

Tony Karp
Techno-Impressionism
Art and Technology



Contents

Introduction

A friend of mine once told me that
my problem is
my work doesn't have a distinctive style.

Actually, my work has
a number of distinctive styles.

And that's what this book is about.

Note: Keep an eye out for the **green button** that appears in the lower right corner of some pages. Click it and you will see a detail of the picture on that page or, in some cases, there will be a surprise.

Then click the red button to return to the original picture.



In the nineteenth century, the salons and juried exhibitions tended to favor the larger and more realistic entries, some of them quite complex in their subject matter. This trend had been underway for some time, but it reached its zenith just about the time that something would come along that would upset the balance of things -- the invention of photography.

Even the crudest early photographs, still in black and white, showed that the contest for realism had been lost. Photography soon advanced into pictorial and artistic scenes, and groups were formed to promote photography as an art form.

This is one of the things that motivated the Impressionist painters. While most of them were classically trained, they saw an end to the age of realism in painting. What they did was to remove some of the explicit detail from their work, creating an "impression" of their subjects. At the same time, they turned to simpler, everyday themes, taking place in the world around them.

Their work struck a chord with the viewing public, one that still resonates today. When you look at these works, you are not inundated with a flood of detail. Your mind fills in the gaps in what's missing. As a result, everyone who sees one of these works will see a slightly different version, leaving some of the interpretation to the imagination of the viewer.

And now, in the twenty-first century, the same goals motivate the Techno-Impressionist artists to break free from the "digital" technology of their era in their quest for impressionistic images, created with technology.

D I V I S I O N I S M

In Divisionism, an image is divided into shapes, each with a single tone or color. Divisionism flattens color and space into solid forms, yielding a new visual language.

When viewed close-up, the breakdown of the image into shapes can be clearly seen, but when viewed from a distance, details from the original image mysteriously appear. You will see a number of different impressions, depending on the viewing distance. And, as with Impressionism, each viewer will see their own unique versions of the picture.

Note that in Divisionism, the picture is divided into shapes based on the image itself. These can be areas that have the same color or tone.. Different methods of dividing yield shapes with more or less detail, sharp or smoothed edges, and varying sets of colors, but always derived from the original image.

In some pictures, the shapes are floated above the canvas to give a three-dimensional effect. In other pictures, the shapes may be outlined so their shape is apparent.



"We are all the subjects of impressions,
and some of us seek to convey the
impressions to others.

In the art of communicating impressions
lies the power of generalizing without
losing the logical connection of parts to
the whole which satisfies the mind."

- George Inness

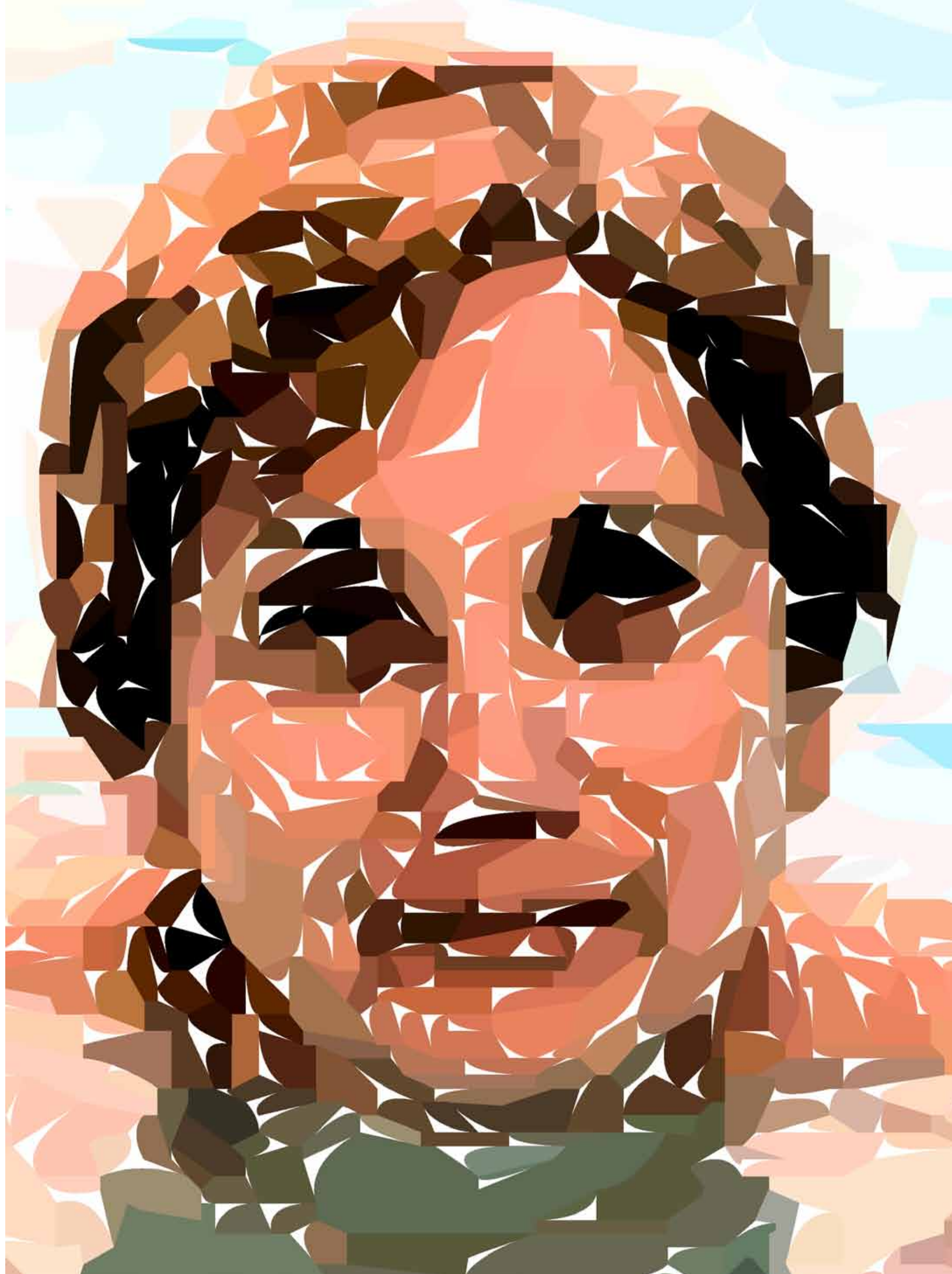


Stay true to your vision.

The artists who pursued their own
unique visions ended up being
shown in museums.

The artists who tried to please the
most people ended up being
shown in motel rooms.





This is my muse.

Just as Dali had his Gala
and Picasso had
his many women,
I, too, have
my very own muse.

She has inspired me for
more than forty years.

She is featured in
many of my works.

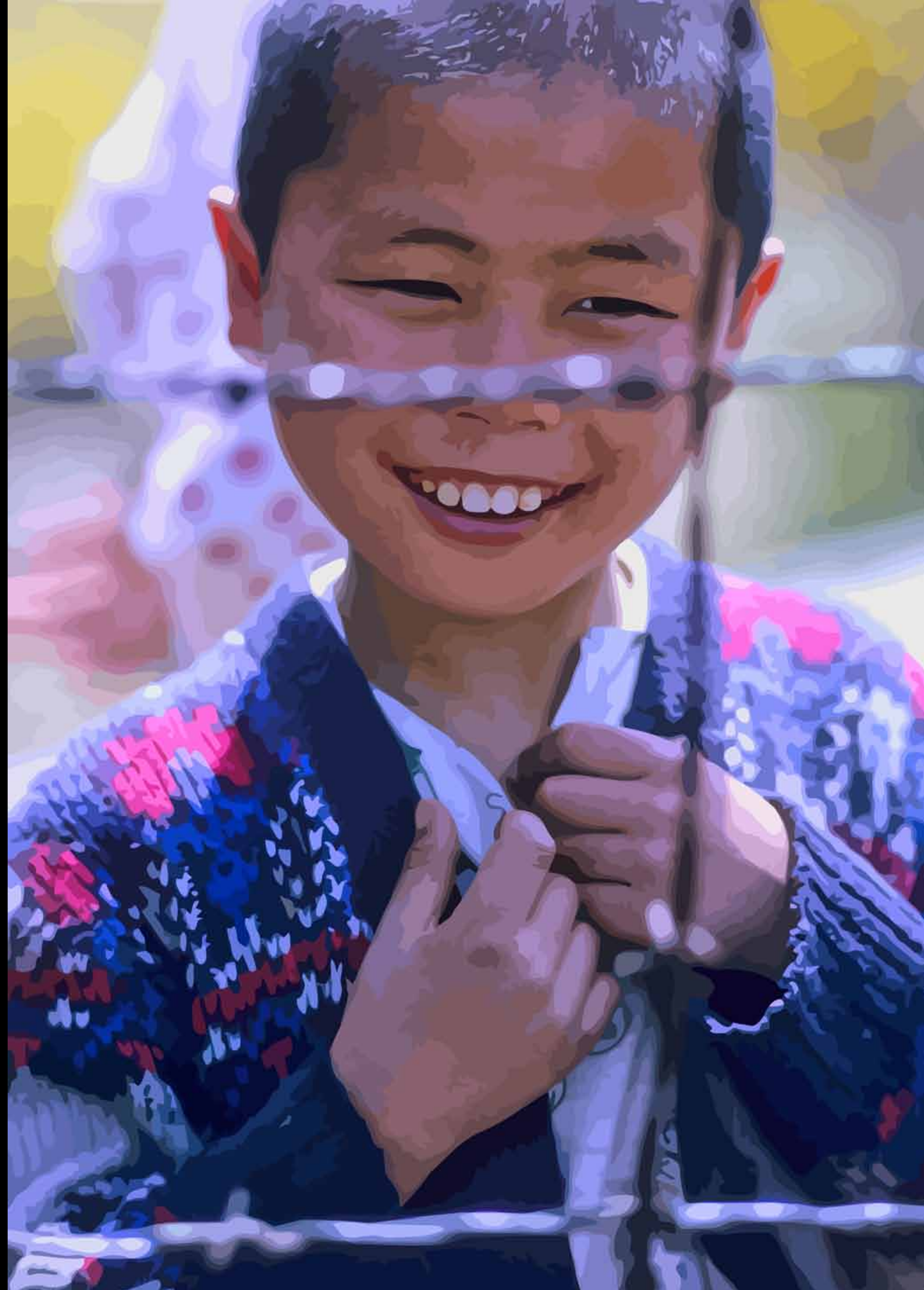














Artist's statement – Goals

1. To make art that is interesting. Not good or great or big or beautiful or new or different or exciting or shocking.

Just interesting. The rest will follow on its own. If you go to an art museum, you will find people clustered in the rooms with the interesting art.

2. To make as much art as I can

3. To show my art to as many people as I can







To me, art is playing and experimentation. You need curiosity, a sense of adventure, and the willingness to follow a trail to see where it leads. And if you can have fun at the same time, so much the better.

Art is about technology and technology is about art. You cannot have one without the other. I have worked in both areas and the skills that I have developed work in synergy. I used art when I was an architect designing computer systems. Now, I use computer technology to create art.

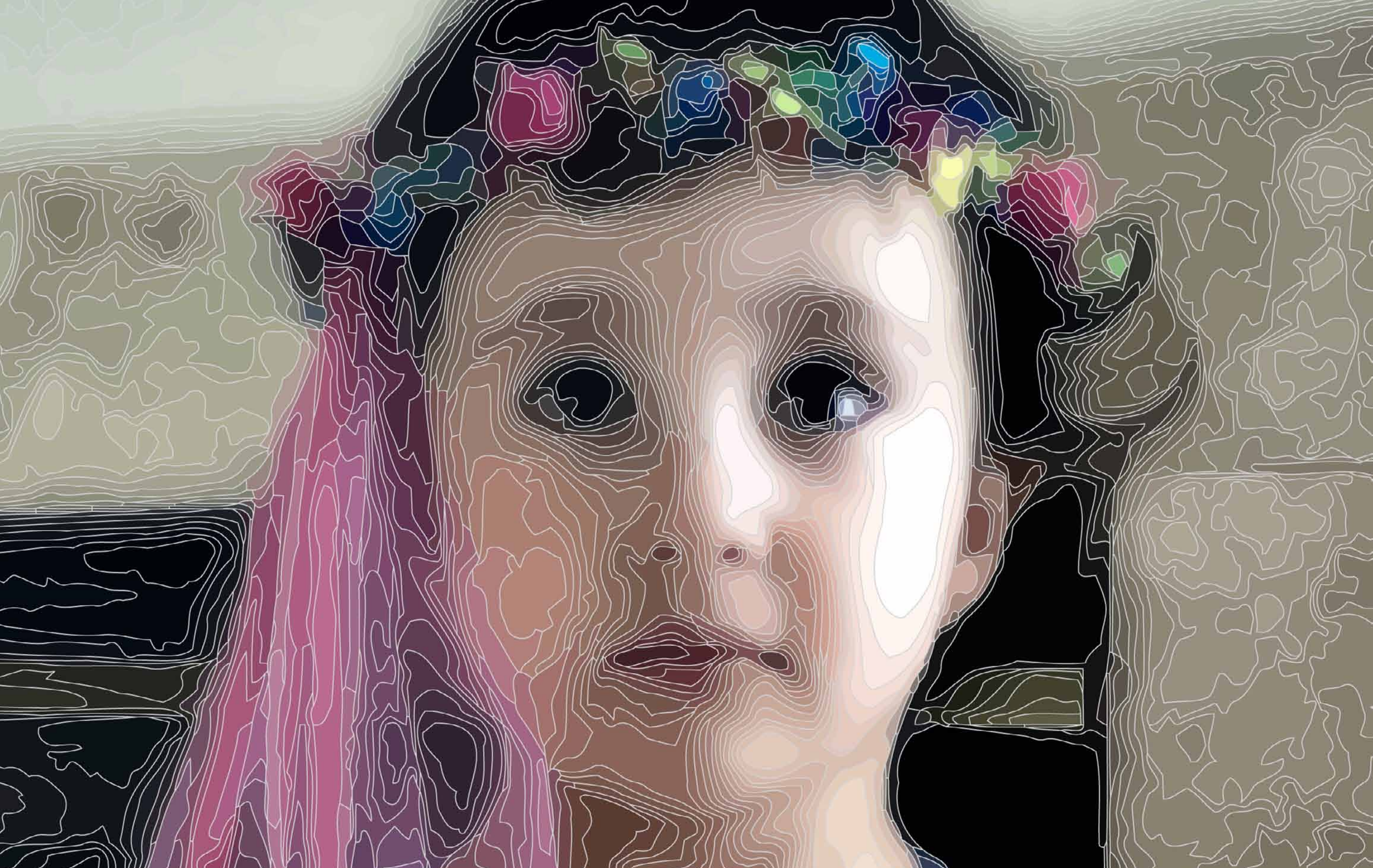
Art has always been supported by technology and, when done correctly, the technology is invisible and you see only the art.

Sometimes I start with one thing and end up with something else. And sometimes it is just the opposite.

I try to create art that is interesting. There is good art, bad art, and great art, but very little of it is interesting. When I show somebody a picture and they say it is interesting, I regard that as a compliment, since that is what I am striving for.









"In our time there are many artists who do something because it is new; they see their value and their justification in this newness. They are deceiving themselves; novelty is seldom the essential. This has to do with one thing only; making a subject better from its intrinsic nature."

- Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

"Ars Longa, Techno Brevis"

- Henri de Toulouse-LaTech

"If Vincent van Gogh had had a telephone we would not, today, have Vincent's letters to Theo. We would have van Gogh's phone bills."

- Henri de Toulouse-LaTech

"Stay off the critical path.
You might run into a critic."

- Vincent van Gui

P A T T E R N I S M

In Patternism, an image is divided into shapes, based on a regular pattern.

While Divisionism breaks the image into shapes based on values found in the original image, Patternism breaks the image into a set of regular shapes, such as squares or rectangles that have no relation to the original image.

Images produced with Patternism seem to change when viewed up close or far away. When viewed close-up, the breakdown of the image into patterns can be clearly seen, but when viewed from a distance, details from the original image mysteriously appear.

The viewer will see a number of different impressions, depending on the viewing distance. And, as with Impressionism, each viewer will see their own unique versions of the picture.

First, look close. What do you see?

Brown squares, in various shades, with some highlighting at the edges. You can see that it's the shape of a face, but not much detail.

Now, back away a little bit and what do you see? The squares are blending together a little bit.

