THE HEART OF THE MATTER

David Rabkin, July 2023

The essence of an image – its underlying energy and feeling – can easily be overwhelmed and masked by the details available in photographs. In fact, often that's the case.

The Heart of the Matter is a set of experiments, each an effort to convey the soul of a place – how it feels – by offering a pure visual expression of what lies at its core. What's new in this work is my emphasis on dialing back non-essential details that otherwise dominate one's attention while retaining and emphasizing what's essential.

The devil *is* in the details. Our eyes and minds revel in sharp images. We are drawn to details, and devote considerable attention to them. But that's [usually] not where the core is found. Rather than demand that we learn to see differently and perceive more deeply, these pieces work *with* our minds to allow us to respond naturally and sense more directly what's essential – the heart of the matter.

These works are intended to be printed very large. While they may work on a smaller scale, they want to be immersive, and lend themselves to a width of at least three feet, if not six, eight or ten.

The ones shown here are my first steps on a journey, itself a process of discovery, of learning a new vocabulary of visual subtraction. Stay tuned.

Greet the Day

Miami Beach is special at sunrise. The sound of waves, and only the waves. No glitz yet. No preening. No thongs. No Lamborghinis. It's just you and the sea and sky, waking up at peace.

Time Stopped at the Beach

There's a point in the day when time stands still and the beach takes on a dreamy character. Put down your belongings and take a walk. Bring nothing with you, and keep going until you get away from everyone. Eventually, you'll encounter pure beach, dreamy, timeless, the real thing.

What Will Today

Another sunrise. A quiet greeting from the sun and ocean, filled with promise. The light brings ambiguity, though. What will today?

Tulips in the City

On New York's upper west side, there's a tulip garden tucked in between residential buildings. It's magnificent if you time it right, even in the rain.

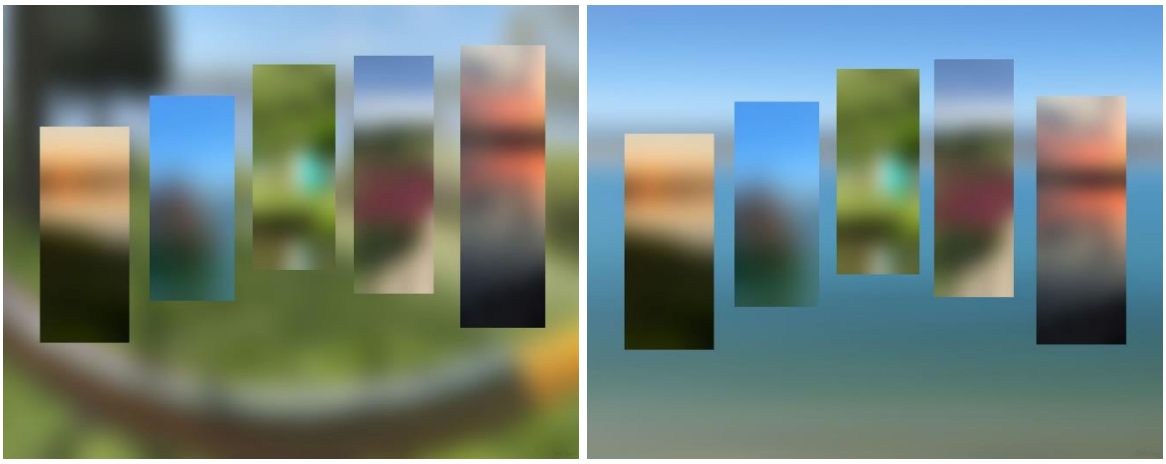
In Bloom

Suddenly, the daffodils, then the grape hyacinths and tulips, are out in force. Intense and varied color reenters our lives, reawakening us after winter. Spring really is here.

Bloom Rush

The flowers can't wait, nor can the people. In New York City – and, at some moment in Spring, probably in most cities – the blooms and people rush out. Life has hidden indoors, underground, bundled up. And then one day, it's out, boldly accelerating in intensity.

