

11 Contemporary Artists Working in Abstract Photography

Elyssa Goodman | 23 August 2023

The relationship between photography and abstraction goes back to the dawn of the form. Notable examples of this include early cyanotypes, Man Ray's "Rayographs," photograms by László Moholy-Nagy, macrophotography by Aaron Siskind, and countless others. And today, the trend for abstract photography continues across the globe; imagemakers are producing work that incorporates a wide range of processes and use of color, often incorporating aesthetics we've come to expect from painting.

In a world where images can be taken and shared anywhere at the drop of a hat, it's understandable that these artists would embrace more complex aspects of photography—those that can't live inside a phone.

Instead, these are images that require a multitude of processes, layers either physical or conceptual, and intricacy. Here, we take a look at some exciting contemporary photographers using the medium to work in abstraction, embracing everything from the natural world to architecture and more.



Outdoor Concert, 2022, Analog Chromogenic Photogram, on Fujiflex, 40 x 49 in.

Liz Nielsen

At a glance, American artist Liz Nielsen's work evokes a cross between sea glass and gemstones with its bold jewel-toned hues in nature-inspired and abstract shapes. Nielsen herself refers to them as light paintings and to herself as "a photographer whose medium is light." Her images are actually not made with a camera, but "in the analog color darkroom exposing light sensitive paper and processing it through traditional color chemistry," she wrote.

Following in the footsteps of Man Ray, Moholy-Nagy, and others, she puts a new spin on the photogram by experimenting with bold color. For a negative, she creates a collage of gels that are then projected onto a negative chromogenic paper—this is where her exciting palette comes from, when the colors are inverted in her development process. She's curious and inspired by physics, color theory, philosophy, and the movement of light in and out of the darkroom, visual interpretations of which are all present in her work.