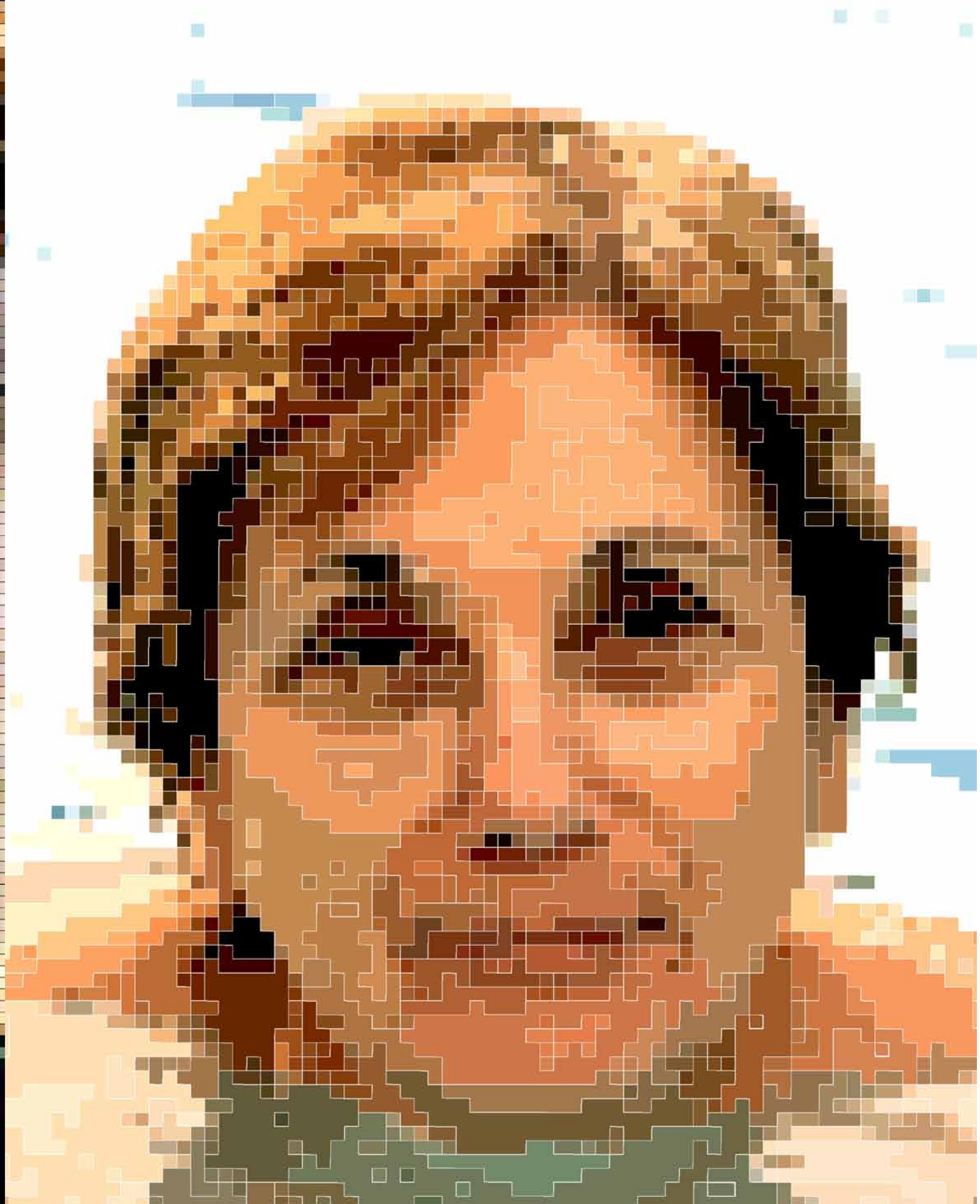
Keep moving back more and more. Slowly, the features of the face are revealed.

At the right distance, you can see the face clearly.

This is one of the aspects of Patternism and Divisionism as well. Pictures that can be viewed in several different ways.

Try this different-distance viewing on the pictures in this book and you will get some interesting surprises.







A lady goes to an opening at a fashionable art gallery.

As the show is unveiled, it's just the artist, standing in the corner of an empty gallery, under a spotlight, naked.

The crowd applauds and shouts its approval.

"The artist has become the object of his art."

"He's reached a new level of abstraction and minimalism."

"The art event of the year."

"Truly cutting edge art."

And so forth.

As the lady leaves the gallery, a man in a raincoat approaches her.

Suddenly, he whips open his raincoat.

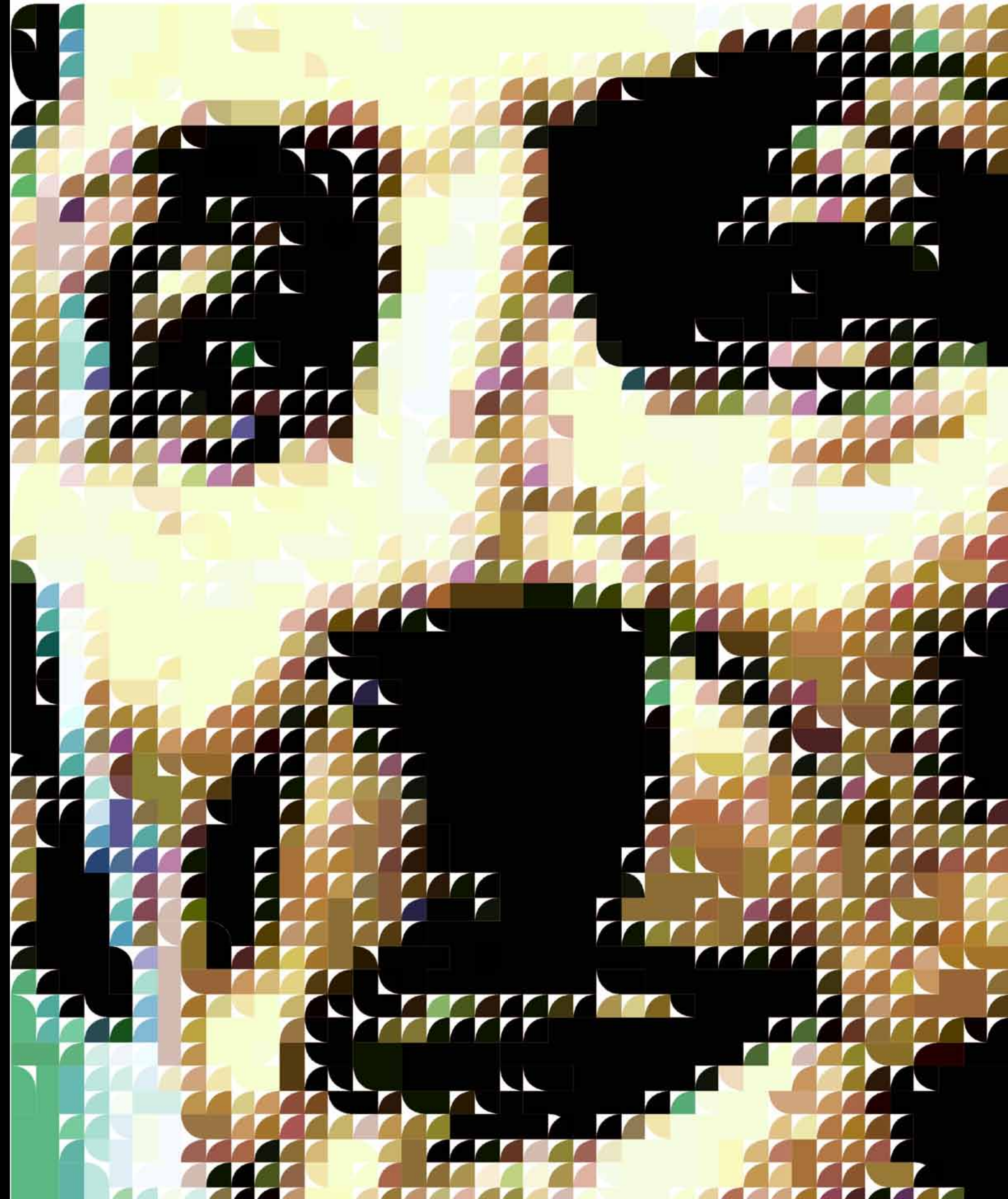
"Omigod," she cries, "another artist!"

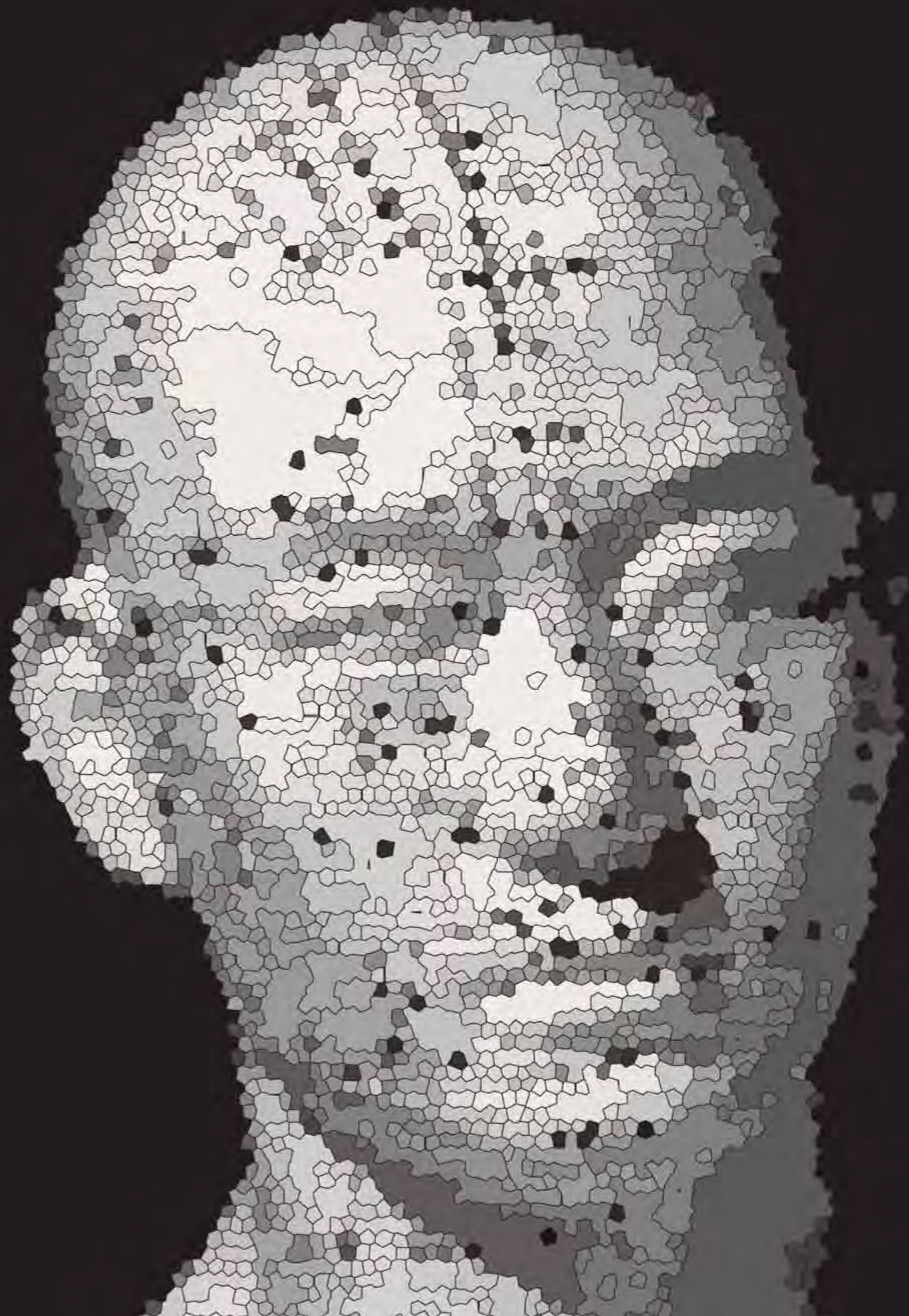
Two of the terms that I avoid are “digital” and “virtual.” Although I use computers, I am not a “digital artist.” Although I have a museum on the Internet, it is not a “virtual museum.” It is as real as the Met or the Louvre.

Fifty years ago, I worked as a photographer. Today, even though I use photography, I think of myself as an artist. Photography is just one of the tools that I use to produce my art.

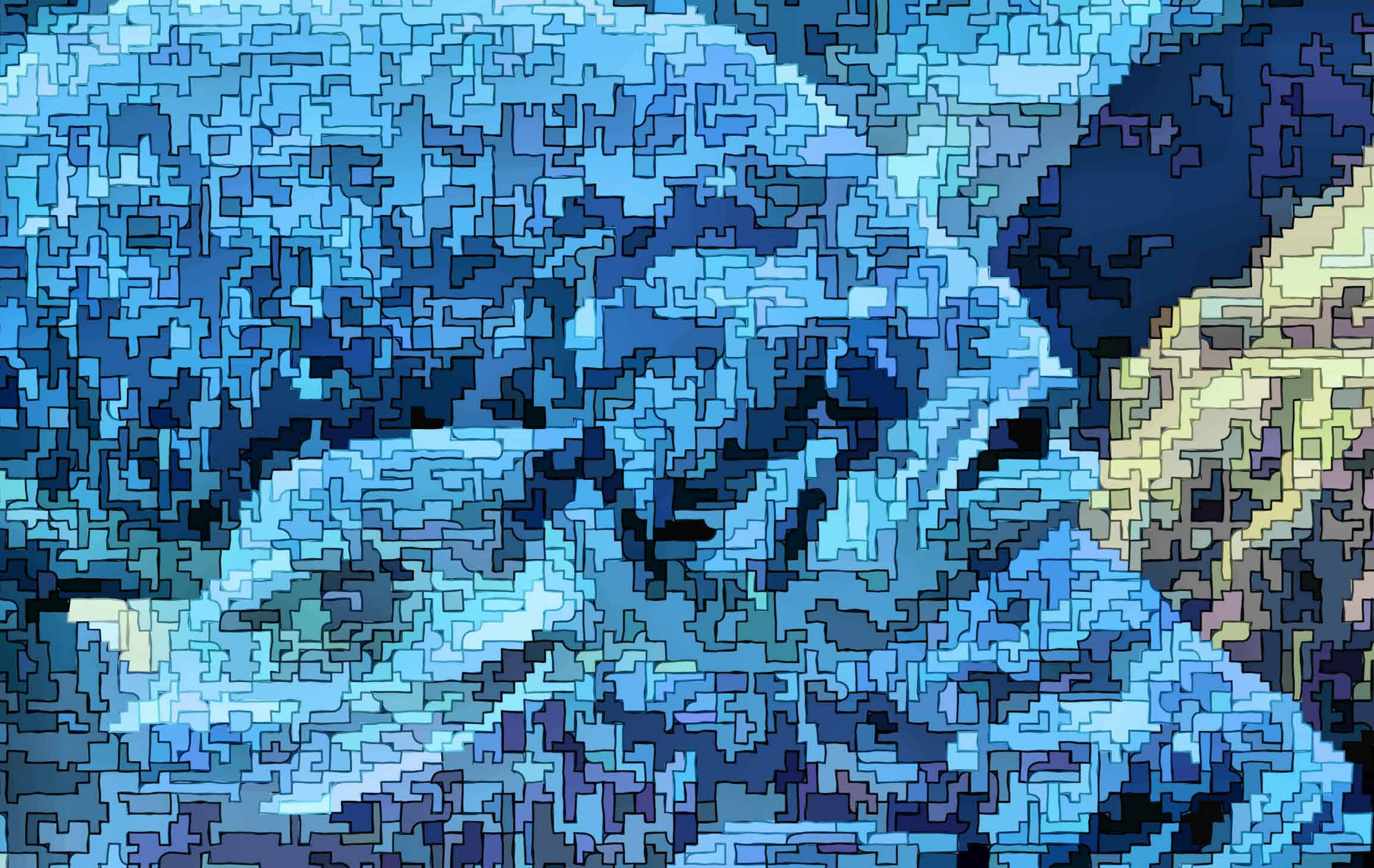
I do not have a “style” in the manner of Renoir or Cezanne. Like Picasso, I am easily bored and, rather than pursuing a technique endlessly, move on to something new.

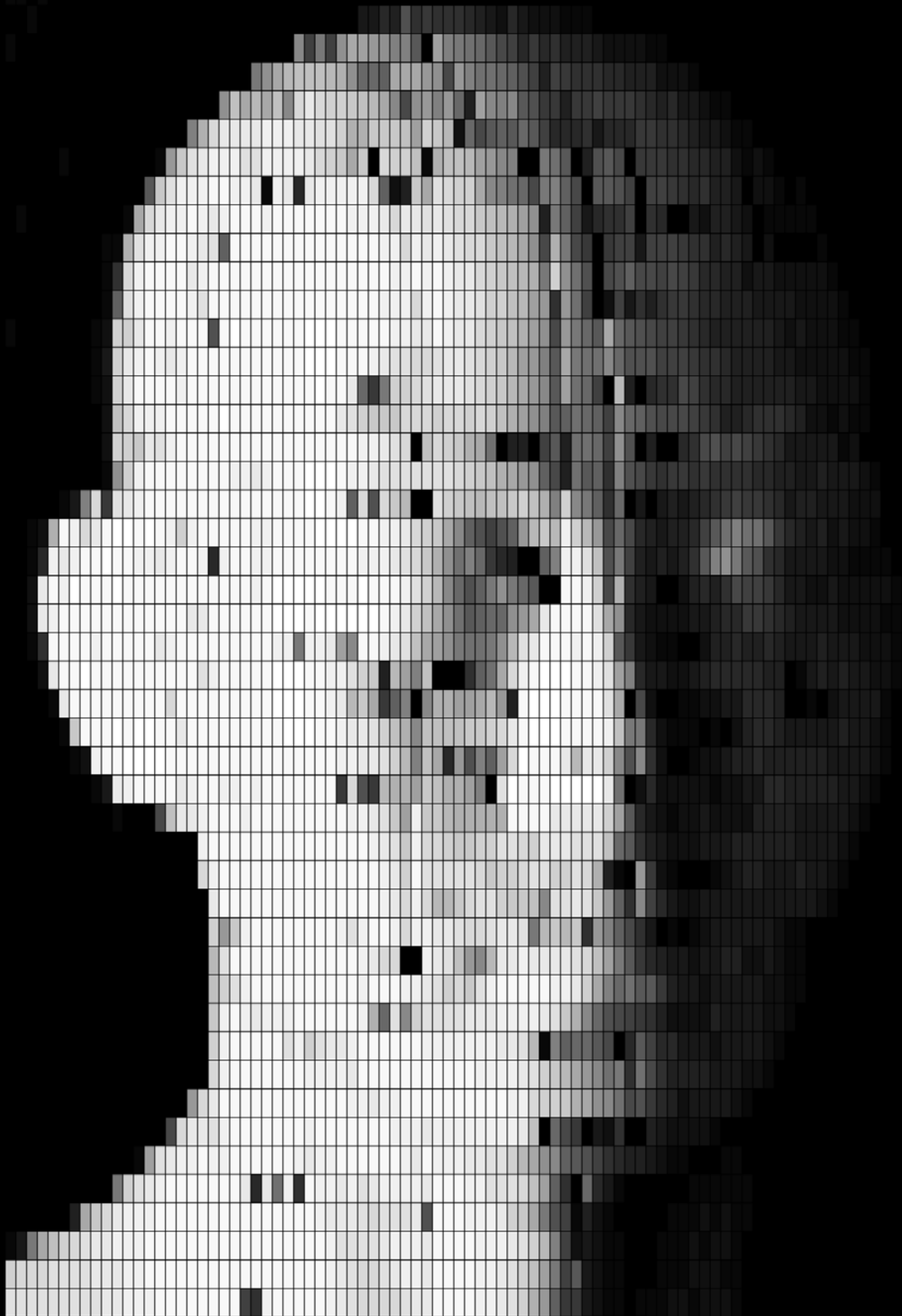
So, while my work falls into many genres, there are several themes that move through it. They are represented in the chapters of this book.









