

Visual Anthropology Module

Thinking Photography

IN LAYERS

depth of field

depth of meaning

depth of feeling

where metadata meet emotion

Curated by

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Revealing Reality 2019



ALEX WEBB / MAGNUM PHOTOS



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1

DEPTH OF FIELD [F-STOP]

Film builds continuity
Photography builds depth

Film builds movement
Photography freezes it

Film is a linear flow
Photography is composite

*As such, a series of images
tells a story each time one
reshuffles the cards*



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Alex Webb is a master at building layers in his photography. He draws invisible lines by placing one element in the foreground, others in the middle ground, and some in the background. The F-stop along his physical position defines, expands or reduces the depth of field.



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Mark Power “If one thread might be said to run through my work over the past two decades it must surely be the idea of layers... layers of history, layers of information, layers of meaning.”

In LiveLab2017 Clerkenwell, Mark Power applies his eye for layers. Except his focus is on the myriad of architectures rather than how humans display in space.



MARK POWER / MAGNUM PHOTOS 'EAST LONDON'



MARK POWER / MAGNUM PHOTOS 'EAST LONDON'

Dorothea Lange “Photography takes an instant out of time, altering life by holding it still.”

American photographer Dorothea Lange was the voice of the people left behind the tragic impact of the Great Depression in the 1930s. In the foreground of her photographs, one person or one message helps the viewer identify with the scale of the tragedy.



DOROTHEA LANGE COVERED AMERICA'S GREAT DEPRESSION



DOROTHEA LANGE COVERED AMERICA'S GREAT DEPRESSION

Keith Jarrett 'When you're on stage you have a very strange knowledge of what the audience is. It isn't exactly a sound - it's a hum, like the streets.'

Out of the streets, photographers build a world inside the world. A frame with depth of field is alike a stage an interpretation of the real conducted by who's behind the lense.



LOU STOUMEN Sunset, Times Square, 1980



RENE BURRI / MAGNUM PHOTOS - SCENES WITH DEPTH OF FIELD



BRUCE GILDEN / MAGNUM PHOTOS WHEN HE MOSTLY OPERATED IN THE STREETS OF NEW YORK

2

Photography is theatrical

THE DEPTH OF A FRAME IS A STAGE OR A SCENE

The photographer choreographs
an instant into a photograph.

By filling up the frame and simulta-
neously excluding elements out
the frame, the photographer some-
how conducts a scene.

Mind and eyes behind the lense
carve out a composition.

Painting – and particularly Renaissance and neo-classical painting, understood the frame as a wide theatre. The painters stretch the depth of field using multiple layers of narrative. The principle can be applied in photography. It is a way to think conceptually: what comes in the foreground, middle ground, background?



PAOLO VERONESE 'The Wedding Feast at Cana' (1563)



JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID 'Leonidas at Thermopylae' (1814)



MICHELE GIOVANNI MARESCHI [1710-1743]



SANDRO BOTTICELLI 'The Punishment of Korah and the Stoning of Moses and Aaron' [1481-82]



MASO DI BANCO 'Miracle of the Dragon' - detail (Circa 1340)



On the left DAVID ROBERT 'The Silk Mercers' Bazaar' (1838)

