

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

ARCHITECTURAL METAMORPHOSIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts

Visual Communications

By

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DEDICATION

To the millions of workers who construct these skyscrapers and the billions of inhabitants who live and have lived in them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

ARCHITECTURAL METAMORPHOSIS

by

Richard Frinta

In partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Visual Arts

My thesis, *Architectural Metamorphosis*, seeks to depict the organic pulse that animates life in an urban environment. My work challenges the ways in which the camera has often functioned with regard to Modern and Postmodern architecture. I photograph these impressive structures in order to record moments in which mirrored glass and steel reflect their surroundings and become crystallized into a solitary image. I approach each skyscraper as a living being, sometimes to use it as a mirror reflecting its surrounding and other times to create an optical veil through which it becomes diffused.

INFLUENCES

I was born in New York City, the birthplace of glass paneled buildings. As a child, I gazed upwards in awe of their majestic presence that scraped at the clouds. I admired buildings constructed in architectural styles ranging from Art Deco (Rockefeller Center, The Chrysler Building, The Empire State Building); to the International style of Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe's Seagram's Building; to Modernist (The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Whitney Museum). On the first birthday that I remember, I asked for a Kodak camera to record family trips. Only when I moved to Los Angeles did I consider what I had left behind, and my photographs did not include any east coast skyscrapers. Subsequent return visits to New York gave me a sense of photographic urgency.

An early influence had been the photographs Berenice Abbott produced for the Works Progress Administration during the mid to late 1930's. She was hired to document the transformation of the New York City skyline. Her black and white, birds-eye view photographs of midtown and lower Manhattan gave a new perspective on the expanding city. Unlike Abbott, I photographed from a ground-level perspective and documented turn-of-the-century New York City. I used black and white film recording the high contrast lighting effects and strong shadows. Later I began to document the city in an effort to remember its details, similar to nineteenth century French photographer Eugene Atget's views of Paris. Other influences were Swiss

photographer Robert Frank's unique perspective on America, recently discovered American photographer Vivian Maier's images of Chicago, and American photographers Diane Arbus' and Garry Winogrand's iconic black and white pictures of New York City street life.

A confluence of experiences changed my main objectives as a photographer of modern city life: my first purchase of a digital camera in 2005, the burgeoning construction of reflective glass paneled skyscrapers in downtown Los Angeles and Westwood, and the realization that these buildings would be exposed to the same environmental elements that organic life undergoes.

THE ORGANIC PROCESS

At street level, the world becomes my studio. I consider the millions of workers who construct these buildings as well as those who spend half their waking lives within these structures. Working with RAW color files, I use a digital camera to photograph Modern and Post Modern skyscrapers in order to construct a somewhat straightforward representation, a gestural impression, or a geometric abstraction. Sometimes these colossal edifices seem to resist gravity and other times they encourage it. In some of my large scale photographs, they melt under the sun or resist the wind's forceful impact. In post-production, digital manipulation is limited to nuanced adjustments of value and contrast. After much thought and experimentation, I came to realize that camera movement is the most optimal process to achieve these effects.

I photograph the organic presence of a skyscraper by considering its geometry and architectural skeleton, which comprise the lines of its steel, weight-bearing construction. My photographs rely on each building's vertical presence and the reflective panels that encase it. I am drawn to large cities, and, as an American, began my thesis project by photographing in the United States. Most of the photographs were made in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and New York.

METHODOLOGY

I use a tripod when photographing as well as a variety of long exposures and different camera movements during those exposures. I approach each skyscraper in three phases. In phase one, long exposures and exaggerated camera movements yield gestural photographs. In phase two, long exposures combined with a variety of angles while the camera is moving. In phase three, the exposure times are shorter and the camera movement is minimal, producing a more faithful representation of the skyscraper.

This approach requires patience and attention to the nuances of light. I need to be at the right place and wait for the right time to photograph. I visit and photograph a location several times in order to survey the quality of light throughout the day in relation to the architecture. The unique atmosphere in different cities produces a variety of colors. I make phase three images throughout the course of a day, while phase one

and two photographs are made using early morning and late afternoon sunlight.

HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY

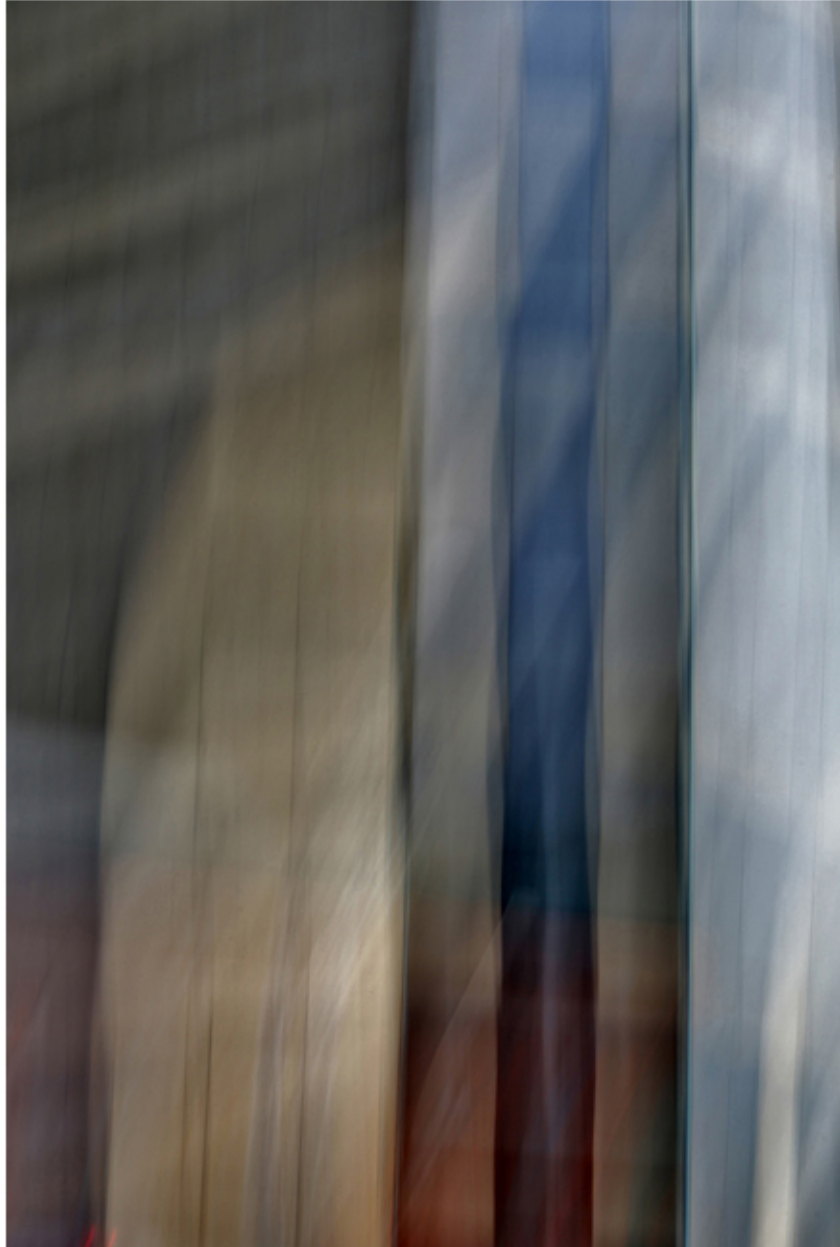
My photographs are influenced by the work of many architectural photographers who use composition, high contrast lighting, and hard edges. The history of architectural photography began with French inventor Nicephore Niepce's 1816 photograph of a birdhouse. Ten years later, Niepce made the first surviving photograph, *View from the Window at Le Gras* (1826), a bird's eye view of the buildings outside his studio. Nineteenth century French photographers Maxime Du Camp, Felix Teynard, Gustave Le Gray, and Francis Frith traveled throughout the Middle East and Orient to photograph temples and other architectural wonders. Eugene Atget bridged the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by photographing old Paris before its architectural transformation. Many architectural photographs in the early twentieth century were made in New York City. Eighty percent of the buildings over twenty stories were located in midtown or lower Manhattan, and Bernice Abbott photographed this skyward transformation.