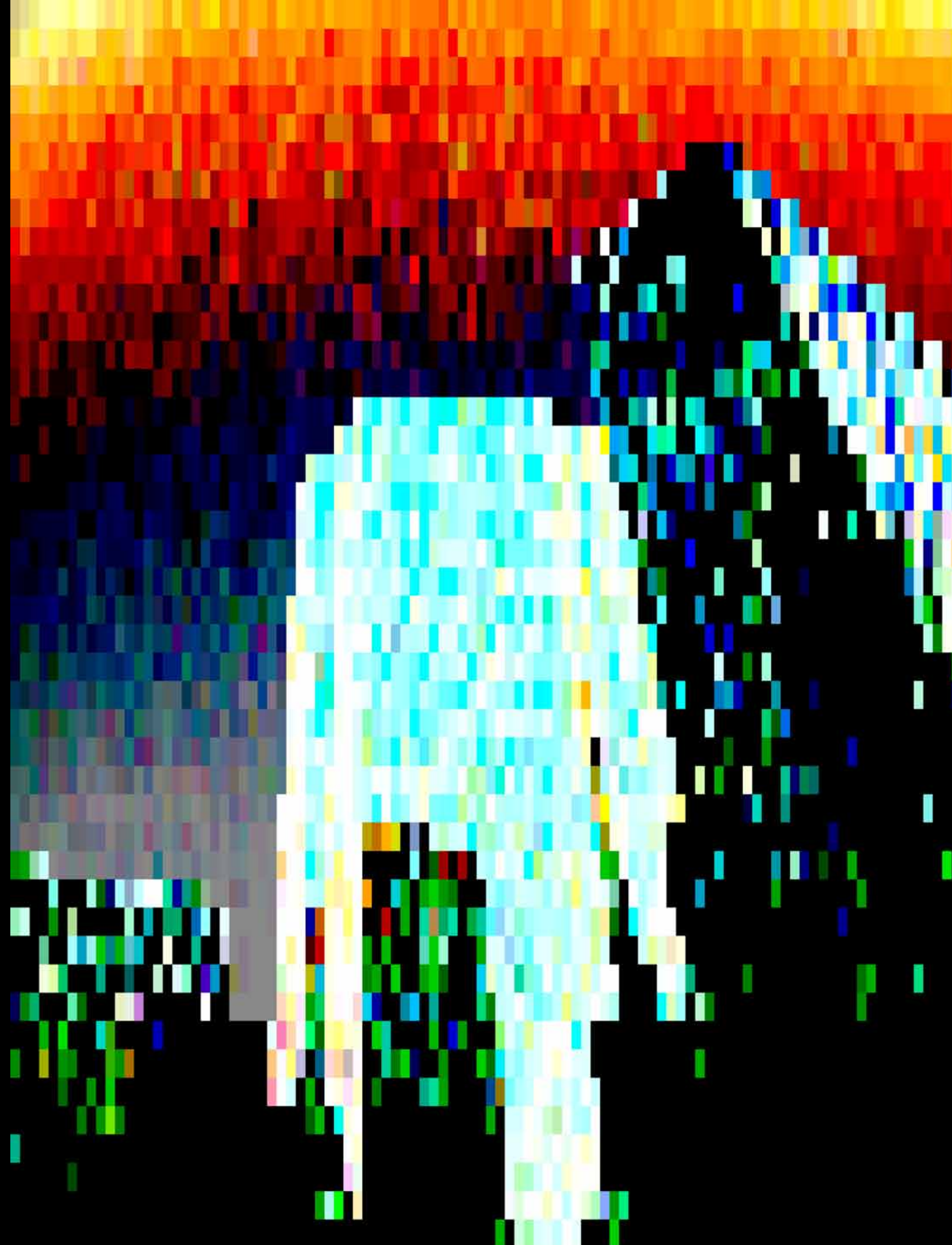


As a Techno-impressionist artist, I will take an image that is highly representational and remove some of the information to change its literal nature and make it more interesting.

One of the tenets of Techno-Impressionism is that a picture becomes more interesting when part of the information is supplied by the viewer.

If you read a story, or hear it presented as a drama on the radio, your imagination is engaged and you become a participant. With movies or TV, nothing is left to the imagination and the viewer is an observer rather than a participant.



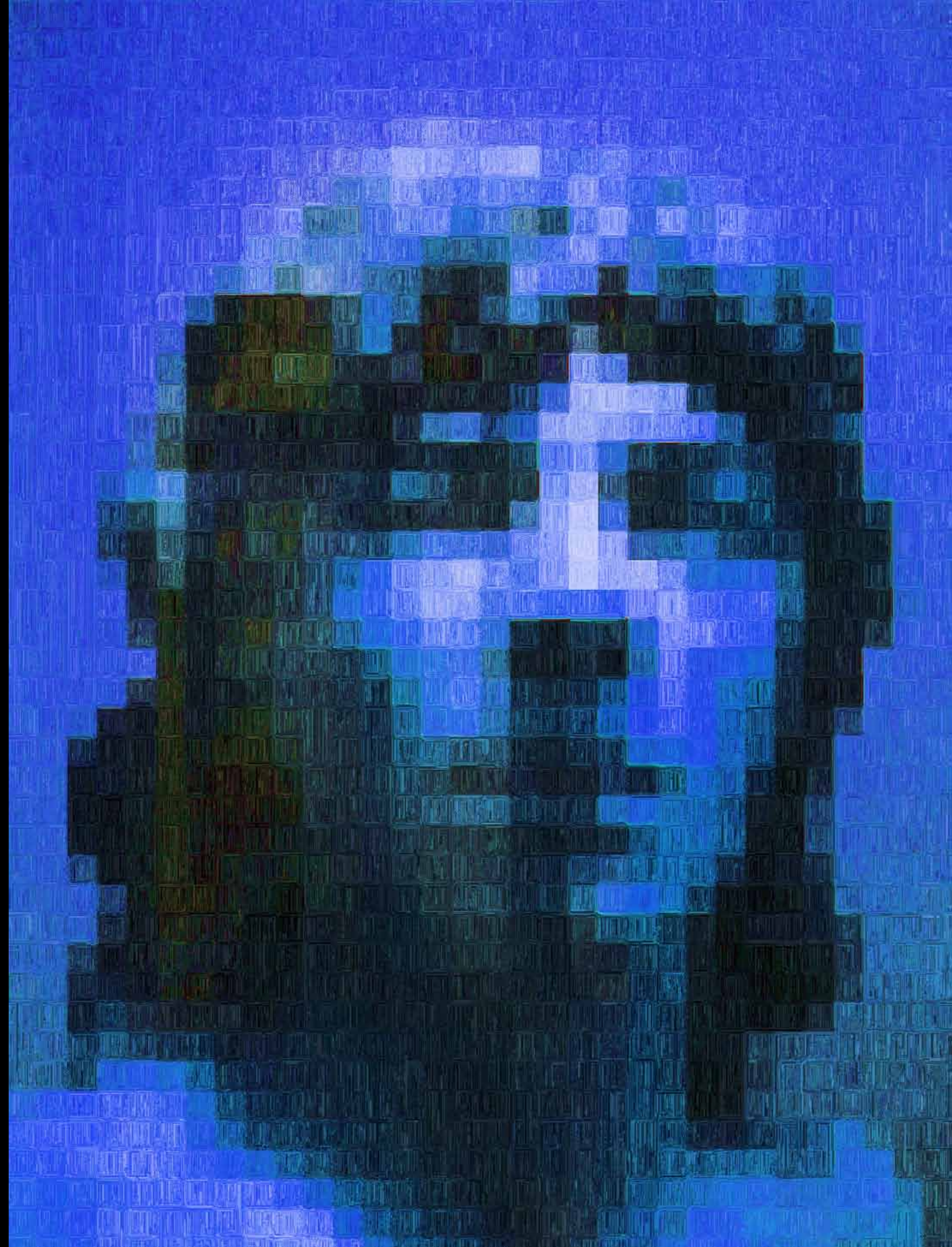


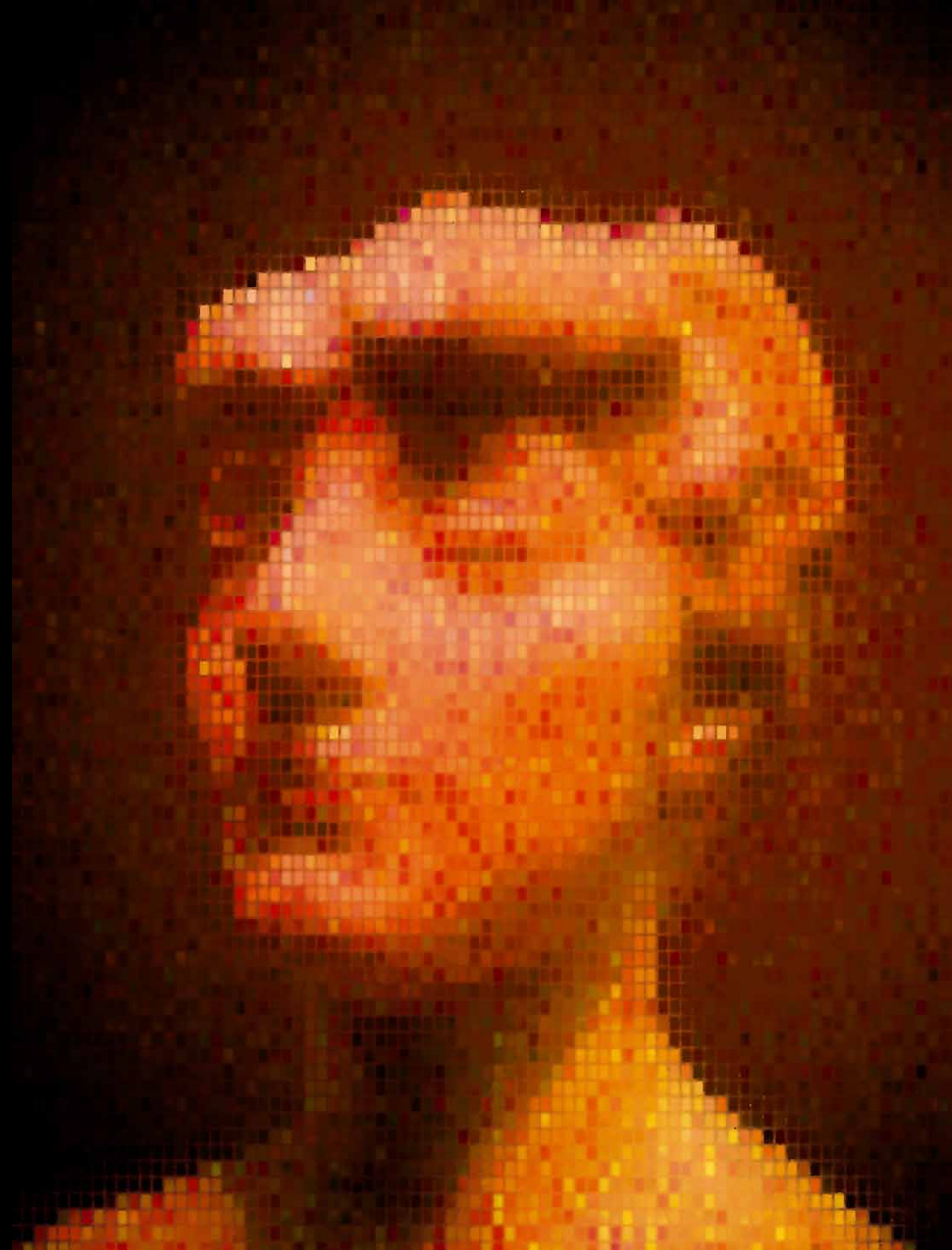
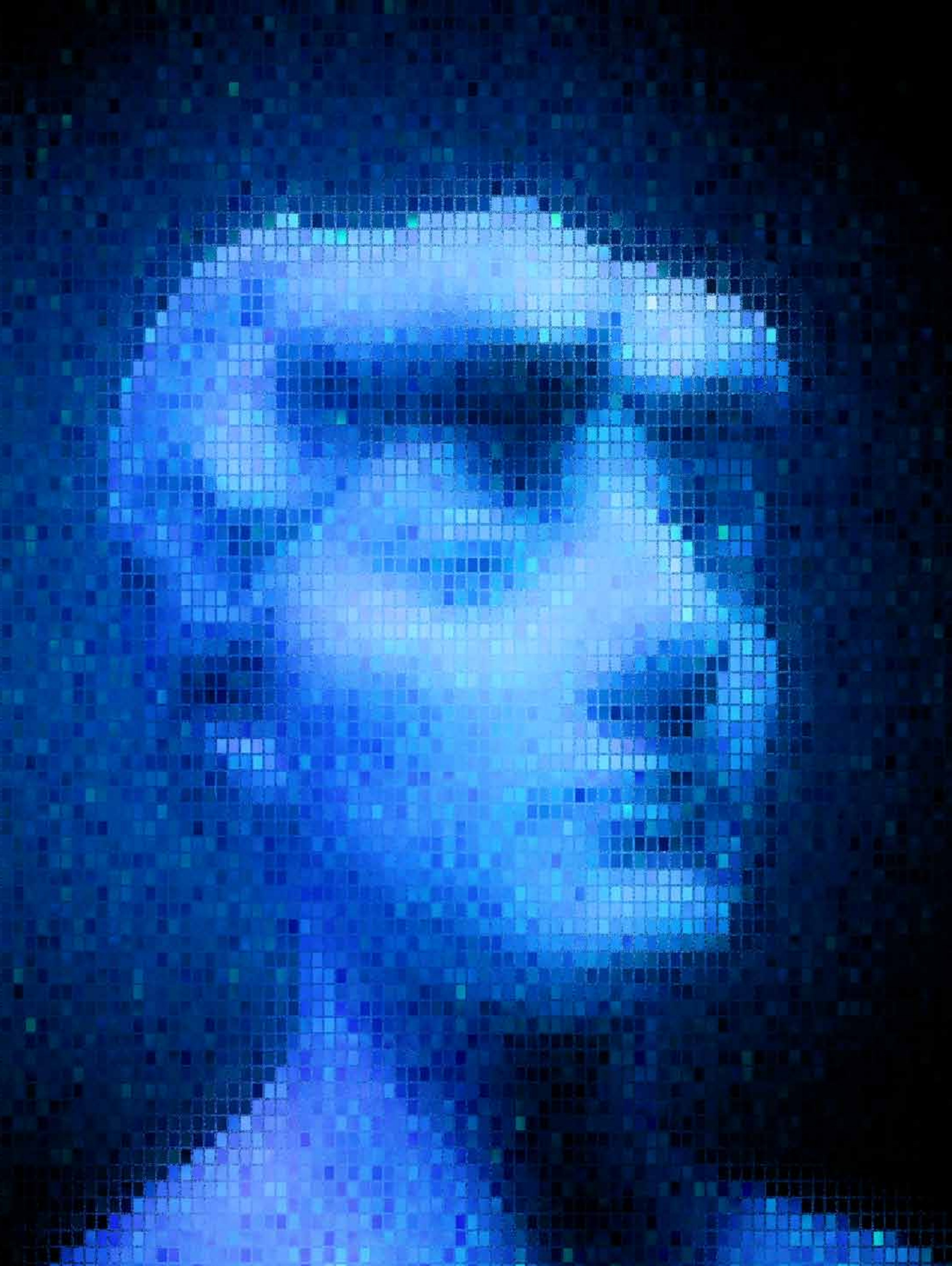
This is the face of Cain, the first human murderer, at the moment when he realized what he had done.

I originally created this image for a poster used during an unsuccessful antiwar protest.

