of presenting the marbles in the British Museum in that state of purity and whiteness which they originally possessed". So for the last five centuries Europe has been a culture where whiteness is identified with the virtuous male, the rational and the western. Colour becomes therefore, the non-male, the non-rational and the non-western.

Fig. 24 In Victorian eyes understated colour in female attire allowed them to keep a sense of decorum and propriety.

Well, I come from Mexico where colour there is! The Aztecs, Toltecs, Olmecs, Mayans and many other Mexican cultures used a lot of colour as did many pre-Columbian cultures in Central and South America. Mayan culture flourished from about 200 to 900 AD. Greek culture was at its height about 300 years earlier. Despite never having had any contact whatsoever, Mayans and Greeks used similar colours and thought in similar ways. *(Figs. 26 & 27)* We've always known that Mayan buildings, statues and frescoes were richly painted, but in the case of Greece, it wasn't until the 21st century that archaeologists discovered that Greeks also painted their statues and buildings. The Greeks certainly had no aversion to colour!

So, returning to the theme of 'Platonic Views', Plato, who by definition was a man of his time, would probably have taken the colours of his times for granted. He had no idea that a couple of thousand years later we would believe his times were 'white' and that the bright colours he knew would appear 'gaudy' or 'vulgar' to us. As far as I know, the natural world in which the ancient Greeks developed was not a particularly colourful one, so their use of colour must have developed independently of the colours immediately found in nature. The Mayans didn't have that problem – just think of the colourful parrots, toucans and macaws that inhabit the area! The Greeks must have experimented a lot with colour to come up with what did not commonly exist in nature. They thought about colour in a different way to the way we do today. According to Plato the primary colours were four: white, black, red and the 'brilliant and shining', which to us is not a colour at all. They had no one word for 'blue' though they used it in many shades. In the play by Euripedes, "Helen", she feels guilty about her beauty having been the cause of so many devastating events in the course of the Trojan War. She pleads that the colours on her statue be removed in order to get rid of that beauty. The Greeks' use of colour is not mere speculation. There are recent archaeological reconstructions which corroborate that ancient Greek statues were actually polychromatic. The effect that the Greeks sought when applying the most brilliant and saturated colours was to portray splendour, energy, movement and life.

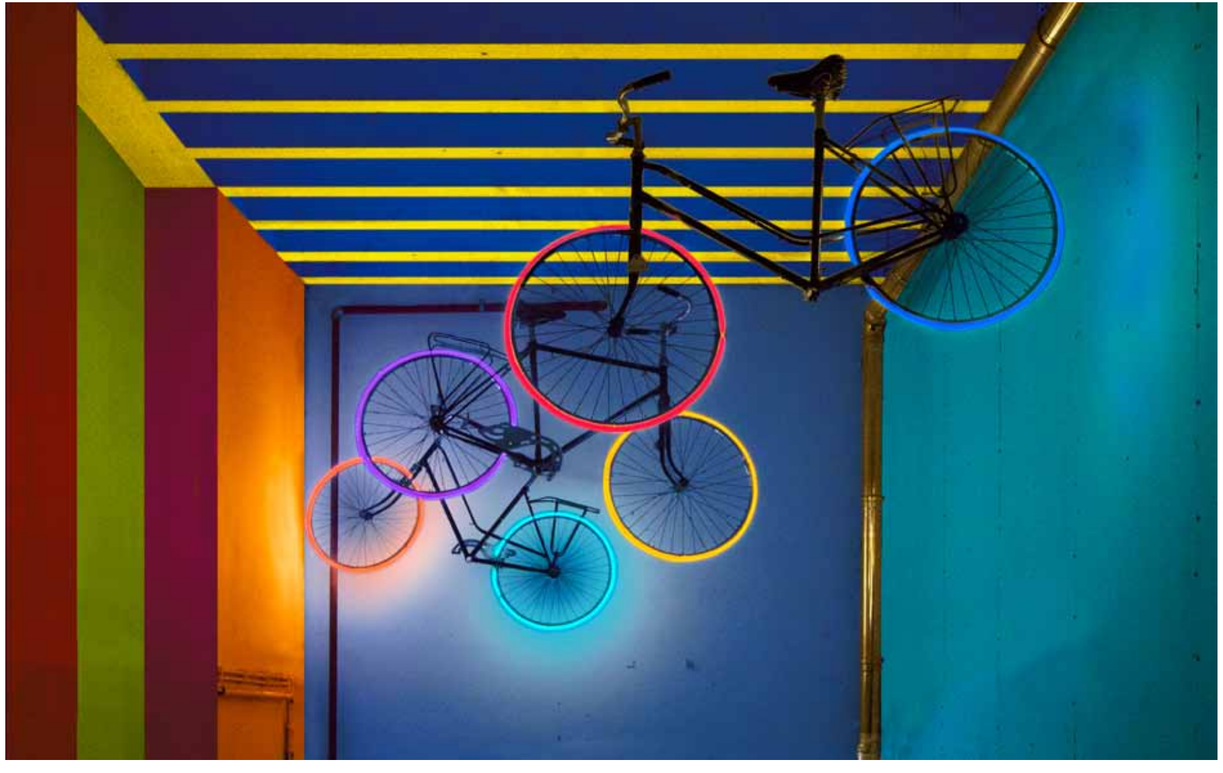
Fig. 26 "Procession in Honour of the Nymphs" (above) is a painting on a wood panel from Pitsa Cave, done in about 500 BC. Very few of these Greek paintings survive today, but this gives a clear indication of the colours that were used.

Fig. 27 Bonampak Mural (below) is a Mayan painting from about the year 600 AD. Compare the colouring and poses of the subjects. There was no contact between these two cultures, yet they developed similar pigments, customs and attitudes.

The series in Abstracted Colour is a continuation of Platonic Views, in the sense that the images are versimilar, however in addition to the impossibly geometric shapes, I gave the images impossibly vibrant colours, in the sense that those colours were not present in the original photograph – a reflection of reality.

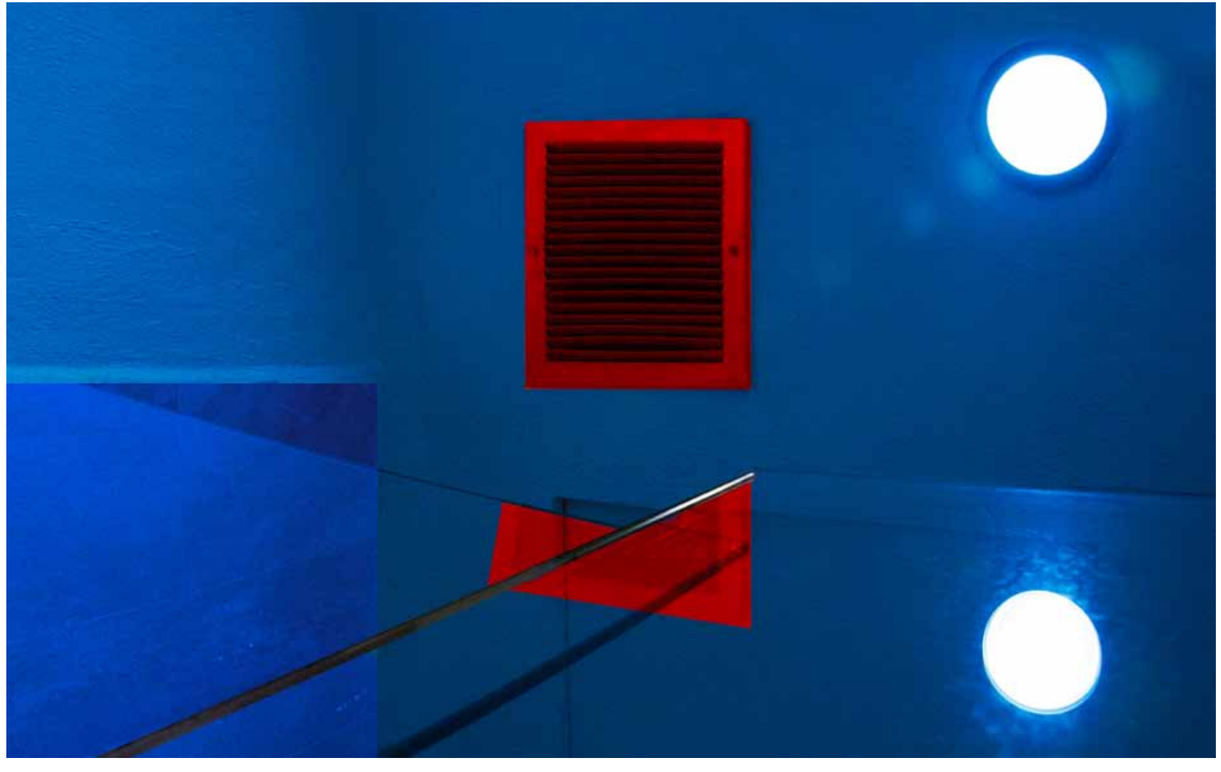
In these times of post-truth, pandemic and climate change, perhaps what we need is a bit of colour without feeling we are unsophisticated!

Composition 413
“Courtyard II”
Ajijic, Mexico
2019



Composition 447
“Bike Lights”
Bruges, Belgium
2019

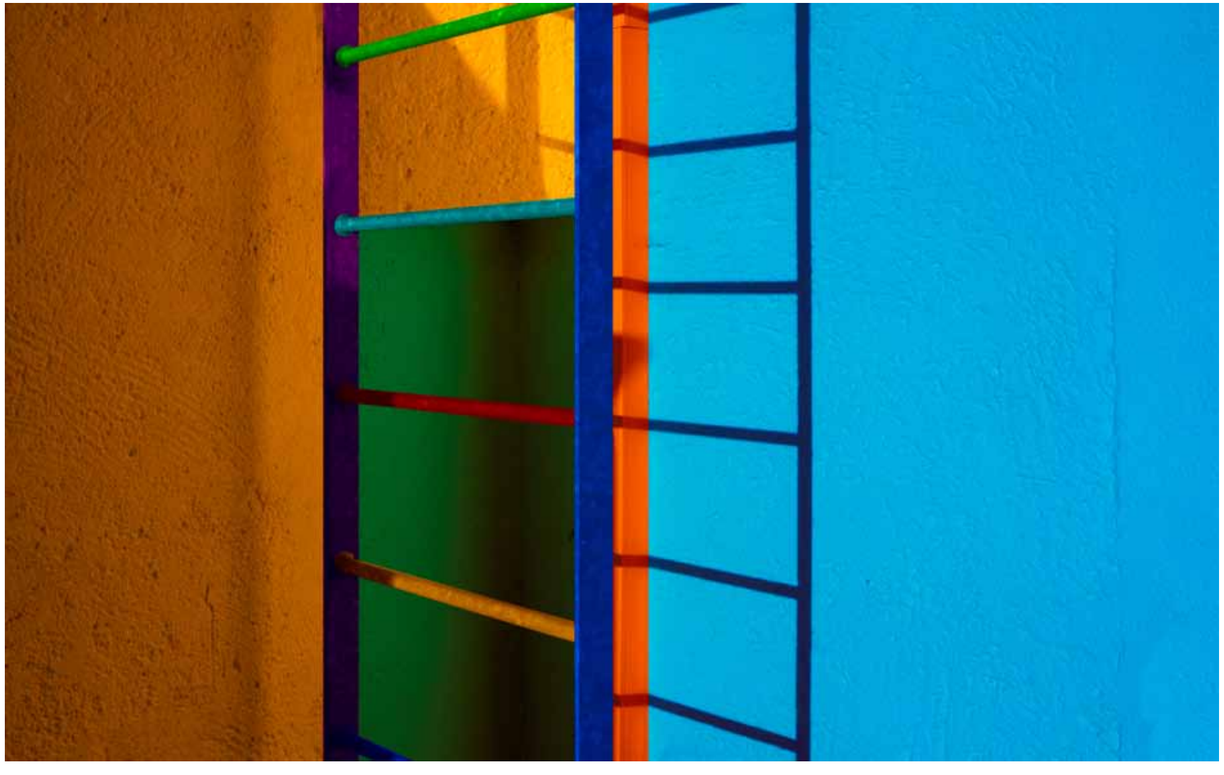
Composition 405
"Lobby"
Guadalajara, Mexico
2018



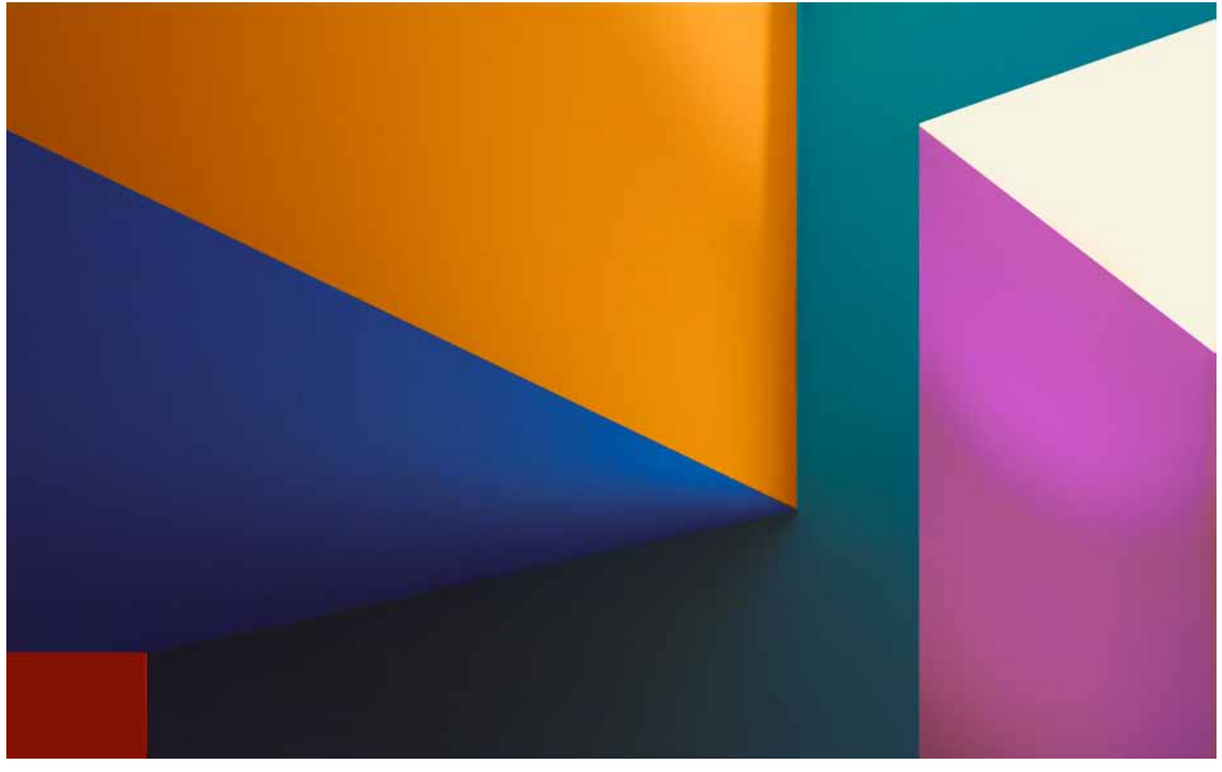
Composition 407
"Air Vent"
London, England
2019