THE FUTURE OF ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY

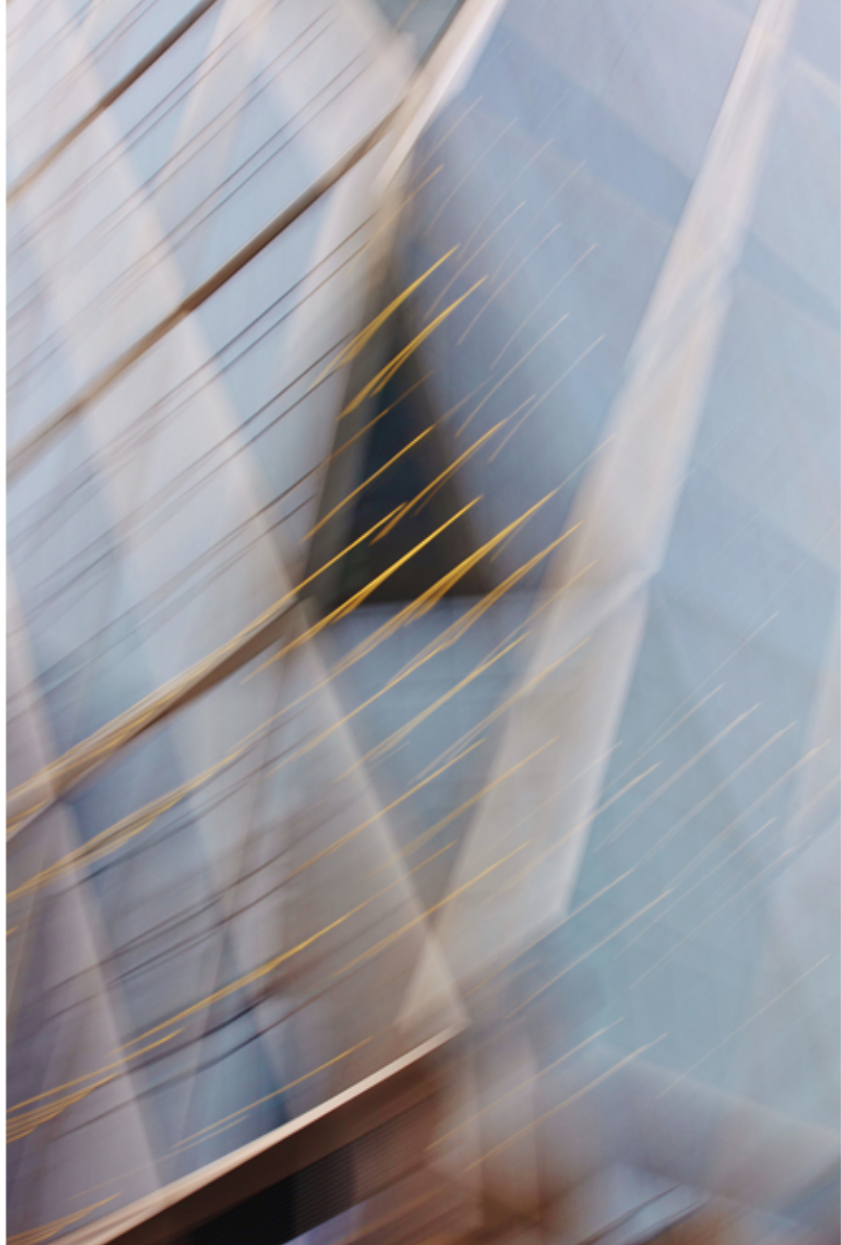
The first years of the twenty-first century have witnessed an incredible proliferation of building, primarily in the Middle East and Far East nations. Some of these buildings

have staggering altitudes and present new challenges for photographers. Whereas the Empire State Building was inspired by the form of a pencil and its function was a place of business, contemporary and future skyscrapers function as multi-purpose complexes, complete with parks, gymnasiums, opera houses, shopping centers, and cemeteries. Photographers who document these structures face challenges in obtaining unobstructed and cohesive views. Perhaps technological breakthroughs (f512?) will help the architectural photographers keep pace?

In conclusion, contemporary architecture is experiencing a significant transformation similar to that witnessed by Berenice Abbott. The second decade of this century has an organic bias with regard to architecture; buildings seem fluid, defying gravity and right angles. I have faith that the remainder of the twenty-first century will stay on a similar path of Architectural Metamorphosis.