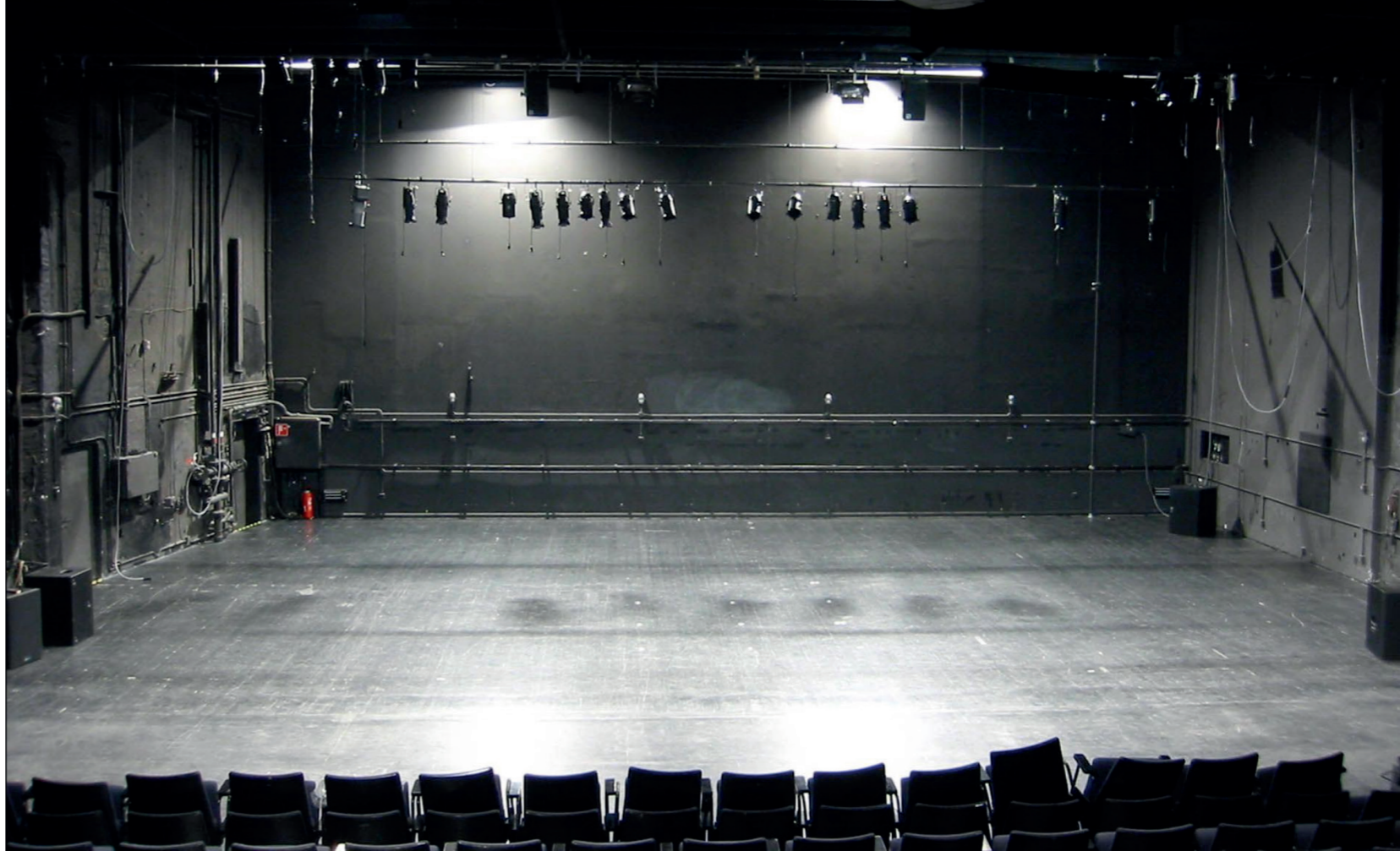
On the right Studio of Giuseppe Galli Bibiena [1696-1757]



Stephen Shore “The artist starts with a blank page and must fill it. The photographer starts with the clutter of the world and must simplify it.”

The world is 3-dimensional. A picture is 2D.
The illusion of a 3D space can be created by flattening the space that is photographed. In that way, the photographer creates relationships between subjects that did not exist previously.

See the full course by 'Carrie Acosta / Nature of Photographs'



Imagine the eye to stretch like an accordion. Expand it towards the end of the stage. **Compose what you see in the frame.** Use your legs to rotate around the elements in the field of vision and give different orders of importance by standing in different corners.



Ernst Haas 'The most important lens you have
is your legs.'