Composition 446
"Bars"
Bruges, Belgium
2019

Composition 103
"Berlin Building I"
Berlin, Germany
2019

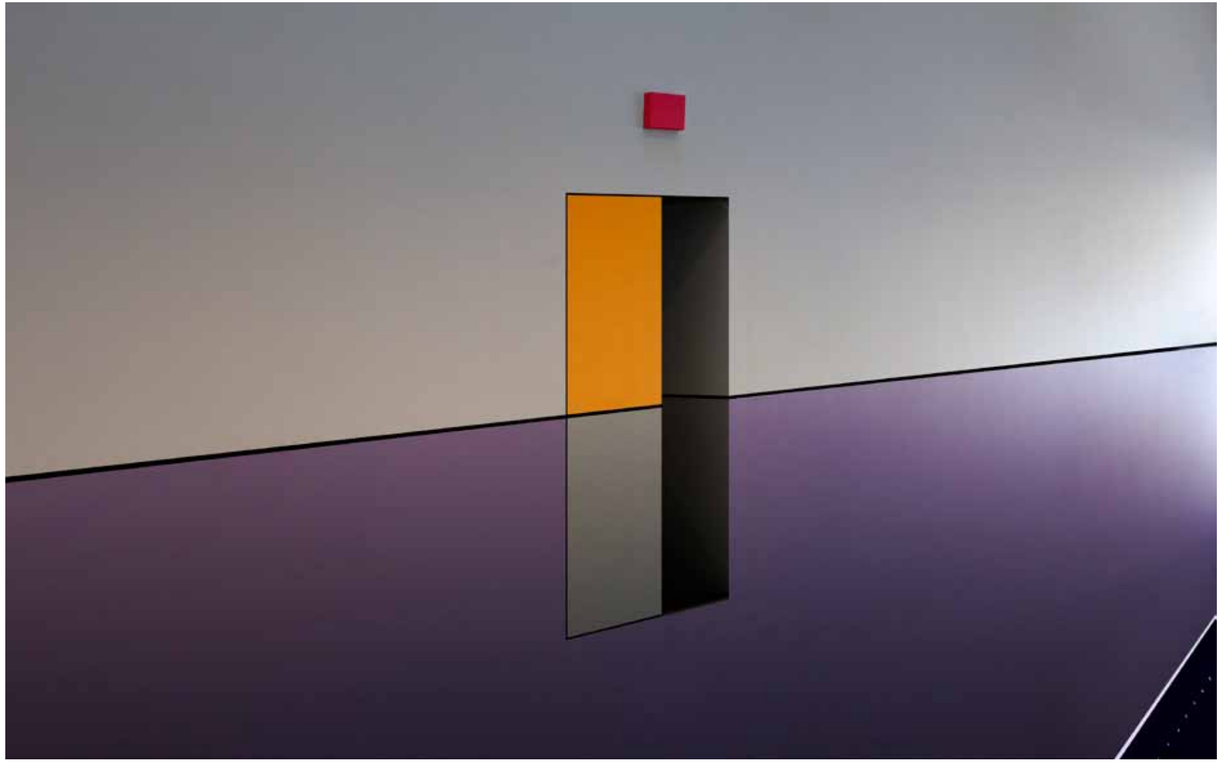


Composition 448
“Escape”
Bruges, Belgium
2019

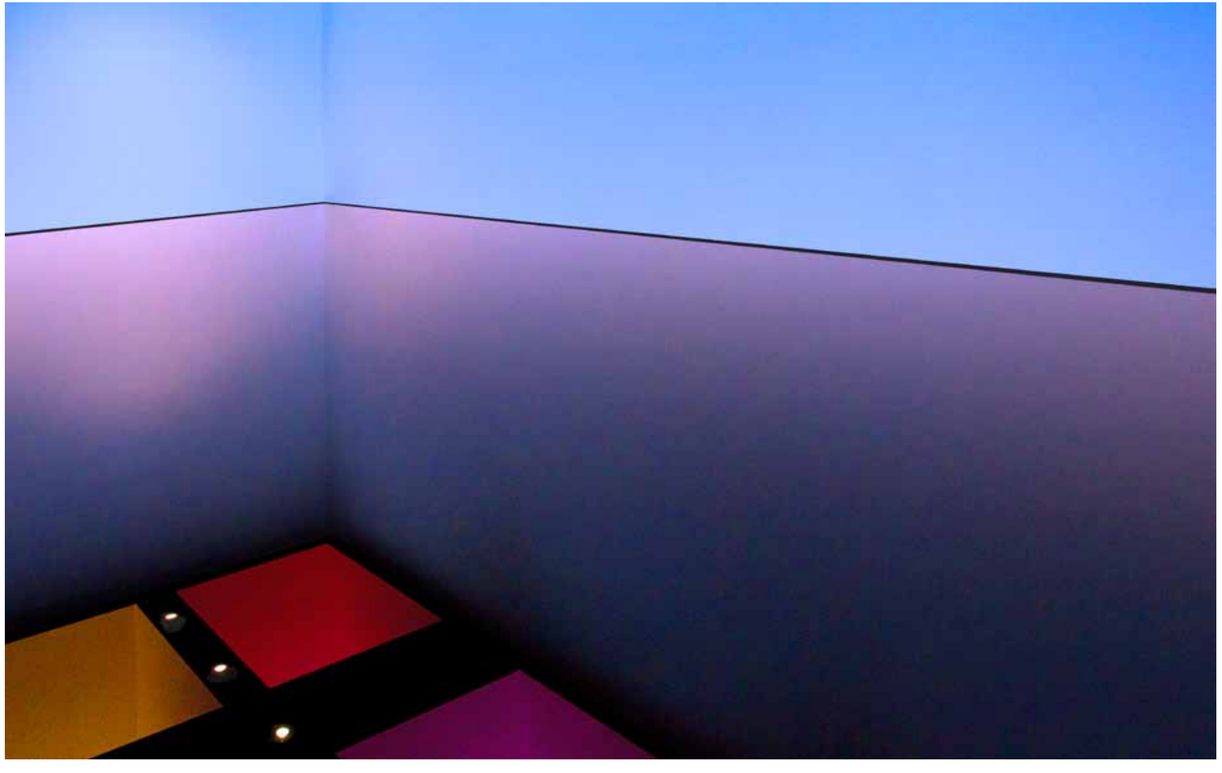


Composition 438
“Window”
Constanta, Romania
2019

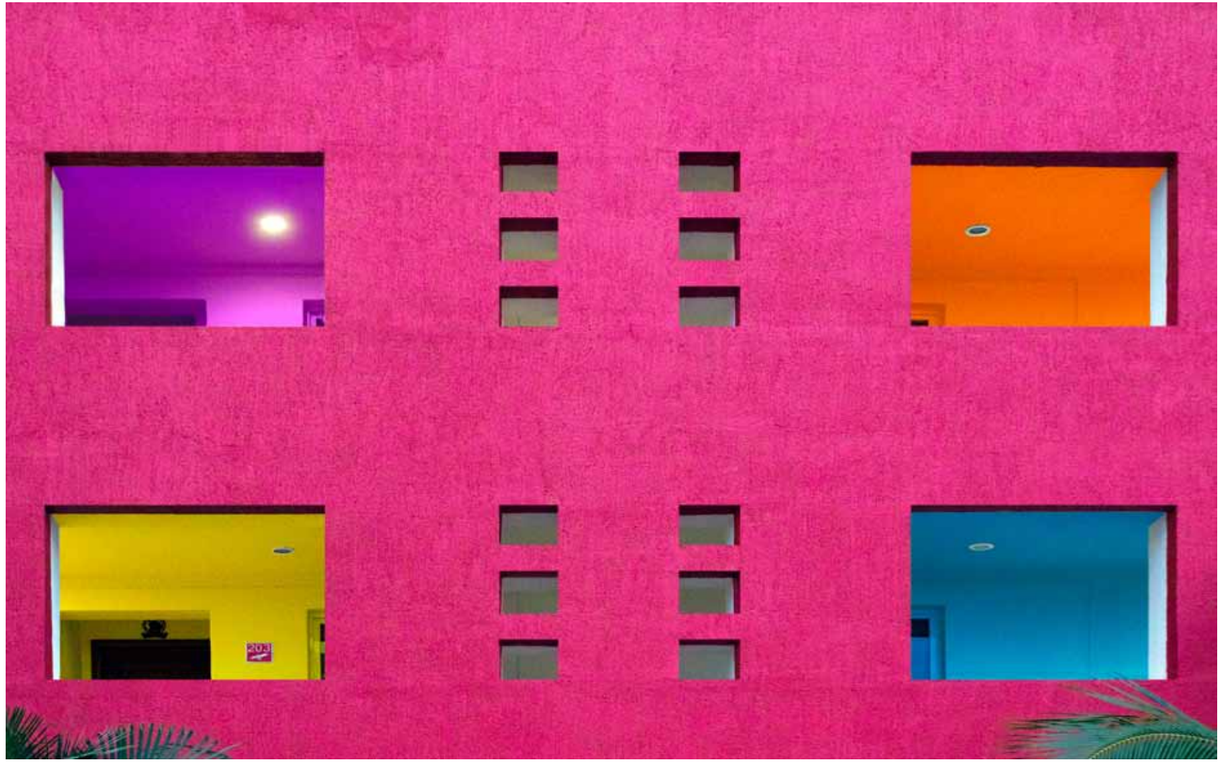
Composition 342
"Am, do, seen"
London, England
2018



Composition 341
"Reflection II"
London, England
2018

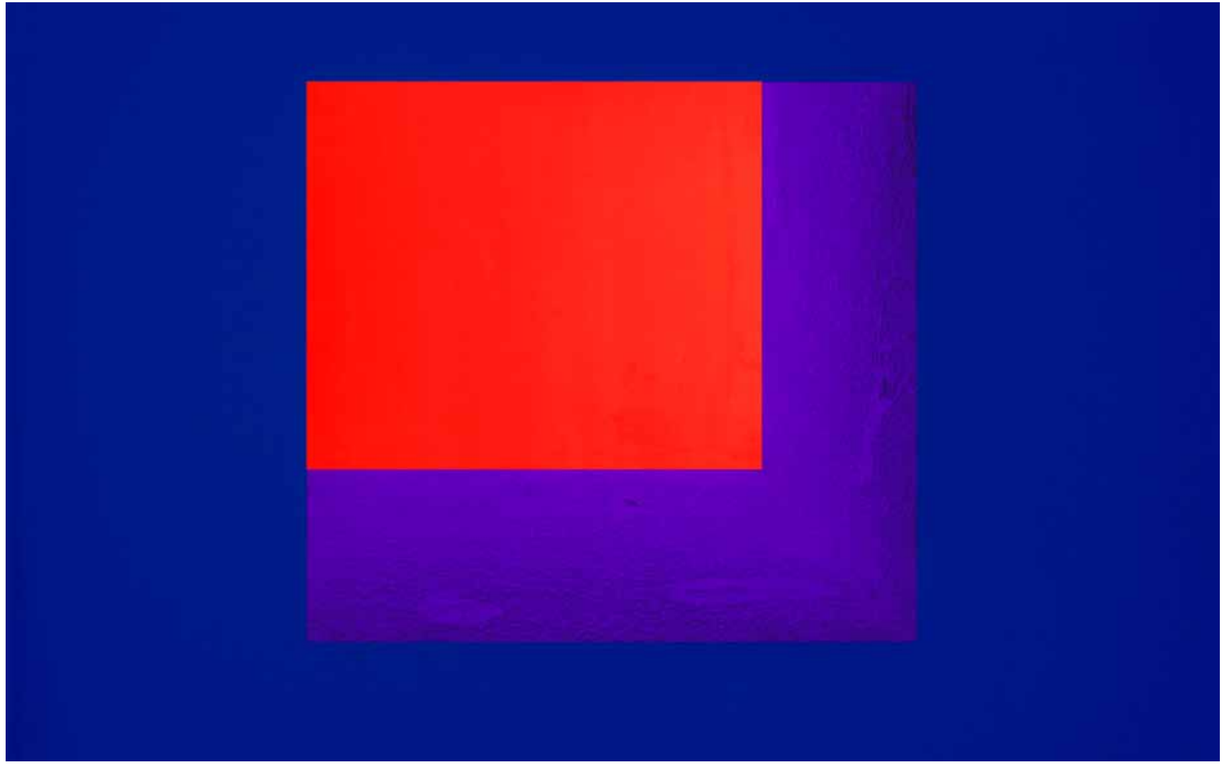


Composition 340
“Reflection I”
London
2018

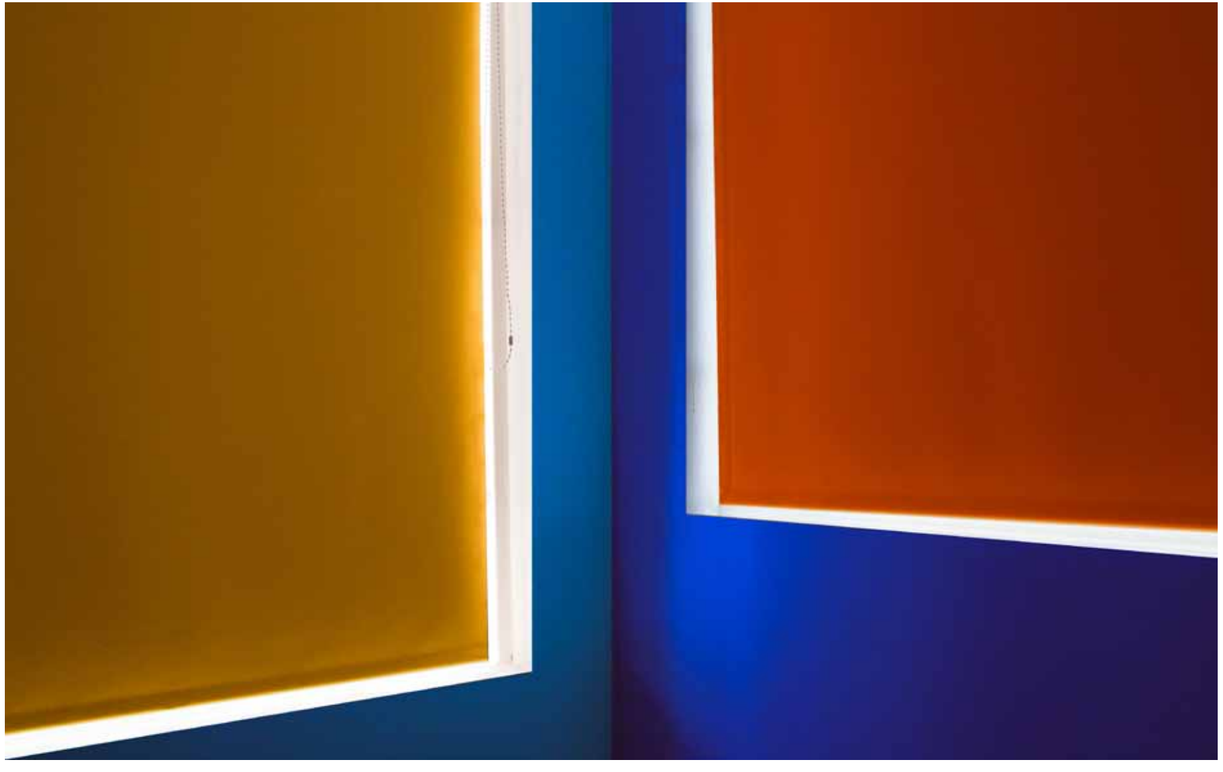


Composition 412
“Condo”
Puerto Vallarta, México
2019

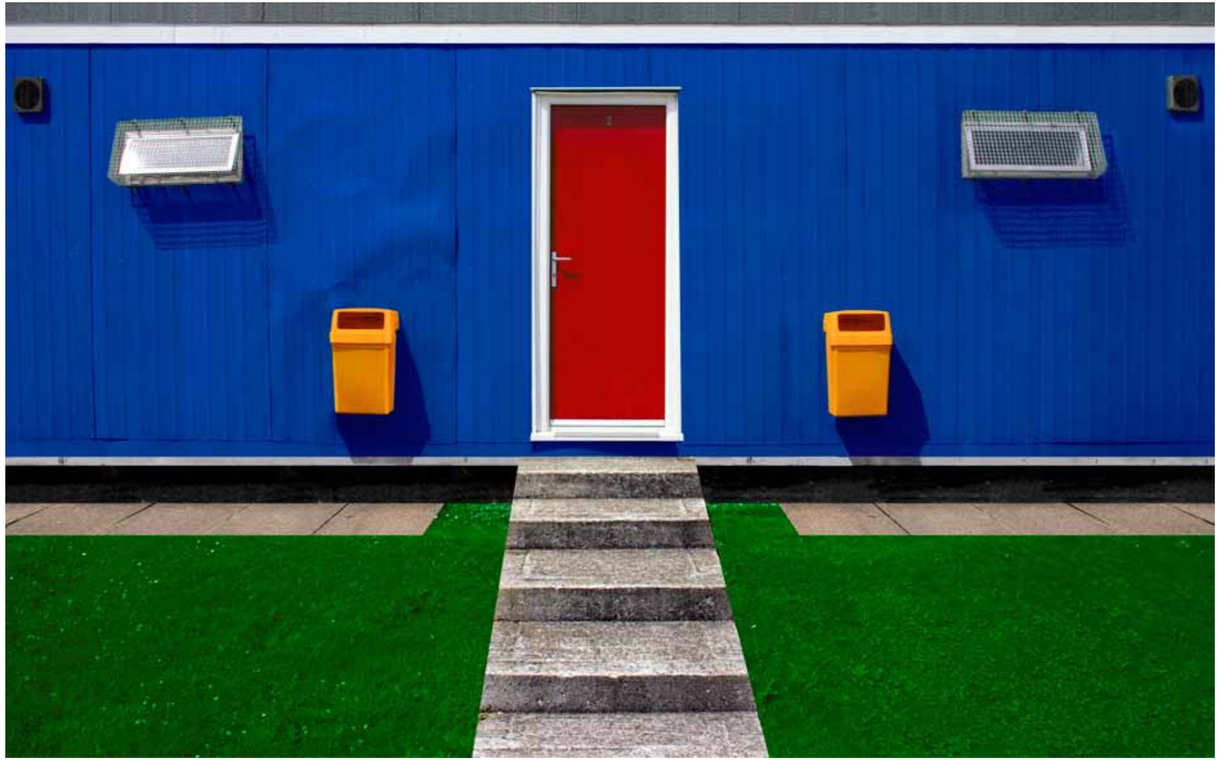
Composition 349
"Courtyard I"
Ajijic, Mexico
2018



Composition 351
"Red Rectangle"
Guadalajara, Mexico
2018



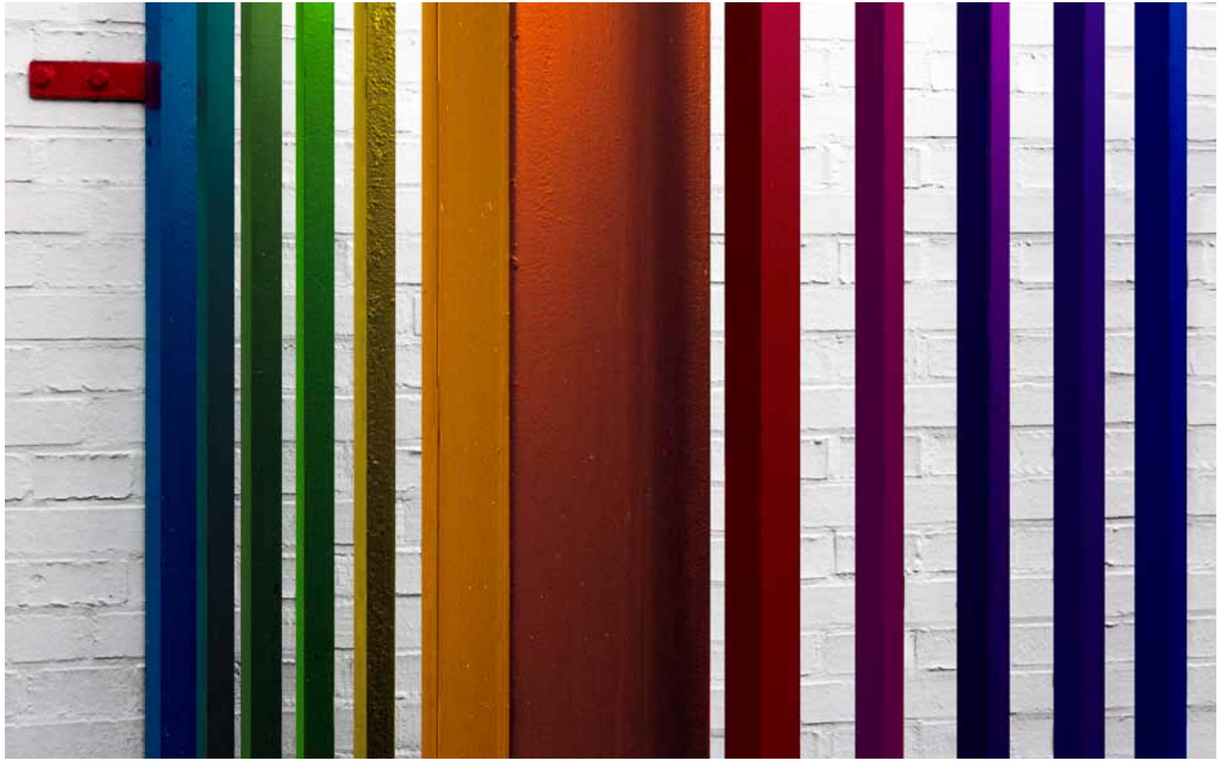
Composition 348
“Blinds”
Guadalajara, Mexico
2018



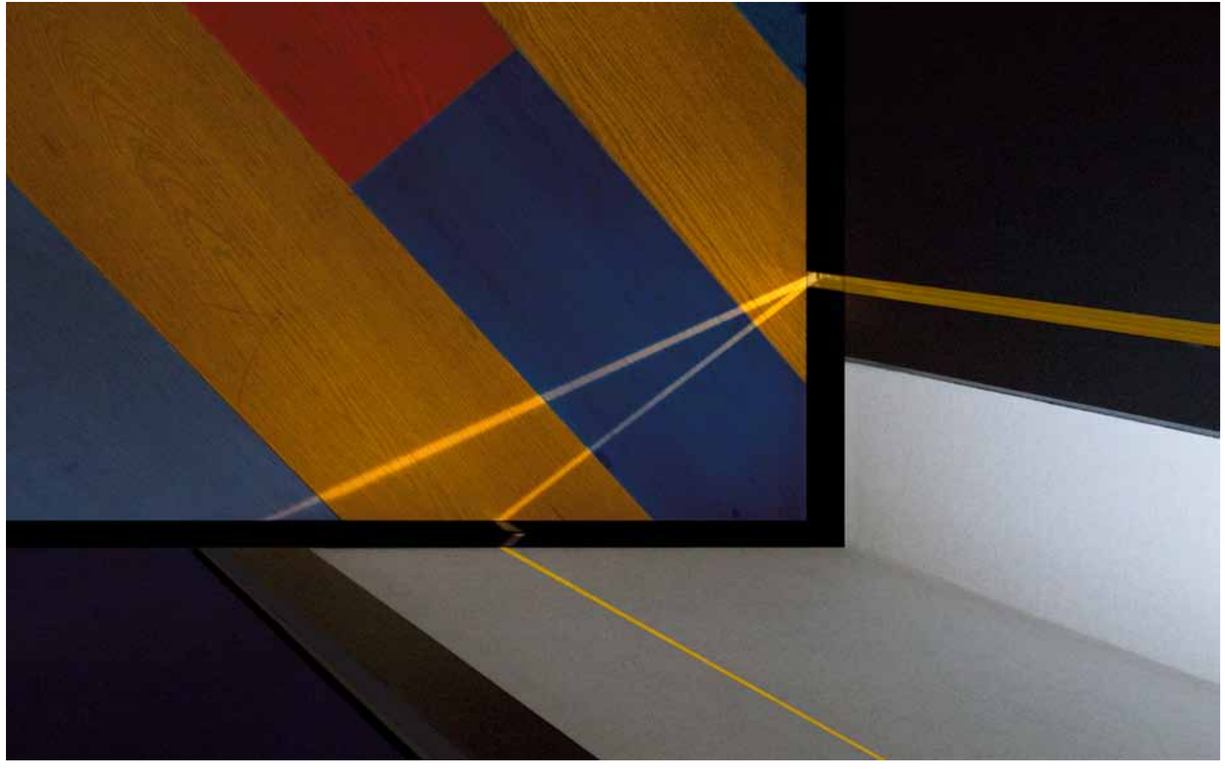
Composition 018
“Shed”
Devon, England
2009