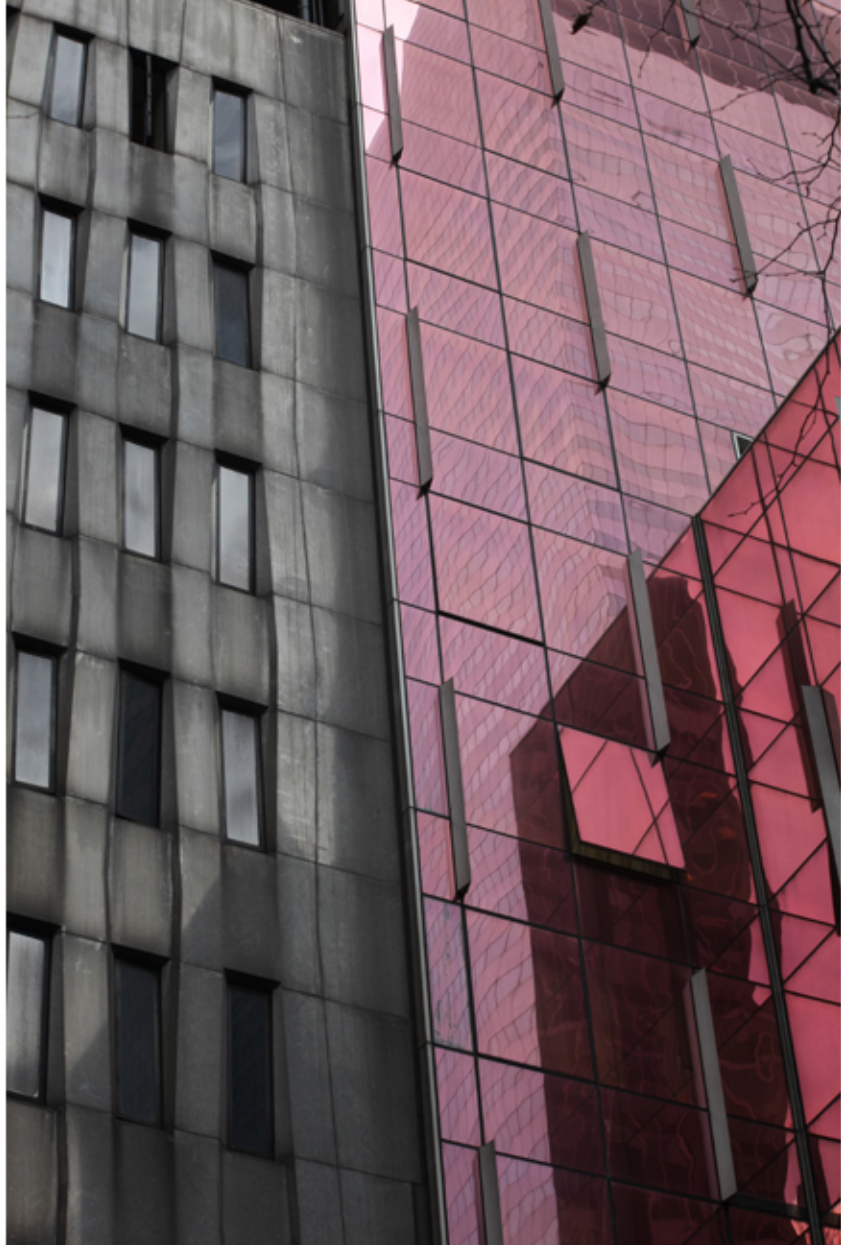


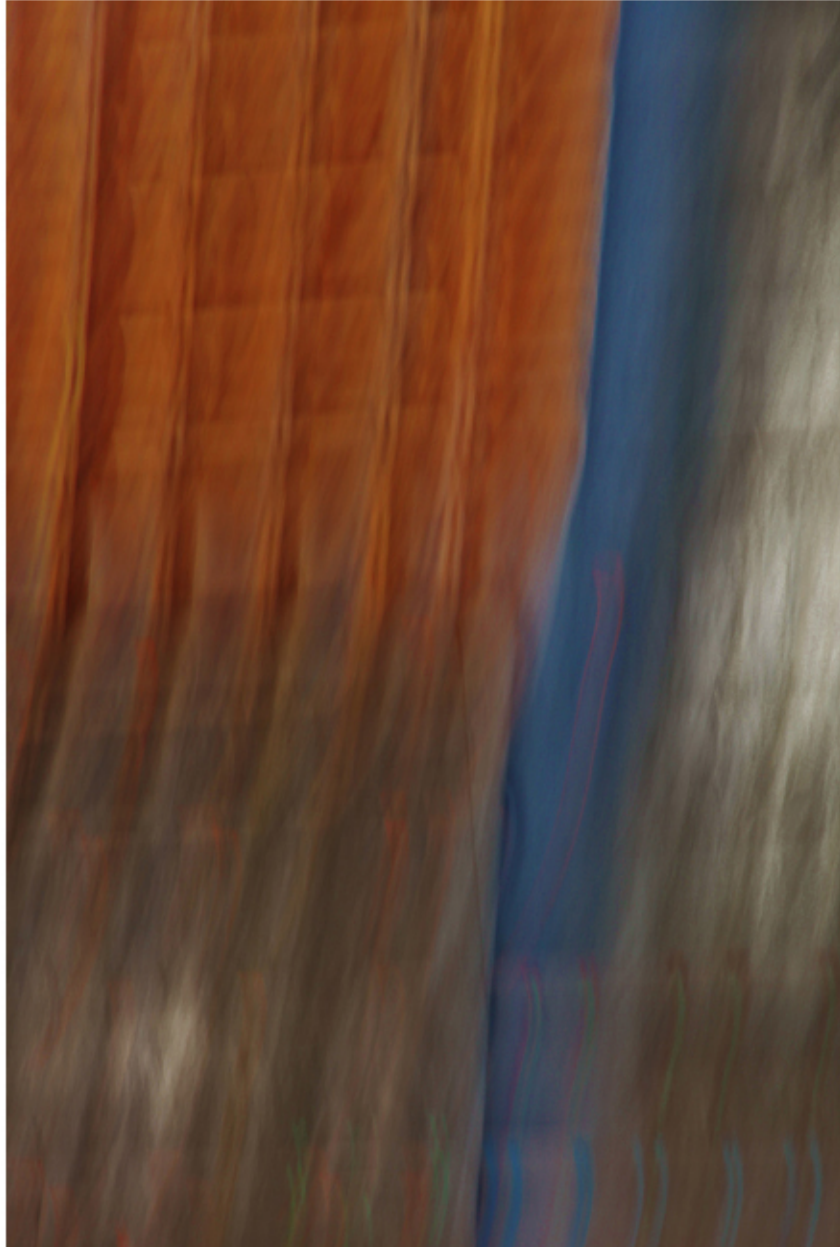