ERNST HAAS New York 1980



ERNST HAAS One, New York, USA, 1968



ERNST HAAS Traffic, New York City, 1952



ERNST HAAS Torn Poster I, Wave, NYC, 1968

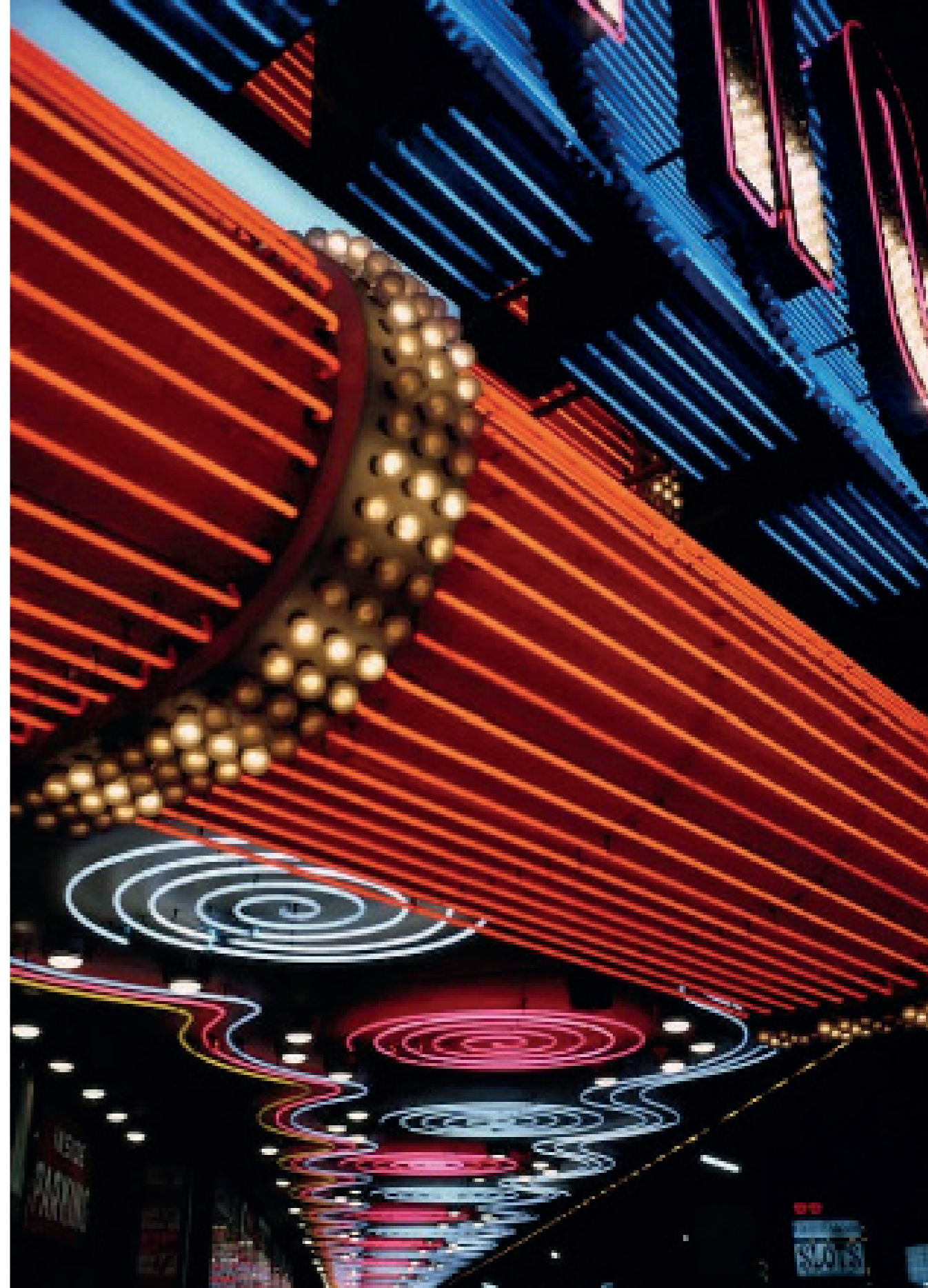
Intention.

The chosen position of the photographer in a room or landscape is informing what enters the frame.

The importance of each object or shape, how they converse within the field is the point of view of the author of the photograph.