Composition 425
"Door II"
Portsmouth, England
2019

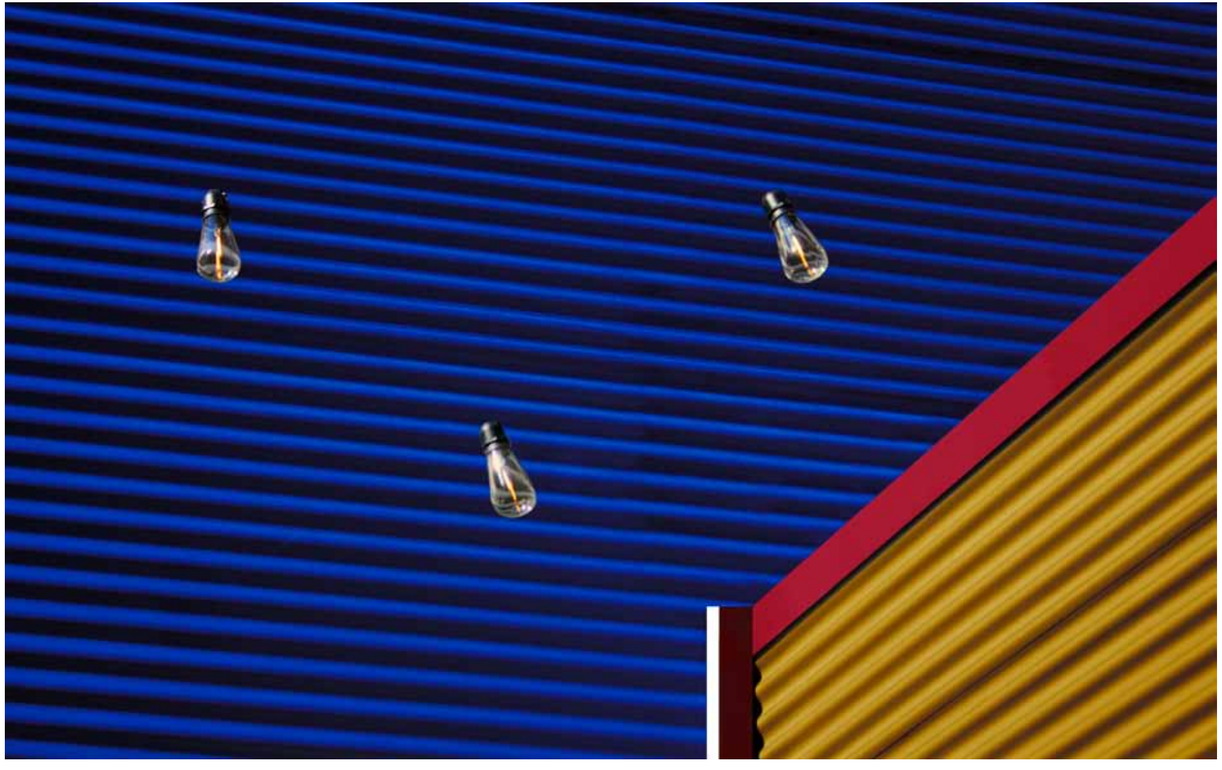
Composition 382
"Bus Parking"
Winchester, England
2019



Composition 445
"Bars II"
Bruges, Belgium
2019



Composition 323
"Doorway II"
Antwerp, Belgium
2018



Composition 326
"Three Light Bulbs"
Antwerp, Belgium
2018

4) Lockdown

"Art is the only way to run away without leaving home" – Twyla Tharp

Fig. 28 The battle of the toilet rolls was unleashed during lockdown, claiming human dignity as one of its victims. I remember as a child being in Mexico in the countryside, where there was no such thing as toilet rolls. There were newspapers, however which didn't work quite as well as toilet paper, but still did the job. Toward the beginning of the pandemic, a British humorous political magazine offered 40 sheets of free toilet paper with the purchase of every copy.

Yesterday I came across a diary that I was meant to keep during the first lockdown starting on 23 March 2020. The idea was that it would help me keep my sanity. At that time no one knew what might happen. There were long queues to get into the supermarket, and when you eventually got in, people were fighting over toilet rolls. *(Fig. 28)* If things were that bad at the very beginning of the pandemic, I could only imagine what would happen when millions had died and society had collapsed, without government or commerce! So I was worried. There was no way to see my children, one in Spain, the other in Bristol. I couldn't see my relatives in Mexico – including my asthmatic 92-year-old mother. The groceries I bought were all washed before being put away, I disinfected every door knob in the house, cleaned the car's steering wheel, gear-shift and handles with alcohol, I wore a glove to open and close gates when on my morning exercise and for handling goods when shopping. As far as I knew the majority of people who contracted the disease would die a dreadful, painful, choking death. I didn't want that for my family … nor for myself … nor for anyone else (with two exceptions). I Skyped a friend of mine who is a psychiatrist telling him that I was having a hard time getting to sleep and having very peculiar and vivid dreams. He recommended some natural products with some honey-based stuff. I'm afraid I saw straight through that: he wanted me to take placebos. I took them and, as placebos do, they worked – for a few days at least, and then I was back to being stressed out. Large parts of the night were spent wandering around the house wearing my comfort poncho. Eventually, I asked my GP for sleeping pills (I had only slept 10 hours in three nights). She was reluctant to prescribe them as they are habit forming. After much insisting, she relented and prescribed 5 sleeping pills, which I was to use only very sparingly. That night I took the first one and slept as would a log! While all this was happening I was going on-line every morning for two reasons. One was so I could listen to stress-calming videos put out by the NHS, which helped. The other was to keep abreast of how the disease was spreading not only in Britain, but in the world. Also, and crucially, I wanted to understand the disease: how it's transmitted,

probabilities of hospitalisation or death if one contracted it, ways of avoiding it (I was syringing hot salty water up my nostrils and coughing it back out hoping that would keep the virus away). In other words I was looking for factual information. Little by little, day by day I realised it was going to be tough, but not the end of the world. With every bit of new knowledge, my anxiety diminished. Knowledge and understanding does away with irrational behaviour. (Verifiable knowledge, I hasten to add. There is no verifiable foundation to think that, for example, Bill Gates in cahoots with large pharmaceutical companies is placing tiny chips into vaccines in order to control us . . . and the world!) Ignorance is the scariest thing in the world – other than unfounded and unverifiable claims to knowledge that only 'the chosen ones' have.

Being confined to our tiny home, which thankfully has a large garden and is in the countryside, we had to concentrate on our surroundings: birds and plants in the garden; the shape of a room, the books on a shelf or perhaps a bit of black fungus on the ceiling in the house. That led to the "Lockdown" collection of images.

For some time I've thought that the number eleven has certain properties. I think of it as my lucky number, though I'm not superstitious. When I was about 14 years old a numerologist worked out that my number was 11 by applying some sort of formula to my full name. I didn't believe it, but I adopted the number as mine anyway. In some quarters it is called an 'angel number' (apparently repeatedly seeing the number 11:11 means that your guardian angel is looking after you). However, and for me more importantly, it is one of the simplest forms of symmetry. Two sticks: 11. It is a prime number. It's easy to multiply (11x11=121, 111x111=12321, 1111x1111=1234321, etc.). I was born on a palindrome (palindromatic symmetry): 15.11.51. The middle number is 11, the outside numbers are both 1 and the other middle numbers are 5. If you add up each number individually 1+5+1+1+5+1, the result is 14 and 1+4=5. If you add it up in pairs, 15+11+51, it equals 41 and 4+1=5, also 14+41=55

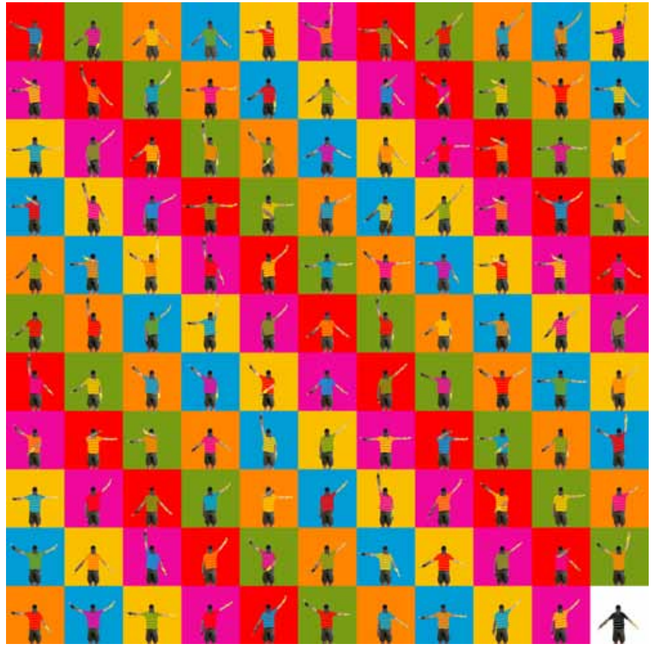


Fig. 21 Composition 462. My mild obsession with the number 11:11 led me to create images with 11 x 11 squares, 121 squares. Using Flag Semaphore, the first column on the left reads "Coronavirus". Then from the top, the horizontal messages start with the letters of that word. So the first horizontal line reads "cannot sleep", then "overanxious", etc. (See text).

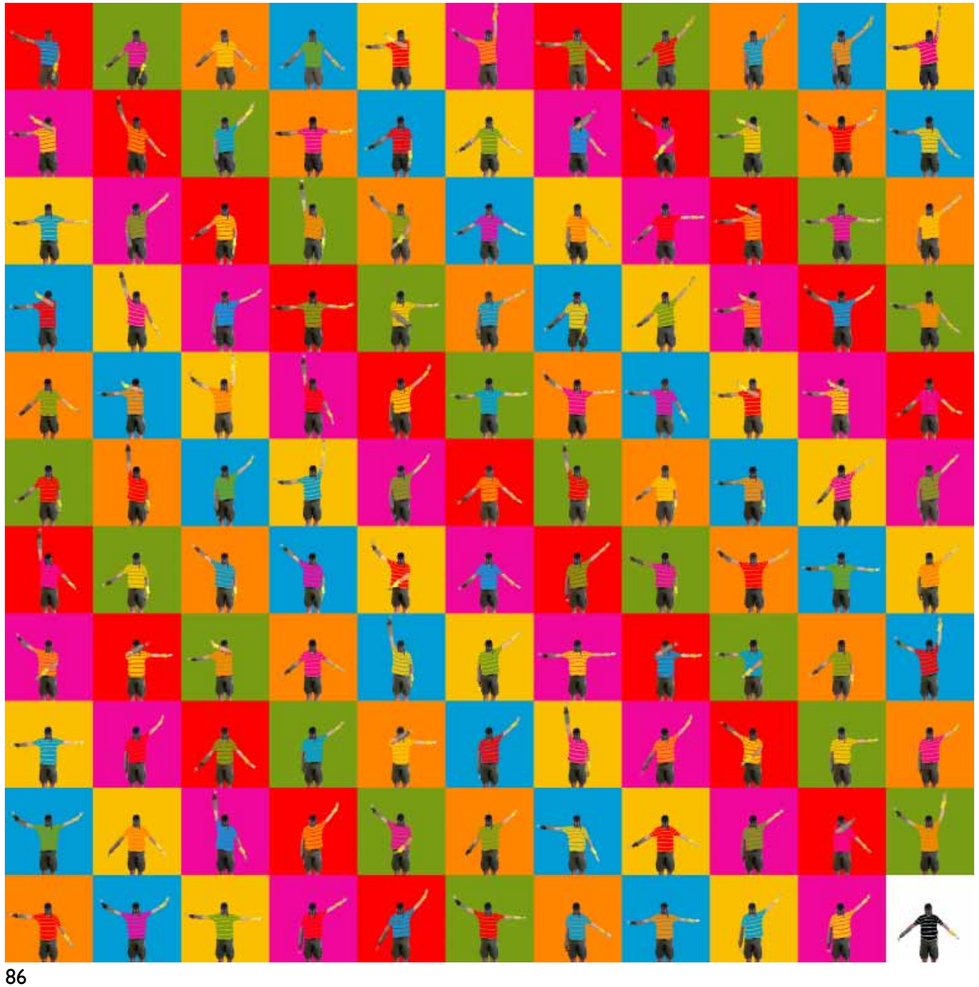
Fig. 30 Detail of Composition 462, "Coronavirus". It is a picture of me in my dining room wearing a heavy-duty face mask and an expression of . . . fear.

(the other two numbers in the palindrome and a multiple of 11). Continuing: 151+151=302, 3+0+2=5; 1511+51=1562, 1+5+6+2=14, 1+4=5; 15115+1=15116, 1+5+1+1+6=14, 1+4=5. A mathematician must explain this to me some day.

Back to Lockdown. Lockdown was forced upon us by the rapid spread of Covid 19, which is a Coronavirus. Curiously, Coronavirus is an 11-letter word. The first image I created specifically referring to Lockdown is a piece called "Coronavirus". *(Fig.29)* I put on my facemask (designed to filter out very fine particles), which I was using to go shopping. *(Fig. 30)* I put on a gardening glove on one hand holding a gardening fork and a washing-up glove on the other holding a paintbrush. I got hold of the coding for Flag Semaphore. My partner took the pictures of me in our dining room doing from A to Z. Using the pictures, I wrote the word 'coronavirus' in squares arranged vertically. Then across 11 rows of 11 letters each, starting with the 'C' from 'Coronavirus'. At the top I wrote "Cannot sleep". The next row: "Overanxious". Then it goes on to say: "Reading more . . . Overzealous . . . Not very soon . . . A dependable . . . Vaccine/cure . . . I wonder what . . . Renewed life . . . Unveils next? . . . Surely green"! I'll translate that: "I haven't been able to sleep properly because I'm feeling overanxious, so I try reading to send myself to sleep. I'm also being too rigorous in the pursuit of Covid avoidance. I simply don't have a clue if and when there will be a vaccine or a cure. Hmmm, I wonder what life will be like after Covid, what will life have in store for us? Surely it will be a greener future!"

The other images in the "Lockdown" collection all follow the same format of 11x11 squares. There is an original photo or photos which I colour. Then I divide it into squares which I rotate, flip and replace in the 11x11 square format following a certain logical formula. This creates the patterns you see on the final image.

As I write this the Omicron variant has been discovered. I wonder where I left the other four sleeping pills I didn't take.



Composition 462
"Coronavirus"
Twyford, Hampshire
2020

Composition 462
"Corona Virus – Detail"
Twyford, Hampshire
2020

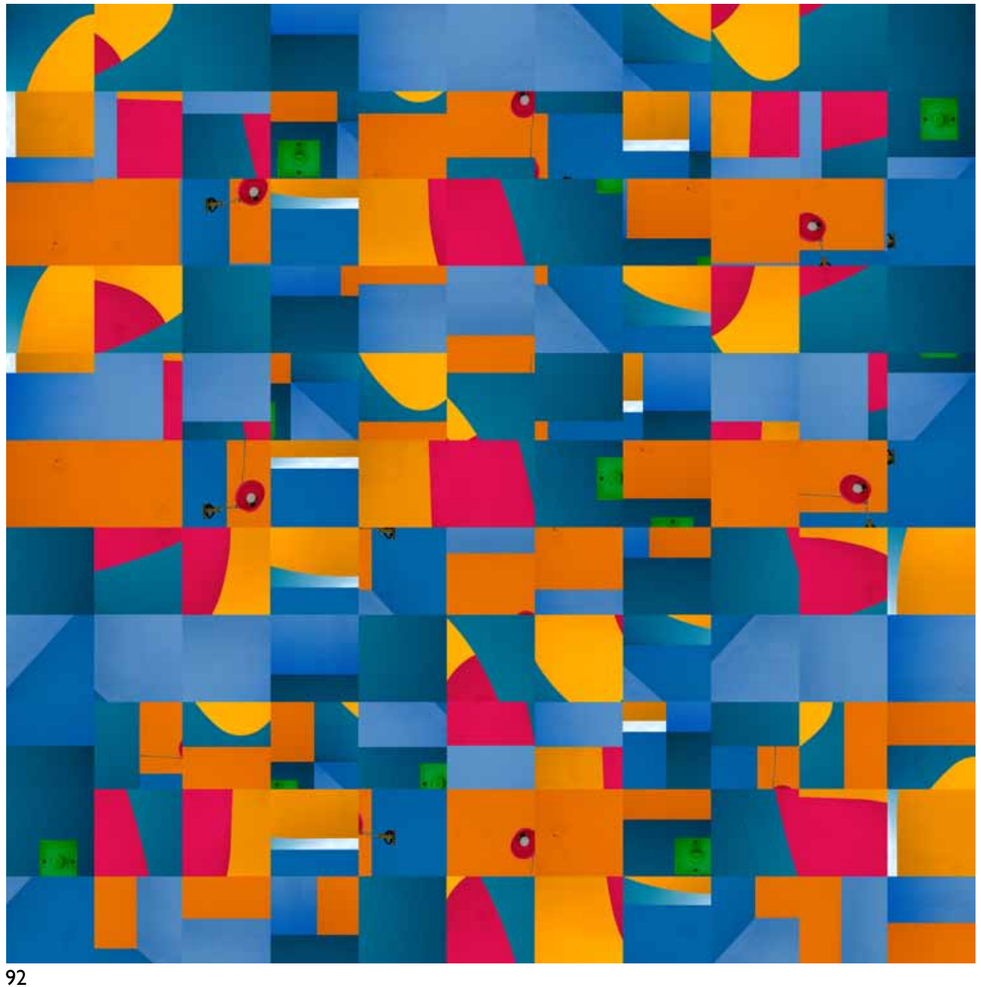
The idea of this image originated on one of the first occasions we were allowed to travel. We visited a very large, very wealthy manor house near Swanage in Dorset. The main hall had dozens of ancient Greek statues and busts, which I photographed. Then we visited a Purbeck stone colliery nearby. I took photos of that too, thinking I would use the photos for an 11x11 composition. But then it occurred to me that the statues were all made of stone. And each statue had been modeled after a human being with all the traits I and my contemporaries might have as human beings. Knowing that the ancient Greeks painted their statues, I decided to 'restore' them to some sort of colour, but in order to give them life and personalities, I also gave them eyes.

