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WIDEWALLS

THESE ABSTRACT PHOTOGRAPHERS REDEFINE PERCEPTION OF THE REAL

Angie Kordic
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What exactly is it that makes abstraction in photography so distinct and alluring? The truth is that abstract photographers can turn anything into a concept, an idea, a metaphysical interpretation of an element of reality. It is their choice of composition, point of view, focus and technical approach, among other things, that makes all the difference, as they transform the world as we know it into an abstract web of forms, lines and colors. Ever since the Surrealist masters, this form of image-making has been among the most popular – but also the most challenging ones, as its artists continued to prove the fact that photography isn't just a simple click of a shutter – au contraire! It takes a lot of creativity and imagination to see beyond the surface and capture the invisible – which is why these particular photo makers now stand out as those who have set the bar for generations to come.

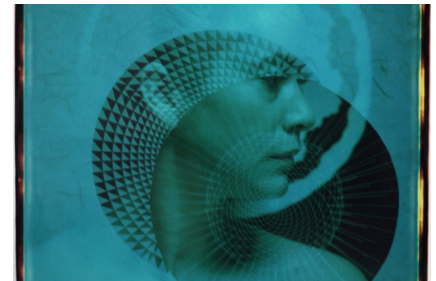
Editors' Tip: Wolfgang Tillmans: Abstract Pictures

Wolfgang Tillmans is without a doubt one of the most prominent practitioners of abstract photography today. In the past decade he has pursued this tack, making wholly non-representational photographs that explore processes of exposure. From the delicate veils of color in the Blushes and Freischwimmer series, and the sculptural paper drops made of folded or rolled-up photographic paper, to the colorfully compelling photos of the Lighter series, the printed object itself, divorced from its reproductive function, is always the point. Designed by the photographer, and with 275 color reproductions of these images, Abstract Pictures – now in paperback – impressively demonstrates how fruitfully Tillmans has mined this terrain.



Ellen Carey - The Polaroid Artist

Self-described as a lens-based practitioner, Ellen Carey is known for her iconic Polaroid works, also called Pulls, which merge the concepts of major art movements such as Abstraction and Minimalism into single images. Her artworks bring a unique and compelling range of form and hue and high impact compositions in tandem with inventive methods of expression, resulting in bold, innovative, experimental visceral and physical artworks. Ellen Carey also uses her large Polaroid 20x24 camera to create site-specific installations, and is surely one of the most creative and forward-thinking abstract photographers out there.



Ellen Carey – Self Portrait, 1987. Courtesy of artist and M+B Gallery, Los Angeles

Wolfgang Tillmans - The Darkroom Experimenter

Working in a variety of genres, such as portraits, still lifes, sky photographs, astrophotography, aerial shots and landscapes, Wolfgang Tillmans managed to establish himself as one of the leading fine art photographers in Germany and worldwide. The first non-English artist to win the prestigious Turner Prize, he initially started taking snapshots of his friends, but perhaps he's most famous for his stunning abstract photography, either created as a result of technical and chemical experimentations in the darkroom, as collages, or the print of a monochrome laser copier. In fact, the imagery made in the darkroom are the most captivating ones, as they evoke the very essence of an abstraction by creating the idea from scratch, rather than modifying reality.



Wolfgang Tillmans
Image via imageobjecttext.wordpress.

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Aaron Siskind - Inspired by Abstract Expressionism

Influenced by Abstract Expressionism and, in particular, the paintings of Franz Kline, Aaron Siskind dedicated himself to photographing details of nature and architecture, with a focus on the texture, lines and patterns. In fact, his photographs were exhibited next to expressionist paintings more than often. A photographer by accident – he received a camera as a gift – he started off with documentary shots, only to realise his interest hid in more conceptual ideas of the surrounding world. In the manner of a proper master of Geometric abstract art, Aaron Siskind worked carefully, making sure to frame his image the best way he could in order to obtain something not immediately identifiable.

Thomas Ruff - Master of Technology

Maybe you've come across the work of Thomas Ruff through his popular Nudes, which could also be considered examples of abstract photography in a way – based on internet pornography imagery, they are digitally processed and obscured without any camera or traditional photographic device. The technology plays a great role in the production of Thomas Ruff, as the photographer often uses it to achieve the impressive visual results – take his recent Photographs, created without a camera, which depict abstract shapes, lines and spirals in seemingly random formations with varying degrees of transparency and illumination. This way, the photographer makes new visual possibilities of the medium and questions its artistic qualities.

Penelope Umbrico - Suns from Flickr

In her practice, Penelope Umbrico uses search engines and picture sharing websites to create appropriated art. Exploring the consumerism, its marketing and the impact of social media, she isolates moments from consumer product mail-order catalogs too, and websites like Craigslist and eBay. Her most famous project to date is Suns from Flickr, for which she found a total of 541,795 pictures of sunsets, as they prove to be the most photographed subject ever. The more she would look it up, the more results she would obtain, which resulted in multiple editions of this project, all of which were exhibited in form of installations in 2006, 2008 and 2009.

Barbara Kasten - Two-Dimensional Three-Dimensionality

Barbara Kasten started off as a painter and textile artist, as these were the fields she studied. But shortly after graduating, she turned to photography and, under the influence of Bauhaus and the abstract photography of László Moholy-Nagy, the artist began recording three-dimensional spaces onto a two-dimensional plane of the photographic paper, often using props like mirrors and lights for the best visual results and pure abstraction. But Barbara Kasten did not abandon the above mentioned studies – using materials such as plexiglas and mesh, she constructs large-scale sets that rely on shadow, light and reflection and then photographs them from angles that reveal their geometric compositions the best way possible.

William Klein - Abstraction in Black and White

The truth is that William Klein is a photographer whose social documentary works and fashion images, all within wide-angle and telephoto shots, are among the most famous ones in the history of photography. However, he is also a sculpture, filmmaker and painter, and in the early 1950s, he began making experimental abstract photographs of his paintings while they were in motion. His black and white photographs are completely dedicated to contrast and intriguing forms and shapes, and most of the time the viewers can't tell what it is these images depict exactly. Sometimes the abstraction would overlap with his fashion or documentary shots, thus creating almost new genres that are even more captivating and alluring.

Kim Keever - Dreamlike Landscapes

Kim Keever is someone who creates his photographs from scratch. They're large-scale, impressive shots of color explosions, dreamy landscapes, mysterious swirls and smoke-like masses. They're actually meticulously hand-made structures consisting of 200-gallon tanks, miniature topographies and water, in which he then dissolves color pigments and applies coloured lights to, in order to create the ephemeral atmospheres we see in his photographs. He must be quick, as these structures will disappear very quickly. As such, Kim Keever's abstract photography references and is inspired by a broad history of landscape painting, especially that of Romanticism, the Hudson River School and Luminism.

Ori Gersht - Of Sublime Colors

Ori Gersht is an Israeli fine art photographer whose main topics include death, trauma, violence, loss and the concepts of beauty. One of his most famous works come from a series which features classic still life compositions of flowers and fruits which gloriously explore before the photographic lens to explore the relationship between photography and cutting-edge technology. Ori Gersht's more sublime works depict the skies of London, captured without the use of any filters or other manipulation. Reminiscing Mark Rothko, these photographs test the medium's ability to transmit the splendid colors of nature during the threshold between daylight and nighttime.