ERNST HAAS Locksmith's Sign, NYC, 1952



ERNST HAAS Las Vegas, 1975



ERNST HAAS California, 1975



ERNST HAAS New York, 1952

Interplay.

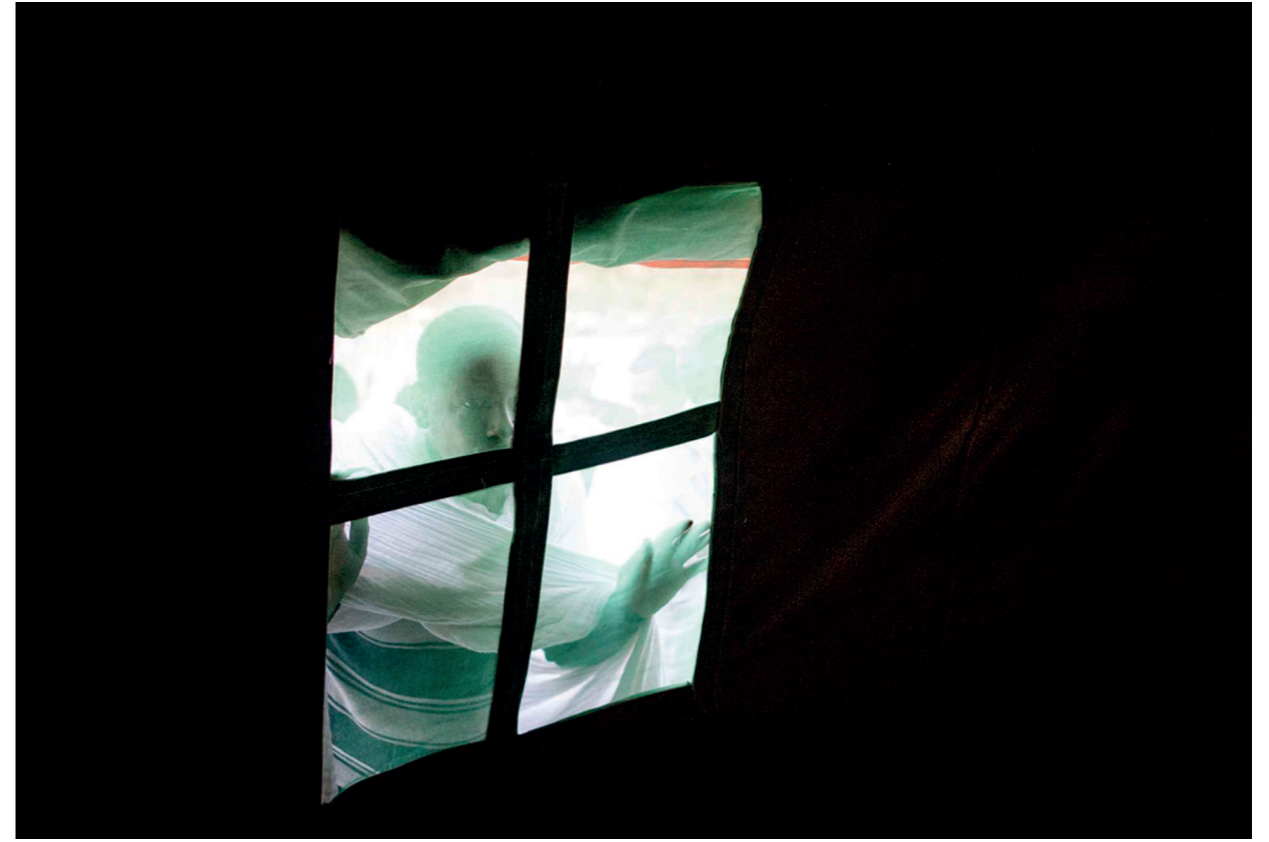
The composition built as such will then be apprehended and interpreted by the viewer. From the depicted form, the image becomes a mental shape that itself replicated fields of vision through the viewer's own post-modern mind. Alike the game of the Russian doll or a mysterious conundrum, subject, author and audience form an interplay.