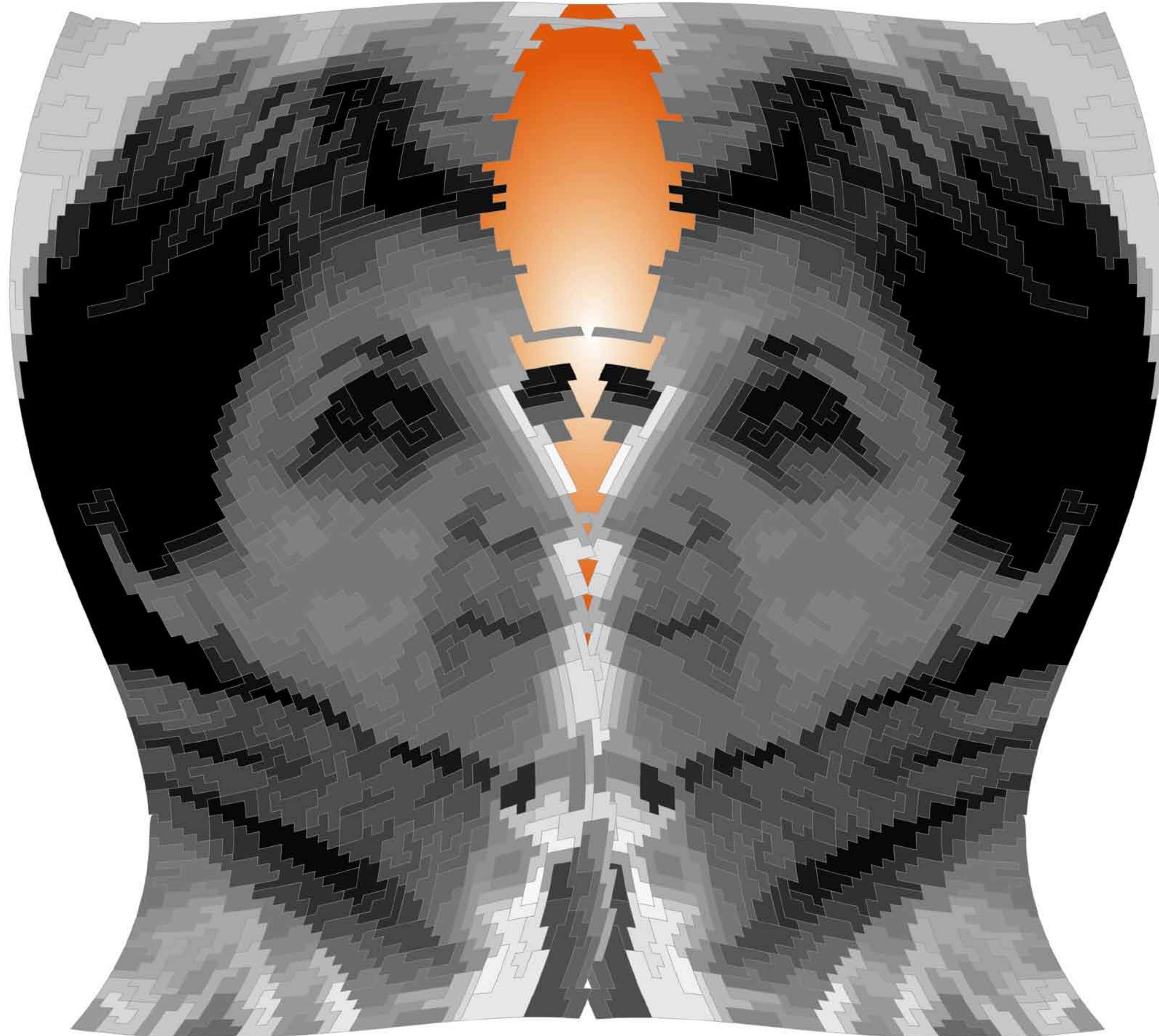
Unsuccessful because we could not, even through mass protests, prevent a war that was preordained.



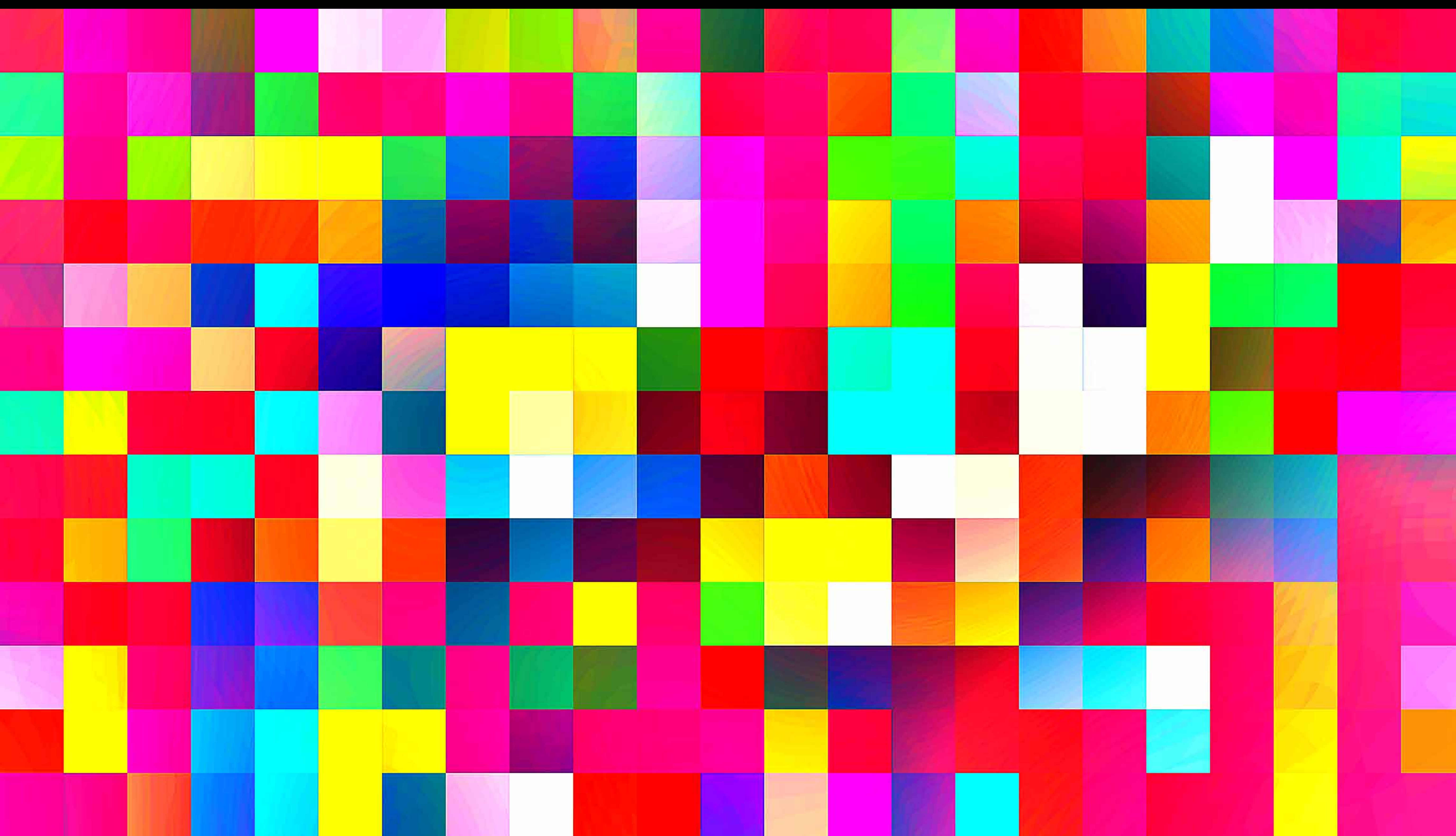












T R A N S F O R M I S M

In Transformism, an image is moved into a different universe.





Sometimes you do something that you cannot explain in words while you are doing it.

But later on you can.

Sometimes I can see the finished image before I begin.

Sometimes the finished image will occur to me part of the way through the process.

Sometimes I am surprised at what a simple tweak will produce.

Sometimes I work on a piece and create many finished images along the way from the same piece.

This is one of the advantages of the media that I use.



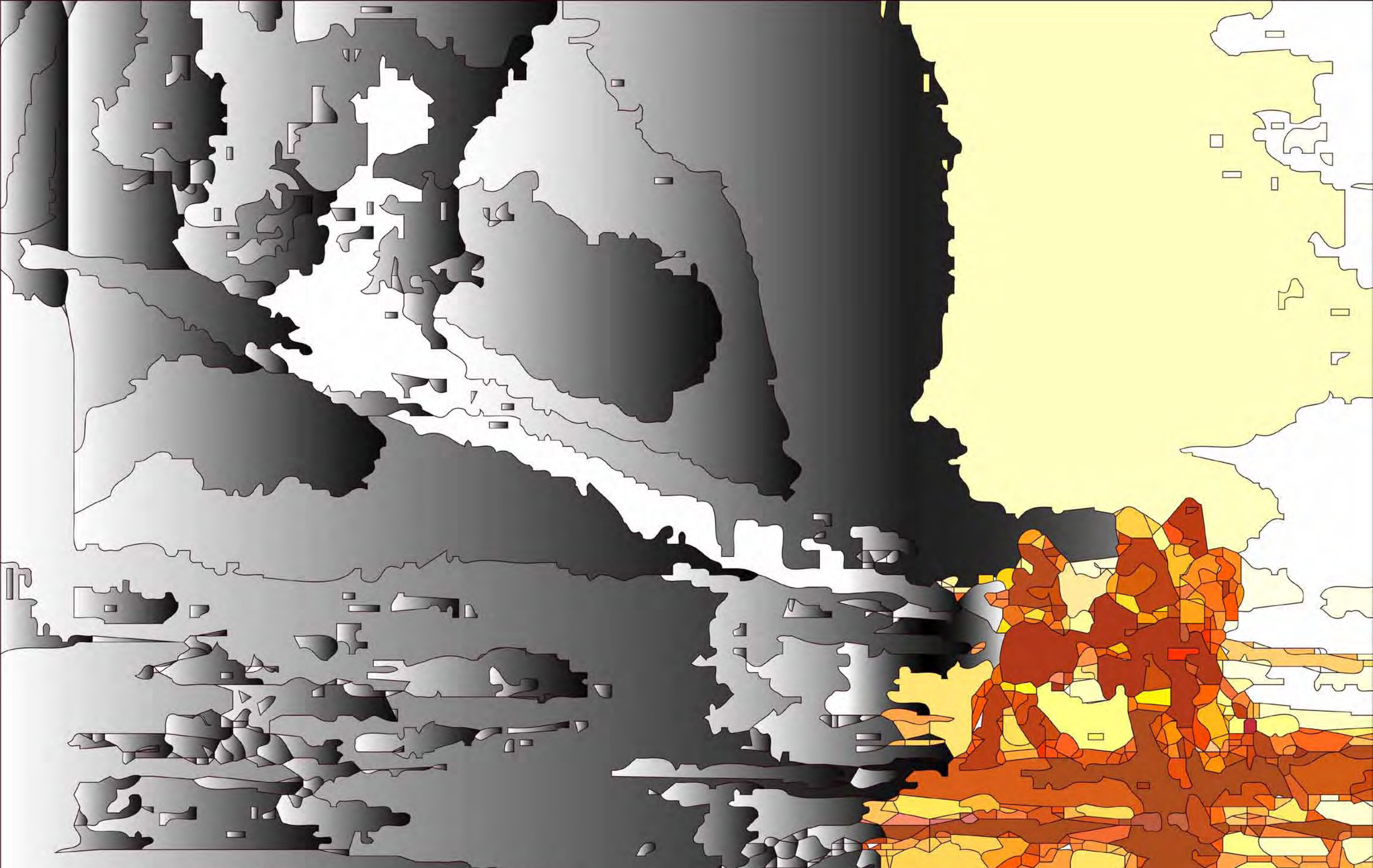
Working with a computer to produce art has a number of advantages. You can, at any point, undo what you have done. You can make copies of a work and take each one down a different path.

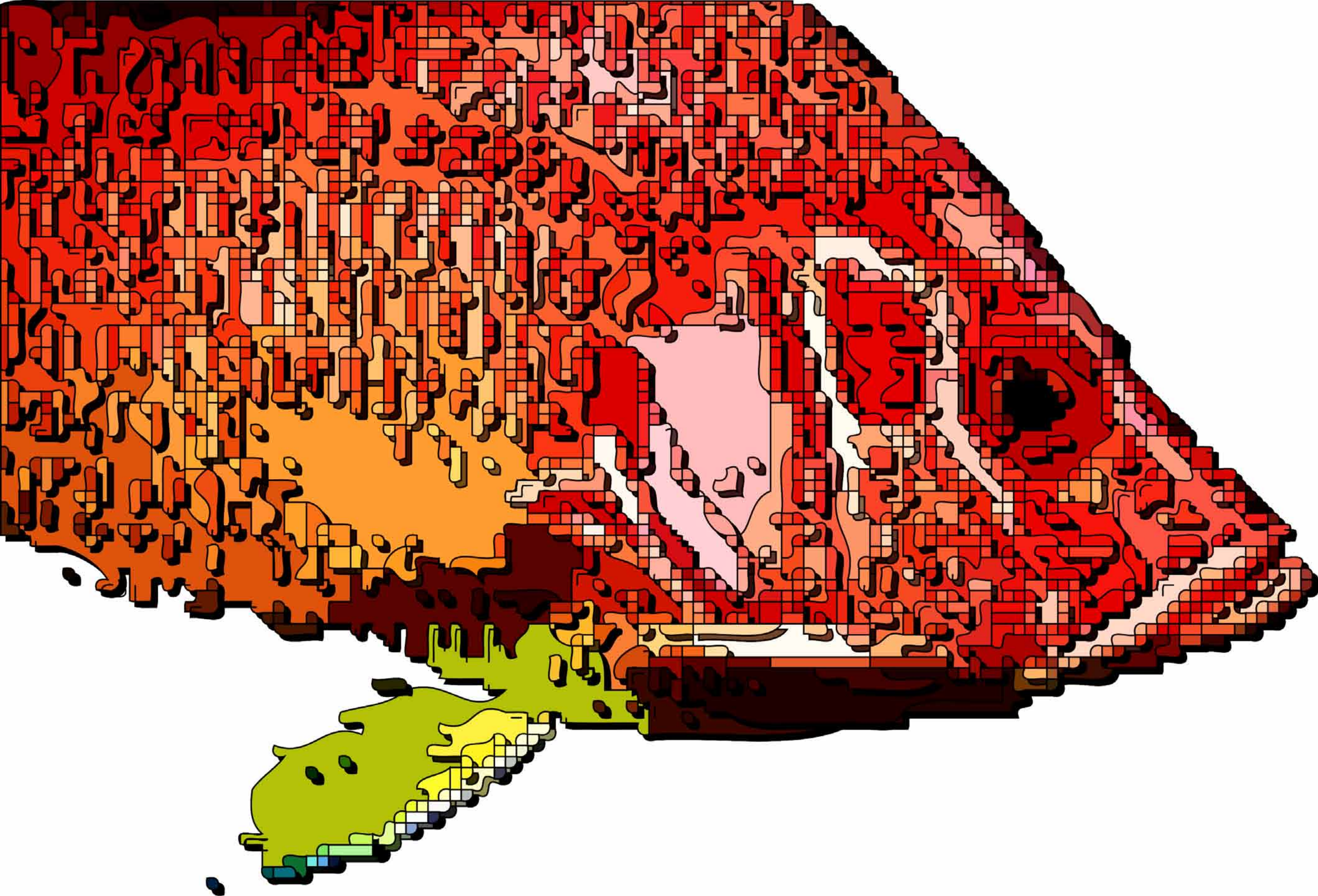
You can “generation” your work. This means that, at each stage, you can save a copy of your work before moving on. When you are done, you have all the “stages” that led up to the finished work.

An artist such as Picasso or Rembrandt, who took their etchings through many stages, could only strike a proof at each stage. In the end, all they had was the finished plate and a pile of intermediate proofs.

There was no way to go back to an earlier stage and try a different idea.











Beware of
the lure of
the challenge
at the
machine
level.

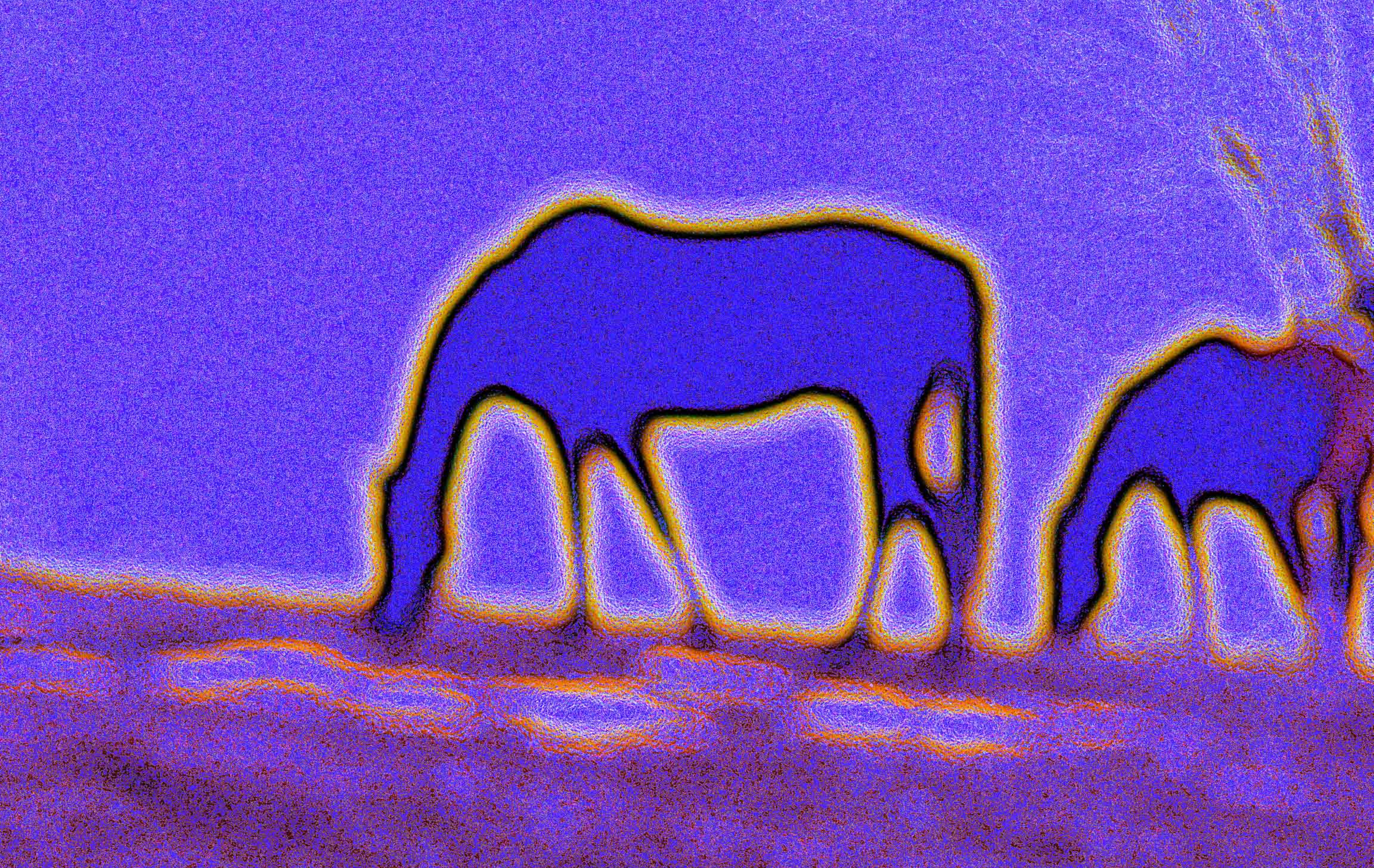
Many photographers
get lost in the
search for technical
excellence instead of
exploring new ways
to grow in artistic
excellence.

