Composition 476
"Lockdown: Stone to Life"
Twyford, Hampshire
2020

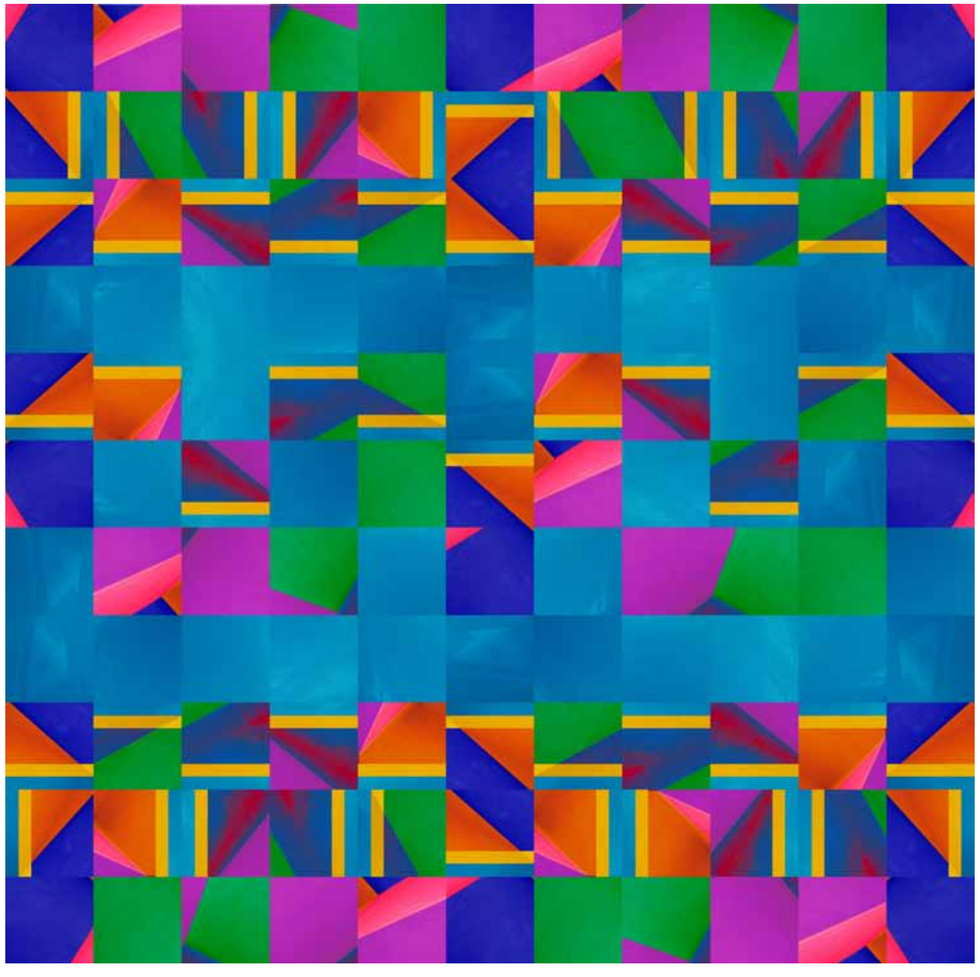
Composition 476
"Lockdown: Stone to Life – Detail"
Twyford, Hampshire
2020

Composition 198
"Time and Space "
Leyden, Holland
2014-2021

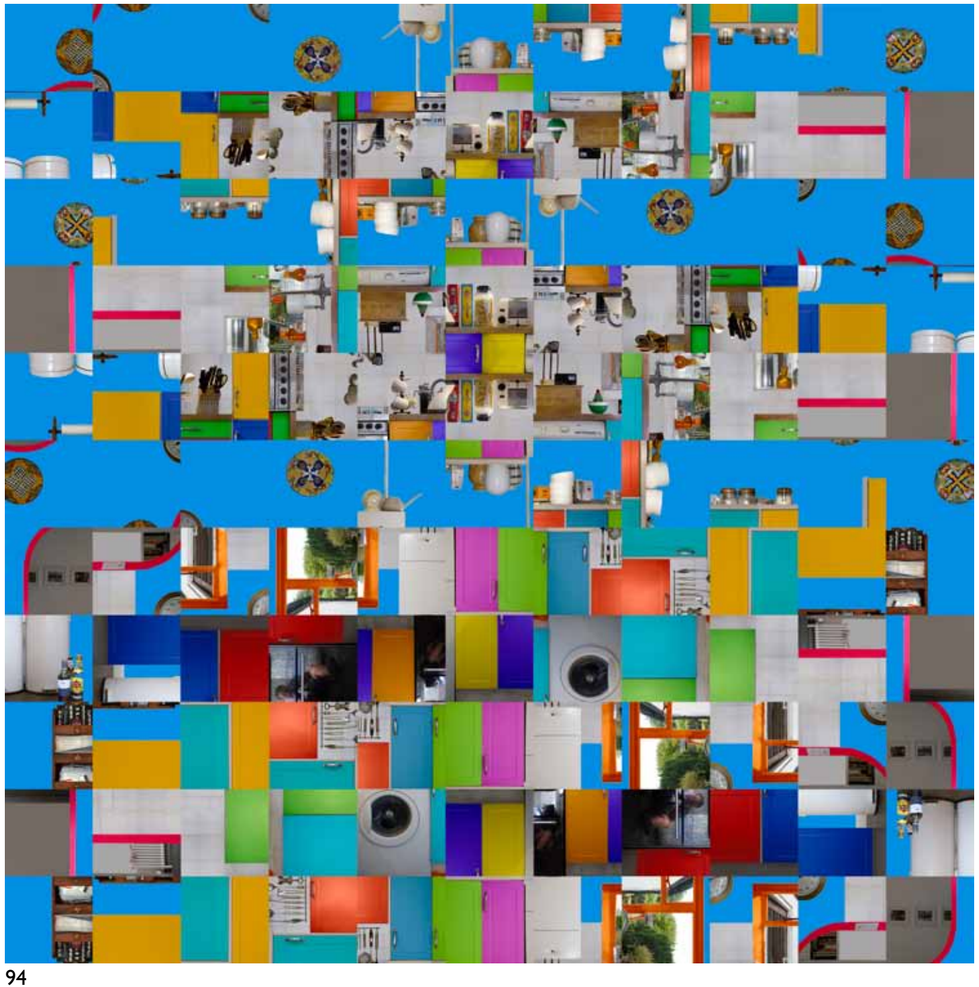
Composition 198
"Time and Space – Detail"
Leyden, Holland
2014-2021



Composition 456
"Dining Room Walls"
Twyford, Hampshire
2020

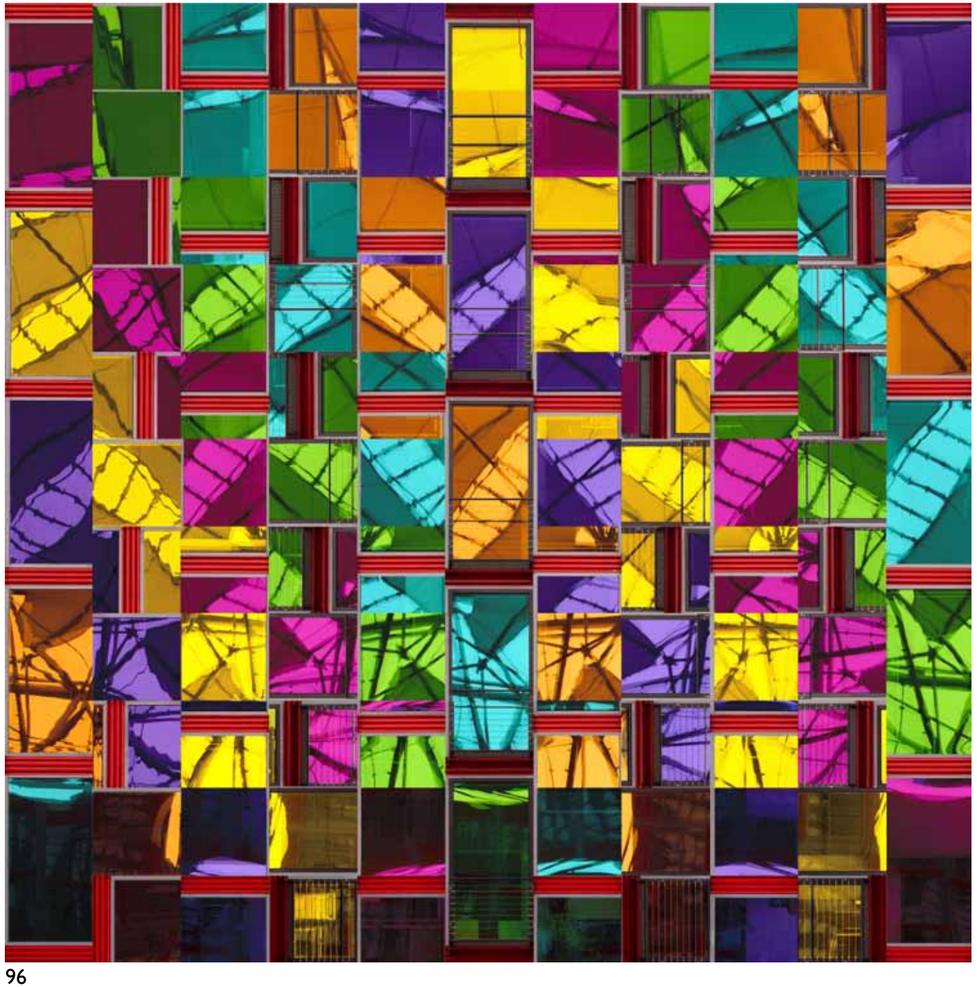


Composition 454
"Bedroom Fungus"
Twyford, Hampshire
2020

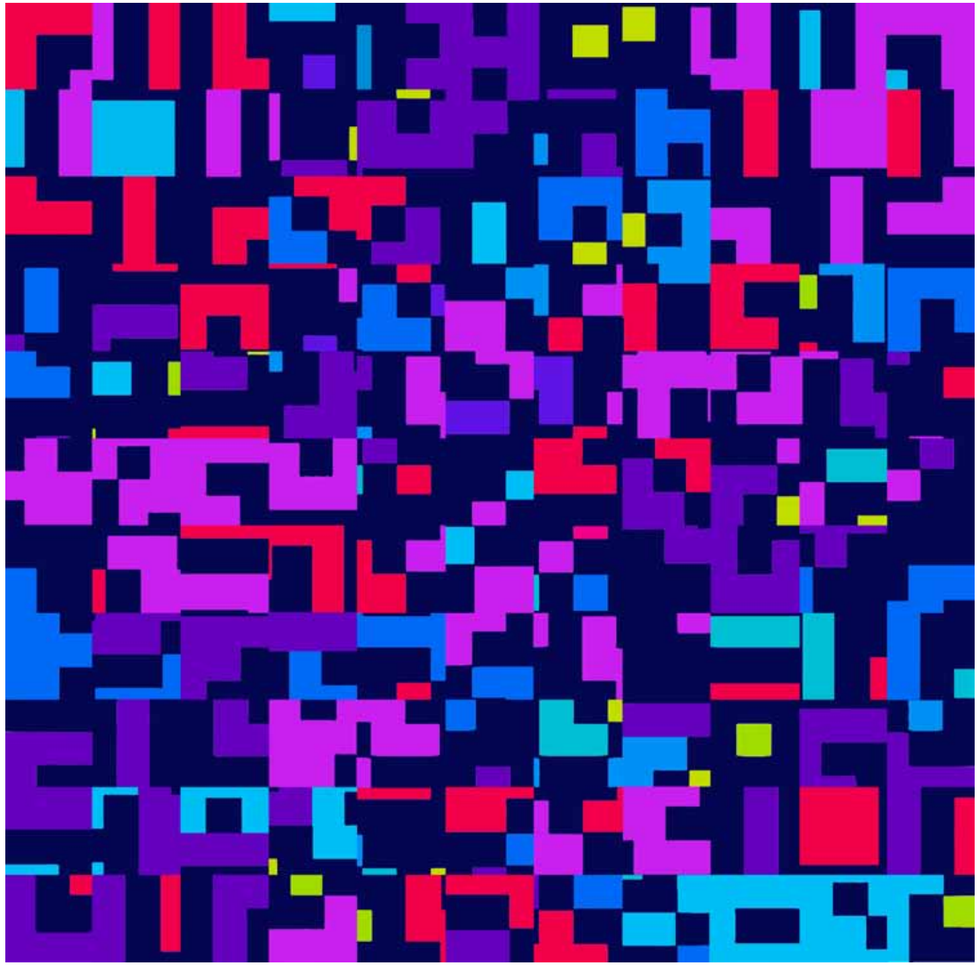


Composition 459
"Kitchen, self & dog"
Twyford, Hampshire
2020

Composition 466
"Atelier"
Twyford, Hampshire
2020

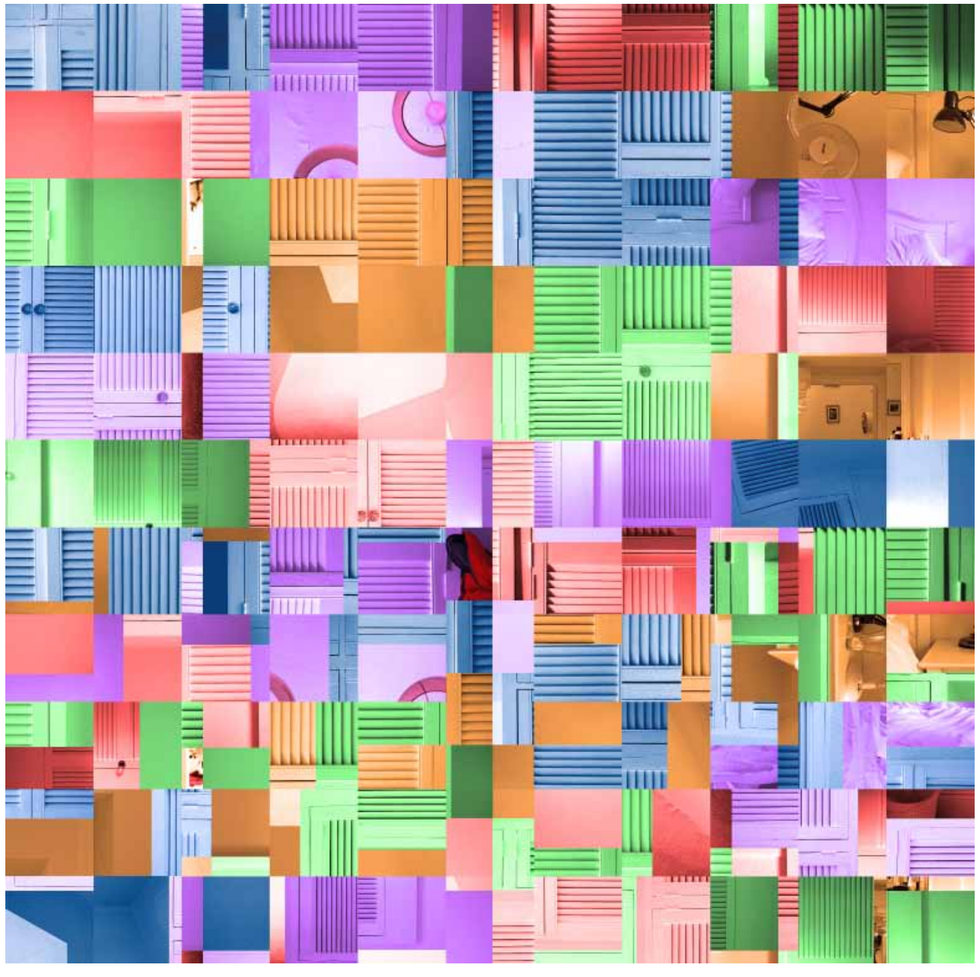


Composition 469
"Sony"
Berlin, Germany
2020



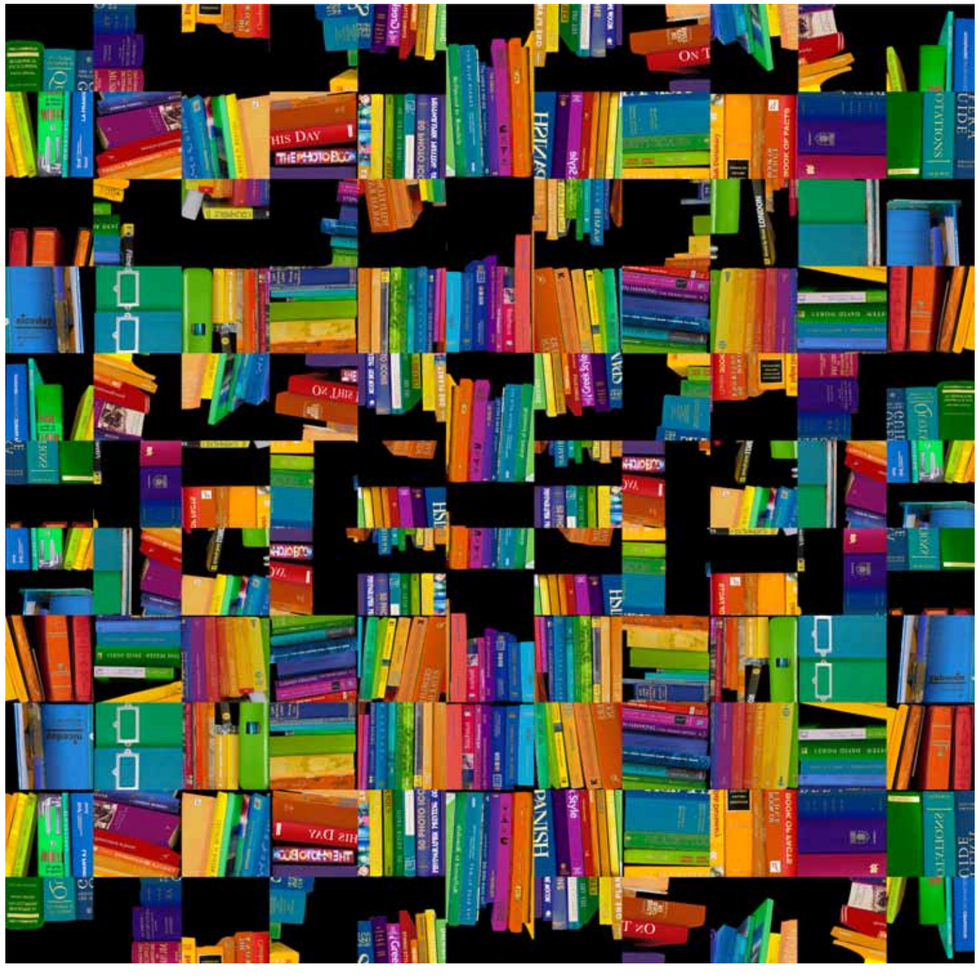
Composition 522
"All the Right Information, not Necessarily in the Right Order"
Twyford, Hampshire
2021

Composition 467
"Table for Two"
Twyford, Hampshire
2020



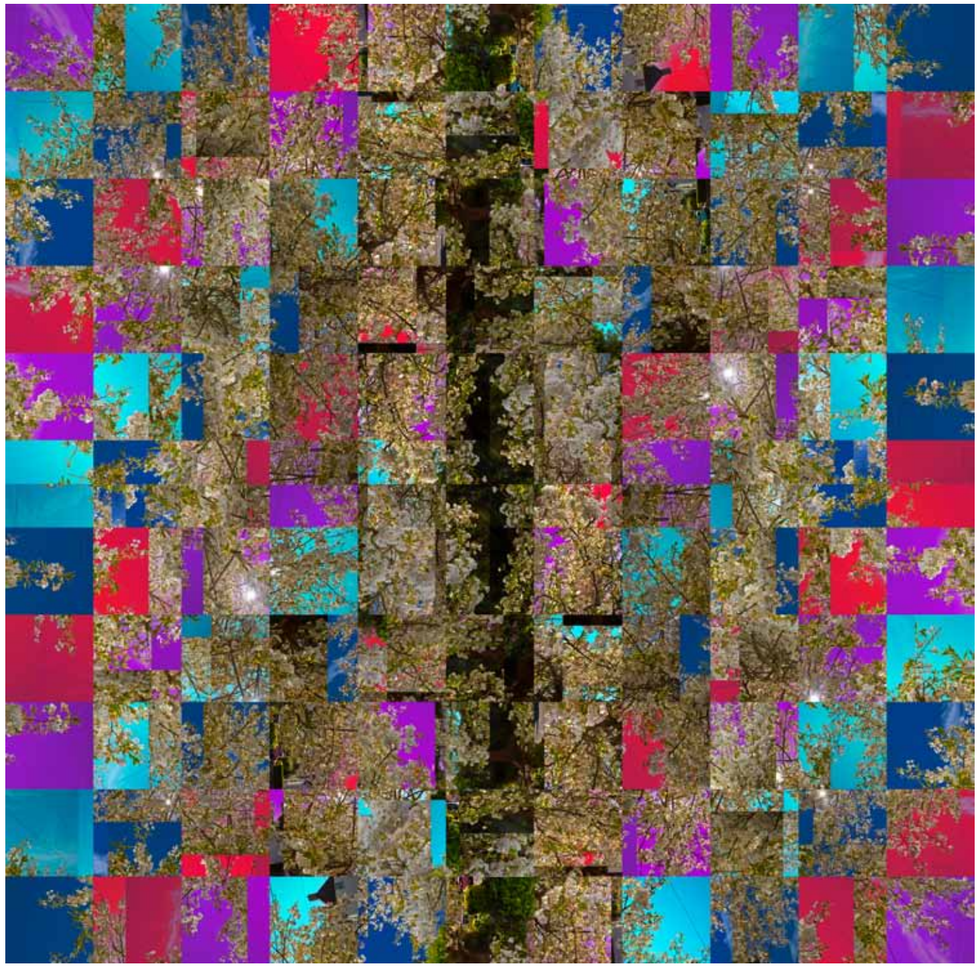
Composition 471
"B&B"
Dorset, England
2020