FAUSTO PODAVINI 'Black Christianity'



FAUSTO PODOVINI 'Black Christianity'



FAUSTO PODAVINI 'Black Christianity'

Susan Meiselas “Finding a photograph is often like picking up a piece from a jigsaw-puzzle box with the cover missing. There’s no sense of the whole. Each image is a mysterious part of something not yet revealed.”

Action. Reaction.

Look attentively at Susan Meiselas's compositions. In *Carnival Strippers*, *Nicaragua* and *Pandora's Box*, Meiselas uses the full depth of field to depict an action and a reaction. The spectators respond to the strippers, the street fighter is circled by comrades, the dominatrix rules her submissive partner... In its cinematography, each picture resembles a movie scene.



SUSAN MEISELAS / MAGNUM PHOTOS New York Subway, 1978



SUSAN MEISELAS / MAGNUM PHOTOS 'Carnival Strippers' 1972-75



SUSAN MEISELAS / MAGNUM - NICARAGUA 1979 [The Sandinist Revolution]



SUSAN MEISELAS / MAGNUM – NICARAGUA 1979 [The Sandinist Revolution]



SUSAN MEISELAS / MAGNUM 'Pandora's Box' New York City, 1995.



SUSAN MEISELAS / MAGNUM 'Pandora's Box' New York City, 1995.

Photography. Metaphors.

Meiselas built three bodies of work around female sexual interplay in America, 20 years apart.

Carnival Strippers performed in front of men and boys was made in the 70s. **Pandora's Box** is an exclusive theatre in which women perform dominatrix roles in New York of the mid-90s. **Postcards from America**, her last essay produced in 2011, records West America as if a mirage turned ghost town. The blond promises are still advertised, female objectification still replicated, but *nessuno* is left in sight...



SUSAN MEISELAS / MAGNUM 'Postcards from America', American West, 2011



SUSAN MEISELAS / MAGNUM 'Postcards from America', American West, 2011



SUSAN MEISELAS / MAGNUM 'Postcards from America', American West, 2011

3

EXPAND THE FRAME BY MOVING IN TANGENTS WALKING ALONG DIAGONALS CHASING CORNERS

AS A WAY TO SHIFT THE PICTURE
FROM ITS PRINT DESIGN 2D
LIMITS TO A 3D SPACE.

A photograph is a frame.
A subject against a neutral back-
ground reduces the field. A diagonal
stretching the frame towards a cor-
ner, expands the depth of field.
Although an illusion.

Find examples of both.



MARY TURNER 'LEAVING AMONG STRANGERS'



IVOR PRICKETT 'Returning Home - Abkhazia / Croatia'

Alec Soth 'I fell in love with the process of taking pictures, with wandering around finding things. To me it feels like a kind of performance. The picture is a document of that performance.'