Move your mouse between the arrows >

< To zoom in on this picture

R E A L I S M

Although the Techno-Impressionists create impressionistic images, they also create realistic ones from time to time.

But it's not enough to produce an image that is sharp, detailed, and "photographically correct."

The resulting image still has to be interesting. It must have something that the viewer can connect with.



Beware of creating an image from something that should be just an element of an image.

A close-up of an ant might be interesting to a biologist.

A picture of an ant in its environment provides a fascinating image.



This is how I work.

I see the creation of art as a process.

I begin with a photograph. I end up with an image. It is always a quest, and I don't know what the end result will be.

I have an ever-increasing stock of images, in various stages of refinement and with multiple variations. New images and variations are added continuously.

I have an easy way of wandering through this image collection.

I browse until I find an image that interests me. It could be from this morning, or from forty years ago.

I work with the chosen image, refining it, making new variations. Or, if I've chosen it to print, I try to make a print that was better than the last one of this image.

Sometimes, I reach a point where I like the image and it's ready to show. Sometimes I reach a point and just put it away for another time and further refinement.

In creating images, I am a "bricoleur," a tinkerer who finds a joy in playing and experimenting.

The penalty for working this way is that you may not develop a single, distinctive style. But, when viewed as a whole, there are themes that run through the work.



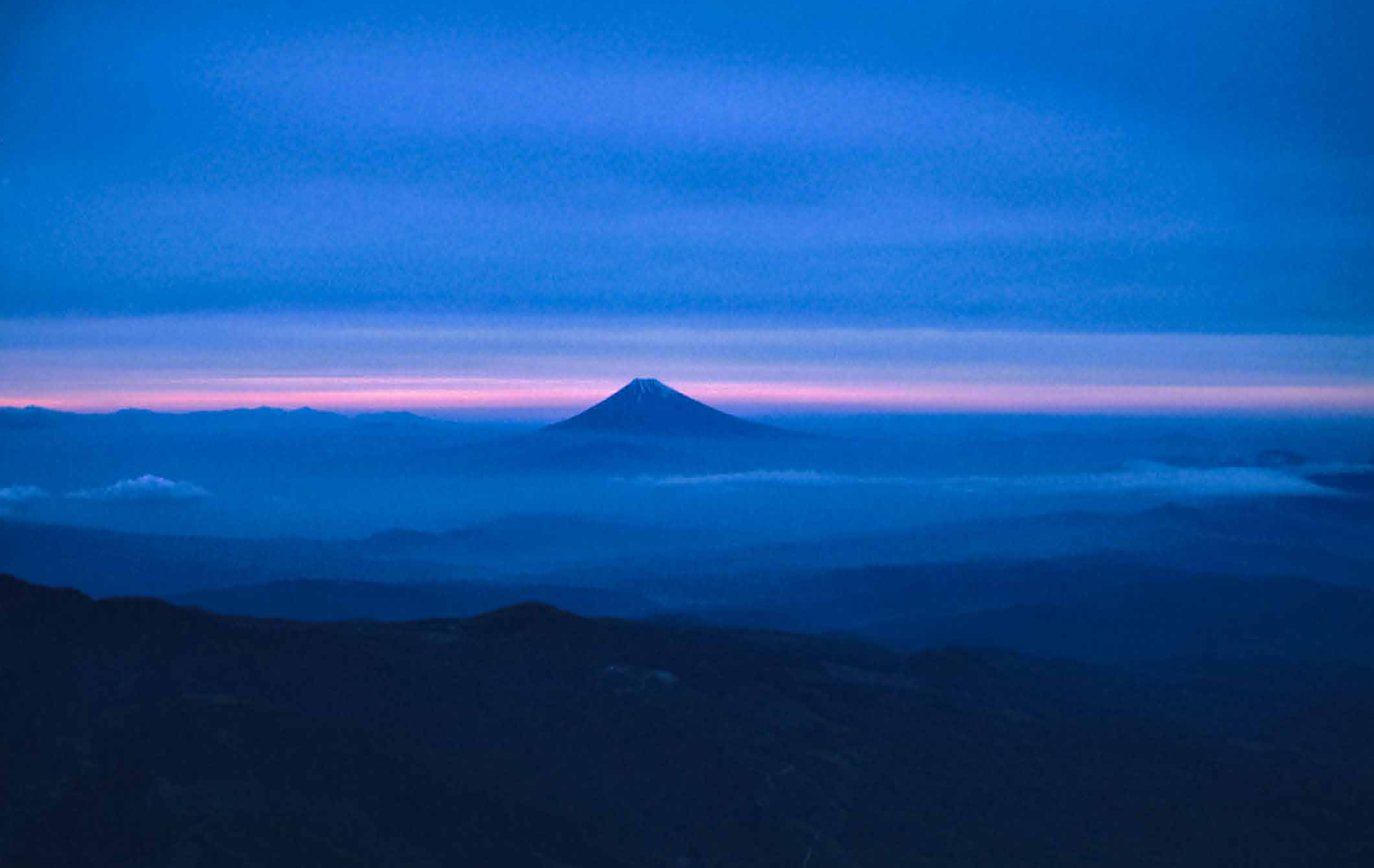














Time to flow

This is about art. And about creating.

Time to get into the "flow." Athletes call it "the zone."

How do you know when you're there?

You become an observer of yourself. You shift away from the first person. You watch yourself creating art.

You can see the picture already in front of you. You're just tracing it.

You no longer care about the outcome, about the cost of the materials, screwing up, deadlines, schedules, the rest of the world. Everything else fades away and all you see is what's in front of you.

Your hand moves with confidence. The lines are sure and smooth. There is no doubt.

Later, when you look at what you've created, you get the feeling it was done by someone else.

It was. It was done by the creative spirit inside you. When you 'flow,' you're in touch with this spirit.









This is Butterbook, a newborn
monarch butterfly.
Here, only a few hours old.
This is the first time
that he has seen the sun.









SURREALISM

In Surrealism, ordinary objects are placed into strange or unfamiliar settings.



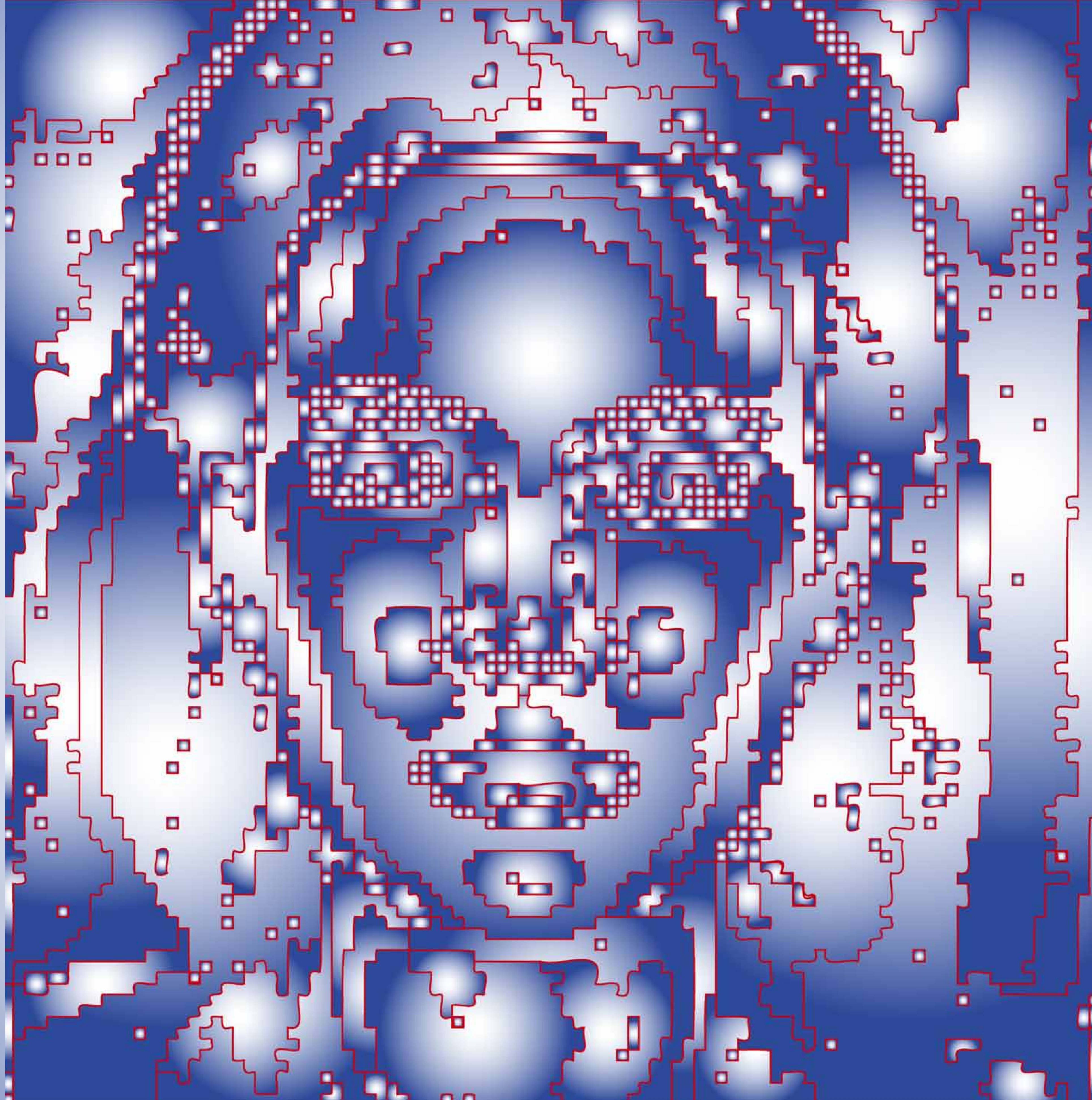
An artist faces many choices when making prints.

I don't do limited editions or multiples. I want to make as many different images as possible, not lots of copies of the same image. For me, the print is the final realization of an idea and an image and I only have to see it once.

In order to get the tightest control over the quality of my work, I do all the printing myself.

On the back of each print is the date that it was printed, information about the image used to make the print, the title of the image, and a note about the materials used to make that print. I sign and date the front as well.

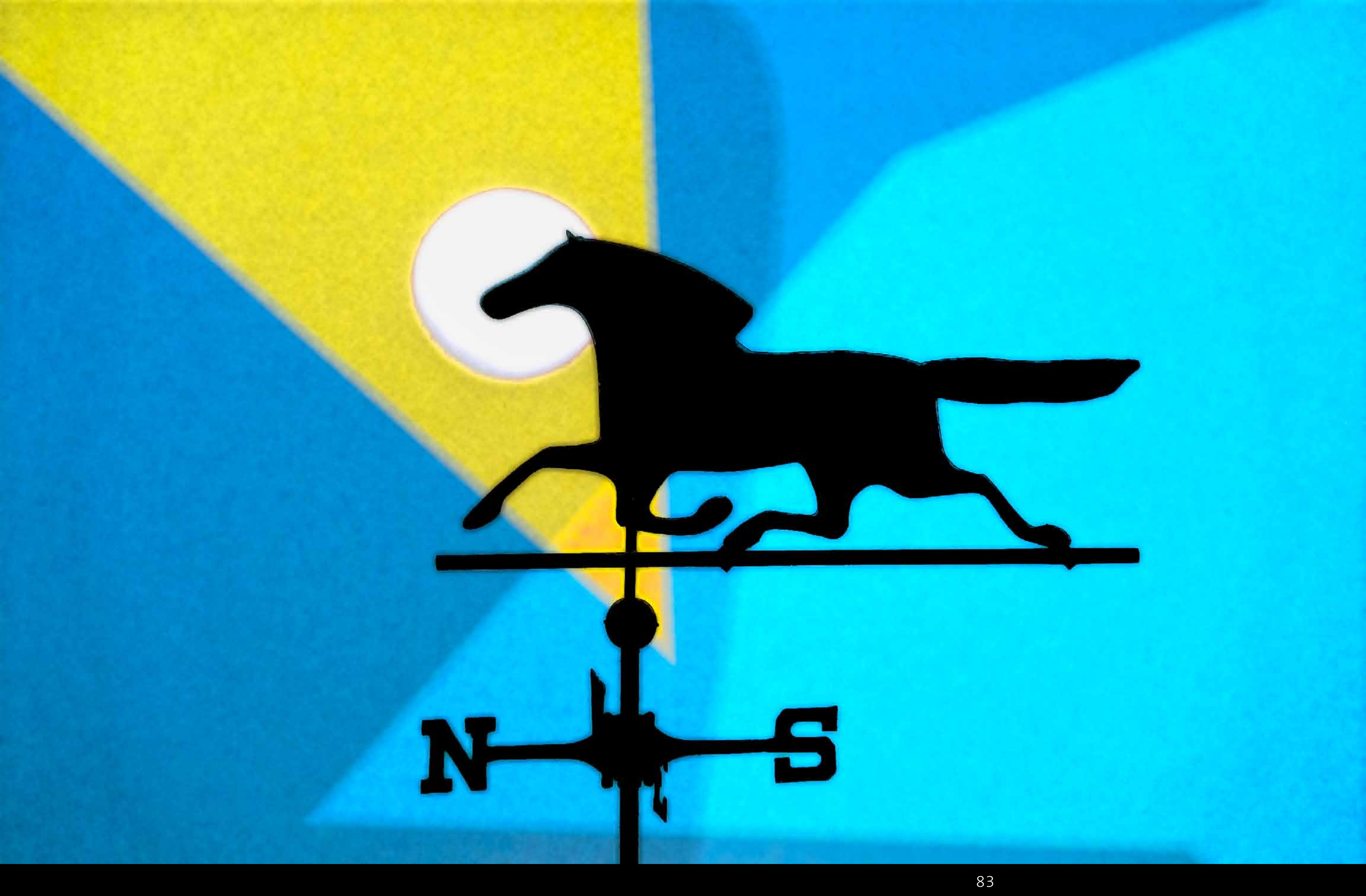
Sometimes, I revisit an image, printing it again if I think that there is a way to improve it, or if I find better materials that can enhance the quality or improve the longevity of the image.

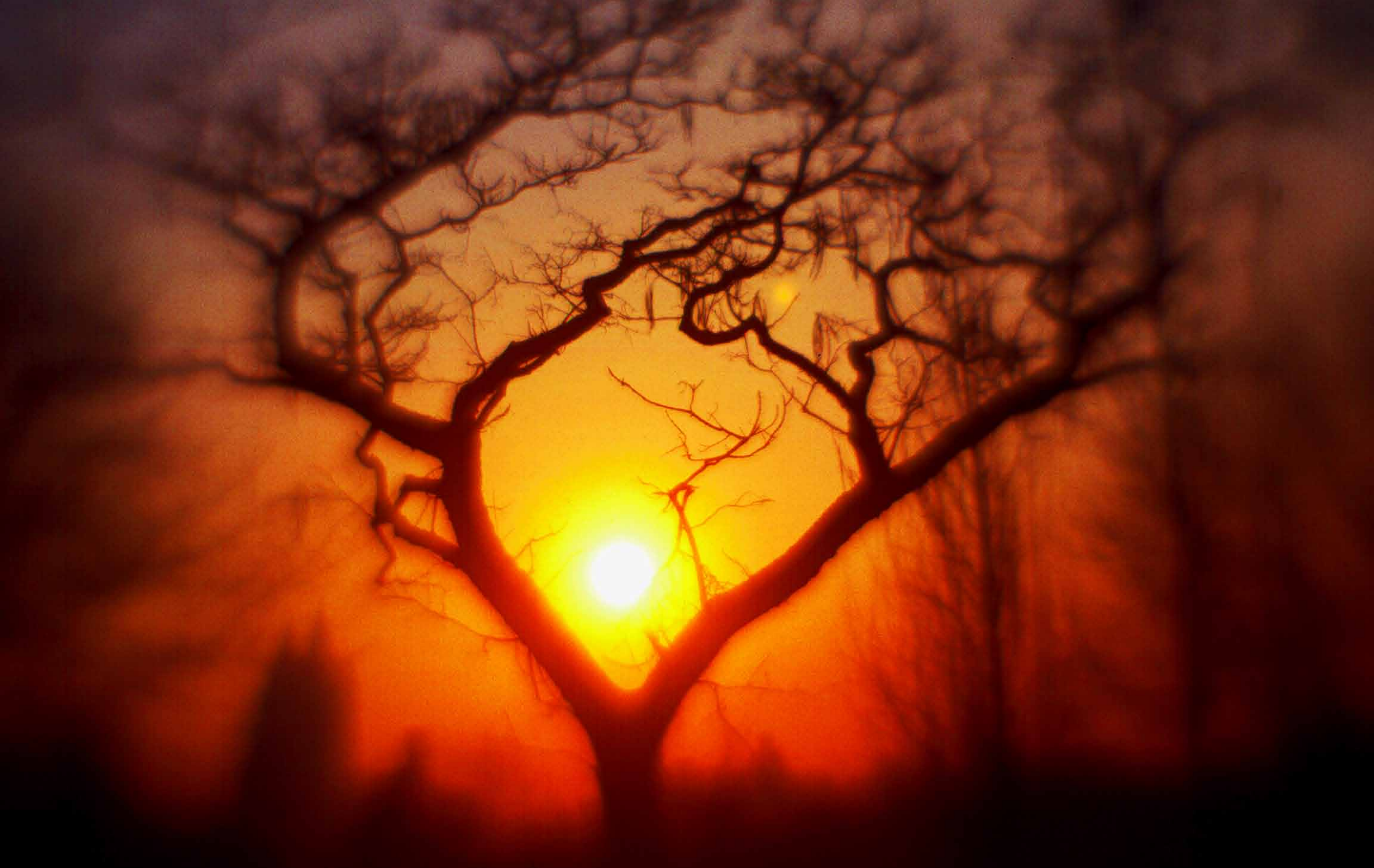




Don't be a spectator on this trip.
There's no death worse than just waiting around.
Set your heart on the hero's gold
And go.
-Rumi