Composition 463
"Unmade Bed"
Twyford, Hampshire
2020

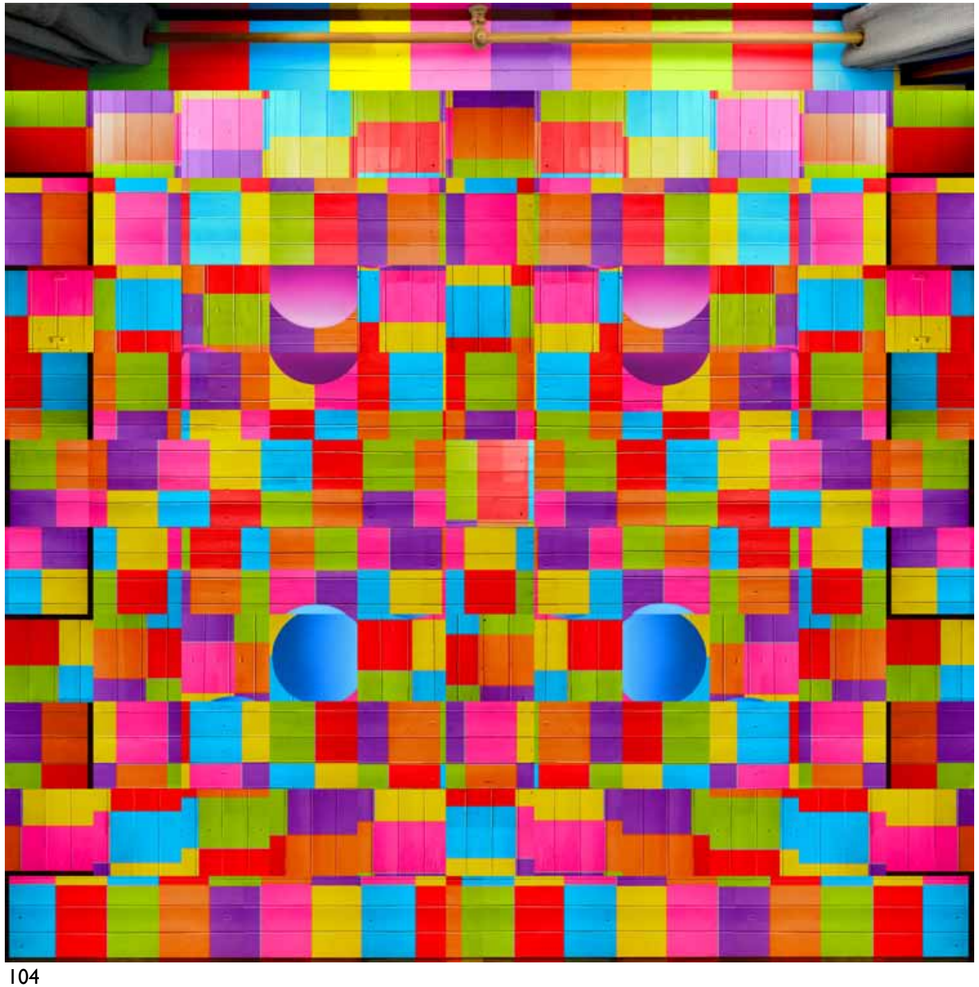


Composition 472
"Books"
Winchester, England
2020

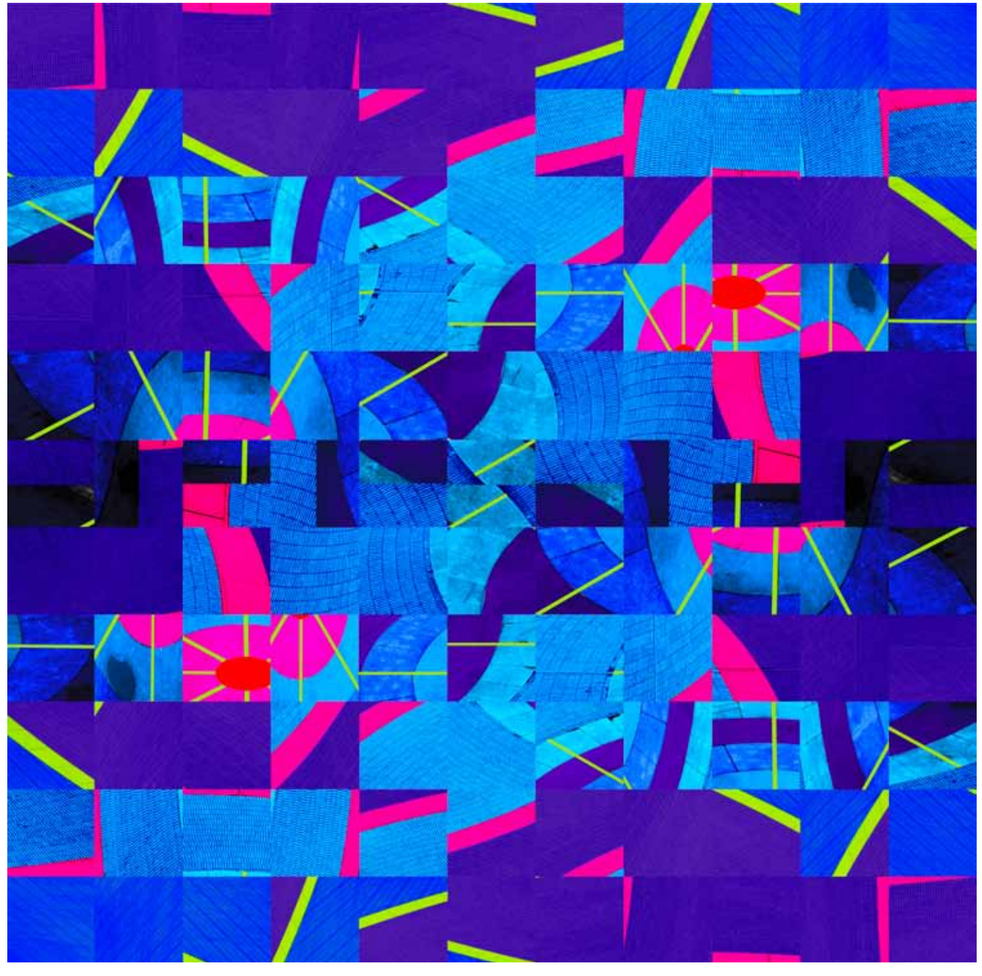
Composition 477
"First Snow"
Twyford, Hampshire
2020



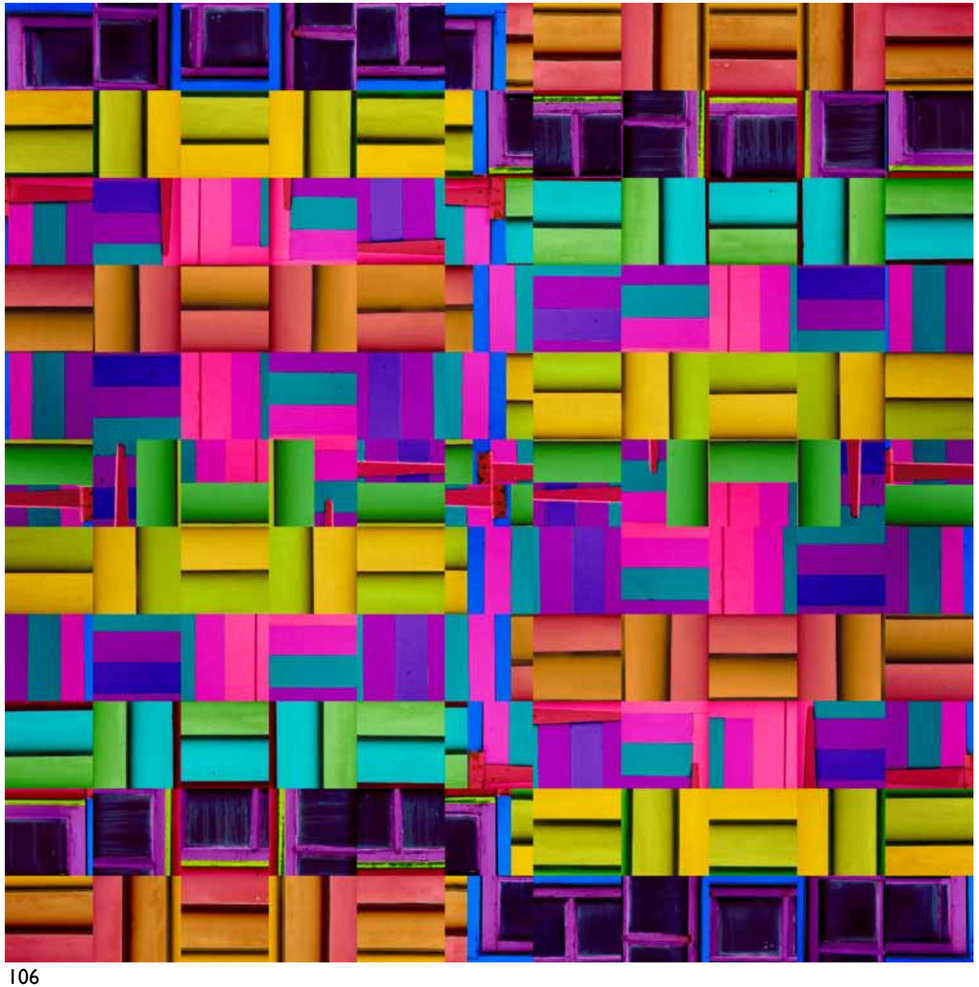
Composition 507
"First Flowers"
Twyford, Hampshire
2021



Composition 475
"Lamps and Curtain Rail"
Twyford, Hampshire
2020



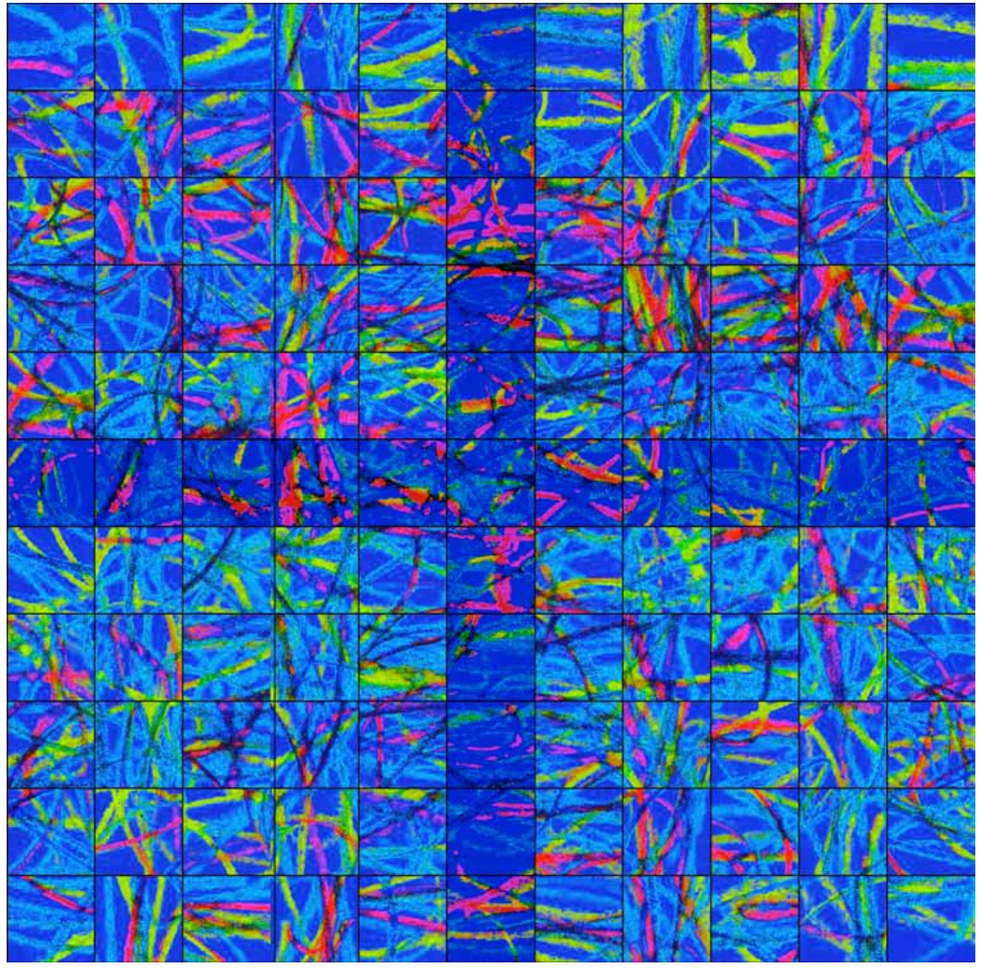
Composition 198 "Time and Space "
Antwerp, Belgium
2017-2021



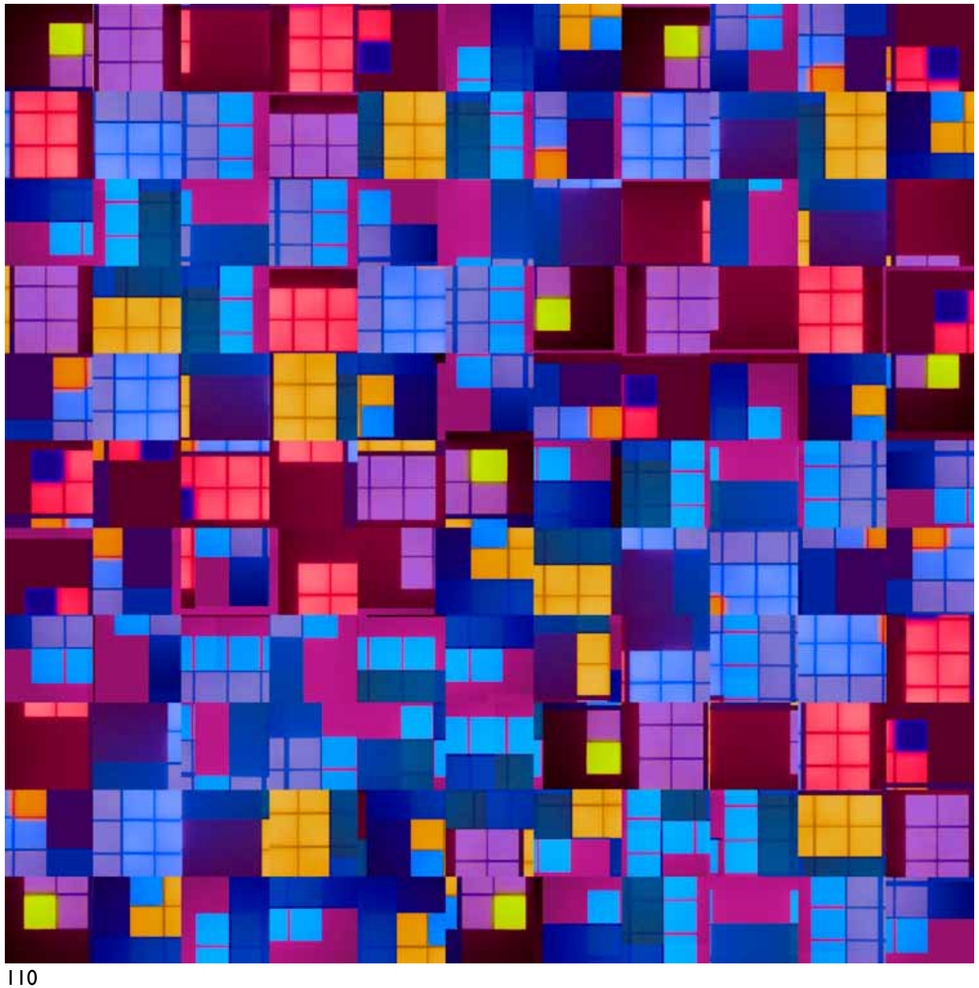
Composition 526
"Rainbow Shed"
Twyford, Hampshire
2021

Composition 531
"Windows"
Bristol, UK
2021

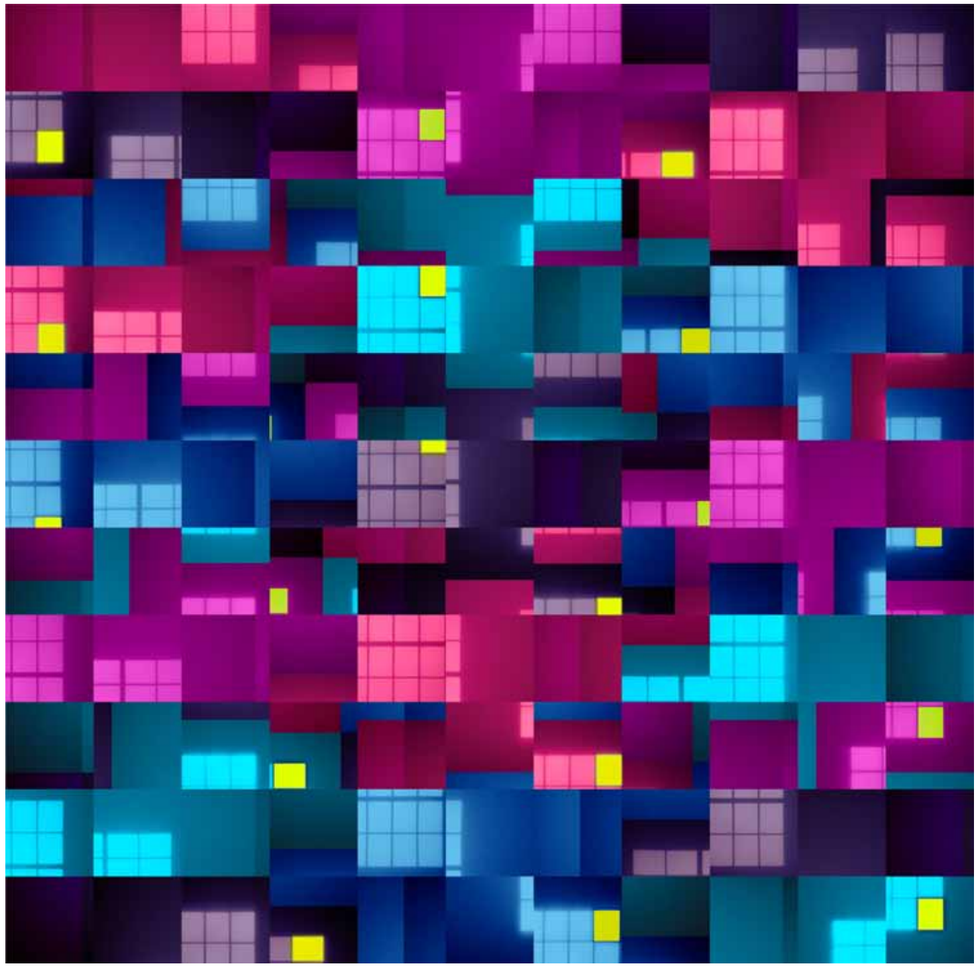
Composition 528
"Tate Pencil II"
Twyford, Hampshire
2021



