

AN ABSTRACT EYE



Hidden Art in Plain Sight



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Considering the Abstract in Art

“To abstract in art is to separate certain fundamentals from irrelevant material which surrounds them.”
Ben Shahn (distinguished American 20th century painter and printmaker)

Two of the most basic definitions of the word “abstract” are to remove from surrounding distractions and to summarize.

In this way, abstraction can simultaneously make our impressions of the world both more and less real.

American artists and photographers have been grappling with the issues of abstraction since the early part of the 20th century. For the most part, their efforts have infuriated the general public and vexed critics.

In the tumultuous post-World War II period, “beat” writers like Allen Ginsburg, Alan Watts, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder brought elements of Zen Buddhist philosophy and aesthetics to the West. It was largely an artistic reaction to the banality of American mass consumer culture and the very real threat of nuclear annihilation during the Cold War.

The concept of “wabi-sabi” was part of this imported ancient Asian worldview. It literally translates as *rustic simplicity* and *withered elegance*. It finds beauty in the inevitable decay of all things on earth. It celebrates irregular patterns, weather-beaten surfaces, impermanence, and abstract design.

The pervasiveness of abstract painting and wabi-sabi-inspired pottery deeply affected

my creative life as a young art student in the sixties, and my subsequent development as a veteran artist now in his 60s.

In January of 2001, I had lifesaving surgery. It is not entirely clear to me why, after this dramatic medical event, my eyes fixated on rusted lobster boat hulls, rough stone surfaces, weathered brick, old wood shingles, and rough pier pilings — rather than human beings, seascapes, or plants and animals. All were in plain sight on the coast of Maine.

The photographs in this folio were taken between 2002 and 2007 with a heavy Nikon 80 camera on Fujichrome film. Both camera and film have been eclipsed by digital technology. But they did the job and made image-making a more deliberate and considered process.

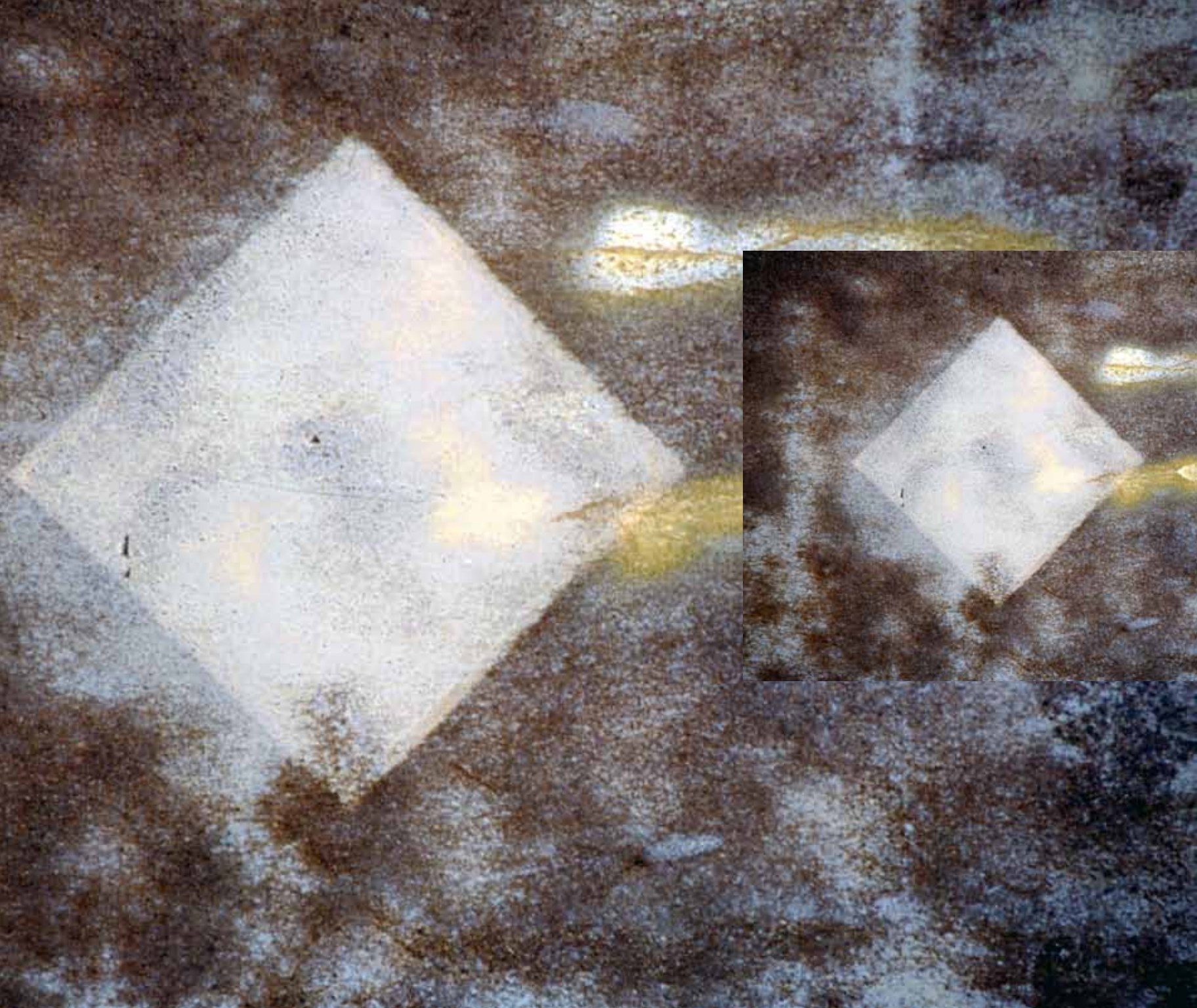
A quote that I stumbled upon resonates with me and seems to put my photos in context: “I understand abstract art as an attempt to feed imagination with a world built through the basic sensations of the eyes.”