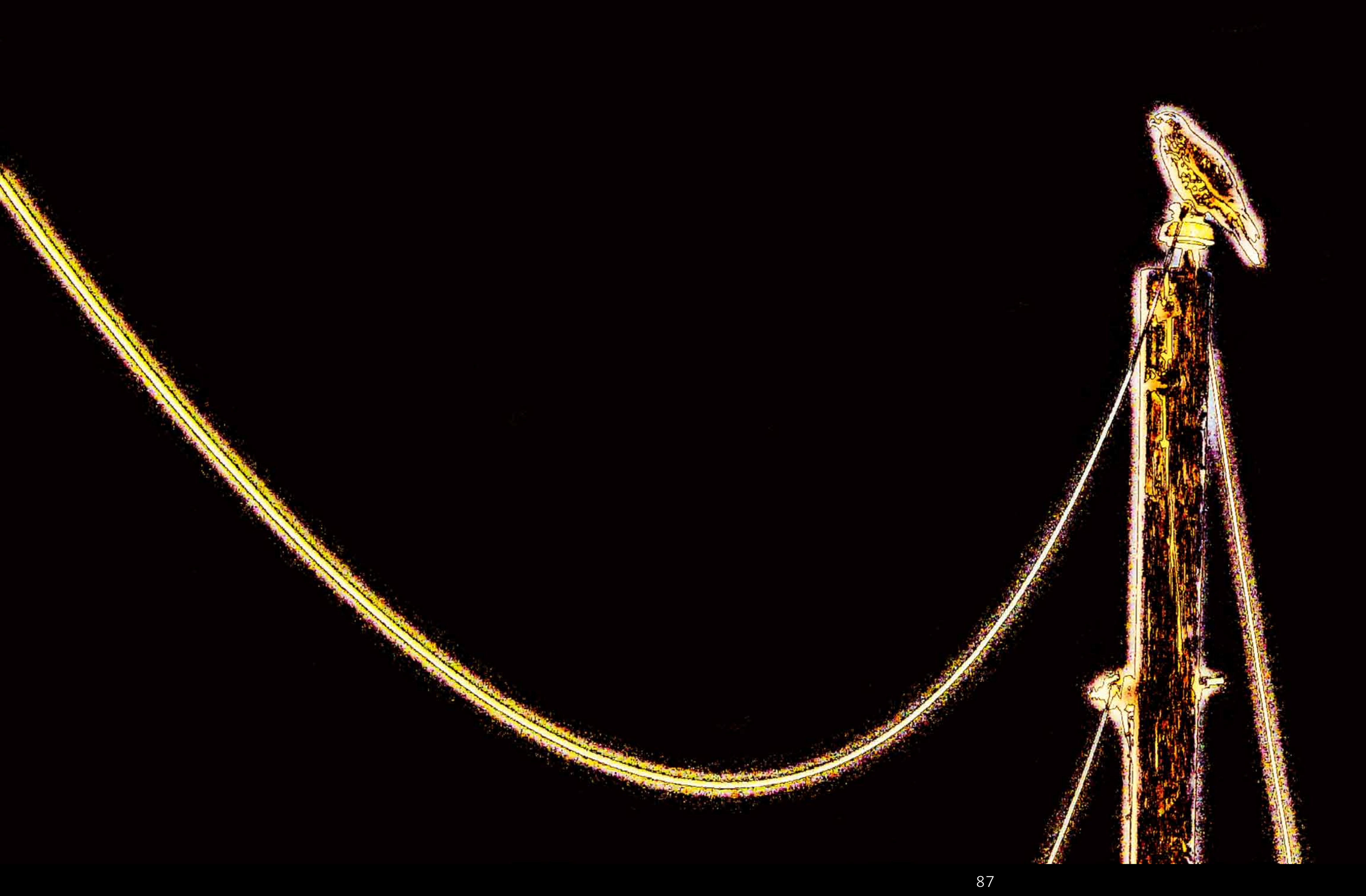


In working with the computer, I have developed a set of tools and methods that lets me personally handle every step of the process that I use to produce images. This gives me the maximum control over the finished picture.

To an artist, maintaining control is very important. Although I can produce fairly large prints with my own printer, it is possible, through outsourcing, to have someone else produce even larger prints.

But in doing this, I would sacrifice a lot of control.





Sometimes... You make a picture
And sometimes... The picture is right
And sometimes...The picture is wrong
But sometimes...You look at the picture again
And sometimes... The picture that was right
is wrong
And sometimes... The picture that was wrong
is right
Sometimes... But not always.





In my advanced old age
I really entertain more delight
in the beauties of Nature and
of Art than I did in my youth.
Appreciation of what is good
and true and comely grows
with years...

- *Sabine Baring-Gould*





Art vs. Photography

At the heart of photography is the quest for technical perfection, the search for the ultimate in representational accuracy and realism. Terms like sharpness, noise and grain, image quality, color fidelity, highlight and shadow detail are bandied about in endless discussions as if they were the subjects of greatest import.

The promise of technical perfection is a siren's song, luring people away from aesthetics and forcing them to confront the tiniest of technical minutiae.

There are people who take the raw sensor data from their digital cameras and process it through mind-numbing workflows in their efforts to squeeze the ultimate from their otherwise ordinary efforts. Others become fascinated with things like the quality of the out-of-focus parts of the image, ignoring the more obvious qualities that add to their pictures.

This perfection is photography's greatest strength and, in the end, its ultimate weakness.

In art, these technical factors are not the primary concern. Artists think about things like control of the medium, but also things like creating images that are interesting, have an impact, and express feelings.

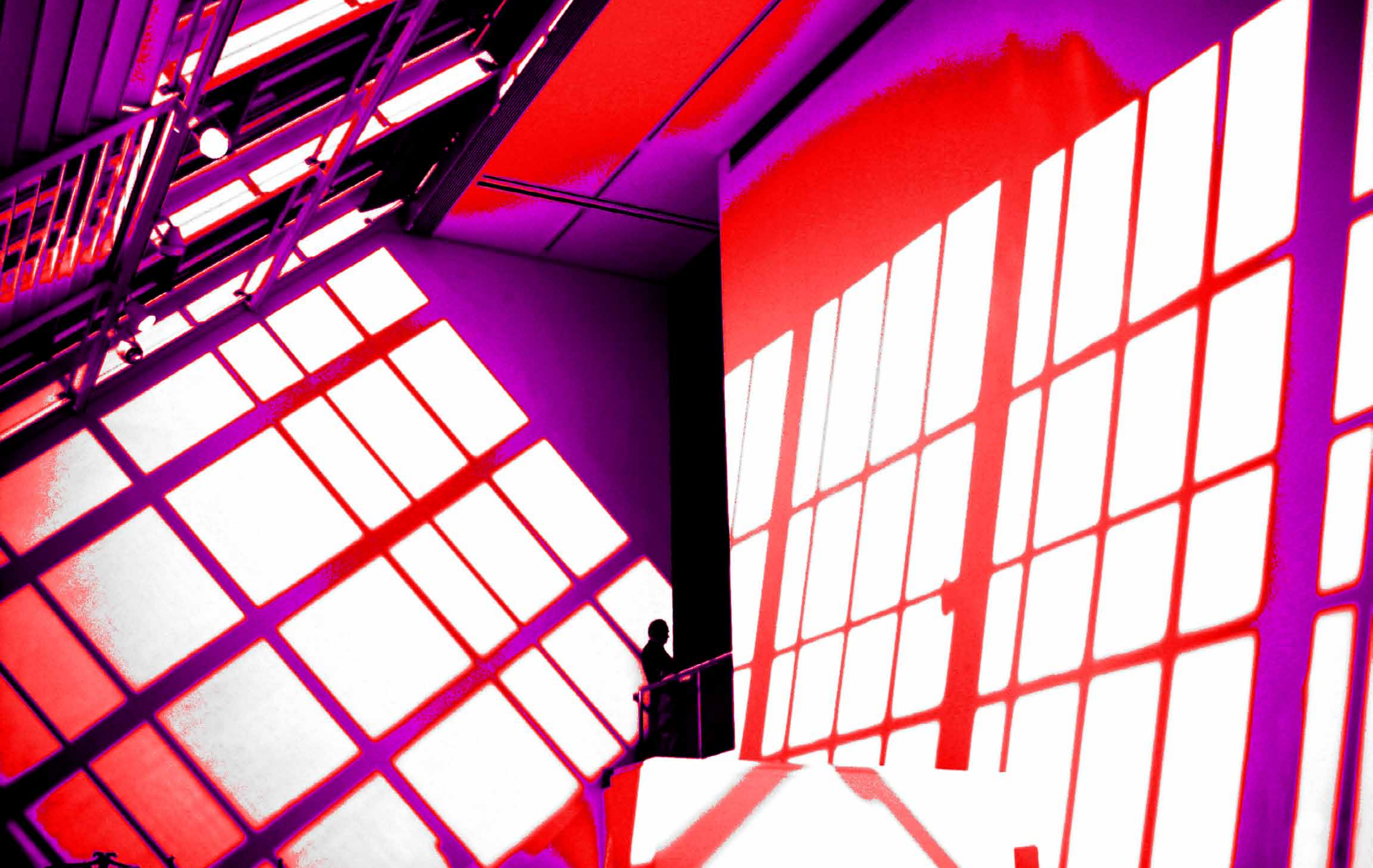
The artist will try to free himself from the technical bonds of his medium and his environment, rather than becoming a slave to them.

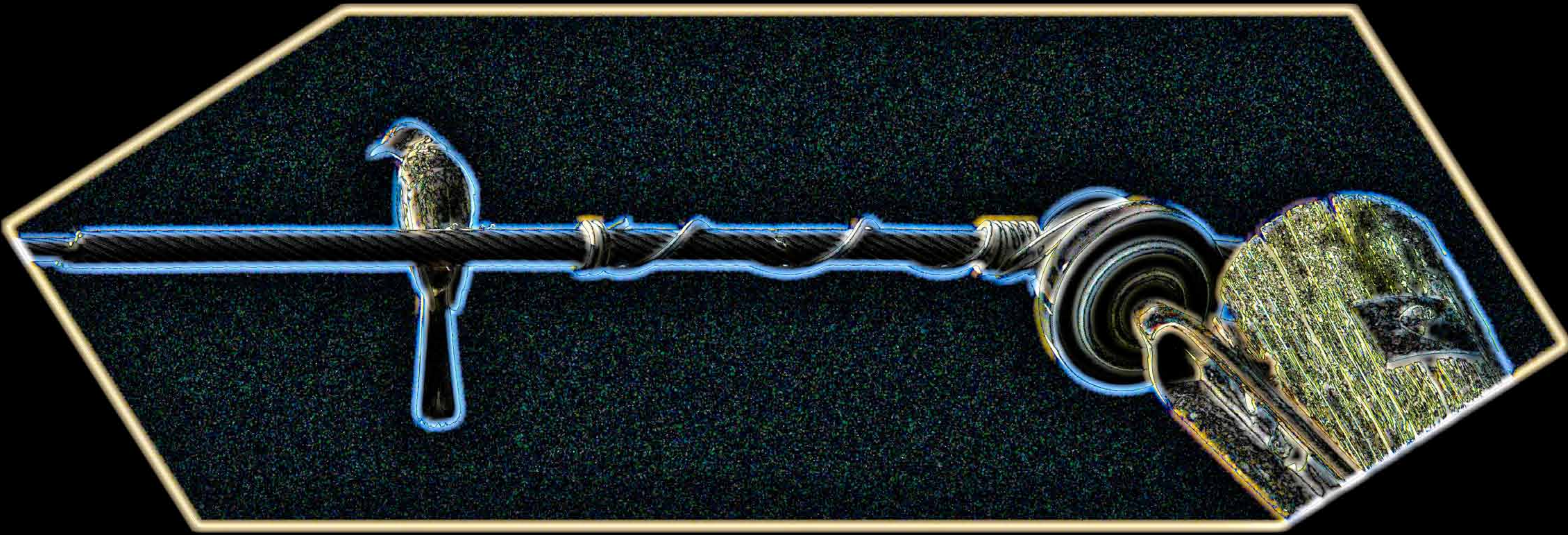




If the early bird gets the worm,
what advice would you give the worm?

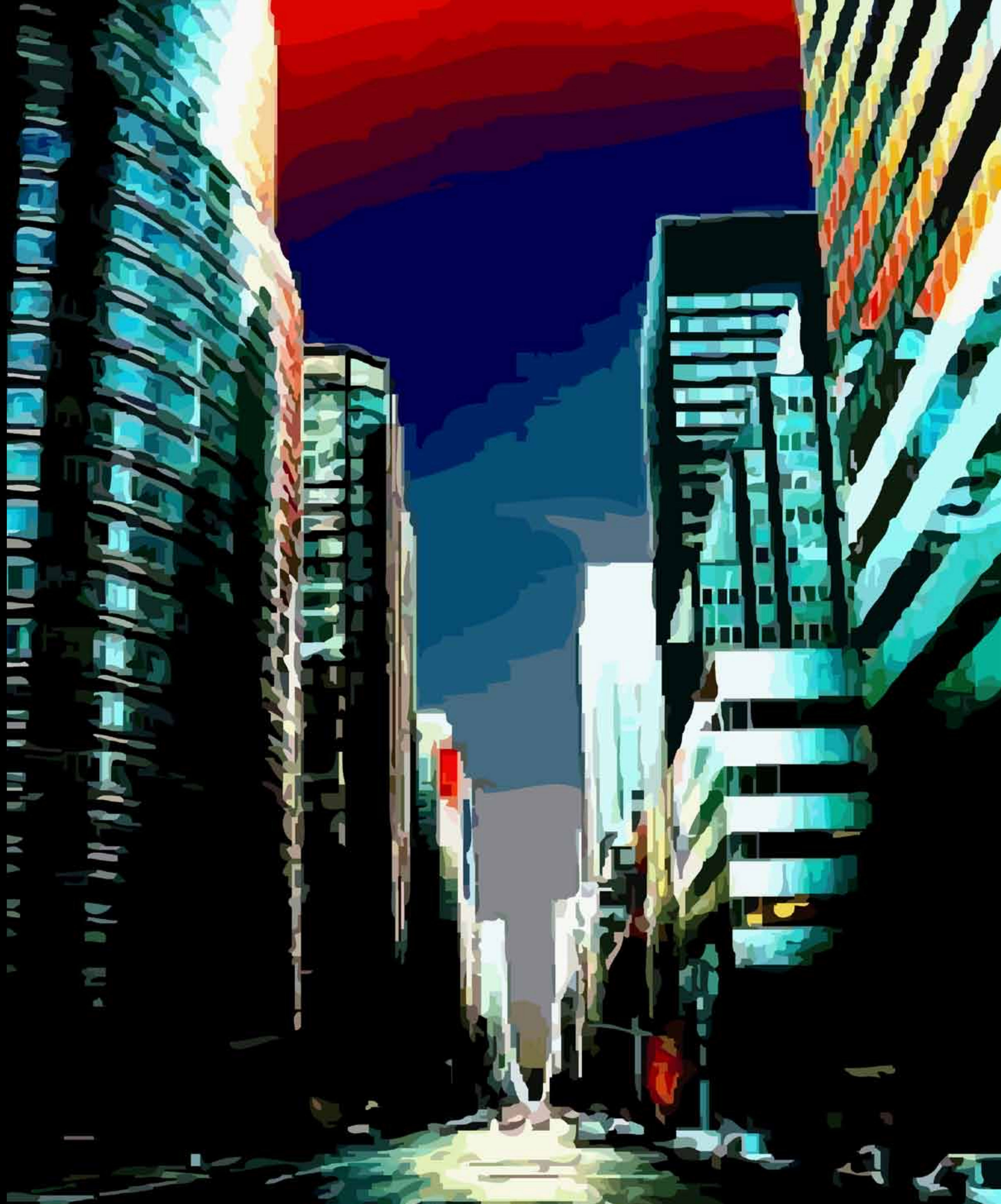
Q: What is the most important discovery of the 21st Century?
A: That people will pay money for the noise their phone makes
when it rings.