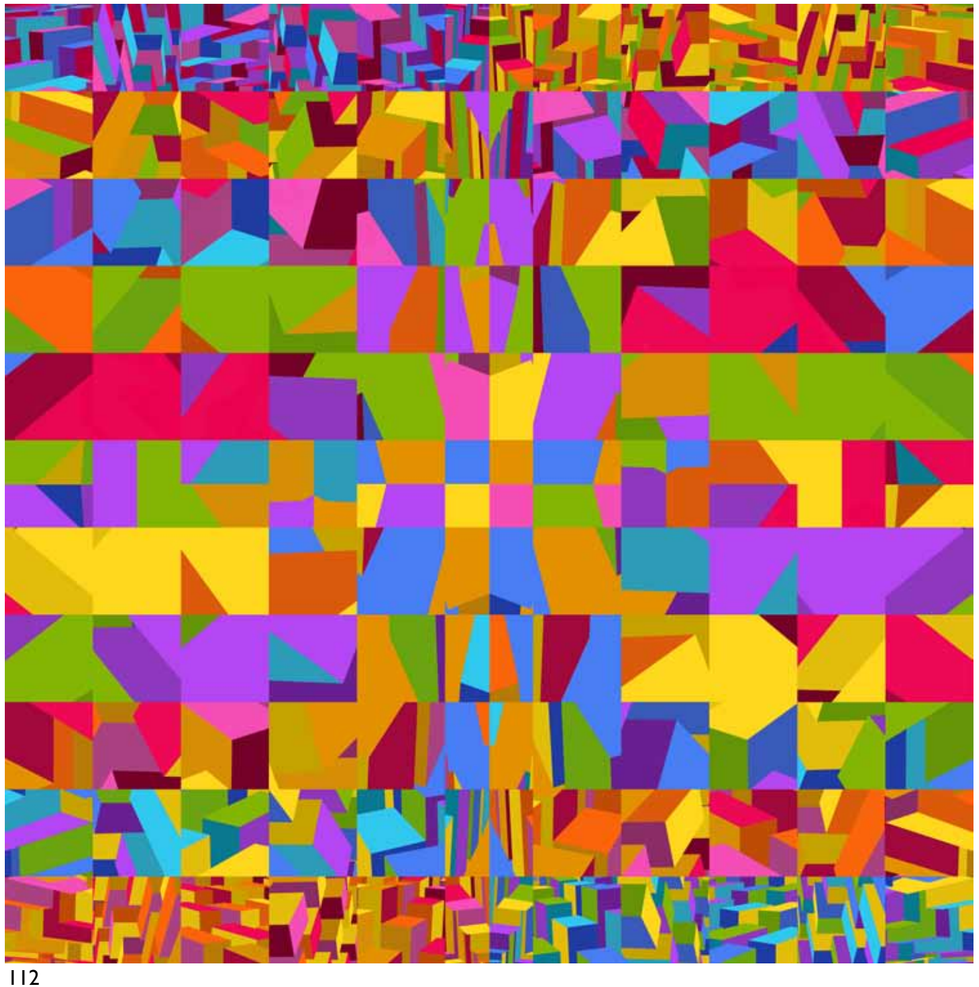
Composition 527
"Tate Pencil I"
Twyford, Hampshire
2021



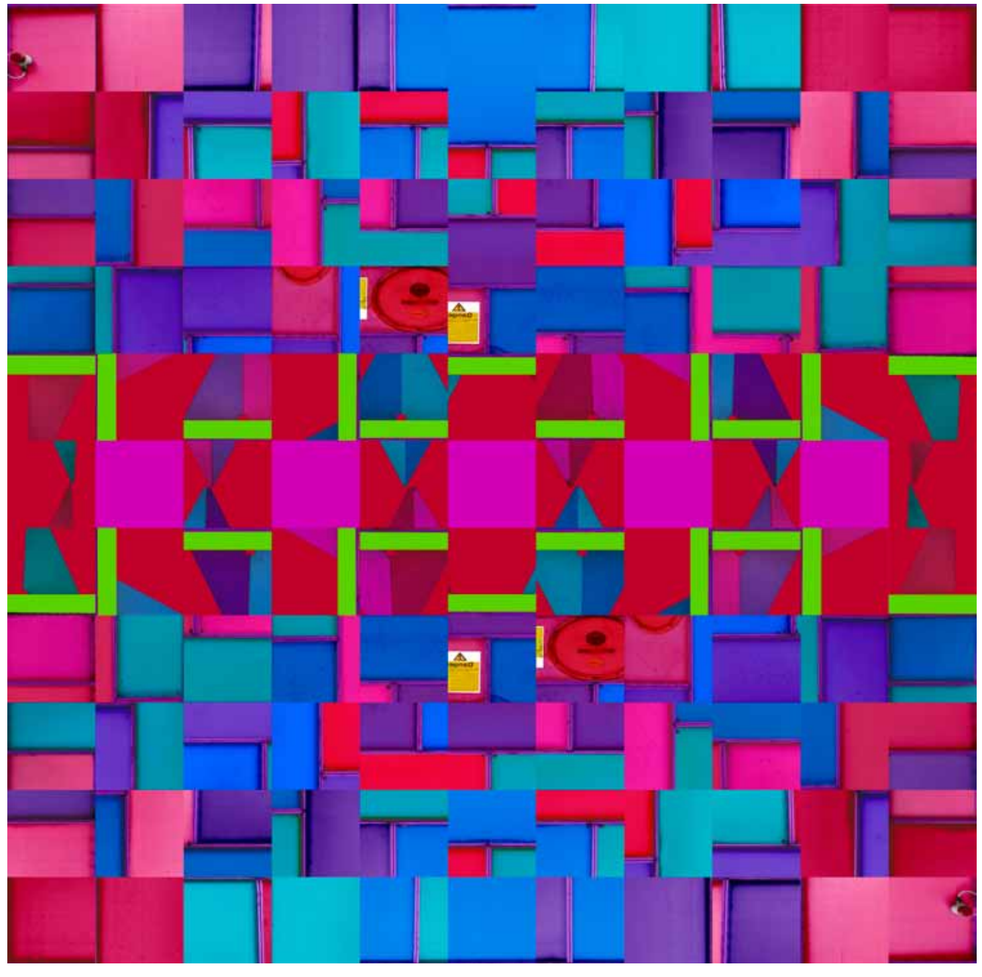
Composition 533
"Reflections"
London
2021



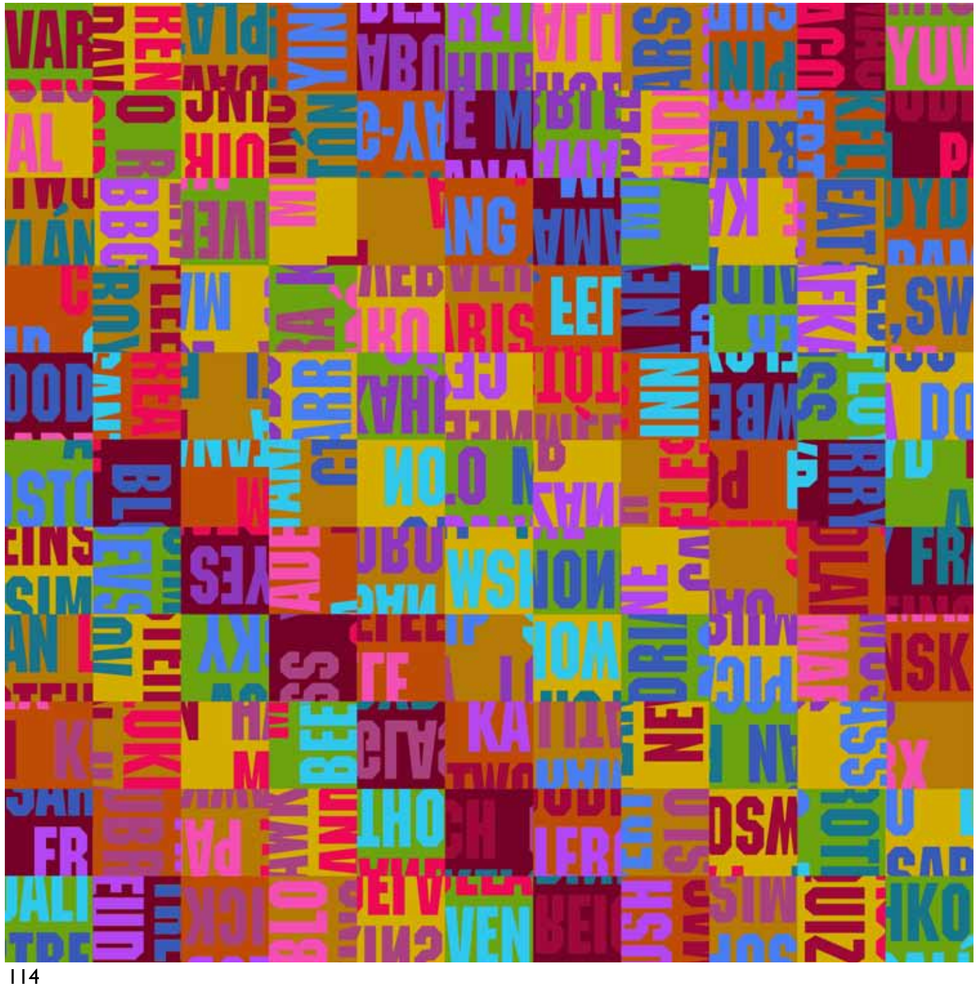
Composition 529
"What Light Through Yonder
Window Breaks?"
London
2021



Composition 532
"Hope"
Berlin, Germany
2016 -2021



Composition 530
"Danger"
Bristol, UK
2021



Composition 538
"Warm Heroes"
Twyford, Hampshire
2021

Composition 537
"Cool Heroes"
Twyford, Hampshire
2021

5) Absent

"Art is the only way to run away without leaving home" – Twyla Tharp

Partly because of the psychological effects of the Covid 19 pandemic and partly because I knew I was about to hit the 'big 7-0', I began to think about the world without me. People I know and love will carry on living and I won't be there. Places I have seen will still be there and I won't be there to see them as they change. Places I haven't been to will remain unseen. I won't know what happens next in the saga that is history and politics. Will climate change be the culprit rather than Covid? Nuclear war?

Fig. 31 My dining room table . . . when I'm gone.

So . . . what about death? Being fanatically agnostic, I can neither look forward to and cherish the thought of eternal life in some sort of paradise as offered by several religions, nor dread eternal life in some sort of hell as offered by some of those same religions. If all those religions are right and one goes to heaven because one has been 'good', then I think I will most likely go to heaven as I've done nothing terrible and I haven't hurt anyone on purpose. I've been a good boy. If God didn't want me to doubt the religions it has sent us, then it wouldn't have given me the capacity to doubt, indeed disbelieve, and therefore not comply with the rules of those religions. As God, I'm sure it will be happy with my performance while living on earth. It understands that my motives are well intentioned. However, I don't believe that any religion is correct in its beliefs. There may well be a god, but none of the religions have got it right. And even if God does exist, I see it unlikely that it will be paying any attention to me individually. If God exists, did it

Fig. 32 The things people do because of their unfounded beliefs. The Aztecs (and most other Mezoamerican cultures), performed human sacrifices, emulating what the gods had done for the cosmos. 5 gods had sacrificed themselves in order to save the cosmos from extinction. People believed it was good and necessary to repeat this sacrifice to keep the cosmos going. There were 18 yearly rituals of sacrifice, one for each month of the year. The victims were frequently warriors taken prisoner from wars with other groups. But there were also people from their own ranks, including women and children. As the priest performed the ceremony he would praise the victim who believed he or she would live in paradise forever. There was acquiessence. Indeed when the Spanish arrived they offered to free prospective victims, but a great many demanded to be sacrificed for the sake of their soul. So, is it always right to respect people's religious beliefs?

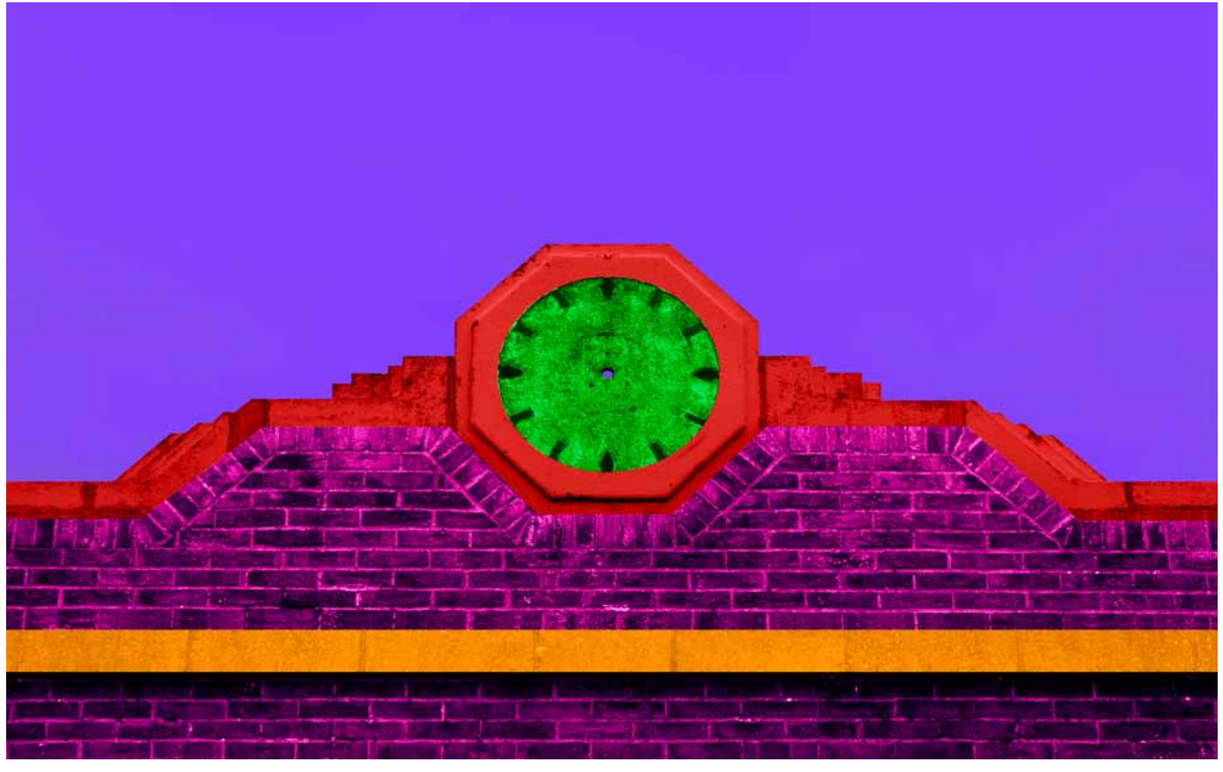
Fig. 33 More things people do for their unfounded beliefs. Horatio Robley with his collection of headhunters' trophies. The man to the right of Horatio's head, looks like a perfectly nice guy.

give us a spirit which lasts forever and ever? If God does not exist, have we developed a spirit? Does it last forever and ever? Or is the spirit mortal? If it's mortal, what are we being offered when the spirit dies? If it's eternal, what do we do for the rest of eternity? Wouldn't it be boring? I think I would prefer oblivion. After all, I don't recall having suffered before I came into being, so oblivion can't be all bad. I don't mind what religious beliefs people have – so long as they don't try to force them on others and in the process harm others or themselves. Think of the Spanish Inquisition. The fire and brimstone brand of Christian fundamentalism. Isis and the Taliban. The Aztecs believed that the sun would be extinguished unless they offered human hearts to Quetzalcoatl. *(Fig. 32)* Headhunters believed that the human head contains the soul and that the hunter could take it for his own benefit. *(Fig. 33)* Concepts such as 'the chosen ones', 'heresy', 'holy war', 'genital mutilation', 'blasphemy', or 'karma' where one can't escape one's predestined condition, are all concepts based on religious beliefs.

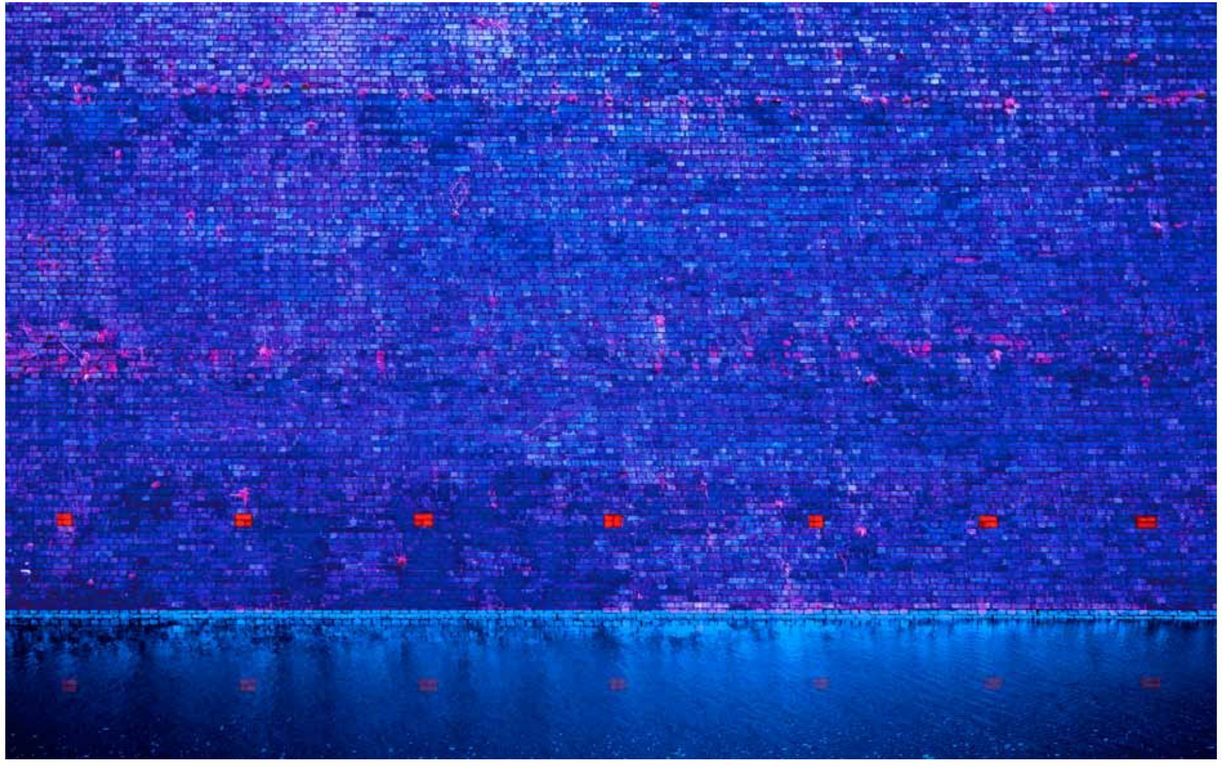
For some reason – probably cultural – I tend to associate the 'cool' side of the colour wheel with melancholy and dark thoughts. Having the blues. The "Absent" series tends to have those colours: red, magenta, violet, blue and cyan (RMVBC). For contrast I throw in a bit of lime yellow, which reminds me that, whatever the melancholy or dark thoughts, that frame of mind will pass and I shall return to the way I really am. So I suppose I had better start thinking about a series using the other side of the colour wheel.