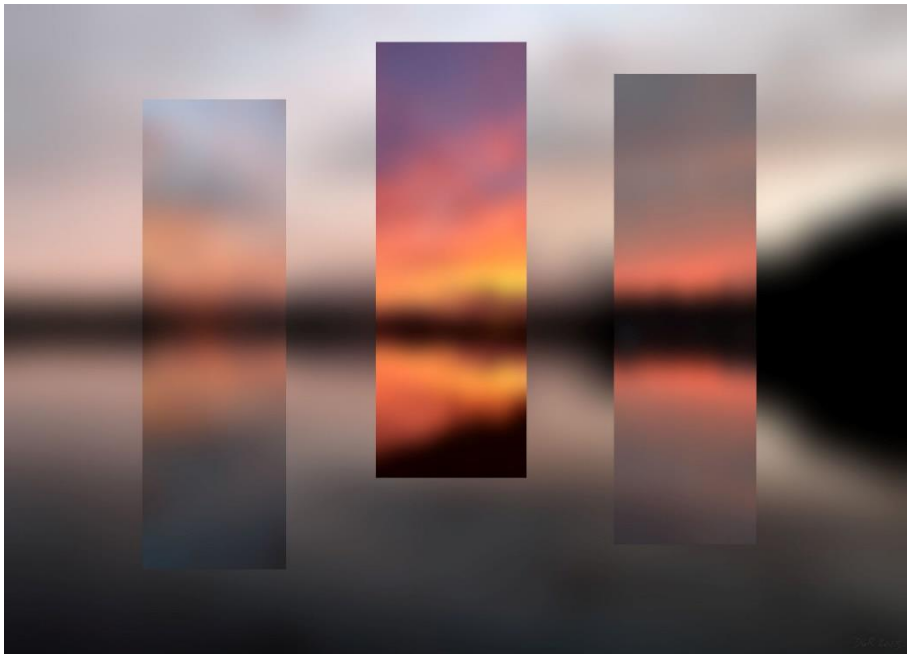
One Summer Day



(Two takes on the same day)

Since I was young, my family has had a house on a saltwater river. Each day there is different and yet there's a pattern of experiences that creates an overall feel to a summer day there.

River Dusk

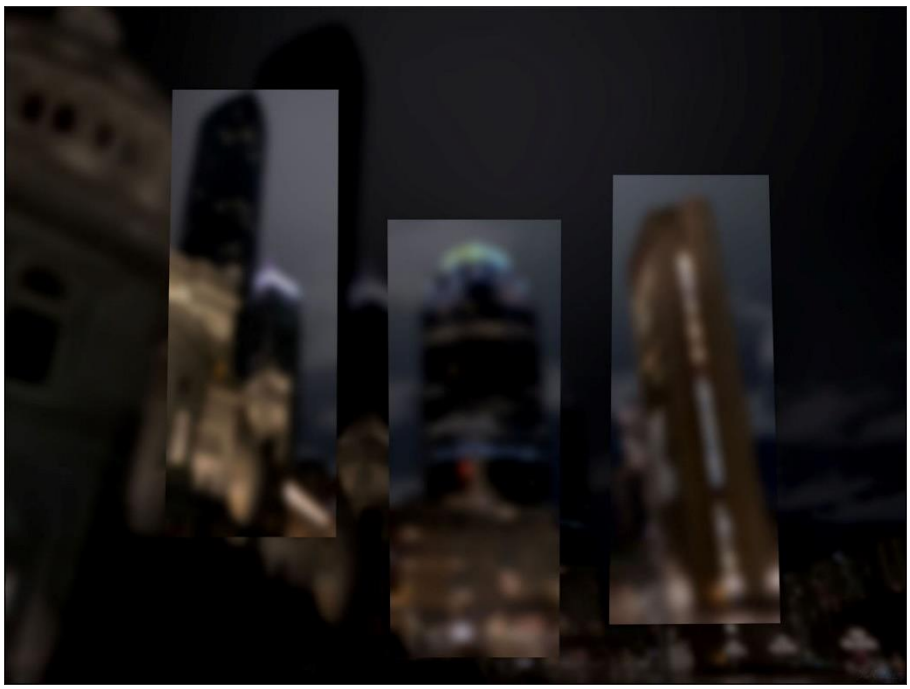


Saltwater rivers are different, and sunset over them is different, too. A hint of soft, warm breeze, the call of a bird a half-mile away, gentle water that smells like the sea, and light that connects you directly to the deep energy of our universe.