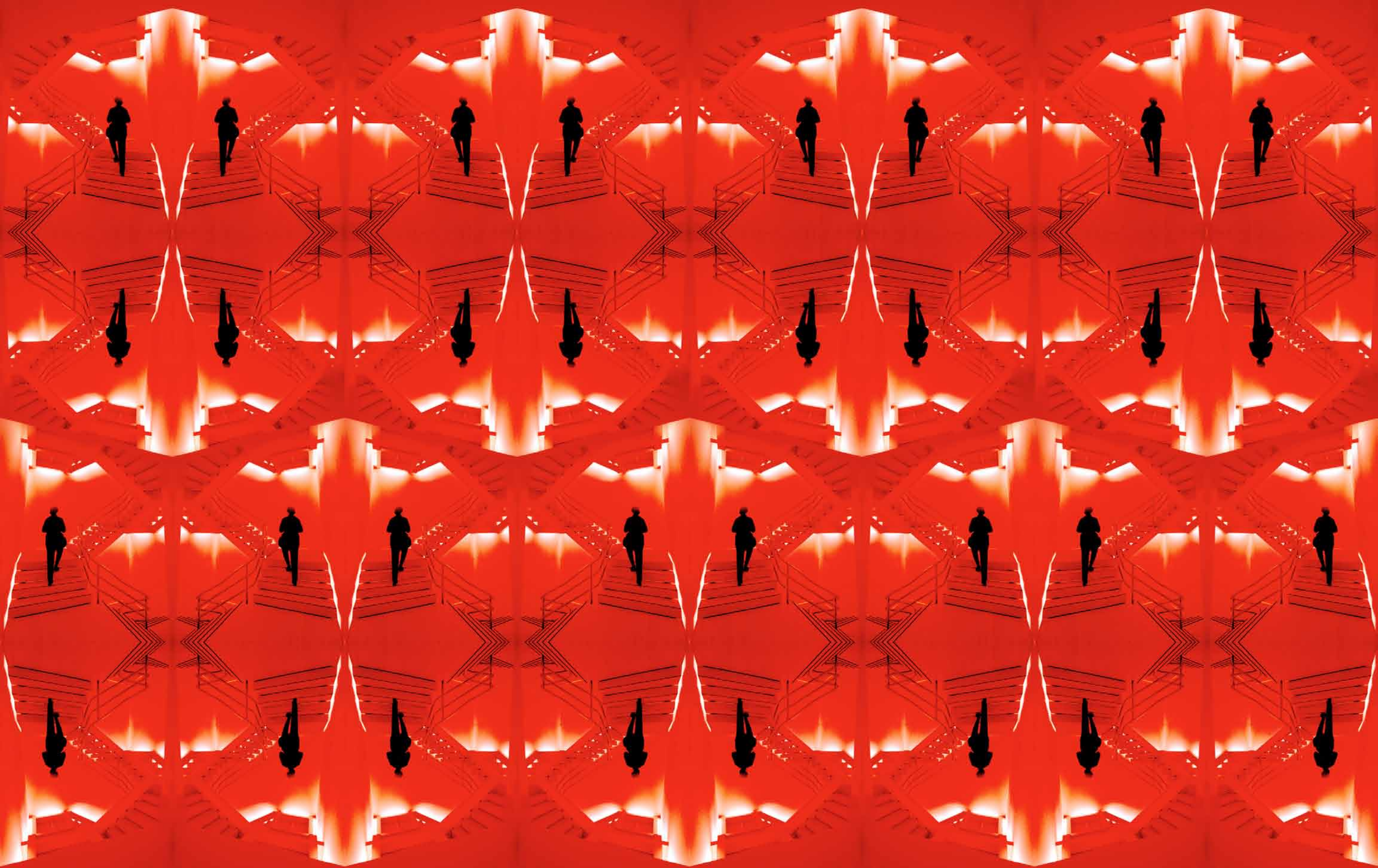










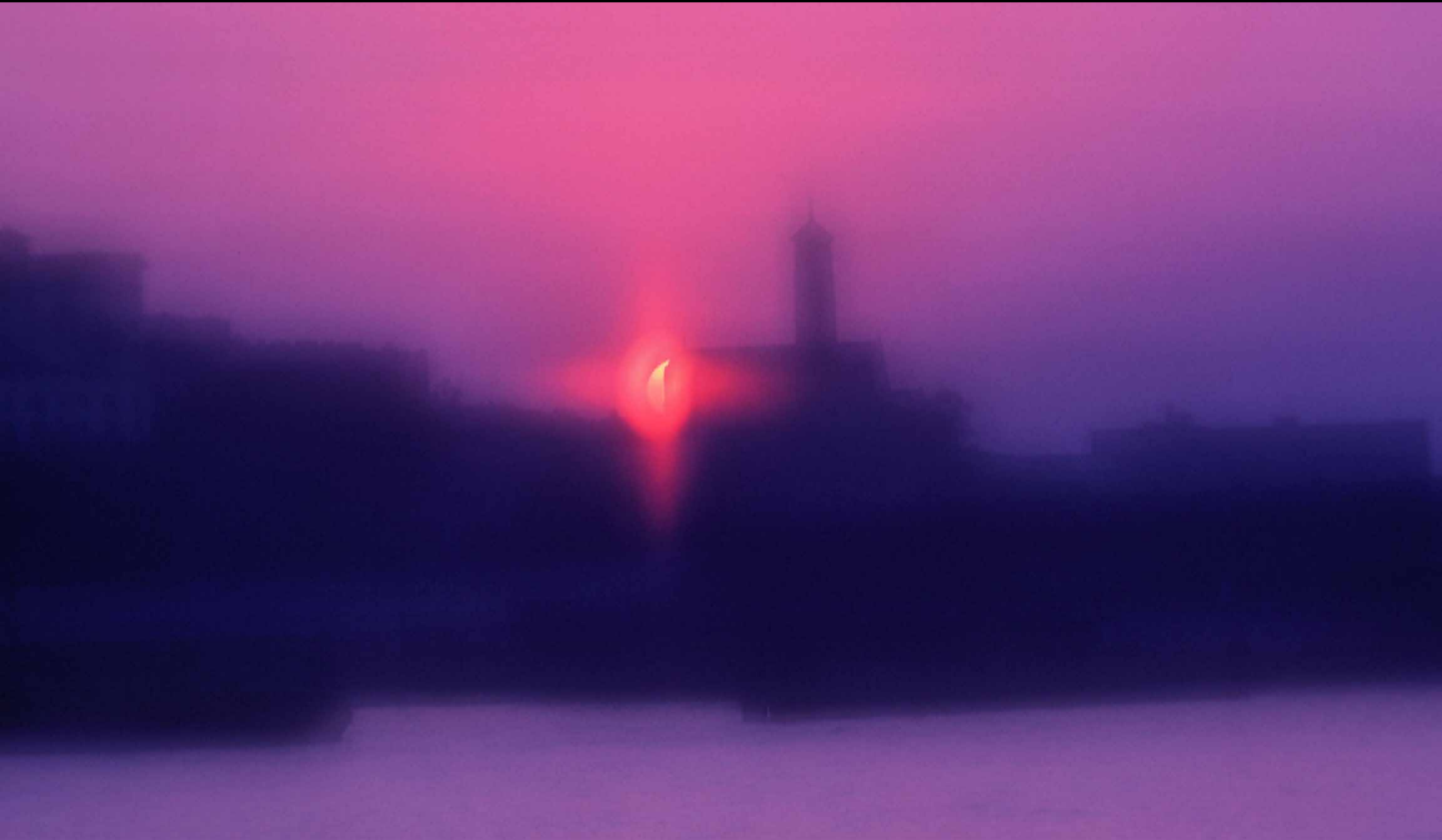


VARIATIONS ON A THEME

This is the fun part. Starting with a single image, often not that inspiring, a number of interesting variations are produced. The computer makes it possible to take an image down multiple paths, each leading to a unique result.

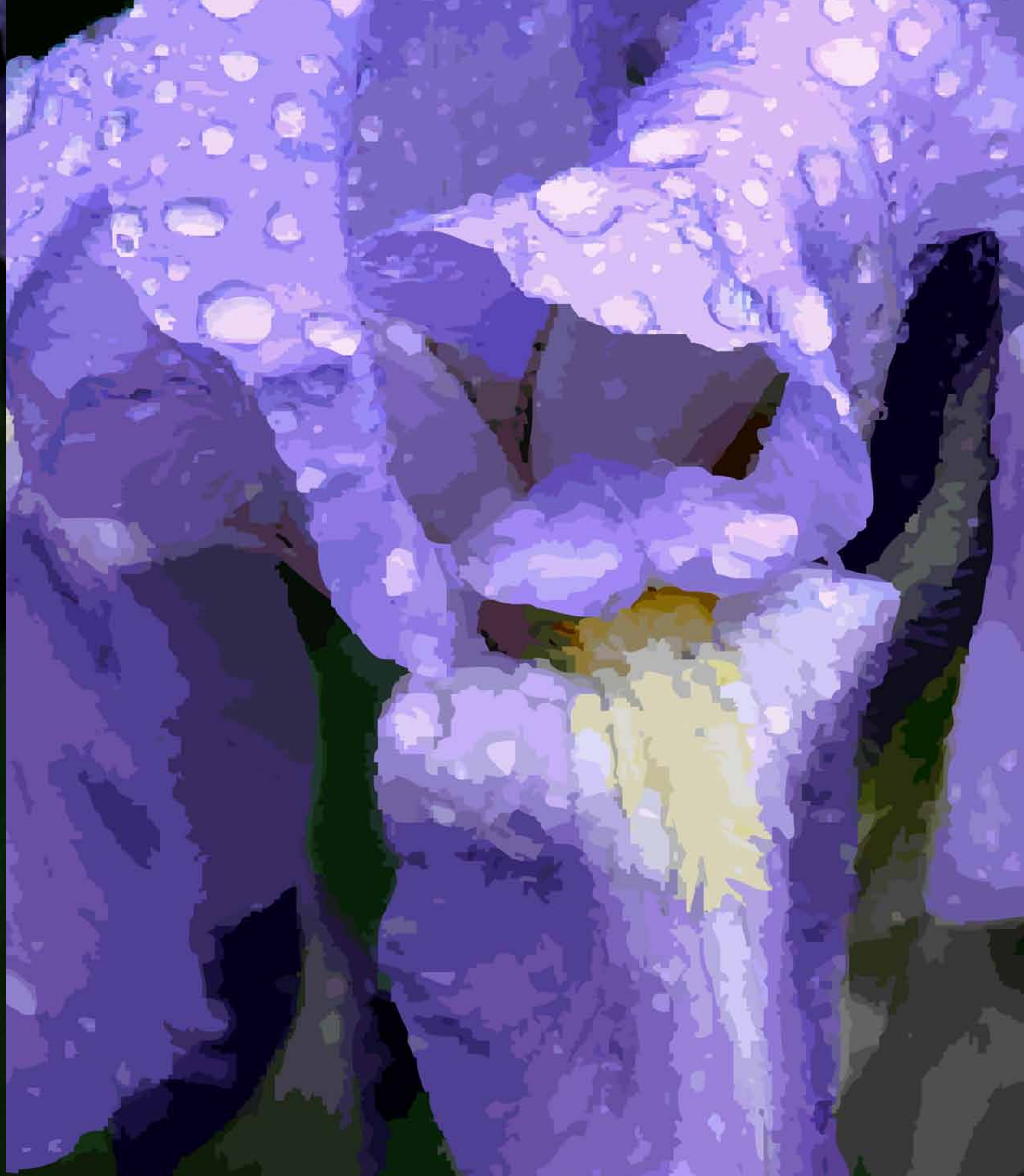
In the following pages, you will find some interactive examples that let you explore these variations in detail

Roll your mouse slowly across the screen to see variations on a New York sunset



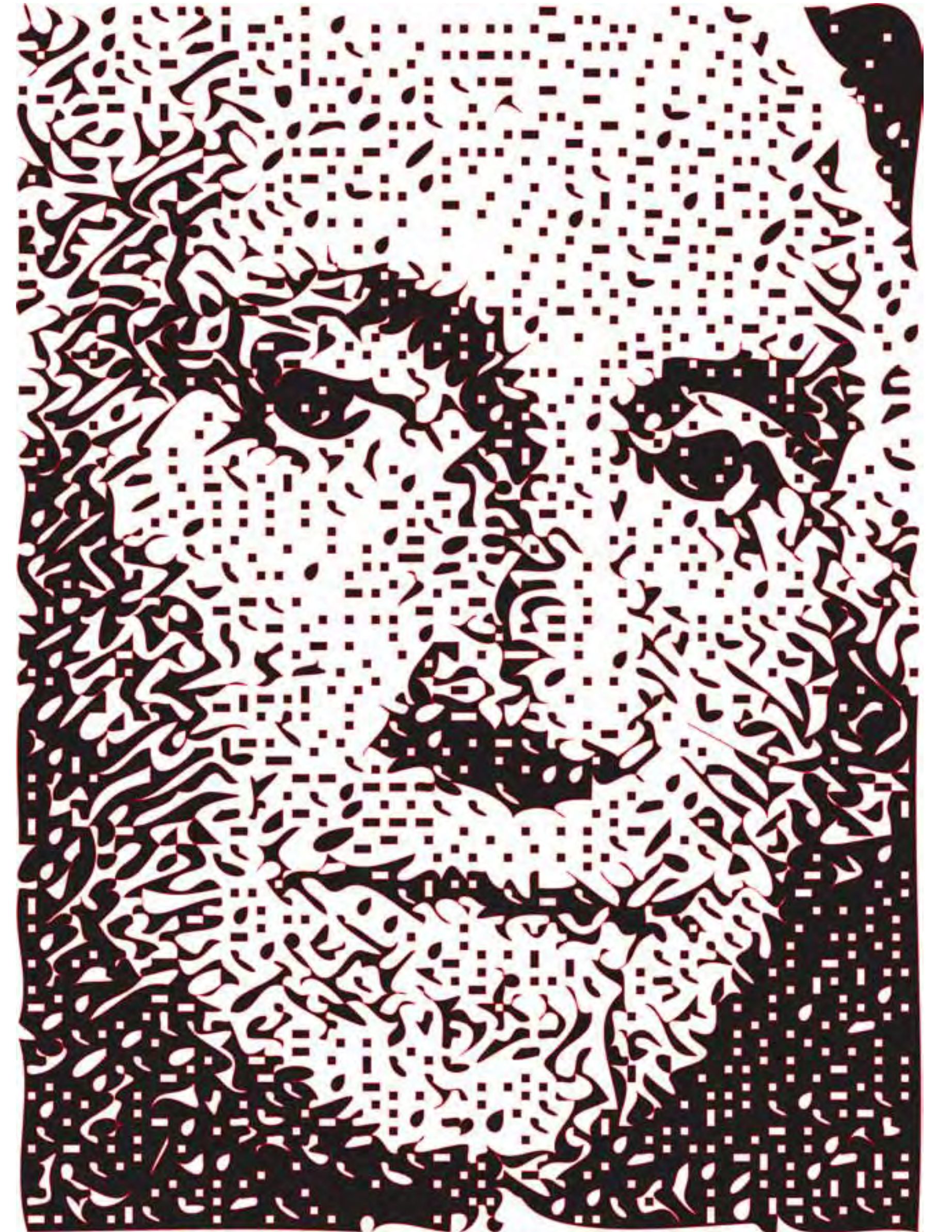






Roll your mouse slowly across the screen to see variations on a matryoshka doll







Roll your mouse slowly across the screen to see variations on a beautiful iris





M I S C E L L A N E O U S

This is the place for things that don't have a place.

Here, you will find:

A look behind the scenes to see how an image was created.

A short course in photography, for all the photographers out there.

A brief peek at the art of Cook-Fu.

Some Love Birds.

Some words about the artist.

And the ever-popular colophon and some words about this book.

And, at the end, the end.

BEHIND THE SCENES

ROLL YOUR MOUSE OVER THE BUTTONS TO SEE HOW THIS PICTURE WAS MADE

Roll your mouse
Over the buttons
To see
How this picture was made



A SHORT COURSE IN PHOTOGRAPHY

0. Photography is about tradeoffs. For every gain, there is at least one sacrifice, with few exceptions.

1. Learn, really learn how your camera works and how to use it. Experiment with the different settings. Practice, practice, practice.

2. Learn how to get the right exposure and white balance when you shoot the picture. Learn how to understand and interpret what you see in your camera's viewfinder. Practice, practice, practice.

3. Shoot lots and lots of pictures. It costs nothing. Find a way that makes this possible (and easy).

4. Don't show the bad ones. Be prepared to lose a few. Learn how to cull out your work. Be ready to discard more than you keep. Each mistake is a lesson for the future.