Composition 482
"Seascape with Nochebuenas"
Puerto Vallarta, Mexico
2017-2021

Composition 481
"Brighton Seascape 2"
Brighton, West Sussex
2021



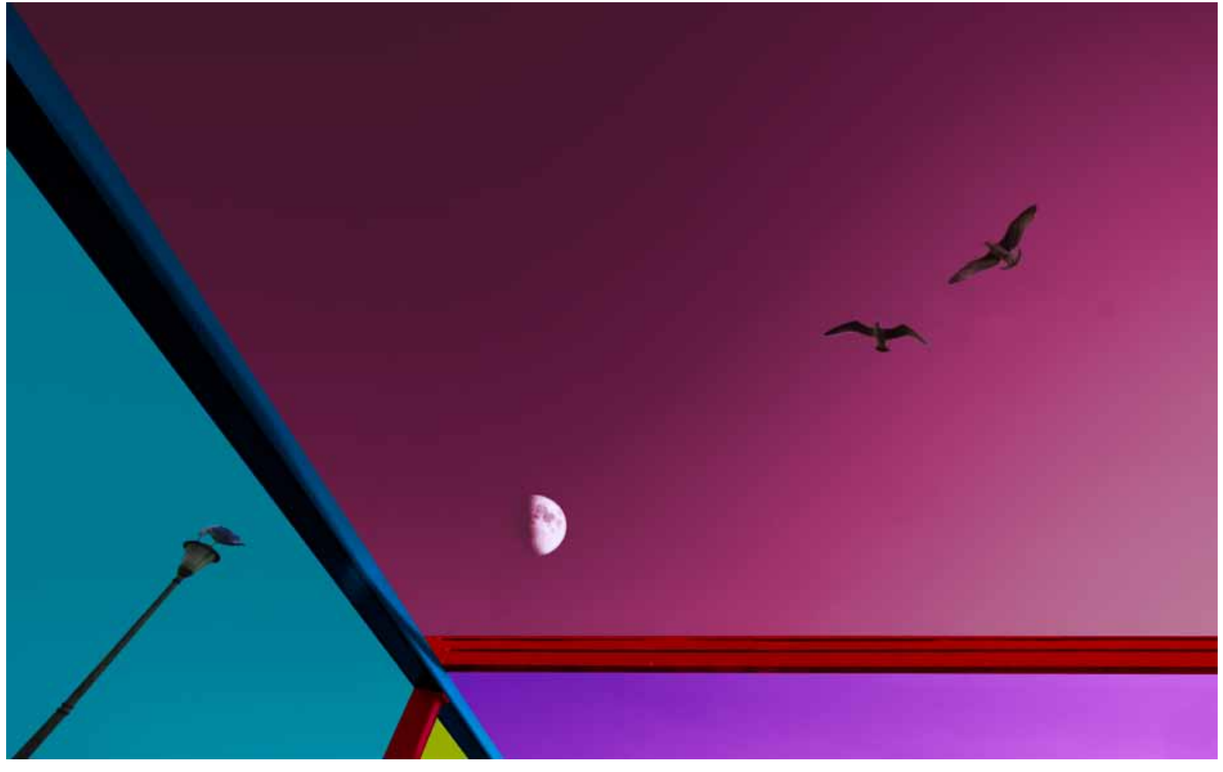
Composition 484
"Timeless"
Old Railway Station, England
2021



Composition 490
"Wall in Hebden Bridge"
Hebden Bridge, W. Yorkshire
2019-2021

Composition 488
"Sundown and Benches"
Twyford, Hampshire
2021

Composition 494
"Sea Sundown"
Puerto Vallarta, Mexico
2017-2021



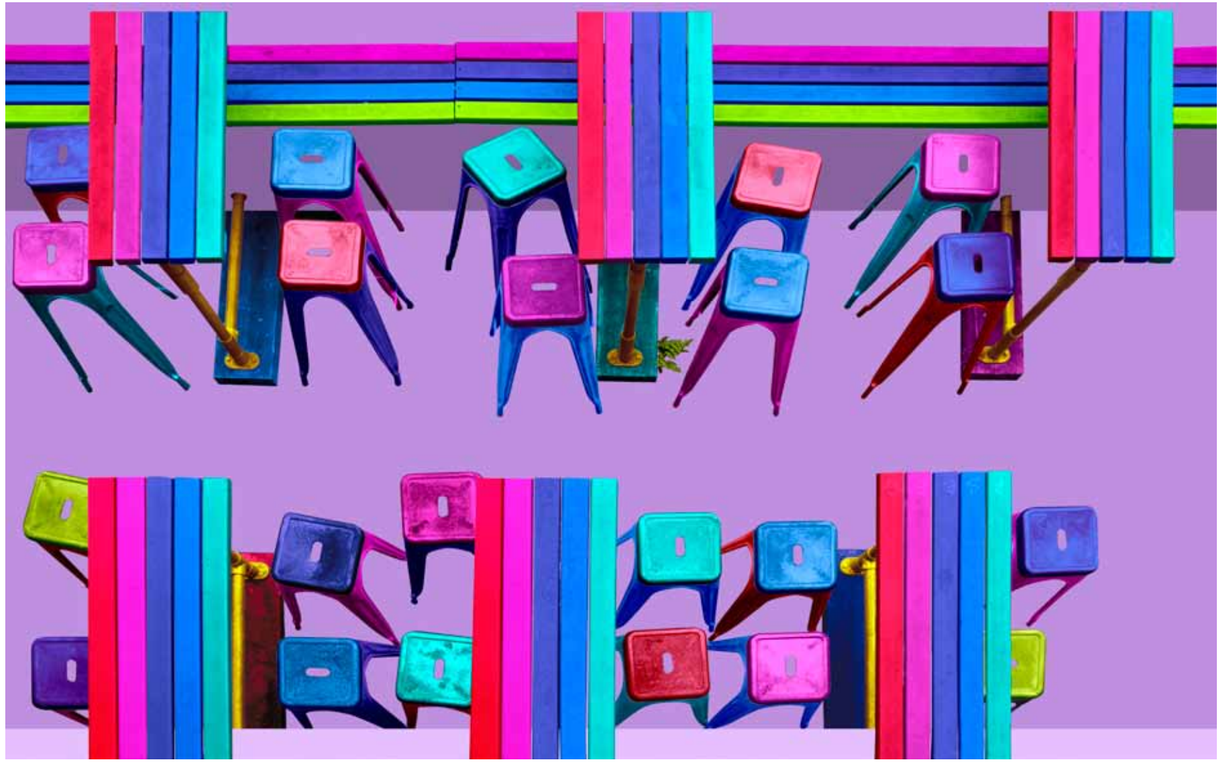
Composition 497
“Constança Evening”
Constança, Romania
2019-2021

Composition 499
“Seascape in Violet and Cyan”
Devon
2021

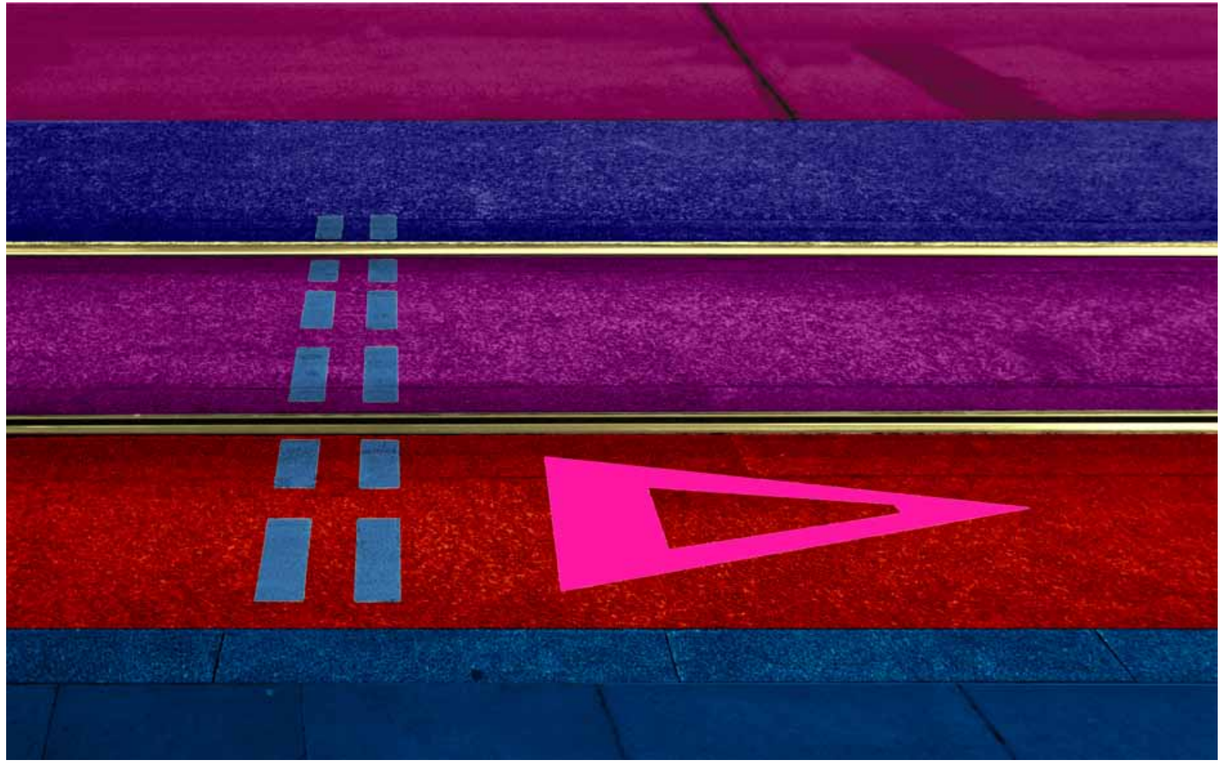
Composition 517
“Absent from Room”
Twyford, Hampshire
2021

Composition 510
“Absent from the Table”
Twyford, Hampshire
2021

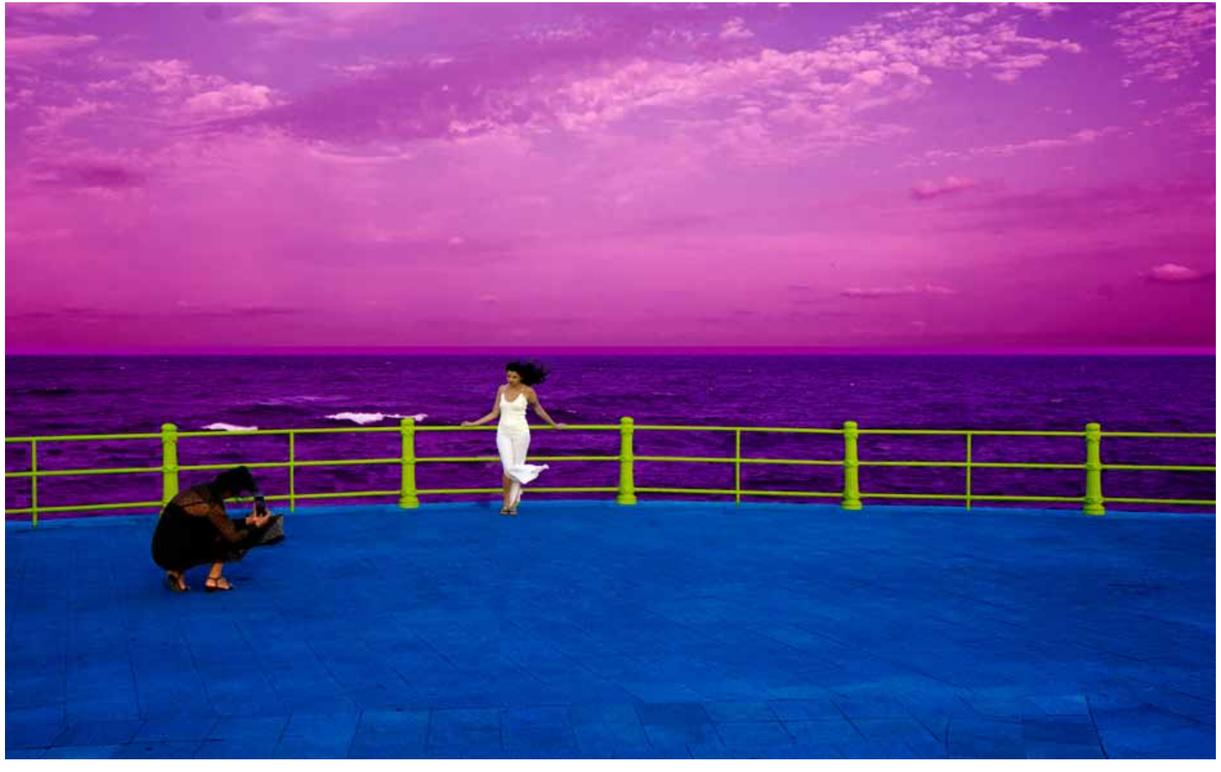
Composition 517,
"Absent Cat's View"
Bristol, England
2021



Compostion 520,
"Absent from Bar"
Manchester, England
2021



Composition 523
"Tram Tracks"
Manchester, England
2021



Compostion 525,
"Young"
Constança, Romania
2019-2021

Composition 534
"Ghost in the Closet"
Barcelona, Spain
2021

Afterword

Plato and Gestalt, Imperfection and Symmetry, the Complex and the Simple, Whiteness and Colour

The images in the preceding pages were not all originally created in order to expose 'post-truth' (many were created long before I was aware of that concept), but they do reflect our times.

Certain aspects of human psychology help to explain why there can be such a thing as a 'post-truth' culture – Gestalt Theory is particularly relevant.

The fundamental principle of Gestalt Theory is the Principle of Prägnanz (pithiness in German), sometimes known as 'Law of Good Gestalt' or 'Law of Simplicity'. Law of Simplicity I think best reflects the way people interpret information. It states that we tend to order our experience in a manner that is regular, orderly, symmetrical and simple. This law implies that when people perceive the world, we tend to eliminate complexity and unfamiliarity so we can observe a reality in its simplest form. Eliminating extraneous stimuli helps the mind create meaning. However, reality is never regular, orderly, symmetrical or simple. These are platonic concepts that only exist in the mind – not in reality. In Gestalt theory this principle of 'simplicity' is broken down into several laws which refine it: Law of Proximity (where things that are close together are bunched as a group – in social terms that could be the basis of 'community'); Law of Similarity (where things that look alike are bunched together as a group – in social terms that could be 'race' or 'nationality'); Law of Closure (where things that are incomplete are completed by the mind – in social terms that could be 'religion', which explains the inexplicable simply: God made everything); Law of Symmetry (where things are perceived as being symmetrical with a central focal point – in social terms that could be seen as, for example, 'balanced news reporting'); Law of Common Fate (where things appear to move upon a path – in social terms that could be some form of 'determinism'); Law of Past Experience (where things are categorised according to what has been perceived in the past – in social terms that could be 'history'). For the purpose of this introduction, I won't go into the detail of all these laws. For the present purpose, I am illustrating and focussing on the Principle of Simplicity or Good Gestalt, Law of Closure and Law of Symmetry.

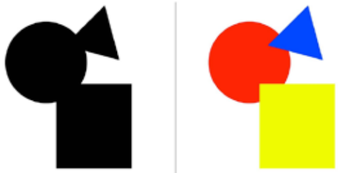


Fig 34

Law of Simplicity

People will perceive and interpret complex images or information in the simplest possible form.

When looking at *Fig 34*, our eyes see the black shape, but our brain separates it into three basic shapes, illustrated by the colour version on the right.

Fig 35

Law of Closure

When looking at an incomplete image or set of information we tend to look for a single recognisable pattern.

In *Fig 35* most people will see a square on the left and a panda on the right. Whereas, if viewed as individual elements, the figure on the left is composed of 4 chevrons, while the one on the right is a group of splodges. Although none of the elements are complete, our brains find a recognisable pattern between the shapes, which is easier than making sense of the individual shapes. We see the whole, rather than the individual components.

Fig 36

Law of Symmetry

People tend to perceive objects as symmetrical shapes that form around their centre.

People will usually perceive there are three sets of eyes in *Fig 36*. Our minds recognise the symmetry in each set and it groups the objects together regardless of proximity (in the illustration each 'eye' is in fact equidistant from the others). This allows us to see three sets of eyes instead of six individual eyes.

How is Gestalt Theory relevant to the images in this book?

Three of the Gestalt Theory laws (symmetry, simplicity and closure) are directly linked to the three main concepts that inspire the creation of the images in this book: Imperfect Symmetry, Imperfect Ideals and Imperfect Perception. First, why 'imperfect'? When humans perceive something, the mind follows the laws of Gestalt. What people perceive is in the mind and, as an idea, is perfect – not so in reality. When trying to reproduce in reality what has been perceived in the mind, the product can only be imperfect because that perception, that idea, has been returned to reality where nothing is perfect. For example, when walking by a fruit stall in a market, one sees the fruit arranged in certain patterns, with certain colours, in certain shapes (*Fig 37*). What the mind sees is not the actual fruit, but a perfect arrangement in a simple pattern, simple colours, simple shapes (*Fig 38*). When we try to reproduce that fruit stall using the image in the mind and elements of what is actually there, it is impossible to produce a 'real' image because the reproduction of the image returns it to reality, where nothing is perfect *(Fig 39)*. In the case of the images in this book, they are trying to be something as close as I can get them to be the way humans perceive images, however it is impossible to portray the 'perfection' of what our minds create, compared to what is possible in reality. Thus the concepts can only be 'imperfect' when portrayed in reality. The reality of the law of symmetry can only be Imperfect Symmetry. The reality of the law of simplicity in its purest form can only be Imperfect Ideals. And the reality of the law of closure when expressed physically can only be Imperfect Perception. At a very fundamental level, one can speculate that the laws of Gestalt have a big bearing on what we know as reality. So, although none of the three figures here are 'real', the image closest to what is actually there is Fig 37; the closest to what we immediately perceive is Fig 38, and what is closest to a 'post-truth' image is Fig 39: it looks like it could be real, but it is an impossible image – no watermelon could possibly be so perfectly circular!

Figç 37 This is a representation of a fruit stall in Ethiopia, captured by a camera as a close rendition of a three dimensional object in two dimentions. It reflects what is actually there.

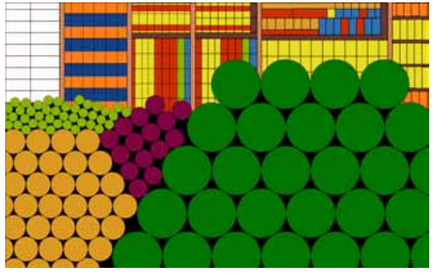


Fig 38: This image is a representation approximating what the mind first perceives. Simple shapes, colours and patterns. It is an 'approximation of the ideal' – an illustration of how the mind transforms things into their simplest forms.

Fig 39: This is a 'post-truth' image. It oversimplifies reality. While at first sight it is seemingly truthful, it is not – it is verisimilar. To paraphrase Magritte, "Ceci n'est pas un etalage de fruits". This is not a fruit stall.

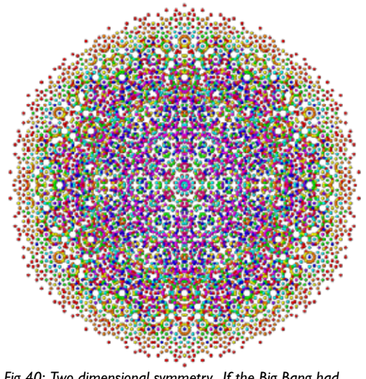


Fig 40: Two dimensional symmetry. If the Big Bang had not had small fluctuations in its particle, the universe might have had a pattern a bit like this, but in three or more dimensions

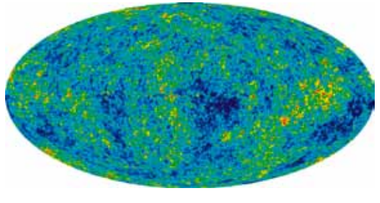


Fig 41: According to a computer programme which took ages to develop, the universe looked something like this (though not necessarily an ellipse) at about the time galaxies were being created – the red bits. That is to say, the universe was not symmetrical.