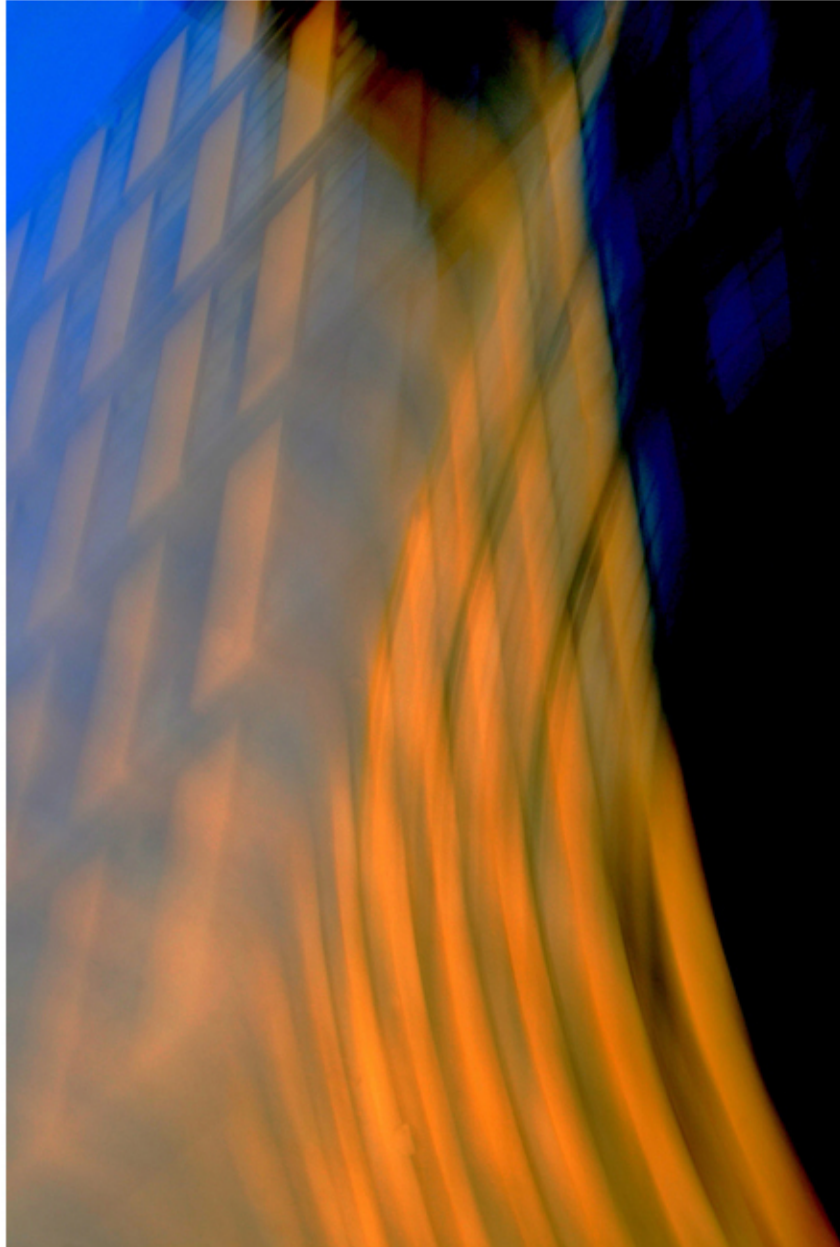