As ever,
Bob Barancik



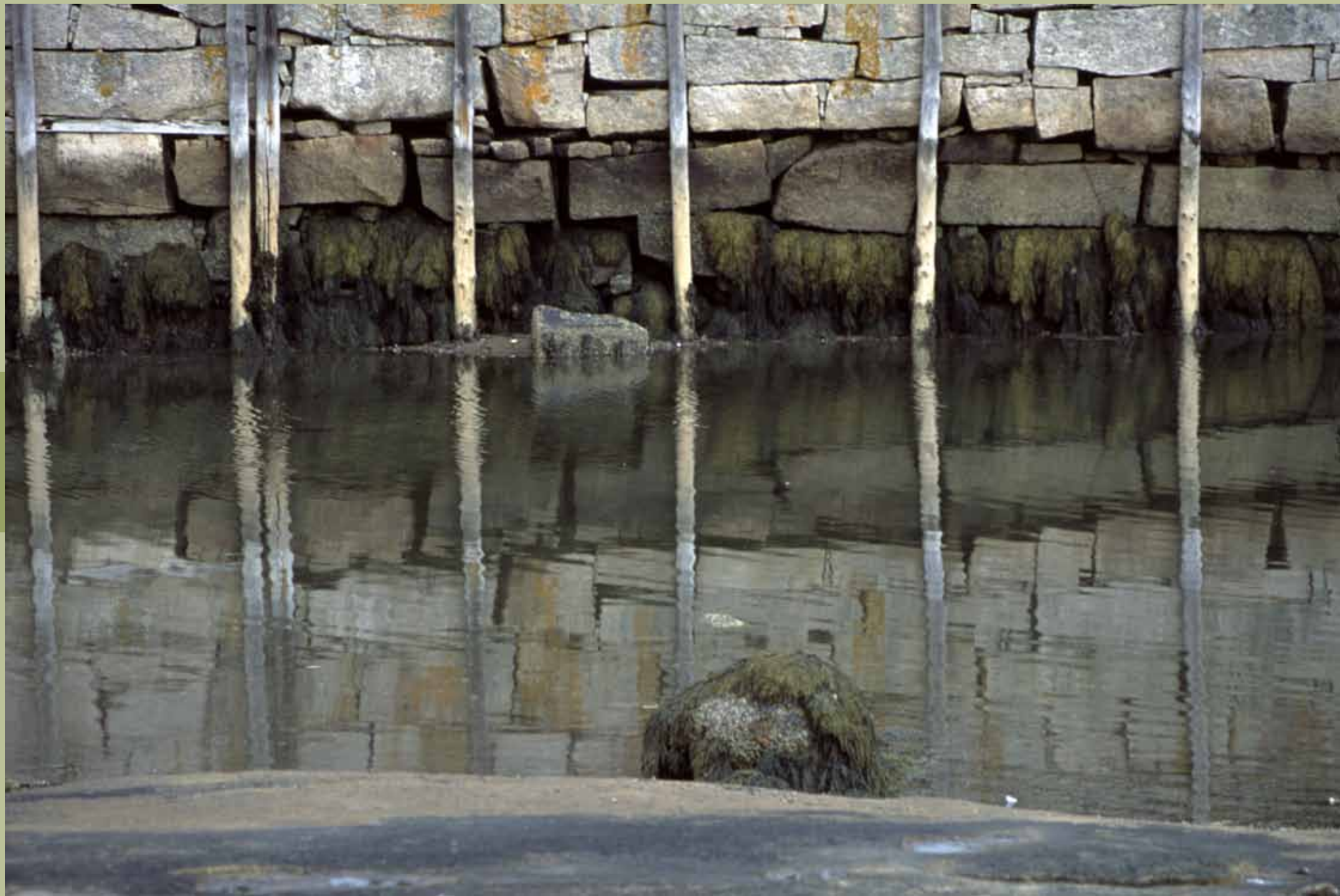










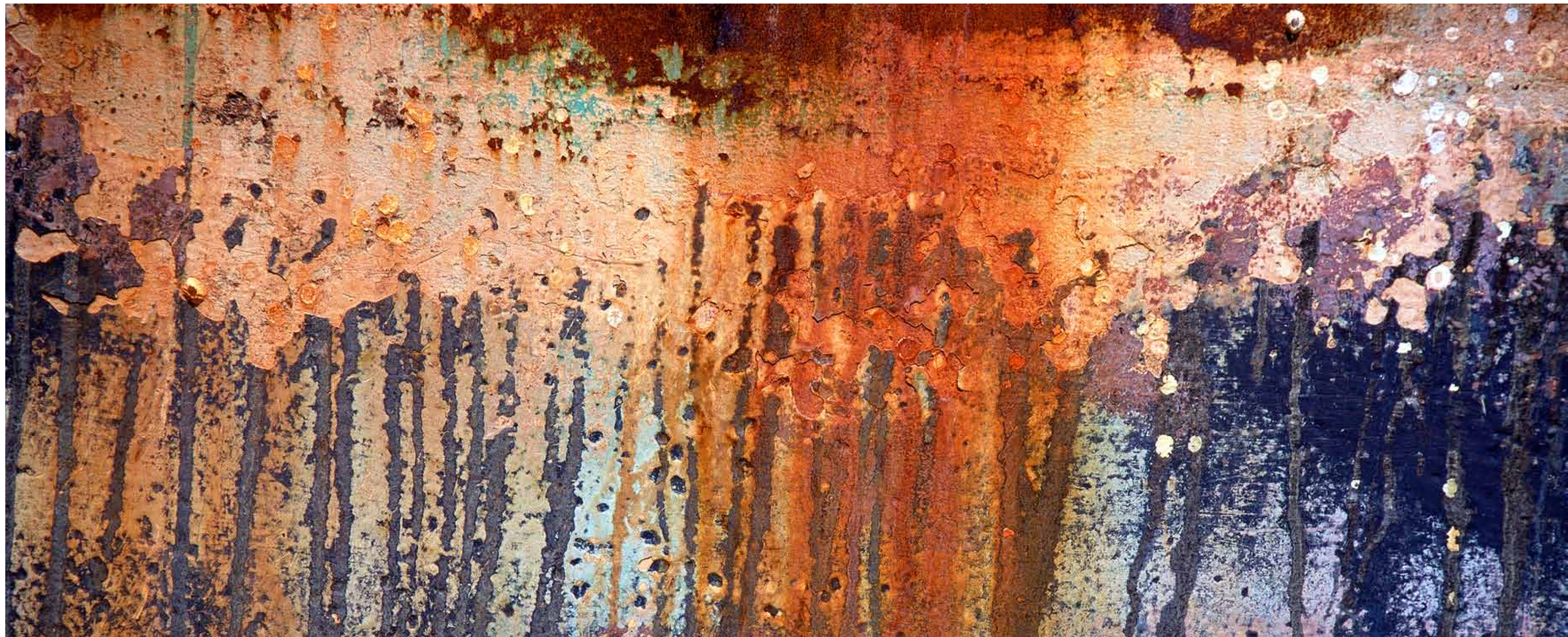




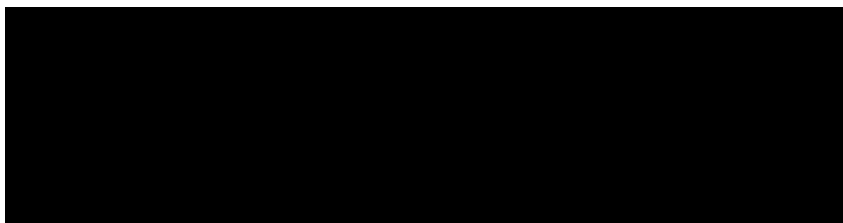





















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