ALEC SOTH / MAGNUM PHOTOS





PAOLO PELLEGRIN / MAGNUM PHOTOS



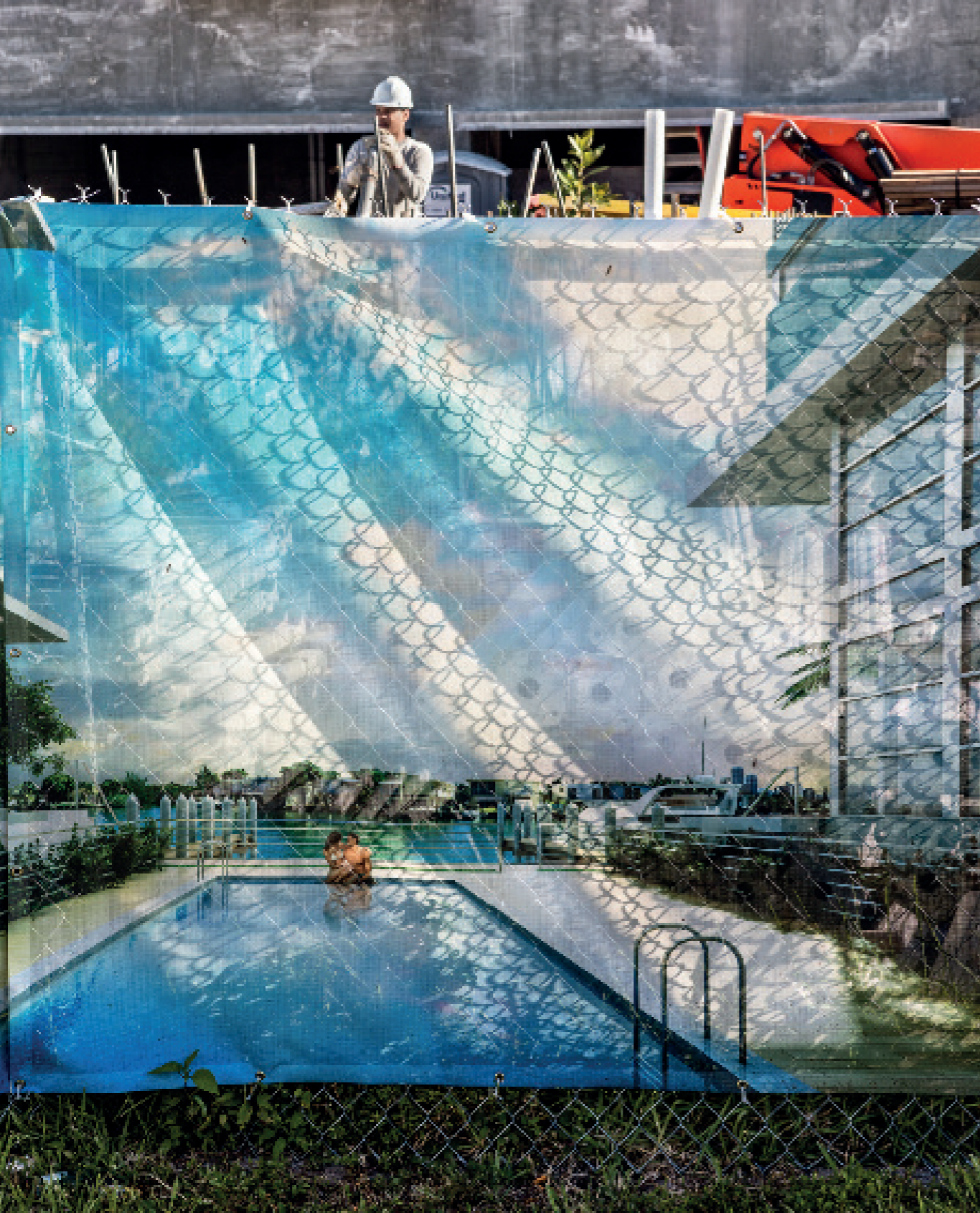
JONAS BENDIKSEN / MAGNUM PHOTOS

The following slides show how 'New Photography' is apprehended by **Anastasia Samoylova** in her projects Landscape Sublime and Floodzone, or how **KangHee Kim** layers realities in Photoshop for her book Golden Hour.

The 'constructed nature of photography' is here fully expressed in layers, either rephrasing archives into large-scale 3D installations or by layering images and blurring the lines between reality and fiction. It shows how the tool palette and the medium itself have ultimately expanded beyond some of the dogma.