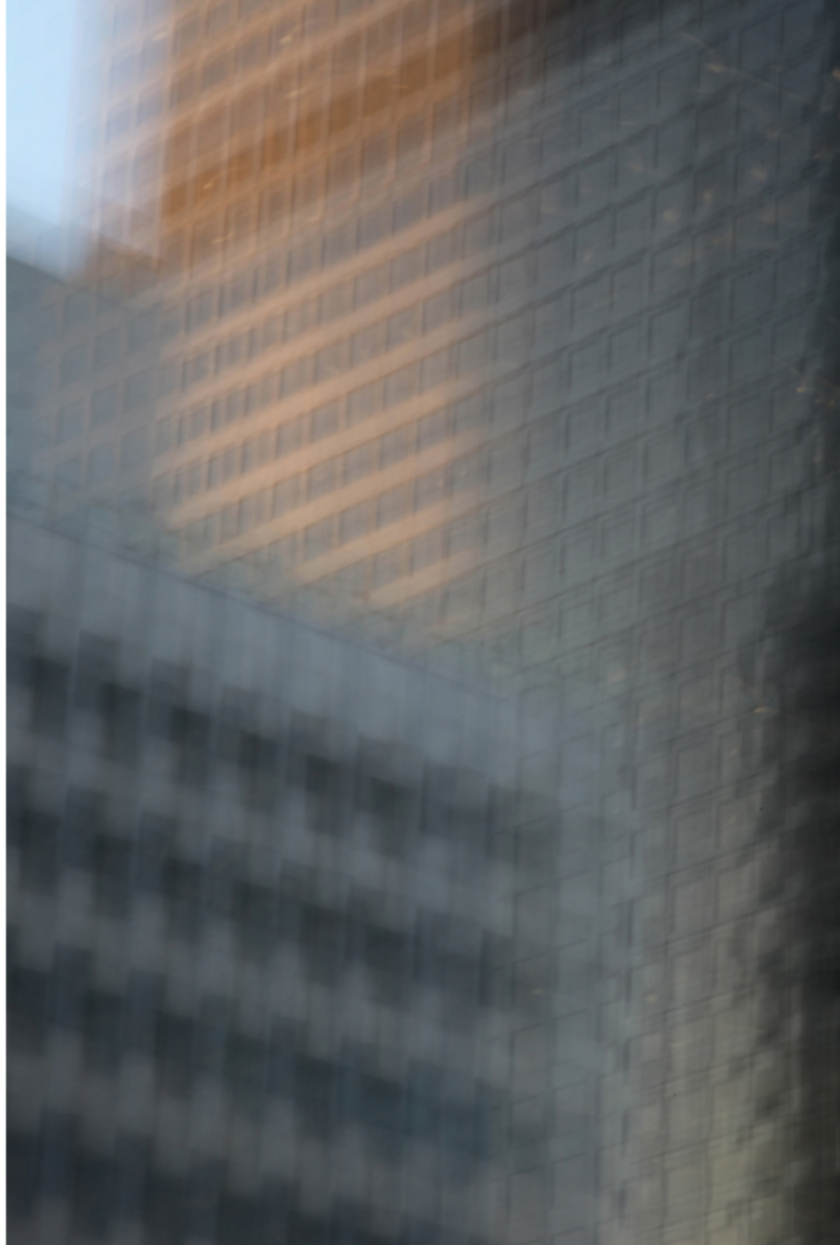


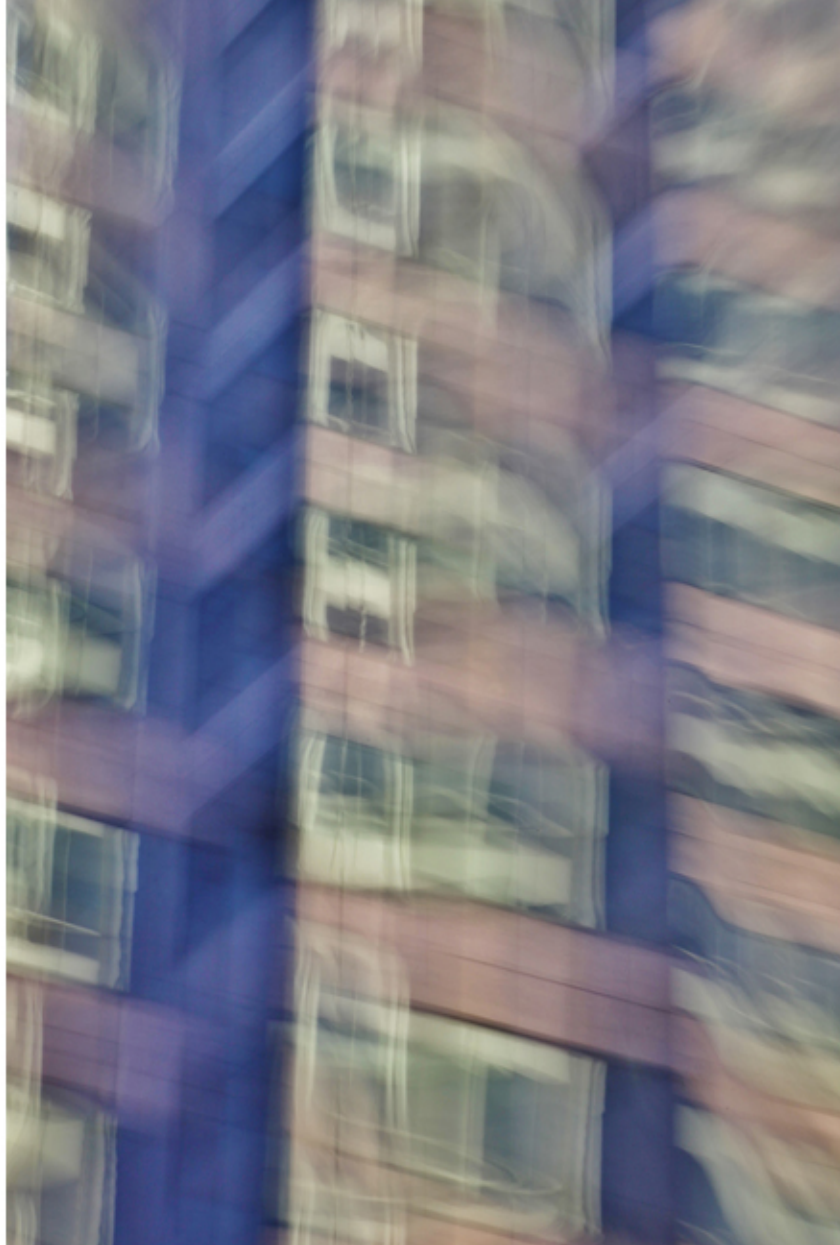