Echoes of Light and Sound

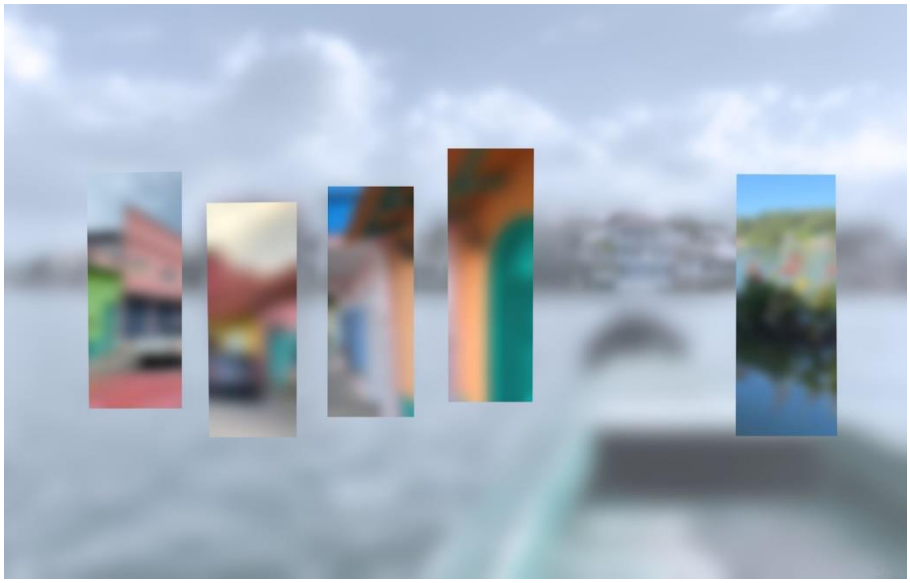
The Abbaye du Thoronet in Provence is ancient and cool, even in the intense summer heat. It's deeply dark and yet filled with light cascading through windows and bouncing around its dark passageways. When someone sings, you can't tell when it stops. The last note echoes forever.

City Light Scale



When you walk through the plaza at Boston's Christian Science Center, one is surrounded by the light and the scale that makes cities exciting. It's an open peaceful space without hustle and bustle. You can feel the city vibe as you walk though, yet you are at ease.

Anticipating Place



What lies ahead? I see it. I imagine it. I can feel it. I know but I don't know. Approaching by water makes anticipation even sweeter – the waiting warmth, color, emerging reality. I am in the place. I am almost there.

Crown Jewels

Art enthroned in temples, which are art themselves. These are our crown jewels, or so it felt to me as I meditated on my visit to art within art.

Meditations on Alternate Paths #1 (Hi-Line)

Train tracks intersect our lives here and there. At those points, looking left and right offers views into generally-unseen dimensions. We usually glance, perhaps with a sense of longing, then move on. But if we turn and walk, we enter new dimensions and leave the everyday behind. When we walk along the tracks, our lives become the occasional intersections. How rich and intriguing – to step outside our lives and see from new vantage points! That's the magic of the Hi-Line and – let's be honest – any path we cross.

Spring is Sprung (2023)

After so much grey, the streets of Cambridge now burst with color. The new leaves couldn't be a livelier shade of green. Poppies, pansies, tulips and roses are all going bonkers.

Great Island

Cape Cod has many different types of beaches. Some stretch seemingly forever –up the beach, down, and out with the low tide. Everything you see – rocks, seaweed, patterns in the sand and dunes – are visual treasures, the simplest and most rewarding of jewels.

Source of The Life Force #1

Whenever I'm in a salt marsh, I feel alive and peaceful. These places nourish life, health, balance. They rejuvenate us and remind us of what truly matters on this Earth. This New England salt marsh, reached by a short hike through scrub forest then impossibly tall reeds, is a huge oasis of life hidden from the rest of the world.

Banks of the Charles #1

On one of many strolls along the Charles River, I – aided by the sun – celebrate the extraordinary phenomenon of another day passing into night.

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