Perfect Symmetry = Stagnation

Under the Gestalt Law of Symmetry, people tend to perceive things as symmetrical and in our mind that symmetry is perfect. But what would happen if reality actually were perfectly symmetrical? The answer to that question starts with the Big Bang, which is, as far as we know or understand, where everything started. Energy and particles exploded into being from 'the singularity' (a point with infinite density and no volume) and speeded out in all directions. The distribution of these particles should have been 'uniform', because all elementary particles were the same. Gravity should have acted on each particle with the exact same force in every direction. Had that been the case, the symmetry of energy and matter would have been perfect – an ever expanding perfect sphere. That's not what happened. Within an instant of the Big Bang, symmetry was broken. For yet unexplained reasons, there were small fluctuations in the distribution and working of these particles, so that when some of them came together, they exercised slightly more gravity than their neighbours, thus attracting more particles, and as the groups of particles congregated, their collective gravity increased, thus attracting more particles and so on. Eventually these bits of matter became galaxies of stars, planets, moons, comets, etc. If there had been absolute perfect symmetry, all the Big Bang particles would have simply expanded evenly forever. Even if the fluctuations of the particles had been symmetrically distributed, we would have ended up with a universe which was also in some way symmetrical. Something, perhaps like *Fig 40* – though maybe in three, four or more dimensions instead of just two.

Whatever shape it might have – flat, spherical or saddle-like (*Fig 41*) –, the universe is not symmetrical. Physicists say that shortly after the Big Bang, perfect symmetry was broken (perhaps to do with quantum uncertainty, quarks breaking away from the electroweak force, and hadrons developing different masses from leptons, the electroweak force fragmenting into electromagnetism and the weak force and so on). So, imperfect symmetry is necessary for change and evolution. Imperfect symmetry is not the same as chaos, or total randomness … there is order, but there is also change. Imperfect symmetry is the first concept that has a bearing on the creation of the images in this book.

Perfect Ideals: Only in the Mind

The second concept is related to the first in the sense of 'perfection versus imperfection', but here it involves human concepts, rather than physics. The perfect straight line, the perfect circle, perfect square, perfect sphere. These are the simplest forms and they are, of course, human concepts that don't exist in nature, nor even in any part of the reality that human beings have created. The only perfectly straight line is in the mind – it's an ideal. The same goes for beauty, morality, knowledge … crime! The perfect crime! If there were perfection in reality, in whatever field, there would be stagnation. By definition, perfection cannot be improved. And so, development stops. In this Platonic sense, any form created in the real world is only a shadow, an imitation of its counterpart in the world of Ideals. After more than two millennia since the time of Plato, we still strive to create these forms, these perfect ideals, without ever being able to do so. Surprisingly, Albert Camus' Myth of Sisyphus comes to mind. Sisyphus is condemned for all eternity by Zeus to push a boulder to the top of a mountain, but the boulder inevitably rolls back down again before he can ever reach the top. Camus concludes that, like the task of Sisyphus, life is purposeless. What gives life any meaning is the act of 'pushing the boulder' – not reaching the top. Camus says, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy". In the same vein, people pursue ideals, but cannot ever fully reach them. Nonetheless, Plato would have been amazed by how close we are in our present time to creating some forms which are very close to what he could only imagine. In the Greek world nothing was straight or smooth, everything was a bit crooked, a bit jagged. But less crooked and jagged than in, say, the Stone Age. Today people can draw a rectangle on a computer screen with edges that are within microns of being perfectly straight. Humans can polish mirrors and lenses to focus on galaxies that are light centuries away. However, as soon as a rectangle is printed, the line is bent, it will be ever so slightly jagged. Even the most sophisticated telescope's most polished mirror is too defective to detect a gigantic planet in the nearest solar system. There is always more polishing to be done. Still, Plato would be impressed if he could see how close humans are today to producing in reality what he might have considered perfect. The 'perfection bar' will always be raised.

Perfect Perception: The Universe at a Glance?

In the field of human perception, this third concept is related to Gestalt's Law of Closure. If people only have a partial view of something (which is what we always have – we never have a total view of anything), we tend to invent the rest of it in accordance to what we think it should or might be, rather than what it actually is (which is something we will never know totally). If I ask, "what is this?" (*Fig 42*) Most would say it was a face. But, of course, it's much closer to being

Fig 42: Two dots and a circle are enough to convey 'face'.

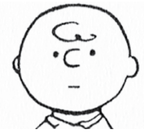


Fig 42a: Charles Schulz, the author of the comic strip 'Peanuts', was a genius at using a minimum to express a maximum. Note that this picture is the exact same image as Fig 42 with the addition of a few more lines.

Fig 43 Clue: 'Meow'

Fig 44 Clue: 'Ruff'

Fig 45 Clue: 'Chirp'

Fig 46 Clue: 'Eeek'

Fig 47: This child's drawing has marks (the undulating line of the kite's string); diagrams (the tree on the left); schemata (the sun and the human), and mandalas (the kites with a cross in the middle). These features are shared with children from all over the world, more or less regardless of what culture or, surprisingly, what time they come from. It would appear that understanding and representing symbols is innate in human beings. Culture does play a role regarding subject matter: This is a drawing by a seven year-old in the USA. It is a child flying a kite (another is stuck up a tree). Now look at Fig 48.

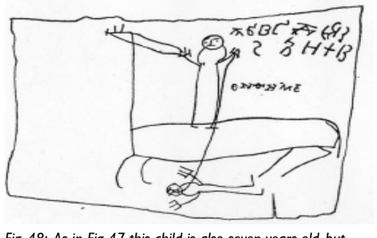


Fig. 48: As in Fig 47 this child is also seven years old, but from Russia. He is portraying himself as a medieval warrior, astride a horse, attacking his enemy with a spear. Why medieval? Because this drawing is from the 13th century drawn on a piece of tree bark. The subject is different, but the symbols are very similar.

a circle and two dots. In people's perception, two horizontally placed dots frequently represent eyes. Two dots on a piece of paper are enough to hold a baby's attention, so this Gestalt thing would appear to be innate. What about those other little figures? (*Figs 43- 46*) Most would say "cat, dog, bird and mouse . . . or maybe rat". It doesn't take much information for people to reach a conclusion about what they see, despite having very few details. And, at the level of absolutes, no one will ever see the whole . . . probably. God might – if it exists.

Gestalt theory (the German word 'Gestalt' means 'form' or 'shape') sustains that humans have an innate ability to recognise symbols as representations of reality, of recognising the whole even when details are missing. Children's drawings, for instance, are usually representations of what they think they know or of what they think should be – not what they see. In their drawings, children share a language that is practically universal. Children from Africa, America, Asia, Europe – they all use very similar marks, such as lines and dots; diagrams, such as circles to represent a treetop or a human head; schemata, such as suns with 'rays' emanating from their periphery and 'mandalas', which are all-purpose shapes such as circles and squares with a cross in the middle. (See *Figs 47* and *48* which contain very surprising details!)

Recognition of symbols then, is something humans are born with and as they grow, they learn new symbols and how to interpret them. Something similar has happened to cultures. With the passing of time cultures acquire new symbols: cave paintings, pottery decoration, hieroglyphics, representational art, use of perspective, abstract art, conceptual art, etc. Once people have started to learn symbols, what they perceive is very much dependent on their culture. People before Classical Greece, for example, would have seen the sea's horizon as a straight line (and probably the limit of a flat earth). We now know that the horizon is not really straight, because the earth is more or less spherical – but, it looks straight. If we could show a photograph of the Earth taken from space to these ancestors, they wouldn't understand what it was. A spherical earth was not conceivable. In the Middle Ages European painters depicted reality as they thought it should be, rather than as they saw it. They didn't portray perspective and when they finally started to do so, it was all wrong. The size of people didn't rely so much on where they were in the picture (large in the foreground, smaller in the background – see *Fig 49*)

Fig 49: Father Ted explains to Father Dougal the difference between cows being 'little' as opposed to 'far away'': "OK, one last time. These are small, but the ones out there are far away". Father Dougal, like the Medieval mind doesn't understand perspective

but on how important they were – big if important, small if not. (*Fig 50*)

Having learned that the Earth is a spinning sphere whizzing around a star at the edge of a galaxy in a big universe does not mean we're very much closer to 'The Truth'. We know from past experience that the human race has come to know things it could not conceive of three centuries ago: motor engines, microbes, nuclear weapons, the Internet, etc. If we were able to bring medieval people into our time, put them in a car and travel at 80 miles an hour on a motorway, they would not know how to interpret this experience. They could not conceive that speed, nor the car's technology, nor the engineering that is a motorway, nor the rules that govern its use. It would all be gobbledegook. A good example is the fly: A fly flies into a room, finds nothing interesting, tries to fly back out, sees light, flies in that direction and straight into a closed window. In the fly's perception, a transparent window pane is not conceivable, so it keeps flying into it time after time and dies on the sill, not realising that all it had to do was fly around the window and out the open door. We people of this modern age and of technologically advanced cultures must have equivalents to 'a window pane' – to paraphrase American politician, Donald Rumsfeld (*Fig 51*)–, something "we don't know that we don't know". If an alien popped out of nowhere into our living room and showed us a picture of the 'worm hole' he or she used to get there, we would be nonplussed. Just as our ancestors would be when showing them the picture of Earth from space. Perhaps a better example is that we may be surrounded by 'dark matter', that is, matter we cannot perceive, in much the same way that flies can't perceive window panes. Until very recently dark matter was "an unknown unknown". All we can interpret is what we do know or what we know that we don't know. There will always be "unknown unknowns". We will never have the full picture, never have the full explanation.

One clear example where we only have a partial picture of the truth or totality is creation itself. We can't understand how our world, our universe came into being. Our response? We invent an explanation, we make up a story: God (or gods) did it (*Fig 52*). We need an explanation and that story is more easily grasped than reasoned explanations such as, say, quantum mechanics or string theory. Having said that, the Big Bang might explain what happened, but not how nor why it happened in the first place. The explanation offered is that there was 'a singularity', an infinitely dense point with no volume, no space and no time, but with infinite mass and heat. That singularity exploded. Why not just say, "let there be light"? There's a windowpane out there that we can't see. (Even now there's a new theory which may take over from Big Bang, called the Big Bounce where the universe expands and contracts, but not to the point of a singularity). If we had perfect perception, we would know everything at a glance.

Fig 50: The Medieval artist did not try to create an illusion of what is real, but rather a representation of what he knew: Important people were large, unimportant people were small, regardless of the position they occupy in the picture.

Fig 51: According to Donald Rumsfeld, "there are known knowns; there are things that we know that we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know". At the time he was lambasted and mocked for this statement, but it's true – though there's probably nothing else one would agree with him about.

Fig. 52 Rather than trying to understand how it is that our universe came about (despite the fact that it is a never-ending task), most of us have chosen variations on "Let there be light"! The human race seems to have a need for answers – even if the answers are mere inventions which with time become myth or 'belief' or 'faith'.

Much of the work in this book tries to convey these three concepts, imperfect symmetry, imperfect ideals and imperfect perception – though not always at the same time. Perfect symmetry would signify stagnation, perfect ideals would limit us to the mind and perfect perception would mean we were all-knowing. It is their imperfection that allows change, progress and art.

Imperfect Symmetry: Change and evolution

In photography, perfect symmetry is easily achievable (In this context 'perfect' means within the parameters of the naked eye). In architecture symmetry has always played a very important role. Gothic architecture, for example. Take Whitby Abbey in North Yorkshire. The construction is certainly striving for perfect symmetry, but in those days they didn't have the tools or the materials to build precisely enough to achieve full symmetry. With digital photography and software, perfect symmetry is quite simple: Cut the image in half vertically, duplicate that half, flip it horizontally, carefully put it back together so that the pixels meet with their identical mirror image

Fig 53: The original photo of Whitby Abbey, where the architect strove for symmetry.

Fig 54: Perfect two-way symmetry, mirroring the left side of the original image.

Fig 55: Perfect four-way symmetry mirroring the left and top of the original image.

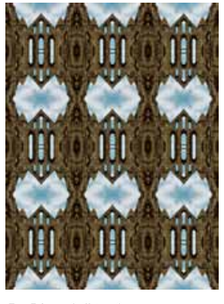


Fig 56 : Still perfect symmetry, but nothing else can happen, except more of the same.

counterparts and, Bob's your uncle. Repeat the process this time cutting in half horizontally and flipping vertically and we have four-way symmetry. Then multiply it by 9 and we still have perfect symmetry (*Figs 53 - 56*). That's it. There's no sense that further progress will be made. The image is stagnant. Nothing more can happen, other than more of the same. Good for wallpaper, but not art.

Perfect symmetry is static. A symmetry which is not perfect, which has small fluctuations, is a dynamic image – that is Imperfect Symmetry. Although imperfect, it looks very symmetrical and there is fascination in finding the asymmetries.

Imperfect Ideals: From the Mind to Reality

Perfect ideals exist only in the mind and can only be represented in the real world as approximations, as Imperfect Ideals. The objective is try to represent some of the shapes of things as they might have appeared in the mind of the engineer who built the road, the designer who designed the tram, the farmer who rolled the hay . . . or the architect who built the building. Trying to find geometric shapes and reproduce them as perfectly as possible, as close to the ideal as possible: perfectly straight lines, perfect circles, perfect squares, etc. But, again, as soon as the ideals are represented in the real world, they become imperfect. We can approach perfection – the Ideal –, but never reach it. So, for instance, the ideal straight line is one-dimensional – length –, but as soon as we reproduce a line in reality, no matter how thin the line is, it will have three dimensions, length, height and width (the ink on the page) – it is an Imperfect Ideal. This is the case with 'post-truth': If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Imperfect Perception: Coping with Ignorance

Finally, Imperfect Perception. The purpose is to limit the amount of information, by giving a partial and minimal view of what might be a whole (of course all views are partial, but our mind separates elements of those partial views and turns them into independent wholes: a building, a car, a person, a face, an eye . . . a postbox, *Fig 57*). The intention of the images here is to provide a minimum of information but enough for viewers to form an idea of what they are looking at and then knowing that the images are impossible.

This train of thought lead first to *Gestalt Blue Skies* and then to *Platonic Views* – usually images where 'real' shapes are transformed into simple, 'ideal', even 'abstract' shapes. The horizon becomes a straight line (*Fig 58*), a watermelon is perfectly circular, an island is totally

Fig 57 Imperfect Perception. A partial view: To some people, this is a postbox. To others it may be a flying saucer. Who knows? But in the blue sky beyond the object lie all the answers – that's where everything is, including, perhaps an infinite number of postboxes.

Fig 58: Imperfect Ideals. The natural lines of nature become straight lines imitating their ideal. The separations of air from water, water from land and one colour of sand from another are perfectly straight lines, forming long rectangles in the image.

Fig 59: Imperfect Symmetry. At first glance the picture is completely symmetrical. It's not. There's enough asymmetry to make it 'imperfect': the door handle, the shadows. the condition of the wall.

Fig 60: Sometimes the two sides of a face reflect two sides of a personality – not a dual personality, just a complicated one. Here one face is rather child-like and innocent, whereas the other shows a grittier, more experienced person.

symmetrical (Composition 82) … These are shapes that only exist in the mind. They are ideals. The intention is to reflect those ideals in an imperfect way, but closer to the shapes formed in the mind. They are ideals we strive for, but, like Sysiphus, will never reach … they are the boulder we must push up the hill. These are imperfect ideals. One part of these ideals is the question of symmetry – trying to make pictures as symmetrical as possible, not by splitting the image into two and then flipping it, but by starting with a reasonably symmetrical image and then altering parts of the picture to increase symmetry – but never completely – leaving bits that break the symmetry. In *Fig 59*, for instance the door-handle is only on the left of the door; the wall surface is damaged on one side, but not the other; the shadows are asymmetric. This question of symmetry leads on to people. We, like most animals, are more or less symmetrical. In fact many sustain that one of the characteristics of human beauty is symmetry. While symmetry is attractive, perfect symmetry in a face is just plain weird. One example is *Fig 60*. This is an oldish woman whose face is not completely symmetrical. She is, nevertheless pleasant looking. However, in this image she is portrayed twice with a perfectly symmetrical face (and only the face), one her left side, the other her right. Perfect symmetry: unsettling or what?

In the end, the purpose of this book is to reduce the subjects of the images to their simplest form – their essence, what makes something be what it is – while knowing that it is impossible.

Fig. 61: These are some of the symbols that were used to identify sporting events at the Mexico City Olympics in 1968.

Fig 61a: An important decision to make.

Fig 61b: Roadworks or 'man opening umbrella'??

Fig 61c: Fine or not fine?

Fig 62: Richard Avedon's portraits were stark, with no background or colour to distract from the essence of his subject. He only took one shot – that's it. Done.

Graphically it is sometimes reasonably easy to portray the essence of things. A few shapes, a few lines and the essence is expressed (*Fig 61*). This is basketball, this is archery, hockey, gymnastics, and so on. With very simple symbols one can also tell which is the gents' and which is the ladies' (*Fig 61a),* that there are roadworks being done (though sometimes that sign is interpreted as 'man opening umbrella', *Fig 61b*), that there is a speed limit (*Fig 61c*), that something is poisonous, etc. Reducing the visible reality to its bare essentials is more complicated, because we're no longer dealing with signposts, but with people's character, social backgrounds, cultural icons, emotions and so forth.

Richard Avedon was a fashion photographer, but today he is more remembered as a portrait photographer. Wherever he went, he carried a big roll of white paper, which he used as a backdrop for his portraits. He would stand his subject in front of this white background, talk about something which made the subject feel uncomfortable and snap – only once. Usually the photos were full frontal, plain with nothing to distract from the face and posture. He portrayed people in their essence, taking away the mask, presenting them starkly (*Fig 62*). That is similar to one of the objectives of the images in this book: present the essence of visible reality with minimum elements including abstract shapes. As it is. Without emotion: Deadpan, but pulling at the heartstrings with the neurons of the mind.

Conclusion

When putting these three concepts into practice, there are overlaps, which graphically look something like the set in *Fig 63:*

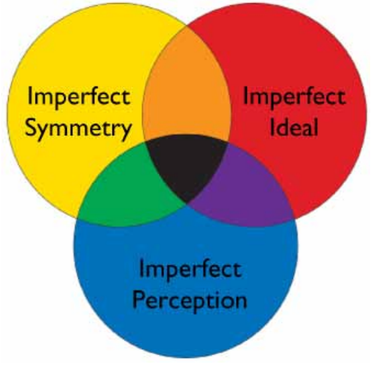


Fig 63: As in Set Theory, elements of one set can also be elements of another

Fig 64: Imperfect Symmetry: The faces are perfectly symmetrical, but not the picture itself. Note the position of the hands.

Fig 65 Imperfect Ideal: Every fruit and vegetable is very close to being a perfect circle, every box a rectangle, every line straight.

Fig 66: Imperfect perception. The viewer only has a partial view of the whole of the object, but an almost total view of the universe and everything that is knowable

Fig 67: Imperfect symmetry and perception. There is symmetry, but it's only a partial view of a larger whole.

Fig 68: Imperfect symmetry and ideals. Although the actual windows are symmetric, their reflections are not. There is no perspective and every window is exactly the same size.

Fig 69: Imperfect perception and ideals. Each 'block' has straight lines and the image is only partial, but here there is an added element: isolation.

Fig 70: All three concepts are incorporated here: Imperfect symmetry, ideal and perception.