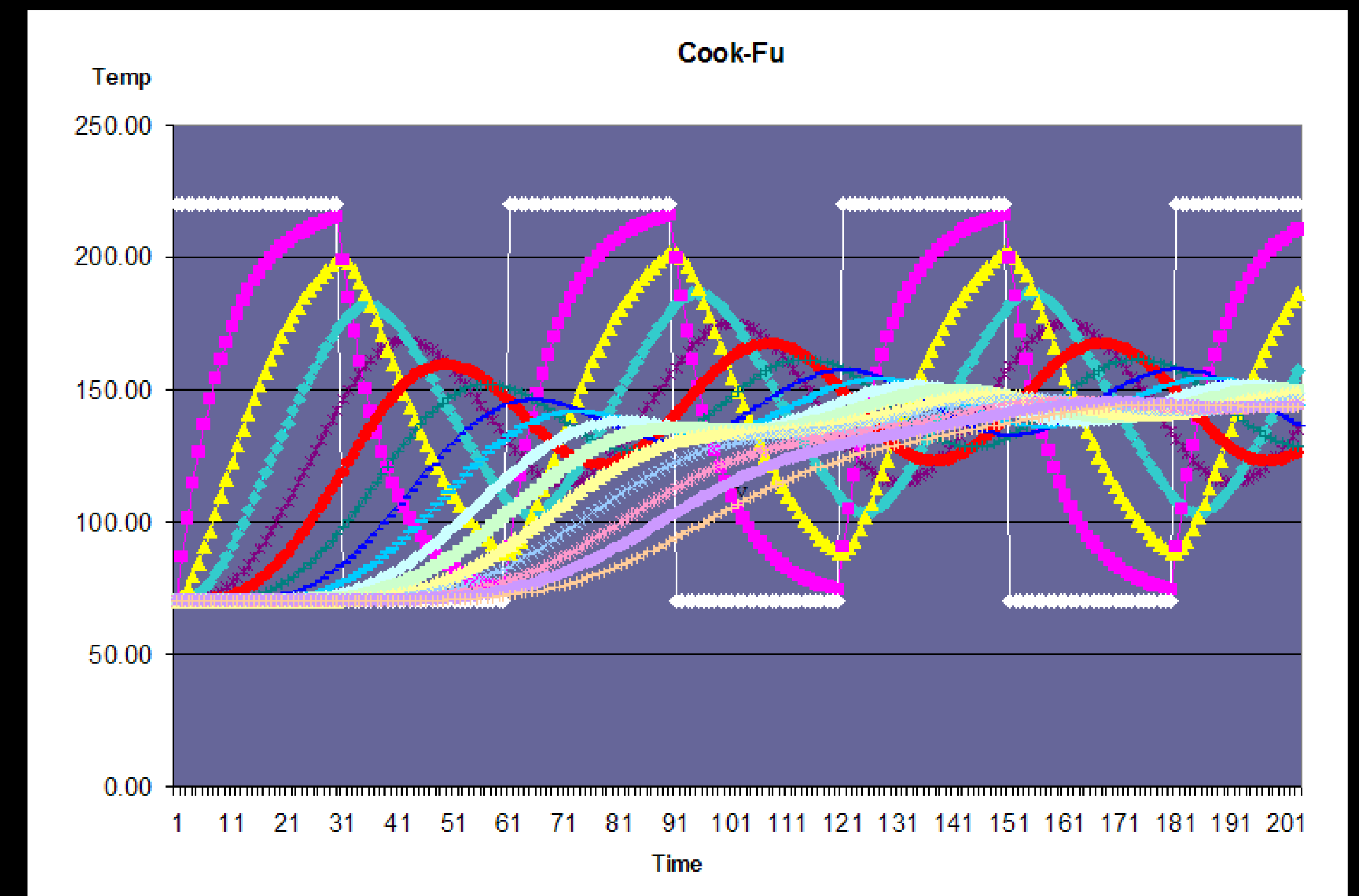
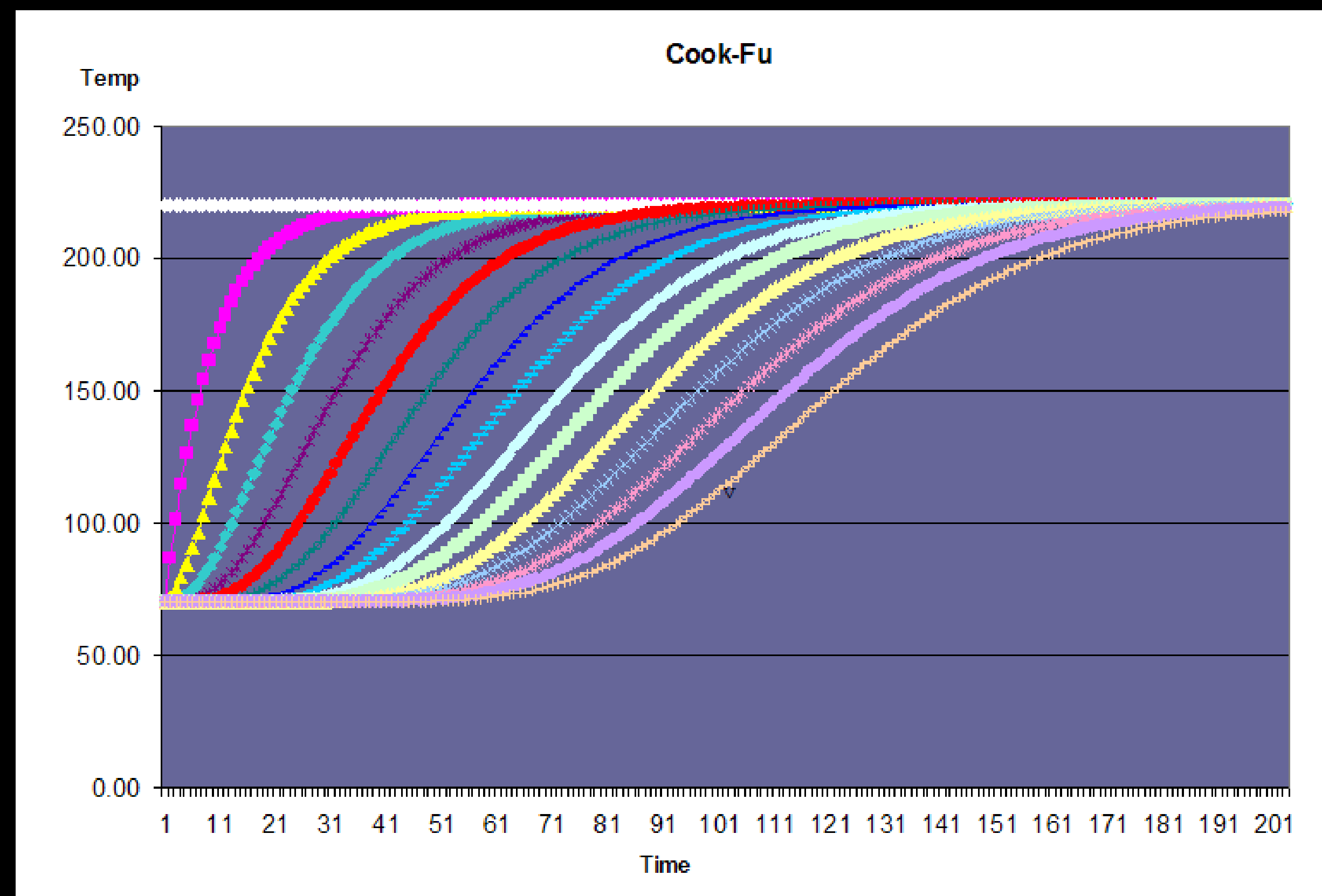
5. Learn how to finish a picture. You're only halfway there when it leaves the camera.

6. Learn how to see with your camera the same way that you see with your eyes. Look for new viewpoints and angles. Be willing to play and experiment.

7. Don't waste your time on B.S. that gets in the way of your photography. Don't get lost in quibbles and bits. There will be no extra points awarded for degree of difficulty.

8. Learn how to conquer the fears that hold you back. Free your mind. There are no rules. Don't worry about the conventional wisdom. Don't worry about being "Photographically Correct."

9. Never, ever forget that the goal of this exercise is making pictures.

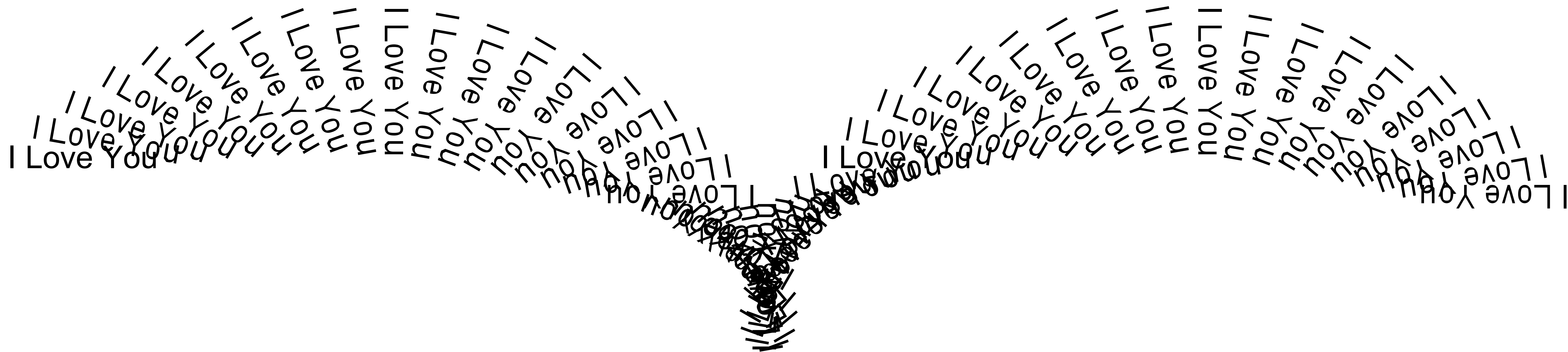
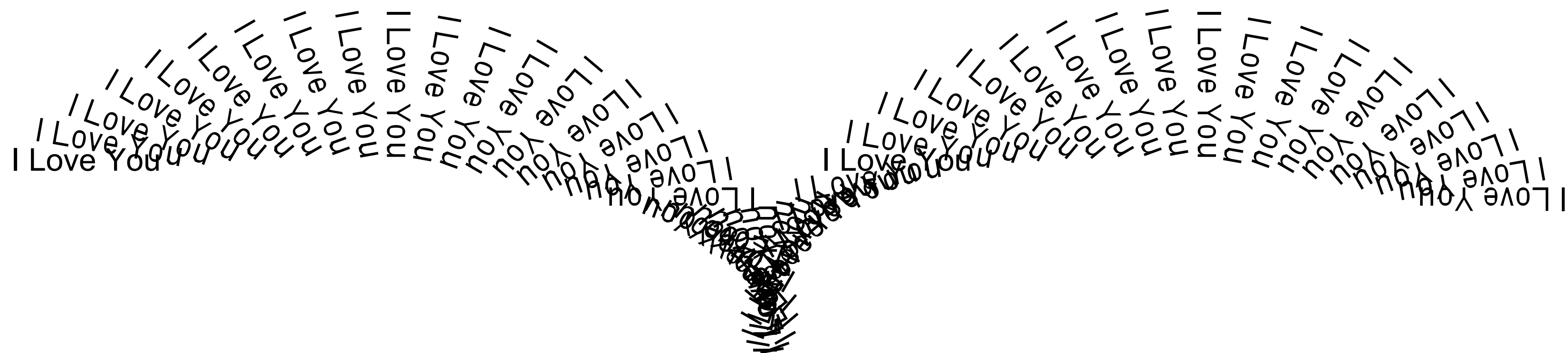
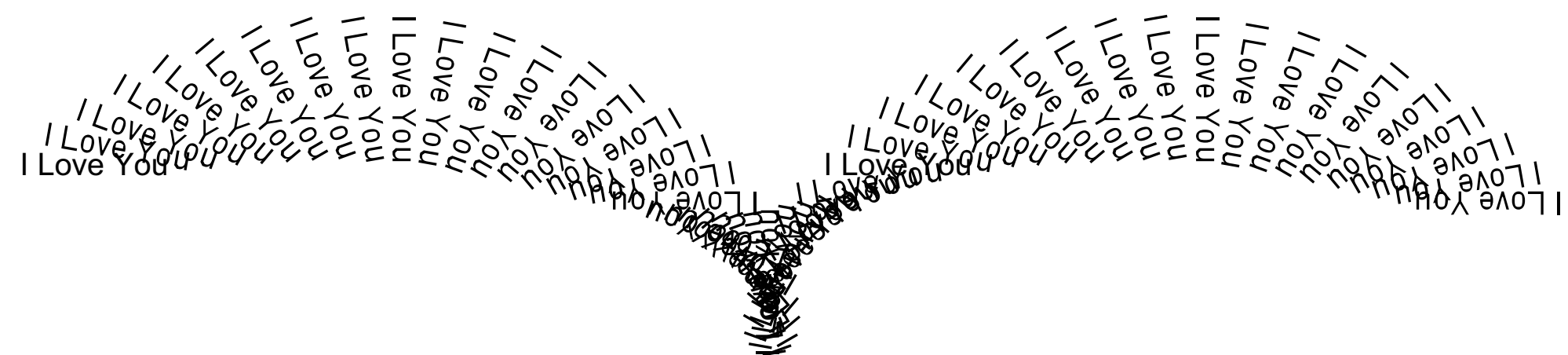


Like Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, the Techno-Impressionists love to cook.

Cook-Fu is a magical and revolutionary cooking technique that they invented.

Instead of constant heat (left), the food is subjected to a series of on-off duty cycles (right).

The two graphs above show the improved results using Cook-Fu.



About the Artist - Tony Karp

Tony Karp has been working with projects involving art and technology for over fifty years. He believes that all art requires technology, and vice versa. Tony calls this blending "Techno-Impressionism." Tony's work has taken him down many paths, through many different careers with the common thread being the successful integration of art and technology.

Tony created his first professional images as a photographer. In 1959 and 1960 he took most of the photographs for NBC's on-the-air advertising. His work also appeared in Life Magazine, the New York Times, Newsweek, and Sports Illustrated. He received several Art Directors awards for his work.

During the 1960's, Tony's technical interests turned to engineering. The high point of this work was the design of a computer-controlled zoom lens that was used to shoot the opening scene of "The Godfather." For this work, Tony was nominated for an Academy Award for Technical Achievement.

In the early 70s Tony became fascinated with computers. For the next twenty five years Tony was the architect and systems designer for a number of large computer systems. Tony designed and built the computer system that controlled a large multimedia pavilion for the 200th anniversary of the Bill of Rights.

In the early 90's Tony changed his focus and again made art his metier. He created the concept of Techno-Impressionist art, in which he combined his knowledge of art and computer technology to produce new and varied images. His largest artwork is the Techno-Impressionist Museum, a complete art movement on an Internet web site. Tony used technology to build the web site, and art to create the images. There are shows, exhibits, and galleries in the museum

Tony now works in his studio in a rural area of northern Virginia, creating art for the Internet and prints for galleries. Since moving to Virginia, Tony has had twelve one-man shows, at venues both large and small.

His latest endeavor is making art books, of which this is one.



Colophon

Most of the images in this book began as photographs, both film and digital, over a period of about fifty years. Photography has changed greatly in that period. Everyone now has a camera and photography has gotten easier and photographs are everywhere.

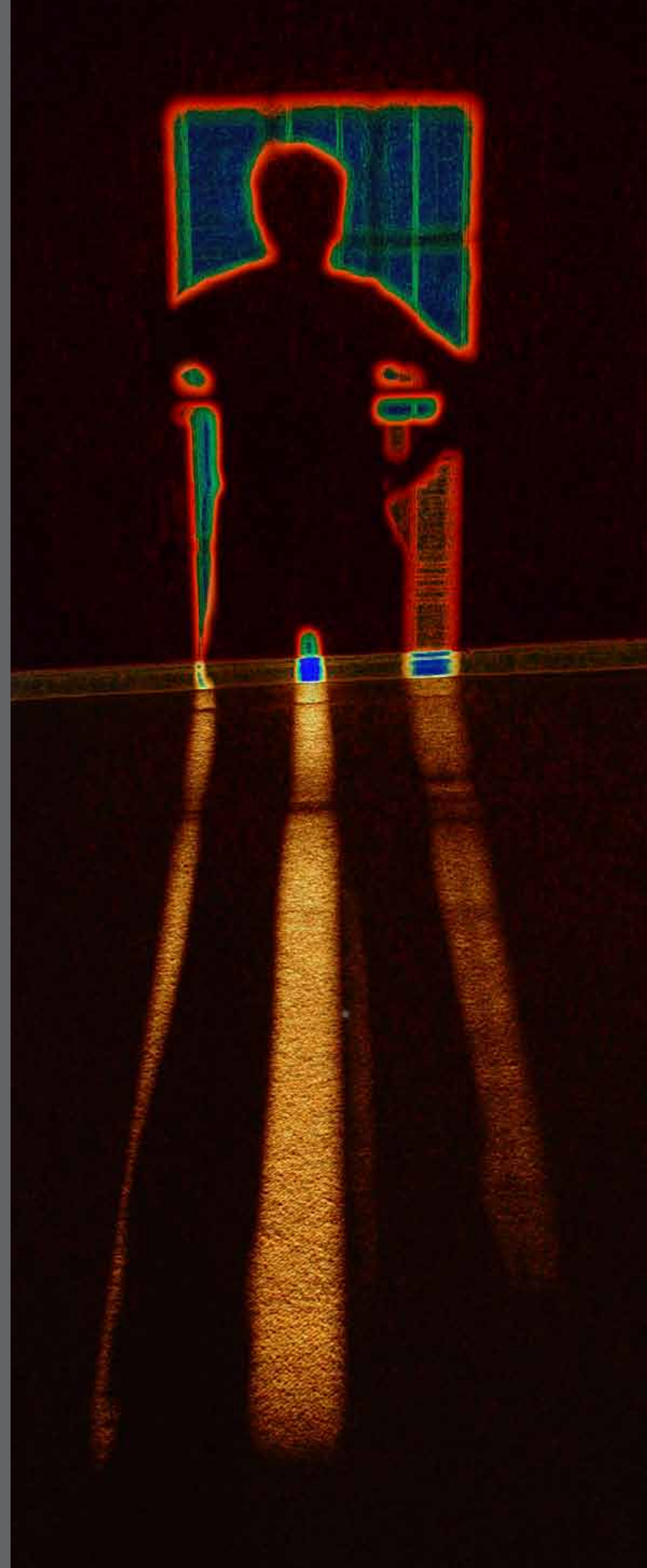
But producing interesting pictures and traversing the worlds of photography and art is still a challenge. Computers and technology help to build the virtual worlds where photography becomes art.

The software programs used to create the different effects are too numerous to mention here. In creating these effects, I keep no notes of the various processes involved, so there is no way to re-create most of them. I have no desire to become famous for one particular look or effect. As a friend once said about me, I don't have a unique, identifiable style. I took that as a compliment.

This book was designed and laid out in Adobe InDesign and packaged in Adobe Acrobat Pro. Other software, built by the artist, was used for the intermediate processing.

My wife, who is also the Artist's muse, is the co-creator of this book. We worked side by side choosing the pictures, laying out the content, and designing the interface. Thanks to her contributions, this book has reached its current state.

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About this book

Artists are driven by many things. For Tony Karp it's his desire to make as much art as possible and to have as many people as possible see his art.

Tony gave up being a computer systems architect and software engineer in order to pursue his art. As Tony's work has evolved, so has his ability to seamlessly integrate art and technology. This book is his latest art work. It's the future of artistic publishing. It redefines what's possible in an art book.

Tony designed and built this book. He wrote the software that enables many of its features. The book is a work in progress and will continue to evolve as it is easy to modify virtual media.

Tony has modeled this after a physical book. You can turn the pages or go to the index pages. You can even turn the titles of the pictures on and off. The "Back" button will retrace all your steps, just like your web browser.

This book has a "live index." Clicking on an image on the index page takes you directly to the page. It also has a "live" table of contents. Mouseing over a chapter title will give you a preview of the chapter.

The newest feature, the green "Detail" button, will show you detail that Tony has hidden for you to discover.

Everything that's been described is available on the interface that Tony calls the "Bookbar" at the bottom of every page. Click the buttons to see what they do. It's very easy.

This book will be revised as the spirit moves the artist.

Marilyn Karp, the Artist's muse June 2011

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