ANASTASIA SAMOYLOVA 'Rainbows from project Landscape Sublime, 2014



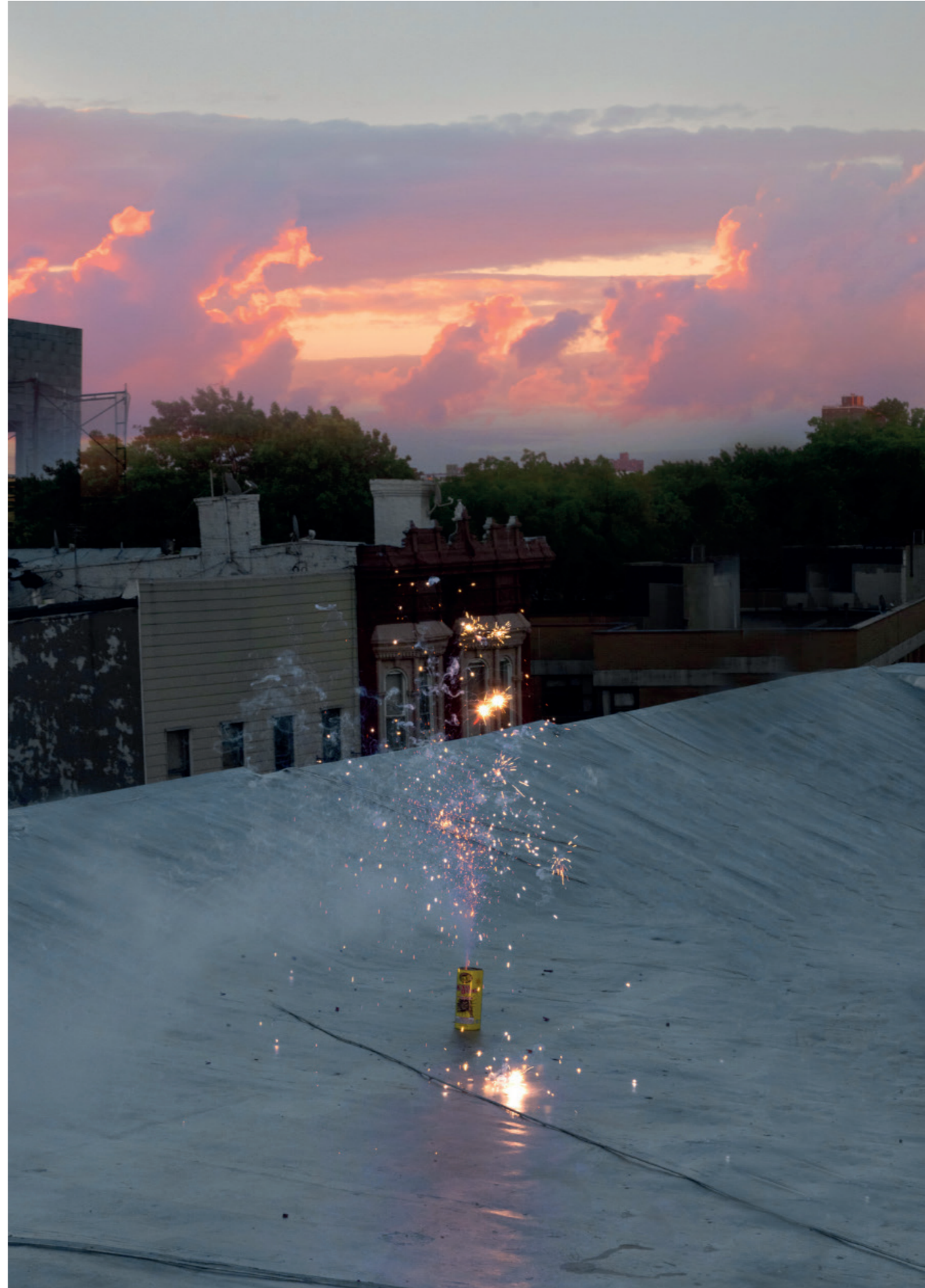
ANASTASIA SAMOYLOVA from Project Floodzone, Miami



ANASTASIA SAMOYLOVA from Project Floodzone, Miami



KANGHEE KIM 'Golden Hour'





KANGHEE KIM 'Golden Hour'

Epilogue.

depth of field

depth of meaning

depth of feeling

“... Capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anesthetize the injuries of class, race, and sex. And it needs to gather unlimited amounts of information, the better to exploit natural resources, increase productivity, keep order, make war, give jobs to bureaucrats.

The camera's twin capacities, to subjectivize reality and to objectify it, ideally serve these needs and strengthen them. Cameras define reality in the two ways essential to the workings of an advanced industrial society: as a spectacle (for masses) and as an object of surveillance (for rulers).”

– **Susan Sontag, The Image World**

[pg.178. Published in 1977]

Action!

Look.

Research.

Reflect.

Analyse.

Compose.