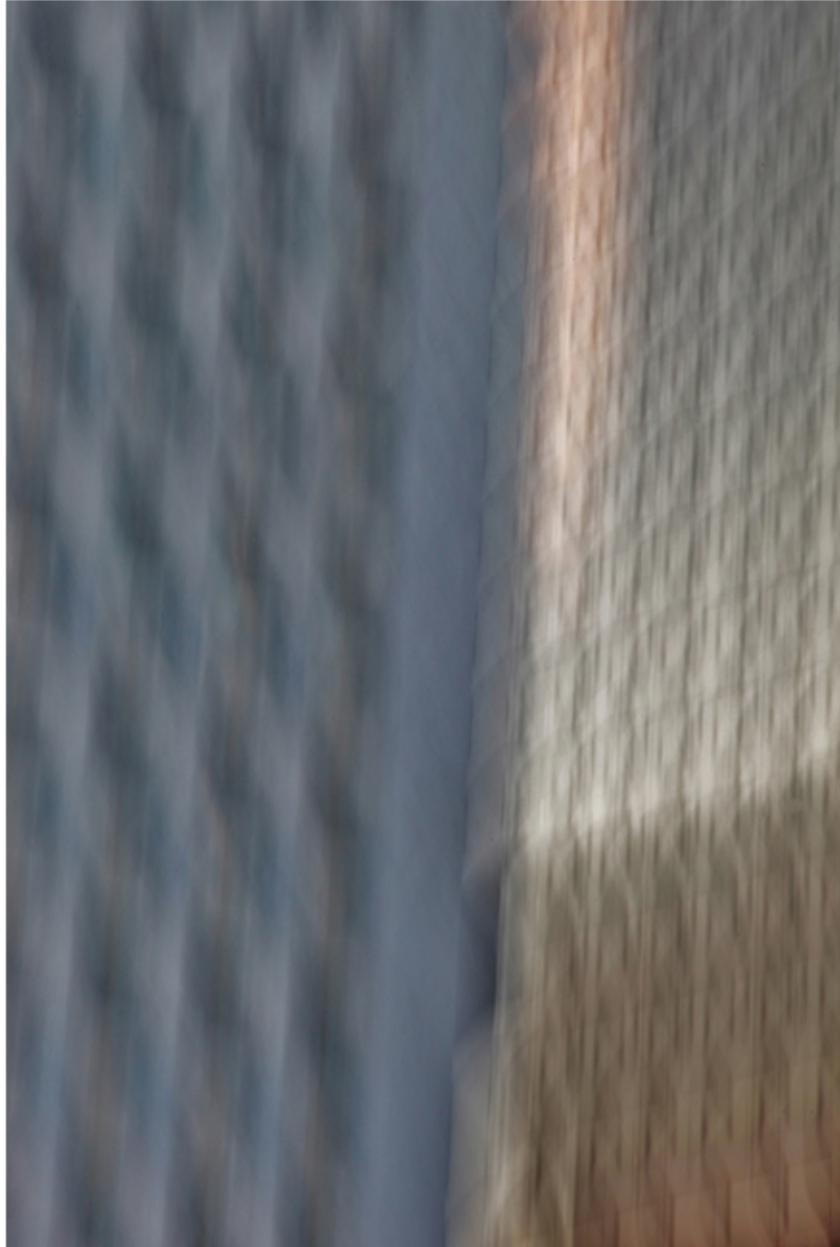


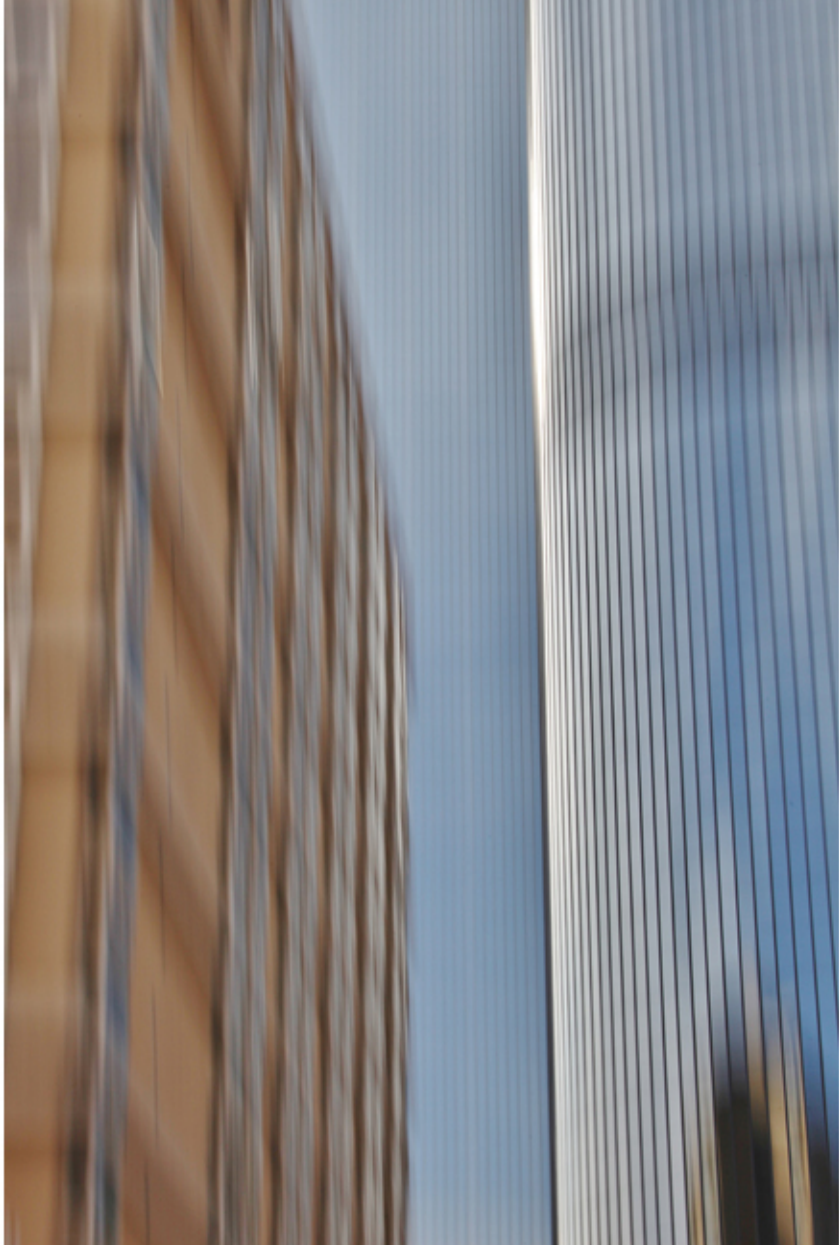












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